

Why fun matters at this age

Kids 9-11 are still deciding whether basketball is going to be *their* game. Practice that feels like a chore at this age becomes a kid who quits at 12. Practice that feels like recess becomes a kid who shoots in the driveway after dinner.

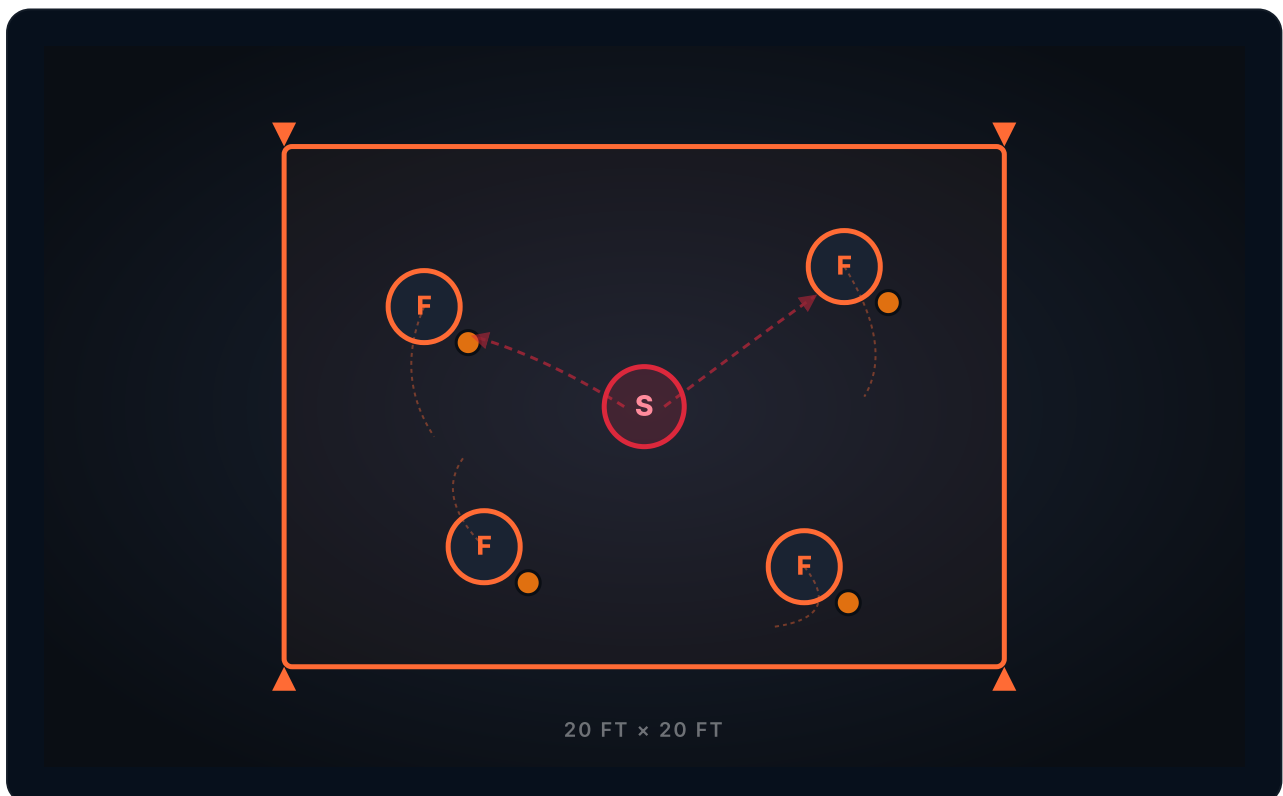
The four games in this guide are designed for energy, success, and laughter — while still building real fundamentals. Each one takes about 8-12 minutes, includes a court diagram, coaching points, and easy variations to scale up or down.

Designed by Coach Duncan — NextPlay's AI Training Specialist. Generated and refined for a U10 beginner-to-intermediate team.

GAME #1 · DRIBBLING

Dribble Sharks

Kids get to be sneaky, fast, and a little goofy while trying not to get their ball stolen. It feels like tag with a basketball, so they stay engaged without realizing they're working on ball control. If they're laughing, they're learning.



EQUIPMENT

- 1 basketball per player
- 4 cones
- Pinnies (optional — chaos works too)

SETUP

Mark off a 20×20 ft square. Every player has a ball inside the space; 1-2 players start as "sharks" without a ball.

HOW TO PLAY

1. All "fish" dribble inside the space using their strong hand.
2. Sharks try to knock balls away or force a bobble — no body contact.
3. If a fish loses control or dribbles out, they do 3 quick jumping jacks and re-enter.
4. Every 30-45 seconds, switch sharks so everyone gets a turn.
5. Add a rule: on the coach's call, everyone must change hands or do a crossover.
6. Keep score by how many clean dribbles each fish survives in a round.

