

# **Tips and Techniques for Basketball Players: Play like a Pro!**

# BASKETBALL

Basketball is an amazing game, a quick-paced, non-stop sport with end-to-end action, featuring great athletes with incredible hand-eye coordination. There are many ways amateur athletes can improve themselves and their game to help them play like a pro. By practicing drills, conditioning, following a strict diet, and improving hand-eye coordination, you'll be playing like your favorite pros in no time.

## DRILLS

There are five parts to the game of basketball that an athlete must concern himself with. They are shooting, passing, rebounding, ball-handling, and the movement around the court. There are many drills in each of these categories that can help. While there are different schools of thought on how to practice, the following is just a sample of the many ways there are to improve basketball skills through practicing drills.

### SHOOTING

There are many facets to an offense. The two basic facets to any offense: Shooting and passing.

Here are some examples of shooting drills:

1. **Basic shooting**

One player stands anywhere in the half court while another player stands under the basket. The ball is passed to the player on the court, who catches the ball low with knees bent, and shoots a jump shot. That player gets his own rebound and passes to the other player, who has set up anywhere on the court.

2. **Bank shot**

This may be the simplest of all drills. Stand as far under the basket as you can and still make a bank shot. Then repeat 50 to 100 times. This basic drill not only improves technique, but also improves arm strength.

3. **Range drill**

This drill can be done using one or two players. Player One stands 15 feet from the basket while Player Two starts under the basket. Player

Two starts the drill by passing the ball to Player One, who quickly shoots the ball. Player One charges in for his own rebound while Player Two runs out to get set for a 15-foot shot. Player One then passes the ball to Player Two, and the drill is repeated in this fashion until both players have shot five times. Then the players do the drill at the 3-point line. Then the players repeat the drill at least a step beyond the 3-point line, and as far as the NBA 3-point line if you have the range. Then come back to the NCAA 3-point line and then back to a 15-foot shot. The drill follows the progressive and regressive shots for two reasons. Following the NCAA 3-pointer and the 15-footer after the NBA 3-pointer will make the closer shots seem easier, and impress upon the importance of the closer shot.

#### **4. Free throws**

There is nothing more important than the free throw in the game of basketball. This is one area that an amateur can actually exceed the skills of a professional player, as the easy free throw has been pushed to the side in favor of the long range bomb and the slam dunk. That's the basketball equivalent of the golfing adage "drive for show, putt for dough." The drill is basic: The shooter takes ten free throws. For each of the ten shots that were missed, a wind sprint is run. Then repeat until the shooter makes all 10 shots. This free through drill is good for a team or an individual. If it's a team situation, the entire team runs the wind sprint. This gives motivation for the shooter to not miss shots. If it's an individual drill, it's an excellent source of self discipline. The shooter has to have it in them to be honest with the number of shots they missed.

## **PASSING**

Passing is an important part of the game, and should not be overlooked. Whether it's an entry pass, a fast-break transition, or inside a set offense, passing can help a team maintain possession and control the flow of the game.

Here are some examples of passing drills:

#### **1. Chest pass**

This is the most basic of passing. The chest pass is most commonly used within a set offense. This is a quick pass that does not touch the ground. The ball should come off the shooter's fingertips with the thumbs facing down. Stepping into the pass provides more power, and knees should be bent and relaxed. The pass should be aimed at the receiver's chest area. This is a good pass to practice against a wall if a

partner isn't available.

**2. Bounce pass**

This is the second most basic of basketball passing. The same basic follow through and hand position as the chest pass is used in the bounce pass. Both types of passes create backspin, making the ball easier to catch. The bounce of this pass should hit roughly two-thirds of the way to the receiver. Unlike the chest pass, this pass should go from the shooter's waist to the receiver's waist. Again, this is a good drill to do against a wall if nobody else is available.

**3. Baseball pass**

The baseball pass is an overhand throw that is most commonly used to cover a lot of the court to start off a fast break. Hold the ball with both hands to the throwing side of your body, with your passing hand a bit higher on the ball. Cock the ball near your ear with your hand behind the ball to help keep the ball with enough backspin to aid with aim. The pass should go over the defense while leading the receiver.

