

What Coaches are Looking for in a Great Boswell Pioneer Basketball Player

Recently after the TABC Showcase I had some time to reflect on conversations I had with college coaches, high school coaches, the players of the team I was fortunate to coach as well as the players from Boswell HS that participated in the event. All these encounters have led me to write this article. What does it mean to be a great player for “Bos Hoops?” I will describe ten attributes that allow players to have individual success in our program.

I must start with the precursor that talent matters. Talent may include traits such as athleticism, size, skill, jumping ability, feel for the game, IQ (mental intelligence), EQ (emotional intelligence). There must be a baseline level of talent for any player to play in our program. For example, as a player at Texas A&M, I could have exhibited all ten of the characteristics listed below and still have earned less playing time than my college teammates. The simple fact was that some of my teammates were taller, faster, stronger, longer wingspan, better rebounders, drivers, and scorers. They had more talent. Talent aside, these are ten characteristics, habits, and skills that players need to possess to be successful with Boswell Pioneer Basketball.

1. **Grades** – We want our players to show excellence not just on the court, but also in the community AND in the classroom. Coach Brown is our academics accountability coach and one of the most difficult aspects of his role is checking grades at the half-way point of the grading period and a player is failing. Then at the fifth and sixth week of a grading period the player is still failing. With two days left, that player finally brings his grades up to a C and is passing. That does not display excellence in the classroom. Players who handle their business in the classroom are players we want in our program.
2. **Mental Toughness** – The Hall of Fame Coach Bobby Knight once said that “mental toughness is to physical toughness as 4 is to 1.” We tell our players we will ask them three questions consistently throughout the season. 1) Can we tell you the truth? 2) Are you coachable? 3) Are you willing to be different? because champions are different. Our coaching staff at Boswell HS is dedicated to making our players the best they can be. We will love our players. Coaches may show “tough love”, but teams win with “love tough.” Overcoming adversity, having a positive attitude, working hard when things seem to be going “south” are all examples of exhibiting mental toughness. Players will never be perfect, but players that have a near perfect response to mistakes can be great. These mentally tough players are winners.
3. **Physical Toughness** – Physical Toughness is required throughout every game. Examples when physical toughness is needed are diving for “50/50” loose balls, rebounding, setting a screen, taking charges, on ball defense, help side defense, among other things. Basketball IS a contact sport. Players that play for Bos Hoops will have to sacrifice their body for the success of the team. “First to the floor” is a phrase we use to describe how our players will get a “50/50” loose ball during competition. Physical toughness is a requirement in practice, in the weight room, and in games to play at Boswell HS. We pride ourselves on defensive toughness and that requires all five players on the floor being tough to win. Once a player shows this physical toughness on a consistent basis, they build trust with their teammates and coaches as well as confidence within themselves.

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- 4. Communication** – This is one of the most tangible aspects of a successful player in our program. If a player is communicating verbally on the floor (especially on defense) then they are displaying this characteristic. We define communication for Bos Hoops as “saying what needs to be said, when it needs to be said, how it needs to be said.” We expect every player on the floor to communicate loud and early in transition defense. Every player is to be “coaching” in practice drills if they are not physically involved in said drill. Our job as coaches is to teach the players WHAT to say and WHY we communicate in a specific manner. After that, it is the responsibility of the player to communicate at a level that allows the team to win. In my experience as a coach, the most competitive players (even if they are quiet by nature) have no trouble being vocal on the floor when it is a matter of winning and losing.
- 5. Skilled Shooter** – We tell our players that shooting is a great equalizer. We also teach shooting as the #1 skill in our program! Great shooters are hard to defend and allows the offense to stretch the defense to an uncomfortable level. Great shooters make everyone on the floor more efficient (specifically Points Per Possession and Effective Field Goal Percentage.) Bos Hoops also believes that great shooters can be made! With a consistent shooting routine and correct shooting mechanics, anyone can be a great shooter. The difficult part is finding young men that are willing to be dedicated to working on their shot BEFORE and AFTER workouts as well as on their own. I truly believe that if a player is tough, can defend, and is a great shooter... it will be nearly impossible for coaches to keep him off the floor.
- 6. Quality Decision Maker** – No matter the sport turnovers and bad decisions lead to losing. Tony Romo’s last full season with the Dallas Cowboys is just one example of this. Every game they had zero interceptions they won! Every game they turned the ball over was a loss! Quality decision makers are players that can make decisions with and without the ball in a timely manner. Most people call this “Basketball IQ.” We emphasize making the next best right decision as quickly as possible. Decisions are made on offense and defense with and without the ball. Turnovers lead to losses. Players who can process the game BEFORE an action happens are quality decision makers. Our practices also reinforce these decision-making processes with transition offensive and defensive advantage drills as well as 1 on 1 all the way up to 5 on 5 scrimmages.
- 7. Workers** – At times during a long basketball season the game will feel like work. Players that know how to fight through the tough days and work have extreme value with Boswell Pioneer Basketball. The same players that can work through these tough days will have the worker character trait that will allow them to work on their game individually, work on the strength and conditioning, work in the classroom, and work at being great every day. I’ve found in my 13 years of coaching and 15 years as a player that the people that REALLY WORK are the ones that hate to lose the most because they have invested so much in working as a player. Another way we word this is our players must have GRIT. Grit can be defined as passion meeting perseverance. The “stick-to-a-tiv-ness” of a player that allows them to work. The grit of a player can be a huge indicator in their individual success on a winning team.

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- 8. Helpers** – Every program has pillars or standards. Bos Hoops is no different. We believe in excellence on the court, in the community, and in the classroom by using passion, servant leadership, thankfulness, and ONE TEAM Toughness as our program cornerstones. Helpers would fall under “servant leadership.” It is hard to have a successful team if players are only looking out for their own interests. Helpers are looking out for the interests of others. Teammates, coaches, basketball operations all need to be willing helpers. This allows a program to grow and thrive. Knowing that others have my back motivates me to give my best to/for them. A team full of helpers makes the season fun and allows players to reach their individual and team potential. In my experience, the teams that overachieve in many peoples’ eyes are the teams that are filled with young men who have learned to be helpers.
- 9. Passion for the Game** – Along with communication, passion for basketball can be very evident to a coach who works with a player (at least) five days a week. I have coached players who do not look or act like they are having fun playing the game of basketball. The players that have the most success in our program are those that genuinely enjoy competing in basketball practice and competing in basketball games. Notice I used the word **COMPETING**. You cannot fake that. You either have a passion for it or you don’t. We communicate the idea that there is a big difference between just playing basketball and being a basketball player. To be a basketball player there must a passion for the game.
- 10. One Team (Team First Mentality)** - “One Team” is the slogan Coach Kenny Boren has brought to our program and we define this as “playing as hard as you can, to the best of your ability, for the person on your right and your left and not for yourself.” This slogan is very closely related to “helper” which was #8 on this list. ONE TEAM is what we say when we break out of the team huddle and it is reinforced with the expectation that we are ONE TEAM on and off the floor. The definition is pretty self-explanatory, but what does ONE TEAM look like? Our players truly care for one another. This takes form by how they talk to each other, encourage each other, practice together, and give their best for each other. When players have this mindset, it makes the hard things a little bit easier because everyone on the team is going to build you up. When talented players have this mindset, it leads to lots of winning.

I hope this list gives individual players as well as parents an idea of what creates great people in our program. Boswell Pioneer Basketball will continue to grow and flourish with young men with basketball talent and the character traits listed above. There may be young players or players striving to make the team next season reading this article. I believe this will give you an inside look into the mind of the coaching staff on what it takes to thrive as a basketball player with Bos Hoops.