

Bilas Program-Day #1
Monday, November 18th, 2013
TOPIC: Toughness Defined

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM on 11/18/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Toughness Defined:

Toughness isn't physical. It's an intangible, an attitude, a philosophy. True toughness is a skill that can be developed and improved in anyone.

"Toughness is doing what it takes to make a difference."

-Tom Izzo

"When you can weaken a man's brain, you've got him . . . it is about will, it is about how you go about your business."

-John Gruden

"You have to coach toughness, the effort and the discipline it takes to be excellent, every bit as much, if not more so, than X's and O's or strategy."

-John Gruden

Toughness comes from how you handle your experiences, what you learn from them, and how you are guided through them by others in your life.

It is mental toughness that makes a person, player or team unbreakable, whereas physical hardness can be more easily broken.

Coaching legend Bob Knight has always said that in basketball, the mental is to physical as four is to one. Knight was talking about concentration, but it also applies to the concept of toughness. True toughness is mental toughness, and has little to do with physical toughness.

There is no reason you can't be exceedingly nice and incredibly tough at the same time. Those two traits are not mutually exclusive.

"You have to be willing to do what it takes to prepare yourself to win, and willing to put in the extra work necessary to be great."

-Tom Crean

I appreciate true toughness in any person. I'll take true toughness over talent any day. Toughness wins. Toughness prevails. But when you combine talent and true toughness, that combination can be unbeatable.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Who is the toughest person you know? Why do you consider them tough?
2. Who do you think is the toughest player in our program? Why do you think this player is “tough”?
3. What are some things that you can do to make yourself “tougher” than you are today? How can work on this qualities?
4. What can we do to be a “tough” team this season?
5. How can “toughness” in basketball translate to “toughness” in life?

Bilas Program-Day #2
Tuesday, November 19th, 2013
TOPIC: Trust

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM on 11/19/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Trust:

To me, trust and belief go hand in hand; and trust and belief are essential ingredients in toughness.

When you trust and believe, you can be challenged and held accountable. Once a coach earns his players' trust, he can push them to new levels mentally and physically, where less trustworthy coaches might not dare tread.

Most players believe that accountability means blame. It doesn't. Accountability is being held to the standard you have accepted as what you want, individually and collectively.

Belief, like trust, is a choice.

When expectations are high, you have two choices. You can meet them, or you can exceed them.

You are not tough alone. The best teams have a collective toughness and trust, and that toughness and trust is contagious.

*"I want every one of my players to know that I believe in them."
-Bill Self*

Belief is one of the characteristics that leads to toughness. How can you be truly tough unless you believe in yourself?

As teammates, it is imperative that we let our fellow teammates know how important their abilities and contributions are, and then we can hold each other accountable for them.

*"The challenge you provide to a player or a coworker can be tough and even harsh, but it has to be fair . . . I'm not out to embarrass or browbeat you. I'm focused on standards being high and expectations being high."
-John Gruden*

Coach Self isn't concerned with how his players react when they are playing well. He wants to know what they will do when they are in the midst of a struggle, when facing difficulties in the classroom, after the breakup with a girlfriend, or when a coach is all over them in practice. Will his players deal with the good times and the tough times with the same resolve?

*"Soft is when you choose the easier path when the right path is the harder one."
-Bill Self*

“Soft is thinking you should have help on defense, and that thought causing a letdown . . . Toughness is the anticipation that you won’t get help, so you do everything in your power to stop your man. But at the same time, you know and trust the help is there. That’s toughness, to me.”
-Bill Self

A setback is a setup for a comeback.

Failure doesn’t make you a failure. Failing makes you a competitor. Every competitor fails.

FOXHOLE TEST

Trust is a quality that can take years to build up and one moment to destroy. In order for people to trust you, and in order to trust others, there must be a consistency to their actions and your actions.

Below is a fox hole, similar to what soldiers in combat are at times stuck in. Put your name in Section 1. In Section 2 (directly behind Section 1), put the name of the person that you trust the most in our program, the person that you would believe would have your back in any situation. In Section 3 (to the left of Section 1), put the name of the player in our program that you trust the most after person #1. In Section 4 (to the right of Section 1), put the name of the player in our program that you trust the most after person #2.

We will not be sharing the results of this activity, but it will give us, as coaches, a good idea as to whom everyone trusts and who doesn’t. It will also give us a good idea as to whom we can trust in tough situations.

