



**YOUTH BASKETBALL
COACHING CURRICULUM
2-3 EXP – GRADE 8**

INTRODUCTION

League Philosophy

SLARA sponsored leagues and activities are formed and operated on the principles of good sportsmanship, fair play, courtesy to others, healthy activity, tolerance and inclusiveness, and all other policies pertaining to community understanding and development. SLARA reserves the right to make decisions which it feels are in the best interest of the league and community.

What to Expect?

As players progress through SLARA's basketball leagues, the level of play will increase. Still, the focus remains on fun and many players are still beginners. Some will pick up the game and skills quicker than others. Be patient and keep the focus on fun! Players should play equal amounts of every game, receive equal instruction, and be provided with an environment suitable for skill development and recreation.

Role of the Youth Coach

SLARA thanks you for your decision to serve as a coach! SLARA coaches are vital to the implementation of all youth leagues. As a coach, your role is to serve as a communicator to parents and players alike, facilitate a learning environment, and provide supervision. It is not uncommon for youth players to view a coach as a role model, use this opportunity to teach fair play, sportsmanship, and a love for the game. Keep practices fun, yet instructional. Use gameplay as teaching moments for young players. Coaching youth sports can be a very rewarding experience, remember to have fun with this!

Purpose of this Curriculum

The focus of this curriculum is to lay out a week-by-week guide to serve as the foundation for your practice program. This curriculum will cover the skills and mechanics each player will need to learn to help grow their game. While this curriculum provides a starting point, additional lessons should be worked in when appropriate. The key to learning for many of these young players is confidence. It is your responsibility as a coach to create an environment that enables these young players to feel confident in their ability. Through repetition, positive reinforcement, and fun, these young players can hope to see improvements in their game from week 1 to week 8!

START PRACTICE WITH A WARM UP

Stretching provides a great starting point for any practice. Stretching allows players to loosen up, prevent injury, and can be a solid team activity to start a practice. Stretching will add structure to the beginning of a practice and gives you a chance to brief the team on important announcements or upcoming practice goals. Try to incorporate stretching into your practice agenda.

Some ideas to get you started:

- Stand on toes, reach arms to the ceiling for 10 seconds
- Spread the legs, while standing, as far apart as possible without losing balance. Reach with both arms through the legs as far as you can for 10 seconds.
- Legs still spread, reach your left arm to your right foot. Repeat with right arm to left foot. Do each for 10 seconds.
- Sit down. Spread legs and reach as far forward between legs as possible for 10 seconds.
- Still sitting, bottoms of feet together, knees out, press down on inside of legs with elbows for 10 seconds.
- Stand up and rotate arms clock-wise and counter-clockwise. Do each for 10 seconds.
- Finish with 25 jumping jacks

WEEK 1 – BALL HANDLING/DRIBBLING

Ball Handling is the most basic skill a young player needs to pick up on. Without proper ball handling mechanics, players will struggle to properly and effectively dribble the basketball up and down the court. The key here is repetition. Being confident dribbling the basketball down the floor will require confidence. The only way to become confident is through proper repetition of the mechanics. Ball handling and dribbling is the focus for week 1 but should not be forgotten as the season progresses.

Coach Focus

Make sure your players are focusing on the following:

- Heads Up! Don't look at the ball while dribbling.
 - Use fingers to bounce the ball
- Keep the ball under control, don't let it go higher than your waist
 - Keep your knees bent
- Ball-You-Man: Keep yourself between the defender and the ball. If a player must go through you to get to the ball, chances are higher they will foul you.

*When teaching dribbling, be sure to stress that it is not a race. Relay races, while fun, can cause players to speed up past what they can handle and use poor mechanics. During drills, stress the use of proper mechanics, speed will come naturally with time.

Drills

Warm up

Players get in a circle, each with a basketball and practice using proper dribbling/ball handling mechanics. The goal of this drill is to get players used to a basketball in their hands and comfortable with proper mechanics.

