

Coach Mac Tryout Series

Coach Mac of Basketball for Coaches (www.basketballforcoaches.com) sends daily emails to subscribers, and from Sept. 27-29 2021 covered the following tryout series.

Lesson #1 - The Most Stressful Part of Tryouts

Basketball tryouts are starting soon for many.

I've received a ton of questions recently about tryout structure, which drills to use, how to announce the team, what to look for in players, etc., etc.

So, starting today, I'm going to do a "tryouts series" where I answer many of these important Q's.

Hopefully it helps!

First topic...

One of the most stressful parts of the tryout process -- *especially for new coaches* -- is the initial introductions to players and parents.

I still remember the first time I held tryouts and had to introduce myself to a group of total strangers who I would soon coach for the next 6 months...

"Nervous" would be an understatement.

I was visibly shaking on the car ride to the gym.

I'd spent the past few days figuring out how to introduce myself...

...desperate to make a good first impression.

Being quite young at the time -- and since it was my first time coaching -- I just wanted to be given a chance.

I didn't want anyone thinking...

"THAT'S our new coach???"

It's stressful.

Which is why I completely understand coaches who are nervous about introducing themselves before tryouts.

In fact, after many conversations with brand new coaches, it's clear that **many are MORE nervous about the introduction than the actual tryout.**

So, here's how I'll help...

Below I'm going to tell you EXACTLY what to do and what to talk about during this initial player / parent / coach introduction.

Let's do this:

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a. Gather everyone together

Round up all the players (and their parents) at one end of the basketball court.

This will allow you to chat with everyone before tryouts begin.

In a loud + confident voice...

"Can I get everyone to this end of the court please!"

b. Quick introduction...

Start by welcoming everyone and thank them for attending.

"Good afternoon everyone! My name's Coach Mac. Awesome to see you all here for tryouts today."

c. Share a little about yourself...

Two things to talk about here:

(1) Credentials

(2) Coaching Philosophy

If you're brand new to coaching and don't have credentials to share, just skip it and move straight to your coaching philosophy.

Something like this:

"A little about myself before we get started... I've been coaching (insert age group) for the last 3 season. I'm a coach who believes in playing tough, full-court man-to-man defense (not zone), I believe all players who suit up each game should receive even playing time, and our number one focus throughout the season will be player development."

d. How tryouts will work...

Next, explain the tryouts process.

This should include when all tryouts will take place, as well as a brief summary of what each tryout will look like:

Such as:

"Here's how tryouts will work... There will be 3 tryout sessions before announcing the team. Today's tryout, we'll have another one on Tuesday at 4pm, and the final tryout will be on Thursday at 2:30pm. Each session will last one and a half hours. We'll run through a number of skill-focused drills. Shooting, passing, dribbling, etc. And we'll also play a bunch of games - 1-on-1, 3-on-3, 5-on-5, where I'll get a chance to watch you compete against each other."

e. What you'll look for during tryouts...

Choose 2 or 3 traits / characteristics that are important to you and set expectations for them.

Say something like:

"Throughout the 3 tryout sessions, coaches will be looking for players who are willing to listen and learn (coachable), players who encourage and support their teammates, and players who love to compete and work hard."

f. Selections...

Address the question on everyone's mind.

Some coaches choose to announce the team via email, posted on the team's website, etc...

Let them know how it works.

"As for selections... we'll announce the team after the final tryout on Thursday."

g. Any questions?

Finally, give players and parents the opportunity to ask you any questions they have about the process before getting started.

"Does anyone have any questions before we start?"

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That's it.

It's a short and sharp introduction.

Feel free to expand on / change any of the points mentioned above, but by using this quick guide you've covered all the essentials.

You can talk about your coaching philosophy and everything else at a deeper level during a pre-season meeting once you've selected the team.

"What's next?"

Tomorrow I'll share exactly how you should structure each basketball tryout.

(which drills / games to use, for how long, etc.)

Contrary to what most coaches think, your tryout plan should not look like a regular mid-season practice plan.

There are a few important changes which I'll discuss tomorrow.

Action Items:

Hit 'reply' and answer these three quick questions...

1. Where age group are you coaching this season?

2. When do your tryouts start?

Looking forward to reading your answers!

Lesson #2 - The Correct Way to Structure Basketball Tryouts

As I said yesterday, many basketball coaches structure their tryouts awfully.

A few of the main mistakes I see:

1. Using drills that don't allow you to evaluate skill

Drills like "form shooting" are absolutely necessary once team practices start, but I'd recommend avoiding them during tryouts.

While you do want players to get better during tryouts, evaluating their current skills is a higher priority than using "technique drills" to help them improve.

2. Starting to teach "strategy" during tryouts

It's crazy to me how many coaches do this...

Tryouts is not the time to start teaching the 5-out motion.

