



# YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT GUIDE







## INTRODUCTION

Basketball is a fast, fluid and dynamic sport that captivates players of all ages, drawing thousands to the court each year in our region. This resource is intended to provide an informed and modern approach to player development - one that nurtures skilled, intelligent and confident young athletes who thrive in the chaos of the game.

This guide is built around the idea of **BASKETBALL AS A GAME** and by embracing a games-based approach, we hope to develop players who can read, react and perform under pressure, all while fostering a lifelong love for the game.

A basketball player is first and foremost a **PERSON** who plays basketball; with the sport being just one piece of a much bigger puzzle in their life. As humans, we are shaped by biology, relationships, culture and countless other influences. If we can create an environment where people thrive, grow and enjoy the game, we can increase the likelihood that basketball will become a meaningful and lasting part of their journey.

As a coach, this means seeing beyond the athlete and understanding the person. When we invest in the individual, not just their on-court skills, we empower them to develop both on and off the court.

This guide will outline Basketball Otago's player development philosophy, phase-specific coaching priorities and practical methods for implementing a games-based approach at every level.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

When using this guide, it is important to understand what it is and what it is not.



### **THIS RESOURCE IS:**

- A reference point for coaches, educators, parents and players within our region, based on the best national and international advice.
- An informed view of the type of game and player that Basketball Otago would like to develop.
- A tool to support the development of coaches, educators, parents and players within Otago.



### **THIS RESOURCE IS NOT:**

- A prescriptive manual that coaches, educators, parents and players must follow.
- A recipe for immediate success.

We encourage you to use your own professional experience and judgement in bringing the content of this guide to life.





## **ENVIRONMENT**

Player development doesn't just happen in isolation, it is shaped by the environment we create as coaches, mentors and supporters of the athlete. A well structured, player-centred environment fosters learning, confidence and lifelong love for the game. The following are a core set of beliefs that have guided the approach and content of this resource.

**Four-Phase Approach:** Basketball Otago's four-phase approach provides a clear, holistic framework for developing athletes at every stage of their basketball journey. Inspired by our region's history of gold mining, it guides players through the phases of Prospecting, Panning, Digging and ultimately Striking Gold.

Each phase focuses not only on skill progression, but also on fostering enjoyment, resilience and personal growth. It's an approach that ensures players are not only equipped with the skills to succeed on the court, but also grow as confident, resilient individuals away from the sport.

**Principles vs Sets:** Basketball is a dynamic, unpredictable game and players must learn to adapt in real time. Focusing on principles of play, rather than relying solely on set plays, encourages athletes to read the game, make smart decisions under-pressure and respond to what's in front of them. We aim to nurture creative and confident problem-solvers who can thrive in the chaos of competition, rather than simply following a scripted plan.

**Communication:** How we communicate with players shapes their confidence and engagement. Clear and consistent messaging helps players understand expectations, feel valued and stay motivated. Creating an open environment where players can ask questions, reflect and provide input strengthens their understanding of the game and encourages ownership of their development.

**Support Network:** A player's journey is influenced by more than just their coach. Parents, teachers, teammates and the wider basketball community all play a role in shaping an athlete's experience. By promoting positive relationships and shared goals between these groups, we can create a stronger and more supportive environment for player development.

In summary, a great basketball environment is one where athletes are respected as people, challenged as learners and supported as they grow. It is a place where long-term development is prioritised over short-term results, where players feel connected to those around them and where learning is driven by clear principles, effective communication and a shared love for the game.

