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By Caleb Wells and Jiling Liu

Every great shooter in the game of basketball has one thing in common: a routine. The players we see playing on National Basketball Association teams, such as Steph Curry and Kevin Durant, all have their set shooting routines that allow them to succeed and be considered great shooters. Dedication and consistency with these shooting routines, like Steph Curry's 2,000 shots per week, which breaks down to a minimum of 250 shots per day and 100 shots before each game, is what makes all the difference (Jenkins, 2016). Furthermore, implementing these routines early on is important for developing a player's proper technique and shooting motion. To help increase basketball shooting accuracy, we present a series of progressive drills that any aspiring middle school basketball player can use to develop their own routine and improve their game.

The Basics of Shooting

The focus of this series of drills is to build a proper shooting technique, consistency, and confidence that will help improve overall performance. Basketball players are expected to be able to shoot from different areas on the court with different body positions. When it comes to the basics of basketball shooting, you need to keep in mind a few technical points. First, the player's eyes need to locate a spot on the goal, usually the front of the rim. Next, the player takes a proper shooting stance, with the feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. At the same time, the player should ensure their grip has all fingers spread across the ball while the palm makes no contact. Then, the player will position their elbow right below the ball, with the shooting hand lined up with the basket. When attempting the shot, the player's elbow goes straight up with the ball, together with legs, core, and arms in a coordinated movement. The ball should be released at the top of the jump. A follow through, where the wrist is flexed and the fingers are pointed toward the rim, should always be maintained.

One-Hand Form Shooting

As mentioned in the previous section, the "release" portion of the shot is critical to shooting accuracy, and our first drill is designed to work on that. To begin, the player should get into an upright version of the shooting stance, still with the feet shoulder-width apart and slightly staggered. They should make an "L" shape with the shooting arm, holding the basketball with the shooting hand only (see Figure 1A). The guide hand will not be used for this drill. The player can stand close to the basket, about three to five feet away initially. It is important to focus on pushing the ball up and out, where the elbow finishes above the eyes at the end of each shot. Also, the player pushes the ball through the fingers, and the end of the follow through should result in the index and middle fingers pointing at the rim (see Figure 1B).

Figure 1. One-hand shooting.

Working on this motion can ensure a proper backspin of the ball, which is important for slowing the shot down, producing a favorable bounce off the rim or backboard, and perfecting the arc of the shot (Villagomez, 2022).

The coach can incorporate this drill into a workout such as 10 practice shots on the wall and 50 shots at the basket. The player may not progress from the wall to the basket until at least 9 of 10 shots are made with correct form. The 50 shots on the basket can be done in increments of 10 from five different spots on the court. This drill can also include the guide hand, but the guide hand should not actually touch the ball in order for the player to avoid overusing it.

Set-to-Go Drill

This next drill focuses on the top portion of the shooting motion and producing one fluid motion that coordinates the extension of the player's legs as soon as the ball passes the shoulder. Starting in the shooting stance, with an arm angled at 90° and the ball at shoulder height (see Figure 2), the player positions themselves a few feet away from the basket. Without jumping, the player extends their legs, releasing the ball at the top of the shooting motion. Once 10 shots have been attempted from the first spot, the player can take one step back and repeat the process. This will be done until the player reaches the free-throw line, and it can be repeated multiple times until confidence is built in the shooting motion. Similar to the One-Hand Form Shooting Drill, this drill can be completed in 50 shots, with 10 shots taken from five different spots. To challenge the player gradually, the shooting spots can range from as little as three feet to as many as 12 feet away from the basket.

