

## KIDS AND SPORTS

# Youngsters need game skills, not conditioning

“Come on, Trey. Only 15 more push-ups to go. After that, we still have 10 more suicides (basketball term for wind sprints) to do. We have to get ready for Saturday’s game against that Monster Truck Transformer team. They’re a good team, but we will be in better shape!” Trey’s coach yells out. This was after spending a good portion



TOM  
KUYPER

of the practice time stretching.

Trey is 7 years old and his coach’s methods are pretty common in youth sports.

Hey, coaches, listen to me: these young kids don’t need conditioning drills. They need skill building, strategy instruction, and lots of playing experience.

Too many coaches spend too much time on stretching and conditioning. Here is the problem with that high school/college style of coaching.

■ Stretching at the beginning of practice takes up too much time. Haven’t you noticed? Seven-year-old kids pull into the parking lot, push open

the door and at a full sprint run to the court. They are ready to go. You only get them for one hour two times a week. They need to learn layups, shooting form, defense and rebounding. They don’t need to stretch out their hamstrings and triceps. They’ve been warming up all day. These kids need one minute of warm-ups and 59 minutes of basketball. I, on the other hand, need 59 minutes of stretching and one minute of basketball. If you are going to do a stretching drill, do a basketball skill drill at half speed. This gets the kids warmed up and works on skill development at the same time.

■ Conditioning drills are a waste of time. Let’s take a look at this. A typical team has 10 players. A game lasts four quarters of eight minutes for a total of 32 minutes. If each kid plays close to half the game, that means they will only play for 16 minutes. At age 7, half of those minutes are spent waving to mom in the bleachers, talking to friends, daydreaming and tying shoes. (Why do kid’s shoes come untied every three minutes?) Shooting 100 free throws is a lot more valuable than 10 laps around the field.

High school and college coaches get

their players for two hours five times a week, and the game is played at a different intensity level, so don’t follow their practice schedule.

If you insist in conditioning drills, make sure you incorporate skill building in those drills.

Do running drills while dribbling or passing the ball. Run up and down the court with a layup or a short shot when you reach the other basket.

Trey should be tired at the end of practice because he worked so hard at playing basketball, not because he ran 17 wind sprints.

They will beat the Monster Truck Transformers because they know how to dribble, shoot, and pass.