



AO HOOPS

The Ignition

Your Pre-Game Activation Protocol

High School Athletes | Club Season | Bodyweight | Any Space

First time? Run through this once at home or before a practice — not before a big game. Get familiar with the movements when the stakes are low. After that, this becomes your pre-game ritual.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE?

**15
min**

Full protocol — Phases 1, 2, and 3

**10
min**

Phases 2 & 3 only

5 min

Phase 3 only — always

<5

45-sec deep squat hold → 2 build-up sprints. That's it.

Phase 3 is the last thing you cut, never the first. Most players stretch for 10 minutes and skip the sprints. That's backwards. A sprint primes your nervous system in a way no stretch ever will.

01

Activate

~5 min

Works in a hallway. Zero equipment.

CHECK-IN: Bodyweight Squat — 8 reps

Do this first — before anything else. Stand with feet hip-width apart, toes pointed slightly out. Put your arms straight out in front of you for balance. Bend your knees and sink your hips down — try to get your thighs parallel to the floor or lower. Keep your chest up, your heels down, and your knees pushing outward over your toes. Stand back up. Do 8 reps at a normal pace. These aren't hard — just use them to notice how your body feels today before you do anything to change it.

Heels coming off the floor → Do a 30-second ankle stretch against the wall before moving on

Knees falling inward → Actively push them out on every rep for the rest of the session

Feel tight everywhere → Spend 30 seconds foam rolling your calves and quads

1. Deep Squat Hold w/ Breathing

45 sec

Stand with your feet a little wider than your hips. Point your toes out slightly. Bend your knees and sink your hips down as low as you can go — like you're sitting on a tiny stool that's 6 inches off the ground. Keep your heels flat on the floor the whole time. If your heels pop up, hold onto a wall, door frame, or post in front of you. Once you're down there, take 5 slow breaths: breathe in through your nose for 4 counts, breathe out through your mouth for 6 counts. Don't rush back up. Just sit there and let your body open up.

When you've been sitting in a car, locker room, or on a bench, your ankles and hips stiffen up. This forces both of them open at the same time. The slow breathing also “wakes up” your core and mid-back — two things that control your balance and rotation all game.

2. Core Activation Circuit

Cat-Camel × 6 + Birddog × 6/side

Start on your hands and knees. For the cat-camel, slowly round your back up toward the ceiling like an angry cat, tucking your chin. Hold for 1 second. Then reverse it — drop your belly toward the floor, lift your chest, and look slightly up. Hold for 1 second. That's one cycle. Do 6, smooth and controlled. Then stay on all fours for birddogs: extend your right arm straight forward and your left leg straight back at the same time. Keep your hips level — don't let them rotate or sag. Hold for 2 seconds, return, switch sides. 6 per side.

Your torso needs to be locked in before your legs can produce real power. If your core isn't braced, every jump and every sprint leaks force through your midsection. This circuit turns your stabilizers on so the glute bridge and everything after it actually works the way it's supposed to.

3. Single-Leg Glute Bridge

1 × 8/side

Lie on your back. Bend one knee and put that foot flat on the floor close to your butt. Pull your other knee up toward your chest and hold it there — keep it off the ground the whole set. Now drive your heel into the floor, squeeze your butt as hard as you can, and lift your hips up until your body makes a straight line from your knee to your shoulder. Hold the top for 1 full second — count it out loud if you need to. Lower slowly. Don't let your hips drop to one side or your lower back do the work. You should feel this entirely in your butt cheek, not your back.

Mini-band upgrade: Put a resistance band just above both knees. At the top of each rep, push your knees apart against the band.

Your glutes are the engine behind every explosive thing you do — first step, jump, stop, cut. If they're not switched on before the game, your hamstrings take over and work overtime. That's how hamstring strains happen. This turns your engine on.

4. World's Greatest Stretch

1 × 4/side

Take a big step forward with your right foot into a lunge — your back knee stays off the ground. Now take your right hand and place it on the floor right next to your right foot. Hold that for a second. Then take your right arm and reach it straight up toward the ceiling, rotating your chest open as you do. Follow your hand with your eyes. Hold for 2 seconds at the top. Bring it back down. That's one rep. Do 4 on the right side, then switch. Move slowly — this isn't a race.

Three things get tight from sitting all day: the front of your hips, your mid-back, and your hamstrings. This stretch hits all three in one movement. If any of those stay tight, you'll feel stiff in your first few possessions.

