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2.3 NATIONAL TEAMS PROGRAM



WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS CHAPTER?

Modern Basketball Training Requires More Knowledge Than Ever

This chapter tells you about what it takes to create smart national training programs for both men and women.

What it also tells you is that modern basketball requires new knowledge in a variety of areas. It is impossible for one general manager, one coach, or one sports director to master all of these knowledge areas on their own.

Modern basketball training, with all its physical and social implications requires federations to build a real team of experts.

If possible, this team should function like a business unit with various departments focusing on specific aspects of the performance program.



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1. Introduction

The purpose of training involves not only the physical, psychological and educational aspects of the players' development, but also the aspects regarding the place of basketball within the political, marketing and economic framework. More and more demands are being placed on the time or elite players, which means shorter preparation time to achieve the best results. In order to achieve the best results, basketball players go through certain selection and training processes.

This chapter talks about creating a fast and efficient process for moving from young selected basketball players to successful senior national team players. This process occurs over a long period, since players at full playing maturity require 5 to 8 years of specific training. We are talking about the systematic, continuous and programmed process that would lead to the improvement of physical, functional and technical/tactical abilities of talented players in the service of the national team programs from Under 16 and Under 18 through to the senior national team.

From the very beginning the main focus is placed on the team selection and team work.

Our responsibility is to provide direction for a promising player, to invest in his playing and competitive skills in order to develop him into a top player.

From the very beginning, the main focus is placed on team selection and teamwork. As for the players, modern basketball not only has strict requirements for the team, including physical characteristics

and abilities, but also requirements of technical performance regarding the players' personality, health status, psychological and social status, as well as knowledge and ethical aspects. On the basis of these requirements, we have concluded that the knowledge base required for the preparation of a modern basketball team exceeds that of any one expert.

The selection and elimination of players represents a complex problem. Selection criteria needs to assess:

- morphological characteristics
- physical characteristics
- functional abilities
- competition quality
- personality characteristics

The coach should play the role of guide, organizer, planner and coordinator of the team. The coach, with the help of his expert associates, needs to make the final selection and team analysis decisions. This means that in order to achieve good results, a successful coach must have the qualities of a successful business manager.

2. National Team Selection

The National Basketball Federation decides on the coach's mandate. The NF should deal with the following issues:

1. basketball development structure
2. organization
3. finance



The coach must know:

- what is he expected to do
- how he should function and how his tasks should be carried out
- how to follow the principles of the basketball organization

Recruiting is carried out by progressive expansion of the team, based on results, traditions and the organization. National team membership is an obligation characterized by:

- competition level
- requirements
- liabilities

Being a member of the national team carries the honor of representing one's country and the players' conduct should be in line with this honor.

At all levels of basketball the national team must be cherished, and the players should be seen as team members who are:

- the best amongst the best
- those who put team goals first, ahead of their own
- those who have the ability to adapt

The coach creates a team from a large selection pool. Players will be selected based on proven results, achievements, and consistently high athletic condition leading to top results.

During the selection period, the NF should make a psychological evaluation of all the players to understand the character of each player, their behavior (as an individual and as a member of the group), their emotions and ambitions. A psychological evaluation, together with testing of basketball abilities, will give the NF a good overview of all players and enable strong predictions to be made regarding who could be the potential players for senior selection. The Federation should see its youth national team programs as creating and identifying future players for the senior national team.



3. Under 16 National Team

When talking about the first national team selection we should start with young players, who are 14 and 15 years old, and should develop a process to organize, train and improve these young athletes.

Discussions with coaches, visiting clubs and attending matches of the younger categories, should create the conditions for the formation of a broad selection of 60 – 100 young players. Activities in the regions should end with the formation of the regional teams. Eighteen months before the beginning of the official National Team competition, regional competitions should be organized, as they also play a key part in national team selection.



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Twelve months before official competitions are organized, a high quality (two to three week) basketball camp for approximately 60 players should be arranged. At the end of the summer preparations a representative selection of approximately 20 players should be selected. During the year, two to three trial training camps should be held and one or two tournaments organized to confirm the abilities of the selected candidates. National youth representation should be open to all, and new players should always be encouraged to join.

3.1 Preparation for Official Competition

National team preparations should last for a period of 5-6 weeks. The primary aim is to develop players, but it is important to always remember that basketball is a team sport. The secondary aim, which should not be ignored, is the need to achieve success (win), since this must be the primary motivation. Depending on the quality of the team, and the quality of other teams, realistic aims have to be targeted. Don't forget the long-term objective: to develop players for the senior national team.

The proper selection of players will result in strong play on the court in the national team. Play is based on the players' abilities to accept, improve and enrich the original concept. Winning tactics, exhaustion and recovery problems, competition stress, tactical firmness and the ability to adapt to different stresses, are conditions which will aid the development of the highest qualities in both individual players and the team.

Preparations can start following the completion of the medical, functional and physical examinations and tests. All data should be documented and carefully studied in respect of individual development, to assist with the wider selection for the national team and the development of a new generation of players.

3.2 Team Staff Composition:

Head coach – national coach

Two assistant coaches

A Physician

A Physiotherapist

A statistics expert

The team manager or organizer

3.3 Working Conditions

Courts – sport arenas,

Gyms – fitness rooms,

Medical service,

Control and monitoring devices, camera, computer, TV set,

Complete equipment for training and competition,

Additional equipment necessary for training,

Secure finances for the basic work conditions,

Ability to cover all training and competition costs,

Remuneration for team personnel.



