

THE SHUFFLE OFFENSE



by Lindsay Gaze

After an excellent career as a professional player (he played at three edition of the Olympic Games and at two FIBA World Championships in the '60s), Lindsay Gaze has coached the Australian national team in four consecutive editions of the Olympic Games (1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984) and of three FIBA World Championships (1974, 1978 and 1982). In 1985, he became head coach of the Melbourne Tigers, where he stayed until 2005, winning two Australian title and three titles of "Coach of the Year".

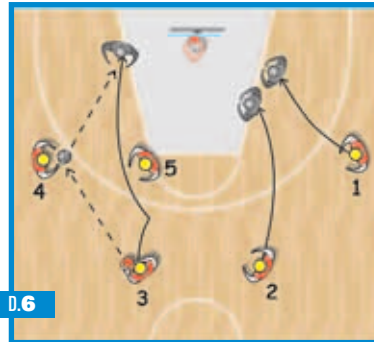
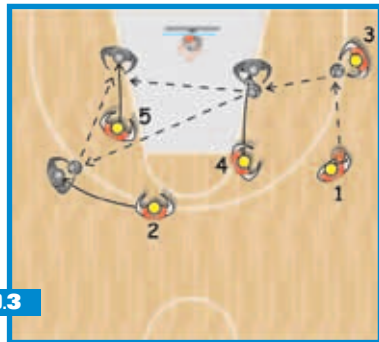
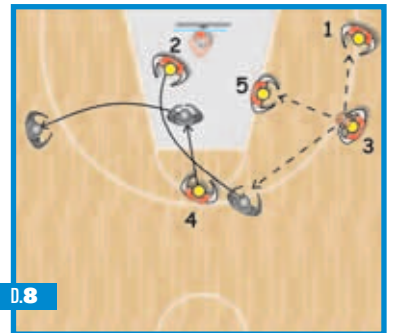
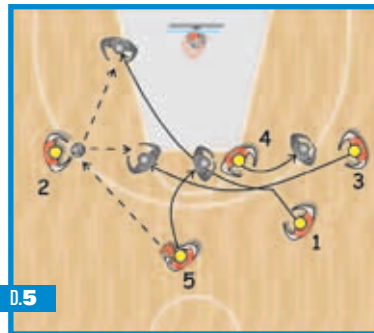
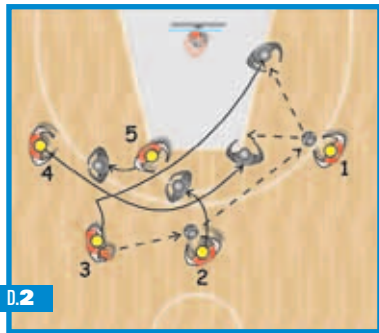
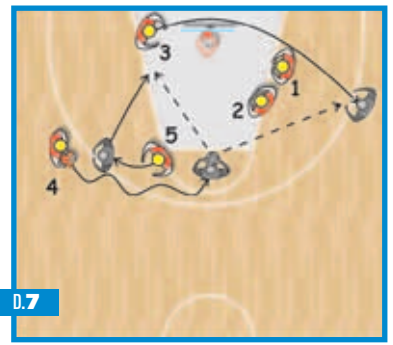
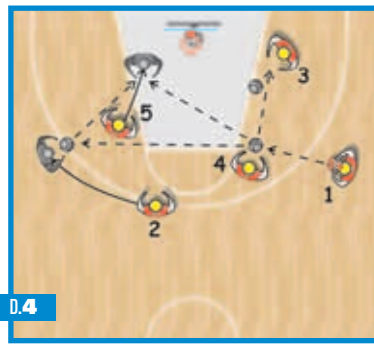
I had the chance to meet outstanding coaches, who have influenced my philosophy of the game and coaching methods. One of the most significant pieces of advice was to select a style of play, learn from others, who have similar points of view and stick with it.