5. Lateral Lunge to Balance

1 × 5/side

Stand with your feet together. Take a big step directly to the right — as wide as you can. When your foot lands, bend that right knee and push your hips back, like you're sitting into the right side. Keep your left leg straight. Both feet stay flat on the floor. Then push the floor away hard with your right foot, drive yourself back to standing, and balance on your right foot for 2 full seconds before bringing your left foot down. Your knee should be pointing the same direction as your toes — not caving in. Do 5 on the right, then 5 on the left.

The inside of your hips and your glutes have to work together to make lateral movements safe and powerful. Every defensive slide, every drive where you plant and change direction — it all starts with this exact pattern.

02

Prime

~5 min

Works in a hallway (10 yd minimum). You should feel springy by the end — not tired.

1. A-Skip

2 × 10 yd

Walk it first if you've never done it. Step forward with your right foot, then drive your left knee up so your thigh is parallel to the ground — like you're stepping over a low hurdle. As the left knee comes up, push off your right foot and get a little hop. When your left foot comes back down, punch it into the ground directly under your hip — don't reach it out in front of you. Switch sides and keep moving forward. Arms swing opposite to your legs — right arm forward when left knee is up. Stay tall. Cover 10 yards.

This teaches your legs to produce force downward into the ground — which is exactly how sprinting and jumping work. It also warms up the hip flexors, calves, and ankles together at speed.

2. Bilateral Pogo Jumps

2 × 10 contacts

Stand with feet hip-width apart. In the air, pull your toes up toward your shins. Just before you touch the ground, snap your toes down and land on the balls of your feet — your heels should barely kiss the floor. Think of it this way: someone should be able to slide a credit card under your heels at contact. The moment you touch, bounce back up immediately. Your knees barely bend. The jump comes from your ankles and calves snapping, not from squatting down. Try to spend as little time on the ground as possible — the faster the bounce, the better. Count 10 ground contacts, rest, repeat.

Your tendons are built to work like springs — but only if you train them. Pulling your toes up in the air and snapping them down before contact loads the Achilles tendon like a rubber band. That's where the free energy comes from on every jump and every first step. Athletes who do these before games feel bouncier from the opening tip.

3. Snap-Down to Stick

1 × 4 reps

Stand tall with your arms above your head. In one sharp motion, snap your arms down and bend your knees, landing in a quarter-squat athletic stance — feet hip-width, knees slightly bent, hips back, weight on the middle of your foot, chest slightly forward. Land as quietly as possible — no stomping. Hold that position for 1 full second. Check yourself: knees pushing out over toes, weight balanced, quiet feet. Reset and do it again.

The most dangerous moment in basketball for your knees is landing. This drill trains your body to absorb force correctly every single time — from rebounds, pull-up jumpers, catch-and-shoot, and any time you stop quickly. Quiet landing = joints protected.

4. Lateral Bound to Stick

1 × 3/side

Stand on your right foot. Bend your right knee slightly and jump sideways off that foot as far as you can to the left. Land on your left foot only — soft, controlled, knee over toes. Freeze for 1 full second. Your left knee should not wobble inward. If it does, push it back out over your toe and hold. Then jump back to the right and stick it. That's one rep per side.

Every closeout, every defensive slide recovery, every drive where you push off sideways — you're producing and absorbing lateral force on one leg. This is the only drill that trains that exact pattern before the game starts.

5. Carioca (Karaoke)

1 × 10 yd each direction

Face sideways and move laterally. Cross your trailing foot in front of your lead foot, then step your lead foot out. Now cross the trailing foot behind. Keep alternating — front, side, behind, side — for 10 yards. Your hips rotate with each crossover step while your shoulders stay square and facing forward. Stay light on your feet, arms relaxed. Go one direction, then come back the other way.

Basketball isn't just forward and backward — you rotate, pivot, and cross over constantly. This is the only drill in the warm-up that trains hip rotation through the transverse plane. It also warms up your adductors and abductors in a dynamic pattern that directly prepares you for defensive slides and crossover steps.

6. Power Skip for Height

1 × 10 yd

This is the A-skip but with maximum effort on the drive. Step forward with your right foot and drive your left knee up as explosively as you can — try to get your thigh above parallel. Swing both arms up hard at the same time to help you get off the ground. You should actually get real air time on each rep. This isn't a smooth, rhythmic skip — it's an aggressive, powerful one. Reach the ceiling with the top of your head on each drive.

