



by Hal Wissel

MAN-TO-MAN OFFENSE: PASSING GAME

Hal Wissel coached Springfield College, North Carolina-Charlotte, Florida Southern, Fordham, Lafayette and Trenton State. He was also assistant coach of Atlanta, Milwaukee, New Jersey, and Memphis of the NBA. He founded the Basketball World, an agency who organizes camps and clinics, and is author of two books and two new DVDs, "Basketball Shooting: Confidence, Rhythm and Mechanics", and "Basketball Shooting: Off the Pass, Off the Dribble and In the Post" (www.basketballworld.com).

The passing game, or motion offense, is one of the most popular man-to-man offenses in basketball. In the passing game players are guided more by principles than by a strict set of specific assigned responsibilities. Every player should learn to execute the passing game because it teaches team play and is an offense used by many teams.

The passing game can be started from a variety of offensive formations, or sets, including the 3-2, 2-3, 1-3-1, 2-1-2, and 1-4. The 3-2 open set, also called the spread formation, is the most basic formation for learning to play team offense. It involves three perimeter players and two baseline players. The point position is above the top of the circle. The wing positions (players 2 and 3) are at the imaginary foul line extended on each side. The baseline positions (players 4 and 5) are at the midpoint between the corner and the basket on each side.

The 3-2 open set encourages versatility rather than forcing players into restricted roles as center, power forward, small forward, shooting guard, or point guard. It gives each

player the opportunity to handle the ball, cut, screen, and move outside and inside. The 3-2 set provides initial structure and spacing that allow players to execute basic two- and three-person plays and plays involving all five players, such as a five-player weave or five-player five-and-go offense.

When executing the passing game, keep in mind these basic principles of good teamwork.

TALK

Communication is key to all aspects of team offense. The passing game is not a set play offense, and players are not assigned a specific set of responsibilities. Therefore, continual communication between players becomes especially important when executing the passing game.

SEE THE RIM

By having the rim in view, you see the entire court. When you have the ball, keep the rim in view and look for teammates cutting to the basket, posting up, and cutting off screens. When you do not have the ball, you should have the rim and the player with the ball in view.

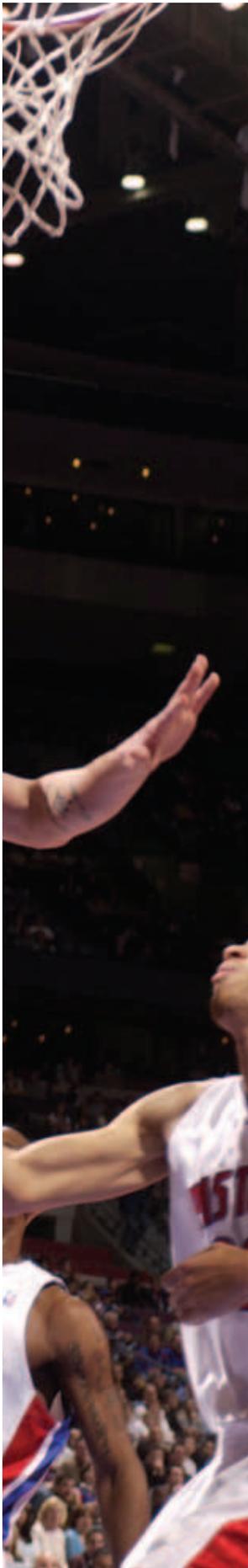
MAINTAIN SPACING AND COURT BALANCE

Start in an open formation with players spread 15 to 20 feet (from m. 4.5 to m. 6) apart. Space yourself high at the top, wide on the wing, and at the midpoint between the basket and corner on the baseline.

BACKDOOR CUT WHEN OVERPLAYED

When overplayed by a defender, who denies you the pass, make a backdoor cut all the way to the basket. When backdoor cuts are used frequently, the passing game





becomes a great offense for beating pressure defenses.

