



by Tom Maher

# CHINA'S OFFENSE AT THE FIBA WOMEN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Tom Maher is one of the most respected and experienced coaches in the women's international game today. He led the Opals (the Australian women's national team) from 1993 to 2000, winning a bronze medal at the Olympic Games of Atlanta in 1996, and a silver medal at the Olympic Games of Sydney in 2000. After coaching the WNBA's Washington Mystics, he took over the New Zealand women national team in 2004, playing in the Athens' Olympic Games. He has been coaching the Chinese women national team since 2005.**

Our team entered the FIBA World Championship with the goal of preparing for the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 and performing well there. Seven players returned from the previous FIBA World Championship in China in 2002: Song, Zhang, Miao, Ren, Sui, Zhang, and Chen. The team is now more mature, with an average age of 23 years, and, of course, with experience from the previous FIBA World Championship. Even though our aim was to do the very well in Brazil, the main focus for us has been the 2008 Olympics.

## STARTING LINEUP

This was our starting five:

1. Lijie Miao, point-guard.
2. Guang Jia, shooting guard.
3. Lei Ren, small forward.
4. Xiaoni Zhang, power forward.
5. Nan Chen, center.

There are three key players on the Chinese team, and most of the offensive sets are built and developed for them. The most experienced player is the point-guard, Lijie Miao, an excellent shooter, both from the middle and from the long distance. She also likes to drive to the basket as well as finish on a fast break, when possible. She finished as the fourth top scorer in the World Championship, averaging 17.6 points per game.

The main post player in the Chinese team is Nan Chen, a left-handed, solid center, who is able to set good screens and attack the basket, mainly from her favorite left-hand side. She finished 6th on the top scorers list with 17.3 points per game.

The third key player is the power forward, Xiaoni Zhang. She is very mobile and technically sound, with a good middle-distance jump shot. An excellent free-throw shooter, she finished third in the final standings in free-throw percentage with 89.2%.

## STYLE OF PLAY

I wanted to give my team a good organization on both aspects of the game, offense and defense. We have good perimeter players who can shoot and drive to the basket as well as feed the post players inside the lane. We have a quick transition game and like to run the fast break.

Offensively, most of our plays are developed to create an open shot for Miao on the perimeter, or else feed the ball close to the basket to Nan Chen or Xiaoni Zhang. The perimeter players spread the floor well and create options for the two inside players to attack the basket, using either a high-low combination or pick-and-roll.

