

# The Pod System of Play

## for girls' lacrosse

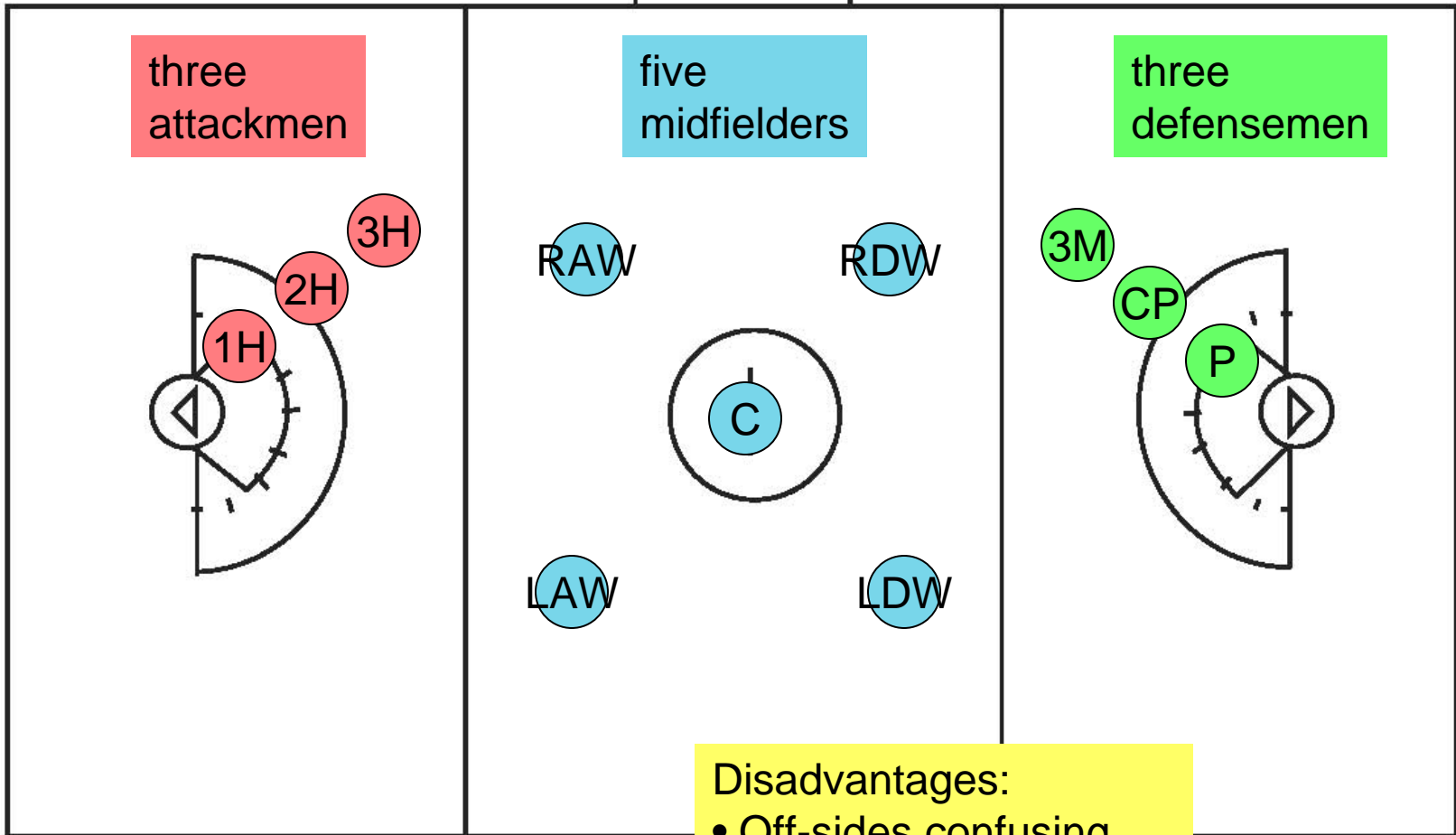
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**January 13, 2007**

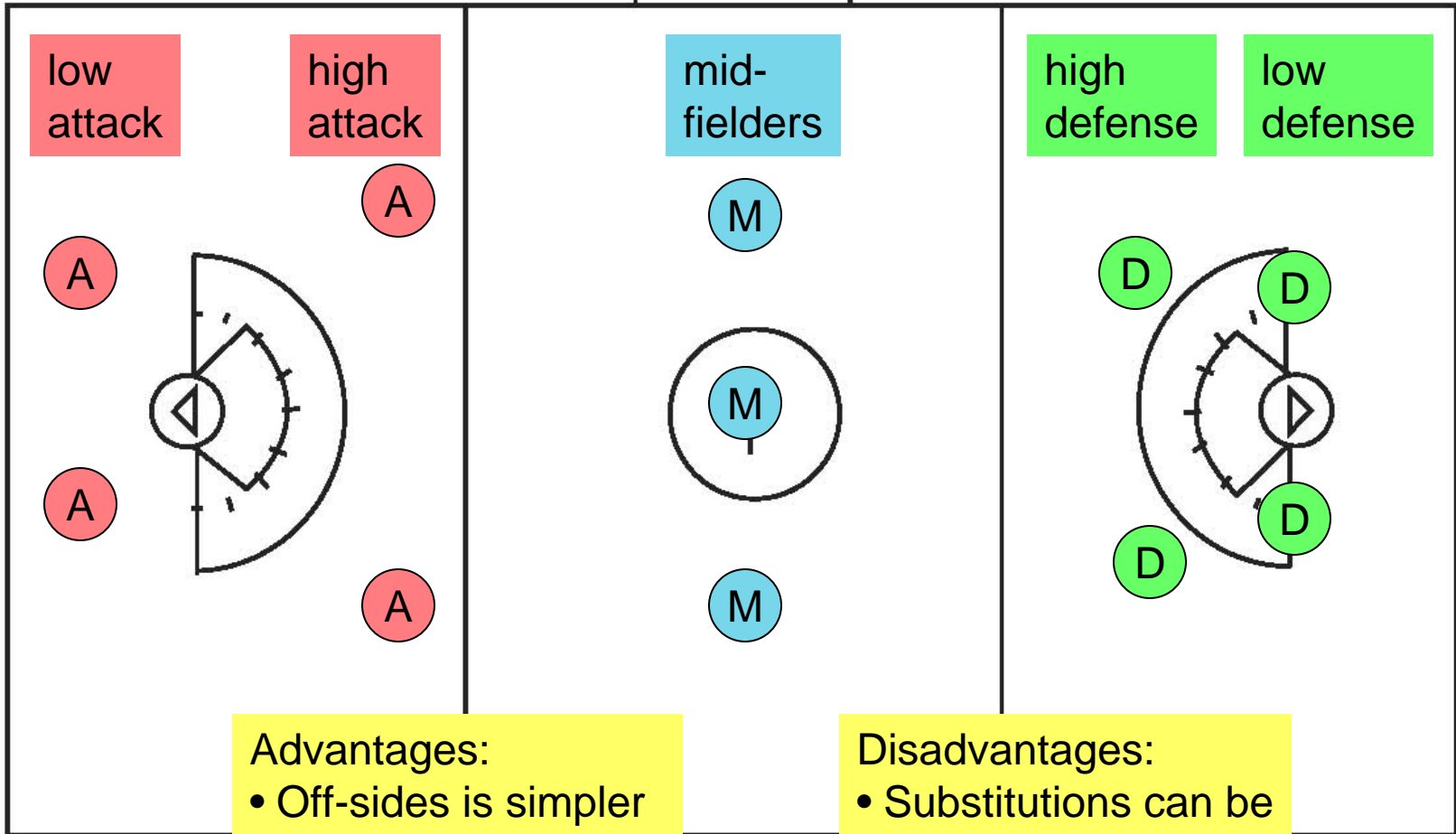
USLacrosse CT State Coaches Convention

# In the old days...



- Disadvantages:
- Off-sides confusing
  - Unintuitive names
  - Unnatural organization

# A more modern setup...



## Advantages:

- Off-sides is simpler
- Intuitive names
- Natural organization

## Disadvantages:

- Substitutions can be difficult

# Motivation

- ▶ My motivation for developing the Pod System is two-fold:
  - **Organizing my team on the field.**
    - The traditional system is antiquated.
    - Seven players around the goal is a lot!!
    - Middies get tired, but are hard to substitute.
  - **Maximizing player development, playing time, and overall satisfaction:**
    - Kids want to play in games – especially girls!
    - For most players, HS lax is the pinnacle of their athletic careers – let them play!
    - Everyone likes to score – yet everyone can also benefit from playing defense.

