



# ASSIST 28

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# DRILLS TO IMPROVE FREE-THROW PERCENTAGE



by Stan Doherty

**Stan Jones coached at the Miami University from 1995 to 2000, going for three times to the NCAA tournament. In 2000-01 season, Jones was assistant coach for the Washington Wizards in the NBA and the following year he went back to college basketball, leading Mississippi State to the NCAA tournament. Since 2002, he is part of the technical staff of Florida State as associate head coach.**

Early in my career as a high school coach, an old-school coach said to me, "Show me a team that shoots free-throws well, and I'll show you a lazy practice coach." Being a respectful, impressionable young coach, trying to learn my craft, I wanted to give that statement some merit, due to that coach's status, but I just couldn't accept that. I kept hearing my college coach pound into us as player's: "That making free-throws and lay-ups win games!" Even with the advent of the 3-point shot as an offensive weapon, I have grown deeper in the belief of my college coach and moved further away from the lazy coach statement to a point of total disagreement.

I heard the legendary Detroit Pistons head coach, Chuck Daly, talk about how the Pistons became champions once they learned how to use the free-throw line as an offensive weapon. By getting to the foul line, they increased their scoring efficiency, foul trouble for their opponents enhanced match-up problems, and they always had their defense set when shooting free-throws and defensive transition was less of a concern. Having been fortunate now to coach many years at a high level in college basketball and as an assistant in the NBA, it has been a constant that when our teams have shot well from the free-throw line and had significant more attempts than our opponents, we have had some of our best year's record wise. The year we went to the





Sweet 16 at the University of Miami, we had the ninth best team free-throw percentage in the country. At Mississippi State, we had the best record in school history and made the seventh most free-throws in a season in the school record book that year. And in 2006-07 at Florida State University, we had the fifth best

team free throw percentage in the country while reaching the quarterfinals of the National Invitational Tournament. I truly consider the teaching and development of great free throw shooting as a critical asset to the ultimate success of a basketball team. To improve our team free-throw shoot-

ing, there are two phases of development that we emphasize. First, we spend considerable amount of time teaching the proper mechanics of shooting and then incorporating those skills into shooting free-throws. Fundamentals of shooting we stress include; 1) set up and alignment to shoot the free throw, 2) establishing a rhythm to the shooter's routine, and 3) correct hand position on the ball, release off the correct finger pads and finishing the shot with a complete follow through. Second, we develop a progression of drills to acquire instinctive muscle memory through volume repetition and to challenge the psychological development of the free-throw shooter in pressure situations. We want every free-throw to feel the same, whether shooting in practice or with no time on the clock in the championship game. Positive mental development should include; emotional stability, success visualization and that "killer instinct" that finishes an opponent in end-game situations. Our free-throw shooting drills are a three-fold process. Our pre-season individual improvement drills have a heavy emphasis on correct shooting mechanics and one-on-one instruction. As we get closer to pre-season practice, we move into high volume repetition drills where we look to transfer the correct shooting form into muscle memory along with using positive self-expectancy through visualization. Finally, as we get into our playing season, we concentrate on shooting in simulated game situations. Here are 10 drills, five in individual work, and five in whole team involvement, that have been super in my career in helping our team improve dramatically at the free throw line:

#### **INDIVIDUAL DRILLS (1-3 PLAYERS AT A BASKET)**

1. 100 in 7. Drill needs: 2 balls, 7 minutes on the clock, passer and rebounder. This is a great drill for anytime in a workout or even in practice if you have the manpower. This is a version of the 2-ball rapid-fire jump shooting drill that we all use but it is adapted to shooting free throws. The objective of the drill is on the mechanics of the shooting stroke. We want the volume of shots and the constant pace to allow the shooter to really get the muscle memory feel for his



shot. To begin the drill the shooter will take his normal routine to shoot the first free throw and this starts the clock. I am a big believer that great free throw shooter's have an obvious stop in their routine after their movements once the ball has been placed in their possession to when they start their motion to release the shot to the basket. Thusly, the passer will be standing on the shooting side of the player with the ball held in front of the shooter where that pause takes place. The shooter will continuously finish his shot then return to that pause position to receive the ball and shoot another shot from that position. There is no emphasis on speed in this drill. It's all about tempo and finish with the correct form and follow through. Most shooters will complete 100 shots in seven minutes, but don't make that the main objective. The goal is to see how many shots can be replicated correctly for 100 straight shots. Coaching point: after the first shot, there are no more dribbles until the drill is complete. Challenge each player with his own high score, the high score for the team that season or the score for the best ever with your program.

2. 10 in a row. This has always been one of our best drills to finish a workout or practice. You can adjust the consecutive made shots based on the skill level of your team or the individual. Ten has always been a positive number for an average to above average shooter to finish practice with. We divide into our shooting groups based on the number of players we have on our team and available baskets. Each player shoots until he misses, then rotates out if did not make ten in a row. If he hits ten in a row, he is done for the practice. This drill creates two psychological pressures on the free throw shooter; 1) to complete the drill successfully, the shooter must concentrate on every shot, and 2) the shooter must deal with the increasing internal pressure (which can come from both negative and positive thoughts) as he approaches the tenth make. You can do some neat team-building competitions with this drill, i.e. - let players continue a streak until they miss and have a team record board for personal best, put a limit on the total number of shots they can take to get to ten consecutive makes or face some punishment, etc.
3. 3 or 2. This is a really good free-throw shooting drill to start practice with as





part of your warm-up period. Just as the drill before, divide your team into shooting groups at available baskets, 2-3 players are best. Each shooter continues to shoot at the foul line until he hits three free throws in a row, or misses two free throws in a row, or misses the third consecutive free throw the second time he has the opportunity to hit three in a row. The objective of this drill is to get each shooter to re-focus after a miss and to stay focused after a make. When the

player hits three shots in a row, the players rotate at the basket. If he misses two in a row or misses the third make on the second chance, he immediately performs whatever physical conditioning contingency we have given the team for that day. Coaching point: the players waiting to shoot always line up in the free throw lane spaces to simulate what a shooter will see during a game.

4. Back Tap Drill. Here's where we

think out of the coaching box for this free throw shooting drill. In teaching correct shooting mechanics, we emphasize with our players to focus on a small target point. With that in mind, the objective of this shooting drill is to get each shooter to focus on a target spot that if they hit will force a missed shot to come off in a certain area in the lane and to practice back tapping out to an area as part of our game situations for short clock needed shots. We will instruct our players as to the target to hit, how we want the potential rebounders to move into the lane and what direction to back tap the miss to where shooters will be moving in to position to receive the tap. With 3 players at each basket, 2 players line up in the second position on the lane line spaces and they work on executing the actions we have in place to jump and tap the ball out to an area. If you want to put a player in the drill to work on moving to the back tap spot and shooting that is a great addition to the drill. It has been my experience that after practicing misses the focus on the spot we have worked on to correctly make a free-throw becomes more acutely aware to the shooter and his success rate goes up.

5. The Jordan Drill. One more different thinking drill we use, especially in individual workouts but can be incorporated into team practice as well. We created this drill after seeing an old film clip of Michael Jordan shooting a free-throw with his eyes closed to impress a heckler in a NBA crowd. The objective of this drill is to incorporate mental visualization and to enhance the physical senses of the body shooting a proper free throw. After shooting some volume of free throws correctly with a proper set-up routine, we then finish the drill by charting the number of free throws the player can make with his eyes completely shut. The progression of the drill has the player complete his set-up and routine then as he concentrates on his target point, we ask the player to close his eyes and see that target point in his mind. Once he sees that target, we challenge him to then see the ball going into the net per-



fectly as he starts his shooting motion. You will see a tremendous growth in the player's confidence as he begins to feel the proper mechanics and the ball goes into the basket. We have had players who have made as many as 22 out of 25 blindfolded free-throws and as you can expect they had great percentages with their eyes open.

#### TEAM DRILLS (GAME SITUATIONS, COMPETITIVE)

1. 1-and-1's. This is a great drill for our team following physically demanding segments of practice. When the drill segment ends, the squad breaks up to the main baskets usually in the team color's assigned for that practice. We line up along the lane line spaces with a manager or coach acting as the referee who will put the free-throw in play to the shooter. The shooter has a bonus free throw. He makes the first then he gets a second shot. Just as in a game. If he misses either shot, he turns to his left and completes the assigned conditioner for that day while the next player rotates into the shooting position. If the shooter makes both, the squad rotates to the next shooter and the original shooter rests until his next turn. We continue the rotation for a certain amount of time, until a designated player makes two in a row, until the squad makes a certain number of consecutive free throws or a certain number of total makes by the group.
2. 1-and-1's to 21. This is a great drill when the season is beginning to get a little long and you want to inject some competitive fun into that day's practice. We line the team up around the lane alternating colors. The coach can decide the squads or you can let the guys draft their teams. Each player then shoots a 1-and-1-bonus situation with someone keeping score. If they miss, the team rotates. If he hits the first shot then he gets a second shot. I really believe this helps players learn to get comfortable into their mechanics for the first shot in a game situation, so that is why we put the 1-and-1 into play. We play first team to a certain number wins, usually to 21 with the loser's having to run. As the game comes down the wire the players really have fun challenging each other and force each shooter
3. 1-on-1 Competitive. This drill is probably more like an individual drill, but we like to use it two ways: 1) to finish practice with one teammate challenging another to make the competition enhance each player's practice focus, or 2) to make it like a "king of the hill" competition where you have to earn your way from basket to basket to play at the championship basket. Either way the drill starts with one player shooting free throws until he misses. Let's say he hits eight. So the score is eight to nothing as his teammate begins to shoot. Let's say that player hits seven. The score is now eight to seven after one round. The rounds continue until one player reaches the designated score for that practice. Normally if it's just 1-on-1 to finish practice, we will play to 50. If it's "king of the hill", the number will be much lower and we will continue to rotate for a certain length of time with the two players at the designated championship basket shooting for the right to not run that day when the clock runs down. This is another great drill during the season to keep concentration up through friendly competition and boredom down.
4. Streaks. This is a great drill to use on game day walk through practices. It takes no energy out of your team but encourages them to concentrate for the team and to build some good camaraderie, as you get ready for that night's competition. We split up into even numbers at both baskets. Players will shoot and rotate to the left with non-shooters in lane line spaces. We will shoot a segment of two shots and rotate. Then switch ends and shoot one shot and rotate. The non-shooters will clap in unison the number of consecutive number of makes for that team. We will shoot for time and the team with the most makes wins. We keep a record for the season of most consecutive makes and remind the players before we start at the next game day practice. This drill sets a good mind-set for the team especially on the road and creates good positive energy getting ready for that day's competition.