3.4 Discipline and Rules

The coach should anticipate and plan his actions in the event that problems may occur with individual players and groups within and outside the team. Discipline should not be used to exhaust energy but to channel it towards the achievement of results. Discipline does not necessarily mean punishment.

There must be rules. The rules are the basis and skeleton of the team. They represent the code of conduct in and outside the group. The rules should be strictly followed. If there are rules, then everybody tends to follow them.

The following elements should be emphasized:

- punctuality
- responsibility
- appearance on and off the court
- conversation/communication
- nutrition/proper food intake
- prevention of injuries
- team spirit

Team preparation should provide:

- good training
- good playing opportunities for promising players – the basic aim of this period
- achievement of good results - the secondary aim we should not ignore

The motto for U16 in this period should be:

- play hard
- play fair
- be a promising player
- be a good competitor
- be a winner

The Phases in motivation learning for U 16 in this period should be:

1. make a decision
2. set the objectives:
 - progress
 - advantages/disadvantages
 - present level
3. build self-respect
4. learn to overcome difficulties
5. play with ease



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3.5 The Coach's Role

The coach should plan to win, whilst ensuring the maximum improvement of the most promising players and the quality of the team development. Winning tactics can sometimes be forgotten in solving the problems of exhaustion and recovery and problems related to tactical firmness during competition and dealing with competition stress. The coach must have a coaching philosophy, which represents the coach's ideas of how to play basketball, based on the principles of basketball, tactics and strategy.

From day one, the coach's efforts are focused on the following accomplishments:

- long-term plans for promising players to attain their peak level
- responsibility for the physical preparation of the team and the individual players
- expert knowledge
- players' motivation for a match
- game plan
- strategy
- tactical organization to manage and win a game, and ultimately to win the competition.

The coach must know the differences and similarities between his players. The coach's authority comprises the following characteristics:

- expert knowledge
- technical skills
- organizational skills
- respect and honesty
- loyalty
- dedication and love for basketball

The coach must recognize the unique qualities of his players and have the ability to treat his players accordingly but equally. The coach must have the skills of a master in order to always draw a thin line between:

- acquaintance
- trust
- confidence

3.6 Organization and Training Plan

Everything must be ready before the start of the preparations. Every day, hour and minute should be organized according to the plan. The players should be trained to react readily to new situations. To that effect the coach must emphasize the importance of organization and a training plan.

The training plan comprises the entire cycle and consists of detailed micro-cycles and daily plans. On the basis of a preliminary analysis, we should set the training aims and objectives. Before making the training plan the following elements should be considered:



- training schedule and duration
- training plan
- diversity – 70% old skills and 30% new skills
- intensity – competitive spirit
- training progress
- basketball is a game in which we make mistakes, repetitions and corrections. We should try to replicate game situations and intensity
- planning groups for specific tasks – prior to training and simultaneously during breaks and game interruptions
- implementation of training according to the overall plan
- individual work - before training and also drills to be undertaken within and after training - but no longer than 30 minutes.

To prepare the players for all phases of a match, means that each player must know his task in a certain situation. Each player must know the package of rules and limitations – the principles applicable in certain situations. The coach should emphasize the game principles during training sessions, at meetings and in informal conversations.

The team wins when it plays better than its opponents and follows its game plan. Victory depends on how well the team as a whole implements its game plan, and on how well the players as individuals implement their parts of the plan.

3.7 Plan Elaboration and Programming

Without this segment it is not possible to achieve the best results. The development of a good player and a good team, depends on a well conceived and planned process. It includes everything related to the preparation and competition. In other words, this program includes:

1. Training process and work methods
2. Everything that accompanies this process
3. Competition and competition schedule
4. Methods used – practice
5. Candidates, usually 16 players with an elimination process
6. The beginning of the preparations – the date with the exact time and place for players to report.

The program should include the following elements:

1. Physical preparation
 - Development of mental and physical characteristics
 - Strength, jumping ability
 - Speed, general and specific
 - Endurance
 - Agility, dexterity, coordination



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2. Technique

- Basic
- Fundamental
- General
- Functional – situational
- Specific, by positions in the team

All these apply to defense and offense

3. Tactics

- Individual
- Group
- Collective (team)

All these apply to defense and offense

4. Matches

- Training matches between 8 and 10
- Competition

5. Psychological preparations

- Individual
- Group
- Collective

Carried out in:

- Critical periods
- Before a match
- During a match

6. Social preparations

- Socialization and rivalry: The ideal form of rivalry are the players' competitive relationships regarding the development of physical or technical fitness and skills – shots and maximum power development. The relationships between players developing the maximum individual contribution to the collective (team) game is also important.
- Group formation – tandem: A tandem is an athletic term for a pair of players characterized by extremely functional bonds between the two players. The basic assumption of a tandem is a high quality synthesis of playing values – thus the efficiency of this tandem exceeds the individual efficiency of both players. True tandems are those in which the players enrich their individual values through joint actions.
- Team formation: Team play with 10 to 12 players. We use constantly 7-8 players and 2-3 players make the difference. This is the basis for the team formation. In this period the aim is to create all-star athletes.



