

THE ROLE OF BASKETBALL IN THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNGSTERS

Jose María Buceta

- 1.1. RIGHTS OF YOUNG ATHLETES
- 1.2. HEALTH ENHANCEMENT THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF BASKETBALL
- 1.3. DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VALUES
 - Commitment
 - Perseverance
 - Personal Responsibilities Within the Group
 - Team Work
 - Respecting the Rules
 - Respecting Others
 - Learning to Compete
- 1.4. DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES
 - Cognitive Development
 - Perception of Control
 - Self-Confidence
 - Self-Concept and Self-Esteem
 - Self-Control
- 1.5. POSITIVE EXPERIENCES
- 1.6. ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT
 - Mini-Basketball
 - 13-14 Year-Olds
 - 15-16 Year-Olds
 - 17-18 Year-Olds
- 1.7. COACHES' WORKING STYLE

Children and teenagers who play mini-basketball or basketball may obtain multiple benefits from this experience; however, they can also experience problems that could do them harm. Basketball, like any other competitive sport, is a valuable tool in the educational process of young girls and boys but there are some requirements that must be taken into account, and it is the responsibility of organizers, parents and coaches to make sure that such requirements are met.

In this chapter, we will point out the purposes that basketball should have as part of the educational process of the young players, stressing the importance of the coach's role within this process.

1.1. RIGHTS OF YOUNG ATHLETES

Coaches should not see their players as chessmen that they can move as they please. The young players are not the coach's playthings. They are people: children and teenagers who have their rights, and the coach that works with these players should start by knowing, accepting and respecting such rights.

Nowadays numerous youth sport organisations acknowledge the following rights for young players:

- The right to participate in sports competitions.
- The right to participate in competitions whose level is suitable to the abilities of each child.
- The right to have a qualified coach.
- The right to play as a child or teenager and not as an adult.
- The right to take part in the making of decisions about their sports activity.
- The right to practise their activity in a safe and healthy environment.
- The right to receive appropriate preparation in order to be able to compete.
- The right to be treated with dignity.
- The right to have fun while practising sports.

1.2. HEALTH ENHANCEMENT THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF BASKETBALL

Health is one of the aspects in the growth of children that may be enhanced through the practice of mini-basketball and basketball.

- ✓ Proper practice of mini-basketball and basketball contributes to the

physical development of the players.

✓ It can also contribute to developing the healthy habit of practising sports.

✓ It provides the opportunity of developing healthy habits related to the practice of sports, which are basically: nutrition habits, hygiene habits and self-care habits.

However, one should be aware of the possible health risks that could be accentuated through the practice of basketball, in order to be able to prevent them.

- Inadequate planning may interfere negatively in the physical development of the players (for instance, a training strategy based on lifting weights as a means of developing strength may be damaging for players of mini-basketball).

- Inadequate planning may favour major or chronic injuries that in some cases may affect the physical development of young players.

- If the activity is very stressful or discouraging, it is very probable that the players will give up the practice of basketball, thus failing to take advantage of the benefits associated with this sport. Thus, it would also be more unlikely that the players consolidate the habit of doing physical exercise.

- In order to improve their performance and control the pain of their injuries, the players could end up taking doping substances, thus seriously harming their health. This behaviour could give rise to an addiction to drugs, given the high vulnerability of this young age.

Therefore, playing basketball alone, does not guarantee achievement of possible health advantages that can be provided by the practice of this sport. Only when done properly, guided by competent leaders and most of all by competent coaches, do mini-basketball and basketball bring about positive effects. However, a lack of control on the part of the coach will increase the risk of negative results.

1.3. DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VALUES

Basketball can contribute to the development of personal and social values that are very important in the educational process of the child and the teenager.

Commitment

Young players should get used to accepting and carrying out their commitments to others. A player must commit himself/herself to train certain days and to play some games during the weekends, and this commitment must be fulfilled even when the player, personally, does not feel like it. The commitment implies that sometimes the player will have to give up certain personal wishes and make certain sacrifices for the group. He/she will have to think about others and not just about Himself/herself. He/she will have to develop the appropriate discipline that will enable him/her to carry out his/her obligations.

* For example: an eleven-year-old player does not feel like going to training and she does not go. Another of her mates does not feel like going either but she respects her commitment to her team and goes to training. Which of the two obtains more benefits from mini-basketball as an educational experience?

Nowadays, one of the most widespread problems in some countries is that of young people not carrying out their obligations because they behave following their personal short-term wishes. In this way, when they do not like something, they give up even if it is unfinished; when something turns out to be uncomfortable for them, they give it up; if something is too complex or requires a continuous effort, they do not do it.

Withdrawal and lack of accomplishment of projects that imply difficulties are two of the most serious effects of the lack of commitment. Mini-basketball and basketball teams are an excellent educational opportunity for children and teenagers to learn to accept and carry out obligations. This education can be relevant for their future as adults.

Perseverance

In life, it is very important to be persistent and basketball can help develop this quality: to be persistent, making the maximum effort.

