



COACHING BASICS 1: SKILLS

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LANDING, BALANCING AND PIVOTING.

(This paragraph assumes a right handed player (RHS). Reverse the sides for a left handed player)

There is a relationship between

- a/ how a player receives a ball, lands and balances [and turns if required], - and
- b/ passes the ball.

Encourage your players to lead quickly and hit the ball hard. To maintain balance when landing, a player should jump as she catches the ball.

How a player is to land depends where she is on the court.

a/ If a player is [in defence and] already facing the attack end, she lands on her preferred foot (RHS), steps through so her body is open, stops to get balance and makes a strong one handed shoulder pass.

b/ if a player is facing away from the attack end, she should land on her 'outside foot,' which means if a player is leading from the centre of the court towards the left hand side of the court she should land on her left foot, step through, and pivot. If a player is leading from the centre of the court to the right hand side of the court, she should land on her right foot. She can then use her left foot to get her balance and step back with the left foot so her body is open for a one handed shoulder pass.

Players are encouraged to be aware of their landed foot. It's not a bad idea to encourage landing on both feet, especially when a player is starting out. Stepping is a rather costly unforced error as the ball will be turned over to the opposition.

Player are encouraged to land with knees slightly bent and with feet in line with the rest of the body. The landing stride should not be too long. This will reduce injury and increase balance. When a player has landed, she needs to stop, however temporarily, and become balanced before passing the ball.

WIDTH & DEPTH

Width and depth are about creating space in the attacking zone. If your players are crowding an area, the coach (or player) is neglecting the concept of width and depth. Width, for example, refers to the GA and WA playing opposite sides of the court (not against the side lines, but not in each others way either). Depth means they are playing around the forward transverse line and are not too far up the defensive end of the court. Therefore GA and WA both have room to move, to dodge, to front cut, to lead for the ball. Another important aspect of Width and Depth is to ensure that, in general play, defenders do not come down the court too soon and shut down the (depth) spaces for the attackers.

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BEING IN FRONT - "BALL SIDE"

One of the most important aspects of ball sports is being in front of your opponent(s) when leading to receive the ball. A common tendency for young or inexperienced netballers is to move towards their own goal which is effectively running away from the ball. A poorly executed pass in this situation will often result in a turnover to the opposition. If the pass is not strong enough, it will be intercepted by an opponent who is ultimately in front. If the pass is too strong, it will often go out of court or be intercepted by a defender reading the play and coming forward. A player leading towards the ball has a far greater chance of getting to a less than perfect pass. The amount of movement off the line of the original lead, change of direction required and reaction time required are all much less and a shorter pass is always going to have more accuracy and be more reliable than a longer one.

Some Important coaching points are:

- Always start back to lead (depth). This will create space to lead into and allow plenty of time to change direction, take your opponent away from the ball and lead back towards it.
- Make your last move a leap forward. This will give you an advantage over your opponent of at least a metre.
- Land on two feet. This will give you a choice of landing foot and help prevent stepping.
- Step in front of your opponent and lead off them. Use the foot closest to your opponent as the one to step in front of them, i.e. player on left, left foot in front of opponent to lead off (i.e. a front cut).
- Protect the flight of the incoming ball with your body. Turn away from your opponent to receive the ball and block them out.
- Indicate to your team mates where you ultimately want the ball to be placed. Don't ever leave it up to them to try and anticipate where you are going to go. Sign language developed within a team that everyone understands can be a powerful tool.
- Impress upon the player being pursued that they always have the advantage. The player in front has the advantage of changing direction and leaving it to the chaser to react and anticipate where you are going to go.
- Always take the ball when moving forward with a committed lead. Never stop to receive a pass.

DEFENCE

It is every player's responsibility to defend. One of the simplest and most effective ways of defending when starting out is a one on one style;

a/ If you think you can get an intercept and turn the ball over for your team, then go for it. Effective defence involves some risk. Effective defence is built on effective anticipation, which means a player must assess where the person with the ball is looking and how they intend to pass, and must weight this up, almost intuitively before the ball is released. Then go for it. Go and get the ball – attack the line that you think the ball will be passed along.

b/ Otherwise, be sure not to overrun the ball and be caught out of position. Hold up, make sure your feet are 3 ft from your opponent's feet before raising your hands. The defender's knees should be slightly bent and body weight forward. Get two hands over the ball and follow the ball with your hands, reacting sharply to the attacker's movements. This will put maximum pressure on the pass. There is always the chance of intercepting the ball

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upon its release, but if not the defender's work is not done. After release the defender should try and block the attacker's drive down the court, thus increasing pressure on the next pass.

