


COACHING 15-18 YEAR OLD PLAYERS

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8.1. CONSIDERING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

When the players reach the age of fifteen, they already have basketball experience, although there are remarkable individual differences among players. Some players master basic fundamentals better than others, some have developed physically better than others, etc. Coaches working with 15-18 year-olds, should understand these differences, assessing the particular resources and needs of each player (their stronger and weaker points) to decide the goals and the contents of training.

As we have seen in previous chapters, in mini-basketball and 13-14 year-old teams, training should be more global and standardised for all players. However, with 15-18 year-olds, training should be more *analytical* and *individualised*. At this stage of players' development it is important to consider their individual needs to widen players' resources, making sure that training helps every player to improve appropriately.

Following this pattern, coaches should consider that **physical preparation** is an important aspect of training with these players. With 15-16 year-olds it is important to prepare them for confronting, progressively, *higher loads* of *physical work*. Thus, when players are older (17-18 year-olds) they will be capable of assimilating more sophisticated training, lowering the risk of injuries that may occur when the demands of training exceed the players' capabilities.

Obviously, *endurance*, *strength* and *speed* are key aspects of the physical work to be considered, but coaches should also take into account *flexibility* and *coordination*. A common mistake is to underestimate the importance of flexibility and coordination; and many players limit their progress due to deficiencies in these aspects.

Players' physical individual needs should be assessed; then, with the help of experts in this field, coaches should devote part of the training programme to developing physical aspects.

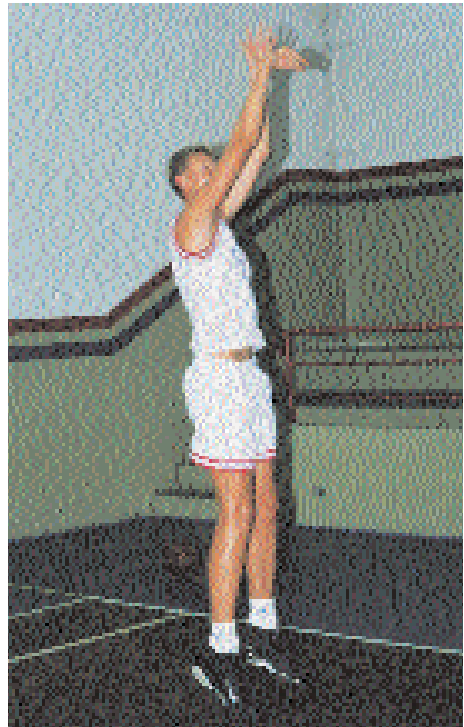
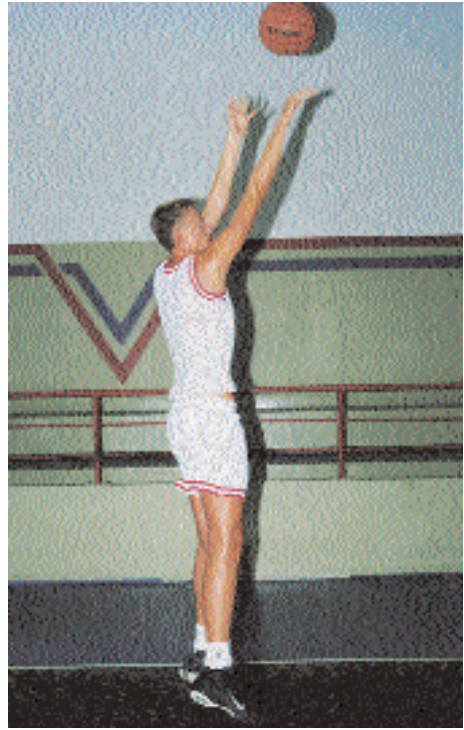
Likewise, players' technical individual needs should be assessed, so that coaches know how their players master basketball fundamentals and what they need to improve.

* For example: the coach may assess his/her players' shooting technique in depth; then, he/she should organise analytical training to improve individual deficiencies.

Following this example, a simple tool such as that shown in Table-23 may help coaches to assess players' individual needs with regard to basketball fundamentals.

| ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED | | COMMENTS |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------|
| B E F O R E S H O O T I N G | FEET | |
| | LEGS | |
| | UPPER BODY | |
| | HEAD | |
| | BALL'S POSITION | |
| | NON-SHOOTING ARM AND HAND | |
| | SHOOTING ARM | |
| | HAND HOLDING THE BALL | |
| D U R I N G A N D A F T E R S H O O T I N G | MOVE TO SHOOT | |
| | ARM THROWING THE BALL | |
| | HAND JUST AFTER THROWING | |
| | ARCH OF BALL'S PATHWAY | |
| | BALL SPINS | |
| | BODY STANCE AFTER THROWING | |

Table 23. Example of tool to assess individual needs, in this case related to shooting.



8.2. IMPROVING INDIVIDUAL FUNDAMENTALS

Besides analytical individualised work to improve basic fundamentals such as passing, dribbling or shooting, coaches should take into account other fundamentals which are usually given less importance during previous years. As an example, we will comment on «Moving Without the Ball», «Offensive Rebounding» and «Low Post Moves».

| | |
|---|---|
|  | Offensive Player |
|  | Offensive Player with the Ball |
|  | Defensive Player |
|  | Coach |
|  | Pass |
|  | Dribbling |
|  | Movement of Offensive Player Without the Ball |
|  | Screen |
|  | Screen and Following Movement |
|  | Movement of Defensive Player |

Table 24. Legend to follow the diagrams of this chapter.

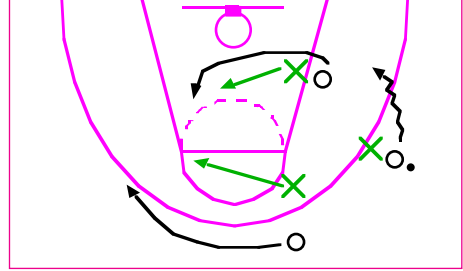
Moving Without the Ball

In offense, only one player has the ball whereas the other four must play without it. Therefore, moving without the ball is an essential part of the game. Coaches should emphasise this issue from mini-basketball onwards, and coaches working with 15-18 year-olds should spend time improving all the fundamentals involved.

Offensive players without the ball may move with one of the following purposes:

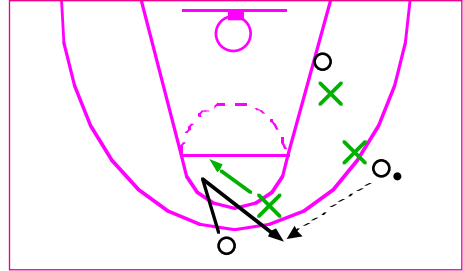
- to favour their teammate with the ball to play 1 on 1 against his/her defender by moving away from the ball, bringing with them their own defenders (Diagram-1);

Diag. 1



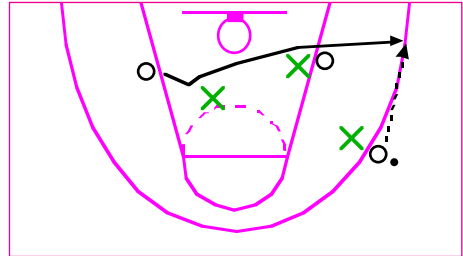
- to have a free passing lane to receive a pass from the teammate who has the ball (Diagram-2);

Diag. 2



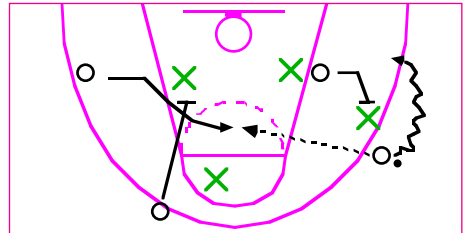
- to get open in a position to receive the ball and shoot, sometimes taking advantage of screens (Diagram-3);

Diag. 3



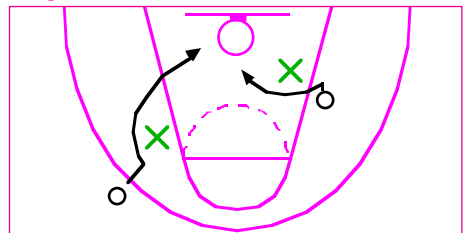
- to set screens for the teammates, either for the one with the ball or for the other three without the ball (Diagram-4).

Diag. 4



- to go for the offensive rebound (Diagram-5).

Diag. 5



Key aspects of moving efficiently without the ball are: appropriate body stance and balance, convincing faking, good footwork, proper speed, adequate running, and good stopping. Coaches working with 15-18 year-olds should assess their players in all these aspects and help them to improve deficiencies.

Body Stance

Basketball body stance is a basic position that allows players to perform. It is not a natural bodily position and, therefore, players need to be taught details such as the following:

- legs spread, a bit more than shoulder width; feet parallel;
- knees and hips slightly flexed, keeping the body's centre of gravity low;
- head up, being able to see the ball and the basket (do not look at the floor);
- upper body slightly flexed;
- body weight equally balanced on both feet, slightly on the toes;
- hands ready to receive the ball, with arms held close to the chest.



The proper position of the body is important before moving because it favours quicker action. And it is also important during the move because it enables the player to both catch the ball in a better situation for shooting, passing or penetrating, and to stop firmly for setting a screen or gaining the spot for the offensive rebound.

Concerning stance, the players must learn to differentiate when they should fully face the ball (this is, a stance facing the ball completely) and when they should face the basket while keeping their waist or neck turned to see the ball, ready to get it. As in other aspects, coaches must observe how their young players master these issues, and correct them if necessary.

Body Balance

Body balance relies on the basic position described above. However, players should learn to shift the degree of inflection of their legs, their weight from one leg to the other, and the inclination of their upper body to perform effective moves without the ball.

* For example: the player may flex one of his/her legs more than the other, stress his/her body weight on this leg and incline his/her upper body in this direction, so, he/she will be able to move his/her opponent to this side before he/she changes direction to the other side.

Faking

Convincing faking makes the defensive player pay attention and react in a way that will favour the purpose of the faker's next action.

* For example: a player who wants to take advantage of a teammates' screen may fake moving to the opposite side of the screen to provoke his/her defender's reaction to that side; then, he/she will move to the screen with a better chance of achieving his/her purpose.

Faking is a very important means of distracting the attention of the defender and to make him/her react contrary to the true intention of the faker.

The proper use of body balance and gestures, as well as change of speed, are crucial elements of convincing effective faking.

- Thus, in the first phase it is important that the faker use resources such as the inflection of his/her legs, bodily weight more stressed on one leg, upper body inclination, gestures with the head, the arms and the hands, and even facial expressions, to *convince* his/her defender of something that in fact is the opposite of what he/she actually wants to do.
- In the second phase, once the defender has reacted to the fake, change of speed will be important, so the player performs the subsequent action quicker and explosively.

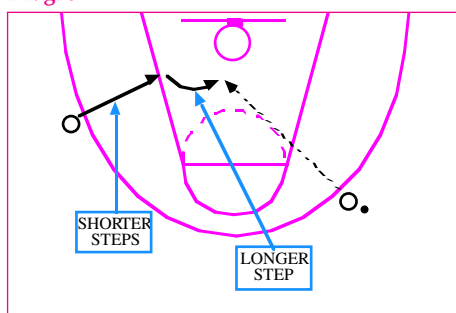
Footwork

The importance of footwork is obvious. If players cross their feet or do not pivot properly, they will not be able to move quickly and effectively. Although this aspect should be well developed at this age, it is advisable that coaches be alert, helping players who fail due to footwork basic deficiencies.

Footwork also includes using shorter or longer steps (and combining both) to beat the defender.

* For example: a player may use short steps while moving to the paint and then use a longer step at the same time he/she pivots, changes direction and increases speed to get the pass from a teammate (Diagram-6).

Diag. 6



As it is shown in this example, footwork is essential for changing direction, one of the most important moves without the ball.



Speed

The speed of the players' moves without the ball is a crucial aspect. Sometimes, these moves require maximum speed whereas at other times they need a slower pace. In many cases, they will benefit from a change of speed, such as the above faking example.

Maximum speed is «compulsory» when the players run the Fast-Break until they reach the other side; then they need to adjust their speed to get the adequate timing with the teammate handling the ball. Set offenses also require maximum speed for specific moves, although always using the proper timing.

Proper *change of speed* is one of the main resources of many great players. However, many elite players do not master this valuable fundamental because their coaches did not emphasise it enough when they were youngsters.

To develop change of speed it is not enough that the coach occasionally tell his/her players «change speed», «you have to change speed», etc. Furthermore, players must work on this aspect specifically.

With this aim in mind, coaches should organise drills which allow their players to *compare their own sensations when performing at different degrees of speed*. This will increase the players' awareness regarding their own speed, being the first step in controlling this aspect.

* For instance: using the same move described above in Diagram-6, the players must approach the paint and react to getting the pass using different speeds. To facilitate this task, three speeds may be established: *high, medium and low*. Utilising these labels, the coach indicates the speed required each time, both for approaching the paint and for reacting to getting the pass.

For example: «low-high» would mean low speed to approach the paint and high speed to react. At the beginning it is advisable to keep the speed of one of the two moves constant (for example: always the same speed when approaching the paint). Later, the coach may use all possible combinations (low-low, low-medium, low-high, medium-low, etc.).

Following this method, the players will learn to differentiate among levels of speed, and thus controlling change of speed.

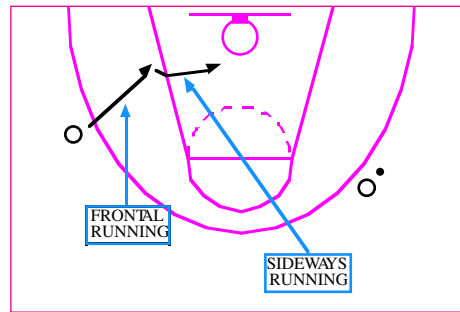
Running

Some young players may need to improve their poor running technique. If this be the case, this aspect should be included within the priorities of physical work.

Besides this, many young players need to be taught how to run when they move in offense without the ball. Three common mistakes are: losing sight of the ball, running sideways and running through wrong pathways.

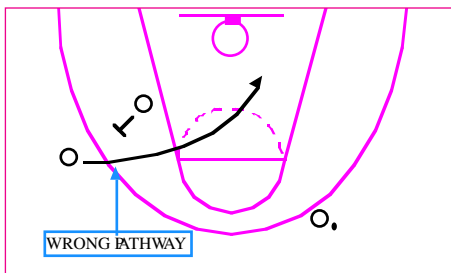
- The players must learn to run while turning their necks to see the ball.
- They should also learn when it is appropriate and inappropriate to run sideways. For example, it may be appropriate when the player enters into the paint cutting to the ball to get the pass. In this case, by running sideways he/she will prevent the defensive player (behind him/her) from intercepting the pass (see Diagram-7).

Diag. 7

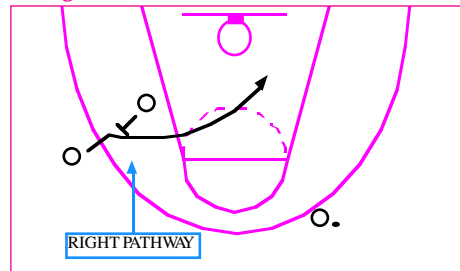


- Likewise, they must learn to run using the right pathways. For example, it would be inappropriate to run the Fast-Break without respecting the lanes, or to cut to the basket surrounding the screener too much (thus giving room to the defender to pass through) (see Diagrams 8 and 9).

Diag. 8



Diag. 9



Changing Direction

When facing a good defense, the players have to *change direction* often. It is a difficult fundamental requiring powerful legs, a high degree of coordination, good body balance and proper footwork.

There are two techniques to changing direction: *frontal* and *backward*.

The *frontal change of direction* can be made with or without pivoting. In the first case, the technique includes the following aspects:

- the foot furthest away from the new direction is the one to be used for the last step in the current direction and the first step in the new one; this will be made by pivoting with the other foot (the one nearest the new direction);
- the last step in the current direction may be shorter; the knee should be bent, stressing the body weight on that leg and pushing the floor hard; faking by using upper body inclination to that side and head gestures may be also very useful to emphasise this move;
- the first step in the new direction requires rapid pivoting, shifting the body weight to the other leg, using a longer step (although not so long as to slow down the motion) and changing speed (from lower to higher speed).

In the second case (without pivoting), the last step in the current direction should be performed with the foot furthest away from the new direction, but the first step in the new direction should be performed with the other foot (the one nearest to the new direction).

- In this case, when the player stresses his/her body weight on the leg making the last step before changing, he/she has the other leg free to move to the other side with a longer powerful step. Shifting body weight and changing speed are also part of the move.

The technique to performing the *backward change of direction* is similar.

- In this case, the last step in the current direction should be performed with the foot nearest to the new direction; then the player pivots backwards with this foot and changes direction; again, shifting body weight and changing speed are important.
- A common mistake is to turn the body in the new direction while performing the last step. The player must use the last step to *emphasise that direction*, so that the defender will react to that move and be beaten when the player changes the direction. Otherwise, the defender will be able to control the change of direction and this will be inefficient.

Other common mistakes during the process of learning to change direction are the following:

- running preceding the change may be inadequate because instead of running normally, the player tends to shorten the final steps. The player should run normally and *only shorten the last step*;
- players may lose balance because they keep their centre of gravity too

high; instead they should keep the centre of gravity lower by *bending their knees*;

- the move is made as a curve and not as an *angle*; instead, the players should *describe an angle*, shifting body weight and taking an explosive first step to the new direction.

Stopping

After moving, stopping is a key aspect to screening teammates and, obviously, to receive the ball in a good position to shoot, pass or penetrate.

To stop, players may use either a *one-count stop* or a *two-count stop*. In the first case, both feet touch the floor at the same time, whereas in the second case one foot will touch the floor first and then the other. In both cases, the most important thing is to keep the body balanced with an appropriate body stance.

Players of 15-18 years of age should master stopping. However it is common to observe relevant deficiencies.

The most important deficiency is *lack of balance*; basically this occurs because the players do not flex their legs (or leg) sufficiently when they stop, they do not stress their body weight properly, or they do not spread their legs to get the basic basketball stance.

- If the players use a one-count stop, the body weight should be equally distributed between the two legs, whereas if they utilise a two-count stop it should be initially stressed on the leg used to stop until the other leg touches the floor. In both cases, the stop must be done with the knees (or knee) well bent.
- Likewise, the distance between the two legs should be a bit wider than shoulder width, with both feet parallel, keeping the basic basketball stance. Players should avoid placing their legs either too close together or too far apart.

Moving and Receiving

Good stopping is essential to receiving the ball in good conditions to shoot, pass or penetrate dribbling.

- When using a *one-count stop*, players should stop with both feet at the same time, just as they receive the ball.
- When utilising a *two-count stop*, they should place the first foot on the floor just when they receive the ball, then place the other foot. As a general rule, when using a two-count stop, it is advisable that the player's first step be with the foot which is *nearest to the ball*, especially when the

player needs to turn to face the basket.

Either with a one-count stop or a two-count stop, the player should face the basket when he/she stops, unless he/she is playing backwards at the paint.

Therefore, in general terms, a one-count stop may be more advisable than the two-count stop only if the player is able to stop facing the basket. Otherwise, to stop facing the ball and then pivot to face the basket would be too slow.

