

Basketball Immersion - Dave Smart on Practices

- In the first week, Carleton focuses on pressure drills (not on offence).
- They play tough in practice, trap the first pass, look to create chaos, want five seconds of very uncomfortable unwanted pressure for the players that have the ball (force the play and decisions).
- In part, predicated on the FIBA 24 second clock, must play quick and get North-South in a hurry.
- With FIBA game, if you force a team to make 5-6 passes that are East-West then they will quickly run out of clock, be forced to play at an uncomfortable pace, and likely settle for less than first choice shot.
- 24 second clock takes away time available to run a motion offence - against a zone, offences need to find an early match-up and exploit it quickly.
- When it comes to offence, do it the easiest way possible.
- Very important for coaches to decide (and communicate the decision) when they are running DEVELOPMENT drills and when running COMPETITIVE drills.
- Need to strike a balance, define what you do and to what percentage you emphasize two sides.
- Ideally, teach the finer points (development) but still foster a “get it done” attitude (which requires proper explanations as well as providing opportunities for competitive application and scoring).
- DON'T keep score (be competitive) in development drills, very unfair and confusing to young players.
- For example, if showing footwork and wanting to teach properly by focussing on the details, don't score
- Keep score in the games, drills, and situations where you want players to show coaches an application of knowledge and a willingness to fight to the finish.
- Be mindful to NOT develop great “drill” players that perform well in practice and then poorly in games (which is what DETAIL coaches tend to produce from their programs).
- COMPETITIVE coaches throw the ball out and say to players “just get it done” and “find a way to succeed”, however the problem is that they don't perform well against the teams that are well-coached in a technical sense AND are also fierce competitors (they'll be smashed by that team).
- Carleton wants COMPETITORS, not simply competitive players (there is a big difference) – they want players that will find every possible way (even so far as to cheat) to win in a competitive drill.
- They promote creativity, want players to find the “good” ways to cheat to win a drill, have them be mentally awake and looking/thinking for loopholes.

- Great source of controlling in order to get what a coach wants, as you can leave loopholes in rules in order to see if players push and discover them (make them be creative, resourceful).
- Keep control and make rules that take away the “bad” or lazy ways that players are cheating – there is a big difference between creatively looking to gain an advantage and lazily looking for a shortcut.
- Coaches need to ask themselves HOW they officiate a drill and WHY they do it a certain way.
- If working smart, they will officiate to get out of it what they want, such as A) represent the way they expect a particular upcoming game will be played, B) to develop the manner in which they want their team to play in games, C) emphasize points that they want to teach, D) create anxiety for the team overall, or get certain players to play through frustration and adversity (make them tougher).
- As a coach, in order to get desired results, you basically have to cheat when you ref your drills.
- End game is to have COMPETITORS that will find a way for their team to win (how tough are they?).
- Coaches need to prepare their team to face the toughest possible challenges and situations (if a team’s own coach does not provide its biggest challenge, then an opposing coach and team will do it).
- Need to coach any team based on its best players (pull others up to that highest level).
- If a team loses its last game then it did NOT do its best (room for improvement).
- If you expect wars in games (especially as the season draws to a championship) then there need to be wars in regular practices, therefore encourage lots of contact and incite a war.
- Your own players need to be ruthless and cut-throat in practices (goal is to elevate the overall play).
- At Carleton, practices are three times harder than their toughest game with an opponent (there is high competition between players on their own team).
- Concept is to be toughest on your toughest player, you want your best player NOT to foul out in a game so therefore you need to be hard on them in practices to learn that lesson.
- Coaches want their worst player to play “tough” and not shy away against the good players on opposition (in practice, call fouls very quickly and with very little leeway on good players, let lots go for the weak players – make all players, good and bad, make good decisions while on the floor).

