Basketball Offense

Selecting Your Half-Court Offenses

Coaches, don't try to use too many offenses or plays for your youth team. Keep it simple and select an offense(s) and those plays that you feel best fit your team's personnel, size, quickness, and strengths.

Remember the key rule in youth basketball... keep things simple and HAVE FUN!!!

Basketball Offense - Set Plays for Man to Man

Blazer

Note in Diagram A that the offense is clearing out the right side of the court. Our post players (O4 and O5) move to the high post and the top of the key. O2 and O3 clear out to the left corner and short corner. The point guard O1 initially dribbles to the left wing, and keeps the dribble going. O5 starts moving toward O1 on the wing and O1 dribbles toward O5. O1 stops, makes a hand-off to O5 while screening O5's defender. O5 gets into triple threat position facing the hoop.

After handing off and screening for O5, O1 cuts around O4 to the hoop (Diagram B). O5 makes the over-the-top lob pass to O1 for the layup.

Notice that the tall post player O5 making the pass over a shorter defender (assuming a defensive switch), and a quick, point guard O1 beating the slower post defender on the cut.

It's amazing how such a simple play often gives you a layup. The hand-off and initial screen often confuses the defenders, whether to switch or not, and even when switching, it seems that the defender is often a step or two behind O1. You would think that O4's defender would switch and pick up O1, but oftentimes it just doesn't happen. If they do switch, pass to O4 who moves to the ball-side elbow.

"51"

This play gives O1 a screen at the top from O5. Also, sometimes it is easier for O1 to start from triple-treat position than off the dribble (as in Loyola). So O1 passes to O2, V-cuts and gets the pass back from O2. Now have O1 in triple-threat position. O1 waits for O5's back-screen and dribbles hard around the screen into the seam. O3 slides to the corner to open the left seam. O1 can shoot the lay-up (or pull-up jump-shot), pass to O4, pass to O3, or pivot and pass back out on top to O5. Notice that this is not a pick-and-roll play as O5 stays out on top. If O1 passes back out to O5 (diagram C), O5 and O4 play "hi-lo" (like in the "Big" series) as O4 posts up inside and O1 clears out to the corner.

"41"

This is the same play as "51" above, but run on the opposite side, with O4 making the back-screen for O1. So O1 passes to O3, V-cuts and gets the pass back from O3. O1 waits for O4's back-screen and dribbles hard around the screen into the seam. O2 slides to the corner to open the left seam. O1 can shoot the lay-up (or pull-up jump-shot), pass to O5, pass to O2, or pivot and pass back out on top to O4. Notice again that this is not a pick-and-roll play as O4 stays out on top.

If O1 passes back out to O4 (diagram C), O4 and O5 again run the "hi-lo" option, as O5 posts up inside and O1 clears out to the corner.

"Michigan"

Run this play vs man-to-man defense. O1 is point guard, O2 and O3 are the right and left wings, and O4 and O5 are the right and left low post players. This can be run in either direction, right or left. The first pass from the point guard determines the direction of the play.

Setup:

O1 calls "Michigan", and immediately the two post players move up to the elbows and the two wings drop down into the corners. When everyone is set, O1 yells "Go" and O2 cuts out toward the wing to receive the pass from O1.

The ballside post (O4) immediately moves over to screen for the opposite post (O5), and to make spacing for the cut by O1. O1 makes the basket cut, looking for the pass from O2. If the pass is not there, he/she moves out to the opposite corner. O3 moves out to the point as soon as O1 vacates the point.

Michigan. Start with both wings low and a double high post set.

O4 has set the screen for O5, but O5 delays until after O1 has already cut through (otherwise if O5 leaves too soon, O1 and O5 will collide, with no spacing). After O1 cuts through, O5 cuts hard off the screen to the ballside low block, looking for the pass from O2. O2 has several options: pass to O1, pass to O5, shoot the 3-pointer, or drive his/her man. If O5 does not receive the pass, he/she can optionally set a backscreen for O2.

Baseline-3

"Baseline-3" is a simple back-door play. You can run this out of a 3-out, 2-in motion offense, or a 1-3-1 offense. The low post player O5 runs the baseline and sets a weak-side screen for the opposite wing O3. Use the label "baseline 3" because it tells our players that our baseline low-post is going to pick for O3, and because the defense might erroneously think that "baseline 3" might mean a 3-point shot from the corner.

Diagram A... O1 is at the point, O2 and O3 are on the wings, O5 is low post and O4 is high post. O3 slides down toward the corner. The defender may think O3 is looking for the 3-pointer there. O1 passes to O2 (diagram B), while O4 comes to the ball-side elbow. O2 passes to O4 at the elbow. Meanwhile, the baseline post player O5, sprints over and screens for O3.

O3 cuts hard around the screen to the hoop (diagram C). O4 pivots quickly and passes to O3 coming in the "back door". Or the pass can go directly from O2 to O3. O2 slides toward the hoop for either the rebound, or a dish from O3. O1 stays on the point to be back on defense, and also, if the play fails, could get the pass back from O4 for an open 3-point shot.

<u>Diagram D. Option on the screen.</u>

If the X5 defender switches and goes with O3, then O3 clears out, O5 has inside position on the screen and seals the defender and cuts to the hoop for the pass.

Basketball Offense - Set Plays for Zone

"Iowa"

This play can be run either to right ("Iowa-2") or the left ("Iowa-3"). Take advantage of the zone over-shifting and screen the backside of the zone.

