

STUFF

Good Players Should Know

» The Finer Points of Basketball
From A to Z

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Foreward by Dena Evans

CHAPTER



A FEW WORDS TO COACHES

Being the son of a basketball coach, I grew up reading everything I could get my hands on—books of plays, manuals on coaching and instructions on ten different kinds of passes and when to use three different heights of dribbles. Despite my diligent searching then and my continued interest in the game as a player, coach and camp director, I have never found a book geared to the player who could already play.

Let's face it, who ever really talks about medium dribbles and hook passes and rocker steps? To my knowledge, there's never been a winning team that spent time on seven different kinds of passes. A kid can learn those at camp and then "get his pants stolen off him" when he meets some athletes on a playground. So...

I wrote this book for players who can already play the game and want to improve and who need not a review of types of passes, but an explanation of fine points and concepts and a breakdown of the little things that great players *seem* to do "naturally." I wanted to write a book that players could take to bed at night and read in the off-season or just before a big game—and improve their own technique with. I wanted to write a book that would be an indispensable tool for the coach and interesting reading for the player. And finally, I wanted to write a book that *you* would recommend to your players because you know you don't have time to teach them all the things you would like them to know. You sometimes get to the point where your players are so conscious of running your offense that suddenly one of your players has the ball, and his defender darts by and falls, but the guy just throws the ball and continues the offense—it has never occurred to him to shoot a layup. And you start asking yourself, "What have I been doing all this time?"

It's tough for the coach and tough for the players. There's just too much to get across in too little time. Often a coach finds himself saying things like, "Don't do it because I said it. This is the way Mike Krzyzewski does it. This is the way Roy Williams does it." There's a need for a special authority, or at least for a new emphasis. No coach can possibly emphasize all the things that need to be stressed. In the course of intense practice sessions, players have enough trouble just psyching themselves into trying hard—they

can't possibly absorb all their coach throws at them. Yet, there's so much they need to know, things the coach may never have time to mention, let alone emphasize.

So that's the reason for this book. Page after page of common-sense ideas about basketball. Not plays to run, not drills to use, but the concepts players need to perform well. The intent is to provide the conscientious player with guidelines he can review over and over to make more and more a part of his game. In the quiet and calm of his room, late at night, when you aren't urging and begging and anguishing over his deficiencies, a player might read over these concepts and make some of them (more of them as time passes) part of his daily habit of play.

No one can absorb all these concepts in one reading, but exposure to them should get more of them done as the season progresses—until someday one of your players is going to save *your* neck by doing something well that you never even took time to explain! (Wouldn't that be a miracle?)

"Good players just do that naturally," you might say. But you know they often don't. More often you are coaching only pretty good or mediocre players, and *they* don't do anything naturally. A very precious few athletes find ways to win games for you, and the huge majority finds ways to lose them.

I am counting on you to put this book in your players' hands, and you can count on this book to put into your players' heads some vivid ideas that someday will help you win some games you otherwise might have lost. I think you will find that few of the concepts conflict with your philosophy and many of them may be expressed in a way that will enable you to reach players you have so far been unsuccessful with in certain areas of the game.

Most of the concepts will be mere confirmations of what you already teach, but the slightly different angle or perspective may help fine-tune your players' concentration just a bit more. This book is a tool that should help your players help you. It is a giant checklist, you might say, of the little things, of the *STUFF Good Players Should Know*.



A FEW WORDS TO PLAYERS

You're no good."

No one likes to be told that he's no good, but most players, even ones who people say are good, fail to do many, many important things game after game.

You probably don't even know all the things you aren't good at. On a night you score 16 or 20 points, you probably go home thinking you played well, even though very few coaches may have been impressed. So you put in a few jumpers, got a couple of layups, picked off some rebounds and your man only scored eight. Does that mean you were good? Maybe. Maybe not.

There are a thousand "little things" that actually decide whether or not you can play. 🐦 Even on nights you shoot one for nine, you can still play well if you do the little things.

A good player is good regardless of how he shoots on a given night and even regardless of how many points his man scores. 🐦 A good player makes it tough for the other team to score. If they score, okay; they are good, too. But they score with difficulty because a good player makes it tough to get easy baskets. A good player helps his teammates stop their men, and he helps his teammates score more. A good player contributes in many ways that the average fan and even the average player never notices or thinks about. But coaches and winning teams know what a good player is, and if you want to be a good player, you'd better know, too.

