

How to Maximize Your Child's Basketball Development -- And Make Your Kid the Best Player on the Block

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3 Keys to Maximize Player Development

Basketball development is widely misunderstood by parents and even coaches too. Almost every parent I meet has the greatest of intentions and some of them think they know a lot about basketball development -- but when it comes down to it, they know VERY little about developing players efficiently and effectively.

It's unfortunate that there are so many misconceptions about basketball development and improving their child's ability.

In fact, youth basketball in this country has become surprisingly flawed and ineffective. This is why European countries have caught up with us when it comes to basketball. European countries are able to compete with us (and even beat us) with far less athletic players and fewer people to choose from. The truth is that they have a better youth and player development system than we do in the United States. They produce highly skilled players and we produce athletes (because we have a bigger population to choose from and better facilities).

So what can we learn from this and what can you do as a parent to maximize your child's development and give them an edge over the competition?

In this report I'm going to dispel the myths and share with you a much better way to develop basketball players.

Basketball ability and development comes down the three key and equally important areas:

1. Athleticism
2. Basketball skill
3. Mentality

Now this is vital -- you'll notice that I said all three areas are equally important!!

This is one of the very common mistakes that I see. Parents, players, and coaches neglect one or more of these areas. To reach your potential, maximize performance, and make big improvements, all three areas must be addressed.

It is very very rare that I see players effectively working on all three of those areas. And if they do work on all three, they don't do a very good job and/or understand each aspect.

Let's talk about how we can improve and develop better players...

Key #1 - Athleticism

What does athleticism really mean? Why is it important? And can you really develop athleticism?

Let's start by pointing out that I'm using the term "athleticism" loosely. I like to group a variety of related attributes into one group. I usually refer to that group as "athleticism" or "athletic development".

Here's a quick summary of what I like to include into the athletic development category:

- Strength (absolute, maximal, explosive, and speed) of the hands, core, legs, shoulders, and arms.
- Agility
- Foot speed and quickness (forward, backward, side to side, and diagonal)
- Hand speed and quickness
- Endurance
- Jumping
- Balance
- Motor coordination - gross motor skills, fine motor skills, eye hand coordination, ambidexterity, accuracy/hand accuracy, spatial awareness, rhythm.
- Reaction time / mental chronometry
- Flexibility
- Proprioception and kinesthesia
- Form (running and movement technique)

If you have played basketball or know anything about basketball, you will quickly realize that all these things are critically important to become a good basketball player.

Huge books have been written about strength, agility, endurance and every aspect of athleticism. I don't pretend to understand all aspects of athletic development nor do I expect you to understand.

I do, however, believe it's important for you to somewhat understand WHAT each category means and WHY they are important. Once you have a basic understanding you'll be able to use some of the simple techniques I'll give you to help your child develop athletically and even come up with your own ways to help your child improve.

So let's jump in and briefly cover each aspect of athletic development and explain why they are important...

Strength (Absolute, Maximal, Explosive, and Speed) of the Hands, Core, Legs, Shoulders, and Arms

Strength in regards to sports is highly misunderstood and that's why I like to make a point of the "4 types of strength". Basketball players can use their strength in different ways.

Absolute strength is the amount of force that one can exert under involuntary muscle stimulation. Most people will never undergo involuntary muscle stimulation, so you can ignore this and focus on the next three.

Maximal strength is the amount of force that one can exert under voluntary effort. This strength quality is seen during a powerlifting competition. Each athlete tries to lift the greatest amount of weight.

Examples of maximal strength training include heavy weight lifting, high-tension isometrics, and strenuous bodyweight movements (ex. one-arm chin-ups). In regards to basketball, positioning yourself in the post and powering up lay ups while getting fouled are examples of maximal strength on the basketball court.

Explosive Strength is the ability to express significant tension in minimal time. Explosive strength is considered the strength quality most characteristic of athletic activities. Explosive strength is developed with fast, powerful muscle actions. Jumping as high as you can is an example of explosive strength.

Speed Strength is the ability to quickly execute an unloaded movement or a movement against a relatively small external resistance. Making a crisp pass or shooting the basketball from long range are both examples of speed strength.

In order to be a GREAT basketball player, you don't need to excel at all 4 types of strength. However you do need to excel (or at least be adequate) in a 2 or more of the areas.

Let's take two NBA players to demonstrate why and how these types of strengths can affect your basketball performance...

Shaquille O'Neal possesses superior maximal strength and good explosive strength too. This allows him to pass the ball at a high speed and long distance, establish position in the post, and power the ball up for easy baskets in the post. Shaq is a very big and powerful player that uses his "maximal strength" to dominate the competition.

Kevin Durant is skinny and lacks raw power. He could barely bench press 120 lbs coming into the NBA. He is NOT strong when it comes to lifting weights and yet he is one of the best players in the league. The reason Kevin Durant is able to be an elite player is because he has explosive strength and speed strength. This allows him to make crisp passes, shoot from long range, and drive to the basket quickly.

It's important to note that some young players do not have the strength to pass the ball far enough, shoot the ball far enough, or move quick enough. Without enough strength to perform these tasks adequately, a player will not be able to compete on the basketball court.

I see many young players (and older ones too) that lack the strength to be good basketball players. It goes without saying that the more maximal, explosive, and speed strength a player can develop, the better they will get.

A common shortfall in exercise programs is that players put their eggs into one basket. They focus on one area like heavy weight lifting and neglect high rep exercises. As a result the

athlete displays tremendous strength but lacks the muscle endurance and explosive strength that will help them on the basketball court.

Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and Bill Russell are some of the best players ever. They all have incredible maximal, explosive, and speed strength. They are extremely well rounded athletes.

Larry Bird had good maximal strength and adequate explosive strength. But generally speaking he was one of the least athletic players in the NBA. He became one of the all time great players by making up for his lack of speed with superior skill (shooting, passing, footwork) and mentality (basketball smarts, etc). I can't imagine how good he would have been with explosive speed and power!

Agility

Agility is the ability to change the body's position efficiently, and requires the integration of isolated movement skills using a combination of balance, coordination, speed, reflexes, strength, endurance and stamina.

Agility is very important because it allows you to get more rebounds, play better defense, dribble through traffic, get open, and score points.

Players should not neglect the importance of developing agility. It will help them in basketball and all sports.

Foot Speed and Quickness

Basketball is all about getting from one place to another quickly. Foot speed allows you to play great defense, get more rebounds, get more steals, get open, get to the basket before the defense can catch you, and much more.

The quicker athletes always have the edge. So anything you can do to improve foot speed will help you on the basketball court.

Hand Speed and Quickness

Most trainers neglect hand speed. You might not put this real high on the priority list, but if you want to develop an all around athlete, hand speed is part of the equation. If you have quick hands you'll be able to steal the ball more often, play better defense, dribble faster, and potentially be a more effective scorer.

Endurance

Endurance is a huge part of basketball. On more than one occasion I've seen less-skilled athletes get more playing time, because they are in better shape. Their endurance allowed them to play harder than everyone else, which allowed them to be better defensive players, rebounders, and have enough strength to hit shots at the end of the game.

Aggression and tenacity is a huge part of rebounding and defense. If you don't have the muscle endurance, heart endurance, and lung endurance, you won't be able to play tenacious defense and rebound aggressively for long periods of time. You will simply wear out and your opponent will win the battle.

