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**HEADLINE:** BOOKMARKS For U.S., easy route taking a toll

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**Michael LeGault** could hardly believe his eyes as he watched the American men's basketball team play in the 2004 Summer Olympics.

"We were supposed to have the best players in the world, and we were getting beat by other countries," he says. "It was obvious that we didn't have the abilities anymore. Our team didn't know how to dribble or shoot or pass - the fundamentals."

The loss stung. But it gnawed on him in another way. Why, he wondered, did the U.S. lose in the game it had perfected and owned? This was another piece of the puzzle he had long been chewing over. What was happening in America? Why was it losing its edge on so many fronts? Slowly he began to see patterns.

"In our society we're getting more averse to the hard work it takes to learn basic skills," he explained in a phone conversation from his Toronto home recently. "Our basketball players may still be the best athletes, but they don't know the basics. And to me their loss was a metaphor for schools or companies not taking the time to learn the fundamentals."

We don't sweat the details anymore, he thought. Then along came Malcolm Gladwell's bestseller, "Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking," and LeGault could no longer sit it out. He got into the conversation, writing "Think!: Why Crucial Decisions Can't Be Made in the Blink of an Eye."

His book explores the lack of critical thinking in today's society.

"No, it's not blink, it's think," he said. "Again, Gladwell is holding out the promise of a free lunch, something easy, and my reaction was no, we don't need any more of this. When it became a bestseller I thought, 'Here is proof. People want more easy, they want more automatic, they want blink.'"

LeGault, a Michigan native and an editor at Canada's Financial Post, believes Americans rely too much on intuitive and emotional thought - Gladwell's blink-of-the-eye decision that explodes from experience - rather than on critical analysis and logical reasoning.

"We want everything to be easy. We want to work without working out," LeGault says. He adds that political correctness is breeding faulty thinking that tends to downplay excellence and rigorous education and thought. Further, our schools are no longer emphasizing advanced math and science, as they did some 40 years ago in the age of the Sputnik.

The result is "knowledge dilution," as LeGault terms it, and an erosion of America's lead.

LeGault left the U.S. in 1987 when he married a Canadian, but he spends as much time in the U.S. as he does across the border. He has degrees in chemistry and biology; he believes parents should encourage children to opt for such rigorous disciplines.

America, LeGault said in our conversation, is looking inward - a danger signal. Historians say that's one reason civilizations decline. When people start fixating on their own emotions - case in point, the Romans - they stop reasoning and looking objectively at the world.

I asked for a suggestion to treat our ills. Get up an hour early to exercise the mind, just as you do the body, he said.

Yes, get up - and read.