



BASKETBALL

COACH

PLAYBOOK

UPWARD
SPORTS

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO PROVIDING THE **BEST LEAGUE EXPERIENCE!**

DEVELOP SKILLS | STRENGTHEN CHARACTER | HAVE FUN



BASKETBALL COACH PLAYBOOK

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SECTION 1

COACHING ESSENTIALS

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→ Goals For The Season

The goal of our sports ministry is:

Success looks like:

Success in our sports ministry is measured by:

→ What You Do Matters

Thank you for coaching this season! You are about to influence the lives of families for the next several weeks but don't worry. This league and Upward Sports provide the tools you will need for the journey, even if you are new to a sport.



Matthew 5:13-16 – You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.



→ Your Role in Sports Ministry

As a coach, you play a vital role in the sports ministry to players and families. You are on the front lines of what takes place this season.

Sports ministry requires that the sport and ministry are both done with excellence as you give your best effort in teaching the sport and caring for people through ministry opportunities. Your league is not “just an Upward league” or “just a church league.” Sports ministry is your chance to provide the best youth sports experience in your community and demonstrate the gospel to the families you serve.

Hebrews 12:1-2 reads, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and perfecter of our faith.

How do you plan to grow spiritually and as a coach this season?

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→ An Upward Sports Coach

Whether you are a first-time coach, veteran coach, or somewhere in between on the coaching journey, there are five crucial things to do as an Upward Sports coach.

Five Keys To Coaching:

- 1. *Be organized to teach the sport*** – Take time to teach the fundamentals of the sport and the rules through organized and detailed practices. Refer to the practice plans for drills and look to enhance each player’s skill development.
- 2. *Lead the practice devotion*** – Coaches lead a devotion, discussion, and prayer during practices using the devotion materials. If you need help, let the league director or coach commissioner know, as they are ready to provide support.
- 3. *Communicate with parents*** – Parents on the team want you to communicate with them. Send a weekly email, text, or both to let parents know how the team is doing and remind them of upcoming events.
- 4. *Instill sportsmanship, a competitive spirit, and a growth mindset*** – Help your players learn how these work together.
 - ◆ Great sportsmanship involves valuing others and showing appreciation for opponents, teammates, and officials regardless of the scoreboard.
 - ◆ A competitive spirit is about doing your best in all situations during practice and games.

- ◆ A growth mindset focuses on growing and improving at each opportunity so that small improvements lead to more significant change as they compound over time. There is always growth potential.

5. Follow the Circle of Affirmation - Support game day officials by being their biggest fans and following the Circle of Affirmation on game days. Following the Circle of Affirmation will provide families with a positive experience and show we value people as God's creation.

As a coach, invest time in giving your best while considering Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:7. Realize that God created the participants you are coaching and those around you. As image-bearers of God, we should treat everyone with the love that God treats them, as you promote the discovery of Jesus.



GENESIS 1:27

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

GENESIS 2:7

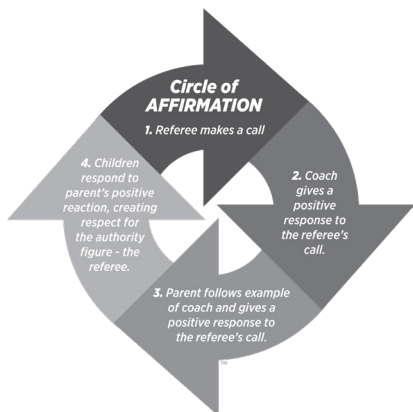
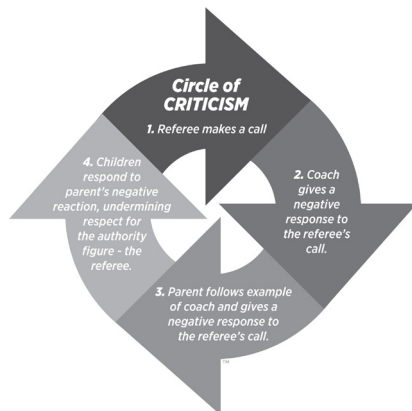
“Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.”

→ Circle of Affirmation

Game Day Attitude

Choosing the right game-day attitude is a key to being an effective Upward Soccer Coach. Actions and reactions on the field can either open or close the door to ministry. The Circle of Criticism and the Circle of Affirmation are simple diagrams that illustrate the results of a coach giving a referee either negative or positive feedback.

In Upward Soccer, coaches and referees work together as a unified team. Coaches have the opportunity and the responsibility to stop the Circle of Criticism by starting the Circle of Affirmation.



The Circle of Affirmation goes beyond the referee. A coach's affirmation of players inspires encouragement and praise from parents, family members and other players. Practicing the Circle of Affirmation makes the game a better experience for everyone.

→ Three Layers of Coaching

The three coaching layers are essential to understand the dynamics of coaching a team. They include a player, the team, and the coach.

THE PLAYER A coach will need to observe each player's skill level and teach accordingly. You may have a wide range of skill levels, with players who have experience and skill and some who have never played the sport. Work one-on-one with players and give them direction on individual skills to try at home. Celebrate success as they develop and be patient with their mistakes.

THE TEAM As you coach each individual, you must also bring the team together. In a team sport, players must learn how to work well with each other. The team concept changes as players become more mature, advance in age, and can focus on others and not just themselves. Small-sided scrimmages and in-game scenarios at practices can aid in developing the team concept. Helping them communicate with each other by using participants' names and showing them how to encourage each other will help them come together as a team.

THE COACH You must prepare for practice and games to coach a team. Coaches should be willing to invest the time it takes to be ready to lead. Spend time reviewing practice plans and thinking about backup plans so that you can move forward if something isn't working. Take time to check the Scouting Report section of the practice devotion and spend time praying for your team.

→ Interacting with Players, Parents, Coaches, and Referees

As you are in a coaching role, people watch how you respond at practices and games and how you lead the team. Your interactions influence the atmosphere of the league, if a family will return next season, and the league's and your ability to conduct ministry.

Interacting with players

Interacting with players is pivotal for a coach. This coaching opportunity may place you as someone's first-time coach. In sports ministry, you have the chance to impact someone for eternity.

Here are ten tips on interacting with your players.

- ◆ Greet each player by name as they arrive.
- ◆ Always be mindful of speaking on a level that the player can understand.
- ◆ Tell participants the details of what you are teaching, show them what you are teaching, have them do it, and then apply it in a game scenario.
- ◆ Focus on one skill at a time as you teach so that players can learn each one thoroughly.
- ◆ Recognize differences in skill levels so that you can help each player improve.
- ◆ Be familiar with the devotion and allow time for discussion.

- ◆ Hold a ten to fifteen-minute meeting with parents at the end of the first practice to set expectations and answer questions.
- ◆ Allow players to be creative during the game. Teach at practice and observe and encourage during the game. You don't need to control all of the player actions.
- ◆ Understand that there is a lot of information a player is processing during a game. When a player is not in the game, one simple question to gain understanding is, "What did you see?" This question requires listening and patience to discover what they saw from their perspective.
- ◆ When distributing stars on game days, give specific reasons each athlete earned a particular game-day star. Don't underestimate the value of recognizing players!

What about distracted and disruptive players?

A challenge for coaches is what to do with distracted or disruptive participants. Here are four things to understand in these situations that will help.

- 1.** Understand that players have short attention spans. Be patient.
- 2.** Players come into practice and, like coaches, are influenced by things that have already occurred during the day. Greet them by name to welcome them into a new environment, so they know you see them.

3. Maintain engagement by cutting down on lines and lectures. To do this, ask parents to help run a drill, so there are multiple stations.
4. Praise desired behavior right away, use the player's name, and let them know how it helps the team. Other players will recognize this and follow.

If undesirable behavior continues, address it with the player and parent so that the player doesn't disrupt a learning environment. Let the parent know that you need their help, as they may be able to offer insight into working with their player.

Interacting with parents

Start the season by getting to know your players' parents and families. Include parents in your first post-practice huddle. Here are a few tips for interacting with parents.

- ◆ Introduce yourself to parents, share expectations, and explain why you are coaching.
- ◆ Share your contact information.
- ◆ Each week take time to have a conversation with one family.
- ◆ Encourage parents to have fun working on skills at home with their players.
- ◆ Be ready to step into any spiritual conversation with parents and talk about what you teach during devotion time.

- ◆ Demonstrate care and concern for players, so parents know you are looking out for their players.
- ◆ Be organized and prepared for practice. Parents want to know you value their time by coaches being prepared and organized.
- ◆ Communicate one time per week through email, text, or both. Keep it short and simple.

After you receive your roster, contact the parents right away. Families are eager to hear from you, and it cuts down on the number of calls and emails a league director has to spend time answering.

Interacting with other Coaches and Referees

An Upward Sports league can set the standard in your community by how coaches and referees interact on game days. Parents, players, and families notice how both team's coaches and referees work together to provide a fantastic player experience. Remember, youth sports are about the youth.

Here are some tips on how to interact with coaches and referees.

- ◆ Introduce yourself to the other coaches and referees on game day, and remember their names.
- ◆ Realize that you would not have a game day without the other team and referees. It's essential to work together.

- ◆ Review Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:7 and understand that we are all God's creation, which should be reflected in how we interact.
- ◆ Be the referee's biggest fan. If you want to have referees for your league, critical behavior does not help.
- ◆ Coaches work together for the experience of all participants.
- ◆ Love one another, John 13:34.
- ◆ Thank the coaches and referees after the game.
- ◆ Review the Circle of Affirmation and follow it.

What sets this league apart from others is that when differences of opinion or mistakes are made during a game, we are all part of one team, providing a great player experience that honors God.

→ Create a Positive Culture

A positive culture is one of safety, learning, and fun. A team's attitude and mindset often mirror that of its coach. Use the beginning of the season to set a tone of positivity through the weeks ahead.

- ◆ Set expectations of behavior and communicate them with players and parents.
- ◆ Start and end each practice on time.

- ◆ Encourage players to support each other by cheering for teammates.
- ◆ View mistakes as teaching opportunities, not a chance to be critical at the moment.

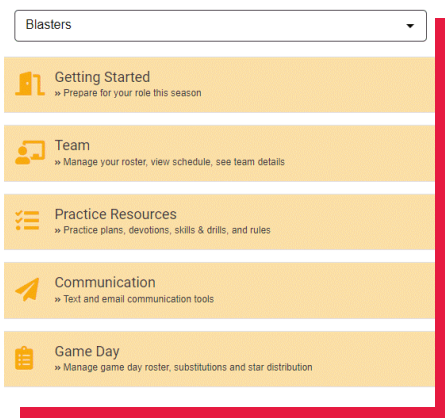
One practical way to create a positive team culture and teach communication is to establish a team huddle at the end of practice. Have players circle up and include the coach. The coach can talk about things done well in practice.

Next, have players look to the person on their right, use their name, and offer something they saw their teammate do well in practice. Continue around the circle until everyone has had a chance to speak. The topic could be different at each practice, such as something the player would like to improve on their own, something they appreciate about the other player or something they would like to see the team accomplish in the next game.

→ Coach Resources and Tools

Many resources are available to help you provide a great experience for your team, plan and efficiently use your time this season.

MyUpward.org – This is the primary tool for you as a coach. The league director will send you an invitation to access resources on MyUpward.org. After you accept the invitation and create a username and password, you can also create an icon on your home screen when accessing from a mobile device.



- ◆ **Getting Started** includes how-to videos and other resources to help you this season.
- ◆ **Team** area helps you manage your roster and see participant information and the schedule for practices and game days.
- ◆ **Practice Resources** provide a step-by-step outline for each practice, devotions, skills and drills, and sports rules.

- ◆ **Communication** is where you will find email and text capabilities, as well as attaching a link to the team page.
- ◆ **Game Day** helps you to manage the substitutions with the Upward Sports game day rotation and the ability to track game day stars.

Devotions - Weekly devotion content for your practices is located on MyUpward.org under the “Practice Resources” and can also be found in the Coach Playbook.

Game Day Stars - Use these stars on game day to highlight each player’s contributions during the game. The Star Distribution Form can be found in the Appendix of the Coach Playbook.

Gospel Video - Sent out from the league director to families to share a video version of the gospel message with them during the season.

Green Practice Stars - Use these stars at practice to encourage participation in the practice devotion, scripture learning, or the goals your league has outlined for the devotion content.

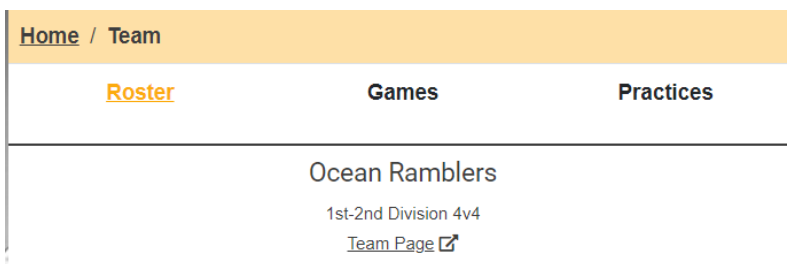
Practice Cards - The practice cards show the bible verse associated with the weekly devotion. Depending on the devotion track, you will hand out cards every week or only at designated weeks noted in the devotion.

Practice Plans – Use the practice plans found on MyUpward.org under the “Practice Resources.” These can be printed out before practice or used directly from your mobile device.

Season Celebration – Celebrate the season with your team. Your league may have individual team parties or a league-wide celebration.

Team Page – Share the team page with your team to give them access to the practice and game schedule. The team page also includes your contact information and a team roster. The team page link is available to send from the communication area of the mobile view of myupward.org.

Team Pages can be accessed on MyUpward.org through the “Team” tab. A link to the Team Page will be under the team name and division.



Upward.org/coach – Helps you learn more about sharing the gospel using the 3 Circles.

→ Play with Purpose

A coach can help develop not only a player but a person. That person has a long-term impact on the community, their family, and eternity. You coach, and they play with purpose. This relationship develops someone through a player development model that is remembered by the acronym M.A.S.S.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL = M.A.S.S.

As an Upward Sports Coach, you play a major role in encouraging your players mentally, athletically, spiritually and socially as they participate on your team.

This approach is based on Luke 2:52: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”



MENTALLY

Mental development for young athletes is a byproduct of the weekly practices and games where players participate. Players grow in confidence, courage, decision-making, and cognitive self-regulation.

Confidence and Courage - As players learn and improve their skills and confidence will increase. Players then gain the courage to attempt new skills and recognize that mistakes are a part of the game that they can overcome.

Decision-Making - The intricacies and complexities of sports, help train young athletes on making correct decisions quickly. When to pass a ball, when to attempt a move or make a defensive play are all part of building decision-making. Through observation and repetition, players improve their muscle memory and learn when and how to make individual and team decisions.

Cognitive self-regulation - Through intense games and drills, players learn to self-regulate emotions and gain focus. Through sports, they will enter various experiences (practices, scrimmages, games, etc.) where they will learn to narrow their focus from a broad range to a specific individual focus and team responsibilities in the pursuit of attaining particular goals.



ATHLETICALLY

Athletic development compounds through small improvements over time. Players learn and grow in their sport to achieve long term growth

Exercise: In a recent State of Play report, the Aspen Sports Institute reported only 24% of youth ages 6 to 17 engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, down from 30% a decade earlier. With many kids spending over 6 hours in front of screens each day (TVs, computers, phones/tablets), the desire to get out and be active is waning.

How can you tell if a child is getting proper exercise? Sweat. Sweat requires constant activity with little “downtime.” Practices should have drills that allow for continuous movement using various muscle groups. Avoid players standing in lines when possible. Keep practice fast-paced and fun, allowing for water breaks and short periods of rest.

Physical Development: Physical development has enormous benefits for children, including stronger bones and muscles, improved heart and brain health, and lowered risk of diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Participants may learn fundamental movements that allow them to run, jump, throw, catch, balance, and change direction. Basic moves will help participants enjoy a variety of sports and begin a path to physical literacy.

Fun: The key to getting kids interested in physical activity is by making it fun. Sports do just that, provided the coaches in charge are focused on the development of the athlete. Practices should teach the game using fun and safe methods.



SPIRITUALLY

Spiritual growth is an essential part of sports ministry. You play a vital role in the spiritual development of players on your team and help them discover a sense of self and a sense of purpose. This development happens in various ways.

Practice devotions - By guiding discussion around the practice devotions each week, you plant seeds of discovery within the minds and hearts of young athletes. Remember to guide every practice devotion conversation back to the Gospel and what Jesus has done for us.

Your relationship with players - You are a safe, trusted adult in the lives of young athletes. You hold a remarkable amount of influence. Listen intently, guide carefully, and be someone who continually points young athletes to Christ in your interactions.

