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Seven Concrete Actionable Tactics to Implement Today to See Immediate Results the Next Time You Practice! (Guaranteed!)

Presented by Sideline Interactive



Unless you are allowed to recruit and/or schedule your own games, the single most important impact that a basketball coach can have on the success of a team is the way you lead in practice.

You have to set the right tone by example in order bring out the best in the assistant coaches, the manager, and ultimately the players. In my opinion, the head coach is responsible for (but needs the talents and contributions of everyone in practice) directing and framing the planning, the structure, the atmosphere, the execution, and ultimately the results of each practice.

The objectives of each practice should be individual improvement, team improvement, rehearsal of game night, preparation for what you will face from your opponents, and preparation for difficulties you will encounter such as poor officiating, injuries, foul trouble, off night, crowds, and anything else you know can affect your players. Here are SEVEN ideas that you can implement immediately to improve the quality of your practices right away.

As Chuck Knox said “Practice without improvement is meaningless.”

#1 Run the Penalty Box Drill

When you use your whistle in practice, use it to coach habits, not to officiate. It is fine to have coaches call violations, fouls, etc... like a referee would in a game. What will have a bigger positive impact on the way your players play is to call violations for the habits that you are teaching you players that players do not execute.

The drill is a five on five full court transition drill. Put a set amount of time on the [scoreboard](#), run the clock like a game and keep score.

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As an example of a violation of your habits emphasis (fill in whatever you emphasize), you teach players to catch with two hands, two feet, or two eyes. Any time a player doesn't look the ball into their two handed catch, blow the whistle and assess a hockey penalty of one minute.

The player who committed your habits violation go to your "penalty box" area and can report back in once one game minute has come off the clock.

That players team is now playing at a five on four disadvantage which allows you to work on numbers advantage/disadvantage in your transition and conversion as well as half court. If another player from that team commits a violation, they are also in the penalty box, now it is 5 on 3. If the other team violates, it is four on four. There are many situations that can unfold.

I recommend playing with no more than three habit violation rules or it is hard to keep track of. You can use whatever you emphasize, but here just a few ideas to get you started: Not blocking out on defensive rebound, dribbling the ball to the corner/sideline, Not looking at the basket on catch to see the floor, dribbling with head down. The best ones will be the ones you come up with.

#2 Play 3 straight minutes of PERFECT defense each practice

The purpose of this drill is to get players to understand the technique, intensity, toughness, anticipation, and communication from all five players that it takes to be a great defensive team.





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The requirement to successfully complete the drill is for the players to play three perfect 51 second half court defensive possessions in a row—nonstop. The first time we do this drill in practice for a new season, we require one 51 second perfect defensive possession. The next time, the defense must complete two perfect possessions, and the third time three so that you are building up.

Another version of this drill is to begin the possession with conversion defense to emphasize to your team that as Del Harris says, “Half court defense begins full court.” I don’t like to begin full court and eat in to the 51 seconds that I am looking to get for half court toughness.

How to execute this drill:

Have someone at the [scorers table](#) to run the clock like a game. The first possession will start with 51 seconds on the clock. Start the clock as soon as the offense begins to move the basketball. Each coach should be looking very hard to find defensive mistakes. Any coach who sees a violation of one of your defensive principles stops play. The clock is reset to 51 seconds and that possession begins again.

If the defense gets a stop by rebounding a missed shot or turning the offense over, the clock is stopped. Give the ball back to the offense and restart the clock from that point. For example, if the defense secures a rebound with 32 seconds remaining out of the 51 seconds that is where the possession continues from when the offense starts again.

You can decide whether or not you want to restart the 51 second countdown if the offense scores a field goal. My philosophy is that our defense is designed to contest every shot, not allow offensive rebounds, prevent scoring in the restricted area, keep us from fouling and putting the other team at the free throw line.

