



Game-Based Drills



Transition Offense

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About the eBook

For your convenience, the following contains diagrams, explanations and the concepts of Sanderson's Gamed Based Training System.

This eBook is only meant for reference and to assist your implementation of the skill development. We strongly recommend watching the entire video before reading this eBook. The video provides detailed explanations and teaching points for each step of the implementation process. This eBook is intended to provide a quick reference guide to supplement your viewing experience.



Chapter One: Intro To Coach Sanderson

Nate Sanderson's coaching credentials include:

- Head Girls Basketball Coach, Linn-Mar High School (2017-Present)
- Head Girls Basketball Coach, Springville High School (2010-2017)
 - 2016 & 2017 Class 1A State Champions
 - 2015 Class 1A State Runner-Up
 - 2016 Tri-Rivers Conference Champions
- Head Girls Basketball Coach, Louisa-Muscatine High School (2002-2010)
 - Most Coaching Victories in School History
 - Set School Record for Wins in Three Consecutive Seasons (2008-2010)
- Career Record: 195-186 (through 2018-2019)
- Regional & State-Wide Coaching Awards
 - Iowa Basketball Coaches Class 1A Coach of the Year (2016, 2017)
 - Iowa Girls Coaches Association Class 1A Coach of the Year (2016, 2017)
 - Tri-Rivers West Coach of the Year (2016)
 - Iowa Sports Spotlight Class 1A Coach of the Year (2015)
 - Ed Thomas Award Winner (2015)
 - Cedar Rapids Gazette Coach of the Year (2015)
- Co-Host of the Coaching Culture Podcast with JP Nerbun (2018-Present)
- Frequent Speaker at National Coaching Clinics
 - Point Guard College / Glazier Clinics
 - IGNITE Basketball Clinic
 - Building Championship Culture Conference
 - Way of Champions Conference
 - Iowa Basketball Coaches Association Coaching Clinic
 - Arizona Basketball Coaches Association Coaching Clinic
 - Hearts & Minds Coaching Clinic
 - Lead Facilitator for ThriveOn Challenges Transformational Coaching Retreat

In the summer of 2017, Nate Sanderson became the varsity girls' basketball coach at Linn-Mar High School in Marion, Iowa. Prior to that, he built one of the top basketball programs in the state at Springville High School. During his tenure at Springville, his teams had a record of 112-59 (.665) including 74-7 during his last three



seasons. Springville won back-to-back state titles in 2016 & 2017 and was state runner-up in 2015.

Sanderson started his coaching career at Louisa-Muscatine High School where he took over a program mired in a 33-game losing streak. He spent seven full seasons as the head varsity coach and became the school's all-time leader in coaching victories. His teams set the school record for wins in each of his final three seasons, and advanced to the regional semifinals for the first time in school history during his final campaign.

Sanderson has received numerous regional and statewide coaching awards. His program has been recognized by Character Counts of Iowa for their commitment to community service and character development. In his seven years at Springville, his basketball program raised over \$30,000 for various local and international charities.

Nate is a frequent speaker at coaching clinics around the country specializing in building championship culture, leadership development, and using a game-based approach to practice. His mission is to serve athletes and coaches alike to create a better sports experience for young people. His work has been recognized by many national organizations including the US Olympic Committee, Changing the Game Project, and Athletic Management Magazine.

Nate graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with a degree in Social Studies Education. He taught high school social studies for 12 years before joining Breakthrough Basketball. Nate has a Masters degree from Gonzaga University in Organizational Leadership. His research emphasis was on the application of servant leadership to sports – a philosophy that forms the foundation of his approach to coaching.

He has been married for 14 years and has two young daughters. With the help of his basketball team, he built a wiffle ball field in his yard where they host tournaments to raise money for charity.



Chapter Two: Individual Offense

Intro to Individual Offense

In this video, we will show you a series of game-based drills and games that you can implement with your teams to teach your offense one segment at a time.

What are Game-Based Drills?

Let's begin with what "game-based" does NOT mean. Not every game you play in practice would meet our definition of a game-based drill. Likewise, simply keeping score does not mean that the drill is game-based.

Rather, we define a **game-based drill** to be one that replicates a game context. In other words, we want players to practice in an environment that is as similar as possible to what they will experience in an actual game.

In Brian McCormick's excellent book, [*The 21st Century Basketball Practice*](#) (2014), he makes a very clear distinction between **technique** and **skill**.

*"**Technique** is the motor component or the action; in shooting, the technique refers to the hand placement on the ball, the stance, the extension, and the release. **Skill** is the combination of the action and the perception. Perception involves the identification of information in the environment, the processing of the information, and the decision to act. The skill of shooting includes the movement to get open, the reading of the defense to determine whether or not one has time and space to shoot, the decision to shoot, and the performance of the shot" (Chapter 3, Section 1, para. 1)*

Technique, therefore, describes the physical task while skill describes the contextual task. The developmental advantage of training the skill is that practice is more likely to transfer to an actual game because it incorporates the same abilities that the game requires. To echo McCormick's example, the act of shooting involves many corollary skills such as reading the defense, preparing to shoot, deciding to shoot, etc. By practicing skills in a game-like context, the player develops much more than simply the physical ability to shoot the ball.

How to Design Game-Based Drills

We use three questions to help guide our creation of game-based drills.



- **What is the skill we want to improve?**
- **In what context does that skill occur in a game?**
- **What's the appropriate challenge level for our players?**

Let's look at an example.

Question #1 – We want to improve our layups. Maybe you generate a lot of layup opportunities in games, but you aren't finishing at an acceptable rate.

Question #2 – When do you get the most layups in games?

Not all layups are the same. Therefore, it's important to identify the context in which you get the most layup opportunities. Consider the vast number of situations that can result in a layup, yet are distinctly different.

- What is the most common defensive situation you face in transition?
 - 1v1 with the defender ahead
 - 1v1 with the defender behind
 - 2v1 with a defender ahead, etc.
- Where do your full court layup situations originate?
 - From a live ball turnover
 - From a defensive rebound
 - From a throw-in after a made basket
 - In press break offense, etc.
- Where do you get the most layups in the half court?
 - A dribble attack met by help side defense at the rim
 - Receiving a pass after cutting to the basket
 - After an offensive rebound
 - After a baseline out of bounds play, set play, etc.

Not all layups are the same. Not all game contexts are the same. You must be able to identify where you are missing the most layups. Once you identify those situations in your games, you can create drills that mimic those exact circumstances in your practices.

Question #3 – What challenge is most appropriate for my players?

The key to answering this question is to understand how to put your players in the **zone of proximal development**. That is, the sweet spot between success and failure. Players must endure failure to grow. They must be allowed to make mistakes in order to learn. The artistry in creating game-based drills is engineering situations where players will be



successful roughly 60-80% of the time. If the challenge is too difficult, players will lose confidence and give up. If the challenge is not difficult enough, players will become disinterested and bored. In short, we want our players to experience just a little bit more success than failure in practice.

Young players may not be able to score in a 1v2 situation if they are still learning how to finish at game speed, or how to finish using a new move. However, rather than leaving these players in undefended situations (1v0 layups) we want to create a game-like context as soon as possible. Instead of telling them to go “game speed,” we create a situation that forces them to compete at game speed.

Often, we will have youth players practice their finishing moves against a disadvantaged defender. In the video, you will see defenders seated in chairs at the beginning of a drill. This gives the offense a slight advantage when starting their attack and creates a situation where they must move quickly to take advantage of the defender as they stand up out of the chair.

There are many ways to disadvantage defenders:

- Place the defender in a chair
- Start the defender facing the wrong direction
- Start the defender in a trailing position
- Position the defender on the inside of an offensive player to force an outside-hand finish, or on the outside of the offense to force an inside-hand finish
- Have the defender walk side-by-side with the offense – “go live” when the offense starts to attack

However, once the offense is successful 75% of the time against a disadvantaged defender, it's time to increase the challenge by playing in a true 1v1 situation. The challenge must be escalated for the offense to continue to develop their skill.

As the offense improves we would continue to increase the challenge by adding a second defender (one disadvantaged defender, one live defender). Ultimately, the greatest challenge to develop individual skill is to play against two live defenders.

To maximize the growth of your players, identify the skill you want to improve, design a context to simulate where that skill is utilized most frequently in games, and manipulate the defense to create the appropriate challenge for your players.

Managing Constraints

Part of the artistry of using a game-like approach is managing the constraints of your drills. As a coach, you can manipulate all kinds of variables to affect what your players will get out



of your drills. Your drills may maintain a similar structure, but subtle changes to the rules allow you to focus on a particular skill, situation, or problem that your offensive players must solve.

There are numerous ways to disadvantage the offense or defense to manipulate the challenge level within a drill.

Add Defenders – Additional defenders might be disadvantaged or live, but you can exert more pressure on the offensive player by adding additional defenders.

Give the Offense a Running Start – One of the best ways to force players to practice at game speed is to give the offense a momentary head start. They must move quickly to maintain the advantage.

Change the Defender's Starting Position – There are many ways to move defenders to increase or decrease the challenge for the offense:

- The closer the defender – the more contested the finish
- The farther away the defender – the greater the offensive advantage

Decrease Space – As a general rule, the more space the defense has to guard, the greater the offensive advantage. By adjusting boundaries to take space away, there is less area for the defense to defend, giving defenders freedom to pressure the basketball.

Set a Time Limit – Setting time limits often forces the offense to be more aggressive, to attack in straight lines, and to play at game speed. The defense also benefits from knowing it must only defend for a short amount of time (similar to what you might see during an end-clock situation in a game).

Enhance the Defense - In order to make our defenders longer, we will give them 3-foot long pool noodles to help them defend and deflect passes. We will give an additional defender a blocking pad to use around the basket to contest finishes at the rim.

Restrict or Require Certain Actions – There are many ways to manipulate how games begin, or when teams are allowed to score. For example:

Requirements

- Each possession must start with scripted action such as an away screen
- The offense to have a foot in the paint before the offense may shoot
- The offensive player must use the ball screen (they may not refuse it)

Restrictions:



- The offense may only play on one side of the floor
- The offense is allowed only one attack before shooting
- The defense may not switch screens

Use a Dribble Limit – Dribbles can be limited based on the player or situation. For example:

- No dribbles in the post (forcing them to score with positioning and footwork)
- Players may not make two consecutive dribbles that are not toward the basket
- The offense plays “No Dribble to Score” after any offensive rebound

The purpose of these constraints is to make the challenge appropriate for the players in the drill, and ultimately, to make the drill more difficult than what they would actually experience in a game.

Creative Scoring Systems

One of the advantages of a games-based approach is that your drills instantly become more competitive by implementing a scoring system to reward both the offense and defense. Your scoring system can be adjusted to reinforce all kinds of behaviors. Consider this example:

Drill: 1v2 Wing Ahead

Offensive Make = 2 Points

Defense Stop = 1 Point / Defender

The offense receives a BONUS POINT if they score inside the paint.

Score the Process – Your scoring system can be used to reinforce particular behaviors, or to encourage experimentation with new actions, skills, etc. For example:

- 1) Offensive points for advancement
- 2) Individual points for attempting prescribed moves with a bonus point for making the shot

Scoring Effort – By having points available on every possession, players on offense and defense are incentivized to give better effort.

To Reward the Defense: Award points for deflections, blocking out, fighting through screens, vocal communication, contesting shots, etc.



To Reward the Offense: Award points for offensive rebounds, effective screens, *potential* assists (passes that create good shots for others even if the shot is missed), scoring cuts (even if they do not receive the ball), etc.

Ultimately, the goal is to reward behaviors that lead to greater success on the court rather than simply recognizing the outcomes of each possession.

A Note About Defense

Another advantage of using a games-based approach is that it allows you to coach your offense and defense at the same time. We will encourage you throughout the video to utilize your own points of emphasis when coaching the defense in your game-based drills. Your defensive rules, positioning, rotations, and vocabulary can all be reinforced in these drills.

The purpose of this video is to help players develop their individual offensive skills in a game context. Consequently, the majority of my attention throughout the DVD is on offensive improvement, and putting the offensive players in situations to make them better. That doesn't mean I don't care about defense, but because we are focusing on offense our expectations for the defense are simplified.

Defensive Expectations

- **Play Hard** – The defense should work as hard as they can to get stops. If they don't give great effort, no one will get better. To create the most game-like situations, the defense must play hard the entire time.
- **Communicate** – The defense must talk to be most effective, and to help create the most game-like challenge for the offense.
- **Guard One Attack** – In most of our drills, the defense will only be expected to defend one attack. Rather than allow the offense to reset, we will typically limit them to one, scripted beginning. This allows the defense to guard with intensity for a short amount of time.

We keep our defensive expectations simple because we know that every coach will have different preferences when it comes to defending different situations. However, we believe that all coaches want their players to guard with intensity. Every coach can benefit from players defending with effort and communication on every possession.

Part I – Individual Offense



The first section of this video will focus on individual offense – meaning that our offensive players when they are attacking the basket will not be allowed to pass. In each chapter we will create a variety of different game situations, starting with transition offense in Chapter 2. These game situations will increase in complexity and challenge as we go through the variations of each drill.

Drill Progression

Progression #1 – 1v0 (+1) Offense vs. One Disadvantaged Defender

Progression #2 – 1v1 vs. Offense vs. One Straight-Up Defender

Progression #3 – 1v1 (+1) Offense vs. One Disadvantaged Defender & One Help Defender

Progression #4 – 1v2 vs. One Straight-Up Defender & One Help Defender

Typically, younger players will start with Progression #1 to give them an advantage as they are learning the technique associated with each skill. This allows them to experience some time pressure from the defense while still maintaining an advantage. Their development will be accelerated as they feel the pressure of the defense's pursuit.

Depending on the skill and experience of your players, you might only implement the first two progressions at a middle school level. With older players, you may only use Progressions 3 & 4 to force your players to negotiate multiple defenders.

The goal is to create the most appropriate challenge level for the offensive player in the drill.



Ch. Three: Attacking In Transition

This chapter will focus on individual offense in transition situations.