Vertical Leap

I probably don't need to say anything about vertical leap. I think jumping ability does help a player but with the crowd pleasing Michael Jordan dunks, jumping has become overemphasized and too much focus is already placed on jumping ability.

However, even though most players want to jump higher, they don't know how to develop and improve their jumping properly. So we'll address that issue later in this report.

Balance

This is huge! Not enough attention is paid to balance. This is something that can and should be developed at an early age. Basketball is all about balance and footwork. You need great balance to play defense, make offensive moves, elude the defense, rebound, and play all aspects of the game.

Coaches constantly talk about balance. But how many basketball players and parents proactively try to improve their child's balance?

Motor Coordination

Motor coordination is greatly misunderstood and neglected. This is very important for youth players.

According to Wikipedia, motor coordination is the combination of body movements created with the kinematic (such as spatial direction) and kinetic (force) parameters that result in intended actions. Such movements usually smoothly and efficiently work together. Motor coordination involves the integration of processes ranging from how muscles interact with the skeletal system to neural processes controlling them both in the spine and the brain.

Motor coordination is both genetically inherited and developed through training. It's particularly important for young children to be in an environment where they can develop strong motor coordination.

This coordination transfers directly into their ability to perform sports activities and play basketball.

A good development program will aid in the development of a child's gross motor skills, fine motor skills, eye hand coordination, ambidexterity, and accuracy (ie: hand striking accuracy).

Eye hand coordination and ambidexterity (ability to use both hands) are extremely important on the basketball court. Almost everything you do requires hand eye coordination (shooting, passing, dribbling, defense, rebounding, etc).

The better your motor skills and coordination, the easier it will be for you to master and excel at your basketball skills.

Reaction Time (Mental Chronometry)

This is another area that is neglected yet improves a player's ability. Coaches often refer to this as "mental quickness".

According to Wikipedia, reaction time is the elapsed time between the presentation of a sensory stimulus and the subsequent behavioral response. It indicates how fast the thinker can execute the mental operations needed by the task at hand. The behavioral response is typically a button press but can also be an eye movement, a vocal response, or some other observable behavior.

If a player can react quick (has good "reaction time") they will appear quicker on the basketball court. I have seen some physically slow footed players make up for it with mental quickness and reaction time. One on one defense is a great example where reaction time is critical. If you have good reaction time it will be easier for you to stay in front of your opponent and keep them from getting to the basket.

Flexibility

Muscle flexibility is important because it reduces the risk of injury, allows for a greater range of motion (ex: so players can reach a few inches further to get the ball), and allows for improved jumping and explosiveness.

In a good athletic development program, flexibility should not be neglected.

Proprioception and Kinesthesia

If you've sprained your ankle and worked with a good physical therapist you've probably heard this word before.

This is because when you sprain your ankle badly, you damage your proprioceptors and lose your ability to balance effectively on that foot.

Proprioceptors are specialized sensory receptors on nerve endings found in muscles, tendons, joints, and the inner ear. These receptors relay information about motion or position and make us aware of our own body position and movement in space. Proprioceptors detect subtle changes in movement, position, tension, and force, within the body.

Proprioception is the sense of the relative position of neighboring parts of the body.

This is important on the basketball court for many reasons. For one, it keeps you from getting injured. Proprioceptors can trigger certain protective reflexes. The "stretch reflex," for example, is activated when the proprioceptors sense too much stretch or force on a muscle or tendon.

This is why it's very common for athletes to re-sprain ankles. Once their ankle is sprained, they need time and rehab to build up their proprioceptors.

In addition to preventing injury, proprioception allows players to control their body extremely well. You often hear sports broadcasters say things like "Derrick Rose has incredible body control and ability to finish at the basket". Well part of the reason these players have great body control is because they have highly developed proprioception.

Form (Running and Movement Technique)

Basketball players, runners, and athletes can become more athletic simply by improving their form/technique for stopping, jumping, running, squatting, lunging, and many other movement patterns. And most importantly, using proper technique will reduce the likelihood of injury.

With proper running form you can get faster. Few athletes work on their form but it's an area that can improve their athleticism.

Final Thoughts on Athletic Development

I hope your head is not spinning after all of that. Don't worry, we'll give you a fairly simple plan to work on all those areas.

The most important thing is you realize that athletic development is tremendously important, there is a lot to it, and it should not be too focused in one specific area. You want well rounded athletes that have a solid foundation that gives them a chance to succeed and thrive in whatever sport they choose.

Key #2 - Basketball Skill

Yet again, there is a lot of confusion and misconception about basketball skill.

For example, most parents believe that if they put their kids in a basketball league at a young age and have them play a lot of games, they will become skilled players. That is a huge misconception.

If you think about it, how many times does a player get to dribble and shoot the ball in a 5 on 5 game? They might get 10 shots in a game. That's not very much practice!

This comes down to simple math. If you play a 32 minute game with 10 other players (and you assume everyone touches the ball evenly and plays the entire game), you get to touch the ball for 3 minutes and 20 seconds. That's not much time to practice with the ball and develop skill.

Not to mention, if you are touching the ball, that doesn't mean you are performing the skills correctly.

Games are a small part of the equation when it comes to basketball development. In fact, playing too many games will deteriorate the previously developed skill. In the NBA you often hear players get asked after a game "What went wrong? How was the other team able to stop you guys?"

The player will almost always say something like, "We just need to get back in the gym and get some practices. We've had a lot of games lately and we just need to get back in practice to work on things."

Game-to-practice ratio

The misconception about games is a big reason why European countries produce more skilled players than the United States. In the U.S. we generally play about 3 games to 1 practice. In Europe they have 3-4 practice to 1 game. That's a pretty good ratio and a far more effective skill development system.

In the US, with only one practice to prepare, we spend most of our time trying to get ready for the game and put in "schemes" and "plays" to win. This does not improve the skills of players!

Our youth sports system is way too concerned with winning, playing lots of games, and not enough with skill development.

European programs approach teaching differently. Players are not limited in how much they can practice, and therefore spend from 60 to 90 minutes in the morning working on footwork, shooting and ballskills. The same players then practice another 60 to 90 minutes in the afternoon on more team-oriented concepts. There is no separation of big guys and guards, every player works on the same skills. As a result, European players are generally more well-rounded and more fundamentally sound. And they are more coveted by coaches at all levels.

What exactly are basketball skills and why are they important?

Basketball skills (aka: fundamentals) are the basics of the game that help you no matter what level, team, or coach you play for.

Like any sport, whether you're a professional athlete or a youth player just getting started, you need strong skills to be successful!

For example, by working on the fundamentals of shooting, you will get better no matter who you play for. The fundamentals of shooting include proper foot alignment, leg bend, hand position, arm angle, follow through, and so on. These are some of the little things that make a difference.

Basketball skills can be broken down into the following categories:

- Footwork
- Shooting
- Dribbling
- Passing
- Defense
- Rebounding

For the most part, basketball is a simple sport. If you can shoot the ball well and hit a high percentage of shots, pass effectively, dribble effectively, play some defense, and rebound, you will be a really good player.

It's all about shooting, passing, dribbling, rebounding, and defense. Work on those skills and you will improve!

