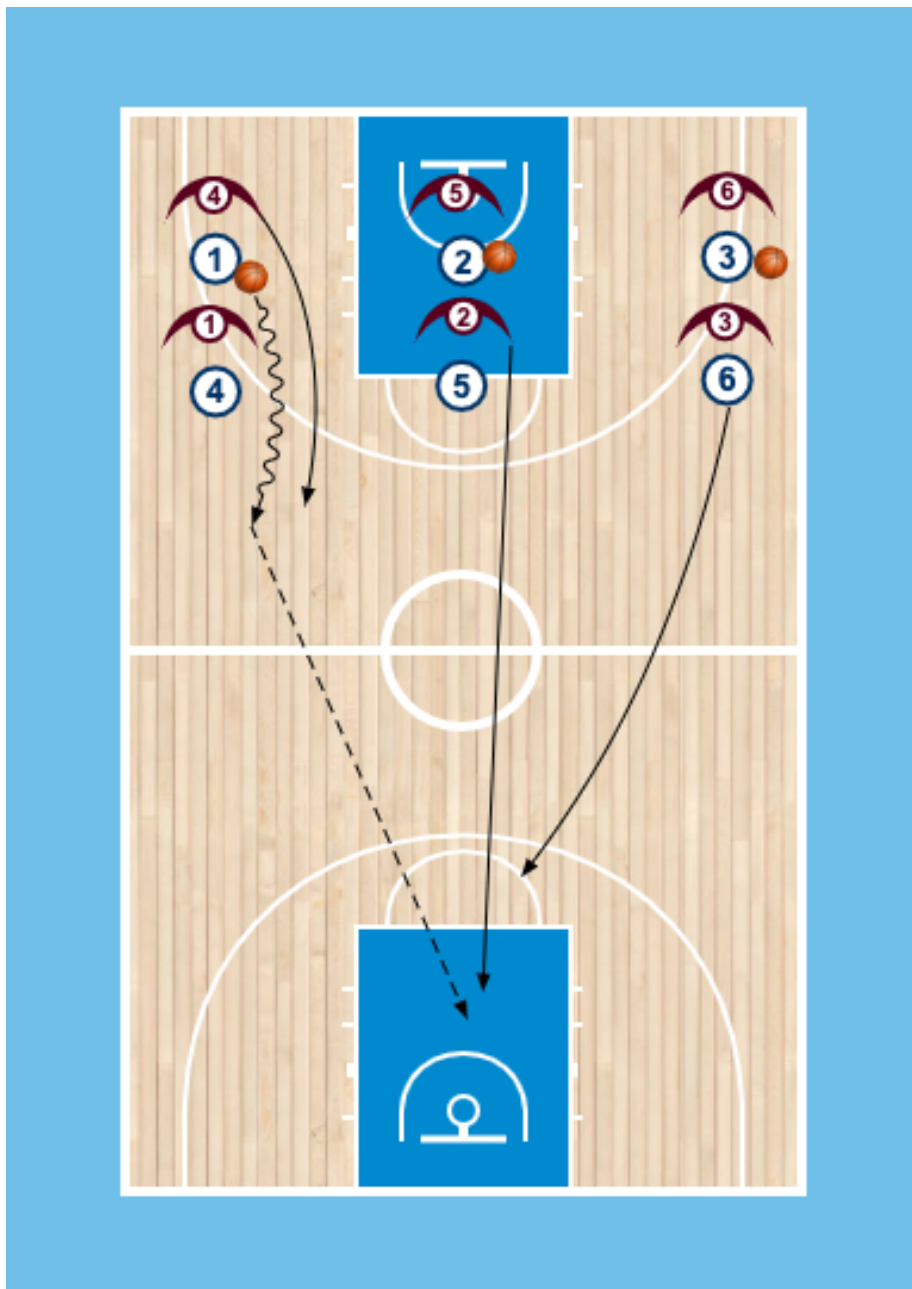


# Efficient Basketball Drills

36 Practice Tasks for Applying  
Complex Basketball Coaching



By Harri Mannonen



# **Efficient Basketball Drills**

## **36 Practice Tasks for Applying Complex Basketball Coaching**

**By Harri Mannonen**

Copyright 2023 © Harri Mannonen

Diagrams © Harri Mannonen

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without the written permission of the publisher. All inquiries should be addressed to:

Harri Mannonen: [harrimannonen@hotmail.com](mailto:harrimannonen@hotmail.com).

Published by Toiminimi Harri Mannonen (Kotka, Finland)



# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>7</b>
<b><u>PRINCIPLES FOR USING DRILLS</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>1V1 DRILLS</u></b>	<b>13</b>
Break From Three Rows	14
Full Court 1v1	21
Full Speed Attack 1v1	24
Half Court Dummy 1v1	28
Ten-Second Drill	30
Three Close-Outs	34
<b><u>SMALL-SIDED GAMES</u></b>	<b>38</b>
Block-Out Queue	39
Break Versus X	42
Dummy 2v2	45
Stop the Dummy	48
<b><u>5V5 GAMES</u></b>	<b>50</b>
Lightningball	51
Scrimmage	53
Shell	54
<b><u>SHOOTING DRILLS</u></b>	<b>56</b>
Five Different Threes	57
Foot Threes	60
Free Throw Roulette	62
Ladder	63
One Two Three	65

Range	67
Six Precision Makes Plus One	69
Twelve Points and a Free Throw	71
Winners' Choice	73

PASSING, LAY-UP AND BALLHANDLING DRILLS 74

Ballhandling Mimic	75
Battle in the Circle	78
Bounce Pass for a Lay-Up	81
Coast to Coast on Demand	83
Full Court Slalom	85
Lay-Up Merry-Go-Round	87
Lay-Up Show	90
Mimic Drives	91
Passin' All Over the Court	92
360 Degree Passing	94
Six Trips	96
Speed Dribble Coast to Coast	98

MOVEMENT WITHOUT THE BALL DRILLS 102

Without the Ball Mimic	103
Without the Ball on Demand	105

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 107

# **INTRODUCTION**

What kind of basketball drills are efficient?

That's the question we look to answer in this book.

I haven't invented the drills. Almost all of them I have learned from other coaches.

Some drills I think are my original ideas but they, too, have probably been used by other coaches without my knowing.

In most cases I can't recall from whom, where, and when I learned a certain drill. Where I do remember, I give credit to whom the credit is due.

Those coaches, too, probably picked up the drills someplace. We're all standing on the shoulders of, not giants but, people who came before us.

Hopefully, we can someday lend shoulders to those who follow us.

You can read *Efficient Basketball Drills* as such, as a collection of useful basketball-specific drills.

Yet it can also be read in a specific context, as hinted by the subtitle *36 Practice Tasks for Applying Complex Basketball Coaching*.

I outlined the complex basketball coaching paradigm in my 2019 e-book *Complex Basketball Coaching*.

It challenges the traditional, reductionistic basketball coaching paradigm.

In *Complex Basketball Coaching* I look to build a theoretically sound basis for the complex coaching paradigm.

In *Efficient Basketball Drills* I discuss drills that can be utilised to put the complex paradigm into praxis.

You may benefit from the drills even if you don't know the complex coaching paradigm. However, *Efficient Basketball Drills* makes more sense if you do know the underlying assumptions.

As a teaser, or a reminder, here are a few basic ideas that underlie complex systems thinking and the complex coaching paradigm.

In all systems, the parts' functioning affects the system's functioning. For example, the motor's functioning affects how a car functions. That is Bottom-Up effect.

In other systems, there is no Top-Down effect but in complex systems there is. Or it is not just that the parts affect the whole but also that the whole affects the parts.

For example, a basketball team is a complex system and the players are its parts. The players affect how the team plays but also the team affects how its players play.

Also, as complex systems interact, they affect each other's functioning. For example, a basketball game is two teams' unitary conflict where they continuously affect each other's functioning.

Consequently, in the complex coaching paradigm it is assumed that we should not practice technical and tactical skill in isolation. Rather, we should practice our ability to interact with our teammates and the opponents so that our team should win the game.

This theoretical stance has practical consequences. That is, for one to optimally practice interaction, she should have teammates and opponents to interact with. So, few drills are run without them.

This contradicts the prevalent reductionistic coaching tradition. It claims that the most efficient way for a player to learn is to practice technical skills in isolation, or without interaction with teammates and opponents.

This difference shows for example in shooting practice.

The reductionistic tradition emphasises first learning to shoot without a defender, applying pressure, and without teammates, providing passing options.

The complex paradigm puts more emphasis on learning to shoot within a game-like context, that is with defender and teammates present right from the beginning of practicing.



The better you understand the complex coaching paradigm, the better you can develop upon what's discussed here, and the more incisively you can criticise it.

Also, the complex coaching paradigm helps to understand why I've excluded some drills imbedded deep in the basketball coaching tradition.

In coaching what we don't do is just as important as what we do do.

The structure of *Efficient Basketball Drills* is simple. This introduction is followed by a few principles on how to utilise the drills, and then there are the descriptions of the 36 drills included.

Some of the drills in *Efficient Basketball Drills* are familiar from *Complex Basketball Coaching*. However, the text has been revised, and diagrams have been added to drills.

These coaches have been direct sources: **Hubie Brown, Jorma Bruce, Joonas Iisalo, Tuomas Iisalo, K.C. Jones, Sulo Kuikka** and **Kari Liimo**. Certainly, I may have misunderstood their ideas or varied them beyond recognition.

# **PRINCIPLES FOR USING DRILLS**

## **1) Limit the number of drills.**

- Teaching the team to run drills takes practice time. So, have your team learn as few drills as possible.
- Yet variability is a virtue, too. To grow the variability, it'd seem to make sense to implement a whole bunch of drills.
- We must deal with this contradiction, or combine scarcity and variability. The best option is to select drills that can easily be varied.
- It's sometimes difficult to draw a line between a variant of a drill and a separate drill.

## **2) Make up impromptu drills.**

- Some drills have been with me for a long time. Some have come and gone.
- Some are gone because they didn't meet the criteria I set for drills.
- Some come-and-gones did what they were supposed to do, yet were dismissed. That's because their scope was limited to begin with.
- For example, I may have run a drill in order to improve a particular part of the then-current defensive scheme. The defensive scheme may have changed later, leaving the particular drill useless.
- So, though I'm listing all basketball-specific drills that I'm using regularly, the list is not comprehensive regarding my current practice sessions.
- That's because I also use temporary, impromptu drills designed for a context-bound purpose.

### **3) Minimise your instructions.**

- When running a novel drill, minimise your practical instructions regarding practicalities, such as rotations. That saves time.
- This will sometimes backfire. Sometimes you'll have to stop action and give more instructions. Yet you're still saving time.
- If a few brief instructions are not enough to get the drill going, maybe the drill is too complicated to begin with and you should scrap it.

### **4) Be specific about your purpose.**

- Only run a drill if you think it will help you reach a specific goal and, consequently, win games.
- This may sound obvious, yet we often we run drills just because we are used to running them.

### **5) Consider your context.**

- The 36 drills included in *Efficient Basketball Drills* are all ones that I've found to benefit our performance.
- Yet they may not be good for you but you must keep an eye on what they do to your team.

### **6) Consider what you don't do.**

- In coaching, as in everything, what you don't do is just as important as what you do.
- For example, even if a drill is useful, it might be a good idea to ignore it.
- That's because you're not looking for useful practice tasks but for optimally efficient practice tasks, and those are two different things.

## **7) Utilise modifiers.**

- In their most basic form, a lot of drills in the book do not comply with the complex coaching paradigm.
- That is, there may be one offensive player with the ball and nothing else.
- Often this basic form is only used when learning the drill. Later, extras are added as defenders and as offensive players, making the action complex.
- Often, once some extras have been added, the drills begin to resemble each other. They all become small-sided games.

## **8) Don't be a purist.**

- If you believe that a drill will help your team, run the drill even if it contradicts your underlying theoretical assumptions. Don't be a purist.
- Sooner or later, one of the two things will happen. You either find out that the drill didn't your team any good, or you reassess and refine your theoretical assumption.

## **1V1 DRILLS**

In their basic form, these drills start out as 1v1 actions. Then, if players and extras are added, a drill turns into a small-sided game and becomes more complex.

Running a drill in its 1v1 form may be just a preparatory phase on the way towards more game-like action.

However, you may maintain some drills as 1v1 tasks for good. It is just that then their limitations must be recognised.

## **Break From Three Rows**

**Category:** 1v1.

**Emphasis:** Scoring off a full-speed breakaway lay-up with or without defense.

**Setup:** Full squad. Full court. One ball per two or three players, depending on the modification.

**Duration:** 6–8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extra.

**Miscellaneous:** *"Four lines, from three rows"*, the most complicated modification of the drill, may be the most complicated one in this whole book. Yet it may be worth learning if you start with *"Two lines, from one row"* and keep adding complications layer by layer.

### **Procedure**

- Players line-up as shown in diagram 1.
- The number of players and balls in each row will depend on the number of players.
- As the coach calls "Go!", two players at the right-hand side row (X1 and X4) take off.
- X1 makes a pass to X4 who scores on a lay-up.
- X1 rushes in for the offensive rebound.
- The call "Go!" implies it's time to go. Rows take turns: right, middle, left, right and so on.
- So on the coach's second call, it's the middle row (X2 and X5) that goes. (Diagram. 2.)
- Once all players are at the other end, they're change lines and rows and go the other way.
- This basic variation is called *"Two lines, from one row"*.

## **Modifications**

### "Two lines, from two rows"

- As the coach calls "Go!", the player with the ball at the right-hand side row (X1) takes off.
- The coach has her left hand raised. She lifts one, two, or three fingers.
- This determines from which row the first-line offensive player takes off. One finger implies the right-hand side row, two fingers the middle, and three fingers the left-hand side.
- For example, in diagram 3 the coach has lifted three fingers so it's X6 who goes.
- The coach may make the vocal call and the finger call simultaneously or at different times.
- The timing of the calls affects the types of passes and lay-ups that occur.
- For example, compare diagrams 3, 4 and 5. In all three the finger call is three but its timing is different.
- In diagram 3 X1 and X6 get going at the same time. Consequently, X1 may take a couple of dribbles to advance the ball before passing to X6 for a lay-up.
- In diagram 4, the coach lift the three fingers before the "Go!" call. Thus #6 has already made it to a scoring position when #1 is allowed to act. So there's no dribbling on his part but just a long pass.
- In diagram 5, the coach has made the "Go!" call before lifting the three fingers. So #1 is already attacking the basket herself when #6 starts running. That's why there may be no pass made at all.

### "Three lines, from two rows"

- In the three line modifications there's an additional line of defenders. See O1, O2 and O3 in diagram 6.
- Both three line modifications end up in a 2v1 live situation.
- In "Three lines, from two rows" the coach calls "Go!" and the player with the ball at the right-hand side row (X1) takes off. (Diagram 7.)
- The left hand finger call determines from which row both the first line offensive player and the chase down defender take off.
- The finger call may be made simultaneously or asynchronously with the vocal call.
- Diagram 7 illustrates the simultaneous call "Go! + Three fingers".
- Diagram 8 illustrates the same combination but called asynchronously. "Go!" has been called before the three fingers, giving X1 a head start relative to both O3 and X6.

### "Three lines, from three rows"

- Again, the vocal call "Go!" implies it's time for the ball handler to go.
- As in previous variation, the coach's left hand determines which offensive player in the first line takes off and when.
- Additionally in this variation, the coach uses her right hand to determine which chase down defender takes off and when.
- For example, in diagram 9 signals have been made in this order:
  1. Right hand two fingers
  2. Left hand three fingers
  3. Verbal call "Go!"



### "Four lines, from three rows"

- This is the same drill as "*Three lines, three rows asynchronously*" with one important exception.
- The exception is that there is now a fourth line of players. They chase down defenders behind the ball handlers. See O4, O5 and O6 in diagram 10.
- Again, the vocal call "Go!" implies it's time for the ball handler to go. But this time also the fourth line chase down defender goes just as soon as the ball handler goes. (See diagram 10.)
- Just as in *Three lines, from three rows*, the coach's left hand determines which first line offensive player without the ball takes off and when, and the coach's right hand determines which second line defender takes off and when.
- For example, in diagram 10 calls have been made in this order:
  1. Right hand two fingers
  2. Left hand three fingers
  3. Verbal call "Go!"
- Since there are now four players involved, coming from four different lines, the play will eventually be 2v2.

### **Variations**

- Vary the starting positions of the offensive and defensive lines.
- Add an extra defender. She may set to protect the rim, so that none of the lay-ups will be uncontested. (Diagram 11.) Or she may roam around the floor unpredictably.

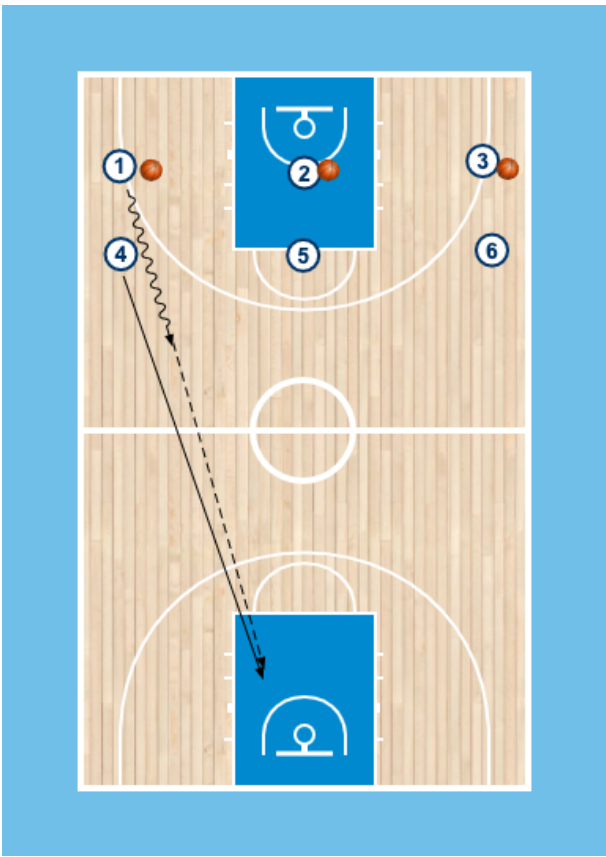


Diagram 1.

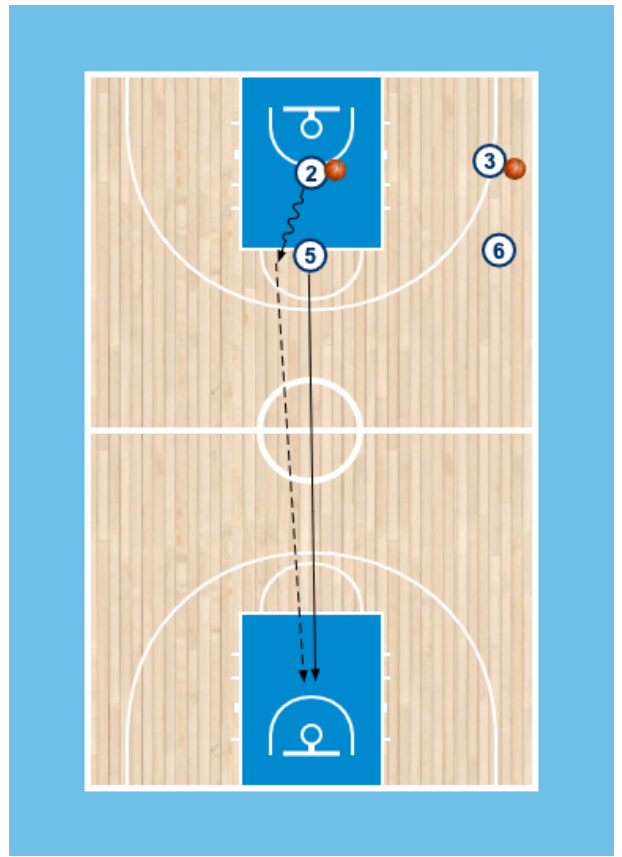


Diagram 2.

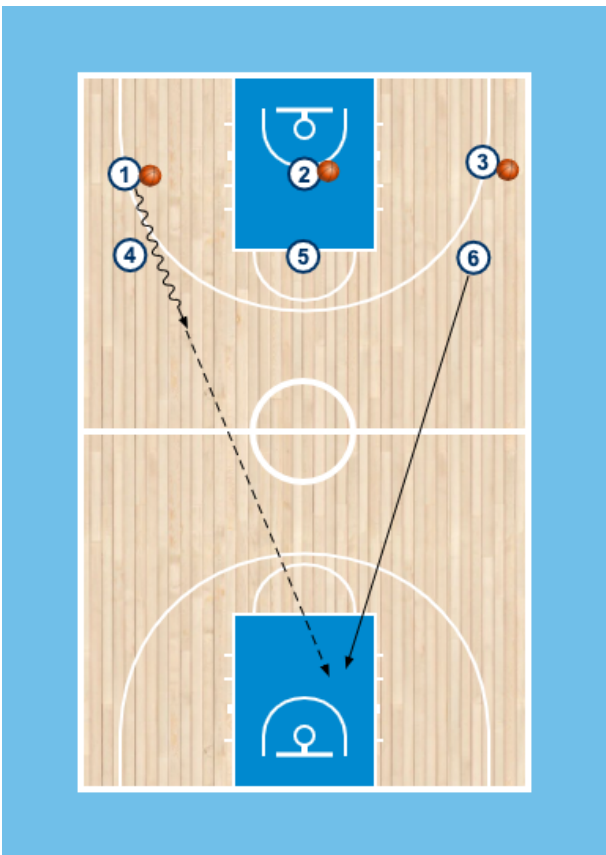


Diagram 3.

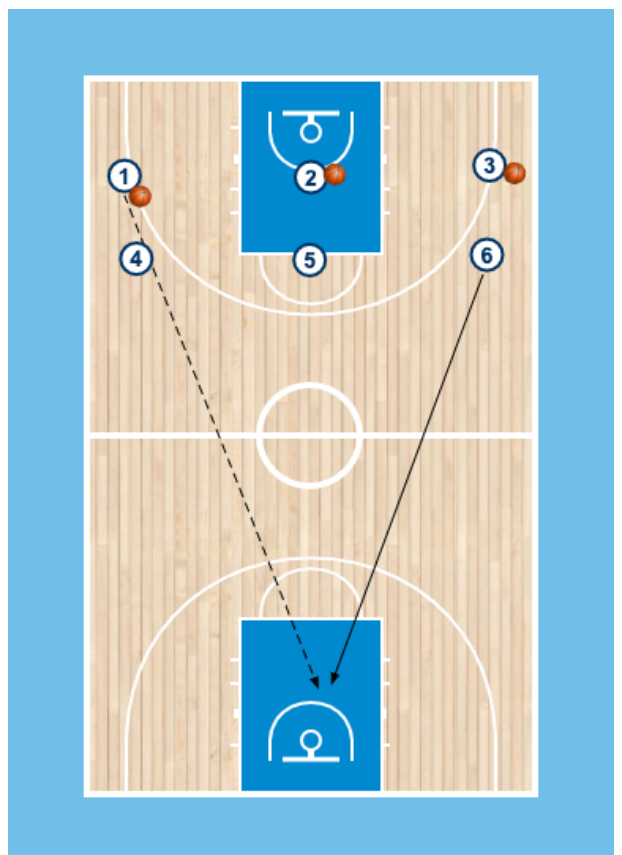


Diagram 4.

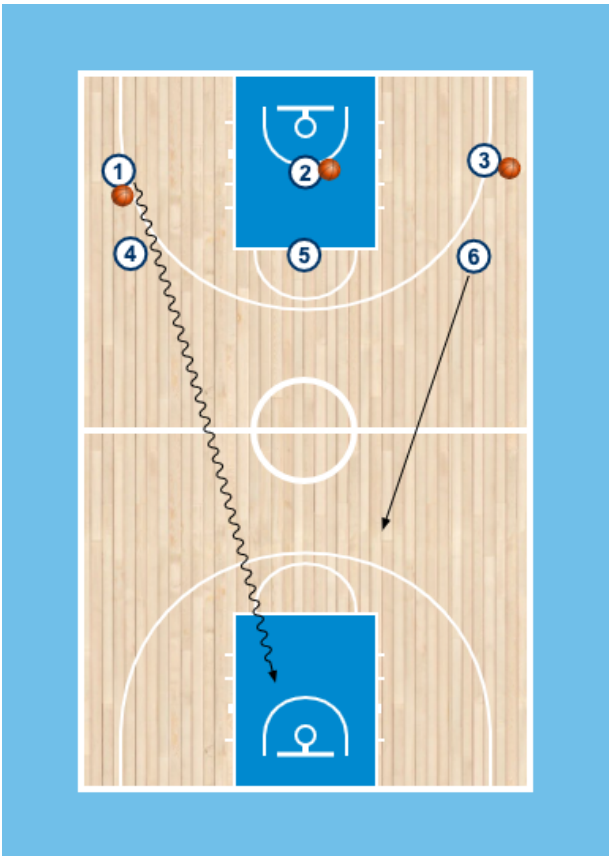


Diagram 5.

