



Ball Handling *by James A. Gels*

Learning to become a good ball-handler and developing a feel for the ball is vitally important in becoming an excellent all-around player.

Hold the Ball Correctly

The most difficult skills, including shooting, passing, catching, dribbling, and rebounding, involve holding the ball. Work on these skills every day. Here is how to practice holding the ball:

- 1.) Hold the ball with your fingertips. The palms of your hands should not touch the ball.
- 2.) Make sure your fingers are far apart.
- 3.) Hold the ball as much as possible at home while watching TV or listening to the radio or music. It is said that the great Pete Maravich slept with his basketball and held it during his sleep! While watching TV, you can hold the ball (with both hands) and spin it around in your hands.

Do ball handling drills at the start of nearly every practice and throughout the entire season. Players can really improve their ball handling skills by the end of the season. Very importantly, these drills can also be done at home, in the off-season, without the rest of the team. We have one of our better ball handlers lead the drill, and face the team. All the other players line up in rows facing the leader, and spread out so they don't get into each other's way. Everyone has a ball.

These are the drills:

Do each one about 30 to 60 seconds and then move to the next one. With all of these drills, try to keep your eyes forward, without looking at the ball.

1.) Finger Grabs:

Hold the ball with the fingertips, squeezing it while rotating it back and forth from hand to hand. The ball should not touch the palms of the hands.

2.) Slaps:

Pound or slap the ball hard from hand to hand. (*Slap the ball hard. Pound it!*)

3.) Tipping:

Tip the ball back and forth from one hand to the next, starting with your hands straight up over your head. Then gradually move the ball down, while continuing to tip it back and forth. Go down to your chest, then your waist, knees, and ankles, and then back up again. (*Keep your elbows straight. Extend your arms out straight (elbows straight) and tip the ball back and forth as quickly as you can.*)

4.) Circles:

Put your feet together and make circles around both legs. Then circle around your back. And then circle around your head. Then combine them and move the ball in circles around your head, then down your body, down around your knees, and then around your ankles ("candy cane"). Then come back up again. Be sure to use your fingertips, not the palms.

5.) Around Each Leg and Figure Eights:

Put one leg forward and move the ball in a circular motion around the leg. Then do the other leg. Finally, spread your legs out wide with the ball in front of you. Move the ball around through your legs in a figure-of-eight motion. Keep your eyes forward and don't let the ball hit the floor. After 30 seconds, reverse the direction.

6.) Drops:

Put the ball between your feet and grab it with both hands. Start with the left hand behind your left leg and your right hand in front of your right leg. Drop the ball and let it bounce once. Quickly, move your left hand in front of your left leg and your right hand behind your right leg, and catch the ball as it bounces up. Drop it again and switch your hands back to the original position (left behind, right in front) and catch it. Repeat this motion continuously. For a more difficult variation, try catching the ball before it actually hits the floor!

7.) Toss Up and Catch Behind:

Here's a fun drill the players like. Toss the ball up over your head. Reverse pivot and catch the ball behind your back.

8.) Crab Walk:

Walk, bent over up the floor and put the ball between the legs, back and forth as you go. The ball is brought over the front of the thigh, then through the legs and then behind the opposite thigh and around and over the thigh.