When I took over coaching the Melbourne Tigers I adopted similar methods, although many refinements have been made as the skills and athleticism of players have developed incredibly since then.

The national teams I coached used the same methods as my club teams, but in each case the points of emphasis would vary depending on the talent available.

The Melbourne Tigers shuffle offense requires every player to be capable of playing every position and it is not unusual for the power forwards and centers to be playing the same roles usually reserved for guards. It has been argued that moving the big players away from the basket reduces their rebounding potential and high percentage scoring opportunities, but equally it can create problems for opponents, who, in many cases, is unfamiliar with defending on the perimeter. Similarly developing our guards to be effective post-up players provides numerous op-





portunities to exploit miss-matches.

One of the most important reasons why we used a "shuffle" offense is due to the fact that in our national league and internationally we have always given away size and height advantage to our opponents. If we were to play them at their own game we would be doomed to failure. It has only been in recent years that our national team has developed enough big men like Luc Longley, Mark Bradtke, Chris Anstey and a new generation, like David Andersen, Andrew Bogut and our 2003 World Junior champions, that we are starting to get on even terms.

When a club, or national team, uses the same methods for their offensive structure for many years and you teach your methods at camps and clinics, it is inevitable that opposing coaches will refine their defensive methods and apply different strategies to counter your play.

This has always been a learning process and as a result our club has been ex-

posed to just about every variety of defense imaginable. The defensive methods have varied from the standard 2-3 zones to the less conventional box-and-one, or triangle-and-two, alternating from man-to-man to zone etc. The great benefit of what we do is we are able to use the same basic principles of our offense, with only slight adjustments to timing and cuts, regardless of the defensive methods.

BASIC 3RD OPTION

The basic positions for all players are very important. Variation to positions will affect options that should be included to counter defensive over-plays (diagr. 1).

- ▼ 1 is the "feeder". He sets up with the inside foot close to the three point line at the free-throw line extended.
- ▼ 2 is the guard and takes up a position straight in line with the basket.
- ▼ 3 is the "first cutter", usually the play-making guard capable of posting up.

His starting position is in line with the post and the basket.

▼ 4 is the "second cutter", usually a strong perimeter shooter capable of making a strong drive and jump shot off the dribble.

▼ 5 is the "post man", a good screener and "post target."

3 passes to 2 and sets up his opponent for a cut off 5.

Note: it is important that 3 does not cut until the pass is in motion to, or has been received by the feeder.

1 may feed 3 if open on the cut (early) or in the low post, or in the corner. If he doesn't



pass to 3, 5 screens second cutter 4 to prevent 4's man from fighting over the top. 2 sets effective double screen and aims to prevent 4's defender to slide through underneath. 4 has opportunity to receive pass for a jump shot around the free throw line, or to set up a high post target (diagr. 2). If the feeder passes the ball to 3 in the corner, 4 slides down to the low-post position for a possible pass and subsequent scoring options (diagr. 3).

Note: whenever a pass is made to a high post or low post position, the player in the 2 spot and the weak-side wing make cuts for scoring options (diagr. 4).

If the feeder does not make a penetrating pass, the players adjust to the basic positions on the right side of the floor and the same options can be repeated with 1 becoming the new 3 man (first cutter), 3 becomes the new 4 man (second cutter), 4 becomes the post and 2 becomes the feeder. 5 becomes the 2 man (diagr. 5).

FIRST OPTION

Players set up in the same positions as for a regular third option shuffle cut. 3 has the choice of passing to 2, which will signal a third option, but may choose to pass to 4, which signals a first option.

