Section 4
On Court Skills Training

4.1 Ball Handling

As simple as it may sound, the game cannot be played without being able to effectively handle the basketball with both hands. As we have said many times with all fundamental skills, even the best drawn out plays can be unsuccessful if one of the players on the floor cannot handle the ball. Players of all positions must be able to advance and move the ball within the offense, escape a defensive trap, and attack the defense through proper ball handling.

As we bring players in and try to teach them how to score off the dribble, we often realize very quickly that their ball-handling skills are just not good enough to complete the move successfully. At that moment, we note to make sure that particular player adds intense ball-handling drills to his daily workouts. We will discuss this more later when we talk about how to build a workout, but this extra ball-handling work will lead to better moves, better passes, and a better player. Every coach knows you do not want all 5 guys dribbling the ball out there in the offense. As coaches and trainers we also know we do not want our players over-dribbling. But think of how much better your team would be if every player was able to effectively and efficiently use his or her dribble to make positive plays?

I think the biggest example of the importance of ball handling is in youth basketball. Step into any tournament and watch a 5th or 6th grade team play and the best players on the floor are almost always the players who handle the ball the best. Ball handling equals control. As many moves as we work, pick and rolls, we work on with our guards, or any drill involving making plays off the dribble, it is always the players with the best handle on the ball who do the move the best. Our best guards, Billups, Baron Davis, Derek Fisher, John Wall, and dozens of others, have an incredibly strong handle and, as we say in basketball, they “have the ball on a string.” The ball is almost part of their hands.

The ball-handling skills and requirements of each position will be different, but each player must be a trustworthy ball-handler in order to earn playing time and make a contribution to the team’s success. Confident and competent ball handling will limit turnovers and maximize offensive potential. Simple escape-dribble moves, shot-creating moves, or offense-initiating dribbles are all skills that should be developed through extensive and focused training.

The Impact Training System skill development section will provide drills to build a strong ball-handling foundation as well as advanced moves and drills for primary ball-handlers. We’ll begin the program with stationary drills that can be done for an allotted time period or specified amount of dribbles, and eventually build into dynamic linear or angular movement drills utilizing cones or obstacles to simulate defenders. Once the foundational skills are built, ball-handling drills are most effective when done at full-speed, breaking out of your comfort zone and entering a new level of proficiency. We will also incorporate passing drills into our ball-handling program. These drills can be done with and without a partner and will enhance your ability to make sharp and accurate passes after a dribble move.

The Impact Training System performance section will target the essential muscle groups for elite ball handling: core, shoulder, and lower-body. You must be able to hold position when threatened by a defender through core and lower body endurance and strength. When driving to the basket or making a low-post scoring move, it is your core and leg strength that will help you maintain your
balance despite counter forces by a defender. In order to utilize your strength to hold your balance and position, you must be strong and flexible enough to get yourself into the proper initial position to establish yourself and gain an advantage. Additionally, Impact players must improve their muscle endurance to produce maximum power over longer periods of time. The Impact Training System strength training drills will help increase your core strength and endurance through resistance and body-weight exercises specifically designed with ball-handling movement and skill in mind. We will provide more insight into this area as we discuss performance training and how to integrate it into the overall training program.

Keep in mind that these drills are ONLY drills to work the ball handling in a controlled setting. As we advance into the Offensive Moves Section, you will see how important it is to emphasize ball handling in those moves, which will also serve as a ball handling drill in itself.

3 ESSENTIAL DRILL SECTIONS FOR BALL HANDLING

Stationary
- Building the basic fundamental traits of solid ball handling
- Developing the foundational skills necessary to move on to more challenging drills, including on-the-move training
- Repetitive drills to build strength, endurance, and muscle-memory

Dynamic
- Ball handling on-the-move
- Changing direction and speed while maintaining control of the basketball
- High-intensity repetition of game-used moves and cuts
- Simulated live-action obstacles (cones, chairs, coaches)

Passing Off The Dribble
- Combination of passing skills and ball-handling drills
- Training the skill of delivering a pass to a teammate off of a high-intensity ball-handling drill repetition
- Utilization of multiple basketballs, coaches, walls, teammates
- Simulated live-action situations; drive-kick, pick and pop, ball-reversal, swing pass, as well as different methods of passing the basketball
SECTION 4 - ON COURT SKILLS TRAINING, 4.1 BALL HANDLING

JOE’S KEY ELEMENTS OF BALL HANDLING

Our step-by-step guide will build a foundation of skills and then challenge the player to implement the skills in dynamic situations that simulate game action. The player will be put into drills where he must react and use improved vision and body control in order to complete the set. These drills are designed to make handling the basketball against any type of pressure for all positions on the court, easier within the game. The drills will change but the following fundamental traits apply to all areas of ball handling training:

**Forceful Dribbles**
Powerful and forceful dribbles will yield more effective ball-handling. Strong pound dribbles will get the basketball back to your hand more quickly, enabling you to control the ball better and then to make the proper decision of what to do with the ball.

