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Working against pressure

In working with the players over that last month, it has become apparent that we still need to improve our ball handling when being closely guarded. Many players who look good in two ball dribbling or when dribbling on air (against no defence), break down fundamentally when faced with a defender and the decision on when to pass or keep the dribble alive. Often our dribbling drills do not challenge the players to improve in the subtle areas that become crucial in the real game. We need to instill the idea of 'deliberate practice'. This is not a new idea, but we can never assume that each generation of athletes and coaches understand the concept. The book Talent is Overrated, by Geoff Colvin makes the case that in all fields of endeavors; deliberate practice separates the successful from the average performer. When I was in Saskatchewan working with our Centre for Performance athletes, I challenged them to demonstrate deliberate practice.

I asked a group of players to work on a pull back crossover vs. an imaginary defender. I stopped the group and asked how many kept their eyes up the entire time when dribbling. The majority were not sure or unaware. I asked them to repeat the drill and focus on looking up. At the conclusion of the task I asked the question, how many kept their eyes up the entire time. None raised their hands (they were a very honest group).

"We need to turn this into a deliberate practice drill"; I told them.

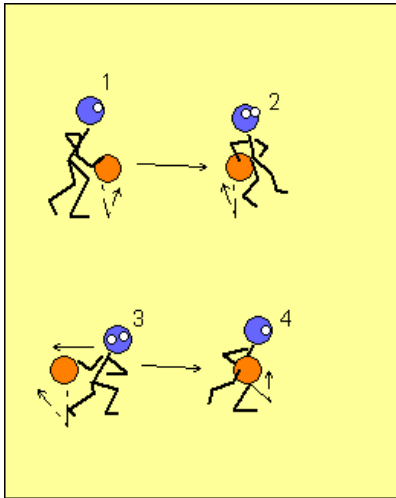
"This means we are going to focus on one very important detail, it is going to be very difficult. If it were easy, anyone would be able to accomplish it on the first try. Dribble using your pull back cross over and keep your eyes on me the whole time. If you lose the ball start over, but don't look down."

When I asked them how many accomplished the drill, without looking down, they all raised their hand. We also had more errors. I asked them how hard it was to accomplish. They found it difficult to do and keep control of the ball with any speed. Did they think if they continued to practice this way it would make them better? A resounding yes!

Deliberate practice is hard and smart work combined. You have a definite plan of what you want to focus on. You pay close attention to that specific detail.

Below is a progression I have used to teach handling pressure. All players play all positions. In order to make it deliberate practice, challenge the players to focus on one detail at a time. As their skills improve, load the drill with a tougher challenge.

It starts with teaching a pullback dribble.



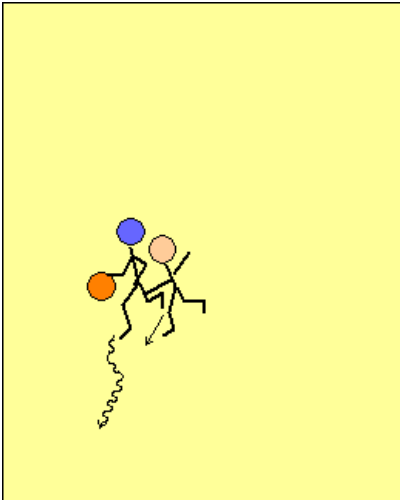
Pull back dribble

Whenever a player sees a double team coming or feels the defender forcing him/her to a dangerous position on the floor, the ball handler needs to stop his/her forward momentum (2) and use a retreat or backward dribble (3).

Notice that the ball is by the back foot when retreating. Creating space from the defender(s), the player can now square his/her body (4). From this position, the ball handler has many options.

All players need to develop this dribble. It must be performed with:

- the eyes up
- definite change of speed
- change of direction
- both hands
- against guide defence



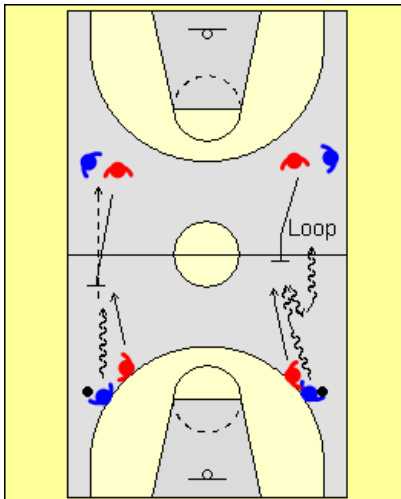
KOB the defender

The second skill ball handlers needs to develop is the ability to KOB (Keep On Body). Often, the dribbler allows him/her self to be funnelled to the sideline or to the trap. The dribbler must lean into the defender. Upon gaining advantage, put the defender on your back.

