

Defensive Fundamentals

The success of any defense is totally dependent on individual player defensive skills and techniques.

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Obviously, in the game of basketball, the offensive player has a superior advantage over a defensive player. However, sound defensive fundamentals and teamwork can neutralize this advantage. Basic defensive fundamentals include: Proper footwork, hand position, and vision, techniques for playing the offensive player with the ball, influencing and containing dribblers, techniques of playing offensive players without the ball, Helpside defense, and defensive rebounding techniques. To be successful, players must possess a working knowledge of the basic defensive fundamentals:

Pressuring the Player with the Ball

1. Ball pressure is the single most important element of team defense.
2. "On Ball" defensive fundamentals are comprised of three basic components: Pressuring and attacking the player with the ball, containing a dribbler and attacking the picked up dribble.
3. Pressuring the ballhandler makes dribbling and passing more difficult, and increases the chances of an offensive mistake.
4. When guarding a player with the ball, the defender should attack, rather than react to offensive actions.
5. The defenders should influence ball handlers to the closest sideline or baseline pushpoint. In keeping the ball out of the middle of the court ("Red Zone"), it not only reduces the offensive operating area, but it also creates helpside defense.
6. Defenders should constantly anticipate and immediately attack any player that picks up their dribble.
7. Defenders must have a hand up and contest every shot. Since shooters know where the ball is going as soon as it leaves their hand, they must be boxed out.
8. Taking a charge is a really big play in basketball. However, in taking a charge, players need to be taught to absorb contact by tucking their chin in and sitting down.

Containing a Dribbler

1. One of the most important principles of defense is to keep the ball out of the middle of the court. Defensively, nothing good ever happens on middle penetration.
2. In keeping the ball out of the middle it not only minimizes the offensive operating area, but it also establishes helpside defensive support.

3. Defend the dribbler with your legs. Do not reach. Move your feet!.
4. On drives to the basket, hold both hands up above the shoulders to contest the shot or pass. "Showing" or holding both hands high also eliminates referees calling fouls..
5. On dribble penetration, it is important that the defender protect the "Elbows" and "Blocks". Do not allow the dribbler penetration into the three second area. .
6. In the open court, do not ever attack a dribbler from the side. Sprint ahead.
7. When the defender is unable to maintain leverage and force the ball handler to a desired pushpoint, just continue to force to the next pushpoint.
8. Do NOT foul a shooter. When the defender is beaten badly, cede the shot..
9. Team defense does not only eliminate one-on-one isolations and player mismatches that may occur during a game, but it also provides defenders with strong, helpside support and quick hitting double teams which, in turn, allows defenders to exert more pressure on the ballhandler without any fear of getting beat.

Strong First Pass Denials

1. Off ball defensive efforts should be focused on obtaining the basketball, not just protecting the basket. Therefore, to achieve this, Off Ball defenders must constantly attack the passing lanes.
2. Defenders must be alert and anticipate all passes. They must watch the passer's eyes since almost all passers will telegraph their passes.
3. Strong first pass denials require that any pass to the opponent should go through the defender.
4. To accomplish this, the defender must assume a position, up the passing lane, between the ball handler and the person they are guarding at all times.
5. In attacking the passing lanes, defenders should deflect most passes rather than trying to catch them.
6. For first pass denials to be successful, defenders do not have to deflect or get a hand on every pass.
7. By constantly attacking the passing lanes, it will disrupt offensive spacing and timing by forcing the offensive players further away from the basket in order to receive the ball.
8. Forcing the receivers out away from the basket increases the opponent's shot distance along with the drive distance to the basket and pass distance into the low post.

Defending Cutters

Rule: Do NOT allow the cutter to make an uncontested cut or trail a cutter to the basket.

1. How to defend cutters is another phase of the game that is often times over looked by coaches.
2. Basket cuts, back cuts and flash cuts have been around since the birth of basketball and are an integral part of every offense today.
3. Players must not only possess a working knowledge how to defend these basic cuts, but also need to develop an attitude and aptitude of anticipating and preventing them.
4. The "Give and Go" basket cut is one of the oldest, yet most admired plays in basketball. When executed successfully, it draws raves from the spectators and coaches alike.
5. However, this simple basket cut should never be allowed. It is a result of careless or lazy defense.
6. When a ball handler passes the ball and makes a cut to the basket, the defender must jump in the direction of the pass and assume a shoulder to shoulder pass denial position
7. The back cut or "Back Door" cut is the tactic of choice used to counter strong first pass denials. Therefore, defenders should be aware of this tactic and alert to defend it.
8. Defending back cuts requires a team effort. In addition to disrupting the actual back cut, it is also imperative for the "On Ball" defender to pressure the passer and for the helpside defenders to be alert and give support by intercepting or deflecting the pass or by taking a charge.

Helpside Support

1. In providing helpside support, it allows the On Ball defenders to be more aggressive and eliminates the fear of getting beat. Helpside support also eliminates one-on-one isolations.
2. Helpside defenders should assume a low, bent knee stance between the opponent and the ball handler.
3. Players in the Helpside I position should recognize when a big player is in a "High I" position and a smaller player is in a "Low I" position, and INVERT whenever possible.
4. Helpside defenders should be ready to execute five different actions: Show & Recover, Double Team, Double Team Early, Block Cutters, and Box Out on shots.
5. When a defender is located 1 1/2 passes away from the ball or half way between a full pass denial and a helpside I support position, they should assume a "Strike" position one step up and one step off the passing lane.

6. "Help the Helper" - A vital part to successful defensive help is the rotation of a third defender.
7. The ability to close out quickly and effectively is a real key to Helpside defense success.
8. Helpside defenders must close out to the nearest opponent as the ball leaves the passer's hands.
9. In closing out to a player with the ball, never leave your feet or run pass the shooter.
10. Anytime a dribbler picks up their dribble, off ball defenders should immediately close out and take away all of the passing lanes.

Post Defense General

1. Being able to defend the post area is crucial in basketball. Post defense is not just limited to the tallest players on a team.
2. Post defense is played before the post receives the ball, not after. All attempts should be made to prevent the offensive post from receiving the ball.
3. There are three basic post areas to defend: Low post, Medium post and High Post.
4. The defender should beat the offensive post to the "spot" and force the opponent to adjust and set up out of their normal set up position.
5. Defend with agility and quickness rather than strength.
6. Pressure all passers so that they are unable to make a good post feed.
7. Strong post defense requires a team effort.
8. How best to defend the post will vary from player to player and game to game.

Defending the Post

1. The defender must be determined to aggressively contest all post passes.
2. Post defenders should assume an aggressive pass denial position on ball side keeping their back foot 12" behind opponent's foot.
3. When changing defensive post position, the defender must move while the ball is in the air.
4. Influence ball away from an outstanding post player.
5. Sound individual post defense can be augmented with post traps at times to insure total disrupt of the inside post up game.
6. When the post sets up on the weakside, post defender assumes a Helpside "Strike" position alert to deny any flash cuts to the ball.
7. Do NOT rotate off a low post to help out on a drive since it is much more difficult to score on a driving shot the down middle than it is off a drop pass.

8. When defending the high post area, defenders should assume an aggressive 3/4 pass denial position on ball side forcing the high post to step out to receive the ball.
9. When the high post receives the ball with their back to the basket, the defender should step off (arms length) and play the passing lane.
10. When the high post turns and drives to the basket, the defensive player should force to a corner pushpoint.

You Never Stop Learning

There is much to learn in basketball, offensively and defensively, as individual players and as part of a team. Practice, repetitious practice, is the only answer. There are no short cuts!