

Transcript

Chris Titley

Welcome to Scoreboard, the podcast that explores how athletes, both current and retired, define success beyond the game. Each episode dives into the mindset, financial decisions and career choices that shape their personal scoreboard, whether they're still in the arena or transitioning to life after sport.

Chris Titley

From victories to challenges, we reveal how athletes take charge of their own paths and decide what truly matters on their scoreboard of life. I'm your host, Chris Titley, and welcome to Scoreboard. Hi, it's Chris Titley here, and as this week's episode of Scoreboard, I'm joined by Cal Bruton.

Chris Titley

Cal, thank you so much for being part of this series.

Cal Bruton

My pleasure, Chris. Thank you for inviting me.

Chris Titley

Cal, I'm interested to know why basketball has been such a love of yours in your entire life.

Cal Bruton

Well, I guess there was the one sport that I was able to play by myself.

Cal Bruton

I grew up with two actually handicapped and another one that was seven years my junior. Basketball gave me a chance to to play a sport that, you know, I can talk to myself and pretend I was in the game winning situation, taking the last shot whereby I played all sports, football.

Cal Bruton

I was a quarterback for the Queens Falcons, our local team in the Popwater Football League, and I played baseball as a superstar for my high school. So I needed teammates for all those sports. Basketball just gave me that opportunity to just go work on my game after watching an NBA game and or just going to watch the big guys in the park and try to emulate what I seen them do.

Cal Bruton

So it was a it was a pretty good sport to keep me occupied.

Chris Titley

And Cal, do you remember the early days of when you picked up that first basketball and you thought, this is this is pretty cool. I can work on this.

Cal Bruton

Yes, I remember I was in Brooklyn, New York, playing at my public school and in the yard. then just throwing up some hoops. And then I have the friend that was pretty good at it already, Michael Moore, I never forget him.

Cal Bruton

And he used to show me a few things. And then before you know, we're playing one -on -one and he just spanked me every day until I decided that enough is enough, I got to get better at this.

Chris Titley

And what did you, what do you think about as a basketball player to get better?

Chris Titley

Was it based on skills? Was it based on fitness at the time? Like what was there something in your head going actually, how do I get better? Or is it just practice?

Cal Bruton

It was, it was definitely practice.

Cal Bruton

And it was really come down to the perfect practice. You know, I learned that probably that term, you know but I've always applied it that perfect practice makes perfect. So I tried my best to emulate some of the top players that I used to see and you know, whether it was their shot or the way they held the ball.

Cal Bruton

And those are the things I took to heart and put a little extra time into it.

Chris Titley

And Cal, do you want to talk about the journey of coming to Australia? You've got a bit of an Aussie twang in your accent, but not an entirely Aussie twang.

Chris Titley

The journey of coming over to Australia and how that all came about.

Cal Bruton

Coming to Australia was an interesting move. I was working on a trash truck in Kansas with a young family, two young boys, ages seven and three, and all of a sudden I missed out on a professional contract, or the MBA, and I started to work on the trash truck, and I also re-enrolled in university to finish my degree in broadcasting.

Cal Bruton

And then a gentleman who had seen me play at the Kansas City Kings camp, who are now the Sacramento Kings, had a gentleman ring me up from Kansas City. They just happened to contact my university to see if they could locate me, and I just happened to be on the campus at that time.

Cal Bruton

I saw the guy pointing upstairs, and someone must have said, oh, there's Cal, sitting up in the 10,000 seat stadium. And they decided to come up after me, but I thought they were coming to kick me out because it was a closed session, so I was leaving when they yelled back and said, hey, we got a gentleman that's trying to reach you from Kansas City.

Cal Bruton

They were talking to me about going to Australia. I was like, really? I said, I didn't know anything about Australian basketball. So he said, this is all right if I make the call back and tell him that you're interested and give him your phone number so he can call you at home.

Cal Bruton

And sure enough, I received a call from a Dr. David Atkins a few days later, at about four o'clock in the morning, right when I was getting ready for the trash, and he suggested that maybe I tuck my trash truck in and come play basketball in Australia.

Cal Bruton

I thought it was Austria. It's winter, and I had snow on the ground. I was behind in my route. wife to be there to drive the truck while my young fellas were taking off the lids of the garbage cans and put them back on while I go pick up the trash and dump it.

