EUROLEAGUE BASKETBALL INSTITUTE

THREE OF A KIND

Course 01: Coach Ettore Messina

Lesson 06: Pick & Roll defense

Language: English

PICK & ROLL DEFENSE

The action of a big setting a screen for a guard is perhaps the most utilized action in modern basketball, and at the same time the most difficult to defend.

We will start with a pick & roll on the side of the court, taking place at the free throw line extended. If we ignore the possibility of switching the two defenders, there are four ways to defend the action:
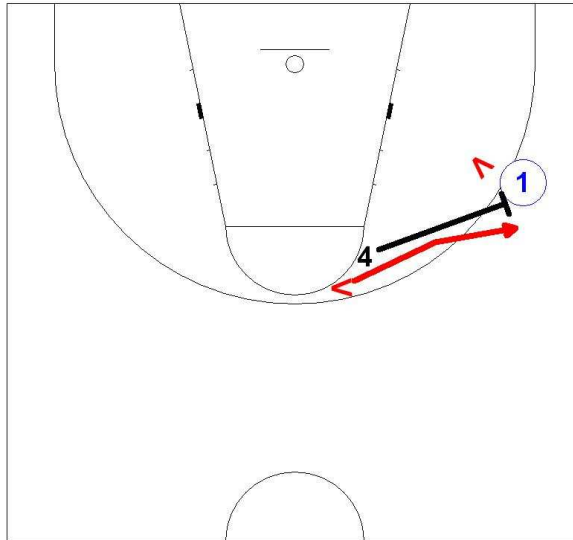
1. Hedge & recover
2. Go underneath
3. Double team the dribbler
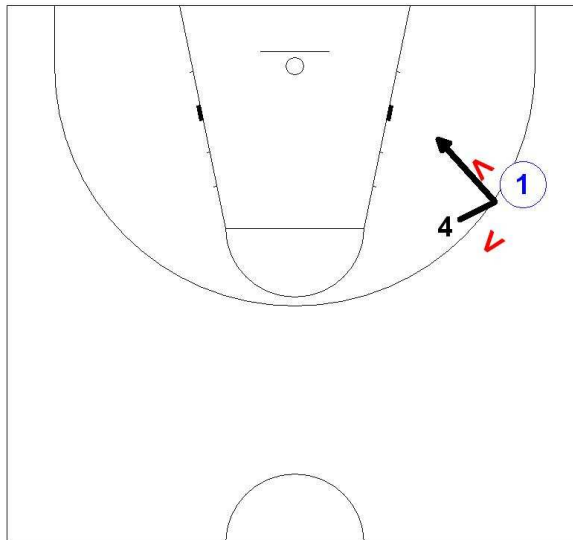4. Force baseline

1. HEDGE & RECOVER

It is necessary to clarify the duties of the two defenders in **diagrams 1-2**. X4 has to be quick, staying as close as possible to the screener, with the objective when the screen is set to create a "V" in which to trap the dribbler for a second or two.

