



Mike MacKay
mmackay@basketball.ca

Re-thinking the game

Many of the concepts that we grew up with as players and coaches need to be reconsidered with the evolution of the game. It is not to say that these concepts are wrong, but are they still the most effective way to teach our players.

The two big areas to consider are:

- effective use of the shot clock
- the "global" player

The use of the shot clock is the greatest change to the game. Very little discussion of the shot clock has taken place in our coaching education. No where is it to be found in our current NCCP. The development of the "global player" has evolved as a result of the shot clock. Today's player must be able to dribble, pass and shoot the ball. More importantly the global player needs to be able to make the decision late in the clock of when to use these skills.

Attack vs. Control

One of the biggest concepts that coaches moving to FIBA rules will have to face is the realization that all players need to develop attacking skills. For years we have taught players to catch the ball square to the basket and then read the defense. This is playing with control. It is still an integral part of the game and must be taught to all players. With the advent of the shot clock players also need to be able to attack. The player reads the situation before catching the ball and instantly acts upon catching the ball.

What are Attacking Skills?

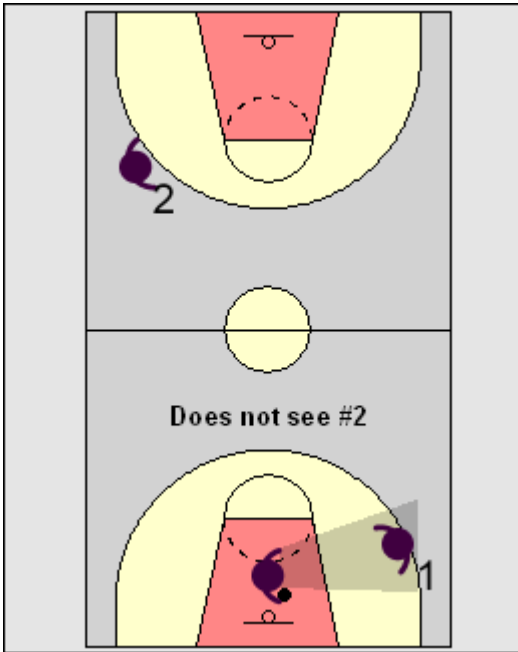
In the backcourt these skills include the ability to:

- scan the rim
- stretch the floor vertically
- break out dribble or push the ball vertically
- pass the ball vertical
- deal with ball pressure
- make the right decision on when to use these various skills
- analyze advantage /disadvantage situations
- perform all of these skills at an ever increasing rate of speed

In the front court the player must be able to:

- scan the rim
- create a shot for him/her self or a team mate
- finish creatively against contesting defense
- pass creatively and effectively leading to an assist

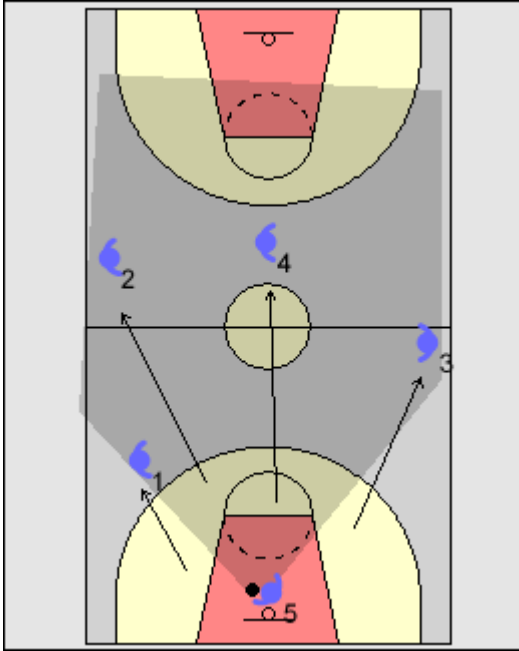
- deal with ball pressure
- analyze advantage /disadvantage situations
- perform all of these skills at an ever increasing rate of speed, with a limited time clock and against all types of defenses



Back court - Scan the rim

Teams that only look for the point guard become easy for good teams to defend as the game progresses. It is very difficult to have one point guard be the sole ball handler for every possession of every game. Playing 40 minutes of every game is difficult enough, let alone being effective late in the game.

By teaching players to scan the rim they will see advantage situation immediately that they can exploit. If they are looking only for the guard first these may not appear.