FLASH BETWEEN THE PASSER AND OVERPLAYED RECEIVER

When a defender denies your teammate the pass and you are the next player away from the receiver, automatically flash to an open area between the passer and the overplayed receiver. Flashing to the ball helps relieve defensive pressure on your teammates by giving the passer another outlet. A flash can not only prevent a possible turnover, but also can create a scoring opportunity if the overplayed receiver combines it with a well-timed backdoor cut.

KEEP THE MIDDLE OPEN

When you cut to the basket and do not receive the pass, you should continue on through and fill an open spot on the side of the court with fewer players. This will keep the middle open and the floor balanced. Do not stay in the post area for more than one count.

MOVE TO A VACATED SPOT QUICKLY

When you are the next player away from a cutting player, quickly move to the vacated spot. It is especially important to replace a player who has cut from the point or top position. To replace the player at the point, cut high above the three-point line, creating a better passing angle to receive a swing pass from a wing and a better angle to reverse the ball to the weak side. This will also force the defense to cover more of the court, thus providing more space for cutting, driving, and posting up.

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS AT THE WING POSITION

When you are on the wing, your options are to catch and shoot within your rhythm and range or to continue your cut out wide.

When you catch the ball outside of your range, look to pass inside to a cutter or player posting up. On the wing, hold the ball for a count or two to give cutters and post-up players time to get open. If you are unable to pass to an open teammate cutting or posting up, look to penetrate and pass (draw-and-kick) or try to balance the court by quickly dribbling to the point. Look to pass to a baseline player only if that teammate is open for a catch-and-shoot jump shot

within rhythm and range or can make an easy pass to a player cutting inside or posting up. You can move the ball more quickly if you swing it from wing to point to wing and keep it off the baseline.

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS AT THE POINT POSITION

When you are at the point position, your options, in order, are to reverse the ball quickly to the weak side, look inside for a pass to a post-up player, penetrate and pass (draw-and-kick), or fake a pass to the weak side and make a quick snapback pass to the wing on the side from which you received the pass.

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS AT THE BASELINE POSITION

When you are at a baseline position, look to set up your defender for a cut off a down screen or set a back pick for a wing player. On the baseline, you should be especially alert to flash to the ball when a wing is denied the pass. Look to receive a pass on the baseline only when you are in an open catch-and-shoot position within your rhythm and range or can make an easy pass to a player cutting inside or posting up. The ball can be moved more quickly if it is kept off the baseline.

KNOW YOUR OPTIONS AS A POST-UP PLAYER

When you receive the ball in the low post, read the defense and look to score before passing out to a perimeter player. When you do not receive a pass in the low post, look to set a back pick for a perimeter player. After setting the pick, pop out to receive a pass on the perimeter for a possible jump shot within your rhythm and range.

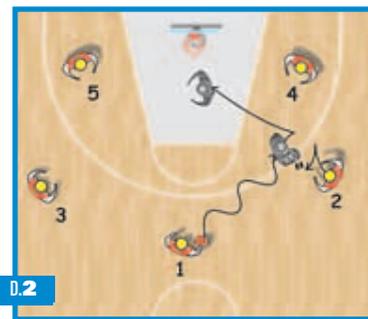
MAINTAIN REBOUNDING AND DEFENSIVE BALANCE

On a shot inside, players should rebound, while the point guard and another outside player should get back for defensive balance. When you take a shot outside of the lane area, you should get back for defensive balance. Any time the player at the point drives to the basket, players at the wings should get back for defensive balance.