Bilas Program-Day #3
Wednesday, November 20th, 2013
TOPIC: Preparation

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM on 11/20/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Preparation:

*"Everybody has a will to win, but not everyone has the will to prepare to win."
-Bob Knight*

*"By far, the most important thing to me is the mental toughness necessary to put in the physical preparation, the conditioning, the fitness, especially in the off-season."
-Herm Edwards*

No player ever got better by just getting through something. True toughness is competing through the end of a practice or workout after having prepared yourself mentally to compete.

***"You may not get the same number of snaps or the same opportunity as some other guy, but you will get an opportunity. It is up to you to take advantage of it."
-Bo Pelini***

The prepared player is more athletic, because the prepared player is reacting rather than thinking.

*"I have to compete against me . . . I have to compete against my will. I have to push through and compete against me, every day."
-Herm Edwards*

A player who is prepared can face negative situations with confidence and belief that he can turn a negative into a positive.

Tough players don't quit. When a player is fully and completely prepared, it is harder to quit because of the investment made.

*"Discipline is not a punishment. Discipline is doing the right thing, at the right time, to the best of your ability."
-Coach K*

Our opponent does not determine our standard of performance or our level of preparation . . . we are striving to meet a standard of excellence, not just trying to beat this team. If we meet our standard of excellence, winning would take care of itself.

The only thing that I can control is how I prepare, and how I react to every situation.

There is a difference between being confident in your opinion and thinking you are always right.

Each game is different and singularly important; so is each practice . . . to get the most from myself and to get the most out of practice, and to give the most to my team, I should have put more effort, energy and thought into preparing myself for each practice.

Mark Alarie wasn't taking shots, he was practicing making shots.

"There are a lot of excuses you can make when you have a disadvantage, and you can be easily satisfied when you have an advantage. It is a test of your concentration, a test to toughness."

-Coach K

Preparation is multifaceted. It is about hard work, but it is also about concentration, is planning on execution, and it is about how you frame things in your mind.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Explain how you prepare for practice.

2. What can you do to prepare for practice better?

3. What did you do this offseason to prepare yourself for this season? Do you think your offseason preparation will help our program be successful this season? Do you think that is enough to put you in the best situation possible for this season?

4. Who in our program do you think prepares themselves the best for competition in practice and in games? Why?

Bilas Program-Day #4
Thursday, November 21st, 2013
TOPIC: Courage

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM on 11/21/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Courage:

Tough people face their fears and doubts head-on, and they overcome them so they can function at the highest level without that fear and doubt inhibiting their ability to perform at their best. Embracing fear and using it to push yourself to get better takes courage.

"If you prepare properly, you love the big stage."
-Curtis Strange

For Tom Crean, mental errors are from a lack of concentration, which is a lack of mental toughness.

The toughest players have the courage to acknowledge failure and take the necessary steps to learn from it and work not to repeat it.

"Toughness is about overcoming anxiety we all feel and getting yourself to a place where you can compete and perform . . . that's really the key. You have to be willing to live with the result. You have to be tough enough to live with the result."
-Steve Kerr

You have to be willing to accept what comes with falling short, because if you compete, you will fall short at times. Mental toughness is being able to accept what comes from winning and losing.

"Teams of entitlement don't win championships. Entitlement never wins championships. Investment wins championships."
-Kevin Eastman

Toughness isn't an absence of fear. It is the courage to face it, keep plugging away and to overcome it.

"The key was, I made a decision, and I wasn't afraid of the outcome. I was willing to accept the consequences that go along with that decision."
-Coach K

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. When have you overcome failure in your life? How did you do it?

2. As you prepare for games, what is your preparation process? How can you improve on this?

3. Within our program, who do you trust to take the “big shot”? Why?

4. Do you have the courage to take the “big shot”? If so, why? If not, what can you do to make yourself confident enough to take the “big shot”?

4. Who in our program do you think prepares themselves the best for competition in practice and in games? Why?

Bilas Program-Day #5
Friday, November 22nd, 2013
TOPIC: Communication

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM on 11/22/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Communication:

Communication is a vital element in any good relationship.

The toughest players play "team" man to man defense. Those players strive for their teams to play "five as one" on the defensive end, and take the collective view that it is "our defense" that is going to protect "our basket" and "we" are going to get a stop against the opposing offense, and do so together.

The talking player is more likely to be down in a stance and ready, and more likely to begin in the right position and prepared not only to cover his assignment, but to help a teammate and still recover.