Your relationship with parents - The top spiritual influence in a child's life is their parents. What they learn from their home life will speak more into their spiritual development than anything else. Your relationship with a child's parents must be strong. Share with them what their child is learning each week in practice. Discuss the devotions. Talk about how their child is developing in their skills. When parents know you care and are investing in their child's well-being, they'll trust you and your spiritual influence on their child.

Your example - Be ready to step into opportunities God provides during practices, games, and your communications to demonstrate and share the gospel message



SOCIALLY

Participants develop socially by learning how to work as a team, communicate, and serve others through a sport.

Teamwork: Through team sports, children learn how to interact with peers and adults in positive ways. These include numerous opportunities for “selfless” behavior, focusing all mental and physical efforts towards the goals of the team. Participants learn how to navigate relationships, encourage others, and recover from mistakes.

Communication: Players learn how to communicate in complex social situations with teammates and competitors. This learning carries over to other areas of life, helping them communicate in school, at home, and in other environments.

Serving: Serving others becomes a critical component for social development in team sports. Children learn to share the ball, encourage teammates, and give their best effort to help the team and not just themselves.



SECTION 2

PRACTICE

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→ Invest in the team by preparing for practice

Your investment shows in the results each week. There are entire practice plans for each week of the season found on MyUpward.org. These plans have been designed for each age group and include age-appropriate skill development and devotion material that progress through the season.

As the season continues, you may need to modify the plans based on what takes place in practices and the game. Be sure to always focus on the fundamentals of the sport. As you become more experienced, you may begin to include other resources for practice. Be sure to use the weekly devotion material as you design a practice.

Coaches are named as the top reason parents and players return or not each season. Parents want to see organized and detailed practices.

→ Practice Breakdown

Opening practice huddle (3-5 minutes) – Start on time the signal to the team parents that you are ready to begin. Point out a couple of things that you will cover in practice. Once games occur, use the first few minutes of practice to talk about the previous game and something you will work on from the game and highlights from the game.

Warm-up activity (3-5 minutes) – Provide players with the opportunity to warm up their bodies slowly.

Practice skills through drills (20 minutes) – Focus on specific skills that matter to the sport. Use drills and game scenarios that reinforce skill development.

Practice devotion (5-7 minutes) – Share the practice devotion for each week. Be mindful of the opportunities to demonstrate the gospel throughout practice, so players see you living it out.

Scrimmage or skill challenges that teach (20 minutes) – Use a controlled scrimmage or skills challenges to test their skills.

End of practice huddle (3-5 minutes) – Review the skills learned at practice and praise efforts. Hand out practice cards and stars and do things to create a positive team culture.

Post-practice time – After practice, take time to get to connect with one family each week.

Here is a chart that outlines the weekly practice plans you can find on MyUpward.org.

Practice	Practice Focus	Team Meeting	Rules to Cover	Skills & Drills
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Get to know each other › Evaluate skills › Set practice rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Teammate introductions › Discuss practice ground rules › Introduce basic footwork, dribbling, and shooting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Practice rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Footwork › Dribbling › Shooting
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Continue skill evaluation › Teach passing fundamentals › Teach positions and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Re-introduce players and coaches › Discuss some common violations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Traveling › Double Dribbling › Palming or Carrying the ball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Footwork › Ball Handling › Dribbling › Shooting
3 week of first game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Review re-start situations › Teach shooting fundamentals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Review traveling, double dribble, and palming the ball › Game situations and court spacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Three second violation › Common fouls › Help defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Passing and Receiving › Defense › Rebounding
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Teach 3-second violation › Discuss positions on the court › Skill developments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Review defensive rules › Game situations and court spacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Three second violation › Common fouls › Help defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Rebounding › Defense › Scrimmage or more drills
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Teach offensive movement › Continue to teach court spacing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Discuss practice focus › Review the last game › Review basic rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Review all rules as a fun quiz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Offensive plays › Areas the need improvement from the game
6-11 through last practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Continue skill development › Analyze game performances, coach through improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Review the last game and improvements that need to be made › Discuss practice focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Continue to review rules for clear understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Work on both offense and defense › Areas that need improvement

→ Warm-Ups & Stretching

Use the first five minutes of practice to get the players moving. This can be done by incorporating athletic development exercises like the examples below. Warm-up first and then follow with stretching.

Here are warm-up activities that you can use. Add music, move to the beat and create a warm-up activity you will use at the start of each practice.

- ◆ **Arm Circles:** Hold arms out standing in a T and circle them
- ◆ **Back pedal:** Run backwards while stepping back as far as possible.
- ◆ **Donkey Kicks:** In a standing position or moving forward, kick heels toward up toward your back side.
- ◆ **Feet on fire:** Running in place.
- ◆ **High Knees:** With hands in front and waist high, lift knees up and alternate between knees. Vary speed as desired.
- ◆ **Hops:** This can be done in one sport of moving forward. It can be done on one foot or both feet.
- ◆ **Jumping Jacks**
- ◆ **Log Step:** With both feet on one side of an imaginary log high step sideways with one foot and then the other to cross over the “log.” Vary speed.
- ◆ **Lunges:** From a standing position large step forward while keeping the back foot in place without the knee touching the ground.
- ◆ **Push-ups:** May use a modified version for very young players.
- ◆ **Running:** One minute around the room. If you have limited space, run in place and change the pace.
- ◆ **Shoulder circles:** With arms by your side, lift your shoulders and take them back down, creating a circular motion.

- ◆ **Side lunge:** Feet wider than shoulder width apart, keep one leg straight while the other bends into a squat position. Keep your back flat, chest up and rear out behind you.
- ◆ **Trunk twists:** From a standing position, twist back and forth slowly.

Here are stretch activities you may use after warm-ups.

- ◆ **Neck Stretch:** Sit or stand with arms by your side. Tilt head to the right and hold for eight seconds, then tilt head to the left and hold for eight seconds.
- ◆ **Triceps Stretch:** Bring one arm up beside your head, bending it at the elbow while reaching across with the other arm and hold. Repeat, using the other arm.
- ◆ **Biceps Stretch:** Reach one arm out straight in front of you with palm facing up. With the other hand gently push down until you feel a slight stretch in your bicep.
- ◆ **Shoulder Stretch:** Reach one arm across your chest, holding it at the elbow with the opposite hand.
- ◆ **Hug:** Reach as far as you can and wrap your arms around your chest giving yourself a hug.
- ◆ **X Stretch:** With feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart, stretch your arms and hands up and out, forming an X with your body. Reach high and stand on your tip-toes.
- ◆ **Quadriceps Stretch:** Support yourself against a wall or stationary object. Pull one heel up behind your body and hold. Repeat with opposite side.
- ◆ **Hamstring Stretch:** Sit on the floor with right leg straight out in front. Bend left leg and cross it over the right one. Pull the knee across your body toward opposite shoulder. Change legs and repeat.
- ◆ **Pike Stretch:** Sitting with feet straight in front of you and together, put both hands straight up and above your head and then slowly bend forward to reach your toes.
- ◆ **Calf-Muscle Stretch:** Lean toward and support yourself against a wall while keeping your leg straight. Press your heel to the floor. Reverse and stretch other calf-muscle.











Skills & Drills

This section reviews the fundamental skills of basketball, explains why each is important and emphasizes the skill's basic teaching points. Each skill is followed by a basic drill that reinforces the skill. ***For more drills for each skill, as well as complete practice plans, go to MyUpward.org.***

Many of the drills described in this playbook require one ball per player. If you are limited in the number of balls you have for practice, you will need to modify the drill by creating lines based on the number of balls you have available.

KEY TO DIAGRAMS

Use this key for the drills located on the following pages.

-  = player
-  = player movement without the ball
-  = dribble
-  = pass
-  = shoot
-  = rebound
-  = screen
-  = coach
-  = sequence
-  = cone

→ Footwork Drills

Proper footwork promotes balance, quickness, and readiness to make something happen on the court. Being proficient at this skill will improve a player’s performance both offensively and defensively. Here are the three basic footwork skills:

Triple Threat Position

- ◆ Provides a player the option to pass, shoot, or dribble
- ◆ Position the basketball in the “shooting pocket” with shooting elbow over the knee
- ◆ Have “strong hands” with possession of the basketball so that defenders cannot easily knock the ball away

Jump Stop

- ◆ Allows a player to establish a pivot with either foot off a dribble or pass
- ◆ Leap/jump should be low to the floor (like sitting in a chair), not a high jump
- ◆ Both feet hit the floor at the same time – good balance
- ◆ Land on the floor in triple threat position
- ◆ Use when catching a pass; teach “ball in air/feet in air” concept

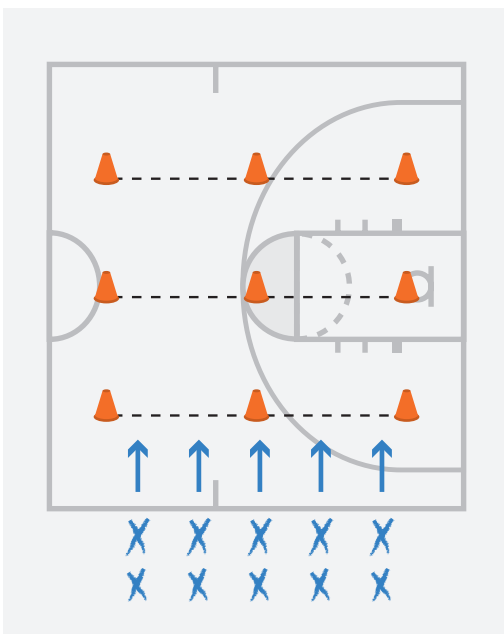
Front Pivot and Reverse Pivot

- ◆ Lift the heel, protect the ball, stay low, and lead with the elbow
- ◆ Allows a player to pivot in one or more directions by keeping one foot planted on the ground
- ◆ Allows an offensive player to move away from defenders while protecting the basketball
- ◆ Remind players to keep their eyes up to be able to see the court and their teammates
- ◆ This skill is also important for setting screens and rebounding

→ Footwork Drills

Footwork Line Drills (no basketball required)

- ◆ Players form lines on the baseline or sideline – two players deep
- ◆ Use cones or mark the court for starting/stopping spots – minimum 3 spots
- ◆ No basketball necessary – players dribble and hold an imaginary basketball
- ◆ Players will start/stop on voice command or whistle
- ◆ Players should stop at each spot with jump stop and land in triple threat position
- ◆ Pause between stops/starts to check for proper balance
- ◆ The second player in line starts as the preceding player leaves the first spot



Rotate the Following Footwork Line Drills:

- ◆ Jump Stop/Triple Threat
- ◆ Jump Stop/Triple Threat/Right Front Pivot
- ◆ Jump Stop/Triple Threat/Left Front Pivot
- ◆ Jump Stop/Triple Threat/Right Reverse Pivot
- ◆ Jump Stop/Triple Threat/Left Reverse Pivot

Have each player raise his or her hand in the air that coincides with the desired pivot direction. This will help each player pivot in the correct direction.

Variation: Add basketballs after your players understand the above concepts. Allow them to practice the above skills after picking up their dribble and receiving passes.

Pivot Drill (no basketball required)

- ◆ Players should spread out in your practice area - no basketball necessary
- ◆ Players start in triple threat position, protecting an imaginary basketball
- ◆ Instruct players to establish a pivot foot
- ◆ Practice half-turns and front/reverse pivots
- ◆ Repeat with opposite foot established as the pivot

Variation: Add basketballs and defenders after your players understand the above concepts. Allow them to practice the above skills after picking up their dribble and receiving passes.

→ Ball Handling & Dribbling Drills

An adept ball handler and dribbler can make things happen on the court. Mastering these skills can help create open shots, obtain better passing angles, and lead to fewer turnovers. A great offensive player must be able to handle the ball!

- ◆ Dribble with fingers, not palms - similar to typing on a keyboard
- ◆ Proper body position, with knees bent and body flexed at the waist
- ◆ Keep head up - see the court
- ◆ Protect the basketball - use your non-dribbling arm as an “arm bar,” meaning sticking it outward with the elbow slightly bent to protect the dribble from defenders reaching in
- ◆ Work both hands - be able to go right and left
- ◆ When picking up a dribble, end in the triple threat position

→ Basic Dribbling Skills

Control Dribble

(Use against defensive pressure)

- ◆ With the body turned to the side, dribble basketball near the back knee
- ◆ Keep the dribble low and compact, below the knees
- ◆ The non-dribbling arm should be held out in front of the body to protect the ball from defenders – arm bar

Speed Dribble

(Use to push the ball up the court and on fast break situations)

- ◆ Dribble is pushed out in front of the body but controlled
- ◆ Dribble is higher and softer

Retreat Dribble

(Use to avoid defensive pressure and to keep dribble alive)

- ◆ Dribble backward (hop back) to avoid pressure
- ◆ Dribble requires a change in speed and change in direction
- ◆ Dribble teaches players not to habitually pick up their dribble when heavy, defensive pressure is applied

Crossover Dribble

(Use to break down a defender; good penetration move)

- ◆ Dribble must be kept low when crossing over from one hand to another, keeping it away from the defender
- ◆ Use head and shoulder fakes to help “sell” the move
- ◆ Goal is to get the defender on his or her heels
- ◆ Explode to the basket with speed dribble after the crossover

Whirl Pivot Dribble

(Use to avoid defensive pressure and to dribble by defender)

- ◆ Pull the basketball through low during the pivot
- ◆ Keep the basketball in the same hand until completing the pivot
- ◆ Pivot should be low and quick with head up
- ◆ Explode to the basket with speed dribble after the whirl pivot

Behind the Back Dribble

(Use to break down a defender; good penetration move)

- ◆ Use head and shoulder fakes to help “sell” the move
- ◆ Swing the basketball behind your waist, turning the hips and driving the ball down with a snap of the wrist
- ◆ Slap opposite back thigh during the exchange

→ Ball Handling Drills (Team Drills)

(one basketball per player or divide your team into two groups)

Ball Slams - With feet shoulder-width apart, have players slap the basketball with fingers spread wide. Players should “slam” the ball by alternating their right and left hands.

Fingertip Drill - With feet shoulder-width apart, players pass the basketball from hand-to-hand in front of the body using only the fingertips. Move ball from ankles, to knees, to waist, to chest, to head, and to above head using the fingertips. Encourage players to keep their arms straight.

Side to Side Dribble Drill - With feet shoulder-width apart, have players dribble with one hand while moving the ball from side to side in front of them.

Front to Back Dribble Drill - With feet shoulder-width apart, have players dribble with one hand while moving the ball at their side from front to back.

→ Ball Handling Drills (Team Drills)

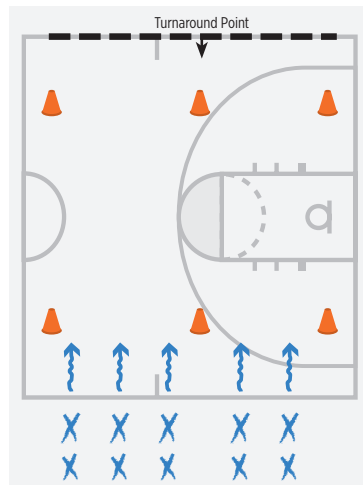
Dribbling Line Drills (three to five basketballs required)

During all dribbling line drills, you should stand in front of the players to teach, encourage, and evaluate each player's performance.

1. Players form lines on baseline or sideline (two players deep) – one basketball per line
2. Use cones or chairs to represent stopping/starting points or change-of-dribble spots
3. Players will begin the drills in triple threat position
4. Players will start/stop/change dribble on voice command or whistle
5. Pause between stops/starts to check for balance, arm bar, and if head is up
6. At the turnaround point, require jump stops with pivots
7. Work opposite hand on return dribble
8. Players should end drills with a jump stop, giving the basketball to the next player in line

Rotate the following dribbling line drills:

- ◆ Speed Dribble
- ◆ Speed Dribble/Control Dribble – on command, stationary control dribble
- ◆ Speed Dribble/Retreat Dribble – on command, two to three dribbles backward against imaginary defender followed by speed dribble



→ Passing and Receiving

Passing and receiving a basketball allows a team to effectively and quickly move the ball around the court. A team that has players with strong passing and receiving skills will spread the defense and be hard to guard.