* For example: John is a 14-year-old boy who gets enthusiastic about many things but soon gives up his projects because he is not persistent. On the other hand, his friend Nick, once he has started something, does not give it up and he always exerts himself in order to achieve his goals. Even when

he is feeling down because things do not turn out the way he expected, Nick is able to follow through till he achieves his goal. Nick has played basketball since he was 10 years old and has learned to accept his commitments and to persevere.

The development of perseverance is especially important when the players go through hard times: if they make mistakes, play poorly, try things and do not obtain the results they wanted, etc... In their lives outside of sports, they also encounter adverse situations in which it is hard to persevere but basketball players can be prepared if this important aspect, perseverance, has been developed.

It is obvious that basketball can contribute to the development of perseverance if the coach working with young players rewards their continuous efforts regardless of their achievements, especially when they are going through hard times.

Personal Responsibilities within the Group

* A player has to defend 1 on 1 against an opponent. He must take on his personal responsibility in order to carry out his task successfully.

The whole team relies on him. If the attacker succeeds in scoring the whole team suffers; if he does not score, then everyone benefits.

It is very important that young people learn to take on personal responsibilities for the benefit of the group. Basketball is an excellent school for developing this aspect.

Coaches should teach their players to take on personal responsibilities within the group as *something reasonable* that gives them pleasure and not as a heavy load, avoiding comments such as «you are responsible for our defeat»; «we rely on you to win this game». In this way, the coach is carrying out a relevant educational task that will be of great importance for the adult future of his/her players.

For this reason it is important that the players know *what they have to do and what is expected from them individually*. The players have to understand the importance of their own contribution to the team. Equally important is the coach's role in highlighting and reinforcing those lines of personal behaviour that are significant to the group, especially those that socially are less noticeable and are less emphasised.

* For example: in a team of boys between 15 and 16 years old, the coach emphasises the importance of blocking out the rebound in order to get hold of the ball, highlighting that it is a personal responsibility (each player must take on his own responsibility of blocking out an opponent) which will result in a favourable result for the whole team (getting the ball). Some players will undertake the task of blocking the rebound, allowing another teammate to catch the ball, and usually the credit will go to this one player but not to the others.

* The coach must reward those players who blocked out the rebound successfully if he wants them to continue taking on personal responsibility for the benefit of the group. In this way, he will help them to keep on behaving in that way and he will favour the performance of his team, but even more important is that he will contribute to developing this important aspect, **accepting personal responsibility**, in the personality of his players.

Practical Exercise

• Make a list with specific tasks that, in the same way as blocking out the rebound, can contribute to develop personal responsibilities for the benefit of the group.

Team Work

In relation to the above point, it is important for children and teenagers to learn to work as a team. Is there a better place to develop this quality than in a basketball team?

* The coach of a mini-basketball team organises a 2 on 2 drill. The offensive players cannot dribble, all they can do is pass the ball. They start at one of the base-lines and must cross to the other baseline controlling the ball. Logically, in order to do that, they must collaborate with each other.

This drill, like others of the same kind, teaches children about the importance of collaboration and team work. The games themselves are also very useful, because one player cannot win a game on his/her own. However, one does not learn to collaborate just by playing basketball (in fact many

basketball players have not learned to work as a team) and that is why it is so important for the coach to highlight the importance of *collaboration*, and to organise the practice in a way that will encourage players to *cooperate*.

With this goal in mind, it would be very useful for the coach to keep track of the efficiency of the team in carrying out tasks that require players to collaborate; for instance: he/she may keep a record of the fast-breaks made by the team during the game.

Practical Exercise

- Make a list of collective tasks the efficiency of which could be registered in order to emphasise the importance of team work.

Respecting the Rules

Obviously, playing on a basketball team means having to respect several rules: internal duties, training rules and game rules. Thus, young people get used to not being able to do exactly what they want, but having to respect certain rules that foster their *coexistence with others*. This is one of the many valuable educational aspects of basketball as a competitive sport.

Respecting Others

We have previously mentioned that basketball is perfect for learning how to work as a team. Playing basketball is also a good way of learning to respect others: mates, opponents, coaches, directors, spectators and referees.

Young players must learn to respect *individual differences* within their own group, accepting and coexisting with teammates who, in some cases, may belong to a different social group, race, religion, ethnic group, country, city, etc... and who may have different ideas and ways. They will have to respect differences that come about while playing basketball, because some play better than others, some master certain skills better than others, some play longer than others, etc...

The everyday situations experienced by a basketball team, encourage players to become more respectful towards their teammates. They become more sociable. In fact, it is very common in basketball to bring together people that due to their differences may have been rivals in other contexts.

- The coach should promote *mutual respect* and an attitude of *solidarity* among the players of the team through his/her behaviour.
- The coach himself/herself must be a model, respecting **all** players in spite of their differences.
- The coach must promote a close relationship among all the players, because the more they know each other, the stronger their respect for each other.
- * For example: the coach can encourage certain players to work together during training or seat them together on the bus. He/she can also organise outside activities such as, for instance, a visit to the zoo, a trip, etc...
- The coach must also emphasise those norms of behaviour that promote respect and solidarity, eliminating those that promote the contrary.
- * For example: the coach must reward those players who contribute integrating in the group those teammates who are different in some unfavourable way, and he/she must intervene when a player underrates another because he/she is different.

