



**WBCA**

# **Offensive Plays & Strategies**



**Women's Basketball Coaches Association**

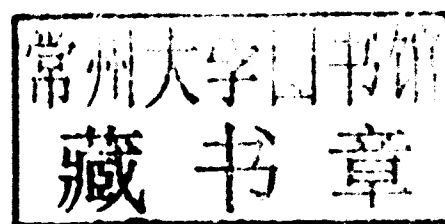
Foreword by Charli Turner Thorne

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## ***Offensive Plays & Strategies***



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**Human Kinetics**

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## ***Offensive Plays & Strategies***

# FOREWORD

Basketball is a game that requires a strong blend of physical and mental skills. Players must be sound in its fundamentals—dribbling, shooting, and passing—before they can even begin to understand how to play the game. It's the tactical team skills, however, that are necessary for competing and winning at a high level. This book will help develop those tactical skills.

Offensive structure, presented in *WBCA Offensive Plays & Strategies*, is designed to create organization for your players. Each player will have a complete understanding of her responsibilities on the court, which will make every player quicker. A player can be decisive when she knows each teammate will do her part. This leads to chemistry and, therefore, successful team offense.

This book offers advice to both coaches and players. Coaches will learn the plays and strategies necessary for success. Players, meanwhile, will find advice to help them understand the demands of the game and their roles within the specific plays that coaches ask them to perform.

The plays presented in this book are designed by 25 of the finest coaches of women's basketball. All are members of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA). Many are conference regular-season champions, conference tournament champions, and NCAA national champions. The plays are explained so that any coach, regardless of experience, can use them with players at any level.

One mission of the WBCA is to provide coaches with instructional resources that will contribute to their success. We as coaches should always look for ways to provide the information necessary to help our athletes come together and succeed as a team. This book goes a long way in providing that information.

Charli Turner Thorne  
Head coach, women's basketball  
Arizona State Sun Devils

# PREFACE

*WBCA Offensive Plays & Strategies* combines the knowledge of 25 of the game's top coaches to give you the plays right from their own playbooks. With this book you'll not only have the plays themselves, but the insight and tips from the coaches who have mastered them on the game's biggest stage. *WBCA Offensive Plays & Strategies* offers coaches the information they need for devising the optimal offensive approach for their team and its success.

The *WBCA Offensive Plays & Strategies* provides guidance for every offensive situation in the game with 119 plays for scoring, inboundng the ball, breaking a defensive press, and many other situations a coach will encounter. It was written to present an insider's view of the best approaches to the offensive aspects of women's basketball. Coaches and players alike will find valuable guidance on the movements and tactics in the most effective offensive systems used in the game. The book also compares the plays—based on alignment and execution, personnel requirements, and unique advantages and disadvantages—so that coaches can match them up to make the best use of their team's talents and to fit specific opponents and situations.

Chapter 1 provides in-depth coverage of successful game planning, making sure your players are prepared for everything your opponent can throw at you. Next, you get plays designed specifically for a team running a fast-break offense. Then the book gives you post and perimeter plays designed for use against both zone and man-to-man coverage. Out-of-bounds plays and plays for beating the press are covered next. And finally quick-shot plays are presented, for those times when a quick score is needed.

Champions make the game look effortless, with every player operating in sync with the other, like pieces of an efficient, well-oiled machine. This book offers you a special collection of plays and coaching points from champion coaches to develop and hone individual and team performance on both ends of the court. Great team skills don't necessarily increase your chances of making the TV highlights, but they do make it much more likely that you'll cut down the nets at the end of the season.