5. 4-minute Drills. I truly believe this drill teaches your team how to close out games when you have a lead. In pre-season practice, we will do this drill two to three times a week. Once the season starts, we try to do this drill almost every practice. We start the drill with different times on the clock that could be after our last media time-out that occurs under the four-minute mark. We incorporate as many different situations as we can for our team in regards to time and score, shot clock time remaining, strategy, etc. We sometimes have real game officials or coaches and/or staff will officiate the game as close as they can. We want to work on fouling situations when we are behind and we challenge our players on the team that is ahead to dominate their opponents from the free-throw line giving their opponent no chance to catch up and win the game. Looking back over my career, we have had our best records in close games when we have challenged our players in practice to make this part of practice as much like a game as possible. And we have also been much better in terms of winning the end game when we have not sacrificed this part of practice do to whatever reason. I challenge you as a coach to put a great deal of emphasis in this area and I believe the emphasis on shooting free throws under these scenario's we make your team a far more confident foul shooting team in all situations.

In conclusion, we have spent this article giving you ideas on how to put free-throw shooting into your team's practice. None of these drills will improve your team's free throw percentage much unless as you put in the work you continue to reinforce and instruct the proper shooting fundamentals with each of your players. Many coaches are afraid to teach shooting and change mechanical flaws in their players' shots. But, if the great Tiger Woods, after terrific accomplishments in his golfing career, has twice totally recreated his swing, we should challenge our players to not settle for less than their best from the free throw line. I take great pride in seeing my team shoot free throws and learning to use the free throw line as an offensive weapon. Remember my old college coach, "Making free throws and lay-ups win games!"





by Nikos Keramefs

# UNDER 18 GREEK OFFENSE

**Nikos Keramefs started his coaching career with the youth teams of Aris Salonica, Greece, winning five national titles with cadet and junior teams. He was also head coach of the MENT Salonica, a second division Greek team, and assistant coach of the Aris first division team. Since 1998, he has worked with the Greek Basketball Federation. In 1999, he was head coach of the national cadet team that won a silver medal. His young men's team that won a gold medal in 2002 and a silver medal in 2007 with the Under 18 team at the FIBA European Championships.**

The main offense that we worked on for the forty days of practices for the 2007 FIBA Under 18 European Championship was the motion offense, with a box-and-one formation. Four perimeter players and one big man inside was how this offense worked. I tailored this offense based on the talents of my players.

Ten days before the opening game of the European Championship U-18 Kostas Koufos 2,13 (7'1") arrived from the United States, where he played in the high school, and was added to our roster. His imposing presence forced us to adjust our offensive game. We continued with our motion offense, but with a different aim. Taking advantage of Koufos' size and skills, we wanted to give the ball to him down on the post and close to the basket, setting the other players on the perimeter, creating difficulty for the player guarding Koufos. Happily for us, Koufos was elected MVP of the championship.

With the short time we had at our disposal after his arrival, we prepared some plays with our main aim to take advantage of him. In this way, we enhanced the value of the rest of our players and their ability to adjust offensively.

In the eight games that we played, we used the plays that I will describe shortly, trying to accomplish two goals. Our first goal was to succeed in passing the ball to

the post player in different ways and with different sets. Our second goal, due to the scouting of our opponents that focused on the presence of Koufos, was to make small changes to our plays from game to game in order to surprise our opponents. What we achieved was great because, after the arrival of Koufos and before the start of the Championship, he participated only in six practice sessions and five exhibition games.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize the excellent collaboration and participation I had from all the other players of the team, as well as my assistant coaches, and the administrative staff of the Hellenic Basketball Federation.

I would like now to describe the following characteristics of our team.

- ▼ Our 5 player was Koufos.
- ▼ In the position of the power forward, 4, we were lucky to have both tall and short players.
- ▼ Our three point guards were all left handed.

We tried to take advantage of the above characteristics while planning for our games.

## UCLA CUT 1

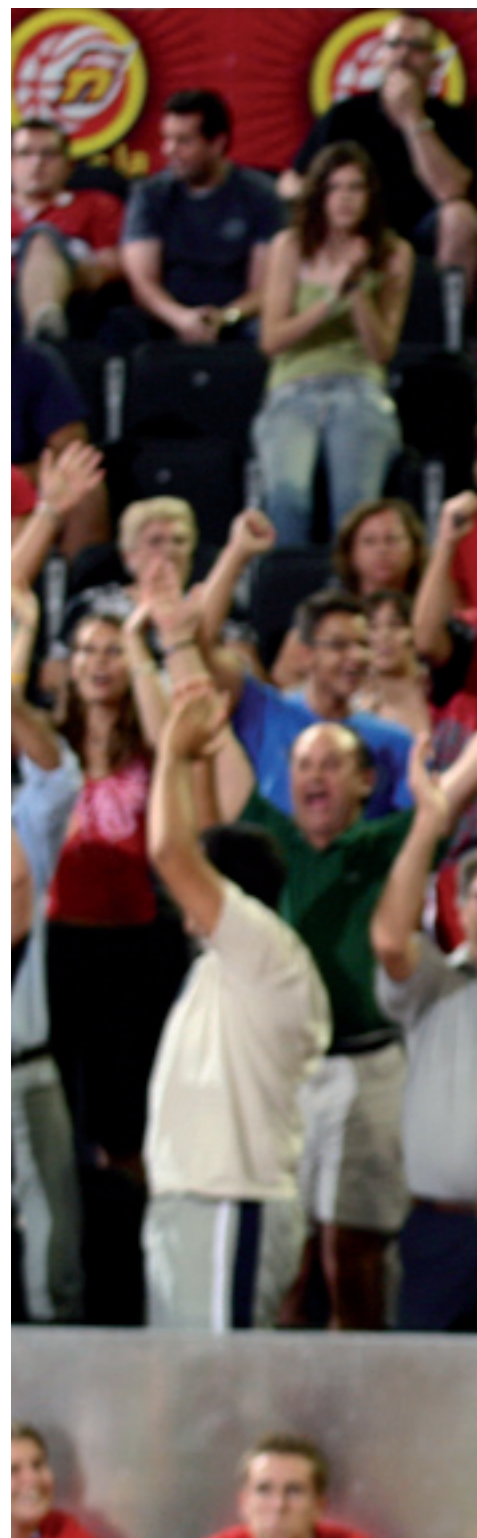
### High-Low Play

4 sets a screen for 1. 1 goes around the screen of 4 and cuts inside or outside, depending on how the defender plays. 2 looks for a pass to 1. If he cannot pass to 1, he passes to 4, who opens outside. 1 posts down low in the lane (diagr. 1)

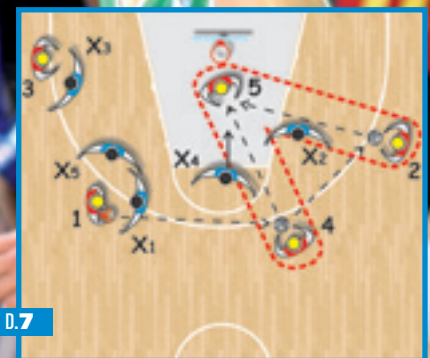
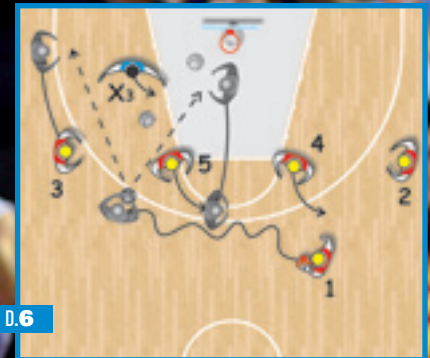
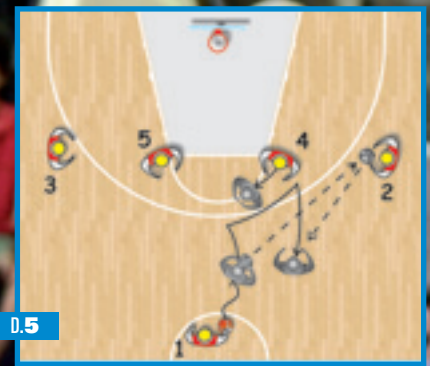
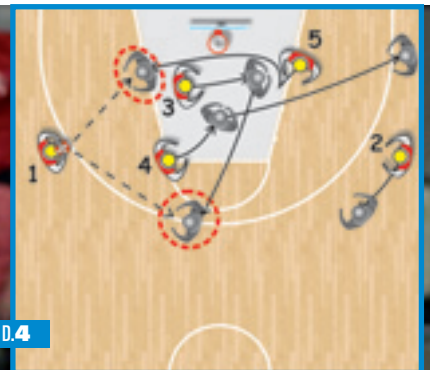
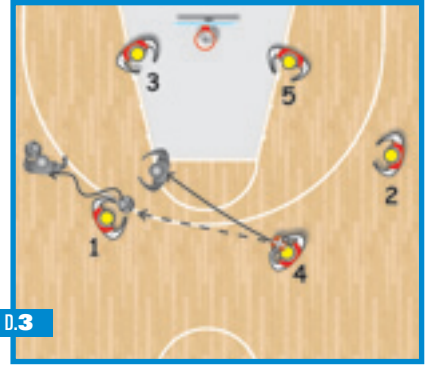
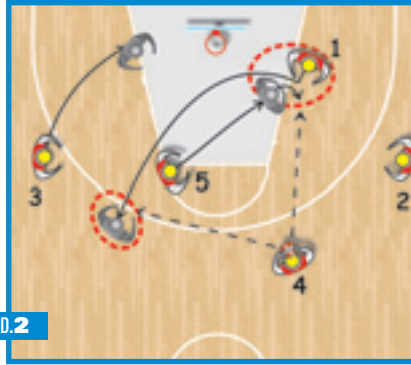
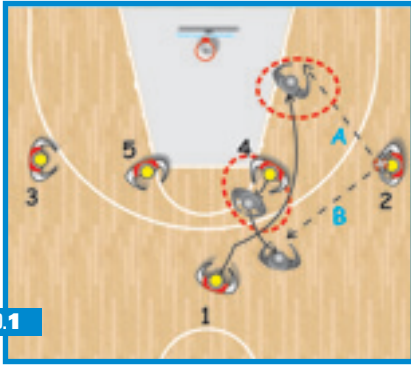
### Cross screen and isolation at mid post

