

Defense Guide for Youth Coaches

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Philosophy

- Core
 - Man to man foundation – shares concepts of Pack Line
 - Play inside the arc and guard 2/3 of court
 - Defend the house
- Full Court Press
 - Pressing is the “easy” way to gain an advantage
 - Recommend to press only when losing by 8+ with less than 5 minutes to go in a game
 - Work on your press only as part of working on your press break
 - Spend time you would spend teaching a great press on instilling other fundamentals
- Half Court Trap
 - Start at 6A level / 7th Grade
 - Change of pace
- Zone
 - Never a primary defense
 - Change up defense for older grades (7th and 8th) only

Coaching Points

- M2M sets the best foundation for young players
- It doesn't take a good coach to run a good press because of player limitations in youth basketball
 - be a good coach

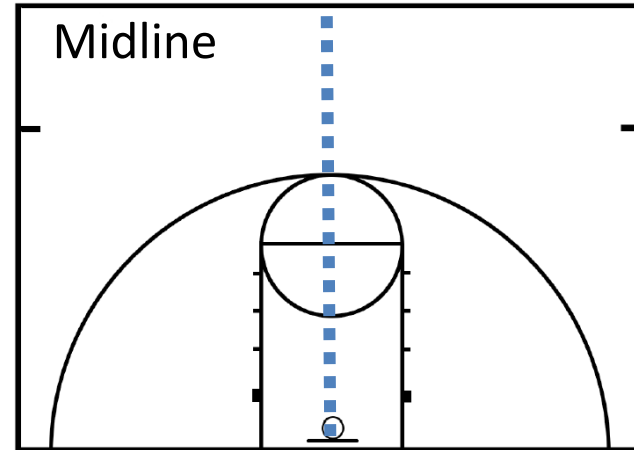
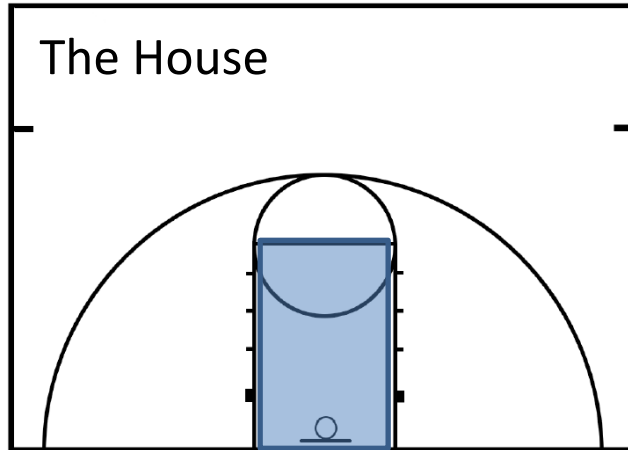
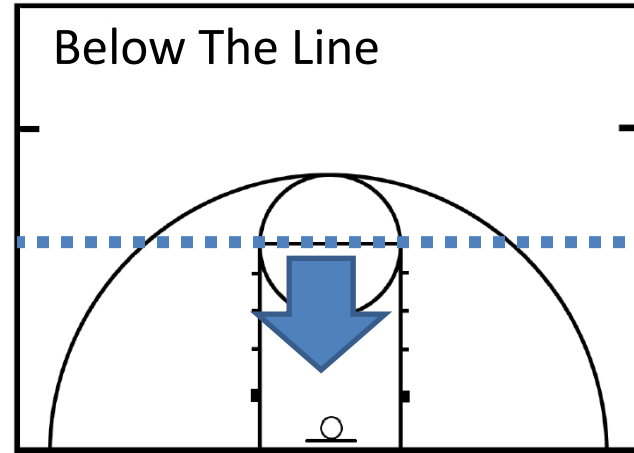
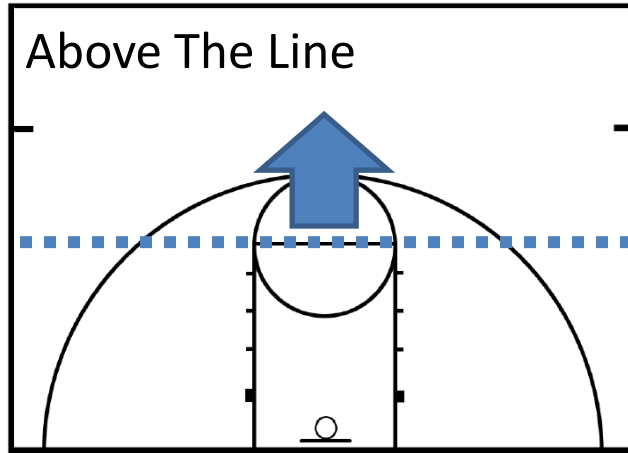
What to Coach When

- 4th / 5th Grade – Man to Man Only
- 6th Grade
 - Primary: Man to Man
 - 6A introduce containing ball to one side of floor with denial of pass back to the top of key
 - Change Up: Half Court Zone Trap (6A/B)
 - Situational: Full Court Press
- 7th / 8th Grade
 - Primary: Man to Man and with M2M trap opportunities and defensive rotations
 - Change Up: Half Court Zone Trap or Match Up Zone or Traditional Zone
 - Situational: Full Court Press

Terminology

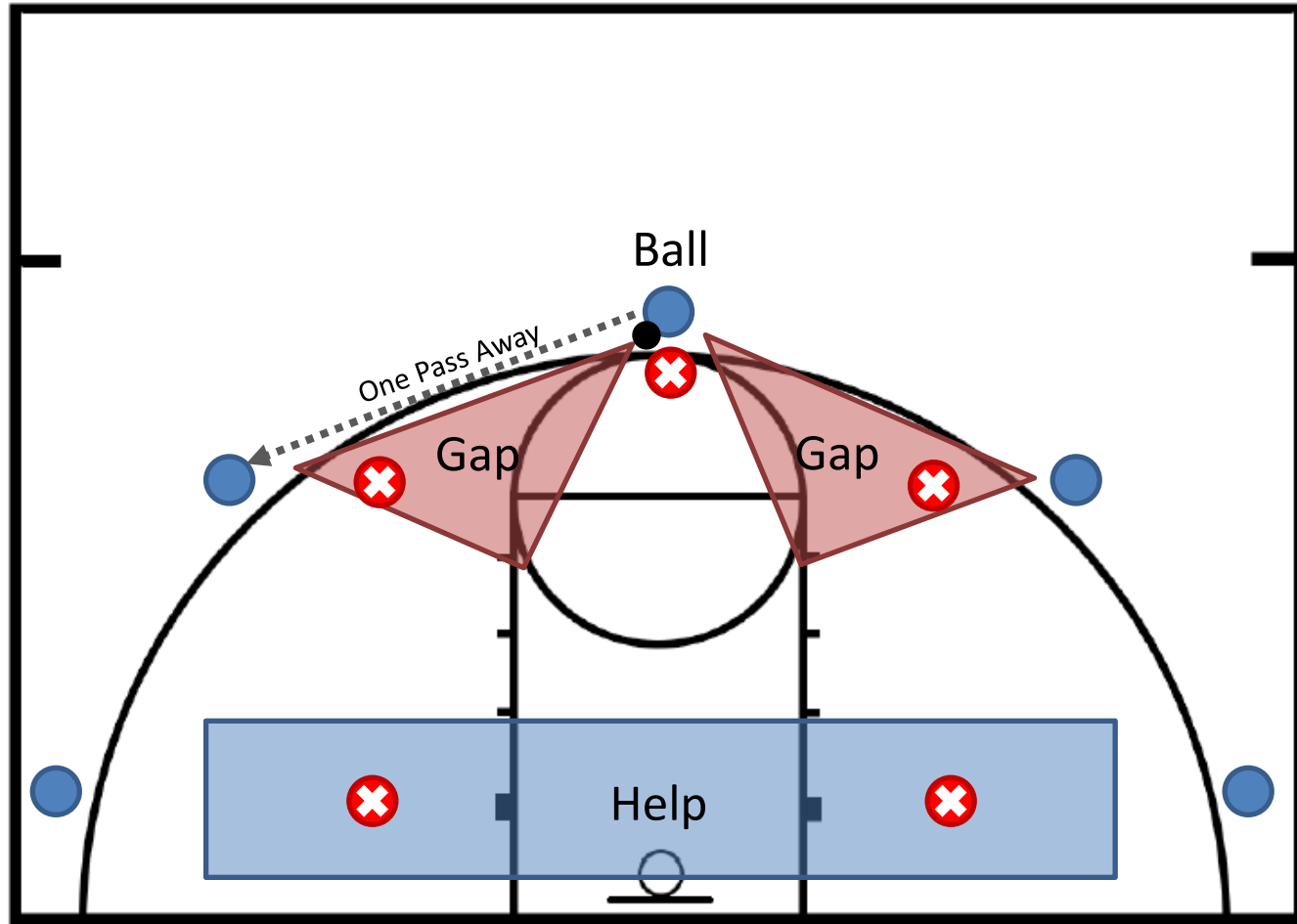
Parts of the Court

- Area of the court above the foul line extended



Ball, Gap, Help

- Man
 - The player with the ball
- Gap
 - The space between the player with the ball and one pass away to either side. The defender one pass away is responsible for controlling the Gap
- Help
 - All defenders two passes away are in Help



Step One: Set the Rules

TEACHING PLAYERS THE BASICS

The Rules

- The *Most Dangerous Player* on the court is the one with the Ball
 - Everyone must always know where the ball is and be able to see it
- Always know if you are on the Ball or have a Gap – if neither, you are in Help
- The ball is not allowed to go into our House (the lane)
 - Stop dribble penetration