COACHING POINTS

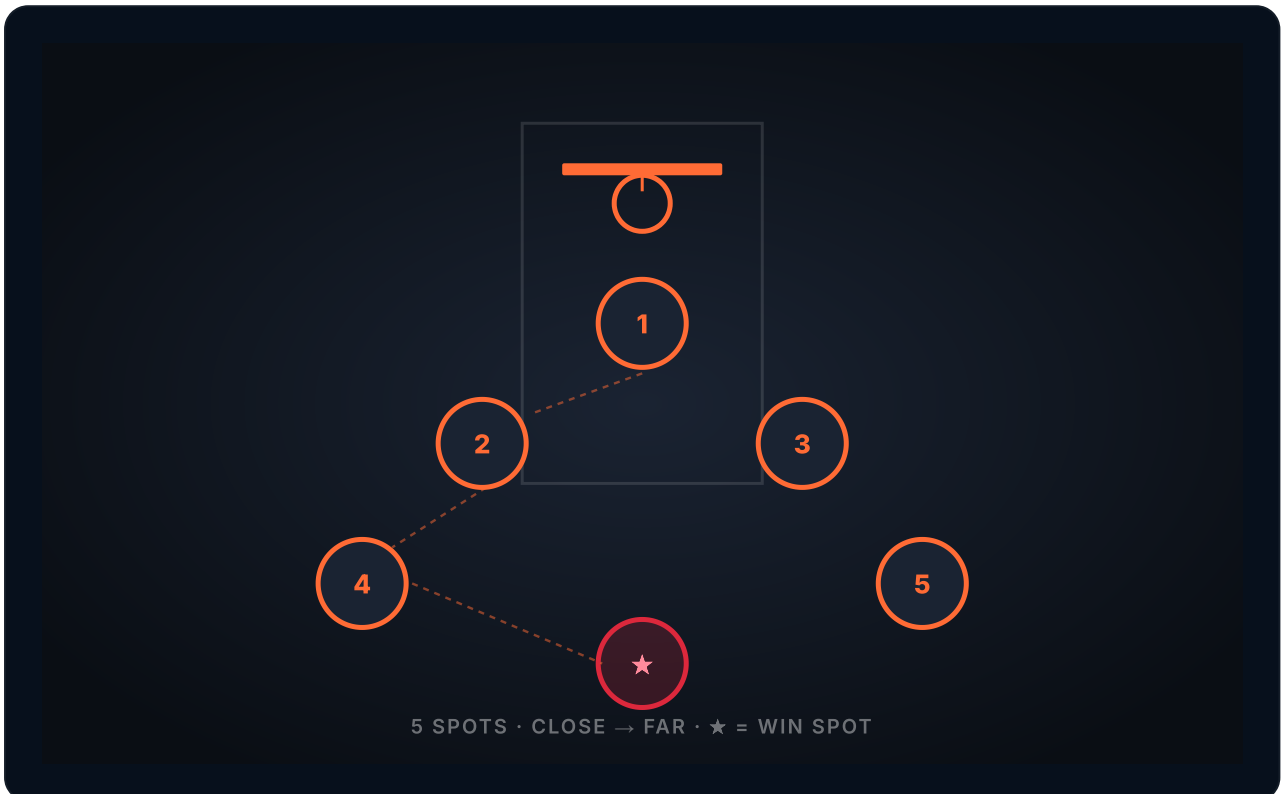
- Stay low, chest up, eyes forward.
- Use fingertips and keep the ball protected with the off arm and body.
- Change speed and direction, not just dribble harder.

Harder: sharks can only target the ball with one hand; fish must use weak hand only.

Easier: bigger space + remove sharks for the first round so fish build confidence.

Hot Hand Ladder

Kids get a ton of makes, quick turns, and a clear chance to "move up" when they score. It feels like a little game show with basketball — simple, fast, and everybody stays engaged.



EQUIPMENT

- 1 ball per player or pair
- 5-6 spots or cones
- Scoreboard or whiteboard

SETUP

Put 5-6 shooting spots in a short line or arc — close range first, then gradually farther out. Give each player a starting spot and the goal to climb the ladder.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each player starts at the easiest spot, right near the basket.
2. On the coach's whistle, they shoot until they make 1 basket.
3. After a make, they move up one spot to a slightly harder shot.

4. If they miss 2 in a row, they stay at that spot and keep shooting until they make one.
5. First player to reach the top spot and make a basket wins the round.
6. Reset quickly and play again so everyone gets multiple chances to win.

