

# Conducting a Basketball Team Selection Trial

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## Foreword

This manual is designed to assist basketball coaches to best manage their team's selection trials. The manual is designed for larger group numbers but hopefully you can adapt the concepts to smaller team settings as the philosophies and practices remain consistent.

Having coached at various levels of this great game for over 30 years, my experience has shown me that a lot of basketball coaches when conducting any team selection trial incorrectly treat the session/s like a skills training session and try to “teach” the players how to play the game, rather than resisting this natural temptation and letting the players show you what they can, or more importantly cannot, do.

When you are preparing a basketball team for a tournament, a season, or an event, you simply do not have the time to coach as you would like during the important selection trial period. In basketball selection trials you will often have large numbers to manage, most likely on a single court for an hour, so don't waste valuable time on individual skill development drills. (These drills are completed once your squad has been reduced to a more manageable number or more appropriately once your team is established).

A team selection trial is about putting the attending players in a position where they are able to show you, the selector/coach, their current skill sets, their understanding of the game and who is able to listen and follow your instructions. Most importantly it is an opportunity to see which players are coachable and in your educated assessment possess the ability to improve a State team, a Championship team, a Domestic team or a School team.

Good luck with your basketball team selections and I hope this manual provides some valuable assistance to you.

## *Helpful Hints*

- At team selection trials observe the players, avoid the temptation to coach the players!
- Prepare situations in your training plan that allow the players to show you what they can do!

## Communication

### Pre Selection

Upon arrival at the venue, the involved players should be welcomed at the door, with their name's marked off, or added to, the official register.

Parents should be allocated a viewing area where they can observe from afar. It is also advisable to allow parents to hear the initial welcoming Head Coach remarks, and provide them an additional briefing prior to selections so that they are clear of the process – this can avoid issues later!

Each player should be allocated a distinct number that is placed on their singlet and/or, outside lower leg and/or, upper outside arm for clear identification by all. It is always easiest to list the players on the official register in surname alphabetical order, with corresponding numbers commencing with the number "1".

It is vitally important that all coaches and selectors involved with your session are immediately introduced to the attendees (and spectating parents) and that they have some form of clear identification – be it a name tag, hi-vis vest or a branded club/school polo. Have as many trained eyes as you can observing the players. We will discuss later in this manual the necessity for, and the mechanics of, a Selection Panel.

As the Lead or Head Coach (which we will refer to as Head Coach herein), you should highlight at the start that the selection trial session, what you and your selectors want to see of the skill sets of the players and what they can offer to the end team.

Players should know and understand the selection criteria and be advised that often the selection trials are not the only pre-requisite of team selection. Players should most definitely have been watched over previous games, weeks or seasons and often it is their previous body of work that is considered just as important as what they display at the selection session. Players always need to understand that they just never know who from the basketball coaches fraternity is watching them perform; be it on the court, at any game, at any team trainings or even as they play on the school yard court, away from this selection session.

Session coaches should be appointed to conduct the selection training plan to allow the Selection Panel to best observe the session and the players involved.

At the start of the session you should team up all the players who are competing for the respective spots. I recommend that you publicly ask for players to identify what positions they are trying out for. Then have all the Point Guards play against each other through certain drills, all the Shooting Guards compete against each other etc.

Later in your planned session when you are moving away from skill or breakdown situations and onto scrimmages, you should then line up the squad from tallest to shortest along the sideline.

Divide the squad into the appropriate number of five (5) person teams, advising each player with a corresponding team number as you move along the line.

It is my experience that you will require more than one (1) session to make an educated selection of your team. The following is a proposed schedule you may like to follow for large numbers of applicants to ensure the end selection of your final team;

- Session One – 75+ players attend and show you what they can, or cannot do. At the conclusion of the session advise 30-40 players to return for the second session.
- Session Two – 30-40 players attend. At the end of the session advise the most suitable 15-20 players to attend the third selection session.
- Session Three – getting closer, your most suitable 15-20 players return for the third session and at the end of the session you can name your team and emergencies.

