

Wales U16 Boys FIBA – Head Coach Dr Nick O’Leary

The coaching programme

The programme began with a trial in early September 2018 and this was followed by four coaching sessions prior to Christmas. These four sessions were based around the following general game strategies:

| General Strategies | Techniques and skills |
|---------------------|--|
| Offence | |
| Possession | Catching, passing, footwork (starting and stopping), pivoting (under pressure), rebounding (offensive and defensive) |
| Support | Getting free, cutting, screens on and off the ball |
| Penetration | Passing forwards (through defensive players), driving off catch and dribble |
| Scoring | Lay-up variations, jump shooting, scoring around the basket (following offensive rebounding), free throws |
| Transition forwards | 1 v 0, 2 v 1; 3 v 2, 4 v 2; 4 v 3, 5 v 3, 5 v 4 |

| General Strategies | Techniques and skills |
|-------------------------|---|
| Defence | |
| Pressure the ball | At the guard, forward and post positions |
| Deny the ball | As above |
| Help away from the ball | As above |
| Transition back | Roles and responsibilities of 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th /5 th players back |

The above general strategies were coached largely through modified small-sided games and open-ended questioning rather than technique-based drills. In doing so, the coaching staff were able to emphasise the importance of such strategies as a foundation for the complex team strategies to be introduced after Christmas. Such an approach also emphasised player decision-making in games; allowed the staff to observe the players strengths and limitations and as a result, select the most appropriate complex team strategies for the players.

Following the Christmas break, the following complex team strategies were introduced and developed:

| Complex Offensive Team Strategies | |
|--|--|
| vs Man to man defence | |
| Three offences | |
| Two set plays | |
| Specific fast break | |
| Press break | |
| ELOB | |
| SLOB | |
| vs Zone defence | |
| Two even fronted offences | |
| Odd fronted offence | |
| Press break | |
| ELOB | |
| SLOB | |

| Complex Defensive Team Strategies | |
|--|--|
| vs Man to man offence | |
| Half court man to man defence | |
| vs Zone offence | |
| Even fronted half-court zone defence | |
| Odd fronted half-court zone defence | |

Players were presented with paper copies of all complex offensive and defensive strategies and were expected to know them. They were given short periods of practice time to read them and then put them on the floor. All players were asked to 'coach' them to their teammates during the post-Christmas sessions.

Players were also given scoring 'homework' to complete away from the sessions. These grew in complexity as the months progressed focussing on perimeter and post scoring. Homework sheets had to be sent to the team manager on a weekly basis.

We were also fortunate to secure the services of Cardiff Metropolitan University staff who delivered workshops on sports psychology and dietary requirements for basketball and tournament basketball. Many thanks go to Dr Paul Smith and Hilary Wickett for their time and considerable expertise in these areas. Additional workshops on time management and the importance of sleep were also provided for the players.

Throughout all sessions the following core concepts were chosen by the staff and players and they underpinned our approach to practices and matches:

RESPONSIBILITY to do your best and be engaged for yourself, team-mates, parents and (club) coaches and the country

HUMILITY - be humble and in doing so, recognise your short comings and the need to be engaged at all times

FAMILY – recognise we are in this together and will support each other

KAIZEN – Japanese for ‘learning through reflection’ to encourage players to consider their strengths and limitations and how these might be improved. The coaching staff met with individual players on a regular basis to further encourage such reflection and learning.

In addition to the ‘set’ monthly coaching sessions, training camps were also organised during school holidays to reinforce and develop learning and engage in games against various school, club and national teams. Teams included Wales U.18 men, Bristol Metropolitan Academy, Bristol Flyers, Liverpool Academy and Stockport Falcons. Our thanks go to those who gave us access to facilities, the coaches / managers of those teams and those who officiated – Rhian and Duncan MacKenzie, Helen Pearce , Jason Merchant, Jordan Seeley, Tom Hooper, Darren Oakey, Phil Cain and Steve O’Donnell amongst others. Thanks also goes to Manchester Magic’s CEO Phil Gordos for helping us organise our Manchester based camp.

