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KEEP IT SIMPLE:



EC

--Monte Nitzkowski

Becoming competitive with young and inexperienced teams

I'm often asked, "Coach, what's the quickest way to become competitive in this sport? We have a new program with young players and are getting clobbered." There are four basic axioms which must be followed if you wish to make young teams quickly competitive.

1. Get your players into top physical shape. This is the easiest of the four axioms to achieve. Most athletes being training probably have a swimming background and are in pretty good shape to start. Hit them hard with a conditioning program which features considerable basic swim training, a lot of ball conditioning and conditioning for quickness. You may not get them in better shape than your opponents, but "equal shape" is good enough.

2. Spend a lot of time on ballhandling. All players need to continue to develop their ballhandling skills--for young players its a must. Passing is the name of the game. If a player can't pick up the ball and pass it accurately, his/her team will be in constant trouble. Ball control is essential and without it, success is impossible to achieve.

Along with basic ballhandling skills, at the earliest stage of development, young players must be taught how to draw a foul. Most often, opponents will pass from the free throw, they will find it extremely difficult to move the ball into scoring position.

3. Defense -- young teams can learn to play good defense years ahead of becoming experts on offense. Most coaches spend way too much time working on offense. With a young team, use that time to learn to play outstanding individual and team defense. This means players must learn to defend one-on-one against drivers and two-meter players. Also, they must learn to defend team defense tactics such as stairstepping, sloughing, foul and dropping, gapping and time switching. Finally, they must learn to play within the defensive scheme (press-dropback) employed by their coach. This plan will usually be developed from scouting reports, the tendencies of opponents, and his/her own teams defensive abilities. Being able to play good defense is essential for the young team.

When working on defense, coaching must teach their teams to play counterattack defense. Experienced teams love to take advantage of young

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teams by pressing and then counterattacking the turnover. If young teams are going to stay in the game, they must learn the principles of counter defense.

4. Offensive -- ball control is the answer here! Young teams cannot afford to get fancy on offense and they should never take low percentage shots. Deny the ball to your opponents. Beginning teams constantly turn the ball over. To counter this tendency every effort should be made to control the ball for the entire 35 seconds. Put the percentage on your side. Good things happen when your team controls the ball. Even if percentage shots are not earned with the 35 second period, ejection's may be awarded. Ball control is everything. When a team keeps the game close against superior opponents, anything can happen in the last several minutes. Look at it this way, the best of teams in the NFL and NBA cannot defeat the worst of teams if they keep turning the ball over. For young teams, there is a strong lesson to learn here--CONTROL THE BALL.

Conditioning, ball handling and great individual and team defense will help young teams to become quickly competitive. And when it comes to the offense, BALL CONTROL is everything. Remember, feeding the other team's offense with constant turnovers is a sure way to a losing season. Conversely, ball control coupled with conditioning, ball handling and defensive skills go a long way toward making for a successful team.

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