

11/9/2008



PERFECT
PRACTICE

WINNING WITH THE
FULLCOURT 2-2-1 DENIAL PRESS

Better Coaching - Better Teaching | Josh Stinson
Copyright 2008 All Rights Reserved

Perfect Practice

Coaching Better Basketball

2-2-1 Fullcourt Denial Press

Table of Contents

2-2-1 Fullcourt Denial Press	1
Introduction and personnel characteristics	2
Basic Personnel Descriptions	5
Press Principles	5
Concepts	7
Initial Alignment of the 2-2-1 press	8
Responsibilities in the 2-2-1 after the ball is in-bounded	8
Responsibilities in the 2-2-1 before the ball is in-bounded.....	12
Guard Maneuvers (1 and 2).....	13
Forward Maneuvers (3 and 4).....	14
Pressing Drills	17
Drill 1: Ride and Slide.....	17
Drill 2: 3 on 2 Fullcourt Trap.....	19
Drill 3: Tag	21
Drill 4: 6 on 5	23
Drill 5: Man in the Middle.....	23
Points of Emphasis	26
Review.....	27
Teaching Progressions	31
Conclusion	33

Introduction and personnel characteristics

The 2-2-1 press is often called a "containment" press because it forces the ball out of the middle of the floor to the sidelines where talented ball-handlers are generally less effective. When run correctly, the 2-2-1 forces the offense to be patient in advancing the ball by allowing ball reversal and taking away all advancing passes. This can take an offense out of its normal rhythm and even make it difficult for that offense to get into half-court patterns.

Before the inbounds pass the 2-2-1 looks more like a man-to-man press than a zone. Each defender denies any open men in his area. When the ball is in-bounded, the 2-2-1 resumes and each man hustles to his area in the zone.

Matching up on the inbounds pass is advantageous for many reasons.

- It applies pressure on the opponent and gives the defense steal opportunities.
- The defense will rarely get burned by denying hard because the 5 man is back surveying the action, ready to pick off a long pass.
- There are 5 defenders covering only 4 offensive players, since the fifth offensive player stands unguarded as he inbounds.
- It gives the impression that we are running man to man. Opposing coaches may change to a man-to-man press breaker only to find themselves facing zone pressure once the ball is inbounded (if this press is used consistently, teams will figure this out - by this time, we expect the surprise factor to be replaced by the fear factor in our opponents.
- The final and possibly most important reason for matching up on the inbound pass is

that it forces the defensive players to hustle and concentrate, sending the message that each player must be constantly active when on the floor.

Any team that commits to this defensive approach will discover the value of tempo in basketball. For beginning coaches tempo can be difficult to define and even more difficult to teach. At every level tempo is a critical component to success but often difficult to control. The 2-2-1 can be very effective at getting opponents to play at an uncomfortable pace. When an opponent starts to play just a little faster (or sometimes a little slower) than they would like, mistakes - rushed shots, errant passes, careless turnovers - start to occur. These can all translate into quick scoring runs and a big boost of confidence for your team.

The 2-2-1 is unique because 'less athletic' teams can utilize it consistently, or even as a primary defensive weapon. Often, it is even effective against 'more athletic' opponents because it 'hems' opposing ballhandling guards to the sidelines and out of the middle where they have more freedom to operate, more passing choices, and are generally more dangerous. By allowing the ball to be reversed, the press forces teams to be patient when advancing the ball – this can be especially difficult for some boys teams because they are working against the 10 second back-court violation. At the same time, the inbound denial component of the press can effectively speed up tempo against the same opponent.

The most important benefit of this defensive approach is it fosters the aggressiveness and team investment that coaches know is critical to success. Player and teams that buy-in to a press like the 2-2-1 are committing to a style of play that demands aggressiveness, toughness, and pride. These are all qualities of a winner.

Reading this might have you believe that I am a 'zone' coach. Actually, I am a strong believer that all teams, especially at the youth levels, should run man-to-man as their primary defense. The fundamentals of man to man defense are the really the fundamentals of defense, as a whole. The concepts of containing the ball, mirroring the ball, influencing the dribbler, help-and-recover, bumping the cutter, etc. are all man to man fundamentals, but they are also critical components of successful zone defenses, including zone presses. This press should not replace a team's man to man defense; rather, it is a great complement to any base defense. Installing the 2-2-1 adds another fullcourt pressure component to your defensive arsenal in a package that is both simple to teach and safe enough to use without feeling that you are gambling team success.

A final note... the 2-2-1 is a great defense for a wide variety of youth and high school teams. In Washington, several of the better girl's high school teams use some variation of the 2-2-1 – it holds added value in the girl's game by forcing offenses to burn several seconds off the shot clock before even getting out of the backcourt. It can be a great weapon for high school boys as well. In 2003 at Evergreen High School in Seattle, we won our district tournament and the team reached the State tournament for the first time in 38 years. The 2-2-1 denial was that team's staple defense.

I have run the 2-2-1 effectively with youth teams as well. I have had great success running this defense with teams as young as 6th grade... the simple rotations allow players to pick up the main concepts quickly without sacrificing from poor effort due to confusion. Whatever level you coach at, I hope this material provides something of value to you!

Basic Personnel Descriptions

Players 1 and 2 – Top defenders in the press. Typically these are our guards – both players should be active on-ball defenders. If the team uses the inbounds pass denial component of the press, 1 and 2 should be alert enough to quickly pick locate their defensive assignment and deny the inbounds pass. Playing longer, taller players at the 1 and 2 spots can be beneficial by limiting ballhandlers' vision of the passing lanes with long arms, but this is a secondary consideration after ball pressure and making rotations.

Players 3 and 4 – The midcourt defenders. Usually 3 and 4 are forwards and/or taller guards – active enough to set good traps and cover basket rotations, and tall enough to defend the basket area if needed

Player 5 – Covers the back of the press. This is usually, though not always, the team center. 5 must be able to get into position quickly at the beginning of the press. This is especially true when denying on the inbounds pass, since some teams will attempt to beat the pressure with a deep inbounds pass. 5 must move laterally from sideline to sideline. Since he sits at the back of the press and has the best vision of the entire floor, the 5 must communicate with teammates. Again, this is especially important when denying the inbounds pass. Good communication from 5 (i.e. “Cutter in the middle!”, “Watch behind you!” etc) provides 1, 2, 3, and 4 with information to keep things running smoothly

Press Principles

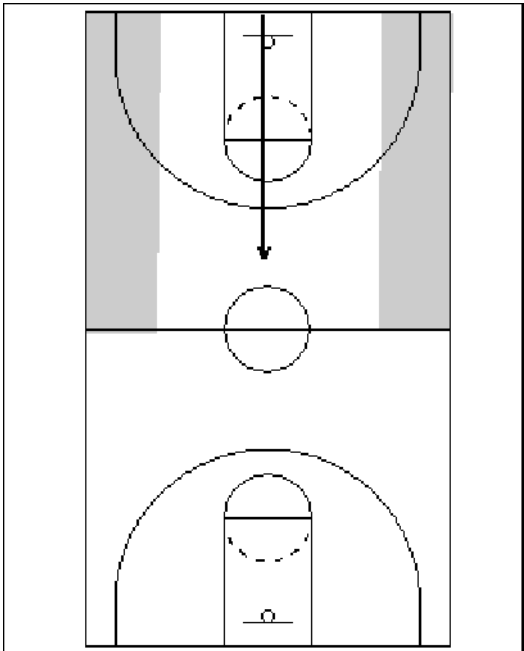
1. **Don't gamble.** Play fundamental defense and let the opponent make the mistake. If faced with the choice of: A. Lunging at a pass with a small chance at a steal but a guarantee that you will be out of position if you don't make the steal, or B. Rotating to the pass receiver and playing sound, fundamental defense, we choose option B every time. If we are consistent in our effort and execution, the odds are that eventually, the pressure will have an effect on the opponent, and that same pass will sail out of bounds. Great pressing teams are fundamentally sound defensive teams.

2. **Never allow a forward pass to the middle.** As the ball is passed around the perimeter of the zone, the defensive guards do not leave the middle until a teammate rotates to cover.

3. **Be tough.** Make your rotations, no matter how long or difficult they may seem. Never allow the ball-handler access to the middle. These 2 components are critical and CAN be achieved consistently by players with the right mindset.

4. **On the trap, don't reach.** Establish position with proper quickness and footwork, and cover the pass by "mirroring" the ball with both hands – i.e. the defender's hands act like a mirror in front of the ball; when the ball goes, the hands go up with ball goes down, again the hands follow. This is consistent with Principle 1: "Don't Reach".

5. **Bend your knees.** This is a basic fundamental of that applies in all areas of the game but is particularly relevant to the 2-2-1 press. Defenders must bend be ready to react aggressively and with purpose in the press. Here is an interesting exercise: the next time you are watching a game, try to spend 5 to 10 minutes watching both teams only from the waist-down. If you see that one team plays with bent knees more consistently than the other, there is a great chance that, when you look up, that will be the team with the lead.

