

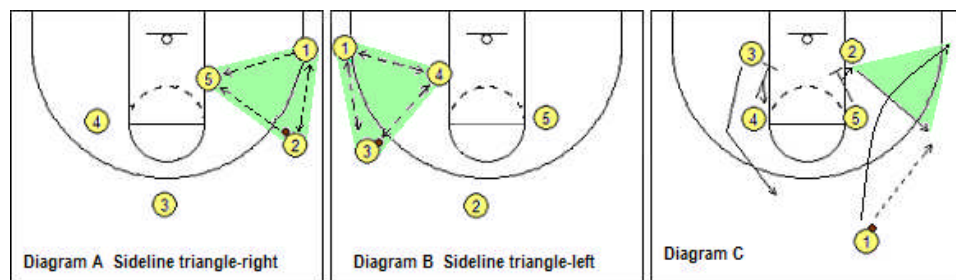
Basketball Offense - The Triangle Offense

Coach's Clipboard Basketball Playbook, <http://www.coachesclipboard.net>

The Triangle half-court offense originated with Sam Barry at the University of Southern California many years ago. It was further developed by former Kansas State head coach Tex Winter, who had played under Barry. Winter went on as assistant coach to Phil Jackson and the triangle offense was instrumental in the Chicago Bulls (Michael Jordan, et al) winning a number of NBA championships. Winter has also been a consultant to the LA Lakers. Some college teams have adapted it, including the Tennessee Lady Vols and UConn's Lady Huskies. This article discusses the triangle in some depth with numerous diagrams below pointing out many of the options. Many of these diagrams point out how the offensive player(s) read and react to the defense.

The offense is detailed and takes a while to learn, but is very effective once players learn how to read and react to the defense. The offense can be confusing for the defense as it can be initiated in many different ways... not the same way with every possession (see "Establishing the Triangle" below). Spacing is key, with players about 15-18 feet apart. The basic structure of the offense is the "sideline triangle" on one side of the floor, and a "two-man game" on the weakside. The sideline triangle is formed by a post player on the block and two perimeter players, one in the corner and one on the wing, and can be set up on either side of the court (diagrams A and B). The "two-man" weakside offense consists of a guard at the top, and a player at the weakside elbow-extended area. Players can interchange, but it's usually best to have two post and three perimeter players.

The spacing stretches the defense to defend both sides of the court, and this creates a problem for the helpside defense and defensive trapping. Unlike a free-lance motion offense, players should be looking to fill the five spots. But like a motion offense, players read and react to the defense without having to call set plays.



Establishing the Triangle

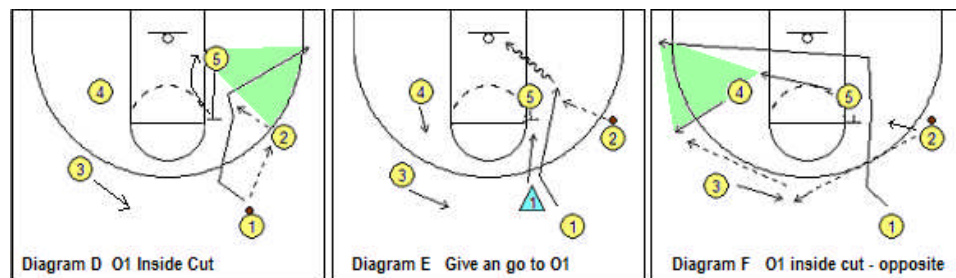
First, before discussing all of the options, we will outline the many ways, or entries, to get into the set. This can be confusing to the defense, and there is a counter for just about anything the defense throws at us. In each case, we want the ball on the wing and establish the sideline triangle.

1-2-2 set

In diagram C above, starting in a 1-2-2 set, O5 and O4 down-screen for O2 and O3, who cut out to the wings. The pass goes from O1 to the wing. O1 will cut to the ball-side corner, and the triangle is formed, with O5 in the low post. The weakside wing moves up to the top and the weakside post player moves to the weakside elbow-extended area. O2, O1 and O5 form the sideline triangle. O3 and O4 are positioned to run the "two-man game".

