

Basketball Defense - Basic Man-to-Man Defense

From the Coach's Clipboard [Basketball Playbook](http://www.coachesclipboard.net), @ <http://www.coachesclipboard.net>

Good offense wins games... great defense wins championships. Believe it! When your offense is struggling, good defense can keep you in the game until your shots start falling. How are you going to catch up the second half if you are down 12 at the half? ... by playing great defense. Simply scoring more baskets won't do it if you allow the other team to score also. You must keep the opponent from scoring by playing good defense and rebounding, to allow your offense a chance to get back into the game.

Everyone on the team has to play good defense, because one weak link will cause the entire defense to fail, and a good offense will eventually find out who the weak defensive player is. Playing good defense involves hustle, inspiration and perspiration (sweat!). You gotta want to play good defense. Defensive skills are fairly easy to learn, unlike some offensive skills, and everyone can learn to become a good defender. If you are a poor, non-aggressive defender, you will hurt your team.

These are the important elements in playing good defense:

Stance and Focus

Your weight should be on the balls of your feet (not your heels), and your feet should be about shoulder width apart. Keep your knees bent and your back straight. Keep your head up, eyes forward, arms out with your palms up and elbows bent a little. Watch the offensive player's belly-button, especially if he/she is quick and hard to stay with. The offensive player can fake you with a head fake, eye fake, arm or shoulder fake, or a jab-step, but the belly-button will always go only in the direction that he/she is going.

Slides

When guarding your opponent, slide your feet sideways, using quick, short steps, and don't get your feet crossed. Don't hop. If you get beat in the open floor, don't just yell for help... turn and sprint after your opponent. Once you get in front of your man again, get back into your defensive stance. [See video clip.](#)

Close-out on the ball receiver

Defenders must learn to "close-out" on the player with the ball. Once the offensive player receives the pass, the defender should rush toward the ball-handler in a low stance. The last several steps should be quick, choppy steps to stop your momentum (so the defender doesn't dribble around you). Your baseline line foot should be back in order to force the ball-handler toward the baseline. As you approach the ball-handler, snap your shoulders and head back to help slow yourself down. [See video clip.](#)

On the Ball

Over-guard toward the offensive player's strong side. If your man is right-handed, over-guard that side and make him/her go left. If your opponent is on the right wing, drop your left foot back a little toward the baseline and overplay a little toward the offensive player's right side, as this will give you time to react to a move to his/her right. Try to force offensive player to the baseline. Once at the baseline, set the trap, and do not allow any further penetration along the baseline.

Keep the palm of your lead hand facing up. Try to get at the ball from below, not by slapping down it, which results in a foul. Your other hand should be in the passing lane. Slide with your opponent, and try to get him/her to stop the dribble, and then close in and apply pressure.

Don't "reach-in". This causes you to lose your balance and defensive stance, and you become easy for the offensive player to get around. Reaching in also results in fouls and free throws for the opponent. Don't get into the bad habit of reaching-in and taking a swipe at the ball as the offensive player dribbles around you. Instead move your feet, hustle, stay with your man, and prevent him/her from getting to the basket by maintaining good on-ball defensive stance. If you get beat, sprint after the offensive player and beat him/her to a spot where you can once again resume your defensive stance.



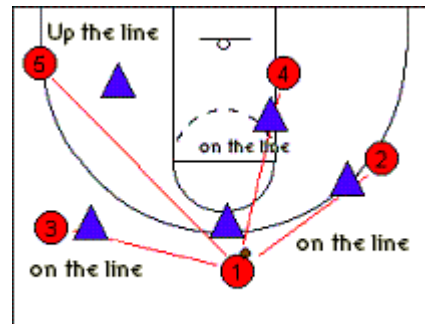
Denial

Clog the passing lane and prevent the player you are guarding from getting the ball, that is, "deny" him/her the ball. When guarding an offensive player who is one pass away from the ball, you should be in denial. Denying your man the ball, keeps him/her from scoring. Play the passing lane and stay between the player you're guarding and the ball. Place your foot and hand nearest the ball slightly forward, and turn the palm of your hand toward the ball, so that you can reject any incoming passes. Be in a position to see both your player and the ball. If the ball-handler stops the dribble, you have a "dead ball situation" and everyone should be in close on their man, in "full-denial".



