

## **Principle#1**

**Have a Plan.** Organization is the key. A coach without a plan will invariably miss teaching points. It is important that the players know that their coach is invested in helping them maximize their individual and collective potential. A coach with a plan sends this message. Planning also insures that the coach teaches as effectively as possible. This applies to more than only daily practices; it is essential to plan for the entire year and a basketball program. This may include a broad yearly plan that includes broad seasonal goals, off-season player development programs, fundraisers, individual and/or team camps, an off-season conditioning programs. Within the context of a basketball season, monthly plans can be very beneficial in determining appropriate times to introduce new schemes. Weekly plans offer more specific information about introducing skills in specific drills, and there been very useful to me in maintaining an appropriate practice rhythm and and presenting material in a logical manner.

## **Principle#2**

**Keep practices quick-paced.** There should be little to no lag time between drills. Players are expected to sprint from drill to drill and to keep practices in constant motion. Basketball is a game of quick transitions and changes. For example, players must make quick changes from offense to defense, defense to offense, and pressing defenses to half-court defenses. All require a quick mental and physical “change of gears”. A fast moving practice can help condition a player for such game situations. Also, aside from the time that a coach uses to teach a skill or to walk through a new scheme, players should make every effort to play their hardest.

## **Principle #3**

**Include as many competitive situations as possible.** This gives players the feel of games and develops the competitor’s drive that is necessary to be a winner. We turn as many drills as possible into mini-games with consequences for the losers, such as running or pushups. We also try to include some one on one play in every practice to keep a competitive tone as well as to work on game moves. Ideally, the players will develop a high level of competitiveness amongst themselves that will carry over into every possible applicable situation in practice. By turning as many practice situations as possible into competitive situations, the hope is to foster this competitiveness, or to unleash it if it already exists. Natural competitiveness is a quality that defines teams and is often a highly accurate indicator of potential success.

## **Principle #4**

**Allow some 3 on 3 play daily.** I believe that 3 on 3 play is the best way to teach kids how to “think the game”. Almost all offensive play boils down to 2 or 3 man games. Examples of this are numerous and include UCLA cuts, Flex cuts, Shuffle cuts, and Pass and Screen Away action. All of these movements can occur in 3 on 3 play. Also, playing 3 on 3 allows the offense more room to operate. If, for instance, a team’s offense features 2 low post players then the wings are rarely provided the opportunity to make backdoor cuts when being overplayed. In 3 on 3 play this option to back-cut is much more likely to be available. Also, 3 on 3 challenges the defense because there are 2 less help defenders on the court. This should force the defense to move more quickly and be more aware. In theory, 3 on 3 play helps improve both offensive and defensive play.

## **Principle #5**

**Teach a skill by first explaining the skill, then demonstrating the drill, then having the player perform the skill.** Hear, See, Do.... this describes the most effective way to learn and retain knowledge from the player's/student's perspective. Teach by first explaining the skill, then demonstrating the skill, then having the players perform the skill - repetitively. Research indicates that we retain only 10% of what we hear; 20% of what we see; 65% of what we hear and see; but 90% of what we hear, see, and do. Developing understanding and communicating effectively (with impact)

should be a coach's top priority. This multi-sensory approach promotes understanding far more effectively than less thorough methods.

## **Principle #6**

**Don't be afraid to critique in a positive way.** Though there are certain times to “just let the kids play”, try to address mistakes when you see them. Don't always stop the flow of a good practice to “nag” or “preach” for everything but find a good time to talk about what you see. Though this may at times become tiresome to both coaches and players, it is absolutely necessary for the development of good habits. Try to keep criticism positive by using the “**sandwich**” **technique**. First, find a positive, then make your critique, then end on a positive. For example: “John, you did a great job setting up your man, but next time make sure to touch shoulders when you come off that screen. Keep up the hard work”. This helps the player understand where they need to improve without making them feel as though the coach is picking on him.

