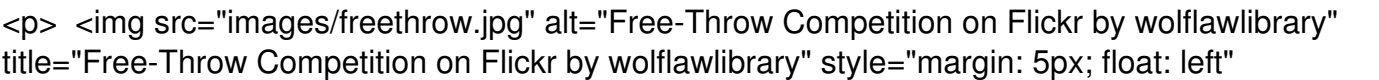


## The Lost Art Of The Free Throw | Allan Besselink

Written by Allan Besselink

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It's 15 feet to the basket, 19 feet to the baseline. The distance never changes. The shot remains the same - over and over again.

Some call it a "free throw" ... a "foul shot" ... others call it a "charity shot". Over the course of a basketball lifetime, you will shoot thousands of them. You've been doing it since you were old enough (and strong enough) to do so. And the mechanics haven't changed since you started playing the game.

One ball, one smooth motion, one release, one arc, one swish. Just 15 feet ... over ... and over ... and over ... just you and the ball and the hoop ...

Surely, after a few thousand repetitions, with some coaching, you could learn to drain a minimum of 70 to 80% of them. That doesn't sound at all unreasonable. Purely examining the shot as a motor task alone, I could easily envision 80% being reasonable.

At least that's what you'd think.

But here's the worst of it - I just watched yet another team self-destruct in the NCAA tournament tonight - my beloved Texas Longhorns - because they couldn't hit from the charity stripe. It's been a problem all season. It's hard to believe that it ended up just a 5 point loss, [74 - 69](http://www.sportsnetwork.com/merge/tsnform.aspx?c=charlotte2&page=cbask/scores/final/boxscore.aspx?GAMEID=44099 "UT/Duke box score"), given that they only hit 64%.

We've seen it happen many times before - far too many times. You know the scenario - fabulous team, phenomenal athletes - but couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. It is something that absolutely drives me crazy. Step up to the line and drain it - it's not like you haven't practiced it 10,000 times before!

When I think of free throws, my mind harkens back to Larry Bird. Bird had a career free throw percentage of 88% - to put him #10 on the all-time list. For grins, number one is Mark Price at 90.4%, with Steve Nash coming in at 90.0%. Now that's a great example of someone taking advantage of the charity.

Of course, we could always talk about the Hall of Shame for free throw shooting, which without question has to go to Shaquille O'Neill, at least in the modern era. That brings new definition to "brick" - something only a building contractor could really appreciate. He's currently weighing in (no pun intended) at 52.8%. I think that Wilt Chamberlain is the all-time lowest at 51.1%. It's a good thing that neither of them has had to depend on their free throw shooting!

But alas, the Longhorns have struggled with this all season. The Big Dance will always pull out your weaknesses - sooner or later, they come back to haunt you. Tonight was that night.