

BASKETBALL SHOOTING

By Dr. Hal Wissel

Confidence is the Most Important Factor in Shooting

Believe in yourself. You want to have confidence in your ability to make the shot every time you shoot. Confident shooters control their thoughts, feelings, and shooting skill. Shooting is much more than good mechanics. It's the feeling, thoughts and belief in your self that comes first. Basketball is a mental, as well as a physical, game. Developing the mental aspect is a key to enhancing shooting as well as performance in all fundamentals.

Three and One-Half Balls Fit in the Rim

To help your confidence it is important to know that the basket is big. The basket is so big that three and one half balls can fit in the rim. This surprises most players. You can get on a ladder and fit three balls side by side over the rim and have enough space to fit and turn your hand between each ball. Realizing that the basket is so big should give a psychological boost to your confidence.

Act Like a Shooter. Keep Follow-through Up Until the Ball Reaches the Rim

To also help your confidence, keep your follow through straight up until the ball reaches the rim. This is not only mechanically correct, but more importantly you will look and act like a shooter.

Feel positive that each time you shoot the ball will go in. Good shooters stay confident even when they hit a cold streak and miss a few shots. After a missed shot, mentally correct the miss and visualize a good shot. Positive affirmation statements ("I'm a shooter!" All net! or "Count it!" for example) that you can say to yourself can promote confident thoughts about yourself and your ability to shoot. You can also remind yourself of past successes to boost your confidence.

Being able to shoot under pressure distinguishes great shooters from the good shooters. You want to take the shot not only when your team is ahead, but when the pressure is on. The direct correlation between shooting confidence and shooting success is the most consistent factor we recognize in great shooters.

Rhythm is the Second Most Important Factor in Shooting

Skills should be smooth, free flowing, and rhythmical and this is especially true in shooting. Mechanics are important, but you want to have good mechanics without being mechanical. Your shot should be smooth and rhythmical rather than mechanical. All parts of your shot should flow together in a sequential rhythm.

Rhythm and Range Come from a Down-and-Up Motion of Your Legs

To help our rhythm and range we use a down-and-up action of our legs, rather than lowering the ball or stepping into the shot. Start with your knees slightly flexed: Bend your knees and then fully extend them in a down-and-up motion. Saying the key words *Down and up!* from the start of your shot until the release of the ball will trigger the down and up action of your legs that provides rhythm and force for your shot. Your legs and shooting arm move together. As your legs go up your arm goes up. As your legs reach full extension, your back, shoulders and shooting arm extend in a smooth, continuous forward and upward direction toward your target. It is important to keep the ball high with your shooting hand facing the rim.

Use the down-and-up motion of your legs for rhythm rather than lowering the ball for rhythm. Keeping the ball high fosters a quick release and also provides less chance for error. Stepping into your shot may help your range, but your shot becomes a two-count shot. Using the down-and-up method allows you to shoot in one motion or one count. When shooting off the catch the down comes just before the catch and the shot goes up as your legs go up providing for a quicker release.

Basic Mechanics Of Shooting

Basic mechanics of shooting include sight, balance, hand position, elbow-in alignment, shooting rhythm, and follow-through. To develop your shot it is best to concentrate on only one or two mechanics at a time.

Key Words Enhance Shooting Confidence, Mechanics, Rhythm and Range

As important as confidence is, accurate shooting takes more than positive thinking: it also takes shooting skill. Neither mental confidence nor mechanics alone is enough. Success results from the integration of the mental and mechanical aspects of shooting. When you think, you are in a sense talking to yourself. That talk can be either positive or negative. A technique called positive self-talk can help you integrate the mental and mechanical aspects of shooting, speeding the improvement of your shot. Positive self-talk uses key words (also called cue words) to enhance performance.

Select words that help you learn correct mechanics, establish rhythm, and build confidence. The key words should be positive, concise (preferably one syllable), and personalized.

Anchor Words

A positive word that you associate with a successful shot is called an anchor word. Identify an anchor word to positively reinforce the visualization of a successful shot. Select your own personal anchor word that allows you to visualize your shot going in. Examples of anchor words are: **Through! In! Yes! Net! Swish! Whoosh! Face!**

Trigger Words

Words that key the correct mechanics of your shot are called trigger words. Examples of trigger words are:

- **High!** - to start your shot high and prevent lowering the ball.
- **Straight!** - to make your shooting hand go straight to the basket and stop turning your wrist.
- **Front!** - to key the position of your shooting hand facing the rim.
- **Point!** - to key the correct release of the ball off your index finger.
- **Up!** - to key a high arch.
- **Through!** - to key any part of your follow-through including shoulders, arm, wrist, and finger.
- **Head in!** - to key the follow-through of head and shoulders toward the basket and prevent leaning back or stepping back.
- **Legs!** - to key the use of your legs.
- **Down and up!** - to key the down and up action of your legs for rhythm and range.