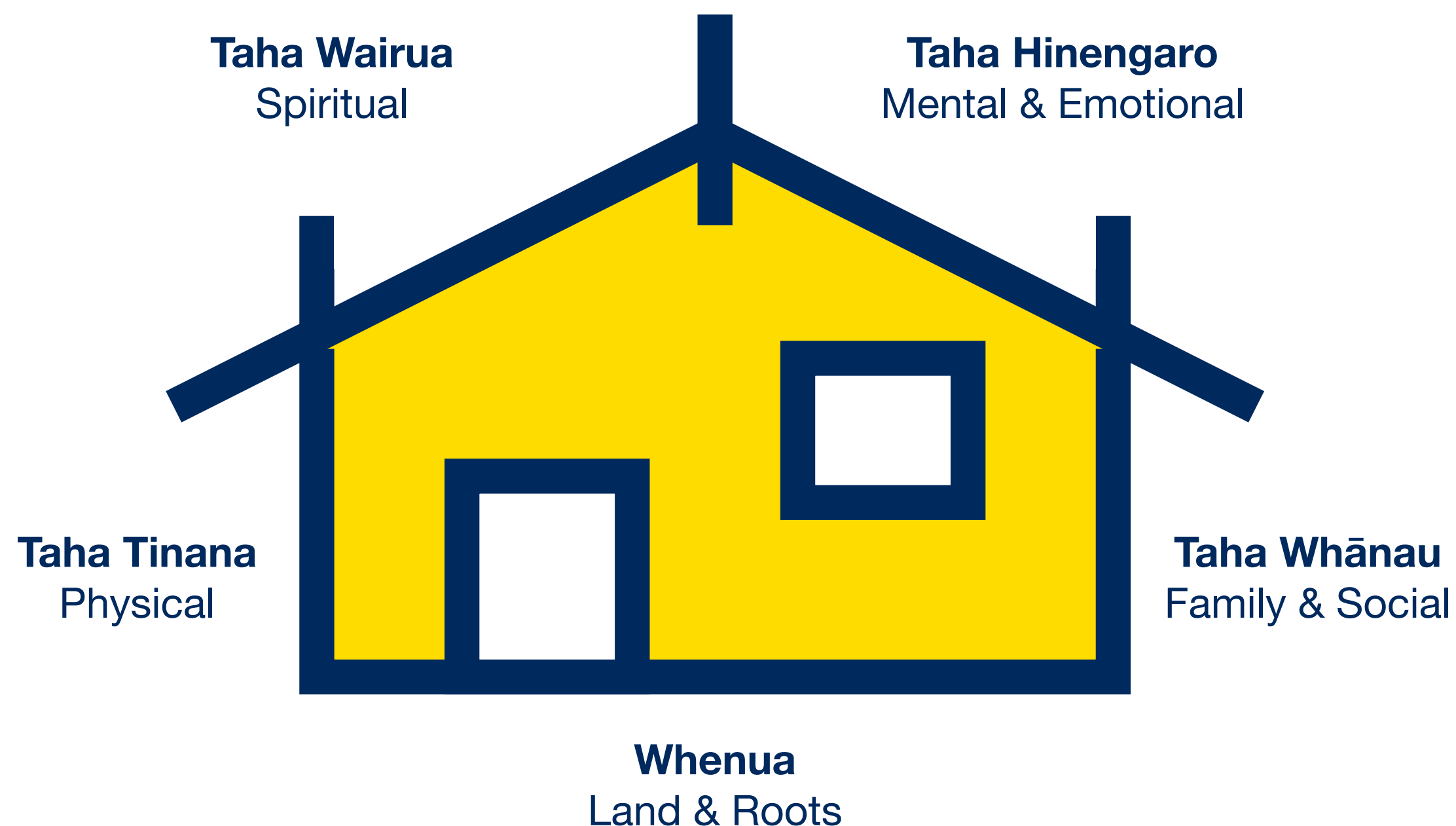




## SOCIAL SUPPORT

Throughout their basketball journey, players will encounter a wide range of challenges and experiences - both on and off the court. Some of these are expected, like learning new skills or adjusting to a different coach, while others are unexpected, such as injuries, changing schools or family circumstances.

Every player's journey is unique and to truly support players as people first, we can draw on **Te Whare Tapa Whā**. This health model describes well-being as a wharenui (meeting house) supported by four walls, with each wall representing an essential aspect of a person's wellbeing.



