

TIME **AND** SCORE

Coach Morgan Wootten's Secrets to Winning Close Games



Coaching
success is
synonymous
with the late,
great Morgan
Wootten.

No other coach in basketball history

combined a love for the game with a passion for coaching young men more than Wootten. In over forty years of coaching at legendary DeMatha High School, Wootten won more than 1,200 games and was the most successful high school coach in basketball history. Wootten led DeMatha to the mythical national championship in 1962, 1965, 1968, 1978, and 1984.

A dedicated educator, more than 150 of Wootten's former players went on to play college basketball, while a dozen played in the NBA. More than 20 of his former coaches or players coached at the high school, collegiate, or professional level.

In 2000, Wootten was named the
Naismith Scholastic
Coach of the Century.

The 1965 DeMatha team broke the 71-game winning streak of Lew Alcindor's Power Memorial team. Recording over 40 consecutive seasons with at least 20 wins, his teams won more than 30 conference championships. And to Wootten's credit, DeMatha finished the season ranked No. 1 in the Washington, D.C. area more than 20 times.

RULES FOR WINNING CLOSE GAMES

Anytime your team is in the last three minutes of a game have your players follow these rules to control the situation:



1. Maintain constant mental concentration and poise (good players get it done under pressure).



5. Get the ball on the foul line by keeping constant basket pressure on the defense (foul shots are money in the bank).



2. Stay in your offensive pattern and continue to move and work for a good shot (movement is vital – stir the defense).



6. Be very alert to the offensive boards – 2nd and 3rd shots are certainly most critical here.



3. Read the defensive man on every pass (anticipate a gamble by the defense).



7. Save three timeouts for the very end of the game.



4. Go inside more than normal for the very high percentage shot (lay ups, foul shots).



8. The above rules can be followed only if your players are in excellent physical condition and you work on them on various time and score situations during practice.



WHEN YOU'RE AHEAD

OFFENSE

If at this point your team is ahead, you should have them looking for either foul shots or a lay up, although it would be best simply to get into a perimeter based offense (4 out or 5 out) and run out the clock.

You should never completely take away the thought of scoring on your opponents because I have seen too many games lost when the offensive team attempts to "freeze" the ball and plays not to lose instead of playing to win.

If your team starts playing not to lose, the defensive team begins to control the tempo of the game and your team, in playing not to make mistakes, will begin to play so cautiously that the defense will be able to take advantage of them. As a coach you always want your players to attack the defense and look to score.

DEFENSE

If you are on defense and ahead by 3 or more points during the closing seconds force your opponents to drive by running at the dribblers and thus not allowing them to attempt any **three point** shots.

Under these circumstances you want your defensive men to get beaten on the dribble since this will force them into making more passes to get the shot off.

If you are successful in making them drive do not let your perimeter players rotate off their men to stop the penetration because doing so will allow their men to spot up behind the arc for the **three point** shot.

You can also disrupt their order and timing in the last seconds by pressing or double-teaming to create turnovers or rushed shots. For example, you could run at and double-team their best outside shooter while rotating to pick off the passes to the perimeter area leaving the post players open.



WHEN YOU'RE BEHIND

OFFENSE

If you are behind similar tactics prevail. You should look for a lay up or a six-footer, but it would be best to get the foul in this situation. This enables you to set your defense as well as save valuable time since you are scoring with the clock stopped.

The defense will be extended to prevent the three-point shot if you are down by more than two and it is here that you must read the time and score situation to decide whether you want a two-point basket or whether you want to attempt a three-point shot.

If you are behind by 4 or 5 points you will still need two possessions to tie or win the game so it may be advisable to get two points if they can be gotten quickly.

In this situation the amount of time left in the game as well as the number of timeouts will determine which shot is the best to attempt. There are many other variables that go into this decision such as the personal foul situation, what the opponent is shooting from the foul line, who is shooting well for you, and whether you are making a run at them defensively.

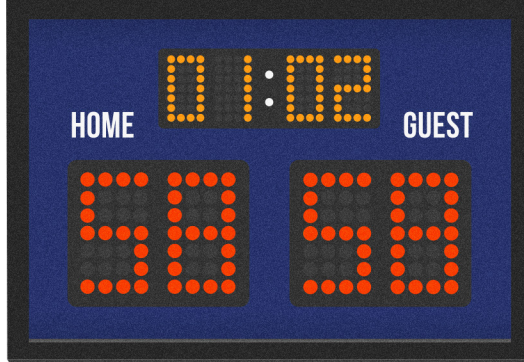
DEFENSE

Your defense will have to do a great deal more for you than your offense in this situation since you are more likely to shoot lay ups off of steals and interceptions as the offensive team spreads out and generally moves away from the scoring area.

If your team is down do not give in to the urge to shoot three-point shots too early in an attempt to get back into the game.

I have seen teams shoot their way out of a game by forcing difficult shots and attempting to get all of the points back at one time instead of chipping away at the lead, playing hard nosed defense, and allowing their opponents only one opportunity at the basket.

Intentionally fouling inside 30 seconds is another good catch up tool but remember your job will be easier if you work hard to gain control of the game in the early part of the 4th quarter.



WHEN THE SCORE IS TIED

If the score is tied with a minute to play you should always hold for the last shot unless you are fouled or are forced to shoot a lay up.

As previously mentioned, you must always be a threat to score in order to keep the defense honest. If the defense is pressuring you run your man offense with a high post and look for the foul or the lay up.

If the defense decides to play it safe move the ball around the perimeter and continue to run the clock down using the same pattern. This called "burning" the offense. It permits you to take time off the clock without having to go into an all out freeze that would take away the offensive aggressiveness of your team.

Your main concern is to get the last scoring opportunity. You can then get a shot out of your regular half court offense or by running a [special set play](#). You can go to any of these options with about 10 seconds left in the period.

It is important that once the last shot has been taken that your players do not pick up a foul by going over the backs of the defensive players to get the rebound. They should let the rebound go unless they have a legitimate shot at clearly controlling the ball. Otherwise, they jeopardize the advantage they have in taking the last shot and may put the opponent on the foul line to win the game.

In addition, teach your players that at the worse you will be in an overtime period and that it is in this extra period that you will gain control of the game and dictate to the opponent what the outcome will be.