



## **THREE OF A KIND**

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

### **Lesson 05: Switching as a Tactic**

**Language: English**

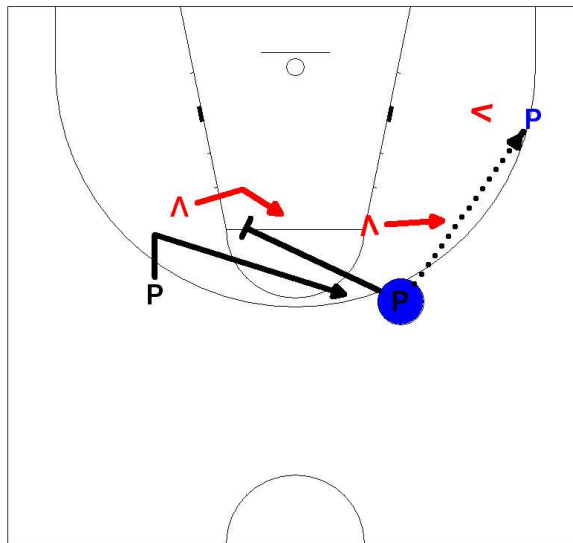
#### **INDIVIDUAL DEFENSE: SWITCHING AS A TACTIC**

The defensive switch has been often considered as a demonstration of passive defense and laziness. Up until a few years ago this was the choice that poor defenders without the mental aggressiveness and technique to get around screens. In this case the defender who was screened out of the play would shout "switch", leaving his teammate to defend his opponent. Since then, the use of this defensive principle has been extended to many teams, with aggressive switches that have made it become a very efficient tactical weapon. Currently, teams who use the defensive switch in certain phases of the game do so with the intention of making it difficult for a particular player to receive the ball, or also to avoid a key pass within an offensive set that is very efficient.

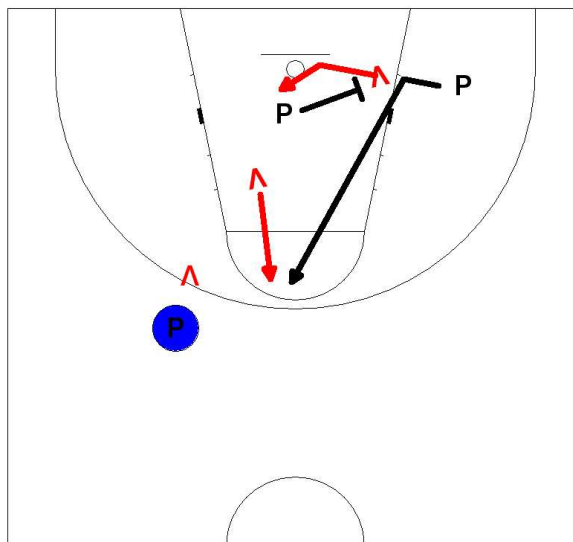
It is therefore a demonstration of great technical and mental aggressiveness, proven by the fact that in these cases, the switch is requested and called by the screener's defender. In fact this defender after having warned his teammate of the pending screen will jump to the passing lane looking to intercept a possible pass.

A defensive switch is more likely to occur between two players who play a similar position or have a similar physical build. In **diagram 1** there is a switch amongst two guards, in **diagram 2** two forwards perform the switch.

LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 01



LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 02

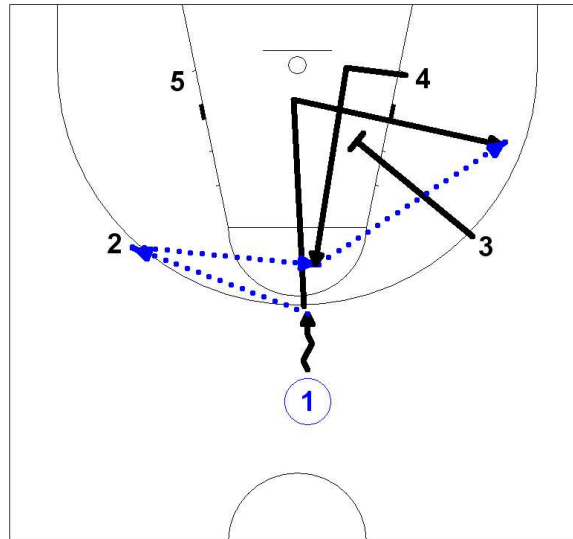


When preparing a game plan, based on the characteristics of your own players and those of your opponent, as well as the offensive sets run by your opponent you can set the rules over how to defend screens. It is then that you can allow switches between guards (1 & 2), forwards (4 & 5), the three big men (3, 4 & 5) and keep creating rules.

These types of choices avoid dangerous mismatches where an opponent who is physically stronger finds himself close to the basket with a weaker defender. There are situations where a switch between players from different positions can be advantageous for the defense, because it means that due to the defensive aggressiveness the ball does not reach a specific player, forcing your opponents to come out of their offensive set and look for an alternative.

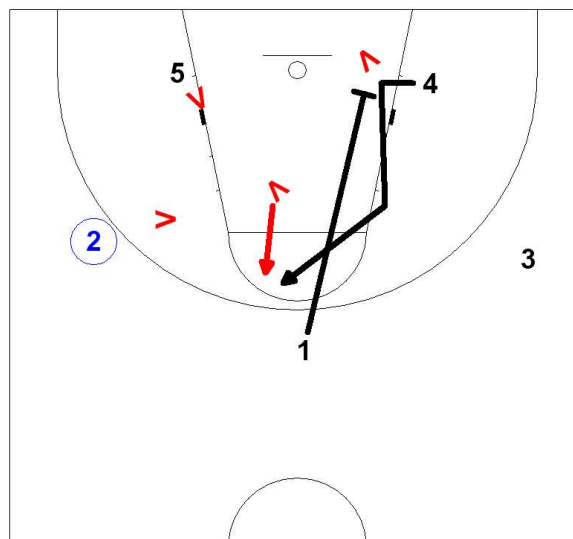
In **diagram 3** you can see a common offensive movement, based on using a down screen by a small player for a big player. Without getting into any detail on the possible continuations, it is obvious that one of the primary offensive objectives is to reverse the ball, getting it back into the hands of the point guard (O1). Our defense must therefore work against two passing lanes.

LESSON 04  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 03



In **diagram 4** it is possible to see a first option: X1 and X4 switch with a difficult anticipation at the high post by X1. The offense could try to take advantage of the mismatch, however the restricted area is full of players and therefore the offense would need to come out of their set to try and create space near to the basket for O4 to receive a pass and exploit the mismatch.

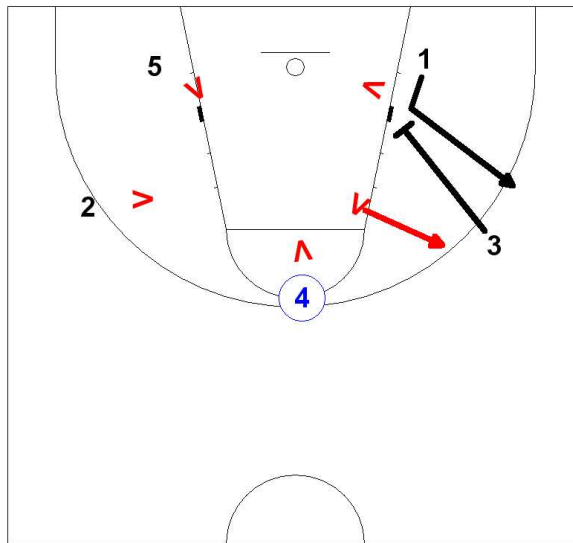
LESSON 04  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 04