7. Supplementary segments

1. Testing (functional skills, physical skills, technical/tactical skills)
2. Recording (training analysis, matches)
3. Statistical monitoring (training, game)
4. Information development (scouting)

Players of this age should work as much as possible on one on one, two on two and three on three situations. A national coach should always instill a winning mentality. Sometimes players in the team, play too much structured basketball and this limits their progress as individuals. The national coach must develop the player's decision making capabilities. Players must be able to read game situations and be creative.

Players in that age category should not play zone defense during club competitions in order to improve their individual strength. In order to do this we need good cooperation between club/team coaches and the National team coach.

3.8 The Final Phase of the Preparations

From the start of preparations team spirit has to be established and a positive working atmosphere is necessary. Discipline is important and each individual has to be part of the team. The coach has to be ready to take tough decisions (even to cut the best player) to avoid possible future disruption to the team.

This phase lasts between 5 and 6 weeks and is segmented into 3 sub-phases:

1. The preparatory phase lasts 2 weeks or 4 micro-cycles. It starts with 1-2 days testing.

The first micro-cycle is the introduction into the training process. The second, third and fourth are basic and they cover the following elements:

- technique
- group tactics
- team tactics regarding both defense and offense
- general physical fitness
- basketball specific fitness

At the end of this period it is desirable to play one or two games. the primary goal throughout the entire period of preparations, even during the competitions and between games is improving team tactics. Each player should be given a chance to play, and coaches have to carefully evaluate the player's performance. Coaches have to be aware that players also need rest and this has to be carefully balanced with the need to prepare the team.

2. Basic phase – coordination lasts 2 weeks or 4 micro-cycles.

Improvement of technical/tactical details

- improvement in fitness – specific physical preparations on the court and in the gym
- further improvement of tactics within game conditions, specifically shooting
- improvement of special plays



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Technical and tactical correction and coordination

The tasks for this period are:

- a) tactics correction
- b) maintenance of physical fitness
- c) coordination through training and games with special competitive tasks
- d) information gathering –meetings and scouting
- e) intensive work on shooting

The team should play 4 to 6 games in this phase. It is very important that the games are played under competition conditions.

3. The pre-competition period lasts 7-10 days or 2-3 micro-cycles, with 1-2 games
 - adapting to the playing conditions that will be present during the competition
 - competition micro-cycles

Tasks for this period

- Functional technique – emphasis on shooting, accuracy under game conditions
- Tactics for the first game in the competition
- Fitness and psychological work

3.9 Competition Period

1. Calendar of matches
2. Traveling plan
3. Coordination of fitness improvement

- Fitness is achieved when all elements necessary for the play reach the appropriate level – it is not good to be in top condition before the start of the competition.
- The level of fitness refers to the technical and tactical skills, physical and psychological preparations. Here it is important to increase the fitness as the competition is in progress, and to reach maximum fitness at the end of the competition.



During the entire competition period we should train with the emphasis on the tasks that will face us in the following game. Players with insufficient court time or who do not play at all must have additional training.



In younger categories where the primary aim is to create players through learning and improvement, the games are very much part of the training process and they greatly contribute to knowledge improvement. The coach and experts should create the best conditions to achieve that aim – to win the game and to have the best possible standing.

Plenty of work has to be done on aggressive man to man defense and full court zone defense. Players should not be overloaded with set plays, the game needs to be kept simple. Players have to be taught to read the situation and to find the best solutions. Because of the need to achieve the best results in the competition, and without thinking long term, too many teams tend to use zone defences in this age group to gain quick success. This is a good reason to practice offense against zone defense, but the focus should still be on an aggressive (man to man) defense, which will enable the team to overcome slow and results oriented opponents.

4. Under 18 National Team

The primary goals should be the formation of players – with physical improvement programs and 50% learning new skills and 50% improving old skills. Unlike the under 16 players who are selected from younger categories, 70-80% of the national team members will have been in the training process for two years. At the age of 18 they will have spent three to four years in the training process. This is therefore not the time for primary selection, but rather is for specialization. It is important for the NF to take into consideration that for some players this year is their last year in secondary school and their final exams will be the priority for many players.

Many of these players compete in the senior category, but for some of them this is the first under 18 competition year. Others will have already been playing Under 18. Specialization will have already taken place with regard to player positions.

The first position to be specialized at the end of the under 16 period is the playmaker while other positions are gradually identified.

All the time, it should be emphasized that the national team is open, so competition should be encouraged and advantage should be taken of new opportunities (new players). The period from 16 to 18 years

The period from 16 to 18 years is the period for identifying new talent – new tall players should not be ignored.

is period for identifying new talent – new tall players should not be ignored. All the rules that have been adopted for the Under-16 team should apply to this age group as well.

Ongoing team analysis and detailed planning in this period will help the coach to formulate new solutions. In this stage of

the process, candidates are actively monitored and the selection becomes more defined. We must not forget that the basic goal is to 'produce' and develop top players. Our program goals are not very different from those applicable to seniors, juniors and cadets. The concepts are the same, but the methods are different. The score is not the most important facet, but it should not be ignored. As with cadets, the score is present as a secondary objective. A young player should always remember and be proud of what he has achieved in his career. This will always be a part of his life.