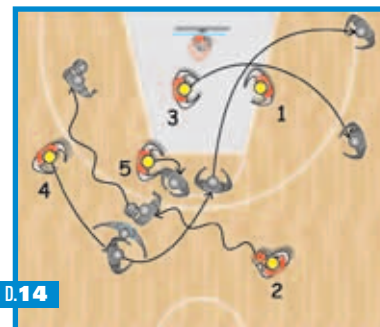
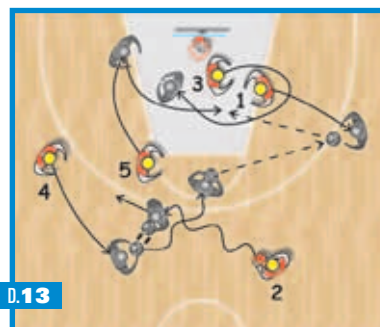
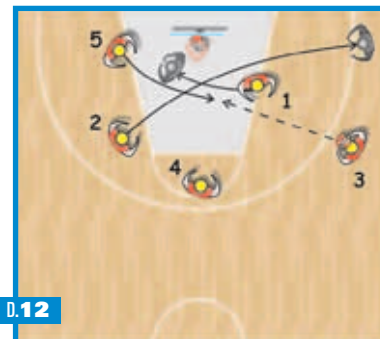
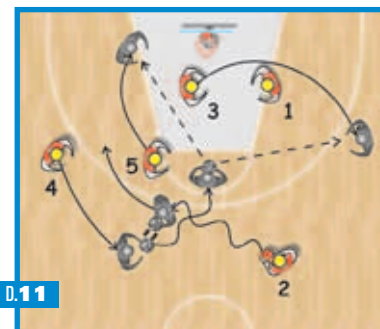
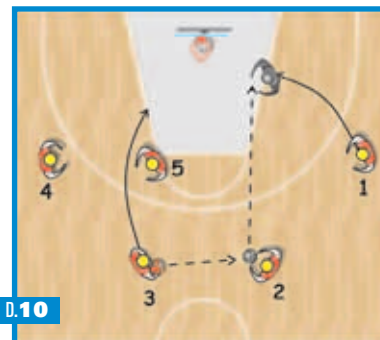
Note: In all cases the post will pivot on the foot closest to the direction of the first pass and will screen with his back to the cutter.

3 cuts using the screen set by 5 and looks to receive a return pass from 4 (and possible scoring option).

If he doesn't pass to 3, 5 sets inside screen for 4, who looks to make penetrating drive and possible jump shot around free-throw line, or screen-and-roll pass to 5 (diagr. 6).

If 4 does not shoot or pass to 5, he passes to 3, who has come off double screen set by 2 and 1. 3 may take short jump shot or look to 5 who comes off screen set by 2 (diagr. 7).

Note: 2 should stay on double screen until pass is in motion to 3, and then he crosses lane to set screen for 5. 5 must wait for screen to arrive before making a cut otherwise opposing defensive players can "zone" the inside area and make good scoring options more difficult. While 2 is setting screen for 5, 1 presents a low post target moving out just far enough from the key to force the defense to respect him. If 1 steps out too far, the defense may



to assess 3's decision. If 3 drives to the middle, then 4 cuts to the baseline and waits for screen set by 2 (diagr. 20).

INVERSION

When both forwards are being over played guards look to post 5, who steps out to top of lane (or as far as necessary to release the pressure). Guards and forwards invert (diagr. 21).

Sometimes cheap scoring options on a hand-off or bounce pass, or late back-door cut on feeds from 5 are available.

The guard, who makes the first pass, is the designated back-door cutter (we don't want both guards to clutter the low post area).

With no "sucker" plays, the rule is "whichever side the post passes the ball dictates the option." If he passes to the right side it will be a third option with 4 as

the first cutter and 3 as the second cutter. If 5 passes to the left side, it will generate a first option with 4 as the cutter and 3 as the driver (diagr. 22).

Note: as 3 is now in a much lower position than normal for the second cutter of a third option, the options vary slightly. 3 is told to wait low for the double screen set by 5 and 1. 3 looks for jump shot opportunity and if no pass balances to new 2 spot.

Usually, because of the attention given to 3, 5 becomes the next target as he will curl back inside after 3 cuts off his screen and presents a good option inside. 1 will balance to new feeder spot on left side.