Passing Teaching Points

- ◆ Two hands on the basketball, with fingers on the sides of the ball
- ◆ Ball in middle of body
- ◆ Step toward target
- ◆ Push thumbs through ball and snap wrists, creating backspin on the basketball
- ◆ Extend arms completely as you follow through toward target

Receiving Teaching Points:

- ◆ Both hands up in ready position – show a target
- ◆ Step toward the ball when passed – meet the pass
- ◆ “Ball in air/feet in air” concept – leads to jump stop, triple threat position, and ability to pivot with either foot
- ◆ Look the ball into the hands

→ Basic Passing Skills

Two-Hand Chest Pass

- ◆ Basketball is held with two hands at chest level
- ◆ Keep elbows out and wide
- ◆ Passer targets the receiver's chest area
- ◆ Passer steps toward their target with either foot as the ball is thrown

- ◆ Snap the thumbs down extending the arms

receiver

- ◆ Passer targets the receiver's chest area from the bounce

Two-Hand Bounce Pass

- ◆ Basketball is held with two hands at chest level
- ◆ Passer aims for a spot on the floor about two-thirds (a little more than halfway) of the way to the

Overhead Pass

- ◆ Basketball is held with two hands above head
- ◆ Passer targets the receiver's chest area

→ Passing and Receiving Drills

Distance Passing (one basketball for each pair of players)

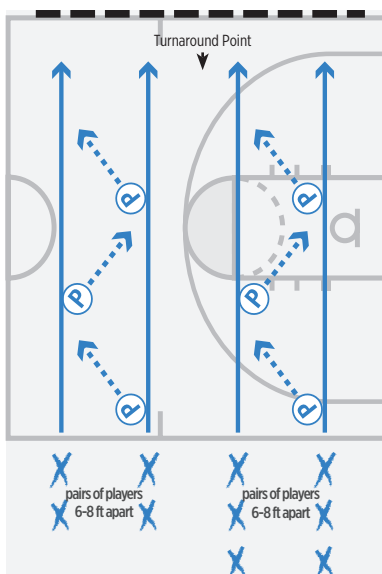
Be sure to incorporate all three basic passes into this drill.

- ◆ Pair up players and have them face each other, six to eight feet apart
- ◆ Instruct players to pass the basketball back and forth using a chest pass
- ◆ After several repetitions, have each player take one to two steps backwards and continue passing
- ◆ Continue moving players back until they are passing from a challenging distance

Two-Line Passing (two basketballs required)

Two pairs of players can perform this drill at one time.

- ◆ Pair up players and have them face each other six to eight feet apart
- ◆ Establish a starting and turnaround point
- ◆ One player in each pair needs a basketball
- ◆ Using defensive slides, players move up and then back down the court
- ◆ While sliding, instruct players to pass the basketball back and forth using a chest pass
- ◆ Players pass the ball immediately upon receiving the ball



Variations: Both players running up and down the court, rather than sliding. You may also require the receiver to perform a jump stop upon catching the basketball and immediately passing it to his or her moving partner.

→ Shooting

Shooting Teaching Points

- ◆ Square up shoulders to the basket
- ◆ Ball on fingertips, not palms
- ◆ Opposite hand should be lightly placed on side of ball (balance/weak hand)

Practice BEEF Principles

- ◆ **B**alance - Learn to prepare for the shot by stopping with the feet set, knees slightly bent, ready to jump (good triple threat position)
- ◆ **E**lbow - Proper shooting alignment; ball should be directly over the elbow with the wrist cocked
- ◆ **E**yes - Pick a spot (front of the rim, back of the rim, etc.) and focus on that target as the shot is being attempted
- ◆ **F**ollow through - Release the ball smoothly, completely extend the arm, and snap the wrist, which should create good backspin on the basketball

→ Shooting Drills

Lay-Up Steps (no basketball required)

Instruct your players to shout “STEP-HOP-SHOOT” when performing this drill. Mirror this drill to practice left-handed lay-ups.

1. Allow players to spread out in your practice area, at least four to five feet apart
2. Players start in the triple threat position, holding imaginary basketballs with heads up and eyes on the target
3. On the STEP command, players step with their left foot (right-handed lay-ups)
4. On the HOP command, players raise their right knee and right arm toward the basket (visualize a string connecting a player’s right arm and right leg)
5. On the SHOOT command, players extend their right arm as they shoot an imaginary ball

Wall Shooting

(one basketball per player or divide your team into two groups)

This is a great drill to keep idle players busy while running a drill on the court that may not involve your entire team.

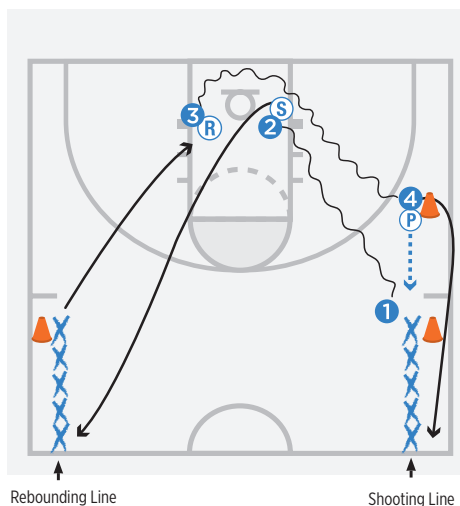
1. Player stands about four to five feet away from the wall
2. Help the player find a reasonable shooting target on the wall
3. Player assumes the triple threat position
4. Player shoots the ball at the target, concentrating on keeping the elbow in and full extension
5. Player should finish the shot up on his or her toes with proper follow through, creating good backspin

Variations: If coaching third through sixth-grade players, allow them to shoot using only their shooting/strong hand.

Two Line Shooting Drills (one or two basketballs required)

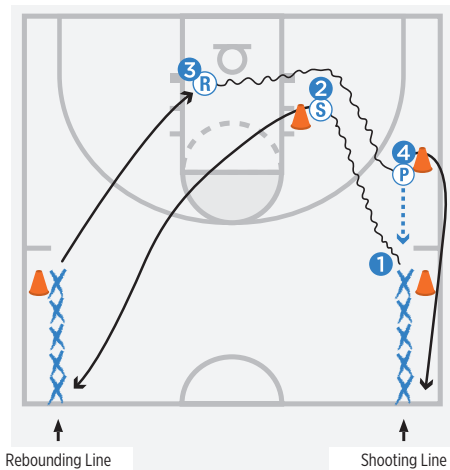
Players rotate lines after each turn. After several repetitions shooting from one side of the goal, change the designation of both lines and shoot from the other side of the court.

1. Players form two lines opposite the goal in each corner of practice area: a shooting line and a rebounding line (use cones or chairs to mark a starting point)
2. Shooting line: Assume the triple threat position, showing ready hands to receive a pass.
3. Rebounding line: Players should block out an imaginary defender and rebound the ball above their head.
4. The player from the rebounding line secures the rebound and dribbles to a designated cone, makes a good jump stop landing in the triple threat position, and uses proper passing techniques when passing to the next shooter in line.
5. Shooter receives the basketball and performs the drill as instructed by a coach.



Rotate the following two line shooting drills:

- ◆ Lay-ups - Stress jumping off the proper foot and using the backboard (STEP-HOP-SHOOT)
- ◆ Pull-up Off the Dribble - Set a cone at desired shooting spot (stress good jump stop and use of backboard when shooting from appropriate angle)



→ Rebounding

When discussing offensive rebounding, remind players that each shot taken by a teammate is a pass to them! Second chance points (put-backs) can be a big contributor to a team's offensive production.

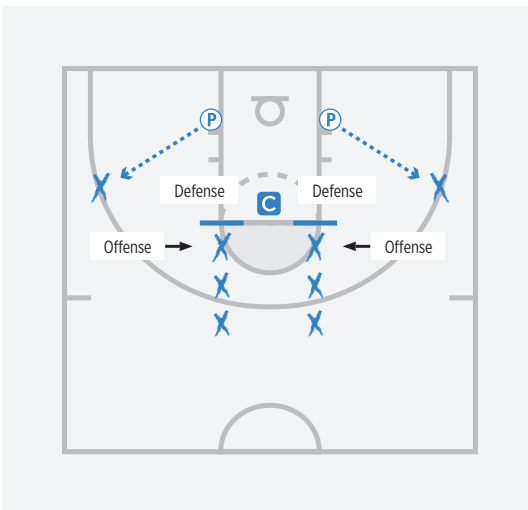
Rebounding Teaching Points:

- ◆ Defensive player stays between the opponent and the basket
- ◆ Using a front or reverse pivot, the defensive player pivots and makes contact with the opponent's body when the ball is shot ("block out")
- ◆ Defensive players should yell "shot" to signal a rebounding opportunity
- ◆ Hold the "block out" position momentarily, with the head up and body facing the goal
- ◆ Release the "block out" - be hungry for the basketball
- ◆ Secure the basketball
- ◆ Be strong with the basketball, keeping the ball at chin level with elbows out

→ Rebounding Drills

Rebound Outlet Drill - no defender (one basketball required)

- ◆ Facing the basket, players form two lines: one at the corner of the free-throw line (elbow), the other at the foul line extended (wing)
- ◆ Coach stands at the other elbow with a basketball. Coach throws the ball off the backboard
- ◆ The first player in line at elbow catches the rebound with strong hands, elbows out, and ball to the chin. The player then pivots toward the first player in the wing line and throws a two-handed chest pass
- ◆ Player from the wing line passes ball back to the coach
- ◆ Both players swap lines and drill is repeated with second players in each line



Rebound Outlet Drill – with defender (one basketball required)

1. Facing the basket, players form two lines: one at each corner of the free-throw line
2. Place one player at each wing area to serve as an outlet receiver
3. The player in the front of each line will turn his back toward the basket (defensive player), facing the next player in line (offensive player)
4. When the coach shoots the basketball, the defensive players will yell “shot” and pivot into the offensive players to obtain a good “block out”
5. Offensive players cannot move
6. Once a defender secures the basketball, pivot and throw a crisp overhead outlet pass to an outlet receiver
7. Players rotate from offense/to defense/to outlet receiver/to back of the line

Variations:

- ◆ *Use one line instead of two*
- ◆ *When the ball is shot, the offense can move and try to score off a missed shot*

→ Defense

Defense Teaching Points:

- ◆ Proper defensive stance
 - » Stand with feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart
 - » Knees bent, with waist slightly bent forward
 - » Good balance – ready to move and slide
 - » Place weight on the inside front of the feet, but not on the toes
 - » Extend arms to the side, slightly bent
 - » Open hands, so palms face the offensive player
 - » Eyes on the offensive player’s chest or “head on the ball”
- ◆ Ball/you/basket principle: When the offensive player being guarded has the ball, the defensive player should stay between this assigned offensive player with the basketball and the basket
- ◆ See the ball at all times
- ◆ Sprint down the floor on a change of possession, stopping any fast breaks

→ Defense Drills

Defensive Slides (no basketball required)

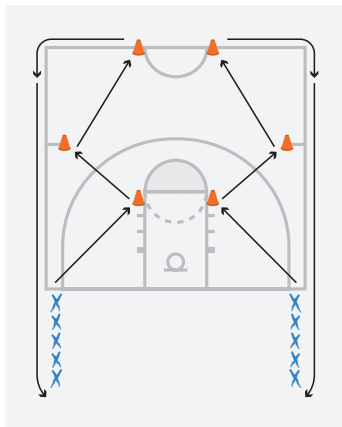
Focus on players' feet sliding (rather than hopping or skipping) and players maintaining a proper defensive stance. Have fun with this drill! Allow players to express enthusiasm and desire by slapping the playing floor and yelling "DEFENSE" on command. Drill should last 20-30 seconds. Allow a short rest and repeat as desired.

1. Allow players to spread out in practice area, at least four to five feet apart
2. On command, players yell "DEFENSE" and freeze in the defensive stance
3. On command (either verbal or hand signals), players will slide left, right, up, and back

Zigzag (no basketball required)

Focus on players making a drop step each time they turn (rather than crossing their feet) and on players sliding correctly while maintaining a proper defensive stance.

1. Form a line of players at one end of your practice area
2. Set-up cones or chairs in a zigzag pattern, spaced 10-12 feet apart (minimum 3 spots)
3. On command, the first player in line will assume the correct defensive stance and will slide in a zigzag pattern as dictated by the cones or chairs
4. The next player in line starts as the preceding player leaves first spot
5. As each player reaches the final spot, he or she should sprint back to the end of the line



→ Offensive Plays

The following offensive plays are provided to help your team with floor spacing and floor balance. These plays are intended for Levels 3 and 4.

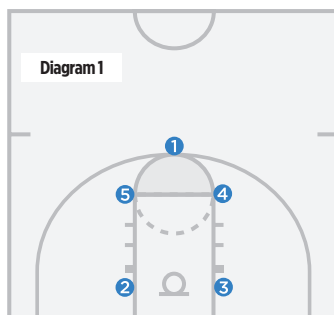
Reminder: View the Skills and Drills videos on the coach section of MyUpward.org for live demonstrations of the following offensive plays.

HALF-COURT SETS

Box Set - Motion

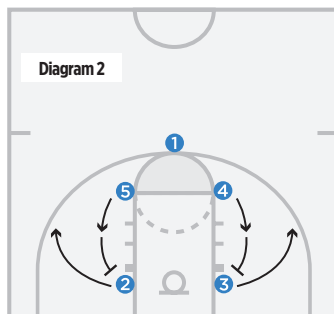
Scoring Options:

1. Player 5 posting up down on ball-side block
 2. Player 4 coming off of low screen
 3. Player 3 cutting to the free-throw line
- ◆ Players 2, 3, 4, and 5 are in the “box” offensive set (diagram 1)



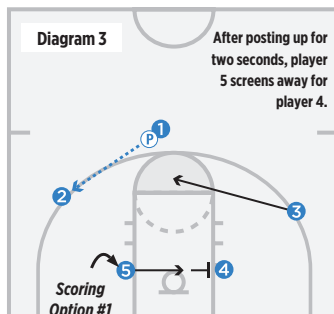
- ◆ Player 1 (point guard) yells “MOTION” or “GO” to start the play (player 1 should keep dribble alive until making a pass)

- ◆ Players 4 and 5, who are standing outside the lane area at the free-throw line extended areas, will screen down for players 2 and 3 (diagram 2)



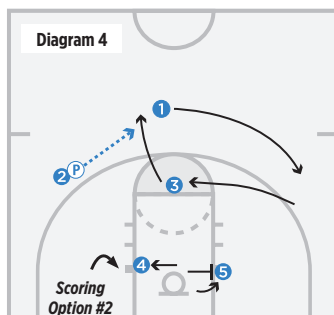
- ◆ Before the screens occur, players 2 and 3 will take two to three steps toward the lane area (to set up their defenders) and then make hard V-cuts to their respective wing areas (diagram 2)

- ◆ Player 1 will pass the basketball to player 2 or 3 (assume player 2 in this example) who will square up to the basket (diagram 3)



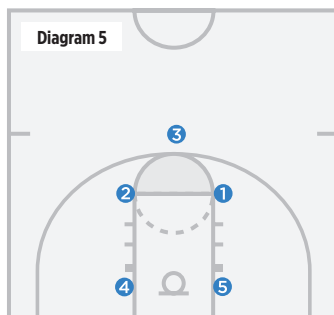
- ◆ Player 5, post player on the ball-side of the court, will post up for two seconds (diagram 3)

- ◆ After two seconds, player 5 will screen away for opposite post player - player 4 (diagram 3)



- ◆ As player 5 turns to screen away for the opposite post player, player 3 will cut toward the free-throw line and player 1 will “fill” his or her spot at the wing (diagram 3)

- ◆ If a pass cannot be made to player 4 coming off the low screen or to player 3 on the cut to the lane area, player 3 will move to the top of the key area to receive a pass from player 2 (diagram 4)



- ◆ If the pass is made to player 3 at the top of the key area, team will be in the “box” offensive set again (diagram 5)

Box Set - (Double Down)

Scoring Options:

1. Player 3 coming off of low screen
2. Player 2 coming off the double screen

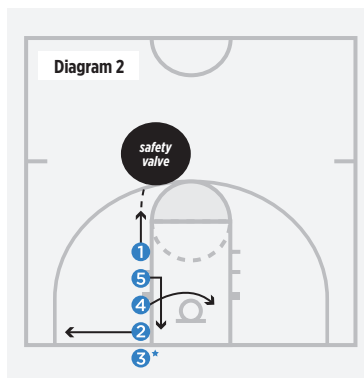
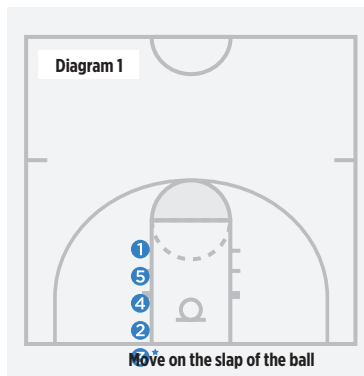
Procedure:

1. Players 2, 3, 4, and 5 are in the “box” offensive set
2. Player 1 (point guard) yells “DOUBLE” or “GO” to start the play (player 1 should keep dribble alive until making a pass)
3. Player 1 dribbles to right-side of the goal - can go to right or left (diagram 1)
4. As player 1 dribbles to the wing area (attack zone), player 2 will screen away for player 3 (diagram 1)
5. Player 3 cuts to the ball-side block area hoping to receive a pass from player 1 (diagrams 1 and 2)
6. As player 3 cuts to the ball-side block area, players 4 and 5 will set a double screen in the middle of the lane for player 2 (diagram 2)
7. Player 1 looks for player 2 as he or she curls around the screen for an open jump-shot (diagram 3)

→ Inbounds Plays

Stack (baseline)

1. All four players line-up straight across from the player throwing in the basketball (diagram 1)
2. When the passer slaps the basketball or yells “break,” the players move simultaneously as follows (diagram 2):
 - ◆ First player in line breaks to ball-side corner
 - ◆ Second player in line cuts to opposite block
 - ◆ Third player in line moves straight down to block area toward the ball
 - ◆ Fourth player in line takes two to three steps back, serving as a safety valve



Note:

All inbound plays - Players should use fakes and jab steps to set up their defenders and get open. Encourage players coming off a screen to rub shoulders with the screener. As the person throwing in the basketball can pass to any teammate, encourage ready hands.

