

Shot doctor helps Dale Davis at foul line

Pacer's free-throw accuracy improves dramatically, bringing more playing time.

By MARK MONTIETH, STAFF WRITER
(Article from Indianapolis Star/News, May 8, 1999)

The Indiana Pacers' roster includes the NBA's free-throw shooting champions from this season and last - Reggie Miller and Chris Mullin.

It has six other players who shot at least 80 percent this season.

The most notable performance, however, might have come from the player who barely cracked 60 percent - Dale Davis.

Records aren't available for improvement at the foul line.

But Davis could be a record contender. His accuracy improved 15.3 percent this season, to .618. For a player who had missed more than half of his attempts the past three seasons, it was a breakthrough. [Note from Tom: The above stats are for the 1998-1999 season. In the current season, 1999-2000, Dale shot 68.5% and was as high as 72%.]

Davis doesn't need to be reminded how important foul shooting can be. He hit 3-of-10 attempts in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals last season in the Pacers' five-point loss to Chicago.

Although players often improve at the foul line over the course of their NBA careers, it usually comes gradually. Davis - whose previous best was .572 as a rookie seven seasons ago - made a career's worth of improvement in a season.

He can thank a part-time golf instructor and former computer whiz, Tom Nordland, 59, of Boulder Creek, Calif.

Nordland worked with Davis in Las Vegas and Atlanta during the lockout and once during training camp in Indianapolis, for a total of eight or nine sessions. He gave long-distance reminders via fax a couple of times during the season. Davis has no doubt about Nordland's impact.

Nordland was a standout guard at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, who led his team to an undefeated season and the 1957 state title. He averaged 28 points that season and set a record that still stands by hitting 19-of-20 foul shots in the title game. He went to Stanford on a basketball scholarship, but the non-shooting aspects of his game weren't strong enough to get playing time. He went to work in the computer industry, until a layoff six years ago led to a new career.

Nordland believes accuracy starts in the legs, where UpForce, a term he has trademarked, leads to a smooth, simple motion that enables players to release the ball from a higher launching point as they move upward. The process leads to a high-arching shot that increases the chance of success.

"The motion is so simple and repeatable you can close your eyes and make them," said Nordland, who has a Web site (www.swish22.com) and video, *Swish - A Guide to Great Basketball Shooting*.

Nordland's first NBA client was Utah's Adam Keefe, whom he met through Stanford coach Mike Montgomery. Keefe had shot just .689 from the foul line two seasons ago, but improved to .810 last season after working with Nordland. He dipped to .697 this season without him. [Note from Tom Nordland: Adam shot 80.5% in the 1999-2000 season.]

Nordland was so confident he could help Davis that he set his fee based on Davis' improvement. If Davis improved to 55 percent, he would pay Nordland \$3,000. If he reached 60 percent he would owe \$5,000. If he shot between 65 and 69.9 percent, the fee was \$8,000. Anything 70 percent or above would cost \$12,000.

"I underpriced myself," Nordland said of the \$5,000 he earned.

The Pacers might agree. Davis' improvement at the line enabled coach Larry Bird to leave him in at the end of close games without fear that opponents would foul him to put him on the line. That gave Davis more opportunities to do what he does best - rebound and play defense. It also lifted his confidence, which raised all areas of his play.

"Late in the game, I don't mind the ball being in my hands," Davis said. "In the past, I was a little hesitant to make a play because I wasn't sure I could step up and hit the foul shot. Now I'm making the play any chance I get."

Added Miller, who led the NBA at .915 this season: "He was almost a liability out there in late-game situations, so teams now are probably scratching their heads because he's going to the line and hitting big-time free throws. That's only going to help us in the long run because we need him out there in late-game situations."

Davis had relapses during the season, but finished strong by hitting 11 of his final 12 foul shots over the final five games. He fell short of his season's goal of 70 percent, but expects to reach that, and beyond, next season.

"I can't tell you how proud I am of him," Nordland said. "But he's only half as far as I can lead him. We have another 20 percentage points to go."

[Photo of Dale accompanied article, with this title:]

NEW MAN: Dale Davis' improvement at the free-throw line with the UpForce technique has increased his confidence. "Late in the game, I don't mind the ball being in my hands," he said.

Published: Saturday, May 8, 1999 in THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR/THE INDIANAPOLIS NEWS

Page: C04

(c) Copyright 1999 Indianapolis Newspapers, Inc.