

3. Attack or defend?

There are many situations where you have to decide whether to try to run the hoop with your next shot (i.e. attack) or prevent an opponent from running the hoop on their next shot (i.e. defend). A defensive shot can also be used to prevent your opponent from knocking your partner ball away. The two most common ways of defending are:

1. Hitting your opponent's ball away with yours, or
2. Placing your ball between your opponent's ball and their target.

Whether you decide to attack or defend will depend on your assessment of the following for each of the alternatives you are considering:

- How difficult is the shot, i.e. what is the chance of success?
- Where are the balls likely to finish if you *succeed* and, if they do finish there, what are your chances of winning the hoop?
- Where are the balls likely to finish if you *fail* and, if they do finish there, what are your chances of winning the hoop?

You have to decide fairly quickly and there is a lot of guesswork involved. I tend think in terms of five categories: are the chances very bad, fairly bad, 50-50, fairly good or very good?

Situations where you should attack include where

- Your chances of running the hoop with your next shot are at least as good as your overall chances of winning the hoop if you defend instead,
- Your chances of running the hoop are fair to middling but, even if you miss your hoop, your overall position will not deteriorate dramatically.

Situations where you should defend include where

- Your chances of running the hoop with your next shot are worse than your overall chances of winning the hoop if you defend instead,
- You need not risk a hoop shot yet because you can improve your overall situation with a defensive shot.

To hit away or interpose? Suppose you've decided to defend. How this should be done will depend on the specific situation and your particular skills. Over a given distance, I find it much easier to simply hit a target than to make a ball stop where I want it to. On the other hand, an unsuccessful attempt to interpose will leave your ball nearer the hoop than a missed attempt to hit a ball away. This could be important if your opponent fails to run the hoop in their next shot.

Key points

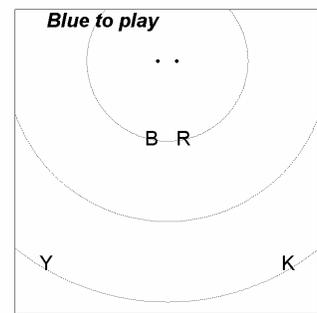
1. Don't give up a good overall position with a risky hoop shot.
2. At each turn (quickly) consider at least two or three alternatives. For each shot, try to assess your chances of succeeding and the consequences of success and of failure.
3. Sometimes a difficult shot is your best option.

In each example the playing side, from which the hoop must be run, is towards the bottom of the page. Blue to play next in each case

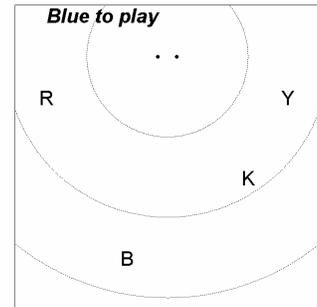
Balls and hoops are not to scale. Concentric circles indicate distances, in yards, from the hoop.

B = Blue, **R** = Red, **K** = Black, **Y** = Yellow

Example 1: Your chances of running the hoop with blue are so high that you should attempt it even though a miss would be very costly.

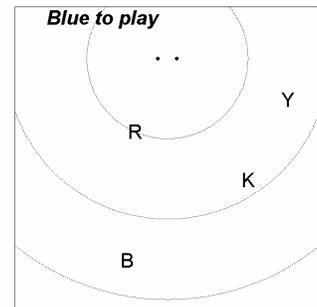


Example 2: Even though your chances of running the hoop are only about 50-50, you should attempt it because a miss would not be very costly. If black had been in a better hoop running position, you would have protected black instead, either by hitting red away or placing blue between red and black.

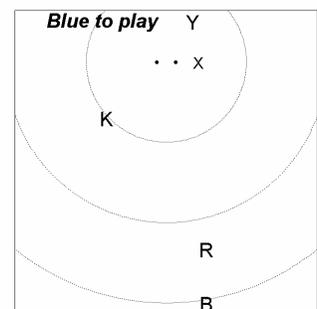


If red had been further from the hoop you could have placed blue in front of the hoop, with the realistic hope that red would not be able to hit it away. Black could then dispatch yellow.

Example 3: Although your balls are in the same positions as in example 2, the red is better placed. You should defend your good position in this case because a failed hoop attempt would be very costly. You need to prevent red from running the hoop. Placing your ball between red and the hoop would achieve that but would not stop red from seizing the initiative, e.g. by hitting black away with a stun shot, which would allow yellow to take care of blue. Hitting red away with blue would be the preferred option, not only because it is easier, but also because it gives red fewer options. If you don't hit red too hard, blue should even finish quite near the hoop.



Example 4: Here is a good opportunity to improve your position with little risk. Aim just a few millimeters left of centre on red, and blue should finish close to the hoop while red is hit well past the hoop. Even if you miss hit slightly, the result should be satisfactory.



Example 5: If blue were, instead, where the X is in the diagram, then hitting red would not be so easy and, even if you hit red, blue could finish a long way from the hoop. Placing blue between red and the hoop might, therefore, be preferable. However, if black had been in a better hoop running position, knocking red away, regardless of where blue finished would give you the best chance of winning the hoop. Note that, with blue at X, yellow would be an easy target, but you would not try to hit it because yellow is not a threat, and blue would not finish nearer the hoop.

Example 6: Black is twenty yards behind the hoop. You have to go for the hoop with blue. Even though your chances of running the hoop are very slim, they are better than your overall chances of winning this hoop if you don't try.

