

Basketball Motion Offense

By Dr. James Gels, from the Coach's Clipboard [Basketball Playbook](http://www.coachesclipboard.net/Playbook.html) (<http://www.coachesclipboard.net/Playbook.html>), @ <http://www.coachesclipboard.net> (<http://www.coachesclipboard.net>)

A motion offense is a flexible offense that utilizes player movement, correct floor spacing, passing and cutting, and setting screens. The origin of "motion offense" is usually credited to coach Henry Iba at Oklahoma State. It was further developed and popularized by coach Bob Knight at Indiana, who utilized screening as a key part of the offense. Rather than running set plays (which can also be run in the motion offense), players move within a basic set of rules. This allows for greater flexibility than just running set plays, and will usually be effective against any kind of defense, whether man-to-man, zone or "junk" defenses. Players can move freely to open areas on the court. Once the basic concepts are learned, special patterns or plays can be designed by the coach to take advantage of his team's offensive strengths.

Motion offense can be run with almost any set. The [3-out, 2-in set](#) described in this article features three perimeter players and two post players. This set provides good balance between the perimeter game and strong inside post play, with good offensive rebounding presence. Teams that are not blessed with true post players (and are more guard-oriented) would benefit by using either the [4-out, 1-in motion offense](#) ([4Out1InMotionOffense.html](#)), or the [5-out open post motion offense](#) ([OpenPostOffense.html](#)). The now popular "[dribble-drive motion offense](#)" ([DribbleDriveMotionOffense.html](#)) uses a 4-out set and very little screening. You can also use a 1-3-1 or a 1-4 set. For purposes of this discussion, I will use the 3 out, 2 in set which uses 3 perimeter players and 2 post players (see diagram A). Be sure to also take a look at our own [3-2 motion offense](#) ([MascotMotionOffense.html](#))... a 3-out, 2-in motion offense that was key in our success in recent years, which included several trips to the state tournament (boys and girls).

If you have a very talented team with five players who can play any position, they can interchange or rotate into any of the five positions. If you have two dominant post players, or excellent perimeter players, then you will want to rotate a little differently. In the later case, have the two posts rotate with each other and the three perimeter players rotate in the three outside positions.

Always try to have your point guard O1 bring the ball up the floor and start the offense.

Make sure that whoever is at the O1 position when the shot is taken, stays back to prevent the opponent's fast break. The O3, O4, O5 positions go for the offensive rebound and the O2 position plays half-rebound and half-prevent mode.

Basic rules:

Spacing

Players should try to stay 12 to 15 feet apart. Avoid bunching up, which can result in double-teams, steals, interceptions, and turnovers.

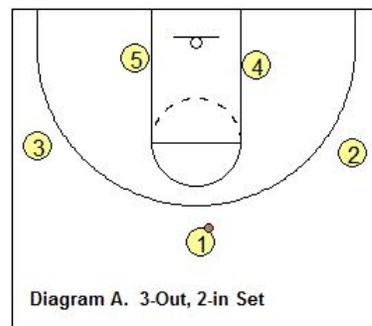
Triple threat position and patience.

Perimeter players should always receive the ball in triple threat position, where the player has the options of shooting, driving to the hoop, or passing. In triple threat position, outside players should (1) look into the post, (2) read the defense and look for the opportunity for a shot, shot fake, or a dribble-move. Perimeter players should be patient and hold the ball for a count of two to allow the screens and cuts to develop. If the pass is too soon, the cutters don't have time to execute their cuts. The exception is when the defense is coming to trap, then pass immediately.

Do not allow your players, after receiving a pass on the perimeter, to immediately put the ball on the floor, bounce it once, and then lose the dribble. The player actually loses the options of shooting and driving to the hoop, and passing may be more difficult when the defender closes in, and the other defenders go into deny. We are constantly teaching and reminding players to "get in triple threat position".

Players may dribble:

1. To attack the basket with a drive.



2. Improve or open the passing lane.
3. Penetrate gaps in a zone defense.
4. To get out of trouble and avoid the 5-second count.
5. To exchange positions with another player. For example, if you want the ball to go to the wing, and the defense is denying the pass, the point guard can simply dribble to the wing, and the wing player can exchange and go to the point.
6. To run up a weave-screen play ([32WeaveScreen.html](#)).

Player Movement

Players must not stand still. They must move with a purpose.

1. The post players can screen for each other and move up and down the lane to the low blocks, elbows, and top of the free throw line.
2. The perimeter players can occupy the three positions shown in diagram A, and also move to the corners. They may make front or backdoor cuts to the hoop, and V-cuts to replace themselves (see Cutting and Faking ([CuttingAndFaking.html](#))). They screen for each other and run pick and roll moves (see Setting Screens ([Screens.html](#))). They must move after making a pass.

Perimeter players should maintain good spacing at all times and keep the defense spread out. Fill the open spots on the perimeter. An outside player can make a cut inside, but should not stay there and clog things up for our post players. For example, if O1 cuts inside through the paint and does not receive the ball, he/she should immediately cut out to the opposite corner and then wing, while that wing player moves out to fill the spot at the point.

