Female Hoops: Changing the Culture

by Brian McCormick, CSCS

April marks the 10-year anniversary of the WNBA’s birth (play began in the spring on 1997). At the time, the public hailed the WNBA as a means to elevate the women’s game, provide more opportunities for female athletes, and spark interest in women’s basketball at every level. In ten years, it has had mild success providing opportunities and sparking interest, but the level of play has remained consistent. More girls are playing basketball, more professional opportunities exist, and athletes are more athletic than in years past, but the actual basketball skills, flow of the game, and aesthetics of the game have changed little.

The WNBA was an attempt to change and improve women’s basketball from the top. A better alternative is to change the game from the bottom. The proliferation of AAU basketball has certainly changed the American basketball landscape and provided more competitive opportunities for female players. However, a greater movement is needed to capitalize on these resources and further elevate the female game. The following changes will not change women’s basketball overnight, and the WNBA may not even survive long enough for the changes to bear fruit, but these ideas provide a revolutionary change to the way we approach youth sports, especially girl’s basketball, and should shape societal agendas, as well as basketball skills.

(1) Educate Coaches

Almost anyone qualifies to coach a youth basketball team, so teams are stuck with parents volunteering, or high school kids earning their community service credits, or PE teachers coaching a sport they never played. Some youth coaches are great and some possess amazing credentials, as well as a passion for teaching and basketball. Unfortunately, many do not. Many may possess the passion and the desire to learn and become a better coach, but few resources exist to train and teach coaching. Sure, dozens of videos exist to illustrate a run-and-jump defense or an offense to use against an even-front zone defense, but little exists in the mainstream to educate coaches on coaching: the psychology of coaching, the physiology of basketball, the learning styles of children, etc.

If we as a society are serious about sports, and everything indicates we are, why leave players in their formative years in the hands of novices without offering any means of proper training or self-education? Why does USA Basketball abdicate its responsibility to train the next generation of coaches? Better coaches using better training methods will develop better players.

(2) Make youth leagues (pre-puberty) co-ed

Very few differences exist physiologically between a ten year old girl and a ten year old boy. However, once boys and girls play organized athletics, cultural and social stereotypes influence the sports development of the sexes. As a substitute teacher, I visit numerous schools each year, usually to teach PE. There are stark differences between grades 1-3, grades 4-6 and grades 7-8. Some of the differences result from the physiological differences associated with puberty; however, many differences are socialized, as girls and boys strive to meet the standards and expectations the society puts forth for them.

In grades 1-3, all the kids play together and everyone is relatively equal; one or two fake injuries or stomach aches to avoid playing, but the majority of kids just play and have fun and do not seem to worry about being good or bad or what their skill level may do to their reputations. In grades 4-6, most kids play together and are still relatively equal, though a few boys typically stand out as the best athletes, though sometimes it is a girl who actually is the best athlete. Girls tend to worry more about being with friends than being on the best team. In the 7th and 8th grade, most boys enjoy playing and are the aggressors and best performers; some girls participate; but, many-boys and girls-prefer to sit around and talk, play hopscotch, flirt, or play video games rather than play the activity, as games are more competitive and less about fun.

Sometime between the third and seventh grades, things change; the change is most apparent with the girls, but also affects some boys too, as not all boys excel in sports, so they fail to meet the norms society sets and thus try to
Praise in public. Criticize in private.

There is nothing wrong with being tough-minded and tender-hearted.

Honesty and pregnancy have this in common: Either you are or you aren’t.

Mr. Meant-to has a comrade, And his name is Didn’t-do: Have you ever chanced to meet them? Did they ever call on you?

These two fellows live together in the house of never-win, And I’m told that it is haunted By the ghost of Might-have-been.

–Benjamin Franklin

Practices are for coaches. Games are for players.

Don’t give directions that can be understood, but give directions that can’t be misunderstood.

–General Douglas McArthur

Don’t give directions that can be understood, but give directions that can’t be misunderstood.

The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, But they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.

–Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.

Your mind is like a parachute. It only works when it is open.

A tiger never growls after a kill.

You should never have an off-night on defense.

Any team can run an offense. Good teams execute an offense.

Defense is rules. Defense is principles.

The best coaches are the least tolerant.

Books:
- The Amoeba Defense by Lason Perkins
- The Set Play 2 by Lason Perkins
- The 1-3-1 Gap Offense by Mike Phelps
- Maximum Offense by Larry Lindsay

DVDs:
- Open-Post Offense by Lason Perkins
- High-Low Triangle by Lason Perkins
- Secrets of International Basketball by Lason Perkins
- Scoring in Transition by Lason Perkins

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Helping Your Student-Athlete Choose A College

by Brianna Finch

It’s that time of year; seniors are cramming for the SAT’s, making one last attempt to bring up their GPA, and filling out college applications for that all-elusive college of their dreams. Well, the same is true for student-athletes, except they also have to factor in the recruiting process and the athletic element of their college career. I’ve heard one collegiate coach refer to the recruiting process as similar “to asking a date to the prom”; sometimes you may get rejected over and over before finding the right one.

High school athletes, parents, and coaches need to remember that not all players are Division I players, and there are numerous options to explore. There are many reputable Division II schools and athletic programs, many that rival the low-major Division I schools in competitiveness. There is Division III, which is typically a strong academic institution, but usually do not offer athletic scholarships. However, many Division III schools can usually put together a significant financial package if an athlete is a strong student and qualifies for academic scholarship money. There is the NAIA, which can offer minimal athletic scholarships and is comparable to Division III in level of play, sometimes stronger. Lastly, there is always the option of community college, especially if an athlete wants a little more time to mature, athletically and personally, while saving money and completing their GE requirements.

There is a fit for everyone. Whether you are a top five player in the country or the sixth man off the bench of your high school team, it’s important to remember that YOU are the one in control of your decision—not the recruiters and not the scouts. Choosing a college is a decision that ultimately needs to make you happy. College is where you will meet new friends, develop relationships, find new interests, challenge yourself athletically, and learn who you are and what you hope to be; so it needs to be a place where you feel comfortable experiencing this growth.

In order to help in this process, below are a list of academic, basketball-related, and miscellaneous questions that you should ask coaches, counselors, or college team members at the institution you are interested in. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. This is a huge investment in your future and you have every right to have your questions and concerns answered.