Coaching Tip

When running defensive drills involving Man / Gap / Help responsibilities, always have players call out what role they have. This helps players a) understand their roles, and b) helps the ball defender hear where his/her support is

Step Two: Guarding the Ball

TEACHING PLAYERS THE BASICS

Defensive Fundamentals

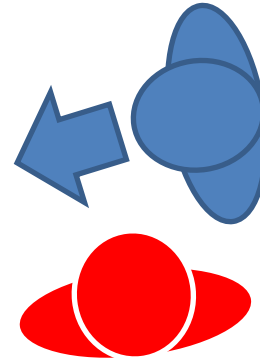
- Butt Down – Athletic Base – Do Not Slouch
- Arms out and hands active
 - Off ball hand to offensive players face. Ball side hand outstretched to side
- Eyes on the ball handler's belly button
 - Ball handler must always take their belly button with them
 - Watching the belly button makes the defender less susceptible to ball fakes, head fakes, jabs, etc.
- Positioning
 - Guard – You – Basket: Stay between your guard and the basket
 - At younger levels – nose on nose. Young players have tough time understanding shading, taking away strong hand, etc. Also forces them to learn to defend without a built-in advantage
 - Older Levels – start to teach shading to ball handler's dominate side to force the dribbler to use his/her weak hand
 - Ball handler picks up the dribble, get inside the bubble (see next slide) with wide, active hands
 - DO NOT REACH

Pressuring the Ball

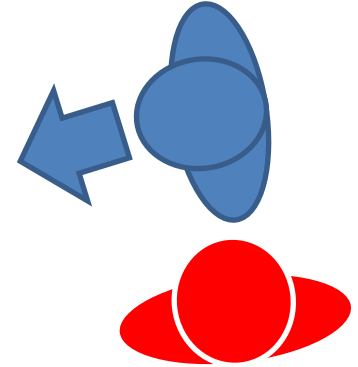
- The ball defender needs to be aggressive on the ball – make the ball handler uncomfortable
- Use The Bubble to explain pressure to players
 - The Bubble is an imaginary bubble that extends from the player's chest to the front edge of the basketball when a player is holding the ball in front of them
- Three levels of pressure
 - **Inside The Bubble:** Defensive player can reach their hand Inside The Bubble. Quicker players would be close enough to almost touch the ball handler's chest. Players with a quickness advantage over their guard should be Inside the Bubble
 - **On The Bubble:** Defensive player could touch the basketball with an outstretched arm if held in front of the offensive player. Players with evenly matched quickness should be On the Bubble
 - **Off The Bubble:** Defensive player is far enough away that they could not touch the basketball with an outstretched arm. Players that are slower than their guard should be Off the Bubble to give space in exchange for better containing dribble penetration

Defensive Slides

- Try and maintain chest to ball positioning
 - When dribbling, this means defender's nose should be in front of offensive player's chest
 - Shoulder to chest means the offensive player is winning – i.e., ball handler's shoulder is square to center of defender's chest
- Modern teaching is you slide with the ball handler only if you can maintain chest to ball positioning
 - If you lose control, turn and start running with ball handler trying to get back in front/cut off the dribble
 - This is called “turn and run” defense
 - The days of slide, slide, slide are over – you can never slide as fast as a good ball handler can dribble after the first few steps/slides



Chest to Ball



Shoulder to Chest

Coaching Tip

Chest to chest vs. shoulder to chest is a great teaching point when working with offensive players attacking the basket. If your shoulder is in your defender's chest, you are winning – FINISH!

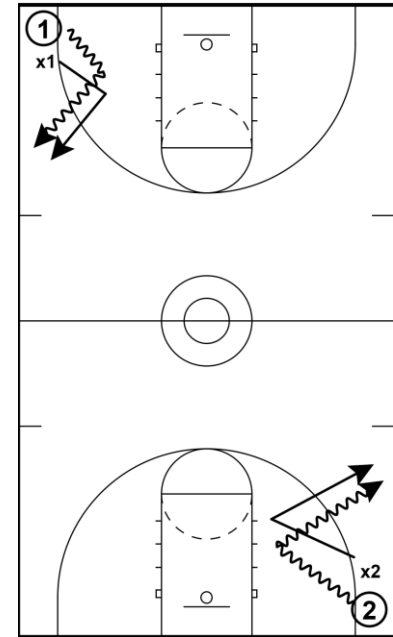
Drills

Alley Defense

- Pair up players. One ball per pair.
- Divide team in half and start at either end of court.
- Offensive player zig-zags down the court with other player defending
- Defender cannot steal ball. If offensive player beat the defender, stop after a few dribbles, let defender catch up and reset, then start again
- Switch roles after going the length of the court and come back the other side
- Offensive player must stay with the sideline and the nearest lane line

Coaching Points

- Increase the difficulty of the drill over time
 - Start with half speed and focus on defender maintaining proper positioning / proper footwork
 - Increase speed of dribble – allow ball handler to randomly change direction
 - Challenge defender to beat the offensive player to a spot and force a direction change
- Some courts will have volleyball lines that can be used to narrow the “alley” for younger players
- Have players go 1 on 1 when the offensive player reaches the far hash



Step Three: Defending the Gap

TEACHING PLAYERS THE BASICS

Gap Principles

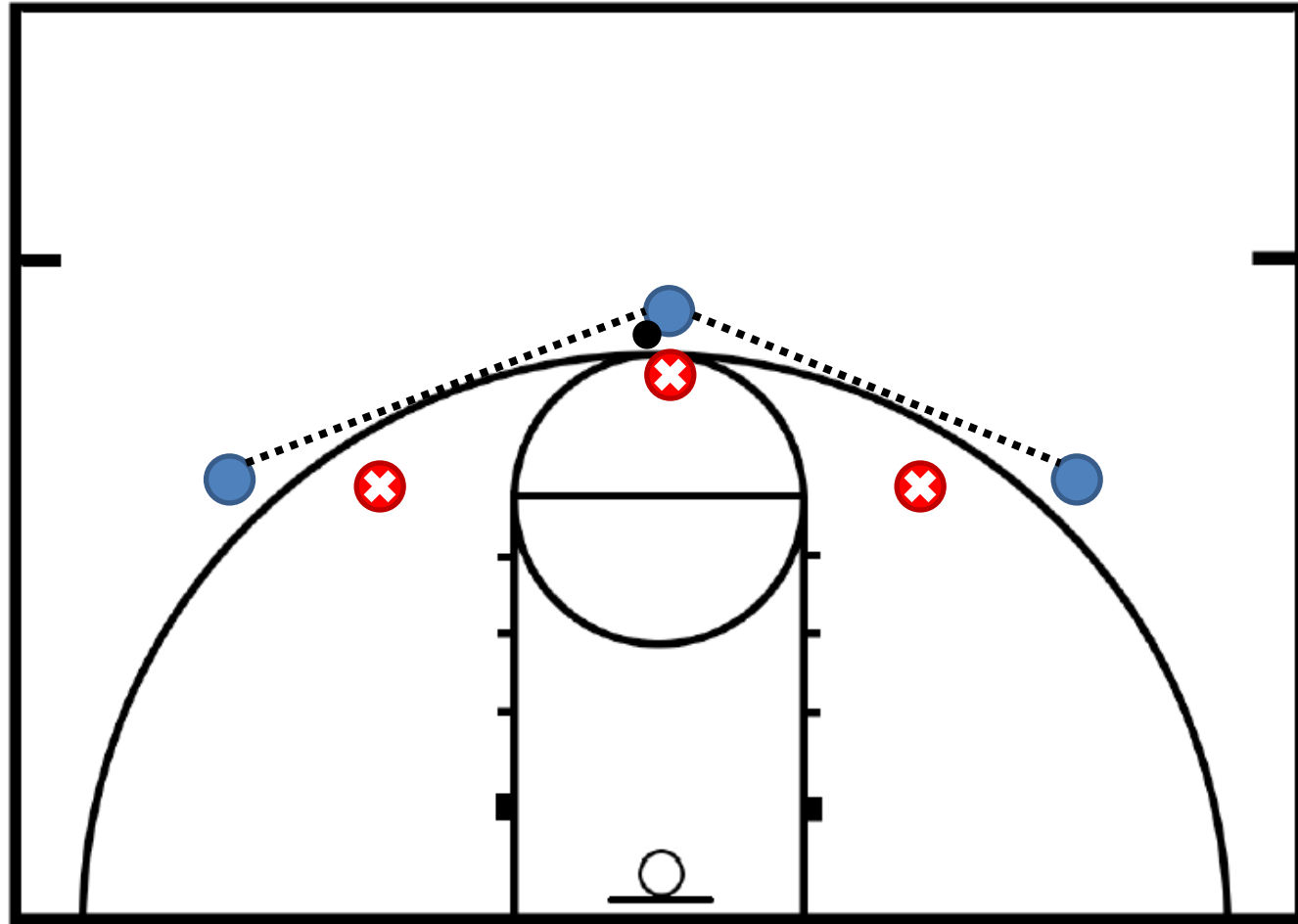
- Stopping dribble penetration is priority
 - May change as players get older / better and opponents show viable drive / kick and/or 3-point shooters
- Positioning
 - Defender is one-third to halfway between man and ball
 - Distance is dictated by ball handler speed, defender speed, and on/offline position
 - Offline position is usually an arm's length to arm-and-a-half underneath the line between the guard and the ball
 - Adjust based on defender's quickness

