

Mike MacKay's Summer Season '06 Debrief"

Similar to last year I have compiled my observations of our developmental athletes, coaches and competitions. My thoughts come from observing CP's / RTC's, Club Nationals, Jr training pods, various competition, the U15,U17 female Nationals in Bishops and the CP male and female head coaches meetings. I have also been able to debrief many of our coaches and administrators who took part in these events. Again, my intent is to encourage healthy discussion that will help us with improvements and innovations. Reflective learning is the best learning.

Mike Mackay – Manager Coach Education and Development

1. FIBA rules

What a difference a year makes! The calibre of play at Nationals in Quebec was awesome. I factor that attributed to this was the coaches who understood that FIBA was going to be played and prepared their teams accordingly. Instead of debating the likes and dislikes of the rules or the bounciness of the ball the coaches prepared their athletes to play. The excitement of the games and the skill that the players brought to the table was incredible. The number of blow outs was reduced. The reason I feel is that more and more teams have global players who can handle the ball. There are less turnovers that lead to easy lay ups. The evidence of CP work was very obvious. Especially in the skills on penetration and the movement of the players.

Strategies and tactics: All teams used concepts that were age appropriate and fit the FIBA game. There was a mixture of man, zone and various forms of pressure. Some areas that we need to continue to address are:

- Attack begins once the ball is secured – the use of long outlets and break out dribbles is key. Also having players sprint the floor to put immediate pressure on the defense. All players need these skills. It was great to see some of the “big” players grabbing rebounds and taking the ball the length of the floor because no one stopped them.
- Flow from attack to control – this is still an area of weakness. We have a tendency to still have to get the ball back to the guard and call a play. This can happen sometimes, but we do not do a good job of attacking the defense when it is still recovering to create easy shots. This is not a secondary break, but the ability to immediately go from your attack to the control offense.
- Attack pressure – The girls improved tremendously as the week went on in attacking the press as opposed to using a more methodical controlled press break. Speed and ability to throw over the top helped. Running the ball back before teams could set up. Both are needed, but if the control break dominates the defense will never take the press off and you will always face a short clock.

FIBA Pre-game warm up

All participants must be prepared ahead of time and understand the script. One person who is very often forgotten is the PA announcer. This is the person who is the link to the public and starts the show. In Quebec the script was very long. The information that was delivered can be divided up and presented at different times.

- A short welcome to the event
- Announce the teams – this was done different ways – a) all 12 players for each team b) alternate one player per team c) announce the first seven and then the five starters. My recommendation is to stay strictly with the FIBA procedure for nationals. This is all 12 players announced with no special designation of starters. If organizations want to change

(CIS, CCAA, High schools) that is there choice as long as it is done within the 6:00 – 3:00 time on the clock.

- Anthem – this takes a little over a minute. I think it is great added touch that could be done at every game. We need to have a visible flag present. Someone singing could be done for the special games.
- 3:00 minute warm up – this is the time when the script can continue. Acknowledgement of sponsors and members of the committees can happen.
- From a player perspective – most teams made use of some dynamic movement in their warm up. This was good to see. There needs to be more of the power yoga, twisting bending in different planes. The basketball warm ups were fine. Physiology during the last 3:00 minutes the players should be doing speed work. This allows the motor neurons to be firing at their peak efficiency. Some teams used this time to talk. This meant that the players went six minutes without moving.
- It next team should not come on the floor until the LOC has had time to clean the floor and benches. Teams were coming on the floor when others were still shaking hands. They should be held off the floor until the game commissioner checks to make sure everything is ready. At this time the 20:00 minutes would start on the clock. We may have to build some extra time into the length of a game.

Half Time – we made the decision to reduce the time to 10 minutes. This was to assist in getting the games in a 2 hour time slot. This worked, but if a game goes long due to fouls, overtime, etc it is still tight. Many FIBA tournaments run 2 hour 15 min time slots.

Minor officials – the role of the minor official is very important in FIBA. It is very important to have a commissionaire at the table to assist these people. This person will have to be paid. Once everyone goes FIBA it will be easier to find local officials who can fill this role. The meeting with the minor officials prior to competition is invaluable. A Canada Basketball representative needs to be present. We have to stress the professionalism of these crews. Wearing ball hats and shooting at half time is not acceptable. The crews should be debriefed and medal round assignments based on performance. Eventually we need levels of certification. My major concern moving forward to host major international competitions is the minor officials. Canada Basketball needs to have sets of paddles that can be used by table crews at our events. This would go to the host committee for the tournament.

Consistency in applying the rules – Last year a major part of my debrief was on this topic. People now understand that it is happening. It is not an issue. We do have to get clarification from FIBA on the procedure for the 5th foul. We still use it as a time out. Internationally this is not allowed.

