

In the past few weeks I have watched the Lakers play on television and read online reports regarding Steve Nash's injury and progress. A little while ago I crossed paths with Jerry Hemmings and expressed my lament about the situation concerning Nash. I told him I had read that Steve had missed something to the effect of 6 games in the previous 10 years, but now I was worried that his 38 year old body would not be able to come back strong. Coach Hemmings told me that if any player could do it, he believed Steve was the one. I know that Steve Nash is rumored to be one of the fittest players in the NBA so what coach Hemmings told me next was not a surprise. I wanted to share it with readers so they could consider the subject of fitness testing.

Twenty-two years ago, Coach Hemmings was the assistant coach of the Canadian men's national team. They brought 45 players into camp as they worked towards the long term goal of hosting the FIBA world championship. The invited players ranged in age and experience. One of them included Rick Fox, who at the time was in the early part of his career with the Boston Celtics of the NBA. Also amongst the group was a sixteen year old high school player from Victoria, British Columbia. This was Steve Nash. Head coach Ken Shields had extended an invitation to Steve because he was quite familiar with his work ethic and skill level. The rest of the staff quickly saw his ability. The first thing that impressed them was Steve's fitness level. Of all 45 players in attendance, Steve finished second in the fitness testing.

What I thought readers would be interested in was the fact Coach Hemmings told me Steve completed level 16 on the Beep Test at that camp. Over twenty years ago, the beep test was in its infancy and today it is widely used across Canada. However, I am not sure if many American basketball coaches would have ever utilized it. The test was created by professor Luc Leger at the University of Montreal in 1983 and it is used to estimate an athlete's VO₂ or maximum oxygen intake. It is important to remember that the test itself is not used as a means of developing fitness but as a method of assessing it. In other words, unlike having players run suicides for getting into shape, and then assigning a number of suicides as a level that must be attained for a standard, players do not undertake the Beep Test in any daily fashion.

The Beep Test is known formally as the Multistage 20m Shuttle Run Test. The following description of the test comes from Wikipedia:

The test involves running continuously between two points that are 20 m apart from side to side. These runs are synchronized with a pre-recorded audio tape, CD or laptop software, which plays beeps at set intervals. As the test proceeds, the interval between each successive beep reduces, forcing the athlete to increase their speed over the course of the test, until it is impossible to keep in sync with the recording (or, in rare occasions, if the athlete completes the test). Many people who test people using the Multi-stage fitness test allow one level to beep before the person makes the line, but if the person being tested does not make the next interval then the most recent level they completed is their final score. The recording is typically structured into 21 'levels', each of which lasts around 62 seconds. Usually, the interval of beeps is calculated as requiring a speed at the start of 8.5 km/h, increasing by 0.5 km/h with each level thereafter. The progression from one level to the next is signaled by 3 quick beeps.

What are some of the advantages to the Beep Test? To begin with, reliability can be established by having a single tester apply the instrument to all subjects. By doing so, standardization of the procedure is achieved by having the evaluator conduct the test in the same fashion each time. Secondly, validity has been established in related research. The scores of individuals have correlated significantly with measured VO₂ of the study groups. Third, the use of the test over time has yielded published results so

that subjects can identify where their fitness level is at with comparison to similar age groups. Finally, the test continues to maximum effort unlike many other tests of endurance capacity. For example, Kate Fagan recently wrote about “Life as Lady Vol” for ESPN magazine (http://espn.go.com/womens-college-basketball/story/_/id/8712604/life-lady-volunteer). In the article, she states,

Most notably, Warlick has completely revamped the team's conditioning test. For years, Tennessee players were required to complete five suicide drills in five minutes to prove they were in shape. This season, however, Warlick upped the ante to 20 suicides in 20 minutes ...

In this scenario we would know that the individual members of the team were either capable or incapable of achieving the standard set by the coaching staff. However, we would not know which players truly were capable of exceeding such a standard. Furthermore, once individuals reached this external goal what internal motivation would drive them to achieve higher levels of fitness? Coach Neighbors has commented in the past that their team charts all possible skill levels and posts these results as a means of motivation. The Beep Test allows this method of comparison and challenge to be done in the area of fitness.

If any readers want to see the Beep Test in action, you can follow the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W45_Xtn4E0U

As a side note to last week's newsletter items, readers may be interested in the following. As a high school player, Steve Nash really wanted to play NCAA basketball and he had his heart set on going to Syracuse or the University of Washington. His high school coach sent out a package to nearly 200 division one schools and the Canadian National Team head coach included a letter of reference in each one. No schools showed any interest except one (Coach Dick Davey at Santa Clara came to British Columbia and upon seeing him, immediately offered a scholarship). Prior to this, the National Team staff sought expert help from consultant coaches and in a series of meetings they brought in Rick Majerus. They told Coach Majerus that he should really look at Steve Nash for the University of Utah, but he was not interested. Canada had not produced a single guard capable of playing at that level and he did not think one existed. Coach Hemmings told me once that Coach Majerus later told him that it may have been the single biggest mistake he ever made in recruiting.