

The Guide To Free Throw Mastery

Beyond Expectation

By

Jim "Makevery" Schatz

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ENDORSEMENT

BY DR. TOM AMBERRY
World Champion of Free Throw

Jim "Makeevery" Schatz came to me for free-throw coaching in 1997. Initially I had heard about his coaching and athletic accomplishments in other sports but at that time I had no idea how much heart, patience, persistence and motivation he has proved to have. I consider Jim to be the number one authority on free throw today.

His 45 years of being coached and coaching professional athletes and his ability to execute his knowledge at the free-throw line makes him one of the very best shooting coaches and teachers of free throw in the game of basketball. Jim has advanced my knowledge of teaching and coaching and today I can thank him. I'm very proud of him and how he exemplifies The 7 Step, Focus and Concentration Free Throw Shooting System.

If Jim "Makeevery" Schatz decides to break my 1993 Guinness consecutive free-throw record of 2,750 in a row ending on a make, which I know he can, he will prove he is worthy of the title World Champion of Free Throw. I hope he does. That would help prove once and for all that my work at the free-throw line was not in vain. That would also substantiate that The 7 Step, "Make Every" Free Throw Shooting System, using the air hole for the center of focus and concentration is the only way to shoot.

Every aspiring basketball coach, player, shooting expert and free-throw master needs to own this book, *The Guide To Free Throw Mastery - Beyond Expectation*. Jim's book is exactly that: beyond expectation.

[P H O T O # 1]

ENDORSEMENT

BY FRED NEWMAN

Owner of five Guinness free-throw records, 98% free-throw master in competition since 2007, considered the number one free-throw shooter in the world today and owner of a three-point consecutive record of 209 in a row

I met Jim "Makevery" Schatz in the year 2000 at the Santa Monica YMCA where I used to practice shooting free throws most mornings. He didn't introduce himself right away. It was just him and me alone in the gym shooting free throws. I was at one side of the gym and he was at the other. I didn't know who he was but I kept noticing he was making every shot. I never saw him miss.

Jim eventually came over and introduced himself to me. He told me his name including the "Makevery" and told me his free-throw coach, Dr. Tom Amberry, suggested we meet. He also told me he had just made 100 out of 102 free throws and that we lived close to each other.

We became good friends after that day, occasionally seeing each other at local senior free-throw tournaments, Jim winning his age group and I winning mine. In 2002 we started practicing together regularly at Cal Tech, in Pasadena, where I currently work and also went to college.

Since we met, I have been following Jim's efforts to write what I feel is the best book ever on free throw. I'm extremely happy to see he has finally finished it. As he has been proclaiming all along, it's way beyond expectation. By making free-throw as easy as many say it looks, this book is going to trigger an improvement trend never before imagined.

No player or coach can expect to reach their full potential without reading and owning *The Guide To Free Throw Mastery - Beyond Expectation*. If there eventually is any substantial prize money in making free throws I will hire Jim as my coach. That way I won't have to shoot against him. Look out basketball, you are in for some great improvements in shooting.

[P H O T O # 2]

Between the in-breath

and

the out-breath

...

A whisper that centers the soul:

"The best you can be."

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, more than three million kids (boys and girls, ages eight to thirteen) lined up at the free-throw line to compete in their age division for a coveted spot in the national skills free-throw program, the Elks 36th Annual National Hoop Shoot. Practicing for months on end, and triumphing in local, district, state and regional contests, the dedicated and focused finalists were rewarded with an all-expense-paid trip with their family to the national championships. The six national Elks Youth champions will have their names enshrined in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts.

[P H O T O # 3]

The Elks National Hoop Shoot is merely one of countless similar youth free-throw programs: The Knights of Columbus, the Junior NBA/WNBA, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, Parks and Recreation, countless youth basketball associations, elementary and middle schools—all told, more than 25 million youths are shooting free throws in organized youth games and skills competitions in the USA alone. Millions more play and shoot free throws all over the world. Basketball today has indeed become the most popular of all youth sports.

Ask basketball's top ten, "What is the most impressive shot in basketball?" and you'll get a variety of answers—Michael Jordan's awe-inspiring slam dunk, Robert Horry's mind-bending, big-game-ending three-pointer, Kobe Bryant's reality-twisting Alley-oop—each and every one an amazing accomplishment.

But ask these same experts, "What is the most important shot in basketball?" and their answers will be one and the same: the free-throw.

Did you know that the free throw is the most important skill in basketball? Points scored at the free-throw line constitute some 22.5 percent of the total points scored in an official game.

Yet surprisingly, until twelve years ago, every skill in basketball was improving except the free throw. In 1996, for example, the NBA's free-throw average was a dismal 68 percent. Today, teaching and coaching of the free throw has become highly advanced. And now, in 2008, the NBA free-throw league average is approximately 77 percent, and improving yearly. Much of that advancement is in defining and understanding the mental plane.

During practice, up close to the basket and later at the free-throw line is where "pure" shooting fundamentals are developed and refined. The world's best free-throw shooters practice shooting free throws every day. Not only are they the best free-throw shooters, but as a result of their excellent fundamentals, disciplined daily practice and dedication, they are also basketball's best "pure" shooters from the field.

The Guide To Free Throw Mastery clearly defines the universal fundamentals and practice systems used and endorsed by the world's best free-throw shooters to help you

develop and perfect your own unique free-throw ritual and style. The mental skills required for free-throw mastery are the same required to achieve any great goal in life. *The Guide To Free Throw Mastery's* goal is one and the same: To instill the physical and mental skills required for you to consistently make 90 percent or better of your free throws, and in the process develop the highest level of confidence imaginable for mastering the free throw...and life itself.

This book offers an improved and proven daily free-throw practice system originally taught to me by free-throw world champion, Dr. Tom Amberry, and then modified with on-the-line education, experience and in-depth analysis with other world free-throw champions. When I began shooting free throws competitively, my average was 68 percent. After Dr. Tom's instructions and his advice to start keeping records of my daily shooting, within a short period of time I reached my goal of making 90 percent of my free throws in practice. During that period I missed practice only a handful of times and averaged making more than 500 free throws per day. Within seven months of that, I became a 98 percent free-throw master in practice. I went from 68% to 98% in fifteen months. I felt I had to be that good in order to teach effectively and do exhibitions and demonstrations.

Practice doesn't make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect. And if you follow the instructions in this book patiently and precisely, you are practically guaranteed success—not in one or two years, but right here, right now.

FOREWORD

BY DR. TOM AMBERRY
World Free-throw Champion

A free-throw is a gift: Get fouled and you go to the free-throw line to shoot uncontested free throws. The points scored from making free throws account for approximately 22.5 percent of the total points scored in a basketball game, with most of the free throws coming at the most critical time at the end of the fourth quarter, especially in the final minute. That makes free-throw execution an extremely vital part of the success of a basketball game especially since games are most often decided by a margin of one to three points.

You stand alone at the free-throw line with your mind (understanding), muscles (physical condition), heart (emotional training) and your beliefs (spiritual development). If you are using focus and concentration in your winning ritual you will make your best shot all the time.

This mental habit of focus and concentration helps in not only improving free-throw shooting, but also in accomplishing anything you want to do in life. I've come to this conclusion: In everything we do, whether in sports or business, in trying to achieve a life goal we are more limited by our beliefs than our abilities. The obstacles to success exist more in the mind than in the physical world.

Those who excel at the aspects of shooting a basketball that others find boring and repetitive create their own zone. When in the zone you know you are going to be at your best every time on your free throws or shots during play. What is the highest level of performance you can achieve? Write a realistic estimate of your talents and add 10 percent more toward your new goal. Stick with it! Focus and concentrate on "making every" free throw.

There are no secrets to success...don't waste your time looking for them. To achieve success, whatever the task, we must pay a price. It's like anything worthwhile. It has a price. You have to get to the point where success is possible. More important, you must pay the price required beyond that expectation in maintaining that success. Success is not a "sometimes" thing. In other words, you can't do what is right once in a while. You must do what's right all the time! SUCCESS is a habit. Unfortunately, so is failure.

I know success comes at the free-throw line in basketball as the result of perfect practice, focus, concentration, character, proper work habits, persistence, learning from mistakes and especially the love of the game. Just reading these words is not the same as experiencing, feeling and knowing the success they produce. Perfect practice makes perfect execution.

What helps toward this perfection is setting your first goal just out of reach and within the realm of your own possibility—a goal set high enough that the idea of achievement really excites you. Your excitement will give you an excellent chance of reaching that goal!

The willingness and persistence to develop perfect practice using focus and concentration makes a champion. The fundamentals of free-throw shooting can be

perfected shot by shot following the same seven steps explained in my book, *Free Throw – 7 Steps to Success* and further explained and demonstrated in more detail in Jim "Makeevery" Schatz's book, *The Guide To Free Throw Mastery – Beyond Expectation*.

[P H O T O # 4]

Chapter I

Getting Started: The Important Aspects of Free Throw

HOW IMPORTANT ARE FREE THROWS?

In a typical basketball game, statistics show that about 22.5 percent of all points are scored from the free-throw line. This is no small number. The free throw is to basketball what the putt is to golf, or the serve to tennis.

But it's more than that.

Much more.

In the final quarter of any basketball game, as time runs out and every second becomes sudden death, making free throws not only becomes a team's primary weapon for scoring points... making free throws ultimately spells the difference between winning and losing. In the final three minutes of any game, 33 percent of all points are scored at the free-throw line. During the final two minutes, 50 percent. And during the final minute, an astounding 67 percent. In a close game, the team that successfully makes more free throws near the end of the game is almost always the team that wins.

And that's just in game conditions. In practice, mastering the free throw is even more important. The free throw forms both the foundation and the mechanisms upon which virtually every other shooting fundamental is developed.

In free-throw mastery, these fundamentals are developed by shooting free-throw repetitions in sets of five, 10, 15 and 25 shots. Then one, two, three or five free throws are made between shooting drills from the field to simulate game conditions.

Since developing good shooting fundamentals takes place primarily close to the basket and later at the free-throw line it makes good sense to spend 25 to 35 percent of solo shooting practice time learning to make free throws. This is especially true if a player is just starting the game. Once a player learns how to make 90 percent or more of their free throws in practice, they no longer need to shoot free throws a quarter of the time.

Maintaining an edge and continuing improvement will still require 100 free throws "made" (that is, "successfully completed") each day. Making 100 free throws takes less than 30 minutes for a 90 percent or better free-throw expert.

HOW TO THINK AFTER YOU ARE FOULED

At the highest level of mastery in any sport, there is a common maxim: "It's not the bad call that's important, but how you react to it!"

Nowhere is this more important than after being fouled in basketball.

When you drive to the hoop for a lay up or dunk you will get fouled often, and often deliberately. When this happens, there is only one way you should react. You should not

over react, but think, "I've got the opportunity to score free uncontested points and help my team."

After a foul has been called, the game slows down then comes to a halt. This break in the fast-paced action allows you to regain your composure, pose, focus, concentration, balance, rhythm, force, pace and timing. To do this, you must learn how to remain still and in silence.

Then, step up to the free-throw line totally relaxed and confident, just like in practice and make your free points.

That's a lot to look forward to. To relax and re-center. Plus, by making your free throws, you gain confidence and can build critical momentum for your team. (Miss them, however, and you help your opponent's confidence and momentum.)

It is a well-known fact that it is harder to make free throws in the game than in practice. Hostile environment, heightened emotions, the physical nature of the game and performance anxiety all play a role. Your level of confidence at the line is directly affected by your free-throw knowledge, experience and especially your free-throw practice average. Even the world's best game-time free-throw shooters have a "drop-off rate" between three and seven percent. (The *drop-off rate* is the difference between your free-throw practice percentage and free-throw game-time percentage.) Most basketball players have a drop-off rate far greater than seven percent, a result of poor preparation, improper practice and mental "failure cycles" that occur unconsciously.

If you are a good free-throw shooter, the opposing team will be careful not to foul you. That's smart, high percentage defensive end game strategy. Likewise, if you can't make your free throws, the other team will try to foul you and not let you take any shots from the field.

THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL FREE THROWS

In the game, there is a single objective for free throws: to help your team by scoring uncontested points. To do this effectively, there is a simple statistic: to make 90 percent of your free throws in competition you will need to average 96 percent or better in practice.

There are five critical factors to achieving this:

1. **Absolute Calm:** The ability to relax, still and clear the mind, emptying it of any possible mental and emotional distraction.
2. **Absolute Focus:** The ability to remain positive, concentrated and focused on the free-throw process.
3. **Absolute Consistency:** The ability to repeat your shooting fundamentals exactly the same in rhythm, pace and force on each shot.
4. **Absolute Mental Image:** The ability to envision perfect hoop entry and mentally hear the sound of the net "pop" or "swish."

5. **Absolute Presence in The Moment:** "Accept, don't Expect." The most important factor for learning and improvement is an attitude of acceptance; that is, your ability to remain in "the Now." The ability to clearly visualize and to stay positive is dependent upon acceptance of the moment. You need to accept, not expect. Expectation of any kind creates problems in focus and concentration. Acceptance, on the other hand, develops a feeling of being at peace with unlimited patience, the vital ingredient to creating flow, confidence and continuation.

THE PHYSICS OF HOOP ENTRY

In mastering free throws, the sound of the net "popping" or "swishing" and consistent scoring are constant and critical objectives. Before you can reach them, however, you must first understand the essential physics of free throw—precisely how the basketball's flight best enters the sweet spot of the hoop.

By floor measurements, it is 15 feet from the free-throw line to the backboard. Because of the added six-inch neck, the center of the hoop is 15 inches from the backboard. If you draw a straight line from your basketball release point to the center of the hoop, that length will be approximately 13.5 feet.

[PHOTO #5]

The men's official basketball is approximately nine inches in diameter. The women's and kids' official basketball is approximately eight-and-a-half inches in diameter.

The basketball rim, or hoop, is 18 inches in diameter. Take a moment to visualize this. Picture the rim laying on the ground, without the net. It looks enormous. It's so big, in fact, that it's possible for two basketballs (men's, women's or children's) to pass through the rim at the same time.

[PHOTO #6]

When the basketball is in the center of the hoop, which is not the bulls-eye target, or sweet spot, there is a margin of error of approximately four-and-a-half inches for the men's basketball and four-and-three-quarters inches for the women's basketball.

[PHOTOS #7 and #8]

It is important to note that the perfect bulls-eye target and sweet spot is *not* the center of the hoop. Rather it is approximately two inches toward the back of the rim along the midline.

[PHOTO #9]

That is because clearing the front of the rim is so important. With the correct "shot arc"

[PHOTO #10] the bottom of the basketball will clear the front of the rim by six inches [PHOTO #11] and make perfect entry through the bulls-eye target and then enter the hoop at the *sweet spot*.

[PHOTO #12]

Because both the basketball and the hoop are round, it is best to shoot the free throw directly in line from the center of the free throw line to the center of the hoop. This is called the *midline*. It is also the shortest distance from the free-throw line to the center of the hoop. In fact, if you can just shoot straight along the midline (without veering left or right), even if your shot is flat, or a little short or long, you are guaranteed to make 70 percent of your free throws.

[PHOTO #13]

With four-and-a-half inches of free space on each side of the basketball as it enters the rim, you can miss slightly off-center and still make hoop entry as long as your distance is correct.. Even slight contact with the rim can result in hoop entry. Ideally, however, you want to avoid contacting the rim. If rim contact is made, it is best to be not only straight on the midline but long because of the backboard and the six-inch neck connected to the hoop. Being straight on the midline and short is far less effective. But worst of all is being left or right of center, because of the lower entry area due to the round shape of the hoop.

(Three pictures)

There is also an ideal arc and flight of the basketball that creates the highest margin of entry. The ideal angle of hoop entry is approximately 45 degrees and the correct distance should allow for about six inches of clearance over the front of the rim. This can only be accomplished with a downward rather than straight or "flat" flight above the hoop. This angle is called the *shot arc*.

(Two Pictures #14)

Since the ideal angle of hoop entry is downward, in order to allow sufficient clearance over the front of the rim, the basketball's flight from release to hoop entry travels about 15 to 15.5 feet, with the flight path reaching its peak about three feet above the rim three-quarters into its flight. Then it's up to gravity.

(Two pictures #15)

The ideal basketball rotation is "backspin" which, at one to three full basketball rotations from hand release to hoop entry, creates what is called a "soft shot" or "shooter's touch." The less rotation, the softer the shot.

[PHOTO]

For additional information on the physics of basketball, here are two additional free-throw references: *The Physics of Basketball*, by John J. Fontanella and *Shoot - The Art of Scoring in Basketball*, by Gary Boren and Denny Price.

[PHOTOS #16 and #17]

BULLS-EYE TARGET

During the execution of the release and the shot, the question many free-throw shooters ask is, what should I aim at?

There are many theories. Most important is that you focus your vision directly on a spot and keep your eyes anchored there, centered and unflinching, until the completion of the shot. My bulls-eye target is seen in this photo of the Free-Throw Trainer. [PHOTO # 18] I attach the FTT to the front-center of the rim [PHOTO # 19]. When shooting, I want the bottom of the basketball to nick the top of the stick's bulls-eye target on its way into the hoop. That way I clear the front of the rim by 6 inches and enter the hoop at the sweet spot, 11 inches from the front of the rim. [PHOTO # ?] This bulls-eye target, which can physically been seen, with the FTT, corresponds to the correct shooting arc of approximately 45 degrees. [PHOTO #?]

In darts, a former world champion once advised, "Aim for the target, and you might not hit it, but you'll be sure to hit the wall. But aim for the bulls-eye, and you might not hit it, but you'll be sure to hit the target. Aim for the center of the bulls-eye, and you own it—the bulls-eye is yours."

Shooting free throws is no different. I look at the bulls-eye target twice: once during alignment, before grip establishment, and next, while shooting the free throw. I often visualize my shooting arm extending fifteen feet, through an imaginary arched shot tunnel, traveling all the way to the bulls-eye target where I go through and then drop or dunk the basketball. This visualization also helps me make a consistent release and follow-through.

[ILLUSTRATION #21]

THE FOUR PHASES OF FREE THROW

1. **Visualization:** "The Morpheus Transformation"
2. **The Initial Move:** Igniting the Momentum
3. **Momentum:** Shoot, Release and Follow-Through
4. **Acceptance:** Being in the "Now Continuum"

Visualization: "The Morpheus Transformation"

Visualization is the tool the world's greatest free throwers use to achieve their goals. How powerful is it? Over 70 percent of the world's population thinks in pictures. In research conducted on visualization, two basketball teams of equal standing were compared. One team practiced on the courts as they always did, while the other team stopped practicing on the court and only practiced visualizing the drills. The results of the test were astonishing; researchers found that both teams improved their skills equally, even though the second team never even touched the ball during the test duration. The

secret was that when they visualized playing, the players always imagined getting the ball through the hoop 100 percent of the time whereas in real practice this could never be true.

As Napoleon Hill wrote, "What the mind can conceive and believe ... it will achieve." Visualization is mental rehearsal. In your mind's eye, you must vividly see every element, every detail of the successful free-throw, before the ball ever leaves your fingertips. Visualize seeing yourself making a perfect shot every time and hearing the sound of the net "pop." Visualize the perfect execution of each of the seven fundamental steps. (We'll get to these in Chapter II, The Physical Plane.) Practice these visualizations while getting into stance, during alignment, while establishing your grip and while your eyes are anchored on the bulls-eye.

The conscious mind is capable of holding only one thought at a time. If that thought is negative, or if attention wanders, the shooter is setting him- or herself up for failure. The use of visualization before and during the free-throw rituals keeps the mind positive, under control and in the present. Visualization that becomes a ritual keeps the conscious mind and the eyes and ears busy, while the subconscious mind does the task of making the free throw. Visualization keeps the mind off all potential distractions, the ego and the stress of competition.