However, if you are not good at those skills and only a great athlete, you will be limited to playing defense and rebounding. And you might not even play at all.

You'll notice that I put footwork at the top of the list. I spend a lot of time teaching and practicing footwork because it gives a player the biggest benefit at all age levels.

Not to mention footwork is a widely under-taught skill and it will help a player in all aspects of their game including shooting, driving, post moves, perimeter moves, defense, rebounding, screening, getting open, and more. So when we do a workout, it all starts with the feet.

Basketball skills are critical to development and can take you a long way.

I've seen a number of mediocre athletes make it to D-I colleges and even the pros just from developing superior skill. Here are just a couple players that made it to high levels based on their great skills (they were not explosive athletes):

- Steve Nash - 2 time NBA MVP
- Steve Kerr - Multiple championships with the Chicago Bulls
- Larry Bird - One of the best players in the history of basketball
- Jeff Horner - Stand out point guard for the Iowa Hawkeyes

- Dirk Nowitzki- Tall but slow footed compared to other centers. Dominates because of superior skill (he's from Europe).
- John Stockton - Long time Utah Jazz point guard
- Deron Williams - Competes against superior athletes yet is one of the top NBA point guards today.
- And the list goes on...

The greatest basketball players of all time further prove that basketball skill can take you a long ways. Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant are arguably the best basketball players of recent times. They are both tremendous athletes. But what sets them apart from thousands of other players with just as good (and sometimes better) athletic ability is their work ethic, mentality, and SKILLS.

Kobe and Michael have incredible skills. Just watch their footwork. They practice footwork on a daily basis and it shows. Their footwork, shooting, dribbling, and mentality allows them to perform at MUCH higher levels than their opponents. That is what allowed them to be great. These guys work extremely hard at their skills and have the entire package. They possess all three keys that we discuss in this report. They are great athletes, they have superior skill, and they have incredible mentality. They also have the championship rings and money to go with it!

Final Thoughts on Skill

The bottom line that that in order to become a good basketball player, skills are very important. Fundamentally sound players need to be able to handle the ball, shoot the ball, pass the ball, and use their feet. Unless a player has these basic skills mastered, he will be limited and therefore easy to guard and difficult to play with.

To develop skill you need a lot of "good" repetitions in practice, not games.

While young kids are busy traversing the country to play in AAU competitions, they are spending hour upon hour running up and down the court in a helter-skelter atmosphere where, 95 percent of the time, they do not have the ball in their hands. What this does is cement bad habits -- and habits, good or bad, are what players revert to under stress.

If these same players were in "good" practice environments instead of in so many games, they would spend the majority of time with the ball in their hands, working on their skills and footwork. And they would be better players.

Key #3 - Mentality

Yet again I use this word loosely and it's commonly misunderstood.

Just to give you an idea, here are the things I like to group in the category of "mentality":

- Passion
- Confidence
- Basketball Knowledge / IQ
- On court decision making
- Focus and concentration
- Nerves
- Work ethic
- Leadership
- Aggression
- Tenacity
- Toughness
- Reduce Fear of failure

There are **VERY IMPORTANT** points I want to make about mentality and a few things that are really important for parents to understand. So please pay attention to these aspects of mentality.

Passion

This is at the TOP of the list for a good reason. Without passion and love for the game, your child will NEVER reach their potential.

Let me repeat. Without passion and love for the game, your child will NEVER reach their potential!

Perhaps basketball is not your child's sport and their passion lies somewhere else. That is fine. But either way you need to be highly aware of how much this affects your child.

The biggest problem parents face is the youth basketball culture that has been developed in this country.

With all the competitive tournaments, year round games, and win at all costs mentality, burn out has become a HUGE problem.

84% of kids that play organized youth sports no longer play after they are 12 years old. A staggering statistic.

When asked, players say the biggest reason is because it's not fun anymore. There are numerous reasons that players are getting driven from the game. One reason is that few youth coaches are qualified or have the background to effectively motivate, develop, teach, and encourage young players.

Kids become discouraged because they are not improving, because they don't get much playing time, because they get yelled at, because it's all about winning and not having fun.

Not to mention kids just play too many games and get sick of it. Basketball needs to be fun and to be good your child has to want to play.

Here is an article and video that I encourage you to watch. The video discusses the "8 keys to success" and passion is at the top of the list:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/blog/index.php/8-secrets-to-succes-how-they-relate-to-youth-coaching-parenting/>

Confidence

Confidence is a trait of all great players. The confidence makes them aggressive and willing to "make plays" without the fear of making a mistake.

Fear of failure is one of the single greatest impediments of basketball players (we'll talk more on that in a bit). But one of the ways to eliminate fear is by developing confidence.

It's important in all aspects of the game. But when it comes to shooting effectively it's absolutely essential. Just ask any shooting coach or expert about the importance of confidence...

They will all tell you that confidence can be the difference between an AVERAGE shooter and a GREAT shooter. Confidence will greatly improve your shooting percentage!

Basketball Knowledge / IQ

Knowing how to set screens properly, the direction rebounds typically go, the correct defensive positioning, how to get open, when to slow the game down, and when to speed things up are all examples of basketball knowledge that will make you a better player.

This is something learned both in practice and in games. It is often learned from a good coach during practice or on the bench during games (never during the heat of a game).

It can also be learned through books and watching games on TV.

On Court Decision Making

This is learned through experience and practice. Players that make good decisions are very valuable. These decisions are learned by playing games, getting experience, and through good coaching.

Focus and Concentration

Anyone that's been around basketball is familiar with the term "getting in the zone". It really does happen and it just seems like you can't miss. The game slows down and your mind gets almost in an alpha-state where your focus and concentration is at elevated levels.

Focus and concentration is a powerful tool that can make you a better basketball player.

However very few players and coaches look into the mental aspect of basketball because the subject seems so mysterious...

Fortunately, it's not that difficult. Just as there are mechanical fundamentals that you can check on in order to develop a more effective shot motion, there are mental fundamentals that you can check on in order to develop focus and confidence.

This is something that should be addressed by a good development coach.

Nerves

Being nervous can affect your performance on the court. Anxiety causes your muscles to tense up and get you out of the zone.

This is just one more example of how "mentality" can affect your game performance.

Work ethic

Everyone knows that a work ethic is a key to success. All the great players and successful people in the world work hard.

The best way to learn work ethic is by following the example of your parents or influential people in your life. It's also learned through life experiences and emphasis from people that are important to you.

Leadership

Basketball is a team sport. Leadership and teamwork is an important mental aspect of the sport. Some players need to learn how to lead in order to reach their potential.

Aggression

Rebounding, defense, and scoring all require a certain amount of aggression. This is all about mental attitude. Developing an aggressive mentality will only make you a better player (especially if it's a controlled aggression).

Tenacity

Rebounding, defense, and getting loose balls all require relentless tenacity. This is another mentality that coaches love to see in basketball players.

Toughness

How do you react to adversity and difficult situations? Coaches want tough players that will play through anything no matter what the situation.

Fear of failure

I believe the fear of failure is the single largest impediment to learning and improvement. I think that the way we teach and what we teach might help instill fear of failure.

You often see players getting upset for missing shots or making mistakes. And you often see coaches getting upset too.

