

AVCSS Basketball, LLC

Making “Defense” a priority in practice...

Most youth basketball coaches spend the majority of their practices on drills, skill work, and offense – But what about Defense? The old cliché “Defense Wins Ball Games” is pretty much a proven one. When I watch other teams practice and see them run over offensive plays, inbounds plays, run a few drills, and then scrimmage the rest of the practice – it makes me wonder why there wasn’t any time (or very little time) spent on defense? Maybe it’s because the common belief is that it’s so easy to play defense, or it’s just a matter of the players hustling – so the team doesn’t really need to practice defense, etc. I don’t know? What I do know is that these same coaches will come back after losing games in a tournament and jump right back on learning more offenses, etc. I am here to tell you that if you don’t make defense a major part of your basketball practices, you won’t be as successful as you could be. Spending half of your practice time on defense (or more) should be a high priority. For the younger age groups, coaches will have to teach players to be aggressive, to hustle, and most of all that every player must move each time there is a pass).

Practice Pointers:

a) Defensive Drills – There are so many defensive skills that need to be “drilled” into players that I don’t know where to start... Each coach should evaluate their team to figure out which drills are needed the most – Do your players move on each pass or are they getting to the player well after they catch the ball? Do they know when to help? Double team? When to front or play behind a player? Are they attacking or reacting? Coaches should know what their players need to work on and select drills that they will get the biggest impact from.

b) Defensive Plays – I’ve seen coaches teach a whole defense in 5 minutes or less, why? They said that it is just too “easy” to play defense, why waste the time. Or my starters got it, so the 2nd string should have been paying attention (assuming that the 2nd string also got it just by watching the 1st string). If a coach has 12 players on the team, they all need to be taught “hands on” not by watching others do it. Review defensive plays just as much as offensive plays. Break them down into little parts, review those parts, and run examples of different situations and what to do if this happens or that happens.

Youth basketball coaches must ensure that their players understand that defense is more important (or just as important) as offense. A good coach can fire up their team to want to play defense just as much as they want to play offense (this is easier said than done – but not impossible).

Have you ever seen a player walk in the gym and start practicing defense? I can answer that question for you – “No” – this is mainly because it’s just not any fun at all for youth basketball players to practice defense. A coach can walk into a gym before practice starts and see the majority of the team “jacking up” up 3-pointers. Defense is not as much fun as offense because it usually requires more work and energy. During a game, you will really never see a player take a break on offense, but often “relax and rest” a little on defense when they are tired. So if a coach wants their players to perform well on defense (which can help your team be more successful) they will need to find a way to make “Defense” fun for the players. Make them understand how good defense can not only stop the other team from scoring points, but also create scoring opportunities for your team (from steals, pressing, etc). I tell my players that if they don’t go hard on defense, they won’t get a chance to play offense! I realize that it’s very easy to get lost in the game, and get caught up in the hype. You have a player that just made 4 shots in a row, they are on fire, but they are not going hard on defense. Yes, this player just scored 4 baskets for your team, but how many baskets did they allow on defense? If they allowed 4 baskets, then what is the point?

Coaches must make defense the highest priority when it comes to basketball practices – good, sound defensive fundamentals will help any team be successful.

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