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PURPOSE

Your role as a WYBA youth basketball coach is to provide strong leadership and qualified instruction during practices and games. The overall goal of the WYBA is to provide each young player with the opportunity to improve his/her skills in an orderly and positive environment. This syllabus is designed to provide WYBA coaches with a guide as to how to organize the teaching process. You are an instructor first and foremost. This is decidedly a player development approach to youth basketball versus a win the league/tournament approach. If we develop players, we should field highly competitive teams that win plenty of games and are competitive in their respective age groups. The better skilled your players are, the more they will enjoy the game. The more they enjoy the game, the more they will want to practice, play and further improve.

COMMUNICATION

In order to teach basketball to kids between the ages of 8-13, it is essential to keep the instruction simple and specific. We are trying to teach kids a handful of simple concepts through a series of specific drills/games designed to develop these skills (and provide them with a “how to “guide to self improvement). Our advice is to be patient yet expect optimum effort from each player. It is essential to provide structure and discipline to your practices. Kids these ages will constantly test your limits so it is mission critical to be well organized and to provide a competitive and challenging environment for the kids to develop within.



Games should be a time for the kids to enjoy themselves in a competitive environment. It is not a time for coaches to narrate and/or hypercharge the experience with a lot of instruction and parental emotion. Never yell specific instructions to a player as to what to do when he/she has the ball (“pass....shoot...over there”). This will only confuse them, as they cannot process the information nearly fast enough to make it worthwhile. A good rule to follow as coach is to yell encouragement and whisper constructive criticism. Focus on coaching the fundamentals during practice and let the kids see what they can do during the games. Allow leaders to emerge and the team will naturally learn how to compete over the course of the year. Even though these basic basketball concepts and skills are relatively simple, beginning to master them requires significant repetition. Consistent and positive feedback/evaluation is key to helping kids develop these skills. There is a fine line between assisting and badgering. When in doubt, keep quiet. Always try to give feedback in a positive manner when dealing with development issues. A good way to do this is to recognize a player who is performing the skill correctly and having the others observe for a minute while he/she demonstrates. Kids will become more confident/interested in their own potential if they observe a peer.

Always bear in mind that these kids are just starting to develop physically, and many are going through growth spurts. Basketball is one of the most difficult games for kids to play. There are a lot of rules/violations, and they have to learn to pass, catch dribble and shoot all while running and being defended (add keeping your head up and it sounds like a circus act!). Don't expect miracles or mastery overnight. Rather, focus on improvement, player effort/hustle and a positive environment. These middle school years are just the beginning and serve as a foundation for kids to start developing their basketball skills and hopefully some passion for the game.

PRACTICE ORGANIZATION

Practice is the single most important tool for developing players of all ages and abilities. For the WYBA middle school coach important points to provide the proper learning environment are as follows:

1. **Be organized.** Take 5 minutes prior to arriving to put together a practice plan for every practice. It will allow you to move the team in an orderly and predictable manner, and allow you to focus on teaching the kids rather than frantically trying to think of what you're going to do next. Start the practice with a 1-minute preview so they know what to expect.
2. **Use the entire practice space and all the balls.** Split players up at multiple baskets and spaces to do drills and minimize any standing in lines. Every player should buy and bring a ball to every practice. Use cones/spots to emphasize correct floor spacing and position. If in doubt always have the players active and moving. Use assistant coaches/parents to supervise and help. A simple and quick explanation/demonstration and let the kids try it themselves.
3. **Be consistent.** Try to develop a structure that is relatively predictable and flows easily. An outline of our recommended practice is outlined below. Also be consistent



relative to discipline and order. One of the hardest tasks as a middle school coach is to get the kids to settle in and focus. We have found time and time again that a fast moving, rigorous and competitive practice will keep the kids on track. The “roll the balls out and let them run around “is unacceptable in the WYBA and is disservice to the kids and the basketball learning process.

4. **Demand and earn the players respect.** Middle school kids will constantly test the boundaries and limits. This is normal. Take control from the outset. Do not let structure and discipline ebb and flow. You as the coach must be clear in what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The big ones are:

No talking/dribbling when the coach is talking (except for questions of course)

- Stop on the whistle
- No fresh talking back to the coach
- Be respectful of your coaches, teammates and opponents....No trash talk
- No profanity
- Be on timeBe ready to play
- Always hustle, always try your best, always work your hardest
- Reward effort and passion
- Yell encouragement, quietly explain mistakes

As a coach, you must demand that your players understand and adhere to these rules. Without structure, you will have anarchy. With anarchy, no one learns anything and the kids will lose interest. If there is a player(s) who consistently break these or other rules you have, the player must be disciplined. Acceptable forms of discipline are removal from the group, removal from the practice or if necessary (and after discussion with the parents), suspension from the team. The more the coach employs a consistent and clear message to the players from the get go, the smoother the practices will run, and the better the learning environment will develop.