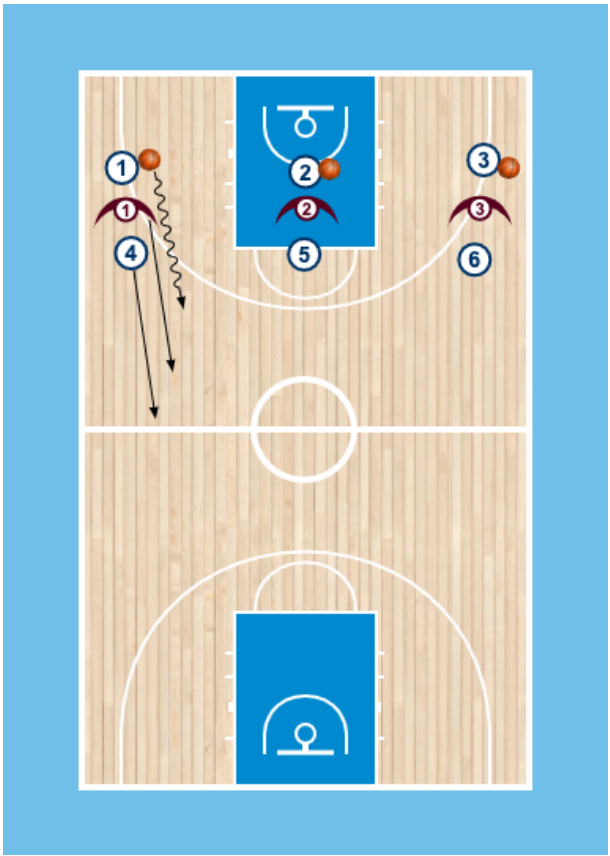


Diagram 6.

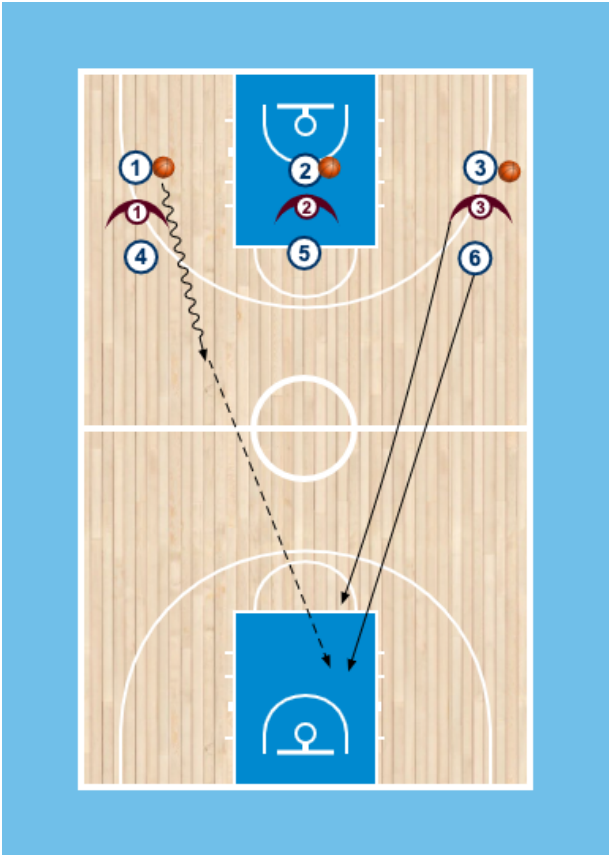


Diagram 7.

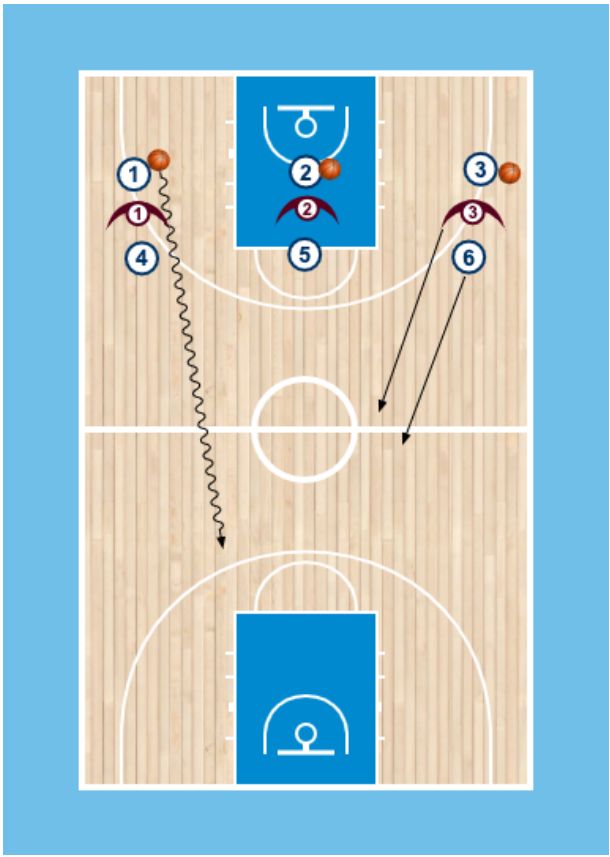


Diagram 8.

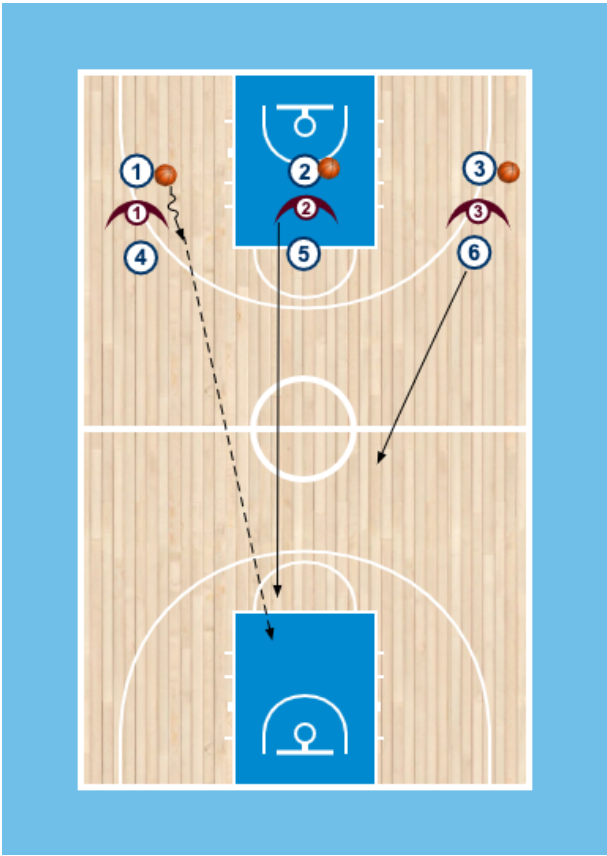


Diagram 9.

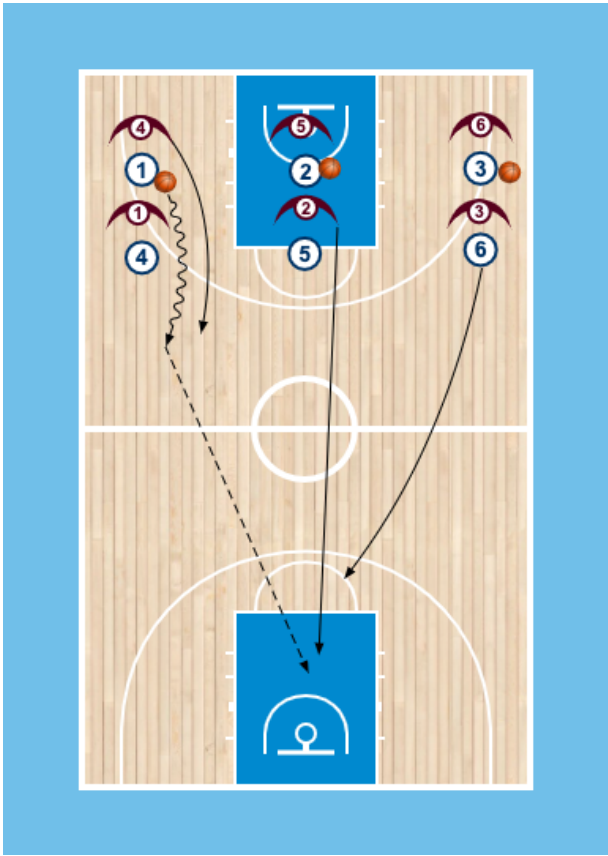


Diagram 10.

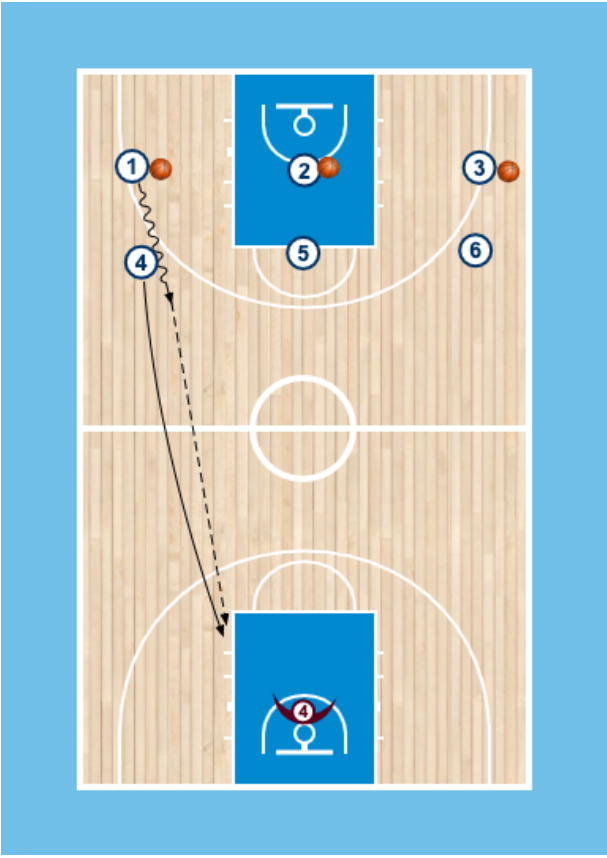


Diagram 11.

# **Full Court 1v1**

**Category:** 1v1.

**Emphasis:** Ball handling and passing when bringing the ball up the floor.  
Scoring off transition.

**Setup:** Two players. One or two extras. One ball. Full court.

**Duration:** 8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** This drill originates from the old Zig Zag where the offensive player is predetermined to first left, then cross and go right, cross and go left, and so on, and the defender stays in front using her best defensive footwork. Along the way the drill has evolved to better fit the complex coaching paradigm.

## **Procedure**

- The offensive extra X2 inbounds the ball from baseline out-of-bounds. (Diagram 1.)
- X1 attacks full speed end to end. O1 plays all-out defense.
- X2 moves around the floor. Anytime she raises her two open hands, X1 passes to her. (Diagram 2)
- X2 passes the ball back to X1 and she continues her 1v1 attack.
- To end the play, X1 tries to score.
- The play ends when there's a score or O1 gets a steal or a defensive rebound.
- A 16-second shot clock and the 8-second rule are in effect.

## **Variations**

- Follow with another possession where O1 gets the ball and attacks the other way.
- Shorten the shot clock to 8–12 seconds.
- Have defensive extra O2 provide help and protect the basket. She may also double X1. (Diagram 3.)
- End the game by flowing into live 2v2. Both extras then become a part of the live play.
- To initiate the 2v2 action, it may required that X1 brings the ball to a certain spot and makes a pre-determined play call. (Diagram 4)
- Alternatively, place X2 in the corner at the offensive end. If X2 stays in the corner with X2, X1 attacks 1v1 against O1. If X2 drops into the paint to help X1 against X1's drive, it becomes a full-blown 2v2 sequence.

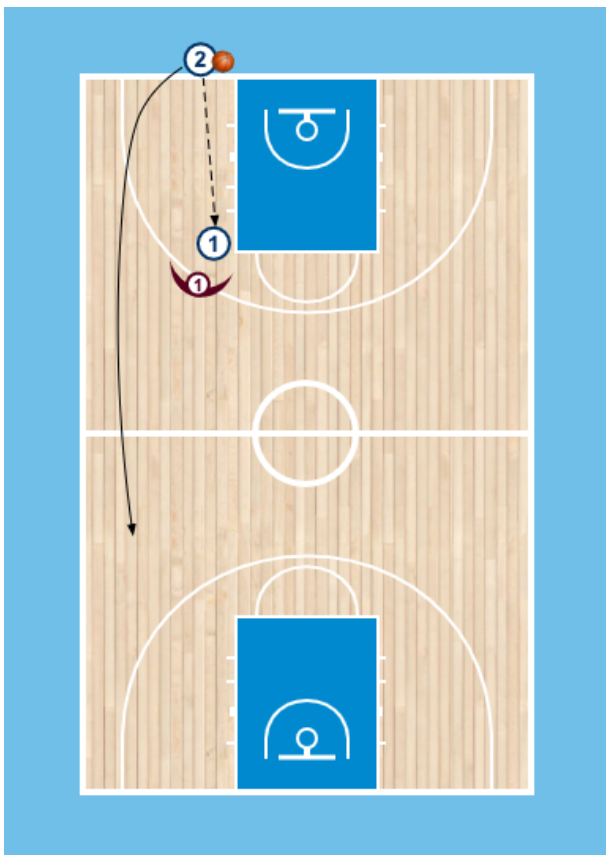


Diagram 1.

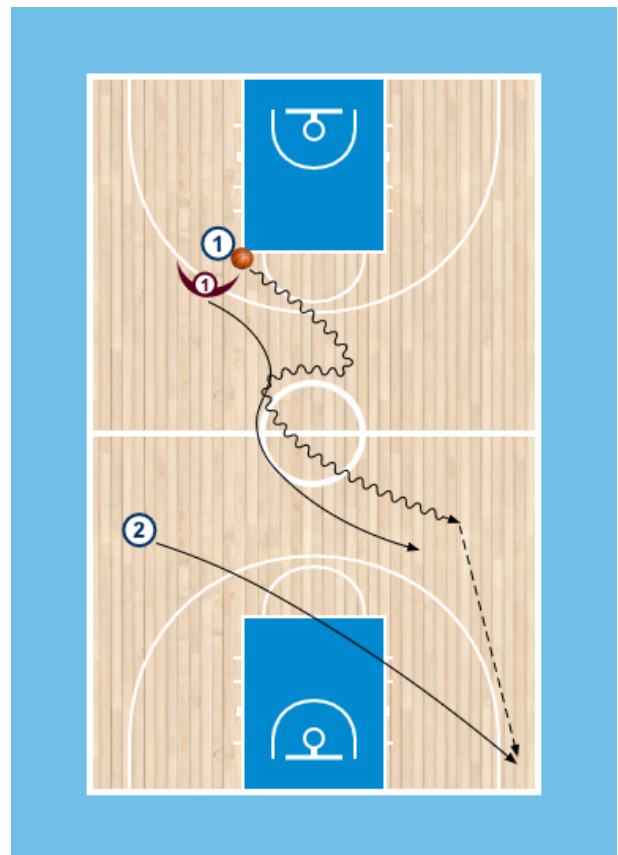


Diagram 2.

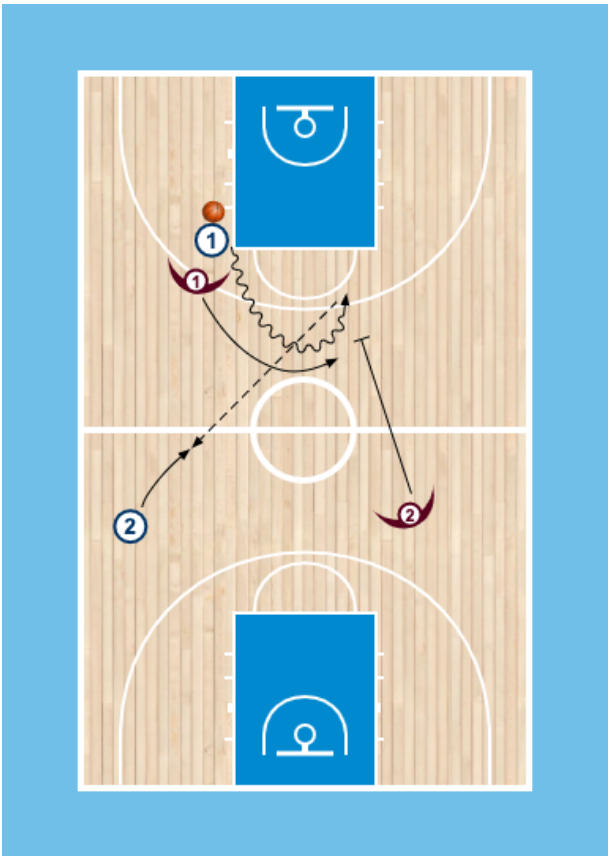


Diagram 3.

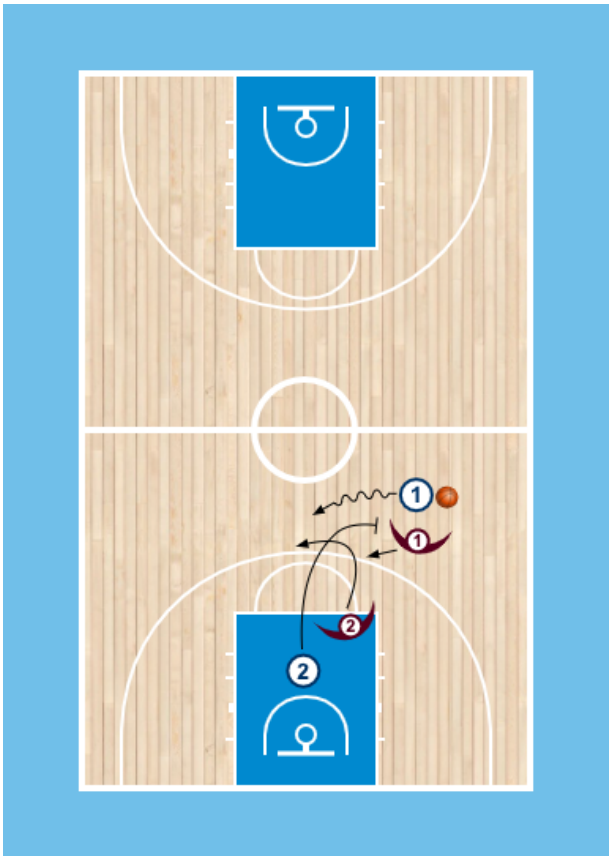


Diagram 4.

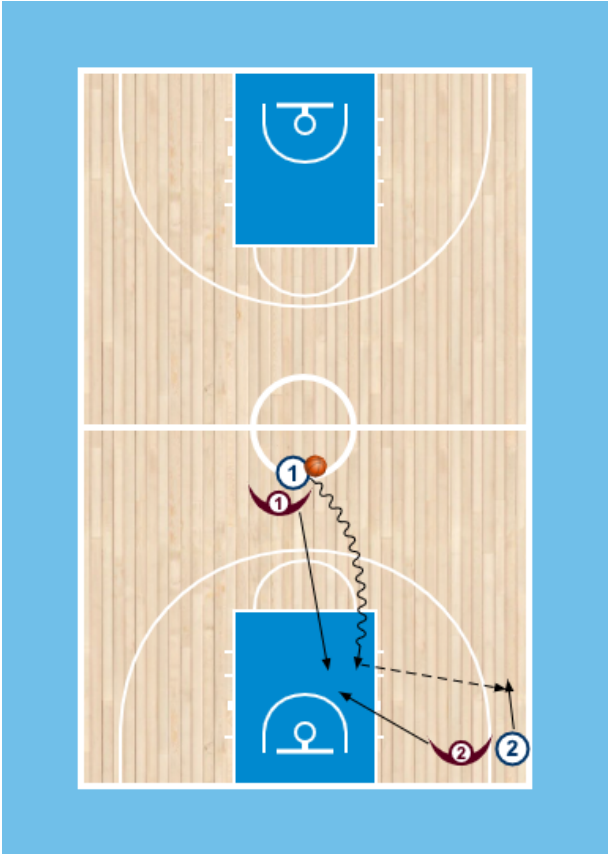


Diagram 5.

# **Full Speed Attack 1v1**

**Category:** 1v1.

**Emphasis:** Scoring off transition 1v1.

**Setup:** One defender at each end of the floor. All other players have the ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Shot clock.

**Miscellaneous:** This is one of those drills where the basic form is very simple but where there are lots of opportunities for more complex variations.

## **Procedure**

- O1 and O2 start under the basket at their end of the floor.
- The offensive players (X1 through X6) are at mid-court.
- At each end there's a coach (#C) involved in the drill. For the full set-up, see diagram 1.
- To start the action at one end X1 throws the ball to #C, cuts towards the basket and gets the ball back from #C. (Diagram 2.)
- As X1 is starting her attack, O1 closes out on her attack. The shot clock is six seconds.
- X1 and O1 play 1v1 until there's a score or O1 gets the ball.
- As soon as either thing happens, X3 throws the ball to #C and cuts. O1 closes out. X3 gets the ball back from #C and attacks O1.
- O1 and O2 stay on defense for three possessions, then switch onto offense.
- Contrastingly, on the offensive side, after the play X1 rotates to the other midcourt.



## **Modification**

- In *Full Speed Attack 2v2*, there are two offensive players and two defenders. (Diagram 4.)
- For as long as O1 stays in the corner area near X1, X3 attacks against O2 1v1.
- O1 may also move into the paint, triggering full 2v2 action. (Diagram 4)
- This procedure is the same as in *1v1 Full Court With Extras*.
- AX1 rotates to the midcourt and X3 replaces her in the corner.

## **Variations**

- Change the starting spots. For example, see diagram 5.
- For 1v1, shorten the shot clock to four seconds.
- For 2v2, lengthen the shot clock to eight or ten seconds.
- Add a second possession. When the defense gets the ball, they attack the other way.
- Limit the the number of passes or dribbles.

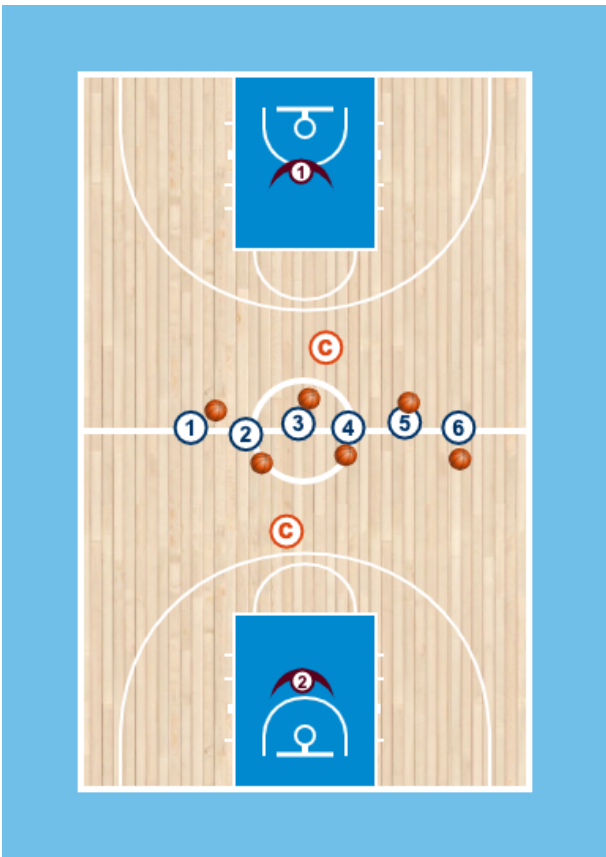


Diagram 1.

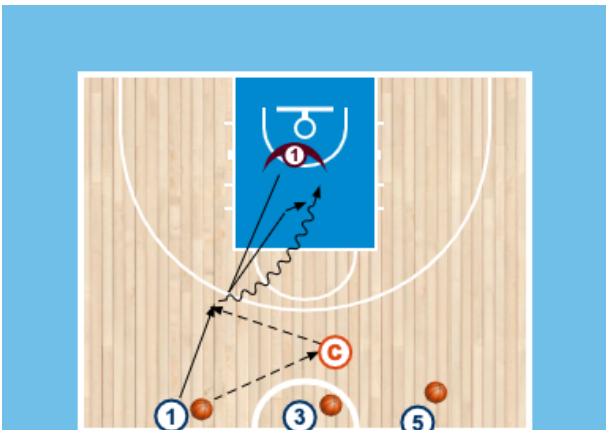


Diagram 2.

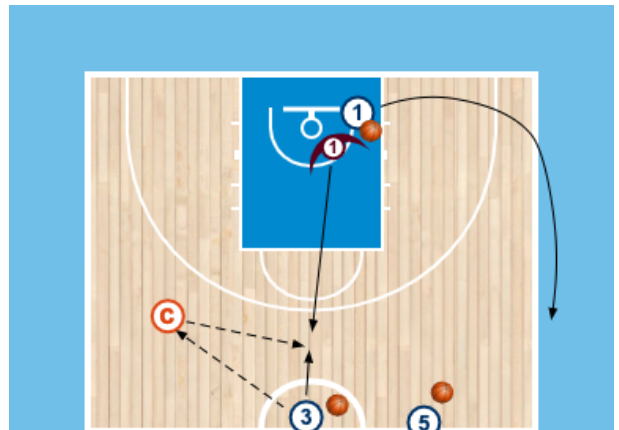


Diagram 3.

