

Mike MacKay - Manager of Coach Education and Development



Pre-game /Post game

At the recent Junior World Championships in Auckland, New Zealand, I was fortunate enough to watch 16 different teams from 16 different countries. I always watch for similarities and differences between the teams. I also look for skills and concepts that we can use within our development system. What teams do pre-game and post game is crucial to their success during the game.

Warm up

I was pleased to see that every country made use of fundamental movement skills in their warm up. Even the USA had a full regimen of form running, balance, coordination and dynamic stretching. In fact you could see the players improve over the two weeks. From the first exhibition scrimmage we played against the USA, to the final gold medal game there was a big difference in the quality of their warm up. One of the main reasons, a coach led the warm up that made the players pay attention to detail. At this age, if left up to the players, warm up usually becomes dunking lines and bad shots. Every team had a coach monitor warm up. Too often I find warm up is the time when coaches letdown their guard. I have heard coaches say; "I let the players figure out their own warm up. They let me know when they are ready." What players figure out is that the coach does not put much stock in warm up. They put the same amount of attention to the detail in warm up as the coach does. Attention to detail is magnified when you only have a short warm up and limited practice time. In youth programs where you may only have one practice a week, the 10-15 minute warm up is an excellent teaching time.

Coach Fabian Mackenzie, who was an assistant with our FISU games team, had the following observations about warm ups:

Before we played Japan they had a very structured dynamic warm up, but also did a few specific mental exercises during the 30 minutes before game time. After the game they also went to the crowd and bowed to their supporters and applauded them. Most teams thanked the fans in this manner.

During our game vs. Turkey, the power went out with 45 seconds left in the first half. The ref didn't let us go to half time and the players waited. A few of our players mulled around the bench and then went out to shoot in a typical North American warm up. 2 or 3 balls with 2 or 3 people shooting. Make it, keep shooting, miss it and battle for the ball so you can shoot; like a high school halftime show. The players from Turkey did a section of their warm up which was very spirited. They did a number of exercises and then did a unique part of their dynamic warm up that had them paired up in a line. Lots of energy and they continued to play that way when the lights came back on. We, on the other hand, weren't very energetic and we noted the difference.

I watched Russia do their warm up and it was very specific and climbed in energy as the horn approached. I noted this with a few other teams as well.

Watching the Serbian men play was a treat and a half. Partly because they were pretty to watch on the court, but mostly because of the passion displayed in the stands. At the time I noted how positive they were. Not many were calling for subs or going crazy at the refs. A few showed disappointment but not in an overly bad manner. (I asked someone who was with us that spoke Serbian to verify this for me). The songs and chants were amazing. The pride they displayed in their basketball team was incredible. The fans in the NBA are not this passionate. We went to the 9PM tip-off at 7:45 and it was filling up. By 8PM the lower bowl was pretty much full in a 20,000 seat arena. For the last six minutes or so of warm up everyone was on their feet singing along to Serbian songs and chanting. I filmed it because I couldn't believe it. I can only hope that someday our players could experience that.

I enjoyed watching the teams in the village and in the gyms. Wherever we went there were Ipods, but I didn't see a ton of them with other teams. I certainly didn't see the other teams wearing them in the pre-game shooting warm up like our team and the Americans. Heck the American men didn't eat with the rest of the village for the most part. They wanted the comforts of KFC and McDonald's in the food court in the mall. It was so clear that we had a different mentality. The Aussies even took it further off the court as they had a team ice bath after one game.

Post game recovery

For the first time recovery was actually visible by a number of teams. In the past I would have to sneak around in the back hallways to see what the teams were doing. This year teams actually did recovery activities on the court when time permitted. Teams did some light jogging and static stretching. I was very proud of Canadian boys as they bought completely into the concept of recovery from training camp right through to the final game. They were very good at static stretching, having a snack, rehydrating and icing. This did not happen by accident. We did not suggest it, we made them do it. It is like getting in a defensive stance. No players does it by suggest it, you must demand it and make it a habit. Eventually they saw the importance of doing it. Our FISU boys' team made use of ice baths for their legs after training sessions. You would see them putting their legs in plastic garbage containers that the trainer had filled with ice water. The key is if they continue to do it on their own when they go back to their home programs or are training on their own. In the past we saw our teams break down over the course of the two weeks. This year it was not so. Now, you never have the same amount of energy as when you started the tournament, but we were not visibly fatigued in comparison to the other teams. This has been major hurdle to overcome in male basketball. Too often the boys don't want to do it because it does not look cool. Younger players do not get to see the pro players doing recovery so they do not know it exists.

Debriefing

This is another area in which there was a vast improvement. Teams always took the time to meet and go over the game before coming out. Now granted teams like Croatia would go to the crowd and thank them first before going to the locker room, but no team allowed the parents and fans access to the team before the team met to debrief. This is a dangerous trend I see creeping into our youth basketball. As soon as the game is over the parents want access to their child. They want to be the first one to plant the seed of how the child played and to add their analysis on the game. Some parents are making use of text messages and cell phones. As soon as the game is over the parents are text messaging the child! The first one to debrief should be the players themselves. Players need to learn how to analyze their own play without the filters from others. The coach can encourage this by asking questions. The players are allowed to think for themselves on how they played. The coach can then add anything that may have been missed.