Thus, *when the player needs to turn to the basket, the two-count stop is preferable*. In this case, the player receives the ball while he/she performing the first step with the foot nearer the ball, bending that knee to gain balance and be able to pivot to face the basket; thus the second step will be placed at the end of the turn and the player will be already facing the basket with the ball ready to shoot, pass or penetrate.

Another important aspect is *timing*. Players should understand that good timing is more important than maximum speed. Correct timing gives the teammate with the ball the possibility to pass at the right time and at the right place. Many young players need to work specifically on this important aspect.

At this age, coaches should assess the ability and the technique of their players to receive the ball when stopping. Probably, they have developed the habit of stopping in a specific way (for example, one-count stop, or two-count stop always placing the same foot for the first step) and they strongly rely on this automatic move, which is difficult to change. However, unless the coach considers that this habit is efficient and does not limit the player's progress, it is important to take into account that these players are still young, so they may and should learn to increase their resources as basketball players.

* For example: a 16 year-old player always uses a two-count stop placing his left foot on the floor as the first step. He is very efficient when he gets the pass from his left side, but he is not so efficient when he receives the ball from his right side. At this age, he manages to solve this deficiency and his present performance may be considered positive. However, what will happen a few years later when eventually he has to play against better defenders? Will he be able to shoot when he receives the ball from his right side? Most likely he will not, because he will lack the proper technique to stop, receive and shoot quickly.

Coaches of 15-18 year-olds should think carefully about the long-term consequences of their decisions about either maintaining or trying to change their players' technique. Many times they only consider short-term performance, without attempting to change habits that today may be efficient but which will limit the future possibilities of the players.

Screening

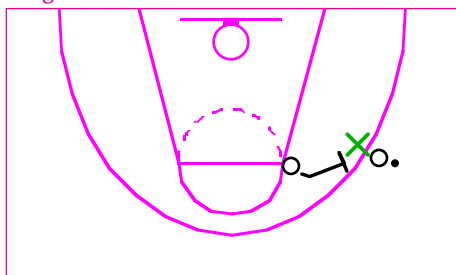
Stopping properly, keeping the basketball basic stance, with good balance, protecting the chest with the arms, and not moving are the keys to set a good screen.

Basically, there are two ways to set a screen:

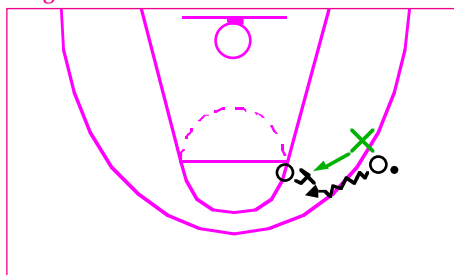
- moving to the position of the defender and setting the screen there (Diagram-10);
- standing in a specific spot on the court and leaving the teammate to be screened to move his/her defender to the screen (Diagram-11).



Diag. 10



Diag. 11



In both cases, the most common mistakes of 15-18 year-olds are the following:

- *setting the screen in the wrong spot.* The players must understand where the proper spot for the screen is in order to set it exactly there. If they move to the position of the defender to set a side screen (remember Diagram-10), they should stand so that the shoulder of the defender is in line with the middle of their chest, leaving the defender's leg in between the two legs of the screener;
- *setting a deficient body stance with bad balance:* incorrect positioning of legs (usually too close) and centre of gravity too high (knees not bent enough). It is important to correct these fundamentals in order to perform good screens;
- *pushing the defender* (sometimes due to deficient balance), instead of letting him/her to make physical contact. Young players must understand

that the role of the screener is only to establish a powerful position that serves to block the defender's move, being the defender (and not the screener) the one who makes physical contact when he/she can not move through the screen;

- *moving to make contact*; in a similar way, some young players change their first screening stance to make contact with the defender when he/she is overcoming the screen successfully. Thus, they move their feet, their waist, their shoulder or their arms to stop the defenders' move, leading, in many cases, to a personal foul.
- *avoiding contact*; some young players screen «with their eyes closed» and narrow their body width or move slightly away to avoid contact with the defender. Obviously these deficiencies should be corrected by the coach.

Execution vs. Decision Making

As we have emphasised in previous sections, it is important that coaches working with 15-18 year-olds assess their technical level in all fundamentals related to moving without the ball to correct deficiencies. However, many times the issue of a faulty performance of these fundamentals is not the quality of the execution, but the *lack of decision* concerning performance.

Thus, the problem of a player who does not set screens may not be lack of mastery of the screening technique, but a lack of decision to set screens. This problem is common in all basketball actions that usually have less social recognition (screening, blocking out, helping, running back, etc.).

Therefore, as well as considering assessment and correction of technique (execution), coaches should consider improve the decisions of their players related to the appropriate performance of all offensive moves without the ball.

With this aim, coaches may use strategies such as the ones discussed in Chapter-4.

* For example: the players of a female 15-16 year-old team have practised the technique of changing speed (execution) and they master it quite well. Now the coach wants to improve the decision of changing speed. He explains to his players the precise situations in which they should change speed, and then he organises a 3 on 3 drill to practise this decision.

The 3 on 3 game, on one basket, with twenty seconds of possession time, will last for ten minutes. The goal of the drill is to change speed in the situations explained. Every time a player changes speed in those situations, her team gets a point. At the end of the ten minutes, the team with most points will be the winner and the prize will be three minutes rest while the other team does a series of moves changing speed.

By using drills of this kind coaches may influence their players' decisions, developing the habit of making the proper decisions. This is especially relevant regarding offensive moves without the ball.

Nevertheless, coaches should always differentiate between *decision* and *execution*, remaining alert to the latter even if the young players have reached a reasonable level of mastery. Thus, it may be possible that, for example, some players (or just one player) show a «technical recession» when they perform change of speed. In this case, the coach should organise the appropriate drills to help these players improve their execution of changing speed (such as the drill explained above in the section dedicated to changing speed), instead of assuming that they will improve this aspect through drills aimed at improving decision making.



Practical Exercises

- Considering all the aspects mentioned above, check the execution of 15-18 year-old players when they move without the ball.
- During a basketball game, choose two 15-18 year-old players to observe and record how many times they change speed to get the ball when playing set offenses.

Offensive Rebound

From their earliest experience in basketball, players hear how important it is to go in to rebound in defense and offense, being encouraged by their coaches to perform this task. However, many players, even tall players, do not develop their rebounding ability due to a lack of specific work on this aspect. At this age, coaches should work on this with their young players.

Going to Rebound

Offensive rebounding, in the first place, requires the players *to be there*; that is, to be in a position where they can actually fight to get the ball. Many



young players just do not move to be there and so they lose their chances to rebound.

Thus, the first thing for those players is to work on the decision of going for the rebound, setting the goal of being in the correct position and rewarding them if they are, regardless of whether they get the ball or not.

* For example: Boris is a tall 16 year-old boy who plays centre. Although he stands around the paint when his teammates shoot, most of the time Boris does not go for the rebound. His coach has decided to establish a special training programme to overcome this problem. Every time a game drill is organised in training (3 on 3, 4 on 4, or 5 on 5), Boris has the individual goal of going for the rebound. Each time he does, regardless of whether he gets the ball or not, a positive point is recorded.

For every drill he has to reach a number of positive points previously established. If he achieves this, he can rest with the rest of the team in between drills; on the contrary, if he does not, he has to spend some extra time practising going for the rebound on his own. This way, Boris' attention is more focused on going to rebound and thus, this behaviour will become a habit.

Anticipation

Secondly, it is important to teach the players to anticipate. In fact, many young players go to rebound but they arrive late because they do not anticipate the shots of their teammates. Thus, it is important that young players learn to anticipate their teammates' shots, so that they move for the rebound *just before* the shot is made.

To develop this skill, the coach should consider offensive rebounding as a part of many drills in training, so the players may learn when they should go for the rebound.

* For example: the coach organises a 4 on 4 drill to practise screening. Usually, he will be concerned with screening and shooting from screening, and as soon as a player shoots the action will end and a new one will begin and so on. However, if he also stresses offensive rebounding and allows the play to continue until the basket is made or the defense controls the ball, there will be opportunities for the players to learn while their teammates shoot.

Thus, coaches should provide opportunities for the players to learn this important aspect. Furthermore, it is crucial that they teach the players the cues to consider; that is, the *signals* that indicate to the players: «go now!».

When these signals are clear, coaches may set the goal of going for the rebound *exactly when the signals appear*, neither sooner nor later, recording the players' behaviour both in training and games.

* For instance: continuing with the example of Boris, the next step for this player would be to reward him with one positive point only if he goes for the rebound exactly when the appropriate signals appear; this is, when he anticipates the shot and goes for the rebound *just before* the shot is made.

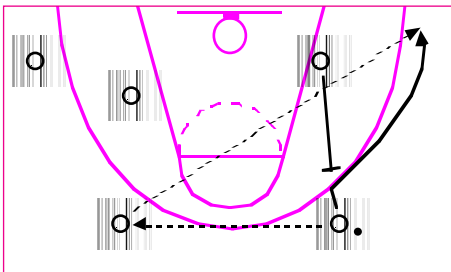
Likewise, it is important that coaches include offensive rebounding within their offensive moves, instead of considering them only as an appendix. This means that the offensive moves should not end with the shot, considering offensive rebounding as an independent aspect, but with the rebounding positioning of the players who have been assigned this task.

Thus, the coach may prepare a strategy for the rebound just as he/she does for the rest of the play, explaining to his/her players what their positions are to go in for the rebound and the pathways that they may use to reach those spots from every possible shot of the offense. This way, the players will consider rebounding as part of the offense and they will learn the right signals to anticipate in every possible shot; further, they will have a guideline concerning the correct rebounding spots.

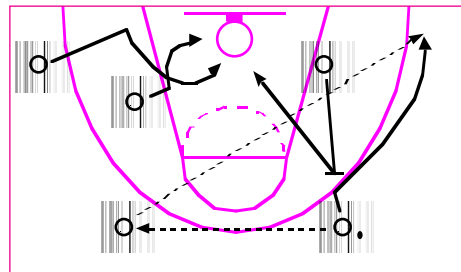
* For example: in Diagram-12 the coach has drawn one of the plays to get a shot, ignoring (as usually happens) the offensive rebound. However, in Diagram-13 the same play has been drawn but now includes the moves of the players to go for the rebound. The latter favours a better rebounding attitude, helps the players to learn the signals to anticipate, and allows organisation of rebounding positions for each player of the team.

When moving in for the rebound, players may fake to one side and move to the other side to beat the nearest defender and have a better pathway to the rebounding position.

Diag. 12



Diag. 13



Getting the Spot

The next stage is getting the correct position for rebounds. Although very important, it is not enough to go for the rebound anticipating shots; further, it is crucial that players move to the right spots and *reach those spots ahead of the defenders*.

In Diagram-13 we have shown that a little team strategy may be organised to assign possible spots among the two or three rebounders of the team. This will help the players to choose the right spots to get rebounds. Nevertheless, the players should learn three rules:

- they should not be just underneath the basket;
- a missed shot made from one side goes most often to the opposite side;
- long distance shots rebound longer than short distance shots.

Players should be especially alert when their defensive player goes to help; this is a very good occasion to anticipate and get the spot to rebound.

They should learn to see the free spots that they can reach, considering the positioning of the defenders. So, as soon as they start moving they must *look for those spots* instead of looking at the balls' pathway.

When the player anticipates and reaches the proper position, he/she is in a good situation to get the ball; however he/she still has to fight against the defenders. Now the task of the offensive player is to reach the spot by preventing the defenders from getting there.

With this aim in mind, he/she should use his/her body to *contact* powerfully with the defender in order to reach the spot. This needs good body balance achieved by bending both knees, and a proper use of the back, shoulders and elbows.

Summing up, the rebounder has to move to the basket anticipating his/her teammates shots; then, instead of looking at the ball, he/she should look for the free spot and also for the nearest defender to make sure he/she



gets the spot; then, he/she will be ready to look for the ball, jump and catch it.

- A common mistake for players going in for the rebound is to turn their heads up to look at the shot, instead of using this time to look for a spot and get it to rebound. Coaches should work to overcome this problem.

Many young players just go for the rebound without considering any of these aspects. Obviously they get some rebounds because there are many chances throughout the game; however, would they get more rebounds if they developed these aspects? Undoubtedly many of them would improve their rebounding ability.

Jumping, Catching the Ball and Shooting

These aspects are the ones that coaches work on more often through different drills. The following points are important:

- the player should be in a *balanced position before jumping*, then jump as high as possible with his/her arms up to hold the ball or tip it;
- *timing* is crucial; players must learn to jump at the proper moment to catch the ball as high as possible;
- players should learn to jump and move their arms to catch the ball *without fouling* the defenders;
- when players come down to the floor they must bend their knees for a *balanced stance, protecting the ball with their body* which should be between the ball and the defenders;
- finally, the rebounder should jump and shoot; sometimes he/she may use faking before shooting; in any case, he/she should *turn his/her head to see the basket before shooting*. Many players miss these shots because



they only look at the basket at the last moment, just as they are throwing the ball;

- players should practise these shots surrounded by defenders as they would be in a game.

Rebounding Own Shots

Young players, especially tall players, should also learn to rebound their own shots. In fact, many players who shoot do not go for the rebound, or go late, or go to the wrong spot.

In this case, the player shooting cannot move to rebound as quickly as with his/her teammates' shots, since his/her first priority is to make a good shot. However he/she should move as soon as he/she touches the floor.

In this case, probably he/she will not be able to fight for the correct spot, but he/she will have a better perspective of the ball. So, as soon as the player touches the floor, without losing sight of the ball, he/she should move to the spot where he/she guesses that the ball will go. As in other cases, players must learn this habit through the appropriate practice.

Some Drills

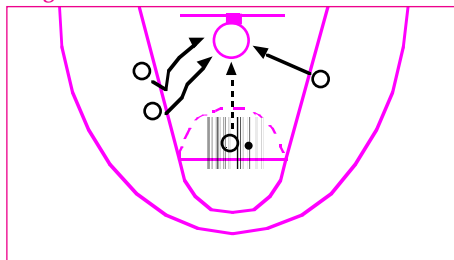
The following are some simple drills to practise offensive rebounding.

- One player under the basket. He/she throws the ball to the backboard and jumps to catch it, then jumps to score. Five times non-stop, switching sides.
- Same drill: now player tips the ball.
- A line of three or four players. The first of them throws the ball to the backboard, and runs to the end of the line; then, the second player tips the ball to the backboard, then the third and so on. Every player goes to the end of the line after tipping the ball. After a number of tips the ball has to be scored.



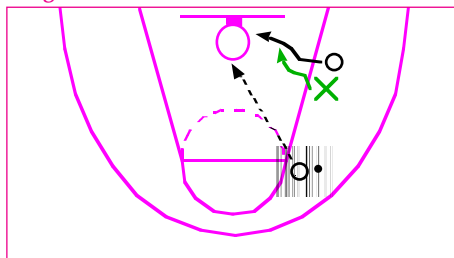
- Player out of the paint. Coach throws ball. Player goes to rebound and scores. Then, he/she goes back out of the paint and coach throws a second ball, and so on with a third, a fourth and a fifth ball in a row.
- Two players fight for the offensive rebound. Both out of the paint. Coach throws ball. First task is to reach the spot, then catch the ball and score.
- Same drill with three players (Diagram-14).

Diag. 14

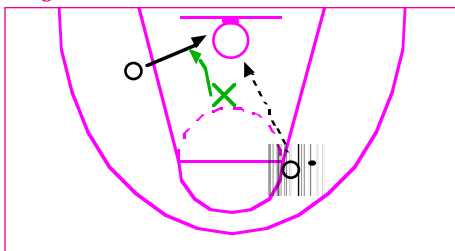


- Same drill with three pairs: one pair plays for the rebound while the other two rest a few seconds until their turn.
- 1 on 1: coach throws ball; offensive player tries to get offensive rebound; defensive player blocks out. From different positions (Diagrams-15, 16 and 17).
- Same drill; now 2 on 2 or 3 on 3 (Diagrams-18 and 19).

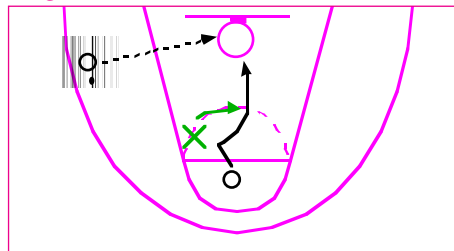
Diag. 15



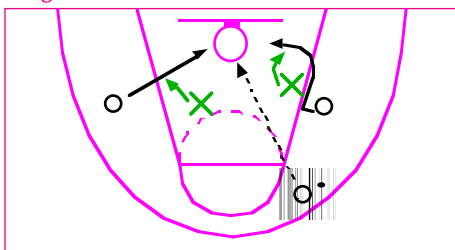
Diag. 16



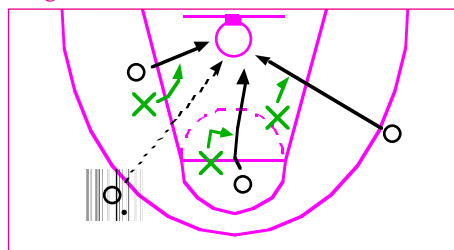
Diag. 17



Diag. 18

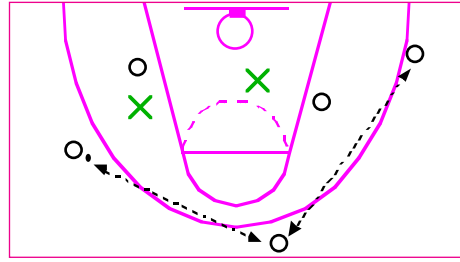


Diag. 19



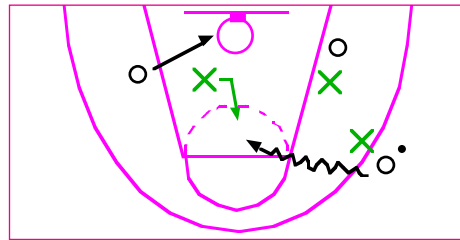
- Same drill: 2 on 2 or 3 on 3; now 2/3 outside players move ball until they shoot (Diagram-20); then rebound.

Diag. 20



- Outside players play 1 on 1 or 2 on 2. Inside players only rebound. Inside defenders should move to help. Offensive rebounders should take advantage when their defenders go to help (Diagram-21).

Diag. 21



- 3 on 3, 4 on 4 or 5 on 5: game situation; emphasis on rebound.



Practical Exercise

- Considering the information above, assess how 15-18 year-old players perform in all aspects of offensive rebound. You may use a tool such as that shown in Table-25.

Low Post Moves

At this age, players should learn to play backwards from the low post (the same from the midpost). And *this is a task for all players* except very short ones. It is obvious that tall players need to develop fundamentals to play backwards, but forwards and big guards may take advantage too. In fact, one of the most valuable team strategies consists of placing at the mid/low post (just *low post* from now) the player who can take advantage of a height mismatch with his/her defender. This player may be either a centre, a forward or a guard, provided that he/she be able to play backwards as a low post.

Before Receiving the Ball

The first task of a low post player is to be able to receive the ball in that position. This is not easy because the defense will be very alert to stopping the pass.

| PLAYER: | DATE: |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED | COMMENTS |
| GOING TO REBOUND | |
| ANTICIPATION | |
| GETTING THE SPOT | |
| JUMPING AND CATCHING THE BALL | |
| SHOOTING AFTER REBOUNDING | |
| REBOUNDING OWN SHOTS | |

Table 25. Example of tool to assess individual skill in offensive rebounding.

