



# BASIC ZONE OFFENSE

11

**PROVEN DRILLS AND PLAYS TO  
SCORE AGAINST ANY ZONE DEFENSE**

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# Introduction

**Zone Defense** – it's a thorn in the side of coaches at every level. It allows your opponents to clog up the paint and prevent high percentage shots. It helps them to minimize matchup problems and “hide” weaker defenders. And it makes it easier for them to slow down the tempo and force the game into a mechanical slog.

But fear not! There are *many* ways to beat a zone.

When a team switches to zone defense you can't simply continue to run your man offense against it. You need to have a few actions you can run designed specifically for attacking the zone.

This eBook will walk you through the basics of zone offense, and provide you with several drills for developing key zone offense skills, and specific plays, proven to help you score against the zone at every competitive level.

When you're running these plays, it's important you keep the ball moving quickly – as the zone shifts back and forth as you swing the ball from side to side, you need to be ready to attack the opening, either via pass and cut, or dribble penetration.

It's also important to prepare for the eventuality of a zone defense by getting shots up in practice. The goal of most zones is to clog up the middle, leaving them more susceptible to leaving shooters open on the outside.

The best way to attack the zone is by pushing the ball inside, forcing the defense to collapse, and kicking it back out to an open shooter, and it goes without saying, that the more shooters you have on your team, the more dangerous it is for other teams to run zone defenses.

Okay, let's get started!

# **Zone Offense Skill Development**

# Mid Post Mikan Drill

## Purpose

The tried and tested best way of attacking each and every zone is by putting a player in the middle of it. The only problem with this is players rarely get any practice making that kind of contested catch in the high post and then making a quick decision. This next drill does a great job of getting post players comfortable working out of and finishing from the high post.

## Setup

The player running through the drill line up in the middle of the paint on the dotted line. There will be three more players helping out – one just outside the paint at each elbow, each with a basketball, and another by the hoop, ready to rebound. You'll also have a coach line up at the top of the arc with a basketball, acting as the post entry passer.

## Execution

To begin, the coach will throw an entry pass to the player in the paint, who will then catch it and secure it, then decisively make a move and attack the hoop, finishing strong at the rim. Once the coach has thrown the entry pass, one of the two extra passers will pass him another ball. The rebounder will collect the loose ball, and pass it to whichever of the two extra passers no longer has a ball. In the meantime, the post player will have sprinted right back up to the dotted line, ready to receive the next pass and do it again. You can either continue the drill until the player has hit a certain number of makes, or simply set a time – 30 seconds for example – until the players rotate and the next man comes in.

## Coaching Tips

It's important that you make this as close to a game situation as possible – throw errant passes, high and low, so that players get used to making tough catches. And make sure players are making their post moves and finishes as if there is a real defender on their hip! Remember – practice how you want to play!

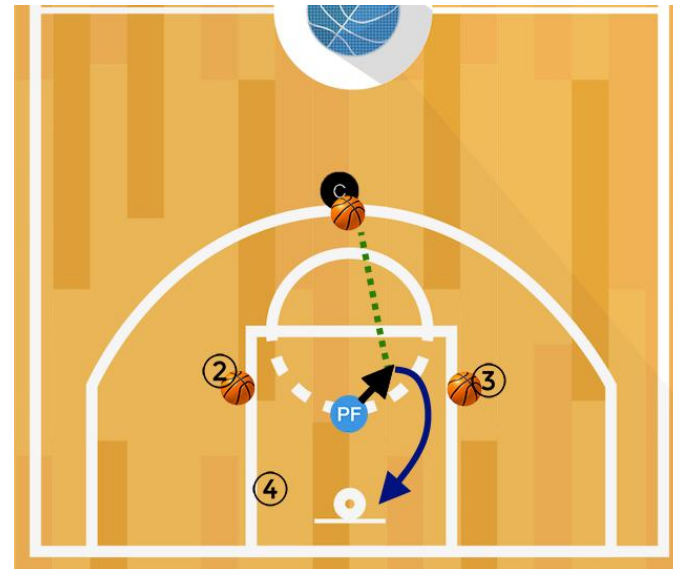


**Figure 1: Mid Post Mikan Drill**

# Stick and Move Drill

## Purpose

Learning to whip the ball with crisp passing in the halfcourt is absolutely essential to breaking down the zone. Hesitating to move the ball around the arc will allow time for the slight openings you've created in the zone to disappear. This next drill will teach players how to anticipate their teammates' movement, hitting the open man as soon as he's available.

