

# Defense

## Transition Defense

"Transition" refers to the process of changing from defense to offense (transition offense), or offense to defense (transition defense). Transition defense can be as simple as having one guard protecting back after a score, rebound or steal, with the rest of the team hustling back on defense. Or, if the opponent is a fast-breaking team, it may require two guards (see below). Or transition defense may employ a full court pressing defense, which can be simple full-court man-to-man pressure, or one of various zone presses.

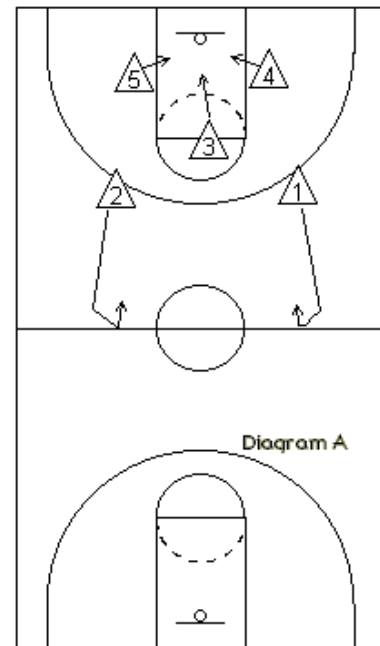
### Preventing the fast break

Our goal is to prevent the opponent from scoring easy lay-ups on the break.

When your team shoots, at least one guard should not attack the offensive board, and should remain "back" beyond the three-point lane, in the center of the floor. This should be assigned to a certain player and be his responsibility. When a substitute comes in for him, the sub must know that this is now his responsibility. If this player drives to the hoop, there must be communication and understanding that a second guard will now have this responsibility. If this fundamental is not kept, the opponent will get easy transition, fast-break lay-ups. As the guard retreats to stop the break, his teammates must hustle down quickly to defend. Players who fail to sprint back on defense usually find themselves on the bench. There is no excuse for not hustling and sprinting back on defense, unless it is fatigue and you need a rest.

### Two-guards back

Some teams are very proficient at the fast-break, and break every time they get the ball. To stop this team, try this defensive approach (diagram A). Assign two guards to stay back on defense. When the shot goes up, the three "big-men" crash the offensive boards, while two guards retreat to the mid-court line, one on each side of the center circle. The guard on the ball-side will pick up the dribbler and try to stop the ball. The other guard retreats back to the opponent's paint area to prevent the lay-up. If the opponent gets the rebound, one of our re-bouncers should try to "jam" and pressure the re-bouncer in order to prevent, or slow down, the outlet pass. The other two players should sprint back on defense.



### Defending the paint area.

Again, we want to prevent the easy lay-up. All players should sprint back on defense and run straight to the paint area to protect the basket. One player should stop the ball, to avoid dribble penetration. Once the fast break is stopped and the "big-men" are back in defensive position, then the defenders can move out of the paint to pick up their man assignment, or zone position.

If the opponent is successful in running a fast-break, your "prevent" guard may find himself in a 2-on-1, or 3-on-1 situation, he being the only defender. In this situation, the prevent man should be taught to first prevent the lay-up. If the opponent chooses to shoot the outside jumper, give it to them, as it is a lower percentage shot than the lay-up, you avoid getting a foul, and you may get the rebound, or delay the offense long enough for your teammates to arrive on defense. Often I see high school players make the mistake of coming up away from the basket and challenging the ball, only to get beaten by an easy pass to another player under the basket for a lay-up. Again, the defender must stay back and "gap" the offensive players, that is, try to straddle and cut off the passing lanes to the easy lay-up.

With the above strategy, team hustle and understanding of transition defensive assignments, you can go a long way in stopping, or slowing down the fast-break.

### Full-Court Press Defense

Transition defense can be even more sophisticated with full-court pressing defense. First, the disadvantages of a press defense are that it takes a lot of practice time to develop a good, cohesive press. Also, remember that the full-court press is a gamble (especially trapping zone defenses). You risk giving up the easy transition lay-up. Good offensive teams with good ball handlers and passers can break the press and turn it into their advantage with an easy score. If you press the entire game, your players may become fatigued, may get into foul trouble, and the offense often "figures it out" with time. So you might want to press only in certain situations (e.g. after a made basket), or certain times of the game. You may want to use the press as a "surprise" tactic.

The advantages are that it can quickly produce back-court turnovers, and easy steals and scores for your team. So it is an offensive weapon as such, and a way to come from behind, or a way to break open a close game. The press keeps the opponent off-balance, changes the tempo of the game, and often has the opponent doing things they don't normally like to do. It often forces the opposing coach to use valuable time-outs. It favors a well-conditioned team with a deep bench, and with more substitutions, allows more of your players to get playing time. There is a saying, "To error is human, and pressure causes error."

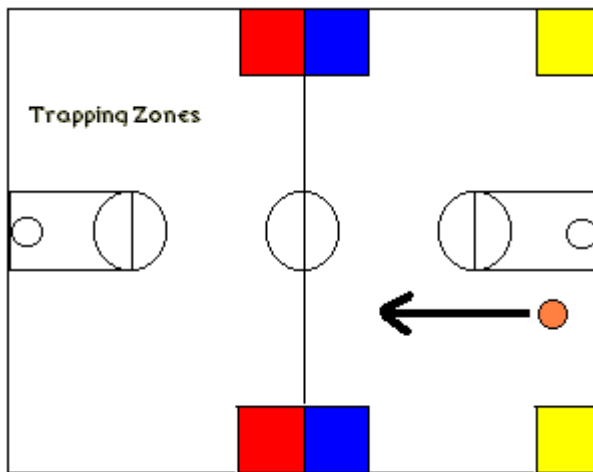
### Some basic principles apply to all presses.

1. Always have one player back in prevent mode to prevent the easy lay-up.
2. Sprint back to the paint when you are beaten.
3. When trapping, or trying to stop the dribbler, don't reach in! Rather, you must move your feet to get into position and deny the sideline. The referee is watching closely for the reach-in foul. Back-court fouls are usually "stupid" fouls, created when the opponent was not even in position to score. It's especially "stupid" if the opponent is in the two-shot bonus, or if it is committed with only seconds remaining in a period.

