Dirk Bauermann, a former assistant coach at Fresno State University (U.S.), was the head coach of Bayer Leverkusen, where he guided his teams to six German titles and three German Cups. He also coached the German National team from 1994 to 1998. In addition, Bauermann also coached Sunair Ostende (Belgium) and Apollon Patras (Greece). He presently is the head coach of Bamberg (Germany) and the German Men’s National team.

The following article describes some of the basic offensive concepts that I have used against man-to-man defenses in the last couple of years. Both the club team that I am currently coaching, and the German National team play according to these concepts.

As coaches, we must constantly adjust our offensive strategies to the players at hand. We also have to constantly incorporate new ideas into our philosophy. Nonetheless, we all have certain beliefs and convictions that create the very substance of our coaching philosophy. I will outline some of my basic offensive tactics, principles, and concepts.

1. CREATE OFFENSE WITH DEFENSE
I have always believed that an aggressive, physical man-to-man defense is the most important building block of a team’s success. Ideally, we would like to generate at least one-third of our points from our defense.

2. BALANCED SCORING
Currently, where statistics have become a major selling point for agents, every player wants good statistics to back up his efforts. If the system provides scoring opportunities for everybody, the player will have much greater motivation to defend, rebound, and do the dirty work. Also, in a balanced attack with a lot of weapons, defensive preparation is much more difficult because one cannot concentrate on stopping the two star players. Am I a friend of equal opportunity offense? No.

Roles have to be clearly defined and not everybody gets the same amount of shots. I would much rather have six players score in double figures than two score over thirty. Why? Because we will be a better offensive team that way.

3. PREPAREDNESS
Bobby Knight once said that it is not just the will to win,
but, also, the will to prepare to win that makes a team successful. He said it more in the context of game preparation, but there is no doubt in my mind that we must prepare our teams for every conceivable eventuality and situation. I want them prepared for anything that our opponent might throw at us. I also want them to know precisely what to do at critical points in the game (e.g., end of quarter situations, special situations, and end of game situations). That is why we work on these types of situations for at least five minutes at the end of every practice. This kind of preparedness will help you win becau-
se your players know what to do and it will develop the kind of confidence that you need to win your close games.

4. GAME TEMPO
I’ve always felt that a nice balance of transition and half-court basketball is most conducive to winning. Players need to able to get out in the open court and enjoy the freedom and creativity that the running game provides. Also, the transition game enables you to score easy baskets, which is the main objective of offensive basketball in the first place. On the other hand, good teams will minimize your fast break opportunities with good shot selection, intelligent decision making, good defensive balance, and great transition defense. Thus, a team’s ability to function in the half-court game, to take care of the basketball, to properly execute its plays under pressure, and to make smart decisions with the basketball defines its degree of success to a great extent, especially in the play-offs.

5. OFFENSIVE STRUCTURE
a. After a defensive rebound, we try to score within the first six seconds of the shot clock. We want the ball in our point guard’s hands as quickly as possible. If another player comes up with a defensive rebound and he has the ability to push the ball up the court, we encourage him to do so as a way to eliminate the outlet pass. We want the ball in the middle of the floor and we want them to pitch the ball ahead to open receivers. We want our wingmen to sprint, rather than run, and we want them to slow down just before they approach the scoring area. In my estimation, it is vital that the players look for and find open teammates. If they do not, wings and big men will stop running. We want our non-rebounding big man to run right at the rim and we send our rebounding big man right to the weak-side elbow area (diagr. 1). If the defense is still scrambling to get back, we try to score quickly out of this box alignment with quick pick-rolls, post-ups, or skips (diagr. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). All these are simple yet effective ways of creating 2-on-2 situations out of transition. If the defense has gotten back on us and there is no more conceivable advantage, we get the ball to our point guard, change the rhythm, and run a set play.

b. After a steal, we obviously try to score quickly. We only encourage our players not to be in a hurry and make good decisions with the basketball.

c. After a made field goal by our opponent, we want one of our big men to inbound the ball as quickly as possible to our point guard. If we can surprise and score quickly, great. If not, we will run into a pre-set offensive alignment that looks like a diamond and then run different options out of that particular set, depending on the point guard’s call.

6. OFFENSIVE CONCEPTS
These are basic guidelines for our players that give them an idea of how we want the game to be played.
a. The main objective of offensive basketball is to create a shot for a teammate, not for yourself.
b. Play off the pass rather than the dribble.
c. Play with a purpose.
d. Get the ball inside on a consistent basis - play inside-out.
e. Do not be content shooting jump shots - attack the rim-get fouled, score on the free throw line.
f. Play within yourself - KISS (Keep-It-Simple-Stupid).
g. Spacing and balance
h. Play with poise and savvy at all times-don’t be in a hurry.
i. Have faith in each other-share the ball and make the extra pass.

7. OFFENSIVE AUTOMATICS
As I have mentioned earlier, we run various plays. Most of them are continuity plays, where we basically go from one option to the next. The players know their looks and options. We usually try to reverse the basketball once before we actually look to score. We try to get the ball inside first, then settle for a jump shot, or else go to a pick-roll of some sort. But regardless of what plays one runs, the same situations occur. With what we call “automatics” we try to give our players some basic rules as to how to react and what to expect from their teammates in these types of situations. Here are some examples of our automatics:
a. Baseline drive - baseline drift (diagr.7)
When a player drives baseline, the wing player on the weak side of the floor must move/drift to the corner in order to get open for a shot.
b. Overplay on wing:
- open post situation: backdoor (diagr. 8)
- post down low: pinch post action (diagr. 9).
c. Wing drives baseline - big man pulls out to elbow (diagr. 10).
d. Wing drives middle - post drifts to soft spot (diagr. 11).
e. Pick-and-roll with 5, 4 up to junction (diagr. 12).
f. Pick-and-pop with 4, 5 ducks in and attacks dotted line (diagr. 13).
g. Post feed: Passer runs elbow or baseline cut, others replace (diagr. 14) or screens and dives (diagr. 15) depending on what the defense does.
We also have rules against post and pick-roll traps, but unfortunately can’t cover them in detail in this short article.

8. EARLY OFFENSE
As I have mentioned earlier, we run into a pre-set play after made baskets by our opponent. Our point guard pushes the ball up the right sideline and each player runs to a pre-designed starting spot on the floor (diagr. 16).
As our point guard approaches mid-court, he calls a particular play that we run out of this diamond set. A specific play is indicated by the numbers 1 through 5.
Now I will outline our 5 and 3 play to give an example of the type of ball- and player-movement we like.

The 5-play (diagr. 17, 18, and 19) is designed to get the ball inside to our center.
Note that we always try to reverse the basketball once before we look to score.
Not every option and counter will be shown in detail.
The 3-play (diagr. 20, 21, 22, and 23) is a version of the shuffle play run by many teams. In this particular play, we try to get a shot for our small forward by playing him inside-outside.

9. SET PLAYS
Most of our set plays are continuity plays.
We rarely run isolation plays or quick hitters, even though we realize that they are sometimes necessary in order to get a good quick shot, such as when it takes you too long to get into your offense or if you have to go quick because you’re behind late in the game.
Sometimes you also might want to foul a certain player out of the game and run an isolation play against him. Again, we strongly believe in the value of patience and quick, precise ball- and player-movement and our play selection reflects this concept. As an example (diagr.24, 25, 26, and 27), here are plays that show our ‘shorts’ play.