Half Court Wing Ahead

This drill simulates an offensive player filling the outside lane and attacking in transition.

Progression #1 – 1v0 (+1) vs. One Disadvantaged Defender



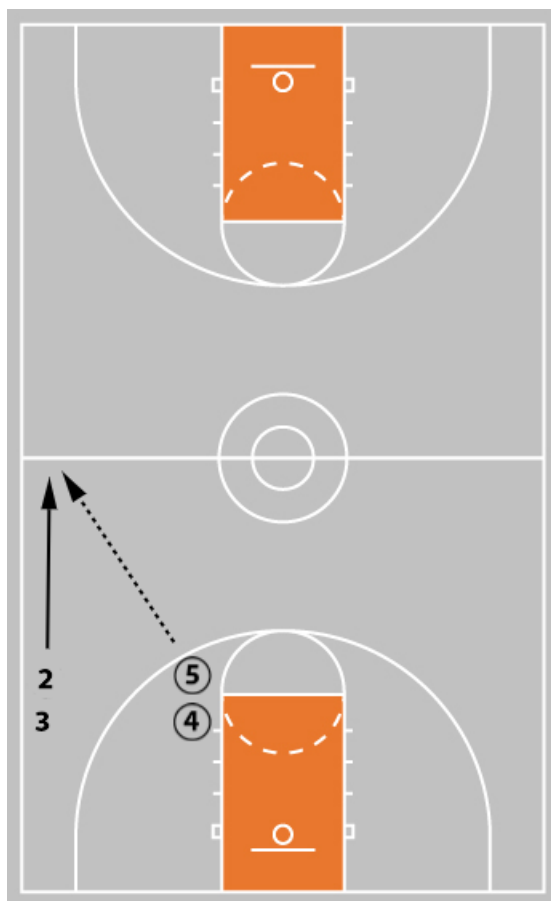


Figure 1

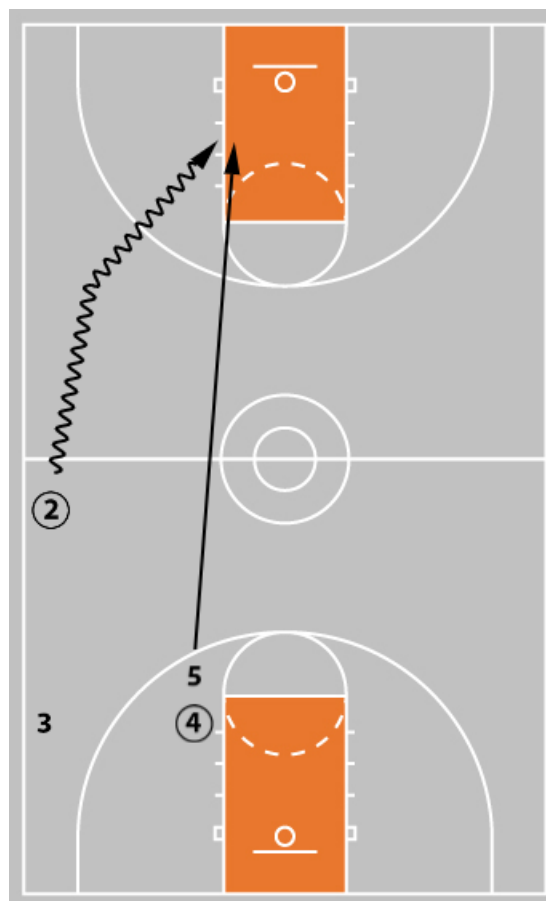


Figure 2

The offensive player (2) starts in the outside lane at the free throw line extended near the sideline and starts the drill on a dead sprint up the floor (Figure 1). The defensive player (5) passes the ball ahead as the offense approaches half court. Immediately after throwing the pass, the defensive player will sprint to the rim to contest the finish (Figure 2).

If Players are Mismatched – It is possible that your players' ability levels could vary greatly within this drill. If you have players who are mismatched in the drill – you can adjust when the defender passes the ball. If the offense is faster, pass the ball sooner. If the defense is faster, pass the ball later.

Remember, the goal is to find a balance where the offense is successful approximately 60-80% of the time.

Progression #2 – 1v1 vs. One Straight-Up Defender

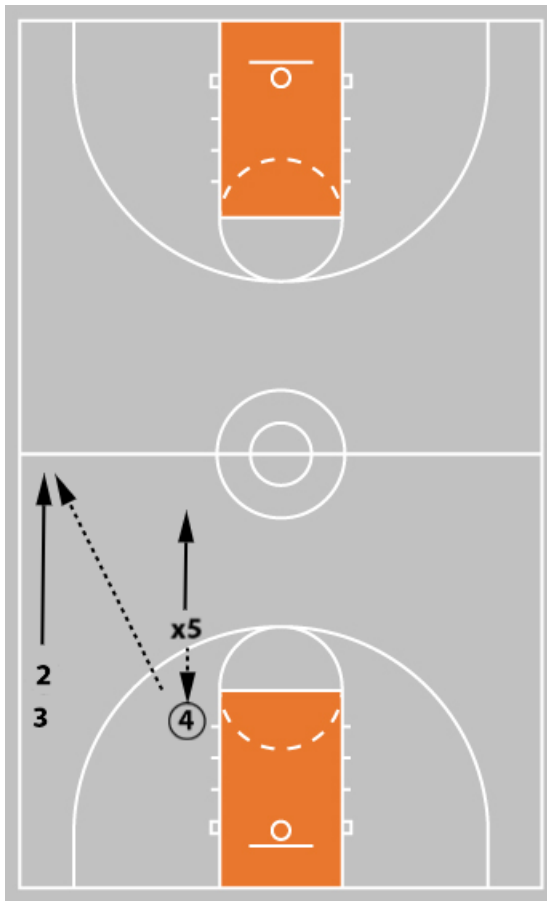


Figure 3

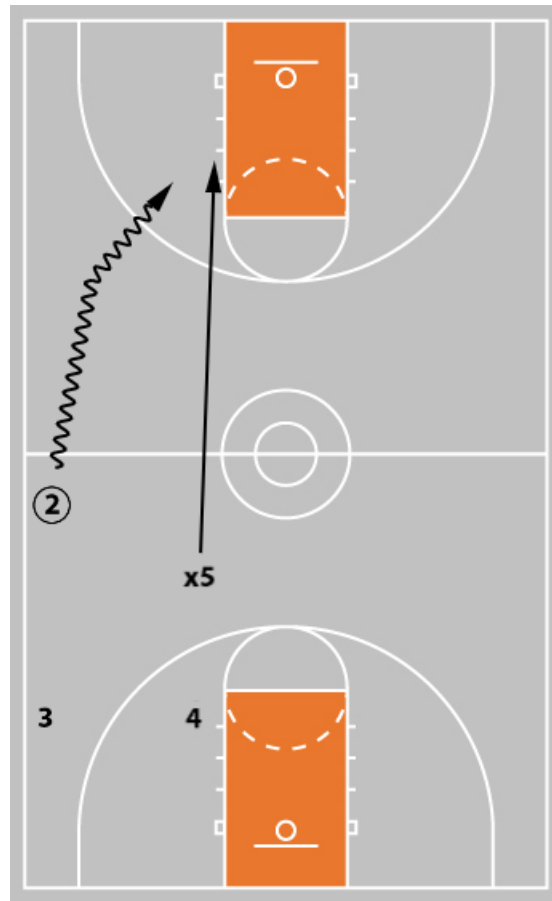


Figure 4

In the second progression we remove the offensive advantage by allowing the defender to get ahead of the ball in transition. As shown in Figure 3, the defender (x5) will toss the ball to the passer (4). The offensive player (2) sprints up the court as the passer receives the ball. Immediately after making the toss, the defender sprints back to defend the goal creating a 1v1 situation (Figure 4).

Here, the offensive player is challenged differently from the first progression. Instead of racing to the basket, the offensive player must beat a defender already in front of them.

Additional Constraint – To increase the challenge of this 1v1 situation you can require the offensive player to finish in the paint.

Progression #3 – 1v1 (+1) vs. One Disadvantaged Defender & One Help Defender

This variation is similar to our first progression. However, to increase the level of difficulty we added an additional defender that begins in front of the ball.

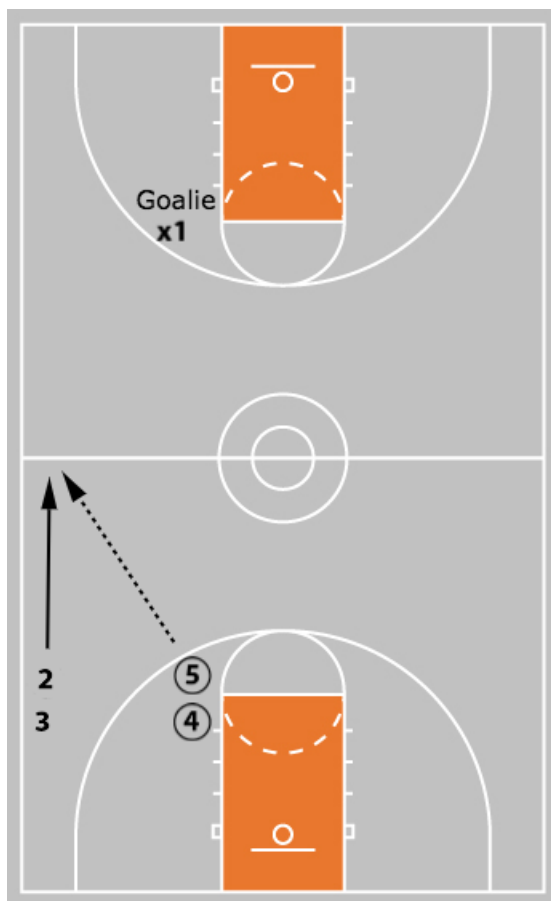


Figure 5

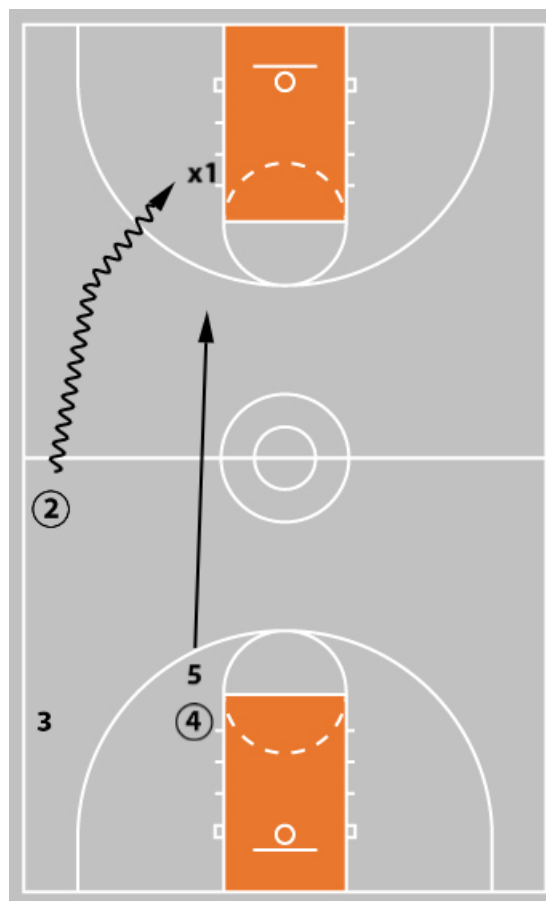


Figure 6

The offensive player (2) begins along the sideline while the disadvantaged defender (5) outlets the ball ahead. The goalie (x1) starts ahead of the ball and outside the lane (Figure 5).

After throwing the ball ahead, the passer becomes the trail defender to create a 1v1 (+1) situation (Figure 6).

Additional Constraint – To focus the offense on ball security, instruct the second defender to chase the ball and not worry about containing or contesting the ball. The more aggressive that chase defender is trying to disrupt the dribble, the more aware the offense will become.

Scoring in 1v2 Situations – To incentivize both defenders to give great effort we use the following scoring system:

- Offensive Make = 2 Points
- Defense Stop = 1 Point / Defender

Progression #4 – 1v2 vs. Two Live Defenders



This variation is similar to our second progression. As we did in the third progression, we add a second defender already ahead of the ball to increase the challenge for the offense.

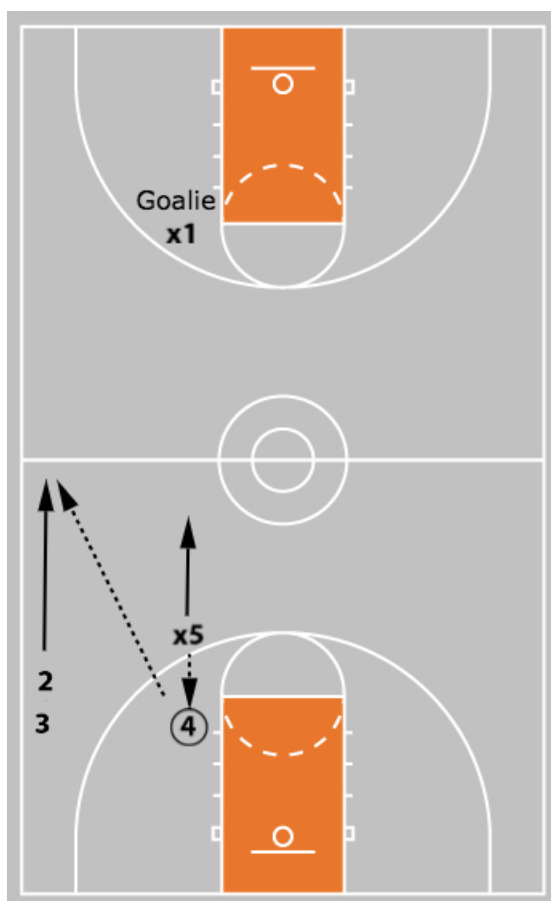


Figure 7

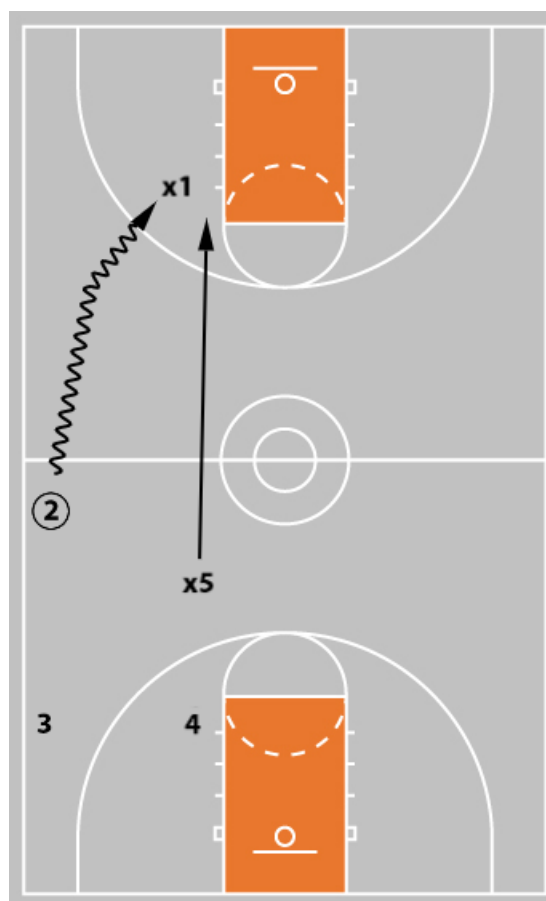


Figure 8

As shown in Figure 7, the defender (x5) will toss the ball to the passer (4). The offensive player (2) sprints up the court as the passer receives the ball. Immediately after making the toss, the defender sprints back to join the goalie (x1) to defend the goal creating a 1v2 situation (Figure 8).

