



by Aíto García Reneses



by Sito Alonso

# AVOID RELAXING ON THE COURT

**Aíto García Reneses** was head coach (and also general manager) of Barcelona (Spain) for many years, where his teams won three Division I championships, three Spanish Cups, one King's Cup, two FIBA Europe, and two Korac Cups. He has been head coach of Badalona (Spain) since 2003, where he won one FIBA Europe (2006), one King's Cup (2008) and ULEB Cup (2008). He also was awarded Coach of the Year of the ULEB Cup 2007-08.

**Sito Alonso** started his coaching career in 1987 with the youth teams of Zaragoza (Spain); then he was responsible for youth teams at Monzón, where he also was head coach of the first team (EBA league) from 1999 to 2004. He has been assistant coach of Badalona since 2006, where his teams won FIBA Europe (2006), King's Cup (2008), and the ULEB Cup (2008).

Twenty years ago, many people criticized player rotations. The possible explanation was that people were not used to seeing rotations on the court and they thought that many advantages were lost, such as the possibility of giving the most minutes to the five best players on the team.

Currently, however, all good (and even the not-so-good) teams use rotations. The most important advantage of this is that teams can play at the highest athletic levels. When a player is fatigued, he can recuperate and recover his energy on the bench and not on the court.

That said, players still relax on the court. We're going to describe some typical examples of situations players use that, if avoided, can clearly raise a player's efficiency and a team's productivity.

## OFFENSE

**1. Two-on-one:** When the defensive team double teams and plays two-on-one, there are two very common "stops" that offensive players use. If, in the spot shown in





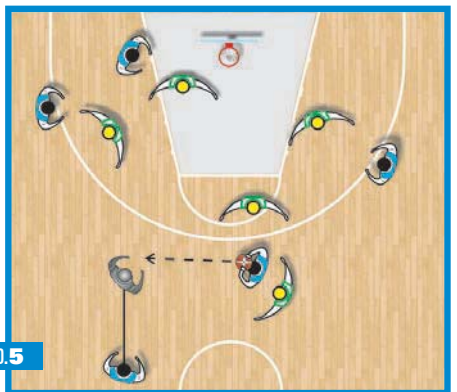
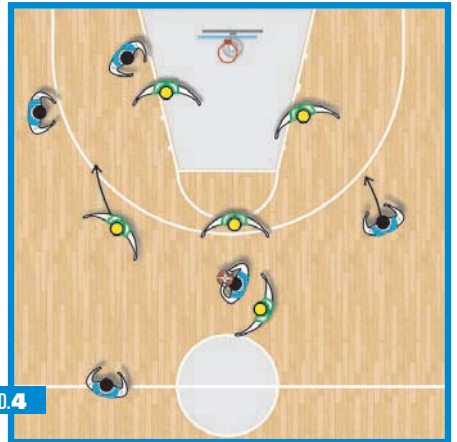
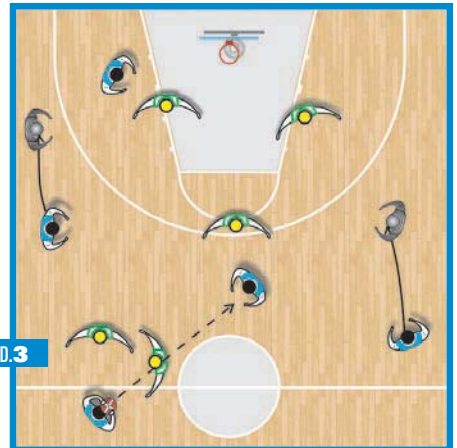
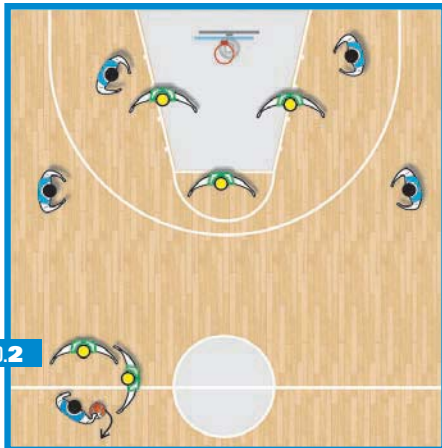
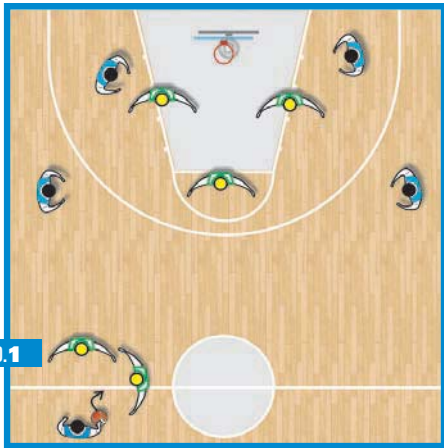
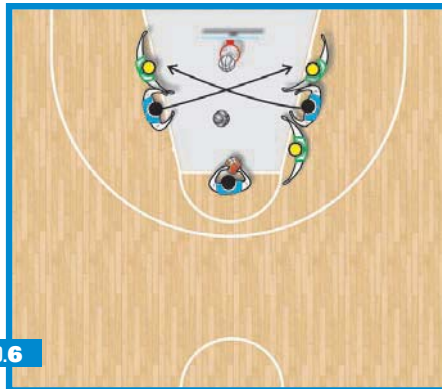