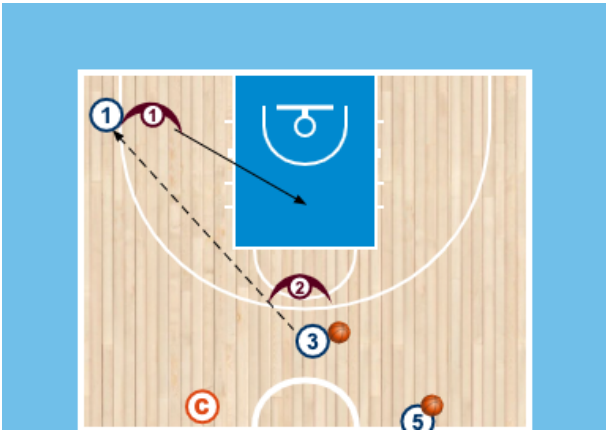


Diagram 4.

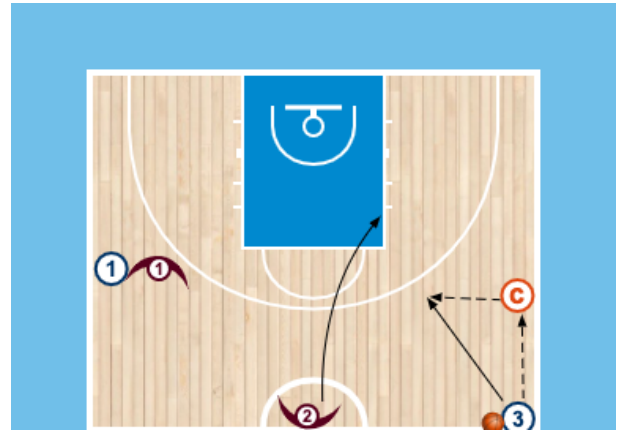


Diagram 5.

# **Half Court Dummy 1v1**

**Category:** 1v1.

**Emphasis:** Utilising advantage on the perimeter in a half-court situation.

**Setup:** Groups of two at each basket. One ball for each group. Up to four extras.

**Duration:** 6–8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** This is my go-to-drill when it comes to creating and utilising advantages at half-court

## **Procedure**

- X1 sets up on the perimeter, O1 has the ball where she chooses.(Diagram 1.)
- O1 makes a pass to X1, closes out on her and starts playing defense.
- X1 attacks with a three-second shot clock.
- O1 will change her starting points so that X1 will face different defenses.
- O1 may not close out at all but rather dare X1 to shoot a three. (Diagram 2.)
- If the initial shot is missed, O1 lets X1 get the offensive rebound. Then O1 contests X1's putback attempt.
- For the second play, X1 and O1 switch roles.

## **Variations**

- Vary what you mean by "dummy". A dummy defense may be made tight or loose or something in-between.
- Vary the length of the shot clock.
- Have O1 fight for the rebound if the shot is missed.

- Implement an extra passer or two who roam around the floor and every now and then ask for the ball. (Diagram 3.)
- Implement an extra defender or two who roam around the floor and assist the 1v1 defenders. (Diagram 4.)
- There may be extra passers and extra defenders simultaneously.

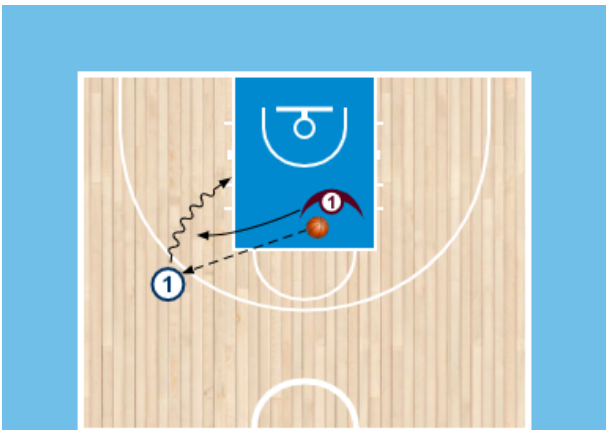


Diagram 1.

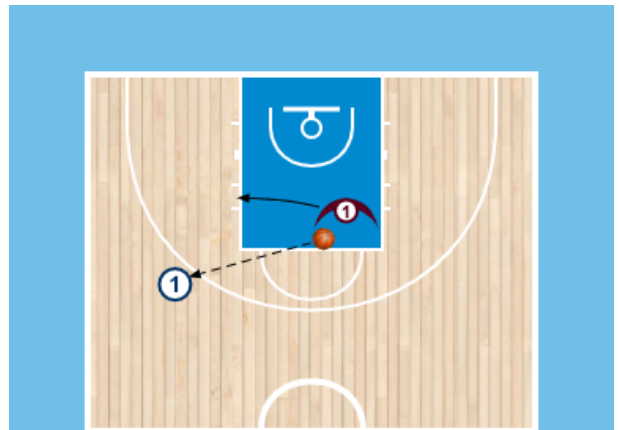


Diagram 2.

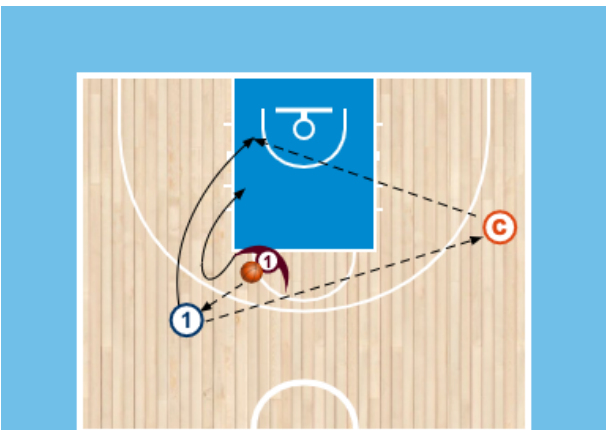


Diagram 3.

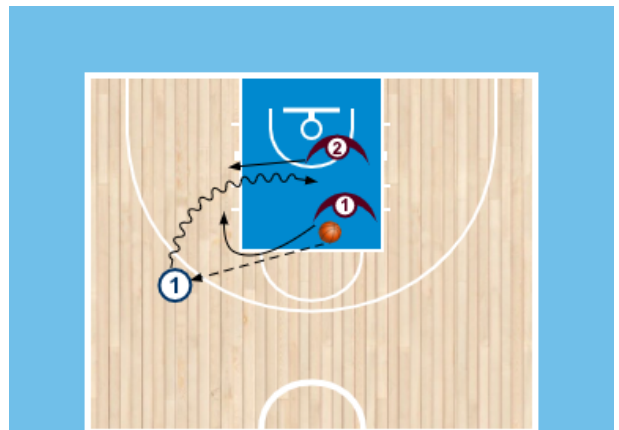


Diagram 4.

# **Ten-Second Drill**

**Category:** 1v1.

**Emphasis:** Applying pressure on the ball.

**Setup:** Two to five players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 6–8 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** I learned the drill's basic idea from **Hubie Brown** at a coaching clinic in 1989. In addition to applying pressure on the ball, Ten-Second Drill can be used to learn a multitude of defensive skills, for example squeezing over a ball screen.

## **Procedure**

- Players set up as in diagram 1. O1 passes the ball to X1 and closes out on her.
- X1 attacks the close out. O1 tries to stay in front. (Diagram 2.)
- After about six seconds, #C starts the shot clock countdown: "Three! Two! One! Buzzer!" X1 has until the buzzer to take a shot.
- If X1 misses and gets the offensive rebound, he'll attack again.

## **Modification**

### **Ten-Second Drill With Three Extras**

- Players set up as in diagram 3. X2, X3 and X4 assist X1.
- The action starts as X4 passes the ball to X1. O1 closes out on X1 and the play continues as in the plain *10-Second Drill*. (Diagram 4.)
- As soon as X2, X3 or X4 raises her two open hands, X1 makes a pass to her. O1 tries to deflect or steal it. (Diagram 5.)

- After the pass, the receiver looks to pass the ball back to X1. O1 tries to prevent the boomerang pass. (Diagram 6.)
- At the end of the ten-second shot clock, X1 attacks. The assistant get out of the way. (See X4 in diagram 7.)

## **Variations**

- \* Have X1 keep the ball until the shot clock countdown. In other words, she must first handle the ball for about six seconds under the pressure applied by O1.
- \* Instead of the shot clock countdown, have an extra raise her two fists up when X1 must attack the basket. For example, that might be X4 in diagram 7.
- \* Utilise different hand signals. For example, two fists up might mean attacking the basket. One fist up might be a quick pull-up.
- \* With three seconds to go on the shot clock, have an extra set a ball screen for X1. See diagram 8.
- \* Once #1 has passed the ball, have the receiver get the ball back to #1 via a hand-off. (Diagram 9.)
- \* If O1 gets a steal or rebound, have her attack the end with X1 becoming the defender. (Diagram 8.)

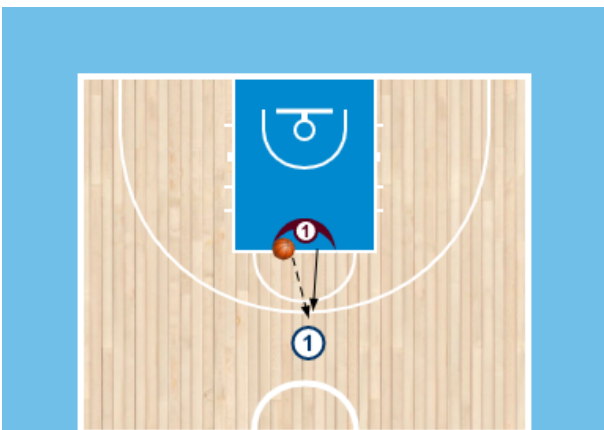


Diagram 1

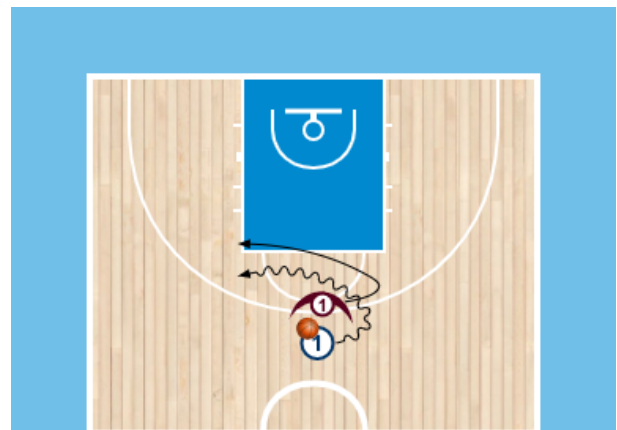


Diagram 2.

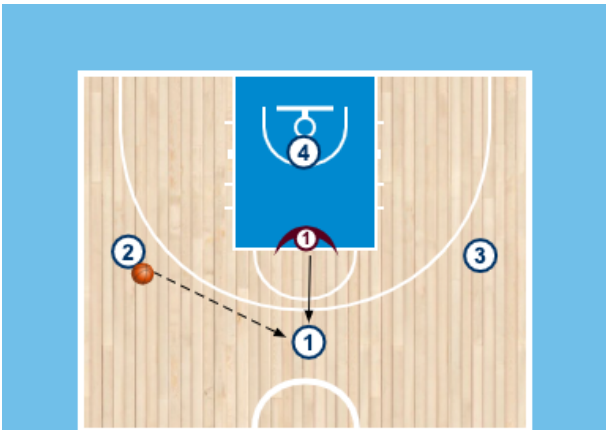


Diagram 3.

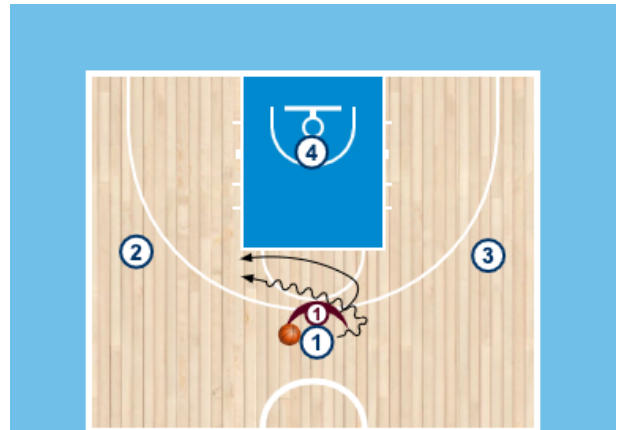


Diagram 4.

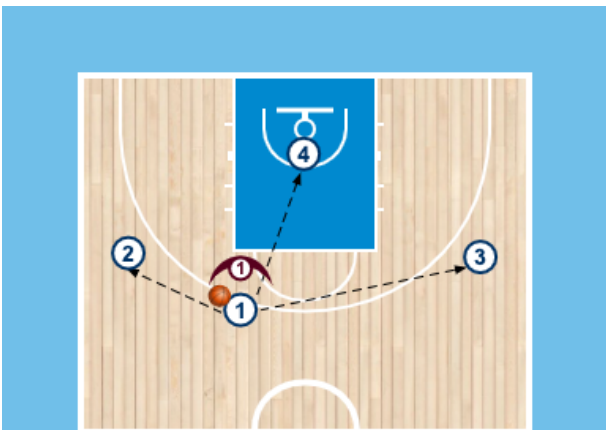


Diagram 5.

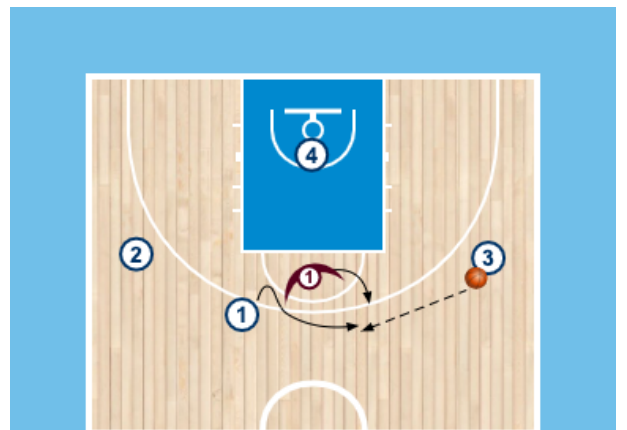


Diagram 6.

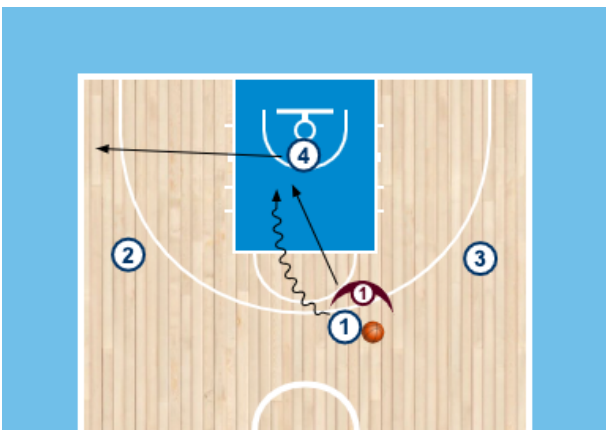


Diagram 7.

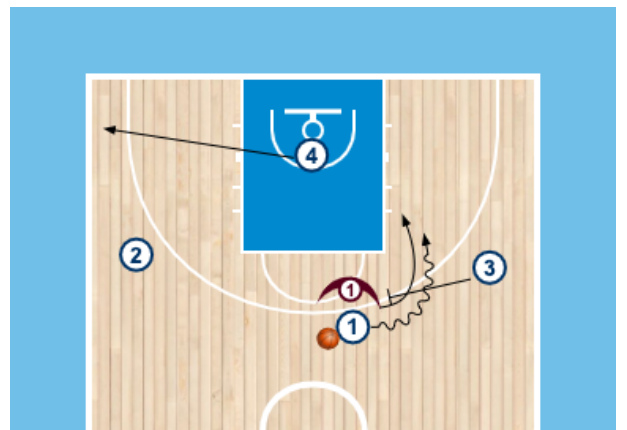


Diagram 8.



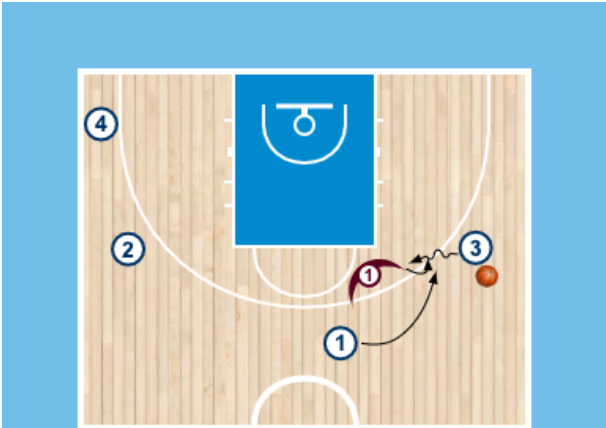


Diagram 9.

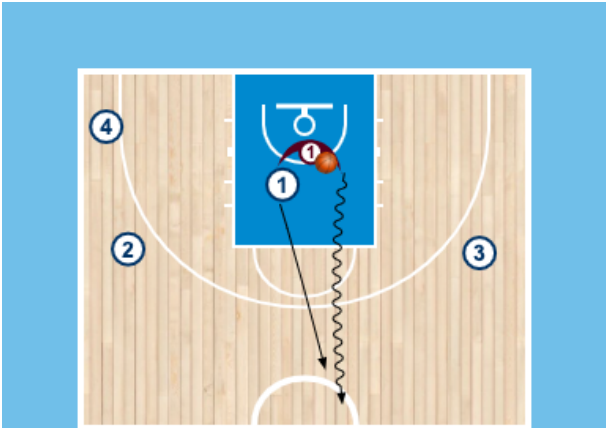


Diagram 10.

# **Three Close-Outs**

**Categories:** 1v1.

**Emphasis:** Executing close-outs both offensively and defensively.

**Setup:** Groups of two at each basket. One ball for each group.

**Duration:** 6–8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras. Number of players.

**Miscellaneous:** This is one of those drills where, as you enrichen the action, you end up making it more and more game-like.

## **Procedure**

- There are three starting spots for the shooter: corner, wing, and middle. (Diagram 1)
- For the first shot X1 starts at the corner. (Diagram 2)
- O1 has the ball under the basket inside the no-charge circle.
- X1 may choose how far away from the basket she starts. The further she is, the longer and probably more open the shot will be.
- O1 makes a crisp, direct pass to X1 and closes out.
- X1 either takes a jumper right the catch or uses one dribble and then shoots.
- If she scores or if there's a shooting foul, she gets 2 or 3 points, depending.
- If there's a non-shooting foul, it's 2 points.
- If there's an offensive rebound, the play continues. X1 may use another dribble.
- The wing is X1's starting position for the second shot. To start the third one she rotates to the middle.
- After three shots X1 and O1 change roles.

- Whoever scores the most points is the winner.
- For the second round, the first-round winners stay put, the first-round losers rotate baskets.
- Extras may be made to appear as help defenders or passing options.

## **Modifications**

### Three Close-Outs 2v1

- X1 gets the initial pass from X2. (See diagram 3.)
- X1 may go for the score or pass the ball back to X2.
- Upon the second pass of the possession, X2 must finish the play vs. O1 who's making another close-out. (Diagram 4.)

### Three Close-Outs 2v2

- In addition *Three Close-Outs 2v1*, there's O2 defending X2. (Diagram 5.)
- In one possession, X1 and X2 may make no more than two passes.

### Three Close-Outs 2v2 Plus #C

- #C throws the initial pass to either X2 or X1. (Diagram 6.)
- O2 and O1 close out accordingly. (Diagram 7.)
- X1 and X2 may make one more pass before taking a shot

## **Variations**

- In the basic *Three Close-Outs 1v1*, have an extra throw the initial pass. (See #C in diagram 8)
- Adjust the maximum number of dribbles that the X's may use. The max may alter between zero and three.
- Have the initial pass be a bounce pass, giving the O's more time for the closeouts.
- Adjust O1's close-out distance and angle. For an example, see diagram 9.

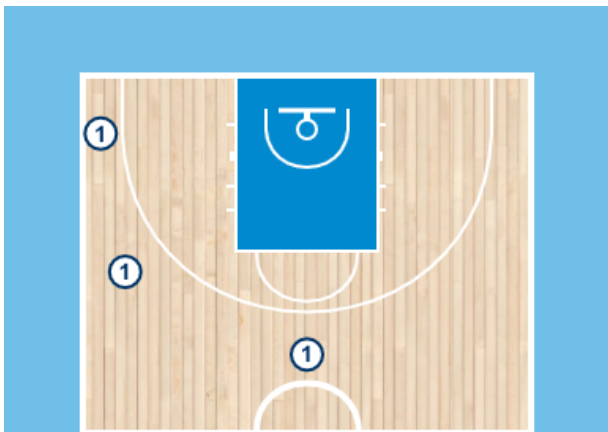


Diagram 1.

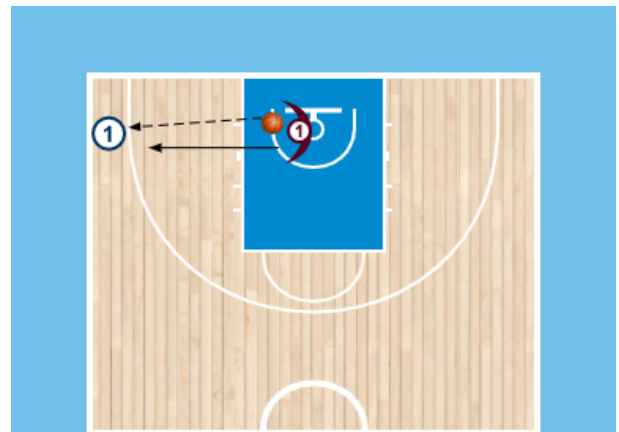


Diagram 2.

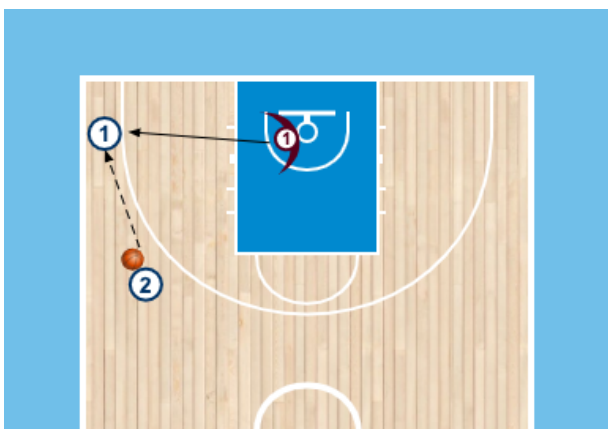


Diagram 3.

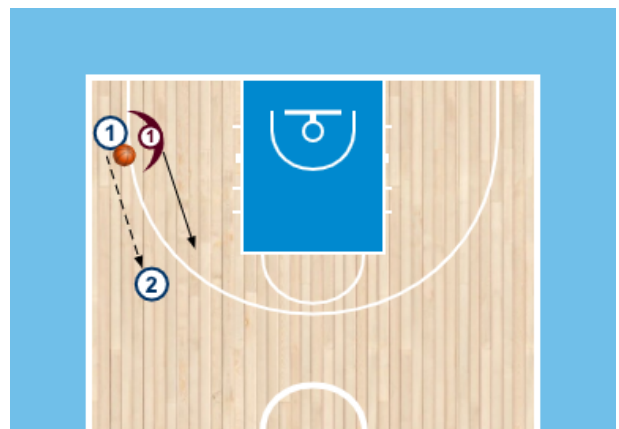


Diagram 4.

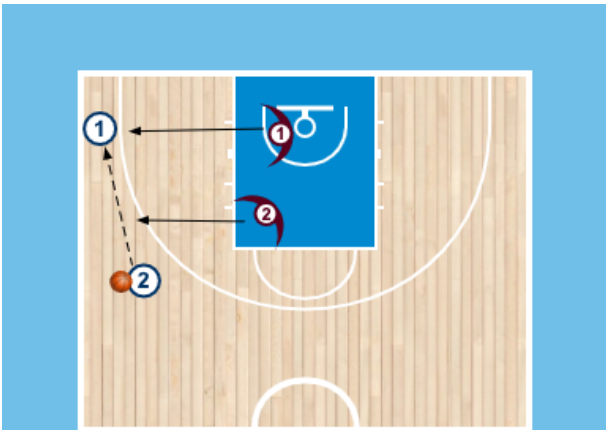


Diagram 5.

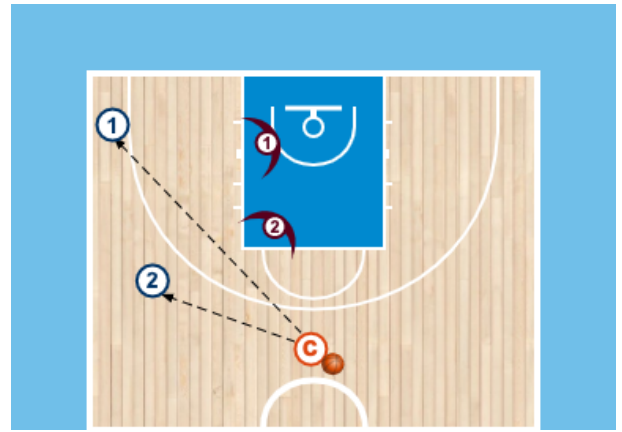


Diagram 6.

