



Getting The Most Out Of Practice



Coach Don Showalter

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Is your team not having the success you want them to have on game days and you are wondering why not? Start the search for answers by examining your practices.

Games are won or lost in practice. Focusing on getting the most out of practices will translate into more wins for your team.

Below are strategies to help you get the most out of your practices.

Positive Atmosphere

It's your job as the coach to create a positive atmosphere for your players to practice in. This atmosphere should be like a classroom where students want to come in and learn. A successful classroom is one where kids are willing to step outside their comfort zone and take risks.

As a coach this is your job to recreate this atmosphere on the basketball court.

There is not one single way to create this atmosphere. If you do not make it a point of emphasis to create this atmosphere, it will likely not happen.

- Players should know they can talk to you.
- Players should know that you support them and want them to succeed.
- Players should want to push themselves to get better and
- Players should not be afraid of making mistakes by going hard

In order to create a positive attitude, your practice needs to be positive. This doesn't mean you can't yell at times, but the most effective coaches do more coaching than yelling.



Consistent Leadership

You expect your players to be consistent in practice, you expect your players to be consistent in games with their performance. But how about you? Are you being consistent with your leadership? Your leadership should not be swayed by the outcome of a game. Your goals, your mission, both remain the same. Your team needs you to provide consistent and positive leadership no matter the outcome of the game.

Important To YOU = Important To THEM

Players are very perceptive, probably even more so than most coaches give them credit for. If something is important to you as a coach, players will pick up on this, and it will become important to them.

But remember, as a coach you can't just SAY it is important without your actions supporting this. If you emphasize organization and punctuality to your team and then you are disorganized and not punctual as a coach, your team will realize these things are not important to you....even if you SAY they are. Your actions are louder than your words.

If sharing the ball on the court is important to you as a coach, then this will come across in the drills and coaching you do on the court. And this will become important to your teams as well. If it is NOT a point of emphasis for your team, don't think you can simply walk into a locker room at halftime and begin yelling at your team for not sharing the ball, and have it be effective. This emphasis and change must come during your practice time and your emphasis of this during your practices.

Team Building Ideas

Most coaches realize they need to do team building to help build a positive culture with their team, but are unsure where to start. It is ok to try different ideas and see what works well for



you and your team. Each team is different and every coach is different. What works well for one coach may not work well for another.

Here are a few ideas to try with your team.

- **“I AM”** - Have players complete the phrase “I AM”. You could take this activity in several different directions. You could have them relate it to what they are on the basketball court, they could relate this to what they are as a teammate, what they are as a family member, what they are in school. It is a great activity to get them reflecting on who they are and who they want to be. Share in a team setting before practice, or after practice. Remember to make sure you are creating a safe environment in which everyone can be honest when they share.
- **Book Reports** - Assign a book report to your teams. It could be the same book for the team, or you could pick out a few different ones and assign them to a variety of players. Pick out books that promote a message that you feel strongly about, have positive messages, or simply get your players thinking. Find a time when they can share the book report with the team.
- **Communication Circles** - Communication circles are a great way to end a practice on a positive note. At the conclusion of each practice, have the players circle up and have them answer a question that you have selected for that particular practice. Coaches can start the Communications Circle by answering the question of the day themselves. The questions don't have to all be serious, the questions can be fun as well. The questions will help players get to know each other as well as build trust between one another.

They are simple to implement but require a coach to commit to them throughout the season. Coaches need to also spend time prior to practice finding the right topic for each day's communication circle.



Sample questions might include:

Tell me one positive thing about the player to your right?

Who is your favorite NBA player?

What do you want to be doing 5 years from now?

Give us 1 word that you think best describes a good teammate?

What is your favorite sport other than basketball?

Define a successful practice (or game or season).

Hate To Lose

The most successful teams and players are those that simply hate to lose. Players should feel it is painful to lose in practice. How do you go about creating this atmosphere?

While most players are naturally competitive, some ways to make sure there is competitiveness in your practices are:

- by using a clock,
- keeping score in drills
- or both using a clock and keeping score

By doing these things, you will naturally make each drill more competitive.

Use The Sandwich Method To Teach

A great way to make sure players respond to negative feedback is by using the sandwich method of giving feedback. The sandwich method is pretty simple and very effective.



Start with **positive feedback** - “Your footwork was great on the drive to the basket.”

Next comes the **negative feedback**- “Next time jump stop on 2 feet so you have a solid base.”

Finish with **positive feedback**- “Way to keep your eyes up and pass to your open teammate.”

Players will be much more receptive to the negative feedback when there are positives sandwiched around the negative.

It takes some practice and you must make a conscious effort to do this when you first start, but after a while it will become second nature to you.

Ask Players “Do I have to coach every play?”

Ask your team if you have to coach every play.

Most likely they will respond no. This should lead to dialogue between you and players about what this looks like if you are not coaching every play. It means the players on the court will need to:

- **Show leadership**
- **Communicate**

Players will realize that if they don’t feel the coach should have to “Coach every play”, then the leadership and communication needed to be successful must come from the players on the floor.

Teach In Sound bites NOT paragraphs

As a coach, you don’t need to go into lengthy speeches to get your point across. Players learn best in short sound bites. Make your coaching point to the team and then move on. Sometimes the more you talk the less players listen.



Be concise and to the point, and move on! If you don't, players may stop listening anyway. You are also losing valuable practice time as well.

Non-Negotiables

You should have non-negotiables for your offense and for your defense.

Examples of non-negotiables on offense might be:

We always send 4 players to the offensive boards

We always make the extra pass to our teammate

We always sprint to the offensive end in transition

Examples of non-negotiables on defense might be:

We never allows drives to the middle

We contest every jump shot

We are the first team on the floor for a loose ball

Obviously you want to put in place non-negotiables that fit your offensive and defensive philosophy.

Also, limit non-negotiables to 1 or 2 each so players can concentrate on these and not lose focus by having too many.



Play Hard & Measure Effort

All coaches want their teams and their players to play hard. Usually, however, they simply use their own judgment after games on whether or not this occurred. And sometimes after games coaches can get caught up in remembering one or two crucial plays, and can overlook the small details that happened throughout the game.

If playing hard is important to you (and it obviously should be) then make sure you try to measure this so you can be more objective when analyzing how hard your team played.

Here are 5 ways that you can measure your team's effort:

1. **Charges** - The goal should be to take a minimum of 2 charges per game. Charges can change the momentum of the game, they can cause the opponent to be less aggressive attacking the basket, and they are simply effort plays that everyone can make.

Another goal along with this would be to take at least 4 charge attempts each game. This encourages your team to at least attempt taking the charge, even if the official doesn't call it a charge.

2. **50/50 Balls** - A 50/50 ball is any loose ball that either team has an equal chance to get. Your goal as a team is to get the majority of these 50/50 balls. At the very least it means you are out hustling your opponent that day.
3. **Deflections** - Have at least double digits of these. When you chart deflections you should have a minimum of 10 throughout the course of a game. Getting this many deflections will ensure a large number of steals. Measuring deflections though is a more accurate way of trying to determine if your team is playing hard, as opposed to steals.



4. **Free Throws** - Your goal should be to shoot more FT's than your opponent. In most games, the team that gets to the FT line more is the team that is more aggressive and plays harder than their opponent.

5. **Rebounds** - You should secure more offense and defensive rebounds than your opponent. A huge piece of rebounding is effort. Even if you are way outsized by your opponent, your effort can still allow you to win the rebounding battle.

