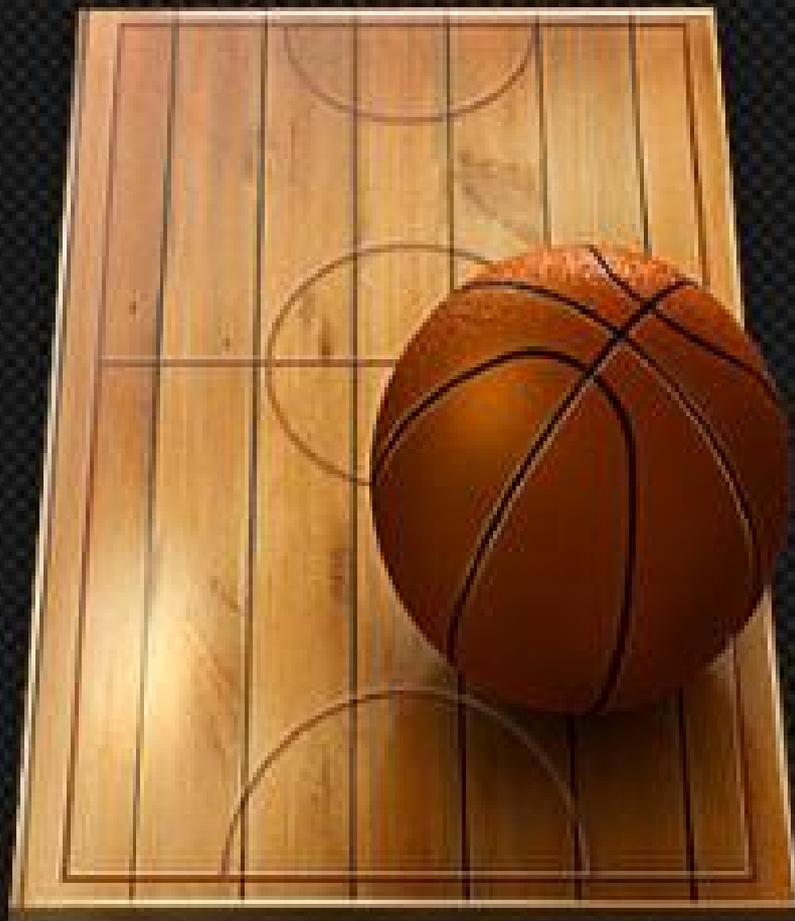


TALKIN' BOUT PRACTICE

Gain a **COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**
with **CREATIVE PRACTICES**



Jamy Bechler

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TALKIN' BOUT PRACTICE
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Please feel free to use any parts of this EBook to help make your team better. The best coaches are always looking for new ways to motivate and optimize their team's potential. There are a number of valuable insights contained in this book that will help give you a competitive edge.

Jamy Bechler is available to speak at clinics and to conduct leadership training for teams. Contact him at Jamy@CoachBechler.com

Special thanks to [Daniel Makepeace](#) for the memes included in this eBook. You can follow him at [@PureIntensityBB](#). Thanks also go out to [Lauren Schwarr](#) for helping edit this eBook. Finally, the author also wishes to thank Allen Iverson for the book title inspiration. Though Allen Iverson was as much a 'gamer' as anyone – one of the toughest players in NBA history – true achievement starts in practice.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamy Bechler coached college basketball for nearly 20 years before leaving the sidelines to be an athletic director for two years at Marion High School in Indiana, where the boy's basketball team won its 8th State Championship (most in IHSAA history).

He has served as head coach at 4 different collegiate institutions and has coached both men and women. He left his most recent coaching position as the winningest coach in program history. In 2014, his basketball team earned the National "Champions of Character" award. Jamy's teams were consistently ranked among the nation's elite when it came to rebounding. One of his teams set a national record with a +19.9 rebounding margin for the entire season. His "Championship Rebounding" video can be found at CoachTube.com.

Jamy is a John Maxwell certified leadership trainer, executive coach and motivational speaker. He now travels the country full-time helping teams and organizations maximize their potential and develop their leadership skills. You can follow him on his website JamyBechler.com.



Philosophy

Keep it Simple, Stupid! The K.I.S.S. method is still valuable today. There is no sense in complicating things. You don't always need elaborate plays. You also don't need long explanations. Be specific and remember the attention spans of your players. Don't overwhelm them.