# KEY TO DIAGRAMS

1, 2, 3, etc.	Offensive player
①, ②, ③, etc.	Offensive player with the ball
X	Defensive player
—————→	Movement without the ball
- - - - -→	Pass or shot
—————	Screen
—————	Block out
~~~~~→	Dribble

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## CHAPTER

# 1

# The Game Plan

**A** major difference between a well-coached basketball game and a high-level pick-up game isn't so much in the style of play as in the planning and strategy that precedes the contest. The individual players on the blacktop might have more raw talent than the players in the high school gym, but getting a *team* ready to compete at the highest level requires a great deal of preparation from both coaches and players.

From what you hear on television, it might sound big-time to pour over your next opponent's offenses, defenses, and player strengths and weaknesses before spending hours of practice time on the court to ensure your team knows exactly how to respond to the opponent's every move, but the truth is that great teams spend much more time focusing on themselves—their own fundamentals, their own style, and their own plays—than they do on their opponents.

Many questions must be answered as your team develops its on-court identity: What tangible and intangible characteristics define your team? What type of offense will you run? What type of defense? Will you apply full-court pressure most of the game or only at critical times? Will your team thrive within a fast-breaking system, or is its strength a half-court game? Will your team take pride in rebounding, in defense, in being smart with the ball, or simply in scoring a lot of points? On what peg will your team hang its uniform?

The answers to these questions are the foundation of the coach's plan for how to maximize talent and minimize weaknesses. Teams with larger players normally tend toward a half-court game because they have the bulk to take up space inside the paint but lack the speed to play an up-tempo style. A small, quick team with good stamina may employ a full-court press most of the game, using its speed to create turnovers and its endurance to wear down the opponent. A team whose collective heart outweighs its raw talent often will play a hard-nosed, gritty brand of ball, scrapping for, hustling toward, and rebounding every ball. Though not necessarily recommended, one with several sharp shooters may bank on simply outscoring the other team rather than making defense and rebounding a priority.

Once those traits and tendencies are identified, the coach can set about creating a plan for the team. The plan covers everything from practice design and film sessions to play selection and game strategy. The length, intensity, and minute-by-minute schedule of practice will depend on details such as the team's current fitness level, the fitness level needed to execute the game plan, and the degree to which precision is critical to the team's success.

Once your team has chosen its desired identity, many months of dedicated practice are required to achieve that identity. A large part of a team's identity depends on the plays the team chooses to run. The collection of plays in a team's arsenal should directly complement its offensive strengths: half-court or fast-breaking style, post or perimeter play. Then plays specifically designed for various defenses can be honed based on the style of play of each opponent. For this book we have selected plays that the best collegiate women's basketball programs in the United States run regularly. We tell you which plays best apply to which situations based on game circumstances and personnel. For each play, we provide detailed, step-by-step instructions and diagrams to ensure the play will run as smoothly for your team as it does for the team that first created it.

As tempting as it might be to design your team's offensive sets on how an opponent defends, that is putting the cart before the horse. Only after a coach has evaluated a team's makeup and abilities, and after a team is comfortable and effective with its trademark traits and play sets, does it make sense to turn attention to the opponents.

Just as foolish as focusing too much attention on an opponent is paying no attention to them at all. Before you face an opponent you need to study and observe their tendencies so you can plan to counter them. How will your offense attack a team's full-court press? How will you handle their big bodies at the post? Their speed at the perimeter? Their all-out assault on the defensive boards?

Once you know an opponent's tendencies, when developing your game plan you can outline an approach to take against the opponent, replacing unknowns with specifics to give your players a mental and physical advantage. In forming your game plan you break an abundance of information down to a few key details for your players to digest. You don't overload them with concepts and strategies that compete for their attention and cause them to think too much during a game.

Preparing your team to play its best against a particular opponent takes time, ingenuity, and diligence. In this chapter we first cover the scouting and strategizing that's needed to develop a game plan. We then discuss the methods of communication and on-court preparation that best enables players to implement the game plan effectively.

## **DEVELOPING A GAME PLAN**

As you have probably seen many times over, a well-prepared, overachieving team with an excellent game plan often has great success over a more skilled team that might be less focused and underprepared. Unless your squad is an Olympic dream team, it's way more effective to anticipate and react to what you know is coming than to try to improvise on the fly.

