

BasketCases: How Youth Basketball Parents Can Lower Their Blood Pressure and Keep Their Sanity

Chapter 29

Full-court pressing in elementary school is like smoking cigarettes and should be banned forever

Moments after the first basket, I can tell you how difficult a youth basketball game will be to watch and officiate. If the full-court press rears its ugly head, especially in elementary school games, I guarantee the game will be long, painful, and sloppy. Chirping from coaches and BasketCases will increase exponentially with each passing minute and the experience we call youth basketball will be unbearable for nearly everyone involved.

A referee's best friend is a made basket. Next time you watch a game, notice how the flow improves when kids put the ball in the bucket. Everyone's happier: parents are cheering for their kids instead of criticizing officials, coaches actually coach, no one is standing at the free throw line, the clock continues to tick, and the referees almost disappear for minutes at a time.

A referee's worst nightmare is watching an elementary team press full court. It's the equivalent of someone lighting a cigarette in a nonsmoking bar. It ruins the experience for everyone; no good can come of it.

Why do so many elementary coaches insist on pressing? Two primary reasons:

- 1) It hasn't been banned yet, or
- 2) The "eye for an eye" Old Testament mentality. If another team is going to press us, then by God we are going to press them.

When elementary school teams press each other, they turn the great game of basketball into a rugby melee. Ten players do anything—grab, push, hold—to gain control of the ball. The

BasketCases are yelling “that’s a reaching foul” when there isn’t such a thing, the players don’t have an opportunity to learn the fundamentals of basketball: dribbling, passing, shooting, and playing good defense. The clock stands still because all of the fouls, violations, and out-of-bounds calls make a bad game last twice as long as it should. The referees have to choose which fouls they are going to call and which ones they are going to ignore, the frustrated coaches are screaming and the players are literally crying. What a great experience!

If I were king for a day, I would ban full court pressing in elementary school forever, and as long as I was at it, I would ban smoking and arrest everyone who throws cigarette butts out the window. But I’m not, so pressing and smoking remain legal despite the toxins they bring to youth basketball and breathing.

The vast majority of elementary school players don’t have the skills to handle a full court press. Elementary school players have no chance to work on the real fundamentals of the game because pressing takes away so many opportunities. I agree that breaking the press is a fundamental of the game. But elementary school players first should develop dribbling and passing skills so that once they reach junior high they have a fighting chance of handling the pressure.

Wouldn’t it be refreshing if elementary coaches voluntarily agreed not to press? Unfortunately, there are way too many coaches who are focused on doing whatever they can within the rules to win, instead of teaching players how to play the game. Even if the AAU banned full court pressing at the elementary school level, other organizations would allow it, so the playing field would remain uneven.

If you’re in the camp that believes pressing in elementary school is a good thing, why does every tournament limit pressing after one team has a sizable lead? It’s because everyone knows it’s bad

for the sport. If that rule wasn't put in place, teams, under the direction of their win-at-all-cost coaches, would press the entire game.

Many junior high students already deal with the peer pressure to smoke cigarettes after school on the playgrounds. Let junior high basketball players handle full court pressure on the basketball court at the same age.

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