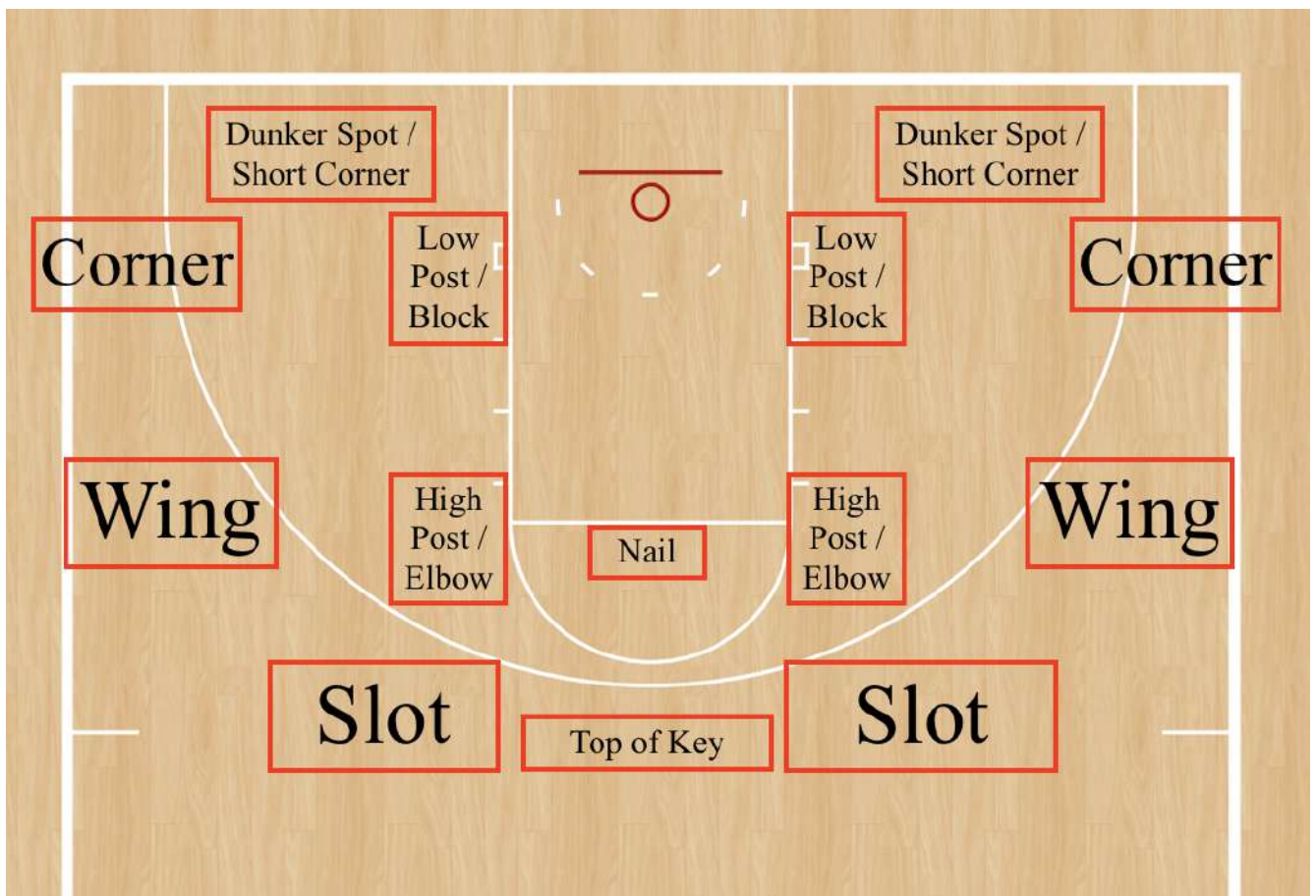# The Basketball Action Dictionary

Visual Diagrams of Each Action:

1. Pick-and-rolls

2. Pick-and-roll coverages

3. Off-ball Screens

4. Cuts (coming soon)

List of Terms:

21 (aka "Pistol"): a fast-paced, 5-out offense primarily featuring the ballhandler (on a wing), another guard (in the strongisde corner), and a big (at the top of the key)

45 cut: a cut at a 45-degree angle from the wing to the basket

At the Level (aka "Up to Touch"): a pick-and-roll coverage in which the screener's defender begins at the level of the screen

Automatic: a predetermined counter to an opponent's coverage (for example, an automatic rescreen if the on-ball defender goes under the first ballscreen)

Back Cut: a cut behind the defender's back and towards the basket

Back Screen: an off-ball screen for a player to cut towards the hoop

Barkley: to dribble from the perimeter into the low block for a post-up, as players like Charles Barkley, Mark Jackson, and Gary Payton used to do

Bazemore Cut: a UCLA-type screen for a wing on a SLOB, often to receive a lob

Bilbao: an off-ball action in which a player curls or rejects the first of two staggered screens, and then the first screener turns around and cuts off the second screener (see **Twirl**)

Blind Pig: a three-person backdoor action in which the ballhandler passes to a big, who passes to a third teammate running by him toward the hoop

Blitz: a pick-and-roll coverage in which the screener's defender is positioned above the screen and helps trap the ballhandler

Blitz to Switch: a double-team ("blitz") after a switch to prevent the ballhandler from attacking a mismatched defender

Boomerang: a pass to a teammate followed by an immediate pass back so that the original ballhandler has a live dribble to attack his defender (usually, a mismatch after a switch)

Brush Screen (or "Brush Cut"): an off-ball movement in which an offensive player cuts so that he (and/or his defender) get in the path of a different defender, functioning like a screen but never making contact and thus not a moving-screen violation

Butt Screen: a flat ballscreen (typically near the top of the key) set with the screener's back to the ballhandler (more loosely, *butt screen* can mean any screen, on- or off-ball, set with the screener's back to the cutter)

Carolina Break: a 4-out transition offense made famous by Roy Williams, featuring a rim runner, a wing on each side, a designated ballhandler, and a trailing big

Carolina Screen: a backscreen for a big to cut from the top of the key to the weakside low block (see "Carolina Break")

Catch Hedge (aka "Catch," "Up to Touch" or "At the Level"): a pick-and-roll coverage in which the screener's defender is positioned at (or one step below) the level of the screen

Chicago: a pin-down screen followed by a dribble handoff (the player who receives the pin also receives the DHO)

Chin Screen: a backscreen for a player to cut from the weakside slot to the basket (see ricky)

Chop Cut: a curved cut on the weakside of a pick-and-roll in which the player who starts in the weakside corner lifts/shakes up to the weakside wing, and then curls toward the basket; an exaggerated Maggette/blade cut (see face cut)

Corner (alignment): an alignment that features three players on the strong side —a big at the Elbow plus a guard in the corner and in the wing—plus another big at the weakside Elbow and forward near the weakside slot (see corner offense)

Corner Offense: a 4-out read-and-react offense with elements of Princeton and Triangle, typically initiated by the point guard passing to the big at the Elbow and then executing split-cut action with the wing in the strongside corner

Cross Screen: an off-ball screen for a player to cut horizontally across the court and towards the ballhandler

Cut Screen: a (basket) cut that functions like a screen because it momentarily draws the attention of a help defender away from his assignment, who is cutting in the opposite direction

Cyclone (aka "Corner Rip"): a backscreen near the weakside Elbow set by a guard who is expected to receive a down screen

Danny Green cut: a baseline cut from the weakside to the strongside corner during a pick-and-roll

Delay: a 5-out offensive series initiated by a pass to the trailing big at the top of the key

DHO (aka "Over"): a dribble-handoff

Dork: to sag off a non-shooter on the perimeter, daring him to shoot

Double Drag (aka "77"): a two-person staggered ballscreen for the ballhandler to dribble towards the middle of the floor (drag screens are traditionally set in transition)

Down: a pin-down screen (i.e., an off-ball screen for a player to cut from the baseline towards the top of the key)

Drop: a pick-and-roll coverage in which the screener's defender is positioned a few steps below the screen, and then backpedals as the ballhandler comes off the screen

Elevator Screen (aka "Gate"): a two-person off-ball screen in which the cutter cuts in between the two screeners, who then slide together like elevator doors in order to separate the cutter from his defender (see Cyclone)

Empty: the lack of an offensive player in the corner closest to a pick-and-roll (if a PnR occurs on the left wing, it's an "Empty PnR" when there's no offensive player in the left corner) (opposite of **"corner filled"** or **"filled corner" PnR**)

Euro ballscreen: an empty ballscreen on the wing; see **45 cut**

Exit Screen: a baseline screen set near the dunker spot for the cutter to cut to the corner (aka "corner pin-in")

Face Cut: a basket cut in front of the defender's face (in other words, the opposite of a back cut), especially from the corner in a Horns alignment

Flare Screen: an off-ball screen for a player to cut along the 3pt line, away from the ballhandler (see **Hammer**)

Flare DHO: a two-part action in which a player sets a flare screen and then receives a dribble handoff from a big at the top of the key

Flat Hedge: a pick-and-roll coverage in which the screener's defender begins just below the screen (i.e., too high for **Drop Coverage** but not quite **At the Level/Up to Touch**) and looks to contain the ballhandler's dribble penetration

Flip (aka "Handback" or "Snap"): an action similar to get in which the ballhandler passes ahead to a teammate, who flips/pitches the ball back to the original ballhandler (unlike "get," flip action doesn't have the second player set a ballscreen for the original ballhandler)

Floppy: a play in which a player, positioned under the basket, can choose whether to cut off a single screen to one side or a double screen to the other

Fronting the Post: a defensive tactic in which the player defending a post up gets in between his man and the ball—instead of between his man and the basket—in order to prevent a post feed but conceding an over-the-top pass (which is the **low man**'s responsibility for preventing)

Garfunkel: a variation of veer in which a would-be picker **ghosts** a ballscreen before setting a pin-down

Gator: a high-low pass from a big to the roller, usually to punish hedging defenses

Get (aka "Throw and Get" or "Chase"): an action in which a player passes to a teammate and then follows his pass for a handoff

Get (alternate definition): a ballscreen (cf. "Elbow Get," in which a big at one of the Elbows gets a ballscreen from the other big)

Ghost Screen (aka "Slide"): a pick-and-pop, but without the pick; a fake ballscreen after which the would-be screener cuts away from the ball into space

Grenade: a DHO from the low block

Gut DHO: an action in which a player cuts up through the paint (aka the middle/"gut") before receiving a dribble handoff near the top of the key (see **Spanoulis**)

Hammer Screen: a weakside flare screen for a shooter to cut from the wing to the corner, while the ballhandler is driving baseline

Hard Hedge (aka "show" or "hedge/show and recover"): a pick-and-roll coverage in which the screener's defender is positioned above the screen and pressures the ballhandler for one or two steps—redirecting him away from the basket—before retreating to the screener/roller

Hawk Action: a <u>UCLA</u> screen (usually for a non-point guard) followed by a side ballscreen

High I Defender: the weakside wing's defender

Hoiberg Roll: a cut from the weakside dunker spot to the strongside dunker spot, while a ballscreener is rolling to the vacated side of the lane (aka "shadow cut" or "slide action"); (see <u>zipper</u> or <u>short action</u>)

Horns: an alignment that features a guard/wing in each corner, a big at each Elbow, and the ballhandler at the top of the key

Horns Out: a Horns set in which the player at one Elbow sets a cross screen for his teammate at the other Elbow to cut to the far wing (aka "Horns Leak" or "Horns Cross")

Ice (aka "push," "blue," or "down"): a pick-and-roll coverage in which the on-ball defender directs the ballhandler towards the sideline (which usually means also denying the ballscreen)

Indiana: a pick-and-roll with a flare screen on the weakside

Inverted Pick-and-Roll (aka "Under"): a ballscreen set by a guard for a big

Iverson Cut (aka "Over"): a horizontal cut from one wing to the other, often while receiving a screen from a big at each Elbow (commonly seen in Horns or a 1–4 High alignment)

Korver Screen: an off-ball screen set by a player who was expected to receive a down screen (e.g., 4 starts to set a screen for 2, but then 2 down screens for 4)

Laker Cut: a basket cut made by the player who passed the ball into the post

Low Man: the defender closest to the baseline and hoop on the weak side of the floor, responsible for providing the first and most important layer of help defense

Nash: an empty two-person ballscreen on the wing (a **double drag** variation common in **pistol**)

Maggette Cut (aka "blade"): a curved cut from the corner to the hoop, often occurring during a pick-and-roll (see <u>face cut</u>)

Miami: a dribble handoff followed by a ballscreen (the player who receives the DHO then receives the ballscreen)

Motion Strong: a staggered two-person pin-down screen for the player in the weakside corner, originally from the San Antonio Spurs' motion offense

Motion Weak: a play from the San Antonio Spurs' motion offense that involves the point guard making a thru cut to the weak side and a cross/pin-down screen-the-screener action

Oklahoma: a double drag and then the second screener screens for the first screener to come back toward the ball (see ricky)

Over: a pick-and-roll coverage in which the on-ball defender goes over the top of the ballscreen

Paul Pierce Cut: a basket cut from the weakside corner

Peel Switch: a defensive tactic to stop dribble penetration by having a help defender switch onto the ballhandler, and then the ballhandler's original defender "peels off" him and guards whoever is left open by the rotation

Pin-in Screen: an off-ball screen near the low block in which the screener is facing the basket, freeing up a teammate to be open in the corner or wing area (see **exit screen**)

Pinch Post: an offensive series in which a big near the weakside Elbow is used as a playmaking hub (while no other teammates are between him and the closest sideline)

Pistol (offensive series aka "21"): a fast-paced, 5-out offense primarily featuring the ballhandler (on a wing), another guard (in the strongisde corner), and a big (at the top of the key)

Pistol (action): a pass to a teammate followed by a downhill handoff back to the original ballhandler on his way to the hoop (see pistol series)

Pistol (action): from the Triangle offense, an action that's either a down screen followed by a dribble handoff (aka Chicago) or a handoff followed by a ballscreen (aka Miami/Orlando)

Pre-switch: an off-ball switch in anticipation of a ballscreen so that a better defender is now guarding the ballscreener and can thus switch onto the ballhandler

Ram Screen: an offensive action in which a player receives a screen and then sets a ballscreen

Release Into the Pocket: a would-be screener slips a ballscreen and settles into open space near the Elbow for a short roll opportunity, commonly used against ice coverage or blitzes

Ricky: a backscreen followed by a down screen for the same player; more broadly, a screen and rescreen involving the same cutter and screener each time, with the second screen set in the opposite direction of the first

Rim Runner: a big who aims to outrun his defender in transition offense (see "Carolina Break")

Rip: a backscreen (traditionally, *rip* referred to a backscreen set by a guard for a big)

Rip DHO (aka "21 Down" from Pistol): a three-person action in which a player sets a rip screen and then receives a DHO

Rub (cf. "Horns Rub" or Elbow Rub"): a backscreen in which a player cuts toward the basket and then hooks around to set a backscreen, typically near the Elbow

Rub (alternate definition): a playcall for middle ballscreen

Rub (alternate definition): a brush cut; a cut/moving screen a player makes to obstruct the path of a defender (but without making contact with that defender, and thus not a moving-screen violation)

Scram Switch: an off-ball switch to mitigate the mismatch caused by an earlier switch

Screen the Screener (StS): an action in which a player sets a screen and then receives a screen from a different teammate (see rip DHO, Swing)

Screen Your Own: a tactic against switching defenses in which an offensive player screens his own defender, preventing his defender from switching onto the

cutter

Secondary Break: an offensive system that transitions from a primary break (aka fastbreak) to a set halfcourt offense (see "Carolina Break")

Short Action: a cut/flash to the strongside during a pick-and-roll, usually to punish hedging or blitzing

Short Roll: a pick-and-roll in which the roller stops short (often near the free-throw line), receives a pass from the ballhandler, and makes plays for his teammates from there

Shuffle (offense): a continuity offense best known for its namesake Shuffle screen

Slash: a pick-and-pop followed by a DHO to the weakside

Slice Screen (aka "shuffle"): a backscreen for a player on the wing

Slip: a basket cut made by an offensive player who was about to set a screen

Shrink the Floor: a team defensive tactic in which the off-ball defenders shift closer to the ballhandler, thereby clogging possible driving lanes but forcing longer recoveries/closeouts if the ball is passed to the weak side of the floor

Spain Pick-and-Roll: a pick-and-roll combined with a backscreen (the player who sets the ballscreen then receives a backscreen as he rolls to the hoop)

Spain Veer StS: a double drag variation that combines Spain and veer: After two players set the double-drag ballscreen, a fourth teammate sets a backscreen for one of the pickers and then receives a down screen from the other picker in a screen-the-screener action

Spanoulis (aka "Peja"): a backscreen followed by a gut DHO (the player who sets the backscreen then receives the dribble handoff)

Spread Pick-and-Roll: a pick-and-roll with the three off-ball players behind the 3-point line (typically, an off-ball player is in each corner, and the third off-ball player is in the slot opposite of the ballscreen)

Stagger: two screens set in the same direction for the same player, one after the other (the opposite of *elevator* or *gate*, in which the screeners stand shoulder to shoulder) (see **motion strong**)

Stampede Cut (aka "Slot Drive" or "Go-and-Catch"): an offensive tactic in which a player on the perimeter is already running to the hoop as he catches a pass and continues driving to the basket (instead of squaring up for a shot and then attacking the closeout)

Step-Up Screen: a side ballscreen set with the screener's back parallel to the baseline

The Steve Novak Play: a variation of wedge roll in which a shooter sets a wedge screen and then receives a down screen to pop to the top of the key for a 3-pointer (more loosely, a PnR with a simultaneous down screen for a shooter to cut from the paint to the top of the key)

Strong Side: the half of the court that has the ball (e.g., if the ballhandler is near the left wing, the left corner is the "strongside corner")

Swing Offense: an interchangeable 4-out continuity offense that rotates between a UCLA screen and a slice/pin-down screen-the-screener combination

Tag Switch: a defensive tactic in which the tagger switches onto an open roller or cutter, whose original defender peels off him and guards the offensive player left open by that rotation

TD Cut (aka "Tim Duncan Cut"): after a guard passes to the big near the Elbow, the guard cuts off the big — using him as a screener—on his path the hoop for a layup

Thunder Screen: a down screen for a big at the low block

Trailer: a big who, unlike the rim runner, is the last man up the floor and settles in near the top of the key (see "Carolina Break")

Twirl: an off-ball action in which a player curls the first of two staggered screens, and then the first screener turns around and cuts off the second screener

UCLA Screen (or UCLA Cut): a backscreen for the ballhandler to cut from the strongside slot to the basket after that ballhandler has passed to the wing

Under (aka "Inverted Ballscreen"): Mike D'Antoni's term for a guard setting a ballscreen for a big

Under: a pick-and-roll coverage in which the on-ball defender goes underneath the ballscreen

Varejão: a pick-and-roll technique in which the screener "flips" or changes the angle of his screen at the last second before the screen is set

Veer Screen: a ballscreen followed by an off-ball screen, usually a wide pin-down (the player who sets the ballscreen then sets a screen for a different teammate instead of rolling to the hoop, as he would in a typical pick-and-roll)

Veerback Switch (aka "veer"): an emergency/unplanned switch after a ballscreen in which the ballhandler's defender and the screener's defender realize they can't recover to their original assignments, so they switch: The ballhandler's defender takes the screener, and the screener's defender takes the ballhandler

Weak: a pick-and-roll coverage in which the on-ball defender forces the ballhandler to his left/weak hand

Weak Side: the half of the court that doesn't have the ballhandler (e.g., if the ballhandler is near the left wing, the right corner is the "weakside corner")

Weakside I: the I-shaped alignment of the two weakside help defenders: "low man" (who is guarding the player in the weakside corner) and the "high I defender" (who is guarding the weakside wing)

Wedge Screen: an angled backscreen set by a guard for a big to cut from the top of the key to the low block, usually to create an advantageous post-up opportunity (see also **ram**)

Wedge Roll: a side pick-and-roll in which a player sets a wedge screen for a teammate who then sets a ballscreen on the wing (similar to **ram**)

Wide Screen (aka "Away" or "Single Away"): a high cross screen set by the player at the top of the key for their teammate on the weakside wing to cut toward

the ball (often in 5-out or 4-out alignment)

Wiper Screen: a flare screen followed by a cross screen, involving the same cutter and screener both times (see **ricky**)

Zipper: a down screen for a player on the strongside low block to cut to the slot, where he receives a pass from the wing

Zoom: a 3-person action involving a screen and a dribble handoff, such as **Miami (or Pistol) Action (DHO + ballscreen)** or **Chicago Action (down screen + DHO)** (see @HoopVision68's video explanation of Zoom Action)

The 4 Main Screens: Flare, Cross, Down, and Back
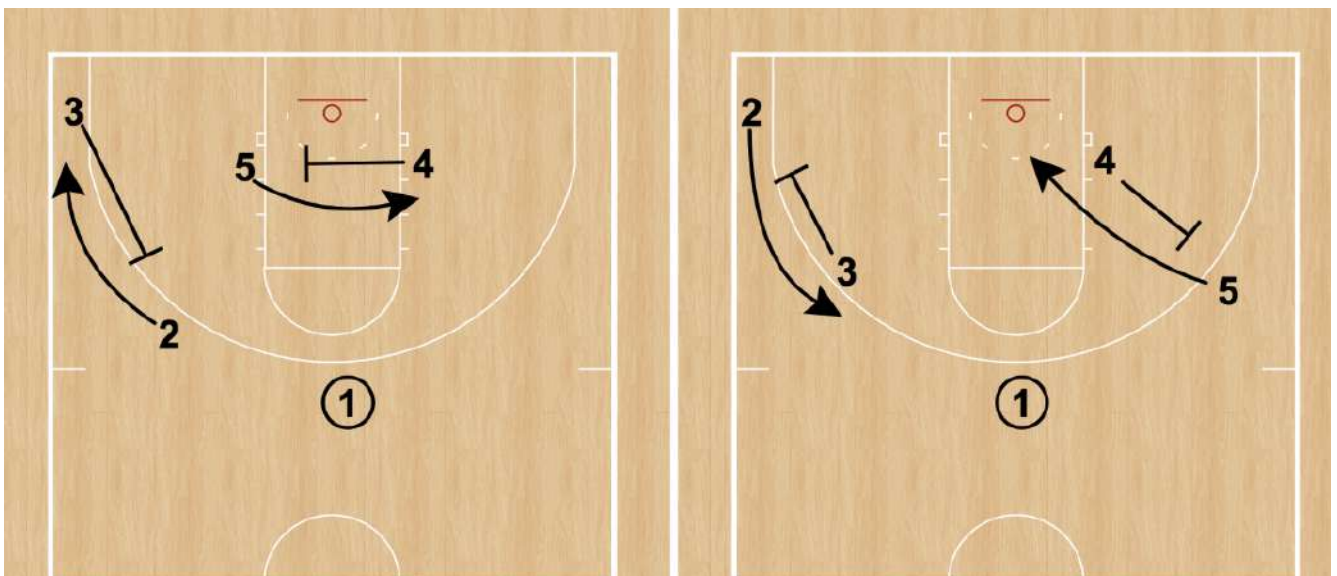
Left panel: 3 sets a Flare for 2; 4 sets a Cross for 5. Right Panel: 3 sets a Down for 2; 4 sets a Backscreen for 5.

1. **Flare Screen:** a screen for a player to cut away from the ballhandler, fading along the 3pt line (e.g., Hammer)

2. **Cross Screen:** a screen for a player to cut horizontally across the court and towards the ballhandler (e.g., Wide, Flex, Horns Out)

3. **Down Screen:** a screen for a player to cut away from the basket/baseline and towards the 3-point line/ballhandler (e.g., Pin-down, Zipper)

4. **Back Screen:** a screen for a player to cut towards the basket (e.g., UCLA/Hawk, Chin, Slice)

How This Works: Inspired by <u>Dylan Murphy's excellent Basketball Dictionary</u>, the Basketball Action Dictionary is definitions, variations, explanations, and video examples of different actions, from 45 cuts to wiper screens.

The hyperlinked terms have pages dedicated to each action. If you have any questions or suggestions for new posts, drop me a line at <u>on Twitter at @bowser2bowser</u>.

If a word is in bold but not underlined, its definition has a link to a different post that mentions the term. For example, **Bazemore** does not have its own post, but its definition links to the page for <u>UCLA screen</u>, which mentions and defines the Bazemore.

Lastly, basketball terminology is like the telephone game: Terms and definitions get slightly altered as they get passed from person to person. The Basketball Action Dictionary tries to accommodate various and occasionally competing definitions (e.g., whether *wiper* and *ricky* are synonyms or merely similar actions). If you know of an alternate definition or term that isn't listed, please let me know and I'll update the post.

◑〗Medium
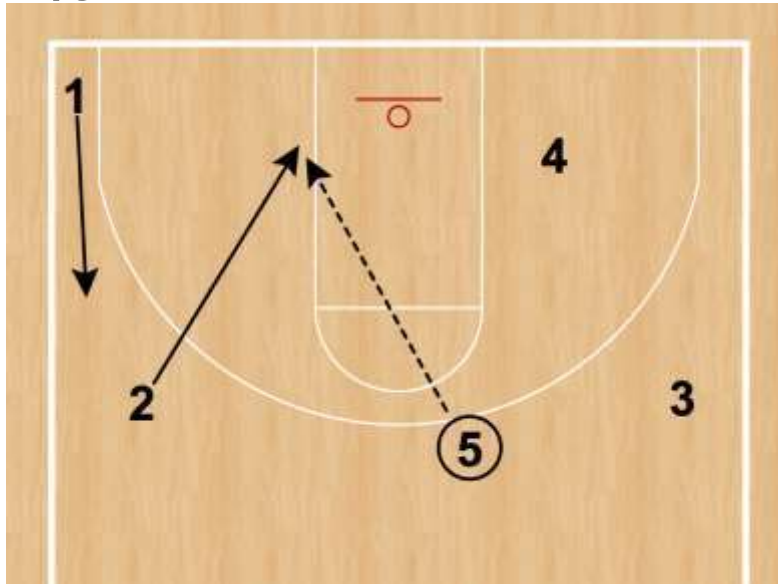
"45 Cut"

Term: "45 Cut"

Definition: a cut at a 45-degree angle from the wing to the basket

Synonyms: burn cut

See Also: Step-Up, Euro ballscreen, thru cut, face cut, single/double gap

How It Works: In the diagram above, 2 makes a 45 cut to the basket.

Why It Works: A 45 cut is usually effective for one of two reasons: The cutter can be open for a pass at the rim, or the cut creates space on the perimeter (often to punish the "nail" defender and prevent him from stunting, or to create a gap).

Some 45 cuts are spontaneous; the cutter sees an opening and makes a move. Other 45 cuts are built into the offense. For example, some teams have the player on the weakside wing automatically make a 45 cut every time their offense runs a pick-and-pop (this is sometimes known as "pop and burn" action):

In those situations, the 45 cut prevents his defender, the so-called nail defender, from stunting, or lunging, at the pick-and-pop big.

A 45 is also used with a ballscreen if there are two players on the strongside of a pick-and-roll: The cut creates a double gap.

A 45 can also be used to punish a defense any time it zones off one side of the court

A 45 cut is often used to initiate a so-called Euro ballscreen, an empty side pick-on-roll on the wing ("empty" means that if the Euro BS is on the left wing, there's no teammate also in the left corner). Euro ballscreens often occur on the second side, or on the weakside of the floor after a ball reversal.

In this example of a Euro ballscreen, the Phoenix Suns run a pick-and-pop to get the ball to the big at the top of the key (cf. **delay** and **slash** action). From there, he dribbles at the left wing, triggering that player to make a 45 cut. Then the big executes a [throw-and-chase](#) (he *throws* a pass to the player who's lifting up from the corner and then *chases* his pass to set a ballscreen):

The cutter can also set a screen. A common ATO from the Utah Jazz is to run a Euro ballscreen initiated with a 45 cut, but the cutter stops short and sets a backscreen.

A Diagram of Every Type of Ballscreen/Pick-and-Roll

34 diagrams of everything from an Angle PnR to a Wedge Roll

Angle PnR:

A type of Spread PnR in which each corner is filled, the ballscreen is set near one slot, while another player (traditionally, a stretch 4) occupies the other slot or wing.

N.B.: In the traditional use of the term, "Angle" usually—but not always—referred to a ballscreen set for the dribbler to drive towards the middle of the court, but in recent years, some coaches have used it for screens set for the dribbler to attack the sideline and get downhill.

Chin Ballscreen (or "Chin Action"):

Chin Ballscreen (aka "Chin Action")
@Bowser2Bowser

Chin Ballscreen or "Chin Action"

5 sets a chin screen for 2 and then a ballscreen for 1

Dive Pick-and-Roll:

Dive Pick-and-Roll
@Bowser2Bowser
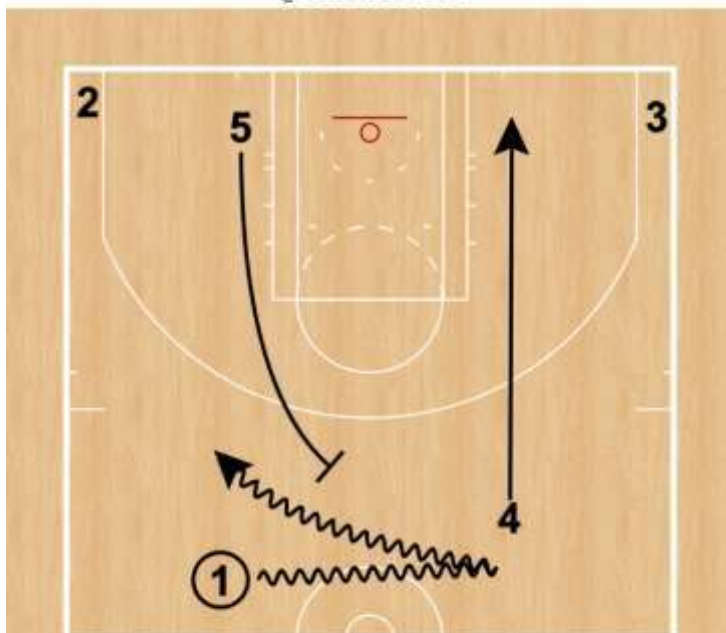
Dive Pick-and-Roll

1 dribbles at 4 as if setting up a drag screen, but then 4 dives and 1 turns around to get a screen from 5 in the opposite direction

Double Drag (aka "77"):
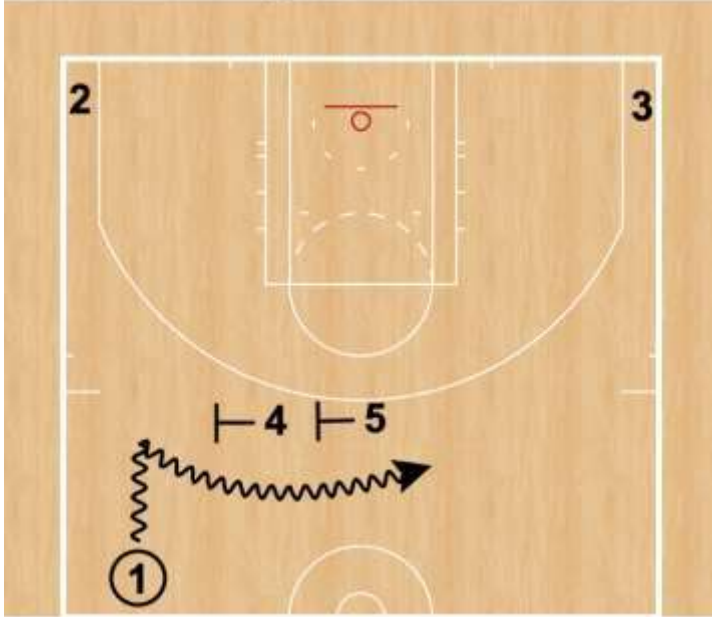
Double Drag (aka "77")

Drag Screen:
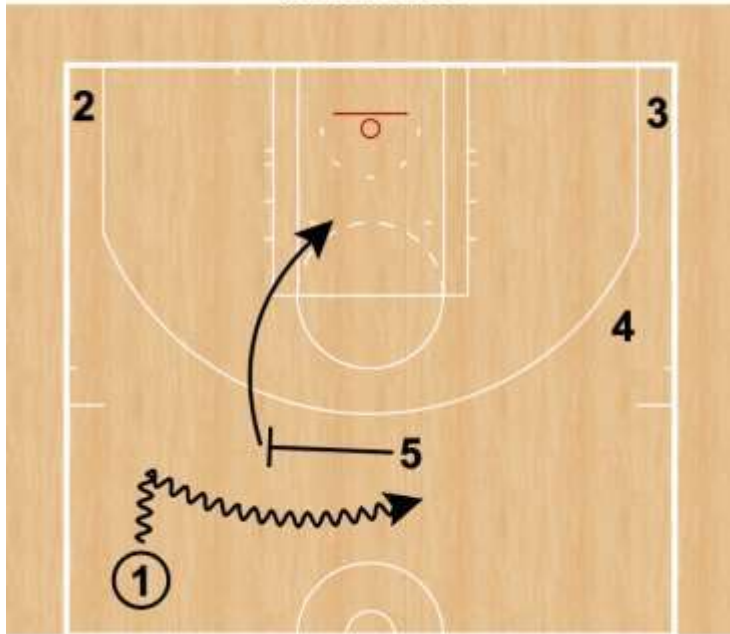
Drag Screen (a ballscreen set in semi-transition by the trailer for the ballhandler to dribble towards the middle of the court)

Elbow Get:

A play popularized by the "Seven Seconds or Less" Phoenix Suns in which a big at one of the Elbows gets a ballscreen from the other big near the nail (sometimes called "Horns 45")
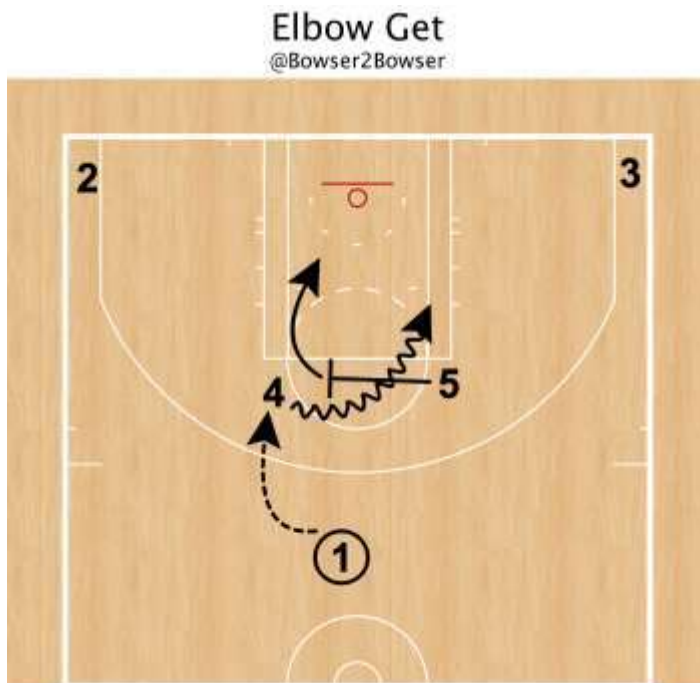
[Empty Pick-and-Roll](#):

Empty Ballscreen (aka "Euro Ballscreen")
@Bowser2Bowser

Empty Side PnR (aka "Euro Ballscreen")

Flat Pick-and-Roll:

Flat Pick–and–Roll
@Bowser2Bowser
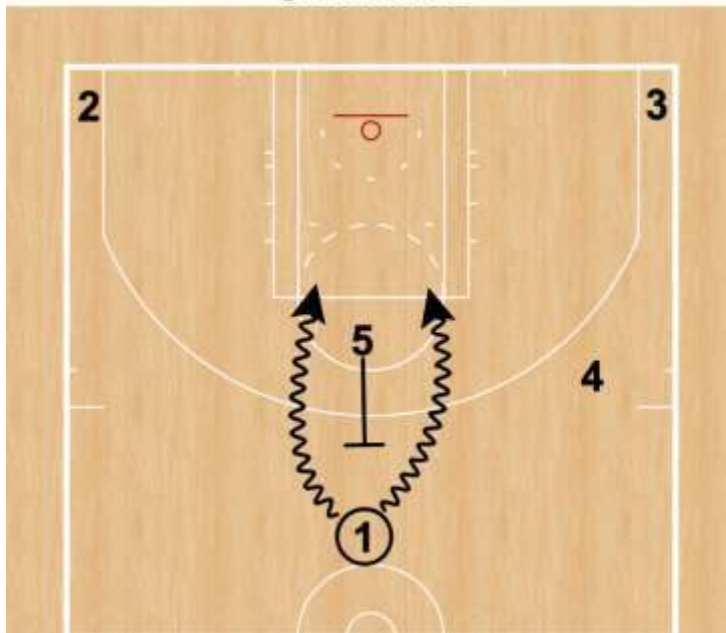
Flat PnR

Flip (Varejão, Change the Angle):

The difference between "flip" and "rescreen" is that in flip, the ballhandler never uses the original screen. Flip is sometimes done at the last second, in which case the screener never comes to a complete before quickly flipping to the other side of the on-ball defender before setting a screen.

Flip (Varejão, Change the Angle, etc)
@Bowser2Bowser
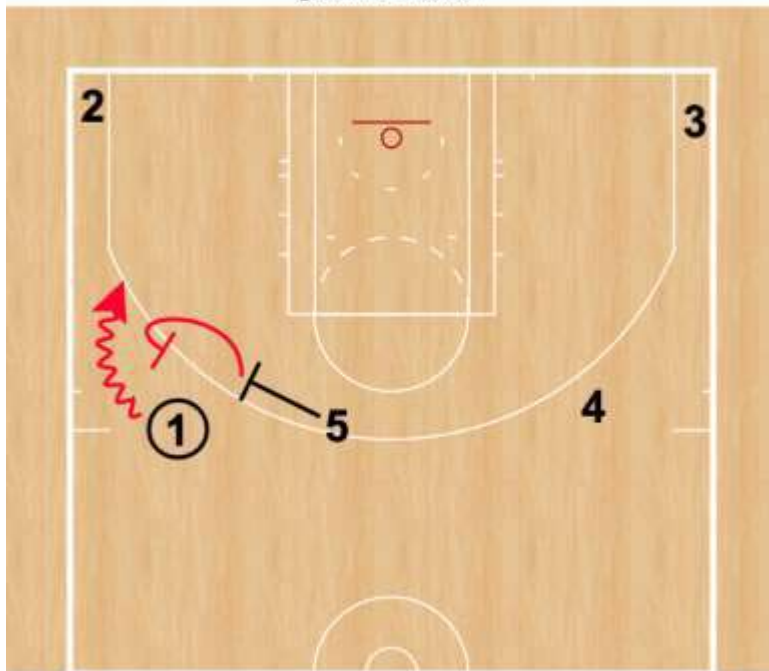
Flip (Varejão, Change the Angle)

Ghost:

Ghost
@Bowser2Bowser
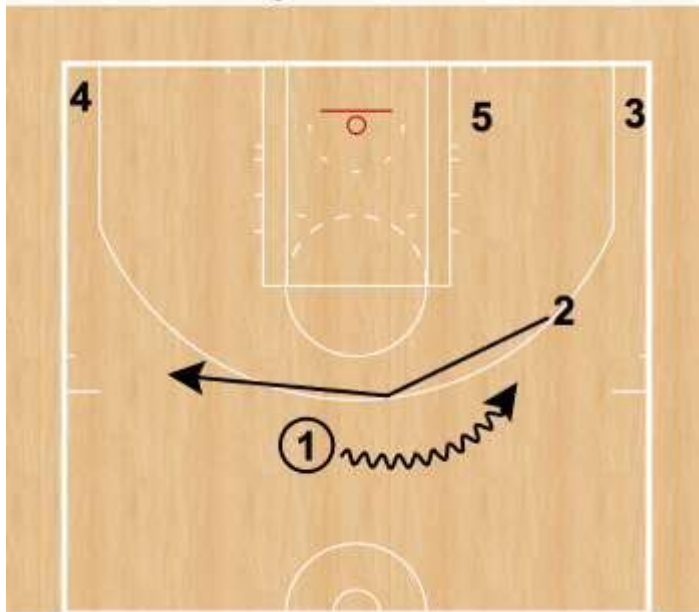
Ghost (2 pretends to set a ballscreen, but then darts to the weakside; functionally, a ghost screen is similar to a "slipped" pick-and-pop)

Hawk:

Hawk
@Bowser2Bowser

Hawk

5 sets a UCLA screen for 2 and then a ballscreen for 1.

Typically, 2 would then cut off a staggered screen from 3 and 4.

Horns:

(N.B. "Horns" is also a name for the alignment.)

Horns
@Bowser2Bowser
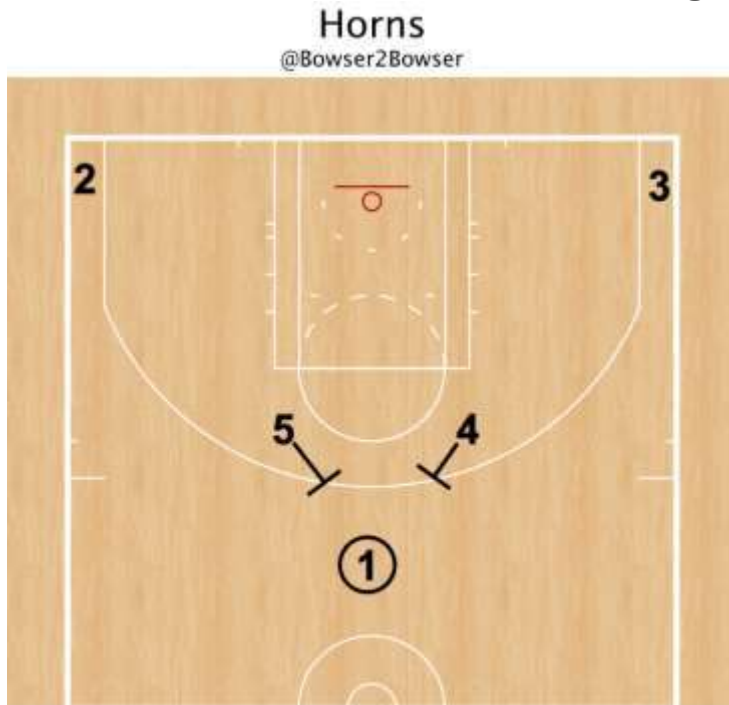
Horns (aka "Horns Fist")

Horns Flare:

Horns Flare
@Bowser2Bowser
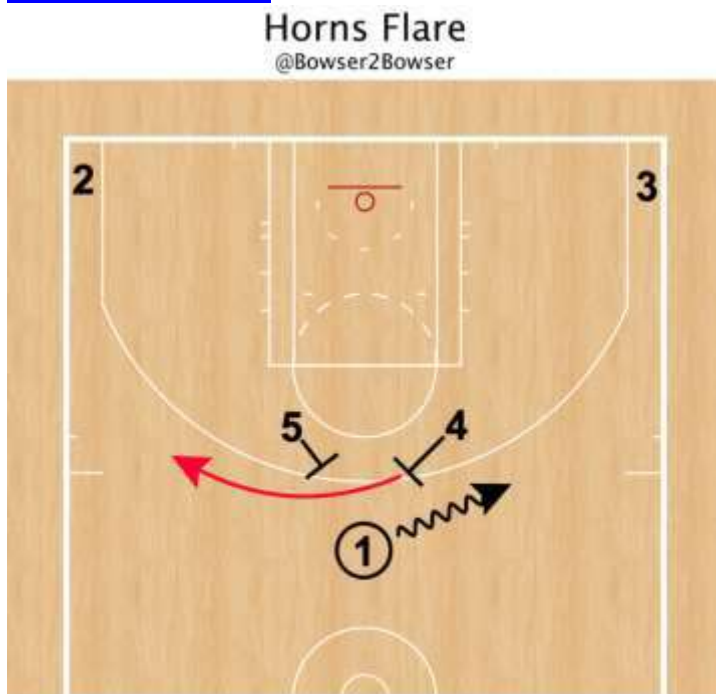
Horns Flare

Inverted Pick-and-Roll:

Inverted Pick–and–Roll
@Bowser2Bowser
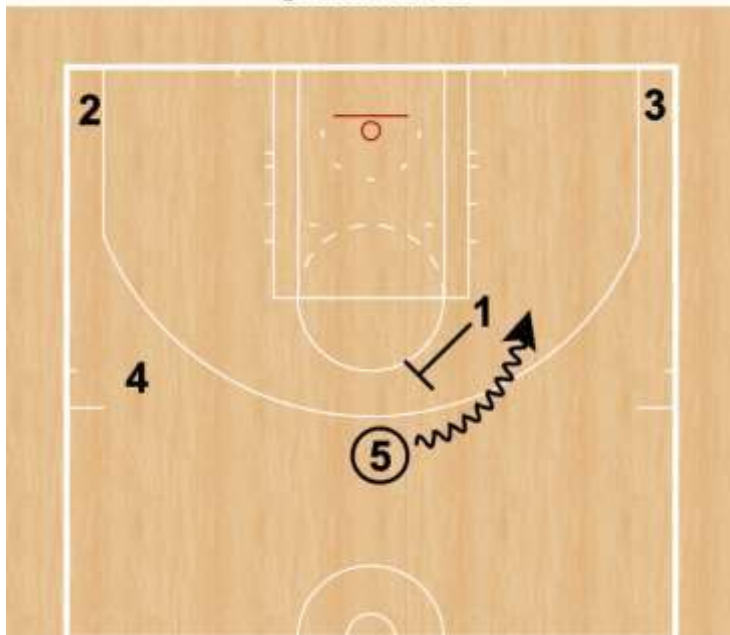
Inverted PnR (a guard sets a ballscreen for a big)

Miami:

Miami
@Bowser2Bowser
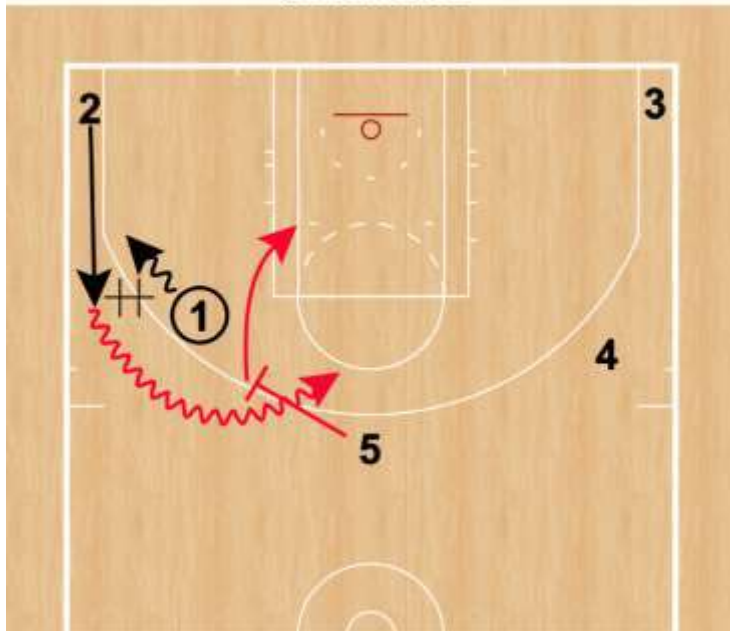
Miami: a DHO + a ballscreen

Nash:
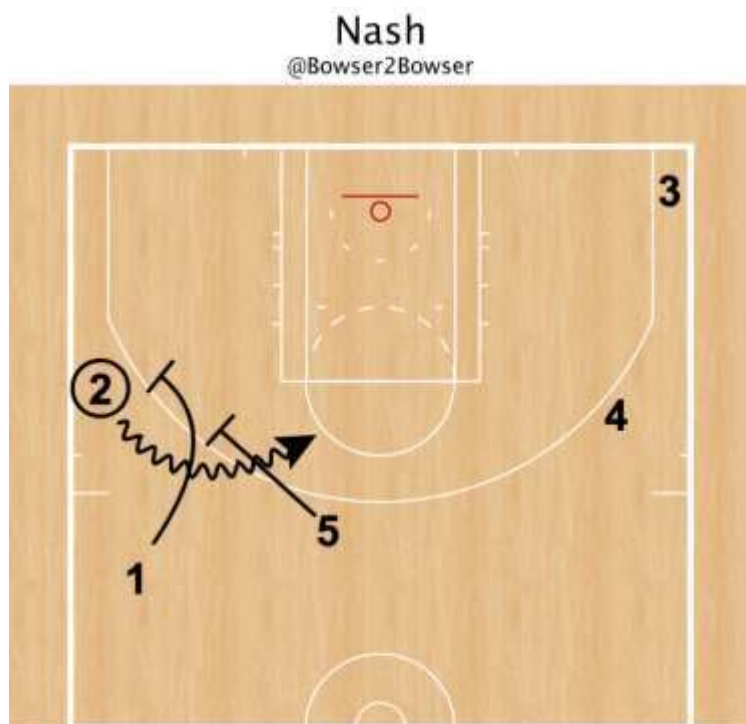
Nash: a double empty ballscreen (typically out of Pistol/21 Series)

Oklahoma:

After 2 and 5 set double ballscreens for 1 (aka "77"), the second screener (5) sets a screen for the first screener (2) to come back towards the ballhandler.
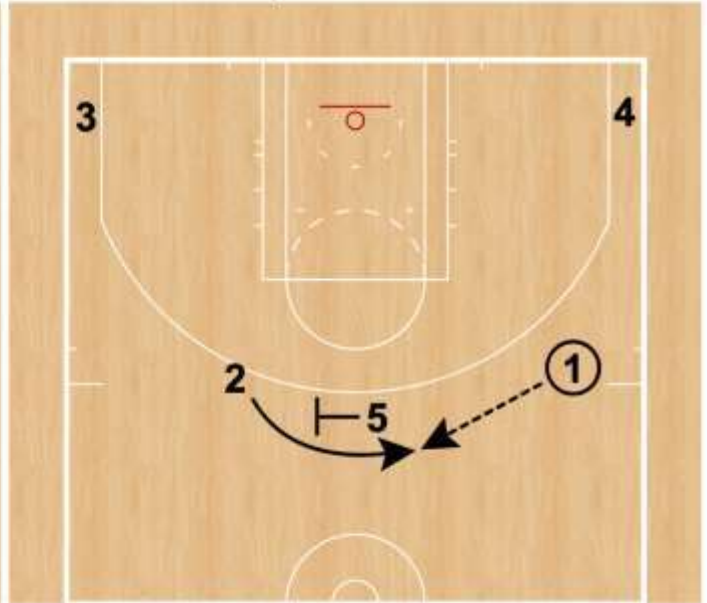
Pistol Screen:

A step-up screen set by a guard near the sideline, typically as part of Pistol ("21 Dribble" or "21 Step" more specifically).

Pistol screen
@Bowser2Bowser

Pistol Screen

Pick-and-Pop:

Pick-and-Pop
@Bowser2Bowser

Pick-and-Pop

Ram Pick-and-Roll:

Ram Pick-and-Roll
@Bowser2Bowser

Ram PnR

Rescreen:

After 5 sets a ballscreen for 1, both players turn around, and then 5 sets another ballscreen, but in the opposite direction (often done when the on-ball defender goes under the screen).

Roll and Replace:

Roll and Replace
@Bowser2Bowser

Roll and Replace

As 5 rolls, the big near the hoop (4) cuts to the slot to replace him on the 3–point line.