Coaching Tip

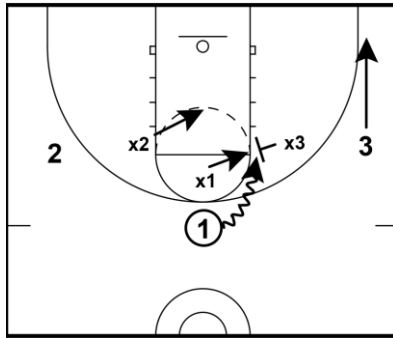
- At the younger ages, the team that can get the most shots inside the lane usually wins. Keeping an opponent out of the lane goes a long way to winning a game. Work on gap defense!
- Recommend off-the-line positioning instead of denial of passing lanes. Off positioning makes defending the gap easier and helps prevent back cuts. Unless you are the quicker team, on-the-line positioning makes defending the lane much harder

Gap Player Position

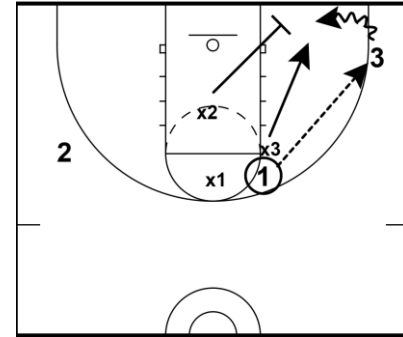
- One to one-and-a-half steps off the line
- $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the distance between man and ball
- Must be able to slide horizontally to close the gap and stop dribble penetration



Drills – Gap Defense



- Ball starts at top
- Ball handler can drive either left or right
- Gap defender must stop dribble penetration
- No reaching – chest to chest stop
- Offensive player on drive side moves away from drive
- Add Later
 - Weak side defender moves to help



- For older / better teams
 - Ball handler passes to strong side team mate if stopped
 - Gap defender must recover to his/her man
 - Can drive basket on catch if desired
 - Help defender can move to stop penetration

Step Four: Playing Help

TEACHING PLAYERS THE BASICS

Teaching Help

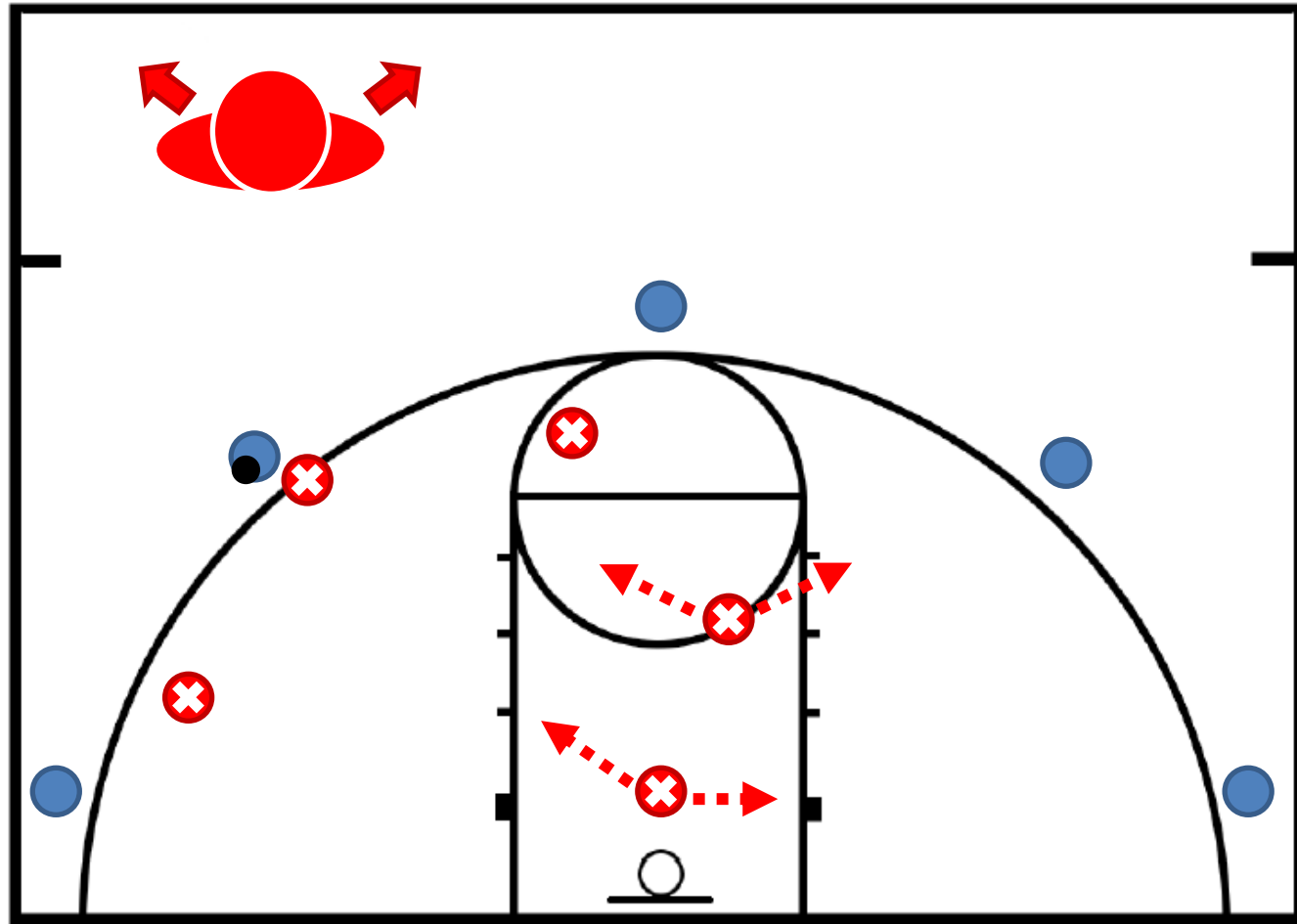
- There are different ways to teach help positioning
 - Cowboy – 4/5th grade
 - Corner Line – 6th+ grade
 - Quad – 7th/8th grade
- Some approaches work better for some teams
- The goal is to get weak side defenders into high / low help positions (“zone”)
- At younger ages, it is just about getting players to the correct spots. Older players can be taught high/low positioning and varied responsibilities (i.e., trapping baseline drives)

Coaching Note

- At the younger ages, DO NOT teach players to “stick to their person” regardless of where the ball is. It develops bad habits and delays learning how to play team defense

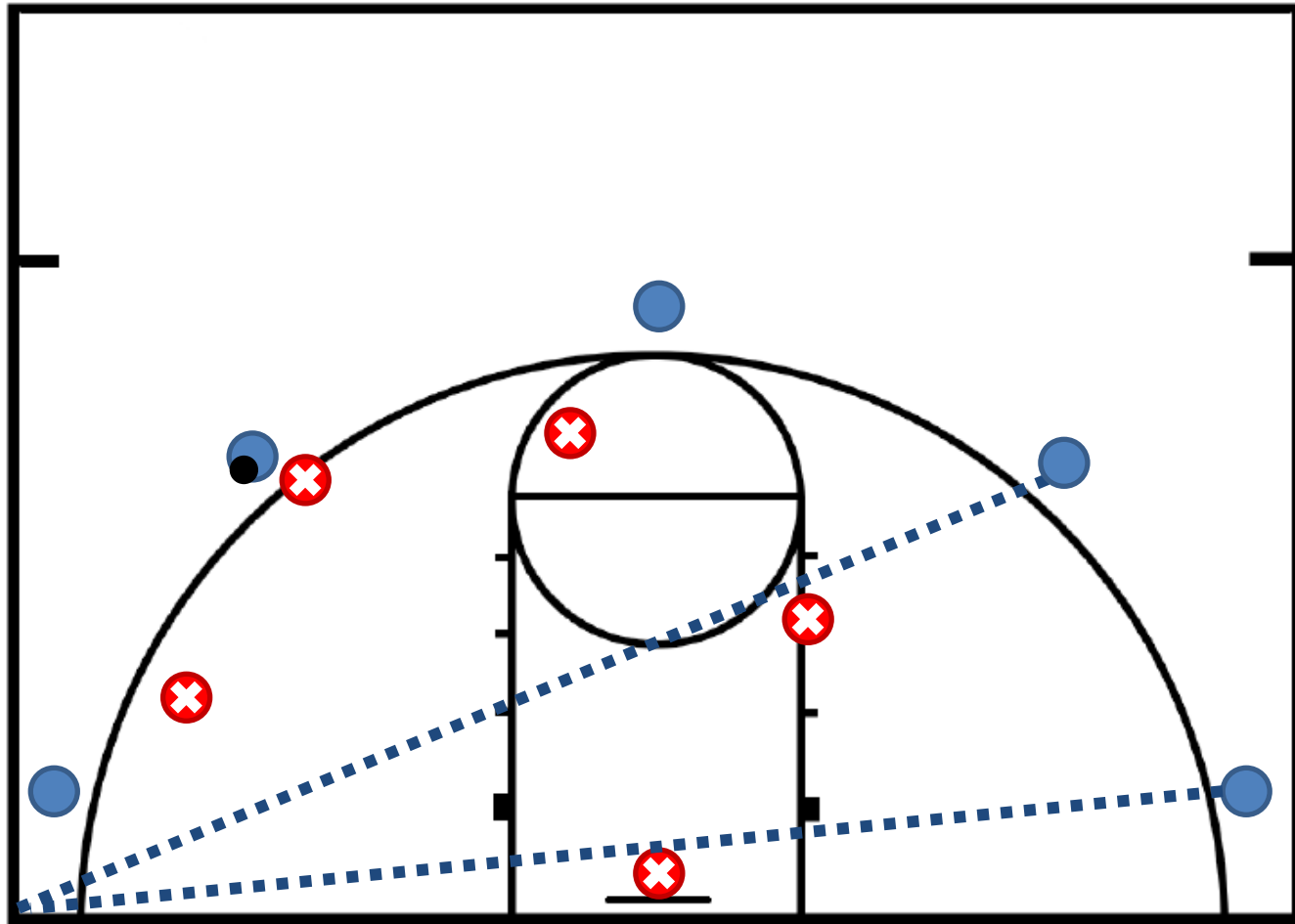
Cowboy Positioning

- Cowboy positioning
 - Player imagines he/she is a cowboy/cowgirl with two pistols
 - Player uses his/her hands as a pistol, holding them at roughly 45-degree offsets from body center
 - Keep sagging back in the direction of the basket until the defender can point one pistol at the ball, and one pistol at his/her person.
 - The resulting spot is help position
- Pros
 - Easy to explain and do
- Cons
 - Wing defenders get deep but not close enough to midline (not a big con when players can't skip pass)
 - Bottom defenders will get turned away from ball slightly if done correctly



