

The short and tall of basketball

by Wayne Westlake

Chukchi News and Information Service

KIANA — The point guard and the center, two of basketball's most dominant positions, present a sharp contrast in size, ability and purpose.

Sports

On the one hand, we have the point guard, who can be up to 6 feet tall but is nevertheless considered "short" by basketball player standards. On the other hand, we have the center, who can be up to 7 feet tall and is considered as "the big man."

The point guard is fast in getting up and down the court. His feet are quick in moving laterally and he is able to change speed and direction quickly. He has excellent ball-handling abilities such as dribbling the ball around the pressure defense and passing the ball to a teammate in position to score.

The guard's good court awareness enables him to see the whole court and know where his teammates are, but also know where his opponents are.

The point guard also is a good shooter from long-range, whereas the center is a good shooter when close to the basket. The center is slower and his ball-handling ability usually does not match the point guard.

The center can, however, rebound well and jump high. He intimidates smaller players because of an awesome ability to block shots. The

center also is good at positioning himself to receive the ball and score.

In contrast, the point guard "quarterbacks" the team. He is the leader and must be able to recognize the type of defense the opponent is playing and call the appropriate offense. He directs other players to their proper positions and controls the tempo of the game.

The point guard is called on many times to get the ball to a teammate who is in scoring position. A good point guard, the ultimate team player, makes his teammates better players because he isn't selfish with the ball.

The center mostly scores points close to the basket and gets rebounds. When the team needs to score, the center takes the responsibility for doing so. As a receiver, the center gets the ball from the point guard and scores. He maneuvers around near the basket, making himself available to receive the ball.

On defense, the center keeps his opponents from getting the ball near the basket, using his considerable size to muscle people away from easy scoring range. He is able to see the court

well from this defensive position. He talks to his teammates and directs their defensive moves when necessary.

We have here two basketball players. The point guard, who is usually short and fast, leads the offense. He also controls the pace of the game. The center, in contrast, is a big man and high jumper who leads the defense and controls offensive and defensive rebounds.

These two dominant positions in basketball are the foundation of a good team. Much of a team's success depends on how the point guard and center work together and their ability to lead the team.

Inupiaq Eskimo Wayne Westlake, who plans to become a certified teacher, wrote this piece in a writing class at Chukchi College, a branch campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Westlake, a licensed electrician and father of three children, has coached basketball at Kiana High School since 1981 and has led teams to two state championships. Chukchi News and Information Service is a writing project of Chukchi College.