The Gap Theory

Introduction: Explanation of Gaps

The game of basketball in its simplest form is - score more than your opponent. How a team goes about accomplishing that will forever be up for debate. However, there is a component of basketball that is universal across every level of basketball. Some players have a natural feel for it, some coaches teach the concept (but don't know that they are), and basketball enthusiasts can recognize it when they see it. This concept is the theory of gaps.

In a perfect world, the plays coaches spend all offseason putting in their playbook, and have their teams run thousands of times in practice, should create open shots and scoring opportunities the majority of the time in games. But in reality, even at the high school level, teams probably score less than 25% of the time by getting an open look directly off one of their set plays. The higher the level of basketball, the lower the percentage becomes. With all the advancements in scouting and the preparation teams make for each opponent, it's hard to simply run a continuity offense and get guys wide open for shots. So, if teams aren't scoring off staggers, pin downs, screen the screener, and the Princeton Flex, how are they scoring? Most coaches, color commentators, and players would say it's pick & rolls, motion offense, and "creating your own shot," but in this book you are going to discover WHY those answers, along with others, are all part of *The Gap Theory*. As I begin to explain this, some of you will think this is way too simple and obvious for you to learn anything from it; I only ask you to give me a chance.

If you watch a lot of basketball, besides the NBA, you will notice that the majority of scoring is done from either behind the 3-point line, or in the paint. The midrange jump-shot is becoming the lowest percentage shot in basketball across the board, as well as the least taken shot. I believe at the most basic level of logic, the reason is because "3s are worth more than 2s, so we should shoot them." And if you end up driving to the basket, you may as well get as close to the hoop as you can to increase your chances of making it. More factors go into it than that, and I will discuss those as we get into more situations involving *The Gap Theory*.

So, if the game is becoming all about 3s and lay-ups/dunks, then strategies, both offensively and defensively, should all revolve around creating opportunities to create or take away open 3s and shots in the lane. These strategies bring us to the purpose of this book; "gaps". What is the definition of a gap? Some would refer to it as a driving lane, but I would define it as the space between a perimeter defender and his next closest teammate. (The image below shows the gaps represented by the black lines)

The space between perimeter defenders and the baseline also constitute as gaps. We will talk about that in more detail later. Most people watching a basketball game would recognize and be able to identify these gaps, but most people don't understand their significance.

Imagine you are playing 1 on 1 and you are on offense. If I ask you before you are given the ball what your ideal shot would be, more than likely you would say as close to the basket as you can get. And if the game continued to increase in team size – 2on2, 3on3, etc. the answer would probably still be the same. The goal offensively, without a situation where you need a 3-point basket, is almost always to get a lay-up if possible. Therefore, the defense's object, conversely, should be to force the offense to take shots as far away from the basket as possible, and contest them as well. This creates the big picture of the entire game of basketball: the offense trying to get to the basket, the defense trying to force them away from it.

Now if two people are playing 1 on 1, the defender is all by himself, trying to accomplish the task of keeping the offensive player away from the rim. But once multiple defenders get added to the equation, it turns into a team effort, i.e. I help you when you're guarding your man, and you help me when I'm guarding my man. An analogy: the lane is like the defensive team's military base and the defense has to do everything they can to keep the offense out. You may be thinking right now, "Sure that makes sense, but if the defense all backs off their opponent to protect the lane then the offense is just going to shoot 3s and mid-range jump shots." You would be correct, which is exactly the reason, in today's game, players are shooting the ball farther and farther away from the basket. There are players in the NBA who shoot the ball comfortably from 28ft (Stephen Curry, Damian Lillard, and Kevin Durant) when the NBA 3-point line is 23 ft 9 inches from the basket (22 ft in the corners). Some high school players shoot it from well behind their 19 ft 9 inch line, and many college players shoot from NBA range when their line is at 20 ft 9 inches. As the game has evolved, basketball players have developed the ability to shoot the ball from deeper, so the defense has to guard them farther out, ultimately creating a more difficult task: defending the 3-point shot and keeping offensive players from getting to the lane.

Before we start getting into spacing principles, mismatches, and other intricacies that make gaps so significant, it's important to understand that for an offensive player, the quickest way to create good shots for your team is to attack a gap. Defensively, the most difficult task there is (probably tied with successfully rebounding the ball) is to close all the gaps on the floor, and still be able to guard your designated offensive player *aka - stunt & closeout/recover.*

*A stunt is the action of a defender faking at an offensive player standing in or driving your gap to either steal the ball, or get him to pick up his dribble or pass. Also referred to by some as "bluff" or "fake trap" *

If these concepts have intrigued you even a little bit, keep reading! We're about to get into some of the most prominent facets of basketball and see how *The Gap Theory* can change the way you coach/play basketball and ultimately win games.

Chapter 1: As Coach Hoiberg Says, Spacing is Everything

I was fortunate enough to spend 3 seasons in college playing under Coach Fred Hoiberg at Iowa State University. Most people know Fred for his impressive career at Iowa State, his shooting ability during his NBA career, and his offensive philosophies that he brought to college basketball that turned the Cyclones into a scoring machine. During my playing career, I had no idea that the concepts and principles that Coach Hoiberg drilled into us day after day were not only well beyond the common knowledge of other programs in the country - but would also be the stepping stones that helped me learn and develop *The Gap Theory*. I'm so thankful for the 8,356 times I heard Fred's voice from the sideline shouting, "Get to the corner!" (you'll understand what that means by the time you're through this chapter).

Why is spacing so important? Simply put, the better the spacing, the bigger the gaps. The bigger the gaps, the harder it is to protect the lane and recover to your man. The next question becomes, "How do I know if our spacing is correct?" The answer will depend on where the ball is, and whether you're in a 3 out 2 in, 4 out 1 in, or a 5 out system. In the diagrams below, there are six different offensive alignments. The first three will demonstrate what poor spacing looks like indicated by the red dashed lines, and the second three will demonstrate good spacing, indicated by the blue dashed lines. The noticeable difference is how wide the gaps are when the spacing is correct, versus how small the gaps are in the examples of the poor spacing.

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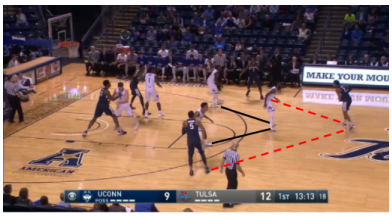
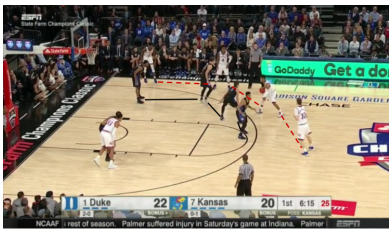
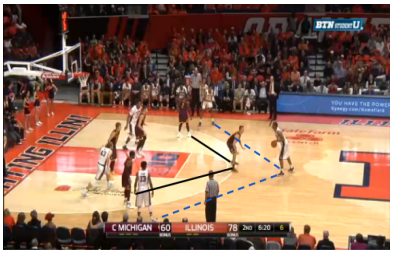
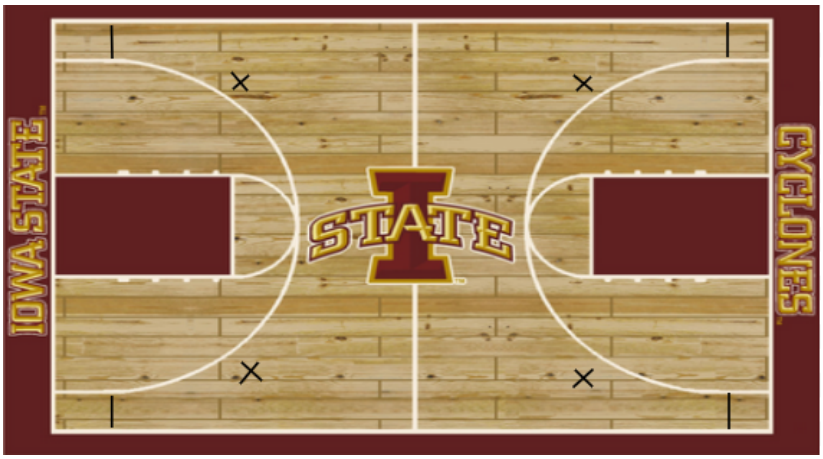
		

3 out 2 in	4 out 1 in	5 out
		

I believe the best way to teach correct spacing is to put two "X's" on the wings - free throw line extended, and two strips of tape that run parallel with the baseline outside the 3-point line just above the block extended creating a box in both corners. After you put these pieces of tape down on your court, you'll in essence have four spots marked off. Besides a player having the basketball at the top of the key, the three or four perimeter players should always be on/in one of these four spots almost all the time. Keep in mind that this is only referring to when you're NOT running some sort of play/set. However this spacing WILL be the same any time you're running any type of ball screen/pick&roll.



So how do these markings on the court help your team discover the method to this spacing? This is probably the most difficult and time-consuming part of this process. You will have to have some patience with this step of the learning. I like to do a drill called 3 on 0 spacing. You'll have a line at the top of the key and a line at both wings with one player out on the court at each spot. The player with the ball at the top of the key starts the drill by making a passing to one of the wing players or penetrating "a gap". Here's where the drill gets tricky. After the initial pass, the drill doesn't have any more instructions besides this one rule - "get to one of the four spots marked off on the court and be ready to move with the basketball".

This is where the patience comes in. Teaching players (and teaching coaches to understand) to move freely with and without the ball in a way that is game-like is difficult. Because the majority of players have been taught to run plays their entire life. "Go to this spot after he passes it there." "Once you get the handoff, dribble towards him and reverse the ball". "Wait to basket cut until the ball get swung to that side." When it comes to *The Gap Theory* there aren't any specific rules, only principles.

Now, back to making the drill effective and purposeful. After the initial pass, the player who started the drill needs to move somewhere other than standing at the top of the key. If he passes it to one wing or the other, there are essentially two places he can go - strong side corner (the corner on the side he just passed it to) or weak side corner (the corner opposite his pass). He can get there a couple different ways. He can basket cut first then empty to a side, or he could sprint straight there. He could start the drill with a dribble handoff to the wing, or make a move and simulate driving his defender to the basket. The most important aspect of the drill is using your imagination to make the movements game-like. This is where players really struggle to comprehend the purpose of this drill.

As far as what you do once you catch the ball - think of it like a game of three on three rather than five on five. If you were out at the park with your friends playing three on three and someone threw you the ball at the wing, what would you do with it? Odds are you'd either pass it, shoot it, or drive. This drill works the same way, but with this drill and this concept of *The Gap Theory*, you're just being intentional and specific with your decisions and movements. The main thing I tell my guys when we first start doing this drill early in the year is 1. Don't be afraid to make a mistake 2. Focus more on moving without the ball than stressing about what you're going to do when you get it 3. Always keep the idea of defenders being on the court in mind and 4. After you've started to get the hang of it, start thinking one and two steps beyond where you're actually at.

Chapter 2: Make Two Guard One

The next order of business becomes, "What happens when an offensive player starts to drive one of these gaps we've created?" The answer is revealed in a concept that I refer to as "Make two defenders guard one." This may be the single most critical concept of *The Gap Theory* so it's important that you grasp this. Since we've established a general understanding of where gaps are and that good perimeter spacing creates the best gaps, the next piece of the puzzle is understanding how to attack those gaps and put the defense at a disadvantage. First, watch the play below and notice the offense has great spacing before the drive happens. That spacing puts a ton of stress on the defenders who are in help to stop the basketball and be responsible for guarding their own man. (You will need to download any QR code reader from either the "app store" or the "google play store")

At the most basic level, what you just watched is how *The Gap Theory* works. Notice the spacing was correct before the guard started to drive. Because the spacing was correct, there were large gaps for the guard to penetrate on either side. For this to be successful, the ball-handler has to be able to get his defender on his hip. Once he starts to drive, the help-side defender chose to leave his man to take away the layup, and then the kick-out occurs and the 3-point shot was wide open. Understand this open shot was created in only 3 dribbles that took about 5 seconds. Ultimately, *The Gap Theory* is about trying to force the defense into this disadvantage as many times as possible throughout a possession. Set plays can be scouted for and stopped by a well-prepared team. With *The Gap Theory*, good offense will always beat good defense.

In this same scenario in a different game, the help defender was more concerned about keeping his man from getting the ball that he didn't help his teammate at all, leaving the gap wide open. Now the on-ball defender is saddled with the task of basically playing 1 on 1 with no help. Offensively, if you're able to get your man on your hip with the dribble then once again… good offense beats good defense and the ball handler gets fouled driving to the basket.

There is one last line of defense that can stop the offense from getting an open shot, and/or fouling on a drive to the basketball. The post player(s). If the ball handler is able to get through the gap and into the lane, the final read becomes the decision between scoring it off the dribble, or feeding your post player. This decision follows the same rule of thumb as on the perimeter. We need to have great spacing, and we need to make two defenders guard one. As for the spacing, on some basketball courts there is a line about 2 feet long that extends from the baseline just a few feet outside the lane on either side. It is a great

use for explaining good spacing to your post players. For the purpose of terminology, I refer to this space as the “room”. For example, “when the guard drives the gap, make sure you’re in your room.”

In these next two clips you’ll see why the proper spacing by the post player (in his room) puts the defense in a difficult situation, where he has to make a decision on who to guard. The choice is step up and stop the ball, or stay back and cover his man. This is where we, again, make two defenders guard one. If the post defender steps up, the ball handler dumps it to the post. If he stays back, the ball handler scores it himself.

I don’t want for you to be discouraged by the first video and think “we don’t have the players to be able to throw a lob to the rim for an alley-oop in that situation. The read and the result will still be the same with good spacing. The team I currently coach doesn’t have any players who regularly play above the rim, and we are still able to execute the same play.

This read is one of the most important reads that a ball handler will need to be able to recognize and execute. This situation probably happens 20-30 times a game. The ability of the ball handler to determine whether the best option is to score it or pass it in that split second, takes a lot of reps. Later in the book, I will use an entire chapter to talk about skill development in the context of these concepts and principles. Because I believe that *The Gap Theory* is universal and can work at any level, I want to leave you with the tools necessary to build a program that can execute these tactics.

Chapter 3: You Must Force Closeouts

Go into almost every gym in America the first week of basketball season and watch a practice. You're almost GUARANTEED to see some variation of a closeout drill. The sound of a coach instructing their players, "Guys, it's a sprint to the perimeter! Then as you start to breakdown - your hands go up and your butt goes down!" is something most former basketball players at every level have experienced before. But why is this skill always worked on at the beginning of the year? I'm willing to bet some coaches do it because 1 - It's kicks your butt and exposes the guys who aren't in shape. And 2 - It's "just something everybody works on...so we probably should too."

The truth of the matter is, if you find a team who can successfully closeout with all five guys, first off I'd like to recruit them haha - but you've got a really good defensive team! The ability to run at an offensive player who has the basketball already, take away their ability to get a good rhythm shot, and still be able to move laterally both ways and cut them off from driving past you, is EXTREMELY undervalued! It's hard! And it's the reason most teams can't stop their opponents from scoring on close to half of their possessions. Well, that and the way the rules have changed that you can't breathe on anyone without getting called for a block or a hand check haha.

So offensively, it would be advantageous if we focused our offense around forcing the defense to closeout as often as possible. Eventually, someone is going to screw up, and thus begins *The Gap Theory* at work. It's vital to your offensive success that you learn how to force closeouts, and attack bad ones. Like you saw in the second chapter (Make Two Guard One), beating someone off the dribble isn't always going to be as simple as those videos made it look. You may not have the ball handlers or the quickness. You may not have the mismatches or the shooting ability on the perimeter to force guys to widen their gaps. Forcing closeouts will combat several of these issues and help you produce the ability to drive gaps. In the remainder of this book, I am going to attempt to cover as many strategies as possible to give you and your team ways to generate bad closeouts, and stunts.

The simplest way to force a closeout (if you're not able to drive a gap and get a defender on the ball handler's hip), is to pass the ball. It seems almost too easy to be true, but trust me - it works. Very few teams play a style of defense where nobody plays off their man in help and everyone just denies passing lanes. By doing so, you're telling all five guys that they are responsible for guarding their man 1v1 with no help at all. Due to this issue, most teams are taught to be in help/gaps when the ball isn't with their man. Therefore, each time the offense passes the ball, the defense is put in a situation where they have to closeout. (Why do you think there always seems to be a correlation between teams who move the ball really well, and their ability to score?... Closeouts)

In this clip, you're going to see a pass that forces the guy near the free throw line to closeout to his man at the 3-point line. On the closeout, the offensive player recognizes the defender is

closing out too hard and at a poor angle - opening up a driving opportunity that he may not have easily had if they both would have started in a neutral position. After the player blows past his man on the bad closeout, the defender who was guarding the man who passed it feels the stress to slide in and stunt at him to not allow a direct drive to the basket. ***Notice*** the offensive player whose man just left him to stunt at the driver doesn't stand and watch the drive. He moves with the driver keeping the space between them the same as when he started the drive. This is SO IMPORTANT because when the passer moves with the drive and his man stunts, when the ball gets passed back to him for the shot the defender is too far away at that point to stunt and still closeout to the shooter. Great spacing, one bad closeout, good movement with the drive, and well-timed pass equals 3-ball! *The Gap Theory* at work:

It won't always be as easy as one pass leading to a bad closeout which leads to an open shot. Or two hard dribbles into a gap forcing a defender to help uphill and the post is wide open. Once you begin to understand each individual part i.e. spacing, attacking gaps, making two guard one, forcing closeouts & stunts, you'll begin to see how you can piece these individual parts together and create some excellent basketball. Watch this next clip a few times and see if you can point out which parts of *The Gap Theory* you saw in this one possession that lead to a layup. I counted seven. Let's see what you've learned so far!

So, how many did you see? It starts with being able to identify each individual part, and then the next step is being able to identify why those parts are effective on any given play. Then the hope is you get to a place where you can start anticipating the next step before it happens.
I'll tell you what I saw in this clip

1. Great spacing by all four guys without the ball on the pass into the post
2. The post player forces two to guard one (when the help-side defender rotates over to double team)
3. An on-time on-target pass to the corner forces a closeout from someone that wasn't responsible for the corner man which lead to an open player on the wing
4. On the swing to the wing, the guard penetrated a gap forcing another "make two guard one"
5. While the guard drove from the wing, the man at the top spaced away to create a larger gap, and a longer closeout on the kick out
6. One final poor closeout to the shooter made for an easy blow by to the lane

7. Both post players created/maintained good spacing on the drive which lead to a lack of help by the post defenders for an easy layup.