Be willing to adapt, change or improve. You should always be open to finding better ways to teach or do things. That is the same thing that you ask of your players. You want them to always be working on their game to improve.

Players need to communicate during games and practices whether they are on offense, defense or sitting on the bench. This point is best summed up by how instructors at the Point Guard College say it, "Players who don't talk are selfish, stupid or out of shape."

Drills have to have purpose — they must connect to your philosophy.

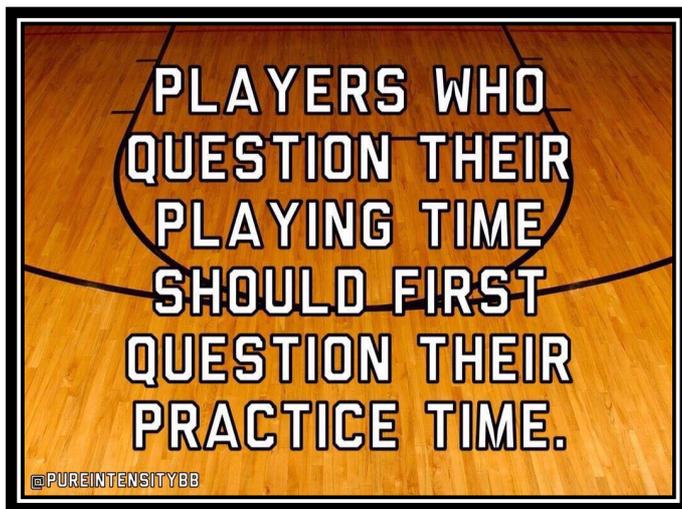
Do things correctly. Don't let them step over the line when they inbound full-court against pressure. Do let them jog through drills. Pay attention to the details. The little things in games get you beat. These are usually a result of what is allowed during practice.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Invent a drill that corresponds to a need that you have.

Make up awards for them that fall in line with what you are emphasizing (taking charges, best rebounder, free-throw award, etc...)

Never be late to practice. Start on time. You expect this of your players. You must set the example for them.

Practices should be designed with clear objectives (how will this drill help your team in games?), intentional progression (break large skills and concepts down), and clear game application (players must understand why the skills or concepts are important, how they will help them be more successful individually, and how they will help the team in games).



Train them to think quickly. You might have a slower team athletically but if the "game slows down for them", they might actually be quicker on the court because they anticipate more.

Incorporate some chaos into your practices to get them used to possible situations during games and to help them think under stress.

Leave the teaching to a classroom or locker room as much as possible. Do not spend more than a quick couple of minutes teaching on the floor. Learn how to teach on the fly. Everything you teach should relate to your system or what you do in games. It is not what you teach but rather what you emphasize.