As far as a young player's biological development is concerned, the hardening of his bones will be completed between the ages of 17 and 19. However, up to the age of 18 some new ossification points



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develop in the vertebrae, so caution should be exercised with static load on the spinal column. The muscle mass is increased, and between 17 and 18 accounts for 40% of the body weight. The cardio-vascular system reacts with more stability to physical strain, although there is still a tendency of the arterial blood pressure to increase with a maximum pulse rate of approx 200. Respiration is similar to that in adults. Between the ages of 17 and 19, players reach their full biological maturity.

According to their playing level and competitive maturity, this age group represents a diverse group with the potential for national team selection, provided that a well-organized selection system is applied. The level of physical and functional maturity may still be associated with some serious dangers in the case of inadequate training strain. This period is associated with the power development, which is mainly limited by an increase in muscle mass up to the age of 18. Strength/power is constantly increased and

The period from 17 to 19 years is a period that can be associated with serious dangers in case of inadequate training strain.

becomes more and more distinct after the period of sexual maturity between 17 and 19. It should not be overlooked that explosive strength is caused by the function of speed that enables the achievement of immense force within a very short time period. We usually define this as

jumping ability. Repetitive power is therefore achieved in order to make a number of quick and successive moves. Strength is very important for players who are not very tall.

Running speed is determined by mobility and power on the one hand, and the processes in the central nervous system, on the other hand. Genetic factors can play an important role in speed development. Speed should be understood as a complex of neurophysiological abilities that enable quick reactions or fast control over a certain space. Speed understood this way may be divided into:

- speed of neural and muscular reaction
- speed of individual movement
- movement frequency within a time unit
- speed of movements in space

Running speed is significantly increased by the length of the legs and their power. Speed and movement frequency attain their maximum level at the age of 14-15. Their increase is in accordance with the growth of leg muscles and the increase of leg length between 15 -18. In other words, the tempo of increase in running speed is considered as the function of power and growth (height), and so the maximum dimensions are reached at the age of 18.

Generally speaking, speed is part of the function of:

- other physical abilities (growth, power, endurance)
- training (improvement of motor habits or movement structure)
- special speed quality representing the cessation of movement (movement speed)
- maximum speed as the component of running speed.

At the age of 18, endurance development reaches defined values of oxygen consumption. Endurance is defined as an ability to maintain the assigned intensity and tempo of an activity during a longer period of time (counter-fatigue ability). General endurance is defined as an ability of continuous work of main-



ly moderate intensity. In physiological terms, it corresponds with aerobic abilities – aerobic work. Specific endurance of a basketball player can be defined as the ability to continuously use speed and strength, with high exertion of the cardio-vascular and respiratory systems.

The movement coordination at the age of 18 reaches almost optimal level. Coordination of movements represents a pre-condition for solid basketball technique. The coordination level comprises the coordination of several elements performed at the same time (complexity of several movements). Certain conflicts may occur between playing, competitive and psychological maturity. Very often a player may reach a certain level of athletic experience and solid competitive potential, but lack sufficient psychological maturity due to his age and his lack of life experience. This age is one of the most delicate periods in life, characterized by difficult problems that a young person has to solve within a short period of time (problems regarding identity, authority, future profession, the opposite sex etc.). Emotional crises, conflicts, resistance, giving up, and uncommunicative behavior are the inevitable (and normal) characteristics during this stage of development.

In this period also, social and psychological development problems can be encountered. Some social development problems include:

- fitting into a new environment
- new school
- entering senior teams
- getting acquainted with new coaches (in senior teams with which a player will work in this new period)
- more duties (training and matches)
- professional orientation (school – advanced education – basketball)
- social popularity
- rational use of time (training, rest period, school)
- influence of agents

Some psychological issues include:

- Having been an important junior player, a player suddenly becomes the 12th, 13th or 14th player on a team
- How to handle sitting on the bench as a substitute player (individual training and development of physical skills)
- Reasonable management of daily duties (economic management of work duties, twice daily training work – fatigue and rest between training sessions - with a focus on spiritual development and preparation for these new activities), ensuring a balanced diet as a pre-condition for quick recovery between training sessions and for further development (nourishment accounts for 30% of physical preparation).

4.1 Preparation of Players for a Competition

The National team consisting of players under 18 has five to six weeks of preparation. Everything that has already been said about the under 16 team will also apply to the under 18 National team.

a) Team staff formation



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- b) medical prevention
- c) discipline
- d) rules of conduct
- e) training process
- f) motivation
- g) organization
- h) plans elaboration (process programming)
- i) testing
- j) statistical monitoring
- k) information and theory development

The mottos for an under 18 player during this period:

- play hard
- play fair
- be a promising player
- be a good competitor
- play with enthusiasm
- be coachable
- be disciplined
- be a team player
- be a winner

The player formation goals should be specifically applied to the national team. The game segments must be adapted to the players' biological development and its restrictions. Unlike cadets, 50% of activity should include learning new skills, and 50% should include improvement and corrections.

4.2 Selection of Players

Unlike the under 16 national team, where selection accounts for approximately 60% of the team performance, with an under 18 player, it is 80-85%. Here the best and most promising players are included. The period between under 16 and under 18 should be the most productive period of the player's development and the identification of his playing qualities.