Shake Pick-and-Roll (aka "Shake Action"):
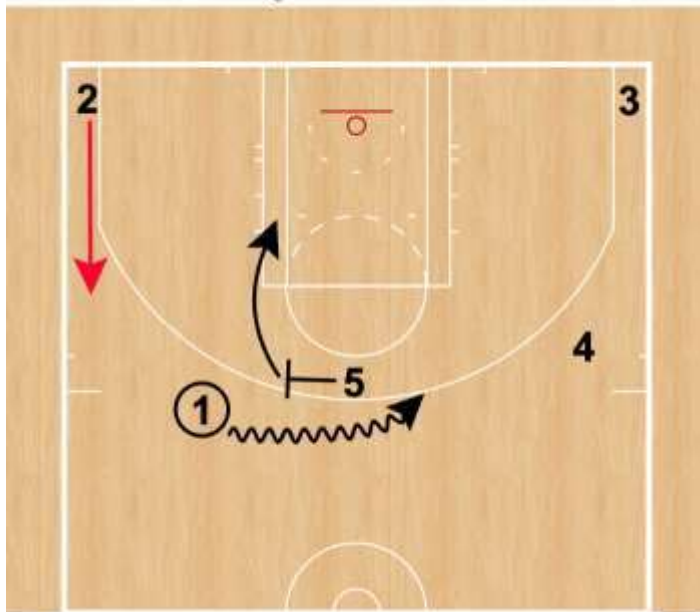
Shake PnR or Shake action

Short Action:
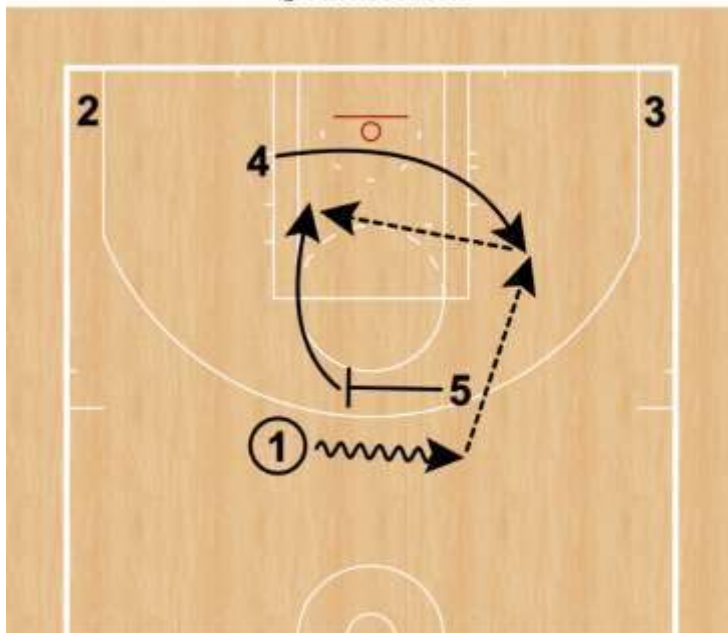
Short Action

Slip:

Slip
@Bowser2Bowser

Slip

Snug (aka "Logo"):

Snug (aka "Logo")
@Bowser2Bowser
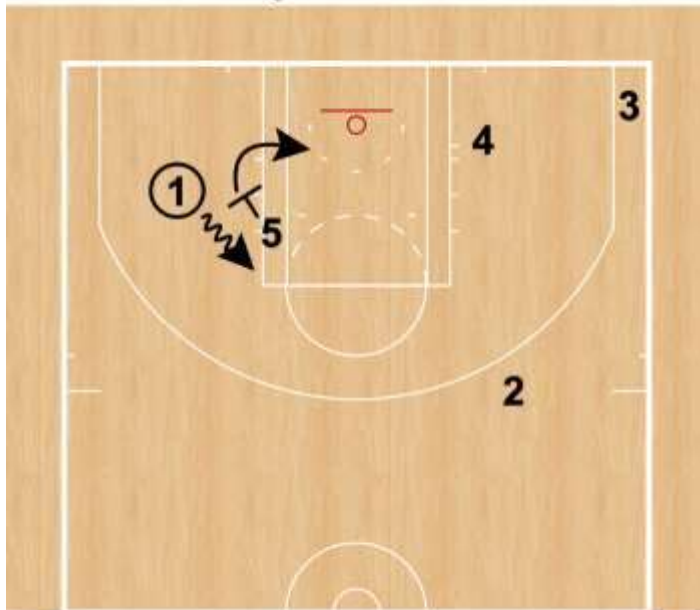
Snug PnR (aka "Logo")

Spain (aka "Stack"):
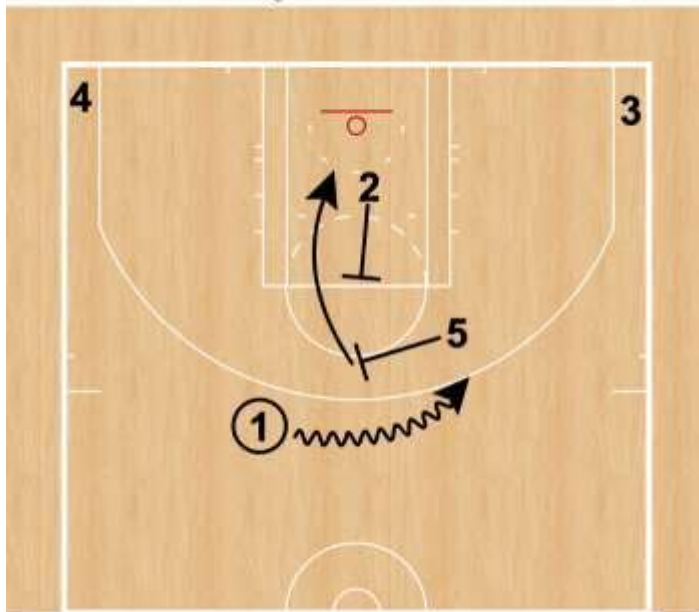
Spain PnR (aka "Stack")

Spain Leak:

Spain Leak

[77 Spain Veer StS](#):

77 Spain Veer StS
@Bowser2Bowser
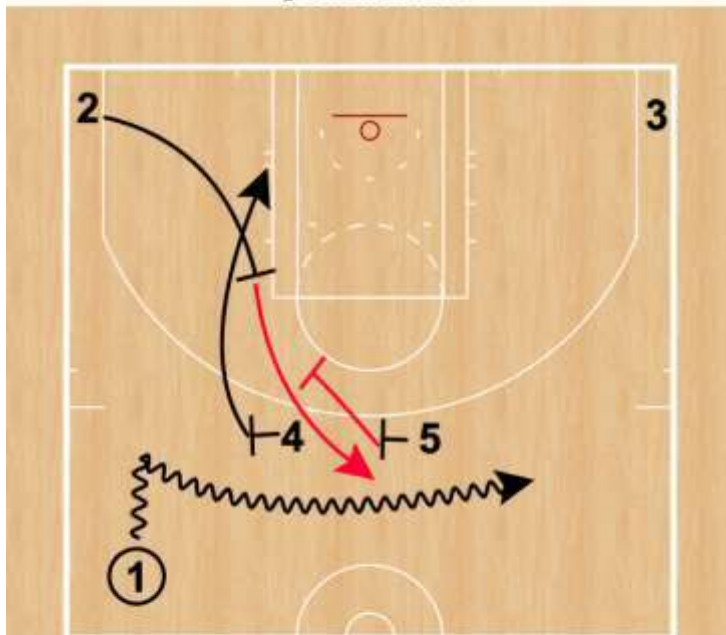
77 Spain Veer StS

after 4 and 5 set a double drag, 2 sets a backscreen for 4 (à la Spain PnR) and then 5 sets a downscreen for 2 (à la Veer)

Spread Pick-and-Roll:

Spread PnR
@Bowser2Bowser
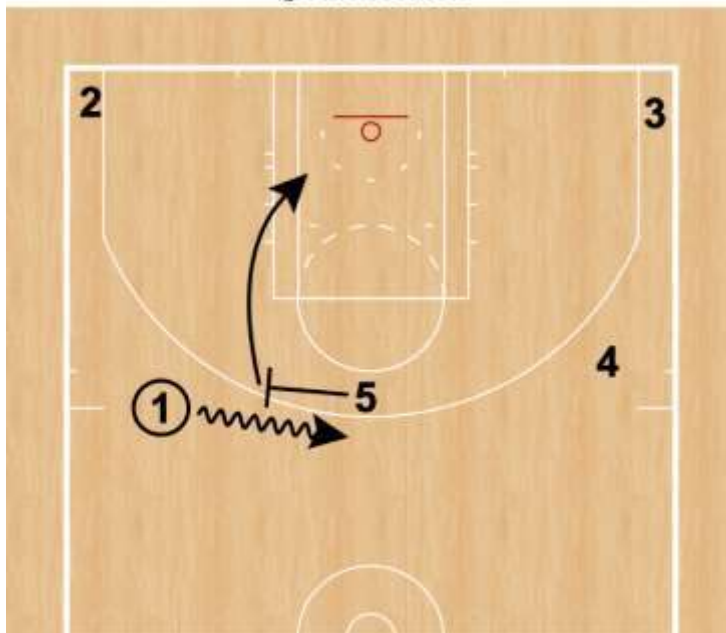
Spread PnR ("Spread" because 2, 3, and 4 are all outside the 3-pt line)

Step-Up:

6: Step-Up

Twist:

Twist does not need to happen in a Horns alignment, but often does. The difference between "Twist," "Flip," and "Rescreen" is that "Twist" refers to ballscreens set by two different people (the second screen is in the opposite direction of the first). Both "Flip" and "Rescreen" include only one screener.
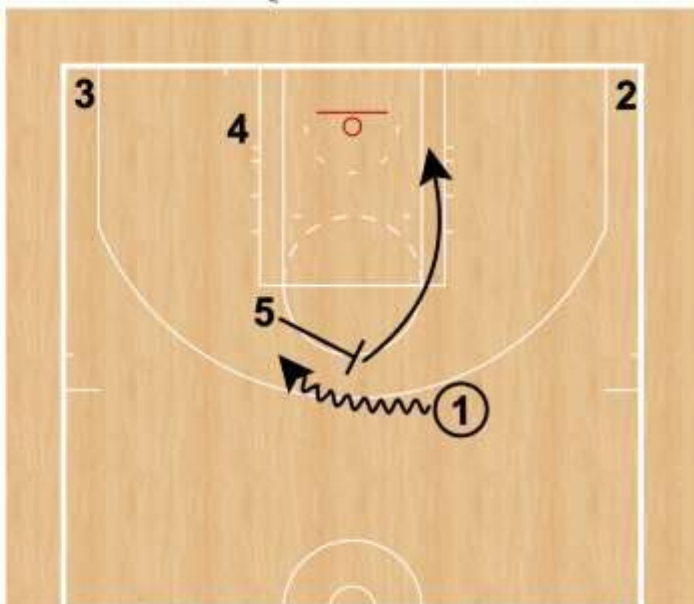
Wedge Roll:

Wedge Roll
@Bowser2Bowser
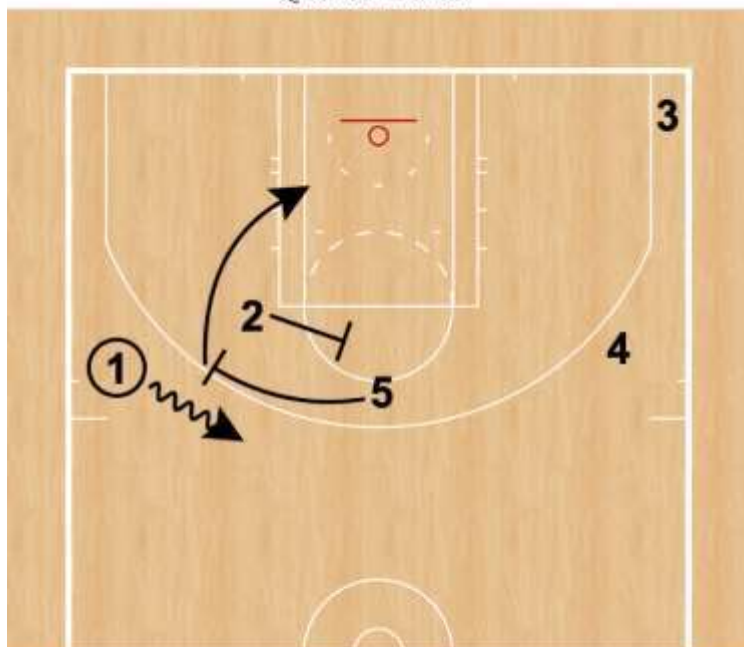
Wedge Roll

2 sets a wedge screen (sort of like an angled UCLA screen, usually to provide an advantageous post-up opportunity for a big) for 5, who sets a ballscreen on the wing instead of cutting off the wedge screen to the low post

Wedge Roll and Ram Screen both involve screens for someone who then sets a ballscreen.

"Blind Pig"
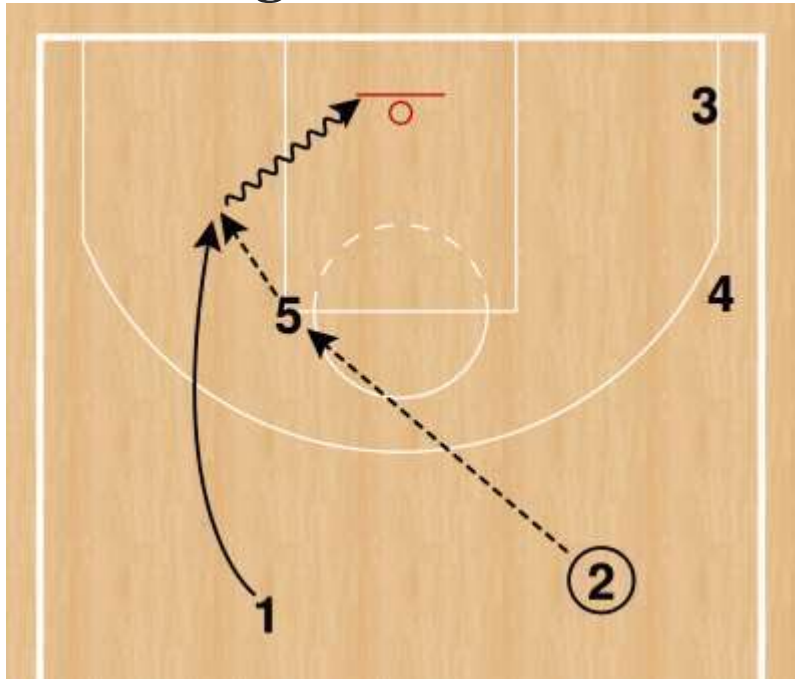
Definition: a three-person backdoor action in which the ballhandler passes to a big, who passes to a guard running by him toward the hoop

Synonyms: backdoor step (note: In the Triangle offense, blind pig and backdoor step are similar but slightly different actions; outside the Triangle offense, the terms have been used interchangeably)

See Also: Triangle Offense, Step-Up Screen, Give and Go

Origin of the Name: The player who receives the first pass has his back to the basket and makes a blind pass to the cutter; also, "blind pig" is another name for a speakeasy and, according to Phil

Jackson's *More Than a Game*, "a term jazz musicians in the 1930s and 1940s used for a marijuana cigarette."

How It Works: Blind Pig originated with the Triangle offense, developed by Tex Winter and popularized by Phil Jackson's Chicago Bulls and LA Lakers teams of the 1990s and the 2000s. One aspect of that offense is the "lag pass," a PG-to-SG pass that swings the ball from one side of the court to the other. That pass is mostly horizontal, but the SG is slightly lagging behind what's known as "the line of truth," hence the name*. If the SG's defender overplays and denies that pass, however, the counter is Blind Pig: The PF flashes to the top of the key, gets the pass from the PG, and passes to the SG as he cuts toward the hoop.

*This is a highly simplified explanation. To learn more about the "lag principle," line of truth, and the Triangle offense in general, check out [this excellent blog from Joon Kim](#).

Why It Works: Beyond Triangle offenses, NBA teams also run Blind Pig to relieve pressure. Any defender who is denying the ball far away from the hoop has his back to a majority of the court. Therefore it can be difficult for him to anticipate Blind Pig action.

Blind Pig also takes advantage of the defender's natural tendency to relax when a pass is made to someone else.

"Carolina Break"
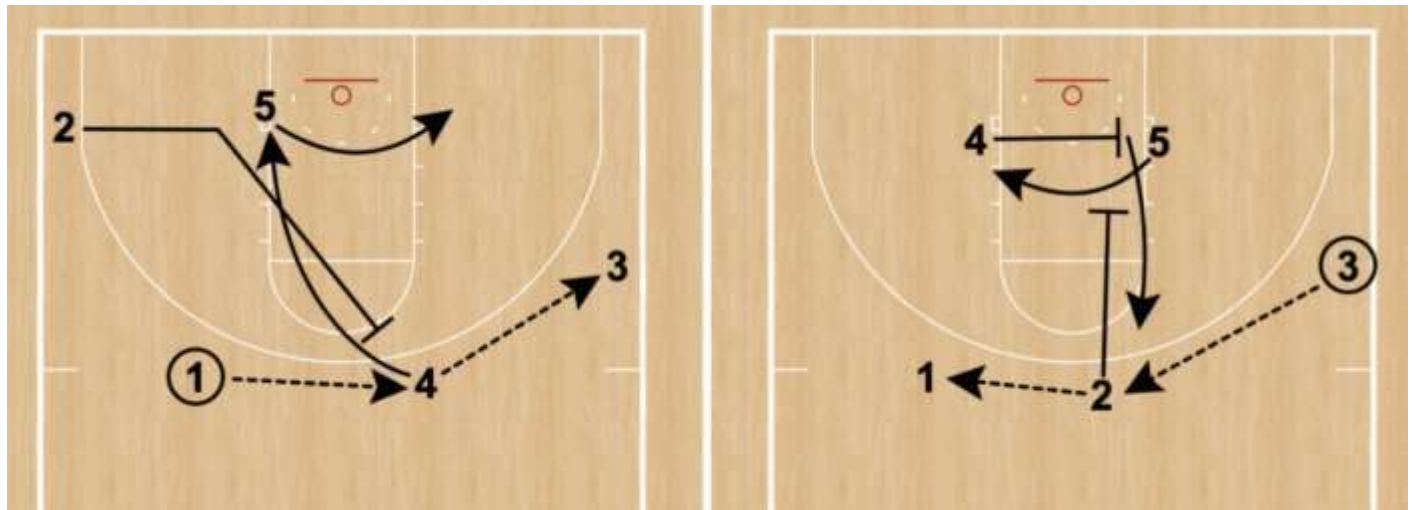
Term: Carolina Break

Definition: a 4-out transition offense made famous by Roy Williams, featuring a rim runner, a wing on each side, a designated ballhandler, and a trailing big.

How It Works: The Carolina Break includes both a primary break (aka a fastbreak, when the opponent has fewer than three defenders back on defense) and a secondary break (the period between a fast break and a set halfcourt offense, a simplified version of which is diagrammed above).

If the 4 and the 5 are interchangeable, the big who gets the defensive rebound or in-bounds the ball after a made basket becomes the trailer, while the other big rim runs. Sometimes, though, the role of trailer and

rim-runner are predetermined based on their attributes, with the more athletic big as the rim-runner and the more skilled big as the trailer.

The primary break looks something like this:
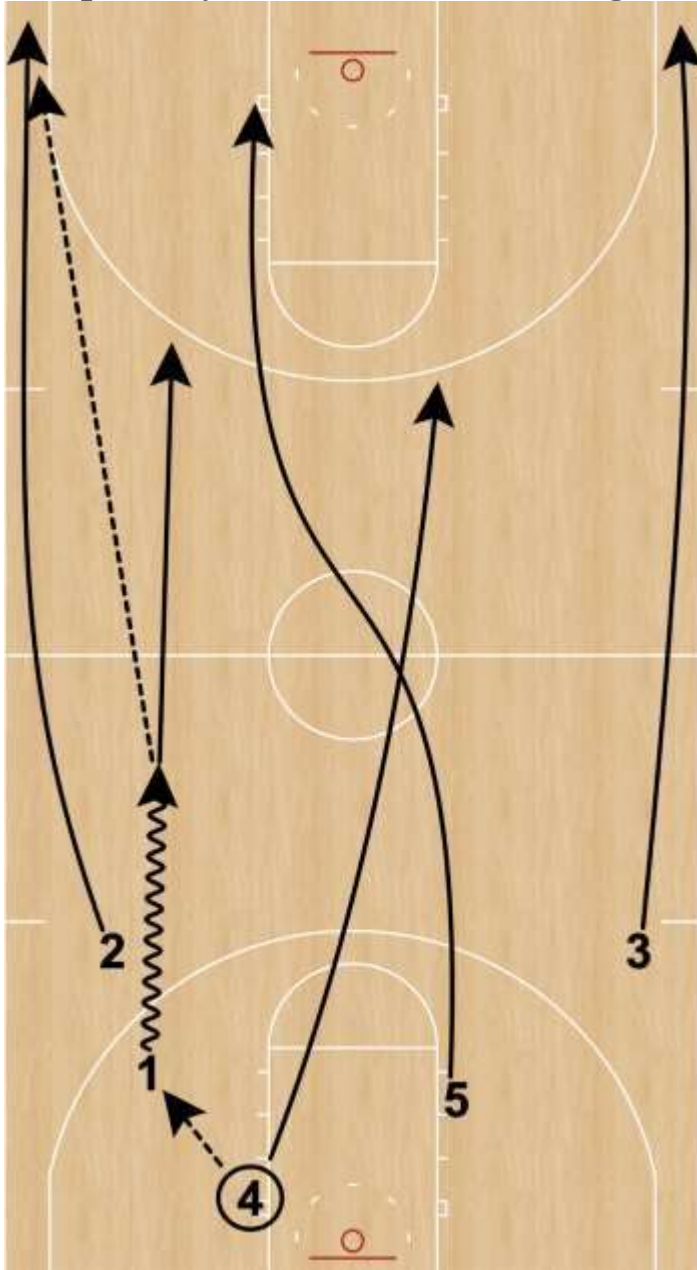
The goal of the primary break is to outrun the defense. The wings (2 and 3) find a sideline and run to each corner. The point guard looks to

score or find either wing. Because wings are often faster than centers, they might have a 1-on-0 or a 1-on-1 before the rim runner (5) reaches the box on the ball side.

If the wing can't score, his first look is the rim runner (5), who tries to outrun or seal his defender under the hoop. If 5 can't score, the hope is that his interior presence alone sucks in the defense, perhaps leading to a wide-open kick-out 3.

If none of those options are available, the offense flows into its secondary break, with a rim runner on the strongside box, a wing in the strongside corner, a point guard in the strongside slot, a trailing big at the weakside lane line extended, and the other wing on the weakside FT line extended. As the ball swings, the rim runner follows, his chest always to the ball, looking for a post up/seal opportunity:
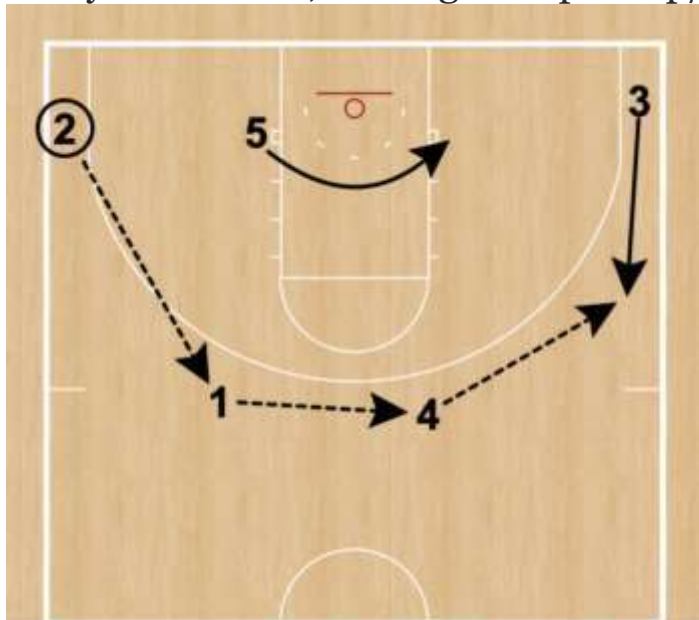
If nobody can feed the post, which is the first option, the next action is the famous Carolina screen, in which the trailing big (4) receives a backscreen to cut to the weakside box (the backscreen was the idea of Roy Williams in 1982; he calls it "my entire contribution to North Carolina basketball in 10 years" as an assistant). The wing (3) looks to lob a pass over the top to 4. In practice, this backscreen rarely works, but it's very, very nice when it does:
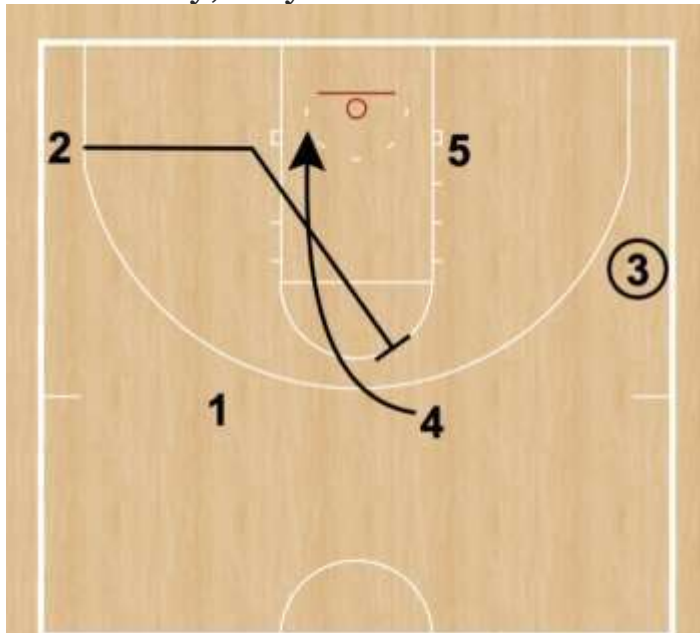
At this point, there is another ball reversal, a big-to-big cross screen, and then an optional screen-the-screener down screen for the trailing big to pop back out toward the perimeter:
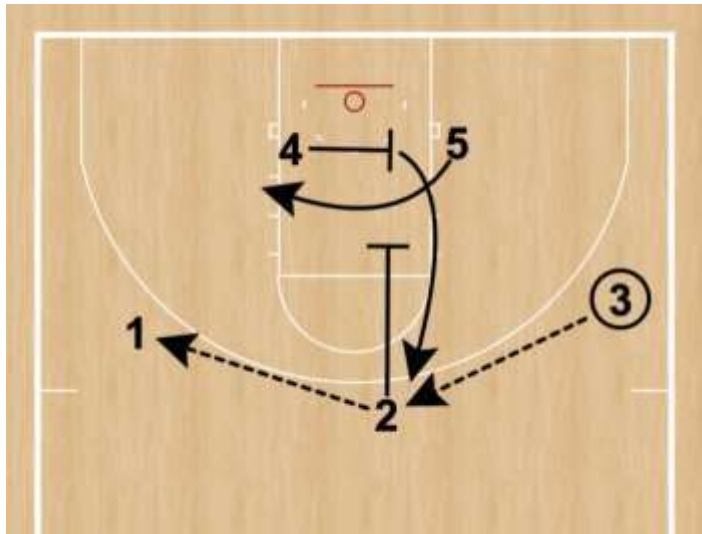
From there, the secondary break is over and the players flow into their halfcourt offense. If that offense is 3-out, the secondary break usually omits the StS down screen for the trailer. If that offense is 4-out, either the trailer (if he doesn't receive the down screen) or the guard who down screens for the trailer leaks out to the far corner.

Why It Works: A slightly different version of the Carolina Break originated with Dean Smith in the 1960s, but its most popular iteration ossified when Smith's protege, Roy Williams, sped up the offense as the head coach of the Kansas Jayhawks (1988–2003), especially with Jacque Vaughn running the point. In fact, some more experienced coaches still refer to it as the "Kansas Break" for that reason.

Williams combined a breakneck pace and a highly organized offensive system, forming what he liked to call "structured chaos," and he ran it with great success, leading to nine Final Fours and three National

Championships. According to opposing coaches' estimates, Williams's teams ran the Carolina Break on up to 90% of possessions.

Perhaps the best part of the Carolina Break is not any particular action, but for its seamless transition from a fastbreak to a set halfcourt offense. Without a secondary break of some sort, the offense is often forced to realize there is no fastbreak opportunity, find the designated point guard, and wait for him to reset his teammates and call a play.

The Carolina Break, on the other hand, skips all of that. The primary break flows directly into the secondary break, which flows directly into Carolina's halfcourt offense — ideally, while maintaining possible cross-matches: "It gives us a chance to keep attacking so that defenders have to pick up people they're not supposed to be guarding," [Williams told *Sports Illustrated* in 2007](). "They're backpedaling and trying to protect the goal, and now we're moving it around and setting screens before the defense can really get set."

Another benefit is that the Carolina Break is too quick for the defense to set up a full-court press, and that opponents often send fewer players to the offensive glass out of fear of giving up points in transition.

Naturally, the Carolina Break requires an exceedingly well-conditioned team, both a fast point guard and a fast rim-runner, and a trailing big who can knock down 3s. Williams's teams often had a deeper rotation than most top-ranked programs, and a nearly endless supply of fleet-

footed point guards (Jacque Vaughn, Raymond Felton, Ty Lawson) and frontcourt college stars (Tyler Hansbrough, Raef LaFrentz, Drew Gooden, Nick Collison). At the same time, however, the Carolina Break is popular on the lower levels, executed by players who will go to a Final Four only if they buy a ticket.

Lastly, like all good offenses, the Carolina Break has evolved over the years to take advantage of trends and personnel, and some iterations won't match this description, which is designed to capture its essence rather than exhaust its variations.

"Chicago"
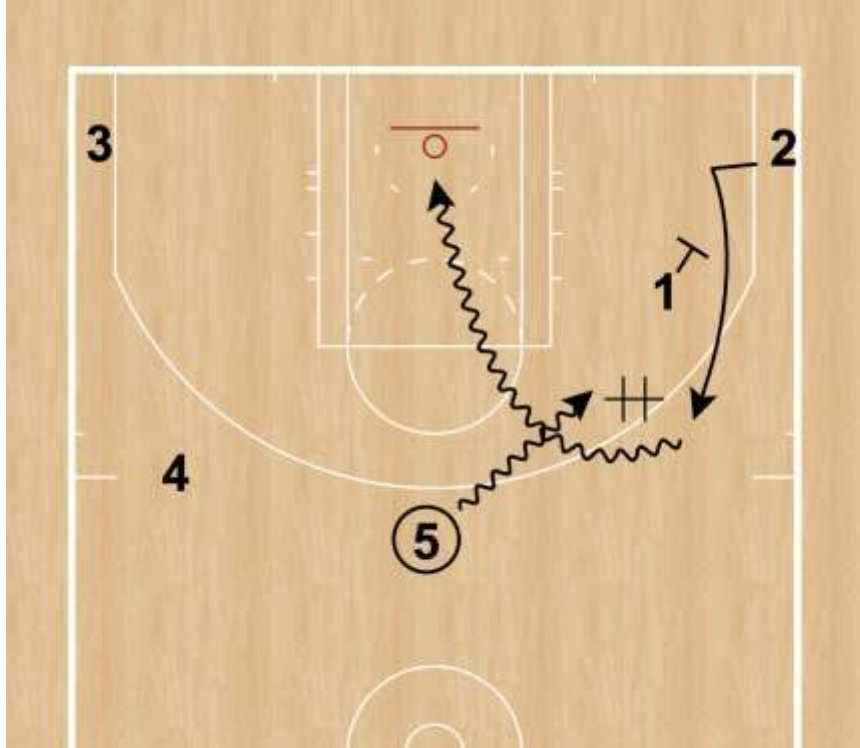
Term: Chicago

Definition: an offensive action in which a player receives a pin-down screen and then receives a dribble handoff (DHO)

Synonyms: Zoom, Staggered DHO, Deuce, Pistol (the Triangle offense's term for this action; not to be confused with the Pistol series also known as 21), Mash

See Also: Delay, 5-out, Dribble Weak (alternate name for Chicago action ran out of a Horns formation)

Origin of the Name: A down screen+DHO is one possible read out of the Princeton, Corner Offense, and Triangle, but the name "Chicago" was coined by [Zak Boisvert, who saw the Chicago Bulls run it frequently for Derrick Rose](#).

How It Works: Out of a "Delay" look (in a 5-out formation, the center is at the top of the key with the ball), "Chicago" refers to a guard in the corner receiving a pin-down screen from his teammate on the wing, and then he'll receive a DHO from the center around the top of the key.

Why It Works: Chicago is an effective play because the guard's defender has to navigate what effectively are two consecutive screens: the initial pin-down in the corner, and then the DHO.

If the guard's defender is still recovering from the initial pin-down, the big (5 in the diagram above) will often pass to the guard (2) and slip to the hoop immediately — instead of screening 2's defender, as he would in a typical DHO. This puts a lot of pressure on 5's defender. If he defends 2 (the man with the ball), that leaves 5 wide-open as he rolls to the hoop.

Often you'll see teams run Chicago action to the weak (far) side. That takes advantage of the natural tendency for weakside defenders to cheat off their man. Because he's standing several feet away, navigating the initial pin-down screen is even more difficult.

"Corner Offense"
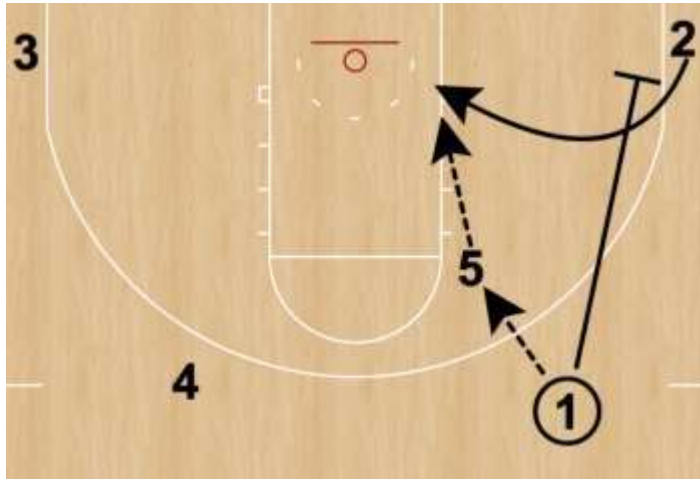
Term: Corner Offense

Definition: a read-and-react offense known for its high-post playmaking and off-ball split-cut action, typically initiated by passing to the big at the Elbow

Synonyms: Sacramento (or just "SAC"), C

See Also:

- Spanoulis: a backscreen+DHO combination sometimes known as "Peja" because the Kings' Corner Offense ran it for Peja Stojakovic

- Chicago: a down screen+DHO combination that is one of many possibilities in Corner

How It Works:

Corner has three players on the strong side: the ballhandler in the wing, another perimeter player in the corner, and a skilled big at the Elbow (originally Chris Webber or Vlade Divac when Rick Adelman refined Corner as coach of the Sacramento Kings; Nikola Jokic with the Denver Nuggets, more recently).

Corner often begins with a pass to the big at the Elbow, followed by split-cut action of some sort. In the diagram above, 1 sets a down screen for 2 in the corner, which 2 curls. A core principle of split cuts is regardless of who screens for whom, one player always dives to the hoop, while the other pops out to the perimeter. In this instance, 2 curls the screen and cuts toward the hoop, so 1 reads him and pops out, either for a pass or a handoff.

Corner borrows elements from Triangle and Princeton, but it's not as complex as either, which also means it's quicker to learn than those two (but still longer to learn than some other NBA offenses). Corner requires playmaking bigs and smart off-ball cutters with great feel and chemistry, since it eschews set plays (and isolation) in favor of improvisation.

Alignment, Then and Now:

With three players on the strong side, the other big and guard space the floor on the weak side. Originally, the other big was stationed at the weakside Elbow, and the other guard in the weakside wing or slot:
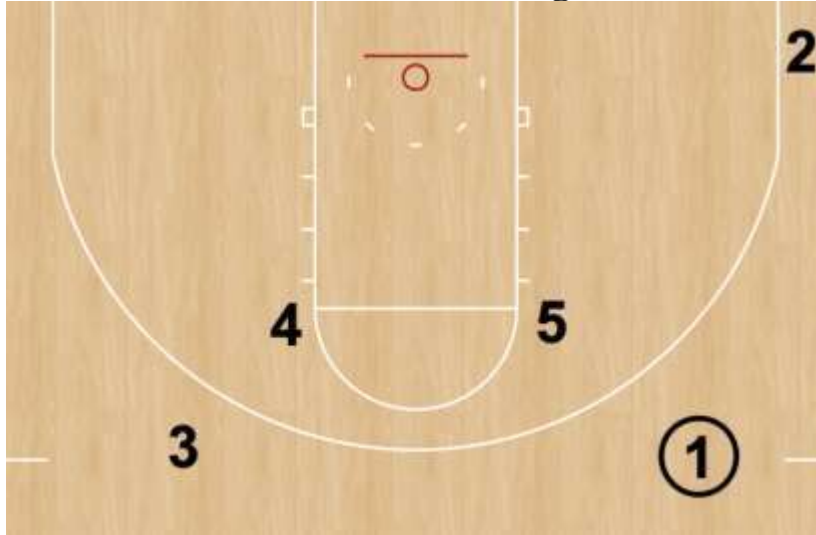
This alignment cleared out the lane and let the big at the weakside Elbow (4) set a flare screen (sometimes a backscreen) for the weakside guard/wing to occupy the help defenders. Oftentimes, the player who set the flare/backscreen would then get a handoff:

In more recent years, the Corner Offense has adjusted by putting the other big in the weakside slot and the other guard in the far corner:
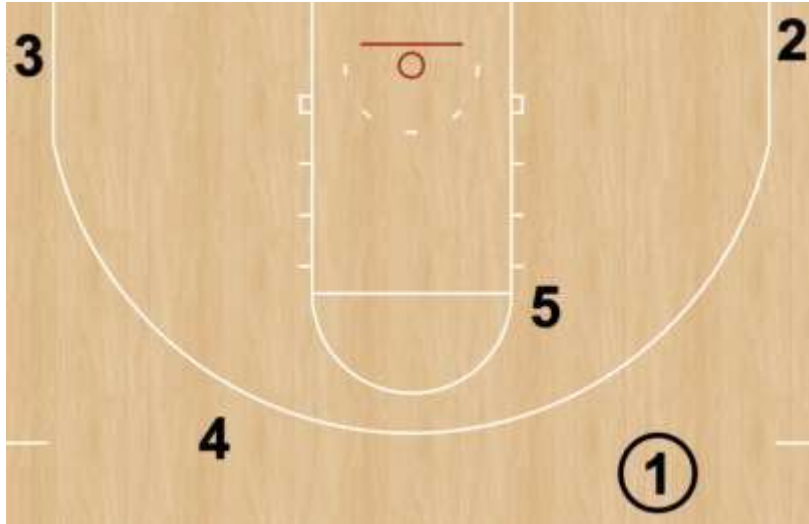
The original alignment still persists on occasion, most typically in specific set plays that require players to be in those positions, but modern practitioners of Corner—most notably, the Denver Nuggets—tend to run it from a 4-out alignment with Jokic at the Elbow. The clips used in this post, which focuses on the offense rather than the slignment, are taken to demonstrate the essential actions or sets of Corner. All of them, however, involve at big at the Elbow and the strongside corner filled, two essential principles of Corner.

Four Options: Low, High, Corner, and Swing

The four main options of Corner are determined by the initial pass and/or the ballhandler's movement after he passes (in the case of Low and High):

1. **Low:** pass to Elbow + down screen in corner

2. **High:** pass to Elbow + high cross screen for weakside slot

3. **Corner:** pass to corner + dive (the below example has the dive turn into a backscreen for the big)

4. **Swing:** swing to far side + slice & [motion strong staggered screen](#)

Because Corner is a read-and-react offense, the exact movements after the initial pass are always different. The above diagrams are representative descriptions of the most common examples, not exact prescriptions. An exhaustive breakdown of Corner is perhaps impossible, but that is by design. Rick Adelman wanted an offense that was hard to scout/predict, according to Mike D'Antoni: "What it stemmed from is everyone does such a good job of scouting," [said D'Antoni, who borrowed from Corner to create his Elbow series for Boris Diaw in Phoenix](#). "So when a coach stands up and yells 'FOUR!' the other bench starts screaming, 'Watch it here, he's going to set a backdoor screen.' Everyone knows what's coming."

"Low" Option: Elbow Feed + Corner Down Screen

Corner most often begins with the ballhandler feeding the Elbow, and then running split-cut action with his teammate in the strongside corner (known internally as "low"). The cutter can has four main

options depending upon how his defender plays the screen: curl, reject, fade, or cut straight (possibly for a DHO/Chicago action):

The screener does the opposite of the cutter. If the cutter dives (from curling or rejecting the screen), the screener pops out to the perimeter, usually for a pass (that pass is often followed by a ballscreen, aka "throw and chase") or a DHO:
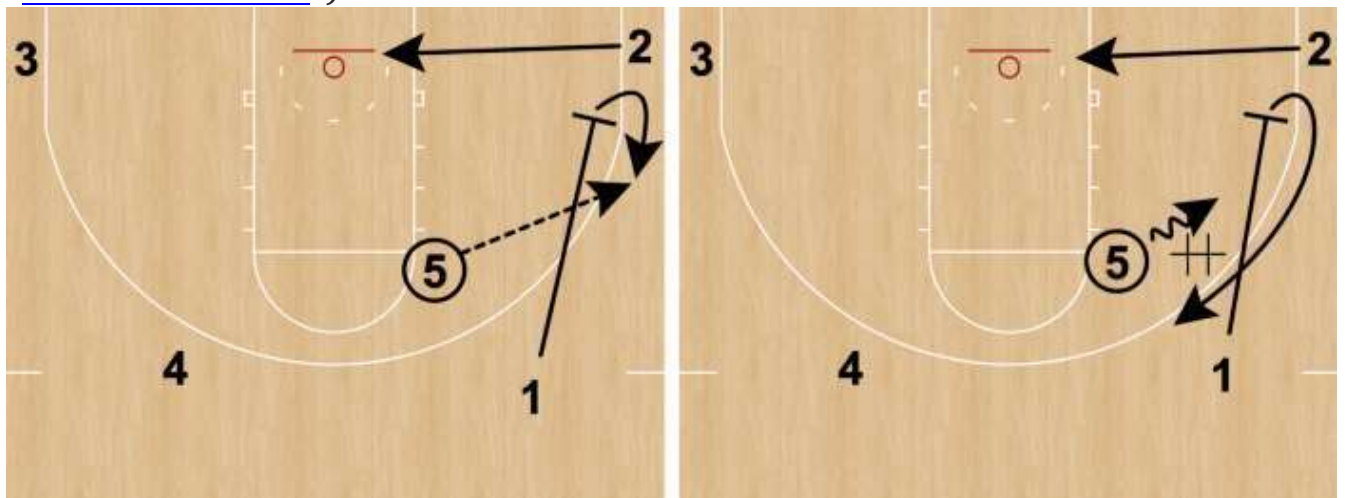

Conversely, if the cutter accepts the screen and pops out, the screener can roll or slip the screen and dive to the basket.

If the big doesn't feed the diver, he respaces the floor. Some teams have him curl back to his original corner, while others have him continue through the lane to the far side.

Corner Low doesn't have to look exactly like the previous diagrams. The ballhandler can cut hard off the big's hip for a DHO (aka "pistol action"). The big at the Elbow also has the option to ignore the strongside corner action and turn to the weak side.

Corner Low: UCLA Entry

Many teams that run Low have the ballhandler and the player in the corner exchange roles: The corner player lifts to the wing for a pass, and the original ballhandler cuts to the corner, receiving a half-hearted UCLA screen from the Elbow big along the way. Although the entry is different, the offense ends up in Corner alignment:

UCLA Corner Low (1 of 2)
Utah Jazz

UCLA Corner Low (2 of 2)
Utah Jazz
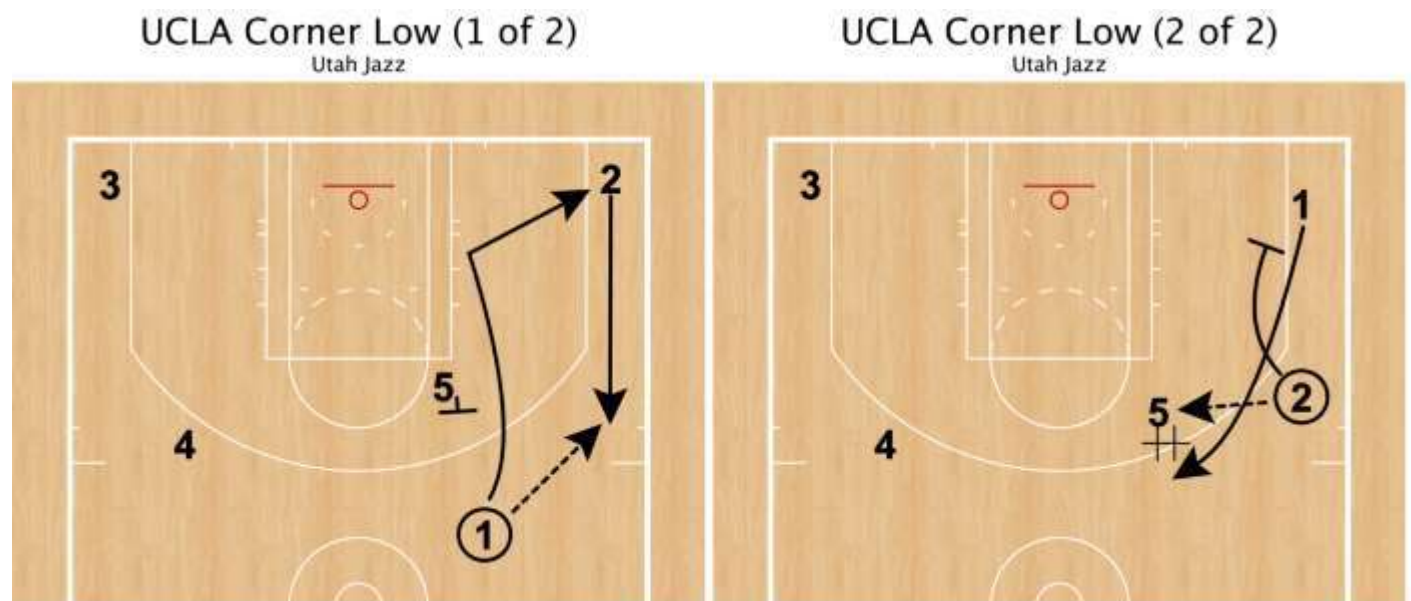
"High" Option: Elbow Feed + High Cross Screen

The second development of Corner is for the ballhandler to feed the Elbow and then engage in split-cut action with his teammate in the weakside slot. Once again, the cutter can accept the screen, or he can reject or curl it:

You might notice a similarity between Corner High and Horns Out, in which a cross screen out of a Horns alignment puts the offense into a nearly identical version of the modern 4-out Corner alignment. When the ballhandler doesn't (or can't) pass to the cutter, he often feeds the Elbow for split-cut action:
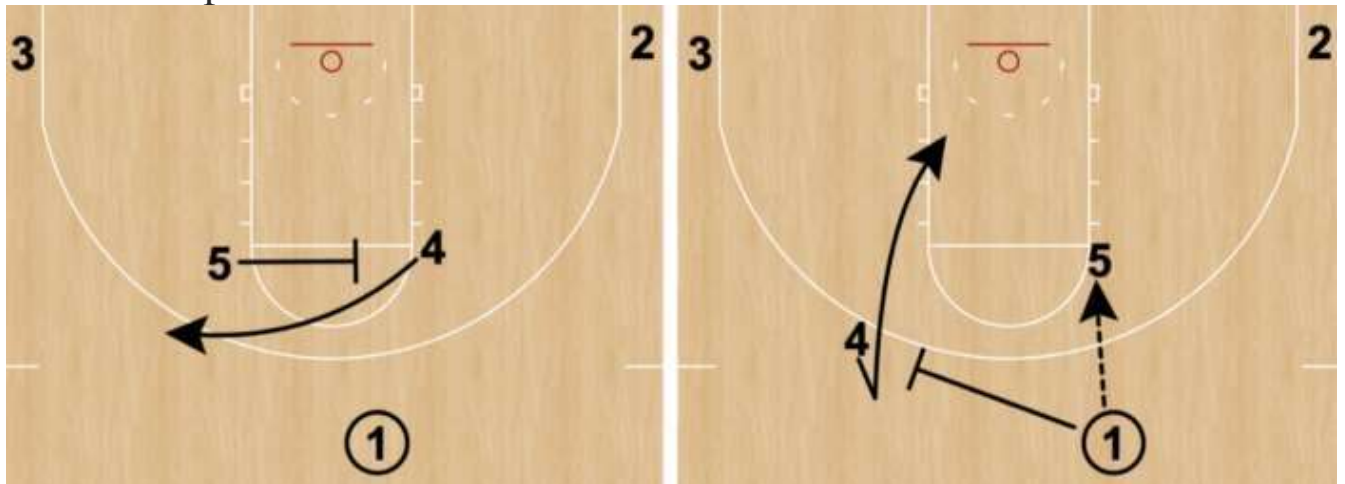
"Corner" Option: Corner Feed + Dive

The confusingly named "Corner" option of the Corner offense begins with a pass to the strongside corner. The original ballhandler then makes a basket cut, which often turns into a wedge/backscreen for the big (after which he would pop out to the perimeter), or he simply clears out to the far corner:
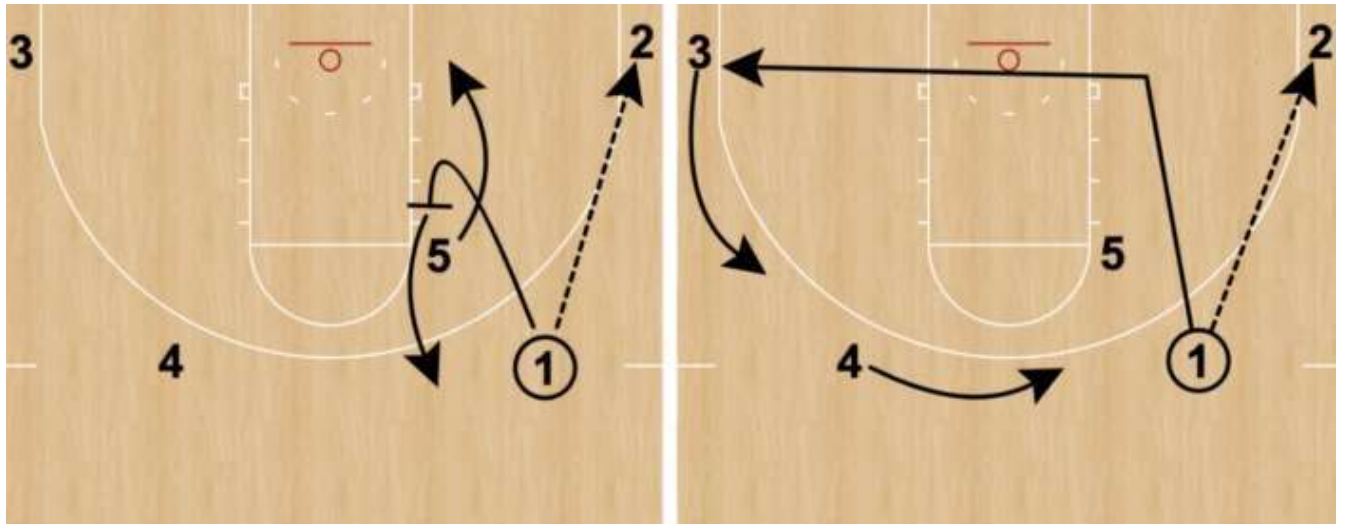
If the point guard clears out to the far corner, the 2 guard and the 5 usually run a 2-man game, such as a corner PnR or a throw-and-get (aka "chase DHO"):
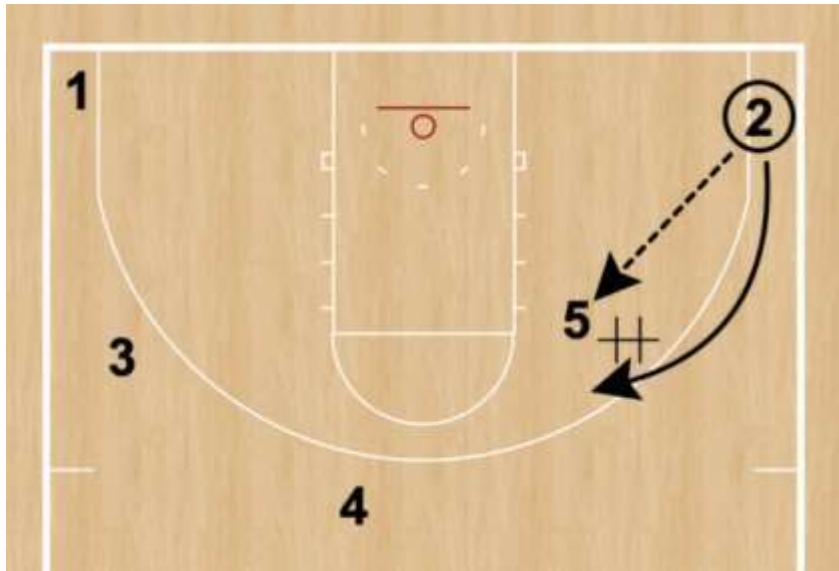
If the point guard sets the wedge/backscreen, the 5 can cut off it for a post feed or set a ram ballscreen in the corner, or the 2 can pass back to the 1, who receives a ballscreen from the 4 (in that case, the 5 might short the PnR to give 4 more room to roll and/or create a passing release valve for the ballhandler):