# Caveats...

- ▶ **I have successfully used the Pod System with my high-school team for three years – but I haven't tried it with a youth team.**
  - It's probably most appropriate for more senior / advanced youth teams.
  - I will try to point out aspects that might differ between high-school and youth as we proceed.
- ▶ **There are many details in what I will describe – I suggest trying to grasp the main principles, and adjust them to fit your own needs.**
  - Adopting the Pod System in its full glory is a radical undertaking.
  - You should feel free to invent your own variations!

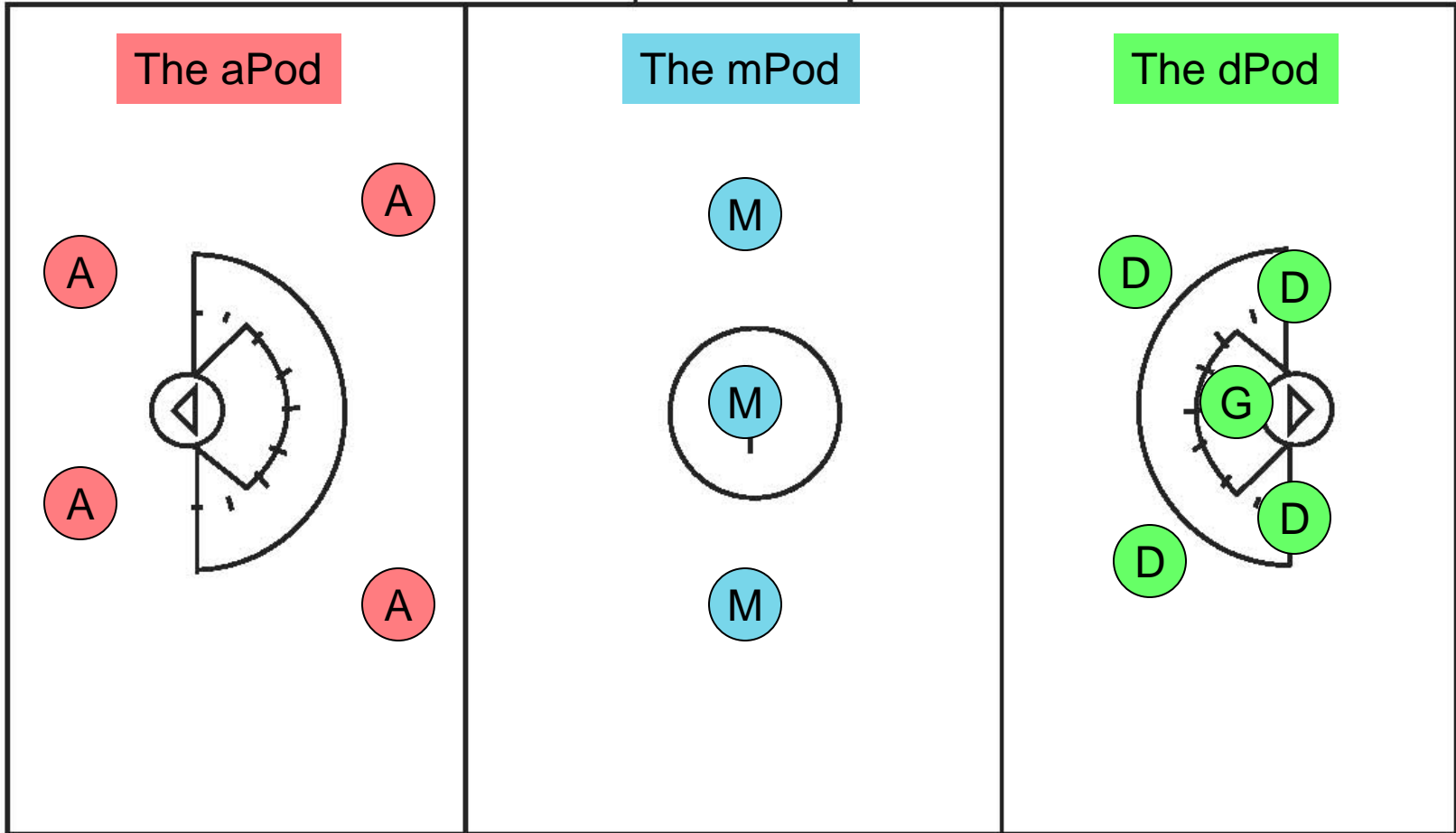
# The Pod System of Play

- ▶ A *Pod* is a small group of players who work together as a unit.
- ▶ In a game, there are three pods:
  - The *defensive Pod* (dPod) consists of four defenders plus the goalie.
  - The *midfield Pod* (mPod) has three midfielders.
  - The *attack Pod* (aPod) consists of four attackmen.
- ▶ The dPod only plays defense, whereas *aPods and mPods are interchangeable!* (more on this later)
- ▶ On my team, all Pods are fixed – they work together in practices and in games, which promotes familiarity and cohesiveness.

