to shoot on a fast break whenever he wants. Other players, such as Marcus Camby and Kenyon Martin, are not our best options for the first shot on the fast break or when they're open on the perimeter, because they possess different offensive skills.

EXECUTING THE FAST BREAK

When it comes to running our break, the rules are few. The freedom we allow execution-wise has a purpose—we want players to learn to think for themselves and react instinctively in the most effective manner in each situation. That's because each situation on any given break presents unique challenges and opportunities. If we were to preprogram players to always move to a certain spot on the court or always run the same pattern, we'd make life much easier for our opponent and miss a lot of scoring chances along the way.

This less-structured approach is a good basis for player development. Through being forced to make many fast decisions on the fly repeatedly every practice, they gain a good sense of what the game is about and how to play it. Mind you, it won't always be pretty, but it's essential that you stand firm behind what you're teaching and stay positive with the players.

When we were implementing the offense in Denver, we had an exhibition game in Wyoming versus Golden State. The Warriors just killed us, and we committed 30 or more turnovers. After the game, everyone was commenting on how poorly we were executing the break and even suggesting that we might want to slow down our offensive attack. So they were surprised when we sounded so optimistic after the blowout. From our perspective, our pressure defense was great, our rebounding was great, and our running was great. What we hadn't quite developed yet was a feel for the passing game.

Starting Point

As we mentioned before, only one position on our team has a defined role in our break. The point guard is responsible for receiving the ball from the rebounder (assuming the point guard hasn't rebounded the ball). We'll emphasize once again just how important defensive rebounds are to making a fast break successful. When the opposition shoots, your players must crash the boards with all their might and make sure they get the ball quickly to the point guard, who should either come to the ball or create a clear passing lane between himself and the rebounder. We want our point guard to receive the outlet pass as far away as possible from the defensive basket (figure 9.1). He's our main target when we start the fast break. However, if there is good defensive pressure on him, making this first pass extremely difficult, we want the guard to quickly come in closer and get the ball (figure 9.2).

Once the ball is in hand, the point guard quickly brings the ball up the middle of the court, where defenders can't use the sideline to trap him. We believe having the ball in our point guard's hands places pressure on the defense. The point guard can penetrate to the basket, pass the ball to an open teammate, shoot a pull-up jumper, or

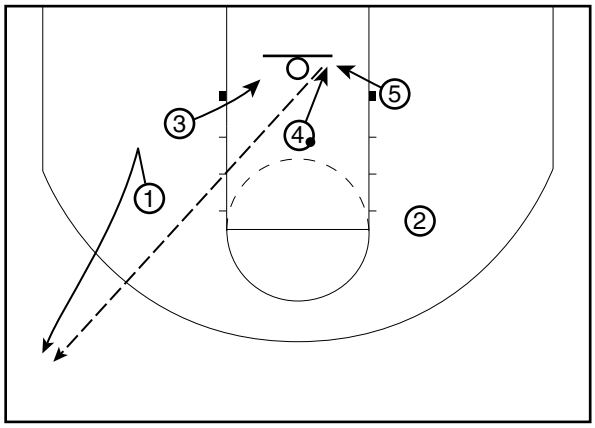

Figure 9.1 We want to make the outlet pass to the point guard as far as possible from the basket.

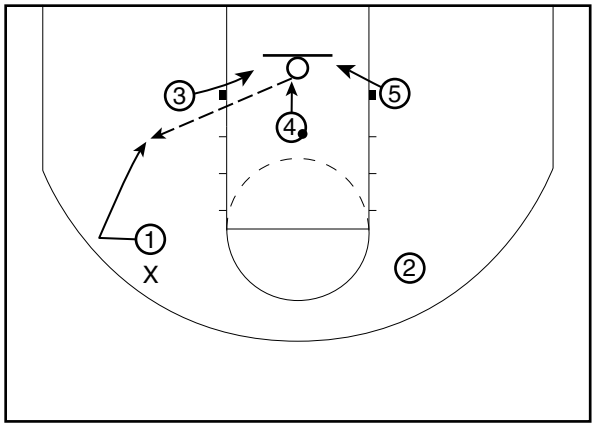

Figure 9.2 When pressured by the defense, the point guard might receive the first pass closer to the rebounder.

even launch a three-pointer on occasion. In our system, as in many fast-break attacks, the point guard is the key cog in initiating the offense and making the first key decision in the frontcourt.