This book is a sort of giant checklist, a discussion of the little things that a good player does and is aware of. 🐦 You can't just read through it once and expect suddenly to be a good player. You have to concentrate and make point after point part of your *habit of play*, gradually, consistently.

Habit of play is a crucial phrase. The world is full of players who can properly perform some task when they are told to concentrate on just that or when they are asked to do it in a drill. But do they do it in games? Do they do it consistently?

For example, take offensive rebounding. Without even considering technique, ask yourself one question: Do you

go after—I mean *actively seek*—every rebound after your team shoots? I don't mean make a casual effort to go toward the ball. I mean, assume someone said, "If you get the next offensive rebound, I will give you \$1,000." You know what kind of effort you would give. You might not get the rebound, but it certainly would be obvious that you were after it.

And yet, during the course of most games, it is rarely obvious that anyone is making that kind of effort, rarely obvious that you are making that kind of effort, even though you tell your coach and your friends and yourself that you want to be a good basketball player.

"A good player contributes in many ways that the average fan and even the average player never notices or thinks about."

What excuse do you give yourself for not doing your best every time? Have you ever considered that a coach could watch you play, even on a night you score 20 points, and he could tell you dozens of things you never bothered doing? Undoubtedly, there are many things that you should do that you don't.

But if you really want to be a good player, if you really care about constant improvement, this book can help you. If you are willing to read it and really try to make these fine points a part of your game... **If you strive to do the little things consistently, there won't be any doubt in anyone's mind what kind of player you are.** 🐦 People may not say that you are great or wonderful or fantastic, but coaches will do better than that. They will say *you can play*.

There is no higher compliment in the game.

DON'T BE STUPID


The concepts in this book are generally acceptable to coaches, and they will serve you well on any court, anywhere. However, if your coach disagrees on some particular point, don't be stupid and argue with him. *Do it his way.*

There are many ways to skin a cat, as the saying goes, and many ways to score a basket or stop an opponent. None of the concepts in this book are stupid, but there are other ways of doing them. Any coach will be delighted if you can master these ideas and use them in games. So try to learn to do all of them *while* being prepared to alter some of them if your coach feels you can get a slight edge by doing them differently.

Take, for example, individual defense. Some of the top coaches in the nation teach that you should have your weight on your front foot, so you can push off it when your man goes and you need to retreat. But I teach that you should have your weight back, so you get in your man's face but are thinking "retreat." Whatever you lose in push-off, I feel you gain in readiness.

Who is right? Your coach is right. Do it his way. *He* is the one who puts you into and out of games. *He* is the one you have to please. And besides, in a game, things usually happen so fast, no one, not even your coach, will likely notice where your weight is when your man suddenly catches a pass and thrusts forward. Your coach will want to see that you are ready to go with your man, to cut him off, to beat him to a spot.

"No team ever lost by playing the wrong defense. They lost by playing that defense poorly."

The important point is that you learn to do these things and that you learn to listen to your coach. Even if your coach isn't the best in the world, five guys working together doing the "wrong" thing have a better chance of winning than five guys all doing their own thing because each thinks he knows best. **No team ever lost by playing the wrong defense. They lost by playing that defense poorly.** 

The first rule of this book, then, is, "This book is a tool to help you help your coach." It is not a holy script to be used for arguing. There are a lot more bad players than there are bad coaches. Think of it. If players always executed properly, no one would ever find out a coach did something poorly.

Remember, you don't lose by playing the wrong way. You lose by playing poorly.

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LONHOBIRS

LONHOBIR is a made-up word for good shot selection—a thing that almost all players are terrible at. The word takes the first letter of each word of the following phrase: Shoot Layups **O**r (shots with) **N**o **H**and (up) **O**n **B**alance **I**n **R**ange.

You've got to wonder (unless time is running out) why anyone ever takes anything but a layup or a shot with no hand in the face on balance and in good shooting range. If you can't get the shot you want, pass off. That seems easy enough, yet players instead want to flip up a scooper or let go a flying hook or a fade-away jumper. What for?

“Learning to make a shot with a hand in your face is not nearly as important as learning to pass up such shots and learning how to get shots with no hand in your face.”

“But Coach,” you hear players say, “I’m good at that shot.”

“Sure, but you’re better at shots with *no* hand in your face. You’re even better at shots when you’re on balance. You’re even better at shots when you’re a little bit closer.”

Why take a fade-away when you can pass off and try again? Why take anything but a very high-percentage shot? 🐦 The guess might be that players are selfish, and they want to score, and they are afraid that if they don’t shoot when they have it, someone else will. But that is not the answer. One-on-one games prove that.