- **Taha Tinana** (Physical Wellbeing): Looking after the body through training, nutrition, rest and recovery.
- **Taha Hinengaro** (Mental & Emotional Wellbeing): Supporting mindset, self-esteem, emotional resilience and mental skills.
- **Taha Whānau** (Social Wellbeing): Building strong connections with teammates, coaches, family and the basketball community.
- **Taha Wairua** (Spiritual Wellbeing): A sense of purpose, identity, values and belonging; including cultural and personal beliefs.
- **Whenua** (Connection to Land & Roots): A connection to where we come from; strengthening our identity and sense of belonging.

If one wall is weakened, the house (the person) becomes unstable. Coaches, parents and mentors must be mindful of supporting the whole player, not just their basketball performance. This means listening, showing empathy and creating safe, inclusive environments where every player feels valued.

Providing this level of support requires ongoing, open and honest communication within the player's support network. Whether on or off the court, the aim is to help each athlete feel grounded, understood and connected - allowing them to thrive in basketball and beyond.





## DAILY HABITS OF A DEVELOPING PLAYER

Player development doesn't happen overnight; it is the result of countless small decisions and habits repeated over time. While long-term development requires patience and perseverance, real progress is built in the day-to-day and how players approach training, recovery, school and life. This section outlines the habits and mindset that players should adopt to fully commit to the development journey outlined in this guide.

**On-Court Habits:** When players step onto the court, their attitude and approach matters just as much as their skill. The most effective players are consistently early, prepared and intentional in their effort. They treat warm-ups seriously, listen actively and execute drills with focus. Every rep is an opportunity to improve and great players seek out opportunities to get better.

Great players are also great teammates. They help others without being asked, celebrate others' success and hold each other accountable in a respectful way. They understand that being part of a team means showing up not just for themselves, but for everyone.

**Off-Court Habits:** What happens off the court often determines what happens on it. Players who eat well, sleep enough and stay hydrated give themselves the best chance to perform. Recovery is not a luxury; it's a necessity. Stretching, foam-rolling and taking care of your body after games and practices are all part of being a developing athlete.

Equally important is how players manage their time and

commitments. School remains a priority and players must learn to balance academics with training and competition. This helps build time management skills that will serve them well beyond basketball. Being organised and taking pride in all responsibilities is a sign of maturity and leadership.

**Mental Skills & Mindset:** Basketball is as much mental as it is physical. Players must develop a growth mindset - the belief that talent is not fixed and that effort, learning and persistence lead to improvement. Mistakes are not failures; they are feedback.

Top athletes regularly set goals, reflect on their progress and adjust their focus. They don't get too high after success or too low after setbacks. They stay present, control what they can and develop routines that help them stay grounded and consistent.

**Self-Leadership:** Ultimately, the best players take ownership of their journey. They don't rely on others to push them and are self-motivated, disciplined and accountable. Self-leadership means knowing when to rest and when to go harder, when to speak up and when to listen and how to represent yourself and your team with pride.

Even without a leadership title, every player can lead by example. This means doing the right thing when no one is watching, setting high standards and lifting those around them. These habits are not just valuable in basketball - they are life skills that will serve players well in every area of their future.





## **BASKETBALL OTAGO PLAYER PROFILE**

True success as a basketball player encompasses a broad spectrum of qualities - it's about the type of person a player becomes through their journey in the game. We have identified five key characteristics that reflect what we value in a successful Otago basketball player. They represent the habits, mindsets and capabilities we aim to develop at every level of the pathway:

### **IDENTITY & BELONGING**

The player understands who they are, how they contribute and where they fit into the basketball community.

### **GAME AWARENESS**

The player can read the game, recognise options and make smart choices in real time.