If 2 does not pass to anyone he balances to run another regular third or first option (diagr. 23).

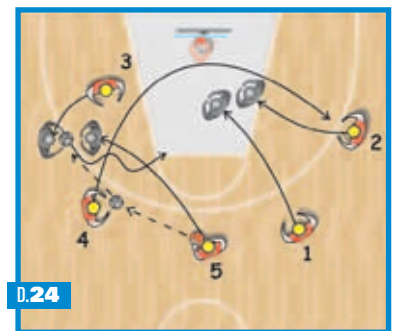
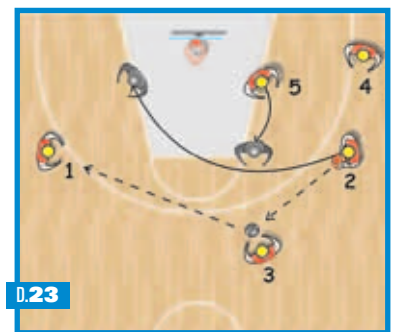
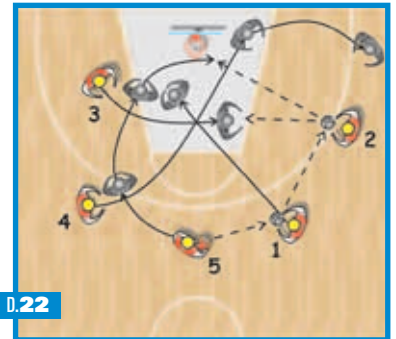
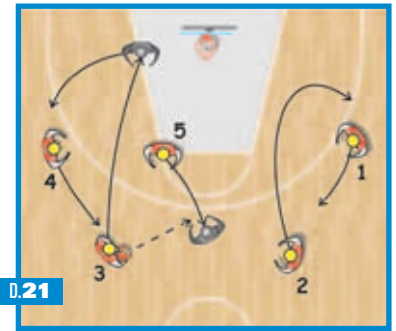
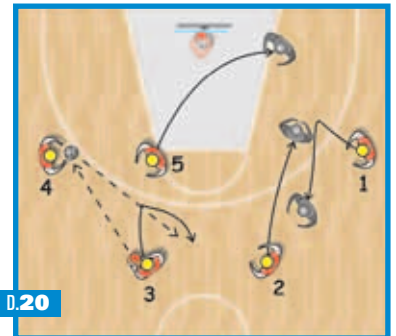
If 5 passes to left side, it will lead to a first option. 4 cuts off the screen set by 5 and 5 will then screen for 3, for screen and roll options or regular continuation if necessary (diagr. 24).

What has been shown here was the basic foundation for the Melbourne Tigers Shuffle offense. There are many other options included in our structure to deal with different types of defense, particularly pressure defense.

Also transition options that allowed us to exploit specific players and balance quickly into out halfcourt game, if necessary. The adjustment to the structure is minimal for zone defenses, although the timing of cuts and decisions for dribble penetration are important.

We always try to remind our players that it is not so much the structure, but how it is executed and why priorities are given to certain elements that will govern success. Trying to include too many options can lead to confusion and poor execution, while not having enough variety will invite strong defensive pressure and unless players are well prepared the structure will quickly break down.

Our methods require all players to have skills in every aspect of the game and it is almost impossible to "hide" inferior talent. It is not easy to teach and all players must be committed to the team structure and the team outcome. However, the satisfaction the players get when everyone contributes to team success is much more rewarding and team morale usually remains high.



choose to ignore him and concentrate on clogging the middle to defend 5.

3 may pass to 5 in low post or 1, who may have a short jump shot, as his man tends to help the post defender. However, 1 may feed post as well. 3 may also feed 2 coming off screen set by 4 (diagr. 8).

If 3 does not feed anyone, he balances the ball to the basic position and may choose to run a third option, or pass to 1, which will signal another first option on right side (diagr. 9).

REVERSE

When the feeder is overplayed, he may choose to run a back-door cut.