Cal Bruton

And they thought it was fun and games when I was exhausted, but I caught up on the route. And then he told me, he rang me back and told me to make a decision whether I wanted to come or not, because I would have to leave on a Wednesday.

Cal Bruton

And this was like on a Monday morning, in order to get there by Friday, I thought, where is this place? That's when I realised I was going through a different time zone. And, and I accepted the deal to come out to play in Australia in the first year of the

Chris Titley

Cal, before we get on to your, your playing time here in Australia, I'm interested to know your relationship with basketball when you then sort of thought, okay, you didn't the NBA may not have been a dream that you could fulfill and you went to a job and you're enrolled in university, was it?

Chris Titley

Was it a throw in the towel or did you have in the back of the mind? There's something there. I just want to keep playing

Cal Bruton

. No, I definitely was continuing to play. I played in under six foot league after getting cut from San Antonio.

Cal Bruton

I, you know, I just thought it was some things I need to work on. So playing in under six foot league, you playing against guys your size so I can work on some different things. And and I was always inspiring to play.

Cal Bruton

I played what you call the it was like the G League.

Chris Titley

Yes, the one before the NBA.

Cal Bruton

And and I went through that. And that was a pretty good exercise to to travel a little bit around the Midwest and states and represent Wichita, Kansas in that it was all in the Midwest.

Cal Bruton

And sure enough, I I came out of being one of the top players in the comp. I always felt that I had the skill set. And this is I have some pro players tell me the same. You know, don't give up, you know, keep going, young fellow, you know, little fellow, whatever they think.

Cal Bruton

But I decided that I would just play the game as long as I was enjoying it. And also I was starting to do some coaching as well. And I started a little local comp. And then when I got the opportunity to come, I thought, yeah, well, here's my chance.

Cal Bruton

It was only for four hundred bucks a week, you know, and and you got your board and I got some some food put in my fridge. But it was a it was a professional contract to me and it was in another country.

Cal Bruton

So I was going to make the most of it.

Chris Titley

And when you worked out that Australia wasn't in Europe and you arrived in your first day to Australia, do you remember it pretty clearly?

Cal Bruton

I do. I remember it was a long trip as a roughly 24 hours, you know, because back then they called it the milk run.

Cal Bruton

You had to fly from Wichita to Denver, from Denver to San Francisco. I had to get a visa and my passport updated. Then from there to Hawaii, from Hawaii to New Zealand, to Auckland, Auckland to Sydney.

Cal Bruton

I thought, Jesus Christ, like, well, then I got from Sydney to Brisbane and landed on the tarmac, they didn't even have an airport. And I was cooking because I had a wool coat with a fur collar and wool pants and boots and a Sherlock Holmes hat just in case my ears got cold.

Cal Bruton

I can pull the mask, the ear muffs down over my ears and I landed in February right on summer. It was pretty hot. And yeah, that was kind of my wake up call. Once I landed, they told me to shower real quick.

Cal Bruton

They wanted to work me out because the television cameras were at the stadium and they wanted to see me play and told me that they'd meet them at the AuchenIDome. I thought, gee, the Auchen Dome.

Chris Titley

Auchenflower , one of the great basketball stadiums in Queensland. Did they greet you at the airport with a little sign?

Cal Bruton

and some the manager, Fred Ben. dungeon. God bless us both those men are still with us.

Cal Bruton

And then also Harold Peacock who was God bless us.

Chris Titley

I remember Harold from many many years ago as a junior following the bullets.

Chris Titley

Now let's talk about the bullets time in Brisbane. Did you enjoy Brisbane?

Cal Bruton

I did yeah Brisbane was a nice wonderful wake -up call nice transition from the winter of Kansas where it was minus 37 degrees to wear shorts and t -shirts every day you know. And you know Dave Atkins didn't let us go slack out a roommate or I should say a next -door apartment.

Cal Bruton

Dan Hickett who was also from Kansas a 6 foot 11 guy who was very very good basketballer and you know although he didn't play a lot at K -State where he went to school but you know here he was a he's a true big man.