diagram 1, the player with the ball is double teamed by two defenders, his teammates run without worrying about the problems that this defensive situation may cause. Normally, the teammate should help the player with the ball. The reaction has to be immediate and they need to change the rhythm by looking for a new passing line. Players, as shown in diagram 2, stay in their spots, energetically calling for the ball, but they are asking for a pass that is susceptible to being intercepted.

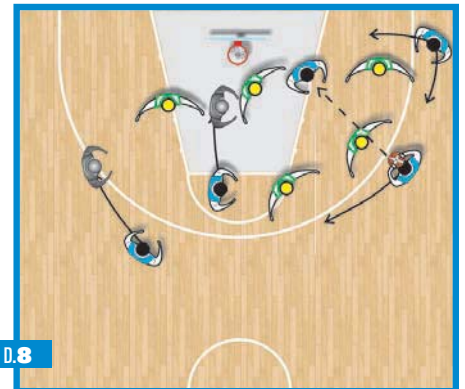
In such a play, the player typically stays in the same position after the pass, resting. Instead, he and his teammates should change their positions, trying to defeat the defenders, and set themselves up for another pass from the player with the ball (diagr. 3, 4, and 5).



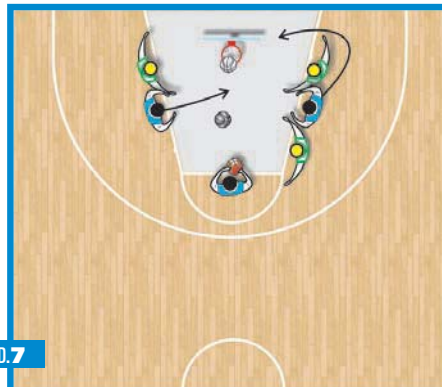
2. **Free-throws:** In many games, players don't struggle for the offensive rebound after a missed free-throw. This situation, simple and repetitive during a game, is one of the moments in which players rest. In doing so, they give up on possible offensive rebounds, conceding the rebound to the defense. Habit turns it into a mistake, and teams pay for mistakes like these during a game. Lack of practice during training sessions causes players not to go for the offensive rebound after a missed free-throw. To break them of this habit, it's good to stimulate the struggle for the rebound with practice drills and games (diagr. 6 and 7).



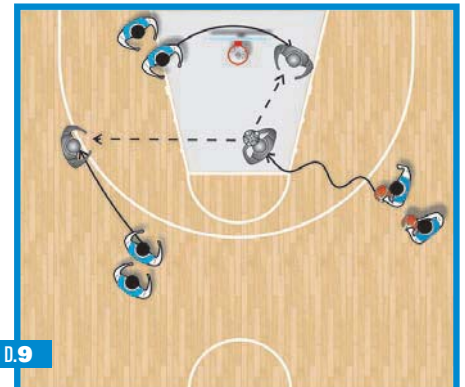
D.6



D.8



D.7



D.9

3. **Playing inside (penetrations, high post, low post):** This occurs using an offense against a zone defense. Many times coaches insist on the importance of attacking these kind of defenses with passing the ball inside. This solution is correct, but incomplete, because it's very important looking for a new passing line (diagr. 8), move, react in the moment when a player drives to the basket or receives the ball in the high post, or in the low post. Saying that is not enough; beside being severe in our game five-on-five, get an habit like this needs some specific drills, that we can apply easily during the shooting sessions of our team (diagr. 9).

4. **Do not stop after the defensive help:** Great shooters dominate this type of play. Many of them pop into mind, for instance, Bullock and Rakocevic, in the Spanish league. After a penetration with an advantage, I'm restrained in my zone because of a player, who does a defensive help, who fakes or

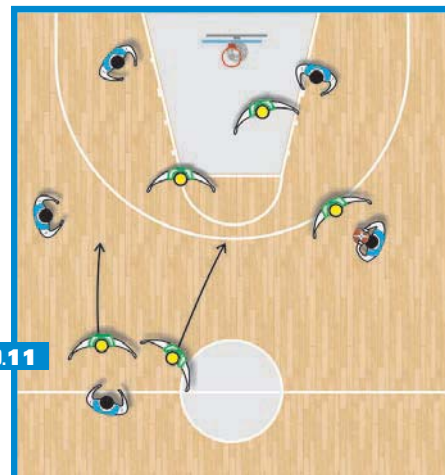
recovers or even switches. The player with the ball, after the pass stops himself, a very important thing in order to avoid an offensive foul, but to avoid the foul, the player has not to stop for five seconds. He needs thus to look for a new passing line that may offer the possibility to receive alone, with an ad-







D.10



D.11

vantage, or playing against a defender with whom there's a mismatch due to a defensive switch (diagr. 10).