With regard to *opponents* (players belonging to opposing teams), it is obvious that the games offer the opportunity of fighting against another team in order to attain the same goal (a goal that can only be attained by one of the teams) while respecting the opponents as sportsmen and as people.

The coach must place special emphasis on his/her players being well-mannered towards their rivals: they should not insult them, they should help them to their feet if they fall down, they should speak to them once the game is over, congratulate them if they have won, etc... The coach must teach his/her players that their opponents are boys or girls of their age, that they are also playing mini-basketball or basketball, that they make efforts like them and that sporting rivalry must be *friendly* and *cooperative*. Under no circumstances should the coach working with young players try to motivate his/her players by pitting them against their opponents, for instance making comments such as: «they have said we are a bunch of...», «last time they won because they were playing dirty», «they said that you are an idiot», etc...

This kind of strategy is *unethical* and it does not contribute to developing values as important as respecting one's opponents.

A coach must not insult, ridicule or underrate an opponent team. On the contrary, being a model for his/her players, he/she must show the maximum respect towards any rival, regardless of his/her characteristics and of his/her level as a player.

* For example: in a mini-basketball game, one of the teams is superior to the other; in the third quarter the score is 35-2; the coach of the winning team must show respect towards the other team, avoiding comments that could be offensive.

Along the same lines, the coach must be a model in his/her behaviour towards the *referees*, thus encouraging his/her players to learn to respect them.

This is probably one of the educational aspects less developed in young basketball teams. For instance, it is often noticeable that coaches insult, underrate and ridicule referees, and that they blame defeats on referees' decisions in front of their young players. This example, together with similar ones set by parents, makes it very difficult for children and teenagers to learn to respect the figure of the referee.

If this is the education that we are offering our children, how are they going to respect referees when they grow up? What kind of example will they set for their own children? What are the consequences if this lack of respect is transferred to other authority figures?

It is evident that the coach working with young players has enormous responsibility in this area of the educational process, and living up to this responsibility is essential if he/she wants to have a positive influence.

Learning to Compete

Life presents us with multiple competitive situations and we must be prepared to confront them.

Competitive basketball is an excellent opportunity to learn to compete in a way that is both healthy and efficient, adopting a working method that can be very valuable for young players in and out of the sports life, and that can help them now and in the future. All the values previously highlighted help young players to learn to compete. It is also important that they learn to accept in the same way victories and defeats, success and failure, good and bad performances, rights and wrongs.

For this reason, it is highly relevant to the teams of young players that they confront different experiences during the season: winning, losing, playing well, playing poorly, etc... and that these experiences be used to teach them

Test Exercise-1

• Answer the following questions by choosing one of the options, indicating to which degree you agree or disagree with the statement. Comments are at the end of the book.

Totally Partially agree agree Disagree

1. Practising a sport is always beneficial to our health.
2. The injuries suffered by athletes are a matter of luck.
3. Playing in a basketball team can help players to develop healthy habits.
4. Commitment is not good. Children should practise sports only when they please.
5. The coach must help players to learn how to work as a team, accepting their personal responsibilities.
6. It is important that players hate their rivals: «Rivals are only good when dead».
7. If the referee makes an unfair decision, the coach must protest energetically so that his/her players can see that he/she is defending them.
8. When playing in a competition that the players cannot win, it is better to quit rather than fool out of themselves.
9. The coach must be a model, showing respect and solidarity to all his/her players, to the opponents and to the referees.
10. Basketball can be a very valuable learning experience for young players. to confront *victories with moderation*, and *defeats with hope*.

Obviously, the players will be happier if they win than if they lose, showing that, like good competitors, they have tried their best in order to win.

However, neither victory nor defeat should be highlighted by the coach. The coach should congratulate his/her players *for their effort*, regardless of whether they win or lose.

When the team has won, the coach must emphasise those actions that were correct (not because of results, but because of the behaviour of the players), and he/she must do the same when they have lost. Regardless of whether the team wins or loses, the coach must set new goals for the future, and use the experience to help players grow up.

Summary

Summing up, basketball can be a great school in which young players can learn how to compromise, how to persevere in their efforts, how to go on being persistent even when the situation is at its worst. Children and teenagers can learn to take on personal responsibilities for the benefit of the group, to work as a team, and to respect others. And furthermore, they must learn to accept victories and defeats as parts of the growing up process, without allowing these to stop them from pursuing the goals they have chosen.

Basketball is an excellent tool that coaches should know how to use for the benefit of young players.

14 BASKETBALL FOR YOUNG PLAYERS

1.4. DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Apart from the values already mentioned, basketball can help young players, future adults, to acquire psychological resources that can be very useful, not only in basketball but also to their lives in general. The development of these resources can also be part of the growing up process of the children and teenagers that practise this sport.

