

COACHING THE GAME

(GAME TIME)

GOAL: To analyse the game being played, make the correct decisions and implement the appropriate strategies to enhance the teams' performance.

YOUR GAME PLAN

As a coach, you would have devised a **game** plan and you would have implemented it during practice and the **team** meeting before the game. In some games it will go according to the **plan** with out any hiccups - in other games the game plan will seem like some **kind** of fictional novel that is nothing more than a B-grade horror movie. What I am trying to say, is that no matter how great your game plan is, **you** will need to be prepared to make some minor adjustments during the game **as** different situations arise. You must remember that the opposing coach **believes** they have a better game plan than you do (in some games this will **unfortunately** be true). Are you prepared for the 'what ifs' during **a** game?

GAME STRATEGIES DURING A GAME (WHAT IFS)

During a game, situations will arise that are **outside** of your game plan. When you were scouting the opposition you **would** have put emphasis on a number of points that you thought were more **important** than other points. For example you may have said that a **particular** player for the opposition was a poor shooter and who ever was guarding **him** was to sag off and clog up the middle. He then comes out and hits his **first** 4 shots. Does this change the way you play him or do you stick to your **game** plan?

Some 'what if' situations that occur regularly:-

What if.....

1. One of your main players gets in foul trouble?
2. Your team is not executing the game plan?
3. A particular strategy is not working? (e.g. doubling the post player).

4. You get out to an unexpected lead or the opposition gets out to an unexpected lead?
5. They are scoring against your man to man or zone easily?
6. The oppositions' main scorer is unstoppable?

The list could go on and on. The best thing to do is look at the opposition you are playing and decide what are the obvious 'what ifs' that could arise while playing that particular team. Look at what an opposing teams' strengths are or what individuals could hurt you and decide what you will do if either of these start to hurt you. For example you may be a pressing team playing against a quality shooting team. You decide to go ahead and press to see if you can force a number of bad shots. However, what do you do if they hit their shots early and build an early lead?

SUBSTITUTIONS

Substituting can be a critical part of the game. Players must know their roles. Players on the bench should know whom they normally replace and an approximate idea when they are likely to enter the game. Bench players should be watching the players they are likely to be guarding.

Prepare your players for situation substituting in the closing minutes of a game, using your top defensive player when the other team has the ball and putting in your best shooters, free-throw shooters when you have the ball.

Coaches should develop a substitution pattern whenever possible. It helps the starters know when they will be getting a break and it helps your bench players know when to get mentally and physically ready to enter the game. There are two major advantages to using your bench:

1. You keep your starters fresh by playing them less minutes.
2. You can develop the players on the bench by giving them more minutes in the game in case you are beset with foul trouble or injuries.

Some coaches like to get all their possible subs into the game in the first half to give them a feel for the game and so they are not going into the game cold in critical situations in the second half. Plan ahead and be prepared for whatever might possibly occur.

TIME OUTS

How time outs are used is going to become a personal preference for all coaches. Many coaches have different theories on how to use their time outs. The following are some situations to call time outs.

1. Should you use time outs to rest players?
2. Should you save your time outs for later?
3. Should you call a time out to put in a special play?
4. Should you call a time out early to stop a team's momentum?
5. When should you call a time out in the closing minutes of a tight game?
6. Should you call a time out to freeze a free throw shooter late in a game?
7. Should you call a time out to lift player effort levels or substitute?
8. Your team has a good lead and the opposition is starting to eat into it, do you call a time out or let your players play through it?
9. Do you call a time out late in a game on offence and give the opposing coach a chance to change their defence?

Whatever strategy you decide to use the important thing to remember is how you run your time outs.

Spend 20% of your time on the problem and 80% of your time on the solution.

Always come into your time out with a purpose. Don't come in angry and talk only about the problems. You must offer your team practical solutions that they can implement immediately. You must also remember the K.I.S.S. principle (keep it simple stupid). Give your players no more than three things to think about. Anymore than this and your players will most likely forget what you said or an important point that you made.

Make sure you have everybody's attention, even those who are sitting on the bench. Tell your assistant coach (if you have one) to make sure the bench are listening. Ask questions during the time out to make sure the players understand what you want. If you are going to diagram a play make sure it is clear and concise or the players will not understand. Master the ability to keep your voice calm late in a game when diagramming a play (of course this is not always easy).