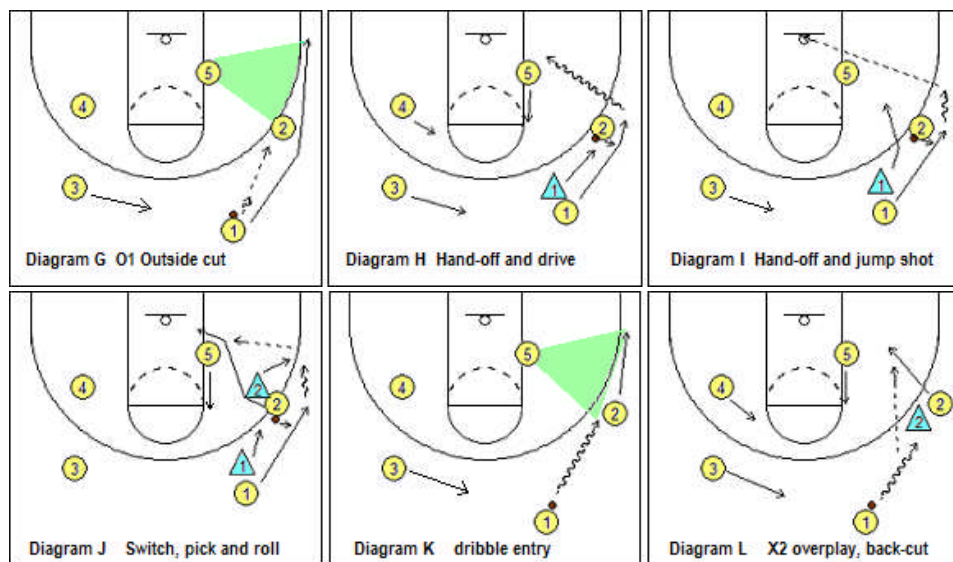
Point guard inside cut

In diagram D, O1 passes to O2 and cuts inside, off O5's screen (near the ball-side elbow). O2 has the option of passing to O1 on the give and go for a possible lay-up from O1 (diagram E). If the pass from O2 is not there, O1 can move to the ball-side corner (diagram D), while O5 drops back down to the block. Or O1 could cut to the opposite corner (diagram F). In this case, the ball is reversed to the top to O3, and then to O4 who has stepped out on the wing, while O5 cuts to the left block... and now the triangle is established on the left side. O2 and O3 would now be the weakside "two-man game", with O2 dropping inside a little near the weakside elbow.



Point guard outside cut

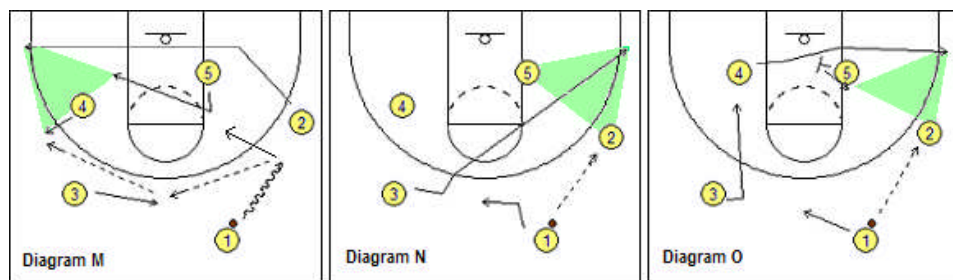
In diagram G, O1 passes to O2 and cuts outside O2 to the corner, and the triangle is set. An option here is a hand-off from O2 to O1. If the X1 defender is screened by O2, O1 can drive to the hoop (diagram H). Recognizing this, O5 slides up to the elbow for spacing and a possible pass there from O1. If the X1 defender goes under the screen (diagram I), O1 can pull up and shoot the jump shot. If the X2 and X1 defenders switch the screen (diagram J), O1 and O2 run a pick and roll. If the X2 and X1 defenders switch the screen (diagram J), O1 and O2 run a pick and roll.



Dribble entry - wing pass denied

When the pass to the wing is being denied, O1 can simply dribble to the wing, as O2 slides down to the corner (diagram K). Sometimes, with X2 overplaying the pass, O2 can back-cut for a pass from O1 (diagram L). Here again, O5 slides up to the elbow.

Diagram M shows O1 dribbling right and O2 cutting through to the opposite corner. The ball is reversed from O1 to O3 on the top, and then to O4 (who has stepped out to the wing). O5 cuts to the left block, and now the triangle established on the left side. O1 and O3 are now the "two-man game".



Weakside guard cuts to ball-side corner

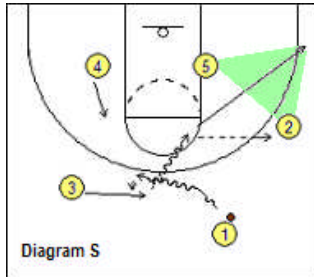
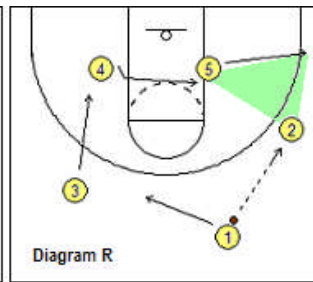
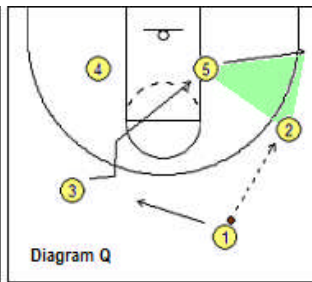
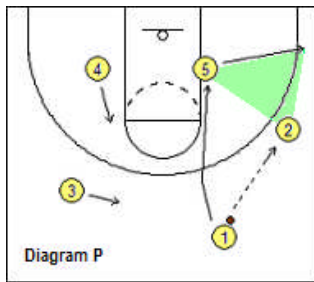
Diagram N shows O1 passing to O2, but this time O3 cuts through to the ball-side corner, while O1 replaces O3 at the top.

Weakside post cuts to ball-side corner

Diagram O again shows O1 passing to O2. O5 screens for O4 and O4 cuts to the ball-side corner. O3 drops into the weakside elbow to replace O4, and O1 replaces O3 at the top.

