



## **THREE OF A KIND**

### **Course 01: Coach Ettore Messina**

#### **Lesson 02: Positioning**

#### **Language: English**

### **INDIVIDUAL DEFENSE: POSITIONING**

The first step in order to build a good individual defense is for the player to learn the correct positioning that he must have in front of the player he is defending, in relation to both his position on the court and where the ball is.

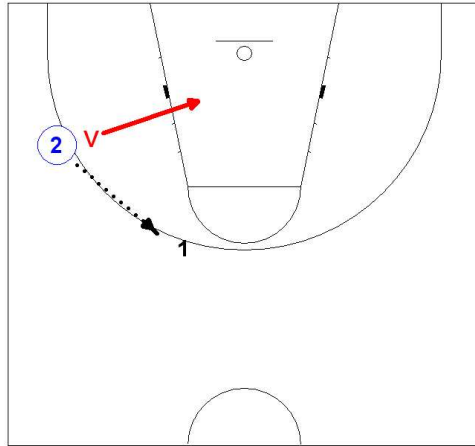
We have already seen, that when defending the ball, we want to create a "wall" in between the opponent and the basket, worrying more about not getting beat with dribble penetration than forcing the opponent with the ball one way or another.

When defending off the ball, we want to always have a position between our opponent and the ball. This is in essence a static position, however it becomes far more difficult when the ball and the opponent are in motion. We ask our players to constantly modify with the appropriate timing their position in relation to their opponent, using as a reference the position of the ball (in constant motion) and that of the opponent. The most common mistake (which is more comfortable for the defender) is that of positioning oneself between the opponent and the basket as the ball moves around the court.

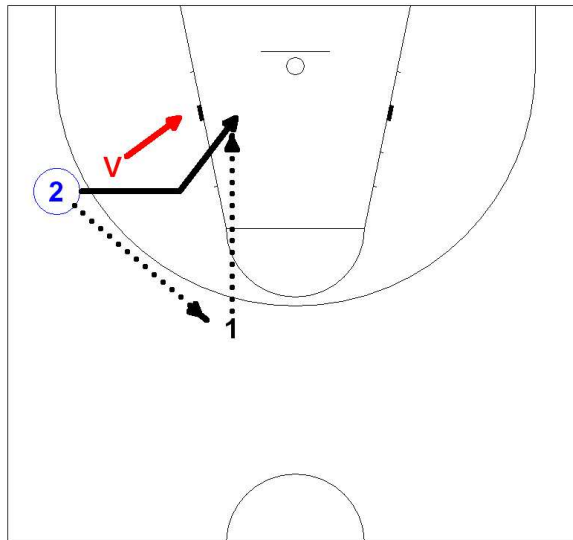
Two typical examples: in the first scenario (**diagram 1**) after the pass from the shooting guard to the point guard, the defender instead of "jumping" to

the ball takes one step back, maintaining a position between the opponent and the basket, opening himself up to a potential "give and go" (**diagram 2**), of a return pass for a three point shot (**diagram 3**) or of a blind screen being set (**diagram 4**).

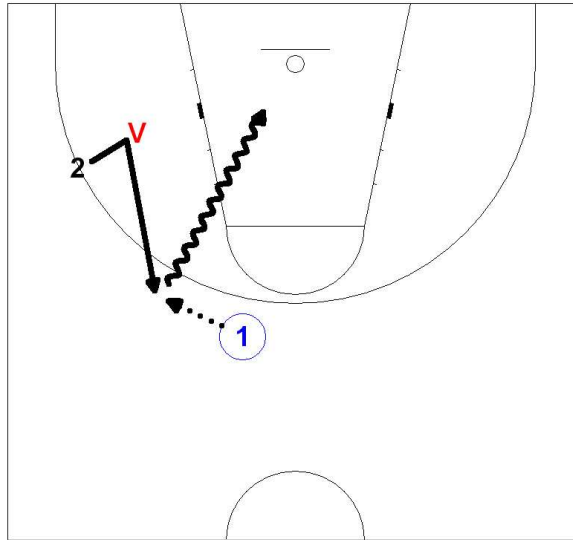
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 1



