

Offensive Strategy

Transition Offense

"Transition" refers to the process of changing from defense to offense (transition offense), or offense to defense (transition defense). Your transition offense can be a slow, walk-it-up-floor transition, an aggressive fast break transition, or something in between. Each coach has to decide which is best for his team and his personnel. Do you really want an up-tempo fast game, especially if you have a strong half-court game with good postmen, or if your guards are not particularly quick, have trouble keeping the ball under control, or are inexperienced?

On the other hand, if your team is quick, with good, experienced ball handlers, an aggressive up-tempo style has advantages.

1. The fast break can produce easy scores.
2. Pushing the ball up the floor quickly puts pressure on the opponent, and they will be constantly worrying about getting back on defense. This thinking may cause them to be less aggressive going for their offensive rebounds, and may keep their point guard from penetrating (thinking he has to stay back to prevent the fast break).
3. An aggressive team attitude on offense will often carry over to your defense and rebounding.
4. An up-tempo game will favor the team that is well conditioned. A poorly conditioned team will "run out of gas" by the fourth quarter.
5. The fast break will often break the opponent's press defense.
6. A team that plays up-tempo will usually use more of its bench players, with frequent substitutions. This often creates good team harmony with many players getting playing time. An up-tempo game will favor the team with a "deep bench", with many good substitute players.
7. The players and fans enjoy a well-played up-tempo game.

Transition Offensive Concepts

The most important rule to inculcate in your players' minds is to always keep under control. You don't want your fast-breaking style to result in turnovers and missed opportunities to score. They have to learn to recognize when to push the break, and when to slow down and stay under control. They must learn not to force bad passes. Some teams like to push the break every opportunity they can (after a steal, defensive rebound, an opponent's score, etc). Some teams only push it up after a steal or a score, or only certain times of the game.

Although this is very basic, young players learning the game must be taught how to transition from defense to offense. Kids must be taught that when an inside, tall player gets a defensive rebound, he/she should immediately look to pass to a guard, a good ball-handler, to get the ball up the court, even if you are playing a slow-down game. Teach your ball-handlers that on every defensive rebound, they must move into a position quickly where the rebounder can pass to them. Coaches often assume kids know this, but like every other fundamental in the game, it must be taught. Rebounders should be taught to take care of the ball after a defensive rebound and make a clean, simple pass to a guard. So often, I see kids work hard for the rebound, only to lose it with a careless outlet pass. Impress your kids that the opponent is often "lurking around" to steal those outlet passes.

Also, some coaches like to assign the same person (usually a post player with good passing skills) to be the inbounds passer each time a basket is made, or the ball is out-of-bounds. The post players should be taught to get down the floor and allow spacing and room for the guards to bring the ball up.

Running the primary fast break

There are different ways of running the transition offense, but most methods use the idea of filling three lanes coming up the floor, a "trailer", and a "prevent" person (diagram A). The guards, or small forward should run the three lanes. One lane is straight up the middle of the floor, and the other lanes are along each sideline. Some coaches feel that it doesn't matter which player is in which lane, but just fill each lane position as quickly as possible and "go!". Other coaches teach that the outlet pass always goes to the point guard (the team's best ball handler) in the center, and the outside lanes, trailer and prevent position are assigned to individual players, so each one knows his role. If the break doesn't develop, then just bring it up slowly and avoid the turnover that can happen by getting the ball into the wrong person's hands.

Preferably, the ball will be in the center lane, although the break can be run from the wing and can be run with only two lanes filled (as after a quick mid-court steal). The center person should dribble the ball all the way to the free throw lane, and should not make any unnecessary passes prior to that point. The two outside lanes should cut at 45 degrees to the hoop for a pass from the point, and the lay-up. If the point guard pops the free throw jumper, the wings should crash the boards for the rebound. If neither happens, the wings should cross under the basket and fill the opposite corner or wing, and the point guard should move to the right side of the free throw circle. Next the "trailer" should cut through the left side of the lane, expecting the pass. The "prevent" player should come up the floor slowly, making sure no opponents are behind him. He prevents the opponent from taking it to the hoop should they steal or intercept the ball. If nothing develops from the break, the team then flows into it's usual half-court offensive set.

Starting the break

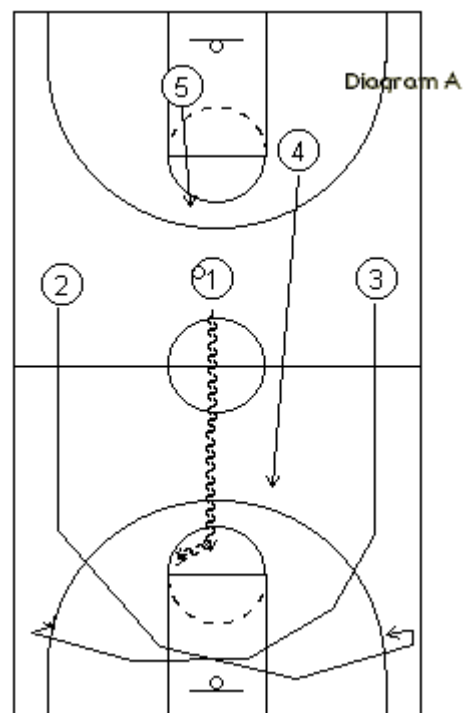
Coaches differ on how to start the break off a defensive rebound. Some prefer the outlet pass to go to a guard out on the wing (free throw line extended). This guard can either pass to the other guard who is filling the center lane, or dribble quickly and fill the center lane himself.

Other coaches teach getting the outlet pass directly to the point guard in the center of the floor. If you can get this pass through, this is certainly the fastest and easiest way to get the break going, and avoids a dangerous pass to the wing, and a centering pass. It also gets the ball into the hands of your best ball-handler. The point guard should come to the pass, pivot and start the speed dribble up the floor, while the other guard and small forward fill the outside lanes.

A successful fast break depends on:

1. Getting the defensive rebound.
2. A good, quick outlet pass.
3. Filling the lanes.
4. Maintaining control. "Be quick, but never hurry."
5. Recognition. Don't force the break or pass if it is not there.

There are several drills that will help your transition offense.



See Transition Offense Drills, 4 on 4 Transitions, Pitch 'n Fire, Rebound-Outlet-Break Drill

When the primary fast break is not possible, consider using the secondary fast break.

Secondary Break, Transition Offense

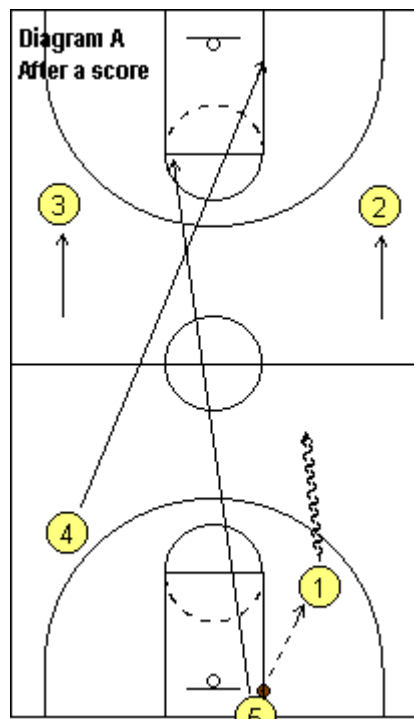
Here is a secondary fast break, when the primary fast break is not possible. You can use this to transition quickly after the opponent scores, or after getting possession by either a rebound or steal. The idea is to push the ball up the floor as quickly as possible, before the defense can get set. You can even use this as a press breaker if you get it in quickly, before the press has time to get set.

After the opponent scores...

The keys are: get the ball out of the net quickly and pass in-bounds immediately to the point guard (#1), your best ball-handler. #2 and #3 sprint down the sidelines into the forecourt. #1 will either speed dribble the ball up the floor, or make the long pass to #2 or #3. Then there are a number of options as outlined below.

#5 always makes the in-bounds pass, and after a made basket, should quickly get the ball out of the net (don't wait for it to hit the floor), step out-of-bounds, and quickly get the pass into #1. Don't waste time and let the defense get their press set. Notice how the floor is spread, with #1 and #2 on the right, and #4 and #3 on the left. #2 and #3 should get down the floor. #4 plays opposite of #1. #5 will be the trailer coming down the floor last. #4 will cut to the ball-side block.

#5, the trailer, comes last and goes to the opposite side elbow. There are many options depending on what the point guard finds open.



The options are:

1 all the way

If nobody stops her, #1 can take it all the way to the free throw line for a nice 3-on-1 break.

1 to 2

1 passes long up the side to 2, who takes it to the hoop.

1 to 3

1 passes long to 3, who takes it to the hoop.

1 to 4

1 passes long to 4 (going to the ball-side block), who takes it to the hoop.

1 to 5

1 passes to the trailer 5, at the elbow.

1 to 2 to 4

1 passes to 2. 2 passes to 4 down on the low block.

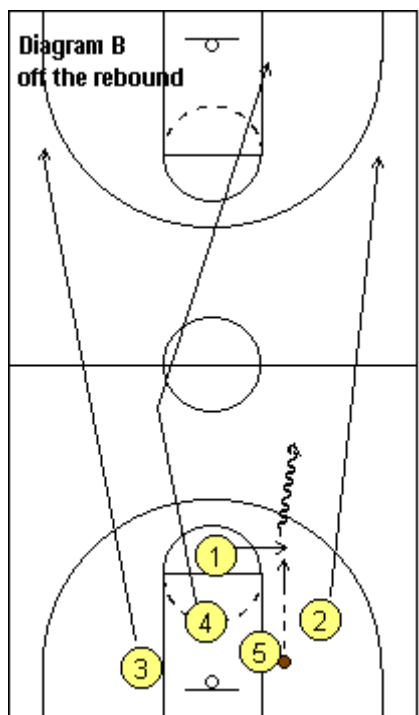
1 to 2 to 5

1 passes to 2. 2 passes to 5 at the elbow.

1 to 2 to 5 to 3

1 passes to 2. 2 passes to 5 at the elbow, and 5 passes to 3 cutting to hoop.

If nothing develops, then flow into your half court offense.



After a rebound...

Everyone goes for the defensive rebound. As soon as the rebound is secured, #2 releases up the right side-line, #3 sprints up the left side-line, and #1 comes to the top, ball-side for the outlet pass. Usually the defensive guard that plays "back on defense" will back-pedal to the center of the court. By having #2 and #3 wide on the side-lines, you should be able to get the pass down floor.

#1 pushes the ball up the floor, or can make the long pass to either #2 or #3.

#4 runs the same pattern as in diagram A, and #5 becomes the trailer again. You could reverse the roles for #4 and #5, depending on who gets the rebound... allowing the re-bouncer to be the trailer.

The patterns and options are the same in both situations, so it is not difficult to learn this secondary break.

Beating the Full Court Press

Full court press defenses try to get turnovers and easy baskets by pressuring, trapping, and harassing the offense. There are several principles and some strategies in beating this pressure.

Stay calm. The press tries to upset you, and make you commit turnovers. Try to be calm and confident that you can beat this. If you make a mistake, you must immediately forget it and stay calm. Otherwise, they may get three more steals from you, like a snowball effect. Do not dwell on what's already happened always think "next play", what is going to happen next. The coach must stay calm too. An upset, angry coach is not what the already rattled players need. In a time-out, the coach must be calm, reassure, re-focus his players, and settle his players down.

Think "attack!". A full court press is always a gamble for the defense. If you think positive, and attack the pressure, you can get an easy lay-up and score. So when you see a press coming at you, ATTACK! Think of it as something to beat, to get an easy score... make 'em pay!

Three "looks".

1. Look up. See the floor. Look up the court. Don't look down at the ball.
2. Look before you pass. Make good, quick safe passes.
3. Look before you dribble. Don't dribble unless you have to. You beat the press by quick, sharp passing usually not dribbling.

Avoid "trap areas"... the corners. Don't dribble into one of the trap areas (see below)... back away but keep your dribble alive, or pass off.

Getting the ball in-bounds. Get the ball in quickly, before the defense can set up. Make sure you make a good in-bounds pass. Do not take the ball out from directly under your basket, or your passing lane may be restricted by the backboard. If the other team has just scored, you may "run the baseline". You cannot run the baseline if the ball went out of bounds and the official is

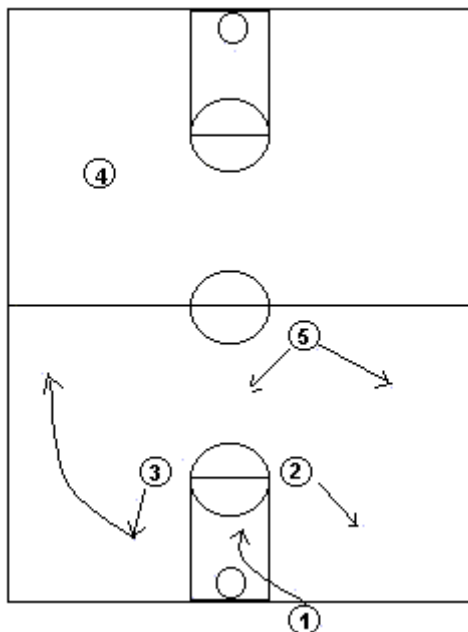
handing it to you. You must stay where the ref gives it to you. If the ref doesn't handle it (like after a score), you can use the whole baseline.