Academic
◆ What is the academic reputation like?
◆ What is the student/teacher ratio?
◆ What is the team graduation rate?
◆ How many of your student-athletes in my sport obtain their degrees with four years? Within five years?
◆ Is there a team academic advisor?
◆ Is there a mandatory study hall?
◆ What is the fifth year to finish degree policy?
◆ What is the summer school policy?
◆ What majors do you offer?
◆ What Graduate programs do you offer, if any?

Basketball
◆ What position(s) am I being recruited for?
◆ What other players are being recruited?
◆ What other players are being recruited at my position?
◆ How many players at my position do you intend to sign?
◆ What is your team’s style of play?
◆ Does the conference earn an automatic NCAA bid?
◆ What is the practice, workout, and weightlifting schedule?
◆ Can you play another sport? Can you play intramurals?
◆ What role does the coaching staff foresee for me in its athletic program?
◆ What are the year-round requirements of a participant in my sport?
◆ Does the athletic department or university provide access to or assistance with summer jobs?
◆ What is your policy/belief on red-shirting athletes?
◆ Under what conditions or circumstances are scholarship athletes cut from the program?
◆ What is the existing contract status of the head coach?
◆ Is any part of the athletic program currently under sanction or probation of any kind for rules violation?
◆ How long are the practices during the season? What is the typical number of hours devoted to my sport during the season? During the off season?
◆ If the cost of tuition, room, and board increases, does the scholarship also increase proportionately?
◆ What criteria are used to renew a scholarship each year? (since all scholarships are awarded only one academic year at a time)
◆ How often do you choose not to renew a scholarship?

Parents
◆ Health Care for athletes?
◆ Are there specific athletic dormitories or student housing?
◆ What does the scholarship include? Tuition, housing, books, etc.
◆ What is the overall graduation rate within the athletic department?
◆ What are the campus crime statistics?
Female Hoops (cont)

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hide or avoid playing. During this period, girls learn to be more passive, while boys learn to be aggressive. Girls learn not to play their hardest, while boys play as hard as they can. Girls feel embarrassed by a mistake, while boys play through mistakes or just make excuses to rationalize them.

These changes occur in and out of sports. Changing the culture of sports is probably too insignificant to enact true change on a larger level, but changes in the sports arena may have lasting results within the sports landscape. By playing boys and girls together during the pre-puberty stage, kids learn to play together; they see each other as equals, not one sex as superior to the other. They play the same game with the same expectations and coaches do not dumb-down practice for the girls. Girls are expected to compete and play just like boys.

The best female players-Diana Taurasi, Chamique Holdsclaw, etc.-grow up playing with boys. However, they are the exception. And, when a girl joins a boys’ league, she is immediately an anomaly and treated differently. However, if all leagues were co-ed, girls would no longer be an anomaly; that would just be how it is and each child would be an individual, not a representative of an entire gender. Some girls will fall behind; so too will some boys; in current leagues, some kids always bat last and play right field, while others always bat third and play shortstop. This happens in girls’ leagues and boys’ leagues and would happen in co-ed leagues as well.

However, youth coaches have a large role in shaping the attitudes and mindsets of young athletes. And, we recognize that many of the best women players in the world played with boys as youths. So, the question is:

- Did the female star play with boys because she was already a star? Or,
- Did she become a superstar in girls’ and women’s basketball because she played with boys as a youth?

If the answer is “B”, why not afford all girls this opportunity and teach all children in the same manner?

(3) Play more 3v3

In European soccer leagues, young players (u-10) play small-sided soccer because they are not ready for a full game. They learn the basics on a smaller field with fewer players, which creates more ball possessions and less running, and progress to the bigger field and 11v11 soccer when appropriate. In basketball, leagues exist for kids under eight years old to play full 5v5 games.

Youth players (u-10) should focus on 3v3 play to develop skills and game understanding. Most youth games denigrate into bumblebee ball, just as with youth soccer in the United States. The teams who continually vie for AAU National Championships at the u-10 and u-11 age group are those with the most effective presses who make lay-ups: nine and ten year olds, especially girls, do not have the size and strength to punish presses that put four defenders between the baseline and free-throw line and smother the offensive player. These games are great for the victors, but demoralize many other players, and place an overemphasis on those who mature early and are bigger, stronger, and quicker than their opponents.

Half-court 3v3 games balance the play and put more emphasis on basketball skill development, as opposed to smothering presses. With more space, players have more opportunities to dribble, pass, and shoot and defensive players learn to cover more ground and move their feet, not just swarm to the ball.

(4) Skills, not Sets

Along the same lines, teach basketball skills before teaching complicated presses and set plays. Currently, the opposite is true, as a tough press is the quickest way to victory, so coaches spend anordinate amount of time perfecting press defenses and press breaks, and precious little time teaching proper shooting form, passing angles, ball handling, defensive footwork, post footwork, etc.

By concentrating on basketball skills at an earlier age, more players develop with an opportunity to play and excel, not just the biggest, fastest kids. Presses work at the youth levels because players are ill-equipped to face press defenses because they lack the passing, footwork, and ball handling prowess, not to mention the strength to punish presses with long passes over the top.

The youth goal should not be to win by any means necessary, but to develop skills. Kids enjoy learning new skills and overcoming challenges; spending hours working on presses and press breaks is boring, even if it leads to easy victories. These victories eventually come with a price, as other players eventually catch up in terms of size and quickness, and if these pressing teams do not develop skills, its players fall behind.

(5) Greater emphasis on all-around movement skills (athleticism), not just basketball skills.

Basketball is, at its most basic level, a game of movement, and its most successful competitors move fluidly and gracefully. Training basketball players goes beyond shooting and ball handling; players must run efficiently, stop properly, jump explosively, land softly, etc. Proper movement skills reduce injuries and enhance performance.

Watching several high school and college teams this season, few players move laterally with sufficient speed; almost every player moves inefficiently, which slows...
their speed. Learning to move properly enhances a player’s defensive ability.

Young players need exposure to core strengthening exercises, running form drills, jumping/landing drills, etc., to insure a safe training environment and maximize performance. So many teams at the high school level see their seasons end due to an injury like an ACL tear that oftentimes result from poor movement skills, especially the ability to stop or land. These are skills which must be taught, but coaches currently expect some other coach (PE teacher?) to do the teaching, and some athletes never learn.