The on-ball defender is your teammate, and he is on an island without the ability to see what is going on behind him. That teammate needs the confidence to pressure the ball without the fear of getting beaten off the dribble. It is the talk, the communication of his teammates that instills confidence and trust.

Your teammates must be able to trust completely that you are there to help them, and that you will be there without fail. Talking to your teammates positively reinforces that trust, and demonstrates your commitment to the mission of that possession.

"Responsible to the element, accountable to the mission."
-NASA slogan

That simple NASA phrase summed up team play in basketball better than anything I had ever heard. On defense, a true team player, a tough player, needs to be responsible for his specific role and assignment, but accountable for the mission, which is to stop the opponent from scoring on the defensive end.

"Kevin Garnett won't shut up. The San Antonio Spurs talk; everybody on the team does it. And when the whole team talks, it is a very powerful and intimidating thing."
-Grant Hill

Nobody ever learned anything while talking. You have to know how to listen, and you have to be aware of what to listen for. The best-communicating teams listen and act upon what they hear.

Communication in basketball, or any endeavor, is about trust and honesty, and good communication requires toughness.

Jon Gruden tells his players that the time to be concerned is when he stops pushing and expecting more of you as a player.

“People ask me all the time how I can get on my guys so hard. I spend the time to build trust. I can challenge them to get better, to push themselves to be their best every day, and not to expect anything less of themselves, because they know I want what’s best for them, and I want them to expect it of themselves.”

-Tom Izzo

Teammates cannot fear hurt feelings, but have to trust that everyone is tough enough to accept that anything said in the best interests of the team’s performance and development.

“Challenging each other, that’s not a negative. It’s a positive, an incredible positive.”

-Julie Foudy

Great communication provides the foundation for coaches and players to be accountable to one another, and to trust one another.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What is your greatest strength as a communicator?
2. Who, in your life, is a great communicator? What makes it easy for you to communicate with that person?
3. On a scale of 1-10 (10 is highest), rate yourself as a communicator on the basketball floor. Using the same scale, rate our team. What can we do to make this better?
4. Who, in our program, is the best communicator? What are things that you can take from this person to help improve your own communication skills?
5. How can communication help our program achieve our goals this season?
6. As a coach, can I challenge you? I would never challenge you just to challenge you, but if I challenge you in the proper way (sometimes louder than others), can you accept the criticism, learn from it, and respond in a positive manner? Why or why not?

Bilas Program-Day #6
Saturday, November 23rd, 2013
TOPIC: Persistence

Name _____
Due: 10:30 AM, 11/23/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Persistence:

Persistence is your ability to keep going without giving up or giving in.

Persistence . . . doesn't give in to excuses or rationalization, or for simply being not tough enough to endure the challenge.

I would not give in to fatigue, and I never let fatigue get the best of me.

"Persevering, getting up when you have been knocked down, is what true mental toughness is."
-Julie Foudy

"Are you going to give up and give in, or are you going to get up and get in?"
-Kevin Eastman

Persistence is not just about pushing forward; it is about pushing through to reach a new height, exceeding a limit you thought you had . . . it takes toughness to push your limits, to push through being tired, to push past muscle fatigue to muscle failure.

"Nothing is guaranteed, but if you get it, if you succeed after putting in all that effort, preparation and work, there is so much more pride and accomplishment than if it is just dropped in your lap."
-Coach K

"The harder I worked, the tougher I seemed to get. Funny how that works."
-Grant Hill

The best and the toughest teams reach their greatest heights because teammates feed off of each other, and are inspired to match or exceed the level they experience every day.

"They need to be made to execute at game point, to hit a free throw with some pressure, to execute and concentrate when they're tired. That builds confidence. That builds togetherness."
-Coach K

"Hard work plus success equals confidence."
-Tommy Amaker

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Describe to me a situation where you had to be persistent and to keep attacking a goal and, despite some failure along the way, you were able to persistent and achieve that goal.

2. What are some things that we can do in practice to work on our persistence?

3. What can you do to help our team stay persistent in the face of some eventual ups and downs this season? What are you going to do to help the team in mid-January (the dog days) to help the program stay on task, on goal, to where **you** want to go?

Bilas Program-Day #7
Monday, November 25th, 2013
TOPIC: “Next Play”

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM, 11/25/13

Jay Bilas’ thoughts on “Next Play”:

Coach K’s use of the concept of “next play” is really a prompt to focus players on the present, rather than dwelling upon what just happened.