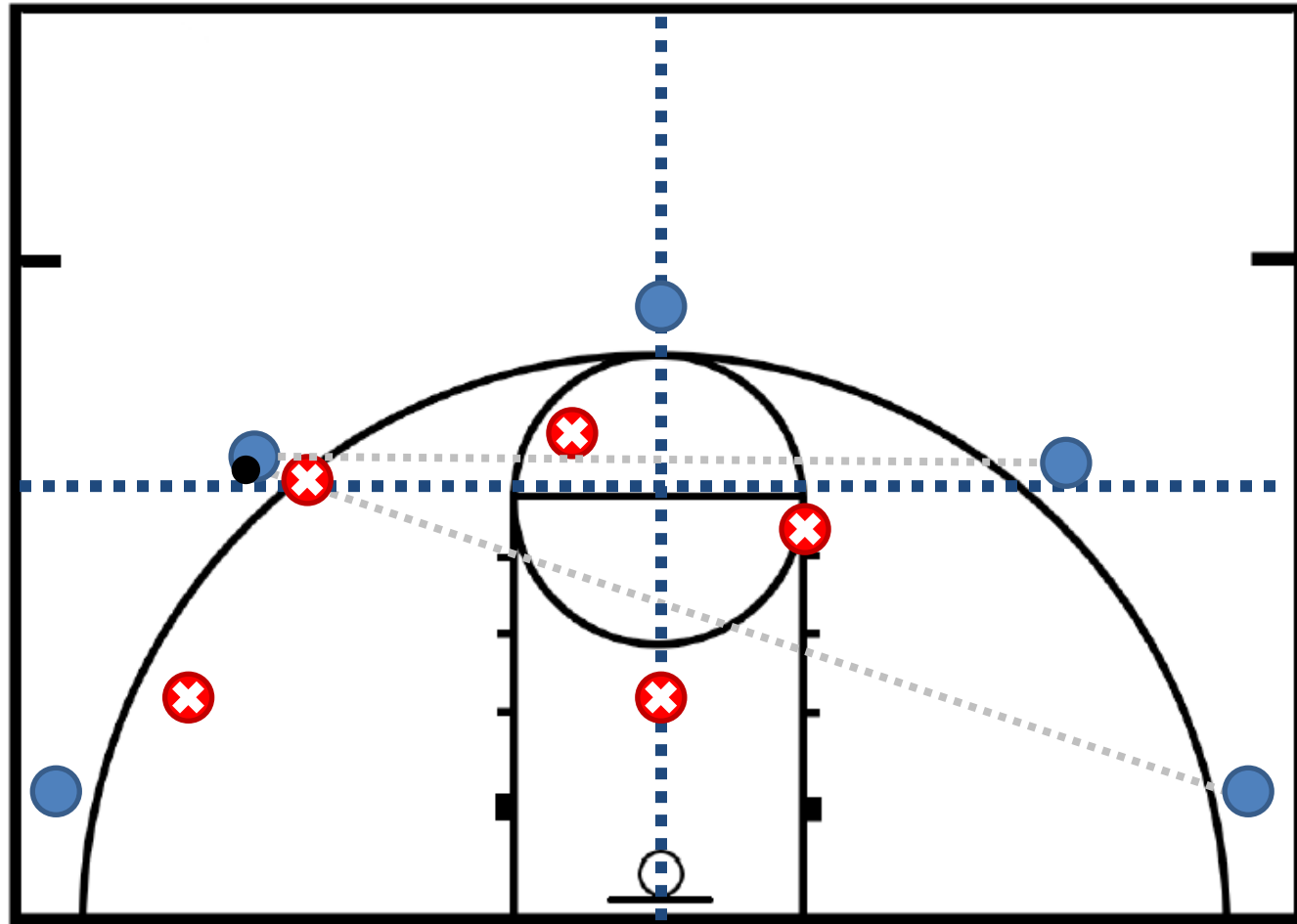
Corner Line Positioning

- Use Line from Guard to Ball Side Corner.
 - Play off the line by enough distance to see guard and ball
 - Wing defenders have to have at least one foot in the lane
 - Bottom defenders are on the midline
- Can use outstretched arms pointing at guard and ball side corner as way to establish the line
- Pros
 - Wing defenders in better position
- Cons
 - Bottom defender can end up under the basket. Need to correct that during practice



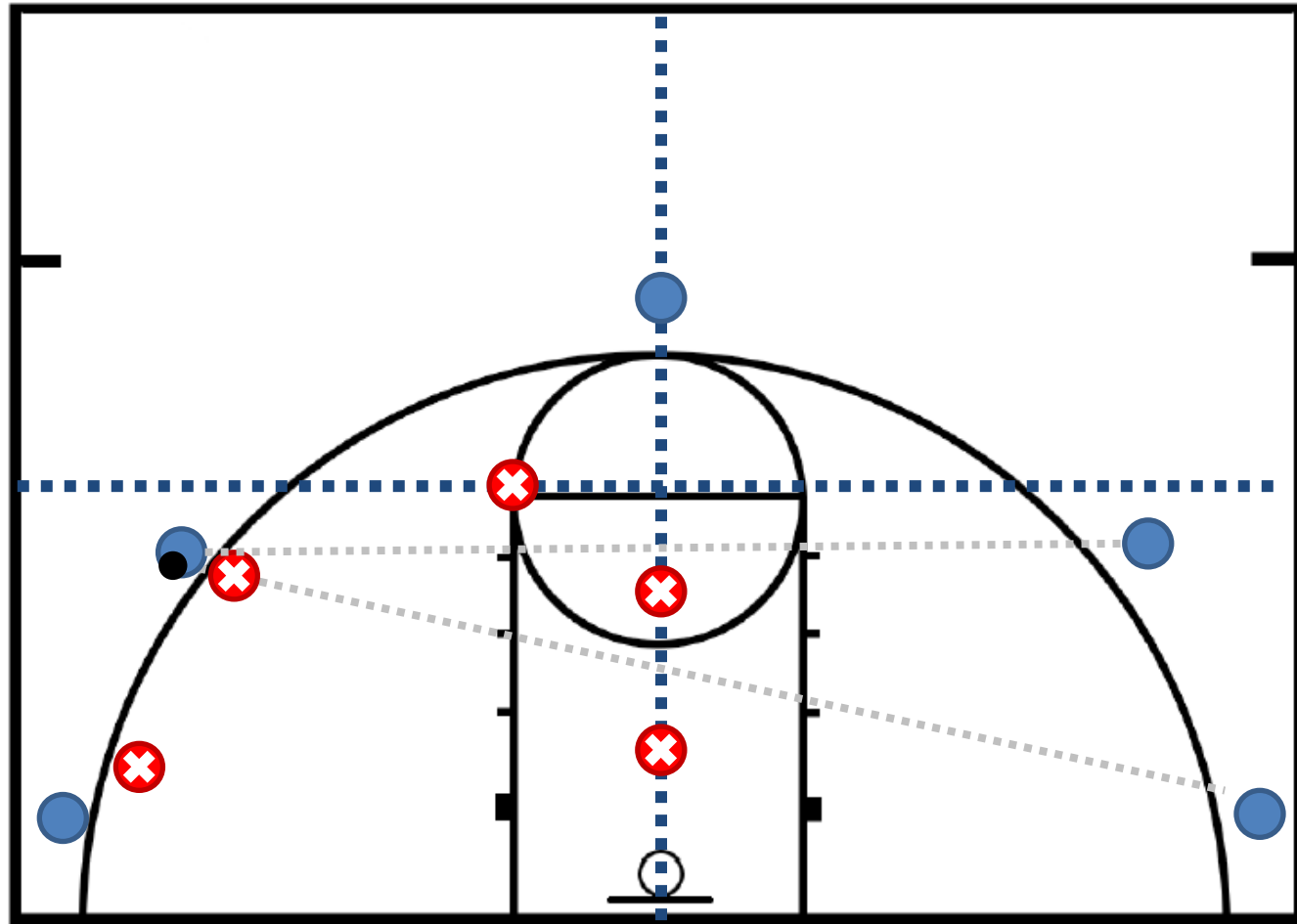
Quad Based Positioning

- When ball is above the line
 - Wing help should have one foot in the lane and two steps below line between man and ball
 - Corner help is on the midline and two steps below the line between man and ball