4.3 Training Process

1. Physical preparation

- Individual development programs
- Flexibility, stretching
- Strength development – stabilization
- Combination of techniques and group tactics in order to improve physical preparation
- Work in blocks – mixing of elements (time is limited, but physical preparation is of great importance).



2. Technical preparation

- Depending on the phase of the training process - at the beginning, focus on performance speed and the technique elements (rebounds, shots, passes, pivots, jumps, game contacts, etc.)
- Passing technique (receiving passes – output elements emphasized and the speed of performing the technical elements of an action).

3. Tactical preparation

- Individual (situations 1/0, 1/1, 1/1 + 1, both defense and offence)
- Group (taking most of the time)
- Team (defense and offence set as well as situation 4/4 defense, offence and transition).

4. Matches – training matches

- 8 – 12 matches
- It is important to take into account the opponents' strengths
- Simulation of the championship tempo (cycles of playing training matches)
- Preparation for matches (own game at the beginning and then preparation for opponents later)
- Getting fit

5. Psychological preparation

- Individual
- Group
- Team

4.4 Supplementary Segments

1. Prevention of injuries and treatment of injuries

- Provision of treatment for an injured player
- Substitute training to facilitate re-introduction into the training process
- Return from injury and readiness for play

2. Testing

- Testing of functional abilities
- Testing of physical skills
- Testing of technical and tactical skills

3. Statistical monitoring

- Training
- Training matches
- Opponent

4. Information and theory development

- Theoretical preparation
- Theoretical process (learning how to gather and process information) - this is achieved from day one



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- Analyses of the opponent's matches
- Theoretical preparation on the court and in the locker-room (meetings)

5. Recording

- Training
- Training matches
- Competitions
- Opponent

We want to become familiar with our play in order to have a better understanding of the system we want to implement, to play more easily as well as to be acquainted with our opponents. Individual strengths and weaknesses of opponents and their system of play in offence and defence.

4.5 The Final Phase of Preparation

This phase lasts between 5 and 6 weeks and is segmented as follows:

The preparatory phase lasts approximately 2 weeks or 4 micro-cycles (one micro-cycle lasts 2 to 3 days). It begins with testing (1-2 days). The first micro-cycle is the introduction into the training process. The second, third and fourth are basic and they cover the following elements:

- Technique with focus on ball handling technique, catching, passing, movement technique, basketball stance (lower stance, maintaining the body in stance), good timing, start, etc.
- Group tactics (simultaneous work on defense and offence from the start)
- Collective tactics (tactics regarding defense, offence and transition) is the objective during the entire preparation period and even during the competition and between games
- General physical fitness (alternating between aerobic and anaerobic exercises)
- Specific physical preparations
- From the very beginning, the combination of elements (outdoor training sessions in the morning, specific physical preparations indoors in the afternoon, in combination with regular training).

Offense and defense systems should be practiced in this phase and the team should be ready to respond to various defensive tactics used by an opponent. The team should prepare one special offense, to be used in critical moments during the game. It is also important that the coach talks often with his players during this phase. Coaches have to be aware that players also need rest and this has to be carefully balanced.

At the end of this period it is desirable to play one or two games. If there is no opponent, players should organize a game amongst themselves – 8/8.

Basic phase – the coordination lasts 2 weeks or 4 micro-cycles and the main focus should be on improvement of the technical/tactical details:

- Improvement of fitness – specific physical preparations on the court and in the gym, including stretching – with stabilization at the beginning and the end of training.
- Further improvement of tactics during game conditions (meetings, theory, practice).
- Specific shooting practice (players are still not under pressure).



- Practice in series (this type of training is first introduced with seniors).
- Special tactics improvement.
- Clarification of roles – cooperation – guards – forwards – centers.
- Tandem formation.
- Playing deep and wide.
- Specific aspects of the National team become significant.
- Game with tall players.
- Understanding between the coach and his players.
- Improvement of technical and tactical details.

The team consists of 16 players, where 10–12 play, 7–8 are used in a game, 2–3 win, and tandems are formed.

The tasks for this period are:

- Technical and tactical correction and coordination (players should learn to listen to the coach's words – this must be learnt as well).
- Tactics correction.
- Development of the winning tactics, adapting to fatigue (we must win even in the most difficult situation).
- Playing 4 to 6 games. The format of playing the games should be similar to the structure of the competition.
- Maintenance of physical fitness.
- Coordination through training and games with special competitive tasks.
- Individual work before and after training sessions (free throws and additional practice).
- Information gathering – meetings and scouting.
- Intensive work on shooting.
- Treatment of injured players (in order to have them back on the team as soon as possible).

Pre-competition period lasts 7–10 days or 2–3 micro-cycles, with 1–2 games:

- Transition from intensive work to the specific competitive regime.
- Adaptation to specific dynamics that would be encountered during the competition.
- Competition micro-cycles.
- Fitness improvement.
- Team lines and sets formation.

Tasks for this period are:

- Functional technique - emphasis on shooting, accuracy in competitive conditions.
- Tactics for the first game in the competition.
- Fitness and psychological work.



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4.6 Competition Period

- Calendar of matches.
- Traveling plan.
- Coordination of fitness improvement.
- Fitness is achieved when all the elements necessary for play reach the appropriate level – it is not good to be in top condition before the beginning of the competition.
- The level of fitness refers to the technical and tactical skills and physical and psychological preparations. Here it is important to increase fitness as the competition progresses, and to achieve peak fitness at the end of the competition.

