Rule of 10,000 Hours

Over the last two years, I have mentioned in the NEWSLETTER the author Malcolm Gladewell is my favorite new writer in years. His mind works in a unique way and has a great ability to make his somewhat scientific approaches readable and entertaining. I think much of his work pertains directly to what we as coaches face on a day to day basis in dealing with players, the society they are growing up in, and the challenges that we are presented with 24/7. His books OUTLIERS, TIPPING POINT, and BLINK have provided us with techniques and insights that have helped us in developing team chemistry, navigating obstacles that arise during adversity, and making those tough decisions that separate coaches.

This is a direct link to his webpage to learn more about him and his works...

http://www.gladwell.com/outliers/index.html

In his book OUTLIERS, Gladewell dedicated a chapter to the RULE OF 10,000 HOURS and I immediately began applying it to coaching. Gladewell used the research and studies of K. Anders Ericsson. Ericsson began his research at Berlin’s Academy of Music. Using the music students that attended, Ericsson divided a group of violinists in three groups:
1) STARs with world class potential
2) merely “good”
3) unlikely to ever play professionally

He then did a survey of each of three groups asking them to roughly estimated the number of hours they had practiced up until this point in their life. Will the same question posed to all three groups he learned:

A) roughly all began at the same age (5 years old)
B) all practiced about the same amount of time for the next 3 years
C) after 3 years the three groups separated virtually across the boards in the three categories that they found themselves in
D) by the age of 20 those still practicing over 30 hours a week found themselves as the STARS with world class potential

He then took his study to the pianists at the school... same results
Every focus group he surveys produced across the board results reflecting the same outcomes. From this it became easy to deduce that you could NOT find a “natural” who made it to the top without 10,000 hours of practice. You could also NOT find a “grinder” who outworked people with more talent. It took a certain level of excellence for them to be accepted to attend the prestigious music academy, but it was the practice (or level of commitment) that separated them once they got there.
Gladewell then takes you through a series of examples of people (many of whom I have always considered NATURALS) and HOW they were able to get their 10,000 hours of experience to reach their excellence.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was someone I always believed to be a “prodigy” but although he was composing and playing at the age of six it wasn’t until a much older age of 21 that his masterpieces began to flow... guess when? Almost exactly to the 10,000 hour rule.

The Beatles were not the overnight success I always believed. They didn’t just invade the United States with their floppy haircuts and reach excellence. They had been together for 7 years and reached their 10,000 hours as a lucky break of having to play in Hamburg gigs for 7 to 8 hour straight at times to make enough money to survive. In just three years of returning to Hamburg they logged over 1,200 performances!!

Bill Gates. Father was a wealthy lawyer, mother was daughter of a well to do banker. As a result he lands at Lakeside Private School. It just so happened the Seattle area school was also home to computer lab during a time when most universities didn’t even have one. Through a series of chance meetings he and Paul Allen end up logging more computer time than anyone in the world because they were at an age when they had the time and the opportunity to reach their 10,000 hours before anyone else could. Needless to say they made the most of that!!

There are many more you can read about in the book.

This got me to thinking about basketball players. Did this rule of 10,000 hours apply to athletes as well?

I started with the math side of 10,000 hours. Let’s say that some one worked 1000 hours a year. That is 2:43 per day every day (which no single person is able to actually do especially at an early age). Even with that number that would take 10 years for a player to reach a level of excellence. So for a player to be reaching a level of excellence by the time they become recruitable for colleges, they need to have started around the age of 6. Now factor in the fact that most players don’t practice two and a half hour a day at that age, it’s a little more realistic that they are going to be reaching their peaks closer to 18 or 19... Now factor in that many of today’s school districts not only do not provide but DISCOURAGE competitive play at a young age... Now factor in the very real free of burning out a young athlete. Now, it is easier for me to understand why our players come in as freshmen to compete with upper classmen who are reaching their level of excellence. It is easier to understand why a player who didn’t pick a ball up until they were 12 can not be expected to be near a level of excellence.

Now look at yourself as a coach. Have you put in 10,000 hours? If you have, was it around that time frame that you seemed to “really get it?”

If this line of thinking intrigues you and you believe would give you some insights into the worlds of your players and maybe even help you understand yourself, you need to pick up a Malcolm Gladewell’s book OUTLIERS... If you enjoy that one, move on to BLINK... then finish it up with TIPPING POINT.