



**So You Want  
to Coach  
Basketball?**



## **Basketball Coaches Association of New York, Inc.**

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Dear Coach:

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This manual is published by the Basketball Coaches Association of New York, Inc., for individuals who are starting out in coaching basketball. The idea of this manual was borrowed from the Texas Association of Basketball Coaches and the Basketball Coaches Association of Michigan. It is meant to be a work in progress. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact Coach Pat Cauley at [PCauley@hamburgschools.org](mailto:PCauley@hamburgschools.org), or Dave Archer, Executive Director of BCANY at [DArcher@stny.rr.com](mailto:DArcher@stny.rr.com).

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# Prologue

So you want to be a basketball coach? Are you sure? Think about it because you are going to have to tolerate quite a bit. Can you live with having to practice long and sometimes, based on the facilities available, obscure hours?

How about that you are going to have to deal with administrators who may not share your passion or vision? What about handling players who have a different opinion of their ability or role on the team than you do? Further, how about their parents who agree with the player and feel that you are root of their child's and the team's problems? Do you mind having your work open to the public and critiqued by your community?

These types of challenges are what you have signed up for. Be aware but understand you are about to embark on a very noble journey. Even though there are pitfalls in this profession, the positives can and hopefully will outweigh the negatives. Yes, you are going to work long and hard and it won't be easy. Yes, you may have to deal with people and issues that will make your job more challenging, but when you can get a group of people from differing backgrounds to come together and play this game unselfishly, it is beautiful. When you can help a young person grow and develop as a human being by using this game, it is beautiful. You see, the game is a 94' by 50' mirror of life and when young people begin to understand this concept, it is wonderful.

It will be tough, for sure, but it is a battle worth fighting.

# Traits of a Successful Coach

The basic fundamentals involved in coaching basketball are the same, whether an individual coaches youth league, middle school, high school, college or professional. While each level has its own unique problems and rewards, certain skills and traits exist that are common among successful coaches. At least three general and basic skills are necessary to be an excellent coach: Knowledge of basketball and teaching skills, people skills (including communication and motivation) and organizational skills. Let's examine these major topics.

As far as knowledge of basketball is concerned, being a good coach does not require that you were a great basketball player. It does require that you develop a thorough knowledge of the game and that on a continual basis you keep building on your understanding of the game. In basketball, as in other sports, the best coaches may as well be the ones who have studied the game of basketball in such detail that they are able to gain an edge when teaching their players. A thorough knowledge of the game is essential if the coach is to properly teach every player the individual fundamentals, which will prepare the player and the team to perform in a cohesive manner.

The ability to communicate to players, parents, administrators and community supporters is of the utmost importance. If a coach cannot communicate effectively he is in big trouble. Remember, it is not just what you say, it's what you do. It's your body language. Communication is not just what you say or do, it's what the other person hears or perceives. Coaches should remember that perception is reality for the players, parents, etc. Communication is what we say and what we do both consciously and unconsciously. Many questions that players and parents struggle with each season occur because there is inadequate communication or a coach's verbal communication is not consistent with his non-verbal actions.

Motivation is difficult because what may motivate one player may crush another. You must know the player and know what "buttons to push" to get the best out of that individual. In general, offer constructive, not destructive criticism, clearly define each player's role, make certain everyone feels important on the team and be firm, but flexible.

Organization is important because as the leader of the team, the coach must set the standards that he expects the players to maintain. Everything must be organized. Practices, game plans and paperwork required by your athletic department must be organized thoroughly. Winning teams, like winning coaches, are prepared and disciplined.

# You as a Role Model

Whether you like it or not, you have signed up to be a role model who has tremendous influence on young people. The players under your supervision critically analyze everything that you say and everything you do. What a huge responsibility! As difficult as it may sometimes be, you must do all you can to behave in a mature and ethical manner.

Let's examine a few tough situations that you may face. First, referees. Here is what I have learned about referees: sometimes they are right, sometimes they are wrong, however, whatever the case is, we must proceed with their call. I have also learned that referees are ethical people who give their time and effort to the game and to young people. Further, I have learned that players and coaches determine the outcome of games, not referees. Keep your cool. Realize that mistakes will sometimes be made against you, however they can also be made in your favor. Just coach your team. If you don't allow your players to question referees, don't do it yourself. Your effort is much better spent on your team and the next play.