### **SKILL & CRAFT**

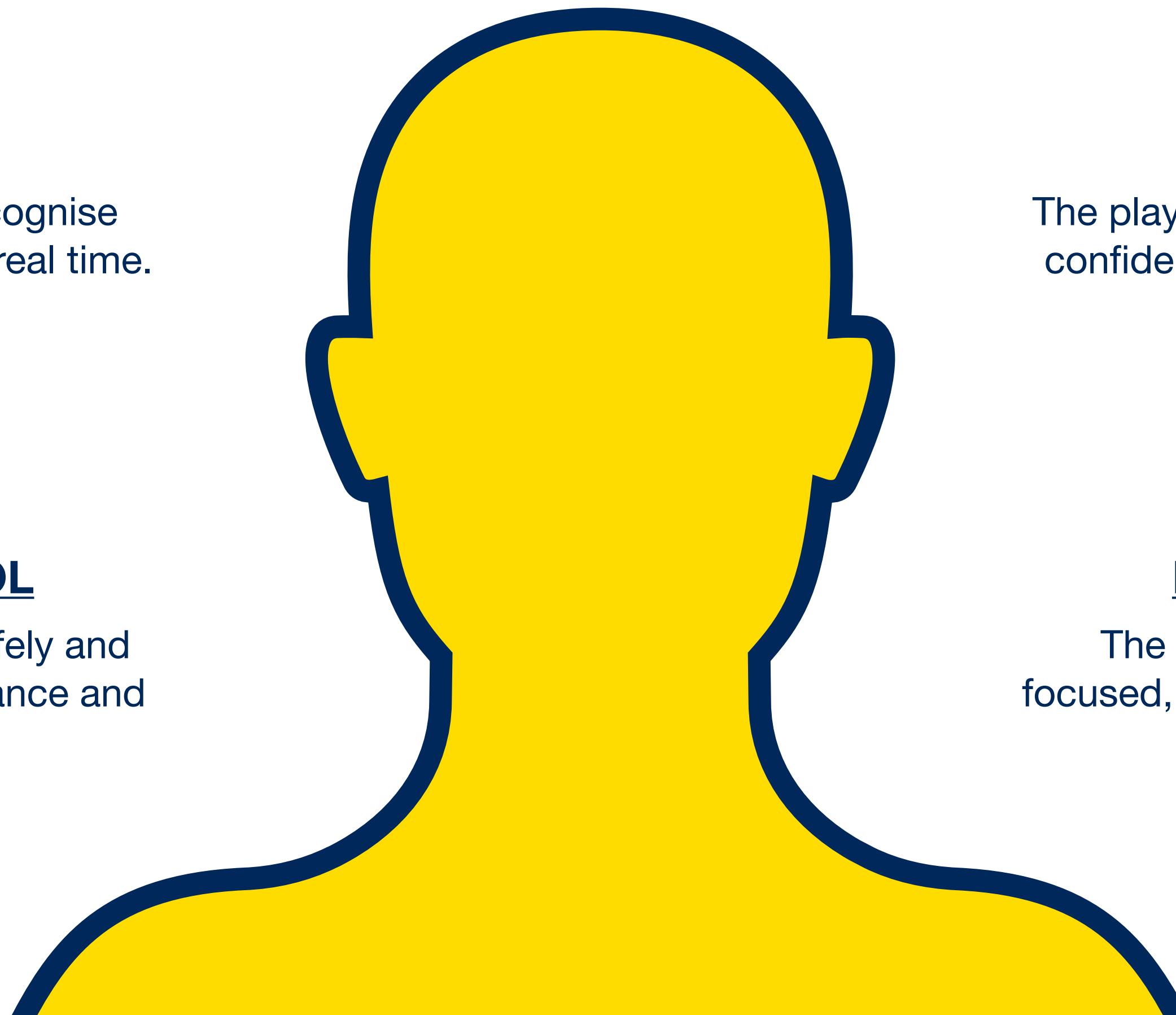
The player has a broad range of skills they can confidently use to express themselves on the court.

### **MOVEMENT & CONTROL**

The player can move efficiently, safely and effectively to support both performance and long-term development.

### **RESILIENCE & MINDSET**

The player has the mental tools to stay focused, bounce back from setbacks and thrive in challenging moments.