A member of your team, usually the point guard, signals the start of the



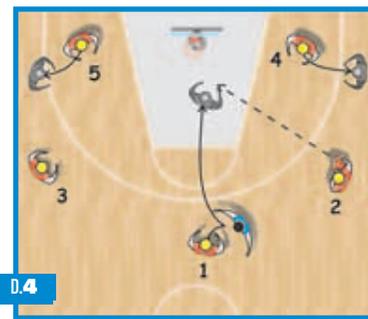
D.1



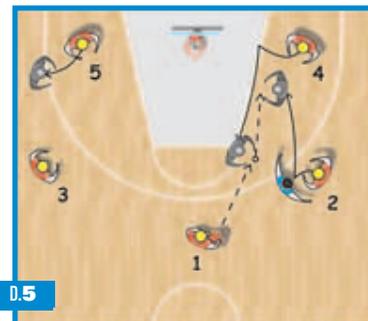
D.2



D.3



D.4



D.5

passing game with a simple verbal call such as "Passing game" or "Motion" or with a hand signal such as circling one finger upward. The best way to start is to pass the ball to the wing and then work together, using basic passing game actions. After receiving a pass on the wing, you should be a triple threat to pass, shoot, or drive to the basket. On a drive, look to score or to penetrate and pass (draw-and-kick) inside or outside to an open teammate.

When the ball is at the point, the closest wing player should initiate movement by cutting through to create an open area for a baseline player, who will cut to the wing for a pass from the point (diagr. 1). When you are at the point and cannot pass to the wing, initiate movement by dribbling at the wing and using a dribble screen or weave action (diagr. 2).

Some of the basic actions used in the passing game are the backdoor cut, flash, give-and-go, dribble screen or weave, down screen, back pick, elbow curl, cross screen, pick-and-roll, and draw-and-kick.

BACKDOOR CUT

You should automatically use a backdoor cut any time you are overplayed by a defender and prevented from receiving a pass. You should also use a backdoor cut when your defender's head is turned away from you, causing a momentary loss of visual contact. Use a designated key word such as "Eyeball" to signal the passer that you are going backdoor. The designated word indicates that you will continue your backdoor cut to the basket once you start it. When you are on the wing, set up your defender by taking a step above the foul line extended (diagr. 3), or when you are at the point, by taking a step above the free throw circle (diagr. 4). After receiving the pass, look to shoot, drive to the basket for a lay-up, or penetrate and pass (draw-and-kick).

FLASH

Any time you see a teammate being denied the pass and you are the next player away, you should automatically flash to an open area

between the passer and overplayed receiver. Flashing to the ball relieves defensive pressure on your teammates by giving the passer another outlet. A flash can not only prevent a possible turnover, but combined with a well-timed backdoor cut by the overplayed receiver, can also create a scoring opportunity. Signal your flash cut with the key word "Flash". As you receive the pass, look to pass to your overplayed teammate cutting backdoor to the basket. If your teammate is covered on the backdoor cut, front turn into a triple-threat position for a possible shot, drive to the basket, or pass. Flash high when your teammate is prevented from receiving a pass on the perimeter (diagr. 5). You can also flash to the high post when your teammate is being fronted in the low post (diagr. 6), and you can flash to the low post if your teammate is being denied at the high post (diagr. 7).

GIVE-AND-GO

The give-and-go (diagr. 8) is the most basic play in basketball. Give (pass) the ball to your teammate and go (cut) to the basket, looking to receive a return pass for a lay-up. Read and set up your defender with a well-timed fake before the cut. Fake by taking a step or two away from the ball (as if you are not involved in the play). Then, as your defender moves with you, change direction sharply and use a front cut to the basket. Another way to fake is by taking a step or two toward the ball as if you are going to set a screen for or take a handoff from the player with the ball. As your defender moves with you, change direction sharply and make a backdoor cut behind. Diagram 8 and 9 show a five player give-and-go offensive pattern.

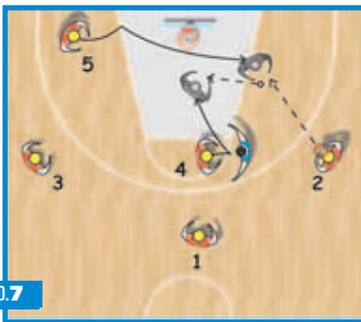
DRIBBLE SCREEN OR WEAVE

A dribble screen is set by dribbling toward a teammate and screening the defender while handing off the ball to a teammate. On a dribble screen, the defensive reaction usually will be for the screener's defender to give defensive help or switch.