#### 4. Trapping

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 cut off the ball-handler's view, and get into his passing lane. 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! This only transforms 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 him to make a bad pass, which is intercepted by one of your teammates.



#### 5. Gapping (zone press)

The other defenders who are not actively trapping, try to get into the gaps between the ball-handler and his teammates. They play the passing lanes and deny and intercept passes from the trapped player.

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.

#### Types of full court presses

Often a pressing team will use more than one type of press. As the offense calls a time-out and makes adjustments to your press, you can change to another type of press. Or you can make simple adjustments of your own, such as whether to guard the in-bounds passer or not, whether to deny the in-bounds pass with full-denial defense, or allow the in-bounds pass in the corner, and then go trap it.

There are many type of presses. I will discuss a few below. Please check these links to view that specific press.

#### Man-to-Man Press

Full-Court Pressure Defense

#### Zone Presses

1-2-1-1 Zone Press

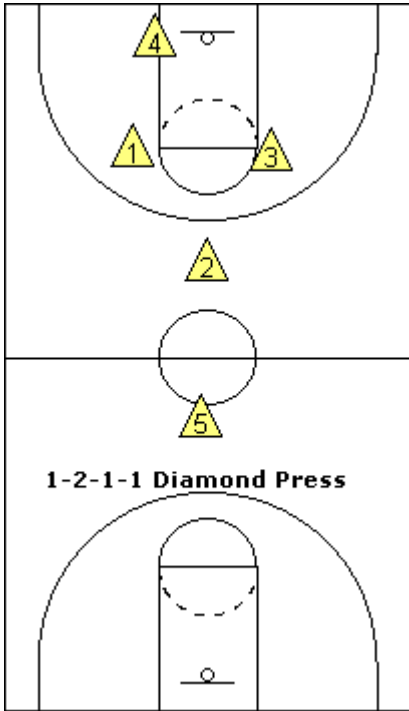
2-2-1 Zone Press

3-1-1 Zone Press

### **"1-2-1-1 Zone Press – Diamond Press"**

The 1-2-1-1 zone press pressures the in-bounds passer, and attempts to trap the first pass receiver. You can call either "one fist" or "two fist" options from the bench to change your strategy a little, and confuse the opponent.

With one-fist and two-fist, always try to deny a center in-bounds pass... make them pass to a player in the corner, or off to the side.



When the offensive player is trapped in the corner, or along the sideline, make sure the first defender to get there, seals off the sideline, so the offensive player cannot dribble up the sideline. The other defenders must play in the gaps between the passing lanes, and try to deny or intercept the pass.

#### **"One-Fist"**

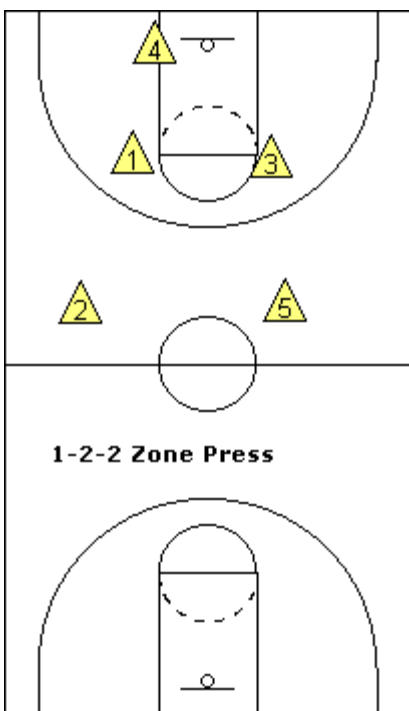
#4 and #1 (or #3) immediately trap the first pass.

#### **"Two Fist"**

#4 and #1 (or #3) wait until the first pass receiver puts the ball on the floor and starts her dribble, and then quickly close in and trap her. In this situation, you are waiting for the pass receiver to first commit herself with the dribble. Once you trap her, she has lost her option to dribble.

#### **"Side Fist"**

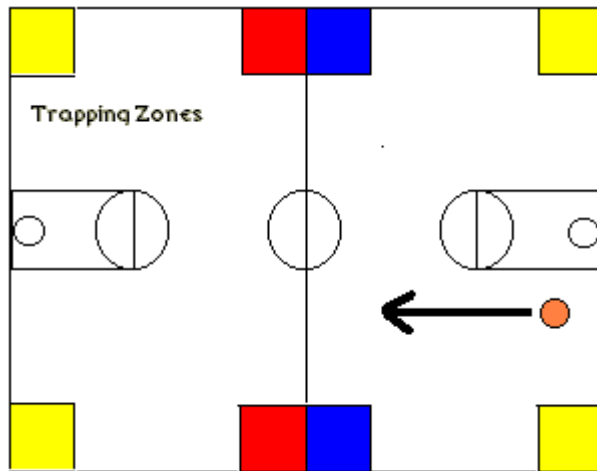
You can also call "side fist" to signal your players to trap the ball handler along the sideline, either in the back-court, or the front-court.



#### **Adjustment, changing to a 1-2-2 zone press.**

The 1-2-1-1 diamond press is vulnerable up the sidelines. If the opponent is beating your press up the sidelines, then you can adjust your defense to a 1-2-2 zone press. #2 and #5 stop the sideline passing and dribble penetration. Of course, this press is a gamble and makes you more susceptible to getting beat long for a lay-up. Have a rule that if one offensive player goes long, then the mid-court weak-side defender (opposite the ball) will move back to prevent the long pass. For example, if the ball is on the left side (#1's side), or in the center, and a player goes long, then #5 should drop back. If the ball is on the right side (#3's side), then #2 drops back.

If the opponent is successful in running a fast-break, your "prevent" guard may find herself in a 2-on-1, or 3-on-1 situation, she being the only defender back. In this situation, the prevent defender should be taught to first prevent the lay-up. If the opponent chooses to shoot the outside jumper, give it to her, as it is a lower percentage shot than the lay-up, you avoid getting a foul, and you may get the rebound, or delay the offense long enough for your teammates to arrive on defense. Often I see high school players make the mistake of coming up away from the basket and challenging the ball, only to get beaten by an easy pass to another player under the basket for a lay-up. Again, the defender must stay back and "gap" the offensive players, that is, try to straddle and cut off the passing lanes to the easy lay-up.