# UNDERSTANDING BASKETBALL AS A GAME







## MOMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE GAME

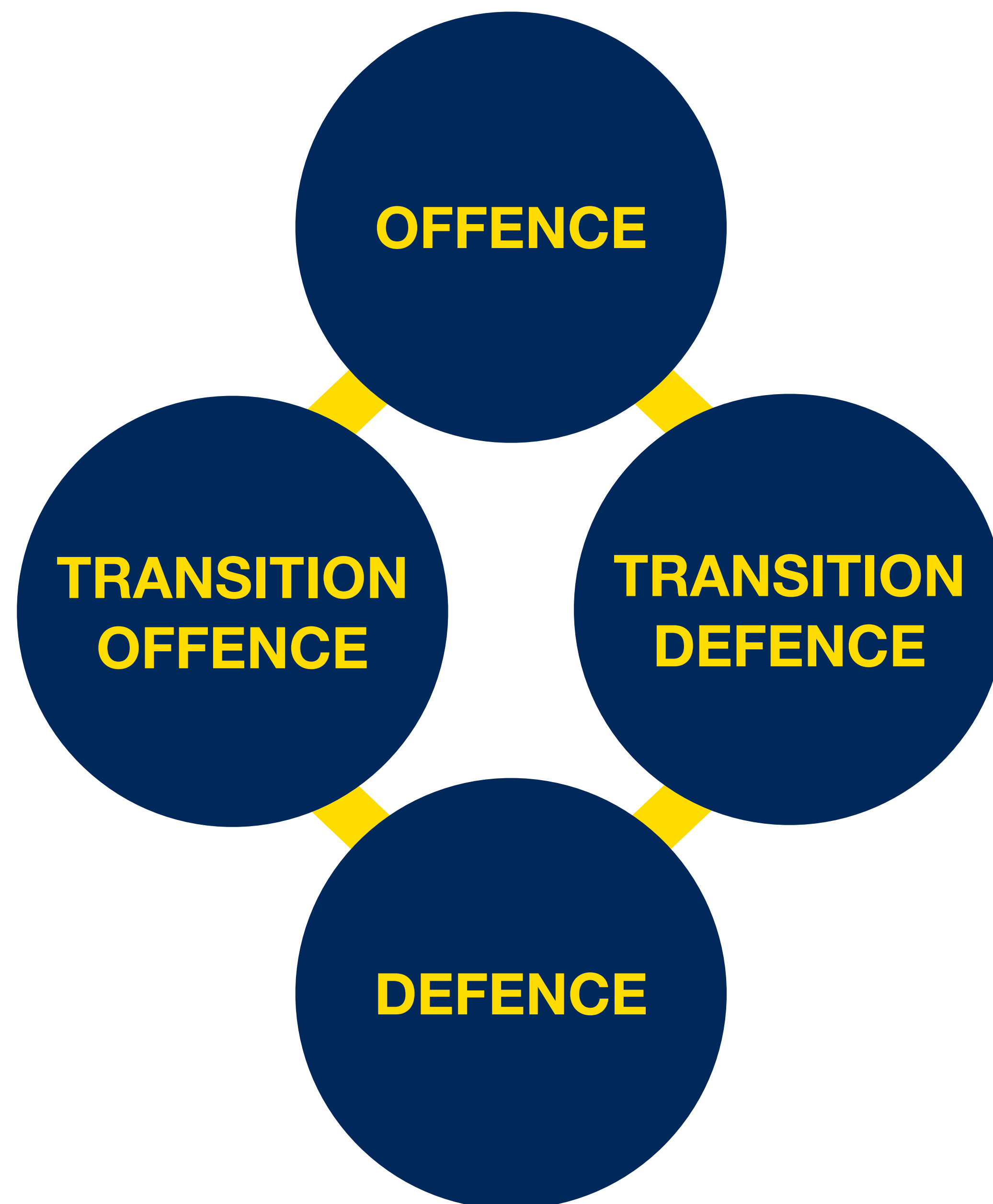
As emphasised earlier, this guide is built around the concept of **BASKETBALL AS A GAME**. At its core, basketball is about generating advantages to create scoring opportunities, while simultaneously disrupting or minimising the opposition's ability to do the same.