Drill this skill by starting with a very tight defender. You want to advance to the stage where the defence is literally pushing on the hips trying to ride the dribbler off a line. Do not get pushed off the straight line.

Load the drill

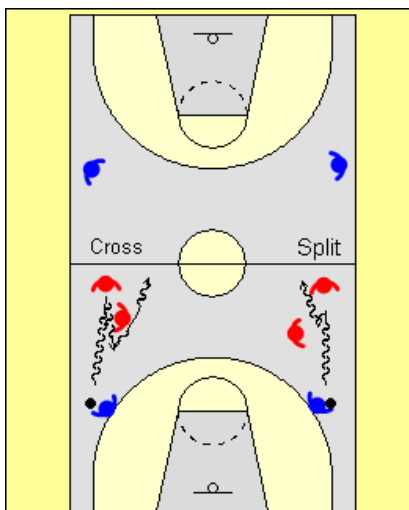
Add a player who calls for a pass. The dribbler must decide if to pass immediately or to create space with a pull back. We do not want a jump stop and then a pivot. This technique is fine at early stages of development. At higher levels players are caught not being able to pass once they pick up the ball.



Pullback Loop

In the example on the far left we see what many beginning players will do; they dribble into the double team, pick up the ball and attempt to pass in the direction that the trap came from. Team that run this trap, practice taking this pass way on a daily basis.

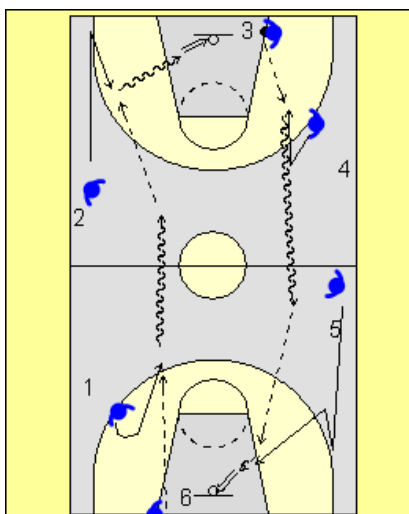
In the example on the right side, we see the ball handler KOB the defender by fighting for the middle of the floor. When the trap comes, the dribbler uses the pullback dribble. Because he/she has made space, he/she can loop around the trap and still dribble up the sideline.



Pullback Cross / Split

In the example on the far left, the dribbler uses a crossover to attack the middle after pulling back. It is important that this crossover occur in a backward direction. The key is to cross the ball from one pocket to the other as you drop your foot. This now allows the dribbler to explode forward once the ball is in the other hand.

If on the pullback, a gap appears between the two defenders in the trap the ball handler can explode and split the trap with a low dribble.



Initiation Drill

Divide the players into six spots. There will be a ball out of bounds at each end. The player moves to get open. This player must now initiate the early shot clock and get the ball down the floor. Once over half the same player must initiate the mid clock offence with a pass to the wing player. You as the coach can decide on the different actions you want the players to practice. The players rotate from spot to spot in a clockwise direction. Points of emphasis:

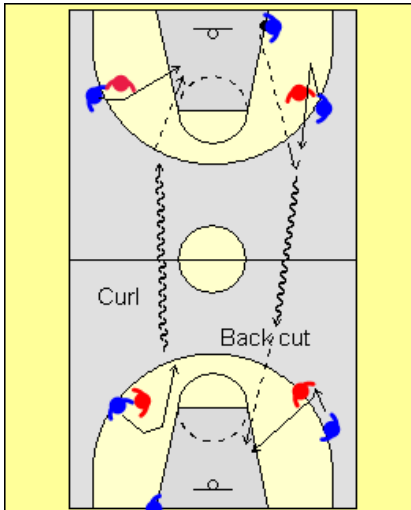
- The inbounder must look like a quarterback by having his/her feet perpendicular to the baseline. In addition, the inbounder should not be under the basket.

