General Thoughts and Application Rules for the Princeton-style Offense

*The following notes were taken from Derek Sheridan’s Basketball’s Princeton-style Offense: A Simplified Approach for High School Coaches*

1. The post player is the only true “position” player. Fundamentally sound players are more important than positions.
2. The player should watch the person in front of him; he tells the player what to do.
3. The player should read the defense before he makes his move. For most situations, the player involved in a play will have two options: One, the defense is overplaying; therefore the player will execute a backdoor cut. Two, the defense is sagging; therefore the player will accept a sweep (dribble hand-off) from the ball handler. There is a counter for everything the defense does. Your player must be able to make a quick read when the ball is dribbled at him.
4. Players must CUT HARD. They must cut all the way to the rim with the inside hand extended out. They should think “layup” on each cut. They will look for the ball twice (early and late) then get out of the way.
5. Players don’t dance. They are to make a read and cut hard. Once a cut is started, they should cut hard and get out of the way.
6. The player should stand ready to shoot when off the ball. Butt down and hands up. Players should think “layups and three-point shots,” in that order. The player will occupy his man and float to open spots.
7. The player should always be ready to fill the spot above him with proper timing.
8. Players shouldn’t screen air. They must get body-on-body on all screens and be ready to step back for a shot.
9. The player will hit the cutter with a bounce pass. The quality of the pass will be in direct correlation to the quality of the shot. The bounce pass should be low so that it is hard to steal or deflect. Pass the ball right behind the defender’s butt.
10. Players must dribble with a purpose.
11. Patience coupled with focus is a virtue in this system. Your players might run 3-4 sets in a single possession.
12. Unselfishness, fundamental play and timing are the foundations for establishing the flow of this offense.
13. Keep the area below the free-throw line empty when playing against a team that is more athletic. Try to “out fundamental” them. Keep post defenders away from the basket.
14. Few quick hitters are used.
15. Repetition is the “mother of all learning.”
16. The post player must be a good passer. His options are S-R-P (Score-Read-Pass).
17. Players shouldn’t run at the ball – greedy players run at the ball. The back cut is used to offset defensive aggressiveness.
18. When a player backdoor cuts from the top of the key, he will exit out to the strong side of the floor if he was not passed the ball. When a player backdoor cuts from a wing, he will exit back out to the side from which he came.
19. A strong-side sweep = a weak-side flare.
20. When a strong-side forward catches the ball, his first look is to feed the post.
21. Never run the same phase twice in a row – think “change.”

From a coach’s perspective, the following are reasons to choose this offense:

1. Necessity
2. Player talent level varies
3. Negates opponents strengths
4. Control
5. Offense becomes defense as game is slowed down