

16 Tips for Running Effective Basketball Plays

Tip #1 - Stress execution

The reason that set plays work so well is that you have the opportunity to practice them ahead of time. However, if you don't stress execution and make sure your players are doing things correctly, then your plays will be lack luster.

You'll need to make sure that your players are setting solid screens, rubbing off screens shoulder to shoulder, setting up their man before the screen, cutting quickly to the basket, and so on.

Tip #2 - Stress concentration

Again, the reason set plays can be effective is because they can be practiced and executed to near perfection. This means your players really need to concentrate to run it correctly. The concentration starts in your practices and continues into games.

Tip #3 - Make sure players know their roles

If the key to a certain play is to have a screener that job steps to set up their man and set a solid back screen, make sure they know their job. It takes five players all working together to make the play successful.

As always, communicating with your players and letting them know their roles makes you more successful. This gets your players to take ownership, feel more involved, and improve the execution of your plays.

Tip #4 - Timing

Timing is critical in order to run plays effectively. It can also be one of the trickiest things for coaches and players to master.

If your screener leaves too early, then your shooter will be open before the ball gets to them. And by the times the ball arrives, the defense has already recovered and the open shot is gone!

You'll need to constantly monitor and be aware of your timing.

Tip #5 - Practice

The recurring theme to all these tips revolves around practice. Practice is where points are scored. You should continually practice and refine your plays so your players know their roles, fundamentals, and everything so they can run the play in their sleep. Repetition, repetition, repetition!

Tip #6 - Run your plays for the right people

Great coaches get the ball in the hands of the players at the right time so they can succeed. At the end of the game, you might want to get the ball in the hands of your best player. Or perhaps you'll want to position your players on their favorite side of the floor. Bottom line, your plays have to fit your players.

Tip #7 - Maintain good spacing

Plenty of spacing between your players is important because it keeps the defense honest and spread out -- so your offense has more room to cut and drive to the basket.

It's much easier to play good defense against a team that has their players bunched together because there's less ground to cover.

That's why almost all the successful coaches stress good spacing. Not only does it give you more scoring opportunities, but it prevents defenses from easily trapping your team.

Tip #8 - Design your plays to flow into the offense

In a perfect world, all your plays finish in the same formation of your primary offense. This allows you to immediately flow into your offense without hesitating. This means the defense doesn't have a chance to recover and can also reduce your team's turnovers (because they won't have to scramble to reset the offense).

Tip #9 - Put your players in good position to get the rebound

Coaches often overlook offensive rebounding when designing plays and this could increase your scoring significantly. Can you get a second or third shot if a miss occurs? Where are your best rebounders located when the shot is taken?

Make sure to position your players appropriately to set them up for success. If a particular play does not provide you with good rebounding position, you might want to re-evaluate the play.

Tip #10 - Teach players to react to the defense

Even though you want your players to know all the plays, you never want them to become mechanical within the plays. When defenses overplay a pass, the player should recognize this and execute a back-door cut.

Teaching your players how to read the defense and react does take time, but it's time well spent! This pays off late in the season and in the playoffs. Almost all good teams will play this style in the playoffs and into championship games because no coach in his right mind is going to let you get into your set plays.

Why not teach from day one how to make proper cuts and screens based on how the defense is playing? That will make your plays even more difficult to defend.

Tip #11 - Teach the fundamentals

No matter what type of offense or plays you use, you must teach your players the fundamentals.

To get the most from your team, you should teach and emphasize the basics of passing, cutting, screening, setting up the defender, reading the defense, and so on.

This is before you even begin running your plays. They need to know how to dribble and shoot. They need to understand how to do a pivot. They need to understand when to do a back-door cut versus a v-cut. They need to understand when to slip a screen on a screen and roll.

It doesn't matter what level of play you are at, you cannot get away from the basics.

Tip #12 - Have big players screen for smaller guards

If the defense chooses to switch on screens, then this creates mismatches and problems for the defense. You can clear out the lane for your post player or you could clear a wing so your guard can take the bigger, slower post player to the basket. Make sure to try this during scrimmages and practices to make sure your players recognize the switches and mismatches.

Tip #13 - Make sure the help side defense is occupied

Whether you're using one of our plays or designing your own, be sure that the help side of the defense is occupied. What's happening away from the ball? Are your players standing or moving to keep their defenders out of the play?

Some players don't take their part seriously because the ball is away from them. But they need to know their role is just as important, even though they are simply a decoy to keep the defense occupied. As a coach, be sure to keep an eye on this.

Tip #14 - Make sure you get the type of shot you want

Your plays should always have a purpose and don't let yourself or your players lose sight. Do you want a lay up out of the inbounds? Do you want to get to the free throw line? Do you want a quick post up?

Sometimes it's really easy for players to force things because they anticipate a certain shot will be open. So be sure your players understand the type of shot you want.

Tip #15 - Run plays from the same initial set

You should use plays that run off your initial offensive sets. For example, if you run a 1-2-2 set, you

should use this same set with your plays. It provides simplicity for the players and the defense gets confused more easily.

If the defense knows that you run a certain play out of a certain set, they'll know what to look for. If your plays occur in the same set, they won't know what play comes next.

Tip #16 - Have visual and verbal cues to let your team know which play to run

It's best to have both verbal and visual cues for your players so you can make sure your players get the message. There's nothing worse than having four players run the play to perfection and one guy has no idea what's happening.

Sometimes the crowd is noisy and your players can't hear you. And other times your players have their back to you. So have both types of cues ready for any situation.