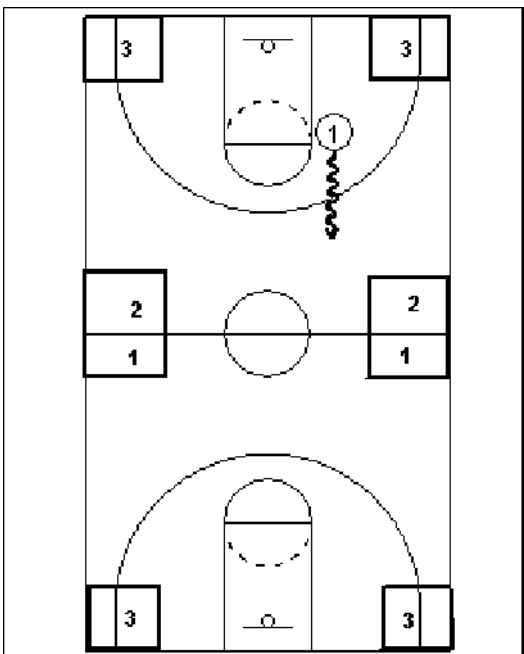


Concepts

The purpose of the 2-2-1 is to **force the ball into the "Blind Alleys"**, the areas in the opponent's back court - no more than 5 feet from the sideline

(The arrow depicts the direction the offense is moving).

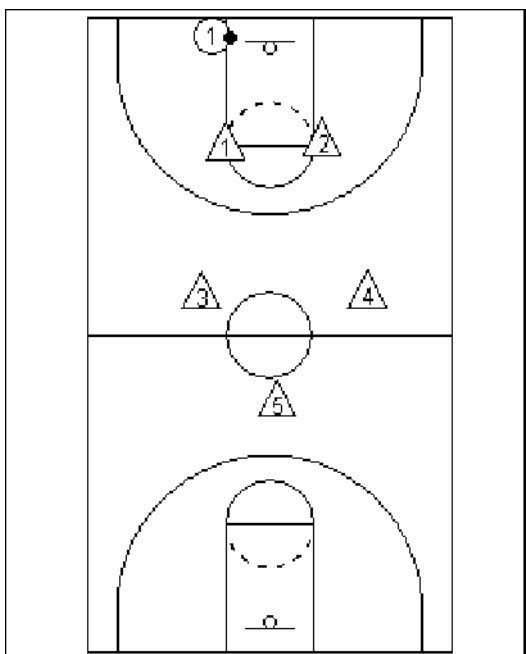
This can be especially effective against teams with good guards because it keeps them out of the middle where they have more room to operate and have more passing options



These are the best areas to trap on the basketball court.

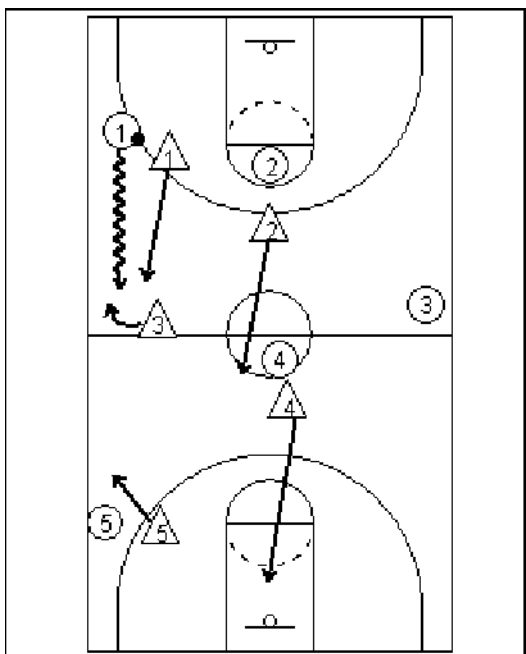
(O1) is included to show the direction the offense is moving.

In the 2-2-1, our primary focus is on setting traps in areas 1 and 2.



Initial Alignment of the 2-2-1 press (when the ball is in the center)

Responsibilities in the 2-2-1 after the ball is in-bounded



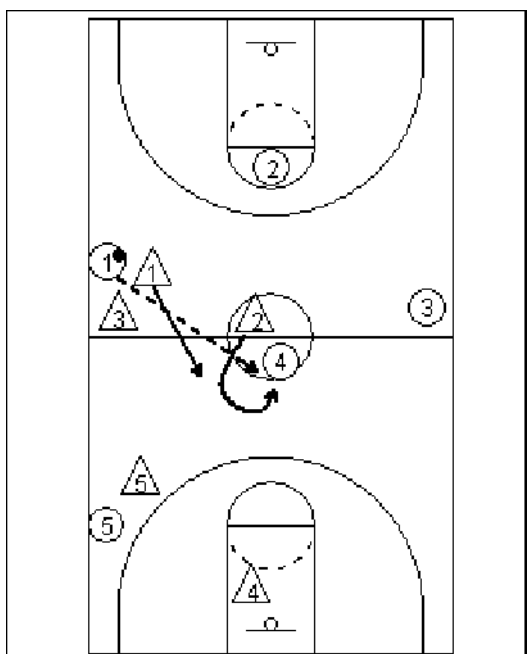
1 and 2 - The player defending the ball (1) forces the ballhandler down the "blind alley" towards the halfcourt trap. DO NOT get beat to the middle!

The opposite player (2) defends the pass to the middle. He sinks below the level of the ball and into the middle, looking to deny anybody in the middle - 2 denies O4 - (or, anybody flashing to the middle - this requires that the defender maintain an open stance so that he can locate cutters).

3 and 4 - When the ball is on a player's side of the floor, they prepare to set a trap near halfcourt.

When the ball is on the opposite side of the floor, the defender (4) moves to the middle of the floor and slides back to cover the basket. NOTE that once the ball is on one side of the floor, all defenders are also on that side of the floor. There are no defensive players on the weak-side.

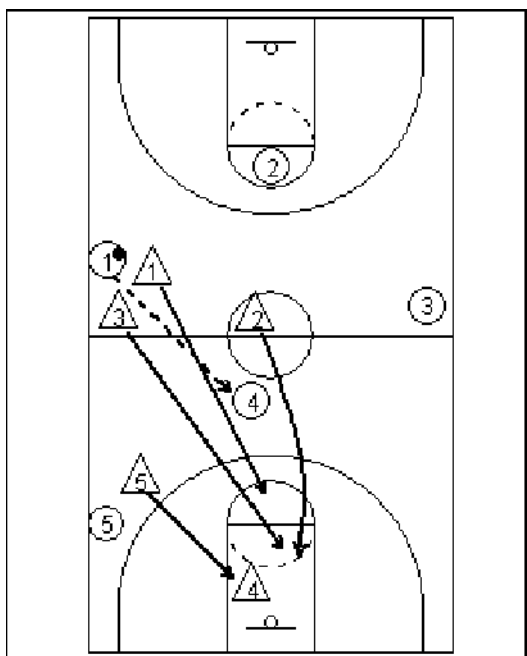
5 - Is always in a direct line with the ball. Note: 5 will hesitate to rotate over to the sideline if the forward (4 in this diagram) is slow to cover the basket. This doesn't solve a problem; it creates two problems! 5 must trust his teammates and make the rotations!



On a "Gut Pass" to the middle

The defensive player who missed the rotation (2) should attempt to get in front of the ball, essentially resetting the press by putting the ball back on the perimeter and out of the middle.

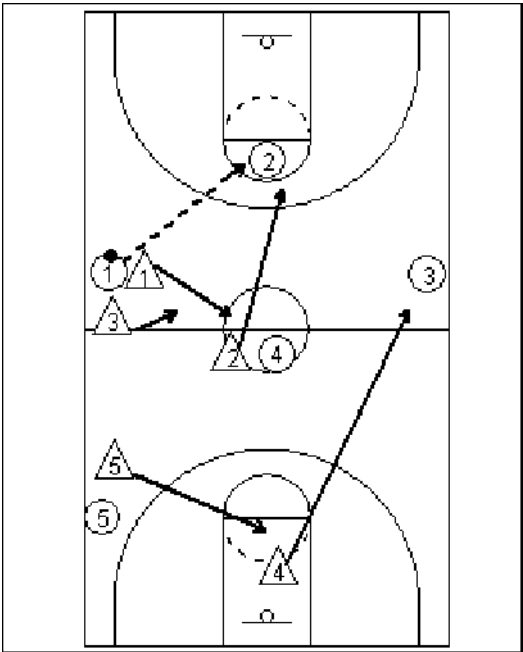
Most teams will automatically retreat out of the press on a pass to the middle. We will usually drop back too, but since playing aggressively is such a key factor, we focus much more energy on making the rotation than on missing it and giving up the middle pass. The player who was guarding the ball should pinch into the middle to help.



If the middle guard cannot get in front of the gut pass:

The gut pass is a trigger to all players that the press is broken.

We sprint back to cover the paint and communicate to cover the ballhandler, as we would when we're defending a fast break - transition defense).