- The player must have a passing lane to get the pass. This means he/she must be between the ball and his/her defender. To reach that position, he/she may use all kinds of moves.

* For example: moving away from the ball (to move the defender with him/her) and then change direction and speed to come back and reach the passing lane.

Faking, changing direction and changing speed in a limited space are very important aspects, as well as timing, stopping and a balanced body stance.

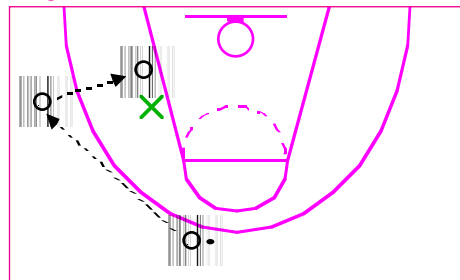
- Sometimes, the passing lane is not free, but might be as soon as the ball changes to a different teammate. This concept is very important for low post players. If they can not get the pass from one position, instead of fighting for that pass, they may *fight for the next pass* anticipating that situation; thus, they can take advantage of the defender stopping the present pass to reach the position for the next pass; so as soon as the ball goes to the next teammate, he/she will be ready to receive the ball.

* For example: in Diagram-22 player-1 has the ball. The passing lane to player-4 (the low post) is not free because the defender is there. Player-4 may work for the next pass taking advantage of his defender's position. He may block him with his shoulder and his arm, when the ball is still in that position; then, when player-1 passes to player-3, he will have a free passing lane from player-3.

Thus, when low posts are not free, they should not follow the movement of the ball by playing «behind» it; on the contrary, they should *anticipate* where the ball will go to work on getting the *next pass*.

- Then, when they finally have a passing lane free, it is important to hold up the defender until they get the ball.

Diag. 22



- A common mistake for young players is to hold up the defender only until they see their teammate passing the ball; then they move their body to catch the ball, leaving the defender free, and the defender takes advantage of this move by intercepting the ball in its pathway.
 - Instead, players should keep a good stance, with their knees well bent, holding up the defender with the shoulder and the arm, using the opposite hand as a target to receive the pass. They should be able to stop the ball with this hand while still holding up the defender, and only then catch the ball with the other hand and use the free pathway to the basket.
- When the defender is behind the post, the passing lane will be free, but the defender might be able to anticipate and intercept the pass, so the post must make sure he/she has the defender under control.

In this case, the post should *make contact with the defender* using his/her lower back, with a good balanced stance (making him/her as big as possible but without losing balance), knees well bent, upper-body slightly flexed forward, and arms and hands well extended forward asking for the pass. **Making good use of his/her body, the low post must create as much room as possible between the defender and the position where he/she will grasp the ball.**

Thus, the player must hold the ball with his/her arms *extended*, not near his/her chest as many young players do incorrectly. Then he/she should open his/her elbows and bring the ball back to the chest well protected. Sometimes it will be useful to step towards the ball as it comes to the player, so it will be more difficult for the defender to intercept the pass. However, this does not mean that the low post should receive the ball out of the proper position. He/she must get the ball where he/she can be dangerous.

Playing With the Ball

Once the low post has the ball, there are two options: if he/she have a free pathway to the basket, he/she should move quickly to shoot. If not, he/she should turn his/her head and take a quick look.

- Two common mistakes of young players are: dribbling the ball as soon as they receive it; and moving their heads down, losing perspective of what is going on.

By *taking a second to have a look*, the post can observe the position of his/her defender as well as the moves of the other defenders and the positions of

his/her teammates. Thus, he/she can see the weaker side of his/her defender, if the other defenders help, and if there are teammates open to get a good pass. This broad perspective of the picture is crucial to the low post's game.

- *Passing* is a very important skill for a low post. Therefore, from a general passing ability that all players should develop, at this point it is important to build a *specific passing ability* from the low post's position. This will include short one-hand passes to players cutting to the basket, one-hand quick passes to teammates at the perimeter, and even jump-passes to overcome help. Players should learn to pass in a «jungle» of arms and hands trying to intercept the ball, so they must find the proper pathway in order to pass and perform a quick good pass which will allow a teammate to shoot.



Therefore, coaches should spend training time developing this specific passing ability through appropriate drills.

* For example: a 3 on 3 set: two perimeter players and one at the low post. The latter gets the ball and the two defenders of the perimeter go to help. The post must pass the ball back in good condition for a shot. Sometimes one of the perimeter players may cut to the basket whereas the other stays outside; then the post will have the option of passing to the cutter or passing to the perimeter shooter.

- Post players must learn to make the decision of either passing to a teammate or playing to score. This will depend on the actions of the defenders. *If they help, the best option will be to pass to the teammate who is free. If they do not help, the low post should play against his/her defender to score.*

Specific Moves

As an example, the following are some specific moves for the low post to play against his/her defender.

- fake to one side (for example the right side) turning the waist, shoulder and head slightly but quickly; then slide the opposite leg (left leg) to the basket while turning to the left, shifting body weight to that leg;

at the same time, bounce the ball with a short quick dribble between legs; then, turn to the hoop while catching the ball and stepping with the other foot (right foot); jump with knees bent (they must be bent all the time), and then shoot.

- same fake; now after sliding the opposite leg (left) and bouncing the ball between legs, do not turn to the hoop; instead, stay backwards, slide slightly the other leg (right) and catch the ball while stepping with this foot (right); then move the other foot (left) rapidly, while turning the head to see the hoop, and jump on this foot for a *short hook-shot*.

The ball should be protected all the time. Do not extend the arm out to perform the hook. Bring the ball straight up the shooting side with both hands and make a *full extension directly over the ear*. Use the other arm for protection from the defense.

- same move; now after the last step, instead of jumping for the short hookshot, fake this shot by moving head up slightly and then turn back, pivoting around the back foot (right), then jump and shoot.

Obviously there are other possible moves but the ones mentioned above give an idea of how the players can perform. In all moves, one important aspect is to *look at the hoop before shooting*, so the player can *see the target in advance* and so be more accurate. Many young players see the hoop right when they throw the ball; this is a big mistake which explains many failed shots.

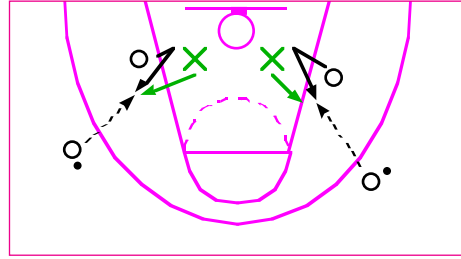
Drills

Many drills can be organised to practise low post moves. Some of them should be limited to practising separately each of the three aspects mentioned above: moves before receiving the ball, passing, and playing with the ball to score. Others should combine just two of these aspects: receiving and passing, receiving and playing to score; passing or playing to score. And others should include all three: receiving and either passing or playing to score. The following are some examples.



- **Goal: practise specific moves to score.** The players start with the ball at the low post and practise different moves. The coach explains, demonstrates and stops to correct. No defense. Later, same drill including a defender.

Diag. 23

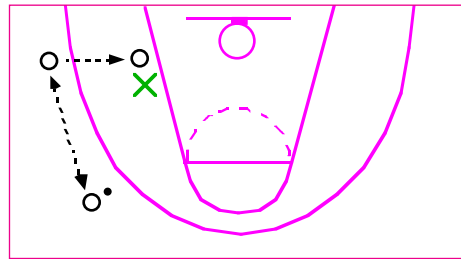


- **Goal: catch the ball and play to score.** Same drill but now a teammate passes from the perimeter. No defense. Later, same drill including a defender (Diagram-23).

- **Goal: improve catching technique.** One low post. Two teammates at the perimeter, each with one ball. The low post practises catching the ball; he/she gets the ball and passes it back, then he/she gets the other ball and so on. The coach demonstrates and stops to correct. No defender. Later, same drill including a defender.

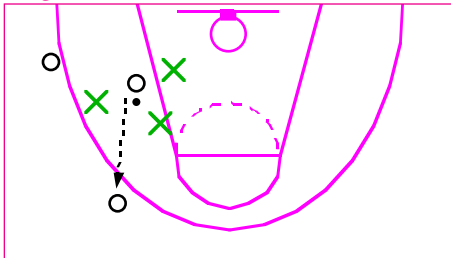
- **Goal: working to get a free passing lane.** One low post and one defender. Two perimeter players. The low post tries to get a free passing lane; the defender tries to stop the pass. The perimeter players try to pass the ball inside through a free passing lane (Diagram-24).

Diag. 24

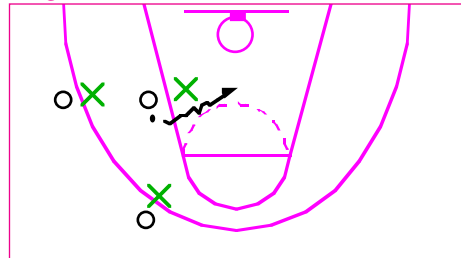


- **Goal: deciding between passing and playing to score.** 2 on 2 or 3 on 3. The low post receives the ball (the defenders can not intercept this pass) and then he/she has to decide between passing or playing to score depending on the presence or absence of help from outside defenders (Diagrams 25 and 26).

Diag. 25



Diag. 26



- **Goal: playing under normal game conditions.** 2 on 2 or 3 on 3. Perimeter players try to pass to the low post, who must fight for a free lane, try to receive the ball and decide between passing and playing to score; then use proper passes or moves.

8.3. DEVELOPING TACTICAL DECISION-MAKING

One of the most important aspects of training 15-18 year-olds is the development of tactical decision-making. That is, learning to decide according to tactical knowledge.

Many coaches do not train this aspect specifically, assuming that players will learn just from working on moves included within the set offenses. However, a relevant problem of many young players (and later of professional players too) is that they do not know why they decide one way or the other. Coaches should consider this problem and work with their young players to improve their tactical decision-making.

Young players develop simple tactical decision-making if they have the proper training during mini-basketball years and at 13-14. At those stages they face 1 on 1, 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 situations, as well as 5 on 5 regular games, which require multiple decisions. For example, a 13-14 year-old player who plays 2 on 2 must decide between passing to his teammate or shooting himself, driving to the hoop or waiting for a screen, etc.



By «trial and error» with some guidelines from the coach, mini-basketball players may discover some of the stimuli that are relevant to making decisions while playing. Later, with the 13-14 year-olds, the coach may be more direct, teaching some important concepts. Now, with the 15-18 year-olds, the coach should design a training programme focused on developing decision-making. As in other aspects, the programme should begin by assessing the level of the players concerning decision-making, in order to detect their *resources* (strong points to be strengthened) and their *needs* (deficiencies to be improved).

Criteria for Making Tactical Decisions

In order to make the right decision, the players must understand the *key criteria* for making those decisions. For example, in a 2 on 1 situation the player with the ball has to decide between passing to his/her teammate or continue dribbling to the hoop for a lay-up. What is the criterion (or the criteria) for making this decision?

In this case, it would be mainly related to the action of the defender; for instance, if the defender moves to stop him/her from dribbling, the best decision would be to pass to his/her teammate, but if the defender stays in the middle leaving enough room to reach the hoop, the most appropriate decision would be to keep dribbling for the lay-up. Understanding this criteria would help the player to make the right decision.

Throughout their previous basketball experience, many 15-18 year-old players have automated basketball habits, relying mainly on the aspects of the game that they master best. Thus, if we observe players playing 1 on 1, it is very likely that they use the same moves repeatedly, regardless of the convenience of those moves; and the same would happen in 2 on 2, 3 on 3, 4 on 4 and 5 on 5. Most of the players would use their stronger resources regardless of whether these be most appropriate to the present circumstances. For example, a player who is a good perimeter shooter would tend to shoot even if a teammate is in a better position under the basket.

Therefore, the process of learning tactical decision-making at this age begins with the coach deciding, and then explaining to the players, the *key criteria* that the players should take into consideration in order to make the right decisions.



These criteria should be *clear*, and the key the coach uses to *judge and correct the players' decisions*. As has been discussed in previous chapters, coaches often lack clear criteria; so they judge and correct players based on the result of their decisions.

* Thus, for example, if a player decides to pass and the pass is successful, the coach would tend to judge the decision as correct, whereas if the pass is intercepted, the coach would judge it as an incorrect decision.

In this case, the only criterion is the result of the action, but this is a *wrong criterion* to strengthen the process of learning to make decisions. Why? It is likely that the player who got bad results (for example, losing the ball when passing) will stop making those decision. In fact, this is the reason why many players limit themselves so soon; they do not attempt to make decisions that may lead to bad results.

Therefore, the criteria to decide if a decision is correct or incorrect should **be present before the decision is taken**. These criteria should be related to the basketball conditions that are present when the player makes the decision.

The criteria for the decision must include clear *key signal stimuli* which must be recognised by the players while they play. For example, the move of a defender in one direction or another, may be the *key signal stimulus* to making either one decision or other.

Thus, while playing, the players must learn to focus their attention on the *key signal stimuli* to produce the correct decisions.



Practical Exercises

- Think and write down some criteria with which to judge players' correct decisions in the following situations: 1 on 1; 2 on 2; 2 on 1; 3 on 2; and 3 on 3.
- Then decide the key signal stimuli on which the players must focus their attention while playing.

Some Examples

Once the criteria are clear, the coach must organise the appropriate drills to develop correct decisions. Basically, these drills should include all the conditions that make up part of the criteria, with many opportunities for the play-

ers to make the decisions.

As an example, we will consider some tactical offensive decisions within a 3 on 3 framework. The difficulty of the drills should increase progressively, from drills with simple demands and simple functioning, to more complex drills as the players master the previous concepts.

Passing to the Low Post

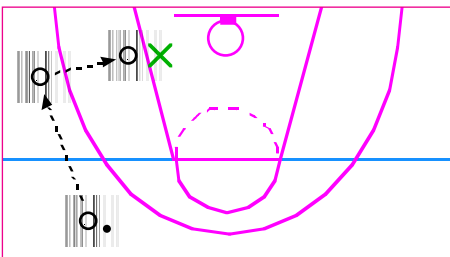
Decision:

- The first decision of this example is the decision of the perimeter players to pass to the low post.

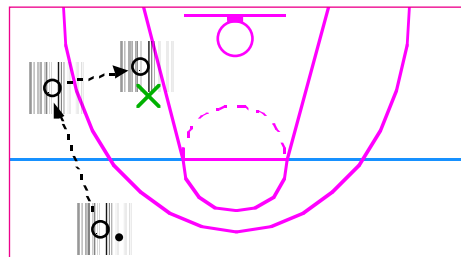
Criteria:

- The pass should be performed from below the extended free throw line (Diagrams 27 and 28).
- The defender of the low post must be either behind him/her (Diagram-27) or playing a three-quarter fronting defense on the opposite side of the passer (Diagram-28).
- ✓ This means that, according to these criteria, the correct decision would be to pass the ball to the low post when the passer is below the extended free throw line (as is player-3 in Diagrams 27 and 28) and the low post's defender is either behind him (Diagram-27) or playing three-quarter fronting defense on the opposite side of the passer (Diagram-28).
- ✓ Therefore, at this point of the learning process, passing the ball to the low post under different conditions (for example: above the extended free throw line, or with the low post's defender playing defense in front) would be an incorrect decision.

Diag. 27



Diag. 28



Drill:

- 3 on 3 competitive drill on one basket; ten minutes; the team which scores keeps playing offense; the winners rest for two minutes; the losers run sprints.
- *Rules:* they can only score if the low post receives the ball because of a correct decision (passing from below the extended free throw line, etc.); all players can score by shooting and rebounding, but only after the correct decision of passing to the low post is made. When a team scores without passing to the low post, the score does not count and the ball goes to the other team.
- To increase the opportunities of making the correct decision, two rules are established at this stage: the defender of the low post must play only behind him/her (later behind and three-quarter fronting); and the defenders of the perimeter players can not intercept the pass inside.

Comments:

- This drill forces the players to make the correct decision, linking the criteria established by the coach to the decision. It is important to begin with a restricted drill such as this, so the players get used to making the correct decision.
- The coach does not need to constantly tell the players: «pass the ball to the low post», «pass the ball to the low post», «don't pass from above the extended free throw line», etc. The rules of the drill will favour that the players centre their attention on all relevant issues (the decision and the correct criteria).



Low Post's Decisions

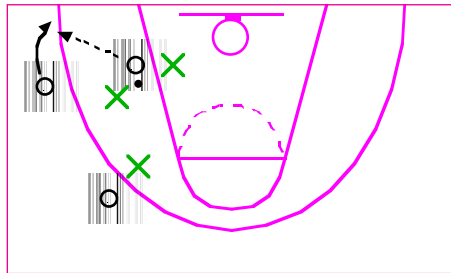
Decision:

- The next step would be to develop the low post's decisions when receiving the ball. He/she may learn to decide between playing 1 on 1 against his/her defender to score, or passing the ball to his/her perimeter teammates (remember the section dedicated above to low post moves).

Criteria:

- The low post has received the ball. His/her defender is behind him/her.
- The *key signal stimuli* will be the actions of the perimeter defenders:
 - ✓ if they help, the correct decision would be to pass to the teammate who gets open (Diagram-29);

Diag. 29



- ✓ if they do not help, the correct decision would be to play 1 on 1 to score (remember Diagram-26 in page 294).

Drill:

- Same 3 on 3 competitive drill on one basket; ten minutes; the team which scores keeps playing offense; the winners rest for two minutes; the losers run sprints.
- *Rules:* they can only score if the low post receives the ball from below the extended free throw line, etc.
- Furthermore, every time the low post makes the correct decision (passing or playing to score depending on the criteria established), his/her team will get one extra point added to their score (maximum two points every play). On the contrary, every time the low post makes the wrong

decision (according to the criteria established) his/her team will lose one point.

- To increase the opportunities for making decisions, two rules are maintained from the previous drill: the defender of the low post must play only behind him/her (later behind and three-quarter fronting); and the defenders of the perimeter players can not intercept the pass inside.
- Likewise, if the coach observes that the defenders always react in the same way (either helping or not helping) he/she might establish another rule: the defenders will lose three/five points if at the end of the drill the difference between the two options (helping or not helping) occurs more than three times. Thus, the coach will write down what the defenders have done each time, letting them know the overall situation every three minutes.

This will keep the defenders' attention focused on the behaviour (helping or not helping) which is the criterion for the decision of the low post. Thus the coach will control the presence of the two key signal stimuli (helping and not helping) favouring the training of the low post's decision.

Comments:

- These drill rules provide many opportunities for the low post to make the correct decision.
- The drill is related to the previous one, so the perimeter players work on the decision of passing to the low post as well.



Perimeter Players' Decisions

Decisions:

Using the same framework, the next step might be to develop the perimeter players' decisions.

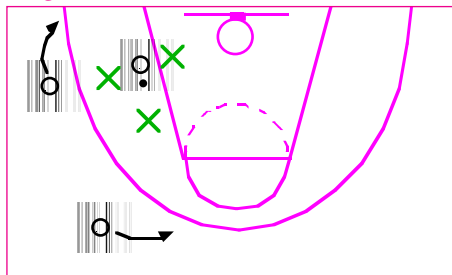
- First, when the low post receives the ball and the perimeter player's defender moves to help, the decision of moving to a spot where he/she can get a good pass back (*Decision-1*).
- Second, when the perimeter player receives the ball back from the low post, the decision of either shooting or driving inside for a lay-up or a jump shot after one or two dribbles (or passing to the open teammate if his/her defender rotates) (*Decision-2*).