## **Principle #7**

**Teach using the “Whole-Part-Whole” technique.** This particularly useful when teaching team schemes, though it applies to aspects of individual play as well. When teaching an offense, for example, the offense should be shown to the players in its entirety so that they can gain a feel of its purpose. Then the offense should be broken down into parts so that the players can concentrate on perfecting different parts of the offense. Often this can be done through different series of 2 and 3 man games.. Then, after different parts of the offense have been broken down, run the offense, again, in its entirety. This technique usually gives players and teams optimum results in understanding and execution. Teaching using the “part method” approach alone, on the other hand, often leaves the player without an understanding of how the skills he is working on fit into the big picture. Using the whole method alone is less effective too because it robs a player of the repetition required to master skills within the larger scheme.

As a coach, it is often tempting to get caught up in a coaching "chess match", implementing more than is reasonable for a team at any given time in the season. However, for most teams this approach contradicts the repetition Principle and robs players and teams of success by over-complicating things. Some would term this "over-coaching" This explains why the coach that adds a new play in the middle of a game rarely sees results; the players have not really seen or done what the coach has shown them.

## **Principle #8**

**Repetition is the mother of learning. Create Habits.** Basketball is a game of habits, and the only way to develop the correct habits is to practice them over and over again. Research indicates that it takes 21 days to create a habit; this translates into a need to spend practice time repetitively and **correctly drill** the skills we want to see at game time. If you teach a player a skill such as coming off a screen once, he might understand the concept in his mind. But the only way to get that player to consistently come off screens correctly is to have him practice the skill over and over again. Also, once the skill is taught, the repetitions must be done at “game speed”. Once that skill becomes a habit, a coach can expect to see real results at game time.

## **Principle #9**

**“Daily Dozen”.** Every year you should make a short list of the things you feel you must do well to have a successful season (I did not say an unbeaten or even a winning season). Make sure that you work on these things every day. The actual drills might differ but the skills being developed remain the same. These things are part of the "daily dozen" that should be part of every practice. Most years include such things as: Defending the ball-handler full court, closing out on the shooter, off-ball

defense, shooting and the primary fast break. Have a drill (or 2) that you run every day for these skill sets. This helps create the repetition needed for these skills to become habits.

## **Principle #10**

**Love your Players.** This does not mean that a coach should try to be buddies with the players. The coach is often the “bad guy” because he must be critical and insist on a level of discipline that players might want to resist. It is absolutely necessary that the coach be consistent and hold high expectations. However, players should also know that underneath everything the coach loves them. They learn this when the coach exhibits consistency to stay positive, to support a player who is going through a tough time or a player who is in the right and being there for a player each and every day. In the end, players will respect the coach that sticks with it every day, even when times are tough. The wise coach never holds a grudge; each day is a new day and a fresh start.

## **Principle #11**

**Treat players as individuals.** – Different players have different individual needs. Some players respond to a coach's stern warning for poor effort; some respond better to being pulled off to the side for a quiet reminder. Similarly, a poor effort in a drill by one player may indicate a lack of interest while for another it may be a sign that he is confused and needs the drill explained more clearly. It is important for the coach to tune into player's needs and respond appropriately. Remember: being fair means giving each player what he or she needs, not treating every player in exactly the same way. Talk with your parents early in the season to get a better understanding of what makes their son/daughter respond best to you.

## **Principle #12**

**You will be successful at what you *emphasize*.** This concept relates closely to the “Daily Dozen”. A team can only be great at a few things. Teams are ultimately a reflection of the coach; in a way they become a reflection of his personality. The coach who allows sloppy play in practice will get exactly that in games, while the coach who demands effort and execution will eventually see results at game time. The tough coach who believes in “grind it out” defense will eventually get that from his players. Consistently emphasize the right things (a full effort at all times, unselfishness, quick and proper execution, etc.) and results will come naturally.

## **Principle #13**

**Start Well: Set the Tone.** The first 15 minutes of practice are the most important. It is a big mistake for players or coaches to “ease into” the practice, moving slowly and without precision or being overly social. How a team begins practice usually sets the tone for the entire session. Teams should come in enthusiastic and focused on playing and learning basketball. They should be loose and confident, but businesslike with focus. It is beneficial for the coach to clearly communicate that he expects players to walk into the gym every day with the correct mindset. It can be very difficult to change the tone of an unfocused practice.

## **Principle #14**

**No practice is better than bad practice.**

If a team is practicing with no interest or enthusiasm, the coach should respond progressively in an attempt to turn things around. Start by stating your expectations and perhaps change some drills. Sometimes, for reasons beyond your understanding, your team will struggle with certain drills, including ones that are commonly used and well-executed. Practice will sometimes improve after a simple change-of-gears such as this.