The thing I love most about *The Gap Theory* principle is that you can't scout for it. The offense in that clip wasn't running a set or doing any predetermined movements. They were following concepts that are extremely difficult to guard.

I want to skip ahead to something we'll learn later about how to create these disadvantages for the defense. Mismatches are a great way to force bad closeouts, force two to guard one, and ultimately get into gaps. If you go back and watch the clip again, you'll see that when the post player initially caught the ball, he handed it off to a perimeter player and the defense switched. Right when they switched, you'll notice the post player went down towards the block and called for the basketball and the perimeter player was ready to pass it to him. The reason why, is because (whether they attribute it to understanding the theory we are discussing or not) the post player knew he had an advantage on his new defender if he could just get the ball. The defense ALSO recognized that advantage and had to react by sending a help defender to keep the post player from getting an easy basket and the whole sequence began. We'll talk more about mismatches later.

The other thing that makes this theory so impactful is how quickly a team can make all this happen. Go back and watch the clip again and see how long it took to make 4 passes with two dribble penetrations to the lane… 10 seconds! That's beautiful basketball. Another thing that makes it a wonderful tool to have in your team's offense is how smoothly you can transition from running a play/set to attacking a gap and creating a shot. In this next clip, you'll see the offense start out by setting two down screens to begin their play. On the first catch, the ball-handler notices his defender doesn't close out under control and chooses to attack the middle gap. That leads to the middle defender trying to close down the gap. The point guard does a great job of spacing with the drive and gets to the wing (or X that we showed on the court earlier) and gets a wide open three. The only thing the defense could do is rotate the corner defender to try to contest the shot, but if they did - the shooter could have made one extra pass to the corner for an open three.

I think after reading this book, you'll begin to think of numerous strategies, expressions, and instructions you've heard and been taught over the years and you'll see the reason why those things are true. Or you may find out that they actually aren't effective, they've just been blindly passed on to people with no explanation of why. It's not just enough to have good plays and good players. Once you and your team understand why you do the things you do, that's when real success is achievable. Throughout this book, continue to ask questions, rethink your strategies and ways of doing things, and see if you do them because they are effective - or because "that's just the way I know how to do it."

I am constantly evaluating my reasoning for teaching and coaching the way that I do. The game is always growing. Let's not get stuck in a routine when there's so much more to learn!

A perfect example of that is in this next clip. The last clip you just watched was from 2015 of Duke getting an open 3 by understanding how to attack gaps and space properly. This clip you're going to see next is from the Michigan State vs Duke game from 2017. The clips will look very similar because the same concepts are timeless!

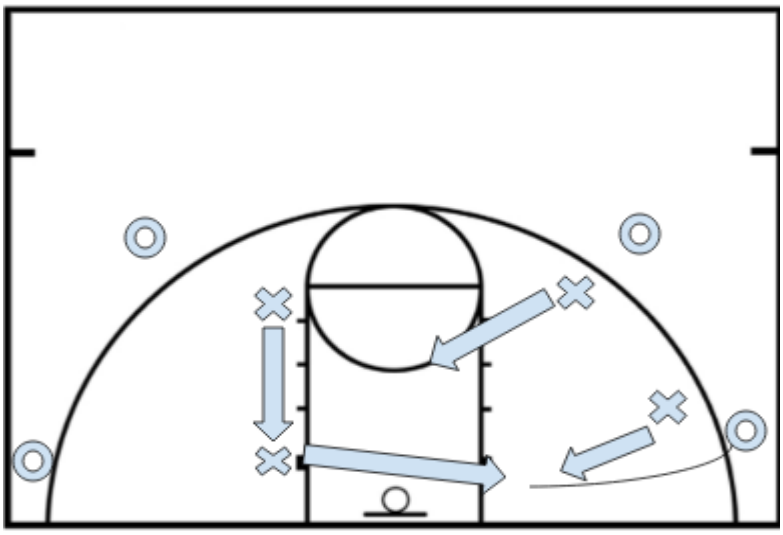
Chapter 4: Baseline Drive

There is one final gap that we have not talked about yet. I saved this one for last because I think it is important to first understand the concept of spacing, attacking gaps, and making the correct reads in regards to penetration going towards the middle. So let's talk about the last gap that there is to attack - the gap between the on-ball defender and the baseline. You have learned so far what options are available to exploit in a defense when you are able to get into a gap going towards the middle. But what happens if you are able to beat your defender baseline off the dribble?

Just as we discussed the importance of spacing without the basketball in previous chapters, understanding the spacing principles on a baseline drive are crucial as well. This movement is a reaction to the way the defense rotates to stop the ball handler. When it comes to middle penetration, there are different schemes and strategies that teams can choose from to try and stop the offense from getting an open look. However, on baseline penetration, the defense is somewhat forced to guard it the same way. You will see that if you're able to drive baseline and the ball handler can get past his defender, an open shot is almost inevitable.

The ideal time for the ball-handler to beat his defender baseline is when the nearest offensive player (typically a post player) is on the opposite side of the lane. It's okay to drive baseline when there is a strong-side post player, but we will take a look at that later. The two most important spots the offense needs to get to on the baseline drive are the corner, and the front of the rim right where the charge circle forms. The terminology we use for getting to the spot right in front of the rim is called a "T-Up". Another term that will be important to know is the pass made from the ball-handler driving baseline to the guy in the opposite corner. We refer to it as a "hammer pass". The question is, why are those two spots so important to get to on a baseline drive? It directly correlates to how defenses have difficulty rotating/helping when a defender gets beat baseline.

If you have ever been on a team, or coached, then you have probably done the infamous "defensive shell drill" at one point or another. The purpose of the shell drill is to practice defensive positioning and rotations on dribble penetration. In the diagram below, I will draw up the standard rotation that teams are taught on a baseline drive. This will help explain why the T-Up and corner are so important.



What you should notice from the image above, is that the nearest baseline defender is responsible for cutting off the ball-handler and keeping them from getting to the basket. As the baseline defender comes across the lane to cut off the dribble, the weak-side perimeter defender is taught to drop down to the baseline to take away the hammer pass. Lastly, the strong-side perimeter defender is taught to get to the middle of the lane as a "center fielder" and take the first pass once it's thrown back out to the offense. Almost every team is taught these rotations and responsibilities once a defender gets beat baseline.

Now you are going to see how the T-Up and corner spot are imperative to the baseline drive. In the four clips below, you'll see the ball-handler beat his defender baseline and the defense rotate in a similar fashion to the diagram above. The difference in a real game vs the shell drill is that in the shell drill there are only four offensive players. Once you add the fifth offensive and defensive players, it is now the responsibility of the defender guarding the opposite side post (who ideally will be somewhere close to his ***room*** but doesn't always have to be) to stop the basketball. Then the two back-side perimeter defenders are forced to try and guard three players at the same time. The progression that the ball-handler should go through on a baseline drive should be 1. Score 2. T-Up 3. Hammer 4. Opposite Slot. Watch these clips below and pay attention to how the defense rotates almost the same every time, and then watch how the four scoring options become available based on how the defense rotates. Here's a secret for ya - it's almost impossible to stop all four options.

This won't work exactly the same every time a player beats his man baseline on the dribble, but by consistently occupying the three spots we discussed, it will be extremely difficult for the defense to take away either an open lay-up or 3-point shot. And to reiterate the methodology of the theory - the reason this concept seems to work so consistently is because it starts with ***driving a gap***, and once that happens the defense must rotate and help. Once you make ***two guard one***, all it takes is ***spacing*** and an accurate pass (or two or three) and someone is usually going to get a great shot. Finally, I'll show you one last clip that in my opinion is the ultimate example of a baseline drive and great spacing resulting in a wide-open basket. In this last clip, you'll see the play start with the baseline drive and the defense rotate over to cut off the ball handler. The ball handler throws a great hammer pass to the opposite corner and you'll see the slot defender go over to take away the 3-point shot. On the catch, she recognizes the stunt and throws one extra pass to the slot for a wide open three. This is good basketball!

Chapter 5: The Pick & Roll

One of the most popular ways to make two guard one and force closeouts is by using the pick & roll. This chapter will take an in-depth look at pick & roll because of how many different offensive reads and defensive coverages you can potentially see. This chapter will be lengthy, and there's a lot to take from it because of how the game has developed and started to rely on the pick & roll. Make sure as you focus in on what's happening in the PnR that you don't lose sight of the spacing/gaps/stunts that happen with the other six players on the court. The PnR is how we can make two players guard one, but the spacing by the other players is equally as important and follows the same principles that we talked about in chapter 1.

Something I've noticed about players running pick & roll is that there's a small percentage of them who anticipate how the defense will try to guard it, and are prepared to take advantage of how the defense tries to stop it. There should always be a mentality offensively that "however the defense decides to guard this ball-screen, we can create a scoring opportunity off of it." For almost any and all coverages of the pick & roll, there is a way to beat it if the offense is in the right spacing, the screener does his job correctly, and the ball-handler reads the two defenders guarding the pick & roll.

First, let's talk about why the PnR (pick & roll) is so effective in the first place. Simply put, a PnR forces the two defenders involved in the ball-screen to communicate (which if you've been coaching any amount of time at all - you know how difficult than can be) And, with the exception of switching, it also forces the player guarding the screen to try and stay in front of (or guard) the ball handler while the defender guarding the ball-handler gets thru the screen - aka **two people are guarding one**. I believe that the reason why this magical action known as the pick & roll is so effective all comes down to this theory: it's the easiest way to force two people to guard one. Now, a lot of coaches would easily diagnose this defensive issue by simply switching any and all ball-screens - which can eliminate the initial threat of the PnR, but if the offense is smart and well coached, the real trouble comes after the switch. It's also important to note that the four players involved in any particular PnR aren't the only moving parts that matter. The way the other three defenders help, makes all the difference in the world. And the way the other three offensive players space the floor, makes all the difference in how their defenders can help. After we look at how the PnR creates scoring opportunity using *The Gap Theory,* I will finish this chapter by discussing what skills are important to develop in order to facilitate these executions. Because, at the end of the day, the reads don't matter if the players aren't able to score. Let's take a look at some different PnR clips and start to dissect how this whole thing develops.

<u>Hard Hedging</u>

The first PnR coverage I want to look at is when the defense "hedges". Now, there are different ways to hedge a ball-screen and there are different philosophies to attack it, but I believe the spacing and the reads are the same. In this chapter I will refer to the offensive player with the ball as O1, the screener as O2, the defender guarding the ball-handler as D1, and the defender

guarding the screener as D2. When a defense hedges a screen with D2, the theory behind it is trying to occupy O1 by forcing him to take a wider route around O2 while D1 gets over or under the screen and recovers. Once D1 has recovered, then D2 either recovers back to his man, or at the higher levels they will switch with the other post player (we'll talk about that later).

On defense, there are usually certain things a defender is taught he MUST do during a PnR based on how they're guarding it. When it comes to hard hedging, it's almost universal that D1 has to make sure O1 uses the screen. If O1 rejects/refuses/goes away from the screen, the defense is now at a huge disadvantage. In the same way, D2 is universally taught he has to make O1 widen his route of attack. If D2 is late and isn't able to force O1 to widen their route, D1 will never have time to recover.

In the same manner, the first two things I constantly drill into my players from an offensive standpoint is 1. O1 MUST attack D2 and get around him. The longer he takes to get around D2 the easier the defense's job. 2. O2 MUST set a solid screen then dive or flare with urgency. Without these two components, it's very unlikely to find any weakness in the defense. When the PnR happens, the other three offensive players have to be in the proper spacing and be prepared to react according to the movement of the O1 & O2 and their own defender. First, let's take a look at what happens when the defense doesn't do their job correctly. You'll see a clip of D1 not forcing O1 into the screen, followed by a clip of D2 not getting out to hedge quick enough.

In the clip on the left, you'll see that D2 was running to get out in his hedge position, but D1 was so concerned with getting over the top of the screen set by O2 that he let O1 refuse the screen and beat him baseline. The reason this is such a problem in the PnR is because D2 is no longer in a place to help at the basket. So if and when O1 can beat D1 with a refusal/reject, they have a wide open drive to the basket with minimal help to stop him once he gets to the paint.

In the clip on the right, you'll see that D2 did a good job of getting in hard hedge position, but when O2 started to roll toward the basket D2 followed him and left his hedging position before O1 started to attack. The issue with this is that D2 ended up almost being used as a blocker as O1 drove straight towards the lane. D1 was expecting D2 to force O1 to take a wider angle of attack towards the basket, giving him time to get back in front. When D2 left, he left D1 out to dry with very little chance of being able to get back in front of O1 before he got to the rim.

So before we even get to how to attack a PnR coverage when it's executed properly, understand that one of the best ways to put the defense at a disadvantage in the PnR is to know what the defense's responsibility is, and try to get them to screw it up.

Against good teams, it won't be as simple to get open shots as the clips you just watched. More times than not, you are going to have to use the ball-screen and you're not going to get a wide-open drive downhill at the basket. So when the defense executes their hard hedge correctly, what are the keys to getting an open shot or putting the defense at a disadvantage? Let's take a look at this PnR with a hedge and breakdown each moving part.

There are number of things we can address in this one clip that relates to what we talked about at the beginning of this chapter. O1 did a good job of getting past the hedge of D2. O2 did a great job of setting a good screen and diving hard straight to the rim and expecting the ball. (The two keys I said I drill into my players) But let's talk about what else happened in this clip. If you watch the defense, they most likely did exactly what they were taught to do. D1 got over the top of the screen and recovered to O1. D2 did a good job of getting out on his hedge and made O1 take a wider route to get around the screen. So why did the offense still get a dunk if they executed it correctly? And why would anyone want to hedge on PnR if this is the result? The answer is because of the great spacing by the offense's other three players and the great read by O1.

If you go back and look at the clip, watch the defender at the top of your screen. He almost gets his hand on the ball as it is passed to O2 but is slightly late. So the question is, was it that defenders fault that they got dunked on? The answer isn't as simple as yes or no. It's the fault of the entire defense. Think back to the very beginning where I used the "protect the fort" analogy. It is the responsibility of all five defenders to keep the ball from getting close to the basket. So you could arguably blame it on the top defender, or the defender who was standing on the block guarding the man in the near-side corner. This is the result of an offense that spaces the floor well and does their job in the PnR, and an O1 who makes the right play.

Ultimately, here is the dilemma with the defense in that last clip - the defender at the top who tried to steal the pass, still had to worry about the pass from O1 going to his man who came out of the corner to the wing (an action I call "shake" that we will discuss later), who could potentially shoot the ball. The defender on the bottom block could have potentially come over and helped on O2 but he was responsible for guarding the three-point shooter in the corner as well. When a pick & roll is run correctly, it creates a bunch of indecision for the defense as they try to help each other. And it all starts with two guys guarding one...even if it is just for a second or two.

Let's take a look at another clip of the same defensive coverage and try to find some of the same things we found in the first clip.

In this clip D2 does a good job of hedging and forcing O1 to take a wider route. The problem the defense has in this clip is D1 doesn't get thru the screen quick enough and O1 gets a wide open 3-pointer. Think back to my keys for both O1 and O2 earlier in this chapter. O1 did a good job of attacking the D2 and getting around him. O2 set a good solid screen forcing D1 to get hung up for longer than he wanted and then he rolled to the basket with urgency. Something that effected this play as well was, the guard who started with the ball did a good job of moving while O1 attacked the hedge so his defender couldn't help contest the three point shot. Lastly, the offensive player in the corner would have been open for a pass as well because his defender was worried about helping out in the lane as the PnR developed.

All these things happened in a matter of seconds, which is why it's so important that your team know these reads and spacing forward and backward. With each level of competition that you advance (junior high to high school, high school to college, low major to high major) all of these reads happen slightly faster. Shots that may be available at the DIII level might not be open at the DII level because of the size, speed, athleticism, etc.

So we've seen that even when the hedge is done correctly, there are still opportunities for the offense to get open looks not only at the basket, but also off the dribble, if all five defenders don't do their job right. The last option I'll show is another way to create a disadvantage for the defense during a hedge situation. Most of you will be familiar with this play, but I want to make sure you understand why it's so effective and what steps need to be taken into account to do it successfully. We know that in a hedge defense, D2 is told he must make O1 widen his route and go around him. There's a lot of stress put on the D2 in the hard hedge coverage. He's told not to foul as he shuffles out to get in the way of O1 and he's told make sure you get out to the screen quick enough to make sure the guard can't go right around you. But both of these tasks make D2 very susceptible to getting split.

So many players watch guys like Dwyane Wade and Kyrie Irving and want to try and dribble split a ball-screen without even thinking of why it's so effective. I tell my guards quite a bit that if you really want to dribble split the D2, you need to first make sure they are in a hard hedge coverage consistently - not just once or twice. Then, you need to attack the outside shoulder of D2 a couple times and get around him as quickly as possible. The reason why is because the D2 will start to anticipate O1 trying to get around him quickly, and when he gets comfortable with that - that's when the dribble split is most effective. The D2 jumps out a bit too early to get a head start, and the O1 gets a huge gap to go through. Ironically, a dribble split is just another form of driving through a gap. And by this time, you should know how effective getting through a gap is, and what the reads are once you do.

Hard hedging isn't the most typical PnR coverage because of the demands it puts on D2, and it's quite honestly just a difficult way to guard a ball-screen. However, I think it is important to understand how every PnR coverage works, and how to score against it. Now we will move on to one of the more popular coverages. It's similar, but has a different look to it. We will now take a look at a flat hedge.

Flat Hedge

There are similarities and differences between a flat hedge and a hard hedge. The ways they are different is primarily how D2's responsibilities change. In a hard hedge, D2 was responsible for getting out past O2 and parallel with the sidelines to force O1 away from the basket, while D1 got back in front. In the flat hedge the concept is the same, except with this coverage (as you can probably guess) D2 now stays at the level of the screen by O2 and moves laterally parallel with the baseline.