"Swing" Option: Ball Reversal

The fourth and (for our purposes at least) final option of the Corner Offense is known as "Swing," in which the point guard makes what the Triangle calls a "lag pass" to the weak side slot. The initial lag pass might be followed by another pass to the far side, which often sets up

the slice/stagger combination (an element from the Shuffle offense that many teams use):
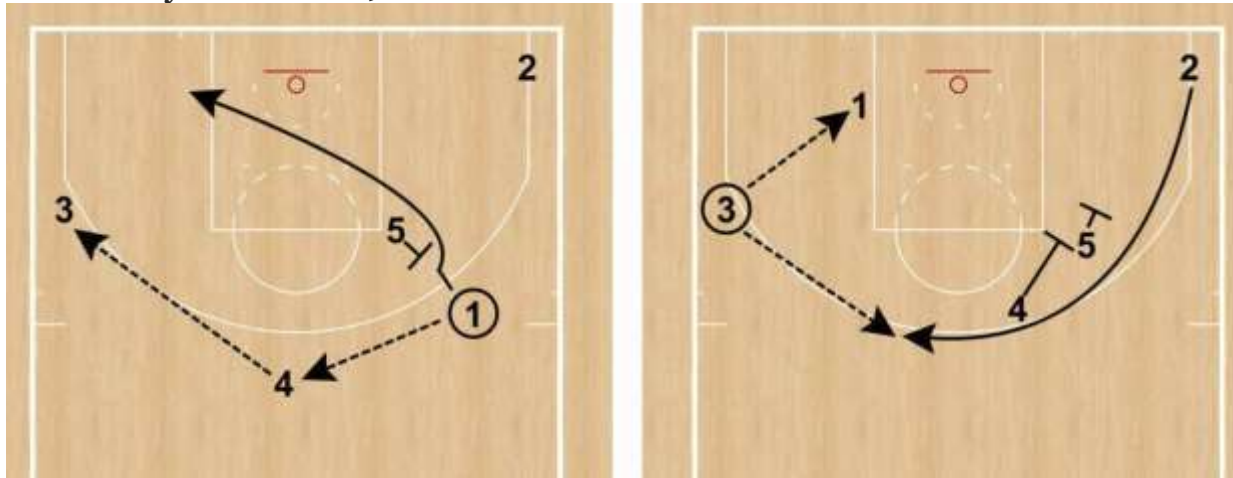
Or, more simply, Swing may simply have just the initial lag pass, which might set up a staggered screen:
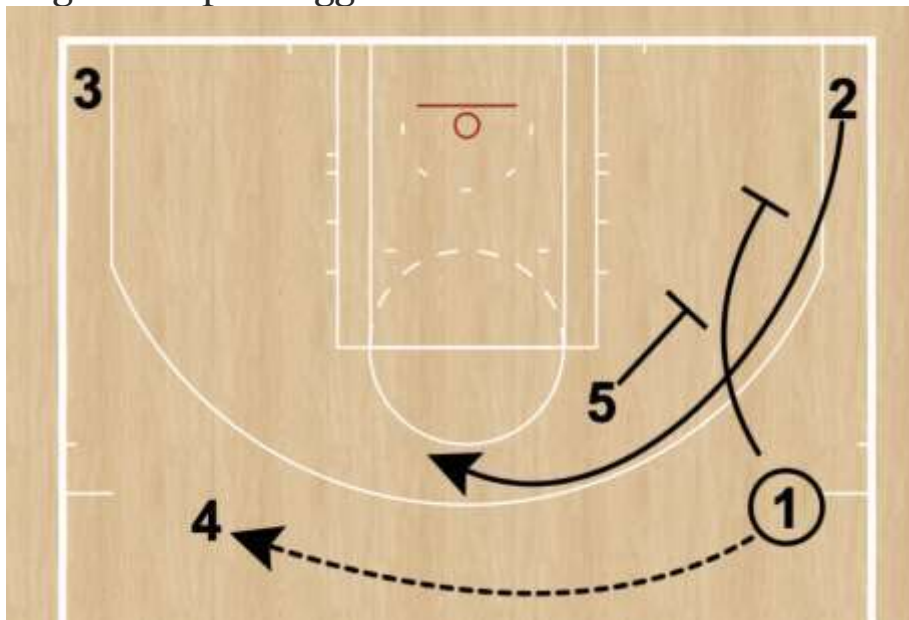
The Swing option of Corner is nearly identical to Horns Out when the ballhandler passes to the original cutter. For example, the diagram below of Horns Out Strong begins with a different alignment (Horns vs

Corner), but the second panel of the following diagram and the previous one are almost identical:
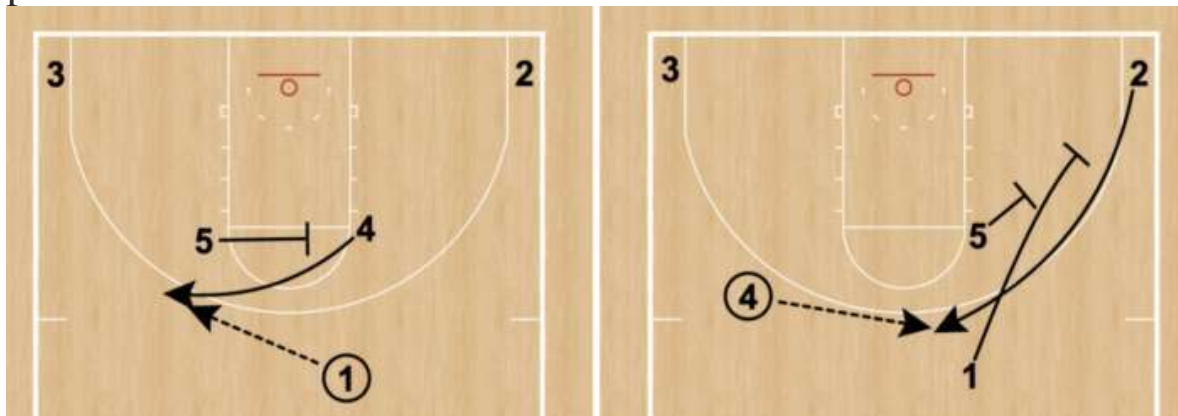
Because Swing doesn't ask the big to make plays with the ball from the Elbow, it's the element of Corner borrowed most heavily by teams who lack skilled centers like Jokic. Although Corner is best known for Elbow playmaking by a big, the Utah Jazz, from their alignments, their 0.5 ball movement principles, and their off-ball screening actions, have taken seemingly every other element of Corner to fit their roster, especially Rudy Gobert.

Horns Out Chin Pin vs Corner Swing Chin Pin:

For example, the following clip is from a Horns alignment, not Corner, but after the initial cross screen, it is, once again, nearly identical to Corner Swing:
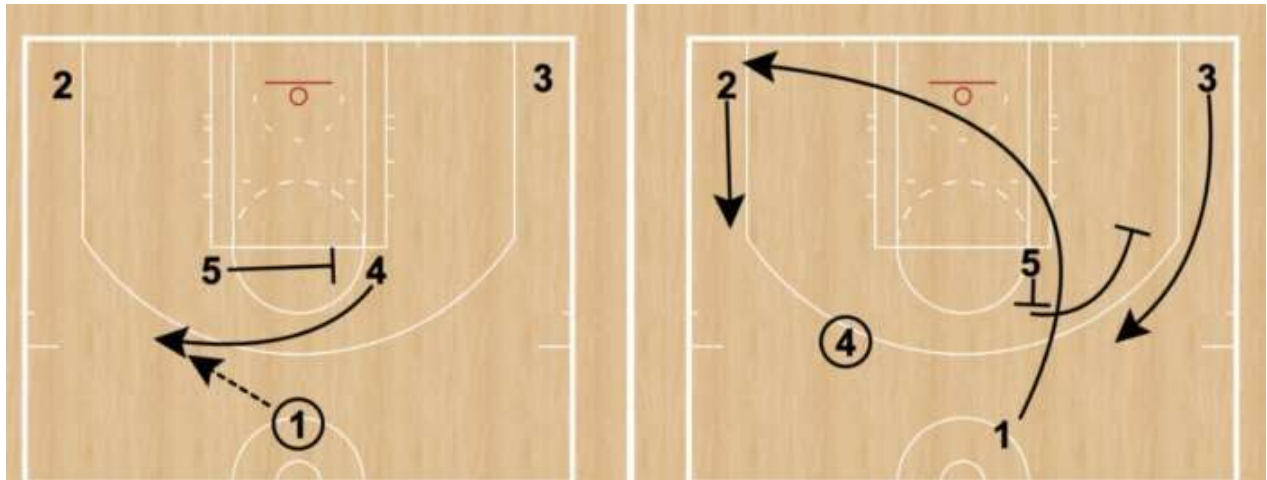
Horns Out Chin Pin
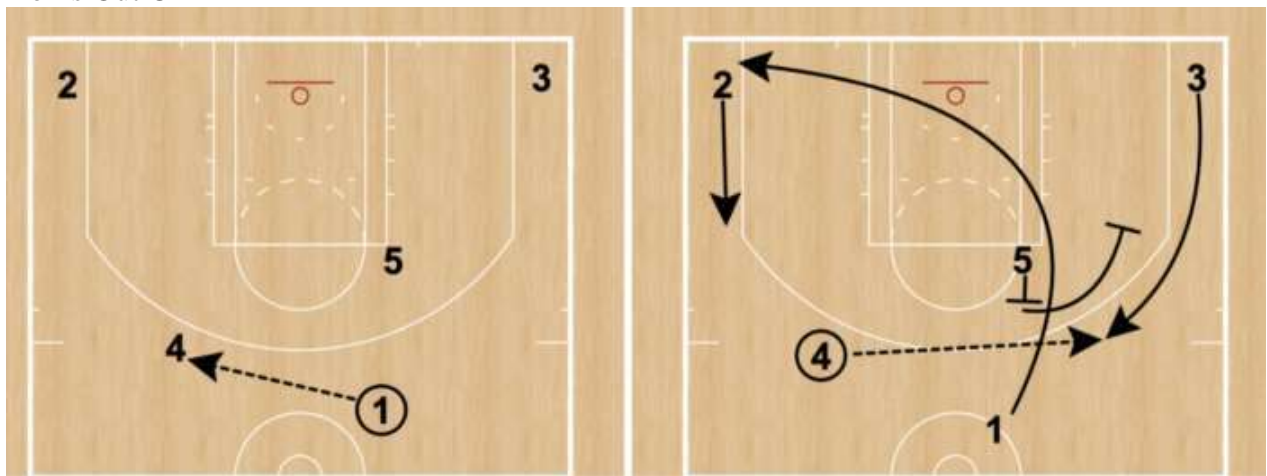

Corner Swing Chin Pin

Second-Side Action: Throw & Chase or Empty Ram

If the initial 3-person split-cut action doesn't provide a scoring opportunity, Corner typically flows into a 2-man game (such as the throw and chase below), with everybody else on the weakside of the floor. If the PnR can't create an advantage, the ballhandler often passes to the top of the key:
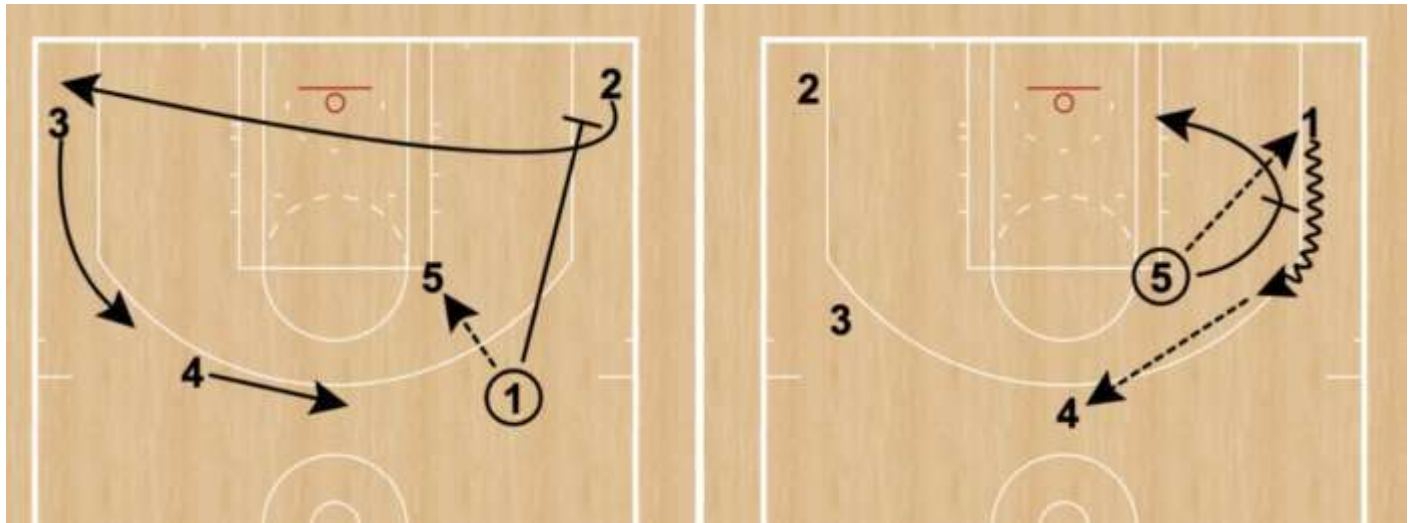
Corner Low 2-Man

The pass to the top of the key triggers a [45 cut](#) from the weakside wing (3), who continues through to the weakside corner, and then 2 lifts up to the wing and receives a pass:
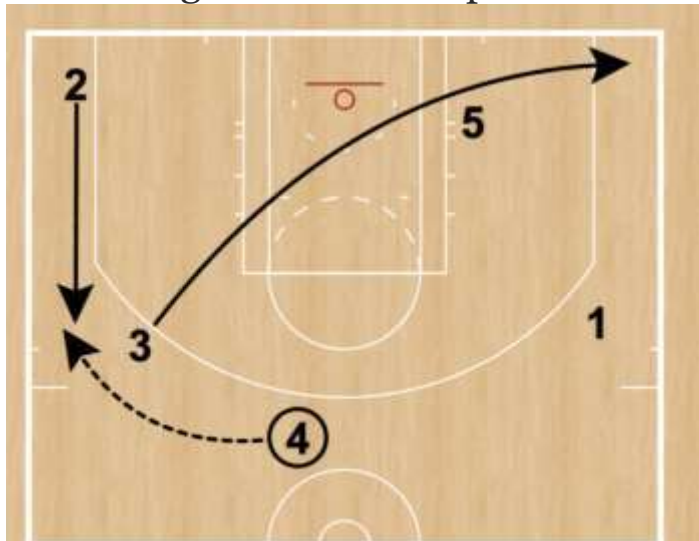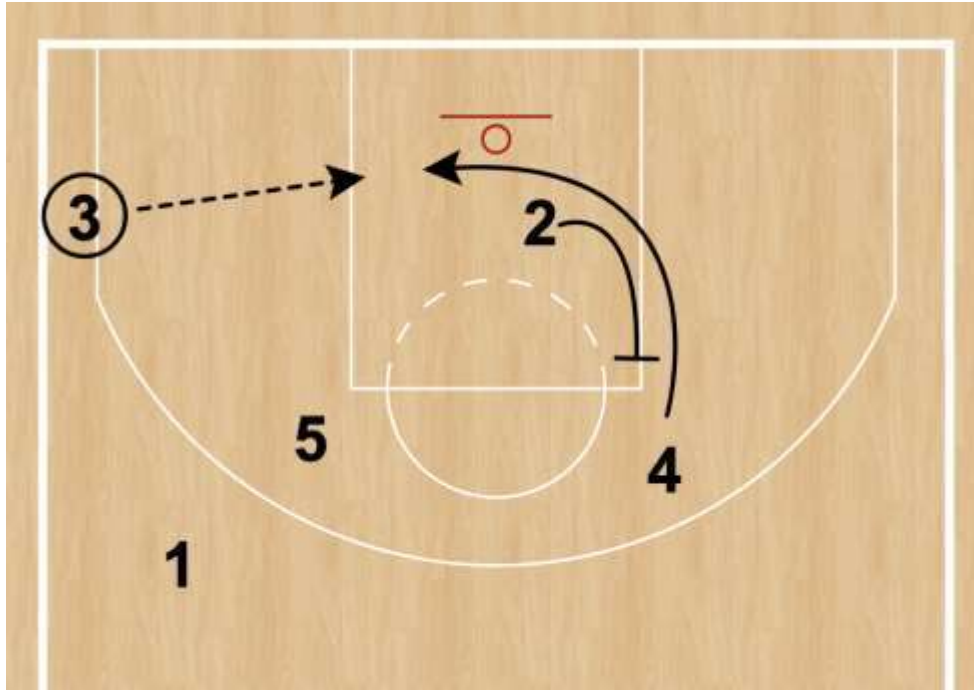

From here, the Corner Offense, at least has it's practiced by the Denver Nuggets, has two main options, which are commonly seen in the San Antonio Spurs play Motion Weak. Either 4 follows his pass to set a ballscreen ("throw and chase"), or 4 face cuts and then sets a cross

screen for 5, who can cut off the screen for a post-up or go set an empty
Ram ballscreen (blue):
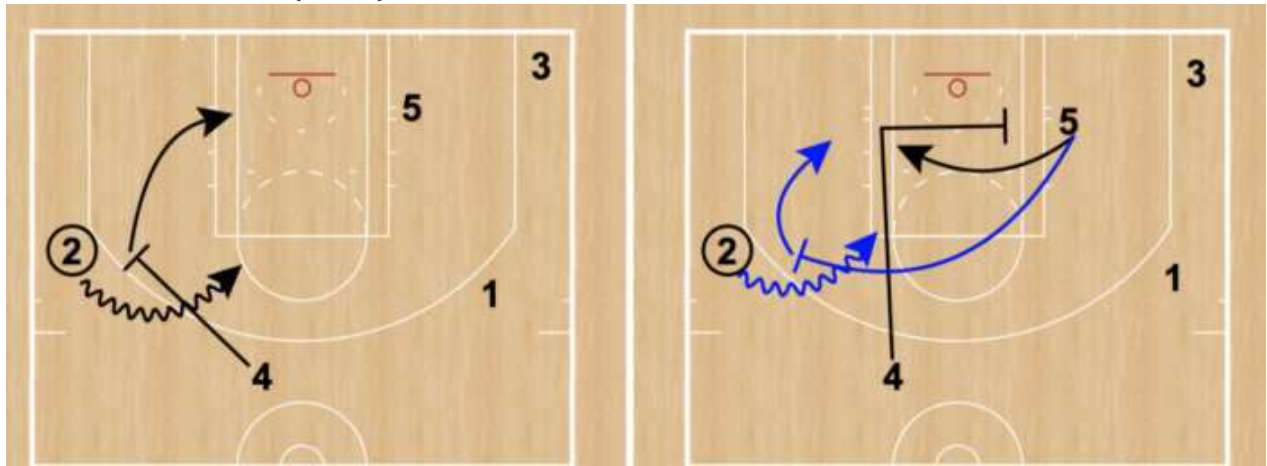
"Cyclone"

Definition: a backscreen near the weakside elbow set by a player who is expected to receive a down screen

Synonyms: backscreen, rip

See Also: Elevator, Motion Weak, Korver

Origin of the Name: Steve Kerr called the play "Cyclone" because he first saw it when watching Fred Hoiberg's Iowa State Cyclones.

"The Golden State Warriors call the play Cyclone because they stole it from the Iowa State Cyclones, who called it Cougar because they stole

it from the BYU Cougars, who called it Dribble High because they stole it from Utah State. It was called Dribble at Utah State because that's what it was called at Colorado State and Montana."

How It Works: In the diagram above, 2 sets a backscreen for 4 near the weakside elbow.

Why It Works: Much like [Rip DHO](#), Cyclone is effective because it exploits the defender's reluctance to help off a good shooter like Steph Curry, which is why good shooters are excellent screeners. If Curry's defender helps against the backscreen, he may be out of position for a subsequent pin-down for Curry.

But Cyclone is different from a typical rip DHO or screen-the-screener action because in Cyclone, the defense is expecting Curry to receive a screen, not set one. Typically, Curry would set a screen and then receive a screen, such as in this elevator play below:
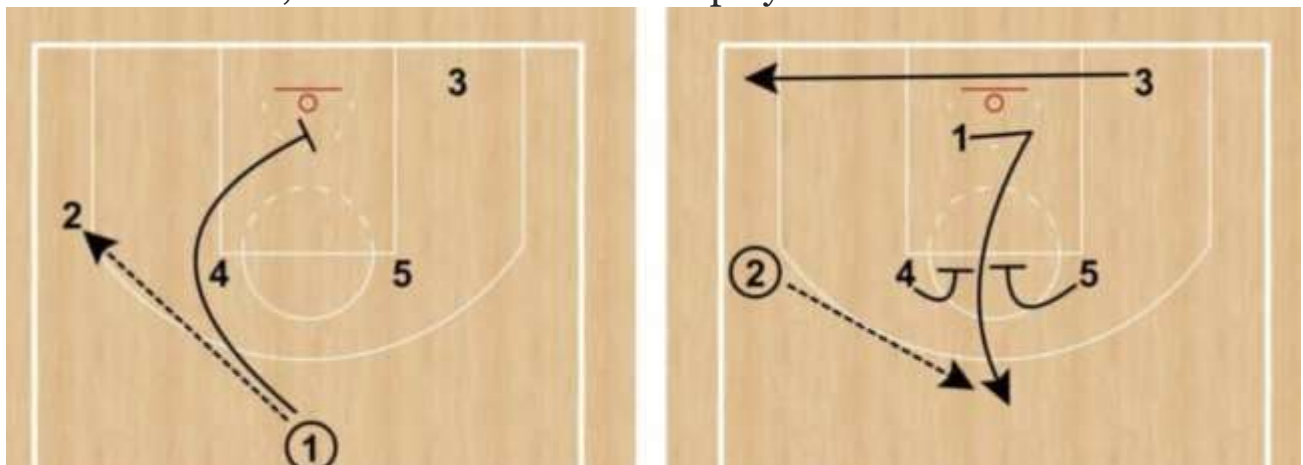
Instead of receiving an elevator screen, 1 sets a backscreen for 5 on the weakside elbow.

As a result, Cyclone is similar to what's known as a Korver screen, in which a player who is expected to receive a screen sets a screen instead.

In Cyclone, the player who sets the backscreen can still receive a pindown, however. In this example, 1 sets a cross screen for 4 and a back screen for 5 (Cyclone) before receiving a down screen from 3.
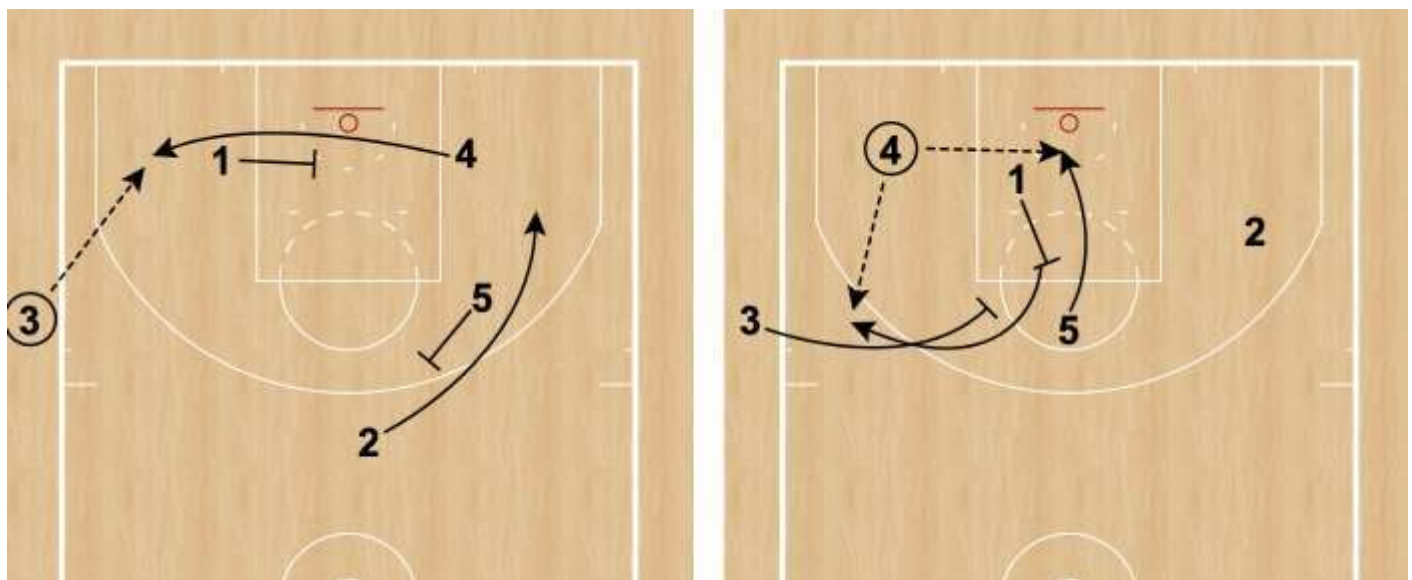
"Double Drag"
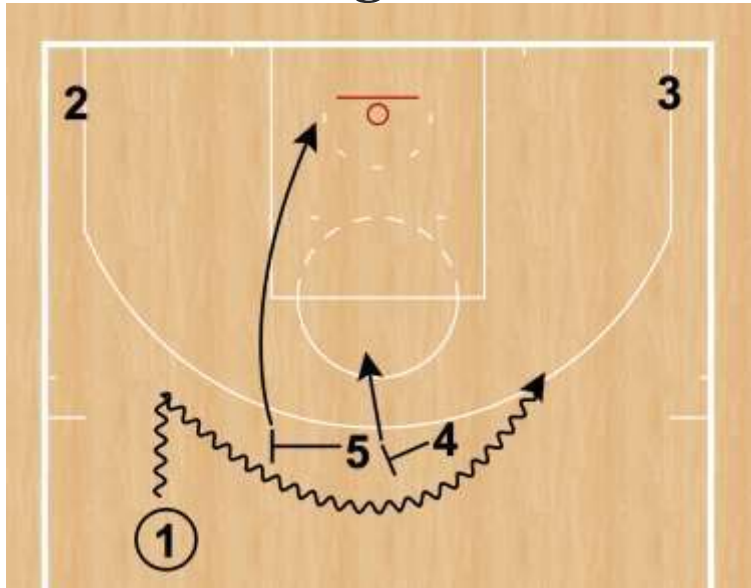
Term: Double Drag

Definition: a two-person staggered ballscreen (*staggered* = the picks are set one after the other à la the down screens in [Motion Strong](#), not side-by-side/simultaneously like the screens in [Elevator](#))

Synonyms: 77, 99, Double (High) Ball Screen, pick pick, Double

See Also:

- Spain [Veer](#) (a double drag variation in which a fourth teammate sets a backscreen for the first picker as he rolls to the hoop, à la Spain PnR, and then he receives a down/[veer](#) screen from the second picker)

- [Pistol](#)

- Nash (a double drag on the wing with no offensive player in the near corner, often seen in Pistol)

Origin of the Name: Traditionally, *drag* refers to a ballscreen set in transition or semi-transition. *Double drag* has come to mean any two-person ballscreen, whether or not in transition, although some may consider that definition to be a bastardization of *drag*.

The term *77* is a wrinkle from *7*, which refers to a single ballscreen.

According to [Doug Brotherton](), Drag and Double Drag are often signaled by a single or a double clap:

How It Works: In the diagram above, 4 and 5 set double ballscreens for 1 at the top of the key.

Typically, one picker rolls, and the other pops. Which picker rolls and which one pops is sometimes decided by order (e.g., the first picker always rolls), and sometimes decided by personnel (e.g., the better shooter always pops).

Why It Works: Simplistically, double drag forces the on-ball defender to deal with two screens instead of one. If he goes [under](), he's forced to go under both screeners (and perhaps both screeners' defenders if they don't let him through). If he goes over, he's at risk of getting caught by the first or the second screen, ruining his [rearview pursuit]().

If the first ballscreen creates an advantage, the would-be second screener can slip to the hoop (a similar concept applies to Chicago action, in which the big doesn't pause to screen the guard's defender if he is still recovering from the initial down screen):

If the defense switches the first screen, a big is out of his skillset by guarding the pick-and-roll ballhandler for the second screen:

And if the defense switches the second screen, the double drag can be followed by a twist, or another ballscreen in the opposite direction of the first (John Collins scores here off a 45 cut):

Double drag exploits the fact that there is only one possible tagger on each side. In this diagram, 2's defender would be the "tagger," the man responsible for bumping/tagging 5 on his roll to the rim, but since he's the only weakside defender, 2 is left open if he lifts to the wing:
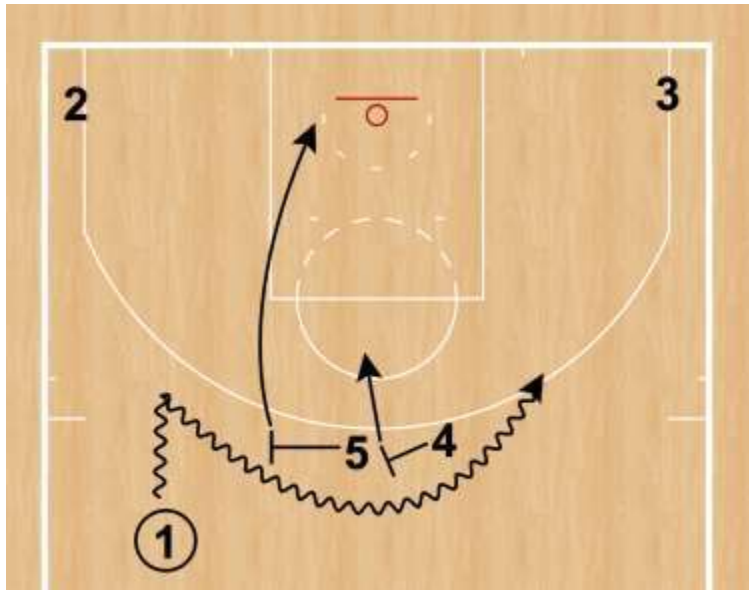
When there are two defenders on the weakside of a pick-and-roll, such as 2's and 4's defenders in the diagram below of an ace ballscreen, there are two possible taggers. Therefore 2's defender can tag 5 on his roll, while 4's defender can split the difference between 2 and 4, zoning off that side of the court:
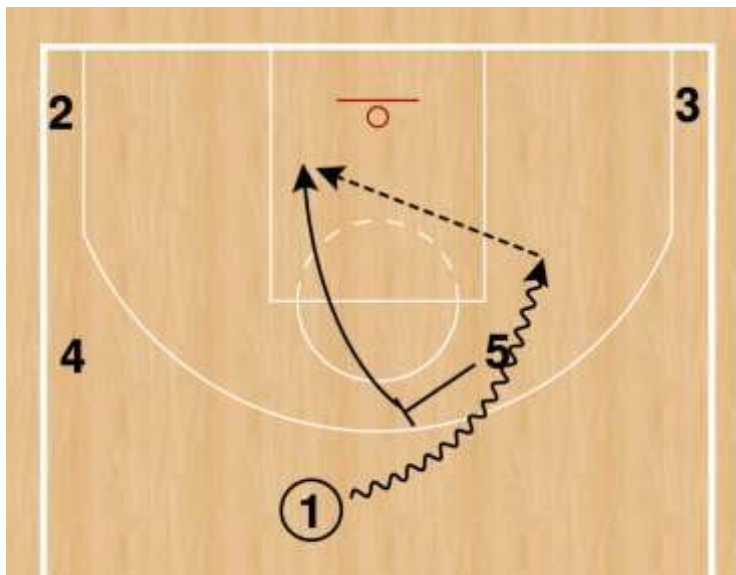
Offenses often try to run a pick-and-roll so that there's only a single tagger, which can occur in double drag or in a spread deuce ballscreen. No matter which direction the ballhandler goes, double drag, in its most common form, creates a single-side tag situation for the defense.

The offense can combine double drag with **veer** by having either one or both pickers then set a down screen for their teammate in the weakside corner.

Or the offense can run a double drag **stagger veer**, in which both pickers set a two-person down/veer screen for their teammate in the weakside corner.

The 77 stagger veer can then become gaggle or wheel/circle action by having those two pickers then set another stagger screen, this time for their teammate in the other corner (the Raptors pair this with Miami, sometimes known as Orlando or Pistol, in which there's a wing DHO to the player about to receive the ballscreen):

Or the first picker can fake setting a veer screen for his teammate on the weakside and instead receive an exit screen in the strongside corner, as Karl-Anthony Towns does in this **77 stagger veer slip exit:**

An increasingly common variation is the **Spain Veer**, in which the player in either the weakside or the strongside corner comes to set a backscreen for the first picker, and then he receives a down/veer screen from the second picker. Typically, the backscreener comes from the weakside corner. This is ideal for the Spain lob (if the backscreener came from the strongside corner, the weakside corner's defender is in position to contest the alley-oop).

A much simpler variation of the double drag is **ricky** action, in which the two pickers set the ballscreens, and then the second picker screens for the first picker to come back toward the ballhandler, ideally for a catch-and-shoot 3:

Of course, the offense can fake a Spain Veer and run Ricky.

Or the offense can play with the alignment, putting both perimeter players on the same side of the court and running the double drag either toward or away from them. In an empty wing double ballscreen, for example, there is no tagger in the near corner and two perimeter players on the far side:
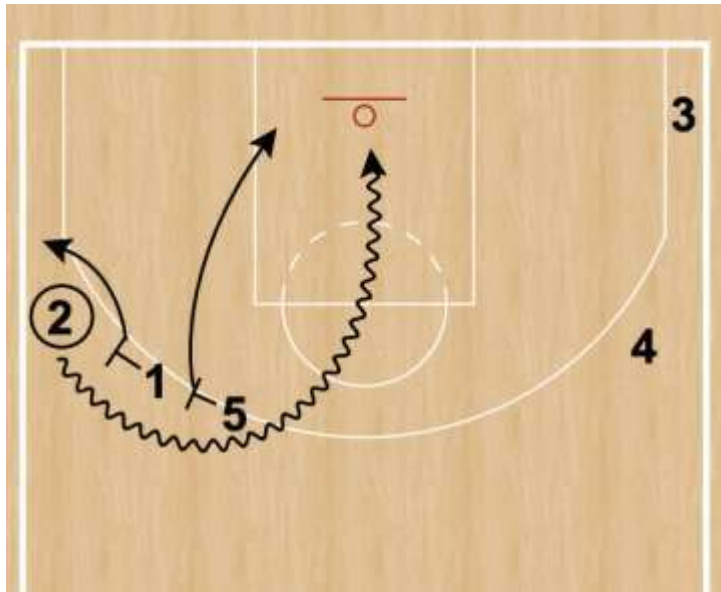
This is a common play out of [Pistol/21 series](#), known as 21 Nash (or 21 Double) and traditionally triggered by the ballhandler passing to the 2-guard on the wing and then following his pass to set the first of two ballscreens.

Or the offense can run 77 in the opposite direction, toward the sideline instead of toward the middle of the court, although it's a bit more crowded and easier to tag (uncoincidentally, these are also examples of veer action):

Variations: [Wedge, Ricky,](#) Twist, Spain (a fourth teammate sets a backscreen for the first picker as he rolls to the hoop), **Spain Veer** (a fourth teammate sets a backscreen for the first picker and then receives a veer/down screen from the second picker), **Spain Veer Punch, Ricky/fake Spain Veer, [Stagger](#) [Veer](#)** (both pickers then set

a [veer](#)/down screen for the teammate in the weakside corner), **Stagger Veer Exit, [Miami](#)** (a DHO followed by a 77), **Miami 77 Stagger Gaggle, Horns Leak 77, 77 Backdoor, 77 Follow, 77 [Ghost](#) [Exit,](#) [Motion Strong](#) Follow DHO etc.**

"Exit Screen"
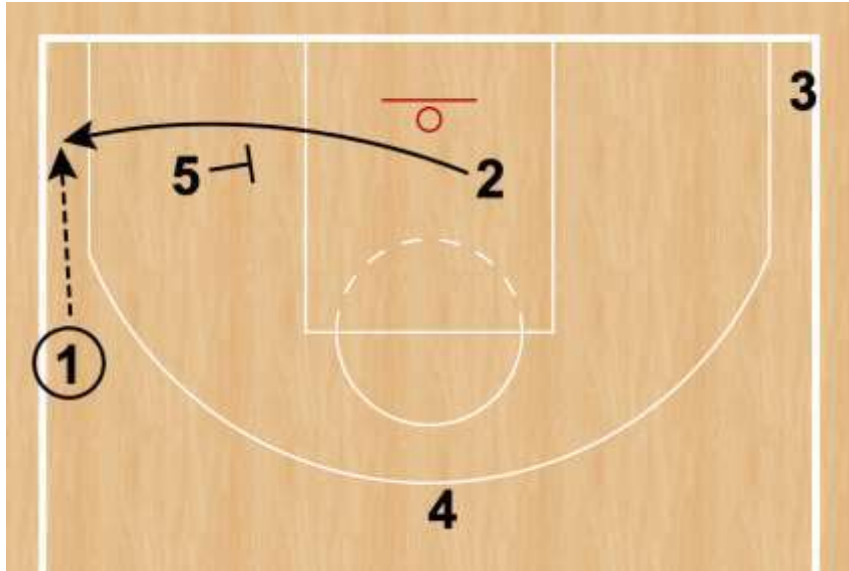
Term: Exit Screen

Definition: a baseline screen for the cutter to cut to the corner

Synonyms: Corner Pin-In

See Also: Ram, Hammer Screen

How It Works: In the diagram above, 5 is near the dunker spot/low block, facing the hoop, when he sets an exit screen for 2 to cut to the corner

Why It Works: Exit Screens have a number of uses. Most simply, an exit screen can lead to a corner 3, which NBA players made just under 40% of the time during the 2020–21 season (39.3%, according to [Cleaning the Glass](#)). [Excluding shots at the rim, corner 3s are perhaps the best shots in NBA basketball](#).

But exit screens have a number of other uses. One, a nonstretch big can space the floor by setting an exit screen. When a big is in the corner or dunker spot, his defender might cheat off him to provide off-ball rim protection. But that leaves him out of position to help against an exit screen.

Exit screens are also used to confuse or remove the "tagger," the weakside help defender in pick-and-roll coverage responsible for tagging, or bumping, the roller as he rolls to the hoop.

The decoy exit screen is a favorite ATO for James Borrego's Charlotte Hornets.

Examples:

Chin Exit, Away Reject Exit, Motion Strong Twirl Exit, [Ram](#) Ghost Exit, [UCLA](#) Exit, 77 Spain [Veer](#) Exit, 77 [Ricky](#) → Exit, [Horns Twist](#) Exit etc.

"Face Cut"
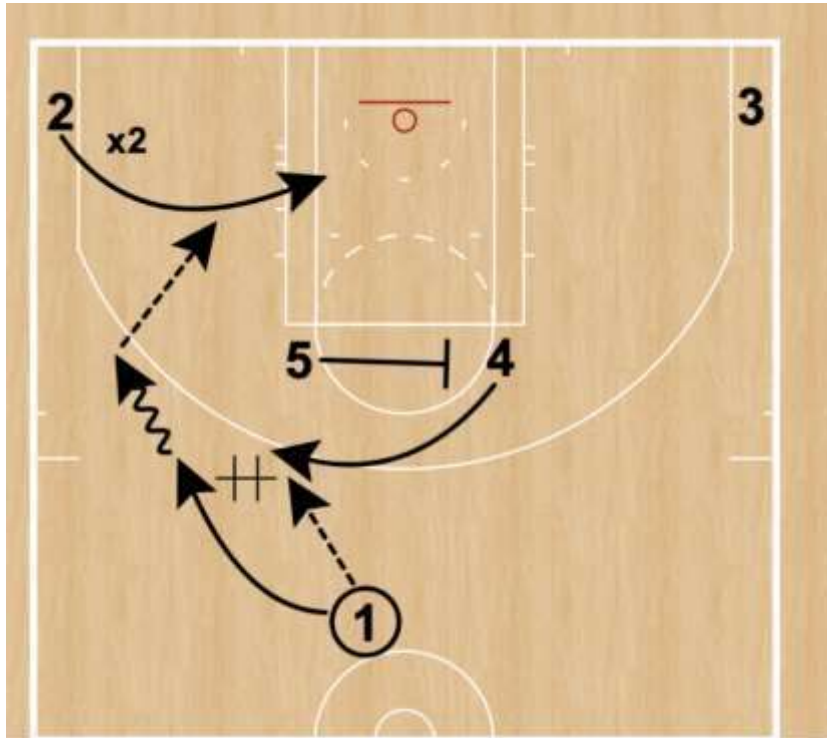
Term: "Face Cut"

Definition: a cut in front of the defender's face to the basket, starting from the corner

Synonyms: Danilovic, front (door) cut, corner cut, Corey/Maggette/blade cut (see **"Semantics"** below)

See Also: 45 Cut, backdoor cut, lift/shake, 90, Pierce cut, Veer, Chop

How It Works: In the diagram above, 2 cuts in front of his defender's face to the basket (while his teammates run decoy action out of Horns).

Why It Works: Face cuts are frequently out of Horns, often to punish a defender for ball-watching or for cheating too close to the baseline.

Or the cutter can post up his defender if he has a size advantage. The threat of a face cut can also create an opportunity for a backdoor cut:

Blade cuts are excellent pick-and-roll tools when the corner man is not a catch-and-shoot threat. If his defender leaves him to tag the roller, he can make a blade cut:

"Flare DHO"

Term: Flare DHO

Definition: a 3-person action in which a player sets a flare screen and then receives a dribble handoff

Synonyms: N/A

See Also: Rip DHO, Spanoulis, Chicago, Delay

How It Works: In the diagram above, 3 sets a flare screen for 4 and then receives a DHO from 5.

Why It Works: Similar to Rip DHO, Flare DHO embodies Chuck Daly's aphorism that "defense can't guard two things in a row." If 3's defender helps with 4 coming off the flare screen, he's out of position when 3 gets the DHO. If he doesn't, 4 could be open off the flare.

In fact, Rip and Flare DHO are typically reads off the same play. If the defender trails the flare screen, the cutter curls and turns Flare DHO into Rip DHO. As a result, the two actions are identical except for whether the cutter cuts toward the basket or fades along the 3pt line.

A benefit of setting flare screen instead of a rip is that the lane may be a bit more open for the DHO and roll (because the cutter and his defender are along the 3pt line instead of by the hoop).
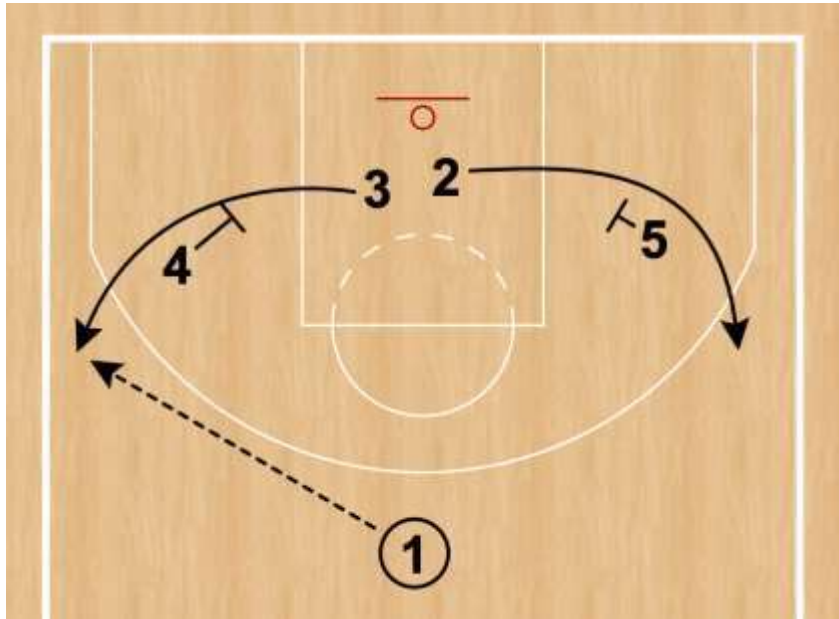
"Floppy"
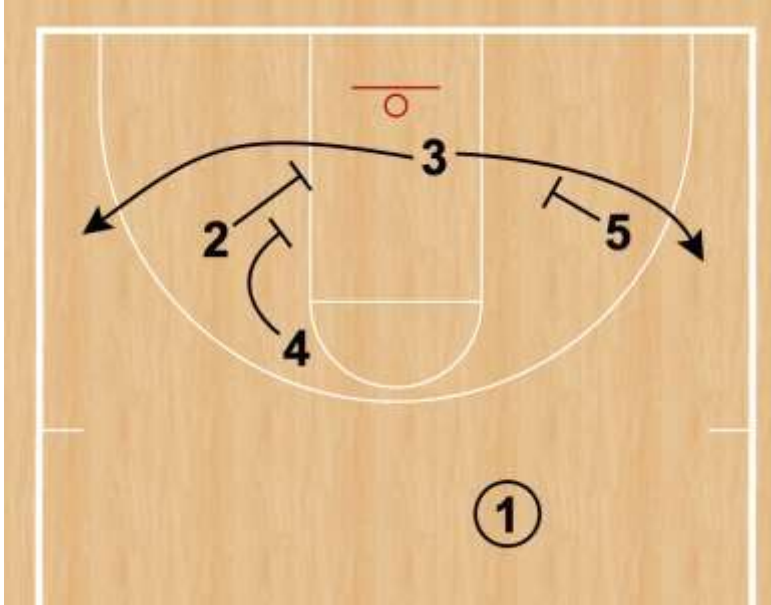
Term: Floppy

Definition: a play in which a player, positioned under the basket, can choose whether to cut off a single screen to one side or a double screen to the other

**Synonyms:** Single Double

See Also: Loop

Origin of the Name: N/A

How It Works: The first cutter in floppy reads the defense and chooses which side to cut to. In the diagram above, 3 has the option of cutting off 5's single screen or 2 and 4's double screen (hence the alternate name "single double"). Whichever side 3 chooses, 2 picks the opposite. If the first cutter chooses the single screen, floppy looks like this:


Why It Works: Floppy has long been used to get catch-and-shoot opportunities for shooters like Reggie Miller, Ray Allen, and Kyle Korver and, until recently, was one of the most popular sets in the NBA.

Along with Motion Strong and Motion Weak, "Loop"—a floppy variation initiated with a zipper cut—is one of the core plays of the San Antonio Spurs' motion offense:
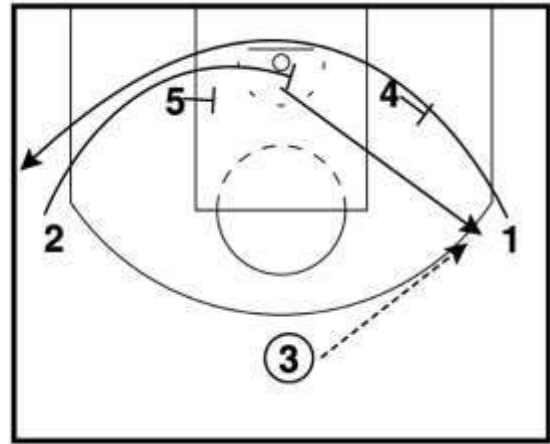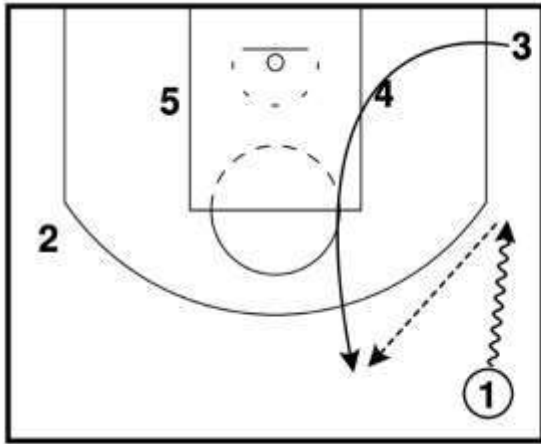
By giving the first cutter the option of a single screen on one side and a double screen on the other, floppy can be an effective counter to top-locking, a defensive technique in which the defender places himself on the top side of his man in order to prevent him from using an screen (but conceding a backdoor cut in the process).

"Get"
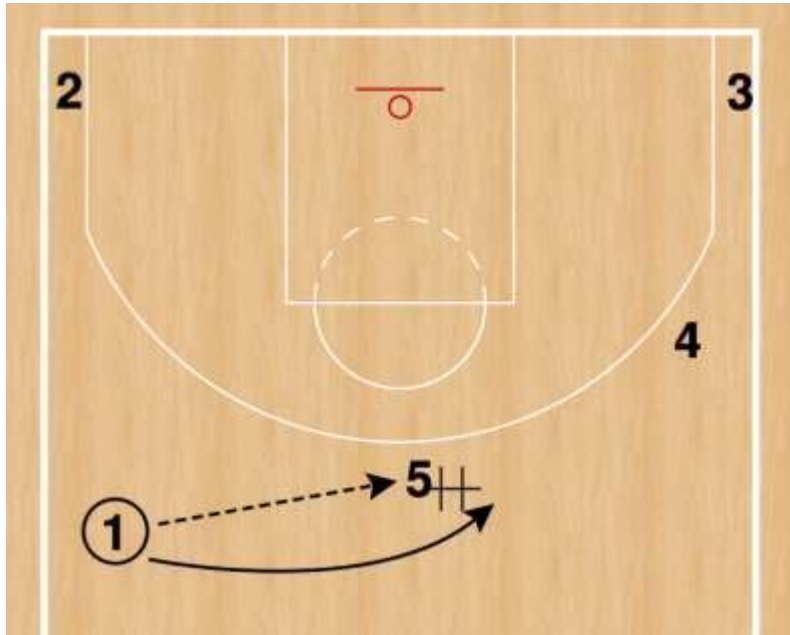
Term: Get

Definition: an action in which a player (usually a guard) passes to a teammate (usually a big) and then follows his pass to receive a handoff

Alternate Definition: a pick-and-roll (cf. "Elbow Get," a Mike D'Antoni set in which a player, usually a PF, gets the ball at one Elbow and then gets a ballscreen near the nail, or middle of the FT line)

Synonyms: Go, Throw-and-Go, Throw-and-Get, Handback, Touch, Snap

See Also: [Throw-and-Chase](#) (an action in which a player, usually a big, passes to a teammate and then chases his pass to set a ballscreen), Snap

How It Works: In the diagram above, 1 passes to 5, and then 1 follows his pass to receive a handoff from 5.