Quad Based Positioning

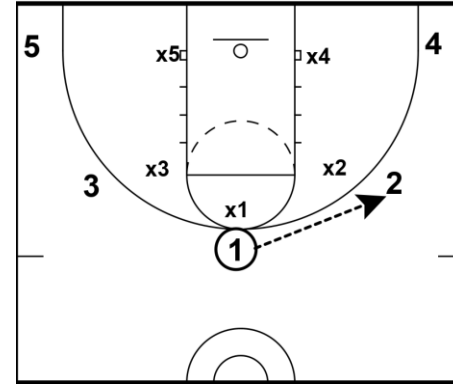
- When ball is below the line
 - Wing help should be on the midline and two steps below line between man and ball
 - Corner help is on the midline and twosteps below the line between man and ball



Example

Ball at Top

- Gaps are contained
- Corner defenders are in help near blocks
- Do not deny pass from 1 to a wing
 - You want the ball to get to one side so you can more easily cover and help



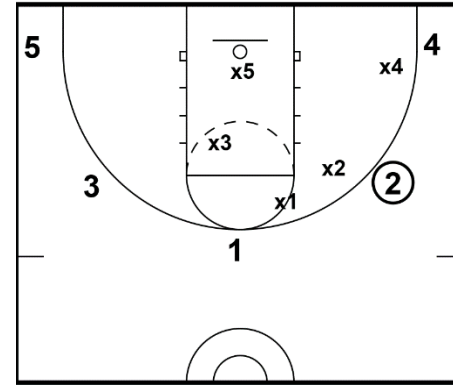
Coaching Notes

- When ball is at the top, it is critical that X2 and X3 contain the gaps.
 - Penetration from the top is very hard to defend once the ball handler is in the lane
- Older teams can try and keep the ball on one side of the floor once the offense commits to a side
 - Deny the pass back to the top of the key
 - May give up middle gap containment

Example

Ball on Wing

- Gaps are contained
- Weak side defenders are in help
 - Bottom defender near front of rim
 - Weak wing defender towards middle of lane



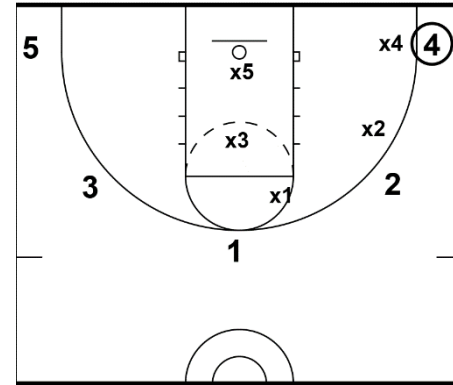
Coaching Notes

- Younger teams can move X3 closer to the middle of lane because there is less danger of a skip pass
 - Help defender's belly button on the far basket is a good visual reminder for the player
- Older teams will have X3 one or two shoes just inside the lane if opponents can throw a skip pass
- Teams that want to deny ball reversal will have X1 pressed out on 1 to deny reversal
 - X3 should be closer to middle of lane in this case to help control middle gap
 - Extreme denial can be applied by X2 shading 2 on the high side to keep that ball on that side of the floor and encourage pass to corner

Example

Ball in Corner

- High side gap is contained by X2
- Weak side defenders are in help
 - Bottom defender near front of rim
 - Weak wing defender at middle of lane
 - X1 near ball side elbow

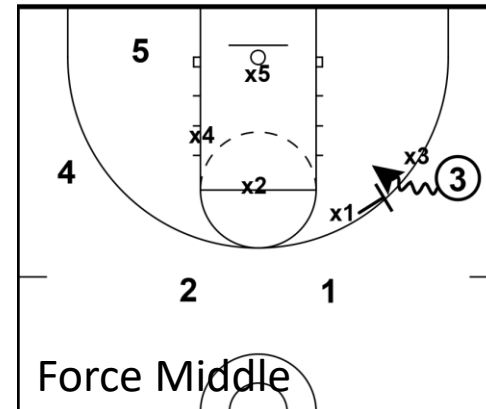
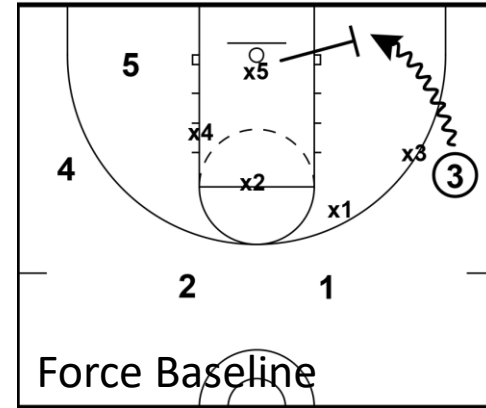


Coaching Notes

- Teams that want to deny ball reversal will have X1 pressed out on 1 to deny reversal
- Teams that want to apply extreme contain will move X2 onto 2 to deny one pass away as well
- Older teams looking for trapping opportunities will put X4 on high side of 4 to encourage baseline drive and trap with X5
 - Must have good defensive rotations to do this

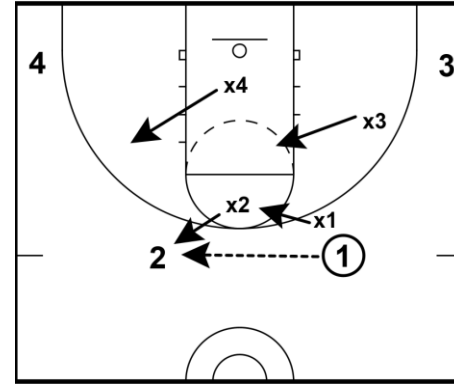
Force Baseline vs. Force Middle

- Neither is right or wrong – it is what you want to do as a coach
- Force baseline uses out of bounds as an extra defender
 - Players must be drilled in cutting off the baseline dribble or else you are immediately in a defensive rotation
 - Provides trapping opportunities
- Force middle leverages gap defenders immediately without affecting help coverages
 - No trapping opportunities
- Pictures at right show how the gap/help defenders would respond if containment is lost



Drills – 4v4 Shell

- 4v4 is better than 5v5 – more ground to cover
- Offensive players pass the ball around the perimeter
 - Older players can skip pass
- Defenders move to appropriate Gap/Help positions
- Add dribble penetration / cutters/screeners over time to force proper defensive adjustments

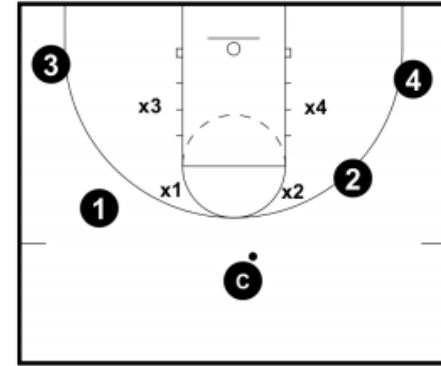


Coaching Notes

- Players in help that end up with a gap after a pass need to be taught to close to their gap position, not their guard. See X4 above as an example
- Players move ON THE PASS
- Players should close based if forcing baseline or forcing middle when appropriate
 - For example, if ball goes from 2 to 4, X4 would close towards high shoulder if forcing baseline or to low shoulder if forcing middle
- COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

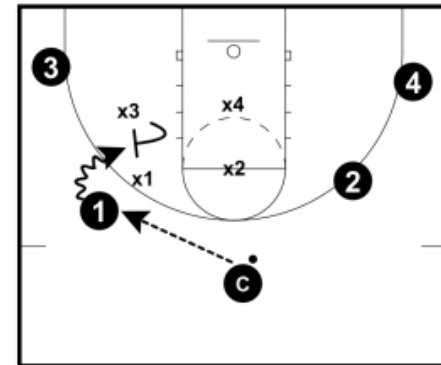
Drills – Defend the House

- Coach start with ball at top of key in 4v4 alignment
- Start the game by passing to any offensive player
- Offense tries to penetrate to the lane
- Players can pass to each other and the coach if they are stopped before reaching the lane
- Players that reach the lane can shoot



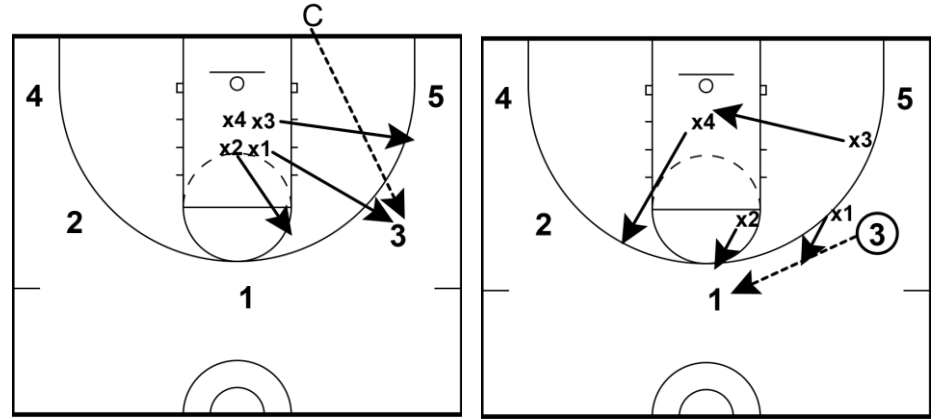
Coaching Notes

- Stress communication and getting to proper gap/help positions
- Keep score
 - Offense gets 1 point for getting into the lane, 1 point for a basket, 1 point for an offensive rebound
 - Defense get 1 point for a steal or 1 point for a rebound
 - First team to 3 wins



Drills – 5v4 Shell

- Four defensive players in front of basket. Coach with basketball
- Coach passes to any offensive player
- X1 must always cover the first pass from coach to player
- Gaps must always be covered
- Remaining player(s) get to help
- Proceed with normal shell drill



