

Basketball Terms



Assist: a pass to a teammate that leads directly to a field goal.

Backboard: the rectangular structure to which the basket is attached.

Backcourt: the area from the midcourt line to the end line furthest from the offense's basket.

Bank shot: a shot where the ball is bounced (or banked) off the backboard and then drops into the basket

Basket: consists of a metal rim with a corded net hanging off of it; attached to the backboard

Blocked shot: deflection of a shot by touching part of the ball on its way to the basket

Blocking: the use of a defender's body position to prevent an opponent's advance

Boxing out: a player's attempt to position his body between his opponents and the basket to get rebounds and prevent the opponents from doing so.

Charging: when an offensive player runs into a defender who has established position; this is an offensive foul

Court: the area in on which a basketball game is played; bounded by 2 sidelines and 2 end lines, containing a basket at each end

Crossover dribble: dribbling the ball across the body from one hand to the other.

Cylinder: the imaginary area directly above the basket where goaltending or basket interference can occur

Dead ball: any ball that is not live; occurs after: each

successful field goal or free-throw attempt, after the whistle is blown, or if the ball leaves the court

Defense: preventing the offense from scoring; "The Defense" is considered the team without the ball

Defensive rebound: a rebound by a player on defense

Double team: two teammates guarding a single opponent

Dribble or dribbling: repeatedly batting or bouncing the ball toward the floor with one hand; used to advance the ball

Drive to the basket: to move rapidly toward the basket with the ball

Dunk: when a player close to the basket jumps and slams throws the ball down into it

Elbowing: throwing your elbow(s) during play in order to hit another player or push him away; it is a foul if contact is made

End line: the line behind each basket; also called the baseline.

Fast break: it begins with a defensive rebound by a player who immediately sends a pass toward midcourt to his waiting teammates; these teammates can sprint to their basket and quickly shoot before enough opponents catch up to stop them

Flagrant foul: unnecessary or excessive contact against an opponent

Floor: the area of the court within the end lines and sidelines

Foul: actions by players which break the rules but are

not floor violations

Foul line: the line 15' from the backboard and parallel to the end line from which players shoot free-throws

Free-throw: an unguarded shot taken from the foul line by a player whose opponent committed a foul; worth 1 point

Free-throw line: see foul line

Full-court press: when defenders guard the offense in the backcourt

Guarding: following an opponent around the court to prevent him from getting the ball, taking a shot or making a pass

Jump ball: where 2 opposing players jump for a ball the official tosses above and between them. The players then try to tap the ball to their teammates to gain possession

Live ball: as soon as a ball is given to a free-throw shooter or a thrower on a throw-in, it is live

Man-to-man defense: the defensive style where each defensive player is responsible for guarding one opponent

Off the dribble: a shot taken while driving to the basket

Offense: the team with possession of the ball

Offensive rebound: a rebound by a player on offense

Officials: the people on the court wearing black and white striped shirts who control the game

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One-and-One or One-plus-One: a free-throw attempt awarded for certain violations that earns the shooter a 2nd attempt only if the first is successful

Open: when a player is unguarded by a defender

Out of bounds: the area outside of and including the end lines and sidelines

Overtime or OT: the extra period(s) played after a regulation game ends tied

Pass: when a player throws the ball to a teammate

Period: any quarter, half or overtime segment

Perimeter: the area beyond the foul circle away from the basket, including 3-point line

Personal foul: contact (including a push, hold, trip, hack, elbow, restrain or charge into an opponent) between players that may result in injury

Pivot: the foot that must remain touching the floor until a ball handler who has stopped dribbling is ready to pass or shoot

Possession: to be holding the ball or be in control of the ball

Rebound: when a player grabs a ball that is coming off the rim or backboard after a shot attempt

Screen: when an offensive player stands between a teammate and a defender to give his teammate the chance to take an open shot

Shot clock: a clock that limits the time a team with the ball has to shoot it

Shooter: a player who takes a shot at the basket

Sidelines: 2 boundary lines that run the length of the court

Squaring up: when a player's shoulders are facing the basket as he releases the ball for a shot

Starting lineup: the five players who begin a game for one team

Substitute: a player who comes into the game to replace a player on the court

Swing man: a player who can play both the guard and forward positions

Team fouls: each personal foul committed by a player is also counted against his team; when a team goes over the limit, its opponent is awarded free-throw opportunities

