

Watching a team that passes and moves the ball well is a pleasure to watch. They may not necessarily have a distinct scorer, a lights out shooter, or breath-taking speed, and despite missing some of these elements that simplifies offensive strategy these teams find ways to score. A great passing team appears to always be one step ahead of the defense and creates timely scoring opportunities with ease. While these special teams make it look so easy, those of us who have coached, played, or been around the game long enough know how rare this is. Passing the ball is an offensive skill that is not solely dependent of the individual with the ball. It takes a quality pass, timely cut and catch, and often the help of other players on the floor by using a screen or decoy cut. These all factor into why it is so difficult to teach youth programs to pass the ball effectively. This curriculum will help you improve on all these facets of the passing game, and supply the coach with drills that will reinforce the proper teaching points and be fun for the players.

Making the Pass

Another old coaching habit that this curriculum will try to debunk is the two handed chest pass. This a practice that looks great in a drill but never plays out in gameplay. Think to the last time you watched a player make a two handed pass from his/her chest to his/her teammates chest. If they completed this play successfully, shame on the defensive players on the floor for being so out of position and shame on the offensive player for holding the ball incorrectly.

Push Pass-This curriculum will stress the push or overhead pass. The push pass will have the same mechanics as the shot and very similar to dribbling. This is because it all starts with the “Triple Threat” position and the “Offensive Square” movements where the offensive player’s dominant hand should be behind the ball with his/her fingers up. From this position the offensive player can push the ball directly and powerfully to the open player while avoiding the defender directly on them. A traditional chest pass will rarely be able to get past a quality defender at any level. The push pass or overhead pass is quicker, more accurate, and more mechanically sound than the traditional chest pass. Either style could be a bounce pass, lob pass, or a straight line to the open player.



Push Pass

Start in “Triple Threat” and move the ball throughout the “Offensive Square” in order to be prepared to pass and protect the ball.

Use a ball fake or pivot foot to create a passing angle

Push the ball with the hand behind the ball and finish with the fingers pointing down

Same motion as a shot, but straight out from the body not up.

-When making a bounce pass, push the ball 2/3 of the way to the player receiving the pass.



Overhead

Start in “Triple Threat” and move the ball throughout the “Offensive Square” in order to be prepared to pass and protect the ball.

Use a ball fake or pivot foot to create a passing angle

Pass by extending the arms and finish with flexing the wrist
Overhead pass could be for a lob or straight pass.



Using ball fakes, protecting the ball, and being aware of open players is a difficult skill to acquire. It takes time to create good habits of players handling the ball under defensive pressure. If the player is focused on protecting the ball and using their pivot foot correctly a timely and accurate pass should not be expected. Be sure to spend plenty of time getting players comfortable in “Triple Threat” protecting the ball with a defender on them before you can expect consistent quality passes. Be patient it takes a lot of repetition, but it can be done.

Receiving a Pass-

Another of the factors that makes passing so difficult in youth basketball is that players are not very good at creating space to get open. Some players depend on his/her speed to get open. Many players are taught to “V” cut or go “Backdoor” which can be successful. While these can be good strategies for players to have, this curriculum teaches players to improve body positioning in addition to the “V” and “Backdoor” cut.

“Take Top Foot”- The defender’s top foot would be his/her foot that is closest to the ball. Often it is furthest from the goal, but the top foot is usually identified by where the ball is located and the area the offensive player is trying to receive the pass. To “Take Top Foot” the offensive player will close the gap between the defender, step across/over his/her top foot, plant and cut to the open area. In “Taking Top Foot” the offensive player gains an advantage by positioning his/her body in between the defender and the open area. This creates a better passing angle for the offensive player to receive the pass.



Recognize the defender’s top foot



Close space and step over the defender’s top foot



Cut quickly to the open area w/ the outside hand out.



Go to the ball to receive the pass and return to “Triple Threat”

“Go to the Ball”- When receiving the pass it is critical that the player receiving the pass goes to the ball. Many opportunities are left open for the defense to make a player when the offensive player waits to receive the ball. Be sure to stress with your players to go to the pass and secure it with two hands.

After the player receives the pass it is imperative that he/she gets to a triple threat position quickly and reads the defender (“Red Light”, “Yellow Light”, “Green Light”).

“Backdoor”- If a player is closely guarded and is unable to get open on the first attempt with “Taking Top Foot”, have the player attempt to go “Back door” (cutting to the basket looking for a pass for a layup). This can be done by taking top foot again or going quickly behind the aggressive defender.



Recognize the defender’s top foot



Close space and step over the defender’s top foot



If the defender overplays put out the outside hand and make a fist



Quickly cut to the goal behind the overplaying defender