

Renovations

One of my favorite shows to watch on HGTV is Holmes on Homes. The basic premise behind the show is the same every week. A home owner has a dream of building a new part, making an improvement or upgrading an already existing piece of their home. A contractor is hired to do the job. Shortly there after, the dream comes crashing down. The workmanship was either shoddy; the project ran over budget or after a short period of time problems started to appear. This is when Mike Holmes comes into the scene. His job is to do it right and make the dream come true. They then proceed to tear apart the part of the home needed to be repaired. Finally they show the care and dedication to detail that is required to do the job right. All of the workers take pride in going the extra mile to make sure it is a quality job. At some point in the show he has a rant. The message is always the same; he just says it in different ways. If you have a dream home in mind here are some things to consider when doing renovations:

- Start with the dream. Have a picture of what you want it to look like.
- You have to analyze the situation – look behind the walls under the tiles, you can't just look at the exterior to solve the problem.
- It starts with the foundation; you cannot build on top of something that will not support it.
- It takes time, hard work and dedication to the small details.
- If you don't know how to do it yourself find someone who does.
- Ask question

Build dreams

Of course by now you know I am going to relate this to coaching. This is the time of year for many athletes to renovate their game for the next season. It starts with a dream or the desire to become a better player. They need to have a vision of what they are capable of becoming in the future. This is why I always liked to take players to watch games or have them over to watch games on TV. Simple statements like; “You know if you worked at your shot you could be like... “

Analyze the Situation

Players are looking to build on their existing game or improve some details of what they already have. For this reason I get many coaches who ask me to send them an off-season workout for their athletes. I am very hesitant to do this for a number of reasons:

- What are the players involved in besides basketball: school. Provincial teams, camps, other sports, other activities? These need to be considered when planning a program.
- Individual vs. team approach – do they plan to work out on their own, do they have a training partner or are all 12 players going to train at the same time (in my experience this rarely works)?
- What injuries did they have during the season? Where are they in their rehab?
- What are the results of a fitness test? Has a kinetic chain assessment been done? This is testing basic movement pattern such as squats and lunges. Very often the same deficiency that were present when the athlete was 12 years old is still present when the athlete turns 18 if it has not been addressed. For example; the inability to get low in stance is because of hip, hamstring, or calf inflexibility.
- What equipment, space, time does the player have available?

- When or what is the athlete peaking for?
- What about the mental, social emotional side of the game? Has an assessment been done in these areas?

And most important of all, is the athlete motivated to work on his/her game. We are deceiving ourselves if we think that by handing out an elaborate off-season workout plan our players get better. All self improvement starts with self-awareness. The athlete has to be aware of what it is he/she is trying to improve. The next step is for the athlete to take responsibility for this improvement. They have to work the plan.

It is recommended that you begin with some form of self-assessment sheet. Let the athletes rate themselves on how well they are doing. Here is example for defensive fundamentals from Dave Malowski from Manitoba.

Rating Scale: 1 – Below Average Skill Level
 2 – Average Skill Level
 3 – Above Average Skill Level
 4 - Highest Level in the Province

DEFENSIVE FUNDAMENTALS

| | <i>Rating</i> | <i>Comments</i> |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. Stance / Footwork | _____ | |
| 2. Closeouts | _____ | |
| 3. Defending the Ball Handler | _____ | |
| 4. Defensive Rotation/Jump to Ball | _____ | |
| 5. Rebounding | | Contact _____ |
| | | Ball Pursuit _____ |
| 6. Transition Defense | _____ | |
| 7. Communication on Defense | _____ | |

It is best to meet with the players after to discuss their rating. Ask questions or look for specific examples to make the athlete dig deep. Remember we need to look under the walls and floors to see what is really going on. The next step is for the athletes to choose which areas they are going to maintain or develop. From this an action plan for workouts can be developed. The key is to get a “commitment to the commitment”. It is easy to say all of the wonderful things we are going to do to improve. The important step is keeping that commitment. Your job is to keep the athlete to his/her commitment.

It Starts With the Foundation

If you build something on top of a weak foundation eventually the structure will fail. What is true for a house holds true for a player. Giving a player a workout that involves jumping up and down with a weighted vest is asking for disaster if the player has poor jumping form (the knees bend in on landing). All you are doing is speeding up the time before the major injury. The same is true for basketball skills. If

the player has poor shot form and spends hours working on a poor shot this does not improve their ability to shoot in a game.

It Takes Time, Hard Work and Dedication to the Small Details

I have always used the idea with my players that it takes 21 days to change a habit. If the truth be known we are not changing a habit we are replacing one with another. This again emphasizes the need for awareness. In working with a player on improving shot form I will often ask the player what the detail is that they are focusing on. They should be able to describe it in detail. For example:

Player: "I want to maintain a low, loaded stance when I catch the ball so I can explode into my shot."

Coach: "I want you to rate your self after each shot on how well you did on staying low and loaded."

What does this do? To be a great athlete you need to take a skill to the unconscious compete stage. This means that you do not have to think about it. In order to improve we need to become conscious of our actions (Awareness). By constantly rating the action the player is now in the conscious competent stage of learning. Over time the player will drift back into the unconscious competent stage with out even knowing it, but the skill will have improved.

As coaches we need to be careful of evaluative comments when working on skill improvement. So often we use words like good and bad when working with athletes. For example: The athlete is working on shooting. After the shot the coach says; "That was bad." The athlete must now decipher what this means. What exactly was bad about the shot? More importantly can the athlete detect for him/her self what made it bad? If the athlete is having troubles with awareness it is better if the coach gives a description of what happened to the athlete. Let's return to the athlete shooting. After each shot the coach gives a simple cue; "low or high". Overtime the athlete will start to be able to feel the difference. Notice that you are not evaluating the shot.

If you don't know how to do it yourself find someone who does.

The off-season is a great time to have other people work with your athletes. A fresh face or hearing something said a different way is always good. This can really help with motivation. If there is an area you are weak at in bring in someone who can teach both you and your players. Showing that you are still learning is important for your players to see. It makes it easier for them to see why they must continue to improve.

Ask Questions – Coach like your coaching bobsled

Don Watt, with the Coaching Association of Canada, shared with me this story from when he went out to evaluate a bobsled coach. They decided to stand at the second turn of the run. It is physically impossible to find one spot, where you can see the whole run. When the bobsled went by all they did was turn their head as it sped by at over 100 km/hour. When they final caught up with the athlete after the race the coach used questions. "How did you set up for turn number one?" "How was your line when you exited turn two?" "Describe for me the start?" Can you imagine the coach trying to tell the athletes what to do? "You should have leaned more to the right when you were in turn two?" It is impossible to see what is happening even when you see the sled go by. I would argue that it is impossible for basketball coaches to see all that is happening on the basketball court. Even when watching an athlete shoot in a training session you need to spend a lot of time to watch the shot. You need to look at the shot from a variety of

angles. You then need to ask questions. This helps improve the athlete's awareness and your awareness of the athlete's awareness.

Good luck with your renovations!