Any player could play the low post

Although X5 and X4 are our main post players, any player can post up on the low block. This strategy could be effective when there is a size mis-match with one of the guards, or a perimeter defender is in foul trouble... so we post up his man and try to get another foul on him/her. We simply move O5 out to the corner and let another player take the low post. Diagram P shows O1 posting up. Diagram Q has O3 in the post (O1 replaces O3 on top). In diagram R, O4 posts up, while O3 drops inside to replace O4 and O1 replaces O3.

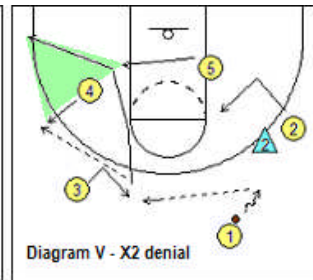
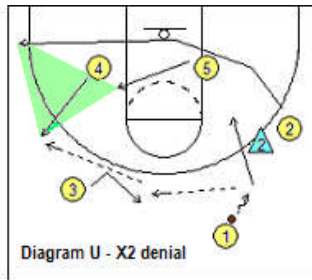
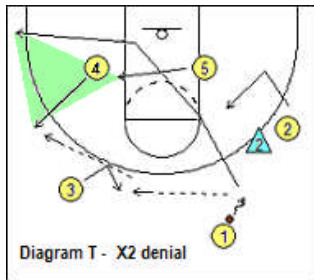


Weave-screen (dribble hand-off) entry

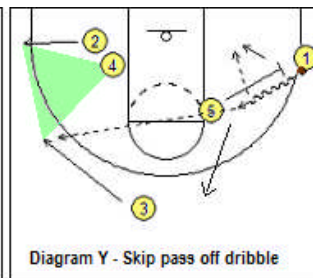
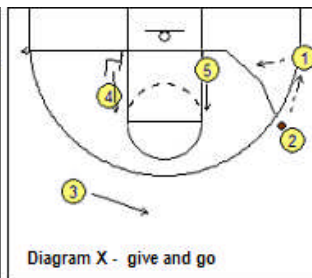
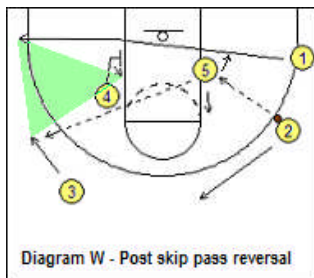
Another way to set up the offense is shown in diagram S. Here, O1 does a weave-screen (dribble hand-off) with O3. Often the X2 defender will drop inside to hedge on the dribble by O3. This allows for an easy pass to O2 on the wing, and O3 cuts through to the ball-side corner. O1 moves to the top.

Wing denial - ball reversal

Above we mentioned that if X2 denies the pass to O2, O1 could simply dribble to the wing as O2 slides to the corner. Another option (when the wing pass is denied) is to reverse the ball to the opposite side. In diagram T, O1 passes to O3 and cuts through to the opposite corner. O3 passes to O4 on the wing and O5 cuts to the left low block. O2 moves to the weakside elbow-extended area. Diagram U shows the same reversal but with O2 cutting to the opposite corner, and O1 dropping inside to the weakside elbow-extended area. Diagram V again shows the ball-reversal, but this time O3 cuts to the corner, with O2 dropping inside to the weakside elbow-extended area.



Another example of ball-reversal is a skip pass from the low post to the opposite wing (diagram W). O2 passes in to O5. O1 cuts baseline for a possible hand-off from O5. If the hand-off is not there, O1 continues through (getting a screen from O4) and moves to the opposite corner. O5 skip passes to O3 on the opposite wing and O1, O3 and O4 create the triangle. Diagrams X and Y show reversal again, beginning with O2 passing to O1 in the corner, and then making a give and go cut. O2 goes through, again receiving a screen from O4. O5 now runs a pick and roll with O1. As O1 dribbles around O5's screen into the top seam, in addition to the pick and roll options, or a jump shot from O1, there is an option for ball reversal with a kick-out pass to O3 on the left wing. The triangle again is established with O3, O2 and O4.



Sideline Triangle Options

We have already discussed above some hand-off and pick and roll options between O1 and O2 (on O1's outside cut to the corner), and a give and go option on O1's inside cut to the corner. When the ball is on the wing, the first option is always to look to pass into the post. The post player can make a strong post move (discussed below), or we can run one of these options.

Corner pass options

Look back at diagrams X and Y above. O2 passes to the corner and cuts through for a give and go pass from O1, while O5 slides up to the elbow (for spacing). If the pass is not there, O2 cuts opposite, and now O5 screens for O1, running the pick and roll.

Post-split

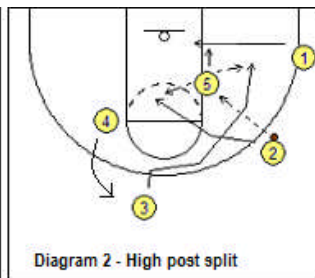
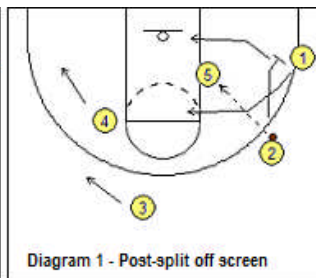
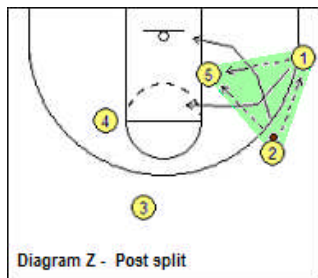
Diagram Z... either O2 or O1 passes into the post O5. O1 and O2 cut around O5 with the passer cutting first. A hand-off from O5 (or a little dump-pass) can get O1 or O2 an easy shot. If the X5 defender, in the confusion, gets more concerned about helping stop the cutters, O5 can fake a hand-off and make a strong move to the hoop.