In "full-denial", the defensive players should be "on the line". To explain this concept, imagine a line extending from the ball to the person you are guarding. In full-denial, you should position yourself so that you are on this line, body toward your man, but with head and eyes turned toward the ball, and your ball-side hand up in the passing lane.

If your man is a long distance, or two passes away from the ball-handler, you can play a little "up the line", that is a little ways from the imaginary line towards the hoop.



Full denial. Red lines (passing lanes).

The distance, or spacing, up the line depends upon the speed and quickness of the defender and the distance his/her man is from the ball. On a long pass, the defender should still be able to move toward the line and intercept the pass. If instead the defender initially played "on the line", his/her man could make a back-cut and get open. Playing a little "up the line" prevents the back-cut, and still allows for the interception.

Help and Recover.

Diagrams E and F below teach how to give help and recover on the perimeter. Rather than play a "full-denial", defenders one pass away play a little up the line and step or two toward the ball in order to help stop dribble penetration. Here O1 tries to dribble-penetrate. The X2 defender gives help and O1 is prevented from penetrating, and has to dish back out to O2 (Diagram F). The X2 defender then has to rotate quickly out to on-ball defense on O2, and the X1 and X4 defenders are now in deny, a little up the line and a step or two toward the ball, while the X3 defender moves into help-side (Diagram F).

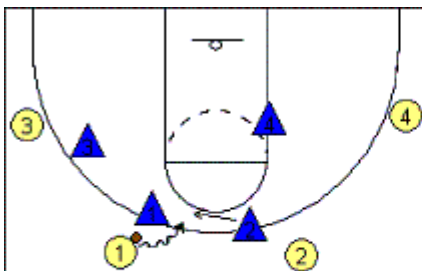


Diagram E. Help and recover. 1 dribble-penetrates and 2 gives help to prevent penetration.

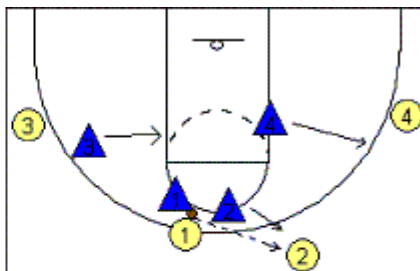
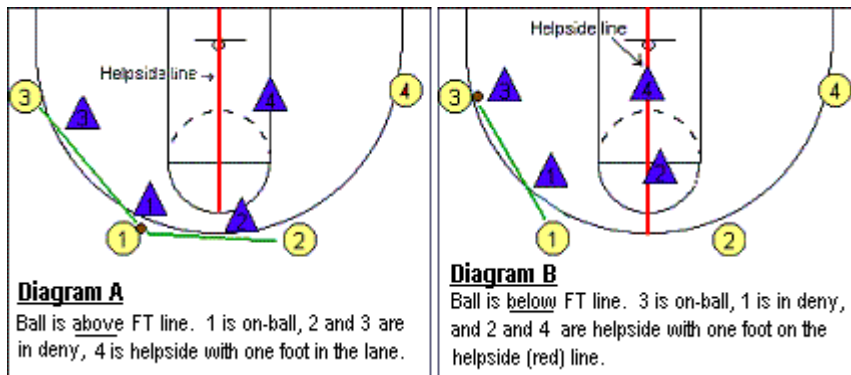


Diagram F. Help and recover. 1 is stopped and passes out to 2. 2 defender "recovers" to on-ball defense.

Helpside

When your opponent is two or more passes from the ball, you should be in "help-side" position. This will allow you to be in position to help your teammates against the ball penetrating the paint. This involves dropping off your man some (but without losing sight of him/her), and sagging toward the ball-side. In the diagrams below, see the imaginary red "help-side line" which goes through the middle of the lane. Many coaches teach that if the ball is above the free-throw line, the help-side defender should have one foot in the lane (Diagram A). If the ball is below the free-throw line, one foot should be touching or staggering the help-side line. Stay between the ball and your man. Be ready to help defend against another player driving or cutting to the hoop, and "help" your teammate who may have gotten beat. Once the ball comes back to within one pass from your player, you get back into deny position. If the ball is skip-passed to your player, you quickly close-out and play "on-ball". See diagrams below.