This is the most challenging version of the drill and should be used only with the most advanced offensive players.

Additional Constraint – To put maximum pressure on the dribbler, instruct the second defender to chase the ball immediately. They are not trying to contain the dribble – they are trying to steal the ball!

Additional Notes

Going “Game Speed”



We use a chase defender so that the drill encourages the player to attack at game speed. As coaches, we are easily frustrated when players fail to go at game speed in unopposed drills – whether that be layup lines, 3-man weave, full court layups, or the like – players often go through the motions when there is no defender present. By adding a defender, we create time pressure on the offense so that they *feel* the pursuing defender, and therefore are more likely to finish at full speed than if they were unopposed in the drill.

Identify Your Most Common Layup Situations

As noted in the introduction, to maximize your players' development in your team's system, you must be able to identify the most common transition situations your players will experience.

- 1) Are they more likely to attack from the wing or the middle?
- 2) Is the defense more likely to be ahead, even, or trailing the basketball?
- 3) Are your transition situations triggered by live ball turnovers, outlet passes, or inbound passes?

Your answers to these questions will help you adjust the drills to match the most common situations that your players experience in games.

Emphasize Additional Skills

You can use these full court situations to teach individual transition defense as well as individual offense. These Wing Ahead drills are also excellent for improving your team's outlet passes. The better the pass the greater the advantage for the offensive player.

Managing and Assigning Groups in Practice

When using drills with multiple progressions, you might see different groups doing different versions of the same drill in our practices. Our most advanced varsity players would likely be competing in 1v2 situations (Progression #3 or #4) while our younger players might be playing live 1v1 (Progression #2). The key is to have your players in a version of the drill that allows them to be successful 60-80% of the time.

Players who are not able to score more than 50% of the time should probably move back one level in the progressions. Players who are scoring nearly every time should advance to the next progression.



5 Seconds to Score

This drill is designed to practice finishing in transition from the middle lane.

Progression #1 – 1v0 (+1) vs. One Disadvantaged Defender

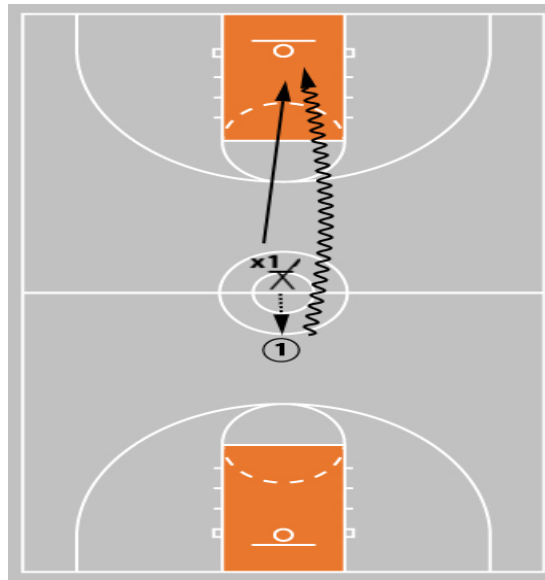


Figure 9

The defensive player (x1) begins in a disadvantaged position by starting seated in a chair facing the offense (1). The defender initiates the drill by handing the ball to the offensive player who immediately attacks the basket.

The defender will trail the ball initially creating time pressure on the offense's finish. This forces the offense to be explosive, to use long dribbles, and to attack full speed in a straight line to maintain their advantage.

The drill also encourages the offense to take their first step tight to the defender, simulating that shoulder-to-hip contact that they would use to beat a defender off a live dribble. This also allows the offense to ward off the defender to keep them from getting back in front.

Forcing a defender to begin from a seated position is an excellent way to help youth players practice their layups. The offensive advantage is sizable, but not unlimited, which provides an appropriate amount of time pressure for beginning players.

Additional Constraints

- 1) Coaches could require the dribbler to attack on a designated side to emphasize attacking with the weak hand.

- 2) If the offensive advantage is too great – turn the chair to face the basket so the defender does not have to turn around before pursuing the attack. The defender can hold the ball behind their head for the offense to grab.

As you add constraints to make the drill more challenging, the offense will encounter more failure. Be mindful that failure is a teaching opportunity if addressed appropriately by the coach. We often say, “*Failure is feedback.*” Players should be encouraged to examine what didn’t work to inform their next repetition.

The goal of a game-based drill is to create an environment that is slightly uncomfortable for the offensive player. That discomfort is a prerequisite for learning.

Progression #2 – 1v1 vs. One Straight-Up Defender

In the second progression we will add an additional time constraint to the drill. The offense will have five seconds to attempt a shot in a live 1v1 situation.

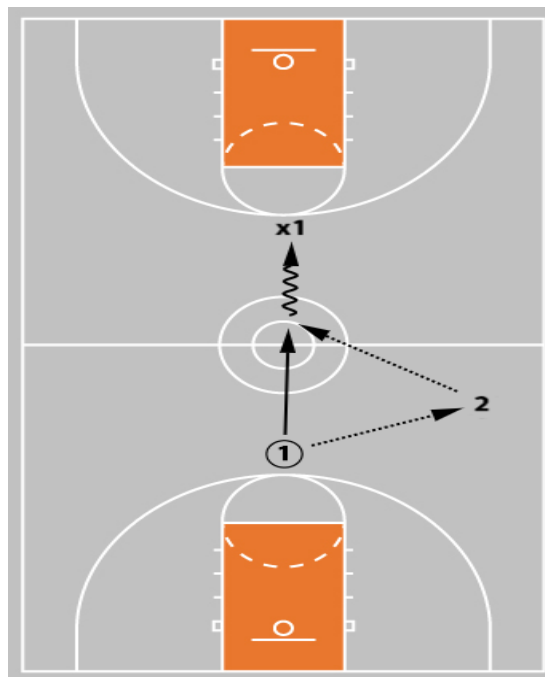


Figure 10

The offensive player (1) begins with an outlet pass to the wing (2). The wing returns the ball to the offensive player in the middle of the floor. This catch starts a 5-second countdown to attempt a shot against the defender (x1).

Points of Emphasis – In full court 1v1 situations, we want our players to get fouled or finish at the rim. We tell them to be aggressive, initiate contact with the defense, and fight for the position that gives them the best chance to score.

Additional Constraint – To increase the challenge, require the offensive player to get at least one foot in the paint before shooting.



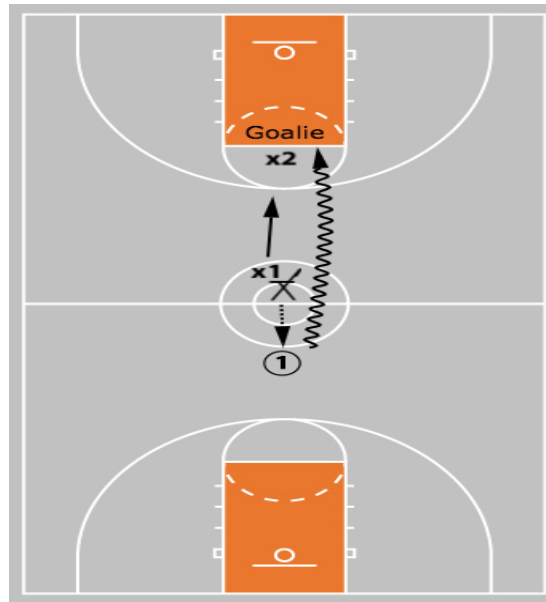
Progression #3 – 1v1 (+1) vs. One Disadvantaged Defender & One Help Defender

Figure 11

The offense will begin with an advantage over the defender seated in the chair (x1). The goalie (x2) will begin at the free throw line. This simulates a full court 1v1 situation with a trail defender chasing the ball from behind.

The Learning Process

One prerequisite of a game-based approach is that players will make mistakes. Consider our objectives:

- 1) Put players into situations where they must solve problems on their own.
- 2) Create an environment encouraging players to experiment with new skills.

Trial and error is necessary for learning to happen. Players should be allowed to explore, to try new things, and to struggle. Mistakes and missed shots may not feel like success, but any feedback (success or failure) informs the learner about what works, what doesn't, and what should be done next time. This type of environment is critical for maximizing learning.

Progression #4 – 1v2 vs. Two Live Defenders

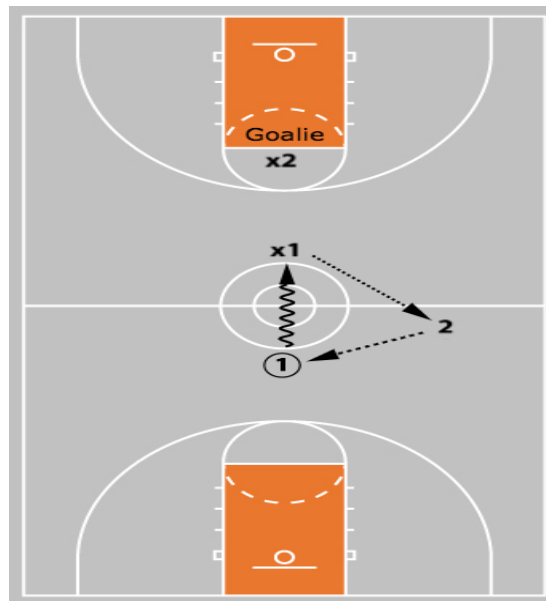


Figure 12

In the final progression, the on-ball defender (x1) will begin in front of the offense, and will initiate the drill by passing to an outlet player (2) who passes to the offensive player (1). The goalie (x2) is positioned at the free throw line creating a live 1v2 situation.

The 5-second shot clock begins once the offense receives the ball.

Scoring in 1v2 Situations – To incentivize both defenders to give great effort we use the following scoring system:

- Offensive Make = FG Value
- Defense Stop = 1 Point / Defender

We would award three points for made 3-point FGs if you allowed them in the drill.

Optional Scoring – Due to the difficulty of the drill, the offense could be awarded a bonus point simply for getting two feet in the paint. If they score from inside the lane, they might receive an additional two points.

Additional Constraints – Consider placing a bigger defender on the ball and a smaller defender at the rim to slightly disadvantage the defense.

1v1 Around the Cones



This drill is designed to practice finishing in transition from various angles on the court.

Advantages of Around the Cone Drills

- A simple way to practice finishing from various attacking angles at game speed.
- Allows for an efficient use of limited gym space – this drill can be done on multiple baskets simultaneously.
- A great alternative to conditioning. For those coaches who want to maximize their time-on-task during practice, this is an excellent way to “run sprints” while simultaneously developing basketball skills.
- Develops confidence to finish in 1v1 or 1v2 situations.
- Encourages players to finish through contact.

Progression #1 – 1v0 (+1) vs. One Disadvantaged Defender

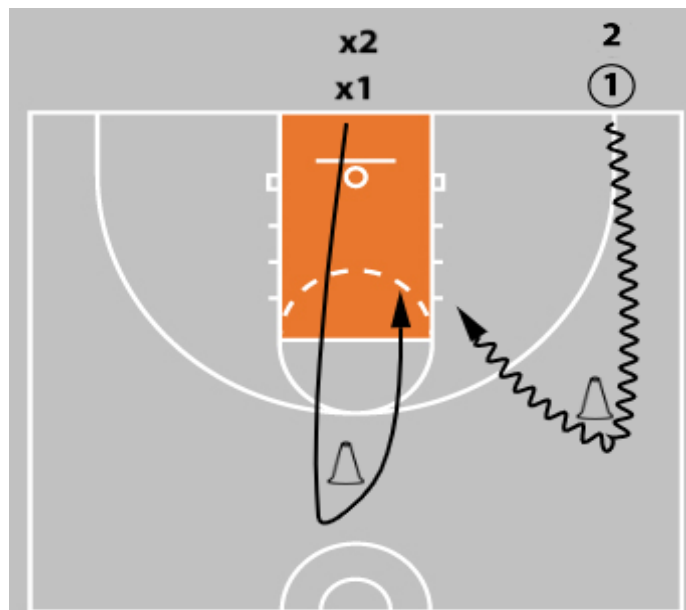


Figure 13

The offensive player (1) begins with a ball opposite the cone on the wing. The defensive player (x1) is lined up opposite the cone in the center of the court. The drill begins when the offense starts to dribble around their cone. The defender sprints around their cone and recovers to contest the attack.

