

For Coaches



Three must-have ingredients for running fun and productive practices

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By Greg Bach

The best youth sports practices – sessions which kids truly love being a part of and that are equally fun for coaches to oversee – must have three key ingredients: high tempo, competitive drills and resemble game day action.

The nation's top college coaches universally agree it's the quickest route to developing skills and forging confident and productive players.

“At the University of Iowa, I try to put my players in game-like shooting situations in practice so they will have the confidence to step up and make – or even take a shot – in the game,” says long-time and incredibly successful Iowa women's basketball coach Lisa Bluder, the school's all-time winningest coach.

It's all about getting kids ready to perform to the best of their ability when the scoreboard is turned on and the bleachers are full.

“Our players practice at game speed, take game-like shots in their shooting drills and we have defenders contest their shots,” says Bluder, one of only nine active major college coaches with 600 or more career wins. “This way nothing seems different when they are playing in the game – and at times it may even seem easier than practice.”

But before you hit the fast-forward button on your practice speed, make sure that teaching and encouraging are a part of everything you do.

Because regardless if you're coaching beginning level players, elite travel team athletes or the nation's premier athletes like Bluder, you've got to teach the proper way to execute the game's fundamentals while keeping their confidence high.

“We also teach our players what is a good shot for them and what isn't a good shot,” says the three-time Big Ten Coach of the Year. “They are then taking higher percentage shots, resulting in more success, which helps build confidence.”

And as players experience some success and gain some confidence it's up to coaches to use that as a springboard to leading them to even bigger and better things.

“Constant encouragement of our players is a must, as keeping their confidence high is the first step in becoming a great shooter after they have mastered the fundamentals of good shooting form,” Bluder says. “I believe when you do all of these things in practice you are setting your players up for success.”

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