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You, Film, and Your Team



Over my 20 years of coaching, I have constantly been tweaking and refining my philosophy concerning offense, defense, rebounding, press attack, in bounds series, and team discipline. Keeping what works and changing what doesn't is the essence of our profession. But the area I would tell you I have changed the most over those years is my philosophy on the use of FILM with our teams.

Huddling in a warm, dimly lit room around a projector displaying images on a white concrete wall for two hours as sophomore are some of my first memories as a player. Like any young coach, recreating what our coaches did that inspired us to be coaches MUST be the way to do things. Right?

Part of the reason my philosophy has changed so much over 20 years has been due to the advancements in technology taking us from the age of reel-to-reel to VHS to DVD to digital media. Part of the reason has been due to my experiences with various teams and head coach's personalities. But the biggest reason for the changes have been a result of studying the learning styles of the players in the IY Generation and simply observing what works and what has not.

For argument sake, we will continue to refer to it as FILM in this piece, even though it's mostly digital media now.

Just like with all things coaching, the most important thing is that you do what is best for your team. There are lot of ways to accomplish the same goals using different tactics. Finding the formula that suits you and your players is all that matters in the end. You can't run the offense Baylor used to go 40-0 last season and win the National Championship anymore than you can follow this piece word for word and expect it to work in your situation. But hopefully, this piece will be able to do 2 things. One, reinforce things you already do well. Two, challenge ways you do other things to either change them or tweak them to work better for your players/team.

In my opinion, FILM can be either by very, very beneficial or very, very detrimental to your team. There is NO in between. There is NO middle ground. It is either helpful or harmful. Period.

When executed with purpose FILM can be the reason your players improve and your team improves.

When executed without purpose, FILM can be the reason your players digress and your team stagnates.

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THE 4 “ents” of FILM

While the philosophy changed drastically from those first days as a player over the first 15 years of my coaching career, not much has really changed over the last five. The author Malcolm Gladwell would argue that is because I reached my 10,000 Hours of learning during those 15 years. No doubt that experience is the greatest teacher.

I believe if you can control 4 things concerning the use of FILM with your team, then you can make it beneficial. If you can properly execute these 4 areas, you will not reach a point of diminishing returns with your players and lose their attention. The 4 areas I will address with our philosophy on FILM are:

- 1. INTENT**
- 2. CONTENT**
- 3. ENVIRONMENT**
- 4. MOMENT**

***INTENT* is the why we watch/show film.**

***CONTENT* is the what we watch/show film.**

***ENVIRONMENT* is the where we watch/show film.**

***MOMENT* is the when we watch/show film.**

I say “watch/show” because I feel when you are talking about FILM, there is a difference in what the coaches must WATCH to determine what/when/why/where you SHOW the team.

So as we discuss how we execute in these 4 areas, it will be coming from 2 different perspectives... A coach’s perspective and a player’s perspective.

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INTENT...

Let's begin with the WHY. "Why" is always the first question young people want answered when they are asked to do something. Once they understand the WHY, research has proven that they are more likely to buy-in.

From a COACH PERSPECTIVE

A coach must watch film to gain knowledge. Through film a coach is able to see things happen. The more film we watch the more information we gain. The more information we gain, the more informed our suggestions are. The more information we gain, the more confident we are in those suggestions. The more confident we are in our suggestions, the more often we end up being correct. The more we are correct, the more credible we become. The more credible we become, the more players TRUST us. And when you have a players TRUST, you have it ALL!!

Of course, no matter how much film you watch, you will not always be correct. But over time, you will be right more often than you are wrong. Without the knowledge you gain from watching film you are simply guessing. You have a 50/50 chance of being right. That is the exact same percentage your freshmen, volunteer student manager has of being correct.

Watching practice film will help you gain knowledge on your individual players. It will help you see things you miss during the normal flow of a practice. Over time you will notice patterns and trends that you can use with individual players. You can point out these trends through film and help them improve their skills and their decision making. That will lead to increased playing time or maybe just practice reps.