If the ball is reversed back to the center of the floor:

The press resumes its initial alignment

The guard who was defending the ball (1), slides into the middle and "tags" the other guard (2).

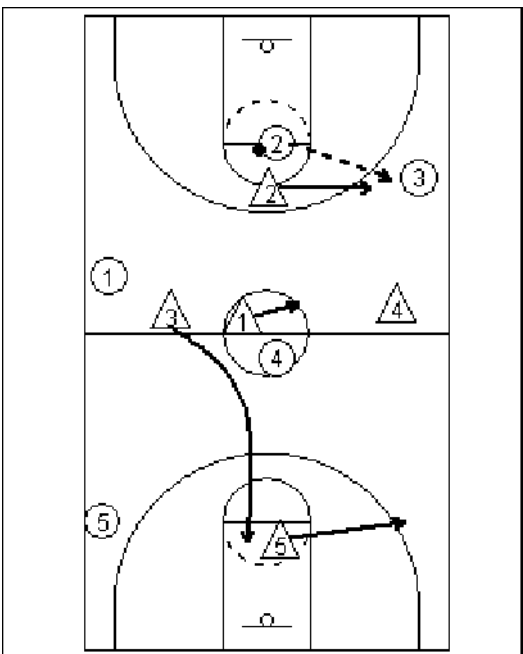
2 waits to be tagged by the other guard so that the middle remains covered before moving to the perimeter to defend the ball.

Here, if the ball was reversed to O3, 2 would follow the pass and force O3 down a blind alley

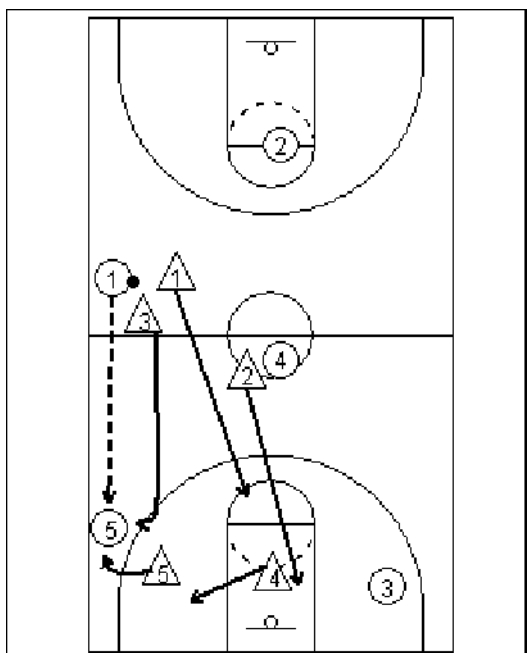
4 comes back up towards halfcourt

3 slides back in to the middle

5 stay in line with the ball



1 and 2 trade roles as the ball is reversed, so that the middle and the ball are always defended.



If the ball is passed up the sideline past the midcourt trap:

1 and 2

The middle guard (2) drops to cover the basket.

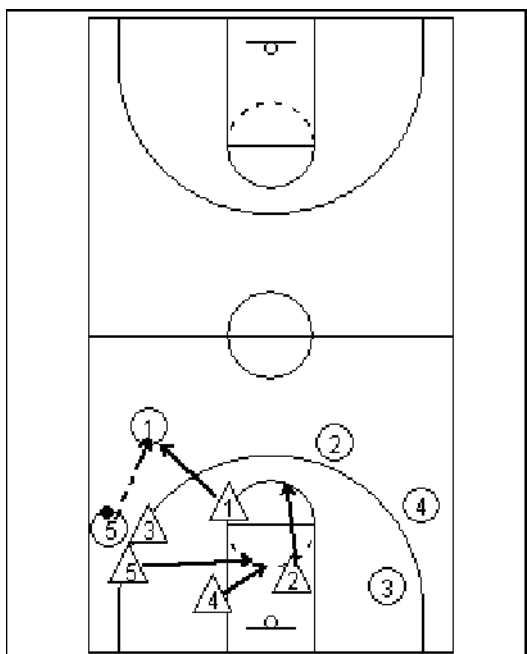
The ballside guard (1) covers the middle

3 and 4

The midcourt defender (3) follows the pass to trap with 5. I tell the midcourt defenders, "If the ball goes over your head, then you turn, follow the pass, and set another trap".

The other midcourt defender (4) comes to the ball-side block from the basket area.

5 hold the offensive player until the midcourt defender arrives to trap. 5 can go for the steal if it is available on the pass up the sideline, but he should not gamble to get the steal (i.e. if 5 doesn't get the steal, he should still be in position to defend the ball and trap).



When the ball is passed out of the sideline trap

The press is over and we enter our halfcourt defense

If we are playing man-to-man halfcourt, our initial match-ups might not always be our normal match-up

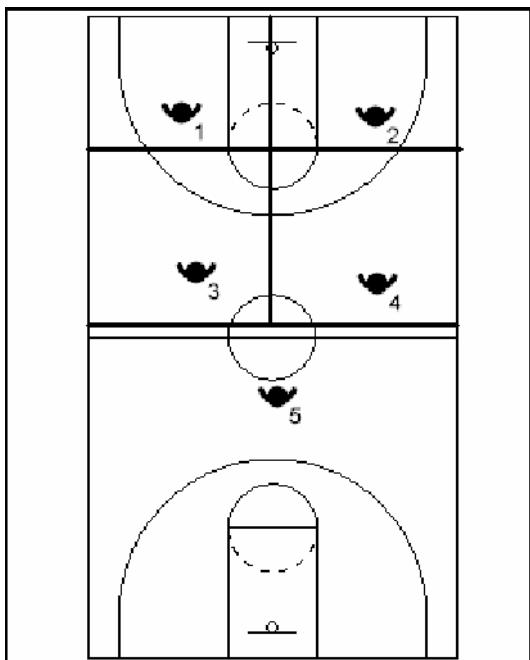
We must communicate and hustle to quickly enter our man to man defense.

The transition between the press to man to man defense is an inexact science, and requires attention.

This is when the defense is most likely to relax or experience confusion, making it very vulnerable.

Teams can become adept at this transition with practice; however, many do not as it is often overlooked by coaches and players alike.

Responsibilities in the 2-2-1 before the ball is in-bounded



Primary defensive coverage areas before the inbounds

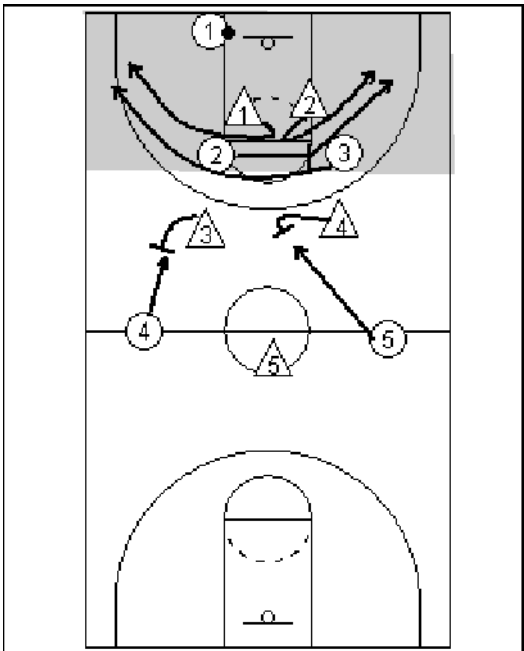
Each player denies an opponent his/her respective area.

1 and 2 cover the immediate inbounds area from the free throw line extended to the baseline on either half of the court

3 and 4 cover either half of the floor between the free throw line extended and halfcourt in the opponent's backcourt

5 is initially responsible for covering the opponent's entire frontcourt.

****Note:** At first glance it may seem as though 5's coverage area is too large. It is not. While 5 certainly must hustle to play the inbounds pass effectively, we know that, 9 times out of 10 any direct inbounds pass from the opposite baseline to a player in 5's area is going to be a lob pass. Forcing lob passes from the opponent is one of our objectives in the press. Lob passes provide steal opportunities, because their arc/trajectory allows the defense to react before they reach their. Our clear, simple message to the defense is that we are athletes... and athletes can cover lob passes. On any lob pass, even if we don't get the steal, every defender has plenty of time to react and get into proper position before the ball is caught. In this situation, more than anything else, what that is really required is our attention and our effort.

**1 and 2**

Deny the closest receiver on one half of the court from the free-throw line extended to the baseline.