# The Numbers (radical version)

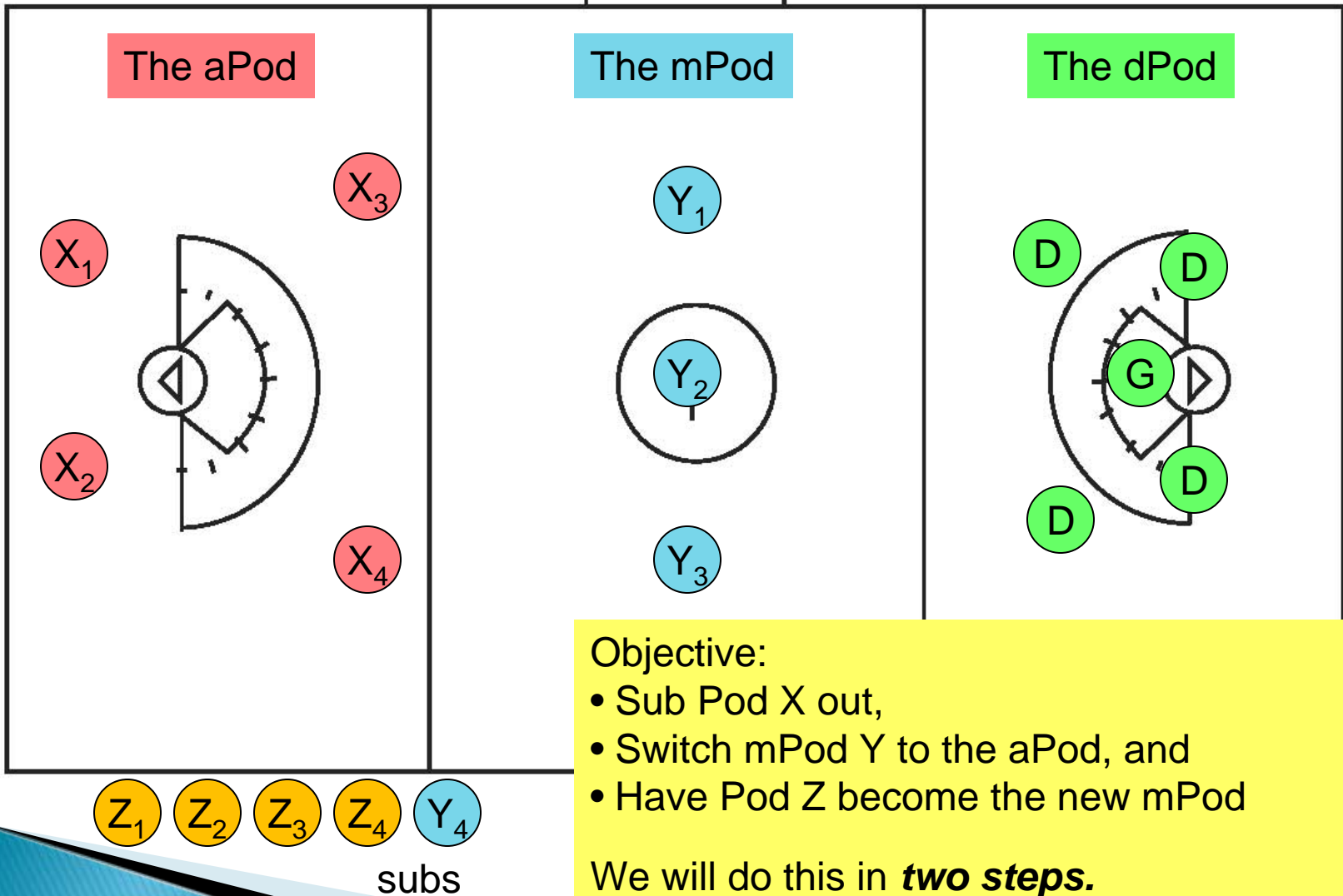
- ▶ In the most radical version of the Pod System, each a/mPod consists of *four* players.
- ▶ Thus when an a/mPod is on the field as an mPod, *one player sits out*.
- ▶ Substitution strategy is discussed next, but:
  - with 3 a/mPods @ 4 players each, and
  - 1 dPod with 4 players and 1 sub,then a team consists of *18 players*, each with a well-defined role.
- ▶ *I think of these players as my starting 18, since they all get meaningful (> ½ game) playing time.*

