

Using Statistics to Evaluate Individual and TEAM Performance

Coaches, players and fans alike like to use stats to evaluate individual and TEAM performance. It does not take a rocket scientist to guess which stat is the most viewed, individual scoring, followed by team scoring. Scoring is an important number and should be used in evaluating performance. Unfortunately, too many individuals view it as the only stat of importance.

In my 22 years as a head coach, I had more complaints from parents about scoring than I ever did playing time and this is putting it mildly. Parents would outright demand that their son or daughter be the leading scorer. Others parents felt would demand that I prevent the leading scorer from leading the team in scoring, because it was not "fair" for that player to be the leading scorer. If you talk to coaches long enough, you will hear many similar stories, most of them true.

The fact of the matter is, coaches and the media are to blame in part for this obsession with scoring. There are other performance variables that can be measured by "statistics" and have a major impact on determining the outcome of the game.

Coaches would be well served to broaden their view of what is important statistically in evaluating performance AND teaching players to focus on certain statistics as a means of determining the outcome of the game.

It is also important for coaches to understand that the traditional view of statistics and how the game is evaluated are not always valid. For example, one view holds that the team that controls the boards will win the game. Often this is true, but consider some other possibilities. What about the team that relies on forcing turnovers on defense to generate offensive possessions? Often these teams are outrebounded because the extreme pressure on defense will create poor rebounding position. Yet this poor rebounding position is more than made up for by the easy transition points scored off the forced turnovers and the opponent's offensive rebound totals are not as damaging as normal because of the limited number of initial shots taken as a result of the high number of turnovers forced by the defense.

Another fallacy of this statistical measurement is the team that is not concerned with defensive transition but instead focuses on obtaining a large number of offensive rebounds. The famous Grinnell System and the Olivet Nazarene System both rely on obtaining 1/3 of all missed shots in the form of offensive rebounds. These teams, Grinnell in particular, are often badly outrebounded yet win games due to the high percentage of offensive rebounds obtained and the resulting high percentage shots from these offensive rebounds.

One of the stats that I always considered essential was when did my team begin to shoot one-and-one free throws combined with denying the opponent the opportunity to shoot one-and-one free throws. Given that many of my teams over the years were at a severe height and rebounding disadvantage, going to the foul line to score was a key strategic component in earning a win.

Other factors that are often overlooked is the percentage of shots contested, not blocked but contested, how many charges were drawn in the lane and how many times we screened a man and not space.

Coaching legend Don Meyer convinced me early in my coaching career that one of the keys to winning was making free throws and lay-ups. Even though my teams were long noted for shooting the three point shot, we won many of our games by making all of our lay-ups.

If conventional statistical evaluation serves your program well, I encourage you to continue to evaluate your team and players using that approach. I do ask that you think about alternative or outside-the-box means of evaluating performance using statistics. Not only do I encourage you to consider other approaches to evaluating statistics, I encourage you to train your players, fans and parents to take a broader view of statistics than just who scored the most points.

Attached is a list of items that I have used over the years to evaluate the performance of my players and teams. This list has changed and evolved over the years but always served as a valid means of evaluation and a teaching tool to help my players understand how to win a game and what to focus on during the game so the team could win.

Statistical Factors That Can Determine the Outcome of a Game

- 1) Make more free throws than the opponent attempts.
 - a) play defense transition, feet, intensity and position – there is never a need to foul except for profit
 - b) hand discipline on defense
 - c) aggressively attack the basket on offense by:
 - i) fast break attack
 - ii) feeding the post
 - iii) driving the funnel
 - d) foul only for profit, not because of a mistake or lack of effort
 - e) do not put the opponent in the bonus unless we choose to
 - f) getting to the foul line accomplishes a lot of positive things:
 - i) scores points (but can be no different than a turnover)
 - ii) stops the clock
 - iii) can change how the opponent plays due to foul trouble
 - iv) allows substitution to set up the press or half court defense
 - v) can force the opponent's weaker players to play significant minutes during crucial periods of the game.
 - vi) can allow you to outscore the opponent for the game when you are outscored from the field
 - vii) should be in the bonus before the end of the first and third periods of the game
- 2) Do not commit enough fouls as a TEAM to allow the opponent to shoot the bonus, UNLESS doing so for profit .
 - a) fouling for profit means we are behind and are in “steal” mode
 - b) staying out of foul trouble allows the greatest flexibility in playing our style of play and substituting freely to best fit the situation.
- 3) Out rebound the opponent.
- 4) Obtain 1/3/ of all possible offensive rebounds
- 5) Limit our turnovers to 14 or fewer per game
- 6) Force 20+ turnovers defensively per game.

7) Shooting percentage/shot selection:

- a) 70%+ for free throws – this is particularly critical for post players and point guards – they are fouled more than other players.
- b) 45-50% from 2 pt. range
 - i) perimeter players - 45%
 - ii) post players 50%+
- c) 33% from 3 pt. range – CANNOT emphasize enough that if you are not a 3 pt. shooter taking a 3 pt. shot is the same thing as a TURNOVER!
- d) if you are a poor shooter you do not have the right to shoot when you want. Every player must be able to make free throws and lay-ups though.

8) Turnovers per minute is a key statistic. This stat should be below .100 if a non-point guard. Should be below .175 for appoint guard (point guards handle the ball significantly more than other players and thus will likely make more mistakes).

9) Hold the opponent to:

- a) 39% or lower from 2 pt. range
- b) 25% or lower from 3pt. range
- c) 7 or fewer assists

Other Significant Numbers

- 1) The total number of possessions – the more the better for an up tempo team – the fewer the better for a slow tempo team.
- 2) There are things that are important other than scoring from the field. These things are drawing charges, assists, obtaining loose balls, offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds and making free throws and lay-ups. It takes scoring AND all of these things to win games.



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