Essentially, by not moving on to the next play immediately, we would be compounding that mistake, either by making another or missing an opportunity to make a great play.

“By moving on to the ‘next play’, concentrating and trying to move to the next thing, you have a better chance to be your best at that moment . . . you have to be tough enough to move on, whether the last play was good or crappy. It takes real mental toughness.”

-Coach K

But, there is no question in my mind that today’s culture has allowed too many of our young people to get away with not being accountable. Every player, especially every tough player, has to be held responsible for mistakes and correcting those mistakes, and has to be tough enough to handle constructive criticism that is respectfully provided.

The concept of ‘next play’ applies to positive plays, not just mistakes. When a great play is made, you still need to say ‘next play’ and move on without dwelling on that great play.

But when there are struggles- and they are inevitable- Jon Gruden explains toughness;

-“You have to be mentally tough enough to put that behind you right away, and play the next snap.”

‘Next play’ eliminates excuses.

You have to stay positive in the moment. Those who do will always be more successful than those who don’t.

The toughness to accept the consequences attendant to winning and losing is important; yes, there are consequences to winning as well as losing, and a lot of times, it is harder to handle winning than losing.

When the game is over, win or lose, you evaluate the performance, clearly define where mistakes were made, and unite on a journey to correct those mistakes and make the next practice about getting better as an individual and as a team.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Describe to me a situation where someone held you accountable for your actions when you “tried to avoid being held accountable”. Was this other person right? Why or why not? What did you learn from it?

2. Why do you think it is harder to concentrate on ‘next play’ if you are winning rather than losing?

3. ‘Next play’ can be used in so many things in life. What is a situation in your daily life where you think you could use the concept of ‘next play’ to help you become a better person?

4. I want us, as a program, to emphasize the concept of ‘next play’ throughout this season. Can you help me implement this as part of our common vocabulary?

Bilas Program-Day #8
Tuesday, November 26th, 2013
TOPIC: Commitment

Name _____
Due: 7:45 AM, 11/26/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Commitment:

Just showing up is not enough.

A player must show up fully committed and prepared to compete and perform at his or her highest level. Commitment is a vital and necessary ingredient for toughness.

Nobody can make it on talent alone. But when you combine talent with toughness, you have a winner in anything.

Playing against superior talent didn't worry me. What worried me was playing against a guy who would outwork me, and never quit or give me a break.

I appreciate talent. I respect and admire toughness.

For any coach, including Tom Crean of Indiana, the most important measure of his team's toughness is the "50-50" ball, the loose ball that is up for grabs and both teams have an equal chance to get possession. When Crean sees that his team has the mental capacity to get 50-50 balls, then he knows that they are ready for the best competition.

When I did the tough things that were expected of me, he (Coach K) noticed it, acknowledged it and reinforced its importance. Toughness was important, so doing something truly tough should excite you.

And when Coach K or my teammates got excited about a tough play, like a charge or a rebound in traffic, it made all of us more determined to be tougher, and to do it again. We were building a culture of toughness, and Coach K made it "cool" to join in and be part of it.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. In your eyes, who is the most "committed" player to our program and to the game of basketball? Why did you pick this person?

2. Using the person that you listed for the answer in question #1, what can you learn about this person to commit yourself more fully to the game of basketball?

3. What are some ways that we, as a program, can reinforce and emphasize a commitment to toughness?

Bilas Program-Day #9
Wednesday, November 27th, 2013
TOPIC: Acceptance

Name _____
Due: 9:45 AM, 11/27/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Acceptance:

Let me begin with one clear and unmistakable statement on roles and role players. Every player on a team is a role player, and every player on a team should strive to excel at what I consider to be the most important rule of all; the role of being a great teammate.

But we all needed to be stars in our roles for our team to be truly successful. And we all needed to be great teammates to accept and embrace our roles.

Nobody keeps statistics for roles on championship teams. Acceptance and embracing of roles, and the celebration of them, has to be valued and emphasized within the team, because it will not necessarily be celebrated outside of the team.

As a reserve, you will continue to get better, and you must be prepared for your opportunity to play. The truth is, you never know when that opportunity will come your way. Nobody does.

"Life isn't easy, but you never quit. Never. I may not have been the best, but I can always give my best. That's how you demonstrate toughness."

-Jay Bilas

"Players play, but tough players win."