During the entire competition period, we exercise and practice with the emphasis on the tasks that we will face in the following game. The players with insufficient court time, or those who do not play at all, must have additional training.

In younger categories, where the primary aim is to create players i.e. learning and improvement, games are a part of the training process and they contribute to the improvement in knowledge. The coach and experts should create the best conditions to achieve that aim - win the game, and achieve the best possible standing.

5. The National Senior Team

The showcase of the national federation is the senior national team. Usually the main public focus is on the senior national team, which participates in various high level competitions. The interest of the national federation is to have a team which will perform well in the long run. Sometimes results should not be the priority, but the NF should always have a clear idea what they want to achieve in the future. Short and long term plans must exist and winning is not possible all the time.

Competition and competition results are the key points in modern basketball. The coach is expected to increase the competitive skills of his players and the team as a whole, but must not forget the requirements of strict and authoritative team management. The national team represents a specific structure where adaptation to norms and the rules of conduct play a very important role. The results of the national team are determined by the ability of individuals to adapt to the requirements of the team. Each player must understand and develop his role as an active participant.

5.1 Team Selection

Player selection in the national team is dependant not only his individual qualities, but his capacity to incorporate his personal qualities into the team structure. Accordingly, the team consisting of the best players is not necessarily the most successful one (there are numerous examples). The most successful team is the one that combines the qualities of all the individual players. The Coach in a basketball game has a huge impact on the team's performance and the result. The selection of the competition team does not only comprise the general selection, but also sub-selections (combinations, substitutions, tandems, team lines). The ultimate selection goal for the national team is the formation and maintenance of the top competition team. Development of a high-quality player is just one of the goals, and therefore it is subordinate to the ultimate goal of forming the senior team.



The mottos for seniors are:

- Play hard
- Be a good competitor
- Be motivated
- Be disciplined
- Be adaptable to stress
- Be a winner

5.2 Program Goals

1. Expert and organizational structure and work programming
2. Structure and systems that determine the formation, organization and management of the team.
3. Contents and tempo of activities
4. Unity of players
5. Group ideology that accounts for differences in group solidarity and the quality of individual and group goals.

The team efficiency should be higher than the sum of the individual players' qualities. This goal can only be achieved by applying the appropriate methods and expert principles.

Experience has proved that one top sportsman usually encourages the formation of new top sportsmen. To that effect the national team must have at least one player who is outstanding in his class. The player who has outstanding competitive and general athletic qualities plays an important role in the achievement of top results.

The national team selection homogeneity should be observed from the aspect of the players' qualities, the level of athletic fitness and the level of competition. A member of the national team feels powerful because he is a member of a powerful team, and the national team is more powerful because it is made up of the best players.

The coach's role is often associated with the problem of authority. Within the national team, the coach is not the only authority, but his role is to govern the authority issues. The coach is the leader, and as the first among equals, he is also crucial for all management and decision-making. The coach must be an expert and the leader. The expert role of the coach implies his role of a psychologist and the leader of young people who admire and respect him.

The leadership is closely connected with the issue of authority, and the coach links his own authority with the players whose roles include some elements of leadership:

- the coach – the team leader
- the coach – the playmaker
- the coach – an extraordinary player



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5.3 Understanding the relationships within the team

Subjective perception and evaluation of the relationships within the team should be addressed by two experts – the coach and a psychologist or an experienced physician, if necessary. Expert observation is not only focused on deeper understanding of the players' behavior in their personal relationships, but also on understanding and predicting their behavior in various situations on the court.

The aim of this evaluation is to obtain the following information:

- how a player sees himself in relation to the team
- how he sees other players and the team as a whole
- what is his attitude to the forthcoming duty or task, group and collective activity
- what is his attitude to the coach, the expert board and other people involved in the national team's activities.

Information that can be obtained during training sessions and games:

- with whom the player chooses to cooperate while playing
- with whom does he not cooperate (because he does not see him)
- with whom does he practice shooting
- with whom does he do additional work

Information that can be obtained during meetings:

- is there closeness between the group during a meeting or in a locker-room, or physical distance between the players
- position on the bench

In addition to the above, the following choices should also be taken into consideration:

- choosing a seat in a plane, bus, restaurant, choosing a room-mate, a partner for leisure activities

These observations may be important for the evaluation of the players' behavior and they can provide relative information important for selecting combinations within the team (group, tandem, the team leader). Such information can also be helpful in preventing some detrimental situations.

5.4 The Team's Composition, Technical and Tactical Profile

Since five to eight years of training are required for the development of full playing maturity, it is best if the numbers of players on the national teams are selected from within that range. The team of 15 players should consist of:

- 3 players between 18 and 21
- 10 older players, between 21 and 27
- 2 players older than 27

Young players are the game carriers. The competition experience of older players and the competition enthusiasm of younger ones should be complementary.

The team should have at least three players who, owing to their playing and competitive qualities,



can carry the game of the whole team, and at least five players who are capable of integrating themselves into the playing and technical/tactical concept of the team. The team must have at least two specialists; players specialized in specific technical/tactical skills and five promising players. One of the players should be a potential top player.