Cal Bruton

So so really had a chance to to kind of get with him and say okay Dan let's do this big Dan the rebound man and uh and we just went to work straight away. We both had a passion for the game and we both wanted to teach the game we were going to all the schools that Dave Atkins used to take us to and we learned so much about the culture and everything right back then.

Cal Bruton

So that was good it was good to to come through Brisbane at that point in time where the game was pretty raw. There wasn't many basketball courts around and most of them was netball rings.

Chris Titley

No that's right and I think I'm just touching on that topic there's basketballs had a bit of a resurgence uh in Australia and and particularly in Brisbane my kids play at a local club and they've been inundated with junior participation.

Chris Titley

Can you talk about the the time now I suppose where basketball is getting a bit of a resurgence and why do you think that is?

Cal Bruton

Well obviously television plays a big part in that uh the the um Larry Kesselman you know the marketing that he puts behind all that is this huge um you know it's on mini games it's on full -time games it's doing the weak replays uh you got all the shows surrounding you know,

Cal Bruton

overtime and nothing but net and you name it. So I think the awareness factor is huge now. And as a result of that, you get a lot of young people wanting to learn how to play the game. I'm still heavily involved with teaching the game to youngsters around the country.

Cal Bruton

And I get to see how enthusiastic these young players are. All of them would like to improve their games and obviously go to the NBA or go to college or even play NBL or NBL1, but the pathways are there now for all these youngsters, men and women, boys and girls, to use the pathway and the tool and engagement to get themselves to a better place.

Cal Bruton

So, yeah, I could see how the game is just really, really blossom over the last, you know, say six, seven years.

Chris Titley

And just on that with the kids these days, potentially wanting to play in the elite level, play professional sport for money, was that in your mind at the time to play for money or was it just to play thinking that you're good and you love playing?

Cal Bruton

I think it was a bit of both. I definitely love playing and love competing, but also you want to make a living, you realize once you come out of college, like, geez, I got to eat, I got to have a roof on my head.

Chris Titley

The kids as well, yep.

Cal Bruton

And in my case, I had two young kids, like I came across here by myself and left my kids at home. So I had to send all my money back to make sure they were straight. And then eventually I came back here with them all, seven months later, I think it was, and having everyone here and then having another son, I think I was only playing in the whole country that had kids and was actually playing for a living and full -time,

Cal Bruton

full -time. I mean, I was coaching seven days a week, the junior development skills schools from under 10s right through to under 18s. And then eventually coaching the senior team as well, as a playing coach.

Cal Bruton

So I had a pretty hectic schedule, almost to the point where I could have probably burnt out, but to make sure that, you know, I put family first on a lot of times to take off and have a little bit of a break with them.

Cal Bruton

And of course my boys love the game as well. It made it easier. They hung out with me and we all kind of played together. So that was good.

Chris Titley

When you look back at your NBL playing career, before we get onto coaching, 250 games over four clubs, how do you describe it now looking back at it?

Cal Bruton

Yeah, it was pioneering stuff, you know? I feel very proud to know that I've come through that era, whereby, you know, I wasn't getting paid a lot of money. Everyone thinks they're hard. Yeah, you know, shit, cow's the only guy getting paid.

Cal Bruton

Well, you know, when you're talking about, talk about 20 grand and you've got a family of five and you're paying a mortgage and a car note and you have to perform. Because they would strictly send you home if you didn't live up to their expectations.

Cal Bruton

I eventually had to drop off that note and go sell women's shoes for a living, at Vogue Shoes. And a lot of people would have had other jobs as well, I'd imagine. Yeah, every player really worked. We used to train in the evening.

Cal Bruton

But when I was actually cultivating grassroots basketball for seven days a week for a good five years in a row around the clock, then you know that you've dedicated to the sport. A lot of those players still talk to me about that.

Cal Bruton

And I get grandparents telling me that, you know, you're coaching my grandkids now, like still. I'm still at it. So I think, you know, basketball was more of a passion project as well as a career. I wanted to see young people improve.

Cal Bruton

Obviously with my sons, I wanted to see them improve and use the vehicle and now I have five sons and a daughter and all my boys have played at a reasonable level. They represent the States and someone represented obviously internationally.

Cal Bruton

I've got a grandson now that's on the international scene. So yeah, basketball has just been tremendous for myself and my family and I'm still, like I said, just turned 70 last week and-

Chris Titley

Happy birthday.