Quick, accurate passing. You must look and find the open man immediately, and make a quick, accurate pass. Avoid soft, lob passes. Passing up the floor, and cutting, are the secrets to beating the press. Look up the floor and anticipate where you will pass the ball, even before you get it.

Receivers meet the pass... go to the ball, get open. But keep your spacing. Look for the open spots in the defense. Get open so your teammate can pass to you. Before you even get the ball, look to see where other open teammates are, so you will know where to pass to immediately. When you receive the ball, don't have your back turned. Immediately pivot and face down-court, so you can find an open teammate.

Use the whole court and reverse the ball to the opposite side. Keep at least one player on the "weak-side" to reverse the ball to the opposite side of the court.

This is one set you can use:



1 takes the ball out. 2 and 3 start at elbows and cut hard. 1 passes to 2 or 3. After passing in bounds, 1 steps into the middle, paint area. 5 should read the defense and either get open in the middle, or along the ball-side baseline. If 2 gets the ball, and gets double-teamed, she must immediately pass to 1, 3 or 5. If 1 gets the ball back, she should look immediately to reverse it to 3 on the left sideline, or to 5 in the middle. If 5 gets the ball in the middle, she can look for 4 down-court. Or look for 2 and 3 cutting hard down the sidelines for a pass back from 5. The press is now beat and you should "attack" and take the ball to the hoop if possible.

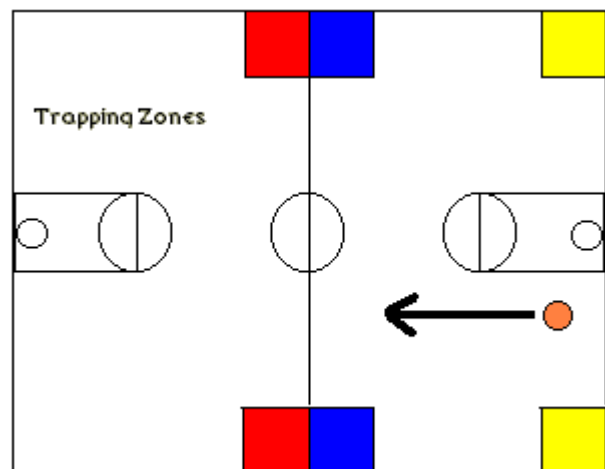
Remember, stay calm, see the floor, pass quickly, make sharp cuts, and "ATTACK!"

Avoid the corners (yellow).

If you get trapped in the blue zones, you risk the 10 second call.

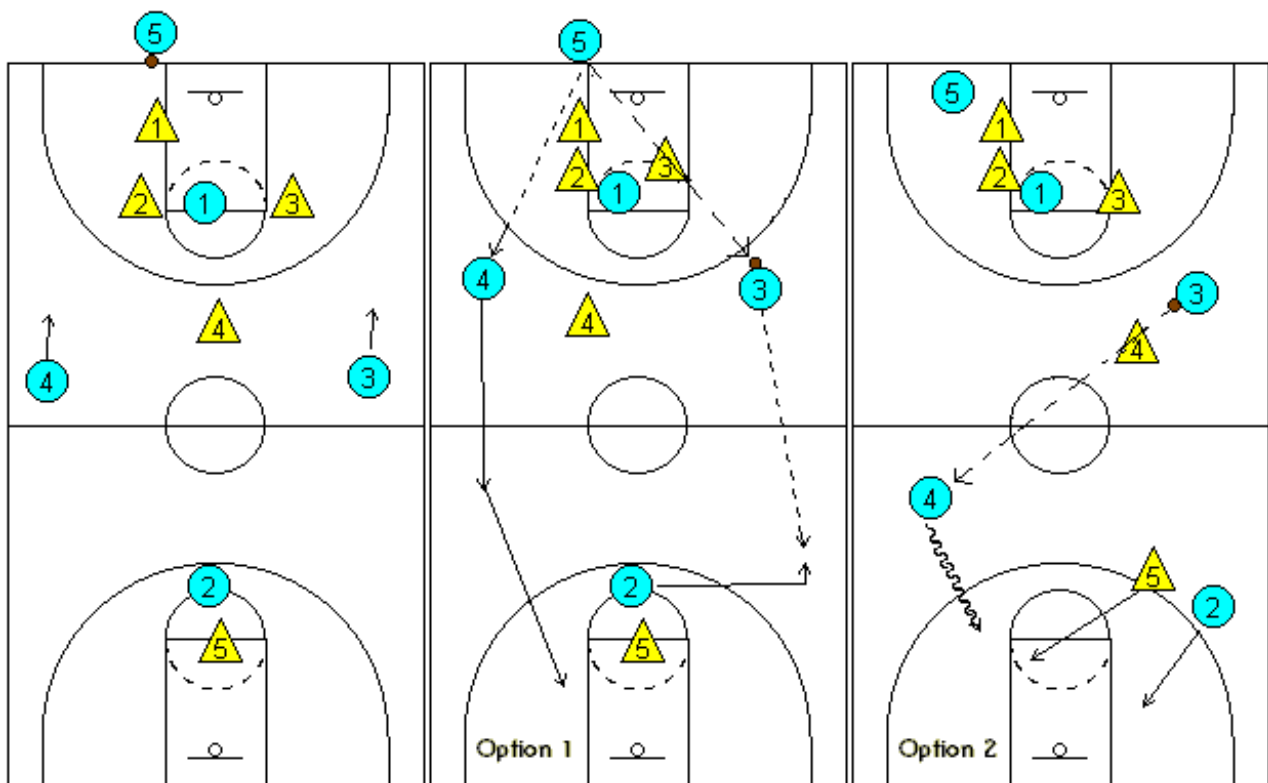
The red zones are just like getting caught in the yellow corners... you are trapped by the sideline and the center line.

Another way to beat the press is to use the "secondary" fast break. Get the ball in quickly before the press is set defensively, then a good long pass up the sideline and you've got a lay-up.



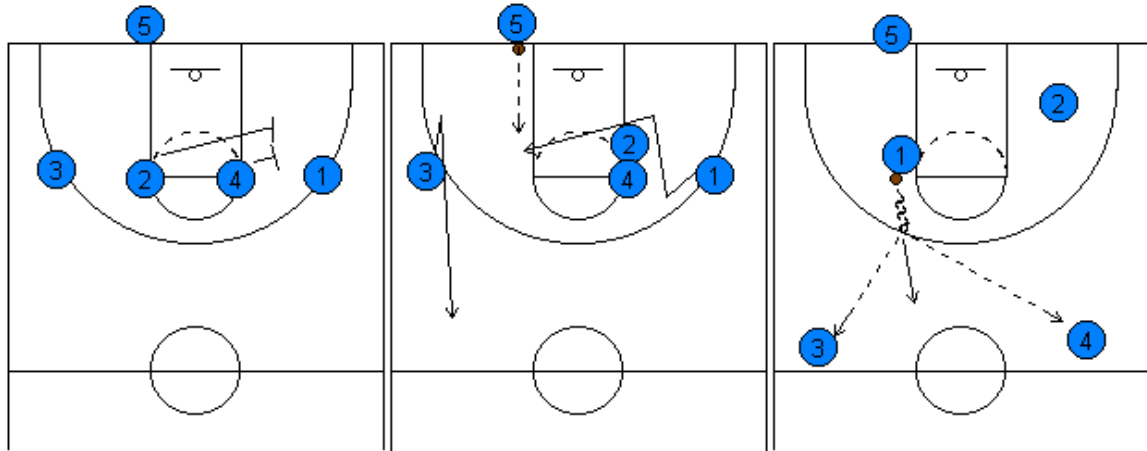
1-2-1-1 Press Breaker

#5 is the in-bounder. Usually the defense will try to deny #1 the ball. So #1 acts as a decoy and cuts into the lane, drawing two defenders with him. #2 goes long to the frontcourt, top of the key area. Having #2 go long usually gives you a speed-quickness advantage as your #2 will usually be quicker than their #5 playing back. #3 and #4 setup up initially at the sideline hash marks, make a fake toward the ball, and drop back for the "over the top" pass. #5 can pass to either #3 or #4. Meanwhile, #2 cuts to the ball-side sideline. In Option #1, #3 receives the pass, and passes up the court to #2. Now you have a 2-on-1 situation with #4 sprinting up the opposite sideline. If the deep defender (#5) denies the sideline pass to #2, then #3 can look to pass diagonally to #4 up the right side (Option #2).



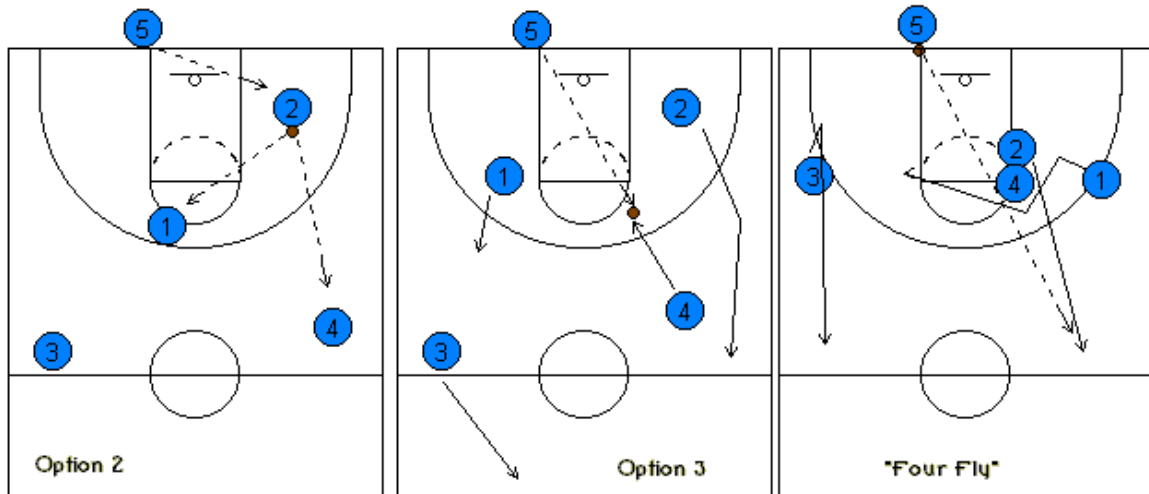
Four Across Press Breaker

Here is one way to beat the full-court press. Use this four across setup.



Option #1

#3 fakes in and then cuts long. #2 and #4 set a double screen for #1. #1 runs his defender into the screen and cuts thru the lane to the opposite elbow and receives the in-bounds pass. Meanwhile, after screening, #2 slides down into the weak-side short corner as another in-bounds pass option. #4 releases to the weak-side half court. After your point guard (#1) receives the in-bounds pass, he dribbles up the floor, looking to pass to either #3 or #4.



Option #2

#5 can run the baseline and the in-bounds pass goes to #2. #2 looks to pass to #1 or #4.

Option #3

#4 comes back to the top of the key to receive the in-bounds pass. #4 looks for #2 and #1 cutting, or #3 long.

"Four Fly"

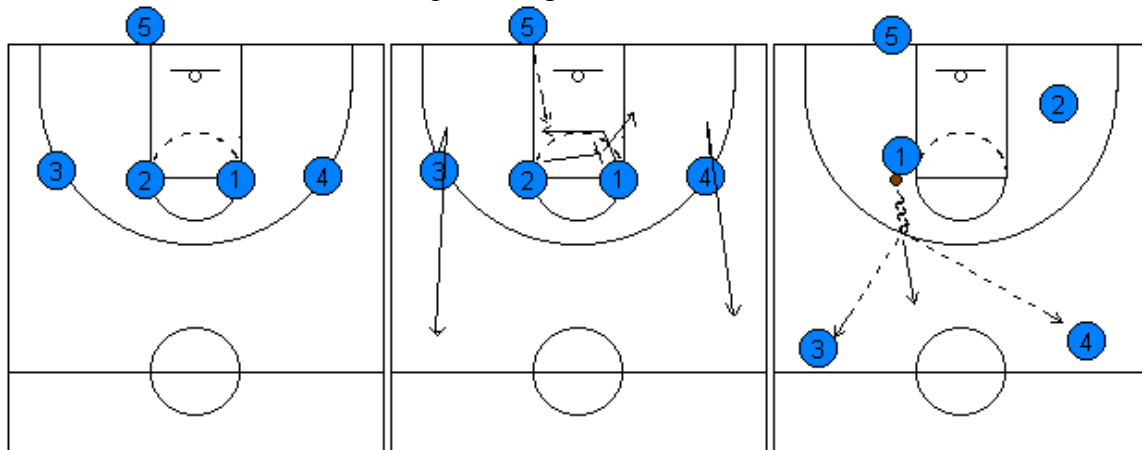
This is a set play for when you only have a few seconds left on the clock. This time #1 cuts over the top of the double screen. As soon as #1 rubs shoulders with #4, #2 takes off on a "fly pattern" for the long pass from #5. #3 should be moving up the floor as well and could receive the pass from #2. #5 should make sure that he has a clear pass and is not blocked out by being directly under the backboard.