The next logical response is to stop practice and have the team run some sprints (with the ball). The purpose is not to punish but to capture their attention; it is to *teach* the team the importance and value of practicing well. The coach should communicate this to the team; if they do not, they will lose a

valuable opportunity to teach their players and they might run the risk of alienating them unnecessarily. Initially, you might only have the team sprint the length of the court and back in ten seconds or run a suicide in 28 or 30 seconds before returning to practice. If you have to stop practice again, the amount of running might need to be increased. If nothing works, it is better to get to the end practice a little early and talk about how there was a reversal of the team momentum that they have been building and now they are replacing good habits with bad ones. Try to communicate that they're only hurting themselves by forcing themselves to start from scratch in developing winning habits. When a coach ends practice early there doesn't need to be a personal attack on the players, and it shouldn't generate any animosity off the court or next practice. It is simply a teaching tool and a message that effort is always expected and that teams change every day. It is the coach's responsibility that their team moves forward every day rather than slide backwards. If mistakes occur that requires some discussion, wait until practice is over.

### **Principle #15**

**Make your drills fit your system.** Some drills look great on paper but might not necessarily complement your teams style of play. Try to avoid any situations in practice that won't occur in games. There are tons of drills out there. If you feel that a drill you use might not be the most beneficial for your team, don't be afraid to find, or even invent, one that fits better.

### **Principle #16**

**Condition with the ball!!** Basketball requires excellent conditioning. Put simply: if you're out of shape, you can't be an effective player. It follows then that conditioning should play a prominent role in every practice. Many coaches accomplish this with sprint drills such as suicides. While such drills may build toughness, they often are a waste of practice time. The game is played with the ball and the only way to make real improvement as a player is to play with the ball. There are innumerable drills that serve as excellent conditioners that simultaneously teach the skills of the game. These drills accomplish the dual role of conditioning the player and improving skills. Another plus is that players are typically much more enthusiastic about running these types of drills than sprints.

### **Principle #17**

**Incorporate transition in to every possible facet of practice.** Basketball games are often won and lost in transition. This is especially true at the high school level and below. Transition usually yields lay-ups, whether from steals or from the fast break. The team that gets the most lay-ups will usually win the game. Conversely, the team that forces its opponent to play 5 on 5 every time down the floor puts itself in a great position to win. Therefore, it is imperative that teams condition themselves to convert quickly from offense to defense and vice versa. The only way to achieve this is to stress transition as often as possible. For example, when a team is working on its ½ court offense the defense should be allowed one quick fast break after every offensive possession before returning to ½ court play. This way the offense gets into the habit of converting quickly to defense every time the opponent gains possession and the defense is conditioned to quickly change ends of the floor every time it gains possession. Both offensive and defensive conversion occur so often in basketball, they must be given the same amount of attention as ½ court situations.

### **Principle #18**

**K.I.S.S. Keep It Simple, Sweetheart.** This acronym is an absolute MUST for all coaches to remember. A coach's job is to teach fundamentals and give the team what they need to play as well as they can. Love of the game seduces many coaches into viewing basketball as a chess match. They install numerous offenses and defenses and make numerous wholesale changes throughout the season and sometimes in games in an attempt at complete control. What this coach forgets is that if the players are at all confused or are fundamentally unsound they will not perform well. Give the players a few effective things and resist the urge to add more until they have the ability and confidence to

consistently execute what they already know. More often than not, poor play is a result of fundamental errors within a system. Without mastering those fundamentals, no system will work well. The coach who focuses on correcting those errors will find that they have plenty of adjustments to make without changing offenses or defenses. A coach's job is to give the players what they need to know, not to show the players everything he or she knows. Compare over-coaching to pouring a gallon of water into a small glass...the team won't retain most of it anyway.

## **Principle #19**

**Scrimmage (with smaller sided games!!...2-on-2, 3-on-3, etc.)** It is absolutely necessary to scrimmage. This is the best way to simulate game conditions. A coach can limit sloppiness by *Scrimmaging with Conditions*.