The conscious mind tries to intervene to help, but usually messes you up. The conscious mind limits potential; the subconscious mind has unlimited potential. By anchoring selected words, repeated like a mantra, precisely timed to your seven fundamental steps, you allow the subconscious mind working with your motor memory to take over so that you are at your best.

To help master visualization, I created what I call *The Morpheus Transformation*. Named for Morpheus, the Greek god of human dreams, The Morpheus Transformation is a dream-like visualization: a way, while stepping into stance and alignment, of seeing one's true and inner self as a perfect machine in a body that is the best it can be and that makes a perfect free throw every time.

The Initial Move: Igniting the Momentum

Having aligned your stance, established your grip, visualized perfection and prepared to shoot, NOW comes the most critical moment and movement of the free-throw process: the initial move that ignites the momentum of shot.

It's like turning the ignition key to start a car engine. In one rhythmic motion, the initial move is the slight bending of the knees while in balance. That triggers the rest of the body to follow. The small movement of the hands, molded to the basketball, moving upward along the shot line, the full bending of the knees, the bending and coiling of the shooting elbow, the tilting of the head as your eyes anchor onto the bulls-eye—all happening at the same time.

All your attention and awareness then shifts to the bulls-eye target/sweet spot, to your balance and to shooting with what's called "UpForce"—to and through the sweet spot with the perfect follow through. *UpForce* is a term popularized by the well-known

shooting coach Tom Nordland in his "Swish" and "Swish 2" instructional DVDs. "UpForce" is trademarked by Swish International (www.swish22.com).

[PHOTO #22]

Momentum: Shoot, Release and Follow-Through

With the eyes and ears riveted on the bulls-eye (you can almost hear the sound of the net "pop"), the momentum of the shot has begun. There can be no conscious intervention to control the momentum. The shot was already subconsciously conceived during the visualization phase and ignited by the initial move.

The momentum of the shot has its own force, coming from the ground up. When full body coil is in effect, the top of the shot pocket is reached. The correct percentage of force should be the same for every shot.

The knees straighten, followed by the extension of the shooting arm, followed by the uncoiling of the shooting wrist and finally followed by the release of the basketball off the fingertips, with the index and middle fingers leaving the basketball last, and while balanced on your toes. With the inertia building from the ground up, the shooting arm pushes upward through the basketball's flight directly toward the bulls-eye target leading to the sweet spot of the hoop.

Many coaches teach shooters to hold the follow-through, firmly holding the final wrist position. This, however, is a sure way to become overly control conscious. The arm ends at the wrist so it may be okay to hold the shooting arm, but never the wrist. The wrist must flop effortlessly, fingers strong, spread and straight, like a fingertip push up.

[PHOTO #?]

I use another visualization, while my eyes are focused on the bulls-eye, to ensure a consistent follow-through and release. [PHOTO #23] I visualize my shooting arm extending the entire fifteen-foot distance, through a shot tunnel with the perfect arc to clear the front of the rim. Then, I visualize the wrist flopping and falling naturally while dropping or dunking the basketball in the sweet spot of the hoop.

[PHOTO #24]

HOW TO PRACTICE. To practice the follow-through or, for that matter, any elements of the Seven Steps, rehearse or mime the exact movements in front of a mirror or at the foul line in practice, instead of shooting the shot at the free-throw line in an actual game. In other words, take care of the mechanical nuances visually and mentally first, feeling them and developing muscle memory in mime. Then, when shooting in an actual game, the body will strive to imitate that exact same sensation and will construct a smooth athletic performance without any conscious intervention.

When shooting free throws, any conscious intervention will interfere with your success. Whether in practice or game conditions, always strive to be in a subconscious state. Much of the improvement takes place not during day-to-day shooting, but in the subconscious while you are away from practice or are asleep. Improvement is gradual,

and often imperceptible. Daily improvement is difficult to see; monthly improvement, far more apparent while keeping records. Knowing this now should help you relax, have trust and confidence that your efforts will be rewarded, your goals will be reached and your positive visualizations will come true.

Acceptance: Being in the "Now Continuum"

The conscious mental time span between each shot is the Acceptance phase. How you think during this time is very important. The mind must accept, not react, nor judge the previous shot, but simply accept. Practice this in silence, and you will develop focus and concentration, correct arousal level (control over your emotions), positive attitude, confidence that you are improving and insights as to why.

The Acceptance phase is also the time when you see if the shot was successful, and determine where the basketball was in relation to the bulls-eye. Recording this during practice paves the way to improvement and self-knowledge. Each shot practiced will make the next shot better when your mind is in the right place.

After each free throw during practice, retrieve the basketball, find the air hole and look into the center while saying to yourself: "Hear the sound of the net 'pop'." Then walk back to the free-throw line, erasing your mind of any thought except the number of shots made. Then, silently step into stance and repeat the process in exactly the same way.

This visualization exercise helps you make a long string of consecutive free throws, controlling your thoughts between shots so no focus or concentration is lost to uninvited negativity or lost attention.

Chapter II

The Physical Plane

The foundation for free-throw mastery is built upon what's called "pure" shooting fundamentals. A pure shooter's fundamentals and shot look effortless. This chapter on the physical plane explains, in seven steps, and demonstrates, in photos, those fundamentals.

It's best to view the free throw in sequential steps although they blend into one fluid motion. Each step is a reference point for the entire free-throw process.

The free throw is like a fingerprint. No two free-throw styles are alike. There are differences in style in each step in rhythm, pace, force and angle joints. Although free-throw styles are unique for each individual, there are fundamental concepts that are the same. Those universal fundamentals need to be understood so one's unique style can be developed.

There are many elements in each of the seven steps. Practice and study until all of your unique elements are exactly the same on every free throw. Accomplish this and you will be called an expert, then a master and finally a champion.

THE SEVEN UNIVERSAL FUNDAMENTAL STEPS

1. Alignment
2. Establishing the grip

3. Initial move, remaining inline and gathering of the UpForce
4. Eyes on the sweet spot/bulls-eye target
5. Lower body power base - knee bend
6. Shot pocket - set point
7. Momentum of shot, follow-through and release

Step 1: Alignment

Alignment has five major components: position, stance, balance, posture and centering.

POSITION refers to setting up your feet so that your dominant eye is in line with the free-throw midline and midline of the hoop. [PHOTO] The dominant eye is usually the right eye for right-handers and left eye for left-handers.

The midline is an imaginary line that goes from the *painter's hole* at the center of the free-throw line to the center of the hoop. (Before painting the key circle, the painter hammers a nail into the center of the free-throw line and ties a string to the nail to draw the arc of the key circle; the painter's hole is left when the nail is removed.) [PHOTO]

Shooting from this universal free-throw position gives the best view of the basket because it's the shortest distance to shoot from and the shot line and midline are the same and overlapped. [2 PHOTOS]

When the grip is established, the center of the basketball should be on or close to the midline and 'target line' so that all three lines—midline, target line and shot line—are close to being overlapped and the same. [PHOTO]

STANCE begins by first placing the adjustment foot (right-handed, right foot; left-handed, left foot) and then the anchor foot (right-handed, left foot; left-handed, right foot) shoulder distance apart in the universal free-throw position as described above. There are three ways to address the free-throw line while setting the stance. Each method of placing the feet, whether square, open or closed, is the starting point for creating your unique free-throw style. (3 PICTURES)

Remember: Each time you approach the free-throw line, the angle of your feet at the line, the distance from the line and the gap between your adjustment and anchor feet must be exactly the same. This ensures consistency and a climb in your free-throw percentages over time.

BALANCE is very important. Your head is the center of balance. Visualize balancing a book on your head like a model walking the catwalk.

Your “in-breath” (breathing in) provides physical and mental balance. Focus on an in-breath as you set your adjustment and anchor foot. Continue to hold the inhalation and focus on your breath as you complete your stance and begin the next components, which are posture and centering.

Your feet will feel solid on the ground and your head, the center of balance, will feel in perfect alignment. These mental steps, done the same way every time, will ensure balance throughout the entire free-throw process. [2 PHOTOS]

POSTURE. During the in-breath, set your posture as follows. Pretend there is a string connected to the top of your head. With both feet set, let that string pull your head up. At the same time, like a puppet on a string, your shoulders lift, belly button sucks in, spine straightens and the lungs expand fully. This way of posturing will give you a feeling of being relaxed while at the same time being at your best, confident and strong. [PHOTO]

CENTERING. The alignment is almost complete. The elements above, with the breath gently held, takes a count of four. Still holding the in-breath, while in perfect position, stance, balance and posture, take a moment to center, or focus, your entire physical, mental and spiritual being on the hoop's sweet spot/bulls-eye target. [PHOTO]

Centered on the hoop's sweet spot/bulls-eye target, you are now ready for step 2, establishing the grip.

Step 2: Establishing the Grip

Establishing a specific grip is basic to all sports. It should be practiced by itself, without shooting. The basketball grip is two-handed. The shooting hand and guide hand need to be set in the exact same way and position for every free throw. [PHOTO]

The shooting hand is set directly under the basketball with the shooting wrist laid back in what's called a "locked-wrist" position. The guide hand is set to the side and slightly under the basketball. [PHOTO]

Both hands and fingers are spread wide and mold to the basketball. All parts of the hand are flush with the basketball except for a small space at the heel of the hand. [2 PHOTOS]

The shooting hand, cocked and locked under the basketball, allows the ball to be balanced on the shooting hand like a waiter holding and balancing a tray of glasses filled with water.

Next, establish the guide hand by placing it in a comfortable position on the side and slightly under the basketball. [2 PHOTOS]

Here's a trick to reposition the grip in the same way each time. Look at the "V" formed by the index and middle fingers of the shooting hand. While standing in position at the free-throw line, point the "V" area at the basketball's air hole and line that up with the shot line, shot arch and the hoop's sweet spot/bulls-eye target. [PHOTO]

Now take a marking pen and outline both hands on the basketball. All you have to do now is put your hands into the drawing of your hands on the basketball and...swish. [PHOTO]

Use the air hole as the point of reference to set the hands. The fingers fall exactly on the seams of the basketball each time. Also, use the air hole as a point of concentration just

before shooting and while shooting as an aid for targeting. Visualize the small black air hole precisely hitting and going through the hoop's sweet spot/bulls-eye target. (3 PICTURES)

The final point is breath control. Set the grip during the exhale (4 count out-breath). Then continue to gently hold the breath during the initial move and momentum of the entire shot.

There are three ways to establish the grip: a standard one-handed dribble, a two-handed bounce called a crab dribble with the air hole upright throughout, or no dribble or bounce. If you decide to dribble or bounce the basketball, use the same number of bounces before each free throw. The less dribbles or bounces the better. Also, if you use a dribble or bounce there is no hesitation going from bounce to grip to shot. The force of the basketball's last bounce, coming up into your hands while establishing the grip, should continue with the same force going into the momentum of the shot. (6 PICTURES)

In my free-throw style, I favor no bounce or dribble mainly because I feel that the simpler the ritual the easier it is to repeat the rhythm, pace, force and grip. The great free-throw shooters are all quick with no or few superfluous moves. [2 PHOTOS]

That's the two-handed basketball free-throw grip. Throughout, find, focus and concentrate on the air hole as a comfortable, familiar place that dismisses the active—conscious—mind and allows no uninvited thoughts or distractions. This act of focusing and concentrating on the air hole allows the performance to be optimal and happen without conscious effort in the silent subconscious. [PHOTO]

Step 3: Initial Move, Remaining in Line and the Gathering of the UpForce

Once alignment and grip have been established, you are ready to shoot. The initial move is made without hesitation. The feeling is of being in deep focus and concentration, balanced, quick, but not in a hurry, and in the flow. (3 PICTURES)

This initial move is a timing move, which does several things. It ignites the shot momentum, keeps the center of the basketball in line with the center of the hoop and triggers the full coil and coordination of all body parts. The eyes lock on the bulls-eye target, the knees bend, the shooting elbow bends and the basketball sets in the shot pocket set point. These three—eyes locked, knee bent, basketball set in the shot pocket—combine at the bottom of the full coil to prepare for the UpForce. [4 PHOTOS]

Execute the initial move by keeping the grip relaxed and molded flush on the basketball. When the bottom of the coil and the shot pocket set point are reached, the position of the grip and especially the locked shooting wrist has not changed or moved and remains in line. [PHOTO]

Remember: The shooting elbow remains relaxed and in its natural position, close to the side of the body, during the initial move. This means that there is no conscious intervention to control the elbow. Keeping the hands and the elbow relaxed will ensure that the basketball stays straight along the shot line/arch line from grip establishment to the shot pocket/set point through out the momentum of the shot, release and follow-

through. There is no bringing the elbow in or rotation of the shooting hand: just straight up and straight through.

This concept of keeping the elbow against the side and relaxed is different from what many coaches teach. However, I feel that bringing the elbow in and under the shooting hand deliberately, as many teach, disrupts the natural flow of the shot. The position of the shooting hand at release is critical to the direction and flight of the basketball. The elbow just releases its coil naturally.

Before, during and after the initial move you are in a quiet, silent and still subconscious state. There is no conscious effort other than maintaining balance and keeping the eyes anchored on the bulls-eye target and hoop. Shoot.

You will now discover that the initial move smoothly triggers all of the steps that follow.

Step 4: Eyes on the Bulls-Eye Target

Your eyes temporarily anchor on the sweet spot/bulls-eye target at the end of the in-breath and beginning of the out-breath during alignment. [PHOTO]

This first look, just before grip establishment, simply locates the bulls-eye target and helps you visualize making the shot. The second look is during the initial move and exacts the bulls-eye target for shooting and making the shot.

After locating the bulls-eye target during alignment, the eyes shift from the bulls-eye target to anchor temporarily on the center of the ball's air hole and establish your grip. During the initial move, the eyes shift again from the center of the air hole for that second look at the sweet spot/bulls-eye target and hoop. Your eyes establish a shot line from the air hole to the center of the bulls-eye target. Visualize that you are shooting just the small black air hole into the sweet spot/bulls-eye target. The hoop will look enormous this way. [4 PHOTOS]

Anchor your eyes on the sweet spot/bulls-eye target from the initial move through the follow-through and release. This ensures an accurate shot, keeps the head balanced and allows the shot evaluation in your march to perfection.

Step 5: Lower Body Base, Knee Bend

The knee bend is ignited by the initial move and blends with the elements of Steps 4 and 6. The knee bend is the essential spring of the lower body power base. The release of the knee coil, by straightening the legs, is the first event in the inertia of the shot.

Rather than trying to control the amount of knee bend, feel for the right amount of lower body power base force. If you consciously over-control the amount of knee bend, you compromise where the focus should be—on the initial move, then on balance while anchored visually on the bulls-eye target.

When the knee bend is made, the head, which is the center of balance, must stay even and in line as it goes down with the knee bend and up with the legs' straightening. That is how balance is maintained while gathering and releasing the inertia. [2 PHOTOS]

Step 6: Shot Pocket - Set Point

When the basketball sets in the shot pocket, also called the set point, all the lower and upper body parts are working together and are in their full coil. You are now ready to shoot and release the built-up energy. [PHOTO]

Both the guide and shooting hands, when in the shot pocket, are relaxed and still molded flush to the basketball just as when the grip was established. The shooting hand is under the basketball and the guide hand is on the side. If the guide hand is taken away while the basketball sets in the shot pocket the ball should be nicely balanced on the shooting hand. The shooting wrist is laid back in a locked position, the shooting elbow is bent and fully coiled and the back of the shooting hand is nearly parallel to the ground. [2 PHOTOS]

While shooting in the described subconscious state, the focus and concentration is entirely on the sweet spot/bulls-eye target and maintaining balance. At the end of the UpForce, the release of the basketball off the fingertips of the shooting hand coincides with the precise moment when the shot is subconsciously visualized and felt. The feeling of being automatic and the vision of making every free throw is the confidence level we seek.

In the next and final step, you'll see the basketball make perfect hoop entry and you'll hear the sound of the net "pop."

Step 7: Momentum of Shot, Follow-through and Release

You're fully coiled, with the knees bent and the basketball in the shot pocket ready to release the built-up inertia. It ignites with the uncoiling of the lower body power base by straightening the legs. The lower body weight shifts upward to the upper body and then shifts to the uncoiling of the shooting arm, releasing the coiled wrist and finally releasing the basketball off the shooting hand and fingers. [4 PHOTOS]

The follow-through ends at the end of the arm, not the end of the wrist, as many teach. You can hold the follow-through at the end of the arm, but never hold the wrist. The wrist must flop forward naturally. The basketball is balanced gently on the shooting hand as the guide hand releases, pushes upward through the shot line, shot arc and shot tunnel into the sweet spot/bulls-eye target of the hoop. [PHOTO]

Getting a consistent and repeatable follow-through and release is the true line to becoming a 'pure shooter.' Practice just the follow-through and release by shooting at a bulls-eye target drawn on a wall, or by standing very close to the basket along the midline. Practice this as you would the full free-throw ritual except without assistance from the lower body. [2 PHOTOS]

From this up-close position practice in two ways. The first way is to stand upright with the basketball set in the shot pocket, remove the guide hand and perform the follow-

through and release with just the shooting hand. The second way is to have both hands molded to the basketball in the erect shot pocket, then practice releasing the guide hand cleanly so the guide hand doesn't drag or pull the shot off line. Practice these drills in sets of 25 shots to develop repeatability in rhythm, pace and force. [2 PHOTOS]

Now take that subconscious muscle memory to the free-throw line by moving back several feet at a time along the midline. Each time you move back, maintaining the same upper body follow-through and release force, add more knee bend, which automatically adds more arc and distance, until you reach the free-throw line. Now you are ready to keep track of your free-throw practice. (3 PICTURES)

*An important final note on the seven steps of the free throw: The optimal force behind the release is approximately 70 percent of your maximum strength. Beyond this, additional force compromises direction, feel and control. Your power and control will improve through time with stronger shooting muscles and fluidity.

This chapter on the shooting fundamentals ends with sequence photos (four views) of the best two free-throw shooters in the NBA and WNBA. (Hopefully Steve Nash and Becky Hammon). There will also be some photos of several other free-throw masters in action: Mark Price, Rick Barry, Calvin Murphy, Bill Sharman, John Wooden, Dr. Tom Amberry, Ted St. Martin, Ed Palubinskas, Fred Newman and myself. Many more current and past free-throw master stylists can be viewed on my Web site, www.freethrowmastery.com.

Chapter III

The Mental Plane

The fundamentals can be viewed visually in the physical plane but the mental plane and a shooter's thoughts are impossible to see or know through casual observation. In the past, basketball players and coaches have not had the exact science and knowledge to understand how the mind works and how the mind should think or not think during the free-throw process. This chapter explains the mental side of consistent optimal performance at the free-throw line.

Free-throw masters are "in the flow," "in the zone" and at their peak of performance all the time. They have developed skills and inner qualities that enhance their disciplined practice, attention, focus and concentration. Free-throw masters are able to synchronize mind and body and perform in the here and now without conscious thought.

You could say that free-throw mastery is similar to Zen in the art of archery, except instead of a bow and arrow a basketball is used to find the center of the hoop and bulls-eye target. It has been said by a Zen master, "The bulls-eye target finds the center of you."

INNER DEVELOPMENT

"The life masters, occult and spiritual teachers of humanity, who have attained the peak of inner development, are said to be in eternal silence, using their mental powers only when necessary to communicate with earthly humans."

"Solitude is the inner silence. It is in man's mind. But man attached to things of outer life cannot get solitude, for his mind is not controlled nor silenced." Mouni Sadhu, *Meditation*

There are certain conditions that influence the success of inner development—and physical prowess. First you must recognize that you are not your mind. The mind should be your servant, like a machine that you put into gear. How often do thoughts enter your mind without your permission? Where do these uninvited thoughts come from? Learn to control your thoughts, emotions, attention, focus and concentration and you gain control over your inner development and life.

