



by Henrik Dettmann

A MUTATION OF THE TRIANGLE OFFENSE

Henrik Dettmann coached the Finnish national teams at every level, from Cadets to Men's. From 1997 to 2003, he also coached the German Men's National team, winning a bronze medal at the 2002 FIBA World Championships. His teams also won three club titles in the First Division League in Finland, where he was elected Coach of the Year two times. He was the head coach of MBC Weissenfels in Germany and his team won the FIBA Europe Cup. He was also elected Coach of the Year in Germany. He is now coach of Braunschweig (Germany), as well as head coach of the Finnish Men's National team.

Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki once wrote, "To give your sheep a large, spacious meadow is the way to control them." I mention this quote mainly because, in the figurative sense, it serves as the role model for a modern team game. The meadow represents wide tactical boundaries, within which the players themselves determine their path to success. There are few limitations and much space for creativity, where intuition and a readiness to take risks are rewarded.

Modern basketball is a "players' game". Ideally, in a "players' game" the coach becomes redundant. Looking at it another way, the aim of a good teacher should be to teach his students to eventually manage without him. It is his duty to help his students to find their own potential and exploit it to the fullest.

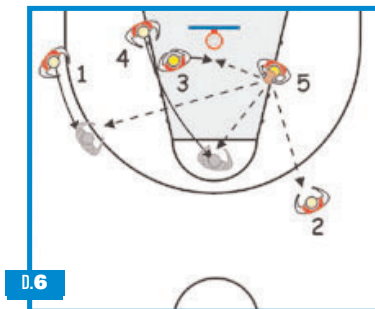
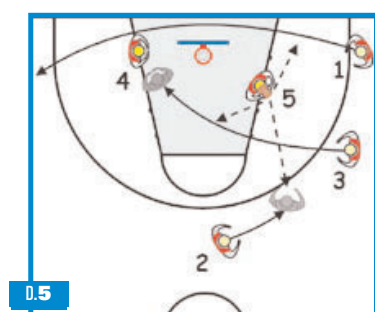
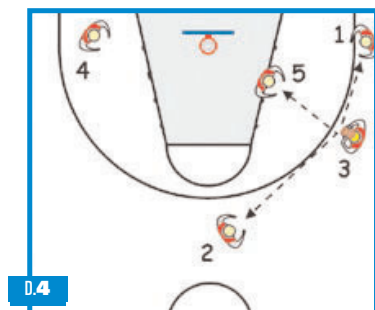
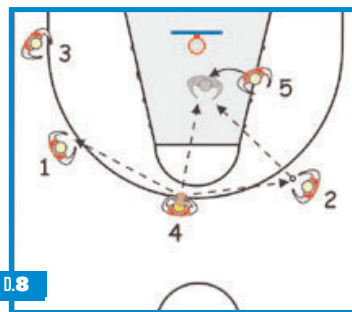
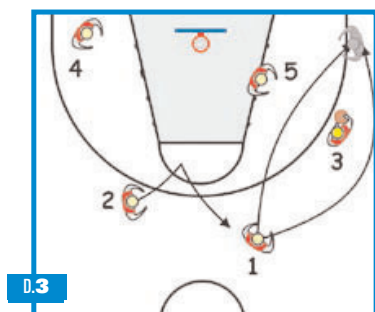
What is understood by the concept triangle offense, but not practiced very often, is very similar to this idea of the "players' game".

The triangle offense is like an amoeba. There are as many different types of triangle offenses as there are coaches using this offense.

"No ball, no game-simple. In the triangle offense the ball always dictates the direction of movement!"

The triangle offense derives from basketball basics such as 3-on-3, 2-on-2, and 1-on-1. It is predicated on constant ball and player movement, and on anticipating and reacting to game situations. One play sequence follows the next. Triangle offense has the invaluable advantage that in the offense no player is doomed to stand around and look on. That does not mean that the players should be constantly shooting. All the players are involved; they move, pass the





ball and, above all, learn to assess their skills. If all the players are involved in the offense, they all become motivated on the defense, too. Moreover, as we all know, "defense wins championships."

The triangle offense does not just help the big stars, but also the role players, since it gives them a sense of rhythm and self-confidence. This offense promotes the training of all-round players, as each player moves to almost every position, thus learning to act and react accordingly. Yet, depending on the players' skills, this concept also allows the game to reach varying levels. It enables the players to recognize their limits and know what to work on.

At an advanced level, the triangle offense works without any great gestures and words. Each player movement and ball movement determines the next player and ball movement. These are actions which, on the one hand are automatic and naturally have to be practiced, but at the same time do not follow a set pattern. Still, they provide the players with escape options, any time, any place, according to their individual skills. This calls for each player to know his strengths and accept his role. There is room for improvisation without the game ending in chaos or a wild 5-on-5.