-Tom Izzo

Coach-directed teams usually go only so far. The best and toughest teams reach their greatest heights because teammates feed off of each other, and are inspired to match or exceed the level they experience each day.

To be a great role player and a tough player, you have to embrace that championship teams are "we" driven, not "me" driven.

"Every player has to believe his role is the most important role on the team. We cannot win without each player executing his role to the best of his ability."

-Doc Rivers

"It's not about the minutes you play, it's how you play those minutes."

-Mia Hamm

Accepting a role on a team takes a special kind of selflessness and toughness on the court and the field. Those are the players who help their teammates succeed and, ultimately, help their teams win.

The toughest teams are the most “together” teams.

Coach K once asked our team to do a simple thing. He asked us to attach the word “together” in every sentence we used. We were not just going to play hard; we were going to play hard together. We were not just going to defend; we were going to defend together. We were not just going to win; we were going to win together. Adding “together” to everything we did and said provided emphasis that we were a part of something bigger than ourselves.

A player’s role is so much more than just the position he or she plays, and the intricacies and requirements of that position. The role of every single player on any team is to be a great teammate. A great teammate is committed. A great teammate is selfless. And a great teammate is tough.

Great teams are made up of great teammates who accept roles, embrace constructive criticism and coaching, and accept the challenge of expectations. To some, that sounds corny. But when you believe in each other and in what you are doing together, it is powerful. And it is a collective toughness.

That is an important and essential form of toughness. When competing for playing time, it does no good to hope that your teammate fails so that you can play.

Part of a great teammate’s responsibility is to say “no” to things that can ultimately affect the team in a negative way . . . “No” is a really important word, and it is a word used by tough people.

Coach Knight believes that use of the word “no” requires great toughness, and its use is the responsibility of a great teammate. Whether it is peer pressure or trying to please everyone, tough people have the ability to say no.

Trouble follows yes, not no.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What do you believe your role is this season? Why?
2. Can you know, accept, embrace and fulfill that role? Why or why not?
3. What are some things that we are going to have to say “no” to this season for us to be successful?

Bilas Program-Day #10
Saturday, November 30th, 2013
TOPIC: Resilience

Name _____
Due: 9:45 AM, 11/30/13

Jay Bilas' thoughts on Resilience, Self Evaluation and Hope:

The ability to come back, to fight adversity or difficulties, is a measure of true toughness.

Toughness is also about being smart and aware, and taking charge of your health.

"I used to think, 'I can play through this injury. I'm tough. This is nothing.' Well, that's not toughness. That's foolishness."

-Grant Hill

A player needs to be smart enough and tough enough to realize the difference between playing through pain and addressing injury, the difference between being tough and foolish.

"That is what toughness is; doing what it takes to make a difference. Toughness is not thinking or accepting that you have a ceiling, but that you have another step to take, another level to reach, another gear."

-Coach K

"You have to be honest with yourself, and you have to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses truthfully."

-Coach K

"You have to look yourself straight in the mirror and ask yourself if you are doing the best you can do, if you are self-disciplined and self-motivated as you possibly can be. You always have to evaluate yourself first."

-Roy Williams

If you prepare to be the best every day, the games will take care of themselves.

Successful players and teams don't just appraise themselves by records or statistics, but by a standard of excellence that goes beyond a final score.

As a coach and a leader, Coach K was thinking 'If we play this way against the best teams, we will not win. This effort won this game, but won't win against the very best competition.'

It is easier to dedicate yourself to getting better after a failure, but harder to strive to get better after a triumph, when complacency and self-satisfaction can take over.

“I want them confident in their abilities and believing that I believe in them. But I do challenge them on effort and concentration. What is more important than effort and concentration? Nothing.”

-Jon Gruden

How do you get people to buy in and believe? In my experience, it is important that each member of the team invest in and take ownership of their personal development, the development and acceptance of their roles, and the development of the team.

In my own personal journey, I have fallen short many times of the standard of toughness I value and expect of myself, and that those around me value and expect of me. But through learned self-awareness, I strive to pick myself up and do better.

I also accept that I am not as tough as I want to be, and that I have to continue to strive, every day, to be tougher; for myself, my team and my family. Toughness isn't about bravado. It is about meeting challenges head-on and not shrinking from them.