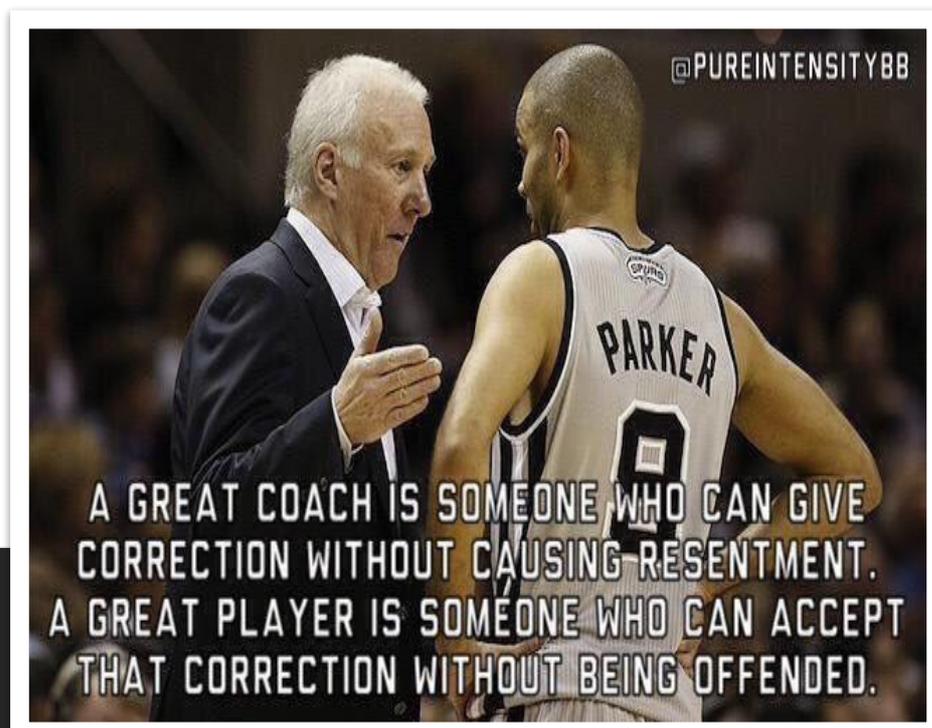
Philosophy

- Pick battles big enough to fight and small enough to win.
- What happens in practice is the lifeblood of a program and dictates what happens in most games. Anything allowed in practice will surface in a game.
- “WE”, “Us”, “Our”, “Team”, “Together” are words to use.
- Every once in a while, close your eyes and listen to your practice. Do you hear effective communication, cutting, teamwork, etc.?
- Do you practice the shots that your offense gets?
- Bring a lunch pail to practice or have the team carry a lunch pail to a game. Put each player’s names in the lunch pail. The lunch pail represents a blue-collar mentality...a get-down to business type of approach. The lunch pail is a symbol of toughness. It could even go at the end of the bench.
- Bending over tells everyone you’re soft and tired.
- “I didn’t run you today, you ran yourself”
- Once a drill is learned, it can become competitive.
- There is no scrub time or garbage time in a great program. All time is valuable and learning can take place.
- Don’t be more interested in running plays than in teaching your players how to play.
- Whatever is important - incorporate that into all your drills.

Spotlighting is a technique that can be used to recognize players and promote team unity. Have a coach or a player make a positive statement about another teammate in front of the entire team. Time can be set aside to spotlight teammates before, during, or after practice. An example of post-practice spotlighting would be to have a coach identify a player for something the athlete did during practice that modeled one of the core values of the program. In turn, that player would be asked to spotlight another teammate. Spotlighting works best by identifying certain themes for the day or the week. Tell the team that theme ahead of time and then have players look for teammates exhibiting these qualities.

Plan It Out

If you don’t have a practice plan then you are not maximizing your potential. Champions don’t just “wing it”. No plan results in practice time wasted on unnecessary things. It also leads to a lack of focus as you will typically tend to scrimmage or drill longer than needed and the players’ attention spans will be tested. This builds dangerous habits that creep up in games (e.g. “my team loses focus too easily”).



Philosophy

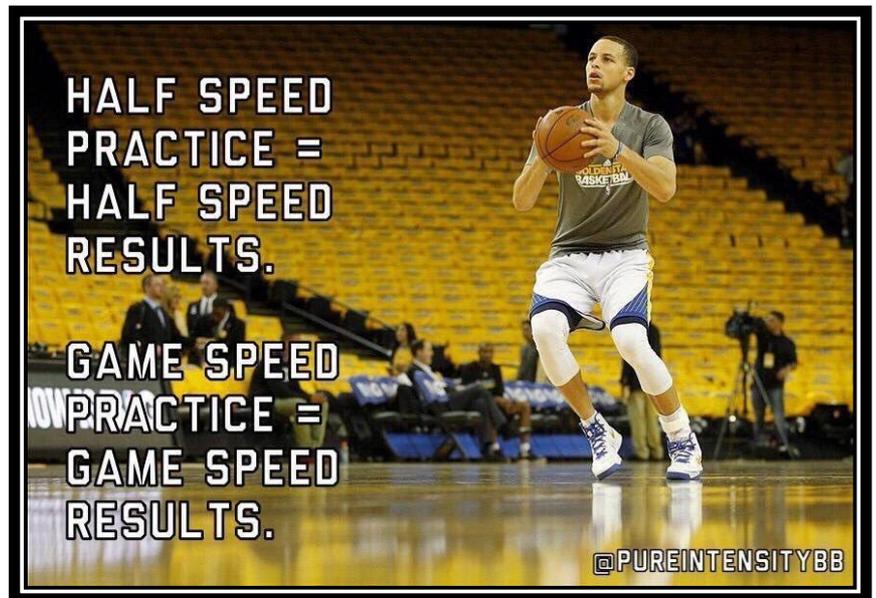
Yelling is not necessarily teaching.