**4. Step and pass drill**

Start with one player on the middle of the foul line and the other on the side line, both on the same end line, facing each other. Both players then side step quickly down the court in a light, almost jumping, step. The players then send a chest pass to each other every two or three steps, without letting the ball hit the ground.

**5. Pass and Go Circle Drill**

This is a good drill to do when you have a number of people to help. Form a circle around the midcourt jump circle, or a 4-meter diameter circle if you're not on a court. One person should start in the middle. The first person makes a chest pass to the person in the middle, and then follows his throw to the middle position. The receiver then passes to the next person in the circle, and follows his shot. Then continue in this fashion around the circle. This helps players make good throws when under pressure before moving to a new position in the offensive set. Make it a challenge by making one hundred passes without the ball touching the ground. This is also a good drill to do with overhead passes, which is a two-handed, overhead throw aimed at the receiver's chest.

## **REBOUNDING**

Rebounding is one of the few skills a player can work on that helps on both offense and defense. It requires both arm and lower body strength, and the stability to jump in a crowd.

Here are some drills to help with rebounding:

**1. The McHale Drill**

This drill is named for the famous Boston Celtics player, Kevin McHale. Begin underneath and to the right of the basket. Toss the ball off the backboard. When the ball comes down, jump up and tip the ball off the glass with your right hand. While doing that, use your left hand to either try to grab the rim or reach as high as you can. After ten repetitions, switch to the other side of the basket, and repeat the drill using opposite hands.

**2. Superman drill**

This is another rebounding drill that involves catching the ball and jumping. Start in the low block position in the key. Toss the ball at the backboard on the opposite side of the paint to where you're standing. Follow the toss, jump to catch the ball and try to come down with the ball on the opposite side of the paint. Then repeat the drill from the opposite side of the key.

**3. The Dantley Drill**

This drill is for more the more skilled players. Start off by standing underneath the right side of the basket, tossing the ball against the backboard. Then jump up, catch the rebound, and while still in the air, pin the ball against the backboard. Then immediately jump up again, toss the ball against the backboard, and then catch the ball and score the lay-up, all in the same motion. Do this for seven repetitions, and then switch to the opposite side of the backboard and repeat.

## **BALL-HANDLING**

Again, there's not much glory in ball-handling, but a well-rounded player will be more successful if they practice this fundamental. And this is a skill that all players should practice and excel at. Even though your guards may do most of the ball handling up the court, there are times in set offenses that big men may also have to move. It's more important in these situations to be able to have excellent ball control, as there is more pressure under the basket than there is above the key.

Here are some drills you can do to improve your ball-handling skills:

**1. The Five-Minute Drill**

This drill was invented by the famous point guard "Pistol" Pete Maravich." It works for both ball-handling and dribbling skills. This is the most basic of ball-handling drills, as all that's needed is a

basketball and a circle to practice in. This can be the center court circle, the free throw circle, or draw a circle with chalk on a hardtop. Starting out for three minutes, dribble in the circle using as many different techniques as you can. This can include under the legs, crossovers, behind the back, and others. Do not cross out of the circle, and do the techniques as fast as you can without feeling rushed. As you improve, work up to doing this drill for five minutes. You should exert yourself during this drill and feel tired when it is finished.

**2. The Low Dribble Figure Eight Drill**

Begin with a low dribble, and then begin to dribble the ball around both legs in a figure eight pattern. Do this drill first with your off hand, and then with your dominant hand. It's important to do this drill with your head up to gain confidence to be able to do this.

**3. The Skip Dribble Drill**

Stand with your back straight and move your legs in a scissor-like fashion, with toes pointing forward. Dribble the ball through your legs from front to back, from one hand to the other, while jumping and shifting feet. Try to do the drill fifty to one hundred times without fail.

