



The State of Analytics in College Basketball

With the word “analytic” being tossed around so much in college basketball, I began to really think about the point at which a number transforms from a statistic into an analytic. The word analytic is associated with complex equations, leading many people to believe that knowledge of advanced mathematics is required. However, many of the analytics - which have been made familiar by kenpom.com - are easy to understand. Unlike traditional statistics like "points per game," These stats are not dictated by tempo. If you read these newsletters then you know that a team’s ability to score or keep their opponent from scoring should not be evaluated with tempo as a factor. We should evaluate offensive and defensive efficiency based on possessions rather than tempo. This makes the data more representative of what is happening on the court. (Not to take anything away from Ken Pomeroy, his website is truly mind blowing. The fact that he was able to put such a tool together is beyond impressive.) One of the stats we see on kenpom.com is turnover percentage (TOs/possessions) instead of the more traditional turnovers per game. Turnover percentage is basic. It uses a “simple statistic” (TOs) and divides it by another “simple statistic” (possessions) to give you a better idea of how often your team turns the ball over. Does that make turnover percentage an analytic? In my opinion the answer is no. All turnover percentage is, is a useful statistic. One that is more useful than the traditional turnovers per game. Another example is deflections or paint touches. How do we categorize these numbers? If you tally deflections because that is something that is really important to you (Rick Pitino), I don’t see it as an analytic. This is a statistic just as someone tallies turnovers.

When I think of analytics, I think of analyzing a specific area of the game (lineups/offense/defense) and the statistics that come from this analysis are called analytics. I’ll give you a few examples.

Lineup Efficiencies

These are the statistics that different lineups or groups of players produce. Lineup efficiencies are often associated with the stat +/-, although I prefer points per possession differential, because subbing patterns can sometimes skew +/- . Another example would be a certain five man lineup’s deflection per possession rate. Now were taking the deflection stat, analyzing our lineups, and coming up with an analytic that determines how often this lineup is able to deflect the ball on defense.

Lineup efficiencies were what Drew Cannon was putting together at Butler (Sports Illustrated article), they are all over the NBA, and it’s what we here at Group Stats offer as a service.

Defensive Efficiency Breakdown

A defensive efficiency breakdown gives the statistics of a team in each defense that it plays. For example a team might have a defensive points per possession of .98 in man to man and 1.03 in 2-3 zone.

Offensive Efficiency Breakdown



Similar to a defensive efficiency breakdown an offensive efficiency breakdown is the different statistics that your offense accumulates against each type of defense.

Synergy Statistics

These are all of those statistics that Synergy offers that show how efficient certain teams/players are in certain areas. For example player X coming off ball screens with his left hand has an EFG% of 43%.

This is what I think about when I hear analytics: Taking statistics to the next level, as opposed to simply using statistics that are more representative of what happens on the court.

Another misnomer of analytics which I saw in a recent Jeff Goodman article on ESPN called "Which coaches love analytics?" was the idea that a certain coach is either a film or analytic coach. As if you cannot watch film and pay attention to advanced statistics as well. The statistics provided through sites like Kenpom.com and analytic undertakings like lineup efficiencies and defensive efficiency breakdowns are not a substitute for film; they are simply a way of making the film viewing experience more useful. As a coach, if you watch film knowing that your defensive points per possession in man to man is .98 and in 2-3 zone it is 1.03 there can be things to look for when watching. Hopefully this will uncover some issues in the zone and will allow you to improve upon that 1.03 number. Another example, using lineup efficiencies, is when a group of three guards is on the court your team does not force nearly enough turnovers to have a chance at being an effective defensive team. Lineup efficiencies showing these stats are not saying you cannot play these players together, but instead hopefully you can find a reason for their defensive shortcomings on film.

Analytic has become a scary word in college basketball, but it shouldn't be. New statistics and analytics are there to give coaches a true idea of their team's performance.

The Career of Greg Oden

While watching Miami's season opening win against the Chicago Bulls I could not help and think about Greg Oden- the once sure fire All-Star now turned "bust". I just wanted to make sure I reminded everyone that his career has been a "bust" not because of how he played when he was on the court, but instead the difficulties he had staying on the court. Oden played 82 games in his first two seasons (08-09, 09-10) in the league- let's take a look at these numbers as if it were one full season and compare it against some other single season numbers big men have put up over the years.

Oden's OReb% was 15.7% during these 82 games. Kevin Love led the NBA in OReb% during both the 08-09 and 09-10 season. Love's OReb% was 14.9% over the course of these two years (Oden didn't play enough games to qualify for the OReb% title in either season). All things considered, you would not be out of line calling Greg Oden the league's best offensive rebounder during his rookie



and sophomore campaigns. (By the way his career DReb% would be good enough for the league's top 15 during his first two seasons).

Oden's Blk% was 5.1%, which would have given him the NBA's sixth highest mark in the 08-09 and 09-10 season.

So we know Oden was a great rebounder and blocked a lot shots, making him invaluable on the defensive side of the floor, but how was he offensively? Oden's ORtg (a statistic that represents offensive efficiency) during these two seasons was 117. To give you an idea of how good that is Shaquille O'Neal matched that number in two separate seasons, and eclipsed it only once with a 120 mark in 93-94. Now ORtg can be deceiving based upon how often a player is used. But Oden was no slouch on offense- he was getting his touches and attempts. Oden had a Usage Rate of 19.7 a legitimate mark for an NBA 5 man. To give you an idea of a 5 man that only gets put backs and catch and dunks Tyson Chandler's Usage Rate last year was 13.3.

Oden as a 21 and 22 year old was a well-rounded monster on his way to being a 1st team all-league center. Unfortunately, the last factor, his health, has not been up to par and Oden will probably never be the player we once thought he would become. But we wish him all the best with his recovery and if he returns to even a shadow of his former self, the Heat will benefit greatly.