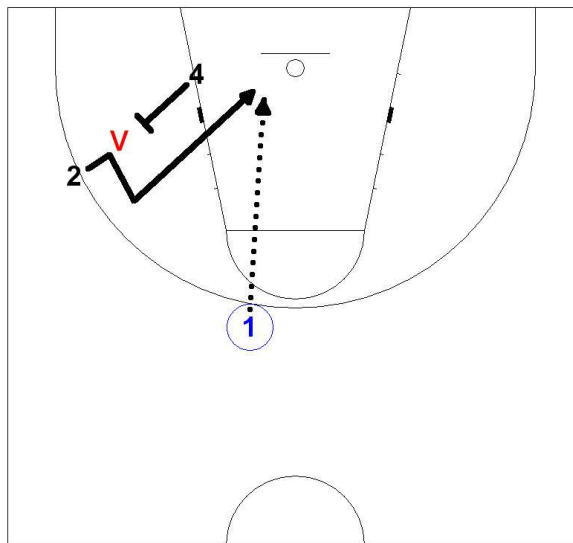
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 2



LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 3

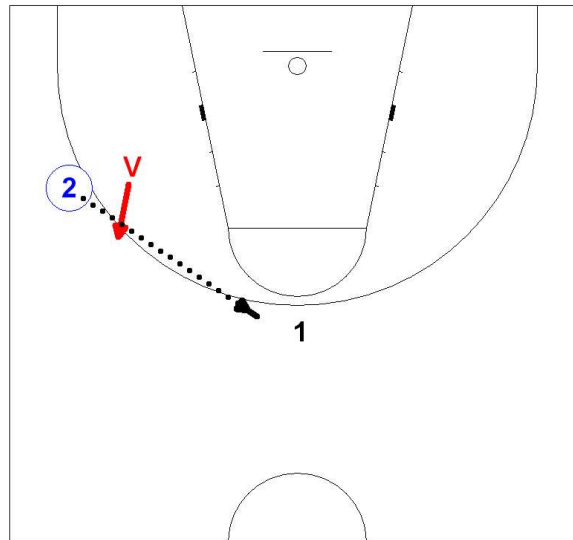


LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 4



In order to not be open to the scenarios above, we teach the defender to take one or two steps whilst the ball is in the air between the shooting guard and the point guard towards the point guard, adopting a posture similar to that of denying a pass, but without making any body contact (**diagram 5**). This small movement, which from now onwards we will refer to as the "jump to the ball" is fundamental in order to arrive to a position between the opponent and the ball, therefore preventing direct cuts to the basket. The defender's reaction must be made immediately with the movement of the ball, otherwise the defense continues to "follow" the offence without ever taking the initiative in the constantly frenetic action-reaction game which defines basketball.

