

Accepting Imperfections

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Think for a minute about what is the easiest part of playing basketball. Really, think about it. What is the easiest, simplest part of playing our game? I would claim that it is free throw shooting.

Free throw shooting is the only thing in all of sports that never changes. It is always the same. 15 feet from the rim, 10 feet off the floor, no defense, no weather factors, same ball. Pitching, hitting, blocking, tackling, putting, all other sports related performances have some variables that change. Free throw shooting is exactly repeatable, every time.

Still, we view missed free throws as an acceptable part of the game. Our expectation is that we will probably make 65% of our free throws in a game. We think that 65% success is an acceptable number for the easiest thing to do in our sport.

We rationalize that nothing about basketball is perfect. The problem of accepting this truth centers around what constitutes our reasonable expectations for failure.

Recently Mike Conlin wrote a piece on the Basketball Officials and Coaches Communication Committee (BOCCC) portion of our website that dealt with the percentage of good and bad calls that establish an acceptable level of officiating. Mike is a former D1 basketball official and coordinator and still works as a Big Ten official in football and baseball as well as being a high school and college basketball assignor and evaluator. He said that NCAA tournament referees are expected to get 85-95% of their calls right. Mike feels that a realistic percentage for high school referees would be in the area of 80-85%.

I began to think about the mistakes that I make during the course of a game. From game planning to the final buzzer, how many poor choices do I make? How many should I tolerate from myself?

It occurs to me that if we have reasonable expectations concerning how many mistakes we will tolerate from players, referees and ourselves, then we can spend more energy dealing with our primary job on game night. Specifically, doing everything that we can to make the evening a positive educational experience for our student athletes.

In the meantime, I still hold out the hope that one day a team that I coach will make 85% of their free throws.