Post-split off corner screen

Diagram 1 shows O2 screening for O1, and then splitting the post along the baseline. O1 splits O5 in the top seam.

High post-split

The high-post split features three cutters (diagram 2). O1 initially cuts baseline on the pass to O5. O2 splits O5 in the top seam into the lane, while O3 cuts inside and splits O5 on the low side. O5 can drop the pass off to any of the cutters, or make his/her own move. O4 would have to rotate up top as our safety, and for spacing for O2's cut.



Wing screens opposite

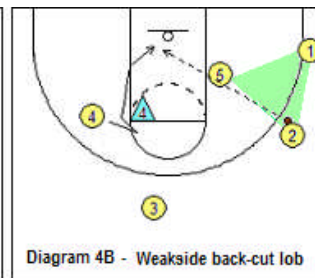
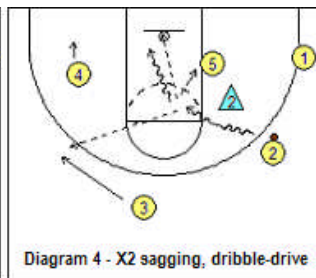
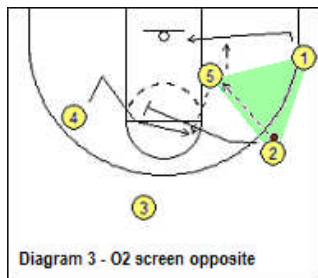
Diagram 3. After passing into O5, O2 screens opposite for O4. O4 comes hard over the screen for a possible pass from O5 and an elbow jump-shot. O1 cuts baseline. In fact, without calling anything special here, you can make this a routine screen whenever a guard cuts into the top seam and does not receive the ball... he/she then screens for the weakside post (O4).

Wing dribble-drives the top seam

Diagram 4. Any time the wing's defender (X2) has dropped inside to help prevent the pass to O5, O2 can dribble-drive the top seam into the lane for the lay-up, pull-up jump shot, dump pass to O5, or kick out pass to O3 on the opposite wing. With X2 sagging inside, O2 could also shoot the 3-point shot.

Backdoor lob to weakside post

Diagram 4B. There are times in this offense (e.g. when the pass from the wing to the top is denied) when O4 will cut to the ball-side elbow for a pass. If this is being denied, O4 can back-cut for the lob from O2

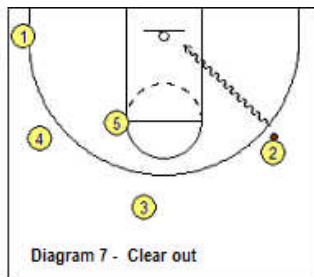
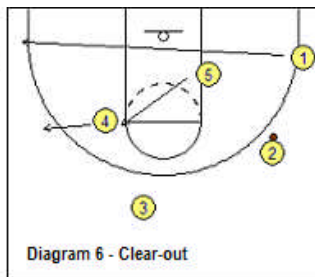
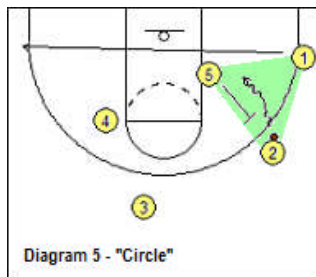


"Runner" or "Circle"

Diagram 5. The wing player can trigger O1 to clear out and run the baseline to the opposite corner by yelling something like "runner", or "circle". Now O2 and O5 play a two-man game with O5 screen and rolling for O2 (pick and roll). Other options off this strong-side two-man game are discussed below.

"Clear" - clear out for wing

Diagram 6. O2 can call something like "clear" or "C" to clear out the side, so he/she can take the X2 defender 1-on-1. O1 cuts to the opposite corner, O5 moves to the opposite elbow, while O4 moves to the opposite wing.

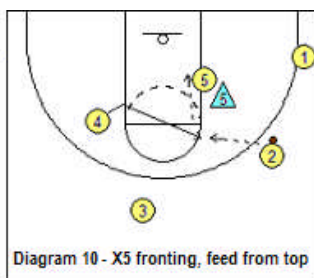
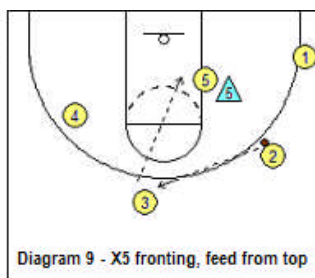
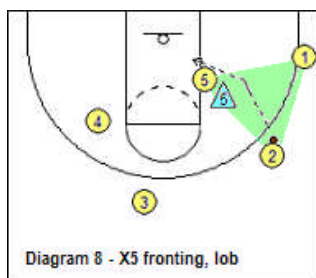


Post Offense

A strong low post offense is a big part of this offense. The pass to the low post is always the first option. Now we will discuss low post options, and reacting to the post defense.