Look For: Make sure each player is using proper techniques and not replicating bad habits

Figure 8

Place cones in a straight line, roughly 5 to 10 feet apart. Have players dribble a basketball in and out of the cones. Repeat several times and have players use both hands at least once.

Look For: Be sure players are using their fingers to control the ball and are dribbling with their head up. Make sure they have confidence in using both hands.

Line of Battle

Have your team all stand in a straight line, about 5 to 10 feet apart. Give the player at the front of the line a basketball. On the whistle, the player with the ball dribbles in a figure 8 through all of the players in line. Once they reach the end of the line, give the new, first person in line a ball and repeat the process. To add difficulty, have players in line attempt to steal the ball as the player dribbles through. Repeat a few times.

Look For: Make sure players are using proper technique when dribbling through. If players are permitted to attempt steals, make sure no one is committing hand fouls.

WEEK 2 – PASSING

A team that is able to move the ball well on the offensive side of the floor will be tough for any team to stop. Good ball movement is achieved through good passing between teammates. The focus for week 2 is passing, how to pass properly, when to pass, and what pass to use.

Coach Focus

You should cover the following passes with your players:

- Chest pass
- Bounce pass
- Overhead pass
- Baseball Pass

Chest and bounce passes are the most common passes used. Make sure your players are keeping two hands on the ball, stepping forward with their foot, extending their arms and keeping their palms out in the direction of their teammate's chest for a chest pass or the floor for a bounce pass. Overhead passes and baseball passes may be taught as well, as they are good options for a fast-breaking teammate. However, these passes can be easy to steal when not done correctly and should be avoided all together in the half-court offense.

Drills

Warm up

Create as many pairs as you can with your players. Have them line up across from one another with one basketball. Players should take turns passing the basketball back and forth. Have players alternate between chest and bounce passes. After a while, have players move further back with each successful pass until they are on opposite sides of the gym. Players can now practice overhead, or baseball passes.

Look For: Ensure players are using proper technique and keeping their passes on target.

Circle Passing

Have the team form a circle with two players being left in the middle. Players on the outside of the circle must make passes to other players on the outside of the circle. The two players will defend passes and attempt to steal the ball. If a ball is stolen, the passer switches roles with the player who stole the ball. Switch roles every so often so players are not stuck in the middle.

Look For: Effective and on-target passes, proper technique. Make sure the defending players are not fouling yet are playing aggressively.

3 Man Weave

Players line up in 3 lines on one baseline. The player in the furthest left or right line starts with the ball. They pass to the player on the opposite side. Players weave around each other and fill in the open space as they make their way down the court, continuing to pass the ball without dribbling. The goal of this drill is to work on ball movement and player spacing while running a fast break.

Note: This drill is a bit more complicated and might be too advanced for younger players.

Skills Competition

This drill works on shooting, dribbling, and passing. Form two lines on the baseline. Players start off and must dribble to halfcourt and throw a pass through a target. After hitting the target, they must retrieve the ball and dribble to the other basket for a 3-pointer (this can be shortened to a shorter jumpshot for younger players). After they make the shot they retrieve the ball and head back and dribble back to the basket where everybody is lined up and make a layup. First player to complete all of this moves on to the next round and goes back in line. The goal is to eliminate everybody on the other team.

WEEK 3 – SHOOTING

If a player wants to score, they are going to have to learn to shoot the basketball! Shooting can be very difficult for younger players since they do not have the strength necessary to use proper form when shooting on a 10 ft. rim. It is still important to teach proper form, so that bad habits are not relied on later.

Coach Focus

Proper shooting technique can be described by viewing the basketball as a clock. For a right-handed shooter, the right hand should be at 6 o'clock and the left at 8 or 9 o'clock. The shooting elbow should be directly under the shooting hand and the wrist should bend to form a "C" with the forearm and elbow. The shooter will bend the knees and start the shot from the chest, coming off of the ground as the shot is released. On the follow-through, both hands and the body should face the basket.

Layups are a crucial part of shooting. For a right-handed shooter, the right foot should come off the ground and the ball should be shot for the top-right corner of the square on the backboard.

