Intermediate Basketball Course Notes

History
Basketball was the first major team sport invented in the United States. It was invented in December 1891 by Dr. James Naismith, a faculty member at the International YMCA Training School (now Springfield College) in Springfield, MA. Naismith created basketball in response to an assignment by Dr. Luther Gulick, the director of the Physical Education Department. Gulick assigned Naismith the task of devising a competitive game like football or lacrosse that could be played indoors during the long New England winters. After rejecting other ideas as either too rough or poorly suited to walled gymnasiums, Naismith settled on the idea of scoring goals by throwing a soccer ball into an elevated basket. He then wrote-up some basic rules and nailed a peach basket onto a 10-foot elevated track. Naismith’s new game, called “Basket Ball,” was an instant hit!

The first official game was played in the YMCA gymnasium on January 20, 1892, with nine players; the game ended at 1–0. The one shot was made from 25 feet (longer than an NBA 3-pointer). By 1897–1898 teams of five became standard. Peach baskets were used until 1906 when they were finally replaced by metal hoops with backboards. Dribbling was not part of the original game except for the “bounce pass” to teammates. Passing the ball was the primary means of ball movement. Dribbling was eventually introduced but limited by the asymmetrical shape of early balls. Dribbling only became a major part of the game around the 1950s as manufacturing improved ball shape.

College Basketball
Soon after the advent of basketball, colleges began competing against one another. By the early 1900’s, frequent injuries in men’s collegiate sports prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to suggest that colleges form a governing body over their sports. On March 31, 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was established to set rules for amateur sports in the U.S. In 1910, that body would change its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

Although not a championship tournament, the first men’s basketball tournament was organized in 1937. This tournament still exists today as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) tournament. The first national championship tournament for NCAA teams, the National Invitation Tournament (NIT), was held in New York City in 1938. Temple University was the champion. The NCAA national tournament began one year later.

College basketball was rocked by gambling scandals from 1948 to 1951, when dozens of players from top teams were implicated in match fixing and point shaving. Partially spurred by an association with cheating, the NIT lost its financial support to the NCAA tournament. To this day, the NCAA tournament is recognized as the championship tournament for NCAA teams.

The Court
Dimensions: 55 feet wide, 94 feet long (college and professional)
Free-Throw line: 15 feet from the backboard.
Three-Point line: 19 feet 9 inches (NCAA Women’s and high school)
20 feet 9 inches—new in 2008 (NCAA Men’s)
21 feet 1.75 inches (WNBA)
23 feet 9 inches—through the arcing portion (NBA)
The Basket

The basket hoop is a metal ring 18 inches in diameter, suspended 10 feet above the floor. Each basket is attached to a fan- or rectangle-shaped backboard designed for banking shots and deflecting inaccurate shots back into the playing field. Backboards are placed 4 feet inside the endline.

Games

Typical game lengths at different levels are as follows:

- **Professional:** 4 quarters of 12 minutes each (48 minutes)
- **College:** 2 halves of 20 minutes each (40 minutes)
- **High School:** 4 quarters of 8 minutes each (32 minutes)

Fouls/Violations

Fouls and violations are called by officials (or individual players in the absence of officials). Fouls are called as a result of illegal contact with an opposing player. They carry with them some sort of penalty—most commonly free throws for, or possession of the ball to, the opponent. In high school, college, and the WNBA, individual players are disqualified from the game when they commit their fifth personal foul. In the NBA this number increases to six.

Some common types of fouls are as follows:

- **Holding, pushing, charging, tripping, hand checking, or impeding an opponent’s progress:** This is usually done by extending the body or a body part into one’s opponent or by using unusually rough tactics.
- **Extending your arms to hinder your opponent:** This is done by extending one’s arms other than vertically, so that an opponent’s freedom of movement is hindered when contact with the arms occurs.
- **Illegal screen:** This occurs when one is still moving while setting a screen and contact occurs with the defender.
- **Technical foul:** A foul that does not involve contact with an opponent; a foul that involves unsportsmanlike conduct by a player, coach, or non-player; or a contact foul committed by a player while the ball is dead.

Ballhandling and time violations are an infringement of the rules, but are not considered fouls. These result in loss of ball possession.

