

Granada Hills has calculated a formula for winning



By ERIC SONDHEIMER FEB 08, 2018 | 10:45 AM



Granada Hills Coach Don Loperena talks to his team during a timeout. He has been relying on analytics to help make key decisions.

Never has a high school basketball team in the City Section relied more on analytics than Granada Hills.

Coach Don Loperena's iPad has become as important as any chalkboard. Before, during and after games, the statistics and video he receives are critical in deciding playing time. The team doesn't practice on Thursdays. Players watch film.

Loperena helped create software that he says has resulted in a stunning revelation.

"I have had zero discussions with parents about playing time the last two years," he said.

That's because numbers don't lie.

If a parent says his son would do better if he received more playing time, Loperena just pulls out his iPad and shows the proof.

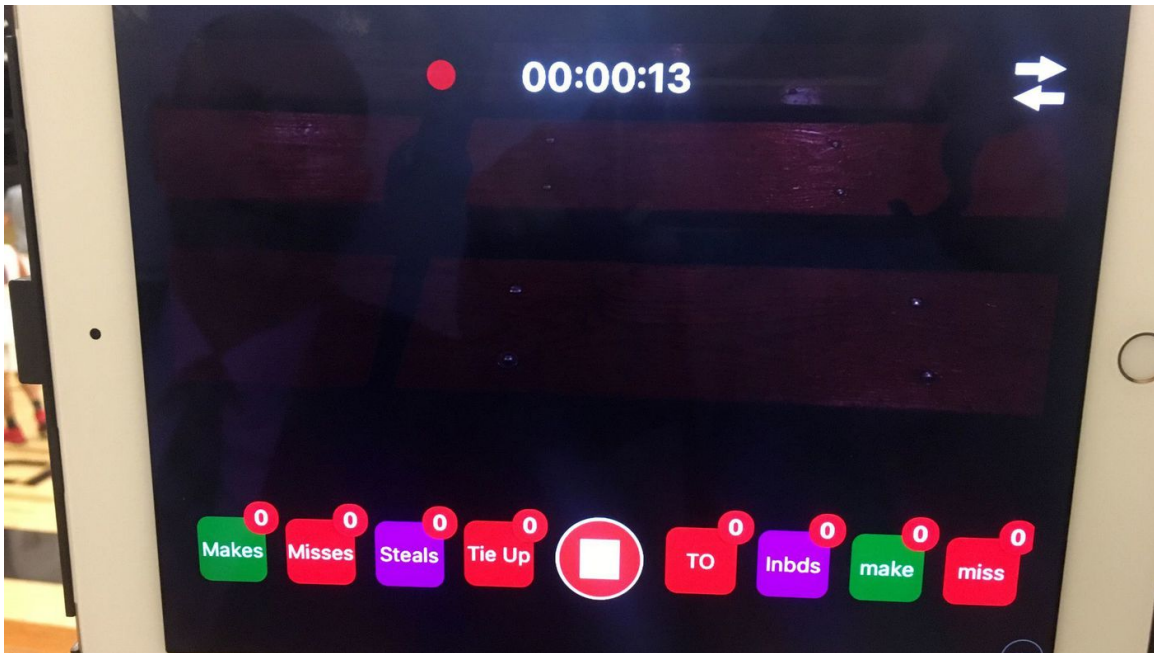
"The software calculates their efficiency rating per minute played," he said.

Something is working because Granada Hills is 18-10, tied for second place in the West Valley League, with wins over Birmingham and El Camino Real. The Highlanders could be selected for the City Section Open Division playoffs.

"It changes the psychology of the players," Loperena said.

The team has been taking video of every game since the fall. Managers also input statistics. There's a point system. A player gets one point for baskets, assists, a blocked shot or a deflected pass. Two points are awarded for taking a charge, but two points are subtracted for a turnover and one point is lost for a missed shot.

In other words, taking care of the ball and taking high-percentage shots pays off, so it's no wonder the Highlanders are finding ways to compete against more talented teams.



Many secrets of Granada Hills' success can be found on this iPad. (Eric Sondheimer / Los Angeles Times)

"It's helping us," guard Luke Alviar said. "It shows us what we can do better. You have no excuse when you're playing because it shows on the iPad."

Alviar, a senior, along with junior point guard Jesse Bannout and sophomore guard Aaron Dozier have been key contributors. Other coaches have been taking notice.

"I'm really impressed," Taft coach Derrick Taylor said. "People tend to overlook them. They're not scared of anybody."

Granada Hills is a crowded charter school with no open enrollment, so the Highlanders rarely get transfers. They train to do the best with whoever shows up.

When the Highlanders upset Birmingham and El Camino Real, Loperena was swamped by text messages with congratulations from other coaches who know the challenge Granada Hills faces.

"The compliments the guys got was awesome," Loperena said. The Highlanders will be dangerous whether they are in the Open Division or Division I. They're like a pesky gnat: It's sometimes hard to make them go away.

"I'm in admiration of them for keeping it up and for how long they can keep it up," Loperena said of his players.

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