5 sets a screen for 1. Before using the screen, 1 must set his defender up to draw him into the screen and then cut the baseline. If the defender of 5 body checks, 5 is free for a moment and can receive the ball from 4. If 5 is not free, 4 passes the ball to 1, while 3 clears out the wing position spot by going to the mid post (diagr. 2).

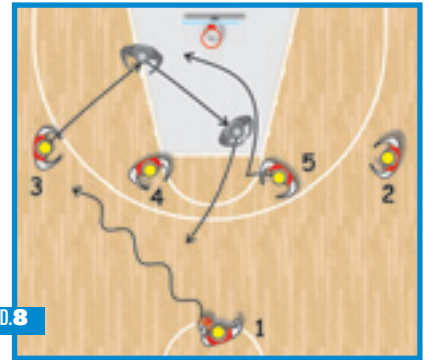
When 1 receives the ball, he dribbles toward the free-throw line extension and 4



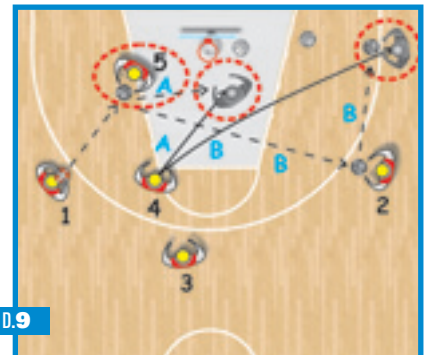




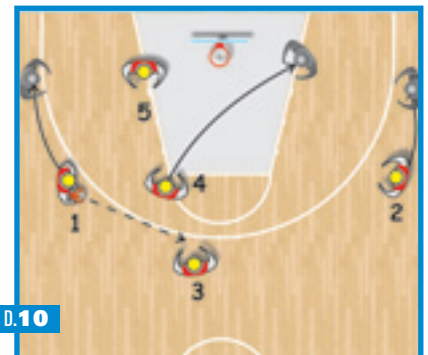




D.8



D.9



D.10

goes to the corner of the free-throw area, ready to set a screen (diagr. 3).

3 makes a cross screen for 5 and 4 sets a screen for 3 (screen-the-screener) and then moves to the corner to clear out for 5, while 2 moves to the weak side for defensive balance. 1 can pass to 5 or to 3 (diagr. 4).

### UCLA CUT 2

#### Pick-and-roll

1 passes to 2 and receives a screen from 4. If 1 cannot cut in the lane, he comes back to the initial position and receives the ball back from 2 (diagr. 5).

1 is screened by 5, and then rolls outside after the screen to have a better angle for the pass and to read the defense. 1 can:

- ▼ Take the shot.
- ▼ Look for a pass to 5, who rolls to the basket.
- ▼ If X3 helps on 5, then the ball goes to 3, who is open (diagr. 6).





### HI - LOW

If X4 helps on 5, then 1 looks to pass on the weak side. 1 can pass to 4 for a shot, and there is a chance of a high-low play between 4 and 5. 1 can also pass to 2 and 2 looks to pass to 5 (diagr. 7).

### ISOLATIONS

#### Point Guard Isolation

1 dribbles to the foul line extension and keeps the dribble alive, while 3 clears out the wing spot, leaving 1 playing one-on-one with his defender. If 1 cannot beat his defender, 3 sets a screen for 5, who sets himself at the mid post spot, ready to receive a pass (diagr. 8).

#### Post Isolation

5 receives the ball from 1 and can go one-on-one. If there is a trap run by the other big man defender, 5 passes to 4, who dives to the basket, or, if 4 cannot receive the ball, he goes to the corner.

If the trap is run by a guard, 5 reads the defensive rotation and passes to 2 on the perimeter, and 2 passes to 4 in the corner (diagr. 9).

#### Shooting Guard Isolation

If the defense does not let 5 receive the ball, 1 passes to 3, and, at the same time, 4 goes at the mid post spot, and 2 and 1 move towards the baseline (diagr. 10).

At this point, 3 has the option to play one-on-one (driving to the right or to the left) at the top of the lane without any defensive help.

If 3 drives to the basket, 1 and 2 create passing lanes, 4 and 5 clear out by moving to the opposite direction from the drive. This offers 3 the chance to have two passing lanes (diagr. 11).

### FIST

#### Quick High Low Play

We set with two high posts at the corners of the free-throw area and two wings lower than the posts.

1 gets a screen from 4, and goes around the screen, forcing X4 to help. At the same time, 5 screens for 4, creating an option for 4 to get open on the weak side

with this flare screen (diagr. 12).

If the defense switches, which often happens, 5, after screening, rolls to the basket, trying to lock X4 on his back to create a high-low play, with 4, who can pass the ball to 5.

The three perimeter players must keep moving to keep their defenders busy and not let them help (diagr. 13).

### FIST SIDE

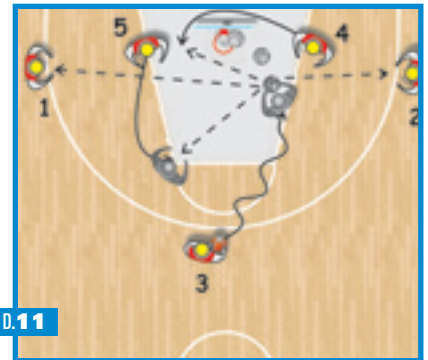
#### Pick-and-roll and back pick to feed the post man

Out of a one-four set at the free-throw extension, 1 dribbles to the foul line extension, keeping the dribble alive and, at the same time 2 moves to the mid post on the strong side (diagr. 14).

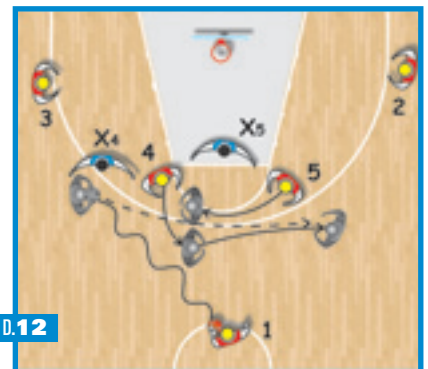
5 sets side a pick on the ball for 1, who drives to the lane and attracts the help of X.

2 sets a back pick on X5. If the pick is successful or if there is a switch, 5 will receive the ball close to the basket, taking an advantage of the mismatch. After the pick, 2 rolls to the wing and 4 goes outside of the lane (diagr. 15).

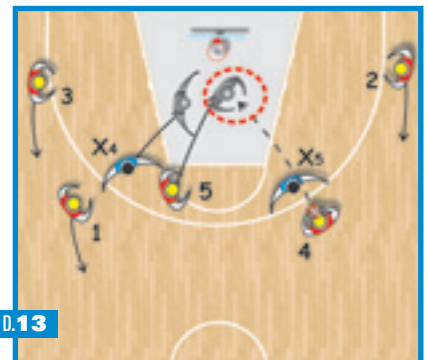
If the ball cannot be passed directly to 5, 1 passes to 2, who opens up at the foul line extension. From there, he can feed the ball to the 5 from a better passing angle.