These changes may not revolutionize the game, but they provide a step in the right direction. Youth teams deserve better coaching and volunteer coaches deserve the opportunity to better their coaching skills and knowledge. Better coaches mean better training which translates to better players. A greater emphasis on small-sided games and skill development, whether athletic or basketball, increases the player’s aptitude and prepares the player for more advanced basketball at a later stage, when players and teams possess adequate skills for significant competition. Finally, boys and girls training together at an early age increases the intensity of the girls’ development and lessens some of the inherent biases between the sexes which sports creates and exacerbates. Hopefully, these changes equal better performance with better players progressing to the WNBA, but, more importantly, a better sports experience for youth players and fewer injuries as players grow.

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**Don Meyers Definite Dozen**

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**Be Committed To Your Academics**

Know your catalog . . . make a plan . . . get a degree. Go to class every day. Be on time. Take good notes. Do all extra work possible. Plan ahead and talk to professor when we travel or you are having a problem. Get tutors when you need them.

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**Be Committed To Having Class**

Treat teachers, trainers, support staff, chapel workers, Marriott workers, and all you meet with respect. Treat other people the way you want to be treated. Moody people are rude. Remember to smile, to say please, thank you, yes sir, and yes ma’am, and give people the benefit of the doubt.

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**Be Committed To Doing The Right Thing**

We have plenty of school rules . . . know them. Realize if you just try to do the right thing you will be OK. Try to do the right thing right and you are as close to perfect as any person can be.

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**Be Committed To The Program**

We realize that our players are in a fish bowl at Lipscomb. Every word and action will be watched.

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Our program’s reputation provides many opportunities yet brings many responsibilities. We must be committed to build on to the tradition of our program and respect those that have gone before us and paid the price to build the program.

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**Be Committed To Hard Work**

Our program is built on the concept that hard work pays off. We believe that we work harder than anyone else . . . and because of that we always deserve to win. There is a reason we are the best . . . we work at it.

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**Be Committed To Becoming A Smart Player**

Our players must be ready to learn. We believe we work smarter than anyone else . . . We must develop players who understand the game. Our players must be good listeners and learn by watching. We must make good decisions, we must play with poise. We prepare mentally for practice and games.

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**Be Committed To Our Team Attitude Concept**

We must have players who believe in our team concept. Our program is built on the concept that the team/program is bigger than any one player . . . We need unselfish players.

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**Commit Yourself To A Winning Attitude**

Our players must be committed to winning but understand we don’t measure our success by winning alone. Each time we play we evaluate ourselves on reaching our potential. The test for our team is to play against the game not just our opponent. We never quit. We always are looking for a way to win.

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**Believe In Our System**

Commit yourself to our philosophy, to our system of play. Be a sponge and soak up the concepts of how we play. Learn your role . . . then accept yours and do it the best you can.

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**Believe In Yourself**

Play with confidence . . . think positive . . . realize you are a great player in a great program. Don’t get down when you play poorly . . . realize you were chosen to be here . . . be a leader. Lead by example.

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**Believe In Your Teammates**

Communicate with each other. Remember the strength of the pack is the wolf and the strength

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In my more than forty years of coaching, I have come to the following realizations about defense:
1. There is often a lot of generalization rather than specific teaching being done:
2. Many coaches believe zone defense is easier to teach than man defense; Most believe defensive skills are easier to teach than offensive skills.
3. Creating a good defensive player is infinitely easier than creating a good offensive player.
4. A team can play good defense and win even when the offense is having an off game;
5. Defense has always created most of my offense.

Throughout my career, at all levels of coaching, from the playgrounds in the beginning, to national teams, we won nearly three out of every four games we played. I had some high scoring teams, and on only few occasions was I blessed to have any superior offensive players. My highest scoring teams were my best defensive teams.

I believe in teaching by building blocks.

We teach defense from the ground up, starting with the placement of the feet and the stance, how to react, how to play on the ball and off the ball, against cutters, in the post, etc., etc. We were rewarded with better play, and I became a fully dedicated advocate of teaching defense.

Defense is so integral to the overall success of a program that it cannot be afforded a cursory inspection, like I was doing in the first few years. Once we teaching-coaches know the ‘how’, it can then be taught easily enough, then drilled to perfection the same way we develop offenses—over and over and over, until it becomes unconscious competence.

Defense begins with the individual. Team defense is only as good as its weakest player, so I look for players who have the will and desire to become defensive specialists. I want players who will take pride in their defensive play because they are confident in their skills.

Coaches, do not expect your team to play good team zone defense if the individual players cannot execute good, basic man principles. In man defense we live by an individual’s ability to play on his offensive player, with or without the ball. Don’t send your kids out to play five-on-five and expect them to be successful if they haven’t got the individual skills to stop the flash, fight over a screen, front a cutter, or be able to play “help” defense.

The successful application of teaching good defense begins with a stance that gets the player low, on balance, under control, and able to move quickly and efficiently.

To start, have your players assume a stance with the right foot forward, feet placed wider than the shoulders and hips. The toes of the back (left) foot should be about even with the heel of the front foot. Bend the knees and get the hips down, keeping the back nearly straight. Get as low as possible, with the feet as wide as possible but still enabling quick, balanced movement. Balance should be centered evenly between both feet. Extend the right arm forward to the outside of the right knee with the hand, as if it’s touching the offensive player. Extend the left arm out to the left side with the palm facing the offensive player. This is the primary stance I teach for playing on the ball with a dribbler going to the defender’s left.

Change the feet and hands and assume the same stance as if the dribbler is going to the defender’s right. Left foot forward; right foot back and even with the heel of the front foot; left arm extended out toward the dribbler; right arm extended out in the direction of the dribble. The arms are forming the letter “L”.

This won’t be a comfortable position for the players in the beginning. Emphasize staying low to improve reaction time and balance. Continually check the foot placement, hips low, back straight, balance between the feet, arm
and hand positions. This position is where the defensive game is played. The muscles must be trained to accept this position. (Tell the brain that the body will be spending a lot of time like this, so adjust, baby!)

With the players stationary, do a little drill to have the group jump on your command from a right foot forward stance to a left foot forward stance. With the coach standing in front of the group, the coach raises either the left hand or the right hand and points in the direction the dribble is going. Players should automatically assume a correct stance with the foot back in the direction of the dribble. The players’ bodies should not jump up in the air when changing directions. Only the feet and arms are changing directions. If you were to draw a line across the top of the head, when changing directions, the head would not move above that line. The feet are barely gliding over the floor during the exchange.