- Catch the inbounder's eye. The passer and receiver must make eye contact.
- The second offensive player at half must read the first receiver. If he/she is not open the

second receiver might have to cut back as a pressure release. Also, do not be so close to allow your defender to become involved in the play, especially when the first receiver back cuts.

- Cross half between the volleyball court and the centre circle. Avoid the sideline.
- The wing player must know when the guard is able to and ready to make the pass. This is usually when the eyes are up and the guard has the strength to make the distance.

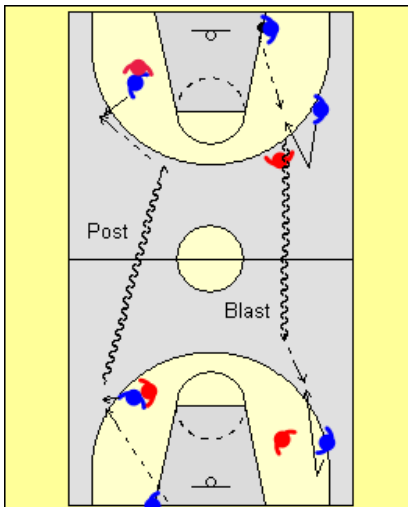
The next rebounder is ready to grab the ball and make an outlet pass on a miss or inbound the ball on a make. I deliberately use the left side to make the players work on their weak hands.



Reads

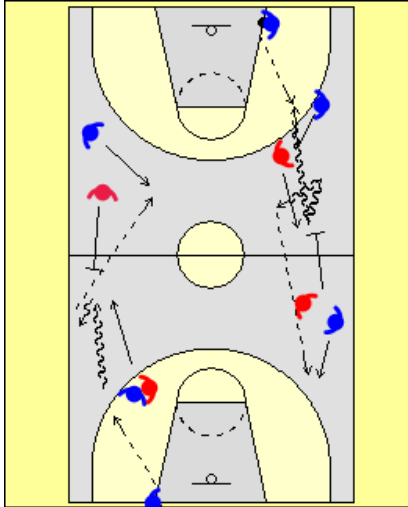
We now add guided defenders who give reads. They become the next offensive player. Notice that the same options can occur in the backcourt and frontcourt. The options are:

- Curl – if the defence stays flat rip under the arm and curl to the middle of the floor. This gets the player attacking north/south immediately. If the curl cut was not open the second receiver would cut back to receive the ball.
- Back cut – I also call this a wink wink. The defender over plays the receiver. Move the defender in the direction of the overplay. This creates more space in which to cut to receive the pass.
- Post – if the defence plays behind you seal the defender. The pass from the inbounder should be to a spot that the receiver breaks too.



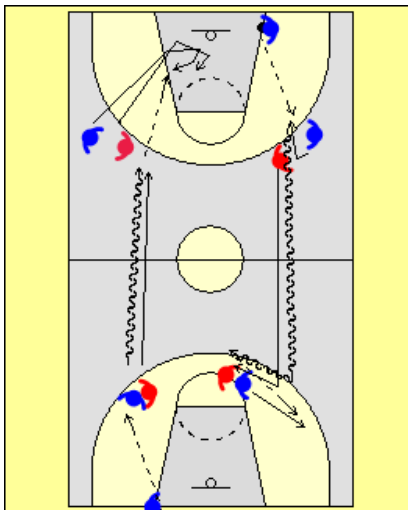
Note: In all of these options, we do not want to receive the ball in the corner, below the foul line extended.

- Blast – the receiver makes greater space by taking the defender away from the ball then cuts back to receive the pass.



Trapping

We now load the drill by having the defence work on setting traps. They can trap the out of control dribbler (going to fast with the eyes down) or just as the ball crosses half. The offensive players are working on moving in space and using the pullback dribbles to keep the dribble alive or to make a better pass angle.



Full court 2 on 2

Now play live full court 2 on 2. The players can work on any entries that you want to emphasize. In the example, the offence is dribbling the player into the post on the left. On the right, the players use a high pick to initiate the offence.