

## Summer 2007 Debrief

This has been a great summer of learning. It started at the Junior Men's World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia. While there I attended a coaching clinic which featured Zelimir Obradovic who coached his Greek Panathinaikos team to the Euro Cup championship. I was able to "informally" watch other team's practices. The discussions off court with other coaches and elite development people were always enlightening. It is always interesting to ask basketball people from other countries to appraise our teams and our basketball system. Some of the best lessons were sitting with our Canadian coaches debriefing and planning for the future. Thanks to Greg Francis and Craig Beaucamp for sharing their thoughts.

At the Women's World Championships in Bratislava Slovakia the lessons continued. One of the greatest ways to learn is to talk with coaches from other countries about what they do for development. The assistant coach from Serbia and a couple of club coaches from Sweden were of great assistance in this regard. Christine Stapleton and Rich Chambers deserve special thanks also for sharing their thoughts. Dr. Doug Richards also needs to be thanked for his informative discussions. I also want to thank Sefu Bernard for making the trip an awesome learning experience. I am sure we discussed every facet of our basketball development system. The willingness to reveal your thoughts to others is one of the best ways I know to create a synergic effect. The ideas that have been generated come from the contributions of everyone. I highly recommend taking a similar trip for anyone who wants to study the game. We have a return trip to Serbia planned for the spring. They do not call it the "Land of Basketball" for nothing.

I followed up the Eastern European trip with our U15, U17 Championships in Sherbrooke and Vancouver. Videoing and listening through a microphone to 26 coaches gives you an extraordinary view of the art and science of coaching. I have learned so much by doing this over the last three summers. I want to thank all of the coaches who have agreed to be evaluated. 68%, 26 of 38, of the coaches at nationals decide to be evaluated. You have contributed to coaching education in this country in ways you do not know. I hope the experience also assisted you in our own professional development. Working with the various technical directors that made the trip was also beneficial. The more we have these people attend nationals the more we can grow the system. It was also nice to see and chat with a number of CIS / CCAA coaches at the nationals.

I have taken the eight questions I asked of each of the evaluated coaches and used this as a template for my summary. The focus is on coaching during the game. Please understand that there is a lot of generalization. I do not want to single out any coaches individually. The specific details were covered with each coach when they were debriefed. The purpose here is to discuss trends. The key is to develop action steps on things we want to maintain in our development system and possible innovations and improvements. Follow up on the actions is crucial. One of the major things I have learned in my three years in this job is that if we do not follow up things often have a tendency to slide back to the way they were.

### Coaching in competition

#### 1. Coach produces a game plan

Most coaches felt they did an above average job in scouting and preparing a plan of attack. I would agree with this observation. The fitness level of the teams was not a major issue. The concern is how the plan is delivered to the athletes:

- a) **Dominated by defence** – the majority of the plans focus on how we will defend the opponent. As a country we are very good on defence. Our problem is on the offence end of the floor. Most offence was delivered in practices as 5 on 0 running plays.
- b) **Dominated with telling** – most coaches still tell athletes what to do. This is because it is quick and easy. Also the coach usually knows what needs to be done. The problem is can

the athlete apply the knowledge. Athletes who can take auditory instructions do better than those who learn visually and by feel. Many coaches made use of video. It was good to see some coaches **physically** putting players in positions during time outs. This shows they understand that telling does not always work.

- c) **Amount of detail** – the sheer volume of information is sometimes staggering. How much is too much. It is important for the coach to know as much as possible about the other team. The key is to know what information will improve your team's performance. I also have a concern that very little information is being drawn from the players. Subtle we are creating players who never think for themselves.
- d) **Shoot around** – during the world championships I was able to observe a number of different shoots or training. First a little history on shoot arounds. Bill Sharman, the coach of the 1972 Los Angeles Lakers, wanted to get Wilt Chamberlain out of bed. He invented the idea of the pre-game shoot with this in mind. Wilt is now dead. We don't have to keep waking him up. I sometimes think a pre-game shoot is more for the coach than the athlete. Coaches must balance the following when deciding on a shoot:
- Fatigue of players – both physically and mentally
  - Amount of time required to get ready for and return from the shoot. Very often it can take over an hour to travel to the practice facility
  - How does it impact on your meals? If you have to get up early or miss a meal is it worth it?
  - Is there another way to deliver the information? I have seen some very creative walk throughs done in parks and ballrooms.
  - If you can get on the floor early do you really need more time to shoot?

