

Mike MacKay - Manager of Coach Education and Development Counting



In his book a **Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance**, Atul Gawande talks about five actions one can do to become a positive deviant. In other words what can we do to make a positive difference for others or society. The one that caught my attention was the idea of counting. He suggests that we take a scientific approach to the things around us. The only requirement is that what you count should be interesting to you. If you count something interesting you will learn something interesting. This was a light bulb moment for me as it is something I have always done without being told.

Here are some of the things I have counted over the years and what interesting things I have learned:

- 1. What time players showed up to practice** – when I first took over coaching the high school football team my biggest concern was the culture of the team. Players showed up late and did not have a sense of team. I felt we needed to find the players who would commit to getting better and wanted to practice. All I did was sit at the locker room door and record when a player arrived in the locker room and when he went out to practice. The results were posted. The players made note of how important this was to me as a coach. I also discovered that the players who were the true leaders were the ones getting out practicing on time. The ones who were constantly late were usually the lures, as Bill Parcells calls them. The ones who show flashes of brilliance and hook you. By the way, I made sure to reward those players who showed up on time.
- 2. How many shots attempts passes dribbles etc players took in pre practice.** – Again I thought players were wasting their time and not working on self improvement. I learned that what I thought was true. The players learned how much better they could become if they used their time wisely.
- 3. How many shots we took / made in practice** – When I had a team that was not shooting well I had my manager count how many shots we were taking / making in practice. I learned that we did not take enough quality shots to improve our shooting in games. It forced me to change the way I practiced. Less time on sets, more time on the skills that were letting us down within our sets.
- 4. The length of time of the shot release** – I knew players need to get their shot off quickly vs. good defense. So I timed the shot from the moment it touched the hand until release. It was amazing to find out how much better players could become if you told them what their time was. The biggest improvement was in the preparation to catch the ball. If a player was loaded their shot release was quicker. The top male players had longer release times than the top females. The reason they jumped higher.
- 5. The number of bad passes to good passes** – I had a manager chart the number of good and bad passes made in scrimmage situation in practice. She then made a graph that we displayed at practice. The players made it a goal to get the positive line above the negative line. We learned that when we made it a point of emphasis we could make better passes.
- 6. The opponent shot chart and rebound chart in games** – of all the stats I kept in games these two pieces of information had the most impact on the outcome of the

game. By showing a visual of where and who was scoring it always allowed us to do a better job defensively. It was amazing how with all of the eyes on the bench sometimes we failed to see that one player was doing all of the rebounding or every score was coming from the same spot.

7. **The number of times we got to the third side of the floor** – One year I had my assistant count on each possession how many times we changed sides of the floor with the ball. What we discovered was that when we got to the third side our offensive efficiency improved dramatically.
8. **The number of dribbles** – counting the number of dribbles is one of the best ways to increase the efficiency and speed of players.
9. **The amount of time before a player's eyes look at the basket.** – By sitting or standing on the end line you have a great opportunity to watch eyes. I have found that many teams never look at the basket until the final shot attempt. This is usually because the players are more concerned with running the offense and making the next pass in a specific pattern. What I do now is make a note on the 24 second shot clock when specific events occur.
 - When transition is initiated
 - When the ball crosses half
 - When the first player has the ball and could have attacked the basket – with Phoenix in one game this was around 3 seconds
 - When the shot attempt was taken – when having discussion about the shot clock for young players I went to an atom girls (11 years) tournament and charted the possessions for three games. The longest possession for three games was 19 seconds. Why are we worrying about a shot clock?
10. **How long before 10 eyes find the ball on defense** – I have discovered by counting this that great teams get all 5 sets of eyes looking at the ball very quickly. Poor teams usually have some players who never get turned and in a stance.
11. **The type of passes Steve Nash took** – When Steve came to play in Toronto one time I recorded the type and number of passes he took. He only took two chest passes, both in transition. Everything else was usually a light touch one handed pass. Only twice did he stop pivot and pass. He only picked up his dribble when he was ready.
12. **How many box outs per possession** – when helping with our NEDA programs I often count the number of box outs per possession. Our definition of a box out is making contact with the friendly forearm. There is rarely a drill where Christine Stapleton does not have the coaches' count something.
13. **How many rep in a certain amount of time** – this is a great way to increase the intensity of a drill.
14. **The winners of games/ drills** – I saw Jay Triano do this at a national team try out. It was amazing to see which players consistently showed up on the winning and losing team.
15. **How long of a delay in warm up from activity to the start of the game** – It amazes me how long this can be. When the long song and dance occurs it can be up to 10 minutes. That is why I like the FIBA warm up. It is always 1 ½ from last activity until tip off.