

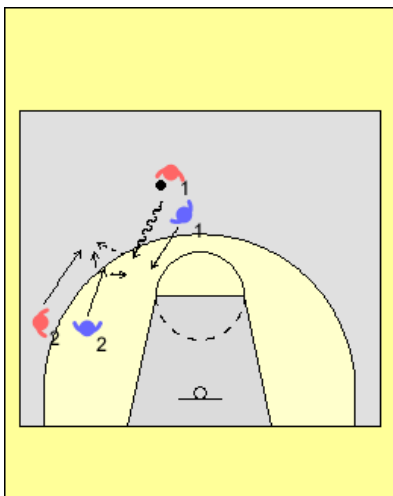
Penetration

I had the pleasure of spending a Saturday and Sunday with Rick Torbett of Better Basketball fame. It is always a pleasure to be in the presences of a great teacher. I want to share some of the lessons I learned from him.

Sharpen the Axe

Abe Lincoln was known as the rail-splitting president because of his rural background. At a political convention, a reporter jokingly asked him what he would do if he had two days to compete in a rail splitting competition. After pondering for a moment, he replied with a grin, “I would spend the first day sharpening my axe”. He knew that without a sharp axe he would be wasting a lot of energy. We continue to believe that, we can be successful by just playing games. Playing games dulls the axe. You need to take time to teach and recover. Below is a look at how we need to sharpen the axe in penetration principles.

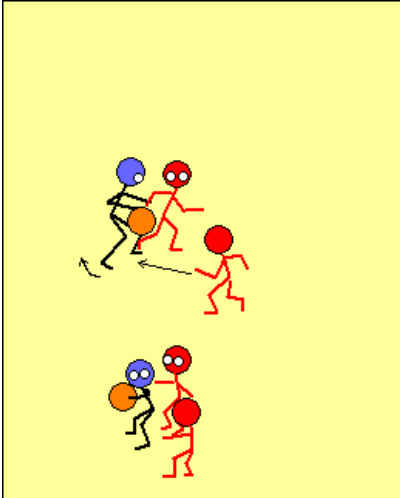
I have received many questions about the use of the dribble drive or read and react type offence. It interests many of our coaches. In my discussions with Rick Torbett we talked about the importance of hard penetration vs. soft penetration when using these offences. Players need to be able to develop the skills to create hard penetration. If not they have to recognize how they can keep the offence flowing when the penetration has become soft. Nothing kills good offense like a seven-dribble move that covers no space or the player who zigzags back and forth with the head down trying to beat his/her defender.



Soft penetration

In this example, the ball handler is not attacking the basket. Players need to be able to get into the paint or key for it to be classified as hard penetration.

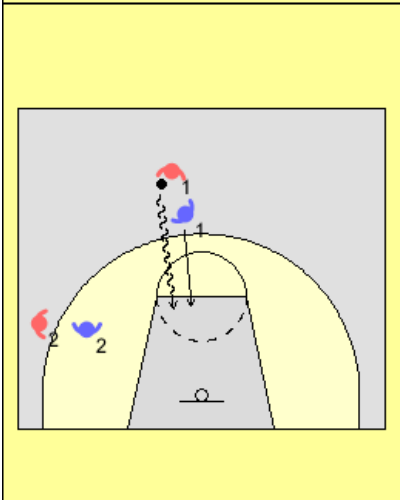
Too often player will take the easy action and run behind the ball. On soft penetration, this is a dangerous move. The defender of the player being dribbled at does not have to help. This defender gets a free swipe at the ball. If the pass is made, he/she also get a chance to steal the pass. This will often lead to an uncontested score at the other end.



Great players see the future

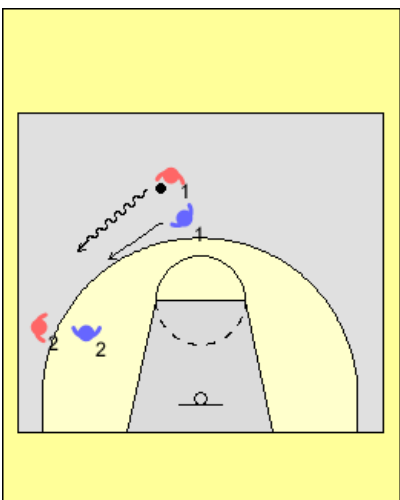
The great players can anticipate because they can see what the defence is going to do. They have learned to anticipate by reading those subtle clues that the defender gives away indicating his/her actions.

Too often, the ball handler does a lazy turn when the help defence approaches. This exposes the ball. It occurs because the dribbler cannot initiate the penetration without looking down. Coaches need to drill keeping the eyes up through out the entire drive. If the decision is late, players need to do a jump stop and a pivot to protect the ball.