The idea in theory is to give more space to the screener, perhaps allowing a cut towards the basket, but in an area that can be covered by other defenders (**diagram 3**). We should not ignore the fact that if the screener attempts a basket cut as illustrated in diagram 3 he will be facing the ball and therefore will be very likely to commit an offensive foul if a help side defender were to step in to take a charge (**diagram 4**). With an aggressive hedge, the dribbler will be forced to go around this new defender with a lateral dribble or even a backup dribble; meanwhile his defender will be able to recover moving through the newly created space therefore avoiding an open jump shot by the dribbler. The defender of the dribbler has to reduce the distance between himself and the dribbler as much as possible when the screen is set (in diagram 2 he will defend the right hip of the dribbler), preventing his opponent from dribble penetrating towards the baseline.
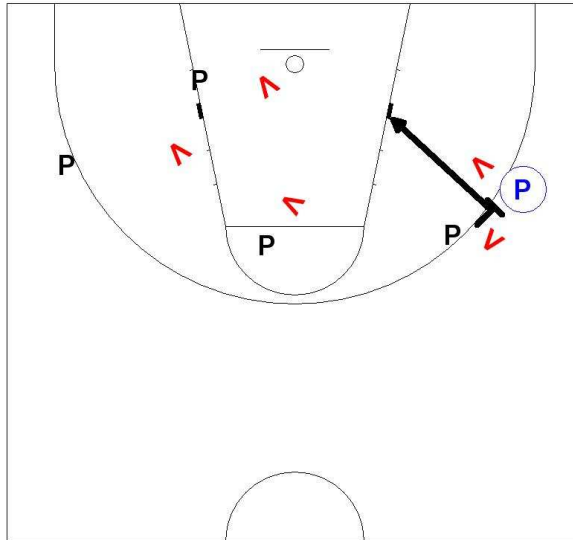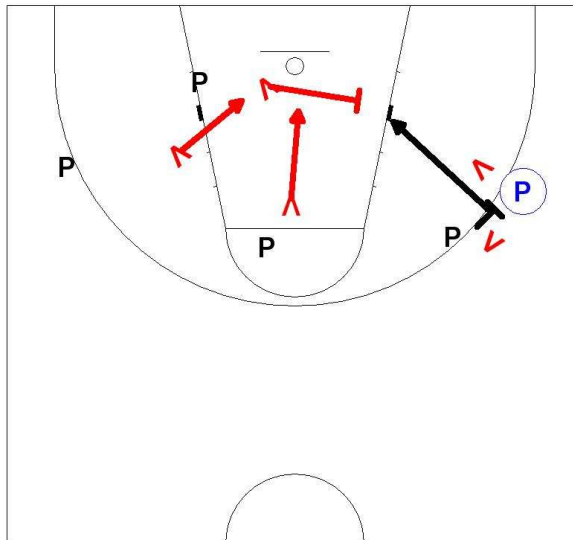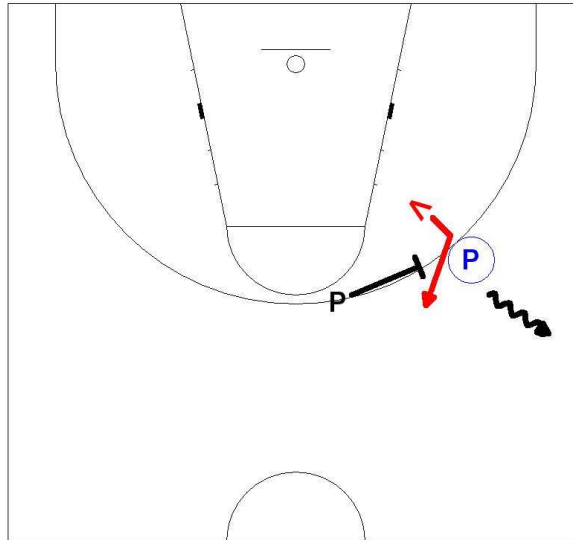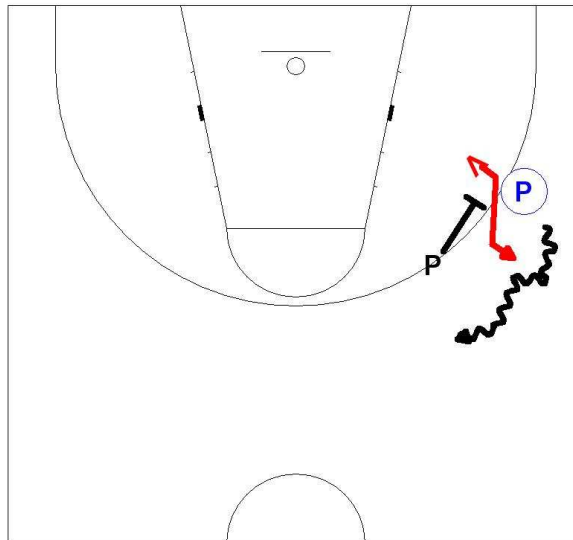
When the dribbler takes a backup dribbler, his defender will go over the screen and contain his opponent (**diagram 5**). If once past the screen, whilst the dribbler is backing up his defender makes the mistake of stepping forwards (**diagram 6**), he will almost definitely commit a foul as the dribbler penetrates.

Many players are convinced that if the screener's defender positions himself perpendicular to the screener's body (**diagram 7**) this is more than enough. It should be noted that although this will slow the dribbler, it allows the screener to roll not only towards the basket but also to pop to one side (if the screener is a good shooter), lengthening the danger area of the offensive players and making the defensive recovery more difficult (**diagram 8**).