# The Pod System in Action

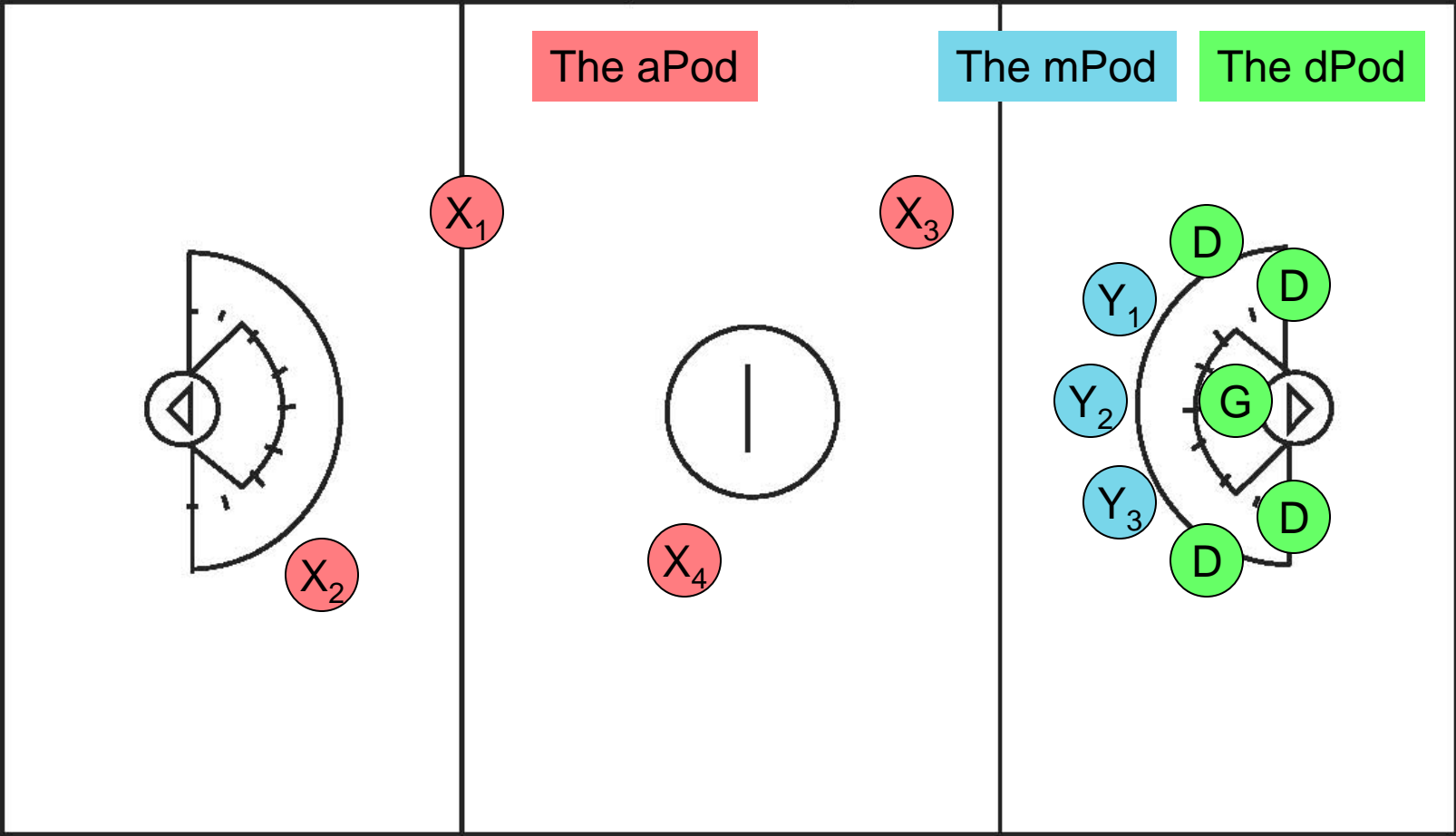




# Substitutions

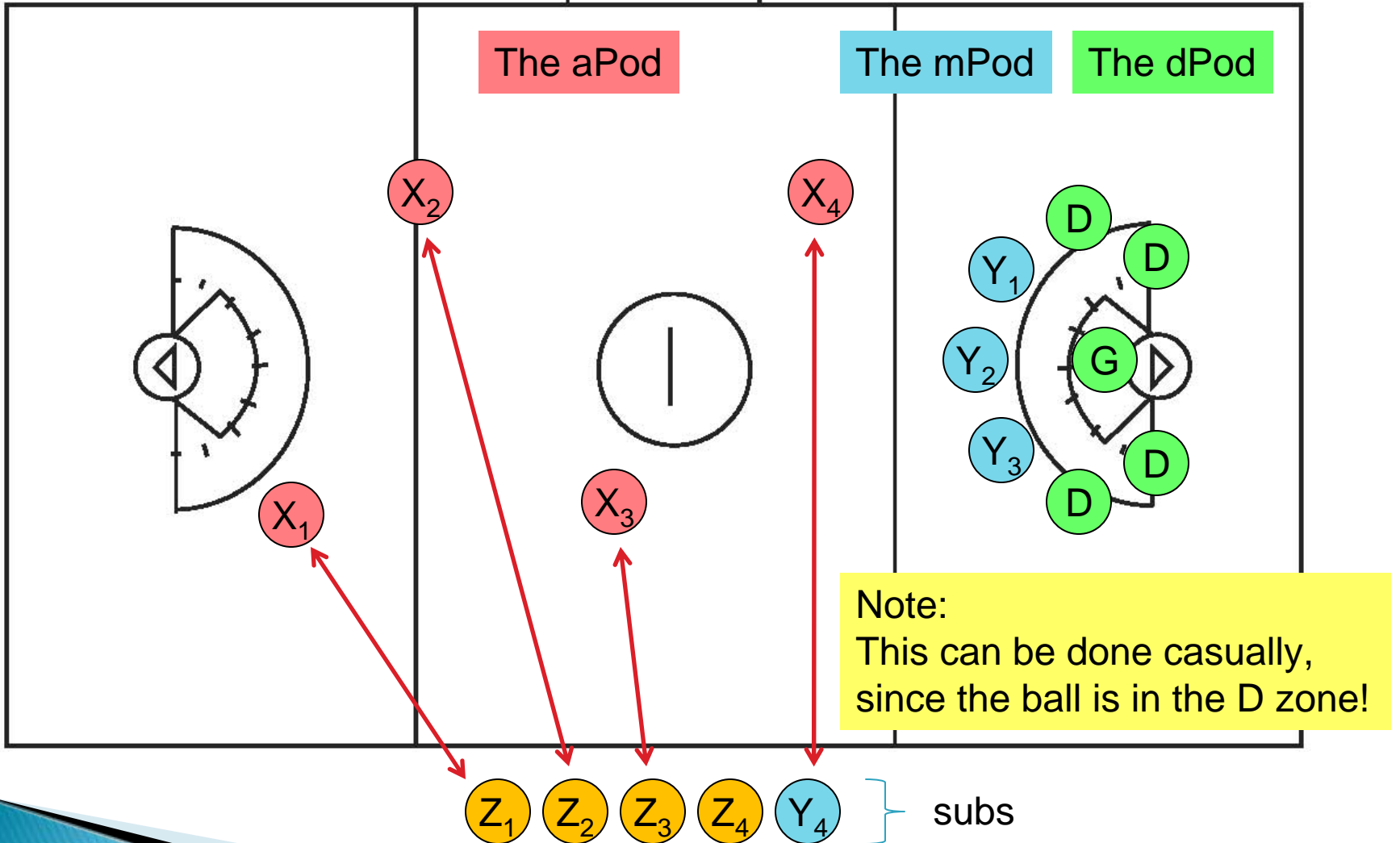


# Step1: when the ball is in the defensive zone...

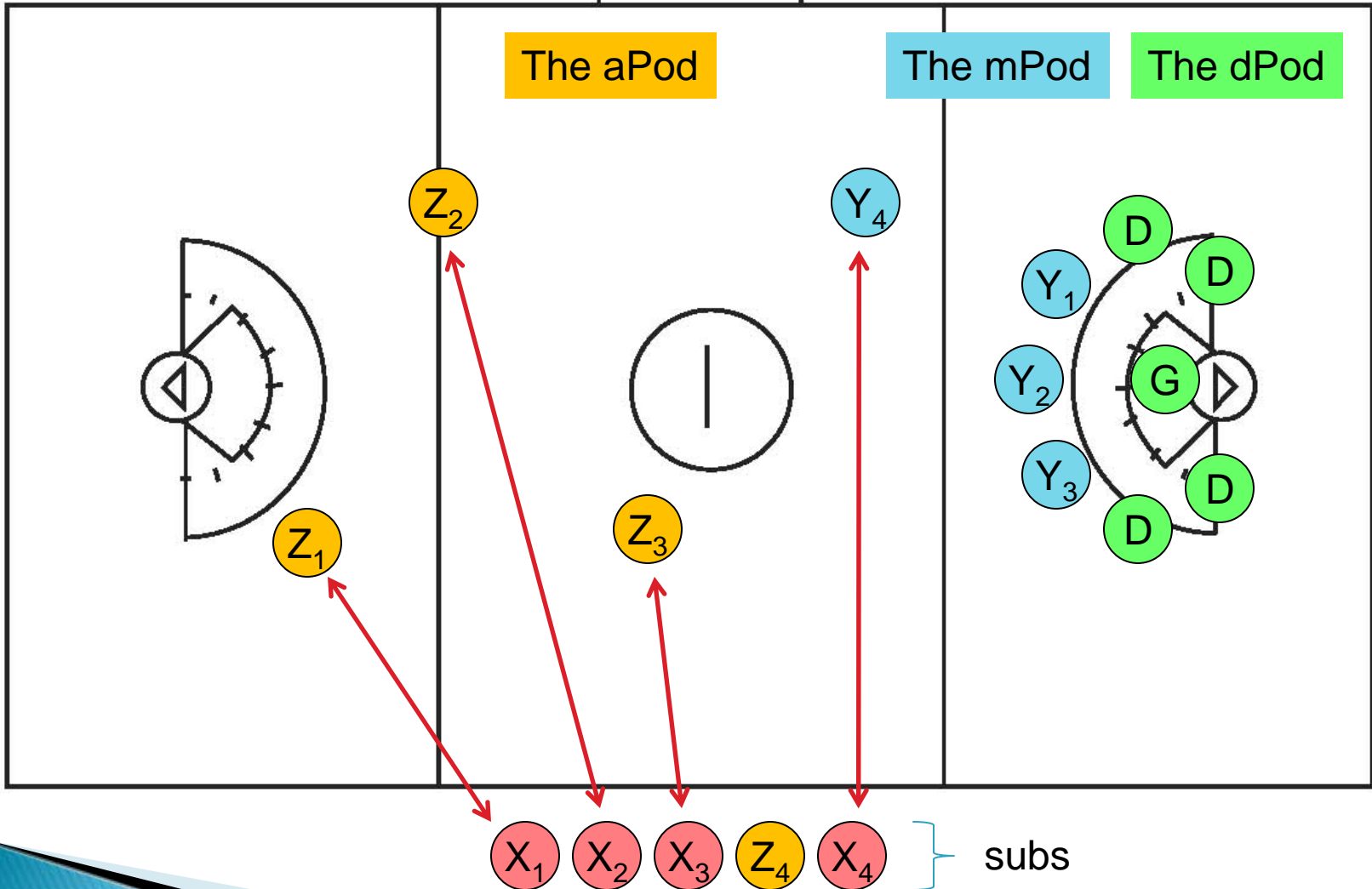


$Z_1$   $Z_2$   $Z_3$   $Z_4$   $Y_4$  } subs

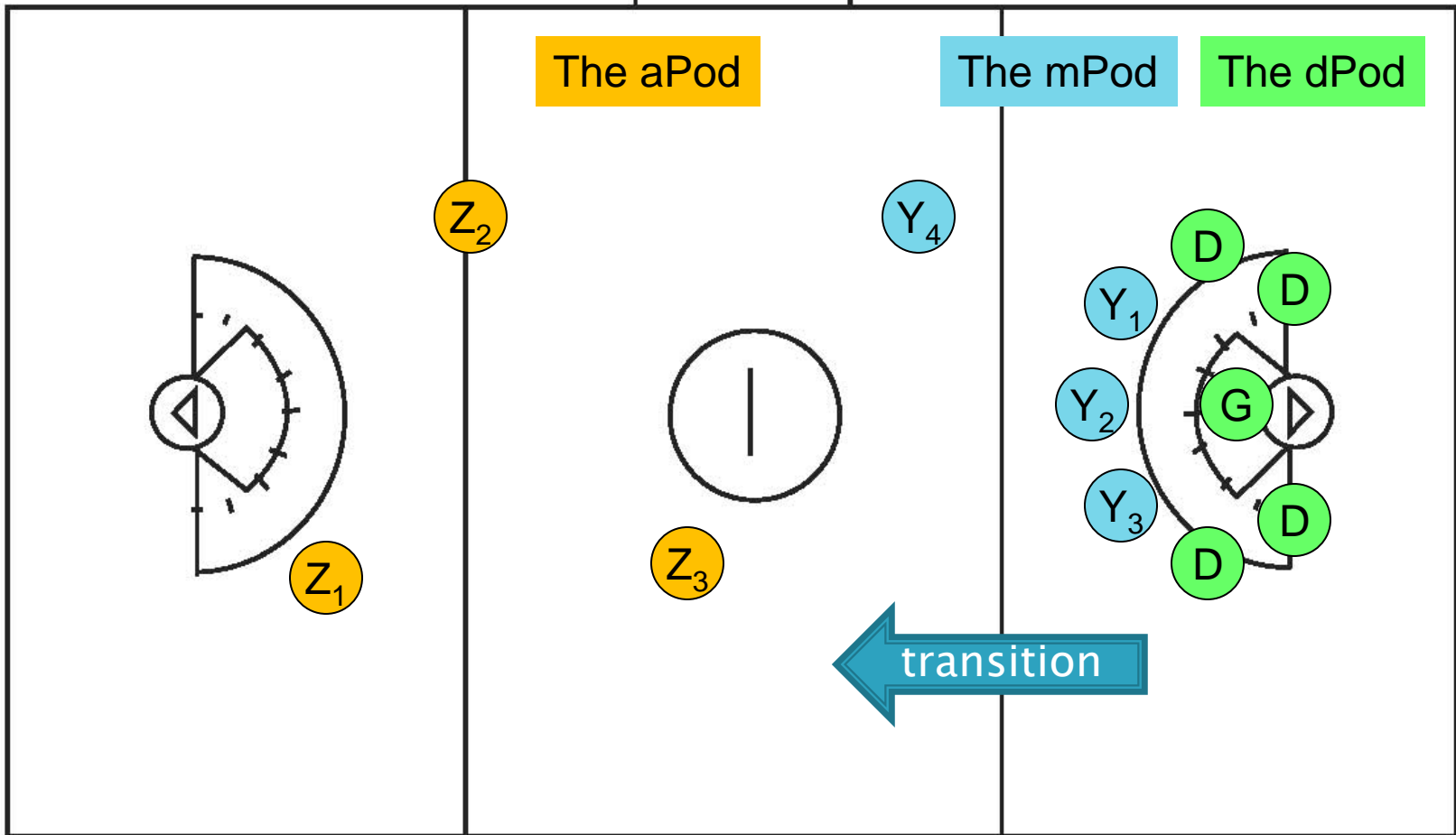
Sub in the new Pod for the aPod, *but* using Y4 instead of Z4:



Sub in the new Pod for the aPod, *but* using Y4 instead of Z4:

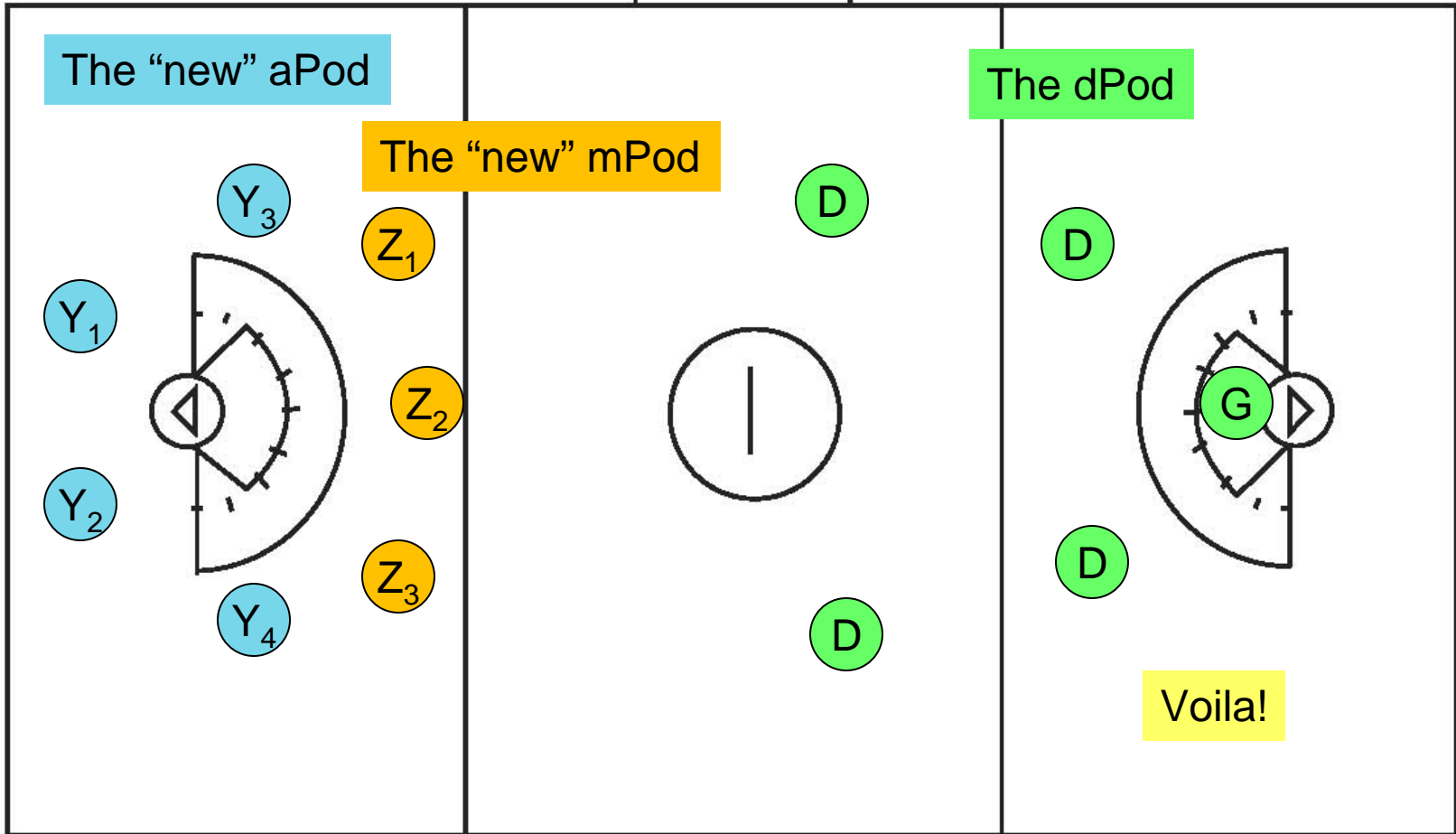


Step 2: When the ball transitions to the offensive end, do a "Pod flop" between the aPod and mPod:



X<sub>1</sub> X<sub>2</sub> X<sub>3</sub> Z<sub>4</sub> X<sub>4</sub> } subs

Step 2: When the ball transitions to the offensive end, do a “Pod flop” between the aPod and mPod:



X<sub>1</sub> X<sub>2</sub> X<sub>3</sub> X<sub>4</sub> Z<sub>4</sub> } new subs

# Comments:

- ▶ I use the command “**aPod out!**” to initiate a substitution.
- ▶ The Pod flop should not occur until the ball crosses the offensive restraining line, *and* your team is in possession.
- ▶ Players entering play are responsible for yelling “**Pod flop!**” at the right time.
- ▶ If substitution is done after a goal, the two steps are simply combined into one – the aPod comes out, the new Pod goes in, and a flop occurs immediately.
  
- ▶ It’s easier than it sounds!!

# Simplified version

- ▶ 3 a/mPods, each with 3 players (instead of 4).
- ▶ *1 pure attackman.*
- ▶ Substitutions: Same as before, but now only three players in a Pod at a time – the pure attackman stays on attack. (Thus slightly simpler.)
- ▶ Can also do a random Pod flop without substitution.
- ▶ The numbers: 9 a/mPodsmen, 1 pure attackman, 4 dPodsmen, 1 goalie = 15 total (instead of 18).
- ▶ If you add 1 sub for the dPod and 1 for the pure attackman, you can run as many as 17 total.
  