Criteria:

Decision-1:

- The player's own defender moves to help inside.
- The *key signal stimulus* will be the defender's position. Depending on this position, the perimeter player should move to a spot where there is a free passing lane from the post (Diagram-30); this is the correct decision.

Diag. 30

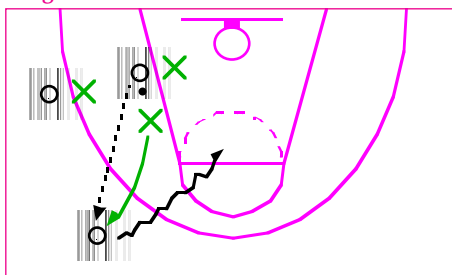


Decision-2:

- The ball comes back from the low post. The perimeter player catches the ball with his/her feet well placed, facing the basket, positioning the ball ready to shoot.
- The *key signal stimuli* will be the actions of his/her defender (who went to help when the low post received the ball):

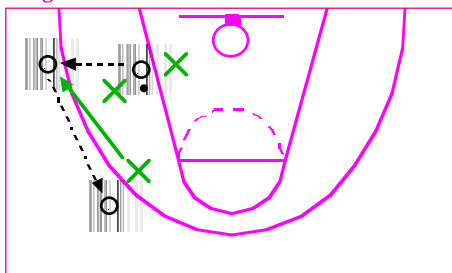
- ✓ if the defender does not come back, the correct decision will be to shoot;
- ✓ if the defender comes back, the correct decision will be to fake the shot slightly and drive inside for a lay-up or a jump shot after one or two dribbles (Diagram-31).

Diag. 31



- Later, another key signal stimuli may be added: the actions of the other perimeter player:
 - ✓ if he/she rotates to stop the shot, the correct decision will be to pass the ball to the teammate who is open (Diagram-32).

Diag. 32



Drill:

- Same 3 on 3 competitive drill on one basket; ten minutes; the team which scores keeps playing offense; the winners rest for two minutes; the losers run sprints.
- *Rules:* they can only score if the low post receive the ball from below the extended free throw line, etc.
- Furthermore, every time the perimeter players make the right decision (either Decision-1 or Decision-2) their team will get one extra point added to the score (maximum three points every play). On the contrary,

every time the perimeter players make the wrong decision (according to the criteria established) their team will lose one point.

- To increase the opportunities for making decisions, two rules are maintained from the previous drill: the defender of the low post must play only behind him/her (later behind and three-quarter fronting); and the defenders of the perimeter players can not intercept the pass inside.
- Moreover, the defenders of the perimeter players (at least one) have to go to help when the low post receives the ball; if they do not, their team will lose one point, and the offensive team will have the ball again.
- Likewise, if the coach observes that the defenders always react in the same way to the low post's pass (either coming back to stop the shot or not coming back) he/she might establish another rule: the defenders will lose three/five points if, at the end of the drill, the difference between the two options (coming back or not) occurs more than three times. Thus, the coach will write down what the defenders have done each time, letting them know the overall situation every three minutes.

This will keep the defenders' attention focused on the behaviour (coming back or not) which is the criterion that the perimeter players should use for Decision-2. Thus the coach will control the presence of the two key signal stimuli (coming back and not coming back) favouring the proper training of this decision.

Comments:

- In this drill, the low post only has one option open (passing to the perimeter players), although he/she has to recognise the key signal stimuli (which of the two defenders is coming to help?) to make the decision of passing to either one teammate or the other. Therefore, he/she gets used to discriminating between the stimuli and linking them to the correct decision.
- However, the emphasis of the drill is upon the decisions made by the perimeter players, so the coach's attention and comments should be focused on these decisions.
- As in previous drills, the rules favour many opportunities for making both Decision-1 and Decision-2.

Low Post and Perimeter Players' Decisions

Decisions:

- The next step might be to work on both the decisions of the low post (either passing or playing to score) and the decisions of the perimeter players (passing to the low post and both Decision-1 and Decision-2 when the post receives the ball).

Criteria:

- Same as used in previous drills.

Drill:

- Same framework and same rules as used in previous drills.
- The defenders of the perimeter players should combine both helping and not helping. To assure this, the coach may maintain that they will lose three/five points if, at the end of the drill, the difference between the two options (helping or not helping) occurs more than three times.
- Likewise, the defenders of the perimeter players should combine both coming back to stop the shot and not coming back. To assure this, the coach may maintain that they will lose three/five points if, at the end of the drill, the difference between the two options (coming back or not) occurs more than three times.

Comments:

- The coach must concentrate hard to control this drill, focussing on the defenders' actions (to write them down) and the offensive players' decisions (to *reward* or to *punish* them according to the rules of the drill).
- The demands and the functioning of this drill are complex, so the previous drills, which are easier, should be mastered earlier.

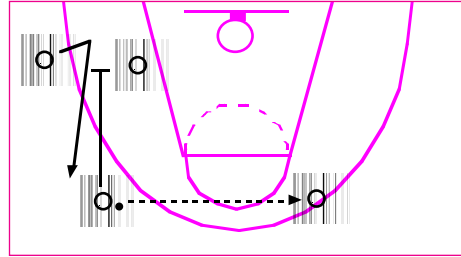


Some Variations

The same drills (same decisions, same criteria, same rules) may be organised with some variations.

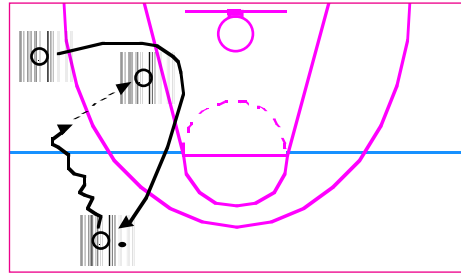
- The perimeter players may use a teammate or the coach to pass the ball and switch positions (Diagram-33).

Diag. 33



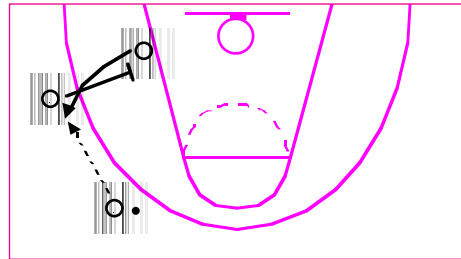
- The guard (Player-1) may dribble below the extended free throw line and the forward (Player-3) cut behind the post to replace the guard (Diagram-34).

Diag. 34



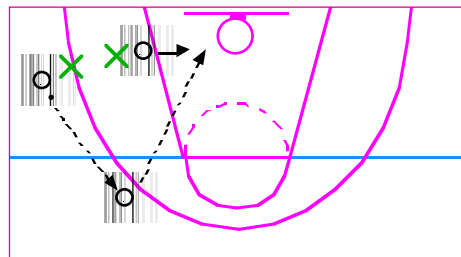
- The forward (Player-3) may move to screen the post (Player-5) to switch positions with him/her (Diagram-35).

Diag. 35



- The players may be allowed to pass the ball to the low post from above the extended free throw line **if the ball comes from below this line** and the defender of the low post plays either three-quarter fronting defense at the baseline side or full fronting defense. Here, these positions of the low post's defender would be the *key signal stimuli* to pass the ball from the wing (below the extended free throw line) to the guard (above this line) and then to the post (Diagram-36).

Diag. 36



Creating the Situation for Decision-Making

An important aspect to be developed with young players is that they be able to create the situations in which the tactical decisions have to be made.

With this aim in mind, the coach may establish rules that favour the players' *creativity*. This way, he/she can observe how the players perform in this task. Later he/she may give the players more information in order to enhance possible options; and he/she may establish the rule that the players must use two, three or four different options throughout the drill. The following is an example.

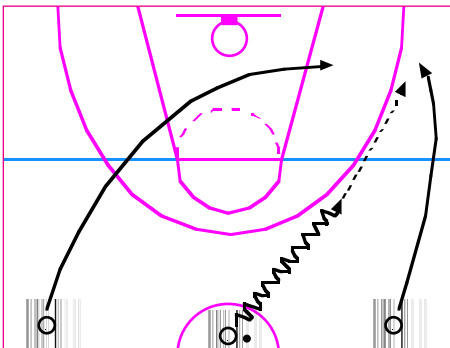
Goal of the Drill:

- The players must create the appropriate situation to make tactical decisions playing with the low post.

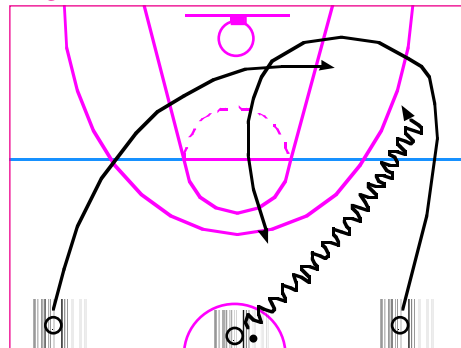
Drill:

- 3 on 3 competitive drill on one basket; ten minutes; the team which scores keeps playing offense; the winners rest for two minutes; the losers run sprints.
- *Rules:* they can only score if the low post receives the ball from below the extended free throw line, etc.
- Instead of beginning the drill with the appropriate alignment, as in previous drills, they begin at the middle of the court; then they must move and get organised in order to be able to carry out the rules. Diagrams 37, 38 and 39 represent some of the possible options that the players may choose from.

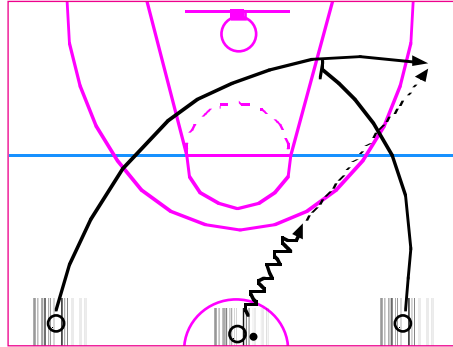
Diag. 37



Diag. 38



Diag. 39



- Later, the beginning of the drill may be more complex. For example, all six players are placed in the middle of the court. During two-five seconds, they run around (slowly) or do defensive footwork; then the coach passes the ball to one of them and his/her team has to play offense, with this player in charge of bringing the ball upwards. Then the three players have to move to create the offensive situation following the rules of the drill:

- ✓ they need a low post;
- ✓ they need someone below the extended free throw line to pass the ball to the low post.

- The players may use different options to create the situation required by the rules of the drill (remember Diagrams 37, 38 and 39). The coach may influence these options (making the drill easier or more difficult) by establishing additional rules such as the following:

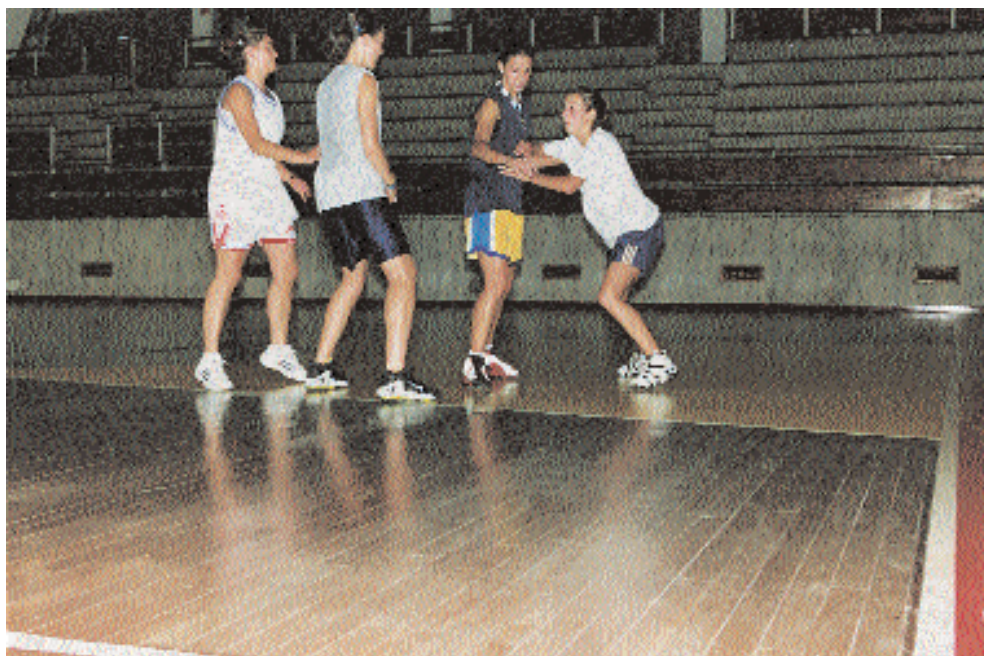
- ✓ the players can not use the same option twice in a row; if they do not respect this rule, they lose the ball;
- ✓ they can not use the same player as the low post twice in a row; if they do not respect this rule, they lose the ball;
- ✓ they can not play at the same side two/three times in a row; again, if they do not respect this rule, they lose the ball;
- ✓ they must include specific aspects: for example, they have to set a screen, the dribbler can not dribble below the extended free throw line, etc.

Comments:

- Using this kind of drills, young players will increase their *basketball knowledge* and their *creativity* to build up tactical situations in which tactical decisions can be made.
- This drill may be complemented with the rules of previous drills concerning low post and perimeter players' decisions. For example, specific rules may be added to work on the low post's decision between passing or playing to score.

**Practical Exercise**

- Using a basic structure of 2 on 2 or 3 on 3, design a series of drills to improve offensive tactical decisions.



8.4. BUILDING TEAM PLAY

Building team play is an important aspect with 15-18 year-olds. However, coaches should understand that this is a progressive process throughout these years, rather than something that can be done just in few weeks.

Building team play should be closely linked to improving individual fundamentals and developing tactical decision-making, so that players learn to interact using the appropriate individual resources.

Team play development should combine defense and offense. Both aspects should be built up simultaneously, providing reciprocal benefits.

In general, team play at these ages should cover aspects included in the following sections.

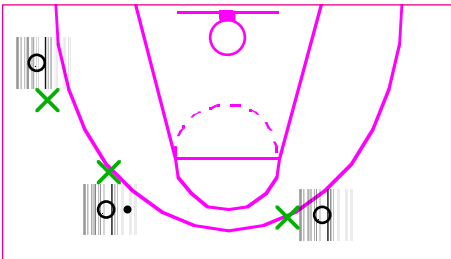
Team Defense Concepts

Basic Positioning

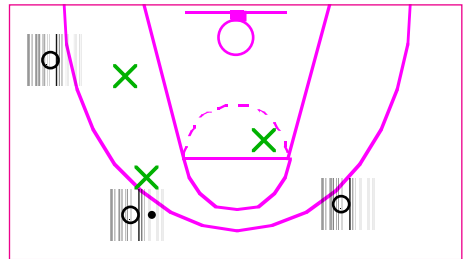
Considering the position of both the ball and the offensive players, basic positioning is the first step of a team defense. Probably in previous years some of these aspects were taught in 2 on 2 or 3 on 3 situations, but now players have to understand the complete defensive picture.

- Coaches should take a decision: What technique will be used to defend players who are *one pass away* from the ball? *Denying?* (Diagram-40) or *Floating* (also called *sagging*)? (Diagram-41).

Diag. 40

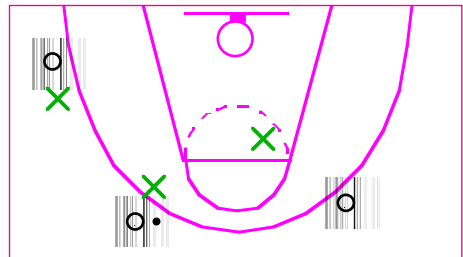


Diag. 41



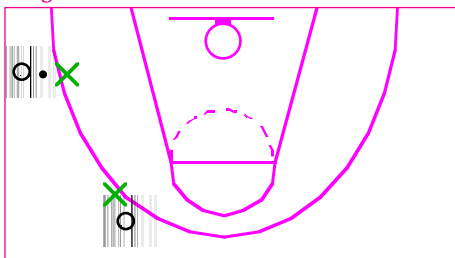
- Will it depend on the side of the defender?: *denying* if he/she is on the strong or ball side, and *floating* if he/she is on the help side? (Diagram-42).

Diag. 42

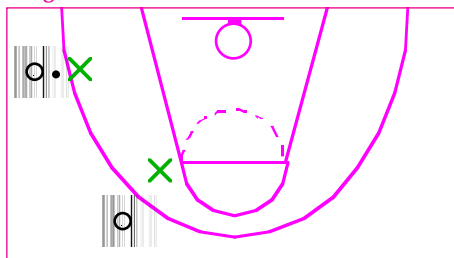


- When the ball is below the extended free throw line, how will the players defend the pass back to the guard? *Denying?* (Diagram-43) or *Floating?* (Diagram-44).

Diag. 43



Diag. 44



- These are key decisions to be made by the coach, since he/she must teach the players one system or the other without confusing them with ambiguous or contradictory messages.



- The next stage should be that the players learn all possible options, so they can use the alternative most appropriate to each specific situation.
- However, at this point they should learn just one way. Coaches have different opinions about the way to begin. Many agree that is better to start with the moves that demand more physical effort and risk (such the ones in Diagrams-40 and 43).

- However, it is advisable to choose a system that includes both *denying* and *floating* (in different positions), so the players will work on both fundamentals (for example, such as in Diagram- 42).

- To develop basic positioning, 4 on 4 drills with all the offensive players open are highly recommended.

Help

Help is an essential aspect of team defense. Basically, the players should learn to help in the following situations:

- dribbling penetrations;
- passes inside the paint;
- screens;
- post defense.

Help to Defend Dribbling Penetrations

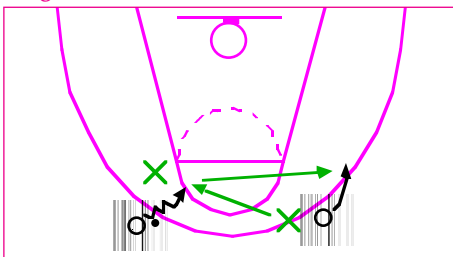
Help and Recover

The players should learn and practise the fundamentals to *help and recover*; this means to help his/her teammate stop the dribbling penetration of his/her player, but without losing sight of his/her own player, so they can recover to defend his/her own player as soon as the ball's player catches it to pass.