It is not easy to achieve an aggressive hedge as explained, and even less to achieve the synchronization between the two defenders, but I believe that it is fundamental to request a decisive attitude to the screener's defender, to then perhaps accept a little less, as long as it does not adversely affect the effectiveness of the action. On the opposite side, initially settling for a passive hedge can then direct us to an overly passive attitude and therefore ineffective.
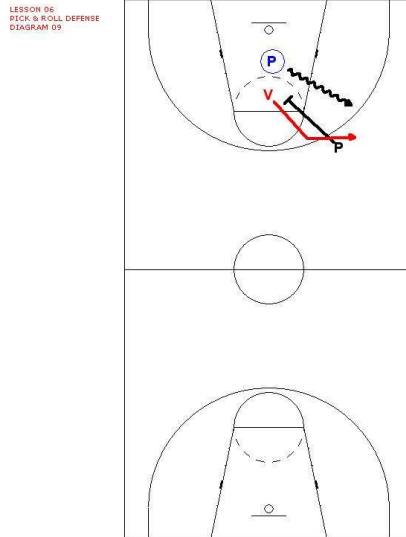
LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 07
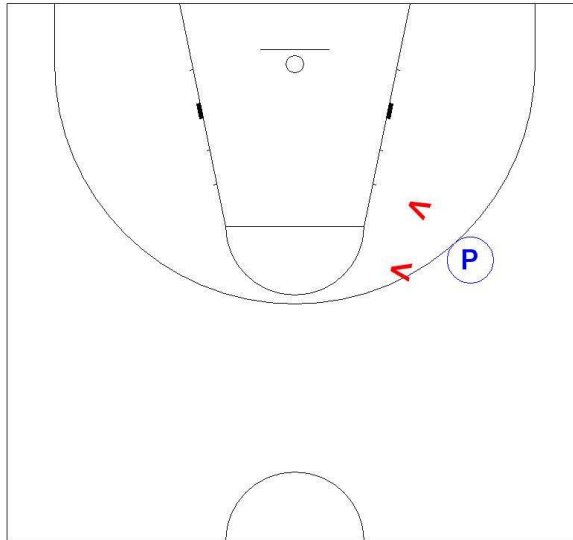
LESSON 06
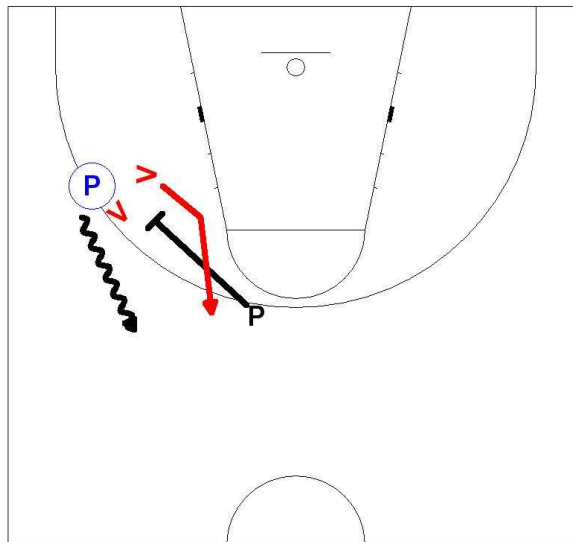PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 08
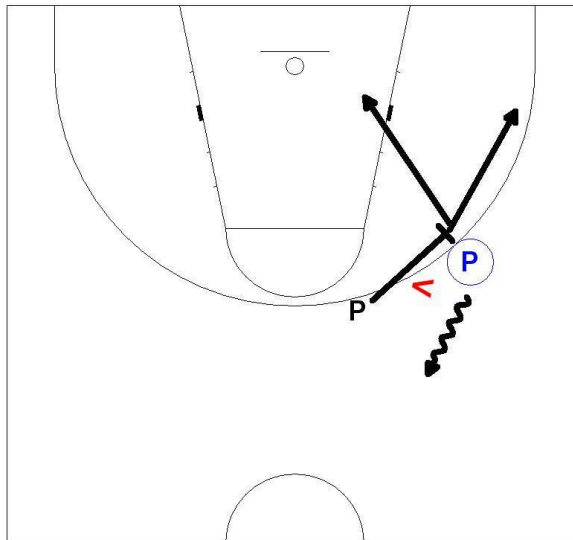
2. GO UNDERNEATH

This is a technique to use against outside players who shoot low percentages form the outside, or also when the screen takes place far outside the three point line: for example to help the dribbler cross the half court line when he is being defended aggressively (**diagram 9**).

If we ask the dribbler's defender to go underneath the screen, we ask the screener's defender to stay in contact with his opponent, without helping his teammate at all during the initial dribble (**diagram 10**).

Against this type of defense the screener is usually coached to pivot (in diagram 10 using his right foot) to re-screen, giving the dribbler a new line of attack towards the basket (**diagram 11**).

LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 11
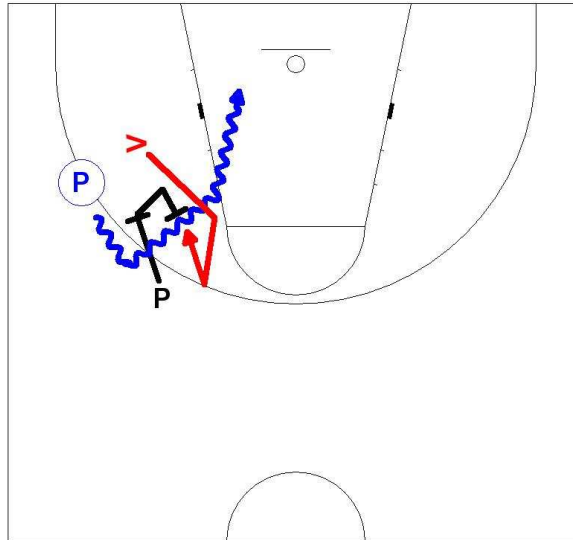
It is obvious that if the screener's defender has made any type of help movement after the first screen, he will be out of position to help against the second screen.   In order to effectively counter the re-screen the screener's defender should hedge after the re- screen (**diagram 12**), effectively forcing the dribbler back to meet his original defender.