But this fear at a conscious and subconscious level can severely hinder your performance.

Consider these facts. Shooters that miss 55% of their shots are considered good shooters. In baseball, if you fail 70% of the time, you have a chance to be a Hall of Famer. The greatest golfer ever, Tiger Woods, loses 79% of his tournaments. If you are a Jack Nicklaus fan, his win percentage is 9% - and that is the 2nd highest win percentage ever.

On the whole, sport is an exercise in failure. It's how you deal with that failure that determines how good a player you are. You can either fear failure or you can accept it as part of the game and move on.

When I catch a player getting frustrated or angry because he has missed some shots, I will ask him, "If I could give you some advice in the form of 3 words and tell you if you follow this advice you will never miss another shot, would you like to hear it?" Invariably, the answer comes back, "Yes." So, I give them the 3 words, "Don't shoot any."

If you don't shoot any, you won't miss any. As long as you shoot, you will miss. That is part of shooting. Accept it and move on. As long as you play, you will make mistakes. Accept that premise and move on. Make the next play.

If players can adopt this mentality and eliminate their fear of failure, they will get better.

Summary

So as you can see, mentality is a huge part of basketball. In fact all three aspects that we discussed (athleticism, skill, and mentality) are huge.

I'm not suggesting that you focus on every single aspect of mentality, athleticism, and skills. That would be crazy and no fun at all!!!

Instead I suggest that you become aware of the things in this report and put your child in multi-facet activities that allow them to develop many of the qualities at the same time.

For example, just limiting your child's video game/TV time and playing with them outside will help them develop confidence, balance, reaction time, proprioception, and athleticism.

Another example would be to put your child in a martial arts program that will develop discipline, confidence, balance, proprioception, hand eye coordination, quickness, accuracy, and numerous traits that will make them better athletes. And hopefully have fun at the same time.

The great thing about these activities is that they help them develop in numerous ways and they are generally fun.

How America's Youth Basketball Slows Development

Youth sports have exploded in recent years. There are more tournaments, leagues, teams, and coaches than ever before.

And the cold hard truth is that the youth basketball culture in our country today slows development and even worse causes detrimental flaws in the skill of our basketball players.

Here are just a few sobering examples....

- 10 ft rims, 28.5 inch basketballs, and 3pt shooting at the youth level is literally RUINING the shooting form and mechanics of thousands of players! Shooting in this country has gone way down hill in recent years. Young players simply do NOT have the strength to shoot properly with large basketballs, high rims, and long distances. 99.9% of the players in this country do NOT have the strength to shoot 3 point shots properly until they are well into high school. Yet we have youth leagues where players are horning up three pointers non stop. It just doesn't make sense.
- Youth basketball is getting more and more competitive. Coaches want to win and that is the mentality with most (not all) but most coaches and teams. As a result they teach zone defenses and full court presses. This is ludicrous and develops bad defensive habits. The reason that presses work so well is because young kids do not have the physical strength, skill, or cognitive ability to pass out of a full court trap. This is NOT teaching situational basketball. This is taking advantage of players not strong enough to handle traps. The defense learns bad habits. The same applies to zone defenses. Kids are not strong enough to shoot from the outside and/or drive to the basket. So the zone defense works really well. The problem is the offense learns bad habits and the defense learns bad habits.
- Most youth teams have one or two point guards that bring the ball up. So even at the age of 3rd grade, players are getting position specific. This is a travesty for a variety of reasons. First of all, the players that get to develop the most are just a couple point guards (usually the coach's kid). So the rest of the players get almost no ballhandling practice. This is terrible from a player development perspective. Even if your child will never be a point guard, they still need to learn ballhandling skills. Even centers need to have ballhandling skills. In today's game everyone needs to be able to handle the basketball and neglecting that skill just limits the players' development. In addition, pigeon holing a player into a position anytime before high school varsity is crazy. Your biggest 5th grader playing in the post might be completely done growing and end up being the shortest kid on his high school team. And your guard (who doesn't get much playing time) might be 6-7 by the time he/she's a senior in high school. You just never know who will grow and what will happen when they get older. So players should learn and practice all positions.
- Most youth leagues play 5 on 5. This is the slowest way to develop skill. Players are better off playing 1 on 1, 2 on 2, and 3 on 3 in their driveway. They will touch the ball

2-8 times more often! This means they get to dribble, shoot, and pass more. Thus developing their skill. 5 on 5 games are just a really slow way to develop skill. There is certainly a place for games but in this country we spend most of our time playing 5 on 5 games and expect our kids to get better and develop. Small sided games are the way to go with young kids.

- Kids get burned out. 84% of kids that play organized youth sports no longer play after they are 12 years old. A staggering statistic. We play too many games, too many tournaments, travel too much, and don't take enough breaks. If you do too much of something you simply get tired of it. We can all relate to that. Kids need time to play and have unstructured activity. They need time off. Playing 40 or more games a year is way too much. Not too mention playing games year round causes burn out and promotes overuse injury.

These are just a few examples. Very few leagues have rules that are conducive to long term development of our children. The inadequate rules in our youth leagues result in:

- Poor shooting skills
- Poor dribbling skills for our off guards and inside players
- Poor defensive skills
- Burn out
- Lack of coordination and motor skill development
- Lack of fun
- Quitting sports

I think lack of fun and quitting sports is what bothers me the most. How much fun is it for a beginner that is uncoordinated from growing so fast to play 4 minutes a game and just run to the post hoping someone will throw them the ball? But that's all the player can do because the coach is scared to let them touch the ball when they get pressed and the coach wants to WIN.

The problem with starting your budding superstar in a 5 to 9 year old league is burnout, frustration and de-motivation. "[The American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#) asserts that when the demands of a team sport exceed a child's development, the child may become frustrated or believe he's a failure." When kids quit sports because they view themselves as a failure, they typically leave all sports; kids who have a positive experience in a sport continue with the sport or have the confidence to try other sports or physical activities. And, keeping kids involved in sports, even at a non-competitive level, is essential to reduce the childhood obesity epidemic."

It All Comes Down to Winning

All these problems exist because parents and youth coaches are more interested in winning NOW instead of developing players for the future. We all have the WIN NOW mentality and we sacrifice long term development to win right now.

As a result, youth coaches spend most of their time "coaching" and putting in schemes, plays, and strategies that allow them to win the tournaments now. This is called "instant gratification" for the parents and the coaches. You'll often hear people say it's for the kids

too. But in reality kids don't care too much. If you look at any survey or study you will see that kids would much rather play than to win. They also forget about the score of the game very quickly. A parent might remember a tough loss for weeks. The child will forget in minutes and just want to know if they are getting ice cream after the game. It's easy for adults to forget what it's like to be a kid.

Today you see much less "teaching of the fundamentals" and more "coaching" in youth basketball. This is because of the desire to win now and lack of training for youth coaches.

European programs approach teaching differently. Players are not limited in how much they can practice, and therefore spend from 60 to 90 minutes in the morning working on footwork, shooting and ballskills. The same players then practice another 60 to 90 minutes in the afternoon on more team-oriented concepts. There is no separation of big guys and guards, every player works on the same skills. As a result, European players are generally more well-rounded and more fundamentally sound. And they are more coveted by coaches at all levels.

