

The Essential Guide to *GREAT* Basketball Play-by-Play



Basketball play-by-play isn't rocket science. Broadcasting the sport is often easier than playing it. With these simple tips and printable resources, providing all-star caliber basketball play-by-play will be even easier.

1. Time and Score

New listeners don't want to wait. Give it at least every 90 seconds. Pick an end of the floor and give the time and score every time the ball goes to that end.

2. Pinpoint the Ball

Where exactly is the ball? It isn't enough to say "Smith on the perimeter." Instead, tell me, "Smith on the left wing or 15 feet out on the left baseline." Use the markings on the court as reference points. You know the free throw line is 15 feet from the bucket and the three-point line is roughly 20 feet out (in high school and college).

It's always surprising to me how often folks fail to even tell me if the ball is on the left or the right side of the hoop.

3. Description

This includes relevant action, movements, behaviors, sights, sounds, smells & emotions of players, coaches, fans and atmosphere.

4. Why does this matter?

This turns your broadcast into a story. Explain what's at stake in this game, this moment, this possession, this play. Think of Why Does This Matter as the plots and sub-plots of your play-by-play story. To that, you need to add character development, which brings us to...

5. Who is important?

It develops the characters (teams, players & coaches) in your story. Instead of "Smith with the ball on the right perimeter," say "Smith, the Cougars leading three-point shooter, with the ball on the right perimeter." Or, "Jones, the All-Conference guard, directing traffic at the point."

If you take away nothing else from this blog, remember to tell your listener a story, and not provide them with only a simple narrative.

6. Recap

People are constantly tuning in and out of your broadcast. Tell new listeners how the game got to this point. Do it every five to seven minutes and keep it brief. Ex: "The Celtics trailed by eight early but lead now 56-43 midway through the third." Or, "Jones with 18, Jefferson High on top of Centennial 61-58 with three minutes to go."

7. Use your voice as an instrument

This is the toughest component of basketball play-by-play to master because it comes only with experience. Still, if you are aware of it, you'll expedite your development.

Match your pacing to the speed of the action. Use inflections and pauses for emphasis and dramatic effect. Be appropriately energetic & excited but never scream.

8. Be clear about which team has the ball

This is the most common mistake in basketball play-by-play. There are a lot of changes of possession in basketball. You can't count on all of your listeners knowing which team has it based only upon the names of the players.

9. Avoid "good" and "no good"

On made and missed shots, avoid saying "good" and "no good." Be specific. Vary your vocabulary. Instead of good, maybe say nails it, drains it, drills it, or swishes it home. Instead of "no good," describe how the shot was missed – off the heel, too hard, rolls around and falls off, etc.

***Pro Tip:** print out the basketball vocabulary list at the end of this guide to refresh your descriptions during the game.*

10. Don't use the shot clock as a crutch

There is no need to reference the shot clock when it is over 10 seconds unless it is following an out of bounds play. However, be certain to reference the clock when it goes under 10 seconds. In other words, wait until it becomes relevant to your story.

11. Use mascot names minimally

There are a lot of Wildcats and Falcons out there, especially at the high school and small college levels. The majority of the time, when referring to a team, use the name of their city or school. Ex: Palisades leading Elsinore.