LESSON 06
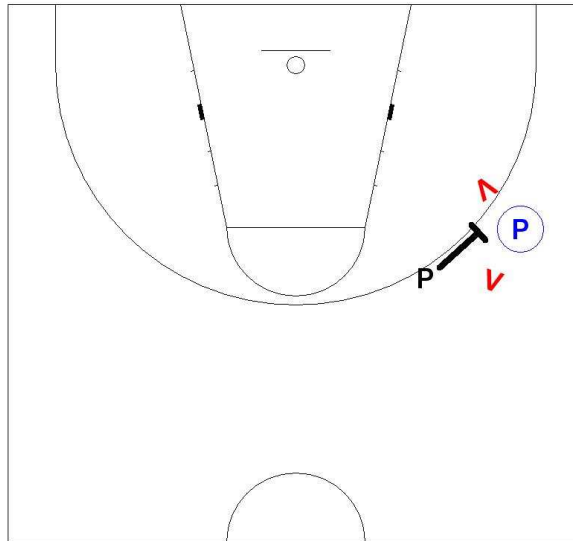PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 12
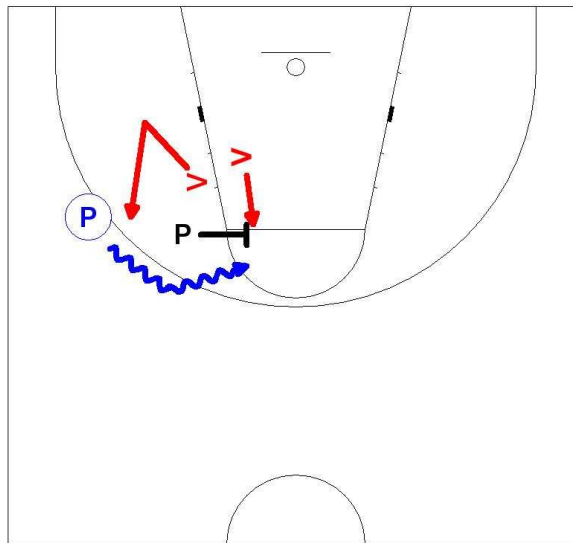
3. DOUBLE TEAM THE DRIBBLER

Double teaming the dribbler has the objective of forcing a good player who is in possession of the ball and trying to create the space for a shot using his teammates screen, to pass the ball, exerting technical and physical pressure on him. It should be clear to both the payer and the coach that whilst this is the fundamental aim, it does not avoid the reception or a comfortable finish to the play by other opponents.

The technique to perform a double team is the same that we use when hedging & recovering, with the only difference being that we wish to accentuate the aggressiveness and position of the "V" the two defenders form, with the aim of maintaining the double team if the player in

possession of the ball picks up his dribble looking for a pass. If the dribbler keeps his dribble alive, this is a sign for the screener's defender and a help side defender to initiate an eventual defensive rotation to interrupt the offensive action and recover their direct opponents (**diagrams 13-14**).
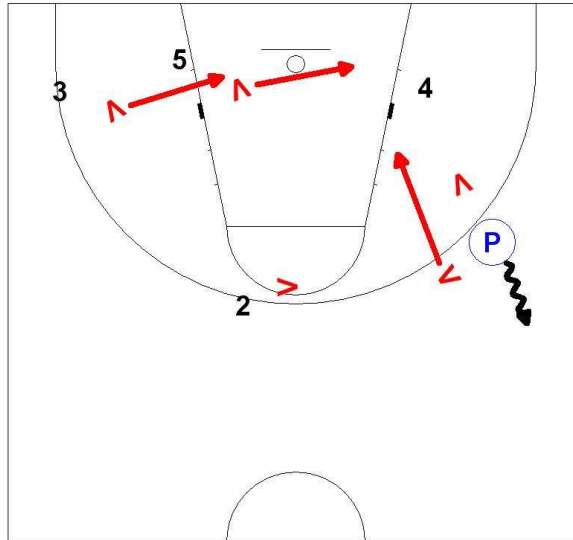
LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 13

LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 14
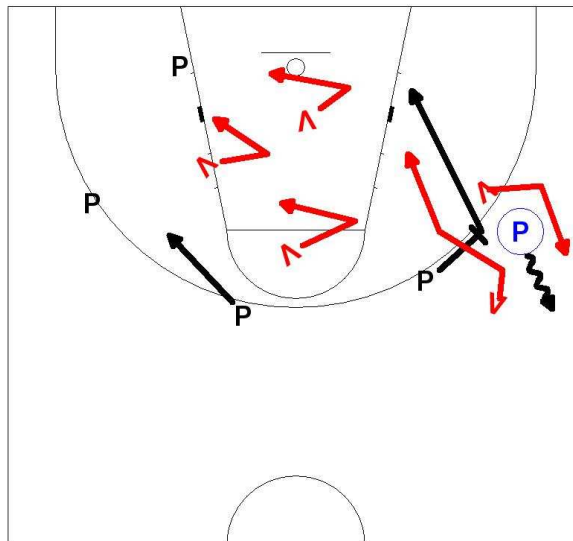
It is easy to understand that double teaming the dribbler during a pick & roll is a defensive technique that must have all five defenders in order to be successful. As soon as O4 rolls to the basket it is probable that X5 will have to rotate and help (**diagram 15**), whilst X3 will ensure he helps down on O5. As for X2, I am convinced that it is vital when double teaming the dribbler to deny the pass to O2, in order to slow any possible rotation of the ball (**diagram 16**), leaving the player furthest away from the ball open for a few seconds (in this case O3).
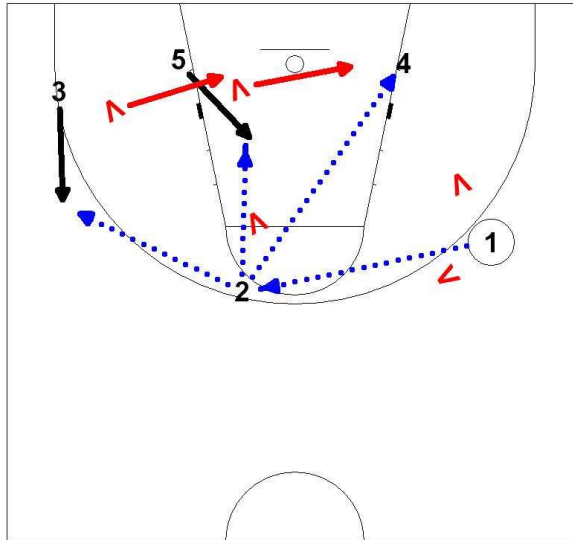
LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 16
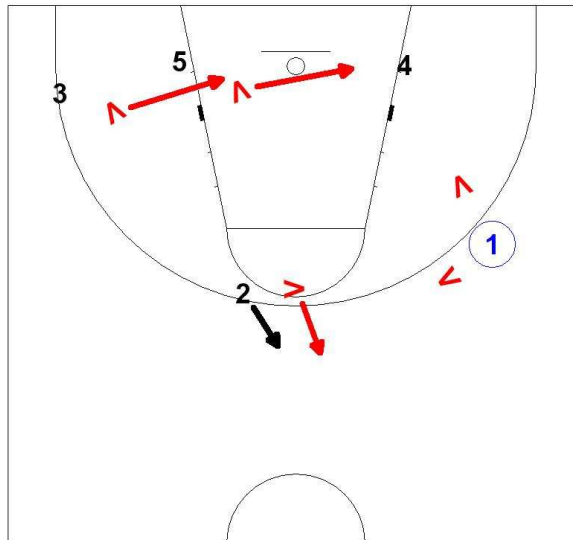
In **diagram 17** it can be clearly seen that if X2 drops to the restricted area, leaving his direct opponent wide open, O2 will after having received an easy pass out of the double team many passing lanes available to him. In this case,, leaving O2 open also forces X3 and X5 to de at a numerical disadvantage against O3, O4 and O5.

LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 17

In **diagram 17** it can be clearly seen that if X2 drops to the restricted area, leaving his direct opponent wide open, O2 will after having received an easy pass out of the double team many passing lanes available to him. In this case,, leaving O2 open also forces X3 and X5 to de at a numerical disadvantage against O3, O4 and O5.

LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 18
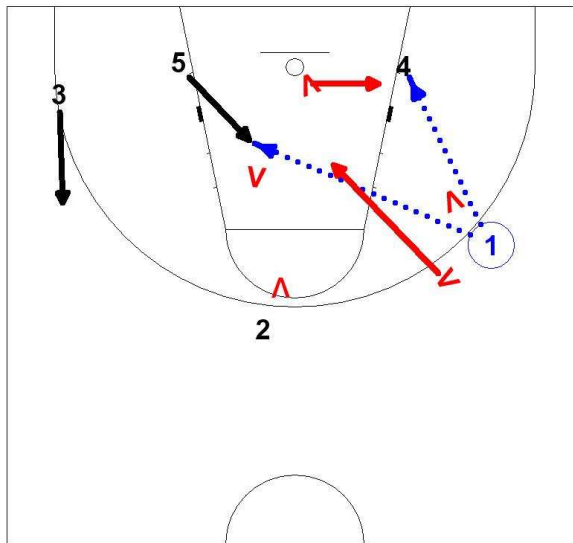
It is incredibly important that O1 immediately after having passed the ball, is defended with a full frontal to prevent him from getting the ball back.

If the aim of this technique is for a very good player to pass the ball, it would be counter productive to allow him to play 1v1, particularly against a defense that has extended itself, with defenders committed in rotations. Anticipating this and taking him out of the play forces the other four offensive players to create their own shot, possibly with less success and therefore advantage for our opponents.