3 and 4

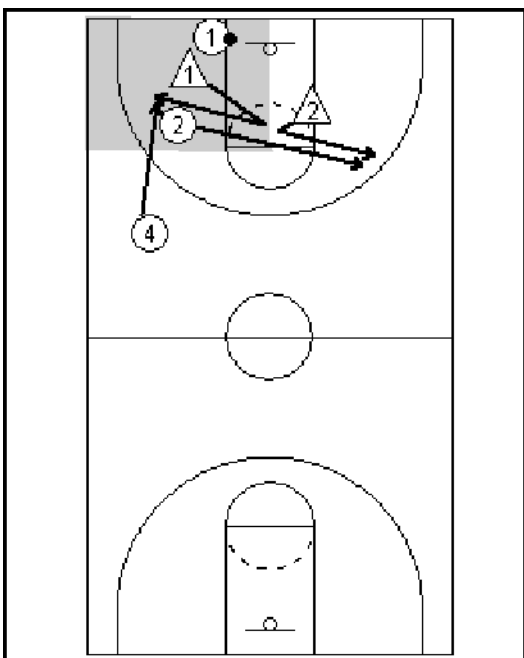
Stand 5-12 feet from the halfcourt line, in an open stance. Players usually flash into this area from around 1/2 court. See the floor and bump players who flash.

5 Cover the area past halfcourt. Play up the line-on the line on receivers in your area.

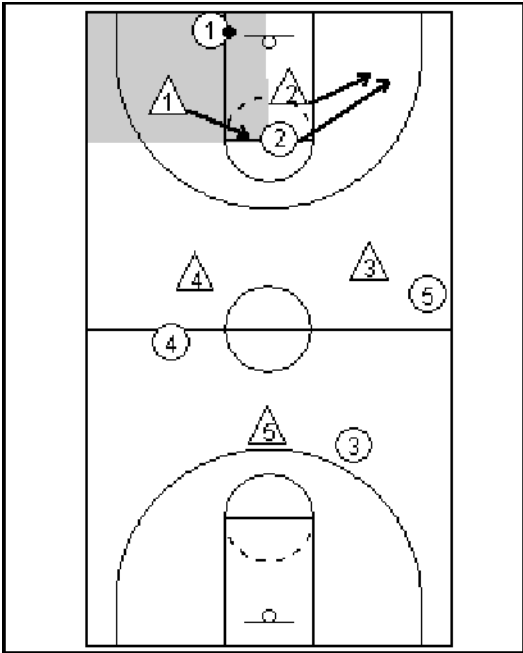
Position yourself so that you can intercept a pass to the player furthest from the ball.

TALK! Help the players ahead of you with their matchups. The back man is the "quarterback" in the 2-2-1.

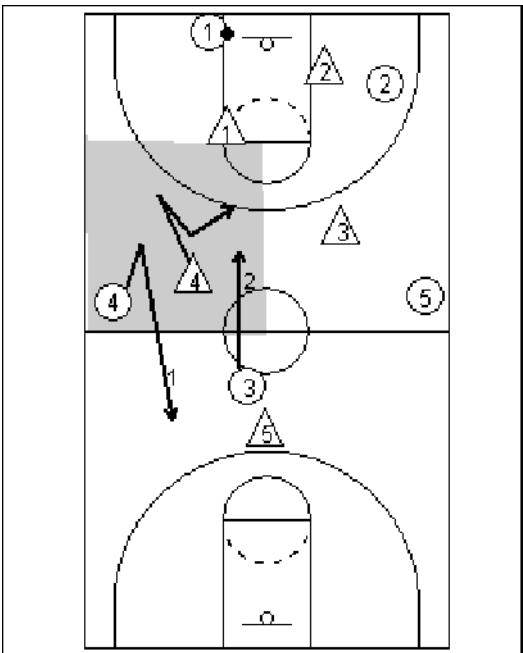
4. If a forward leaves his box, 5 should be ready to step into that box and deny.

**Guard Maneuvers (1 and 2)**

If your man leaves your area, scramble to find another receiver in your area. (1 scrambles to cover 4 here)

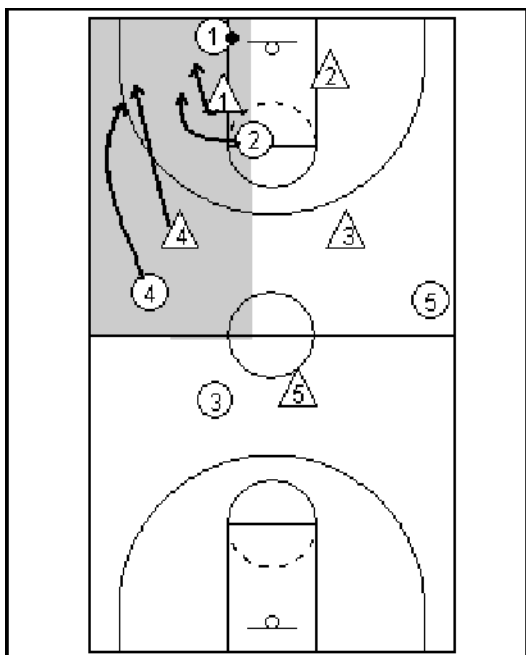


If there is nobody in your area, **pinch in towards the middle at the free throw line area**. Open up (facing the sideline) and look for anybody moving into your area while keeping vision of the ball.

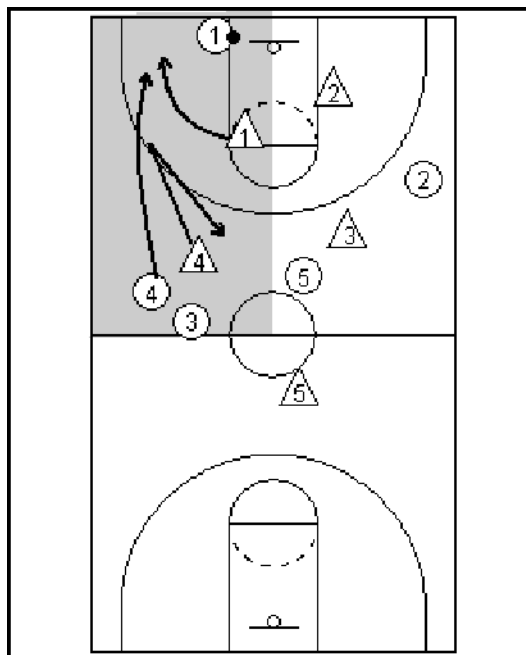


Forward Maneuvers (3 and 4)

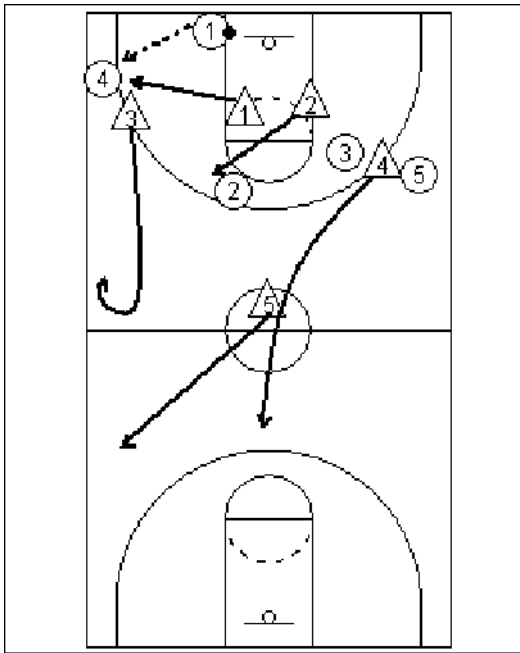
If a matchup leaves 4's area, 4 will release and look for a new player to defend.



If a player flashes from a midcourt area into a guard's (1) area, continue to deny the cutter into the guard's area **IF** the guard (1) is already defending someone.



If 1's box is empty, 4 passes the cutter off to 1



When the ball is inbounded:

1 and 2

If the ball is in-bounded in your area (1), pick up the ball and force it down the blind alley

If the ball is inbounded in the other guard's area, (2), sprint to the middle of the floor to cover the gut pass

3 and 4

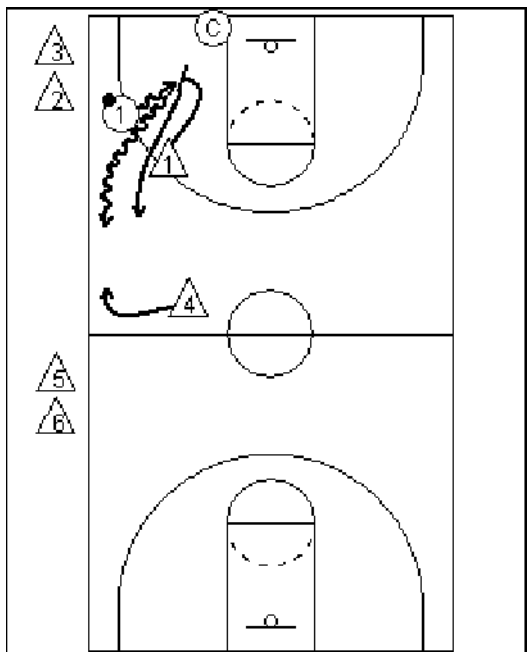
Sprint back to halfcourt

5

Get positioned in the back of the press directly ahead of the ball, ready to intercept any pass up the floor.

Pressing Drills

Drill 1: Ride and Slide



Purpose: To teach the guards in the 2-2-1 press to influence the ball down the sideline (into the "blind alley") and out of the middle. To teach the forwards in the 2-2-1 press proper positioning and how to set the half court trap.