2. Debriefing events

This is still a major part of the process. We need to continual looking to improve and innovate. Coaches, players and administrators could do online evaluations to assist in future decisions. I have included my suggestion from last year as I still think it applies. We have improved but more work is needed.

- a) Caretaker(s) of the game – this is a two person role. It should be one person appointed by Canada Basketball and one from the host. Their role is to oversee the event and make sure the overall goals of the event are maintained. A major role would be in monitoring behavior of the fans and

making sure proper steps are taken to educate the fans as to the nature of the event. They would also coordinate meetings between each of the various groups.

- b) Coach evaluator(s) – This would be a representative from CB and the province – they would debrief each coach during the competition
- c) Official evaluator(s) – This person(s) would be from CABO and would debrief the officials
- d) Commissionaire(s) – Sits at the scorers table and assists the minor officials and debrief the table crew after the game.
- e) Coaches – debrief the players

3. Talent identification vs. talent selection

At the female nationals it was nice to see that many provinces are recognizing the late maturing athlete. These provinces should be applauded. My sources at the male nationals tell me that we still have a problem with early maturing players dominating. This is still a matter of educating our coaches in the developmental stages.

4. Communication/ Registration

This is still a problem. The amount of paperwork that was not properly completed was unacceptable. We need to make sure that the National is done online as an event registration. Duplicated paperwork needs to be reduced. Is the medical release necessary if every province already has one? Picture ID's should be used.

5. Players Skills

First I would like to review the suggestions for last year.

1. Playing with our eyes up – there is improvement in this area, but when dribbling with a defender we still have very few players who can see team mates and help defenders. Emphases on drills that require players to scan the floor need to be used.
2. Ball handling at speed – There is an increase in the number of players who can perform this skill. At the U15 level the dominate hand still is overused and players tend to go diagonally across the floor. Few players can perform this skill with defense on them.
3. Shooting the open shot – there is a slight improvement, but many players are still not preparing for their shot. Since they are not ready to shoot they put it on the floor and end up dribbling into the defense.
4. Creating a shot late in a clock – vast improvement in this skill. Most teams had many players who were able to perform this skill.
5. Penetration skills – The majority of teams improved on their spacing. The use of the drift pass was prevalent. Too many players still pick up their dribble on a baseline drive. More pass passes to take advantage of the recovering defense.
6. Use of body – could see evidence of players using sealing. This was especially nice to see at the U15. The timing was often not there with the passer so the results were not always successful.
7. Ball screens – these are still run as plays. The majority of players do not know how to read coming off the screen. Players still tend to take two dribbles and pick the ball up. The movement by the screener is still poor. They do not create sprint to space. Also the other players often do no move to create relay passes. Our coaches need to become better at teaching this conceptually and not as a play.
8. Rhythm – This is still mostly accomplished through running plays. There was evidence in penetration of timing and spacing.

Skills to improve this upcoming year

1. Stance – too many players are playing too upright. This means that they cannot effectively move, especially laterally. This is a habit, but also a strength factor. Players must work to improve their leg and core strength. Players are not activating their core by locking the abs. It is noticed especially when players decelerate. When landing from jumping many players collapse at the waist. The same is true when moving in one direction the player must stop and accelerate in the other direction. The upper body sways over the leg.
2. Movement skills – a lot of the problems come from poor core strength. Players need to improve on their lateral core strength. Players cannot decelerate their bodies without swaying the upper body. Doing side planks would improve this area. Also reminding players to lock their core when doing movement work. The players need to become aware of what their body is doing. Video or a full length mirror can assist in this regards.
3. Floaters, runners, scoops and odd angle lay ups – I was impressed with the number of players who realized on their own that they needed to learn to shoot these shots. I suspect that their coaches don't always practice them. Many players shot them because they did not have their head up and could not see the help defender until it was too late. It is suggested that coaches stand at the rim and take away the good angle when players are performing lay ups. Also work on reading when to use the floater and when to pass.
4. Playing in small spaces – This is a combination of footwork and core strength. Players still have a tendency to stand upright and get skinny when pressured. Our inside players especially need to be able to stay on balance with good vision. Many ending up travelling because they could not get on balance. Too many long, slow first steps that are travels and going away from the basket. This long step is slow and allows the defense to recover. Players need to work on pivoting, but keeping the head up for vision. Passing out of the post is just as important as passing to the post.
5. Passing – Everyone I talk too has this as a point of emphasis. It is more than the type of pass. It is the crispness of the pass, passing away from the defense and the courage to throw the pass. Sometimes we worry too much about the turnover in the developmental stages. Players become fearful to try anything but the safe pass. Practice is the time to work on these skills. We need players who can throw long. We also need players who can pass back against the grain. In football we wanted to throw long early in a game to let the other team know that it was a possibility. If we never threw long the defense could keep creeping up to increase the pressure. This starts with vision and courage.
6. Attacking zones – This is still mostly handled with a strategy or play. Coaches need to improve the player's abilities to read the zone and different concepts that can be used such as dribble push and dribble pulls, sealing and screening, popping a post.
7. Boxing out – Many offensive rebounds especially on the weakside and over the head of the interior players. Players are not "escaping the paint" to create space. Many of us coaches are still using the same technique to teach rebounding that we did prior to the three point shot. It is the long rebound that seems to cause teams problems. The old technique of moving backward into an offensive player does not work in open space.