PRACTICE STRUCTURE

The WYBA practice structure is as follows;

Warm Up- When the kids arrive at the gym they should immediately get a partner and do some 2 person drills. Layups are a great way to warm up, get lots of reps and keep them from firing 3 pointers. It also sets the tone for a focused practice.

1/3 Individual skills – 30 Minutes

1/3 Small group/team skills – 30 Minutes

1/3 Controlled scrimmage and Review – 30 Minutes

Since each practice time slot is 90 minutes, each of these components is 30 minutes. You must be organized and crisp in order to keep the kids moving through this practice.



INDIVIDUAL SKILLS – 30 MINUTES

This is the part of practice where we are focused on individual skill improvement. It is the component of the learning process where the kids should get a lot of feedback. “Keep your head up, Move you feet quickly, hands up, closer to your man” are all simple examples of the type of feedback you need to provide. In order to do this, you have to understand what the drill is designed to do and what the common problems young players have in performing them.

Ball handling – 8 Minutes

Everyone has a ball all the time

No lines where kids are standing around waiting to do the drill

Always try to keep your head up when dribbling

Every drill should be done with BOTH hands

Keep ball on finger pads and off palm

Stationary

Around the body-25 each way

Fingertip taps-30 seconds

2 ball dribble-25 (pair up for this)

Crossover low side to side

Figure Eight No Dribble – 25 reps

Figure Eight With dribble – 25 reps

In out Right/left -25 each way

Spider dribble

Moving

1-Jerry West (run while putting the ball through your legs-no dribble)

2-Suicides with the ball (baseline to foul line & back, ½ court & back, ¾ court & back, full court & back). Different dribble each way. Control, speed, defensive. Left hand/right hand. Reverse pivot dribble at each change of direction. 3 times through for each player. Half the players at a time.

Passing & Catching- 8 Minutes

Step toward ball when receiving all passes

Crisp passes with backspin – 10-15 feet at the most when drilling

Elbows in-hands on sides of ball

Never throw a pass to a teammate that isn't looking

Bounce passes are much harder to intercept

Bounce passes should land ¾ of the distance to the receiver

Stationary

3-person monkey in the middle. Show them how to pivot around the defender. Show them the different alleys for passes. Start dummy defense, work up to live.



Moving

1-Box drill-1,2 and 3 balls. Chest and bounce passes. Clockwise/Counter clockwise. Focus on proper pivoting here.

2- 2 ball shuffle drill- split team in 2 , line each up along sideline full court, passer steps out and passes one ball while receiving the other ball and sliding correctly up and back full court.

3- Celtics Drill-one ball ,three lines, ball starts in corner, passed to half court, back to the passer who is moving toward half court, is passed to the middle, middle takes a hard dribble to the foul line and hits the half court player with a bounce pass for a lay-up. Passer gets rebound a returns it to the baseline.

Lay-ups/Shooting- 5 Minutes

-Eyes on the front rim

-Ball on finger pads

-Balanced stance

-Focus on the short shots

-Backspin and high arch from proper snap release- Finish high with hand in cookie jar

-Free throws should be shot with shooting side foot slightly in front of other

1- Mikan drill- left and right lay-ups using 1-2 footwork-pair up at baskets and do 15 reps each player-good one for kids to do before practice

2- Full court lay-up drill-see diagram-every player has a ball-Complete both right and left handed

3- Full court pull up jump shot drill- same as lay-ups- no deeper than 8 feet- use backboard

4- 2 person 2 spot shooting-one rebounder, one shooter-10 at a time-3 sets-keep track-loser runs up and back

Individual Defense-On Ball

Palm to chest spacing for man to man

Knees bent -Back straight-head up-palms up hands away from the body

Balance weight evenly

Slide feet to move- don't cross or touch them-short slides

Head on ball

Focus on turning the dribbler

1- Zig zag Drill. 3 lines, dribbler goes side to side in control dribble, defender focuses on proper fundamental position to turn the dribbler. Also try with hands behind defender's back to focus on footwork. Make sure the dribbler uses left hand to go left and vice versa. Have the dribblers work on crossover move to start and work into behind the back, reverse dribble and through their legs as they get more comfortable.