Just because your old successful coach ran a drill doesn't mean it is right for this team.

Even if you see a good drill at a clinic, you don't have to do it the exact same way. Tailor it to match your team, their needs and your resources.

Be careful, especially at the lower levels, of celebrating results over process.

Drills should have a purpose, and the coach should know the purpose for each part of practice, even if the purpose is to take a break to recover before an intense drill.



Don't ever place an emphasis on drills over skills. You should always be focused on developing their skills, not just completing a drills.

Conditioning/Punishment

Do not do conditioning only for conditioning's sake during practice. All of your conditioning should be with a ball or defensive-related. You are not building a track team, you are building a basketball team. Yes, you want them to be in shape but you also want them to be functional. You also don't want to waste valuable practice time when you can kill two birds with one stone.

Reward as opposed to inflicting punishment.

Instead of running for punishment or when they do something wrong, instruct the team to get into "Push-up position" or do wall sits. While they are doing these things for 30-45 seconds, instruct them and use this as a time to refocus them.

Do the 3-man weave with 3 or 4 players in individual workouts as conditioning.

If you have to "condition" to get them in shape, your practices either (1) aren't hard enough or (2) aren't planned well enough.

Defensive drills and full-court transition/fast-break drills are great for conditioning.

Mental Training

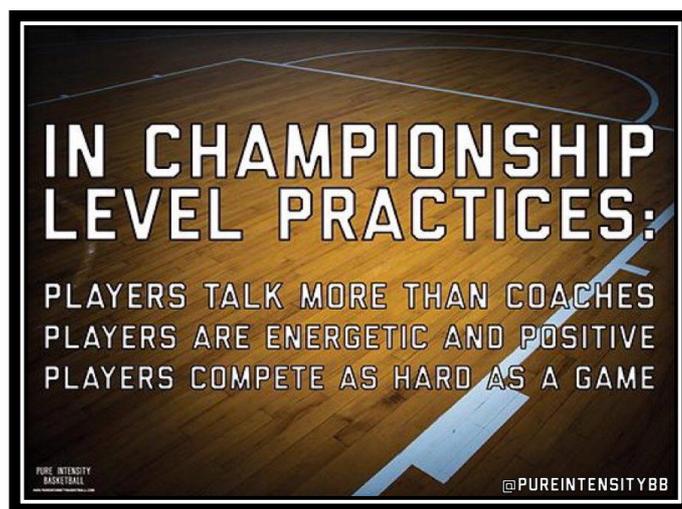
Create “Bad Breaks” during practice. The purpose is to simulate the bad breaks that your team might be up against in a game. It is important to let the players know ahead of time that you will be doing this because it can become more of a problem than a benefit to your team if the players do not understand why and when you will be doing it. You don’t want to create a situation where a certain player or players feel that you are singling them out or picking on them. From time to time make obvious bad calls in your 5 on 5 segments in practice that go against the first team. At times take out your leading scorer as you practice your end-of-game situations so that the rest of the team can develop the mental toughness necessary to make the crucial plays with that player on the bench due to fouls or injuries. If you can use practice time to mentally prepare your teams for these types of unexpected emergencies that crop up at the most inopportune times, they have a better chance of handling it in games.

Provide obstacles on free throws (have them shoot with an old or bad ball, stand close and talk to them while they try to shoot, wave pool noodles underneath the basket, etc.)

Give players a method for dealing with mistakes. Mistakes are a part of almost everything we do when improvement and competition are the areas of focus. Teach your players a positive method for dealing with mistakes so that they can profit from them rather than allowing them to have a negative effect on the future.

“Next Play,” not “my bad,” is what one should say when they mess up. Likewise, coaches need to train themselves to react with a “next play” mentality rather than reacting negatively, just like they teach their players. Set the example.

At UNC, Coach Dean Smith’s players received a daily practice plan with a “Thought for the Day” and the “Emphasis for the Day.” Smith started each practice with a few comments and then selected a player to either recite the “Thought for the Day” or the “Emphasis for the Day.” Players knew that it was their responsibility to learn these prior to practice. If for any reason a player failed to give the correct response, the entire team had to run. Players made sure they learned the “Thought for the Day” and the “Emphasis for the Day.”