Additional Constraints:



- 4) Change the distance of each cone to manipulate the offense's advantage
- 5) Require the offense to dribble attack or finish with their weak hand
- 6) Require or limit the finishing moves the offense may use
- 7) Require or restrict which side of the basket the offense may finish on
- 8) Require the offense to finish in the lane

Progression #2 – 1v1 vs. One Straight-Up Defender

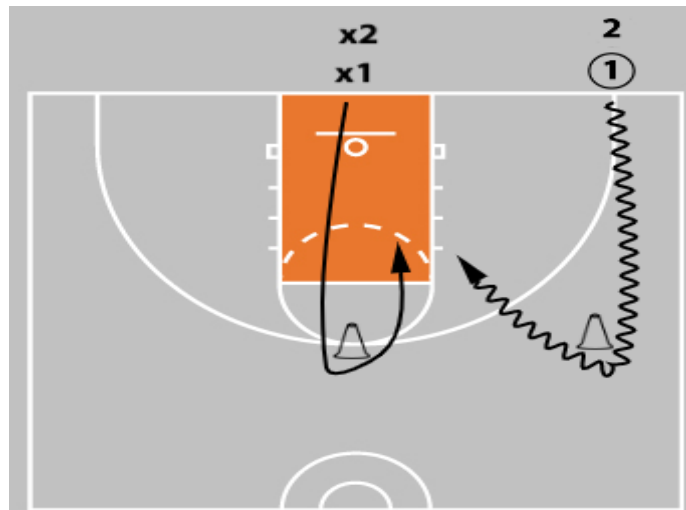


Figure 14

In the 2nd progression, the defense's cone has been moved in to create a more even 1v1 situation. This often creates a scoring opportunity where the defender is next to the offensive player, rather than clearly in front or behind.

This version of the drill encourages the offense to use their inside hip and shoulder to ward off the defender while finishing away from the defense.

Scoring in 1v1 Situations – To incentivize the defense to give great effort we often award a point on every possession:

Offensive Make = 1 Point Defense Stop = 1 Point

A Note About Offensive Rebounding

- 9) To encourage more repetitions, limit the offense to one attempt
- 10) To encourage the defense to context and boxout, allow the possession to continue until the defense gains possession or the offense scores



Progression #3 – 1v1 (+1) vs. One Disadvantaged Defender & One Help Defender

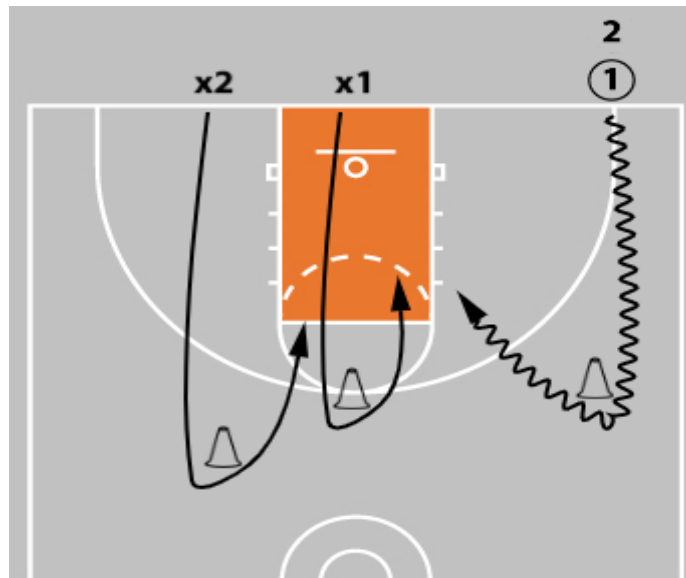


Figure 15

In the 3rd progression, an additional defender (x2) is added to the drill. The second defender also sprints around a cone on the weak side of the floor to simulate a chasing defender in transition.

Additional Constraint – We use this version of the drill to teach our players to attack the opposite side of the rim by requiring them to finish on the weak side.

Progression #4 – 1v2 vs. Two Live Defenders

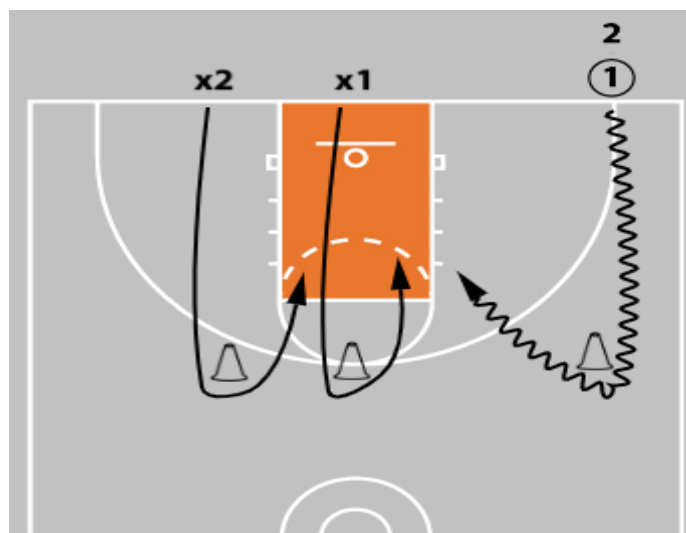


Figure 16

The final progression will simulate a 1v2 situation by moving the second defender's (x2) cone closer so that they are better able to contest the finish.

This drill is also excellent for encouraging players to hunt for opportunities even if they don't have a traditional numbers advantage in transition. Simply because a player is back on defense does not mean they are ready or organized to defend the goal. Ultimately, we want players to be aggressive even in disadvantaged situations.

Dribble Keep Away & Go

In this drill we will initiate a transition attack by beginning with a game of Dribble Keep Away. We play keep away to vary the starting point of the attack to simulate a live ball turnover. This generates random angles and attack situations in the open court.

This drill also trains players to attack immediately after a turnover or securing a loose ball.

Progression #1 – 1v1 vs. One Randomized Defender

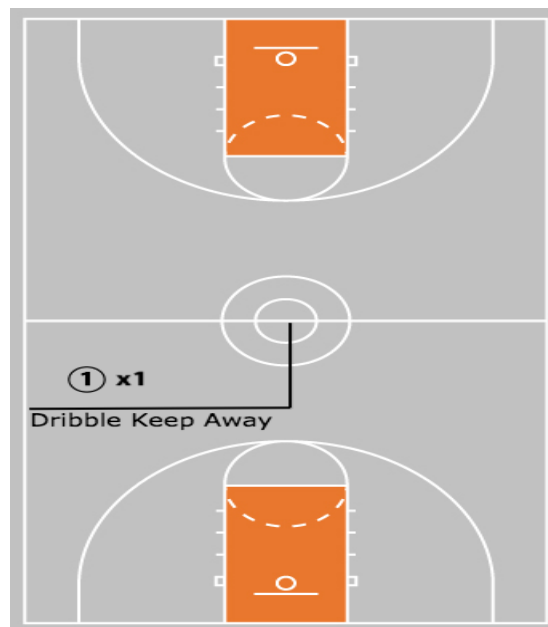


Figure 17

The drill begins with the dribbler (1) attempting to protect the basketball from a live defender (x1). The players are confined to a predetermined area where they play Dribble Keep Away (we often use the volleyball 10-foot line – basketball sideline – rim line – half court line as boundaries).

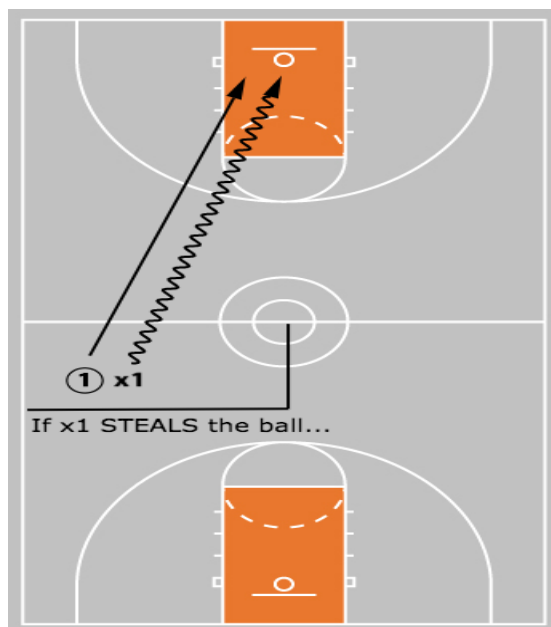


Figure 18

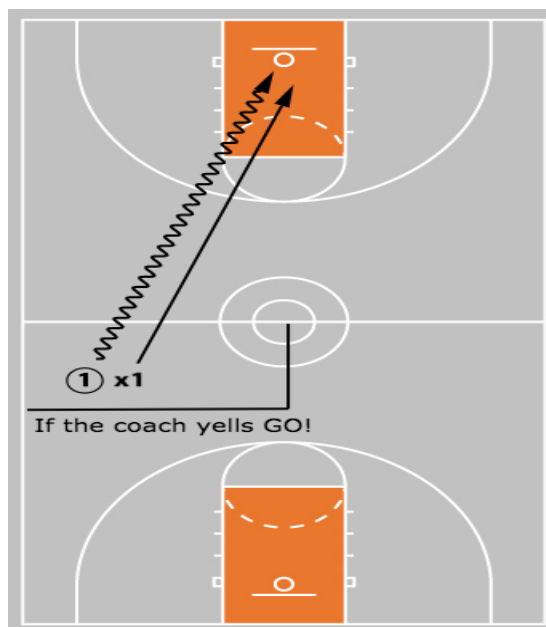


Figure 19

If the defensive player steals the ball during keep away – they immediately transition to full court 1v1 (Figure 18)

If at any point the coach yells, “GO” before a turnover occurs, the dribbler attacks the basket in full court 1v1 (Figure 19).

Progression #2 – 1v2 vs. One Randomized Defender & One Goalie

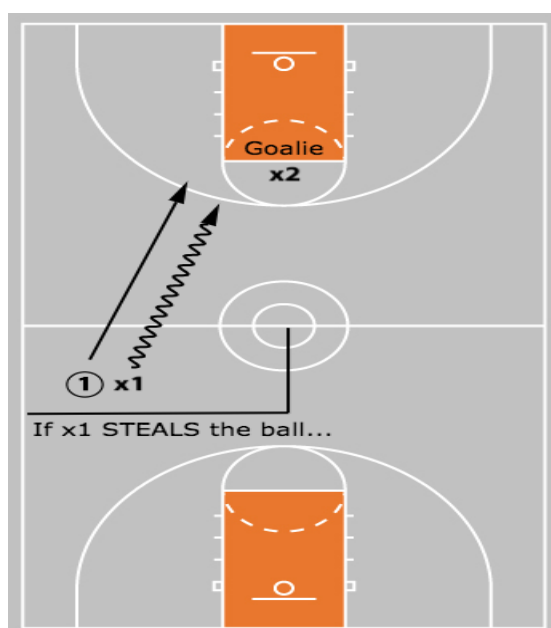


Figure 20

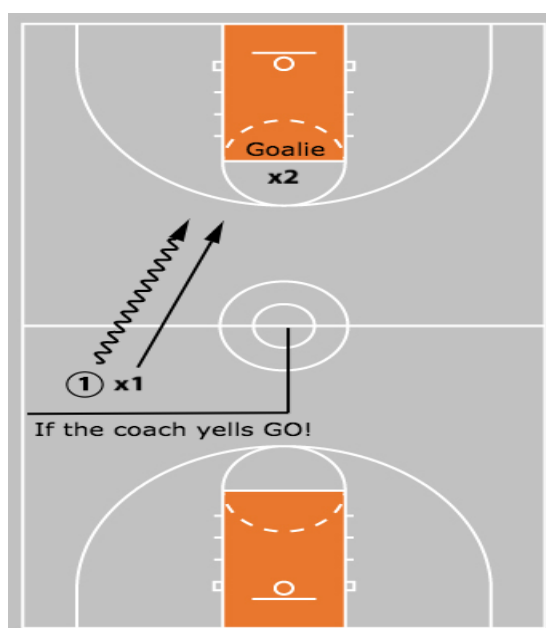


Figure 21

In Progression #2 we increase the challenge by adding a goalie to create a 1v2 transition situation.

Progression #3 – 1v2 vs. Two Randomized Defenders

The purpose of this progression is to create an even more variable 1v2 transition situation. By adding a second game of keep away, we randomize the help defender's timing and position in the 1v2 attack. This drill is chaotic and may not be suitable for all practices.

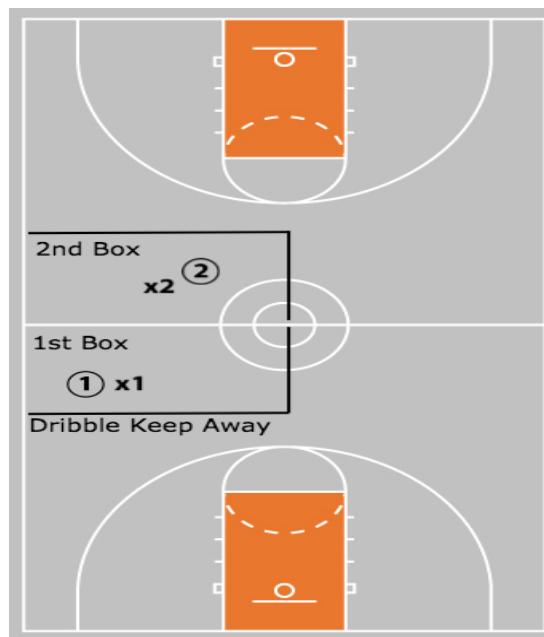


Figure 22

Note – Players should start on opposite ends of their rectangles as pictured above.

1st Box - The drill functions in the same way as the previous progressions for the two players in the backcourt area (1, x1).

2nd Box - Two additional players are engaged in a second game of keep away. If the defender in the 2nd box (x2) steals the ball before the offense attacks, the player who lost the ball (2) immediately becomes the goalie.

If the defender does not steal the ball then they become the trail defender as soon as the full court attack begins.