Now, we’re ready to slide. The slide is done with a reaching slide-step in the direction of the dribble, pushing off the front foot and reaching with the back foot. This is: Push; Reach; Fill. Pushing off the foot away from the direction you’re sliding, reach and step in the direction of the dribble and fill the vacated back foot spot with the front foot. A very important point of emphasis here is, the defender should never lift up (line over the head) during the slide, change the center of gravity or allow the feet to come together. The same distance between the feet is maintained during the slide.

This last point is important. When teaching a dribbler to attack a defender, the dribbler will look for defensive weakness. The dribbler should always be aware of what his defender is doing with his feet and what happens to his body balance during the faking moves. If the defender places weight on one foot, the dribbler can attack and drive to that side because the defender is off balance and can’t react.

The same thing happens if a defender straightens up; the reaction time is slowed, or the defender’s body may now be too close to the dribbler’s body, allowing the defender to be beaten.

Review the teaching points with the players: Foot placement, hips down low, back straight, balance between the feet, arm and hand extension, slide and reach with the back foot, push off the front foot, don’t go up and down during the slide (like a carousel horse).

With the coach in front of the group again, have the coach point out dribble directions, as in the last drill, and have the players slide, changing feet when the coach changes directions. When the coach points out a direction, the players should take 3-4 slides in that direction to get used to continuation defense. When changing directions, a player will jump-switch the feet (without raising up); that is, stop the rear foot slide and push off it while bringing the front foot back to become the sliding foot. While pushing off the rear foot, reach with the other in the direction of the dribble. Do the slides slowly at first in order to get the whole process controlled and precise. Make whatever corrections are necessary here and re-emphasize whatever points need to be re-covered.

Repeat this drill several times. When they have it well enough, the coach can add a ball. Now the object of the defender’s attention is the ball first. Teach your players to never take their eyes off the ball! The dribbler has to take it with them, has to pass it, or shoot it. Nothing the dribbler is doing should affect a defender because he has his eyes on the ball ready to react to whatever happens with the ball. The coach dribbles right or left and points at the same time, helping with visual clues for the direction the defender is going in. Have them go slowly again. Repeat this several times, then begin quicker changes with the ball, adding forward and backward.

The forward slide would be done with the front foot away from the ball side, reaching and sliding. The ball-side foot is always back, pushing forward. In the backwards slide, again the ball-side foot is back, now reaching and sliding, while the forward foot is pushing backward. This whole maneuver will look similar to a fencer doing advances and retreats with a rapier.

At all times, balance must never be over a foot but rather still directly between the feet. Quick changes with the ball will enable the teaching-coach to spot any player not reacting and switching feet quickly enough. The switch should be done exactly with the dribbler’s changing hands. Defenders don’t want to be caught with the ball-side foot forward. Check players for straightening up during the switches. Is a player allowing the feet to come together during the slide? Look at the balance point—is it directly down from the middle of the body centered between the feet?

The stance and sliding procedures covered above are for perimeter use, outside of the key, while putting pressure on the dribbler.

I’ve covered individual stance and movement that applies to playing on the ball equally, both in man and zone defenses. Too many coaches fail to see this fundamental as being common to both types of defense. To successfully play on the ball when it’s in a player’s zone requires all the skills of sound man defensive principles and techniques.

Now, let’s drill one-on-one and, while this is defense, let’s not forget to emphasize good offensive skills too. (i.e. protecting the ball, controlled dribble, etc.) The teaching-coach will want to place the pairs so that the coach can see everyone with a quick glance. Have a player with the ball assume
Financial Well-Being

by John Forman

Do you have money in the financial markets? If you are like most of us, you do. The majority of people these days have some form of investment in the markets, often through retirement programs like IRAs and 401ks. For many of us, this has proven to be a rather unsatisfactory experience in recent years, as the stock market has not exactly been providing us the returns we would like to see. Figure 1, which is a graph of the S&P 500 index, a broad measure of the stock market, depicts roughly what has happened to the value of mutual funds in our retirement accounts.

It was a rough spell through the first three years of the decade. Since the beginning of 2003, the market is up about 50 percent, yet it is well below the peak in early 2000. The situation is even worse if you look at the more aggressive growth sector of the market, which is represented by the NASDAQ index (see Figure 2).

Those big-time growth stocks were producing really nice returns in the late 1990s, but they also came down very, very hard after that. The NASDAQ lost about 75 percent of its value. While it has just about doubled since its late 2002 low, the index would have to double again to get near those 2000 highs. That's a lot of value lost by lots of folks. Many of us know of people who were looking forward to retiring, but who had to put their plans on hold because they suddenly found themselves with significantly less money.

This is not to say that investing in the markets is a bad thing, especially as part of a long-term retirement plan. If you have consistently been making contributions to an IRA or 401k plan, then chances are the plot of your balance over the last few years does not look as bad as those charts. These programs are very good as a sort of forced savings plan. They offer nice tax benefits and when employer matching comes in to play, it is like getting free money. Most people should have them.

That said, passive investing has its limitations, and putting money in a mutual fund is passive investing. After all, once you make the decision as to which fund or funds in to which to allocate your money, what actually gets done with that money is a decision made by others. They— not you— determine the returns you make. It is kind of like picking a team based on the players’ past performance and estimated potential, but never actually getting to coach them.

However, there is a way to take more control. It’s called trading.

What is Trading?

Trading can be defined as taking on speculative positions (those with the objective of making profits) in the financial markets—stocks or otherwise—where there is expected to be a finite holding period. An example would be buying IBM stock with the expectation that it would probably be sold in investing, which is more open-ended. We put our money in a mutual fund expecting to just leave it there and watch it grow. That is investing. There are other ways of differentiating between trading and investing, but this one serves the purpose in this particular case.

What it really boils down to is frequency of action. Trading tends to be shorter term in nature. It is the process of getting in and out of positions, where investing is more about getting in and holding on.

This is not to say, however, that trading necessarily means buying and selling all the time. One who does a handful of transactions a year can be just as much a trader as one who does 10 trades a day. The idea is the same.

Why Trade?

Trading is a way for the individual to take more control of his/her financial well-being and produce better returns than passive investing is likely to generate. Trading means taking responsibility for your performance, and not leaving it completely in someone else’s hands. The results can, at times, be spectacular. I will use myself as an example.