**Dribble Location**
Regardless of position, ball handlers should almost never dribble the basketball wider than their knees and hips. When pressured by a defender, ball handlers should almost always dribble the ball no higher than their knee.

**Posture**
Elite ball handlers are almost always on-balance with their hips low, back straight, chest up, eyes scanning the court, and core engaged. This posture has many benefits including, the ability to deter reaching or trapping defenders, better ability to change direction quickly and efficiently, and increased court awareness to allow for proper offensive play.

**Breaking Out Of Your Comfort Zone**
To improve ball handling, players must be willing to experience discomfort and fatigue. Ball handling is best trained at a high-intensity level in order to increase motor skills while simulating game conditions. By staying in your comfort zone, you may maintain your current skill level but your likelihood of improvement is diminished.

**Strong Core**
Proficient ball handling often means advancing a dribble against physical pressure from an opponent. Combined with posture, body positioning, and dribble location, a ball handler must possess solid core strength in order to hold his desired position against physical resistance and contact.

JOE’S KEY POINTS FOR DRILLING EFFICIENCY

This topic will be covered in in its entirety in the drill sequencing and workout building section.

Some basic points to keep in mind as you are reading through this drill section:

- Ball handling is a great way for players to warm-up at the beginning of a workout but can also be spliced into a workout for conditioning purposes
- While used as a warm-up technique, players should be strongly encouraged to “pick up the pace” and engage in full-speed repetitions when possible.
- Ball handling does not improve at half speed, drills must be completed at 110% effort in order to reach a higher level of proficiency
- Maximizing space is essential to the ball handling section:
  - Multiple players can engage in the stationary drill section within close proximity to one another
  - This often creates positive synergy as the players tend to push each other with their energy and encouragement when faced with physical discomfort or fatigue
- In the dynamic section, coaches must be able to utilize their space efficiently by strategic placement of obstacles/cones
- Even half of a half court is more than enough space to complete all of our dynamic drills
- In order to prevent injury, players must be properly
activated and stretched before full-speed dynamic ball handling training

- Intensity is paramount
- Cardiovascular training is a very positive by-product of high-intensity ball handling training
- Coaches must challenge players to improve by encouraging them to attempt new dribble moves at a faster-than-comfortable pace

### STATIONARY DRIBBLING SECTION

Developing a strong foundation of ball handling skills through stationary training is essential in order to progress to more advanced drills and continued improvement. Players of all levels can benefit from daily stationary ball handling repetition to generate and sustain powerful muscle memory and efficiently simulate in-game ball handling movement.

Stationary ball handling can be another way for neuromuscular activation at the beginning of a training session. Players can increase their heart rate while activating their circulatory system through simple stationary ball handling drill sequences. Because there is little or no joint stress with the stationary drills, players can use this time as another way to mentally and physically prepare for the training session.

All of the stationary drill sets can be completed for a prescribed number of repetitions or length of time. Adjusting this aspect in different drills within the same training session is a good way for a coach to keep a player focused and reduces monotony.

### Single-Hand Pound Dribble (high)

While also a basic set, by standing in an upright position, players develop the necessary core strength to ward off defensive pressure by engaging their core muscles and maintaining proper posture. Coaches must beware of players leaning to one side or not dribbling forcefully, out of their comfort zone.

- Player is standing upright with core engaged
- 25 pound dribbles, each hand from shoulder-height, maintaining pillar posture
- Without looking at the ball, player attempts to hit the same spot on the floor with each dribble of the basketball
- Player completes sets with both hands

### Side-to-Side Single-Hand Dribbles (low)

We begin to incorporate ball movement within a low and activated athletic stance. Proper body positioning will help players increase core and shoulder strength, which is necessary to improve speed and force of the dribbles.