"Developing your mental powers and concentration leads much further than the mere capacity for one pointedness of mind. Actual success means nothing less than the understanding of the mind's nature and source. The problem is that the interests of both man and his mind are often opposed." Mouni Sadhu, *Concentration - A Guide To Mental Mastery*

I believe in John Wooden's definition of success. The greatest basketball coach of all time, he said, "Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable to become."

THE FREE THROW AS THE PERFECT MEDIUM FOR DEVELOPING ATTENTION, FOCUS, CONCENTRATION AND THE INNER SELF

We know that practicing to make every shot at the free-throw line can develop pure shooting fundamentals. We also know that pure shooting fundamentals lead to higher scoring in a basketball game. More important than those two truths is that practicing to make every shot at the free-throw line is the ideal method and medium for developing attention, focus and concentration.

As you develop self-discipline, strong will power, a positive attitude, good physical and mental health, high morality, good judgement, good character, lack of bad habits, persistence and patience, you will experience a longer attention span, stronger focus and more powerful concentration.

Definition of *Attention*

"*Attention* is the cognitive process of selective concentration on one aspect of the environment while ignoring other things." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attention>

"*Attention span* is the amount of time a person can concentrate on a task without becoming distracted. Most educators and psychologists agree that the ability to focus one's attention on a task is crucial for achievement of one's goals." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attention>

"Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. It implies withdrawal from things in order to deal effectively with others, and is a condition which has a real opposite in the confused, dazed, scatterbrained state which in French is called *distracted*, and *Zerstreuung* in German."

William James, *Principles of Psychology*. Quoted at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attention>

Developing a longer attention span requires commitment and practice. By combining the physical and the mental, free-throw training is a great technique for improving one's attention. Free-throw practice takes advantage of natural physical impulsiveness and "hyper" tendencies and refines them into fine motor skills enhanced with continually narrowing mental focus and concentration.

Attention span generally increases as we age. Babies can concentrate for a few seconds; young adults can maintain attention on the average up to 20 minutes. As a person matures, their attention improves. This might explain why many of the best skill free-throw masters are over 55 years old. By that age impulsiveness and hyperactivity have diminished biologically due to a combination of slowed metabolism and life experience.

Definition of *Focus* and *Flow*

As defined by Webster's dictionary, **focus** has several meanings: 1) Point of greatest intensity; 2) Point at which converging rays of light, heat or waves of sound meet; 3) To obtain a clear image.

Flow is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing by feelings of energized focus, full involvement and success in the process of the activity. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flow_(psychology))

Definition of Concentration

"The Latin origin of the English word **concentration** has a clear and definite meaning. It refers to that which has a common, center, or is moving towards a center, and is best expressed by the term 'one pointedness'." Mouni Sadhu, *Concentration - A Guide To Mental Mastery*

"The average mind is cluttered with many thoughts and ideas thus making each thought and idea extremely weak. When there is one thought replacing the many useless thoughts it is a power in itself and has a wide influence. This type of strong concentrated thinking can account for the ideas that have come from great scientists and inventors, whose ideas are now serving humanity. Their ability to think solely about the subject to the exclusion of all else has proved the powers of the concentrated mind." Mouni Sadhu, *Concentration - A Guide To Mental Mastery*

"Can you affirm with utter certainty that you always think only when and about what you really want to, and that therefore you know from where your thoughts and feelings come into the light of your consciousness? Can you withhold the entry or limit the duration of thoughts in your mind for as long as you wish?...the average man is not a good craftsman, because he cannot control his chief tool—the mind and its thoughts." Mouni Sadhu, *Concentration - A Guide To Mental Mastery*

"A man's power of mental concentration is to a great extent his measure of greatness." William Walker Atkinson, *Practical Mental Influence*

The secret to controlling attention and "one-pointedness" lies in the exercise of self-discipline and will power.

The power of the mind can be observed visually through a simple experiment. Take a glass of water and place a pin, oiled by some butter, on the top of the water's surface. By solely concentrating, staring and focusing all your mental energy on getting the pin to spin you can observe how powerful your mind can be when the pin spins. Any outside thought, other than getting the pin to spin, that enters your mind during the time you are staring and trying to spin the pin, will defeat your purpose by weakening your mental power. That's a demonstration of real mind over matter.

Another mental exercise for mental mastery is to silently stare at a clock's second hand for as long as possible to see how long you can maintain concentration in silence before an uninvited thought enters your consciousness. The goal is to remain in silence for one minute, then two, then five and finally ten. This is a great mental exercise for developing mastery over your most important tool, the mind, and is similar to what's required to stay silent in the here and now during the ritual and process of shooting a free throw.

THE WORLD CHAMPION OF FREE THROW, DR. TOM AMBERRY, DISCOVERS FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION

During the period that Dr. Tom Amberry was developing his free-throw ritual, unique style and seven fundamental steps, and before he set his amazing Guinness consecutive free-throw record of 2,750 ending on a make, he was trying to make sure he gripped the basketball the same way on every shot. He realized that the air hole was the only universal element on all basketballs. He decided to use the air hole as a point of reference for establishing the same grip every time. [PHOTO]

Soon after that, he discovered that by using a two-handed crab dribble he could keep the air hole up while he slowly bounced the basketball. Then, while staring at the air hole, which was up on every bounce, he could establish his grip on the seams exactly the same every time. [PHOTO]

More important than establishing the perfect grip every time, he discovered that the act of looking at the basketball's air hole held his attention silently in one place for the length of time it took to shoot a free throw. He called this quiet state of mind, while hypnotically narrowing his focus on the air hole, *focus and concentration*.

One Thought at a Time

"Sometimes our minds seem hopelessly cluttered. While we are capable of many thoughts in rapid succession, we can only have one thought in our conscious mind at a time. Make that thought negative and you pave the way to failure. But make that one conscious thought positive and you have greatly increased your chances of succeeding." Tom Amberry, *Free Throw - 7 Steps to Success at the Free Throw Line*.

It's important that we control our conscious thought process with positive words and visualizations. This act of remaining positive, one thought at a time, with selected words or thoughts keeps us in the here and now and is a requirement for free-throw mastery.

The Here and Now

No one can deny the power of positive thinking but the real secret to success at the free-throw line is the ability to perform in the present moment called the here and now.

You cannot perform well when your mind is elsewhere. When your attention, focus and concentration is in the here and now you are at your best. By being totally in the present moment, focused on your free-throw ritual, no distractions or negative thoughts are able to enter consciousness. By performing in the here and now the mind remains disciplined, still, quiet and out of the way so the body can function subconsciously and do what it's been trained to do successfully.

The "Inner Game" was coined and developed by a sports guru by the name of Tim Gallwey. He wrote *The Inner Game of Tennis* and a number of other Inner Sports books. He discovered that while playing sports the mind is divided into two selves: Self One and Self Two.

Self One is an inner voice that is constantly being analytical, judgmental and inhibits the Self Two's flow for an effortless performance. The other side of the mind, Self Two, is quiet, confident and its potential is unlimited. When playing sports Self One is constantly thinking and is an inner voice which is being very disruptive, judgmental and negatively interferes with Self Two's confidence, potential for mastery and quiet nature.

Gallwey's solution to the inner game problem was to recognize this natural split of the mind and learn to trust Self Two. To accomplish this he employed a technique that keeps the mind anchored in the here and now. In tennis he had his students say "bounce" the moment the tennis ball bounced and say "hit" the moment the tennis racket made contact with the ball. The purpose of saying "bounce" and "hit" is to keep Self One's voice busy and in the here and now, which let's Self Two perform subconsciously in the here and now and perform at its peak.

Actually the words "bounce" and "hit" are similar to a mantra. A mantra is a word or statement repeated over and over again. By repeating those words over and over the "active" mind stays busy and out of the way. Remember the mind can only think one thought at a time consciously. By keeping the mind, eyes and ears busy anchored to the free-throw process, in the here and now Self One stays out of the way of messing up the confident, sky's-the-limit Self Two.

Time

The time dimension is made up by three time zones: the past, the present and the future. When your thoughts are focused on something past or in the future you are not fully centered on the process of your performance as it takes place in the here and now. Your attention, eyes and ears, have to coordinate, connect and be in sync with your fundamentals and goal to make the free throw you are shooting.

Consistent "sweet spot" hoop entry and consistency in the seven fundamental steps demand your full attention, focus and concentration. You need to be in sync with what you are trying to accomplish, otherwise you are engaging the mental cycle of failure. If your mind is wandering to the past or future before or during the time you are shooting, your mind is too active and elsewhere, divided against itself. The end result is a poor performance.

Place

Being in the wrong place mentally means being preoccupied with outside thoughts that have nothing to do with the task at hand. Being in the wrong place mentally while shooting free throws is a disaster. Thinking about the coach, the crowd, winning or losing or other concerns are forms of out-of-place focus. Those uninvited thoughts that come from nowhere and all of a sudden invade your mind are a real problem and also lead to the cycle of failure.

You must have your attention, focus and concentration on the free-throw ritual and process which is what you can control. Never let your mind wander to another time or place or focus on the outcome or results or any thing out of your control. When you are in the right place and time, the here and now, and focused on the ritual and free-throw process there is no worry, the results automatically take care of themselves in time, through patient mastery.

The Failure Cycle

The cycle of failure lays dormant and appears during or after a poor showing at the free-throw line in practice or in game performance. Once the cycle of failure starts, it's hard to

stop its momentum. Before the failure cycle occurs you need to be armed with knowledge about how this mental cycle starts.

The cycle of failure is caused by mental errors. Unless you catch them as they occur, they get by your conscious mind and becoming buried in your subconscious. There they become mental habits that occur automatically over and over and become ever more difficult to weed out. Going into the next competition you may become preoccupied with past failures and overly concerned that they will happen again. That kind of thinking sets up performance anxiety, which sets in motion further failures resulting in the deterioration of confidence and functioning far below your potential.

The Mental Errors of the Failure Cycle

PAST. This is being in the wrong mental time zone. During free-throw practice and game-time performance it is important to remain in the here and now all the time. That is accomplished by staying in the moment, moment to moment. If your mind has a tendency to wander on its own, a *mantra* (positive word or words) may be repeated in between each shot.

The mantra or rehearsed positive word or words helps to eliminate the possibility of any thought entering your mind uninvited. A mantra also helps you to remain in the right time zone, the here and now, by quieting Self One's efforts to interfere. Allowing the mind to wander to anything in the past is a huge mental mistake that disrupts the subconscious performance and nearly always creates misses, lags in improvement and confidence momentum.

FUTURE. This is also the wrong mental time zone and may be a function of not sticking with set practice procedures. Stepping out mentally from the set mantra, ritual, orderly visualizations and process in any manner is disruptive to the rhythm, pace, force and flow of making each free throw and will limit reaching full potential.

An example of being in the wrong time zone in the future is thinking about the results or a future possibility such as winning and losing. If your mental time is not planned and scripted with a mantra and positive set visualizations, your thoughts become random and this randomness will negatively affect your best effort.

EXPECTATION. "Any kind of expectation creates a problem. We should accept, but not expect. Whatever comes, accept it. Whatever goes, accept it. The immediate benefit is that your mind is always peaceful." *Sri Swami Satchidananda*

Expectation leads to conscious intervention and a busy mind. This upsets the natural flow in the subconscious, changing the heart rate, blood pressure, rhythm, pace and force of the shot. It also lowers your confidence and slows your improvement.

In the case of uncertainty, expectation is considered the most likely to happen. An expectation, which is a belief that is centered on the future, may or may not be realistic. A less advantageous result from an expectation gives rise to the emotion of disappointment and can become a serious threat to internal validity.

Expectation is another mental error during practice or competition. Once the focus shifts away from the here and now, your mantra, ritual, positive visualizations and free-throw

process on to judging your performance, you lose the subconscious connection. The result is you lose your initiating rhythm and pace necessary to activate the proper chain of muscles. You also lose your ability to maintain the optimal arousal level and stay relaxed thus the active mind becomes busy, reactive and hyper.

There is no point in being disappointed or involving the emotion of anger if the basketball doesn't enter the rim. The proper reaction to a miss is to see how it missed: long, short, left, right, flat or too much arc. Involving your emotions sets off the cycle of failure and decreased confidence and slows the improvement of momentum.

REFLECTION means contemplation of one's self. Contemplating yourself—how you look or what other people might be thinking about you, for example—is the wrong focus while practicing or performing at the free-throw line. Reflecting takes you out of the here and now. When your focus is on yourself, this starts an inner conversation that disrupts the subconscious state necessary for flow. Any inner conversation only makes things worse, clutters the mind with trivia and is a trigger for the cycle of failure.

UNCONTROLLED AROUSAL LEVEL. Arousal is our physiological and psychological state of being during the time we are awake. It involves the brain stem, autonomic nervous system and endocrine system which, working together, control heart rate and blood pressure. Arousal also provides a condition of sensory alertness, mobility and readiness to respond. Its importance is in regulating consciousness, attention and information processing. There is a direct relationship between an individual's optimal arousal level and task performance.

In simple terms, arousal level is felt as alertness; if it's too high or too low, free-throw performance is affected adversely. Maintaining the optimal arousal level is critical for peak performance. It is the same as keeping your "game face" on all the time.

The optimal arousal level is different for each individual and takes a while to find and feel. The perfect arousal level is when you are in the flow and making every shot. Perfect arousal is disrupted by lost attention, a wandering mind or overreaction to misses or makes.

Not being aware of or maintaining your peak performance optimal arousal level contributes to the cycle of failure.

LACK OF SELF DISCIPLINE AND WILLPOWER. Self-discipline refers to the training one gives one's self to accomplish a certain task, even though one would rather be doing something else. Thus self-discipline is the assertion of will power over more base desires and is usually understood to be similar to "self control."

Willpower is the ability to exert one's will over one's actions with firmness, decisiveness, determination, resolution and persistence. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willpower>

These two inner characteristics, self-discipline and willpower, are essential for free throw improvement and ultimate mastery. They are the characteristics necessary for consistent daily practice. Without daily, planned, disciplined practice improvement is nearly impossible and goals become unreachable.

BAD HABITS hurt us in every part of our lives; the most destructive bad habits are addictions to drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. If you want to insure poor work habits or bad health, these bad habits will surely affect you adversely. There are many other bad habits: immortality, dishonesty, anger, untruthfulness, lack of steadiness and endurance, etc. These bad habits are obstacles to focus and concentration and interfere with reaching goals, happiness and success in life. Bad personal habits are the worst of all the cycle of failure mental mistakes.

Mantra

A mantra is a religious or mystical syllable or poem primarily used as spiritual conduits, words or vibrations that instill one-pointed concentration in the devotee. Great emphasis is put on correct pronunciation. They are intended to deliver the mind from illusion and material or egotistical inclination. Chanting is the process of repeating a mantra. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantra>

In between and right before shooting free throws, you can use a mantra, selected word or a few selected words, rhythmically timed and paced to the free-throw ritual, free-throw process, your in- and out-breaths and seven fundamental steps. This helps to keep the performance in the here and now by blocking out wandering and uninvited thoughts. A mantra can help in the coordination of the mind and body for a subconscious peak performance.

My mantra is, "Hear the sound of the net pop." I say it several times, timed precisely during my free-throw ritual and positive set visualizations. My best performances are when I have no uninvited thoughts throughout the entire series of practice shots or during a competitive set of shots. These best periods of controlled thinking (my mantra my only thought) surrounded by complete silent account for my best consecutive free throws-made-in-a-row runs, my high free-throw average and free-throw mastery.

Jopa

A *jopa* is a long series of words or ideas repeated as a mantra. I created a one-minute jopa that I use as a form of meditation. Repeating my jopa insures no other thought or thoughts will enter my conscious mind for as long as I continue the repetitions. I repeat my jopa many times a day; I believe repeating it helps my focus and concentration and stills my mind.

My one-minute jopa, made up of 100 words, is titled, "The Best I Can Be" and it goes like this:

"The Best I Can Be"

Quiet, calm, silent, still, totally here all is so clear.

Relax, balance, center, with the universal mind no uninvited thought will intervene or appear.

Focused - concentration, in deep meditation, contemplation, co-creation, in the now, in the flow, in the zone, peak performance near.

Step into The Morpheus Transformation, dream-like, Zen mind, selflessness, self-hypnotic, subconscious perfect mental state, the best you can be. Visualize and see.

In-breath—hold—out-breath—hold—smooth, nice and easy, make every shot, know you can, trust in God, the impossible is possible, hear the sound of the net "pop."

I've repeated my jopa thousands of times and know it by heart. It always relaxes me and clears my mind. I say it many times upon waking in the early morning, during the day and right before I go to sleep. It is one of the meditations I do daily.

Meditation

Meditation is a mental discipline by which one attempts to get beyond the reflexive thinking mind into a deeper state of relaxation or awareness. Meditation often involves turning attention to a single point of reference. It is recognized as a component of almost all religions and been practiced for over 5000 years.

Meditation is also practiced outside religious traditions. Different meditative disciplines encompass a wide range of spiritual and/or psychological practices that emphasize different goals, from achievement of a higher consciousness to greater focus and concentration to creativity or self awareness or simply a more relaxed and peaceful frame of mind.

Meditation leads to contemplation. Plato, the philosopher, felt that through contemplation the soul may attain knowledge of the form of good or other divine forms. The highest form of contemplation is to experience God.

For our purposes of free-throw mastery the practice of meditation can help us be more relaxed and increase our ability to focus and concentrate. It is highly recommended for gaining mental clarity and the power of positive thought.

Visualization

Creative visualization is the technique of using one's imagination to visualize a positive picture. That picture can produce a positive field for success at the free-throw line. All the best free-throw shooters use visualization in their free-throw process.

Studies on visualization in sports have proved the value of mental imaging. A scientist compared four groups of athletes in terms of training techniques. Group One trained 100% physically, Group Two trained 75% physically and 25% using positive visualizations, Group Three 50% physical and 50% visualization and Group Four trained 25% physically and 75% using visualization. Group Four performed the best in this study proving the value of positive mental practice and visualization over actual physical practice.

When you use positive visualizations such as seeing and hearing the basketball pop or swish the net or see a 15-foot-long arm extend and drop the basketball into the center of the basket you create positive images of what you wish—intend—to happen. These

positive visualizations, when done over and over again tend to attract what you are focusing on.

These positive visualizations also serve to keep you in the here and now just like a mantra. It is important that your visualizations and selected thoughts are perfectly timed to your free-throw ritual, process and fundamentals exactly the same every time you shoot. This helps ensure consistency in rhythm, pace and timing.

Setting Goals

Setting short- and long-term goals is essential for free-throw improvement and mastery. Goal setting involves establishing specific, measurable and time-targeted objectives. The most effective goals are tangible, specific and realistic.

Write down your short- and long-term goals with a time frame for their achievement. Goals serve as an energizer to induce a greater and greater effort. Goals affect persistence and passion. A goal will also activate cognitive knowledge and help develop strategies for coping. Once a goal and time frame are written down a written plan can be perceived and actions along those plans can be initiated.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goal_setting

An excellent short-term goal in free-throw shooting is to improve 4% every month. The way to improvement is to practice shooting 100 or more free throws regularly. In fact, to practice every day is best. In order to set up practice time first you need to write down your entire week's or month's schedule and then list your priorities. Then you can determine the days and times you can practice shooting free throws. There is much more to this free-throw goal of 4% improvement and you can find the time schedule forms and the rest of the practice plan in Chapter Five - Perfect Practice.

Goals provide a sense of direction and purpose. To repeat Dr. Tom Amberry's advice from the foreword to this book, "What helps is setting your first goal just out of reach and within the realm of your own possibilities—a goal set high enough that the idea of achievement really excites you. Your excitement will give you an excellent chance of reaching that goal."