Cal Bruton

Yeah, thank you. Thank you. And still healthy here, my father -in -law as they used to be. But I enjoy seeing young people improve and use this vehicle because it can take you all over the world, which is indicative by my son CJ being in China now, coaching.

Cal Bruton

Absolutely. Cal, I'm interested to know at the top of your game, when you felt like you were at the top of your game, what sort of characteristics that you had at the time that was it skills? Was it fitness?

Cal Bruton

Was it strategy? Were you eating well? Like was there lots of different things or was there something else that you thought that I've just got to keep going because I want to be the best in my business?

Chris Titley

No, that's a good call, Chris. I definitely want to be the best. I pride in myself on being the number one player in the country. You know, I don't often get a chance to say it but I don't think it's anybody including Andrew Gays and the likes of his status that led the league in scoring, led the NBL in assists, led the NBL in three point percentage and been a champion player and coach.

Cal Bruton

And I did this a lot while I was in my late 20s, early 30s, you know, leading the way, won Victorian titles, won MVPs in Victoria, South Australia, interstate stuff, won championships there as well as MVPs.

Cal Bruton

And I think it was my desire to continue to improve. Fitness -wise, I used to run around with a... Stop watching my hand, you know running four hundreds two hundreds No one would probably know but I was always prepared to be the last man standing on the court And you know the old cliché prior preparation beats that PP performance Yeah, wasn't ever gonna get me because I was always in the gym, you know making 100 free throws in a row If I miss that 90,

Cal Bruton

I'm still in there starting again And you know sometimes wife had to come in and rebound the basketball just so I can get out of there dinner's ready Yeah, that was it I wanted to be the best you know making all -star teams and You know even to the point where I had to pack up my family and and leave because some clubs Uh, you know because I became a strange citizen.

Cal Bruton

I was had that flexibility And I obviously represented Australia, you know through the 85 88 period And I really felt that in order for me to survive here. I had to a citizen because I've seen so many Americans get kicked to the curb and I was not going to be one of them because I had the responsibility of a family here.

Chris Titley

When you're walking down the street and people recognize you and they say it's Cal Bruton and they come and say hello and you might be having a coffee with your family or whatnot, how does that make you feel?

Cal Bruton

It makes me feel great. Sometimes, you know, I've never ever knocked anyone back, you know, always try to be kind and courteous. My goal was always, my grandson actually came out with the acronym, the Bruton acronym, you know, and he was nine years old, like be kind to others, you know, don't cost you anything.

Cal Bruton

Respect your elders. In my case, just show respect for everyone. They got to use your manners. My mom always taught me that, you know, and my grandson related that he heard it from his dad, you know, CJ.

Cal Bruton

Trust in God, you know, which, you know, I'll carry open Bible in my house and, you know, I'll go read a verse and, you know, put my hand on it and count my blessings. To own your mistakes, you know, we're all going to make them.

Cal Bruton

But, you know, I always put my hand up and I like to think that, you know, people will know me understand that, you know, that I'm going to be real with them. And my number one is what he, my grandson said, Pop said, you never give up.

Cal Bruton

And I've had that many knock backs, you know, like, and I'm thinking, yeah, why should I take a step back, even though someone else doesn't want me, you know, and just give up and don't go anymore, for instance, you know, winning championships and then having to move on to another destination because, you know, build that club up and they don't feel that they need your services anymore.

Cal Bruton

So I just said, well, okay, well, that's the way you feel about it. I'll see you at the top on my next, on my next journey. Yeah. And that's happened on a few occasions, actually. That's a fabulous, fabulous acronym.

Chris Titley

And I need to write that down later and talk to my kids about that. Just on some characteristics, Cal, you sound very resilient. Do you remember? like, you probably missed a number of shots in your life and you've lost a number of games as player and as coach.

Chris Titley

How important is resilience when it comes to sport?

Cal Bruton

Oh, utmost importance. You got to, you definitely got to persevere through those difficult times, you know. And if you learn how to handle those appropriately, it can help you grow in a lot of respects.

Cal Bruton

And I took pride in that. That was another acronym. I knew I had to persevere and we talked about respect. I knew I had to get more intelligent about the way I went about my business, being investigative in the new measures and learning how to stay ahead of the curve.

