

DEFENDING THE PICK-AND-ROLL

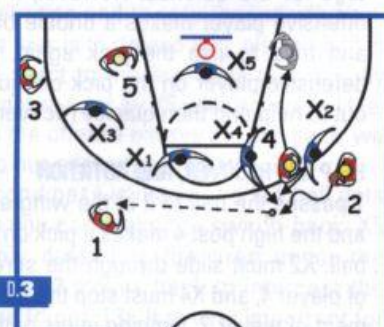


by Laszlo Ratgeber

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The pick-and-roll is one of the truly classic basketball plays. When worked properly, teams can use this offensive play to baffle defenses—even when they know that it is coming. That is because when it is well executed, it is very difficult to stop. The pick-and-roll is basic basketball: An offensive player stops to block a defender (the pick) for a teammate handling the ball and then slips behind the defender (the roll) to accept a pass as he moves towards the basket for a lay-up.

Defensive practice sessions should be divided between the defense on the moves with the ball, and those without the ball. Defending the one-on-one moves with the ball are the most important, but right after that comes the defense of two-on-two with the ball. The most important play to be ready for is the pick-and-roll play. Teams that are able to defend the pick-and-roll are able to solve plenty of defensive problems, thus protecting against many easy baskets. Here I will describe different ways to defend on the pick-and-roll, based on different offensive situations, spots on the court, and the type of offensive and defensive players involved in the play.





SLIDE THROUGH

Aside from any type of defense on the pick-and-roll, the best way to defend on this offensive play is having the screened player trying to break through the screen. When this happens, the screen become ineffective and the offense must try something else.

PUSHING OUT

Another way for making the pick ineffective is by pushing out. When practicing the technique of pushing out, the defensive player must force the offensive player out and away from the pick. This defensive strategy must be employed with bent elbows and legs, with the feet slightly apart, using the hand closest to the ball for force, while the other hand is ready to contest the three point shot. There is no defensive rotation at all, and this is a huge advantage for the defense. However, if the offensive player makes a dribble back and tries to use the pick again, the defensive player on the pick can jump out to help and then quickly recover.

HELP AND RECOVER, AND ROTATION

1 passes the ball to 2 in the wing area and the high post 4 makes a pick on the ball. X2 must slide through the screen of player 4, and X4 must stop the movement of player 2, jumping in his path. If

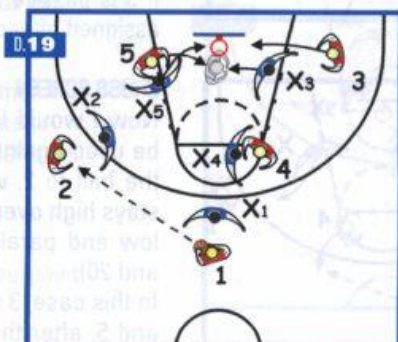
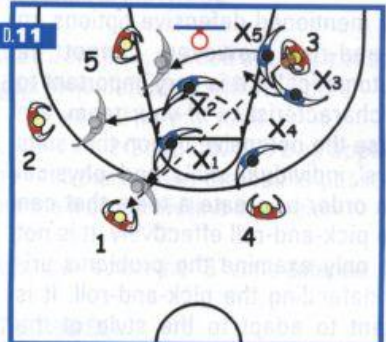
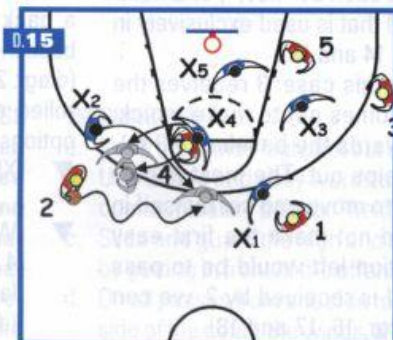
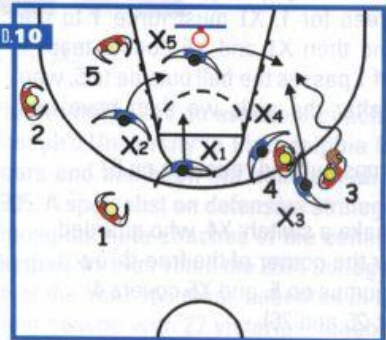
2 passes the ball to 1, X4 stays on 2 until X2 reaches 2, and then recovers on 4, his offensive player, who rolled to the basket. In the meantime, X5 plays in a sort of zone defense (diagr. 1, 2, 3, and 4).

If 4 rolls to the basket after the pick, and receives the ball from 2, then there must be a rotation between X4 and X5. X5 must immediately run to guard 4, while X4 goes in middle of the lane to guard 5. X1 must be ready to intercept a possible pass to 1, while X3 is in the passing lanes to 5 and 3 (diagr. 5 and 6).

DOUBLE TEAM

1 passes the ball to 2 and 4 comes out of corner of the free-throw lane and makes a pick on X2. In this case, X4 jumps out with his body parallel to the





sideline. X2 positions himself parallel with the sideline, and won't let 2 go inside, trying to push him into the imaginary corridor, towards the baseline.