The triangle offense can be played at various levels of difficulty and, like a set of building blocks, it offers unlimited possibilities. You can run this offense against a man-to-man defense as well as you can against a zone.

The greater the number of offensive options, the less predictable the offense will be, whereby the requirements also become apparent when this system displays its full strengths: the longer the coach and players can hone the system, the more efficient it will be.

RULES

Rule 1: Penetrate the defense

This you can't emphasize enough. One should not misunderstand and think that the only penetration to use is the dribble penetration. The best way to penetrate the defense is a pass to a player cutting to the basket.

Rule 2: Court positions

Players must find the proper court positions to be able to determine the triangle side (three-man game), and the tandem side (two-man game).

Rule 3: Spacing

The distance between each player on the court must be approximately 4 meters.

Rule 4: Timing

Number the passing options (penetration pass is always number 1, swing pass number 2, etc.) to help the players understand the timing of the offense.

Rule 5: Pass the ball to the open man

All players should always be available for a pass and you should always pass the ball to the open man (following rule no. 1). This is the ultimate goal of team play. A pass to the open man will result in a "natural way of playing", as well as create confidence and harmony between the players. There are no predetermined decisions, since everything is reading the play and then reacting. This makes the offense very hard to scout. Think pass-look to score!

The more passes you make, the higher your shooting percentage will be. In the bronze medal game against New Zealand at the World Championships in Indianapolis, we had 32 assists and a 65 percent shooting average from the field.

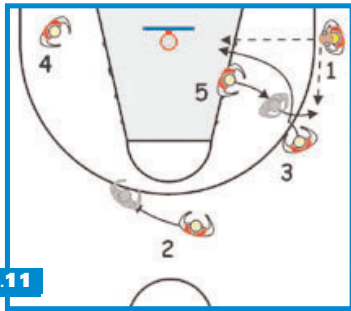
Rule 6: Move with a purpose

A player without the ball should always be ready/open to receive a pass. If you are not open, then move with a purpose to get open. We all are of equal danger for our opponent when we are on the basketball court. The difference will be seen as soon as we move or we receive the ball. The old good saying is "cut to the basket and something good will happen."

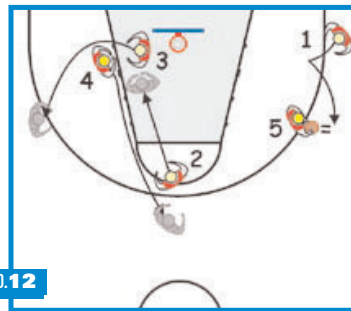
PLAYERS' ROLES

N. 5 (center - back to the basket)

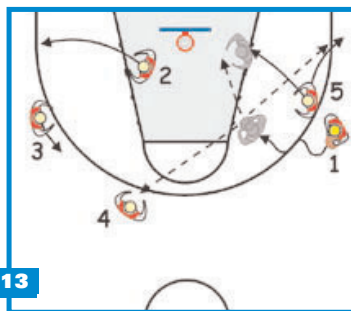
The center should be able to get open in the post. He should be a good passer and he should be able to hold the ball in the post. As



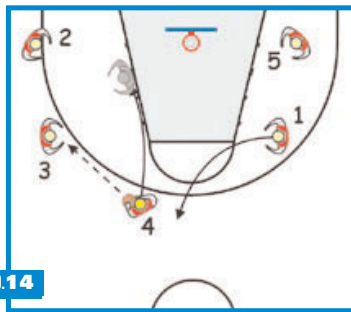
D.11



D.12



D.13



D.14



D.15

soon as he catches the ball (in the post), he becomes a passer (except if he has his man sealed off and he can have a lay-up or a dunk).

When the center is feeding the cutters, the pass should always be a bounce pass (bounce the ball hard on the floor so the cutter can pick it up easily without losing his court vision).

If the defense is able to cut off all passes and there are no openings, the center must be able to work his man and go for a lay-up.

N. 4 (power forward - face the basket/back to the basket)

He is (perhaps) the most important player on this offense. He should have a complete game (full package: passing, putting the ball on the floor, three-point range shooting, cutting, driving to the basket). He should also be good in reading the openings and flashing to the ball.

N. 2, 3 (wings - face the basket)

Must understand how to feed the post, as well as playing without the ball (by cutting, the wings are creating opportunities for their teammates). The wing must be able to use the dribble penetration against pressure defense.

N. 1 (point - key player - as always)

Pick & roll/hand-off, must be able to beat his man off the dribble. The triangle offense is a "read and react" offense. The better your point guard learns to understand the different options and the strength of the different individuals, the more you will get out of this offense.

