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Where to Fit Speed Training Into Basketball Practice

By Lee Taft

One of the most common questions I get as it relates to finding time for speed training during basketball practice is; how and when can I fit it in?

First of all, let me explain one of the most common mistakes made when it comes to speed training. Most coaches make the speed training session into conditioning sessions. In other words, they run far too long and allow little recovery. An example of this is running a suicide or doing a 30 second shuffle drill. Once the drill goes over 7-10 seconds it is now starting to become more of a metabolic conditioner rather than a neurological speed enhancer.

There is a definite time and place for conditioning, but when speed is the goal the short bursts and longer recover are the keys to success.

The problem is when to do speed during a practice. Should it be at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end? The answer is YES! Using this simple method of increasing basketball speed can be used anytime throughout a practice. Now I will say this. If the goal is to get the purest and most effective speed when the player is least fatigued- it must occur at the beginning of practice or I should say, shortly after the warm up.

Because the goal in basketball speed is to be as quick and explosive as possible in any situation the practice of speed training must mimic that. If the coach wants his players to shuffle for 6-8 feet as quickly as possible to cut the baseline off, then why not practice that at 100% effort. Yes, I know a player must have the conditioning to be explosive all game, but I don't care how good the conditioning level of a player is if he or she is slow. There is time to improve both.

The coach must fit speed training into the practice plan at opportune times. For example; just after the warm up session. The coach can allow for 2-3 minutes of lateral speed training. This can consist of 5-6 reps of 5 second foul lane shuffles with 40 second rest. Foul shots can be part of the rest period to optimize time.

If the coach wants to work on speed and quickness with his or her players while under slight fatigue a shorter rest period can be used (still keeping the work interval real short) or do the speed session toward the end of practice.

Below is an example of how I would interject a speed session into my basketball practice and what form of court speed skills I would use.

Monday:

- **Skill - Lateral change of direction (shuffle)**
- Set up- Use all the foul lanes at each basket. Have 1-2 players perform the skill at a time. During the brief recovery period- I would have them shoot foul shots. (adjust according to number of baskets and players)

- Execution- Shuffle from side to side across the lane with only the outside foot crossing the line. Focus on good plant angles and keeping hips level and controlling shoulder sway. The drill must be done at 100% effort.
- Time frame- 5 seconds (remember, it is about speed not conditioning at this point)
- Recover for 40 seconds (shoot foul shots while resting)
- Number of Sets- 5
- Great time to perform this drill is after the warm up!

Tuesday:

- **Skill - "First Step" acceleration**
- Set up- line all the players up on the baseline.
- Execution- Have the players accelerate as hard as possible to the top of the key and gradually slow down and walk to the opposite baseline. Turn and repeat going the other direction.
- Time frame- Should only take roughly 1.5 seconds give or take.
- Recover by getting to the opposite end of the gym
- Number of reps- 8
- Great time to perform this drill is after the warm up or before the first drink break!

Wednesday:

- **Skill - Retreating (opening up and shuffling, crossover, or running)**
- Set up- Starting at the center circle with two lines. The first 2 players will be facing the coach and all other players in the lines will be behind the coach.
- Execution- The first two players will be in a good defensive stance waiting the "GO" command of the coach. On GO the players will perform a HIP TURN to quickly open the hips and shuffle to the 3 point line. These players will get to the end of the opposite line while the next two players get set to go. The next exercise the players will use the crossover move to get to the 3 point line, the 3rd exercise will use a HIP TURN and run. Each player should do each skill 2 times on each side (turning to the right and left). The line to the right of the coach opens to the right and the left line opens to the left.
- Time frame- 2 seconds (remember, it is about speed not conditioning at this point)
- Recover for 20 seconds roughly
- Number of Sets- Each player does each skill 2 times on each side.
- Great time to perform this drill is after the first drink break!

Thursday:

- **Skill- Lateral change of direction (crossover)**

- Set up- Use all the foul lanes at each basket. Have 1-2 players perform the skill at a time. During the brief recovery period- I would have them shoot foul shots. (adjust according to number of baskets and players)
- Execution- Crossover from side to side across the lane with both feet outside the lane. Focus on good plant angles and keeping hips fairly level and controlling shoulder sway. The drill must be done at 100% effort. The player needs to open the hips so the legs can run while the upper body stays oriented toward the top of the key area.
- Time frame- 6 seconds (remember, it is about speed not conditioning at this point)
- Recover for 40 seconds (shoot foul shots while resting)
- Number of Sets- 5
- Great time to perform this drill is after the warm up or anytime after!

Friday:

- **Skill- Combinations**
- Set up- Starting at the center circle with two lines. The first 2 players will be facing the coach and all other players in the lines will be behind the coach.
- Execution- On the "GO" command the player will open up and shuffle to the outside when the coach points back, crossover when the coach points to the right or left, accelerate forward when the coach points behind him. This drill is done as quickly as possible by the players. They must control each and every plant and body position in order to be quick. Be sure to switch lines. Each player does it once on each side.
- Time frame- 8 seconds (remember, it is about speed not conditioning at this point)
- Recover for 40 seconds- depends on how many players are in front of them and before their next turn.
- Number of Sets- 5
- Great time to perform this drill is after the warm up, first drink break, or toward the end of practice!

These are examples of what forms of multi-directional speed skills can be used to maximize court speed during a practice. Keep in mind that the players are working on speed all practice just going through the practice. So when you are doing these 2-3 minutes speed sessions it is a great time to force the players to really concentrate on being quicker and controlling their bodies.

This form of training has paid off big for my athletes over the years. When I want raw court speed- this is what I use. If I need to condition my athletes I will do that during full court drills or other forms of conditioning drills.

You will be surprised how your athletes become better players when they are faster.