Teach the mental part of basketball -- not just the physical. Too many coaches complain that their players are idiots but continue to do the same old things with their practice time. Instead of complaining, find ways to make your players smarter. For instance, additional ball-handling drills are not always the answer to turnovers. Find ways to develop their focus.

Prepare your players in practice for bad officiating or questionable calls in games. If their mindset during practice is not to worry about the officiating then it will be minimized during games. A foul is anything that the official calls. Get them used to it. Different officials call different things (even during the same game). It might not be right but it is reality. If you de-emphasize good officiating in practice then they will worry less about it during games.

Special Situations

If you go over the opponent's plays with your scout team or reserves, then use big play cards with the plays diagrammed on them so that the players can see and/or remember the play easier.

Coaches should go over the scouting report without notes. Players won't have notes during the game. This also portrays the image that you are well prepared as a coach.

If you teach the other team's plays, then stick to the main ones and yell out what is coming ("backscreen", "screen the screener", "lob", etc...). They should not have to memorize play names or whole plays, just concepts. Use triggers and they'll remember the concepts better. Don't teach every opposition play -- stick to key concepts and quickly recognizable features.

Simplify your scouting reports with only the information that is needed. For example, don't bother to point out an opposing player that has made 2 out of 2 three-pointers if they've played 15 games. That player is not a three-point shooter even though they are 100% on the year. They have enough other stuff to worry about. Give them the important stuff.

Realize that when you say an opposing player likes to go left, that is not easy for a defender in the heat of the battle to remember. The offensive player actually likes to go to the defender's right. Simplify it for your players. Even though things might be easy for us as coaches to comprehend, what is most important is helping all of your players comprehend it.



***“Every battle is won
or lost before it is
fought.”***

**- Sun Tzu,
THE ART OF WAR**

Special Situations

Simulate game situations as much as possible to prepare your players for the game. A few interesting ideas to try:

- Open a door to the gym to make it cold if you are going to be playing in a cold gym.
- Keep music playing loudly the entire practice if you will be 'playing at a loud gym and it will be hard to hear each other.
- Turn the lights down during practice if you will be playing in a dark gym.
- Practice in the mornings if you'll be playing an early-morning game.
- If it's a tournament and you'll only have a few minutes to warm up on the court, then only allow that many minutes for your players to get on the court early before practices leading up to the game.
- Run through special situations every day.

If you use a scout team then give them points for things other than scoring. This evens things up whether they are better or worse than your team. For instance, give them points for offensive rebounds.

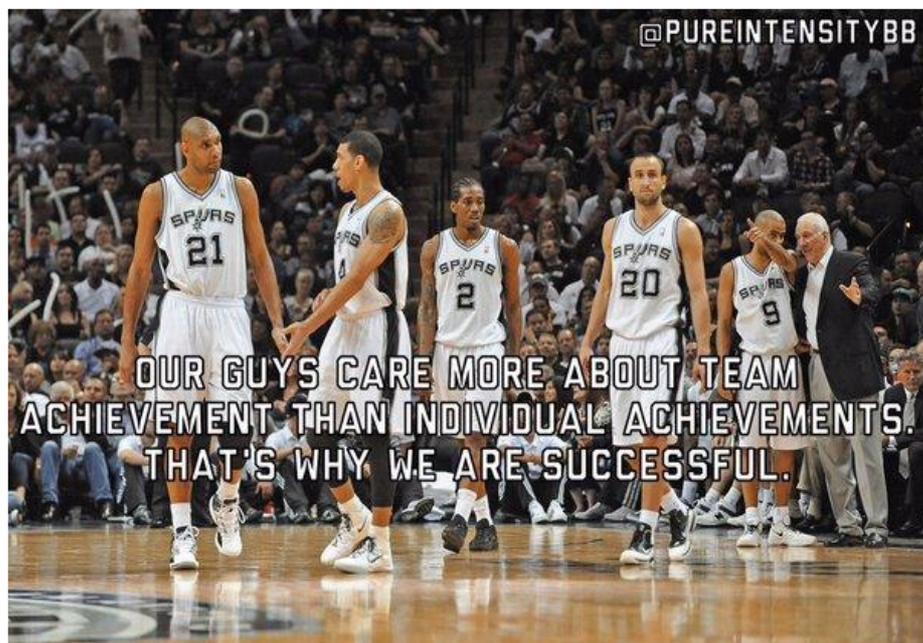
Work on baseball passing and/or work on inbounding each day. These are underrated skills that can cost you a game.