When we do the drill, if the offense hits a three point shot and it was contested the way we teach, the clock does not reset. If the offense hits a contested midrange two point shot, we do not reset. If they MISS an uncontested shot, the clock starts over at 51 seconds. If we foul, it starts over at 51 seconds. I want the emphasis to be on



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execution based on our defensive rules and standards and not on whether the second five or JV can make shots. Our defensive execution on game night is what we are looking to improve.

The drill is not over until the defense has run the clock down to zero. If they make too many defensive mistakes, the drill can take a while to complete. We like to run it at the end of practice when we are tired to serve to build extra conditioning and toughness.

One other benefit of this drill besides drilling your habits, tenacity, and physical toughness is that it instills defensive confidence. At the end of a close game, your players know that they have completed 3 x 51 seconds of defensive perfection in practice and that they can get a series of crucial stops when needed in late game situations.



#3 Include timeouts, quarter breaks, halftime in practice

Not for the value of practicing what do you for each of these, but for the value of going hard, then stopping, then having to warm back up and be ready to go full go again. You can shoot free throws during these breaks, huddle as a team, review what you did well the first half of practice and what you need to do for the remainder of practice.



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Anything works that helps drop your players heart rates and then warm them back up in the way that happens on game night.

#4 Be more efficient than you truly believe is possible



Let's say you practice 50 times during the season. More than likely, you will practice more, but even if you only practice 50 times and waste only 5 minutes each practice, you still waste 250 minutes or two full two hour practices over the course of the season!

That definitely makes it worth your time to plan and execute as efficiently as possible to cut down on any and all wasted time.

One way to save time is to have a simple and efficient way to watch video with your team on the court rather than moving to a locker or classroom.

You can do that on a Sideline Interactive scorers table or video board. You can watch game or practice film, You Tube clips, Hudl, or any other video that you have.

On game night you can use the equipment to generate the ULTIMATE GAMEDAY EXCITEMENT in your gym and raise \$10,000 or more per year for your program.

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#5 Try it, You'll Like It!

Develop a list of things that can improve your program to experiment with in your practices. Then, schedule 10 minute experiment segment in your practice Early in the

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season, you might experiment every day. As the season unfolds and you are reducing the length of your practices and fine tuning your system for the year, you can reduce the experimenting to one or two times per week.

It is best to tell the players what you are doing. That you are trying out a new idea that seems like a good idea, but you want to take a look at it in real time before deciding if you want to move forward with it.

Some of the things I like to experiment with are:

1. An idea for a new drill (like items one and two above!)
2. An idea for a new wrinkle or variation of a drill you use to teach a skill
3. A new inbound play
4. Players playing in a new role
5. A change of pace defense
6. A quick hitter to run against a zone
7. Missing a free throw on purpose
8. A defensive gimmick for use against a great player

I never experiment just for experimenting sake. I only do it with ideas that I have that I believe have a good chance to make us better.

I believe that this also models for players the real life skill of having a growth mindset of always looking for ways to improve and not being afraid to have others see our trials and errors as we look to grow.

#6 Have an emergency plan to salvage a bad practice

We have all been there. A practice starts out stagnant, emotionless, sloppy, or with any other number of symptoms of a practice that you would just as soon start over. Actually, you can start over and with a different plan!

The solution is to have a list of strategies to use to resuscitate a practice that is tanking.

Have well thought out steps to turn the negative start into a day where your team improves. Have your written plan in your back pocket for easy reference.

Every day you get better or worse, you don't stay the same. If you allow a bad practice to unfold without doing something to about it, your team will take a step or two backwards by the end of practice.



Here are some ideas. Each tactic is not appropriate in all settings or situations. The relationship that the coaching staff has with the players has a great deal to do with how affect each or any of these strategies will be. The purpose of the exercises is not to point blame at individuals, but rather determine how to revive a negative day of practice into a positive one.