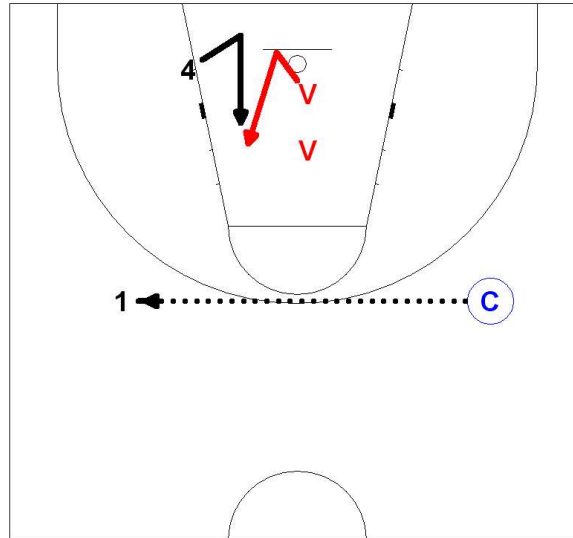
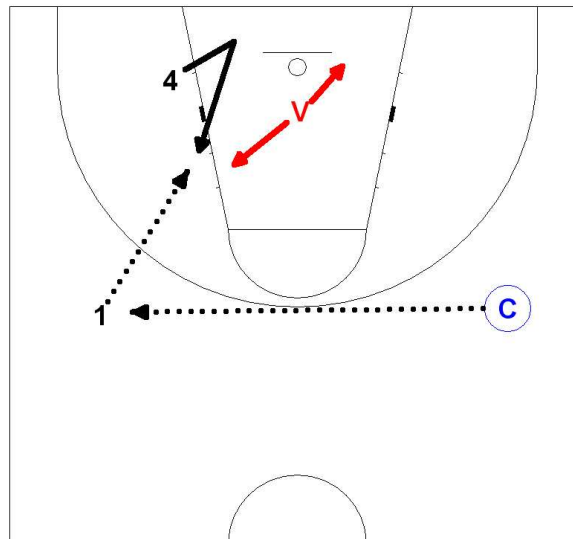
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 5



Through the teaching of our most fundamental drills, we improve the capacity of our players to “jump to the ball” whilst the ball is in the air: on many other occasions we will see how important it is in our sport for certain cuts or footwork to take place whilst other actions are occurring and not afterwards.

For example, passing a ball to a team-mate whilst he is getting open allows the ball and the player to reach a certain part of the court at the same time before the defender, double teaming a player in the low post at the same time he receives the ball will prevent him from easily seeing where his open team-mates are, with the obvious advantages this creates for the defense. The correct defensive positioning in relation to an opponent is fundamental not only when defending outside players but also inside players (centers and strong forwards).

**Diagram 6** is a simple drill. The Coach stands on one side of the court with a ball. On the opposite side is a centre and a shooting guard with their respective defenders. As soon as the Coach passes the ball to the shooting guard, the centre will try to gain position in front of his defender after starting the drill behind him. The player defending the centre must work to always be in between the ball and his opponent, bearing in mind that often the attacking centre will make a v-cut towards the baseline, his defender will follow the movement and then the attacker makes a sharp cut up the key (**diagram 7**).

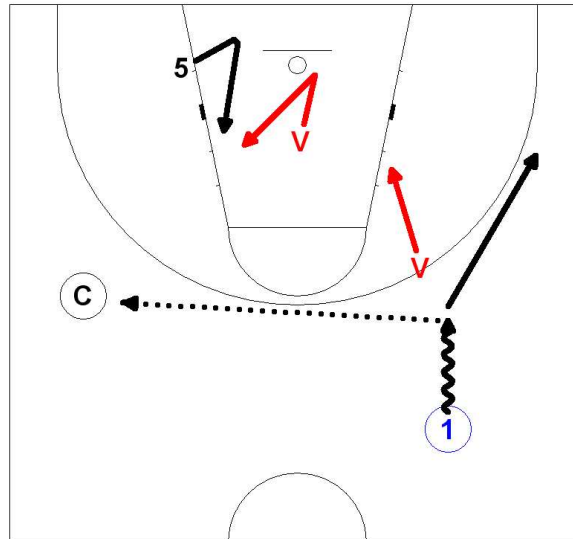
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 6LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 7

The defender must always be ready to move forwards and backwards, maintaining himself between his opponent and the ball, keeping the two in sight out of the corner of his eyes. Gaining experience, he will learn to have the correct positioning in relation to the ball and the body of the opponent who is making contact with him. If the player in possession of the ball is defended with a minimum aggressiveness, he will have the ball either on his left or right side, therefore forcing which way he is going to pass the ball. In the same way the majority of offensive players look in the direction where they intend to pass the ball, or worse still directly at the team-mate they wish to pass the ball to. All of these are advantages that our defenders must not forget, especially in order to understand when to hedge their intensity a little more on a particular opponent or on the contrary when to position him self in a greater help position defensively. Controlling the position of the ball relative to our opponents body and looking at the eyes of the player in possession of the ball help us to act more quickly and correctly on the defensive end of the court.