Simplified Version of the 4-Across Press Breaker

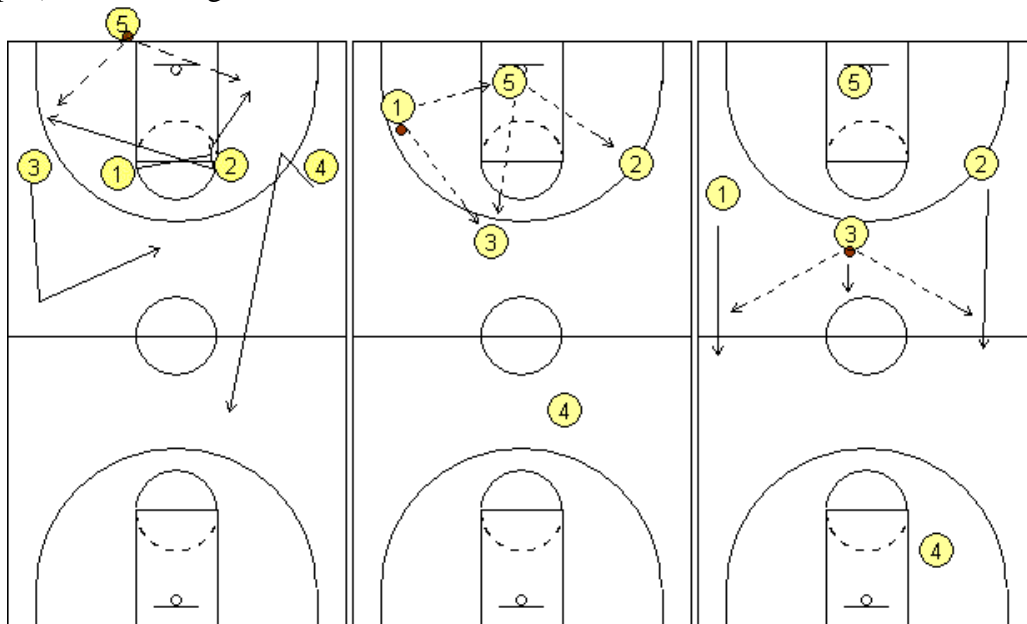
Oftentimes in basketball it is best to keep things as simple as possible. The above 4-across press breaker will require some practice time. Below is a simplified 4-across press breaker that I was actually able to teach my 16U girls team at a half-time break.

The line-up is a little different, and I think easier for the players to understand. The #1 and #2 line up on the inside and #3 and #4 are along the sidelines. Instead of a double screen, #2 sets a screen for #1 who receives the in-bounds pass from #5. Meanwhile, #3 and #4 make a fake cut toward the ball and then break up the sidelines toward half-court. After #1 receives the pass, she/he turns up the floor with just a couple quick dribbles and can probably pass to either #3 or #4 up the sidelines. If #3 and #4 are covered on the sidelines, then #1 can probably just dribble straight up the middle. If the defense collapses on her/him, then #3 or #4 should be open.

If #1 is unable to get the in-bounds pass, then #2 should be open to receive it and also attack the middle with the dribble, while looking for the pass to #3 or #4.



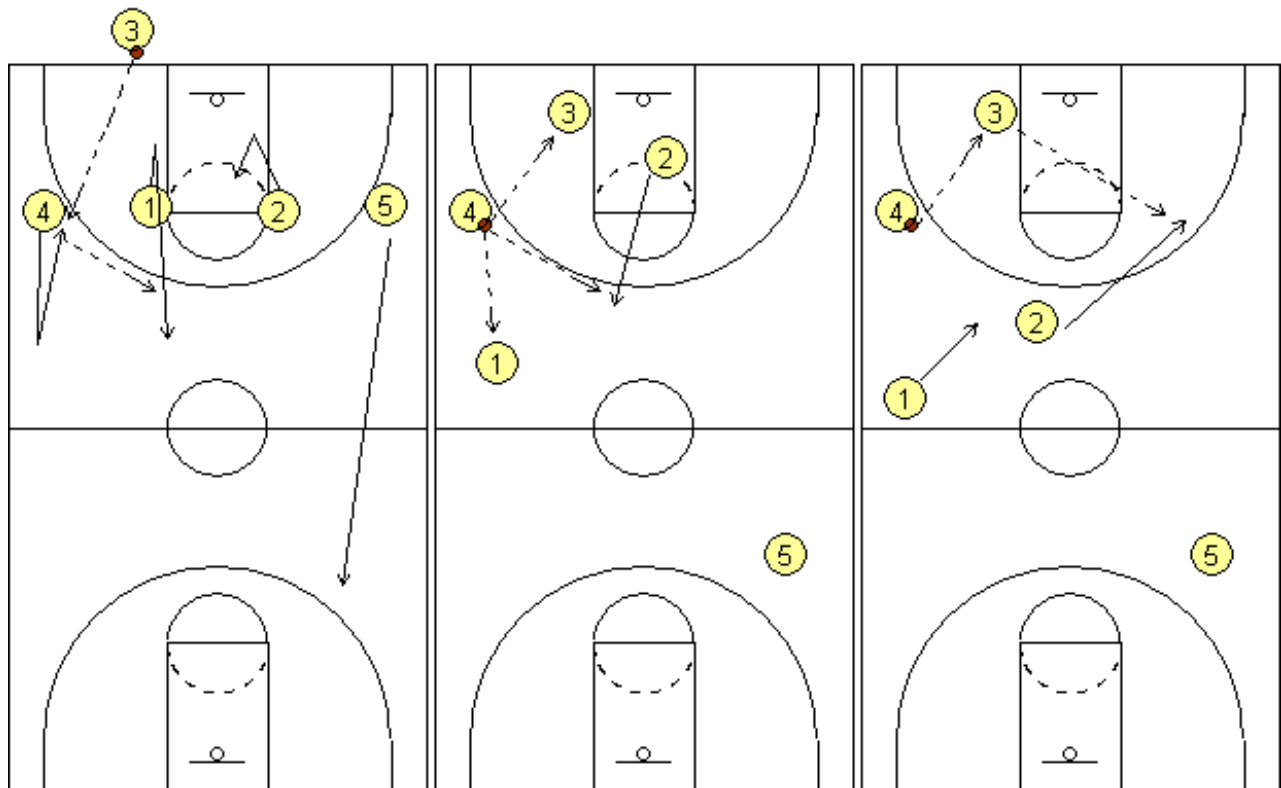
Here's another adjustment. If the defense is denying the sideline and the middle looks open, try this scheme. #5 is the in-bounder and #1 and #2 screen and cut for the ball, same as above. This time, #3 fakes going long up the sideline, and then cuts back hard to the middle. #4 goes long. After #1 or #2 receive the inbounds pass, they look for #3 open in the middle and cut up the sidelines looking for the pass back. If #3 is denied the pass, #1 or #2 can pass back to #5 who is used as the "reverse" person who can then pass up the opposite side or middle (usually one of the other is open). See the diagram below.



You can use this simple press break to also attack the 2-2-1 zone press, where the defense is denying the sideline pass... see 2-2-1 Press Breaker.

Another Version of the 4-Across Press Break

See the diagrams below. This time #3 is the in-bounder, your two best ball-handlers line-up on both sides of the free-throw line, #4 is at ball-side sideline, and #5 is at weak-side sideline. #4 fakes long and v-cuts back hard to receive the inbound pass. #1 and #2 fake a cut toward the in-bounder #3. #1 then cuts hard up the middle looking for the pass from #4. #2 is your second cutter delaying his/her cut until #1 clears, and then looks for the pass from #4. If both #1 and #2 are denied the pass, then #4 can pass back to #3 moving inbounds and #2 can move to the weak-side for ball reversal from #3. #5 breaks long and may occasionally be able to receive the "home run" pass.



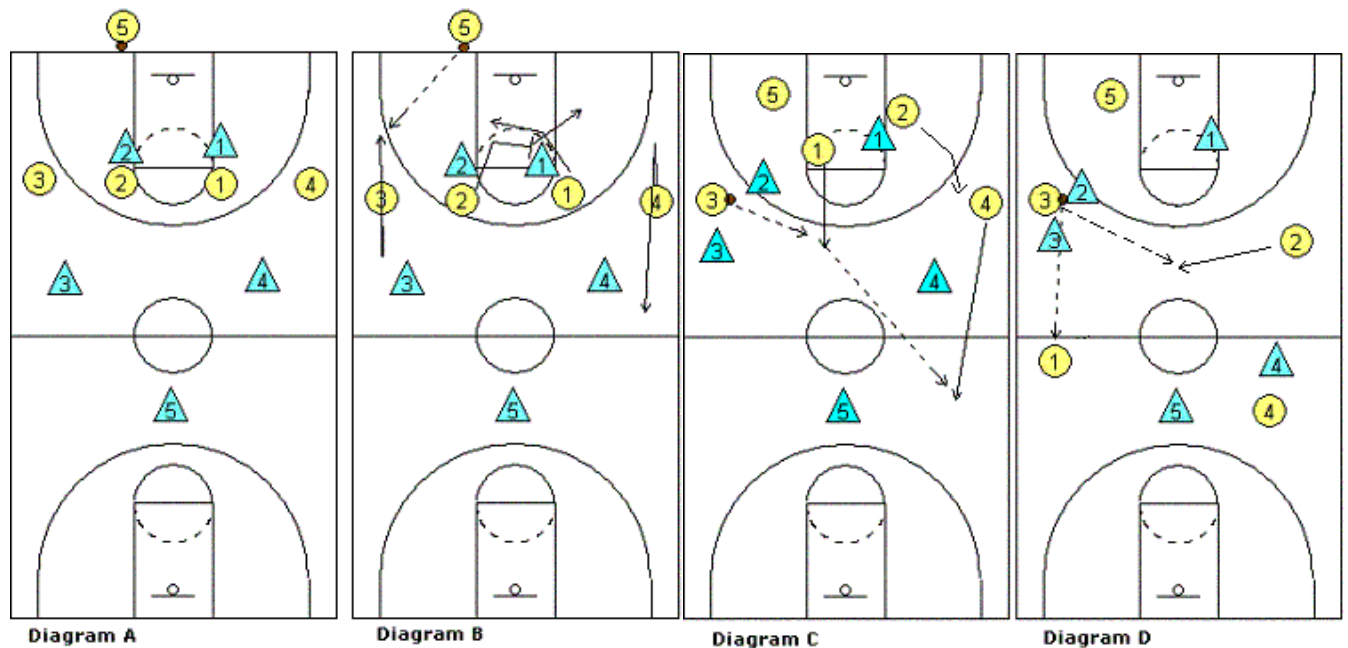
2-2-1 Zone Press Breaker

The 2-2-1 zone press attempts to deny the offense the sideline at the half court line. This press could be the opponent's primary press, or could be an "adjustment" after you have beaten their press up the sidelines a few times. Now they are trying to deny the sideline. So, like any other situation in basketball, you take what they give you... you will attack up the middle.

Here is one way to attack the 2-2-1 zone press. Refer to the Diagrams below.

Use a **4-across** set-up (Diagram A). #5 is the in-bounder. The two up front defenders will probably make it difficult for your #1 or #2 to get the ball, but #2 should set a screen for #1 (Diagram B). #5 fakes a pass to #1 or #2 but instead makes the quick pass up the side to #3 (who initially breaks long and then v-cuts back to the ball). As the defense attempts to trap #3 (Diagram C), #1 should be open for the quick pass up the middle. #1 can then pass to #4 going up the opposite sideline. #4 should get past the #4 defender. If the #4 defender goes man-to-man with #4, then #2 should be cutting up the left sideline for the pass from #1.

Now refer to Diagram D. If #1 is covered, then he/she should clear out and cut to the ball-side sideline just beyond the half court line. #2 should cut toward the middle to receive the pass from #3. Or #3 could pass to #1 up the ball-side sideline. Keep #5 back for a "safety" out pass for #3. If the ball reverses back to #5, then #2 must stay back and get the ball from #5.