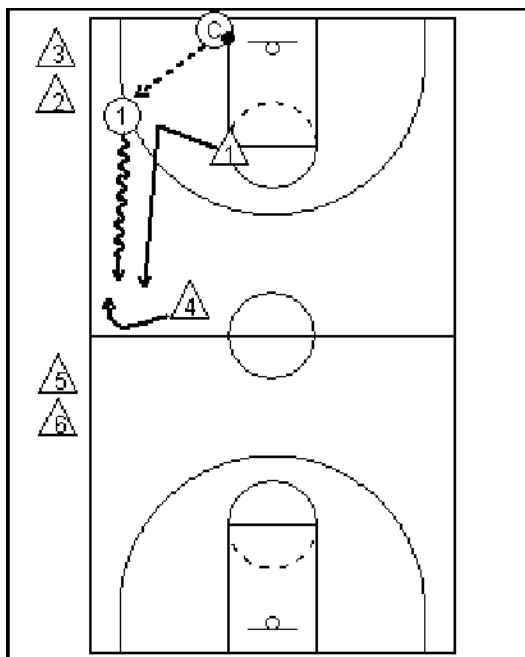
Organization: The coach stands out of bounds under a basket with the ball. Forwards line up out of bounds at halfcourt. Guards line up out of bounds on the baseline. Two guards step onto the floor; one will play offense and the other will act as a top defender in the 2-2-1 press. One forward steps onto the floor; the forward will act as a midcourt defender in the 2-2-1 press.

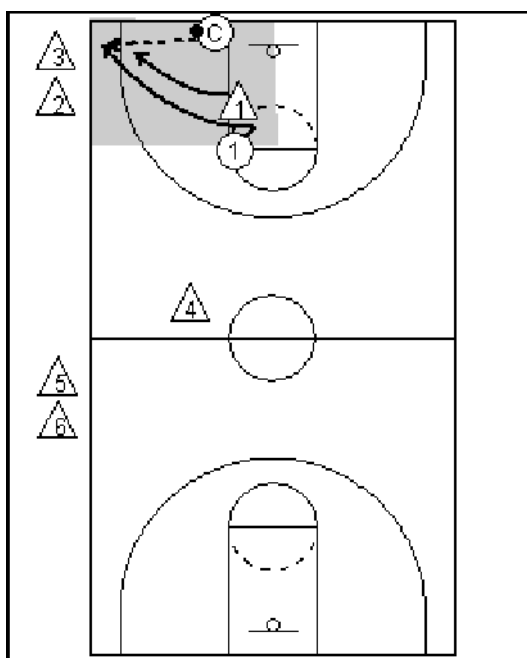
Procedure:

1. The coach passes the ball inbound to the offensive guard
2. The defensive guard defends the ball, influencing the ballhandler down the "blind alley" towards the trap. The drill ends when the two defenders have successfully set a half court trap.
3. The ballhandler should attempt to beat the trap, either by beating the defensive guard to the middle of the floor or by dribbling down the blind alley and going around or through the trap.

Coaching Points:

1. Once the guards understand and can successfully execute the drill defensively, have the defensive guard deny the inbound pass at the beginning of the drill
2. The offensive guard starts at the elbow and must cut to get





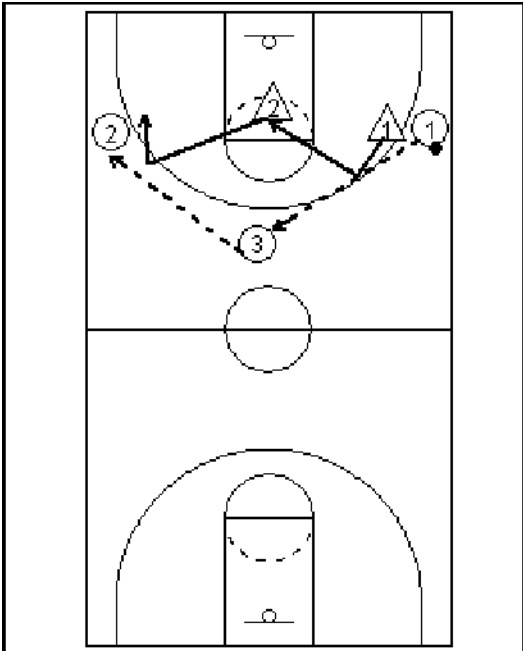
open in the shaded area. The offensive player is only allowed to get open in the shaded area because, in a game situation, the defensive guard would switch off if the offensive player left this area.

3. After the ball is successfully inbounded, the drill resumes as normal.

4. If the ballhandler attempts to go to the middle of the floor, the defender should slide to cut him off and force him back down the blind alley

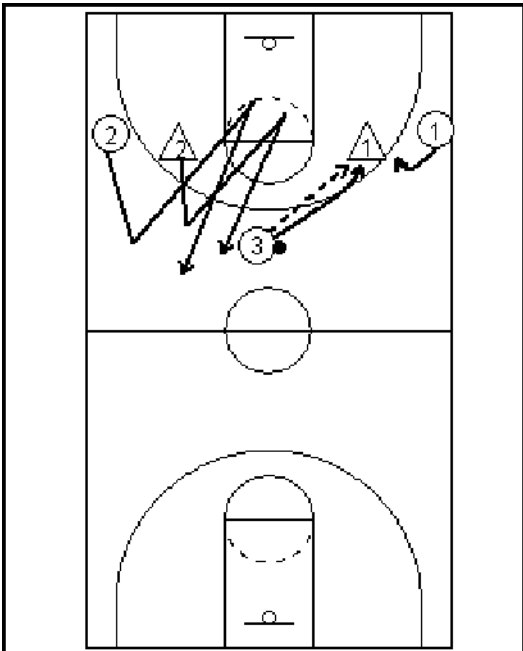
5. If the defenders are unsuccessful in setting the trap, run the drill again with the same players until the defenders have success.

6. At the completion of the drill, the defender's both step off of the floor. The ballhandling guard then becomes a defender. The next guard to step into the drill acts as the ballhandler. The next forward to step into the drill acts as the midcourt defender.

Drill 2: 3 on 2 Fullcourt Trap**Purpose:**

- A. to drill half court man-to-man defensive positioning
- B. To develop aggressive trapping as well as denial of the first pass out of a trap.

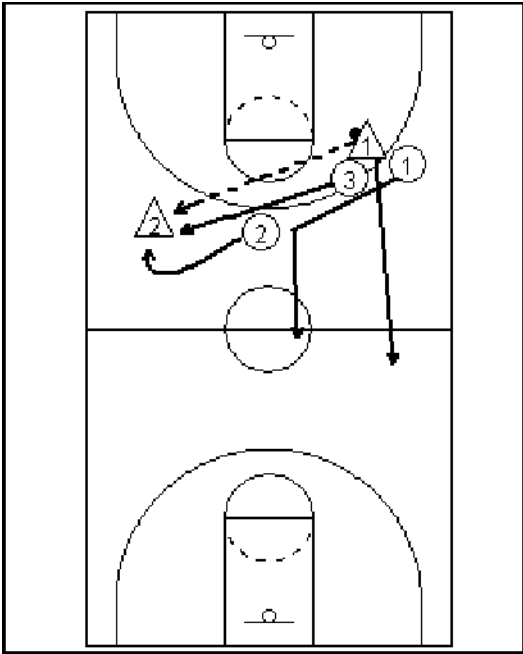
Organization: The drill begins as a defensive shell drill with three players on the perimeter (at the point and at both wings) and with two defensive players defending either wing.

Procedure:

1. The three offensive players begin the drill by passing the ball around the perimeter. The two defensive players, each guarding a wing, make defensive adjustments from on-ball defense, to denial, to help defense, as they would in a half court man-to-man defense

2. After reversing the ball a couple of times, the point guard passes the ball to one of the defensive players. Players then switch roles, with the defense switching to offense and the offense switching to defense.