## Setup

You'll need four teams of three players, with two teams starting out on the court as offense and defense, and the other two off to the sideline. You'll also need a coach to act as an extra passer, and while you don't need to mark it explicitly, it's important the players know the court has been split in half right down the middle of the paint, and they are restricted to one side for the entirety of this drill.

## Execution

To begin, the offense will make a pass to the coach, then using a combination of cuts and screens to get open. The offense is trying to score a bucket, while the defense is doing their best to steal the ball. The players are free to do whatever they like – they can pass back to the coach at an time, and as long as they aren't setting illegal screens or taking too long to get open, they can keep going. After every win – either the defense getting a steal/rebound or the offense scoring a hoop – the losing team gets off the court with the next team ready to sprint on and continue the drill. The drill ends once a team has accrued 10 wins, with the losers all doing pushups or running sprints.

## Coaching Tips

It's important not to overcoach in this drill. Let the players solve the puzzle of exactly what they need to do to be successful. You should however keep an eye out, as you rotate through the teams, you'll notice that some players just seemed to have a natural chemistry together, and pairing them off in games can pay big dividends.

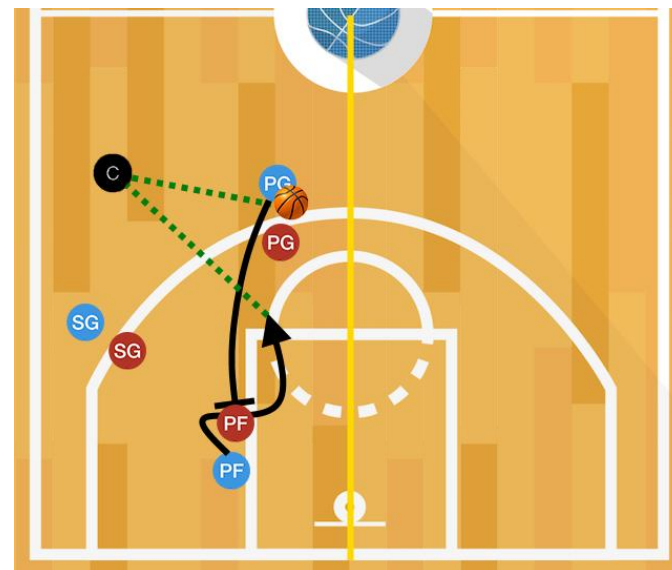


**Figure 1: Stick and Move Drill**

# Attack the Closeout Drill

## Purpose

Once the zone begins to shift back and forth, eventually, there will be a crack, and when you see that crack, you need to attack! In this drill, we are going to teach players how to draw the defender out, attack the closeout, and get a good shot under control.

## Setup

To begin, the players will form a line out on the wing, with a coach or defender under the hoop with a basketball.

## Execution

The coach will throw the player on the wing a chest pass and then sprint out of the paint, chopping down his feet at the end with his hands up, closing out hard on the ball. The offensive player must wait until the defender has begun to chop down, at which point he can attack the hoop and look to finish strong.

## Coaching Tips

When you first start running this drill, work on predetermined moves – pump fake, to one dribble pull up inside for example. Then pump fake to one dribble pull up baseline. Then you can have players take it all the way to the hoop. You can closeout short, leaving them open for the three. There are tons of options, but they should all be quick and decisive – no more than two dribbles at any given time. Once your players are comfortable reading the closeout and reacting with about 3-5 different moves, you can open it up to interpretation. Closeout differently every time, and allow the players to read your closeout and make the correct decision on how to attack it.

Once the drill is at this point, you can sub out the coach, and put a line of players at the baseline to act as defenders. The same rules will apply, but you can make it into a contest – the first player to score 7 points on offense wins, with the rest of the players running sprints.

