

Become the best player or coach you can be with basketball tips, tricks, and suggestions from Coach Wootten

Pushing Accuracy in Free-Throw Shooting

Type “ugly free throw” into a Google search and you’ll find over 500,000 video results alone. This could be because we’re all familiar with the stomach-dropping, wince-inducing feeling that comes along with a botched shot from the free-throw line. It might be because we have years of practice as fans trying any means necessary to psych out the shooter during these “moments of truth.”

It’s also because free throws win games.

Our goal as a team is to make sure we shoot at least 20 free throws per game and hit at least 70 percent. Why? If we’re shooting at least 20 free throws, it means we’re playing a physical game in an aggressive style — attacking in the paint, attacking the basket, and constantly putting pressure on the defense.

It means that our offense is dictating the tempo of the game, a vital key to victory.

How do we emphasize getting to the free-throw line? We stat paint touches (post feeds and drives into the paint), and we drill driving low and creating contact to enforce picking up fouls and getting to the free-throw line. Coach Bob McKillop from Davidson College encourages his guards to drive early in the game to draw fouls early, which gets his team to the bonus quickly.

How do we focus on improving free throws if we’re not shooting well? I know it’s taboo to talk about missed free throws or a bad percentage. I take the

focus off the miss and make, and refocus on the keys to being a good free-throw-shooting team.

What are the keys?

1. **Stop the ball by your face and pause.** We want our free-throw shooters to keep their shooting motion *simple*. Many bad free-throw shooters stop the ball by their waist. This allows for too much motion in their shot, creating a greater chance of error. If you stop the ball by your face, your shot motion is more compact, streamlined, and simple, allowing for less room for error.
2. **Show poise.** Poise and the pause go hand in hand. Pausing allows a player to slow down and show the confidence that makes a good shooter. [Melo Trimble](#) is a great free-throw shooter because he has such great poise.
3. **Remember: up and over the front rim.** Good free-throw shooters find the rim with their eyes and go up over the front rim. This allows for the proper arc and gives the ball a greater probability of swooshing in.
4. **Go nice and easy, and hold the follow-through.** Many shooters start walking off the line prematurely or rush their follow-through. Good shooters stay on the line and hold their follow-through with poise.

It bears repeating: don't underestimate the importance of teaching good free-throw shooting technique, and the role that free throw accuracy can play in winning games. Emphasizing poise, patience, finding the rim, and holding the follow-through will help your players improve their other skills, too.

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