Cognitive Development

First, mini-basketball (for the youngest) and basketball pose multiple situations that oblige young players to develop certain *cognitive capacities*.

Basketball players (mini-basketball players included) must learn to pay attention and to concentrate on different stimuli. Sometimes the stimulus is a single one, sometimes they have to focus on more than one stimuli at the same time, with more or less intensity, and for a longer or shorter amount of time. And depending on the situation, the players have to learn to change, increase, or decrease their attention at very precise moments. Not many activities provide children with this great opportunity of developing their *attentional skills*.

Likewise, basketball may help players to develop their skills of selecting and processing external information. From all the stimuli that they receive from their environment, they must select only those that are relevant and that can be associated with what they have already stored in their memory. And they must learn to make quick decisions too.

These cognitive processes: selection, association, storage, use of stored data, and decision-making can be developed better if the coach promotes them by making suitable demands depending on players capacity.

* For instance: if the coach of a mini-basketball team sets up a drill that demands from the players a great amount of attention (several stimuli at the same time), that may result in an *information overload*. This overload will complicate subsequent cognitive processes, and that will derive in deficiencies to the decision making process.

* Another example: if the coach of a team of girls between the ages of 13 and 14 wants her players to learn several new concepts at the same time, these concepts may not be associated and stored properly. In doing so she will not achieve her learning goal, and the cognitive efforts made by the players will not be worthwhile.

In the same way, if the stimuli offered by the coach are inadequate, this will not stimulate the appropriate cognitive processes of the young players.

* For example: monotonous practices that include unexciting drills, with contents that are too simple, without allowing the players to contribute with their own initiatives, do not lead to a better cognitive development of children and teenagers.

Perception of Control

People need to feel like they are in control of the things that concern them: that is, that they can work on them.

This notion of *control* is the foundation of our self-confidence which constitutes a decisive aspect of our psychological strength.

On the opposite side of control is *helplessness*. A helpless person feels like he/she cannot work on the things that concern him/her, and as a result he/she comes to the conclusion that whatever he/she does, nothing comes as a result of his/her actions.

Cases of helplessness can be found in many children and teenagers.

Helplessness prevents them from believing in themselves, making them suffer. Feeling helpless when involved in an activity leads to discouragement related to that activity and even undermines the self-esteem.

Therefore, when working with children and teenagers, whatever the field, it is very important to develop this notion of control instead of allowing them to feel helpless.

Lack of confidence, which is normal in children and teenagers, may be relieved by setting up situations of control instead of increased through setting up situations of helplessness.

Children and teenagers need to experience situations of control to believe in themselves and become psychologically stronger.

Basketball provides many opportunities for this kind of situations, although if they are badly used they can cause helplessness.

* For example: in a 1 on 1 drill the players can feel like they are in control of the situation using those abilities that they already master, or they may feel that they can control the situation by improving certain aspects. However, they may also feel helpless when they see that no matter what they do, they cannot control the demands of the drill.

If a coach proposes a drill with an appropriate level of difficulty and if the players know what they have to do, then the players will feel in control of the drill. On the other hand, if the difficulty of the drill exceeds their possibilities, they will feel helpless.

Unfortunately, many young players feel helpless because they cannot do as much as it is expected from them, or because they have not been told exactly what it is that they have to do.

* For example: László is 13 years old and he plays on his school team. In one of the games he made a shot and missed; his coach told him from the bench: «László, do not shoot so soon, the ball should move around a bit more». In another move, László was free close to the basket and instead of shooting he passed the ball to one of his mates, and that time the coach shouted: «László, shoot!». On a third occasion, the same thing happened but this time László shot and unfortunately he failed again. His coach criticised him once more: «László, how could you miss?, If you have no intention of scoring you should not shoot!».

* László felt helpless, because he did not know how to react; he probably felt that it was impossible to do it right and please his coach. From that moment on he held himself back as much as he could and made only those decisions that implied fewer risks and where mistakes would be less noticeable.

Measures to Improve Control

All coaches, and especially those who instruct young players, must help their players to feel like they are in control rather than to feel helpless. With this in mind, they should consider measures such as the following:

- Coaches should train players to *increase their basketball skills*, so that they will have more resources to control the requirements of basketball.

- Coaches should establish *attainable goals* based on the level of their players.
- Coaches should introduce *drills that their players can control*.
- They should *explain* to their players what they are supposed to do, what their tasks are, and require that they perform only the assigned tasks.
- The players should play games against rivals whose level is similar to theirs, so that they confront situations that they feel they can control.

Even if the team has to play different kinds of games, against rivals that are superior or inferior to them, the coach should make sure that there are enough games in which players *can control the demands*.

- Coaches should *highlight the players' actions rather than the results they obtain*. When certain results stand out or need to be highlighted, they should be related to specific actions. By doing this, the coach will encourage in his/her players the *capacity to see the relation between their actions and the results obtained*, thus reinforcing their perception of control.

