A Review of the Effectiveness of Preshot Routines in Free Throw Shooting

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This article addresses the effects of a preshot routine prior to a free throw in basketball. The subjects that were evaluated were male and female Division 1 college basketball players. The evaluators watched five games of the subjects and were solely responsible for determining if the exact same preshot routine was followed every time.

Prior to data collection, the researchers determined that for a participant to be considered maintaining a preshot routine, the players would have to perform the same routine at the foul line prior to each shot 90% or more of the time. A same routine is defined as experiencing the exact actions from shot one to shot two (Czech, Ploszay, Burke, 2004, p. 326).

The hypothesis was that the group that kept to their routine would have a considerably higher free throw percentage that those that did not. After all data was collected, the percentage difference between the two groups was only 6%.

There were several strengths and weaknesses in this article. One of the strengths was the group sample size. The authors recorded at least 50 free throws per subject, which allowed for external variables such as score, time in game, etc. to be taken into account. Another strength was to give equal emphasis to the fact if a free throw occurred in the first or second half. This was an important consideration for the overall results since; “Athletes may not have perceived the free throws as being as influential (on the outcome) in the first half and thus did not concentrate as fully on executing the preshot routine “ (Czech et al., 2004, p.327).

There were also several weaknesses. First, the study made no mention of the positions the subjects played. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association statistics (2013), both male and female guards typically shoot free throws better than centers or forwards. Second, the observers who were responsible for verifying that a subject duplicated the exact preshot routine can be very subjective. It can be very easy to miss a small part of the routine. For example, taking a certain number of deep breaths. The final weakness was the fact that the study only took into account two shot free throws. By not counting bonus situations (1 and 1), a critical aspect was missed. The 1 and 1 free throw may provide more pressure on the subjects, thus forcing more concentration and more reliance on a preshot routine.

This study could be applied to a coaching situation primarily in a practice. Each player has their own preshot routine, and its exact duplication could be tested during practice by simulating game conditions through either pumped in crowd noise or distractions or fatigue through running wind sprints. The preshot free throw routine is something a player can control. As Coach John Wooden believed in, “Focus on the process, not the outcome” (Gordon, 2012, p.1).

References

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