Reminder:

This play can also be used on the sideline, with players moving in the same pattern as above.

Box (baseline)

- ◆ Each player takes a spot outside the lane area, with the post players (Players 4 and 5) at the block areas and the perimeter players (Players 1 and 2) at the free-throw line extended areas. Player 3 will throw in the basketball (diagram 1).
- ◆ When the passer slaps the basketball or yells “break,” the players move as follows:

Box Option #1

1. Player 5 sets a diagonal screen for Player 1 (diagram 2)
2. Player 1 waits for the screen and moves toward the basketball to the opposite block (diagram 2)
3. If Player 1 does not receive the basketball, he or she continues to the ball-side corner (diagram 3)
4. Player 4 moves up to set a screen on Player 5, who cuts down toward the weak-side block (diagram 3)
5. Player 4 rolls toward the middle of the lane after setting the screen (diagram 4)
6. Player 2 serves as a safety valve (diagram 4)

Diagram 1

Move on the slap of the ball

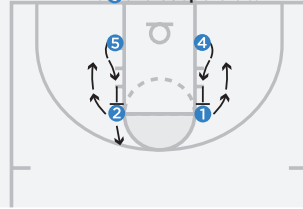


Diagram 2

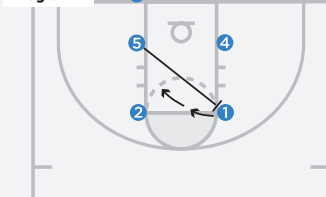


Diagram 3

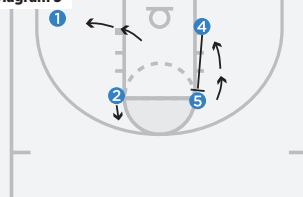
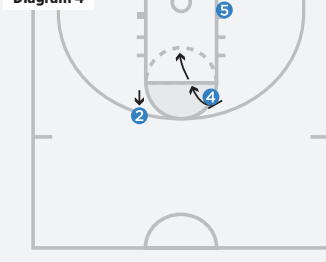
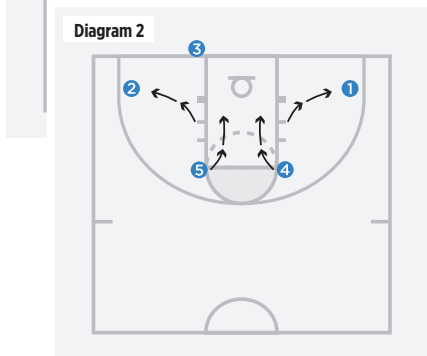
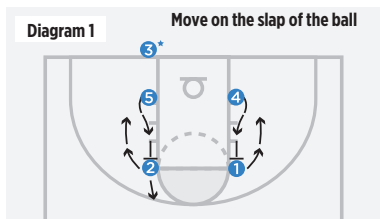


Diagram 4



Box Option #2

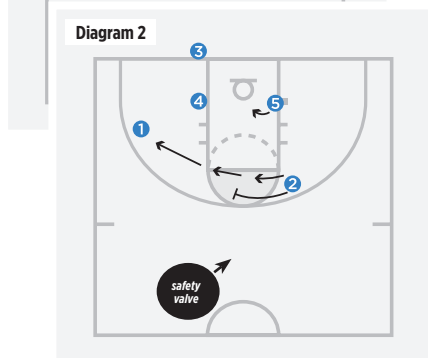
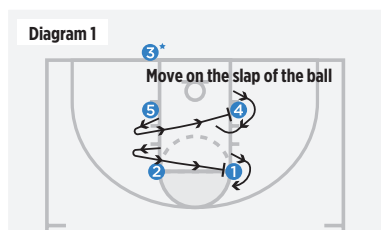
1. Players 4 and 5 screen up for Players 1 and 2 (diagram 1)
2. If a pass cannot be made to either 1 or 2, they each move to the closest corner (diagram 2)
3. After setting the screens, Players 4 and 5 should roll back toward the ball (diagram 2)



Box Option #3:

All four players will take one to two steps toward the closest sideline to set up their defenders (diagram 1)

1. Players 5 and 2 will both cross-screen for Players 4 and 1 on the weak-side (diagram 1)
2. After setting a screen, Player 5 will turn around with ready hands (diagram 2)
3. Player 2 will roll back to ball-side, free-throw line extended area to serve as a safety valve (diagram 2)



SECTION 3

PRACTICE DEVOTIONS

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→ Devotions

As an Upward Coach, you are not only teaching skills for the sport but also values for life. The devotion time allows you to teach the character of Christ through the virtues He modeled. This season will focus on virtues which are taught in your practices and are highlighted by Bible verses. The chart below is designed to assist you as you organize and prepare for your devotions. It shows the virtues and verses for each group of practices.

PRACTICE NUMBER	BIBLICAL VIRTUES	VERSE
Week 1	<i>Kindness</i>	No Key Verse This Week
Week 2	<i>Respect</i>	Take delight in honoring each other. Romans 12:10b (NLT)
Week 3	<i>Respect</i>	Take delight in honoring each other. Romans 12:10b (NLT)
Week 4	<i>Respect</i>	Take delight in honoring each other. Romans 12:10b (NLT)
Week 5	<i>Kindness</i>	Do to others as you would like them to do to you. Luke 6:31 (NLT)

PRACTICE NUMBER	BIBLICAL VIRTUES	VERSE
Week 6	<i>Kindness</i>	Do to others as you would like them to do to you. Luke 6:31 (NLT)
Week 7	<i>Kindness</i>	Do to others as you would like them to do to you. Luke 6:31 (NLT)
Week 8	<i>Good News</i>	For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NLT)
Week 9	<i>Forgiveness</i>	Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13 (NLT)
Week 10	<i>Forgiveness</i>	Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13 (NLT)
Week 11	<i>Forgiveness</i>	Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Colossians 3:13 (NLT)

BASKETBALL LEAGUE DEVOTIONS

UPWARD
SPORTS

PRACTICE 1

KINDNESS

Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** This season, our devotions will focus on three virtues—respect, kindness, and forgiveness—with kindness being the overall theme. This first devotion will explain why it is so important to treat other people well.

The parallel sections in Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34, and Luke 10:25-28 are often titled “The Greatest Commandment,” or in the NLT, “The Most Important Commandment.” Leading up to this moment, the opposing religious factions of the Pharisees and the Sadducees had been trying to trap Jesus by peppering Him with questions that could easily have controversial answers. They wanted to trip Him up so they’d have an excuse to arrest Him. But Jesus’ wisdom shines brightly with every answer. He won’t be tricked. Finally, one of them asks Jesus a question that was a common topic of debate at the time: “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” The first part of Jesus’ answer comes from Deuteronomy 6:5, part of the *Shema*, the primary creed of Judaism. In addition to loving God wholeheartedly, Jesus said there is a second greatest command along with the first: loving your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). “These two commandments are the greatest because all others flow from them; indeed the whole Old Testament ‘hangs’ on them. In other words, all other commandments are summed up and/or contained in these.” (Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: Matthew*) If you want to know the motivation behind God’s commands, the answer is always love. Why are kindness, respect, and forgiveness so important? They are essential to our love for others and an overflow of our love for God.

- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; 1 John 4:7-21. If you don’t own a Bible, you can download the YouVersion Bible App for free.



- **Encouragement:** “There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.” - Fred Rogers
- **Coach’s Question for Reflection:** If I had a creed or vision statement for my life, would love for God and others be included?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

Bottom Line: I want to love God and others.

This season, we will be talking about respect, kindness, and forgiveness. All of these virtues tell us something about how we should treat other people.

The Bible tells us that God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to live among us and teach us more about who God is. One day, someone asked Jesus what the most important commandment in God's law was. You see, in the Old Testament, God had given His people many rules to follow for them to be holy and set apart from other nations. God is good and perfect, and He wanted His people to live the right way.

When someone asked Jesus this question, the religious leaders at that time considered there to be about 613 commandments in God's law. They wanted Jesus to narrow it down to the most important one.

So Jesus said, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37b-40, NLT)

Jesus said that the most important things we can do are to love God with all our heart and love other people as we love ourselves. That's huge! And it's so important for us to remember as we go about each day.

Jesus Himself really showed us how to love God and others. He was a great teacher, but that's not all He did. He healed people, performed miracles, and cared about people no one else noticed. He loved us so much that He ended up dying on the cross to rescue us from sin and death. We'll talk about that more later this season.

It's important for us to remember how much God showed His love for us through Jesus. When we realize His love for us, it makes us want to share that love with other people. There's a verse in the Bible that says this: "We love each other because he loved us first." (1 John 4:19, NLT) We know God loves us, and we want to love Him back, but that love will also show up in how we treat others.

That's why we're talking about respect, kindness, and forgiveness this season. Being kind to people and treating them well is what it takes to love others as God loves us. What are some ways you can treat each other kindly this season? (*Let athletes answer.*)

LET'S PRAY

God, thank You for our team. We are so excited to get started with this season. Thank You for loving us, Lord. We love You, and we want to love others well. Teach us to have respect, kindness, and forgiveness in our lives. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** The first virtue we'll focus on this season is respect, which is foundational to kindness and forgiveness. In this devotion, athletes will learn why they should respect others. We must see people as inherently valuable, with the dignity of someone created in the image of God. If you don't value someone as a person, it's nearly impossible to treat them with respect. Understanding and acknowledging the incalculable worth of every human being is foundational to living a life that honors God, their creator. The idea of being an "image of God" carries connotations of royalty and representation. In the cultures around ancient Israel, idols and kings were these other nations' images of their gods. They represented the god. In the case of the king, he reigned on behalf of the god. But the God of the Bible was different. His image could not be narrowed down to inanimate objects or one ruling person. He gave His image to all of humanity. He gave us the authority to reign and rule over the earth, to move creation forward, and to be His representatives. So humans aren't only special because God created each of us uniquely (which He did!), but also because He gave each of us an important job to do.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 8; Psalm 139:13-16.
- **Encouragement:** "You were made for a purpose. You were made to reflect someone who is infinite and limitless, which means there is plenty of uniqueness and creativity to go around. You were made to take what God has given you and do amazing things." – Zechariah Zienka, "What Does It Mean to Be Human?", bibleproject.com
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** Do I see all people as valuable? Why or why not?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

RESPECT is showing others they are important by what you say and do.

KEY VERSE

Take delight in honoring each other.
Romans 12:10b (NLT)**Bottom Line:** I want to respect others because I respect God.

Have you ever made something you're really proud of? Raise your hand if you'd like to tell us about it. (*Let athletes answer.*) When you create something like an awesome drawing, a LEGO masterpiece, or a really cool art project, it usually means a lot to you. It even shows people a bit about who you are. Now, how would you feel if someone ripped up your drawing? Or smashed your LEGO creation? Or poured water all over your art project?

That would be terrible, right? You would feel so bad because that person didn't just mess up something you made—they showed that they didn't respect or care about *you*.

This is what it's like when we don't respect other people. You see, God created each and every one of us. Every person is a unique and wonderful creation that He made. He loves and cares about us so much, and we reflect who He is. So when we choose to disrespect other people, when we hurt them on purpose or treat them like they don't matter, it is saying to God that we don't respect *Him* either.

This is why respect is so important. We're going to be talking about respect for the next couple of weeks. Respect is showing others they are important by what you say and do. We want to respect other people just for being people, just for being someone God created and loves very much.

In the very first chapter of the Bible, it says this, "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27, NLT)

This verse says that you are created in the image of God. I'm created in the image of God. Your parents and brothers and sisters are created in the image of God. All of your friends and classmates and teammates are created in the image of God. People on the other side of the world are created in the image of God. People who are a lot like you and people who are different from you are all created in the image of God. That means God made them special. They are valuable to Him. They reflect who He is.

Understanding this is where respect starts. If you respect God, you will have respect for the people He has created in His image. And that means everyone, including you!

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- What does respect mean?
- Why should we respect other people?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- How does respecting other people show our respect for God?
- How does it make you feel to know that God created you and that you are important to Him?

(7th Grade and up)

- Only humans were created in God's image. What do you think it means to be created in His image?
- Why does God creating people in His image give them value and make them worthy of respect?

LET'S PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for creating us in Your image. Thank You that You care about us and that we are valuable to You. Help us to show we respect You by respecting other people. Amen.

Practice Card Reminder: If your league uses practice cards, remember to distribute the practice cards entitled "Practice 2" at the end of practice.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** One important way to respect others is through the things we say. One of the most powerful Bible passages about our speech is found in James 3:1-12. James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, wrote this letter offering wisdom to all of Jesus' followers. His work was inspired by Jesus' teaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and by the book of Proverbs. His imagery-rich essay in the third chapter vibrantly explains the power of our words and warns us against praising God and speaking sinfully against others with the same tongue. As Jesus said, "What you say flows from what is in your heart." (Luke 6:45b, NLT) But being respectful with our words isn't just about what we shouldn't say. It's also about what we should say. In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul tells the Ephesian church to live in the truth and righteousness of Jesus and "let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes." (Ephesians 4:23, NLT) We would all do well to follow his advice and be led by the Holy Spirit to let everything we say be good, helpful, and encouraging.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read James 3:1-12; Ephesians 4:21-32. .
- **Encouragement:** "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." – Psalm 19:14 (NLT)
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** Am I respectful to others with my words? How does the Upward Circle of Affirmation help throughout the season?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

RESPECT is showing others they are important by what you say and do.

KEY VERSE

Take delight in honoring each other.
Romans 12:10b (NLT)**Bottom Line:** I can respect others with my words.

Last practice, we started talking about respect. Can anyone tell me why we should respect other people? (*Let athletes answer.*) We respect others because we respect God and He created all people in His image. Today, we're going to talk about *how* we can respect others.

Remember, respect is showing others they are important by what you say and do. That means we show others respect with our words and actions.

Today, let's focus on our words. There's a passage in the Bible that talks about just how powerful our words can be. It says that just like a tiny spark can set a forest on fire, the things you say can set your whole life on fire. We all know what it's like to say something without thinking and then have to deal with the consequences, like when you talk back to your parents or when you hurt a friend's feelings. Because of this, we should choose our words carefully. "Think before you speak" is great advice!

This passage goes on to say that you can tame all kinds of animals, but you can't tame the human tongue. It says, "Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!" (James 3:9-10, NLT)

If we want to respect God and others, we will do our best to speak in a loving way to people and about people. It doesn't make sense to praise God and say we love Him, but then go around saying hateful and hurtful things to the people He has made. It also doesn't make sense to be kind to someone to their face, then go behind their back and say mean or untrue things about them to someone else.

Think about the last time someone said something that really hurt your feelings. I bet you can quickly remember their words, can't you? What about the last time someone gave you a great compliment? You can probably remember that easily, too. Words have power. They affect us more than we know. When you think before you speak, you should ask yourself, "How would I feel if someone said this to me?" If it would hurt you, you probably shouldn't say it to someone else!

So, what should you say instead? There's a Bible verse that says, "Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them." (Ephesians 4:29b, NLT) We should say good and helpful things to each other. We should encourage each other and build each other up! That shows respect.

Now, let's think about some specific ways we can respect others with our words. Think about your teammates. When we're practicing or at a game, you can encourage them when they make a mistake or compliment them when they do something well. Think about your parents. You can respect them by answering them in a loving way and not talking back to them. Think about your teachers and coaches. You can respect them by backing them up when one of your classmates or teammates wants to disobey or by thanking them when they teach you something new. Think about your friends and brothers and sisters. You can respect them by not saying things you know will hurt them. You can tell them when they do a good job on something and let them know you care.

There are so many ways we can be respectful or disrespectful with our words. Let's do our best to think before we speak and show respect in the things we say.