4. FORCE BASELINE

This is a technique that can be used when the player setting the screen is not a good outside shooter and we wish to force the player with the ball towards a part of the court where there are not many passing lanes available. In **diagram 19** defender X1 is in a position where he is forcing his opponent towards the baseline, different to what we have seen up until now. This is done knowing that X4 is in a help position, eventually allowing O4 to receive a pass near the free throw line. Before explaining what the defenders on the help side must do, we will look at the technique that X1 and X4 must employ in more detail.
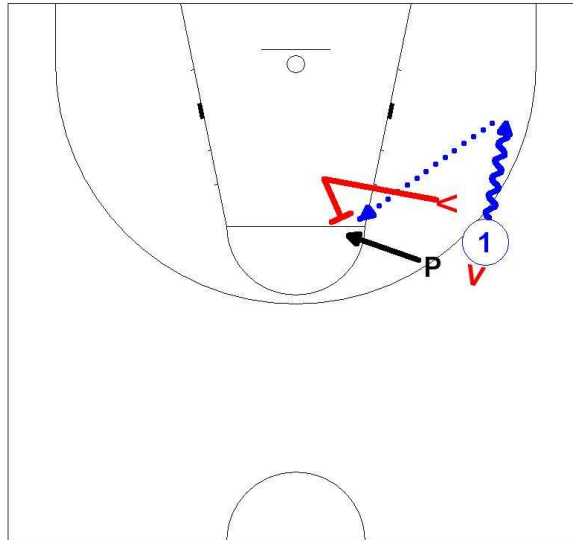
X1 will be in contact with O1 (in the example illustrate din diagram 19 he could even have his right forearm on the left hip of O1, forcing him to lower his head and try to dribble penetrate, without offering him the possibility of shooting, passing or dribbling under control).

LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 19
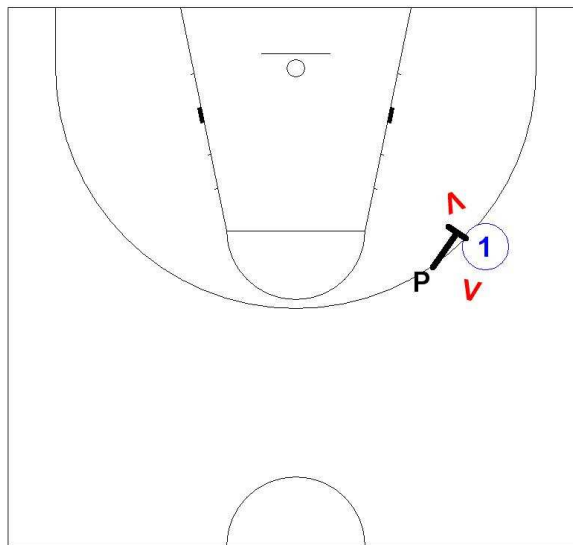
X4 will position himself in a line parallel to the sideline and perpendicular to where O4 is (**diagram 20**), with his arms out, ready to stop any penetration by O1 and recover to O4 should he receive the ball. If X4 were to position himself further back than this imaginary perpendicular line, not only would his recovery to O4 be more difficult, but it would also allow O4 to cut in front of him, establishing a dangerous position near to the basket (**diagram 21**).
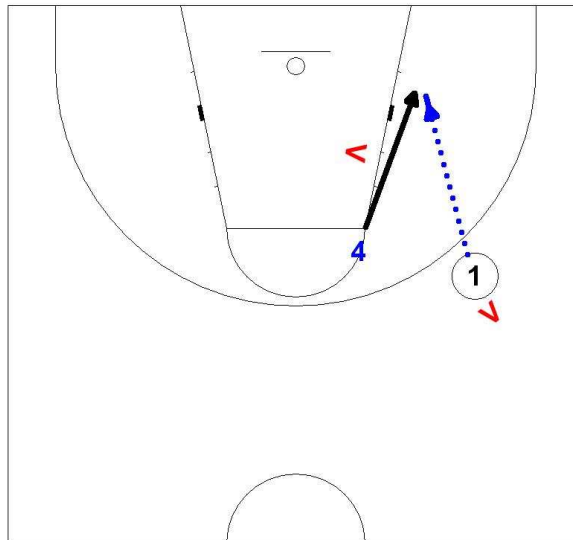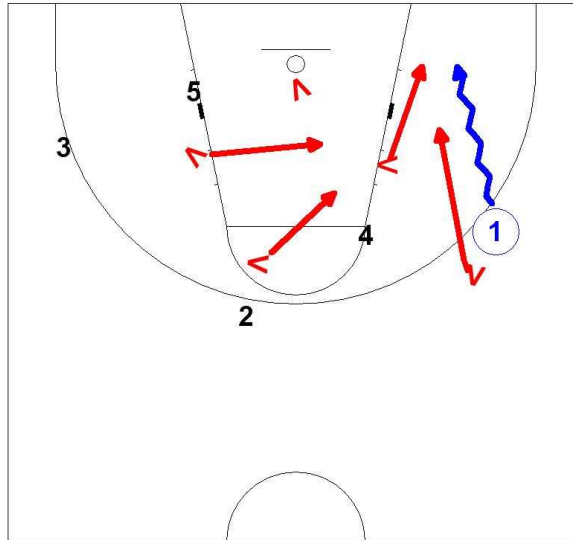
When we force the player baseline, the defenders furthest away from the ball are also vital.

In **diagram 22** there is an example illustrated with X2 helping at the high post, for a moment leaving the player furthest away from the ball open, should O1 dribble towards the baseline.