This changes how D1 and D2 have to work with each other because in a hard hedge concept, as D2 slides up the court D1 gets over the screen set by O2 and back in front of O1 by going underneath D2. Think of it like a garage door opening up and a little kid running underneath it before the door comes back down. D2 would be the door itself and D1 would represent the kid. But with a flat hedge, now that D2 isn't going above the level of the screen D1's job is now to get over the top of the screen then back in front of O1 AND between O1 and D2. Think of it like a person walking into an elevator door before it closes. The person must get all the way thru the two doors to get into the elevator.

This is a much more common PnR coverage and it would be wise to work on scoring against it, because I would venture to say you'll see this coverage more than the rest of them. With that being said, the movement of O2 doesn't change at all. O2 needs to either roll to the basket quickly or flare and get as much separation from D2 as possible. Even though D2's responsibility towards the screen itself changes, he is still faced with the same dilemma as he is guarding the ball-screen. If O2 rolls to the rim on time and with good pace, D2 has to recover to his man who is behind him and on his way to the basket. If O2 flares, D2 has a long way to go to recover to O2. At the same time, D2 cannot leave early in either situation until D1 gets "through the elevator doors" and back in front of O1. If D2 leaves early, a smart O1 will wait for D2 to recover to O2 and then drive to the basket before D1 can recover (All of this O and D talk will make more sense once you see a few clips, I promise).

Things change slightly for O1 because he no longer has to widen his angle of attack when getting around the screen. D2 won't be coming out to impede his path, so now the only thing O1 has to be thinking about is getting close enough to the screen set by O2 that D1 gets hung up on it. If O1 takes too wide of an angle, D1 can slip in between the two and the defense has won.

Pick & Pop

Before I continue you, let's take a look at a couple clips of a flat hedge and see how the different plays unfold and how we can breakdown the reads. First, we'll look at options of who's open for O1 to pass it to. Hopefully you're not too overwhelmed yet, we've got a few more coverages after this. Let's start with the pick & pop option.



In these first clips, you saw what D1 and D2's responsibilities look like. You also should notice the stress this coverage puts on D2 as he attempts to keep O1 from getting downhill to the basket, but then has to recover all the way back to O2. This is what a flat hedge coverage looks like vs a Pick & Pop. The keys to the offense's success are that O1 did a great job in both clips of attacking the ball-screen and forcing D2 to stay in front of him for a few seconds. That gave O2 time to get space after the screen and get as far away from D2 as possible. Next, it's important to point out that in the first clip, the closest defender to O2 was guarding a different post player on the block. This is considered the "weak" side because there's not a perimeter defender guarding a man on the wing and/or corner who is able to help/stunt while D2 recovers. Pick & pop is a **GREAT** option for a good shooter on the weak side.

In the second and third clip O1 and O2 did the same thing, but you'll notice they ran it to the "strong" side. There was a defender guarding his man in the corner somewhat close to O2 as he went to shoot it. However, because of the correct spacing of the offensive player in the top corner, the defender guarding him was put in a tough position. It would have been difficult for him to sprint all the way up to the slot to contest O2's shot, and even if he made it there on time O2 could have made one extra pass to the corner and he would have been wide open. This is where spacing plays a huge role! If the offensive player in the corner would have been standing on the wing (near where the "X" would be on the court) the defender could have contested O2's shot AND still be able to recover to his man on the extra pass.

I will show another clip that speaks to the importance of the spacing of the offensive perimeter players not directly involved in the pick & pop. You will see in the clip that the defense does a great job of guarding the ball-screen, recovering, and helping D2 while he tries to recover. But because the strong side perimeter player is all the way in the corner, the perimeter defender tries to influence O2 not to shoot it, but ultimately has to recover to his man. Because O2 knows that is the help defender's responsibility, he catches the pass from O1 ready to shoot and knocks it down.

That read of knowing when to make the extra pass to the corner and when to catch and shoot takes practice. It's not just something you have or don't have. I spend lots of time with my post guys putting them in game-like situations where they have to pick & pop, catch a pass and make the split-second decision of whether to shoot it or make the extra pass. The more your team drills this read the better they will see it and the better decisions they will make come game time. Here are three final examples of the same action unfolding, but O2 decides to make the extra pass because of how close the help defender got on his stunt and it resulted in a three-pointer and a frustrated defense.



If you have a post player who is a good 3-point shooter, this is a great way to attack a flat hedge PnR coverage.

Pick & Roll

Now, let's say you don't have someone who can pick & pop, or that you would prefer not to try and get a 3-point shot all the time. Let's take a look at what happens when O2 rolls to the basket. There are more reads that play into this action and we will discuss them after the clips. In these first two clips, you will see O2 sets the screen and rolls to the basket while O1 attacks on the dribble. Because of the timing of O1 and O2 and the proper spacing by the other three offensive players, there comes a point where D2 is stuck trying to stay in front of O1 but O2 is getting past him. O1 has to have a good feel for timing and where the right place to make the pass is- below the defenders' hands on a bounce pass (also known as a pocket pass) or over D2 with a lob that D2 isn't quick enough to get up in the air and react to. Take a look at these two PnR clips where O2 gets a basket off the roll.


The pass to O2 doesn't always have to be a pocket pass or a lob. Many of you are a part of teams that don't have guys who can catch lobs for dunks that effortlessly, and sometimes the pocket pass isn't quick enough at the time to get it to the rolling O2. Here is one more clip of the same read with a direct pass from O1 to O2.

This seems easy enough, and based on these clips that you should score practically every time. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. The D1 won't always get hung up on the screen every time you run a PnR, and the help-side defense will make adjustments and rotate to keep O2 from getting the ball that easy. Which leads to the next read in the PnR vs a flat hedge. This is called a "shake" action. There may be different names for it, but that's what I know it to be called from my playing days.

The essence of a shake action is to force a help-side defender to make a choice on a PnR. It's very simple to do, the timing of it is the most important detail. To demonstrate the shake action, let's take a look at some clips. Key in on the movement of the perimeter player in the top corner who moves up to the wing ("X") as O2 rolls to the basket. The way I teach this action is by instructing the perimeter players that they are to move with O2. Meaning, if O2 sets a screen on your side and pops to the wing, you stay in the corner (the example of that is above when we looked at the pick and pop examples and the perimeter players stayed in the corner (or wing/top) and created great spacing and a tough decision by the help defender). If O2 rolls, the perimeter players should sprint up to the wing in sync with O2 rolling. When this is executed correctly, the perimeter player and O2 should be going the opposite direction of each other at the same time. Take a look at these two clips and then I will teach why this action is simple, but necessary and effective.

The reason this action is so important is because we now know that D2 is responsible for helping D1 on the PnR until D1 gets back in front of O1. Which means that someone has to be responsible for helping D2 until he can recover to his man as well. **If you want to remember an important learning tool from this book please remember this statement** - If you can force a defender to help, then his man has to be open. If he's not open, it's because someone else is helping off their man to cover him which means that his man is open. And so on and so forth. The more film we watch, the more you will begin to see this statement played out. And hopefully, you'll start to recognize it quicker and quicker. Great offensive teams recognize this so fluidly that you may not even notice that it's going on.

So let's get back to the shake action. Someone is responsible for helping D2 while he is helping D1. That person is the one guarding the perimeter player in the corner. If you watch both clips

again, you'll see in the first clip that the defender we're talking about sees his man start to "shake" and follows him up to the wing. In doing so, there was nobody there to help D2 and O2 was wide open for a dunk. Seems pretty easy, huh? In the second clip, the defender in question sees the PnR coming, gets down into the paint to help D2 so O2 doesn't get a dunk and in turn leaves his man wide open. The perimeter player in the corner cuts up to the wing and O1 recognized the help defender covering O2 on the roll, and knows that the throwback has to be open. He swings it back to the wing for a knockdown three. Seems pretty easy, huh? Haha.

It's important to understand why this movement is important, not just that it works. I've found that when it comes to teaching and coaching, players are typically more prone to following your directions if they can know and explain the purpose behind it. The whole "because I said so" reason tends to fall on deaf ears in my experience. So why does this movement work? (I'm hoping by now you can answer that before I tell you) Once O2 starts his roll, there are two players guarding O1 - D1 and D2. Which means there are three players left offensively with only two defenders to guard them. We want to create the most separation we can between those three offensive players to make the help defender's job as difficult as possible. The shake action creates this.

If the player in the corner were to stay there as O2 rolled, there is a good chance that his defender could sink into the paint and cover up O2 and still be able to run out to the corner on a pass from O1 and recover in time. Not to mention, the pass O1 has to make to get it to the corner is pretty difficult. But when the player in the corner "shakes" up to the wing area it creates this stress on the help defender. I'll show you another example from an NBA game in 2016. You will see the help-side defender (Antetokounmpo) freeze as he tries to make a split second decision whether to leave his man open and make sure his team doesn't give up a lay-up, or be "selfish" and decide he's not going to let his man get an open shot. Kemba Walker does a great job after getting around the screen to influence Giannis back out towards his man on the wing with his eyes and his body. Watch this clip a couple times so you can see all the moving parts. Antetokounmpo is stuck in the middle trying to guess who is going to get the ball. Side note - once a team really starts to understand why the spacing they have is so important, this game becomes so fun, watching a defense scramble and get frustrated when you pick them apart.

Now that we've covered the reads that O1 should be making when looking to pass out of this PnR coverage, we still need to breakdown ways in which O1 himself can score off this as well. To score against this coverage, here are some shots that the ball handler is going to need in his game to be effective and efficient (not just against a flat hedge, but really all PnR coverages). In no particular order; a three-point shot off the dribble, a mid-range pull-up off the dribble, a floater inside the paint, and the ability to finish with both hands at the rim. We will look at some more

clips and see how each one of these shots become available for O1 against the flat hedge coverage.

We will go in that same order as we breakdown how O1 can score vs a flat hedge. As you watch these next two clips, you will see that both defenses leave the three-point line open. D2 doesn't want to come out too far to guard O1 because it makes the pocket pass to O2 easier and it also leaves D2 susceptible to getting beat off the dribble by O1, who's coming off the screen from O2 with some momentum. If O2 sets a good screen and D1 gets caught up in it at all, there is usually space to hit a three off the dribble. Let's take a look.

As you can see, the clips almost mirror one another. The key to this shot is O1 has to force D1 to run into (or go under the screen) and then be ready to pull-up when the space is created. This shot isn't easy, and will take a lot of reps by any ball-handler that comes off screens, but I believe it's worth working on because it is a very difficult shot to guard. Most avid basketball players have seen this shot made a number of times by Stephen Curry. This shot has become one of his signature shots that he's put into his game. Here's a look at the same shot you just watched.

Moving on to the next shot in our sequence is probably the biggest separator between college and pro basketball. The midrange jumper. Statistically, as we talked about at the very beginning of the book, we discussed how mid-range jumpers are the least quality shot you can shoot in basketball. They aren't really close to the basket, they're usually not completely wide open, and they're still only worth two points. However, that doesn't mean this shot isn't valuable, and if you have players who are good at this shot I think it can be a huge advantage for your team. In the same way that we just saw how O1 can get an open three-pointer against the flat hedge, the mid-range jumper works very much the same. But instead of O1 coming right off the screen and pulling up, with this shot he is going to get around the screen and attack D2 before pulling up. The thing to remember is that D2 is still responsible for covering O2 at the rim so his full attention typically isn't on O1. This is what gives O1 the freedom and the space to pull-up for a mid-range jumper.

If you're familiar with the Wisconsin Badgers, they are typically an above average defensive team. They have been using a flat hedge ball screen coverage as long as I can remember. Former Head Coach Bo Ryan's philosophy was quite smart in my opinion. He decided that when it comes to ball-screens, his team was going to willingly give up contested mid-range jump shots to any team that wanted to take them. So they run this PnR coverage year after year and make teams settle for mid-range jump shots before they will let a team get anything else. I think based on their success in the past decade, Coach Ryan had a pretty strong philosophy. Because Wisconsin is known for running this ball screen coverage, I think it's appropriate to watch how this shot develops against a team who lives off forcing teams to take difficult, mid-range jump shots.



As you can see from these clips, this shot is not exactly easy. If you are a coach who thinks this shot is difficult, I agree with you. That's why it's one of the lowest percentage shots in basketball. However, that was against arguably the best defensive team in that particular area of the country so you have to keep that in mind. Most importantly, it's another piece that you can add to your reads of ways to score and create offense. Let's take one more look at it from a clip from my team this past season.

The next shot in the sequence is probably the biggest up-and-coming shot for guards/perimeter players. The floater. This shot is becoming so valuable at all levels of basketball because of the transformation of the blocked shot over the last 10 years. How this shot unfolds versus the flat hedge is almost identical to the mid-range jump shot, with the exception that typically players get a little deeper into the paint before shooting this shot. As you watch these next clips, you will see that the play looks very much the same as the mid-range jumpers you just watched. This shot is valuable because it usually gets O1 a bit more separation from D1 because there isn't the need to slow down with this shot. It's also valuable because O1 can continue to attack D2 as he back pedals and then when he decides to, O1 can get the ball out of his hands quickly without breaking stride or concern about D2 blocking his shot. Let's take a look at some of these examples.



I will be the first to say that the level of difficulty of these last two ways of scoring is fairly high. But at the same time, especially in regards to the floater - I believe it's worth a player's time to develop this shot in their game. If you go back and watch the clips again, one thing that you should make note of is that there is a certain place in these PnRs that a player makes the decision after D1 is out of the picture because he's caught behind O1, and D2 has dropped low enough worrying about O2, that a window opens up for that floater. It's such a valuable asset to have in a player's game to be able to score in the paint and not have to be all the way to the basket to make the shot. This shot will take a lot of reps and game-like situational training for a player to develop this skill, but I would encourage you to implement it as soon as you can.

This last area of scoring at the rim can happen in a number of ways. When looking at getting to the basket it can be broken down into a one-on-one concept. As O1 turns the corner and has D2 backpedaling, they can really go to either side of the defender to attack the basket. When it comes to scoring at the basket, it doesn't always look the same when you watch it, but the idea is consistent. It's a "you vs me" mentality between the guard and the big. This is where an O1 has to have some creative feel to his game and be able to see opportunity and attack.

We talked some during the hard hedge section about the dribble split and its effectiveness against greedy D2 defenders who jump out in their hedge too soon. The same action is possible against a flat hedge but it looks slightly different as it unfolds. Here's a clip of what a dribble split concept looks like against a flat hedging D2.

O1 attacked the left side shoulder of D2 who was standing flat-footed, which gave him the ability to make a quick change of direction back to the middle of the court to blow by D2. This particular read works much better when the PnR is set at the top of the key rather than the wing. The reason for that is because O1 has a better chance to pick up some speed and attack D2 straight down-hill, rather than moving laterally when it's set on the wing. I always encourage my guards to make a quick move rather than something fancy that takes a lot of time. Very few D2 defenders are going to steal it from an O1 who's coming at them that quickly, and the goal is to get past D2 as quick as possible. Less is more when it comes to going at the D2 who is flat hedging.

Another way to get to the rim is with a hesitation. This move takes great feel by O1. When O1 gets over the top of the screen set by O2, D2 is the only thing in between O1 and the basket. If D1 goes over the screen set by O2 then he is usually behind O1 or at best on the side of O1. You may want to scroll back up to the beginning of this chapter when we discussed the movement of D1 and D2 working together. I spoke about the importance of the timing of D2

waiting for D1 to get “through the elevator doors before they closed” to create the mental picture of D1 getting all the way back in front O1 before D2’s responsibility to stay in front is over. This timing can be taken advantage of by O1 if he recognizes the opportunity to do so. Take a look at this clip and first focus on where D1 is when D2 starts to abandon O1 to get back to the rolling O2. Then watch it again and see how D1 went under the screen but didn’t fully get back in front of O1 as he accelerated to the basket.

The last clip we will look at is how to use D1’s momentum against him. The place to attack in this read is focusing on how D1 has to get over the screen and back in front of O1 under control. In the same way that it’s difficult for a defender to close out to an offensive player (to take away the shot) and at the same time be able to stop his momentum and move laterally either direction to cut off a potential drive, it’s also difficult to fight over a screen to get back in front of a player dribbling away from you and be able to stop and cut him off if he chooses to change direction while you’re recovering. In this last clip, O1 actually allows D1 to recover and get back in front of him after coming off the screen. He does this because he knows D1’s momentum is going to make it very difficult to stay in front as he crosses over and attacks the same spot that D1 just came from. Let’s take a look.

Not only does this read make it extremely tough for D1 to stay in front of O1, but by the time O1 crossed over and got past D1, D2 had already recovered to O2 and wasn’t able to help any longer. Please don’t think that those clips represent the only ways that O1 can get to the rim and score against D2. There are several others but I think those three are a great place to build from.

You may have felt that I spent an outrageous amount of time going over all the reads involved in scoring against a flat hedge PnR coverage - but the reason I did is because I believe you will see this coverage more than any of the others. I want to make sure you are equipped with the understanding of how these defenses try to stop you, the reads (and spacing) a team needs to get quality shots, and what skills to practice and train to get your players prepared for success come game time.

Ice/Down/Black

I have heard this PnR coverage called several different things. It originated in the NBA less than 10 years ago and its primary function is to deny teams the ability to use ball-screens. I think this speaks volumes as to how effective the PnR is, that coaches got together and said, “We need to find a way to not allow anybody to use these anymore.”

For the sake of consistency, I will refer to this coverage exclusively as “icing” a ball-screen, but I understand different coaches/teams refer to it differently. The purpose of this coverage, as I said, is to force teams away from using ball-screens. This coverage is primarily used on the wings but it can be done at the top of the key. When teams ice a ball-screen, they take D1 and have him get directly in between O1 and O2 facing O1. By doing so, it makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible to use the ball-screen, because D1 is there almost in a hedging position. Then D2’s responsibility is to stay in between O1 and the basket more or less in a low hedging position if O1 decides to refuse the ball-screen and attack the basket.

After O1 decides to attack the basket, because he’s unable to use the ball-screen, D1’s job is then to get back in front of O1 by getting between O1 and D2 (almost exactly like in a flat hedging situation just going towards the baseline) which then allows D2 to recover back to his man and the ball-screen is taken away. If you haven’t heard of this ball-screen coverage, you will most likely need to see it to understand what the functionality of it is. So we will take a look at two clips and then discuss how to attack it offensively. At the root of icing a ball-screen, a team is still having two people guard one, which means there has to be a player open. Let’s break it down.

