

Small Town Leagues - Player Selection!

Coaching in a small city where there may not be an overabundance of talented player's can make a team selection process even more difficult than it already is. In smaller areas, a coach may get 2-3 quality players (or even less), and then the level of talent can fall dramatically from there. Larger cities can provide an abundance of talent, which can also make the team selection process a difficult one (but generally a better situation to be in). If you are coaching in a small city and the talent level of players trying out for your team is low, it wouldn't hurt to take a minute to read the following information...

One very common mistake that many coaches make during the selection process (high school, middle school, and competitive basketball tryouts) is not being realistic about the talent level of players, their attitudes, and what it will take to get these players ready for competitive basketball. Are you being realistic about the talent level of the players trying out for the team? Will you cut a hard working guard to make room for a tall player that is lazy? Will the negative attitude of a player you keep be disruptive to the team? Are you really doing your homework on these players?

Here's what I mean by this:

A player shows up to tryouts that is fast as lightning, but cannot dribble the ball, another player is a hustler but cannot make a lay up, or a very tall player shows up that cannot catch the ball and is not very athletic. Is there potential there? I would say "yes" - but what is it really going to take to get this player ready for "competitive" basketball? And most of all is the player willing to work hard to improve?

Consider these points:

1. Do you have the extra time to spend on these players and not neglect the needs of the rest of the team and their development?
2. Will a player's negative attitude outweigh the effects of the possible disruption of the team's chemistry? Attitude adjustment can take up a good amount of time.
3. Does this player really want to play basketball? Why have they started so late? And what was their motivation to start now?
4. Are these players willing to work extra, stay after practices, work on their game on their own time? Do they have the attitude it takes to make improvements?
5. How long (realistically) will it take for this player to develop and start contributing to the team's success?

Coaches initially get excited (which is natural) and say "we can fix that" or "a little extra work and they'll be fine." But what happens when reality sets in – the player doesn't show up for a practice or two, they aren't doing those extra drills you asked them to do, or the player isn't catching on as fast as anticipated? Unfortunately coaches cannot foresee these things at the tryout; all they see is "potential" to help make the team better – not the "potential" problems that can occur.

Another very common mistake is "cutting" players that are willing to work hard on their game in order to make room for players that you know nothing about (only because the new player is athletic or very tall). If the tryout numbers are small – coaches won't have

the option of cutting many players, but if a large number of players show up, now a coach has some tough decisions to make.

The point I am really trying to make here is that coaches should be excited about new players with potential, but they also need to be realistic about the player's potential to develop. It's very important to give new players the opportunity to participate, but it is also just as important to discuss any potential problems that can occur before making a final decision. Take a few minutes to think about what it's going to take to get this player ready to help the team, and if this player has the right attitude about working hard.

Communication is the Key:

Discuss the reality of the situation with the player and parents!

A short discussion with the player and parents about how long it will take for this player to start getting some playing time, and how hard the player will need to work can go a long way. If there are going to be cuts, this player will take up a spot on the team (which means some other player was probably cut to make room), they have to be sure that this is something they really want to do...

A few items to include in your discussion:

1. Let the player know that you are willing to give them a chance, and are willing to work with them (start off with a positive comment).
2. Let the player know that they are the one that will have to put in the extra work, and you as the coach will help them (working extra needs to be the responsibility of the player, not the coach, this should be made clear that this is up to the player).
3. Let them know that "quitting" cannot be an option, make them promise that they will work hard and see this to the end of the season. This cannot be something that they just want to try, and then say it's not for them, and quit.

The selection of players is still a judgment call on the coaches part – Will the players you select for this years squad work hard and eventually contribute to the success of the team? Making clear decisions based on reality will certainly help, but only time will tell...