

Skills Challenge a Fun Way to Flaunt Fundamentals

By Ryan Wood, iHoops.com

Tony Fryer helped organize a Skills Challenge local event in the Miami area last year. He was ready to accommodate the kids who already signed up--but he was pleasantly surprised with what came next.

"Siblings who came along just to watch liked it so much that they asked their parents to sign them up too," Fryer said. "After the event ended, even the parents wanted to give it a try before they left."

The Skills Challenge enters its third year and is now under the iHoops umbrella, after two years affiliated with the Jr. NBA/Jr. WNBA. It is a competition for basketball players ages 9-14 across the country, and stresses basketball's ultimate fundamentals--passing, shooting and dribbling.

In 2009, more than 100,000 kids participated in the Skills Challenge in three age groups for boys and girls: 9/10 year olds, 11/12 and 13/14.

The event is completely free, both for administrators and for participants. The Skills Challenge Headquarters will reach out to youth sports administrators in NBA team markets, and interested administrators will then go to iHoops.com and register to host a Local Competition. After signing up, they will receive an administrative kit in the mail that has everything they need to run the competition--a handbook, cones, a stopwatch, floor spots and ribbons, among other things.

In 2010, local competition hosts will have between January 9 and March 7 to run the competition and report the results back to the Skills Challenge headquarters.

So what do the participants have to do? Simply put, dash through a basketball obstacle course as fast as possible. Here's the entire breakdown:

- Players start at half court and dribble in and out of a row of cones.
- After they weave through all the cones, they drive to the basket and finish a layup.
- They then head to the right elbow and take a jump shot. If they miss, they must attempt a second shot.
- If they make it, they head over to the left elbow and shoot from there. Again, if they miss, they shoot one more time.
- After taking shots from both elbows, they dribble through another row of cones before reaching a passing spot.
- There, they pass the ball to a coach, who then passes it back to them.
- The players then turn and head back toward the basket where they finish with another layup. There, the stopwatch stops.
- After the time is up, players get the chance to shoot two free throws. If they make them, it will take time off their final result.

The goal is to move quickly and efficiently. While missing a jump shot isn't a penalty, it does take more time because players then have to take a second attempt.

After the local competition hosts submit their results, 18 players in each NBA market (nine boys, nine

girls; three in each age group) will advance to the regional competition, which will take place between March 7 and April 11.

Regional qualifiers enjoy an unforgettable experience. Not only do they get to compete in the regional competition at an NBA arena or practice facility, they also get a free T-Shirt and two free tickets to an NBA game, and are often recognized during pregame or halftime of the game they are attending.

The 522 regional participants are whittled down to 18, and that select group competes in the national finals from May 14-17. That comes with an all-expense-paid trip for two to Orlando, Fla., a competition at the Orlando Magic's home arena and a trip to Universal Studios. In the past, NBA players like **Jameer Nelson** and **Vince Carter** have attended the event to lend support.

The mission is simple for the iHoops Skills Challenge: to promote the fundamentals of basketball in a competitive, fun environment.

Local events are generally run within a 75-mile radius of NBA cities, and there are typically 20-25 local events in each NBA market. They are often administered by local Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA's, parks and recreation departments and private youth basketball leagues.

Because of the number of events in each market, winning your local event does not necessarily mean that you're qualified for the regional event. But win or lose, most everyone who participates leaves inspired and happy.

"The events were great family fun," said Fryer, who runs the [1on1 Basketball Academy](#) in South Florida. "Everyone walked out of the gym with a smile on their face."