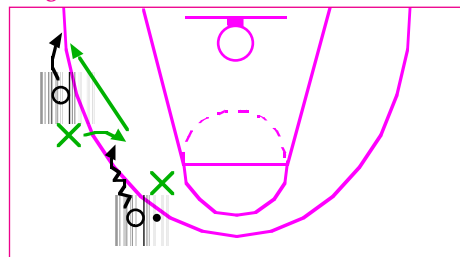
Help and recover drills should be practised both from denying and floating, and also from different places on the court (according to the basic defensive positioning):

- from denying the pass, in different parts of the court (Diagrams-45, 46 and 47);

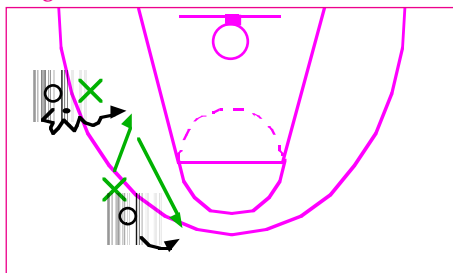
Diag. 45



Diag. 46

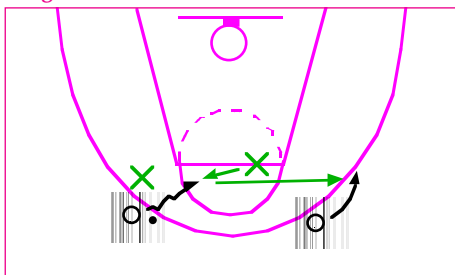


Diag. 47

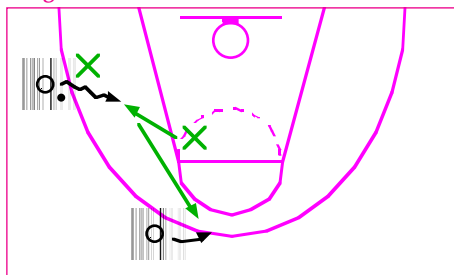


- from floating, also in different parts of the court (Diagrams- 48 and 49);

Diag. 48

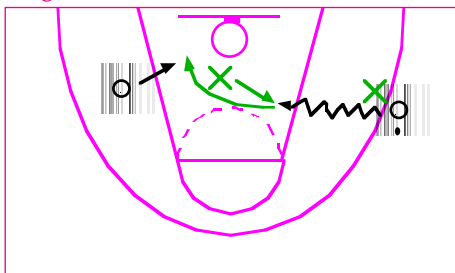


Diag. 49

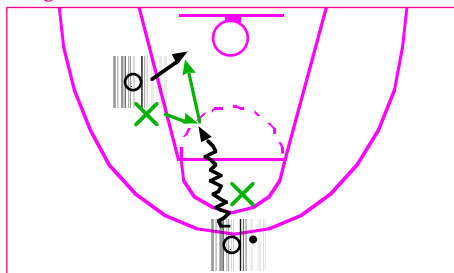


- inside players, from floating at the help side (Diagram-50) and from denying at the ball side (Diagram-51).

Diag. 50



Diag. 51



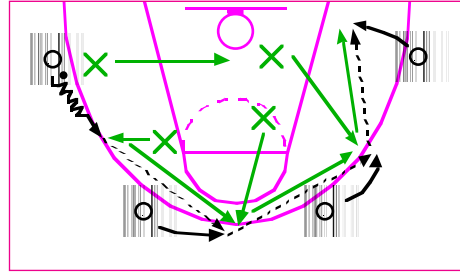
Helping the Helper

The players should also learn to *help the helper*. This means being alert to help a teammate helping a dribbling penetration. This teammate may recover a little bit behind the ball, so the task of the second helper is to stop his/her teammate's player until he/she recovers. This second help should also be performed without losing sight of the own offensive player, since the helper has

to recover quickly to defend his/her player.

- A 4 on 4 framework is very appropriate for practising help to the helper (Diagram-52). One of the offensive players penetrates dribbling and forces the nearest defender to help and recover. The ball's player passes to the open teammate and forces the next defender to *help the helper*, and so on. Offensive players should move away when their defenders go to help, making recovery difficult.

Diag. 52

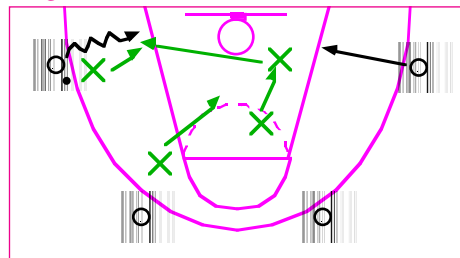


Rotation

Players should learn to rotate, especially to stop dribbling penetrations to the baseline (Diagram-53). When a player penetrates to the baseline, help must come from the nearest defender at the other side. This player should try to help stop the dribbler as far as possible from the hoop. He/she can not think on recovery, but should focus just on helping and stopping the dribbler. Rotation is needed to defend the helper's player in a very dangerous position at the other side of the basket.

- The defender who rotate (the nearest above) should be prepared to cut the pass to the open offensive player near the basket and, very important, to block out the rebound, since it is very possible that the dribbler shoot.
- Defenders who rotate to take care of players near the basket, must be prepared to block out the rebound to taller players than them.
- Defenders above the extended free throw line, as soon as an opponent player penetrates to the baseline, may move to the paint to protect this area from offensive players cutting or rebounding.
- 4 on 4 drills are very appropriate to practise rotation (Diagram-53).

Diag. 53

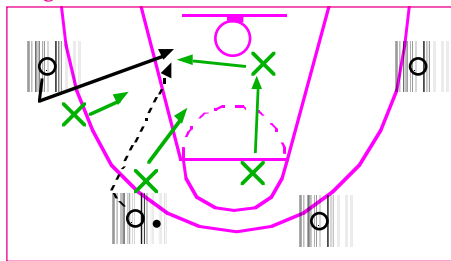


Help to Defend Inside Passing

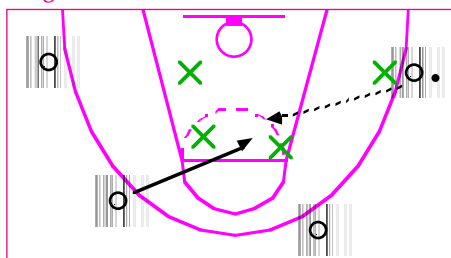
Help is also important to stop inside passing, both to perimeter players when they cut, and to post players. We will refer to post players later.

- A relevant offensive play which needs defensive help is the *back-door* (Diagram-54). The defender at the baseline on the help side must be alert and anticipate the intention of the player with the ball. Then he/she will be able to react and either intercept the pass, force an offensive foul (by standing in the proper place, since the receiver will be just watching the ball) or defend the receiver tightly as soon as he/she gets the ball, forcing him/her to either walk or shoot badly.
- The teammate who is nearest on the help side, should *rotate down* to take care of the offensive player left by the back door's helper (Diagram-54).
- Help may also come from defenders who are floating one pass away from the ball. For example, in Diagram-55, the player defending the guard who is one pass from the ball at the strong side is floating. He/she should be placed in a position that makes difficult the inside pass; he/she should also anticipate whether the player with the ball intends to pass inside, by watching both the player's eyes and the ball.

Diag. 54



Diag. 55



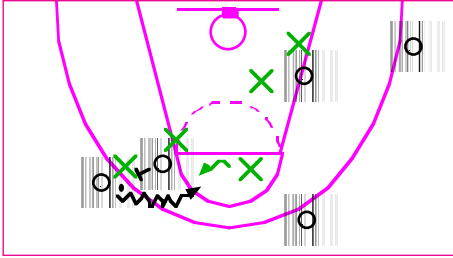
Help to Defend Screens

Defensive help is crucial to defend *screens* too.

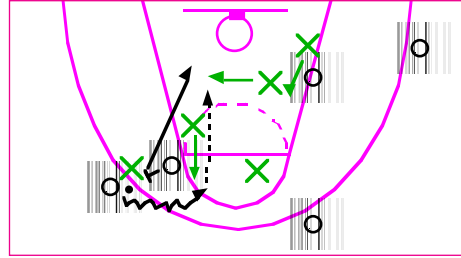
- In the *on-ball screens* (screens to the player with the ball) it is important to work with the two defenders directly involved in the screen (the screened and the screener's defenders) to improve their fundamentals to stop the screen. Nevertheless, it is also important to develop a team defense through appropriate help from teammates.

Help may be directed at stopping the dribbler just after the screen (Diagram-56), or to stopping the pass to the screener (Diagram-57). In either case, helping to the helper or rotation may be needed from other

Diag. 56



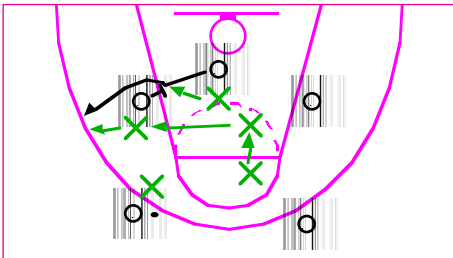
Diag. 57



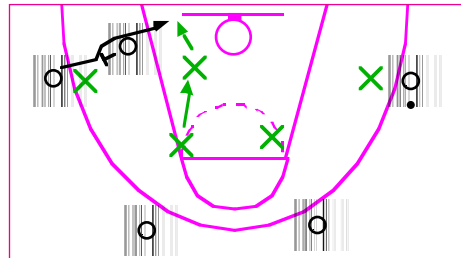
defenders, so all five defenders must be alert when the offensive team sets an on-ball screen.

- In the *off-ball screens* (to players without the ball) the screener's defender may help his/her teammate either leaving him/her room to pass through, denying the passing lane until he/she recovers, or stepping

Diag. 58



Diag. 59



into the pathway of the screened player (Diagrams 58 and 59). Sometimes the helper will also need help from another teammate.

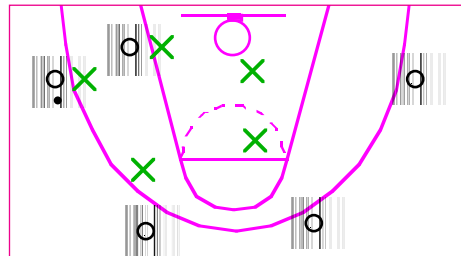
Low Post Defense

Although post players have their own defenders, post defense must be considered a team responsibility, so young players should develop this.

In the first place, team defense to defend the low post will depend on the way the post is being defended by his/her own defender.

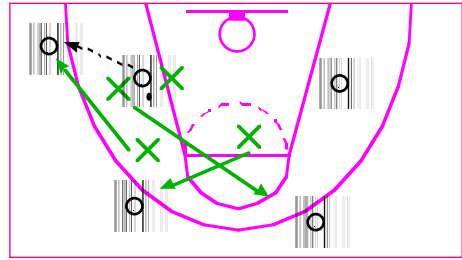
- If the low post is defended from *behind*, **help from teammates should be in front** (Diagram-60). In this case, the helper should anticipate the pass to the post, either to prevent it, intercept it or to complicate the post's reception of the ball.

Diag. 60

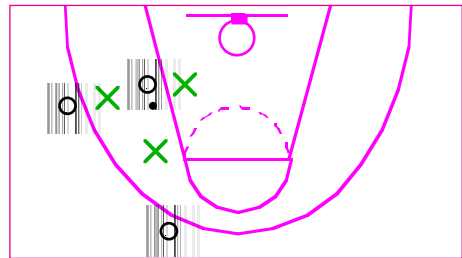


- If the post receives the ball, the defenders of the perimeter players should be ready to help. This help may be «full help» (double-team help) or «mid-help».
- When the perimeter defenders *double-team* the post, he/she will tend to pass the ball to his/her open perimeter teammate; then, *rotation* of other defenders will be needed to stop the open perimeter offensive players (Diagram-61).
- When the perimeter defenders play «mid-help» they will be in *mid-way* between the post and their perimeter offensive players (Diagram-62).
- Thus, if the post passes the ball back outside, these defenders should react to defend their perimeter players; on the contrary, if the post decides to play 1 on 1 to score, they should fully help inside. In this

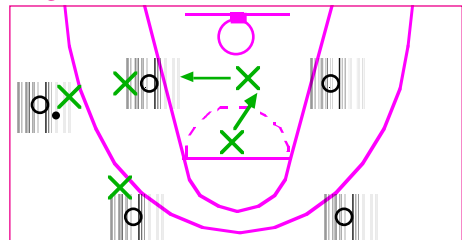
Diag. 61



Diag. 62



Diag. 63



- If the low post is being defended *three-quarter fronting* or *in front*, then the **help must come from**

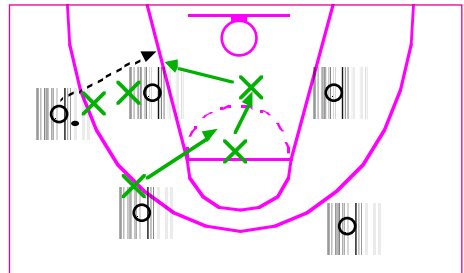
the teammates on the help side (Diagram-63). In this situation, if the attacker at the wing is not strong playing 1 on 1, the defense may deny the pass to the guard, so the wing may be forced to perform a lob pass to the low post.

- In this

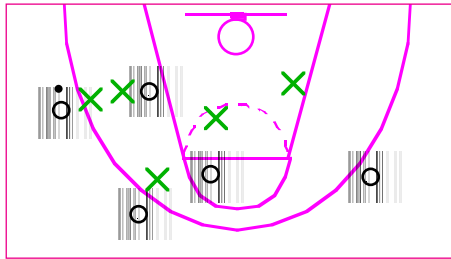


case, help-side players should be alert in order to anticipate the lob pass.

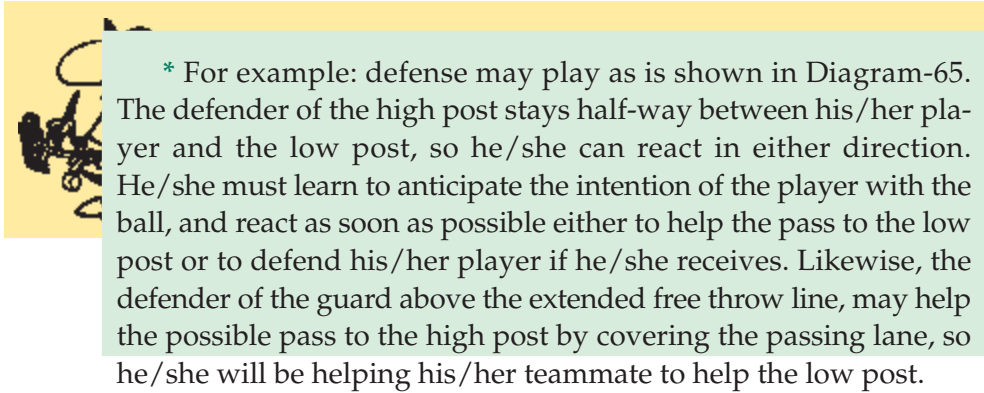
Diag. 64



Diag. 65



- Usually, help should come from the defender nearest the baseline, and rotation will be needed to defend his / her attacker (Diagram-64).
- To prevent this help, some offenses do not place a player at the opposite low post spot; team defense should be prepared to defend despite this.



Talking in Defense

This is a very important aspect in building team defense. Unfortunately, many coaches realise this so but do not work on developing this aspect.

Talking in defense is essential for defenders to *communicate* concerning relevant points, such as screens, cuts, helps, shots, etc. However, it is not enough to tell the players they must talk.

The coach must specify the situations in which talking should take place, decide the precise words to be said, and specify who should be the player to say those words.

Players can not use long sentences; instead they need short *key words*, meaning of which should be understood by the whole team. For example: «left screen!» may be enough to alert a teammate to this situation.

Afterwards, key words should be included within practice as one of the performance goals to be achieved.

* For example: the coach may design a 4 on 4 drill to practise team defensive concepts. He/she should include not only the correct moves, but also the key words significant to that drill. He/she may even utilise a reward system to reinforce the use of key words. For instance, every time a player uses the correct key word at the right situation, his/her team gets an extra point.

Practical Exercise

- Make a list of key words that you might include within your defense, specifying the precise situation for those words to be used and the player responsible for saying.

Zone Defense

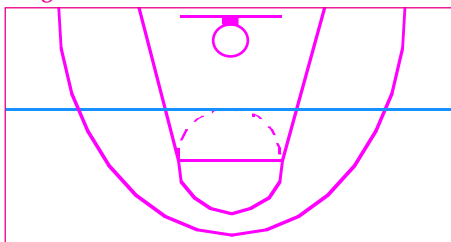
15-18 year-old players have to learn to play zone defense too. At 15-16, it will be enough to start with one simple alignment (2-1-2, 2-3) to teach the players how to adapt the defensive fundamentals to a zone structure.

At this age, 2-1-2 or 2-3 are the most advisable alignments for three reasons:

- they are very simple, so players can assimilate basic moves very quickly;
- they have the same structure (four outside players) as the one recommended for developing team defense (remember all 4 on 4 situations mentioned above), so the players can easily apply all the defensive concepts;
- they are the most common alignments, so the team can use them to

improve both defense and offense.

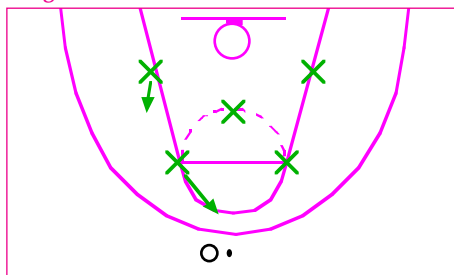
Diag. 67



Key Points

At this age, the most important thing is that young players

Diag. 66



understand that playing zone defense does not mean making less effort or having less individual responsibility.

Thus, the role of the coach is not just to teach the basic moves in the zone, but to clearly point out the specific responsibilities for each position.

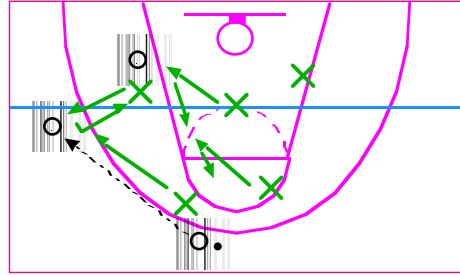
- Who should stand in front of the player with the ball?
- Who should stop the penetration of the dribbler from every position?
- Who should help and recover?
- Who should help the helper?
- Who should rotate?
- Who should cover the inside passing lanes in every position?
- Who should help inside if the high or the low post get the ball?
- Who should stop the attackers from cutting from every position?
- Who should stop each shot?
- Who should block out the rebound?

These questions should be answered by the coach and then made clear to the players. Furthermore, the coach should observe the individual functioning of each player to detect individual deficiencies and correct them.

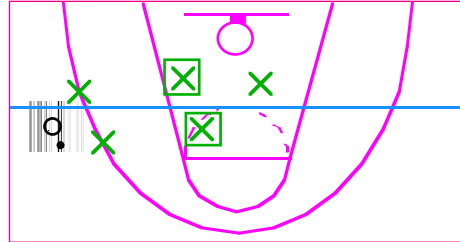
Specific Concepts

The task of the coach when teaching zone defense is to adapt defensive concepts to a zone structure. Nevertheless he/she must work specifically on the following aspects.

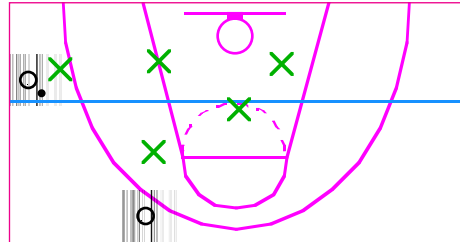
Diag. 68



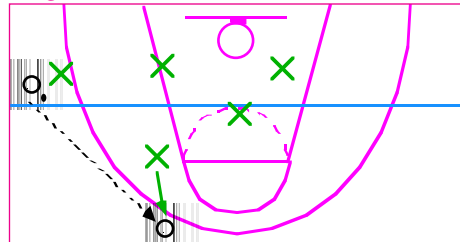
Diag. 69



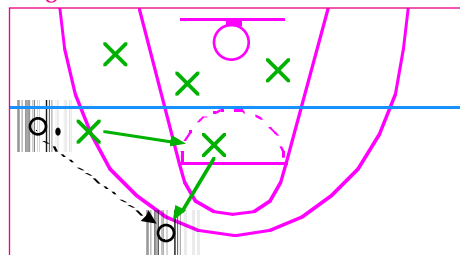
Diag. 70



Diag. 71



Diag. 72



- Players defending in front of the zone must decide *who gets the guard with the ball*, since probably this player will stand in the middle of the two defenders (Diagram-66).
- Then, the defender behind the one who goes to stop the player with the ball must be very alert and move slightly forward, since probably the pass will go to his/her side (Diagram-66).
- The coach has to establish the limit between the area in which the offensive player at the wing must be defended by the defender in front, and the area in which this player must be defended by the defender at the back.

