

Developing Confidence in Participants

Sometimes, young players might experience periods of low confidence. Left unchecked, this can lead to disengagement or even damage their love for the game. But there are ways we can adapt our sessions to help kids regain their sense of self-belief. Below, we explain how to create practices that are fun, tailored to the individuals in our group, and designed to help players develop confidence.

- The importance of knowing your players
- Making practice fun
- Empowering the individuals within your team

Knowing Your Players

Knowing your players and understanding the purpose of practice is not only key to good session design, it can help engage kids who might be experiencing low confidence. A coaches focus is to help players build a love for the game, and a great way to facilitate this process is to learn about the context around the individuals we coach.

“Some characters might just be shy, so it comes down to knowing the individual and some of those socio-cultural elements that exist around them — getting to know their family and the environment they come from so that you can understand them better,” explains Player Development Project Co-Founder Dave Wright. “That conversation with the child to find out what they’re enjoying, what they consider the most fun part of basketball, is a really positive one to have. It could reveal some interesting things that can subsequently guide your session-planning.”

Making Practice Fun

According to Wright, the next step is to ensure that practice is fun: “The key focus has to be the fun factor. We have to make sure the environment is positive, that kids are having great experiences and learning to love the game, and that there are lots of positive opportunities for play.”

In the younger age groups, some children might simply want to run around with their friends. Others may just like wearing a kit. A coaches role is to tap into their source of enjoyment, whatever it is, in order to help them forge a love for the game.

As coaches, we want players to leave our sessions smiling and excited to return; we want kids to have fun and for them to come back next time. This may mean deviating from drills towards games, or designing more activities where kids get to express themselves and score baskets. But no matter how we do it, maintaining the fun factor is a great starting principle when designing our sessions — and this should, in turn, help kids to enjoy playing basketball and feel more confident.

Adjusting Our Sessions

Building on the principle of putting fun first (FISH),

“For example, if one kid loves dribbling with the ball, perhaps give them some time playing in wide areas, so that they get more chances to dribble or run into space,” “You can build some positive reinforcement around those moments, allowing them to practice this part of their game and enjoy success.

As program organisers don’t be reluctant to have conversations with players or their parents, find out what aspects of the game they like, and then incorporate them more into the sessions.

The Key Points

- Get to know your players and the context around them. This will allow you to understand them as people and realise the best ways to help them develop confidence.
- First priority should be to make practice fun and help kids build a love for the game.
- Design your practices to give players more positive experiences and reinforce the things they're best at.

Credit for article resources to Player Development Project and Dave Wright