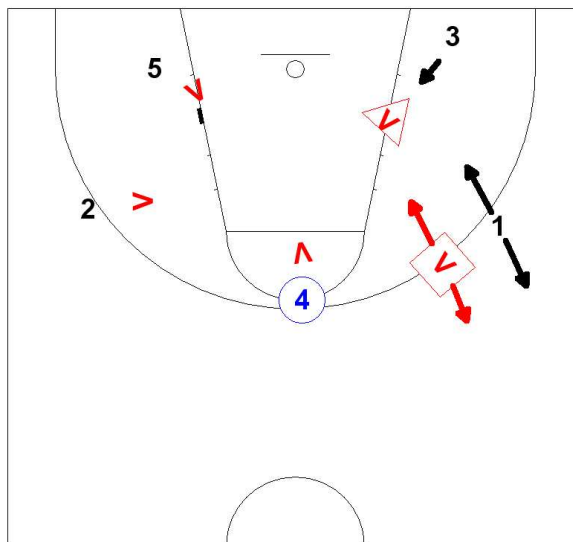
A second option that is less risky is illustrated in **diagram 5**, where X1 and X3 switch at the same time as the screen is being set on the right side of the court. O4 has the ball, X3 will aggressively deny the pass to O1, who will not be able to cut backdoor due to the lack of space. At the same time X1 will deny the pass to O3 in the low post, preventing a high-low pass

(**diagram 6**). The switch has prevented the ball to be rotated, making the offense incredibly static, and so it will be very difficult to find alternative options.

LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 05



LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 06

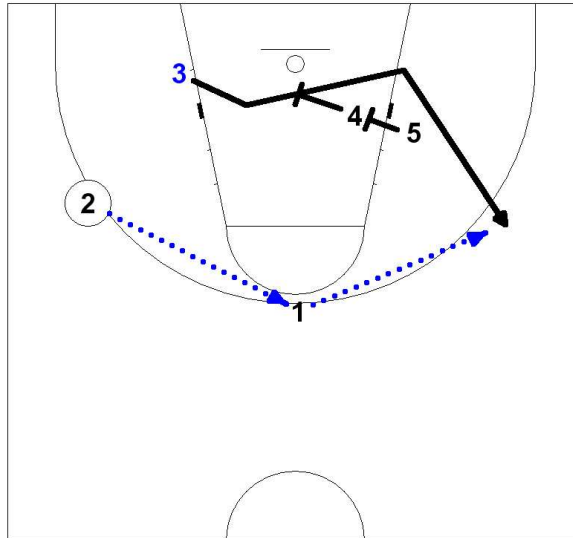


The tactical defense that we are talking about can be even more efficient in preventing the reception of the ball by a dangerous offensive player, particularly if the offense is designed to get the ball to a player who will finish the play, perhaps with a jump shot or an isolation for 1v1.

In **diagram 7** we can see the end of an offensive set which is looking to setup O3 for a shot, using staggered screens by O4 and O5.