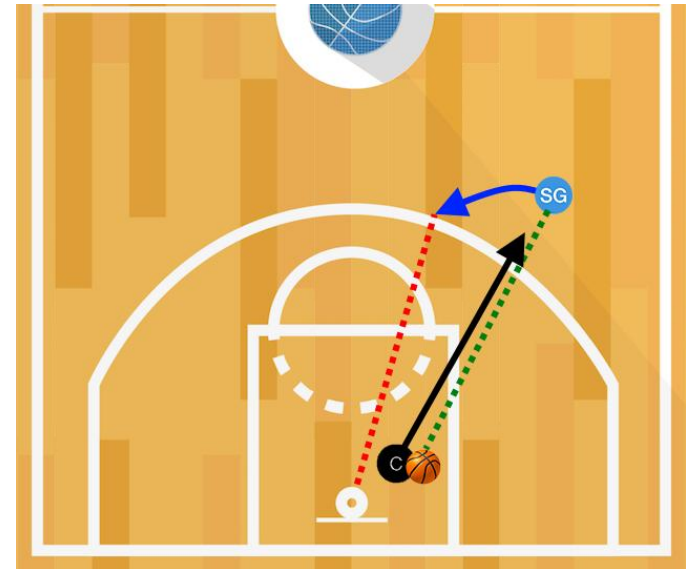


**Figure 1: Attack the Closeout Drill**

# Zone Offense Plays

# Zone Offense – Shallow Cut

## Setup

The offense will begin in a classic 3-2 alignment, with the point guard up top with the ball, the shooting guard on the right wing, and the small forward on the left wing. The power forward will set up on the right block, and the center down on the left block.

## Execution

The point guard will dribble right at the shooting guard on the wing, with the shooting guard making a shallow cut right past the point guard up to the top of the key. Immediately after, the point guard will swing the ball up into the shooting guard's hands at the top of the key.

The point guard will with sprint along the baseline, rubbing shoulders with both the power forward and center as he passes them filling out to the far corner. Simultaneously, the shooting guard will hit the small forward on the wing, allowing him to hit the point guard in the corner just as he arrives.

## Options

There is only really one option on this play – the corner three for the point guard. If the defense overcompensates, crashing down on the corner, it is likely that either the center or small forward will have been left alone, making them good secondary options for a pass.

Otherwise, the shooting guard can slide back to the right wing, the point guard can pass to the small forward, and allow him to reset up top, putting the offense right back in its standard 3-2 alignment.

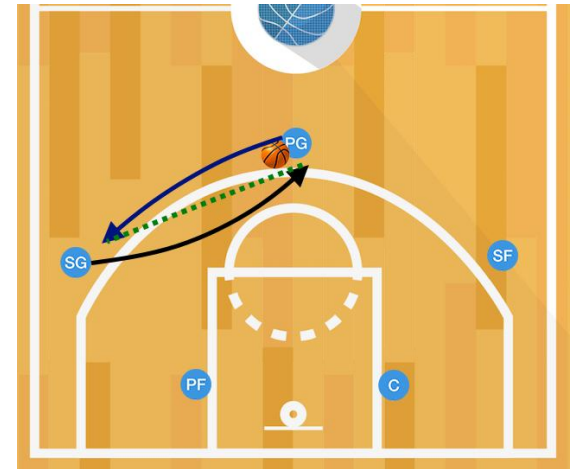


**Figure 1:** Shallow Cut Pt. 1, PG-SG Exchange

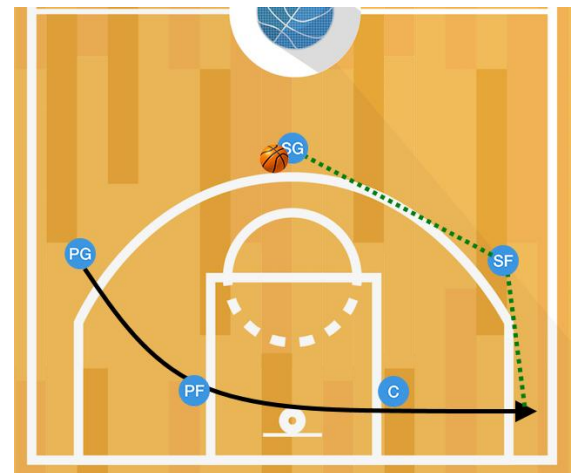


**Figure 2:** Shallow Cut Pt. 2, Swing Around Arc to Corner 3

# Zone Offense – Overload 1 (Post to Post Screen)

## Setup

The point guard will start at the top of the arc with the ball, with the power forward and center down on the low blocks and the shooting guard and small forward out on the wings, putting the offense in a standard 3-2 alignment.