SUMMARY - THE BEST PART OF UNDERSTANDING THE MENTAL PLANE

All basketball players have felt the devastating effects of performance anxiety. This difficult-to-control condition can keep you tossing and turning before a big game. During the game you may feel choked up, have trouble breathing and your arms can feel like they weigh a hundred pounds each. If you are working toward the goal of free-throw mastery, you now have the tools from this chapter on the mental plane to think properly, use a mantra, use positive visualization, control your attention, focus and concentration and effectively perform in a relaxed, quiet state in the here and now.

"The athlete who has conquered performance anxiety is the personification of the eye of a hurricane, a totally calm feeling in the center of a storm. The athlete understands that performance-disrupting stress comes from concentrating on uncontrollables and things that lead to the cycle of failure. The key to peak performance is focusing only on things that can be controlled." Jim Poteet, from his doctoral thesis, "The Paradox of Free

Throw” (an important reference for this chapter on the mental plane). Free-throw mastery will be the end result.

Strive for excellence in all that you do. Be committed and follow through. Improvement at the free-throw line is possible for those that believe and are willing to set the perfect practice time required. An improvement of 4% per month is very reasonable and possible for those with strong self discipline and unshakable will power. Free-throw mastery is the end result and takes desire, devotion, patience and a fair amount of time.

Success is a habit

As Dr. Tom said in the foreword, "Success is a habit; unfortunately so is failure."

It will pay to take a close look at yourself: your current habits and patterns that make up your life. You cannot change what you refuse to acknowledge. The payoff for getting brutally honest with yourself is the change that will align better habits and patterns with your goals and dreams.

High achievers have created and practice success systems—habits and rituals that serve rather than detract from their goals.

Your destiny

Some words of wisdom as told during an interview with 83-year-old Helen Hadsell, author of *The Winning Sage* (www.winningsage.com).

"Watch your thoughts, they turn into words."

"Watch your words, they become actions."

"Watch your actions, they become habits."

"Watch your habits, they become your character."

"Watch your character because that becomes your destiny."

Chapter IV

Your Unique Ritual and Style

THE IDEAL FREE THROW PROCESS, RITUAL AND STYLE

As unique as fingerprints, each individual has their own free-throw process, rituals and style. There are a few universal principles and concepts. We will explore those concepts in this chapter. Knowing those universals is critical for developing free-throw mastery and your unique method for preparing to shoot (rituals) and shooting (individual style).

At the end of the second chapter, The Physical Plane, we will have the opportunity to study sequence photos of many past and current free-throw experts, masters and champions.

[PHOTOS]

It is important to study the rituals and shooting styles of the very best free-throw shooters rather than a superstar or one of your favorite players. That's because the superstar or your favorite player may not be shooting free-throw mastery percentages (over 85% in game time competition from the free throw line). Their free-throw averages often are in the 70% range, or worse, so their approach to the free-throw line is not the best method, rituals or style to copy.

The most common denominator of the very best free-throw shooters is their simple motion, minimum number of bounces and their quickness, without rushing, from alignment to release of their shot. They use no wasted motion or superfluous moves. They are not trying to look good, be unnecessarily unique or draw attention to themselves. Such extra moves, which are difficult to repeat precisely and take too much time, are simply bad rituals that lead to too much thinking and inconsistency.

The very best free throw shooters just get the free-throw job done as easily and as quickly as possible.

By being quick at the free-throw line, without rushing, there is less chance to think; that is one of the keys to success and free-throw mastery—"the empty mind." During the fast-paced game, players react and make plays and shots on instinct; that is how you should step up to the free-throw line. Quickly gain your composure, in-breath relax, out-breath align, make your initial move, see your bulls-eye target, shoot and score.

THE DEFINITION OF FREE-THROW PROCESS

The free-throw process is made up of a series of seven physical steps that overlap and flow together subconsciously into one fluid free-throw motion. I emphasize using visualization while developing your unique free throw process, rituals and style.

When using visualization you want to see yourself executing each ritual and each of the seven steps of your free-throw process perfectly, the free throw ending with the basketball having a perfect arch and making perfect hoop entry. During this visualization, in your imagination, you not only see but also *hear* the sound of the net "pop" or "swish."

THE DEFINITIONS OF RITUAL

A ritual is a detailed method or procedure faithfully or regularly followed. A ritual is a state or condition characterized by the presence of an established procedure or routine.

The free-throw ritual is the practice or pattern of behavior regularly performed in a set manner before actually shooting. Free-throw rituals are used to help set a rhythm, free the performer and his/her mind from performance anxiety and to forestall the entry of any uninvited thoughts, which would be disruptive to the free-throw process. A good free-throw ritual is the foundation for free-throw mastery, peak performance and for remaining in the subconscious during the entire free throw process.

THE BEST FREE-THROW RITUALS

There are two separate rituals that need to be performed exactly the same each time. The first, The Acceptance Ritual, is practiced in between each free throw; the second, The Morpheus Transformation Ritual, is practiced between stepping into stance, grip establishment and the precise moment the *initial move* begins. The initial move is the point where your rituals end and you subconsciously begin the momentum of shot.

1) The Acceptance Ritual

The Acceptance Ritual is a universal free-throw ritual and should be practiced in the same manner by everyone. This ritual gets its name because *acceptance* is the state of mind you must remain in between shots, while practicing or during game time for confidence and improvement momentum. This ritual also helps the shooter maintain focus and concentration and remain in the subconscious.

The Acceptance Ritual begins at the exact moment the free throw is completed. Completion of the free throw is at the first bounce after the basketball either went through the hoop or reflexed off the rim or backboard. The first part of the ritual is just to observe, while remaining in stance fixated on the sweet spot/bulls-eye target, whether you made perfect hoop entry with perfect arc and perfect basketball rotation and whether the shot was off, left, right, short or long.

[PHOTOS]

The second part of the Acceptance Ritual, after shot evaluation, is the act of finding the basketball's air hole. The deliberate act of finding the air hole will occupy your mind long enough so no other thought will intervene. Finding the air hole also keeps you focused and connected to the present. Find the air hole as you get the basketball back, ideally by way of a good ball return system.

[PHOTO]

Again, the Acceptance Ritual has two parts. The first act is to observe the shot in stance and the second is to locate the basketball's air hole.

After finding the air hole the next actions are optional. Your goal is still to remain fully focused, still and quiet in the subconscious. The option here is the use of a mantra. A mantra can help those with poor attention or extremely busy minds.

I use a couple of mantras to remain connected. When I look at the basketball's air hole I look deep inside the hole and say to myself silently, "Hear the sound of the net pop." When I am rebounding for myself, which is not recommended, during the long walk back to the free-throw line I often repeat another mantra, the number of shot I'm on, for example, "Ten."

I don't want any uninvited thoughts to appear or intervene so I keep them away by using a preconceived mantra. Remember: You are only capable of thinking one thought at a time so make sure you are either in total silence or are using a predetermined mantra.

[2 PHOTOS]

The Acceptance Ritual blends into the second ritual, The Morpheus Transformation Ritual, at the first moment of stepping into stance on an in-breath.

[PHOTO]

A note on ball return systems

Use of a good basketball return system is not just highly recommended—it's a must! A good basketball return system will automatically add 10% more to your free-throw average when you are practicing free throws.

The reasons for this are fairly obvious. First and foremost, rhythm is a huge contributor when it comes to establishing a chain of nerve impulses to trigger the correct groove of motor muscles. A good ball return system returns the basketball quickly, the same way every time, allowing little time for thinking and thus supporting a silent and empty mind, consistent timing and more fluid fundamental motions.

The quickness and repeatable rhythm of the identical return helps to set a naturally consistent shooting rhythm, pace and force. A ball return system also helps you to establish balance and consistent follow-through because you are able to easily remain in position at the foul line after each shot.

[PICTURES OF MANY BALL RETURN SYSTEMS]

2) The Morpheus Transformation Ritual

The Morpheus Transformation Visualization, as explained in chapter one, is seeing yourself, while taking a relaxation in-breath, stepping into stance and alignment, as a perfect, 100% free-throw-making mastery machine, that is at its best all the time, making every shot.

[PHOTO]

Morpheus was the Greek god of dreams. The second free-throw ritual is called The Morpheus Transformation Ritual because Morpheus makes it possible to transform your goals and dreams into reality. Our dream is being the best we can be all the time. This dream-like, best-you-can-be ritual happens between stepping into stance and alignment and the beginning of the out-breath and totally being locked in at grip establishment. It's the preparatory time period for putting together your best effort and "pure" momentum of shot.

The Morpheus Transformation Ritual is slightly different for each of us because we each address the line differently—our stance is open, closed or square, we use a bounce or no bounce, the number of bounces vary, the grip and fingers are set differently, we use or don't use a mantra and the words of our mantras are different.

My Unique Morpheus Transformation Ritual

During the Acceptance Ritual, after I find the air hole, I place the basketball, with the air hole up, under my "off" arm. Now I'm at the free-throw line with the basketball under my arm. I make an in-breath, gently held for a count of four, upon the positioning of my right foot, which is my anchor foot since I'm right handed, and then the positioning of my adjustment foot, my left foot. During this time, while I'm on an in-breath, aligning, posturing and centering in stance, I look at the sweet spot/bulls-eye, the FTT (free throw trainer), target briefly. This first look helps in exacting my target. Next I start the out-breath, gently held, precisely timed to the establishment of my grip while again looking at the center of the air hole and saying, "Hear the sound of the net pop."

[PHOTOS]

The Morpheus Transformation Ritual ends precisely at the beginning of the initial move, which is a slight knee bend. You are still holding the out-breath gently as the initial move begins the momentum of the shot and the subconscious execution of your unique style.

[PHOTO]

To get your Morpheus Transformation Ritual precisely the same every time takes a lot of practice. This ritual should be practiced *without shooting* until it is consistent and precisely the same every time. Write down the exact steps of your Morpheus Transformation Ritual so that you can repeat them over and over; before long you won't need your notes. Sequence photos are also useful to help define your ritual.

THE DEFINITION OF STYLE

“Style is the manner in which something is done or how it happens. A particular distinctive characteristic mode of action or manner of acting, or form of construction or execution in any art or work. To design or arrange in accordance with a given or popular style.”

Free-throw style is the unique manner in which each individual executes the seven fundamental steps. We have used two rituals in the preparation to shoot. The Acceptance Ritual takes place in between shots so it's not described as part of the seven steps, but it is still a part of a shooter's style, being the beginning and the ending of the seven fundamental steps. You could actually call the Acceptance Ritual the eighth step.

The Morpheus Transformation Ritual is also part of the shooter's unique style. This preparing-to-shoot ritual takes place during the first two steps, alignment and establishment of the grip, before the initial move of slightly bending the knee.

The third step, the initial move, gets the shot into momentum subconsciously; the precision of the free throw has been determined by how well you have executed the two preparing-to-shoot rituals. This is a key point: Getting the rituals right guarantees your best effort.

THE SIX UNIVERSAL FUNDAMENTALS

We have mentioned there are universals that are the same for all shooters. There are actually six universals. The first is the Acceptance Ritual.

[PHOTO]

The second is alignment along the midline.

[PHOTO]

The third is having the shooting hand's fingers spread as wide as possible and having the wrist, hand and fingers coiled, locked and molded flush to the basketball.

[PHOTO]

The fourth universal is the timing point at the top of the shot pocket or set point.

[PHOTO]

The fifth universal is keeping your eyes fixated on your bulls-eye target.

[PHOTO]

The last and sixth universal is the full follow-through and natural flop of the wrist with the fingers extended straight.

[PHOTO]

YOUR UNIQUE FREE-THROW STYLE

What makes us each unique is our body type: length of our legs, arms, hands and fingers. It is essential to be comfortable at the free-throw line. If a comfortable feeling at the free-throw line isn't getting results, finding the fundamental flaws can make the difference between continued moderate success and real success.

I have found that many of the fundamental errors that are taking place during the free throw are because of bad ritual or poor ritual preparation. When the ritual is bad or "off" it will affect the fluid flow and consistency of the fundamentals. Getting a good and proven ritual precise is the starting point for improvement. If you haven't been using The Acceptance Ritual, start now; it's very easy to do, and you will see an immediate improvement.

Most of the great free-throw masters use small, concise movements for consistency and accuracy. My free-throw motion is a set shot that is very compact, with a low shot pocket. I hardly bend my knees and the heels of my feet hardly come off the ground. Most free-throw masters agree that the free throw is similar to the putt in golf. It's a compact, short shot requiring the highest form of accuracy.

If you are using a high shot pocket and a lot of knee bend it is going to be more difficult to be accurate, but that also depends on your work ethic. If you work hard enough, long motions can still work effectively. You have to be committed to excellence and that means committed to correct free throw theory.

Making a positive change to any of the seven steps is initially uncomfortable; it will take lots of time and patience. There is a set time frame for when a fundamental change will feel comfortable: between 40 and 100 hours of perfect practice. Thus, your fundamental changes should be accomplished in the off season.

It takes a lot of courage to change an unproductive habitual movement, but it is well worth the advancement. Just how good of a free-throw shooter do you want to be? If the answer is the best you can possibly be, then you are going to have to make some initial sacrifices. Once you get past the uncomfortable period, you will never look back.

THE SEVEN STEPS, 98 ELEMENTS AND THE 2% SOLUTION

If you divide the seven steps into 100% you get 14% per step with 2% left over. I like to think that there are 98 total elements of motion in the free throw: 7 times 14%. If you do one of the seven steps incorrectly or inconsistently you bring your free-throw average down by 14%. The extra 2% I think of as spiritual. The 2% represents your relationship with God or your higher power. Get that part right and you can't ever fail.

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN GROOVE – HOW TO USE RHYTHM AND PACE IN PRACTICE TO ACHIEVE MUSCLE MEMORY

I have already mentioned how important having a good basketball return system is for practice and for a higher free-throw percentages. Having a good ball return system is so

important that I'm repeating it again. Without a ball return system you will get in the groove but fall out of it often. With a ball return system you remain in a groove because the ball keeps coming back at the same speed, thus keeping you in a set rhythm and pace.

TAKE SEQUENCE PHOTOS OR VIDEO MOVIES OF YOUR FREE-THROW STYLE

This is the starting point for working on your unique rituals and style. It's difficult to see how you are shooting while you are shooting, so you need photos. You want photos of yourself shooting from several vantage points: front, side(s), back and above.

Once you have a starting set of sequence photos you can start to see what needs to be worked on or changed. Making a change in any of the steps after the initial move will require a set method and procedure and I will explain that in detail.

MIME, MIRROR IMAGERY, ISOMETRIC PRACTICE AND VISUALIZATION

The ritual parts of the free throw are easy to practice. These rituals happen *before* the shooting motion. Practice the rituals at home, over and over, in front of a full-length mirror, not just at the gym.

All the shooting motions, beginning at step three (The Initial Move, Staying in Line), require different methods of practice if you are making a change. When working on changing a fundamental step we don't keep track of shots made, we only keep track of shots *taken*; thinking about that change in the step during the shot affects percentages negatively. Shooting for percentage is different; we are letting it go with no thoughts outside of doing a perfect ritual, maintaining balance and fixating on the sweet spot/bulls-eye target ending in acceptance.

You should know the difference between practice methods and procedures when you are making a fundamental change and when you are keeping track of your free-throw percentages. When making changes your free-throw percentages will suffer at first.

We can use the mirror to watch our motion change. We can also use mime, which is imitation of the change in front of the mirror and at the free-throw line. By using mime and isometrics to practice the new movements, a clearer visualization of the change takes place and aids in making that improved change a reality.

YOUR UNIQUENESS WITHIN THE SEVEN STEPS

In each of the seven steps there are many elements; you should spend some time designing your unique free-throw style. Decide how you will do the elements in each step so the steps can coordinate with the six universal timing points.

Below are the seven fundamental steps of the free throw. We have previously outlined what the six free-throw universals are. There are many individual ways of executing each step. Below are your choices.

Step one - alignment

Set your feet your way: open, closed or square.

[PHOTOS]

Set your feet the same way every time. Set the feet shoulder-width apart.

Set the feet so that if you use a bounce, the bounce will pitch on the midline (shot line), which is the center of the free-throw line and the shortest distance from the free-throw line to the center of the hoop.

Use breath control to remain relaxed, in focus and to set the rhythm, force and pace. Time the in-breath to the elements within the alignment the same every time. Set your balance and posture exactly in the same manner and order every time.

Arrive at perfect alignment ready for step two, grip establishment, exactly the same way in focus, concentration, force, pace, rhythm and balance every time.

Step two - establishing the grip

The grip is the most important fundamental starting point in every ball sport. Watch accomplished athletes in any sport and look at the way they hold their racquet, club, bat, ball, etc. No two athletes in the same sport hold their equipment in exactly the same way; each has what's known as a signature grip within the parameters of basic technique.

Use of the air hole is not yet considered a universal but it will be some day. Using the air hole for the center of focus, for finding the grip and for help in targeting is highly recommended. In fact I really think it should be mandatory. When using the air hole, the air hole is always held up in full view. If you use a dribble it will be difficult to keep the air hole up and steady unless you do it slowly. Use of a two-handed crab dribble is preferred, which produces a slow bounce rather than a dribble.

[PHOTOS]

You have many choices for how to establish your grip. If you use a bounce or dribble, the fewer bounces or dribbles the better. More than three bounces are too many. I don't use a bounce or dribble for rhythm; rhythmically I am able to set my grip in stance.

[PHOTOS]

If you use a bounce, make sure your bounces are exactly the same in place, speed, force, pace, intensity and rhythm. You are preparing to set up the basketball exactly the same way every time so the same grip can also be established the same way every time.

The grip, how the grip is established and the stance at the free-throw line are the starting points when determining individual style. Those areas are the most unique from individual to individual.

The grip is the same for everyone in these ways: The shooting wrist is fully coiled and in what's called a locked-wrist position. It's called the hammer grip because the wrist is locked up and fully coiled back.

[PHOTOS]

The fingers on the shooting hand are spread as wide as possible while still being comfortable and the finger pads are molded flush to the basketball.

[PHOTO]

The air hole is the reference point for the placement of the fingers, which are usually set on the ridges or seams of the basketball.

[PHOTO]

The difference in grips is often seen in the placement of the index finger. Sometimes the index finger is pointed directly at the air hole and sometimes it's to the left or right. That finger placement is individual but you must remember that we want to bring the basketball straight back and up through the sweet spot/bulls-eye target line. There should be no rotation of the hands and wrist.

The basketball should be able to sit and be balanced with just the shooting hand at the top of the shot pocket, set point, just like in one-handed shooting drills. That is the best way to establish the guide hand. The guide hand is set to the side and slightly under the basketball. The guide hand is also flush to the basketball, with the fingers spread wide and with the wrist also coiled and locked.

[PHOTO]

When you have confidently set your hands on the basketball, take a marking pen and outline your hands; then just place your hands within the appropriate outline.

[PHOTO]

Step three - the initial move, remaining in line

For a consistent and accurate shot, the position of the hands and elbows needs to be exactly the same at each of the universal timing points. The timing points once again are: full alignment, grip establishment, shot pocket-set point, end of the follow-through and, of course, the acceptance ritual.

Much has been said about how the elbow works. The elbow's leverage is created by bending and straightening. Just as there is a natural flop of the shooting wrist at the end of the shot, there is a natural way of letting the elbow position itself, coil and uncoil. There should be no conscious effort to bring the elbow in line. It's already in line naturally.

What can be designed is the height of the shot pocket. The lower the shot pocket, the lower the position of the shooting elbow. You need to decide how compact your in-line

motions will be. Remember the free throw is like the putt in golf—it's a short shot requiring great accuracy; a lower shot pocket will help in that regard.

[PHOTOS]

The height of the shot pocket and the speed and pace during the initial move will automatically create the appropriate amount of knee bend. The levers of the shooting wrist and shooting elbow determine how much knee bend and lower body power is necessary for your unique style.