- * For example: the team has won a game and the players are all very happy with this result. The coach should take advantage of this opportunity to relate the result obtained with the specific actions on the part of the players that could be repeated. In this way, the players will understand that they have the resources to control the demands of the game and thus obtain the results they want.

- It is also important for the coach to continuously *emphasise efforts made by the players in order to obtain results*. Therefore, if the actions that are highlighted are those that mainly require a remarkable *effort* (running, blocking out the rebound, anticipating or helping in *defense*, etc...) it would be enough to relate them to the results obtained. However, if the actions to be highlighted are those that mainly require *accuracy* (passing, dribbling, shooting, etc...) then, the coach should focus on efforts made to master those skills and to obtain the results:

- * For example: «we have won this game (result) thanks to our defense moves (actions that mainly require an effort and that must be specified) and to the scores that we have obtained when playing 1 on 1 (accuracy skills). You have improved enormously on the 1 on 1. You have made a great effort during practices. When we do the drills you are very concentrated on what you are doing. You all work very hard (the coach focuses on the efforts that go into the mastering of accuracy skills) and this work makes it possible for you to make so many points when playing 1 on 1».

- The coach must appreciate the players' decisions based on the circumstances that are present at the time when the decisions are being taken, and not based on the results.

- * For example: a player is free close to the basket, and she has been told by her coach that this is a good opportunity to shoot. If the player decides to shoot, the coach should evaluate this decision in a positive way regardless of the result; that is, even if she does not score that time. This way, the player will feel in control of this situation and will know what to do on future occasions.

In the educational development of children and teenagers who play minibasketball or basketball, developing their *perception of control* is of great importance.

The players should understand that they can learn to control the things that concern them if they work on it. Developing this aspect is very important for young people, since they will feel more secure and more competent in any field of their lives.

Experiencing situations of control stimulates the players' performance and is very rewarding. If basketball continues providing them with this kind of experience, it is more probable that the children continue practising this sport.

P r a c t i c a l E x e r c i s e

- Make a list of the things that you, as a coach, can do to develop the perception of control in your players.

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is closely related to the perception of control. Self-confidence is the *trust that the players have in their own resources* to be able to achieve a certain goal.

However, self-confidence does not mean that one has to be confident «just because», or because «that is how one should be». The issue is not to make comments like «we are going to win for sure», «we are a bunch of winners», or «we cannot even think of losing», or pretend that one is sure of the victory by saying things like: «come on kids, we will recover in the second round».

Being confident is an *inner process* that implies having a *real sense* of both the difficulties of the result we want to achieve, and of our own resources to achieve it. Keeping all this in mind, one should base his/her confidence on the real chances that exist of obtaining the desired results.

Therefore, a player with self-confidence, in contrast to one that does not have it, knows approximately what his/her chances are, and what actions he/she must perform to make those possibilities come true. He/she also knows the difficulties that could prevent him/her from achieving the desired objective, and the actions that, in such cases, he/she should perform in order to neutralise those difficulties.

Self-confidence grows if the player feels that he/she is efficient when controlling the demands of practices and games.

Developing the self-confidence of the young players is very important for their education as basketball players and as future adults.

- As a player, because self-confidence is the key to their progress.

It will enable them to satisfactorily face the most stressful situations during games, and to keep on playing with the hope of achieving ambitious goals.

- As a person, because to be confident in ourselves helps us to face life with all its demands, and contributes to improving our self-concept and our self-esteem.

General and Specific Self-Confidence

A person's self-confidence is not the same in every aspect of his/her life; for example, a boy may have more confidence while playing basketball than while studying mathematics. However, by reinforcing one's self-confidence in a relevant aspect of one's life (for example, basketball) this self-confidence may spread to other areas through the development of an *objective way of functioning* that includes the following elements:

- The realistic analysis of both the situations that need to be faced, and the person's own resources to do so.

- Setting realistic goals and realistic plans to achieve those goals.

This will lead to adequate expectations of one's performance.

- Emphasis and control of one's own behaviour, above all those things that do not depend on one's own actions.

- The objective and constructive evaluation of one's own experiences, thus controlling both success and failure to strengthen self-confidence.

We could make a distinction between *specific self-confidence* that works in specific situations, and more *general self-confidence* that would show the level of confidence in one's own resources in any situation, known or unknown.

Good management of the practice of sports can help to improve the self-confidence that is specifically related to sports, so that athletes believe in their own resources when having to face the demands of practices and games.

Moreover, sports can contribute to developing an objective way of doing things that may not only help players to strengthen their specific self-confidence, but also stimulates their self-confidence in other areas of performance.

Thus, through the practice of basketball, young players can strengthen a psychological resource of great importance for the development of children and teenagers.

This matter is of special importance if we take into consideration that often children and teenagers have little confidence in themselves to confront challenges. These girls and boys, can improve their self-confidence and become psychologically stronger, thanks to basketball.