In a one-on-one game, you not only get every shot, but the more shots you make, the more shots you get to shoot since most players play one-on-one with a “make-it-take-it” arrangement. Yet, even in one-on-one games, players repeatedly take poor, low-percentage shots instead of being patient and waiting for a better opportunity. There is no explaining it except as being a lack of awareness. Most players just don’t give much thought to percentages.

Learning to make a shot with a hand in your face is not nearly as important as learning to pass up such shots and learning how to get shots with no hand in your face. 🐦

Of course, layups and inside shots are not included in the “no hand” rule. You should be able to make those with *ten* hands in your face.

For a quick review, some questions.

What excuse do you have for shooting shots off balance and out of your “sure-shooting” range?

Why do you shoot when there is a hand in your face? Why won’t you pass off and wait for a higher percentage opportunity?

And the best question of all is, why do you ever take a bad shot in a one-on-one match?

Sometimes, even good players make very little sense.

LOOK DOWNCOURT

Any time you get the ball, and often before you get it, look to your basket. 🐦 **It is astonishing that players need to be told such a thing, yet players fail to do this constantly.**

Often there are men free near the basket (Isn’t that where you go when you are free?), but the player with the ball doesn’t look at them. Frequently, a so-called great pass is made, and all it took was someone to look.

There is nothing clever or complicated about this instruction. It is something everyone can do, but very, very few players do it every time.

It *can* be done every time, so make it a habit. Overdo it in some pickup games if that will help you remember. And then do it in games. Every time.

LOOK 'EM IN THE EYE FIRST

When a big man gets the ball in the 3-second lane on a pass or maybe on an offensive rebound, often he sneaks up a quick shot. He tries to get it up there before the guy

near him has a chance to block the shot *and* before that guy has a chance to foul him. The problem is, there is a better chance for an aggressive shooter to draw a foul than there is for even a very tall center to block a shot. So a quick sneak shot is not a very intelligent play.

When you get the ball near the basket, turn toward the defender between you and the basket and look at him.

See what he is going to do. 🐦 If he is going to jump, let him; then you go up. And if he wants to stand there, let him. Then you go up strong.

The important thing to remember is look him in the eye first and then make your move. There is no reason to sneak up shots inside, no reason to shoot before you know where you are in relation to the basket and the defenders. Take the time to look at the defender, freeze him and go for it. For every shot that gets blocked, you will get 10 fouls. The exchange is well worth it. Besides, any shot-blocking center will tell you that it is easier to block a fade-away or a sneak shot than a shot that goes right up past his nose.

Look him in the eye first, then go for it.

LOSING

No one is quite sure about how a player is supposed to act after a loss. It doesn't seem necessary to cry for a week, especially since you are likely to have another game within that time. Yet, it doesn't seem quite right to walk off the court laughing either. Naturally, some losses will be more bothersome than others, and, just as naturally, every player will lose sometimes. Therefore, it seems intelligent to prepare a response in advance for those unhappy times when the inevitable happens, you lose.

First, after you lose, you should think. Thinking should keep you from laughing and probably from crying as well. 🐦

Neither laughing nor crying is likely to help you much for next time, but thinking is always valuable. Did you give your best physical effort? Were you fully tuned into the game mentally? What things could you have done better? How could you have prevented the loss? What would you do differently if you had it to do over? What did the other team do to confuse you or to make it difficult? Can you use that on someone else in the next game?

“There is no reason to sneak up shots inside, no reason to shoot before you know where you are in relation to the basket and the defenders.”

There are a lot of questions to ask yourself, and those should come in place of the more common comments like “The referees were terrible,” “The coach was stupid,” or “If only Jones hadn't tried that stupid shot.”

No one loses a game singlehandedly. There are unfortunate circumstances when a player misses a shot at the end with his team a point behind, or he travels with the ball or kicks it out of bounds. People may say he lost it. But he didn't. You lost it with that one turnover at the beginning, that bad pass, or that failure to talk on defense in the first half that gave the other team an easy basket.

Second, get out of the habit of blaming referees and coaches and others, and think. 🐦

Don't decide until the next day what your verdict is. A lot of times, with emotions high after a big game, things get said that aren't meant and aren't true. But, mixed in with disappointment, anger and fatigue, it is easy to say things that won't seem so intelligent the next morning.

Third, get in the habit of saying you aren't sure what happened or why you lost. Say you need time to think about the game. And then do that. Think about it. Go back over every play, everything you can remember—not forever, not even for a week, but certainly on your way off the court, in the locker room, on the bus home, and that night in bed. That ought to be enough.