## Execution

To begin, the point guard will pass the ball to the shooting guard on the right wing, and then fill in to the corner. After the first pass is made, the center will flash to the ball side high post, and the small forward will fill in at the top of the arc.

The center will then come set a pindown screen in the middle of the zone for the power forward. As this is happening, the shooting guard will pass to the small forward at the top of the key, allowing him to hit the power forward just as he curls inside off of the center's down screen.

## Options

The primary option on this play is the power forward duck in. If this pass is unavailable, the point guard can fill in to the small forward's spot on the left wing and the bigs can space out to the blocks, putting us right back in our 3-2 alignment and ready to try a different action.

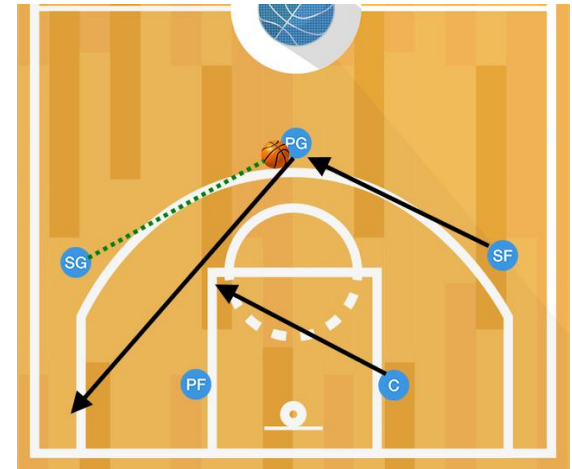


**Figure 1:** Overload 1 Pt. 1, Wing Feed, PG Corner Fill, C & SF Flash Hi

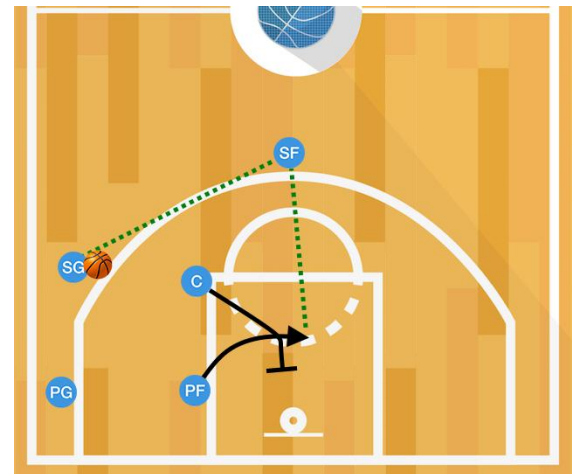


**Figure 2:** Overload 1 Pt. 2, C Downscreen, PF Duck In

# Zone Offense – Overload 2 (High Low Feed)

## Setup

This is another simple play for attacking the zone run out of the 3-2 alignment, with the point guard up top, the small forward on the left wing, the center on the left block, the shooting guard on the right wing, and the power forward on the right block.

## Execution

The play will begin with a pass to the shooting guard on the right wing, with the point guard immediately filling in to the ball side corner, the small forward filling in to the top of the arc, and the power forward sliding up to the midpost on the right block.

The shooting guard will then hit the power forward on the block, queuing the center to duck in under the hoop and make himself available for the pass.

## Options

With the defense overloaded on the right side of the court, if the center can establish good position, he will be free to work one on one underneath the hoop, which should lead to a high percentage shot. If however the defense doesn't collapse on the power forward, anticipating the pass to the center, he has the option to take that little 13 foot jumper, or kick back out to either of the guards on the wing for the three.

