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Offense versus Switching Defense

Intro

- Believes that pass first teams are the winning teams
- Switching defense forces defenders to hesitate, play 1v1 and think a lot
- In every practice have to reward unselfishness to encourage giving the extra pass
- Important players at EuroLeague level are not necessarily the scorers but the passers
- Philosophically have to get buy-in from the franchise player, who is normally a scoring point guard or 2. Bartzokas was lucky to have Spanoulas and Navarro, who were fantastic passers and knew about importance of ball movement. Have to build relationship with the franchise player first if they are originally resistant to the concept of making extra pass and ball movement.
- For instance, Alexey Shved wants to score a lot and have the ball in his hands. Even playing more than 32 minutes a game, his offense created the most spot-ups through extra passes in EuroLeague. Sometimes Bartzokas admitted to struggling with Shved because he didn't want to pass after a switch, but instead to play 1v1. However, because he was so talented it sometimes worked to their advantage.
- On any P&R situation (mid or sideline)

Strategies against Switching

Vs Weak Defender:

- Showed video of Alexey Shved coming off a G2G (Guard to Guard) Pick. Because the defender that switched onto him was weaker than his primary, went straight into 1v1. This wasn't the main action against the switch, but sometimes this can work well especially if it's your best offensive player vs their weakest defender.

Mid P&R Switching:

- Screen comes from 5 starting in the block or corner. Want to get the ball handler to dribble to the sideline to create a weakside. Otherwise, everyone is in a reasonable help position from the middle.
- Screening angle (back to short corner) invites the ball handler to the sideline.
- On the switch, player on the new strong side clears out to overload the weakside. Post in weakside corner cuts to the top to create a high low option with the roller who is sealing front of rim.
- This situation means there are 3 guards as rim protectors as the two bigs are on the perimeter.

Main idea vs switch is constantly getting ball to sideline.

Ettore Messina Pick & Roll Offense

Intro:

- He believes most important thing is spacing and timing.
- Spacing = if you allow one defender to guard his man and bother someone else, you are in trouble. With correct spacing you can still create and exploit an advantage.
- Timing = something ends while something is happening. If you arrive before the ball arrives, defense has disrupted the advantage.
- Messina always considered spacing and timing to be of equal importance. But then realised in the NBA that timing is less important due to the athleticism of the players. The athleticism means they could cover for mistakes in timing.

Location of P&R:

- Coach Pop called Mid Pick & Roll “Rub.” Would rub his shirt. 1-5 meant between 1 and the 5.
- Angled was a ‘C’ on the hand, meaning a screen above the 45. 23 meant between 2 and 3.
- “Roll” = sideline P&R.
- Spurs specified players in off-ball receiver spots during P&R. Therefore if opposition neutralised first action, they could counter and with what player.

Screening Fundamentals:

- Players very rarely wait for the pick to come.
- Best rule is to look to attack away from the pick. Best thing can be to fake you are going away from the pick, which gives time for the screener to arrive.
- Screener should know their teammate and if they are a shooter or non-shooter. For instance if a non-shooter, the defender looks to go under. Therefore if the screener screens with chest, it's easy to go under and recover. But Messina wants player to have to go as far under as possible to create advantage. This can be done through a subtle change of screening the defender with the top of the shoulder. This gives more space for a shot if they go under, or to re-screen deeper and closer to the paint.
- May only be 30-40cm but that distance is important.
- Like-wise, if screening for a shoulder, screen with the lowest shoulder higher-up. This makes the distance much greater for the defender to chase over the top.
- Classing way of screening with chest bone to middle of shoulder doesn't create as much advantage. Players should use their shoulders to screen as long as they are set.

Passes you need to master for P&R:

- For Spurs, two mandatory passes were the pocket pass to exploit advantage off P&R.
- Have to be aware of knowing how to pass but seeing what passes present themselves in the moment. Be aware of how your defender is rolling, popping, how is defense helping etc?
- Pocket most used when defense were in drop coverage and on-ball defender chased over the top.
- Skip pass to corner key if corner defender bumps roller.
- Messina also uses the term ‘guided defense.’ Spurs start on-air then go to guided.

How to use the dribble in P&R:

- Vs drop coverage, must use lateral dribble to create angle for the pocket
- Vs aggressive coverage, must be able to retreat dribble
- Vs ice, retreat dribble to create more space. If defender follows, screener follows and re-screens flat to create more space
- Trying to create a situation where players and coaches look at the game through the same glasses (e.g. sunglasses vs sunglasses and contacts!)

Where to Roll and General Spacing

- Vs aggression or switch, try to move the ball ahead as much as possible as opposed to behind.

- Vs hedge of switch, roll diagonally instead of straight because it opens up passing lanes by forcing the weak side defender into a difficult decision to tag or stay.
- The pass behind on P&R is a shorter close-out so generates less advantage. Defender can tag the roller and then with two steps get back to contain, vs moving ball forward to wing and having to help further.
- Vs containing or flat defense (e.g drop), prefer to keep ball in middle and engage the big, then look for the pass behind (throwback) or lob to roller.
- Vs the switch, it's easy to front the roller if it's a throwback pass to the lifter, as rollers' defender is in between the ball and roller. Rather, should throw the ball forward and roller looks to go diagonally across the key. This is particularly good on the triple switch as roller can seal in the middle.
- If you want to build a system where you want players to read and react, can't offer 10 options because even the most experienced players can't cope with this (x5 diff players = 50 diff options). Have to start with two or three options, and then once mastered, add to it.
- Messina spoke about open gym. Players looked fantastic. Then once Spurs started putting in their system, it looked awful because players were thinking. Takes x3 or x4 months before going back to the normal approach to the game.
- Coach has to help players to use their brain in a natural way so they can react with instinct to any scenario.
- Referenced 0.5 seconds concept used by the Spurs (making a decision to shoot, drive or pass within 0.5).
- Important to adjust the spacing while the action is developing. Utah Jazz do this very well. For instance, recognise how the P&R is defended and adjust spacing accordingly.
- Vs switch we throw ball ahead, if there's a mismatch can pass back (boomerang). Very important to have post on weak side for this so there's space for the drive. This is an example of adjusting spacing as actions emerge (e.g. the switch and pass back). This is why Messina doesn't look for low sets as it's a wall that prevents ball handler from exploiting the switch.
- Another example of adjusting spacing on the move is the snake dribble. If player starts dribbling towards baseline off a pick, but then snakes and comes back, opposite wing must re-adjust and be pushed. Messina calls snake a 'cross back.'
- On the Snake, Messina likes the corner to automatically ghost cut, leaving the whole side for the wing to space.
- In the NBA, every defender of the opposite wing in a ball screen situation is at the nail with their arms spread. Exceptions are if they are guarding a Steph Curry or Klay Thompson. This is why it works well to clear the corner against teams that guard like this, as the wing can just drift to the corner for an easy pass and bigger close-out.
- Spacing cannot be the same at the beginning and end of the action. If they stay in the same spot, you've wasted the action or advantage.

Pick & Roll Trends over last 5 years:

- 'Stack' = Mid P&R with back screen. New Orleans and Oklahoma started using a lot, originated from Zeljko at Fenerbahce.
- Dallas Mavericks in 2019 has 10 plays that all ended with a stack as the last action.
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