If O1 is having difficulty passing to the wing (the defense is denying the pass to the wings), then he/she can simply dribble the ball to the wing. We have a rule (except in a weave-screen play)... whenever a teammate is dribbling toward you, back-cut out of the area. For example, if O1 dribbles toward O2, O2 back-cuts underneath along the baseline and fills the O3 spot while O3 rotates out to the point. Another thing you can do if the wing pass is being denied is simply run a "weave-screen" play.

Passing

We want to try to get the ball into the low post. A wing entry is usually the easiest way. You can also get there by passing to a post on the free throw line, and the high-post can then pass to the low post. At all times we must "see the defense" and not pass into the defense.

Don't pass to someone standing still as these passes are more likely to be intercepted.

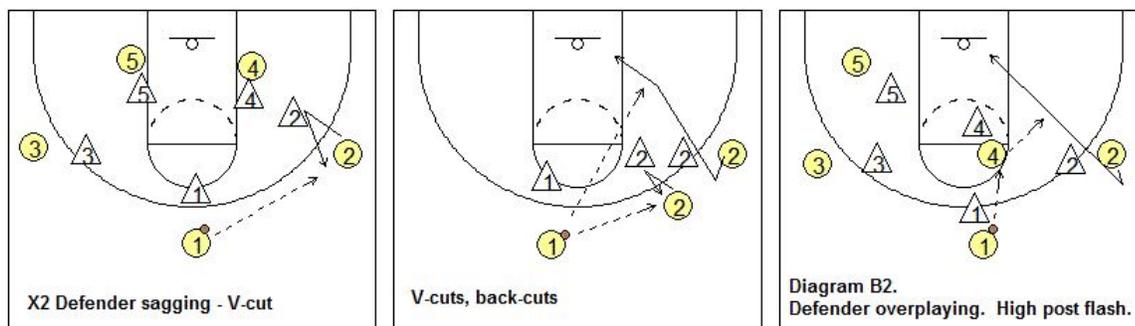
After passing, players must do one of these:

1. Cut to the hoop for the return pass ("give and go" play).
2. Screen away. Example: after the point guard passes to the right wing (O2), he sets a screen for the left wing (O3).
3. Follow the pass and set a screen for the ball-handler (and then roll off the screen).
4. V-cut and replace self.
5. After a cross-court "skip" pass (example from O3 to O2), slide out of the defender's (who should be in "helpside") line of vision and go backdoor to the hoop.
6. After a wing passes into the low post, he/she should slide down to the corner. If the post player is double-teamed, the corner is usually the easiest pass back outside and is often open for the three-point shot.

Read the defense

Situations for Perimeter players:

1. You have the ball and the defender is overplaying you up tight: make a jab-step fake and drive straight to the hoop. Don't go wide around the defender as this just allows the defender time to recover. Make contact with the defender's shoulder and get him/her on your backside. If help defense closes in, dish to the low post where the help came from. (See [Outside Moves \(OutsideMoves.html\)](#))
2. You have the ball and the defender is sagging off you: hit the outside shot.
3. You have the ball and the defender is playing good defense on you: pass to a teammate and then execute one of the five options above (what to do after passing).
4. You have the ball and the defender is playing good defense on you and your teammates are being denied the pass: call out and execute a [weave screen play \(32WeaveScreen.html\)](#).
5. You are one pass away and the defender is sagging off you: make a V-cut inside and come back out for the perimeter pass.
6. You are one pass away and the defense is denying the pass to you: Make a fake outside, and then cut hard backdoor. The low post on that side should learn to read this situation also and either cut to the high post or clear out to the opposite side, to make spacing for the backdoor cut.
7. You are one pass away, and the defender is playing good defense and you can't get free: Set a screen either for the ball-handler or the low post.



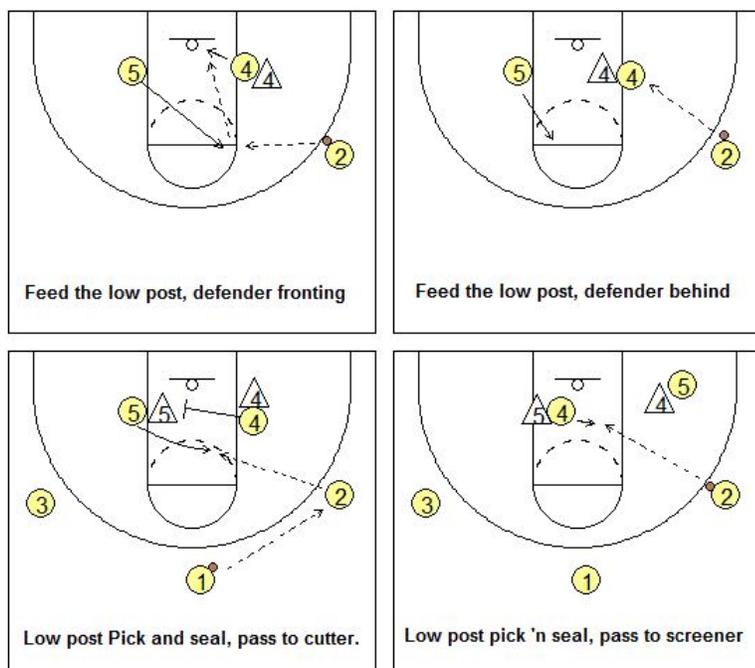
Situations for post players:

