

## **Seven Basketball Tips For Young Players**

by Sidney Goldstein

Whatever your basketball level you can tremendously improve your game. This article will get you going in the right direction by explaining the most important skills to practice.

### **1. All Great Players Are Great Athletes**

The most important thing you can do to improve your game is to become a good athlete. The stronger and faster you are, the better you will play. Achieve this goal through conditioning and weight training. Have a physical check-up by your doctor before you start training.

Conditioning is easy. Start with 15 minutes of continuous motion, either jogging or, even better, running full court with the ball. Dribble, shoot, and rebound as usual; don't stop moving for the time allotted. You do not need to move quickly. After a week or two of conditioning you will find a comfortable pace. Then, increase the time you spend in the activity according to your performance. Do this every day. Increase moving time about five minutes a week after the first two-four weeks.

Weight training is very helpful. However, there is some disagreement on what age a child can start. One theory says that a build up of muscle mass while bones are growing can limit growth. Some tall body builders disagree, and use themselves as an example to the contrary. Make sure you are well supervised and get advice if you weight train.

Any physical education teacher and most coaches can show you how to do push ups, sit-ups, and other various strengthening exercises. Twenty minutes of instruction will reap great rewards. Remember that you always must underdo these exercises at first so that you can find your level. Underdoing means that you put out a minimum of effort. Do as few as possible, rather than exercise to exhaustion. (The "no pain, no gain" philosophy definitely doesn't work for beginners. I question whether or not this approach works for athletes in good shape.) This approach prevents injury.

Don't forget stretching. Stretching permits you to have a more full range of motion allowing you to twist and turn more readily. You will even run faster. Any physical education teacher or coach can give you tons of stretching exercises. Make sure to warm-up before stretching and always hold the position, never move back and forth.

## **2. You Can't Shoot Properly Unless You Hold The Ball Correctly**

The most difficult skills, including shooting, passing, catching, dribbling, and rebounding, involve holding the ball. There are many signs of faulty ball handling: dropping passes; spraining and jamming fingers; palming the ball; rebounding poorly, shooting poorly. I can't overemphasize the importance of working on this skill daily.

Here is how to practice holding the ball:

1. Make both hands into claws. Growl like a lion and move the claws forward like you are going to rip something apart.
2. Make sure your fingers are far apart.
3. Put the ball between the claws and hold the ball securely. Your only contact with the ball should be your finger ends, not the pads. The palm and other parts of the hand do not touch the ball. Overdoing the hold this way is most beneficial.
4. Hold the ball as long as possible at home while watching TV or listening to the radio. Before practice, hold the ball for a minute or two and at every other opportunity.

## **3. Use Your Wrists In Shooting, Passing, and Dribbling**

The wrist skills, which include shooting, passing, and dribbling, involve the motion of the hand and wrist. Waving good-bye is an example of wrist motion that needs to be practiced. This rarely practiced motion reaps incredible benefits. Not only will you improve, but you will permanently improve.

Here is how to practice:

1. While standing, put your arms straight up overhead, palms facing forward. Keep your elbows straight and do not move your arms throughout the exercise.
2. With your hands slightly clawed, flick your wrist backward and let it come forward without additional effort. Continue to flick your wrists backward. You are doing this correctly if your hand and wrist go back and forth like a wet noodle. Make sure to keep your hands in a slightly clawed position.
3. Continue doing this for one to two minutes. Initially this motion will be very difficult.

4. This first part of the exercise helps with shooting and passing. For help with dribbling, lower the arms to the side with the palms facing backward.
5. With elbows straight and arms stationary, flick the wrist forward and let it come back without effort. Continue doing this for one-two minutes. Make sure the hand is slightly clawed.
6. Do these exercises as often as possible. Make them part of your normal practice warm-up. The more difficult this exercise is to do, the more you need it. It may take one month or more to do these exercises properly.

#### **4. Pivoting Is A Key To Many Other Skills**

Many players and coaches underestimate the importance of pivoting. Every movement with the ball initially involves pivoting. Players routinely pivot to shoot or pass. What is not so obvious is that all moves, most fakes, and driving to the basket all depend on the ability to pivot. Poor pivoters do not have moves and cannot drive well to the basket.

You must be able to pivot forward and backward using either foot. So each exercise must be repeated four times: left foot forward; left foot backward; right foot forward; right foot backward.

The pivot foot is the foot that stays in place. Actually only one part of the foot, the ball of the foot, stays stationary. As you turn, the rest of the foot rotates about the ball of the foot. If you slide or change your pivot point after you have the ball, officials call a walking violation. Your team loses the ball.

Here is how to practice pivoting:

1. Start with the left foot as pivot foot. If you have a ball, hold it in the exaggerated claw position during this exercise.
2. Pivot forward 15 times like you are stomping on bugs as you go. As you find your balance, increase the rotation to a half turn.
3. Repeat rotating backward 15 times.
4. Switch pivot foot. Repeat forward 15 times.
5. Repeat backward 15 times.

Have a bystander or friend watch for several things. You must keep your head up like you would in a game.

- a. Your pivot point must not change.
- b. Your pivot foot does not slide.

## **5. Defense Is Easy To Learn**

Your stance for defense and dribbling is very similar. In both positions you need to be ready to run full speed in any direction. Tap dancing on your toes while in position helps you to practice tap dancing:

How to get in position:

1. In a standing position, move your feet to slightly greater than shoulder width apart.
2. Bend your knees, keeping your back straight and vertical, not bent, till you are down as far as you can go. Then come halfway up.
3. Move the arms slightly outward from the shoulders and move the forearms parallel to the ground.
4. The hands should be slightly clawed in what I call the "ready" position.

What to do in position:

5. Tap dance by quickly bringing the knees slightly up (one-two inches) and down one at a time.
6. Count to 20, one tap at a time.
7. Then sprint four steps forward. Tap and count to 20 again.
8. Pivot around and sprint four steps backwards. Face the original direction, and tap and count to 20 again.
9. Continue for five minutes, moving back and forth and then left and right.

Two other suggestions are:

## **6. Practice shooting from one foot, rather than from greater distances.**

Unless you shoot with the proper technique, practicing from great distances distorts your shot. Improper practice makes your shot worse. So, practice from one foot while you develop your shot.

Here is how to practice:

Take 10 one foot shots from the right side of the basket, then 10 from the left, and then 10 from the center. Use the backboard from all three positions. You can repeat this many times.

## **7. Play full court rather than half court**

Half court street basketball is very different from full court ball. Here are some problems associated with half court ball:

- Half court does not have a transition from one basket to the other. Starting a play half court and starting one full court is very different.
- In half court games you do not need to run full speed for great distances. In full court games, you must perform out of breathe after sprinting down court three or four times.
- Players congregate closer to the basket in half court than in full court, yielding more three second violations.
- In half court you are so close to the basket that players readily go one-on-one, rather than play team ball.
- In half court you have a greater chance for injury: since

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