I do not want people to think shoot arounds are bad. I think over the course of a week players need to polish little details. Getting familiar with the facility, the self-confidence gains from shooting and breaking up the day are positive benefits. Coaches just need to think "big picture". In general we in Canada we tend to cover every possible set and inbounds play run by the opponent. Some coaches even get mad because the second line up doesn't run the opponent's offence exactly right. These same coaches get mad in the game when the players don't remember. "We went over it in practice and pre-game"; is a common lament. Another common problem is putting in an entirely new offence before a game. Again these coaches get frustrated when the team does not execute the offence as designed. These same coaches very often run out of time and the players do not get a chance to shoot. The players leave the session frustrated and mentally fatigued. After watching other countries and having some great discussions with coaches, especially Ed Pomykala, at Bishops, I have the following recommendations:

#### Pre Game Plans

- Keep it short
- Use all three learning styles – auditory, visual and kinesthetic
- Emphasize concepts

#### On defence

- Who are the shooters
- Who are the drivers
- Who do we not have to defend
- How will we cover screens / picks / post ups / penetration

#### On Offence

- Let them shoot !!!!
- how do we gets shots for our shooters
- How do we create drives opportunities for our drivers
- What positive actions can our non-shooters take

- How might they defend our screens/ picks / post ups/ penetrations

## 2. Competition logistics are managed

This is a strength of the majority of coaches. They are very good at setting out schedules and keeping the players well informed. Many printed and posted a schedule or gave players copies. Some had a detailed schedule before arriving. These are all things we want to maintain in our coaching education.

Areas of concern:

- a) **Plan B** - when Plan A goes wrong a number of coaches "lose it". Very often they shift this stress to their team. It is a fine line between fighting for your rights and going with the flow. Very often coaches build in the excuse for losing. If players hear the coach say, "We wouldn't have been in this situation if the LOC did not cancel our shoot around." they have their excuse for losing the game. Have contingency plans. Blaming others for problems is not a solution.
- b) **Use of down time** – during a week long stays in residence coaches need to build in activities that do not drain energy and assist in avoiding the residence blues. This is especially true of the U15 athletes. You cannot expect them to "focus" for extended periods of time.

## 3. Coach develops an effective coaching team.

I was pleased to see growth in this area from coaches who were evaluated in the past. It was obvious that they took actions steps to improve their coaching team. These staffs knew their roles and you could actually see them being applied on the bench during the game. It was disappointing to see some coaches still trying to coach all by themselves. The assistant coaches were never consulted and all observations and decisions were made through the head coaches eyes.

We do have to do a better job in **mentoring assistant coaches**. Often the head coach confided that their assistant coach was not performing as well as the head coach wanted. When asked what feedback was given it was usually very little. The head coach is responsible for the coaching team; he or she must clearly define roles and responsibilities. Follow up must be taken to ensure the job is being done. Here are some recommendations for building the coaching team:

- Increasing the **collective knowledge** of the team – one of the most important concepts I have learned is that the more important information is collected, shared and applied the more a team can make tactical adjustments during the game. Too often, as stated above, only the head coach is allowed to observe and distribute information. A slight improvement is when the assistant coaches are allowed to add to the collective knowledge. The great teams also welcome and seek information from the players.
- Not everyone is the head coach – too many assistant coaches act as head coaches, watching and saying the same things. Many assistant coaches were **assigned the role** of watching the opponent on defence. Yet when asked the question of how a certain screen was being defended the answer was not readily available.
- Someone has to do the **"grunt work"** – if you ever watch assistant coaches in the NBA they usually are taking notes. It amazed me the number of staffs that did not keep simple stats on the bench. If the head coach asks how many fouls does "player X" have, there should be an answer. Saying that the assistant doesn't want to do it is not a good answer. We need to start keeping more advanced stats on the bench. To improve on offence we need to know what is happening. Possession charts is one way to monitor offensive efficiency.
- Time management – how a head coach spends his/her time during the game is very important concept. Too many coaches spend the majority of their time on activities that produce the lowest return on improving the team's performance. They never do actions or activities that truly impact the tactical play of the team. We have done a very poor job in our coaching education on

assisting coaches in this regard. What follows is my first attempt at describing the roles a coach assumes during the actual game:

1. **Strategist** – calling out plays, defence, inbound plays
2. **Cheerleader** – “Way to go”; “great job”, motivating the team
3. **Reminder** – here the coach remind players of actions they should be taking. This can often be taken to the extreme where the coach sounds like a play by play announcer. Coaches are often reminding the referee as well as the players on the floor.
4. **Corrector** – here the coach catches all of the mistakes made by the players. “You can’t give up penetration”; “Were getting killed on the boards”; are examples of statements often made by coaches. Some coaches also find it important to correct the officials as well as their players.