Remember, good defense is "team defense". Man to man defense is a team defense just as much as zone defenses. Here is a good quote: "The best man defense looks like a zone and the best zone defense looks like a man."

Defending the Low Post

There are three positions the defender can assume when defending the low post player.

Playing behind the offensive post player.

Here the defender plays directly behind the offensive player. This may be advantageous if your post defender is much taller than the offensive player, and has a good chance of altering or blocking the post player's shot. But do not let the offensive player back you down under the basket. Use your legs (use a strong stance with knees bent) and your lower body strength to keep the offensive player out... but do not put your hands on the post player's back as you may get called for a pushing foul.

Full-fronting the low post player.

Here the defender moves directly in front of the offensive post player, between him/her and the ball, and denies the pass. The wing defender should put pressure on the ball in order to make the pass to the low post, or the lob pass, more difficult. Fronting may backfire if the offensive player is taller and can easily seal for inside position and get the high lob pass. Another disadvantage is the defender is out of position for the rebound, and the post player may be able to score just by sealing for inside position and receiving the inside pass, or by getting the rebound and put-back.

Three-quarter (or one-half) front the low post player.

This is probably the best method. Instead of directly fronting the low post player, the defender "straddles" him/her with one foot in front and one in back, standing sideways to the offensive player with one hand in the passing lane. If the ball is below the free-throw line extended (in the corner-wing area), the defender should play on the baseline side of the post player, making contact with the post player's inside (baseline) shoulder, and with the left arm and hand out in the passing lane. If the ball is passed out on top (above the free-throw line extended), the defender should slide chest to chest with the post player and move to the post player's high-side (or lane-side) shoulder, again with a hand up at all times in the passing lane.

Trapping (setting the double-team)

In trapping, one defender should first stop the dribbler, often along the sideline or baseline, or in one of the "trapping zones" (see below). Trapping zones are those areas where the offensive player definitely does not want to get caught losing his dribble. It's like getting caught in a corner.

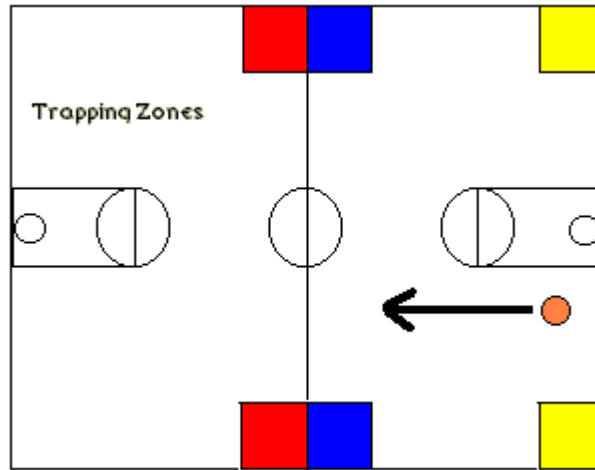
Once the ball is stopped, the second defender sprints over and double-teams the ball carrier. They obscure the ball-handler's view, and get into the passing lane. Their knees are adjacent to each other to prevent the ball-handler from "splitting" the trap. The position of their hands should be at the same height as the ball. If the offensive player holds the ball high to "throw over the top", the hands should be high. If the ball is low, the hands should be low to prevent the bounce pass. Do not reach in! "Reaching-in" changes a good situation into a bad one (now the player goes to the free throw line). Instead, the trapping players should deny the player from getting the pass off and get the 5-second call, or force her to make a bad pass, which is intercepted by one of your teammates.

The yellow zones catch the player in the corner.

The red zones are excellent trapping zones, since the offensive player cannot retreat across the 10 second line.

The blue zones are good trapping zones because the offense has to worry about the 10-second count.

For **defending against screens** and other more detailed points, see "[Teaching Man-to-Man Pressure Defense](#)"



Related pages:

[Man-to-Man Pressure Defense](#), [Shell Drill](#), [Man-to-Man Breakdown Drills](#), [Man-to-Man Positioning Drill](#), [1-on-1 Drill](#), and [Close-Out Drills](#).

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