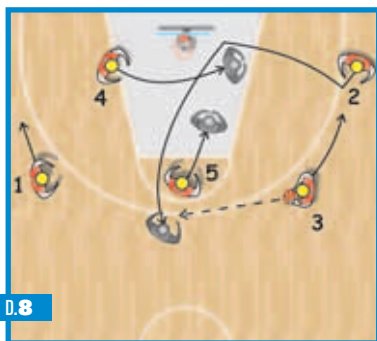
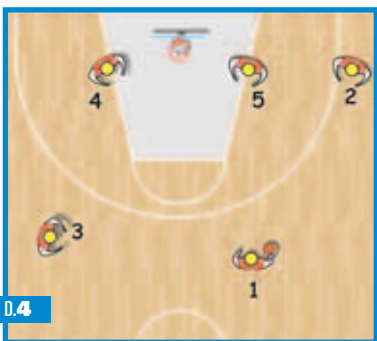
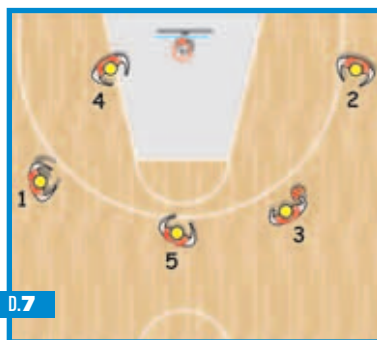
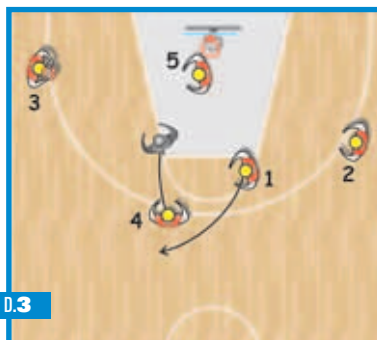
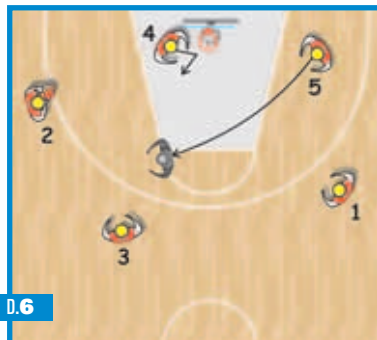
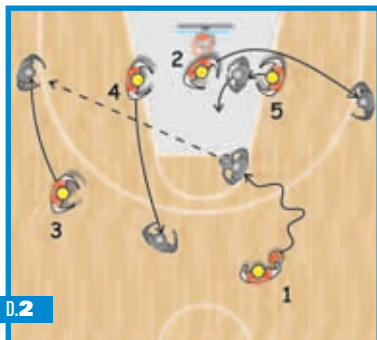
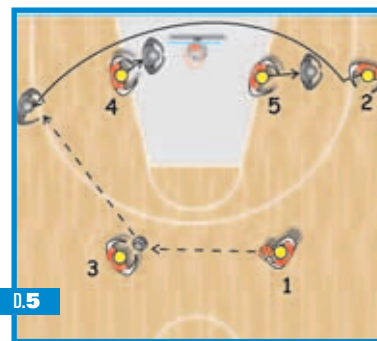
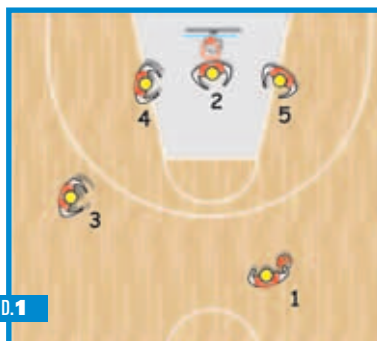
The guards and forwards are shooting the ball well from the three-point range and therefore they take a lot of shots from that distance. Of course, some times this creates problems if the team is not shooting well, because it exposes us to many easy fastbreaks. Miao is an excellent scorer, very confident, and likes to take charge in tough situations. Most of the plays go through her.

We finished 5th in overall shooting percentage with 50.8% which is an excellent achievement. We were also second overall in the free-throw percentage, shooting 77.3% from the line. We sometimes found it difficult to create opportunities to score, especially when playing against big and physical teams.

Against zone defenses, we wanted to use the principles of overload with the high-low in the paint, relying mainly on the quick movement of the ball on the perimeter and the outside shooting of the perimeter players. The two inside players, Chan and Zheng, rotate well inside the key and also look for their shots from close range, or from the top of the key.

We were also organized against the press defenses, and





had no major problems attacking them. We spaced well on the court, had clear understanding of roles, being also able to find the gaps in the defense easily.

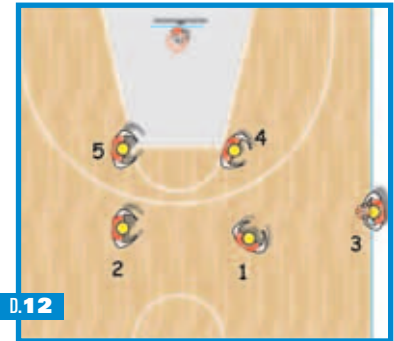
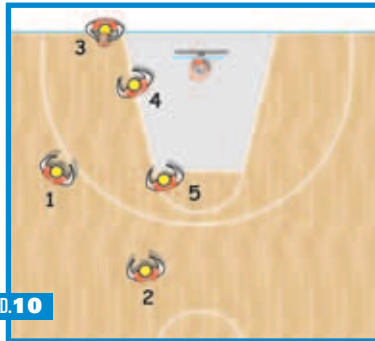
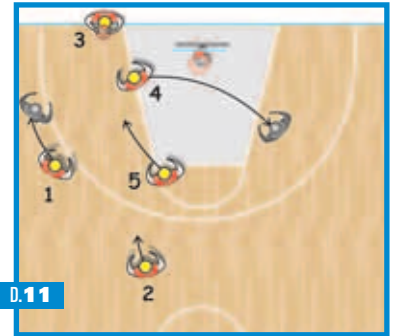
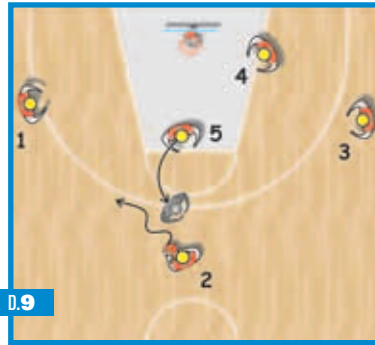
Defensively, we preferred to start the games with a man-to-man defense, trying to play aggressive half-court defense with a lot of help and communication. The players always try to get over the screen and switch only if trapped, trying to cover the shot and help inside the key.

