

Beads of perspiration shone on my forehead as I gazed up at the scoreboard. We were tied, with two minutes remaining, and the other team had possession of the ball. The blazing sun showed no sign of letting up, relentlessly beating down on my neck and arms. Our coach, Tony, called for a time-out. Pulling me aside, he sent me to replace one of our exhausted players. As the other team dribbled the basketball down the court, my teammates and I positioned ourselves in our defensive formation. In a flash, one of my opponents passed the ball and the receiver drove down the right sideline. Finding a dead end at the corner of the court, he lobbed a sloppy pass over the center. My teammate saw the ball flying in his direction and stuck out an arm, intercepting it. I immediately sprinted down the court as he launched the ball towards me. I caught it and came to a jump stop. My surprised opponents who had been dashing after me flew in front of me, not expecting my sudden stop. Immediately, "B.L.E.S.H." popped into my mind. Bending my knees, lifting and extending my arm, I snapped my wrist and released the ball. I held my follow through but looked up in horror, seeing that the ball was clearly going to miss the basket by a foot. Standing there, stupefied at my miss, I was shocked as the basketball ricocheted off the edge of the clear backboard right back towards me. Luckily, I was able to take the ball and dribble to the left, finishing the drive with an easy lay-up. Just then, the timer sounded with a defiant buzz.

Of all the sports in which I have participated, basketball has always been my favorite. That game was one of my first and most vivid ones at Excel basketball camp, which I have loved to attend every summer since 4<sup>th</sup> grade. It had taken place right after my first shooting lecture. Coach Allocco, the head of our camp, had just talked to us about the correct shooting form, so that we would not form bad "shooting habits". Using the acronym "B.L.E.S.H.", I could easily remember the perfect shooting motion:

**B**ending your knees, **L**ifting the elbow, **E**xtending your arm, **S**napping the wrist, and **H**olding the follow through.

I have received many helpful pieces of advice throughout my life, but this one has been the most memorable. As I practice my shooting using this technique, it has improved my game dramatically. I now play with a fiery passion and confidence in every shot, dribble or pass. It has verified that indeed "practice makes perfect". At first, using "B.L.E.S.H." seemed awkward and I had a few shots that didn't quite make it (ok, fine, they were off by miles), but after working with it for a while, the motion became natural, and I started making my baskets with confidence. For example, I now can shoot 6 or 7 free throws out of 10 attempts, compared to the 3 or 4 that I used to be able to make.

From my experience with "B.L.E.S.H.", I have also realized that sometimes the best way to succeed is to have an open mind and learn from others. Everyone has some useful advice. It is possible to benefit from their words if one grasps the meaning with understanding and puts it to good use. If I had given up on following Coach Allocco's acronym at first, because it didn't seem all that effective, my shooting skills would never have improved to its present level.

I have demonstrated the use of this acronym to some of my friends, and it has helped to improve their shooting capabilities as well. Whenever I become rusty, I can return to the basics and recall "B.L.E.S.H.". I have used it many times to "rehabilitate" my skills during the off-seasons. I have also learned from "B.L.E.S.H." to keep an open mind, which has become an integral of me. With practice, this advice from Coach Allocco has helped me not only at succeeding in basketball but also with playing the biggest game of all, life.