Cal Bruton

The D's was my backbone or my structure. It was all about it. It's all about the discipline staying on it every day and the details on how I was going to go about charting my goals and Achieving them as well.

Cal Bruton

So so the the D's was important, but none of that was going to happen without the effort and I put forth always effort, you know, I'm I'm constant being a student of the game, you know and trying to explore different ways to continue to help it grow as I Mentioned earlier.

Cal Bruton

I'm I'm still coaching from under 10s creatures program to Coaching the under 18 hoop fest took a team over there To pursue they'll participate in that which gave these young people tremendous experience and two young Sudanese players in particular that I had to pay For to go over there to help them have an opportunity.

Cal Bruton

So through my foundation I'm getting a great opportunity to spread the spread that goodness and help these kids See that they could whatever happened for me as being a Hall of Famer and all that. Well, it can happen for you, too Yeah, absolutely.

Chris Titley

Do you touched on there the word goal? Were you a goal setter and if you were how far out was your goal?

Cal Bruton

I had short -term goals Mid -term goals long -term goals the long -term goals now is to build this foundation up to where it's nationally renowned Internationally renowned and have my sons and my daughter, you know, take the baton and run with it You know, so

Chris Titley

to set up a legacy basically you think the Cal Bruton legacy.

Cal Bruton

They tell me I got one So most people tell me yeah that it's been a tremendous legacy that I've set up for my family and I but I think at the end of the day you you want to Be in a position where you can you can open the door and help somewhere else do it, you know And I believe that wholeheartedly that if you do help others It comes back to you tenfold might not be when you wanted to you know, but eventually it will So,

Cal Bruton

you know when I look back at my career, I think wow i'm seeing these players succeed and go ahead and sometimes they move on and forget about you. They don't even want to even recognize you have to even help them get to.

Cal Bruton

That's fine, that's okay. I can still look them in the eye and know that I gave my effort. And at some point I feel they're gonna come around and say, wow, thank you, man. I really appreciate you. So I don't look for that, never have, and I teach my kids not to as well.

Cal Bruton

CJ, as of what he had to go through recently, I said, hey, welcome to my world. It happens and his family has now moved to Canberra so that we're all assisting them right now and watching them settle in.

Cal Bruton

Well, he's over in China, and it just happened to all my sons in one place or another. But I teach them to just, yeah, turn the page. Yeah, you got to put two eggs in your shoes and beat it and make like a breeze and blow.

Chris Titley

Cal, I'm going to throw some words out there now, which may or may not describe your personality. I'd love you to say yes or no and explain a little bit whether you are that person or not.

Chris Titley

I'm going to start with the word competitive.

Cal Bruton

Yes. To the max, actually. I like to win. It's just know if, as a bust about it, if I lose, I'm not a sore loser, but I'm going to figure out a way to beat you next time that's where I go about it.

Chris Titley

Are you serious?

Cal Bruton

Very. But I'm a fun guy as well, so I don't let the seriousness dominate my personality other than to take the hits and learn from them and move on, but I like to have fun. My philosophy, as you would have heard, run, stun, and have some fun.

Chris Titley

That's it.

Chris Titley

What about nervous? Do you get nervous?

Cal Bruton

No, I've got my father-in-law here. He's almost asking the question for me, but no, he knows me very well. I don't get nervous because I prepare. I think when you prepare for something, don't be nervous about it.

Cal Bruton

You just try to really focus in on the task at hand and the task at hand. I think it's important to really lock in when it comes to that situation.

Chris Titley

Superstitious.

Cal Bruton

Yes. Gee, my left eye blinks too much.

Cal Bruton

That means you're not going to be good luck, so I've got to rub it and everything and stop it from blinking. But yeah, I'm superstitious to an extent.

Chris Titley

Structured.

Cal Bruton

Structured, yes. Although my wife would tell me that I need to get into my diary a little bit better than I do, but I do have a program that I follow because of my aging body.

Cal Bruton

but I kind of let my body take over sometimes. I need rest, I rest, but I'm known to drive 16 hours straight to go to the destination. And yeah, obviously take breaks in between just to stretch your legs and get a coffee or whatever, but I'm structured in what I have to do and how I go about it.

