



## P7- Tips on Playing Without the Ball- Screening and Cutting

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## Talking X's and O's- Playground Pointers



## Tips on Playing Without the Ball: Screening and Cutting

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One of the trends I'm seeing more consistently in young players these days is the desire to take over and win the game by themselves. This shouts to me two clear points. First, "I" am more important than the "TEAM" which has never been the case in championship level teams and never will be. And second, that most of the time playing individualistically is an obvious sign of lack of total basketball skills and understanding of the game, more than a trophy of ability.

I want to provide you young players with a few tips on the importance of playing without the ball both as a screener and as a cutter and how you can develop that portion of your game.

**Concept 1- Movement occupies the defense and actually creates more scoring opportunities not less.**

*Standing around is the cardinal sin in basketball.* This doesn't mean you should move without purpose. However, if you are in a position to receive a pass and don't you should do basically one of two things: 1) if you are on the weak side of the court, you should screen away, 2) if you are on the ball side you should screen to the ball or cut through to the basket and away from the ball when you are not posting up.

*A stationary player is one who isn't prepared to move and react well.* If the defense is playing aggressive and helping on penetration, a standing offense is as useful as a 12 foot ladder at a skyscraper fire. Teams that have great ball and player movement more effectively dictate to the defense how and where they must play.

**Concept 2- At progressively higher levels of the game players get much better shot opportunities off of screens than by waiting for a teammate**

## **to create an open passing lane off the dribble.**

*The quickest and best looks at the basket occur when you have executed a great screen for a teammate forcing your defender to momentarily help on your cutting teammate. This gives you a brief second where you can cut freely to the ball without pressure from your defender. This is especially true when you have big man-to-small man or vice versa screens. Learn to use this to your advantage. If the defense switches you also improve your chances of scoring because of size or quickness mismatches.*

*Keep your vision of the ball and the defense when you are screening so that you can react quickly when the defense is over-aggressive. Teams who have players that don't move and react without the ball are much more susceptible to trapping defense and turnovers. Good ball and player movement effectively discourages aggressive defenses.*

*Picking the Picker is probably the most effective way to get a player open. If you are looking to create a scoring chance for a teammate go pick a teammate who has just picked.*

## **Concept 3- When setting a pick, screen an area one step from your teammate and be ready to react to a cheating defense.**

*Screen an area and let the cutter or use your screen. When you screen put your chest to the inside shoulder and one step away from the your teammate's defender to avoid getting an offensive foul. Set your feet in a fairly wide stance and bend your arms at the elbow with your elbows slightly out and hands in to the chest. Some coaches teach having the hands down but I believe it is much more difficult to raise your hands quickly to catch the ball in this manner. Never extend your forearms or lean when you screen or you will draw a foul.*

*When you are screening tell your teammate to wait until your feet are set to avoid picking up unnecessary offensive fouls. This also forces the defenders to make a definitive decision about switching or doubling the ball thus increasing your chances of reading the screen properly and getting an open shot.*

*When screening weak side, down screen if the defense is loosely guarded, and back screen if they are closely guarded. This keeps the defensive help weak side uncertain of which direction a screen may occur and makes your screening more effective.*

*Cut behind your defender if they ever show their back to you. This simple tip will help you determine when you should go backdoor on a cut without the ball and will also get you an open shot if your defender goes to double the ball on penetration.*

## **Concept 4- How a cutter uses the screener away from the ball determines a it's success.**

*The cutter has the best chance of getting open if they wait for the pick to be set before cutting to the ball. Cut shoulder to shoulder off a screen to eliminate any chance your defender can slash through the screen. There are basic four options for you to read depending how your defender plays the screen.*

1. *Go over the top* and continue to the basket when your defensive player trails you around a screen.
2. *Curl over the top* for the quick shot if the screener's defender allows your defender to slide behind the screen one-man removed.
3. *Pop-Out or Step-back* for the shot if your defender attempts to go completely behind the

- screeener and their defender two-men removed.
4. If your defender cheats and jump high in front of the screen before it can be properly set you can either *flare away* from the screen in the opposite direction your defender has jumped, or you can go back door to the basket if your defender gets caught high side by the screener.

## **Concept 5- Screening to the ball and running pick and roll is one of the most effective fundamental plays in basketball.**

The same rules apply for screening on the ball as away from the ball. However you must be ready to react to how the defense plays in a slightly different manner when screening the ball.

*Make sure your screen is set before your teammate initiates the dribble to avoid getting offensive fouls.* Starting your dribble too early gives all the advantage to the defense because you will not be in position to react to the defense or to the dribbler in an effective manner.

*If your defender pinches under your screen it is a good practice to change directions of the screen and have the dribbler come back the opposite direction.* Defenders commonly defend the initial screen well, but start the defense of the second screen slightly out of position increasing the chances of getting an open shot, cut or dribble penetration to the basket.

*Slip the screen and cut to the basket if the defense tries to step outside your shoulder aggressively for a steal, or double team the dribbler.* If you don't receive the pass when you have slipped the screen (also called screen and go) don't stop. Continue through the basket and then away from the ball. Two things may happen. The defensive help may take away the initial part of the cut once you've slipped the screen, but the defense commonly relaxes after thinking they've covered the top end of the cut leaving you open directly at the basket. Secondly, continued movement away from the ball pulls a defender out of controlled help position and creates more penetration space for the ball handler. If you have a size mismatch once you slipped the screen and gone through the basket you can return and post up ball side if the dribbler is not attacking the basket.

*If you are in the low post and a your teammate with the ball defender is being closely guarded on the wing, step out to run the pick and roll to loosen up the defense.* This can also be used by a high post screener on top of the key if the point guard is being tightly defended, or in the open court against full court pressure.

*When the dribbler is double teamed off a pick and roll, be ready to loop back or pop-out away from the double team, as the dribbler tries to pull back and then split the trap hard with the dribble.* You will find yourself open a large percentage of the time.

## **Conclusion**

These are a few of the most important basketball skills you can learn when playing without the ball. The better you become at executing these movement skills without the ball the more open you will find yourself and your teammates. You must learn to read and recognize how you are being defended away from the ball and improve your scoring opportunities to become a complete player. There is only one ball, and ten players on the court. In a forty minute game you may only handle the ball four to five minutes. So what are you doing without the ball to be an effective player? So move your tail....effectively and with purpose!

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