CCoonnttrroollleedd FSauicluerses and

In order to improve the self-confidence of children and teenagers, basketball should provide situations of control (see above). Good results as well as bad ones (that is, achieving or not achieving the established goals) may contribute to the perception of control if the activities are adequately presented and conducted.

- «**Controlled Success**» may take place whenever good results are obtained (when players accomplish their goals) and players associate those results with their own controlled resources.
- On the other hand, «**Controlled Failure**» takes place when the results are not the ones players wanted to obtain (they do not accomplish their goals) but the players still feel that they have controlled the process in trying to attain those results. In this case, they will learn from their experience of failure and they will apply this knowledge to future games.

The experiences of «controlled success» constitute the achievement of goals that were previously set thanks to players' own contribution, producing balance between previous expectations and accomplishments that will strengthen players' self-confidence.

The experiences of «controlled failure» contribute to developing tolerance to frustration and the capacity to react and persevere when confronting adverse situations. In these cases, subsequent success will help players to learn to believe in themselves when they do not obtain the desired results and must continue to seek future results.

In consequence, alternating controlled success with controlled failure seems to be the most appropriate thing to do during the process of developing the self-confidence of the young players (that is, they should experience both), although it would be better for players to experience more success than failure, and also, that failure not be too far from the desired goal (in other words, even if they do not achieve their goal, players should be as close as possible to it).

To sum up, the procedure to obtain controlled success and controlled failure to improve self-confidence, should include the following features:

- Organise adequate competitive activities both in practices and in games (for example: competitive games that present attainable challenges, games against teams of a similar level).
- Set appealing goals that are also realistic, based on players' performance (their own actions) and not on the results obtained on the game.
- Elaborate plans that are adequate for achieving the goals that have been set, focusing on players' own personal efforts to achieve the goals.
- Use the correct criteria (criteria that is understood by the players) when deciding if the goals set have been attained or not.
- Analyse performance in an objective and constructive way, based on the criteria previously agreed upon.
- Do not judge the performance of the players according to results that can be due to other factors.
- Coaches should not reach general conclusions based on isolated experiences that have impressed them (for example: they should not arrive to the conclusion that the team has played poorly just because the game was lost in the last play).
- Avoid judging the players' performance when the emotions are intense (for example: at the end of a game in which both teams ended up with very close scores).

As we can see, **the way in which the performance of the players is evaluated constitutes a crucial element in the development and strengthening of self-confidence.**

A general evaluation, that is ambiguous and arbitrary, based on criteria that are not known or are unclear, will have negative results. If the criteria used to evaluate do not correspond to the goals previously agreed upon, it will be very difficult to establish the precise relation between actions and outcome. This would create a damaging state of helplessness instead of perception of control that contributes to strengthen the self-confidence.

Self-Concept and Self-Esteem

Self-concept refers to the opinion that a person has of himself/-herself; and *self-esteem* shows the extent to which that person likes that opinion.

In both cases, it is a global evaluation that is not specifically related to any activity in particular, but linked to the data that each person has processed about himself/herself, with those aspects that each person considers more significant in his/her life the most important.

With regard to children and teenagers, self-concept and self-esteem are very unstable values that fluctuate easily. Sometimes, self-concept and self-esteem change depending on their experiencing success or failure in certain aspects that for them are very important, for example basketball. In fact, the global evaluations that many young players make of themselves often depend on these

experiences. Therefore, *basketball experiences may affect young players' self-concept and self-esteem.*

In order to better understand the relevance of this issue, we will differentiate between three groups of young players, according to their level of self-concept and self-esteem.

In this first group are those players with adequate self-concept and self-esteem that do not depend upon their success in sports.

In these cases, the situation should be maintained, strengthening the players' self-confidence and preventing them from associating their success in sports with their worth as people.

Nevertheless, coaches should pay special attention to those teenagers (from the age of 13) in whose lives basketball plays a major role (especially outstanding players who play in more important teams).

In cases like these, it is possible that other sources of gratification, outside of basketball, may disappear, and many young players will be unable to put basketball into perspective and controlling success or failure correctly.

These players become especially *vulnerable* when associating their self - concept and self-esteem with their success or failure in sports. Under these conditions, basketball will turn out to be a very stressful activity that may harm the performance, health and development of these young people.

Test Exercise-2

• *Answer the following questions by choosing one of the options, indicating to which degree you agree or disagree with the statement. Comments are at the end of the book.*

Totally Partially agree agree Disagree

1. The coach can not do anything to improve the psychological resources of his/her players.
2. Introducing adequate training drills may contribute positively to the cognitive development of young players.
3. Monotonous practices are the most appropriate for developing the attentional skills of the players.
4. In order to develop a notion of control in young players, it is advisable for the coach to associate the results obtained with the actions of his/her players.
5. Controlled Success situations are those in which the players succeed just in those games in which they wanted to succeed.
6. Controlled Failure situations may help improve Self-confidence.
7. The coach who carefully explains to his/her players what they have to do helps to develop the perception of control in his/her players.
8. The coach who sets challenges that his/her players can attain, stimulates players' self-confidence.
9. Self-concept and self-esteem should depend on success in sports, because young players will be more motivated.
10. The coach's comments to his/her young players may have a great influence on both their self-concept and their self-esteem.