#### DEFENSE

**5. Two-on-one:** Without stopping to describe the technical details of the two-on-one, one of the more frequent and dangerous "stops" in our defensive system occurs when the offensive player passes the ball after a double team. Normally, the player involved in the two-on-one reacts well after the pass and tries to recover his man, or else looks for a free opponent in the rotation. However, the player, who guards the man with the ball, usually just turns his head and maintains his position; he prefers to rest, instead of thinking of the other responsibilities he has after the pass has been made. This player must get into the habit of getting back to his proper position as shown in diagram 11. In diagram 12, on the other hand, we can see how the player, after having run to his spot, helps stop an easy penetration to the basket.

**6. Do not stop if the offensive player does:** This is one of the hardest actions to practice in our sport. Here is a very common situation in a basketball game, with the offensive team that plays a di-



rect screen on the ball. The defender of the player with the ball come into contact with the screen and the offensive player takes an advantage. The defender runs, in the best case, to recover his position, but the offensive player stops. In the 90% of the cases, the defender stops, too. However, he does this before getting to the correct spot on the court. This is a big mistake.

Another very common example occurs with the defender who presses full court. Once the offensive player beats the press and gets an advantage, the defender will typically run beside the player with the ball and when he stops, the defender often stops, too, instead of putting himself in front of the player with the ball (diagr. 13 and 14).

- 7. My space:** The name of this indicates exactly what we're talking about. One defender has to guard his opponent, but this is not enough. Many times we see defenders in perfect defensive stance: they deny the pass, they're legs are bent, and intently watching

their opponent so he won't be able to score. Defensive positioning entails the responsibility of the defender towards his opponent, but of equal importance, it also means guarding a particular zone of the court, which has to be protected. Too many times, we see a defender watch an offensive opponent drive by and the defender does not take the initiative of faking, stepping out, or trying to stop him. Instead, he thinks, "This is not my man," and lets the offensive player go right by (diagr. 15).

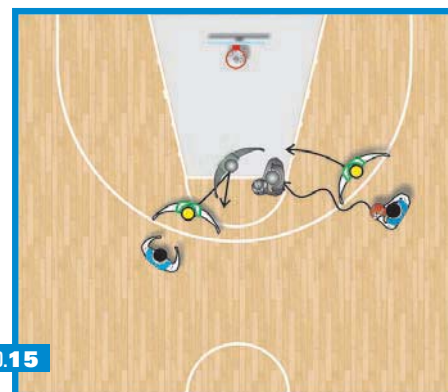
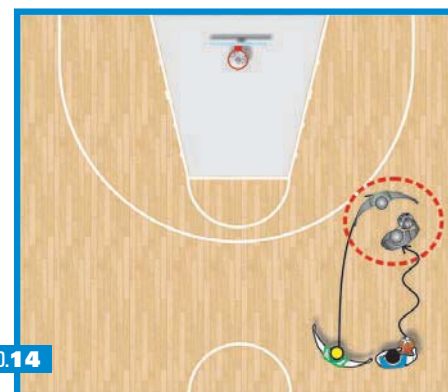
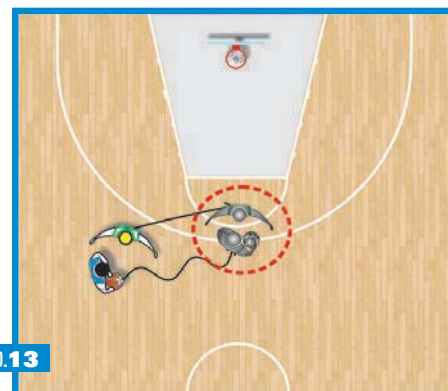
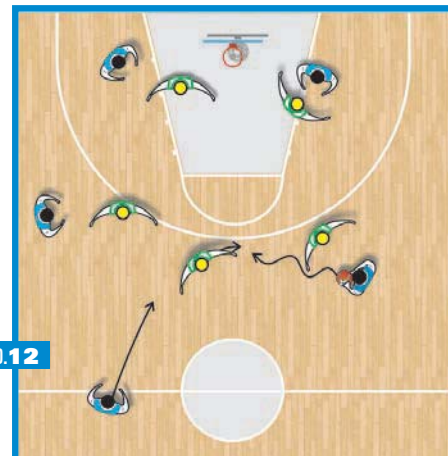
Defensive players have to be responsible not only for their man but for a zone that they occupy. They cannot let players drive easily to the basket, or make uncontested cuts or passes.

### CONCLUSIONS

Basketball, like most popular sports, has undergone an evolution as the game globalized and has been tweaked and improved through the input of tens of thousands of coaches. These improvements are noted today in the technical, tactical, and physical level of the game that's played at the highest level. For this







reason alone, coaches have to be prepared to change and innovate in all aspects of game preparation. Paying attention to the smallest detail and instituting change whenever possible can make the difference in the final outcome of a game, a game that your team might win.