**These first four roles dominate the time of a number of coaches.** This is what they believe coaching is all about. Their total focus is on the five players playing the game. There comes a time when we need to take the training wheels off the bicycle and let the player ride on their own. It was great to see at nationals that the most successful coaches had taken off the “training wheels”. They did not see the need to clutter the players mind with constant chatter. Through watching these coaches I was able to identify other roles which provide added benefit to the teams performance.

5. **Teacher** – the teacher is similar to the corrector, but does so in a positive way. Instead of “We have to stop penetration” the coach say’s; “John, he is always driving to your left side, anticipate”. Two things have happened: the coach put a name on it and he/she has given a solution to the problem not just restate the mistake. Instead of being a cheerleader, “well done”, the coach describes to the athlete exactly what he/she has done well. “Betty, you anticipated the drive and cut her off, great job!” Taking it to an even higher level the teacher ensures that the information is shared with others who can benefit. The coach turns to the bench and tells the bench exactly what Betty has done. More importantly he/she may point out to Suzie that she must remember this when she shortly enters the game and will be guarding the same player. In summary:
  - Use the players name when possible
  - Paint a positive picture – give specific detail on what the player just did / or what the solution is to solve a problem
  - Echo the information to those who can benefit in the future
6. **Debriefer** – here the coach asks questions of the athlete to help gather positive information for the future.
7. **Consulting** – the coach shares his/her thoughts with his coaching team and players. He/she seeks input as to possible actions. The head coach honours the input from others by recognizing that he/she has heard the comment. If he/she decides not to make use of the information he lets the person know why.
8. **Observing** – often the coach must take time to see what is going on. He/she must train his/her eye to watch things other than his/her own team and the ball.
9. **Reflecting** – time must be taken to remember the plan and to think about possible future actions: subs, time outs, offensive and defensive strategies. This cannot be done if the coach is overly engaged in the play on the floor.

#### 4. Strategies / tactics are appropriate for the abilities of the athletes and FIBA rules.

In general the all teams ran offences and defences that will work with the age group and FIBA rules. The coaches did a good job in this area. The problem is that we are not great. The very habits that make us good limit our players from becoming great. We still tend to dominate play with structure; meaning that there is very little room for flexibility. This is especially true on offence. The structure will solve all problems in the mind of the coach. If we are not scoring it is because we are not running the offence. If a player is struggling it is because he/she has gone outside of the offence. The athletes must do exactly as the coach says. This is not about running motion or set plays it is about allowing players to **read**. We need to improve the decision making of our athletes. The athletes who have attended CP's have improved their skills and knowledge of the game. The problem was that in many situations provincial team coaches put in systems of play that did not allow these players to capitalize on their increased skills and knowledge. This was especially apparent in penetration principles and reading off screens. A major question provinces must ask is; what are the links between their provincials teams, RTC's and CP's? Consistency of programming is essential.

I will be sending out more detail on these areas of concern around strategies for FIBA rules. Provided here is a brief description;

1. **Teaching offence** – this is one of the greatest limitations of our coaches. When you look at all levels of programming we struggle to put the ball in the basket. It is not a simple solution because there are many variables involved. Here are some points to ponder:
  - **Post play** – the trapezoid key does make a major difference in how post skills need to be taught. Drop power is only effective if the post can seal the defender in the key or if he/she has established an attacking move. When used on the wide block with the defender playing behind, the offensive player wastes his/her dribble and ends up with a difficult shot. Players need to be taught the crab dribble series from the post position. This is foreign to many coaches who have never allowed their post to dribble. Also many entries to the post come after elaborate time consuming movements. Giving the ball to a player on the block late in the clock, especially with no perimeter movement, entices double teams with no chance of a pass out. All players need to be able to post up taking advantage of the weakness of the defence.
  - **End of clock** – in general our teams struggle with end of clock situations. At both World Championships we were the only country that had the bench count down the shot clock. This often produced panic in the players. I noticed the same situations at national championships. When there is a shot clock violation in our country we often blame the bench for not counting down. In the rest of the world they blame the players on the floor. Here were some situations that happen regularly to our provincial teams and junior national teams in end clock situations
    - When a player gets the ball on the perimeter the other players would creep towards that player taking away any chance to go one on one.
    - Players who did not have good one on one skills would often find themselves open on the perimeter late in the clock. They would hold the ball, afraid to dribble or pass. Too late in the clock they would make a desperation pass to someone who had no time to make a play. Others would often drive baseline and pick up the ball.
    - Post players, who have no advantage in the post, continually align themselves in front of the ball. This takes away penetration by a drive, cut or pass.
    - Players receive the ball late in the clock not ready to shoot.

