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Process vs. Outcome

In my recent visit to Manitoba I had some interesting discussions around the topic of process and outcome and how it relates to coaching and player development. It is easy to measure outcome. We can see who won the game, we can see who scored more points, had more assists etc. A dangerous trend has materialized in our sport, *consumer basketball* (I heard this term used in the Manitoba round table discussion I attended). A parent pays for their son or daughter to play in a basketball league. The parent sees the value in the game. This is where my dollar is being spent. Therefore the logical conclusion is that there should be more games. Many coaches have also submitted to this pressure and are playing too many games. We need to fight this trend and communicate that the true value is in the process of practice where the player's development occurs. A teacher in school does not get paid just to supervise tests. It is the work in the classroom between tests where the true measures of a teacher's ability are shown. Bev Smith our former national team coach and one of the all time greatest female players often said it best; "A game is only one assessment of where you are in your current development." Games are used as measuring sticks to guide future development during the development stages.



Does your process lead to a higher level outcome?

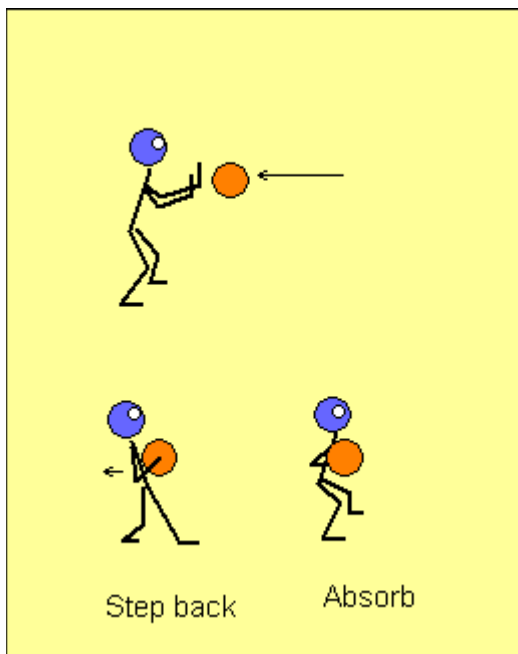
The other night we took the NEDA athletes bowling. I used a very conservative approach throwing a straight ball that almost always hit the head pin. One of the young apprentice coaches used a technique where he was working on spinning the ball into the pocket. Who had the better process? Who had the better outcome? At this particular point in our bowling careers I had the better outcome, but my process would not allow me to go much higher in the bowling world. His outcome was poor, but the process that he used, **if he continued to practice**, would allow him to rise to higher heights than I could ever dream. As a recreational bowler I do not need to change my process. It keeps me from injury and allows me to enjoy my one night of bowling. If I wished to move up to the PBA I would have to change. I have witnessed the same dilemma occurring in basket at all stages of development. The early maturing player who dominates by dribbling hard to the basket with his head down and physically intimidates the other players with his aggressiveness. If this player does not develop another process he will eventually fail if he moves up a level. It is our duty as coaches to help developmental players, who have aspirations of moving to a higher level, to work on a process that can be effective at that next level. I often shudder when I hear coaches say it is not my job to prepare them for the next level. I need them to be effective to win now. If this approach is applied across the entire basketball spectrum we are in trouble.

Some points to ponder:

1. **Balance** – one of the biggest requests I get when doing clinic for young players is to show fun games to teach the skills. I always caution coaches that they need to balance the games approach with the drills approach. By playing games alone you often do not get the children developing the proper details required in the skills. To become a good shooter, dribbler etc you need constant repetitions of little details done correctly.

2. **Demand** – I have always believed that children of all ages want discipline. By this I mean that they want to know the parameters under which things will operate. As coaches we must make certain demands from the athletes. Doing a skill in the correct way is a reasonable demand. So is the idea that in order to get better you need to practice.
3. **Corrections – coaches need to**
 - ❑ Observe the athletes
 - ❑ Make a mental comparison to a set standard of performance. What should an athlete at this age look like doing this skill?
 - ❑ Correct the performance of the athlete. The coach needs to develop many different techniques to help the athletes become aware of their actions and what they can do to change.
 - ❑ Give the players opportunities to test their performance.

I am going to use catching as an example of a skill where we have done a big disservice to many of our developing athletes. In working with a number of athletes over the past few weeks I have noticed a problem with what we consider the simple skill of catching. Last night working with a group of eleven year olds the light bulb went off for me.



Catching is a collision between your hands and the ball. With beginning players this can be a scary experience because it can hurt. In order to lessen the impact we need to learn to slow down the ball by absorbing it. Most young player's natural way is to step backwards. This is because they are using their whole body to lessen the impact. This process works, but it is not effective as you move to higher levels of play.

The correction we made was to start by having the players:

- ❑ Be in a ready position with hands up and knees flexed
- ❑ Absorb the ball by catching it with your fingers and bend at the elbows.
- ❑ Be quiet with your hands
- ❑ No step was allowed
- ❑ Start close together or use the wall where the player controls the action

Second progression

- ❑ Now the players took a step towards the ball as it was released.
- ❑ Still concentrate on the above leanings

Third progression

- ❑ Now the players had to hop to receive the ball while still absorbing the impact with the arms only.

We also did the same sort of progression with blocking and trapping. What was of big interest to me was when I immediately went to a 15 year old practice I could see the remnants of the same problem present. Just doing passing drills does not solve the problem if the coach does not address the process the athlete is using to achieve the outcome.