* For example: the coach might establish this limit as an imaginary line from the top of the dotted semicircle of the paint (Diagram-67). *Above* this imaginary line, the defender in front would be the one responsible for stopping the wing player; *below* this line the one responsible would be the defender at the back.

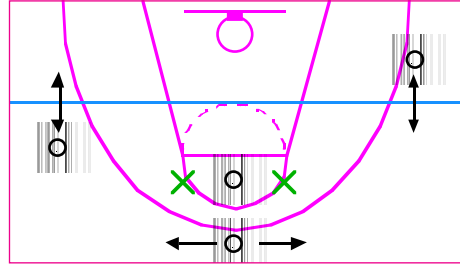
- This means that, if the pass goes to a wing player who is *above* this line, the back defender should help until his/her teammate arrives, and then recover his/her position, whereas the defender in the middle helps the helper, and the other front defender covers the inside pass to the high post area (Diagram-68).
- Thus, while the two defenders at the strong side are playing wide (the front defender to reach his/her new position coming from the top to the wing; and the back defender helping his/her teammate) the *defender in the middle* and the *help-side front defender* must cover the inside passing lanes (Diagram-69).
- On the contrary, if the pass from the guard to the wing goes *below* the line established, then the back defender should take care of that player, and the front defender should move backwards to cover inside passing lanes (Diagram-70).
- When the ball returns from the wing to the top, there are two possibilities:
 - ✓ if the back defender is with the wing, then the front defender at the strong side, should be the one to move out (Diagram-71);

✓ if the front defender is with the wing, then the other front defender should be the one to move out; in this case, the front defender who was with the wing player must move quickly inside to cover the inside passing lane (Diagram-72).

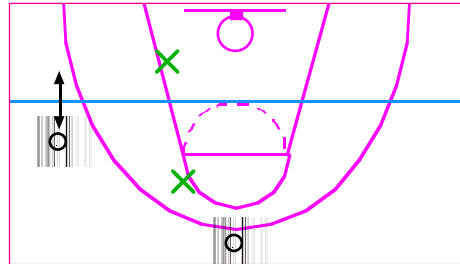
- The players have to learn to *anticipate the next offensive pass*, so they are ready to move as soon as the ball leaves the hands of the passer.
- The players should always remember to *move with the ball* instead of behind it.
- The players should learn to move using the *proper footwork*, always looking at both the ball and the offensive player who might be their next responsibility.
- When they move from one position to another, it is important that they learn to *use their arms to cover possible passing lanes*, since most of the dangerous passes take place while the defenders are moving. This way they will manage to delay passing until they are settled.

- This is especially important for the defender who comes out to defend the player with the ball; and also for the player who moves back from defending the ball to cover the inside passing lanes. The coach should be especially alert with the latter, since young players tend to move back late.

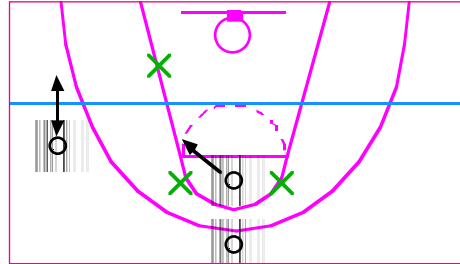
Diag. 73



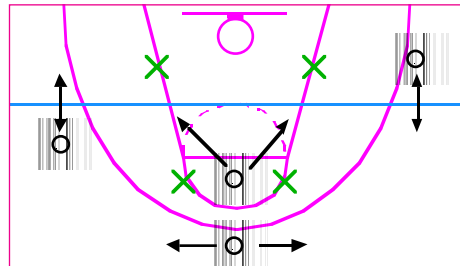
Diag. 74



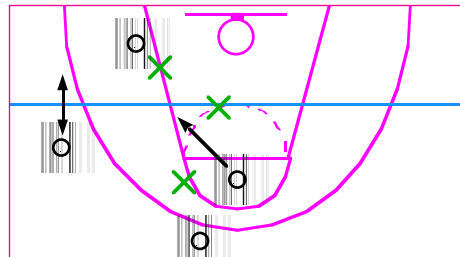
Diag. 75



Diag. 76



Diag. 77



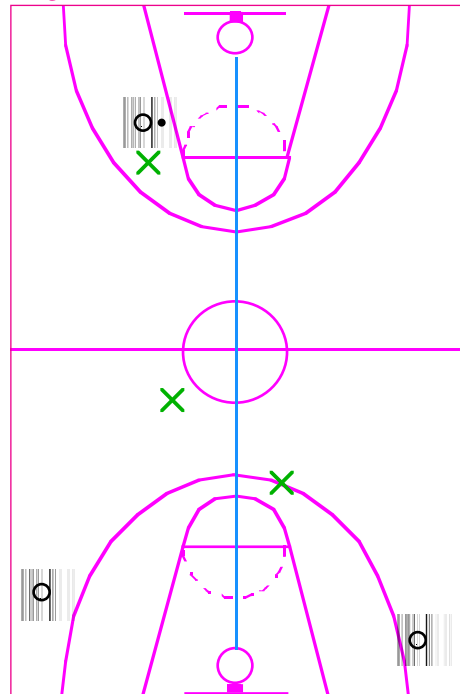
- The player defending the attacker with the ball is *responsible for stopping this player's dribbling penetrations*. Teammates next to him/her are responsible for helping if this happens.
- Help-side players should learn to stop cutting by *placing their body in the pathway of the cutter*, so the cut will not be carried out in the best pathway to receive the ball.
- The defenders at the back should *front the low post* (not stay behind). They will take care of the low post's cutting until the middle of the paint; then the other back defender will take care of the low post. The defender in the middle will cover, as much as possible, the passing lanes to the low posts, and will help his/her back defender teammates when necessary.
- The defender at the middle and the two defenders at the back should *block out the rebound* at the positions near the hoop. Front defenders should block out at the high post area, blocking out the high post player every time they can.

Drills

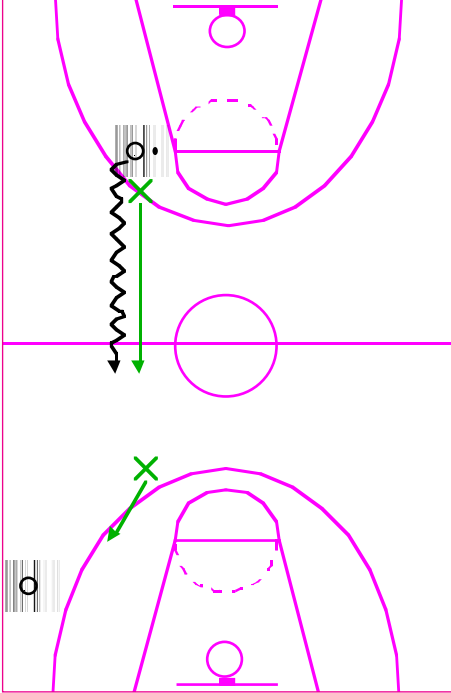
All these concepts should be progressively developed through appropriate drills, using a *whole-part method* of teaching. That is, combining drills in which the whole zone is played (5 on 5) with drills in which just a part of the zone is practised.

- For example: a drill to practise the moves of the two front players (Diagram-73). The offensive wings should move between both sides of the limit line. They can neither shoot nor penetrate if they are below that line. They can neither shoot nor penetrate if they are below that line. Offense can not shoot until they give at least four passes. Front defensive players should move according to concepts explained above.
- Another drill, now to practise the moves of the front and the back defenders (Diagram-74).

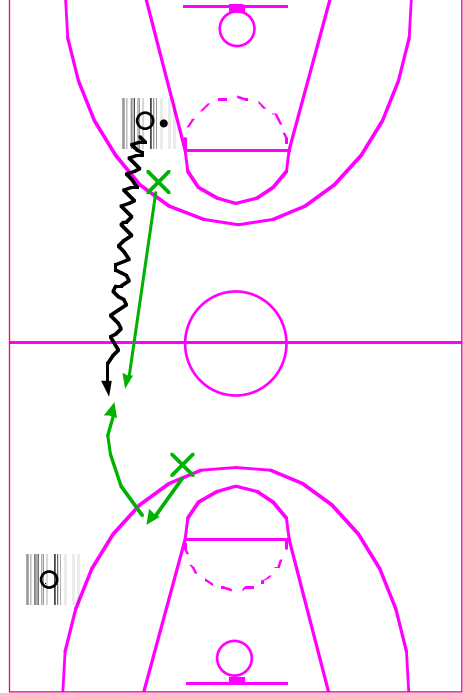
Diag. 78



Diag. 79

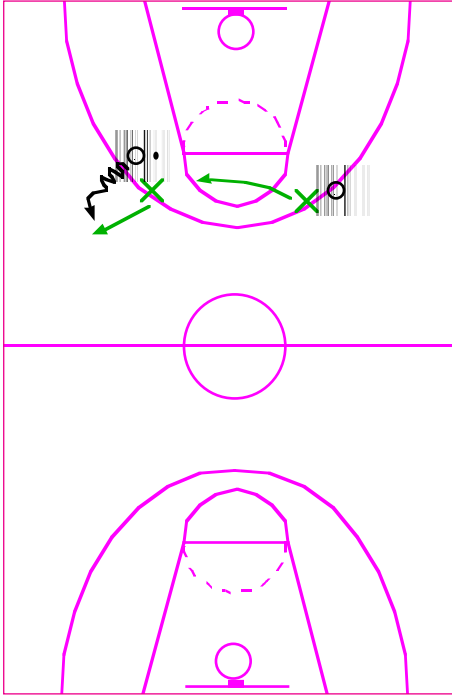


Diag. 80

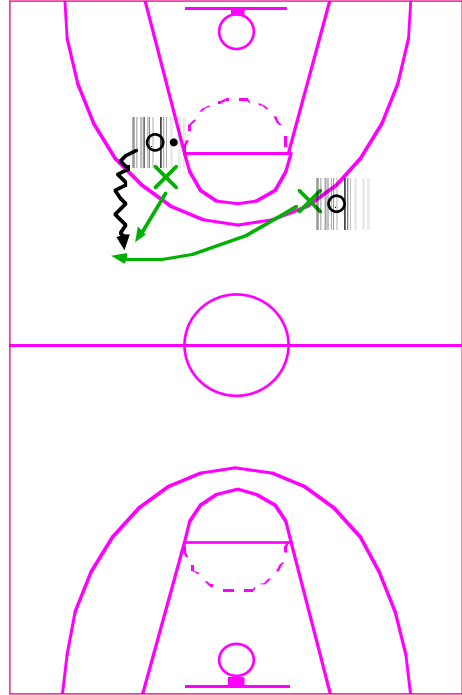


- The next drill also includes the help-side front defender (Diagram-75).
- The next drill includes the four outside defenders (Diagram-76).
- A drill with the strong side front and back defenders, and the defender in the middle (Diagram-77).
- 5 on 5 drills to practise whole zone defense.

Diag. 81



Diag. 82



All these concepts may be properly developed during the 15-16 year-old period; then, at the 17-18 year-old period, they should be improved. Likewise, at the 17-18 year-old period, coaches may teach other zone alignments such as 1-3-1, 1-2-2 or 3-2, match-up zones, and mixed zones such as «box and one», «diamond and one» or «triangle and two».

Press Defense

In general, at these ages, coaches should not spend much time on developing specific press defense.

Working with 15-16 year-olds, the coach may practise «man to man press» using basic team defensive concepts (help and recover, rotation, etc.) and, of course, basic individual funda-



mentals.

At this point, the coach can not take time from other basketball contents which should have a higher priority, so it will be enough to use «man to man press» as an opportunity to develop defensive skills, without spending time improving specific aspects.

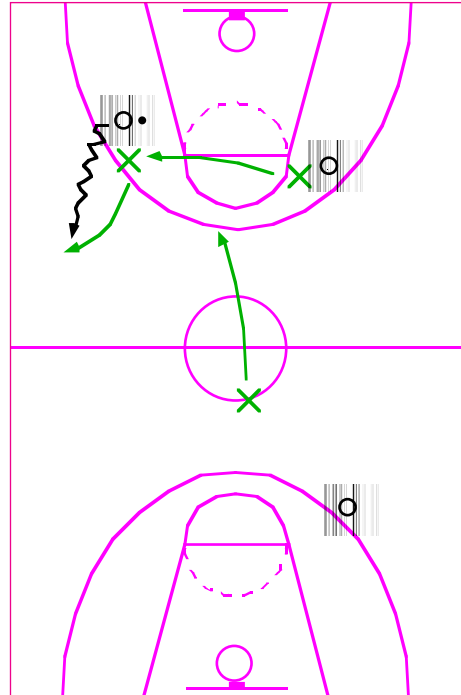
Later, working with 17-18 year-olds, these specific aspects may be worked on specifically.

Positioning and Moving

The coach may organise drills to improve positioning and moving of all players. He/she should pay special attention to the players *far from the ball* (Diagram-78).

- In this case, the *player's back should be oriented to the middle vertical line of the court* (imaginary line; see Diagram-78), so he/she can see both the ball and his/her offensive player.
- Likewise, *the further the player is from the ball, the longer the distance between him/her and his/her attacker*. Thus, this distance should be reduced as the player with the ball approaches (Diagram-79), although at a lesser speed, so at some point the defender might be able to jump onto the player dribbling (Diagram-80).
- Defenders far from the ball must be ready to react to a long pass to their attackers, so they can intercept the ball or, at least, be there to defend the player. They should also learn to *anticipate long passes and run quickly backwards*, without losing sight of the ball, as soon as the ball leave.
- These defenders should learn to change their position every time either the ball or their attacker changes.
- It is important as well that they anticipate the move of the ball to be ready to *help and rotate*.
- They should also practise *stopping their attacker cutting to the ball*, since this may be an offensive strategy.

Diag. 83



Double-Team

The coach may also work on double-team technique and strategy. Who should double-team? How should he/she double-team?

* For example: if the dribbler's defender stops him/her, the dou-

ble-team may come from behind the dribbler (Diagram-81), but if the dribbler have overcome his/her defender slightly, the double-team may come from the front (Diagram-82).

- When the two players set the double-team, they must make sure that the dribbler *does not pass through the middle*, so they should work to develop this skill.
- Likewise, players should learn to double-team *without fouling* (a common mistake of young players is fouling while they double-team).
- Once the dribbler picks the ball, the purpose of the players making up the double-team should not be to steal the ball, but to *force a bad pass or a five-second violation*. Thus, they do not need to touch the attacker, just to *cover passing lanes with their arms*, so that passing is difficult.

- The other three defenders should learn to *rotate*, to take advantage of their teammates' double-team (Diagram-83).

Other Aspects

- The coach should also decide, and work on, what the players will do if the other team uses screens. In general, *switching* is a good strategy at the front court, and sometimes also at the back court. Whichever is used, the players should work on this through specific drills.
- Furthermore, the 17-18 year-olds' coach may decide to include specific press defenses, such as «run and jump» or zone-press defenses at different places (full court, half-court, etc.).

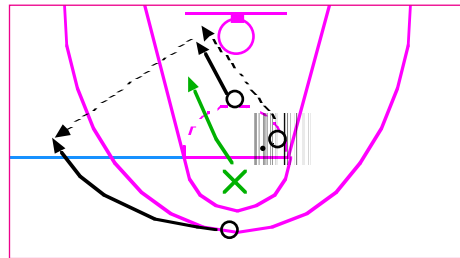
Obviously he/she should assess if his/her players are ready to perform those defenses, and if they are not, it would be a waste of time working on them instead of developing the defensive concepts that the players need.

In any case, it is not advisable for the coach to try to build up different kinds of press defenses, since this will probably confuse the young players.

Advanced Defense Strategy

With 17-18 year-olds, the coach should continue to strengthen basic defensive individual fundamentals as well as the basic concepts of team defense. Furthermore, if the team is ready, he/she can work on more complex aspects of defense, such as press defense, mixed zones, etc., and also defensive combinations that make up part of advanced defensive strategy.

Diag. 84



* For example: he/she might develop different ways to defend one-pass away from the ball (*denying* versus *floating*) and teach his/her players to use each alternative depending on the global defensive strategy of the game.

* The same thing might be done regarding post defense. If players develop different ways of defending the post, they may learn to combine these, depending on the circumstances. Thus, the coach might decide to play a game with players defending the low post behind, and then change at half-time or in a time-out, to defending in front.

* The coach may also teach his/her team to use alternative defenses; this is switching from man to man defense to zone defense, from zone to man to man, from one kind of zone to another kind, etc. For example, he/she may work on switching to a 2-1-2 zone after shooting a free throw or to defending out-of-bounds plays.

This kind of learning should be part of the 17-18 year-old players' basketball development. However, it is obvious that this will be a very difficult objective if the players have not gone through the appropriate *progressive learning process* in previous years.

Therefore, the coach of 17-18 year-olds has to make a *realistic assessment* of his/her team's current capabilities in order to decide the extent to which the players are ready to work advanced defensive strategy. He/she will probably need to spend most of his/her time to improving and strengthening basic individual and team defensive concepts, and in some cases he/she will be able to spend some time working on complex aspects related to advanced strategy.

Fast-Break and Transition

Basketball players should play fast-break from the beginning. Coaches should not prevent young players from fast-breaking, since this is fun for the players and helps them to develop most basketball fundamentals.

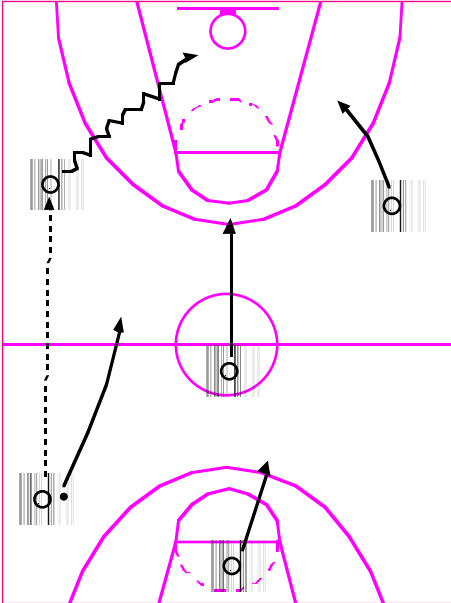
During the 15-18 year-old period, fast-break fundamentals should be assessed by the coach, who should work to improve all deficiencies that he/she may find. The following are some of the aspects that usually need to be improved.