**4. The Yo-Yo Dribble Drill**

Start on one end line under the basket. Start down the court, and at the first free throw line, cross over from right to left and immediately from left to right (or opposite if you are a left-handed dribbler) and continue down the court. Repeat at the other free throw line, and then shoot a lay-up. This is a move you would use to deke a defender.

## **FOOTWORK DRILLS**

Footwork is an important part of basketball. Even without possession of the ball, players are constantly moving, using a series of short sprints, cuts, dekes, and other moves that could cause a player to trip up if they haven't practiced. Footwork drills are an excellent way to improve your basketball game, because these drills also go to improve your strength and conditioning, as well as your basketball skills

Here are some footwork drills to work on:

**1. Dots Drill**

Find a spot about five feet wide where you can mark (electrical tape, chalk) five spots in the same pattern as the five spots on a die. Make sure there's about two feet in between all the dots. There are several ways to do this drill, which involves hopping or jumping between the dots. It can be done on the right foot, the left foot, both feet, and then

hopscotch style. For the first three, start on one of the lower dots. Then hop (or jump) to the middle dot. Then go to the top dot diagonally from where you started. Then go laterally to the second top dot, then back to the middle, then to the other lower dot, and then across to the dot you started at. The hopscotch drill is just like the children's game, starting with one foot on each of the two lower dots. Then jump and land with both feet on the middle dot. Then jump again and land on the top two dots. Then go backwards in the same fashion. Work on each one of the four drills for 15 to 30 seconds, and run them consecutively. To challenge yourself, work on either how technically accurate you can be within the time frame, or how many circuits you can complete in a set amount of time. This drill is great work for leg strength, coordination, balance, and footwork.

**2. Side Step Drill**

Side steps are an important part of basketball defense. This drill is perfect for working on this skill. Start one baseline. Move sideways from the baseline to the center court line, always perpendicular to the baseline and never crossing one leg over the other. To make this a true defensive drill, work on keeping your palms up and work in a defensive stance, with your butt low and knees bent. Then repeat this drill facing the opposite direction.

**3. Leg Hop Drill**

Starting on the baseline, hop down to center court on one leg. Then return to the baseline while hopping on the other leg. This drill is to concentrate on height, not speed or distance. Then do this drill with a jump with both legs together.

**4. Ladders Drill**

This drill is well-known by all basketball players, though it may be called different things: Ladders, suicides, or wind sprints. This drill is usually known as a warm-up or even a punishment drill, it's excellent for improving footwork because of all of the stops and starts. Start on one baseline and then run to the free throw line, bending down to touch the line. Then run back to the same baseline, touching that line. Then run to the center court line, and back to the original baseline. Follow the pattern to the far free throw line, and then to the far baseline and back again.

**5. Line Jumps Drill**

Start in one corner of the court facing down the sideline with both feet together. Then jump from one side of the sideline to the other, making your way down to the opposite baseline. When you reach the far corner, sprint down the base line to the opposite corner, and do the drill down the other sideline. The key to this drill is quick, low, diagonal jumps.

# CONDITIONING

Conditioning is the training and exercises done during the off-season to keep your body in shape. Conditioning is not only good for its health benefits, but also it is good, as mentioned before, for an athlete to have the self-discipline to continue the hard work it takes to be a better basketball player.

A good conditioning session includes a warm-up, stretching, strength work, endurance work, a cool-down session, and then more stretching.

## WARM-UPS

Warming your body up before you begin any strenuous exercise is vitally important. It allows increased blood flow to muscles and joints to lubricate themselves. This allows you to go through the entire gambit of basketball exercises (stretching, jumping, running, bending) with a greatly reduced fear of injuring yourself. One of the best warm-ups for basketball training is jumping rope. This allows your body to get into its rhythm for exercising without overtaxing itself with resistance. You should be sufficiently warmed up when you feel yourself starting to lightly perspire.

## STRETCHING

Stretching helps your body improve its range of motion, and should always be done immediately after warming up. Again, increasing range of motion helps to prevent injuries. It's important to not bounce while stretching because it can prevent the muscle from stretching to its maximum length and can even cause a tear.