Another variation of this drill involves transitioning from a "tuck" position (where the player is not set in a shooter's stance and the ball is at waist height) into the "set" position,
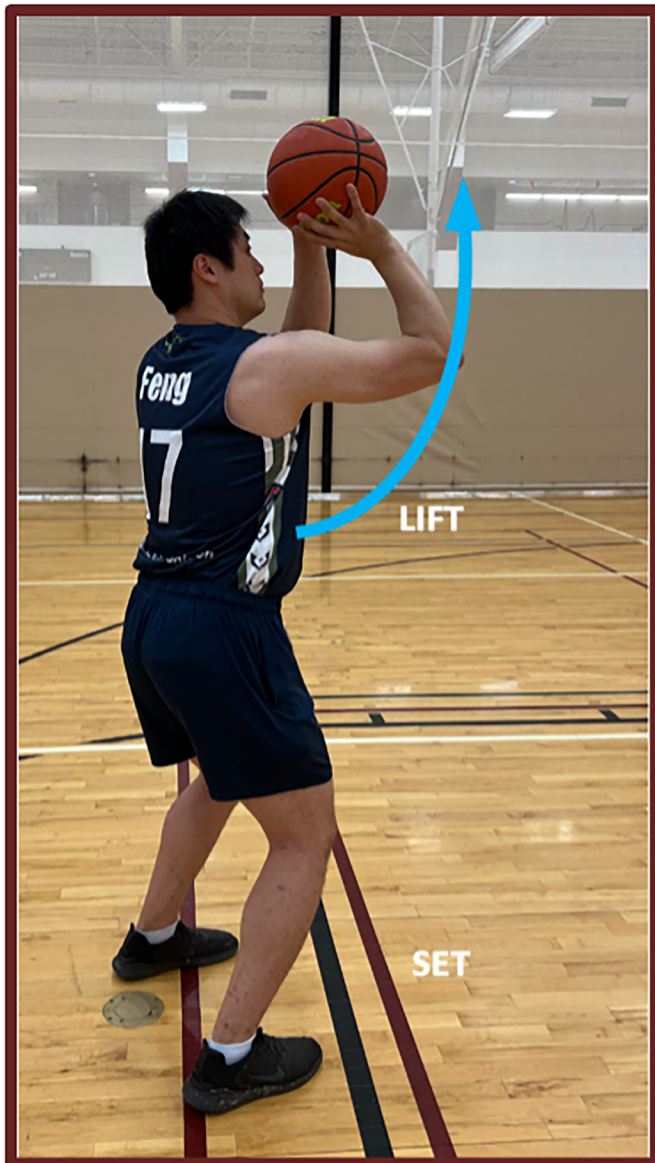
Figure 2. Set-to-go drill.

where the player is now in a shooter's stance with the ball at shoulder height. The final step to this alternative version is to combine the "tuck," "set," and release all into one fluid shooting motion. This helps a player practice shooting from a position where they have just received the ball from a pass or picked up from dribbling.

Shooting Off the Pass

Built on the previous two drills, the next drill aims to put the player in a game-like scenario. This drill is very similar to the Set-To-Go Drill, but now the player will be receiving the ball *via* a pass. To start, the player positions themselves about 10 feet away from the basket, ready to receive a pass from the

coach or another player (see Figure 3A). A key aspect of this drill is to alternate which foot is "set" before the pass is received. Before the player receives a pass, they should plant one foot forward and keep the other behind, resulting in a staggered stance. As soon as the player catches the ball, they step up, with the back foot into a shooter's stance (see Figure 3B). Immediately, the player jumps upward to complete the shot (see Figure 3C). This process should all be done in one fluid motion, 30 times on each leg. This drill can also be completed from different spots and distances away from the basket, just like the previous two drills. To add more challenge, the coach can allow the player to move on only after 15 or more shots are made from each leg at each spot.

Sell-Out Shooting Drill

In a real basketball game, players will have to be comfortable shooting the ball while being guarded. The Sell-Out Shooting Drill aims to practice under such conditions, and it is the most physically demanding drill in this series. This drill requires more than one player. As Figure 4 shows, three evenly divided groups of players line up along each baseline, all facing each other. One side of the court will be designated as offensive players and the other as defensive players. At the sound of a whistle, three players from the offensive side sprint and dribble to the other end of the court. Once the offensive players reach half court, three defensive players will sprint toward them and "sellout" or try to block their shot. The offensive players are allowed to use any combination of pump-fakes or dribble moves to make a shot. After the offensive player has shot the ball, the defensive player will get the rebound, and both players will switch sides. This drill can start with players taking midrange shots inside of the three-point line and progress to taking long-distance shots from behind the three-point line. The coach can rotate the lines once each player has made 10 attempts or more.

Conclusion

Scoring is the key to winning a basketball game. For many teens, it is essential to master proper shooting mechanics, whether they are looking to score more points in a game or hope to make the high school varsity team—or eventually play at the collegiate level. The series of shooting drills presented here focus on the essentials of a good shot, and it is hoped that middle school basketball players will improve their shooting percentages by incorporating these into their practice routine.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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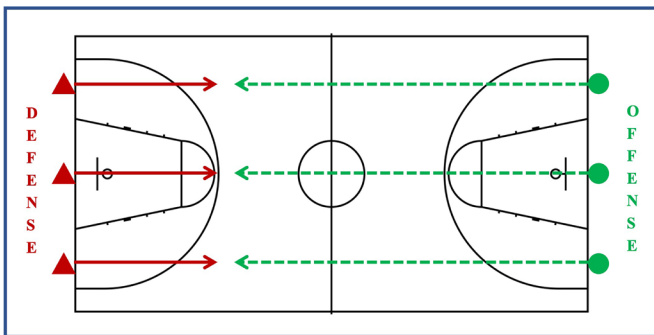
Figure 3. Shooting off the pass.

Figure 4. Sell-out shooting drill.

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