



by Mike McHugh

DEFENSIVE TRANSITION

Mike McHugh came to New Zealand from his position as head coach of the ACT Academy of Sport basketball program in Australia. He had previously been head coach of the Canberra Capitals in the Australian WNBL, and had worked at the Australian Institute of Sport. He has also had a role on the coaching staff of the Australian Opals. He coached the Wellington Saints (Men) in New Zealand's NBL, whom he led to the 2003 Championship. McHugh is currently head coach of the Tall Ferns, New Zealand's national women's basketball team, who won silver medal at the Commonwealth Games in 2006.

The greatest enemy of truly great defense are turnovers and poor shot selection. Fast break defense requires communication and organization, our first priority is basket defense, cover the "runner/s", second is slowing down the progress of the "ball", this requires an immediate channel to the nearest sideline by the handler's defender and thirdly matching up with the remaining offensive players in order of potential threat. The most important aspect is achieving this is communication, if there is no effective talk we cannot defend the fast break.

- ▼ We must have an offensive plan that gets us good shots and a plan for offensive rebounding, which allows for defensive balance. We must develop our offensive rebounding game as best we can.
- ▼ 3, 4, 5 are "attack rebounders" and go to the boards every time we shoot.
- ▼ We must cover the long rebound by positioning 2's and 1's at the foul line.
- ▼ When 2 and 1 shoot from the corners, they must rotate to long rebounder "outlet" outlet spot.

It is vital that an offensive rebounder has to vigorously contest in order to rebound. Aggressive offensive rebounding ensures the defensive rebounder is more concerned



with protecting the ball than igniting the fast break. The offensive rebounders must get two feet in the lane and attempt to "touch" the ball.

We prefer to have four offensive rebounders and one safety (diagr. 1). X4, X5 and X3 attack offensive board, X1 is the safety, and X2 covers the long rebound and prepares to immediately channel outlet to sideline. The concept of defensive transition is to "slow" the attack, get the ball on a sideline and match up most to least dangerous. Ideally, we have a guard-type positioned near the foul line for the long rebound. This player is responsible for immediate channeling of the outlet receiver towards the nearest sideline.

The safety player's first responsibility is to protect the basket. If possible we want the smaller safety to invert with the first front line player, who is in a position to do so. The smaller player is therefore able to be released to deny any ball side pass to the front court. If the smaller player cannot release, she must communicate which player must play ball side denial. The last rebounder back acts as a "plugger." The remaining rebounder monitors the weak side at the high split.

From these positions we match-up. Our priority is from most dangerous to least dangerous. When a fast break score is no longer a threat, we begin our designated defense. Safety is generally covered by X1 or X2 i.e. If 1 has penetrated key for shot, therefore X2 is safety. If a circumstance arose where both X1 and X2 were in the key (i.e. 2 posts X2, 1 drives to the basket), then X3 would read the situation and take safety.

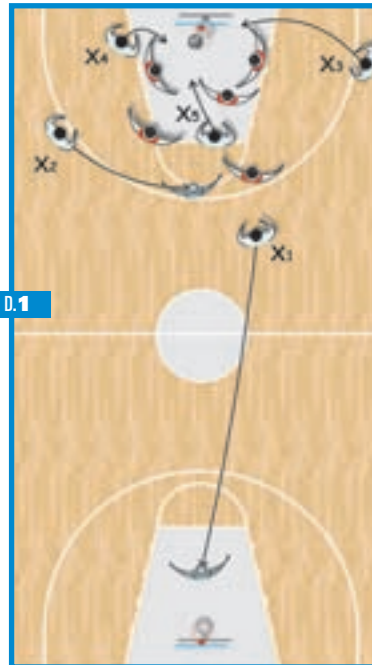
The movements of the defenders after the outlet pass of the opponents are drawn on the following diagrams. X2 "herds" handler 1 to sideline, not attacking the ball, but allowing 1 to dribble slowly, X1 is safety, X5 becomes the "plugger" in a help position on the split line to prevent any middle penetration, and X3 and X4 "sprint" back to match up (diagr. 2).

As the runner 2 sprints through the key and cuts for pass from 1; X1 goes to defend the receiver on X3's instruction, and X3 becomes safety, X5 continues to plug the middle and X4 sprints back to cover the weak side (diagr. 3).

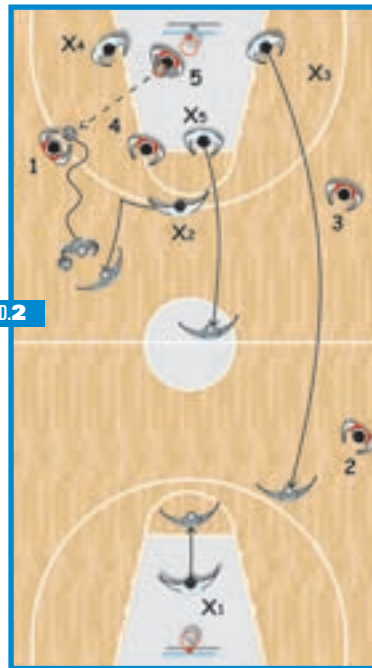
X1 has matched up on the ball handler 2; X2 is denying the return pass to 1, X3 is denying feed to 3, and X5 and X4 are matching up on the trailers (diagr. 4).