It’s very evident that the defense does not want the ball handler getting to the ball-screen at all. Which means the movement of the offense won’t be the same, but as we break this down further you will see that the reads are quite similar. If the ball handler isn’t going use the ball-screen, that really only gives him one direction to dribble - towards the baseline. As he goes that way, D1 is going to follow him and try to corral him to the corner/baseline with D2 almost like a trap. The thing to remember is that D2 is still responsible for O2 who is most likely still in the vicinity of where he was attempting to set the screen. I’m going to give you a few different ways to attack this coverage. More than likely this will be one of the PnR coverages you deal with the least.

If we know that D2 is still responsible for O2 and O2 is a good shooter (I’m hoping you have my next remark already on the tip of your tongue) then it would be smart to have O2 come to set

the screen and then pop. Because as we saw from the clips, D2 (his defender) is camped out almost in the lane protecting the drive by O1. That means there is a lot of space between O2 and his defender. But it's not enough to just have O2 pop. O1 plays a big role in this process as well. To occupy D2 as long as possible, O1 **must** attack D2 and cover some ground. The biggest mistake I see against ice is an O1 who takes one small little dribble and tries to reverse it back to O2. It makes it way too simple for D2 to recover. Take a look at the difference it makes when O1 stretches the defense vs when he doesn't attack D2 and gives it back to the O2 too early.

As you can see in the first video, once the defense cut off the middle and D2 was in help - O1 just reversed it without attacking at all. This made D2's closeout to a below average shooter way too easy. In the second clip, the ball handler attacked D2 forcing him to stay and corral O1 and then when the ball got reversed back to O2 he had so much more space to shoot.

There isn't a set number of dribbles that O1 needs to take before throwing it back to O2. There are times where O1 can drive more aggressively at D2 and create a lot more space for the throwback and there are also times that D2 gets so low in his help that O1 actually doesn't need to attack before reversing it. There isn't one specific way to create this "pick & pop" action against ice. However, more times than not, O1 is going to need to attack D2 to create that distance between O2 and D2.

Here are two more examples of a team having success against ice. The first is an example of O1 being extremely aggressive and driving at D2 with the intent of getting past him. When D2 cuts him off, the throwback to O2 is wide open.

In this second clip, the defense gets into its ice coverage and O2 recognizes it and pops before O1 starts to attack. Because O1 makes a quick and on-time pass to O2, D2 does not have the time to recover and O2 gets an easy mid-range jump shot.

Once again, there isn't a way to predetermine how many dribbles or how far O1 has to penetrate to create the right amount of space. It comes down to what is the best shot for the offense, how deep does D2 get initially when getting into their PnR coverage, and the timing between O1 and O2.

Another area that you will possibly see ice used is at the top of the key when running "tap head" or a pick & roll in the middle of the court. Sometimes even if a team doesn't ice ball-screens on the wing, they will still ice ball-screens in the middle of the court. The reason behind that strategy is typically because they want to force O1 to drive with his non-dominant hand. Which for the most part means teams will ice the ball-screen by forcing O1 to his left hand and corral the ball handler with D2. Let's take a look at that defensive scheme and how the pick & pop works to create open shots for O2. You will probably notice that it works very similar to the pick & pop vs the flat hedge that we saw earlier.




It's somewhat crazy to me that all those clips almost look identical. But it just goes to show that there is a consistent way to attack this PnR coverage. I would like to point out two specific things from the last clip that I think gives a unique angle, so you can see the play develop from a different perspective. The first thing about that play was how O1 used his dribble to hold D2 in his help position as long as possible to allow O2 to get separation before he threw it back to him. The second is how O2 anticipated the help-side defender coming up to stunt and he gave him a ball fake to influence him to go back to his man in the corner before shooting it. This is a prime example of two guys who truly understand how the defense is designed and know how to attack it.

Some of you might question if that is the only way to attack a defense when they ice. Fortunately there are more ways to take advantage of a team who is icing that we will go over. I think it's important to have more options than just relying on your O2 to pick & pop and shoot threes. Next, we will talk about how O1 can score against this coverage.

Because of how far on the topside of the screen D1 gets during this coverage, and how D2 stays close to the paint to protect the blow-by, it resembles how the defense looks during a flat

hedge after O1 gets over the top of the screen. So just like we discussed the four ways O1 can score in those situations, we can use two of those options against ice. The mid-range jump shot and floater are both available against ice on occasion if D1 doesn't press up into the ball handler, and D2 is too far back. Let's take a look at what that looks like.



These clips weren't identical by any means, but I hope you saw the space in which O1 can get into that area between D1 and D2, and pull up for a mid-range jump shot or a floater. This is especially true if the player is right-handed and on the right side, because D1 can't do much to contest the shot without going through O1's body and inevitably fouling him. The second and third clip you just watched with Kyrie shows that pretty well.

Another tool you can use against ice is by O2 changing the angle of his screen. In the clips we've watched up to this point, O2 has stayed on the top side of D1 and either popped or rolled. But in these next clips you will see that O2 can also change his angle and set the screen on D1 underneath him instead of on the side. What the changing of the screen angle does is, it turns a side pick & roll into the pick & roll we recently looked at that was set at the top of the key. If O2 sets his screen underneath D1, it now gives O1 a clear path to go one-on-one with D2 in the exact same way that we saw it in the flat hedge coverage. Here are few examples of how that looks when O2 changes his angle on his screen, and how O1 has a one-on-one opportunity with D2. You will see that these clips are of Kyrie Irving, who I understand is arguably the best pick & roll player in the league, but the principles are still true.


Lastly, I will go over how you can still execute the "roll" part of the PnR against ice. Even though the defense has dictated the direction O1 has to go, there is still the possibility of having O2 execute his roll. It simply comes at a different angle. We've seen that once the defense has set their ice coverage, D1 is extended up the court almost in a hard-hedging position. We've also seen that D2 starts off the ball looking to protect the paint. Because of this set up, there is a small crease in between the two of them that O1 can usually fit a pocket pass through, and hit O2 rolling to the basket. Here are two clips that will demonstrate where that gap is.

Something I think worth mentioning about this particular pass is that if/when the ball gets through, more times than not O2 is going to have to make a read and probably dribble once or twice. The read that will need to be made (and you can go back and look at both clips and see this unfold) is that the help-side defender of the perimeter player on the opposite side could be there to stop O2. This actually takes place in both clips. In the first clip, O2 spins off him and scores over the top. In the second clip, O2 isn't distracted by his stunt and goes in for a finish. The other defender that will probably come into play is the second post defender. Usually (if you are running a system with two post players - 3 out 2 in) the other post player will be in "his room" at this time. That means his defender could step up on the drive by O2 in which O2 would need to be ready to make the extra pass to the other post.

This is why it's important for all five of your players to understand each other's role so that they can play multiple positions, but also so they know where everyone should be. I think it's similar to football. I was a quarterback growing up and played some in college before playing basketball for ISU. I was told my whole life by coaches that "it's the QB's job to know everyone's position/responsibility for every play". I took pride in being able to do so and it really helped me learn the game. Because I knew what each individual position's responsibilities were, I looked at the game differently. I think it works the same way with basketball. As a post player, if you understand what the point guard is looking for when he gets through a gap and is attacking the basket, you are more prepared to put yourself in a position to make yourself available. As a knock-down shooter, if you understand how defensive rotations work and that your point guard is much quicker than his defender, you are more likely to stay deep in the corner and wait for your PG to attack a gap and free you up for a shot when your defender helps, instead of running around aimlessly trying to get open on your own. As coaches, I think it is our responsibility to learn that first and then over time teach our players how to look at the game not through the lens of "their responsibilities", but through the lens of how the entire concept functions.

If you coach at a level lower than collegiate basketball, there is a good chance you may never see a team ice ball-screens. There's a chance that this concept will make its way down to the high school and even junior high level one day, and hopefully this gives you a head start. One thing I would encourage you to do if you see this PnR coverage and you are having a hard time dealing with it, is check out a video on YouTube called "How to beat "ICE" ball screen defense," by Zak Boisvert. It's only a 3 ½ minute video, but it shows clips that talk about different actions that make icing a ball-screen difficult for the defense. I thought about breaking those concepts down, but his video already does a good job of demonstrating those actions, so I will just refer you to that video.

The last thing I will say about ice, as well as the other pick & roll coverages, is that you may not see all these coverages at your level or in your particular league that you play/coach in, but maybe you are interested in one of these coverages and want to implement it into your team on the defensive end. One of the great things about studying the game from either side of the ball is that it makes you smarter on the other side of the ball as well. For instance, if you primarily run a flat hedge PnR coverage, hopefully you've pick up on how teams tend to score against it from reading this, and now you can decide what shots you're willing to give up based on those options. Or maybe you think a different PnR coverage is more ideal for your team's personnel or against the teams in your league and you feel you will have more success by switching. Or, maybe you would like to change your PnR coverage and you want to make sure when you implement it that you know what areas/holes you want to take away as you implement it. All these things can be learned and thought about as you learn how to be more efficient offensively. I hope that with this section of PnR breakdown you are able to take something from it that's new or refreshing, that can help you broaden your understanding and knowledge.

We have one final PnR coverage that I want to talk about. This coverage is unique because it doesn't typically require a read to be made at the point of the screen, but after it instead. We are going to talk about how to take advantage of a team that switches ball-screens.

Switching

A common strategy that teams will use is to just switch all ball-screens or maybe just point guard through power forward. The actual reason for that is it eliminates two people guarding one. It eliminates any confusion as to who needs to help for who, struggling to get over or under screens, and many more issues. If teams just switch the ball-screen, then the problem is solved. Well if it's that easy, wouldn't everyone just switch all ball-screens and it would never be an issue? This is where mismatches come into play. If you watch the NBA, when you break down their game, almost the entire scope of offense is built around mismatches. Part of that reason is because the majority of the NBA has such highly skilled offensive players that when you pair it with a defender that's not qualified to defend them - your percentages of a basket go way up.

But most of you don't coach in the NBA or have NBA caliber players, so why am I wasting time discussing something that isn't relevant? Because to a lesser degree, the same exact thing happens all the way down to the grade school level. Example; have you ever been to a game with little kids and there is always that one big kid who grew much earlier than everyone else? And what do teams usually do? They throw the ball to him and he stands under the basket and shoots it (and potentially misses it five or six times and gets his own rebound) until it goes in. Well guess what, that's a mismatch. Have you ever been to a similar game and seen that one kid who's extremely skilled for his age and has great control over his body? He easily blows by his defender every chance he gets and either goes in for a lay-up or dishes it off to a teammate with ease. Well guess what, that's a mismatch.

There is nothing new under the sun when it comes to the game of basketball. People might come up with interesting strategies and schemes, but the game is the same from start to finish.

The difference is as players get older, everyone's talent continues to increase and defensive tactics come into play. But nevertheless, mismatches are a huge part of the game that you'd be wise to take advantage of.

Now more times than not, players don't pay attention to how teams are guarding them until a coach points it out. Which makes it important to develop player's minds and not just their skills, so they are intelligent not just talented. I can't tell you how many times I've been coaching or playing and the ball handler has a big slow center guarding him and a post player being guarded by someone much smaller than him runs up and sets a screen and the defense switches. It's infuriating! But I think as coaches we need to share some of the blame in that. Clearly that player hasn't been taught enough to understand how foolish that is.

I'm willing to bet that some of you reading this have the attitude of "I've tried to take advantage of mismatches when we get a switch and we spend so much time trying to throw the ball to the post or clear everyone out for the ball handler that the defense figures it out and makes it way too difficult." If that's the position you are coming from on the matter, you're not wrong. It can be tough to take advantage of mismatches. My hope is that by breaking down the options that are available and how to create them, this will be beneficial to you especially.

When a team switches a ball-screen, there usually will be a power forward or a center guarding the ball handler and a guard switching off onto your center or power forward. Depending upon the level that you play or coach, that could be a subtle mismatch or a drastic one. The first thing that I think is important to understand when playing a team who switches, is to identify the best mismatch possible for your team. I see teams who play against switching PnR coverage and just start randomly setting ball-screens without actually thinking what mismatch favors them. We played a team last year who had a seven footer on their team. He wasn't very mobile, but man was he big! When discussing the scouting report, I was very intentional to tell our guys, "If the seven-footer comes into the game, we need to put him in a pick & roll every chance we get." The reason being, I knew that whether they were switching, hedging, or anywhere in between, he was going to struggle trying to stay in front of our guards. That is the mindset you have to have when thinking about mismatches. Don't just set screens to set screens, be intentional.

Another huge mistake I see on the court is, a team will get a switch and have a huge mismatch with their center, and he will go and post up two steps outside the paint by the block and call for the ball. I have a theory that positioning is like real estate in the post. If you can get the ball on the block, you're living pretty comfortably. You probably have a two-car garage and a nice yard. Maybe a fully furnished basement and a three-bedroom-two bath. But if you can get a foot in the paint, there's a good chance you have a three-car garage. Most likely, you've got people cleaning your house and some guys taking care of your yard. You probably have rooms you don't even have stuff for and you live in a gated community. And, if you can get both feet in the paint and get the ball, my friend you live in Beverly Hills. There's a good chance your house is being featured on cribs, even! But if you catch the ball off the block, 7-10 feet away from the basket, odds are you don't live in a very good neighborhood, and your house is falling apart. What am I saying? Every foot you can get in the post makes a difference! Don't let post players

settle for a trailer home when he could live in a penthouse, especially when they have a smaller defender on him. When a post player gets a point guard switched off on him, he's just won the Powerball! He can afford any house he wants. So take whatever you can get, and get in the paint!

Most of the frustration that comes with taking advantage of this switch comes from thinking the aftermath of the switch will be as simple as passing it to the wing, throwing it over the smaller defender to the post, and him getting a basket like the enormous 5th grader we talked about earlier. In high school, collegiate, and professional basketball, it's not that simple. You have to understand how the defense compensates to protect the mismatches, both on the perimeter and in the paint. So let's start to break this down with some film and see if we can identify weaknesses that can be exploited based on the things we have learned this far.

In this first clip, I want to show you an example of how even at the highest level of basketball there are times when players don't think about mismatches. Take a look at this play, and before reading my afterthought, decide what is wrong with the decision-making of the offense.

Hopefully your answer to what went wrong offensively is this: O1 came off the ball-screen from O2 and D1 and D2 switched creating a mismatch, but then O2 didn't post up and actually came back out to the perimeter to set another screen for O1; as a result, the defense (original D1 and D2) could switch back to their original assignments. If that is what you were thinking, you were spot on. Now, I want to revisit the clip and bring to light some of the stuff you may not have seen. Read my comments and then go back and look for these things to unfold in the order that I describe them.

Directly following the initial ball-screen, O1 reversed the ball and immediately called for the ball right back. Watch how he passes it and starts to clap his hands and ask to get it back. Why? Because he knew immediately after the switch that he had a mismatch and a guy who didn't stand a chance of guarding him one-on-one. Once he got the ball back he told that player to clear out so he has room to take advantage of the slower defender, but by the time he finally got that player out of the way, O2 made his way back up to the perimeter to set a screen. So O1 yells at him and waves him off to get out of the way and go back down to his room. Why? Because the last thing he wants is for D1 and D2 to switch back and ruin the match up. While O1 is waving at him to leave, O2 is still committed to this ball screen that he wants to happen and is waving at O1 to come off the ball-screen, which starts to frustrate O1 even more. They actually had a non-verbal argument in the middle of an offensive possession. I think it is kind of comical.

As this is taking place, take a look at the defense's bench. I would venture to guess that the player with the towel around his neck realized the same thing that O1 did and was yelling at D1 to switch back to O1, but it was too late. At the same time, the head coach and two of his assistants start barking out directions trying to help the defense, because they recognize the issue this mismatch has created. Now, take a look at the players who are in help. Every player is trying to get in help without leaving their man because they know O1 is determined to take advantage of the slower defender. This is where an offense needs to understand spacing, how to move with the basketball on dribble penetration, and how their defender will be influenced based on what O1 decides to do. I think it's important to give credit to the offense for their spacing in this clip. Both posts get to their rooms, the strong-side wing is in the corner, and the opposite wing is right on the "X".

Lastly, let's talk about O1's decision and the options he had that he didn't take. O1 recognized the defender was concerned about getting beat off the dribble, so he knew before he attacked that the pull-up jumper would be uncontested. This is pure speculation, but I think he was so frustrated with his teammate's lack of recognition that he decided he was shooting the ball no matter what. But what other options did he have available? Had O1 decided to drive his defender towards the middle, there is a good chance the help-side perimeter defender would have tried to help, which would have left the wing with an open jumper. If he didn't help, O1 would have most likely gotten to the rim for a lay-up, or the original D1 would have had to step up and help, leaving O2 open for a pocket pass and dunk. O1 probably would have been reluctant to drive baseline because of the lack of space to go anywhere with the corner filled, and a post player in his room and his defender up so high in help. The other thing O1 could have done is quickly reverse the ball to the weak side wing, who could have thrown it into the post who had a huge mismatch as well. All these options became available because of one switch. But if the offense doesn't have a good concept of spacing and an O1 who knows his options, it goes to waste.

Having your O1 take a somewhat contested three every possession isn't going to work throughout the course of a game, so we need to create some of those other opportunities. I think it's important to have a good balance of scoring options with a team who switches ball-screens and it's not even the worst thing in the world if you just continue to run your offense/continuity. The thing to keep in mind is that most centers do not guard on the perimeter a lot, and the same goes for a guard playing defense in the post. So it's important that we take advantage of the unfamiliarity the defense will be put in.

In the next clips, I will show examples of a defense switching a ball-screen and the O1 taking advantage of the defense by attacking D2 off the dribble. In the same way that we learned very early on that the defense's goal is to protect the paint, having a slower defender guarding the ball handler makes the defense much more susceptible than if the match-up was even.