Step four - lower body power base and knee bend

The free throw is a very short shot. It travels about 15 feet so not much strength is required. The less knee bend, the easier to maintain balance and accuracy. The amount of knee bend is a fundamental step that designs itself and is a function of the upper body power levers.

Practice keeping your head in alignment for balance while going up and down during the execution of the shot. Picture keeping a book balanced on top of your head like a model would do while walking on the catwalk.

Step five - eye on the bull-eye target

This is also a universal and is assumed. You have to see what you are trying to hit. The eyes need to fixate on one spot, whether it's the sweet spot/bulls-eye target, a spot above the rim, the FTT as suggested, or the front or back of the rim. The eyes need to remain on your spot until the completion of the shot and completion of the acceptance ritual. This steadiness in vision will help in reaching free throw mastery.

Step six - shot pocket/set point

Decide how high you want your shot pocket to be. The concept is the lower the shot pocket the more accuracy. Bringing the shot pocket down to a lower position is an easy fundamental adjustment to make.

Step seven - momentum of shot and follow through and release

The momentum of shot was created during the ritual period of your free throw. Momentum of shot is not something that can be designed in the middle of the shot. It's not something you can think about or make happen while it's happening; it just is.

On the other hand a perfect follow-through is the end result of perfect shot momentum. By holding the follow-through at the end of the arm, you allow the wrist to flop forward naturally. You want to shoot up and through the shot tunnel and perfect shot arc into the sweet spot/bulls-eye target and through the hoop.

By holding the follow-through you give yourself a chance to evaluate the shot during the acceptance ritual. When you build your free-throw style this way you are almost guaranteed success—shooting 90% or better from the free-throw line in practice.

DEFINE YOUR FREE THROW RITUAL, PROCESS AND STYLE IN WRITING

You will notice that the sequence photos of our free-throw masters seen in chapter 2 have a detailed description of the steps in action. This is also your task. Once you have your own sequence photos, carefully write down your own unique rituals and style. This is a critical step in gaining free-throw mastery.

Chapter V

Perfect Practice

Once again let's look to Webster's dictionary to define *perfect* and *practice*.

WEBSTER'S DEFINITION OF *PERFECT*

Perfect: 1) Being entirely without fault or defect. 2) Corresponding to an ideal standard or abstract concept. 3) Faithfully reproducing the original. 4) Absolute, unequivocal. 5) To make perfect.

WEBSTER'S DEFINITION OF *PRACTICE*

Practice: 1) To perform or work at repeatedly so as to become proficient. 2) A repeated or customary action. 3) Systematic exercise for proficiency.

DEFINITION OF PERFECT PRACTICE FOR FREE-THROW MASTERY

Is perfection possible? No, not in free throw, but you can come very close. As a prime example, Dr. Tom Amberry was perfect for 12 hours when he set the Guinness consecutive free throw record of 2,750 in a row. He was really perfect that day because he ended on a make.

Perfect practice is a concept. The concept is to strive for perfection and there are proven methods, systems and procedures that will lead the dedicated and disciplined student to free-throw mastery. Without strong desire, purpose, persistence, patience and especially a design for perfect practice, you will fall short and are destined to fail.

In this chapter on perfect practice you will learn what those steps, methods, systems and procedures are that lead to success. The closer you can come to following these perfect practice instructions the faster you will improve. Our long-term goal is free-throw mastery and to ultimately become a 90%-or-better free-throw shooter in game-time competition and 96% or better in practice.

DR. TOM AMBERRY TEACHES ME HIS FREE THROW MASTERY PERFECT PRACTICE SYSTEM

In 1995, at 48 years old, I started taking basketball lessons from a famous Los Angeles basketball shooting coach by the name of Kenny Kroft. I had always wanted to learn how to train and learn basketball fundamentals. I had been retired from professional sports (tennis and racquetball) for a number of years and missed the competition. But even more I missed the routine and exercise of daily solo and partner practice.

After working with Kenny once a week for about a year and a half on shooting fundamentals and footwork I decided I wanted to follow in his footsteps and teach shooting. Kenny had taught me a shooting system he had learned from John Wooden called "Make 5 Free Throws in a Row - Keeping Shooting" and it became obvious to me

that the free-throw line is where a basketball player refines his/her shooting fundamentals. I decided that I would not be just another shooting coach; I would become a free-throw specialist.

I was reading and collecting out-of-print and in-print basketball books when I discovered Dr. Tom Amberry's book on free throw, *Free Throw - Seven Step to Success at the Free Throw Line*. It turned out that Dr. Tom lived in Long Beach and was still practicing daily at the Seal Beach Athletic Club, which was only an hour's drive from my house. In 1996 I contacted him and we set up a meeting and a free-throw lesson.

In that first session Dr. Tom spent more than three hours with me, explaining everything he could about how he was able to make 2,750 free throws in a row, ending on a make, in only one-and-a-half years of daily practice. He even made every free throw he demonstrated that day. He changed my rituals, taught me to use the air hole and taught me his shooting style, which I immediately began to use. Most important, he got me to keep daily records.

Dr. Tom told me that his success was based upon *perfect practice*, which is basically using a ball return system, following a set practice procedure, setting up a daily schedule, sticking to it like crazy glue and keeping records. In a mostly empty basketball gym he practiced every morning, including Saturdays and Sundays, at the same time, only missing a day here or there because of sickness or emergency. He quickly worked up to shooting and making 500 free throws a day and on some days he shot more.

Obsessed with free-throw mastery, Dr. Tom traveled all over the country seeking out free-throw instruction from different basketball coaches. He also traveled around the country competing in nearly every free-throw competition available, which he mostly won. When he finally made 500 in a row, ending on a make, he decided to go for the Guinness consecutive-free-throw record. At that time Ted St. Martin owned the record of 2,126 in a row.

After setting this new goal, Dr. Tom worked up to making as many as 2,500 free throws a day, which takes about ten hours, and eventually he made 2,500 in a row, twice, in practice. He then knew he was ready to break the record. He put together his support shooting team, score keepers and witnesses. Guinness requires ten witnesses and a signed affidavit. Talk about pressure! But at age 72 Dr. Tom Amberry pulled it off.

He told me he spent about two months in final preparation thinking nothing but pleasant thoughts. He got up at the same time every day and went to sleep at the same time every night. He only listened to his favorite music, ate his favorite foods, didn't watch TV or read any negative news and he spent all his time with his wonderful wife and family. He was totally relaxed and confident the entire time, only visualizing himself succeeding.

The rest is history. Dr. Tom set the Guinness consecutive-free-throw record. Today there may or may not be another brave soul mentally strong enough to dedicate themselves to their craft as he did, but Dr. Tom proved it could be done. I have tried to follow in his footsteps, as have many other students; we have demonstrated the power of his influence and perfect practice theory.

When I started working with Dr. Tom I had no idea what my free throw practice average was because I never kept records. It turned out to be 68%. I was an excellent student

because of my background in professional sports and because I already had an enormous love for solo practice. With the solid shooting foundation I developed while working with Kenny, and with Dr. Tom's free-throw instruction, I quickly began to improve.

I initially improved about 4% per month. It was frustrating and sort of painful at first because I had so little control over my mind and thoughts. I didn't really understand the mental plane at that time and I had a very limited attention span. When I reached the 84% level and started using a mantra I gained some mental control and got rid of my frustration.

My improvement slowed down but didn't stop. It took me approximately five months to reach 84%, three more months to reach the 90% plateau, one year to reach 96% and finally I peaked, fifteen months later, at 98%. I accomplished this by sticking exclusively to the perfect practice system that Dr. Tom used and taught me. In fact, I learned that, using perfect practice theory, many people have become 90%-or-better game-time free-throw shooters and 96% or better in practice in half the time it took me.

THE STARTING POINT / CREATE YOUR OWN PERFECT PRACTICE SCHEDULE

Daily, disciplined practice is essential for developing free-throw mastery. It is critical that you set up a practice schedule and consistently stick with it. There is a simple method for doing this. Below is a weekly schedule form with a column for listing priorities.

Since many of the students of free throw mastery are still in school and living with their parents, they have many priorities that come before basketball practice. Getting to the basketball gym or a hoop may not be an easy task to do on a regular basis. Wherever you are starting, you have to take your own situation into consideration and modify your plans accordingly.

Sit down by yourself and make a list of your responsibilities and priorities, then adjust your weekly schedule until it contains everything—including basketball practice and sleep! Start filling in your weekly schedule with your sleep time—when you go to sleep and when you get up. Next, fill in meal times. Next add the priorities you listed and slot those into your schedule; family, religious services, school, classes, home work, hobbies, team practice, etc.

If you are still in school, after you have figured out your weekly schedule on your own, get together with your parents to review your ideas and finalize your weekly schedule. You always need to make sure to have your parents' total approval, support and assistance. You are going to need to work together with your family like a team with a common purpose of striving for excellence. That's going to take a lot of sacrifices on your parents' part and sometimes it's not even possible due to adult responsibilities. If it can't be done perfectly immediately, be patient; in time there will be an opening to progress faster. If you anticipate having trouble getting to the gym due to time or travel problems, having your own portable or stationary basketball hoop at the house may very well be the solution.

If you are on your own, with transportation, it still is wise to fill out this form and go over your schedule with your family, coach or a good friend. As you get older there seem to

be many more distractions; that makes it even more important to have a prioritized, written schedule.

It is highly recommended that both students/athletes and their parents sign up for student/athlete development assistance with the National Collegiate Scouting Association. View their Web site at www.ncsaspots.com and sign up.

At their Web site read the free ebook, "Athletes Wanted," and study the other materials. Kids and their parents need to get an early start thinking about their future education and sports goals. It's not too early to sign up at age 14; in fact in today's competitive world 14 is a perfect age to begin getting prepared for college, especially if you are hoping for a scholarship.

[INSERT SCHEDULE FORM WITH PRIORITY LIST]

PERFECT PRACTICE CONDITIONS

Perfect practice conditions are difficult to find or create, but not impossible. First, you would like to practice at the same time every day. This helps build a comfortable daily ritual. Second, the best time to practice is very early in the morning when your energy is very high. In addition, the basketball court is not usually in use and the quiet conditions help your focus and concentration. These three conditions—same time, early and quiet—account for about 10% of your improvement before you even pick up a basketball.

I was very lucky when I started developing my free throw mastery. I was able to practice every day for a year and a half in an empty gym, from 5:30am to 8:30am. When I got in early it was always so peaceful and quiet. I was easily able to set up my ball return system, do a full warm up, shoot 500 or more free throws, do the "Make Every" Shot Work Out and warm down without any distractions. I don't recall a day that wasn't satisfying.

THE "GETTING TO THE GYM" RITUAL

You are probably noticing we are suggesting many new rituals. How you get to the gym matters and what you do once you are there matters too. If you can learn to stick to a set schedule and be on time or early, you will be way ahead of the crowd. By being on time, you arrive at the gym relaxed and in the proper mental frame of mind.

Once you are in the gym, if you are alone you won't have any chance for distraction. Again, that's one of the reasons to get to the gym early. If you get to the gym late or later in the day you may see a teammate, a game in progress, a friend who wants to practice with you or wants you to play, or, worst of all, there may be no court for practice. Those scenarios take you away from your planned practice sessions and your progress and should be avoided.

You need an entering-the-gym routine or ritual that is the same every time. As an example, when I got to the gym in the morning I would always say hello and be friendly

but I never got into a conversation longer than 30 seconds. I would go directly into the locker room to clean and wash yesterday's dirt, sweat and tears off my basketball. After three hours of shooting, the basketball does get dirty. Then I would go into the basketball gym, put my equipment down, get my record keeping notebook ready and attach the ball return system onto the hoop. Next I would go into the weight room and do some stomach and back exercises along with fingertip push ups to work up a little sweat. Then I would go back into the basketball gym and do a short meditation and some yoga stretching exercises. These rituals provide perfect preparation for a peak practice every time.

Design your own getting-to-the-gym ritual and stay with it. Put it in writing, the way I described my ritual, so that it's crystal clear.

WARM-UP PROCEDURE

You now understand how to create your own practice schedule and perfect practice conditions for a peak performance every time. You are ready to start shooting. But before getting to the free-throw line there is a warm-up procedure that should also become a ritual. The warm-up begins not at the hoop but at the wall.

The most important part of shooting the basketball accurately is a consistent release. A consistent release doesn't really require any lower body coil or knee bend if you have good timing, arm, hand and finger strength. The "pure" release is based upon having total control over all the small muscles and joints so that the only movement is from the three major joints—knees, shooting elbow and wrist. A "pure" release also has a fundamentally sound grip, a consistent shot pocket, full shooting arm extension upward along the shot line and natural wrist flop with fingers wide and straight with no bend in any of the finger joints.

Start practicing your free-throw rituals and steps against the wall. Set up your stance as if you were at the free-throw line, about five feet from the wall. Find an imaginary bulls-eye target on the wall and shoot at that target. As you progress, keep moving the bulls-eye target higher. Practicing against the wall is excellent if you are having difficulty establishing your grip, the initial move, consistent shot pocket or setting a pace and rhythm because it eliminates the distractions of making or missing a shot and rebounding, since the basketball will come right back to you. Shoot a hundred shots from there when working on an element of your style.

[PHOTOS]

Even today, every time I practice, I start my sessions with the close-to-the-wall warm-up. The next step in the warm-up takes you to the hoop. Position yourself about three feet back from the hoop along the mid- and free-throw shot lines.

[PHOTO]

Set up exactly as you would to shoot a free throw from the free-throw line. This up-close position along the midline is called The Shot Release Practice Position.

[PHOTO]

Since developing a clean and consistently pure release is the essence of pure shooting and proper shooting fundamentals, spending a lot of time shooting three to five feet from the basket will be very helpful. When practicing from this up-close position keep track of shots made in a row. Keep striving to make longer strings of shots in a row and make every shot swish or pop the net. This is initially done one-handed.

With practice, if you cannot make a hundred in a row from three feet from the basket, you will never be a 90% free-throw master. My personal best from the release position is 500 in a row ending on a make. I could easily make many in a row every day because my release, focus and concentration are very good. Shooting from up close was instrumental in my free-throw mastery development; it will pay off for you too.

You need to know what it's like to make every shot before you can gain that confident feeling at the free-throw line and beyond. Make it a rule from now on to warm up your release, shooting one handed from close-in and then move out as the warm-up progresses.

There are several ways to practice the warm-up-release drill. First practice doing your entire free-throw motion, including rituals. Most of the time practice from up-close with no lower body assistance or knee bend.

[PHOTOS]

Second, start in the shot pocket position, take your guide hand away and keep it still and to the side as you shoot the basketball with the shooting arm and hand only. Practice primarily with no knee bend.

[PHOTOS]

Next, practice the release with both hands, starting from the shot pocket. In this drill you are trying to release cleanly from the guide hand and have the guide hand remain in the same position it was in while practicing with just the shooting arm and hand. Again no knee bend.

[PHOTOS]

(More on one-handed shooting in Chapter 7 for head coaches.)

GETTING TO THE FREE-THROW LINE

When you have mastered making 100 in a row from the release position, you are ready to move back. You may not have the patience for that, so practice in the release position every practice session for five or ten minutes to see how many you can make in a row. The goal is to make 5, then 10, 25, 50 and finally 100 in a row ending on a make.

Since you will be keeping records of each practice session, keep track of your best in-a-row from the release position until you can make 100 in a row easily. Write down your best score made from the release position and you are now ready to move back along

the mid- and shot-lines, shooting with your free-throw rituals and style until you eventually reach the free-throw line.

Each time you step back several feet to practice your free-throw ritual and style, see if you can make the shot swish or pop the net without bending your knees. Keep moving back and if necessary add some knee bend. Again, see if you can make 25 in a row in each position.

I can move all the way back to the free-throw line, making every free throw without using any lower body power or knee bend. I'm really not that big or strong but my hands and fingers are strong and when you combine that with perfect timing and free-throw shooting knowledge, not much power from the lower body or knee bend is necessary.

Now you have reached the free-throw line and you are ready to practice mostly from there for the next 30 to 90 minutes. There are several ways to practice once you have reached the free-throw line. It is not essential that you shoot for score every minute of your free-throw practice. Sometimes you will want to work on refining your rituals or one of the seven fundamental steps; when you do this kind of work, keeping track of how well you are shooting is counterproductive.

CONSECUTIVE-FREE-THROW PRACTICE

Since we are no longer players, for free-throw masters like Dr. Tom, many other shooting coaches and me, consecutive-free-throw practice is all that's required for staying sharp. For players, which most of you are, consecutive-free-throw practice is the foundation for developing your shooting fundamentals and scoring skills.

Making free throws in game competition is more difficult than in practice, so players also need to practice their free throws in game-like conditions, shooting consecutive-free-throws 50% of the time and shooting free throws in between training and shooting drills the other 50%.

Before doing any shooting drills or training, do your free-throw warm-up and consecutive-free-throw practice. ALWAYS! Doing the solo shooting practice session in the correct order, starting with the warm-up and consecutive-free-throws is the most important of all free-throw mastery procedures.

We will get to The "Make Every" Shot Workout shortly. First let's define the different ways to practice consecutive-free-throw shooting and how each method of practice is useful in your efforts to achieve free-throw mastery.

SHOOT A HUNDRED CONSECUTIVE FREE THROWS QUICKLY

This is probably the easiest consecutive-free-throw shooting drill. You may not have shot from one position 100 times, so start by finding out what it's like to shoot exactly 100 free throws and then stop shooting.

First, take a look at the clock so you will know how long it takes to shoot 100 free throws. Mark your start time and finish time in your record-keeping notebook. As an example: I

started at 6:00am and finished at 6:15am, so it took me 15 minutes to shoot 100 free throws.

Simply count one more for each shot until you reach 100. Of course you want to make every free throw, but that's not where your main focus should be in this drill. Just count the shots. Count consistently on the first bounce after each shot; when the basketball bounces say to yourself the number you are on: 47, 48, 49, etc.

Use this 100-shot consecutive drill while consciously working on one of the elements of the fundamental steps. A hundred consecutive shots also helps to establish quickness and a consistent pace, force and rhythm while building strength and stamina. Doing the 100-shot drill is especially important when you're getting started.

CONSECUTIVE-FREE-THROWS-IN-A-ROW SHOOTING

Once you are comfortable shooting 100 free throws and begin to understand how to work on your fundamentals in this 100-quick-shots drill, you are ready for the next consecutive shooting drill. This time you will set a time period, for example 15 minutes. In this 15-minute practice period you will only keep track of free throws made in a row. Mark your start time in your recordkeeping book.

Again, make your count on the first bounce after the shot. If you happen to lose your focus and your place, start the count over again. When the time period is up, record the best free-throws-made-in-row into your notebook. If you are still on a make when the time period is up, continue shooting and counting until you "unfocus." Always follow that last shot, which was an unfocus, with a make, which is a focus, and you're ready for the next consecutive-free-throw drill.

FIND YOUR STARTING FREE-THROW PRACTICE PERCENTAGE

Now that you have a feel for the methods and procedures of the first two consecutive-free-throw drills, it's time to find out what your starting practice free-throw percentage is so you can build from there.

You are about to discover what free-throw master and champion Ed Palubinskas calls "The Imperfect Gap." The imperfect gap is the percentage you are *not* making out of 100%. For example, an 80% free-throw shooter has a 20% gap. It's this gap that needs our attention and analysis.

The procedure for finding your starting free-throw percentage is very simple. First do your warm ups. Next, when you arrive at the free-throw line, do the two consecutive-free-throw drills described above, but this time shoot 50 consecutive-free-throws and then do 5 minutes of consecutive-free-throws-in-a-row. Remember to record your time to shoot 50 shots and record the most free throws you made.