### *Pre-Selection - Helpful Hints*

- Greet the players upon arrival and mark them off the register
- Provide a viewing area for parents – ensuring they are able to hear the initial group welcoming and or establish a separate briefing session for them
- Ensure each player is individually numbered – uniform, lower leg or upper arm
- Ensure all coaches and selectors are clearly identifiable – the Selection Panel
- Advise all players that they are attending a selection trial not a coaching clinic
- Have the players advise what playing position they are trying out for
- For even scrimmages, have the players line up tallest to shortest and provide each player a corresponding team number

### *Things to arrange*

- Volunteers to assist with registration process
- Permanent markers for individual numbering
- Coaches to run the training selection session for the Head Coach
- Clip boards for selection panel members to make notes

## Post Selection

A post trial meeting is always encouraged with your Selector Panel to ensure consistency of message and openly discuss selections and/or the next session plan.

Once Selection Panel agreement is achieved on the end team, advising the 10-12 successful players of their selection on the team is the easiest, most enjoyable and most rewarding part of coaching.

The toughest part of coaching however is advising those players on the fringe of team selection, who you would have undoubtedly developed a positive relationship with and who have committed to the team thus far, that they have been unsuccessful. Honesty, compassion and directness is the only way to deal with this task.

If participation numbers are high it is impossible to individually advise each unsuccessful player of why they did not make the team. Referral to your selection criteria will assist you addressing these concerns, (we will address this shortly!).

Always be aware that you can only select 10, or 12 players, depending upon the rules of your competition. It is impossible to accommodate for every player who tries out for one (1) basketball team!

It is recommended that in a group setting of over 25 players that you read out those names of players who are successful and advancing to the next stage – it is impossible to be personal with large numbers.

For the players who make it to the final 20-25, but miss end selection in the final 10-12, where possible you need to sit down with each and provide them valuable feedback on why they were unsuccessful. This conversation, could be only two (2) minutes in length, but should always be undertaken with an adult witness present, ideally another coach, the team manager or the player's parent, remember they are simply in observation of the conversation. The observer should not be permitted to be involved in the conversation as it opens the door for "ugly parents" to surface.

The "hamburger method" of feedback is always recommended here – start with positive items, then advise the player of the negative items that has lead to their non-selection and areas/skills that they need to improve on, and then finish with reinforcing the positives again. The reality is that the player will not comprehend anything you tell them after they hear that they were unsuccessful, as they will be naturally upset that they are not in the team. It is your coaching duty however to teach and to make your players aware of their strengths and weakness.

If you have the time and the capacity, then offering written feedback to the final 20-25 players is strongly recommended as then once the player has settled and come to terms with their non-selection, they can constructively sit, review your written feedback and set a plan for addressing the items raised.

There are a number of ways you can advise your team of selection. In my early days as a player, I would nervously sit beside the home letterbox awaiting a letter of confirmation of my selection, or non-selection, after the preceding selection process. This was the easy way out for coaches at the time as they avoided the dreaded discussion with those who were unsuccessful. It did also avoid dealing with a disgruntled parent though!

There is no doubt that after session there still may be some uncertainty in the minds of the coach/selector and this may necessitate additional discussion, debate and/or due consideration for the end team.

It is my experience though that by session three (3) you will have 90% of your team identified and it is important that as a Head Coach you place yourself in the shoes of the players and understand that prompt delivery of your final team list is best for all parties concerned.

I would always recommend face to face conversations with your final 20-25 players. Coaches have a responsibility to be honest with their players and ensure that each under their guidance is better for the time they spend with you.

