

## REBOUNDING

In my opinion, the two most important statistics in basketball are rebounding margin and turnovers. I became infatuated with rebounding during my time at Oklahoma. To start the 2003 season we began implementing the "Gonzaga Rebounding Model". We had struggled the year before keeping teams off the glass and were exposed in the NCAA tournament. Being undersized we had to find a way to consistently win the rebounding war. To me the two things Gonzaga rebounding addressed immediately were technique and accountability.

### TECHNIQUE:

I really believe in one on one rebounding against scout team guys because it exposes our players. Are they weak mentally, physically, or does their technique need improvement? Ultimately it forces players to develop a sense of toughness both mentally and physically. The mentality that needs to be developed in practice to be a good rebounder is the first thing that must happen as part of teaching technique. If a sense of toughness does not exist individually and cohesively as a team you will never be a great rebounding team. Technique and muscle memory must support the mindset of rebounding. To start practice on Day One, our warm up drill was working on our technique and the verbiage we would use. "Shot, chest, swim", three consecutive words I am certain I will never forget, and words I probably say in my sleep after games if we lose the rebounding battle. We started with four lines on the baseline and with a teammate free throw line extended facing the baseline. Pretending the teammate at the free throw line was on offense coach blows the whistle and the first person in line goes at half speed to close out, chest, and swim. I am fairly certain we did that for the first 6-8 weeks of practice coming back to it periodically through out the year depending on how well we executed in games. Needless to say you have to practice it full speed in drills and live action during practice, but the fact that we started practice that season with rebounding as our focus set a foundation for who we would be that year.

**Shot:** Closing out on a shooter with high hands with intentions of discouraging the shot.

**Chest:** With your hands holding your jersey chest level and elbows out, you meet (hit) the offensive rebounder and make contact with intentions of stopping their forward progress.

**Swim:** After "chesting", forward pivot and swing your elbow over and through in the same direction as the offensive player chooses to go, keeping the player from changing directions and getting the ball. Finishes looking like typical box out with high hands.

### ACCOUNTABILITY:

Accountability involves lots of film and post game analytics. Most players do not believe it until they see it. Watching film of practice and letting them see that they are not "checking" their shooter, are not "chesting" rebounders, are not crashing the glass on offense, etc. is all part of the process. One of my favorite parts is once teams became more aware of rebounding and start executing; the one person who does not do their job, their man **always** gets the ball. So accountability changes from the

coaching staff saying rebound, to rebounding because they are letting the other 4 teammates down on that possession. This sense of accountability is the biggest motivator and leads to solid rebounding teams.

Grading rebounding after games became a huge quantifier for the staff and the players. Chad Thraikill and I would grade each player on every shot attempted including FT's after every game. The magic number was 70% for our team. If we achieved that number as a team we never lost, the only exception was if we turned the ball over a ridiculous amount of times, which did happen once or twice. The correlation between our rebounding numbers with wins and losses was amazing! You could pretty much go off the number alone and tell how the game went and who had a good game. The correlation was also evident in a player's offensive performance whether it is PPG or FG%. If they were locked in to rebounding, their offensive game followed the majority of the time. If we reached our 70% or higher there were no repercussions the following day in practice. If we were below 70%, the players had to one on one rebound vs. our scout team guys the number of rebounds for which they were graded negatively. So if a player went 9 for 22 they would have to get 13 rebounds the next day. Sometimes they only had to get 5 and sometimes they had to get 30 so it became a reminder to rebound while improving their skill. At Albany the team did up downs for the number of negative grades and that too seemed to work.

Ten years later I find myself working at the University of Washington working for Mike Neighbors, a defensive minded coach, who is a number crunching machine and knows all too well the correlation between rebounding and winning. Last year we were undefeated when our starting posts each finished with double digit rebounds. This year that streak was broken, guess why... 20+ turnovers!

I appreciate playing devil's advocate and in all my stops of coaching there have been some anomalies whether they be players or teams. While coaching on the men's side at Rogers State we never used the shot, chest, swim technique, instead we used the punch them in the mouth and go get the damn ball technique. To be quite honest we had some athletic hard nosed players that competed and we never really had any problem rebounding. Two other players that were anomalies to the theory were Julie Forester and Courtney Paris. Courtney Paris I am sure you have heard off but Julie Forester was a 6'1 lanky kid who I coached at Albany and was a rebounding machine!! She had an uncanny ability to read the flight of the ball and get to it faster than anyone I have ever seen. I was always happy I did not have to coach against her because she would have drove me mad had she been getting all those rebounds against a team I coached. Courtney was the best rebounder I have ever coached. Her ability to see the ball in flight, get position, and have the best hands I have ever seen allowed her to shatter NCAA rebounding records. That being said, her teammates doing their jobs also left her one on one, which was a battle she would always win.

Most players are not natural rebounders and most players regardless of how talented they may be, do not comprehend the importance of rebounding. This is

something that must be taught and emphasized in some form or fashion on a daily basis as far as I am concerned. The beauty of it is, once they see the results they will always believe in it and attempt to recreate it. Much like playing good motion offense, once you know how to play in it you never want to “just go hoop”. From time to time you will be blessed with a player who “just gets the damn ball a lot” and you will have to just let her do what she does knowing that her gift will only be magnified by her teammates doing their jobs.

#### INTERESTING STATS:

Of the top 75 rebounding teams last year, all but 6 had winning seasons and the majority you saw in post-season play.

In the 2013 Final Four 3 out of the 4 teams were ranked Top 5 in rebounding margin.

From 2002-2013, 60% of Sweet 16 teams finished in the Top 50 of rebounding margin.

From 2002-2013, 25% of Sweet 16 teams finished Top 10 in rebounding margin.

Since 2002, of the 192 teams in the Sweet 16, all but 2 have been in the top 200 in rebounding margin nationally.