Post being full-fronted

Diagram 8. Here the X5 defender is full-fronting the post O5. If O4 stays high on the weakside, there often is no helpside defender. O5 pins X5 outside and O2 makes a lob pass to O5. We can also feed the post from the top. Diagram 9 shows O5 sealing the X5 defender as the pass goes to the top. A quick pass from O3 to O5 is another chance for a power lay-up. Diagram 10 shows a feed from the high post O4. Again, O5 seals the defender and gets the pass inside.



Post being half-fronted from the top

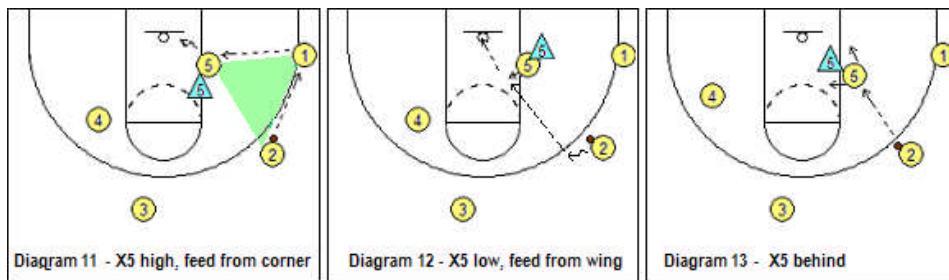
In diagram 11, the post is being half-fronted from the top. Here O5 seals X5 as the pass goes to the corner. It's usually an easy curl bounce pass from O1 to O5, and O5 makes the power baseline move.

Post being half-fronted from the baseline side

In diagram 12, the post is being half-fronted from the baseline side. O5 seals X5. If O2 takes one hard dribble toward the top, the left-handed bounce pass can then be made directly into O5. O5 makes the jump hook or baby hook into the lane.

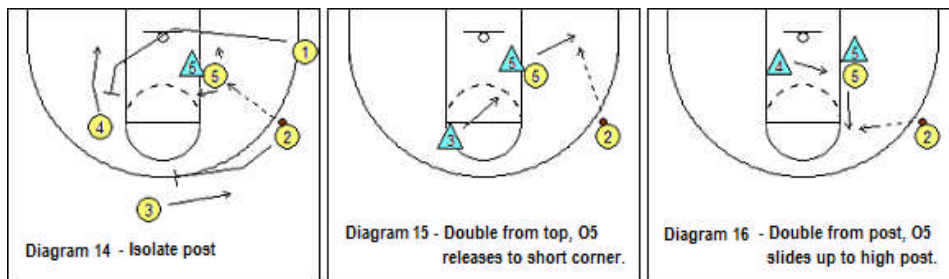
Post defender playing behind

In diagram 13, the post defender X5 is playing behind O5. O5 seals X5, and O2 has an easier pass into O5. O5 can make one of many post moves, or pivot, face the defender and shoot, or shot-fake and go to the rim.



Isolate the post

Diagram 14 shows how we can isolate the low post player and let him/her take the X5 defender 1-on-1. O2 passes into O5, and then lateral screens for O3. O1 cuts baseline and then screens for O4. This cutting and screening action occupies the other defenders, allowing O5 to go 1-on-1.

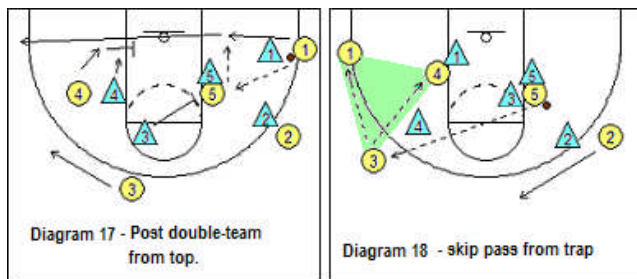


Avoiding the post double-team

If the post player is getting double-teamed a lot, there are ways to avoid the trap. If the double-team comes from the opposite wing X3 (diagram 15), O5 can move a little toward the short corner, as this is usually too far for the helpside defender to venture. If the trap comes from the opposite post (diagram 16), O5 can move up to toward the elbow, again too far away for the opposite post helpside defender.

Skip passing from the double-team

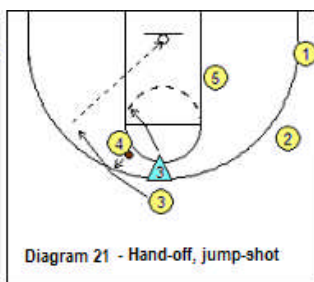
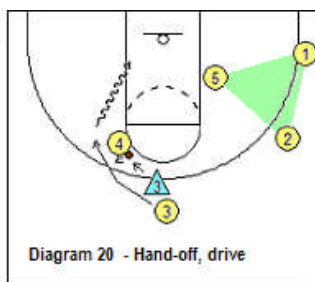
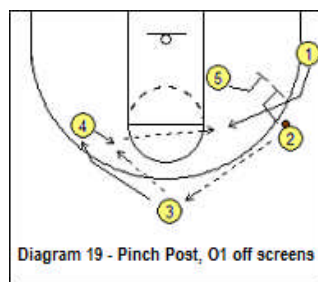
If the post player gets double-teamed (diagram 17) by the opposite wing defender X3, a skip pass to the vacated wing is usually a good option. Notice how O1 cuts to the weakside corner (getting a screen from O4), while O3 spots up on the wing. The X4 defender will have difficulty covering both O3 and O1 (diagram 18). And there will often be a mis-match in the low post with O4 being defended by X1. O3 can make the extra pass to a wide open O1 in the corner, or into the post mis-match.