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### **2-2-1 Zone Press**

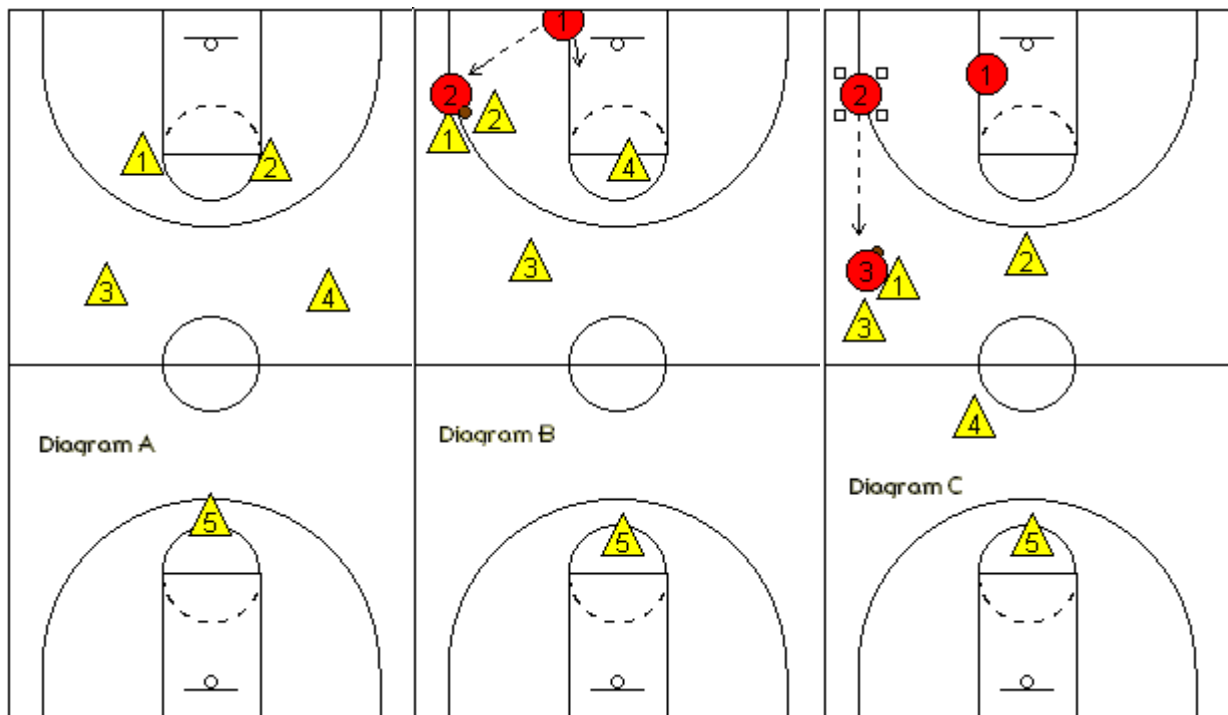
Set up the 2-2-1 zone press like this (see Diagram A). Have two players set at both ends of the free throw line. Two other defenders should be positioned just inside the half-court line, and the fifth player plays "prevent".

The in-bounds pass is not contested or guarded. Do not allow a pass in the middle of the floor. The defenders #1 and #2 should allow the pass to a receiver near the corner. They should wait until he commits himself and starts dribbling. Once he starts his dribble, they should attack and trap him near the sideline (Diagram B). The other two defenders then position themselves in the passing lanes to other would-be receivers and look for the interception. The #5 defender should only come up if he has a clear-cut interception. At this point the defense looks like a "trap-2-1" zone.

If the ball gets part way up the sideline, the mid-court defender (#3 or #4) should stop the penetration along the sideline, and trap the ball-handler along with the guard from that side (#1 or #2). Now the opposite guard and mid-court defenders play the zone passing lanes (see Diagram C).

Allow a backward, retreating pass, as the 10-second rule is in your favor. If the ball moves to the opposite side, the traps and zones are set on that side the same as described above, only with the opposite defenders positioned as above. The defenders should never let the ball get ahead of them on the court. If that happens, they must sprint down-court quickly to recover. Once the press is broken, or the offense crosses mid-court, all defenders not on the ball should sprint back to the paint to protect basket (unless there is an easy trap in the sideline, mid-court line corner). The on-ball defender should stay on the ball and stop dribble penetration.

There are variations and adjustments to this basic zone, depending on how the offense uses their point guard... i.e. whether he tries to receive the in-bounds pass, or make the in-bounds pass and then receive the ball right back. See “2-2-1 Zone Defense Variations.”



## 2-2-1 Zone Press Variations

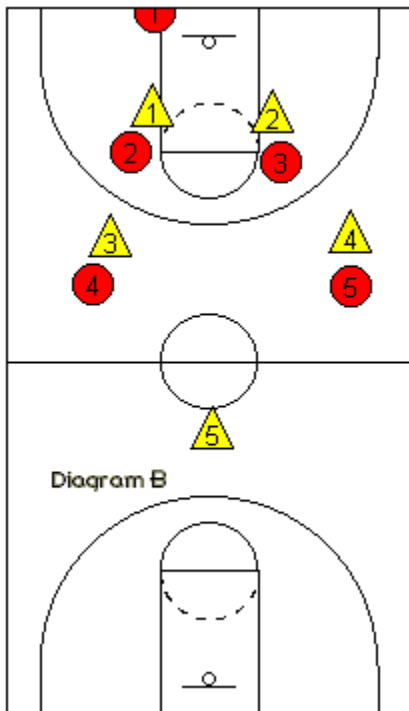
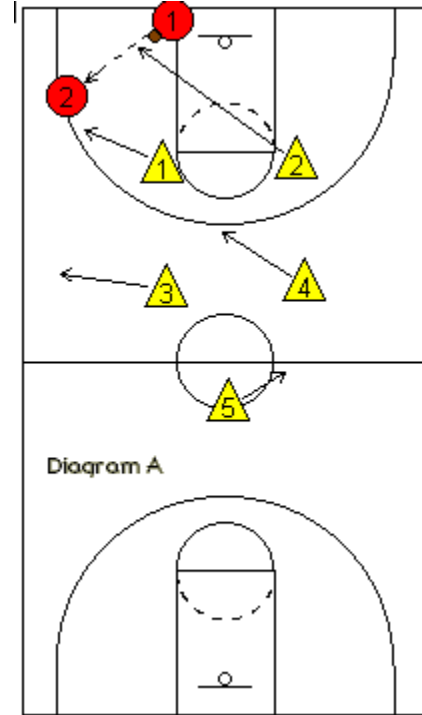
### 2-Up Zone Press