If time does not allow the face to face conversation of advise, then the following options may be considered when nominating your team, in no particular order;

- Placement of the end team list on the stadium/school noticeboard
- Placement of the end team list on the club/school website, Facebook page etc.
- Write a letter and post to those successful players
- E-mailing each of the players
- Holding another session where you meet with parents first and then the players to advise of the end selections

### *Post Selection - Helpful Hints*

- When over 25 players remaining at the end of your selection session, you should read out those names of successful players
- When under 25 players remaining in your selection session, always try to meet individually with those players who are unsuccessful
- Always ensure these individually meetings have another adult present as an observer, be they another coach/selector or the player's parent
- Use the "Hamburger Method" when meeting with and addressing the unsuccessful players – POSITIVE items, then NEGATIVE items, then POSITIVE items again

## Why you need to have selection criteria

There is always going to be subjectivity, when selecting any team in any sport, so it is important that you have established a basic selection criteria for your team to assist and support you and your support staff in your decision making. This selection criteria also provides justification when conversing with players, parents, coaches and administrators in post selection discussions.

If selecting for larger associations, then as the Head Coach please make sure that you understand what the selection criteria of the body is that you are undertaking for and on their behalf.

The major part of any selection criteria for any of my teams is not just about the basketball component, but about what type of person the player actually is, what is their character like and will they fit into my team.

- SIZE – Height? Weight? (in our sport taller players often get the benefit of the doubt!)
- SPEED – Can they sprint baseline to baseline?
- AGILITY – Can they change direction quickly? Can they run a “shuttle-run” in 28 seconds or less?
- VERTICAL JUMP – Can they jump and land on two feet?
- STRENGTH – Can they do a push-up? Can they do a sit-up? Can they hold their ground when pushed?
- RESPECT – Do they respect the game? Teammates? The venue? Officials? And most importantly your coaching? Was the player on time?
- HARD WORKING – Does the player make an effort in all play/drills?
- GOOD LEADERSHIP – Does the player lead by example?
- GOOD DECISION MAKER – Does the player have game sense and court awareness? Do they look to make their teammates better at both ends of the floor?
- SUITABILITY TO POSITIONS – Does the player have size and length for a forward, or ball handling and distribution skills for a guard?
- COACHABLE – Does the player listen, follow instructions and look you in the eye when you are talking?
- GREAT ATTITUDE – Does the player treat their teammates and support staff with respect? Do they understand team concepts? Are they supportive and enthusiastic?
- UNSELFISH – Does the player make the extra pass? Do they over dribble? Do they shoot the ball every time and refuse to look for teammates in better shooting positions?
- SKILL BASE SET – Does the player exhibit the required skills for the position trying out for?
- FUTURE or PRESENT – Are you selecting a team for now or one for the long-term sustainability of your club/program?

For ELITE TEAMS, two (2) further considerations are undertaken, such as;

- Can the player defend and contain the opposition at one end, and have the ability on offense to create for themselves and teammates?
- Can the player attend and commit to all scheduled team preparation trainings and events? (This is vitally important for team culture, ensuring that the athlete is fully committed to the full journey of the team).

### *Selection Criteria – Helpful Hints*

- Subjectivity is unavoidable in any team selection
- Develop a clear selection criteria for your team that will assist conversations post selections
- Basketball skills are always second in consideration to team selection, first you must ensure you select good people who will listen and are coachable

### Example of Selection Criteria

The following is a draft weighting selection criteria you could use when selecting team members for your program. From the items mentioned previously you can develop your own weighting program – but here is one we prepared earlier that you could use:

#### **Rate the player against the following six (6) headings**

##### **1. The attitude to become an exceptional basketball player**

(Score - 5 points awarded if you 'agree' through to 1 point if you 'disagree')

*Possessing mental toughness, leadership, concentration, strength, temperament, determination, commitment, performing in adverse conditions, coping with pressure/setbacks/criticism and persistence.*

##### **2. Athleticism and physical capabilities**

(Score - 5 points awarded if you 'agree' through to 1 point if you 'disagree')

*Physical capacities including: height, weight, arm/wing span, vertical jump, 20m sprint, shuttle run, flexibility and change direction quickly.*