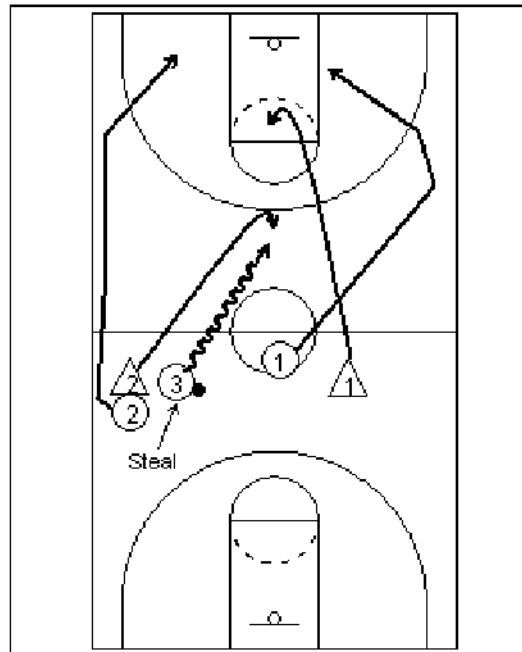
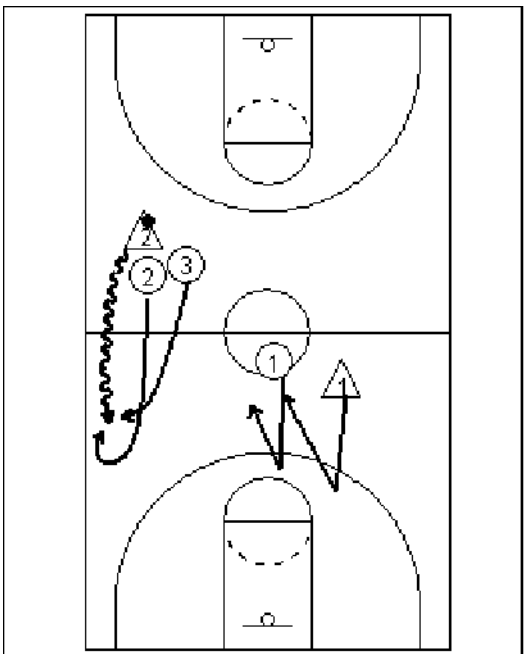
3. The two offensive players attempt to advance the ball up court and score on the opposite basket playing 2 vs. 3.



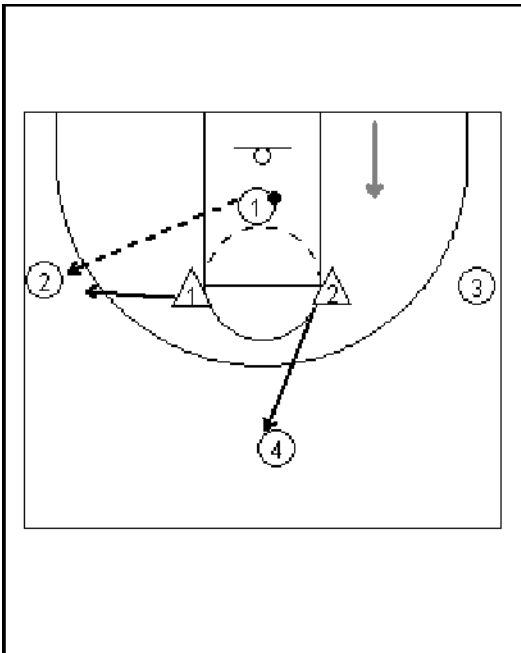
4. The three defensive players continuously play "trap and deny" versus the two offensive players. The two defenders closest to the ball aggressively trap, while the third defender aggressively denies the third offensive player.

5. On any pass made by the offensive team, the defenders must adjust, with two defenders trapping the ball, and the third defender denying the outlet pass.

6. The drill ends when the two offensive players score or when the 3 defenders get a steal and a fast break (3on2) for a basket



Drill 3: Tag



Purpose: to drill coverage rotations for the top two players in the 2-2-1 press, with an emphasis on covering the middle pass

Organization: the drill is set up with four offensive players (a point guard, two wings, and a player in the middle) and the top two defensive players in the 2-2-1 (the grey arrow shows the direction the offense would be going in a game).

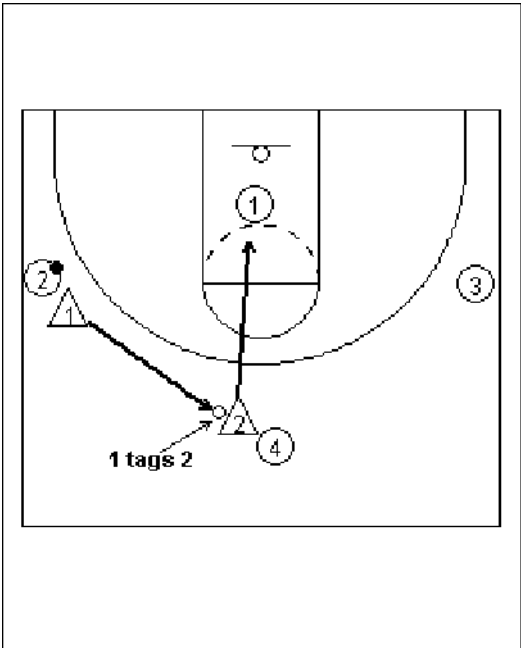
Procedure:

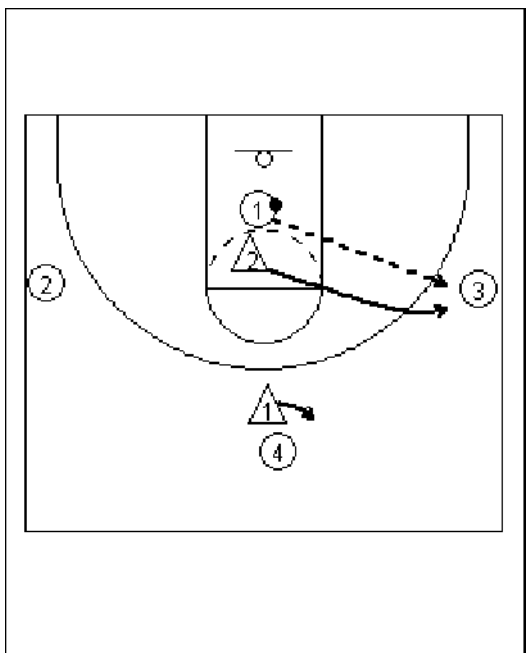
1. The three offensive guards (1, 2, and 3) rotate the ball around the perimeter. As the ball is rotated, players look for the open pass to the player in the middle (4).

2. The two defensive players are each responsible for one half of the floor (1 is responsible for the left half of the floor and 2 is responsible for the right half of the floor).

3. On a pass to the wing, one defender moves to defend the ball and influence it down the "blind alley" (1) the other defensive player sinks below the ball to cover the middle pass (2).

4. As the ball is passed back around the perimeter (from 2 to 1), the on-ball defender slides back into the middle. The defender covering the middle (2) does not leave his position until he is **tagged** by his teammate. After he is tagged, the defender (2) moves out to the perimeter to defend the ball. Tagging ensures that your guards are defending the "gut pass" in the 2-2-1 press.

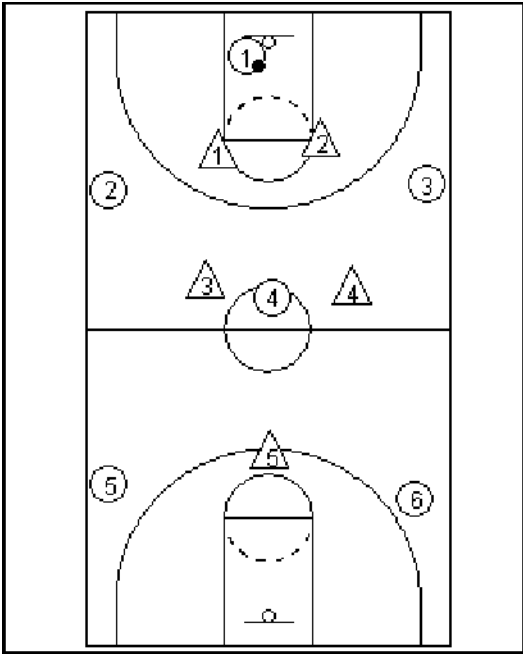




5. As the ball is rotated to the other wing, the player responsible for that side of the floor (2) slides over to defend the ball and influence it down the blind alley. The other defensive player (one) adjusts to cover the middle.

6. As the ball is rotated around the perimeter again, 2 would slide in to tag 1 and 1 would pop out to cover the ball.

7. The drill should continue for three to four ball reversals, giving the defensive players several opportunities to "play tag" and rehearse their coverage responsibilities.

Drill 4: 6 on 5

Purpose: To practice the 2-2-1 press against an offensive numbers advantage.

Organization: 5 defensive players set up in the 2-2-1 press. 6 defensive players spread themselves out across the floor, with one player in the middle (4), one player in the back (1), two players on the wings (2 and 3) and two players of the court on the sidelines (5 and 6).

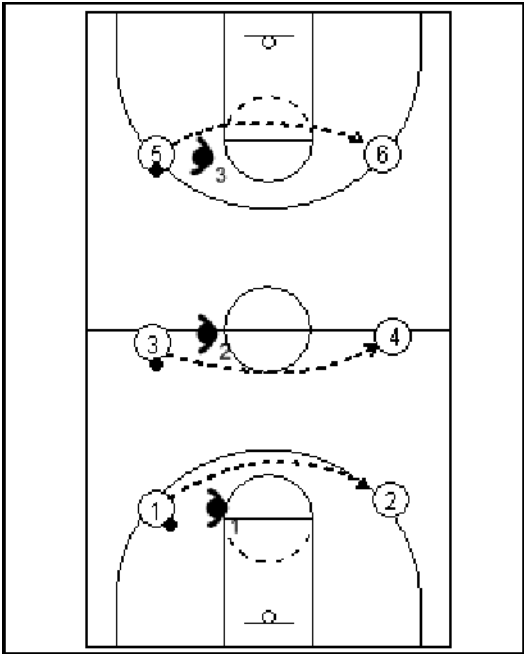
Procedure:

1. We play this game one possession at the time with the offensive team attempting to move up court and score quickly against the press.