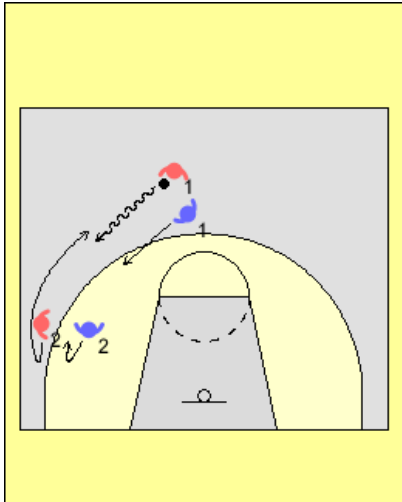
On hard penetration the defence must now make a decision;

- Help
- Or allow a easy score at the rim

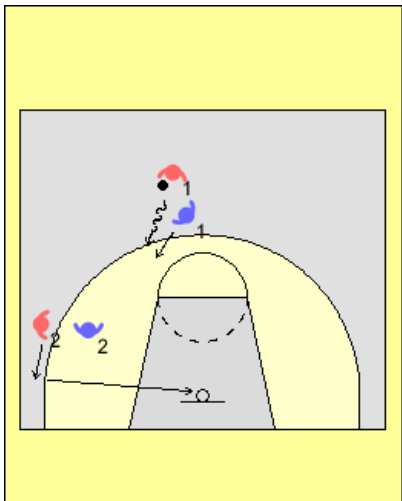


Dribble at

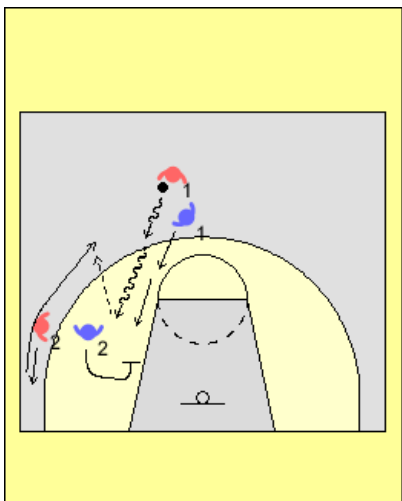
The other type of penetration that occurs is when a ball handler dribbles at a team-mate or the defender of an opponent.



This type of penetration leads to dribble hand-offs. It is the foundation of so many of the offences that are using weaves to initiate their attack.

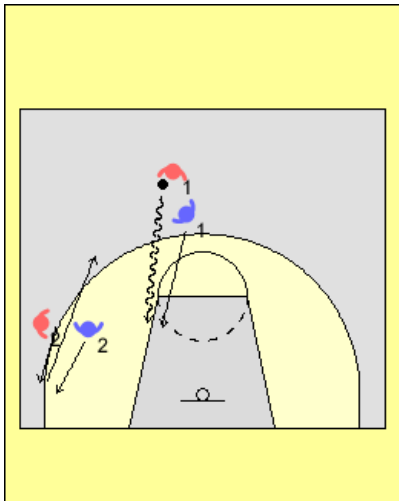


On soft penetration, the player is pushed away from the ball. The best option is to vacate the area. This takes the help defender out of the picture. The dribbler knows that they now have another pass option behind them.

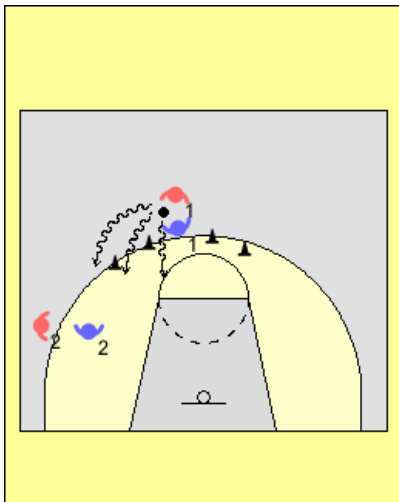


Circle behind

When the defence helps over and not up, the player being dribbled at can look to circle behind the ball. Defences do not always recognize that it is soft penetration. If the defender slides back and over to help it is a good time to circle behind.



On hard penetration the player being dribbled at can circle behind when his/her defender 'hugs' him/her. This means they stay tight and deny. Note that the player moved away first.



For teaching purposes, it is often advisable to place pylons to help define hard vs. soft penetration. (I actually recommend football dummies or something soft and solid so the player cannot go over the pylon). We need to teach players to go tight beside the defender.

If they do go with soft penetration, between the two pylons, the wing player can make the easy distinctions. If the player goes outside the second pylon, we know it is a dribble at.