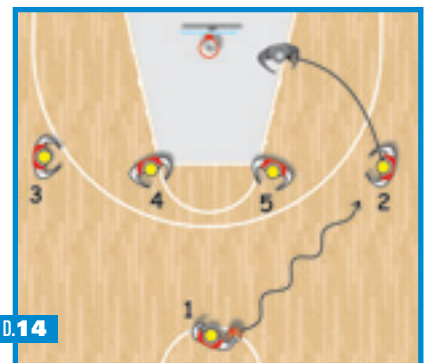
D.11



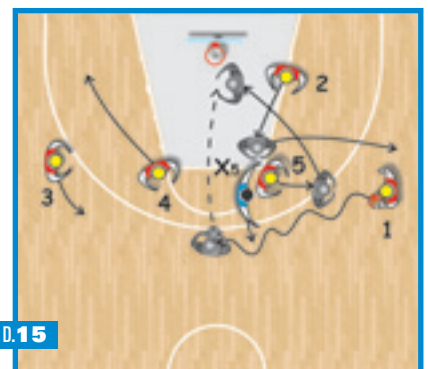
D.12



D.13



D.14



D.15



by Simone Pianigiani



by Luca Banchi

# THE 1-4 OFFENSE AGAINST MAN-TO-MAN DEFENSE

**Simone Pianigiani was 18 years old when he first started coaching the Montepaschi Siena (Italy) youth teams. From 1995 to 2006, he was assistant coach of the men's team and the coordinator of the youth teams. He won five Italian titles with youth teams. As assistant coach, his team won the 2002 FIBA Saporta Cup and the 2004 Italian title. Since 2006, he has been the Montepaschi Siena head coach. In his first season, his team won the Italian title and he was named the "Serie A Coach of the Year." He also won the 2007-08 Italian Supercup.**

**Luca Banchi began coaching the Don Bosco Livorno youth team in 1995, winning three consecutive Italian Junior titles. Then he coached the Livorno and Trieste Serie A teams. He also coached the Italian men's national B team, winning the bronze medal at the 2001 Mediterranean Games. Since 2006, he has been the assistant coach of Montepaschi Siena, a team that won the 2006-07 Serie A Italian title.**

In our 2006-07 season, we decided to create a 1-4 offense against a man-to-man, a set that could fit our personnel. We did not have dominating big men, but dynamic players in the paint. In addition, our perimeter players could easily switch their roles, going from point guard, shooting guard, and small forward. This was also the offense that could quickly solve scoring problems or bad ball circulation. That can be effective against zone and match-up defenses, too. This offense (we called it "Horn") had different entries, depending on what the defense allowed our guards and on what we wanted to create immediately as a threat to the opponent's defense. The point guard 1 begins dribbling to one side of the court, starting the offensive play. He tries to make a back-door cut in order to make the defense work and, in case of not receiving the ball, to steal the position in the low post (diagr. 1). Then, the big man 4, who is set on the elbow on the ball side, sets a vertical screen for 2, who can cut inside, outside, or pop out away, depending on the defender's position (diagr. 2).

The offense can also begin with an entry pass to the wing and, with 1 cutting, using the blind screen of the high post player 4 (diagr. 3). It can also begin with a pass-and-follow the pass and then a screen between the perimeter player and the post (diagr. 4). As the ball is passed from the top of

the key to the weak side, from 1 to 2, a vertical screen is made between 5 and 3 to open the lane. The screened player, 3, must go to the top of the key, and receive the ball for a jump shot or a drive to the hoop. He can also kick the ball out (diagr. 5). After the ball is reversed to the other side of the court, 1, cutting in the lane, receives a staggered screen by 4 and 5 and goes to the other corner to receive the ball from 3 (diagr. 6). 3 can also swing the ball to the weak side to 2, who has received a flare screen from 4 (diagr. 7).

At the end of the offense, we always try to create a side pick-and-roll coming from the weak side, between 4 and 1, if we decide to give the ball to the shooter coming off the corner (diagr. 8). A side screen off the strong side between 2 and 4 can also be made (diagr. 9).

## BUILDING THE OFFENSE

For building this basic offense, we divide all moves and options in order to see all the geometric solutions, making every option automatic for our players when they face every defensive adjustments.

## BALL SIDE

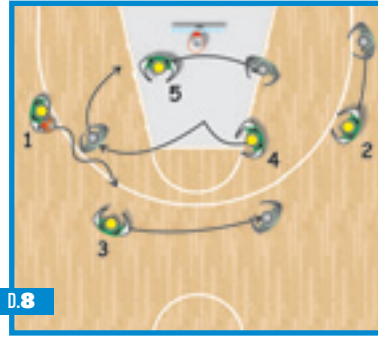
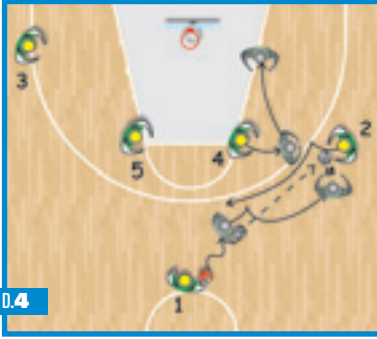
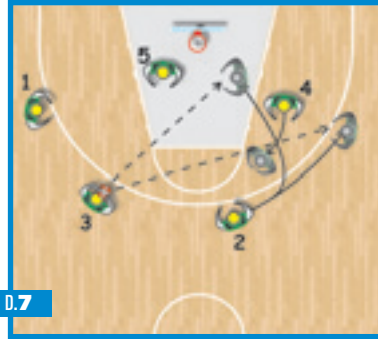
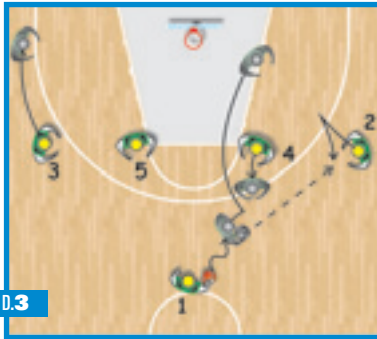
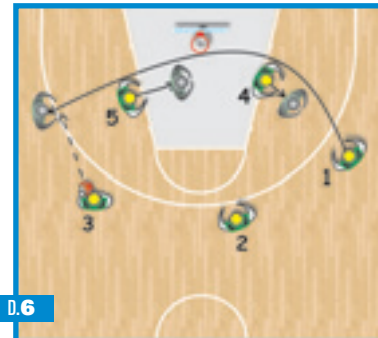
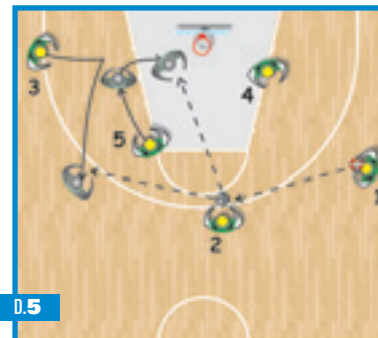
Three against zero: The point guard, 1, dribbling to one side of the court, passes the ball to the cutter, 2, who is going back door. 2, alternatively, will drive to the hoop (diagr. 10) or he will pass the ball to the post player 5, who will cut in the opposite direction of 2's drive. He is guarded by an assistant coach (diagr. 11). If, after attempting the cut, and 2 doesn't receive the ball, he will try to get the best low-post position to receive the ball and play one-on-one (diagr. 12) or pass inside the lane to 5 (diagr. 13). The high-post player, 5, will move now in order to set a screen against the guard's defender. The guard must be aware of the high-post player's position and move. He must decide if he's going to use option: A) use the screen passing over; option B) passing under; or option C) popping back to the same corner (diagr. 14).

## ENTRY PASS

1, the point guard, must decide if it's better to cut by using the post's 5 blind screen to go in the low post (option A); or if it's better to let 5 receive the ball (option B) (diagr. 15); or if it's better to go back to the top of the key, if he cannot receive the ball in the low post (diagr. 16). If 1 makes a pass-and-follow play for a hand-off pass, 2 will decide how to use 5's



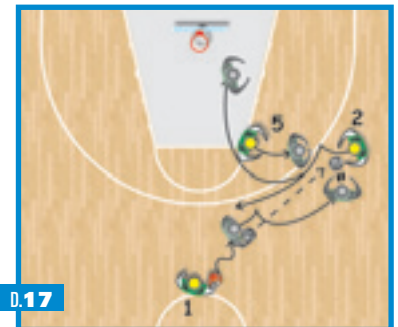
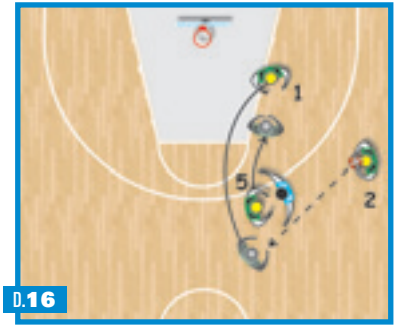
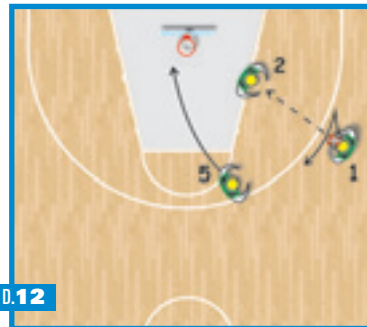
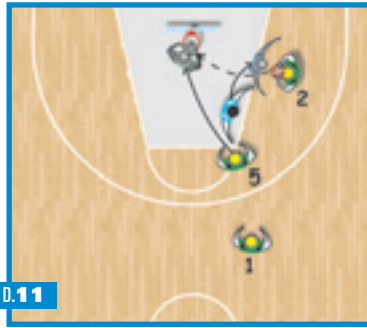
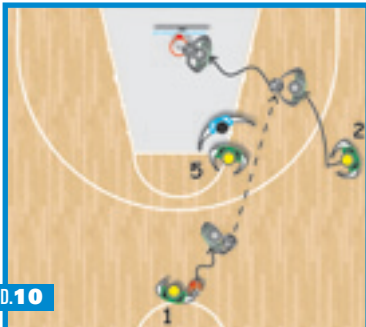
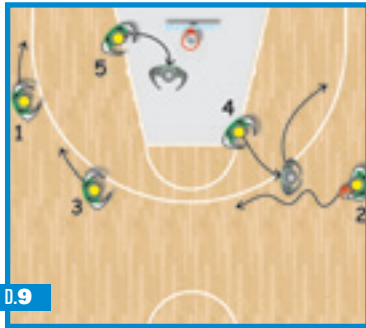




screen (diagr. 17), or if he will pick for 5, allowing him to receive a pass in the low post (diagr. 18).

### THREE-ON-ZERO WITH A COACH OR TEAMMATE

After reversing the ball to the coach or a teammate on other side of the court, 5 will screen first for 1, who cuts along the baseline (option A), and then for 2 (option B), who can curl, make a back-door, or screen-the-screener (diagr. 19). While screening on the ball in the final part of the offensive play, we need to take care about the execution, timing, and spacing to react correctly to the defensive adjustments (diagr. 20), switch (diagr. 21), or jam in the lane (diagr. 22). The offensive abilities of the posts and power forwards convinced us to look for rolls to the basket rather than cuts to the perimeter. This way, we can "split" the screens and avoid any possible defensive adjustment (diagr. 23). If 1 chooses



to cut on the blind screen of 5 (diagr. 24), the other offensive players will adapt their positions, creating a sort of "screens' box" set (diagr. 25). They must then decide if they are going to use the lateral pick-and-roll or a new screen on the ball (diagr. 26 and 27).

