

Working with young Players

Kids at this age have varying skills and talents. Some of the kids may have played before, and some have never played at all. Some are there because they already love the game, and some are there because of their friends. Some were urged by their parents to give it a try. Their parents will likely have varying perspectives. A few will think you should win every game at whatever cost, and will be yelling advice from the sidelines. Some will be thankful and happy that their child is on your team. Some will be a little fearful that you may yell at their child, or that their child may not be a good player and will embarrass him/herself.

So what advice can we give you?

First, make it fun for the kids. Do not yell negative things at them as this embarrasses them in front of their friends, and is actually counter-productive creating more stress and more mistakes. It makes you look like a bully, and you may completely turn the player away from ever wanting to play again. You can yell, but it should always be positive comments. If a player messes up, don't embarrass him/her in front of his/her friends. For example, if someone is having trouble with a certain skill or drill, rather than pointing the finger at him, blow the whistle and say, "Some of you are having trouble doing... blah, blah, blah... let me show you how to do this." So maintain a positive attitude, even if you are losing by 30 points. Teach good sportsmanship by your example... no yelling at the refs, no demeaning the other team, other players, etc. Teach them to play hard, but do not allow "dirty" play or trash talking. Teach them to respect their opponents and the officials. Wins and losses are not important at this age. Teach them that you don't have to win a trophy to be a winner. Also, let the kids know that it is OK to make mistakes, that you expect them to make mistakes. Basketball is not a perfect game. All players make mistakes, even Michael Jordan. Coaches make mistakes, and we all know that the refs make mistakes! You just have to keep playing hard and learn from those errors. "A good garden may have a few weeds."

OK... now down to playing basketball!

First, you probably have limited practice time at this age. So don't try to accomplish too much, and keep it simple.

Teach the fundamentals. At every practice, do ten minutes of ball-handling and dribbling drills. Do simple passing drills. Teach footwork (pivoting, triple threat position, doing lay-ups, how to shuffle and slide on defence, etc).

Team Offence. With a limited number of practices, find out who can dribble and handle the ball... they are your point guards and wings.

Teach them the numbering quickly... 1 is the point, 2 is the right wing and 4 the right post, and 3 the left wing and 5 the left post (the even numbers are on the right side and the odd numbers on the left). The only reason to put them into a set is to try to maintain some spacing on the floor... so all five don't end up in the right corner! But tell them that they must not stand still in their position, but cut and move. Don't teach any plays except maybe a simple out-of-bounds play. They will not execute plays at this age anyway. Let them just "play".

Team Defence. At Brookwood we believe all young kids should first learn to play man-to-man defence. Our league does not permit zone defences at the younger ages. Double-teaming is allowed, except in specific areas. The kids will become better defensive players if they learn to move their feet and learn to play good man defence.

Full-court press. We believe that full court pressing probably should not be permitted with younger kids. Instead, teach them to simply apply a full-court man-to-man defence, so it flows easily into your half-court man-to-man defence. Simply, you pressure the ball handler, and the other players try to deny a pass to the person they are guarding.

Balancing. Try to figure out who your best players are. When you do your line-up, always have two good players out there... someone who can dribble and get the ball down the floor, and someone who can rebound and play tough defence.