2- Zig Zag Drill-1 on 1. Same as above but use two lines and have the two players go live once they hit half court. Defense gets a point for turning the offensive player, offense gets one point for a score.



SMALL GROUP/TEAM SKILLS – 30 MINUTES

Team Defense

4 Person Shell Drill- 4 on 4 where the ball moves around the perimeter and defensive players have to shift their position based on where the ball is and where their man is. Offense should be relatively stationary during the first 5 times you do this. You can slowly work dummy offense into the drill where the ball is passed and the offense moves at half speed. On the whistle, play is live. Key concepts here are:

- Pointing to the ball and your man (pistols)
- Jumping to the ball on every pass,
- Help and recover defense,
- Seeing the ball and your man simultaneously
- Transitioning from off ball to on ball defense.

Advanced teams may start to understand help rotations as they become more proficient. At the onset, you want your weak side players to play off of their man toward the ball, and help when the player guarding the ball gets beat. One other critical concept is talking on defense. This is a great drill to teach the concept of talking to each other when the ball is moving, calling out to the ball defender that he has help, and boxing out on offensive shots

Fast Break Drills

Catching, passing, dribbling and defending on the run are some of the most difficult skills for young players to acquire. These fast break drills should help them and are fun to practice. It is critical to consistently remind players of the following points:

- RUN! RUN! RUN!
- Try to keep your head up all the time...See the floor, see your teammates
- Run and play hard, but try to stay under control
- Try to lead your teammates with passes on the move
- Fast break layups require the shooter to slow down with the 1-2 step as he/she approaches the basket-Use the backboard for all lay-ups
- On defense your first job is to stop the dribbler/ball
- The most important pass in fast break is the outlet-make sure that the concept of first pass to the outlet and second pass to the middle are explained discussed
- Run wide if you are filling an offensive lane-spacing is important to create opportunities for passes and drives to the hoop
- Defense must sprint back to the paint EVERY time
- Scoring pass is usually a bounce pass
- Outlets usually overhead passes



- Early break passes are usually chest passes

3 On 2 – 2 On 1

3 lines at one end of the court, 2 players at half court sideline. Middle line player tosses the ball off the backboard jumps up as high as he can to rebound the ball with two hands, pivots to the outside and throws overhead outlet pass to player at hash mark (who has called “outlet”). Rebounder runs up the opposite sideline (staying wide) from his/her pass. Outlet player chest passes to opposite side player who is running the “Banana Cut” to the middle. Banana cut is a looping cut from the opposite sideline so the player receives the ball heading up court. Once the ball is in the middle, the outlet receiver fills the outside lane on his/her side. The 2 players at half court run to the middle circle and touch the floor, starting out when the rebounder throws the ball off the backboard. Once they touch the floor, they retreat, never losing sight of the ball, into a tandem (one at the top of the circle, one in the paint) set with the back player taking the first pass. The banana cut player has the ball in the middle and the two outside players are filling the lanes. The middle offensive player dribbles to the foul line, jump stops and bounce passes the ball to one of the wings that is Diagonally-Cutting (planting outside foot and cutting diagonally to the basket) to the basket. Once the shot goes up the player who shoots goes back on defense and the two defenders come down 2 on 1. Make sure you play one shot only to begin with to avoid long scraps under the boards. In the 2 on 1 stress ball movement and the bounce pass for the lay-up, as well as the defender challenging the ball and retreating on a pass. Repeat for 5-7 minutes so each player gets to rotate through different positions.

Rebounding/Boxing Out

Middle school players usually shoot less than 20% from the floor as a team. 60-70% of the scoring is on rebounded misses. Guess what you should spend some time teaching your team to do? **CRASH THE BOARDS AND REBOUND!!** Rebounding is 75% effort and 25% skill/athleticism at these ages. Particularly for athletic kids who may not yet be as skilled as their teammates, rebounding is a great way for them to contribute. Focus points for rebounding:

- Be relentless...it’s not who jumps the highest or the tallest player who gets the rebound....It’s the player who uses their body the best
- Watch the ball, chase the ball
- Go strong with two hands to grab the ball
- Strong stance- knees bent-explode to the ball...No tiptoes!
- When boxing out, make contact and keep contact with the player you are holding out. Focus on sitting on his/her knees and little tap steps to keep in contact.

