

Playing basketball in flow

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For Active.com

April 13, 2007

Florida's unselfish play in the NCAA tournament proved that basketball isn't just about athleticism, it's a game that depends on court communication and that abstract quality known as flow. When teams and individual players execute their tasks in a smooth, continuous and quick manner, they are playing with flow -- and putting themselves in a great position to win. But how do you incorporate flow into your team's game?

Phase transition

During a game, changes in ball possession are frequent and sudden. At one moment, a team is on offense, the next on defense. Each change from one phase of play to the next is called phase transition.

If teams are playing with a high degree of flow, they will begin organized team play the moment they anticipate phase transition. (For example, if a player gets a defensive rebound they should begin playing team offense the moment they anticipate the defensive rebound, not after the rebound has occurred.) The same is true of the players on defense. Players who begin organized team play the moment they anticipate phase transition will have a significant advantage over players who don't play with a high degree of flow.

Set transition

Well-organized teams have a formation or set for each part of the court (the court grid). Such teams, for example, will use a full-court set to fast break after a defensive rebound. When the fast break ends without a shot, the players must begin play in their frontcourt set. The time interval between the end of play in the full-court set and the start of play in the front court set should be as short as possible.

Unfortunately, over the years I have seen too many games in which both teams did not begin organized team play until the point guard dribbled the ball from the back court into the front court. Whenever the point guard got a rebound or received a pass from the rebounder, he/she began to walk the ball up the court, while teammates and opponents ran up the court to occupy positions in their respective front and back court offensive and defensive sets. Such teams get demolished by teams that play with flow.

The key to both of these techniques is about anticipating what will happen next. Be prepared for the next transition and you'll often find, just as Florida did, your opponent trailing behind you each step of the way.

It is the responsibility of the coach to develop and teach a system of play which will help players to be organized on offense.