In the drill, if the ball does not arrive at the low post the point guard will have a 1v1 situation. The same concept is illustrated clearly in the next drill.

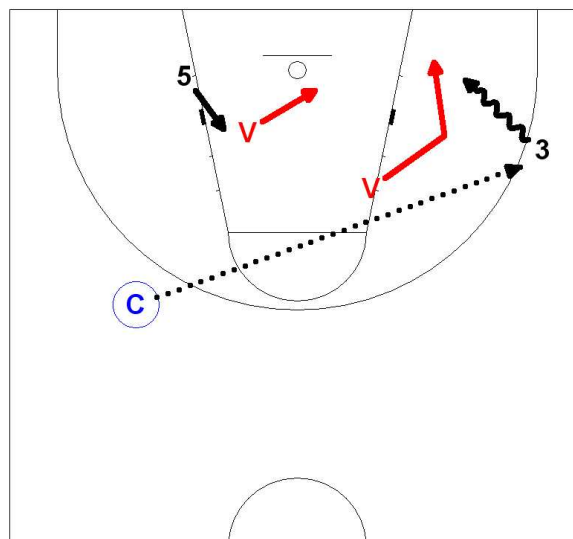
Initially we invert the position of the Coach and the shooting guard, so it is the Coach who will try to pass to the centre when he tries to gain position over his defender (**diagram 8**).

LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 8



If this is not possible, the Coach will pass the ball to the shooting guard who will have spaced himself to create a 1v1 situation (**diagram 9**). The defenders must rapidly adjust their position in relation to that of the ball, trying as hard as possible to be in the passing lane and finishing with a 1v1 with help defense.

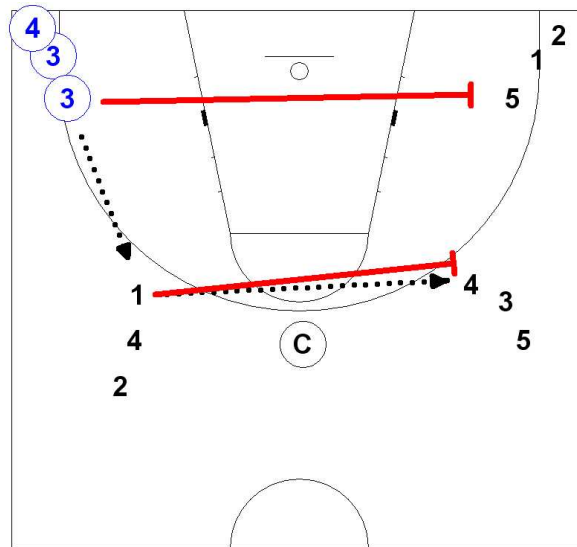
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 9



Another good drill is that which is illustrated in **diagrams 10-12**. There are four lines of players; if we wish to run this drill between players who play at the same position, we would put the players in two lines facing each other. The players in the left corner have one ball each. After having reversed the ball through one line to the opposite side (**diagram 10**), the