COACHING POINTS

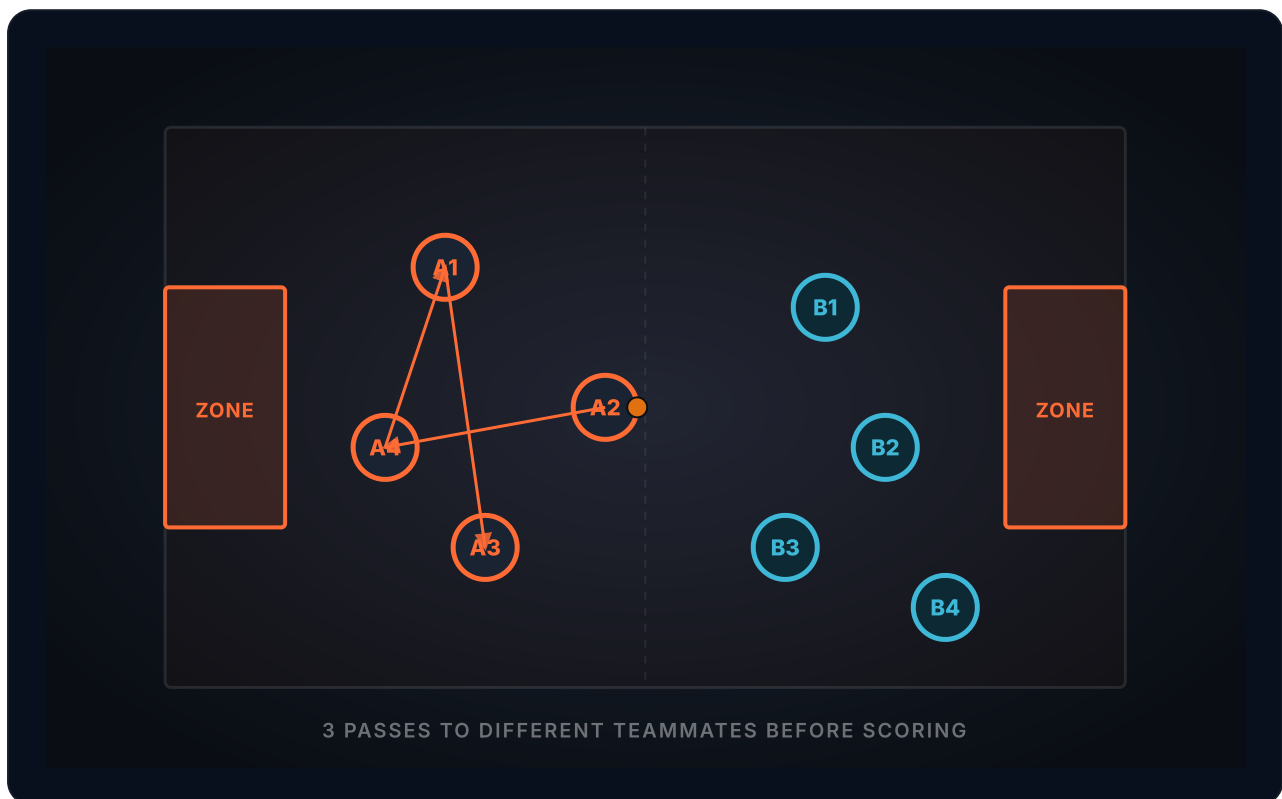
- Balance first: feet set, eyes on target, finish high.
- Soft touch: smooth, gentle release so they feel success.
- Good habits every shot: quick set, straight follow-through, rebound fast.

Harder: require 2 makes before moving up each spot.

Easier: start 1-2 spots closer + only 4 spots total.

3-Pass Treasure Hunt

It feels like a mission, not a drill. Kids get instant success when they move the ball, and they start seeing that passing leads to points — not just dribbling into traffic.



EQUIPMENT

- 1 ball
- 8-12 cones
- Pinnies, 2 hoops or scoring zones

SETUP

Small grid, about half-court. Scoring zone or hoop on each end. Split the group into two teams.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The offense must complete 3 passes before they can score.
2. A score only counts if every pass is to a different teammate.
3. No dribbling more than 2 bounces before passing.
4. Defenders try to steal or force a bad pass.

5. If the defense gets a steal, they become the offense right away.
6. Bonus point if the scorer catches and finishes without holding the ball more than 2 seconds.

COACHING POINTS

- Keep spacing: don't stand next to the ball.
- Show hands early and call for the ball.
- Pass and move — don't admire your pass.