- Player enters a low-athletic stance with feet shoulder-width and hamstrings parallel to ground
- Keeping their entire body from moving, except for their arm, player rapidly dribbles from side-to-side, aiming the bounce at the same spot with each dribble directly in front of their toe

### Stationary Move Superset

We now integrate multiple dribble moves within a single set in order to help players react and adjust their dribble to changing defensive pressure. Posture and lower-body muscle endurance will be tested in these longer length sets.

- Player rapidly completes each dribble move for 5 seconds and switches to next move (45s total)
- In and out › Side to side › front to back › cross over › in and out cross › side to side cross
- 6 total sets; 3 beginning with RIGHT hand, and 3 beginning with LEFT hand
**Move + Foot/Hip Twist**
By introducing slight movement of hips in feet while maintaining a position, we simulate making a dribble move and capitalizing on the advantage gained over a defender. This set will help players build muscle memory to produce proper movement patterns once a dribble move has been made.

- Player executes a move immediately followed by a quick hip/foot rotational twist and returns to home/original position
- Complete 3 dribbles then a twist; 2-30s sets with each hand, each move
- Pound dribbles
- In and out dribbles

**2 Bounce Cross Over Sets**
Now we introduce both hands within the same dribble set. This begins the more challenging aspect of changing hands with the dribble when necessary to avoid a defender. This set MUST be completed at higher-than-comfortable intensity in order to improve dexterity, especially with the player’s non-dominant hand.

- Player enters a low-athletic stance with feet shoulder-width and hamstrings parallel to ground
- Player then forcefully and rapidly executes the dribble sequence
- 3 – 30 second sets of the following combinations:
  - 2 Dribble + Simple Cross
  - 2 Dribble + Double cross (30s each hand)
  - 2 Dribble + Double through-the-legs cross (30s each hand)

**Chop Cross**
Basic foot movement in small space is now introduced to incorporate handling the ball and moving. This set can be a great way for a coach to increase a player’s heart rate within a workout or as a way to activate hips and lower body muscles.

- Player enters a low-athletic stance with feet shoulder-width and hamstrings parallel to ground
- 1 pound dribble in between alternating through the legs crosses (30s)

**Target Slaps**
The focus of Target Slaps is to improve a player’s court vision while maintaining proper dribble form. Players are forced to eliminate looking at the ball while making the dribble move in order to slap a target. This encourages players to see the floor better while handling the ball from any spot on the floor.

- Player enters a low-athletic stance with feet shoulder-width and hamstrings parallel to ground
- Player then executes a dribble move or crossover dribble and slaps a target (or partner’s hand) within arm’s reach all with the same hand
- 30 second sets of the following moves
  - Pound dribble
  - In and out
  - Side to side

**Hurdle Dribbles**
Here we are building core and shoulder strength and endurance by incorporating an obstacle for players to dribble over. This movement requires core strength to maintain posture and shoulder strength to move the ball from side to side.

- Player enters a low-athletic stance with feet shoulder-width and hamstrings parallel to ground
- Player executes a pound dribble, on alternating sides of the 12-24” hurdle or other obstacle (chair or painted line on the court can also be used), using the same hand to dribble on both sides
- 3 - 30 seconds sets with each hand
**2 Ball Stationary Pound**
Players are now challenged to complete dribble moves with 2 basketballs at the same time.

- Player enters a low-athletic stance with feet shoulder-width and hamstrings parallel to ground.
- Player then executes forceful pound dribbles with both basketballs
- 3 – 30 second sets
- Alternating
- Simultaneous
- Side to Side
- Front to Back
- In and Out

**DYNAMIC DRIBBLING SECTION**

Once a solid foundation of ball handling basic skills has been established through stationary drills, players will then advance to ball handling drills on-the-move. Impact players are able to handle the basketball equally well with both hands while moving in any direction. Being able to see the entire court, find an opening for attack, or deliver a pass to an open teammate is an essential skill that we will work to develop through our drill progressions.

Coaches will utilize cones and other obstacles in order to simulate in-game situations and defenders. Impact players will visualize these obstacles as defenders and make their move within the drill as if a defender is pressuring them.

Coaches must pay attention to the player’s footwork. In order to best prepare for live action, proper and sharp angles must be taken while making dribble moves. Dynamic dribbling drills will fully prepare the player for handling the ball in the open court and half court from all offensive positions.

