

FUNdamental Stage

(Ages 6-8 females, 6-9 males)

The goal at this level is to learn fundamental movement skills through basketball in a positive fun way. The participants will be introduced to very basic fundamental basketball skills. **It is not to win, but rather to have fun while playing sports** and ensuring success. It is the coach's duty to guarantee success for every participant. The intended emphasis should be focused on giving children the basic fundamental movement skills; agility, balance, coordination and speed; thereby making them *physically literate*. Providing these basic athletic skills will build a base for the child that will enable him or her to develop to their full physical potential in later years. Players should learn good practice technique. Enjoyment of the experience is paramount and to aid this, coaches will strive to make certain that all the children will be successful in accomplishing given tasks.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Fundamental movement skills

- Agility
- Balance
- Coordination (throwing and catching)
- Proper running technique – forwards, sideways and backwards
- Change of speed and direction
- Jumping and landing
- Starting and stopping (jump stop, stride stop)
- Pivoting-front and reverse

Fundamental Basketball Skills

With and Without Ball

- Ready Position
- Offence – triple threat stance
- Vision – play with eyes up

Ball Handling

- Ball control
- Stationary dribbling (low, high, wide)
- Movement while dribbling (running, sliding, walking, change of direction, starts, stops, low, high)

Passing Skills

- Stationary passing
- Moving passing
- Passing to a team mate
- Receiving the ball – absorbing
- Catching on the move
- Catching the ball with 2 hands, 2 eyes, 2 feet

Shooting Skills

- Squaring feet and shoulders to sight the target
- Push with both legs

- Follow through (release) – first without ball/then with ball
- Close range shots
- Lay-up progression

PLAYING PRINCIPLES

Basic Offensive Concepts

- Advancing the ball towards your offensive basket
- Shooting the ball into the basket to score
- Spacing of players (ideal spacing is 3 to 4 m)
- Cutting of players (away from the ball or towards the ball)

Basic Defensive Concepts

- Recognition of knowing when you are on defence
- Recognition of the person he/she is defending
- When defending the ball, stay between the person you are guarding and the basket
- When defending away from the ball, stay between the person you are guarding and the basket

GAME MODIFICATIONS

To properly develop basketball players, we must alter the training environment of this group of athletes in order to suit their needs. The following modifications are recommended.

- Play with a smaller-sized basketball either a size 3 or 5. Small hands require small basketballs;
- Play at lower hoops. It is much easier for young players to learn to shoot correctly on hoops that are within their range. (2.60 metres is recommended);
- Reduce the number of players when scrimmaging as this allows everybody more opportunity to handle the ball. (3-on-3 or 4-on-4);
- Play player-to-player defence;
- There will be many rules violations (e.g. double dribbles, travels and other violations). Let many of them go, but explain the infraction as learning opportunity for the entire group;
- Have players play an equal amount of time of during the modified games;
- Players should be taught balanced spacing on the court. Avoid designating set positions that limit players having the opportunity to handle the ball;
- Coaches must use creative scoring principles in order to encourage learning. For example, a team scores a point for every pass completed;
- It is not recommended to keep a visible score at this time. The focus is on play and not finding the winner of the game.

DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Physical Development

Basic Characteristics

- Larger muscle groups are more developed than smaller ones;
- The cardio vascular system is still developing;
- Basic motor patterns become more developed near the end of this phase and balance is maturing;
- Females develop coordination faster than males;
- Fast twitch muscle fibre (those parts of the muscle that are responsible for athlete quickness) recruitment can contribute to future speed capacities. Speed work must be part of warm-ups when players are fresh.

Performance Capabilities

- The child's aerobic system (for activity that lasts longer than 2 minutes) is trainable but emphasis should be on the anaerobic system (for quick activities or bursts of activity that last up to 10 seconds);
- Children are more skilful in gross movements involving large muscle groups than in precisely coordinated movements involving interaction of small muscles;
- The body is very susceptible to injuries through stress or heavy pressure;
- There is improvement in speed, agility, balance, coordination and flexibility towards the end of this phase.

Performance Indicators

- The child demonstrates the ability to perform correct running, jumping, catching and throwing skills;
- The child demonstrates the ability to perform the basic movement skills of starting, stopping, change of direction, change of speed;
- The child demonstrates a progression in developing the ABC's of Athleticism (agility, balance, coordination and speed);
- The coach monitors body alignments (ankle, hip, shoulder, back). This is explained in NCCP Community Coach and Introduction to Competition;
- The child participates in as many activities as possible, ideally 4 per week (2 are basketball, 2 are other sports or activities and should be physically active for the other three days of the week).

