



## Watch What You Teach

- By Don Kelbick

When we step on the floor to teach our players, what is it that we feel is important, what is it that we really teach? Are there lessons inside of the [ballhandling](#), shooting, etc?

Over the years, I have had great success in facilitating player's improvement. I have worked with NBA All-Stars, high school, college and youth players. If I had not been successful, the player would not have come back and I would not have new players asking me for my time.

I don't believe I know any more basketball than anyone else. I don't think that I am better than anyone. I just know what works for me and I know it has been very effective. My teaching style is different than most. I have different priorities and different methods. Some agree with it, some don't. I am not saying it is any better than anyone but I am saying it is just different.

While others teach [jump shooting](#), ball handling, [passing](#), etc., I try to teach something different. No matter what level of player, regardless of age or sex, I teach one thing. I think it is the most important skill any player can learn. I try to teach players [not to fear failure](#).

I believe the fear of failure is the single largest impediment to learning and improvement. I think that the way we teach what we teach might help instill fear of failure.

I grew up with the same work ethic that we all did, "Practice makes perfect." Then, I was introduced to the saying that, "Only perfect practice makes perfect." For a long time, I bought into that, full force. I was so intent on "perfect practice" that I made players afraid to act.

My insistence that players make every shot, commit no turnovers, allow no scores on [defense](#) actually forced my players further and further away from what the objective was. I decided that maybe I should look at my methods.

Here are some things I have come to realize. Shooters that miss 55% of their shots are considered good shooters. In baseball, if you fail 70% of the time, you have a chance to be a Hall of Famer. The greatest golfer ever, Tiger Woods, loses 79% of his tournaments (if you are a Jack Nicklaus person, his win percentage is 9% - and that is the 2nd highest win percentage ever). On the whole, sport is an exercise in failure. It's how you deal with that failure that determines how good a player you are. You can either fear failure or you can accept it as part of the game and move on.

When I catch a player getting frustrated or angry because he has missed some shots, I will ask him, "If I could give you some advice in the form of 3 words and tell you if you follow this advice you will never miss another shot, would you like to hear it?" Invariably, the answer comes back, "Yes." So, I give them the 3 words, "Don't shoot any."

If you don't shoot any, you won't miss any. As long as you shoot, you will miss. That is part

of shooting. Accept it and move on. As long as you play, you will make mistakes. Accept that premise and move on. Make the next play.

I think most of us will accept that line of thinking. But, do we, as coaches, contribute to instilling that fear of failure? Do we insist on "perfect practice" and thereby point out all the times we are less than perfect? Do we lose patience with players after multiple imperfect repetitions? Do we jump on players every time they make a mistake? Do we tell our players, "I want you to play loose and free. I don't want you to worry about me. I don't want you to play the game looking over your shoulder."? And then jump off the bench at the slightest mistake.

We, as coaches have to understand our complicity in creating players who play out of fear. Do we want players who are afraid to fail so they are also afraid to try? In the guise of teaching, do we instill fear?

Perfection is a fine ideal, but to use it as a goal will lead to endless frustration and even resentment of the game because nobody is perfect. If you expect perfection, you will always be let down.

A great illustration of this is 7th game hero and noted psychologist Ron Artest, of the L. A. Lakers. I was listening to him on Dan LeBatard's local Miami radio show. He spoke of career, his psychiatrist and the playoffs. The conversation came around to his shot in the 7th game. He spoke about his confidence in making that shot. He said that he really did not understand why teams give him that shot. He pointed out that he is a 40% shooter from 3, which is one of the best in the league (so he misses 60% of his shots but he is considered one of the best). LeBatard then says, "Maybe so, but you still have thrown up some memorable clunkers, haven't you?" To which Artest responded, "Sure, but that doesn't mean I can't make it. It just means I'm not perfect."

Interesting thought.

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**Please share your thoughts, ideas, and suggestion below.**

#### Comments

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**ball parent says:**

7/24/2010 at 2:28:53 PM

Thank you so much for posting this.

I love showing stuff like this to my 13 yr. old daughter.

I keep trying to remind her that she is 13 and she's going to have many ups and downs - sport imitates life or vice versa.

I love that you guys can balance the physical training with such supportive mental training.

Keep it coming!

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**igor says:**

7/24/2010 at 2:47:21 PM

easy but very effective  
thanks!