Chapter 10
Fast Break or Counterattack Offense and Defense

I. Offense transition.

The ability to transition from defense to offense often provides a team with good to excellent scoring opportunities. There are at least five opportunities for this offensive advantage situation to happen:

- Goalie block and possession of ball.
- Shot either tipped by defender or missing the cage completely.
- Steal by a defender.
- Offensive foul.
- Possession clock expires.

The fast break should be a natural reaction for a team on every transition listed above. The opposition is most vulnerable when a shot is taken because the shooter and his(her) teammates might be watching to see whether a goal has been scored or not.

This chapter will look at the transition from defense to offense and tactical ways to maximize these scoring opportunities.

A. Defense to offensive positioning:

“weak side”

“O” = offense;  and = defense;  = ball (strong) side.

Players on the weak side (#1, 2 spots) should “cheat” up towards the other end of the pool with their hips up, ready to sprint to offense and find swimming lanes for approximately 12-20 meters of fast, head up swimming.
In order to receive the first(outlet) pass as part of the fast break, the players going to offense should develop a release move to help with the outlet pass – usually made by the goalie.

B. Initial break – **releasing for goalie or field player pass:**

Short release – White team on offense - notice possession clock, 90° move to the “outside”, eye contact between the goalie and the receiver on right side

In order to get free from a defender and create an area for the goalie or passer to throw an area or wet pass, the offensive player must make a movement towards the outside (the edge of the course) of the pool or back towards the goalie or passer. Most releases are done to the goalies right because most players are right handed and can receive an assist pass easier if it comes from their right side. **And, it is essential to keep the ball away from the middle of the pool!**

There are at least three different possible movements to free a releaser on counterattack: (the choice depends on how much defensive pressure there is and how quickly the ball needs to be advanced – less pressure (fastest) = banana; most pressure (slowest) = hook.) The goalie or field players pass must be **accurate** so the players don’t have to deviate from their paths. Much like a football pass, this release pass should be made to where the receiver will be, not where they are. The potential receivers of the release pass should ALWAYS know where the ball is and even take a stroke or two on his/her back to get eye contact with the passer.
Releases (con’t.)

1) Square out:

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\text{½ pool} \\
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2) Banana:

\[
\text{½ pool} \\
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3) Hook: (45°):

\[
\text{½ pool} \\
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Finally, it is important that during the fast break the ball moves ahead of the rest of the offensive field players so that easier assist passes can be made to the players sprinting down pool who are free.

C. Numerical advantages on the fast break:

For each of the fast break opportunities, there are slightly different variations on attacking the opposition and goalie:

1) One on the goalie –

**Technique points:**

- Move the ball to the middle of the cage for the best angle, approximately 3-4m. from the cage.
- Try to get the goalie to jump and get off center with a good pick up and fake of the ball.
- Know how much time there is before a defender is near.
- Good technique dribbling and ball pick up are essential. The shooter should keep his or hers dribble rate for as long as possible – not slowing down to let defenders catch up. One fluid motion is beneficial.
- Find where the biggest hole is and shoot there without hesitation.
- If the goalie is covering the strong side of the cage, shoot across to the opposite side.
- If the goalie doesn’t come up, a high shot is a good percentage location, if the goalie does come up, a low shot is good percentage location.
White 11 out in front, pick up ball on the post

Blue 3 in front, look behind for defenders, pick up ball on post

Blue 3 picks up ball high over head, cross-cage shot or low near side
2) **Two offensive players on one defensive player:**

- Bracket the cage. One player on one post, one on the other to extend the goalie and keep a good shooting angle.
- Clean pick up of the ball.
- Set the goalie on the strong side of the cage.
- Be sure to look at the goalie and see your teammate(s) out of the “corner of your eye.”
- Pass a catchable assist, preferably firm and quick, over any interceding defenders; or shoot to the open portion of the net.

