

personal ambitions to the best interests of the group. This is essential for the system to achieve optimal results.

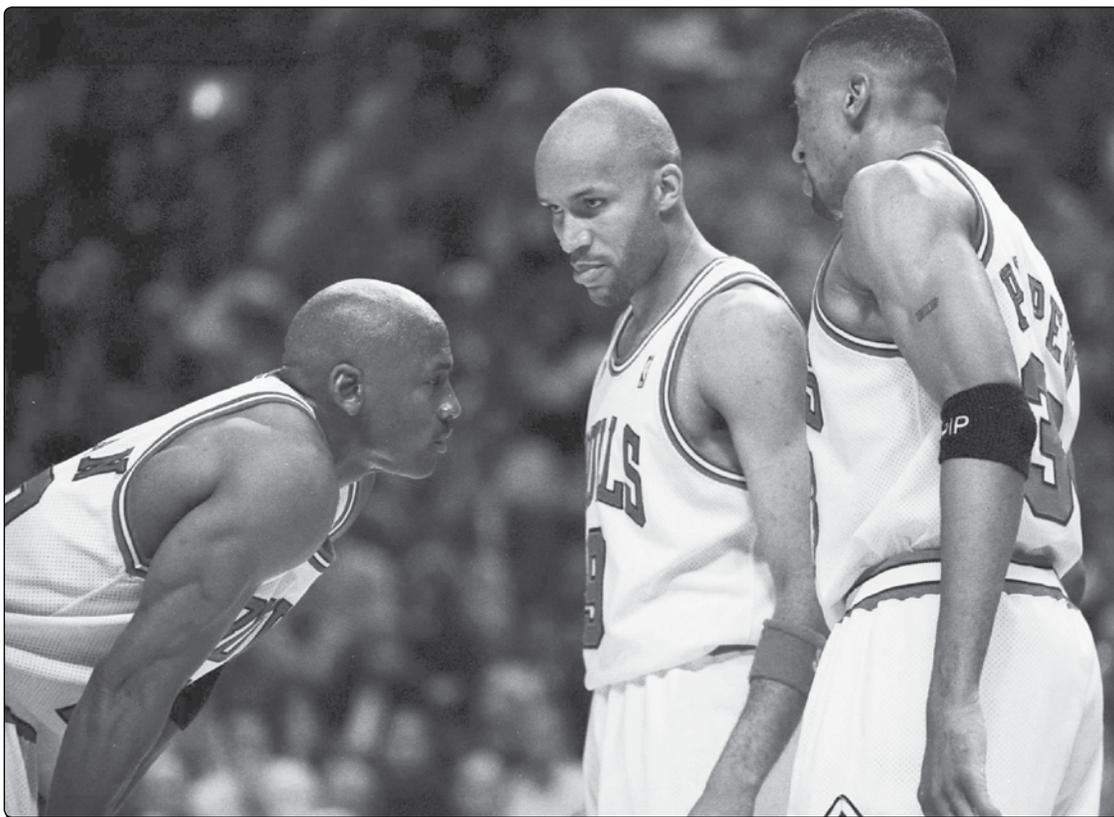
The system also runs better when players' games are well-rounded, not one- or two-dimensional. Complete players well-versed in fundamental movement, ball handling, screening, and shooting skills will perform the tasks demanded of them within the offense more effectively and consistently. Basketball played at its best is a reflexive sport, and I want my team to play a fluid, instinctive, complete game.

I rejected the idea of relying solely on a point guard to bring the ball up the court and make all the ball-handling decisions. Ultimately, a good defensive opponent will pressure and destroy a team with a single point-guard orientation. A two-guard offense allows players to share the ball handling and passing duties and prevents a defense from ganging up against one player out front.

## SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE SOUND OFFENSE

An effective offense, to my way of thinking, features the following dimensions.

1. *Penetration.* Players must penetrate the defense, and the best way to do this is the fast break, because basketball is a full-court game, from baseline to baseline.
2. *Spacing.* I am a fanatic about how players distribute themselves on the offensive end of the court. They must space themselves in a way that makes it most difficult to defend, trap, and help. Players must align a certain number of feet apart. In high school, I'd recommend 12 to 15 feet spacing, in college, 15 to 18 feet, and in the NBA, 15 to 20 feet. Proper spacing not only exposes individual defensive players'



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Multidimensional players like Michael Jordan, Ron Harper, and Scottie Pippen, shown here back in the 1996 Finals, are perfectly suited to run the triangle offense.

vulnerabilities, but also ensures that every time the defense tries to trap, an offensive player will be open.