The first step in developing a game plan is gathering information about your opponent. A consistent method of gathering data and a template on which to record the information leads to a comprehensive scouting report. A consistent method also helps players form a habit of studying and assimilating information.

The second step is analyzing the data through the filter of your own team. For instance, say that after studying film you determine your next opponent can't handle full-court

pressure. Does this mean you quickly draw up a new press for your players to learn and practice to prepare for the upcoming contest? Maybe, but just as likely not. Your decision depends on your players. If your players know nothing but a half-court defense, or if they lack the athleticism required to press, you're not going to want to risk changing your defense. The key to preparing for a game is planning to neutralize an opponent's strengths and exploiting their weaknesses with what your own team does well.

## Scouting

The best way to obtain information about another team is to watch them play—either in person or via game footage on video. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. When neither is possible, a coach should talk with another coach or source who's familiar with the opponent. Though not nearly as information-rich as the visual choices, verbal communication is far better than nothing, as long as the source is knowledgeable and trustworthy.

All members of a coaching staff should watch game film, but some staffs disperse the duties, assigning a lead scout for each team who's responsible for making sure the report is comprehensive and presenting the information to the head coach. When possible, the lead scout also gathers the opponent's roster and statistics. Game-by-game statistics of the contests on film provide a staff with a snapshot of those games, whereas cumulative season stats give a more accurate view of each player's contributions to the team.

### *Scouting Methods*

A team's method of scouting depends largely on its level of competition, size of staff and budget, geography, availability of game footage, and governing regulations. An NCAA Division I basketball staff will dissect video of several of the opponent's games before taking the floor, but rules prohibit them from scouting in person except for games played in tournaments in which the team is participating. High schools located in close proximity to their opponents can send a representative to opposing teams' contests when scheduling conflicts prevent the coaches themselves from attending, but few have an abundance of game footage to watch.

A coach at any level can be best prepared for an opponent by using game film to reinforce in-person scouting. Whenever reasonable, an open exchange policy among teams—especially those with common opponents—will help more than hurt in the long run.

**In Person** High school coaches have a great advantage because they can scout in person. There are several benefits to taking in a game live. You can see the action on the court more clearly than on film. You can hear and see the verbal and nonverbal play calls. You can watch when, how, and who communicates the next play.

You can also factor in the environment and emotion surrounding the game action. How players react to various situations is invaluable information. Are they rattled or intimidated by boisterous crowds? Are they flat in an empty gym? Do they lose focus when a call goes against them? Do they point fingers when a teammate makes a poor decision? How well do they fight back when momentum shifts to the other side? How effectively do they use time-outs and dead-ball situations?

Scouting in person is a combination of art and science and like any other skill it takes practice. The obvious disadvantages to watching a game live is the inability to pause, rewind, and fast-forward fast-paced action, and the inability to really study what both teams are doing on the same play. One way to avoid missing information is having multiple coaches scouting. The division of labor might be by teams, with each one taking

down everything their assigned team is doing, or by side of the ball, with one focusing on all offensive play and the other all defensive play. If scouting alone, using a recorder and then transcribing the notes immediately after the game gives the coach another opportunity to process the action when it's still fresh.

**On Video** Although breaking down video might seem the easiest and most direct way to collect the most information about another team, it can quickly become overwhelming. How many games should you break down? How much time should players spend watching video instead of practicing on the court? Before either of these questions can be considered, a coach must have the equipment on which to watch and edit the video, an ability to use it, and the time to do so.

Generally speaking, studying three games usually provides a well-rounded feel for a team's players, various offenses, style of defense, favorite dead-ball plays, preferred game speed, and any trends or intangibles that inevitably surface for a keen eye. Watching game film of a team playing a common opponent helps put those performances in perspective.

A 32- or 40-minute game can be edited down to 12 to 15 minutes of valuable footage—plenty enough to show players the highlights of an opponent's offensive, defensive, and transitional style. Any more than that and some players will lose focus, as well as the court time practicing their own plays.