Note: The offense itself does not need a traditional point guard, since all outside positions (1, 2 and 3) are interchangeable. In this case, you must just count that the team will need more time to create a natural understanding of each other's game.

TEACHING EXPERIENCES

I have been running the triangle offense with different teams, on different levels, for more than 10 years, and have found that every situation requires a different approach.

One thing is obvious in modern basketball: it has become a full-court game. Transition offense and transition defense will decide the outcome of the game. We like to build almost all our drills where we you convert from offense to defense or vice versa.

To build up the triangle offense we start at one end of the court with a simple three-player triangle action (the inside option with the wings cutting), then we run our transition offense over to the other basket and go straight into our sideline triangle where we repeat the cuts. Then, we continue piece by piece, until we have all basic movement covered.

Do one thing well, than ten things "so-so." The most important question a coach should ask before he starts to plan a practice is: "If there is only one thing we can learn today, what should we work on?" Of course, this philosophy also applies to teaching the triangle offense. Your players should first learn to develop (and reco-

gnize) the triangle side and the tandem side. Then teach the different options using the sideline triangle.

Rule 1 says: "Penetrate the defense," so you start to teach all options on how to get the ball to your big man from the sideline triangle and then how to execute the "inside option."

Second, teach all options on how to swing the ball and how to execute the "swing option."

Then, at last, teach the different ways to execute the "corner option."

I had a very interesting experience when I was teaching the basic triangle offense to a team made up of top boys and girls. Both were more or less at the same basketball level and about the same age. The girls were able to understand and execute the different options right away. They "played the game" and were able to use the options the defense gave them. They tried to solve the problems collectively "using their heads." The boys were different. As soon as they got in trouble, they jumped out of the offense using their one-on-one skills. The boys tried to solve the problems individually using their physiological ability.

I found that I could show the whole basic concept to the girls at once, while teaching the boys it was really necessary to emphasize only one thing at a time.

This is a typical example of what coaching is all about. You should have a clear philosophy of what and how you want to run things. At the same time, you must be able to adjust your concepts according to your personnel.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

- ▼ The philosophy contains all elements of play.
- ▼ Creativity, risks, no predetermined decisions, handmade, intuition, players game, the ball is the game.
- ▼ Know yourself.
- ▼ Play to your strengths.
- ▼ Ultimate team concept.
- ▼ Sharing the ball = sharing the game (enjoy together).
- ▼ Emphasizes all basketball basics.
- ▼ Shooting, passing, dribbling, timing, spacing, getting open, cutting, screening.
- ▼ Know and accept your role.
- ▼ Everyone has an opportunity to participate.
- ▼ No spectators.
- ▼ Built on the basic elements of the game:
- ▼ 1-on-1.
- ▼ 2-on-2.
- ▼ 3-on-3.
- ▼ Develops versatile players who have to learn to use all basic basketball tools.
- ▼ Versatility = hard to scout.
- ▼ In the end, no one has a problem when you win a game.
- ▼ Good role model for the modern game.

EXPLANATION OF THE DIAGRAMS

Basic Alignment. 1, the point guard, 3, the

wing, and 5 the post, form the triangle, while 2 is on the other wing position, and 4, the power forward, in the short corner (diagr. 1).

Strong Entry. 3 feeds 5, 1 must clear out, and then screens for 4, while 2 goes in the middle of the court (diagr. 2).

Strong Entry (another option). 3, 1 and 5 form the triangle, while 2 and 5 play on the other side of the court. 1 passes to 3 and cuts inside or outside to 3, and goes in the corner (diagr. 3).

Passing Options for 3. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 5;
- b. To the wing to 2, or
- c. To the corner to 1 (diagr. 4).

Ball to 5. He can pass:

- a. To 1;
- b. To 3, while he cuts going to screen, or
- c. To 2 (diagr. 5).

Passing Options for 5. He can pass:

- a. To 2;
- b. To 4, who comes off the screen of 3;
- c. To 3, who rolls to the basket, after the screen for 4, or
- d. To 1 (diagr. 6).

Passing Options for 2. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 5;
- b. Inside to 4, or
- c. To 3 in the wing (diagr. 7).

Passing Options for 4. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 5 (play high-low);
- b. To the wing to 1, or
- c. To 2, who passes to 5 (diagr. 8).

Triangle on the Other Side. If nothing happens, 1, 3, and 4 form a triangle on the other side.

Passing options for 1. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 4;
- b. To 2, who comes to the middle of the half court, or
- c. To the corner to 3 (diagr. 9).