If O1 passes quickly to O4 (**diagram 23**), the defense assuming that O4 is not a good shooter will try to take advantage of this, aggressively double teaming to ensure the ball is not passed back to the best shooter, with X4 closing out and recovering his position in a balanced way.
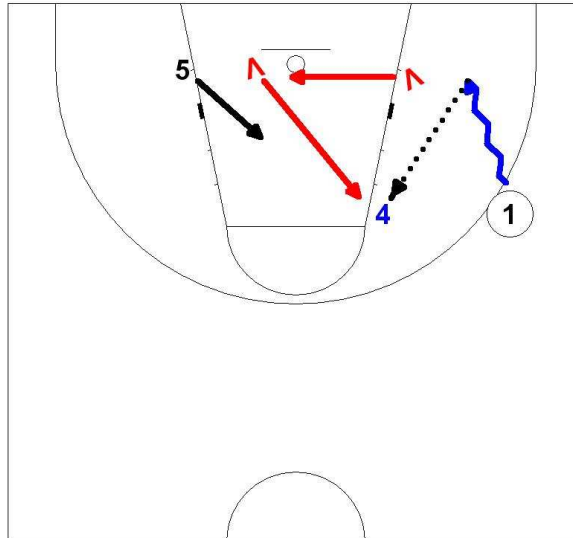
LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 23
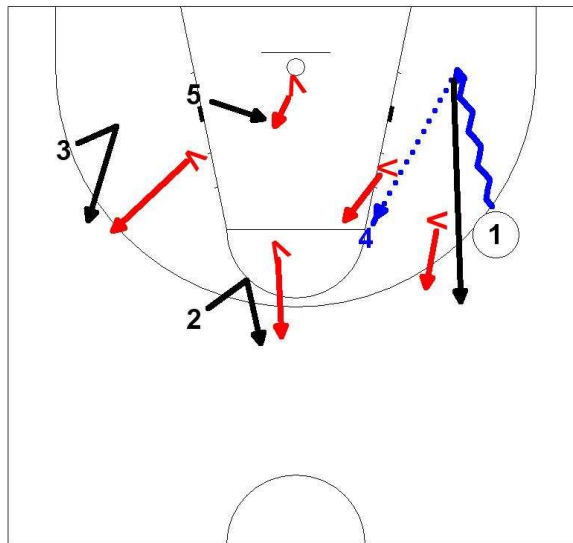
Forcing baseline can also be a valid option if O4 is an average shooter, and if O1 is such a good shooter that we prefer him to dribble penetrate before shooting a three pointer. In each case I prefer the eventual adjustments on O4 come from the outside players, without ever involving the low post defender in an improbable rotation between X4 and X5 which with the ball in the high post would be very dangerous (**diagram 24**).
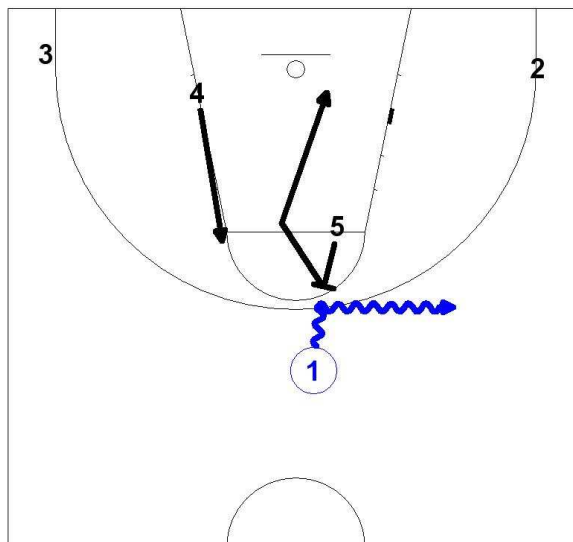
The techniques that we have illustrated in the four points above can be applied also for a middle pick & roll, something increasingly common in recent years (**diagram 25**).

It is worth looking at the defensive rotations by X4 and X5 after the pick & roll, independent of the technique used to defend it, always bearing in mind that O2 and O3 will be reasonable shooters. If they were not it would be easy to have their defenders help in the restricted area therefore complicating O1's dribble penetration. If O5 turns towards the basket, we would ask X4 to wait for him at the free throw circle, looking to eventually take the baseline, whilst X5 once the help is finished would defend O4 along with X3 (who is defending the player furthest away from the ball), ready for further help if necessary (**diagram 26**). X3's movement will also be decisive when O5 if he is a good shooter pops to the side inside of rolling to the basket. In this case X4 would be left with O4 and X5 would recover to his own man, for a moment being helped by X3 (**diagram 27**).