Some common violations are as follows:

- **5 seconds to inbound:** Failure for a ball to be caught within 5 seconds after a made basket or after an official hands the ball to the inbounder.
- **10 seconds to cross midcourt:** Taking 10 seconds or longer to get the ball across midcourt.
- **3 seconds in key (lane):** Being in the offensive key for 3 seconds or longer without a member of your team shooting.
- **Charging:** Running into or pushing a stationary defender.
- **Illegal Dribbling:** Resuming dribbling after having stopped dribbling or dribbling with both hands simultaneously.
- **Out of bounds:** Causing the ball to go out of bounds (lines are out).
- **Over-and-back:** Causing the ball to return to the backcourt after it has crossed into the frontcourt without the defense touching it.
- **Palming the ball:** Placing the dribbling hand under the ball and momentarily holding or carrying it while dribbling.
- **Traveling:** Taking more than one step before starting to dribble or taking two or more steps before releasing a pass or shot.
Hand Signals
Fouls and Ball Violations

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Skills
Defensive Positioning/Footwork

Defensive pressure on the ball is required at all times. When guarding an opponent, always maintain a defensive position (feet apart and staggered, knees bent, back straight, arms raised to the sides, and head up). Position yourself between your opponent and the basket at all times.

Defensively, you should always be ready to move. Following are three basic defensive movements:
• **Side step:** Push off the far foot and take short, quick steps in the direction of your opponent. Keep proper balance and never cross your feet. *(For when your opponent tries to move around you.)*

• **Drop step:** If the offensive move is toward your lead foot, you must first perform a drop step in the direction of the attack. To do this, quickly drop your lead foot in the direction of your opponent’s move by performing a reverse pivot. Use quick side steps to reestablish your intended defensive position.

• **Attack step:** Use good judgment and balance when “closing out.” Maintain a staggered stance and push off your back foot, using short, quick attack steps, without crossing your feet. Protect your lead foot by positioning it outside your opponent’s body. *(For when you want to apply more pressure on your opponent.)*

**Ball Handling**

Good dribbling is a key skill that should be acquired by every player. Dribbling helps a player to move the ball out of congested areas when passing isn’t an option. It also plays a key role in advancing the ball up court during fast breaks and pressure situations. Dribbling allows the offense to penetrate the defense for a drive to the basket. As well, it helps draw defenders to the ball, creating an opening for other teammates.

Special attention should be given to developing your dribbling with each hand. Following are the two basic forms of dribbling:

• **Control dribbling:** Don’t watch your dribble. Keep your knees bent and head up to see the rim. Dribble the ball close to your body at a knee height or lower. Focus on keeping the ball in contact only with your finger pads and maintain strong wrist and finger flexion. Finally, use your non-dribbling hand to shield your defender and protect the ball. *(To be used when closely guarded.)*

• **Speed dribbling:** Again, don’t watch your dribble. When moving forward, dribble the ball out in front of your body with the ball at waist height. As with control dribbling, effort needs to be made to dribble off the finger pads, with strong wrist and finger flexion, while protecting the ball with your other arm. *(To be used when not closely guarded, during fast breaks, or when performing a quick drive to the basket.)*

Despite its high value, dribbling should rarely be the first option upon receiving the ball. The goal is to score—not to look good dribbling around. If a scoring opportunity presents itself, take it. If a pass presents itself that could set up a scoring opportunity, pass the ball (a pass travels much faster than a dribble). If these opportunities are not there, then start a control dribble and see how things develop.

**Passing/Receiving**

Passing the ball is the fastest way in which the ball is moved around the court and, as such, should be the primary weapon of your offensive attack. Passing and receiving are the common denominators of offensive success. Despite this, passing and receiving are the most neglected offensive fundamentals in basketball. Developing your ability to pass and catch makes you a better player and helps make your teammates better.

Two common forms of passing are as follows:

• **Chest pass:** Starting from a balanced position, hold the ball with two hands in front of your chest. Elbows should be in, with hands slightly behind the ball. Step toward your target as you extend your legs, back, and arms. Force your fingers and wrists through the ball with a snapping motion. Give emphasis to your weak hand, as the strong hand tends to dominate. Whenever possible look away from your target when passing or fake a pass to another area on the court first. This will give you an advantage over your opponent.
• **Bounce pass:** The bounce pass is usually used when you do not have a clear ball path to your teammate. The bounce pass allows the ball to go under the arms of your opponent and to your teammate. When placed properly, the bounce pass is often an easier pass to receive. Execute the bounce pass the same way you would a chest pass only throw the ball toward the floor instead of directly at the target. Aim for a spot on the floor about two thirds of the way to your target. If the ball bounces too far from or too close to your target, it will result in the ball being high or low, making it difficult to catch.

Remember, pass before you dribble. Know where you want the ball to go before you start to pass it. Once you are sure about it, pass the ball quickly and accurately. Passing is a risk/reward skill. While some passes may appear to have a great reward, they are often the riskiest passes to attempt. Develop a balance between aggressive passing and conservative passing. Be smart with your passes, but know when to take risks.