The team members on the bench need to count down the last 10 seconds of the shot clock.

Shootaround/walkthrough the day of the game is normally a blow off time so don't expect to do anything serious. Do more special situations and late game stuff.

Are YOU ready for the end of the game?

- In a tie game would you ever foul to get the last possession?
- Do you push the ball and play or do you call a timeout to set up the last shot?
- Is your team prepared to deny the ball to one great foul shooter?
- How do you teach your players to intentionally miss a free throw?
- Do your players know when to foul?
- Do you save your timeouts or do you use them early to keep your team in the game?
- When do you start taking 3's in order to catch up, do you have a hurry-up offense designed to get you quality shots in less time?
- Would you trap a team holding the ball for the last shot?
- Your opponent calls a timeout to diagram their last second play, do you change your defense?



Practice Format

Keep your drills short and concise with a time limit. Don't go on endlessly as that will lead your players to take the same mentality. It de-emphasizes each repetition. If you absolutely need to go longer on a drill, then consider coming back to it later.

Chart everything that is important to you during practice, then communicate them to your team and hold them accountable. Create healthy competition out of this.



Intentionally assign roles to injured players. They should still be involved in practice.

Name your drills so that they are easy to remember. Be simple, yet creative.

Do something fun to end some practices. When it is a player's birthday, you could do a "Birthday Shoot." All players line up at half-court. Coach puts two \$5 bills in the center circle. Birthday player get the first and last try at making a half-court shot. In-between, each player gets one try at a half-court shot. If someone makes it then they get one of the \$5's and the birthday person gets the other one. If the birthday player makes it then they get all of it. If no one makes it, then it is saved for next time.

Video tape every practice even if you don't rewatch it. This could come in handy later on if you are accused of something or if players question their playing time.

Finish all drills. In nearly all "dummy" drills, the players had to score twice to finish.

2:00/3:00/5:00 segments at practice—players give you total intensity (mental/physical) when it is shorter and they know it will end.

Make sure you have lots of water available for preseason outdoor workouts.

Take into account the court space, number of baskets and number of basketballs that you have available to plan the most efficient practice.

Utilize the clock. Time everything. This will keep you, your assistant coaches and your team accountable. It can also create a sense of urgency. Be careful not to keep putting more time on the clock for a particular drill. That devalues time. The most under-utilized piece of equipment in any coach's toolbox is a scoreboard and game clock.

Change practice partners daily.

Practice Format

Mention each player's name positively within the first 15 minutes of every practice.

Have assistants take notes during practices to help track the little things that should be evaluated or discussed.

Assistants should use the same terminology as the head coach.

Coaches, when you are in practice, don't pick a space and stand...be moving.

Teach a few players on offense and make the others learn by observing; then teach it to everyone later.

Many coaches spend way too much time scrimmaging 5-on-5 without engaging in any real teaching/coaching. You can use scrimmage situations, but make them competitive. Instead of scrimmaging for 20 minutes straight, split it up into 5-4:00 scrimmages. Switch up teams or keep a running tally of wins and losses. Set a different goal for each session (for instance, baskets in the paint count as 3 points and three-pointers count as 1-point; or we will subtract a point for every turnover).

Your best players have to learn how to play with fouls. Drill this in practice. Tell your star that "for the next 5 minutes you have 4 fouls" and hold them accountable to play accordingly.

More Tips

Chart FT shooting in practice. If below a certain percentage, you must make a certain amount of FT's in a row before leaving.

Have standardized wording in your program. Is it a screen or a pick? Is it a block out or box out? Do you "fake a pass to make a pass" or just pass fake? Having talking points will engrain your philosophies into your player's heads.