- ▶ Last year I had a player whom I preferred to keep on attack – and so I ran this version, and typically gave 16 players  $> \frac{1}{2}$  game playing time.



# Advantages

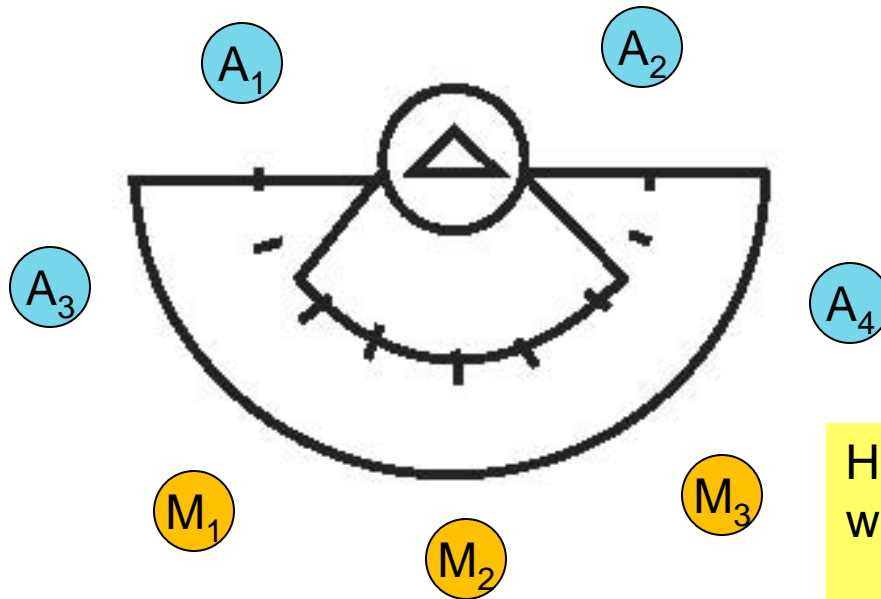
## ▶ **Player satisfaction:**

- Larger number of players in a game.
- Gives players chance to play both midfield and attack.

## ▶ **Strategic advantages:**

- Confusing to defense.
- Prevents fast breaks on subs.
- Midfielders can run harder, knowing they will be subbed.
- Attackers will re-defend more vigorously.
- Offensive plays can be organized around Pods  
(see following slides)

# The complexity of settled offense



How do you control seven girls with sticks around the crease??

There are as many answers as there are coaches...

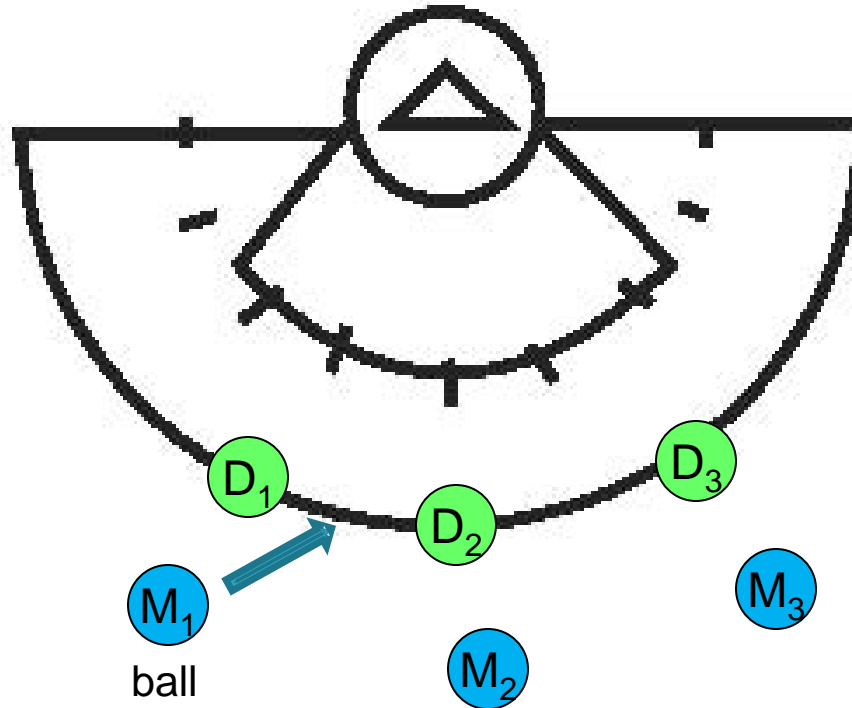
My answer:

***Let the aPod and mPod work (more-or-less) independently.***

# Fundamentals of offensive play

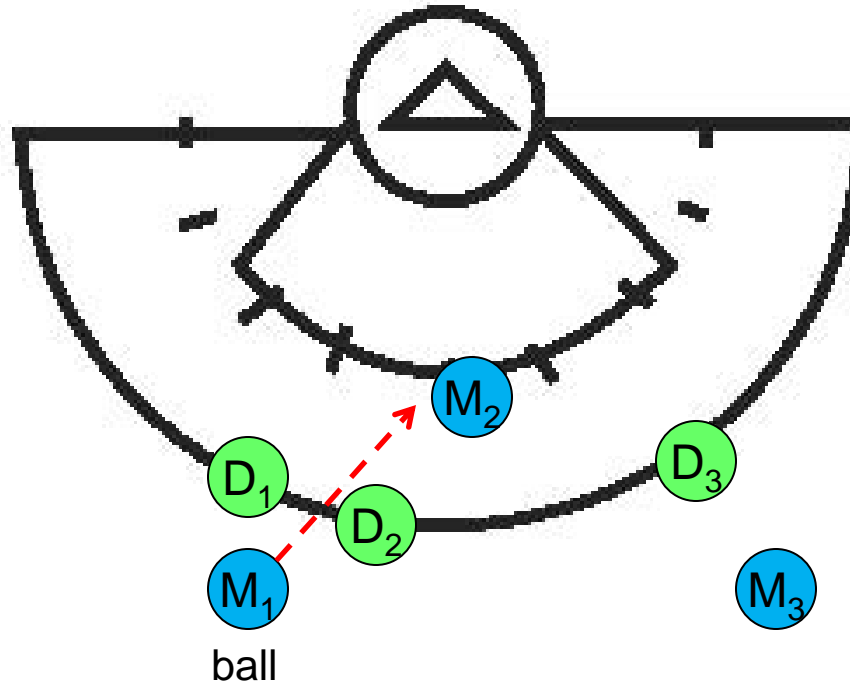
- ▶ Every good lacrosse player should know how to run (at a minimum) the following plays:
  - Draw and dump (“back door”)
  - Pick and roll (many variations)
  - Pass and cut (“give and go”)
  - Isolation
- ▶ Note: *All of these plays involve a small number of players.*
- ▶ Therefore each Pod can run them – *and practice them* – independently.

# Draw and Dump



- The “Draw”:  
M1 pressures “seam” between D1 and D2,  
thus drawing D2’s double-team.

