

'Awakening' leads to shooting clinics

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Tom Nordland could drill jump shots and free throws when he was a basketball player for Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, Minn.

The team's offense was built around his shooting as a senior, and he averaged 27 points a game in leading the basketball squad to a 28-0 season and a state championship - the second one for Roosevelt in Nordland's high school career.

Thirty-three years later, in 1990, a graying Nordland decided to shoot a few baskets during a lunch break from his job at a computer company in California.

"After about 10 minutes of warming up, I started to sink everything," said Nordland, who was then 50 years old. "I thought, what did I know 33 years ago to allow this to happen?"

Nordland started watching shooters, reading books on shooting and watching how-to videos. What he noticed was that the coaching focused on where feet should be pointed, on "flicking" the wrist and releasing the ball at the top of the jump.

"That has very little to do with shooting," said Nordland, who will hold a shooting camp consisting of two four-hour sessions at Evansville's Memorial High School on July 6. "Control over the flight of the basketball - that's everything. Most coaches spend too much time on the fundamentals and too little time on the flight of the ball."

Nordland's method of teaching shooting is just the opposite. He doesn't fret over players not being "squared up" to the basket. He wants them to have a high arch and use big muscles, like the legs and back, to push the ball upward and into the basket. The "wrist flick," according to Nordland, uses the smaller and less effective muscles of the fingers and wrist. Nordland had learned those things physically as a high school athlete. He said it showed most in his consistency - he hit 19 of 20 free throws in the state championship game, a record that still stands almost 44 years later.

"I figured something out in my youth with hundreds of hours of practice about how to control the flight of the ball and be repeatable, even under pressure," Nordland said. "I could do it then, but I couldn't coach it. Eleven years ago I had an awakening, a reloading of what I did in high school."

The result has taken Nordland around the country, teaching his method to preschoolers and pros and everyone in between. He writes numerous articles on shooting and has a "Swish" shooting video available for purchase.

One of Nordland's most prominent pupils is former Indiana Pacers forward Dale Davis, whose free throw shooting improved from 46.5 percent to 68.5 percent after working with Nordland for two seasons. Davis is now with the Portland Trailblazers. Nordland has also worked with Adam Keefe, forward for the Golden State Warriors and formerly with the Utah Jazz, and with Mark Madsen, a Stanford All American and the first round pick of the Los Angeles Lakers in the 2000 NBA Draft.

A friend of Dave Hayden's informed the Memorial High School boys' basketball coach of Nordland's novel way of thinking about shooting. Hayden listened and absorbed.

"The technique makes a lot of sense," Hayden said. "You learn to shoot with a lot of consistency and repeatability the way he teaches it."

Hayden had some questions about the style, and Nordland talked him through them over the phone.

"Here I am, on the phone with my arm up like I was going to shoot, going through all the theatrics," Hayden said. "Tom was explaining it, and explaining it well."

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As an aside, here is a testimonial Coach Hayden gave me a few months after my visit to Evansville:

"Tom, Here's a pretty good story for you. We were playing some 3 on 3 in Ashland, Oregon several weeks ago and, while we shot around for one of the games, I hit five shots in a row

with my eyes closed from about 15 feet. Then, when we started the game, I immediately got open for a jumper at the free throw line. I received the ball, sighted on the basket, SHUT MY EYES, and let it fly--- swish!

"My sons, brother, and brother-in-law saw me shut my eyes and stood in disbelief as the ball swished through the net. That kind of shoots the theory of where to sight on the basket as you shoot!"

-- D. Hayden, Evansville, Ind. (High school coach)