Tex Winter, until 2007 a consultant of the Los Angeles Lakers, is one of the most respectful basketball coach in the world and the innovator of the triangle offense, learned from coach Sam Barry of the University of Southern California, where he played. He then entered the coaching job as an assistant at Kansas State University, then moved to Marquette University with the position of head coach. Back to Kansas State as head coach for 15 years, he then coached at University of Washington, Northwestern University and Long Beach State. His first approach with the NBA started in 1972 with the Houston Rockets, where he coached for two seasons. In 1985 he became assistant coach of the Chicago Bulls and won six NBA titles, with Phil Jackson as head coach. Then he followed Jackson to the Los Angeles Lakers, where he won three more championships.

I was not the inventor of this offense, but an innovator of this style of play. I think this is a great offense for every level of play, from the high school to the pros. To describe it, I would say it is a sideline triangle on one side of the court and a two-man play on the other side, where the offensive options are dictated by the moves and the reactions of the defenders.

The reasons why I decide to adopt the triangle offense was that I wanted a team to be self-reliant and in control of their game: I wanted to give to my teams a system with which to play basketball. I did not want at all to coach in a frenzy way, calling plays and isolations for the scorers. My belief was and is that a team on the floor knows what is going on and the players must be confident that they could read the defense and react accordingly. Second, basketball should be a reflexive sport and I wanted that my team play a fluid, instinctive, complete game. I rejected the idea on relying only on a point guard, who must make all the ball handling decisions: I think, ultimately, that a good opponent would pressure and destroy a point-guard oriented team.

I trust on this axiom that it is not the system, but the execution of the systems that counts. I am convinced that this is a self-evidence truth, we want to obtain the proper execution through the fundamentals. Any systems can succeed or fail on the execution of the minute details of the basic fundamentals, and these details can be the difference between a great player and an average one, or between winning and losing teams. The first aim of a coach and the players should be to have the complete mastery of the individual fundamentals, while the second one is the integration of these individuals into a team. Once this is done the basketball house has been built on a solid, sound foundation. The team will go on the court with confidence and poise, so essential to success. As I told, this method of play is as old as basketball. The set is adjustable to the personnel, but, due to the nature of the offense, the only necessary adjustments from one season to the next one are possibly a series of options based on the individual strengths.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF SOUND OFFENSE
These are the seven principles of a sound and effective offense.

1. Penetration of the defense. You 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 literally a fanatic of spacing. The floor must be spaced, so it is difficult for the defense to help as well as to trap. The players must be distant from each other a certain number of meters (feet), and the distance varies. In the high school, I would recommend from 4 to 5 meters (about 12 to 15 feet), at the college from 5 to 6 meters (15 to 18 feet), and in the NBA from 5 to almost 7 meters (15 to 20 feet). With this proper spacing, if the defense tries to trap there always will be an open player.

3. Ball and Player Movements. The players must move the ball and move themselves on the court, but with a purpose, because there is only one ball and the players will play almost 80% of the time without the possession of the ball.

4. Options for the Ball Handler. He must be able to pass the ball to all the other four teammates, so the players must be in constant move.

5. Offensive Rebound and Defensive Balance. On all the possible shots, the offense must provide a strong offensive rebounding, as well create a defensive balance to avoid the opponents’ fast break.

6. To fill any spot. The offense must offer to any player the chance to fill any spot on the court, independently by his role. All the position should be interchangeable.

7. Utilize individual talents. Take advantage by your best players, but always with the respect of all the other teammates on the court. Michael Jordan taught me this.

PASSING

One underrated skill today is passing, and passing is one of the basic of the triangle offense. For this reason I think it’s important that the player really understand the principles we want to apply on passing.

▼ No more than one meter (three feet) should be the distance between the passer and his defender and preferably less. The closer the defender covers the offensive player with the ball and less time he has to react to the passer movement, giving to the passer the chance to recognize what the defender is doing. This principle of good passing is violated more than any other.