3 Player rebounding drill (Multi Basket drill)- Have 6 players outside of the paint in shell drill positions. Have 2 players pass the ball back and forth so the defense has to react and play the ball and their man. One of the players shoots the ball after 5 passes.



The drill then goes live. Play offense gets 2 points for a rebound, defense gets 1. Play to 4 and switch.

Boxing Out Drill- Place a ball in the middle of the circle. Put the entire team around the ball 15 feet away. Half on offense (outside) half on defense (inside closer to the ball). On the whistle, defense pivots and boxes offense out. We like to front pivot at this age. Second whistle is 5 seconds later. If offense touches the ball they get 1 point if defense holds them out they get 1 point. Play to 5, and switch.

3 on 3 half court or 5 on 5 small side full court (no dribbling)

To encourage passing and cutting to get open. Start a half court game of 3 on 3 with no dribbling with at least two passes before a shot. This drill disciplines players to pass and get open. After a few minutes the game can be modified to allow one dribble. This drill works well with small side full court since the only way to advance the ball up court is through passing.

Motion Offense Principals

We have attached a basic motion offense as addendum to this syllabus, along with 3 set plays, and a sideline and baseline out of bounds plays. Set offense is the single most difficult to get middle school kids to master. They have a hard enough time passing, catching, dribbling and shooting on the move without layering on the timing and intricacies of offensive sets. As a result, a motion offense that does not rely on all kinds of specific cuts and screens offers players to develop a sense of spacing and the fundamental movement that are the building blocks for later years. Do not mistake this for “freelance, roll out the balls and let them play” offense. Players of this age can often surprise you with how quickly they respond to facing up, spacing, screening off the ball and back door cutting. You have to be patient and stress the simple fundamentals. The most important components of the motion offense are as follows:

- 1-3-1 basic set
- Assign each player a number to get them started
- Point Guard passes to either wing, or to the high post to get started
- Wings V-cut to get open
- If the ball goes from the point to the high post, the wings both cut back door
- Point guard can either screen away, rub off the high post, or cut back door to the hoop
- EVERY TIME A PLAYER RECEIVES A PASS HE/SHE FACES UP IN THE TRIPLE THREAT POSITION AND LOOKS TO PASS.
- Players should attempt to keep the basic shape of the 1-3-1....fill space where player who is cutting has vacated
- Look pass first, shoot drive second
- Every player must learn to V-Cut to get open. If you can't get open, go screen for somebody.



- *Keep spacing 10-15 feet between players.* Blow the whistle and stop everyone when they get bunched.
- Screen a body
- When there is an alley to the basket, drive and score
- Try to get at least one swing of the ball from one side of the court to the other.
- Passes from the wings and interior passes should most always be bounce passes.
- Moving and screening away from the ball will get you the best scoring opportunities
- Crash the boards

The best way to get players comfortable is to start with 3 player sets stressing passing and cutting to the basket and setting off the ball screens. Try this with dummy defense to start, and after a practice or two start to go ½ speed defense and 4 /5 player motion. Try to spend 5-7 minutes per practice on this. It is most useful to do it just before scrimmaging so it is fresh in player's minds.

CONTROLLED SCRIMMAGE AND REVIEW – 30 MINUTES

Start with 5 minutes of 4 on 4 full court with no fast breaks. If you have 12 players, bring 3 different color pinnies. Teams change on every score (The team that is sitting out should be on sideline ready to enter. If the teams take more than a minute to score, arbitrarily change out one of the teams) Keep track of who has most points for and of practice team building.

Go to 5 on 5 full court and make sure you or an assistant referee as if it is a real game to teach the kids the rules and get them prepared for what they will find when they play in an official game. Play mini games of 5 minutes, keeping score and shooting 1 free throw instead of 2 to keep it moving. Make every attempt to keep rotating combinations of kids on different teams to keep it competitive, and give you a better sense as to each player's strengths and weaknesses. Change one or two kids per game. Players who are sitting out (hopefully 2 or less) should do ball handling drills and be subbed in a rotation.

Review

To end practice, have the players line up on the end line under the basket. Every player shoots 1 free throw. One sprint for every missed shot. Take the kids off to the side after they run for a 3 minute break up meeting. Go over schedule, review what went well in practice and what we need to work on. The 3 things to evaluate are effort, skills, and quality of team play. This is a great time to call out a player who has improved at a skill/drill, or a team that worked particularly well together. It's also a time to get the kids a little excited about an upcoming game.