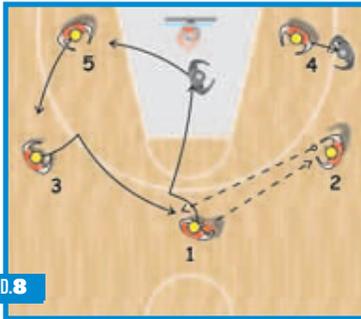
Before receiving the handoff, read the defensive positioning. When



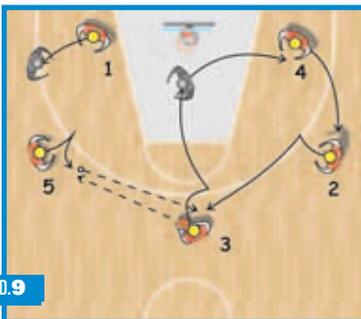
D.6



D.7



D.8



D.9

your defender attempts to prevent the handoff by getting in your path, make a backdoor cut to the basket. After you receive a handoff on a dribble screen, read the defense. If the defenders do not switch and your defender is slow getting over the screen, turn the corner and drive to the basket. If your defender slides behind the screen, look to take the outside shot, go at least two dribbles past the screen and pass back to the screener, either rolling to the basket or popping out.

One way to defend the dribble screen is for the dribble screener's





defender to jump switch into the path of the receiver with the intent of drawing a charge or changing the direction of the player receiving the ball. To combat the jump switch after the handoff, make a short 5- to 10-foot (from m. 1,5 to m. 3) cut to an open area and look for a quick return pass. If you anticipate a jump switch, fake the handoff and drive to the basket.

Another way to defense may try to overcome the dribble screen is for both defenders to trap the player receiving the ball on the handoff. If the defenders trap you, retreat dribble to stretch the defense and then pass to your teammate, making a short 5- to 10-foot (from m. 1,5 to m. 3) cut to an open area.

The defense will then be outnumbered, and the player with the ball will be able to drive or pass to an open teammate for a shot.

The dribble screen is used to execute a weave (diagr. 10 and 11), a basic play in basketball. A weave involves at least three players who set dribble screen for each other. It starts with a dribble screen and handoff to your teammate. After receiving the handoff, shoot from behind the screen, drive to the basket, or continue the weave by dribbling toward another teammate for another dribble screen and handoff. The weave continues until you or a teammate can take advantage of an opening for a shot or drive to the basket.

DOWN SCREEN

A screen is set by a player screening down for a teammate is called a down screen. By setting a down screen for a teammate, you create a scoring opportunity. Your teammate can cut off your down screen to get open to receive a pass for a shot or drive. If your defender switches to your cutting teammate, you will be on the ball side of the defender you screened, momentarily open. Taking a few steps toward the basket before setting the screen enables you to get a better angle on the defender. You want the defender to go under the pick. As you set the down screen, communicate with your teammate by using a designated key word such as "Down".

Use one of the four basic options for cutting off a screen, depending on

how it is defended: pop-out, curl, backdoor cut, and fade. Be patient. Wait until the screen is set to prevent an illegal moving block, and read how the defense is playing it. Before using the screen, slowly set up your move off it. Set a good angle for cutting off the screen by first moving slowly in the direction your defender plays you and then cutting off the screen in the opposite direction. Cut far enough away from the screen so that one defender cannot guard both you and the screener. This creates space for a pass to the screener if there is a defensive switch.

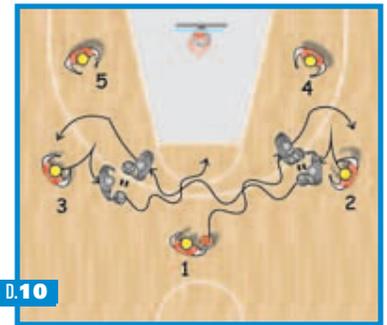
When you cut off a screen correctly, the screener's defender usually will give defensive help or switch. If you cut to the outside, the screener will be free to roll in toward the basket and receive a pass for an inside shot. If you cut to the basket, the screener becomes free to pop out and receive a pass for an outside shot (diagr. 12).