Why It Works: Gets are effective for the simple reason that players move faster without the ball than with it. For some players, especially those not known for their handle, a get can create more separation than dribbling into a ballscreen.

More broadly, gets can provide the advantages (and reads) of pick-and-rolls, along with the opportunities of high-post playmaking. If the guard's defender goes under the DHO, for example, the guard can look to shoot. But since the big has a live dribble, he can also fake the DHO and drive to the hoop against aggressive pick-and-roll coverages, such as blitzing or hard hedging.

If the guard's defender is overly aggressive, the guard can cut backdoor, set an inverted ballscreen, or curl around the big to the basket. Or the guard can fake receiving the DHO and set a screen for his teammate to get the DHO going in the opposite direction:

Against a switch, the guard can attack the big's defender off the bounce, or the big can seal the guard's defender.

Gets are also helpful for players who have already picked up their dribble, and for beating an aggressive closeout. The Miami Heat, for example, teach their shooters to beat aggressive closeouts with a sidestep 3 or a get instead of pump-faking, dribbling once inside the 3pt line, and shooting a long step-in 2.

"Ghost"
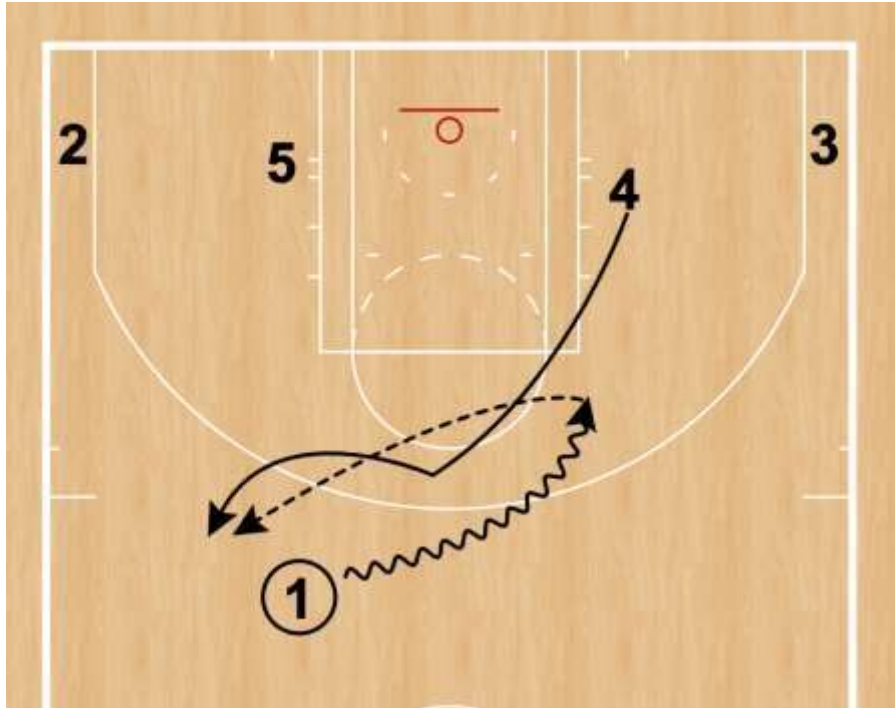
Term: Ghost

Definition: a fake ballscreen after which the would-be screener sprints away into space; a pick-and-pop, but without the pick
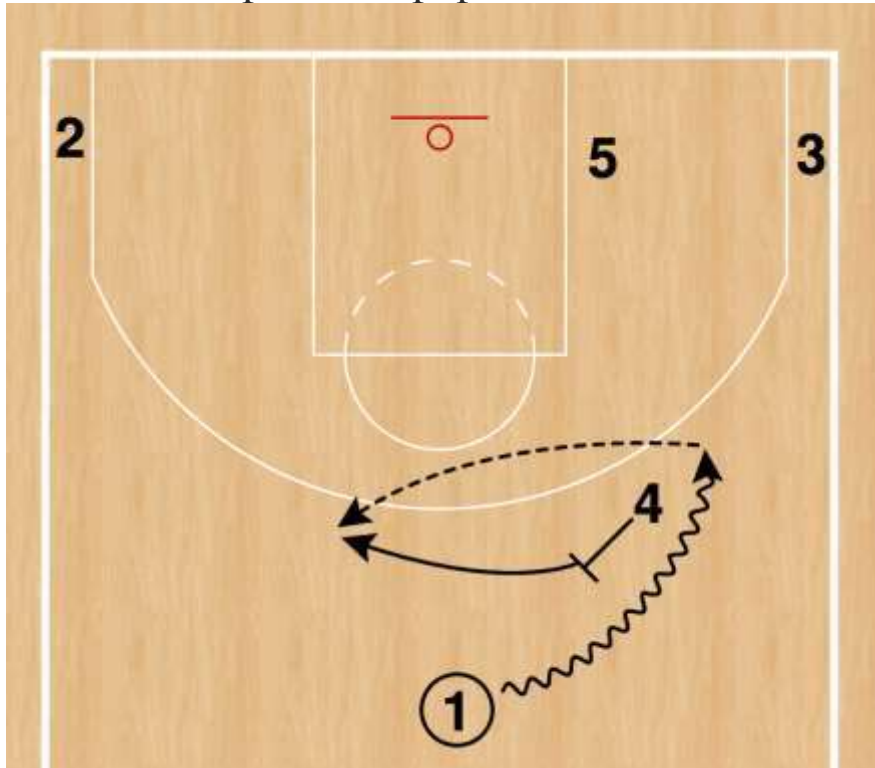
Synonyms: N/A

See Also: [Veer](), Slip (a ghost, except the would-be screener cuts to the basket, not away from it), Rub
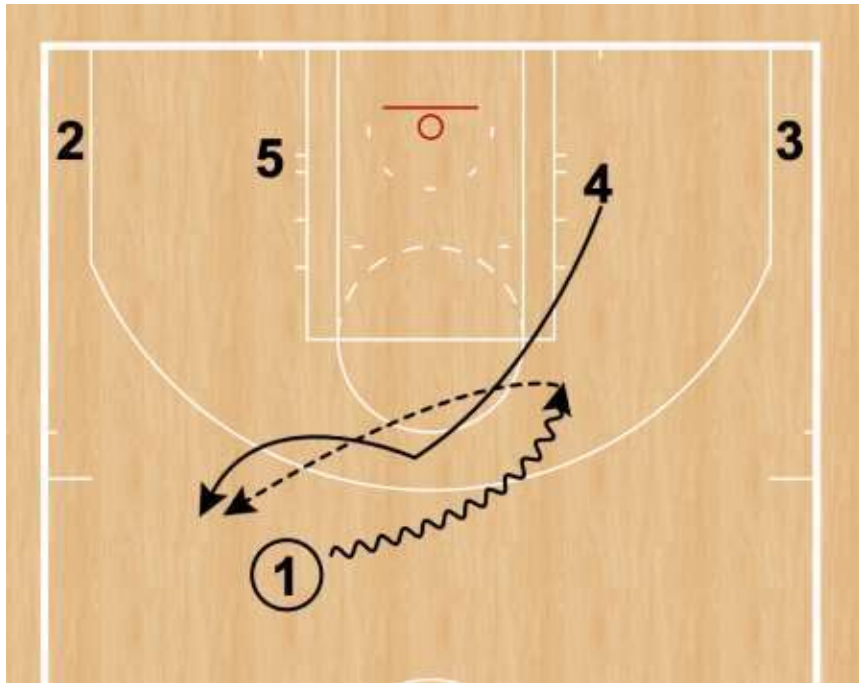
Origin of the Name: N/A

How It Works: In the diagram above, 4 sprints toward 1's defender, as if to set a ballscreen. But then 4 cuts to the weakside wing instead of setting a screen.

Contrast this pick-and-pop:

...with this ghost screen:

Why It Works: Ghost screens often cause a mistake from either the on-ball defender or the would-be screener's defender—or, short of that, freeze the defense just enough to disrupt its ballscreen coverage and create an advantage. For example, if the screener's defender prepares to hedge/show on the ballscreen, he's left behind when the screener ghosts and cuts to the weakside wing.

"Hammer Screen"
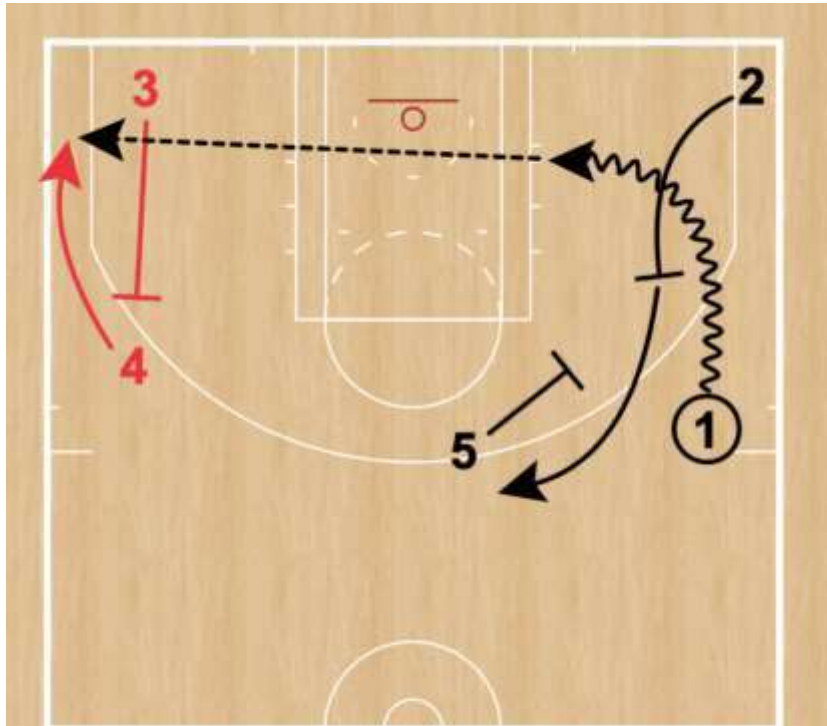
Term: Hammer Screen

Definition: a weakside flare screen for a shooter to cut from the wing to the corner, while the ballhandler is driving baseline

Synonyms: N/A

See Also:

- Flare screen (an off-ball screen for a cutter to cut along the 3pt line, away from the ballhandler; hammer is a specific type of flare screen, which doesn't necessarily happen on the weakside and doesn't require the ballhandler to be driving baseline)

- **Low Man**: the screener's defender, who can't switch the screen because he's the primary help defender responsible for rotating over and protecting the rim against dribble penetration

Origin of the Name: One of the most effective actions for a 3-point shot, the hammer screen is named after Darvin Ham, a small forward who made four 3-pointers in eight NBA seasons.

Out of players who have actions named after them, from Danilovic and Iverson cuts to Spanoulis and Korver screens, Darvin Ham is perhaps the only person who never used his namesake action. Ham neither set nor received hammer screens; he was the passer.

Three of Ham's eight NBA seasons were with the Milwaukee Bucks under head coach George Karl. During a timeout, Karl drew up a play for Ham to get the ball in the midpost, drive baseline, and pass to the weakside corner for Ray Allen, who cut off what has come to be known as a hammer screen.

How It Works: In the diagram above — a classic hammer variation of the Pistol play called "21 Dribble"—1 drives baseline while 3 sets a hammer screen for 4 to cut to the weakside corner.

Why It Works: Hammer screens exploit the overarching principles of "no middle" and help defense (and unprincipled ball-watching). But unlike some actions that originated more than two decades ago, hammer screens have remained both popular and effective in the NBA,

first with the San Antonio Spurs and now with the entire league. In many of the videos included in the **"See More"** section, the screen works despite the defensive bench calling out "hammer! hammer!"

As the defense rotates to contain dribble penetration (perhaps [trapping the box](#)), it is vulnerable on the weakside, often leaving one defender to guard two players.

Hammers are difficult to switch for a few reasons. One, the screener's defender, known as the "low man," is first responsible for rotating over and protecting the rim if there's been dribble penetration. Two, because hammers are "blind screens"—set behind the defender so that he can't see it coming—a switch might be late.

And, three, hammer switches are especially vulnerable to slips

Much like [Motion Strong](#), hammer can also be a mere weakside decoy action, great for spacing whether or not the cutter gets the ball.

Some teams set two-person stagger flare screens, such as this give-and-go sequence from the Toronto Raptors to get Paul Watson a chance at a corner 3.

"Horns Out"

Term: Horns Out

Definition: a Horns set in which the player at one Elbow sets a cross screen for his teammate at the other Elbow to cut to the far wing

Synonyms:

- Horns Leak

- Horns Cross

- Horns Chest (N.B.: "Horns Chest" is also used for what is sometimes known as ["Horns Flare"](#))

See Also:

- **Slash**: a pick-and-pop followed by a DHO on the weakside wing (Horns Out is often followed by a similar DHO)

- Stack Down: a similar end result, albeit with a tweaked initial alignment in which the players are "stacked" at the same Elbow or low post

- **Face Cut**: a curved cut from the corner to the hoop, often preceded by Horns Out Flip action

- Horns Out Flip: Horns Out, but the cutter flips the ball back to the ballhandler (and then often receives a flare screen from the big)

- **Zipper**: a down screen for a guard to cut to from the low block to the slot, where they receive a pass from the wing

Origin of the Name: N/A

How It Works: In the diagram above, 5 sets a screen for 2 to cut from the right Elbow to the left Wing, where he receives a pass from 1.

Why It Works: Like Miami or Zipper, Horns Out is a great way to get the ball into the hands of a non-PG ballhandler, such as Bradley Beal or Devin Booker.

In typical Horns, a big is at each Elbow. Horns Out often replaces one of them with a guard (which teams like the Miami Heat do for many other plays).

If the defense anticipates the guard cutting to the weakside wing, he can fade to the strongside wing.

The big who set the cross screen often follows ("chases") the guard for a pick-and-roll.

That guard can also get a double ballscreen (aka "[Double Drag](#)").

Now let's look at Horns Out when the initial cutter doesn't look to score, including Horns Out Slash and Horns Out Keep.

Horns Out Slash (DHO to weakside wing):

Traditionally, ["slash"](#) refers to a pick-and-pop followed by a DHO on the weakside wing, such as this Horns Slash [Blind Pig.](#)

But Horns Out can replace the initial pick-and-pop and accomplish the same swing and ball reversal, such as this Horns Out [Miami.](#)

Horns Out Slash [Step](#) Spain.

Horns Out Keep (PnR or Split Cuts):

Horns Out Keep refers to the point guard not passing to the cutter, either by design or because the defender has denied the pass. Typically, he will either receive a "Snap" and/or Angle ballscreen from the big at the Elbow (the same person who set the cross screen)...

... or pass to that big for Split cut action.

Against the Denver Nuggets in the 2021 NBA Playoffs, the Phoenix Suns, which had been using Horns Out consistently that series, used Horns Out Keep Snap to punish Nikola Jokic's drop coverage with Chris Paul's pull-up midrange game:

Sometimes, the cutter and the screener are in a so-called Stack alignment (instead of Horns), such as this Stack Down Ghost Angle:

Horns Out Flip:

Horns Out Flip often precedes a face cut/Danilovic cut, as in the clip below, and is explained in further detail on the Face Cut page.

See More: Horns Out Ram 77, Horns Out Ram Fist Flare, Horns Out Fade Chase PnR and Horns Out Flip Face.

How to Identify Pick-and-Roll Coverages

From left to right: x5 is above the level of the screen (blitz or hard hedge); at the level of the screen; below the level of the screen (drop)

3 Factors Differentiate Pick-and-Roll Coverages:

1. Does the on-ball defender channel the ballhandler towards the screen (**drop**, any **hedge**, **blitz**)? Towards the sideline (**ice**)? Or away from the screen/towards his weak hand (**weak**)?

2. Where is the screener's defender when the screen is set? Above the screen (**hard hedge** or **blitz**)? At the level of the screen (**catch hedge/at the level**)? Or a few steps below the screen (**drop**)?

3. What does the screener's defender do after the screen is set? Does he trap the ballhandler until he picks up his dribble (**blitz**)? Does he redirect the ballhandler towards the halfcourt line for a couple of steps before retreating (**hard hedge**)? Does he try to contain the ballhandler until the on-ball defender can recover (**catch hedge**)? Or does he drop back, keeping both the dribbler and the roller in front of him (**drop**)?

Coverage:	Direction?	Location of Screener's Defender	Action of Screener's Defender
Ice (push, blue)	Towards sideline	2+ steps below screen	Drop back
Weak	Towards weak/left hand	2+ steps below screen	Drop back
Drop	Towards screen	2+ steps below screen	Drop back
Catch Hedge	Towards screen	At or 1 step below screen	Contain dribbler, then recover
Hard Hedge	Towards screen	Above screen	~2 steps on dribbler, then recover
Blitz (trap)	Towards screen	Above screen	Trap dribbler

For the first component, the on-ball defender almost always channels the dribbler towards the screen (see the section **"What Happens When the On-Ball Defender and the Screener's Defender Have Different Agendas?"** below). The notable exceptions are **ice** (towards the sideline) and **weak** (towards his weak hand/away from the screen).

The second component is pretty consistent. A big might drop deeper or shallower depending upon a few factors, but where he stands when the screen is set—above it, close enough to touch it, or a few steps below it—is the easiest tell of which PnR coverage the defense is using.

The third component is the most nuanced. How long the screener's defender pressures the ballhandler differentiates **blitz** from **hedge**, and other coverages, especially **ice** and **weak**, which usually ask the defensive big to **drop**, but sometimes he'll **hedge, blitz,** or even **switch.**

- **Drop (aka "Soft"):** the screener's defender backpedals, looking to contain the ballhandler and the roller (drop coverage often

asks the screener's defender to keep both the ballhandler and the roller in front of him at all times)

- **Catch Hedge (aka "At the Level"):** The screener's defender crowds the dribbler, and then recovers to the roller (slightly more pressure on the ballhandler than drop, but less on-ball pressure than hedge or blitz)

- **Hedge ("Show"):** The screener's defender spends 1 or 2 steps doubling the ballhandler—ideally, redirecting him towards half-court—before retreating to the screener/roller (a hard hedge/show is more pressure, a soft hedge/show is less pressure, but there are also other subcategories, such as a flat hedge)

- **Blitz (Trap):** The screener's defender double-teams the ballhandler until he picks up his dribble.

There's also switching, which is intuitive, and other, less common coverages like "jam," "hug," or "body," in which the screener's defender nudges the screener farther and farther away from the basket so that the screen is now set outside the ballhandler's shooting range, which lets the on-ball defender go under the screen with impunity.

Furthermore, there are variations and subcategories for each of these entries, and the specific terminology and definitions vary from team to team. For a more complete picture, see below.

Drop/Deep Drop (aka "Soft"):

What it's good for:

- encouraging long 2s

- letting the off-ball defenders stick to their assignments instead of helping and recovering

- discouraging catch-and-shoot 3s from the off-ball offensive players

- not letting the screener get behind his defender on the roll

- slow-footed and/or tall defensive bigs with length

- on-ball defenders expert at avoiding screens

What it's bad for:

- preventing pull-up 2s and 3s (especially if the dribbler's defender is poor at navigating the screen)

- preventing pick-and-pop 3s from the screener

- undersized bigs (without athleticism to compensate)

In drop coverage, the on-ball defender directs the ballhandler towards the screen, and then the screener's defender starts several feet below the level of the screen. The screener's defender backpedals, always keeping himself between the ball and the basket — while not letting the roller get behind him. The goal for the screener's defender is to take

away shots at the rim (from either the ballhandler or the roller) and encourage long 2s.

The depth of the screener's defender varies according to the team's philosophy and the defender's mobility (less mobile defenders tend to drop more deeply), but in general, drop coverage looks like this, with the screener's defender a few feet below the screen (if not more):

Statistically, drop is the most effective coverage for ballscreens set in the middle of the floor. If the on-ball defender gets caught by the screen, however, drop can concede pull-up 3s.

Or pull-up 2s:

Or drop can give the ballhandler a large runway to gain speed to attack the big for a layup:

There are subcategories within drop coverage, especially with regard to how deeply the screener's defender greets the screen. And sometimes the execution differs from the plan. For example, a coach might want his big to be in more of a catch hedge/at the level technique, but if he's late to the screen, it might be safer for him to play drop coverage instead of flying to predetermined spot at the level of the screen and get blown by.

Perhaps the most common version is sometimes known as "no man behind" drop coverage, which asks the screener's defender to let neither the ballhandler nor the roller ever get behind him. For many teams, this type of drop is ideally a "2-on-2" coverage, which means the on-ball defender and the screener's defender hope to defend the pick-and-roll without any help from their teammates (such as a tagger). The Utah Jazz, for one example, have a different term for whether the low man should tag aggressively (if they are playing a more aggressive pick-and-roll defense) or if he should barely tag at all (when they are in deep drop and Rudy Gobert is told not to let the roller get behind him).

The best-laid plans often go awry, however, and if a defender has to choose between sticking to scheme and preventing a wide-open layup, his coach would want him to break scheme 99% of the time.

There are versions of drop that asks the screener's defender to begin much closer to the screen. If he's at or slightly below the level of the screen, however, that brings him closer to what's sometimes known as "catch hedge."

Catch Hedge (aka "At the Level," "Up to Touch,"):

What it's good for:

- taking away pull-up 2s and 3s from the dribbler

- screeners who aren't explosive threats rolling to the rim

What it's bad for:

- letting the screener get behind his defender on the roll (especially vulnerable to quick pocket passes or lobs over the top of the defensive big)

- forcing off-ball defenders to tag the roller, which makes it likelier that the offense gets a catch-and-shoot 3

- bigs who are too slow-footed to prevent the ballhandler from blowing past them, and bigs who are undersized

The precise definition of Catch Hedge varies from team to team, but think of it as a pick-and-roll coverage in between (deep) drop and hedge/show; when the screen is set, the screener's defender is too high to be considered (deep) drop but too low for hedge/show/blitz. In other words, a big in Catch Hedge is either at or slightly below the level of the screen. This is an adjustment to drop in order to take away pull-up 2s/3s and give the ballhandler less room to attack, but it's now easier for the roller to get behind his defender for a pocket pass (which

is why it's important for the screener's defender to keep his hands low to discourage/deflect such passes).

Catch hedge is similar to deep drop except for two things:

1. The screener's defender starts higher up on the floor (at or near the level of the screen; some coaches teach their big to have his toes even with the screener's heels)

2. The screener's defender is primarily concerned with the ballhandler (at the risk of letting the roller get behind him)

In a catch hedge, the screener's defender crowds the ballhandler until the on-ball defender can recover. As a result, catch is more vulnerable to the roller getting behind his defender — especially if the screener slips the screen — and therefore requires more attention from help defender(s) to tag the roller.

Hedge (Hard Hedge/Soft Hedge, aka "Show"):

What it's good for:

- getting the ball out of the dribbler's hands (presumably, the offense's best playmaker/decision-maker)

- stopping pick-and-pop 3s (by hedging, the defensive big is closer to the pick-and-popper than he would have been in drop coverage)

- defensive bigs who are nimble and/or smaller than most bigs

- avoiding a switch on a guard-to-guard ballscreen (guards like Trae Young, Luka Doncic, and Steph Curry often hedge when their man sets a ballscreen to avoid a switch/mismatch)

- on-ball defenders who aren't great at navigating screens

What it's bad for:

- stopping elite dribblers/playmakers who can easily navigate and/or pass over the double-team

- preventing catch-and-shoot 3s, since the off-ball defenders must [tag the roller](#)

The only difference between the next two coverages — hard hedge and blitz — is how long the screener's defender pressures the ballhandler before recovering to the screener. In both, the ballhandler's defender channels the ballhandler towards the screen, and then the screener's

defender is above the level of the screen; typically, he straddles the screener's top foot:

How long the screener's defender spends on the ballhandler differentiates the different subcategories. Perhaps the screener's defender takes one quick lunge at the ballhandler before retreating (a coverage sometimes called "soft hedge," among other names):
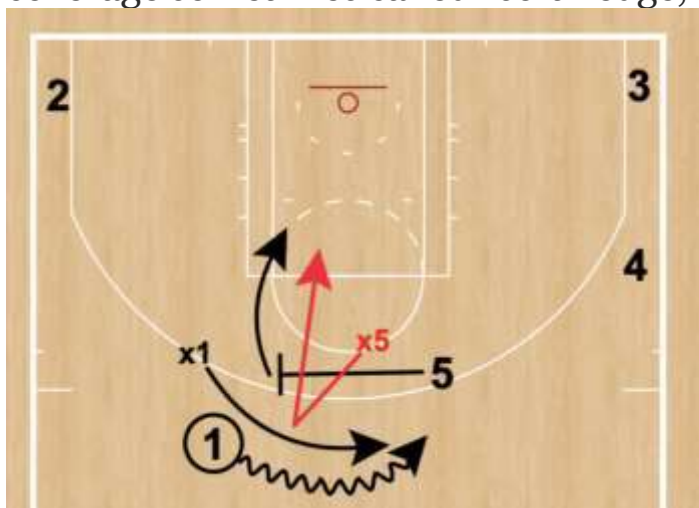
In a traditional "hard" hedge, the screener's defender takes two steps with the ballhandler to redirect him towards half-court. This can

momentarily look like a double-team, which is why Duke's coach Mike Krzyzewski calls it a "fake trap":
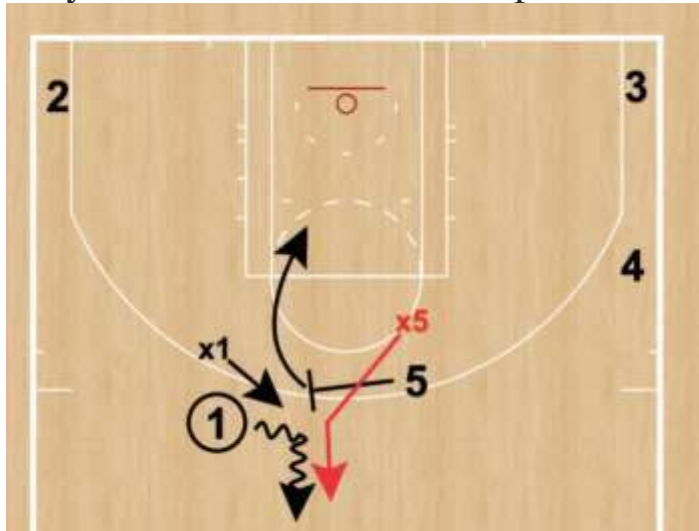
The ballhandler's defender goes over the screen but under the hedger, and then the screener's defender retreats to the roller as quickly as he can, with both hands raised to block a potential pass.

Perhaps the most important defender in a hard hedge is the tagger. Without him, the roller is left wide open underneath the basket.

Like weak and ice, hedge can also be combined with a switch, either intentionally or unintentionally (if the screener and the ballhandler are too far from each other for the hedger to recover to the screener, invoking an unplanned veerback switch between the two PnR defenders).

Blitz:

What it's good for:

- stopping elite playmakers and pull-up shooters

- forcing the screener to handle the ball in the short roll

What it's bad for:

- screeners who are superb at short-roll playmaking, like Draymond Green

- forcing the defense to defend 3v4 as the two defenders on the ball recover from trapping the dribbler

Blitz starts identically to a hard hedge, but then on-ball defender and the screener's defender trap the ballhandler. Whereas a hedging defender stays with the ballhandler for only a couple of steps before retreating, a blitzing defender stays with the ballhandler until he picks up his dribble:
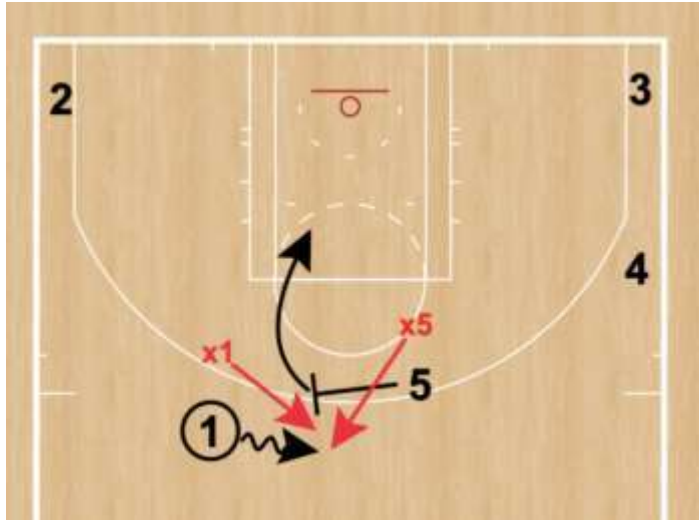
Meanwhile, the other three defenders zone off until the ballhandler picks up his dribble or makes a pass, at which point the screener's defender recovers.

Some coaches uses "blitz" and "trap" interchangeably, but sometimes there is a slight difference between the two terms. Stan Van Gundy, for example, uses "blitz" if the screener's defender retreats when the ballhandler picks up his dribble, but he uses "trap" if the screener's defender stays on the ballhandler even after picking up his dribble.

Ice:

What it's good for:

- forcing the ballhandler towards the sideline, away from his teammates (and thus passing options)

- encouraging long 2s

What it's bad for:

- pick-and-pop 3s

- defenses who aren't adept at help responsibilities

- pull-up 3s (if the defensive big is in drop)

In ice coverage (aka "blue," "push," "down," or "channel"), the on-ball defender forces the ballhandler towards the sideline, and the screener's defender drops back, staying in between the ball and the basket. (How far back he drops changes depending upon several factors, including his mobility, the location of the screen, and defensive scheme.) When the on-ball defender fully recovers, the screener's defender returns to his man.

Ice is used for side ballscreens and helps enforce the common "no middle" defensive philosophy. And because about 95% of NBA players are right handed, ice is used most often on the left side of the court, forcing the ballhandler to his left hand.

When the screen is set for the ballhandler to dribble towards the middle of the court, ice looks like this, with the on-ball defender denying the screen:

However, if the screen is designed for the ballhandler to dribble towards the sideline, the on-ball defender is still forcing him away from the middle of the court, even if that means encouraging the screen instead of denying it. In this case, ice looks identical to drop:
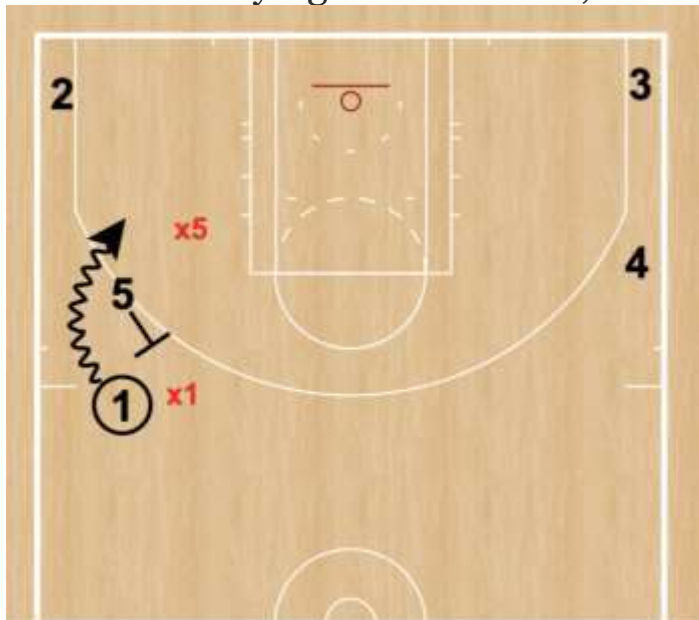
Usually, the screener's defender is in drop coverage, but ice can be combined with many other types of coverages. For example, "ice to

blitz" refers to the on-ball defender forcing the ball towards the side, and the screener's defender traps the ballhandler ("ice to blitz" typically occurs when the screen is set too close to the sideline, which acts as a third defender). "Ice to switch" involves the on-ball defender forcing the dribbler towards the sideline, and then he and the screener's defender switch. And in "ice to touch," the screener's defender is at the level of the screen, à la catch hedge.

Weak:

What it's good for:

- preventing pick-and-roll maestros from running pick-and-rolls (especially pick-and-rolls toward their strong hand)

What it's bad for:

- letting the ballhandler have a straight-line drive towards the hoop

- defenses that aren't adept at help responsibilities

Weak is used for pick-and-rolls in the middle of the court, but the activity is similar to ice. The name "weak" comes from the on-ball defender preventing the dribbler from using a screen on his right, forcing him to his left/weak hand:

Confusingly, the term "weak" has evolved in different directions, leading to contradictory definitions.

For some, "weak" always refers to forcing the dribbler to his weak hand, forcing a right-handed player to the left or a left-handed player to the right. If the screen is set for a right-handed dribbler to go right, "weak" means the on-ball defender denies the screen. But according to this definition, "weak" also refers to forcing a right-handed player to his left, even if that means directing him into the screen. In this case, "weak" looks identical to drop:
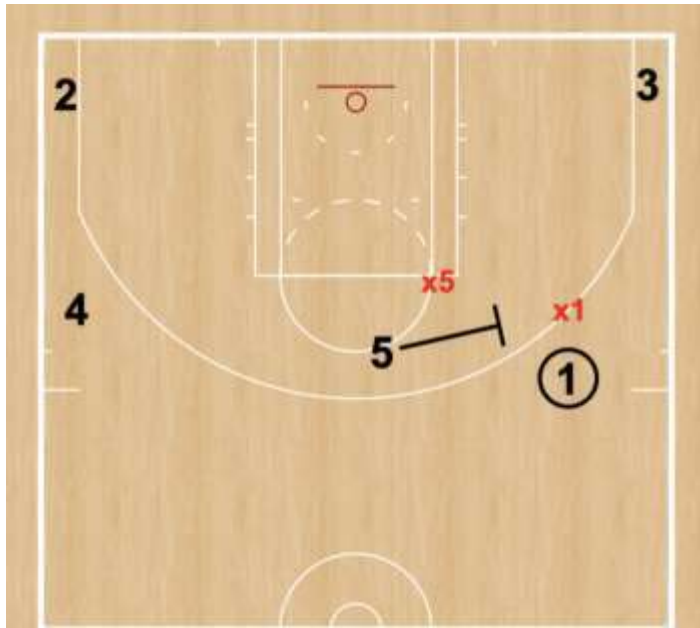
However, a second definition of "weak" always means "force him left," whether the ballhandler is right-handed or left-handed.

Why would a defender force a left-handed guard to his left side? Ironically, some left-handed guards are better going to their right. Second, weak, like ice, can help keep the ball on one side of the floor, reinforcing no-middle philosophy. Third, denying ballscreens can disrupt the offense's attempt to combine a pick-and-roll with another action, such as coordinated PnR Exits or this would-be (Away Reject) Spain PnR that ends up forcing Hayes to his left and missing a floater:

But perhaps the best reason for "weak" always meaning "force him left" is that it's simplest to remember. Instead of having the screener's defender and the on-ball defender constantly stopping to remember

the ballhandler's strong hand, some teams simply use "weak" to mean "force him left" and "strong" to mean "force him right."

N.B.: "Strong" and "Weak" are also common coverage calls from the screener's defender to the dribbler's defender, in which case "strong" means "force him to his right" and "weak" means "force him to his left."

Like ice, weak can also be combined with other coverages, such as "weak to switch" or "weak to blitz." However, also like ice, weak is most often combined with some variation of drop.

What Happens When the On-Ball Defender and the Screener's Defender Have Different Agendas?

Willie Sutton was a Depression Era bank robber — a peer of Bonnie and Clyde, John Dillinger, and Baby Face Nelson — who is best known today for a quote he didn't say. According to apocrypha, a journalist asked why he robbed banks. Slick Willie Sutton replied, "Because that's where the money is."

Most coverages want the ballhandler to use the screen. Why? Because that's where the help is.

"Korver Screen"

Term: Korver Screen

Definition: a pin-down or pin-in screen set by a player who was expected to receive a screen.

How It Works: In the diagram above, 4 comes to the corner to set a pin-down screen for 2, an elite shooter (think Kyle Korver). But then 2 screens for 4 to pop out to the 3-point line.

See Also: Cyclone, rip DHO, Spanoulis

Origin of the Name: The Korver screen was popularized by Kyle Korver, who used the move with the Atlanta Hawks and the Cleveland Cavaliers. A teammate would come over to Korver as if to set a screen for him, but then Korver would turn into the screener.

"We call it the 'Korver Screen' when he screens the big and Kevin (Love) pops back, getting out," [Tyronn Lue, the head coach of the Cavaliers, said in 2018](#). "They switch, Kevin has smaller guys on him. So that played a factor in his shooting ability."

Why It Works: A theme of a number of these posts, from [rip DHO](#) to [Cyclone](#), is that good shooters make excellent screeners. The high level of attention shooters like Kyle Korver, Klay Thompson, and Duncan Robinson attract from their defenders leave those defenders unwilling or unable to provide help defense on a screen.

"Laker Cut"
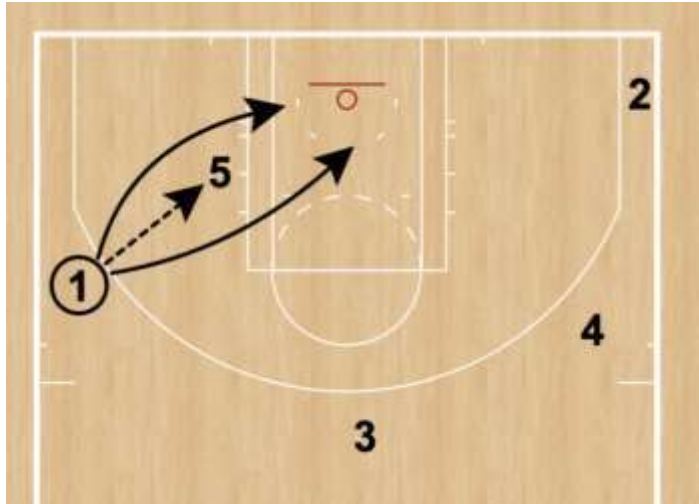
Term: Laker Cut

Definition: a basket cut made by the player who passed the ball into the post

Origin: The Showtime Lakers, which used the Laker Cut a lot, especially with Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

How It Works:

In the diagram above, 1 passes to 5 in the post and then makes a Laker cut to the basket, either above ("high Laker cut") or ("low Laker cut") his teammate in the post.

If the cutter doesn't receive a pass, he continues his cut all the way through to the far corner to space the floor.

Why It Works:

First and foremost, the Laker cut embodies the popular offensive philosophy of always following a pass with a cut. Many offenses, but not all of them, teach their players that passing and then standing still is a sin.

Second, the Laker cut, much like UCLA and Chin screens, takes advantage of defenders' tendency to relax after their mark has passed the ball. Defenders frequently take their attention off their mark and watch the ball — especially if that pass's recipient is the NBA's leading scorer of all time—and as a result, the passer is often open for a give-and-go:

Third, the Laker cut takes away the perimeter defender's ability to dig down, or stunt/feign a double team, on the post player. Digs always come from the strong side, which makes it easier for the digger to dig and then recover to his man. (Double teams can come from the strong or the weak side, depending upon scheme.) A Laker cut takes the possible digger from the strong to the weak side, and although the offense often rotates over somewhat to make room for the Laker cutter, no perimeter defender is as close to the ball as the original digger had been.

Fourth, a low Laker cut—in which the cutter veers below the post instead of above him—frequently concedes a layup because of the NBA's "no middle" defensive philosophy. Most NBA teams defend practically everything, including post-ups, by funneling the ball away from the paint/middle of the floor and toward the sideline/baseline. In the following diagram, notice the positioning of both x1 and x5 relative to their matchups. Because x1 is enforcing no middle, he's susceptible to getting beat by 1's low Laker cut, and because x5 is also enforcing no middle, he might be unable to protect the rim in time:
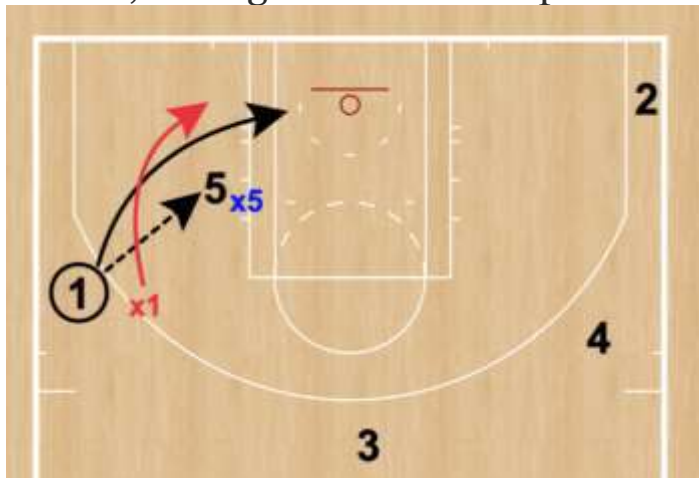
In the absence of a Laker cut, x1 would dig down, and the low man—x2 in this example—would rotate over if 5 attempted to spin toward the baseline (x4 would close out to 2 in the corner, if necessary):
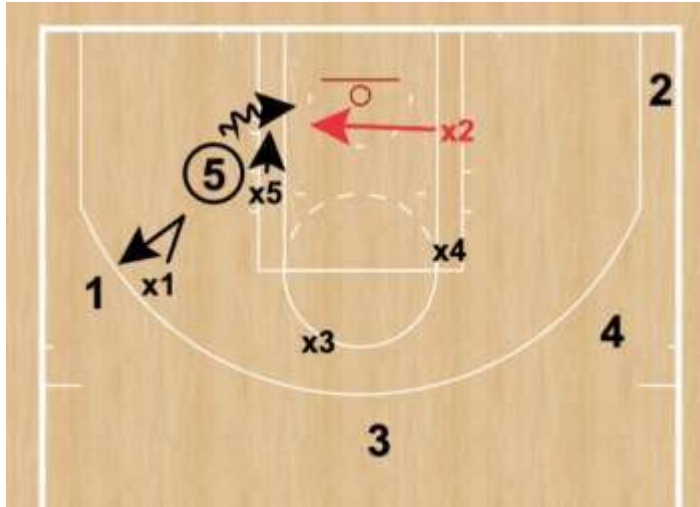
But the low man is usually too far from the ball to prevent a layup against a low Laker cut, which is why many teams teach their players to break their "no middle" scheme to stop low Laker cuts, funneling the cutter through the middle instead of toward the baseline.

Fifth, a Laker cut, even if it's defended perfectly during the cut, can confuse the roles and responsibilities of the help defenders. In nearly every defensive scheme, especially among NBA teams, the two help defenders farthest from the ball form a "weakside i," standing parallel to each other (x2 and x4 below):
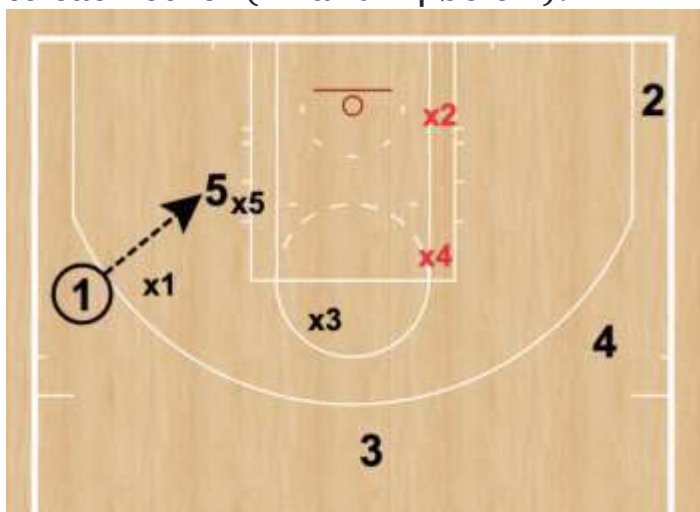
(Because the NBA has its defensive three-second violation, which awards the offense a free throw if any defender is in the paint for three seconds without being within reach of an offensive player, the two members of the weakside i often straddle the lane line on the far side, 2.9-ing in and out of the paint. At lower levels, the weakside i is frequently in the paint, perhaps on the rim line.)
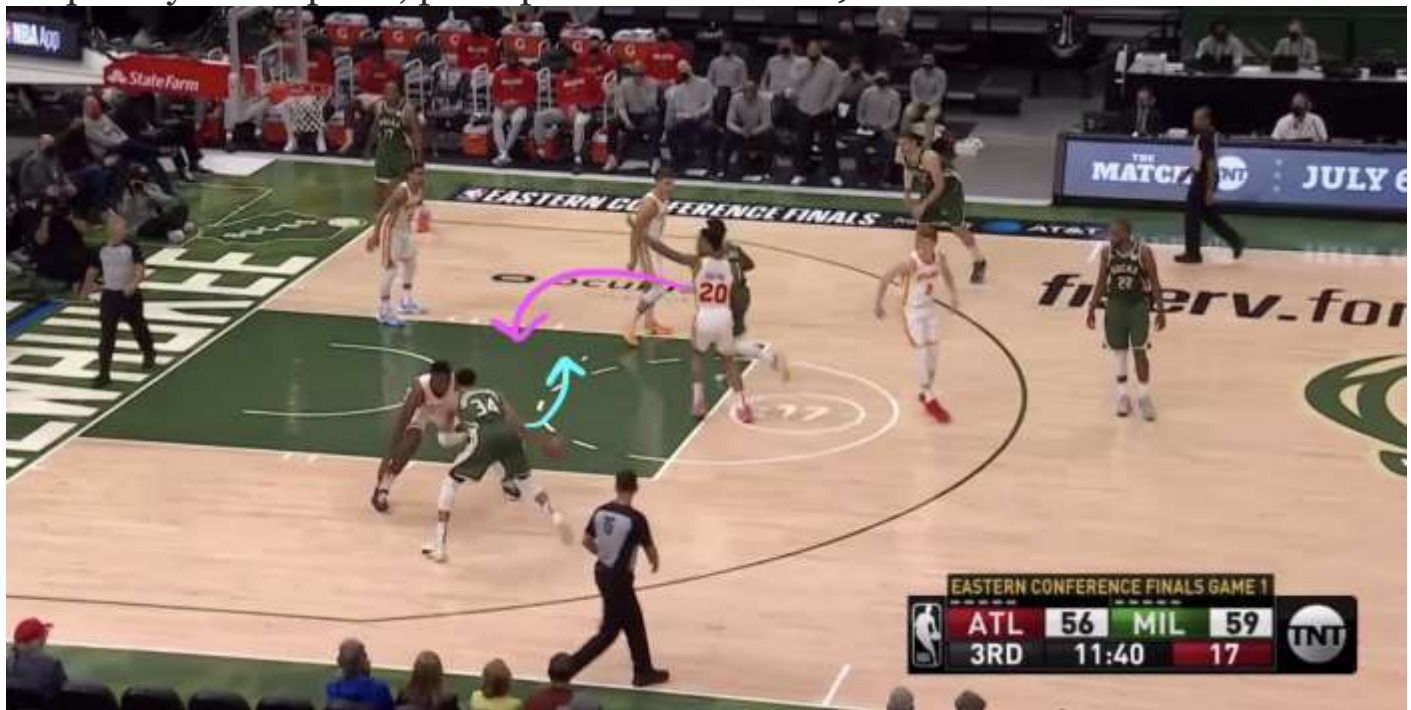
Sixth, a Laker cut can be effective even if it doesn't directly lead to a bucket because it compromises the opponent's post defense. Although post-ups might not be de rigueur in the NBA, their ineffectiveness has perhaps been overstated, especially among the most frequent users of the post-up. According to Cleaning the Glass, halfcourt offenses averaged 0.95 points per play in the 2019-20 NBA season. Among the 21 NBA players who logged the most post-ups that season, 15 of them (71.%) averaged at least 0.94 ppp (excluding assists from the post).

Post-up scoring, furthermore, is frequently more effective than isolation possessions: 0.920 ppp vs 0.908 ppp, respectively, in 2019–20.

"Low Man"

Term: Low Man

Definition: the defender closest to the baseline and hoop on the weak side of the floor, responsible for providing the first and most important layer of help defense

Synonyms: Low, Gaucho (the term used by Quin Snyder's Utah Jazz), 2.9 defender, MIG ("Most Important Guy")

See Also: Nail Defender

Prerequisite Reading:

Unsurprisingly, Dylan Murphy's excellent Basketball Dictionary does a great job explaining the four main principles of help defense:

1. **Two-Nine**: help defenders' technique of jumping in and out of the paint to deter driving lanes without invoking a defensive 3-second violation

2. **Trap the Box:** the low man's rotation to the strongside low block if the ballhandler drives to the hoop

3. **Sink and Fill (aka "Help the Helper"):** the weakside defensive rotation in which a perimeter defender "sinks" down to defend the low man's mark (near the dunker spot) after the low man has rotated to the trap the box on the strong side, followed by the next defender "filling" into the lane

4. **X-out (or "X-ing")**: a defensive rotation after the ball has been passed out of the strong side, and then the path of defenders' closeouts form an X as they switch matchups

In this diagram, x5 (red) traps the box as x3 (blue) sinks and x4 (yellow) fills. After the ball has been passed out to the corner, x4 and x3 X-out (gray):
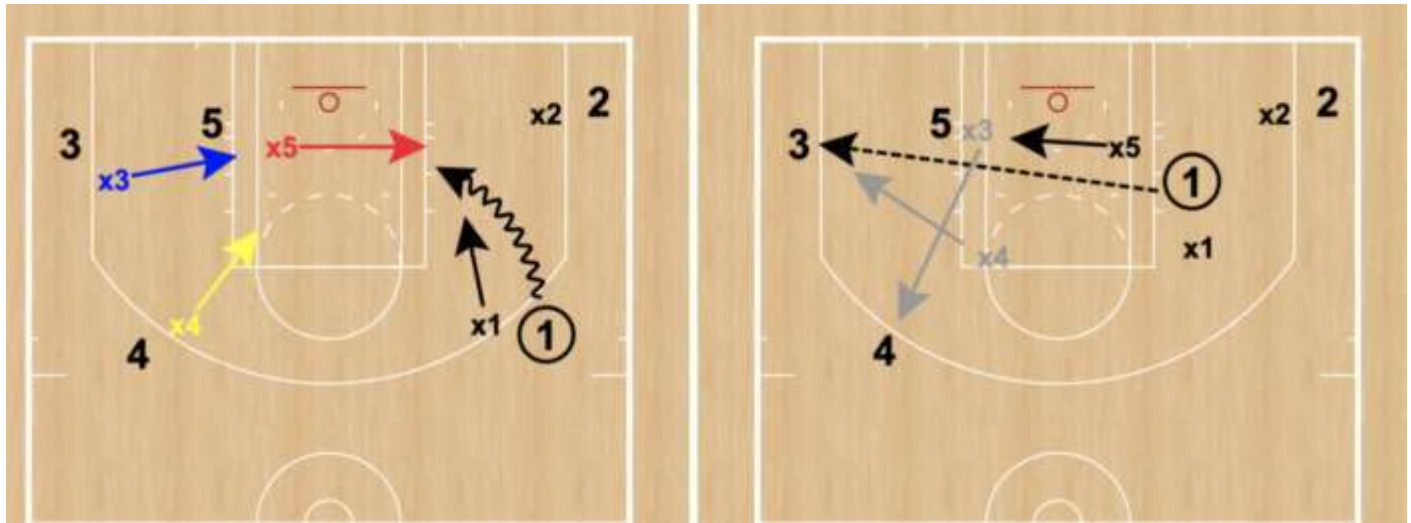
This post will touch on some of those concepts while expanding specifically on 5-out and spread PnR situations, which have exponentially increased since Murphy began his Basketball Dictionary in 2016, when 4-out sets were more common among NBA teams.