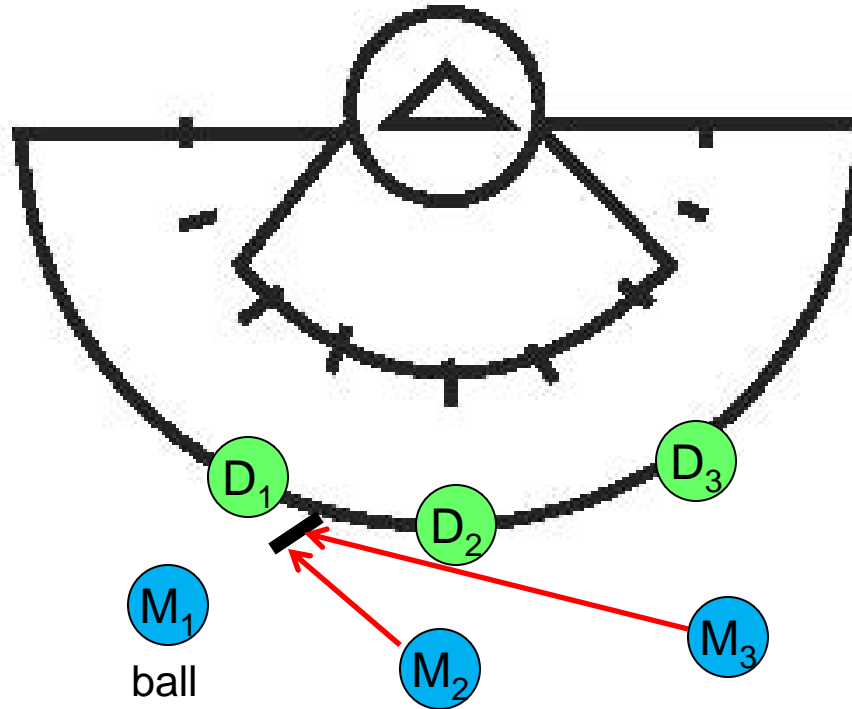
# Draw and Dump



Coaching tip:  
Tell your players to  
“Watch your defender!”

- The “Draw”:  
M<sub>1</sub> pressures “seam” between D<sub>1</sub> and D<sub>2</sub>, thus drawing D<sub>2</sub>’s attention.
- The “Dump”:  
**M<sub>2</sub> sneaks behind both defenders for feed from M<sub>1</sub>.**

# Pick and Roll

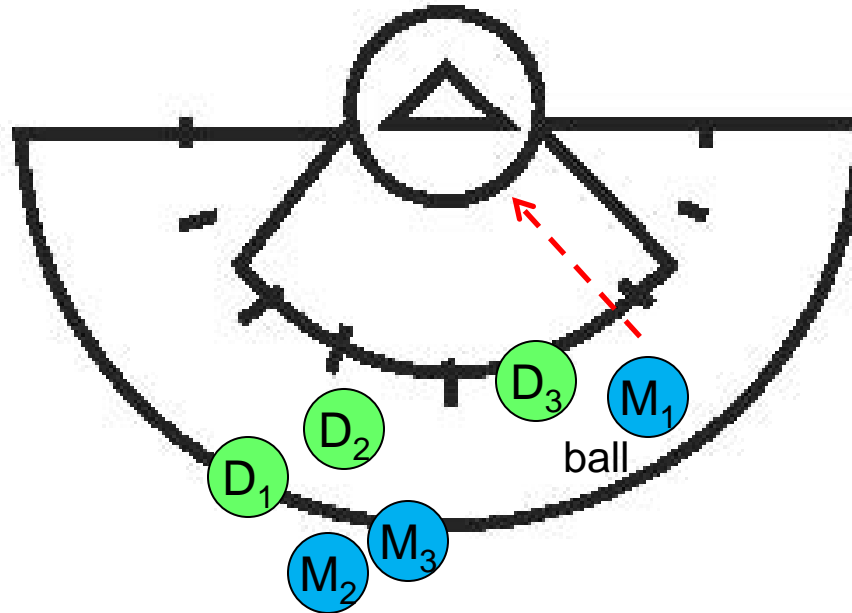


Many variations... here's one:

- The "Pick":

- M2 and M3 set a "double pick" on D1

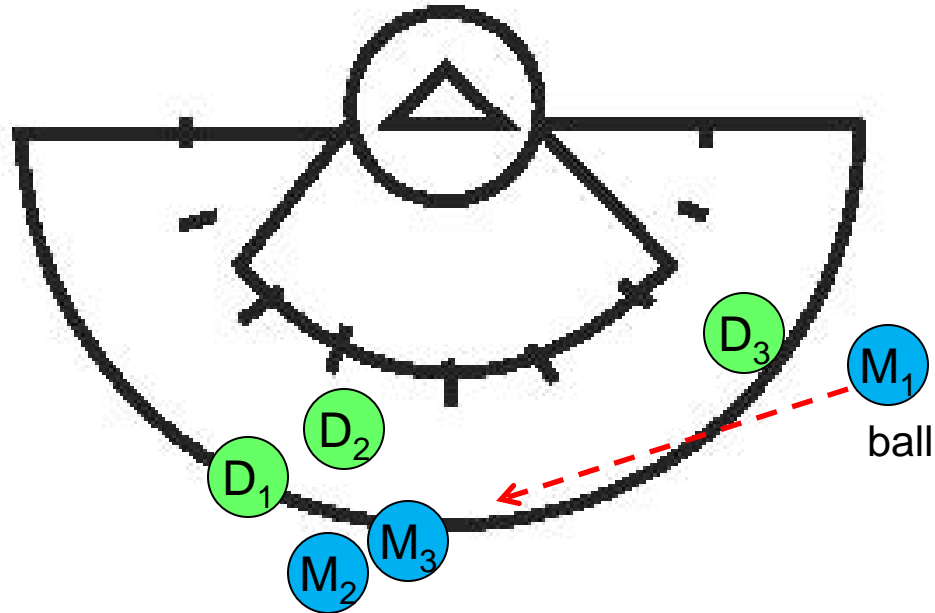
# Pick and Roll



Many variations... here's one:

- **The Pick:**  
M<sub>2</sub> and M<sub>3</sub> set a "double pick" on D<sub>1</sub>
- **The Roll:**  
**M<sub>1</sub> either shoots off the pick, or feeds M<sub>2</sub> or M<sub>3</sub> rolling off pick**

# Pick and Roll

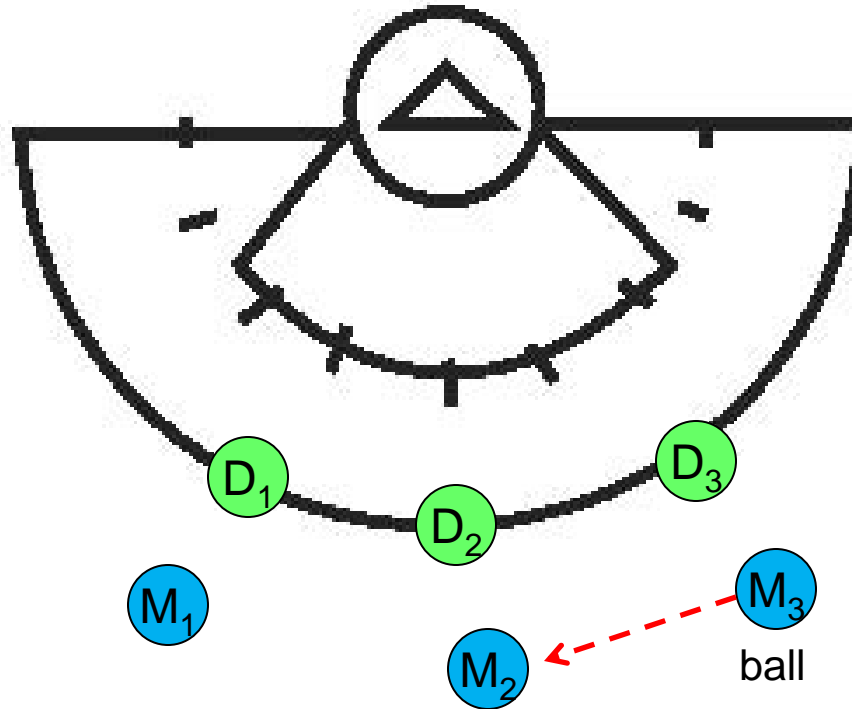


Many variations... here's one:

