

Suggestions for Imbalanced Games

All coaches have experienced the dreaded moment when you are winning by an embarrassing margin or being beat so badly you wish you could disappear. This inevitable imbalance of team skill can be an opportunity to try some new ways to play the game. If the kids were playing pickup basketball with no adults they would find a way to balance the game and so should you as a coach.

In an effort to help coaches we have compiled a list of suggestions for coaches who find themselves in an unbalanced skill game. As you are aware our handbook calls for action by any team winning by more than 20 points. We believe none of the following suggestions take away from the integrity of the game because by limiting one area of the game you are forcing practice in another important aspect.

This list is timely as The University of Maine Sports and Coaching Initiative has released its report, "Sports Done Right: A Call to Action of Behalf of Maine's Student-Athletes". In essence, the report calls for coaches, parents and athletes to put teamwork and sportsmanship ahead of winning and individual achievement.

A winning coach can:

- Make a passing requirement which can be cued by a verbal signal rather than yell out "five passes before you shoot". Passing requirement may require bounce passes only, the ball be touched by all five offensive players before a shot, a minimum number of passes etc.*
- Restricting the high scorer(s) to no shots until player X or X, Y and Z score. Some say this is not fair to the high scorer, but passing and positioning is as important at any level and this gives a chance for shooting development in other players*
- Make players dribble with the opposite hand*
- Designate who the next basket must be scored by, again this can be cued by a verbal signal so as not to embarrass the opponents.*
- Shut off the scoreboard at 20 point. Reset the scoreboard at the end of each quarter or half.*
- Assign the weakest guard of the winning team to the strongest player of the losing team.*
- Play a "smart offense", cue word for no stealing, no shot blocking, no interception, no reaching. Go for the rebound after the shot. This forces practice on good position.*
- Have players take turns bringing the ball down.*
- Centers and guards exchange places*
- If teams are of the approximate same size coaches can play lines like ice hockey with the players grouped by strength.*

The trailing coach can:

- Adjust goals away from winning and to personal or team goals which may include such things as scoring for an individual, utilizing good screens or bounce passes or getting a certain number or % or rebounds.*
- Admire a specific skill set of the other team and copy or learn from it. It is more productive than dwelling on the score and hating the other team for being good.*
- Dwell on the little victories like a well-executed give and go or a good screen or rebound.*
- Come away from the game with some personal, team highlights or good plays that may or may not have led to a score.*
- Take it upon themselves to communicate with the opposing coach during the game rather than wait to the end and grouse.*

If you as the coach do not feel comfortable approaching the other coach to ask for adjustments due to the score. You should feel free to talk to the AYBL site director or the referee and let them do the 'negotiating'.