- Running a ball screen as a play on with reads. Players dribble over the screen having made up their mind on what they are going to do. Another trend on picks is to reject the screen, for no apparent reason, there by negating any option for the screener.

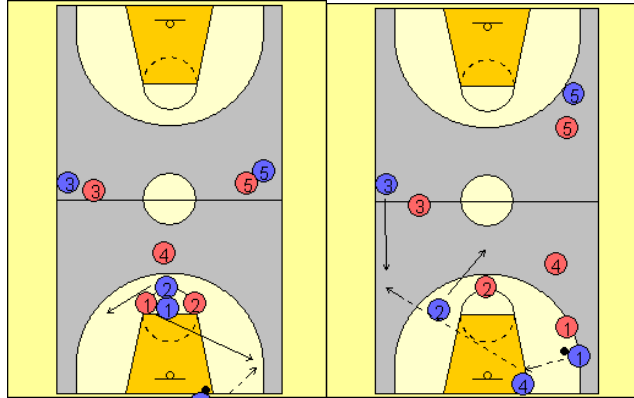
We need to practice with shot clocks. Players must get comfortable with locating the clock and taking responsibility for initiating end of clock situations. All players must know how to initiate at the end of the clock in order to create a good shot opportunity for the team. Counting down has deferred responsibility for being aware of clock from the players on the floor to the players on the bench.

- **Points of attack** – On offence players need to know what the major points of attack are on any given possession. Is the offence try to
  - **isolate a player** – be it at the rim, wing or top. “First big” is an example of a quick point of attack trying to isolate a player at the rim.
  - Attack a **weak defender**. Recognizing that a player has four fouls and may be prone to playing timid is an example.
  - Attack the **weakness of the defence** – If you notice that a team does not communicate well on screens you may want to set more screens.
  - Attack through the **strength of our team** – get the ball to the best player and let him/her make a play

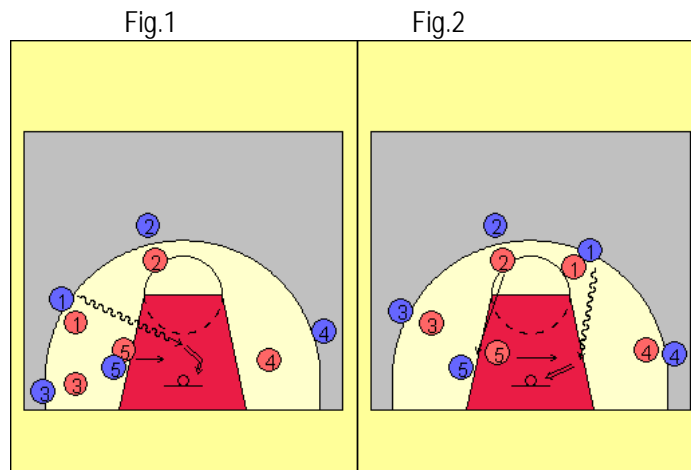
Too often we have taught players offence as a pattern or a series of moves. The players subconsciously are thinking about the next step in the sequence and not about attacking the basket. All one has to do is sit at the end of the court and watch the eyes of the offensive players. Very often no one looks at the basket until a shot is taken. The players need to have a greater understanding of various attacks within an offence. The great teams have flow from one attack to another seamlessly. We have a tendency to want to reset if one attack does not provide a scoring opportunity.

- **Killing flow**
  - **Not catching the ball clean** – fumbles
  - **Picking up the dribble** – especially going baseline
  - **No pass pass** – freezing the ball and allowing the defence to recover
  - **Lack of meaningful movement** – maintain spacing throughout the entire shot clock
  - **Not looking at the rim**

2. **Press break** – Too many press breaks make use of lateral and backward movements. Players cut back to the baseline and dribble at the sideline. Many teams used the following press break this summer. They would stack the two guards (or screen). They used a big to inbound the ball. The first pass was usually to a player cutting to the corner. The second pass was back to the inbounder, who often would not or could not dribble. The third pass was to the wing coming back down the sideline. This consumes a lot of time to get the ball to the far sideline. Teams have gotten very good at shadowing the ball with the non-ball handler’s defender. If you do not **go vertical** you do not break down the press. We need more vertical cuts, passes and dribbles in our press break attack. Having players involved in breaking the press who are not allowed to dribble is another disaster waiting to happen against good teams. Especially if this players trails up the floor.