After Easter the squad was trimmed to 13 players:

Joshua Brown – Vale Vipers (Andy Leftley)

Adam Duncan (c) – Vale Vipers (Andy Leftley)

Jayden Edwards – Bristol Flyers (Ieuan Alex Jones)

Zean Evarette – Swansea Storm Cougars (Gavin John Lewis and Jason Merchant)

Robert Mateware – Pontypridd Panthers (Jon Bunyan)

Archie Parry-Jones – Vale Vipers (Andy Leftley)

Kian Quest – Vale Vipers (Andy Leftley)

Juan Roderick – Cardiff Met Archers (James Dawe)

Lucas Scotland – Cardiff Met Archers (James Dawe)

Jacob Solvason (c) – Worcester Bears (Rick Solvason)

Sol Minty-Walker (c) – Vale Vipers (Andy Leftley)

Ben Woog - Cardiff Met Archers (James Dawe)

Oliver Wright – Worcester Wolves (Tom Cox and John Miller)

Thanks go to the club coaches (in brackets above) who not only ‘produced’ the players listed but supported our programme.

The focus from Easter to the FIBA tournament were the complex team strategies, keeping possession (which had been a constant general strategy problem for us) and what we felt were the core game skills; namely, closing out, offensive and defensive rebounding, scoring around the basket, perimeter / post shooting and free throws). The core concepts above were now supplemented by our six on-the-court commandments:

- 1) Be great defensively
- 2) Do not turn the ball over
- 3) Take great shots
- 4) Comprehensively out-rebound the opposition
- 5) Comprehensively out-run the opposition
- 6) Win the hustle plays

A four day training camp in Bristol and Cardiff culminated in a vest presentation evening on Thursday 11th July, 2019. The following day we flew to Tirana, Albania.

FIBA Tournament – Albania

Our four core concepts and six on-the-court commandments provided us with our foci during the tournament. In addition to the brief daily coaching sessions, we also reviewed film of our opponents and observed them live when possible. Individual players met with the coaching staff on a regular basis and were mentored by one of the three appointed captains during the tournament. Quizzes were run in the evenings and players had the opportunity to relax by the swimming pool or visit the local shopping mall during the day. They had the opportunity to spend time with their parents on one day and a meal with staff, players and parents took place with over 50 people in attendance. It was hoped these ‘add-ons’ would develop team morale, relax the players and ensure they also stay focussed on the job-in-hand. Close attention was also paid to the amount of sleep the players were getting and their dietary intake throughout the tournament.

Results

Group phase:

v Andorra W 72-41

v Malta W 103-31

v Gibraltar W 60-37

Semi-final:

v Luxembourg L 56-57

3rd/4th place play-off:

V Scotland W 84-72

The achievement of securing a bronze medal was one of the many successes of the tournament and the programme as a whole. Other notable successes were:

1. Improved performance levels of the players in the programme in terms of their technical and tactical understanding of the game.
2. Further development of an education programme to support the coaching programme
3. Fostering a 'supportive' environment, encompassing players, coaches and parents to ensure a positive 'vibe', which led to the incredible support in Albania
4. The training programme and games meant we were prepared for the FIBA tournament
5. Most importantly, the staff provided a programme that was enjoyable, created lifelong friendships and improved the self-esteem of the young men that they can take forward in their sporting and academic endeavours, future careers and relationships. They were an outstanding group of men to coach.

Staff:

Rachael Symons - Team Manager. Organised, resourceful, helpful and always possessing a smile. The hub of everything we did. She was outstanding in the lead up to the tournament, ensuring training sessions and camps were efficiently run while effectively communicating to parents on a regular basis. During the tournament, she organised the 'show.' Quite

simply, she was and is, irreplaceable. Rachael would no doubt want to pay special thanks, as do I, to Jon Bunyan for all his advice behind the scenes.

Tom Hooper - Assistant Coach. The work he undertook to develop players' individual and team defensive skills together with the team's fast break was excellent. His input during games was inspired. He was a delight to work alongside. Recommendation - Tom has the capability to become an International Head Coach and should be encouraged to stay in the Welsh programme.

Stefan Rosier - Assistant Coach. Stefan stepped into the role as Assistant at the start of the FIBA tournament. He contributed effectively to the tournament practices and made insightful points during the games which made my job easier. His work preparing film of the opposition was also very useful. A key member of the coaching team and again, he should be encouraged to stay in the Welsh programme.

We would also like to acknowledge the £2000 sponsorship from Excel Construction, individual player sponsorship totalling approximately £1200 and other fundraising efforts including a Tesco bag pack, a raffle and individual bucket collections which raised a further £1500. A wonderful effort by all concerned.

Finally, thanks should go to the parents of the players. They gave time, energy and financial support to the players and the programme. The staff and players will not forget their priceless encouragement in Tirana. Thank you.

Dr Nick O'Leary - Head Coach Wales U16 Men