
FUNDAMENTAL

“I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.”

~ **Bruce Lee**

“Excellence is achieved by the mastery of the fundamentals.”

~ **Vince Lombardi**

“Learn the fundamentals of the game and stick to them. Band-aid remedies never last.”

~ **John Wooden**

“It isn’t the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out; it’s the pebble in your shoe.”

~ **Muhammad Ali**

“The minute you get away from fundamentals – whether it’s proper technique, work ethic or mental preparation – the bottom can fall out of your game, your schoolwork, your job, whatever you’re doing.”

~ **Michael Jordan**

Fundamentals are oftentimes not very fun. They are not flashy. They are not loud. They are not common. Tim Duncan was nicknamed “The Big Fundamental” throughout his 19-year NBA career. Duncan embodied consistency and reliability as a man, basketball player, and teammate. Throughout Duncan’s life he seemed to maintain a consistency of mentality, principle, and character. It didn’t matter if it was during youth ball, at Wake Forest University, or with the San Antonio Spurs. Duncan

grasped the concept that by focusing on the fundamentals and being someone that was dependable, he would be more valuable than other flashier players.

Duncan had a late start to competitive basketball. He was a swimmer until 9th grade when Hurricane Hugo destroyed the only Olympic-sized pool in his town. Duncan began his long career as a basketball player. His mother died of breast cancer before his 14th birthday. Before she passed she made her children promise to get a college degree.

Duncan played for Coach Dave Odom at Wake Forest University. While in college he won the Naismith College Player of the Year, USBWA College Player of the Year, and John Wooden awards in his final year. Many people considered Duncan to be the top NBA prospect each year of his college career but he remembered his mother's request and stayed in college for all four years until he graduated. He might have missed out on money during that time but further solidified his work ethic and consistency. That approach would eventually lead him to be considered the greatest Power Forward of all-time and more than make up for the money he missed out on as a college underclassman.

Duncan was drafted by the San Antonio Spurs as the #1 pick in the 1997 NBA Draft. He would play his entire career with the Spurs winning five NBA World Championships and earning All-NBA First-Team honors 10 different times. Throughout his time with the Spurs, Duncan was always reliable. He was relaxed yet focused during games. He once said "If you show excitement, then you also may show

disappointment or frustration. If your opponent picks up on this frustration, you are at a disadvantage.”¹

He had a straight forward approach to the game and did not waiver from this in favor of flashy moments or self-promoting plays. He was clinical in defense and moved the ball selflessly in the offense. The Spurs had a culture of finding the open man and finding the best shot. It did not matter who scored or what individual stats were. Duncan was at the forefront of this culture of selflessness.

Duncan always focused on his fundamentals but as his body aged, he became more technical when he could no longer rely on his athleticism. He was adaptable. He transitioned into different roles on the team. He even changed the way he ran as he aged so that he could keep playing and serving his team. He was consistent in his motivation to succeed and his push to improve. That is what made Duncan truly incredible.²

“He's fundamentally sound”, said Dave Odom, Duncan's college coach. “He is a fearless, determined champion, someone who didn't feel like he already knew everything, who puts the team first -- those were throwback virtues and attributes. Those were things that made the old Celtic teams great, but today that's not true. Today's game is style over substance. He's the opposite. He's substance over style.”³

Greg Popovich, his NBA coach for 16 years said about Duncan, “You don't see Timmy beating his chest as if he was the first human being to dunk the basketball, as a lot of people do these days. He's not

pointing to the sky. He's not glamming to the cameras. He just plays, and we've seen it for so long it's become almost mundane. But it's so special that it has to be remembered.”

“But he's why I'm standing”, Popovich continued. “He's made livings for hundreds of us, staff and coaches, over the years and never said a word, just came to work every day. Came early, stayed late, was there for every single person, from the top of the roster to the bottom of the roster, because that's who he was, in all those respects.”⁴

It wasn't Duncan's jumping ability or speed that helped him become a 15-time All-Star. He was, perhaps, the most fundamentally sound player of his generation. He would use just the right angles on his bank shots. He would practice his footwork so that he would be in a position to make the most effective offensive moves. He would pay attention to where the ball was being shot from and where the misses would come. His emphasis on doing the little things better than anyone else set him apart.

The Pittsburgh Steeler's Hall of Fame football coach Chuck Noll liked to say that “Champions are champions not because they do anything extraordinary but because they do the ordinary things better than anyone else.”

Duncan embodied this. In the day and age of the highlight slam dunks and flashy plays. Duncan was okay with being a boring champion and one of the greatest of all-time.