These are just some of the many examples of an O1 recognizing his new defender doesn't have the quickness to stay in front of him, and so he makes the decision to simply attack that mismatch. In the first two clips it resulted in easy baskets for the O1. In the third clip you saw how the O1 forces help defenders to leave their responsibilities to cover for D2 after getting beat and you saw the post player "T-Up" for an easy dunk, like we talked about in the section on baseline drives. Finally, in the fourth clip, you saw an example of an offense's perimeter player having horrible spacing as he drifted out towards half court, but his defender didn't take advantage of the mistake and allowed O1 to get through his gap and get an And-1. The concept of *The Gap Theory* is magnified when teams switch ball-screens, because the initial gap attack is typically made easier because of the switch.

Here are some similar examples from our season last year, that mimic the same reads/concepts that you just saw.

Hopefully you're seeing these clips and they look extremely similar to you. The way they develop, the way O1 attacks D2, the spacing of the offensive players without the ball, etc. In the last clip, it reiterates that just because there is a switch doesn't mean that O1 is now responsible for shooting the ball. Typically, the defense will shrink the floor to protect the mismatch and that opens up the drive and kick for other players. That is why spacing and being shot-ready is so valuable.

Lastly, the third clip is going to give us a segue into the next part of taking advantage of a team who switches PnR. If you go back and take a look at the third clip, you will see that after the switch, D1 fronts O2 after he rolls, and O2 starts to call for a pass over the top. To effectively attack a switching defense in the pick & roll, not only does O2 have to do his job of getting the best real estate possible - O1 (and all perimeter players for that matter) must be good passers.

There is usually limited time and limited space to make an entry pass to a post player, especially after a switch. The defense is well aware of their shortcomings in the post and usually over-help to cover up that weakness. That means the entry pass into the post is going to need to be on time and in a generally small window. In this third clip, if you pause the video once O2 puts his hand up and calls for the ball, you will see that O1 would need to throw the ball just

over the top of O2's hand at a fairly quick pace so the help-side defender on the opposite block couldn't recover in time to contest O2's shot, or even worse - steal the pass. As we breakdown this part of the PnR against switching, pay attention to the excellent passes that are made by the guards. They are on-time and on-target.

It is the responsibility of O2 to get the best position possible after the switch, and then to determine if it's a better choice to call for the ball over the top of the defense (like O2 did in the clip we were just talking about), or to keep the smaller defender behind him and keep him sealed until the ball gets there. There are benefits to both. When it comes to throwing the ball over the top - if you can get the ball to O2 over the top, there usually isn't anyone who can impede O2 from scoring at that point. However, the pass is usually a bit more difficult because it can't be a slow high arching pass, due to the other defenders who can help. So this pass must have some pace on it and be at an angle that doesn't make O2 adjust to the ball. If you watch football, the QB has to be able to make this same pass to his wide receivers. If O2 decides to just seal D1 because he is already behind him, then the pass needs to get to him as quick as possible because most likely O2 will catch it in the lane and the three-second-rule then comes into play. We will take a look at both entry passes so you can see how the plays develop and what goes into both passes being successful.

Since we just looked at a clip where O2 wanted the pass over the top, we will look at some clips like that. Key in on the angle and pace of the entry pass, how the post player seals the smaller defender on his top side, and where he puts his hand up when calling for the ball. You will also want to look at the clips to watch how the surrounding players on offense space the floor and how the help-side defenders try to protect the paint from the mismatch.

This next clip is a similar situation where D1 and D2 switch. In this, take notice to how O2 recognizes the switch early and that D1 is trying to fight to the top side of him. Instead of working really hard to keep D1 underneath him, he lets D1 go where he wants and then he stops and creates a target for O1 to pass it to. This is something a LARGE percentage of post players don't understand how to do. This O2 gives O1 a huge target to pass to because of where he seals off D1. This is an example of an O2 with a high IQ.

The other way that O2 can take advantage of the switch can be by simply rolling to the paint, establishing the best position he can get, while keeping his new defender between him and the basket and posting him up. Typically once you get to the collegiate level, and occasionally in high school depending where you're at, there is a pretty clear discrepancy between the five man and the point guard or shooting guard. In the following clip, you will see the switch take place and O2 make his way as quickly as possible to the middle of the paint. D1 does his best to wall up and keep him as far away from the basket as possible but it is simply too big of a job for him. I'd also like for you to watch the help-side defender in the top corner who comes in to clog up the passing lane as much as he can. Unfortunately, because he is guarding a capable shooter who has great spacing in the corner, the help-side defender cannot fully commit to helping D1. Finally, you will see there is a bit of a struggle between O2 and D1, as D1 for just a second, tries to get in front of O2 to take away the easy post pass. O2 was willing to be fronted so he could get a lob over the top, but D1 changes his mind and stays behind. Please notice and take note that once the ball does go into the post when there is a mismatch, it is imperative that O2 doesn't waste time once he gets it. More than likely there will be help (or a double team) on the way immediately, so O2 needs to make his move quickly and shoot it before the help comes. Take a look at this clip and notice the subtle difference between this clip and the lob over the top, and notice some of the specifics I just pointed out.

I wanted to show you one more clip in regards to getting the ball to your post player off the switch, and give you an example of how much of a difference O2's roll changes the play. I struggle with getting my post players to understand the importance of their effect on every pick & roll, based on how committed they are to rolling all the way to the block with conviction. I could truthfully show you hundreds of PnR clips of O2's either creating opportunities for perimeter players to score, or getting easy baskets for themselves, just by having the discipline to roll with purpose each and every time they set a screen. It was actually quite difficult to pick and choose which clips to put in this book because of how many there were to choose from.

In this next clip, after D1 and D2 switch, O2 recognizes he has a mismatch and doesn't take advantage by getting the best real estate possible. And I want you to see how difficult he makes this scoring opportunity on himself. I think it is important for you to not only see all of the "perfect examples" but also the ones that aren't quite right. That way you can understand fully and communicate to your team how important attention to detail is. Pay close attention to O2 on this PnR compared to the last three clips you just watched.

I don't want to make it seem that there is exactly one way to achieve success when it comes to playing against a switching PnR defense, but I do think there are some principles that help produce great scoring opportunities. In the clip you just watched, O2 still scored, so all is well that ends well. I do think, however, that if O2 wouldn't have cut his roll short and tried to come back for the basketball instead of taking D1 all the way into the post first, he wouldn't have had to make a one-on-one move after catching the ball, and avoid the help defender who attempted to block his shot. Regardless of whether this is splitting hairs or you think the distinction is necessary to point out, I think you can see that taking advantage of mismatches is attainable and beneficial.

There are a couple more PnR coverages out there that I know of that I have chosen not to add to this section, because I feel that these four coverages are going to make up a majority of the situations you find yourself or your team in. Getting yourself, your coaching staff, and your players all accustomed to these four variations, and how to exploit each one, will put you on the road to success. I truly believe that as players see more film of themselves and others, that they will start to anticipate and think two and three moves past where they are at. I told my guys while we were watching film that once you start to get these concepts into your head, you will begin to transform your instincts on the court and start playing chess instead of checkers.

If you think back to all the different videos you watched in the PnR segment of this book, hopefully you recall seeing video footage from a lot of different levels of basketball. I made a conscious effort to intentionally get video footage from D2, D1, WNBA, and NBA games, to support my philosophies. The reason being - this game is essentially the same no matter what level you are playing at. Whether you are currently a junior high coach, a class 4A girls varsity coach, or coaching a professional team of some kind - these concepts are consistent at every level. There are bound to be discrepancies depending on the skill level that you are at, but it doesn't make these concepts any less relevant to you. Later in the book, I'm going to address how skill development and specialist affect these principles. The reason I think it is critical address specific positions and break down what skills are important to look for and develop, is because at whatever level you are competing, those skill sets affect what advantages are available to your team. Not only that, but I believe having a clear understanding of what skill sets create advantages, will help you when it comes to developing your team and/or recruiting for your program.

Chapter 6: Playing Through the Post

We've spent a lot of time talking about things that pertain to the guards and the wings, but we haven't talked about how *The Gap Theory* works when it comes to throwing the ball inside to the post. I think this chapter will be extremely beneficial for women's basketball coaches and players. I have spent a lot of time watching both men's and women's basketball over the course of this year while writing this book, and it is very apparent that the women's game is heavily dominated by post players, more so than the men's game. We could argue or discuss why that is, but at the end of the day it's really not that important. The point is, to be successful in women's basketball – it typically has a great deal to do with successful post play, while the men's game is starting to be dominated by guards.

By this time, we understand the concept of trying to drive between gaps on the perimeter and forcing multiple closeouts. We also have spent time looking at the pick & roll and getting two players to guard one, or creating mismatches that work to our advantage. However, we haven't spent any time on understanding how *The Gap Theory* principles show up when we just want to throw the ball to our post players and score inside.

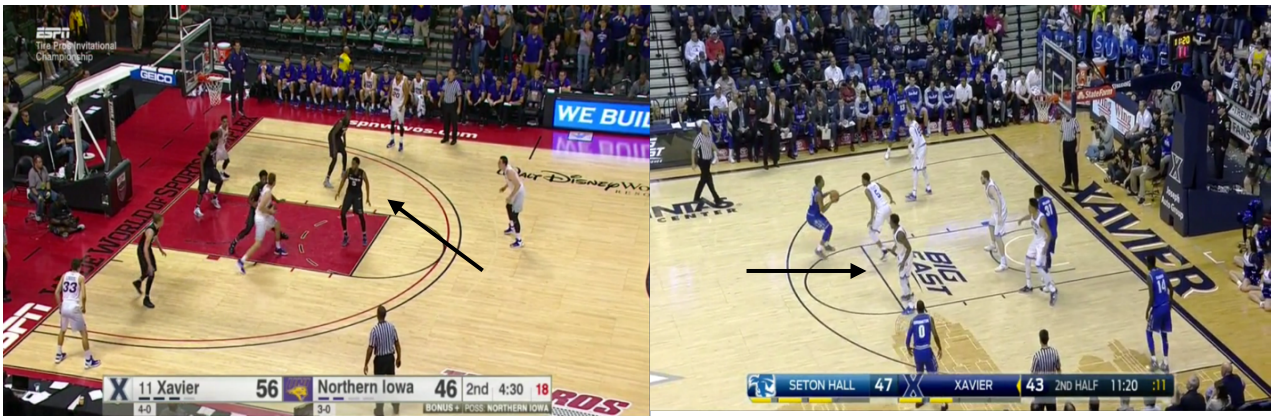
The way *The Gap Theory* shows up the most when it comes to post play, is with mismatches and making two guard one. We started this book at the very beginning talking about how basketball at its most basic identity is – get the ball as close to the basket as you can to increase your chances of making the most shots. This is probably why the men's game used to be focused around great post players. I also believe that when it comes to going to the post for your offensive production, there are more plays involved in this strategy than freelance movement, like there is when you try and focus on guard-play. If you ask me, that is why you can go watch a college men's basketball game and see a ton of drive and kick/pick & roll style basketball and then go watch a women's game and see them run a set almost every time down the court. If you are a coach who wants the ball going into the post a lot, or a player who is on a team with that philosophy, you are most likely going to run a lot more plays than teams who want to run pick & roll and drive gaps. I believe it's still important for you to hear the principles behind spacing and movement within the context of post play.

The principles all start with the ability that your post player has to score the ball. We talked about real estate in the PnR chapter and how important it is to catch the ball as close to the basket as you can. If you do not have a post player capable of consistently scoring from the block area, then these principles and this chapter probably aren't going to help much.

Most defenses are taught the concept of "digging" on the post when the ball is thrown to a post player on or near the block. This is essentially the same thing as stunting, but at a different angle. The defender of the perimeter player who throws the ball into the post, is taught to get half way (or sometimes closer) between his man and the post player and "fake" at the post player to keep some of their attention focused on other things rather than scoring. This creates our first advantage. If the post player can ignore the dig and continue to score the ball, then keep scoring it! Once the defense has to start committing more to the dig, our spacing becomes

the key to exposing the defense. Take a look at these clips and see the defense digging on the post. Pay attention to the differences and similarities from team to team.

Once you've established a post presence that is respected enough that teams dig consistently, then we can look at the next steps in the progression to expose the defense. If you look at the defense digging off the post the same as a perimeter player being in help-side stunting at someone on the opposite wing, it looks almost exactly the same. Here's an image of both scenarios.



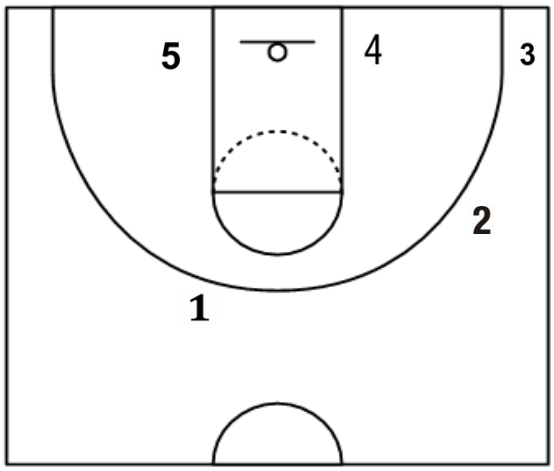
You will see that in the image on the left, the post player was in the middle of his post move and the defender guarding the player at the top of the key is half way (maybe even a little further) between his man and the post player, attempting to dig. In the picture on the right, the player with the ball has just made a move and is about to pull up for a jumper, and the defender guarding #0 who's on the "X" is doing basically the same thing. So we can look at a post dig the same way that we look at a defender stunting, and we learned very early in the book that once you force a stunt, you've forced a closeout. Now that we've forced a closeout, a chain reaction begins.

The first thing that you can do is throw the ball back out to the same perimeter player who threw it in, and get an open shot off the pass back out. The second option would be to throw the ball back out to the perimeter and attempt to drive a gap, as the defender who is digging attempts to closeout. Going one step further, if we can get our spacing right, we can not only force a closeout but we can typically force another perimeter defender to stunt or rotate on the pass

back out. This starts the chain reaction that we can quickly take advantage of with good spacing and a good pass.

Most coaches teach their players to “relocate” or slide once they throw the ball into the post because if the ball gets thrown from the “X” or lower, it’s pretty easy to dig on the post and recover to your man. When the nearest offensive player gets in the “shoot” (a term used to describe the space between both lane lines and behind the 3pt line) it becomes much more difficult to stunt and recover without needing some help. Now, there is an action that I call “split action” that takes place on the perimeter once the ball gets thrown into the post, to make it more difficult for perimeter defenders to dig, but I won’t get into that because I want to focus on simple spacing. If you would like to know more about “split action” check out a video on YouTube called Warriors Split Action: Plays We Love by bballbreakdown.

When it comes to just spacing the floor properly on the post pass in a way that forces the defense to work really hard to dig on the post and cover the perimeter players, I like to use the spacing you see below in the diagram. Assume the ball was just thrown to the 5.



The reason I prefer this spacing is because of how it puts stress on each defender. If the defender guarding 1 helps too much and the ball gets passed back out to 1, he will either be open or the defender guarding 2 will have to come stunt/rotate. In the event of that happening, if 1 swings the ball to 2 as the stunt or rotation happens, then 2 is wide open. This will force the player guarding 3 to make the decision whether to leave his man in the corner and help on 2. If the player guarding 3 decides to go stunt/rotate, that leaves 3 open in the corner with nobody left to rotate. It all starts with the player guarding 1 to dig too much, and then it comes down to spacing and on-time on-target passes. To show you what this looks like, because everything looks good on paper, here is an example of this very rotation happening.

As I said before, this concept really only works if you are able to create a mismatch in the post that the defense has to compensate for by digging or double teaming. I don't want to give you the impression that this is the only way to space the floor when the ball gets thrown into the post. As we talked about earlier, there are actions like split and other things that the perimeter players can do to create indecision by the defense. There is also the option of cutting guys to the rim from the perimeter once the ball gets thrown into the post, that we didn't get into. I chose to only address this one spacing concept because I think it's easy to teach and it directly follows the rules of *The Gap Theory*.

It's also worth mentioning that the ball doesn't always have to be passed back out to the player who threw it in. If all four of the offensive players space the floor correctly, then it is up to the post player to assess the defense and see which defender is helping/digging too much. Typically, the defender who helps the most indicates who will be open on the kick out. In these next clips, you will see how this plays out. Once the open player is located and the ball is kicked out, the same concept still applies in the decision-making on whether to shoot it or swing it. The one constant in these clips is the spacing of the perimeter players.



The last thing that you will need to do with this spacing, if you choose to use it, is to practice having the perimeter players make decisions on each catch. The choice between shooting, driving, or passing it, will need to be made very quickly, and practicing these reads in a realistic way really slows down the game for players.

Chapter 7: Our Mission Is Transition

My first game at Iowa State was one for the storybooks. I wish time allowed me to tell you the whole thing, but that's not what you are reading this book for. But long story short, my first game as a basketball player was Monday, January 3rd, 2011. What was significant about that day was that we had a game against Northern Illinois in Hilton Coliseum, and not only was that my first game, but it was my first day on the team. I was a quarterback on the Iowa State football team the year prior, until the spring semester of 2011, and switched from being a football player to a basketball player in 24 hours. Wild, huh? You have no idea haha. So why am I dusting off the archives to tell you about my college days? Because my first experience on the team came around 1:00pm at walk thru before the game. My head was spinning and I felt seven inches shorter than I actually am, as I walked past all these guys who were at least 6'5" or taller. When we got done walking thru a few of NIU's sets and talking about how we planned on guarding them, we split up post and perimeter players to get shots up. When I got in line to show coach my stuff for the first time, I continued to hear this coined phrase said by everyone on the team, and continued to hear it each and every day until that season was over. "Our mission is transition!"

Now I had played enough collegiate sports at this point in my life, and just got done spending a year with the football team, to have racked up a number of sayings that were clever but also important. What's cool about this particular phrase is how relevant and impactful this concept has been as I've grown as a coach. In this chapter, I am going to continue to breakdown *The Gap Theory* and talk about how transition offense plays into it. I want to talk about my thoughts on transition scoring versus scoring in the half court. How the spacing principles that we have discussed already are consistent when talking about transition offense. And, I want to talk about how mismatches are created by transition offense.