3. **Foul line** - coaches must spend more time on teaching players how to box out on the trapezoid key. The shape and the rules make it a highly specialized skill. I was surprised that more teams do not take advantage of the rules to create offensive rebounding advantages. Our coaches seem more concerned with players huddling. Huddles need to be quicker and meaningful if they are going to be useful. Too many times the players returned to the lane and forgot the most important thing, box out.
4. **Skills** – I have added in some key skills that need to be enhanced.
  - a. **Effective use of the dribble** – this is one skill where you can tell that CP has made a difference. We are not seeing as big of blow outs as we did in the past. With more players capable of handling the ball there are fewer turnovers that lead to easy baskets.
    - Number of travel calls indicates that we need to emphasize putting the ball down correctly. Many were caused by the player playing too tall with the ball. Players need to get into stance.
    - Wasted dribble. Many players did not see the open player because they would immediate dribble.
    - Eyes up when dribbling – players are not seeing the what is in front of them
    - Picking up the dribble. Especially when going baseline. This action kills more flow in offences than any single action.
  - b. **Help off the ball side or helping off shooters** – we still have too many players who continually want to help off shooters on simple non threatening penetration. This is a three point shot.
  - c. **Rebounding** – we have improved in this regards but still must be emphasised. It is the 15' rebound that clears the head of the interior players that seems to give us trouble. Especially with more longer shots being taken.
  - d. **Lay ups** –
    - **Vision** – players need to quickly get their eyes up once they have beaten their defender.
    - **KOB** – keep on the body. Too many are still going wide and allowing help and recovery.
    - **Speed lay ups** - players need to go faster to the hoop. We tend to decelerate to score. Watching international teams in the last 3 minutes of a warm up is impressive.
    - **Release point** – players need to have more than one release point.
    - **Zig zag** – players need to be able to move laterally to avoid the help defence
    - **Odd angle** - Because teams are hesitant to help off of three point shooters there are a number of lay ups appearing that we never thought possible.



- e. **Shoot the ball** – if we ever want to become a **great** basketball nation we need to put five shooters on the floor. The better the range the more the floor can be spread. Teams do not guard non-shooters. In every tournament I attended this summer you could see this strategy being employed. We need to become a nation of shooters. Having said this it must be taught right. I am pleased to see that we have started to raise the release points of our players. Also we are starting to have players who understand the importance of the step back and dribble jump shot.
- f. **Passing** – This observation came from Mike McNeill, assistant coach of our senior women's national team. "One significant weakness in our development that impacts our ability to score – we are a horrendous passing country. We lack the ability to make "passes of significance" (the pass through a defender to an open cutter or to a post with a good seal). We pass the ball around the perimeter rather than into the heart of the defence. My beliefs are that this impacted because we spend so little time on faking and pivoting that our ability to create passing lanes is very poor." I totally agree with Mike's observation that improved footwork and faking will improve our ability to create better passing lanes. I also believe that we need to improve their **vision** and how **hard** they pass the ball. Watching form the baseline points out the lack of eyes that attack the rim. I suggest using lots of games approach basketball where the players are rewarded for looking through the defender to the key area. Players must understand that this needs to be a primary point of attack. Also there can be violations for not looking at the basket. I suggest as much as possible run drills that use the basketball court running in the appropriate direction. This way, the coach (or player) can stand near the basket and show 'ten fingers, this forces players to always be aware. Keep loading the drills by adding defenders on the ball and at the rim. Players then have to think about making relay passes to the player in the key.

### 5. Confidence and skill building interventions are made during the competition

The majority of our coaches make use of positive feedback. It does tend to be a little general in nature and could be more specific (see being a teacher above). There is not a lot of evidence of individualized mental

training plans and distraction plans in place. We have a tendency to talk about these areas off line but do not bring them to the actual competition.

Many coaches were able to assist their athletes with improving certain skills during the competition. They used a variety of methods to help the athletes be aware of what they needed to do to improve.