8. Decision making – I know that many coaches think they are developing this skill in players, but it is not materializing in enough players as yet. Players need to become more involved in the strategies of the game. I constantly hear coaching lamenting that there are no longer the smart players who understand the game. I then see the same coaches controlling every decision that is made on the floor in regards to the strategies that the team will apply. Coaches need to assist players in understanding the little nuisances of a strategy. Coaches also need to question and listen to the suggestions of the players. Those coaches who did empower their players with simple strategies and allowed the players to grow to own the strategies were very successful. The FIBA game happens too fast for one person to try and control it. Christine Stapleton had great success with our junior women using the simple concept of “who am you and how are you being guarded, who are your team mates and how are they being guarded”. This allowed the players to start to take more ownership for their decisions on the floor. More importantly these decisions had to be related to the context of the team. Players were responsible for knowing their own strengths, recognizing defense and understanding how the team can create the best advantage on both offense and defense.

9. Self-reliant athletes – We need to get to the point where players are starting to look after themselves when it comes to rest, recovery, nutrition and hydration. There should be a notable difference between the U15, U17. I can not say this happened. Many coaches when asked at the Nationals felt they were on the players about these sorts of things, but it was only used at the nationals. It has not become ingrained into our athletes.

5. Coaches skills

1. There is a major difference between coaching summer basketball and a school or club team.
 - The length of season – short and compact
 - The environmental conditions – usually hot and humid or cold due to air conditioning
 - Speed and physicality of game – when you place the top athletes together on one team this is bound to happen

Coaches wishing to coach with national and provincial team programs have to have a good grasp this concept. The coach must be willing to change in order to meet the demands of a shortened season. Failure to change will result in frustration for the coaching staff and players.

Since the season is shorter very often you do not have as much time to get to know one another. The relationship between players and coaches, and players and players will often not develop unless the coaching staff makes a concentrated effort on this part of the program. The importance of team building and role identification can not be emphasized enough. The players on these teams are usually the all-star in their local team. Almost all of the players must now take on a different role with players and coaches they do not know.

The importance of recovery, hydration, nutrition and the proper use of down time are also magnified because of condensed compact schedule. Coaches of these summer programs must include this into the program and we need to see a carry over into the school and club programs.

The team's strategies and tactics must fit the characteristics of the team and can not be so cumbersome as to limit the creativity of the players. Too often coaches try to take their entire school team package and squeeze it into a short summer program. They forget that very often they have had players in their program for four years learning the concepts.

2. Working with officials

In observing the coaches at nationals and in my discussions with the coaches and CABO representative, there to mentor the officials, it became quite obvious that we have done a poor job in preparing our coaches for working with the officials. Coaches are unaware of how the officials are being taught to work with the coaches. A FIBA official is taught that flow of the game is paramount. Officials work to keep the game flowing. They do not want long stoppages in the dead ball situations. Officials are mentored to lend an ear to the coach if it does not take their concentration from the court and the coach approach in a respectful manner. They may not look at the coach. Coaches must understand that this cannot occur on every stoppage of the game or every time the official is in front of the bench. This is excessive and distracts the official. At this point the coach may be warned. This also can lead to situations where the other coach feels that the first coach is gaining some "mysterious" advantage. Official will not talk to the coach during the flow of the game. Coach should not distract the official from his/her job. It is the same for the coach. He/she does not want the parent coming down and talking to him during the game to tell him what to do as the game is going on.

The officials rely on the minor officials to inform them of situations when they must stop the flow, such as subs and time outs. Where coaches will find changes are in the following:

- a) inboundings – as our minor officials improve you will find that the officials will quickly get the ball inbounds
- b) Fouls shots – the huddles of players will be quickly broke up if they occur in the key. If you call your players over to huddle you may not get them back in for the second shot if they are not there at the appropriate time. If players huddle on their own they must show a movement into their spaces immediately on competition of the first shot.
- C) 30 secs to sub on 5 fouls - we are currently checking the ruling on this with FIBA. Currently we are the only country that is allowed to use this as a time out.

Some coaches will see this as taking away from their abilities to coach. It means we as coaches must learn to:

- a) Prepare players in practice
- b) Have them react quicker to instructions and huddles
- c) Make use of coaching on the fly and coaching during dead ball situations
- d) Coach the bench – too many coaches only coach the players on the floor. You must prepare and alert the bench players as to what they will see and face when they enter the court.
- f) Allow assistant coaches more responsibilities in communication with players
- e) Give some control of the game back to the players

Officials will only talk to the head coach. This is again to avoid distractions and to aid in keeping the game flowing. Only one coach may stand.