### **3. Positional abilities and skill**

(Score - 5 points awarded if you 'agree' through to 1 point if you 'disagree')

*Unselfish, having the ability to become a versatile basketball player, for example one who can play both in the post and on the perimeter.*

### **4. Potential to improve**

(Score - 5 points awarded if you 'agree' through to 1 point if you 'disagree')

*Great attitude, coachability, assessment of present performance level relative to past performances. Does the player have sport successful siblings/parents?*

### **5. Individual application in training and competition**

(Score - 5 points awarded if you 'agree' through to 1 point if you 'disagree')

*Attendance, availability, respect to coaches/teammates/officials, ability to rehabilitate from injury, outstanding work ethic, compete in every drill, compete in every play.*

### **6. Team/squad orientation**

(Score - 5 points awarded if you 'agree' through to 1 point if you 'disagree')

*An individual's ability, within a team sport, to 'fit in' and influence the squad/team in a positive manner.*

*For elite teams this would also include an ability to understand and accept a role, be able to contain at one end of the floor (Defence) and possess an ability at the other to create and create for others (Offence).*



Players Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Players Number: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Headings</b>	<b>Score</b>
1.	Attitude	/5
2.	Physical Capabilities	/5
3.	Positional Skill	/5
4.	Potential	/5
5.	Application	/5
6.	Team Orientation	/5
	<b>TOTAL – Out of 30</b>	<b>/30</b>

Players Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Players Number: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Headings</b>	<b>Score</b>
1.	Attitude	/5
2.	Physical Capabilities	/5
3.	Positional Skill	/5
4.	Potential	/5
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	<b>TOTAL – Out of 30</b>	<b>/30</b>

## Court set up for team selections

With limited time it is important to be prepared and have your venue set-up for the arrival of the players so as to maximize your limited court time.

As the Head Coach you need to provide as much of an opportunity as possible for the attending players to show you what they can do.

It is therefore recommended that you develop a training plan that allows players to show you what they can do.

Have no more than 20 players to one (1) court – and no more than 10 to a basket. If numbers are higher than this and you have limited court space then you should investigate for a matter of fairness, to allocating more time to your selections and/or increase the selection period.

Ideally a coach to player ratio of 1:5 is always recommended for each selection session.

It is recommended to contact all players before the event and request they arrive 15 minutes early, bring with them a basketball, which is clearly marked with their name on it and one white singlet/t-shirt and one dark colored singlet/t-shirt.

Depending upon your training plan, which we shall address next, the following equipment may be required:

- x1 basketball per player
- x1 whistle for the coach/es
- x2 permanent markers
- reversible singlets / colored bibs / colored team ribbons.

### Court set up – Helpful Hints

- Be prepared
- 20 players and no more allocated to each one court
- Coach:Player ratio is to be 1:5
- Request players beforehand to arrive 15 minutes early, bring with them a basketball, one white singlet/t-shirt and one dark colored singlet/t-shirt
- Ensure you have enough basketballs.

## Positional skill set

Another important factor to consider when choosing a team is playing positional skill set. No team will be successful if it is filled entirely with x10 quick Point Guards or alternatively with x10 slow moving big bodied Centers.

You will need to choose a combination of players that can fill each of the five (5) playing positions on the basketball floor.

In my teams of 10 players I always try to select on the following team balance

- x2 Point Guards
- x2 Shooting Guards
- x2 Small Forwards
- x2 Power Forwards
- x2 Centres

Here's how to do it: firstly, as we mentioned earlier, ask the players at the initial group discussion what position they think they are trying out for and have them then work/compete against those like types – you can always move the obvious errors to the most appropriate positions, for example there are no 150cm tall Centres or a 220cm tall, big bodied Point Guards.

Following are some basic criteria you should consider for each of the five (5) basketball positions.