**Rebounding**

Good rebounders are good because they want the ball. Doing everything you can to get the ball is what will set you apart as a successful rebounder. Often this is displayed in what you do to prepare for a rebound rather than the rebound itself. The key to preparation is getting inside position on your opponent. The first thing you should do when a shot goes up is make contact with your opponent. Defenders are at an advantage because they are already positioned between the basket and their opponent. You establish inside position by “blocking out” your opponent. Stated simply, blocking out is putting your back on your opponent’s chest and holding your position. If your opponent is standing and watching the shot, simply turn into him/her and establish your ground. If your opponent tries to run around you to get the rebound, block their path by turning in the direction they are going. When attempting to recover an offensive rebound, the key is to move. Do whatever it takes to get around your defender. Avoid being blocked out by continuing to move. If you do get blocked out, don’t give up—keep moving and get around the block.

When rebounding, do not wait for the ball to come to you. Attack the boards aggressively, going up with both hands. Be prepared for attempted steals by firmly grasping the ball and protecting it in front of your forehead and away from your opponents.

**Shooting**

**Lay-ups**

All players should learn to properly shoot both left- and right-handed lay-ups. When shooting a lay-up, attack the basket by accelerating to the hoop. Jump high off the inside foot by “stomping” on the last step (minimize forward motion). Go up with both hands, while protecting the ball from your opponent by keeping it on your outside shoulder or hip. Lay the ball up softly off the backboard with a feather-like touch. Focus your shot on the top near corner of the box on the backboard.

Types of lay-ups:

• **Overhand (push):** Palm faces backboard. *(Most common.)*
• **Underhand (scoop):** Palm faces up with arm extended. *(Softer shot.)*
• **Reach-back (reverse):** Take one extra dribble where you would normally jump. Take two steps under the basket and use the hoop to shield your opponent. Face away from the basket and shoot on the opposite side of your attack. Either hand can be used. *(Shields a trailing defender.)*
• *Jump stop (power)*: Come to a full stop. Go up strong using the backboard. Like a close-range jump shot. (*Used in high defensive traffic.*)

• *Finger roll*: Similar to the underhand only straight on at the hoop and no backboard is used.
Jump Shot

For a jump shot hold the ball high (around the head) and shoot after jumping (just before your highest point). Performing an effective jump shot takes practice and focus. Follow these six keys to good shooting:

- **Sight:** For non-bank shots, focus on the basket, just over the front of the rim. If your shot is consistently short, try focusing more toward the back of the rim. For bank shots, focus on the top near corner of the box on the backboard.

- **Balance:** Position feet shoulder-width apart and point your toes at the basket (this brings your knees, hips and shoulders into alignment). Most players stagger their stance by bringing the foot on the side of the shooting hand forward. Flex your knees prior to shooting (this is where you will get your power).

- **Hand placement/Wrist position:** Place your shooting hand directly behind the ball and your support hand to the side and under the ball for balance. The ball will be released off your index finger, so place that finger directly at the midpoint of the ball. Position your wrist so that it is “locked and cocked” (in toward the body and back toward the head).

- **Elbow alignment:** The shooting elbow should be elevated, in-line with the shoulder, and in front of the wrist.

- **Shooting rhythm:** Rhythm involves synchronizing the extension of your legs, back, shoulders, and shooting elbow, and the flexion of your wrist and fingers. This should be a smooth sequence of events starting with the legs and ending with the fingers. Release the ball off your index finger with a soft touch to impart backspin on the ball. Keep your support hand on the ball until it is released.

- **Follow through:** After release, keep your arm up and fully extended with your index finger pointing at the basket. The palm of your shooting hand should face down and the palm of your support hand should face up and to the side.

Free Throws

Confidence is the single most important part of free-throw shooting. If you think you are a “bad free-throw shooter” you will always be right! Think positively!

Develop a sound routine for shooting free throws. This helps you remember your mechanics, relax, focus, and shoot with rhythm. Use the same mechanics for a free throw that you would for a jump shot, but without jumping. With free throws you have the advantage of aligning yourself directly in front of the basket. Position yourself so that the ball (shoulder of the shooting arm) is aligned with the middle of the basket. Position your shooting hand on the back of the ball with your index finger covering the air hole. Properly support the ball with your support hand. Follow the other mechanics used in performing a jump shot (sight, balance, wrist, elbow, rhythm, and follow through) to complete the free throw. Before shooting, visualize a successful free throw and allow yourself to relax. Even with proper mechanics, tension and doubt will almost always cause you to miss. Trust in yourself and you will find success.