Then, there should be some jokes in the morning that will be funny again, and it will be time to be getting ready to win the next one, to encourage others and to go on living. It's only after the game you should think about it. Think so much that there isn't time to laugh or cry.

If you don't think about it when it is fresh in your mind, it is difficult to believe that you really want to be a good player.

Good players think. Especially after a loss. That's



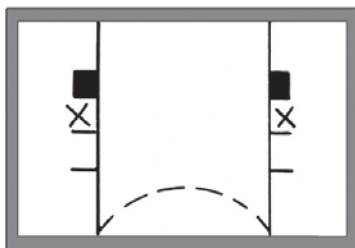
how they learn not to lose very often. 🐦

LOW POST PLAY

Whole books could be written about playing and scoring inside, but the basics are simple, though often ignored.

1. Set up in a good position.
2. Give the guard (or passer) a good target with your hand.
3. When you get the ball, take what the defense gives you... dynamically.

LOW POST SCORING POSITION



Stand between the box and the first mark on the lane.

1. Position. Stand on the “up” side of the box. This allows you to receive a pass and turn to score on the baseline side as well as to the middle. If you position yourself too close to the baseline, it is easy to get behind the backboard, and then the backboard helps the defender.
2. Target. Many players get free down low, but they fail to ask aggressively for the ball and show the passer where they want it. Be sure you set up and are strong. Hold the defender out with a firm forearm and make it clear where you want the pass to be thrown with your other hand (the hand farthest from the defender).
3. Take what comes. Don’t fight the defender; use him. If he forces you to the baseline, take the baseline aggressively with a quick drop step and (at the most) one protected dribble, so that you get to the basket with your feet in position to go up strong. If you get the ball with the defender on the baseline side, one step into the middle for the shot is all you need. Or take a quick drop step to the middle, use one protected dribble, and then gather yourself on two feet and go up strong.

Whatever you do, do it immediately and with power.

The low post is no place for sneak shots or for cute moves. Power is the key 🐦, even if you are not

a strong player. Any player can make a powerful move inside because the defense is not permitted to grab your arm. It is not a matter of how strong you are, but how aggressive and strong the move is.

Don’t fool yourself into thinking that trick shots and fadeaways, even if you are good at them, have any place in a low post man’s game. 🐦

4. One more tip. If you get the ball and the defender is directly behind you, or if you aren’t sure exactly where he is, look immediately to your strong side. With the ball held firmly at your chin, find out how he is playing you. If you can step anywhere to that strong side, do it and get the body momentum you need to go strong to the basket. As you go, keep your non-shooting elbow high (above your head) and “roll” it toward the defender as you shoot. If you cannot go to that strong side, you ought to be able to “drop” the other foot (if you are right-handed, drop your right foot) and get by your man on that side. A defender should not be able to contain both a strong side move and a drop step to the weak side. Be sure you go up strong with any shot you take in the low post area. (See “Look ‘Em in the Eye First.”)

“Don’t fool yourself into thinking that trick shots and fadeaways, even if you are good at them, have any place in a low post man’s game.”

LUNGING


Have you ever noticed that good boxers don’t miss very often with wild swings while inexperienced boxers are constantly missing with big swings that look like they could knock out an elephant if they connected? It doesn’t pay in boxing to swing wildly or lunge forward and get off balance. A boxer is too vulnerable when he is badly off balance.

And so are basketball players. Good ones don’t lunge and get out of position very often. It is the mediocre player

who tries to show the coach he is hustling by making flamboyant attempts to steal or block shots when obviously it is too late. How many times per game do you dart out to steal a perimeter pass and go by your man after he has received the ball? How many times do you run at a shooter and go sailing by him after failing to touch his shot?

These lunging errors should happen only a few times per season, not a few times per game. The problem is, basketball players don't learn this as quickly as boxers. When a basketball player lunges out of position, it only results in a five-on-four situation, and the eventual shot may seem to be someone else's fault. Too bad basketball players can't get a solid rap to the chin when this happens. If they could, they would learn faster.

For every time you lunge and miss, you should have about five or six steals. That's an adequate ratio, but it's strange. The great ball hawks don't have many "dart-on-bys" while the non-stealers are usually the lunging leaders. Taking yourself out of a play with a lunge more than once per game is too often, and even "once" assumes that you are getting five or six steals.

Learn to play good, solid defense without lunging. Get the other team aware that you are always a factor , always someone who may touch a ball or get his body in the way.