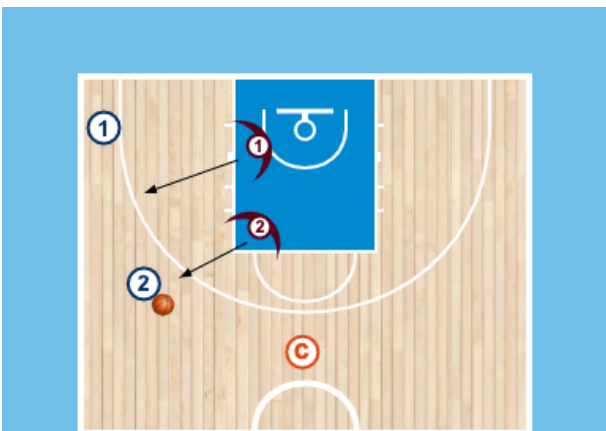


Diagram 7.

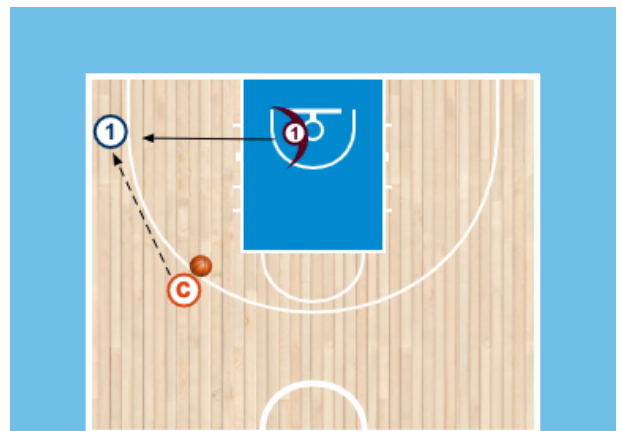


Diagram 8.

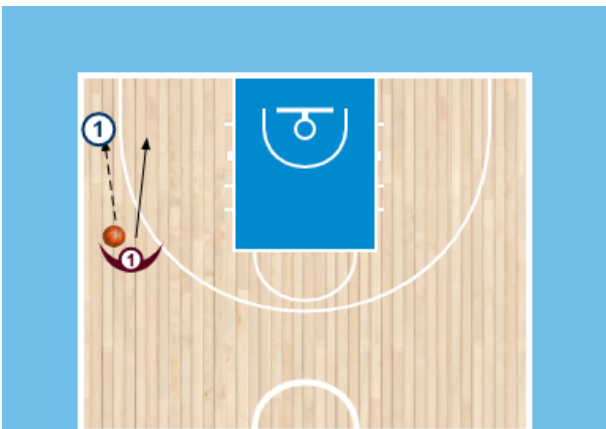


Diagram 9.

## **SMALL-SIDED GAMES**

Generally, small-sided games include tasks where the action includes two, three or four players a side.

Not all small-sided games of this book are presented in this small-sided games section. That's because all six drills of the 1v1 section can be expanded into small-sided games.

Even though 5v5 is the default set-up when playing, small-sided game are an important addition. That's because they, for example:

1. Involve a larger portion of players in scoring actions.
2. Allow prolific chances to accelerate the offense.
3. Add to the variability of physical, technical and tactical challenges the players face.

In the small-sided drills presented in this book there is little 4v4 action. That's because in 4v4, especially the collective defensive actions turn out fundamentally different from the ones in 5v5.

Admittedly, that's a subjective assessment. So, please feel free to use the 4v4 variations if you so wish.

# **Block-Out Queue**

**Category:** Small-sided games.

**Emphasis:** Getting the rebound off a game-like spacing.

**Setup:** 6–8 players at each basket. One coach or other extra. One ball.

**Duration:** 8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras. Rim reducer.

**Miscellaneous:** This may look like a defensive rebounding drill but just as well, it may enhance offensive rebounding, off-the-ball defensive spacing, tagging up and initiating a break off a rebound.

## **Procedure**

- Players and the extra (#C) line-up as shown in diagram 1.
- #C may shoot right away or pass to either X1 or X2 (as in diagram 2). Anytime #C shoots, she'll miss on purpose to cause a rebounding situation.
- If #C shoots, O1 and O2 block out, X1 and X2 go and try to get the offensive rebound anyway.
- If #C passes to X2, X2 may attack right away with a drive, take a jumper, or quickly pass to either #C or X1.
- A fourth pass is not allowed. So, after the third pass the receiver, be it a player or #C, must take the shot. See X1 in diagram 3.
- If there's a miss and a defensive rebound, O1 and O2 go pass the ball back to #C and the play resumes. (Diagrams 4 and 5.)
- If the shot goes in, O1 and O2 inbound the ball to #C as quickly as possible and the play resumes.
- If there's a miss and an offensive rebound, X1 and X2 go for a putback or pass the ball back to #C.

- This goes on for as long as O1 and O2 have gathered two defensive rebounds or steals.
- Then X1 and X2 rotate out; O1 and O2 to offence; and a new pair comes in to play defense.

### **Variations**

- Have X1 and X2 apply ball pressure as O1 and O2 look to get the ball back to #C.
- Install a second extra (#C) who will look for a long outlet after a defensive rebound or a made basket. (Diagram 6.)
- After the second defensive rebound, have O1 and O2 play 2v2 full court against X1 and X2. (Diagram 7.)
- Install a rim reducer so that there will be less made shots and more rebounding situations.

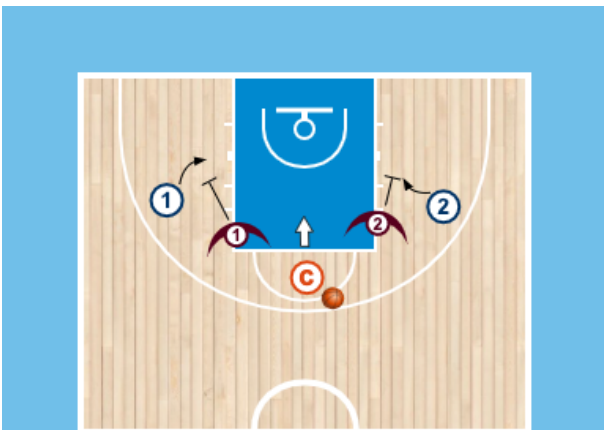


Diagram 1.

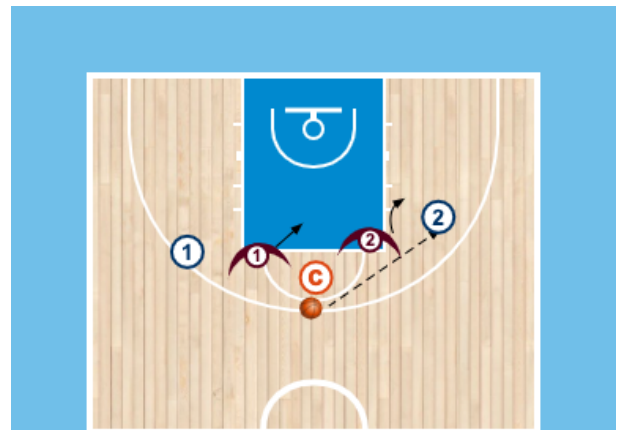


Diagram 2.



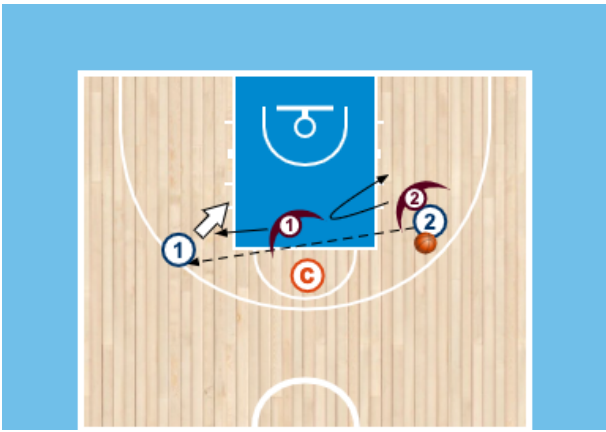


Diagram 3

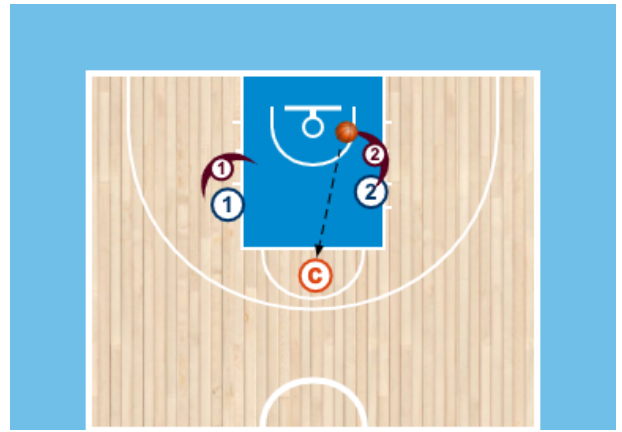


Diagram 4.

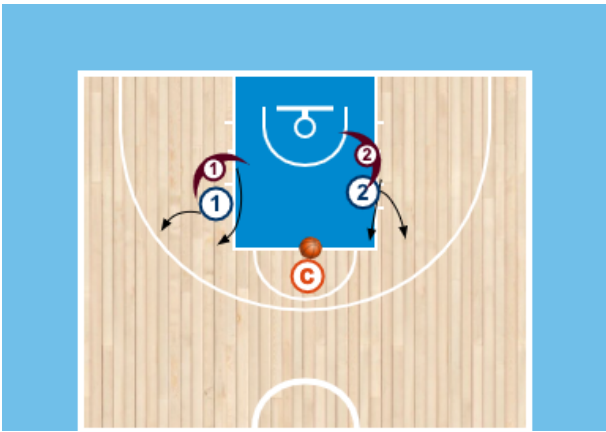


Diagram 5.

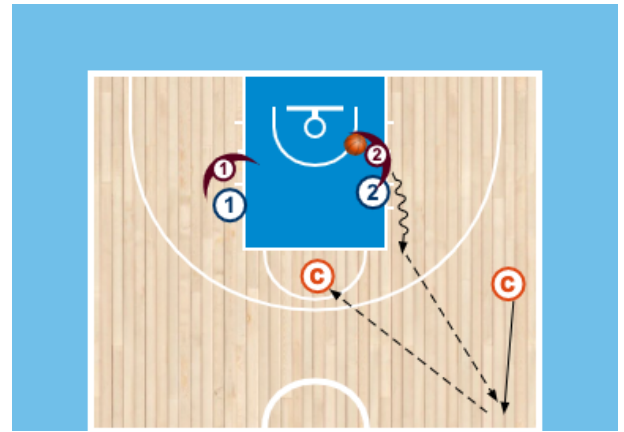


Diagram 6.

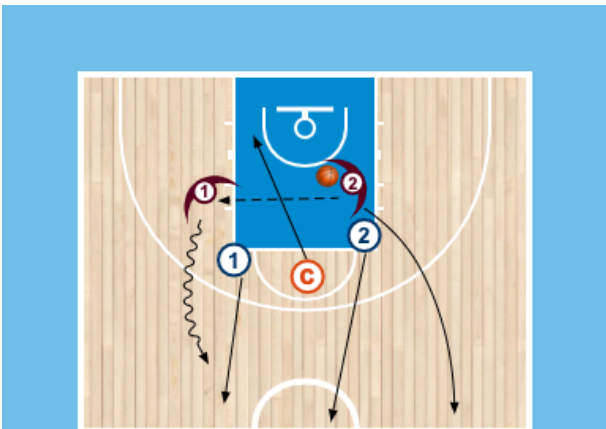


Diagram 7.

# **Break Versus X**

**Category:** Small-sided games.

**Emphasis:** Running the break against different numbers of defenders.  
Stopping the break with different numbers of defenders.

**Setup:** Full court. Groups of three players.

**Duration:** 8 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** This a more complex variation of the traditional 3v2 fast break drill.

## **Procedure**

- X1, X3 and X5 set up near the basket. (Diagram 1.)
- O1, O3 and O5 set up at half-court.
- Coach #C1 shoots. X's go get the rebound and start a fast break.  
Alternatively, #C1 may also make a pass to an X.
- Meanwhile at the other end, Coach #C2 raises her one, two or three fingers, signalling how many defenders may now play defense. In diagram 1 the call is two fingers.
- X's start the break and go for the score. (Diagram 2.)
- At some point #C2 signals again, this time allowing the rest of the O's to play defense. (O1 in diagram 3.)
- #C2 alternates how many defenders she allows to play defense and when.  
For example, in diagram 4, #C2 has called three fingers early. In diagram 5 the call is one finger so late that the break is basically 2v0.
- As soon as the possession is over and O's get the ball, they attack the other way.

## **Variations**

- Play 2vX or 4vX.
- To start the play, place one of the O's in midst of the X's. (See diagram 6.) If O3 gets the rebound, the O's are on offense. If O3 doesn't get the ball, she starts playing defense immediately, regardless of #C2's signals.

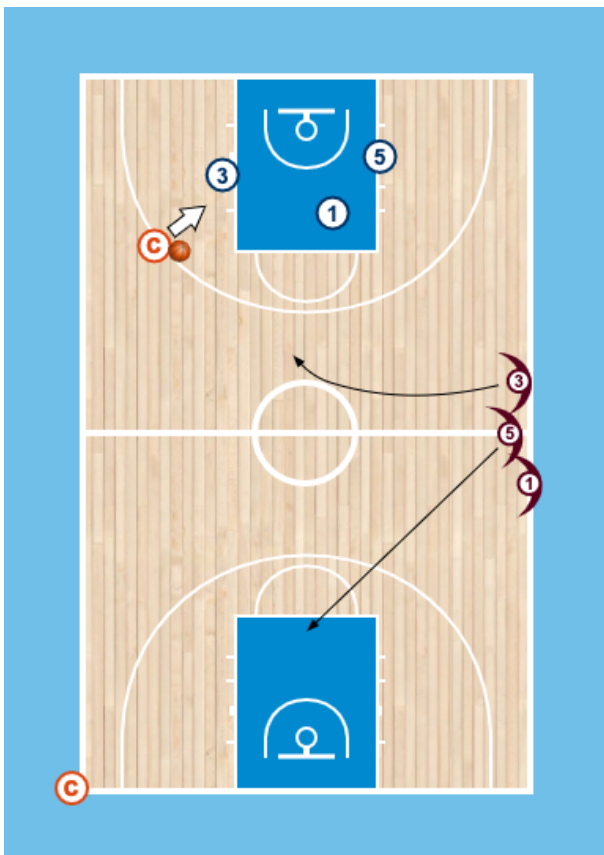


Diagram 1.

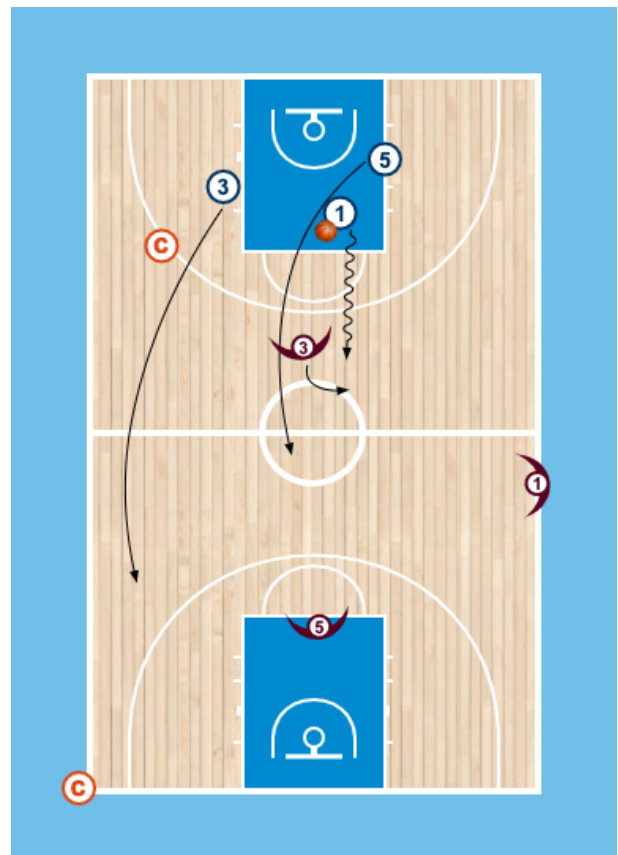


Diagram 2.

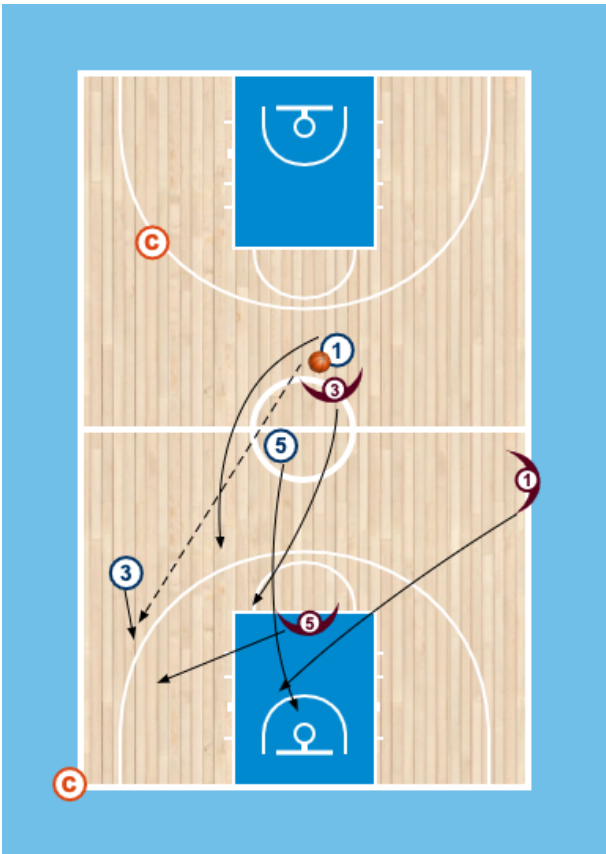


Diagram 3

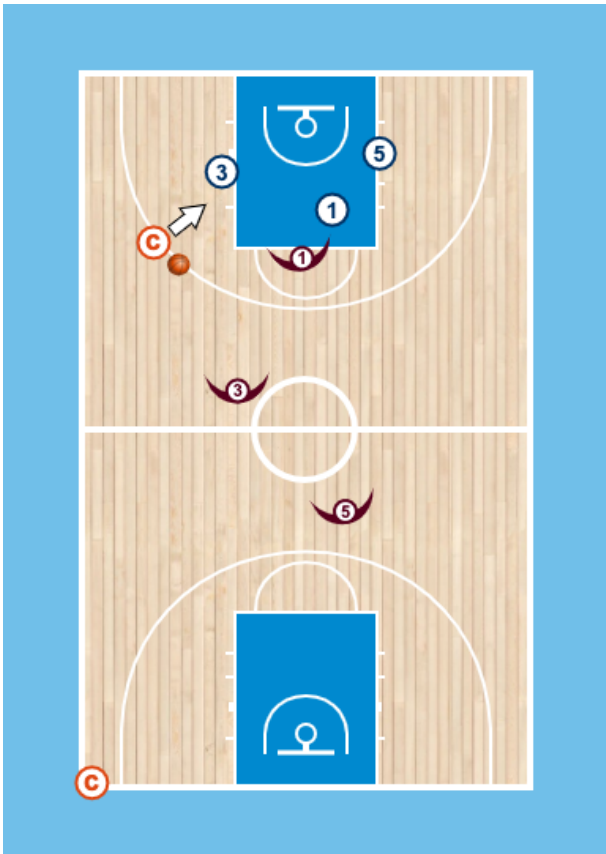


Diagram 4.

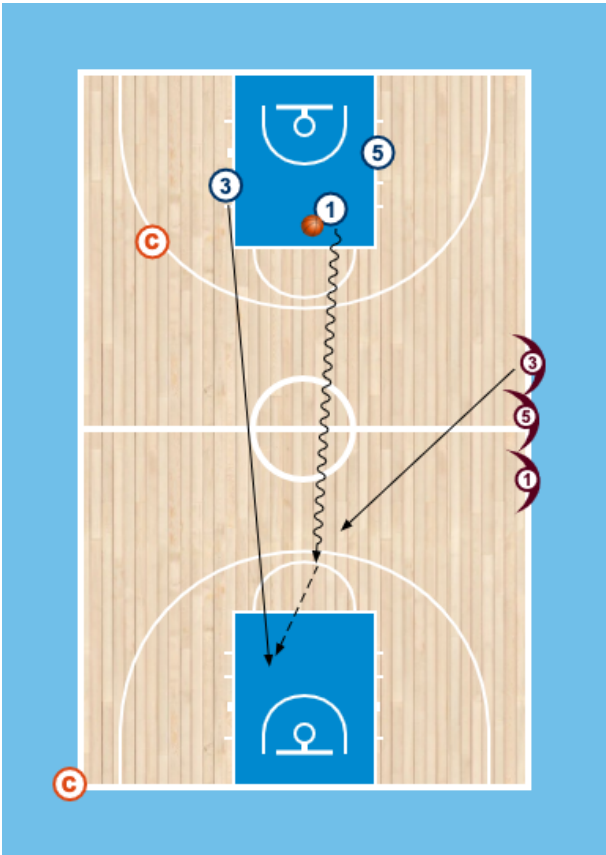


Diagram 5.

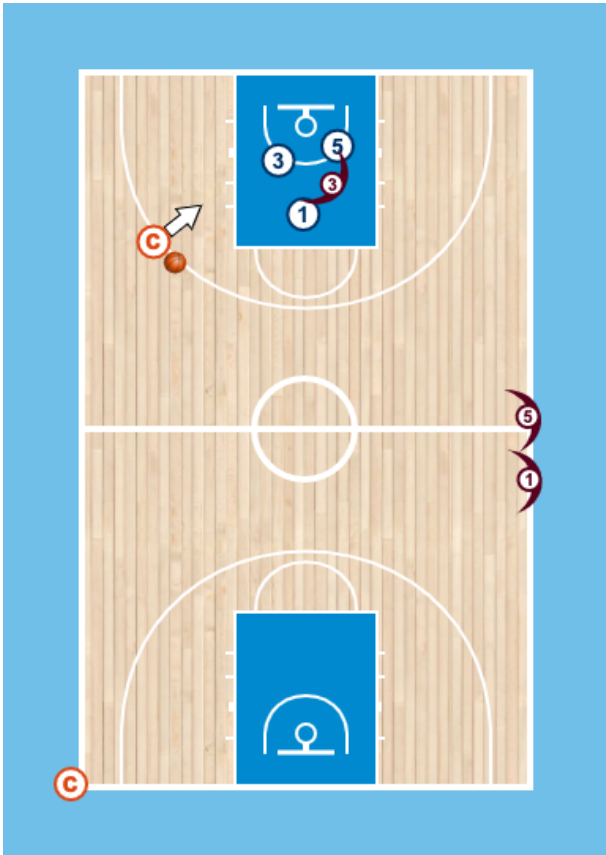


Diagram 6.

## **Dummy 2v2**

**Category:** Small-sided games.

**Emphasis:** Collective tactical skills.

**Setup:** 2v2 at each basket.

**Duration:** 8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** Rather than a drill, *Dummy 2v2* (or *3v3* or *4v4*) is a concept that can be used to work on a multitude of tactical skills.

### **Procedure**

- The coach scripts a 2v2 scenario that contains redetermined tactical elements.
- Players execute the scenario.
- For example, the scenario may be a 2v2 high middle ball screen where the defense hedges and switches. (Diagrams 1 and 2.)

### **Variations**

- The play is scripted only up to a certain point and then the action goes live. For example, in diagram 2 the live play might start just as soon as the switch has taken place.
- The play may then be followed by a role change and transition, with O1 and O5 attacking X1 and X5 the other way.
- The defense is given multiple options and, unbeknownst to the offense, they decide upon one. The offense is then expected to react accordingly. For example, for defending the high middle ball screen the designed alternatives may be "hedge and switch" or "hedge and double." When there's a switch, X5

is expected to deep roll. But in case of a double, she'll short roll. (Diagram 3.)

- An extra is implemented in order to add some element to the play. For example, with #C as a passer, the high middle ball screen may be preceded by a pin down. (Diagram 4.)
- The action may be expanded to into Dummy 3v3 (Diagram 5.) or Dummy 4v4.

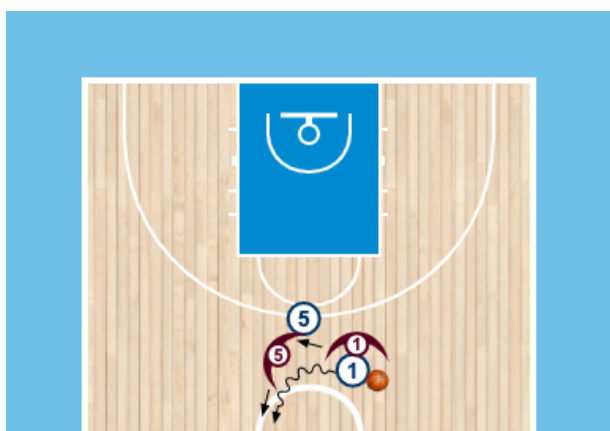


Diagram 1.

