

Dribbling/Ball Handling

Becoming comfortable with how the basketball feels is a critical first step for young players. The more often they have a ball in their hands, the quicker their touch will develop. They must be able to hold and move the ball properly before they can begin to work on fine motor skills like dribbling and shooting. When teaching ball handling/ball familiarization drills, emphasize the following:

- Keep eyes up and off the ball.
- Players should be in a balanced position – feet shoulder width wide.
- Use your fingertips, not your palms – fingertips exert more control.
- Learn to become comfortable with the basketball using both hands.
- Encourage players to try to go faster in these drills – Encourage mistakes!

Ball Handling/Ball Familiarization Drills: For these drills, each player should have their own ball. It is important to encourage mistakes when doing these drills, as the more mistakes one makes, the better they become. Always try to go faster and do drills at maximum speed, especially with more advanced players.

1. **Finger Tipping** – tip ball back and forth between fingers at different heights and different distances from body.
2. **Hand Slaps** – slap ball with alternate hands; make sure to pound the ball hard.
3. **Body Circles** – players circle ball by moving the ball from one hand to the other around the body. One can start by doing circles around the head, then moving down to the chest then around the waist, down to the knees and finally ending by doing circles around the ankles. To add variety to the drill, move the ball back up the body, changing the direction of the circles.
4. **Leg Circles** – in a stride stance, circle ball around one leg, then the other.
5. **Figure 8's** – Player stands with legs shoulder width apart and weaves the ball through the legs in a figure 8 fashion. Player weaves the ball in both directions and may also perform the drill while walking forward. Work on developing speed.
6. **Pretzel** – Player holds the ball between their legs with one hand in front of their legs, the other behind. Player must keep the ball in this position while changing hands on the ball – the hand in front moves to the back, and the hand in back moves to the front. Repeat. Work on speed.
7. **See Saw** – Player holds the ball behind the knees – release the ball between the legs then catch the ball with two hands in-front of the knees – release the ball again and catch it with both hands once again behind the knees. Work on developing speed.
8. **Ball Throw** – Player start with ball in front of body, toss ball in air, clap as many times as possible and catch ball behind body. Try to increase the number of claps.

Dribbling:

Dribbling is the act of bouncing the ball against the floor with one hand while running, walking or standing. The purpose of dribbling is to:

- Advance the ball into offensive end when a pass is not possible.
- Improve an opportunity for passing or shooting.
- Relieve pressure in a congested area.
- Make an offensive move to the basket.

When teaching dribbling, emphasize the following:

- Start in triple threat position.
- Keep center of gravity low, body compact and moving together.
- Keep head up and never watch the ball; maintain court awareness.
- Push the ball down with fingertips; don't slap at ball.
- Keep dribble low; less chance of defender deflecting it.
- Protect the ball with body, outside leg and non-dribbling arm against defensive pressure or in congested areas.
- Learn to use both hands effectively.

Types of Dribbling:

Stationary Dribble

In the static dribble, players dribble the ball under control and in a stationary, protected position.

When performing Static Dribbling, emphasize the following:

- Start with knees flexed and feet shoulder width apart.
- Head up and eyes forward.
- Foot of non-dribbling hand forward.
- Ball dribbled with dribble hand slightly ahead of back foot.
- Push ball to floor using fingertips, not palms.
- Elbow bent, wrist follows through.
- As ball returns to hand, repeat the pushing motion.
- Protect the ball by keeping the non-dribbling shoulder, arm and leg between the ball and defensive players.

Control Dribble

The control dribble is a low, controlled, protected dribble that players use while moving at medium-to-slow speed. Players use this dribble to improve a passing angle, move ball away from defensive pressure in congested areas or move the ball up the court toward the basket when closely guarded.

Speed Dribble

Players use the speed dribble when they are running near top speed and are in an uncontested area with little defensive pressure, for example, on a fast break or breakaway.

Change of Direction Dribble

When changing direction while dribbling, players plant in one direction, change dribbling hands, then push in the opposite direction.

When performing Change of Direction Dribble, emphasize the following:

- Plant outside foot.
- Bend knees to lower center of gravity.
- Push off outside foot.
- Step and transfer weight on to opposite foot.
- Keep the ball tight to the body.
- Bounce ball slightly ahead and towards opposite hand.
- Change pace-accelerate into change of direction.

Types of Change of Direction Dribble:

- Crossover in Front of Body
- Crossover Between the Legs
- Spin Dribble
- Behind the Back Dribble

Teaching progression (Dribbling drills should be practiced in this progression)

- Static/ Stationary – Stressing the technique using both hands.
- Dribbling with Movement – Control Dribble, Speed Dribble.
- Change of Direction.
- Games Approach – Dribbling in the half-court offense and transition.

Stationary Dribbling Drills:

“Stationary Dribbling Drill” (All Ages) – Have a player stand with feet shoulder width apart, knees flexed with back straight and chin up. Player bounces ball at waist height, ball is kept tight to body and bounced ‘hard’ to the floor. Use both left and right hands. Encourage players to stay low to the ground while keeping eyes off the ball. Video available here.

“Push Pull” (3rd - 6th Grade) – Have the player bring the ball out in front of body, then back behind body with one hand. The arm and hand will be working as a lever, swing back and forth while bouncing the ball.

“Half Cross Over” (3rd - 6th Grade) – Using one hand at a time, have the player bring the ball from outside one knee to outside the other knee, back and forth in front of the body.

Dribbling with Movement Drills:

“Cone Dribbling” (Grade K - 2nd) – Have Players line up at a starting point on the baseline. Position cones on court so players must dribble between the cones, weaving their way through. Emphasize that this drill is not focused on speed, rather control, feel and change of direction.

“Partner Control Dribble Drill” (All Ages) – Two players dribble within an area of the floor bounded by lines, and try to steal each other’s ball while maintaining their dribble.

“Speed Control Dribble” (All Ages) – Players gather at one end of the gym and divide into groups of 3 or 4; every player in every group has a ball. On a signal, the first player from each group starts a speed

dribble; on the next signal, each switches to a control dribble. Players also change hands while they are dribbling and stop and start without traveling.

“Speed Dribble Relay Race” (All Ages) – Players gather at one end of the gym and divide into teams of 3 or 4. On a signal, the first player on each team speed-dribbles to the far end of the gym, returns with the speed-dribble with the other hand, and passes to the next player on the team. The winning team is first to have all its members finish dribbling.

“Dribble Tag” (All grades) - Dribble tag is played by designating a court of play, giving every player a basketball and then designating one person to start as “it”. From there, the person who is “it” chases the other players (all while dribbling) and looks to tag them somewhere on their body. Here are some rules and progressions you can add to the game to tailor it to your desires: After the person who is “it,” tag someone else. They immediately leave the field of play and perform some sort of skill. Allow participants to only dribble with their weak hands. Make a rule that the player who is “it” must tag a shoulder or knee of the other player for it to be a successful tag. Increase or decrease the field of play.

“Knock Out” (All Ages) - This drill is a fun drill and a great way to teach young players how to handle game pressure. Spread players across the court, with each kid having a ball. Use court lines to set boundaries for the game. On your command, the players will control dribble around the playing boundaries, while trying to knock the ball away from other players (Everyone against everyone). If a player’s ball is knocked free, he or she is “out” and has to sit out on the sideline. As the game progresses, and players are being knocked out, make sure to “shrink” the boundaries. The game will end with the last two players in the top key circle trying to knock each other’s ball out. If you don’t want kids standing around once knocked out, you can have them partner pass or form shoot on the sideline.