Sometimes, we allowed an easy drive on the baseline or through the middle, which was a problem against more athletic teams. We box-out well. However, in the big games against the more powerful and athletic players, we allowed too many easy rebounds.

On defense, we used a press, usually half or 3/4 court, either 2-1-2 or 1-2-2 formations, and our zone defense worked quite well. We also pressed sometimes after a successful free-throw and tried to steal the ball and score an easy basket.

**BASIC PLAY**

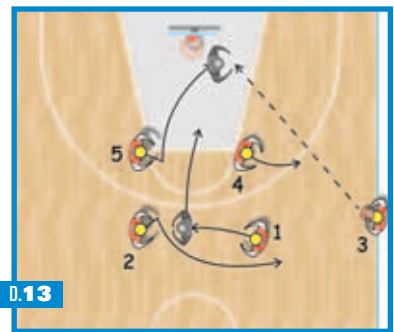
The basic play (diagr. 1) starts with 4 and 5 on the low post positions, 1 and 3 outside, and 2 under the basket. 5 sets a screen for 2. 1 dribbles to the free-throw line, while 3 drops to the corner, and 4 steps out of the three-point line (diagr. 2). 1 can kick out the ball to 3 or 2 for a three-point shot, or to 5, who rolls to the basket after the screen for 2 (diagr. 3).



**STAGGERED SCREEN PLAYS**

We set in a two-three formation, with 4 and 5 at the low post positions. 4 and 5 set staggered screens on the baseline for 2, 1, and 3 wide out (diagr. 4 and 5).

1 passes to 3 and 3 passes to 2 for a three-point shot. If 2 cannot shoot, he can pass to 5, who, after the screen, rolls to the basket. The third option is a pick-and-roll play between 2 and 5, or a high-low play between 4 and 5 (diagr. 6).



Another play starts again from a staggered screen, but now set vertically for 2 (diagr. 7), who starts from the corner and goes off the screens of 4 and 5 and comes out to the top of the key, and receives the ball from 3 for a three-point shot (diagr. 8). 2 can also play the pick-and-roll with 5, or can pass to 3, who has gone to the corner for a three-point shot (diagr. 9). If nothing happens, 5 can deliver a high-low pass to 4, or maybe pass to 1 on the weak side, or can drive to the basket.

**OUT OF BOUND PLAYS**

**From the baseline**

This is a play for the post 5 (diagr. 10), who is set on the elbow, while 4 is on the low post on the same side. While 4 clears out, cutting to the opposite side, 5 makes a vertical cut to the basket and receives the inbound pass from 3, on the left-hand side (diagr. 11). If 5 won't receive the ball, 2, who spots up in the corner, can receive the ball for a three-point shot.

**From the sideline**

4 and 5 are at the elbows on the free-throw line, while 1 and 2 are the guards and 3 will make the inbound pass (diagr. 12). 1 sets a screen for 2, 4 steps out to the three-point line, while 5 makes a back-door cut to the basket. 3 can pass to 5 under the basket or to 1, who rolls to the basket after the screen, or also to 2 (diagr. 13).