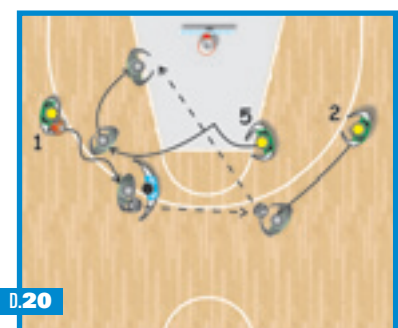
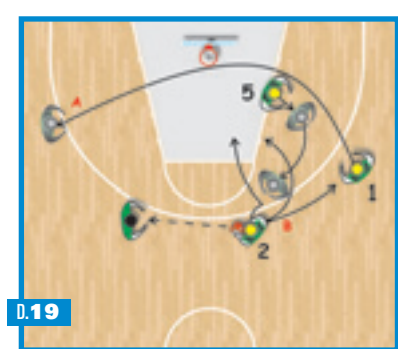
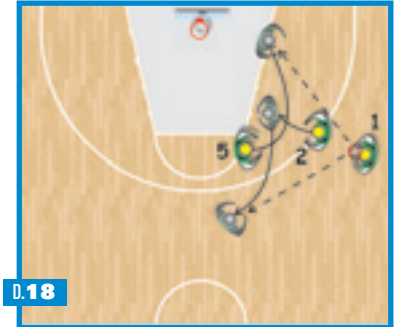
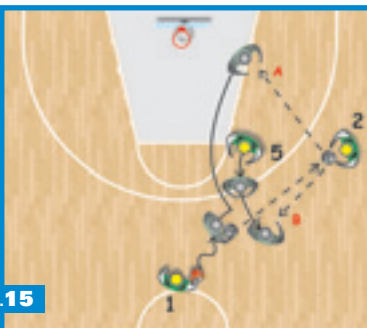
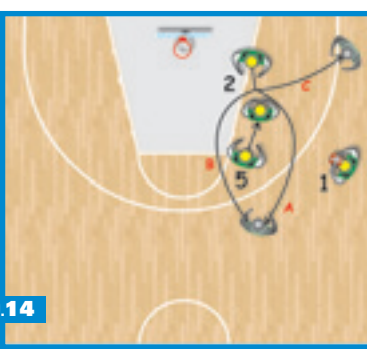
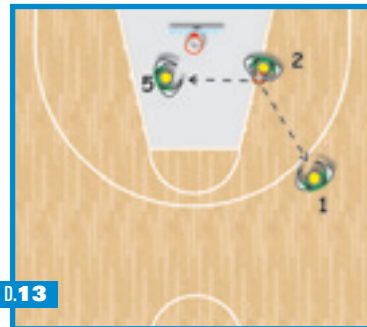
**WEAK SIDE**

We take care of the vertical screen on the weak side to change our offensive side and use our guards' skills to attack the basket. The shooter sets the screen by opening the court, faking to move to the corner, forcing his defender to follow him on the screen, which is set at a 45-degree angle. This particular screen will allow the player to attack the lane's elbow as the first option, or, if he doesn't get the ball, he then goes out to the three-point line (diagr. 28). If the defender tries to stop the exit with a body-check, the picker must change the screen's angle, making it "flat." The screened player will receive the ball out of the three-point line, rather than on a cut inside the lane (diagr. 29). The following screen must be set with both feet inside the lane. The screener will decide if he should cut to the opposite elbow in a pick-and-roll action, or move away from the ball, waiting to take advantage of an eventual defensive help or rotation (diagr. 30).

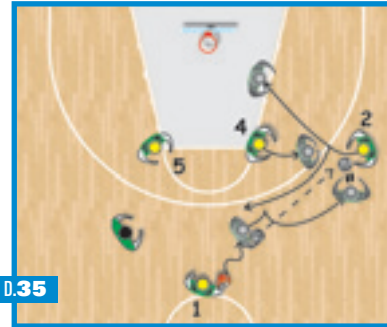
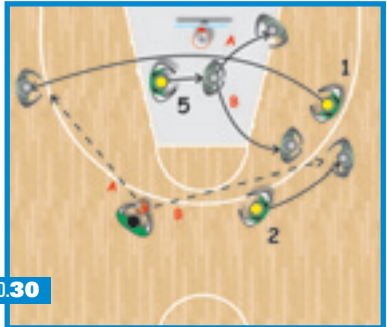
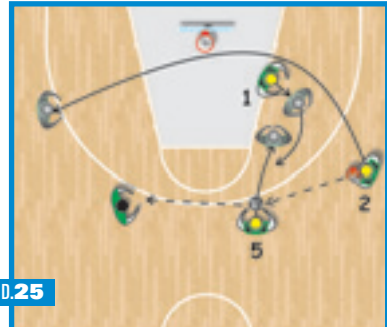
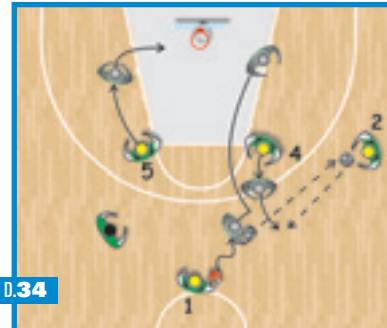
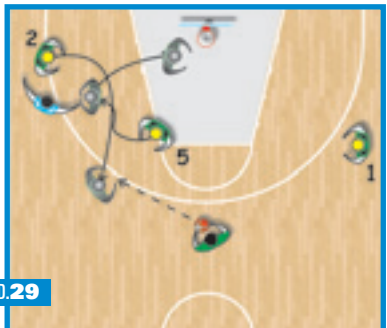
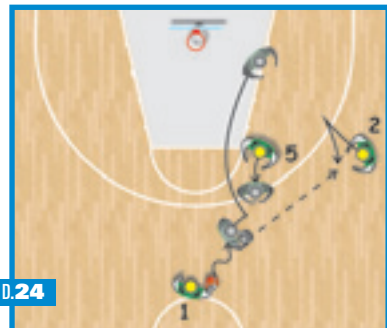
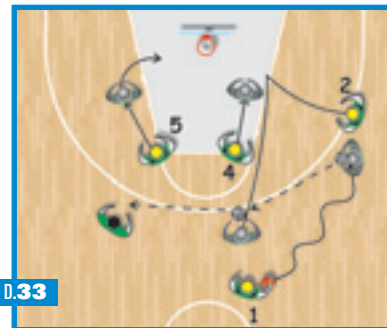
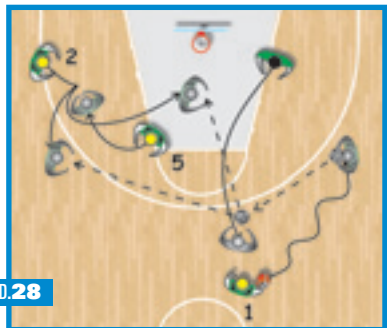
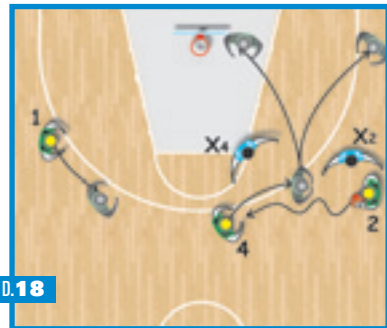
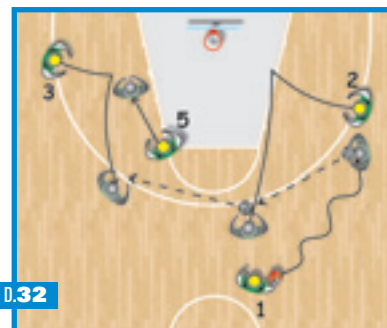
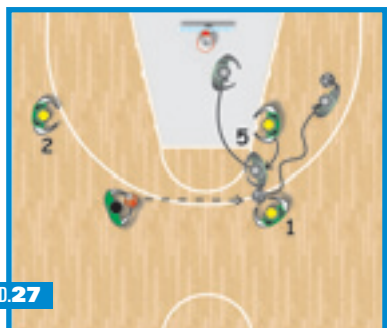
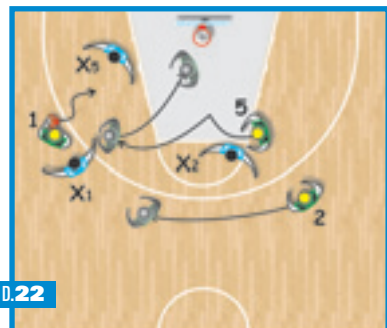
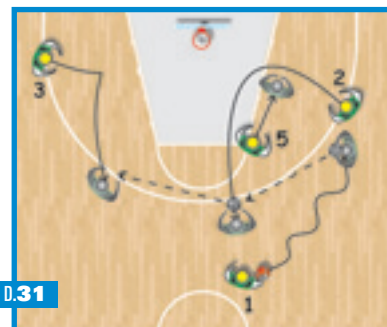
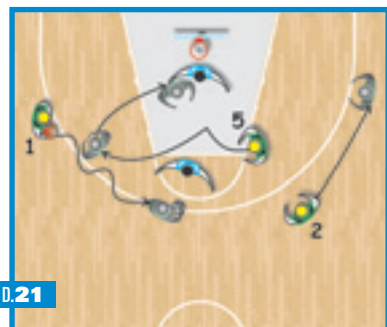
**FOUR-ON-ZERO**

It's possible to run this drill in two ways: with three guards and a big man, or with two guards and two big men. This drill allows us to coordinate the moves of several players at the same time, reducing their own spaces so they can better understand how to collaborate with each other and which adjustments to make, especially in the last seconds of an offensive possession (diagr 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35).