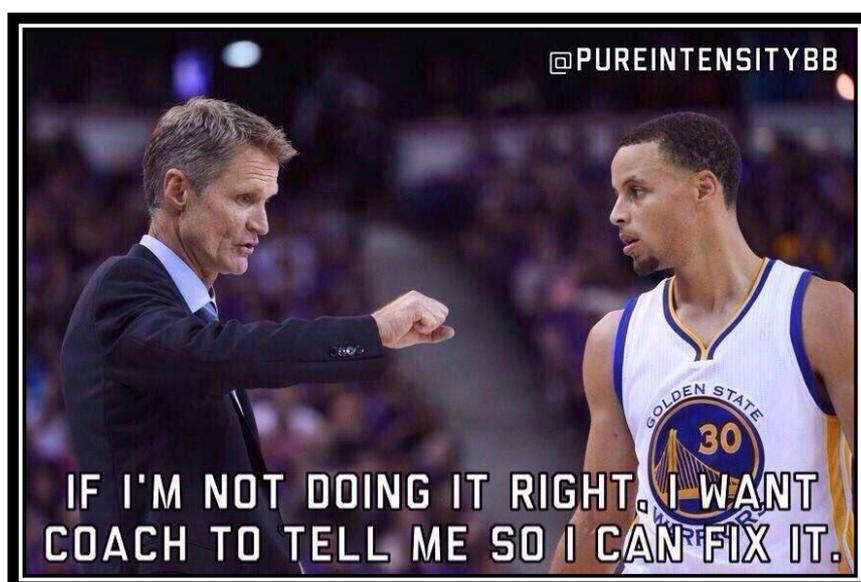
Teach your players to play until the whistle blows. This will get them used to doing it during games. It also minimizes confusion between coaching and directing practice.

Plan your practice drill rotations. What will players do when they are not in a drill? How will they rotate? All of these things are small but add up to a lot of wasted time if you are not careful.

Teach many of the drills during preseason group workouts so that they go quicker during practice and minimal teaching is needed.

Invite an official(s) to your practice during early season to talk about rules.

Repeat drills throughout the year so that you have consistency. Continue to add wrinkles and make them competitive so that they don't become stale. You don't need 15 different rebounding drills. Have 5 good ones and then emphasize rebounding in all of your practices, using variations of those drills to add interest.



Practice Format

Instead of traditional water breaks where players stand around for an extended amount of time and do nothing, try having “timeouts”. If you get 6 timeouts during a game, then have 6 water breaks for 90 seconds and stick to it. This will get both the players and your staff used to quick, concise instructions. You can even have them sit down or gather around just like it is a game timeout. Talk about what is next, review what you just did, whatever. This saves valuable practice time and cuts down on b.s.

No out of bounds lines. Play until the whistle. Coach needs to be aware of walls or obstacles and blow the whistle quicker if danger looms but you want to teach them hustle.

When a jump ball/tie up situation occurs in practice, don't blow the whistle, let them fight it out for the ball. The other players should position themselves for what could happen next depending on who comes away with the ball.

Too many players look like the Statue of Liberty (S.O.L) when they post up. They are too straight up and have one arm up in the air. This keeps them from having a good base, which limits their effectiveness once they get the ball. It also increases the likelihood that a defender can steal the ball. You don't want to be S.O.L.

Example of a 90-Minute Practice Format

10 minutes—Team Motivation/Warmup

10 minutes—Shooting (& offensive rebounding)

10 minutes—Rebounding

15 minutes—Defense (5 drills for 3:00 each)

15 minutes—Offense

10 minutes—Pressure (1-2-1-1; 2-2-1; 1-3-1 ½ ct., etc.)

10 minutes—Special Situations

10 minutes—Scrimmage/Miscellaneous

Split up coaches into stations or areas of responsibility.