Monkey in the Middle

This drill offers another way to create variability to begin a transition attack. Here we simulate a live ball turnover off of the pass. The purpose of the drill is to reinforce an



immediate reaction following a live ball turnover. We want players to attack aggressively as soon as there is a change in possession.

1v2 vs. Two Randomized Defenders

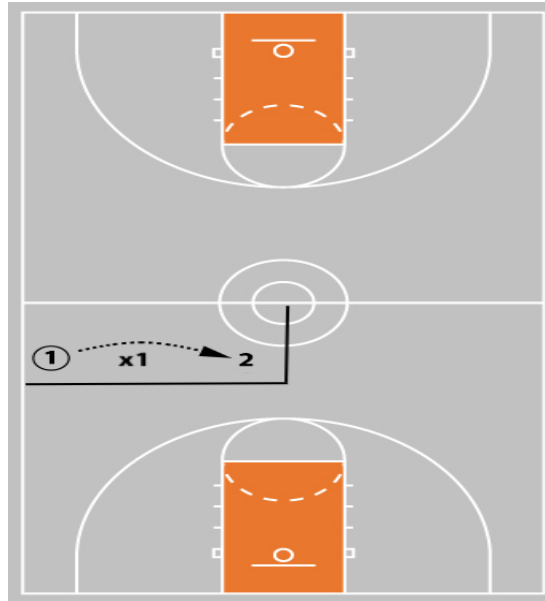


Figure 23

The drill begins with two stationary passers playing catch (1, 2) against a live defender (x1) in the same area we designated in Keep Away & Go. The defender is playing to get a deflection or a steal.

The defender immediately attacks the basket after any steal or deflection in a 1v2 situation. If the deflection is recovered by one of the passers – they should flip the ball to the defender to initiate the 1v2 attack.

If the coach yells GO then whoever has the ball will attack the basket against the other two players.

Teaching Defense – While this DVD is focused on the offense attacking in a live 1v2 situation, you can encourage the defender (x1) to practice a number of defensive fundamentals during “Monkey in the Middle” including:

- 1) Defending with active hands
- 2) Mirroring the ball
- 3) Closing out with proper footwork
- 4) Communicating after a deflection
- 5) Harassing the passer in an appropriate stance

Constraints on the Passers – We will put two important limitations on the passers:

- They may not move more than one step to pivot or receive the ball
- They may not throw the ball over the head of the defender (we want to emphasize throwing sharp, precise passes through passing windows)

Additional Variations – This drill can be adjusted to become a 1v1 attack by having the defender retreat to play defense when the coach yells, “go,” or having the passer retreat to defend after a turnover.

Touchdown Layups

Touchdown Layups is a loose ball drill that turns into a competitive scoring situation. Granted, a loose ball scramble into the backcourt does not happen all that often, but the game reinforces a number of important skills including:

- Grabbing the ball with two hands to secure possession
- Immediately attacking the basket after recovering a loose ball
- Defending in the open court from a randomized starting position

The game also varies the starting location of the 1v1 attack for both the offensive player and the defender making each attack unique. Players will develop their skills faster and more effectively in random situations.

Progression #1 – 1v1 vs. One Live Defender



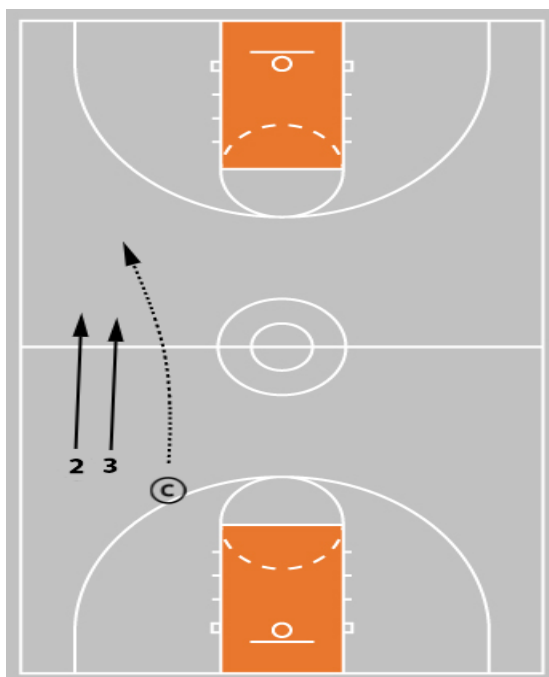


Figure 24

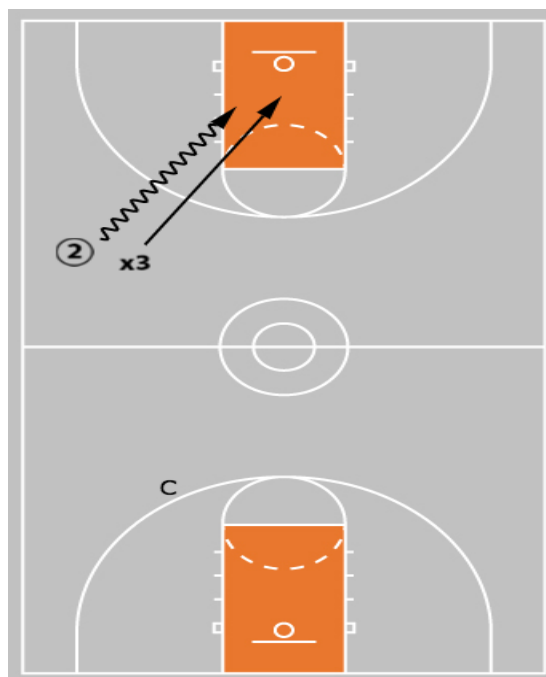


Figure 25

The drill begins with the coach throwing, bouncing, rolling, or kicking a loose ball into the frontcourt (Figure 24). The players race to gain possession of the ball. The player who recovers the basketball immediately attacks the basket with the other player defending (Figure 25).

Progression #2 – 1v2 vs. Two Live Defenders

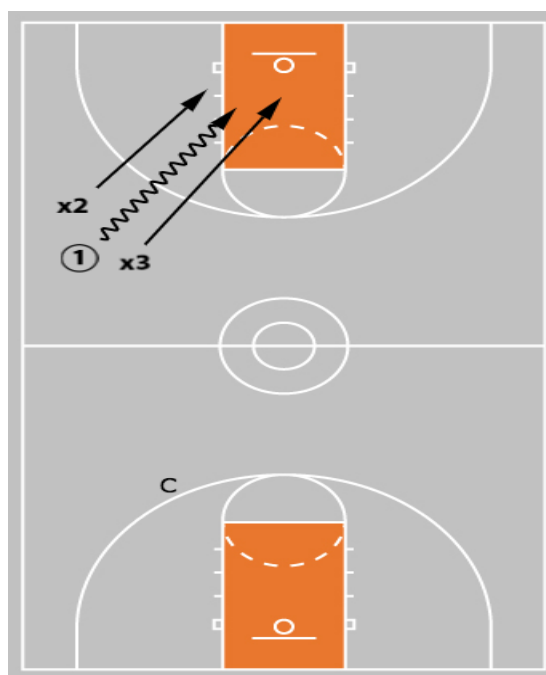
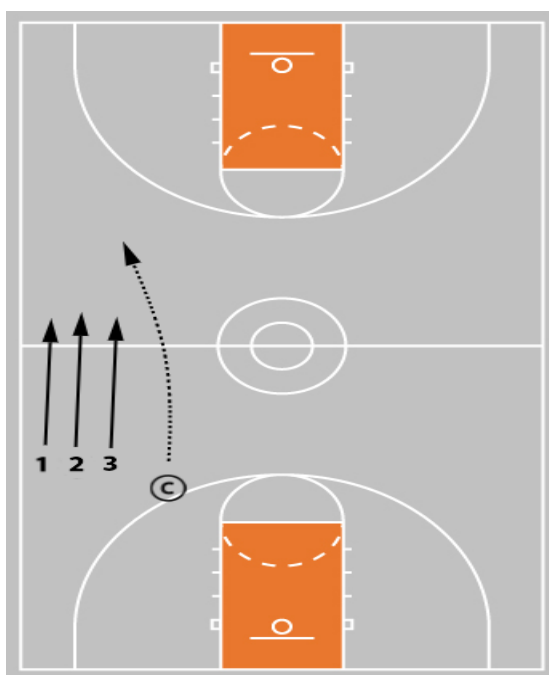


Figure 26

Figure 27

The drill is set-up the same as in the first progression. However, three players will compete for possession of the loose ball (Figure 26). The two players who do not recover the ball become the defenders (Figure 27).

Additional Variations

- Players may start shoulder-to-shoulder, or arm's length apart
- Play to Completion – Should the offense lose possession of the ball, allow the player who recovers to become the offense. Continue to play 1v2 until someone scores.

Chapter Four: Incorporating Decision-Making

The first half of the video focused on individual offensive improvement. The second half of the video will focus on adding a passing element to our two-man actions.

In Part I, we limited our offense to attacking actions to 1v1 and 1v2 situations because we want players to develop an aggressive, attacking mentality. We want players to have the confidence that they can beat multiple defenders in a variety of situations. By taking away the passing option we force players to find a way to score. By starting here, players are more likely to hunt for opportunities to score that ultimately engages more defensive attention and creates more space to pass the ball.

In the same way that we created a step-by-step progression for manipulating the challenge in 1v1 and 1v2 situations, we will follow a similar model as we add decision-making to our drills in Part II.

The drills will continue to increase in complexity and challenge as we go through the variations of each drill.

Drill Progression

Progression #1 – 2v1 Offense vs. One Live Defender

Progression #2 – 2v1 (+1) Offense vs. One Live Defender & One Disadvantaged Defender



Progression #3 – 2v2 (+1) Offense vs. Two Live Defenders

Progression #4 – 2v3 vs. Offense vs. Two Live Defenders & One Disadvantaged Defender

Multiple Layers of Decision-Making

These simple drills and games will combine multiple layers of decision-making including:

- Knowing when to shoot, drive, or pull-up
- Knowing how and when to pass to an open teammate
- Knowing how to position away from the ball to create better passing options

This segment will revisit the many of the same situations we demonstrated during the first half of the DVD starting with transition offense. We will then progress into the half court where we will explore driving actions, weak side actions, two-man interactions on the perimeter, and opportunities generated by cutting and posting.

Chapter Five: Transition Situations

In this section we return to transition opportunities that will now involve the decision to attack or pass.

Volleyball Line 2v1

We begin by easing into the decision-making options with a simple 2v1 game from the volleyball line. The decision is to shoot or pass while attacking the basket in a transition situation against one defender.

Progression #1 – 2v1 Offense vs. One Live Defender



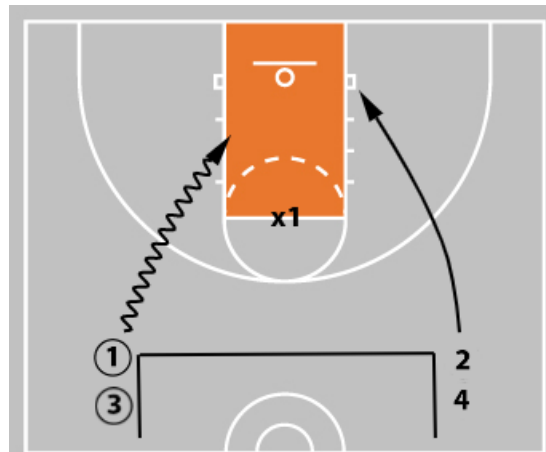


Figure 113

The offensive players will begin behind the volleyball ten-foot line, and outside the volleyball sideline (about 25 feet from the basket). The defensive player (x5) starts on the free throw line. This position gives the defender the freedom to attack the dribble, take away the cross-court pass, or retreat to the basket, requiring the offense to perceive the defender's movement before making a decision.

Initial Constraint – The offense is limited to ONE PASS and ONE SHOT.

We use these constraints because it creates a more game-like situation. In an actual game, retreating defenders limit time and space. For players to capitalize on their momentary advantage they must be aggressive and decisive.

Limiting players to one pass creates a score-first mentality because they are limited to only two actions. The driver must score – or the receiver must score. There are no other options.

Finally, these constraints enable our team to maximize our repetitions in practice. If you watch the video carefully, you will see that these four players are getting one repetition every 6-8 seconds. That's nearly 10 decisions per minute! We believe that **players get better by doing**, and creating the most efficient practice design helps our players improve the fastest by maximizing their repetitions in practice.

Rotation – The shooter always becomes the next defender.

Players may begin with the ball as illustrated in Figure 113, or by receiving a pass from a coach as demonstrated in the video. The advantage of using an outlet pass is the coach can regulate when the next repetition begins ensuring that all players start in the correct position.

A Defensive Consideration – You could use this drill to practice your transition defense. In that case, to create a greater challenge for the defender, you might limit the offense to one pass but allow them to continuously offensive rebound (and gain an additional pass with each rebound) until they score or the defense gains possession by rebound or steal.

Obviously, the more passes the offense is allowed the more difficult the task is for the defense.

Your PURPOSE for the drill will help you determine the appropriate constraints.

Progression #2 – 2v1 (+1) Offense vs. One Live Defender & One Trail Defender

The second progression simulates an additional transition defender rotating back behind the basketball. Once again, we use this defender to add time pressure to the offensive attack.

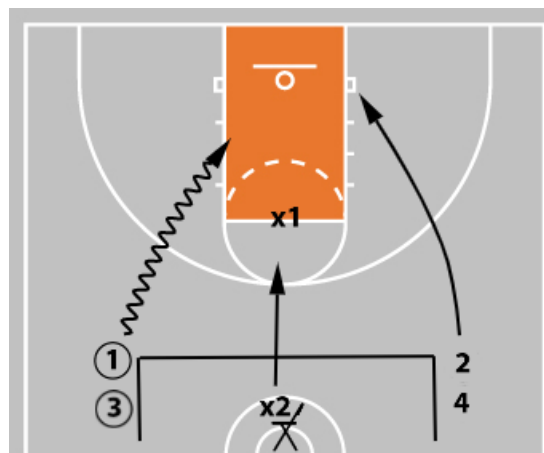


Figure 114

The second defender (x2) may rise from the chair as soon as the offense initiates their attack. Placing this defender in the chair communicates to everyone that the defense is ready. By positioning the chair just inside of the timeline, we can play the same game on both ends of the court (Figure 115).

