

Coach's Corner



Youth coaching tips
By Tom Kirkendall

When my children were younger, I coached youth baseball and basketball (both boys and girls) for eight years, so I developed some definite thoughts on that rewarding experience. The following points relate to coaching youth basketball (basically, 12 years of age and under), but the principles can be applied to any youth sport:

1. Get a whistle for practice. I could never understand how my fellow coaches could run an effective practice without a whistle. Most of them simply didn't. It usually showed when my teams played them.
2. Never criticize physical mistakes by your players. I never understood why many other youth coaches did so. I always wanted my kids taking risks to try to make good plays. If the kids are worried about getting criticized for making physical mistakes, then they would be less inclined to take the physical risks necessary to make good plays.
3. Limit practice time to no more than an hour. The attention span of children is limited, so, after an hour, you reach the point of diminishing returns that make practices drudgery for the kids. I always emphasized making practices fun it's always better to stop practice bit too early than too late.
4. Organize your practices tightly. Kids actually enjoy the regimentation of a well-organized practice.
5. Emphasize playing the game during practices. I always emphasized playing the game over drills during practice. For example, the majority of the time in my practices involved the kids running the 3-on-2-on-1 drill, which allows the kids to play the game while allowing me to teach all the kids after a specific good or bad play is made during the drill. The kids uniformly love the drill because it allows them to play the game
6. When correcting a player's physical mistake during the 3-on-2-on-1, always start with a compliment of the player, then provide the instruction for correcting the mistake, and then follow it with another compliment. Pretty basic stuff, but it's amazing how many youth coaches fail to follow it.
7. The only time that I would raise my voice with a youth player is when they were doing something dangerous or not listening during practice. There is a difference between not

listening – which a kid needs to be jolted out of – and a failure of concentration, which is more common. The latter is really the same as a physical mistake and should be dealt with in the same manner.

8. Teach the kids a special under-the-basket in-bounds play. You would not believe how many easy points your team can score by having the players learn and execute a good in-bounds play under the basket. I used the stack play where the four players not in-bounding the ball line up on the side of the lane where the ball is being in-bounded. Upon the in-bounding player slapping the ball, the first two players in the stack take off for each corner of the court, the fourth player in the stack takes off backward, and the third player fakes a quick turn away from the basket and then simply turns around toward the basket and moves toward the player passing the ball in from out-of-bounds under the basket. The play almost always resulted in an easy layup.
9. I would teach the kids to run the in-bounds play under the chaos and pressure of game situations by periodically blowing my whistle during the 3-on-2-on-1 drill during practice and yelling “Run It! The players were taught immediately to stop the drill and line up in the stack under the basket as if they were in a game situation. I would play the ref and hand the in-bounding player the ball promptly regardless of whether the other players were ready. This taught the kids to react quickly and get ready during a game by yelling “Run It” whenever there was an in-bounds play under our basket.
10. Finally, have fun yourself. The kids reflect the attitude of their coach. If you are having fun, then it’s likely they will too.