1. Huddle up and have a different voice than the head coach address the team about what they need to do to get practice on the right track. An assistant coach, the team captains, the freshmen/rookies, the managers.
2. Have a team huddle with an open mic for volunteers to offer their critique of practice and how you can make the most of your remaining time.
3. Refer to your list of practice absolutes that was developed by the players and the coaching staff. (see item #7 below in this article). Ask for honest feedback from your team on how they are living up to the standards that they set for themselves.
4. Change something—have all players change their jersey color, change ends of the floor if a drill is going poorly, rotate baskets, change gyms if you have that as an option, run new drills, change your practice structure or the order that you normally use for segments of the game. (Example: If you normally do shooting drills in the middle of practice, move them to the end)



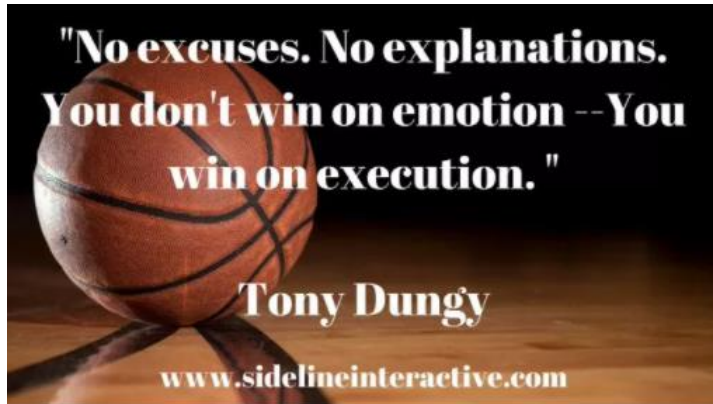
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5. Allow the players to choose a few drills, and possibly even coach each other through those drills as long as all feedback is constructive and delivered in a spirit of helping.
6. Play 5 on 5 with 2 of the players coaching the teams. If you do this, DO NOT let the players draft their teams.
7. Take a break to play summer camp games like dribble tag, knock out, H-O-R-S-E, or any other fun shooting or skill games that you would play with elementary players. Hopefully that will generate some enthusiasm. Then finish the rest of your practice, but make sure to end at the scheduled and announced time!
8. End practice early. Not as a punishment, but in order to reset mentally. The way you frame it is extremely important. It cannot be done sarcastically or in a spiteful manner. This might not be an option if you have young players who rely on rides who will be picking them up at the scheduled end time of practice. A better way to end practice early could be with a fun spirited game of dodgeball, kickball, or whiffle ball in the gym if you have access to your PE department's equipment room to get the appropriate balls for those activities.
9. Work with your players to add your own ideas to this list. Those will be the best ones!

#7 Develop your program's practice standards

Prior to or early in the season, work as a group (players, coaches, and managers) to select the values that you pledge together as a group to aspire to in practice. When there is an issue that needs to be confronted regarding the attitude and effort you are seeing in a practice, you can refer to the absolutes for your expectations.



Having that agreed upon list helps make it less about a clash between a player and a coach and more about the norms of the group.

Give them a name such as Definite Dozen or the Winamac Way that has meaning in your program. Here are some examples

that have been generated by some of the teams I have been a part of over the years. That is not to say that these should be yours.

Every time we practice, all players, managers, and coaches are committed to these values:

1. Work relentlessly to improve themselves for the good of the team
2. Never offer nor accept an excuse
3. Treat each other in practice the way we want our teammates to treat us
4. EVERY TIME WE TAKE THE FLOOR, WE PRACTICE AND PLAY WITH THE TECHNIQUE, INTENSITY, TOUGHNESS, AND TOGETHERNESS OF A STATE (OR NATIONAL) CHAMPION
5. Strive to learn and execute the details because attention to detail is what leads to improvement
6. Believe that games are won during practice
7. Realize that everyone in the practice has different roles, but that everyone's efforts are essential to the success of the practice
8. Accept constructive feedback in the spirit that it is intended



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9. Work and compete to help our teammates improve
10. Respect all team members
11. Use positive language and have a positive attitude
12. Earn the right to be proud of my effort regardless of the results
13. Maintain a high level of focus and concentration
14. Show appreciation for each other
15. Never let your teammates down

I feel that these seven ideas have improved our practices and am glad to share them in the hopes that they will do the same for you!