### ***Anatomy of a Scouting Report***

Scouting reports come in all shapes and sizes. Those that precede a big game or originate in a program with multiple staffers, a scouting budget, and access to statistics and game footage will of course be more elaborate than one-coach shops who are isolated geographically and digitally from their opponents. One size does not fit all, but the size that fits no one is a scouting report that confuses players by its complexity.

The sample scouting report at the end of this chapter (p. 9) tends toward the very complete. The report provides details on how players, individually, and the team, collectively, execute on the court, taking virtually all possible situations into account. This report also covers patterns of behavior, includes a detailed one-page summary of the finer points of play, and presents keys to winning the game, logistics of the trip or game day, and any out-of-the-ordinary aspects of the contest.

A scouting report includes video clips of opponents when available. When used in combination with game film, the order in which the game film is shown to players should correspond to the order in which the plays appear on the scouting report. For instance, if the video starts with a team running a cross-screen/back-screen action play, that should also be the first play on paper. This kind of organization saves time when reviewing the report and keeps the focus on the material.

**Personnel** It's best to give players their anticipated defensive assignment as soon as possible after the preceding game is over to prepare them for what they're going to face next. This starts with making sure they know their players' number and name. Attention is generally focused on players who will be on the court for at least 25 percent of the game.

Explain each player's value to her team: why she is on the floor and what she does well. As a rule, players will have one dominant move that they default to or rely on in pressure situations, whether it's pulling up at the three-point line, driving to the middle as soon as she touches the ball, or spinning off a defensive stop for a jump shot. But informing players of that move isn't enough. Teach them how to take that strength away and how to exploit the opponent's defensive and offensive weaknesses.

As a coaching staff, consider ways to create mismatches. If the opponent has a smaller guard, create situations to get the ball to your physical guard and give her the green light to drive or shoot. If the opponent switches defensively, prepare your team to play against the switch and, specifically, to set up further mismatches.

Keep stats about each opposing player as succinct as possible. A grid on the first page of the report should include the player's number, name, position, height, class, points per game, rebounds per game, field-goal percentage (with number of attempts and makes), three-point field-goal percentage (with number of attempts and makes), free-throw percentage (with number of attempts and makes), average minutes played per game, and total number of assists and turnovers.

**Offensive Plays** Include the three to four most frequently used offensive sets each opponent uses against a man-to-man defense. Generally speaking, a team has either a primary offense or, if it's a quick hitter-oriented team that runs several different plays, an offense with fall-back plays to use in critical or quick-score situations. If you know the opponent's play call (i.e., a signal, hand gesture, or audible call), label the play as such so players can identify it quickly during the game. Otherwise, assign the play a descriptive name to use when you see the play developing. Then pick out two places within the offense to stop either their initiation process or the desired action. The same should be done with a team's top one or two offenses against the various zone defenses.

If it appears the opponent has never, or rarely, faced a zone defense, consider springing a zone on them for a couple of possessions out of dead-ball situations to see how their players react. In all cases, the idea is to identify tendencies and prepare to take away the specific shots the opponent most wants to take.

**Transitions** Most teams have a primary fast break to get down the floor as quickly as possible, hoping to score several easy buckets during a game. Many teams also have a more controlled, structured secondary break for situations when the offensive and defensive numbers are the same. Identifying the times when the opponent employs the fast break (off makes, misses, or both), the primary ball handlers, and the players who force the tempo helps slow down their break and possibly create turnovers. If the opponent uses a long pass or outlet to half-court or beyond, plan to shadow the players that get down the floor early to ensure no offensive players get behind the deepest defender.

**Special Situations** Special situations include out-of-bounds plays, last-second out-of-bounds plays, plays when the shot clock is running down, and late-game tendencies. For out-of-bounds plays, whether they originate under the basket or on the sidelines, first identify the player alignment. If the alignment changes for every play, it's easier to prepare your team for how to defend each play. If the alignment is the same for every play, determine whether certain player shifts in the formation tip a certain action, such as one player moving first for one play and another player moving first for another.

Knowing a team's favorite play or two during critical situations gives your team the advantage when the game is on the line. From where does the opponent like to initiate their specific action? Who do they want to have the basketball? Make them deviate from their plan, even if it's necessary to call a time-out to remind your team of their anticipated action and how to stop it.