I'm sure that out of all the people reading this book, not everyone has the same thoughts and feelings towards transition offense. Some of you may try and score 110 every night, and if you have to set up a play, it's not what you want to be doing. Some of you may try and limit possessions to a minimum by slowing the game down and never trying to score in transition. My objective isn't to try and persuade you to go one way or another, I would just like to show you some things that I have learned, and hopefully it will give you some new things to think about or use in your system.

Going all the way back to the beginning of the book when we talked about the most basic concept of how to score - I used the analogy about the defense being likened to a fort. The fort is protecting the "base" which is the basket. If I were to give you two scenarios and you could pick which one you prefer; A. Attacking a military base who has state-of-the-art equipment, guards at every post on the look-out for intruders, and big scary dogs out front who haven't eaten in a while; or B. Attacking a base that isn't fully set-up yet, some of the guards are on their

lunch break, and they don't have anything protecting the front - It's pretty obvious that the better choice is B. Likewise, in the game of basketball, if I gave you these three options offensively - Would you rather play 5 v 5, 3 v 2, or 2 v 1, the majority of you are going to choose playing 2 on 1. It just makes sense, because there are less bodies on the court, and more importantly there are less defenders. The fewer defenders we have to account for, the better our chances in any situation.

I'm a huge statistics guy. I love stats! because I feel they are extremely telling and can help you gain an edge both with your team and against your opponents. I did some analytics on the 2016-2017 basketball season to see what a group of team's PPP (points per possession) were in transition versus in the half court. These were my findings via *Synergy Sports Tech:*

<u>BIG TEN:</u>
Illinois: 0.964(T) 0.908(HC) Indiana: 1.01(T) 0.947(HC) Iowa: 0.997(T) 0.916(HC) Maryland: 1.121(T) 0.91(HC) Michigan State: 1.022(T) 0.91(HC) Michigan: 1.204(T) 1.025(HC) Minnesota: 1.028(T) 0.882(HC) Nebraska: 1.028(T) 0.817(HC) Northwestern: 1.092(T) 0.892(HC) Ohio State: 1.112(T) 0.885(HC) Penn State: 1.058(T) 0.821(HC) Purdue: 1.078(T) 0.98(HC) Rutgers: 1.035(T) 0.763(HC) Wisconsin: 1.01(T) 0.927(HC)

<u>Big 12:</u>
Baylor: 0.99(T) 0.92(HC) Iowa State: 1.067(T) 0.991(HC) Kansas: 1.125(T) 0.963(HC) Kansas State: 1.106(T) 0.904(HC) Oklahoma: 1.024(T) 0.836(HC) Oklahoma State: 1.205(T) 0.948(HC) TCU: 1.129(T) 0.9(HC) Texas Tech: 1.118(T) 0.945(HC) Texas: 0.987(T) 0.815(HC) West Virginia: 1.192(T) 0.896(HC)

<u>ACC:</u>
Boston College: 1.049(T) 0.857(HC) Clemson: 1.142(T) 0.912(HC) Duke: 1.129(T) 0.993(HC) Florida State: 1.153(T) 0.921(HC) Georgia Tech: 0.958(T) 0.828(HC) Louisville: 0.971(T) 0.928(HC) Miami: 1.099(T) 0.876(HC) North Carolina State: 1.112(T) 0.904(HC) North Carolina: 1.018(T) 0.932(HC) Notre Dame:1.073(T) 0.997(HC) Pittsburg: 1.112(T) 0.909(HC) Syracuse: 1.139(T) 0.931(HC) Virginia: 1.286(T) 0.916(HC) Virginia Tech: 1.152(T) 0.999(HC) Wake Forest 1.121(T) 0.984(HC)

Let's talk about these numbers, because I think the information is remarkable. There were only six teams out of the 39 teams that didn't score over 1 PPP in transition. Likewise, there wasn't one team out of the 39 who scored at least 1 PPP in the half court. I believe the reason for the stat about the half court is because like we discussed earlier, it is difficult to score 5 on 5 because of the defensive schemes, scouting reports, and sheer nature of 10 guys playing in a small space. The stat that I was most surprised by was that there wasn't one team out of all 39 that scored a higher percentage of PPP in the half court compared to their transition offense. Not one. Here's another stat for you that I thought was staggering - Keep in mind that I understand no team can score in transition every possession, but if it were attainable, here are some numbers for you.

I decided to use West Virginia because they have had a large amount of success the past few years and they play an up-tempo brand of basketball. WVU had a total of 3,157 possessions on the year last year. 2,398 of them were in the half court (84.8%) and 480 came in transition (15.2%). WVU's average number of total possessions per game was 85 and after taking into account their average of 12 turnovers per game, that leaves roughly 73 possessions of offense where they took a shot or got fouled. That means they took an average of 62 shots in the half court and 11 shots in transition. WVU scored an average of 81.4 points per game last season. This is where the stats provide information that really makes you think. If WVU were to flip the number of shots in the half court vs transition per game based on their number of shots and their average PPP in each category, they would have scored roughly 15 more points per game. And, if they took all of their shots in transition, based on their PPP they would score almost 19 more points per game.

I fully understand that this is all hypothetical, and the game itself doesn't allow a team to feasibly pull something like this off, but with 15 more points per game, WVU would have won all 9 of the games they lost during their season, one of which was the sweet sixteen against Gonzaga. Please understand, I am not giving all of these statistics to promote teams pushing the ball every chance they get and throwing up poor quality shots all in the name of "Transition Scoring". I just want you to know the value a couple more baskets per game can make, and hopefully help you and your team find ways to do that.

The reason why I believe Coach Hoiberg instilled in his teams at Iowa State that "our mission was transition" was because he recognized the advantages to it statistically, and wanted to score before the defense had a chance to set-up. So the question is, how does transition facilitate that, and how can we do our job offensively to make it as tough on the defense as possible?

Fortunately, a lot of the things I'm going to discuss and teach in this section are concepts that we have already talked about earlier in the book. The same spacing principles that we talked about in the half court apply to transition as well. There are a few modifications and wrinkles, but for the most part, it stays the same.

Instead of doing a bunch of teaching right now about the proper spacing, where the post players should run, who should bring the ball up the court, is it better to throw it ahead or dribble it up, and what about secondary transition offense? I'm going to show a group of clips of successful transition scoring and then work backwards by breaking the specifics down after you have had a chance to see them. This way, you can make your own evaluations on what is important and what is not. What keys you think created the easy scoring opportunities, and then you can compare and contrast them with my teaching.

For the purpose of making it easier for you to find clips, I will put them in groups based on where the scoring happens.

Lay-Ups








Jumpers






We could go on for hours looking at transition baskets, but hopefully there was enough material there for you to see some similarities within the clips. This is the part about books where I wish you could call in or email me all your findings and breakdowns of the clips so this could be more of a conversation rather than a lecture. The place I would like to start breaking down transition is by first discussing what the defense's rules/objectives are. If we don't know what the defense is trying to do, similar to our PnR segment, then we don't know what to expose. My hope is that I can connect transition offense to the key principles that we have discussed already about *The Gap Theory* and create a clear understanding of <u>why</u> transition is so successful, not just that it is.

I can't speak for all basketball teams and philosophies, but every team I have ever been a part of has always talked about transition defense by making some general rules/principles. The first rule is always focused on the "get back guys". Most teams tells their 4 and 5 to crash the offensive glass, so that leaves three guys to either crash from the perimeter or get back on defense. I think the most common strategies that I have seen are to send three guys to the boards and two back in transition. Along with that, it is most likely that they send the tallest or longest perimeter player to the glass for rebounds, which tends to be the 3 man. So with that being the case, that leaves the point guard and shooting guard responsible for setting the defense once the transition takes place. If a team decides to send four guys to the glass, that obviously leaves only one guy left to get back on defense.

There may be a few discrepancies in this next stage because I know coaches do this portion differently. Once the offensive transitioning team has secured the rebound, as the three defenders who went for an offensive rebound get back, the two guys who got back early are responsible for 1. Picking up the ball (handler) and 2. Protecting the basket. You can see this played out if you go back and watch the clips again. The smallest guards are always the ones who are back first due to the forwards and center crashing the offensive glass.

There are several different ways to teach this next part of transition from a defensive side, but what I have seen to be the most common is, one defender attempts to pick up the ball once it gets past half court and before the ball handler gets to the three-point line. The other guard who is back is responsible for staying in the paint near the rim to protect it until the 4 and/or 5 man get back. In the event that a team crashes four guys, then the one guard who is back has to either protect the paint and wait for help while another guard picks up the ball after crashing the glass, or the guard who gets back picks up the ball after making sure nobody has a free run to the basket.

As the offense pushes the ball in transition, the first defender is responsible for the ball and the second defender is "waiting for the cavalry to arrive" so he can build out and pick up a perimeter player. Typically, the rule of the guy at the basket is they can't leave to pick up someone else until a post player gets back to "relieve him of his duties". This creates our first *Gap Theory* philosophy - *mismatches*. If an offensive post player gets down the court before his defender, what typically happens is the guard who is protecting the basket ends up taking him as his new matchup. So the defensive post player who is still transitioning to defense is then responsible for taking whoever is left, which is going to be a perimeter player (unless he takes the other post player which in turn would leave that post player with a perimeter player). Now we have a mismatch. Not only do we have potentially a point guard on the 4 or 5 man, but most likely the post player has two feet in the paint and the point guard is behind him. Along with that mismatch, we now have a defensive 4 or 5 out on the perimeter guarding someone who's most likely quicker than him. Now, all of the principles of the switching PnR strategies come into play without needing to set a ball-screen.

The next piece of defensive transition that is a very commonly used concept is, “nobody automatically has their own man in transition”. Most coaches teach that the first two guys get back, one of the guards picks up the ball, the other stays in the paint. The first post player back is supposed to get to the paint so the guard responsible for the paint can leave to get a perimeter player. The other two guys getting back are usually told to “communicate, locate your man, and load ball side”. Now, that leaves a lot of room for guys to be confused about who they are actually guarding. This creates our second *Gap Theory* philosophy - *make two people guard one*. Between the first post getting back and the guard waiting on him to get there and the last three guys figuring out who to pick up on the fly, there are several opportunities for the defense to accidentally have two guys be on the same man. We will talk more about the offensive side in a bit, but this is why offensive spacing will be imperative.

The last piece that I want to address about the defensive principles is based on the concept of “load ball side and find your man”. Because coaches are aware that the defense is most vulnerable early in transition, the common strategy is to get as many defenders on the same half of the court as the basketball so that in the event someone gets beat off the dribble or loses their man, that the team is there to protect the paint. This is a fear of most coaches because players are scrambling to find their man, and the defender on the basketball is attempting to guard a guy who is running at him full speed. These two issues for the defense lead us to our third *Gap Theory* principle - *Drive a Gap.* Since most defenders on the perimeter haven’t had much time to get set-up, they are less likely to be prepared to close a gap on dribble penetration by the ball handler. This means it’s much easier for a ball handler to get to the paint and/or the rim. Due to the post players just getting back from sprinting the court, they are usually not as ready to deal with a guard driving at them and stopping a shot at the basket. If they do, the help defenders usually aren’t prepared to help the post, and that leaves any post player in his “room” wide open for a dish and easy bucket.

The reason that transition offense tends to create high quality shots and a higher percentage of PPP is simply because the defense isn’t ready to defend these key principles we talked about trying to take advantage of in the half court. If I can use my fort analogy one more time - it’s always easier to attack someone when they are less prepared.

As an offense, there are some key things that we can do to make our transition more effective and consistent. The reason these keys work is because it exposes the defensive rules/principles we just talked about and makes it tough for the defense to stick to them. Let’s start from the very beginning. Force a missed shot. Transition offense is always easier when you can get a rebound rather than taking the ball out of bounds. I have seen teams who are still capable of scoring in transition off of made field goals by the other team, but it’s a tall order. Once you get a defensive rebound, I like to split transition up into four categories. 1 - Ball handlers 2 - Trailers 3 - Wing Runners and 4 - Rim Runners. It’s possible that one player could be more than one of these three, so having a good feel of the lineups on the court is important.

Rim Runner

Let's start with rim runners. Typically this is your 4 and 5 man. This is usually pretty simple to delegate. If your 4 man gets the rebound, your 5 man is the rim runner and vice versa. If neither of them get the rebound, whichever of the two get to half court first is the rim runner. The strategy of the rim runner is pretty obvious haha. Run to the rim! But the goal is to get to the rim before your defender does. There is a clip that was shown earlier of a big man running the floor and getting a breakaway dunk. That was a textbook rim runner who just did his job. The other objective behind the rim runner getting down the court before his defender is that it forces the guard who is protecting the basket to stay longer in the paint before working out to a man on the perimeter. Several times, if you watch closely, a perimeter player will get a wide open three in transition because the rim runner did a great job and kept the guard in the paint long enough to free up the shooter at the wing or corner. The last objective of the rim runner is to get a post seal. You also saw a clip of this above. If the post player who is guarding the rim runner doesn't do a good job of defending, the rim runner can run straight to the front of the basket and seal his man for an easy shot. To be effective as a rim runner, you have to have a great motor and you have to run with purpose. I'll show a few clips of successful rim runs that weren't shown earlier.







Trailer

The second position I'd like to talk about while we are focusing on post players is the trailer. The reason I call this the trailer position is simply because he generally trails the play. This is the opposite post player who doesn't get to half court first, or who gets the defensive rebound. That doesn't always have to be the case, but typically it works out that way. Another rule of thumb is your better perimeter shooting post player is the trailer. The reason this piece is so important in transition offense to combat the rules/principles of the defense is, most post players are taught in transition to sprint all the way to the paint first. After that they are told to build their way out, but most are taught to get to the paint first to protect the basket before locating their man. This works out nicely with the trailer position because power forwards who can shoot the three can get wide open catch-and-shoot threes in rhythm, due to their man being in the middle of the paint when they get to the 3pt line. The other option that the trailer has is to run right into a pick

& roll. Usually, by the time the trailer gets down the floor is about the time the ball handler gets down the floor and declares a side of the court. It is a very seamless transition to go straight into a ball-screen and with the trailer's defender in the paint, it creates a great opportunity to attack a ball screen with no D2 present.

This position is probably the least important because many teams have both of their posts run to the block area. I will say that the trailer position is probably the most flexible. They can look to get transition threes, they can come down and set a ball-screen for the ball handler, or a number of things. Here's a look at the trail man getting transition threes and setting drag screens.








Wing Runner

Next, let's move to the wing runners. Depending on the personnel on your team, this could be any number of players. Typically, it is all perimeter players (with the exception of a point guard who you always want bringing the ball up the court no matter what) and your power forwards, if they are shooters. I don't want to say that there is any one position in transition that is more important than another one, but I think for the consistent success of your transition offense, your wing runners have to do their jobs well. I also think this is the hardest position out of the four to get guys to do correctly, as well as have a good feel for where they need to be.

Wing runners are basically anyone who isn't rim running, bringing the ball up the floor, or trailing. There are a couple key things that can make or break the fast break, and a lot of it has to deal with this position. For starters, we can use the four spots we marked off on the basketball court way back in the beginning for spacing purposes. To refresh your memory, those were the two corners and the two wings where the X's are. The wing players have to have the best feel on the court because there are some situations where it is better for a wing to run to the basket to try and get a lay-up, and there are other times when it is more beneficial to run to the corner/wing. If you go back and watch the clips I started with, you will quickly see in the "Lay-Up" clips most of the wings were running to the basket. Then in the "Jumper" clips, most of the time the wings were running to the corners or wings and staying wide. I wish I had some sort

of numerical equation that determined which choice the wing player should make, but I don't. Part of me thinks that is a good thing though, because I think it would complicate the decision. The more reps a player gets running the wing in transition, the better feel he will get for it.

One thing that is consistent regardless of where the wing ends up running to, is that he needs to start wide. This is so important because it creates angles that really stretch the defense. Imagine having a 2 v 1 or even a 3 v 1 and the offensive guys standing as close as possible as they ran down the court. I would bet one defender could cover even three offensive players who were an arm's length away from each other. The wider the offense gets, the harder the decision-making becomes for the defense, and the more they are stretched. If you go back and watch the clips, you will see no matter which team is the one on the fast break, the wings get wide early and either attack the rim from a wide angle or sprint to the corners each and every time. This is where our 4th and final *Gap Theory* principle comes into play - *Spacing*. Let's go back to the defensive rules and principles again. The first guard who is taught to protect the paint will eventually be responsible for a wing runner. If that wing runner stays wide and gets to the corner, it stretches out the defense and pulls them away from protecting the paint. Likewise, if the wing runners sprint to the corners in transition, the gaps that are created for the ball handler become significantly bigger, in case the ball handler chooses to drive and attack the paint.

Here's an area that seems to give coaches and teams a tough time offensively when it comes to wing runners in transition. What if the defensive rebound gets secured, the wings take off in transition, and they realize there are two guys running the same lane? This is a great question. In my experience, I have learned that it is all based on the intended target of the wing runners. If the offense has obvious numbers and there is a good chance of one of us getting a lay-up, then I think you need to have one of the wing runners cross over so it's even. This way the defenders who are back can't know in advance which way the ball is going, if the ball handler passes it. If it is not a guarantee that the play is going to result in a lay-up, and it looks like a wing runner who is considering crossover to the other side is going to end up running to the corner or the wing, I think it is best to either have both wing runners stay on the same side and fill the corner and wing or the wing who is going to crossover should do it asap. I say that because I think a wing runner going all the way down the court and then circling to the other side on the baseline is a waste. It tends to put them in the way of a potential drive by the ball handler, it clutters up the paint for a potential post touch, and the wing usually doesn't get to the other side in time to get open for a shot. There are clips of both filling the same side corner and wing as well as crossing the middle early in the clips above. Here are some more clips of successful transitions that are either created by great spacing by the wing runners, or the wing runners score because of their correct spacing.








Ball Handler

The last person who is an option to score is the player bringing the ball up the court. I think it is important as a coaching staff to designate early on in the season, which roles players should occupy. There will be some players who you would like to strictly bring the ball up when they are on the court, or guys who you never want bringing it up and only running the wings. There may be players on your team who can run the wing and also be a trailer. Having clearly defined roles when it comes to the fast break will help tremendously. There is nothing wrong with having multiple guys on the court who have permission to be the ball handler, as long as everyone on the court knows that. Having multiple guys who can bring the ball up the court in transition is nice because it makes it easy to outlet the ball when there is more than one person who can bring it up, and the chances of the rebounder being a ball handler also increases. When I played at Iowa State, we had a unique situation because our power forward at the time was very skilled and capable of bringing the ball up. So we had four guys on the court at times who could lead the fast break, which was one of the reasons we were one of the top scoring teams in the country when it came to fast break points.