The "Two-up" zone press is used against teams who have their best ball-handler make the in-bounds pass, and then step in-bounds and receive the pass right back. We want to keep the ball out of the hands of the best ball-handler, and have someone bring it up who is not comfortable in that role, thereby increasing the chance of a turnover.

See Diagram A.

In this case, the #2 defender will deny the pass back to the in-bounder, and will play him man-to-man, in full denial. The other four defenders essentially play a zone. #3 will prevent the sideline pass, and #4 prevents the middle pass.

The weak side of the court is open and #5 might be able to anticipate a long cross-court pass there, or a long down-court pass. Long passes are often thrown out-of-bounds, or are intercepted. But again remember, all zone presses have an element of risk, and are a gamble.



### 2-2-1 "Deny" Defense

With this full-court press, we try to deny the in-bounds pass and get the 5-second call. This can be used against a team that tries to make the in-bounds pass to their best ball-handler.

See Diagram B.

In this defense, don't guard the passer. Instead, place your #5 man back in "prevent", to protect against the long pass and lay-up. The other four defenders match up with the other four offensive players and play full denial, trying to prevent the in-bounds pass. Until the ball is passed in-bounds, you have a 5 on 4 situation, with five defenders and only four offensive receivers.

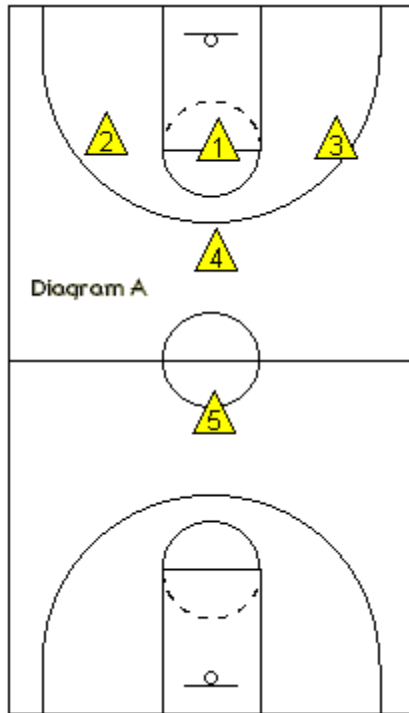
The offense may try to screen to get a man open. Be ready for the quick switch, or fight through.

The offense may try to run their #4 and #5 man toward the passer for a quick pass. Defenders 3 and 4 must stay between them and the passer to deny this pass. Often defenders 3 and 4 are worried about getting beat

by the long pass over their heads, but defender 5 should be back to cover the long pass. This is the advantage of not guarding the passer, but rather having your #5 man protect against the long pass.

### 3-1-1 Zone Press

The 3-1-1 zone press features three defenders across the free throw line area, one just beyond the 3-point line in the center, and one down-court in "prevent" (see Diagram A).



There are two ways of playing the in-bounds pass. In the first method, the in-bounds pass is not contested, but allowed to an offensive player near the corner (try to deny a center pass). The middle and outside defender on the ball-side immediately trap the ball-handler, while the other three defenders cover the gaps between the other four offensive players, trying to deny or intercept the pass (see Diagram B). In covering the gaps, the defenders should stagger, or position themselves halfway between two passing lanes. They should watch the ball-handler's movements and eyes in order to anticipate where the pass will go. Once they see the commitment in the passer, they should quickly move into that passing lane and get the interception.

A second method has one of the three front line defenders guard the passer, and then stay with the passer after the in-bounds pass has been made. This is to prevent the pass back to the offensive player who in-bounded the ball. The other two front line defenders trap the ball, and the other

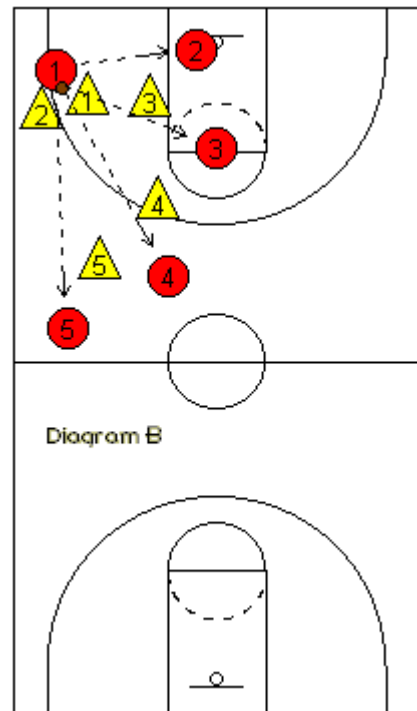
two defenders play the gaps between the offensive players.

The defenders must stay ahead of the ball. If the ball gets ahead of any defender, he must sprint back immediately to stay between the ball and the basket. If the press gets beaten, all defenders must sprint back to the paint and protect the basket. Once the break is stopped, they can fan out into their zone or man-to-man assignments.

#### Playing the gaps.

Diagram B. Triangles are defense players.

There are 4 passing lanes to the offensive players. The 3 defenders not involved in the trap (#3, #4 and #5), stagger themselves between those lanes, and look for the interception.

