



TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM

Pay attention to what is happening in a basketball game, whether you are a participant or a fan, and you will notice an extreme sense of collaboration, love, and community among teammates.

Every year around the time of the NBA trade deadline—that stretch in February within which teams reshape their rosters for the end of the season and hope they can acquire a player or two to “put them over the top”—you will hear a lot of discussion in the media about what impact such trade(s) might have on the “chemistry” in the locker room. And if a team adds a bunch of new players in a particular offseason, observers may wonder how the players will mesh as teammates on the court. On the one hand, this makes sense. On the other ... have the people verbalizing these concerns never played youth basketball? Church league? AAU? Or even—perhaps especially—pickup basketball? Emotionally intelligent basketball players become bonded to their teammates in a matter of minutes. Picking them up off the floor; having their back in an argument over a call; shoving an opponent on their behalf; giving high fives.

Any team sport, by definition, relies on the notion of teammates. But basketball, through a combination of the smallness of the team, the close quarters in which the action takes place,

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and the limited clothing players wear while competing, is where you see its importance the most. There was even an academic study from 2010 in which Michael Kraus, then at the University of California, Berkeley, looked at the impact physical touch had on the performance of NBA teams. The study showed that, in effect, more touching among teammates “predicted improved performance even after accounting for player status, preseason expectations, and early season performance. Moreover, coded cooperative behaviors be-

tween teammates explained the association between touch and team performance.”

This study focused on the highest level of basketball in the world, and it is fascinating. It also just falls in line with what regular ballers, aka “weekend warriors,” who show up at the local park to play pickup feel. Things might be awkward on arrival: “Who’s got next?” “Can I run with you?” But over a matter of minutes or hours, a team gets settled on, and the rhythm of the game takes over. Games may go to 11, or 21, or 32, whatever. A team will get on a run and win several games in a row. And