There are a couple different options that the ball handler has when looking to score in transition. The first one we will go over is one that we have somewhat talked about previously - the trailer PnR. Now that we have discussed how effective the PnR is, it makes sense to try and use them throughout the course of the game. Transition ball-screens are great because not only are you creating an opportunity to put the defense at a disadvantage, but when you use it in transition the defense is usually vulnerable and not fully set-up yet. This creates problems when it comes to help-side defenders and the D2 (hopefully you haven't forgotten what D2 stands for yet haha) doing his assignment in their PnR coverage. If you watch much college or professional basketball, you will probably see a few transition ball-screens almost every game.

The next option, that is probably the most common, is the ball handler driving the ball all the way to the basket and scoring around the hoop. The reason that this option is available so often in transition, I believe, is due to two factors. The first is something we have touched on. The

defense is still setting up and getting organized/matched up, so the gaps for the ball handler to drive through are typically much bigger. The second reason is due to the nature of a fast break. Usually defenders who are responsible for guarding the basketball are taught to pick up the ball somewhere between half court and the three-point line. When they do this, they are usually either standing stationary or at a slow back pedal. If the ball handler is pushing the ball quickly up the court, he is at a sprint. It's similar to arena football, if you have ever watched how their game is played. Wide receivers are allowed go back behind the line of scrimmage and get a full head of steam as the QB hikes the ball right as they are nearing the line of scrimmage. In most situations, the defender is going to need some help to stay in front of the ball handler without fouling. This is why the spacing of the wing runners is so important.

The last option for the ball handler is taking advantage of confusion and miscommunication. As much as teams practice and drill and prepare for defensive transition, it is inevitable that teams are going to make a mistake and not pick up the ball handler throughout the game. This happens much more frequently, in my opinion, when a team has multiple guys who can bring the ball up the court. If the defense picks up the ball handler with a much slower defender, or picks them up too late, it is usually pretty easy to get to the basket and get a high-quality shot, or force the defense to help and the ball handler can kick it to an open player. With the way the game is evolving and players are becoming more proficient at hitting pull up jumpers off the dribble, ball handlers in transition aren't just getting to the basket but finding wide open jump shots in transition.

Here are some clips of the ball handler scoring in transition both from the perimeter and in the lane. You will see that it doesn't always develop the same way each time, but what is consistent are the key points we discussed above.









When it comes to transition offense, I think you have to make a decision as a coach how much or how little you want to utilize it. I can say from experience that I have noticed a higher percentage of turnovers occur during transition due to the speed in which everything develops. Everyone is typically running faster than usual, decisions have to be made faster, and the timing of each decision is crucial. Weighing the option of risk vs reward will ultimately be in the hands of the coaching staff, but my goal in this chapter was to equip you with plenty of statistics, information, and video footage to help you have the most productive transition offense possible.

Chapter 8: The Zone

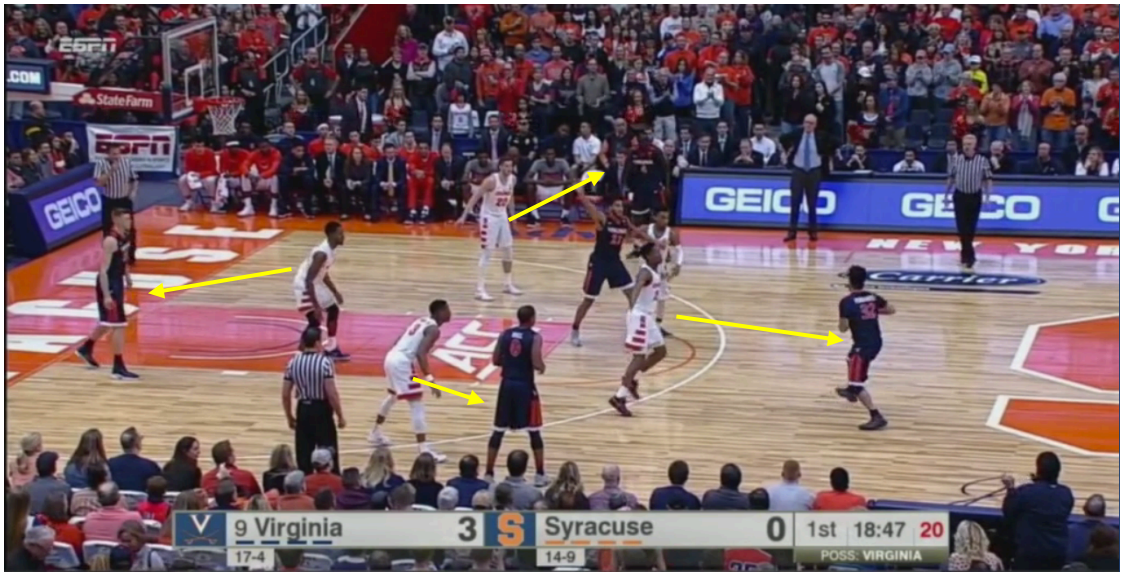
If you watch a lot of basketball, and have been around the game for a good amount of time, most of you would agree that the game of basketball has changed and adapted quite a bit in the last decade. One big area that has radically impacted basketball (aside from the NBA) is the zone. It is alarming to me how I can go into a gym and see 3rd and 4th graders camped out in a 2-3 zone while their nine and ten year old opponents jack up three pointers for 32 minutes. Don't get me wrong, I think that a good defensive zone is extremely smart and effective. My frustration is that as a college coach in only my 5th year of coaching, I have had several players come to the program I'm with and not have a CLUE how to play defense, because they stood in a zone for four years in high school. However, the purpose of this chapter isn't to give me a soapbox to share my coaching woe's with you, it is to discuss how *The Gap Theory* can still be implemented when it comes to dealing with zone defense.

I actually think this chapter will advocate for the importance of learning and teaching these principles because the theory works the same in man and zone. From my experiences so far, *The Gap Theory* becomes extremely valuable when it comes to scoring against zone, simply due to the lack of plays teams have against it. Think about the team you are on currently or were a part of last. How many offensive sets versus man-to-man defense do you think you had? If you don't know the specific answer, just ball-park it. Now, think about how many zone sets your team has? Regardless of how many man-to-man plays you guessed, I would be surprised if any of you said more than six for zone sets. The reality is, coaches haven't discovered very many "plays" to run against a zone defense. I believe it is because plays are typically designed to screen defenders, fool them with misdirection, and set ball-screens – but when a team is in zone, those concepts aren't that simple anymore. The crazy thing is, with the way the NCAA and high school levels are trying to "clean up the game" by calling more fouls for any defender taking away "freedom of movement" from the offense, I think in the next 5-10 years more teams will start running zone defense at a higher percentage than ever before. If I happen to be correct in my assumption, it is going to be imperative that coaches/players/teams learn how to score against zone defense without just swinging the ball around the perimeter and shooting a lot of three pointers.

The great thing about *The Gap Theory* is that the type of defense you are facing bares no weight on any of the concepts. You just have to recognize where the concepts apply to the situation. In this chapter, I will breakdown the 2-3, the 3-2, and the 1-3-1 zone, and teach how the principles of *The Gap Theory* can be applied to each zone type. I think that if you can understand the principles against these three zones, they will translate to any other variations of zone you may come across. I will do the majority of the teaching in this chapter by using the 2-3 zone. Then I will go over the other two and compare and contrast the differences. In the same manner that we broke down man-to-man defensive schemes, if we can get an understanding of how the defense works – we will then be able to identify how to exploit it. One thing I feel is a huge advantage to these concepts, is that you are not going to have to rely on a bunch of clever plays and quick hitters to score.

2-3 Zone

Please hear me when I say I am not an expert on the 2-3 zone or on how the best zone teams teach it. I have watched a lot of film and discovered patterns that have brought me to some conclusions about consistent principles of the 2-3 zone. One principle that I have discovered has two parts. Part A is that someone is always responsible for guarding the basketball. Part B is that the other four defenders are responsible for matching up with someone on offense at all times. The irony of this concept is that they are in a zone, but when you really get down to the nuts and bolts everyone is still matched up. Take a look at the image below and see how the defense, while in a 2-3 zone, is still matched up.



I'm not trying to suggest that a 2-3 zone is not a zone. I am, however, suggesting that within the zone, each player is always searching and identifying who is the player in his zone, and if there isn't one they are usually instructed to leave their zone to match up with the closest offensive player. This is where the strategy of trying to "overload" the zone became such a popular strategy. The reason I think this is important is because in some regard, we can look at a 2-3 zone as a modified man-to-man defense.

Another principle of the 2-3 zone that I would like to go over is the concern of the high post. In most conversations that I have been a part of when discussing this zone, there is almost always a point in time where discussion about the high post is brought up. Some coaching philosophies lean towards denying anyone a catch at the high post. The reason people fear the ball getting to the high post area is because of the vulnerability it creates once it gets there. The middle man in the bottom of the zone is then forced to make a decision on coming up to guard the ball, or protect the rim. If the other defenders collapse to get the ball out of the high post, they leave themselves vulnerable to a quick pass to the perimeter for an open three pointer. What is ironic about this debate when you look at it from *The Gap Theory* principles, is the ball getting passed to the high post emulates the ball handler driving a middle gap almost to the T. In both

situations, the ball handler has the option to shoot a pull-up/floater, force the big man to help so he can dump it to his teammate in his room, or force a wing defender to help and kick it to a corner/wing for an open 3.

Another key factor of a successful zone when the defense is working on a 2-3, is communication. Coaches typically spend a lot of time while instructing their players in zone urging them to communicate as much as they can. The reason it is so important is because the defense is constantly trying to cover everyone who is “in their personal zone”, which can lead to one of our *Gap Theory* principles – making two people guard one. Because of the nature of a 2-3 zone, the defense is constantly running back and forth in their zone guarding guys. Where the defense can get into trouble is when the offense is very particular about their spacing and get right at the intersection of two different defender’s zones. Take a look at the image below.

The reason this simple concept can work to the offense’s advantage is because even with great communication, the defense is susceptible to having two defenders try to guard the same guy. If the offense can occupy the spaces where the defender’s zones intersect, the defense then has to cover a lot of ground within each individual’s zone. Let me give you a few concepts that you have probably either taught or heard of, that line up with this concept. Most of you have probably heard or use the strategy of a three-guard-front versus a 2-3 defense. Using a one guard front. One guy at the top, and a player on both wings. Why is this concept so popular, and why does it prove to be successful?

Go back and look at the diagram with the circles that represent each defender’s zone responsibility. If we focus only on the top two defenders, you will notice that they are responsible for the entire perimeter above the free throw line extended. That is a lot of ground to cover. Which brings us to the next concept that most coaches teach when working on zone. Pass the ball quickly around the zone. Now, this concept seems simple enough and most people wouldn’t

argue with it. But why does this strategy work? Because two players are trying to guard three, and with this spacing there is a player at every corner of these two defender's zones. But here is how *The Gap Theory* comes into the equation. By moving the ball around the perimeter with quick passes, you are creating two important things… I really hope you know the answer to this! You force a lot of closeouts, and you create huge gaps to drive through! So these two well-known zone offense concepts are just a product of people implementing *Gap Theory* principles whether they know it or not.

In the clip below, I want you to watch for these two things. Watch how the ball moves back and forth and how it forces the defenders to closeout multiple times. Then you will see how one of the offensive players drives when there is confusion about who should be guarding the ball, just off a few rotations of the ball and a well-timed drive.

This won't always work the exact same way or be a fool-proof way to get an easy shot, but there is a high likelihood that if you move the ball from side to side and each player is ready to drive a gap when they catch it, that there will be space available to get into the paint.

The next area of attack that we talked about before that accomplishes the same thing as driving a gap, is passing the ball to the high post. Typically, teams won't make the 5-man responsible for guarding the man at the high post, as we talked about at the beginning. This means that one of the top guards is responsible for covering up the high post. Usually, this will be the guard opposite the basketball when it is on a wing. When swinging the ball from side to side, it is almost impossible for both guards to constantly cover up the high post. If you can get the basketball to the high post, there are lots of options that open up to score. The man who catches the ball can sometimes have an open jump shot or drive to the basket one-on-one against the big in the middle. There is also the opportunity to kick the ball out to the perimeter for an open jumper. Lastly, when the ball gets to the high post, there is a good chance the middle man will step up to take away the shot and there will be a high-low opportunity for the post player underneath.

The last area of attacking a zone is the pick & roll. Sometimes there is a misconception that because a team is in a zone that you can't run ball-screens anymore. Nothing could be further from the truth. In a 2-3 zone, let's consider the alignment of the defense when the ball is on a wing. There is most likely a top defender on the ball, and the other top defender somewhere near the "nail" or the middle of the free throw line. If a post player ran up into a side PnR, the defensive 5 man would not come up with them to help, they would just have the opposite guard play the role of "hedging" instead. Now let's imagine that we put an offensive perimeter player on the "X" away from the PnR. If the help defender on the PnR is the guard, the only person who can keep the opposite guard from getting a wide open shot is the bottom wing player in the zone. If you create the same spacing as we would verses a man-to-man defense and put a player in the corner, the defense isn't able to cover everyone.

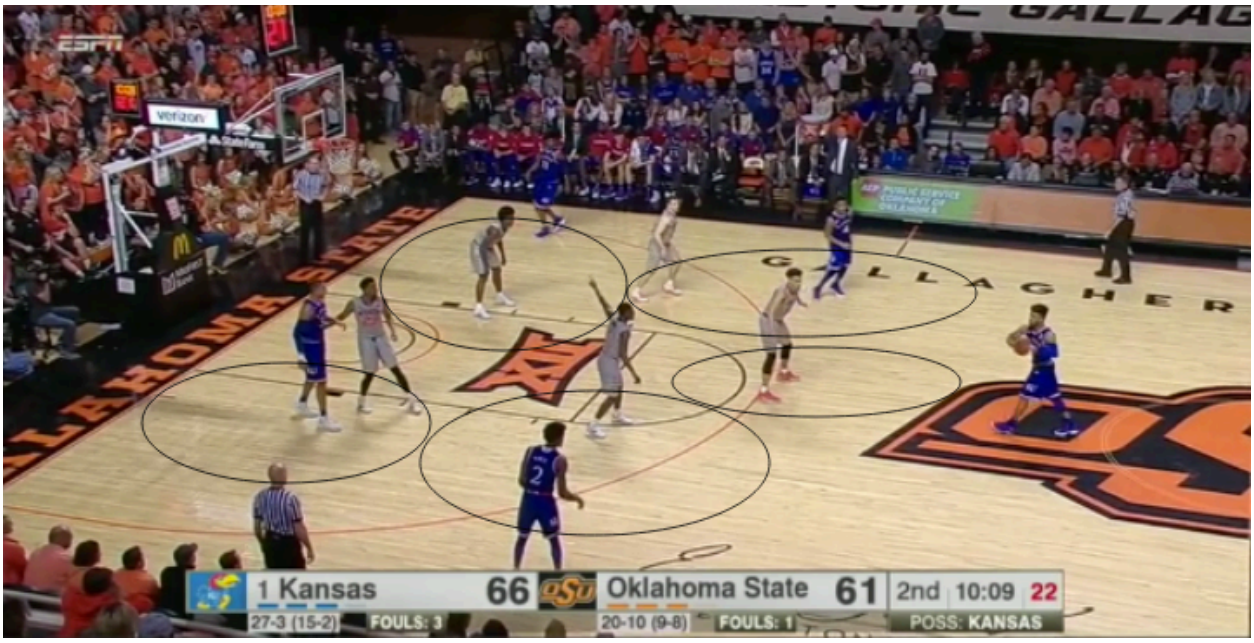
The other way that a screen can be set against a zone is on the baseline side of one of the top guards. If you look back at the image that shows who is responsible for what areas of the court, take a look at the bottom wing and the guard on the same side. Now visualize the ball handler coming off a screen angled towards the baseline. The bottom wing would be responsible for stopping the ball handler, but imagine if there was also a shooter in the same corner. It creates a lot of indecision for the defender. Ultimately, screening one of the top guys in a zone just makes it easier for the ball handler to drive a gap and get to the paint, and because the middle man doesn't come up with the screener, there isn't anyone to help. Here are a few clips of teams utilizing the PnR against a 2-3 zone to penetrate gaps and force defenders to help.



Hopefully, you can see from the clips that the concepts that we discussed against man still work against the zone. It may look slightly different in its execution but nevertheless, the principles still hold true. I'm not discouraging teams from running plays against a zone by any means. I do think that when the offense doesn't work, you can use these principles to get open shots. In almost every zone that you will ever see, there are four keys that can help you dissect it: Spacing, forcing closeouts, getting to the high post, and PnR.

3-2 Zone

The 3-2 changes some of the attacking ideas because of where the defense is heaviest. Against the 2-3 zone, the weakest spot of the zone was above the three-point line, but now the defense is most vulnerable in the corners and short corners. Take a look at this diagram which shows what zones the defensive players are responsible for.