Time for Unstructured Play

There just aren't many outlets for kids just to play anymore. Kids and parents go from one sporting activity to another leaving little time for unstructured play. Everything they do is organized and structured.

Unstructured play is an important part of a child's development because it allows them to develop an imagination and function on their own. Lots of lessons can be learned from unstructured play.

Focus on "Learning Goals" instead of "Outcome Goals"

Beyond a more playful introduction to sports, there is a definite mental side to developing a youth athlete into an athletic superstar. Most expert performers have families who demonstrate in their everyday lives the importance of hard work and always doing one's best. When a young child sees this example every day, these traits become part of the child's core values. And, these core values are present in almost any expert performer in almost any endeavor. Nobody reaches the top of his profession without hard work.

Beyond the family environment, coaches and parents need to focus the child on "learning goals" as opposed to "performance or outcome goals."

A development-oriented coach encourages his player to share the ball, dribble with their weak hand, experiment with a free form motion offense, learn proper man to man defense, and so on. With young players, these choices may not lead to success in terms of the final score. However, if the coach and parents encourage learning goals, rather than performance goals, these opportunities to improve make the game more fun and give the players more opportunities to improve.

When a child returns home from a game, the first question is almost always, "Did you win?" This is quickly followed by "How many points did you score?" Very rarely do parents frame questions in terms of improvement of skills acquired. Rather than asking a basketball player how many points he scored, what about asking if he tried any new moves? If players are

encouraged to develop learning goals, they are more willing to experiment in games, which is good, because they do not fear losing: winning or losing no longer validates the player's performance. Instead, the player uses games to evaluate improvement and uses mistakes as learning experiences rather than bouts of failure.

If players develop a love for the game through their initial play experiences; learn values of hard work and always doing one's best from their home environment; and develop with learning goals rather than performance goals, they are more likely to enjoy the experience and develop the passion necessary to take their game to the next level. Without the love, the values and the passion, the blooming sports prodigy will never maximize his potential.

I encourage parents to remove the desire to watch their 8 year olds win the weekend tournament; I encourage coaches to remove their 'Lombardi' hats when they walk into a practice or game situation.

My recommendation for your plan is simple.

Play sports seasonally.

Find coaches and programs that highlight skill acquisition rather than victory.

Find trainers who do the same - work towards instilling skills into kids rather than creating performance markers.

Misconceptions About Coaching

When a school team (high school or middle school) struggles to win the coach is almost always blamed. This mentality starts in the PROS and trickles down. Professional coaches are always the scapegoat for a losing team and are fired at an alarming rate.

When a high school team loses a bunch of games we usually blame the coach. But is it really their fault? Would they be winning if they had more skilled and athletic players?

What most parents don't realize is that a school coach has TWO WEEKS to accomplish the following before their first game:

- Break bad shooting habits kids acquired as youngsters
- Break defensive habits that worked in youth clubs but not at the high school level.
- Practice fundamentals (shooting, passing, free throws, etc)
- Implement a man to man offense
- Implement a zone offense that works against 1-2-2, 2-3, 1-3-1, etc
- Be prepared for junk defense (box and 1, triangle and 2, etc)
- Teach set plays (for end of game situations, etc)
- Teach players how to set and read various screens.
- Implement at least one defense (man to man or zone)
- Teach and implement a press breaker
- Teach and implement inbounds plays
- Prepare for every defense and press imaginable
- Develop camaraderie and teamwork among the players
- Scout the first game
- Watch game film
- Have a parent meeting
- Set expectations for players
- Deal with administration
- Analyze stats
- Scrimmage
- Etc

Basketball coaches only have a few weeks at the beginning of every season to teach players an impossible amount of information. And those coaches are expected to win and develop those players (while making a couple thousand dollars a year, which usually equates to about 50 cents an hour).

There just isn't enough time for these miracles to be worked. Even if there weren't so many players coming in with bad habits that need broken and poor skills, there still wouldn't be enough time to get everything done.

Don't get me wrong. You want a good school coach working with your child and we need to hold coaches accountable. And a good school coach will practice fundamentals as much as possible.

The point is that school coaches have VERY LITTLE time to teach your children fundamental skills. Don't expect a school coach to be able to perform miracles and teach your child everything they need to develop skills and compete.

If a coach doesn't have skilled players and/or athletes to work with, it's almost impossible to win. And coaches just don't have much time to work on fundamental skills. I don't think many parents realize this.

How to Develop Your Child's Athleticism, Skill, and Mentality

Now that you have a basic understanding of what it takes to be a great basketball player, you have a chance of figuring out what to do about it.

There are lots of ways to develop in all these areas. I'm going to give you some good ideas to implement based on age level. But you can also come up with your own methods. Use your imagination at home, do your own research, and have fun with your kids!!

Here are the exact steps you should take to make your child the best basketball player they can be and maximize their development:

Step 1 - Put Your Child in a Position to Succeed, Have Fun, and Develop a Passion for Basketball and Sports

Since youth sports in our country are not always conducive to skill development and having fun, then you as a parent will need to take steps to put your child in an environment where they have fun and develop.

This means you should look for leagues and coaches that give out fairly equal playing time, provide positive reinforcement, run drills that are fun, use players at all positions, teach the same skills to all positions, and understand fundamentals.

You should provide lots of encouragement so your child develops confidence, work ethic, toughness, and is not afraid to fail!

You should also limit the number of structured basketball games that your child plays. Depending on the age, you will want to limit them to 20-60 games a year.

Encourage unstructured play and activities at home, at the park, and with friends. Nothing is better than some friends playing pick up games in the drive way or touch football in the back yard. Are they developing skill? Maybe. But they are certainly having fun and they are developing athletically while other kids play video games.

Step 2 - Put Your Child in an Environment and Activities Where they Can Develop Athletically

This can be as simple as playing tag with your child in the basement or as advanced as putting them into a professional athletic development program.

I'll share some ideas and suggestions (in the section below) based on age level. The key here is to put your kids in fun environments where they can develop athletically.

Older kids might participate in more serious development programs. Where younger kids would obviously focus on more fun and less structured activities.

I think it's foolish to put your 5 year old in a basketball league and think that will make them a better basketball player.

Did you know that Steve Nash (2 time NBA MVP) did not play basketball until he was 13?

Did you know that two of the best players of all time (Michael Jordan and Bill Russell) were NO good in high school and got cut from their teams? Basketball is a tough sport and you don't become really good until late into development (post puberty).

I think you're much better off putting a young (3 to 9 year old) child in programs like swimming, gymnastics, soccer, and martial arts because those activities will develop your child's athletic ability and coordination much faster than a basketball league. Not to mention, young kids are not strong enough to play basketball the right way (it's a tough sport) so they end up developing bad habits by compensating for their lack of strength.

Step 3 - Put Your Child in an Environment and Activities Where they Can Develop Basketball Skills and Mentality

Ideally, you child should practice skills for 2-3 hours for every organized game that they play in. Your child should also receive proper instruction in a fun practice environment so they can maximize their skill development.

Don't push your child to practice (especially for a long period). Otherwise you'll drive them from the game and it will no longer be fun.

Now if your child needs a little push because they are not confident or scared, that is a different story. Some kids need pushed out of their comfort zone into something like a skill development program or a soccer club so they can work with a good coach that ultimately builds their confidence.

