



**Excerpt from Coaching Youth Basketball (4th ed.)
Online Course**

ASEP & Don Showalter

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MAKE BASKETBALL PRACTICES FUN USING THE GAMES APPROACH

In the past, we have placed too much emphasis on the learning of skills and not enough on learning how to play skillfully—that is, how to use those skills in competition. The games approach, in contrast to the traditional approach, emphasizes learning what to do first, then how to do it. Moreover, the games approach lets kids discover what to do in the game, not by your telling them, but by their experiencing it. It is a guided discovery method of teaching that empowers your kids to solve the problems that arise in the game, which is a large part of the fun in learning.

On the surface, it would seem to make sense to introduce basketball using the traditional approach—by first teaching the basic skills of the sport and then the tactics of the game—but this approach has been shown to have disadvantages. First, it teaches the skills of the sport out of the context of the game. Kids may learn to shoot, pass, and dribble the ball, but they find it difficult to use these skills in the real game. This is because they do not yet understand the fundamental tactics of basketball and do not appreciate how best to use their newfound skills. Second, learning skills by doing drills outside of the context of the game is downright boring. The single biggest turnoff in sports is overorganized instruction that deprives kids of their intrinsic desire to play the game.

The games approach is taught using the four-step process described below.

STEP 1

Play a Modified Game

With the games approach, you begin by playing a modified game that is developmentally appropriate for the level of the players and also designed to focus on learning a specific part of the game. Modifying the game emphasizes a limited number of situations in the game. This is one way you “guide” your players to discover certain tactics in the game. For instance, you can have your players play a 2v2 or 3v3 game in a half-court situation; the objective of the game is to make four passes before attempting to score. Playing the game this way forces players to think about what they have to do to keep possession of the ball.

STEP 2

Help Players Understand the Game

As your players are playing a modified game, you should look for the right spot to “freeze” the action, step in, and ask questions about errors that you’re seeing. When you do this, you help the players better understand the objective of the game, what they must do to achieve that objective, and also what skills they must use to achieve that objective. Rather than telling them what the critical skills are, you led them to this discovery, which is a crucial part of the games approach.



STEP 3

Teach the Skills of the Game

Only when your players recognize the skills they need to be successful in the game do you want to teach the specific skills through focused activities (i.e., activities consisting of the skills needed to be successful in a specific game situation). This is when you use a more traditional approach to teaching that breaks down the skills of the game. This should be implemented early in the season so that players can begin attaining skill, which will make games more fun.



**STEP 4**

Practice the Skills in Another Game

As a coach, you want your players to experience success as they're learning skills, and the best way for them to experience this success early on is for you to create an advantage for the players. Once the players have practiced the skill, as outlined in step 3, you can then put them in another game situation—this time a lopsided game (e.g., 3v1, 3v2). The idea is that this makes it more likely that, for instance, in a 3v1 game, your three offensive players will be able to make four passes before attempting to score.

Using the games approach, your players will get to play more in practice, and once they learn how the skills fit into their performance and enjoyment of the game, they'll be more motivated to work on those skills, which will help them to be successful. To download two gamelike drills that you can use during practices to help keep motivation and interest high and to keep the sport fun, click on [Helping Hands](#) and [Return to Sender](#).

The Coaching Youth Basketball Online Course teaches you how to prepare you for your season and provide the best possible experience for your athletes. The course is supplemented by the *ASEP Coaching Youth Basketball* book, which is available either as a series of PDF downloads or as a physical book. The course includes many interactive exercises that apply and enrich concepts from the book. It also includes streaming video, 30 games and gamelike drills, and a handy Coaches' Clipboard utility with forms, documents, and detailed plans for successful practice sessions and game-day coaching.

About the Authors

Practice
the
skills!

"Freeze" the
action and ask
questions!

ASEP & Don Showalter

Content for the Coaching Youth Basketball Online Course was created by the American Sport Education Program (ASEP) in conjunction with USA Basketball's Don Showalter.

Showalter has been the head boys' basketball coach and activities director at Mid-Prairie High School in Wellman, Iowa, since 1984. He has coached USA Basketball junior and youth development teams and coached the West squad in the 1999 McDonald's All-American game. Showalter has directed basketball camps all over the world, including Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, England, and Scotland.

For information on registering for the Coaching Youth Basketball Online Course, call 800-747-5698, e-mail ASEP@hkusa.com, or visit www.ASEP.com.
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