BACK PICK

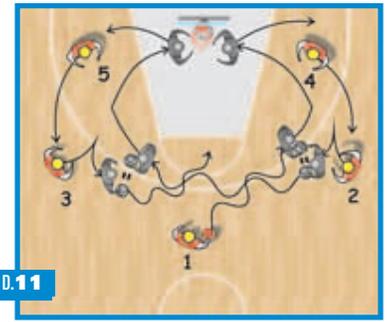
When you screen for a teammate by setting a pick behind the teammate's defender, it is called a back pick or up screen (diagr. 13). By setting a back pick for a teammate, you create the opportunity for either the teammate or you to score. Your teammate can cut off your back pick to get open to receive a pass for a lay-up or drive. If your defender switches to the cutter, you will be on the ball side of your teammate's defender, free to pop out to the basket to receive a pass for a jump shot. Take a few steps toward the basket to get a better angle on the defender you will back pick, communicating to your teammate by shouting a designated key word such as "Up".

Make sure you set a legal screen. With a back pick, you are not allowed to be closer than a normal step from a stationary opponent if that opponent is unaware of your screen. You also may not be so close that a moving opponent cannot avoid contact without changing direction or stopping. Your opponent's speed determines what your screening position may be. This position will vary and might be one to two normal steps away.

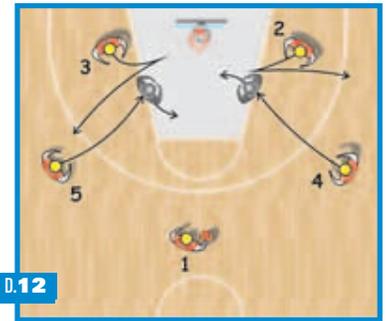
As with the down screen, wait until the back pick is set before cutting



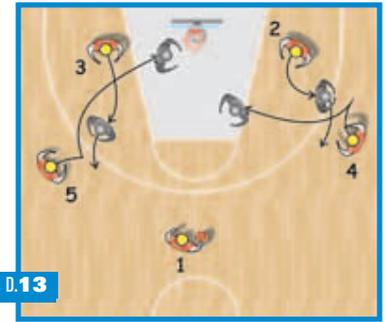
D.10



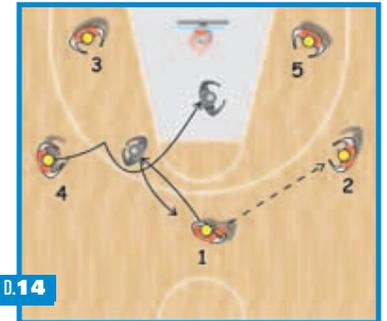
D.11



D.12



D.13



D.14

off it to prevent an illegal screen and to read the defense. Slowly set up your move off the screen for a good angle before you cut hard off it in the opposite direction. If you cut to be basket with a front cut or backdoor cut, the screener will be free to pop out and receive a pass for an outside shot, the screener should cut to the basket. The four basic options for cutting off a back pick, depending on how it is defended, are the front cut, backdoor cut, pop-out, and fade.

ELBOW CURL

When you set a down screen for a teammate positioned at the elbow, your teammate should look to curl off your down screen. On an elbow curl (diagr. 14), your defender usually will give defensive help or switch. This momentarily frees you to pop out and receive a pass for a jump shot. The elbow curl is best used when a smaller player sets a down screen at the elbow for a bigger player. The bigger player can curl to the basket and the smaller player can pop out for a catch-and-shoot jump shot. To set the screen for an elbow curl, again take a few steps toward the basket to get a better angle on the defender. Signal to your teammate to curl off your down screen by shouting the word "curl".