Additional Constraints

- Allow an unlimited number of shots by the offense
- Allow a maximum of two passes before attempting the first shot
- Gain two passes to shoot each time the offense rebounds

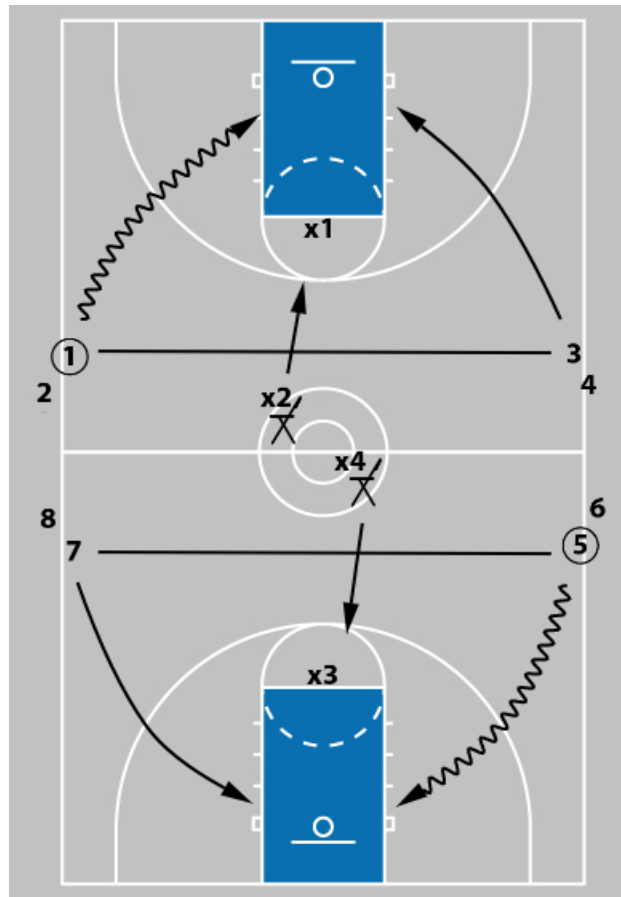


Figure 115

Rotation – The last player to shoot (or turn the ball over) always goes to the free throw line as the live defender in the next repetition. The other offensive player fills the chair at half court.

Using Questions

In the video, we paused the drill after a number of repetitions to give players a chance to reflect on their experience by asking them, **“What worked on offense?”**

Their answers are instructive and indicative of their own discovery:

- Using Fakes
- Good Spacing
- A Perfectly Timed Pass

Certainly coaches can expound on the players’ responses as I did in the video, but questioning has been proven to enhance an athlete’s learning and should complement your use of game-based drills to maximize their effect.

Additional Variations

- To increase the challenge for the offense – move the chase defender's chair closer.
- To decrease the amount of time to make a decision – start the offense with a pass on the run (Figure 116). Here the offense starts on a dead sprint from half court. The coach throws the ball to one of the players on the run increasing their speed going to the basket.

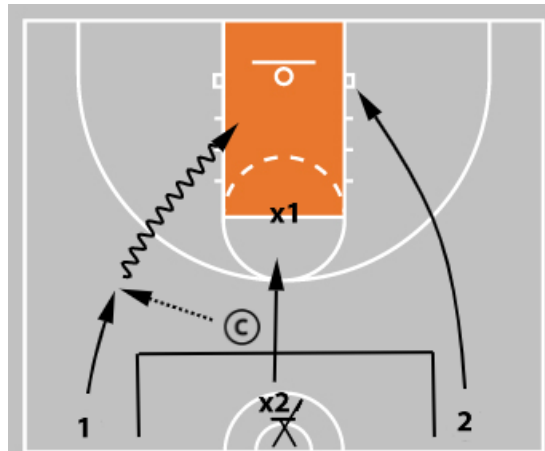


Figure 116

In the video, the offensive conversion rate for the offense was just 25% in four possessions with the defender's chair moved closer to the basket and the drill starting on the run. This is not necessarily because of anything the defense did, but rather the result of changing the constraints. We increased the pace of the attack that added a higher degree of difficulty. Just as driving a car at a higher rate of speed requires great precision to maintain control, attacking in transition at a higher rate of speed requires greater skill, perception, and decision-making ability to be effective.

The offensive challenge was greater because we reduced time and space.

2v1 Around the Cones

In the same way we played 1v1 Around the Cones in Part I we now use the same structure to create a 2v1 situation.

Progression #1 – 2v1 Offense vs. One Live Defender

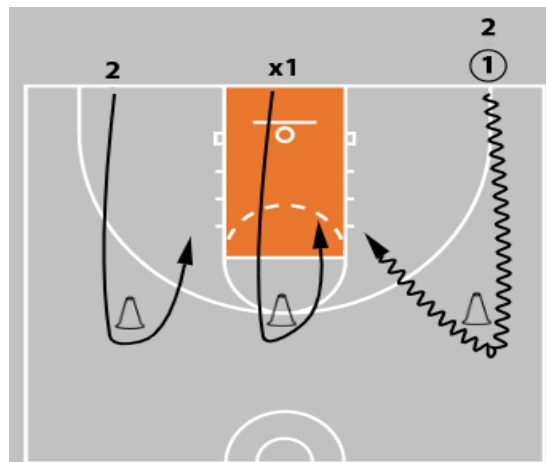


Figure 117

All three players sprint around their respective cones with the defender circling the middle cone that is positioned slightly closer than the outside cones. The dribbler must use their outside hand going to and around the cone.

Initial Constraint – The offense is limited to ONE PASS and ONE SHOT.

One additional benefit of this constraint is that it naturally rewards the dribbler for engaging the defender before making a decision to pass. If the defender does not commit to stopping the ball, the dribbler should score every time. Once the defender commits to the ball, the cutter should be wide open. If the dribbler does not read the defender's position correctly they are much less likely to be successful.

This reinforces our mentality that the player with the ball in transition should always look to SCORE FIRST. We want our players to always default to being aggressive with the ball.

Progression #2 – 2v1 (+1) Offense vs. One Live Defender & One Trail Defender

To simulate a second defender retreating in transition we add a fourth cone to the drill. Once again, this adds time pressure to the offensive attack.

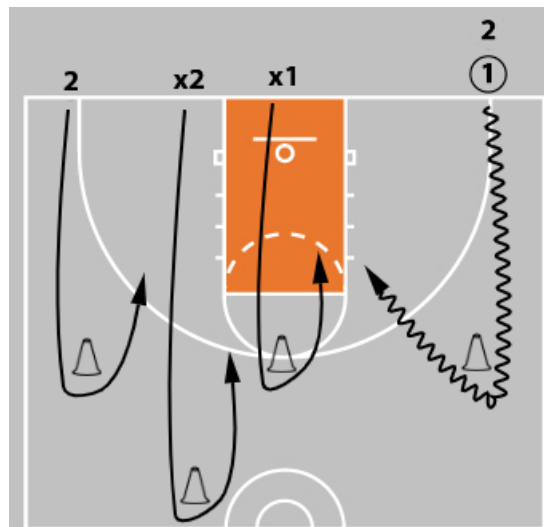


Figure 118

The fourth cone is positioned the farthest from the basket to simulate the trailing defender. In situations that become 2v2 we like to allow the offense an unlimited number of offensive rebounds to encourage the defense to be cognizant of their block out responsibilities.

This drill is game-like because it creates defensive traffic in the middle of the floor by requiring both defenders to round the cone from the outside-in. The window between the defenders closes quickly, requiring a high degree of perception, decision-making, and precision from the dribbler.

Additional Variations

- Manipulate the distance of each cone to expand or contract the amount of time and space for the offense. Those distances should reflect the ability level of those players participating in the drill together.
- The drill can be initiated with a pass to simulate catching on the run (Figure 119).

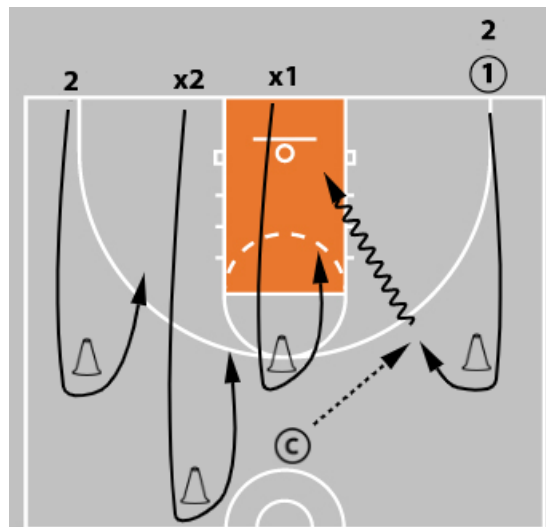


Figure 119

The location of the passer (C) may depend on the types of passes your team uses to initiate a full court attack. If your guards tend to bring the ball up the middle, position your passer in the middle. If you advance the ball up the side, move the offensive players wider and throw the ball from a guard lane position. Your goal is to simulate what your players experience most frequently in their games.

Note - When using cones to create an offensive situation off the dribble, remember to drill both sides of the court equally.

Straight Line 2v2

Straight Line Layups can easily be adjusted to create a 2v1 or 2v2 transition situation. In this drill, the trail defender starts in a wing lane creating a different pursuit angle than having them chase from the middle of the floor.

Progression #1 – 2v1 (+1) Offense vs. One Live Defender & One Trail Defender

This drill begins with a disadvantaged defender (x2) seated in a chair in front of the ball. A live defender (x1) is positioned on the free throw line to create a 2v1+1 transition situation. The dribbler initiates the drill with a straight-line attack with the second defender chasing out of the chair.

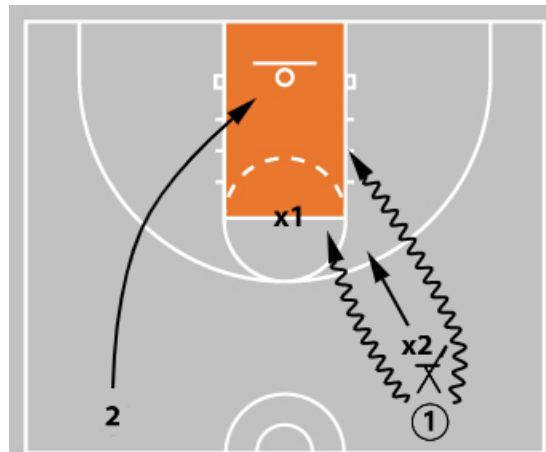


Figure 120

We allow the dribbler to attack on either side of the seated defender. The chase defender is instructed to pursue the basketball from behind to pressure the dribbler.

This drill emphasizes the importance of the player running the outside lane hard. While the dribbler needs to accelerate quickly to maintain their advantage, the runner puts tremendous pressure on the goalie (x1) by sprinting to the basket.

Progression #2 – 2v1 (+2) Offense vs. One Live Defender & Two Trail Defenders

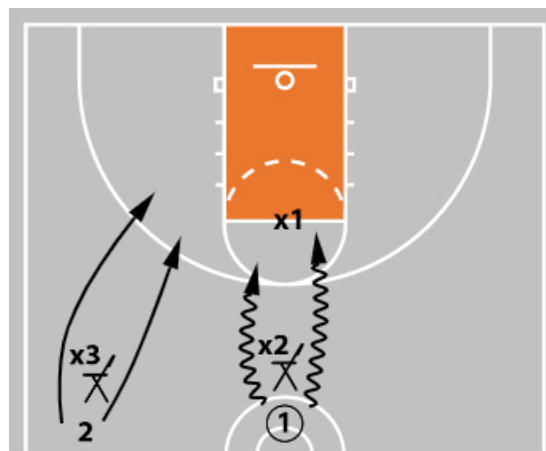


Figure 121

Once again, by adding a third defender we reduce the amount of time and space the offense has to capitalize on their initial advantage. With additional defenders in pursuit, the offense needs to recognize how to create and exploit space in their attack. The more the goalie (x1) is drawn to the ball the more space there is for the outside runner to exploit on the opposite side before the trail defenders arrive.

Additional Variations – The starting point for the offense can be manipulated to create all kinds of different angles. The more space created in the beginning, the greater the offensive advantage.

The Importance of Embracing Failure as Feedback

As seen in the video, this is a difficult situation for the offense. However, their failure to score does not negate the value in the experience. Players must learn to recognize that failure simply means they need to try something different next time. The dribbler may see the passing window, and make the correct decision, but fail to execute the correct pass to complete the play. Experience is basketball's greatest teacher. Failure should never deter your players from learning.

To maximize their learning, players must be encouraged to reflect so they are equipped to learn from their mistakes. Allow your players to learn from their own experiences in live play. As your players embrace failure as feedback they will experience greater freedom to explore which will lead them to become more creative problem-solvers in the midst of live action. This is exactly what they need to do to be successful in a game.

Scramble 2v2

In Part I we used different keep away games to create a variable beginning to a transition situation. In this drill we use similar rules to produce a randomized 2v2 attack.

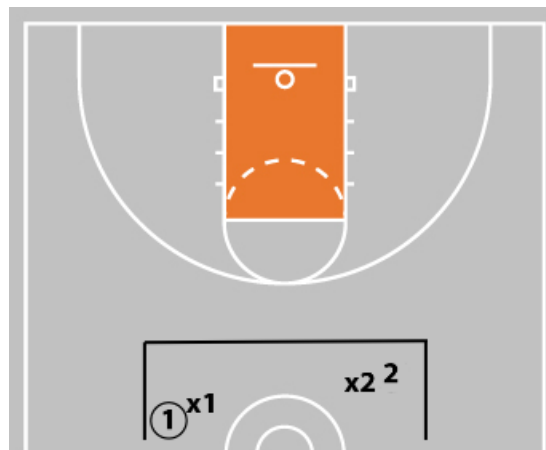


Figure 122

The game begins with the offense playing keep away inside a skinny box formed by the volleyball 10-foot line, the volleyball sideline, and the basketball timeline. The team with the ball attempts to maintain possession for as long as possible against maximum pressure from the defense. The offense may pass, cut, or dribble anywhere inside the skinny box.



