

IV.

BASKETBALL:

Playing the Game the Way It's Supposed to be Played.

I hear comments from coaches at all levels from High School to the Pros about how difficult it is to get players to play the game the way it is supposed to be played. Well.. the question then becomes; just how is basketball supposed to be played? First it might help if we look at a little bit of the history of the game.

When you consider that James Naismith invented basketball as a game of fitness and recreation for football players that could be played in the gym during the long winter months of the off-season, I think he would be utterly amazed at how the game has grown in popularity over the past 100 plus years.

Basketball long ago established an identity of its own and is not only popular in America but has gained widespread popularity all over the world. Of course, in basketball crazy Indiana, basketball is just not a game but a way of life.

I think some comments made by fellow Hoosier and legendary Coach John Wooden give us some incite into what it means to play the game the way it is supposed to be played. Coach Wooden has been quoted as saying that the purest form of basketball played today is being played by the women's teams. His explanation is that in his opinion, most women are less athletic, don't run as fast or jump as high as their male counterparts, so therefore they rely less on athleticism and more on the execution of fundamental basketball skills. I think the key words here are fundamental basketball skills.

Throughout the history of International Basketball competition, the USA has pretty much dominated. But in more recent times, it appears the rest of the world is catching up. Case in point is the World University games played here in Indy in 200?. It was rather embarrassing to see International teams beating us at our own game in our own country. I think it was the consensus among USA Basketball experts, that if we are to reestablish our basketball reputation, we had better get back to the basics.

There is no doubt that today's players possess more athletic skills than past generations of players. Today's players are bigger faster stronger, but somewhere along the way, for whatever reason, it has become more fashionable to play with spectacular style than with fundamental substance (style over substance). I think that most people will agree that the most spectacular player ever has been Michael Jordan. But he will be the first to tell you; he first mastered the fundamental skills to go along with his athleticism, before he became the spectacular player we all know. In my opinion, many young players today make the mistake of trying to emulate spectacular play, before they master the fundamental basketball skills.

Perimeter shooting skills statistically continue to deteriorate because in my opinion many young players during their developmental years are lowering the basketball goals on their driveways so they can slam dunk, or they spend time going one on one take your defender to the basket (what I call the macho mentality) on their school yard courts. Instead of attending camps during the summer to work on fundamental skills, many players spend more time traveling around the country playing tournaments or league games. It's important for players to play a lot of basketball in the off season but if all they do is run up and down the floor and try to out talent one another and don't spent some time working on fundamental skills, a lot of bad habits may developed that will have to

be corrected when they get back to their school teams where they will be expected to play with more of a purpose. This is the challenge many coaches find him or her self confronted with today.

During my coaching career at Ben Davis, the way we defined playing the game the way it is supposed to be played for our players was very simple. We wanted them to perform fundamentally spectacular within the team concept. We expected them to play hard, play smart and play together. I think most coaches would agree with this definition. During my 13 years as Head Coach at Ben Davis we were truly blessed with outstanding athletes who were coachable enough to fulfill these expectations of play. As a result these players have a lifetime of Championship memories.

There are many different styles of basketball play; half court, full court, up tempo, man to man defense, zone defense, full court defense etc, but the fundamental skills of the game have always remained the same. I believe all basketball fundamental skills a player needs to learn, so he/she can play the game the way it's is supposed to be played and reach his/her full potential as a player, can be placed in one of five categories.

1. Shooting/offense skills
2. Defensive skills
3. Passing skills
4. Dribbling skills
5. Rebounding skills

Over the next few weeks before the ESPN High School game of the week, we will be discussing each of these five basic fundamental skills.

Steve Witty