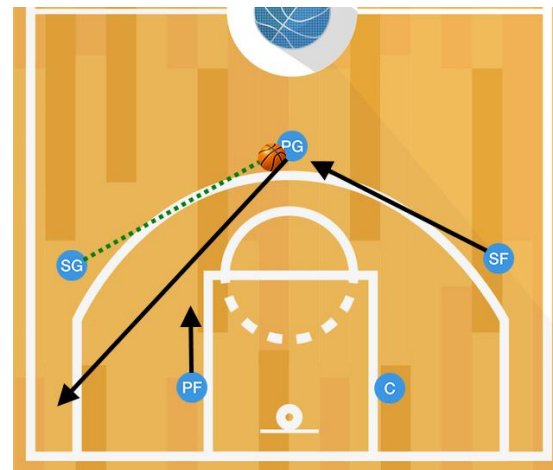


**Figure 1:** Overload 2 Pt. 1, Wing Feed, PG Corner Fill, PF & SF Flash Hi

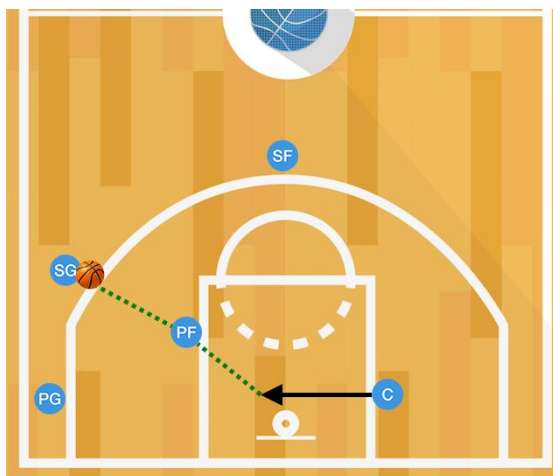


**Figure 2:** Overload 2 Pt. 2, Mid Post PF Feed, C Duck In

# Zone Offense – Rodeo

## Setup

The offense will begin here in a 3-2 alignment, with the point guard up top and the shooting guard and small forward on their respective wings. The power forward will line up on the right block and the center on the left block.

## Execution

The play will begin with a pass to the small forward on the left wing. The shooting guard, power forward, and center will all slide to the left side of the court, with the shooting guard on the left elbow, the power forward on the left block, and the center in the left corner. The small forward will then pass the ball to the center in the corner, and run through the paint, underneath the power forward on the block and up and out to the right wing. Next, the point guard will flash over to the ball side wing, getting a pass back from the center. He will then drive hard to the middle of the court, with the shooting guard popping off the elbow and out to the left wing. At the same time, the power forward will set a back screen for the center, who will make a cut to the hoop.

## Options

The point guard needs to read the defense as he penetrates middle. His first look is to hit the center after the back screen for the easy layup, but that will only be available if he attacks the middle of the paint as if he is going to take it all the way to the hoop. If neither of those options are available, he should look to hit the power forward popping out with a bounce pass, or kick out to the shooting guard spotting up on the left wing.