1. Read the defensive over-play (deny) on the wing. Flash to the high post to receive the ball and then pass to the wing going backdoor (see Diagram B2).
2. You get the ball one on one against the defense: Make a low post move. Try to score or get fouled. (see [Post MOVES \(PostMoves.html\)](#)).
3. You get the ball and are double-teamed: Pass the ball back outside, often to where the double team came from. Going "inside-out" is a good way to get wide open three-point shots.

Post players working together: (see the diagrams below)

1. If the ball-side post is being fronted: the opposite post flashes to the ball-side elbow for the pass. Meanwhile the low post player seals the defender on his back, and the post at the elbow passes inside to the low post for the lay-up.
2. If the ball-side post defender is playing behind: The wing should pass to the low post, and the opposite post player should clear out to the weak-side elbow.
3. If the ball-side post defender is 1/2 or 3/4 defending him with a hand in front: the ball-side post should set a screen for the weak-side post, who comes to the ball for the pass and lay-up. Note that if the low post

defenders switch on this screen, then the low post cutter should move out to the ball-side short corner (or high-post), and the screener should seal off his defender and come back to the ball for the lay-up.



Also, be sure to see this page on some [Hi-Lo options \(32HiLo.html\)](#) that your post players can run.

Once your team learns and executes these concepts, you can devise your own patterns and special plays to create opportunities for your best scorers and take advantage of the defense's weaknesses.

For example, if the defense is in a 1-3-1 zone, then consider using two of the perimeter players out on top and drop the third perimeter player down in the ball-side corner (see [Attacking the 1-3-1 Zone \(131zoneoffense.html\)](#)). If the defense is in a 3-2 zone, after passing to the wing, have your point guard shallow cut to the ball-side corner to overload the zone (see [Attacking the 3-2 Zone \(32ZoneOffense.html\)](#)). You don't need a time-out to communicate this... just yell out "corner 1" (point guard shallow cuts to corner) or "corner 2" (O2 slides down to the corner), or "corner 3" (O3 moves to the corner). If they are in 1-2-2 zone, have one of your post players play up on the free throw line (yell "1 up"). If you want to try the 1-4 set, call "2-up" and both posts move up to the elbows. Of course you can get more creative on these signal calls! (See [Motion Options \(MotionOptions.html\)](#))

There are a number of set plays that can be run with the 3-out, 2-in motion offense (see related pages below).

If you have a shortage of post players, consider the [4-out, 1-in motion offense \(4Out1InMotionOffense.html\)](#), the ["dribble-drive motion offense" \(DribbleDriveMotionOffense.html\)](#), the [5-out \(open-post\) motion offense \(OpenPostOffense.html\)](#), or the [Open-Post Double-Up motion offense \(OpenPostDoubleUp.html\)](#).

Related pages:

[Bob Hurley: Motion Offense \(HurleyMotionOffense.html\)](#), [3-2 Motion Offense \(MascotMotionOffense.html\)](#), [Drills for Teaching the 3-2 Motion Offense \(32MotionDrills.html\)](#), [Guard \(Perimeter\) Breakdown Drills \(GuardBreakdownShootingDrills.html\)](#), [Post Player Breakdown Drills \(LowPostOffensiveDrills.html\)](#), [3-2 Motion Options \(MotionOptions.html\)](#), [3-2 Motion Plays \(32MotionPlays.html\)](#), [3-2 Hi-Lo Plays \(32HiLo.html\)](#), [90 Series \(90Series.html\)](#), [MSU \(BasketballPlays32MotionOffense.html#MSU\)](#), [Michigan \(Michigan.html\)](#), [Kentucky \(BasketballPlays32MotionOffense.html#Kentucky\)](#), [Loyola \(4OutLowMotionOffensePlays.html#Loyola\)](#), [Texas \(BasketballPlays32MotionOffense.html#Texas\)](#), [3-2 Slip Play \(BasketballPlays32MotionOffense.html#Slip\)](#), [Weave Screen Plays \(32WeaveScreen.html\)](#), [3-2 Option Series \(32OptionSeries.html\)](#), [Isolation Play \(Isolation2.html\)](#)

See these two excellent animations:

[Blue Eagle Motion Offense Animation \(javascript:openpopupBEMotion\(\)\)](#) and [Coach's Clipboard Motion Offense Animation \(javascript:openAnimationpopup\(\)\)](#)

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