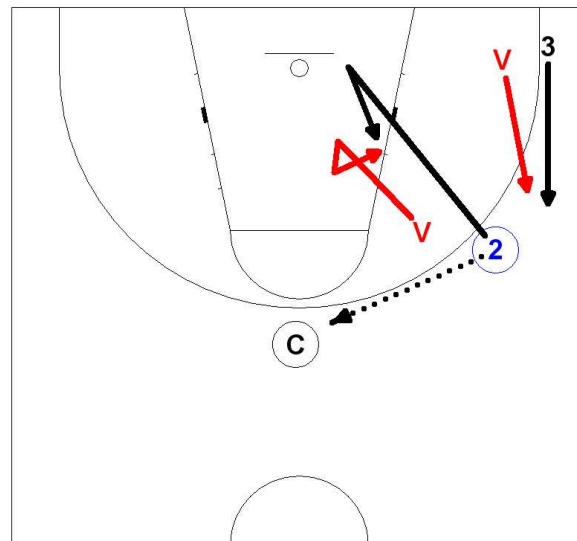
first players from the two lines on the left run to defend the two players who are in front of them on the opposite side. We have therefore created a 2v2 situation with the help of the Coach in the central position.

LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 10

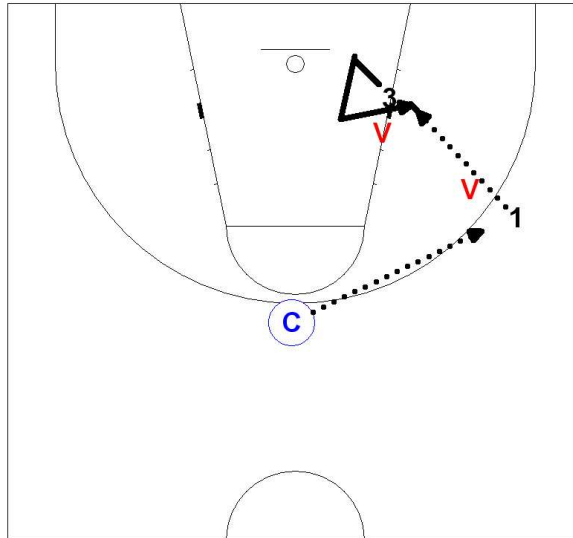


The player in possession of the ball after having passed it to the Coach will make a very deep back door cut (**diagram 11**), whilst the player in the corner will come towards the ball to receive a pass and play on the same side as his team-mate (**diagram 12**). The goal for both defenders is to always be in the passing lane, in a very dynamic situation where the ball as well as the attacking players are moving rapidly.

LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 11



LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 12

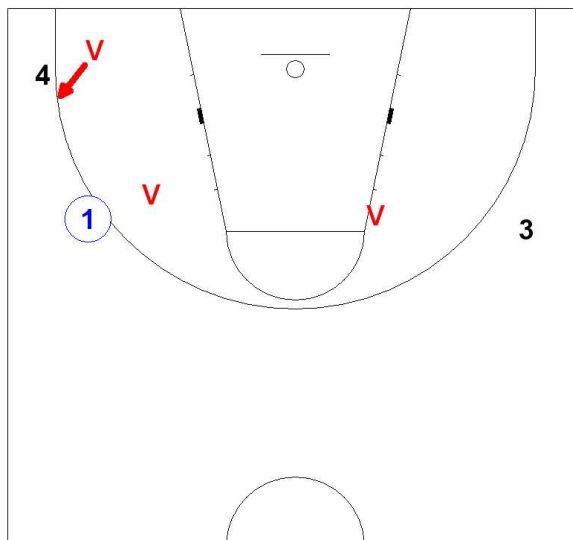


At the end of the play (always ends in either a basket or a defensive rebound), the players switch lines anti-clockwise and continue with the same drill.

A third drill that we often use needs six players (3v3) as well as the Coach as a passer.

In **diagram 13** we have two players at the wing positions and a third in the corner. Initially the drill progresses as the ball changes side of the court, the player with the ball after making his pass cuts towards the ball and then towards the corner.