You are now totally warmed up and ready to find your starting free-throw practice percentage. You are going to shoot four sets of 25 free throws—a total of 100 free throws. Start each set with two warm-up shots, then start the count this way: 1 out of 1, 2 out of 2, 2 out of 3, 2 out of 4, 3 out of 5, etc. The first number is your successful shots;

the second is the total number of shots you've made, up to 25. Make the count to yourself on the first bounce after the shot and again when you step into stance on an in-breath.

After a 25-set is completed, mark the score in your notebook, for example: 18/25. From there, when you're shooting 25-shot sets, it's easy to calculate your percentage. Multiply the shots made by 4, thus $18 \times 4 = 72\%$. Take two practice free throws again and then shoot the next set, record your time and score and continue to follow this procedure until you have completed all four sets and 100 free throws.

Now, as an example, your score might look like this in your recordkeeping notebook: 18/25, 15/25, 14/25, 20/25. Add up the columns and you find your starting free-throw average is 67/100 or 67%. You need to know your starting average so you can start fixing the "Imperfect Gap" and set improvement goals.

THE THREE PERFECT PRACTICE RULES

- 1) A missed shot is called an "unfocus." The words *miss* or *missed* don't appear in our "Make Every" shot vocabulary. When the basket and score wasn't made, think of it and call it an *unfocus*.
- 2) When an unfocus occurs, always follow that with a "focus," better known as a "Make."
- 3) End your sets and practices on a positive note, on a make. The way you end on a make is by counting only shots made. In other words, I would shoot a set to make 10 which allows me to end on a make. It might take me 15 free throws to make 10 (66.7%) but making the tenth one allows me to end on a make.

CONSECUTIVE-FREE-THROW SHOOTING IN SETS

You have a choice when shooting sets for percentage: Either shoot to make a specific number of free throws or shoot in sets, such as 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 100, etc. If I make 100 free throws and it takes 104 shots to accomplish, I divide 104 into 100 to get my shooting percentage, $100 \text{ divided by } 104 = 96.04\%$. Computing your percentage is a little more difficult that way but it's preferred because it allows you to end on a make.

The ideal is to practice solo shooting every day for one to two hours or more. This may not fit into your schedule or be easy at first so you will have to organize yourself in the best way you can. You now know what it takes to succeed; the question is: Are you ready?

When you are getting started, shoot in shorter sets such as 5 or 10 until you can make them all; then progress to 15, and finally to 25. When you can make all of them you can move up and shoot in sets of 50 or 100, but generally 25 sets is the rule.

HOW TO COUNT WHILE SHOOTING SETS FOR PERCENTAGE

There are several ways to keep track of your score while shooting. You can keep score by keeping track of shots made out of shots taken, for example, 3 out of 5, 4 for 6, 7 in 10, etc., but it's best to keep track of **only the shots made**. That way you are unaware of how well you are shooting, which is appropriate since you should be concentrating on your free-throw rituals and process.

Dr. Tom Amberry showed me his penny counting system. The penny counting system only keeps track of shots made. So the counting process is simply 1, 2, 3, etc., adding one more for each shot made.

Dr. Tom uses the pennies primarily to keep track of how many sets he had shot and the occasional unfocus. He does this so he doesn't have to stop shooting to keep his record; he can simply record his score at the end of the session.

He carries the pennies in his back pocket and if he accidentally unfocuses on a shot he puts a penny in his left front pocket. When he finishes a set he put a penny in his right pocket.

I use Dr. Tom's penny counting system every practice session. These days, since my free-throw routine is to shoot two days a week and only make 100, I only need one pocket for the unfocuses. I could shoot more, but it's no longer necessary. I am able to maintain a 96% average in practice. When I compete in free-throw tournaments I step it up.

Now we have completed the first phase of our perfect free-throw practice session and are ready for the second phase, which is shooting free throws in game-like conditions called The "Make Every" Shot Workout.

THE WARM-UP BEFORE THE "MAKE EVERY" SHOT PRACTICE AND TRAINING DRILLS

After free-throw consecutive practice, your upper body is warmed up but not your lower body. You are going to need your legs for doing shooting drills and training in between shooting free throws. To warm up the lower body, this is an excellent time to do some exercises and yoga stretching. Spend 5 to 10 minutes doing this warm-up.

First do some push-ups and some fingertip push-ups. Fingertip push-ups are excellent for strengthening the hand and fingers—vital to free throw and shooting accuracy.

[PHOTO]

Next jog around the court or run around the court dribbling the basketball. You can also do dribbling exercises or speed running exercise drills, but make sure to pace yourself.

When you are totally warmed up, do a deep stretch, especially the back, calves, ankles, feet and groin area. You are going to do a lot of running and shooting during the shooting drills, also some half- and full-court wind sprints; you don't want to pull something or get injured.

THE "MAKE EVERY" SHOT PRACTICE SYSTEM TO SIMULATE GAME-TIME CONDITIONS

The "Make Every" Shot Workout is similar to several other well-known practice shooting systems, including John Wooden's, "Make 5 Free Throws In A Row - Keep Shooting" and Steve Alford's, "All American Work Out." These systems work well for developing free-throw and shooting mastery.

This book is about free-throw mastery so I'm not going to explain the shooting drills in detail. (When I coach a college player or professional after several consecutive-free-throw shooting sessions I begin to work with their shooting coach or I have Kenny, my shooting coach, help out. I station myself at the free-throw line and the shooting coach directs the shooting drills.)

The "Make Every" Shot Workout is a simple concept. When doing the workout it's difficult to keep track of your shooting percentages, so it helps to have an assistant doing the counting. It's easy to count the shots you make, but don't keep track of the shots you unfocused; let your assistant do that. During the workout keep track of both your free throws and separate shooting drill percentages.

After this workout warm-up, go to the free-throw line and make one free throw. The workout starts when you make the first free throw. Next, rebound the basketball and go to the first station for the first shooting drill. After the first shooting drill, instead of making one free throw make two; continue making two each time between drills.

You can design the shooting and training drills by yourself or with your assistant or coach. Make sure to record them, including the order in which they are to be done. Always start in-close and work outward.

After making 5, 10, 15 or 25 shots from the field in a shooting drill, go back to the free-throw line and make two free throws. When you begin start with smaller sets. The idea is to get winded during the shooting drills, but not exhausted; then instead of resting immediately after the shooting drill go to the free-throw line and make two free throws.

You can do one shooting drill over and over again and go to the free-throw line to make two or you can do ten different drills; it's up to you and your coach. Design a great workout and have fun. It will be more fun if you make every shot! You will understand shortly.

After the shooting drills are completed there are two more drills and a warmdown before the training session is over. I call the last two drills Motion Isolation and Still Isolation.

The Motion Isolation drill is a full-court sprint, back and forth, ending with one free throw. The goal is to be breathing hard when you get to the free-throw line. Start with three and build up to 10 or more full-court sprints.

The Still Isolation drill simulates a time out. This is the last drill we do each practice session. The opposing coach calls a time out to try to ice or get the free throw shooter to think too much, lose focus, lose concentration and get mental. There are two ways to do this drill. You can walk around the court or sit or stand for a minimum of two minutes then make one free throw. Repeat this drill 10 to 25 times. The goal is to feel like you can walk up to the free-throw line any time, no matter how much pressure, and make your score.

Now that your practice session is over, make sure your records are accurate and well written. Take a little time to comment on that day's session and on your progress.

Thought we were out of here? Not quite.

Last we do a warmdown. The warmdown is a meditation and full 10-minute stretch. The best time to stretch is *after* a workout because you can stretch deeper. Do the workout warmdown every time in these practice sessions so it becomes a habit.

Now use your getting-out-of-the-gym ritual and go.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY / THE LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS

When you want to get better it may seem that if you do more you will succeed faster. That more-is-better theory generally is not correct.

You are using your body and mind to their limit in a perfect practice; this is exhausting. You need to pace yourself for best results. Go slow at first.

The law of diminishing returns means that there is a point beyond which your actions begin to have a negative effect. You need to keep yourself highly motivated and be careful not to go beyond your capabilities. When you are tired mentally or physically you need rest, so listen to your body.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I'M PRACTICING CORRECT SHOOTING FUNDAMENTALS?

The answer may seem too simple—when the shots are all going in. That statement is true, but you are also going to need some photos or video for better analysis.

Just thinking about making perfect free throws every time magnetically draws that reality closer and closer. The more you believe in your potential, the harder you will work. It's sort of like which came first, the chicken or the egg—the chicken being making every free throw and the egg being perfect shooting fundamentals.

Don't worry. Many free-throw masters still can shoot over 96% with small flaws in their fundamentals. They have a deep understanding of the mental plane and they have developed their attention, focus and concentration to their fullest. Good focus and concentration is very powerful and can often overcome poor fundamentals: You are not just developing pure shooting fundamentals, you are also developing your mind and working on your mental abilities.

FREE THROW SKILL TOURNAMENT PREPARATION

There are many free-throw tournaments each year but none of them are widely advertised. We are still in the primitive stages. Someday free-throw tournaments will be sanctioned, with a pro-prize money division and with pro and amateur national, regional and local rankings. (I invite tournament directors to alert me about their events so I can

announce them on www.freethrowmastery.com. I also invite tournament directors to send me their final results so I can record the results.)

Many free-throw masters who are no longer playing basketball compete in these free-throw events. Most of the events are targeted at kids or seniors. There are few for the high school, college and pro players who actually need skill tournaments the most.

In Chapter Seven, I urge team coaches to set up free-throw competitions for their teams. In addition to free-throw games and a free-throw handicap ladder for a team, coaches can set up free-throw skill events for the team, school and community. School and community tournaments are excellent fundraisers.

Free-throw tournaments are good for the game of basketball and for the players who aspire for free-throw mastery. Tournaments provide goals, focus and improvement motivation. Perfect practice requires entering free-throw competitions—so enter a free-throw tournament any time you can find one.

Preparing for the tournament is simply practicing the format. Some tournaments have you shoot a 25 set with the highest score winning gold. Some tournaments give you shorter or longer sets. Then there are NBSA tournaments that are head-to-head and require a ranking and seeding system.

Since shooting free throws is not very physically demanding, you can practice all the way up to the day of the tournament. When you do this type of preparation, take a day off and get a lot of rest the week before. Pace yourself during your practices the week leading up to the tournament so that you peak at the tournament.

Most sports have senior divisions where the stars of yesteryear are still competing. Unfortunately basketball is so strenuous that injuries keep many past stars from playing beyond age 45. Here is your opportunity to keep shooting. If you start practicing now you might have a chance to win substantial cash and prizes at the 2020 "Make Every" Shot World Championships coming soon to your neighborhood.

RECORD KEEPING (FORMS)

Chapter VI

Amazing Free-Throw Mastery Feats, Amazing Kids and Records

WHAT'S SO AMAZING ABOUT SHOOTING FREE THROWS?

Why is it that hundreds of millions of people from all over the world love the game of basketball? There is no short answer as basketball attracts people for a variety of reasons. Watch the game on television or computer and you quickly see that the professional game is played by the biggest, tallest, strongest, baddest and best athletes in the world. These athletes can practically leap over the basket, jumping off the ground three feet and higher. We are fascinated by the sheer staggering physical feat of it all.

I often wonder whether I could have competed on today's basketball stage. To stay close to the game, I love shooting and making baskets and I know many fans share my enthusiasm. Who hasn't fantasized shooting threes or free throws against their favorite top shooters?

We were all introduced to basketball early in grammar school. It was a lot of fun then and it's still great fun today. Just shooting a basketball by oneself is a great mental and physical exercise at any age. As we get older, it's the perfect mild exercise. That's why the best shooters in basketball are over 50. They just practice the shooting part of the game, which doesn't require quickness, speed, flexibility or lots of strength and power.

Basketball is extremely easy to learn today, especially when kids are starting to play as early as five years old in organized youth basketball programs. The instruction and coaching materials have never been better or more complete. Basketball technology is at the cutting edge.

Go to the Web and you will find practically every major teaching academy, college coach, assistant and basketball teacher with their own Web site and programs there for you to view. The game is so well taught, scientific and organized—I wish I were a kid today.

When I see a Web site like The National Collegiate Scouting Association (www.ncsa.com), I see just how lucky young shooters are to have a coach's official scouting guide for student athletes as young as 14. If you are just starting out, go to The National Collegiate Scouting Association and let them help you get organized.

Another couple of great sites for parents and their student athletes to get started are: Ed Shilling's new Coaches Academy, www.coachesacademy.com, and Ronn Wyckoff's www.Top-Basketball-Coaching.com.

So, what *is* so amazing about shooting free throws—and why perform amazing feats? The free throw is the foundation for shooting and scoring in basketball, so naturally records will get set. But more than setting records, shooting free throws is a mild form of mental and physical exercise. For me it becomes a form of meditation. Once you start making every—or nearly every—shot, you experience a state of being still, peaceful and quiet.

Once you gain that serene sensation, it feels so good you're motivated to continue. When you make your first 100 in a row, you think, "If I can make 100 in a row, why not 500?" Suddenly you have people performing amazing feats and breaking records.

Making hundreds of free throws in a row in practice is a natural process and progression. To make your first 100 in a row you will need to get your free-throw practice average to about 92%, which is also considered par in free-throw shooting.

With a 92% free-throw average you have an 8% gap. Shooting 8% over your mean free-throw average happens very rarely when shooting 100 shots. The smaller your perfection gap the more likely you are to make a 100 in a row. Breaking the 100-in-a-row barrier is one of the first goals toward being perceived as a free-throw master.

TWO TYPES OF FREE-THROW MASTERY

Free-throw mastery is critical for all basketball players to achieve and it is the advantage you are seeking while competing in the physical game. But free-throw mastery and mastery in shooting can be enjoyed by anyone with the added bonus of great mental, spiritual and physical exercise.

In 2010 the National Basketball Shooters Association started holding sanctioned shooting tournaments with competition at all skill levels. Shooters can win cash and prizes and even get state and national ranking competing against professional basketball players, college players, high school players, youth players and skilled shooting experts.

There are two types of free throw masters. The first is the Shooting Expert. A Shooting Expert generally is no longer playing competitively but competes in free throw, three point and the game of horse, does exhibitions, teaches and coaches.

The second type is the Expert Shot Maker. Expert Shot Makers compete in the game of basketball and demonstrate their shooting skills during game time. An Expert Shot Maker can also be a Shooting Expert but only by competing in skill contests and tournaments. That's exactly what an Expert Shot Maker needs to do to reach the peak of their ability. Basketball players need to be both Shooting Experts and Expert Shot Makers.

Competing in basketball shooting events is an essential part of free-throw mastery. Through competition, humans interact to improve, pull and push each other to reach their full potential and be the best they can possible be. Competing creates a much deeper commitment and focus.

THE ALL-TIME BEST EXPERT SHOOTERS

There are many known competitors among the ranks of Expert Shooters today, but since the ranking system is so new it's anyone's guess who they are and who is the best. That will change as the National Basketball Shooters Association runs and sanctions basketball shooting tournaments.

To stimulate a discussion, I have taken the liberty of listing here my all-time top ten. They are all championship-caliber shooters from the free-throw line, but more important than their shooting mastery is their over-all contribution to the game of basketball and the advancement of free-throw shooting.

MY ALL-TIME BEST TOP TEN EXPERT SHOOTERS*

- 1) John Wooden
- 2) "Bunny" Harold Levine
- 3) Dr. Tom Amberry
- 4) Ted St. Martin
- 5) Fred Newman
- 6) Ed Palubinskas
- 7) Dr. Jim Poteet
- 8) Mark Price
- 9) Rick Barry

10) Calvin Murphy

*Actual championship rankings will be available at the end of the 2009/2010 season, through sanctioned tournaments held nationwide throughout the year.

Here are the reasons for my fantasy picks.

- 1) **John Wooden.** Coach John Wooden is now 99 years young. I placed John Wooden first for several reasons. First, I think his record of 134 free throws made in a row during his professional basketball career is the greatest of all free-throw records and feats. That record has not been broken in about 75 years at any level of game-time competition. Coach Wooden's free-throw average during that era was the highest. [RESEARCH year? / percentage?]

Second and even more important was the method and procedures Wooden used during his solo practice sessions to develop his shooting skills. He passed this on to students and coaches as the "Make Five Free Throws In A Row, Keep Shooting" method in between shooting and training drills. He did much more than just win 10 collegiate championships in twelve years and develop young adults into great athletes and men. He developed coaches and great shooters.

I have personal experience with Coach Wooden's practice theories, systems and methods. My first shooting coach, Ken Kroft, taught that system to me as it was taught to him. My learning experience with John Wooden's practice system is significantly responsible for my shooting ability, instruction and this book.

[PHOTO]

- 2) **Harold "Bunny" Levitt.** Harold "Bunny" Levitt passed away several years ago at age 96. He was originally from Chicago. His mother called him "Bunny" when he was a kid because he was very small and extremely quick. He was 5' 4" and just as round when he set his world record of 499 free throws in a row in 1935. "Bunny" was declared the first world champion of free throw.

Harold was also a champion handball player. He was the Harlem Globe Trotters' team manager and he shot free throws at half time, never losing a challenge to a college basketball player. Harold's greatest love was teaching kids basketball fundamentals and he continued doing that into his nineties.

Harold's free-throw style was underhand like almost every basketball player of his era, but it was different than Rick Barry's, according to Dr. Tom Amberry, who, as a high school student, got to rebound for "Bunny" at a Harlem Globe Trotters exhibition. Harold tutored both Rick Barry and Bill Sharman at the free-throw line early in their basketball careers.

[PHOTO]

- 3) **Dr. Tom Amberry.** Dr. Tom Amberry is now 87 years old and he is still shooting at 98% or better. He doesn't practice every day any more but he is still sharp and still does speaking engagements. He has done more than a hundred appearances with college coaches and served on the Chicago Bulls and Golden State Warriors staff as free-throw master and coach.

Still waiting to hear if he's coming to compete at the nationals this year. If he comes he will be seeded second. Yes, he's still that good at 87 years old.

Dr. Tom came from out of nowhere in 1993 and broke the second-most-difficult record to break in free throw, the Guinness one basketball, one rebounder consecutive-free-throw record with ten witnesses. (It has been 75 years since John Wooden set his consecutive game-time free throws in-a-row record and no one has broken that yet. The game-time consecutive record is the hardest; the consecutive record is second.) Dr. Tom's consecutive-free-throw record is 2,750 ending on a make; it took 12 hours to accomplish, with five-minute breaks every hour.

His story is interesting. He retired from his podiatry business at age 69; a year and a half later he broke Ted St. Martin's consecutive-free-throw record by 714 but ended on a make. It was closing time at the gym, so since Dr. Tom had already broken the record he didn't mind stopping. Had he realized Ted would come back with a score of 5,221 he probably wishes he had continued making shots.

Dr. Tom Amberry was an all-American in college and led the nation in scoring two years in a row. He was 6'7" then but claims he has shrunk and is now 6'4". Known as the "Big Kahuna of Free Throw," he had to change shooting arms from left to right during his year-and-a-half-run after injuring his left shoulder.

To me, Dr. Tom Amberry is still the world champion of free throw—at least until the end of the 2010 season when a new national champion will be crowned. Dr. Tom is my free-throw mentor, close friend and my biggest hero.

Dr. Tom wrote the first book focused on free throw, *Free Throw, Seven Steps To Success At The Free Throw Line*. He also has a DVD called “Make Every Free Throw,” which sells as a set with the book. His free-throw mastery book is essential reading and is a companion to mine as is Dr. Jim Poteet's, *The Paradox of Free Throw*. Our three books are the only free-throw-only instructional books available. Most other books on shooting focus on the moves and shots taken in the game. (Ed Palubinskas is working on several free throw books.)

