

Thoughts from Julesburg Recreation Director and Former Coach – Dennis Hill

As we make efforts with the best of intentions, we tend to forget about what is crucial to developing young athletes and future members of our athletic teams/sports programs – FUNDAMENTALS. In my current positions as Rec Director and Athletic Director for Sedgwick County Athletics I've observed an unsettling trend that I believe is hurting sports in general.

Our society has become focused on whether teams/individuals are winning championships: from the Super Bowl and Olympic Gold down to High School State Championship and Club Team Tournaments and even further down to our local rec league teams. Because that trend has trickled all the way down to our youngest participants, the development of FUNDAMENTALS has suffered and we need to get back to teaching them at the lowest level.

Over the years I've shared many quotes with my athletes and teams. A couple of quotes that I used every year and season are, "Fundamentals are the winning edge in sports", and "Success is neither magical nor mysterious. Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying the basic fundamentals". I believe those statements to be true.

I think that it should be reasonable for high school coaches to expect athletes coming into a high school program to have a solid base with fundamentals. What I've seen lately are athletes that can't handle a ball with either hand while seeing the important activity on the court happening around them, or have the hand eye coordination to catch a pass that has a velocity required to get it past the defense. This list goes on and on in sports I watch throughout the year.

With those observations it is my belief that we need to refocus on skill development and not worry so much about playing the game. In this article I've included other authors (coaches) beliefs relating to the importance of teaching FUNDAMENTALS:

- Teaching fundamentals in any sport is critical in maintaining consistency. It is the foundation for establishing good habits. Though we may ooh and ahh at the no look pass in basketball, the towering home run in baseball, or the 70 yard pass in football, it is imperative that we emphasize to our youth that learning the basic principles in their respective sport is more important than these exhilarating moments.

- Every coach in youth sports should become acclimated with teaching the fundamentals of their sport. Fundamentals are more important than any strategy a coach can conjure. Without proper fundamentals players will be unlikely to execute the strategy properly. Continuous focus should be placed on having players repeat the basics of their sport. Wins and losses are secondary to the teaching of fundamentals on the youth level.

- Emphasizing fundamentals establishes a foundation that allows for the athlete to incorporate their own personality later on in their career. Remember those athletes that we exalt in professional sports started somewhere. At some time in their career someone took the time to teach them the basics.

- The fundamentals of basketball are the foundation for every individual play, offensive or defensive strategy, and every move that your players make. The best players have perfected the basics of the game. Learning and mastering these basics make the rest of the game much easier!

My number one recommendation when coaching youth basketball is to focus on the fundamentals!

Spend at least 75% of each practice on them.

If you make teaching your players the fundamentals your number one goal, your players will enjoy practice, they will appreciate their improvement, and they will be grateful down the road.

Like any sport, no matter what your age -- whether you're a professional athlete or a youth player just getting started -- you need strong fundamentals to be successful!

Unfortunately, most people don't really understand what that means.

So what are the fundamentals?

The fundamentals include working on the little things that will make you better -- no matter what team or coach you play for -- or what offense or defense you are running.

For example, by working on the fundamentals of shooting, you will get better no matter what offense you run. The fundamentals of shooting include proper foot alignment, leg bend, hand position, arm angle, follow through, and so on. These are some of the little things that make a difference. Learn them!