

## **The Greatest, Most Realistic, Pressure Free Throw Shooting Drill**

There are a multitude of ways this drill can be done. Let's use, for this example, a team of 12 players, split into two groups, with 6 guys at one basket and the other six at the basket at the opposite end. One player is at the FT line, the others are stationed around the lane as in a game.

For the purpose of explaining the drill, let's say the team that gets to **+10** is the winner (any number can be used, usually depending on how much time a coach has to allot for the drill). Regarding that point: no one has a limitless practice time, so it may be necessary to put a time limit on the game, e.g. get to +10 in 8 minutes or we run. As your players understand and compete at this drill, you'll usually find the goal can be raised. At the colleges where I implemented it, we'd have a goal of +15 and, occasionally, if we were on break or even at a weekend practice, we'd use +25 as our goal. Read on and you'll see how this can tell you, the coach, who to have in the close game at the end (when you have a small lead) and who to make sure is sitting next to you.

**Here's the drill:** Each player shoots **two** free throws (*not* one-and-one). The score is kept for the **team**, not the individual.

Each make is +1. Each miss is -1.

*(Note: if a team gets to -3, they automatically have to run - maybe a "down and back" or "wall touch" or whatever the coach wants. It should be short and explosive, however, like in a game where the players are running hard and someone gets fouled. That's why I don't like push ups as a penalty in this game because when does your team ever do push ups in the middle of a game, then have to shoot FT's?)*

After the first player shoots, the team score will be +2 (if he or she makes both); 0 (if one is made, the other missed); or -2 (if both are missed). By the way, that's the reason the team doesn't run until -3 (so that one bad FT shooter doesn't cause the entire team to run) - plus, after the team gets to -2, it puts the pressure on the next shooter because if *that* first shot is missed, the team's score goes to -3 and everybody on the team runs.

After the first player shoots his two free throws, the players move around the lane (clockwise or counter clockwise doesn't matter - as long as **every player shoots two**). This rotation continues until the team gets to the goal, loses to the other team(s) or time runs out.

Next shooter is up. Let's imagine the first guy made both, so the team score, when the second player gets to the line, is +2. Let's say shooter #2 also makes both. Now the team score is +4.

**HERE IS WHERE THE GAME CHANGES.**

The third shooter is up. Each make is still +1. **HOWEVER**, each miss (once the team gets to +4) is -2. So, if the third shooter makes his first FT, the score is +5. If that first FT is missed, the score becomes +2. For the second FT, a make is +1 and a miss is (since the team score is now +2), -1, so at this point in the game, a miss followed by a make would make the score go from +5 to +3 (on the first miss), then to +4 (when the second FT is made).

The game continues like this: every make is **always** +1. The price of the misses are as follows: -1 if the team score is +3 or less; -2 if the team score is between 4-6; -3 if the team score is 7 or 8 and, here's the ultimate beauty of the game, when the team score gets to +9, each miss is -9.

Why so severe? Because it's like getting fouled with no time left and score's tied. What's the situation? Simple. Make the free throw and the team *wins* (i.e. +10), but miss it, and you go to *overtime* (i.e. the score goes back to 0).

### **Benefits of the drill:**

You, as a coach, never know who is going to be on the line for the big FT. It teaches coaches who can be counted on to make the pressure FT. When I was at Toledo, we had a 6'7" forward who was academic all-conference and one of the smartest, nicest, most competitive kids I've ever been around - and a 75% FT shooter. Yet, during this free throw shooting game - we used to play it to +15 - this kid **NEVER** made a free throw if he was up there at +14. At first, we kidded about it. Finally, we realized we couldn't have this kid in at the end of a close game.

"The FT missed in the first two minutes cost us just as much as the miss at the end" might be true, but the *pressure* is different, causing that miss to *seem* like it cost more. As a game goes on, FT's seem more and more valuable - just like in this game. As your team gets closer to the goal, the misses tend to carry more weight (and tend to devastate a team more - this game doesn't let that happen - you must get to the goal or else the game goes on forever). However, there's no need to hurry. If time is running out, tell them that each team will be allowed to "run it out." This means, no matter where the team is (between -2 and +9), the coach will allow the team to *keep shooting* until they either get to the goal or miss a free throw, ending the game (as a loss and whatever punishment is deemed appropriate, they do either then or at the end of practice). Same rule if one team wins, i.e. the team (or teams, depending on how many groups the coach has shooting) get to "run it out." This means that if one team gets to +10, the other team, if they continue to shoot two per player at a time - and don't miss, i.e. get to the goal, they're considered to have "won" as well). The reason there is no need to hurry is that the only way you can be stopped (after time is out or one of the other teams beat you there), is to *miss!* Also, if one team is a lot closer to the goal than the other, a couple misses by the team that's ahead and/or a couple makes by the one's that's behind, and the the whole complexion of the game changes.

**Dealing with adversity:** When you're on the line and your team's at +8, if you miss, the score goes to +5. How many times has the first miss affected the second one, so that one is missed as well? In this game, if you get to the line and your team's score is +8, you're shooting two. If you miss the first, the score goes to +5. If you make the second, it goes to +6. So, you got there with the team at +8 and when you left, it was at +6 - not good, but not devastating. If you miss the *second*, though, it goes to +3. So when you got there, the team was at +8 and when you left, it was +3. **That** is really hurting your team. Moral: don't let the first miss affect the second. Each FT is separate unto itself, i.e. whether the first one goes in or not, it has ZERO effect on what *the next one* will do. Similarly, how many times does bad FT shooting become *contagious*? One kid misses and the others say, "Wow, he's our best shooter. How can anybody expect lil' ol' me to make one if *the star* can't?" If you get to the line after your stud just bricked two (with the team score at, say, +6), it means when he got there it was +6, but when he left it was +2 (-2 at +6 bringing the score to +4, then -2 at +4 bringing it to +2). What are you going to do? Miss both and send your team to zero - after you've been so close (if he and you had **made** both, the game would be over!) OR make yours and put your team at +4 and back in the game.

Teams *must* yell out their score and, *only when a team gets to +9* (or whatever the "game point"

is), **trash talking is allowed** (just like when the player's taking that big FT on the road - you know, with the game on the line, that those fans don't want their team to lose).

Try the game *once* when the goal is +25 and the rules are +1 for a make, -1 for a miss in the score's +5 or under, -2 for a miss when the score's between +6 and +10, -3 when it's between +11 and +15, -4 when it's between +16 and +20, -5 when it's +21, +22 or +23 and -24 *when it's +24!* If you have a kid with the stones to knock down a FT at +24, knowing it's "make it and end practice or miss and put you team back at 0," that's a kid you want in the end of a close game and a kid you want to make sure gets the ball).

Which brings up *the main coaching point*: "**The only way to win is to ... make one free throw at a time.**" There's no quick fix, no "five point FT."