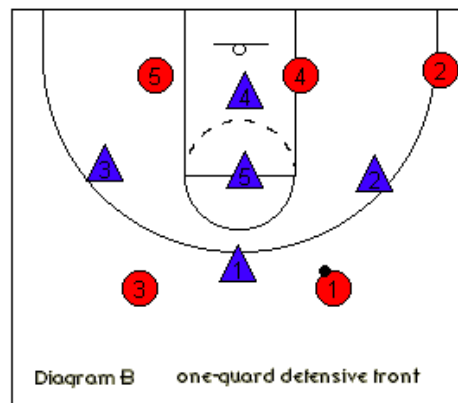
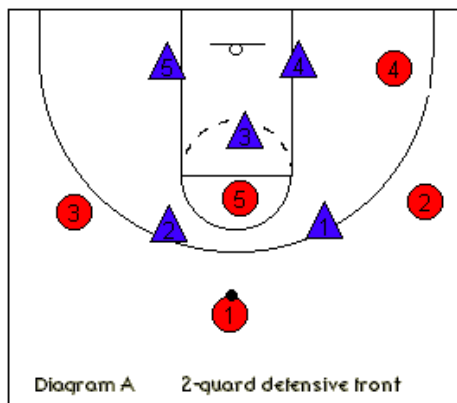


Zone Offense

Zone defenses create special problems for the offense. Plays and sets designed to be successful against man-to-man coverage often run into problems against zones. You must have a "zone offense(s)" in your offensive arsenal to counteract zone defenses. Here are some pointers in dealing with zone defenses.

1. If it is your team's offensive style, fast-break and push the ball up the floor as quickly as possible, before the defensive zone can get set.

2. Full-court press on defense, in order to favor a "transition type", wide-open, up-tempo game. A slow-down, half-court game allows the zone defense to be more effective.



3. Analyze the zone defense to see what set you are facing. Then set your offense accordingly. If the defense shows a two-guard front (e.g. 2-1-2 or 2-3 zone), use a one-guard front, or point guard (e.g. 1-3-1, 1-2-2 ("3-out, 2-in"), or 1-4). Just the opposite applies if the defense shows a one-guard front (e.g. 1-3-1, or 1-2-2 zone), use a two-guard front (e.g. 2-1-2, 2-3, 2-2-1). See Diagrams A and B. Observe to see if the defense keeps switching its defensive set, and be ready to call out your offensive counter-move from the bench. Some defenses will keep changing on you, and you can't call a time-out every time!

4. Be patient on offense, but take the first open, good percentage shot. Make sure your best shooters are getting their shots.

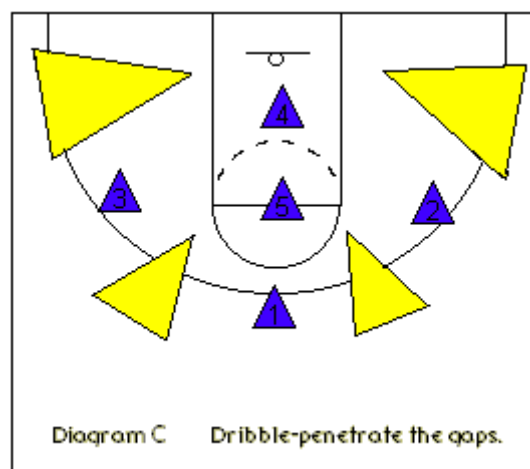
5. Crash the offensive boards as a zone defense often does not have clear-cut box-out assignments, and extra, high-percentage shots can be gotten off the offensive rebound.

6. Maintain good spacing, don't get "bunched up".

Players should move into the gaps in the zone (see Diagram C). "Overload" zones by flooding areas of the zone with more offensive players than it can cover.

7. Avoid unnecessary dribbling as this allows the defense time to adjust or reset. However, guards and wings should look to dribble-penetrate the gaps in the zone (Diagram C), and look to dish off inside.

8. You must get the ball inside for high-percentage shots. It's OK to take the outside jumper or three-pointer, but don't settle for the outside shot on every possession. You must find a way to get inside to be successful. You must be able to get those important "points in the paint". Having success inside will cause problems for the defense, may result in their getting into foul trouble, and will open up your outside shot when the defense collapses inside. When



the ball goes inside, if it is well-defended, go "inside-out" with a quick pass out for a wide-open three-pointer.

9. Use crisp passing, and use the "skip" pass from corner to wing, and wing to corner. Look for the lob pass to the baseline and back-door. Passers should use ball-fakes, where they fake a shot or fake an overhead pass in one direction to get the zone to move, then pass in the opposite direction.

10. Set screens against the zone, both inside and outside. Players should make cuts into the open areas, and look to the weak-side, or "back-door".

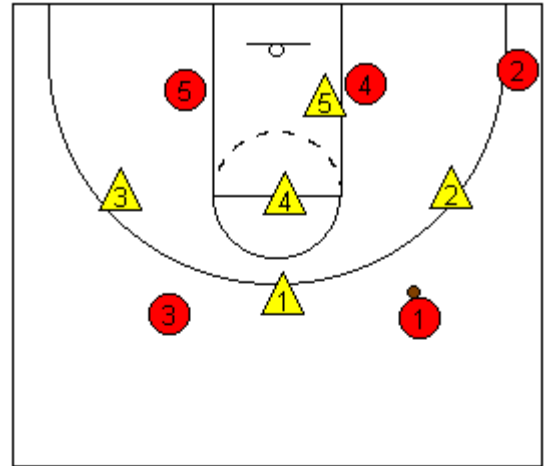
11. Make sure your players receive the ball in "triple-threat" position, ready to shoot, pass or penetrate.

One last strategy:

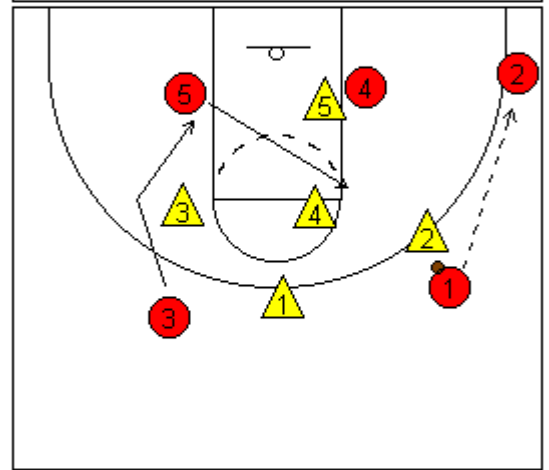
If you have the lead and the opponent switches to zone defense, and if you are not confident that you can beat their zone, you can refuse to play against it. Instead, you go into a "4-corners" delay offense. Since you have the lead, they will have to eventually come out a play you man-to-man. Of course, this strategy won't work if there is an offensive shot clock rule. Also, if your forte is a fast-breaking style, going to a delay game may be the worst thing you can do!

Beating the 1-3-1 Zone Defense

Use a two guard front with 1 and 3 out front. Have 2 play down in the ball-side corner. Have two low posts on opposite sides of the lane.



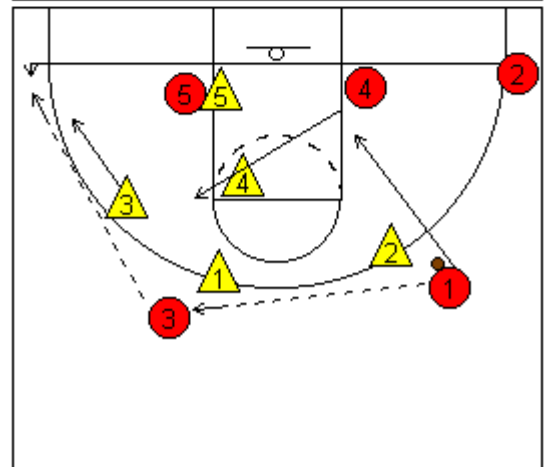
The opposite post player cuts up to the ball-side elbow. 2 should be in the ball-side corner. Pass the ball into the corner (2). 2 can shoot, or pass to either post at the block or elbow. 3 can slide "back-door" on the weak side



You can reverse it to the opposite side.

Now 2 runs the baseline, and gets screens along the way from the two low post players, and goes to the ball-side corner.

The ball is passed to the left guard (3), and the opposite low post cuts to the ball-side elbow. The ball can be passed down into the corner for the same options from the left side. 1 slips into the right "back door".



How to Beat the 2-1-2 (or 2-3) Zone Defense

The 2-3 (or 2-1-2 zone) is a commonly used zone defense, usually designed to stop the inside game. Good outside shooting can rip it apart. But you still need to get the ball inside, especially late in the game, or when your shooters are not hitting. The 2-1-2 zone is basically the same as the 2-3, except that the middle low defender is positioned a little higher in the paint, just below the free throw line.

Let's discuss several ways to beat this zone... (1) simply over-shifting the zone, (2) a 2-3 zone offense and (3) a more complicated over-loading scheme.

Over-shift the Zone

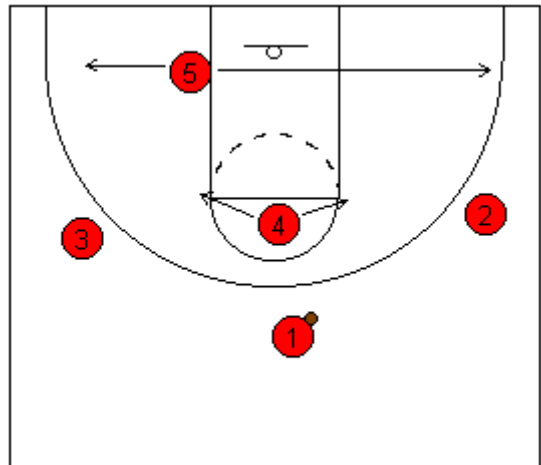
To over-shift a zone, the offense should pass the ball quickly around the perimeter, and into the high and low posts. The ball should be like a "hot potato" - pass it quickly without holding onto it. By passing quickly and using "skip" passes (e.g. wing to wing pass), the zone has to move quickly to cover the offense. By quickly reversing the ball to the opposite side of the court, the zone can be caught over-shifted on the wrong side, and the opposite wing player, or post players, can often get an open shot.

Using a 1-3-1 offensive set is a good way to do this. 4 sets up at the free throw line and 5 runs the baseline back and forth, cutting to either a post-up position (on the block), or the corner on the side the ball is on. If 5 goes to the corner, then 4 can cut down to the ball-side block and post-up there. Meanwhile, 3 can flash down to the low block on the weak-side.

If the ball goes back out to the wing or point, 4 moves back to the free-throw line. If the ball is on the wing, 4 should move to the elbow on the ball side. If 4 gets the ball, 5 can cut low through lane for a pass from 4.

#1 should try to keep the ball moving quickly and avoid unnecessary dribbling (which allows the zone time to reset). #1 should look to pass to the wings (2 and 3), or to 4.

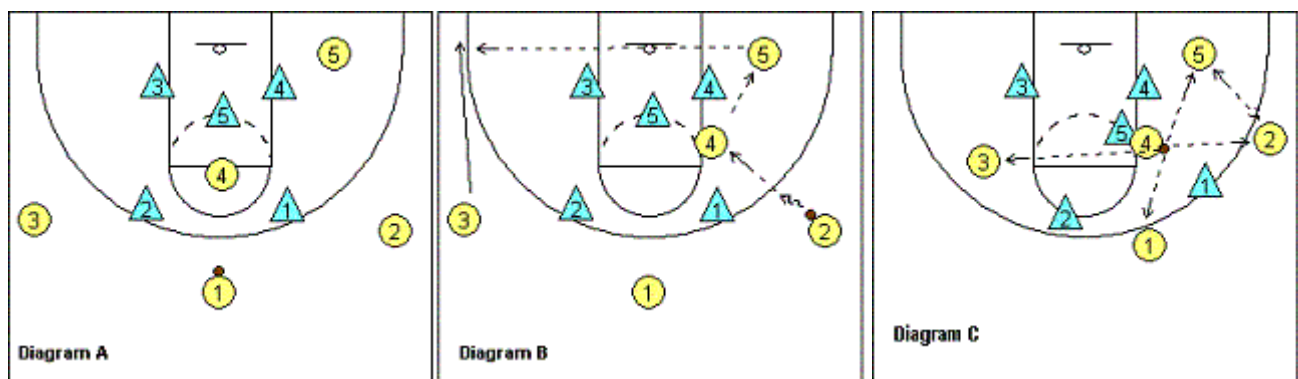
2 and 3 should look to shoot, if open, or pass to 4, 1, or the corner (5). When the ball is on the wing, the opposite wing should slide in near the opposite elbow to get a pass for an open shot. Good outside shooting will break the press down. Players can dribble penetrate the gaps.