Technical fouls or Ts: misconduct that officials believe are detrimental to the game; penalized by a free-throw opportunity to the non-offending team

Three-point play: a 2-point field goal followed by a successful free-throw

Three-point shot: a field goal worth 3 points because the shooter was standing behind the 3-point line when he released the ball

Throw-in: inbound the ball

Timeout: when play is temporarily suspended by an official or at the request of a team to discuss strategy or respond to an injured player

Tip-off: the initial jump ball that starts the game

Traveling: when the ball handler takes too many steps without dribbling; also called walking

Triple double: when a player scores double-digits in 3 categories during one game (points, assists and rebounds -also can be blocks or steals)

Turnover: when the offense loses possession through its own fault by passing the ball out of bounds or committing a floor violation

Zone defense: a defense where each defender is responsible for an area of the court and must guard any player who enters that area

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Backdoor Play: when a player gets behind the weak-side defense on the baseline to receive a pass

Box Out: a player attempts to put his body in between another player and the basket in order to get rebounds and prevent the other player from doing so.

Drop Step: a move where a player, with his back to the basket, takes a step back to the side of his defender and then spins and drives past the player on the step side

Give and Go: a play where the player who passes the ball then immediately makes a cut to the basket

Passing Lanes: the space between defenders through which it is possible to make a pass

Pass types:

Entry pass: a pass made inside to a player in the post

Wing pass: a pass from the point to the wing position, usually intended to either get the wing player a shot – if the defense is laying off- or to hit the wing as he cuts to the basket

Swing pass: a cross court pass made over a zone defender

Skip Pass: a pass that goes over one offensive player to a player beyond him

Outlet pass: the first pass a player makes to start the ball down the court is the outlet pass. Also the pass made after a defensive rebound to start the fast break is the outlet pass when specifically referring to a fast break situation.

Post:

High Post: the imaginary area to either side of the

paint at the free-throw line

Low Post: the imaginary area to either side of the paint at the basket

Post up: the process of getting into post position

Press: a defense that puts extreme pressure on the ball handler, often through double teams, in an attempt to force bad passes and turnovers. This is commonly played one of two ways: either as a 'full court press' with pressure applied as soon as the ball is inbound in the backcourt; or a 'half-court press' where pressure is applied once the ball enters the frontcourt.

Roll: when a player starts with his back to the basket and then makes a quick turning motion around the defender and breaks to the basket. Also see Pick and Roll.

Rub Off: a phrase used to describe good movement off a screen. This generally involves rubbing shoulders with the screening player, hence the term. The defender can also be described as having been 'rubbed off' on the screener

Screens/Picks: (screen = pick)

To take a position in the anticipated path of the defensive player guarding a teammate in order to free the teammate to take an open shot or go to the basket.

Basically, a screen is used to shake an offensive player loose from a tight defender. A good screen frees up a player to shoot, cut, dribble and pass. A screen can be set either on the ball, or off the ball: i.e. for the player defending the ball handler, or an off-ball defender. The screening player plants both feet – to avoid a foul - and the offensive player uses him as an obstacle to impede the player defending him.

Screen Down: a high post player moves down (vertically) and sets a screen for the low post player's defender

Screen Up: a low post player will move up (vertically) and set a screen on the high post player's defender

Blind Screen: also called a 'back pick', is set behind the back of the defensive player. This screen has the advantage of sometimes catching the defender by surprise.

Screen Away: a screen made on an off-ball defender in order to free an offensive player up for some sort of off ball movement – a cut for example – or to free that player to receive a pass.

Double Screen: a screen formed when two players screen next to each other, giving the offensive player two movement options, one horizontal and one vertical. This screen is often used to get open jumpshot looks (See Ray Allen or Dirk Nowitzki...)

Pick and Roll: a play where the Player A has the ball on the wing, with the player B in the high post and the C in the low post. A passes the ball to the B, who draws a double team and then passes it back to the A; then A then makes a pass to the C and moves ("rolls") to the basket off a pick set by the another guard; C then passes back to A for the layup or easy score.

Stack: an offensive alignment with two players in the low post on one side of the basket, and a third player in the low post on the opposite side of the basket. Often used for throw-ins from behind the baseline.

Weakside: the side of the court away from the ball

Strong side: the side of the court that the ball is on