

## Selecting Starters

### The 5 “Best” players or the 5 “Right” Players?

One of the common mistakes that youth basketball coaches make is to pre-determine who their starters are going to be (especially before tryouts or the season has begun). In the off season I have had many discussions with High School basketball coaches, and am always surprised to hear that they already know who their starters are going to be. Don't get me wrong, it's not a bad idea to plan or get a feel on who could be a starter – it's just that some coaches don't take certain things into account before making this very important basketball decision.

#### Let me explain my logic:

1. Do you really know how many and exactly who will be trying out for the team? Are there any transfer students? Are any players hurt?
2. Do you know if your starters have worked hard in the off season? Or did one or two sit around and do nothing all summer?
3. Has another player come along that has improved? Has this player worked hard on their game all summer?
4. How do you know that these players can work together as a unit, and “gel” as a team? Have you seen this group play together?

The season has not begun yet, so why would a coach have players penciled in to their starting line up? **What happened to awarding a starting position to players that have worked hard in the off season?** Where's the motivation for players to work hard if they already know they won't be starting? Or, will your starters stay motivated and still work hard if they have been handed a starting job without really earning it? What kind of message is this sending to your players and the team?

The main concern with selecting starters in the off season is that once the season begins, the coach will sometimes “force the issue” with these 5 players in the starting lineup and be reluctant to make a change (another common mistake is not recognizing that a change has to be made, and following through with it). A coach may have his 5 most athletic players on the court, but they don't exhibit teamwork (too much selfish play)? Or a coach has a 6 foot player as center just because they are the tallest player on the team?

**The fact is - that it's not necessarily the “Best” 5 players that need to start, but rather the “Right” 5 players that need to start.** The best possible combination of players that will exhibit team work, unselfishness, and follow the coaches philosophies are your best bet for a “winning” combination! As a coach, if you can figure out a winning combination of players, you will be more successful and win more games.

*“They said you have to use your five best players but I found that you win with the five who fit together the best.” (Red Auerbach, Boston Celtics).*

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