

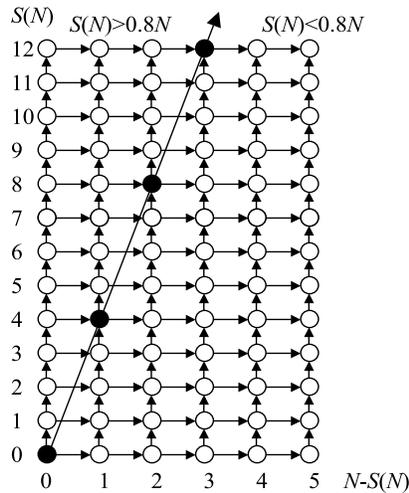
# Putnam Proof Without Words

Robert J. MacG. Dawson<sup>1</sup>  
 Saint Mary's University  
 Halifax, Nova Scotia,  
 Canada B3H 3C3  
 rdawson@stmarys.ca

From the 2004 William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition, A1:

Basketball star Shanille O'Keal's team statistician keeps track of the number,  $S(N)$ , of successful free throws she has made in her first  $N$  attempts of the season. Early in the season,  $S(N)$  was less than 80% of  $N$ , but by the end of the season,  $S(N)$  was more than 80%. Was there necessarily a moment in between when  $S(N)$  was exactly 80% of  $N$ ?

Answer: Yes. Proof:



The reader should now also be able to answer the following “riders” that did not form part of the competition question:

- Answer the same question assuming that Shanille had  $S(N) > 0.8N$  early in the season and  $S(N) < 0.8N$  at the end.
- What other values could be substituted for 80% in the original question?

<sup>1</sup>Supported by NSERC Canada