How It Works (Overview):

As 5 sets a ballscreen on the strong side of the floor, x4, who is guarding the player in the weakside corner, is the low man. He and x3, the nail defender, form a "weakside i":

Against a 4-out look — which almost invariably places the 5 in the weakside box/dunker spot to open up driving lanes on the strong side — the low man is x5, since he is closer to the hoop than x4.

Because of the NBA's defensive 3-second violation, the low man often straddles the lane line, 2.9-ing in and out of the paint. At lower levels,

the low man is usually stationed in the paint, which is beneficial for two main reasons:

1. The low man in the paint is a stronger rim deterrent because he's in between the ball and the basket instead of having to rotate over

2. If 1 makes a skip pass to his matchup, the low man (x4) can make a "one-way stunt" (i.e., from the paint to the corner) to close out. A one-way stunt is easier than a "two-way stunt" (i.e., from the weakside low block into the paint, and then back out to the corner), which is longer and uses the low man's momentum toward the ball against him:
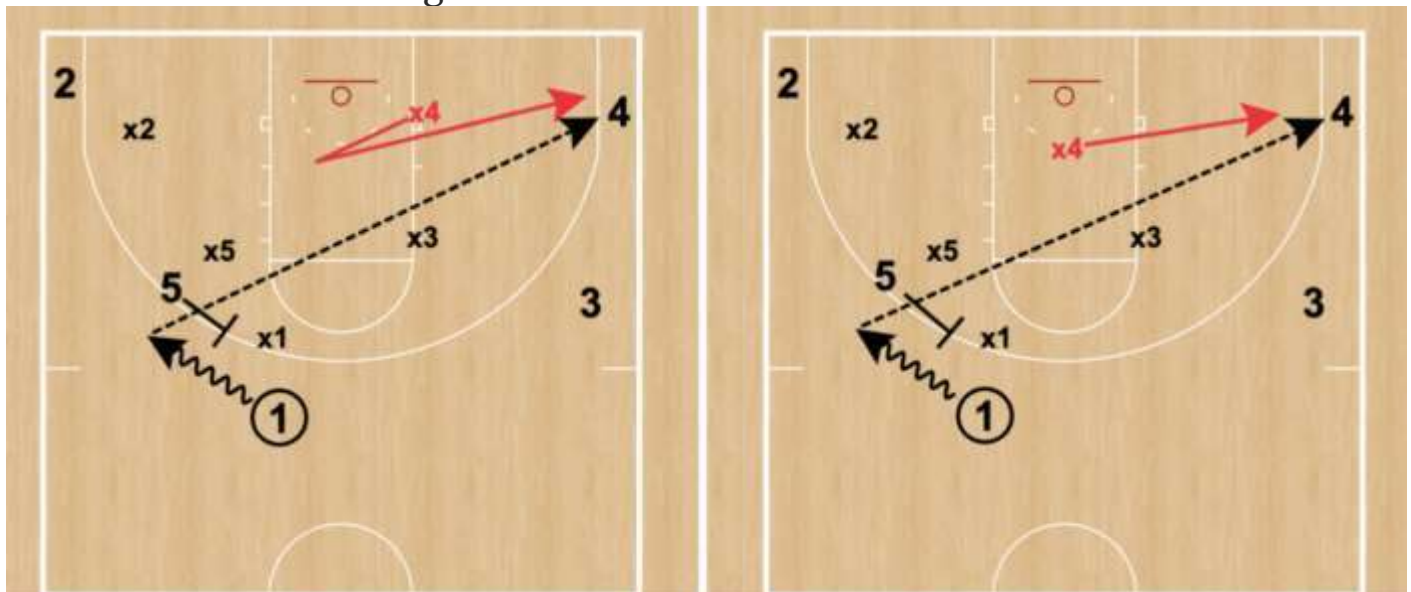
4 Responsibilities of the Low Man (incomplete list)

1. trapping the box (rotating to stop dribble penetration)

2. tagging the roller

3. pinching in (when the defense is fronting the post)

4. rotating for post-ups (especially when the post player spins baseline)

1. Trapping the Box (Stopping the Ballhandler)

The low man's first responsibility is to rotate to the strong side and offer rim protection in the event of a drive.

2. Tagging the Pick-and-Roll (Stopping the Roller)

After dribble penetration, tagging the roller is perhaps the biggest responsibility of the low man. When there are two defenders on the weak side, many teams like to have both of them—the nail defender (x3) and the low man (x2)—tag the roller. The nail bumps or lightly tags the roller early in his roll to stop him from gaining momentum, and then the low man is the final tagger:

When there is only one player on the weakside of a pick-and-roll, the low man is the only possible tagger (in most schemes, but not all of them). Offenses go to great extents to remove the tagger and/or make his life as difficult as possible.

Tagging is always a read, however. If the roller is already contained, an unnecessary tag from the low man gives up a corner 3. The same thing happens if the tagger focuses too closely on the roller and not enough on the shaker, who is often lifting up to the wing:

The next example is a play called Horns Out Angle: Washington's Montrezl Harrell sets a cross screen for Bradley Beal to cut to the left wing, and then Harrell snaps around and sets an angled ballscreen:
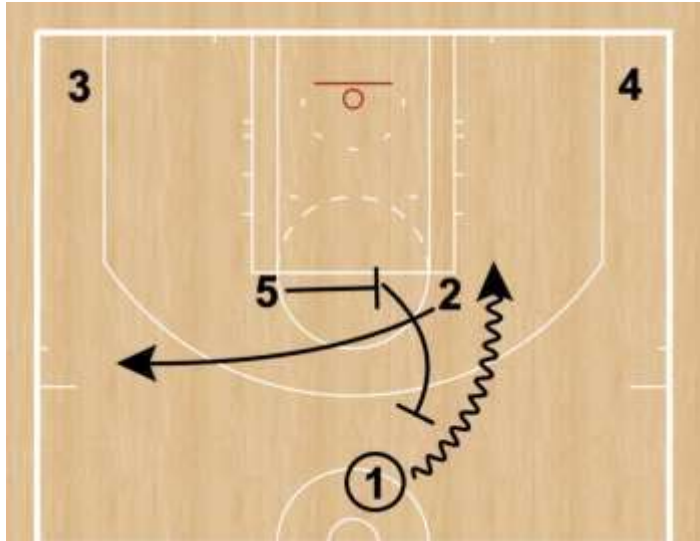
Offenses often try to put the opponent's worst defender in the weakside corner. Notice that the Wizards ran the above play so that Trae Young, not John Collins (who is in the opposite corner), is the low man. Another change is putting a stretch four on the weakside wing instead of in the weakside corner, which prevents the opponent's PF from being the low man and thus a secondary rim protector. Offenses also have their two weakside perimeter players "exchange," or change spots on the floor, so that the weaker defender is the low man (defenses often switch these exchanges to prevent that from happening).

On the flip side, defenses like to place their best defender as the low man. Some of the greatest defenders in recent years, from Draymond Green and Giannis Antetokounmpo to Kawhi Leonard and Robert Covington, are purposely tasked with "guarding" low-usage players so that they can prioritize help defense rather than locking down the opponent's top scorer.

3. Pinching In (When Fronting the Post)

Against good post scorers—especially after a switch has caused a drastic mismatch—some teams like to "front the post," or face-guard the post defender and force a pass over the top:

Fronting a mismatch in the post (called "white" by some coaching staffs and "red" by others) fixes the immediate problem—a post feed—but concedes perhaps a bigger problem: an easy over-the-top pass for a dunk. That's why it's the duty of the low man (x4 below) to "pinch in" and take away that pass:

Although the low man is supposed to be the first line of help protection at the rim, the most important rule of defense: Always break scheme if it means preventing a layup.

4. Rotating for Post-Ups (especially against baseline spins)

As with trapping the box against dribble penetration, the low man is also responsible for rotating over and stopping the ball if an offensive player in the post beats his defender. Because most NBA defenses have a "no middle" philosophy, a post defender, if he does get beat, often gets beat by a baseline spin, which, uncoincidentally, forces him toward the low man.

Attacking the Low Man (Coming Soon):

Because the low man is so crucial to the opponent's help defense, offenses have great success toying with the low man. Here is a limited number of techniques:

1. [Roll and Replace](#)

2. [Exit Screen](#)

3. [Hammer Screen](#)

"Miami"
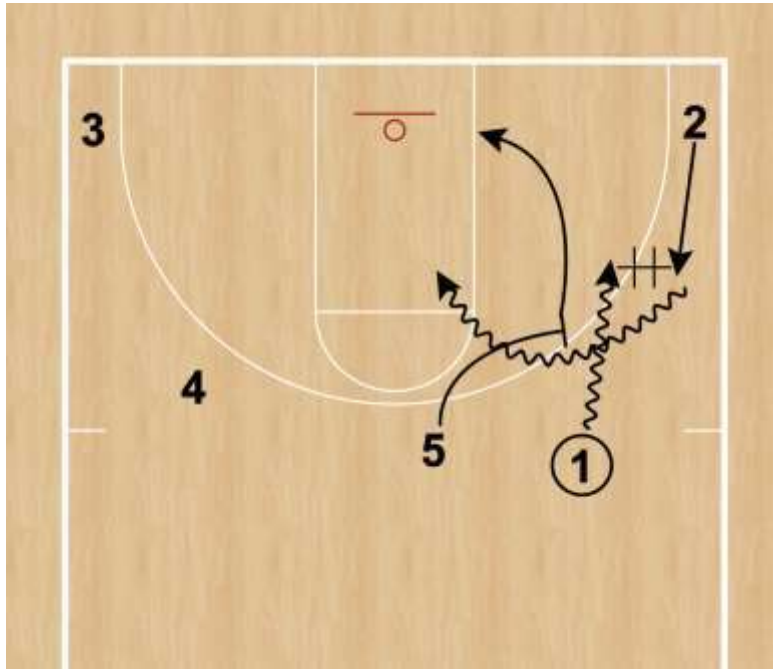
Term: Miami

Definition: a DHO (dribble handoff) followed by a ballscreen

Synonyms: Orlando, DHO ballscreen, Pistol (the Triangle offense's term for this action, along with what's also known as Chicago; not to be confused with the Pistol series also known as 21

See Also: Chicago (a screen → DHO rather than a DHO → screen), Pistol

Origin of the Name: The Miami Heat

How It Works: In the diagram above, the ballhandler on the right wing (1) DHOs to the guard coming from the right corner (2). That guard then receives a ballscreen from the big coming from the top of the key (5).

Sometimes the guard who receives the DHO will execute a "throw and get" with the big. Instead of dribbling into a pick-and-roll, he passes the ball ahead to the big and gets it back via a second handoff.

Sometimes Miami action is followed by a double ballscreen, making the play Miami Double Drag or Miami 77:

And then sometimes a team runs Miami Double Drag [Veer](#) Stagger [Gaggle.](#)

"Motion Strong"
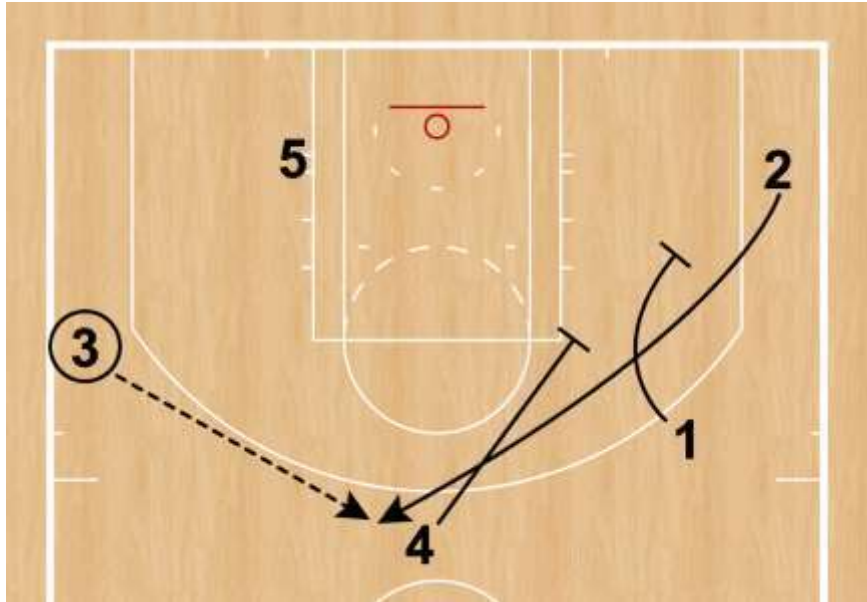
Term: "Motion Strong"

Definition: a stagger (two-person) pin-down screen for the player in the far corner

Synonyms: Strong, Stagger, Point, Away, Double Away (note: some use "Away" to mean "Motion Strong," while others use "Away" to mean a one-person away screen, such as 4 screening for 1 in the diagram above)

See Also:

- **Motion Weak:** like Motion Strong, Motion Weak is a staple of the Spurs motion offense in which the point guard loops through the lane to the weakside wing

- **Delay:** a 5-out alignment with the center at the top of the key with the ball, along with one player at each wing and each corner

- **Twirl/Boston:** a Motion Strong variation in which when the cutter (2 in the diagram above) curls around the 1st screener (1 in the diagram above), and 1 then cuts off 4's screen to the top of the key

Origin of the Name: In Motion Strong, the point guard stays on the strong side (unlike Motion Weak).

How It Works: At its simplest, Motion Strong is a play in which the player at the top of the key and the player on the weakside wing set a down screen for their teammate in the weakside corner. In the diagram above, 4 and 1 set a stagger screen for 2.

The San Antonio Spurs initiated Motion Strong with a ball reversal and ran it out of 4-out spacing. Approaching the wing, the point guard passed to the trailing big at the top of the key, who passed to the weakside wing. The point guard and the trailer then set a stagger screen away from the ball:
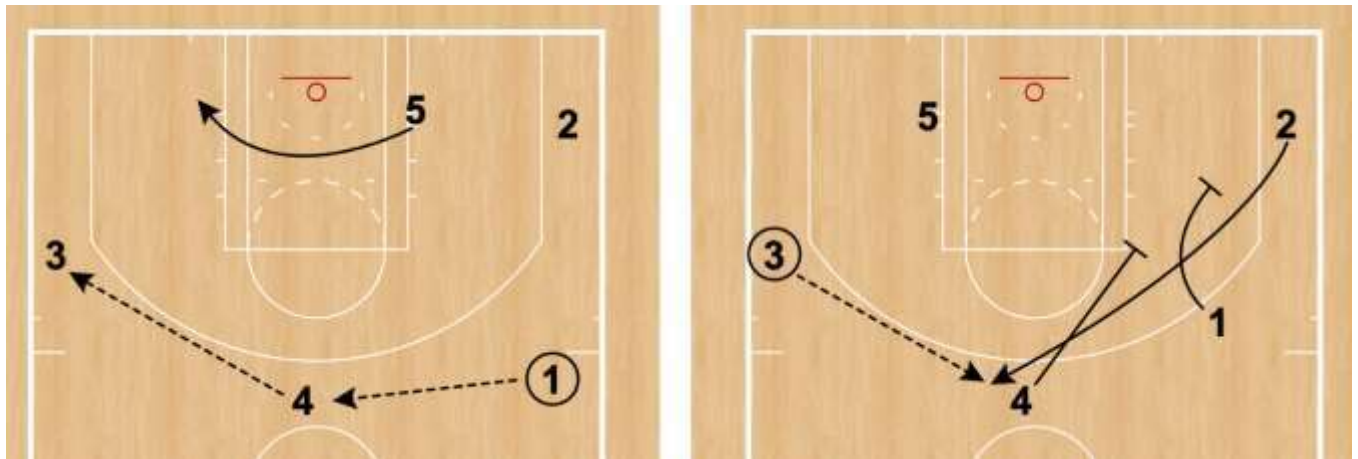
In the Spurs motion offense, the next progression in Motion Strong is known as "circle" or "wheel." The two players who set the initial stagger screen set another stagger, this time for the guard who began the play in the strongside corner:
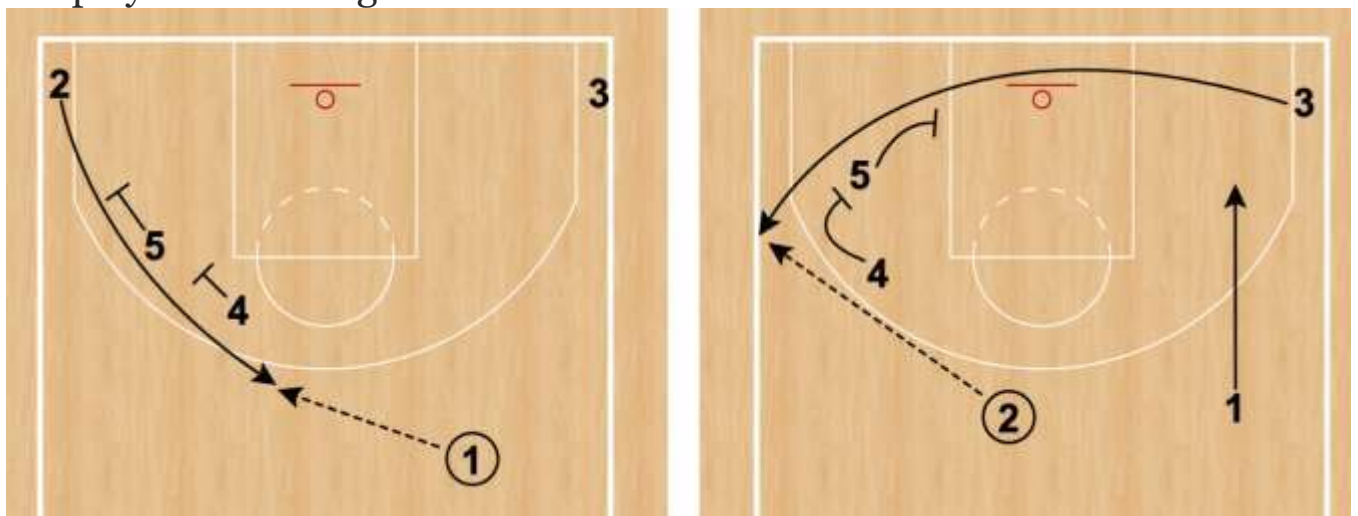
Outside the Spurs, however, wheel is far less common than the initial stagger screen, which is one of the most popular actions in the NBA. Motion Strong is often run from 5-out spacing and is initiated by the point guard simply pointing at the weakside corner (sometimes called "Dribble Entry"):
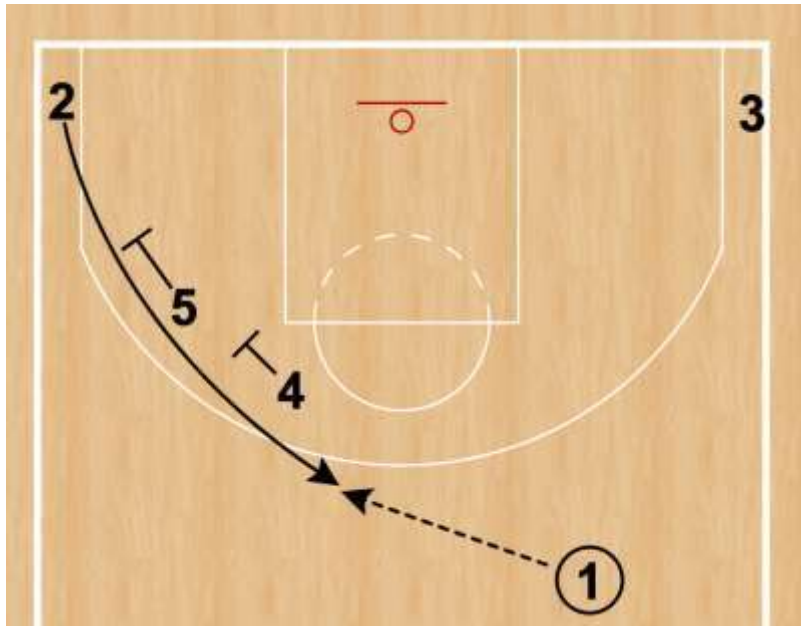
Why It Works:

Motion Strong is an effective scoring action that never compromises spacing: At every moment in the play, the lane is open for drives, cuts, or slips. As a result, Motion Strong can be a decoy action for an isolation.

Motion Strong is also difficult for defenses to switch against because either screener can easily slip to the hoop. Some teams zone off the weakside of the court against Motion Strong, while others automatically top-lock the cutter.

Motion Strong originally took advantage of weakside defenders' tendency to sag off their man toward the lane, in better position to provide help.

But the play has become so popular that the cutter's defender often [top-locks](#) him, using a defensive technique typically reserved for only the best of shooters. The cutter's defender positions himself between his man and the stagger screen, conceding a backdoor cut but preventing the cutter from using the screens.

Motion Strong, not to mention its many variations, has become so widespread and effective that defenses use more aggressive coverages than normal.

WRINKLES:

Many NBA defenses, if not most of them, guard Motion Strong by having the first screener's defender sag back close to the lane to prevent any slips. A common wrinkle is to have the first cutter curl the first screener, who then spins around and cuts off the second screener:

Motion Strong Twirl (aka "Motion Strong Boston"):
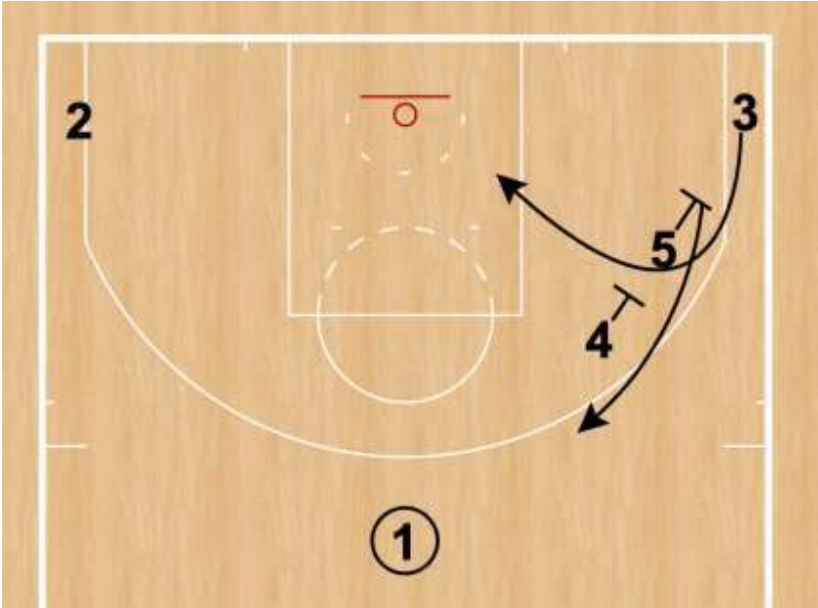
Horns Motion Strong:
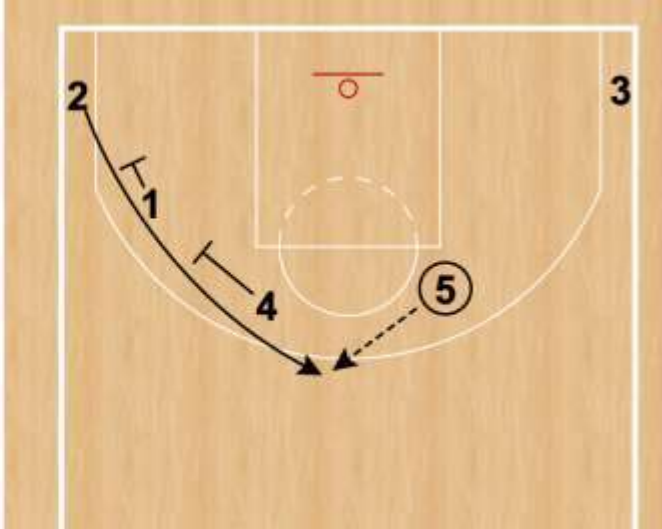
Motion Strong Twirl (aka "Motion Strong Boston"):
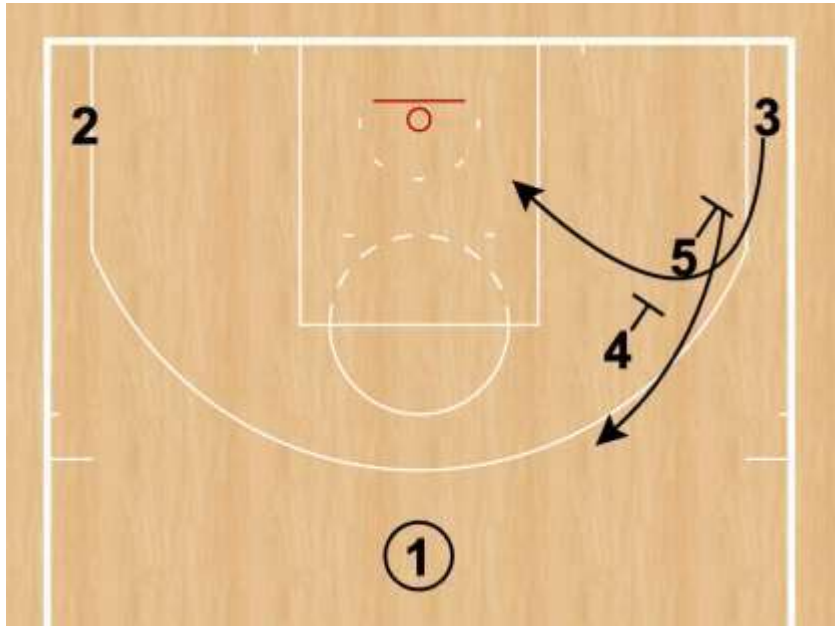
Motion Strong Twirl Exit:
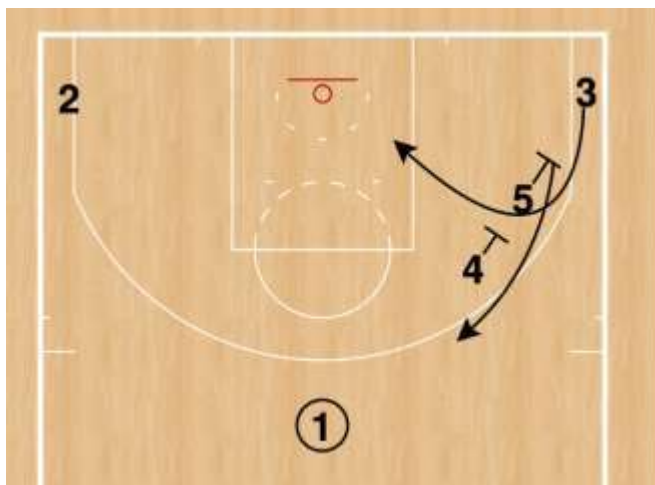
Motion Strong Elevator:
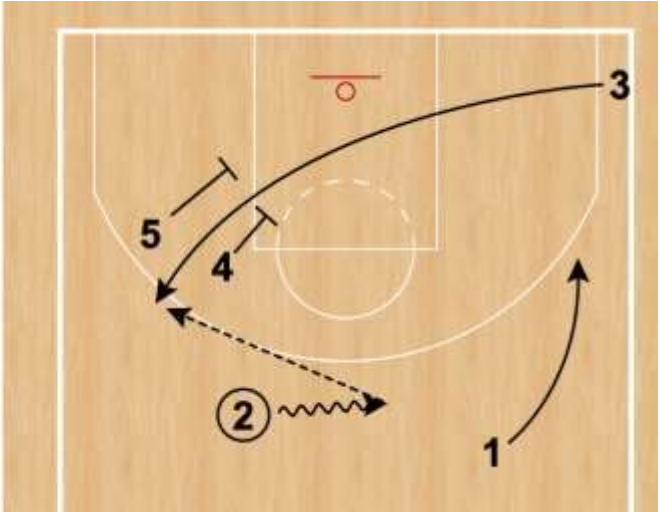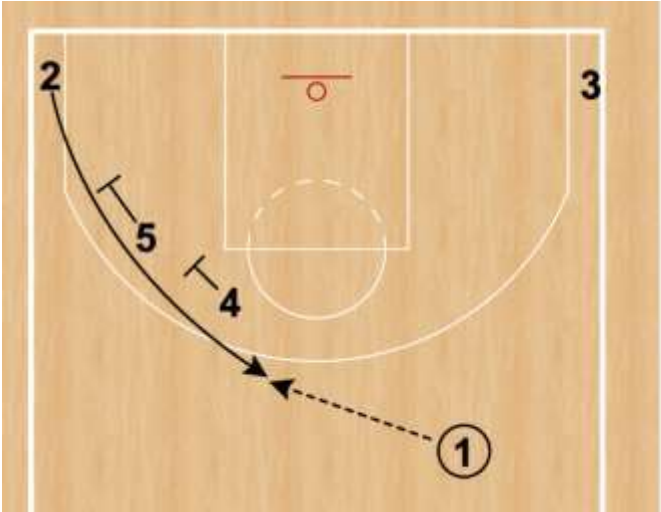
"Motion Weak"
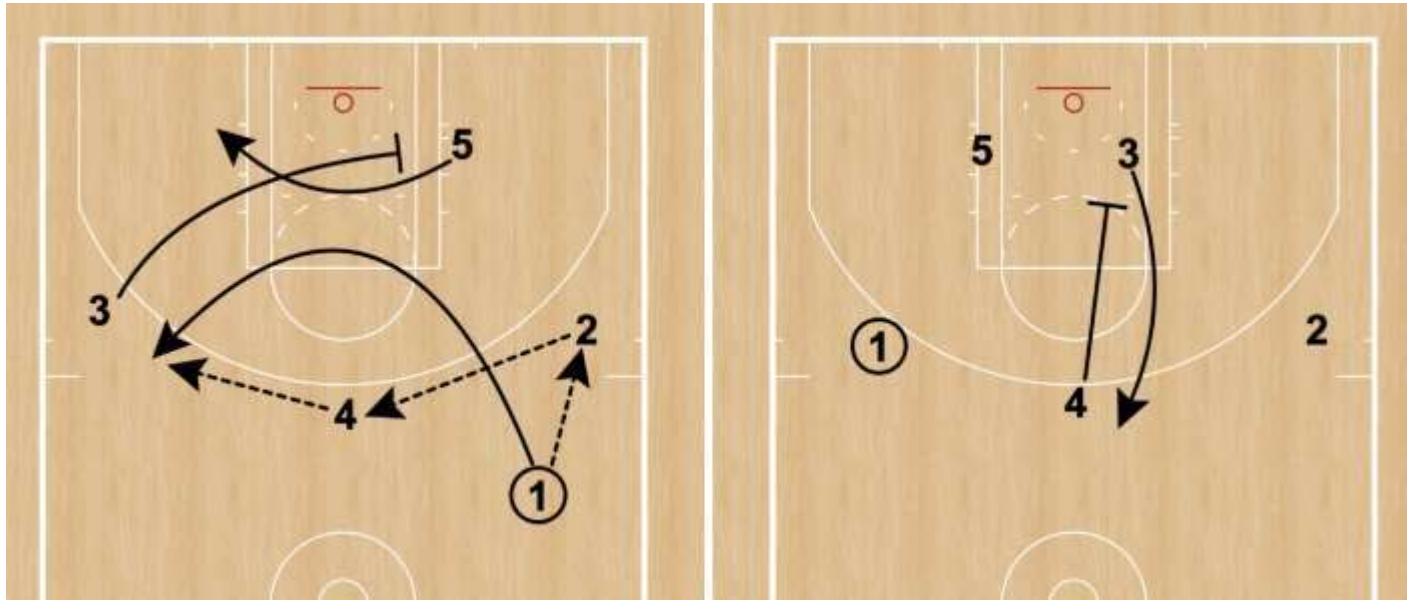
Term: Motion Weak

Definition: a play from the San Antonio Spurs' motion offense that involves the point guard making a thru cut to the weak side and a cross/pin-down screen-the-screener action

See Also: [Motion Strong](#) and [Loop](#) (two other plays from the Spurs' motion offense that begin with the same alignment)

How It Works: Motion Weak has many variations, but the diagram above is its core. In a 4-out alignment with the center on the strongside box (just like Motion Strong/Loop), the point guard passes to the shooting guard or small forward on the strongside wing and makes a thru cut to the weakside wing. The SG/SF passes to the trailing big (usually the power forward) at the top of the key, who swings the ball

back the point guard on the far side. Meanwhile, the player who began the possession on the weakside wing cuts toward the hoop to set a cross screen for the rim runner (usually the center), and then receives a down screen from the trailer.

That's only the starting point, however. Motion Weak also has designed counters, built-in reads/automatics, and room for improvisation based on the players' chemistry and strengths/weaknesses. The combination of both preplanned actions and improvisation helped the Spurs maintain a top offense even as Tim Duncan approached 40-years-old, and it helped create "The Beautiful Game" of the 2014 team:

Strong, Weak, and Loop: The Spurs' Motion Offense:

The Spurs' motion offense uses 4-out spacing, with one big at the strongside box and the other (trailer) at the top of the key, with three interchangeable perimeter players:
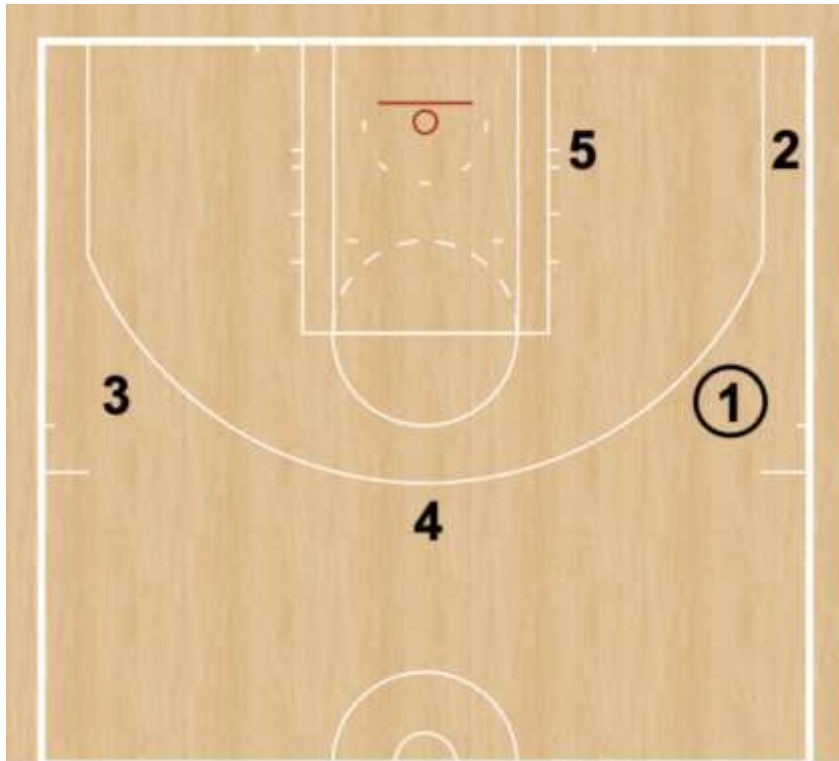
In Motion Strong, the ball swings to the far side, but the point guard remains on the strong side (hence the name). The rim runner flashes to the strong side, and then the point guard and the trailer set a staggered pin-down for the guard in the corner:
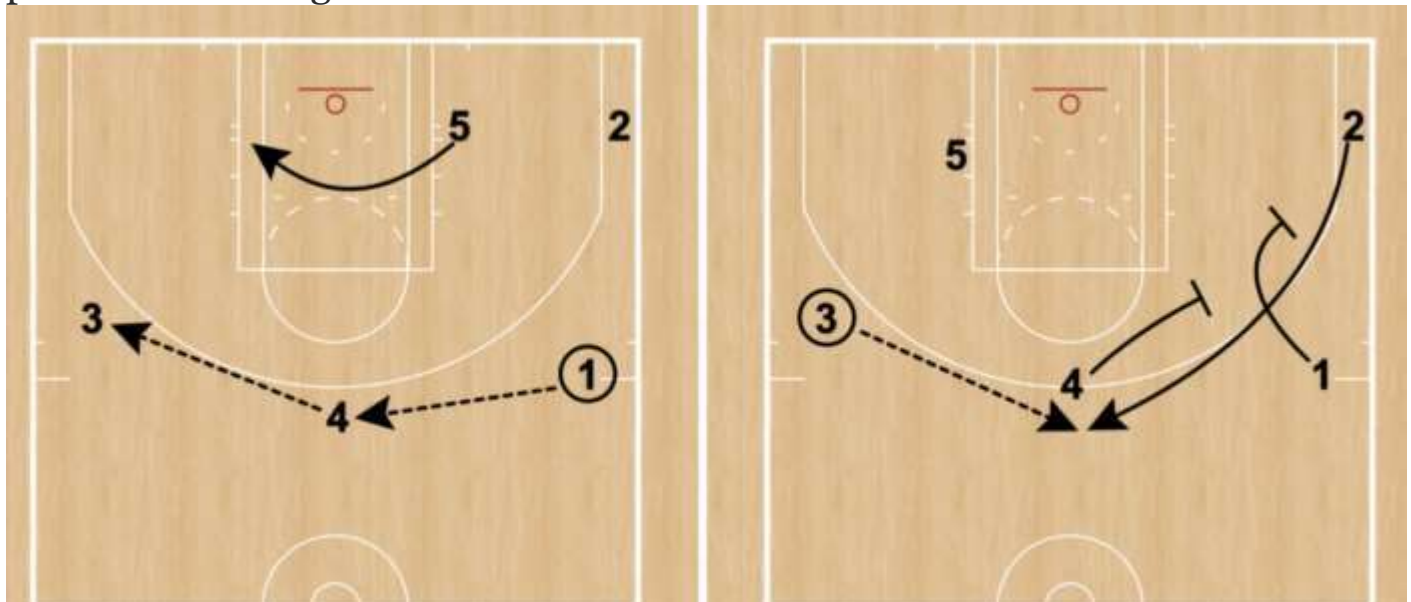
In Loop, the guard/wing in the strongside corner makes a [zipper cut](#), receiving the ball in the slot. The point guard then runs off a triple screen to the weak side. tThe guard/wing who set one of those screens (3 in the diagram below) cuts in the opposite direction, à la [Floppy](#):

Off-Ball Screens: 22 Diagrams, from Pin-Downs to Wiper Screens

3 sets a flare screen for 4
1 sets a pin-down screen for 2

flare and pin-down screens
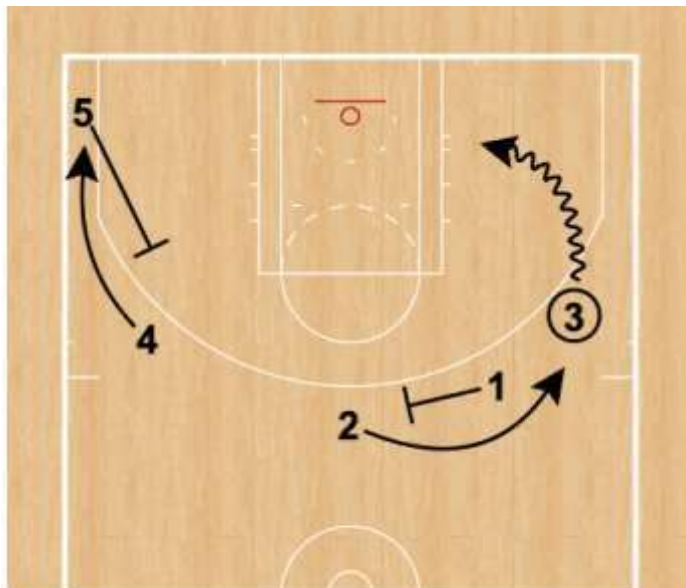
5 sets a hammer screen for 4
1 sets a comeback screen (or a level screen) for 2

[hammer](#) and comeback/level screens

4 sets a UCLA screen for 1
5 sets a Chin screen for 3
* note: Both UCLA and Chin are subtypes of backscreens

UCLA, chin, backscreens

2 sets a Korver screen for 5
4 sets an exit screen (aka "corner pin-in" screen) for 3

Exit and Korver screens
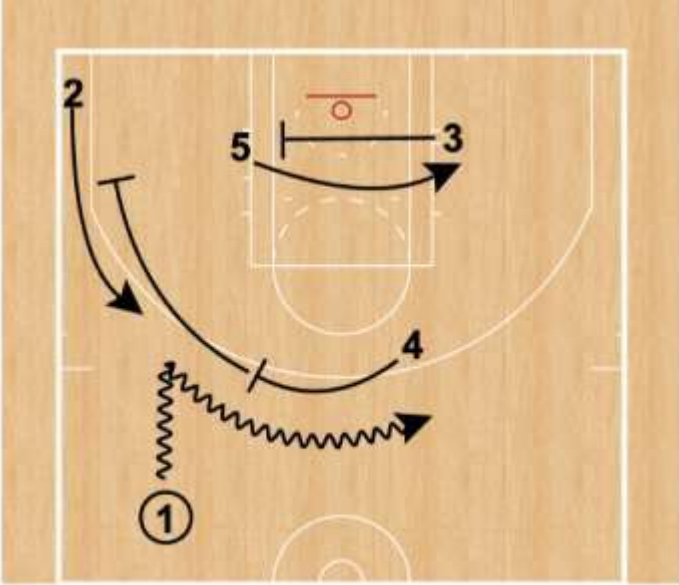
4 sets a veer screen for 2
3 sets a cross screen for 5

[Veer](#) and cross screens

4 sets a Garfunkel Screen for 2
3 and 5 Exchange

[Garfunkel](#) screen and exchange
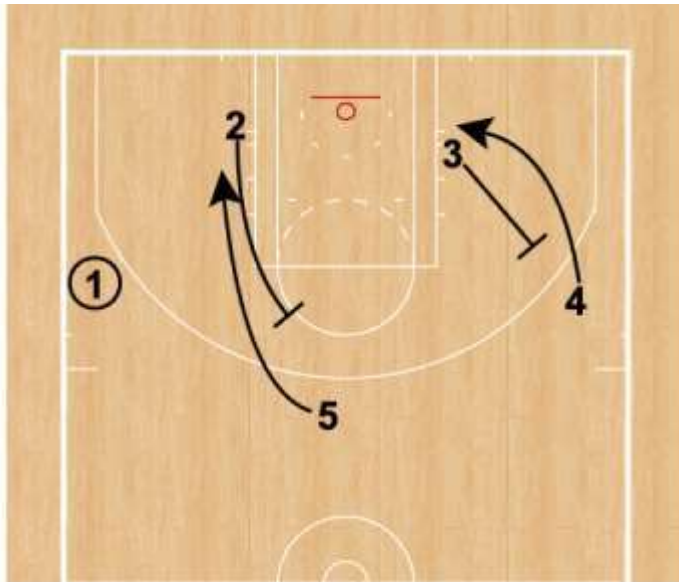
2 sets a Wedge Screen for 5
3 sets a backscreen (aka "rip") for 4

[Wedge screen](); backscreen/rip
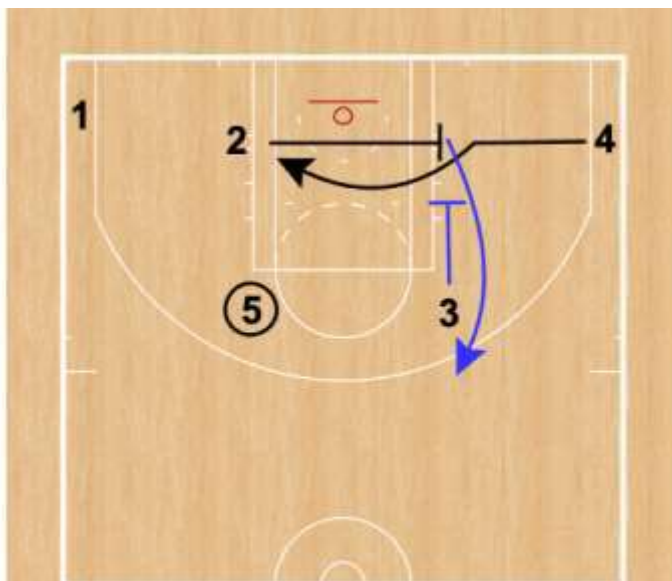
2 sets a Flex Screen for 4
3 sets a Down Screen for 2 for Screen-the-Screener (StS) action

flex and down screen (screen the screener)
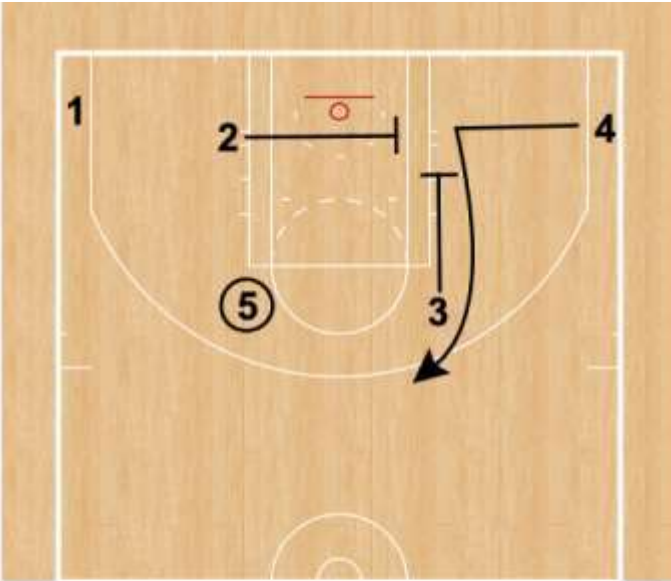
4 "bumps": he rejects the screen intended for him
(2's flex screen) and instead cuts off 3's down
screen (which was intended for 2 after 2 finished
setting the flex screen).
*Note: Bumps are typically found in
screen–the–screener actions

Bump (screen the screener)
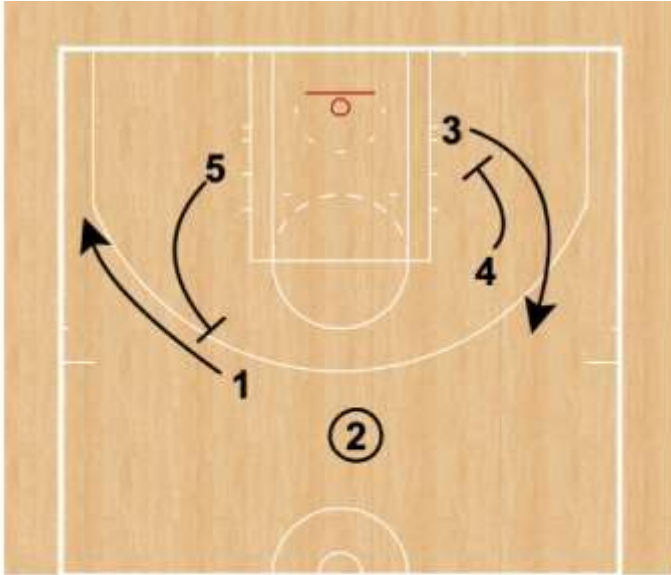
Mover–Blocker: 5 sets a flare screen for 1 on one
side of the court, while 4 sets a down screen for 3
on the other side

Note: 4 and 5 are the "blockers," while 1 and 3 (and
possibly 2) are the "movers"

Mover-blocker: flare and pin screens
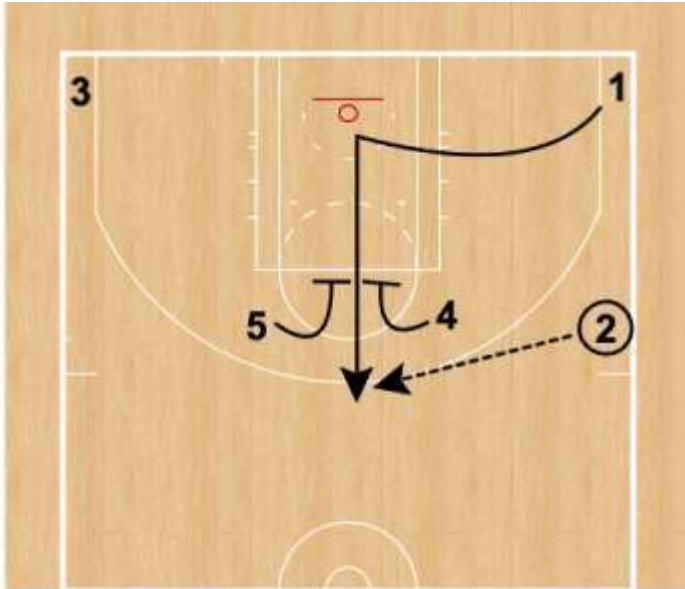
4 and 5 set an Elevator Screen for 1: After 1 cuts in between the two down screens, 4 and 5 slide together like elevator doors to separate 1 from his defender (aka "gate")

Elevator screen (aka "gate")
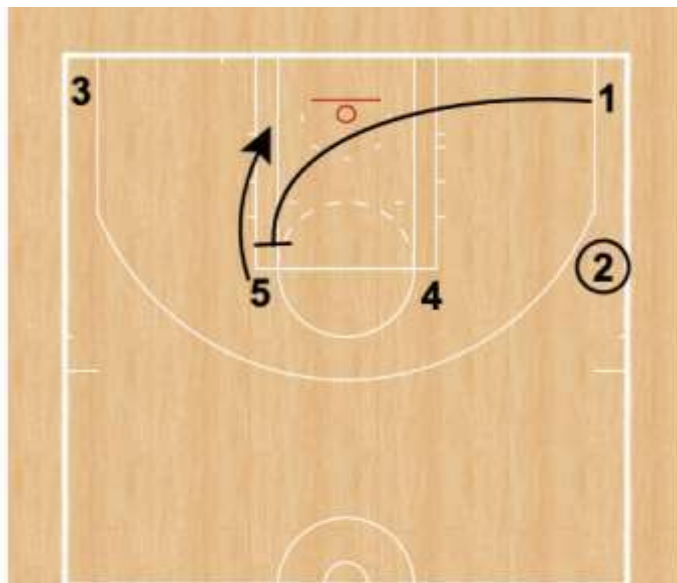
Cyclone: 1 sets a Cyclone screen for 5 (a backscreen near the weakside elbow, when the defense is expecting 5 to set a down/elevator screen for 1)

Cyclone screen (backscreen)
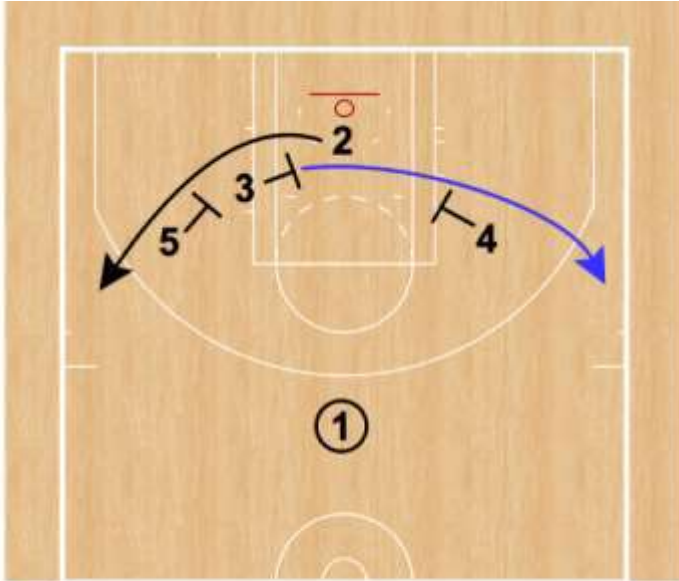
Floppy (aka "single-double"): 2 has the option of cutting off 3's and 5's double down screens, or 2 can cut off 4's single down screen. Then 3 goes the opposite direction of 2

Floppy (single-double)

Loop: a triple screen for 1 to cut to the far wing, after which 3 cuts to the opposite wing (cf. floppy)