### **1 Position (point guard/PG)**

These players will be your primary ball-handlers and floor generals. They should be comfortable dribbling and passing the ball under heavy defensive pressure. They should have a general understanding of basketball strategy and have the ability to direct their teammates on the floor and execute set plays. They must also possess strong on ball defensive skills and be able to contain their opponents off the dribble. Shooting range and general scoring ability are important, but not essential.

More importantly, the Point Guard should be able to penetrate into the keyway off the dribble and distribute the ball to other players in high percentage scoring areas (i.e. under the basket, open jumpshots etc.). Lastly, your point guard should be mentally tough; He/She will often be called upon to handle the ball in high pressure situations, and should be confident in this role.

## ***2 Position (off guard, shooting guard, wing, SG)***

Your off guards/shooting guards will sometimes be called upon to handle the ball in lieu of the Point Guard being unable, so these players should also be comfortable handling the ball in the open court under defensive pressure.

Shooting Guards, as their name suggests, should be able to shoot the ball from the outside, preferably with three point range. They should have the ability to score off the dribble, get to the basket well with the ball, defend well, run the lanes and finish on the fast break.

## ***3 Position (small forward, wing, SF)***

These players should be versatile, with the ability to play either the Off Guard or Power Forward positions (but not necessarily both). Small Forwards should have a variety of offensive skills. They should be comfortable enough with the ball to help break full court pressure if necessary. Ideally, your Small Forward has the ability to beat his defender off the dribble and score in the lane. He/She should also be able to move without the ball and get up the court to finish on fast breaks.

## ***4 Position (power forward, big, PF) & 5 Position (centre, big, C)***

I have grouped these two (2) positions together because their basic skill sets are generally the same. Power Forwards and Centres (or “Post Players”) are generally your tallest players. You will need four (4) of these players on a 10 player team. They should be strong and physically aggressive, capable to defend against your opposition’s largest players. Post Players should be effective rebounders, have the ability to establish and maintain position under the basket and take up space on the floor.

The most effective Post Players will possess good footwork and should be able to finish around the basket with heavy defensive pressure. Shooting range and ball handling ability are nice bonuses, but are by no means essential for your post players.

## The training plan – what do I do in my selection trials?

When conducting a team selection trial you can implement some of your basic offensive and defensive “systems” to see which players can pick it up, who listens to your instructions, who applies the instructions and who tries what is asked of them.

Do not implement all set plays or over complicated offences or defences at this time, just implement some concepts of the style of game that you, or the program, are looking at teaching.

Remember team selections are about allowing the players the best opportunity to show you what they can do! The areas they cannot do will be addressed with your time coaching them thereafter.

Ensure all drills are competitive with minimal to no down time or standing around by the participants.

Ensure you provide a variety of drills to try and cover as many of the items addressed in your selection criteria. Mass participation drills are always best and as many competitive game situation drills used as you can.

You should cover the following areas in team selection trials:

- Introduction of Coaches and Selectors and key support staff
- Warm up drills (Footwork drills, Combination drills with; running, ball handling, passing and finishing / shooting drills)
- Shooting Drills (Catch and shoot, lay-ups, give and go, shooting off of one dribble)
- Full court running Drills (2 on 1, 3 on 2, Tennessee 5 Ball Shooting Drill)
- Transition Offence (Build it up; 3 on 0, 4 on 0, 5 on 0)
- Half court Offence (3 on 0/3, 4 on 0/4, 5 on 0/5, Ball movement penetration and receivers rules, On ball screening situations)
- Full Court Defence (1 on 1, 2 on 2, 3 on 3, 4 on 4 and 5 on 5)
- Half Court Defence (Close Outs, Shell drills, Containment of penetration, Defending On ball screens)
- Half and Full Court Scrimmage (3 on 3, 4 on 4 and 5 on 5)
- Next Sessions details or planned points of emphasis.