Note: this is the reason 3 should not be cutting, until the pass is on the way to the feeder. We do not want 3 and 1 to be cutting to the same area of the court at the same time.

If the back-door cut is not on, then 2 looks back to 3. This signals 3 to now make his cut (or look for kick back options, described later) 2 then concentrates on the 4 man's defensive opponent and starts a hard drive off the post screen set by 5. 2 aims to give 4 a hand-off pass and continues his cut around screen set by 1. After 4 receives the hand-off he may have jump shot option or a pass back to 2 (diagr. 10).

If there is no shot or pass to 2, then 4 passes to 3, who comes off screen set by 1.

Note: all of this action is similar to a regular first option, except the play is started with a drive to 4, instead of a pass, and 3 is coming off a single screen instead of a double screen. After 4 has made his drive 5 rolls to low post area on the left and waits for screen set by 1 (diagr. 11).

If 3 does not have a shot opportunity, he looks for 5 coming off the screen by 1, or a pass to 2 in medium low post area, or resets the offense to run any of the options from the right side (diagr. 12).

Variation: 3 may run a curl cut off 1 for possible jump shot, or continue to set screen for 5. 1 steps back after screening 3 and if he receives pass from 4 will feed 5 or take possible jump shot (diagr. 13).

REVERSE - VARIATIONS

If 4 is overplayed, 2 should not force the hand-off. 4 may just hold his position temporarily allowing 2 to continue his drive to about the level of the hash marks along the

lane. 2 may have a jump shot or he may look to 4 now after 4 has cut around screen set by 5 (diagr. 14).

If 2 does not have shot or pass to 4, he looks to 5, who has held his ground after the drive of 2. 5 makes a bounce drive for possible jump shot, but more likely to pass to 3, who is coming off a screen set by 1.

Note: an important rule for 3 is to wait on the screen until the ball gets to the middle of the free-throw line. This might be by way of a drive from 4 or from 5. The timing is critical, as there is no point for setting free 3 if the pass is not yet available (diagr. 15).

Alternatively, if 4 is overplayed, he may choose to make a back-door cut for possible pass from 2. If 2 does not make the pass to 4 on the back-door cut, he continues his drive for jump shot options or the same continuity as described above (diagr. 16).

Note: the options described here are useful when aiming to establish early jump shot opportunities or post up options for either guard.

KICKBACKS

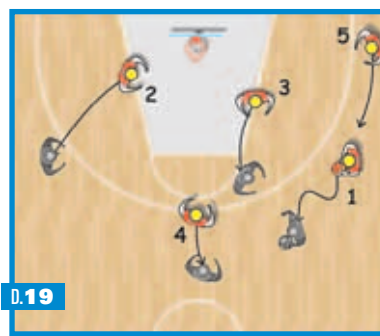
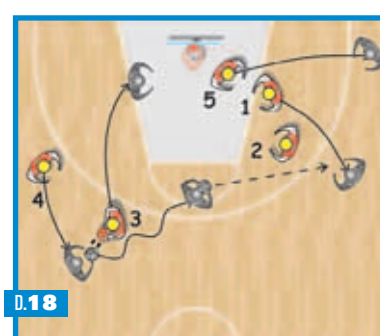
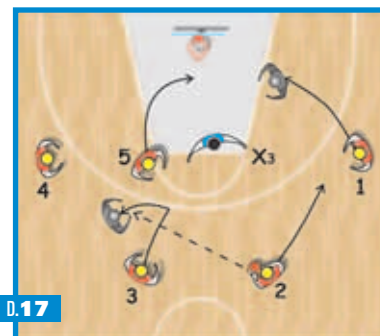
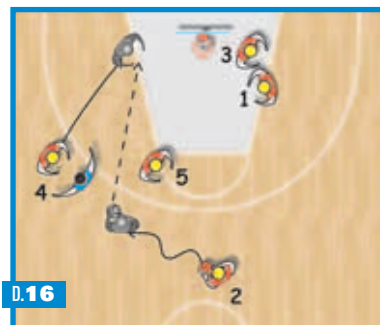
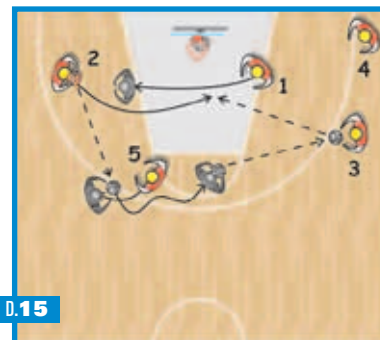
When the first cutter's defender "cheats" to clog the lane, 3 may elect to call for a "kickback" for potential shot aided by a screen set by 5. 5's opponenet may try to help to prevent, or block the shot and therefore 5 rolls to the basket on all kickback options (diagr. 17).