[PHOTO]

- 4) **Ted St. Martin.** Ted St. Martin is known for his records in consecutive free throw shooting. When Ted started going for records, Bunny's record wasn't recognized. The record was thought to be 144. Ted broke that easily and made 200. Finally in 1977 he made 2,036 in a row and that remained the consecutive free throw mark until Dr. Tom Amberry broke that record in 1993.

In 1996 Ted set the free-throw consecutive speed record of 5,221, using many basketballs and many rebounders, which took him less than six hours to accomplish. Those amazing numbers, 5221 in a row, may have put the free-throw line consecutive speed record out of reach forever. I know just three free-throw masters who are capable and are considering making that grueling physical,

spiritual and mental marathon run in spite of the new ranking system: Ed Palubinskas, Rick Rosser and Jeff Liles.

Ted has been considered the world champion of free throw just as "Bunny" and Dr. Tom were when they owned the consecutive-free-throw world record. Ted is in his seventies now and still doing exhibitions, teaching and coaching. His book, *The Art of Shooting Baskets*, is a best seller. He says he will never retire and his greatest joy is teaching kids. Ted will be tough to beat at the free throw line this year at the Nationals. He's my long shot to win it all and another world championship.

[PHOTO]

- 5) **Fred Newman.** Fred Newman is the holder of five recognized free-throw Guinness records: 1) Highest percentage for 24 hours (98.2%); 2) Most free throws made in 24 hours (20,371); 3) Most free throws made in 10 minutes using two balls (388); 4) Most free throw made in-a-row blindfolded (88); 5) Most free throws made in an hour (1,639), done recently on a live Japanese television show. His one-hour record isn't even his highest; he made over 1,800 in an hour when he was younger, during an NBA all-star game. Fred also can be seen on YouTube making 209 three-point shots in a row, which I believe is also the record. All of Fred's records are documented, witnessed and seen on either YouTube or television. His best in-a-row at the free-throw line is more than 1,500 but he is no longer interested in breaking any of the marathon free-throw records.

In my free-throw rankings for world champions, I place Fred second after the next master on the list of tournament experts, Ed Palubinskas. Competing at the free-throw line, only Dr. Tom Amberry has more gold medals than Fred.

Fred is one of my main free-throw mentors. Together we developed the format for the tournament competition that appears in chapter seven. We practice regularly at Cal Tech, in Pasadena, California, where Fred currently works and where he went to school.

Fred doesn't enjoy teaching or coaching free throw; he likes to teach by example and just "Make Every" shot.

[PHOTO]

- 6) **Ed Palubinskas.** Eddie "P", the Surgeon General of Free Throw, is truly one of basketball's greatest shooting masters. I rank Ed number 1 at the free-throw line in competition. I believe the reason Ed will be declared free-throw champion of the world next summer at our Nationals is because he feels so strongly about who is teaching free throw. He is so motivated to lead us.

We both believe that knowing how to make all your free throws is critical and proves you know what you are talking about as a teacher. We also believe if you can't demonstrate at the 96% minimum level or better you are only guessing and not really qualified to teach at the pro or top college level.

Eddie “P” is an innovator in free-throw mastery instruction. He developed what he calls the “Smartball.” I can endorse the ball because it has helped my shooting. I now understand more teaching and coaching principles. Developing that ball took years and cost about \$350,000. Ed has also created three DVDs: “Secrets To Perfect Shooting Principles”, “Master The Shooting Moment” and “Shooter’s Lab.”

He teaches what’s called the triangle method and is the number one doctor of the release. His expertise is the hands and fingers. That’s why we call him The Surgeon General of Free Throw.

[PHOTO]

- 7) **Dr. Jim Poteet.** Dr. Jim Poteet is currently the President and Commissioner of the Association of Christian College Athletes. He is a past player and college coach. Dr. Jim is also a student of Dr. Tom Amberry, shooting almost identically in style, including the famous Amberry loop. Dr Jim is a 96% or better free-throw master in competitions and exhibitions and is one of the U.S.A.’s very best free-throw coaches.

Dr. Jim is another one of my free-throw mentors. In 1995, to obtain his doctorate, he wrote *The Paradox of Free Throw*, with Dr. Tom at his side. When Dr. Tom showed me Dr. Jim’s free-throw book, I had been working with Dr. Tom for about four months and was struggling to get beyond 84% in practice. I felt I was stuck there. After reading Dr. Jim’s book I started improving immediately and rapidly thanks to his analysis of the mental plane. A lot of the material in chapter three, The Mental Plane, I learned from Dr. Jim.

Dr Jim Poteet never published his book so few have had a chance to read it. He recently decided to make it into an e-book and it should be available for purchase early 2010. His material is important reading and a companion to my book and Dr. Tom's.

- 8) **Mark Price.** Mark Price is the oldest son of Denny Price. Mark is considered the greatest pure shooter of all time. The Price boys, Mark, Brent and Denny are considered the best family of shooters in the history of basketball. Mark is still the current career free-throw leader in the NBA (.9039%). There is one NBA player nipping at his toes though, and that's my hero and favorite current NBA player, Steve Nash.

Mark played in the NBA for 12 years and is one of only three players from the NBA to be a 180 shooter: 40% or better from the three-point line, 50% or better from the field and 90% or better from the free-throw line. The other two are Larry Bird and Reggie Miller.

Mark is now a basketball coach with a shooting coach's mentality. He teaches shooting and was the shooting coach for the Atlanta Hawks last season. He also teaches shooting at the Suwanee Sports Academy in Atlanta, the home of the Mark Price Shooter's Lab.

Mark won the three-point contest twice during the NBA All Star Games and is always a big threat to win any shooting championship. I pick Mark to be one of the shooters to contend for world champion.

- 9) **Rick Barry.** Top 50 in the NBA and in the Hall of Fame, Rick Barry is one of my all-time favorite players and people. He is one of the nicest guys I don't know very well. Everyone on this list is a potential world champion of free throw and Rick Barry is also a real threat to walk away with the honors at the nationals if he decides to train.

Rick is my favorite of all free-throw stylists. A real hero to sports fans all over the world, he has accomplished a lot as a player but he is best known for his unique underhand free-throw style.

In Rick's most famous free-throw article you find out why Rick's style is the way to shoot. (I believe it appeared in "Sports Illustrated." [GO TO LINK / SPORTS ILLUSTRATED FREE THROW ARTICLE](#) find the article.) I think the best way to shoot a free throw is the underhand method Rick uses. What Rick says about his shooting technique makes a lot of sense. Check it out as you develop your unique free-throw shooting style.

I shoot and teach the set-shot motion from the free-throw line because it's a direct relative and method of teaching over-all shooting. But I don't change the methods of good stylists. Rick was unusual in that he was a great shooter both underhand and over head.

I'm hoping he comes out of shooting retirement and joins our National Basketball Shooters Association shooters tour and national championship. He will have a lot of support from his fans to do well against his shooting equals.

Rick has been number two, .8998%, in the NBA career free-throw records for many years. Last season saw him slip to number three. Steve Nash is number two at the present time at .9003%.

[PHOTO]

- 10) **Calvin Murphy.** Murph is also in the NBA hall of fame. He was an over-achiever and a true champion in everything he did. Still is. Calvin Murphy is as well known in baton twirling as in basketball. When the word “quick” comes to mind I always think of Calvin—quickest and best hands I ever saw.

Calvin is currently loosing ground in the NBA career records as players get better from the free-throw line. Calvin was number three for many years but recently a few players have passed him by. He is currently sixth at .8916%.

His most spectacular year at the free-throw line in the NBA was the 1981-82 season. He shot an incredible .958%—the record and highest mark ever at the free-throw line for a player in an NBA season. During that season he also set the record for most-free-throws-made-in-a-row: 78.

If Calvin decides to get his shot together, look out, part the seas, he is another potential free-throw world champion.

[PHOTO]

TWO MORE CHAMPIONS

I do have two more free-throw masters that I want to mention because they both had a big influence on my free-throw mastery style and instruction.

Bill Sharman. When you make a list of top ten there is always controversy and differences of opinion. I listed Bill Sharman here because he is also a mentor of mine. Bill wrote the best book by far on shooting and shooting free throws during his era, *The Bill Sharman Basketball Shooting Guide*. I rank his basketball shooting book a classic and up there in importance with Bill Tilden's tennis book, *Spin of The Ball*, in terms of helping the sport grow and mature.

Bill Sharman set all the early free-throw records in the NBA and still has the most free-throw records of any player in the NBA. In fact it was the Bill Sharman show when it came to making a free throw in the clutch. Bill is up there in age now so I'm not sure he is still shooting. I hope so, because if he trains he also would be a world champion contender. He will have the fans in the palm of his hand if he shows up next summer at the nationals.

Steve Alford. Steve Alford played in the NBA for a short time but made his mark in college basketball. A career 90% shooter, he now enjoys coaching at the University of New Mexico. Steve was also Indiana's "Mr. Basketball", coming out of high school, and in Indiana that's as big an honor as being inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

What makes Steve unique is one of his basketball shooting instructional videos, “The All-American Workout.” If you have not seen this tape you are missing an important ingredient for your own free-throw mastery success. My “Makeevery Shot” Workout, with free throws practiced between shooting and training drills, is influenced by Steve’s All American Workout and John Wooden’s Make Five Keep Shooting free-throw mastery practice system.

I want to say one more thing about Steve Alford that few know today. Steve started making teaching videos while he was still going to Indiana University—quite an accomplishment for a college student. He always seemed to have a vision and a direction. In my mind, the message at the end of the All-American Workout is more valuable than the shooting portion. Check it out.

ONE MORE SPECIAL MENTION

Eva Nemcova. There are no women on my list and I apologize. The WNBA is celebrating its 12th year, the league is more stable than ever and the women’s pro game is catching on and rightfully so. Women are terrific players and excellent shooters. I think they shoot better than the men when they have an open shot. Because the women’s game is so strong defensively, it’s harder for them to get open shots and find open lanes to get to the basket.

Eva Nemcova sits at the very top of the WNBA career rankings. She is retired now but a great free-throw master. She owns the WNBA consecutive-free-throw record. She shot 66 in a row and set the WNBA free-throw season percentage record, making 62 out of

63 for .984%. She missed her first free-throw attempt of the season and made the rest. The following season, she continued the streak and made four more, ending the run at 66.

There may be a hundred or more U.S.A.-qualified Expert Shooters not on my list, from the NBA/WNBA pros to the eight-year-old Elks' Hoop Shoot phenoms. Make your own fantasy list and email them to me at jim.freethrowmastery@gmail.com. I would like to know your thoughts on who made the biggest contribution and who is the best shooting master in basketball's history from the free-throw line.

WHO'S BETTER, THE EXPERT SHOOTER OR THE EXPERT SHOT MAKER?

No one knows for sure. Until this year, 2010, there have not been organized sanctioned tournaments. The National Basketball Shooters Association is now in place to handle that responsibility. We expect to see the very best shooters show up for the prize money and to showcase their skills now that our national association sanctions tournaments, ranks players, seeds players into the draw sheets and keeps shooting percentage records.

The format we are trying is new so everyone who has experience with it will have the early advantage. You will find the free-throw format in chapter seven for coaches. Chapter seven teaches basketball coaches how to set up free throw programming for their team practices and fundraiser tournament procedures for the school and community.

2008-09 NBA CAREER FREE THROW RANKINGS

1. Mark Price .9039
2. Steve Nash .9003
3. Rick Barry .8998
4. Peja Stojakovic .8944
5. Ray Allen .8929
6. Calvin Murphy .8916
7. Chauncey Billups .8892
8. Scott Skiles .8891
9. Reggie Miller .8877
10. Larry Bird .8857

Only 38 total players are over .85% for their NBA careers. These percentages indicate the NBA is still struggling at the free-throw line. While it appears the great athletes can't

make their free throws, it's not the athletes, it's the past teaching and coaching they have received. It's difficult to relearn a skill that should have been learned at 10 years of age. Kids today have it a lot easier because free-throw instruction and programming today is highly advanced.

The WNBA is different. The WNBA is better over all than the NBA at the free-throw line, in terms of years and number of players over 85%. I think that's because women concentrate more on shooting at an early age; in addition, the general consensus is that women are easier to coach than men because they are generally better listeners. Higher percentages could also be a result of playing with the official women's basketball, which is approximately one-half inch in radius smaller than the men's official basketball.

2006 WNBA CAREER FREE-THROW RECORDS

1. Eva Nemcova .897
2. Nicole Powell .891
3. Becky Hammon .889
4. Seimone Augustus .887
5. Elena Tornikidou .874
6. Sue Bird .874

7. Cynthia Cooper .871

8. Janeth Arcain .867

9. Kiesha Brown .866

10. Kara Lawson .865

The list above is based upon shooting more than 100 free throws. The 2009 season ended recently so this list will be updated as soon as it's available from the WNBA. (The WNBA Web site lists only to 2006 and the NBA no longer lists the career records on their Web site.)

MORE AMAZING FREE THROW FEATS

There are hundreds of basketball players and shooters who have set and accomplished many free throw mastery feats and records. Once again I request that the readers send in amazing free-throw mastery feats and records that they or their friends have set so I can list them in the Amazing Free-Throw Mastery Feats and Records section to be viewed at my Web site, www.freethrowmastery.com

Below I have listed ten more amazing feats and records not already mentioned.

1. **The Elks** organization, the largest volunteer organization in the United States, annually holds a national free throw tournament called the **Hoop Shoot** for kids. Every year more than 3 million boys and girls from ages 5 to 13 compete at the free-throw line in their own age divisions. The National Hoop Shoot winners all get their names enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The national finals are an amazing event to witness. More often than not all the winners make perfect scores of 25 out of 25. Go to their Web site, www.Elks.org/HoopShoot, for tournament information and to view the winners from last season. You will be amazed at the shooting skills of these young people.

[PHOTOS]

2. **The International Shoot Out** was held every year for several years until a few years ago, when it was discontinued. The National Basketball Shooters Association hopes to bring that event back in 2011. In 1996, Lurie Koehn, a 14-year-old 8th grade phenom beat out all the great shooting masters present in the open event, which was a combined free throw and three-point shot score. She made 48 out of 50 for 96% and that was the highest score that year.

[PHOTO]

3. A high school basketball player named **Daryl Moreau**, from De La Salle High in New Orleans, Louisiana, made 126 free throws in a row in competition over two full basketball seasons, 1978-79.

[PHOTO]

4. **Paul Cluxton** has had the only perfect season in college basketball. He shot 100%, making 94 out of 94 in Northern Kentucky Division I, 1996-97.

[PHOTO]

5. **Mark Price** averaged over 95% in two seasons in a row during his 12 seasons in the NBA.

[PHOTO]

6. **Michael Williams** set the NBA consecutive-free-throw record at 97 in 1993. He broke Calvin Murphy's consecutive mark of 78 in a row. What's interesting is in that same year Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf also broke Calvin's record, making 81 in a row. Last NBA season 2008-09, Jose Calderon came within a few makes of breaking Michael Williams's consecutive record.

[PHOTOS]

7. The highest career free-throw record in NCAA college basketball was set by ?? in men's basketball and by ?? in women's basketball. (Waiting for names and percentages from NCAA)

[PHOTOS]

8. **Rick Rosser** made 100 free throws in a row in 228 YMCAs across America. Rick is on a mission to meet great shooters, known and unknown. Rick is one of the best free-throw shooters in the world. He is a contender for breaking Ted St. Martin's consecutive record of 5,221 and being declared world champion of free throw at the 2010 National Basketball Shooters Association year-end championships next summer. Rick can be viewed on YouTube at www.focusfreethrows.space.live.com.

9. **Jeff Liles** is another of the potential free-throw mastery world champions and a threat to break Ted's consecutive mark. Jeff is a senior pastor and coaches the girl's basketball team at Watonga High in Watonga, Oklahoma. He is also gunning for Fred Newman's one-hour free-throw record.

Jeff trains, as they say, religiously. He shoots and makes 500 swishes five days a week. He calls that "Gut Endurance." He trains by doing push ups, sit ups, pull ups, stretching and jogging and that is the secret to breaking endurance free-throw physical records and tests.

10. **Jim "Makeevery" Schatz**. Jim "Makeevery" Schatz finished his free-throw mastery book, *The Guide To Free Throw Mastery – Beyond Expectation*, at the end of 2009 and is a co-founder of the National Basketball Shooters Association. He is a 96% or better shooter in free-throw competition and teaching exhibitions. He is a contender for the world free-throw title and says, "That's the only title I'm interested in achieving."

Hope to see everyone at the National Basketball Shooters Association's "Make Every" Shot National Championships coming in summer 2010.

For more information email Jim at jim.freethrowmastery@gmail.com

Chapter 7

For Head Basketball Coaches: the NBSA Free Throw Mastery Program

INTRODUCTION

Our NBSA Free Throw Mastery Instructional Team features the very best free throw shooters in the world. They are: Rick Rosser, Eddie Palubinskas, Bob Owen, Dave Hopla, Rick Barry, Ronn Wyckoff, Mike Scudder, James Pauley, Adam Filippi, Mike Anderson, Andrius Ragauskas, Bob McCoid, Duane Shaw, Ann O'Neil, J J Garwood, Al Caliejas, John Ackerman and Jim "Makeevery" Schatz. Our teaching staff shoot between 96% and 99% at the free throw line in practice and in shooting competition. Shooting 96% or better from the free throw line is our NBSA minimum requirement for demonstrating and teaching free throw mastery. Some of our NBSA Free Throw Mastery experts have played or coached in the NBA and these are also the best competitive basketball shooters in the world, who have been winning the majority of the shooting events I direct at our annual NBSA Masters Invitational Basketball Shooting Championships, now in our 7th season.

The NBSA Masters Invitational is by invitation only. Open to shooters 25 years old or older. To qualify you must be able to shoot the NBSA minimum of 92% or better in practice and shooting competition from the free throw line. The NBSA rates 92% (23-25) as par in free throw shooting and 96% (24-25) or better as free throw mastery. There are three shooting events at the NBSA Masters Invitational every year. They are: Free Throw (25 shots for qualifying), Three Point (NCAA college 3 point line / 25 shots for qualifying) and our 60 second timed event called the Make Every Shot Challenge. The 7th Annual NBSA Masters Invitational Basketball Shooting Championships will once again be held in Las Vegas, on Friday, October 12, 2018. The entry fee for all three events is \$500 this season. We encourage all shooters to find sponsors to support their efforts by paying their entry fee and expenses. All the entry fee funds are given back 100% in prize money.

The NBSA teaching staff invites all head basketball coaches from around the world and all levels of competition, from youth to middle school, high school, college, pro teams and leagues nationally and internationally and the NBA/WNBA, to join us in assisting your players and teams at the free throw line through our Internet NBSA programing. We are offering free throw mastery video instruction through our individual and team video streaming system through the Internet from our new NBSA / Free Throw Mastery website, www.freethrowmastery.com .

Our free throw mastery coaching staff is available as a team of analysts, a new concept, for any of the professional basketball national or international leagues. For more information on free throw mastery league analyses contact me at jim.freethrowmastery@gmail.com. We also offer individual and team programing, instruction and coaching for all levels of play. For individual or team instruction you are able to pick any of our experts to assist you. Many of our NBSA Free Throw Mastery instructional staff are also available for personal appearances, for exhibitions, for shooting events and clinics and are available for hire, through their personal page here

or through their personal agents, for the entire 2018-19 season.

Originally I was able to bring these elite free throw mastery shooters and teachers together in 2009 when I founded and began organizing the National Basketball Shooters Association, NBSA. I brought this group together to share their mastery of free throw shooting ability, compete against one another in our head to head format and ranking system, share instructional materials and share their knowledge and understanding of free throw mastery. Our mission, of course, is to improve free throw shooting in the game of basketball in practice, in game time and in shooting competition.