3. *Ball and player movements.* Players must move, and must move the ball, with a purpose. Effective off-the-ball activity is much more important than most fans and players think because they're so used to watching only the movement of the ball and the player in possession of it. But there is only one ball and there are five players, meaning most players will have the ball in their hands 20 percent or less of the time the team is in possession of the ball.
4. *Options for the ball handler.* The more options a smart player has to attack a defender, the more successful that offensive player will be. When teammates are all moving to positions to free themselves (or another teammate with a pick), the ball handler's choices are vastly increased.
5. *Offensive rebounding and defensive balance.* On all shots we take, players must go strong for the rebound while retaining court balance and awareness to prevent the opponent's fast break.
6. *Versatile positioning.* The offense must offer to any player the chance to fill any spot on the court, independent of the player's role. All positions should be interchangeable.
7. *Use individual talents.* It only makes sense for an offense to allow a team to take advantage of the skill sets of its best players. This doesn't preclude the focus on team play that is emphasized in the six other principles, but it does acknowledge that some individuals have certain types and degrees of talent, and an offense should accentuate those assets. Michael Jordan taught me this.

Finally, I want the offense to flow from rebound to fast break, to quick offense, to a system of offense. The defenses in the NBA

are so good because the players are so big, quick, and well coached. Add the pressure that the 24-second clock rule applies to the offense to find a good shot, and the defense gets even better.

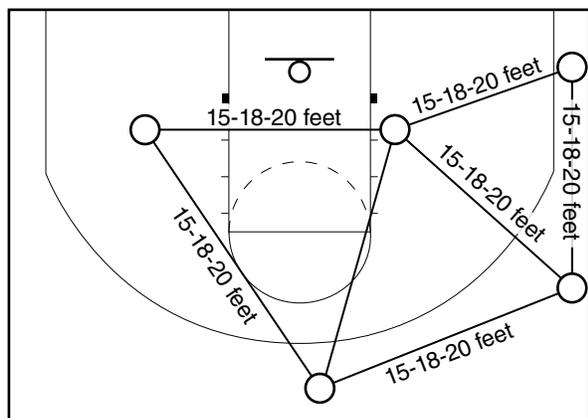
The triangle offense has proven most effective, even against such obstacles, when players commit to and execute the system. The offense hinges on players attending to minute details in executing not just plays but also the fundamentals underlying the plays. Once players have mastered the individual techniques required of their roles, we then integrate those individuals into a team. Once this is done, the foundation for a good offense is solidly in place. The team can then go on the court with the confidence and poise so essential to success.

This method of play is as old as basketball. The triangle set is adjustable to the personnel, but such adaptations can be made without altering the essence of the offense. The only necessary adjustment from one season to the next involves tailoring the series of options based on each individual's talents. Now Tex and I will present the triangle offense in detail, including some of those variations and options to optimize its use for specific teams.

## COURT SYMMETRY

Proper spacing gives the ball handler ample room to respond to help and traps and also puts the onus on the defense to cover a larger area in which it can be attacked at more angles. So the offense starts in a symmetrical alignment of players, forming a triangle on both sides of the half-court (figure 6.1).

In the triangle offense, the role of the players is totally interchangeable. There's no need for the guards, forwards, and centers to play only in their typical spots on the floor—the spots can be filled by any player. Once the spots are filled, the offense is run by where the ball is positioned on the court and by how the defense is moving.



**Figure 6.1** Proper spacing of the triangle on the half-court.

## LINE OF DEPLOYMENT

One of the assets of the triangle offense is the chance to isolate the post and attack his defender. We want to talk now of the “line of deployment,” a basic concept. With this

term we mean an imaginary line traced from the forward with the ball to the center in the low post, his defender, and the basket.

To play a standard defensive position between the center and the basket, the defender of the center must play behind him, as long as the center remains on the line of deployment (figure 6.2). But when being defended in this way, it’s easy for the forward to pass the ball to the center.

If the center’s defender wants to prevent an easy pass, he must overplay him, either on the baseline side or the high side, losing in this way his alignment with the center and the basket, so the forward can make a quick pass to the open side of the center. The center must master the technique of shaping up on the post, playing the line of deployment. After receiving the pass, the center can either shoot or pass out to a teammate in position to do something constructive with the ball (figure 6.3).



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Spacing and ball movement are key elements of the offense’s effectiveness. With the ball in the low post here, if Shaq can’t make a scoring move, he can kick the ball out to Kobe at the top of the key or to the wing, or perhaps spot an open player on the weak side.