"2-3 Zone Offense"

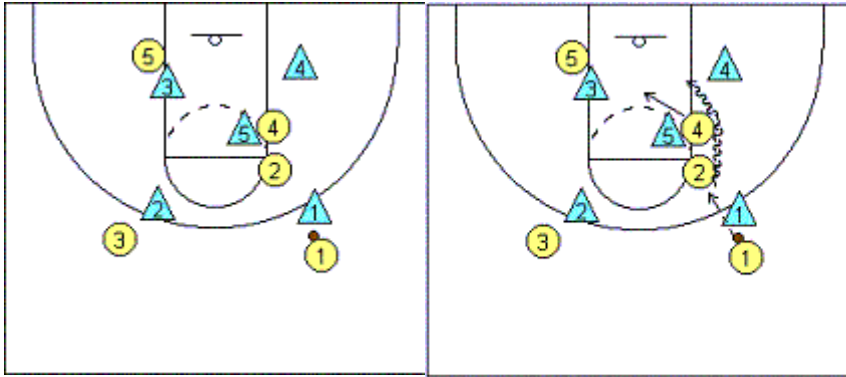
Here is an offense that you can use against this zone (refer to the diagrams below). Notice in Diagram A that the defense is set in the 2-3 zone. Use a 1-3-1 offensive set, but with some modifications and the following rules:

1. #5 will run the baseline from short corner to short corner and we will try to get the ball down to him.
2. The wings #2 and #3 will set out a little farther than usual from the three-point arc so that the #1 and #2 defenders are not in their passing lane (from #1). After receiving the pass, #2 or #3 can dribble in, get the defender to commit and then pass or shoot.
3. When the ball is on the wing, instead of posting at the elbow or at the low block (which are usually defended in this zone), #4 will set up a little lower than the elbow, actually in the gap between the high and low defenders.
4. You can get the ball to #5 either through a pass from #2 or #4 (or #3 when the ball is on the left side). #5 may be able to make a quick inside pass to #4 cutting for the lay-up (once the #4 defender commits to guarding #5). The other option for #5 is to pass to #3 in the opposite corner.
5. The weak-side wing always cuts to the corner when #5 gets the ball (Diagram B). When #4 has the ball (Diagram C), the weak-side wing can either slide into the gap between the high and low defenders looking for the medium range jumper, or if he/she is a good three-point shooter, look for the skip pass out to the three-point arc.
6. Outside shooters have a tendency to let the first open shot go. So that we continue to try to get the ball inside, we have one rule. Before taking the outside shot, the ball has to go inside to #4 or #5 for at least one touch. Looking at Diagram C, you can see that once #4 gets the ball, there are several offensive "triangles", or passing options (4-2-5, 4-2-1, 4-1-3) where you gain a 3 against 2 advantage on the defense. Quick passing will get you a good shot.



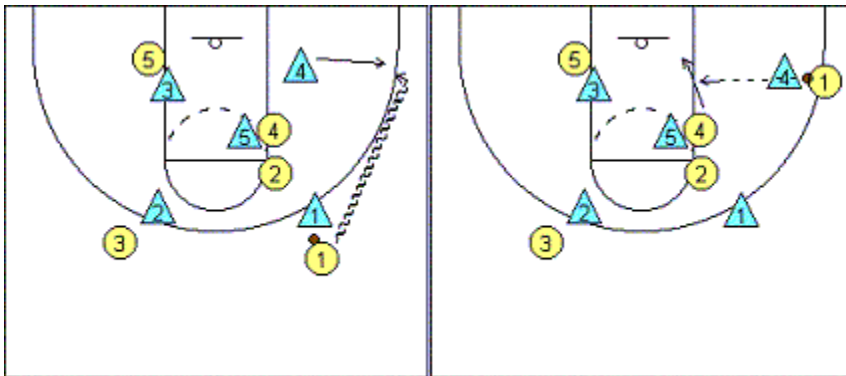
Over-Load the Zone

Although a bit more complicated, over-loading the zone allows you to get the ball inside. There are only 2 guards (#1 and #3). #2 and #4 stack up along the right elbow. This puts pressure on the center of the 2-1-2 zone to cover both players. #5 plays the opposite block.



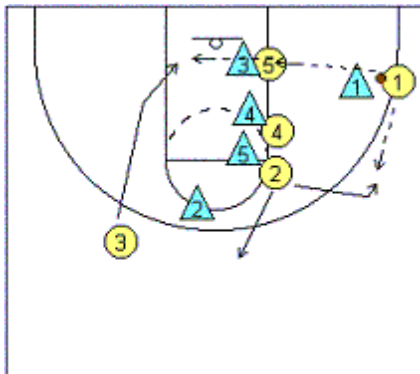
Start with #1 passing to #2. #2 can roll around the right of #4 (#4 screens the middle defender), and #2 can shoot, or pass to #4 rolling off the screen into the paint. If the opposite post defender comes up to get #4, pass to #5 down low.

Option:



Do this if the low post defender comes up to defend the stack.

First, take the ball to the corner. #1 should dribble the ball to the corner. When the defender comes out to get #1, #1 passes to #4 cutting to the hoop. #3 gets back on defense.



If the guard defending #1 goes with #1 to the corner, then #5 cuts across to the block for the pass from #1. If the defender goes with #5, then #5 passes back door to #3 cutting to the hoop. If #1 can't pass inside, then #2 should split out to get pass from #1. If the ball goes inside, then #2 gets back on defense.

How to beat the 3-2 zone defense

A coach asked, "What is a good offense to run against the 3-2 zone defense?"

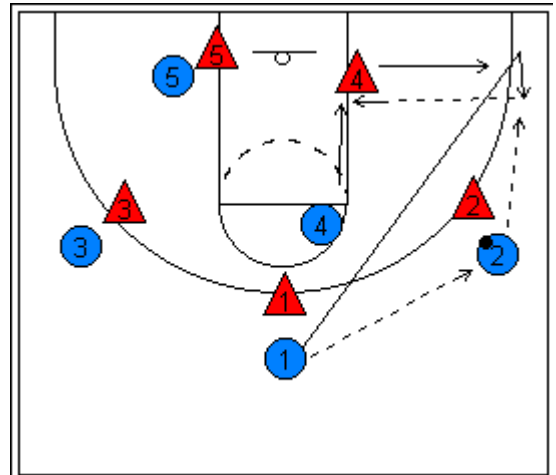
An expert coach responded:

"It is difficult to give a complete answer because just knowing the zone formation is not enough. As coaches, we must know what the particular slides are in the zone. Do the down men stay on the block and the wings cover the corners? Let's assume that. In this case, you want to create situations where the wing defender has to cover a guard with the ball and you cut an offensive player under her into the corner. At the same time, have a player flashing to the same side low block. This puts lots of stress on the wing defender and the down defender."

Use a 1-3-1 offensive set.

1 passes to 2 and then shallow cuts to the right corner. 2 passes back to 1. 4 cuts down to the block. 1, 2, and 4 have a 3 on 2 situation with the defenders, if the passing is crisp.

Options: After 4 goes to the block, 5 can flash to the ball-side elbow, and 3 can cut back-door to the weak-side block.



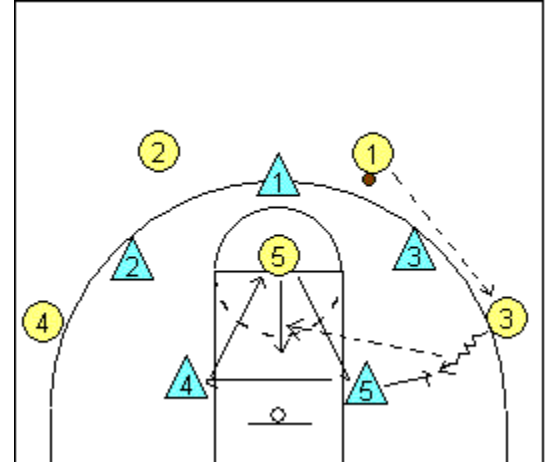
Another way to attack the 3-2 (and 1-2-2) zones...

I believe that a 4-out, 1-in motion offense would work very well.

Take a look at the diagram at the right. With this offense, you split the #1 defender with a two guard front. Your #3 and #4 cause problems for their wing defenders, especially as they stretch the defense toward the corners. This may cause the low post defenders to come out to defend. Then #5 cuts up the lane, or to the low block for the pass and shot.

Generally, #5 follows the ball... moves to the high post when the ball is on top, and to the ball-side low post when either #3 or #4 has it.

Look at the spacing... #3 and #4 are in excellent position to attack the short corner gaps in the zone. If #3 dribble penetrates the short corner, and the #5 defender comes over to stop him, there is a good chance for a dish off to your #5 cutting down the lane.



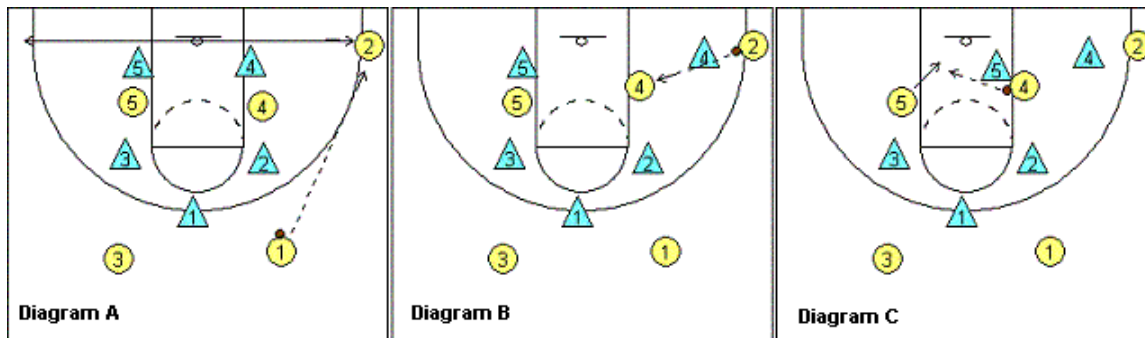
With this offense, #5 is already in good position between defenders at the high-post and causes problems when he slides down to the ball-side block. And #1 and #2 are also in a position to attack the outside gaps.

Another simple way to attack the 3-2 zone.

As mentioned above, you can go with a 4-out, 1-in offense, but then you give up an inside rebounder. This zone is vulnerable to attack from the corners, which puts pressure on the down defenders.

This is a simple way to attack this zone. See Diagram A below. Set your offense in a 2-out, 2-in set with #1 and #3 flanking the #1 defender, and #4 and #5 positioning themselves in the gaps between the low and high defenders on each side of the lane. Have your best shooter, #2, run the baseline from corner to corner, always on the ball-side. If he can make a couple from the corner, the #4 defender will have to come out to defend (Diagram B). This frees up #4 on the low block. If the #5 defender slides over to pick up #4, then your #5 should be open for the pass from #4 and the lay-up (Diagram C).

You want to keep the game as simple as possible, and this is a very simple, effective way to beat this zone, without giving up an inside rebounder.



Beating the "Box and 1" Zone Defense

The "box and 1" defense is a commonly used "junk defense", or combination defense. With this, the defense sets up in a four-man zone box formation, with one defender playing your best player man-to-man.

Like attacking any zone defense, look for the gaps in the zone and penetrate those areas. See Zone Offense to review the principles of zone offense. Your other four players have to "step up" and look for the shot themselves.

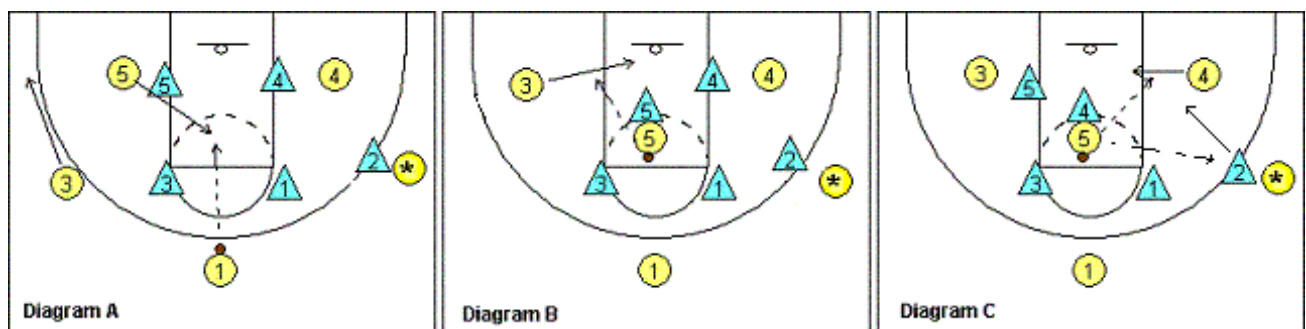
There a number of ways to attack the box and 1, depending on whether your star player (being guarded man-to-man) is a guard or post player. Actually, it doesn't even have to be anything fancy. You could have your players set good screens for your star player. Or, what is often even more effective is having your star player set screens for the other four players and then he/she seals the defender being screened and rolls to the hoop for the. This is often an easy way for your star player to get open, and it often creates a "mis-match" in the defensive coverage.