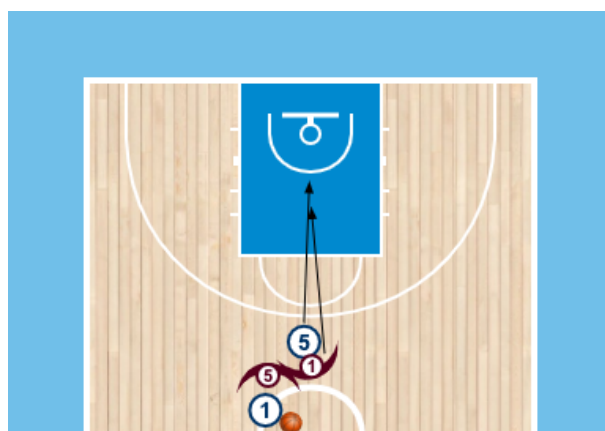


Diagram 2.

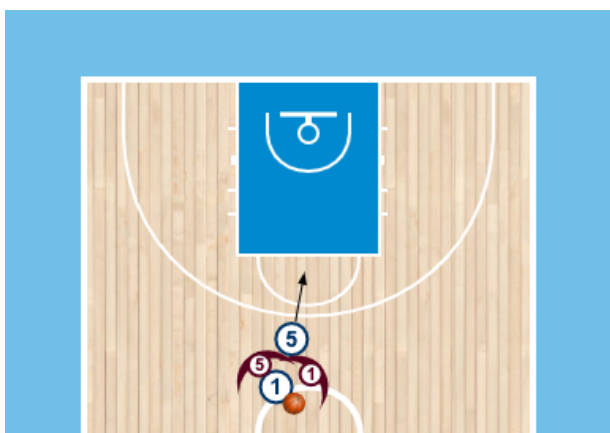


Diagram 3.

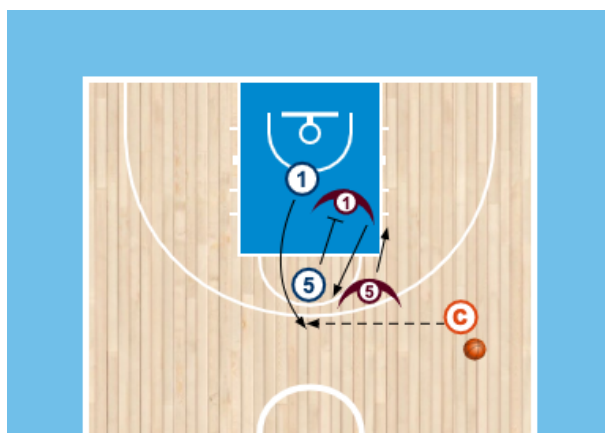


Diagram 4.

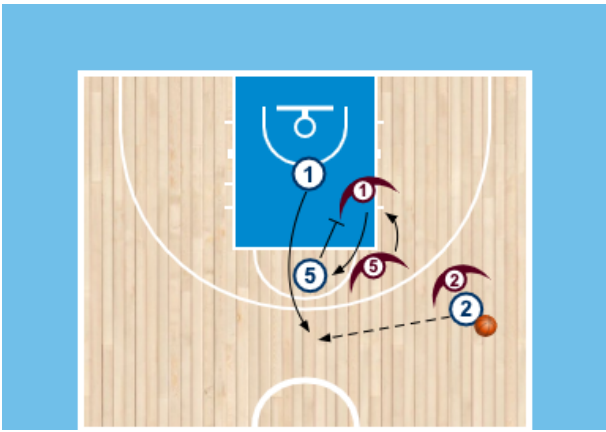


Diagram 5.

# **Stop the Dummy**

**Category:** Small-sided games.

**Emphasis:** For offense, utilising an advantage. For defense, neutralising an offensive advantage.

**Setup:** 3v3 and a dummy at each basket.

**Duration:** 8 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** This drill skips the part where an advantage created and skips directly to the part where an obvious advantage is created.

## **Procedure**

- \* The offensive players set up in a spacing that's relevant to the team's offensive system.
- \* Offensive dummy (#C) makes a drive towards the basket. (Diagram 1.)
- \* As the defense moves over to stop #C, she makes a pass to one of the offensive players. (Diagram 2.)
- \* This creates an advantage for the offense. As they start attacking, #C steps out of the play. (Diagram 3.)

## **Variations**

- \* As soon as defensive team gets the ball, they attack the other way
- \* The initial set-up is 4v4 and an offensive dummy. (Diagram 4.)



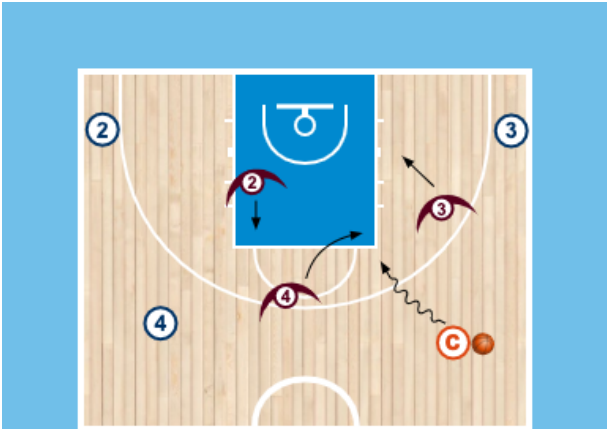


Diagram 1.

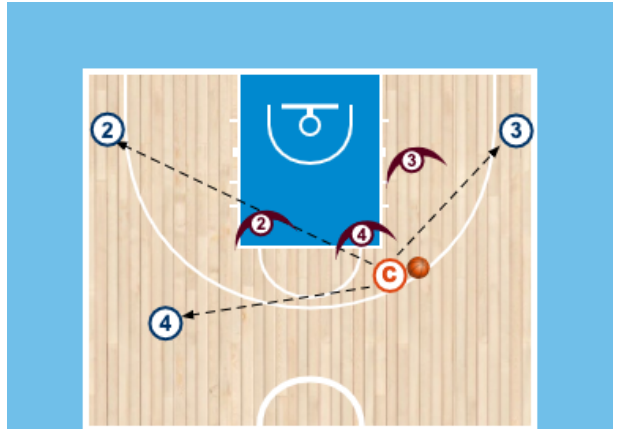


Diagram 2.

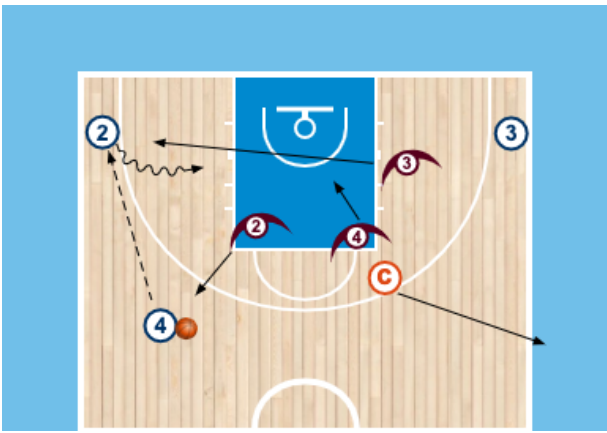


Diagram 3.

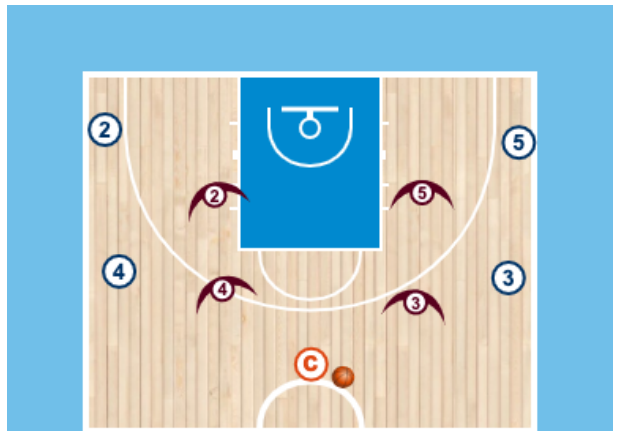


Diagram 4.

## **5v5 GAMES**

Learning is specific. In other words, to learn to play 5v5 competitively we'd better play 5v5 competitively.

Also to be considered: the goal of practice is to enhance the chances that our team should win as many games as possible.

Put together, these two things imply that playing 5v5 competitively, or scrimmaging, should be our default practice task.

If we could only use one practice task, it'd need to be Scrimmage, one of three presented in this section.

Of the Small-Sided Games, also *Break Versus X* and *Stop the Dummy* could be varied 5v5 games.

# **Lightningball**

**Category:** 5v5.

**Emphasis:** Accelerating the 5v5 play.

**Setup:** 5v5 full court.

**Duration:** 3–8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Shot clock.

**Miscellaneous:** I learned the idea of this drill from **Tuomas** and **Joonas Iisalo** when they coached at Telekom Baskets Bonn in Germany. They called it *Murderball*, but, working in youth basketball, I renamed it. *Lightningball* is a reference to Finnish sports history. It was the English-speaking name of *salamapallo* or a Finnish version of touch rugby developed in the 1960s.

## **Procedure**

- Start with a jump ball.
- Play 5v5 for a predetermined time without any breaks.
- The defense tags up and pressures full court.
- There are no dead balls but the play goes on and on.
- After a score the offensive team grabs the ball right out of the net and goes.
- If the ball goes out of bounds, the team that the ball belongs to takes the ball and starts the offense immediately.
- If the ball bounces out of bounds and far away from the players, the coach throws a new ball into play
- If there's a shooting foul, the coach calls "Two free throws!". The shooting team is awarded the two points but the play is not halted.
- In case of a held ball, defense gets the ball.
- One game lasts between 45 and 90 seconds.

- The work:rest ratio is 1:1 or 1:2. For example, after a 60 second game, you rest between 60 and 120 seconds. Only relatively long rest periods allow you to both run multiple repetitions and keep the action at full speed.

### **Variations**

- To accelerate the action even further, shorten the shot clock.

# **Scrimmage**

**Category:** 5v5.

**Emphasis:** Directly enhancing collective game performance.

**Setup:** 5v5 full court.

**Duration:** 8–12 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Rim reducer.

**Miscellaneous:** Since learning is specific, players best learn to play 5v5 by playing 5v5. This is why playing 5v5 competitively, aka scrimmaging, is our default practice task.

## **Procedure**

- Teams play 5v5.
- There are numerous ways to add to the variability of scrimmaging. These are some examples below.
- The same variations may be applied to small-sided games.

## **Variations**

- Shorten the shot clock to emphasise transition offense and defense.
- Give the ball back to the scoring team to emphasise half-court play.
- Use a rim reducer at one end of the floor to create an advantage for the other team.
- Use rim reducers at both ends to emphasise rebounding.
- Use the game clock and the scoreboard to create different end-of-game situations.
- Give four points for a three-point shot to emphasise three-point shooting on both offense and defense.

# **Shell**

**Category:** 5v5.

**Emphasis:** Defensive positioning.

**Setup:** 5v5 at one end of the floor.

**Duration:** 8 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** Shell is a very traditional drill often played 4v4. However, I don't like a 4v4 shell. or any other 4v4 drill for that matter. I find it better to play 5v5 or 3v3. When playing 4v4, especially the defensive actions look wrong.

## **Procedure**

- The offensive team X's set up in a formation of the coach's choice. For two alternatives, see diagrams 1 and 2.
- X's play dummy offense and just pass the ball around.
- As X's move the ball, O's do not steal the ball but keep adjusting their defensive positions.
- When the coach calls "Shot!", X's must shoot right away or make one more pass and then shoot. O's block out.
- Once O's have got the defensive rebound or a steal, defense and offense rotate.

## **Variations**

- X's attack to the basket with dribbles or cuts or both.
- O's are allowed to steal the ball.
- After receiving the defensive rebound or a steal, O's attack the other end and X's convert to defense.

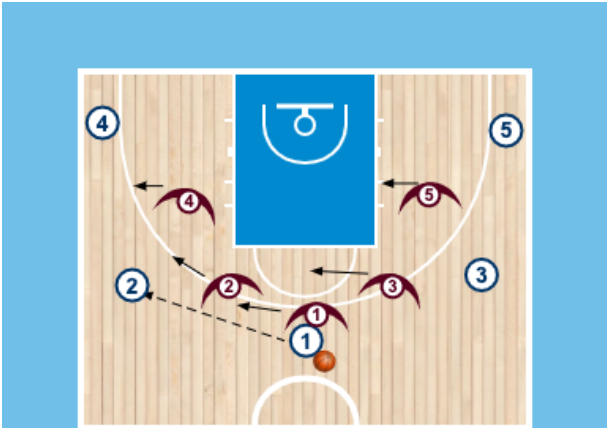


Diagram 1.

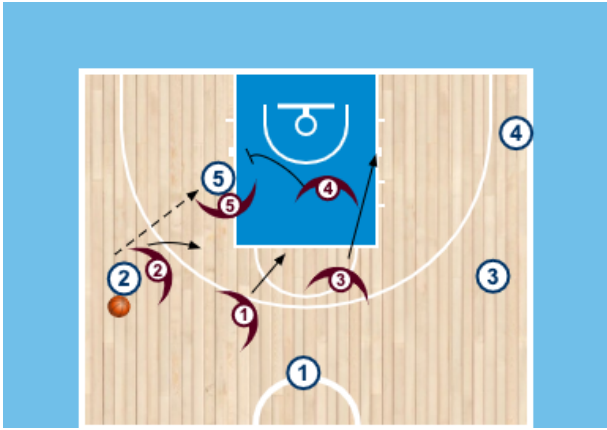


Diagram 2.

# **SHOOTING**

There are a lot of shooting drills in the world.

The ones presented here all share one thing: they have variability, coming from different sources.

There may be extra defenders or extra passers. The rebounder may supply variability with her instructions to the shooter. Or by design, each shot will be different from the previous one.

In some drills there are no opponents and no teammates. So, in that regard they do not fit the complex coaching paradigm. Yet the drills are there since they offer variability and ways to challenge some aspect of the technical shooting skill, for example length-control.



# **Five Different Threes**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Shooting variable three-point shots.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** The five-shot selections listed below are just examples. You can develop novel selections in order to work on a certain aspect of shooting. For example, if you want the players to quicken their release, you might put in *Five different releases* where the players are to vary the quickness of the release.

## **Procedure**

- X2 rebounds and calls the shots, X1 shoots.
- For the win, X1 must shoot five different three-pointers.
- Coach calls the selection of five threes to be made.
- Before each and every shot, X2 calls the three that X1 must make.
- The selection may be, for example, threes five different arches.
- The calls are:
  - *One!* = Very low arch.
  - *Two!* = Moderately low arch.
  - *Three!* = Regular arch.
  - *Four!* = Moderately high arch.
  - *Five!* = Very high arch.
- X2 changes the call each time until there are four makes and thus only one possible call to be made.
- Once X1 has scored following a certain call, X2 doesn't make the same call again.

- For example, if X2 calls "One!" and X1 hits a very low arching shot, X2 doesn't call "One!" anymore.
- Once X1 has hit "One!", "Three!", "Four!" and "Five!", X2 keeps calling "Two!" until X1 hits the shot and wins the competition or someone else does.

### **Examples of selections**

- Five directions of the approach (See diagram 1.)
  - *Left!*
  - *Right!*
  - *Backward!*
  - *Forward!*
  - *Still!*
- Five directions of the pass (diagram 2). These need not be called but X2 just goes to a certain position to make the pass.
  - From behind the left shoulder.
  - From behind the right shoulder.
  - From the left hand side.
  - From the left hand side.
  - From the front.
- \* Five speeds of the approach.
  - *Zero!* = Standing.
  - *One!* = Walking
  - *Two!* = Jogging.
  - *Three!* = Moderate sprinting.
  - *Four!* = Hard sprint.
- \* Five amounts of dribbles.
  - *Zero!* = No dribbles.
  - *One!* = One dribble
  - And so on.

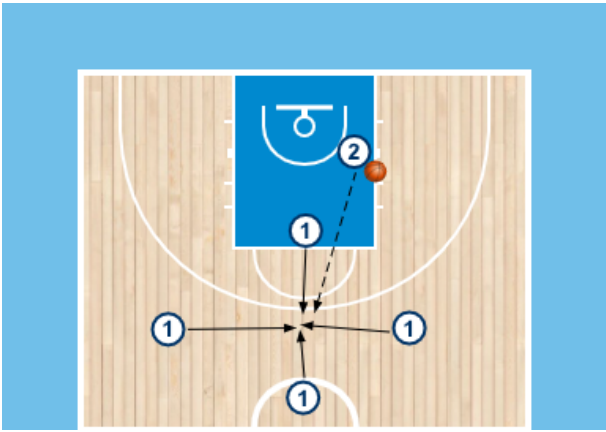


Diagram 1.

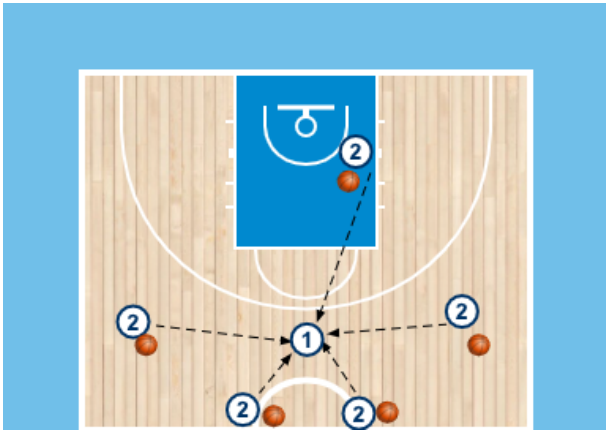


Diagram 2.

# **Foot Threes**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Extending shooting range.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** A three-point shooter isn't going to be very good for as long as her effective shooting range is limited to barely beyond the line. *Foot Threes* is designed to help to extend the range.

## **Procedure**

- X1 shoots. X2 rebounds.
- X1 takes her first shot from just outside the three-point line.
- If she misses, she shoots from the same spot again.
- As soon as she makes one, she moves about a foot or 30 centimeters further away from the basket.
- Under the FIBA rules, one foot puts her at about seven metres from the basket. After two makes she's at 7.35 meters and so on.
- There is a set time for the shooters. Based on my experience, in about 75 seconds, players somewhat reach the outer limit of their range.
- When the time is up, the coach calls "*Time!*".
- Once the time is up, players can take at least one more shot. If it goes in, they step further and continue to shoot and advance until they miss.
- A player's result is the number of her makes.

## **Variations**

- If the players' shooting range is limited, set the starting point at the free throw line.
- Use cones to set the shooting distances.
- Vary the set time.
- Have the players shoot off the dribble.

# **Free Throw Roulette**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Making the first free throw in a set.

**Setup:** Full court. Pairs. One ball per pair.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** In free throw sets, players make the first shot with a lower percentage than the second one. If the first one goes in, so will probably the second one. Therefore when practicing, it makes sense to emphasise making the first free throw in a set.

## **Procedure**

- X1 sets up at the free throw line. X2 throws the ball to her the same way a referee does in a game.
- X1 takes free throws and X2 rebounds until X1 makes one.
- After X1's make she and X2 change roles.
- After X2's make she and X1 rotate to the next basket.
- They keep rotating until each one has made one free throw at four different baskets.

## **Variations**

- Change the number of baskets where each player must make a free throw.
- Change the number of free throws that must be made in each basket.
- If the required number of made free throws at a basket is more than one, it may be required that the makes must be in a row.

# **Ladder**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Controlling the length of the shot.

**Setup:** Groups of two at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Rim reducer.

**Miscellaneous:** In this drill, there are no opponents and no teammates. So, some might argue that Ladder does not fit the complex coaching paradigm. Yet I use this drill. It puts a lot of pressure on the players' shooting accuracy while remaining playful and fun.

## **Procedure**

- There are five approximate shooting distances: three meters, four meters, five meters, six meters and three-pointer.
- X1 shoots, X2 rebounds for her.
- X1 starts at the three-meter spot and keeps shooting from there until she makes one.
- After a make, X1 moves onto the next spot further from the basket, or up the ladder. That's why this basic variation of the drill is called *Ladder* or *Ladder Up*.
- The winner is the first one to make a three pointer.

## **Variations**

- Vary the number of shooting distances or the number of shots one must make in order to win.

- Have X1 make a free throw after finishing the ladder. There's only one free throw attempt for the win. If she misses, she must go back to the first step of the ladder.
- After X1 has finished the ladder, have X2 take the free throw for the win. This makes the drill more of a team competition.
- In *Ladder Up in a Row*, for the win X1 must hit from all distances in a row. After a miss she must start again from the shortest distance or the first ladder.
- In the *Ladder Down* variation, X1 starts from beyond the three-point line. After each make, she moves onto the next spot closer to the basket, or down the ladder.



# **One Two Three**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Hit open outside shots. Make free throws under pressure.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 4–8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Tasks. Rim reducer.

**Miscellaneous:** The trick here is to hit shots in a row, without missing any. That basic idea came from a drill run by **Jorma Bruce** when he coached at Peli-Karhut (Kotka, Finland) in the early 1990s.

## **Procedure**

- Coach designates a set of shots that must be made in a row for the win.
- He calls the task and the players start shooting.
- After someone has hit all named shots in a row, all duos switch shooter.
- The code numbers are:
  - 0 = Close-range two-pointer
  - 1 = Free throw.
  - 2 = Mid-range two-pointer.
  - 3 = Three-pointer.
- For example: *2113* = Mid-range two-pointer, two free throws, and a three-pointer.
- For the win, the shots named in the code must be made in a row.
- If there's a miss, the shooter starts from the top.

## **Variations**

- Have the shooter shoot off the catch or off the dribble.
- Add "Plus" to the call. Then the initial rebounder becomes the shooter after the plus.
- For example: In *333+1* the initial shooter first needs to hit three three-pointers in a row. Then the initial rebounder must make a free throw for the win.
- Install rim reducers at the baskets.

# **Range**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Shooting under varying conditions.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras. Rim reducer.

**Miscellaneous:** This drill started out as a drill for errorless shooting. The shooter, as she kept hitting shot after shot, would gradually move further from the basket. Thus the name *Range*. The name has stuck even though currently the drill doesn't have anything to do with extending a player's shooting range.

## **Procedure**

- X1 shoots, X2 assists and rebounds.
- X2 also works to make X1 execute variable actions.
- X1 relocates after each shot.
- These are several things X2 may do to make X1's shooting variable.
  1. After passing to X1, X2 raises her two open hands. X1 passes to X2 and relocates.
  2. X2 follows her pass to X1 and plays defense on her. X1 takes a jumper or drives against the close-out.
  3. X2 follows her pass and sets a ball screen for X1. (Diagram 1.)
  4. X2 dribbles towards X1 and makes a hand-off pass.
  5. To change the passing angle, X2 dribbles to the perimeter before making the pass.
  6. X2 calls out the number of dribbles X1 must take before taking shot.
  7. X2 calls out the type of a shot X1 must take, for example "*Stepback!*" or "*Pull-up!*"

## **Variations**

- Implement an extra defender (O1) or two who roam around the floor and randomly play defense against the shooter. (Diagram 2.)
- Implement an extra passer (#C) or two who roam around the floor and every now and then ask for the ball. (Diagram 3.)
- Also, there may be extra passers and extra defenders simultaneously. (Diagram 4.)
- Install rim reducers at the baskets.

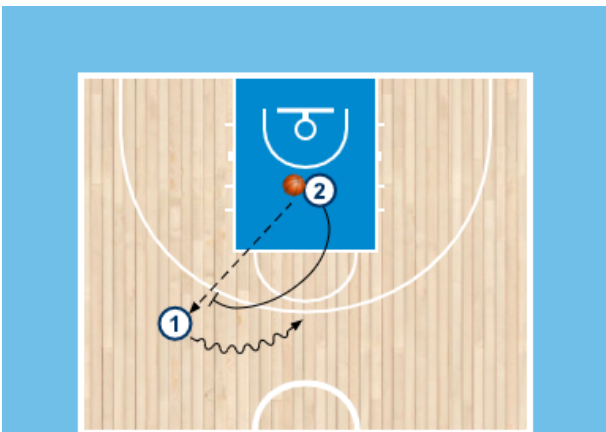


Diagram 1.

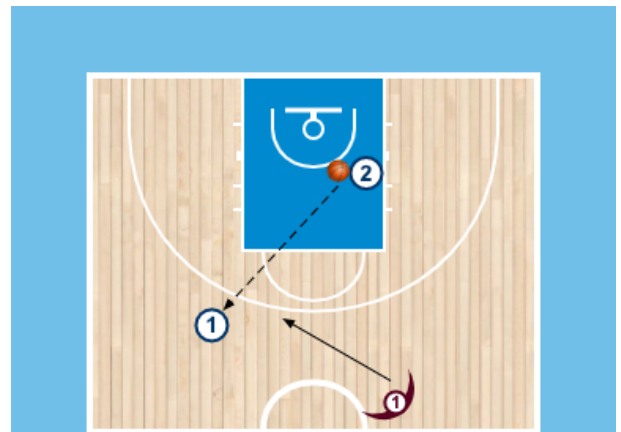


Diagram 2.

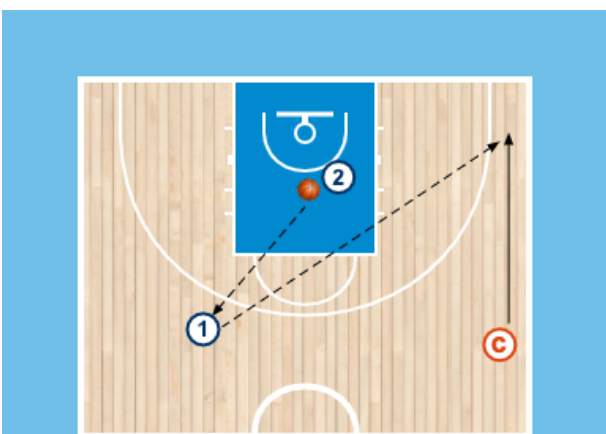


Diagram 3.