**Defense** Pick apart the opponent's defense. Do they have a poor defender who neglects to get into help defense, so that when the ball is on the opposite side of the court a player can drive to the basket knowing she only needs to beat her player? Do they have a poor on-ball defender who fouls often or can't contain off the dribble? How do they handle screens?



An opponent's press defense should also be evaluated. Where do they like to initiate the press—full court, three-quarter-court, or half-court? Is it a man-to-man, zone, or matchup zone press? When are they most likely to press? Do they trap out of the press, trying to create a turnover, or is their press used primarily to shave seconds off the shot clock? If they do trap, in which areas do they tend to trap, and which players are usually involved? What are their rotations on the floor, and who covers specific spots?

**Keys to the Game** Details are important, but too many muddle a mind. A coach's job is to take the details, synthesize them into the most important points, and then emphasize those points to the team during practice and games. Trying to do too much waters down the effectiveness of any one of the goals. Give players no more than two or three sentences on each facet of the game—offense, defense, and transition—that tells them how to win the contest.

**Team Tendencies** Coaches and teams tend to follow the same patterns, falling back on the same plays or players in tight games or coming out of dead-ball situations. Maybe they like to change things up defensively coming out of a time-out or when the ball is taken out on the side, or maybe they prefer to press at a certain time. If their team is down, they might rush shots or pull a quick trigger beyond the arc. Against a physical defense, a player might be more perimeter-oriented rather than playing in the post. Simply knowing that can help your players react to it more to your advantage, but sometimes a specific play or action can be scripted to counteract that tendency. Knowing what to expect at different times in a game is a major advantage.

**Logistics and Setting** Travel plans and the environment surrounding home and away games are important factors in preparing mentally and physically for a competition. It's amazing how much more at ease an entire travel party will be, families included, when they all have information about departure and arrival times, lodging details, and meal plans. Players can know they'll be fueled for the contest, and parents can arrange their trip with the team's itinerary in mind, abiding by any team policies regarding family time, of course.

Distractions are common elements in sports and can pop up unexpectedly. However, some distractions are predictable and can be negated with coaching. Will a sell-out crowd be on hand? If so, tell your team so they can steel themselves for the opposition and the noise. They'll also need to practice alternative methods of communication, such as hand signals and placards. Are you expecting a lifeless gymnasium? Coach your players to provide the energy and fill the place with their own enthusiasm. Is the home team introduced with a flamboyant production? Desensitize your team from the awe by talking about it. Will your team have to wait through a pregame ceremony, such as Senior Day, or extended media time-outs? If so, let your players know how to spend the time.

**Detailed Checklist** The last page of the scouting report provides a checklist of what to know about an opponent. Every important aspect of a team is covered, from player depth and how they use screens offensively to their ability to switch defensively and if they shoot threes in transition—and everything in between. The checklist paints a vivid picture of the opposing team so that your team can begin considering how to alter that picture to its benefit.

## Strategizing

Once the scouting report is complete, you want to distill the information into a plan that gives your team the best chance of winning. As we mentioned earlier, the plan starts with your own team and knowing its strengths. Who's the best defensive player? Who's the

worst? Who's the best defensive perimeter player? Who's the best defensive post player? Who are the best rebounders?

Only after these determinations have been made should the opponent factor into your plan. Who are their best players? What players must they have on the floor to win the game? Who are their best rebounders? Your plan unfolds as a way to nullify strengths and exploit weaknesses. Unless your best player is overwhelmingly your best defensive player, having her guard their best player isn't always the best option because it sets her up for foul trouble. A better plan is to identify their biggest threat on the perimeter and assign her to your defensive stopper, and do the same thing in the post. Then develop a two-deep depth chart of who will potentially guard each person on the opposing team projected to play at least 25 percent of the game.

A team might have 20 offensive looks, but chances are they won't execute all of them well. As you study the scouting report, a team's bread and butter should become apparent. It might be their post play or that their guards dominate their games. They might draw fouls and get to the line more than usual; they might have sharp shooters from three-point range; they might be an excellent rebounding team; they might play smothering defense. Identify the plays, the offensives, the cuts—whatever is essential to their team. If a team seems to lack a clear identity, break things down statistically, charting how many times they run each play.