Friedman's philosophy on the foundation of true toughness is simple, and it is surprising; hope. Friedman believes that you cannot be truly tough without first having and embracing hope.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. When you evaluate yourself, what do you consider to be two or three strengths as a person, and what are two or three weaknesses that you need to work on?
2. When you evaluate yourself, what do you consider to be two or three strengths as a basketball player, and what are two or three weaknesses that you need to work on?
3. What is a situation where you have fallen short on your own expectations of toughness? What did you learn from this experience?
4. We are beginning a long and tough journey; what have you learned from these exercises that has better prepared you for this journey this season?

THE JAY BILAS "TOUGHNESS TEST"

NAME _____

Directions: Circle either "Yes" or "No" for each statement. At the end of the test, fill in the blank with the number of times you circled "Yes" and the number of times you circled "No."

1. Set a good screen: The toughest players to guard are the players who set good screens. When you set a good screen, you are improving the chances for a teammate to get open, and you are greatly improving your chances of getting open. A good screen can force the defense to make a mistake. A lazy or bad screen is a waste of everyone's time and energy. To be a tough player, you need to be a "screener/scorer," a player who screens hard and immediately looks for an opportunity on offense. On the 1984 U.S. Olympic Team, Bob Knight made Michael Jordan set a screen before he could get a shot. If it is good enough for Jordan, arguably the toughest player ever, it is good enough for you. **Do you set good, tough screens? Yes/No**

2. Set up your cut: The toughest players make hard cuts, and set up their cuts. Basketball is about deception. Take your defender one way, and then plant the foot opposite of the direction you want to go and cut hard. A hard cut may get you a basket, but it may also get a teammate a basket. If you do not make a hard cut, you will not get anyone open. Setting up your cut, making the proper read of the defense, and making a hard cut require alertness, good conditioning and good concentration. Davidson's is hardly a physical muscle-man, but he is a tough player because he is in constant motion, he changes speeds, he sets up his cuts, and he cuts hard. Curry is hard to guard, and he is a tough player. **Do you set up your cuts? Yes/No**

3. Talk on defense: The toughest players talk on defense, and communicate with their teammates. It is almost impossible to talk on defense and not be in a stance, down and ready, with a vision of man and ball. If you talk, you let your teammates know you are there, and make them and yourself better defenders. It also lets your opponent know that you are fully engaged. **Do you talk on defense? Yes/No**

4. Jump to the ball: When on defense, the tough defenders move as the ball moves. The toughest players move on the flight of the ball, not when it gets to its destination. And the toughest players jump to the ball and take away the ball side of the cut. Tough players don't let cutters cut across their face -- they make the cutter change his path. **Do you jump to the ball? Yes/No**

5. Don't get screened: No coach can give a player the proper footwork to get through every screen. Tough players have a sense of urgency not to get screened and to get through screens so that the cutter cannot catch the ball where he wants to. A tough player makes the catch difficult. **Do you fight through and avoid screens? Yes/No**

6. Get your hands up: A pass discouraged is just as good as a pass denied. Tough players play with their hands up to take away vision, get deflections and to discourage a pass in order to allow a teammate to cover up. Cutters and post players will get open, if only for a count. If your hands are up, you can keep the passer from seeing a momentary opening. **Do you get your hands up on defense? Yes/No**

7. Play the ball, see your man: Most defenders see the ball and hug their man, because they are afraid to get beat. A tough defender plays the ball and sees his man. There is a difference. **Do you see ball/ see man and execute your help like a good, tough teammate should? Yes/No**

8. Get on the floor: In my first road game as a freshman, there was a loose ball that I thought I could pick up and take the other way for an easy one. While I was bending over at the waist, one of my opponents dived on the floor and got possession of the ball. My coach was livid. We lost possession of the ball because I wasn't tough enough to get on

the floor for it. I tried like hell never to get out-toughed like that again. (The man...who gets on the floor first usually gets the ball. watch!) **Do you get on the floor and win 50/50 balls for us? Yes/No**

9. Close out under control: It is too easy to fly at a shooter and think you are a tough defender. A tough defender closes out under control, takes away a straight line drive and takes away the shot. A tough player has a sense of urgency but has the discipline to do the right way. **Do you close out under control? Yes/No**

10. Post your man, not a spot: Most post players just blindly run to the low block and get into a shoving match for a spot on the floor. The toughest post players are posting their defensive man. A tough post player is always open, and working to get the ball to proper angle to get a post feed. Tough post players seal on ball reversal and call for the ball, and they continue to post strong even if their teammates miss them. **Do you get open in the lane away from the ball? Yes/No**

