

Coaching Clinic Notes – Coach Eric Olen, University of New Mexico

Session Focus: Five Out Ball Screen Motion Offense

Introduction

Coach Eric Olen, newly appointed head coach at the University of New Mexico after two decades at UC San Diego, presented his offensive basketball philosophy. His system revolves around **five out ball screen motion**—prioritizing player decision-making, offensive spacing, and reading defensive coverages rather than relying on rigid set plays.

Core Philosophy

- **Concepts Over Sets:** Offensive actions are concept-based, with set plays reserved for ATOs or specific situations.
 - **Spacing-Driven System:** Five out spacing is non-negotiable—three players remain behind the arc on all ball screen actions.
 - **Freedom Within Structure:** Players have freedom to make reads, provided they execute within the defined framework.
 - **Versatility:** Emphasis on teaching players to both handle and screen, increasing flexibility and matchup hunting opportunities.
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Ball Screen Spacing Concepts

Three Defined Spacings

1. **One Behind**
 - One player behind the ball screen.

- Flat screen angle to force over.
- Automatics: roll/lift, two-man exchange to vacate the nail.

2. Two Behind

- Two players behind the screen.
- Allows shaping up for throwbacks and “burn the stunt” cuts.
- Pop or slip into cut/read actions.

3. Empty

- All three non-screener on one side.
- Step-ups and two-man games dominate this spacing.
- Drives require weak side reads and 45 cuts or pin downs.

Note: Even imperfect spacing falls into one of these three categories.

Automatics and Action Flow

- Screen **rejection** triggers an automatic **pop** from the screener.
 - Actions flow organically: a **rejected screen** can lead to a two behind or empty action.
 - Ball screens are **layered**, not isolated events—fluidity is essential.
 - **Rolls, pops, and lifts** are all leveraged based on the defense’s coverage.
 - Every action connects to the next—**conceptual chains** instead of “set play” execution.
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Roles and Responsibilities

Screener

- High usage decision-maker.
- Must read coverage and flow into post-up, pop, or re-screen.
- Drives offensive continuity by linking actions.

Guards

- Frequently used in ball screens due to skill and matchup creation.
 - Can switch roles with bigs to create confusion and mismatches.
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Tactical Strategies

- **Switching Defense:** Used to target favorable mismatches (e.g., “Waldo” concept).
 - **Rejecting Screens:** Exploits soft coverage; converts actions dynamically.
 - **Reading the Low Man:** Key to weak side decisions in empty spacing.
 - **Matchup Hunting:** Strategic switches and slips are used to isolate weaker defenders.
 - **Post Entry from Guards:** “Aaron Gordon” post-ups for mismatched wings.
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Practice & Drills

- **Breakdown Drills:**
 - Part-whole method (e.g., 3-on-0).
 - Controlled defense to simulate reads and decision-making.
- **Reading the Low Man:**
 - Coaches simulate defenders in breakdowns.
- **Screen Angle Emphasis:**

- Flat = ideal for forcing “over.”
 - Avoid “chest-to-sideline” angles that allow easy unders.
 - **Winning the Race:**
 - Beating soft under coverage by creating downhill angles.
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Transition Offense

- **Five Out in Transition:**
 - Prioritize spacing before attacking.
 - Avoid crowding the ball—find drag or empty actions quickly.
 - **Early Post Ups:**
 - Exploit defenders not yet matched up.
 - Target cross-match opportunities on the break.
 - **Running to the Rim:**
 - When ahead of defender, run straight to post or seal.
 - **Ball Movement:**
 - Flow from rim runs into movement and next action if advantage is lost.
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Personnel & Lineup Versatility

- Not positionally rigid—players are grouped by **skill sets**.
- **Non-traditional lineups** are embraced: guards in the post, bigs on the perimeter.
- Versatility increases control over possession outcomes and enhances matchup leverage.

Final Takeaways

- Ball screen motion built on structure + freedom = consistent advantage creation.
- Every player must understand spacing, screening angles, and flow.
- The system gives control back to the offense by dictating matchups and reads.
- Seamless **transitions between actions** are more effective than static plays.
- Teaching versatility allows the offense to adjust to any personnel or opponent.