* For example: Karl is 15 years old, and he has just joined the cadet team of a big club. Now, all he cares about is succeeding as a player. If he does not, he will feel like a failure. Karl is demanding a lot of himself and he is under a lot of pressure. Any negative comment from his coach affects him a great deal. His mistakes both during practice and games affect him enormously. In general he suffers a lot, and he does not enjoy himself anymore. Each game is to him a distressing test to prove himself. Karl is not playing as well as he can, and things are getting worse. Lately he has had two injuries that have prevented him from playing in several games. He is feeling very depressed and is considering quitting.

This case illustrates the experience of many adolescents who play basketball.

They end up *identifying their self-concept and self-esteem with their success or failure as athletes*, and that can be extremely harmful.

The young players belonging to the second group are in a similar situation to the ones mentioned above. Their self-concept and self-esteem are characteristic of their age, but they depend too much on their success as athletes.

This situation makes them weak, and it is very probable that when going through hard times in their sports career they will suffer low points in their self-concept and self-esteem that will affect them negatively.

Furthermore, in cases like Karl's, the risk of this happening turns practices and games into even more stressful experiences, because young players are not only risking their performance as players, they are also risking their self-concept and their self-esteem.

In these cases coaches should try to approach the situation by clearly differentiating the sports success from the personal evaluation that the player may make of himself/herself.

In order to do this coaches should act in two ways:

- On the one hand, highlighting those aspects in the life of the player, apart from basketball, that deserve notice.
- On the other hand, encouraging the players' perception of control over sports experiences in order to strengthen their self-confidence, preventing them from perceiving uncontrolled failure that could provoke a serious crisis to their self-concept and self-esteem.

The third group is made up of those young players with weak self-concept and self-esteem who could use the experience of basketball to mitigate the problem.

In these cases, basketball can contribute to improving the self-confidence of these young players, (see the previous section on self-confidence) and thus their self-concept and self-esteem, although these two should not be associated to their success as basketball players, but to their efforts and their control of the situation in order to achieve such success.

The Influence of Coaches

The relationship between coaches and young players may have a decisive influence on the players' self-concept and self-esteem. Thus, the coach's behaviour in relation to players is crucial.

* For example: a coach may have a negative influence if he/she insults his/her players («are you an idiot?»); if he/she underrates them («are you making a fool of yourself as usual?»); making fun of them in front of their teammates («kid, the basket isn't across the street!»); scolding them without an explanation or without giving them the opportunity to rectify in the future («you never get it right!, you make nothing but mistakes!»); or using expressions that could compare their worth as athletes to their worth as people («you can't do anything right!, you're a mess!»).

However, coaches have a positive influence by avoiding such behaviour, and applying the following strategies instead:

- Defining with clarity and precision the goals that the players must achieve.
- Helping players to achieve such goals and reinforcing them for their good actions.
- Differentiating actions that have to do with players' athletic performance by referring to them specifically.
- Correcting players constructively, pointing out what they do wrong while making them understand where they make mistakes, and providing them with the opportunity to rectify.

Self-Control

For a basketball player it is very important to develop self-control: being able to control his/her impulsiveness and in general his/her actions in order to be prepared and give the best performance.

Basketball provides many situations in which the players must learn to control themselves. Let us think for instance about the adverse decision taken by a referee, about a mistake that must be corrected promptly, about the wrong actions of a teammate, or when a player goes to the bench.

* Helena is 11 years old and she loves mini-basketball. She is on one of her school's teams. She trains two days during the week and plays on Saturdays. Helena is very involved and tries to do her best. That is why she wants her teammates to take it as seriously as she does. On several occasions, when a teammate has made a mistake she has got mad at her and has scolded her aggressively.

Her coach has explained to her that she should not behave in that way, and Helena has made an effort to control herself. Now, every time one of her mates makes a mistake, instead of scolding them she either cheers them up or simply ignores them. She concentrates more on what she has to do. Her mother has said that she also seems less impulsive in other ways.

* Mario also plays mini-basketball. One day he complained to a referee because he had pointed out a personal foul that, according to Mario, did not exist. His coach did not allow him to play on the next game, explaining to Mario that his lack of self-control was the reason for this punishment. Since then Mario is capable of controlling himself.

These examples show the opportunities that mini-basketball and basketball provide to young players to learn to control themselves.

As in these cases, the opportunities must be properly used in order to profit from them, and for this purpose, the role played by the coach is of great relevance.

In these examples, the coaches of Helena and Mario have made very good use of the opportunities, but in similar cases many coaches waste them.

The coach working with young players must be always alert in order to take advantage of those opportunities that might be of use in helping his/her players to improve their ability to control themselves.

Practical Exercise

- Think about your team for ten minutes, and make a list of all those opportunities that you could use to help your players improve their self-control.

1.5. POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

We have previously seen that basketball provides excellent opportunities to improve personal and social values and to enrich the psychological resources of young players.