Weakside Two-Man Game

The weakside "two-man game" is a really powerful weapon in the triangle offense. This is usually set up by a pass from the wing back out to the top. For example, in diagram 19, if the wing pass (O2) to the post or corner is denied, the pass should go back out on top to O3. The diagram also shows a double-screen option for O1.

The weakside options can be categorized as (1) options off the pass to the weakside post (O4), and (2) options off a ball-screen and dribble from the top (O3). The later may occur if the pass to the post O4 is being denied. If O4 cannot get open for the post pass, he/she ball-screens for O3 on the top. With all of these options, it's a matter of reading and reacting to the defense.

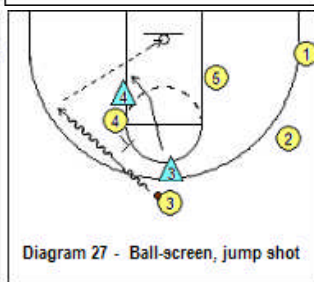
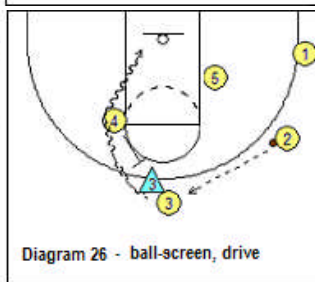
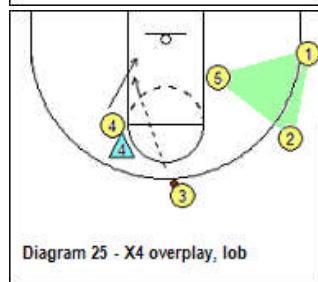
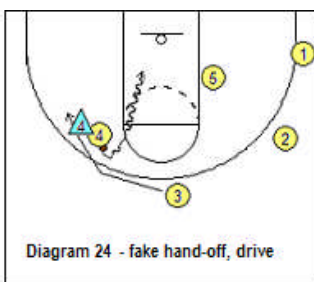
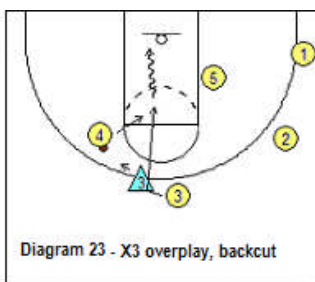
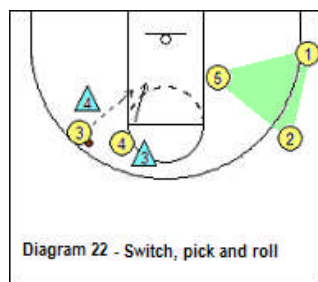


Options off the pass to the pinch post (O4)

O3 passes to O4 at the weakside elbow area, and then follows the pass and cuts around O4 for a possible hand-off.

Options off the pass to weakside post

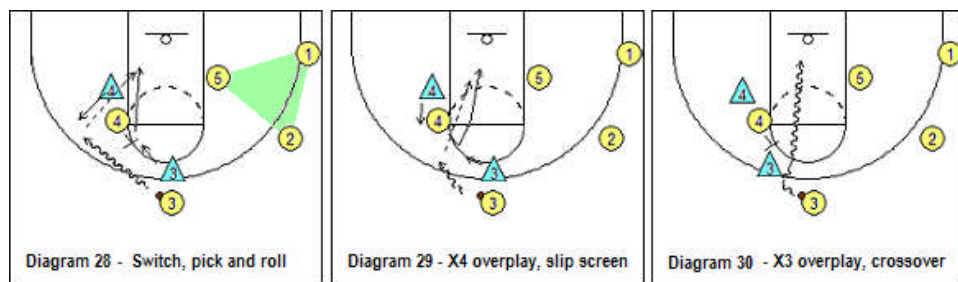
- Hand-off and drive... diagram 20. With the X3 defender trailing, O3 gets the hand-off and dribble-drives to the hoop.
- Hand-off and jump-shot... diagram 21. X3 defender goes under the screen, so O3 gets the hand-off and pulls-up for a jump shot.
- Hand-off and pick and roll... diagram 22. Defense switches on the hand-off, so O3 and O4 run a pick and roll, with a pass inside to O4. Or O4 can clear-out to either the corner or the top, and let O3 take the slower X4 defender 1-on-1.
- O3 cuts inside on X3 overplay... diagram 23. If the X3 defender overplays and denies O3's hand-off cut, O3 just back-cuts right down the lane for the pass and lay-up.
- Fake hand-off and drive (O4)... diagram 24. O4 fakes the hand-off to O3 and dribble-drives to the hoop. This is especially effective if O4 senses the X4 defender is cheating over (jump-switching) on the possible the hand-off.
- Lob to O4 on pass denial... diagram 25. X4 denies the pass to O4. Since there is often no helpside defender, O3 can lob pass to O4 back-cutting to the hoop.



If the pass to the post O4 is denied, O4 ball-screens for O3.

