

Ball Hog!!!

I'm hearing a lot anymore about ball hogs. As a non-parent, I'm alternately amused and saddened when I hear the term applied to youth players. Everyone has an agenda. I think the term ball hog springs out of jealousy. I'll bet you dollars to donuts that Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Diana Taurasi, Cynthia Cooper and Lisa Leslie were all called ball hogs at one time or another when they played grade school and high school ball. Further, I'll also bet than none of those who leveled the charge made it to the pros, let alone to college ball (at any level). So, there is an element of sour grapes involved.



There are ball hog hats...

In girls basketball, the charge is even more of a problem than in boys hoops. Unlike boys, girls have built into their personalities an overwrought sense of democracy when it comes to sports. If Susie took the last two shots for her team (whether she missed them or not), she better let someone else try the next shot. And, heaven forbid Susie actually takes a *third* consecutive shot. "*Ball hog!!*" "Hey! You've got *teammates!!*" "Ever hear of *passing* the ball?!?" At conflict with the pressures from parents and their peers to give everyone an equal chance, you have ESPN, Sports Illustrated, and any number of interviews with college and pro coaches that mention "go to" players and players who "carry the team" on their shoulders. By definition, these players would have to, *at least some of the time*, play selfishly. And yet, it's precisely these players who win MVP, All-Tournament Team, and Player of the Year awards. Girls get a lot of pressure from both sides. "My coach wants me to take it to the hoop all game long. When I do that, my teammates hate me. What should I do?" It's not easy to sort all of this out.

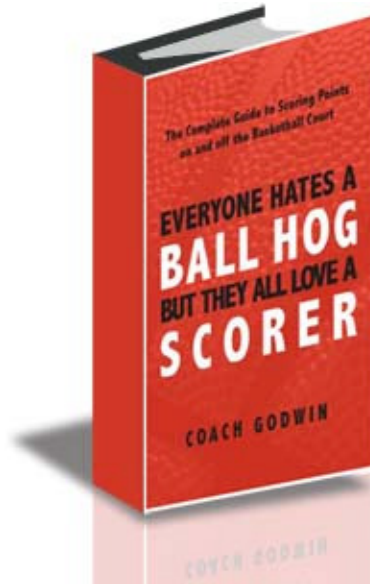


There are ball hog t-shirts...

My own view of the situation is that basketball is a team game composed of great individuals. There are times, especially with girls teams, where you have to encourage your better athletes toward somewhat "selfish" play. But is it really being selfish if a girl that has the ability -- the gift -- to score 25 points a night actually goes out and does so? Twenty-five points is a huge contribution. It dramatically increases the chances of her team winning the game. And that's the idea, right? So, a great individual performance seems, to me, to be cause for general celebration -- not condemnation -- from her teammates. And not every player has the skill or talent to score 25 points in a game. Most won't ever score 25 in a game *over their entire playing career*. If your team has such a girl, doesn't it make sense to use her? Doesn't it make sense to turn her loose on other teams? The more she is successful, the less strain there is on everyone else to come up big.

Lastly, there is the fact that much of the game of basketball is free market. There are checks and balances. If one girl keeps shooting over and over and over (and, we assume, she is making her shots), the other team will allocate more of their defensive resources toward containing her. It may get to the point of double or triple teaming the star player. At this point, things should be opening up like crazy for her teammates to start sharing the load. And, if the star player is mature and wise about it, she'll recognize the changed situation on the court and work her teammates into things a lot more. If she's triple teamed and she **STILL** continues to effectively score, then every teammate of hers should honestly praise their own Supreme Being for giving them the opportunity to play with such a

special, phenomenal player. The idea in basketball is to win the game any way you can without compromising sportsmanship. As a coach, the players I want to have shooting the ball most often are the ones with the best chance of making their attempts. It goes against the ingrained democratic principles of most girls, but that's basketball. If we don't care about winning, then we're back to YMCA league for little kids. No scores are kept. Every player plays the same amount of time. Standing out from the crowd is discouraged. Everyone is equal. Competition and being aggressive aren't some alien, unbecoming, inhuman qualities. They are a big part of what life is! We compete in class to get the best grades. We compete to get into the best schools. We compete to get the best jobs and promotions. Hardly anyone rails against those forms of everyday aggressiveness. Yet, we'll derisively call a girl a ball hog when all she's doing is trying to win the game.



There are even ball hog books.

To all the girls who have been called a ball hog, I would suggest that you not be hurt or embarrassed. Keep in mind that what makes people call you that are their own inadequacies and shortcomings. In other words, they are jealous of you, or, perhaps, they don't fully understand competitive sports.

(This article does not pertain to those players out there who are real "problem players" on their teams. Yes, there are girls who think of themselves as separate and above their teams. These girls, though, usually have a lot more names that they are called other than "ball hog.")

Most of those names cannot be printed here! These are players that shouldn't even be playing basketball and whose coaches should remove them from their rosters. This article deals with the girl who usually is the high scorer on her team and who gets more touches than most of her teammates. Her only apparent crime is that she puts the ball in the basket more than everybody else.)

Jim Charles