In 2000 I made the transition from working in a professional environment full-time to coaching full-time. During that period, I wasn’t really paying much attention to my retirement accounts, as my focus was elsewhere. One day, a year or so later, I did look, only to find that my balance was half of what it had been when I left my job thanks to the market’s decline (sound familiar?), and it wasn’t looking like it was going to recover very much any time soon. Fed up, I rolled the money out of the 401k where it was sitting (I wasn’t working for that employer anymore, so I was making no deposits) into an IRA account and started trading stocks myself with the money. In 18-24 months, I more than made back all the money the fund managers had lost, doing nothing all that fancy. I am sure that had I left the money in the 401k, I would still be waiting today to be back to where my account balance was in early 2000.

I don’t mention this to brag. Nor do I tell this story to suggest that people ditch their retirement accounts and trade. Rather, what I am trying to provide is an indication of what individuals can do when they take charge of their own finances. I sincerely believe that everyone can learn to trade...
effectively, and in doing so, can have a significant impact on his or her financial situation.

Now, there are loads of excuses not to trading. Most of them are not very good ones.

“It don’t have time.”

Despite being one of the most frequently heard, this is probably the most pathetic excuse for not trading there is. Why? Because the availability of technology and information in the modern day means that we can operate in literally any time frame we want. Many people, when they hear “trading” think it means sitting in front of the computer all day. While that certainly is one form of trading, most of us do not have the schedule to allow us to dedicate hours each day to monitoring the markets. The good news is that we don’t have to tin order to trade effectively.

I will again use myself as an example. My college coaching position has me frequently in the gym, in meetings and on the road. What’s more, I run a club program and a couple of businesses on the side. In 2004, even though there were long periods when I did not trade at all, and I probably only put on a dozen total positions all year, I was still able to make 200 percent plus in the stock market. If I can trade given my schedule, and have performance like that, anyone can.

“I don’t have the money”

In the past, this was a pretty viable excuse for not trading. These days, though, one can trade with relatively little money. Transaction costs have dropped dramatically over the last decade and there are more trading options than ever before. There is one particular trading platform which allows an individual to put on trades of as little as $1 in value, and they have no minimum account size requirement.

Is it better to have more money? Absolutely. The more capital you have at your disposal, the better are your available options and the more actual money you can make.

Having more money is not always a good thing, though. For the inexperienced trader, it is better to have only a little money at risk. Why? It is the same as anything else. Just like athletes new to a sport or to a skill make mistakes as they are learning, so do new traders. And just as you would not throw your new player into a championship game against experienced opponents, neither should those new to the markets take on large trades and put significant portions of their assets at risk. It’s common sense. It is better to make the inevitable mistakes when there is relatively little at risk.

“It’s too risky”

Trading is only as risky as you make it. If you take risky trades, then trading is risky. If you don’t, then it isn’t. There will always be the risk of losing money on a trade. That is completely unavoidable. But that could be said about all of life.

Driving is one of the most risky things in the modern world, but we still do it. We reduce the risk by obeying traffic rules, planning our route, wearing seatbelts, paying attention, and all that. Does that completely eliminate the risk of ending up in an accident? No, it doesn’t. Nor does it necessarily keep us out of traffic jams or from getting lost. We understand the risks, though, and weigh them against our need to get places in a timely fashion.

Trading is the same. We do it because it helps get us where we want to go—in this case, financially. There are going to be hiccups along the way, but if we are focused and conscientious, we can minimize the risks—and potentially the damage—an unfortunate turn inflicts and remain on course.

“IT'S too complicated.”

Do you accept that kind of excuse from your athletes? I’m guessing not. Nor should you from yourself in terms of trading, especially when it’s not true. Technology and competition have combined to make trading so much easier than it has ever been before. All it takes is a couple of clicks and you can execute a trade, check your positions, get news and anything else you need to do.

Can trading be complex? Sure it can. There are those in the markets who use complicated software, mathematical algorithms, even artificial intelligence. None of that is necessary, though. Some of the best traders use little more than price quotes or a simple bar chart. How intricate you get is strictly a matter of personal preference, not necessity.

Is there a learning curve? You bet. Trading is like anything else, there are things you need to know. The good thing, though, is that there are loads of resources out there to help you learn.

Conclusion

Trading the financial markets is a way for us coaches—who often tend to be control freaks anyway—to take charge of our monetary well-being. Anyone can learn to trade effectively. It’s a lot like athletics. There are going to be those who excel based on some natural gifts, but just about anyone who commits to it and puts forth the effort can become a solid performer in his/her own way.

And just like sports, even a little is better than nothing. You need not become a super-active trader to gain the benefits. The simple act of becoming involved in trading will make you more knowledgeable and aware of the financial markets. That not only helps you in your decision-making about retirement account allocations and the like, it also impacts the rest of your life. The financial markets aren’t just stocks. They include things like interest rates,
of the wolf is the pack. Encourage each other and support each other. Don’t ever forget the importance of the shell around the team. Be a friend. We understand that we are all different - be tolerant of teammates and others.

Believe In Your Coaches

Know that your coaches are trying to make you better people and players. Ask questions... don’t whine and complain. Learn to take tough coaching. You must believe that the coaches are doing what they think is right for the team and you.

Individual Defense (cont)

continued from page 7

a protective stance as if dribbling to the defender’s left (right handed dribble for the dribbler, body between the ball and the defender). Have the defender step up to the dribbler, place the right foot to the dribbler’s front (left) foot and slightly outside it. The left leg will be back and outside the ball for the slide. Now with the feet placed, drop the body as low, and the feet as wide, as possible for quick reaction.

The defender, reach out with the right arm. It should extend fully so the hand just brush touches the dribbler’s hip, thigh or knee of the front leg. If this arm is kept extended, always “touch-touch-touching”, without bending the elbow, it will act as a measurement for the defender that they have the right distance from the dribbler’s body. If that arm bends, the dribbler is getting too close. Don’t leave this hand maintaining the touch on the dribbler. This is a “touch-touch-touch” and is not meant to impede the dribbler, but in addition to keeping the distance marked between the two bodies for the defender, it also serves as a reminder to the dribbler that the defender is right there.

The left arm is extended wide in the direction of the dribble, outside the ball. While the front hand should never reach across the dribbler’s body for the ball (it should be used to stop a cross-over dribble that is coming toward it), the back hand leading the ball should be intimidating the ball all the time, coming up at the ball rather than slapping down and possibly hitting the dribbler’s arm or hand.