LESSON 06
PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 26
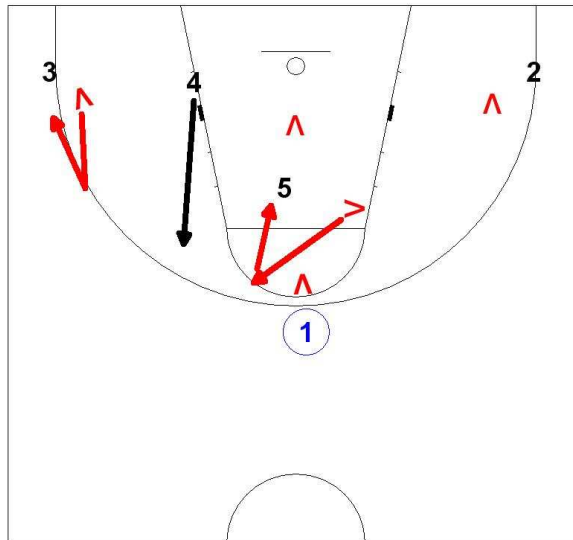
LESSON 06
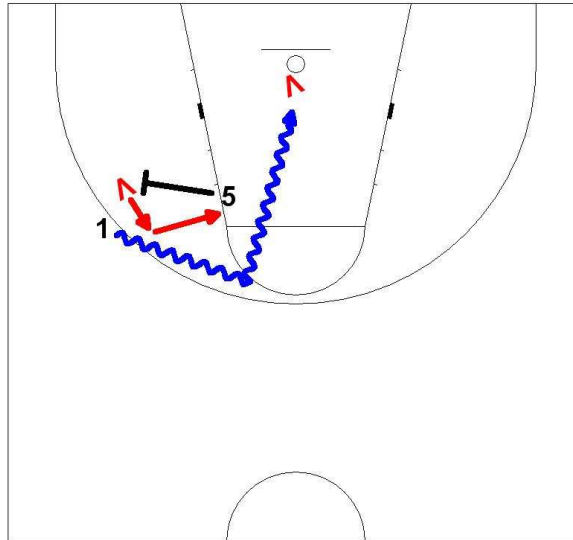PICK & ROLL DEFENSE
DIAGRAM 27
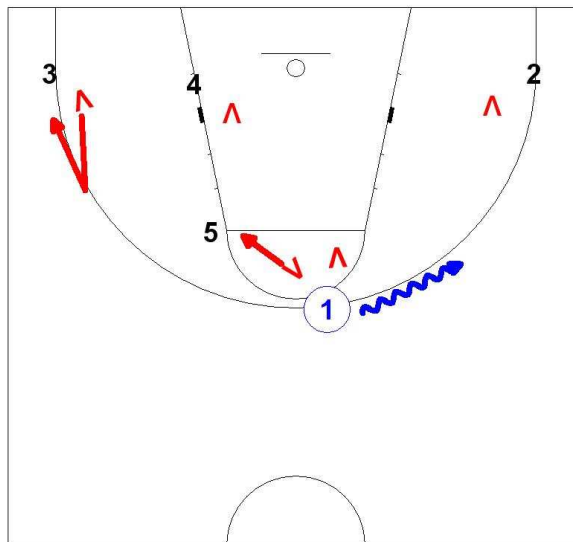
Our defense will continue to aggressively and with correct positioning look to force our opponents to make one more pass to find an open player instead of passively following the screen which would favor O1.

Although our defensive organization depends on the good will of our athletes, it is not always possible, particularly due to the quality of our opponents, to cutoff penetration. The situation that is repeated most often is when the help on the screen for whatever reason does not come in time. In this situation above all, X1 must have started to correctly go over the screen. When it is obvious that the help is not coming, I prefer to "push the opponent into the restricted area", before leaving him open outside for a shot (**diagrams 28-29**). In the case of a mistake I prefer forcing the dribbler towards the forward who is waiting for him (X5), allowing him only the possibility to stop and shoot a contested jump shot in the middle of the restricted area. This emergency technique is also used as a defensive technique by teams who have great shot blockers who can dominate the restricted area but who find themselves with problems if trying to aggressively close out perimeter players.
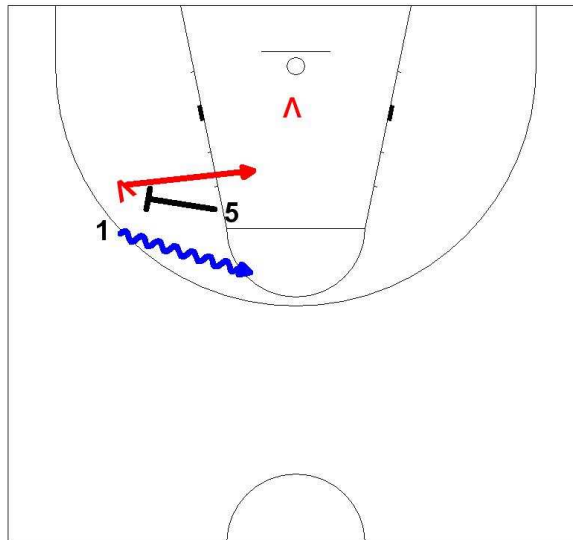
REMEMBER

- Pressure on the ball and the aggressiveness of defenders on both players is decisive to not suffer the consequences of a pick & roll
- Hedge & recover: as a general rule, without switching between the big and the small
- Go underneath: against outside players who dribble penetrate but do not have a good outside shot
- Double team the dribbler: against a very good player who we wish to force to pass the ball before finishing the play
- Force baseline: against a screener who does not shoot well from outside
- You cannot effectively defend the pick & roll without the help of the three players not directly involved in the pick & roll