

# New Lenox Community Park District Children's Basketball League Coaching Tips

- 1. Let your child know you're considering coaching.**
  - a. Explain that you're really looking forward to this, and ask for feedback about it. Your child's opinion may or may not change your decision about coaching, but it's good to have your child in on this new role you'll be playing from the beginning.
- 2. Be clear on your own goals for coaching.**
  - a. Coaches of kids just starting to play a sport may have the simple goal of a season enjoyable enough that everyone returns for next season.
- 3. Share your goals with your players and their parents from the start.**
  - a. Having a pre-season parent meeting is ideal. If it's too late for that, just get the parents together at the end of a practice and let them know why you're out there. It might sound like this: "My number one goal this season is to give your kids such an enjoyable experience that they all can't wait for next season. And, yes, I hope to teach them some skills, too!" Of course, if you have more ambitious goals in terms of skill development or imparting life lessons, share those, too.
- 4. Invite the parents to help.**
  - a. It often helps to have some parents pitch in at practices and games. If you invite them directly, they will likely support you with a few extra hands. Getting them involved at your practices also makes it more likely they'll be comfortable practicing the sport with their child outside of official practice time.
- 5. Welcome each player by name at every practice and game.**
  - a. When kids arrive to coaches who are smiling and greeting them by name, they feel welcome and positive from the start.
- 6. Developing a practice plan**
  - a. Start to develop drills to work on your weaknesses.
  - b. Showing up to practice with a plan or script for how things should be run is a way to take pressure off you and your coaching staff and will provide your players with constant instruction and interaction.
- 7. Research**
  - a. Use the internet to find hundreds of drills you can use and specific coaching tools. YouTube is a great tool for this.
- 8. Assessing your talent accurately and quickly.**
  - a. As soon as you start practicing you need to assess the talent you have through drills and game like situations. This process isn't just to find who your best players are but to discover what your team needs to work on as a group and how you can elevate the less skilled players so you can rely on everyone.
- 9. Plan ahead**
  - a. Plan your season out now or shortly after assessing your talent. What do you want your players to know or be able to do by the end of the season?

**10. Pick 1-2 areas of focus per practice/game.**

- a. You likely only have one hour for your practice. Pick one topic (two at the most!) to introduce and repeat over and over again. At the start of practice, you might say, "Today is going to be all about passing." Then each time you bring the players in, ask them, "What is our focus today?" Then have this same focus for your competition that week. Whenever you see it being executed well, let your players know it, "Milo, awesome pass to Nathan!"

**11. Stations in practice**

- a. Depending on the number of coaches you have use stations so you can focus on specific skills and get that muscle memory practice. It is also a great opportunity to enlist parents to help. Most basketball practices these days are fast moving, high focus and high attention to detail with very little standing around.

**12. Limit Standing Around**

- a. This is a common problem with youth sports that ultimately turns kids off. Whether it's a game or practice, engage every participant consistently. Kids don't attend practice to watch others play. Kids enjoy practices when they have fun and they experience an improvement in their overall skills. Many professional coaches put a major emphasis on fast paced and interactive practices that eliminate downtime.
- b. When kids are moving and active, they are more likely to stay focused. At the younger ages, avoid lines. Bring plenty of equipment, so kids are not standing around waiting for their turn. Find games/drills that give kids a lot of repeated practice of the skills.
- c. The sideline during a game is a perfect opportunity to coach up your team. This keeps your players engaged during the game and can help prevent future mistakes on the court.

**13. Stretching**

- a. Always do a light stretch before practice. You don't need to spend a lot of time at the beginning of practice. Concentrate stretching at the end of practice to take advantage of muscles and tendons already being warmed up, getting rid of lactic acid. This is a good opportunity for the kids to relax before sending them home and a great time to focus on handing out praise.

**14. Fundamentals, Fundamentals, Fundamentals**

- a. You can never spend too much time on the basics. Fundamentals must become engrained in their muscle memory, so your players are doing, not thinking on the court.

**15. Footwork**

- a. The key to basketball is footwork, just like fundamentals, you can never practice this enough.

**16. Use Cones**

- a. Cones are great for this age group. Less confusion about boundaries and where they are supposed to go.

**17. Make it fun!**

- a. Your job as a coach is to make it fun and interesting and if you win along the way, great. Try to be creative at the end of practices to have competitions (silly competitions) team building competitions to build teamwork and have fun. (relay races, tag games, partner races, etc.)

**18. End practice/competition on a positive note.**

- a. At the end of practice or a competition, call in all the athletes and the parents. Ask the kids: "Who saw one of your teammates do something well?" The kids are good at answering this question. Then ask the parents, "Parents, what did you see that you liked?" This gives the parents a nice chance to recognize specific, positive things they saw, and it ends the practice/competition on a high note.

**19. Late season practices**

- a. Around the 3-6<sup>th</sup> week of basketball especially after the new year, is typically when injuries start to occur. Go back to fundamentals and slow things down to avoid injuries.

**20. Coach and teach everyone**

- a. Anybody can coach the best player, that's not really coaching, you're just grabbing for the low hanging fruit. Getting the most out of every player is coaching.

**21. Yell Encouragement, Whisper Constructive Criticism**

- a. Keep it positive. As a youth basketball coach, you should never tolerate negative comments from your players, parents, coaching staff, and especially yourself. Kids realize when they have made mistakes. What they don't need is to have that mistake compounded by negative feedback and comments. What they do need is feedback on how to correct the mistake supported by positive encouragement.

**22. Feedback Sandwich**

- a. Before you give feedback or a correction to a player, give some positive encouragement before and after the feedback.
- b. For example: On offense, Tommy screened away but should have cut to the basket. In the result of this, his teammate anticipated his cut and threw the ball away to the other team. Your response shouldn't be yelling at Tommy because he went the wrong direction. You should respond in a way like this,
  - i. "Tommy you did a great job setting a screen for Billy, right there. Just remember on that play you are supposed to cut to the basket instead. Also, way to hustle back on defense!"

**23. Reminders are only useful before they are needed.**

- a. If a player makes a mental mistake because they forgot something, don't blame the player, blame yourself. You as a coach should always be giving reminders during practice and the game. These reminders can be on plays, fundamentals, and even a quick reminder of what play to run after a timeout.

**24. Don't forget, this can be hard!**

- a. Most parents are surprised by how hard it is to feel successful coaching. We go in with very high expectations, and we don't have control over the outcome! You are not alone. Find other coaches who have been doing this for a while and share your challenges. They can serve as a wonderful resource.