2. We are always giving up ball reversal, meaning that player 1 will always be open, but that the pass to player 4 will always be covered. As long as the offensive team is working against the 10 count in the back court, we don't want to gamble by covering the reversals pass in the 2-2-1 press.

Drill 5: Man in the Middle

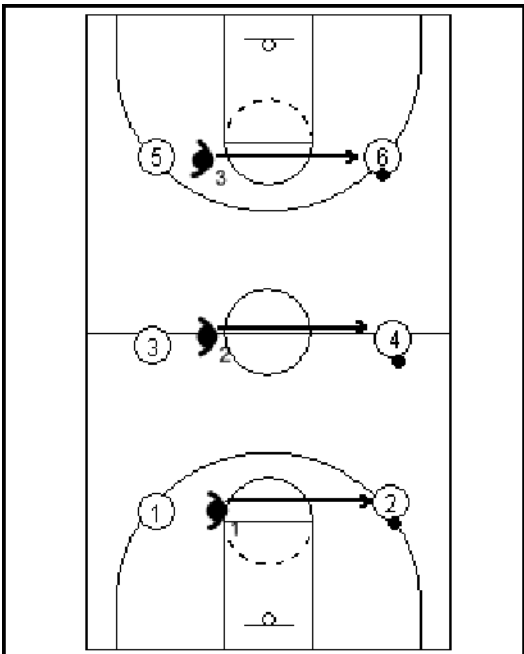
Purpose: To drill mirroring the ball defensively, looking for pass deflections. This drill specifically relates to the 2-2-1 press by teaching the importance of not reaching in defensively and of playing with active hands during the trap.



Organization: Players organize into groups of three, with two offensive players facing each other, approximately 15 feet apart. The defensive player stands between the offensive players. One offensive player has a ball.

Procedure:

1. Offensive players pass the ball back and forth to one another while the defensive players attempt to deflect all passes. Offensive players should "fake a pass to make a pass": performing ball fakes in one direction and passing in the other direction. Players should fake low as if to complete a pass off of the defender's hip, and pass high completing a pass off of the defender's ear. Alternatively, players should fake high as if to pass off of their defenders either, and pass low, sending a pass off of the defender's hip.



2. Defensive players follow every pass, closing out on the offensive player with the ball. Defensive players respond to every ball fake by aggressively mirroring the ball with both hands (As the ball goes high, the defenders hands follow as if they were a mirror in front of the ball).

3. Defenders remain "in the middle" until a pass is deflected. A deflection is defined as a player getting his hands on any part of the basketball. When this occurs, the offensive player who threw the pass switches positions with the defensive player, and the drill continues.

Coaching Points:

1. Offensive players are not allowed to make any lob passes. All passes must be either direct passes or bounce passes.

2. Offensive players should attempt to reach past the body or head of the defensive player when releasing the pass. This insures that the defense will not get a deflection. By "faking a pass to make a pass" the offense is simulating completing a pass to the post and against a trap.

3. Defensive players should aggressively mirror the ball with both hands and look for pass deflections. The pass deflections do not always lead to turnovers, they can still be quite valuable in disrupting the opponent's confidence in running its patterns fluidly. For pressure defensive teams, pass deflections are an excellent indication of aggressiveness. This type of aggressiveness can erode an offense's confidence over the course of the game.

Points of Emphasis

Four specific areas of the press that require effort and extra concentration are:

1. When denying the inbound pass after made field goals (as opposed to made free throws), 1 and 2 must hustle to locate and deny the player in their area. 3 and 4 must also hustle to cover their areas and prevent the long inbounds pass to the middle, but 1 and 2 have the more demanding responsibilities.

2. 5 must always hustle to cover the back spot in the beginning of the press; some teams will look for an easy basket off of the deep inbounds pass. 5 doesn't necessarily have to be the team's center. From time to time, I will put a quick guard in this position, especially if an opponent is looking to inbound with a deep pass, if we're having trouble with the rotation to the sideline (either with *making* the rotation or with *containing* the ball when it gets passed up the sideline).

3. Protecting the middle is absolutely critical to the success. 1 and 2 must develop a habit of quickly shifting from on-ball defense to cover the middle. While it is not critical that 1 and 2 actually 'tag' each other in and out of the middle, it is critical they work in tandem, and that the middle defender not rotate out until he is certain that his partner can cover.

4. The forwards' (3 and 4) rotations from midcourt to the basket area (and back) are the longest rotations in the press and require effort and awareness to be covered consistently.

Review

Responsibilities in the 2-2-1 after the ball is in-bounded

Players 1 and 2

1. The player defending the ball forces the ballhandler down the "blind alley" towards the halfcourt trap. DON'T get beat to the middle!
2. The opposite player defends the pass to the middle. He sinks below the level of the ball and into the middle, looking to deny anybody in the middle (or, anybody **flashing** to the middle - is requires that the defender maintain an open stance to locate cutters).
3. If the ball is reversed back to the middle of the floor, the player who was defending the ball slides into the middle and "tags" the other guard.
4. When the ball is reversed back to the middle of the floor, the player in the middle waits to be tagged by the other guard, and then moves out to the perimeter to defend the ball.
5. Players 1 and 2 are each responsible for one side of the floor. They DO NOT switch sides during play.
6. On a "gut pass" to the middle, the defensive player who missed his rotation (the player who should have prevented the gut pass) should attempt to get in front of the ball, essentially resetting the press by putting the ball back on the perimeter and out of the middle. The player who was guarding the ball should pinch into the middle to help.
7. If the guards cannot get in front of the "gut pass", the press is broken and all players retreat to the basket area to set up the half-court defense. In this situation, the rules used in transition defense are applied; with one player stopping the ball and everyone else sprinting back to cover the basket.

Players 3 and 4

1. Players 3 and 4 are each responsible for one side of the floor. They DO NOT switch sides during play.
2. When the ball is on a player's side of the floor, they prepare to set a trap near halfcourt
3. When the ball is on the opposite side of the floor, the defender moves to the middle of the floor and slides back to cover the basket. NOTE that once the ball is on one side of the floor, all defenders are also on that side of the floor. There are no defensive players on the weak-side.
4. If the ball is passed up the sideline past the midcourt trap, the midcourt defender on the ball-side follows the pass and sets a trap with 5 I tell the midcourt defenders, "if the ball goes over your head, then you turn, follow the pass, and set another trap". The other midcourt defender comes to the ball-side block from the basket area.
5. If the opponent "guts" the press with a pass to the middle, the midcourt defenders retreat to the basket and enter the halfcourt defense. In some situations, one midcourt defender will be forced to defend the ball on a gut pass.

Player 5

1. 5 initially covers the basket area. As the ball moves from side to side, 5 moves with it. 5 is always in a direct line with the ball.
2. If the ball is passed up the sideline past the midcourt trap, 5 defends, holding the offensive player until the midcourt defender joins him for a trap. 5 can go for the steal if it is available on the pass up the sideline, but he should not gamble to get the steal (i.e. if 5 doesn't get the steal, he should still be in position to defend the ball and trap).

3. If the ball is passed out of the sideline trap 5 retreats to the basket and looks for a man to match up with as the defense changes to man to man. If the defense is shifting to a zone defense, 5 hustles back to his position in the zone.

Responsibilities in the 2-2-1 before the ball is in-bounded

Players 1 and 2

1. Deny the closest receiver on one half of the court from the free-throw line extended to the baseline.
2. If your man leaves your area, scramble to find another receiver in your area.
3. On a guard cross, switch and deny.
4. If there is nobody in your area, pinch in towards the middle at the free throw line area. Open up (facing the sideline) and look for anybody moving into your area while keeping vision of the ball.
5. If the ball is in-bounded in your area, pick up the ballhandler and force him down the blind alley
6. If the ball is inbounded in the other guard's area, sprint to the middle of the floor to cover the gut pass.

Players 3 and 4

1. Stand about 4 feet ahead of the halfcourt line directly behind the elbow. Deny any player on your half of the floor between the free throw line extended and halfcourt.
2. Players usually flash into this area from around 1/2 court. See the floor and bump players who flash.

3. If a player leaves your area, release him and look for a new player to deny in your area.
4. If a player flashes through your area into the guard's area, you can follow into the guard's area IF the guard is already in denial. If there is nobody in the guard's area, do not leave your area.
5. On the inbound pass sprint back to halfcourt.

**Remember, if the opponent tries to flood the guards' boxes (sending 3 or more players, the forwards can step in and deny because their area should be empty).

If their area isn't empty, 5 can step in and cover. If the forwards choose to stay in their areas while the opponent flood the guards boxes that is ok too, even though you will probably give up the inbounds pass.

