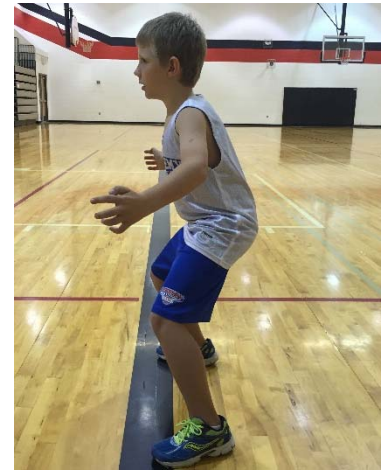


The old coaching adage is “Defense wins you championships” has some truth to it. Many teams have ridden their defensive juggernauts to win championships, but many have also struggled to be .500. Regardless of whether you place defense on the top or lower down on your priority list you must recognize how it is nearly half of the game and it can’t be ignored.

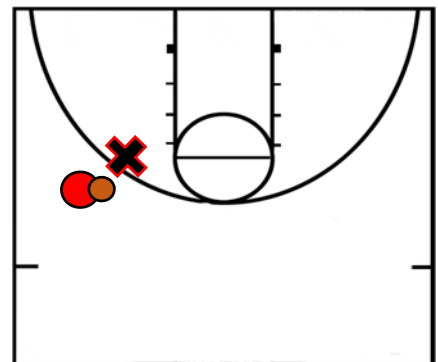
Some players are able to make plays because they are bigger, faster, or stronger than other players on the floor and can get away with being out of position at times. Some players are “heads” and see plays develop better than others. They are able to make up for a lack of athleticism or size by reacting faster, being in the right spots, and by “playing smarter” than others. The best defenders are able to use all of his/her athletic potential by moving efficiently and understanding his/her role as a bigger part of the team’s defense. Each of these traits (athleticism, making good decisions) are skills that can be trained and improved. Not all players are fast, but every player can become faster. Not all players make decisions on defense, but every player can learn to make better decision.

**Body Position and Movement-** This can be awkward for young players, but it is critical to teach players how to move on a basketball court. Players should begin with getting into an athletic stance with feet wider than shoulders, knees and hips bent, chest and head up, and arms out in front of his/her body. Show players how this position maximizes balance, acceleration, reaction time, and being able to move in all directions. This basic stance will lead to every defensive movement a player will make.



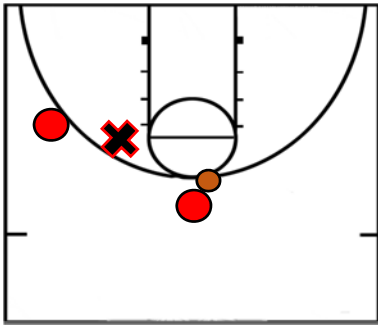
**Seeing the Ball-** While playing defense, players will find themselves in three main positions: “Ball,” “Deny,” and “Help.” These positions can change quickly and frequently, but the one constant that never changes is that the ball tells you what to do. Defense is not guarding your man, or making steals. It is made up of 5 players stopping the ball from scoring. This is why “Seeing the Ball” is the most important skill for a defender, because the all movement and play is dependent on the ball.

**“Ball”-** When guarding the ball players should begin at an arm and half distance from the player in an athletic stance. This will provide enough space for the defender to move and keep his/her body between the offensive player and the goal. The players should remain at this distance as the offensive player dribbles, pivots, or holds the ball (Once the offensive player has used the dribble the defense can close this space). Teach players to push step quickly on the balls of his/her feet to move with the offensive player, trying to keep feet as close to the same distance apart as in our basic athletic stance.



If a defender gets to a point where the offensive player has moved past him/her and by push stepping he/she cannot regain position between the ball handler and the goal, the defender should turn and run to a spot that would regain proper position. Be sure to teach players the ultimate goal of guarding the ball is to not let them get past you.

**“Deny”**- This is when the defender is guarding a player that is within a distance to receive a direct pass. The defender should position him/herself in an athletic stance with one arm extended into the passing lane and the other toward his/her player. The defender's body should be positioned so that his/her back is still toward the goal and his/her chest is still toward his/her player. Notice the distance the defender is from the ball and his/her player in the diagram below. He/She is close enough to the ball that he/she could move to stop the ball handler if they penetrate toward the paint. At the same time they are at a distance where they could move to an “Ball” position if a pass were able to get to his/her player, if not deflect/steal the pass.