*2 on 1, Red team bracketing the cage, setting the goalie to the near side*
2 on 1, White team ball pick up, setting goalie to near side

2 on 1, White team faking goalie, ready to pass or shoot

3) Three offensive players on two defenders:

a. *One approach* – rotation away from the ball. In the upcoming diagram, the ball starts on the outside right portion of the pool. (S)he (player #1) must improve his/her shooting angle by taking the ball towards the middle of the cage. Player #2 needs to rotate to the opposite post of the cage, away from the dribbler, thereby forcing the defender (“b”) to move out of the path of the dribbler or leave player #2 wide open in front of the cage. Player #3 occupies his/her defender (“a”) by forming a triangle passing lane and moving slightly middle. Player “c” is the defender trailing the dribbler.
b. **A second approach:** Using this “direct” method, the dribbler follows a straight path to the 2m. line and his/her teammates form a triangle in two other high percentage areas of the front court. Thus player #2 “pops” directly back from the 2m. line to create a passing lane from player #1 and player #3 goes to the 2m. line, to open a passing lane also from player #1.
4) **Four offensive players on three defenders:**

a. In the sequence below, the red cap player releases for the ball on the left hand side of the pool. The free player is the 4\textsuperscript{th} red in the middle, being trailed by a white-capped player. The goalie has the ball ready to release pass to the left.

*Releasing for the ball with 4 on 3 advantage for the Red team*

![Releasing for the ball with 4 on 3 advantage for the Red team](image)

b. In the second portion of the 4 on 3 sequence, the red player on the left wing has the ball and penetrates towards the cage. Her teammates spread the field away from the ball so that they can stay open and available and the dribbler is less easily attacked.

*Offense (red team) spreading the defenders and moving towards the cage*

![Offense (red team) spreading the defenders and moving towards the cage](image)
c. In the last portion of the 4 on 3 sequence below, the red dribbler is committed to by the nearest white defender and by the goalie. At this point, the red dribbler passes the ball to her teammate on the far post who then quickly shoots, beating the goalie. (Notice that the furthest red player from the ball has moved to the right in order to allow for the open passing lane and assist.)

**Cross Pass from the Red team left wing to the far post beating the Goalie**

D. **Last thoughts regarding offense on the fast break.**

1) Fast breaking is very physically demanding – players must be in superior condition to do this style regularly.

2) Developing court sense and positioning takes time – coaches and players must build from simple to complex and play in different areas in order to be a consistent contributor to the fast break.

3) Use “trailers” when practicing drills simulating the advantage situations. Have these players start well after the initial wave of players goes towards the cage (use a second whistle for this).

4) A good cross cage pass will almost always beat the goalie because the ball travels much faster than (s)he does.

5) Realize that from 4 on 3 on up, the complexity of positioning increases and these are not necessarily high percentage scoring opportunities. In the table below, it shows a team’s vulnerability if they force a pass or shot and perhaps give the ball to the other team. Be careful! The objective is not always to score on a fast break.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense advantage</th>
<th>Defense opportunity</th>
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II. Counterattack Defense.

“A team is most vulnerable to defense when it’s on offense.” (proverb)

Things to keep in mind when transitioning to defense:

- Balanced offensive formation – spread, not too many players (≤3) committed inside the 2-4m. line when attacking. This allows more players to contribute sooner to the defensive end.
- Not watching shots – the habit of spectating to see if the shot goes in. As soon as a shot is taking, the offensive players should be rotating back to defense.

“Sealing off” opposition

- Seal off the paths of the offensive players towards the other end of the pool. In figure above, all six of the offensive players are moving into the paths of the defenders in order to alter their paths towards the offensive end of the pool.
- HELP to the center of the pool (also called “jam center”), preferably doing backstroke so as to be able to see the offensive players that may be open. The shortest distance between two lines is in the center; therefore, this is the quickest spot to go to in order to cover a free offensive player.
- FOUL and DROP – if there is a free player advancing without the ball, the defender on the ball should foul him(her) in order to pick up the free offensive player. This disallows the dribbler the opportunity to shoot.
- “Stunt” the dribbler – if there is not time to foul the dribbler as in #5 above, the defender should take a couple of quick strokes out to the ball and then rapidly come back to the center.
- Go back on the CHERRY PICKER – the goalie should call this out. It is better to play five on five rather than leave one player open for an uncontested shot.
- Field players take who the goalie says….he is the last line of defense.
References:


Ibid. Level Two Manual, 1996.

Dettamanti, Dante, “Effective Defense of the Counterattack,” National Coaches Clinic, Irvine, California, 1993, pp.29-36