Here are some important stretching exercises:

1. **Shoulders**

Pull one elbow across your chest toward the other shoulder. With the opposite hand, pull your elbow toward the opposite shoulder and hold for 20 seconds. Repeat with the opposite elbow.

2. **Back**

Lie flat with both legs straight out. Raise one leg and hold it just below the knee. Bring the knee up toward your chest while keeping your head on the floor and keeping your leg as straight as you can. Hold for



20 to 30 seconds. Repeat the exercise five times with each leg.

**3. Groin**

Sit on the floor and bring the bottoms of your feet together and hold them with your hands. Lean your elbows on your legs and lean forward. Hold for 20 seconds once you feel slight tension in your groin area. Repeat as necessary.

**4. Hamstrings**

Sit cross-legged on the floor. Slowly straighten one leg, keeping the toes pointed up. Keep the opposite leg bent with the foot facing or touching the inner thigh. Lean forward until you feel a slight pull in your hamstring, and hold for 20 seconds. Repeat with the opposite legs.

**5. Calf**

Stand a step back from a wall. Place your forearms on the wall and place your forehead on the backs of your hands. Bend one knee and bring it toward the wall while keeping the right leg straight. Move your hips toward the wall, and your right calf will begin to stretch. Hold for 20 seconds, and then repeat with the other leg. If you bend your knee while doing this exercise, you can stretch your Achilles tendon.

## **STRENGTH WORK**

Progressive weight training is key to keeping fit during the off season. As you gain in strength, you'll notice that a certain weight will not provide resistance. At that point, add a small amount of weight to your exercise.

For guards and small forwards, concentrate on working with 60 percent of your single-lift capacity. Do sets of ten repetitions with three sets per session. Only increase the weights when you are comfortable you are no longer feeling any resistance from the weights.

For centers and power forwards, lift 70 percent of your single-lift capacity. Do eight repetitions for three sets.

A couple of words of warning: Strength training should always be done with supervision. It does not matter how skilled or advanced you are around weights. Even the smallest weights can cause serious damage, and accidents can happen. Always have a spotter, or when using smaller weights, at least have someone else available in case there is an accident.

Also, it's widely accepted that children should not weight train before high school, as their bodies have not fully developed.

And no matter what age you are, consult with your doctor before starting a weight training program.

## **ENDURANCE TRAINING**

Basketball is almost a non-stop sport, where its athletes are required to sprint up and down the court, or constantly move in both offensive and defensive sets. To help keep up with this incredible pace, it's necessary to work on endurance training. By working on endurance, it helps your cardiovascular system provide more oxygen to your muscles with less effort. It will also help you maintain energy toward the end of a game, or recover quicker with shorter amounts of rest. The best and most basic form of endurance training is running. All you need for running is a good pair of shoes with good support.

Running helps strengthen your heart muscle. It helps to increase the heart's size, making it more efficient by beating slower while pumping more blood.

## **NUTRITION**

Anyone interested in improving their basketball ability on the court must develop healthy eating habits. The following is a very basic guide to nutrition. However, it's advisable that athletes should consult a registered dietician for a more individualized program.

For a basic guide to staying healthy, try this:

- Eat five to seven small meals throughout the day.
- Limit your intake of sodium, fat, and sugar.
- Eat a variety of healthy foods (whole grains, fruits, vegetables, etc.)
- Drink lots of water.
- Eat a balanced diet, with approximately 10 to 15 percent protein, 60 to 65 percent carbohydrates, and 15 to 20 percent fat.

## **FOODS**

Here are some examples of foods that are good for a basic diet:

- **Carbohydrates:**  
Whole wheat breads and pasta, brown rice, sweet potatoes, beans, oatmeal, fruits and vegetables
- **Fats:**  
Nuts, fish, peanut butter
- **Protein:**  
Low-fat dairy products, lean beef, turkey, fish, tuna, chicken

## **LIQUIDS**

Staying hydrated is important to maintaining a healthy body and staying in game shape. Don't wait until you're thirsty to start drinking liquids. Stay hydrated throughout the day, and you'll find your body responding and recovering better.