Winging It

Once possession is gained, the two players closest to the wings (roughly the free-throw line extended on each side of the court) should sprint to those spots. We want them as wide as possible to create space to allow more room for the point guard to receive the ball from the rebounder. Then, as the point guard takes off with the ball, the wings dash down opposite sides of the court, staying wide until they reach the free-throw line extended on the offensive end (figure 9.3). The most difficult thing to teach the players who run on the wings is to stay wide. The wider they are, the better the passing lanes, thereby increasing our chances to score.

Again, we don't force any rules on the wings. Depending on the defensive situation, they must read and react. In short, the two wings can cross in the lane (figure 9.4), they can stop at the free-throw line extended (figure 9.5), they can play give-and-go with the point guard (figure 9.6), or they can try any other option the defense allows.

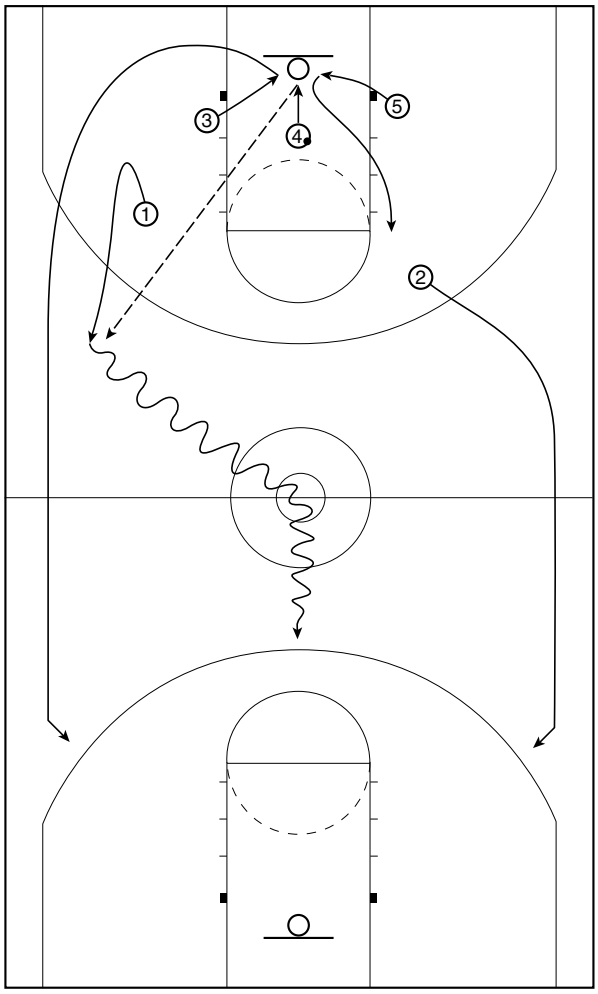

Figure 9.3 The two wings stay wide and run near the sideline.

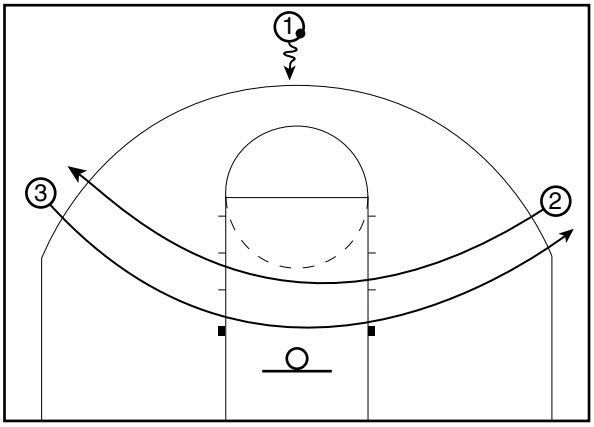

Figure 9.4 Depending on the defense, the wings can cross in the lane.

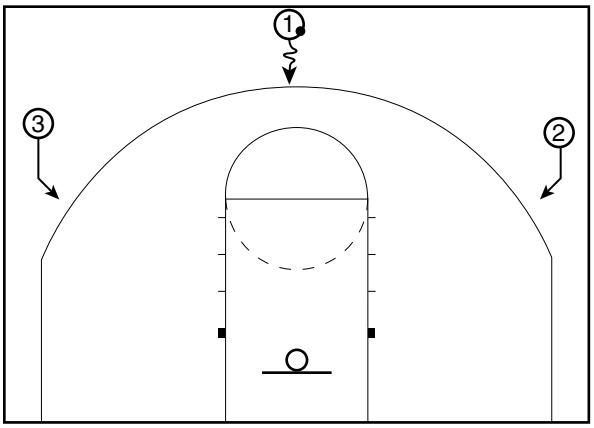

Figure 9.5 The wings can also stop at the free-throw line extended.