This logic guides our understanding of the game and breaks it down into four cyclical "Moments of the Game" (MOGs): Offence, Transition Defence, Defence and Transition Offence.

Each MOG has a distinct objective, giving rise to a set of "Principles of the Game" (POGs). These POGs are always at play, regardless of whether a team favours an up-tempo approach or a more structured half-court style; they remain constant but are expressed in different ways.

As coaches working with youth players, these MOGs and POGs serve as a roadmap, guiding us towards our goal of developing players who have a deep understanding of the game, can adapt skilfully to different situations, and consistently make good decisions. This type of player can then be implemented into any system of play.

When planning seasons and sessions, a clear understanding of these MOGs and POGs can help ensure that every training task has a clear purpose and works towards the player's ability to recognise and resolve problems.







## **OFFENCE**

**Goal:** Generate and manage advantages to create high percentage shots

### **Principles**

- Spacing
- Ball movement
- Attacking gaps and closeouts
- Moving on the drive
- Extending the advantage



## **TRANSITION DEFENCE**

**Goal:** Avoid quick scores or regain possession

### **Principles**

- Offensive rebounding
- Protecting home
- Stopping/slowng the ball
- Defending numerical advantages



## **DEFENCE**

**Goal:** Regain possession or force low percentage shots

### **Principles**

- Ball pressure
- Stopping penetration
- Helping and rotating
- Defending numerical advantages
- Defensive rebounding



## **TRANSITION OFFENCE**

**Goal:** Generate break-outs and create advantages to score quickly

### **Principles**

- Outletting
- Break-outs
- Exploiting numerical advantages
- Shot selection







## GAMES-BASED APPROACH

Basketball is a game of constant movement, decision-making and adaptability. Players must navigate unpredictable situations, read defenders and execute skills under pressure. Traditional drills that isolate skills in a controlled environment often fail to prepare athletes for the demands of real competition. Instead, a games-based approach is encouraged as this places players in dynamic and game-like situations where they develop skills in context. This leads to better retention, understanding and enjoyment.

**Many & Varied Repetitions:** Skill development requires repetition, but as we've already established, game situations are hardly ever the same. To prepare players for the unpredictable nature of the sport, repetitions must be varied. By using small-sided games, modified constraints and different playing scenarios, athletes experience diverse repetitions that help them adapt and apply their skills in real-time.

**Lots of Decisions:** To develop cognitive ability, players need to be faced with the decisions they are likely to encounter in a game. A games-based approach ensures players are constantly making decisions and encourages problem-solving and creativity. This helps develop basketball intelligence and confidence in decision-making under pressure.

**Enjoyment:** Learning is most effective when players are engaged and having fun. A games-based approach fosters excitement, competition and creativity; making practices more enjoyable and meaningful. This keeps athletes motivated and builds a genuine

love for the sport.

**Player Reflection:** Learning doesn't just happen during play - it happens when players reflect on their experiences. While giving players the right answer may lead to quick results, encouraging them to reflect and discover solutions on their own creates deeper, long-lasting learning. This process fosters self-awareness, critical thinking and a growth mindset.

In summary, a games-based approach develops skilled, intelligent and adaptable players by immersing them in realistic, decision-rich environments. Through varied repetitions, constant decision-making and active reflection, athletes learn to read the game, respond under pressure and execute effectively - all while enjoying the process. By prioritising game-like learning over isolated drills, we create an engaging and dynamic development environment that not only builds better basketball players, but also fosters a lifelong passion for the game.

Keep in mind that the game-like scenarios should be age-appropriate and relevant to the context of your players. Coaches should modify the complexity of the games and challenges based on the developmental stage of their athletes. For younger, less experienced players, this might mean simplifying the rules or reducing the number of players. As players progress, the complexity of scenarios can increase to match their growing abilities.





