

## Training Grip Strength For Basketball Players

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Among high school and college basketball players there seem to be two mindsets when it comes to strength training in the weight room. For one group, lifting is something they partake in because they want to get stronger so they are able to perform better. For the other group, they either don't lift at all or they do just enough so as not to get called out. However, regardless of which group an athlete falls into, there is one thing that is often overlooked but must be prioritized if true increases in basketball performance are going to be developed in the weight room. Just as it is vital for athletes to have strong feet for ground-based sports, basketball players, too, must have strong hands in order to get the highest transfer between the weight room and the court.

In basketball the point of contact between the ball and the player is the hand, specifically the fingertips. Rarely is the whole palm applied to the ball, and even when the ball is being held with both hands the majority of the contact between the skin and leather is through the fingertips and fingers. This is important to understand due to the fact that this will alter how a basketball player should go about training his or her grip. To put it simply, the grip used when holding a basketball is more along the lines of a pinch grip than a crushing grip. Reason being, when an athlete holds a basketball the thumb is heavily involved, which is not the case at all when squeezing a hand gripper or when gripping a smaller object such as a tennis ball. Instead of using those two common techniques for increasing grip strength among basketball players, I would look to be using wider objects that open the hand more and force the thumb to play a crucial role in the exercise.

After reading *Mastery of Hand Strength, Revised Edition* by John Brookfield (Amazon.com) I have realized that there are literally an infinite number of ways to train grip strength, however, not all of them are right for basketball players. In my opinion, some of the best exercises from this book that would be suitable for basketball players are lifts using thick-handled dumbbells and coin bag work. Lifts with thick-handled dumbbells are pretty self-explanatory; just find dumbbells with handles that are between 2" and 3" thick (Brookfield, 52). Coin bag work was a completely new concept to me, but I love the potential of it. In his book, Brookfield calls this exercise bag catching and has it in his "Crushing Grip" section (Brookfield, 18). However, with just a slight modification to the exercise I can see this being a very effective tool for basketball players.

To start, you will need to attain a coin bag from a bank if you don't already have one. Then you'll need to fill it with some type of weighted substance, such as steel shot like Brookfield suggests. Then you tape the bag completely shut to make sure the contents will stay sealed. Now, Brookfield suggests throwing the bag up to yourself and catching it by the little flap on the top. However, I am going to modify that and say to catch the bag with only one hand on the thick part of the bag. You can grip it so your thumb is pointing up, i.e., palm medial, or so your thumb is pointing laterally, i.e., palm down. Either way, taking a full grip into this bag on

every catch is definitely a sure-fire way to strengthen your grip in a basketball-appropriate manner.

If you don't have a coin bag or don't want to go get one something else you could do is to weigh down a coffee can and hold on to it one hand at a time. I wouldn't suggest catching and throwing this, but simply performing static holds should work wonders. Also, take your current hand size and strength into consideration when choosing what size can to use. Make sure to tape the lid securely shut before performing any exercises with it so as not to lose the contents of the can.

Finally, the absolute best thing a basketball player can do strengthen his or her grip for the sport is, in my opinion, medicine ball work. Medicine balls are incredibly versatile tools that can bounce, be thrown, caught, and come in varying weights and sizes. Throwing and catching medicine balls will not only strengthen the entire hand, including the joints, ligaments, and tendons, in a sport-specific manner, but it will also train the specific muscle synergies that are developed in basketball while passing and catching the ball in a variety of ways. From catching in the low post to rebounding to driving the lane, having an incredibly strong grip on the ball is absolutely vital, and using medicine balls is a must when trying to develop this.

These are just a few tactics that can be used when trying to train your grip strength for basketball. For more information on grip strength training and for more ideas on how to go about grip strength training read *Mastery of Hand Strength, Revised Edition* by John Brookfield, available on Amazon.com.

Get big or die tryin'.

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