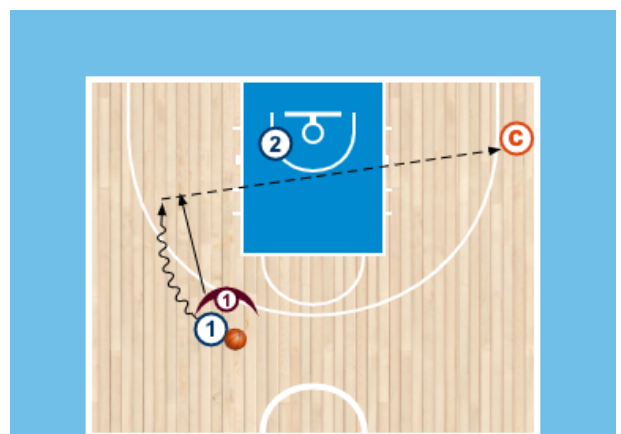


Diagram 4.

# **Six Precision Makes Plus One**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Controlling the exact spot where the shot falls.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** The rims are relatively large: two balls fit in at the same time. This implies shots often drop in even if they're only approximately on the spot. *Six Precision Makes Plus One* teaches players to finetune their shots, or to make the ball land precisely where they want it to land.

## **Procedure**

- X1 shoots from three different distances: from close range, from about the free throw line and from beyond the 3-point line. X2 rebounds.
- X1 starts shooting from close range.
- Before moving further away from the basket, she needs to make two different shots from a spot.
- She keeps shooting the same shot from the same spot until she makes one. I Following this procedure, six shots must be made: two shots from each of the three distances.
- After the six such makes, for the win X1 must make a seventh shot or a regular three-pointer.
- The two makes from each spot are different from each other. Or they follow a constrained task pair.
- The two different shots are different in that they must go into the basket via two different routes. This implies that the shooting techniques as such are not constrained.

- These are suggestions for constrained task pairs.
  1. A) The ball doesn't touch anything but the net. B) The ball first touches the backboard or rim, and then goes in.
  2. A) The ball doesn't touch anything but the net. B) The ball first touches the backboard and then nothing but the net.
  3. A) The ball touches the left side of the ring. B) The ball touches the left side of the ring.
  4. A) The ball touches the back rim. B) The ball touches the front rim.

### **Variations**

- X1 starts by shooting constrained three-pointers and gradually moves closer to the basket. For the win, her seventh shot is still a regular three.

# **Twelve Points and a Free Throw**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphasis:** Shooting jumpers from different spots and hitting the first free throw of a set.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** A fun shooting game. Boston Celtics head coach **K.C. Jones** demonstrated this drill at the FIBA World Cup clinic in Barcelona, Spain, in 1986.

## **Procedure**

- X1 shoots, X2 rebounds
- X1 may shoot threes or twos.
- She starts from the left-hand side corner spot
- She keeps shooting from the same spot until she makes one.
- After a make she rotates to the next spot.
- She needs to score twelve points.
- So, if she's shooting threes, there are four spots. (Diagram 1.) If she's shooting twos, the number of spots is six. (Diagram 2.)
- After collecting twelve points on field goal attempts, X1 has one free throw attempt. If she makes it, the pair gets one total point. If there's a miss, it's zero points.
- In either case, after X1's free throws the roles are rotated. X2 becomes the shooter and X1 the rebounder.
- For the win, the pair needs to collect two total points.

## **Variations**

- Vary the number of total points required for the win.
- For young kids, whose collective free throw percentage is below 50, allow two free throw attempts for one make.
- Allow only threes or twos.

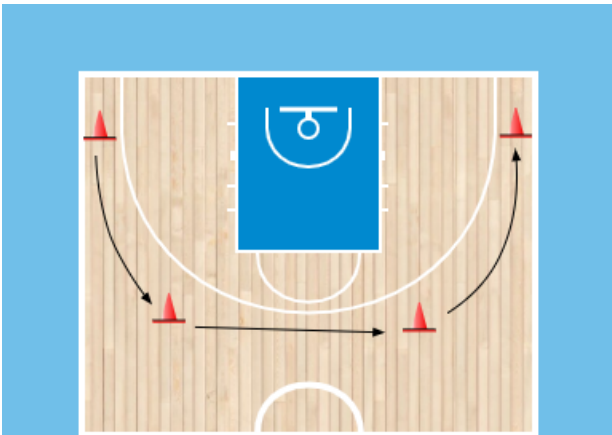


Diagram 1.

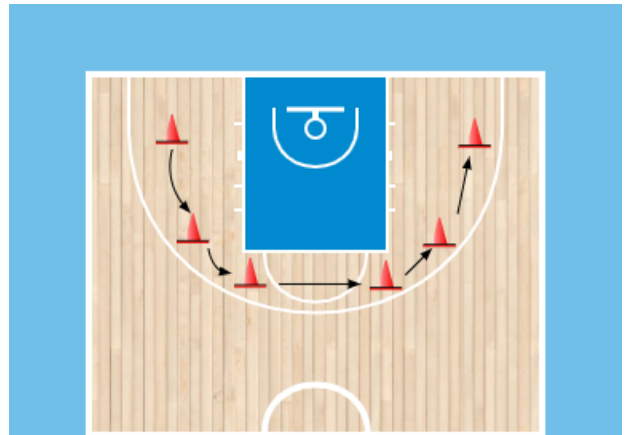


Diagram 2.



# **Winners' Choice**

**Category:** Shooting.

**Emphases:** Shooting two-pointers. Encouraging self-determination.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** I learned this drill in the 1970s from my youth coach **Sulo Kuikka**. The club was Kotkan Työväen Palloilijat in Kotka, Finland.

## **Procedure**

- X1 and X2 line up at the right-hand side elbow.
- X1 shoots, gets the rebound, passes to X2 and cuts back to the elbow.
- X2 shoots, gets the rebound and so on.
- The first pair to make seven is the winner.
- They choose the next shooting spot.
- It may be any spot, provided that it's inside three point line.
- The second winner gets to select the third shooting spot and so on.

## **Variations**

- \* As in H-O-R-S-E, allow extra conditions. Meaning that there will be trick shots.
- \* Depending on the players' skill level, extra conditions might include hitting shots standing back to the basket, bouncing the ball off the floor, and so on.
- \* Under extra conditions, the required number of makes might be five, or only three.

## **PASSING, LAY-UPS AND BALLHANDLING**

It may be counter-productive to practice dribbling as isolated, or without defense and without the option to pass or shoot. That's because it encourages you to dribble without looking to pass or shoot, and that's bad basketball.

Yet in some of the drills of this category, there is no defense. They are designed to be very challenging technically.

Those kinds of drills may be useful if you want to develop players' pure technical virtuoso. Making decision-making non-existent or at least quite easy may enhance your chances of reaching your goal.

# **Ballhandling Mimic**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Passing and dribbling under some cognitive load.

**Setup:** Full court. Groups of two. One ball for each group.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** If the players being mimicked handle the ball variably and creatively, the drill is efficient. If not, then not. So, encourage them to handle the ball variably and creatively, even if it means fumbling the ball frequently

## **Procedure**

- X1 and X2 face each other.
- X1 dribbles, frequently changing direction and using multiple techniques in order to, for example, switch hands.
- X2 mimics whatever it is that X1 is doing.
- As the coach call "*Time!*" both X1 and X2 go for a lay-up. (Diagram 1.)

## **Variations**

- Have a coach call how players must immediately switch hands.
  1. *Cross!* = Regular cross-over.
  2. *Back!* = Behind the back.
  3. *Legs!* = Between-the-legs.
  4. *In-and-out!* = In-and-out.

- Implement an offensive extra (#C). In diagram 2, #C has called X2's name. X2 makes a pass to #C, cuts to basket, gets the ball back from #C and scores on a lay-up. Meanwhile X2's partner X1 drives to the basket on her own.
- Implement defensive extras to harass ballhandling (O1 in diagram 3) and to protect the basket (O2).

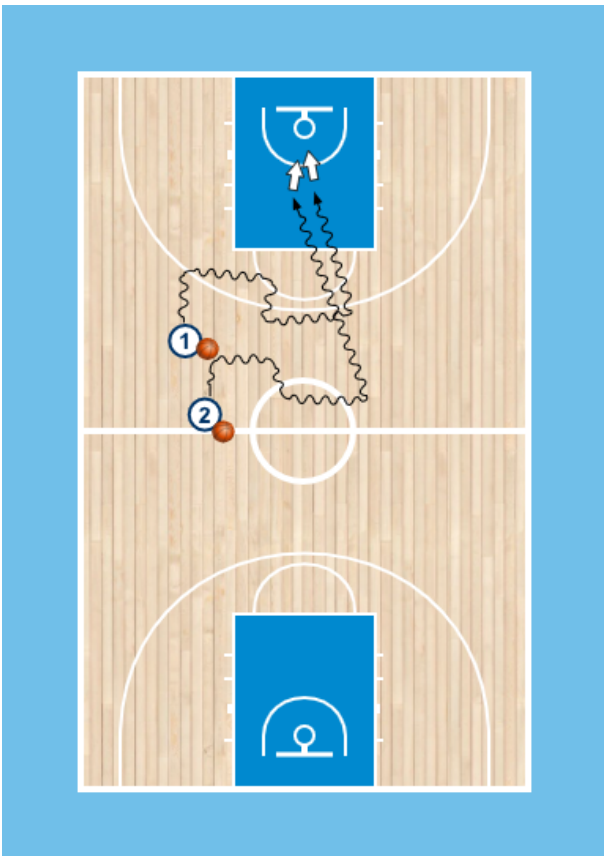


Diagram 1.

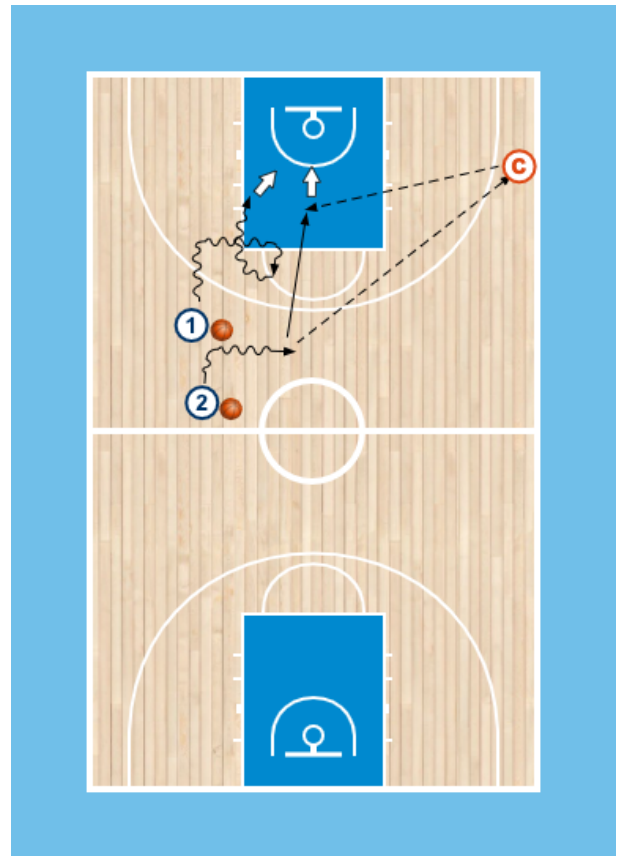


Diagram 2.

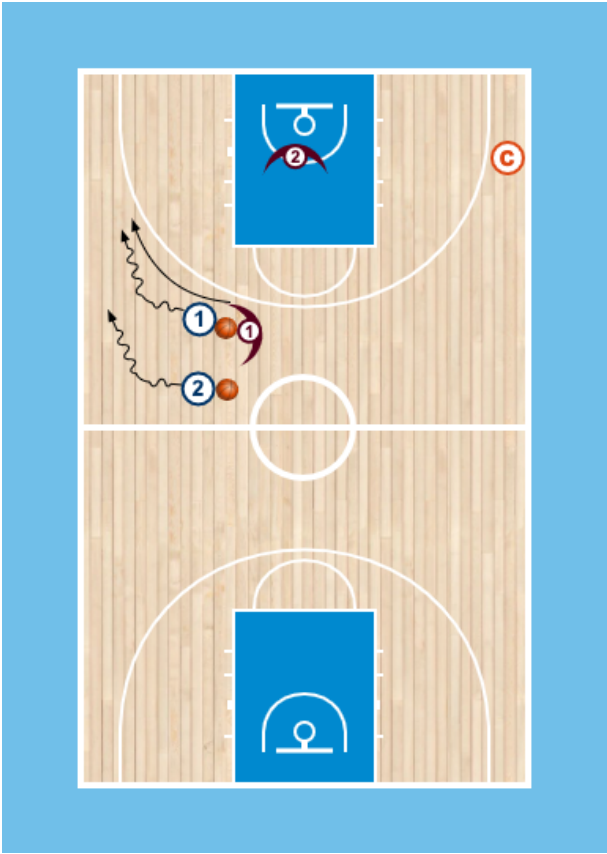


Diagram 3.

# **Battle in the Circle**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Passing and handling the ball under pressure in traffic.

**Setup:** Two players at each action area. One ball.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras. Size and shape of the action area.

**Miscellaneous:** The basic idea of *Battle in the Circle* is quite similar to *Dribble Tag* as presented by **Bob Knight** and **Pete Newell** in their 1989 book *Basketball According to Knight and Newell Volume II*. However, adding extras fundamentally changes the drill. In any case, the very simple premise leads to aggressive and physical action.

## **Procedure**

- The half-court circle is one of the action areas. Other quite similar areas, as shown in diagram 1, may be limited by cones.
- In each area there are two players who both dribble the ball. See X1 versus O1, X2 versus O2, and so on in diagram 1.
- While maintaining her dribble, X1 attempts to poke O1's ball outside the designated area, and vice versa.
- This basic version of the drill is called *Battle in the Circle 1v1*.

## **Modifications**

### *Battle in the Circle 1v1 Plus Extra Passer*

- An extra passer is added. See #C in diagram 2.
- #C calls either X3 or O3 by her name.
- That player in must make an immediate pass to #C, as X3 does in diagram 2.
- #C returns the ball to X3 and she resumes her dribble.

### *Battle in the Circle 2v2*

- Two extras are added. See X6 and O6 in diagram 3.
- X3 and X6 try to complete passes between each other and to stop O3 and O6 from completing passes. O3 and O6 do the same.

## **Variations**

- Limit the number of dribbles the players can do with their strong hand. One continuous dribble may be allowed, or using the strong hand may be totally forbidden.
- Vary the size and the shape of the action area.
- Instead of just two, have three or four players dribble in the action area.

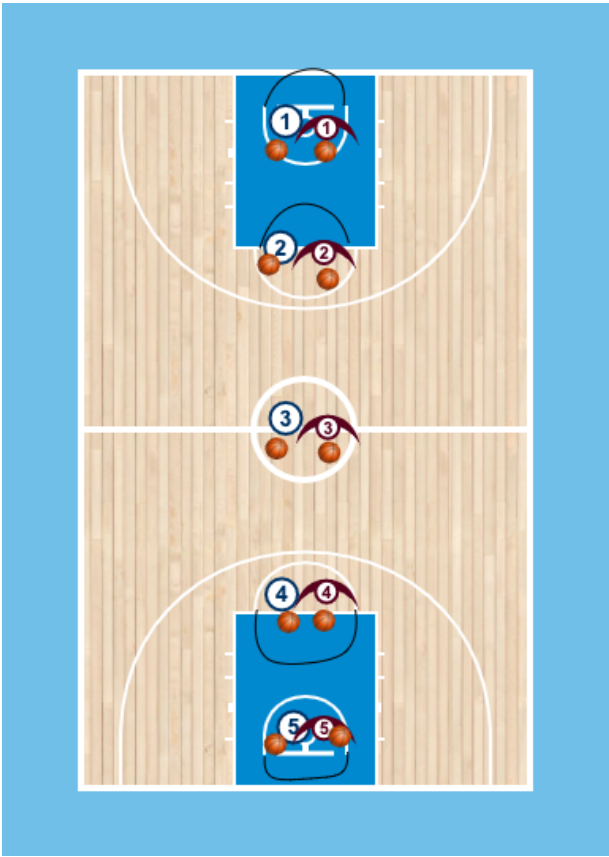


Diagram 1.

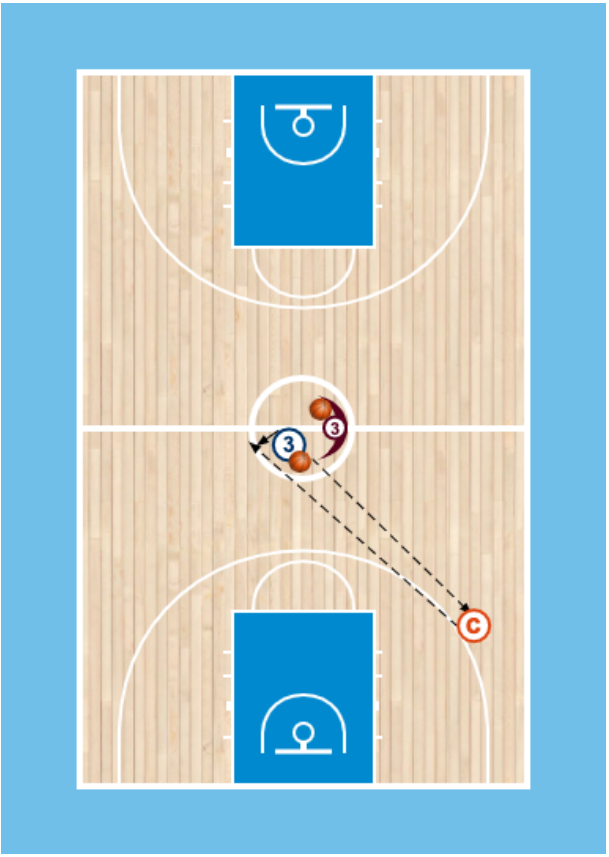


Diagram 2.

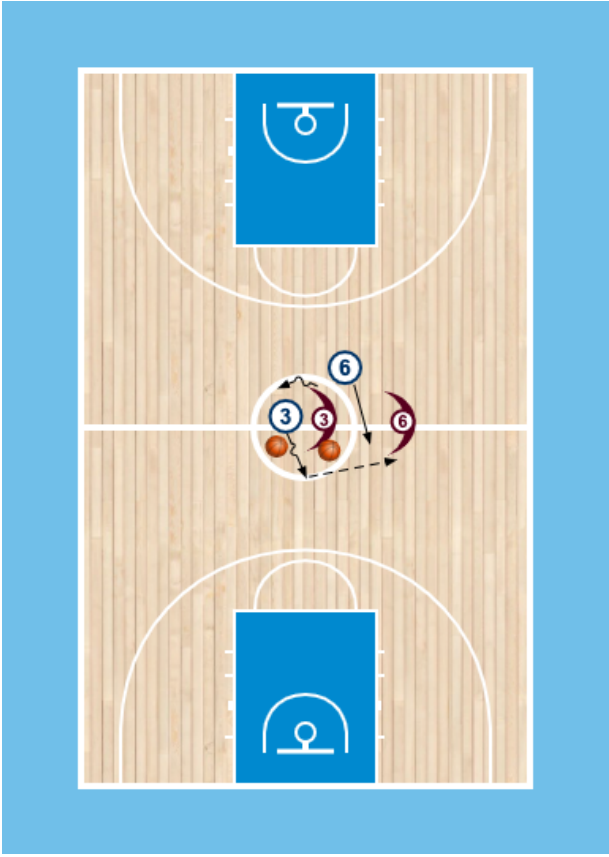


Diagram 3.



# **Bounce Pass for a Lay-up**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Handling the ball and making quick passes in traffic.

**Setup:** One basket. Four to eight players. Each one with a ball.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** I learned this drill from Finnish coach **Kari Liimo** around 1990. Liimo played for BYU Cougars in 1965–69.

## **Procedure**

- X1 is the designated passer. The others dribble the ball side by side.
- X1 makes a bounce pass to anyone, for example to X2. (Diagram 1.)
- X2 picks up the dribble, passes her ball quickly to X1, catches the ball passed by X1, goes for a lay-up and then return to her starting spot.
- The designated passer switches every 30 seconds or so.

## **Variations**

- Add an extra as a defender under the basket. (Diagram 2.)
- Add an extra as a defender on the quick pass. (Diagram 3.)
- Have the designated passer throw direct passes, while the lay-up shooters use exclusively bounce passes.
- Have a coach call how players should immediately switch hands, even if they're just attacking the basket.
  1. *Cross!* = Regular cross-over.
  2. *Back!* = Behind the back.
  3. *Legs!* = Between-the-legs.
  4. *In-and-out!* = In-and-out.

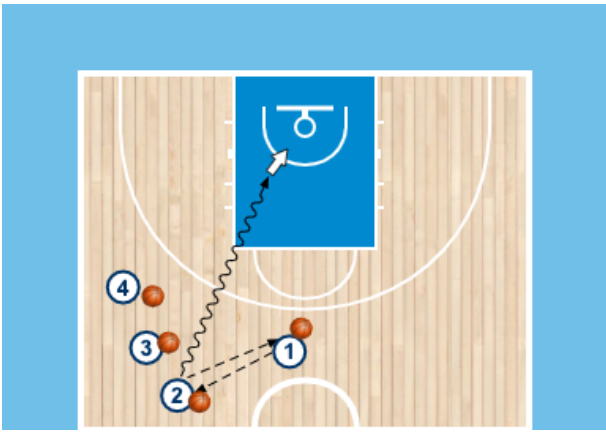


Diagram 1.

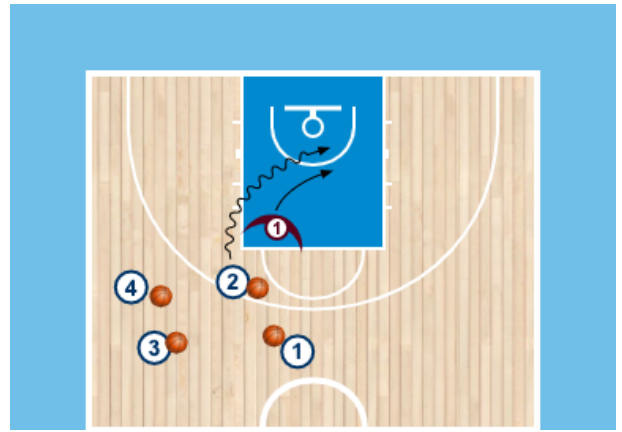


Diagram 2.

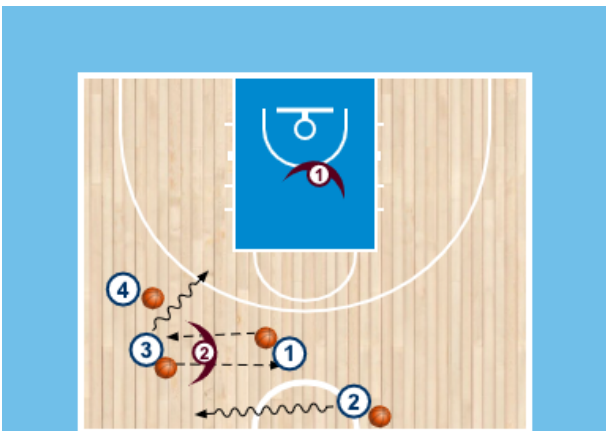


Diagram 3.

## **Coast to Coast on Demand**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Ball handling and passing.

**Setup:** Full court. Full squad. One ball per player.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** You may start this, as I did, as a traditional reductionistic youth basketball drill, but luckily *Coast to Coast on Demand* can be turned into quite wild an affair.

### **Procedure**

- All players dribble baseline to baseline.
- Coach directs the action by hand signals and verbal calls.
- Hand signals direct the direction and speed of the dribble.
  1. One fist up = Moderate speed forward.
  2. Two fists up = Full speed forward.
  3. One arm extended in front of the body = Moderate speed backward.
  4. Two arms extended in front of the body = Full speed backward.
  5. Extended arms at side = Stop.
- Verbal calls direct switching hands.
  1. "Cross!": Cross the ball over.
  2. "Back!" = Behind the back.
  3. "Legs!" = Between the legs
  4. "Spin!" = Spin around.
- Additionally, if the coach a player's name, she goes full speed ahead and scores on a lay-up. See X1 in diagram 1.

## **Variations**

- Extras may be added as designated defenders (O1) and as designated passers (#C). (Diagram 2.)
- A passer extra may ask for a pass by calling a player's name or by raising her two open hands and making eye contact with her. The player passes to the extra, cuts to the basket, gets the pass and scores on a lay-up. See X2 in diagram 2.
- Defender extras play defense as they wish or as instructed by the coach.