The team can hardly tolerate more than two players who do not fit the standard profile, for example, a player with an extraordinary tendency to dominate or a player with a lack of competition toughness. The national team cannot tolerate rivalry between two players.

The evaluation of all members on the national team (including those who are not in the narrow selection, amongst the 13, 14, 15 players), but specifically those who increase the training quality by their involvement, also helps younger members of the national team to become a part of it and to coordinate their abilities, aspirations and obligations.

The players in the senior team have solid comprehensive techniques whereby specific individual technical skills are an advantage, but not the key values. On the level of technical skills and individual tactics, the team should meet at least two requirements:

1. To work as a single unite in deffence
2. To combine the individual offensive skills into a unified and coordinated offense.

The synchronized action of the players having different technical/tactical performances should be the most powerful asset of the team.

Offence – the best results are achived when each player performs their individual role in a coordinated manner.

The power of defense is achieved by almost equal technical and tactical performance.

5.5 Preparations of the Team

The senior national team has preparations lasting 5 to 6 weeks, and could be preceded by a short 7 – 10 day period when the wider selection of players is involved. The formation of a top competition team requires:

- Team staff formation
- Medical preventive measures
- Discipline
- Rules of conduct
- Training process
- Motivation
- Organization
- Plans elaboration (process programming)
- Testing
- Statistical monitoring
- Information and theory development



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5.6 Selection of Players

Monitoring of candidates for a specific cycle should be achieved through:

- Internet
- Conversations with players and their coaches
- Watching games and monitoring the players' fitness
- Discussions with agents
- Playing career planning
- Coordination of plans with national championships
- NCAA competitions
- NBA/WNBA camps
- Permanent monitoring and acceptance of new players (team rejuvenation)

5.7 Training Process

The first test camp can accommodate approximately 20 players (7 – 10 days) and is the preliminary part which will be followed by the basic phase of the preparations. Three micro-cycles include working on defense, offense, transition and physical preparation for testing the skills of players around the team. At the end of this phase, it is desirable to play 1 or 2 games. This will help form a clear picture of the candidates on whom we may need to rely on in the future. If it is possible, they can be a part of a national B team.

The main preparations last for 5 to 6 weeks and the following tasks should be completed:

1. Physical preparation

- Individual development programs
- Flexibility, stretching
- Strength development – stabilization
- Combination of technical elements and group tactics in order to develop physical preparation
- Work in blocks – mixing of elements (there is not much time, but physical preparation is of great importance)

2. Technical preparation

- Depending on the phase of the training process - at the beginning, focus on speed of performing the technique elements (rebounds, shots, passes, pivots, jumps, game contacts, etc.)
- Passing technique and the speed of performing technical elements of an action
- Shooting; Each training session is dedicated to shooting

3. Tactical preparation

- Individual (situations 1/0, 1/1, 1/1 + 1, both defense and offense)
- Group (taking most of the time)
- Team (defense and offence line-up as well as 4/4 situation defense, offence and transition)



4. Matches – training matches

- 8 – 12 matches
- It is important to take into account the opponent's strength
- Simulation of the championship tempo (cycles of playing training matches)
- Preparation for matches (game between players at the beginning, and later preparationfor opponents)
- Working on fitness

5. Psychological preparation

- Individual
- Group
- Team

Psychological preparations represent a measure and harmony of all factors which are the keys to success. All individual players and the team as a whole must be prepared to dedicate all of their efforts to achieving results. The quality of motivational preparations is one of the most important factors in transforming the team's potential into the ultimate success. A reputable coach will seldom tolerate defeat if his team is playing against a team with lesser qualities. Coaches always respect their opponents, even those who are far behind their teams, and they will easily motivate their players with such an attitude — it is important to adapt the level of efforts, willingness, and self-confidence, but also to have respect for the opponent (each opponent wishes to win, not only to play a game, even when playing the biggest favorite).

5.8 Supplementary Segments

1. Prevention of injuries and treatment of injuries

In cooperation with a physician, physical therapy specialist and coach, it is necessary to make a plan on returning injured players to the team. More serious injuries should be treated and an evaluation of injuries should be made in cooperation with the team physician

- It is necessary to provide treatment for an injured player
- Alternate training to facilitate the re-introduction into the training process
- Return and readiness for play

2. Testing

- Testing of functional abilities
- Testing of physical skills
- Testing of technical and tactical skills

3. Statistical monitoring

- Training
- Training match
- Opponent



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4. Information and theory development

- Theoretical preparation
- Theoretical process (learning how to gather and process information). This is achieved from the first day.
- Analyses of the opponent's matches
- Theoretical preparation on the court and in the locker-room (meetings)

5. Recording

- Training
- Training matches
- Competitions
- Opponent
- Finding video recordings of the opponent and preparations for the first games
- Preparations for scouting during competition – data gathering

We become familiar with our play in order to have better understanding of the system we want to implement, to play more easily as well as to be acquainted with the opponent, individual and team aspects of their play.