If the defense steals the ball, or deflects the ball outside the skinny box, they immediately attack the basket. If the coach yells, “Go,” the offense attacks the basket in a live 2v2 situation.

Additional Variations – The box can be formed anywhere on the court. In the video we demonstrate a square area near the sideline to contain the keep away game (Figure 123).

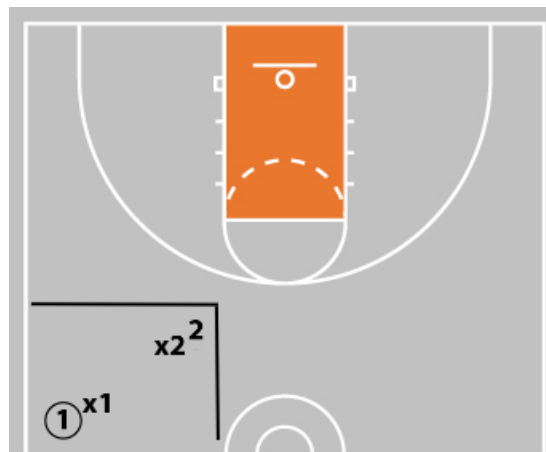


Figure 123

This simulates a live ball turnover closer to the sideline.

You could also trigger the offense by allowing them to attack the basket after completing a designated number of catches inside the box. For example, they could attack after the third reception in the box.

Note – This is designed to be a transition situation. If the attacking team pauses at any point, we would restart the drill back in the box. We want to attack the open space with the mentality of attacking 1v1 to score. If they hesitate, it is no longer a transition situation, and we would reset the game.

We would rather commit a turnover of aggression in practice than lose the initial advantage by being passive after the change of possession.

Ch. Six: Game-Based Philosophy

For much of my career, I did a lot of traditional drills in practice. We did a lot of unopposed shooting and we practiced most of our layups without any defense. While we often shot 50% or better in practice, we rarely found that kind of success in games.

As I struggled to understand the difference between our performance in practice and our performance in games, I came across a book called [*The 21st Century Basketball Practice*](#) by Brian McCormick. McCormick helped me understand the differences between a traditional practice and a game-based approach.

Our most important takeaway from the book was this – everything we do in practice should be similar to what happens in a game... that means we must include DEFENSE.

Early in my career I confused the terms technique and skill. **Technique** describes the physical task such as making a shot or throwing an accurate pass. **Skill** refers to the contextual task – the ability to make a decision and execute the technique in a game context. Skill includes recognizing when to employ a specific technique as well as recognizing what technique is most appropriate in a given moment.

For example, shooting is a skill. It is a decision not to pass or dribble based on how the player perceives the defense. Clearly, shooting against live defense is different than shooting unopposed shots. Not only are the shots contested, but the player must decide what type of shot is most appropriate given their position on the floor in relation to the defense and the rim.

I made the mistake of spending too much time in practice on techniques, and not enough time on developing our skills. We did a lot of block shooting games where players would shoot for 1:00 from four different spots on the court. While we became very efficient at getting a high volume of shots in a short amount of time, we were taking shots that rarely occurred in a game because they were all unopposed.

Unopposed shooting develops technique, but not necessarily the skill of shooting the ball in the context of a game.

Shooting is a DECISION. Yet we never practiced decision-making in any of our shooting drills. We caught the ball and shot it with no consideration of what other options might be present in an actual game.

The decisions that players make in games are entirely dependent on what they perceive the defense to be doing. This is called **perception-action coupling**. A player chooses to use a particular technique based on what they perceive from the defense, their positioning on the court, the location of their teammates, etc.



If a player catches the ball in space and they perceive that the defender is three feet away then the decision is to shoot. That's a skill in game context. If the defender is close enough to contest the shot, the decision is to move or drive the ball in search of an advantage.

In order to get better at decision-making, players must practice against defense. They have to practice in situations that are random, that are not predetermined by a coach. They have to practice attacking moves against human beings, not inanimate objects like cones or chairs because we never played against cones in any of our games.

It's important to note, techniques are still vitally important. However, players need to learn when a technique will be most effective, and the only way to do that is to play against live defense.

The purpose of this video is to help you create different situations to teach individual offense in the context of your offense.

Drill Progressions

To create a context for decision-making, this DVD provides a series of drills, each with its own progression, to create different challenges for your players even as they practice the same skill. We will use the drill Half Court Wing Ahead to explain the progressions in the video.

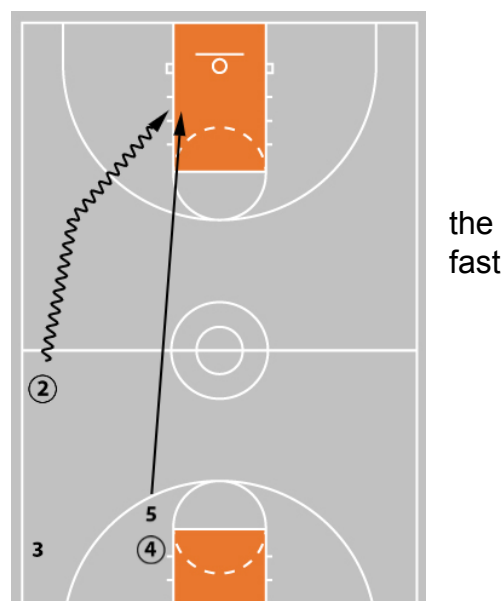
Progression #1 – 1v0 (+1) Offense vs. One Disadvantaged Defender

In the first progression, the offensive player attempts to finish in the open court with a disadvantaged defender chasing from behind.

The skill component of this drill involves choosing the right finishing move given the proximity of the defense, location of the offense in relation to the rim, and how both players are moving.

To learn how to process all of these variables simultaneously, players must experience situations that force them to understand the context and make the appropriate decision.

A live defender allows for randomness to occur in the drill. At times the defender may sprint ahead of the ball causing the offense to use a dribble move to get past the defender. Other times the



defender may catch up to the ball at the last moment causing the offense to finish at an uncomfortable rate of speed as they try to beat the defense to the basket.

All of this is similar to the same type of environment that a player will have to navigate in an actual game.

Progression #2 – 1v1 vs. Offense vs. One Straight-Up Defender

In the second progression, a live defender begins in front of the basket, requiring the dribbler to create an advantage in the open court. This adds the element of figuring out what dribble move will be most effective to beat a defender in transition.

Progression #3 – 1v1 (+1) Offense vs. One Disadvantaged Defender & One Goalie

In the third progression we increase the challenge by adding a goalie in front of the offense, and a disadvantaged defender behind the offense.

Progression #4 – 1v2 vs. One Straight-Up Defender & One Goalie

The final progression involves two live defenders. The first begins directly in front of the dribbler and the second is stationed on the free throw line waiting to protect the goal. This is the most difficult situation we can have with three players on the court.

The purpose of creating different variations of the same drill is so that you can find the appropriate level of challenge for your players. When a drill is too easy, players disengage and quickly become bored as they go through the motions. When a drill is too difficult, players become frustrated and give up easily because success seems out of their reach.

The goal is to find the version of the drill where your players are experiencing success about 50-60% of the time. That means they are right on the edge of their current ability. Players will be more motivated as the next step in their development is just beyond their current reach.

We hope to give you the tools to learn how to use a game-based approach regardless of the skill or experience level of your players. The key is to challenge players at a level that correctly balances success and failure.

The Importance of Failure

If you put your players in challenging situations they are going to fail. They are going to make mistakes. They will try things that don't work, and they will get frustrated. Players must learn that failure provides just as much feedback as success, even if it doesn't feel the same.



If a player beats the first defender in a 1v2 situation, but they struggle to finish against the second defender because they tried a floater that was off the mark, or they went off of one foot and had the ball blocked out of bounds, the player is simply learning that what they just tried doesn't work in that situation.

My role as a coach is not to provide constant feedback or correction. Rather, my job is to create a game context that allows them to try something else until they find what works. This is called **implicit learning**.

When my daughters learned how to walk, we didn't do any walking drills. We didn't practice right foot – left foot stomping patterns. We simply created an environment where she could explore walking in ways that were both safe and fun. She learned how to walk as she explored her own growing abilities.

Players can learn basketball skills in a similar manner. They can use experimentation without specific instructions to solve problems and learn new skills. If you put players in situations where they are encouraged to be creative, and you give them the freedom to experiment with their skills and try new things, they will become better problem solvers. They will become more confident when they find themselves in game situations that you may not have prepared them for.

Don't we want players who can solve problems in real time?

Creating Random Situations

An essential ingredient to a game-based approach is creating random situations. The game of basketball is unpredictable. It is impossible to script what will happen from one possession to the next. Defenses will guard things differently from game-to-game and possession-to-possession. Players must get used to responding to what they perceive in the environment.

A game-based approach allows you to train in random ways that better prepares your team for what actually happens in a game.

Developing players isn't a matter of repeating a technique over and over until they can do it without making a mistake. It's about getting players to be able to adapt to what the defense is trying to do to them. By encouraging your players to compete against live defense, in all different contexts, your players are learning how to play. They are learning how to respond to variable situations, which is exactly what they will encounter in games.



Ch. Seven: FAQ

What do your practices look like?

It's important to first understand some of our practice objectives when discussing how we have implemented a game-based approach.

#1 No Lines – We want all players to be involved in practice as much as possible. We don't want kids to be standing in lines. We don't believe that players will learn nearly as much by watching as they learn by doing. They get better at the game of basketball by playing the game of basketball.

One advantage of using these small-sided games is that we can use all of the baskets in our gym simultaneously. This allows us to have everyone involved all the time. Small-sided games allows you to use your gym space more efficiently so everyone gets to play. Everyone gets to touch the ball. Everyone gets an opportunity to shoot, pass, and dribble. Everybody is learning by doing.

#2 Competitive Groups Create the Best Challenge – We often group our players by ability level, sometimes that means players of equivalent skill, other times that means similar physical stature. We group our players to create the most appropriate challenge level at each basket.

For example, we might play Drive & Kick for 8:00. Our best players might be playing live 2v2. Our middle players might be playing 2v1 (+1) while our younger players might be playing 2v1. All groups are doing the same drill and working on the same skills, but they are being challenged at a level that is most appropriate for their ability.

#3 When It Comes to Roles... Context Matters – At times we also group players by position so they are practicing in a context most relevant to their role. Our post players generally dive into the low block from the elbow, while our guards cut from the perimeter. When we do post development drills we take this into consideration when designing what drill is most appropriate for which players.

Similarly, our shooting games might be governed differently depending on the skill level of our players. Some players have permission to shoot 3-pointers behind a dribble hand off or ball screen, but not everyone has that license. When we shoot in practice we attempt to simulate how players get their shots in games and create those circumstances in our drills.

In our press break, we use our posts as “goons” on the back end. If they receive the ball it's likely they will take only a couple dribbles before reinforcements arrive. They might have an occasional 2v1 situation against our opponent's goalie, so we group our goons together to play 2v1 Around the Cone to simulate the same situation.



Our guards have very different responsibilities against a press, so they might be playing 2v3 Inbound on another basket.

It's important to note that game situations may be dependent on position, but when our purpose is skill development, everyone will participate in our passing, dribbling, and shooting games.

Our Guiding Principle:
Are all players actively involved in situations that happen in games?

Do you ever do anything without defense?

The vast majority of the games and drills we use in practice involve defense. I want players to learn in a game-like environment. If we remove defense then we would practice scripted movements chosen by the coaches. While in real life their movement, passes, and actions should be determined by the defense and the space on the court.

Probably 90% or more of our drills and games include defense. That doesn't mean we are always playing in a live situation. We often use numerical advantages (such as 2v1) and disadvantaged defenders to develop our skills at a slower pace and with more space available.

The bottom line is that we want them to respond to defense because we encounter defense in every one of our games.

Do players have to learn a specific skill before they can execute it against defense?

Does one have to learn the technical skill without defense before being distracted or discouraged by going against defense?

Players may benefit from a relaxed environment during initial learning. There is some value in understanding the technical skill, and the words and body movements associated with it before going against live defense.

However, one of the mistakes I made earlier in my career was that I taught techniques without a game context. I asked players to repeat the movements until they were nearly flawless thinking that if they could do it right ten times in a row that demonstrated mastery of the skill.

No matter how proficient my players became at performing the physical techniques on-air, I did not prepare them to use those skills in uncomfortable and unpredictable situations when defense was on the floor.



I would rather players have a limited understanding of the skill while competing against defense than have them master the physical techniques but have no idea what to do when the defense does something different.

As coaches, we try to create an environment where players can explore the application of their techniques to the game. We try to add defense as quickly as possible so players begin to learn how to use their skills in a game context. The sooner you add defense, the sooner your learning will accelerate because players will not only learn *how* to perform a skill, but *when* and *where* to use it as well.

Do you recommend a game-based approach with youth teams?

If you accept the proposition that a game-based approach is the best approach for learning, then it only makes sense that all of your players, regardless of age, would benefit from doing the things that will accelerate their learning the most.

We believe that using a game-based approach is absolutely appropriate for youth level teams. That does not mean that they should never practice anything on-air. For example, youth players will need some initial instruction on how to jump stop. However, as soon as they are jump stopping correctly 50-60% of the time (without defense) I would move them to jump stops in a 2v1 game, or have them jump stop before shooting a layup. The term for this is **interleaving**, which means combining skills together (jump stop + shooting or jump stop + passing). By creating a more game-like context, or a disadvantaged defender, players learn when and where to use the jump stop in addition to learning how to jump stop.

Remember that coaches have complete control over the defensive constraints. If the offense is struggling in a game-based drill, there are numerous ways to handicap the defense including starting defenders in chairs, giving the offense more time and space, etc.

The drills in this video will look different at the youth level compared to the high school level.