Each one of these collaborations will be tried against the defense because once the players have learned the automatic moves, it is necessary that they be able to develop different solutions based on the reactions of the defenders. As we said in the introduction, this offensive set, once improved upon thanks to daily work in practice sessions, should also be effective even against special zones, using both screens and the ability to attack the basket with drives and cuts, while always respecting spacing and teammates' roles.









by Brian Goorjian

# AUSTRALIA OFFENSIVE SETS

**Brian Goorjian, American born, was named in 2003 as the greatest coach in the first 25 years of the Australian National Basketball League. He started his coaching career as assistant coach of Geelong in 1985, later becoming coach of the Melbourne Tigers and winning two championships. He then coached Sydney, winning three titles in a row from 2003 to 2005. He was named NBL Coach of the Year four times. Since 2001 he has been head coach of the Australian men's national team, coaching them at the 2004 Olympic Games and 2006 FIBA World Championships.**

## OFFENSIVE PHILOSOPHY

Our first priority at the 2006 FIBA World Championship was to move the ball very quickly down the court with the point guards handling the ball. The wing players sprinted ahead of the ball to keep pressure on the defense. We also took advantage of our agile power forwards, who sprinted to the offensive basket and looked to receive the ball as close to the basket as possible. In addition, our quick ball reversal was one of our best offensive assets, combined with the dribble penetration of our guards and small forwards.

If we did not have an opportunity for a full court transition, our guards started to control the offensive play. Here a list of our offensive sets strategies:

- ▼ On ball screens.
- ▼ Entries through our 4 and 5 players, flashing at the elbow of the free-throw area.

- ▼ Turn out actions from our 2 and 3 players.
- ▼ Effective use of screens from little players to big players.

Our main offensive alignment was to have four perimeter players and one inside player, or else use three perimeter players and two inside players. When there were just a few seconds left on the shot clock, we relied on ball screens, quick ball movement, and dribble penetration. I am proud to say that we had a good awareness of the offensive tempo and a good judgment of which plays were required depending on the time left in the game and the score.

## PLAYER POSITIONS AND SKILLS

### Guards

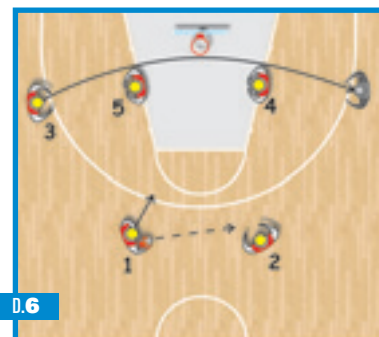
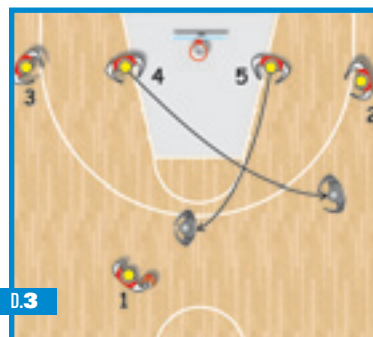
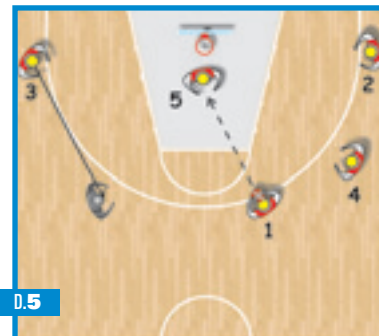
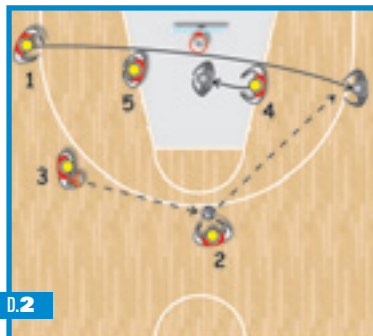
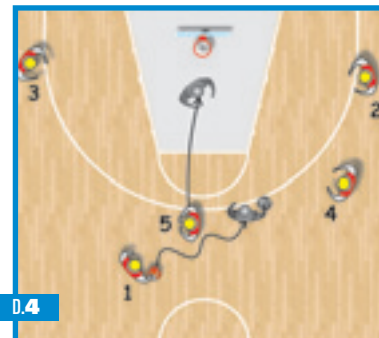
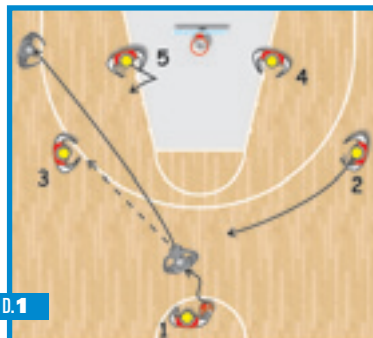
Our guards handled the ball and were able to control the tempo very well. They had a good range of shooting from the perimeter and penetrated with the ball through quick dribbling off the ball movement. They passed well to the cutters and post players who were flash cutting to the elbows of the free-throw area. Their main attacking moves were the crossover and the speed dribbles.

### Forwards

Our forwards ran the court very well in offensive transition and the power forwards were very agile and quick to post up strongly. The small forwards had good shooting range. They were effective with the catch-and-shoot jump shot and penetrating with the ball inside the three-second lane. They also passed well to teammates cutting off screens.







### Centers

Our centers passed to the cutters very well. Their main offensive moves were the jump hook from a "back in" move and turn-around jump shot. They also had strong and effective counter moves from the low post position, combined with a medium shooting range. They screened well on the ball screens and created effective scoring threats from these offensive plays.

### THE TEAM

These were the players who played the most minutes and we designed plays to take advantage of their skills:

- C. J. Bruton, point guard**
- Jason Smith, guard**
- Sam McKinnon, forward**
- Luke Kendall, forward**
- Andrew Bogut, center**
- Mark Worthington, forward**
- Brad Newley, forward**

The following plays are some of the quick plays we used at the FIBA 2006 World Championship.

### PLAYS OFF THE TRANSITION

#### Play for the point guard, Bruton

Out of the three-two set, with two low posts, 4 and 5, 2 and 3 on the wings with 1 (Bruton) with the ball at the middle of the floor, 1 passes the ball to 3 and runs to the corner, while 4 and 5 start to run a staggered screen (diagr. 1).

2 moves toward 3, receives the ball from 3 and passes it to 1, who gets off the baseline from the staggered screen of 5 and 4 (diagr. 2).

#### Play for the center, Bogut

Here a play from a one-four set, with two wings: 2 and 3 in the corners, and 4 and 5 are at the low post positions. 1 has the ball on one side of the court, 4 runs out of the lane and sets himself near the sideline, while 5 screens on the ball for 1 (diagr. 4).

1 drives off the 5's screen, while 5 rolls to the basket and freezes his defender near the basket (diagr. 5).

1 drives to the opposite side of the court from where he received the screen, and passes the ball to 5 under the basket (diagr. 6).

**PLAYS VS. MAN-TO-MAN SET DEFENSE**

**Plays for Bruton or Bogut**

Out of set with three perimeter players and two inside players, 1 (Bruton) passes to 2 and 3 runs along the baseline and cuts off the screens of 5 (Bogut) and 4.

Right after the pass to 2, 1 curls around 5, goes back to the same position and receives the ball back from 2 (diagr. 7).

5 gets out of the lane and plays pick-and-roll with 1, who can shoot, drive to the basket, or pass to 5 on the roll. While 5 screens for 1, 4 screens for 2 (diagr. 8).

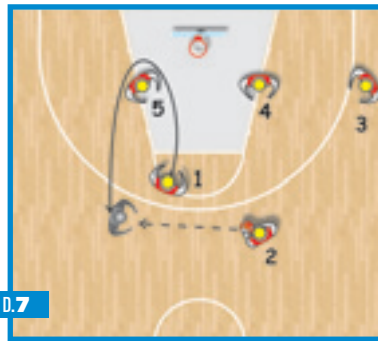
**Play for Kendall**

Using a set with three perimeter players and two inside players: 2 (Kendall) passes to 3 and cuts to

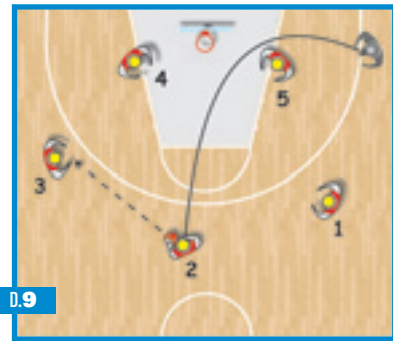
baseline around 5 and goes in the corner (diagr. 9).

5 sprints out of the lane and screens for 3 (diagr. 10).

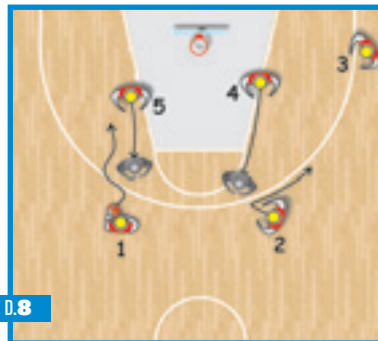
3 drives off 5's screen and drives to the basket. If the defender of 2 tries



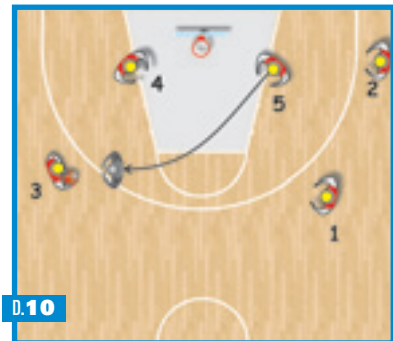
D.7



D.9



D.8



D.10



D.11

to help, 3 passes the ball out to 2 in the corner for a jump shot (diagr. 11).