Implication for Coach

- Basic athletic skills should be developed during this phase;
- Short duration, anaerobic activities and alactic (short bursts of energy) activities should be planned. Endurance must be developed through play and games;
- Use slow progressions in hopping and bounding. Strength training limited to the body weight of the athlete, Swiss balls and medicine balls;
- Activities should emphasize coordination and kinaesthetic sense;
- Gymnastics, diving and athletics are excellent for the development of young athletes. Obstacle courses and relays are activities that improve the child's athleticism;
- Work on speed (ability to react to stimuli and move as fast as possible to desired destination) when children fresh;
- Children should be active (not necessarily basketball) at least 4 times per week for improvements to be made.

Physical Capacities

The framework of the **Five S's of Training and Performance** will be used throughout the Athlete Development Model to describe the trainability of the various training and performance factors, namely: **stamina (or endurance), strength, speed, skill, suppleness (or flexibility)**.

The Principles of Training and Performance during the FUNdamental Stage:

Stamina – At this stage, the trainability of the aerobic system is good. Aerobic training should take place in the form of games with an aerobic component. Young athletes usually have a fairly short attention span so a variety of games presented one after the other is ideal. Aerobic games on and off court should be emphasized.

Strength – Strength gains during pre-adolescence are possible. It appears that children are as trainable as adolescents or young adults but strength gains for this age group are mainly in relative strength (percentage improvements) rather than in absolute strength.

Strength gains before puberty occur through improvements in motor coordination, and through morphological and

neurological adaptations. Exercise and increased muscle activation will also increase strength. It is important to remember that structural changes, such as muscle hypertrophy (muscle shrinkage), should not be expected for this age group.

Strength training can be introduced at a very early training age using the athlete's own body weight, Swiss balls and medicine balls in exercises that are fun.

Swiss ball exercises contribute to core stabilization (*strengthening the muscles of the mid-section so that the centre of gravity is maintained over the base of support during movement – these result in efficient movement*) and upper and lower body strength development and help to develop balance. The development of core stabilization is very important at all training ages.

Speed – two sensitive windows of time are identified in the scientific literature as potential periods for accelerated adaptation to speed training (Virus et al., 1998/1999) are:

- *Females 6 to 8 years and 11 to 13 years*
- *Males 7 to 9 years and 13 to 16 years.*

The first window for speed training for both females and males is not energy system but rather Central Nervous System (CNS) training (agility, quickness, change of direction). The volume and duration of training is very low but the CNS and to some extent, the anaerobic alactic system (the system used in activities of less than 10 seconds) should be challenged.

Anaerobic alactic, power and capacity should be trained by interval training (a series of short sprints). This training should only begin during the second window of accelerated adaptation to speed training which occurs in the **Train to Train** stage.) Interval training is not recommended for the **FUNDamental** stage.

Skill – the primary importance of this stage is to develop physical literacy, including the ABC's of Athleticism - **A**gility, **B**alance, **C**oordination and **S**peed; the ABC's of Athletics – run, jump, throw. The introduction to these activities is crucially important for future athletic development. These basic fundamental movement skills should be mastered during this stage.

Physical literacy is most trainable from the ages of 5-12. It is important to note that skill trainability gradually declines after 11-12 years of age or more precisely after the onset of the growth spurt.

Suppleness – the introduction to the basics of flexibility training should be done through fun and games. The use of dynamic follow-the-leader-type activities where the children move their bodies in all directions, twisting and turning the body in different planes are desirable. Flexibility is a key training and performance factor. Optimal individual and sport-specific flexibility should be established at a very early training age.

Flexibility training should be done 5 to 6 times per week if flexibility needs to be improved. 2 to 3 sessions of flexibility training each week or flexibility training every other day will maintain current flexibility levels.

Static stretching (stretching that is done very slowly, in which a body part is held for 15-20 seconds) should be removed from warm ups. *Static stretching does not prevent injuries*, however fitness does. In principle, static stretching and PNF (proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation — a limb is actively and slowly taken to its end point) should be performed 2 hours prior or 2 hours after training and/or competition activities.

Mental and Cognitive Development

Basic Characteristics

- Children must be active because attention spans tend to be short;

- Children have a limited reasoning ability;
- Children should repeat movements;
- Children have blossoming imaginations.