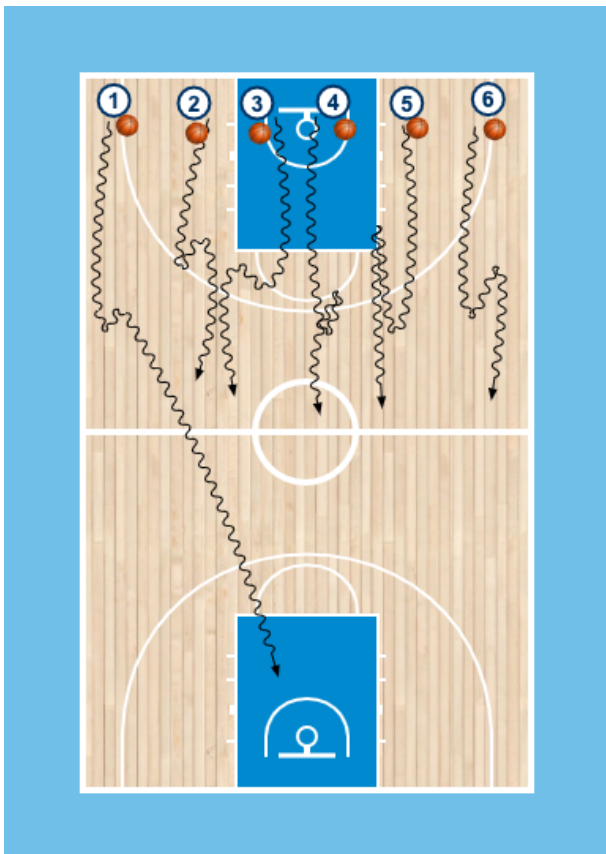


Diagram 1.

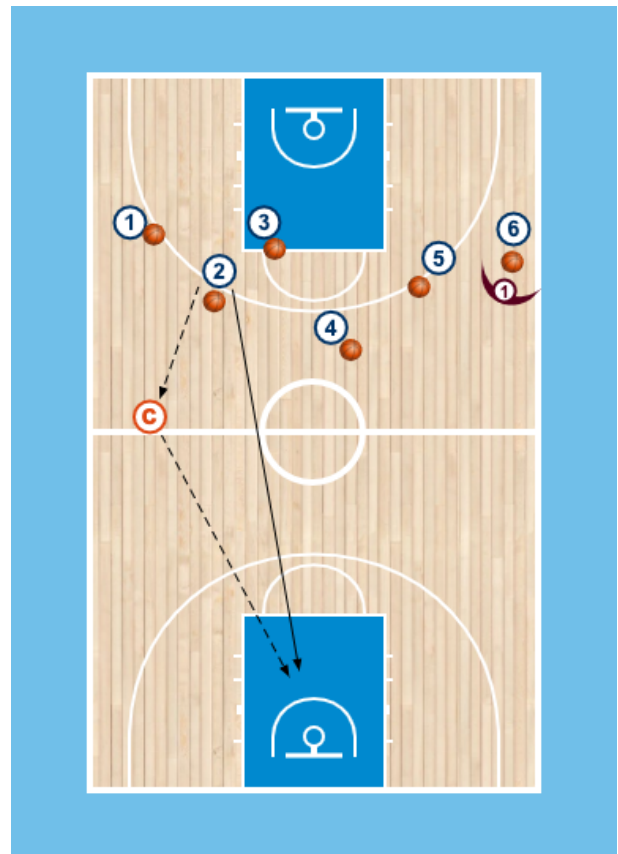


Diagram 2.

# **Full Court Slalom**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Attacking full court and full speed with the ball.

**Setup:** Full court. Each player with a ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** In the basic variation of the drill there is no passing and no defenders. Thus this variation is only run to learn the drill. Usually there are extras implemented as passers and defenders.

## **Procedure**

- There is a course of five cones or chairs set on both sides of the floor. (Diagram 1.)
- X1 speed dribbles around the cones and scores on a lay-up.
- Simultaneously, X2 slaloms on the other side of the floor. (Diagram 1.)

## **Variations**

- Implement extras as passers. They ask for a pass by raising their two open hands, as #C does in diagram 2.
- Implements extras as defenders. (O1 and O2 in diagram 2.)
- Replace cones with live defenders. X1 doesn't need to circle around them via a certain route but can advance as she sees fit. (Diagram 3.)
- For clarity's sake, only the action on one side of the floor is shown in diagrams 2 and 3.

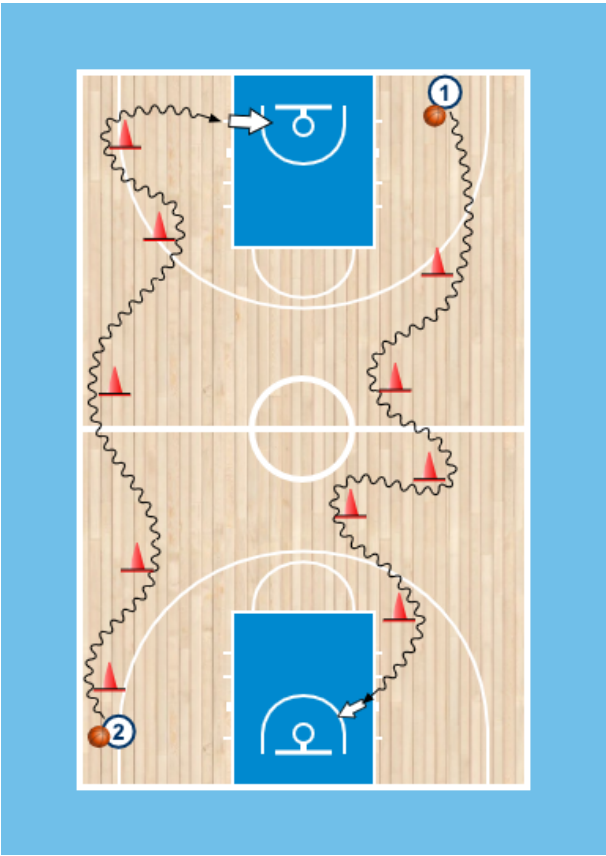


Diagram 1.

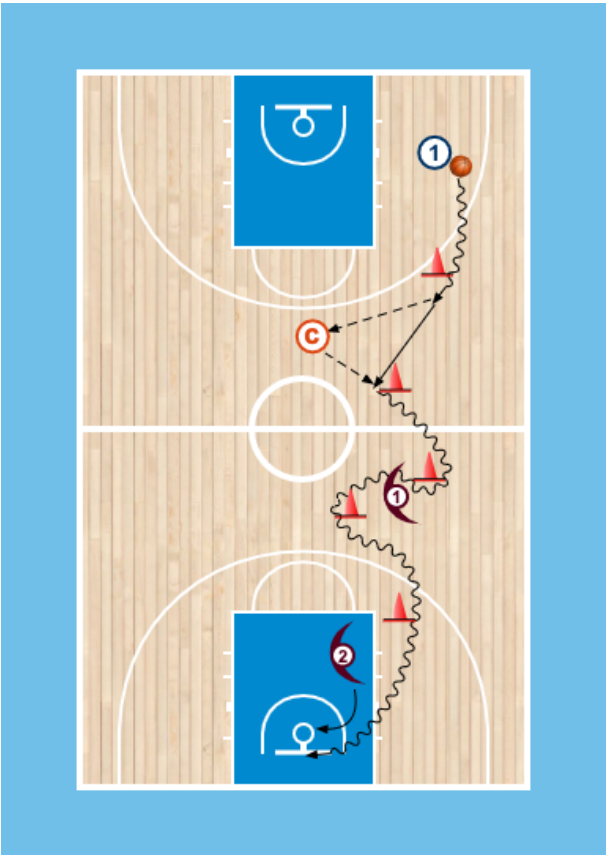


Diagram 2.

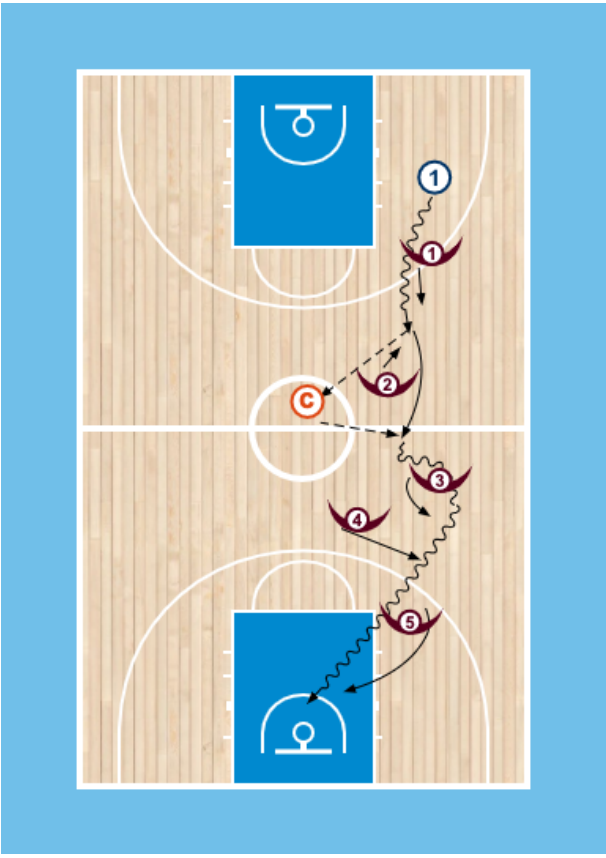


Diagram 3.

# **Lay-up Merry-Go-Round**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Setup:** Full court. Full squad. One ball per player.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** The basic version of this *1v0 Lay-up Merry-Go-Round* quite different from the basic version of *Full Speed Attack 1v1*. Yet once the extras are added, the two drills start to resemble each other.

## **Procedure**

- Each player has a ball at half-court.
- The coach calls constraints on how lay-ups are to be made, for example "*Goofy left*", meaning that the players are to jump off the left foot and finish with the left hand.
- X1 and X2 are the first two to go. (Diagram 1.)
- After the lay-up, they rebound it, return to the half court, wait for their turn, and then attack the other basket. (Diagram 2.)
- These are examples of the constraints that that the coach may use.
  - *Weaker hand only!*
  - *Reverse!*
  - *No backboard!*
  - *High off the glass!* = The ball must touch the glass above the painted square.
  - *Extra spin!* = When the ball touches the glass, it must be spinning differently than it usually does.
  - *Behind the back! Between the legs!* = The coach determines how the player should switch hands right before going for the lay-up.

## **Variations**

- In case of a miss, have the player get the rebound and immediately try to score on a putback.
- Have the players come up with their own solutions for lay-ups, asking them to do for example "Four different speedy weaker hand lay-up that you can barely do."
- Put in extras as passers (#C's in diagram 3). They pass the ball back to players so that they can go directly for a lay-up, without putting the ball on the floor.
- Put in defensive extras that play variable defense. (Diagram 4.)

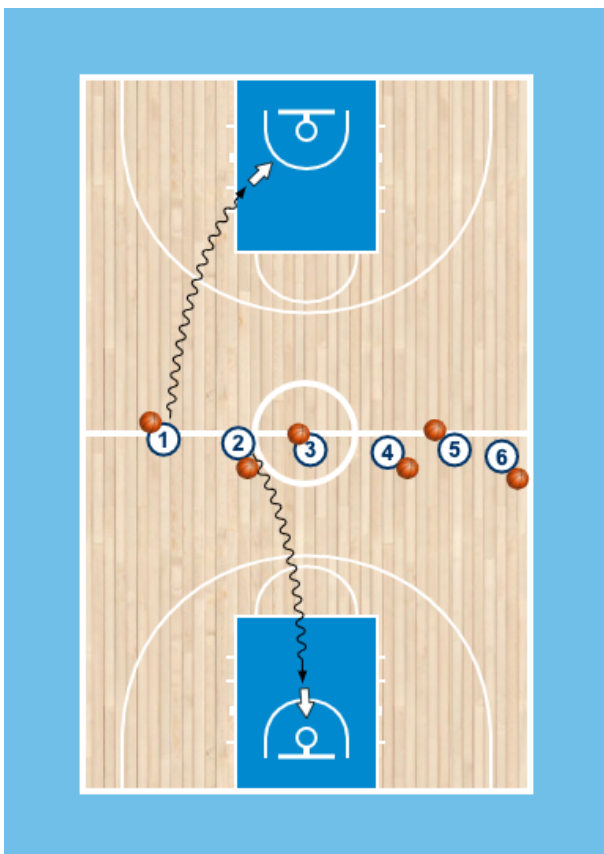


Diagram 1.

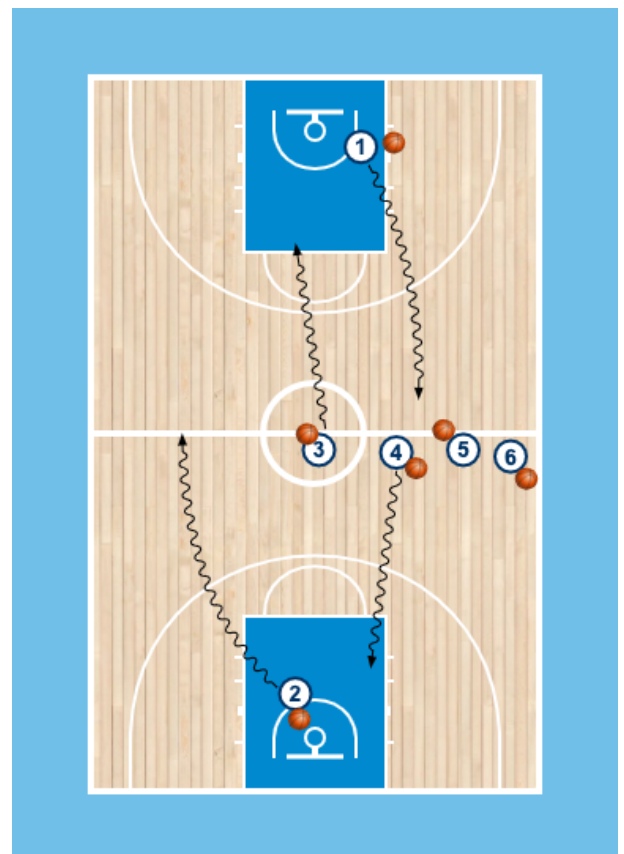


Diagram 2.



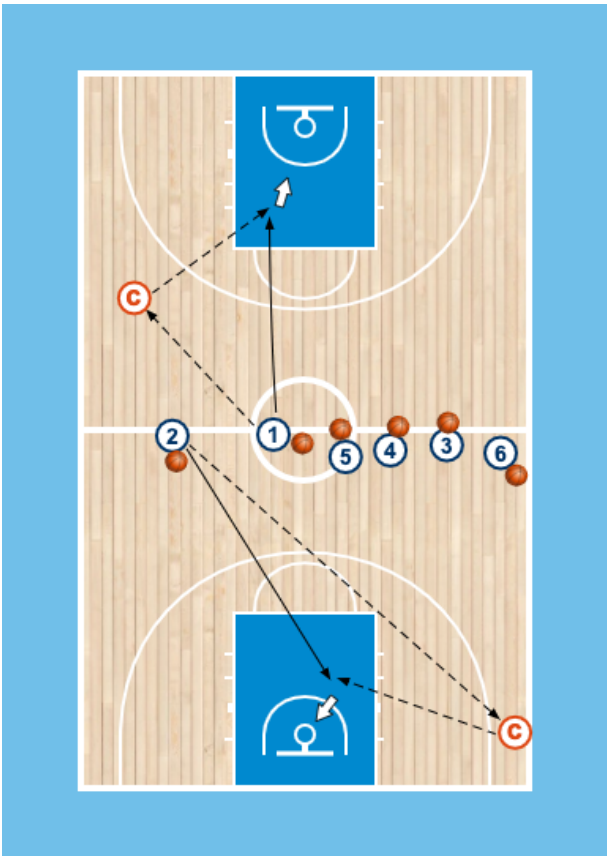


Diagram 3.

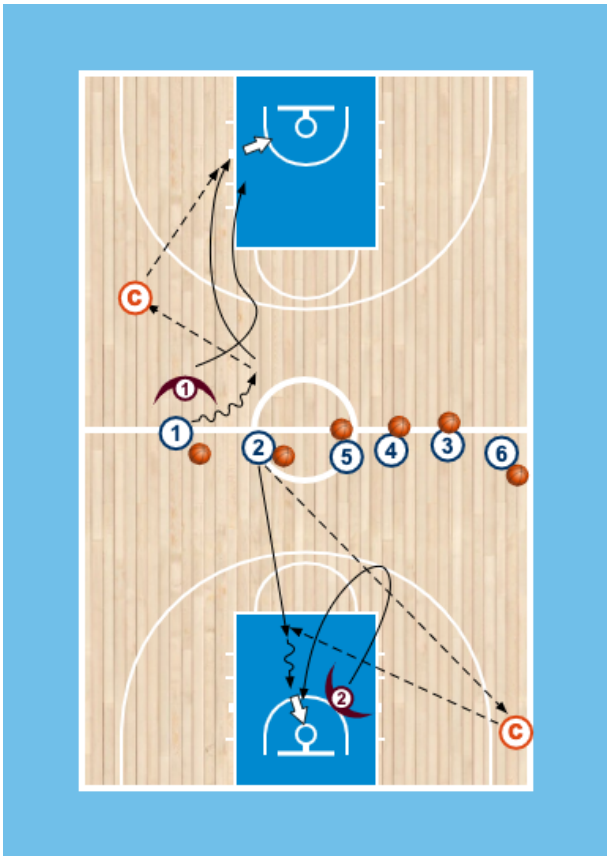


Diagram 4.

# **Lay-up Show**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Ability to execute difficult passes and lay-ups.

**Setup:** Full court. Groups of two or three. A ball for each group.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** This is one of those drills where the goal is to encourage players to improve their skills towards technical virtuosity. It's also a fun one.

## **Procedure**

- Groups of two or three are given six minutes to choreograph and practice an act for the show.
- The goal is to advance coast to coast passing and dribbling and then scoring as showily as possible.
- The act is executed twice.
- The judge then picks the winner. The judge may be a coach, an injured player, or an innocent bystander.
- The criteria are:
  1. Degree of difficulty.
  2. Speed of crossing the court.
  3. Flawlessness of execution.

# **Mimic Drives**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Enrichening one's movement patterns.

**Setup:** Full court. Each player with a ball.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras. Videos.

**Miscellaneous:** The superficial goal is to copy the general pattern of the drive exhibited. For example, to go behind the back with the left hand and score on a goofy right-handed lay-up. The more profound goal is to mimick the model's expressive behaviour, for example the way she runs when accelerating for the drive.

## **Procedure**

- X1 shows twice the same uncontested drive. It should include her favourite moves and be difficult to execute.
- The other players watch and then attempt twice to mimick the drive and to hit the consequent lay-up.
- X1 judges who did the best job of mimicking her. The criteria are:
  1. Resembleness.
  2. Flawlessness of execution.
- The winner becomes the next model.

## **Variations**

- The coach shows the model as a video clip. So instead of teammate, the model may be any player in the world.
- An extra is added as a passer so that a pass may be a part of the execution.
- A passive defender is added as an extra, and drive is executed considering her.

# **Passin' All Over the Court**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphases:** Utilise different kinds of passes while moving.

**Setup:** Full court. Pairs. A ball for each pair.

**Duration:** 6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** I've used this one as a part of warm-up. To avoid boredom, there should be use calls and extras.

## **Procedure**

- Pairs circle around the court and pass the ball back and forth. (Diagram 1.)
- Along the sidelines the two run side by side.
- Along the baseline they run one after the other and facing each other.
- In other words, in diagram 1, X4 is running forward while X3 is backpedalling.
- The coach calls the type of a pass to be used. Possible calls include:
  1. *"Bounce pass!"*
  2. *"Scoop!"*
  3. *"Behind the back!"*
- The coach calls when the direction of the circulation is reversed.

## **Variations**

- The running speed may be determined and varied by the coach.
- Extras are put in as defenders. See O1 and O2 in diagram 2.

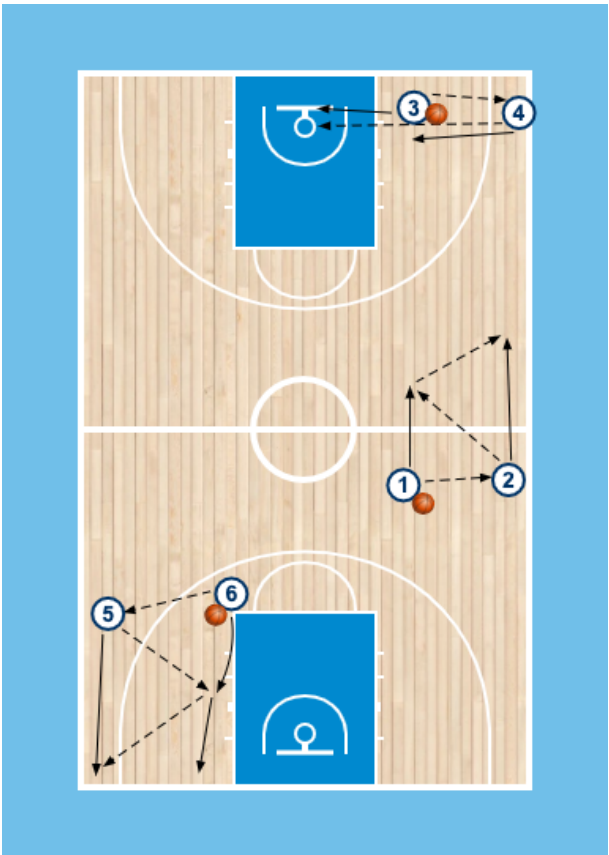


Diagram 1.

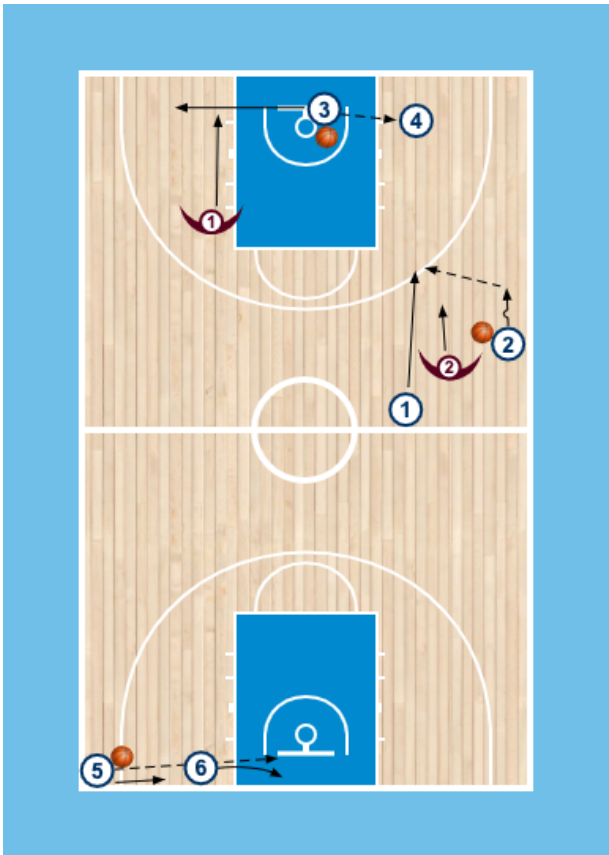


Diagram 2.

# **360 Degree Passing**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Dribbling and passing off dribbling in a half-court situation.

**Setup:** Two players at each basket. One ball.

**Duration:** 4 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** This can be a dull and inefficient drill if players only do what they know they can do. Yet the drill can also be an efficient one if the players use techniques they can barely execute.

## **Procedure**

- X1 dribbles facing the basket. X2 moves randomly around him. (Diagram 1.)
- When X2 asks for the ball by raising her two open hands, X1 makes a pass to him. X2 returns the ball to X1 who resumes the dribble.
- When the coach calls "*Time*", X1 attacks and goes for a lay-up. X2 plays defense on her.
- Then X2 and X1 reverse roles.

## **Variations**

- Add an extra defender who plays defense on either X1 or X2. (O1 in diagram 2.) There also may be multiple defender going around the floor.
- Add an extra passer. She asks for the ball by raising her two open hands and serves as an extra passing target for the ball handlers. (#C in diagram 3.)

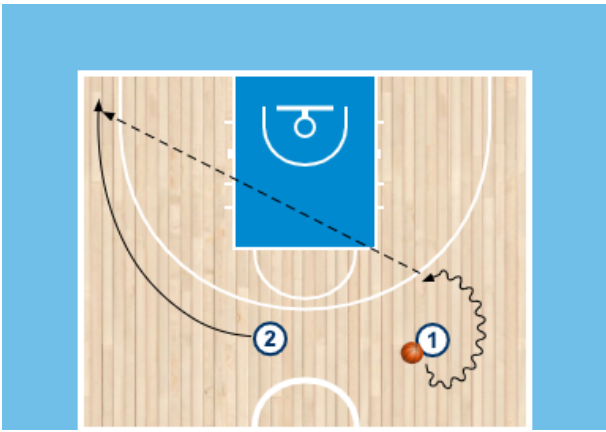


Diagram 1.

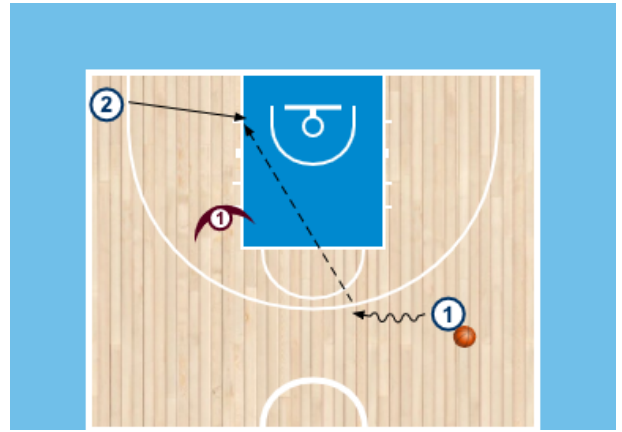


Diagram 2.