First, O1 passes to the opposite wing O3 to get the zone to shift. Notice that O5 starts on the side that the play is being run to and does not go to the ball-side short corner in this case (like in the normal zone offense where O5 runs the baseline). Next O3 skip passes to O2. O4 screens the top defender while O5 screens the low defender and posts up on the low block. O2 has the option of shooting or passing to O5 or O4 posting up. If the pass goes to O4, O4 might be able to make a "hi-lo" play with O5 (passing to O5), especially if O5 is being fronted.

"21" and "31"

Run this simple play either right ("21") or left ("31"). In diagram A, O1 dribbles at and tries to engage the top defender on the side the play is being run. Either O2 ("21") or O3 ("31") screens the outside top zone defender for O1 to dribble around and shoot the mid-range jumper. The opposite post (O4 in the diagrams below) slides up to the high post-opposite elbow area to occupy the middle defender in the zone. O1 can shoot the short pull-up jumper (diagram B), or pass to O5 if the low defender comes up to defend (diagram C). The opposite wing (O3) should drop down inside to become a back-side rebounder. After screening, O2 pops out on top as the safety.

"Indiana"

These two plays try to exploit the outside weakness of the 2-3 zone. This is a simple pass to either wing ("Indiana-2" to the right, and "Indiana-3" to the left), followed by O1 setting a screen on the ball. The wing dribbles around the screen for the medium ranged jumper. If the opposite wing defender cheats over, the pass could be make to the weakside wing for the open shot (diagram C), but the first option is the shot off the dribble.

The other very important part of this play is that both of our posts setup very low, below the defense (diagram A). This keeps the down defenders down. More important, once our wing makes the move and takes the shot, O4 and O5 should be able to step inside the defense and box-out for perfect rebounding position. Half of the time the shot will be missed and our posts should look at this as a great opportunity for an offensive rebound and a easy put-back.

"UConn"

If you are fortunate enough to have some very good shooting guards (O2). This simple play gets O2 a shot in the paint, and works well against teams that play the middle low defender (X3) fairly low in the paint. Start with a 1-3-1 set. O1 passes to O3 (to get the top defenders to move), while O2 drops down to the short corner. O3 passes back to O1. O4 sets a down-screen on the middle defender X3. O2 curls around the screen, gets the pass from O1 and the turn-around jump-shot in the paint. If not open for the pass, O2 moves out to the usual spot on the right wing, and could get the pass and shot there instead.

"4"

Using an inside screen. Refer to the diagrams below. O2 runs the baseline, always in the ball-side corner. The ball-side post (O4) is positioned halfway up the lane, near the elbow. Once again pass to the corner. O2 can shoot the 3-pointer or dribble-penetrate the baseline. Meanwhile O4 screens the middle defender in the zone, resulting in a 2-on-1 situation with O2 driving to score, or dish off to O5 (Diagram B). The screener O4 must be aware of the three-second violation, but if the initial screen is set above the free-throw line, O4 could release up the middle as another option (Diagram C).

"24" & "34"

Against the 1-3-1 zone, screen both the low X5 defender and the middle X4 defender, and cut O5 under the low screen. O5 gets the pass from O1. "24" is run with O2 and O4 as the screeners, and "34" is the same play but with O3 and O4 as the screeners.

"24-Wide" & "34-Wide"

Start the same as "24" above. This time, O2 cuts out to the corner for the pass. O4 screens the middle defender. O2 could shoot (diagram B), or pass to O5 cutting inside (diagram C).

"45" & "54"

Run these simple plays from the "zone-2" offense, and these will actually work against the 2-3 zone as well. The same rules apply as above. In "45", the pass goes to O2 in the right corner. O4 screens the X5 defender and this frees O5 for a cut to the ball-side low post and the lay-up. Against a 2-3 zone (diagram C), O4 screens the middle low defender. In "54", it's all the same, except on the opposite side with the pass going into the left corner, O5 setting the inside screen and O4 cutting to the ball-side low post for the pass and lay-up.

General pointers in attacking any zone defense.

1. Beat the defense up the floor.

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

This favors a "transition type", wide-open, up-tempo game. A slow-down, half-court game allows the zone defense to be more effective.

3. Patience

Be patient on offense, but take the first open, good percentage shot. Make sure your best shooters are getting their shots. It's always easy to just settle for outside shots against zones. But you still must get the ball inside. Have a rule that (except in transition), before any outside shot goes up, the team must have one post touch first (either low or high post).

Diagram C.
Dribble-penetrate the gaps.

4. Offensive rebounding

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.

5. Maintain good spacing

Stretch the zone with a pass to a wing or corner, and then skip pass to the opposite side. Don't get "bunched up" Players should move into the gaps and passing lanes in the zone (see Diagram C). "Overload" zones by flooding areas of the zone with more offensive players than it can cover.

6. Attack the gaps, but avoid unnecessary dribbling

Unnecessary dribbling 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. Another good option is the "penetrate and pitch back"... when someone dribble-penetrates, the next perimeter player over rotates into the spot vacated by the dribbler. Now, as the dribbler sucks that perimeter defender inside, he/she can stop, pivot and pass back out to where he/she came from, which will be wide open for the 3-point shot.

7. You must get the ball inside

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 (see pointer #4 above). 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.

8. Use crisp passing

And use the "skip" pass from corner to opposite wing, and wing to opposite 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. Reverse the ball from side to side a few times and the zone often falls apart and gets out of position.

9. Screen the zone

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". You can design and use set plays against zones, often taking advantage of screening either the backside of the zone (followed by a skip pass), or screening inside.

10. Triple-threat position on the perimeter

Make sure your players receive the ball in "triple-threat" position, ready to shoot, look inside and pass, or penetrate. Don't allow perimeter players the bad habit of catching and dribbling. Unless there is a gap for a quick attack to the hoop, players should receive the pass in triple-threat position.

12. 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!