### **Examples:**

1. Focus on zone offense by scrimmaging, but don't allow any fast breaks. This will force the offense to execute against the zone every time down court;
2. If players dribble every time they catch the ball instead of getting into triple threat position, make a rule that possession is lost every time a player fails to "catch and read".
3. If there is no ball movement, a coach can require ball reversal on every possession unless there is a wide open lay-up. Including these types of parameters helps emphasize important facets of the game while keeping scrimmages under control early in the season.

Let them play. Don't stop every possession of a scrimmage if that was not your original intent. Make corrections in the flow of the scrimmage by using key words and short phrases that players can recognize and use without stopping. Use substitutes to pull players out when more focused communication is needed.

## **Principle #20**

**Utilize the teaching tools at your disposal.** Use stations to maximize the use of extra baskets. Use jump ropes to condition and enhance hand-eye-foot coordination. Use football blocking pads in stations to simulate the contact that occurs on shots in the paint. Use a Bigball or Shrunken Rim to increase Shooting accuracy, and a weighted basketball or a medicine ball to improve strength and speed up passing and ball movement. Use any tools you have at your disposal to improve or speed up team development. Keep in mind, however, that these types of aids are peripheral to repetition and conditioning in player development, and should only be incorporated into practice when using them does not disrupt tempo or conditioning.

## **Principle #21**

**Expect Mistakes.** It is very easy to become frustrated when several mistakes occur during practice. This is especially true at the beginning of the season, where at times you will feel that you will never be able to properly execute important fundamentals, much less a team offense or defense. Later in the season, you will experience the same feeling when your team has an average or poor practice following a period of success that caused your expectations to grow. It is beneficial to balance this by reminding yourself that mistakes occur constantly in basketball. Your role as the coach is to continue to correct the mistakes and to provide players with the repetitions needed to eliminate them permanently. Even then, players and teams will go through stagnant periods where old mistakes will pop up. Your philosophy should be: as long as the players are giving consistent individual and collective efforts, you can accept mistakes as part of the growth process because you will trust your AND their abilities to correct them and move forward as a whole. When mistakes are the result of poor effort or disinterest, your response to that situation will need to change and become more disciplined with a strong communication about how that is not acceptable. Remind yourself often, **QUITE OFTEN** that the team that makes the most mistakes usually wins. This may seem counterintuitive, yet it happens so often because many teams that make more mistakes are

also teams that play faster and more aggressively. Often, having the courage to play with all-out effort despite looking silly at times has far greater impact than playing with cautious reserve.

## **Principle #22**

**Stations** Utilizing Stations can be very beneficial simply because they optimize time and resources. Stations can be used to teach many different skills in a short time, teach different skills to players by position (i.e. 'guards' and 'big's'), or provide the repetitions required to master one or two skills. The intensity and short duration of well-run stations provide excellent anaerobic conditioning, which is critical in basketball.

## **Principle #23**

**Define Discipline.** You need to believe it is important to define what is meant by the term 'discipline' early on with your players. In the context of team and individual performance, discipline describes a team that: sticks to its game plan; makes consistently good decisions; maintains a high level of play when fatigued; maintains excellent conditioning; and, very often, is a Winner. Any suicides, pushups, or other activity that gets handed out to your players is given in order to teach them how to become the disciplined winner just described.. Work very hard to approach kids with a 'clean slate' every day, so the idea of punishing players based on a grudge or a selfish need to exert control is foreign to you as a coach. Try to make your expectations very clear to players and foster the belief that 'discipline', despite the negative connotations attached to it by many people, is one of our primary objectives each year. Players that buy-in to this philosophy usually come to feel that playing on undisciplined teams is not enjoyable at all, because the people involved lack the common vision, shared growth and a level of respect from their peers that typify disciplined teams. These players will come to expect and embrace a coach's 'punishment' for breaking rules, for poor conditioning, and for poor effort. They realize that the coach who doesn't respond to these types of problems is short-changing his team, by failing to teach them to become winners. Remember to gauge your decision of how to handle discipline and it should be in line with the grade you are coaching. 8<sup>th</sup> graders can handle more than 5<sup>th</sup> graders...go at this after careful consideration prior to these situations arising. You should discuss, with your assistants, an appropriate level of discipline for different situations so you don't coach with a reactionary style all the time.