Coaching Notes

- Players in help that end up with a gap after a pass need to be taught to close to their gap position, not their guard. See X4 above as an example
- Players move ON THE PASS
- Players should close based if forcing baseline or forcing middle when appropriate
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- Add dribble penetration / cutters over time to force proper defensive adjustments
- COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Defending Cutters

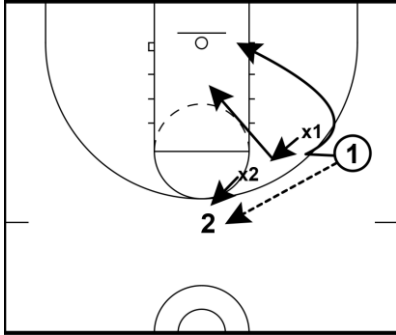
DEFENSIVE SITUATIONS

Basic Principles

- On a pass, never let a cutter get between defender and the ball
 - Jump to the pass to take away inside lane
 - Jam the cutter to force behind
- Cutters away from ball side are less dangerous than cutters to ball side
 - Space widens between defender and cutters as they move away from ball until defender reaches help position
 - Space narrows between defender and cutters as they move closer to the ball until defender is covering gap, help or ball depending on result of cut

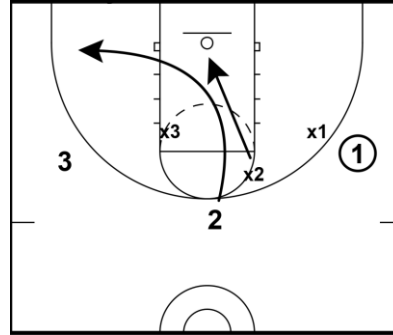
Examples

On the Pass



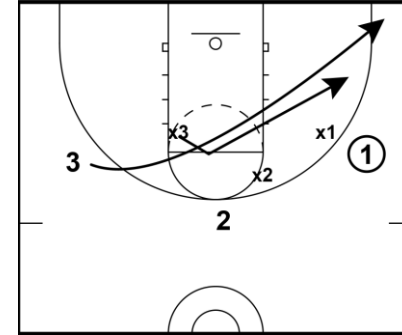
- 1 passes to 2
- X1 would jump to the pass to defend gap and take away easy “across the face” cut by 1
- If 1 attempts to go over X1, X1 would physically jam 1 and force him/her to go behind
- X1 would move with 1 on the continuation of the cut moving towards help position based on 1’s final stopping point

Away From the Ball



- 2 cuts down middle of lane
- X2 will drop with 2 on the cut
- X2 does not need to make physical contact – 2 may be going to down screen and X2 wants to leave room for the screen defender to get through the screen
- As 2 fills to weak corner, X2 assumes the proper help position – X2 does not go with 2 to the corner

Towards the Ball



- 3 attempts a typical 2nd away cut
- X3 is in help
- As 3 cuts to lane, X3 will jam the cut and ride it through the lane
- As 3 clears the lane and heads to corner, X3 begins to fill towards gap position
- X3 does not follow 3 to the corner then go to the gap – fill to the gap

Defending Down Screens

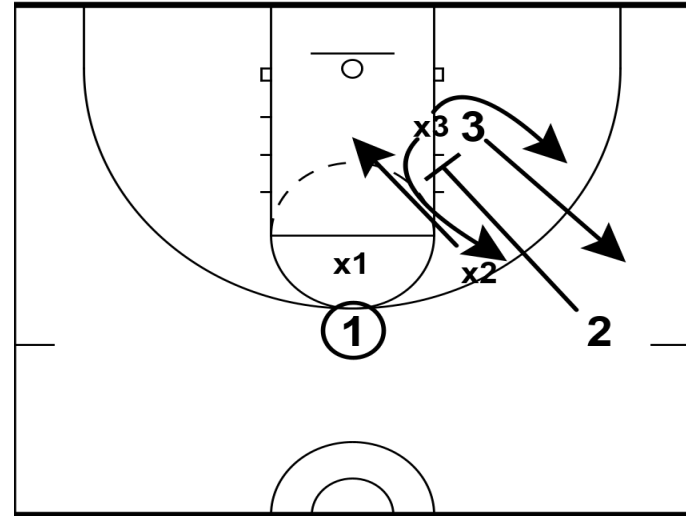
DEFENSIVE SITUATIONS

Basics

- Do not switch down screens
 - Youth basketball usually creates more advantage on the inside rather than outside due to lower outside shooting percentages
- Most down screens are from wing to block or short corner
- Screener defender defends as if a cut away from ball
 - Move towards middle and give space as cutter goes down (cutter will not be trying to go across defender's face when setting a down screen)
- Screened defender can use space to go over or under the screen
 - Usually, force baseline would go over the screen and force middle would go under

Example

- 2 is setting down screen for 3
- As 2 cuts to set screen, X2 would move with the cut maintaining space and position
- X3 now has the choice to go under or over



Coaching Notes

- By maintaining space, X2 does not become an extra screener for 3 (e.g., cutting off the over for the screened defender)
- Can coach the screened defender to get into the hip pocket of 3 and follow footstep-for-footstep
- Post cross screens (block to block) can be defended by switching

Defending Ball Screens

DEFENSIVE SITUATIONS

General

- Three typical ways to defend a ball screen
 - Switch: Defenders switch on any ball screen
 - Go Under: On ball defender goes under the screener and re-establishes position on ball handler on other side of screen
 - Go Over: On ball defender squeezes over top of screener to maintain position on the ball handler
- There are other approaches (i.e., Icing a screen) but at the youth level they are probably too complex given limited practice time, skill, and understanding.

Recommendations

- 4th/5th grade: Switching
 - Easiest to understand. Let's you spend limited practice time on more important defensive fundamentals: stance, footwork, gap, help
- 6A, 7B+, 8B+: Go Over
 - Starts teaching techniques needed in high school
 - Can be used with switching and/or go under based on players
- Notes:
 - Strongly recommend going over for older players.
 - Do something other than just switching to teach players different ways to play the game.

Defending the Post

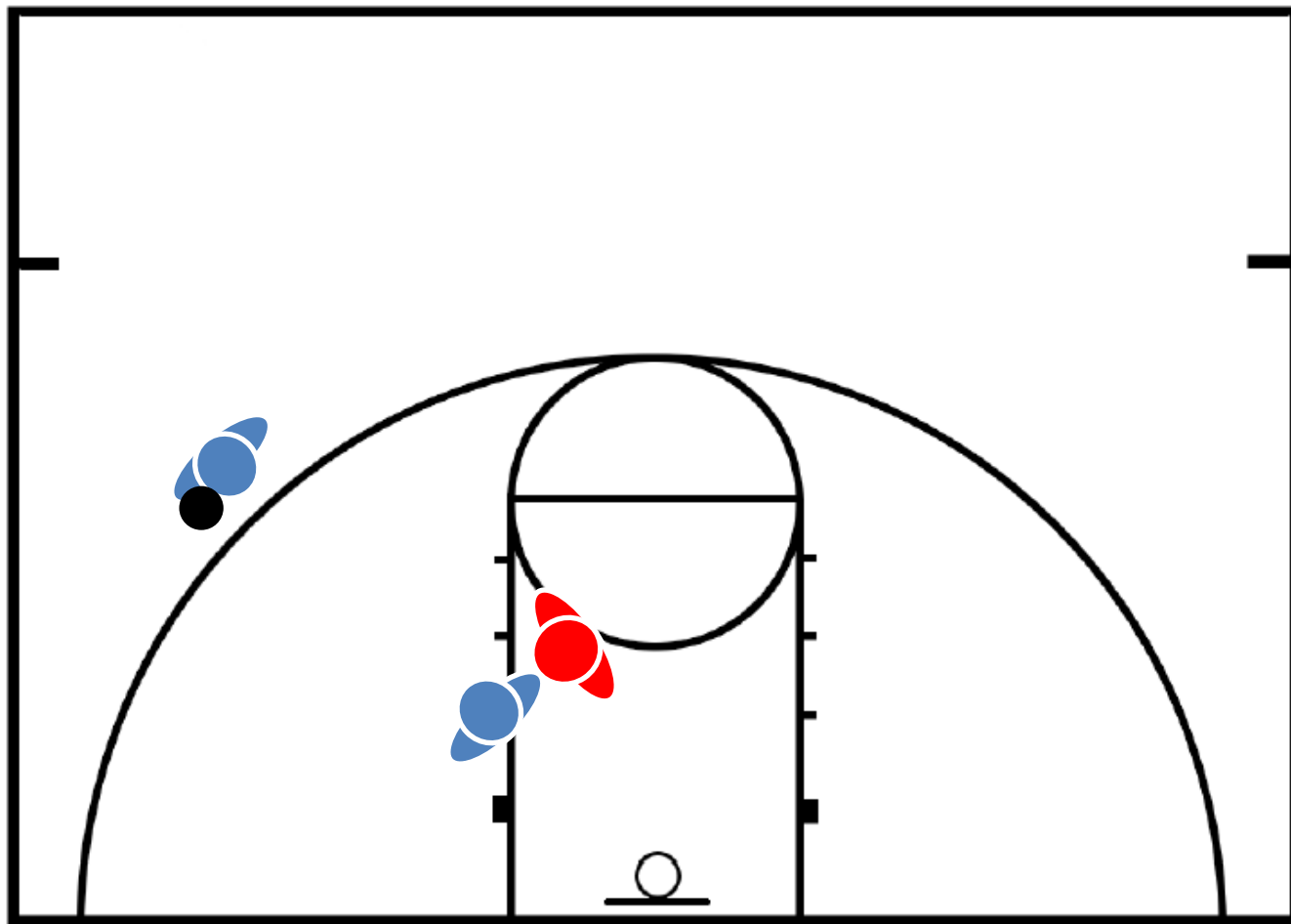
DEFENSIVE SITUATIONS

Post Defense

- “Equally” matched players
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ Denial
- “Over matched” defender
 - Full Front Denial

