



THREE OF A KIND

Course 01: Coach Ettore Messina

Lesson 24: Game Planning

Language: English

GAME PLANNING

The day to day on court work of a senior team has only one goal: game planning. This work tends to be divided into four:

1. Getting to know the opponent
2. Getting our team ready (application of our own offensive and defensive rules to our opponents individual and collective characteristics)
3. Preparing our game plan
4. Presenting our opponents to our team

GETTING TO KNOW THE OPPONENT

Other than during the playoffs, every game is different from the last one due to the opponent changing. It is based on getting to know the opponent that the game plan is prepared. We do this by watching previous games (normally the last three, as well as any others that we consider of interest such as struggling to play against a particular type of defense, using combination defenses etc.) We prepare a scouting report that contains:

1. Man offense and zone offense

2. Individual players characteristics and tendencies
3. Team characteristics (how they play on offense and defense, their goals, their game philosophy)

GETTING OUR TEAM READY

At this point we start the real, authentic preparation: planning how we want to defend their offense and how we want to attack their defense. In other words, we decide what we will do in practice in order to prevent our opponent from reaching their goals and to impose our style of play over theirs.

In order to do this we have tried to work using concepts, working to apply our offensive and defensive rules against their style of play. On occasion there may be exceptions where we are forced to make changes to our habits in order to better adapt to our opponents.

When preparing our defense for example, we concentrate on how many and which plays they use, as well as their goals and what style of play they are looking to exert. Here are some examples:

DEFENDING OUR OPPONENTS

e.g. Our opponent has a center who is very good playing 1v1. We know that our opponents coach wants the ball in the low post before any shot. If the ball reaches the low post and is in the hands of a good player, this is a difficult situation for our defense. What will we do? This can be addressed in two conceptually different ways:

1. We can ask what to do once the ball arrives in the low post
2. Or we can prevent the ball from arriving in the low post in the first place

We have tried to address this situation with the second option. Preventing the ball from arriving is a way of maintaining the initiative instead of passively waiting for the opponents to develop their offense and then reacting. Summing up, we do not wish to follow the decisions taken by our opponent.

Speaking practically, we have to defend a situation such as O5 is the player who we do not want to receive the ball. The ball is passed from O4 to O3, and at the same time O5 has a baseline screen set for him by O2 in order to receive the ball in the low post. Our defensive counter measures will be:

1. X3 denies O3 so that he cannot receive the ball, or at the very least so that he receives the ball as far away from the free throw line extended as possible
2. After receiving the ball we will pressure him. X3 will also funnel his player to the middle, preventing him from having a good passing lane to O5
3. X5 will go over the screen and this way always be ready to front and deny the pass

The combined defense by X3 and X5 is to deny an easy passing lane. We have done nothing more than applied our defensive rules to our opponents play. As we have mentioned before, this is not always possible.

ATTACKING THEIR DEFENSES

To plan our offense, as we have already mentioned re: defense we want to know what our opponents goals are. Therefore we need to know how they defend the following:

1. Side and middle pick & roll
2. Low post – 1v1, helping, double team, if so with which defender
3. Dribble penetration – collapsing in the restricted area, defending up the passing lane

As well as which combination defenses they use as an alternative to their man:

1. Even or odd fronted zone
2. Zone press, half court or full court
3. Combined defense – Box & 1, Triangle & 2, Matchup Zone

Based on this understanding we will plan our practices before the game. e.g. We will prepare how to attack a zone press following a free throw, how to attack a box & 1 or how to take the initiative after having been double teamed in the low post. Another example can help to illustrate how best to do this.

How do our opponents react when one of their players is beaten in a 1v1? How do they prevent dribble penetration? Many teams in this situation choose to protect the restricted area to prevent a scoring opportunity close to the basket, either from the player who is dribble penetrating or from a player who is free after help has come.

In this situation the defense fills the restricted area. When faced with this we can always create an advantage by spacing our outside players. It will be far easier to make a pass to a teammate on the three point line, ready to shoot than making a pass to an inside player.

In order to achieve this our outside players must maintain good spacing, always seeing the ball and having their back to the corner (**diagram 5**). Also in this case we have applied our defensive rules.

Our game plan will simply be the application of our offensive and defensive rules against the characteristics of our opponents and in order to save time (when you are playing 2 or 3 games per week this is very important) I recommend teams to reinforce their own identity and technique. This way we want our team to impose our technical and tactical choices on the opponent, and avoid having to constantly change our rules be they offensive or defensive.

PREPARING OUR GAME PLAN

The game plan is nothing more than a prediction of how we believe the game will evolve on the court – we make an effort to imagine the game and “play it” before hand. Some of the questions we will ask ourselves are:

1. What type of defenses will we face?
2. What defenses will we use, at what moments in the game, and against which group of players?
3. Which of our players will we use more often on offense? Which players can be most effective based on the individual and team characteristics of our opponents? Even more so, which of our players are best positioned to attack a certain defensive concept?
4. How can we react to the potential changes in formation and playing style of our opponents?
5. When will we switch defensively? (e.g. only between inside players or between outside players)

PRESENTING OUR OPPONENTS TO OUR TEAM

We will only talk explicitly to our team about our opponents the day before the game. During the team meeting prior to practice we show our players a quarter from one of their recent games (during 20-30 minutes maximum). The goal is for our team to have an idea of what type of play our opponents have. e.g.

1. How they attack
2. How they defend
3. How much importance they put on their fast break and how this is developed
4. The main characteristics of our individual opponents
 - a. Their preferred moves and ways to finish a play
 - b. Their defensive weaknesses
 - c. Their role in the fast break
 - d. Whether or not they are active on the offensive glass
 - e. Whether or not they often get to the free throw line
 - f. Their shooting percentage

Our players also receive information regarding:

1. Starting Five
2. Defensive Matchups
3. Game Plan
4. What we will do during practice

On the day of the game, usually before the morning shootaround we show the team a video edit of maximum 10 minutes duration to reinforce the most important points from the scouting report that we have prepared.