Performance Capabilities

- Children cannot sit and listen for long periods of time;
- Children like and need to be led;
- Children should be able to experiment and create.

Performance Indicators

- The children will become restless and easily distract when listening;
- There will be hesitation in following the instruction;
- The child may have a look of confusion.

Implication for Coaches

- Use short clear, simple instructions. Children want to move and to participate in actions;
- Coaches should adopt a “follow me” approach;
- Coach must be able to provide a correct demonstration and correction of skills;
- Coaches should encourage input from children;

Psychological Skills

- The coach should provide a positive environment, based on positive reinforcement;
- The coach should provide enormous encouragement;
- The coach should keep things simple, and have a good demonstration of skills;
- The coach should encourage and promote self expression and self discovery;
- The coach should utilize activities that challenge and promote fun and success;
- The coach should emphasize effort verses outcome;
- The coach should combine males and females together in activities;
- The coach should encourage interaction with peers;
- The coach should provide an environment in which the children have fun while learning, playing and developing.

Performance Indicators

- The player should demonstrate enthusiasm and desire to play and learn in a positive environment;
- The player should demonstrate the ability to deal with simple problem-solving tasks that arise out of activities;
- The player should demonstrate the ability to understand the concept of team, as well as the concept of cooperation, respect and fair play;
- The player should focus on being the best he/she can be by trying to give his/her best effort;
- The player has fun while learning, playing and developing.

Emotional Development

Basic Implications

- The child’s self concept is developing through experience and comments from others;
- Children like to be the center of focus and attention;
- Influence of peers becomes very strong;
- The child wants challenges and opportunities to experiment with all kinds of activity and movement. There is a limited fear attitude;
- The child understands the need for rules and structure.

Performance Capabilities

- Children perceive athletic experiences as a form of self expression;
- If a situation becomes threatening children tend to lose confidence;
- Children enjoy playing simple games with simple rules.

Performance Indicators

- The child will be excited to try new activities;
- Children will ask the coach to observe what he/she has done;
- Children participate with enthusiasm in an activity;
- There will be no arguing about the rules;
- Everyone is participating, no one is left out.

Implications for Coaches

- The coach needs to provide positive reinforcement on a regular basis;
- The coach needs to structure all activities so success is guaranteed;
- The coach must be able to properly assess the basic skills and provide a varied repertoire of practical opportunities for the technical and tactical development and improvement of players;
- The coach should endeavour to make children feel comfortable enough to try a variety of activities. Do not worry about mistakes of a technical nature.

Ancillary Capacities

- Activity elements of warm-up and cool down need to be introduced and implemented regularly by the coach so that the children can establish their own routines;
- Proper gym and activity apparel are important elements of sports;
- Introduction and development of healthy nutrition and hydration habits are guidelines set forth by the coach. This information should be provided to players and parents.
- Players should be introduced to a simple debriefing procedure. The coach can ask the players simple questions:
 - What did you do well today?
 - What did you learn?
 - What did you like best about today's practice?

It is best to draw from the players and not tell them what you observed as a coach. This should be done after the players have a chance to speak.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE FUNDAMENTAL PHASE

- The various stages of physical, cognitive and emotional development are predictable, but the rate or tempo of that development is individually and genetically determined. Thus, athletes will go through the same development but at different rates;
- As many sports as possible should be included in the athlete's development. Sports such as gymnastics and athletics should be high on the list since the ABC's are taught and learned in these sports;
- Speed and power training are essential during these years to teach the central nervous system how to fire properly. This type of training should be done at the beginning of practice sessions while players are fresh;
- Use body weight for strength, endurance, agility and speed development. Keep it fun and stay within the training guidelines to avoid overtraining and burnout;
- Make everything into a game;

- Technical and tactical development should be constructed in a way that ensures success for players. Tactical solutions must be based on technical abilities;
- Remember that 3 training sessions per week is maintenance only. For young players to improve, they must be active 4 times per week (ideally, 2 are basketball, 2 are other sports or activities and should be physically active for the other 3 days of the week).

A sample practice plan for players aged 6-9 years:

- 60 minutes in length
- Warm-up including speed work and agility 5-10 min
- Technical skills and drills 35-40 min
- Scrimmage and simple tactics 10 min
- Cool down 5 min

Emphasis should be placed on:

- Acquiring the ABC's of Athletics
- Basic basketball fundamentals
- Playing to have fun
- Playing games through which the rules, cooperation and fitness will be developed.