

Hi Everyone,

Joe Haefner and Bob Bigelow are a few of the resources I frequently quote and learn from and took this overview from. It is in this manner that we will build our youth program to help the kids develop along with many other inserts from youth coaching professionals.

Coaching Youth Basketball - What Should You Teach?

Many youth basketball coaches don't know where to start or what to teach. Well, we hope to help you out in this area. Below, we provide some advice on what to teach youth basketball players. We break it down between 3 levels. As you perfect each level, you can advance to the next level to teach more skills & concepts.

All beginner players should start with Level 1 no matter the age. We put ages next to the level as a general guideline. Depending on the age and skill level, you'll progress through the levels at different rates. You may notice that you'll spend 4 years working on Level 1 with 7 to 10 year olds. At the same time, you may be able to progress to Level 2 after two weeks working with a group of 13 year olds who are playing basketball for the first time.

I would advise to go back and start at Level 1 every year. A lot of high school and college coaches start at Level 1 every year. They just progress through the levels more quickly than a youth team. It's a great way to ingrain the fundamentals into your players year in and year out.

We are finishing the process of writing up a master practice schedule for the season, so you can progressively teach them the skills mentioned below. It may take a few years to teach all of these skills at one level and THAT'S OKAY! For youth players, we want to focus on the long-term development, not how many games they win when they're 11 years old. If you try to progress them too quickly, it will hurt them in the long-run. You want to have a solid foundation first. You shouldn't try to teach them every dribble move in one year or every option in the motion offense. The same way in which you couldn't teach a person calculus if they did not know how to do simple addition and subtraction.

Level 1 (7 to 10 Year Olds)

Here's what to teach, ordered by priority:

Footwork - Teach them triple threat positioning, pivoting on their left and right foot without traveling, jump stops, and to square to the basket as soon as they catch the ball in a triple threat position. You should spend a lot of time on footwork!

Ball handling - You should teach your players to dribble with left and right hands equally. Basic dribble moves such as the speed dribble, crossover, protect-the-ball dribble, and back-up dribble.

Lay ups - You should practice lots of lay ups with both hands. Your goal should be to get all players to make lay ups with their left and right hands equally well!! Teach them to jump off the proper foot. They should jump off the left leg when shooting a right hand lay up. They should shoot off their right leg when shooting a left hand lay up. It will be difficult but work on it. You'll probably need to start really close to the basket, with no dribble, and take just one step to practice the footwork. Once you add the dribble, they should dribble with their left hand when shooting left hand lay ups. And vice versa.

Shooting form - For this age group, we highly recommend using smaller balls and lower baskets. If that is not possible, allow the players to dip their elbows which will give them more strength.

Athletic & movement skills - Teach them how to run, jump and land, skip, stop, move laterally, squat, lunge and any other basic movements. If you don't know how to teach these movements, ask a professional or PE teacher to show you how. 99% of the time they would be more than willing to help, and they may even come and show the kids themselves.

Basic passes - Teach and practice the basic chest, bounce, and overhead passes.

Play plenty of 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 games to teach concepts (**no dribble keep away**). It gets the players more experience and allows them enough space to operate and **use the new skills they have learned**. Make sure to use plenty of age-appropriate drills & games.

Offense - Do NOT use any structured or patterned offenses. First, get them comfortable on the court. They will start to figure things out on their own. Your main concern should be to have them move & not stand still.

If you use a few basic cuts and maybe screens in your shooting drills at the beginning of practice, then your players will already know how to move in a motion offense. Then you don't have to waste time teaching offense. Just let them play. Once players feel comfortable on the court, show them proper spacing. As they progress, you can start to introduce them to motion offense situations.

Basic cuts & how to get open - If time permits, you can introduce the basket cut and straight cut. I would suggest that you just work these cuts into your shooting drills at the beginning of practice. This will save loads of time.

Defense - Teach the basic stance, defensive slide, and basic off-ball principles. Don't worry about spending as much time on defense. As they get older, you'll gradually spend more time on defense. Focusing on it 5 to 10 minutes per practice would be more than sufficient.

Basic Off Ball Principles:

- Stay between man and the ball
- Always stop the ball if it is in front of you!

No Zone Defense

For anyone coaching this age group, we HIGHLY recommend the DVD Coaching Youth Basketball the RIGHT Way (By Bob Bigelow). You'll get lots of drills and learn exactly how to teach the most important fundamentals the "right way". We truly believe this DVD should be required viewing for ALL youth coaches.

Level 2 (10 to 12 Year Olds)

You should expand onto more advanced skills for everything mentioned above. But remember, if your 10 to 12 year olds are inexperienced, you should start in Level 1. And at the beginning of each season, you should start at level 1 until those skills are perfected. Then you can progress into the more advanced stuff below.

Lay ups - jumping off one foot and jump-stop lay ups.

Teach more cuts: back cut, curl cut, etc.

Continue to focus on shooting form and introduce some movement for shooting drills (shooting off the dribble and off the catch). To learn more on shooting, we also have the Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide.

Ball handling & dribbling - teach more dribble moves such as the inside-out dribble (fake crossover), hesitation move, and between-the-legs.

Passing - continue to teach basic passes and introduce some advanced passes (baseball pass and wrap around pass). Use other drill such as machine gun passing and pass and switch.

Passing under pressure - you can use pair passing with a defensive player in the middle running back and forth to pressure the passer. You can use this drill to practice breaking pressure: full court press breaker drill.

Teach basic screens.

Footwork - introduce jab steps and ball fakes (pass fakes and shot fakes).

Rebounding - introduce rebounding technique.

Basic post moves. drop step and jump hook.

Spacing - introduce more basic spacing concepts.

Offense - keep playing 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 to teach concepts. You can also start to introduce more motion offense situations and play some 5 on 5 in the second half of the season.

Defense - keep emphasizing and spend a little more time on the defensive stance, defensive slide, and off-ball principles mentioned in Level 1. If you feel that your players are ready, work on more off-ball defense principles.

Man to Man Defense Only

Level 3 (12 to 14 Year Olds)

You should expand onto more advanced skills for everything mentioned above.

Lay ups - practice contested lay ups. Also, you could start to teach players, same-leg same-shooting hand lay ups. I know that is against conventional wisdom, but think about it for a second....Your player just blew by a defender or is on a fast break. Do you want them stutter-stepping to give the defense time to recover and contest the shot? So if that means jumping on your right-leg and shooting right-handed on the same side, so be it.

Continue to teach basic cuts and add more cuts.

Continue to emphasize shooting form (move to big baskets and bigger balls). Practice shooting on the move off of the pass and the dribble. To learn more on shooting, we also have the Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide.

Ball Handling & Dribbling - teach more dribble moves such as the spin move, behind-the-back. Incorporate some double-moves (crossover followed with a behind-the-back).

Passing - introduce some other advanced passes (dribble pass, behind-the-back pass, pick and roll pass).

Passing Under Pressure - You use Pair Passing with a defensive player in the middle running back and forth to pressure the passer. You can use this drill to practice breaking pressure: Full Court Press Breaker Drill.

Teach Basic Screens.

Footwork - continue to work on jab steps, pivots, and ball fakes (pass fakes and shot fakes).

Rebounding - put more emphasis on rebounding technique and spend more time on rebounding drills.

Post moves - keep practicing post moves mentioned above while introducing a few more when the players are ready drop step counter and up-and-under move.

Spacing - advance to higher levels of spacing drills.

Offense - introduce more motion offense situations. You should start to notice that your players are becoming much better at reading the defense.

Defense - Emphasize basics from previous levels and move on to rotations and situations.

We are against zone defenses for development purposes.