## Training plan – Helpful Hints

- Ensure ALL planned drills are competitive, mass participated and with minimal standing around
- Ensure you cover a variety of skills required to have the players address your selection criteria and show you what they can do!
- Ensure minimal 1 on 0, 2 on 0, 3 on 0 drills are used in your plan

## The selection panel

Choosing members of the team is the end responsibility of the appointed Head Coach, this can be made easier by the appointment of a Selection Panel to allow the Head Coach to utilize more sets of eyes in observing the selection trials.

The selection task is not to select the 10 best players, but to select the “team” of 10 players that will best represent the club/school. Talent identification principles require evaluation of sport specific skills, athletic ability, attitude and work ethic.

The members of the Selection Panel must be well versed in the selection criteria and the coaching style of the Head Coach.

Selection Panel members must attend the selection trials organised by the Lead/Head Coach and provide selections on observations made during training and other competitive environments of identified athletes.

It is recommended that the Selection Panel consist of the following persons and that the respective voting entitlements apply:

- Head Coach - 2 Votes
- Assistant Coaches - 1 Vote each
- Independent Selector - 1 Vote
- Club/School High Performance Director - 1 Vote (If required)

If votes are tied at the end of selections, then I would always recommend that the Head Coach has the deciding/casting vote as it is he/she that ultimately has to work with the player and whose is ultimately responsible for the performance of the team.

It is recommended that coaches be engaged to conduct the on-court items on the training plan. These coaches will ensure the training plan is best adhered to and allow the Selection Panel to concentrate and observe on the players.

## Development players/Emergency players

Inevitably in all sports just before you take the court for your first fixtured game you will be confronted by individual player illness or injury to your selected team.

It is important to therefore select suitable and capable players for your team in the difficult development or emergency player role.

This is recommended to be your next best player and one who has the brightest long term upside; often a younger or bottom age player or even the new beginner that you have identified to have great potential. Most importantly it should be a player who can compliment and add value to your team's preparation, as opposed to one who is bitter, selfish and/or negative throughout and ultimately brings the quality of your limited preparation down.

It is an important role to get right as often the development/emergency player will increase intensity at trainings and create doubt in your mind closer to the competition that they should have actually been originally selected in your end team. This is a positive outcome though and as a Head Coach a credit to you to providing an opportunity to better a player and better our game for the longer term beyond this campaign, by their involvement.

### Development players – Helpful Hints

I would always select three (3) emergency players to combat any unforeseen injury or illness. My three (3) players would cover the three (3) key positional areas of:

- x1 Point Guard
- x1 Small Forward
- x1 Centre

Select emergency players who are suitable and capable players and will compliment and add value to your teams' preparation.

## Selection Team Matrix

**Team:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Selection Trial:** \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Player Number	Player Name	Playing Position	Right / Left Handed	Attitude	Physical Capabilities	Positional Skill	Potential	Application	Team Orientation	Overall Rating	Comments
10	Andrew G	SG	RF	5	5	5	5	5	5	30	<i>Good Shooter, Slow laterally, but a Future Boomer!</i>

**Additional Notes/Observations:**

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## Selection Trial Practice Schedule

Date: / /

Time:

Practice Number:

	Duration
<b>Warm up</b> 3 minutes – Ball handling 4 minutes – Three Man Weaves (Passing /Lay-up drill) 3 minutes – Personal stretching	10 min
<b>Full court running drills</b> 2 on 1 Continuous	10 min
<b>Half court offence</b> 2 minutes – 3 on 0 pass and cut into lay-up 2 minutes – 3 on 0 pass and screen away into jump shot 2 minutes – 3 on 0 pass and on ball screen 4 minutes – 3 on 3 half court games .	10 min
<b>Full court defence</b> 2 minutes – 1 on 1 4 minutes – 3 on 3 4 minutes – 4 on 4	10 min
<b>Half court defence</b> 4 on 4 Shell Drill.	10 min
<b>Scrimmage</b> 5 minutes – 5 on 5 half court games 5 minutes – 5 on 5 full court games	10 min
<b>Cool down</b>	5 min
<b>Squad gathering to advise of selections</b>	