

Rebounding – Challenging, But Not Impossible

In basketball one of the most challenging skills to teach, as well as to learn, is rebounding. Its difficulty lies in its complexity, for it encompasses six major skills: positioning the body, seeing the ball, tracking its direction, moving to get it, jumping, and catching. In order to rebound effectively, a basketball player must first be in the right position on the court and in the right position with his/her body. As the player sights the ball, the body is low and coiled with the elbows out and the hands up. When the ball comes off the backboard or rim, the athlete explodes off the floor with the arms driving upward and the hands snatching the ball out of the air. Upon landing, the player is on balance with the ball kept up around the chin and shoulders. The athlete pivots to the open court in order to pass the ball to an open teammate.

The question is how can this challenging skill of rebounding be taught so that an athlete can effectively rebound in a game situation? The solution exists in isolating the components and building from the more simple to the complex. With each step in the process varying forms of demand are presented in drills/activities and game-like play.

1. Passing and catching

The skills of passing and catching are taught first. The body is in front of the ball, and the eyes are on the ball. As a player receives the ball, at least one hand is behind the ball with the palms facing the ball. The arms are away from the body and toward the oncoming pass. As the ball touches the hands, the speed of the ball is cushioned as the player brings it toward the chest.

Drill: Two players face each other approximately 10-12 feet away.

- a. Two coaches, or an athlete and a coach, demonstrates the drill.
- b. Each player passes and catches return bounce passes. The ball travels in a flat arc directly to one's teammate. Each athlete has hands up, showing the teammate a target as well as being in readiness to catch the ball.
- c. The pass is now lobbed over an obstacle. The obstacle can be an opponent with arms raised overhead. The athlete who is receiving the ball sights the ball all the way into his/her hands. This arc is like the path of a ball coming down from the basket.

2. Positioning and moving to the ball

The next step involves the athlete seeing the ball, visually tracking its movement, and moving to get it. "Go get the ball" is the verbal prompt. Each athlete moves to get a passed ball, bounce passes it back to the coach, and goes to the end of the line.

Drill: Three athletes, one behind the other, stand facing the basket and in front of the coach.

- a. The coach demonstrates what the drill will be.
- b. The athlete is instructed to "get low": legs bent, elbows down, hands and head up.
- c. The coach first rolls the ball directly to the athlete. The athlete moves to the ball, catches it, and bounce passes it back to the coach.
- d. A progression of demands is increased from rolling the ball directly to the athlete, to rolling it to one side of the athlete and then to the other.
- e. The next set of progressions involves a bouncing ball.
- f. Then the ball is thrown into the air.
- g. To make the drill more game-like, the coach shoots the ball off the backboard and then the rim. The athlete is still instructed to "go get the ball", which is in essence what a rebound really is, and pass it to a teammate who is near the athlete, but on the sideline behind him/her. That teammate then passes it back to the coach. This simulates an outlet pass to a teammate.

3. Positioning, moving, and jumping

Many times, jumping is the most difficult skill to teach. Some athletes have never jumped or felt what it was like to propel themselves into the air.

Drill: Three or more athletes are in a circle around a coach.

- a. A jump is demonstrated by the coach. Body position and movement are demonstrated and then tried.
- b. The athlete is instructed to take a low position with legs bent, elbows down, and hands and head up. To jump, the athlete bends to coil and explodes upward in full body extension -- legs, body line, and arms straight.
 - 1) If the athlete still cannot jump, the coach gets on one side of the athlete, physically prompting the movement by putting the athlete in the proper position and moving them through the required movement.
 - 2) If the athlete still cannot jump, two coaches put the athlete in proper jumping position. On "ready, jump", the coaches physically assist the athlete: holding the near arm and back of the shorts, taking them through the jumping position from bending to extending, and lifting them off the floor.
- c. Repetitive jumping: after the athlete is able to jump the next step is repetition of the jumping movement.
 - 1) The athlete performs of series of 10 jumps in proper fashion; timing and proper form is emphasized, not speed. This is a high jump, not a long jump. The proper low body position is assumed; the athlete bends and extends to jump and then lands under control and on balance.
 - 2) The process repeats for 9 more jumps in the series. The athlete can do 3 sets of 10 jumps, practicing proper form. (Please note that when the athlete lands, it is important that the athlete's knees bend over the toes – not in toward each other.)
- d. The previous drill can be done with jumping added.

4. Positioning/jumping and grabbing the ball

If timing and grabbing the ball is still not accomplished, a coach can use a tetherball. (The tetherball rope is thrown over the back of the rim, and the ball is suspended out of the athlete's reach. Or a coach can stand on a chair and hold the ball overhead.) Three or more athletes are with each coach at each basket.

- a. First, the coach demonstrates the skill.
- b. A coach holds a tetherball rope. The athlete is instructed to "go get the ball." The athlete jumps up, grabs the ball, and pulls it down to his chin – elbows are out; head is up. Again, do 5 repetitions before the next athlete practices the skill.
- c. With the athlete improving the skill, the coach gradually pulls the ball up higher so that the athlete is challenged to jump higher in order to get the ball.
- d. Timing the jump for a ball coming down is the next element that the athlete needs to learn. The coach pulls the rope tighter so that the ball starts next to the rim. The coach instructs the athlete to jump when the athlete sees the ball coming down. The coach then lets the rope go. The athlete times his/her jump, grabs the ball overhead, and pulls it down to his chin with elbows out as before.

5. Positioning/jumping and grabbing a ball shot/thrown off the board.

A true game-like situation is created so that the athlete is able to accomplish a rebound. Again three or more athletes are with a coach at a basket.

- a. An athlete shoots the ball so that a coach can demonstrate the drill.
- b. The athlete stands in front of and facing the basket. The coach stands so that the athlete is able to see the shot/throw to the backboard. The coach instructs the athlete to "go get the ball". The skill is demonstrated, and then the athlete rebounds the shot. Repetition is key. Give each athlete 3-5 tries before the next athlete gets a chance. Rotate through the group at that particular basket.

- c. The drill is repeated, but now the coach shoots the ball so that it may hit the rim and/or backboard. The athlete rebounds this type of shot. The pivot and outlet pass is added. (This is the finish to a rebound.)
- d. “Rebound Ball” can be played. One shooter stands at the free throw line. 2-3 potential rebounders stand in front of the basket about 9 feet away. The shooter shoots the ball; the rebounders go for the ball with one coming up with it. The rebounder outlets the ball to the coach. The coach passes it to the shooter. One point is scored for each rebound. As soon as 3-5 points are totaled, that player becomes the next shooter. Play continues for 10 minutes.
- e. 1-on-1 is played so that the athlete gets a truer game-like situation, but in a somewhat isolated way. 1-on-1 is game-like play. The athlete now rebounds as the occasion presents itself.

Rebounding is a challenging skill, but it can be learned if it is broken down and the various components are taught in progression. Plus, play is used to put the skill into more game-like situations. Thus, the athlete is challenged to apply the skill of rebounding through gradually increasing amounts of pressure. Because of these series of successes, the athlete learns to rebound the ball under the pressure of live competition.