



ZAMBIAN HOOPS.....

I just returned from a week in the African country of Zambia where I conducted coaching clinics and did some work with their National Team. It was a great opportunity to help advance the game, observe their systems, and meet with the people who could help improve the overall level of play.

It's a LONG trip to get there, (30 hours) but it was well worth it. The coaches and players were terrific....attentive, curious, responsive and "all in". Along with Coach Mike Mai from Germany, we led 40 coaches in 3 days of clinics, 6 hours per day. They speak English in Zambia, so the communication was easy. One of the local leagues provided us with 15 local players to use as demonstrators.

In speaking with the local basketball leadership and Minister of Culture/Sport, it became obvious that there are 3 main areas to improve the overall quality of basketball.

- 1. COACHING EDUCATION.....For the past few months, we have had weekly Zoom meetings with the Zambian coaches, covering topics such as practice preparation, offensive and defensive concepts, skill development and player relationships. Being there in person connected a name with a face and allowed us time for Q/A about everything related to being a coach. They have few opportunities to exchange ideas, observe on court drills, and learn a different way of teaching/learning. These clinics gave them a different perspective and how it could improve their coaching.**
- 2. INFRASTRUCTURE....One of their biggest hurdles to overcome is the lack of basketball facilities. In a city of 2.5 million people, Lusaka has 2 indoor courts open to the public. There are a few more, but those are associated with private schools and universities. Even more startling is the lack of outdoor courts. If they were to build more courts, kids would play all day, and if they had lights, most of the night as well. In addition, the lack of basic equipment, (balls, nets,) was incredible.**

3. BETTER COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE AGENCIES... Within the basketball community, there are several organizations which run leagues and tournaments. There is a high school league, but it only runs 2 months and is more of a recreational program. The **Zambian Basketball Federation** oversees all the leagues and programs. We met with these people, and they were very supportive of our goals. Hopefully, the Federation and leagues within the country can improve communication and goals to improve the overall product. It is the goal of the Federation to have one of Zambia's teams play well enough to advance to the **BAL**, (**Basketball Africa League**). In addition, they hope to improve their level of play to elevate Zambia in **FIBA** competition.

While there, we observed some qualifying games (**Sweet 16**) in the top league. Here is what stood out:

- 1. They play so FAST. No real pace or CHANGE of pace to the games.**
- 2. Very poor shot selection, which was never corrected.**
- 3. Overall lack of shooting skill.**
- 4. Turnovers.**

The positives:

- 1. All teams COMPETED. Everyone played hard for the most part.**
- 2. Great quickness and length.**
- 3. Fearless in attacking the basket.**

We made some great strides towards our goal of improving the overall level of coaching and play. The people we met were very open and willing to take our advice and help. We will continue this project with a camp for youths this summer, probably sometime in July. We will continue with our Zoom meetings. In addition, we will continue to advise and consult for the **National Team Program**.

Big thanks to **Maziko, Rodrick, Alan, Paul, Mwape** and all of the coaches and players.

It was a great learning experience....if you ever get a chance to visit Zambia, try the coconut rice and definitely go on a safari!