This is where the warm-up shifts from preparation to power. You're now doing full triple extension — ankle, knee, and hip all extending completely — with real intent. By rep 4 or 5 you should feel your legs loading and releasing. That's the feeling you want going into Phase 3.

03

Ignite

~5-7 min

Walk back between every rep. This is activation, not conditioning.

1. Wall Drive → Acceleration

3 reps

Find a wall. Put both hands flat on it at about hip height. Walk your feet back until your body makes a straight diagonal line from your hands to your heels — like a push-up position but standing against a wall at a 45° angle. You shouldn't be standing upright. From here, drive one knee up explosively — thigh comes to parallel — then back down. Do that 3 times on the same leg, fast and sharp. On the third drive, push off the wall with your hands and sprint 10 yards forward. Start with that forward lean from the wall, then gradually come upright as you build speed — don't stay hunched the whole way. Walk back and repeat with the other leg. Build intensity each rep.

Full court add-on: Swap rep 3 for a 3-point stance start into a 15-yd sprint at 95%.

Intensity: Rep 1: 80% → Rep 2: 85% → Rep 3: 90%+

The biggest mistake slow starters make is standing upright on their first step. The wall forces your body into the correct forward lean angle for your first few steps. But your body should naturally rise with each stride as you accelerate — that's real acceleration mechanics, not a fixed position.

2. Sprint to Stick

2 reps

Start in an athletic stance. Sprint 5 yards as fast as you can, then decelerate hard into a low, controlled stop — the same "stick" position from the snap-down drill. Feet slightly in front of your hips, center of mass low, chest up, knees bent and tracking over toes. Hold that position for 1 full second. Then stand up and walk back. Do 2 reps at 85-90%.

The ability to stop is what keeps you safe. Most noncontact knee and ankle injuries happen during deceleration — on closeouts, defensive recoveries, and hard plants before a change of direction. This drill rehearses the braking pattern so your body has already practiced stopping at high speed before the game asks you to do it for real.

3. Build-Up Sprint

3 reps × 10–15 yd

Stand with feet staggered — one foot slightly in front of the other. On your own count, start running and gradually build your speed over the full distance. Don't explode out of the gate — start at about 80% and let your speed grow through the whole run. Drive past the finish line, don't slow down before it. Walk all the way back before the next rep. Each rep should feel faster than the last. Rep 3 should feel close to your top speed.

Intensity: Rep 1: 80% → Rep 2: 85% → Rep 3: 90%

Your nervous system needs to practice going fast before it does it in a game. If the first time you sprint at top speed is in the first quarter, you're behind. These three reps prime your legs so that your first breakaway of the game feels like rep 4, not rep 1.

Recovery between reps: Walk back to the start line. Every time. As you walk, take 2–3 slow breaths: in through your nose, out through your mouth. Stay calm between reps — you want to feel sharp, not amped. The goal is to feel fast, not fatigued. If Phase 3 takes 7 minutes because you're resting properly, that's perfect.

After your last sprint, stand still for 5 seconds. Notice how your legs feel — springy, alert, ready. That's the feeling you're chasing every game. Remember it.

CLUB & TOURNAMENT MODIFICATIONS

First game of the day

Full protocol — all three phases

Game 2, same day

Phases 2 & 3 only (~10 min). Tissues still primed from Game 1.

Game 3+ in a day

Phase 3 only (~5 min). 2 wall drives + 2 build-up sprints at 80%. Protect your legs.

Back-to-back days

Full protocol. Sleep resets you — treat it like a fresh game.

Cold gym / outdoor court

Add 60–90 sec of light jogging or seal jacks before Phase 1. Get an actual sweat started. Temperature is the #1 injury variable.

Hot weather (85°+)

Shorten Phase 1 to squat hold + glute bridges only. Hydrate before, during, and after warm-up. Heat is doing the tissue prep for you — focus on neural activation in Phases 2 and 3.

Feeling sluggish / heavy legs

Phase 1 only (squat hold + glute bridges), then jump straight to Phase 3 at 75–80%. Skip Phase 2 entirely — let the sprints do the priming. Listen to your body.



AO HOOPS



Phase 3 is your first possession. Win it.

Earned, Not Given • Next-Play Speed • Don't Judge • Family Standard

`aohoops.training`