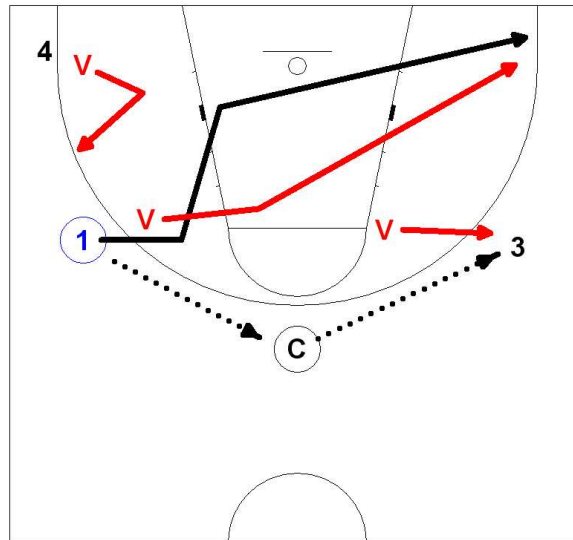
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 13



In the meantime the player in the corner tries a flash cut towards the ball when the Coach receives the first pass to then fill the vacated wing position and restore the original setup (**diagram 14**). In this first step the Coach is not very fast changing sides with the ball, in order to give the defenders time to assume the correct defensive position, jumping to the ball quickly in order to avoid that the opponents cuts take them by surprise.



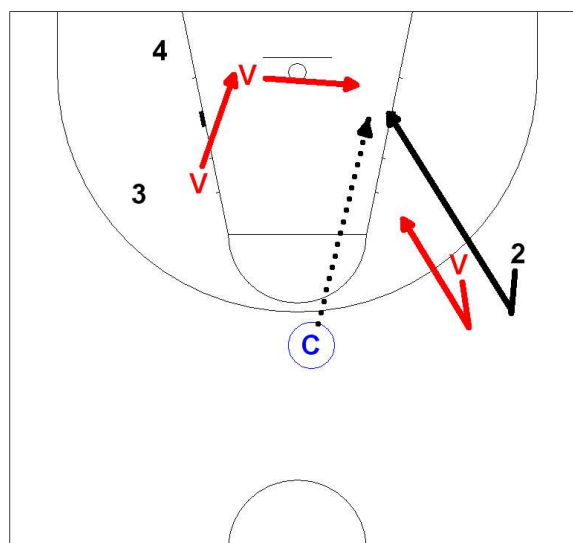
LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 14



The Coach (especially when working with young players) is worried about creating a game like situation, keeping the ball on one side of his body (as if he had an aggressive defender in front of him), on occasion passing the ball back to the side it came from to ensure that the defenders do not get used to running the drill the same way like robots. On the contrary, the goal of our work in this situation is to improve the footwork of the defenders and also develop their habit of paying attention to where the player in possession of the ball is looking in order to gain a few fractions of a second when working out how the play will develop.

I will never tire of insisting in this point: a well developed capacity to quickly understand the development of a play is decisive in speeding up the correct defensive positioning of our players. An incredibly athletic player with poor understanding of the game will be much slower than a player who has less natural quickness but is far more developed to mentally anticipate the play. In a second stage of this last drill the defense will see itself motivated to anticipate the ball reversal; in this case the wing will try and make a back door cut towards the basket (**diagram 15**).

LESSON 2  
INDIVIDUAL POSITIONING  
DIAGRAM 15



When this occurs the defenders on the help side will have to help their team-mate who has been beaten: we must become familiar with the "passing lane", fundamental in order to play the team defense that will be dealt with in the next lesson.

**REMEMBER**

- When defending an opponent in possession of the ball we want to maintain a position between him and the basket, creating a wall that is as impenetrable as possible
- When defending an opponent off the ball, we want to always be between the opponent and the ball to avoid cuts or being the victim of a blind screen
- It is fundamental to establish the correct defensive positioning whilst the ball is moving through the air and not one it has arrived in our opponents hands
- Looking at the eyes of a player who is in possession of the ball and where he has the ball in relation to his body helps the defenders understand fractions of a second ahead of time where the pass will go

**(Video of 1v1 on ball defense inside a team defense)**