Cal Bruton

And I try to really sort of zero in on the importance of where I'm going. I feel like most of the things I do it's going to be a mission statement in the end of the day.

Chris Titley

I got two more, confident.

Cal Bruton

Very, I'm a very confident person.

Cal Bruton

I believe in myself, having grown up without my dad, who I lost when I was seven years of age. And my mom told me at the age of eight that I'm the man of the house. So I took that very personally and became confident about the way I carried myself.

Cal Bruton

And I like to think the way I present myself. nice things. Clothes, I like to wear. My mom told me I got to have always my head shaved nice or cut nice when I had hair. But also the first thing people look at is your head and your feet.

Cal Bruton

So I always keep my little white Air Force Ones in good nick or I might have some patent leather shoes on when I have my suit on. So yeah, I try to be confident about the way I present myself.

Chris Titley

And the last one is empathetic.

Cal Bruton

Yes, I think I have empathy to the max probably almost too much because if someone calls me or someone needs a favor, I'm probably the first person to try to put my hand up and find out a way how I can help.

Cal Bruton

So yeah, I got a lot of empathy for particularly people that go through hard times. I know what it's like for myself having gone through some difficult challenges. And as I mentioned, I think that's what makes you a whole being when you're empathetic and you got all the quality characteristics that you asked me earlier.

Chris Titley

One final question. I've got kids and you've got kids and grandkids and they're out there playing sport. We live in a wonderful country here in Australia. What's some advice that you'd give them now just to get out there and to play sports?

Chris Titley

Some might have their eye on the prize, some might get picked in under 12 rep teams or whatever it might be. But some advice from you?

Cal Bruton

I would say, obviously, to believe in yourself. And that's the most important.

Cal Bruton

If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. So you have to go about believing yourself. And maybe again, I can use another acronym for them. You got to pack your swag in your bag. That's a skill set.

Cal Bruton

Whatever your passion is that you can apply your skill set to, go for it because that's going to give you the little leverage that you need to keep it going. You got to have a work ethic. I don't believe there's a player or person in this country that working harder than I do.

Cal Bruton

You know, that's including all the big wigs that got the million dollars and all that. You know, you might see me, you know, on a recent schedule having to go from here to the Blitz and then go from the Blitz and work to camp in Rockhampton then fly from Rockhampton and to Brisbane and drop a car and then I'll start driving car to Brisbane then jump on a plane back to Canberra then hop on a plane to Perth and then do the coaching there then hop on a plane back to Canberra,

Cal Bruton

get changed my bag my suitcase and drive four hours to Wagga Wagga so I do a four -day workshop. Then I get a chance to come on for my birthday, right? That's the schedule that I, all of a sudden go, whoa, I done locked myself into this, I got to get it.

Cal Bruton

You know, so the work ethic is important that you don't let anybody down. Your attitude is your altitude. How do you want to rise? I think that's my prayer right there. You know, I try to pack a great attitude.

Cal Bruton

I try to spread that. to all my kids, I say attitudes are contagious, is yours worth catching, you know? So I bring that to the table. And the last thing is that we talked about earlier, the goals, you know, you got to keep setting them.

Cal Bruton

You got to keep promoting where you want to be and how long it will take for you to get there, you know? And again, now that I'm in my seventies, I'm starting to, the clock's ticking, right? And there's some things that I really want to achieve.

Cal Bruton

And, you know, I sit on different platforms at the moment. I try to work my social media so people know, you know? And also so I can keep my family in touch in the States, which recently I was denied a trip to get back to the US, which really hurt me deeply.

Cal Bruton

They wouldn't let me on the plane for whatever reason, still haven't told me. And I couldn't see my two younger sisters who daily really miss me. I'm still trying to find someone in the government to help me out here, you know?

Cal Bruton

But, you know, it's been, everything I do is, it's always about looking in the future, more so for my kids than myself. But we've been able to be a really good family and promote good things. And I take a lot of pride in that.

Chris Titley

Cal, thank you so much for taking your time out today to talk on the Scoreboard podcast. And I really do appreciate your insights as a player, as a coach, as a human being, your attitude and your work ethic and also some advice that you can give to the younger audience and really look forward to meeting in person at some point in time.

Cal Bruton

Thank you, Chris, for having me. I really appreciate it.