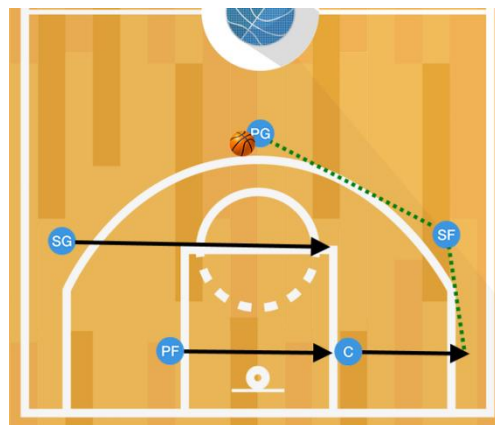


Figure 1: Rodeo Pt. 1

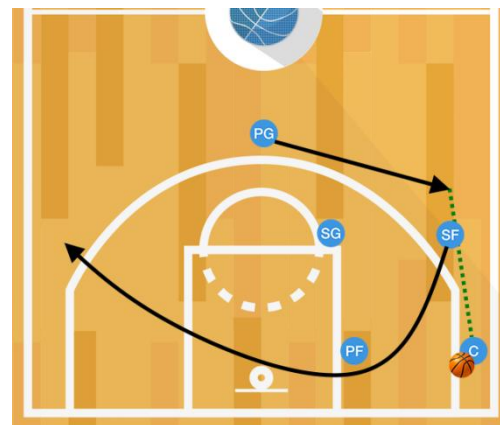


Figure 2: Rodeo Pt. 2

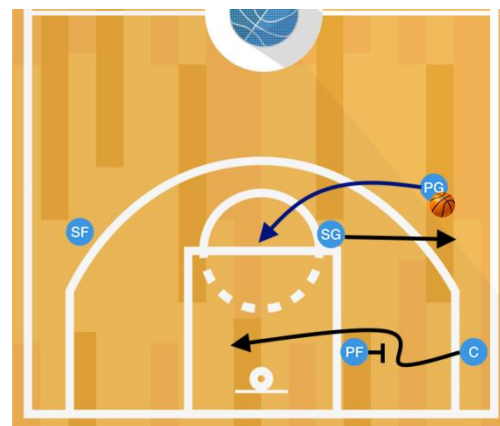


Figure 3: Rodeo Pt. 3, PG SG Exchange, PF Backscreen for C

# Zone Offense – Wing Ballscreen

## Setup

The offense will start here with a classic 3-2 alignment, with the bigs down on their respective blocks, and the shooting guard and small forward on their respective wings, with the point guard at the top of the arc, starting with the ball.

## Execution

To start, the point guard will send a pass to the small forward and space to the weak side while the shooting guard sprints down and along the baseline and out to the ball side corner, where he will receive a pass from the small forward.

The shooting guard will begin to dribble upcourt, right at the small forward – who will shallow cut underneath him and fill into the corner. The center will head up to the wing to set a ball screen for the shooting guard, who will use the screen to attack the middle of the zone. As the shooting guard comes off the screen, the power forward will duck in, making himself available for the pass underneath the hoop.

## Options

As the shooting guard comes off the ball screen, he should look to get all the way to the rim, or take the pull up 12 footer if they're giving it to him. His next option is to hit the power forward ducking in under the hoop. And if a man from the top of the zone cheats down to cut off his driving lane, he should kick to the point guard spotting up on the arc for a three pointer.

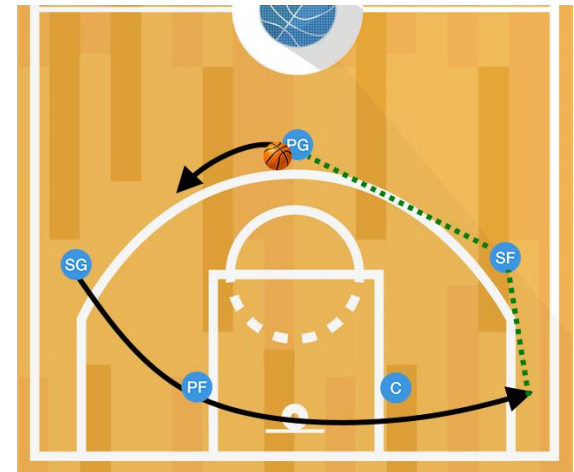


**Figure 1:** Wing Ballscreen Pt. 1, SG Ballside Corner Fill

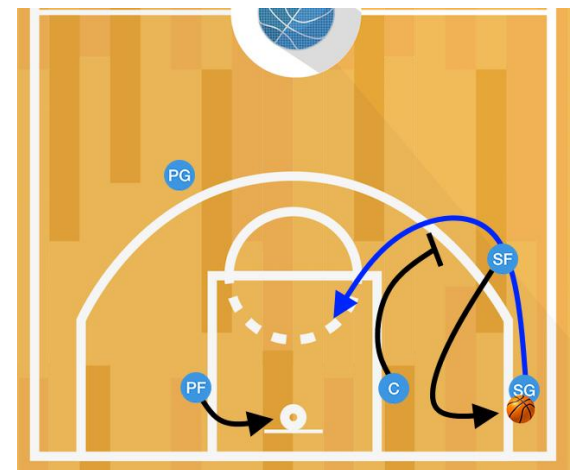


**Figure 2:** Wing Ballscreen Pt. 2, C Ballscreen

# Zone Offense – Loop Zone

## Setup

The offense will start out in the standard 3-2 alignment, with the point guard up top with the ball, the shooting guard on the right wing, and the small forward on the left wing. The power forward will position himself on the right block, and the center will set up on the left block.

## Execution

The play will begin the point guard dribbling right at the small forward, with the small forward looping underneath and up to the top of the arc where he will receive a pass from the point guard. As this action is happening, the shooting guard will slide down along the arc to create more space for the next part of the play.

The power forward will come up to set a ballscreen for the small forward, who will attack hard off the screen.