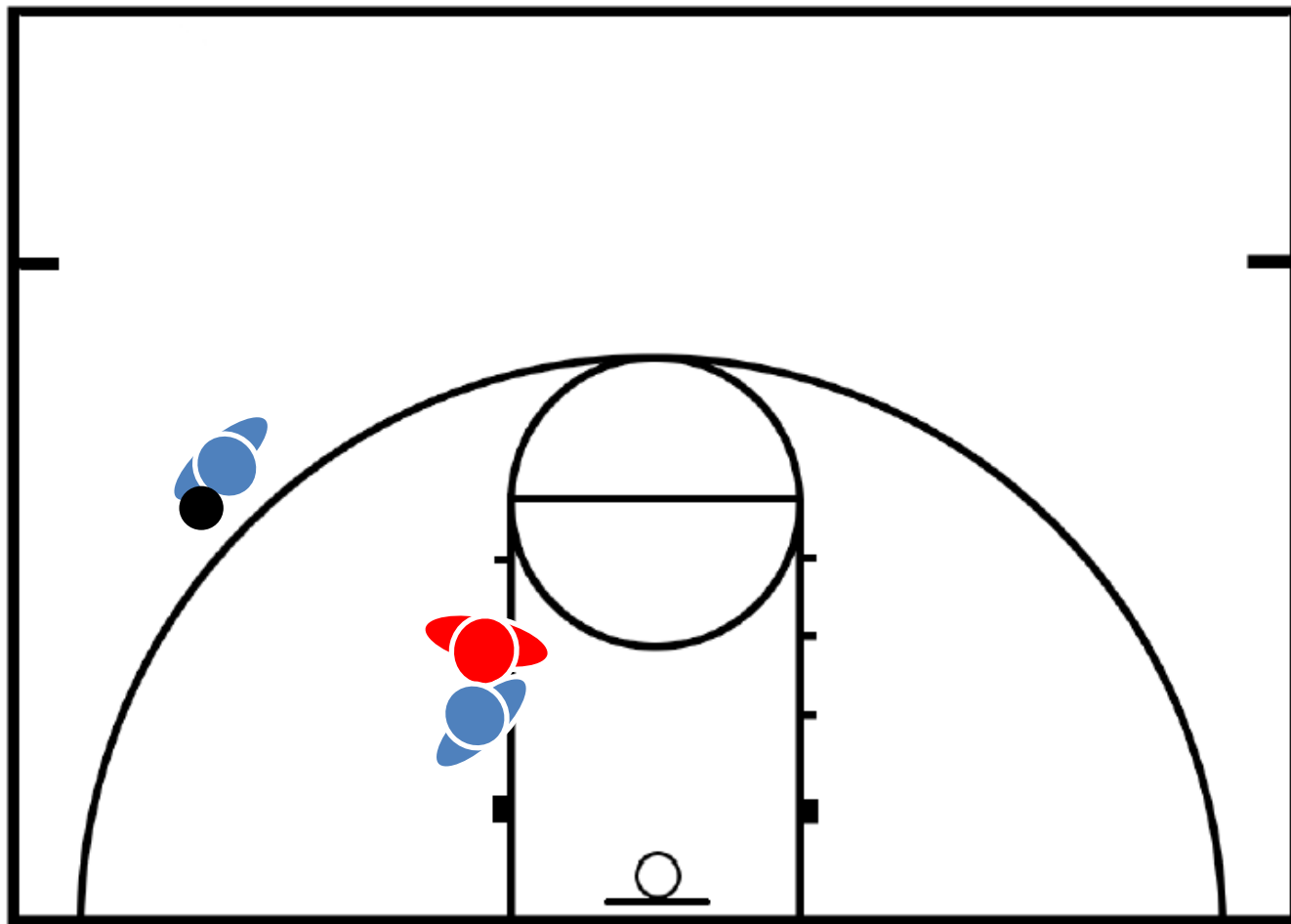
½ Denial

- Encourage pass to baseline
- Deflect pass or recover to defensive position between ball and basket
- Position
 - Defender chest to player shoulder
 - Near hand outstretched in front of player
 - Far hand on hip



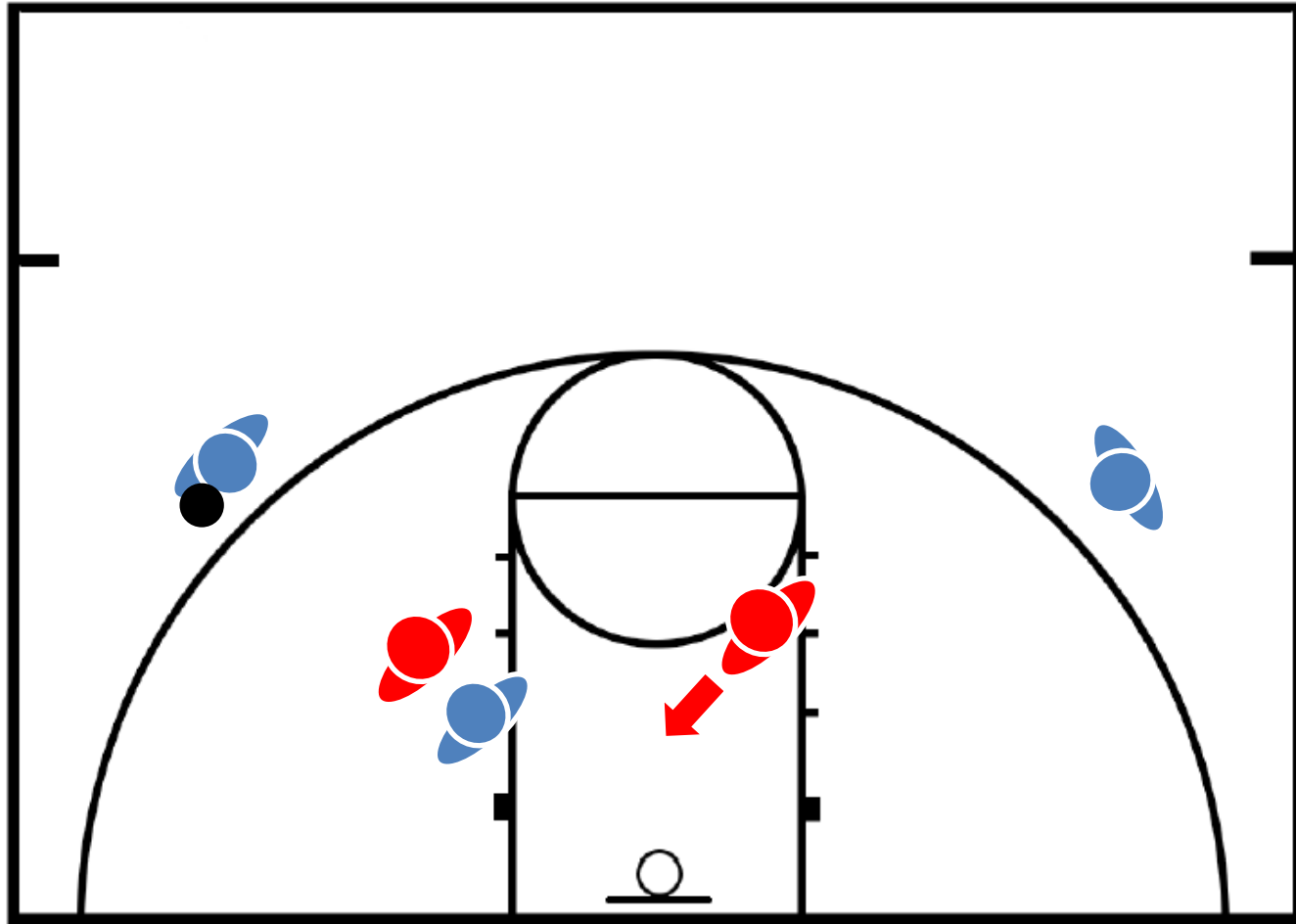
$\frac{3}{4}$ Denial

- Force pass to baseline
- Deflect pass or recover to defensive position between ball and basket (harder than in $\frac{1}{2}$ denial)
- Position
 - Defender far shoulder on player shoulder
 - Near hand outstretched in front of post player
 - Near foot across foot of post player



Full Front Denial

- 100% in front of player
- BUTT IN THIGHS!!!
- Need to work on backside help to defend against lob entry
 - Backside help defender responsible for defending against lob
 - If only help is a wing defender, help defender will need to drop down more to discourage/deny lob pass
 - Help concepts can also be applied to $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ defense as well, but mandatory in full front



Advanced Post Defense Tips

- Pressure the wing ball handler
 - Make the entry pass harder
 - Keep them off the ball, post player, basket line if you can... makes the entry pass angle tougher
 - Wing defender can shade baseline side when $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ post defense to take away baseline angle
- If Full Front defense, drill several things on successful post entry
 - Help defender immediately double teams the post with post defender. Post defender will be on high side, help defender walls up between post player and basket
 - On shot, help defender boxes out and post defender goes to front of rim for rebound

