



Building Confidence

One of the stories I want to share from the Canada Games is the one involving Hannah Jardine. I first met Hannah two years ago when she attended her first CP session in Moncton, New Brunswick. It was one of her first times away from home on her own. She was rather homesick and her confidence was waning. Not uncommon for a 12 year old. I remember spending a lot of time with her in 1 on 0 situations building her confidence through working on her shot form. I have always believed that the best way to build confidence is through individual skill work. It gets the player to understand that he/she can change through practice. The player begins to believe in him/herself. I know Hannah has spent a lot of time with her dad working on her skills. This helped her confidence grow. There was an interesting study done at St. FX University, on the confidence of young girls and their involvement in sport. One of the findings was that girls who had someone spend time with them on learning the proper fundamentals of throwing a ball, were more confident and less likely to drop out of sports at a later age. My interpretation was that these girls learned valuable lessons on;

1. How to deal with adversity.
2. By working at something I can improve.
3. If someone works with me I can improve quicker.

Fast forward to this summer's Canada Games. Hannah was the youngest player in the basketball competition at 14 years old. For most players this age they might be a first time player at the U15 level. Since Hannah comes from a smaller province, Newfoundland, where taller players are not as common, she was asked to play for the U17 team, in order to bolster their lineup. I love how Hannah kept the game very simple:

- She runs the floor from circle to circle every time. Her goal is to beat her check down the floor on offense and defense.
- She goes after every rebound on offense and defense. She is very good at jumping laterally to get the ball at its highest point. Once rebounding the ball she knows how to make an effective, quick, outlet pass to teammates who are better dribblers than she is.
- She only takes the shots she knows she can make. This is mostly right hand lay ups or turning right for a close in jump shot. She does not force bad shots and quickly passes the ball to someone who has a better shot if she is off balance or double teamed.
- She keeps her emotions under control at all times. No one knows what is going on inside because she shows the same emotion. This allows her to give energy to her teammates.
- She is a very good help defender. She lets her teammates know she is there, and protects the basket without fouling. She changes opponent shots.
- Because she plays close the basket she often gets fouled. For this reason she has worked on her foul shooting.

When I think of Hannah I cannot help but reflect on the clinic I attended by Ettore Messina. He asked the question of the coaches in attendance;

“How do we develop the young big player? Very often this player is not as skilled as his/her shorter faster teammates, who tend to dominate at younger ages. To feel good about themselves they have to contribute something positive to the team. It takes longer for the young big player to develop. Eventually with patience, he/she will dominate the game. Many coaches will not put the young big player on the court because he/she may hurt the team's performance. For this

reason, it is crucial that we find ways to assist the young big player in developing certain key skills. This growth in confidence to play sends a strong signal to his/her teammates and coach who will also have confidence in his/her abilities.”

The coaches of the Newfoundland team, Frank Foo, Doreen Pond and Randy White should be commended for doing this with Hannah.

One of the areas that I have been observing all summer is shooting percentages and shot selection. One of our points of emphasis has always been the development of the multi-skilled athlete. Part of being multi-skilled is the idea of been able to finish in more than one way. Some call this creative finishes. There is some confusion between the idea of multi-skilled, creative shot s and shot selection in competitive situations.

At the Train to Compete stage of development a competitive game is not the time to experiment with a creative shot for the first time. The first time you take that shot should be on your own in a gym or on the play ground. Through repetition the player develops confidence to use that shot. Next the player experiments with the shot in competitive situations in practice or small sided games, like 1 on 1, 2 on 2, or 3 on 3. On the play ground you stayed on the court only if your team won. You learned what shots worked best. You did not make use of a shot until you mastered it. In recreational games such as summer leagues it is ok to try out these shots for the first time. Once you have shown your coach and teammates that you can make the shot in practice you then get to take that shot in the competitive game. Players who play numerous games often lose the importance of each possession. “We have another two games today, why is the coach so upset about this shot?” The problem with these players is that they often do not have the individual or team practice time to work on developing their skills. Everything is trying to be learned in the course of the game. Very often the coach and teammates lose confidence in the player for trying out these new skills in the game. This often results in the loss of playing time.

One of the things I do at games is shot charts. I use the label NP (non practiced shot) This is a shot that you know the player has never taken in a practice situation. It may be because of:

- The speed at which the player is shooting.
- The angle of the shot, particularly lay ups,.
- The degree of difficulty, how many pump fakes, scoops and spins.
- The balance of the player.
- How contested by the defense is the shot.

This is one of the main reasons for a low shooting percentage, the number of high degree of difficulty shots we continue to take.

If you only have one shot you are easy to scout. This is true, but you are also a very effective scorer. This summer I had the opportunity to talk to one of the assistant coaches at the University of Oregon. Paul Westhead , the new University of Oregon coach, runs a shooting drill in practice called ‘go to’ shooting. The players spend five minutes working on their “go to” shot. This is the shot they would take to win the championship if there was only one shot left in the game. When first putting in the drill the players would be practicing five different shots. He had to instruct them that they only had one ‘go to” shot. It had to be done at the same speed and intensity that would occur in the game. Once you can make it regularly, you may have the one counter.

Hannah Jardine was the living example of this simplified approach to the game. She only played to her strengths and avoided her weaknesses. Since she was a weak dribbler she avoided this skill if others around her were better at dribbling. This allowed her to maintain her confidence at all times in the game. She has plenty of time, as she is only 14 years old, to continue to add things to her game. By keeping this simple approach to the game here were her stats for her last game of the tournament:

- 40 minutes of playing time
- 32 points - 8/14 FG - 57%, 16 /22 FT- 73%
- 20 rebound - 8 offensive 12 defensive
- 3 steals
- 2 assists
- 2 Turnovers
- 2 blocks
- Numerous – changed shots by the opposition (This is not an official stat, but one that reflects a big players impact on the game)
- 2 fouls

This might have been the most impressive stat line for any player male or female for the entire tournament. Way to go Hannah! Keep the game simple by playing to your strengths. Use your time in practice to polish your strengths and continue to add new strengths that can be applied to your game.