# FOUR-PHASE APPROACH TO YOUTH PLAYER DEVELOPMENT







## **FOUR-PHASE APPROACH**

Basketball Otago's Four-Phase Approach offers a clear, purposeful framework for developing athletes in a way that is progressive, inclusive and grounded in long-term growth. Drawing inspiration from our region's rich history of gold mining, this approach symbolises the journey every player takes - from discovering the game, refining their craft and ultimately reaching their full potential.

Just as miners searched and dug deep to uncover something truly valuable, our players move through the phases of **Prospecting**, **Panning**, **Digging** and finally **Striking Gold**. Each phase ensures that players are supported at every step of their journey, helping them grow a lasting connection to basketball and build the tools to succeed both on and off the court.

**Prospecting** (Explore Learning): In the beginning, miners explore the land, looking for signs of gold. Similarly, athletes start their journey by discovering the sport, learning the basics and having fun. This phase is all about exploration and engagement, where players develop a love for basketball and build the foundations for further growth.

**Panning** (Learning to Play): Once prospectors find promising areas, they pan for gold. In basketball, players begin to refine their skills, learning core fundamentals, improving technique and gaining confidence. This phase is about developing essential skills and understanding gameplay.

**Digging** (Playing to Compete): Miners dig deeper into the earth to

uncover valuable veins of gold. Similarly, players begin to dig deeper into the sport by learning more advanced skills and enjoying competition. It's about growth, focus and honing their skills and mental toughness.

**Striking Gold** (Competing to Succeed): The final step in gold mining is striking gold - hitting the rich veins after all the hard work. For basketball players, this phase is not just about winning, it's about striving to be the best version of themselves. This phase is about embracing competition, rising to challenges and staying committed to ongoing development. It's a celebration of the journey, as much as the reward.

This Four-Phase Approach serves as more than just a development model and by guiding players through each stage with purpose and care, we aim to create not only skilled basketball players, but resilient and thoughtful individuals with a lifelong connection to the game.

Coaches play a key role in tailoring the experience to each phase. Game-like scenarios and challenges should be age-appropriate and developmentally aligned. For younger or less experienced players, this may mean simplified rules and reduced numbers. As players progress, the level of complexity can increase to reflect their growing skills and understanding of the game.





# PROSPECTING

Explore Learning - “Search & Explore”

RECOMMENDED AGE: Under 10’s

GOAL: To ignite a love for the game by creating fun, inclusive experiences where players feel safe to explore.

## CHARACTERISTICS

Identity & Belonging

Game Awareness

Skill & Craft

Movement & Control

Resilience & Mindset

## WHAT TO DEVELOP

Love for the game and enjoyment

Introductory game sense

Introductory core skills

Basic movement mechanics and co-ordination

Trying new skills and building confidence

## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Encourage smiles and friendships

Ask guiding questions - celebrate lightbulb moments

Fun games and activities that promote these skills

Fun movement and co-ordination challenges

Reward curiosity and effort

## RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE & METHODOLOGY:

It is recommended that sessions last no longer than 60 minutes and they are designed to be active, engaging and fun. Use games-based activities that spark creativity and promote guided discovery; allowing players to explore and learn through play. Keep coach instruction short and purposeful, delivering teachable moments within the flow of the session. Minimise lines and waiting time, aim to keep every player moving - preferably with a ball in their hands. Encourage a wide variety of movements to support the development of agility, balance, co-ordination and overall physical literacy





# PANNING

Learning to Play - “Sift & Refine”

**RECOMMENDED AGE:** Under 12/14’s

**GOAL:** To develop core skills and game understanding through engaging activities that build confidence and curiosity.

<u>CHARACTERISTICS</u>	<u>WHAT TO DEVELOP</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES</u>
Identity & Belonging	Understanding team dynamics and self-confidence	Celebrate contribution and effort - not just outcomes
Game Awareness	Recognition of space and simple tactical decisions	Modified games and constraints
Skill & Craft	Refine core skills and weak-hand development	Many and varied repetitions
Movement & Control	Introduce basketball-specific movements	Education around activation and cool down
Resilience & Mindset	Growth mindset	Reflective questioning

## RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE & METHODOLOGY:

It is recommended that sessions last between 60-90 minutes and be designed to challenge players while still being fun and engaging. The focus should be on combining technical skill through games-based activities that encourage decision-making and creativity. Use simple, purposeful coaching interventions to support understanding and create space for players to discover solutions on their own. Encourage efficient movement by introducing activation and educate players on the importance of preparing their bodies for physical activity.





# DIGGING

Playing to Compete - “Build & Aspire”

**RECOMMENDED AGE:** Under 16/18’s

**GOAL:** To improve skills, game-sense and resilience by preparing players to embrace challenges, contribute to their team and grow through competition.

## CHARACTERISTICS

Identity & Belonging

Game Awareness

Skill & Craft

Movement & Control

Resilience & Mindset

## WHAT TO DEVELOP

Clarity in team roles and personal purpose

Tactical understanding and in-game adaptability

Skill execution under pressure

Basic and core strength

Composure during competition

## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Introduce leadership roles and shared accountability

Introduce some video analysis

Many and varied repetitions under pressure

Weight-room introduction

Reinforce positive self-talk and breathing exercises

## RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE & METHODOLOGY:

It is recommended that sessions last no longer than 90 minutes and they should be purposeful, challenging and designed to replicate the demands of competition. Incorporate a mix of skill development, tactical application and conditioning - all blended within realistic, game-like contexts. Provide opportunities for players to lead, communicate and reflect. Coaching interventions should promote ownership - ask questions, give space for problem-solving and allow players to take responsibility for their actions.





# STRIKING GOLD

Competing to Succeed - “Reap The Reward”

RECOMMENDED AGE: Under 20’s

GOAL: To support players in becoming confident, capable and self-driven athletes who strive to be their best and continue developing beyond the game.

## CHARACTERISTICS

Identity & Belonging

Game Awareness

Skill & Craft

Movement & Control

Resilience & Mindset

## WHAT TO DEVELOP

Role models for younger athletes

Advanced tactical understanding

Consistent execution at game intensity

Positional strength

Commitment to continued growth

## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Mentorship schemes

Advanced game scenarios and video analysis

Many and varied repetitions under pressure

Individualised performance plans

External development opportunities

## RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE & METHODOLOGY:

It is recommended that sessions should last between 90-120 minutes and replicate the intensity, complexity, and demands of competition. Blend high-tempo activities with tactical preparation and position-specific work, ensuring everything is anchored in game relevance. Encourage player ownership by involving athletes in session planning, problem-solving, and review. Use feedback loops — video, peer observation, and coach dialogue — to promote continuous self-assessment and improvement. Maintain a professional but supportive environment, where players are challenged, trusted, and encouraged to take responsibility for their performance, wellbeing and growth beyond the court.





## FINAL MESSAGE

At Basketball Otago, our commitment is to provide every young athlete with the opportunity to grow, compete and thrive within a supportive and challenging environment. This Youth Player Development Guide outlines a clear and structured pathway that empowers players at every stage - from their first steps in Miniball to representing Otago on the national stage. By aligning our efforts across the basketball community, we aim to foster a strong basketball culture built on development, inclusion and aspiration.

Through deliberate planning, quality coaching and strong community engagement, we believe that every player can reach their potential - whether their goals are to represent New Zealand, make their school team or simply enjoy the lifelong benefits of sport. Together we are building a future for Basketball Otago that is sustainable, connected and full of opportunity.

This document is intended to act as a guidebook for the development of youth basketball players. We encourage you to use your own professional experience and judgement in bringing the content of this guide to life.

For any queries regarding Basketball Otago's player pathway, development programs or representative program, please contact our Pathway Development Manager: [will@otago.basketball](mailto:will@otago.basketball)