The arms extended in this fashion represent the letter “L”. Within the breadth of this stance, the area the arms and feet cover on the floor, the defender should have the dribbler within his or her “embrace”. If the stance is correct, the defender’s nose should be “on” the ball. The nose is the “me” in “ball-me-basket”, the position the defender on-the-ball should always be in. Remember, keep your eyes on the ball!

Now have the dribbler change directions and hands with the dribble. Have the defenders copy exactly what was just done going to his left, now to the right: Left foot forward to the outside of the dribbler’s front foot; left arm extended to “touch”; right leg back and outside the ball; nose “on” the ball; and the right arm extended outside the ball creating the “embrace”.

Review. Go slowly in a “dummy” fashion where the dribbler does not try to beat the defender. Just take a few dribbles in one direction and then change direction. The defender also does nothing to impede the dribbler, constantly giving ground to the dribbler, at about a 45-degree angle, while maintaining “touch” contact. This is practice for the defender to get proper on-the-ball positioning while sliding and in the jump-switch on the change of direction. Teach quick exchange of feet, arms, and hands while pushing off the front foot and reaching with the back foot in the direction of the dribble. At the same time, this drill allows the dribbler to get a feel for how to dribble-protect under close defense. Keep to a given area of the floor, so the drill doesn’t get out of hand.

The teaching-coach can use “freeze action” by blowing the whistle and have everyone stop immediately where they are. Now all positioning for both offense and defense can be checked and adjusted, if necessary.

We want everything to come in good time, so we have not allowed the dribbler to do his thing, nor allowed the defender to crowd the dribbler. They must all have a feeling of confidence and control with their skills before we take it to the next level. I don’t want pressure to perform offensively or defensively until they have mastered this “dummy” script. Building skills by plateaus!
Wolf for “3”
1 dribbles toward 2 who loops to the top along with 4.

1 looks to drive to basket with 2 filling behind and spotting up. 4 spots up at top and 3 pops to corner with 5 screening. 1 finds open man for “3”

Triplet from Out-of-Bounds
2 will cut off screen by 5, then 3, then 4 always looking for a spot to receive pass and shoot. If a defender looks to switch on any of the screens, the screener will step to the ball.

Majerus vs. Zone
1 dribbles toward 2 who cuts to the opposite corner. 5 posts the middle defender and 4 fills behind 1.

1 passes to 4 who reverses to 3. 3 drives into a gap and looks to feed 2 or 1 as they spot up. 3 can also hit 5 in the lane or pass back to 4.

Denver
1 dribbles toward 3. 3 cuts across lane and screens for 5. 4 loops down and screens for 3. 1 looks for 5 inside and then for 3 at the top.

Denver (for a shooter)
1 dribbles toward 3. 3 cuts low into lane. 5 sets low creen for 3. 4 loops down to set second screen for 3 as 3 cuts back up to top. 1 reverses to 3 for shot.

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Taking the best from three different offensive systems – (motion, continuity patterns, and set-plays) – to build a workable man offense.

by Mark P. Zacher
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Coaches today, in designing and deciding upon a man-to-man offensive attack for their teams, have a wide range of selections that basically fall within two very broad categories.

On the one hand, there is motion offense. This is a system that emphasizes teaching players “how to play” rather than “how to run plays”. In motion, players are given a set of rules that they are to follow, usually concerning spacing, movement, and screening, and then they are given the freedom to operate within those rules according to how the ball, their teammates, and their opponents move. It is, fundamentally, a freelance offense. The advantages of this system are the freedom that it allows players, the near impossible task of trying to scout such a system, and its adaptability as players are taught how to “read” the flow of the game and to react accordingly. The disadvantage is that it requires a significant time for players to learn the system, feel comfortable and free in using it, and then coordinating their movements with those of their teammates. Much too often, unfortunately, beginner teams using motion tend to resemble four offensive statues standing around, not knowing what next to do, and, therefore, watching the one player with the ball go one-on-one.

On the other hand, there are pattern plays and offenses. This system, which can be further subdivided into two categories, uses precise and practiced patterns of movement to create scoring opportunities for a team. These patterns can either be “set-plays,” - (these are designed to be run from a starting point to a finish and have the goal of getting a specific player open or getting a specific shot.), - or they can be “continuity offenses,” - (these are patterns that are run continuously, constantly resetting without end, until a scoring opportunity is utilized.). An example of a set-play is what has often been labeled as “America’s Play”. It involves specific patterned player movement that terminates in getting a shot for a team’s best shooter off of a double-screen. The advantages of running set-plays are that a coach can control the movement of his or her players and can, generally, decide who, where, and when a shot will be attempted. The disadvantage is that once the set pattern has been run and an open shot has not resulted, the team needs to stop its offensive movement, pull the ball back out, and call another play. An example of a continuity offense is the popular “flex offense.” This offense is run and reset from one side of the court to the other until an offensive scoring opportunity is exploited. The advantages of continuity offenses are, again, a coach can control his or her players’ movements, the players know where they should be and what they should be doing, and the resetting nature of the pattern allows the offense to “work” the clock and control the tempo. The disadvantage is that the continuously resetting pattern can become easy to defend. In addition, finally, there are also a number of common disadvantages to both set-plays and continuity offenses. These include that they are somewhat easy to scout, defenders can recognize what is being run by either the play call or the patterned movement, and players are generally denied much offensive freedom or creativity.

Of course, the key to both systems, motion offense and a patterned attack, is player execution. Either system can be effective if players execute properly, run their cuts hard, locate bodies on screens, and look to take advantage of the scoring opportunities that present themselves. Likewise, neither system will work if players do not execute or play hard. The key is always in getting your players to treat every offensive possession as if they are running their offense with the goal of perfect execution, be it motion or pattern offense.

In attempting to combine the best features of each of these systems and to negate the disadvantages inherent in each, the “modified motion” offense was developed. Basically, this is a patterned offense that gives the players some freedom, without the need to make a play call, to read the defense in entering the ball on offense and then provides specific movements that they are to run based upon this ball-entry. It involves continuity, as the offense continually resets itself after each specific movement. And, finally, it provides options that can be used to get a specific player the ball for a shot, a possible post-up, or a dribble penetration opportunity.