Use of profane language must be avoided at all costs. There is no place for it anywhere in education. I have heard some coaches say, "Well, they (the players) have surely heard worse". That may be true, but if you want your players to respect you and refrain from bad language themselves, you have the responsibility to speak appropriately.

How do you handle a situation where the opponent's fans or players are taunting your players? Do you talk to the other coach? Go into the stands yourself? NO! Think to yourself what a great opportunity to work on focus and poise. Tell your players that whatever is said or done cannot disrupt our focus as a basketball team. What matters is what happens between the lines of the basketball court, if these outside factors bother you and your team, then the "hooligans" feel like they have won.

Another situation to consider: you are up by 25 points with three minutes to go in the final quarter, what do you do? Hopefully you are thinking about substitutions. Your goal is of course to win the game, but also to develop as many players as you can. Give as many players on your team a chance to play in each game and never stop coaching. If you are joking with the starters while the second team finally gets their chance to play, you are short changing those players on the court. Further, don't embarrass opponents. If your ego needs feeding, don't do it at the expense of another group of young people. The same should be said if you are on the other side of a lopsided game. If you stay in this game long enough, there will come a day when you run into a team that you just can't stay with. In that event, you should also sub freely and go back to the drawing board.

Lastly, you want to develop an attitude personally and as a team that even when you lose, you win. In other words, you and your team are playing hard and unselfishly until there is nothing left on the clock. If at that time the scoreboard does not read in your team's favor, so be it. Congratulate the winning team, learn from the defeat and move forward. That way you win even when the numbers said you lost.

# Picking Your Team

Selecting the right players for your team is a challenging situation. Think about it, college and professional coaches recruit or draft players whom they think will develop into potential stars. Are they right? The answer is not always. With their large staffs and huge budgets, these are organizations that are quite often wrong. If large universities and professional teams cannot evaluate and predict who will develop into a fine player, how can an overworked and understaffed middle school or high school program? The answer is you can't predict a star. All coaches at one time or another have misevaluated players whom they cut or they kept on the team.

Team selection is one of the most difficult decisions a coach has to make. Usually a few players will be far superior to the rest. The difficulty comes in deciding who makes the team when the rest of the players are very close in skills. The coach must be aware of who he believes will develop the most and who fits the style of play the program uses. Also, you must document why you selected certain players while letting some others go. Cutting players is never enjoyable, however it is a necessary evil of the job. Most likely, you will have to handle some telephone calls from parents wondering how you could have cut their child. If you have documented reasons supporting your decision, they can still disagree with you, but you have yourself covered with your administration and school district.

# What Style of Play

If you are an assistant coach in your program, the style of play you will use has probably been established by the program's head coach. Learn all that you can about that system so that you can teach it effectively. Players are very perceptive. If you don't fully understand what you are trying to teach them, they'll figure it out quickly and, even worse, they'll lose respect for you. Make certain you really know your basketball curriculum and more importantly, that you can teach it clearly. Young coaches often have trouble understanding why players are not picking up on what the coach believes are simple concepts. When this happens, the coach must look at himself and his teaching methods. It is not what the coach knows that is important, it is what the players understand that is paramount.

If you are responsible for implementing the style of play that your team will use, you must first assess the abilities of the players under your supervision. Size and physical speed will certainly impact how you are going to play. Look at your schedule and pick out the best two or three teams that you will face. Ask yourself what style must my team play in order to compete with those teams? Chances are good that whatever style you need to play against the best on your schedule will work reasonably well against inferior opponents.

Whatever you select, remember that less is more when teaching a system of play. In other words, your players will have a much better chance of executing one or two simple concepts well than they will many complex concepts. You must teach in simple progressions that build upon each other. That way your players will have a chance to execute correctly. Young coaches often see a college or professional team execute a play and believe that play will benefit their teams. This may be true, but make sure you are not teaching a play but *how* to play. Also, keep in mind that there is no substitution for repetition. Players must perform skills and team concepts over and over again in practice if you expect them to execute well in a game situation.