If 3 does not shoot or pass to 5, he hands-off to 4 and thus effectively generates another variation of a first option. 4 drives off a screen set by 3 and if he doesn't shoot or pass back to 3 on the roll off, he passes to 1 stepping out off screen set by 2. 5 always continues his roll to the low post on the right side. If 1 does not have shot, he looks to 3 coming off screen set by 2 or looks to five in medium low post position (diagr. 18).

If there are no scoring options taken, 1 balances to new three spot on right side and prepares to run a regular third option or first option (diagr. 19).

The same rules apply if a kickback is run off a first option. 5 must roll on the pass back to 3. 3 may choose to feed 5 or to hand off to 4 or take a one bounce drive to the middle of the key and pass to 1.

After 4 passes to 3, he waits just a moment



to assess 3's decision. If 3 drives to the middle, then 4 cuts to the baseline and waits for screen set by 2 (diagr. 20).

INVERSION

When both forwards are being over played guards look to post 5, who steps out to top of lane (or as far as necessary to release the pressure). Guards and forwards invert (diagr. 21).

Sometimes cheap scoring options on a hand-off or bounce pass, or late back-door cut on feeds from 5 are available.

The guard, who makes the first pass, is the designated back-door cutter (we don't want both guards to clutter the low post area).

With no "sucker" plays, the rule is "whichever side the post passes the ball dictates the option." If he passes to the right side it will be a third option with 4 as

the first cutter and 3 as the second cutter. If 5 passes to the left side, it will generate a first option with 4 as the cutter and 3 as the driver (diagr. 22).

Note: as 3 is now in a much lower position than normal for the second cutter of a third option, the options vary slightly. 3 is told to wait low for the double screen set by 5 and 1. 3 looks for jump shot opportunity and if no pass balances to new 2 spot.

Usually, because of the attention given to 3, 5 becomes the next target as he will curl back inside after 3 cuts off his screen and presents a good option inside. 1 will balance to new feeder spot on left side.

If 2 does not pass to anyone he balances to run another regular third or first option (diagr. 23).

If 5 passes to left side, it will lead to a first option. 4 cuts off the screen set by 5 and 5 will then screen for 3, for screen and roll options or regular continuation if necessary (diagr. 24).

What has been shown here was the basic foundation for the Melbourne Tigers Shuffle offense. There are many other options included in our structure to deal with different types of defense, particularly pressure defense.

Also transition options that allowed us to exploit specific players and balance quickly into out halfcourt game, if necessary. The adjustment to the structure is minimal for zone defenses, although the timing of cuts and decisions for dribble penetration are important.

We always try to remind our players that it is not so much the structure, but how it is executed and why priorities are given to certain elements that will govern success. Trying to include too many options can lead to confusion and poor execution, while not having enough variety will invite strong defensive pressure and unless players are well prepared the structure will quickly break down.

Our methods require all players to have skills in every aspect of the game and it is almost impossible to "hide" inferior talent. It is not easy to teach and all players must be committed to the team structure and the team outcome. However, the satisfaction the players get when everyone contributes to team success is much more rewarding and team morale usually remains high.