Forcing your child to do something for long term is where the problem comes into play. Many times kids don't want to listen to their parents.

A good skill development coach will also teach mentality, life lessons, and make the game fun.

The more your child practices their skills (especially post-puberty), the better they will become.

My Suggestions Based on Age Level

Here are some specific things you can do based on age level and suggestions to maximize your child's basketball development -- and make them the best player on the block:

Ages 0 - 2

I'm not an expert when it comes to infants. So at this age my best suggestion is for you to get some books about infant development. And above all give your child love, time, and attention. It's amazing how far such simple things will take you.

Beyond the infant development books, here are just a few ideas that might help with the development of an athlete:

- Consider a swimming program. You can put your child in a swimming program shortly after birth. This is supposed to help with your baby's muscle development and coordination.
- Play catch. See if your baby can throw a small ball with left and right hand (develop ambidexterity).
- Read books and provide some intellectual stimulation.
- Let them get plenty of sleep. This is when your child is developing and they need sleep.
- Provide stimulating colors and toys to play with.
- Encourage plenty of playful activities and give them objects that allow them to develop their motor skills and coordination.

Ages 2 - 5

At this age the most important thing is for your child to be in a loving and positive environment where they can develop mentally, physically, and emotionally.

I am not a child development expert -- I'm a basketball, sports, and athletic development guy. So I urge you to seek out some good child development books for 2 to 5 year olds.

And most of all, give them your love, time, and attention. That is the most important thing to set a solid foundation for your child's future (whether it be basketball, another sport, or playing the guitar).

Beyond that basic advice, here are a few excellent activities that will help develop your child as an athlete and potential basketball player:

1. **Tag.** This is an incredible athletic development game that builds strength, quickness, balance, change of direction, and so on. You can play tag in the basement or outside. Not to mention it's lots of fun and there are many variations of tag including freeze tag and werewolf tag.
2. **Gymnastics.** The physical and mental elements that can be built through gymnastics are amazing - spatial awareness, flexibility, strength, balance - the list goes on. If for no other reason, the ability to know where you are in space and take a fall 'well' is a required skill for any sport.

3. **Swimming.** Swimming is incredible for developing muscle balance, coordination, kinesthetic differentiation, and motor skills. The added shoulder and hip mobility also gives a great deal of pliability to the frame of a young athlete.
4. **Martial arts.** Finding a good martial arts program (when old enough) can be invaluable. Martial arts are incredible for mental and physical athletic development. Almost every martial art is based on skill acquisition as a primary marker. Not only is that mentally and emotionally good for a child, but it infers the teaching of patience and 'enjoying the journey' rather than 'searching for the destination'. Athletically speaking, dynamic flexibility, balance, proprioception, end-range systemic strength, mobility, spatial awareness - the physical ability built through martial arts is awe-inspiring and can apply to any sport.
5. **Soccer.** When old enough (4 or 5), it is a wonderfully athletic and tactical-based sport. Sudden bursts of explosive power, change of direction, looking two plays ahead, playing a 'forcing' based defense in which the defender uses their body/skills to change what the offensive player wanted to do - these are fantastic athletic lessons that can be filed away in the nervous system and used at a later point in any sporting activity.
6. **Dribbling.** If it's ok with Mom, you can let your child dribble the ball around the house. If your child shows interest, let them dribble. Maybe they'll have fun. If not, don't worry. It's not important just a simple way to for them have fun and develop physically.
7. **Speed and agility games.** You need to be careful and introduce games like this carefully. But when done right this can be lots of fun and a great athletic development tool. I get lots of ideas for running and agility games from Alan Stein's DVD called "130 Pro Power Speed, Quickness, and Reaction Drills". It's not meant for young kids but I really like the drills for ideas and concepts. I used some of the change of pace and tennis ball exercises with my 3 year old son and 5 year old daughter. They loved them! <http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/pr/Alan-Stein-130-Speed-Reaction-Drills.html>
8. **Nerf basketball.** Dribbling and shooting nerf baskets is as advanced as you should get. And this isn't even necessary. Only if they have fun. Make sure it's a light ball and not too heavy.
9. **Physically Active Games.** There's no end to the games you can play. I've played games like Coin Drop Races, Rabbit Jumping Games, Easter Egg Run, T-ball in the Basement, and the list goes on. You can run races where you start from different positions (on your back, on your stomach, side, sprinting blocks, etc). These are great for development. Wrestling around on the floor is great too. There is no end to the games you can come up with...
10. **Imagination.** Use your imagination to come up with your own fun games and activities that are both physically and mentally stimulating. Do your own research and find things you like. Have fun!

Don't feel like you have to stick exactly to this list or include all of these activities. Your child might not be ready for soccer or swimming.

The key is to expose your child to a wide variety of physical activities -- running, jumping, skipping, kicking, jump rope, playing catch, hitting a ball, climbing trees, etc. Some of the best things are just playing games in the basement or the backyard. Nothing organized or structured.

It is also worth noting that ALL KIDS should have plenty of unorganized and unstructured play time. This is where they get to use their imagination and develop through the simple activity of play. Don't get caught up in organized sports. Present a well rounded variety.

Ages 6 - 9

At this age it's VERY important to put your child in activities where they can develop coordination and the athletic aspects discussed in this report.

Contrary to popular belief, immersing a young athlete into one selective sport at an early age is counter productive to their eventual success. Along with the concerns with emotional burnout and overuse injuries, young athletes who follow a sport specialized lifestyle never gain the macro skills and coordination necessary to master the advanced skilled in a given sport.

Now your child is at an age where they have almost unlimited opportunities to play organized sports and you as a parent have some decisions to make. What should you do? What sports should they play?

First of all, ANY sporting activity lead by a quality-based coach is wonderful for kids. However most youth sports teams are coached by untrained coaches. It is only when poorly educated and over zealous parents and coaches (i.e. adults) get involved too heavily in youth sports that the experience can become sour. Parents often push too hard and seek success at a young age; coaches often are limited in their understanding of developmental science and routinely 'drill' kids with sport exercises that are too narrow in scope.

My recommendation for your plan is simple.

Play sports seasonally.

Find coaches and programs that highlight skill acquisition rather than victory.

Find trainers who do the same - work towards instilling skills into kids rather than creating performance markers.

Allocate plenty of time for unstructured play.

When enrolling your kids in sports, I believe the best sports for your child's basketball development are (in no particular order):

1. **Gymnastics.** The physical and mental elements that can be built through gymnastics are amazing - spatial awareness, flexibility, strength, balance - the list goes on. If for no other reason, the ability to know where you are in space and take a fall 'well' is a required skill for any sport.
2. **Swimming.** Swimming is incredible for developing muscle balance, coordination, kinesthetic differentiation, and motor skills. The added shoulder and hip mobility also gives a great deal of pliability to the frame of a young athlete.
3. **Martial arts.** Finding a good martial arts program (when old enough) can be invaluable. Martial arts are incredible for mental and physical athletic development. Almost every martial art is based on skill acquisition as a primary marker. Not only is that mentally and emotionally good for a child, but it infers the teaching of patience and 'enjoying the journey' rather than 'searching for the destination'. Athletically speaking, dynamic flexibility, balance, proprioception, end-range systemic strength, mobility, spatial awareness - the physical ability built through martial arts is awe-inspiring and can apply to any sport.
4. **Soccer.** When old enough (4 or 5), it is a wonderfully athletic and tactical-based sport. Sudden bursts of explosive power, change of direction, looking two plays ahead, playing a 'forcing' based defense in which the defender uses their body/skills to change what the offensive player wanted to do - these are fantastic athletic lessons that can be filed away in the nervous system and used at a later point in any sporting activity.
5. **Flag Football.** This is incredible for developing coordination, spatial awareness, quickness, agility, and overall athleticism. Being able to catch a ball while running and catching over your shoulder is a complex coordination movement that is great for youngsters. Not to mention it's a high speed game that requires you to elude defenders and change directions.