FASTBREAK DEFENSE

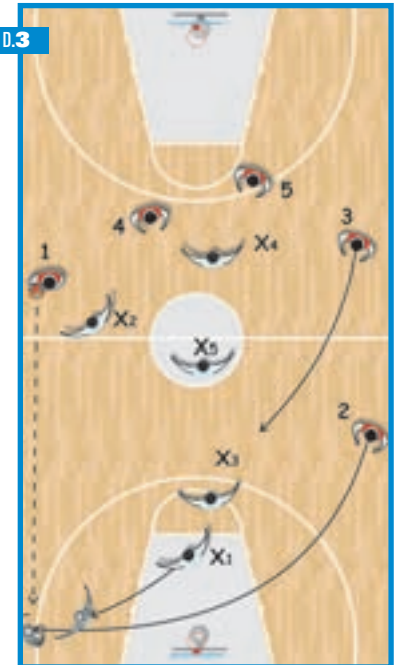
In any situation where we turn the ball over or our extended defense is beaten, we must revert to fast break defense. These rules are:



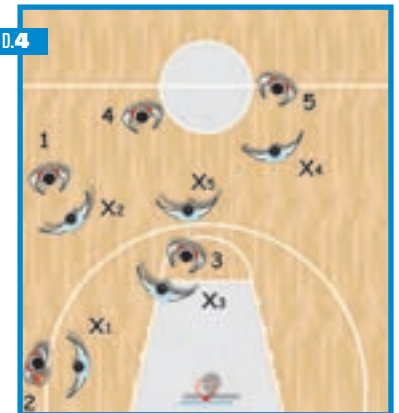
D.1



D.2



D.3



D.4

- ▼ The first responsibility is to protect the basket.
- ▼ The second responsibility is to channel the ball and prevent a quick second movement.
- ▼ The next responsibility is to match up with the most dangerous receiver.
- ▼ The next responsibilities are to match up as best we can.

- a) Take away the lay-up
- b) Make the opposition run half court offense.
- c) Be able to contest the rebound, if a quick shot is taken.

1. Defensive transition roles

- ▼ We must have one guard communicate "safety" and retreat to prevent the basket. She will go as deep as the deepest offensive player, and must cover any "runner" against the long pass and deny the lay-up. If one guard drives to the basket his partner is the safety. In our offensive sets usually one guard is the "safety", the other is the long rebounder "outlet".
- ▼ Closest man to rebounder/inbounder is the "plugger", she pressures the outlet pass. She must not allow the rebounder to explode by him on the dribble. She then supports the on ball



defender against middle penetration by forming a middle triangle between the ball herself and her man. She is in a position to trap or run-and-jump with the handler's defender if the game plan calls for it. At all times she communicates to the "outlet" that she has help in the middle.

- ▼ Player closest to the outlet side (X2 or X1) gets to the foul line to cover the long rebound and then identifies the outlet receiver. She tries to force the receiver to catch the ball going back below the foul line. This will immediately slow their fast break, don't let them "turn-and-go". She is the "outlet", then contains the handler and influences her to sideline. She will stay with the ball until "switched" by the safety or defensive assignment.
- ▼ Other two players are "sprinters". First player back sprints to release the safety and protect the basket matching up with the next most threatening player shading the ball side. Next player back will match up shading the help-side.
- ▼ At this point you must have:
 - a) Basket protection by the "safety".
 - b) Ball channeled and contained by the "outlet".
 - c) Middle coverage by the "plugger".
 - d) Triangle coverage by the "sprinters".

2. Influence the ball to the sidelines

- ▼ This allows us to establish a ball-side and help-side early and enables our half-court defense to be set up.

- ▼ We will have the "plugger" positioned in the shallow middle (split line) to assist the player defending the handler. If the player with the ball turns his defender to the middle, the "plugger" must help her contain the handler and allow her to channel him back to the side. This will help eat some clock, we may also have the "plugger" trap, if a non-handler has the ball or we want to take the ball out of a good player's hands.

3. Establish our half court defense

- ▼ We must now establish a defensive perimeter where we want the ball. This perimeter is 1.5 metres outside the three-point line and on a sideline.

- ▼ At this point we want:

- a) On ball containment.
- b) Help/denial defenders one pass from the ball.
- c) High split active.
- d) Low split active.

- ▼ The principle focus of our defensive transition and half court defence will be to make every effort to influence our opponent to use up the shot clock. We will deny quick reversal and not allow middle penetration. Now we have the ball where we want it, on the sideline and we have a used clock.

- ▼ Once the ball is forced to be caught on the sideline we will pressure with a trace hand, space it at arms length and split the jab foot. The defender on the ball must contain penetration and contest any shot.

The success of our defense will be directly related to our ability to maintain our stances throughout the possession and to go from one stance and one position on the floor to our new stance and new position on the flight of the ball, with explosive quickness.

DEFENSIVE PRINCIPLES ON MAN TO MAN AND ZONE

Philosophy

- ▼ Effective individual containment.
- ▼ Constant basket protection.
- ▼ Extend the perimeter of defensive coverage to be as disruptive as possible.
- ▼ When the ball penetrates our perime-

ter coverage, all other defenders converge to a position to defend our basket.

- ▼ Once the perimeter coverage is penetrated all pressure is eliminated, therefore basket protection becomes our primary consideration.
- ▼ Man-to-man offers the best pressure, zone principles offer the best basket protection, and thus we will combine the two concepts.
- ▼ Winning the possession game is our priority.

ON BALL DEFENSE IN THE HALF COURT

- ▼ Defender guarding the ball below the foul line extended: containment with effective hand pressure. Help defense is to provide security against penetration.
- ▼ Defender guarding the ball above the foul line extended: total pressure, channel to sideline/corner. Immediate pass receiver's defense contests the passing lanes (open/closed stance) or is packed in, an open stance helping on middle penetration.
- ▼ Help side defenders protect the basket with zone principles: establish "high/low split positions". Front all low posts unless scouting decrees otherwise.
- ▼ All defenders must be in constant communication.

