Using Colored Wristbands in Youth Basketball

Many youth basketball teams and leagues are adopting a color-coded wristband system for a number of reasons. The wristbands can help players remember plays and serve other purposes. Below are some pros and cons of using the colored wristbands.

Offensive Play-calling and execution

When coaching young players, it can be difficult to get them to remember and properly execute basic plays. By assigning a colored wristband to each designated area of the court or each route within a single play, young athletes may adapt better to more complex ideas. Tech-savvy coaches could even print out plays, with each movement colored to match the player's wristband.

With very young beginners, colored cones can be placed on the court to help players remember which sections of the floor are theirs.

Defense

The same concept can be applied to zone defense, using colored cones or even tape to help players remember which area they are supposed to defend.

Some leagues are requiring all players to wear the wristbands to assist in man-to-man defense. Sometimes it can be difficult for young players to remember whom they may be guarding, particularly when substitutions take place during game play. Suddenly, a player's "man" is out of the game, leaving coaches to yell opposing players' numbers for their team to pick up defensively. Wristbands alleviate this confusion, as players simply find the matching wristband on the other team, allowing them to focus more on the skills they've learned as opposed to finding the correct person.

Fun learning experience

Plays can be called for certain players to shoot the ball by using the players' wristband colors as references. For example, in the fall, young players may associate the color orange with Halloween. When naming a play designed to allow the player with the orange wristband to shoot the ball, the play could be titled based on a Halloween reference. Like in school, the bright colors can simply help make learning fun.

Designating skill level

Some leagues currently require teams to assign colored wristbands based on each player's skill level. For instance, the most skilled player on the court must wear red, followed by the next player wearing blue, etc. If not handled properly by experienced coaches and parents, this situation could lead to trouble down the road. Not only does it risk a rivalry among teammates who are each striving to be the "best" player on the team, but parents could also resent the decisions made by the coaching staff when deciding who is "most skilled." Which skills are more important when distributing wristbands: shooting, passing, or defense?

When coaching in a league that requires you to use this system, the best method is to be completely upfront with parents and players. Explain the skills you will be assessing when choosing wristbands and stress that the overall goal is to create individual matchups that are as fair as they can be. If players are close in skill level, offer to let them switch from game to game, allowing a number of players to wear the "best" color over the course of the season.

Using colored wristbands properly in youth basketball can help both the teaching and learning processes. Just remember that you and your players should be having fun.

Black = Best overall player and most likely to score, handle the ball and rebound
Blue = 2nd best overall player and 2nd most likely to score, handle the ball and rebound
Red = 3rd best overall player and 3rd most likely to score, handle the ball and rebound
Yellow = 4th best overall player and 4th most likely to score, handle the ball and rebound
White = 5th best overall player and 5th most likely to score, handle the ball and rebound