11. Run the floor: Tough players [sprint](#) the floor, which drags the defense and opens up things for others. Tough players run hard and get "easy" baskets, even though there is nothing easy about them. Easy baskets are hard to get. Tough players don't take tough shots -- they work hard to make them easy. **Do you run the floor every possession? Yes/No**

12. Play so hard, your coach has to take you out: I was a really hard worker in high school and college. But I worked and trained exceptionally hard to make playing easier. I was wrong. I once read that Bob Knight had criticized a player of his by saying, "You just want to be comfortable out there!" Well, that was me, and when I read that, it clicked with me. I needed to work to increase my capacity for work, not to make it easier to play. I needed to work in order to be more productive in my time on the floor. Tough players play so hard that their [coaches](#) have to take them out to get rest so they can put them back in. The toughest players don't pace themselves. **Do you play yourself to exhaustion? Yes/No**

13. Get to your teammate first: When your teammate lays his body on the line to dive on the floor or take a charge, the tough players get to him first to help him back up. If your teammate misses a free throw, tough players get to him right away. Tough players are also great teammates. **Are you the first to pick up a teammate off the floor? Yes/No**

14. Take responsibility for your teammates: Tough players expect a lot from their teammates, but they also put them first. When the bus leaves at 9 a.m., tough players not only get themselves there, but they also make sure their teammates are up and get there, too. Tough players take responsibility for others in addition to themselves. They make sure their teammates eat first, and they give credit to their teammates before taking it themselves. **Do you put your teammates before yourself? Yes/No**

15. Take a charge: Tough players are in a stance, playing the ball, and alert in coming over from the weak side and taking a charge. Tough players understand the difference between being in the right spot and being in the right spot with the intention of stopping somebody. Some players will look puzzled and say, "But I was in the right spot." Tough players know that they have to get to the right spot with the sense of urgency to stop someone. **Would/do you take charges for the good of the team? Yes/No**

16. Get in a stance: Tough players don't play straight up and down and put themselves in the position of having to get ready to get ready. Tough players are down in a stance on both ends of the floor, with feet staggered and ready to move. Tough players are the aggressor, and the aggressor is in a stance. **Are you consistently in a stance on both ends of the floor? Yes/No**

17. Finish plays: Tough players don't just get fouled, they get fouled and complete the play. They don't give up on a play or assume that a teammate will do it. A tough player plays through to the end of the play and works to finish every play. **Do you finish plays at both ends of the floor? Yes/No**

18. Work on your pass: A tough player doesn't have his passes deflected. A tough player gets down, pivots, pass-fakes, and works to get the proper angle to pass away from the defense and deliver the ball. **Do you value possession with your passing and decision-making? Yes/No**

19. Throw yourself into your team's defense: A tough player fills his tank on the defensive end, not on offense. A tough player is not deterred by a missed shot. A tough player values his performance first by how well he defended. **Do you put your defense ahead of your offense? Yes/No**

20. Take and give criticism the right way: Tough players can take criticism without feeling the need to answer back or give excuses. They are open to getting better and expect to be challenged and hear tough things. You will never again in your life have the opportunity you have now at the college level: a coaching staff that is totally and completely dedicated to making you and your team better. Tough players listen and are not afraid to say what other teammates may not want to hear, but need to hear. **Can I challenge you to get better? Yes/No**

21. Show strength in your body language: Tough players project confidence and security with their body language. They do not hang their heads, do not react negatively to a mistake of a teammate, and do not whine and complain to officials. Tough players project strength, and do not cause their teammates to worry about them. Tough players do their jobs, and their body language communicates that to their teammates -- and to their opponents. **Do you display consistently strong body language? Yes/No**

22. Catch and face: Teams that press and trap are banking on the receiver's falling apart and making a mistake. When pressed, tough players set up their cuts, cut hard to an open area and present themselves as a receiver to the passer. Tough players catch, face the defense, and make the right read and play, and they do it with poise. Tough players do not just catch and dribble; they catch and face. **Do you find the rim on every catch? Yes/No**

23. Don't get split: If you trap, a tough player gets shoulder-to-shoulder with his teammate and does not allow the handler to split the trap and gain an advantage on the back side of the trap. **Do you execute on defense in the full court consistently? Yes/No**

24. Be alert: Tough players are not "cool." Tough players are alert and active, and tough players communicate with teammates so that they are alert, too. Tough players echo commands until everyone is on the same page. They understand the best teams play five as one. Tough players are alert in transition and get back to protect the basket and the 3-point line. Tough players don't just run back to find their man, they run back to stop the ball and protect the basket. **Do you communicate and help struggling teammates, both on and off the floor? Yes/No**