PASSING AND CATCHING

Passing and catching are obviously a most important part of netball, and it is imperative that coaches get it absolutely correct, especially when developing younger players.

Good balance is essential for good passing.

A good shoulder pass is the first essential tool in the young netballer's toolkit. Elbow in, weight over back foot, chin up and looking towards the target. As the ball is released the player's weight should transfer to the front foot and be perfectly centred over both feet at the moment of release, before the fingers follow through pointing at the target and body weight is transferred to the front foot as part of the follow through.

A netballer who does not pass well most likely has a landing and balance problem (see above). A netballer who does not pass strongly enough is probably not transferring her weight from the back to the front foot correctly. Strong passes are as much a matter of technique as they are physical strength

The majority of passes are given to a receiver on the lead, and passes should therefore be in front of a player. Passes are given to space – not to static players. Passes are placed in front of the receiver's hands.

Catching requires soft (relaxed) hands that grip the ball firmly, neither knocking it back out (hands too tight / hard) nor dropping the ball. Players should watch the ball all the way into their hands. This is not as easy as it sounds – players in many sports watch the ball until it's about 2-3cm from their hands (or racquets) but rarely all the way in. This is one of the hallmarks of an elite athlete.

CHANNELS

Channels refer to the practice of dividing the court into three imaginary channels (or lanes) that run the length of the court, from one base line to the other. In principal players attempt to pass the ball down the court into the attacking end, and in so doing can swap the ball from one channel to another, or keep the ball in the same channel. What they should not do is move the ball across two channels with one pass. Some coaches like to divide the court into four channels (or lanes), and the principle is the same. This is a way of getting your players to play down the court and not across it, and improves the angle of the final lead toward the ball.

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VISION

Vision is a very important part of any sport, and ball sports in particular. In part, vision is determined by how a player lands. If the coach has taught landing and pivoting and channels, the player with the ball should be looking down the court toward the goals, and that's half the battle. Teach players to look "down the court" (not across the court), or if feeding the goalies is a possibility – to "look in" (to the goal circle), and look to the space the ball is to be fed in to.

Vision includes direction (looking towards the goals) and also includes distance (or length). For example, how far ahead does the player actually look? Is it 3 metres, or 5, or more? It's a bit difficult to know when you're looking into thin air. But players learn that their on-court vision is rather like a camera lens and can, with practise, be focused a certain distance ahead. The length of vision is related to where a player is on the court and the conditions on the day. For example, a defender will have longer vision than an attacker, because the defender's first preference should be to bring the ball long out of defence. The length of vision can depend on circumstances of the game. An outdoor game played in wet and / or windy conditions demands a shorter vision / focus (perhaps three metres). A game played in mild conditions may lend itself to longer passes and longer feds into the goalies and therefore the vision may be up to 6 or 7 metres, shortening to 5 then 3 metres if there is nothing on offer down the court.

Vision automatically adjusts itself to voice and is a right brain function, which is to say it will happen automatically with practice – rather like walking up stairs. We don't think; "I'll move my right foot up 7cm and in 6.5cm. We just see it and do it, but we fell down a few steps before we learned. Practice responding to voice, moving eyes and not heads.

CUT AND DRIVE (FRONT CUT)

There is little point in a player driving hard down the court on a lead if she draws an opponent into the contest with her. Front cuts put space between the attacker and her direct opponent, allowing the attacker to lead for the ball unopposed.

To execute the front cut (or cut and drive), stand close to the opponent with knees slightly bent and elbows tucked in. The first movement that the attacker makes is to step in front of her opponent using the foot nearest to the opponent. When stepping in front, the attacker should be as close to the opponent as possible without causing contact and have her body weight centred over the outside foot (foot furthest away from opponent), and as she steps in front her body weight is transferred to the inside foot. The attacker's first move concludes with half her body in front of the defender, and with her knee bent ready and weight over the inside foot ready to push off and drive towards the ball. If the attacker drives hard from this position, she will quickly gain at least half a metre on her opponent.

Front cuts are a good habit. They are not the only preliminary move, but it is good to teach this manoeuvre to juniors and seniors alike so they understand that netball is not a matter of straight and easy leads - but that space is something an attacker creates for herself.



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