As games got tight and stressful emotions tended to rise. Some coaches fell into the trap of also raising their emotions. This did not help the athletes play better. The successful coaches became calmer and showed great confidence to their players.

## **6. Effective timing of time outs and substitutions.**

Most coaches had a plan for time outs and subs.

### **Time outs**

**Red flags** – called immediate with out hesitation – Usually a major run by the other team, frustration or lack of execution. No one I interviewed mentioned calling a time out late to advance the ball to half. We have to rethink our timeouts to coincide with the FIBA rules. Some coaches have learned that they must let players play through runs and certain frustrations. You cannot take time outs to solve every problem. I call these **Yellow flags** – a time out alert. We will attempt to play through the situation. I also think you need to consider **Green flags** – this is where you cancel a called time out. As often happens in a FIBA game you go for a while without a stoppage. I have seen teams turn a run around and then have it stopped because the coach did not cancel the time out.

### **Last two minutes of the game**

Very few coaches made use of the rules that allow subs when scored upon. Many coaches also called their time out with the opponent shooting a foul shot before the first foul shot. This meant if the 2<sup>nd</sup> shot was successful the ball could not be advanced to half court. Coaches must decide what is more important; the time out before the shot or the possibility of moving the ball to half.

Coaches were very often late going into the time out. You have little time to consult with your assistants. This can occur at the ¼ time. You only have 50 seconds. Officials all across the country are being instructed to get players out of the time outs on time. Effective time outs have one or two major points. The last information given is usually the action the players are going to immediate do. If you're on defence talk about the defence last.

### **Substitutions**

**Red flags** – two fouls in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, lack of effort, numerous mistakes, and fatigue

**Yellow flag** – often the head coach would warn the assistant coach to watch “so and so”. Many coaching teams had an assistant responsible for subs. Many coaches prepared the subs before entering the game. This was a good trend.

## **7. The coach makes uses of self, individual and team debriefs to assess strategy / tactical / motivational plans.**

### **During the game**

This was probably the biggest area of improvement over the previous summer. The majority of coaches who were evaluated in the past had a plan in place to debrief each athlete as they came to the bench. This ranged from a simple comment from the head coach to an assistant sitting with each sub. Telling still dominates the debrief. We do need to make use of questions. An example of the power of questions comes from an actual game this summer.

Coach: "Do you feel you can make use of a break out dribble?" (This is a yes or no question which is not always the best)

Athlete: "Yes I think I can, the big girl is right up on me when I get the rebound."

Coach: "That's great; once you break clear you can really push the ball up to the wing. I want you to do that."

Athlete: "Ok! Coach!" pause, "I think #6 is left handed. She is always going left to score."

Coach: "Really! I never noticed that, we must make sure to tell the other post players who might be guarding her. If you notice anything else let me know!"

This is the beauty of asking questions. You gain insight into things that add to the **collective knowledge** of the team. No one had pointed out the fact that the player was left handed. I do not believe the athlete would have volunteered the information if the exchange had of gone as follows:

Coach: "I need you to use your break out dribble; once you get in the clear you can push it to the wing. Do you understand?"

Athlete: "Yes"

"Do you understand?" is **not** a question that is very effective in gathering information on what a player really understands. In the heat of the battle it usually means do what I tell you? If we are going to improve the decision making ability of the players, a must in the FIBA game, it is crucial that we use questions to inquire what they are thinking, feel and doing. When coaches first use this technique they are often frustrated with the results;

a) The player gives the **wrong** answer – wrong it is not the answer the coach wants. Coaches need to honour the athletes answer.

Example:

Coach: What happened on that screen?

Athlete: "I got tripped up by the screener."

Coach: That's not what I saw, you're supposed to under the screen. Make sure it doesn't happen again!"

A better response would be to honour the answer.

Coach: "What do you mean by tripped up? Describe what happened?"

This allows the coach to see through the eyes of his/her athlete.

b) "**I don't know**" – this answer frustrates coaches because he/she cannot comprehend how an athlete just completed a task and cannot explain how or what they did. Athletes often do not have the vocabulary to describe their thoughts, feelings and actions. It is up to us as coaches to assist them in learn how to express these things.

Example;

Coach: "What did you see when you dribbled off that pick?"

Athlete; "I don't know?"

Coach: "What do you mean you don't know? How can you not know it just happened?"

A better response is to honour the answer and probe for understanding.

Athlete: "I don't know?"

Coach: Which defender picked you up?

Athlete; 'I think it was post?"