**Play for Newley**

With two players on the corners, 3 (Newley) and 2, 5 at the left elbow of the free-throw area, 1 with the ball on the right wing, and 4 out of the top of the key, 4 screens for 1 (diagr. 12).

Right after 4's screen and 1's drive off the screen, 2 back screens 4 (screen-the-screener action). 4 cuts to the baseline and then on to the low post on the same side (diagr. 13).

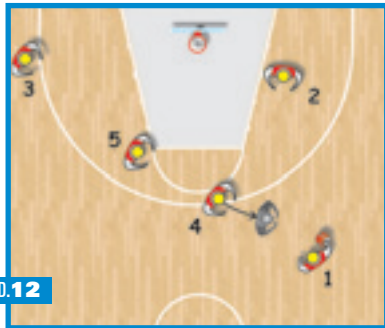
Right after setting the back screen for 4, 2 runs to the baseline on the wing position and 1 passes the ball to 5. 3 cuts to the baseline, receives a screen from 4, and 5 passes to 3 for a shot, while 2 goes in the corner (diagr. 14).

**Play for Worthington**

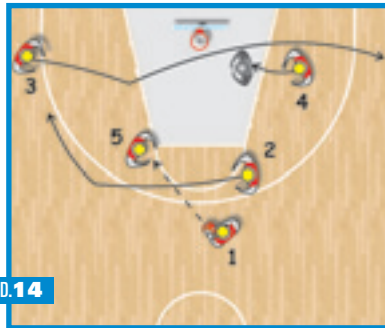
Out of a set with three players outside and two players inside: 3 (Worthing-



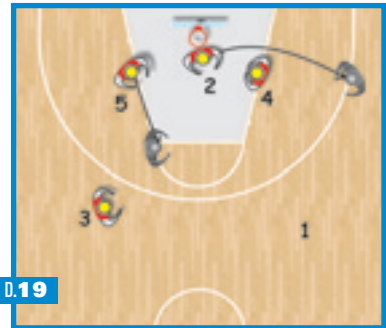




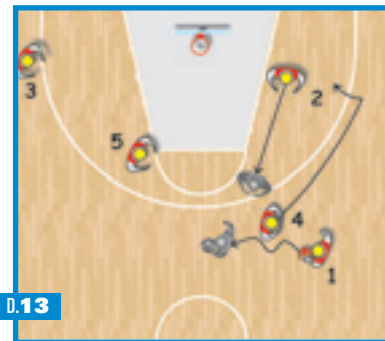
D.12



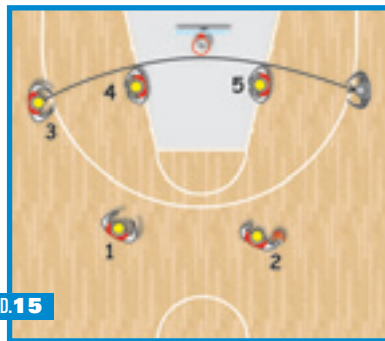
D.14



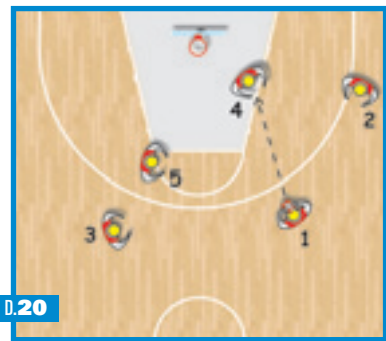
D.19



D.13



D.15



D.20

ton) cuts along the baseline and gets off the screens of 4 and 5 and sets himself on the wing (diagr. 15).

2 passes to 3 and then down screens for 4, while 1 relocates on the wing, and 5 pops out of lane and goes to the corner (diagr. 16).

3 passes to 5, cuts to the basket, and 5 passes the ball to 3 (diagr. 17).

**Play for McKinnon**

The initial set is the same, with 1 with the ball: 2 cuts down in the middle of the lane and waits for a second under the basket, and 3 replaces 2 (diagr. 18).

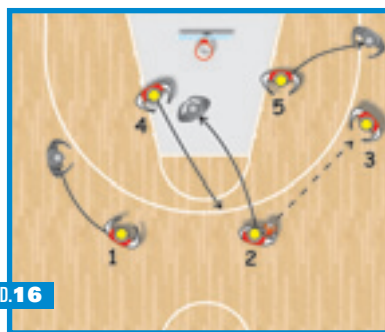
2 runs off 4 (McKinnon) and goes in the corner, while 5 goes to the elbow on the same side (diagr. 19).

Right after the cut of 2, 4 cuts to the lane and receives the ball from 1 (diagr. 20).

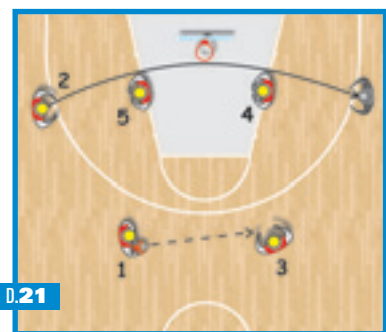
**Play for Bogut**

The initial set is the same, with 1 with the ball: 2 cuts along the baseline and off the screens of 4 and 5 (Bogut) screens, while 1 passes the ball to 3 (diagr. 21).

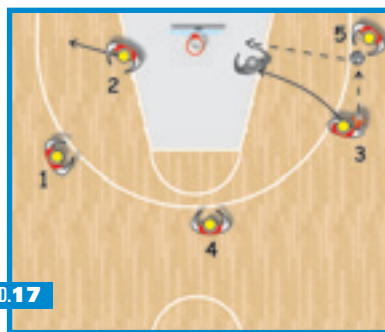
5 flashes to the elbow and 1 cuts to the corner to take away the defensive help. 3 passes to 5, who plays one-on-one (diagr. 22).



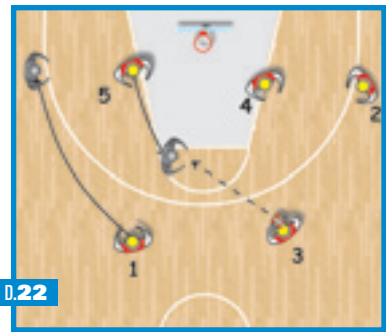
D.16



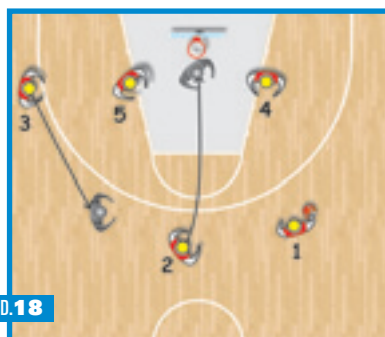
D.21



D.17



D.22



D.18



by Miroslav Nikolic

# SERBIA UNDER 19 DEFENSIVE PHILOSOPHY

**Miroslav Nikolic won the 2007 FIBA Under 19 World Championship title with Serbia. He coached Beocin, Partizan Belgrade, Buducnost Podgorica (in two different occasions with one Yugoslavian title), Red Star Belgrade on two different occasions, Radnicki Belgrade, and Hemofarm Vrsac, all Yugoslavian and later Serbian First Division teams. He also coached Apollon Patras, the Greek Division I team. He was also assistant coach for the Men's Yugoslavian national team from 1996 to 2000, winning a FIBA European Championship in 1997. In 2006, he was head coach of the Serbia and Montenegro national team, which won the FIBA Under 20 European Championship.**

I would like to talk about the zone press, 1-2-1-1, with the transition to a combined 3-2 zone defense. Let's start with the principles of the 1-2-1-1 zone press.

My philosophy is to establish the 1-2-1-1 zone press with the defenders set at the three-quarter-court mark (diagr. 1). We invite the opponent to inbound the ball with a short pass at the free-throw line level. At that moment, the defenders start applying the following defensive principles of this zone press.

The first line defender X1, (usually our playmaker), does not immediately attack the player with the ball, but directs him towards the corner of the side line and the mid-court line, always remembering that all horizontal passes are allowed, but not vertical pass to the middle of the court.

Our main idea is NOT to steal the ball, but to slow down the offense, stealing the opponent's precious seconds.

The two defenders of the second line, X2 and X4, stand along the sideline, about at the level of the half-court line, faking to trap the player with the ball, with X1, our defender of the first line of the zone press. Their main







task is to prevent long passes, which are very dangerous for the zone press. They move backwards, especially X2, the second line defender, who is on the ball side. X4, the second line defender on the weak side, must go deeper towards the central part of the court, taking a position that will allow him to play aggressively the offensive player on this spot of the floor. His job is to prevent him from receiving the ball: it is crucial to keep the ball away from the center of the floor, where the offense can move the ball to the left or the right of the half court (diagr. 2).

From these two previous diagrams, it is possible to clearly understand one more principle of our zone press: it is X4, who is setting a trap on the three-quarter of the court with X1, the defender of the first defensive line. At the beginning of this defense, X5, the last line defender of our zone press, is responsible for the offensive player on his side, as well as preventing any long pass toward our basket (diagr. 3).

Now that I have described the basic principles of this zone press, the individual tasks of all the defenders, our rule of allowing the ball to be passed horizontally, let's review the case where the ball reaches the offensive player 2: we try to control the ball deep along the court and, possibly, to make one more trap on the other side with X3 and X1, while X4 covers the middle of the floor (diagr. 4).

We can say that this defense is considered successful if we make one effective trap and "steal" approximately 7 seconds from the opponent's offense.

Let's now say that the offense has overcome all our traps of the zone press, the ball is on our half court, and the opponent is now able to organize their offense. In this situation, our players withdraw to a 1-2-2 zone defense, which is considered temporary, with the purpose of confusing the playmaker, leading him (hopefully) to make a wrong decision.