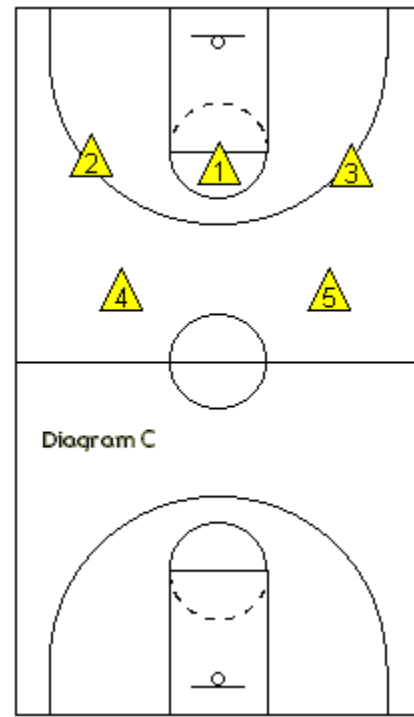




### **Adjustment:**

#### **Diagram C.**

If the offense is successful in passing up the sidelines (on either side of the #4 defender), then adjust your zone defense to a 3-2 zone, bringing the #5 defender up, and have #4 and #5 play just inside the mid-court area. This of course is more of a gamble, because no defender is back in "prevent". All defenders must really hustle back any time the press is broken.



### **Two Half-Court Defensive Strategies**

#### **Deny the Wing Pass?**

I sometimes hear coaches discussing which is a better defensive strategy, to allow or to deny the pass from the point guard to the wing.

Some believe the wing defenders should play "on the line" (see Basic Defense) and prevent the pass to the wing player. By denying the pass to the wing, you may be preventing one of their better shooters from getting the ball. Also, since the entry pass to the low post most often comes from the wing, you are making it more difficult for the offense to get the ball into the low post by contesting two passes (the point to wing pass, and the wing to low post pass). The disadvantages of this strategy include (1) the wing defender getting beat by the back-cut, and (2) dribble penetration up the lane by point guard who can shoot or dish off to the low post.

On the other hand, some coaches want to get the ball out of the point guard's hands and allow the pass to the wing uncontested, but then deny the pass back to the point guard. This philosophy has the ball getting into the hands of players who may not be as skilled ball-handlers as the point guard. This helps stop the point guard from being a big factor, but may allow easier access to the low post.

So which philosophy is best?

As is often the case in this game, I think you have to be flexible and adapt your strategy according to the team you are playing.

If your opponent has strong wing shooters, or likes to get the ball into the low post from the wing pass, then try to take this away from them by denying the wing pass.

If the opponent's strength is their excellent point guard who like to dribble penetrate, then pressure the point guard and get him to pass off to the wing. Then aggressively deny the pass back to the point and keep the ball out of his hands.

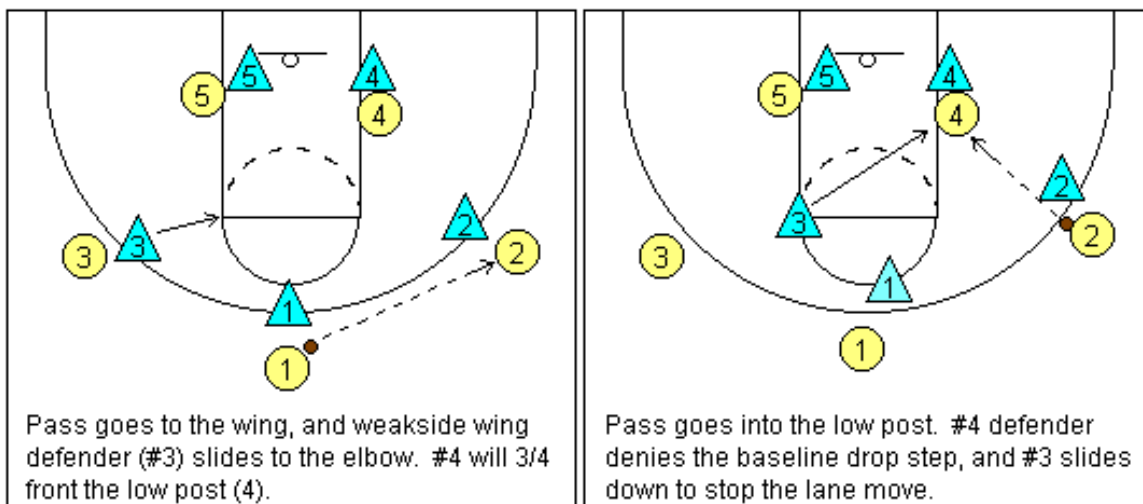
### Double Teaming the Low Post

There are various ways to try to stop the low post star player. You could go zone (2-1-2 or 2-3) and pack the paint to make it difficult for him. Or you can use your man-to-man defense and double team him as discussed below. No matter what strategy, keep him off the offensive glass by boxing him out on every shot.

First, you may want to deny the point to wing pass as discussed above. This stops the first pass.

Then try to deny the second pass (wing to low post pass) by having your low post defender "three quarter" front him with a hand in front. If the post player receives the ball, his defender should prevent the move to the baseline, as I believe this is the easier, more natural move for most post players. So first take the drop step to the baseline away from him, and force him toward the lane. Then double team him with your weak-side guard, who prevents the move into the lane.

In this situation, when the ball is in the low post, your weak-side guard slides down quickly to prevent the move to the lane. This should not be difficult for the weak-side wing defender as he should already be backed down to the weak-side elbow in "help-side" position when the ball is on the wing and his man is two passes away from the ball. As soon as he sees the pass go into the low post, he should slide down and double team the post player from the lane side. I think this is a better strategy than double teaming with your weak-side low post defender, as this opens up the opposite offensive post player for a dish and open lay-up. Whereas, when the double team comes from the weak-side wing, the low post player may be forced to pass back out to the perimeter to the opposite wing. If the opposite side wing player is an excellent outside shooter, you may have to double team with the low post instead.



## **Basic Defense**

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. Believe me now?

Everyone on the team must 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 "D"**

### **Stance and Focus**

Your weight should be on the balls of your feet (not your heels), and have your feet 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 your opponent's belly-button. Your opponent can fake you with her eyes, head bob, shoulders, a jab step, but her belly button is only going the way she is.

