

Good Fundamentals by Terry Schroeder, Head Coach, Men's National Team

Good fundamentals are what separates our team from the best teams in the world. We are behind in this area. We need to get back to the basics and do the simple things well. This is part of our strategy with team USA. I am reminded of a quote that I put into our USA Water Polo team playbook. The quote reads "We don't have to do the extraordinary things; we only have to do the ordinary things better than our opponents". It really is all about creating better habits. No matter what we do in our life good habits equate to success. My favorite poem of all time is about Habits. The poem reads:

YOU ARE WHAT YOU REPEATEDLY DO.

The beginning of a habit is like an invisible thread.
Every time you repeat the act you strengthen the strand.
You add to it another filament with each repetition,
until it becomes a great cable
and binds you irrevocably to each thought and act.

First you make your habits
and then they make you.

Your thoughts lead you to your purpose.
Your purpose always manifests into action.
Your actions form your habits.
Your habits determine your character,
and your character fixes your destiny.

Your habits are either the best of servants or the worst of masters.

This is so true. Good habits will make you successful in all you do while bad habits are a certain path to failure. In practice focus on the simple skills such as body positioning, leg strength, passing. **Do these ordinary things better than your opponents and you will be successful.**

I was fortunate to spend some time with a good friend of mine, Igor Milanovic. Igor played for Yugoslavia in the early 80's when Yugoslavia won two Olympic Gold Medals. Igor is now the president of Partizan, which is the club in Serbia that I described in my last column as a water polo factory. **In my conversations with Igor I asked him to tell me about some of the things that made him successful as a player. Here are a few of the things that he told me.**

1. When you think that your legs are strong – do more. You will dominate this game if your legs are the strongest in the pool.

2. Never be lazy when you pass or shoot. Think about your body positioning and balance in the water all the time. Pass and shoot in practice like you are going to pass and shoot in a game. Use your legs and be intense.
3. Be a good team mate – when you help a team mate you are in a sense helping yourself. Take pride in making good passes.

I also asked him what made him a great shooter and he said “Here is my biggest secret as a shooter – I tried to make my first fake a part of receiving the ball”.

There is great wisdom in this. As a player if you can catch the ball and make everyone believe that you are going to shoot the ball immediately then you are in control. Many of our players tend to catch the ball and then get up on their legs to prepare to shoot or pass. The real key is to catch the ball in a position where your body is all ready prepared to shoot. Igor finished his statement by saying very passionately that when I caught the ball and made my first fake a part of receiving the ball I knew that I had my defender. **If I could make him bite on this first fake then I knew I had a great chance of scoring.**

Igor was one of the best that ever played the game and his advice was all about fundamentals. I am thankful for the time I spent with my friend and as I said I am more convinced than ever that team USA is on the right track by focusing on our fundamentals. **Keep it simple – do the ordinary things well and you will be successful in this game.**