Loop (floppy variation)
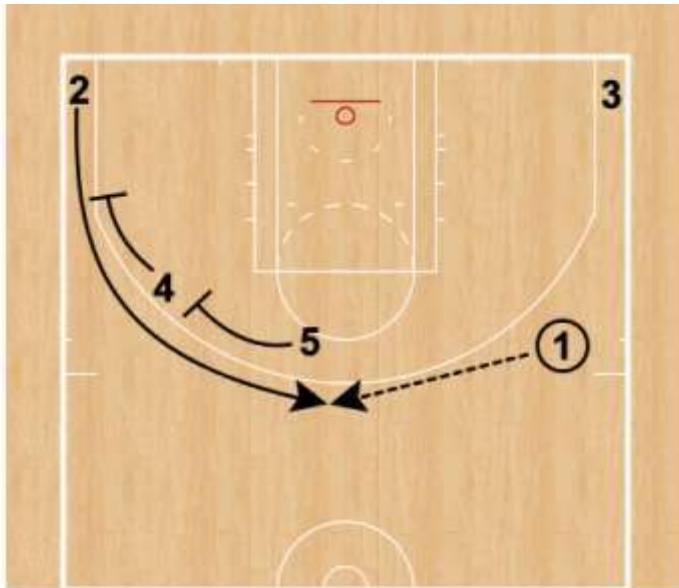
Motion Strong (aka "Strong"): 4 and 5 set a staggered down screen for 2

[Motion Strong (stagger)](#)
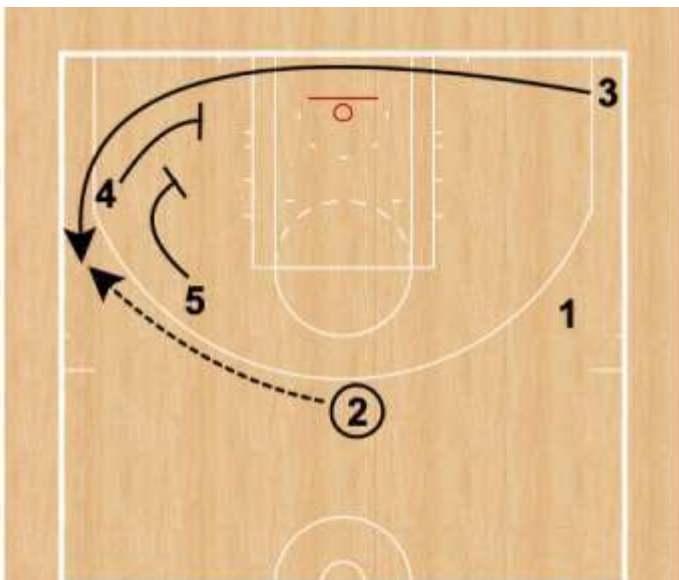
Circle or Wheel: after 4 and 5 have set a staggered down screen for 2, they turn and set a staggered down screen for 3

[Circle/wheel](#)

Twirl: 2 curls 4's down screen, and then 4 turns around and cuts off 5's down screen (aka "Boston")

Twirl (Boston)
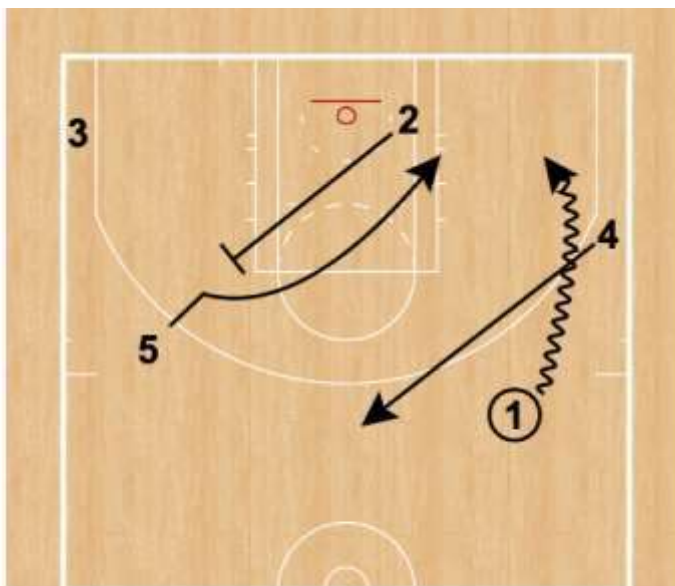
2 sets a shuffle screen for 5 (aka "slice screen")
4 sets a brush screen for 1

Shuffle/slice screen and brush screen

Wiper: 5 sets a flare screen for 2 to cut away from the ball, and then 5 sets a cross screen for 2 to cut back toward the ball

Wiper: flare screen + cross screen
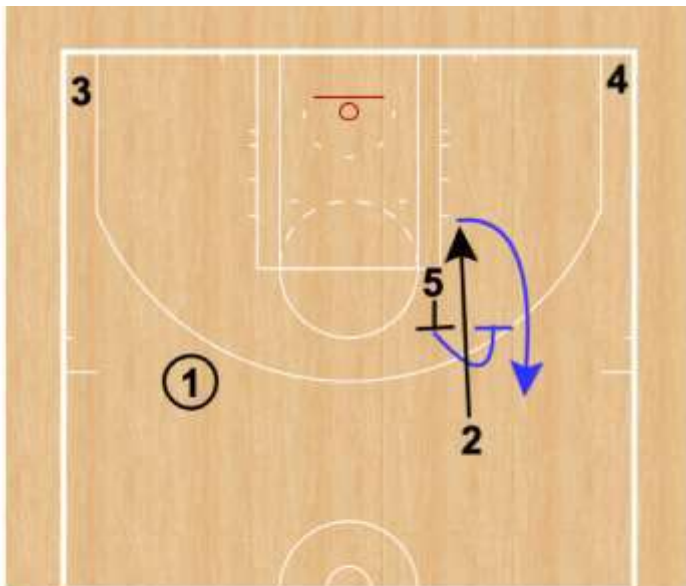
Ricky (rescreen): 5 sets a backscreen for 2, and then 5 sets a downscreen for 2 in the opposite direction

Ricky (rescreen): backscreen + down screen
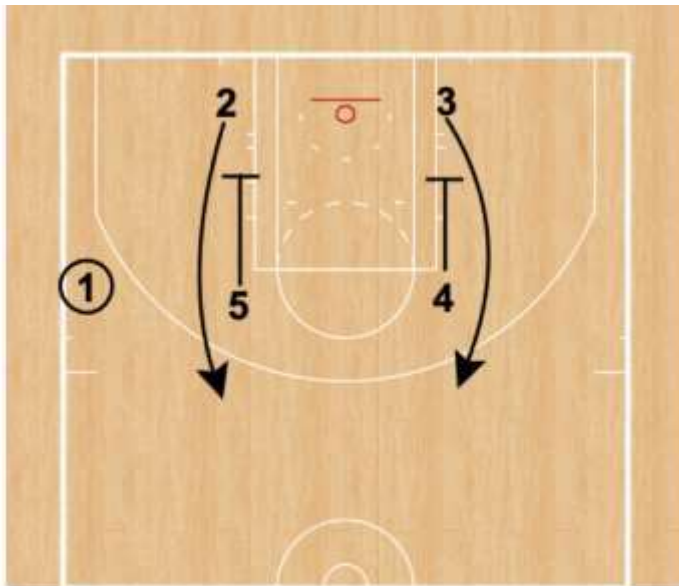
Zipper: 5 sets a down screen for 2
* 4 sets a down screen for 3. Because that down
screen is not on the strongside low block, it is not
considered a zipper

Zipper and down screens
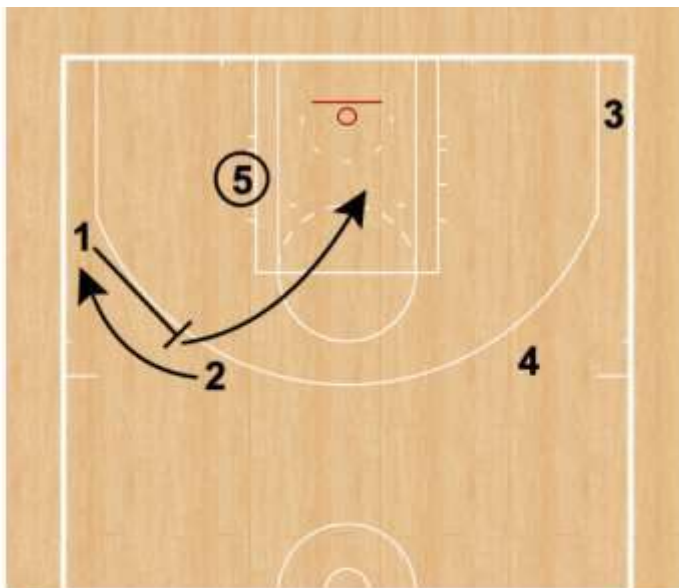
Split Cuts: improvised screening between 1 and 2
in which one of them cuts toward the hoop and the
other remains on the perimeter

Split Cuts

"Pinch Post"
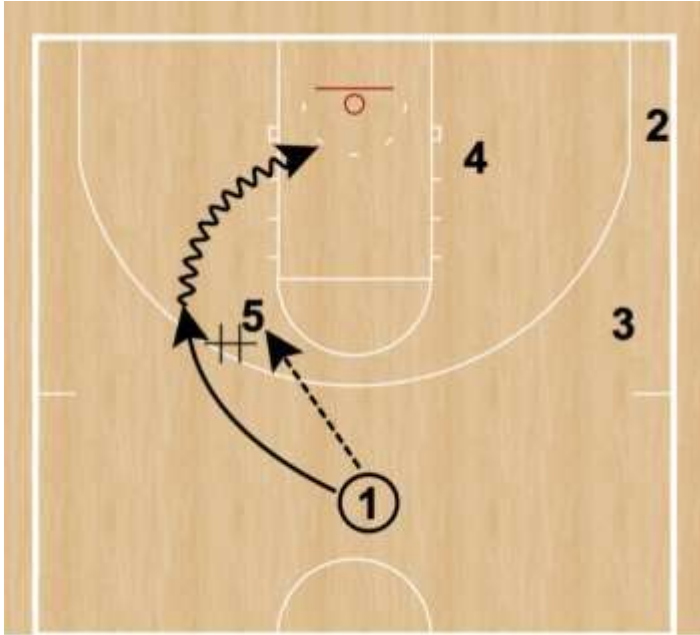
Term: Pinch Post

Definition: an offensive series in which a big near the weakside Elbow is used as a playmaking hub (while no other teammates are between him and the closest sideline)

Note on Terminology: The term "Pinch Post" can also refer to the player occupying the Pinch Post, or it can mean the specific spot on the floor (as long as there are no teammates between that spot and the closest sideline).

See Also:

- Triangle

- [Spanoulis](): a back screen+DHO, sometimes from the Pinch Post

- Iverson Cut (aka "Over"): a cut from one wing to the other, often used to transition from Horns or 1–4 High to Pinch Post

- [Chicago](): a down screen + DHO, which is one of the original options of the Triangle's version of Pinch Post

How It Works:

In the diagram below, the ballhandler (1) passes to 5 in the Pinch Post and follows his pass for a handoff:

What differentiates Pinch from similar alignments is that the big at the Pinch Post is the only player on that side of the floor. Contrast Pinch Post (far left) with Horns/Elbow, 1-4 High, and Corner, all of which have a big near an Elbow and somebody outside of him (usually on the wing or in the corner, if not both):

The Pinch Post is older than the NBA. It has been used in John Wooden's UCLA High-Post Offense and Tex Winter's Triangle, and it's similar to the Princeton offense's Point series. First, we'll look at Pinch's origins with Triangle, and then at more recent uses of it.

Pinch from Triangle to the Modern NBA:

Pinch Post is perhaps best known for its role in the Triangle offense. In the halfcourt, Triangle (usually) starts with the ballhandler on the wing (3) forming a triangle with the corner (2) and the low post (4), with the other two players at the top of the key (1) and near the weakside box (5):

The first option in Triangle is for the ballhandler on the wing (3) to feed the post (4). The second option is Pinch: A pass to the top of the key (1) triggers the weakside post player (5) to flash to the Pinch Post—usually about halfway between the Elbow and the 3-point line:

From there, 1 and 5 run a two-man game on the weak side of the floor. Because there are no other defenders on that side, Pinch is especially effective as a give-and-go action between guard and big. If the guard receives the handoff but can't get downhill, that triggers an empty pick-and-roll:
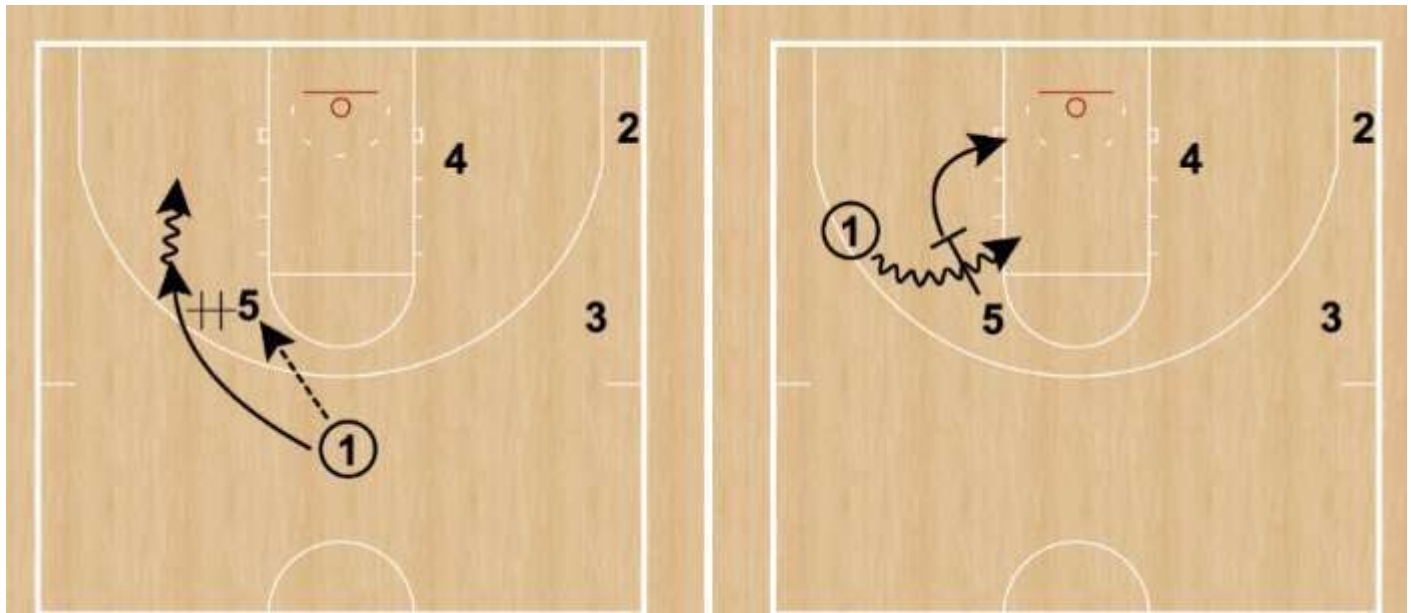
Another option is for the pinch post to set an angled ballscreen for the guard to attack the empty side:

If the ball is entered to the Pinch Post but he can't hand the ball back to the guard, the Triangle—and most modern offenses that use the Pinch Post—will have that guard clear out to the corner. Meanwhile, a down screen (sometimes a two-person staggered screen) is set for the guard in the opposite corner:
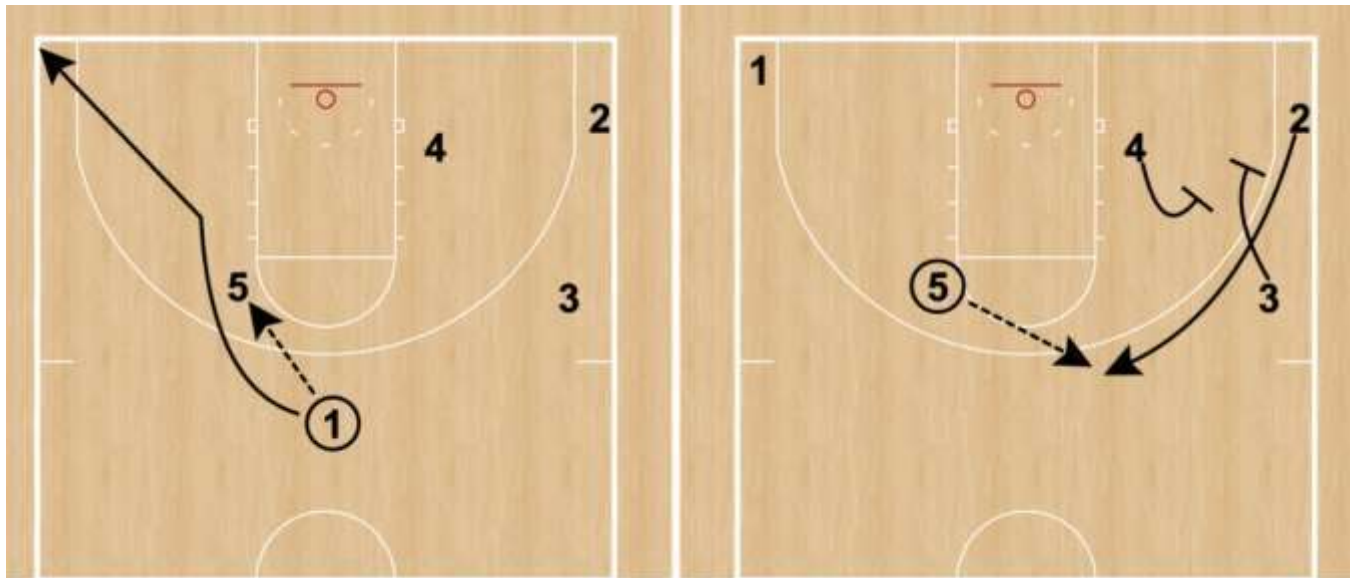
Pinch, especially after an Iverson cut clears one side of the floor. In fact, this play uses the same two-part Pinch progression from Triangle: a potential handoff from the Pinch, followed by a staggered screen for 3 in the far corner:
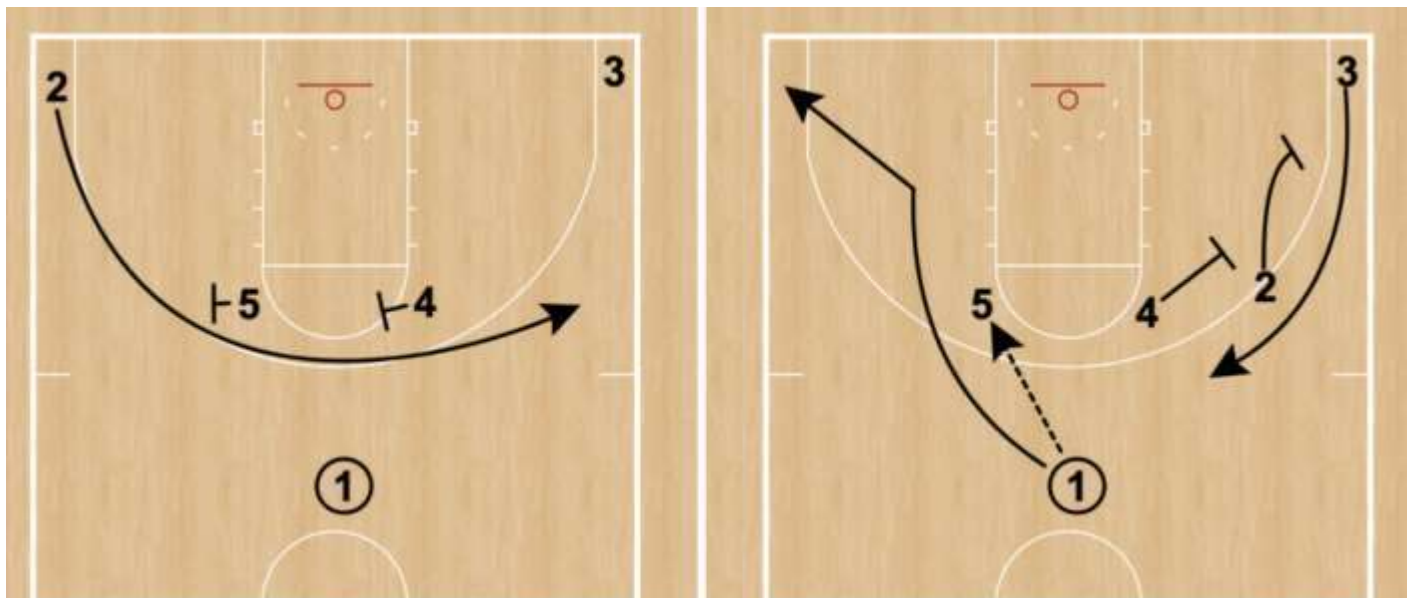
Many NBA teams run designed ATO plays with a Pinch Post, and some—especially the Miami Heat and the Denver Nuggets—use it to feature their playmaking bigs. The Triangle may be gone (or at least dormant), but teams have kept the Pinch Post, especially by extending it beyond the 3-point line to adapt it to the modern game.

"Pistol"
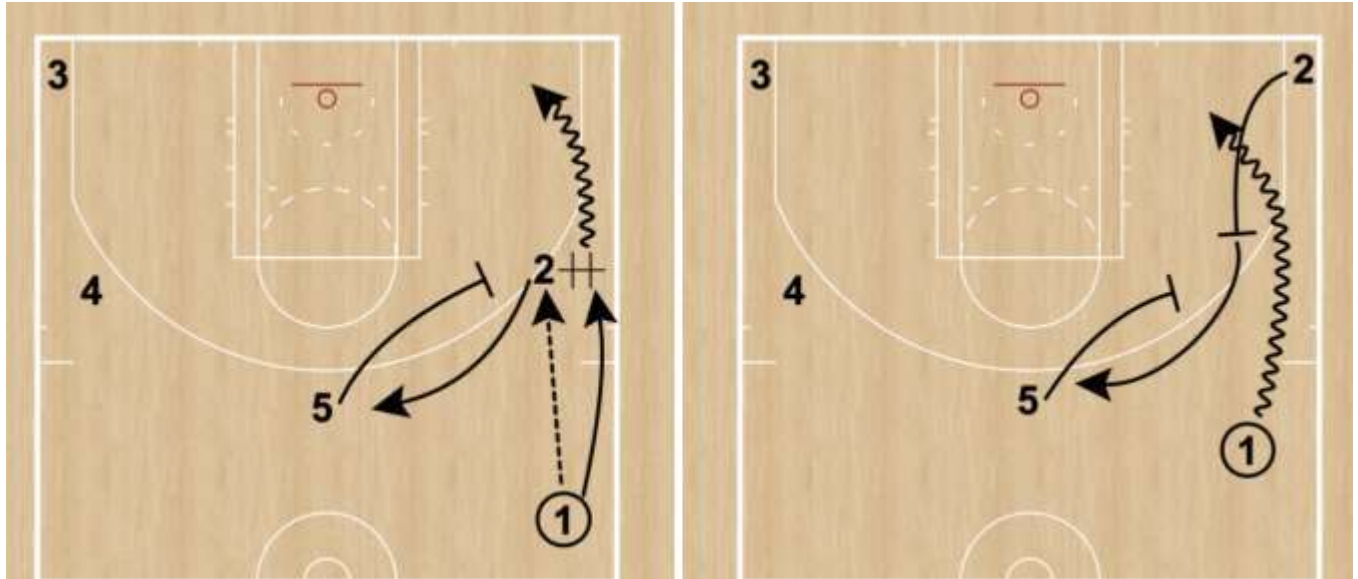
The two main iterations of pistol: 21 Chase on the left (a give-and-go followed by a flare screen for 2) and 21 Dribble on the right (a step-up screen, also followed by a flare screen for 2)

Definition: an up-tempo series that uses 5-out spacing, ballscreens, and flare screens, typically found in transition/early offense situations

Alternate Definitions: Among NBA teams, the early-offense series called "Pistol" is better known as "21." Instead, NBA teams use the term "Pistol" slightly differently (and contradictorily). Depending upon which coaching tree you belong to, you might use the term "pistol" to mean…

1. a wing handoff followed by a ballscreen
   (aka Miami/Orlando action)

2. a down screen followed by a handoff (aka Chicago)

3. a throw-and-get designed to get the ballhandler running downhill toward the hoop (such as this **Horns Pistol** below):
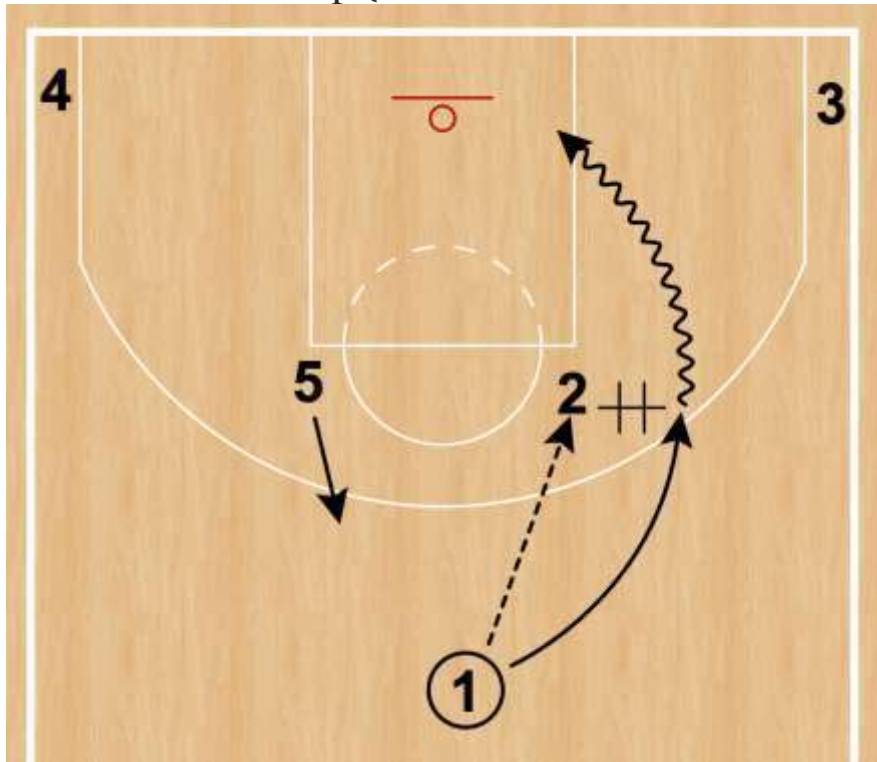
Synonyms: 21, Hurry-Up Offense

See Also: Double Drag, Rip DHO, Delay

Origin of the Name: "21," the original name, refers to the action between the 1-guard and the 2-guard.

How It Works: Popularized by Mike D'Antoni and Steve Nash's Phoenix Suns, Pistol begins with 5-out spacing. The two wings sprint to each corner, the point guard brings up the ball on either wing (typically the left wing for a predominately right-handed team), the trailing big is

behind the PG and stops near the 3-pt line near the strongside slot, while the other big runs to the weakside wing.

The wing on the same side as the ball snaps back toward the ball, stopping near the free-throw line extended.
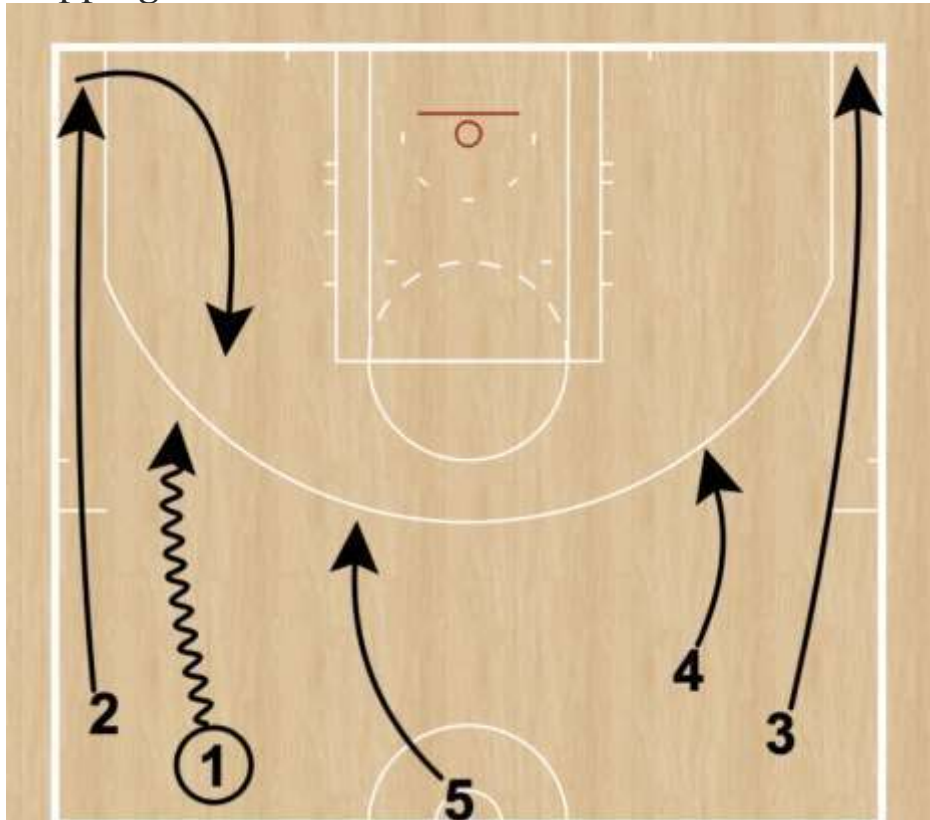
From there, the offense typically runs one of four main reads: Chase, Keep, Dribble, and Down.

Set plays, such as Pistol/21 Hammer, can be called as needed, but Pistol primarily uses reads instead of specific playcalls.

1st Option: 21 Chase

The PG and the wing (2, in this instance) execute a [get action](), in which the PG passes to the 2, and then the 2 handbacks to the PG for a layup:

If the PG can't score off a layup, 2 cuts off 5's flare screen to the top of the key, and then 5 sets a corner ballscreen for 1:
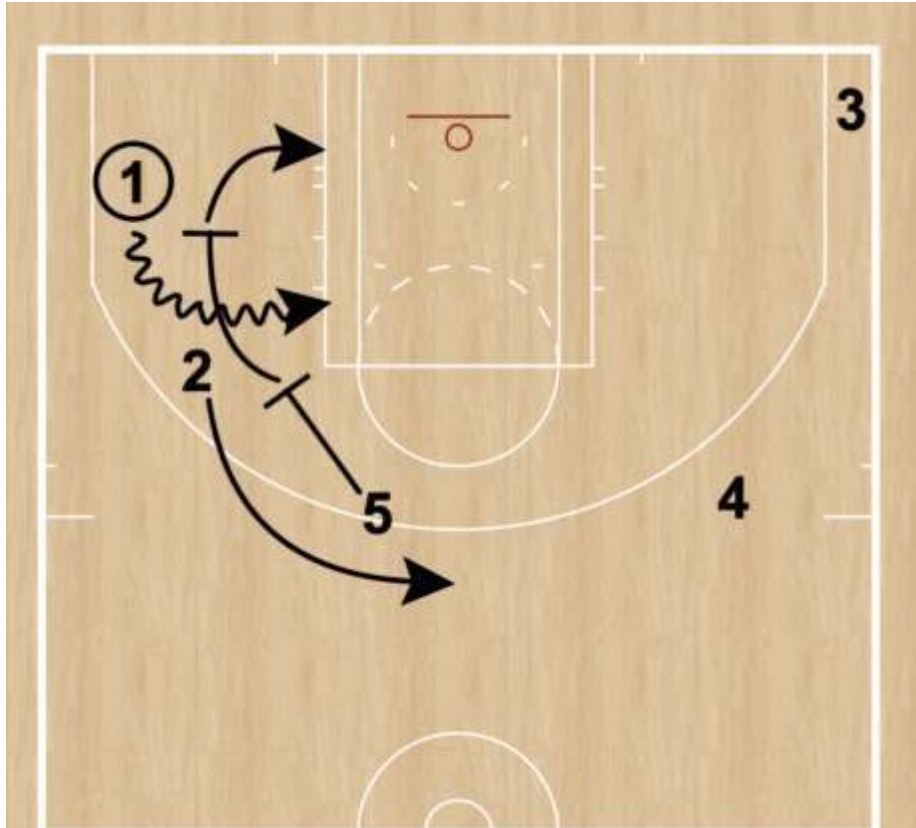
From there, Pistol begins to diverge based on team and personnel, although there's often a flare or a pin-down screen between 3 and 4 when the PG passes to 2:
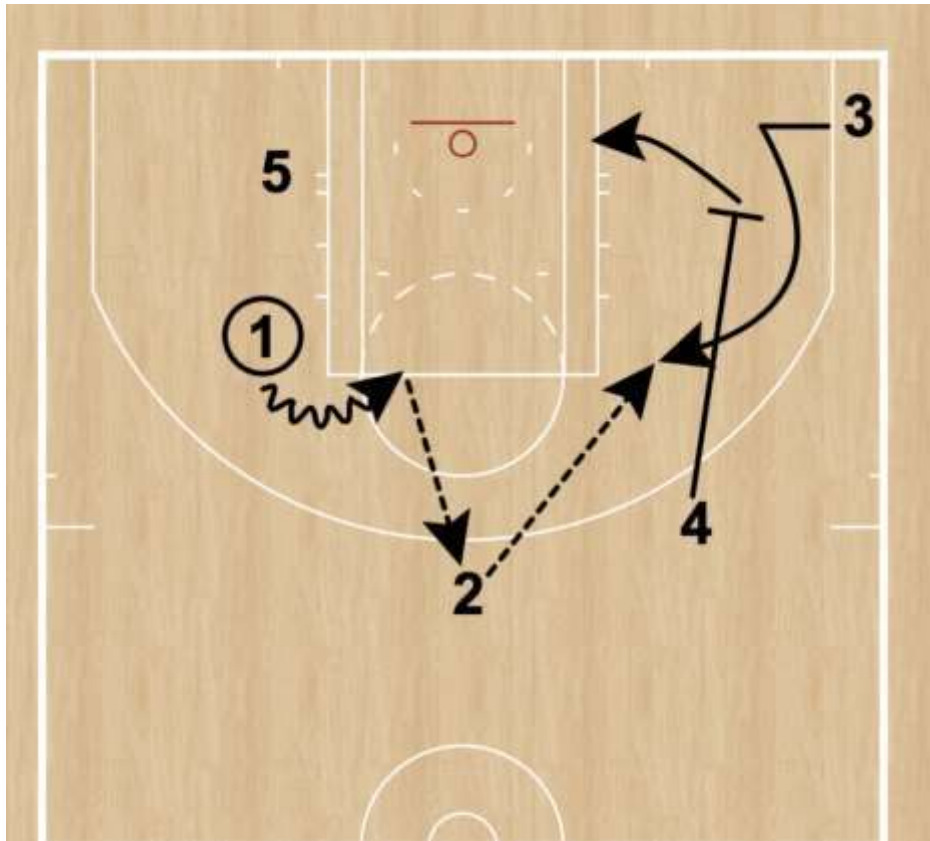
At this point, the team typically flows into their half-court offense, although some have a predetermined next step if nothing is open. For example, the Chris Paul-era LA Clippers had the weakside big (4 in the image above) flash to the Elbow for 2-man Pinch Post action between 2 and 4.

2nd option: 21 Keep

The second option is for 2 to fake a handoff to 1 and then receive a ballscreen from 5:
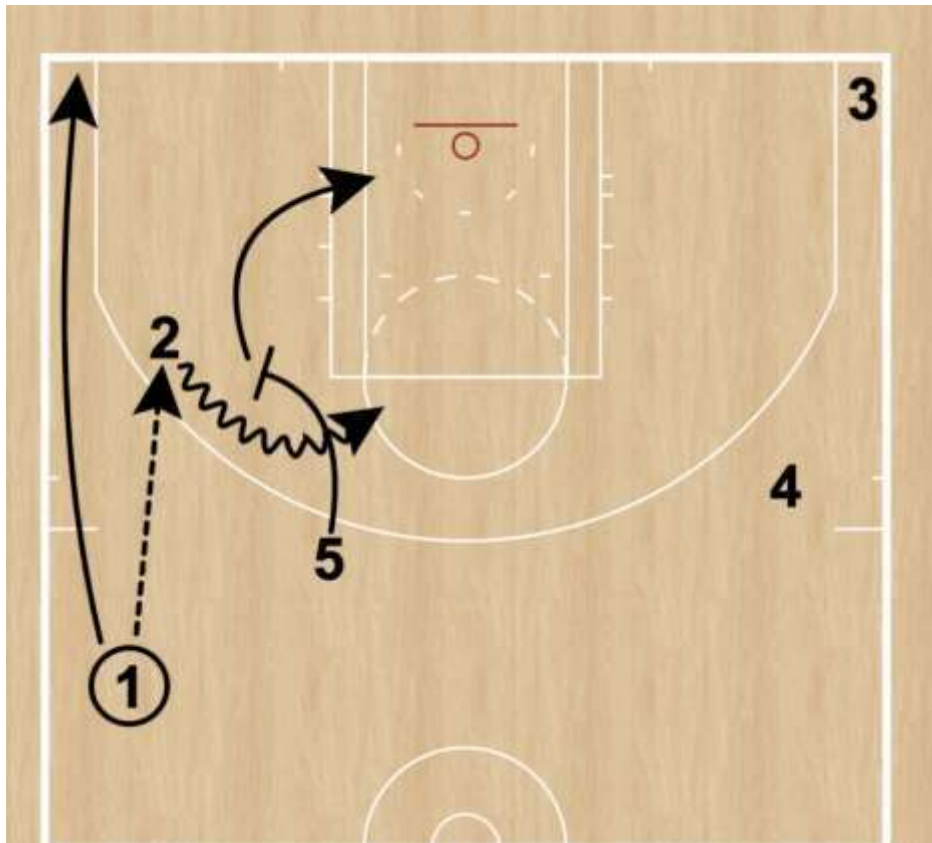
As 2 and 5 run their pick-and-roll, 1 lifts back up to the wing for shake action, and 4 sets the same pin-down for 3 (if that's what they do for 21 Chase):
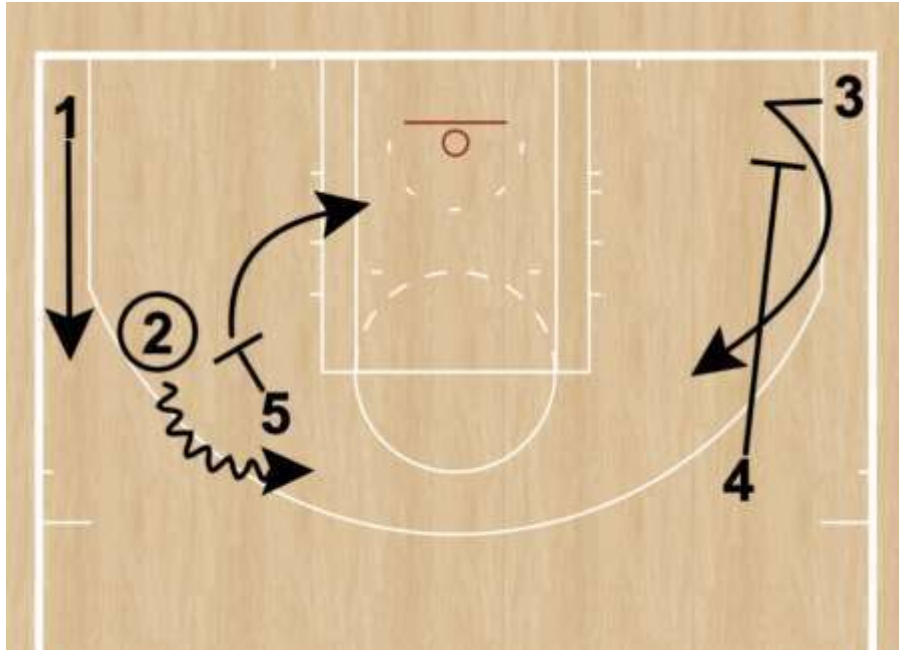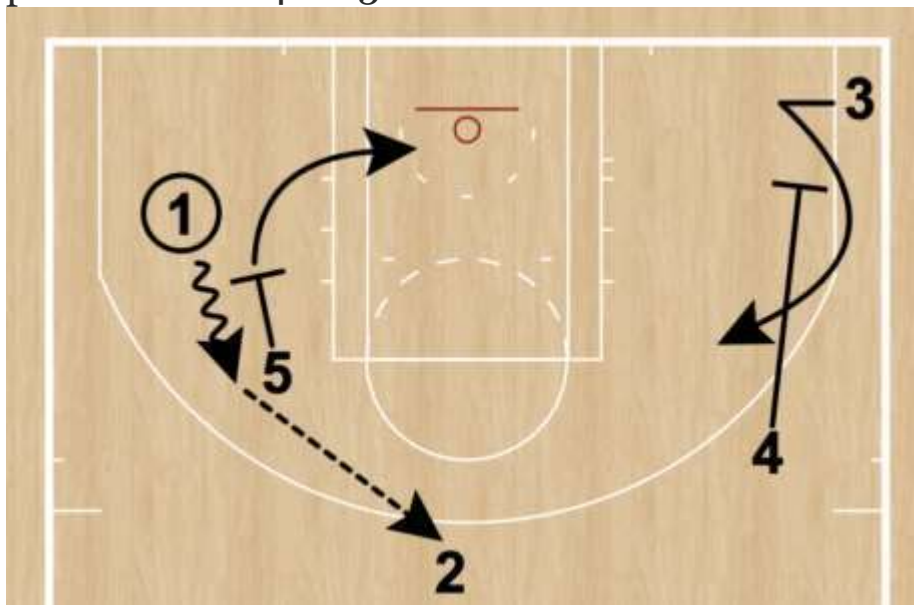
3rd Option: 21 Dribble

If 2's defender, x2, denies the hit-ahead pass, 2 sets a ballscreen for the PG in what's called Dribble action. As with 21 Chase, the PG looks to score a layup first, and then 5 sets a flare screen for 2, and then 5 sets a corner ballscreen for 1:
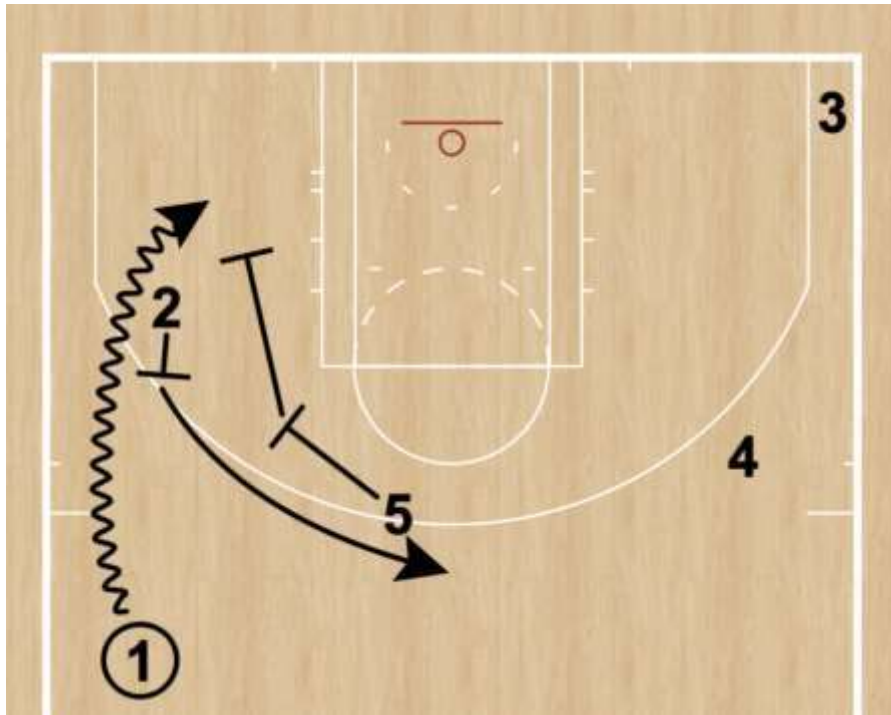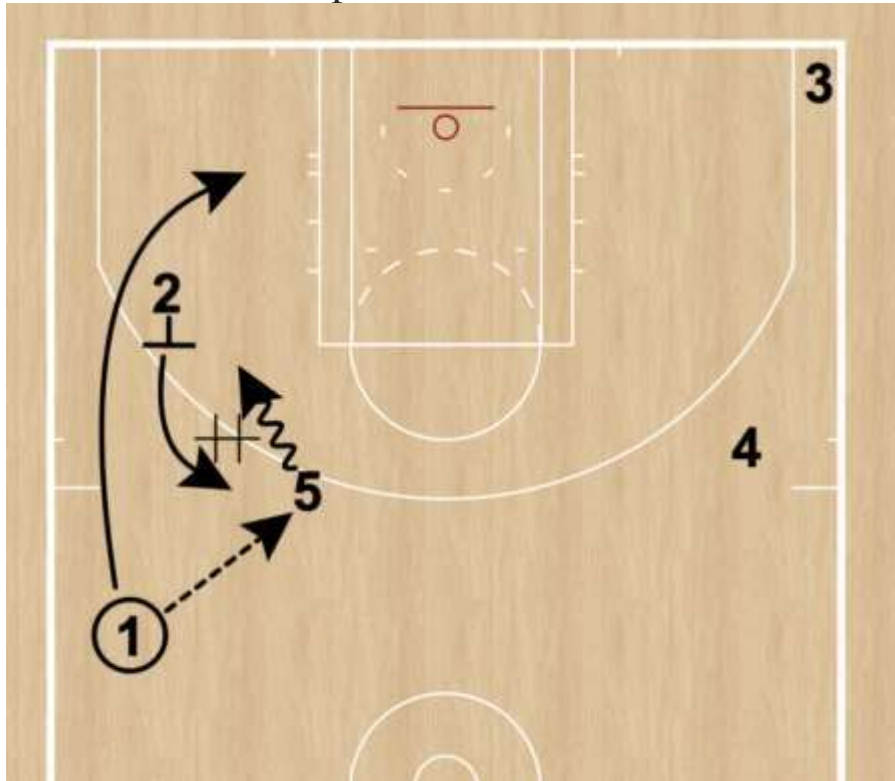
If 1 passes to 2 at the top of the key, that triggers the same weakside pindown from 4 for 3 as before:

4th Option: 21 Down (aka "Rip DHO"):

21 Down differs in that it begins with a pass to the trailing big, à la Delay. From there, the offense runs what's sometimes called Rip DHO, in which 2 sets a rip screen for 1 and then receives a DHO from 5:


If 1 is not open for a layup, he retreats to the near side corner, and 4 sets his automatic pin-down for 3 (if applicable) as soon as 5 hands off to 2.

This play was [perfected by the Golden State Warriors]():

In reality, the pass to the trailing 5 can trigger any number of Delay sets, including Chicago, Down, Up, 50, etc.

Why It Works: The Pistol offense is great for creating [“quick shots with great spacing,”](#) according to Dave Severns, a pro personnel scout for the LA Clippers. Many NBA teams, if not all of them, run some form of Pistol as part of their offense (which makes it easy to implement despite high roster turnover). It's a simple yet sophisticated system that provides both pace and space, ideal for teams with multiple ballhandlers (especially a scoring point guard) and a roll threat.

Because Pistol involves only three players, it can be run in early offense, without waiting for the other two players to get set. At the same time, however, Pistol can also create many scoring opportunities for the weakside, such as this **Pistol Hammer**:
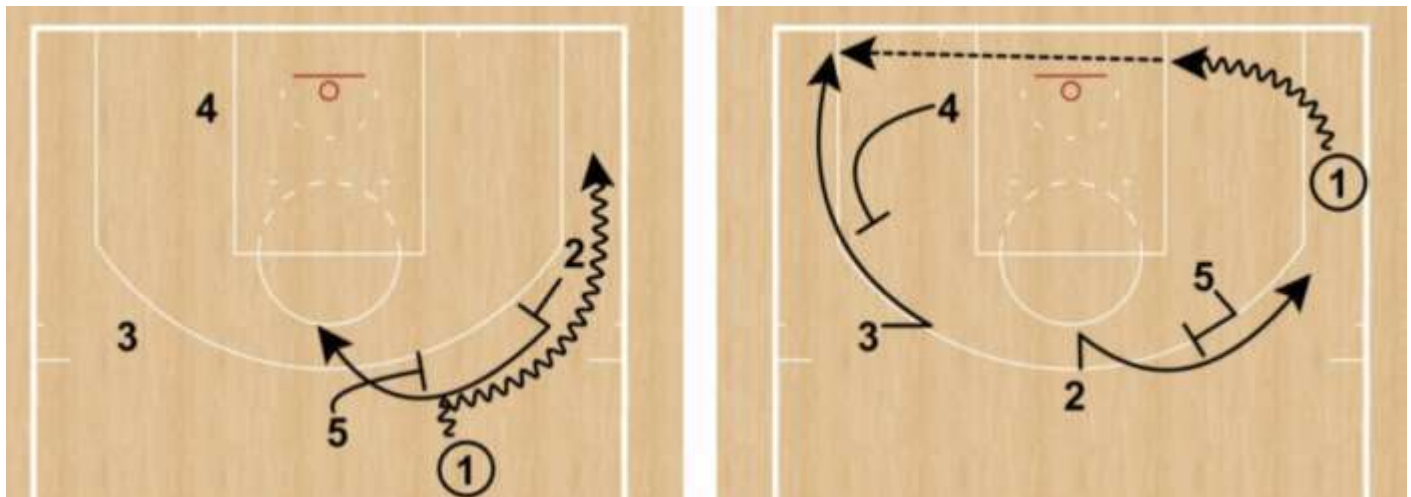
Pistol is also great for inducing a switch early in the shot clock. For example, "Pistol Touch" — 21 Dribble, but with the 2-guard setting a "touch" screen for the PG—exploits the defense's instructions to switch

a screen as soon as there's contact. The 2-guard will lightly touch the ballhandler's defender to induce a switch, and then slip to the hoop, often for a backdoor layup…

…or to exploit the mismatch by posting up a smaller guard. That play — **Pistol Touch Punch**—is often used by bigger guards.

But Pistol, especially 21 Dribble, is also great for exploiting matchups the defense *doesn't* want to switch. Defenders are reluctant to help off great shooters.