Many coaches make all interactions with the officials in a confrontational manner. The coach uses aggressive language, tone, body language and moves into the official's space. They use language such as "you must", "you have too" and dominate the conversation. The arms are usually

outstretched, raised over head or pointed in an accusatory manner. The coach usually steps toward the officials leaning forward into the personal space of the official. The tone is often in an unfriendly or disrespectful manner. How would you respond to someone if they treated you this way? What lessons are you passing on to your players? These coaches never recognize the good calls made by the officials. When they do it is usually in a sarcastic clap.

Coaches who have no problems treat the officials with respect; they talk in a calmer tone, often ask if he/she can approach and talk to the official, ask questions; tells the official when they make a good call even if it was against his/her team. Very often these coaches use the official's first name when approaching the official. These coaches are often trying to help the game not gain some advantage.

Too many coaches get caught up in the other game. This is my way of saying that the coaches concentration is now on the officials and not the players. Most interventions by the coaches are spent debating and question calls or giving a rules clinic. My observation is that you will have more success as a coach if you can make your players box out more, move on offense, than to continue to work an official for that one make up call. I have seen many games where it is the coach who should take credit for the loss because he/she tried to win the other game.

When problems occur it is appropriate to approach the minor official at get them to blow the horn. Make sure you have accurate information. It amazes me the number of teams that do not have someone keep a scorebook on the bench. I have seen coaches argue over the wrong things.

3. **Bench coaching during competition** - please see the attached document.
4. **Improving coaching/teaching skills** - one anomaly that I have begun to notice in my debriefs of coaches is that rarely does the coach suggest things that he/she needs to change or improve. Normally the coach will say that the team or the players must improve in some area, but never suggests things of a personal nature. I usually had to prod with questions to find out something specific that the coach wanted to change. Even then it was usually of a strategic nature; I want more information on transition offense, press breaks, better way to attacking zones etc. Also I have received many requests to do coaching clinics and have looked at the topics at most clinics. They are 99% of a strategic nature. We have allowed this idea to creep in that coaches improve by learning more "stuff". This is not what I have observed. The average Canadian coach has more than enough "stuff". They have "stuff" from their playing days, from the internet or because of TV and videos. What we are lacking are people who can teach; who can improve the skills of the players and understand the stage of development that the child is going through. Coaches need to improve things such as: their positioning on the floor, using different types of formations, using different types of feedback, using a variety of teaching methods besides telling, effectively using assistant coaches, incorporating mental training into the practice session. These things do not happen by reading about them. The coach must make a conscious effort to change a current behaviour. When these topics are brought up at clinics they are not usually well received yet every coach at every level needs to constantly improve their ability to teach. In the new NCCP the point of evaluation will be to point out to coaches areas of self-improvement and to monitor if the coach is sticking to his/her plan. I challenge all coaches to pick out one or two points that they can personally change that will make them a better coach. Develop an action plan and ways to measure if you have achieved your goal.

Please note: I do have a tendency to generalize; some of the coaches at nationals did mention self improvement in their debrief and a couple even demonstrated positive change during the Nationals.

I am proud of those coaches who understood that the most important changes we can make are those we make in our self.

6. **Fan /parent behaviour** – We did not have a major incident like last year in Calgary, but some parents still needed to be talked to about their behaviour. I feel we need to do more to inform a parents about there role as the parent of an elite athlete. The parent needs to understand about nutrition, recovery etc. The parent also has to be informed of the options available to the athlete so the family can make the right decisions for the athlete. Too many decisions are being made with one side information. We can never assume that parents will know what is right. Every time a child goes through these situations it is the first time for that parent also, unless they have had other children. This should happen with our CP/RTC's and with all provincial and national team programs at the developmental stages.

7. Administration

Here are a couple of additional thoughts:

- **Gender specific** – There is no question that this is a better format than the co-ed. It allowed the girls to be the stars of the show.
- The closing ceremonies held in Bishops were the best I have seen. Instead of highlighting the committee and adults the players were the stars. It left everyone feeling special.
- LOC – Canada Basketball cannot assume that the manual is being used. It is our responsibility to meet with the LOC and have them show us how it is being applied.
- Blood kits need to be at court side with a trained person ready to use them
- Performance bonds should be issued to the provinces. Failure to comply with deadlines will mean an appropriate fine. Also coaches who fail to follow rules would also be fined. This taken out of the performance bond.

A special thanks to the people at basketball Quebec and the Sherbrooke LOC. Their hospitality was tremendous and made for a great experience for all who attended the Nationals. I am looking forward to BC next year. I hope the same hospitality was extended.