A coach must also watch film on opponents. The WHY is the same. It gives us more information to work from. The more film the more information. We will discuss what we look for in a later section, but the WHY remains the same regardless of whether you are watching your own team or someone else's.

Armed with this knowledge we are now ready to use that knowledge with our team.

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INTENT...

From a PLAYER PERSPECTIVE

A good player wants to see film for one of three reasons... to improve, to prepare, to motivate.

To Improve:

The film doesn't lie. We've all heard that line. We've all used that line. Most all of us have lived that line.

That time when we as a player were 100% certain we sprinted back on defense, pointed and talked to team mates, and got properly matched up only to see on film that we actually were back pedaling, giving no sign of communication and gave up and uncontested lay-up.

The film doesn't lie.

With film we as coaches can help players improve on individual skills. We can show a flaw in footwork. We can show a poor decision in transition. We can show a missed post feed opportunity. We can show whatever we want as long as that player understands we are showing it to them to help them improve. It's not about embarrassing them. It's not about proving your point. It's not about anything other than IMPROVEMENT.

A lot of players have to be taught the art of watching film. They have to learn it's not about evaluating how their shoes match their uniform or what their mom was doing in the stands. When they learn to watch the action rather than the scenery then they can improve.

When you gain their trust and the player can check their pride and ego at the door then you are on the way to best utilizing your film time with them.

A large percentage of your team learn better from seeing than they do hearing. Showing them short clips of them doing something wrong (or something correctly) is more impactful than any words you can say to them.

We will discuss what to show them, when to show them, and where to show them these clips in a later section.

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INTENT...

To Prepare:

The 2nd “WHY” we show a player film is to PREPARE them. We are either preparing them for a situation we are putting them in or preparing them for an opponent they are going to face.

As just mentioned, being able to visualize something helps some players learn better than telling them. Seeing a clip of an upcoming opponent repeatedly rain in jumpers from 25 feet is more impactful than me telling them their match-up can really, really shoot it from deep.

When a player feels prepared you are raising their confidence level. I trust we would all agree a more confident player is who we want on our side.

While we will discuss more in depth in later sections, I think we must mention here and now that it is a delicate balance between being prepared/confident and paralyzed/unsure. We must know our players and our team. We must know how much information prepares them and makes them feel confident and how much paralyzes them and unsure.

Preparation can also carry over to new ideas you might be introducing on offense or defense. It might also help them prepare for special situations.

We keep a video file of end of game situations from various games (NBA, WNBA, Olympics, etc).

Again, I am starting to get into a future section of CONTENT, so we will move to the last WHY.

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INTENT...

To Motivate:

The 3rd reason we would show a player FILM is to motivate them.

A well timed highlight video is a good way to break a shooter out of a slump. A short clip emailed of them locking down an opponent before they face a tough match up... A video of their favorite player doing their thing... A video of the greatest speeches from sports movies...

The above flows over into our CONTENT and MOMENT sections once again, but you get the point.

A motivated player performs better. A motivated player may be able to do things they wouldn't normally be able to perform. A motivated team can help an average team do above average things.

Not only can a motivational film make an immediate impact but it can make a life long impression. I receive calls and texts from former players every season saying they were cleaning out a box and come across a video I made for them.

If you as a coach summon a player or gather a team to watch film, as long as you are doing so to help them improve, help them prepare, or motivate them, then you have a chance of it being beneficial.

If you do so to punish, embarrass, or ridicule you are being counter productive and also seriously hamstringing yourself in your film efforts that might actually be beneficial...

Is there a time to show a player something that might embarrass them? Sure. But that can't be the point of what you are doing except in extreme cases.

The second your team views film as punishment you are done as well.

So that wraps up the INTENT section of our FILM philosophy. Up next... CONTENT!!