Nor is it the time to run the "shell drill" to begin educating players on the correct defensive positions depending on where the ball is.

3. Including zero competitive drills / games

Getting players competing against each other is 100% compulsory.

Competition weeds out the "fundamentally-sound" players who aren't actually good... and gives the "non-fundamentally-sound" players who ARE good a chance to prove they deserve a spot on the team.

(the latter has massive potential)

Now, to the main topic of the email...

The Correct Way to Structure Basketball Tryouts

First, if you've been following my emails for a while, you know the in-season practice plan structure I recommend looks something like:

50% - Skill Development
25% - Strategy
25% - SSG's / Scrimmage

But for tryouts, there's no need for strategy.

So let's cut that out and add in a few more games / competitive drills -- which are super, super, super important in tryouts, as said above.

Here's the tryout structure I recommend:

50% - Skill Drills
50% - Competitive Games

Simple, isn't it?

You'll spend the first half of tryouts going through a series of shooting / passing / dribbling / defensive drills...

And you'll spend the second half of tryouts using competitive games / drills such as 3-on-3, 1-on-1, 4-on-3, etc.

This gives you a good mix, in my opinion.

You'll be able to (1) evaluate the individual skills of each player during the skill drills, and (2) see which players can really "hoop" during the competitive games.

My thing is...

DON'T OVERCOMPLICATE THIS.

You don't need to split these into two perfect halves either...

You can mix it up.

Basic example:

10 min - Dribble Tag
10 min - Full-Court 1-on-1 Drill
10 min - Shooting Drill
10 min - 3-on-2 Full-Court
10 min - 2-on-2 Box Out
10 min - Full-Court Netball

(you'll notice skill drills and competition overlap for many drills)

A straightforward example, but you get what I mean.

"What's next?"

Tomorrow I'll share 6 important "tryout rules" that you must keep in mind.

I won't give any of them away now, but it's essential you know all of them to make sure you (1) pick the best players and (2) run a fair + effective tryout.

Make sure you read tomorrow's email.

Lesson #3 - Essential Basketball Tryout Rules

Today is email #3 in the "tryout series" I'm writing to help coaches get ready.

This email will share 6 important tryout rules coaches should remember while planning and during their basketball tryouts.

Let's jump straight into it...

Tryout Rule #1 - If Possible, Don't Cut Anyone

Youth basketball is about participation.

Telling a player they're not allowed to participate should be your last resort.

"Too many players?"

Create two teams instead of one.

"Too many players, but not enough for two teams?"

Instead of cutting 2 - 3 players, accept everyone on the team and then sit each player out for a tournament or two (most families will have at least one tournament they can't participate in anyway).

There will be times where you have no choice but to cut players (HS, senior teams), but you should look for ways to avoid it.

Tryout Rule #2 - Give Every Player a Clean Slate

When you walk into the first tryout, do your best to do so with an open mind.

Some players have worked incredibly hard over the off-season to improve...

...and it's only fair you give them a clean record to prove themselves.

Many coaches will go into tryouts already having selected the team based on the previous season's performance.

Don't do this.

Tryout Rule #3 - Focus on the Intangibles

To put it simply, intangibles are the important "winning" qualities that only a trained eye will notice.

Things like:

- > Mental toughness
- > Leading by example
- > Supporting teammates
- > Consistency in attitude / performance

There are important qualities for all members of the team, of course, but they're **ESPECIALLY** important for your final two selections.

"Why?"

Well, if you're coaching a team where playing time isn't distributed evenly, you need to round out your roster with players who are team-first and will keep a positive attitude while receiving fewer minutes than some of their teammates.

Tryout Rule #4 - Play Competitive Games

This is the topic I touched on in yesterday's email...

(and it's something I'll talk about again later this week)

Coaches who only use "technique drills" like form shooting to evaluate during tryouts, will NOT select the best team.

Some players will struggle during technique drills, but then dominate competitive games.

They just "get it".

They just know how to put the basketball in the hoop.

On the other hand, there are many people who I call "practice players".

Players who look great when executing their skills 1-on-0, but they're terrible during real games against live defense.

Tryout Rule #5 - Be Organized and Prepared

Chances are you only have a limited amount of time to run tryouts and evaluate players.

Which is why it's CRUCIAL that you come to tryouts prepared.

If possible, get an idea of how many people are going to attend and have drills / games prepared in advanced.

Don't waste time.

Tryout Rule #6 - Find Someone to Help

Another important part of the tryouts process is to find someone you trust / respect to help you evaluate the team.

I highly recommend this for every new coach.

You'd be surprised how willing experienced coaches are to step in and help you out if they're asked.

Not only will they be able to give you a trusted opinion when it comes to selection time...

They'll also help you set up drills and coach the tryouts, which will give you more time to step back and evaluate the players.