The Selection of Key Words Should Be Personalized

Identify a personal trigger word or words that you associate with the correct mechanic or mechanics. Practice using different trigger and anchor words until you find what works for you. Select two words that trigger the correct mechanics and one anchor word to reinforce shooting success. Sometimes you may want to say the same trigger word two times in order to produce the desired result. For example, saying *Straight! Straight!* may prove more effective than saying *Straight!* only one time to key your shooting hand to start straight and finish straight. One word can also be both a trigger and an anchor word. For example, the trigger word *Through!* can key the follow-through of your shoulders, arm, wrist, and fingers and it also can be an anchor word for the ball going through the basket.

Say your three one-syllable words in rhythm, from the time your shooting motion starts with your legs until you release the ball off your index finger. For example, if legs and through are your trigger words and yes is your anchor word, you would say in rhythm to your shot: Legs-through-yes! It works better to say your words aloud, rather than to yourself. Saying your personalized key words in an even rhythm establishes the rhythm of your shot and enhances your mechanics and confidence.

Give time to mental, as well as physical, practice. Mentally practice by relaxing and saying your key words in the rhythm of your shot as you visualize shooting and seeing the ball go in the basket.

Guard against paralysis by analysis. This happens when you think about too much. A sure sign of too much thinking is when your shooting rhythm becomes slow or uneven. Saying only three or less one-syllable key words tends to keep you from doing too much thinking. The words are actual thoughts. Your goal is to reduce conscious thought and promote automatic execution of your shot. Trigger words help make the mechanics of your shot automatic, and an anchor word, which reinforces a successful shot, helps build your confidence. As shooting improves one trigger word may suffice. Eventually, an anchor word may be all you need to trigger the automatic action of your shot.

Learning From the Reaction of Your Shot on the Rim

Learn to shoot correctly and then practice intelligently each day. Develop an understanding of your own shot. You can always benefit from having an instructor or coach watch you shoot. Most of your practice, however, occurs when a coach is not present. Personal feedback (information about your performance) can help you determine what adjustments to make. Three basic sources of feedback are observing the reaction of your shot on the rim, internally feeling your shot, and video analysis of your shooting form.

Analyzing a shot's reaction on the rim can reinforce successful execution or reveal most shooting errors and their possible causes. For example, the ball goes where your shooting arm, hand, and shooting finger direct it. If you missed to the right (or left), your shooting arm, hand, and finger was pointed in that direction. Perhaps your body faced in the direction of the miss, rather than being square to the basket, or your elbow was out, causing your follow-through to go to the right.

If you see that the ball hits rim and circles out, you know you shot the ball with sidespin, which is generally caused by your shooting hand starting on the side of the ball and then rotating behind it. If you over rotate your shooting hand, the ball will hit the right rim with sidespin and roll left. If you under rotate, the ball will hit the left side of the rim and roll right. Other causes of sidespin are having your palm on the ball, the ball sliding off your ring finger rather than your shooting finger, moving your hand on the ball, or thumbing the ball with your non-shooting hand.

Your sense of feel also yields clues: You might feel your shooting hand rotate to the right or the ball come off your ring finger (instead of your shooting finger). Both mistakes will give the ball sidespin. An excellent method to develop feel is to shoot with your eyes closed. Have a partner tell you if the shot was successful, and after a miss tell you the specific direction of the miss and the reaction of the ball on the rim. By analyzing your shot, you can detect and correct errors before they become bad habits.

React to a Missed Shot by Mentally Correcting the Miss and Visualizing a Good Shot

Act like a shooter, feel like a shooter, be a shooter. Many players commonly get upset at an error, particularly a missed shot, and often dwell negatively on the missed shot thus negatively affecting succeeding shots. Each time a player verbally recites a negative word, acts with negative body language, or has negative thoughts after a missed shot the brain is being conditioned to perform the same missed shot again. Learn to "act like a shooter," rather than dwelling on your missed shot.

We use the computer analogy. When you use a computer and make a mistake, what do you do? Do you type the same mistake again? No! You erase and correct it. You back space to delete it, or you cut and paste the correction. The same should apply to a shooting error. After a miss, know why you missed by seeing the reaction of the ball on the rim or by the feel of your shot. Immediately correct the miss with a positive trigger word that corrects the miss. For example, if your shot was short and you felt it was due to not using your legs, immediately correct it with a positive trigger word such as *Legs!* - to key the use of your legs. After a missed shot mentally correct the miss with a positive trigger word and then visualize a good shot.

An excellent method that can be used to condition successful shooting is to use a positive anchor word in association with correct mental rehearsal and visualization of a successful shot. Select your own personal anchor word that allows you to visualize your shot going in, such as *Through! In! Yes! Net! Swish! Whoosh! Face!* As soon as possible after missing a shot, correct the miss with a positive trigger word, and then visualize a good shot while saying your anchor word. The purpose of this method is to avoid negative thoughts, which can disrupt concentration and lead to other missed shots. Learning to react to a missed shot by visualizing a successful shot and saying your anchor word will condition you to "Act like a shooter, feel like a shooter and be a shooter."