

Suggestions for Imbalanced Games

All coaches have experienced the dreaded moment when you are winning by an embarrassing margin or being beat so badly you wish you could disappear. This inevitable imbalance of team skill can be an opportunity to try some new ways to play the game. If the kids were playing pickup basketball with no adults they would find a way to balance the game and so should you as a coach.

A winning coach can:

- Make a passing requirement which can be cued by a verbal signal rather than yell out “three passes before you shoot”. Passing requirement may require bounce passes only, the ball be touched by all five offensive players before a shot, a minimum number of passes etc.
- Restricting the high scorer(s) to no shots until player X or X, Y and Z score. Some say this is not fair to the high scorer, but passing and positioning is as important at any level and this gives a chance for development in other players
- Make players dribble with the opposite hand or foot
- Designate who the next goal must be scored by, again this can be cued by a verbal signal so as not to embarrass the opponents.
- Shut off the scoreboard if a team is winning by more than 20 points. Reset the scoreboard at the end of each quarter or half.
- Assign the weakest guard of the winning team to the strongest player of the losing team.
- Play a “smart offense”, cue word for no stealing, no shot blocking, no interception, no reaching. Go for the rebound after the shot. This forces practice on good position.
- Have players take turns bringing the ball down.
- Centers and guards exchange places.

The trailing coach can:

- Adjust goals away from winning and to personal or team goals which may include such things as scoring for an individual, utilizing good screens or bounce passes or getting a certain number or % or rebounds.
- Admire a specific skill set of the other team and copy or learn from it. It is more productive than dwelling on the score and hating the other team for being good.
- Dwell on the little victories like a well-executed give and go or a good screen or rebound.
- Come away from the game with some personal, team highlights or good plays that may or may not have led to a score.
- Take it upon themselves to communicate with the opposing coach during the game rather than wait to the end and grouse.