Don't get me wrong, the list is nothing without a quality coach at the helm of each of these respective sports. Good coaches do exist and I urge you as a parent to find them.

Play soccer in the autumn.

Swim in the summer.

Participate in martial arts through the winter.

Take gymnastics in the spring.

Mix in some developmental training and play other sports recreationally for interest and development sake (basketball and baseball for example).

By the age of 13 - 14, you'll have a solid athlete with limited injury who understands sport tactics and is strong, mobile and flexible...

Not a bad place to be!

Here are more excellent activities for you to consider for your child:

1. **Tag.** This is an incredible athletic development game that builds strength, quickness, balance, change of direction, and so on. You can play tag in the basement or outside. Not to mention it's lots of fun and there are many variations of tag including freeze tag and werewolf tag.
2. **Speed and agility games.** You need to be careful and introduce games like this carefully. But when done right this can be lots of fun and a great athletic development tool. I get lots of ideas of running and agility games from Alan Stein's DVD called "130 Pro Power Speed, Quickness, and Reaction Drills". It's not meant for young kids but I really like the drills for ideas and concepts. I use some of the change of pace and tennis ball exercises with my 3 year old son and 5 year old daughter. They love them! <http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/pr/Alan-Stein-130-Speed-Reaction-Drills.html>
3. **Physically Active Games.** There's no end to the games you can play. I've played games like Coin Drop Races, Rabbit Jumping Games, Easter Egg Run, T-ball in the basement, and the list goes on. You can run races where you start from different positions (on your back, on your stomach, side, sprinting blocks, etc). These are great for development. Wrestling around on the floor is great too. There is no end to the games you can come up with...
4. **Unstructured play.** Allow for plenty of unstructured play indoors and outdoors (this means NO TV and/or video games). Climbing trees, building forts, and running around with friends is great for development. The trick is keeping them off the TV, computer, and electronic devices.
5. **T-ball / baseball.** Playing t-ball or baseball in the backyard is fun and good for athletic development. You can also play kick ball, soccer, football, or almost any sporting game outside (or in the basement during the winter).
6. **Imagination.** Use your imagination to come up with your own fun games and activities that are both physically and mentally stimulating. Do your own research and find things you like. Have fun!

Remember, at this age the most important thing is to put your child in fun activities where they can develop athletically, mentally, and emotionally.

When it comes to basketball (playing games and skills), I think it's ok to put kids in a good program. Just don't go overboard with the time commitment and be careful about the program you choose. Find a good team and coach that incorporate the ideas included in this report.

At this age I personally focus on footwork, ballhandling, having fun, athletic development, coordination, and small side games (2 on 2, 3 on 3). From a skill standpoint, you'd be

amazed at how a good footwork and ballhandling program will skyrocket a player's confidence and ability at this age.

I have historically been against starting my own basketball skill development program at this age. However I know parents are very eager to get their kids in a program and thousands of 5 to 9 year olds participate in basketball. So I figure that if they are going to play, I might as well start my own program that I know will be good for them. You can learn about our youth basketball program here:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/cr/youth-training.asp>

Ages 10 - 14

Now your child has reached an age where they can start participating in skill development programs, athletic development training programs, and play some games.

With that said, those programs must be done a certain way, must be age appropriate, and have excellent coaching. Not all programs are good and you need to take time to choose a program that teaches the right way.

Multiple Sports

I think kids should be playing multiple sports that they enjoy. Let your child choose their sports as much as possible so it's fun for them. Martial arts, gymnastics, baseball, soccer, and pretty much all sports (except maybe full contact football because of concussions) are good for kids at this age.

The key is to let them play multiple sports seasonally. This allows for a well rounded athlete that doesn't get burned out.

Athletic Development

According to Alan Stein (world renown basketball strength and conditioning coach) proper strength training does not stunt growth. In fact, you can actually begin a safe, age appropriate training program as young as 8 or 9 years old.

The most important concept to understand is that a child's chronological age and their physical and mental maturity are not always congruent. Some 10-year olds look and act 16 and some 16-year olds look and act 10!

However, as a general rule of thumb, young players can participate in a structured, supervised, age-appropriate training program.

A proper youth training program should involve dynamic flexibility, movement preparation, footwork, strength training, coordination, and agility drills. The program should be done two times per week, for 30-45 minutes per workout, and focus on multi-joint movements such as skipping, hopping, jumping, lunging, squatting, pushing, pulling, throwing, and twisting. The

workouts should be challenging, yet fun and engaging with the goal of building great training habits and a solid foundation of efficient movement.

It is important for younger players to regularly experience a variety of motor skills in order to promote future athletic success and injury prevention.

Research has shown that coordination is best developed between the ages of 10 to 12 years old. There are several components to coordination, such as balance, rhythm, body awareness in space, and reaction. Younger players that master these components, and improve their coordination through appropriate training, tend to have better athletic success at later ages.

Here are four guidelines to a quality youth training program:

- **Safe:** young players must use proper form and appropriate resistances (if applicable).
- **Fun:** young players should be engaged and enjoy training!
- **Fundamental:** young players should master a variety of general motor skills (skipping, hopping, jumping, lunging, squatting, pushing, pulling, throwing, and twisting) before trying to master sport-specific skills (ball handling, shooting, etc.).
- **Challenging:** young players learn quickly, so challenge them physically and mentally with a variety of new movements, exercises, and drills.

A well developed 13 or 14 year old can participate in more advanced athletic development programs. Again, it's up to a good trainer to judge what is best for that particular player.

Beyond professional training, I suggest that you review the recommended sports and activities in the section above (for ages 6 - 9). All the activities listed (like gymnastics, soccer, martial arts, tag, and so on) are excellent for athletic development.

Skill Development

As with athletic development, one of the most important concepts to understand with skill development is that a child's chronological age and their physical and mental maturity are not always congruent.

Finding a good coach that understands the fundamentals of the game and the physical development and limitations of a child is important.

For a player to make significant progress, consistency is vital. Camps and clinics are great. However they are very intense and last only a short period of time (usually 1 to 5 days). A player can only digest so much information and their body can only learn so many skills in a short amount of time like that.

And unfortunately the skills learned at those camps are quickly lost unless they are maintained and continue to be practiced properly. So I am personally not a big fan of camps and clinics. I think they are good and can be fun. But should not be relied on exclusively to develop basketball skills.

I believe the best (and fastest) way to develop skills is to work with a QUALITY local player development coach over an extended period of time (several hours each week).

A good development coach will do wonders for a player's dribbling, passing, shooting, footwork, and scoring ability.