Defensive Rotations

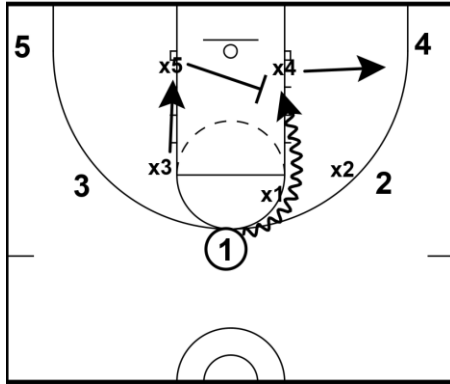
DEFENSIVE SITUATIONS

BASICS

- At younger levels, 4th, 5th, 6th – focus on nearest defender in help position stopping penetration that gets through a gap or to baseline
 - Advanced 6th grade teams may be able to handle additional rotation movement
- 7th and 8th can start working on complete defensive rotations

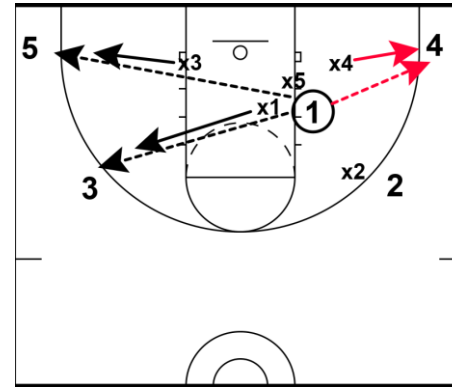
Top of Key Example

Rotation



- 1 was penetrated the gap
- Younger teams
 - X4 would stop penetration
 - No other rotations occur
- Older teams
 - X4 must cover natural pitch to corner
 - X5 comes from weak side to stop penetration
 - X3 drops to cover weak side help

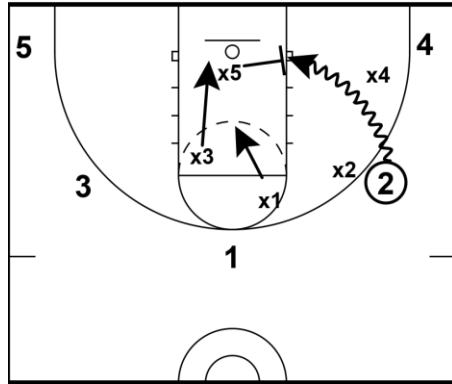
Recover



- 1 has been stopped
- Red indicates younger team's recovery if 1 passes to 4
- On outlet pass from 1 to weak side, nearest defender has close out responsibility
 - X3 has corner
 - X1 has wing

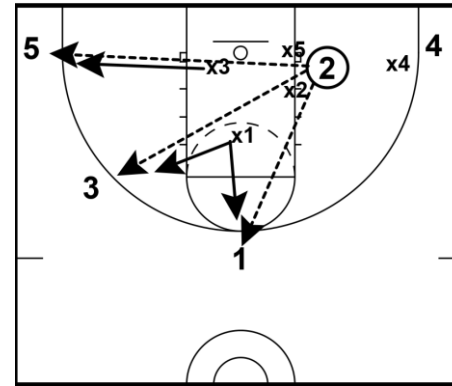
Wing to Baseline Example

Rotation



- 2 has penetrated baseline
- X5 moves to stop dribble
- X3 rotates down
- X1 rotates to middle help

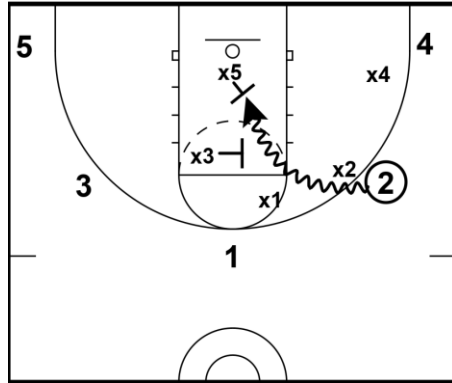
Recover



- 2 has been stopped
- On outlet pass from 1 perimeter, nearest defender has close out responsibility
 - X3 has corner
 - X1 has to cover a pass to 1 and 3
- X4 denies strong side pass after failing to control gap

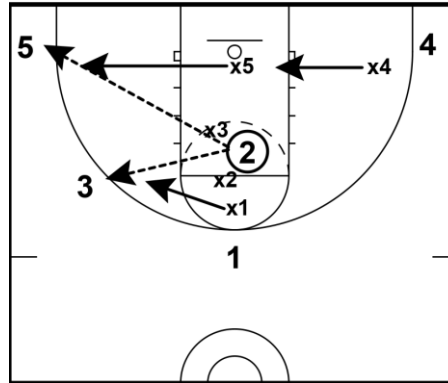
Wing to Middle Example

Rotation



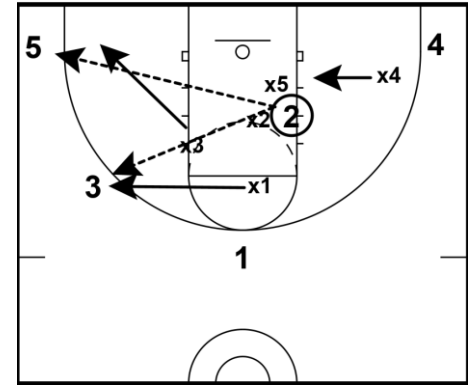
- Middle penetration causes a lot of problems – DON'T LET IT HAPPEN
- On penetration at foul line, X3 is closest help defender to stop penetration
- On deeper penetration, X5 is closest
- Better to stop the ball with both help defenders (by accident) than neither – when it doubt, stop the ball!

Recover X3 Stop



- 2 has been stopped by X3
- X4 should be moving to help
- X5 covers pass to corner
- X1 is shown as the close out on pass to 3
 - For youth basketball, this is usually ok

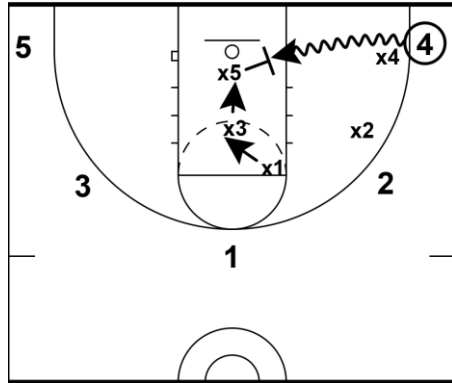
Recover X5 Stop



- 2 has been stopped by X5
- On pass to corner, X3 is closest help defender and closes out
- X1 is responsible for pass to wing and the top of key
- X4 is moving to help on drive by should be able to deny pass to 4 or close out if pass is made

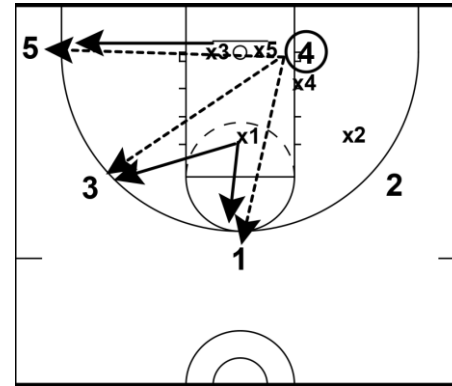
Corner to Baseline Example

Rotation



- 4 has penetrated baseline
- X5 moves to stop dribble
- X3 rotates down
- X1 rotates to middle help

Recover



- 4 has been stopped
- X3 has corner
- X1 has to cover a pass to 1 and 3

Closeouts

DEFENSIVE SITUATIONS

Two Schools of Thought

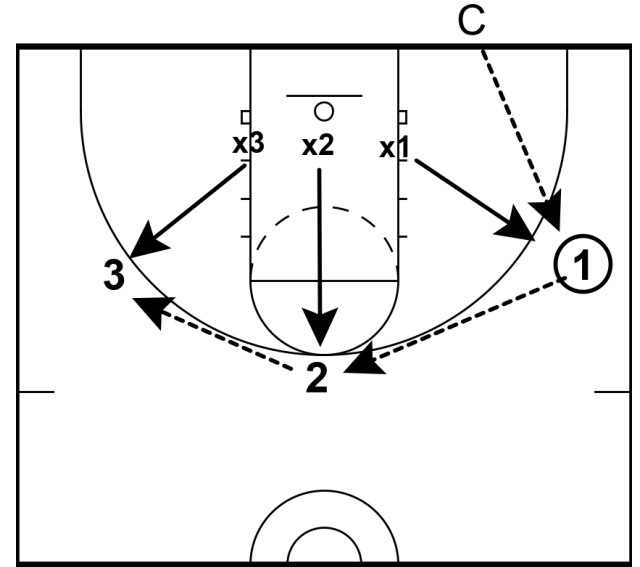
- Old School
 - Sprint towards ball
 - Start chopping feet, slowing and raising hands three or four steps from ball
 - Better when the fear of the drive is bigger than fear of the jump shot (especially the 3) – e.g., younger ages
- New School
 - Sprint towards ball
 - Defender two step stops
 - Hands up during stop
 - Better to discourage/disrupt shot with higher risk of giving up drive

Coaching Notes

- Teach players to close so that they force the drive to where they want it to go (i.e., towards middle help or baseline)
 - Aim for the opposite shoulder – force drive to the right into help means the defender closes on the ball handler's left shoulder (from defensive point of view)
- Eyes on belly button on close out
- Stay down – even on a shot

Drills

- Three offensive players around perimeter
- Defense players on blocks and middle
- Coach passes to 1. Ball is swung from one side of floor to other
- Defensive players close out on their guard – cannot move until the ball is in the air to their guard
- Can add live play on catch by 3



Coaching Notes

- Can add live play on catch by last player
- Can let offensive players drive at any time