Another easy strategy is to put your star player in either corner, running the baseline, always on the ball-side. This forces the defense to play what looks like a 2-3 zone. Now just use your 2-3 zone offense.

Now let's look at a couple simple set plays.

Situation #1. Your star player is your #2 guard, your shooting guard.

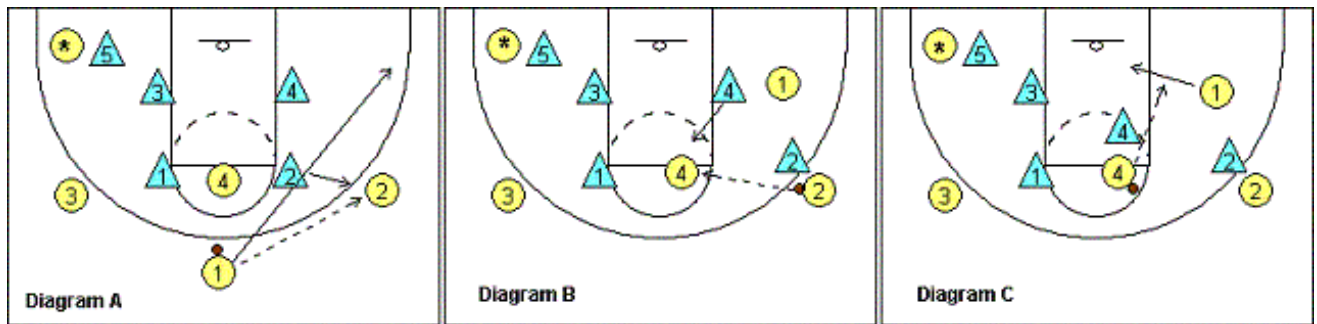
See the diagrams below. Using a 3-out, 2-in offensive formation, put your star player way out on the right wing so that his/her defender is out of the way. You will note that the "box" is vulnerable in the middle. Have #3 slide down to the corner, or short corner area. #5 cuts to middle of the box and receives the pass from #1. If open, #5 can turn and shoot the short shot, or pass to #3 cutting back-door if the #5 defender comes up to defend the middle (Diagram B). Instead, if the #4 defender comes up to defend the middle, then your #5 can dump the pass off to #4 down low (Diagram C). If the defender guarding your star player recognizes this and drops down to help defend against #4, then your #5 makes the pass outside to your star player for the outside shot. These decisions and passes must all happen quickly so that your #5 player does not pick up the 3-second lane violation. Work on this in practice, emphasizing to #5 that he/she must quickly make the decision to either shoot or pass to #3, #4 or #2.



Situation 2. Your star player is a post player.

See the diagrams below. Use a 1-3-1 offense, with your star player running the baseline. In this particular play, your star player once again is a decoy, playing below the low defenders in the zone, off in the weak-side corner. Your point guard #1 starts the play by making the pass to #2. #1 then shallow-cuts to the ball-side short corner area. #2 makes the pass to #4 in the middle of the 1-3-1 offense at the high post. If #4 is a good shooter, he/she can destroy the defense with a few shots from this area (Diagram B). If the #4 defender comes up to defend the high post, then your #4 simply dumps the pass down to #1 in the short corner, who should be wide open for the shot, or lay-up (Diagram C).

Although not shown in the diagrams, instead of having their #4 defender come up to defend the high post, the defense might have their #3 defender come up to defend the high post. In this situation, teach your #3 to move down to the weak-side low block any time he/she sees the #3 defender moving up to the high post area. Meanwhile, your star moves way out to the corner or wing areas to take his/her defender out of the picture. Now #3 is wide open on the weak-side low block for the pass and lay-up.



Basic Concepts of Motion Offense

A motion offense is a flexible offense that utilizes player movement, correct floor spacing, passing and cutting, and setting screens. Rather than running set plays (which can also be run in the motion offense), players move within a basic set of rules. This allows for greater flexibility than just running set plays, and will usually be effective against any kind of defense, whether man-to-man, zone or "junk" defenses. Players can move freely to open areas on the court. Once the basic concepts are learned, special patterns or plays can be designed by the coach to take advantage of his team's offensive strengths.

Motion offense can be run with almost any set: 3out-2in, 1-3-1, 1-2-2, 1-4, 4out-1in, etc. For purposes of this discussion, I will use the 3 out, 2 in set which uses 3 perimeter players and 2 post players (see diagram A).

If you have a very talented team with five players who can play any position, then your players can interchange or rotate into any of the five positions. If you have two dominant post players, or excellent perimeter players, then you will want to rotate a little differently. In the later case, have the two posts rotate with each other and the three perimeter players rotate in the three outside positions. Always try to have your point guard bring the ball up the floor and start the offense. Make sure that whoever is at the #1 position when the shot is taken, stays back to prevent the opponent's fast break. The 3, 4, 5 positions go for the offensive rebound and the #2 position plays half-rebound and half-prevent mode.

Basic rules:

Spacing

Players should try to stay 12 to 15 feet apart. Avoid bunching up, which can result in double-teams, steals, interceptions, and turnovers.

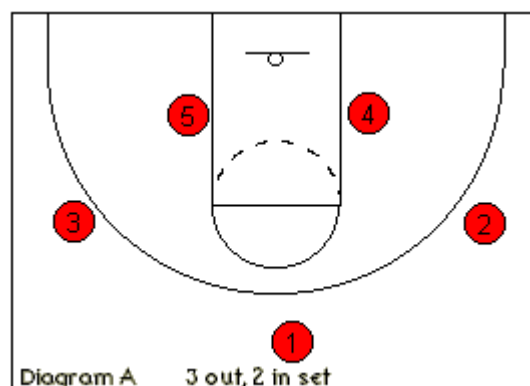
Triple threat position and patience.

Perimeter players should always receive the ball in triple threat position, where the player has the options of shooting, driving to the hoop, or passing. Perimeter players should be patient and hold the ball for a count of two to allow the screens and cuts to develop. If he passes too soon, the cutters don't have time to execute their cuts. The exception is when the defense is coming to trap, then pass immediately.

Do not allow your players, after receiving a pass on the perimeter, to immediately put the ball on the floor, bounce it once, and then lose the dribble. The player actually loses the options of shooting and driving to the hoop, and passing may be more difficult when the defender closes in, and the other defenders go into deny mode.

Players may dribble only:

1. To attack the basket with a drive.
2. Improve or open the passing lane.
3. Penetrate gaps in a zone defense.
4. To get out of trouble and avoid the 5-second count.
5. To exchange positions with another player. For example, if you want the ball to go to the wing, and the defense is denying the pass, the point guard can simply dribble to the wing, and the wing player can exchange and go to the point.



Player Movement

Players must not stand still. They must move with a purpose.

1. The post players can screen for each other and move up and down the lane to the low blocks, elbows, and top of the free throw line.
2. The perimeter players can occupy the three positions shown in diagram A, and also move to the corners. They may make front or backdoor cuts to the hoop, and V-cuts to replace themselves (see Cutting and Faking). They screen for each other and run pick and roll moves (see Setting Screens). They must move after making a pass.

Passing

We want to try to get the ball into the low post. A wing entry is usually the easiest way. You can also get there by passing to a post on the free throw line, and he in turn can pass to the low post.

Don't pass to someone standing still. These passes are more likely to be intercepted.

After passing, players must do one of these:

1. Cut to the hoop for the return pass ("give and go" play).
2. Screen away. Example: after the point guard passes to the right wing (2), he sets a screen for the left wing (3).
3. Follow his pass and set a screen for the ball-handler (and then roll off the screen).
4. V-cut and replace himself.
5. After a cross-court "skip" pass (example from #3 to #2), slide out of the defender's (who should be in "help" mode) line of vision and go backdoor to the hoop.

Read the defense

Situations for Perimeter players:

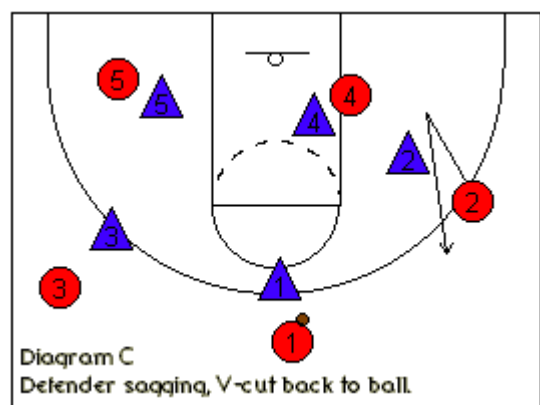
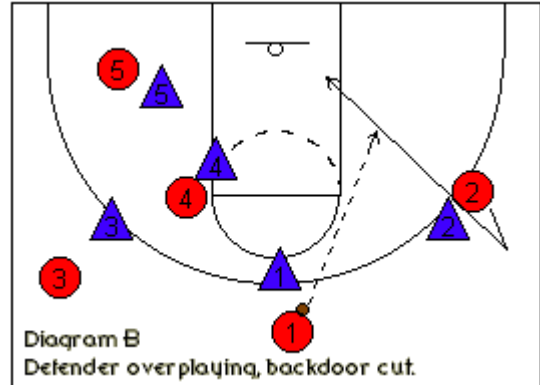
1. You have the ball and the defender is overplaying you up tight: give him a fake and explode around him straight to the hoop. Don't go wide around him as this just gives him time to recover. Make contact with his shoulder and get him on your backside. If help defense closes in, dish to the low post where the help came from.

2. You have the ball and the defender is sagging off you: hit the outside shot.

3. You have the ball and the defender is playing good defense on you: pass to a teammate and then execute one of the five options above (what to do after passing).

4. You are one pass away and the defense is denying the pass to you: Make a fake outside, and then cut hard backdoor. The low post on that side should learn to read this situation also and clear out to the opposite side, to make spacing for the backdoor cut. See Diagram B.

5. You are one pass away and the defender is sagging off you: make a V-cut inside and come back out for the perimeter pass. See Diagram C.



6. You are one pass away, and the defender is playing good defense and you can't get free: Set a screen either for the ball-handler or the low post.

Situations for post players:

1. You get the ball one on one against the defense: Make a low post move and try to score or get fouled. (see Post Moves).
2. You get the ball and are double-teamed: Pass the ball back outside, often to where the double team came from. Going "inside-out" is a good way to get wide open three-point shots.

Post players working together:

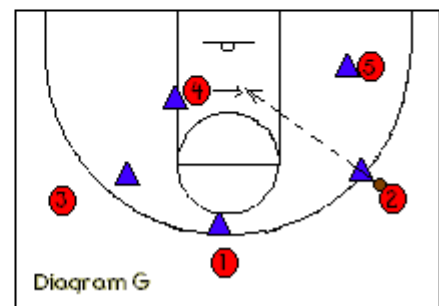
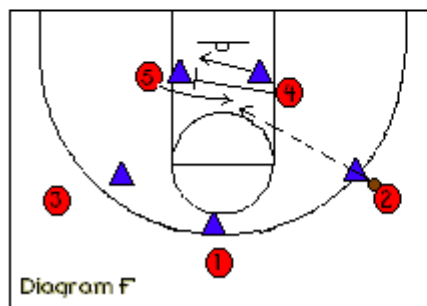
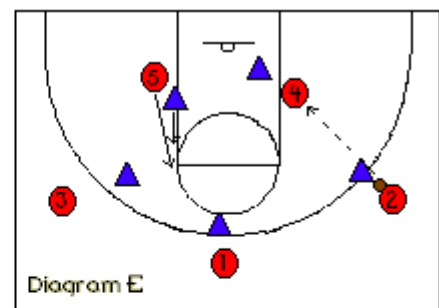
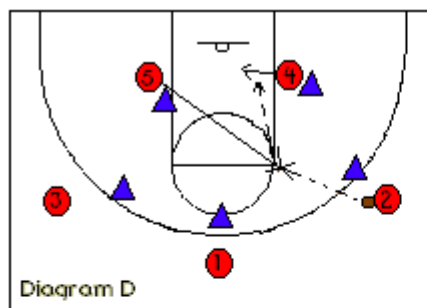
1. If the ball-side post is being fronted: the opposite post flashes to the ball-side elbow for the pass. Meanwhile the low post player seals the defender on his back, and the post at the elbow passes inside to the low post for the lay-up. See Diagram D.
2. If the ball-side post defender is playing behind him: The wing should pass to the low post, and the opposite post player should clear out to the weak-side elbow. See Diagram E.
3. If the ball-side post defender is 3/4 defending him with a hand in front: the ball-side post should set a screen for the weak-side post, who comes to the ball for the pass and lay-up (Diagram F). Note that if the low post defenders switch on this screen, then the low post cutter should move out to the ball-side short corner, and the screener should seal off his defender and come back to the ball for the lay-up. (see Diagram G).