Stay alert to any changes an opposing team makes during a time out. Use an assistant or manager to watch the opposing teams huddle. Have they made a sub? From your scouting report do they change up their defence after a time out or is there a particular offence they run? These are little things that may help you in a game. You may remember from an earlier time out in the game that they made a defensive or offensive change.

This is a situation you may like to remember.....

It is late in the game and the scores are close. You could be up by 1 or 2 points or down by 1 or 2 points. The opposition has the ball. If you are up, then you may want to ask the bench for a time out so that if the opposition score you can diagram a play. If you are down and there are more than 24 seconds left you may want to have a time out in case they score. If you don't have any time outs, you may want to use a sub to relay a play you want to run.

It's not what you tell them – it's what they hear.

Red Auerbach

USING ROLE PLAYERS

As a coach you must know exactly what each bench player can offer you. What do they bring to the table game after game? Does one player play exceptional defence, is another a good shooter, is another calm under pressure in tight games, does somebody bring energy onto the floor when the team is flat or is another an outstanding rebounder? Different situations will arise during a match where a particular bench player may give you the advantage you need. So, know your players, what they can give you and use them.

In the lead up to a match you may foresee a particular situation arise that will require a certain player. Tell that player that you may use them and to be ready if that situation arises. It is amazing how that player then comes out full of confidence and rewards you for having faith in them.

FOUL TROUBLE

Some players can play with fouls and other players cannot. You will need to know your personnel as to who can and who can't. If a player picks up two early fouls in a game do you sub him out, change his defensive assignment or even change the defence to keep that player in? It will depend on what you decide as a coach, Is that player important enough that you need him to stay on the floor? Will changing the defence affect your game plan?

However if a player picks up his third foul in the 1st quarter you will probably have to sub them out. If they then pick up their 4th in the 2nd quarter you will probably have to sub them out. If you only get 5 fouls, and a player picks up his 3rd foul in the second quarter, you may not start him in the 2nd half so he does not pick up his 4th early in the second half.

On the flip side, if an opposing team's main player picks up early fouls, you may have a strategy to attack them to try and draw another foul before the opposing coach can get them out of the game.

The other situation that can arise is the opposition. Your team needs to stay aggressive and attack the basket, put their defence under pressure. This must come out of your offensive system and not individual 1 on 1 play with everybody standing around watching.

ESTABLISHING THE TEMPO OF A GAME

Your game plan and your team's system will have a lot to do with establishing the tempo of the game if all goes according to plan. Every team has a tempo that suits their style of play. Some teams love the up beat, open court style. Another team might like to grind out the game by being methodical in offence and then playing bruising defence, making the game a slow physical affair. Another team may like to press and force the game into a fast paced track meet. Whatever style you play then you will want the game at this tempo.

However, sometimes the tempo of the game will be suiting the opposition more than your team, even if it is the tempo that normally suits your team. If this is the case, can you change the tempo of the game to halt the opposition's run? The most important thing to do to change the tempo is to take the opposition out of its comfort zone. You would have come up with some theories in your scouting of things the opposition did not like.

Sometimes however, you may have to try something different. A big point when changing the tempo is the possession game. Your team must be disciplined enough to take care of the ball on offence and get the ball back on defence.

Often the best way to control the tempo of the game is to execute your team's system and what they know and believe in. If your team is trying to match the opposition and it is not what you usually do then you must call a time out and stress to your team **your system**.

WHEN YOU ARE LEADING

When you hold a lead and the opposition is now starting to chip away at it, there are several things you need to identify.

1. What did you do to establish the lead?
2. What have the opposition done to turn the game?
3. What has your team stopped doing that established the lead?
4. What do we have to do to re-establish control of the game?

It can be difficult to play with a lead because the mind set of your players changes. They relax and are not as purposeful in their play. The players become careless in their play and don't value possession as much. The players stop executing the fundamentals of the game. It is good to have a favourite play to go to. This can help settle the players down. You must also stress to the players to execute the fundamentals of your system. Also reinforce the need to stay positive and aggressive in their play.

WHEN YOU ARE TRAILING

As with when you are leading, there are several things to consider:-

1. How have the opposition established the lead?
2. What are they doing well?
3. What are we not doing well?
4. What do we have to do to turn the game around?
5. Are we playing to our system?