### **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 her again, get back into your defensive stance.

### **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.

### **On the Ball**

Over-guard toward the offensive player's strong side. If she is right-handed, she will probably want to go to her right, so over-guard that side and make her go left.

If your opponent is on the right wing, drop your left foot back a little toward the baseline and overplay her a little toward her right side, as this will give you time to react to a move to her right. You can run her to the baseline. Once at the baseline, trap her there, 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. Slapping down will usually result in a foul. Your other hand should be in the passing lane. Slide with your opponent, and try to get her to stop her dribble, and once she does, close in on her with good pressure. But don't reach in and foul her... or you'll change a good defensive stop into free throws for the opponent.

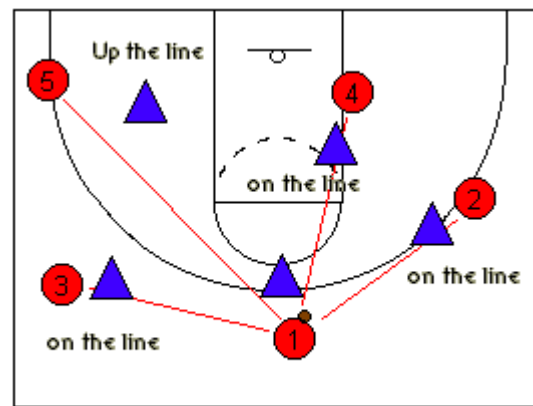
### Denial

Clog the passing lane and prevent the player you are guarding from getting the ball, that is, "deny" her the ball. When guarding an offensive player who is one pass removed from the ball, you should be in denial. If you keep your player from getting the ball, you keep her from scoring, as she can't score without the ball. 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 picks up her dribble, you have a "dead situation" and everyone should in close on their player, in "full-denial".

In "full-denial", the defensive players should be "on the line". To explain this concept, imagine a line, or a string) 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.

The distance, or spacing, up the line depends upon the speed and quickness of the defender and the distance his man is from the ball. On a long pass, he should still be able to move toward the line and intercept the pass. He should not initially be "on the line", as his 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.

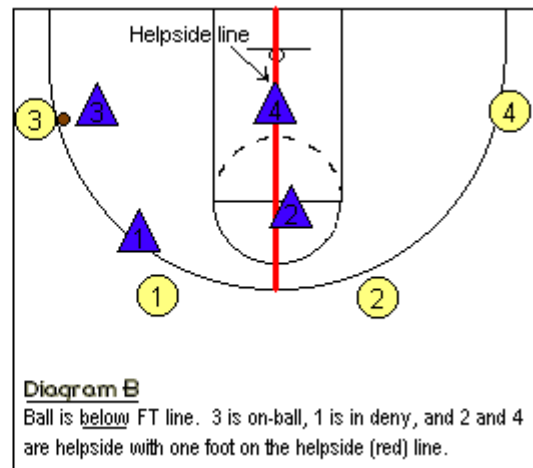
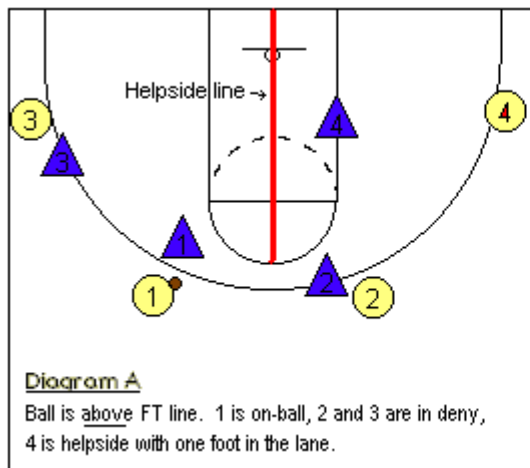


Imaginary red lines (passing lanes). Full denial.

### Help-side

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 her), and sagging toward the ball-side. In the diagrams below, I have painted an 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 denial with her. If the ball is skip-passed to your player, you quickly get back up on her (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 ways the defender can position him/herself in defending the low post player.

#### 1. 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.

#### 2. Fronting the low post player.

Here the defender moves directly in front of the offensive post player and denies him/her the ball. The wing defender should put pressure on the ball on the wing 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.

#### 3. Three-quarter front the low post player.

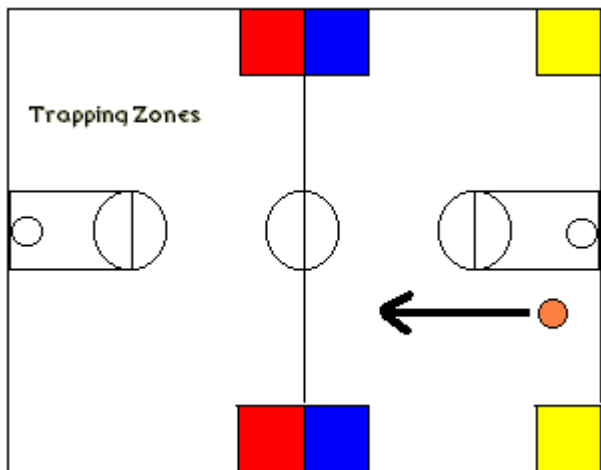
This is probably the best method. Instead of directly fronting the low post player, the defender "straddles" him/her with one foot in front and one in back, standing sideways to the offensive player with one hand up in the passing lane. If the ball is in the corner-wing

area, he/she should play on the baseline side of the post player, making contact with the post player's inside (baseline) shoulder, and with his/her arm and hand out in the passing lane. If the ball is passed out of the corner, or out on top, the defender should slide chest to chest with the post player and move to the post player's high-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 cut off the ball-handler's view, and get into his 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! This only transforms 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.