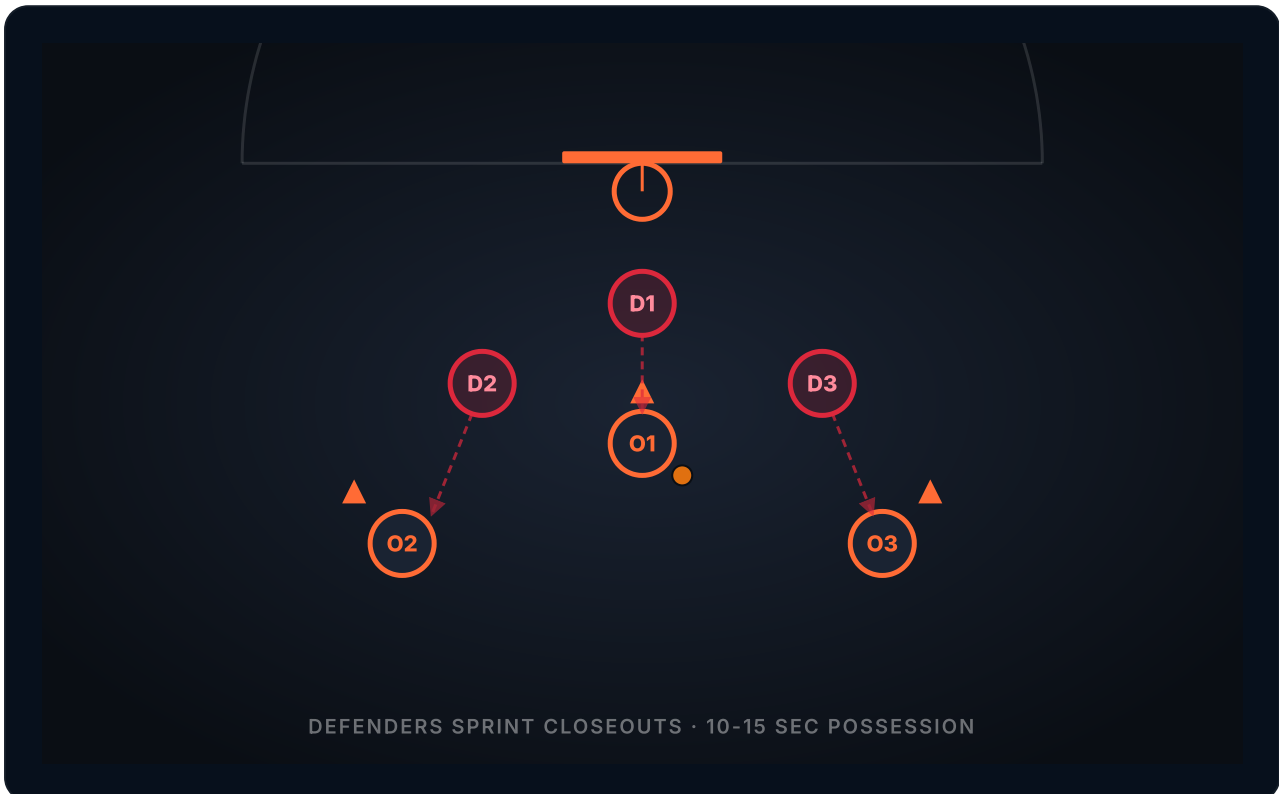
Harder: the ball must touch all 5 players before a score.

Easier: allow unlimited dribbles, but still require 3 passes before scoring.

GAME #4 · DEFENSE

Shut-Down Champions

Turns defense into a points race. Every closeout, every stop, every steal feels like a win. Kids this age love instant feedback — and this game gives them a chance to "score" without even touching the ball on offense.



EQUIPMENT

- 1 basketball
- 4 cones
- Pinnies (2 colors)
- Whiteboard for scoring

SETUP

Half-court game, two teams of 3-5. Cone on each wing and one near the top for clear closeout targets.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Offense starts with the ball at the top and tries to score in 10-15 seconds.
2. Defense earns 1 point per stop, 2 per steal, 1 bonus for a great closeout that forces a bad catch/dribble.

3. If the defense gets a steal, they must finish the possession with a layup to keep the point.
4. If offense scores, they get the ball back immediately; defense has to sprint into a new possession.
5. Play short rounds of 3-4 minutes — keep energy high.
6. First team to a target score wins; the losing team does a quick team challenge.

COACHING POINTS

- Reward effort loud and fast: "Great closeout!" "Big steal!"
- Hands active, chest up, feet moving — no reaching or lunging.
- Make the scoreboard matter so defense feels like the action.

Harder: defense only scores if they force a shot in 5 seconds or less.

Easier: defense gets 1 bonus point just for getting a hand up and sprinting on every closeout.

Want these games tailored to YOUR team?

NextPlay's AI Coaching Staff generates fun, age-appropriate practice games based on your roster's level, your weekly focus, and how much court time you have. 14-day free trial. No credit card.