Of course, a team might do more than one thing very well, but be careful about building up a team to sound unbeatable by emphasizing all of the areas in which they're great. Instead, focus on neutralizing what they consider their biggest advantage, or at least the advantage you believe your team can best influence. Negating that strength might throw off a team enough to shake their confidence or disrupt their timing.

## **IMPLEMENTING A GAME PLAN**

No matter how brilliant or carefully crafted, a game plan is not worth the paper it's written on if players can't execute it. Remember that games are won on the court, not on paper or in a film room. Thus it's critical that players understand the concepts of the game plan and can perform the skills required to carry it out.

The culmination of the scouting and scheming is game day. Can your team put your plan into action when it counts? Can you read the flow of the game and draw up just the right play at just the right time to give your team a quick emotional lift, a key stop, or a game-winning bucket?

## **Preparation**

Preparation for an opponent occurs in up to three phases: the written scouting report, film sessions (when available), and the on-court practice that puts theory into action. Each phase builds on the previous: players read the critical information on the opponent, see the concepts on game film, and make the concepts come to life on the court.

The standard lead time before facing an opponent is two to four days, except during tournament play and interruptions in the schedule for final exams or holidays. Developing a routine of when players receive the written report, watch film sessions, and hit the court will maximize not only the time to prepare but also your players' ability to shift focus from one game to the next.



## Off-Court

Coaches need to be at least a game ahead in terms of scouting so that the written report and the video report (when available) for the next opponent are ready immediately after the preceding game, or else two to three days in advance of the contest—whichever comes first.

One method of introducing material to the team is distributing the written report at the beginning of the film session for that opponent, which the lead coach for that opponent will have prepared. After an explanation of the one aspect of the game the opponent relies on, the lead coach reviews the personnel in the order listed on the report, always starting with the point guard and moving through the other players, and always talking directly to the players who will be guarding those players.

The video session should highlight the offensive plays the opponent employs most often, with four being the maximum. Including every look an opponent has will overload your players and dilute the impact that presenting the key plays has on them. Start with offense before moving to the fast-break and secondary-break systems, out-of-bounds plays under the basket, sideline out-of-bounds plays, defensive schemes or style, man-to-man defenses, zone defenses, and presses. Include not only clips of the opponent executing well but also clips in which another team has disrupted that play, showing your players the cracks in the opponent's armor. Arrange the clips so that they appear in descending order of the frequency with which they are used and in the same order as they are drawn on the written report. In some cases, players might want their own copy of the video clip to study on their own.

## On-Court

To emphasize in theory and in practice that focusing on your own team is more important than focusing on an opponent, limit the time on scouting report sessions to no more than 15 to 20 minutes per day. After that, your players will start to lose interest and focus. First, explain the play and have players or the scout team walk through it. Then demonstrate specific ways to stop that specific action.

Be organized and move efficiently through the material, walking through their offenses and special plays and explaining what they'll do against a press defense. The last thing you want to do is lecture for an hour. Move fast enough to get players thinking; replicate gamelike situations as much as possible.

One way to maximize retention is to cover the written scouting report, watch film, hit the floor, and after practice cover the written report and film session again. This way, players read it, hear it, see it, physically experience it, and then hear it and see it again to tie it all together. After two or three days of this routine, they should be well-versed on the other team's identity.

## Game Day

Game-day preparation will vary among individuals. Every player should have the relative freedom to gear up for a game in the way that works best for her. But basketball is a team sport, and at some point the team must come together and prepare as a unit. The timing might vary depending on competition level and logistics, but including the following points and keeping the routine consistent are what matter most.

Have your team meet in the locker room about an hour before tipoff to review the main bullet points of the opponent's personnel, offense, and defense; the team's offense and defense; and three keys to be effective and win the game. This meeting should not be a learning session, nor is it the forum for presenting new information unless it concerns an injury, officials, or game atmosphere. Your intent is to get players thinking specifically about the game and their assignments.