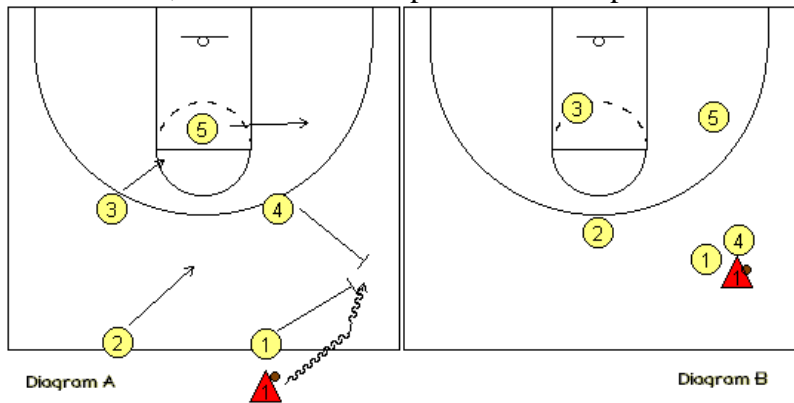
The blue zones are good trapping zones because the offense has to worry about the 10-second count.

**2-2-1 Half Court Press**

This half-court trapping press can be especially effective against teams with mediocre, inexperienced guards. Remember, any trapping defense always carries some risk of giving up the easy weak-side lay-up.

Set up as in Diagram A. Two defenders are at the half court line (#1 and #2). #3 and #4 are positioned near the three-point arc. #5 is positioned in the middle near the free throw line. We like to have someone at this position at all times to cut off the center pass.

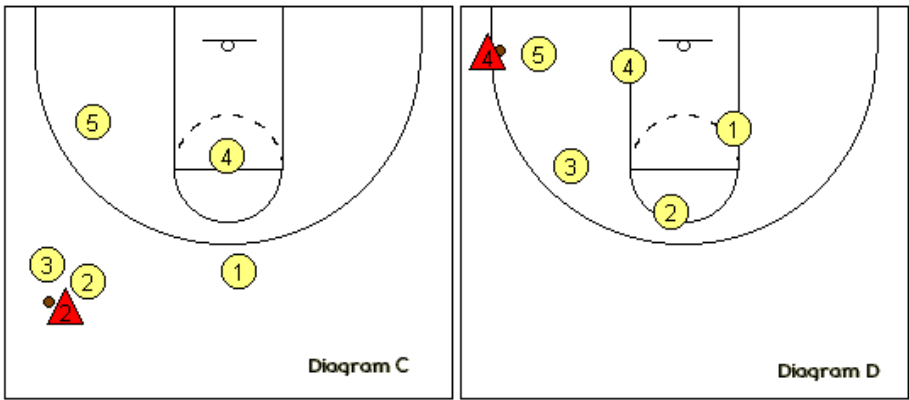
Our guards (#1 and #2) will meet the ball carrier at half-court and try to force him to move to one side (away from the middle). As the ball moves to the side, the defenders shift also toward that side (see Diagram A). In this example, the ball is being dribbled toward the right sideline. In this case, #4 will come up and will stop the sideline penetration, with #1 completing the trap. #2 has dropped down toward the three-point line and #5 move out a little toward the corner, and #3 moves to the middle (see Diagram B). Notice that we still have a 2-2-1 configuration at this point.



#2 and #5 try to position themselves in the gap between two offensive players, and are concentrating on the pass interception. #3 moves in front of any offensive player that moves into the center at the free throw line, and denies that pass.

See diagram C. If the ball is passed across court to the opposite sideline, #2 and #3 should create the trap, with #1 moving to the top of the three-point arc (#2's former position), #5 moving to the ball-side, and #4 moving quickly to the middle (#3's previous position).

If the ball is passed into the corner (Diagram D), #5 will move out to cover it, while #4 will move to the ball-side low block. At this point, I would move into a standard zone defense, such as a 1-2-2 (see 1-2-2 Zone). You can continue trapping using this zone defense, as outlined on that page.



## Zone Defense

Zone defense is different from man-to-man defense in that, instead of guarding a particular player, each zone defender is responsible for guarding an area of the floor, or "zone", and any offensive player that comes into that area. Zone defenders move their position on the floor in relationship to where the ball moves.

Zone defense is usually effective in stopping dribble penetration and one-on-one moves, and for this reason, has been banned in the NBA, as fans like to see spectacular one-on-one moves. On a personal note, I believe that all kids must develop their man-to-man defensive skills first. I believe youth basketball leagues should limit the use of zones to the older age groups. On the other hand, some high school and college coaches treat zone defense almost as if using it were blasphemous, or an admission of inferiority! At the upper levels, I believe you should assess your team's strengths and weaknesses as well as your opponent's, and the game situation, and use whatever tool you need to try to win.

### Advantages of zone defense

1. Not all teams have quick, good man-to-man defenders. Or the offense may have a couple of outstanding players too quick to defend individually. Playing a zone can help against mis-matches such as these. You may have a tall, strong, but not particularly quick team. A zone can look intimidating with all your big guys stacked up inside with their hands up.
2. In using a press, you can protect the paint area and force the opponent to shoot from outside. An example would be using the 2-1-2 or 2-3 zone which places a lot of defense in the paint and invites the offense to shoot from outside. This is a good way to see if the other team can shoot from outside. Not all teams can shoot the outside shot consistently. Even good shooting teams have off nights, especially under tournament pressure.
3. Your team may be in foul trouble, especially your big man. You can help protect him with a zone.
4. You can slow the game and control the tempo somewhat with a zone.
5. Although players must hustle regardless of the type of defense that is being played, sometimes when your team is fatigued, playing zone for a few minutes may help them catch their breath.
6. By changing defenses from man-to-man to various zones, you can keep the offense off-balance and confused.
7. If you use the full-court or half-court press, after the press is broken, it is easy to slip back into a half-court zone defense