Once your team learns and executes these concepts, you can devise your own patterns and special plays to take advantage of your best scorers and the defense's weaknesses.

For example, if the defense is in a 1-3-1 zone, then consider using two of the perimeter players out on top and drop the third perimeter player down in the ball-side corner (see Beating the 1-3-1 Zone). If the defense is in a 3-2 zone, after passing to the wing, have your point guard shallow cut to the ball-side corner to overload the zone (see Beating the 3-2 Zone). You don't need a time-out to communicate this... just yell out "corner 1" (point guard shallow cuts to corner) or "corner 2" (#2 slides down to the corner), or "corner 3" (#3 moves to the corner).

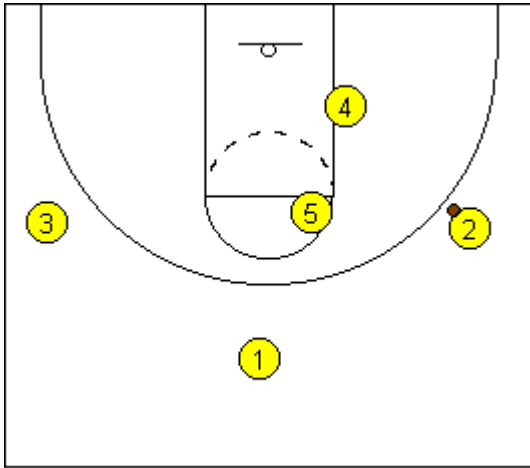
If they are in 1-2-2 zone, have one of your post players play up on the free throw line (yell "1 up").

If you want to try the 1-4 set, call "2-up" and both posts move up to the elbows. Of course you can get more creative on these signal calls!



3-2 Motion Offense Options

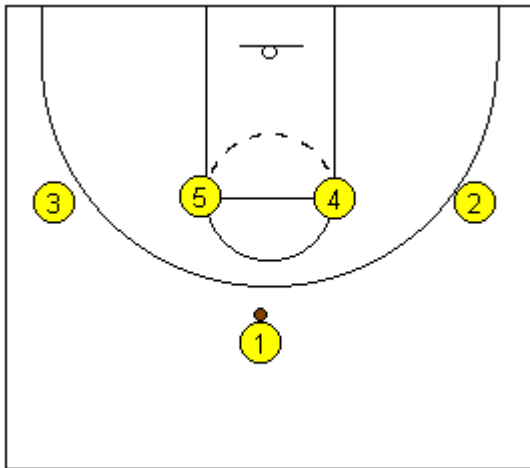
So you want flexibility and want to vary your offensive attack, while maintaining the 3out-2in as your basic set. Here are some easy ways to do it.



"1 UP"

To change to a 1-3-1 set, call "1 up" and the weak-side low post player moves to the high post.

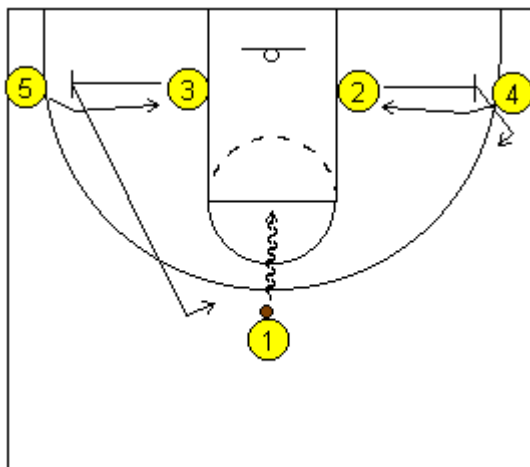
If the ball is on the point, #5 moves to the high post.



"2-UP"

Want to show a 1-4 stack set, call "2 up" and both posts move to the elbows.

Now you can run either the "high-post pick 'n roll" play, or another 1-4 stack play.

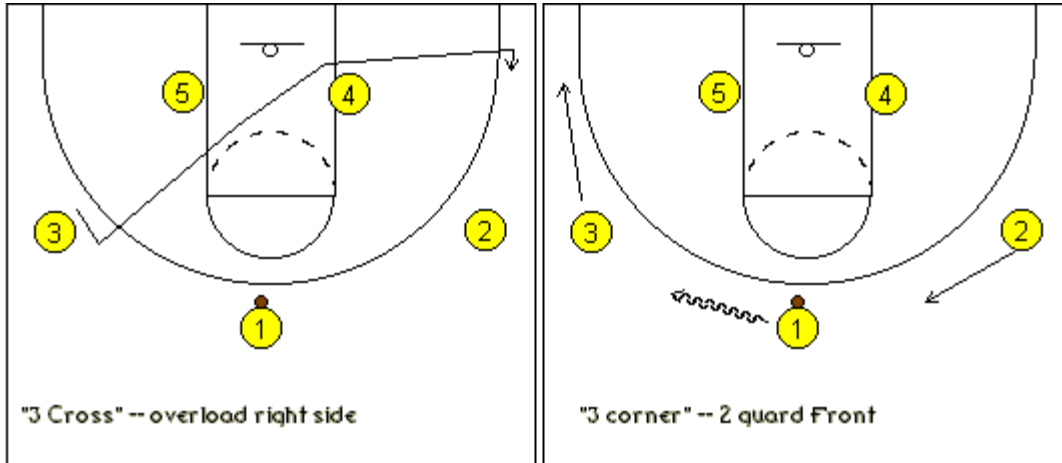


"4-DOWN"

Call "4 down" to run a simple low stack play such as this. #1 drives and tries to create his own shot, or dishes off to a teammate.

#2 and 3 set picks for 4 and 5. #2 flares out for a three-point option. #3 moves out on top as prevent man on defense.

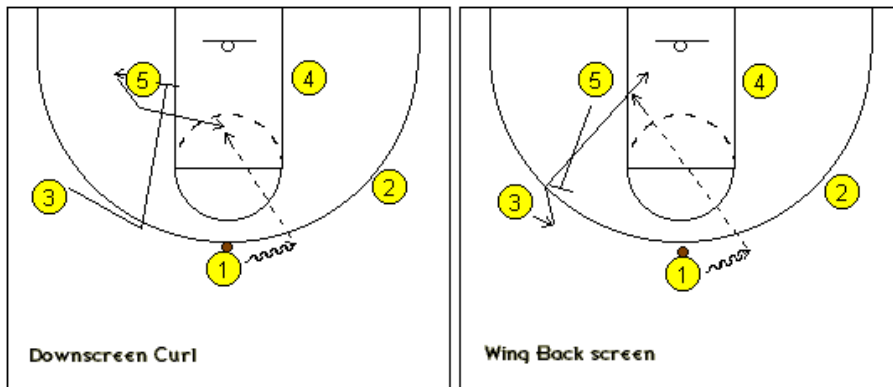
Want to overload a zone (in this case the right side)? Call "3-cross" to have #3 make a cut to the hoop, and then out to the opposite corner. Now the right side of the floor is over-loaded.



The defense is showing a 1-3-1 zone and you want to go to a two-guard front. Call "3 corner" to have your #3 slide down to his own corner, and #1 and #2 move over into a two-guard set.

Wing-Low Post Motion

Wing sets a down-screen for the low post, who curls around the screen for pass from #1. After setting the screen, #3 can seal for the inside position and the pass from #1, or flare out to the short corner or wing for a pass for an outside shot.

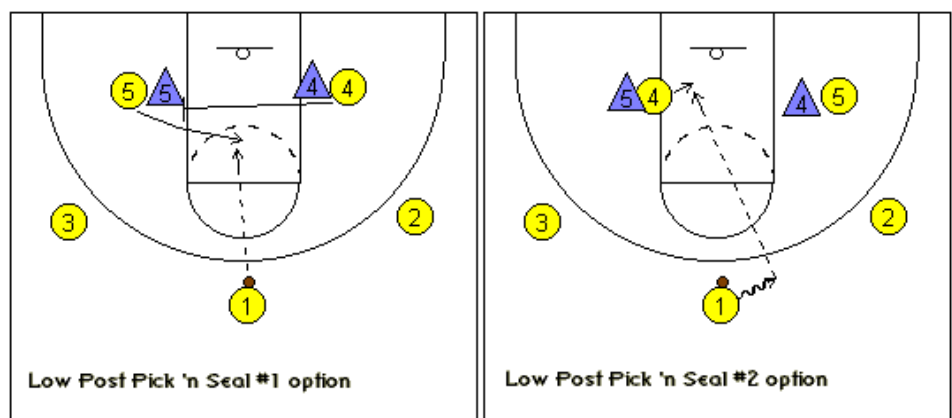


Low post sets a back-screen on the same side wing defender. The wing cuts backdoor for the pass from #1. The low post can also seal and roll for a pass from #1.

Post-Post Motion

Option #1: #4 sets pick for #5 who cuts off the screen for the pass from #1.

Option #2: Same play as option #1-- in this case the defenders made a "switch" and the #4 defender picks up our #5. So our #5 takes his defender out to the short corner, and meanwhile our #4 should have inside position after screening and sealing his man, for the pass from #1 (who dribbles a little to the right to set up a better passing angle).

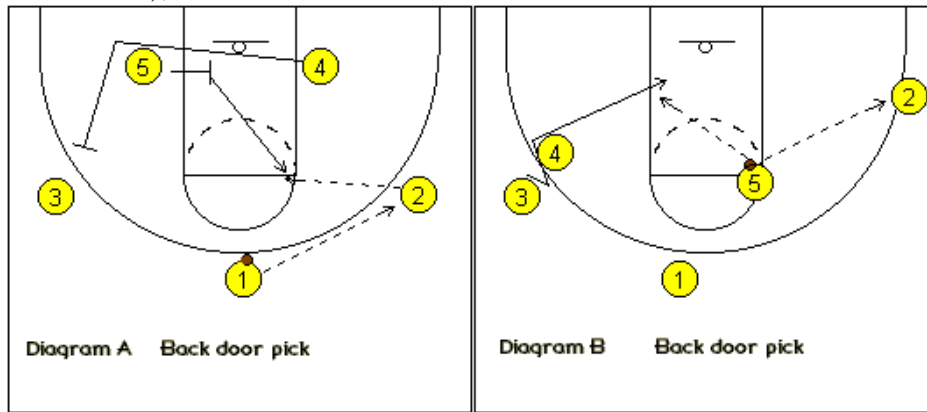


3-2 Motion Offense Plays

"43"

Diagram A. #1 passes to #2. Meanwhile #5 screens for #4, who sets a screen for the opposite wing #3. After setting the screen, #5 flashes to the high post for the pass from #2.

Diagram B. #3 cuts backdoor for the pass from #5. Optionally, #5 can shoot, drive, or pass to #2 (now in the corner), or across to #4.

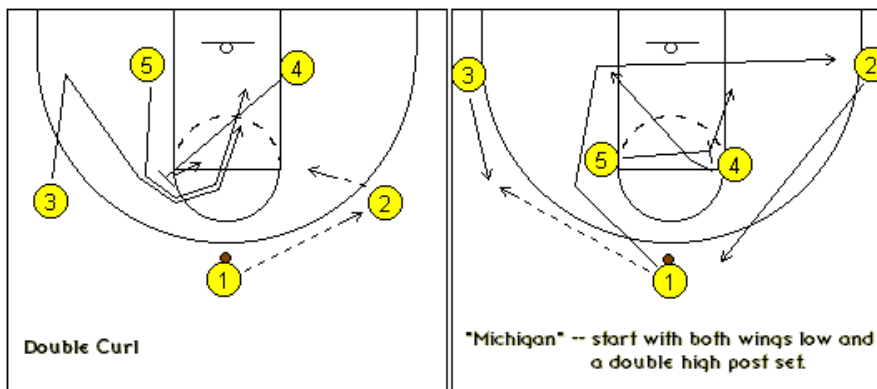


Double Curl

#1 passes to #2. Meanwhile #4 moves to the opposite elbow to act as a screener. #5 curls around #4 and looks for pass from #2 (and clears back to his original short corner if he doesn't get the pass).

After #5 cuts, #3 delays and curls around #4's screen looking for the pass from #2 (and clears to the opposite corner).

Then #4 delays, seals, and cuts into the paint for the pass from #2.



"Michigan"

This play starts with both wings in the corner, and both posts at the elbows.

#1 passes to #3 cutting up to the wing, and #1 cuts thru for the pass, and clears to the opposite corner. #2 moves out to the point.