CROSS SCREEN

A cross screen (diagr. 15 and 16) is set by starting on one block and screening across the lane for a teammate at the opposite block. On a cross screen, the screener's defender usually reacts by giving defensive help or switching. When you cut off a cross screen, you should read the defensive positioning and cut either over or under the screen. When you set a cross screen and your teammate cuts low to the block by cutting over or under the cross screen, you should pop out high to the elbow area and receive a pass for an outside shot. If your teammate flashes high to the elbow to receive a pass for an outside shot, you should roll back to the ball-side block.

PICK-AND-ROLL

The pick-and-roll (diagr. 17), another basic basketball play, gets its name from the action. You set a pick (screen) for your teammate, who dribbles past it for an outside shot or drive. If your defender switches to your teammate, you will momentarily be inside the defender you screened and free to roll toward the basket, looking to receive a return pass from the dribbler for a lay-up. Four options with the pick-and-roll, depending on how it is defended, are pick-and-roll, pick-and-pop, slip (early

release), and stretch-the trap. Diagram 17 shows the basic option when defenders switch.

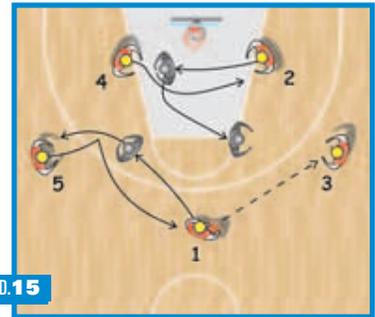
DRAW-AND-KICK

When you penetrate past a defender and a teammate's defender leaves to give defensive help on you, an open passing lane to your teammate is created.

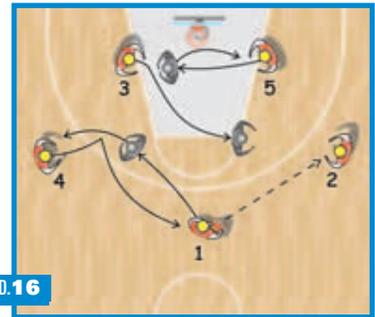
This action of penetrating and passing is called "draw-and-kick".

Always be alert for an opportunity to drive past a defender to score or create an open shot for a teammate whose defender is drawn to you. Also look for an opening or gap between two defenders to penetrate with one or two dribbles and draw the defenders to you.

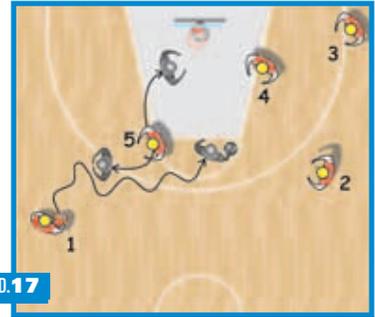
Effective use of the draw-and-kick depends on judging well when and where to penetrate. But it also depends on players without the ball moving to open spots. Because the passing game depends primarily on moving the ball, over-dribbling becomes counterproductive. The draw-and-kick is best used from the wing after a swing of the ball from ball side to weak side. Penetrating options include driving to the basket, shooting an in-between runner (pull-up jump shot), penetrating and passing inside (diagr. 18), and penetrating and passing outside (diagr. 19).



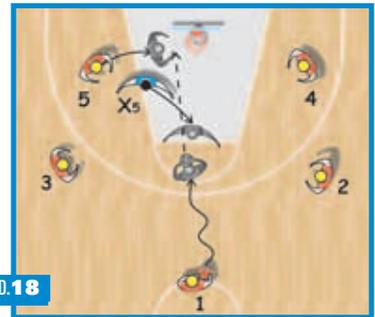
D.15



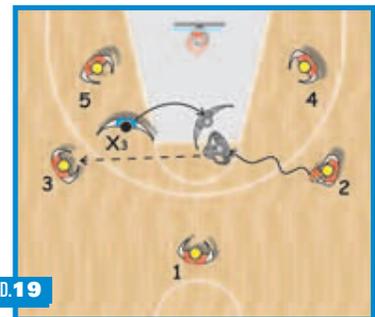
D.16



D.17



D.18



D.19