Options off the ball-screen and dribble from the top

- Ball-screen and dribble-drive... diagram 26. O3 dribbles around the screen to the hoop.
- Ball-screen and jump-shot... diagram 27. The X3 defender goes under the screen, so O3 comes off the screen with a pull-up jump shot.
- Ball-screen and pick and roll... diagram 28. Defense switches the screen, so O3 and O4 run a pick and roll, with a pass inside to O4. Or O4 can clear-out to either the corner or the top, and let O3 take the slower X4 defender 1-on-1.
- Post O4 slips the screen on X4 overplay... diagram 29. O4 goes to set the screen for O3. O4 senses the X4 defender is cheating over the screen (jump-switching), and "slips" the screen with a back-cut, for the pass from O3.
- O3 crossover dribble on X3 overplay... diagram 30. If the X3 defender overplays O3, denying the path around the screen, O3 just crossover dribbles right down the lane for the lay-up.
- Lob to O4 on pass denial... diagram 25 (above). X4 denies the pass to O4. Since there is often no helpside defender, O3 can lob pass to O4 back-cutting to the hoop.

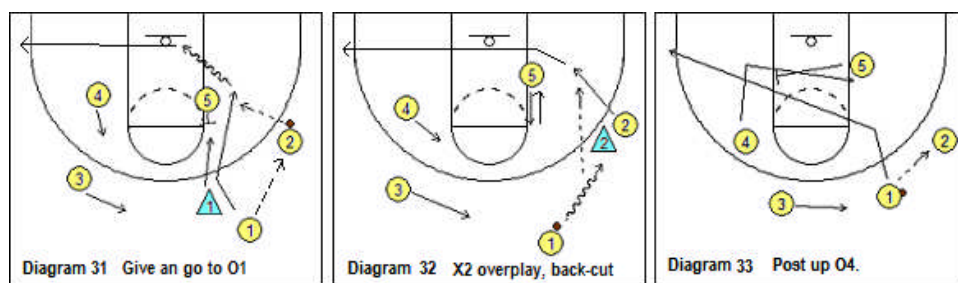


Strong-side two-man game

We can also run a two-man game on the strong-side (triangle side). There are several ways to set up the ball-side two-man game. Diagram 31 reviews how O1 passes to the wing O2 and cuts through for a possible give and go play. If O1 doesn't get the ball, he/she can cut out to the opposite corner, leaving a two-man option with the wing O2 and O5 in the low post.

Diagram 32 reviews the dribble to the wing, with X2 denying the wing pass. Our wing player O2 back-cuts for a possible pass and layup. If O2 does not get the pass, he/she cuts to the opposite corner, again leaving a two-man setup for O1 and O5.

Diagram 33 shows how we can get O4 in the post by having O5 screen for O4. This is a good option if O5 can't get open for the pass... instead he/she screens away for O4. O1 passes to the wing O2 and cuts to the opposite corner. Now we have the two-man set with O2 and O4.

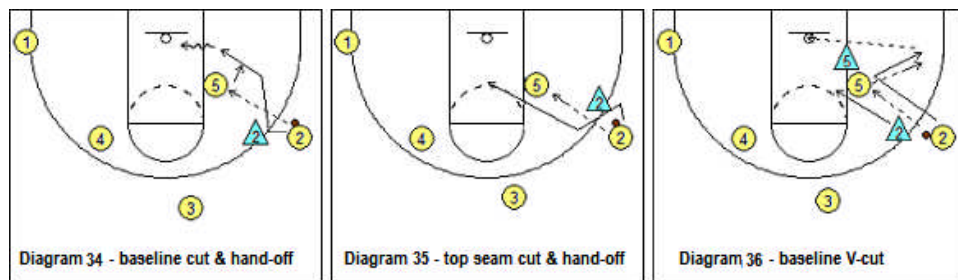


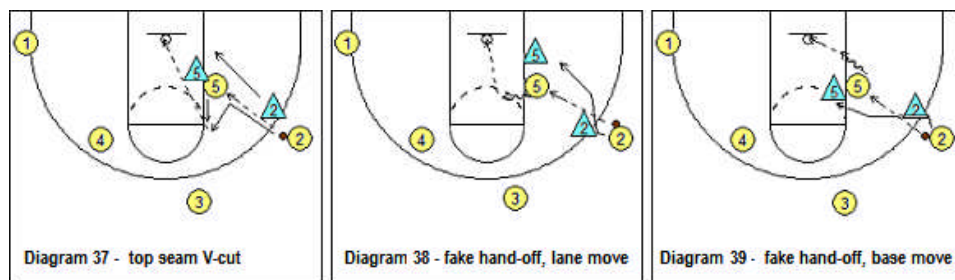
Ball-side two-man options

Here are several options the two players can run, again reading and reacting to the defense.

Wing player options after pass into the post

- Baseline cut and hand-off... diagram 34. With the X2 defender playing high (forcing baseline), O2 cuts around the baseline side of O5 for a possible hand-off and layup.
- Top seam cut and hand-off... diagram 35. X2 defender is overplaying the baseline cut. O2 cuts into the top seam around O5 for a possible jump shot or layup.
- Baseline V-cut and jump shot... diagram 36. The X2 defender slides over the screen (or switches with X5). O2 v-cuts to the short corner for the pass and a jump-shot. If the defense switches the screen, O2 might be able to make the quick pass back into O5 who has a mis-match with the smaller X2 defender.
- Top seam V-cut and jump shot... diagram 37. If the X2 defender goes under the screen, O2 v-cuts to the elbow-free throw line area for the pass and jump shot.