12. Use the one-ear headphone

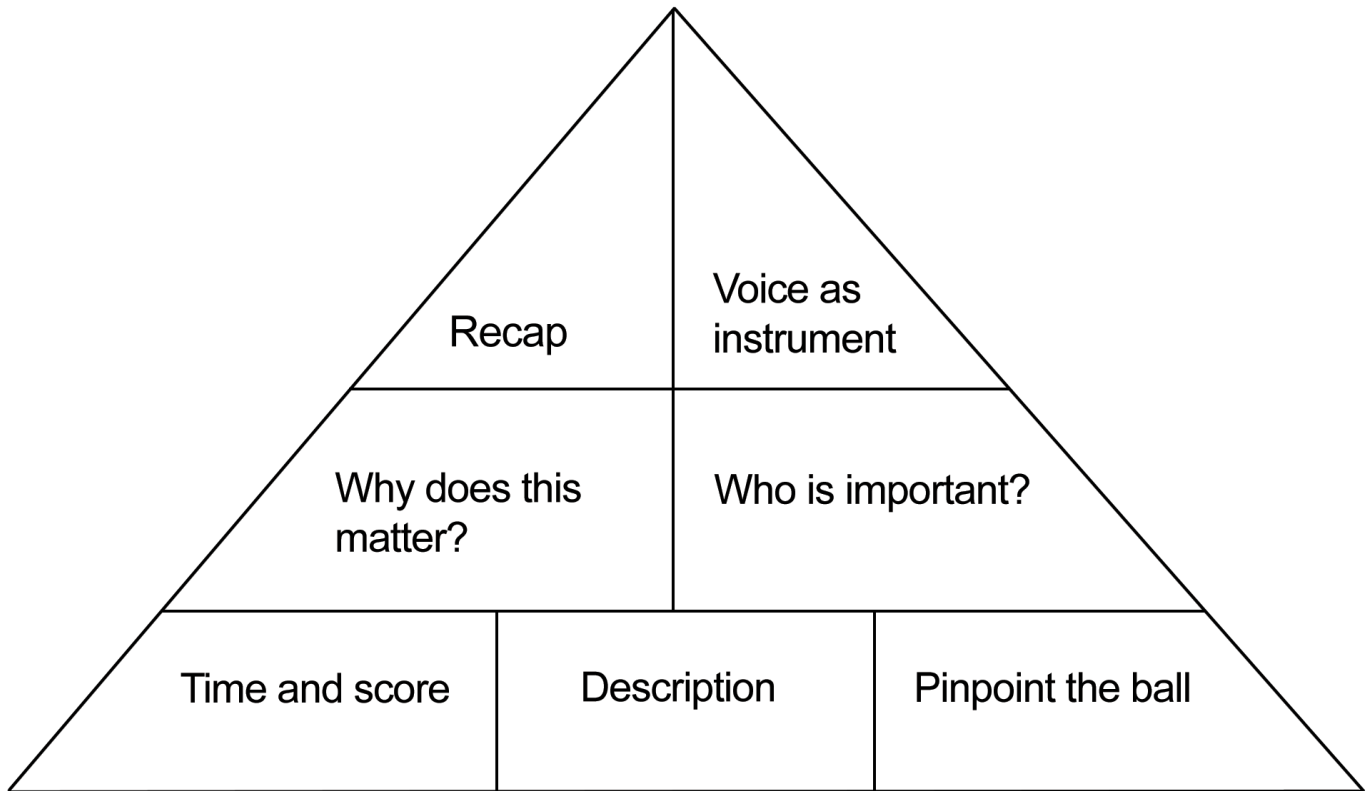
Only cover one ear with your headphones. Keep the other ear uncovered and you will hear a lot of info that will help your broadcast – things like the PA announcer saying which player was charged with a foul or coaches barking instruction to players.

These are all easy-to-implement suggestions. Use them and see your basketball play-by-play take a big step forward!

Additional Resources

- [Score sheets & spotting board templates](#) (free downloads)
- STAA Play-by-Play Pyramid (page 6)
- Basketball Vocabulary (page 7)

Play-by-Play Pyramid



1. **Time and score:** New listeners don't want to wait. At least every :90.
2. **Pinpoint the ball:** Where exactly is the ball? Use both vertical and horizontal reference points.
3. **Description:** Relevant action, movements, behaviors, sights, sounds, smells & emotions of players, coaches, fans and atmosphere.
4. **Why does this matter?** Turns your broadcast into a story. Explain what's at stake in this game, this moment, this possession, this play, this at-bat.
5. **Who is important?** Develops the characters (teams, players & coaches) in your story.
6. **Recap:** Tell new listeners how the game got to this point. Every 8-10 minutes.
7. **Voice as instrument:** Match your pacing to the speed of the action. Use inflections and pauses for emphasis and dramatic effect. Be appropriately energetic & excited but never scream.

Made Shot

Bingo
He gets it
Swish
Spalsh
Drops in
Connects
Bang
Count it
Knocks it down
Bullseye
Around and down

Missed Shot

Strong
Short
Back iron
Rims out
Rattles out
Around and out
Pinballs out
Skips out
Off the mark
Off the front/back
rim

Passes

Swings it
Bounces
One-handed
Chest
Overhead
Spins it low
Skips it
Dishes
Feed
Lobs
Floats
Rainbow pass

Rebounds

Grabs it
Snags it
Clears
Snares
Corrals
Hauls it in
Goes high for the
board
Snatches it
Pulls in the board

Close

Floater
Runner
Finger roll
Flips it up
Tear drop
Scoops it up

3-Point Shot

Trey
3-ball
Bonus distance
From deep
Downtown
Trifects

Steals

Poked away
Stolen
Stripped
Pocket picked
Intercepted

Dribbling

Angles to the right
wing
Zig zags in the lane
Sprint dribble
Jog dribble
Yo-yo dribble
Walking dribble
Hip-high dribble
Pump fake and drive
Jab step and drive
Surges ahead
Slashes into the lane
Attacks off the
dribble
Penetrates
High dribble
Low dribble
Wheels inside
Spins down low