Forcing 3 or 4 offensive players to come all the way back to the ball will usually take the offense out of its press-breaker pattern.**

Player 5

1. Cover the area past halfcourt. Play "on-the line, up-the-line" against receivers in your area.
2. Position yourself so that you can see the player furthest from the ball and intercept a deep pass if necessary
3. TALK! Help the players ahead of you with their matchups. The back man is the 'quarterback' in the 2-2-1.
4. If a forward leaves his box, be ready to step into that box and deny.
5. On the inbound, position yourself in the back of the press directly ahead of the ball ready to intercept any pass up the floor.

Teaching Progressions

1. We teach using the “**Whole-Part-Whole**” philosophy. As such, we start by **walking through the entire press** (3/4-court, without defending the inbounds pass). We walk through and discuss each player's responsibilities. We **teach the proper rotations** as the ball is reversed around the perimeter, passed up the sideline, and passed into the middle “gut pass”. We will usually **spend some time scrimmaging** after teaching the press and its entirety, and before breaking the press down into drills.

2. Next, we **break the press down** into drills. We usually run **1 drill a day**. We usually start with “**Trap and Deny**” to teach aggressiveness in trapping, even though the drill does not directly correlate to the 2-2-1. The other drills are typically taught in the following order: Ride and Slide, Tag, 6 vs. 5.

3. After the press is taught, we **practice it is often as possible in scrimmage situations**. We usually run **controlled scrimmages, starting with a player shooting a free throw**, and running the press on the made free throw. We'll usually keep the scrimmage running until the offensive team (the team that did not shoot the free throw to start) scores. As long as the defensive team is getting steals (or defensive rebounds) and converting them into baskets, we want to keep getting right back into the press, **building momentum, and making runs**. NEVER stop the action after the press causes a steal and a score “this is when your defenders should begin to “smell blood”, so to speak. Let them get back into the press and see if they can build on the momentum.

If we taught the 2-2-1 press over the course of one week, the “press” and “scrimmage” sections of **practice plans for the week** would probably look similar to the table on the next page:

DAY	TIME ALLOTMENT	DRILL & DESCRIPTION
Day 1	10-15 minutes:	Walk through the whole press, teaching rotations and responsibilities (Whole Method).
	5-10 minutes	Controlled scrimmage using the press - after made free throws.
Day 2	10 minutes	Trap and Deny
	5 minutes	Review responsibilities (Whole method)
	5-10 minutes	Controlled scrimmage following made free throws.
Day 3	10 Min	Ride and Slide
	10-15 minutes	Controlled scrimmage
Day 4	5-7 minutes	Trap and Deny
	5 minutes	Tag
	10-15 minutes	6 vs. 5
Day 5	10-15 minutes	Add inbounds denial (Whole method). We usually have the opponent run a simple press break with simple rules for getting open on the inbounds (i.e. have the guards cross and 1 or 2 players flash into the middle from the halfcourt sidelines)
	10-15 minutes	Controlled scrimmage using inbounds denial. From this point forward, we run full and controlled scrimmages using the press on a daily basis if possible.

It can be beneficial to run the inbounds denial vs. various different press-breakers to give players a feel for different types of situations they might face in games. We will revisit specific drills if and when it becomes apparent that we need work in any specific area of the press.

Conclusion

One of the biggest challenges facing both girls and boys coaches at the youth and high school levels is consistently getting the effort that we demand from our players. In my experience, the teams that do give a great collective effort are most often the teams that have a *strong sense of identity*. They take pride in the way they play. They also have a sense of individual pride that comes *from* the way they play.

At its best, I have seen this 2-2-1 denial press do both:

- Bring out the maximum team effort that makes a coach proud
- Be the driver in the development of a team's identity through the results of those efforts.

One of my most memorable examples of this came several years ago as a Freshman coach at one of the perennial state powerhouses in Washington. Despite the school's varsity reputation, we weren't expected to be a very good at the Freshman level because the school's freshman class was so extraordinarily talented that all of the 'good' players (a total of 9 players) started out on the Sophomore, JV, or Varsity teams... leaving me with a group of players who not only lacked talent; they suffered from a complete lack of self-esteem after getting cut from their school teams and AAU teams for several years in a row.

After a slow start to the season the players started to express a sense of mediocrity, especially when their classmates were beating other teams by 20 points on most nights! I met with the head coach, who approved my request to shake things up by installing the 2-2-1. After spending a couple of days working on rotations and applying intelligent pressure to keep the ball on the sidelines...we began to show some defensive progress...in our last 2 games before winter break, we picked up a couple of extra steals, threw the opponents off balance, and didn't give up any cheap baskets out of the press. Then, over winter break, we really worked on the transition from the press into our halfcourt man to man defense, installed ball denial, and started matching up on the inbounds pass as described. The tone of practice started to change... after some initial resistance, player started to buy-in and play more aggressively. Then in the first game in January after winter vacation, everything changed. We came out against one of the best teams in the division, that hadn't lost a game...and we won in a 17

point blowout! I knew we had improved over the prior two weeks, but I had no idea we could put together what was an awesome game... all 12 players gave their absolute maximum effort for the full 32 minutes. Over the next several weeks, we just kept on improving, and it started to show in the way the players carried themselves... they even started to gain some recognition in the larger student body. The most memorable part for me was the last five games of the year. Anybody who has ever coached high school will tell you that non-varsity games aren't exactly big-ticket events... especially for Frosh and Sophomore teams, where the crowd tends to be a spattering of parents or the players' buddies (we didn't even share a gym with the other teams, playing in an off campus 'Rec' center. Nonetheless, for the last 5 games the gym was completely packed! In one game I looked at the crowd before the game and wondered out loud if people were going to an event but had all landed in the wrong place. My point guard responded, "They came to see 32 minutes of hell, Coach!" in reference to University of Arkansas 40 "minutes of hell" champions in the 1990's.

...Please Note that said earlier that when we first installed the press I stated that we didn't give up any easy **baskets**. I did *not* say 'easy shots'. This particular team did not give up any easy shots, but from time to time the opponent may get some easy shots against any press...if you find yourself coaching in this scenario, don't press the panic button just yet... ask yourself two questions:

1. Is the opponent actually scoring off of these opportunities? If not, why aren't they scoring? Is it because they are just bad at shooting, or does it have to do with the tempo you've created? You see them as good shots, but may be surprised to learn that the opposing coach sees them as *rushed* shots or *tired* shots... both are outcomes of the tempo that the press has created. Now, you should definitely *correct the errors* that allowed the shot to happen... the coach should always be a teacher... but you don't necessarily need to jump ship.)

2. By pressing, are we creating a situation where the tempo and the cumulative pressure will wear out the opponent? Be observant; the answer is **not** always 'yes'. Often, though, the press can wear an opponent down over the course of a game, and suddenly you are rewarded with an 8-12 point run. If you have faith in your conditioning, you can see signs that the opponent is wearing down (i.e. hands on the knees during dead balls, increased

substitutions), and the game tempo is to your advantage, can you work through the mistakes in the press rather than going away from it altogether?

I think it surprises some coaches to learn that most often; I've gotten great results without **great talent!** These coaches are among those who subscribe to the school of thought that pressing is only the most athletic teams, or should only be used as a desperation tactic.

With good, consistent teaching, the 2-2-1 is a different kind of press. By allowing ball reversal, and by placing a player (5) in the back of the press, the 2-2-1 doesn't leave the defense overly exposed in the way that a more aggressive press like a fullcourt 1-2-1-1 does.

Players are required, however, to give a full effort. This defensive philosophy helps foster and maximize that effort. Sometimes players will surprise you with what their efforts on the court can accomplish when a coach expects, encourages, and pushes them towards giving their **best efforts.**

Thanks for taking the time to read this e-book. I hope that it has provided some value to your coaching library. If you feel that it has, please take a moment to help make Perfect Practice known to other coaches

A. [Spread the word](#); Clicking the link takes you to a Tell a Friend form on Perfect Practice. Add 3 coaching colleagues to be taken to a download link for a free drills book.

B. For more coaching resources, tutorials, and tools, visit the [shop](#). The library of resources is always growing.

Thanks!

Josh Stinson

www.perfectpractice.net

Coaching Better Basketball

Josh Stinson has coached youth basketball in the Seattle area for 18 years. He has coached high school basketball for 10 years, at the following schools: Nathan Hale, Ballard, Mercer Island, and Evergreen. He has also coached at Washington Middle School, Rotary Boys and Girls Club, and the Mercer Island Boys and Girls Club.

Josh began coaching at Meadowbrook Community Center in Seattle, where he coached an exceptional group of young men from the 1st through 8th grades.

Josh's coaching style came under the tutelage of head coaches Ed Pepple, Shawn Hall, Max Silverman, and Ed Reed. His most influential coaching mentor is Coach John Burnley. Mr. Burnley's coaching success and personal impact at two unlikely Seattle schools qualify him as one of the great coaches in the area.

Josh holds a B.A. in Humanities from Seattle University and a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Washington. He practices clinical social work with at-risk children and families in the Seattle area. Josh is 32 years-old.