Similarity With Horns:

21 Chase and 21 Dribble are nearly identical to the Horns plays known as [Horns Flare](#) or Horns Flip.

Like 21 Dribble, Horns Flare has a player set a ballscreen and then receive a flare screen. Like 21 Chase, Horns Flip involves a throw-and-get followed by a flare screen:
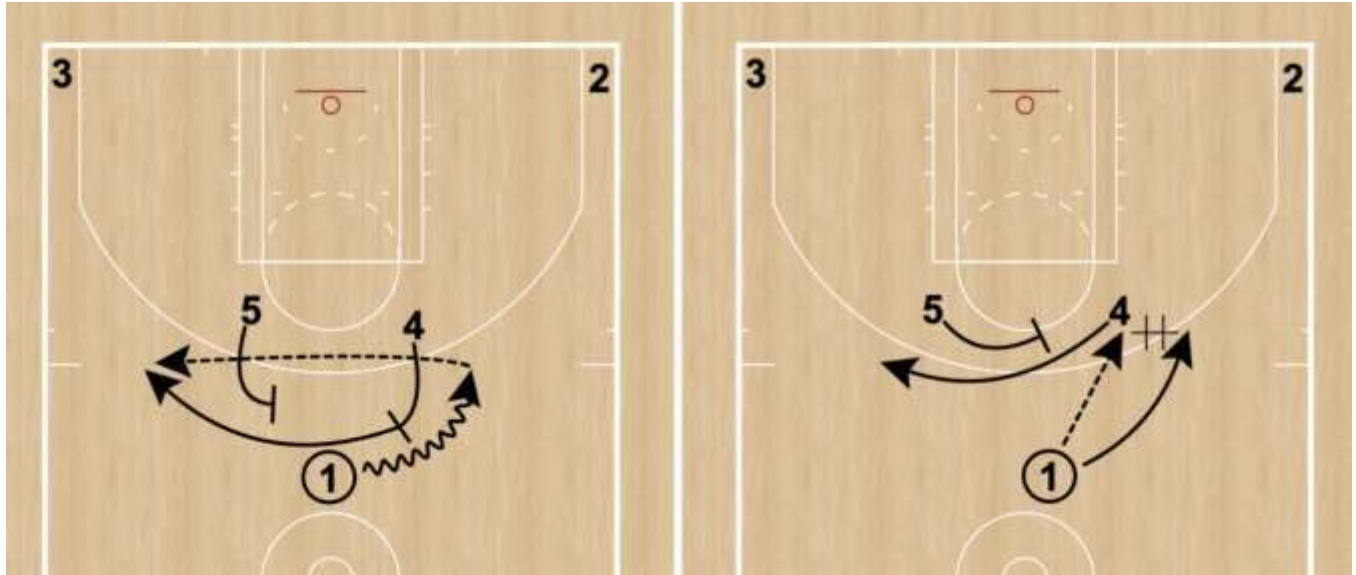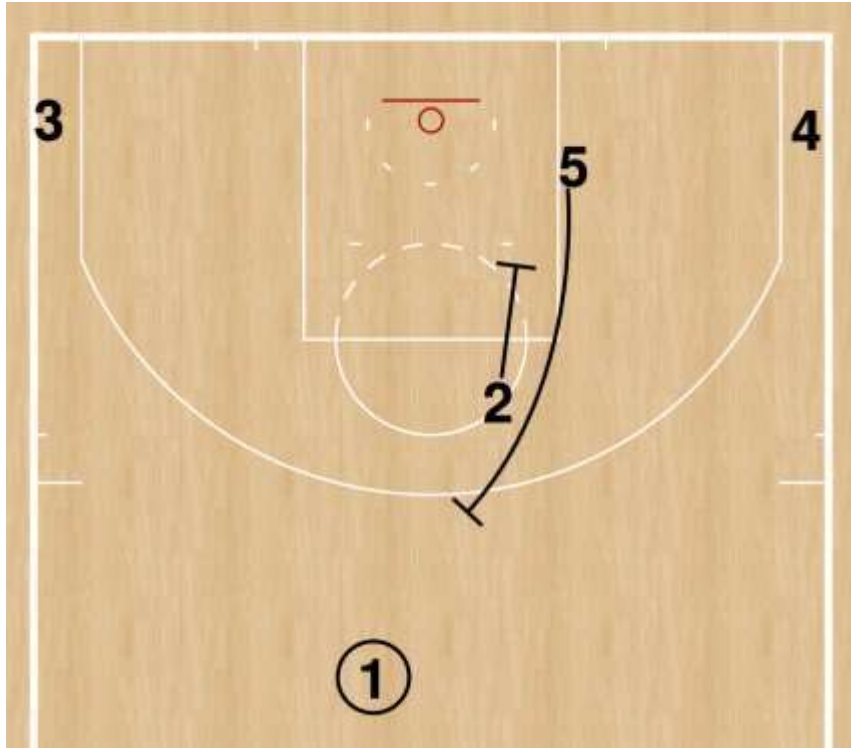
Horns Flare (left) and Horns Flip (right), two plays similar to the Pistol staples 21 Dribble and 21 Chase

The differences are the alignments (5-out vs Horns) and, usually, the personnel: 1, 2, and 5 (Pistol) or 1, 4, and 5 (Horns).

Examples: 21 Dribble (Pistol Flare), 21 Chase, 21 Nash ("Nash" is the double ballscreen on the wing; also known as 21 Double), Pistol Touch Pin etc.

"Ram"

Term: Ram

Definition: an offensive action in which a player receives an off-ball screen then sets a ballscreen

Origin: Gibson Pyper ([@halfcourthoops](#)) named this action after the VCU Rams, whom he saw run it

See Also: [Ghost](#), [Stack/Spain PnR](#), [Exit](#), [Wedge Roll](#), Screen the Screener

**How It Works:** In the diagram above, 2 sets a down screen for 5, who then sets a ballscreen for 1

Why It Works: Ram action is effective mainly because the ballscreener's defender is recovering from the first screen instead of preparing for the subsequent ballscreen. As a result, Ram screens can subvert the defense's intended ballscreen coverage, such as "ice" or "show."

A weakness of Ram action is that the player who sets the first screen is often near the basket, which means his defender is in position to provide off-ball rim protection.

One solution is set the initial screen elsewhere on the court.

Another solution is to have the initial screener then receive a baseline "exit" screen.

Teams will also combine Ram action with a Spain PnR (aka "Stack"), in which the ballscreener receives a backscreen as he rolls to the hoop. The left diagram below is traditional ram action, with 2 screening for 5 before 5 sets a ballscreen for 1. The right diagram is a Spain PnR: 2 backscreens for 5 as 5 rolls to the hoop.
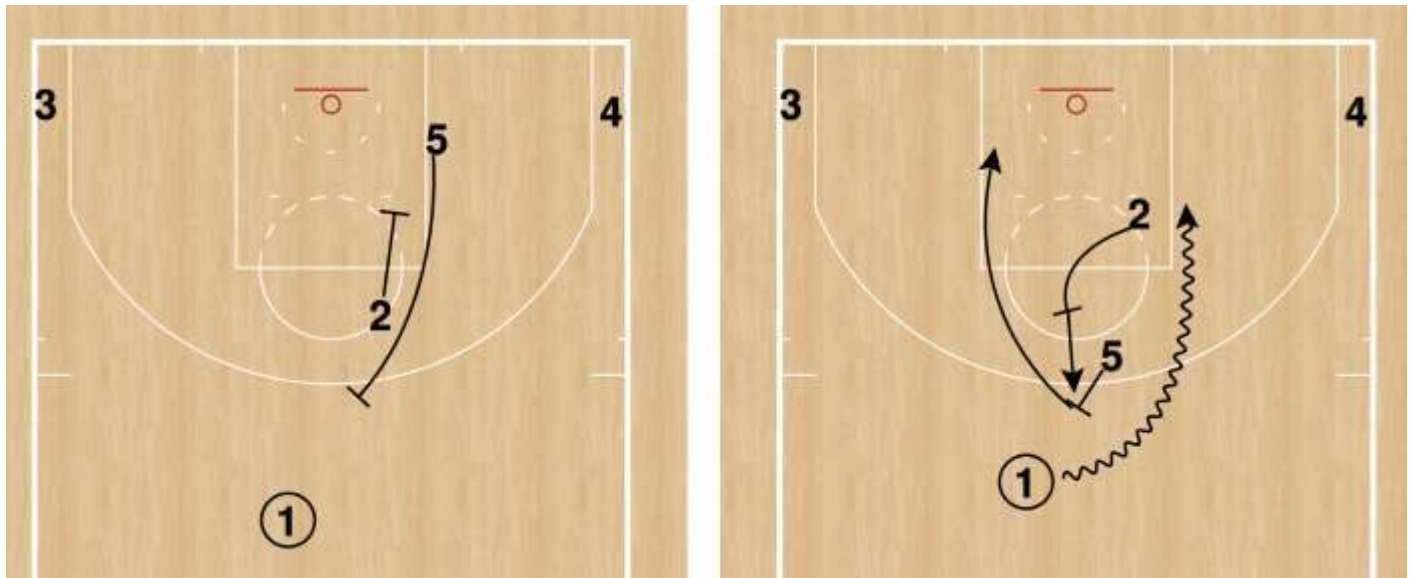
Or teams with combine Ram with back-to-back ballscreens: The player who sets the initial down screen will also set the second of two ballscreens.

In concept, Ram is similar to a Wedge Roll, in which a player who receives a wedge screen then sets a side pick-and-roll.

Although both Ram and Wedge Roll are actions in which a player who receives an off-ball screen then sets a ballscreen, the difference is their origin (and their location: Wedge Rolls occur on the wing). A Ram PnR is a wrinkle of a standard PnR, but a Wedge Roll is a wrinkle of a post-up play. A wedge screen is typically set for a big to get him a post-up opportunity near the low block:
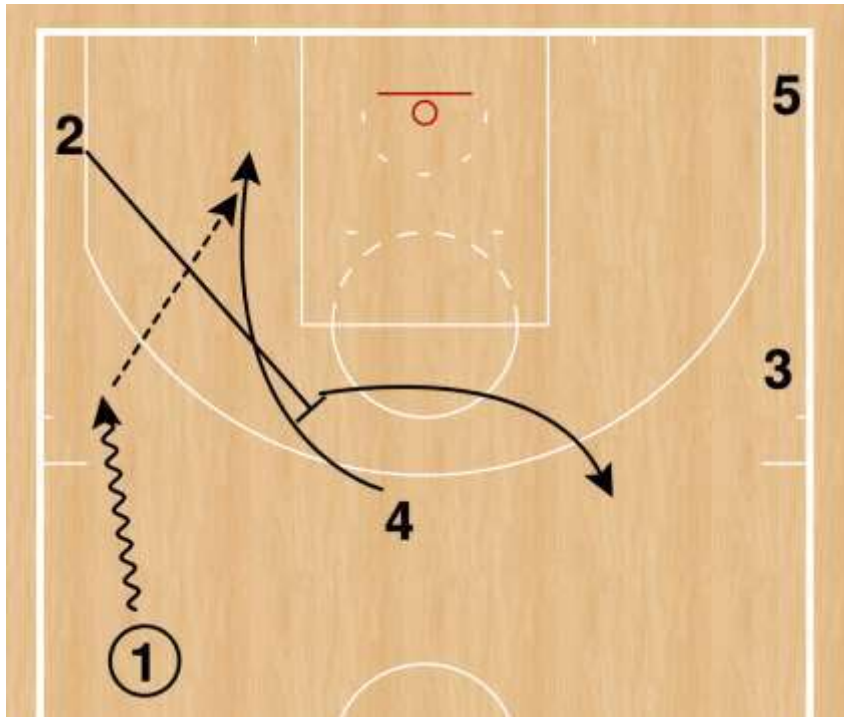
A counter from the defense is to have 4's defender go under 2's wedge screen. A counter to that counter is to have 4 set a ballscreen instead of cutting for a post-up. If his defender goes under 2's wedge screen, he's out of position to help with the ballscreen on the wing.
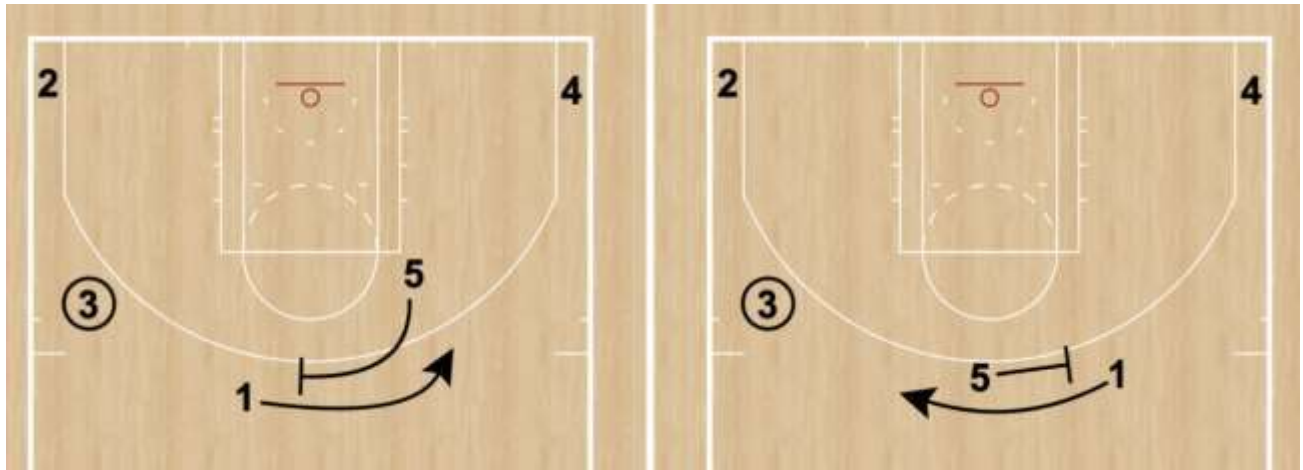
"Ricky"
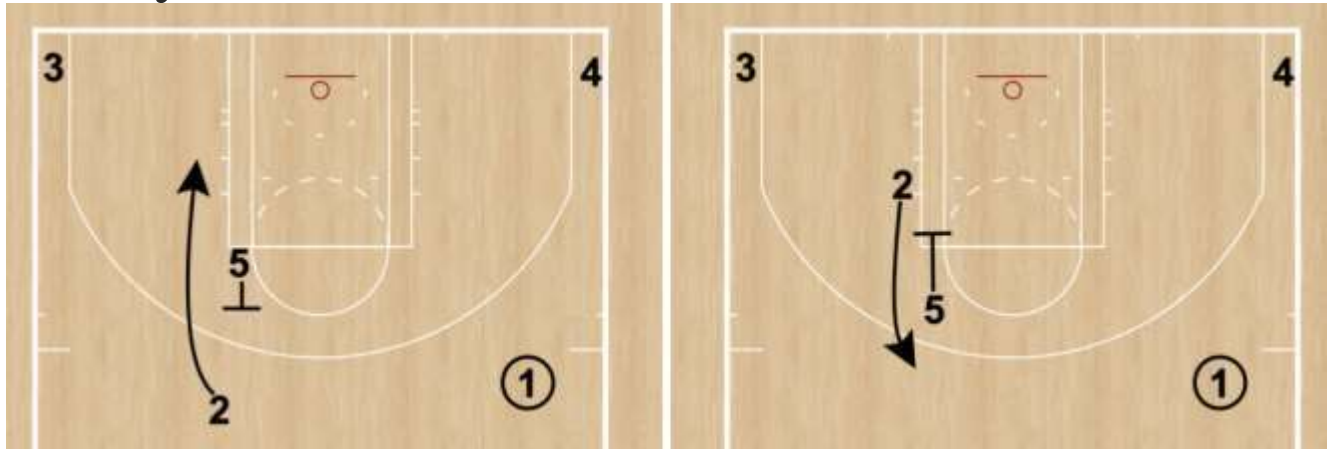
Term: Ricky

Definition: a backscreen followed by a down screen for the same player; more broadly, a screen and rescreen involving the same cutter and screener each time, with the second screen set in the opposite direction of the first
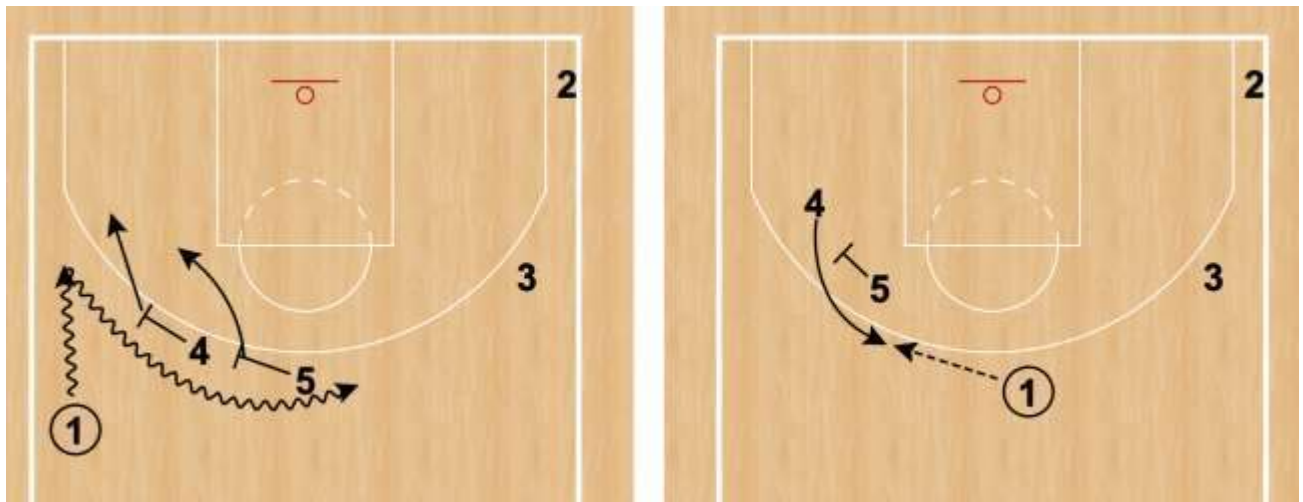
Synonyms: rescreen, comeback

Ricky Variations:

- **Wiper:** a flare screen followed by a cross screen for the same player

- **Oklahoma:** a double drag followed by a pin-down for the first screener to come back toward the ball

See Also: Double Drag (77), Chin, Top-Lock, Iverson

Origin of the Name: Unknown

How It Works:

In the example above, 5 sets a backscreen for 2 (the type of backscreen is a "chin"), and then 5 sets a down screen for 2.

In this next example, of *wiper* action, 4 sets a flare screen for 2 to cut away from the ball, and then 4 sets a wide pin for 2 to cut back toward the ball.
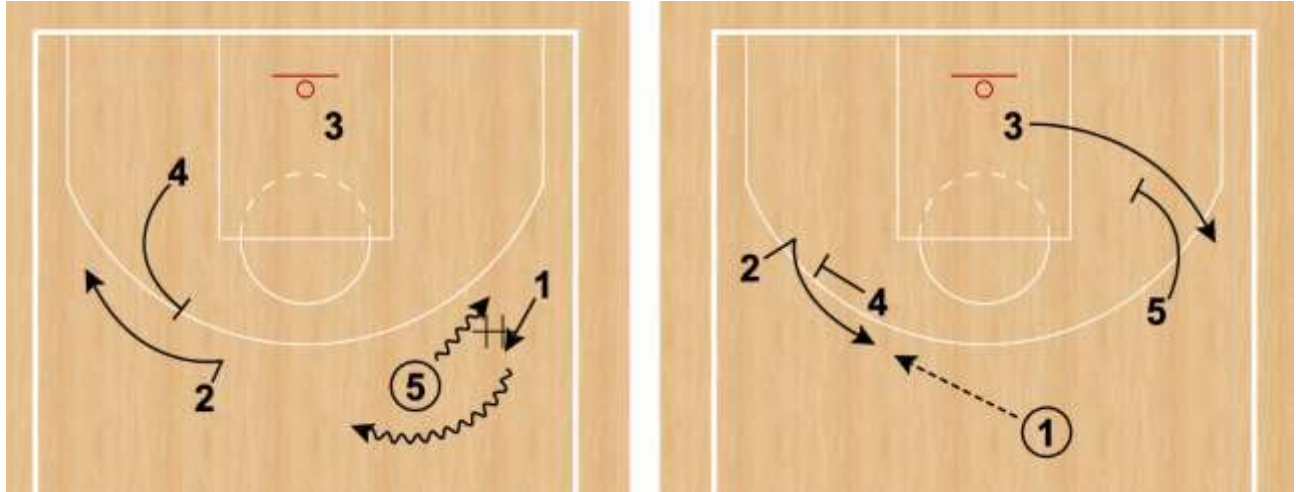
This last example is a 1–4 Iverson (2's horizontal cut in the first frame is the "Iverson"). After 2 curls 4's initial screen, he pivots and receives a second screen from 4 in the opposite direction.
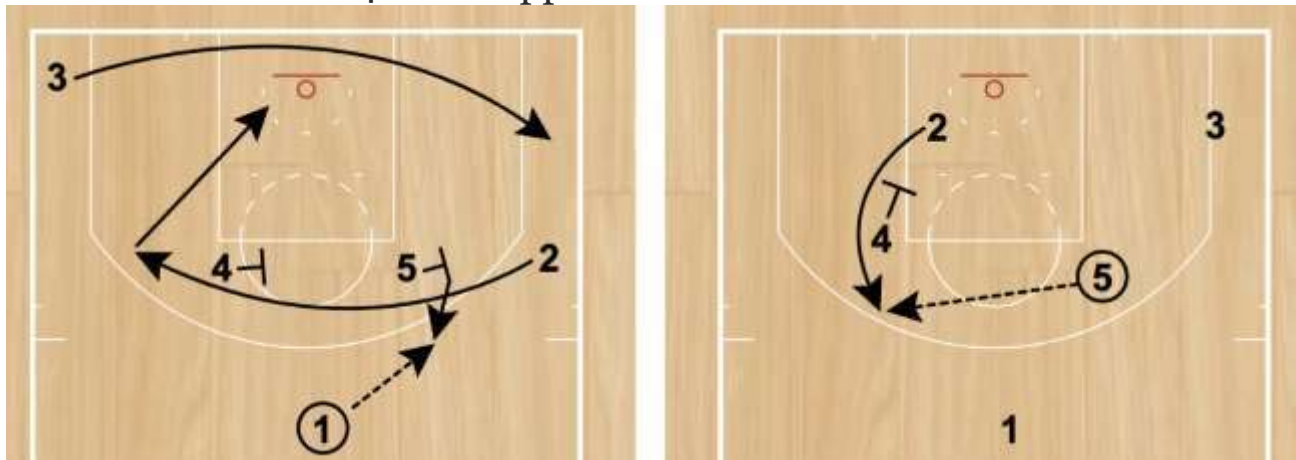

Why It Works: Multiple reasons.

1. Navigating two consecutive screens is difficult for any defender.

2. Ricky is often a wrinkle to a common action, such as the Chin screen above. The defender might relax when he spots the Chin screen, knowing he's prepared for it. But then the Chin screen turns into a Ricky.

3. When Ricky is part of a Double Drag, any attention the screener's defender gives to the ballhandler (such as hedging/showing) takes him out of position to help against the Ricky screen.

"Rip DHO"
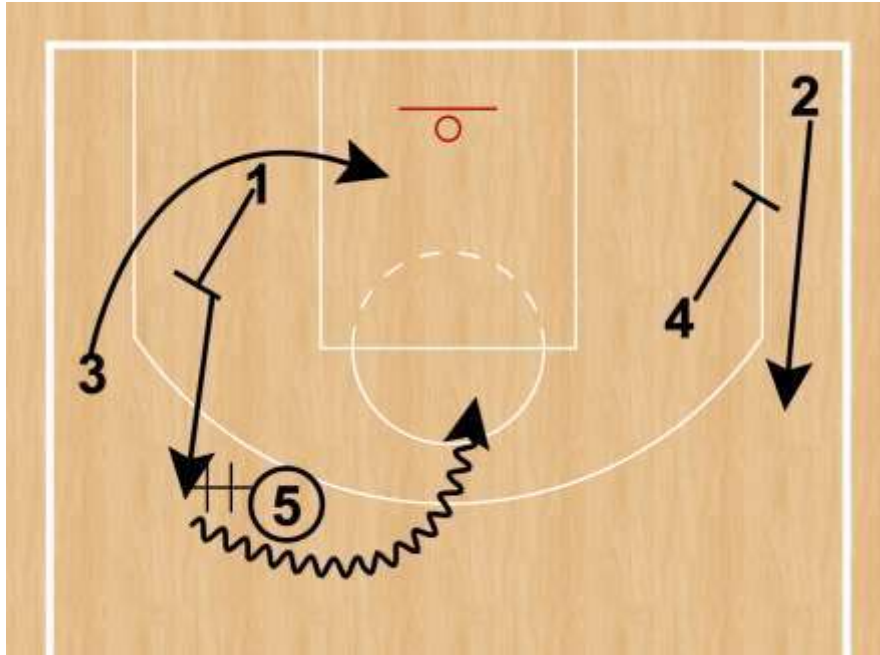
Definition: a 3-person action in which a player sets a rip screen and then receives a dribble handoff

Synonyms: 21 Down

See Also: Pistol/21, Spanoulis, Delay, Screen the Screener, UCLA Screen, Rip Pin, One Thru Rip DHO/Pin

Origin of the Name: A combination of a rip (back) screen and a dribble handoff

How It Works: In the diagram above, 1 sets a backscreen for 3 and then receives a DHO from 5.

Rip DHO is another name for 21 Down, one set from the [Pistol/21 series](#).

Why It Works: Much like a [UCLA screen](#), a rip DHO rarely results in a layup for the player receiving the backscreen but is still effective because the defense's adjustment to prevent the layup creates a disadvantage elsewhere. If 1's defender provides help on the rip screen, he's out of position against the DHO. But if 1's defender doesn't provide that help, 3 is potentially open for an easy bucket at the rim.

As a result, rip DHO is perhaps the most common SLOB (sideline out of bounds) play in the NBA. The player who inbounds the ball receives the rip screen, often from a good shooter whom the defense does not want to help off of.

If the defense is able to prevent a layup or an open 3, it can still be at a disadvantage against the DHO, particularly because there's nobody to tag the roller. In pick-and-roll defense, the low weakside help defender (x2 in the diagram below) is the tagger, responsible for bumping/tagging the roll man:
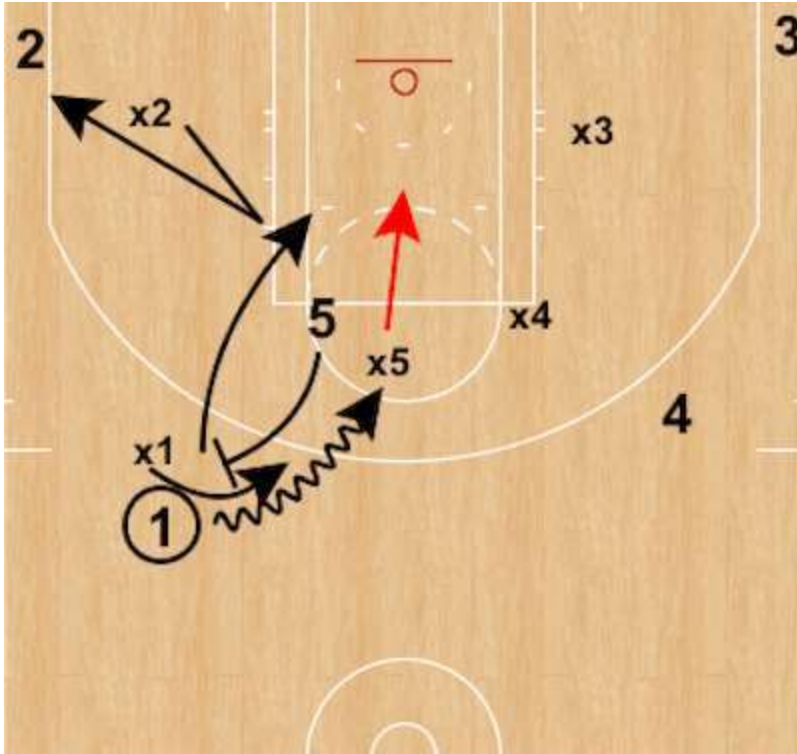
For a more detailed and better explanation of the tagger, check out Dylan Murphy's Basketball Dictionary.

Because the player who receives the rip screen clears out to the far side, however, there's nobody to tag the roller. If the defense shows/hedges the DHO — often necessary to prevent an open 3—the roller may be open for a lob:

The rip DHO combination is also effective because it's a quick action that provides two opportunities for the defense to switch and therefore create a possible mismatch.

Another option is for the cutter to reject the rip screen and take the DHO himself.

The player who sets the backscreen can follow that up with an inverted ballscreen if his defender is face-guarding:

One type of rip DHO is called [Spanoulis](#), named after the legendary Greek basketball player Vassilis Spanoulis. In this version, the player who receives the (gut) DHO sets the backscreen near the weakside elbow, not to the outside:

A cousin of the rip DHO is the rip pin, in which the big—instead of DHOing to the player who sets the backscreen—passes to the weakside wing and sets a pin for him instead:

"Short Action"
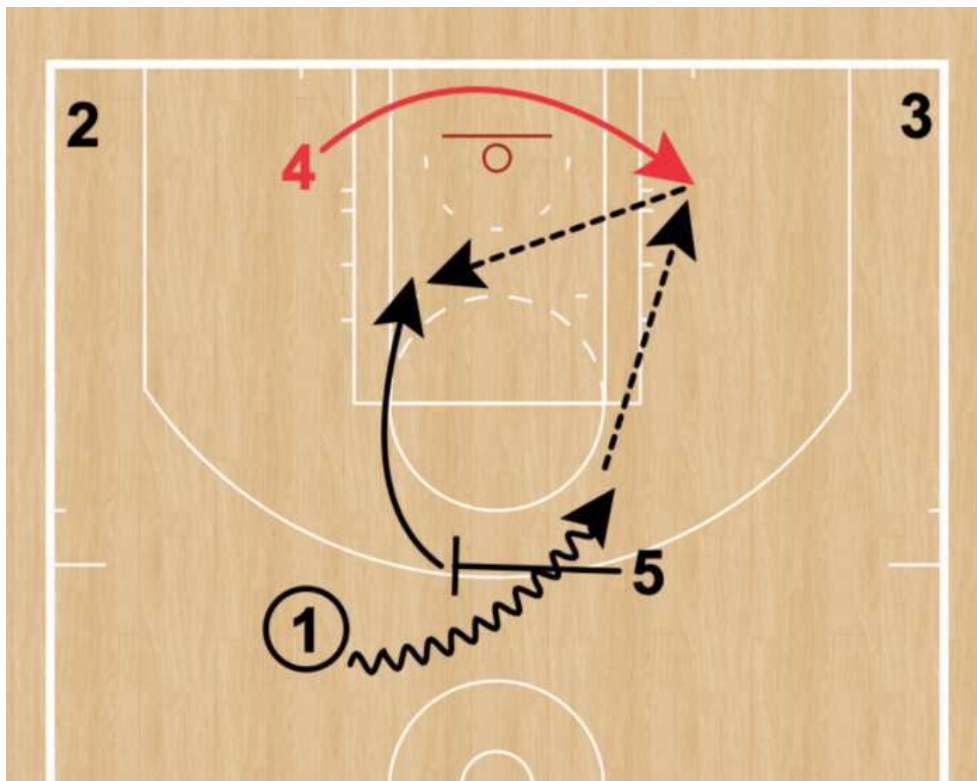
Term: Short (Action)

**Definition:** A cut/flash to the strongside during a pick-and-roll, usually to punish hedging or blitzing

See Also: Hoiberg roll, throw-ahead pass (aka "gator pass"), roll and replace, short roll (which is not the same as short action; in short roll, the ballhandler passes to the roller, who has stopped short near the midrange instead of continuing to roll towards the basket).

How It Works: In the diagram above, 5 sets a ballscreen for 1 as 4 shorts the pick-and-roll by cutting under the basket to the strongside dunker spot. This cut gives more room for the roller and gives a better passing option for the ballhandler (especially against hedging/blitzing).

Mike D'Antoni and the "Seven Seconds or Less" Phoenix Suns are credited with originating "Short Action."

Why It Works (against hedges/traps): When the defense hedges, x5 briefly guards 1—ideally, by funneling the ballhandler towards the halfcourt line for one or two dribbles while also preventing an over-the-top pass to the roller—before retreating to his man (5). Meanwhile, x4 tags the roller (briefly guard 5 to prevent an easy layup, and then retreating to 4 when x5 recovers to 5).

If the PG is unable to pass to the roller himself, he can pass to 4. At that point, 4 and 5 have a two-on-one against x4:
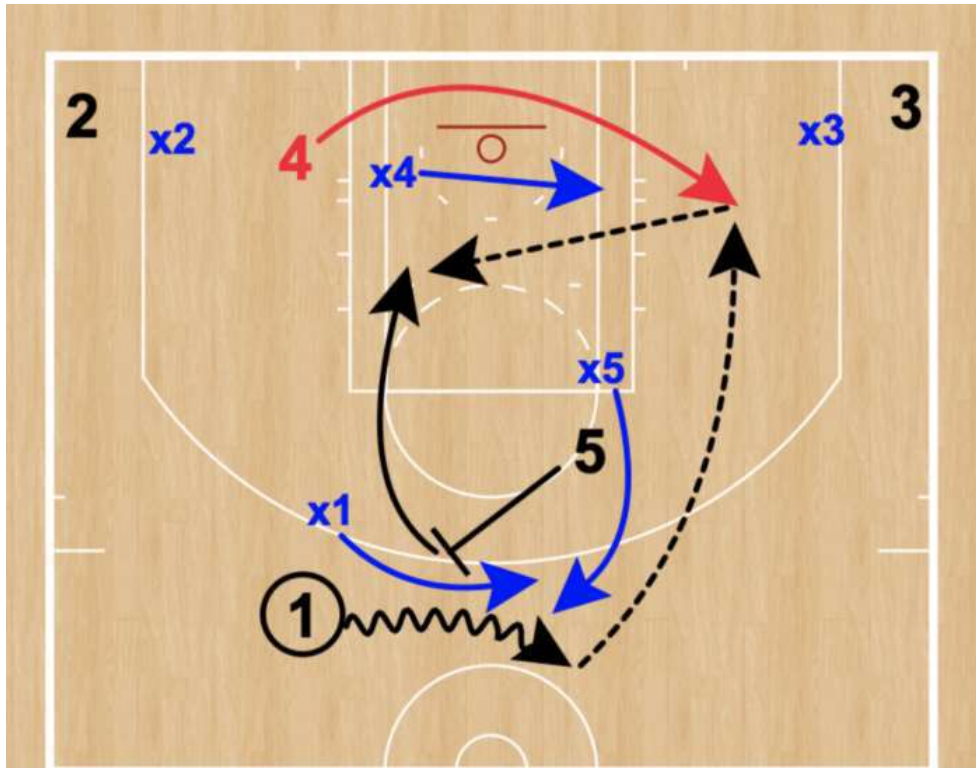
Since the NBA has embraced [drop coverage](#) in recent years, which is far more conservative than hedging, short action has been relatively dormant in the league, but in the 2021–22 season, as defenses have returned to hedging more and more, especially against elite pull-up shooters, short action has also returned.

"Short Roll"
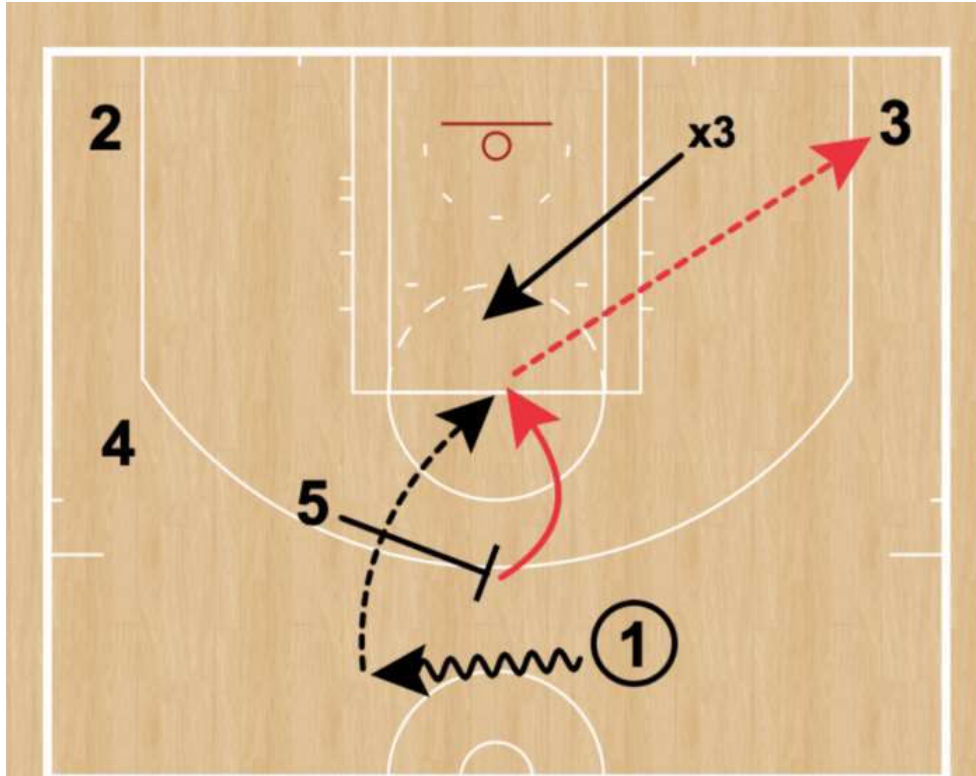
Term: Short Roll

Definition: A pick-and-roll in which the roller stops short (often near the free-throw line), receives a pass from the ballhandler, and makes plays for his teammates from there.

See Also: Short Action (a similarly named but different action; in Short Action, a third teammate cuts to the strongside of the pick-and-roll and acts as a middleman between the ballhandler and the roller; in

Short Roll, the roller is often the middleman between the ballhandler and the shooter on that play)

How It Works: In the diagram above, 5 sets a ballscreen for 1, who finds 5 near the FT line on the Short Roll. The [tagger](#), x3, has come into the lane to stop 5, so 5 finds 3 for a corner 3-pointer.

Why It Works: The Short Roll is typically used to punish teams that blitz (or hard hedge) ballscreens. If the roller rolled all the way to the hoop, the tagger could frequently intercept the pass from the ballhandler or take a charge. Instead, the roller stops short and exploits the 4-on-3 advantage created by the defense's trap.

"Slash"
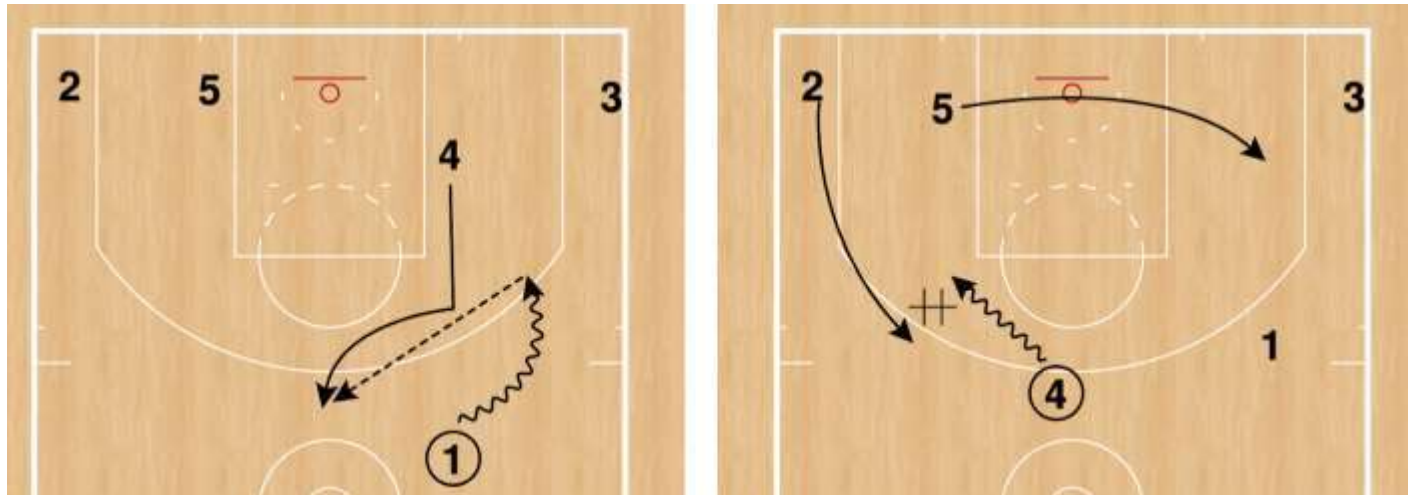
Term: "Slash"

Definition: a pick-and-pop combined with a dribble handoff to the opposite side of the court; after setting a ballscreen, the screener pops, receives a pass, and then DHOs to a teammate on the weakside

Synonyms: N/A

See Also: Blind Pig, Step-Up (two actions that often follow slash), Miami, Leak, Chicago

How It Works: In the diagram above, 4 sets a ballscreen for 1 near the right wing and then pops to the top of the key. After receiving the pass, 4 DHOs to 2 on the weakside wing.

Why It Works: Most simply, slash is a quick and effective way to set up a 2-man action on the weakside.

But slash can also set up another ball reversal for such actions as [blind pig](#) and [step-up](#) screens.

"Spain Pick-and-Roll"

Term: Spain Pick-and-Roll

Definition: a pick-and-roll combined with a backscreen for the picker as they roll to the hoop

Synonyms: Stack (the more common term in the NBA), backscreen pick-and-roll

See Also: Spain Veer (a two-person ball screen that combines Spain and Veer action; a fourth teammate sets a backscreen from one picker and then receives a down screen from the other picker)

**Origin of the Name:** @Halfcourthoops named the Spain PnR after watching the Spanish national team run this play.

How It Works: In the diagram above, 5 sets a ballscreen for 1 and then receives a backscreen from 3 while rolling to the hoop.

Why It Works: Spain PnRs are a nightmare to defend, especially if the defense uses a drop coverage against pick-and-rolls. If the defense is caught unprepared, the roller is wide open for a lob.

One variation of a Spain PnR is veer action: Instead of the guard setting a backscreen for the roller, the roller sets a down screen for the guard to pop out for a 3. Or the would-be backscreener can slip the screen and be open for his own lob. And sometimes the defense is so concerned with the backscreen that they forget to defend the ball.

Ram Spain PnR:

Spain PnR is often paired with ram, which is when a player receives an off-ball screen before setting a ballscreen, like so:
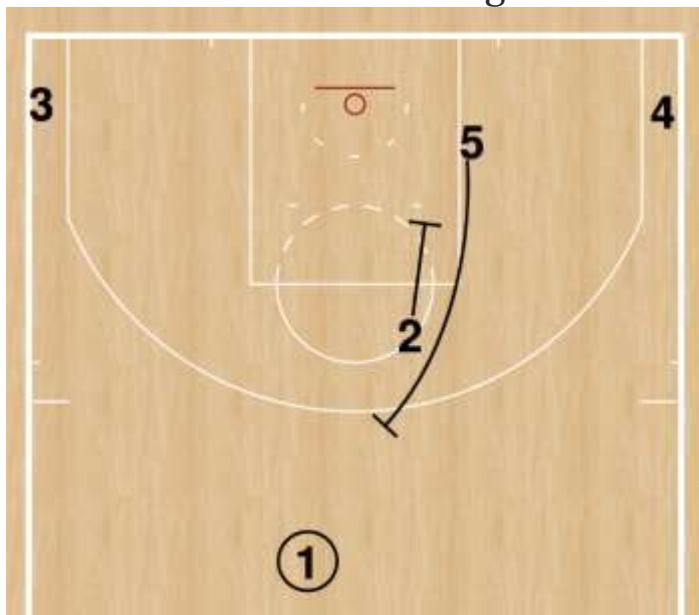
A drawback of ram is that the ram screener's defender is close to the hoop, taking away driving and rolling lanes. Ram Spain fixes that problem by having the ram screener become the backscreener.

But there's another reason to run a Ram Spain: Spain PnR works best against drop coverage, and a ram screen often forces the defense to run a drop (the defender who gets ram-screened is recovering from that and therefore trailing too far behind for a more aggressive PnR coverage, such as a [blitz or a hedge](#)).

If the defense switches the initial ballscreen, the Spain/backscreen becomes, in all intents and purposes, simply a second ballscreen, à la [Double Drag](#), or the offense can abandon the second screen entirely:

How to Defend It:

As the Spain PnR has become increasingly popular, defenses have found new ways to defend it. One option is to have the backscreener's defender bump the roller before recovering to his man.

Another option is to for a switch between the ballhandler's and the backscreener's defenders **Variations:**

Chin DHO Spain, [Ram](#) Spain PnR (the player who sets the Ram screen also sets the backscreen), Double Drag Spain PnR and Flip Alley Spain.
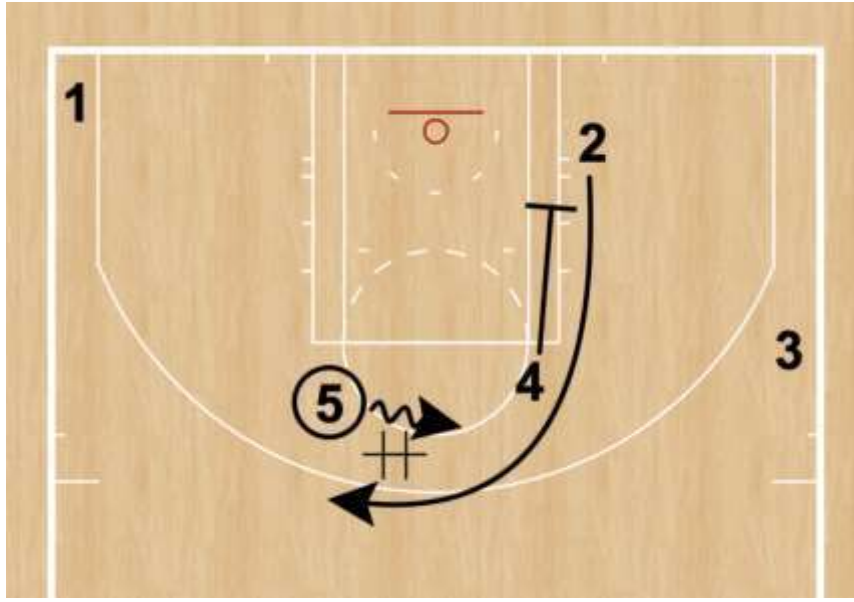
"Spanoulis"
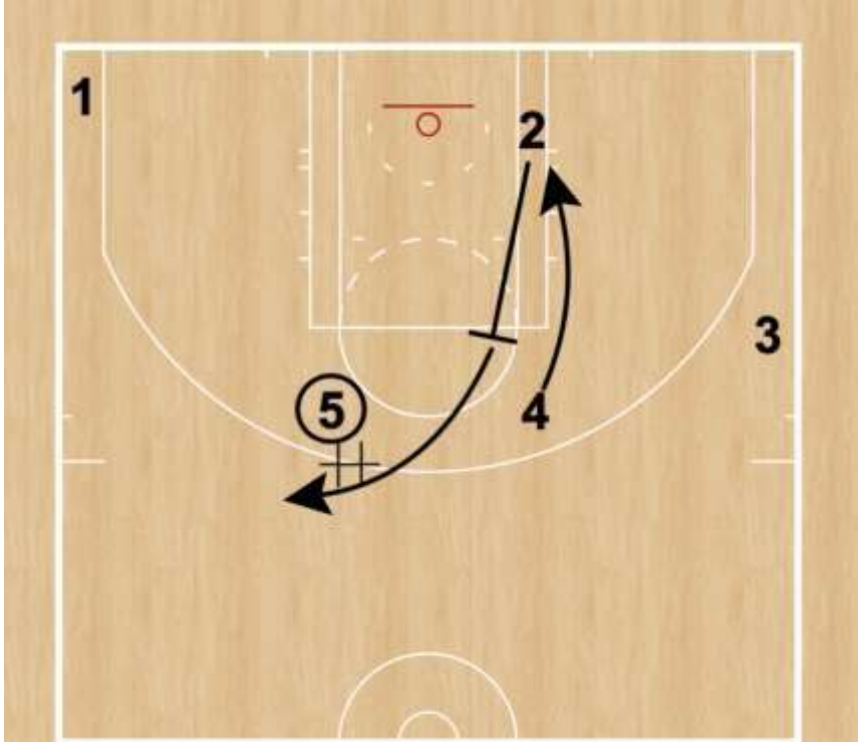
Term: Spanoulis

Definition: a backscreen followed by a gut DHO (a guard sets a backscreen near one Elbow and then receives a handoff near the other Elbow)

Alternative Definition: a down screen followed by a gut DHO — aka a Gut Chicago:

**Synonyms:** Gut Rip DHO, Peja (after Peja Stojakovic)

See Also: [Rip DHO](), Iverson cut (aka "AI" or "Philly")

Origin of the Name: [Vassilis Spanoulis, the legendary Greek basketball player idolized by Luka Doncic and Giannis Antetokounmpo as kids.]()

How It Works: In the top diagram, 2 sets a backscreen for 4 and then receives a DHO from 5.

Why It Works: If 2's defender helps prevent the possible alley-oop/backdoor pass to 4, he's out of position to defend against the handoff between 2 and 5. Or vice versa: If he doesn't leave 2 because he knows the DHO is imminent, that can leave 4 open for the easy alley-oop.

Stampede Cut
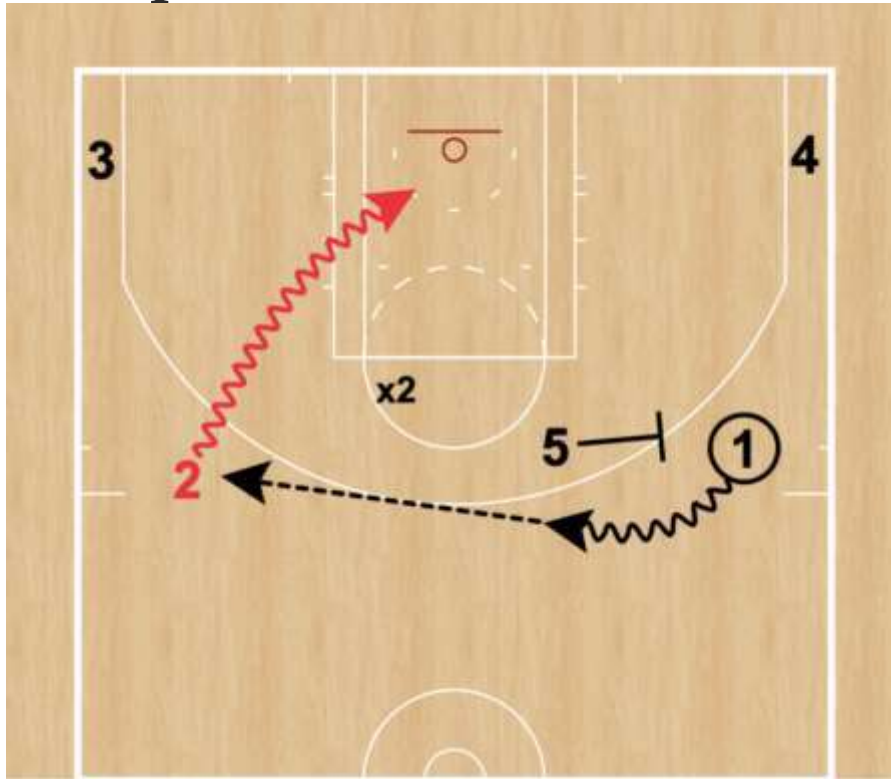
**Term:** Stampede Cut (aka "Slot Drive," "Go-and-Catch," "Run Thru")

Definition: an offensive tactic in which a player on the perimeter is already running to the hoop as he catches a pass and continues driving to the basket (instead of squaring up for a shot and then attacking the closeout)

How It Works:

Perimeter players are often taught to look to shoot as soon as they receive a pass. "The most open you're going to be is when you first catch the ball," former coach Jay Wright taught his players at

Villanova, for one notable example. After the shot has been considered, the ballhandler decides whether to drive (attack the closeout) or pass.