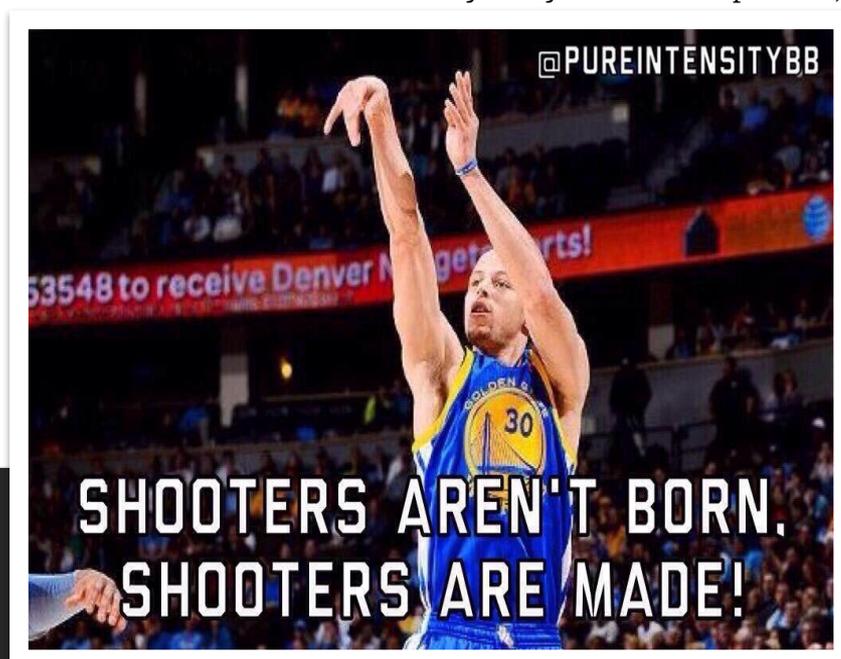
Work on perimeter and posts separately.

We required substitutes in games to hand a towel to the player they were going in for, so we did this in practice as well.

Validate drill wins with a free throw at the end.

Shorten practice as season moves along.

If you say one hour for practice, then mean it.



DRILL IDEAS

Add wrinkles to drills. Some ideas include:

- Add a 2nd ball to the Mikan Drill. Shoot and rebound with the same hand. Keep the ball above your shoulder. Right-left-right-left. Shoot high, Catch high.
- Power block pickup – Instead of players just picking up a ball at the block and scoring, have a teammate/manager/coach hold the ball down so that the player has to use their legs and rip the ball away.
- Use football blocking pads (especially for blackout drills) so that the players have no excuse being physical with their teammates.
- Use pool noodles to add a distraction element during free throws or other focused drills like layups or mikan.
- Limit the number of dribbles that can be used. Restrict your players to only one dribble and have them play a full-court scrimmage. They learn very quickly that they must work hard to create open passing lanes for their teammates. It takes excellent teamwork to advance the ball and get an open shot.
- Incorporate a ladder drill or something similar every day.
- Use 2 balls for ball-handling.
- FT game (+1 swish, -1 miss, 0 make).
- Try scrimmaging but make every score count as “1” — don’t encourage 3-pt shots.
- FT Bonus—1-and-1 for team (make 25 for 15 people or 80%).
- If a team is struggling with focus or turning the ball over too much then you could turn down the lights in the gym to make them focus harder.
- +/- 80% FT (split at baskets; each player shoots 5 ft’s; make 80% as group; run sprint for each under 80%; over 80% carry over to next practice as credit.
- Baylor’s “Reset” Drill—Put 2:00 on the clock with 2 players at a basket. If any group misses 2 in a row, the whistle blows and the clock resets.
- When doing dummy 5-on-0 (or similar), keep it game-like. For example, don’t have them throw a chest pass. This is not game like. You rarely are able to throw a direct chest pass.
- Continuous 1-on-1 (no check up, no out of bounds) is a great toughness & conditioning drill.
- Play 3-on-3 with no check ups on top. Instead, when a team scores, the other team immediately takes the ball out of bounds. This works on in-bounding and defensive transition (without going full-court).
- During your warmup periods, do “pre-hab” exercises. Have your players perform exercises usually found in rehabilitation settings. Why not stabilize the joint before it is injured?
- Periodically introduce 1-possession games for consequences. 0:30 on the clock. Defense has to get a stop. Offense has to score.
- Traditional layup lines are a time waster. However, add an extra element to it. For example, there is punishment for a missed layup or you have the blocking pad in the paint to disrupt the layup. You can also have the rebounder take the ball out of bounds, fake a pass and then make a pass to a streaking player for the layup. This practices your inbounding as well as handling the basketball.



After the team lost 20 consecutive games, Coach Farnsworth did his best to help his players regain their confidence.

“A coach will impact more young people in a year than the average person does in a lifetime.”

(Billy Graham)