Here's a basic hydration guide:

- Drink a glass of liquid 15 minutes before a game, a workout, or practice
- Drink liquids during your game, workout, or practice
- Drink three glasses of liquids per pound of bodyweight lost following your game, workout, or practice
- Drink two glasses of liquids two hours before your game, workout, or practice

## **PRE-GAME**

On game day, make your nutrition routine the following:

- Drink enough water before the game (see the above recommended requirements)
- Limit the intake of fatty foods before playing
- Eat lightly before a game. A full stomach can weigh an athlete down

## **POST-GAME**

After a game, basketball players should do the following:

- Replace any sodium or potassium that has been lost during training or games. Salty foods, fruits and vegetables are the best ways to do this.
- Replace any fluids that were lost (See the above requirements).

- To replace the energy stores of your muscles, take in carbohydrate-rich drinks (such as Gatorade) and foods as soon as possible.
- Try a Super Shake after the game:
  - 1 cup of frozen fruit (blueberries and strawberries are great for this)
  - 1 cup of orange or apple juice or low-fat milk
  - 1 cup of low-fat yogurt
  - 1 to 2 scoops of protein shake powder

## **NUTRITIONAL TIPS**

Basketball players should make healthy eating part of their lifestyle. Here are some tips for healthy living.:

- Make healthy eating a routine for life. Dieting is only a temporary fix; the weight you lose while dieting will come back as soon as you stop the diet.
- Have the self-discipline to plan your day correctly. Wake up early enough to have breakfast, and carry healthy snacks with you when you travel, etc.
- Don't look at supplements as a staple. Most of your caloric intake should come from regular food.
- Look to complex carbohydrates to be your main energy source, whether it's for a game, practices or intense training.

## **HAND-EYE COORDINATION**

While fundamentals of shooting a basketball involve many physical attributes, such as wrist control, finger positioning, and arm strength, it's also important to have good hand-eye coordination. It's all about aim to get the ball going on the right trajectory and into the basket, or sizing up that bank shot.

One way to improve hand-eye coordination is through playing video games. Although it's not a good idea to constantly play video games, it is a good exercise. A new game for the Nintendo DS system is "Flash Focus." This is a product along the lines of "Brain Age," which is meant to develop mental sharpness. "Flash Focus" is specifically designed to help improve hand-eye coordination. The game concentrates on improving peripheral vision, visual acuity, and hand-eye coordination.

Here are some other ways you can improve your hand-eye coordination:

1. **Connect Four**

This may be a child's game, but this three-dimensional game of tic-tac-toe helps with visual organization and planning.

2. **Speed Bag**

Using the boxing speed bag helps players by making contact with this fast-moving target. This is also an excellent cross-training method, as it provides a great cardiovascular workout.

3. **Wall ball**

This is an excellent drill for basketball players. Stand with a basketball in front of a flat wall. Throw the ball against the wall and catch it, and repeat this quickly. After you've warmed up, then start throwing the ball against the wall with one hand, and pushing it back against the wall as if you were dribbling, using your fingertips in a cupped hand position. Then do the drill with your opposite hand.

4. **Racquet sports**

Whether its ping pong, tennis, or racquetball, playing sports that involve hitting a ball with a racquet greatly helps improve hand-eye coordination. These kinds of exercises do not have to be organized either. A ping pong table can be set up so one side is vertical, allowing a player to play as an individual. Or, find a public park that has a racquetball facility. If you don't have a racquet, use a baseball bat or even a sturdy stick to hit a tennis ball against the wall.

5. **Goalie**

Stand in front of a goal (real or makeshift) and have someone toss a ball at you. This can be any sized ball. The hitch is that you can only stop the ball with your hands. If it's a small ball, try to catch it. If it's a large ball, prevent it from going into the goal.

Follow these tips and techniques, and you will grow into an excellent basketball player!