Drills

Technique Practice

Have players line up on the baseline with a ball. On the whistle, they should take 3 to 4 dribbles ahead, stop, and shoot the ball into the air, not far enough so that it is out of reach. The goal here is to practice proper mechanics without focusing on getting the ball to the hoop. Have them repeat this process all the way down the floor.

Look For: Shooting technique! Now is the time to correct players on shooting technique before it becomes habit.

Around the World

Players line up around the key or 3-point line. Have players go around the line taking shots at the basket. See if all players can make a shot in the same cycle.

Look For: Proper mechanics

Break Away Drill

Coach will throw a ball off the backboard, so it caroms out towards the other basket. The player will track down the rebound and dribble to the opposite hoop to lay it in.

Look For: Proper dribbling and lay-up mechanics

Give-N-Go

Create two lines near the basket, a lay-up line and rebound line. Players in the lay-up line will make a pass to the player in the rebound line. The player who passed the ball will then drive to the basket and take a pass back from the player in the rebound line before shooting a lay-up. Each player will switch lines after completion of the drill.

*You can use this same set-up for a simple lay-up drill without the give and go element.

Look For: Strong, accurate passes. Good breaks to the basket. Proper lay-up technique.

Mini-Mikan Drill

Place 2 basketballs on each side of the lane, about 5 feet away from the basket. One player rebounds the ball and places it back in its original position, the other player shoots. On the whistle, the shooting player will pick up a ball, shoot, run to the other ball, and shoot again. They should go back and forth between balls for 30 seconds. Switch roles.

Look For: Shooting technique can break down as fatigue settles in. Make sure players are using proper form even when tired.

WEEK 4 – FOUL SHOOTING

Another aspect of shooting is foul shooting. As players get older, the importance of foul shots will become even more important. Incorporating foul shot practice into your practice plan will allow for your players to learn a crucial part of the game while having the opportunity to perfect their shooting mechanics introduced in the previous week. In teaching foul shots, you should also touch on rebounding foul shots.

Coach Focus

The goal here is simple: Teach your players to become dependable shooters from the line. You will want to make sure players are utilizing proper shooting mechanics. If a player cannot reach the rim with the shot consistently from the existing free throw line, have them move up a few steps to maintain proper form.

Drills

Set the Standard

Each player shoots three foul shots in a row. After all have taken their shots, the players who made the most shots all move on to a play-off round. During this round, each player will have three shots. If the first shooter goes 1 for 3 and the next goes 2 for 3, then the first shooter is eliminated. If a shooter goes 3 for 3, then all players who do not replicate this are eliminated.

Seven Up

Players line up to shoot foul shots. Each shot made is worth 1 point and points will add up when made shots are strung together. If the first and second shooter makes their shot, then there is 2 points on the basket. If the 3rd shooter then misses, they get the 2 points that were on the basket. The value of the basket can reach 7. Once a player gets 7 points for missed shots, they are eliminated. Players who make shots are putting pressure on players behind them to make their shots as well. This game is good for players to practice making a free-throw under pressure, something they will encounter countless times throughout their playing careers.

Guts Free-Throws

This is another drill that puts pressure on shooters and tries to prepare them for the fan distractions that occur in a game. Have all of your players line up along the baseline on one end of the floor. Starting out, have the first player in the line step forward to the free-throw line while teammates stay along the baseline. He/she must shoot two free-throws. Coaches, assistants will yell and try to distract the shooter. This is a good drill to have fun with your team at the end of practice while also practicing free throws. You can also incorporate running on missed free throws depending on the skill level on the players.

WEEKS 5 THRU 7 – FLOOR PLAY

The skillsets covered in the first part of this curriculum serve as a good start to teaching any young player the game, but players will eventually need to know how to put those skillsets to use.

Coach Focus

Over the next few weeks, you will teach your players the importance of overall floor play. These include non-skill tasks like pivoting, rebounding, defense, and offensive positioning. While the mastery of basic skills is important, hard work, hustle, and awareness on the basketball court separate the good players from great players.

