

USBA: Cleaning the Glass

The Importance of Rebounding

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As a young assistant basketball coach at my alma mater, Wooster College, in 1972 I had the great pleasure of visiting the Tar Heel basketball program at the University of North Carolina. I spent two days watching the Tar Heels practice, watched video tape with the assistant coaches, and was a guest of Coach Dean Smith at his home. A few years later I also worked the North Carolina basketball camp. Those experiences greatly influenced my basketball philosophy. We use several of the Tar Heel drills in practice on a regular basis.

Coach Dean Smith broke the game of basketball into three areas: offense, defense, and rebounding. That is pretty much how I have coached the game. We put equal emphasis on all three areas. There have been years when we were not very talented; that is, we could not score consistently. However, we have always been competitive on the boards. In those less talented years we have still been able to have winning seasons.

What are the characteristics of outstanding rebounders? One of the most important is the desire to go after the basketball. The best rebounders go after the basketball. At our summer basketball camp we have a quote for the day. A popular quote is, "There are three kinds of players: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened. Which kind are you?" Players that do not rebound well "watch and wonder."

The physical attributes of outstanding rebounders are strength and quickness to the ball, not necessarily height. One of the best rebounders I have ever coached was a 6'5", 225 lb. player named Steve Jesse at Northern Kentucky University. He was cut in high school and played C.Y.O. basketball. He could not score outside the paint. I told him he was not good enough for a scholarship at a Division II school. Each year I would recruit someone to replace him. Each year he would punish the kid I recruited to replace him. After four years he was the school's all-time leading rebounder. Jesse had strength and quickness to the ball. Obviously, an NBA player I now admire is Ben Wallace.

Another rebounding attribute is anticipation. The best rebounders know when a shot is going to be taken before it is taken. They also know where the ball is going to come off the rim before it hits the rim. There have been some pretty good rebounders whose greatest attribute was anticipation. One that comes to mind is Larry Bird.

Catch and Pop Method

Although most coaches teach players to rebound two handed, at Hanover we teach the "catch and pop" method of rebounding. I learned this from Bob Hamilton, who was the head coach at Wittenberg and the U.S. Naval Academy. Although most coaches teach players to rebound two handed, we do not. We teach them to reach out and grab the ball one handed and then slam the ball into the other hand, creating a "popping" sound. We prefer the ball be "popped" above eye level. Do not bring the ball down below the eyes. We always kid players that anyone who completely takes the air out of the ball gets a steak dinner. Players actually like rebounding this way. If you watch the great rebounders, it is what they do.

The catch and pop is practiced on a regular basis. We have two catch and pop drills. One involves the entire team. Players partner up with one ball. While practicing our passing we will incorporate the catch and pop into the passing drills. After making the regular two-hand chest pass (and catching it two handed), we will make the chest pass to a target hand extended out away from our bodies. The players catch the pass one handed and pop the ball into the other hand. From the chest pass we move to the two-hand over-head pass. After catching the ball two handed the players then pass the ball to the target hand, which is extended above eye level. The players then catch and pop the ball "above the eyes."

The other catch and pop drill occurs on the "Rebound Dome", a rebounding device I believe that was invented or at least endorsed by Coach John Wooden. It is a bubbled dome which

attaches to the rim. The bubbles create unusual bounces. When the ball is shot on the dome, there is no way to know for sure where it is going to come off. Here is how the drill works. The coach shoots the ball on the dome and the player rebounds by catching and popping the ball above his eyes. The player immediately puts the ball back up on the dome. He does this 5 times or until the coach ends the drill. In addition to working on the catch and pop, players are forced to really go after the ball. Otherwise, they will be rebounding below their eyes. The ball is absolutely not permitted to hit the floor. We normally incorporate this drill while we shoot free throws and get a water break. When it is time for a break, we will divide the team into three groups, a water break group, a free throw shooting group, and a rebound dome group. When there is a complete rotation we commence practice again. By doing this we usually work on the dome two or three times per practice.

There are two different types of rebounding: offensive and defensive. Here are the coaching points for each, which I stress with my team:

Offensive Rebounding:

- Anticipate that every shot your team takes will be a miss.
- Don't take your eye off the flight of the ball. Anticipate where it's going to come off.
- Do not stand behind the shoulder blades of the screener. Move around the screener with your hands up.
- Go after the ball (catch and pop right back up for an offensive rebound basket). Do not bring the offensive rebound down below your eyes.

Defensive Rebounding:

- When the shot goes up call "shot."
- Take your eyes off the flight of the ball and move toward your man.
- Pivot toward the middle of the court.
- Get in basically a defensive stance and make contact with the offensive player. • Keep your weight on the balls of your feet. Do not get back on your heels or you will lose balance.
- Keep your hands and elbows up. Hold with your elbows, not your hands.
- Slide with the defender.
- After the ball hits the rim, release and go after the basketball ("catch and pop").

There are many good rebounding drills. However, all of the drills in the world will not make your team a good rebounding team if you have players who "watch and wonder." In this article I have attempted to explain how we teach players to rebound (the "catch and pop" method) and the qualities of a good rebounder. I am not inclined to give players playing time if they "watch and wonder." Neither should you.