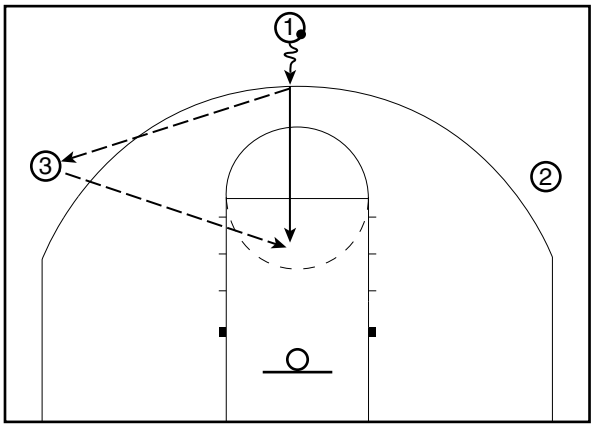

Figure 9.6 The wings can also play give-and-go or try any other option the defense allows.

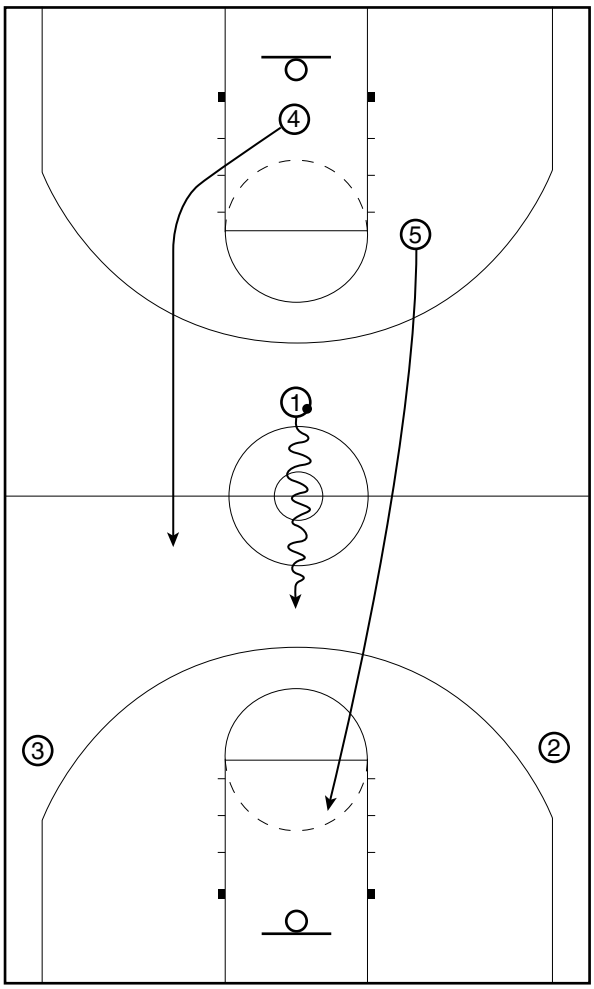

Figure 9.7 The big men (4 and 5) are usually the trailers—but not always.

Ideally, your 2 and 3 players will fill the role of the wings most of the time. They'll usually be faster than your big men and better able to convert a scoring opportunity during the initial onslaught. But we don't have any strict rules on this because in some cases the 4 or 5 could fill the wing lane.

Support Troops

Assuming your 4 and 5 players gain the majority of your defensive rebounds, they'll most often be the last two team members up the court. If 4 grabs the rebound, he'll fill the lane between the point guard and a wing on one side of the court. 5 will trail the point, moving to a position near the top of the key (figure 9.7).

As with the wings, the spacing of the two trailers is important. They should be far enough apart that they both can't be covered by one defender, and they must stay aware of what's happening as they run upcourt, ready to alter their paths as necessary.

PRIMARY BREAK

As you'd expect, quickness and speed are vital to the primary break. By "primary break" we mean a fast break run when there's a real advantage over the defenders.

In all situations in which there's an offensive advantage, defenders are outmanned and kept off balance, creating a variety of possible mismatches. The defense simply