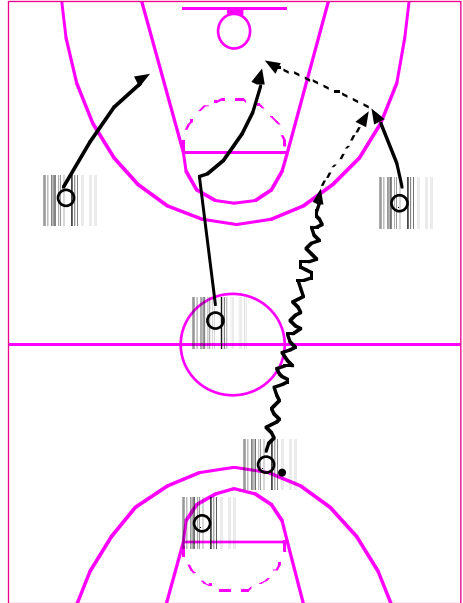
Outlet Pass

The coach may find problems such as the rebounder turning incorrectly to o

Diag. 85

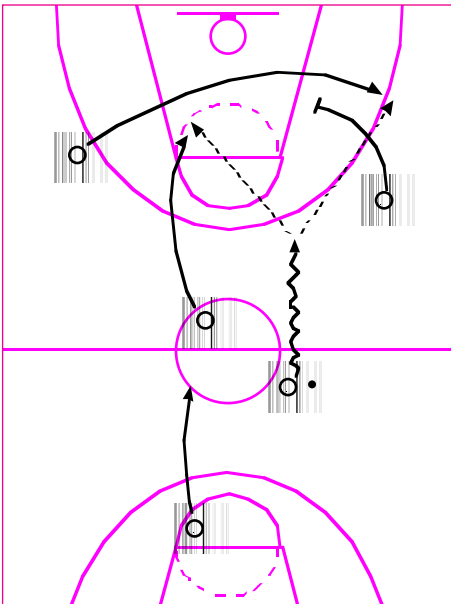


Diag. 86

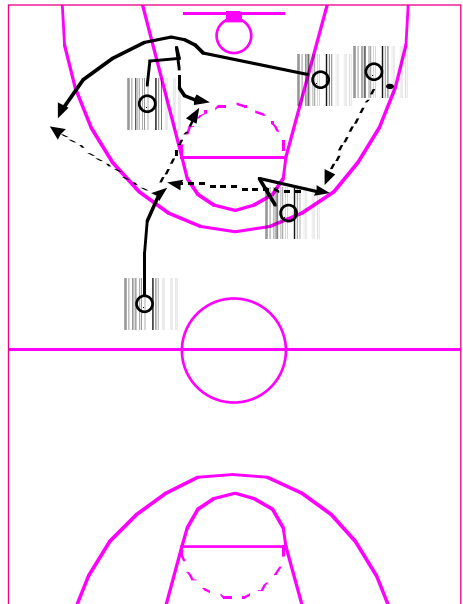


the sideline (using a wrong or unbalanced position of his/her body, or wrong position of the ball) or the guards opening late or badly to the sideline (wrong area, wrong body position).

Diag. 87



Diag. 88



- The **defensive rebounder** must *turn to the sideline on the same side* from which he/she got the rebound, facing the nearest corner of the court; he/she should turn slightly in the air as he/she moves down, so that he/she lands in the right position to quickly perform the outlet pass. A balanced stop when landing from the rebound is crucial to performing a good pass.

Young right-handed players usually have problems turning properly at the left side (since the outlet pass should be performed mainly with the left hand), and the opposite happens to left-handed players.

- The rebounder should *land with the ball well protected*, far from offensive rebounders. By extending his/her arms, he/she should find a *free passing lane* for the outlet pass.
- The **guard** should *move to the proper spot* at the sideline just as he/she see his/her teammate catching the ball in the air. The coach must decide on the spot he/she wants for the outlet pass. A common idea is the extended free throw line. Some young guards tend to approach the rebounder to get the ball. This reduces the chances of the fast-break, since it is important to gain some meters with the outlet pass.
- Thus, the guard should move to the extended free throw line, with his/her *back to the sideline*, and wait there for the pass. Only if there is no free passing lane can he/she move to the baseline or to the middle to get the pass.



Specific drills may be designed to develop all aspects involved in the outlet pass. First without opponents. Later, with a defender on the rebounder (Diagram-84). Later, adding a defender on the guard.

Guard's Play

Some young guards need to improve their skills when receiving the outlet pass. Two common mistakes are: turning to face the sideline, thus losing sight of the whole court; and bouncing the ball as they catch it without looking ahead first (some guards look ahead while bouncing the ball).

- Guards must learn to *turn with their backs to the sideline*. As they turn, they should *move their heads up* to have a wide view of the whole court, so they can rapidly assess the situation and decide whether to pass forward to a teammate who has a clearly advantageous position, dribble quickly to the middle lane, or stop the Fast-Break.
- This rapid assessment should be made *without bouncing the ball*, just taking one second to look around and decide.

- When dribbling to the middle, they should learn to use a long bounce to begin with, using the hand furthest from the sideline (many young guards only use their stronger hand, losing opportunities to fast-break when this hand is not the appropriate).

Obviously all of the guards' skills should be assessed and improved when necessary. For example, their dribbling and passing ability while moving to the front court, the decisions made at the end of the fast-break, etc.

Rebounder Dribbling the Ball Forward

This is a valuable resource to be developed with young players, so that when they get a long rebound, or they see the middle lane open for them, they can dribble forward rapidly to begin the fast-break.

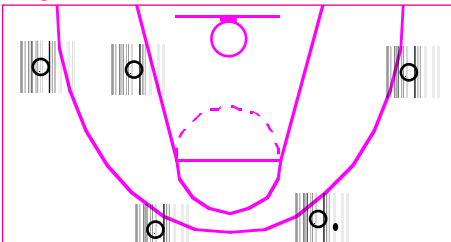
Coaches need patience to develop this skill, since tall young players may make many mistakes at the beginning. However future benefits make this investment worthwhile.

Running the Fast-Break

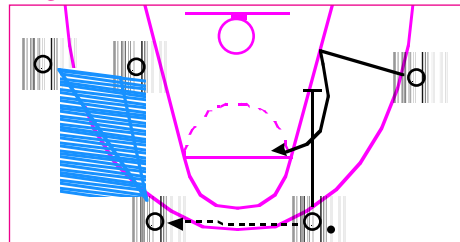
Many times, young teams do not run the fast-break because the players do not start out at the right moment. A common mistake is to wait until the guard catches the outlet pass, but by then, it is too late to run.

- Players who are neither catching the rebound nor guarding, must *run forward quickly*, as soon as they see their rebounder teammate catch the ball. First of all they should run quickly to the nearest free lane without watching the ball, then, at about half-court, turn their heads to see the ball.
- In general, they must take the nearest free sideline. If the nearest is not free, they must take the other sideline; if this is not free either, they may take the midlane in front of the guard (obviously the last point will depend on the fast-break structure that the coach has designed for his/her team).

Diag. 89



Diag. 90

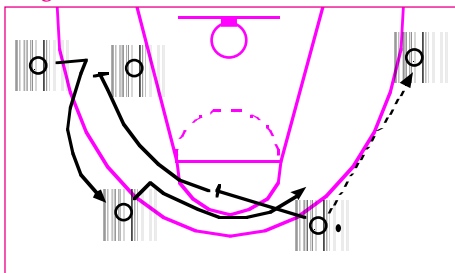


End of the Fast-Break

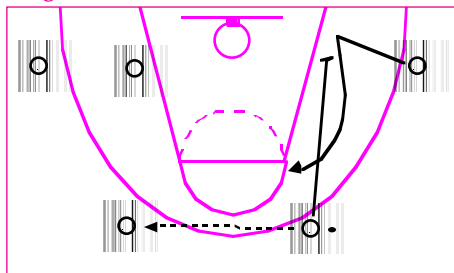
The coach must decide how he/she wants his/her team to end the fast-break, and work on this with his/her players.

- 15-16 year-old teams should have simple endings, easy situations of

Diag. 91



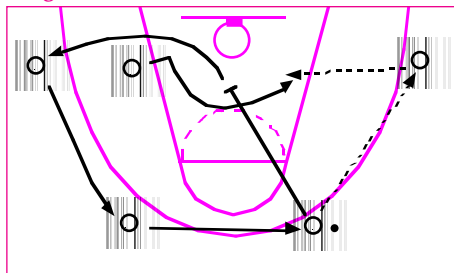
Diag. 92



superiority (1 on 0, 2 on 1, 3 on 1, 3 on 2, 4 on 2, 4 on 3), keeping the players in their own lanes (Diagrams-85 and 86).

- 17-18 year-old teams may develop more complex transition moves to link the fast-break and the set offense (as an example see Diagrams-87 and 88).

Diag. 93

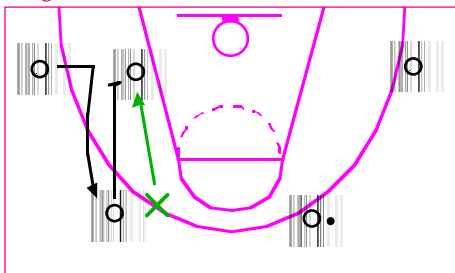


Fast-Break from a Steal

Many fast-breaks begin with a steal of the ball. Therefore, it is important to organise and to practise this situation.

- If the player stealing the ball is in an advantageous position, he/she

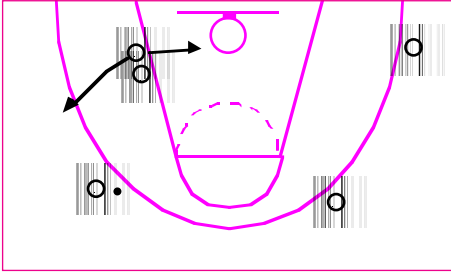
Diag. 94



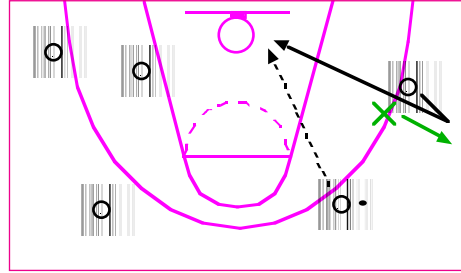
- The other four players must move rapidly. The guard should find a free passing lane while moving to the sideline nearest to the ball. The other three, should run to take the free lanes of the fast-break.

The coach may use many defensive drills to practise fast-break after a

Diag. 95



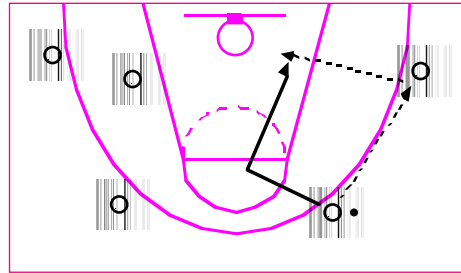
Diag. 96



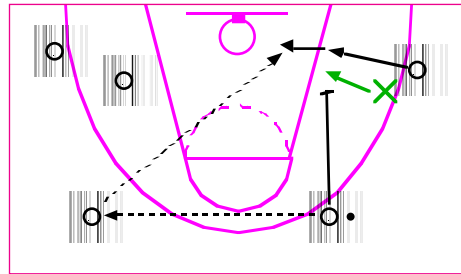
steal. He/she may also organise specific drills.

* For example: 3 on 3, 4 on 4, or 5 on 5; all players at one end, placed as decided by the coach at the ball and the help side. The coach makes a wrong pass or throws the ball to the floor. The defenders must play a quick fast-break.

Diag. 97



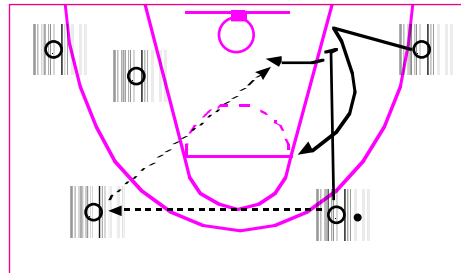
Diag. 98



Practical Exercise

- Organise three drills to practise specific aspects of defense and fast-break when the defensive team recovers the ball.

Diag. 99



Man to Man Offense

The team offense, both man to man offense and zone offense, should be closely linked to the development of offensive tactical decisions and offensive individual fundamentals. A very common mistake of coaches working with 15-18 year-old players is that they teach their players a series of set offenses that the players learn as automatons. This means that the players know where they should move, but do not master the tactical decisions and

technical fundamentals involved in each move, thus performing these badly.

The result of this is, for example, a 15-16 year-old team with a nice set offense that includes screens, but players unable to perform those screens properly (incorrect stopping, unbalanced body stance, moving and fouling, wrong decisions, etc.). Or a 17-18 year-old team with a beautiful set offense



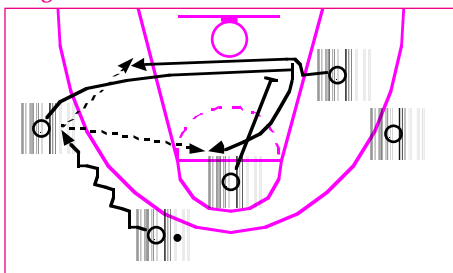
play with the low post, but players unable to see and to successfully perform the inside passes needed.

All this seems very obvious; however many coaches still spend most of their training time teaching set offenses that their young players are not able to perform correctly.

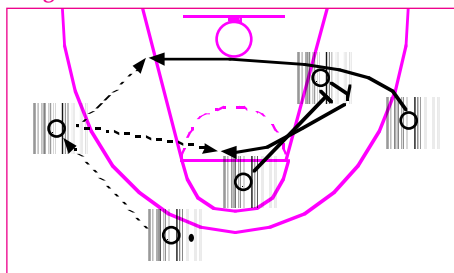
Therefore, keeping this in mind, coaches should decide what kind of offense may be more appropriate for their teams. As an example, some ideas will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Basic Offense for 15-16 Year-Olds

Diag. 100

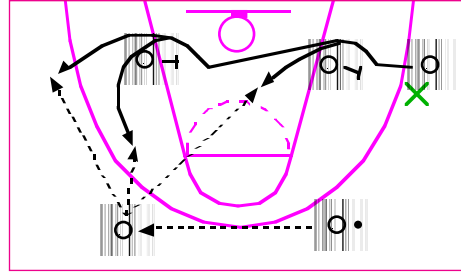


Diag. 101

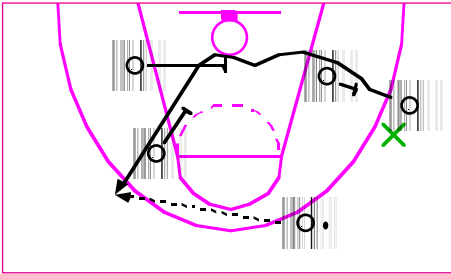


With 15-16 year-olds, it may be appropriate to set an offense with four outside players facing the basket and just one inside player playing backwards. Furthermore, it is advisable that no player is limited to playing backwards, so all can play facing the basket and some of them (if possible all except the shortest) can also play backwards. Why?

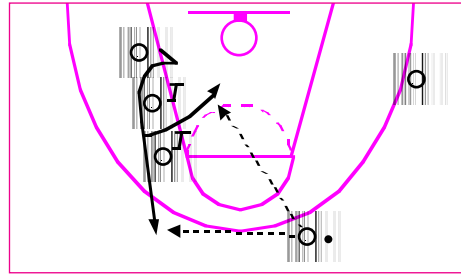
Diag. 102



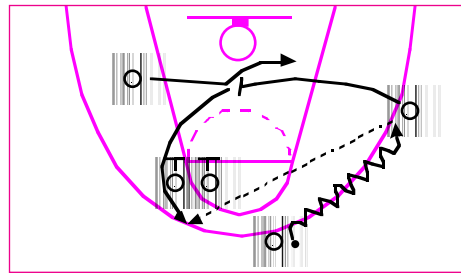
Diag. 103



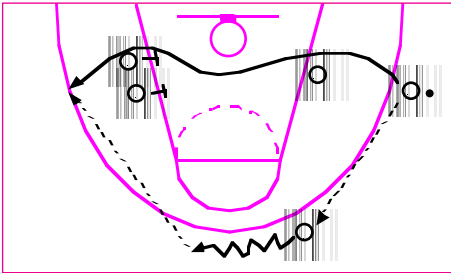
Diag. 104



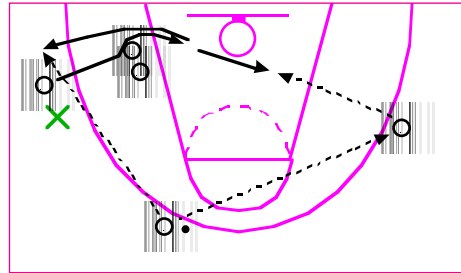
Diag. 105



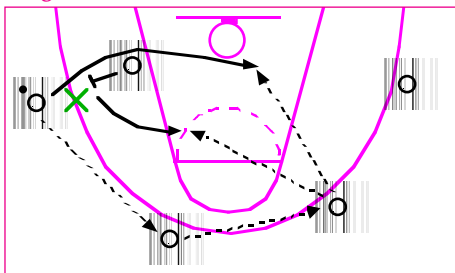
Diag. 106



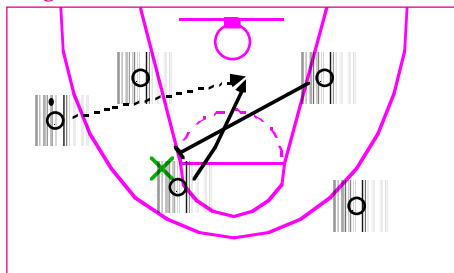
Diag. 107



Diag. 108

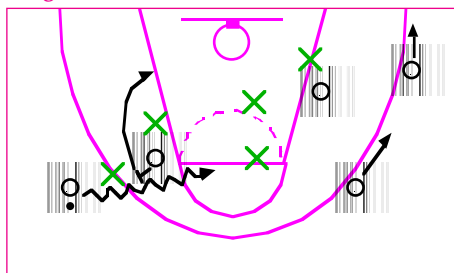


Diag. 109



- All players need many opportunities to play facing the basket, so they can develop all basic offensive fundamentals. At this age, they are just beginning to learn how to play backwards, so less opportunities are needed for them to practise this position.

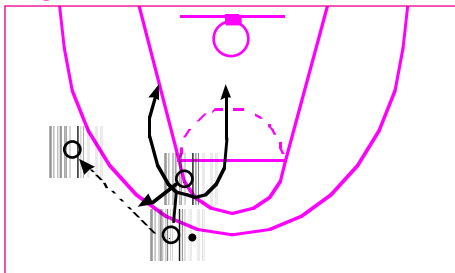
Diag. 110



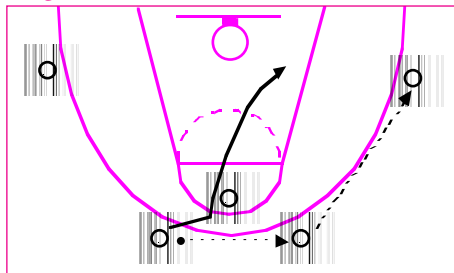
- Further, they need enough room to drive inside for lay-ups as well as enough room inside to play with the post without too much traffic.
- Using this pattern, players will also have many opportunities to develop basic tactical decisions.
- To build up team defense, a 4 on 4 structure of outside players is excellent at this age. Therefore, an offense with 4 outside players will help to build up team defense and will benefit from better defense as well.