The key to getting better is having an intelligent workout plan over an extended period of time. You need to work on your skills for several hours each week and get continual repetitions.

That's why we recommend working with local player development coaches. The coaches will keep you on task, keep you working on the right things, teach you about the game of basketball, and dramatically increase your overall development.

It's also about consistency.

As a skill development coach, I focus very heavily on footwork, ballhandling, shooting (with the more developed kids), passing, and mentality. I even incorporate athletic development into the drills and activities.

You can learn more about our skill development program and the skills we teach here:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/pr/cr-marion-iowa-training.html>

Mental Development

I believe that playing multiple sports (with good coaches) is a great way for players to develop mentally (build confidence, develop passion, mental toughness, etc).

I think martial arts can be great for mental development. As a player development coach, I focus heavily on the mental aspects of the game and continually try to teach these lessons in my skill development program.

Players also need to participate in games to start learning "how to play" and developing other "mental aspects" of basketball...

Basketball Games

For players to improve and develop the fastest, they should get approximately 2-4 hours of skill for every game they play. So ideally, if a player can practice skill for three hours during the week and play 1 or 2 games over the weekend, that would be the most productive situation.

This allows a player to develop skill and then experiment with those newly learned skills during games. It also allows the players to improve their basketball IQ and improve on court decision making. It's a perfect balance of developing skill and mentality.

With that said, you don't want to play too many games or play all year round. It's also excellent to play small side games (2 on 2, 3 on 3, and 4 on 4). I would try to limit players to about 40 organized games per year.

Note: Your child might already be practicing 2-3 times a week and play on weekends. But are they actually working on SKILLS in those practices? Many (but not all) teams' coaches spend a lot of time of plays, schemes, and tactics during practice and little time is actually spent on skill development (dribbling, passing, shooting, footwork, etc).

Ages 14 and Up

At this age your child is ready for more serious training and sporting activities. Again it depends on the exact age and maturity of the player, but at the age of 14 most players are ready to handle responsibilities, learn work ethic, and play on teams that have the "WIN" mentality.

Don't get me wrong. Basketball should still be fun. That's why we play. But we're in high school now and most players are physically, mentally, and cognitively ready to take on the challenges of a competitive team, skill development program, and/or and athletic development trainer.

To maximize your child's performance, all the concepts in this report still apply. However here are the specific things that will help the most at this age...

Multiple sports

Continue playing multiple sports. This will still be tremendous for overall athletic and mental development. It also helps prevent injuries. Players that focus on only one sport and play year round are much more prone to injury. It's the repetitive use that causes problems. Playing multiple sports seasonally also strengthens all parts of your body and allows for uniform muscle development.

Lastly, playing a variety of sports helps avoid burn out. I know when college coaches are recruiting, they look for good multi-sport athletes. So I think it's good to encourage multiple sports.

Skill Development

For a player to make significant progress, consistency is vital. Camps and clinics are ok -- however they are very intense and only last a short period of time (usually 1 to 5 days). A player can only digest so much information and their body can only learn so many skills in a short amount of time like that.

And unfortunately the skills learned at those camps are quickly lost unless they are maintained and continue to be practiced properly. So I am personally not a big fan of camps and one-time clinics. I think they are good and can be fun. But they should not be relied on exclusively to develop basketball skills.

I believe the best (and fastest) way to develop skills is to work with a QUALITY local player development coach over an extended period of time (several hours each week).

A good development coach will do wonders for a player's dribbling, passing, shooting, footwork, and scoring ability. Ideally a player should get 2-8 hours of skill development practice during the week and play one or two games on the weekend.

The key to getting better is having an intelligent workout plan over an extended period of time. You need to work on your skills for several hours each week and get continual repetitions.

That's why we recommend working with local player development coaches. The coaches will keep you on task, keep you working on the right things, teach you about the game of basketball, and dramatically increase your overall development.

It's also about consistency and working on the right skills. You can learn more about our skill development program and the skills we teach here:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/pr/cr-marion-iowa-training.html>

Mental Development

Playing multiple sports for a good coach is a great way for players to develop mentally (build confidence, develop passion, mental toughness, etc).

I think martial arts can be great for mental development. As a player development coach, I focus heavily on the mental aspects of the game and continually try to teach these lessons in my skill development program.

Playing competitive basketball games while receiving instruction from a good coach can also be vital in developing the mental aspects of the game.

I would just be careful about going overboard with games. You'll want to limit the number of games to avoid burn out, injury, and allow time for skill development.

Athletic Development

A good athletic development program and trainer can do wonders for a player's athleticism. I highly recommend finding a good program and a sports trainer to work with.

A good trainer will improve quickness, strength, vertical leap, coordination, flexibility, and also prevent injuries. The key is to find a reasonable balance of other sports, skill development, athletic development, and playing games.

Players need time off to recover and should not play 12 months out of the year. They should also be careful about over-training and over-working. Teenagers need enough sleep so their bodies can recover and continue growing. School, followed by team practice, followed by weight training, and followed by evening video games is a lot in one day. Prolonged

exposure can wear a kid down and stunt development. Plenty of sleep and time for recovery must be mixed in.

Are You Worried that Your Child Already Missed Out on These Development Opportunities?

Don't worry. It's never too late to get started and improve.

Ideally it's great if you can incorporate some of these activities as your child is growing up. But it's impossible to do everything and not something to obsess over. I certainly don't do all of these things with my children.

For example, my daughter will be six soon. She plays soccer and gymnastics. However swimming didn't work out too well (although we do try to take her to the pool when we can) and we haven't tried martial arts yet. I try to play games, play catch, and do various activities with her. But I certainly don't do everything and I could do much much more. I just do the best I can with a busy schedule and the challenges of being a parent.

If your child is 17 and wants to improve, find a good coach for them to work with. It's not too late. There are always opportunities to develop athleticism, mentality, and basketball skill -- no matter what age you are. That is why 30 year old NBA players still have trainers that help them improve their athleticism, skill, and mentality.

About Jeff Haefner

Jeff Haefner is a player development coach in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa area. He is also the co-owner and operator of BreakthroughBasketball.com, the world's most visited basketball coaching website in the world. Over 60,000 coaches around the world subscribe to their newsletter and read the advice they publish.

Jeff's primary job is to study basketball and learn from the best.

One of the biggest influences on Jeff's training program has been professional player development coach [Don Kelbick](#). Many of Jeff's teaching methods come from Don Kelbick, a pro coach that works with NBA players like Raja Bell, Carlos Boozer, Guillermo Diaz, Rasual Butler, Carlos Arroyo, Tim Hardaway, Bruce Bowen, and others. Don also works with younger players and gives training camps all over the world. Jeff has been fortunate enough to become good friends with Don and learn his training techniques. Don has probably been the most influential person on Jeff's training program.

In addition, Jeff has learned from dozens of player development coaches around the country. BreakthroughBasketball.com has allowed him to meet and become friends with player development coaches from all over. In fact, he has started a "master mind" group where professional development coaches from all around the country share ideas and help each other.

Because of Jeff's unique experience he is able to offer a very distinctive training program that is very precise, efficient, and effective.

If you'd like to contact Jeff or learn more about his player development programs, you can visit:

<http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/cr/>