Proper distance to man and the ball

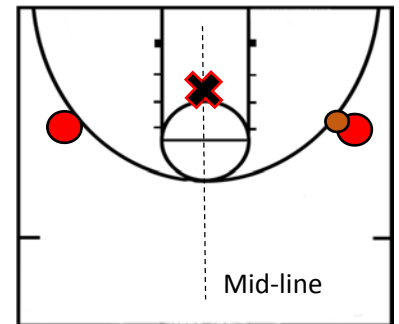
Chest to player

Athletic Stance

Arm in passing lane, not full body



**“Help”**- This is when the defender is guarding a player that is not an immediate threat to receive a pass a direct pass. The defender should position his/her body in an athletic stance straddling the mid-line of the court. He/She should be close enough to the goal that he/she could “Point the Pistols” (Being able to see both the ball and his/her player by point both index fingers toward them). The defender should be ready to help the ball if the ball handler attacks the lane, jump in front of cutters or other offensive players looking to get open in the middle, or move to a “Deny” position if his/her player moves to a position to where he/she could receive a direct pass.



Athletic Stance

Back to the Goal

“Point Your Pistols”

Straddling the Midline

**\*Communicating-** Try to train your players to communicate and yell out what's they are doing on defense. If a defender is on the ball, he/she should call out “Ball.” If a defender is in “Deny” or “Help,” he/she should call it out as well. When the offense takes a shot, train players to communicate that and call out “Shot.” The sooner players learn to communicate the simple things, the easier it will be when they need to begin communicating much more

**\*\*Moving with the Ball-** Putting it all together is easier said than done, but once the defenders have a good understanding of where they should position themselves relating to his/her player and the ball, they are ready to tackle some team defensive situations. As players progress to this point, he/she must learn to move while the ball is in the air. In order to be successful on defense all players need to at the desired position (“Ball”, “Deny”, “Help”) when the ball arrives in the hands of the offensive player. A simple rule to follow is to teach players to move in the direction of the pass. Ensure players are moving in the fastest way possible to get to those positions as the ball is in flight.

**Rebounding-** If offense is when your team has the ball, and defense is when the other team has the ball. Rebounding would be those short moments when a shot is taken and no one has the ball. Those short moments can make a major impact on the game. Rebounding is often over looked in skill development and practice time. It is quickly noticed during games when other teams get 2 or more shots at the goal. No one in the gym ignores that.

It is important to go over rebounding early on in practices so that it can be worked into other drills. It is difficult to make time for specific rebounding drills in a short practice, but it can easily supplement the shooting and defensive drills you may already have planned. The first step to teaching rebounding is training players that they cannot stand and “watch the fireworks.” Rebounding begins as soon as the shot happens, not when the ball comes off the rim.

**Boxing Out-**When teaching players to box out be sure to continue to emphasize that the ball is still the most important. A big mistake coaches make when teaching young players to rebound is the overemphasis of keeping contact with his/her player and neglecting to be aggressive to go get the ball.

*Shot Occurs...* The defensive player steps to the nearest player and makes contact with forearm while staying low. This step and contact forces the offensive player to make a decision. Will he/she go right/left and go after the rebound or will they stay put? Depending on what the offensive player does, the defense will respond as shown below.

*If the offensive player goes after the ball by trying to get around the defender boxing out...* the defense’s task is to maintain contact and position between the player and the basket. This is done by stepping across the offensive player and using their body to block him/her from getting to the ball.



*After the defender establishes position between the offensive player and the goal, they must maintain a low and wide stance. In this position the defender using his upper arms as “feelers” to feel the direction the offensive person is moving to. Once feeling them move, the defender must adjust his/her feet to cut off the offensive player. While maintaining this position the defensive player must regain sight of the ball and be ready to go get the rebound at the first possible opportunity.*

\*The defender that is guarding the shooter should not make contact and commit a foul while the player is in the act of shooting. Simply taking the hand that was up to contest the shot and keeping it extended toward the player is enough to see if the shooter will crash the boards. If they do, the defender will then initiate contact and box out.

**Youth Basketball Rebounding-** With shorter goals and shorter shots taken, rebounding happens quickly. Train players first to track the ball and where it’s going. During shooting drills have partners earn points for catching a rebound before it hits the ground. Once kids learn to be aggressive while the ball is in the air, next they can learn how to position themselves to box out keep others from getting the ball.