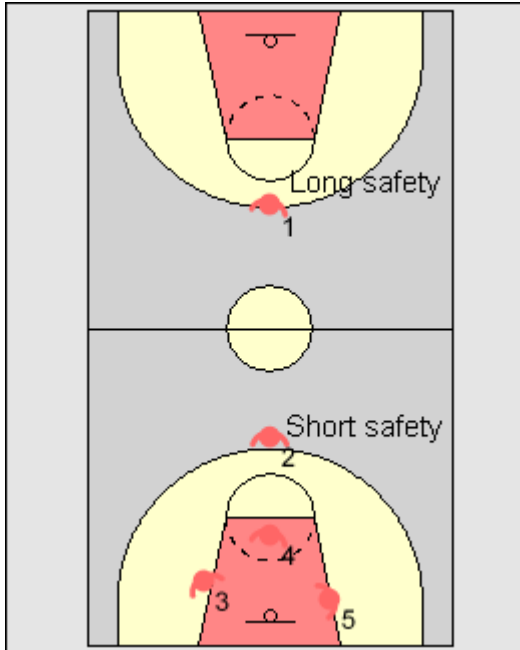
Stretch the floor vertically

When a rebound is secured and the rim is sighted the other players put immediate vertical pressure on the defense by sprinting vertically. They fan out to spread the floor. It is important that these players have been taught to run forward while still looking back over their inside shoulder.

Decision making now comes into play. The player with the ball must decide to:

- throw long
- break out dribble
- pivot and look for a teammate to cut back to the ball

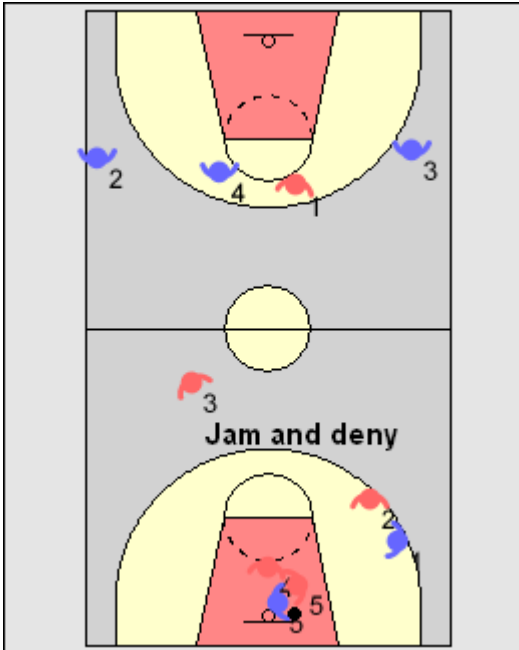
The other players must evaluate the situation also. You can still have the point guard cut back to receive the outlet.



Taking advantage of transition defense

Transition defense has been taught in a number of different ways:

- "get back" - everyone sprints back to the defensive 1/2 court and then matches the ball. This type of transition does not challenge the attacking team until the half court. If you push the ball you will find advantage since not all players will arrive at exactly the same time.
- Fan - in this transition the defense spreads out to meet the offense. It becomes like a zone press. The slower you attack the easier for the defense to set.
- Funnel - the concept here is to immediately find the ball and put pressure on it to direct it to spots advantageous to the defense
- Combination - these more complex transition defenses rely on a combination of fanning and funneling. The most common taught today involves long and short safeties.

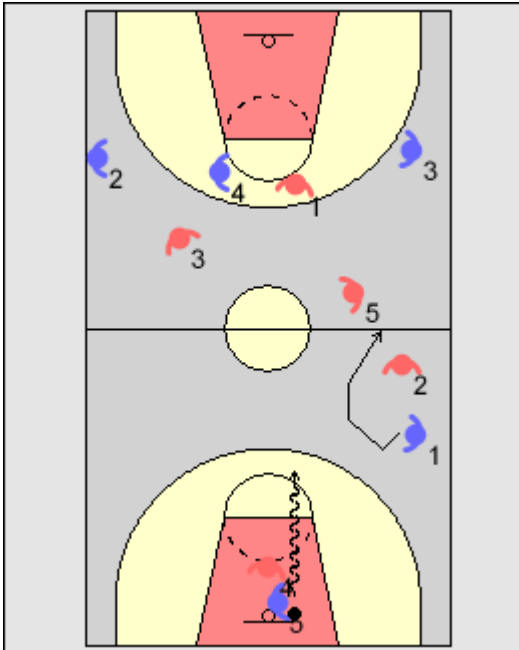


One of the major weaknesses of all transition defenses is the mismatches in numbers and in abilities that can occur when teams run. Failure to run allows teams to begin to exert pressure on the ball immediately. In fact teams will even be able to deny outlet passes and set up 1/2 court and 3/4 pressure.