25. Concentrate, and encourage your teammates to concentrate: Concentration is a skill, and tough players work hard to concentrate on every play. Tough players go as hard as they can for as long as they can. **Do you come ready to play every time we get together? Yes/No**

26. It's not your shot; it's our shot: Tough players don't take bad shots, and they certainly don't worry about getting "my" shots. Tough players work for good shots and understand that it is not "my" shot, it is "our" shot. Tough players celebrate when "we" score. **Do you force your offense? Yes/No**

27. Box out and go to the glass every time: Tough players are disciplined enough to lay a body on someone. They make first contact and go after the ball. And tough players do it on every possession, not just when they feel like it. They understand defense is not complete until they secure the ball. **Do you box out consistently? Yes/No**

28. Take responsibility for your actions: Tough players make no excuses. They take responsibility for their actions. Take for example. With 17 seconds to go in Wake's game against Duke on Wednesday, missed a 3-pointer that bounced right to Johnson. But instead of aggressively pursuing the ball with a sense of urgency, Johnson stood there and waited for the ball to come to him. It never did. Scheyer grabbed it, called a timeout and the Blue Devils hit a game-tying shot on a possession they never should've had. Going after the loose ball is toughness -- and Johnson didn't show it on that play. But what happened next? He re-focused, slipped a screen for the winning basket, and after the game -- when he could've been basking only in the glow of victory -- manned up to the mistake that could've cost his team the win. "That was my responsibility -- I should have had that," Johnson said of the goof. No excuses. Shouldering the responsibility. That's toughness. **Do you take responsibility for your actions? Yes/No**

29. Look your coaches and teammates in the eye: Tough players never drop their heads. They always look coaches and teammates in the eye, because if they are talking, it is important to them and to you. **Do you have good eye contact at all times? Yes/No**

30. Move on to the next play: Tough players don't waste time celebrating a good play or lamenting a bad one. They understand that basketball is too fast a game to waste time and opportunities with celebratory gestures or angry reactions. Tough players move on to the next play. They know that the most important play in any game is the next one. **Are you a "next play" player? Yes/No**

31. Be hard to play against, and easy to play with: Tough players make their teammates' jobs easier, and their opponents' jobs tougher. **Do you take pride in making your teammates jobs easier? Yes/No**

32. Make every game important: Tough players don't categorize opponents and games. They know that if they are playing, it is important. Tough players understand that if they want to play in championship games, they must treat every game as a championship game. **Do you understand the importance and respect the concept that every game, regardless of the opponent, is important? Yes/No**

33. Make getting better every day your goal: Tough players come to work every day to get better, and keep their horizons short. They meet victory and defeat the same way: They get up the next day and go to work to be better than they were the day before. Tough players hate losing but are not shaken or deterred by a loss. Tough players enjoy winning but are never satisfied. For tough players, a championship or a trophy is not a goal; it is a destination. The goal is to get better every day. When I was playing, the players I respected most were not the best or most talented players. The players I respected most were the toughest players. I don't remember anything about the players who talked a good game or blocked a shot and acted like a fool. I remember the players who were tough to play against. **Do you strive to get better every day? Yes/No**

TOTAL "YES" ANSWERS: _____

TOTAL "NO" ANSWERS: _____

GRADING SCALE

Total Possible = 33

30 or Above = A...and you can consider yourself a “Tough” player.

26-30 = B...and you can consider yourself on the verge of being a “tough” player, lacking in only a couple areas needing improvement.

23-26 = C...and you need to work harder on being more conscious of the things a “tough” player must have. You must identify 3-5 aspects of your game that you will work to improve. Set small goals and have your teammates or coaches help you be accountable to the areas you are working on.

23 or less = F...and you must do some soul searching. It is time for you to meet with your coaches and possibly captains. You need to first begin working on skill #28 (Taking Responsibility for Actions) You must be willing to admit, reflect, learn and apply new practices. Have a teammate and coach make you accountable to the areas letting you down. You still can become tough. It is up to you however to apply change NOW!

Toughness has nothing to do with size, physical strength or athleticism. Some players may be born tough, but I believe that toughness is a skill, and it is a skill that can be developed and improved. Michigan State coach Tom Izzo always says, "Players play, but tough players win." He is right.