5.9 The final phase of the preparations

This phase lasts between 5 and 6 weeks. After the camp activities we have a clearer picture on the team composition. All the players who will be on the team should not be there from the very beginning. For these players it is necessary to provide easy entry and continual preparations. This phase is divided into three sub-phases:

Preparatory phase lasts approximately 2 weeks or 4 micro-cycles (one micro-cycle lasts 2 to 3 days). It begins with testing (1-2 days). The first micro-cycle is the introduction into the training process. The second, third and fourth are basic and they cover the following elements:

- Technique with focus on ball handling technique, catching, passing, movement technique, basketball stance (lower stance, maintain the body in stance), good timing, start.
- Group tactics with simultaneous work on defense and offence from the start. In the beginning this will consume most of the time, but this aspect must be given full attention. It is important to focus on corrections from the very beginning. Improvement and correction are one of the most important elements in the course of the preparation process.
- Team tactics (tactics regarding defense, offence and transition) are worked on during the entire preparation period, even during the competition, between games.
- General physical fitness (alternative aerobic and anaerobic exercises), (morning training sessions are for quick regeneration of the body after a long competition season). After one or two weeks, the body will be able to deal with new loads and strains.
- Specific physical preparations.
- From the very beginning, a combination of elements (specific physical preparations indoors in the afternoon, in combination with regular training).



The head coach should prepare at least two different defensive strategies against individual offense, one defense on the full court, one zone press defense and two different zone defenses. In reserve, team should have one combination defense (one, four or two, three zone defense). For the offense the team should have, besides standard plays, at least two special plays which should be used during the appropriate moments of the game.

At the end of this period it is desirable to play one or two games. The competition requirements should be met, i.e. games should be played to maintain competition tempo.

Basic phase – coordination lasts 2 weeks or 4 micro-cycles

Improvement of technical/tactical details:

- Improvement of the physical condition – specific physical preparations on the court and in the gym, stretching – stabilization at the beginning and at the end of training
- Further improvement of tactics in the game conditions (meetings, theory, practice)
- Specific shooting practice (players are not under pressure yet)
- Practice in series (this type of training is first introduced with seniors)
- Special tactics improvement
- Establishment of roles – cooperation – guards – forwards – centres
- Tandem search
- Playing deep and wide
- Specific aspects of the national team become significant
- Game with tall players
- Understanding between the coach and players
- Improvement of technical and tactical details

The team consists of 16 players, where 10–12 play, 7–8 are used in a game, 2–3 win, and tandem is formed.

Technical and tactical correction and coordination is important, as well as improvement of knowledge in dealing with information and the capacity to make efficient preparations in a short period of time. Two tournaments (3+3 games), should be played, as a simulation of the actual competition (similar to the dynamics of the competition). Development of winning tactics, fatigue adaptation (we must win even in the most difficult situation).

The tasks for this period

1. tactics correction
2. maintenance of physical fitness
3. coordination through training and games with special competitive tasks
4. individual work before and after training (free throws and additional practicing)
5. information gathering –meetings and scouting
6. intensive work on shooting
7. treatment of injured players (in order to have them back on team as soon as possible)



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All these elements are significant, but the most important is to consider the end of this period as a completed process. The players are ready for the competition and now they can focus on details.

Pre-competition period lasts 7-10 days or 2-3 micro-cycles, with 1-2 games

- Transition from intensive work to a specific competitive regime
- Adaptation to specific dynamics that would be present at the competition
- Competition micro-cycles
- Fitness improvement
- Team lines and line-up

Tasks for this period

1. Functional technique - emphasis on shooting, accuracy in competitive conditions
2. Tactics for the first game in the competition
3. Fitness and psychological work

5.10 Competition period

1. Calendar of matches
2. Traveling plan
3. Coordination of fitness improvement
4. Work in specific micro-cycles (meeting + games).

The work in micro-cycles includes knowledge of information (scouting and capacity of the team to get activated and to provide its maximum skills).

The purpose of gathering before the match is to achieve the highest level of readiness by appropriate information sharing and psychological preparation. For this purpose coaches and their assistants utilise a lot of information.

Fitness is achieved when all elements necessary for the play reach the appropriate level – it is not good to be in peak condition before the beginning of the competition. The level of fitness refers to the technical and tactical skills, physical and psychological preparations. Here it is important to increase the fitness as the competition is in progress, and to achieve peak fitness at the end of the competition.

During the entire competition period we practice with the emphasis on tasks that will face us in the next game. The players without sufficient court time or who do not play at all must have additional training.

In preparation for the games, coaches have to be aware of the selection of the starting line-up which is conditioned by the selection of tactics, and the coach's concept of how the players should be involved in a game. Even the key players may be treated as substitutes, due to some tactical and competition requirements.

The national team is associated with efforts to increase and maintain the level of top athletic fitness which has been achieved. The national team offers possibilities to implement the game concept through the appropriate selection of players. In the national team, the play is created by the players'



ability to accept, improve and enrich the basic concept. The coach needs to be able to sacrifice his own success for the success of the team, and thereby the mutual trust of the players is increased (as they are also expected to sacrifice something). Only the coach who is ready to sacrifice his own success may count on his players to adjust their attitudes and their habits, even those that contributed to their success. In that way, qualities are confirmed and improved, and **SUCCESS IS GUARANTEED**.

6. Keep in Mind

In many cases the NF should bear in mind that most of the players are playing abroad and there is a need to have constant and friendly contact with all players. There is a need to have a person who will take care of all players' issues and to keep touch with all of them. The NF should carefully choose the location for the preparation period and schedule national team preparation in a very professional manner. The team manager together with the coach and the NF should coordinate these issues. All of the arrangements should be completed before the start of the preparation.