In any case, whenever you add defense to a drill, you make something a game, you keep score, or you create a drill that simulates what players actually experience in a game learning will increase. **Retention** (the ability to remember something from one day to the next) will increase. The **transfer** of what they practice to their games is going to increase. You will be more effective, and your practices will be more efficient. Certainly, those things will benefit youth teams just as much as they would a varsity team.

What if a player's fundamental skills are lacking when they are put into a game-based approach?

For a player to be successful in a game-based drill they have to use a variety of skills and make a number of quick decisions. Consider all that is involved in 2v1 Around the Cone:

- Sprint dribble



- Immediate change of direction
- Find the other two players and quickly judge their speed and position
- Decide whether to attack the basket or pass the ball
 - If Attack – What finish to use?
 - If Pass – What kind of pass to use?

All of this happens in less than six seconds, but what happens if you have players that can't sprint, dribble, or struggle to make uncontested layups?

Brian McCormick's advice is to begin with everyone in a game-based situation as an assessment of where your players are in a given context. When you observe a specific technical skill that needs to be addressed for an individual to be able to function in the drill you can pause and do some remediation.

For example, if a player struggles with footwork you could pull them to the side and work with them individually while the rest of the team continues to compete. If it was something that multiple players had trouble with you might pause the drill and isolate that specific technique without defense for just long enough to provide them a better understanding of what they are lacking. However, as soon as the players understand the technique outside of the game context, they should be put back into the drill to see if the new understanding transferred. Assistant coaches, managers, even parent volunteers, can help give basic feedback to players who need a few minutes of individualized instruction.

Players need to figure out how to use their skills in the context of a game, even if that means that the drill might be ugly. They certainly won't get any better in an actual game if they are not practicing in a game-like environment.

Do you use your game-based approach in pregame practices to prepare for a specific opponent?

Yes. To prepare for a specific opponent, or a specific style, we simply adjust the constraints of our games to match what we expect to see in the up-coming game. If we knew a team was going to pressure the ball, or switch all screens, or trap ball screens, we would incorporate those rules into our small-sided games as part of our pregame practice.

Many times we will change the rules (particularly on defense), but not give the offense any specific instructions on how to counter the new rules because we want them to find what works without relying on the coaching staff for all the answers. We have found that players will often discover adjustments that the coaches hadn't thought of, which only makes us better prepared for our next opponent.

The same principle can be applied to your defensive preparations. If you know that a team likes to set a lot of wing ball screens you can play 2v2 and script the offense to mimic what your opponent is likely to do. While this seems like a common scout team strategy, our



effectiveness is amplified because of how many additional reps we get by playing in small groups rather than in 5v5.

We attempt to isolate the actions that are most dangerous to our defense and isolate those in small-sided games before playing 5v5 at the end of practice. We would much rather get repetitions of our ball screen defense, for example, every 6-10 seconds in a small-sided game than every 15-20 seconds playing full court 5v5.

A typical pregame progression to prepare our ball screen defense would often lead to 5v5 at the end of our practice. For example:

- 2v2 Wing Ball Screens
- 3v3 Wing Ball Screen with Corner Shooter
- 4v4 Shell Drill Initiated with Wing Ball Screen
- 5v5 vs. Scout Team Offense

Can you use a game-based approach to coach your defense?

All of your defensive coverages can be practiced while using small-sided games. Your practices will become even more efficient when your offense and your defense improve on every repetition.

What are different ways to score your game-based drills?

There are a number of ways to score game-based drills. To best answer this question you must first understand the purpose of the drill before choosing the scoring system. In other words, what are you trying to improve, and in what context?

Once you have identified your purpose you can creatively incentivize the behaviors you want to improve. We also reward teams for doing things we are trying to prevent. For example, if we want to learn to contain dribble penetration we would give the offense a bonus point for any jump stop in the lane. This motivates them to be more aggressive driving the ball.

Ways to Score Game-Based Drills

Offense

- Make = 1 Point
- 2pt FG = 2 Points; 3pt FG = 3 Points
- Play Make It – Take It

Defense



- A Defensive Stop = 1 Point
- Get a Stop – Stay on Defense (only score on defense)
- Winner of the Possession = 1 Point

Rebounding

- To incentivize defensive rebounding, make offensive rebounds = 2 points
- Any offensive rebound and the team automatically goes to defense (if you are scoring only for defensive stops)
- Play until possession (no out of bounds – players must secure every loose ball or rebound no matter where it goes)

Fouling

- Any foul = Loss of ALL points
- Any foul = Transfer of points to the opposite team

Additional Notes About Scoring

Scoring drills can be an effective way to improve your practices because players are more likely to compete with greater effort when a score is kept. As a general rule, when you keep score, players play harder. It also makes it more game-like because a score is kept during your games.

We often use scores to randomize our groups in practice. You can keep score to help change the match-ups at each basket by pairing winners and losers together. This helps moderate the challenge level at each basket, and gives players an opportunity to “level up” if they can win at their basket. This can be especially motivating for younger players who can earn the chance to compete with upper classmen.

Finally, you can also record winners and losers for the duration of practice, or the season, to form a competitive cauldron. You might find it interesting to see who has the highest and lowest winning percentages during your games in practice!

How do you use the clock in practice?

We like to do everything on the clock in practice because it encourages our kids to get as many reps in practice as they can, and keeps all of our separate baskets coordinated so we can transition from one drill to the next together. Using the clock encourages your players to hustle during the drills.

Additional Uses of the Clock



- To determine winners in keep away games (the team with possession of the ball when the horn goes off)
- We increase the number of possessions by using a shot clock
- A 3-second closely guarded rule encourages ball movement

Typically when the ball is out of play, we stop the clock in games like 2v2 Keep Away.

Why do you ask so many questions?

We like to engage our athletes by asking them questions. Rather than having players wait for us to tell them what to do, we prefer that they discover it for themselves. This does not absolve us from all coaching responsibilities, and we obviously use the questions to steer their reflection, but the more dialogue our players have with one another about their experience the better we are able to function as a unit.

We often put our players into a new game and let them struggle for a while. We encourage them to explore what works and what doesn't work. At some point we pause the drill to ask a couple leading questions:

- 1) **What worked?**
- 2) **Why did it work?**
- 3) **What didn't work?**

Do we ever teach in practice? Yes, absolutely, but we are trying to be more mindful of leading a conversation rather than presenting a lecture. If we want the knowledge to be their learning we have to give them room to discover for themselves.

Asking questions improves your players' ability to recall their experience and learn from it. Ultimately, we want players to be able to solve problems by sharing with each other. This helps them accept responsibility for their own improvement.

Why do you celebrate mistakes?

One fact that you must accept when using a game-based approach is that the drills are messy. Players are going to make mistakes, but we view mistakes as valuable feedback in the learning process. Again, returning to the strategy of asking good questions, we encourage our players to consider:

- 1) **Did that work?**
- 2) **Why did it work?**
- 3) **Why did it not work?**
- 4) **What do I need to do differently next time?**



Whether it worked or not you gain valuable feedback. Just because that possession may have been a failure because you turned the ball over doesn't mean it doesn't retain value. Players must be taught to embrace the feedback they get from success and failure. Learning that something doesn't work is just as valuable as discovering that something does work.

There is an overwhelming tendency for kids to internalize their failures. As coaches we need to value the feedback from our players' failure to model the growth mindset that can unlock their greatest growth potential.

Mistakes are simply feedback to help you get better if you embrace it in the right way.

We embrace mistakes. We create an environment where players can try things, they can mess up, and they can get better because of the value we find in our mistakes.

Why do you use chairs in your practices?

First, it's a great way to disadvantage a defender. We want the defense to play live, and we want the offense to have a slight advantage from the start. By placing defenders in chairs we create a one-second advantage for the offense. This forces the cutter or driver to attack hard to maintain their advantage.

At the same time, if you ask the defense to play live, they have to recover quickly to neutralize the temporary advantage.

The chair is useful for simulating a screen so that you don't have to use a live screener. There may be some value in allowing a player who sets a lot of screens in your offense set screens in these drills, but because we limited the scope of this DVD to 2-4 players we did not include any options for a designated screener to continue in the drills.

Note - Pay attention so that your chairs don't overlap a drill on another court.

Most of the time we use chairs on the perimeter or in transition situations. This allows us to start a defender in a predictable spot that starts the same every time. It makes our drills more efficient because everyone is involved.

If I haven't used game-based drills before, where do I start?

If you are interested in adopting a game-based approach, start with these three questions:

- 1) What do you do the most?
- 2) What frustrates you the most?
- 3) What do you see most from your opponents?



Start with the answers to these questions. If you set a lot of ball screens in your offense, start there. If you are frustrated because your team can't finish, figure out what context causes them the most difficulty and design a drill to work that same situation. If you see a lot of switching man-to-man, then use that as a default defensive constraint (require the defense to switch).

Your team is unique. What works for us may not work for you. Hopefully, this DVD has given you some ideas about how to design your own game-based drills.

How do you help players who struggle in the Pick & Roll?

When players struggle in the pick and roll, it's often because they cannot perceive enough information to make a good decision. To simplify the decision-making process, we take away a defender to create more space with less defense so they can see a more obvious decision.

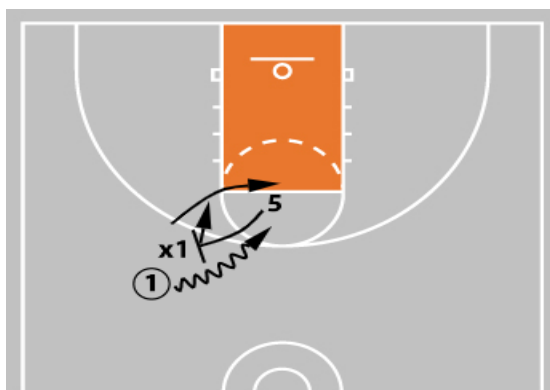


Figure 165

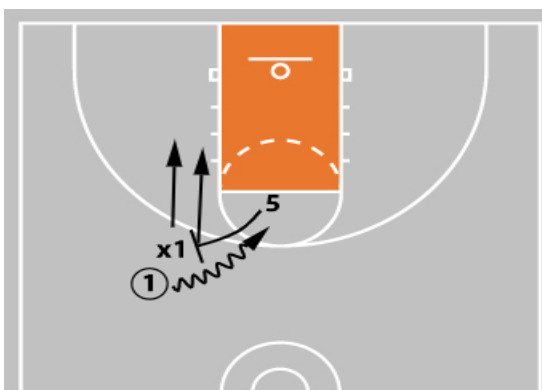


Figure 166

The post begins the drill unguarded and steps out to set a ball screen for the dribbler (1) who struggles to make the correct pick and roll read. The defender (x1) must decide between going under the screen aggressively to stop the ball (Figure 165) or staying on the screener to take away the roll to the basket (Figure 166). Whatever the defense decides to do they should make their decision obvious.

By removing the screener's defender there is more space for the dribbler to perceive that should allow them to make a correct decision every time. It also encourages the dribbler to attack with eyes up to see the defensive coverage.

Learning to Read the Dribble Hand Off

The same strategy can be used to learn to read the Dribble Hand Off.

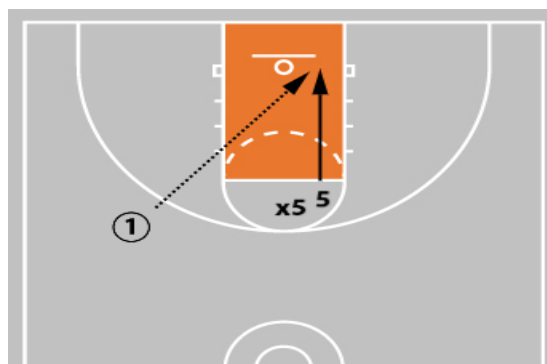


Figure 167

The first option is for the dribbler (1) to recognize that the post defender (x5) choose to deny the entry pass to the high post. The space is created below the free throw line so the post sprints backdoor.

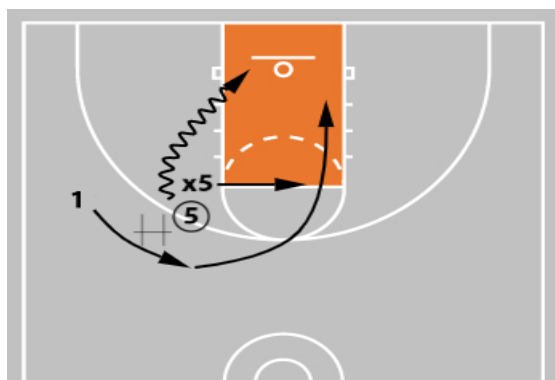


Figure 168

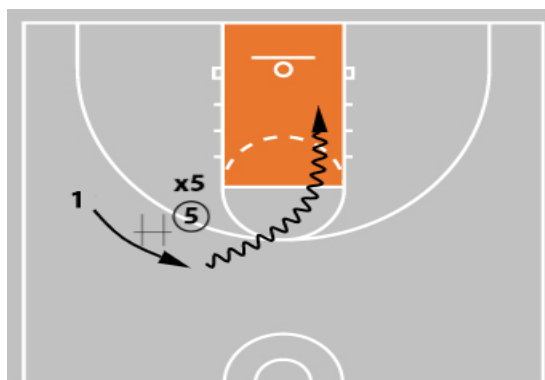


Figure 169

In Figure 168, the post initiates a dribble hand off. The post defender aggressively jumps to the cutter creating space for the post to keep the ball and drive to the basket.

In Figure 169, the post defender stays on the post as the exchange happens. The post recognizes the space is created for the receiver to drive to the basket so the pitch is completed to the dribbler.

The post defender should randomly choose one of the three coverages each time so that the five and dribbler learn to react to perceiving the same space.

These drills help develop perception and decision-making.

Ch. Eight: Concluding Thoughts

We want to thank you for taking the time to view this video. Hopefully we have presented some different ideas about how to better engage your players and improve their learning during practice.

I want to encourage you to take pieces of your offense and defense and turn them into small-sided games. Players will love it, and I'm confident the things you do in practice will transfer to your games more and more.

Breakthrough Basketball also offers a plethora of free resources for coaches covering nearly every coaching topic imaginable.