Another time to use Stampede Cuts is to punish a help defender for stunting/cheating towards the ball. In this diagram, x2 is the "nail defender," who is presumably responsible for digging at the ballhandler as he comes off the pick-and-roll:
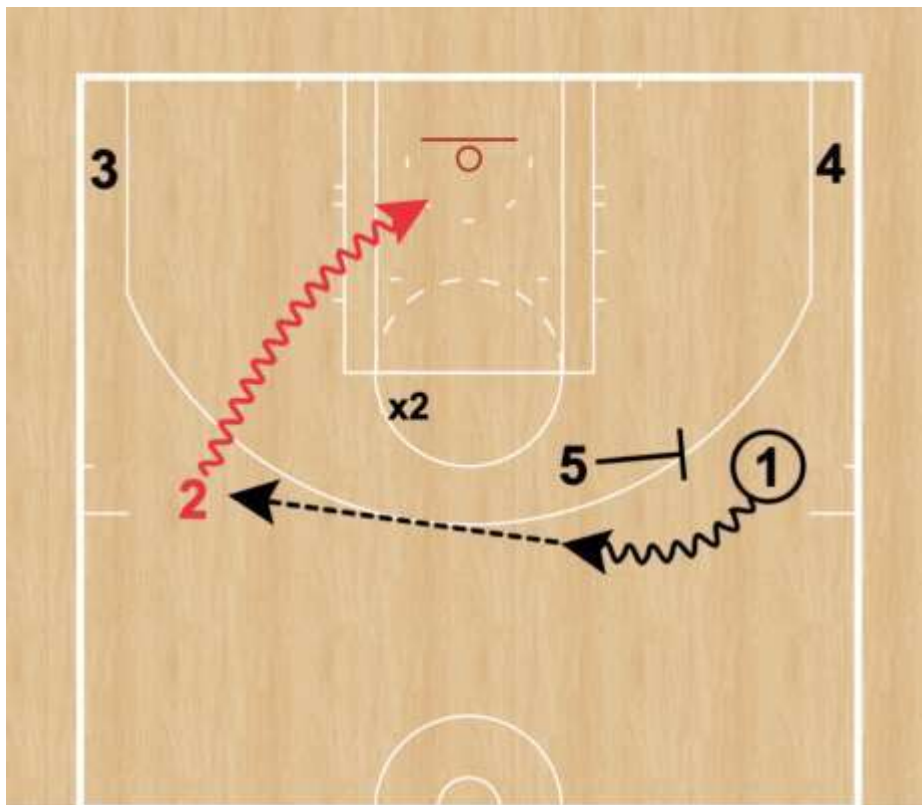
In this example, 1 uses the ballscreen and then passes to the weakside slot for 2 to make a Stampede Cut (violet).

(Note: the corner

The difference between Stampede Cuts and regular backdoor cuts is that the Stampede cutter catches the ball close to the 3-point line. He might already be running towards the hoop when he gets the ball, but he still has to dribble and drive before he's close enough for a layup. Contrast the Stampede Cut on the left with the backdoor 45 Cut on the right:
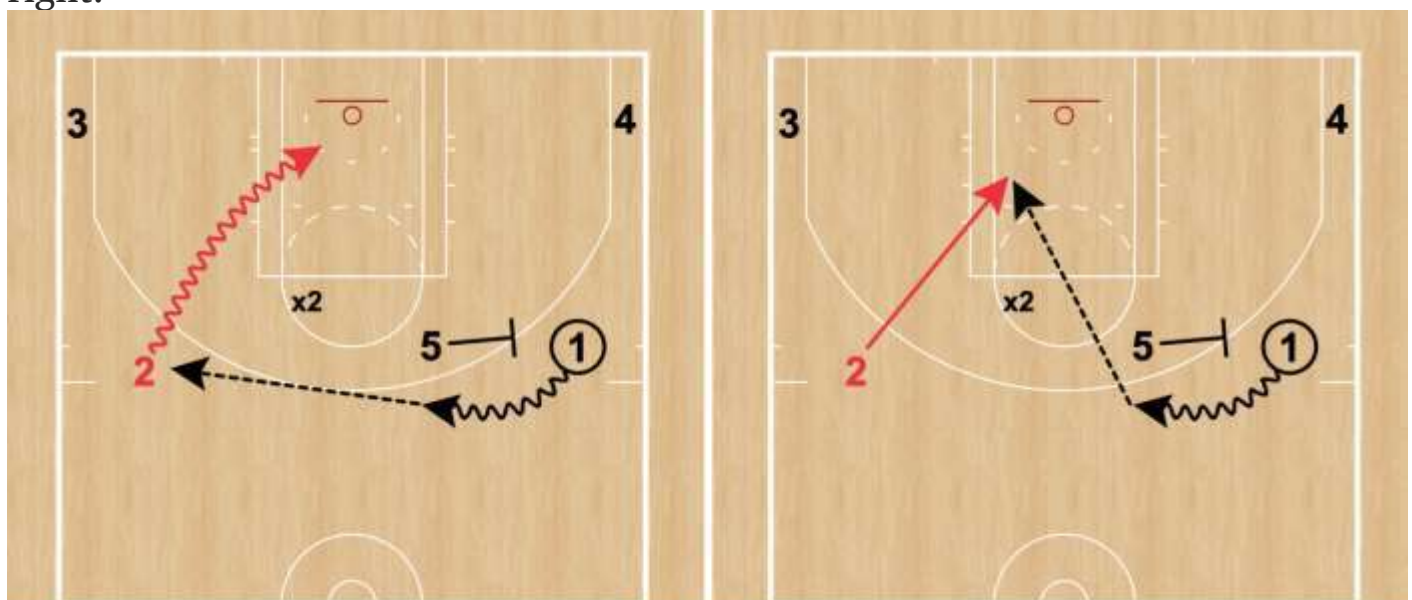
Because the cutter is both on the move when he catches the ball and too far from the hoop to layup without dribbling once or twice, Stampede Cuts are similar to Maggette Cuts (aka "blade" or "Corey Cuts"), which is when a player on the backside of a pick-and-roll lifts up from the corner to the wing and immediately attacks when he gets a pass as he curves towards the hoop.
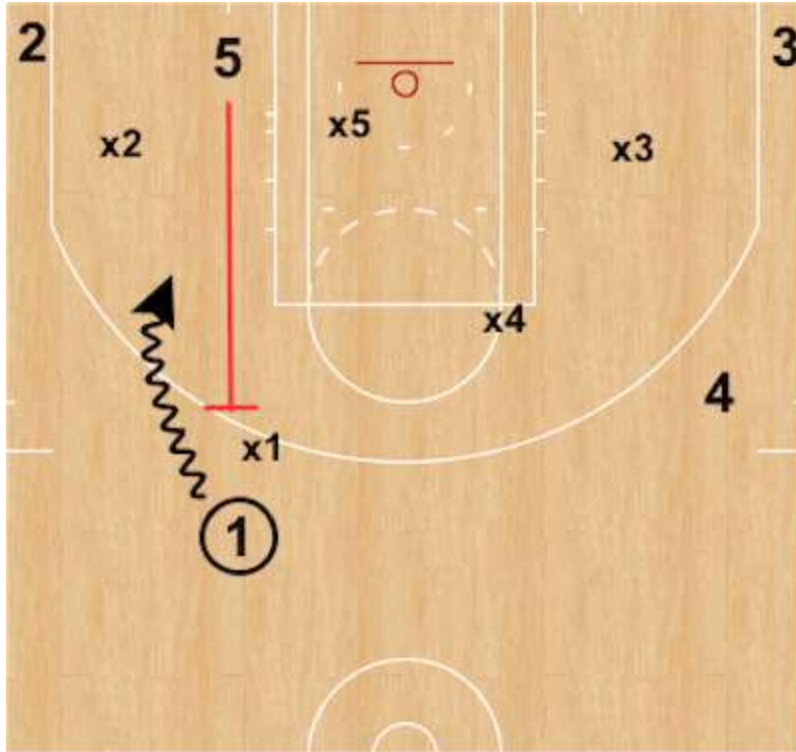
"Step-Up Screen"
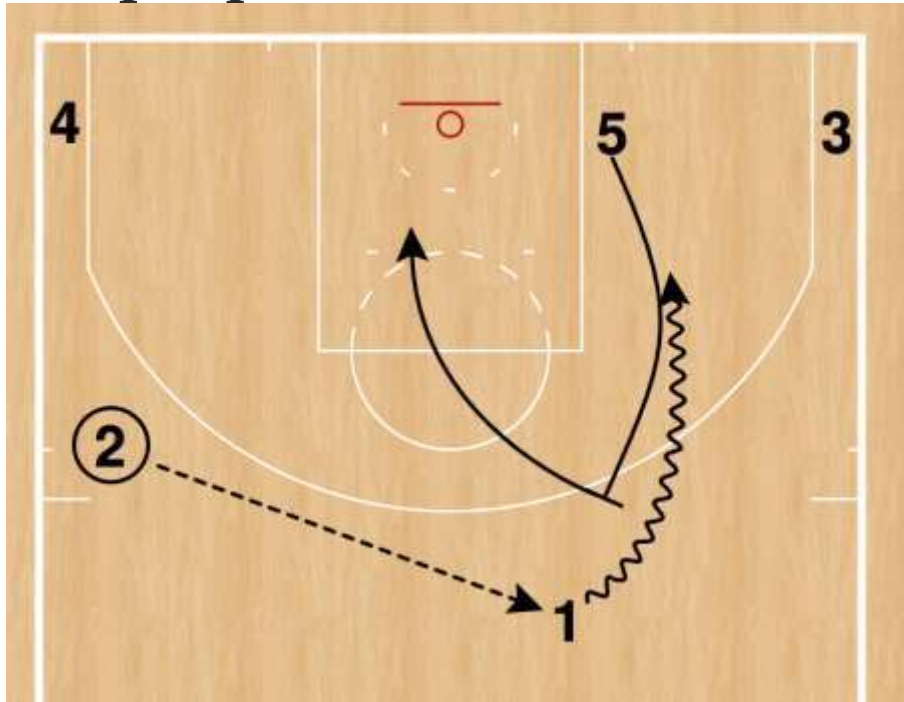
Term: "Step-Up Screen"

Definition: a side ballscreen set with the screener's back to the baseline

Synonyms: Knicks, flat

See Also: slash, alley screen, blind pig, crack screen (whether *step-up*, *Knicks*, *flat*, and *alley screen* are synonyms or related terms is a matter of debate, touched on below)

How It Works: A big near the baseline, usually close to the low post, steps up toward the wing to set a flat ballscreen.

Some sources, including [Dylan Murphy's Basketball Dictionary](#), state that the angle of step-up screen is completely flat so that the ballhandler can choose whether to drive left or right:


Hence the synonym "flat ballscreen." However, some say that not all flat ballscreens are step-ups, especially when they're set in the middle of the court (image from [@radiusathletics](#)):

Other sources agree that a step-up screen has a flat angle, but specify that it's designed for the ballhandler to drive toward the sideline:
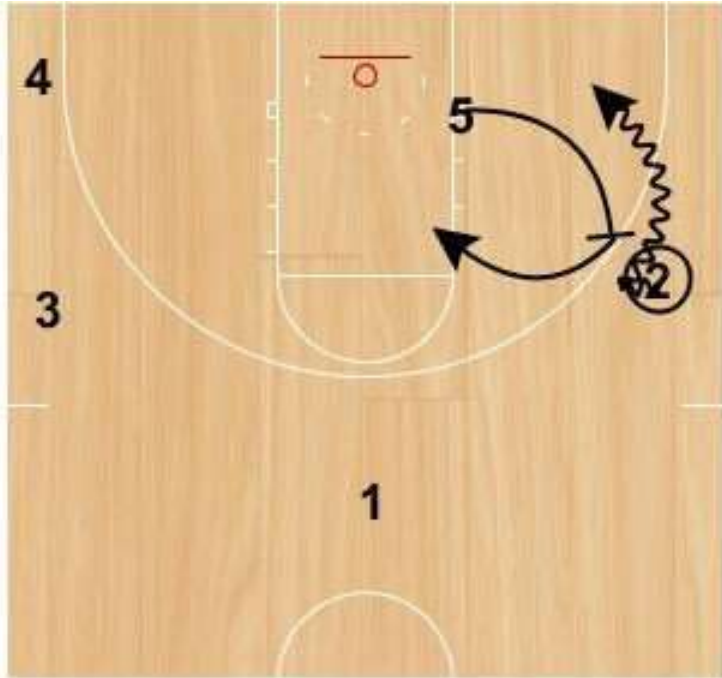
Whether it's by design or by choice, most step-up screens send the ballhandler toward the sideline because of the common "no middle" defensive philosophy. As a result, step-up screens are often, in practice, slightly angled (these are sometimes called *alley screens*):
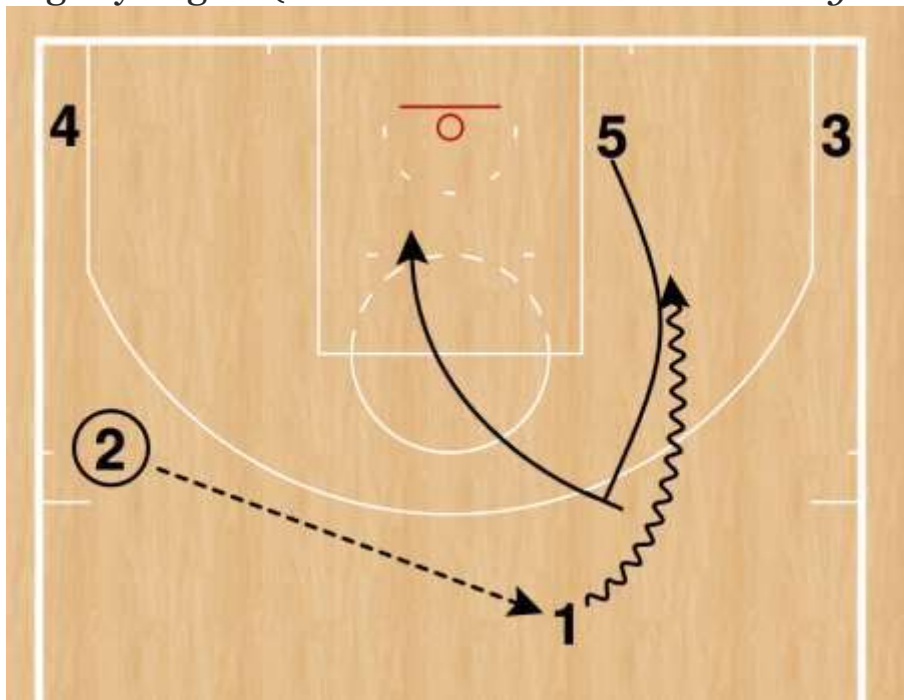
Why It Works: According to Dylan Murphy, step-ups work best when there's an element of surprise:

"A perfect step-up is almost a sneak attack. Because the screener never actually enters the on-ball defender's vision (the screener sprints into it from behind), he often cannot see or even feel it coming. And without a heads up from a defensive teammate, he gets blindsided — exactly what the offense wants."

To capitalize on the element of surprise, step-up screens are commonly used in one of two situations: in transition to relieve defensive pressure on the ballhandler (such step-ups are considered *crack screens*), and after a ball reversal.

The other common use of a step-up is after a ball reversal or lag pass. The post for blind pig mentions that teams like the Atlanta Hawks like to use slash action to set up a step-up screen for Trae Young:

If Trae's defender denies the pass to him, however, the step-up turns into blind pig. The ball is passed to the big, who pitches it to Trae as Trae runs toward the hoop.

"Swing Offense"

Term: Swing Offense

Definition: An interchangeable 4-out continuity offense that rotates between a [UCLA screen](#) and a slice/pin screen-the-screener action

Synonyms: Badger

See Also: [UCLA screen](#), Shuffle (offense), Shuffle/Slice (screen), Screen-the-Screener, Flex

How It Works: The Swing Offense uses 4-out alignment, with a player at each wing and one at each slot, including the point guard. It begins with a UCLA screen for the point guard, which means the post player starts at the low block on the strong side, while the two players on the weakside screen each other or exchange to distract their defenders from help responsibilities.

If the UCLA screen presents no scoring opportunities, the ball is swung to the opposite side, and then the point guard (1) sets a slice screen for 2 and then cuts off 5's down screen. 2 cuts all the way through the paint and establishes post position in the low block on the ball side. If he doesn't receive a pass, he then sets the UCLA screen and pops out.

From there, the pattern repeats itself: UCLA screen, ball reversal, slice/pin StS, followed by another UCLA screen, ball reversal, and slice/pin StS

Why It Works: Much like Princeton and Shuffle, the Swing Offense obviates the need for traditionally sized post players. Because every player eventually fills every spot and duty in the offense, the lack of size is less detrimental. In fact, the Swing Offense attempts to turn a negative into a positive: Because each role is interchangeable, the opponent's defenders are often asked to defend outside their typical roles, such as a point guard defending the low post and a center defending on the perimeter.

Bo Ryan, who invented the offense while an assistant coach at the University of Wisconsin, took the two backscreens — UCLA and Slice — that he felt were hard to defend without fouling. Instead of having his center try to score on the opponent's center, Ryan preferred to let his guards post up their counterparts.

Like all continuity offenses, the Swing Offense can be predictable, but it also lends itself to several variations that punishes defenses who try

to guess what will come next. For example, instead of receiving the slice backscreen, the player on the weakside wing (4) can set a down screen, which, combined with the down screen that slot player (2) was planning to set anyway, becomes a stagger screen.
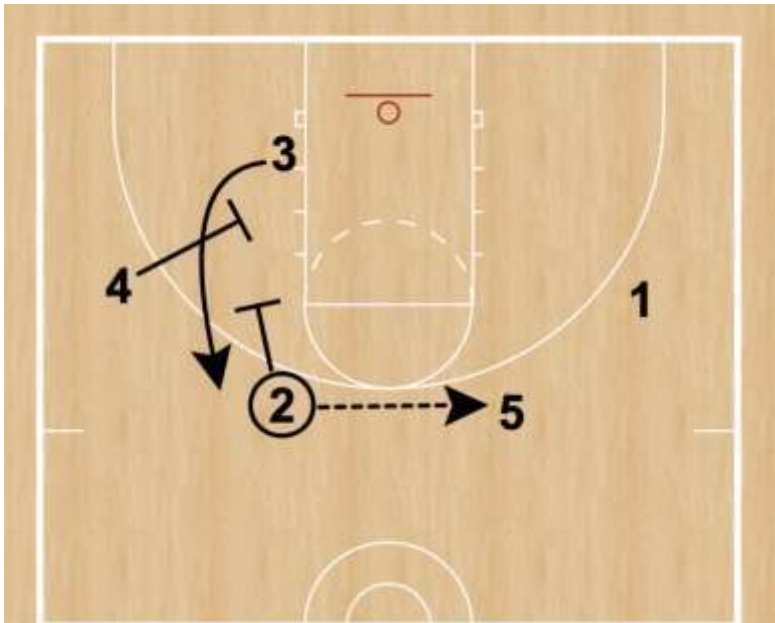

The player on the weakside wing (2 in the diagram below) also has the option of rejecting the slice screen (from 4) and cutting off the down screen (from 3):
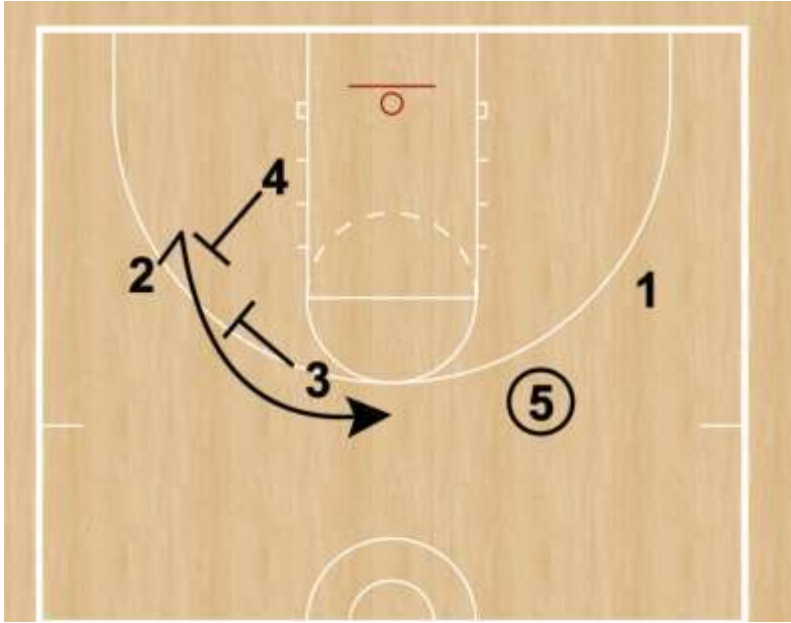
Like Princeton and Triangle, Swing is rarely copied in its entirety, but its best actions show up in vastly different offenses. The slice/pin screen-the-screener combination, including the option to reject the backscreen and cut off the down screen, is used by many NBA teams.

"Thunder Screen"
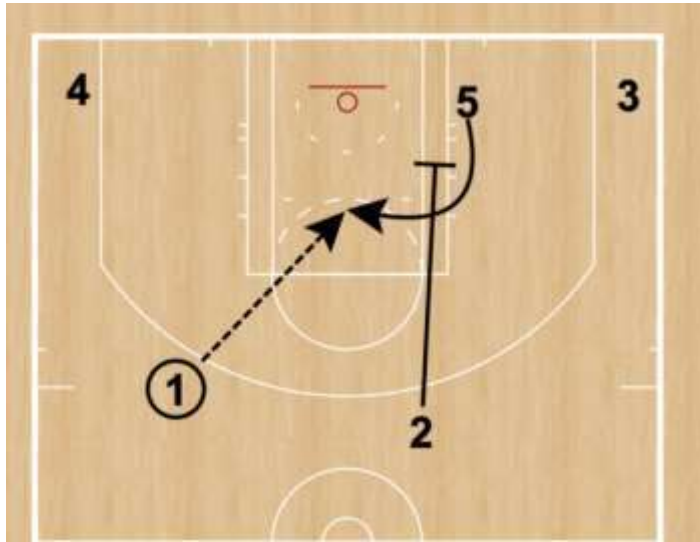
Term: Thunder Screen (aka "Dunker Pin")

Definition: A down screen for a big at the low block

See Also: down screen, zipper, ram (if the cutter then set a ballscreen)

How It Works: In the diagram above, 2 sets a thunder screen for 5, who curls the screen into the paint.

Why It Works: Much like zippers, thunder screens are difficult to switch because the offense would then have a size mismatch next to the basket. Furthermore, because the screen is near the hoop (and thus within scoring range for even the most limited of centers), the screened defender is at a disadvantage whether he goes under or over the screen. If he goes over, he's trailing from behind. If he goes under, he has to

disconnect from his man and often concedes good post position, if not a lob over the top.

In this example, Orlando's ballhandler, Hassani Gravett, feeds Robin Lopez and then makes a [Laker cut](#) that turns into a thunder screen for Franz Wagner. Atlanta doesn't want to switch this screen because that would leave the 6-4 Skylar Mays defending the 6-10 Franz Wagner underneath the hoop. Wagner's defender, Cam Reddish, fights over the screen, but Wagner still has time to finish an open layup:
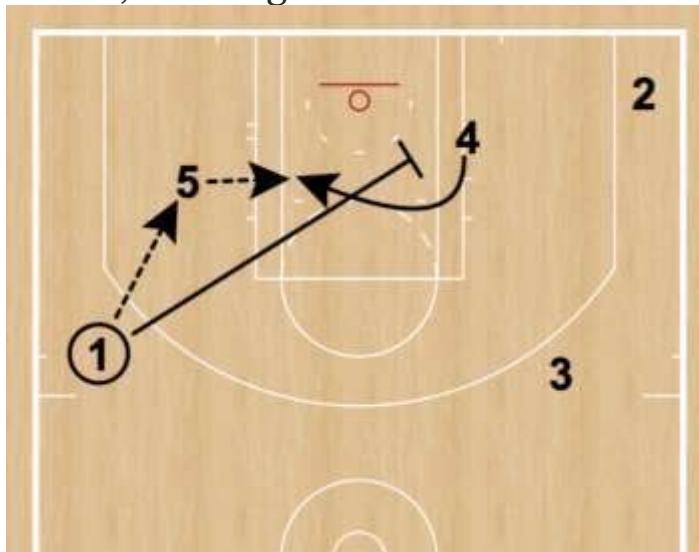
As its name suggests, the thunder screen was popularized by the Oklahoma City Thunder, who used it to great effect to free up Kevin Durant (if KD's defender top-locked him in anticipation of that screen, Russell Westbrook would often lob a pass over the top for an alley-oop).
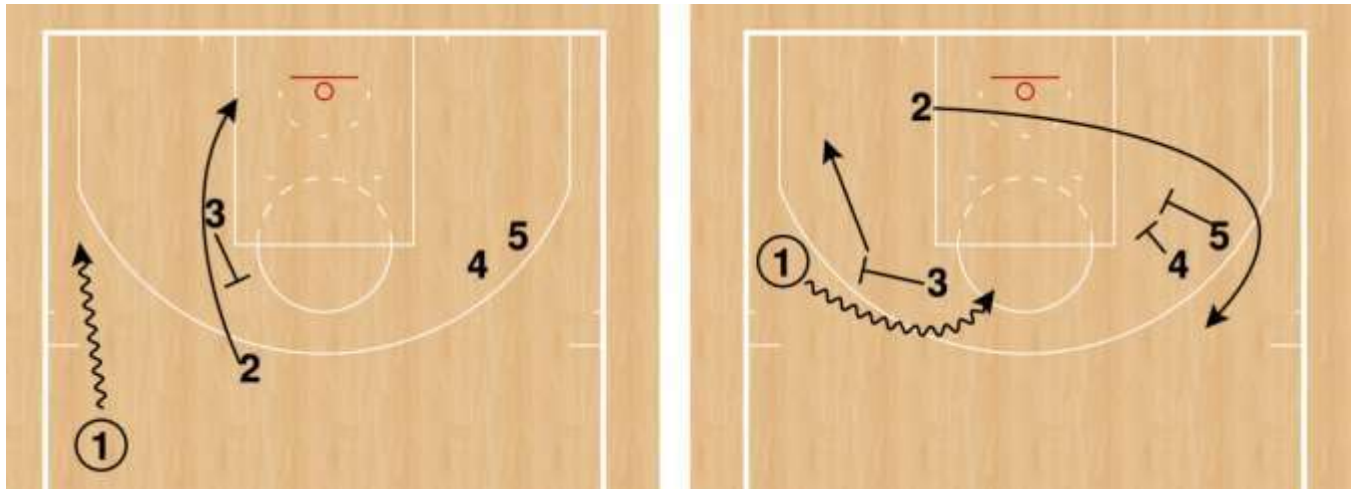
"UCLA Screen"
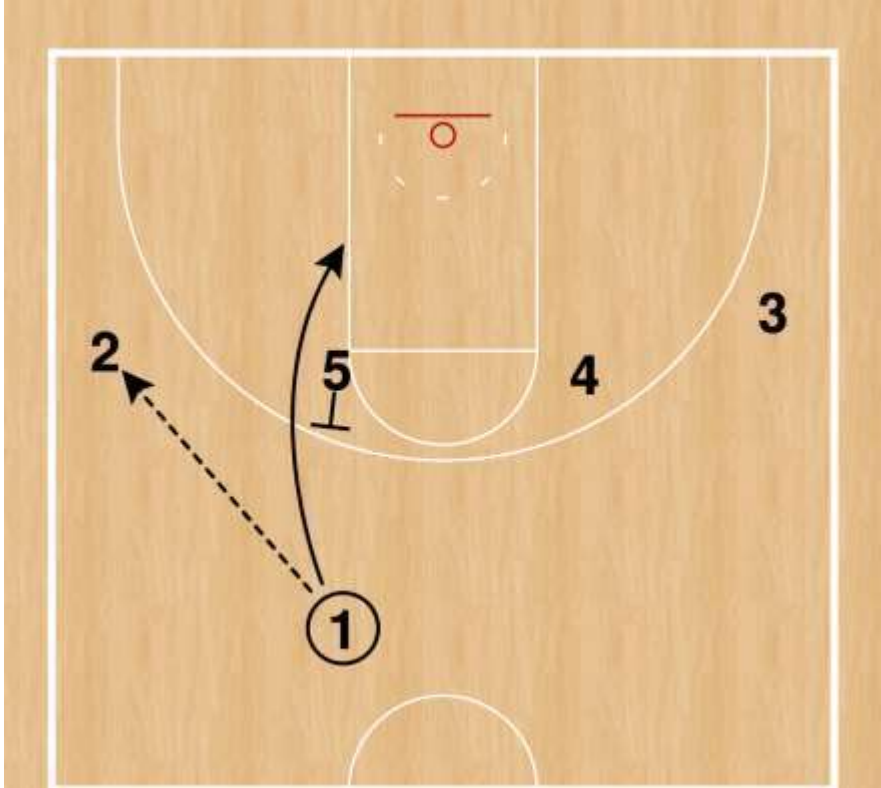
Term: UCLA screen (or UCLA cut)

Definition: a high-post backscreen for the point guard after the PG has passed to the wing

**Synonyms:** back screen, up screen

See Also:

- **Hawk Action:** a UCLA screen followed by a side ballscreen (except the point guard begins the play on the wing instead of passing there); the cutter often receives a weakside stagger

Hawk Action

- **Hawk Screen:** a UCLA screen for a non-PG (some use Hawk screen specifically for the trailing big in transition/early offense); instead of passing to the wing, the ballhandler begins the play there

- **Bazemore Cut:** a cut off a Hawk screen intended to set up a lob for the cutter; named after a SLOB play the Atlanta Hawks ran for Kent Bazemore

- **Jazz:** the PG makes the UCLA cut, then sets a back screen for the big on the weakside (the 4 in the diagram above), and then receives a pindown screen from the other big (the 5)

- **Chin:** a weakside UCLA screen, often preceded by a pass from the cutter, and often followed by a ballscreen (similar to Hawk action)
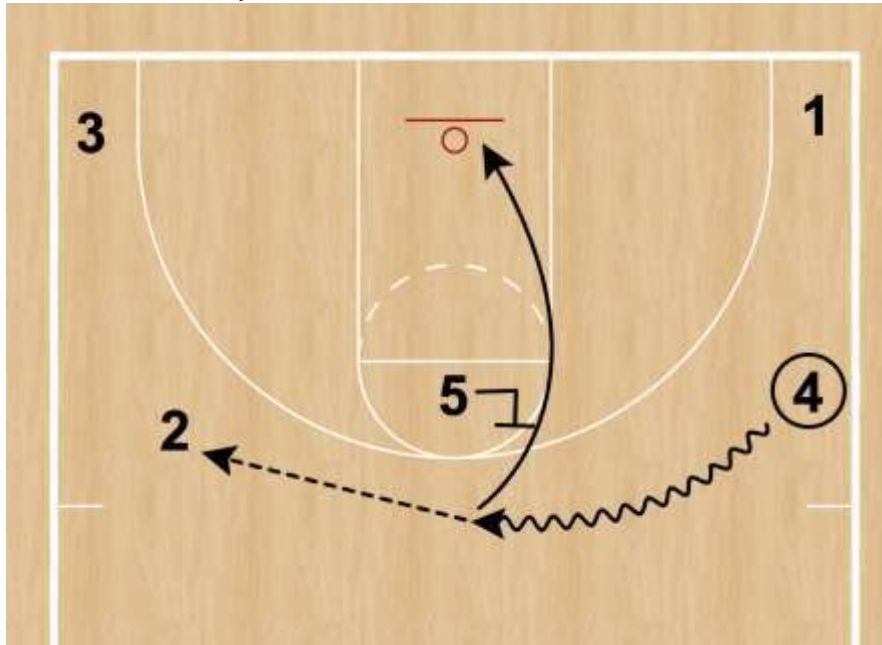
Origin of the Name: The UCLA Screen was a staple of John Wooden's 1–4 High offense.

How It Works: In the diagram above, 1 passes to 2 on the wing and then cuts off 5's UCLA screen.

Why It Works: The UCLA screen exploits the defender's tendency to relax after his man has passed the ball. Because defenses are reluctant to switch a big onto a point guard, the UCLA screen provides an easy layup when it works.

Except for defensive lapses, the UCLA screen rarely creates a wide-open layup for the cutter. The defense's adjustment to the screen,

however, leaves it vulnerable to secondary action — hence the number of variations listed in the "See Also" category. If the screener's defender sags off him to prevent the layup, for example, he's out of position to help on a subsequent screen (such as a ballscreen in so-called Hawk action or a level screen).

Quin Snyder's Utah Jazz run the UCLA screen more often than perhaps any other NBA team, but rarely do they score directly off of it. Instead, the screen is a quick way to get the defense rotating and recovering, and therefore vulnerable.

Perhaps the most common secondary action for the UCLA is to have both backside players set a stagger screen for the cutter.

UCLA Ballscreen (cf. Hawk or [Miami](#)) enables the pull-up 3 for Bojan Bogdanovic:

UCLA Point creates a handoff and roll for a Derrick Favors layup.

The UCLA screen for Bradley Beal gets his defender scrambling and vulnerable to the [exit screen](#) that sets up the corner 3:

"Veerback Switch"
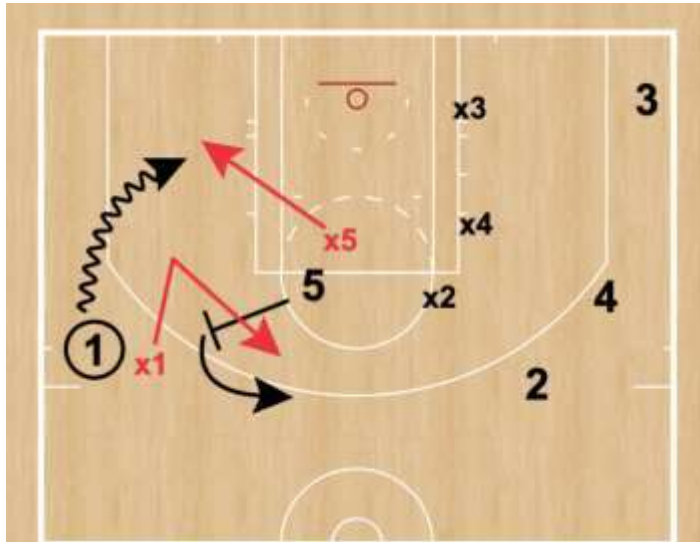
**Term:** Veerback Switch (aka "Veer Switch," "Late Switch," or "Paint Switch")

Definition: an emergency/unplanned switch after a ballscreen in which the ballhandler's defender and the screener's defender realize they can't recover to their original assignments, so they switch: The ballhandler's defender takes the screener, and the screener's defender takes the ballhandler.

How It Works:

How Veerback Works Against a Pick-and-Pop:

In the diagram below, x1 and x5 are icing a side pick-and-roll: x1 puts himself between the ball and the screen, forcing the ballhandler down

the sideline, and x5 drops to contain the ballhandler's dribble penetration:
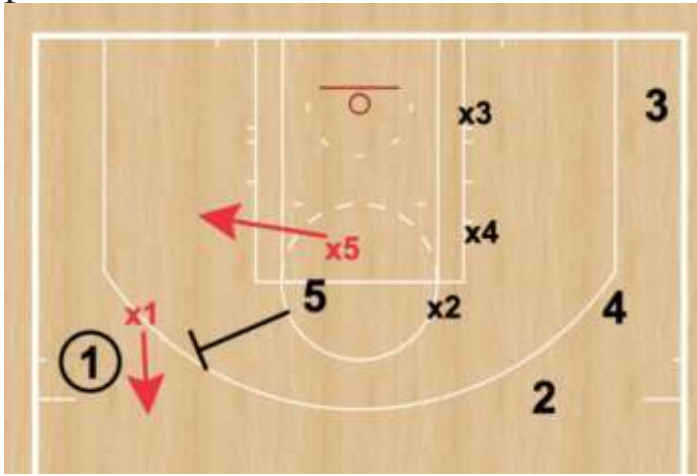
Because x1 is denying the ballscreen, the ballhandler dribbles once or twice down the sideline. The on-ball defender, x1, tries to recover back in front of the ballhandler, but icing the screen has caused him to be a step or two behind the ball. As a result, x5 must stay with the ballhandler so as not to give up an easy layup:

However, the screener, 5, pops instead of rolls and is wide open on the perimeter. Because x5 is too concerned with the ballhandler to leave him and recover to 5, he and x1 execute a veerback switch. The

screener's defender (x5) yells out his team's call for a veerback, often "veerback" or just "veer," so x1 knows to take the screener as x5 stays with the ballhandler:
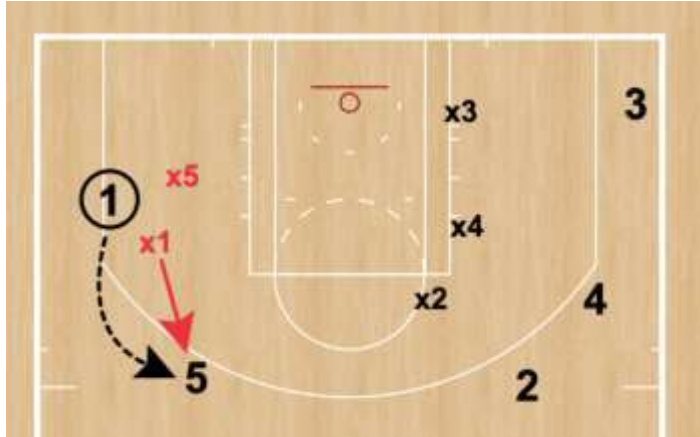
How Veerback Works Against a Pick-and-Roll:

Veerbacks can be used with any pick-and-roll coverage, but are seen most often with drop/ice/weak, all of which ask the screener's defender detach from the screener and drop back. Sometimes, containing the ballhandler brings the screener's defender too far from the screener, even in a pick-and-roll situation. In this diagram, x1 goes over the screen and is attempting his "rearview pursuit," but then veers back to x5. Notice that the veerback switch occurs below the 3-point line, which is where some teams want it to occur on a pick-and-roll:

The primary difference in veerback switching against pick-and-pops versus pick-and-rolls is the activity of the ballhandler's original defender (x1). Against a pick-and-pop, he is concerned with closing out to the screener. Against a pick-and-roll, x1 is taught to get into the legs of the roller to prevent a pocket pass and then box him out to prevent an offensive rebound.

That assumes x1 successfully navigated over the screen. If he gets caught by the screen, however, the veerback can happen much sooner—while the screen is still being set, in fact.

Veerback Against a Pick-and-Pop

Because [drop](#)/weak/[ice](#) coverage ask the screener's defender to drop back and protect the hoop, they are susceptible to pick-and-pops. But if the veerback comes early enough, it can nullify a pick-and-pop.This next play is called [Horns Out](#) [Miami](#). From Horns Out, Vucevic (5) sets

a cross screen for Zach LaVine (2) to cut to the left wing and get the ball, followed by Miami action: a DHO from LaVine to DeMar DeRozan (3) into a ballscreen from Vucevic:
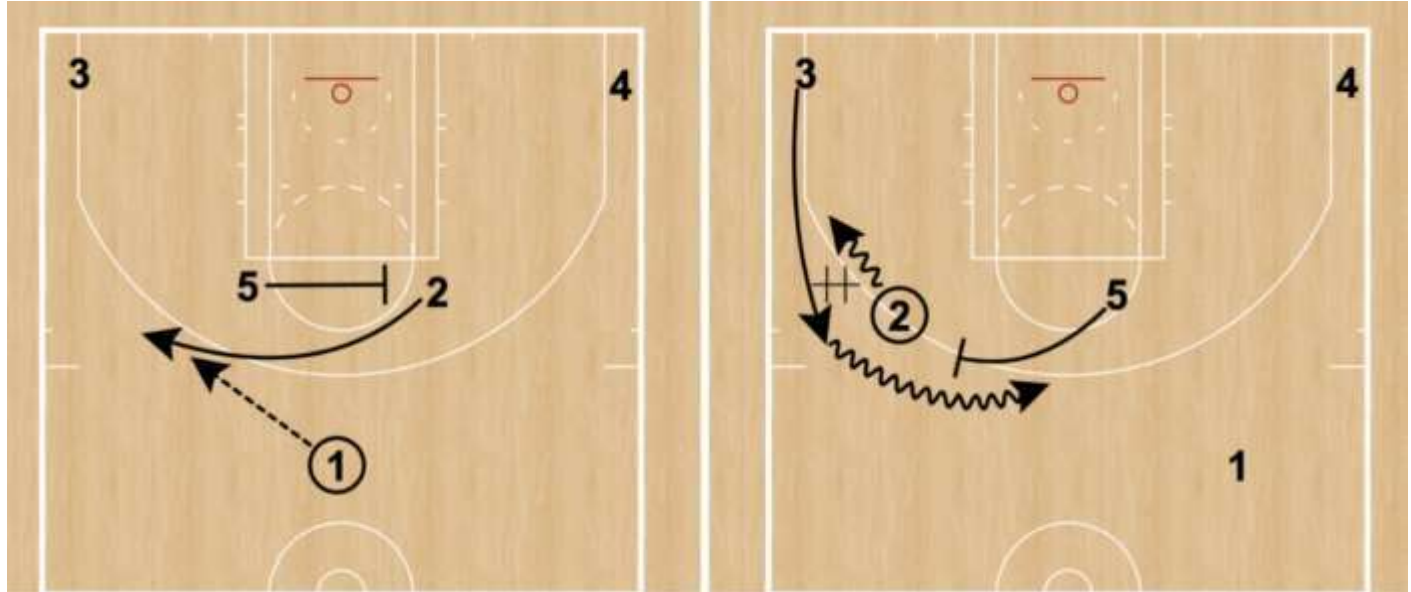
Stunt Against a Pick-and-Pop

If not veerback switching, many NBA teams defend a pick-and-pop by stunting from the closest perimeter defender.

At the lower levels, stunts are sometimes designed to discourage the pass to the popping big, but NBA teams tell their defenders not to stunt until the ball is in the air so that the player receiving the pass thinks the stunt is actually a full closeout. How hard he stunts depends upon the shooting ability of both the popping big and his original matchup. If he stunts too hard, he can still give up a 3, albeit to someone else:

Punishing a Stunt With a 45 Cut:

There are many ways to punish a stunt, which often leaves the defense vulnerable on the weak side since one defender is momentarily guarding two people. The simplest is a cut from the stunter's mark, especially a a [45 cut](#) from the weakside wing.

There are countless ways to punish drop or ice coverage with a popping big. Put simply, the more often a defense is in stunting and thus in rotation/recovery, the more likely it will make a mistake.

Veering Back to the Veerback:

The veerback is not without weaknesses. The most notable is a poorly executed switch.

The second biggest weakness of a veerback is the resulting mismatch. :

There are ways to mitigate mismatches, such as "triple switching" or "scram switching," both of which involve a second (off-ball) switch to lessened the mismatch caused by the first switch. If the offensive big tries to post up his mismatch, the defense might try to front (the call for this is often a color, such as "red" or "white"). All of these, however, are made easier by having the right personnel, which is often what dictates whether a team veerbacks or stunts in the first place.

Veerback on Pick-and-Rolls:

Veerbacks often occur during pick-and-rolls when the ballhandler "drags it out" or "snakes" the PnR, dribbling sideways to make it difficult, if not impossible, for the screener's defender to guard both ball and the roller.

Notes on Terminology:

1. The Veerback Switch or "Veer Switch" has nothing to do with a Veer Screen, in which a player sets a ballscreen and then sets an off-ball screen for a different teammate instead of rolling to the hoop.

"Veer"
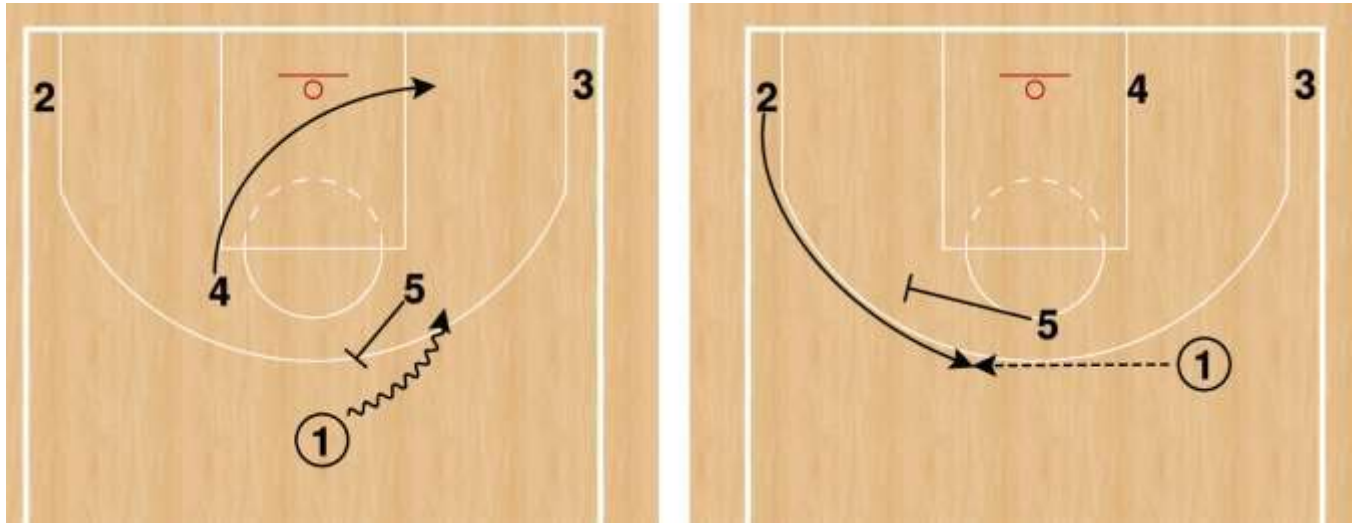
Definition: a ballscreen followed by an off-ball screen, usually a wide pin-down (the player who sets the ballscreen then sets a screen for a different teammate instead of rolling to the hoop)

Synonyms: Hooiser

See Also: Ghost, Ram, Korver, Spain Veer, Spain PnR, Double Drag (77), Garfunkel (a variation of veer in which would-be picker ghosts the ballscreen before setting the pin-down; coined by @evin_gual and @samfolkk on their podcast, Bouncing Around)

Origin of the Name: N/A

How It Works: In the diagram above, 5 sets a ballscreen for 1. But instead of rolling to the hoop (as he would in a typical pick-and-roll), he sets a wide pin-down screen for 2.

Why It Works: In short, Veer screens exploit the defensive concept known as the <u>"tag."</u> In the diagram above, 2's defender is the "tagger": His responsibility is to "tag," or bump, 5 as he rolls to the hoop.

"Zipper"
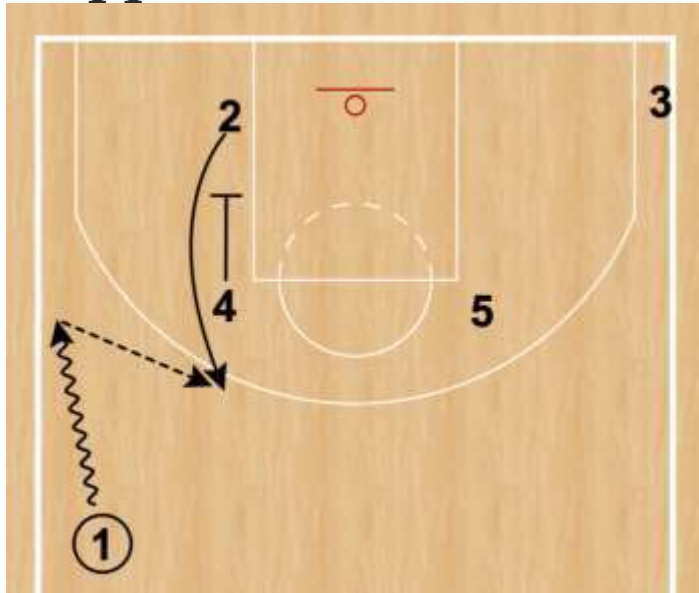
Term: Zipper

Definition: a down screen for a player on the strongside low block to cut to the slot, where he receives a pass from the wing

See Also:

- Down screen

- Loop (a play from the San Antonio Spurs motion offense similar to floppy that is initiated with a zipper)

- UCLA (a zipper screen in reverse)

Origin of the Name: The zipper cut was the first movement of the zipper offense used by the Boston Celtics in the 1960s.

How It Works: In the diagram above, 4 sets a zipper screen for 2 to cut to the slot, where he receives a pass from 1 on the wing.

Zipper screens are often preceded by the point guard dribbling to the wing, triggering the player in the corner (or on the wing) to move to the low block and make a zipper cut.

Unlike most down screens, a zipper is rarely a scoring action by itself. Of course, zippers can set up a catch-and-shoot attempt or an isolation:

But more often than not (especially at the pro level), it's followed by another action, such as a pick-and-roll or and an off-ball screen, typically to the weakside.

Why It Works: Because the zipper screen occurs near the low post, defenses are reluctant to switch; if they do, the screener (often a center) is defended by a guard on the block, in easy post position. Instead, the cutter's defender usually lock and trails, making him a step or two behind his man and therefore at a disadvantage.

From ram/wedge rolls to Chicago, actions are often stacked on top of each other because recovering from the first puts the defender susceptible for dealing with the second. For zippers, the second action is frequently to the weakside, exploiting the principles of help defense (as hammers also do). Perhaps the most common use of a zipper is to

pair it with a ballscreen, often called Zip Spread or Zip Fist, to the opposite side of the court:
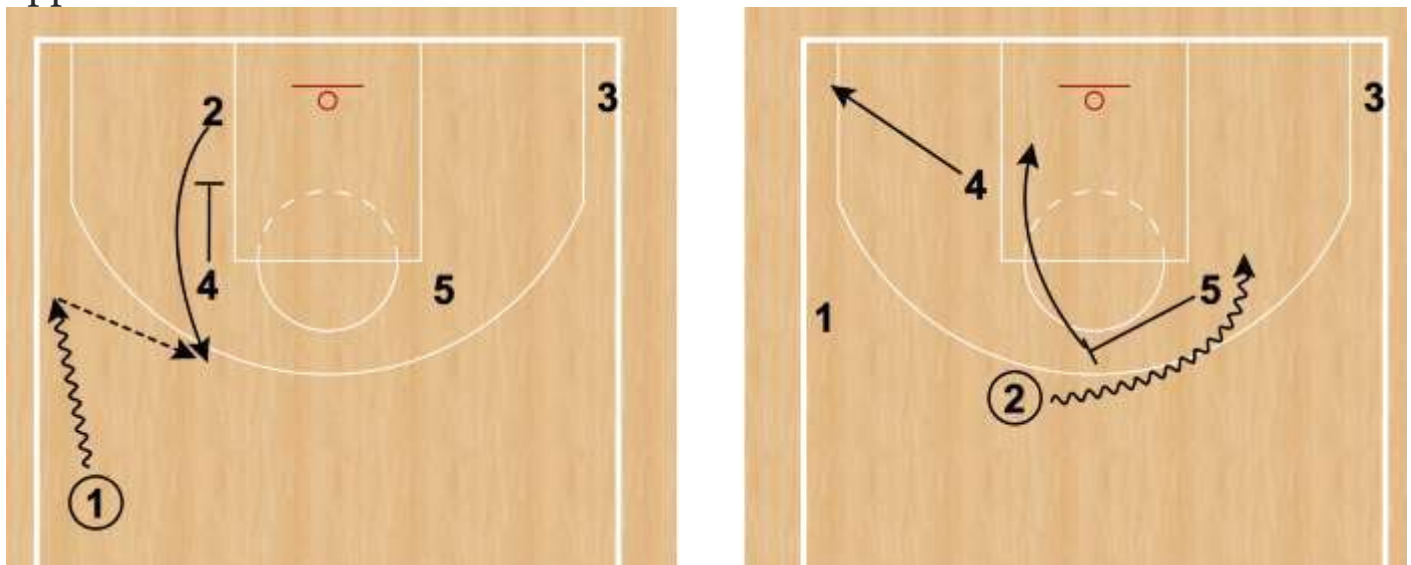
A zipper can also be paired with a weakside pin-down or flare screen.

Zippers are also great for getting the ball out of the point guard's hands, particularly if he's a shooter adept at coming off screens: San Antonio's "Loop" play also uses a zip cut, thus letting the initial ballhandler, often Tony Parker or Manu Ginobili, cut off the floppy screens:

Conversely, zippers can also be used to get the ball into the hands of scoring off-guards and also relieve the pressure for a team playing without a traditional playmaker at point guard.

Although zipper is a type of down screen, not all down screens are zippers. Here, Tony Snell inbounds the ball to Trae Young, who's coming off a zipper screen.

Because zippers include a pass from the wing, they're commonly part of SLOB plays. Here, the inbounder gets a handoff or pitch from the player who made the zipper cut and then gets a ballscreen (similar to [Miami](#) action):

See More:

Zip Spread:

Zipper [Blind Pig](#):