Pivoting

Pivoting can help a player to get away from defensive pressure, create better angles, and open up better passing lanes. Demonstrate to players how to successfully pivot and encourage them to use the technique to avoid tie ups in game situations.

Pivot Drill

Two lines are formed. On coaches' whistle, the first player in each line sprints to the near foul line and jump stops (landing on both feet at the same time). On command, they will pivot right or left then pivot back. After completing their pivots, have them take a jump shot. Repeat process until each player has had several attempts.

Look For: Proper jump stop technique, pivoting using the whole foot and not the toe.

Rebounding

Rebounding is a very important aspect of both a good offense and good defense. When rebounding, it is crucial to keep yourself in between the player you are guarding and the basket. Don't be afraid of contact when battling for a rebound but be sure to avoid fouls.

Rebound Drill

The coach will shoot to miss and cause a rebound. Two players, one offensive and one defensive, will battle for the rebound. If the offensive player gets the rebound, they should attempt to shoot a lay-up while still being defended.

Look For: Proper block out techniques, defensive players getting low, making contact with the offensive player. Correct players who lose sight of the ball or foul the other player.

Defense

Defense is typically not a focus on the minds of young players, however it is very important to teach. Players should be taught to keep themselves between the player they are guarding and the basket. They should also be taught to guard the basket first, then pick up the player they

are guarding. Young players will follow the person they are supposed to guard around the entire court, and often times group up creating easy fast break opportunities. This should be avoided. Players must also learn when to go for a steal and when to hold back.

Shuffle Drill

Players assume the defensive position: Knees bent, heads up, hand extended-palms up, feet shoulder width apart. On the whistle, players shuffle to the pointed direction.

Look For: Players getting tired, proper form, slow reactions

Defense Drill

One player will dribble a basketball forward and a defensive player will shuffle to stay in front, keeping their head up and focused on the offensive player's waist.

Beat Your Opponent

Have two players line up at the free throw line while everybody else lines up under the basket. One of the two players in line starts off with the basketball. They pass the ball to one of the players at the free throw line and they shoot. If they make the shot, the next players in line step up to the front and you repeat the same thing. If the shot is missed, the players under the basket must box out and try to get the rebound. After somebody rebounds the ball, it just turns into a 2-on-2 scrimmage. Whichever team scores first stays at the free throw line while the other team goes back in line.

Look for: Proper boxing out and shooting mechanics

Offense

Every young player's favorite part of the game, scoring a basket! However, scoring a basket takes hard work long before a shot is even taken. To keep an offense running effectively, teach your players these aspects of good offensive play:

- Keep the ball out of the corners. The sidelines make it easy to get trapped as they act as an extra defender.
- Balance the skill on the floor at one time and keep everyone involved! Having every player on the floor involved creates more self confidence among your players and helps your offense beat the defense.
- Make passes from the wing. The wing will provide the best angle to work the ball to the low post.
- Send one player to help a teammate in trouble. Often times young players will group up and all go for the ball when a player picks up their dribble. Designate a player to do this so other players remain options for passes.
- Assign positions/areas on the court a number. This helps young players, who may not have a grasp on what each position's responsibilities figure out where they play. For

example, point guard may be a 1 and should be the player to carry the ball up the floor. Now, a player assigned 1 knows what their position does and where on the floor they play.

Whistle-Freeze Drill

Players will take part in a controlled scrimmage. Introduce various in-game situations. Players freeze in place on coach's whistle for instructions/corrections.

Look For: Offensive and Defensive strategies/positionings. This is a good time to correct/remind players on what has been taught the previous couple weeks

WEEK 8 – SCRIMMAGES

It's been a season full of instruction for your players so far. As it winds down, make sure to remind them why they play the game...to have fun! Let them scrimmage and stay out of the way for the most part. Obvious errors or mistakes should be corrected as not to create poor habits, but this should overall be a laid back and fun practice session. Work in different player combinations and make sure everyone gets an equal amount of playing time as well as time with the ball in their hands.