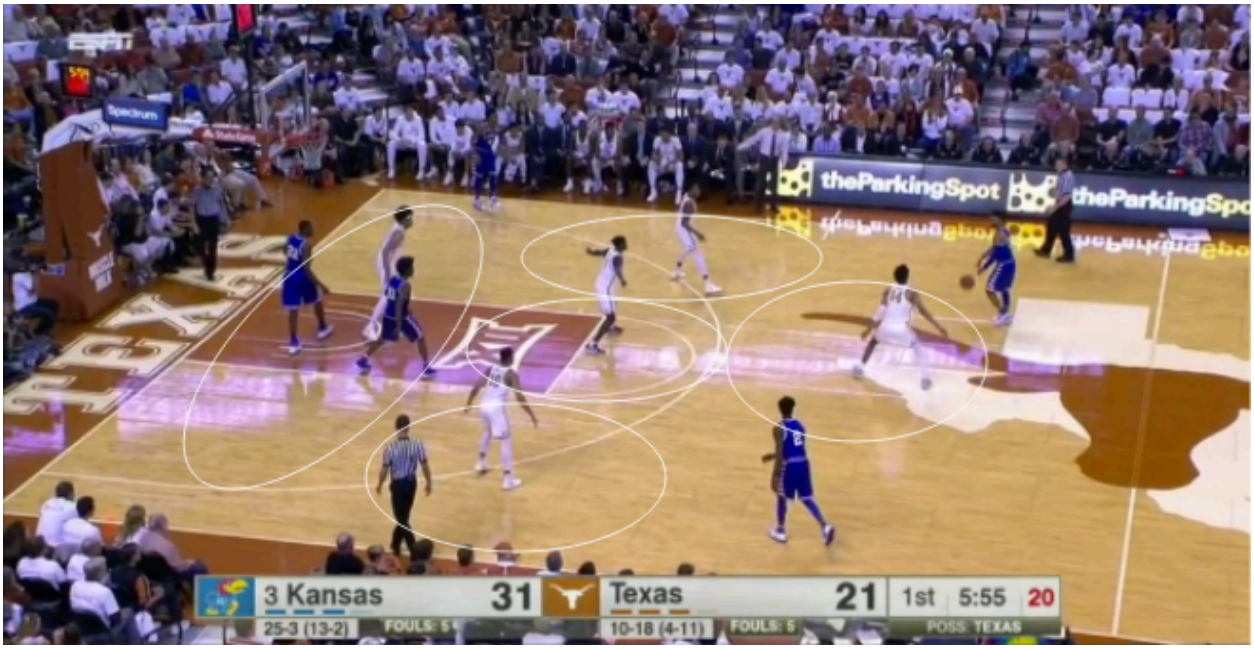


Most 3-2 defenses are trying to keep teams from getting the ball below the free throw line, but having heavy pressure on the wings and creating the fear of traps if the ball ever goes to the corner. My suggestion for spacing against a 3-2 zone is to have a player in both corners or the short corner area. The simplest way to line up against most zones is to “put players at the intersection of the zones.” So, against this zone you want to have a player somewhere in the middle, two players up top splitting the middle man of the zone so you can reverse the ball from side to side, and two on the bottom. Here are some clips of offenses getting great shots against a 3-2 zone by great ball movement, driving gaps, and getting the ball to the “soft spots” in the defense, which are the corners and short corners.

There is typically a lot of success that can come from getting the ball to shooters in the corner or to post players in the short corner. Setting ball-screens won’t be as easy against this zone because of the amount of players on the top of the zone. It is still possible to get the ball to the high post or drive a gap on the perimeter, even though it is more difficult against this zone. If you are able to get the ball to the high post area, the defense is in big trouble because they only have two players below the free throw line.

1-3-1 Zone

The 1-3-1 zone can give people problems because of the ability that the defense has to pressure the basketball and force them away from the basket. Sometimes a 1-3-1 can almost feel like you are being trapped constantly. It is vital that your spacing is right against this zone. First let's take a look at the zones that the defenders are responsible for.



I truly believe the reason this zone is successful and the reason teams run it is because it is built to keep the ball out of the middle. This zone forces you to get the ball to the corners to be successful. It is so important against this zone that you drive gaps when they are available and get the ball below the free throw line. With only one defender running the entire baseline, that is where the defense is most vulnerable. Ball movement and dribble penetration will be the most successful weapons against this zone. You may not be able to set ball-screens against a 1-3-1.

As you watch these clips, pay attention to the offensive spacing, the ball movement, and how vulnerable the defense is once the ball gets into the short corner areas.

Chapter 9: Building a Championship Program

We've talked about a lot of concepts, theories, principles, and tactics throughout this book. But I am a huge believer that knowledge without vision is useless. In this final chapter, I want to take some time to give you tangible goals and skills that need to be worked out for these concepts to actually reap success. Depending upon what level of basketball you play and/or coach at, the statistical goals that I go over may vary, so please don't be thrown off or discouraged by them if they simply don't match the level you are at. I hope, in this chapter, to create both goal setting and vision as a primary function of your team.

If you choose to take any or all of these principles and implement them into your program, the first thing I will suggest to you is to start at the foundation of *The Gap Theory* and work your way through it similarly to how I wrote it. The core foundation of this book can be simplified down to three things: *gaps, making two guard one, and spacing*. If you learn or teach these principles out of order, it can be frustrating and more difficult to learn than it should be. I believe that you must start with the concept of a gap. Every player must understand what a gap is and be able to verbally identify where the gaps are on the court. The next concept that you can build on from that point is how to identify what "making two guard one" looks like. Even after spending over a year with some of my current players, I am still amazed at how hard/confusing it is for them to identify what this looks like. The final piece of this puzzle is the concept of spacing. I think this part is the hardest! The reason I think this is because 1. It involves the four players on the court without the basketball and 2. Spacing typically is more of a flow than a detailed list of steps. I think in basketball today, players without the basketball think they can just stand and watch the ball and they don't realize that they are a HUGE part of the equation. You will typically find that spacing is an ongoing conversation throughout the entire course of a player's career. I can say that confidently because even NBA coaches talk about how much they work and focus on having the proper spacing.

Once those three things are established, you have got some freedom to go whichever direction you feel is most important for your program. Some coaches want to play fast all the time and for them I would suggest focusing on the chapter about the fast break. For some of you, a great place to start would be in the pick & roll. Then there might be some of you who find yourself constantly having issues with zones and that would be a good place to begin. My hope is that regardless of what areas you start and end with, you will see carryover between the different areas of the game and players will start to pick up things quicker as they learn more.

Now I would like to talk about skill development. For those of you who don't know, I spent two years with a company called Championship Productions, creating a skills program called Smart Basketball Training. The idea for this program was to provide athletes with a program that they could have 24/7 access to so they would know what to train and how to train whether they had someone in the gym with them or not. My passion behind it stemmed from feeling like basketball players weren't growing up and truly learning the game that I love. Athleticism, skill, quickness, and strength were increasing at an outstanding rate, but when it came down to the intellectual side of the game – I thought players were regressing. In my program, I focused on certain skill areas that I felt will translated over to real game situations. The skills that I would focus on in my

drills were centered around four main categories; Shooting, ball handling, passing, and finishing (lay-ups). I feel these skills are vital because to execute the things that you have watched in the dozens of video clips in this book – it comes down to these four skill sets. So I would like to break down these skills and correlate them with the principles from *The Gap Theory*. Hopefully this will give you some key areas to focus on as you are developing your players (and if you are a college or professional coach, looking for as you are recruiting).

Shooting

It is no surprise that shooting the basketball always was, and always will be, a big part of basketball. Twenty years ago, it was all about Larry Bird, Reggie Miller, and Chris Mullen and in today's game it's all about Steph Curry, Klay Thompson, and Kevin Durant (sorry if you're not fans of Golden State but those are my guys lol). The fact remains the same that as a team, YOU MUST be able to shoot the ball to have success. Shooters provide a lot of advantages. When it comes to guys who are good catch-and-shoot players (your traditional guys like Kyle Korver and JJ Redick), they make it almost impossible to help off of. Which means gaps to drive through become much bigger. Another advantage that having a great shooter on your team provides is the pump fake. Most teams are told to "run shooters off the line" and not let them get any open shots from three-point range. The problem with that is, a good shooter with a good shot fake is going to get guys off their feet and now there is an opportunity for a drive. Once that drive happens, we are into a gap and the defense is vulnerable.

Another area where shooting heavily impacts the game is off the dribble. As we talked about in the pick & roll chapter, there are a lot of opportunities to get open shots around the free line area (the "Kill Zone"), that having the ability to shoot the ball off the dribble makes it really hard to stop. Combine a good mid-range shooter with a knock down 3-point shooter and you have a recipe for a deadly PnR or fast break team.

I would recommend having your primary ball handlers work on a lot of shooting off the dribble. Being able to make jump shots in transition and coming off of a PnR will make them highly effective. If you have any pure shooters who don't do a whole lot else, have them spend a lot of time on catch-and-shoot three pointers both standing still on wings and in the corner, and sliding/running to the wings and the corners. They can provide a lot of scoring simply by being ready to shoot if their man tries to stunt at dribble penetration, or moving with the basketball on dribble penetration or in transition. The last thing I would suggest, because all good players need a counter to their dominant asset, would be to work on a one dribble pull-up. With defenders being instructed not to give up any threes, a lot of times their closeout will be way too aggressive. Being able to get past them for a one dribble pull-up will make them extremely hard to guard!

Finally, I am a firm believer that shooting (and quite honestly the whole game of basketball) is a game of muscle memory and repetition. There are some rare breeds out there who can just roll into the gym and shoot a high percentage from the field, but the majority of players will NEED to be in the gym daily working on their footwork, release point, and consistency, to be an effective

shooter. I would suggest making it a goal to shoot 40% from 3pt. Anything about 35% is adequate but 40% is very good!

Ball Handling

I feel that in the last decade this area of the game has really evolved. Thinking back to the years the San Antonio Spurs dominated the league with the "Twin Towers" (Tim Duncan and David Robinson), who rarely ever took more than a few dribbles on any of their moves, and now we have the likes of Kristap Porzingis and Karl Anthony Towns who are working on scoring from the top of the key. The game of basketball demands that you have several players on the court who can make plays off the dribble. I think part of the reason that *The Gap Theory* is so successful, is because of the ability of players to handle the ball and get past their defender with a dribble move.

When it comes to ball handling, there are some players who have a natural ability to get past defenders, and others who have to spend countless hours making moves on chairs, going past cones, etc. I was one of those guys who had to do all the ball handling drills. But here is the key when it comes to ball handling within the context of *The Gap Theory* – the goal isn't to be able to create Sports Center Top 10 highlight reels. You just need to be able to get on your defender's hip and force a stunt or a post player to step up to help. That being said, don't waste too much time working on three, four, and five dribble combos to try and emulate Kyrie Irving. It's not necessary. Focus more on being strong with the ball while contact happens and taking great angles on your penetration.

If you go back and watch the clips again, and you are concentrating on becoming a better ball handler/penetrator – watch the types of moves the guards make to get to the paint. They are usually no more than one good move and a great understanding of changing direction and pace. Unfortunately, there aren't any "get rich quick schemes" when it comes to ball handling. You simply have to dedicate time to working on your handles, and watching film on yourself, and seeing the reads as they develop. The more you see yourself play, the more the game will slow down while you are on the court.

Coaches, I would encourage you to have your post players spend time on their ball handling. Having the ability to put post players on the perimeter who can handle the ball and drive gaps is a huge advantage. Not only does it create more opportunities to penetrate gaps and force more closeouts, but it brings the opponent's biggest players further away from the basket! No rim protector means easier finishes at the rim.

For you players, find some dribble combinations that you like and that feel comfortable to do at game speed. Get a package of about three to four solid off-the-dribble moves so you're not a one-trick-pony and master them. Know when to use which move to get by your defender and then learn when to counter once your defender starts to anticipate the ones you have already used.

One thing that I won't spend as much time as I certainly could is triple-threat position. I have noticed with my players that I coach right now, they struggle to be efficient out of the triple-threat position. You should not need to put the ball on the floor to be able to get by your defender. Likewise, you shouldn't need five or six dribbles to do it either. The best ball handlers are the ones who can catch the ball in triple-threat and get on their defender's hip in two to three dribbles. I would suggest playing King of the Court periodically and having a three dribble limit. You will quickly discover who can create a shot and who can't! As far as specifically what dribble moves to use or where to find them? I would suggest watching basketball. I see plenty of moves just by observing other players and seeing what they do. There is a ton of material online that you can search if you need a new move to implement.

Passing

Still to this day I believe that passing is one of, if not the most, under-practiced skill in the game of basketball. Coaches spend time working on plays, shell drill, rebounding, shooting, and the list goes on and on – but very rarely do coaches work on the fundamentals of passing equal to any of the other skills they spend time on.

For your team to be able to execute the principles of *The Gap Theory,* they must be able to pass the ball quickly and on target. From my experience, coaches, players, and even parents just assume that as you grow up you should develop into an efficient passer whether you work on it or not. Passing is a skill that develops just like shooting or dribbling. It takes time and dedication to the muscle memory of it. I was actually at Iowa State's basketball practice last weekend and they are in their first week of official practice. You would be amazed at how many of them, as talented and athletic as they are, struggle to make a 10 foot pass with their non-dominant hand! That just goes to show you that everyone could stand to work on passing more.

There is a pretty specific list of passes that your team will have to make to be successful at the principles of *The Gap Theory.* Guards who handle to ball will need to be able to make chest passes at full speed to moving targets on their left and right in transition, and be able to lead post players up the court as they rim run, like a QB throws it to a wide receiver. They will need to be able to make passes off the dribble with both hands when a defender goes to stunt at them. One of the most difficult passes that I think has to be made is from the guard driving down the middle of the lane to a post player who is in their room as the post defender is coming up to help. Deciding between a pocket pass, chest pass, or lob over the top. This decision has to be made in a split second and be on time and on target so the post has time to score.

Players who will have the ball in their hands in the PnR will need to get reps at these passes and reads a lot. The best guards in the NBA and college make it look so simple to come off a screen, hold your defender off while looking past the help defender, all while threading the needle – but take it from me… it's not that easy. Just on PnR alone, the time and effort it takes to pass and catch is more than most people are even willing to spend on it. Timing and ball placement in the PnR takes chemistry that is built within a team over the process of reps during practice, and watching it on film.

Another pass that is highly overlooked, that is actually more difficult than some would assume, is the extra pass. When the ball is swung to a player who has a defender stunting at him to take away the catch-and-shoot shot, the ability for an offensive player to catch it and swing it to the next man in time for them to get a clean look at the basket is hard! But when a team is capable of making that pass consistently, the defense is in trouble. LeBron James makes some of these passes that still to this day make my jaw drop. Let's not forget the ability to drive baseline at full speed while a defender comes over to cut off the baseline. To be successful, you will need to be able to either make a quick pass to the post player who's about to T-Up or rifle a hammer pass down the baseline on target so the player who is spaced to the corner can catch-and-shoot without moving to catch the ball. Most likely, you will have to be able to make that pass both left and right handed while drifting out of bounds.

Even post players aren't exempt from being good passers. Like when the ball gets thrown into the post and a defender is pushing and shoving for position, meanwhile a scrappy guard is digging at the ball and trying to make them turn it over. Or on the occasion when the defense flies a double-team at the post and they have to stay under control and make an accurate pass out to the perimeter.

What am I trying to say? I'm trying to paint the picture that this system is fluid and beautiful to watch, but without the ability to make sharp and accurate passes, the likelihood that you'll be successful becomes very small.

<u>Finishing</u>

This skill has also transformed and adapted over the years that I have been in basketball. The increase in athleticism across the board has skyrocketed! Players at the age of 14 and 15 are now dunking like they are 20 year olds. Because of how athletic people are becoming, it has transformed the way scoring at the basket happens.

The amount of blocked shots has increased tremendously over the past couple years, which has changed the way players are now finishing. If you are a guard or even a wing and you are not able to dunk every time you go into the paint, you are almost forced to develop different finishes to give yourself a chance to score around the basket. Some moves that I have implemented with my team and in the training program I started were floaters from just inside or outside the paint with either hand. Reverse lay-ups with either hand on either side of the rim to avoid blocked shots. Leaving the ground off the same foot as you are laying the ball up (some would call it "wrong foot" or "opposite foot") to throw off the timing of the shot block. I also spend time working on leaving the ground off two feet, absorbing the contact of the shot blocker, then shooting the ball on the way back down before their feet hit. This neutralizes the contact, hopefully prevents your shot from getting blocked, and gives you an opportunity to finish the lay-up on the way back down with a chance of getting an And-1.

Guards and wings should spend time regularly making lay-ups through contact and over defenders (or coaches holding up broom sticks or anything you can find to make your reach close to nine feet tall). Rejecting ball-screens or going in baseline for a lay-up isn't going to

come without a tough finish. Getting around the hedge on a PnR and taking the basket down the middle of the lane might require a floater off one foot over a block attempt with your defender breathing down your neck. Scoring a lay-up in transition typically happens 5x faster than you ever practice it outside of a game because you're rarely ever moving that fast except for game time. All of these scenarios, and many more, are things that should be practiced in the most game-like environment you can create so you are prepared when the real game comes around.

The amount of time that could be spent just around the rim working on finishing shots around defenders could be hours a day. Learning how to put English on the ball so you can put it off the glass in different spots. All of these facts go into the players who are exceptional at finishing around the basket. Ironically, we haven't even talked about post players and how precise and skillful they have to be to finish in the paint. Two key things I will focus on for post players and finishing at the basket is 1. Scoring from your room and 2. Scoring off the PnR. Because of how much better players have become at getting to the paint off the dribble, there are so many opportunities in a game to score when the post defender steps up to help and the ball is passed to the post player in their room. Footwork, a solid catch, and anticipating the pass coming, is something posts should work on daily. With the PnR, most of you have seen how much the game has developed into setting PnRs. Post players have to be ready for the pass as soon as they come out of their roll, and they have to be prepared to score over or around a help-side defender as soon as they catch the basketball.

They amount of missed shots from five feet and in could make a coach pull his hair out. It's not the easiest thing in the world even when it looks like it should be. Players must spend time working on scoring around the basket and being confident that when they go to the paint they are going to make the shot, not just hope for a foul.

In closing, I can't imagine the number of questions that you have or comments you would like to bring up to me, and I wish I was able to answer or discuss all of them. My hope is that after reading this book there were some things you learned, discovered, or already knew that you can take to the program you are a part of and become more successful. I love this game of basketball and I love learning and growing as a coach so I can do my job better. I would encourage you to go back and watch these clips as many times as you'd like. Then, when you are watching basketball for pleasure or for studying, see these concepts happen in a game. I can't tell you how crazy it is that I can go watch 5th grade boys play basketball and see how the same things that happen during March Madness unfold the same way.

If you have any questions that I can answer for you about any of these topics or even about other things involving coaching/playing – please feel free to send them to my email at coachmcbeth12@gmail.com. I'm truly humbled and grateful that you decided to read my book, and I wish you the best of luck in your basketball career!

Thanks, God Bless
Austin McBeth