Passing Options for 2. He can pass:

- a. To 5 (play high-low);
- b. To 4, who has cut to the free-throw area, or
- c. To 1, who comes off the screen of 3 (diagr. 10).

Passing Options for 1. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 4;
- b. To 3, who cuts off the screen of 5, or
- c. To 5, who rolls to the ball after the screen for 3 (diagr. 11).

Ball to 5. He can pass:

- a. To 2, who cuts around him;
- b. To 3, who has received a screen from 4, and, after the screen, goes out, or
- c. To 4, who received a screen from 2-screen the screener (diagr. 12).

Drive of 1. He can penetrate and pass:

- a. To 5, who has cut to the basket or faded away in the corner;
- b. To 4, while 2 goes to the corner, and 3

posts up (diagr. 13).

Ball to 3: 2, 3, and 4 form the triangle, 1 is on the other wing and 5 in the low post on the weakside.

Passing Options for 3. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 4;
- b. To 1 in the wing, or
- c. To 2 in the corner (diagr. 14).

Weakside Entry. 1 passes to 2 and cuts to the corner. 2 passes to 4, who comes out to the wing. 2 goes to the opposite side on the low post position after the pass (diagr. 15).

Options. We can use the same options on the strong entry: 5 forms the triangle with 1 and 4, and 3 goes in the middle of the court.

Passing Options for 4. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 5;
- b. To the wing to 3 (or use a slice cut, see diagrams 17 and 18).
- c. To the corner to 1 (diagr. 16).

Slice Cut. This is an option, when 3 has the ball. 4 receives a screen from 5, and 3, after passing to 2, comes from the corner to the wing, and screens for 1. 4 goes around the screen and then to the low post on the ball side, while 3 cuts in the corner on the ball side (diagr. 17).

Form a triangle. 2, 3, and 4 forms a triangle, 1 in the wing, and 5 in the low post on the weak side. 4 can pass to 3, who comes in the middle of the court, or to 1 in the corner (diagr. 18).

Flash Entry. 1 passes to 4 and 2 cuts near him, while 5 screens for 3. 4 can pass to 2 on the cut (diagr. 19).

Other Options. 4 can also pass:

- a. To 3, who goes around the screen of 5, or
- b. To 1 with an hand-off pass, while 2 goes in the corner, opposite to the ball (diagr. 20).

Form a triangle. 1, 3, and 4 form a triangle. 2 is on the wing and 5 on the low post on the weakside. 1 receives the ball and drives to the wing, while 5 screens for 2 (diagr. 21).

Passing Options for 1. He can pass:

- a. Inside to 4;
- b. To the wing to 2, or
- c. To the corner to 3 (diagr. 22).

Push Down Option. If 3 is overplayed, 1 dribbles toward 3, and this is a signal for 3 to go in the corner, while 2 replaces 1 (diagr. 23).

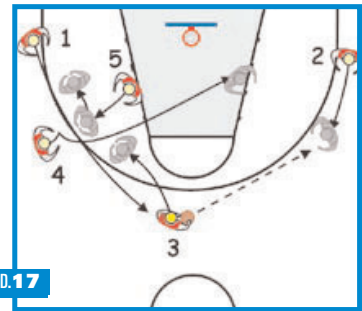
Cross Screen Option. For creating space we can use a cross screen when the inside player, 4, in this case, is overplayed. 4 screens for 5, and 1 passes to 5 (diagr. 24).

Flash Entry Option. This is used for creating space for a lob pass or a high-low play, when the inside player, 4, in this case, is overplayed. 1 can make a lob pass to 4, or pass to 5, who has flashed to the high post, and 5 passes to 4 (diagr. 25).

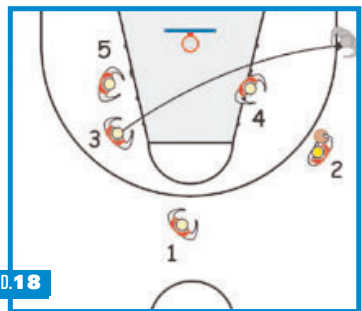
Back Screen Option. This is used to get open when the inside and wing players are overplayed. 5 screens 2, and then rolls to the basket. 1 can pass to 2 or 5 (diagr. 26).



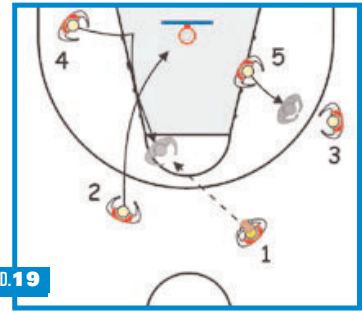
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D.17



D.18



D.19



D.20