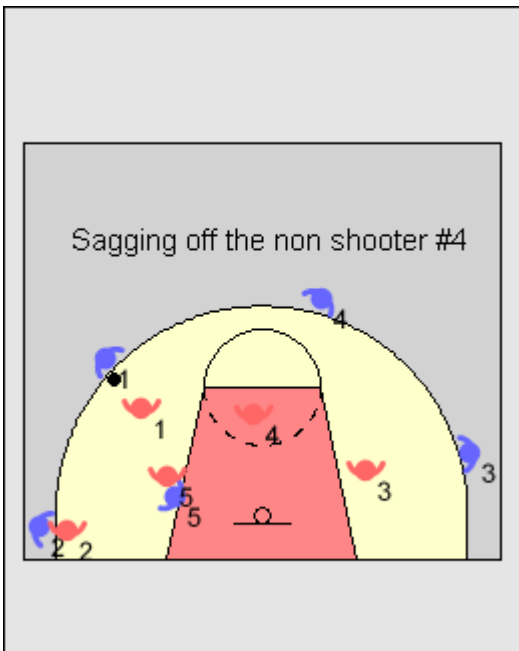
A vulnerable time for the transition defense is the time when the safeties, usually smaller perimeter players, are released by the retreating bigger players to apply ball pressure. It requires communication and coordination to for this to happen seamlessly.

Teams that fail to run or always use one player to advance the ball allow this to happen almost instantaneously. A team can leave their “bigs” to jam the rebounders and send a player to deny the outlet because they know there is no deep threat.

This puts instance pressure on the defense and forces the back line players to move backward. If you do not do this and allow these players to move forward teams get very good at building pressure. There is always that point when the defensive safeties must be released by the retreating interior players. The further down the floor this occurs the more space and less pressure the offense will face. If no release occurs you create mismatches that the offense wants to quickly exploit before the defense can recover.



Teams that stretch vertically, throw long or use break out dribbles move the release point further down the floor, later in the transition. The safeties must move back first before moving forward. Teams may also have to designate fewer players to the offensive boards. The advancing defenders now have to face an offensive player coming at speed.



Front court attack

When the shot clock winds down another universal attack situation occurs. If teams begin to realize that players cannot attack late in the clock they become very good at disrupting the

offense when these players have the ball. If coaches try to hide these players it can really disrupt your court spacing and the ability for other to create.

Teams will not guard a non-shooter late in the clock who stands on the perimeter. Also a non-ball handler who catches the ball will face extreme ball pressure.

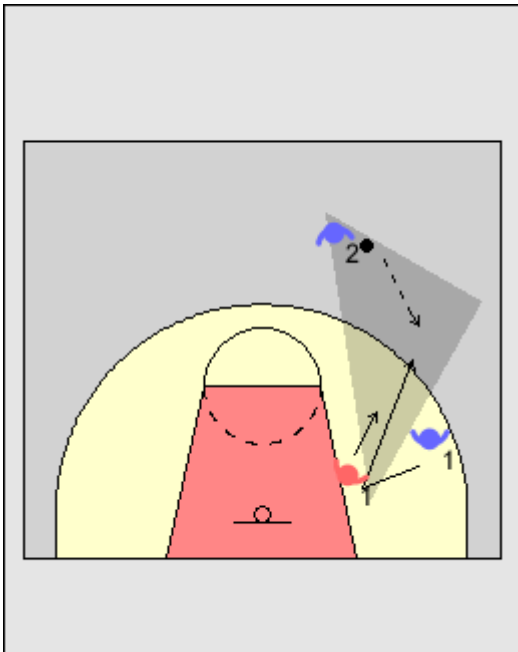
The more players who can create shots and assists, the harder the team is to defend. One trend that we have started to notice internationally is that it is rare to have one player dominating the scoring. These players are too easy to stop over the long haul. It is the team that has a number of players averaging double figures that are tough to defend.

Analyze the situation

Players need to be able to analyze the situation:

- What are my strengths
- How am I being defended
- Who are my teammates (strengths)
- How are they being defended

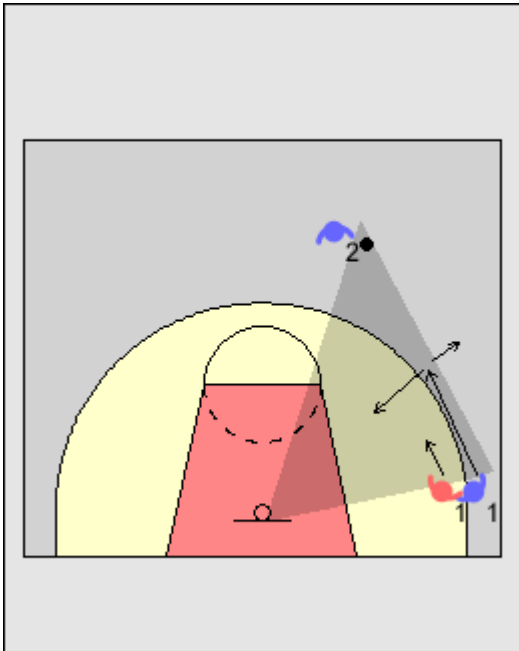
The player with the ball must know where the greatest advantage lies for the team. Ideally we want the player with the greatest advantage to have the ball to score. The key is having all players know what this is and how to get the ball to that player. When it is a late clock situation the urgency is magnified. Great teams seem to have the knack of not panicking in these situations and still getting off quality shots.