▼ He must see the passing lanes and the receiver, but not look at the receiver, unless the pass is preceded by an effective fake, and do not turn and face...
He must pass the ball to a teammate’s open side, a rule often violated also by the best players. The passer must have the vision not only of his defender, but also of the passing lane and the receiver’s defender. Naturally also the receiver must help the passer offering him good target, as well as keep his defender away from the passing lane or freeing or sealing him for a second for giving to the passer the change to pass safely the ball.

He must anticipate when he may receive the ball and have enough intuition to know in advance the best places to pass the ball. And this is a skill the best players have. This is the reason why some pro teams are outstanding also if they appeared to have very little definite team pattern. If the players do not have this ability, it is necessary to build an offensive pattern that gives to the players the chance of keeping busy the defense.

**Spacing Symmetry and Spots on the Floor**

When we talked of spacing on the seven principles of triangle offense, we underlined that this is absolutely a must for this method of play (but also for any offense). All the players must understand the importance of spacing. At the pro level the proper space among the players ranges from 6 to almost 7 meters (18 to 20 feet). This gives the room for the ball handler to play, as well as spreads out the defense and do not give the chance to help out or trap. The triangle is formed on both sides of the half court (diagr. 1).

On the triangle offense the role of the players are totally interchangeable. There is no need that the guards, the forwards and the centers play on their typical spots on the floor, but the spots area can be filled by any player. Once the spots are filled, the offense is run by where the ball on the court is positioned and by how the defense is moving.

**Line of Deployment**

One of the asset of the triangle offense is the chance to isolate the post and attack his defender. We would like now to talk of the “line of deployment”, a basic concept. With this terms we mean in imaginary line which is traced from the forward with the ball, to the center in the low post, his defender and the basket.

For playing a standard defensive position between the center and the basket, the defender of the center must play behind the center, as long as the center remains on the line of deployment (diagr. 2). But, defending in this way, it is 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 the center, 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 good technique of shaping up on the post, it means playing the line of deployment (diagr. 3).

We stress this theory and we were and are successful to pass the ball to the center,
either for a shot or for a pass out to a teammate, who is in a position to do something constructive with the ball when he receives it.

By thoroughly indoctrinating the players on the line of deployment theory, we feel we have been very successful in getting the ball to our center, and this has been true despite a concentrated effort by the opponents to prevent the pass to the post.

DIFFERENT METHODS OF FORMING THE SIDELINE TRIANGLE
The triangle offense can start in several
ways, depending by the defensive adjustments or offensive strategies.

**BASIC WAYS TO FORM THE TRIANGLE**

*N. 1* Pass from the Triangle

We call this *N. 1* pass because it is this first pass that is done for forming the triangle, and after this one we form the triangle.

**STRONG SIDE FILL**

Guard

Outside Cut. 1 dribbles on the lateral lane, passes to the wing 3, cuts outside him and goes in the corner, forming a triangle with 5 and 3. The wing 3 must set himself with the proper space, away from the sideline for letting 1 cutting behind him, as well as the other types of cuts, which we will explain on the next paragraphs.

Slice Cut. 1 passes the ball to the wing 3, goes toward him and then cuts away and goes in the corner (diagr. 4).

Blur Screen Cut. 1 passes the ball to the wing 3, cuts inside, brushing off the center 5, and goes in the corner.

On all the cuts of the strong side guard 1, the other guard 2 gets in the middle of the floor for defensive balance and for then playing two-on two on the weak side (diagr. 5).

Wing

Dribble entry: 1 dribbles toward 3 and this is a signal for 3 to go in the corner, while 5 moves to high post and 2 goes in the middle of the court (diagr. 6).

Basket Cut. 1 passes the ball to the wing 3 and cuts to the basket, coming off the center 5, and goes in the corner. On all the cuts of the strong side guard 1, the other guard 2 gets in the middle of the floor for defensive balance and for then playing two-on two on the weak side (diagr. 5).