The first thing you need to establish is if the players are executing your system. Is the opposition defending a certain offence well? Is their offence

handling your defence with ease? If you are having trouble scoring you may need to employ your counters. No matter what you employ, you have to identify what areas of your offence are breaking down. If your defence is not holding up, you must first identify where your defence is breaking down. Is your team rotating well? Is there help on the screens? Are you containing the dribble penetration? Are the opposition reversing the ball too easily? You may have a pressing defence that you want to employ.

Although at times you have to gamble to change the tempo of the game, the majority of the time you don't. Often you just need to get back to your system, play high percentage basketball with good offensive execution and solid miserly defence to fight your way back into the game. One area you must stress to your players is the importance of the possession game. Your team must look after the ball on offence and rebound at both ends of the floor, particularly the defensive end. The changes you make in this situation are always going to be a personal preference based on your observation and understanding of the game.

We all want to win on the scoreboard. Sometimes however, your team will do everything you have asked of them including perfect execution of the team's system and not win the game on the scoreboard. The opposition will just be more competent on the day. Whilst the scoreboard suggests that you have lost, you have won in other areas that are equally important.

Acknowledge this to yourself and the team.

SPECIAL STRATEGIES

- A. Clock Management: Every player should know the time and score at any point during a game. If a shot clock is used then your players should be aware of how much time is remaining on it. Use the two clocks at training whenever possible and demand that your players learn to be aware of it. You do not want your players not knowing the time late in the game or in a crucial situation.
- B. Saving the Ball: A play that comes up often in every game is saving the ball from going out of bounds. You should spend some time going over what your team should do in this situation. You may have a specific strategy, for example a specific area of the court to throw the ball or have players move and make themselves available.

- C. Rebounding: Sometimes a rebound cannot be grabbed, you can talk about hitting the ball to a designated area (e.g. foul line area). Little things win ball games and ball possession is the key commodity.
- D. Fouling to Stop the Clock: Establish rule and principles on when to foul and who to foul in a given situation. During your scouting you should have established who are the opposing team's poor free throw shooters. Do you have a verbal or nonverbal signal to alert your players to foul?
- E. Down two points, 10 to 15 seconds on the clock. Do you go for the win or drive the ball to the basket and penetrate? The defence does not want to foul, so you may get a lay-up or even a three-point play. Do you score quickly giving your opposition 5 seconds and a chance to win or do you take the last shot so your opponent does not have a chance to win.
- F. What do you do with the shot clock running down and the set play has broken down? Who has the ball? Do you signal a play or do you have an automatic play to go to in this situation?
- G. With 0 to 24 seconds remaining in the game and up by 1, 2 or 3 points, don't trap. Your players must keep their hands out and not foul. Lock in and play high percentage defence. If down then look to trap and force a turnover.
- H. On the last shot in a quarter the players must know when to start the play. You don't want to give the opposition a chance for another shot, but we want to give ourselves a chance to get the offensive rebound. When you start will depend on the play you are running.
- I. Sideline out of bounds, 5 to 10 seconds left, end of game, down by 1, 2 or 3 points. Do you: a) Pressure the pass or lay off & play in the middle for a steal? b) Pressure the inbounder for 3 seconds then step back for the steal? c) Face guard? d) Invert and switch every screen or cross? e) Look for a steal? f) Foul immediately? g) Channel the pass to a specific area and trap?
- J. End of a quarter, 15 to 24 seconds left, you are shooting a free throw. You feel the opposition will hold the ball for the last shot. Do you press or trap trying to force a turn over? Do you fall back and defend the last shot?
- K. 2 for 1: Sometimes at the end of the quarter you receive the ball with approximately 38 to 42 seconds. Do you have a quick play to run so you can get the last shot of the quarter after the opposition has their last shot? If you do this you must practice this situation so the players know exactly what to do.
- L. Have a special verbal or nonverbal signal to alert the players the shot clock is running down.

M. You have no time outs, down by 1, 2 or 3 points. There are 5 seconds to play. You have the ball at the sideline in the backcourt. Does your team know what to do? Have you practiced these situations? What about if you have the ball in the frontcourt or under your basket?