As an example, Diagrams-89 and 90 show a pattern that may be appropriate-

Diag. 111



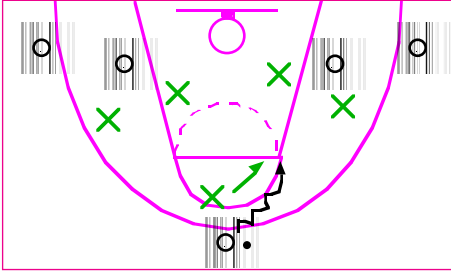
Diag. 112



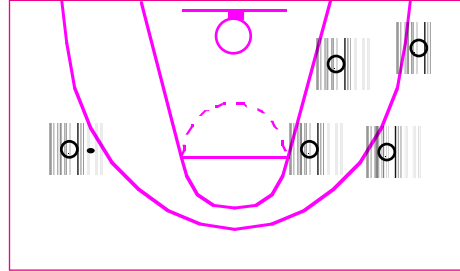
ate for 15-16 year-olds. As we can observe in Diagram-90, this pattern develops *3 on 3 play with a low post*, and *off-ball screens*, as well as other options that may be added progressively (for example, *pick and roll*).

A few rules may be established to favour the options of this play.

Diag. 113

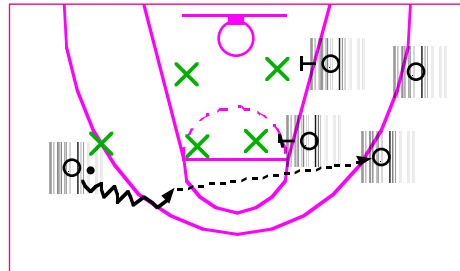


Diag. 114



- Every time a player at the position of one of the guards passes the ball to either side, he/she will move away to screen all the outside players at the other side (Diagrams- 91 and 92).

Diag. 115

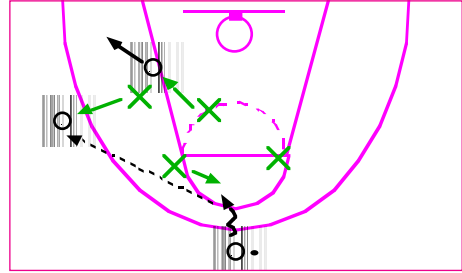


- Later, another option could be added: when the guard opposite to the post passes to the wing, he/she will screen to the post; then his/her teammates will replace him/her (Diagram-93).
- Every time a player at the guard's positions can not receive the ball because he/she is well defended, he/she must move away to screen all the outside players at the other side (Diagram-94).

Because of these rules, the positions and the moves of the players provide many options that should be developed through specific work on decision making and individual fundamentals.

- The wing player at the post's side may *use the post to get open* (Diagram-95). The wing player at the opposite side may try to play *back door* if his/her defender denies the pass (Diagram-96).

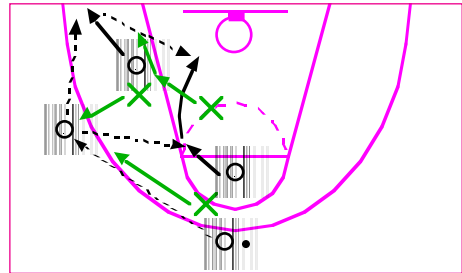
Diag. 116



- Players may use *change of direction* with *change of speed* to get good passes (Diagram-97).

- Off-ball screens provide many opportunities. For example, in Diagram-98 the player who is screened (player-5) *fakes* a move to the basket to move the attention of his/her defender away from the screen; however, he/she sees the opportunity to *change speed* and then to receive the pass near the hoop.

Diag. 117



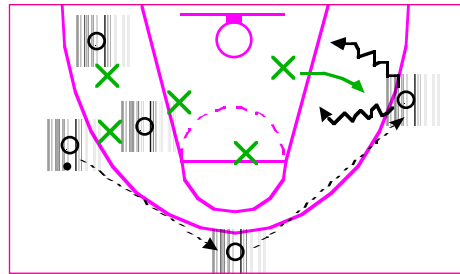
- Another example may be seen in Diagram-99. In this case the screener (player-5) takes advantage of a defensive switch: he/she *pivots* and *steps into the paint* to get the pass.
- As in the last example, if defense switches to defend off-ball screens, players may learn to take advantage of this depending on the *mismatch* produced by the switch. Thus, players with a height advantage may learn to *post*, whereas players with a height disadvantage may learn to *move out*.
- These moves provide many opportunities for *1 on 1 plays*, so the players can develop 1 on 1 decisions and fundamentals.
- These moves also provide the opportunity to play against help and recover defense. Thus, every time the dribbler penetrates and gets help from another defender, he/she may learn to *look for the open teammate*.

Advanced Concepts for 17-18 Year-Olds

With 17-18 year-olds other concepts may be introduced. At this age players can learn to play with two inside players (either two low posts, two high posts, one low post and one high post). As an example, these players may work on plays that include concepts such as the following.

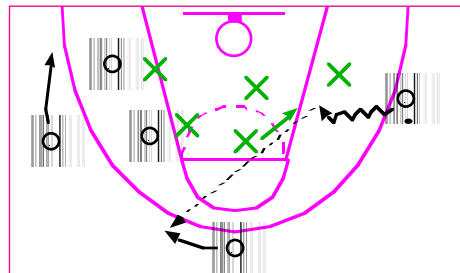
- *Screen for the Screener* (Diagrams-100 and 101). In this case, the player who screens is then immediately screened by another teammate, so the player with the ball has two consecutive options to pass.
- *Series of Screens for a Shooter* (Diagrams-102, 103 and 104). These are two or three screens in a row to allow a shooter to get free and get the pass to shoot or play 1 on 1. The screeners may learn to ask for the pass themselves if the defenders switch or help. The screened player must learn to «read» the defense, so as to take advantage of the situation.

Diag. 118



- *Double Screens* (Diagrams-105, 106 and 107). Two players stand side by side to set a screen. They must learn to «read» the defense, so they can ask for the pass when their defenders help or switch.

Diag. 119

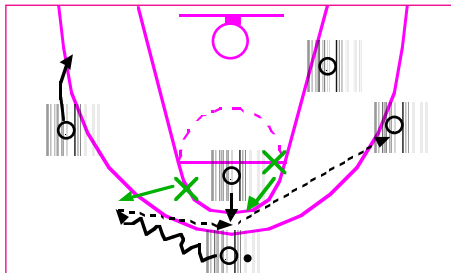


- *Blind Screens* (Diagrams-108 and 109). The screen comes from behind the defender, so he/she can not see the screener. This screen is efficient for screening defenders whose attention is so intensively focused in front of them, that they are not alert to the screen. For example, to screen defenders of players who have just passed the ball (Diagram-108) or defenders denying the pass (Diagram-109).
- *Pick and Roll with a triangle at the help side* (Diagram-110). Players should already know how to play pick and roll. Now they can play pick and roll with a triangle at the help side. The two players at the pick and roll (players 1 and 4) can play this with plenty of space. If help comes from

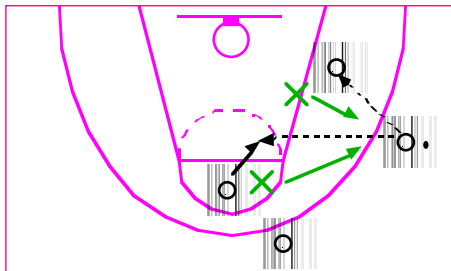
the help side, the ball may be passed to the open teammate. This set makes defensive help very difficult, but offensive players have to master all the decisions and fundamentals involved in this play.

- *Cuts off the High Post Screens* (Diagrams-111 and 112). Guards may cut off the high post just after the ball goes below the extended free throw line, before the defenders move to float. Timing is very important, especially if the cutter comes from the help side (as in Diagram-112). These cuts may provide two passing opportunities: one to the cutter, and one to the high post if he/she steps out slightly.

Diag. 120

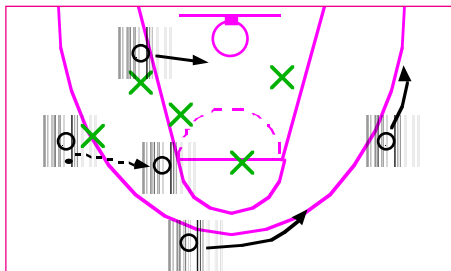


Diag. 121



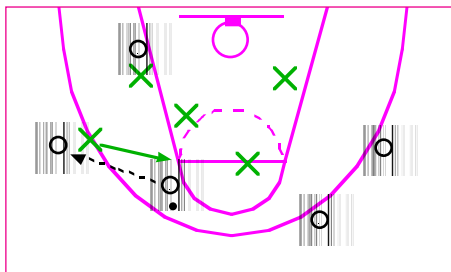
- *1 on 1 plays* (Diagrams-113 and 114). In this case, one player has plenty of room to play 1 on 1. He/she must play to score himself/herself. However, it is likely that help will come from other defenders, so he/she should be alert and ready to pass the ball to the open teammate.

Diag. 122



In the same way, teammates should learn to get open when their defenders move to help. If defense helps using the inside defenders, and moves the outside defenders to help the helpers, inside offensive players (4 and 5) may screen outside defenders to prevent them coming back; then there will be a good chance to pass to the perimeter players (1 or 3) (Diagram-115).

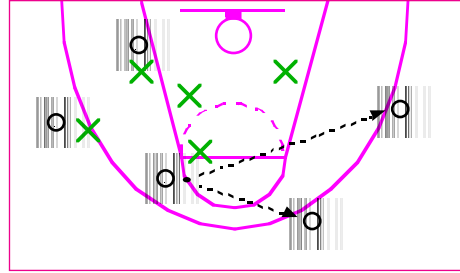
Diag. 123



Obviously, it is neither necessary nor convenient for the coach to teach all these moves to his/her 17/18 year-old players. Rather, he/she should only choose some of them to increase his/her

players knowledge, taking into account the number of contents that players are able to assimilate. Coaches have to keep in mind that it is not enough to memorize moves, but that players should understand their meaning, master all the decisions and fundamentals involved, and practise enough to be able to perform each move efficiently.

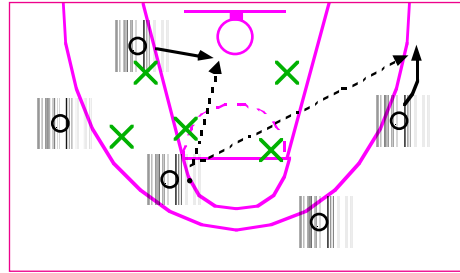
Diag. 124



Zone Offense

The same philosophy should be applied in the case of zone offense. At the age of 15-16, players should develop some team concepts to attack the zone, mastering the decisions and fundamentals involved. Later, at the age of 17-18, this learning process may be completed by working on more concepts. The basics to attack the zone are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Diag. 125

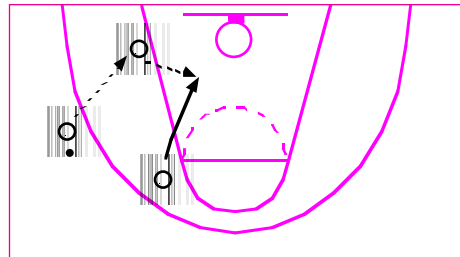


Moving Defenders Out of their Position

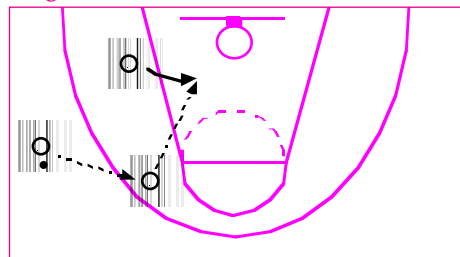
This is a basic concept that should be taught to the players in first place.

- The guard with the ball should move to a spot where he/she force one of the front defenders to *move out of his/her zone position* (Diagram-116).
- Then he/she should take advantage of this situation by passing the ball to the wing on the same side (Diagram-116).
- The wing teammate should stand in a spot that force the defender at the back to *move out of his/her zone position* when the wing player get the pass from the guard (Diagram-116).
- The low post should move to a spot that force the defender in the

Diag. 126

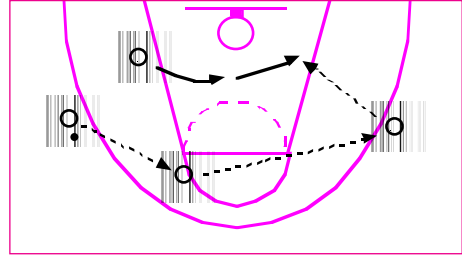


Diag. 127



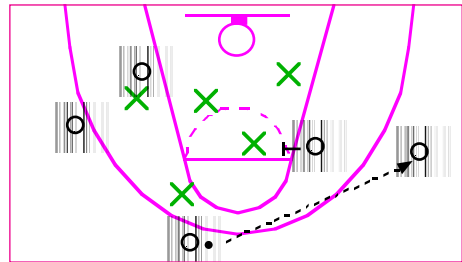
middle to *move out of his/her zone* to help the defender at the back (Diagram-116). Some teams, especially 15-16 year-olds, may decide to play with a *false low post*; thus, the player initially placed in that position would open to the corner as soon as the back defender moves up to stop the teammate at the wing.

Diag. 128

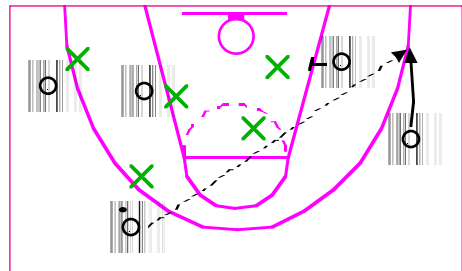


- These moves will provide good chances for the wing and the low post to shoot the ball unless the defenders move out of their positions. If this happens, there will be good opportunities to *pass the ball inside* to the player at the high post. This player should learn to *move down to find a passing lane* to receive the ball (Diagram-117).
- A common mistake of young players at the high post is cutting down as automatons, so that they have no chance to get the pass. Instead, they should *step to the proper spots* (the free passing lanes) to get the ball.
- Likewise, the players at the wing and at the low post (and also the guard when the ball returns) should *learn to see*, just before they receive the pass, if a defender is coming to take them; if not, they should look for their own shot; if a defender comes, they should know *which side* he/she comes from, to focus on *attacking on that side*.
- Also, *just before receiving the ball*, outside players should *look for* the possibility of passing the ball inside, since the best opportunities to pass inside come when the defenders move from one position to another. By doing this, outside players will be able to *pass inside* as soon as they receive the ball, before the defense is set in the new position.

Diag. 129



Diag. 130



A common mistake of young players attacking the zone is to move and to move the ball without thinking, not provoking defenders to move out of their positions, not passing according to the weak points of the defense, and not looking for the opportunity to pass the ball inside.

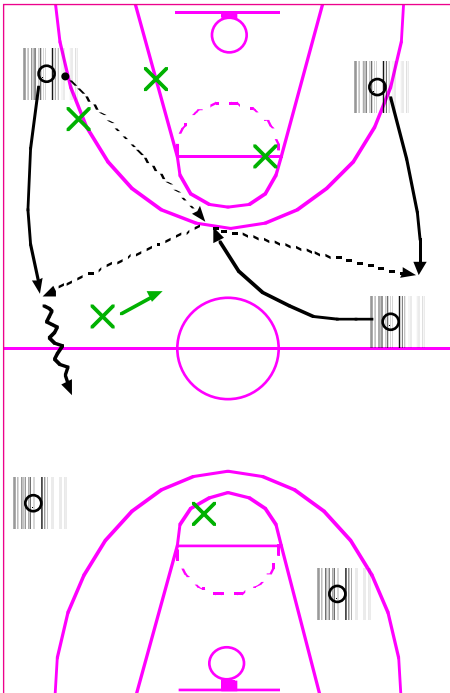
Penetrating Inside

Another common mistake against the zone is not using dribbling to penetrate inside. However, this is a valuable resource to be developed with young players.

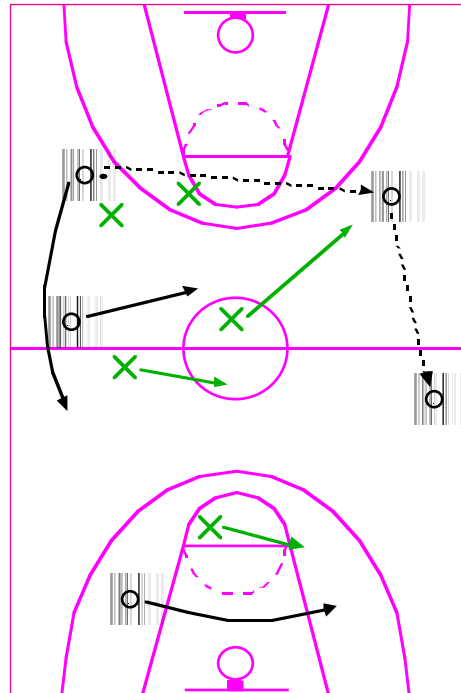
- Players may learn to penetrate when the defender who is moving to stop them *comes late*, especially when the ball has changed from one side to the other (Diagram-118).
- Then, they should learn to decide according to the defenders' reactions. Sometimes, they should just dribble once or twice to stop for a *jump-shot* at the border of the paint before the big defender in the middle can stop them. Other times, if they attract help from other defenders, they may look for a *pass to a teammate* who is open (Diagram-119). This move could provide good opportunities for outside shooters.

Playing With the High Post

Diag. 131

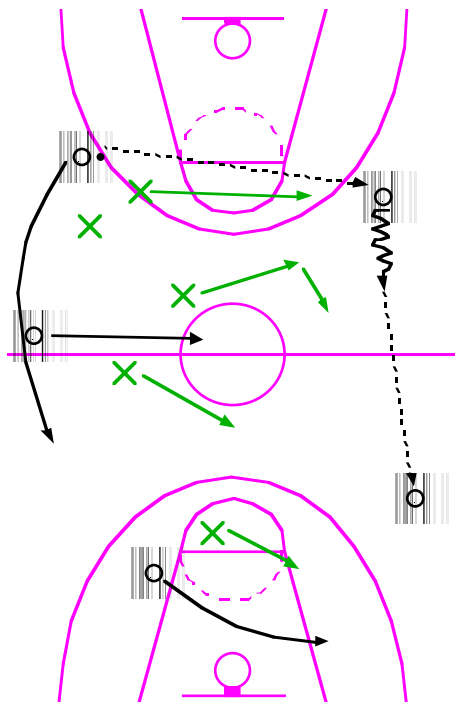


Diag. 132



We mentioned above how outside players should be alert to pass the high post when he/she cuts inside. Likewise, it is interesting to use the high post player while moving the ball, to create problems for the zone defense. Two examples.

- In Diagram-120, the guard dribbles to the wing, thus bringing with him/her the front defender on that side. Then the high post opens slightly and receives the pass. He/she can shoot unless a defender comes to stop him/her. In this Diagram, the help-side front defender takes the post, so the post can take advantage of the weakness of the defense on that side by passing the ball to the wing.



Diag. 131

- This will provide the wing with the opportunity to shoot unless either the back defender or the front defender (this defender moving very quickly) is able to stop him/her. If he/she can not shoot he/she may take advantage of the defenders' moves to either pass to the low post, pass to the high post as he/she cuts to the free passing lane (Diagram-121) or penetrate dribbling (remember Diagram-118).
- The second example is in Diagram-132. The player at the wing (here, player-3) may look for the pass to the high post when he/she is defended by the front defender. In this case, the high post must learn to move to the corner of the free throw line to complicate help from the other front defender. Then, as soon as he/she receive the ball he/she may shoot or, if a defender comes to take him/her, pass to the

Diag. 132