Coach: "Did he stay you or did he switch back?"

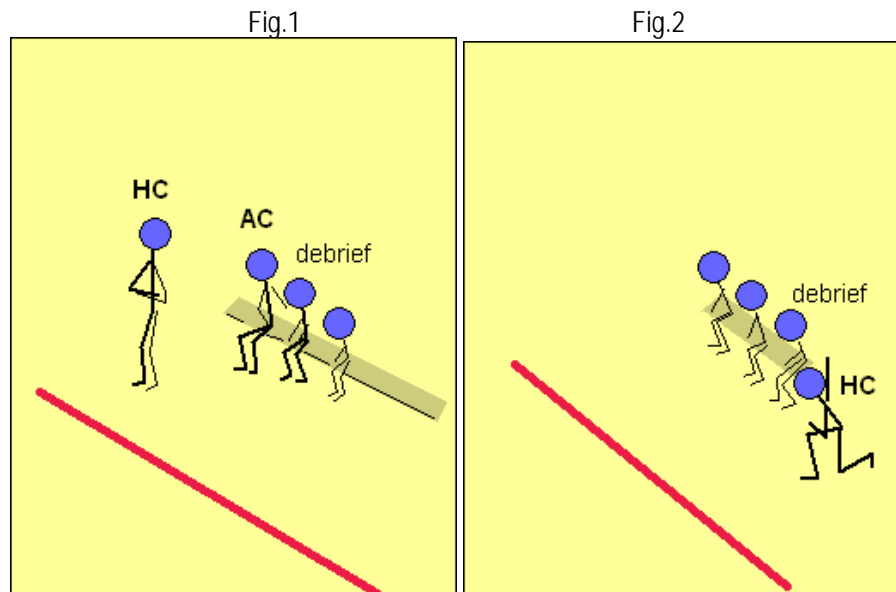
Athlete: "I am pretty sure he switched back."

Coach:"What do we call this action?"

Athlete: "High hedge?"

Coach; "That's right"

- b) Coach do not want to **distract** his/her attention from the game – Too many coaches feel it is important to constantly watch the action on the court. (See the note on **Coaching Time Management**). By taking time to talk to a bench player they might miss out on the game. In those situations the role should be delegated to an assistant coach or the coach must position him /her self in a manner where he/she can multi-task.



In Fig. 1 the assistant coach keeps an open chair beside him/her self. When an athlete comes off the floor he/she knows to sit in the chair for a quick debrief. The head coach should try to greet each athlete as he/she comes off the floor. Look the athlete in the eye and give them a quick comment. By looking the player in the eye you can judge the emotion of the player. The eyes do not lie. It is important that the players know why they are being subbed.

In Fig. 2 the subbed player goes to the end of the bench. The head coach kneels by the player and does the debrief. By taking this position the head coach can look through the bench to see the bench players as well as the players on the floor. If the coach wants the whole bench to hear he/she can speak louder. If it is a private conversation whisper in the player's ear.

### Post game

It was great to see that a number of coaches were allowing the players to talk first in the post game debriefs. These coaches often felt that they did not have to add anything to the conversation as the players would cover all of the topics. The players would often bring up areas of concern for which the coach was unaware.

Many coaches still dominate with a "we" debrief. This is where the coaches would tell the team post game what we did well and what we need to do better next time. The only chance for the players to talk was at the end when the coach would ask if there were any questions or comments. Players have learned a long time ago that if they keep quiet it is time to leave. Also most of the comments will have been tainted with the coaches' comments first. Players often say what they think the coach wants to hear not what needs to be said.

## Debriefing

One of the things that become apparent this summer was that we need to train more people in the art of debriefing. Asking probing questions is one key to self-improvement. Questioning only works if we listen closely to the response. Dig deeper with clarifying questions for more specific details. Don't allow "fluff". The person responding to the questions should describe action steps that can be measured. Follow up must occur. Some time in the future an assigned person needs to check to see that the actions are being implemented.

### Who needs to be an evaluator?

Coaches – when working with athletes

PSO's/technical director – when working with coaches

NCCP evaluator – this is a crucial position as we move into the "new" NCCP with competency based learning. Provinces need to identify people who have this skill.

### Example questions:

#### What were your strengths or what went well?

The purpose of this question is to identify actions that should be repeated or maintained in the future. Too often we allow people to give general answers.

Example:

Evaluator: "What was your strength as a coach this game?"

Coach: "I prepared my team well for competition."