We can use two different options for helping out at this point:

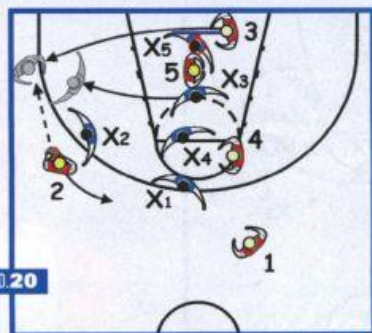
▼ One. When 2 is stopped, we double team with X2 and X4, who popped out. X1 moves up to anticipate the first possible pass from 2 to 1. X5 moves to the ball side and covers his own opponent, also filling the lane, but ready to help on 4, who rolls to the basket. In the meantime, X3 takes up a position between 5 and 3 (diagr. 7, 8, and 9).

▼ Two. Let's image a pick of 4 for 3, with 3 who drives to the baseline. X5, from the weak side, has to stop and trap 3 with X3, while X4 remains with his opponent at the top of the key. X2 must try to intercept the first pass to 5 and X1 remains between 1 and 2 (diagr. 10). Also in this case, we allow only one pass, which is to 1, and after the pass, every defender moves back to guard his own opponent (diagr. 11).

SWITCH

One of the preferred methods of defending the pick-and-roll in women's basketball is switching. Especially in situations where the height difference between the forward and the center is not so huge. This kind of defense has its advantages and shortcomings, but, even when playing against a huge height difference, it is a definitely good weapon against pick-and-roll in the last seconds (6 to 8 seconds) of the 24-second shot clock. In these moments, there are only a few seconds to take advantage of height. 2 receives a pick from 5 and dribbles outside: X5 and X2 switch, with X5, who aggressively guards 2, the player with the ball, while X2 defends against 5. X5's tasks are to prevent 2 from penetrating and to stop the outside shot, while X2's task is to defend 5 by playing him in front. We react to the first pass to 4 only by moving sideways, or by X5 withdrawing a little. But when the offense passes the ball back, we recover to our original man (diagr. 12).

If the second pass is made and the ball gets to 1, then you can make the switch-back: X5 is primarily defending the area under the basket, and X2 moves back to intercept the cross pass (diagr. 13). It is very important for the defenders on the ball to pressure their



offensive players, thus making the job of the defenders away from the ball easier.

STAY

When you apply this defensive option, good communication is of utmost importance. After 2 has received the ball and 4 starts moving to the screen, X4 must warn X2 to take up a position parallel to the baseline before the pick is completed. To make this kind of communication effective, the players need to shout a harsh order (a word such as "now") or a number ("two," "three") that is used exclusively in this situation (diagr. 14 and 15).

Let's examine now this case: 3 receives the ball from 1 and 4 comes out to make a pick. If 3 penetrates towards the baseline, X3 follow him and X4 helps out. The most important thing for X4 is to move and set himself in a way that 3 could not make the first easy pass. The only option left would be to pass to 2. When the ball is received by 2, we can easily recover (diagr. 16, 17 and 18).

If 3 is passive, everyone should stay on their assigned offensive player.



CROSS SCREEN

Now I would like to analyze the defense to be used against the cross screen. 1 passes the ball to 2, while 5 is going to pick 3. X5 stays high over 5, while X3 chases 3, staying low and parallel to the baseline (diagr. 19 and 20).

In this case, 3 receives the ball in the corner and 5, after the pick in the lane, comes out and picks for 3 again. X3 and X5 then trap 3 in the corner. If the pass comes out of the trap and 3 passes the ball to 2, X4 slides



down from the high post area to protect the lane and cover X5, if this offensive player rolls to the basket after the pick. X2 slides to the corner of the free-throw lane, and X1 comes up to guard 1. If the ball is passed to 4, who came out of the high post position, each defender recovers on his own offensive player (diagr. 21, 22, and 23).

BACK SCREEN

1 has the ball in the middle of the court. 5 comes out of the high post position and makes a back screen for 1. X1 must force 1 to the baseline and then X1 and X5 double team 1 (diagr. 24). If 1 passes the ball outside to 5, who rolled out after the pick, we then have two options:

▼ X5 jumps out and recovers on 5.

▼ We make a switch: X4, who guarded 4 near the corner of the free-throw lane, jumps on 5, and X5 covers 4 (diagr. 25 and 26).

The above mentioned defensive options on the pick-and-roll, however, cannot be applied automatically. It is very important to know the characteristics of your team. We must choose the defensive option that suits our players' individual skills and physical abilities, in order to create a team that can defend the pick-and-roll effectively. It is not enough to only examine the problems arising from defending the pick-and-roll. It is as important to adapt to the style of the opponent and to the characteristics of their players!

For instance, against teams with players who are good on dribbling penetration, but not so good as outside shooters the "push out defense" can be an outstanding weapon.

Against teams having no real big or physically strong players in the post-reducing the need to strongly control the lane-but with good shooting power forwards (the 4 position), the switching option is a proven defensive scheme.

We must also consider another important factor when we apply a certain defensive option. Namely: the score. If our team has fallen behind, it is important to make a steal or force a turnover as soon as possible. Applying a passive defense on the pick-and-roll does not help. Therefore, we must use an aggressive defense. For example, we must employ the double team or else channel the offensive player to a certain area of the court, so we can trap him there. The latter option can be applied, too, when we want to prevent the opponent from making a pick-and-roll. Forcing the offensive player to use his weak hand, we channel him into a corridor and force him to make a turnover.