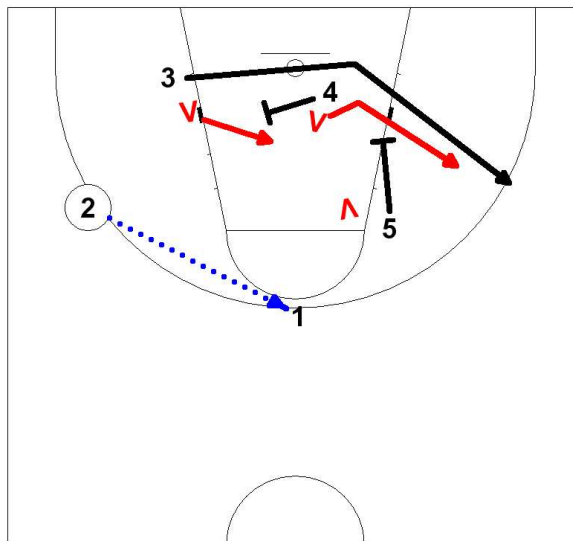
## L05 EM Switching as a tactic ENG

LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 07

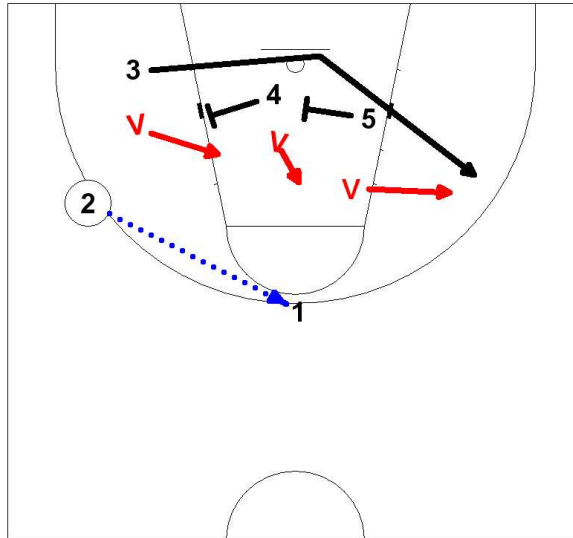


Accepting that it is impossible for X3 to get around two screens by large players, the alternatives are a switch between X3 and X4, with X4 waiting for O3 at the baseline to then get around the screen with hi, (**diagram 8**) or consecutive switches between X3 and X4 and then between X4 and X5 coming off the last screen (**diagram 9**). In this case X5 will deny the pass with a full frontal defense, risking a possible backdoor, but this is difficult to execute due to the lack of space. In each one of the illustrated examples it is always fundamental to put pressure on the player in possession of the ball to make his read of the situation more difficult, for example not being able to see the screener open to the ball ready for a pass.

LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 08

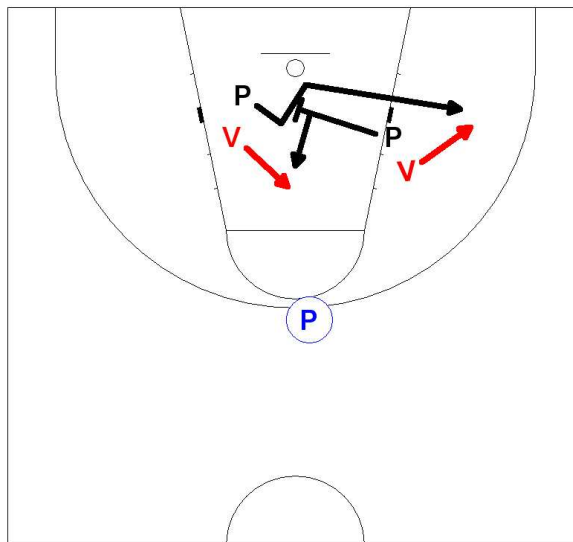


LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 09



It is also important that the defenders who are being screened have good footwork so that they do not allow themselves to be screened out of the play (**diagram 10**). Finally, the defender who initiates the switch must be in a denial position to prevent his new opponent from receiving the ball.

LESSON 05  
SWITCHING AS A TACTIC  
DIAGRAM 10



The combination of “switch + denial” is fundamental because otherwise the defense would be at a disadvantage where a great offensive player after receiving the ball would be defended by a slower or smaller player, with obviously disastrous consequences. Over the years I have become convinced that the “switch + denial” can be efficient particularly against well organized teams, who do not like to come out of their game plan or set offenses. It can be even more efficient if used in specific moments of a game, without allowing the opponent to use their planned countermeasures (as an example using only screens between bigs and smalls to create many mismatches); the key is always in being mentally and technically aggressive, which should be used to surprise your opponent and steal a ball or force a difficult shot in the moment you are looking to change the rhythm of the game.

**REMEMBER**

- The defender of the screen always initiates the switch, jumping to the passing lane
- It is fundamental that the defender who is being screened anticipates the screen in order to avoid an easy pass, especially if the defensive switch has caused a mismatch which the offense can take advantage of
- Aggressive pressure must be placed on the ball handler in order to avoid him making an easy read of the situation

**Video**