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- How can you respect adults with your words?
- How can you respect other kids with your words?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- What was a compliment or something kind someone has said to you that really encouraged you?
- How can you respect adults with your words? What about other kids?

(7th Grade and up)

- Why do you think words have such a big effect on us?
- What do you need to work on most when it comes to your words? Encouraging others, not gossiping, not making fun of others, being respectful to adults, what you say in messages or comments on your phone, or something else?

LET'S PRAY

God, we know our words have power. Forgive us for the times we use them carelessly. Help us to learn to think before we speak. Teach us to use words that build others up and encourage them rather than words that tear people down. Help us respect others with our words. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** In our last devotion, we talked about respectful words. Here, we'll talk about respectful actions. In this devotion, we'll refer to our Key Verse, Romans 12:10b, but the broader context of this short statement is also helpful. Paul spent the first part (Romans 1-11) of his letter to the Romans writing more about theological issues, specifically God's actions on behalf of humanity. Now, chapter 12 begins his call to action. Verse 1 is the perfect transition. In light of all God has done for us, we ought to give Him our very lives as an act of worship. God can renew our minds and work in us to help us become people who honor Him with our love and respect for one another. Paul reminds the Roman believers that they make up one body working together, and then he encourages them to love genuinely and cling to what is good. Though the word "respect" is not used, the kind of life Paul encourages is one that exudes respect through sincere and loving actions.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Romans 12.
- **Encouragement:** Read Romans 12:9-16 and write down a list of every instruction Paul gives his readers. Pray over these things and ask God to help them be descriptors of your own life.
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** Am I respectful to others with my actions?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

RESPECT is showing others they are important by what you say and do.

KEY VERSE

Take delight in honoring each other.
Romans 12:10b (NLT)

Bottom Line: I can respect others with my actions.

Who can tell me what we've been talking about the past few weeks? (*Let athletes answer.*) That's right, we've been talking about respect! We learned why we should respect others and how to respect others with our words. Today, I want to talk about how we can respect others with our actions.

Being respectful with your actions probably looks a little different depending on what situation you're in. When your parents ask you to do something, being respectful with your actions means obeying them as soon as you're asked. When someone else is presenting something at school, being respectful with your actions means paying attention and not distracting others. When you're at a restaurant, being respectful with your actions means being polite to the waiter and not leaving a huge mess to be cleaned up.

Respectful actions can be big and small. They might mean a lot to someone, or they might go unnoticed. What matters is that you are acting out of respect. You value the other person and want to do your best to show that respect.

Sometimes, people get the idea that it's weak or boring to show respect to others, but that can't be further from the truth. It takes strength and a lot of character to respect others as much as you can.

Think about a professional athlete, maybe an NBA player. This person gets a lot of respect from others because of their talent and work ethic, but even they have to respect others with their actions to be as successful as they can be. They respect their coach and follow his plan for the game. They respect their teammates by passing the ball and working together to win. They respect their opponents with good sportsmanship and shaking hands after the game. They also need to be respectful toward referees, fans, and the media. That's a lot of people that a successful professional athlete needs to respect! And when an athlete doesn't respect others, they get a bad reputation as someone who is difficult to work with—and it could potentially cost them millions of dollars! If a professional athlete can show respect for others, so can you.

There's a verse in the Bible that says we should "take delight in honoring each other." (Romans 12:10b, NLT) Honor is a lot like respect. This verse basically says we should

be excited to respect each other! That's a different way of thinking about respect, isn't it? Another version of this verse says, "Outdo one another in showing honor." (Romans 12:10b, ESV)

The idea of outdoing one another in showing honor or respect is kind of fun. It makes you think of it like a competition. If you were having a competition with a teammate or your brother or sister to see who could do the most respectful things, what would that look like? You'd look for every opportunity to show respect. You might run to hold the door open for someone. You might race to see who can help the coach clean up all the supplies after practice. You might have your room picked up before your mom or dad even asks.

Why don't you try that this week? It doesn't have to be a competition with anyone else but yourself. How many respectful things do you think you can do in a week? I bet it's a lot!

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- What is the difference between a respectful action and a disrespectful action?
- What is one respectful thing you can do before the end of the day?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- We don't usually think of respecting others as something that makes us feel good or excited. Why do you think the Bible says we should see it this way?
- What is one respectful thing you can do before the end of the day?

(7th Grade and up)

- We talked about the power of words last week, but actions are powerful, too. Why is it important to show respect with your words and actions? What does it mean if you show respect with one but not the other?
- What is an area of your life where you could be more respectful in your actions?

LET'S PRAY

Heavenly Father, we want to respect others with our actions. We want to show people that they matter to us. Help us to outdo one another in showing honor. Show us new ways that we can respect others through our actions this week. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** As we begin looking at the virtue of kindness, our overall theme for the whole season, it is helpful to remember that Jesus was (and is) the perfect embodiment of kindness. If you were to read through the Gospels and write down every kind thing Jesus did, it would be a long list—and those are just the stories that were written down. Today, we'll look at the story of Zaccheus. Jesus often helped those who were poor or ill. Zaccheus was rich and healthy but morally and socially impoverished. Since he was a tax collector, his fellow Jews saw him as both a thief and a traitor—and he was. But Jesus' kindness to spot him in the tree, speak to him, and spend time with him dramatically changed his life. Zaccheus pledges that "first, he will give half his possessions to the poor and, second, he will restore anything he has extorted from the taxpayers four times over. The 'four times' figure is the required restoration a thief was commanded to make in the Torah (Ex. 22:1). It is a vivid (and expensive) confession of his thievery." (Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity*) It is interesting to compare this story to one that comes just a chapter before this in Luke 18:18-30, in which a different rich man goes home sad because he doesn't want to give up his wealth.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Luke 19:1-10.
- **Encouragement:** The image of Zaccheus scrambling up into a tree to see Jesus is one to capture the imagination (and sing about in Sunday School), but Zaccheus doesn't just climb the tree because he's short. He climbs the tree because he is eager to see Jesus. When Jesus invites Himself over, Zaccheus is quick to accept Jesus into his home. It appears he was even quick to do a complete turnaround with his morals. God was clearly working in Zaccheus' life, and he was eager and ready to accept the kindness of Jesus at every turn. Jesus looks for this same eagerness and earnestness in us. He wants to show us His kindness if we are ready and willing to accept it.
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** Has the kindness of Jesus changed my life? If so, how?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

KINDNESS is showing others how valuable they are by how you treat them.

KEY VERSE

Do to others as you would like them to do to you.
Luke 6:31 (NLT)

Bottom Line: Kindness can change lives.

For the past few practices, we've been talking about respect. We learned that it is important to show everyone respect because everyone is created by God and matters to Him. For the next few practices, we're going to talk about something that goes along with respect: kindness. Kindness is showing others how valuable they are by how you treat them.

How does it feel when someone is kind to you? (*Let athletes answer.*) We all appreciate kindness. It makes us feel like the other person cares about us. And we want to be kind to other people.

Our best example of kindness is Jesus, God's Son. When Jesus was on earth, He was kind to everyone—even the people who were often left out or looked down on. He helped people, spoke kindly to them, fed people who were hungry, and healed people who were sick or hurting.

One example of Jesus' kindness is the story of Jesus and a man named Zaccheus. Zaccheus was a rich tax collector. He made a lot of money by collecting people's taxes for the Roman government and taking extra for himself. Most people did not like tax collectors. But Jesus was different.

When Jesus visited Zaccheus' town, Zaccheus came to see Him. But there was a crowd around Jesus as He walked through the town. Zaccheus was too short to see Jesus over the crowd, so he climbed up into a tree near the road.

This is what the Bible says happened next: "When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. 'Zacchaeus!' he said. 'Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.' Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. 'He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,' they grumbled." (Luke 19:5-7, NLT)

Zaccheus was so excited that Jesus noticed Him and wanted to be a guest in his home. The crowd around Jesus didn't understand why Jesus would want to spend time with this tax collector. But Jesus' kindness changed Zaccheus' whole life! He told Jesus he would

give half his money to the poor and that if he had cheated anyone and taken more than he was owed, he would give them back four times as much as he had taken. Wow!

Have you ever realized that being kind to someone could change their life? When we follow Jesus' example of kindness, we show people that they matter. We can make them feel loved. A kind word or a kind action goes a long way. Let's be like Jesus. Let's be kind!

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- What was kind about what Jesus did for Zaccheus?
- When has someone been kind to you in a way you remembered for a long time?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- Why do you think what Jesus did meant so much to Zaccheus?
- When has someone been kind to you in a way you remembered for a long time?

(7th Grade and up)

- Jesus was surrounded by a crowd of people. Why do you think He singled out Zaccheus?
- What is an example of a time when you've seen kindness leave a lasting impact?

LET'S PRAY

God, thank You for being so kind to us. Thank You for sending Jesus and for His example of kindness. Teach us to be kind like Him. Show us what would mean a lot to the people around us, and help our kindness to make a difference in people's lives. Amen.

Practice Card Reminder: If your league uses practice cards, remember to distribute the practice cards entitled "Practice 5" at the end of practice.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** In this devotion, you'll challenge your athletes to ask God to help them be kind every chance they get. Kindness isn't just a one-time action; it's a way of life. We want to be ready to be kind at every opportunity. You'll share Colossians 3:12b with your team, which lists kindness as one of the things we should "put on" or "clothe" ourselves with every day. This is an extension of Colossians 3:10 (NLT), which says, "Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him." The more we get to know Jesus, the more we will become like Him in His kindness and in so many other ways. "The language of taking off and putting on in verses 10-11 may reflect the early Christian practice of exchanging an old soiled garment for a clean new garment at baptism as a symbolic gesture. Those who have been baptized with Christ are a new creation." (John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters*)
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 3:1-17; Matthew 9:1-8; John 9:1-6; Matthew 14:13-21.
- **Encouragement:** "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith." - Galatians 6:9-10 (NLT)
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** How would my life look different if I consciously chose to "put on" kindness every day?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

KINDNESS is showing others how valuable they are by how you treat them.

KEY VERSE

Do to others as you would like them to do to you.
Luke 6:31 (NLT)

Bottom Line: I want to be kind every chance I get.

If you read through the Gospels, which are the books in the Bible about Jesus' life on earth, you'll find tons of examples of Jesus being kind. He was always showing how much He cared about people. Last week, we heard the story of Jesus and Zaccheus and saw how kindness could change someone's life. Kindness is powerful! And today I want to share with you more about what kindness looks like and how we can be kind each and every day.

So what is kindness? What are some examples of kindness that you've seen before? (*Let athletes answer.*) Philippians 2:4 (NLT) in the Bible says, "Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too." A big piece of kindness is just looking out for other people and thinking about them more than you do yourself.

There's another passage in the Bible that talks about putting on kindness like you might put on your clothes in the morning when you're getting ready for school, or like you might put on your uniform when you're getting ready for a game. It says, "clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." (Colossians 3:12b, NLT) You can think about kindness as something you want to have with you all the time. You want to be ready to be kind whenever you get the chance.

This is how Jesus operated during His time on earth. As He traveled around teaching, He was always looking for opportunities to be kind. Jesus would meet people, see their needs, and help them right then and there. Let's look at a few examples.

People would often come to Jesus if they needed to be healed, or sometimes their friends or family members would bring them to Jesus. Matthew 9:1-2 (NLT) says, "Some people brought to him a paralyzed man on a mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, 'Be encouraged, my child! Your sins are forgiven.'" Then, Jesus told the man to pick up his mat and walk—and he did! He was healed!

Another time, "As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth." (John 9:1, NLT) Jesus healed the man before he could even ask to be healed!

One time, Jesus got some bad news. His cousin had died. The Bible says, "As soon as

Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matthew 14:13-14, NLT) Later, Jesus realized that it was getting late, and the crowd of people didn’t have any food to eat. He performed a miracle and fed thousands of people with just one boy’s lunch.

We can see from these examples that Jesus was always ready to be kind, even when it was inconvenient or unexpected. He was always ready to help. If people needed healing, He healed them. If they needed forgiveness, He forgave them. If they needed food, He fed them. If they needed love and conversation, He talked with them and showed He cared.

Like Jesus, we should carry kindness with us every day, always being ready to use it. This week, I want to challenge you to pray to God every morning and ask Him to help you to be ready to be kind every chance you get that day. You will probably miss some chances, but that’s okay. So will I. But kindness will be on your mind, and it will help you remember how you should treat others. Let’s go be kind this week!

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- What is something kind you’ve seen someone on our team do for you or someone else?
- Do you think you can remember to be kind this week? What might help you remember?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- What is something kind you’ve seen someone on our team do for you or someone else?
- Have you ever heard that kindness can be contagious? What do you think that means?

(7th Grade and up)

- Why might it be good to prepare to be kind?
- Do you think kindness can become a habit? Why or why not?

LET’S PRAY

God, thank You for being so kind to us and for Jesus’ example of kindness. Help us to put on kindness, mercy, humility, gentleness, and patience every day. Please help us to be kind every chance we get. We love you, Lord. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** It's easy to be kind to those who are kind to you. Jesus, however, calls us to extraordinary kindness. We are to love those who aren't so easy to love. We are even to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43). "Almost all people look after their own. The true test of genuine Christianity is how believers treat those whom they are naturally inclined to hate or who mistreat or persecute them." (Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: Matthew*) Jesus exemplified this as He cared for those cast out by His culture, as He engaged with those who belonged to the religious groups that were trying to trap Him, as He forgave those who tortured and mocked Him on the cross, as He died for all of us while we were still in sin and rebellion against God. The famous Parable of the Good Samaritan shows what Jesus found most important: not identity but mercy. If we are going to follow Jesus' example, we will love our enemies and show compassion for all people—not just those we consider appropriate.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 10:25-37; Proverbs 15:1.
- **Encouragement:** Our culture seems increasingly polarized—generationally, politically, socioeconomically. The message our world sends us is often to see people in other groups as our enemies and to treat them with contempt. But this is not the way of Jesus. Though there might be disagreements and differences between us and other groups, we are still called to treat them with compassion and respect as people made in the image of God.
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** In what ways do I need to love my enemies?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

KINDNESS is showing others how valuable they are by how you treat them.

KEY VERSE

Do to others as you would like them to do to you.
Luke 6:31 (NLT)**Bottom Line: I want to love my enemies.**

We've talked a lot about how Jesus was kind and how we want to follow His example of kindness. But even though Jesus was always kind, sometimes He had important things to teach that weren't always easy for everyone to hear. Some religious leaders would often get upset with what Jesus taught—because it didn't always fit what they believed and how they lived their lives.

Quite a few things that upset these religious leaders are found in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. A crowd gathered on the side of a mountain to hear Jesus speak, and He taught them many things that seemed upside-down to what they knew and what was accepted in their world. Many of these things are upside-down to the way our world says we should live today.

One of the most upside-down things Jesus said was this: "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that?" (Matthew 5:43-46a, NLT)

Love your enemies. That definitely isn't very common in our world today. What do you think it looks like to love your enemies? (*Let athletes answer.*)

Jesus once told a story that helps us understand what He meant when He said to love your enemies. The story goes like this: a man was traveling between two cities when robbers attacked him. They beat him up and left him on the side of the road. A religious leader passed by, but instead of stopping to help, he ignored the man and walked by on the other side of the road. Then, another religious leader did the same thing! But finally, a Samaritan man saw the man lying on the side of the road. He bandaged him up and took him to an inn, where he paid for the man to be cared for while he healed.

The Samaritan did the right thing. The problem was that Jesus was a Jew and was talking to Jews—and in those days, Jews and Samaritans hated each other because they were different and believed different things. They saw each other as the enemy. So, it would

have surprised Jesus' listeners that the Samaritan was the hero in the story. It showed that you can love those you are supposed to hate.

When Jesus said to love your enemy, He reminded us that we shouldn't only be kind to our friends and family. We shouldn't just be kind to those who are exactly like us. We need to be kind to those who are different from us. We need to be kind to those who have different opinions than we do. We even need to be kind to those who aren't kind to us.

Now, that's not to say you shouldn't stand up for yourself. If someone continues to be unkind to you, you should tell your parents or another adult you trust. But most of the time, if someone else is being unkind, you can still respond in a way that's kind instead of being unkind back to them.

There's a verse in the book of Proverbs in the Bible that says, "A gentle answer deflects"—or *turns away*—"anger, but harsh words make tempers flare." (Proverbs 15:1, NLT) You can be kind even when someone else is unkind. You can be the bigger person. You can love your enemies.

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- Why is it so hard to be kind to someone who is unkind to you?
- How do you feel when you are mean to someone, but they are kind to you in return?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- Why is it so hard to be kind to someone who is unkind to you?
- What is an example of how you might be able to love your enemies?