The initial set of the “modified motion” is a high 4-out - 1-in (Figure 1). As in a pure motion offense, proper spacing is a necessity in our “modified motion” and the five positions need to be filled for the movement to reset and continue. As a team learns the different entries and the resulting player movement, the offense should be executed quickly, cuts and screens should be properly timed, and rapid ball and player
Out of this 4-out-1-in set, the player with the ball has the freedom to initiate the offense in anyway that he desires. However, this should be done based upon how the defense is playing. For example, if the defense is not denying wing entry passes, the point-guard can easily pass to the wing. But, if the defense is denying the wing, then the point should make use of any of the other options available. Each of these different entries will then initiate the team’s movement on the floor without the need of any sort of play call. Hopefully what results is a coherent offense in which the team-members are reading each other’s movements and reacting harmoniously.

The six different entries into the modified motion that can be made are: a wing-entry-pass, a pass-entry-on-top, a skip-pass-entry, a post-entry-pass, a dribble-entry-to-wing, and a dribble-entry-on-top. Any of these can be made initially to begin the offense and any of these can then be utilized as the offense is executed and reset. The players have the freedom to read how the defense is playing and to make use of any of these without the burden or need of calling out a play. And, in turn, each of these entries will begin the appropriate player movement as the team reacts to the decision that is made and where the ball is moved.

To begin, 1 makes a wing-entry-pass and immediately cuts to the basket and then out to the ball-side corner (Figure 2). At this point, the player on the wing with the ball has two options available.

The player can either pass to the corner or pass-fake to the corner and hold the ball. The pass to the corner option is made as the 1-player is cutting out from the lane. Immediately, the passer cuts to the basket and the quick look is for the give-and-go (Figure 3).

The second option that the player on the wing has after receiving a wing-entry-pass is to pass-fake to the corner and keep the ball – (Figure 6). The 5-player will read the pass-fake and then step out of the high-post to set an on-the-ball screen for 3. These players work a screen-and-roll. As this is occurring, on the weak-side the 4-player should cut down and then off of a staggered double-screen set by the 5 and 2. The 4-player should look for the shot off of this double-screen and then, if the shot is not taken, replace the top right position (Figure 4).

On the pass to the 4-player on top, with no shot taken, the motion positions should be refilled as 2 and 5 replace themselves and the 3-player continues through to the opposite wing (Figure 5). The offense is now reset and rapid ball movement, with appropriate player movement, should continue.

As 1 receives the pass, he should dribble out of the corner to replace the wing spot, looking for this give-and-go cut. As this is occurring, on the weak-side the 4-player should cut down and then off of a staggered double-screen set by the 5 and 2. The 4-player should look for the shot off of this double-screen and then, if the shot is not taken, replace the top right position (Figure 4). On the pass to the 4-player on top, with no shot taken, the motion positions should be refilled as 2 and 5 replace themselves and the 3-player continues through to the opposite wing (Figure 5). The offense is now reset and rapid ball movement, with appropriate player movement, should continue.
These are the main two continuity movements of the offense. For the most part, the rest of the entry options will result in the ball being on the wing and the wing-player have the options to either pass to the corner or pass-fake to the corner and keep the ball.

The next entry option that the point-guard, or any player on top, can make is the pass-entry-on-top. If the pass is made on top, the wing player on the side of the passer immediately back-screens for the passer to fade to the wing for the skip-pass. This option often produces an open shot on the wing – (Figure 9). If the shot is not taken, the player who made the skip pass – (2-player in the Figure) – will then cut low off of 5 (Figure 10). The immediate look on this cut is for the score. If a scoring pass is not made, 2 cuts out to

The skip-pass-option should be made when both the wing and top players are being strongly denied. In this option, 1 skips the ball to the opposite wing. On this pass, 1 makes the low cut off of 5 (Figure 11). The two wing options will then result with 1 cutting out to the corner if he did not receive a scoring pass on the initial cut.

The final pass option that can be utilized is the post-entry-pass. On the pass into the post, the top players will scissors off of the high post looking for the hand-off and a possible lay-up (Figure 12). Gener-

ally, if a hand-off option is open, it will be the second cutter. If a hand-off is not made, the second cutter (2 in the Figure) continues down and sets a screen for the wing (3 in the Figure). The 2-player cuts off of the screen and then off of the high post and receives the ball (Figure 13). As this is occurring, 1 and 4 set a staggered double-screen for 2 to come to the ball-side wing looking for the shot (Figure 14). Finally, if the pass is not made to 2 for the shot, 5 steps out and sets an on-the-ball screen for 3 and 1 clears to the opposite wing (Figure 15). The 3-player looks to penetrate to the basket
and has the option of 1 as a kick-out shooter if the denial defender sags to help. If none of these options are taken, the ball is simply taken across the top and the players without the ball refill the spots of the offense (Figure 16).

The dribble-entry-to-wing option should be utilized when the defense is strongly overplaying and denying. The player on top with the basketball (1 in the Figure) dribbles at the wing player, keeping his dribble alive, which triggers a backdoor cut. The initial look on this dribble-entry is the backdoor to beat a strong overplaying defender (Figure 17). If the backdoor pass is not made, the cutter then has two options. He can v-cut back out to the corner, which would result in the two main wing options being available (Figure 18). Or, he can turn and back-screen for the post-player to cut hard to the ball-side box. This provides a perfect post-up opportunity as it often catches the post defender sleeping (Figure 19). If the post-up option is not open, the screener – (3-player in Figure) – steps out for the ball reversal pass and an immediate back-screen and fade occurs on the weak-side (Figure 20). If the skip-pass is made, this initiates the skip-pass option and the offense continues (see Figure 11).

The final entry option, the dribble-entry-on-top, will result in the other top player (2-player in Figure) – cutting off of the high-post, circling, and then coming off of a screen on the new ball-side. As the dribble-entry is being made, 4 on the wing cuts in to screen for 2 to coming out on the wing. This is a possible shot opportunity (Figure 21). If a scoring pass is not made, the ball can then be entered to the wing and the two main wing-entry-pass options are available. Of course, as always, the player with the ball has the freedom to make the appropriate entry with the other players reading his action.