V-Cut

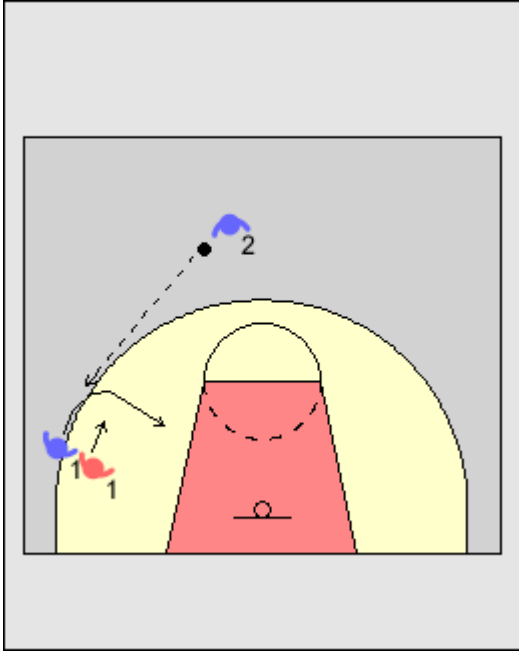
The v-cut has been taught for many years in the game of basketball and is still a very important skill for all players to learn. It is important that players understand the strengths and weaknesses of this cut. It is often over used at the wrong times and therefore limits the options of the offense

When the offensive player breaks to the sideline it is very difficult to read the defense since the vision of the offensive player is away from the middle of the court. The player must play control. If the player does decide to back cut requires a 180° change of direction. Also when the player is setting up the cut to the sideline he/she restricts the ability of other player to attack the rim.



Blast cut

This is an attacking cut since the offensive player can make a read on the defense before the ball is caught. If the player does back cut it is only a 90° cut opposed to the 180° cut of the V- cut. Also the passer has room to penetrate to the basket. It also keeps the basket open for other cutters to attack the rim.

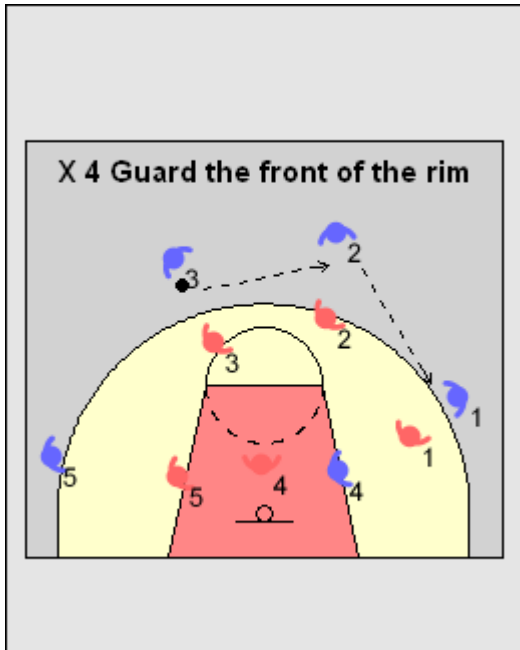


Pivot Foot

When playing attack the offensive player needs to be able to pivot off either foot. It is a natural movement that the players will make when receiving the ball. Usually there is little hesitation in the movement upon receiving the ball.

When playing control basketball there are many different theories as to which foot should be the pivot foot. It has been my observation that the great stationary one on one players usually have a dominate foot that is opposite their shooting hand.

No matter what the theory players need to be able to play off of both feet when playing attack basketball.



Post players

Many offenses have an interior player playing in on the blocks. Every time the perimeter player catches the ball there is an interior player between him/her and the basket. There is an advantage to this positioning if the interior player can score from this position and the perimeter player is nifty at passing to the post. The problem occurs when the player is not a serious scoring threat or constantly follows the ball. The post defender can guard the front of the rim. The ball often gets frozen and allows the help defense to build. This limits the ability of the perimeter players to attack the basket:

- no space to penetrate
- no space to back cut if over played
- no space to attack the basket with a cut; whether it be from a screen or a straight cut when the defense is out of position

The ability of the interior player to move and exit the key is a vital part of attack offense. If this player can also play more "globally" i.e. score from the perimeter the offense has more flexibility.

Some people feel you lose the advantage of rebounding when you spread the floor. This is a matter of teaching players when to attack the basket to rebound instead of standing on the perimeter.