Post player options

- Fake hand-off and move to the lane... diagram 38. If O2 cuts baseline, and the X5 defender is hedging that way, O5 can fake the hand-off and make a quick move to the lane.
- Fake hand-off and baseline move... diagram 39. O2 cuts into the top seam. X5 is cheating toward the top to stop O2. O5 fakes the hand-off and makes the power baseline drop-step move.
- 1-on-1 post moves... If the hand-off or pass to the wing O2 is not there, O2 might cut through to the opposite side (and screen for the weakside post (O4). O4 would cut to the ball-side elbow for a possible jump shot. This leaves O5 with a 1-on-1 situation with the X5 defender.
- Post ball-screens for wing... If X5 is denying the pass into the post O5, O5 can set a ball-screen for the wing player O2, and run a pick and roll play.

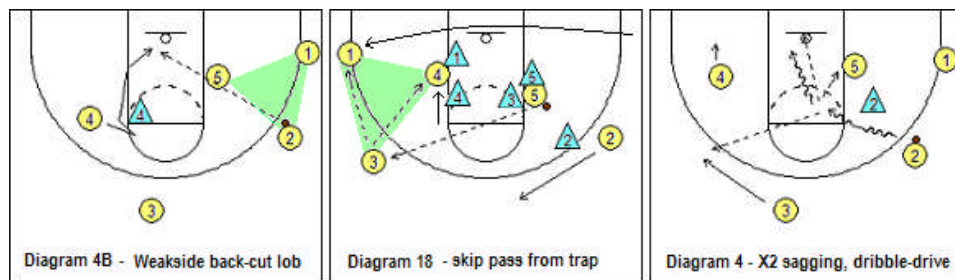
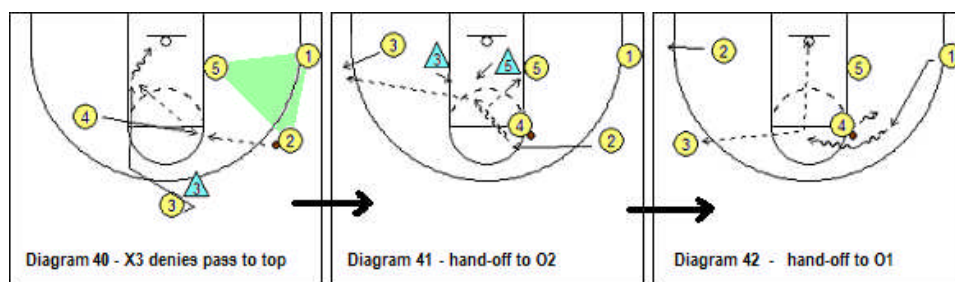
Reading and reacting to the defense

We have already discussed a number points that have to do with reading and reacting to the defense... reading the post defense, reading wing pass denial, the wing reading and reacting to his defender sagging in the post, and reading the weakside and strong-side "two-man" options. Here we'll discuss a few more.

Diagram 40. The ball is on the wing (O2), the low post is being denied, and the X3 defender is denying the pass to the top. An important "read" for the weakside post O4 is to recognize when the pass to the top is being denied. When this happens, O4 cuts to the ball-side free-throw line area to receive the pass from the wing (O2). O3 reads X3's defensive overplay and back-cuts around O4 for a possible pass and lay-up (1st option).

Diagram 41. If the pass to O3 is not there, O2 cuts around O4 for a possible hand-off, with all the hand-off options discussed above under weakside options (2nd option). O2 may have a layup, a pull-up jump shot, a dump-pass to O5, or a kick-out pass to O3.

Diagram 42. If O4 does not hand-off to O2, O1 cuts around O4 for another possible hand-off option (3rd option). Or O4 may just keep the ball and take an elbow jump shot (4th option). O1 could have a jump shot or a kick-out to O3. Looking at diagram 33, you can see that if the pass goes to O3 on the opposite wing, it's easy to establish a new sideline triangle on the left side, with O5 cutting over to the left low block. O4 would be the weakside post, and O1 would pop out on top.



We'll re-visit the last three diagrams from above's discussion. Diagram 4B shows the X4 defending, bumping and denying the weakside post O4's cut to the ball-side elbow. O4 reads this and back-cuts for a possible lob pass from O2.

Diagram 18 shows O5 caught in a double-team, with the double coming from the opposite wing defender X3. The skip pass to the opposite wing O3 is the counter. O1 cuts baseline, receives a screen from O4 and goes to the opposite corner. If the X1 and X4 defenders switch that baseline screen, O4 can post up the smaller X1 on the block. Additionally, the extra pass from O3 to O1 in the corner often results in a wide-open corner shot.

Diagram 4 again shows the wing player O2 with the ball reading the X2 defender sagging inside to deny the post. O2 attacks the top seam with the dribble, or could shoot the 3-point shot.

In summary, the Triangle Offense features good spacing, cutting, passing, post play, and a basic set with five spots that must be filled. From there, it's basically learning to read and react to the defense and take what the defense gives you.

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