The final movement that can occur goes all the way back to the initial pass to the wing and the immediate cut that is made by the passer (see Figure 2). The cutter (1-player in Figure) also has an option, in addition to cutting out to the corner, that can be taken and the other players must read and react to accordingly. The 1-player can also, if he feels like the post defender is sleeping, turn and back-screen for the post-player (Figure 22). The post player...
again, as in the dribble-entry-to-wing option, cuts to the ball-side box looking for the pass. The reset movement is the same for this option as for the dribble-entry-to-wing option. If the post-up option is not taken, 1 steps out of his screen to receive the reversing pass and an immediate backscreen and fade will occur on the weak-side (Figure 23).

These are the movements of the offense. They need to be broken down and individually taught. Then, as the players become more and more comfortable in reading the entries, they should be drilled continuously with rapid player movement and ball reversal until the offense moves easily from one option to the next. The result will be a team that is difficult to scout, has offensive freedom, and yet is running a series of carefully designed patterns.

The offense is a type of “motion” in that it provides the players with the freedom of decision-making and takes out the need of making verbal play-calls. It is a “continuity-offense” in that it constantly resets itself until a scoring opportunity is utilized. And finally, it also offers “set-play” opportunities as specific entries can be run to get a shooter an open look, to get a post-up opportunity, or to get a two-player, screen-and-roll look. The “modified motion” offers the best of all three!

Sense Quiz

1. The 3-point field goal line is how wide?
   A) 2 inches  B) 3 inches  C) 1 inch  D) 2 1/2 inches

2. Can a visiting team be called for a technical foul because of the behavior of spectators?

3. What is the penalty for calling successive time-outs during an overtime period?

4. A player accidentally kicks the ball to his teammate who lays the ball in. Is this basket allowed?

5. During the opening jump ball, is a player required to jump and attempt to control the tossed ball?

6. A player inbounds the ball from the half court by successfully throwing the ball in his basket. Is this a legal basket?

7. Is it a violation for a player who is standing still and in control of the ball, to touch the ball to the floor?

8. Does it count as a player’s dribble if, while standing still and in control of the ball, he touches the ball to the floor?

9. A player attempts a front court pass to a teammate. The ball, untouched by any other player, is deflected off of the referee’s leg and into the backcourt. Can the passer retrieve the ball in backcourt and maintain possession?

10. The home team provides the game ball. If the visiting team objects to the choice and provides their own choice, who gets to make the final decision concerning which game ball is used?

Sense Quiz Answers:
1) A  2) Yes  3) No penalty, it is just not allowed.  4) Yes. Accidental kicks are not a violation.  5) No  6) No  7) No  8) No  9) No  10) The referee.

The Basketball Sense Desk Calendar

This calendar will make a great gift for you, your staff, or a coaching friend. It is not available in retail stores. There is nothing quite like the Basketball Sense Desk Calendar. Printed as days of the month only (leap day included), the calendar can be used over and over for years to come.

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Price: Only $14.95, plus shipping; Five or more, $12 a piece, plus shipping
Player/Parent/Coaches Meeting

by Bill Ayers
Mead, Washington

Every year, two weeks prior to the season, we hold a mandatory meeting for all prospective players, their parents/guardians, and program coaches (note: failure to attend this meeting by a player and/or his parents/guardians would preclude a young man from turning out for the program. We offer the opportunity for those who miss to meet with the head coach later only in extreme extenuating circumstances). Our primary intent is to avert any potential conflicts in the future by clearly outlining our program philosophy/goals, to enhance player/parent understanding of our methods and procedures, and to field any questions pertinent to these areas (we also discuss eligibility requirements as well as the district athletic policy/handbook, and allow local vendors to display basketball shoes at discounted prices).

Each family unit receives a booklet divided into the following chapters:

Introduction
This section includes a welcome, brief bios on the coaching staff, and usually a borrowed comment on basketball in general (e.g., why the game is so special and what makes it so great – we want parents to get a feeling for our passion for the game.

Comment on the Previous Season
A comment by the head coach on the previous varsity season, accentuating the contributions of graduated seniors and briefly outlining the prospects for the up-coming year. It is here that we like to introduce players/parents to our “catch phrase” for a particular season (e.g., “While we can’t ensure success, we can deserve it.” This was our mantra for a recent season where our talent pool was shallow and we knew we would have to work extra hard to have success).

Philosophy
This section is the cornerstone of the booklet. It is here that we introduce our general program philosophy and goals. What can parents expect their sons to garner educationally from participating in our program, aside from the development of individual skills, physical fitness, and team strategy (see attached “Dear Parents . . .”)?

We also list an outline of the characteristics that must be evaluated when selecting teams at the various levels, as well as a ten-step procedure that will enhance academic success.

Expectations
Here we clearly outline communication parents should expect from our coaching staff (e.g., location and times of all practices and contests, team rules and guidelines, procedure regarding injuries during participation, etc.), communication coaches expect from athletes/parents (e.g., advance notification of any schedule conflicts, special information regarding physical limitations, etc.), and again cover issues not appropriate to discuss with coaches (playing time, team strategy, play calling, other student-athletes).

Perspective
This section is directed at the parents. We attempt to define what attributes a real Wildcat basketball parent would possess, and then we expound upon them. Attributes we discuss are:

♦ Shouting words of encouragement to your son during the game.
♦ Shouting words of encouragement to all Wildcat players, even if they are playing in front of your son.
♦ Refraining from razzing the other team’s players.

♦ Allowing the officials to do their job and call the game, understanding that they are human and are capable of making mistakes.
♦ Leaving the game at the gym and talking about it only if your son initiates the discussion.
♦ Not blaming the coaches for your son’s problems or lack of playing time.

We also include a copy of the poem, “A Parent Talks To A Child Before The First Game” (unknown). Lastly, we include a life size picture of Julius Erving’s right hand (an example of being born with real physical tools) and a college fact sheet for high school basketball compiled by Metro Index Scouting Service (the stat that only 1.2% of all high school seniors in the U.S. play D1 basketball is an eye opener for many parents).

Care of Equipment
We include explicit directions for care of all equipment we issue to our athletes (washing/drying instructions, storage, etc.).

Nutrition
This is an important section, and we have found that parents have a lot of questions regarding nutrition. There is a plethora of materials on the internet regarding nutrition and athletes. Gator Aide has some good material.

Schedules
The final section consists of game and practice schedules (place and time) for all teams, as well as phone numbers (work/home) of all program coaches.

It has been our experience that this pre-season meeting with parents, players, and coaches goes a long way toward creating a cooperative attitude amongst all parties involved, and has lessened the amount of in-season turmoil as a result of clearly outlining our philosophy and expectations.