THE FREE THROW'S IMPORTANCE

The free throw is the most important shot in basketball, accounting for approximately 22.5% of the total points scored in a basketball game. It is not being taught, being programmed or coached properly, which is obvious to the casual observer. Learning the correct basketball shooting fundamentals, which is just one part of developing free throw mastery, is learned and developed through form shooting close to the basket and close to the free throw line. Making all your free throws in game time in the NBA is a skill no player has ever accomplished in a season. Is it possible? The NBSA thinks that a perfect season at the free throw line can be achieved. The highest free throw average in a NBA season ever was set in the 2008-09 season by Jose Calderon. He shot .9805%. Calvin Murphy shot the second highest free throw average in NBA history of .9581 in the 1980-81 NBA season. It's a fact, in close basketball games, the team that makes the most free throws, at the end of the fourth quarter, wins.

THE DEFINITION OF FREE THROW MASTERY

Free Throw Mastery is defined by the NBSA as the ability to make a minimum of 96% (24 out of 25) of your free throws in practice and in shooting competition. In game time the NBSA has determined that free throw mastery is much lower, currently only 85% or better in the NBA/WNBA. Game time free throw mastery is rated 85% or better now in the NBA / WNBA due to the small amount of players in the leagues who have been able to achieve this 85% or better average thus far during their entire professional careers. What's amazing is that approximately only 60 players out of thousands of NBA players, over the 60 plus year history, have achieved this basketball mark of 85% or better at the free throw line. This game time free throw mastery mark of 85% or better is now in the process of change. Free throw mastery in game time will be rated 90% in the NBA/WNBA in five years by the NBSA, once all coaches and players have the understanding and begin implementing the NBSA free throw mastery shooting program, fundamentals, practice system, ladder system , shooting competition format and instruction.

It is much more difficult to make free throws in game time conditions than in practice or shooting competition. The hostile crowds, performance anxiety, lack of focus and concentration, differing court conditions, altitude, jet lag, time change, injuries, difficulty catching your breath, over-reactions causing stress and high blood pressure, etc. Those obstacles in game time cause what's called the Drop-Off Rate. The Drop Off Rate is the difference between the free throw practice percentage and free throw game time percentage. All players have a drop off rate at the free throw line in game time. The best

shooters drop off as little as 3% and then there are the others, who are more of a liability to a team than an asset, who drop off as much as 40%. The primary causes of this excessively large drop off rate is inconsistent and incorrect practice habits, poor shooting form and fundamentals, lack of coachability and inability to focus and concentrate all the time, which results in performance anxiety, lack of confidence and missed free throws.

These mistakes and/or bad habits create an obvious lack of confidence and a negative thought process, with the players internally talking to themselves, which makes players judgmental and uncomfortable, consciously and unconsciously, after getting fouled, knowing team mates and fans depend on him/her to score. A big part of our free throw mastery instruction teaches players how not to think, be silent, remain in the now, in the subconscious, which creates acceptance, confidence, a relaxed state and peak performance. Every time a free throw is made in game time it creates momentum for the shooting team. Missing free throws creates momentum for the opponents. Making free throws in game time is that important.

HEAD COACH TEAM PRACTICE INFORMATION

Head basketball coaches and their assistants are not able to demonstrate, organize or teach mastery of the free throw for their individual players or their teams. They try but few succeed. They simply can't demonstrate and don't have the know how or the time. They often try to improve the players free throw performance during team practice time. This is totally wrong. This type of individual practice, just shooting repetitions in a team practice, takes up too much valuable team practice time. Instead head coaches should have their players commit to their own consistent, scheduled, solo shooting practice time and commit to keeping records of each practice. This individual solo practice time and game time, of course, should be the only times free throw mastery is preformed and practiced.

In team practices the only free throw drills should be the final two minute free throw end game drills. This is essential preparation for the end game, in the fourth quarter, which is often the deciding point in a team's winning or losing the game. These end game drills require the players, the head and assistant coaches to know precisely who their best free throw shooters are by knowing their players' current and up to date game time free throw percentage. In these many end game drills the entire end game team (top five free throw shooters) are on the floor on offense with the team's top free throw shooter at the free throw line. In these end game free throw drills the top five alternates are also on the floor set as the defense. It's important to practice all the end game possibilities at this point, in the last two minutes, in deciding the game.

A head coach and his/her assistants needs to accurately know how well his/her players are shooting from the free throw line on a daily basis and not just in game time. They also need to know their players' practice percentage. To know these critical practice free throw percentages is critical in understanding what each player's different drop off rate is. Knowing the drop off percentage helps the coaches with their game time substitution, helps the players improvement and this knowledge effects the overall success of the team. That is another critical reason for setting up our individual and team NBSA Free Throw Mastery program. The NBSA Free Throw Mastery team program should start at the beginning of the pre-season and be maintained weekly also during the season and then carry over to the off-season so that it can be maintained the entire year, making it

easy when the next season begins the following year. The coaches need all their players to keep track of their practices by keeping accurate records of each day's solo practice and of their scores in percentage. We endorse Noah Basketball for helping shooters with consistent shooting and especially for their ability to store individual players records. If Noah isn't available use our NBSA solo practice record forms for record keeping. These NBSA practice record forms are available at the NBSA / Free Throw Mastery website, www.freethrowmastery.com.

NBSA FREE THROW MASTERY PROGRAM

An individual's quest for free throw mastery can only start to be achieved by consistent daily solo shooting practice and record keeping. There is an exact NBSA procedure to follow. This procedure starts with the NBSA free throw mastery warm up. The NBSA basketball shooting warm up consists of one handed form shooting up close to the basket, moving a few inches back on each shot along the midline. Make a minimum of 25 shots this way while moving back a little every shot until five feet from the free throw line. We keep track of how many one handed shots are made, not how many are made out of how many shots initially. Eventually, during this one handed practice we need to make every shot and pop the net every time. Our ultimate mastery goal one handed, up close to the basket, is to make 100 shots in a row.

While consciously trying to make fundamental corrections during one handed form shooting, on one of the seven fundamental steps, many shots are missed due to the focus being on the fundamental step being practiced so this is really not the time to be too concerned about how many are made out of how many shot. Next, after one handed shooting, from five feet from the free throw line, we continue form shooting, continue moving back while adding the guide hand into the form equation. Making another 25 warm up free throw shots are shot continuing to move back on each shot until reaching the free throw line. We are using our free throw ritual in this part of the warm up form practice while mostly concentrating on the feet and head being in balance. We are also concentrating on the guide hand's finish and the shooting hand's follow through and finish, finishing each shot in a posed posture, like a statue. Doing this isometric type of exercise allows the shooter to evaluate their fundamentals and form.

Once we reach the free throw line we are no longer focused on form shooting, the form and fundamentals are automatically getting better from the form shooting. We are now just highly focused, concentrating entirely on making every shot. Now we shoot 25 shot sets from the free throw line, keeping score and records. Depending on the amount of practice time available, shoot as many 25 shot sets as time permits.

Practicing the form shooting, step by step, warm up, develops correct basketball shooting fundamentals and consistency over time. Practicing one handed form shooting helps to bring the shooting elbow into alignment over time. This is due to having to balance the basketball with the shooting hand only while using the proper grip. Practicing form shooting with both hands, provided the same one handed ball balance is in effect, develops the proper release, follow through and finish with both hands. From this form practice warm up your form and free throw shooting will improve consistently. By keeping records of the shots made during form shooting you will begin to see the improvement monthly. As a goal we try to improve mentally, emotionally and physically about 4% every month.

*To read and view the seven fundamental steps for shooting a basketball correctly see Chapter 2 - The Physical Plane – in my new e-book titled, “Free Throw Mastery: Beyond Expectation.” Basketball shooting fundamentals can also be studied in many of our other NBSA Free Throw Mastery Instructional books and videos, which are written and produced by our NBSA free throw mastery staff at www.freethrowmastery.com.

During the free throw repetitions part of mastery practice we shoot one, two, or more 25 shot sets of free throws concentrating only on making each shot, we record the score for our daily percentage. At this point your fundamentals of shooting are set so don't think about them. Just concentrate on your free throw ritual and balance. Generally this takes approximately 10 to 60 minutes depending on the number of predetermined shots that will be taken. The amount of shots depends on being organized, knowing the total amount of solo practice time available. If you have time to shoot several hundred, even 500, that is excellent. Shooting 500 free throws can be done in about 90 minutes. In most cases the more you shoot the faster the improvement. You will notice after shooting 100 free throws you will begin to shoot better and better in the shots that follow.

After form shooting and free throw repetitions keeping records, we are now ready to begin the shooting drills from the field. This is what we have warmed up for and now after the preparation period we can create a peak performance every solo shooting practice session. Free Throw Masters practice this way.

BASKETBALL SHOOTING TECHNOLOGY

This NBSA Free Throw Mastery warm up and practice system should be done with a basketball ball return system and solo practice partner. The NBSA basketball return system with the NBSA Free Throw Trainer (FTT) targeting system is highly endorsed and recommended for solo shooting practice by the NBSA. If you can shoot on the Noah Basketball system, also endorsed by the NBSA, which is able to keep your records automatically, using all three technologies is the best way to practice. The NBSA basketball ball return systems helps to create a consistent, quick, rhythm for shooting and helps to achieve the subconscious state of mind, not thinking, necessary to help remain in the now, in a meditative state, subconscious, thus reaching higher and higher free throw percentages and eventually mastery.

The FTT presents a physical target that can be seen. (PHOTO). The bottom of the basketball should nick the FTT bullseye target on the way into the hoop, this gives 6” of clearance for the basketball over the front of the rim and also approximates the 45% arc angle for hoop entry recommended by Noah Basketball and in the physics of shooting. When using this FTT bulls-eye target, above the center and front of the rim, we can easily see if we are short, long, left or right of bullseye target, which is highly important and how the shooter should be focused. We must accept our makes as well as our misses the same, without disappointment or anger, acceptance helps us know how we missed and helps us to improve, relax, be silent and just moving on without any negative thoughts or reaction.

Players who are not consistently practicing our free throw mastery warm up and free throw repetitions, as described above, done before starting their shooting drills from the field will always fail and fall short, never experiencing the art of pure shooting nor reach

free throw mastery percentages or their full potential. After the NBSA Free Throw Mastery warm up and free throw repetitions we continue shooting free throws but now they are shot when we are winded in between shooting drills making two free throws in between making 10, 15 or 25 of the same shot, move or exercise in the shooting drills from the field. This work out called The Make Every Shot Work Out, making free throws in between the shooting drills is what we have warmed up for. The warm up insures improvement and shooting success from the field while simulating game time conditions alternating the shooting drill with one or two free throws.

In The Make Every Shot Work Out keep track of the free throws made. Start with 1 free throw then finish the 25 shot set with 2 free throws at a time, during the alternation of shooting drills until the 25 shot free throw set is completed and recorded. Keep track and records of the shots made in the shooting drills from the field also. This is why it is very important to practice on Noah Basketball or work with a competent team member or friend who can become a good practice partner by rebounding the misses and helping keep track of your score. Switch roles and help your practice partner by rebounding and keeping track of their score. As you improve at the free throw line all of your shooting from the field will also improve. The key is consistent practice, following our NBSA free throw mastery procedures, acceptance, being present in the now and keeping accurate records.

NBSA FREE THROW MASTERY CLINIC AND EXHIBITION PROGRAM

The NBSA Free Throw mastery teachers and coaches are currently setting up Free Throw Mastery Clinics / Exhibitions demonstrating and teaching our practice system with head coaches, individuals and teams. This initial free throw mastery session is approximately two hours long. With teams, once the place, day and time is set for the free throw mastery exhibition clinic the players are invited. Six to ten basketball hoops are necessary for this clinic, two players per hoop. This is normally done in the pre-season but can be started any time. All the team members are required to show up to this critical free throw mastery practice session, no exceptions. During this meeting all the team members will be required to set their practice free throw percentage by following the free throw form warm up practice procedures, which was explained in this chapter, and will be explained and demonstrated again during the clinic.

After the free throw mastery clinic and demonstration, which takes approximately 30 minutes, team members are paired up. Every team member is required to warm up properly, starting with the one handed form shooting, making 10 form shots close to the basketball, then the free throw ritual form shooting is practiced, making another 10 shots, using both hands in their free throw ritual. When arriving at the free throw line we take 3 practice shots before keeping track and shooting one set of 25 free throws.

From this practice we can set up each team member's baseline free throw starting practice percentage. The free throw scores, as an example, 22 out of 25, are transferred to a percentage (88%). How high the players score and their percentage this day and at this starting point is not what's important. Everyone will improve over time. What is most critical during this initial clinic and practice is that every team member learn the free throw mastery warm up procedures and that they commit to consistent scheduled solo shooting practice that starts with the form warm up one handed and two handed free throws, then free throw repetitions in 25 shot sets keeping records and finishing solo

shooting practice with the shooting drills assigned by the head coach with free throws shot in between the drills, simulating game time.

During a break in the action, after the free throw practice is completed, all the scores are tallied and placed on a list in order of percentage. The players are listed best on top, lowest on the bottom with their percentage. Next, after the free throw warm up practice we introduce the NBSA's Championship competition format. We qualify the top 16 scores by how many free throws made out of 25 attempts, from this warm up practice we then seed and place these players into our 16 shooters NBSA Championship draw sheet.

Once all the players are seeded and placed into the draw we can begin our NBSA Championship format competition. 16 shooters creates four rounds of competition, (round of 16, quarter finals, semi-finals and finals). We compete now head to head, alternating free throws. A winner is declared by who makes 25 free throws first. The winners move on to the next round. The losers of the match now become the audience and the fans, watching and cheering their team mates as they compete. If the players are tied at 25 makes it becomes sudden death, first to win by one make.

The team free throw mastery ladder is made after our NBSA Championship competition. The ladder reflects the warm up percentages and tournament results, by placing each player according to how they finished in the competition. Their free throw shooting percentage for all shots made during free throw repetitions and the NBSA format competition is displayed on our NBSA Free Throw Mastery Team Ladder. Each players game time free throw percentage, up dated every game, is also updated by game and listed next to each player's name. If there is a tie in the player's finish, the shooter with the higher free throw shooting percentage will go above on the ladder list. Also while seeding the shooters for the tournament, after the warm up, from the original list, if any shooters are tied in the warm up percentage we place those shooters names into a hat and draw them out, one by one to place them. See the NBSA Tournament Guidelines at our website, www.freethrowmastery.com

*This NBSA Free Throw mastery clinic and practice is just the beginning of the our development of individual and team free throw mastery. There is much more to this as seen in the first six chapters of my e-book, *Free Throw Mastery – Beyond Expectation*, and our other books, videos and study guides available at our website, www.freethrowmastery.com.

NBSA FREE THROW MASTERY LADDER AND RULES

Once the teams free throw mastery ladder is made from this initial practice and competition it is posted on a wall where it is highly visible to all players on the team. The teams free throw mastery ladder list is also posted at our NBSA Free Throw Mastery website, www.freethrowmastery.com. At our website the rest of our free throw mastery instruction is housed and available through many of our e-books, books that have been published, CD's, videos, NBSA masters' blogs and instructional articles.

LADDER RULES

Players are required to make a minimum of four challenges a month. There is no limit to the amount of challenges you are allowed to make. The more challenges you make the faster you should improve and that is the point of this ladder, individual and team improvement.

1. Ladder matches are two out of three sets, first to 25, alternating shots. Sudden death if tied at 25. Players warm up time is limited to ten minutes. There are no practice shots in between sets once the match has started. After completing a set of 25 makes, start the next set immediately. The winner is the first to win two sets.
2. Official basketball is the basketball used in the teams game time competition.
3. You may only challenge four players above your ranking or two players below your ranking.
4. Each team player is required to accept a minimum of four challenges a month or one a week. It is encouraged to accept any challenge at any time.
5. All match results are recorded on the team Free Throw Mastery Ladder immediately after the match results are turned in. The winners go ahead of the loser's position on the ladder and the shooting percentages are added to the existing practice average on the ladder. The challenge ladder forms need to be filled out accurately and turned in to the ladder form result box, next to the ladder. They can also be called in to the coach in charge of the ladder or up dated to our NBSA website,
 1. www.freethrowmastery.com. All challenges need to be approved by the coach in charge of the free throw mastery program and ladder.
6. After a ladder match is completed, the winner will either remain in the same position or move ahead of his ladder challenge opponent. In the second case all the other shooters on the ladder will move down one rank.
7. **HANDICAP:** A handicap may be used in the challenge match if both opponents agree. The handicap is not used in the recording of the score and percentages appearing on the ladder. With a handicap, the lower ranked shooter has a better chance to win and this effects confidence and motivation positively. When using a handicap players can challenge anyone on the ladder. The lower percentage shooter gets a handicap of 2/3 the difference between the two opponents' averages. Example: Two players, one shoots 92% (23-25), the other shoots 76% (19 – 25), 23-19 is 4 so 2/3 of four is 2.67, which rounds up to 3 point per 25 sets. So in this case the lower percentage shooter start each set at 3 and the higher percentage shooter starts at 0, first to 25, alternating shots. Using the handicap for challenges is highly encouraged. Very confusing???

PRIZES AND AWARDS

Prizes and awards should be provided by the head coach and rewarded for winning the single elimination competition and for ladder accomplishments like most improvement and most challenges made, etc. These prizes and recognition keep morale and

motivation in high gear. The NBSA offers special NBSA t-shirts and pins for making the NBSA Free Throw Mastery Club by making 25, 50 or 100 free throws in a row in competition or during a witnessed practice.

FREE THROW MASTERY SPECIAL ASSISTANT

As one can clearly see, running a free throw mastery team program is very time consuming. It can be a full time job. Finding highly qualified and motivated assistants, who can shoot and demonstrate 96% or better at the free throw line is the key. This mastery assistant can be on your team's bench during game time watching the shooters and helping you with the end game strategy and responsibilities. They can also scout the opposing team's free throw tendencies and much, much more.

Having an assistant who can set up and direct our NBSA sanctioned shooting events for the team, school and community can help turn your free throw mastery program into a great fund-raiser for the team and your program. More importantly, a great free throw mastery assistant coach can help make your basketball program a winning program.

**Go to the NBSA Free Throw Mastery website
for our sanctioned tournament format, procedures and rules.**

We also offer head coaches, individuals and teams who prefer or live out of the area, Internet video instruction as well as help with the team free throw mastery ladder. More information can be obtained at our website, www.freethrowmastery.com

Appendix

Glossary

drop-off rate. The difference between your free-throw practice percentage and free-throw game-time percentage.

The Imperfect Gap. A term coined by Ed Palubinkas to indicate the percentage of shots you are *not* making out of 100%

jopa. A long series of words or ideas repeated as a *mantra*.

mantra. A religious or mystical syllable or poem used primarily as a spiritual conduit. Words or vibrations that instill one-pointed concentration in the devotee. Great emphasis is put on precise pronunciation. Mantras are intended to deliver the mind from illusion and material or egotistical inclination. Chanting is the process of repeating a mantra.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantra>

midline. An imaginary line that goes from the *painter's hole* at the center of the free-throw line to the center of the hoop.

painter's hole. Before painting the key circle, the painter hammers a nail into the center of the free-throw line and ties a string to the nail to draw the arc of the key circle; the painter's hole is left when the nail is removed.

UpForce. A term popularized by shooting coach Tom Nordland in his "Swish" and "Swish 2" instructional DVDs. "UpForce" is trademarked by Swish International (www.swish22.com).

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Organizations and Web sites

The National Collegiate Scouting Association – www.ncsa.com

Jim "Makeevery" Schatz – www.freethrowmastery.com

Ed Shilling's new Coaches Academy – www.coachesacademy.com

Ronn Wyckoff's – www.Top-Basketball-Coaching.com

DVDs, Videos, etc.

Alford, Steve - "The All-American Workout"

Palubinkas, Ed - "Secrets To Perfect Shooting Principles," "Master The Shooting Moment" and "Shooter's Lab"