#5 sets pick for #4 who cuts to the ball-side block looking for the pass from #3. #5 slides down to the weak-side block. or optionally, can cut back to his original elbow position for the pass from #3.

"Blue"

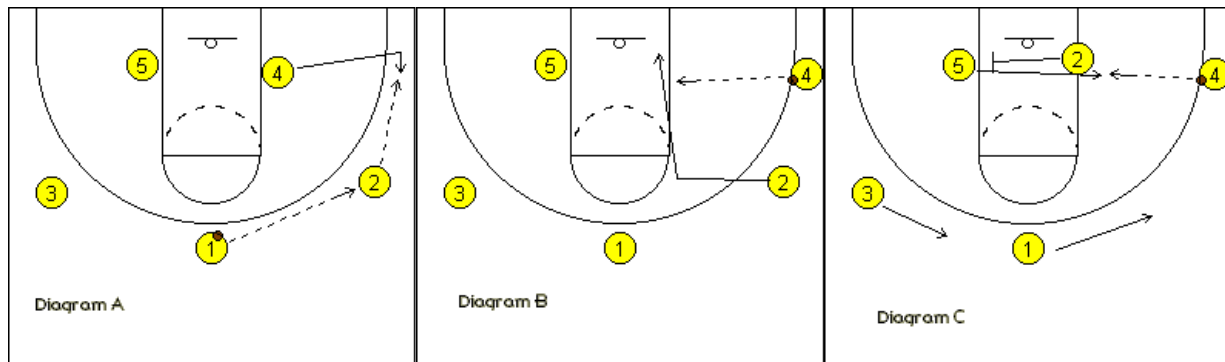


Diagram A. #1 passes to #2, who passes to #4 in the corner.

Diagram B. #2 makes a lane cut and #4 can pass to her for lay-up. If the pass is not there, go to diagram C.

Diagram C. #2 goes over and sets a screen for #5. #5 cuts to the ball-side block and gets the pass from #4.

"White"

This play is similar to "Blue" except here #1 makes the lane cut.

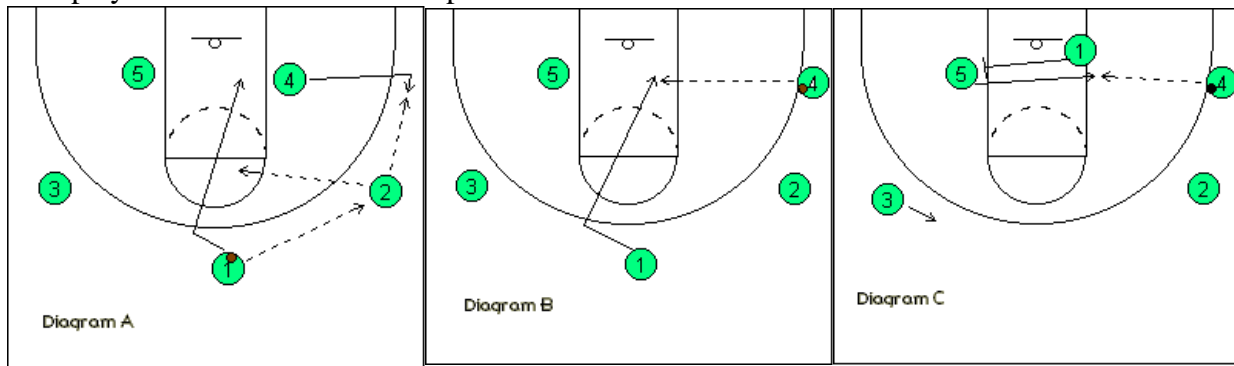


Diagram A. #1 passes to #2. #2 either passes to #1 cutting through the lane, or to #4 in the corner.

Diagram B. #4 can pass to #1 for lay-up. If the pass is not there, go to diagram C.

Diagram C. #1 goes over and sets a screen for #5. #5 cuts to the ball-side block and gets the pass from #4.

"Red"

This play is similar to "White" (see below) except here #1 just makes the pick for #5.

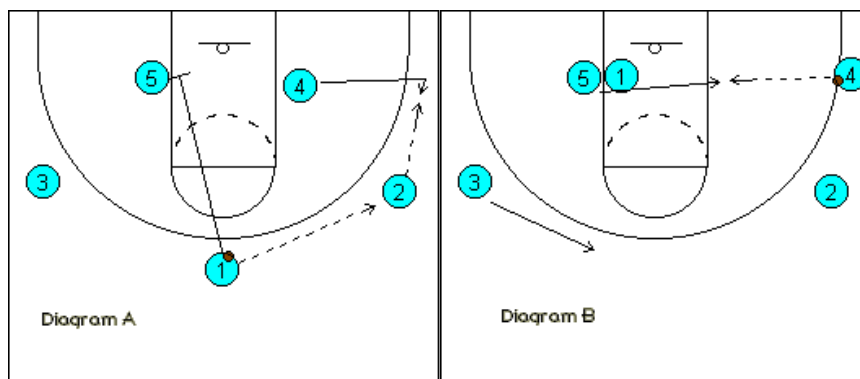
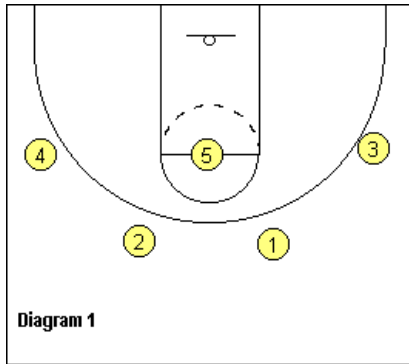


Diagram A. #1 passes to #2. #1 sprints down and sets a pick for #5.

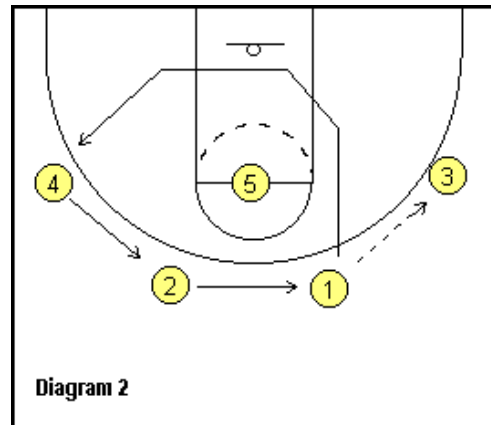
Diagram B. #4 passes to #5 for the low post lay-up.

Swing Offense

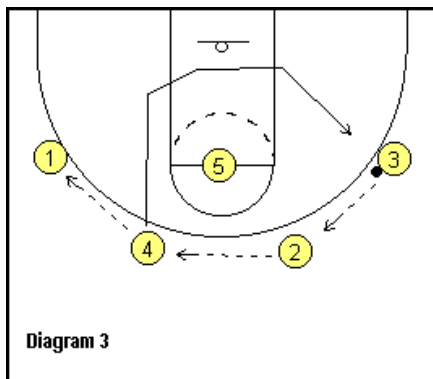
The “Swing” offense is really nothing terribly original. It is a simple pass, cut, and fill offense that offers a variety of counter options based on how the defense chooses to play.



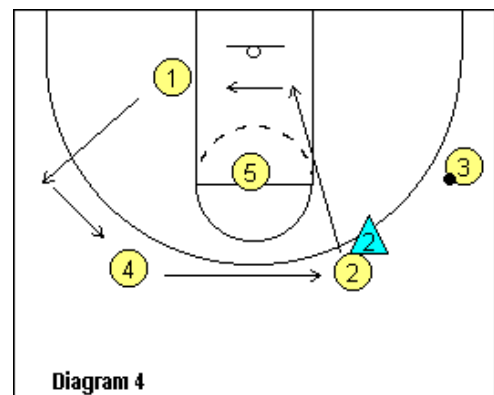
The basic set up is a 2-3 formation with the wings positioned free throw line extended outside the three-point line and a post player positioned at the free throw line (diagram 1).



The motion of Swing is initiated with an entry pass to the wing. On the entry pass a hard basket cut is made and the player exits to the wing area opposite the ball. All other perimeter players “wheel” around to fill the open spots in front of them i.e. 2 fills the spot vacated by 1, #3 fills #2’s spot, and #1 fills #3’s spot after making his basket cut. (diagram 2).

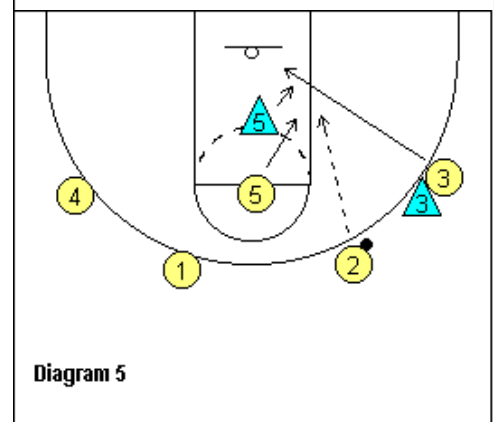


After the ball is entered to the wing and a basket cut is made, we look to reverse the ball from side to top to side. (diagram 3). Once the ball is reversed and another entry is made to the wing, the basic motion is initiated again beginning with a basket cut.

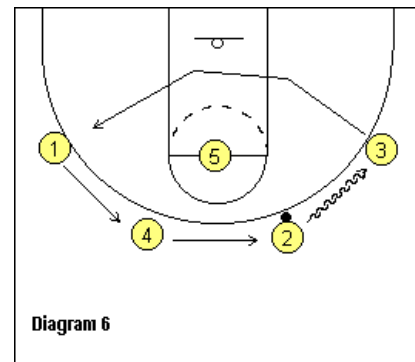
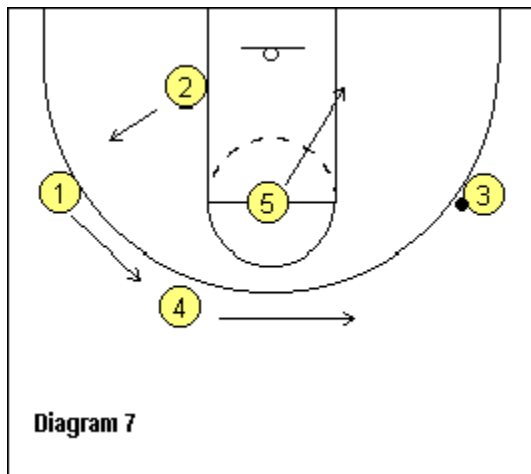


As stated earlier, all of the options we use out of “Swing” are counters to how the defense is playing. One counter would be used when the wing is looking to reverse the ball after a basket cut and a defender is doing a great job of denying the pass. Immediately, #2 would recognize the denial of the reversal pass and make a hard basket cut initiating the basic swing motion. (diagram 4)

Another counter option might occur if the wing entry is being aggressively denied. In diagram 5, #2 cannot enter the ball because #3 is being denied. 3 has the option of immediately planting their outside foot and cutting back door. If #3 receives the backdoor pass and #5’s defender drops off to help, #5 should move into the mid lane area to look for a drop off pass from #3.



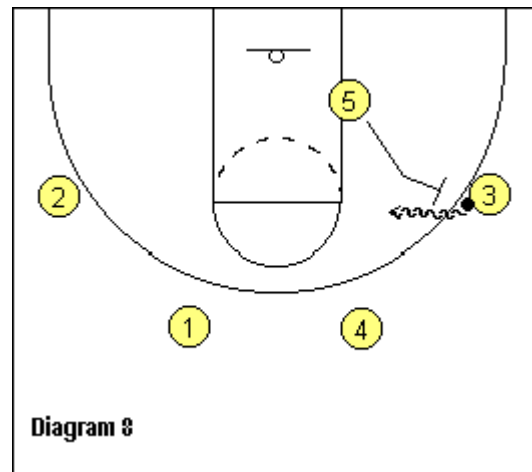
Another counter that could occur as a result of the wing entry being aggressively denied is a simple dribble entry as shown in diagram 6.



Your post at the free throw line can be a threat as well. We give our posts the options of rolling into the low post at anytime as long as it is after a basket cut. We give the basket cut priority so as to not end up with 2 players cutting to the same area at the same time. (diagram 7). Our posts are given a 2 count and then they must either relocate back to the free throw line until another basket cut is made.

Or...

#5 can step away from the low post and set a ball screen for the strong side wing and play a 2-man game (diagram 8).



As said, this is not a terribly original offense, nor is it terribly complicated. It does offer a lot of flexibility during its motion. I've provided some of the counters we've used and been successful with. You certainly can play around with the set and motion and come up with options or set plays on your own.

Another aspect to this offense that I like is that it can be used as a half court man to man defensive drill. By removing the post at the free throw line and playing 4 on 4 you can work on your help side positioning, jumping to the basketball, denial, close outs, etc.... The offense creates the motion requiring use of those defensive skills/concepts.