(7th Grade and up)

- Why do people struggle to be kind to those who are different from them?
- What do you think loving your enemies looks like in today's world?

LET'S PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You so much for loving us and for teaching us what real love and kindness looks like through Jesus. Help us to love our enemies and to be kind to those who are unkind to us, even when it's tempting to be unkind back. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** You've already introduced your team to the kindness of Jesus this season, but in this devotion, they'll hear about Jesus' greatest act of kindness: His death on our behalf. This act of kindness isn't only able to change lives on earth—it changes them for eternity. "The pinnacle of the manifestation of God's kindness is found in the forgiveness he freely bestows even upon those who have sinned against him." (Jonathan Landry Cruse, *The Character of Christ*) Take time to prepare for this important devotion by reading John 19-20 and considering all that Jesus went through to save us from sin and death.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:4-7; John 19-20.
- **Encouragement:** "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead . . . So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus." – Ephesians 2:4-7 (NLT)
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** In what way is the kindness of God most evident to me in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

The GOOD NEWS is that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins.

KEY VERSE

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 (NLT)

Bottom Line: I can be saved through Jesus' kindness.

So far this season, we've talked about respect and kindness. We talked about how God created each of us in His image and how Jesus gave us an amazing example of kindness. Last week, we learned that Jesus even said we should love our enemies.

Today, we're talking about something Jesus did that was HUGE. It was really the kindest, most loving thing anyone has ever done.

You see, even though God created us, loves us, and wants to have a relationship with us, we are separated from Him because of something called sin. Sin is anything we think, do, or say that is disobedient to God. It's following our own way instead of His. Some examples of sin are lying, stealing, and treating people God has made with disrespect and unkindness.

Sin destroys our relationship with God because God is holy and perfect. He doesn't sin. Sin is the opposite of who He is. And the Bible tells us that the punishment for sin is death and separation from God. That's a serious punishment. But sin is serious. It goes against God and His goodness. There's nothing we can do on our own to make up for our sin. There's nothing we can do to fix our relationship with God. But this is where Jesus comes in. This is where He changes everything.

Jesus is God's Son. About two thousand years ago, God sent Jesus to earth to be born as a baby and live among people like us. He laughed, cried, got hungry, worked hard, and grew up. And after a while, Jesus started traveling around His homeland, teaching people about God, performing miracles, healing people, and caring for those no one else noticed. He started showing us the kindness and goodness of God. And, during the whole time He was on earth, Jesus never sinned. He always followed God and did what was right.

But some people didn't like Jesus. They had Him arrested and beaten. He was nailed to a wooden cross and died a painful death. But, three days later, the tomb where Jesus was buried was suddenly empty! God raised Him from the dead, and He was alive! He appeared to many of His friends and spent time with them before returning to heaven, where He is still alive today!

That's an amazing story, but what does it have to do with us? Why is what Jesus did so kind? The truth is, because Jesus was God's Son and never sinned, when He died on the cross, He actually took the punishment for all our sins on Himself. He paid for your sin and my sin. He gave His life for us. Then, when He rose from the dead, He conquered death forever. He defeated both sin and death.

The Bible says, "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, NLT)

When we believe in Jesus and what He did for us, we can ask God to forgive us for our sins, and He will forgive us through Jesus. When we trust in Jesus to save us from sin and death, and put Him in charge of our lives, we can have a relationship with God. We don't have to be separated from Him by sin anymore. We belong to Him. And even though we will all still die one day, when we believe in Jesus, after we die, we will live with Him in heaven forever.

Jesus didn't have to die a painful death. He didn't have to take our place. He didn't even have to come to earth to live as one of us. But He did all that for us. It's all because of His love and His kindness.

There's another verse in the Bible that says, "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (Romans 5:8, NLT) What Jesus did for us is the kindest, most loving thing anyone has ever done.

If you have questions or want to talk more about what all this means, I'd be happy to talk with you after practice.

LET'S PRAY

God, thank You for Your amazing kindness and for loving us so much that You sent Jesus to save us. Thank You that we can have a relationship with You through Him. Forgive us for our sins. Help each of us to trust in Jesus to save us. We love You, Lord. Amen.

If someone has questions about following Jesus, let your League Director know and ask them about the follow-up process for your league. You can also let the parents know their child is asking questions. If the family does not attend church, this would be a great opportunity to invite them to come to church with you.

Practice Card Reminder: If your league uses practice cards, remember to distribute the practice cards entitled "Practice 8" at the end of practice.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** Our final virtue for this season is forgiveness. In the last practice, we discussed God's incredible kindness toward us through Jesus, which results in the forgiveness of our sins. Now, as people who are forgiven by God and grateful for His kindness, we are to forgive those who sin against us. "One of the key concepts of mercy . . . is that once we are shown mercy, we become obligated to give mercy. Upon realizing that the person from whom we have a right to expect nothing has given us everything, we must reciprocate." (Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity*) This devotion focuses on a parable Jesus tells after His disciple Peter asks a question about forgiveness. He wants to know the limits of forgiveness, thinking his offer to forgive someone up to seven times is quite generous. But Jesus goes on to teach that forgiveness should be without limits. When you recognize the depth of your sin and how much God has forgiven you, you realize you have no right to withhold forgiveness from anyone else.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Matthew 18:21-35.
- **Encouragement:** "For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." – Psalm 103:11-12 (NLT)
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** How does God's forgiveness toward me motivate me to forgive others?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

FORGIVENESS is deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay.

KEY VERSE

**Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.
Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.
Colossians 3:13 (NLT)**

Bottom Line: I can forgive others because God has forgiven me.

Earlier this season, we talked about treating other people with respect and kindness. For our last few practices, we will be learning about forgiveness, which goes along with respect and kindness. Forgiveness is deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay. If we are going to treat other people well and love them as we love ourselves, we need to learn how to forgive.

Last practice, we learned how God's great kindness led to Him sending Jesus. When we believe in Jesus, we can be forgiven of our sins. That's amazing!

The Bible tells us that because God has forgiven us, we should forgive others. Jesus told a powerful story, called a parable, about forgiveness. It goes like this.

There was a servant who owed millions of dollars to a king. The man and his whole family and everything they owned were all going to be sold in order to pay back the debt.

So the man fell down in front of the king and begged the king. "Please, be patient with me," he said, "and I will pay it all." The king had pity on the man, so he let him go and forgave the debt.

What happens next in the story is very unexpected. The Bible says, "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full." (Matthew 18:28-30, NLT)

The other servants told the king what had happened. "Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?'" (Matthew 18:32-33, NLT) Then, the king threw the first man in prison.

This story makes us feel angry, doesn't it? How could the first man refuse to forgive the much smaller debt of the second man after the king had just forgiven him a huge debt?

It doesn't make any sense! But the point of Jesus' story is that this is what we are like if we don't forgive others. God has forgiven us in a huge, amazing way. Because of that, we should be ready and willing to forgive other people.

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- What does it mean to forgive someone?
- Why do we need to be forgiven by God?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- Why does what the first servant did feel so wrong to us?
- How can God's forgiveness inspire us to forgive others?

(7th Grade and up)

- What stands out to you about this story?
- How can God's forgiveness inspire us to forgive others?

LET'S PRAY

God, thank You so much for offering us forgiveness through Jesus. You have shown us such great mercy. We are so grateful to You. Help us to forgive others because You have forgiven us. Amen.

Practice Card Reminder: If your league uses practice cards, remember to distribute the practice cards entitled "Practice 9" at the end of practice.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** In this devotion, we'll see how forgiveness can forge new relationships. It can bring good from bad, wholeness from brokenness. God can use the forgiveness of His people to empower His church for incredible things. He did so in the life of Paul the apostle after he first converted to Christianity. In Damascus, God used Ananias to literally open Paul's eyes, comfort him, and lead him into the first moments of his new life as he received the Holy Spirit and was baptized. Probably about three years later, in Jerusalem, God used Barnabas to vouch for Paul and welcome him into the larger Christian community. But before these two incidents, there was actually one more instance of someone forgiving Paul for his involvement in the persecution of Christians. Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and was clearly in collusion with his murderers. Yet Stephen, following the example of Jesus, shouted, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" (Acts 7:57-60, NLT). Because of the faithfulness and sacrifice of these men to love and forgive their enemy, countless people came to faith in Christ, churches were planted all around the Mediterranean world, and millions of Christians over thousands of years have been blessed by Paul's writings in the New Testament.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Acts 9:1-31.
- **Encouragement:** Think about someone who has played the role of a Barnabas or an Ananias in your life. Who has forgiven you, welcomed you, or helped you find community? These kinds of people are such a blessing and have more of an impact than they usually know. Consider if there is someone in your life for whom you could be this kind of person.
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** How have I seen forgiveness bring good out of a bad situation?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

FORGIVENESS is deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay.

KEY VERSE

**Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.
Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.
Colossians 3:13 (NLT)**

Bottom Line: I want to be someone who forgives.

We started talking about forgiveness last week. Who can tell me what forgiveness is? (*Let athletes answer.*)

Today, I want to tell you about someone named Paul, who was also sometimes called Saul. Paul lived during Jesus' time, but we don't read about him in the story of the Bible until after Jesus had died, risen from the grave, and returned to heaven. During this time, Jesus' followers told everyone who would listen about Jesus and what He had done. But other people didn't like that Jesus' followers were spreading this news. They tried to hunt down Jesus' followers, throw them in jail, and even have them killed. Paul was one of those people. He thought Jesus was a liar and a fake, and he hated Jesus' followers.

One day, Paul was traveling, and a light from heaven suddenly shone around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying his name and asking, "Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:5, NLT)

Paul's life changed from that moment on. He believed that Jesus really was who He said He was. He was the Son of God. Paul now believed the same things that the people he had been trying to imprison and kill believed. He was one of them now. He was a Christian. But how could the others trust him?

God spoke to one Christian named Ananias in a dream. He told Ananias to go to the home where Paul was staying and to place his hands on Paul. Paul had been blinded since he encountered Jesus on the road, and he would be able to see again when Ananias did this.

Ananias was scared. He had heard what Paul had been doing to Christians. But God encouraged him to go, and Ananias obeyed God. He found Paul, placed his hands on him, and Paul could see again. Almost immediately, Paul started preaching and telling people all about Jesus. Ananias trusted in God enough to forgive and help Paul, but that wasn't the end of the story. There was someone else who did something similar.

Most of Jesus' followers lived in Jerusalem at this time. The Bible says, "When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer! Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told

them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.” (Acts 9:26-27, NLT)

While the other Christians in Jerusalem were scared of Paul, a man named Barnabas trusted God and took Paul under his wing. He introduced Paul to the other believers and told them how God had worked in Paul’s life. Because he did this, Paul was finally accepted by the other Christians.

“Barnabas” was actually the nickname of a man named Joseph. The name Barnabas meant “son of encouragement.” He was so encouraging that people started calling him that! It’s not surprising that Barnabas was the person who was able to see the truth about Paul, forgive him, and include him before everyone else.

Paul went on to become one of the greatest missionaries of all time. He traveled to many different places, starting churches and preaching about Jesus. Many people came to believe in Jesus because of him. And it all started with people like Ananias and Barnabas being able to forgive him and see what God was doing in his life. Barnabas even became one of Paul’s missionary partners, traveling with him to many different cities to tell people about Jesus.

It’s not always easy to forgive. Sometimes, we have good reasons to doubt someone. But we must trust God to guide us and to bring good out of the bad. He can change people’s lives. He can heal relationships. He can work through forgiveness in ways we can’t even imagine.

Discussion Questions

(K-2nd Grade)

- Why is it important to forgive?
- When is it easiest to forgive someone? When is it the most difficult?

(3rd-6th Grade)

- Do you think Paul would have been as successful a missionary if people like Barnabas and Ananias hadn’t led the way in forgiving him? Why or why not?
- Why is forgiveness so powerful?

(7th Grade and up)

- Do you think Paul would have been as successful a missionary if people like Barnabas and Ananias hadn’t led the way in forgiving him? Why or why not?
- How does forgiveness heal broken relationships?

LET’S PRAY

God, thank You for forgiving us. Please help us to forgive others. We know You can change lives and heal relationships. Give us wisdom and guidance, and show us when to forgive and help others. We love You, Lord. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



Scouting Report | Coaches, here's an inside look at this week's devotion.

- **Background:** Christians are to be a community of people who make a habit of forgiving one another. So, we must also be a community of people who make a habit of acknowledging our offenses and asking forgiveness—not only in our relationship with God but also in our relationships with others. Jesus said that if we are worshiping the Lord and remember there is an offense or fracture in one of our relationships, we should go immediately and make amends with that person. Sin is, first and foremost, something we should confess to God, seeking His forgiveness. But we must not forget to also confess our sins to one another and seek forgiveness when we have wronged someone else. This is not always the easiest thing to do, but it is the kind and respectful thing to do.
- **Big Picture:** For more insight, read Proverbs 28:13; James 5:13-16; Matthew 5:23-24.
- **Encouragement:** A healthy relationship will have a give-and-take of forgiving and asking for forgiveness if both parties are seeking to follow Jesus. Harmony and reconciliation are the byproducts of humility and forgiveness.
- **Coach's Question for Reflection:** Am I someone who apologizes when I hurt others? Why or why not?

Practice Devotion | Share This With Your Team

VIRTUE

FORGIVENESS is deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay.

KEY VERSE

**Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.
Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.
Colossians 3:13 (NLT)**

Bottom Line: I want to be someone who asks for forgiveness.

Wow, I can't believe the season is almost over! I'm so thankful for our team and for all the great times we've had. I'm so proud of you for how you've learned and grown this season.

Today is our last devotion about forgiveness. We've talked about how we want to be people who forgive others because God has forgiven us. But if we're really loving, respecting, and being kind to other people, there's another part of forgiveness that is also important. We don't just want to be people who forgive others. We want to be people who ask for forgiveness.

We might not like to admit it, but we're not perfect! We've talked before about how we all sin. Even when we believe in Jesus and know that He has paid the price for our sins, that doesn't mean we will stop sinning here on earth. God's Spirit will help us grow to be more like Jesus every day, but we're not there yet! As long as we're in our earthly bodies, we'll still sin sometimes. We'll still make mistakes.

Thankfully, we can know that if we have trusted in Jesus to save us, God has forgiven our sins. We should still confess those sins to Him and ask for His forgiveness because we love Him and want to be honest with Him. But our sins are already covered by Jesus. God isn't going to hold something against you if you forget to talk to Him about it.

But God is not the only one we need to ask for forgiveness from, is He? Sometimes, we hurt other people. When we sin against someone on purpose or we accidentally do something that causes them harm, we should apologize and ask for their forgiveness.

Why do we need to do this? Let's think back to some of the things we learned at the very beginning of the season. We learned that everyone is created in God's image and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves, with respect and kindness. When we hurt someone, the kind and loving thing to do is to let them know we're sorry. That's what we want others to do for us.

There's a verse in the Old Testament of the Bible that says, "People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy."

(Proverbs 28:13, NLT) The New Testament says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16, NLT)

Forgiveness, kindness, and respect are all important parts of what Jesus taught and how He lived. Following Jesus means living a life that is full of all these things. How we treat other people matters because people matter to God. I hope you’ll remember that and look for ways that you can be kind to others wherever you go, in whatever you do.

Discussion Questions

(Apply to All Grades This Week)

- How does it feel when someone apologizes to you?
- Is it easy or difficult for you to tell someone you’re sorry? Why do you think that is?
- What is something you learned this season?

LET’S PRAY

God, thank You for a wonderful season. Thank You for helping us learn all about kindness, forgiveness, and respect. Help each of us to remember that we matter to You and that other people matter to You, too. Show us how to treat others as we want to be treated. We love You, Lord. Amen.

Green Practice Star Reminder: If your league uses green practice stars, remember to distribute one to every athlete at the end of practice.



SECTION 4

GAMES

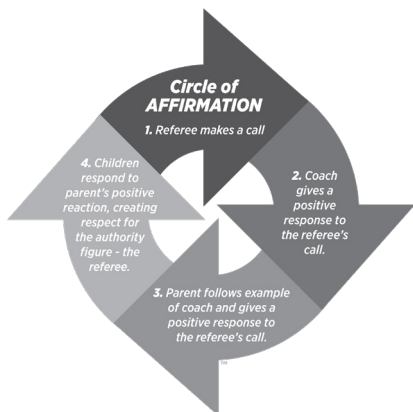
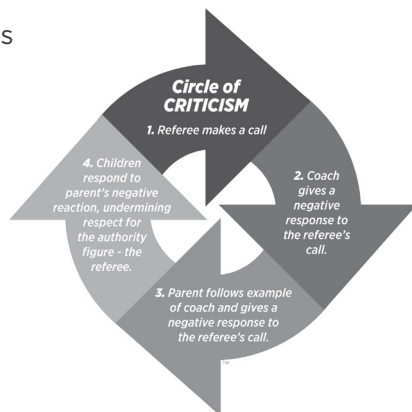
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→ Circle of Affirmation

Game Day Attitude

Choosing the right game-day attitude is a key to being an effective Upward Basketball Coach. Actions and reactions on the field can either open or close the door to ministry. The Circle of Criticism and the Circle of Affirmation are simple diagrams that illustrate the results of a coach giving a referee either negative or positive feedback.