- Force good players to rise above adversity by allowing them to be attacked by the bad players (and NOT get called for it – places the importance of “reffing to get a desired result” in practices).
- As with reffing, the same concept applies to point scoring systems in practice – award points for performance in order to attain a desired result from a drill (get focused results by rewarding points of emphasis and punishing areas of weakness, should elevate overall performance of the team).
- Keep score in EVERY drill (competitive ones) as coach should want players to compete hard all of the time (they will “turn off” mentally if score is not kept in a drill – need to keep them sharp).
- Coach Smart prefers to get running done in drills as opposed to conditioning from dryland training.
- When running drills, the coach controls the variables in order to achieve a desired outcome – coach makes the rules, picks the players on the drill teams, picks the teams that will face each other, refs in a certain manner, etc.
- Need to make sure that, as a coach, you don’t care who wins a drill – just want an environment where you can bring out your leaders and have them lead, provide opportunities for competitors to make those around them better (position them to prove and improve leadership).
- Coaches need to make rules to suit the outcome, test their players, promote the development of a certain culture (which does NOT always mean that it will be FAIR).
- IDEA – put the worse conditioned player on the same drill team as his/her best friend – forces better player to find a way to motivate their friend and get them in better shape and playing at higher level (also another opportunity to pull leadership out of somebody, make them find a shortcut).
- Challenge players to make their team-mates better (need to help with preset situations).
- September is “Mental Toughness Month” at Carleton
- Individuals make decisions all day every day, “life” affects players daily before they show up to the gym, need to strengthen mentally to strip away the emotions of moments and minimize distractions.
- As a team, they seek mental toughness, want players to make their team-mates better (pull them up).
- Competing hard right from the first day of workouts will set the tone for how a coach expects the team to play all season (the players WON’T accept a lesser effort from each other, after all, they will get what they accept FROM EACH OTHER).
- September is the time to develop the “team’s culture” (which will be based on how leaders step up).

- Determine the culture of the team very early (need to create it), and then set upon reinforcing it.
- With most drills at Carleton, they split entire group into 3 teams so that two are playing while one is off (shooting free throws, etc.).
- In practices, as a team, they focus on their weaknesses in drills – for example, if a team in a drill is able to do something to its strength (i.e. able to go right when being forced left) then they are punished.
- Example of drill punishment is to stop the drill, have the punished group run two full court down and backs in under 19 seconds, then put them right back in the drill with no break (others were resting).
- Losing in a drill means running 3 suicides under 88 seconds while winners are off shooting.
- Having a system of payments creates toughness in many ways – after having some success, Carleton had a crisis of not playing well mentally and physically so they turned up the toughness on the guys – the result was that they went from “soft” to not losing for the rest of the season.
- High level of toughness comes with a risk – guys will be extremely tough mentally but risk fatigue and being physically banged up.
- Coaches often ask “how do certain players play well in big situations?” but Coach Smart believes that they don’t play “well” – in fact, they play a “normal” game (because of their training) while others around them are choking and NOT playing well – this concept needs to be taught to players.
- At Carleton, every situation needs to be deemed “important” so that they become their “normal.”
- Need to train players NOT to think about what they need to do or how important a certain game is, instead encourage them to play how they are used to playing – in practices, coaches need to make their “normal” situation as tough as possible (then there will be no surprises in important competitions).
- If players are used to crisis and chaos then they’ll play with a sense of calm and patience in games.

Teaching younger players

- NEVER underestimate what younger (club, school) players are capable of doing – test them.
- Younger players have fewer bad habits to be broken, are more open to learning, and are easier to teach.
- They also have short attention spans so they need to be quickly transitioning in shorter drills.

- They are willing to learn, want to get better, and don't feel that they already know EVERYTHING.
- There are more development opportunities with younger players, but they also like to play.
- In workouts, structure the development in the first portion, making it clear from the beginning that competitive games and drills will follow if good work is done earlier (you'll have their attention).
- Again, importance is on making messages CLEAR – the kids need to know when you are teaching in a development mode versus having them compete in a score-keeping situation.
- With respect to competition, if it is not introduced by Grade 9 then Coach Smart feels it is too late (has to be brought in early enough in a player's life so that it can be developed properly).
- Example of competitive vs. competitor – in CIS, Carleton's players are in the gym for 6 hours each day during the summer and are being COMPETITIVE.