Offensive Strategy

At its best, basketball is a team game played by five players moving the ball, moving without the ball, and making quick, intelligent decisions, especially in regard to shot selection.
**Man Offense**

The passing game, or motion offense, is one of the most popular team offenses in history. It involves passing, movement with the ball, movement without the ball, communication, and proper spacing. It is usually employed against a team using a man defense. Some basic actions used in the passing game are the backdoor cut, flash, give-and-go, dribble screen or weave, downscreen, back pick, elbow curl, cross-screen, pick-and-roll, and draw-and-kick.

**Zone Offense**

Often when teams are playing a zone defense, the offense is forced to play a different style of offense. The most common way of attacking a zone is by using an offset alignment. Attacking an even numbered zone with an odd number of players allows the offense to get into the gaps of the defense. Teams usually implement basic zone principles rather than specific zone offenses. These principles include fast breaking whenever possible, using good spacing, quickly moving the ball with passing, reversing the ball’s direction, splitting the zone (going to gaps), drawing in the zone and kicking the ball out, patience and good shot selection, and, finally, attacking the offensive boards.

**Movement without the Ball**

To help your team create scoring opportunities, you must be able to move without the ball. Players tend not to move if they don’t have the ball; doing so hurts your own and your team’s opportunity to score. Moving without the ball not only results in getting yourself open, but in setting and moving off screens to enable your teammates to get open.

Some basic principles pertaining to movement without the ball are as follows:

- Using various maneuvers to get open allows you to receive the ball and to be an offensive threat.
- Setting screens on or off the ball may open up a teammate or force a switch, opening you up.
- Using screens set for you allows you to get open or may open up the screener.
- When away from the ball, movement keeps your defender occupied and limits the amount of defensive “help” on the ball.
- Movement within the flow of the game keeps you alert to loose balls or to a change in ball possession.
- When a shot goes up, movement should be in the direction of an offensive rebound or getting back on defense.

Specific movements that might be used in a game are the v-cut, backdoor cut, give-and-go, screen away, pick-and-roll, flash-and-backdoor cut, and dribble-screen-handoff.

**Defensive Strategy**

Evidence suggests the old statement, “defense wins championships,” is rather accurate. Teams that display determination on defense appear to be more consistent from game to game. Teams that rely heavily on their offense are forced to rely on consistently high shooting percentages in order to win. A solid defense can help a team “weather the storm” of a poor shooting game.

**Man Defense**

The most effective way to play great defense is by pressuring the ball. This is why most teams use what is referred to as “man defense.” This is where everyone on the team is assigned to guard a specific player. Each teammate is responsible for his/her individual opponent while at the same time defending against the opposition as a whole. However, when one teammate gets beat, it is the responsibility of the rest of the team to help him/her out. Man defense gains its strength from its ability to put constant pressure on the offense. No offensive player goes unaccounted, and the defense is better able to take advantage of offensive mistakes.
Zone Defense

Some teams like to use a zone defense to defend the ball. Zone defense breaks up the offensive court into specific territories or “zones” which they defend. Each player is assigned to a zone regardless of who might be in the zone. There are several different zone alignments a team can choose. Probably the most common zone defense is the 2–3 zone. This is where 2 defenders cover zones at the top of the key, and 3 defenders cover zones at the bottom of the key. Other types of zones might include the 2–1–2, 1–2–2, 3–2, and 1–3–1. Most teams use both man and zone defenses.

Executing Defensive Rotations

When a team member leaves an assigned opponent to defend another player, teammates must rotate using key phrases such as: Switch!, I’ve got the ball!, I’ve got the post!, I’m back!, I’m up! As a rule of thumb, when a teammate gets beaten defensively, top priority should be given to the biggest scoring threat. Collectively, the rest of the team should rotate to defend other scoring threats.

Zone vs. Man Defense

Man defense is the basis for all defensive strategy. All defenses, whether zone-based or man-based, require solid man-to-man defensive skills. As such, man defense should always be the primary defensive focus of any team. Despite this, there are several advantages specific to both defenses.

Pros of a man defense
• less susceptible to 3-point shots
• less susceptible to offensive rebounds
• more flexible than zone
• you can easily pressure to cause havoc and turnovers
• easier to come back from a deficit when time is running out
• your zone defense will be better if players first learn man defense principles
• it’s easier to keep your players working hard; some players tend to get lazy in zone defense

Pros of a zone defense
• you can implement and teach zone a little faster than man
• good for combating specific strengths of your opponent’s offense or highlighting their specific offensive weaknesses
• often forces more 3-point shots—advantageous if the opposition has poor shooters
• you can protect players in foul trouble
• zone defense tends to be less energy-consuming—effective when you are tired
• most teams don’t practice their zone offense as much, so sometimes they struggle executing against zone defense
• it’s usually harder to get lay-ups and inside scoring against a zone because the help-side defense is always there