This is too general. The evaluator must go deeper to find out what actions were taken by the coach in preparation.

Evaluator: "Give me an example of some of the specific things you did in your preparation that you would repeat again next year."

Coach: "We held shorter meeting of about 15minutes in length. We always concluded with 'popcorn' where each athlete had a chance to express his/her opinion."

Too often people being evaluated do not know what the successful actions were. You may have to prod them.

Evaluator: "What were some specific things that went well in game preparation?"

Coach: "We had good warm up." (To general draw out the detail).

Evaluator: "What made it good?" (Probing deeper)

Coach: "We were always ready to play" (Again, very general)

Evaluator: "What specific things did you do in the warm up that made you ready? Things you would include with your next team?" (Looking for the detail)

Coach: "We did dynamic movement, lots of shooting and speed lay ups."

#### What can you do to improve?

The purpose here is to have the person reflect on actions that will enhance the experience in the future. Very often the person will list all of the negative things that happened, but will not have solutions. The debriefer needs to prod the person for improvements and innovations. An **improvement** is an adjustment to an action taken in the past. **Innovations** are to start or do something not done before. As stated above the debriefer must lead the person to action steps.

Example:

Coach (as the debriefer): "So what do you need to improve before the next game?"

Athlete: "I didn't shoot very well". (Statement about what went wrong. This needs to be turned into a positive action statement)

Coach: "What do you mean you by not shooting well?" (Restate to draw more detail)

Athlete: "I was missing easy shots that I make in practice."

Coach: "So what can you do to improve on that before next game?"

Athlete: "I need to practice more shots" (often the player will not know the answer)

Coach: "Will practicing the same way change the results? What do you have to do different in order to get different results? (Before making suggestions the coach tries to draw from the athlete first)

Athletes: "I don't know, what do you suggest?"

Coach: "Maybe we can work together on shooting at game speed with someone contesting your shots."

Athlete: That sounds great! Can we start tomorrow?"

## 8. Presents a basic competition day nutrition / hydration / recovery / activity plan which is in place for athletes / team

This is an area of great improvement. Every team was very aware of the importance of nutrition and hydration. The coaches monitored these areas. Recovery still needs some work. We do a good job on eating immediately after competition. Chocolate milk seems to be a favourite. Where we need more work is on the light aerobic activity to remove lactic acid. The Ontario juvenile girls were the only team that I saw do this in a cool down. It is crucial over a week long tournament that we do a better job on this element of recover. We have to explore the use of hydrotherapy. Christine Stapleton did an excellent job with the U19 national team of pool work outs.

### In summary

We continue to improve, but so does the rest of the world. We have the talent to win medals at world competitions. We have talent in our player, coach official and administrator pools. For us to take the gigantic leap forward from good to great we need to have everyone within our elite development system on the same page. This goes for players, coaches, officials, administrators and parents. We need to do a better job of educating and communicating with everyone within the system. Being on the same page means seeing the big picture.

When I was in junior high school in little Truro N.S. it was compulsory to take French. Somehow the federal government had convinced the provincial government that this would be a good thing for the country. When I arrived in high school it was an elective. I chose not to take French. As long as I lived in Truro N.S. this decision never impacted my life. Since moving to Canada Basketball there is not a day that goes by that I do not regret this decision. My decision has kept me from rising to top. What does this have to do with our basketball community? If we want to become a great basketball nation, not just good, we have to stop making local decisions that impact the future of our great players, coaches and officials.

We need people striving to be the best in the world not just the best in their own school, province or country. If they fall short we still have some pretty good player, coaches and officials.

When provincial official's groups arbitrarily decide to teach different mechanics, because they like this way better, they hurt those officials who may wish to work at a national or international level.

When a coach decides that he/she is not going to let a 5'11' post player dribble or shoot the ball he/she hurts that athletes chances to play at a higher level.

When players / parents decide not become involved in CP's, RTC's or provincial team, but to play on an exposure team that gets a nice trip and gear, it hurts their chances to improve their skills and be seen by national / provincial coaches.

When administrators make decisions not to "buy in" to our system of play it can set back a program through lack of consistency and mixed messaging.

What is our style of play? It is a question I asked numerous people this summer. No one seems to have the answer. Here is my first attempt and defining our style of play:

Through our elite development system we want to develop world class **multi-skilled, intelligent** players who can all **shoot** the ball and are great **defenders, rebounders** and **passionate** about playing for their country.

Mike MacKay  
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Canada Basketball