

## How does one define toughness in basketball?

You have doubtless heard, countless times, about a coach preaching "toughness" to his team. A team or player needs to be tougher, or their toughness is being questioned.

Are coaches talking about Chuck Norris toughness? Do they mean Jack Youngblood playing on a broken leg in the NFL playoffs? Are they referring to Ronnie Lott having his finger amputated so he could play a football game? Or is it Randall "Tex" Cobb taking a bloody beating in the ring but never going down to the canvas?

What exactly is toughness in the context of college basketball? In the Gonzaga-Tennessee game, while the Volunteers were bending over at the waist, 7-foot-5 reserve big man Will Foster dove on the floor for a loose ball, secured the ball and passed it out, and Gonzaga got a layup and a foul in transition on the other end. Gonzaga went to overtime and won. Without Foster's "toughness" play, the Zags go home with a loss.

Here are just a few examples of how you can demonstrate true "toughness" in college basketball:

- Going after rebounds with both hands.
- Stepping to the line and knocking down pressure free throws, especially when tired.
- Talking on defense and letting your teammates know that you are there in case they get beat.
- Bump and stand up a cutter.
- Close out to a shooter under control.
- Sticking with your team's defensive principles, and doing it under pressure.
- Having a sense of urgency to stop the other team from scoring, not just your man.
- Getting on the floor for a loose ball.
- Taking a charge.
- Getting down in a stance and staying there.
- Finishing plays.
- Setting up your man and making hard cuts.
- Getting your teammates together and keeping them together on the road.
- Not allowing yourself to get screened.
- Moving on to the next play, and displaying positive body language to give confidence to your teammates.
- Sprinting in transition, both on offense and back on defense.
- Filling your tank on the defensive end, and not the offensive end.
- Putting a body on somebody.
- Jumping to the ball, and taking away the ball side of the cut.
- Catching and facing the defense against pressure, not catching and dribbling.
- Blocking out on Free Throw situations every time.
- Taking good shots, and having the judgment to pass up challenged ones.

Toughness isn't just about being physical. It is far more than that. It is mental and physical discipline under pressure, to do the right thing every time