**Straight Line Cone Series**
- 8-12 cones (or other obstacles) are set up in a straight line, each cone 1 yard apart
- Players complete the prescribed dribble move at each cone, on each side (left and right)
- Coach can add a finishing move at the rim at the end of each dribbling sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Maintaining a low and athletic stance throughout sequence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eyes up, surveying the court</td>
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<td>• Chest up, not leaning forward or off balance</td>
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<td>• Hips low and balanced</td>
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<tr>
<th>Skill Focus</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Completing ball-handling movements faster than comfortable</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pushing off back foot toward next cone</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Efficiency of footwork; no wasted or negative steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Taking proper aggressive angle around cone in order to best-simulate cutting off defender</td>
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<th>Dribble Moves:</th>
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<td>In and Out</td>
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<td>Side-to-Side</td>
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<td>Around the leg</td>
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<td>Crossover + Wraparound</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hesitation + Go</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hesitation + Double Cross (crossover move can vary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Double Legs Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Behind-the-Back</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fake Spin and Go</td>
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**Weaving Through Cones Series**
- Cones stay in same position (1 yard apart) as in straight line series
- Player executes dribble move incorporating change of direction in order to weave through cones

**Dribble Moves:**
- Simple cross
- Through the legs cross
- Wrap around the back
- In and out cross
- Side to side cross
- Hesitate cross
- In and Out cross

**Lateral Movement Series**
- Cones stay in same position (1 yard apart)
- Player moves laterally through cones while performing prescribed dribble moves

**Speed Pound**
- Pounding dribbles with same hand while moving laterally through cones
- Dribbling 2 balls; alternating and simultaneous dribbling

**Angled Cone Series**
- Place 8 cones at a 45 degree angle, 10 feet apart
- Player completes prescribed dribble move at each cone, changing direction, and sprinting to next cone
- Complete 4 sets of each move. 1 set = down and back through the 8 cones

**Dribble Moves:**
- Simple Cross
- Through the legs cross
- Wraparound
- In and Out cross
- Side to side cross
- Pull-back and Cross
- Spin and go
- Back down and pivot

**PASSING OFF THE DRIBBLE SECTION**

In order to completely integrate game-simulated action into our drill training, we finally put our entire ball handling sequences together and add the final piece: passing.

Ball handling proficiency is essential for offensive success; advancing the ball up the court, separating from a defender for a shot, maintaining offensive flow, and more. Delivering an accurate pass to an open teammate at the proper time is a primary skill that we will work to develop through our next series of drills. By building the foundation of ball handling with our stationary drill section and combining those skills with our dynamic movement training, we are now ready to advance to dribble moves with passing.

Coaches can serve as the player’s partner for 2-ball drill sequences, or a coach can identify a target on a wall or other stationary object for the player to deliver his pass to. These drills are best done at a fast pace in order to increase ambidexterity, vision/court awareness, and muscle memory.

**Target Passing**
- Player completes prescribed dribble move and then forcefully passes the ball to a partner or target
- Player then retrieves his pass as it returns to him or receives a second basketball from his coach or partner in order to complete the next repetition

**Areas of focus:**
- Maintaining a low, balanced, athletic stance
- Snapping the pass as quickly from the hands and accurately to the target as possible

**1 Ball Sequence**
- Player completes 1 hard pound dribble and immediately snaps a one-handed pass to his target
- Player can receive next basketball from coach/partner and immediately complete next repetition or simply use the same basketball as it returns from the wall/target
- Sets are completed with both RIGHT and LEFT hands
• Same action as in part a. but player now performs 2 hard pound dribbles

**Cross over series**
• 1 hard pound dribble, a cross over dribble, and then a pass
• Sets completed with both hands

**Double Cross Over Series**
Player completes a hard pound dribble and then an immediate double crossover dribble back to his original hand and snaps a pass at the target
Sets completed with both hands

**2 Ball Partner Sequence**
This drill sequence is best with a training partner or coach. Players will complete dribble moves and deliver a pass while simultaneously receiving a 2nd basketball and continuing the dribbling sequence. This is a great way to improve ambidexterity while also forcing players to maintain vision of the entire floor. Players must see the pass that is coming to them while also visualizing the target to which they are delivering the pass in order to successfully complete the drill sequence.

Players must continue to focus on the focal points of ball handling; vision, posture, dribble location, intensity, and core strength.

Each player completes dribble move and then passes to the partner (30 passes per set)
Partner can be a coach that simply passes 2nd ball back to prescribed hand, or a wall that re-directs pass back to player

Pound Dribble and Pass (player dribbles with right hand and snaps a one-hand bounce pass to partner’s left hand)
In and Out and Pass
Side to Side and pass
Double Cross and pass
Pound dribble + cross over + pass