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Tempo's Impact on Statistics

What would you say if I told you that any team statistic that ends in "per game" is irrelevant? Before you answer that question, let me explain myself. There are a few things that go into a "per game" stat. Let's take points per game, for example. To average a high number of points per game, a team needs to score the ball well, but the other factor that comes into play is how fast the team plays. What is the team's tempo? Tempo is defined as the number of possessions in a game. Because a "possession" does not register as an official stat, there is a formula that allows us to track this number.

A possession is anytime the ball changes hands from one team to another. This can happen through a made shot, a turnover, or a missed shot that the defense rebounds.

Statistically, it is defined as **Possessions=(FGM-OR)+TO+(FTA*.475).**

Possible Questions to the above:

Why doesn't a new possession start with an offensive rebound?

First, offensive and defensive rebounding are two different skills. An offensive rebound is an offensive skill and should improve the respective team's offensive rating. Second, the way it is set up, both teams will end the game with virtually the same number of possessions, give or take one or two because there are two halves (If you outscore your opponent on a per possession basis you will outscore them for the game).

What does this have to do with tempo?

The more possessions a team averages per game, the faster the team's tempo is. A faster tempo will cause a team to score more points but allow more as well. This does not necessarily make fast teams good offensive teams or bad defensive teams. Remember, in a game, two teams will have virtually the same number of possessions. The team scoring more points per possession can expect to be the winning team. North Carolina is a great example of this. Everyone knows North Carolina likes to go up and down, they always have. The team always gets a lot of credit for their offense and not much for their defense. At times their defense is even criticized. Looking at North Carolina's defense during this past year, they allowed 69.2 ppg (241st in the nation). Bad right? Not so fast. North Carolina allowed .969 points per possession (80th in the nation). Not great but certainly not 241st. During North Carolina's 29-8 2011 season they actually ranked higher in defensive efficiency than they did in offensive efficiency. Take a look!

North Carolina

Year	Offensive Efficiency	Rank	Defensive Efficiency	Rank
2013	105.5	76	96.9	80
2012	111.2	19	92.2	21
2011	105.9	76	94.2	24
2010	102.1	159	98.3	111
2009	117.7	1	95.1	43

Reminder: **Offensive and Defensive Efficiency=points per 100 possessions**

North Carolina's 105.5 Offensive Efficiency=105.5 points per 100 possessions=1.055 points per possession

As you can see, North Carolina's defense is similar to their offense, very good. Another example of this is Bo Ryan's Wisconsin teams. Wisconsin is commonly thought of as a team that plays great defense and is scrutinized when it comes to their offensive ability. But take a look at Wisconsin's last five years and how they ranked in terms of offensive and defensive efficiency.

Wisconsin

Year	Offensive Efficiency	Rank	Defensive Efficiency	Rank
2013	104.1	101	89.9	11
2012	108.5	43	90.1	6
2011	117.6	3	101.5	172
2010	111.4	22	94.0	36
2009	107.6	69	98.9	112

After looking at Wisconsin's last five years you can see that, like North Carolina, Wisconsin's goal is to be a balanced team. Wisconsin's offense may be boring, depending on your definition of boring, but it is certainly above average at worst and, amazingly, in 2011 ranked 3rd in all of college basketball.

North Carolina is an example of a fast-paced team that wants to and usually does play good offense and defense. Wisconsin is an example of a slow-paced team that does the same thing. Don't fall into thinking that a team is more or less efficient based on the tempo that they play. Fast-paced teams create more opportunities for themselves, as well as their opponent. Slow-paced teams limit the amount of opportunities for themselves, as well as their opponent. But in both cases your team and your opponent are getting, virtually, the same amount of opportunities.

The same is true regarding other "per game" statistics. Turnovers, rebounds, assists, and virtually every other team statistic are impacted by tempo. A team that plays faster will average more of these statistics than a team that plays slow. For example, based on what we know, North Carolina having 15 turnovers is not nearly as bad as Wisconsin finishing a game with 15 turnovers. There have been statistics created like TO%, OR%, and DR%, which evaluate how well a team performed in these categories, adjusting for tempo. In September's newsletter, we are going to explore these different statistics and how tempo can affect them. One major finding that will be discussed is that faster-paced teams get to the free throw line at a higher rate than slower-paced teams. Thanks for reading.