## Options

Most often, this play will force the defense to choose between clamping down on the small forward driving to the lane, or leaving the shooting guard open on the arc. As the small forward comes off the screen, he should look first to get to the hoop or take the open pull up jumpshot if it's available. If not, his next option should be to hit the shooting guard for a three, and thirdly, the power forward, who will pop after picking, looking to catch and shoot from about 17 feet.

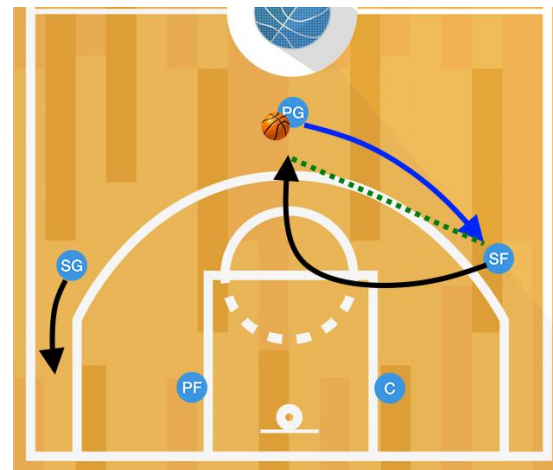


**Figure 1:** Loop Zone Pt. 1, SF Loop Cut

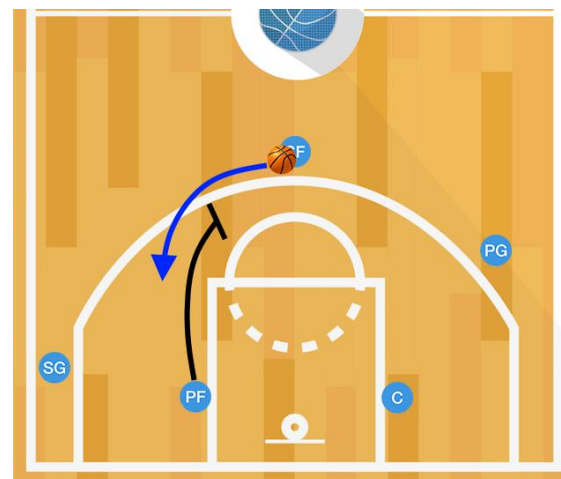


**Figure 2:** Loop Zone Pt. 2, PF Ballscreen

# Zone Offense – Wing Handoff

## Setup

This next play does a great job of manipulating the zone, keeping the players distracted with good ball and player movement that leads to an open look more often than not. To begin, the shooting guard will start in the right corner, with the small forward on the left wing. The power forward and center will stack on the left block, with the center closest to the baseline in the stack, and the point guard will start out near the hash mark on the right side of the court, further back than he normally would so that he has a chance to build up a little steam as he dribbles down to initiate the play.

## Execution

To start, the point guard will dribble hard, right at the shooting guard on the right wing. As the point guard dribbles at him, the shooting guard will run up, looking to receive a handoff from the point guard just below the foul line extended. After handing the ball off, the point guard will continue, sprinting along the baseline and out to the weakside corner.

The shooting guard will take the handoff and dribble into the middle of the court, staying inside the arc, looking to put some pressure on the defense. Once he gets to about the middle of the court, he will hit the small forward with a pass. The power forward will anticipate this pass, and set a downscreen on the center's defender, allowing him to curl around the power forward and receive a pass from the small forward and finish strong at the hoop.

## Options

We are trying to set up the center for the pass from the small forward, but there are other options as well. The shooting guard should be aggressive off the handoff, as it is possible he may find a crack in the defense, especially if you've run this play a couple times and they begin to assume it is just a distraction from the main action on the block. The small forward should also look to hit the point guard for the corner three if the defense isn't respecting it, and if the defense collapses on the center after the power forward's down screen, it is possible the power finds himself available for the entry pass as well.