- **The Pick:**  
M<sub>2</sub> and M<sub>3</sub> set a "double pick" on D<sub>1</sub>
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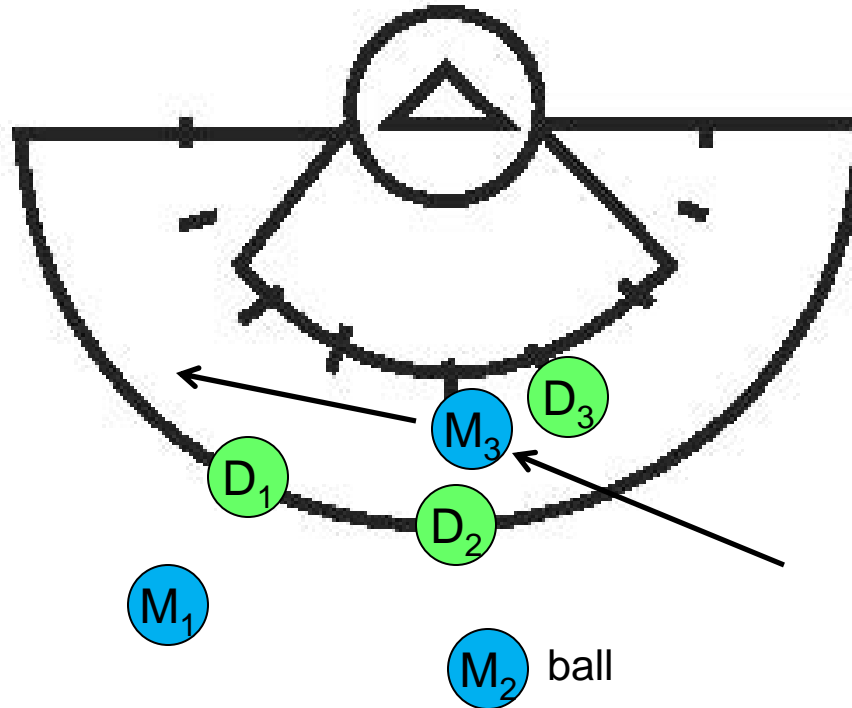
# Pass and Cut



Can be run from left or right:

- The “Pass”:  
M<sub>3</sub> passes to M<sub>2</sub>

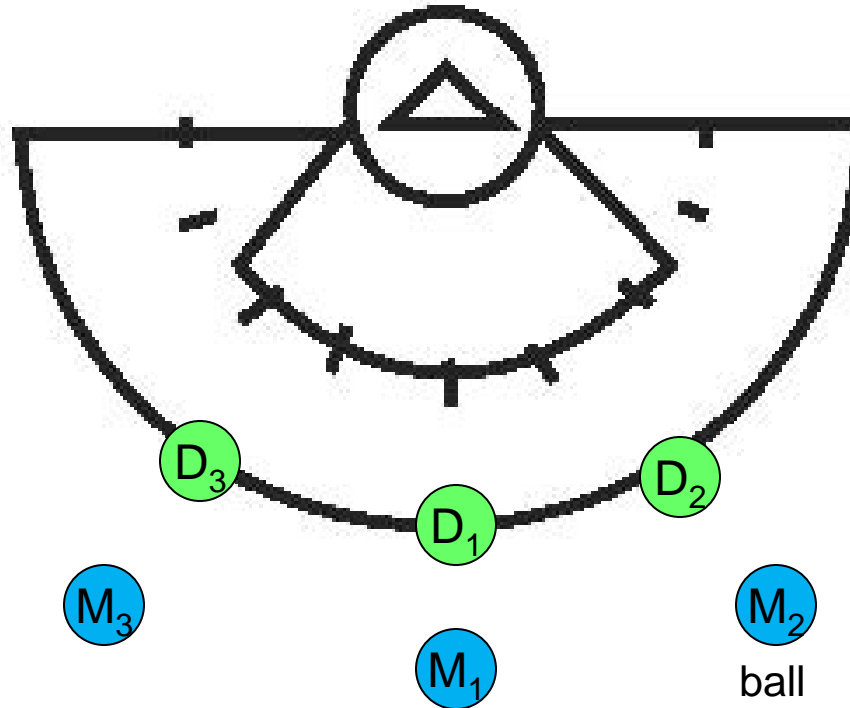
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- The “Pass”:  
M<sub>3</sub> passes to M<sub>2</sub>
- The “Cut”:  
M<sub>3</sub> cuts behind D<sub>2</sub> for feed.

# Pass and Cut



Can be run from left or right:

- The “Pass”:  
M<sub>3</sub> passes to M<sub>2</sub>
- The “Cut”:  
M<sub>3</sub> cuts behind D<sub>2</sub> for feed.
- **The continuation:**  
**M<sub>3</sub> circles to outside, M<sub>1</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> shift right**


# aPod fundamentals

- ▶ The same “offensive fundamentals” can be run by the aPod – the differences are in the details:
  - “(Crease) Roll and dump” (instead of “draw and dump”)
  - “(Crease) Roll isolation”
  - Picks on crease defenders
  - Etc.
- ▶ In addition, can run a variety of “post” plays.

# Off-ball play

- ▶ When a certain Pod has the ball, it is “on-ball”.
- ▶ The other Pod is “off-ball”.
- ▶ The off-ball Pod can run plays too:
  - Keeps defense on toes.
  - Can run picks, etc. to free up players for cuts (look for these in “slow break” situation)
  - Can react to other Pod’s plays to create space, detract defenders, etc.

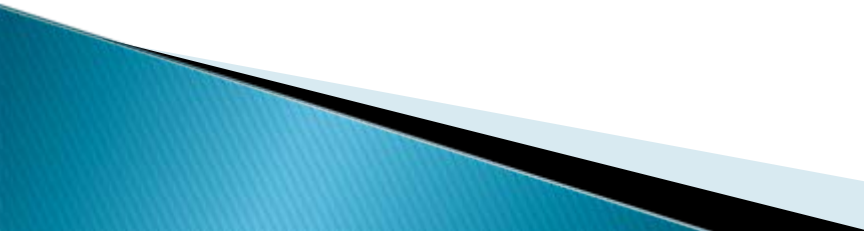
# What about the dPod?

- ▶ Defense is a very specialized skill – more so than offense, in my opinion.
  - ▶ Some players *prefer* defense – so I let them.
  - ▶ And some players *should* play defense – and so I tell them to.
  - ▶ My dPod is fixed – but at the youth level, I see no reason not to treat the dPod like the others, and allow it to play as an a/mPod.
- 

# Training

- ▶ Many drills can be designed based on 3- and 4-person groups.
- ▶ I ask each Pod to choose a “Pod commander” to help facilitate communication.
- ▶ I try to make it fun, but also competitive.
- ▶ We keep track of goals and assists per Pod, to draw attention away from individuals.
- ▶ The focus is thus on performance as a unit.
- ▶ Ironically, this allows individuals to excel – a Pod will want its best scorer to score, etc.
- ▶ Pods encourage creativity and cooperative problem-solving.

# Is the Pod System right for you?

- ▶ What is your “coaching philosophy”?
    - To win games, of course!
  - ▶ The Pod System has strategic advantages to help win games, but there is more: To give each and every one of your players a positive sports experience, via:
    - Meaningful playing time
    - Player development – well roundedness
    - A focus on the team, not on individuals
  - ▶ The details of how you run it will depend on the make-up and depth of your team, and the balance you desire between the above factors.
- 



# Thank you!!

- ▶ You can get copies of these slides by sending me email at [paul.hudak@yale.edu](mailto:paul.hudak@yale.edu).
- ▶ I would also appreciate comments / feedback on the ideas – please write!