

Have you ever asked yourself the question: “What’s more important (1) playing AAU Basketball or (2) training on your skills?” This article will help parents and players answer this question by examining how the best players got to where they are.

First let’s examine the pros and cons of playing on an AAU Basketball Team:

PROS:

- **Team play.** You will learn the “team concept” and “team skills.” Depending on the AAU program you are a part of you will get to have 1-2 team practices per week and with good coaching your child should get a fundamental base of “pick and roll” offense, out of bounds plays, team defense, and more.
- **Playing in weekend games** will help your child to build game IQ and game sense. Typically an AAU Basketball program will play weekend tournaments in which teams could play 2-5 games in a given tournament. By playing games this helps players to understand proper courts spacing, game situations, and pressure of the moment.

CONS:

- **Little to no individual skill development.** By paying the money to play AAU basketball, you would expect your child to be developing fundamental skills such as passing, ball-handling, and shooting; however, most AAU programs will not do this because the focus is on team play over skills.
- **Playing time.** Many AAU basketball programs will take twelve or more players, which makes it hard for everybody on the team to get equal playing time. Some players may get even zero playing time because they are not good enough to be playing at that level of competition.
- **The coaching.** Usually the coach is a parent or has limited coaching experience. Many AAU programs will designate parents to be the coach, which may create playing time bias. Also, there are many programs that hire coaches with no coaching experience and the kids are not learning fundamentals of team defense and offense.

Now let’s examine the pros and cons of basketball training / skill development:

PROS:

- **Increased repetitions.** By working on your skills and drills such as passing, ball-handling, shooting, and finishing your child will get significantly more repetitions than when playing in games. Your skills improve tremendously when you get more practice attempts and focus on what you are practicing.
- **Increased confidence.** By getting more ball touches and practice attempts your child will see a steady improvement in how many shots he/she is hitting as well as the strength of their passes and dribble moves. This increase in confidence will lead them to creating more plays in games.

- **“Basketball Shape.”** Being in the gym more to practice your skills get you into better “Basketball Shape.” This means players will have more endurance and strength when playing in games.

CONS:

- **Competition level.** When doing skills/drills training sometimes you are not able to play 1v1, 2v2, or 3v3 games with players of your skill level. This means that you may be able to dominate in these small group workouts, but cannot perform as well in AAU Games.
- **Game IQ.** By only practicing your skills, you will be limiting yourself to a “skills player.” This means that you will not know how to apply the basketball skills and drills you are practicing when playing in a game.
- **Being a well-rounded player.** Many kids want to practice only shooting or only ball-handling in skills and drills workouts. This may mean that you could be a good shooter or dribbler, but not so good at passing, finishing near the rim, boxing out, etc. It’s important to find a great program that can help your child practice all aspects of his/her game.

Now, lets’ go back to the question... What’s more important: Basketball games or skills training?

The answer is **both**. To be the best, you need to combine practicing your skills and putting them into games. All of the best players have gotten there because they played more basketball than everyone around them.

By combining the following things, players reach their full potential:

- Private Lessons
- Small group training clinics
- AAU basketball games
- Playing pick-up games at local YMCAs or outdoor courts
- Attending basketball camps
- Dribbling/carrying a basketball everywhere you go