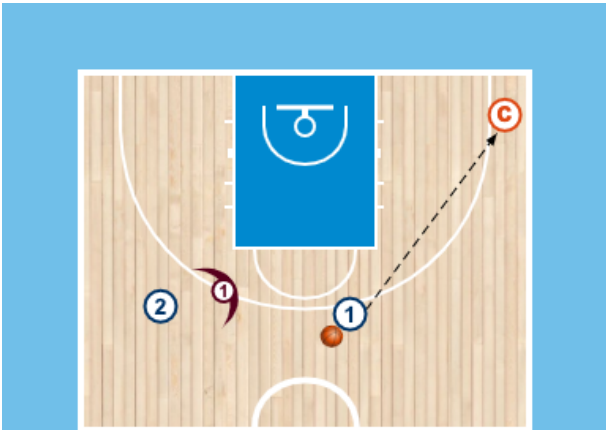


Diagram 3.

# **Six Trips**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Making difficult passes while moving.

**Setup:** Full court. Groups of two. One ball.

**Duration:** 6–8 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras. Rim reducer.

**Miscellaneous:** Coaches hope that their players become virtuosi, yet the drills we run seldom call for virtuosic actions. Six Trips is an attempt to make that call.

## **Procedure**

- Determine the type of a pass and the type of a lay-up to be used.
- X1 and X2 go coast to coast, using exclusively the determined pass and the determined lay-up. (Diagram 1.)
- If the lay-up is missed, X1 or X2 may score off the rebound so that one jump up, catches the ball and shoots the putback while still airborne.
- Each pair has three tries. Each try is timed. The best time wins.
- Possible violations include dribbling the ball or accidentally dropping it on the floor, going out of bounds and using passes or lay-ups that are not allowed.
- After three rounds, a winning pair is declared and novel constraints are set for passing and lay-ups. Then the pairs go for another set of three trips down the floor. Thus the name of the drill, *Six Trips*.
- Suggested passing constraints include:
  1. Behind the back.
  2. Between the legs.
  3. Bounce pass with a spin.
  4. Jump passes.
  5. One hand only.



- Suggested lay-up constraints include:
  1. Alley-oop.
  2. No backboard.
  3. Off-hand only.
  4. Reverse layups.
  5. Spin the ball around the waist before shooting.

### **Variations**

- Implement one or two extras as passive defenders between X1 and X2. Thus they must vary the passes further to be able to pass around the defenders.
- Add an extra defender inside the no-charge semi-circle to eliminate uncontested lay-ups. (Diagram 2.)

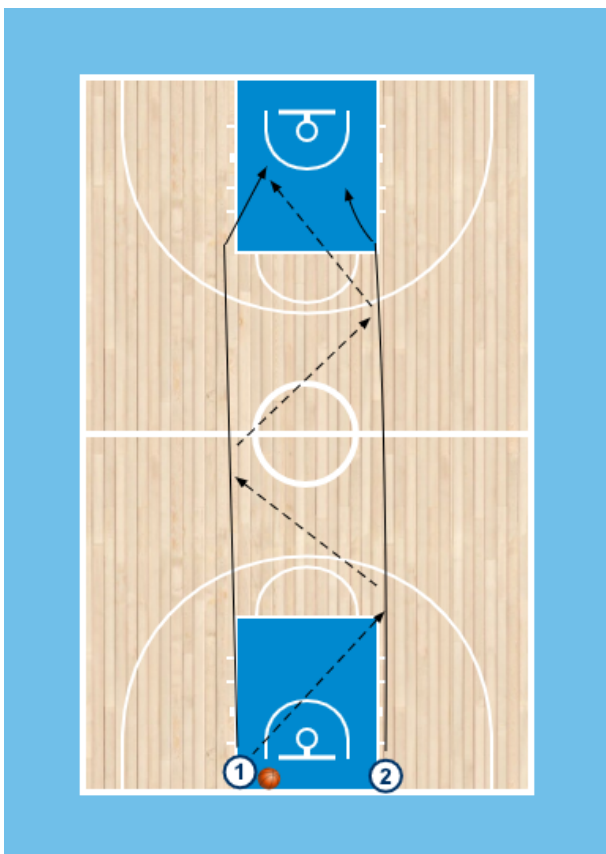


Diagram 1.

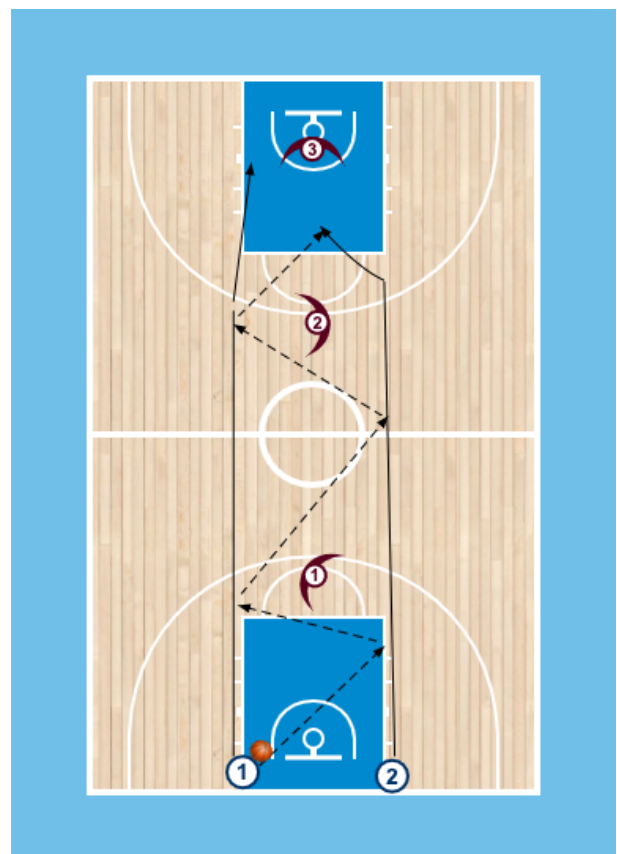


Diagram 2.

## **Speed Dribble Coast to Coast**

**Category:** Passing, Lay-ups and Ballhandling.

**Emphasis:** Passing and handling the ball in full speed.

**Setup:** Full court. Groups of three. One ball for each group.

**Duration:** 4–6 minutes.

**Modifiers:** Extras.

**Miscellaneous:** Out of the drills in this book, this is probably the one where it's easiest for the ball handler to grow her dribbling speed.

### **Procedure**

- The squad is split into groups of three.
- Two players and the ball at one end of the floor, the third player at the other end. (Diagram 1.)
- Using speed dribble, X1 starts advancing towards the other end where X2 awaits.
- While speed dribbling, X1 will switch hands as predetermined by the coach, using cross-over, behind-the-back, between-the-legs, or in-and-out dribble.
- At some random point, X2 asks for the ball by raising her two open hands.
- X1 makes a pass to X2 and continues to run. If X1 hasn't yet reached the baseline, she gets a return pass from X2, as in diagram 1.
- The receiver X2 may show another signal, too. If she extends her arms at her side, X1 quickly stops and only goes on when X2 lowers her arms.
- As X1 reaches the baseline, she hands off the ball to X2. X2 starts her speed dribble towards the other end, where X3 awaits. (Diagram 2.)

## **Variations**

- Have a coach call on-line how players should switch hands.
  1. *Cross!* = Regular cross-over.
  2. *Back!* = Behind the back.
  3. *Legs!* = Between-the-legs.
  4. *In-and-out!* = In-and-out.
- Vary the dribbling speed. It can be on the safe side, where the players only dribble so fast that they can handle the ball. Alternatively, the coach may ask them to go to the risky side where they move so fast that there's a risk of fumbling.
- A player waiting for a pass at the baseline may ask for the ball from a player who's not in her group. See #8 pass to #3 in diagram 3. As soon as this happens, #9 evens things out by asking for a pass from #2.
- Defenders may be added as extras. They play dummy defense, putting random pressure on dribbling and passing. (Diagram 4.)
- Extra passers may be added. They ask for the ball and deliver it back to the dribbler on a give-and-go. (Diagram 5.)
- All these three variations may be utilised at the same time. (Diagram 6.)

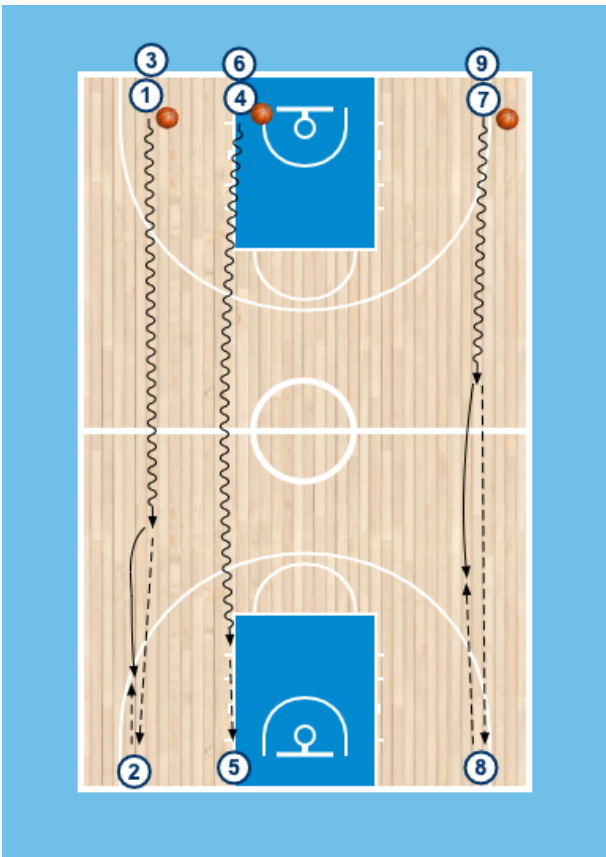


Diagram 1.

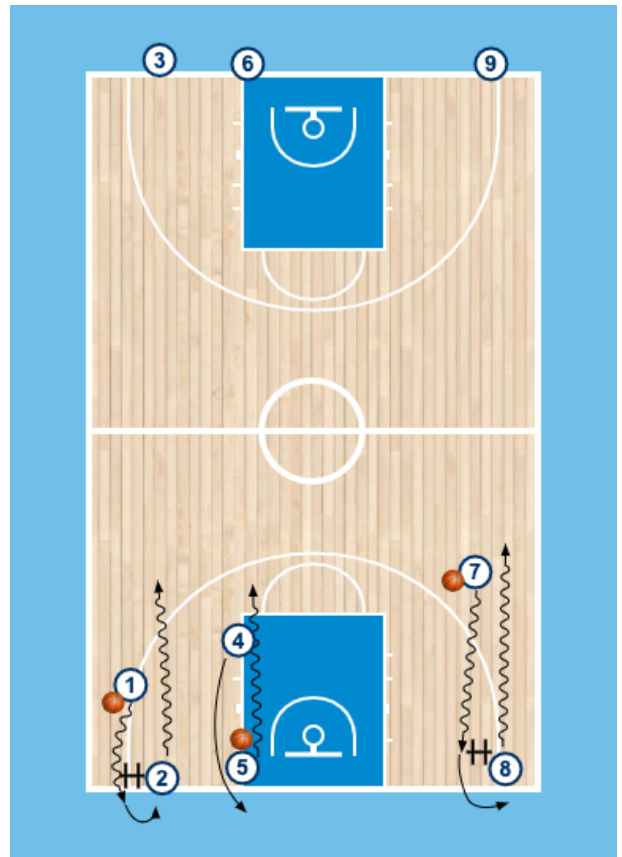


Diagram 2.

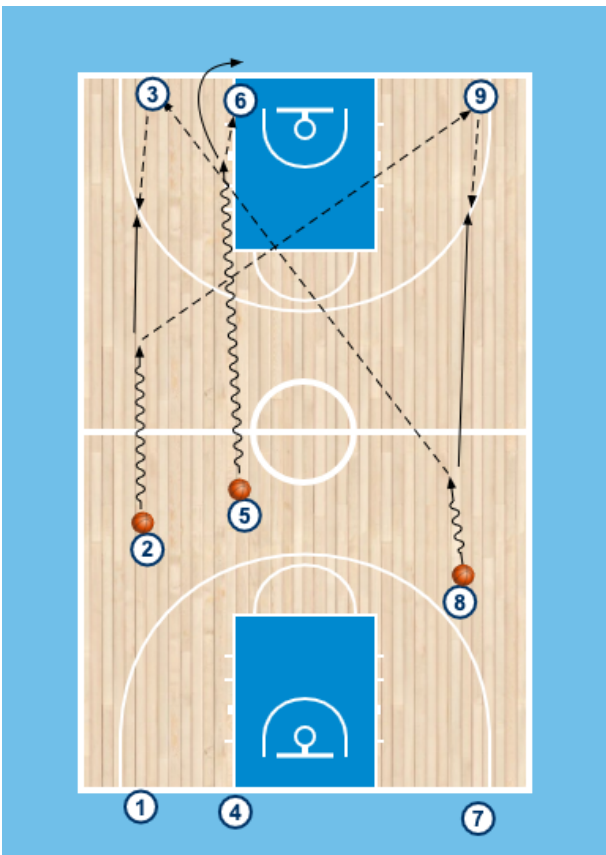


Diagram 3.

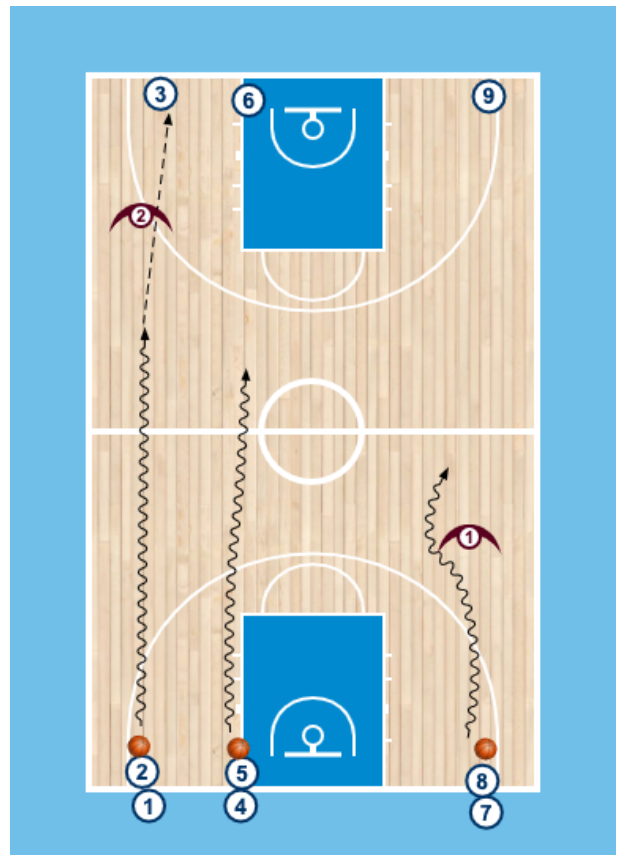


Diagram 4.

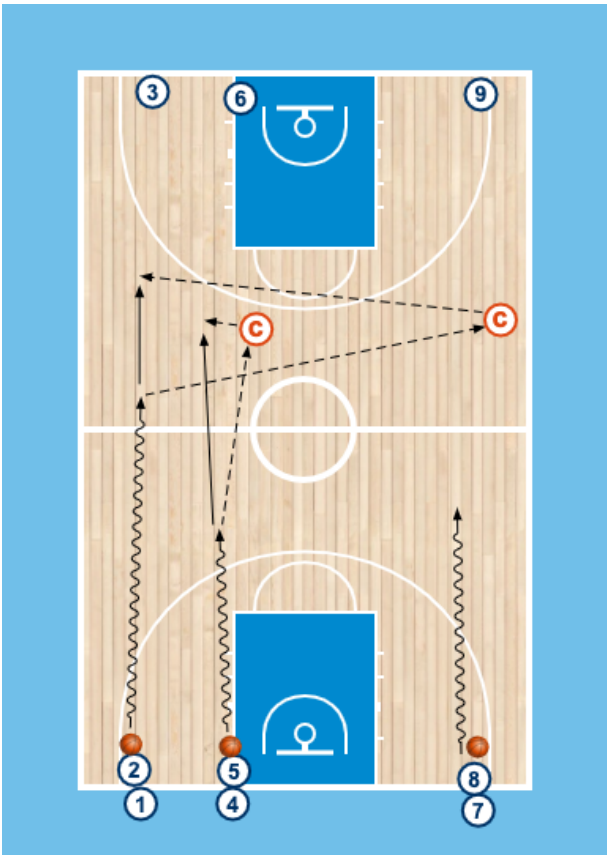


Diagram 5.

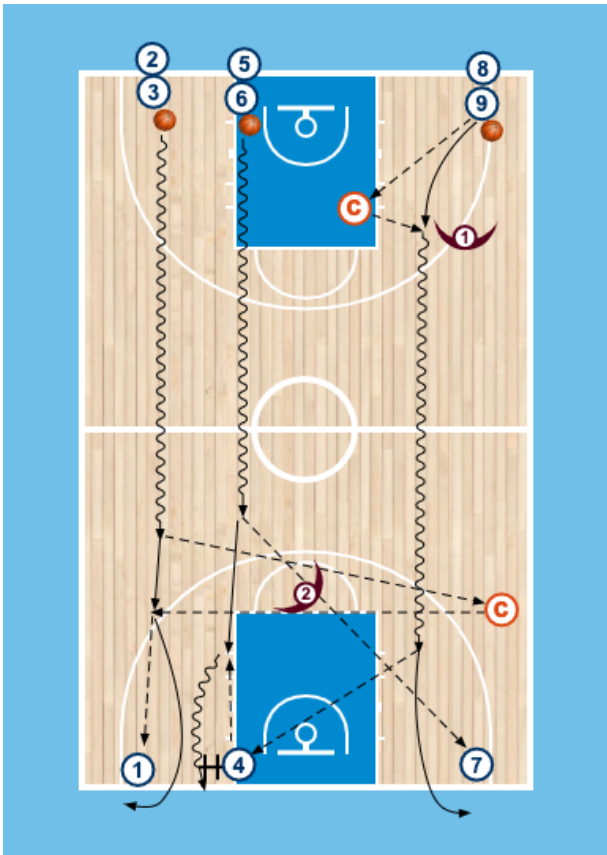


Diagram 6.

## **MOVEMENT WITHOUT THE BALL**

The two drills in this category involve no ball. Thus, you can make a case that they shouldn't be in this book.

That's because this book should include basketball-specific drills only, and you may claim that if there's no basketball ball in a drill, the drill is not basketball-specific.

However, I think that since these two little drills involve basketball-specific movement, they do earn their place here.

# **Without the Ball Mimic**

**Category:** Movement Without the Ball.

**Emphasis:** Warm-up.

**Setup:** Full court. Full squad. No balls.

**Duration:** 2 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** *Without the Ball on Mimic* could be listed as a modification of *Without the Ball On-Demand*. That's actually how I came up the concept. I was trying to figure how I'd get the players to execute similar movements without having to do the arm signalling myself.

## **Procedure**

- The squad is split into two. That is, a group of five to eight players line up at the baseline. (Diagram 1.)
- X1 starts moving up and down the floor.
- He may do a wide variety of thing:
  1. Run.
  2. Backpedal.
  3. Come to a full stop.
  4. Slide sideways.
  5. Spin 360 degrees.
  6. Accelerate and decelerate.
  7. Hop and skip.
  8. And so on.
- All other player (X2 to X5) mimick whatever it it that X1 is doing.
- After 8 to 14 seconds the coach blows her whistle, and the whole first group sprints to the other end of the floor. Simultaneously, the second group gets going from the opposite end.

- Once it's the first group's turn again, they have a new model (for example X2) for the others to mimick.
- Each group does three or four sets.
- Since this is a warm-up drill, the tempo of the movement grows as we go along.

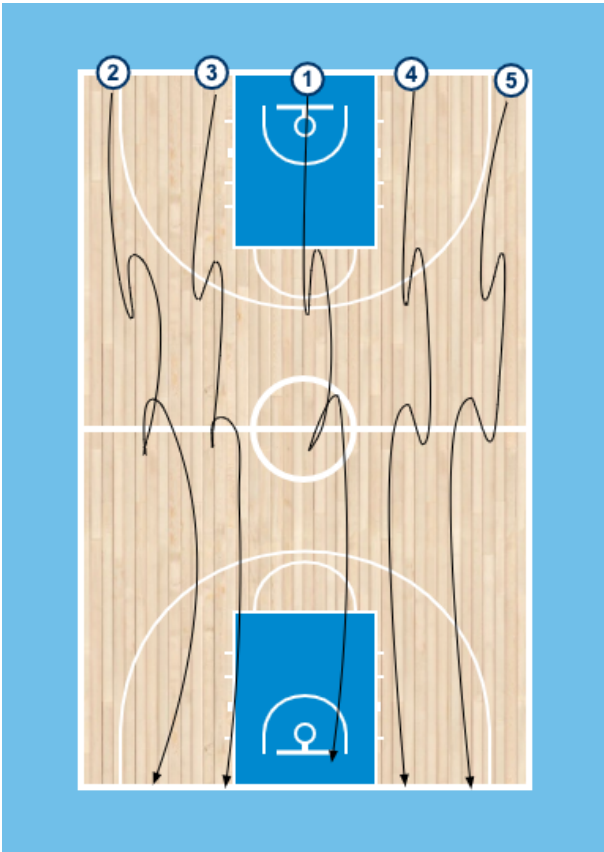


Diagram 1.



# **Without the Ball On-Demand**

**Category:** Movement Without the Ball.

**Emphasis:** Warm-up.

**Setup:** Full court. Full squad. No balls.

**Duration:** 2 minutes.

**Miscellaneous:** In addition to warming up, *Without the Ball Mimic* may enhance injury prevention. That's due to its combination of relevant moves and unpredictable, quick changes of direction.

## **Procedure**

- The squad is split into two. That is, a group of five to eight players line up at the baseline. The coach (#C) is facing them. (Diagram 1.)
- #C does arm signals.
- The direction where he points determines the direction where the players move.
  1. Forwards.
  2. Backward.
  3. To the left.
  4. To the right.
- Arm raised means that the players should immediately come to a full stop.
- The number of arms determines the speed of the movement:
  1. One arm = Moderate speed.
  2. Two arms = Full speed
- Additionally, #C may use verbal calls, for example "Jump!". Then players jump.
- Each group does three or four sets.
- Since this is a warm-up drill, the tempo of the movement grows as we go along.

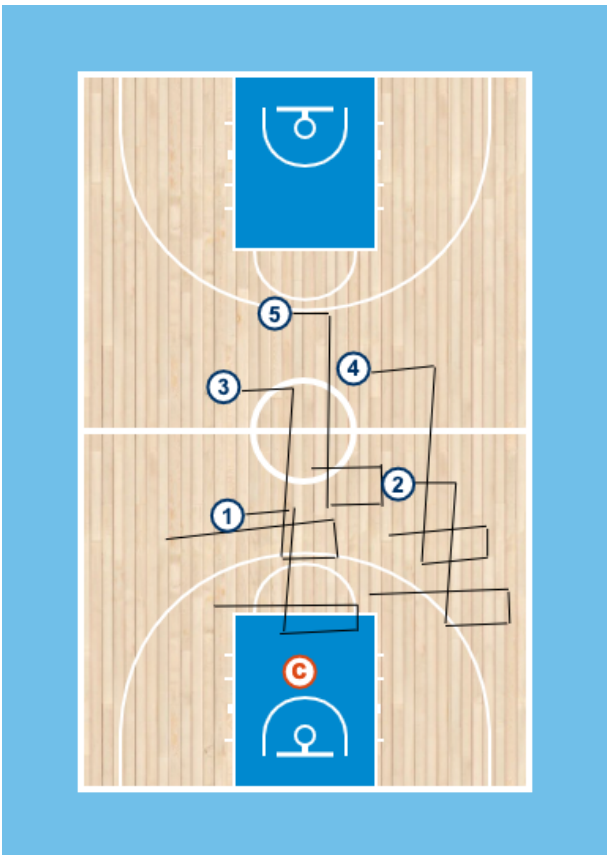


Diagram 1.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Harri Mannonen (b. 1967) is a basketball coach, coach educator and a freelance writer based in Kotka, Finland.

A basketball coach since 1984, he has experience from a wide variety of levels – from the grassroots to the professional and national team level. Besides Finland, he has coached in Denmark and Iceland.

Mannonen has a FIBA coach certification and a Master's Degree in Basketball Coaching from University of Worcester in England.

Besides basketball coaching, he has studied literature, education, philosophy and psychology.

Previously he has previously written and self-published two basketball books.

### **The Basics. 75 Things a Basketball Player Should Know (2012).**

A personalisable textbook for youth basketball players and teams. If you're interested in getting your own personalised edition, e-mail me at [harrimannonen@hotmail.com](mailto:harrimannonen@hotmail.com).

### **Complex Basketball Coaching. How to make basketball practices more effective. (2019)**

An overview on how to coach while considering that a basketball team is a complex system. To purchase *Complex Basketball Coaching* as an e-book, please visit [coachtube.com](http://coachtube.com).