X4 is positioned as the first defender in the zone, two defenders X2 and X1 are on his left and right, while at the last defensive line await our center and small forward, X5 and X3 (diagr. 5).

It is of the utmost importance to have the offensive playmaker thinking that this is our definitive defensive alignment. We achieve this by standing, for a second, in a slightly narrower defensive set, emphasizing our new line-up, the 1-2-2 (diagr. 6).

But, this is not the definitive defense because our ultimate goal is something else: a combined defense with three defenders on zone and two defenders on man-to-man, where our three players X5, X3 and X4, form a defensive triangle, while X1 and X2 guard the individual players they are in charge of (diagr.7)

Before we begin with the explanation of new principles of this combined defense, I wish to point out some specific details.

This type of defense may be played against the team that does not have more than two outstanding outside jump shooters on the court. We usually chose to aim maximum concentration of our defense on such two players and then apply what I call "band aids."

The remaining three players, who play the zone form a strong defensive triangle, pointed in the direction of the ball, which moves itself according to the principles I shall explain later.

It is also necessary to point out that this type of defense may be played only when the team you coach shows affinity for such types of defense and possesses high physical and mental characteristics. As far as physical characteristics are concerned, the small forward X3 is a tall and strong player, who can defend the low-post position and get defensive rebounds. Then, the two defenders who play man-to-man, covering the opponent's best or the most dangerous players, must be extremely good at individual defense, since they will be often in a situation to defend one-on-one.

As for X4, normally our power forward, we pay the most of our attention to his play since he is the "brain" of this defense. This player has the most difficult and responsible role. In addition to his physical qualities (speed, mobility, jumping ability), he must have court intelligence, which means that he must be able to make quick and correct decisions, but also be able to play this position.

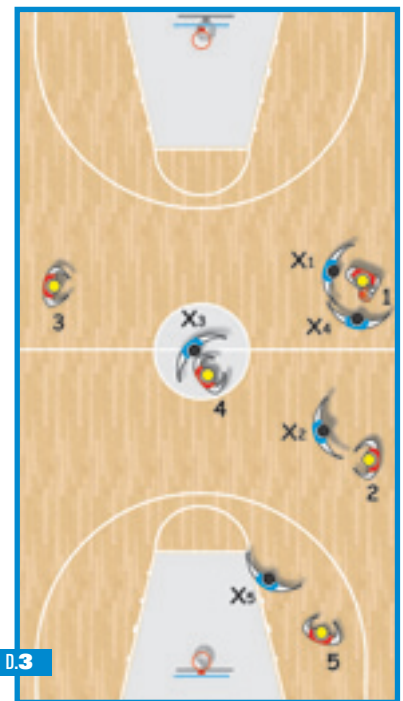
#### PRINCIPLES OF THE COMBINED ZONE DEFENSE

We can discuss now the basic principles of this defense. Since we have decided to play man-to-man with X2 and X1, they must cover their assigned offensive players in a very aggressive way, following the rules of the man-to-man defense. This means overplaying them when they are on the ball side, and being in a defensive triangle when they are on the weak side of the court (diagr. 8).

X5 and X3, our center and the small forward, have very similar, almost identical tasks. The principles of their defense are the same, but



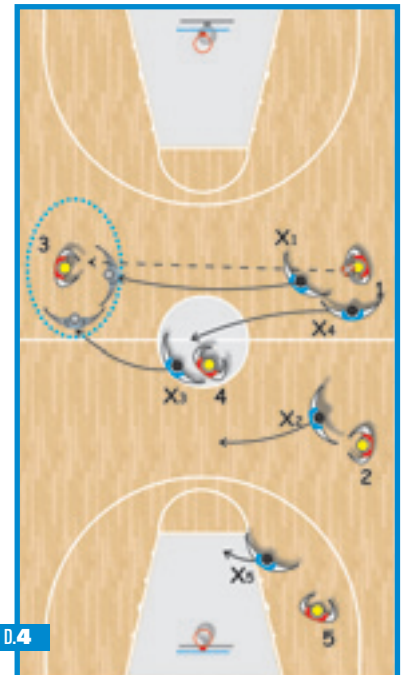
D.1



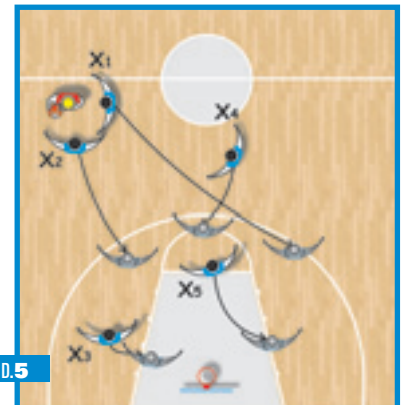
D.3



D.2



D.4

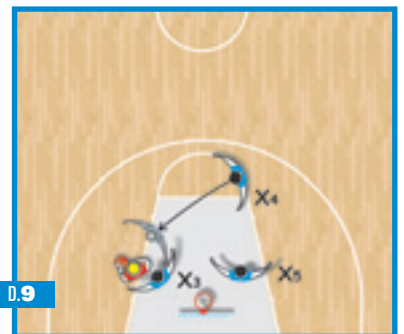
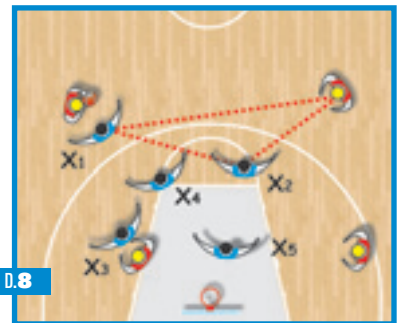
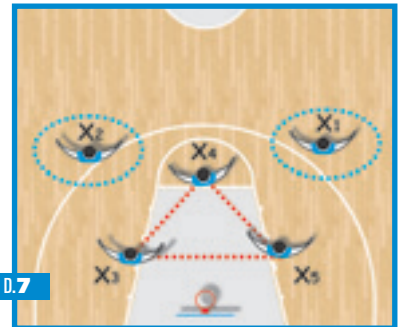
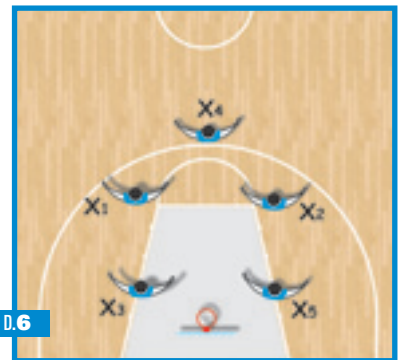


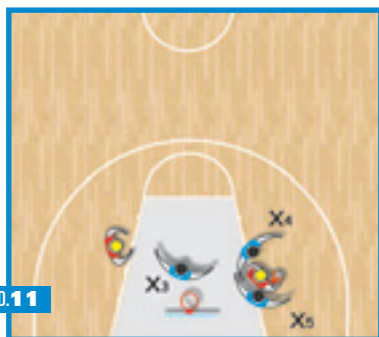
D.5

the difference is in giving to X3, the small forward (due to his characteristics), the task of playing defense in a wider area, allowing him to go farther from the basket.

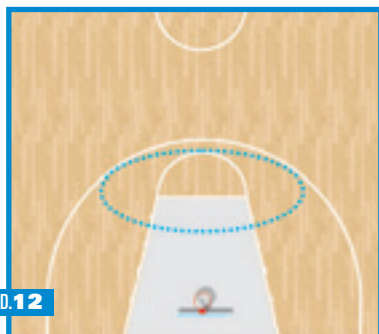
These are their common responsibilities. When the ball is on their side, their duty is to play defense in the area that they must cover, while the opposite defensive teammate must guard the back of his partner from the rear defense line, while avoiding lob passes. If the offensive player in this area receives the ball, and then tries to attack the rim, facing or with his back to the basket, X5 and X3 will direct him to the middle of the three-second lane. They can receive help from X4, who, coming from







D.11



D.12

the top of the lane, will trap the offensive player (diagr. 9)

As we have said, the tasks of X4 are the most difficult and demanding. He is in charge of the widest area, and he has to stop the penetration of the offensive players, who are covered man-to-man, helping and recovering. He also has to make traps on the offensive low post, both on the right or the left side of the half court, trapping them with X3 or X5 (diagr. 10 and 11).

Besides, he must also cover the pick-and roll play, which are run in his assigned area. These are the basic principles of this defense, which evolves in different ways. In the first stage, we have the 1-2-1 zone press on three quarters of the court, which is adjusted to have an adequate line-up for going to the 1-2-2 zone defense. This is only to confuse the opponent's playmaker and push him to call for an offense against the regular zone defense. The last part of this defense is a transformation into a combined defense with three defenders, X3, X4, and X5, who form a defensive triangle playing the zone, and two defenders X1 and X2, playing man-to-man. I would now like to review some additional principles of this tactical, special defense.

In case of any pick-and-roll play involving the defenders X1 and X2, who are playing man-to-man in the area covered by X4 (diagr. 12), there has to be a change of assignment. The defender, X1 or X2, whose assigned player plays pick-and-roll, will exchange places with X4, now playing zone, at the top of the three-second lane. X4 has to jump out



aggressively and now guard the player with the ball, following the rules of the man-to-man defense.

We have another defensive scenario when the offensive player covered man-to-man cuts in the lane to overload one side of the half court after passing to the small forward 3. Then, X1, or X2, takes the position of X3 and continues to play defense in the zone

triangle. X3 aggressively follows the player, who runs through the lane and takes over the role of the defender, who is in charge of playing man-to-man defense.

I hope that this brief explanation of this particular defense has attracted your attention. This defensive philosophy has given me much satisfaction, many important victories, and has influenced the course of my coaching career.