# Practice Planning

Practice planning is an area where young coaches sometimes experience difficulty. In order for your practices to be beneficial, they must be well organized. It is a must that each day you take the time to prepare a detailed practice plan. These plans must reflect what is important to you as a coach. It is not what you teach; it's what you emphasize as a coach that is important. Take a look at your practices. Are they an accurate reflection of those areas that you believe are the most important? Are the drills that you use benefiting your players in game situations? If not, then it is time to reflect on your practice planning and organization. Even experienced coaches review their plans and fine-tune them from year to year. Remember, you generally have three times as much practice time with your players than you do game time during a season. The practice gym, therefore, is your laboratory.

You as the coach set the tone for each and every practice session. ESPN analyst and former college coach Fran Fraschilla once said: "If I watched 15 minutes of your practice, I should be able to tell what you are all about as a coach". He is correct. In that small amount of time it is apparent what type of intensity you supply, whether you let things slide or you are on top of every detail and how clearly you can organize and teach. Ultimately, you want to be hard to practice for but easy to play for. Not the other way around. So, plan practice with the competitive drills, game situations and fundamental work, which will prepare your players for the rigors of the actual game. It is hard for a young coach to imagine, but many retired coaches have cited that it is the practice sessions that they miss most, not the games. Seeing players and a team show growth and maturity is extremely gratifying.

# Dealing with Parents

Understand that parents do not and cannot see the same picture as you, the coach. Their perspective is the complete polar opposite of yours. You see, parents are only concerned with) what is best for their child. What is best for the team is not of their primary concern. You as the coach see what is best for the entire team as your first concern and then what is best for each individual as a secondary or even tertiary concern. Those two perspectives are bound to collide at some point.

The best approach is to be proactive. Have a pre-season parents' meeting to introduce yourself and clearly outline all of your expectations for the upcoming year. Leave no stone unturned. Include your policies on playing time, team rules, player expectations, parents' role and expectations as well as explain your role as the coach. Even though the perspective between parent and coach is different, both do want the child involved to have a positive growing experience. With that common ground, the relationship between parent and coach need not be negative, but can be positive and cordial if expectations have been clearly defined.

If you stay in this profession long enough, you will come across all sorts of personalities among parents. Most are supportive. However, you will inevitably encounter some difficult people. Maybe, they feel their child is better than you have assessed him or her to be, maybe they feel that you are playing their child in the wrong position or maybe these people are living their own athletic life vicariously through their child. In any case, inform all parents of the policies regarding coach-parent communication during the parents meeting and stick to it. If you have established that there will be no discussion of concerns immediately after a game and an irate parent provokes you after a contest, quickly diffuse the situation and have the discussion at a later date. Hopefully cooler heads will prevail.

Lastly, don't ever let a parent dictate to you what you should be doing with your basketball team. First, remember that they probably don't have the same perspective as you have as the coach. Second, they are not there at practice everyday witnessing what you are witnessing. Third, they probably do not even understand what you are trying to accomplish. You have to look yourself in the mirror, so make sure you can live with the decisions that you make.

# Good Luck!

This manual is designed to help prepare you for what you might come across as a basketball coach. Unfortunately, and inevitably, some things will go wrong. Maybe you'll have a few bad games, a difficult parent or you may just make a mistake. No one is perfect! Don't ignore or avoid the situation. Look at it as a challenge and do what you believe is right. Every coach has tough situations. The trick is to turn those situations into positives. Legendary UCLA coach John Wooden had a great saying on the subject:

“Things work out best for those who make the best of the way things work out”.

Step back and see if you could be part of the problem, sometimes our expectations are not reasonable and goals may need to be adjusted. No season or day will ever be without problems. Your attitude during these times will eventually be reflected in your team.

Lastly, remember you are involved in a noble profession. Molding the young people of our nation! All the while, involved in a game that you love. Stay positive and Good Luck! If BCANY can assist you in any way, do not hesitate to contact us.