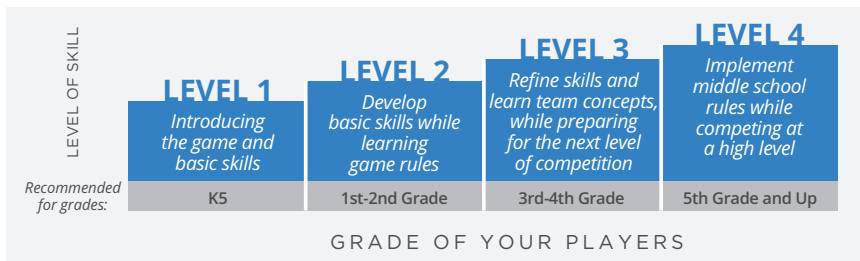
In Upward Basketball, coaches and referees work together as a unified team. Coaches have the opportunity and the responsibility to stop the Circle of Criticism by starting the Circle of Affirmation.



The Circle of Affirmation goes beyond the referee. A coach's affirmation of players inspires encouragement and praise from parents, family members and other players. Practicing the Circle of Affirmation makes the game a better experience for everyone.

→ The Levels of Upward Basketball

Upward Basketball suggests a four-level, age-appropriate format that progresses with each player. Each level of Upward Basketball is tailored to meet players where they are in their age development and ability, allowing them to reach their full potential.



→ Basic Rules for Levels 1-3

Note: These rules do NOT apply to Level 4.

Except where the following rules apply, play is governed by the National Federation of State High School Associations' (NFHS) Rules Book www.nfhs.org

Game Format

- ◆ Referees lead both teams in prayer at center court before every game. This sets the tone and focus for the game.
- ◆ A coin flip or other impartial method determines which team receives possession first. In jump ball situations, possessions will alternate. This promotes fairness for both teams while adhering to the NFHS rule for jump ball situations.
- ◆ Clock format: Running clock throughout the game, stopping only for pre-determined substitutions at the end of each segment and halftime.
- ◆ At the end of each segment, the team that receives the ball next is based upon the direction of the possession arrow. This avoids the offensive team that may have possession in the next segment from stalling at the end of a period.
- ◆ All coaches will adhere to the Upward substitution system. The substitution system allows for equal playing time for all players.
- ◆ There are no timeouts. This allows more playing time and keeps the games on time.
- ◆ Teams switch goals at halftime. This rule is in compliance with NFHS Rules. It also evens any advantage that may occur because of the court.
- ◆ Any game ending in a tie should remain in a tie. No overtimes are played so games stay on schedule.

Rules for Play

Defense

- ◆ Man-to-man defense will be played at all times in Levels 1-3. In a man-to-man defense, players are only guarding the opponent that closely matches their ability and height. This allows for a more competitive system for every player on the court while creating an equal opportunity for each player.
- ◆ Defensive players must stay within approximate arm's reach of the player they are guarding. This prevents defenders from sagging or crowding an area of the court to gain a defensive advantage. When a violation occurs, award the team in possession a throw-in from the spot nearest to the violation, or have the player step back and establish their dribble.
 - › After a warning to the player, the player will be assessed a personal foul for subsequent violations.
- ◆ Double-teaming is not allowed and prevents players not guarding their correct player from stealing the ball off the dribble. However, help-and-recover defense is strongly encouraged in the instances below. Help-and-recover lets a player temporarily guard another player as outlined in the examples below, but must leave as the other player gets within arms reach as double teaming is not allowed.
 - › **Lane Area:** If a defender is in the lane and the player they are guarding is within arm's reach, the defender is allowed to provide help defense inside the lane. Since many goals are scored in the lane, it provides the defense more opportunity to properly defend this area.

- › **Picks and Screens:** Defensive switching is allowed on offensive picks or screens. The non-screened defender can help his or her teammate by temporarily switching until the teammate recovers to defend their offensive player. This is commonly referred to as "help-and-recover." This prevents the offense from continually setting screens to gain an advantage.
- › **Fast Breaks:** When a transition begins in the backcourt and the offense quickly moves the ball up court, another defensive player may help-and-recover. Upon stopping the fast break, defenders should return to guarding their assigned players. This rule is meant to prevent the defenders from helplessly watching the offensive player score without being able to help.
- ◆ At the beginning of each segment, players will line up at half court and "match up" with whom they are guarding. This act is performed to promote equal player match-ups. Equal match-ups combined with man-to-man defense create five competitive pairings on the court.
- ◆ Full-court presses are not allowed. Defensive players may not guard their opponents in the backcourt. This will allow for more play to occur in the front court and create an equal opportunity for each player to participate both on offense and defense.
- ◆ When playing on a short court, backcourt violations will not be called. If playing on a regulation-size court (84 feet) as opposed to cross-court, backcourt violations should be called. 10 seconds should be called on short courts or regulation size courts.
- ◆ A player committing two fouls in one segment must sit out the remainder of that segment. The next player in the rotation comes in as the substitute and is rewarded some

extra game time. This does not change the normal rotation as the fouled-out player does not re-enter the game until they are next scheduled to do so. This rule allows the offending player time to regroup during the remainder of the segment while realizing that there is a consequence for the violation.

Offense

- ◆ The offense must purposefully attack the defense in every situation – no stalling or throwing the ball into the backcourt to “reset” a play or “retreat” from the defense. After a warning from the referee, a violation will be called resulting in a turnover. This will prevent a team with the lead from running the clock out by staying in the backcourt where the opponent is unable to play defense.
- ◆ Isolation plays will not be a part of Levels 1-3 because they take away the opportunity for improvement for all players and contradict the spirit of the rules. For offense this prevents players being positioned at half-court to isolate defenders away from the play.
- ◆ Non-shooting fouls will result in the ball being in-bounded from either the baseline or sideline. All shooting fouls will result in two free throws. By not administering “bonus” situation free throws, all players on the court can contribute to consistent game action.
- ◆ No score will be given for a basket in the wrong goal. It will be treated as a turnover and will be taken out along the baseline. This will prevent further embarrassing a player for making this mistake.

→ Level 1 (K5) Modifications

RULE	EXPLANATION / COMMENTS
Goal Height	7 feet
Ball Size	27.5"
Games consist of six, 6-minute segments and an 8 minute halftime. One minute is allotted for substitutions between segments.	This keeps games to approximately an hour time frame.
Score is not kept	The focus of this age is to learn fundamentals, not winning and losing.
3-second violation is not called	Referees should advise players of this potential violation but not penalize.
Coaches are allowed on the floor with players	The focus is for coaches to instruct and encourage players at all times.
Stealing the ball from the dribbler is not allowed	To encourage the offensive player to dribble with correct form without the pressure of having the ball stolen.
Stealing the ball off a pass is not allowed	To encourage the offensive player to pass with correct form without the pressure of having the ball stolen. A block should not be considered a steal.
Violation is not called for having two hands on the ball while dribbling	Due to limited hand-eye coordination, this allows a player to establish correct dribbling form through rhythm and pressure on the ball.
Violation for double dribbling is called but does not result in a turnover	Players should learn the concept of double dribble but should be allowed the opportunity to correct it without penalty.
Violation for traveling is called but does not result in a turnover	Players should learn the concept of traveling, but should be allowed the opportunity to correct it without penalty.
Violation for traveling is not called when a player shuffles feet when trying to set up for a shot	Because this age group is single skill focused, players will tend to shuffle their feet when focusing on setting up for a shot. This is corrected as the player develops in skill as he gets older.
Fast Breaks are allowed in any transition situation	Players at this age will learn proper transition offense.
Free throws are awarded on all shooting fouls	Two shots are attempted by the fouled player at the 8'-10' line. Offense may have up to 2 players on the lane, not including the shooter. Defense may have up to 3 players on the lane. After the last free throw attempt, the ball becomes live.

→ Level 2 (1st & 2nd Grade) Modifications

RULE	EXPLANATION / COMMENTS
Goal Height	8 feet
Ball Size	27.5"
Games consist of six, 6-minute segments and an 8 minute halftime. One minute is allotted for substitutions between segments.	This keeps games to approximately an hour time frame.
Score is Optional	Focus on teaching young athletes the proper skill development traits needed to handle winning and losing after a game. This will translate into life lessons.
3-second violation is not called	Young athletes at this age should focus on offensive basics (dribbling, passing, shooting, and rebounding).
One Coach per team is allowed to walk the sidelines to encourage and instruct players	Players will be able to focus their attention on the coach standing. Walking the sidelines allows the coach to instruct and encourage players at all times.
Free throws are awarded on all shooting fouls	Two shots are attempted by the fouled player at the 10' line. Offense may have up to 2 players on the lane, not including the shooter. Defense may have up to 3 players on the lane. After the last free throw attempt, the ball becomes live.
Stealing the ball off a dribble or pass is allowed	Players at this age should be taught and held to these basic basketball rules.
Double dribble violation is called in all circumstances	
Traveling violation is called in all circumstances	
Fast breaks are allowed in any transition situation	

→ Level 3 (3rd & 4th Grade) Modifications

RULE	EXPLANATION/COMMENTS
Goal Height	9 feet
Ball Size	28.5"
Games consist of six, 6-minute segments and an 8-minute halftime. One minute is allotted for substitutions between segments.	This keeps games to approximately an hour time frame.
Score IS kept	Young athletes at this age should learn how to handle winning and losing after competition. This translates into life lessons.
3-second violation is called and results in a turnover	At this age, young athletes should understand the concept of offensive movement by not allowing an offensive player to stay in the lane more than 3 seconds
One coach per team is allowed to stand in their coach box area to encourage and instruct players.	Players will be able to focus their attention on the coach standing. Walking the sidelines allows the coach to instruct and encourage players at all times.
<p>Clock runs continuously with special rules in effect with fewer than two minutes remaining in the game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Non-shooting fouls result in the offensive team getting one point and the ball. ◆ Shooting fouls result in the offensive team scoring two points. The opposing team then takes possession. ◆ Players fouled in the act of shooting and making the basket are credited with the basket plus one point. The opposing team then takes possession. 	<p>Because the clock does not stop, this rule keeps the game moving without wasting the running game clock on lining up for free throw attempts</p>
Free throws are awarded on all shooting fouls.	Two shots are attempted by the fouled player at the 12' line. Offense may have up to 2 players on the lane, not including the shooter. Defense may have up to 3 players on the lane. After the last free throw attempt, the ball becomes live.
Stealing the ball off a dribble or pass is allowed	Players at this age should be taught and held to these basic basketball rules.
Double dribble violation is called in all circumstances	
Traveling violation is called in all circumstances	
Fast breaks are allowed in any transition situation	

→ Level 4 (5th Grade & Up) Rules

*The following rules are exclusive to Level 4. They follow a more traditional middle school format and game play. Except where the following rules apply, play is governed by the National Federation of State High School Associations' (NFHS) Rules Book www.nfhs.org

RULE	EXPLANATION / COMMENTS
Referees lead both team in prayer at center court before every game	This sets the tone and focus for the game
Goal Height	10 feet
Ball Size	28.5" (girls), 29.5' (boys)
Games consist of 4, six minute quarters	Follows middle school rules and allows game to begin and end within an hour timeframe
The clock stops at each whistle	Stoppage of play includes violations, fouls, out-of-bounds play, timeouts, and injury
Overtimes are 2 minutes in length (regulation clock)	<p>Gives both teams the opportunity to win the game with reasonably extended time. If the game is still tied at the end of the first overtime period, you have two options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The game ends in a tie ◆ First team to score a basket wins the game (no extra time needed)
Teams are allowed one 30-second timeout per half (1 per team per half)	This allows a coach to meet with players and adjust strategy during a game
All games are played on a full-sized regulation court (no cross court)	This is appropriate floor size for players at this level
A jump ball is used to start the game and overtime period	Athletes at this age have the physical ability to jump for the ball to obtain possession. It also follows the NFHS rules for starting a game or overtime
Zone and man defenses are allowed (both may be used throughout the season)	Players at this level possess the ability to defend and attack both zone and man principles. Zone and man defenses are a part of the game of basketball and should be understood by players as they prepare for the next level.
Press defense is allowed in the backcourt at all times except if a team has a 15-point advantage	To promote fairness and integrity of the game, teams with a 15-point advantage should drop into a basic half-court defense.

(cont.)

→ Level 4 (5th Grade & Up) Rules Cont.

RULE	EXPLANATION / COMMENTS
<p>All players are allowed five fouls each game. After the 5th foul is committed, the player is out for the remainder of the game</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Beginning with the fifth team foul in each quarter, bonus free throws are awarded to the fouled team (2 shots). The number of fouls counting towards the bonus resets at the end of each quarter, so the bonus free throws do not carry over from quarter to quarter.</p>	<p>This rule follows traditional middle school rules format</p>
<p>Three point shots are allowed only if the court features a three-point arc.</p>	<p>Courts without a 3-point line should not award 3 points no matter the shot distance</p>
<p>Playing time requirements for each player in Level 4 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Each athlete plays a minimum of $\frac{1}{4}$ of each game ◆ Each athlete must play in both halves of each game 	<p>Level 4 does not use the substitution system found in Levels 1-3. This allows flexibility in managing playing time for each coach based on the game situation while promoting fair game participation for all players</p>
<p>End of season tournaments are encouraged for Level 4</p>	<p>End of season tournament play adds excitement to your league. (see Resources on MyUpward.org for tournament templates)</p>

→ Upward Substitution Rotation

- ◆ The basic Upward substitution system applies to ONLY Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 divisions.
- ◆ Level 4 division does not use the basic Upward Substitution Rotations detailed in this training guide. Playing time for this division are:
 - Each player plays a minimum of 1/4 each game.
 - Each player must play in both halves of each game.
- ◆ In Level 1 games consist of six 6-minute segments with an 8-minute halftime. Levels 2 and 3 plays six 6-minute segments with an 8-minute halftime.

The Upward Substitution Rotation for Levels 1-3 is designed to provide every player equal opportunity for improvement. The substitution system ensures the following:

- ◆ Every player will play at least half of the game. This eliminates preferential treatment of players.
- ◆ No player will sit out more than six minutes at a time. This allows each player to be involved in consistent game action and assists in keeping players focused and engaged in the game.
- ◆ The starting lineup shifts down one player for the start of every game allowing every player to be in the starting lineup. This gives all players a time to be on the court first and no child feels as though they are used only as a reserve player.

- ◆ Coaches are not open to making unfair substitutions. Following substitution rotation helps coaches manage who should be in the game.
- ◆ Coaches are free from monitoring playing time for each player. The substitution system allows coaches to focus more on instructing and encouraging players than awarding playing time.
- ◆ Playing time for all players is virtually even over the course of the season. This gives all players game experience and to allows them to be a contributing teammate.

When using MyUpward, mark the game complete to see a summary of the stars and notes you took during the game for easy post game star presentation.

MYUPWARD MAKES THE SUBSTITUTION SYSTEM EASY TO MANAGE. IT SHOWS THE GAME BY GAME PER PERIOD ROTATION WHERE YOU MAY ACTIVATE PLAYERS, REMOVE PLAYERS FROM THE LINEUP, TAKE NOTES AND TRACK GAME DAY STARS.

→ Filling Out the Substitution Form

Here is how to use substitution form in the back of the book if you are not using MyUpward.org.

Step 1

Rank players according to skill level starting with letter "A." This ranking is based on evaluation score and what you observe at pre-season practices.

Step 2

For Week 1, begin with Player "A" and work down the first column (A-E). These are your starting five.

Step 3

Begin the rotation where you left off in the previous segment. If you are at the bottom of your list, be sure to go back to the top until you have five players in the segment.

Week 1		FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF		
PLAYER NAME	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	
A Beth	X	X	X		X	X	
B Ann	X	X		X	X	X	
C Susan	X	X		X	X		
D Kim	X		X	X	X		
E Mary	X		X	X		X	
F Karen		X	X	X		X	
G Amy		X	X		X	X	
H							
I							
J							

Step 4

Continue this process for the remainder of the segments.

For Week 2, begin with Player “B” and fill in five players for the starting lineup.

Using the previous method, you would then fill in the rest of the form accordingly for Week 2.