## **Principle #24**

**Be Yourself.** A youth coach typically spends around ten hours per week with their players during the season. As many players begin to play basketball year-round as early as 4th or 5th grade, coaches at all levels maintain contact with players throughout the year as well. By high school, coaches have constant contact with their players. They are around their players so often that they will see the real coach. Players will know if a coach is projecting a fake personality. A coach that pretends to be something they are not or tries to emulate another coach will ultimately lose the respect of their players. Consistency is extremely important, and the only way for you as a coach to be truly consistent is to be yourself. Emulating someone else might work for a day but over the course of time players will respect the coach who is true to themselves.

## Chapter 2 - Practice Format

The way you format your practice depends on your philosophy, priorities and time availability. It is important to have a balanced practice, one which emphasizes each area of the game. Break down your practices into different sections that work together to provide the team with a comprehensive understanding of the game. Each section gets roughly the same amount of time each day so that no part of the game gets neglected. Many coaches believe that giving more time to offense than defense in practice is necessary because good offense requires more skill development since it includes the ball. Somedays you will need to agree with this philosophy but DO NOT lose sight of how important defense will be at our level over the course of the entire season. Strong defensive concepts and training will ultimately teach how to play hard which will transform into offensive confidence. Try to give each section 15-20 minutes of attention every day, though times might change day to day depending on which areas need work and time concerns because of gym availability, player fatigue, and where you are in your. Here is each section and the general focus of each:

**Pre-practice (5-10 min):** This is usually a light warm-up that precedes actual practice and focuses almost exclusively on the “big 3”; shooting, passing and ball-handling. Basic footwork such as jump stops, pivots, and cuts are also emphasized.

**Warm-up (5-10 min):** After stretching and some light jogging warm up with both half-court and full-court drills that usually emphasize cutting, passing and shooting. Though it is a warm-up, treat this time seriously and with full effort because this sets the tone for the rest of the practice. Constantly emphasize getting into a “practice rhythm” by being sharp, working to improve and giving a full effort.

**Transition (5-10min):** Break down your fast break into parts and work on getting back and setting your defense. Try to include at least one competitive drill that emphasizes both the offensive and defensive phases of transition. Most transition drills also serve as excellent conditioners.

**Defense (20 min):** They say that defense wins championships. You should agree with this because the most important aspect of both defense and championship level play is desire. The defensive portion of practice is intense and requires hustle and effort from each and every player. A variety of drills are used to break down on-ball defense, off-ball defense and rebounding (Rebounding could very easily warrant its own section in the practice plan, but we put it with defense because it is so central to defense.) Man to man defense is the primary focus because its principles apply to *any* defense. This is also where you should teach your team defensive technique and fundamentals.

**Offense (15-20min):** Here we break down our offense into parts. Basics such as footwork, screening, cutting, and 1 on 1 moves are constantly taught and re-emphasized. We also work on our plays and sets in this section. Though it isn't competitive, we will also dry run (5 on 0) our sets to keep them fresh in our heads.

**Scrimmage (10-15min):** Here is where we try to “put it all together” and apply the concepts worked on earlier in practices into game situations. I do not define scrimmaging as merely 5 on 5 and do not coach them by simply “rolling out the ball”. While scrimmages are usually the most fun part of the practice for the players, to be effective the coach must continue to teach. Oftentimes we will play some 3on3 or 4on4 in this section. Smaller scrimmages like this are essential teaching tools. They allow players more open floor space, which gives them the opportunity to develop fundamental skills that the team offense might not allow. It also teaches players to “think the game” and read their teammates better because they don't have set plays to run. We also run controlled scrimmages that help focus on certain area of the game. For example, if we need to focus on our zone offense we might run a scrimmage in which no fast breaks are allowed so that the offense faces a zone on every trip down the floor. Or, to teach great movement without the ball, we might allow only one player from each team to

shoot so that the team can focus on screening to set him up. DEVELOP VERBAL CUES to reduce thinking and stopping.

**Shooting/Free Throws (10-15min):** Shooting is important so allow for it each practice. Try to get at least one hundred shots up during this time. The primary focus is on rhythm shooting in pairs. This provides necessary repetition and also serves as a conditioner so that players practice shooting with fatigue. Include shooting competitions, shots that come out of your offense and sometime utilize stations to focus on different types of shots.