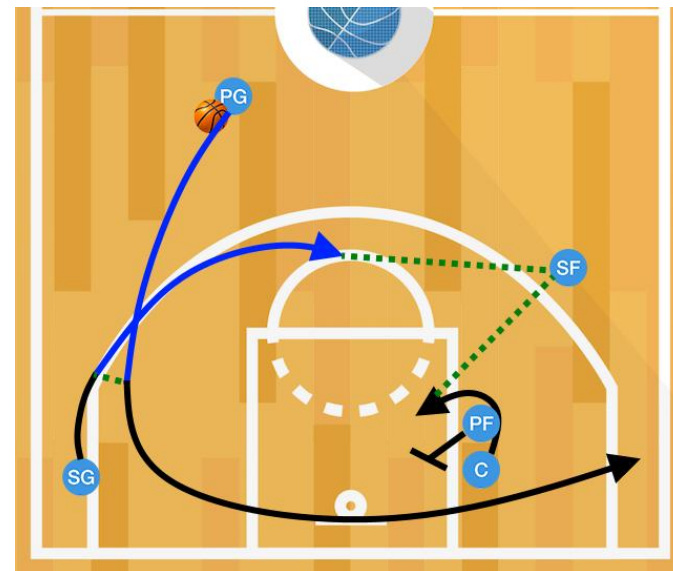


**Figure 1: Wing Handoff Action**

# Zone Offense – Working Out of the Short Corner

## Setup

This next option will begin out of the classic 3-2 alignment as well, with the center and shooting guard on the right side, and the forwards on the left side in their respective positions.

## Execution

Working out of the short corner isn't so much a designed play as it is a chink the armor of a 2-3 zone. By putting a player with the ball in that spot, the defense is put in a compromising position, where, with the right spacing by the offense, there will almost always be an open player.

To get into position, the point guard will dribble down, with the shooting guard sliding lower onto the wing, below the free throw line extended. The point guard will then hit him with a pass, while the center flashes up to the elbow and the power forward flashes into the short corner. The shooting guard will then hit the power forward with a pass.

## Options

From there, there are quite a few options. If the center doesn't come out to defend the power forward, he should just take the open 8-10 foot jumpshot. If the center does slide out to defend the jumpshot, the center should cut hard to the hoop, looking to catch and finish. And if the small forward or point guard leave the wings to come help out in the paint, the power forward should kick out, either to the shooting guard or even with a skip pass directly to the point guard for the three.

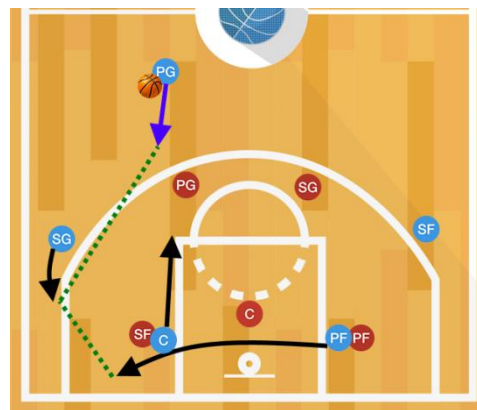


Figure 1: Short Corner Entry

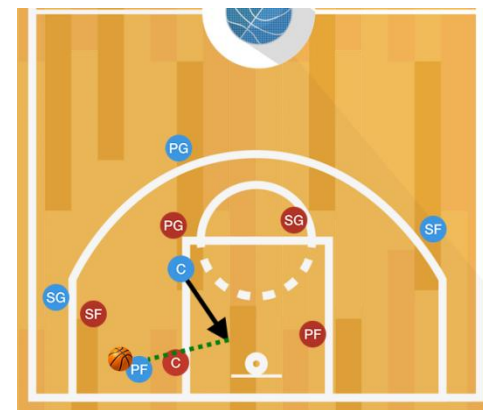


Figure 2: Short Corner to C Dive

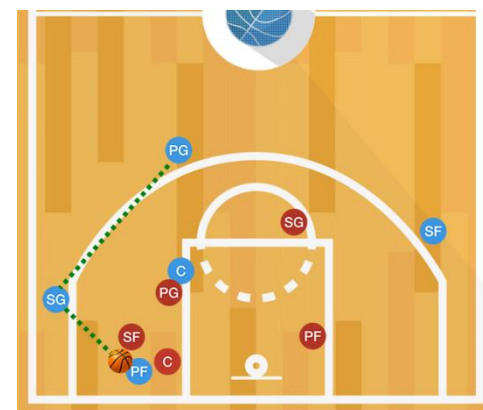


Figure 3: Short Corner Double, Kick Out

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