Week 2

PLAYER NAME	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF		
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min
A Beth						
B Ann	X					
C Susan	X					
D Kim	X					
E Mary	X					
F Karen	X					
G Amy						
H						
I						
J						

Substitution Scenario

It's Week 3 and, as game time approaches, Mary has not arrived (she is supposed to be in the starting lineup for Week Three). She did not call prior to the game and inform you that she will not be present.

How to fill out the form:

Since it's Week 3, you'll start with Susan followed by Kim. For the first segment only, draw a line through the box for Mary. Fill in the box for Karen and Amy (this now gives you four players). To occupy the fifth spot, fill in the next person in the rotation (Beth). This is your new starting lineup for Week Three.

Week 3

PLAYER NAME	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF		
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min
A Beth	X					
B Ann						
C Susan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
D Kim	X					
E Mary	---					
F Karen	X					
G Amy	X					
H						
I						
J						

For the second segment, start with the next person in the rotation (Ann) and work down the form to include Susan and Kim. Draw a line through Mary's box and continue down the form to include Karen and Amy.

If by the third segment Mary has yet to arrive, draw another line through her name and begin with the next person in the rotation (Beth) to begin this segment. Continue this lineup with Ann, Susan, Kim and Karen.

Week 3

PLAYER NAME	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF		
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min
A Beth	X		X			
B Ann		X	X			
C Susan	X	X	X			
D Kim	X	X	X			
E Mary	---	---	---			
F Karen	X	X	X			
G Amy	X	X				
H						
I						
J						

If Mary arrives during halftime, continue with the current cycle including Mary in the proper rotation. Then continue with the rest of the rotations through the end of the game. As you can see with the previous example, it is important to NOT fill out your form prior to the game. If a participant is absent, it is best to fill out your form segment by segment in case the absent player arrives at some point during the game.

Week 3

PLAYER NAME	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF		
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min
A Beth	X		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	
B Ann		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	X	
C Susan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X	X		X
D Kim	X	X	X	X		X
E Mary	---	---	---		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X
F Karen	X	X	X		X	X
G Amy	X	X		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	X	X
H						
I						
J						

→ Game Day Stars

If your league is using Game Day Stars, you have an Award Stars booklet. These multi-colored stickers are given to each player at the end of every game. Star presentation should be an exciting time. Encourage parents to cheer as stars are distributed to each player. Make specific points why each participant receives a particular star. Notes you or your assistant coach take during the game should be used during this time as you encourage their efforts.

TIP: Find a location off of the court and take your time with this activity after the game.

Here is an example of how to conduct a star presentation:

“During the game today Luke was in the right position on defense every time with his arms out and palms up and defending the other players strong hand. Luke made great decisions and made the defensive stop each time. Today Luke will get the red star for his defensive effort. Great defense today Luke!”

Use the star distribution form on MyUpward in the Gameday area or in the back of your coach playbook to track which stars each participant has received. Make an attempt to award each participant all five stars throughout the season.

Encourage players to display the stars they receive on their posters. Here is a list of the game day stars and what they represent.



Blue is for Effort



Gold is for Sportsmanship



Gray is for Offense



Red is for Defense



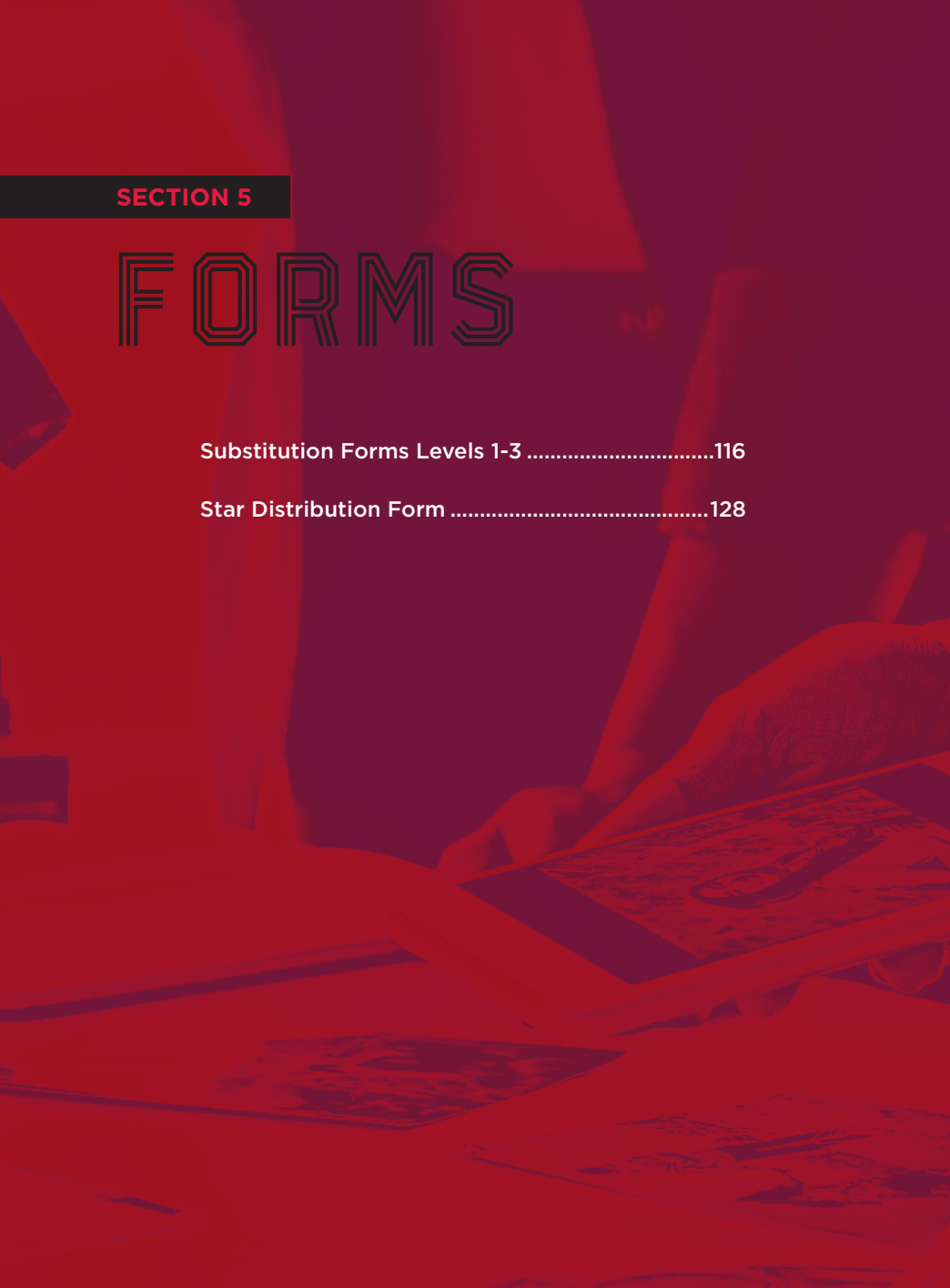
White is for Christlikeness

SECTION 5

FORMS

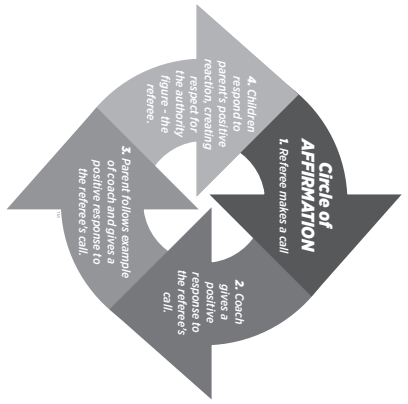
Substitution Forms Levels 1-3116

Star Distribution Form128



Game 1 - Sub Form

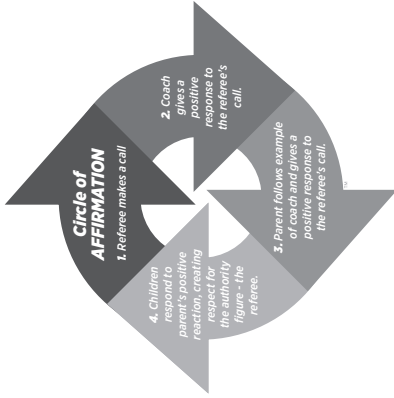
	FIRST HALF						SECOND HALF						POST GAME
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	Notes / Stars						
A													
B													
C													
D													
E													
F													
G													
H													
I													
J													



NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 2 - Sub. Form

Player's Name	FIRST HALF		SECOND HALF		POST GAME		
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	Notes / Stars
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							

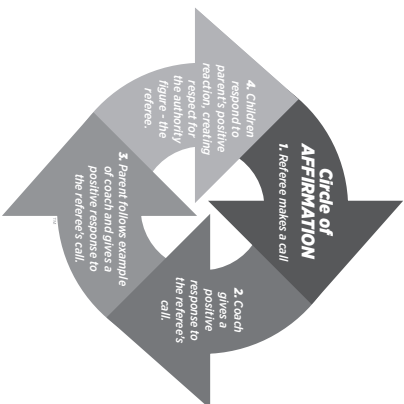


NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 3 - Sub Form

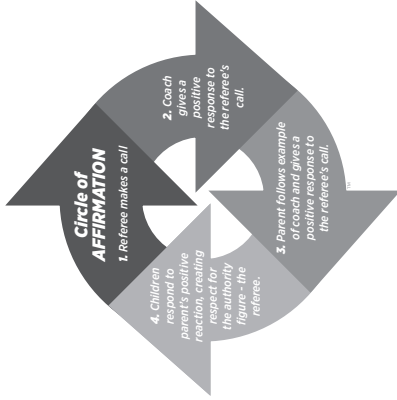
Player's Name	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF			Notes / Stars
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							

NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:



Game 4 - Sub. Form

Player's Name	FIRST HALF		SECOND HALF		POST GAME
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min 12 min 6 min	Notes / Stars
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					
F					
G					
H					
I					
J					

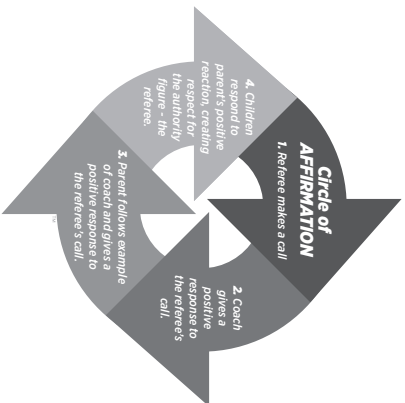


NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 5 - Sub. Form

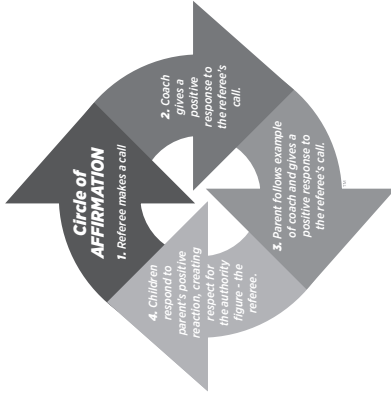
Player's Name	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF			Notes / Stars
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							

NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:



Game 6 - Sub. Form

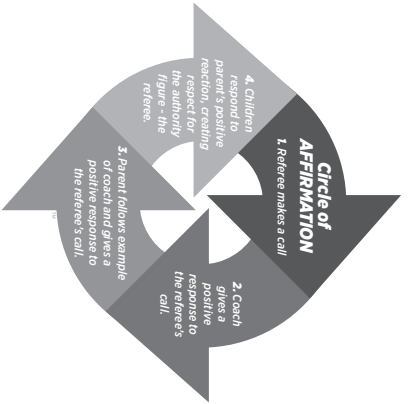
Player's Name	FIRST HALF		SECOND HALF		POST GAME		
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	Notes / Stars
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							



NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 7 - Sib. Form

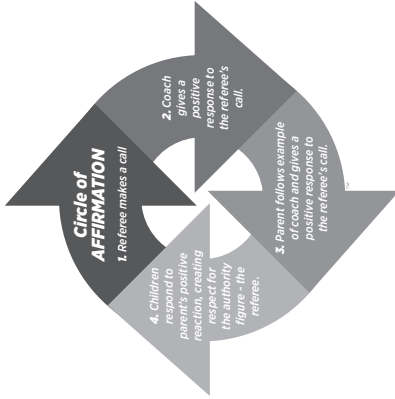
Player's Name	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF			Notes / Stars
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							



NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 8 - Sub. Form

Player's Name	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF			POST GAME	
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	Notes / Stars	
A								
B								
C								
D								
E								
F								
G								
H								
I								
J								

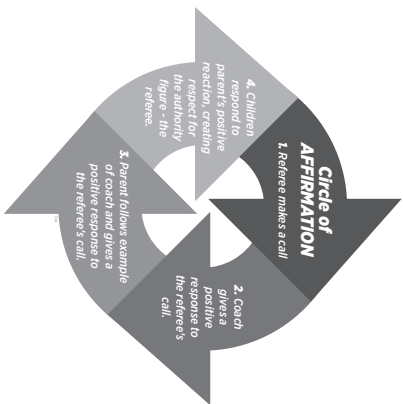


NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 9 - Sub. Form

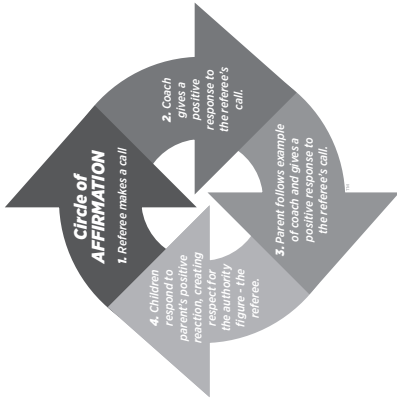
Player's Name	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF			Notes / Stars
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							

NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:



Game 10 - Sub. Form

Player's Name	FIRST HALF		SECOND HALF		POST GAME	
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min
A						
B						
C						
D						
E						
F						
G						
H						
I						
J						

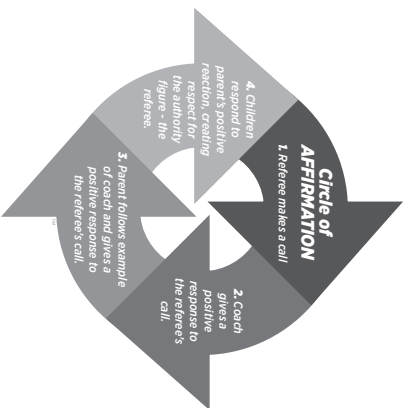


NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Game 11 - Sub. Form

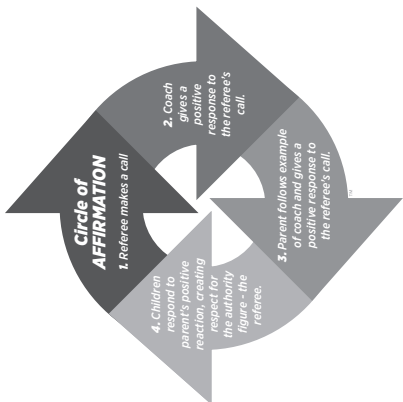
Player's Name	FIRST HALF			SECOND HALF			Notes / Stars
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min	
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							

NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:



Game 12 - Sub. Form

Player's Name	FIRST HALF		SECOND HALF		POST GAME	
	18 min	12 min	6 min	18 min	12 min	6 min
A						
B						
C						
D						
E						
F						
G						
H						
I						
J						



NOTES FOR NEXT PRACTICE:

Upward Basketball STAR DISTRIBUTION FORM

Use a pencil to record the color of the star that players receive each game.

Player's Name	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game	Game
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Award Stars help you to celebrate effort and place value in individual and team growth. Coaches should give sincere praise, which is specific to what participants have earned. Consider recruiting a “Star Coach” who can take notes and help with times where stars are presented.

BLUE STAR – The blue star represents EFFORT which means giving your best at all times regardless of the circumstances.

GOLD STAR – The gold star represents SPORTSMANSHIP which means treating your teammates and opponents the way you want to be treated. You show respect to yourself, teammates, opponents, referees, coaches, and the game by demonstrating sportsmanship.

RED STAR – The red star represents DEFENSE which means coordinating with your team to slow down or stop the opponent from making a play or scoring. Defense requires an awareness of being in the right position, hustle and hard work.

GRAY STAR – The gray star represents OFFENSE which means working with your team for a positive play or a score. Offense requires being aware of your teammates and their opportunities as well as using your skills to advance the goals of your team which leads to a score.

WHITE STAR – The white star represents CHRISTLIKENESS which means doing your best to imitate Jesus in every way through your words, attitudes, and actions.

Find tools online at MyUpward.org to teach the sport and share the gospel.

Accept the invitation from your League Director to MyUpward.org and have access to:

- *Team roster*
- *Practice and game schedule*
- *Practice plan and devotion material*
- *Videos for practice*
- *Communication Tools*
- *Game day management*
- *Tutorial videos*