Likewise, because it provides players with positive experiences on a daily basis, basketball may be a *very rewarding experience*.

Positive rewarding experiences are important for everyone. In the case of children and teenagers, basketball may be one of the sources that provide them with more positive experiences. If the positive experiences surpass the negative ones, then it will be more likely that players keep on playing and obtaining more benefits from the practice of sports.

Positive experiences should occur every day through aspects such as the following:

- fun;
- skills mastery;
- achievement of appealing goals;
- social recognition from coaches and teammates;
- rewarding inner experiences (positive feelings, personal satisfaction, pride);
- feeling social support from coaches and teammates.

1.6. ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

Logically, one of the aims of the teams of young players is the athletic development of the players so that they eventually can become good elite basketball players.

However, this goal must be placed within the scope of overall development (not only athletic) as described in this chapter.

- First, because the great majority of young players of minibasketball and basketball do not become elite basketball players. They can, nevertheless, benefit themselves as people while playing this sport for a longer or shorter amount of time. In this way, *basketball contributes to a better society*, with men and women who are better prepared to confront life with efficiency, with health and with a more tolerant and cooperative spirit.

- Second, because mini-basketball and basketball for young players must try to educate future coaches, referees, leaders, parents, sports journalists, experts in the sports sciences, spectators, etc... In the future, if all of them or at least the majority have been players of mini-basketball or basketball, and if their experiences have been positive ones, it is clear that basketball will benefit from it, and in that way we will be assured of having future generations of people associated with sport who are better educated.

- Third, because if we follow a work plan that stimulates players' development physically, technically and psychologically, there would be more players who could become elite basketball players. By

treating young players correctly while they are learning, we would avoid losing players whose level of performance could reach very high standards.

- Fourth, because those who become elite players, should not be «survivors » who «have made it after all», but players who are better prepared in every aspect, thus raising the human and athletic level of those working in professional basketball.

In general, it is important not to hurry things, letting young players follow their own path, channelling their sports formation progressively.

Mini-Basketball Players

Coaches must understand that some children improve faster than others, and should try to adapt themselves to this circumstance, treating each child like a «tailor» who is sewing «tailor made suits». Coaches must follow a general working plan with all the children of their teams, but they must respect the individuality of each player; that is, making demands according to their characteristics, and helping each of them to develop their own talents.

At these ages, perfecting basketball fundamentals is not very important.

It is enough for the players to know the most basic and to start mastering them.

Players should feel the need to satisfy the demands which appear when playing the game. They must develop the initiative of using basketball fundamentals even if they make mistakes.

And they should have a reasonable number of positive experiences that will make them want to keep on playing.

Daily fun and the personal initiative of players are very important aspects to take into account when coaching mini-basketball.

13-14 Year-Olds

The coach of players of ages between 13 and 14 must realise that even if some of the players appear to be physically bigger, they are still young teenagers.

At this age they are going through a stage of great emotional vulnerability in which they need to vindicate themselves (for example: they would be inclined to abandon if they feel like they are not in control).

Furthermore, many of these players are getting used to playing basketball after having practised mini-basketball, which might make them feel insecure and less competent than in previous years.

Coaches of these players must help them to adapt themselves progressively to this higher level of requirements. Coaches must go into more depth concerning the development of technical fundamentals and individual tactical decisions (the decisions taken on the 1 on 1, 2 on 2, 3 on 3, etc.).

However, they should try not to go too fast, because the players need to assimilate what they are learning, and they need to feel safe obtaining the reward of being in control.

At these ages, it is important **not to limit the players**. On the contrary, coaches should improve the possibilities of obtaining better results in the future by allowing players to do any kind of task (for example: they should all be able to fastbreak in any position).

The players will probably make many mistakes when doing things that they do not master, but the coach must try his/her best and combine those demands that they are weaker at with those that they already master so that they can get some satisfaction out of it.

While working with children of these ages, coaches must set up multiple **situations that players can control** and that will improve their self-confidence.

15-16 Year-Olds

When working with teams of 15- 16 year-olds coaches should maintain an overall perspective of the formative process of the players, but they should measure with a greater detail the **particular needs of each player**: what is he/she missing? what aspects should we work on to improve his/her resources?

At these ages,

Test Exercise-3

• *Based on the information provided in this chapter, answer whether the following questions are True or False. The correct answers are at the end of the book.*

True False

1. The attainment of attractive challenges is a positive experience that must predominate in the activities of young players.
2. The players must know how to control themselves; if they do not succeed this time they will later.
3. Having fun is a positive experience that must be taken into account only for mini-basketball teams.
4. Young players must specialise as soon as possible in order to become part of the élite.
5. The coach working with young players must imitate those coaches who coach professional teams, because they are the best coaches.
6. In the teams of young players it is important that the coach should provoke many situations of control.
7. The coach working with young players must treat all players with dignity and respect.
8. The coach is a basketball technician, and his/her only goal is that of coaching basketball, because teachers and parents already take care of players' education.