### Disadvantages of zone defense

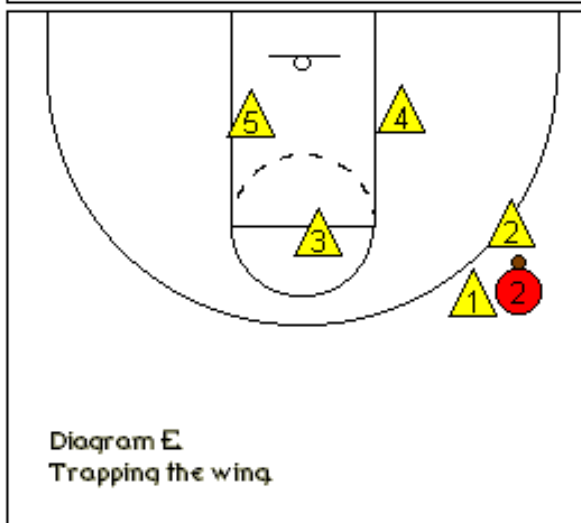
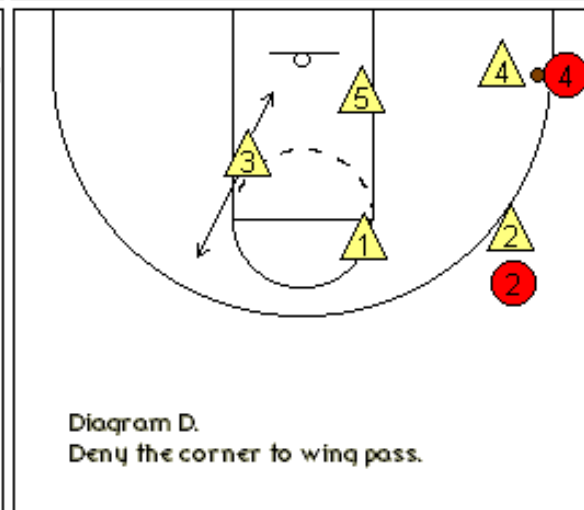
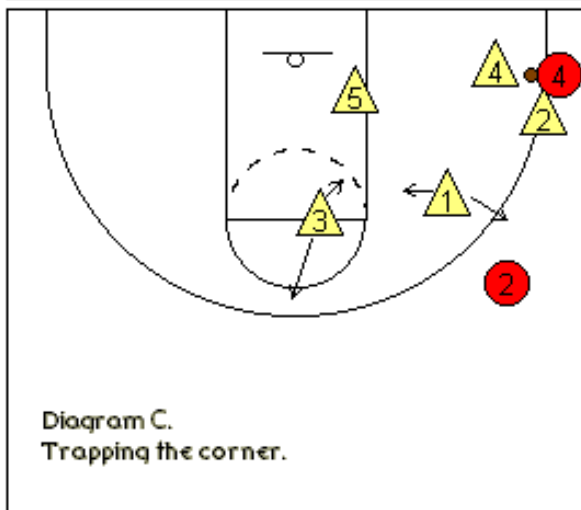
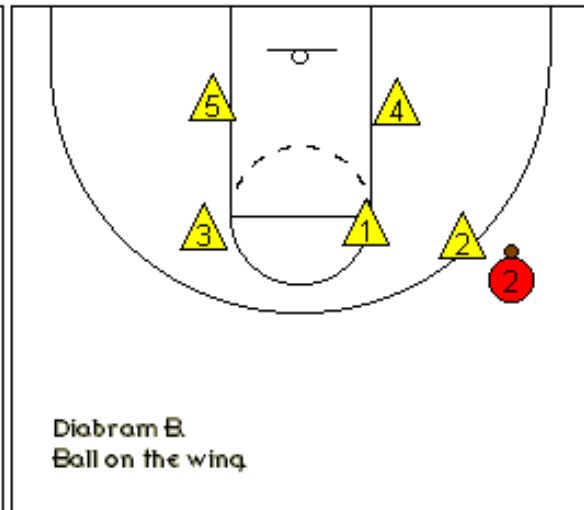
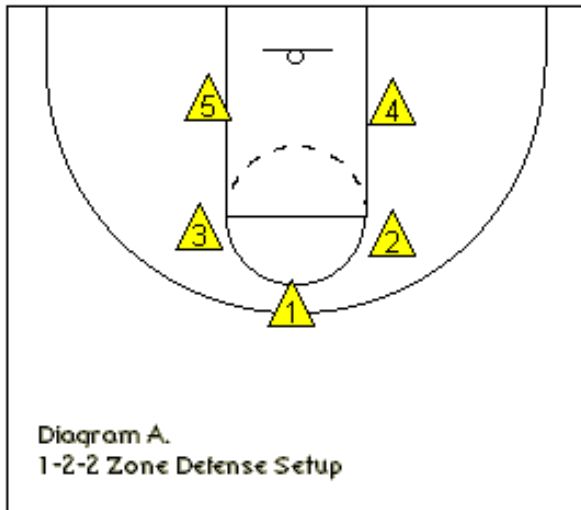
1. If your team is behind, you won't get enough pressure on the ball, and the offense can eat up a lot of time by holding the ball for a good shot. You must go man-to-man in this situation.
2. If the opponent is having a good shooting night, your zone is beaten, and you must consider going to the man-to-man to get pressure on the ball out on the perimeter.
3. There are not always clear-cut rebounding box-out assignments and sometimes the offensive player will slip inside for the offensive rebound and lay-up.
4. If you play zone most of the time, and rarely play man-to-man, your players may become complacent on defense and may lose their man-to-man skills. I would practice man-to-man 80-90% of the time, and zone the remaining 10-20%.

### Basic pointers for all zone defenses

1. Try to keep the ball outside. Double-team the ball in the paint.
2. Be vocal, talk to each other.
3. Move, adjust your position relative to the movement of the ball.
4. Get your hands up and out, to shrink the passing lanes.
5. When the offense dribble penetrates, quickly close the gap.
6. Get to know your opponent and adjust. Over-protect against the best shooters, or the "hot" shooter, and sag off the guy who never shoots.
7. Trap the corners.
8. Especially if you are ahead, don't gamble or get too zealous about trapping the wing and point guard positions. Keep pressure on the ball, but also protect the paint and force the outside, low-percentage shot.

## 1-2-2 Half-Court Zone Defense

Study the diagrams below to understand the how the zone shifts, or moves.



### Diagram E.

The 1-2-2 becomes a trapping 3-2 zone when you stretch the perimeter players outside and trap the wings.

Although trapping the wing adds an element of risk to your defense, you might consider this when the ball-handling skills of the offensive perimeter players is suspect, or if you are behind and need to get pressure on the ball.

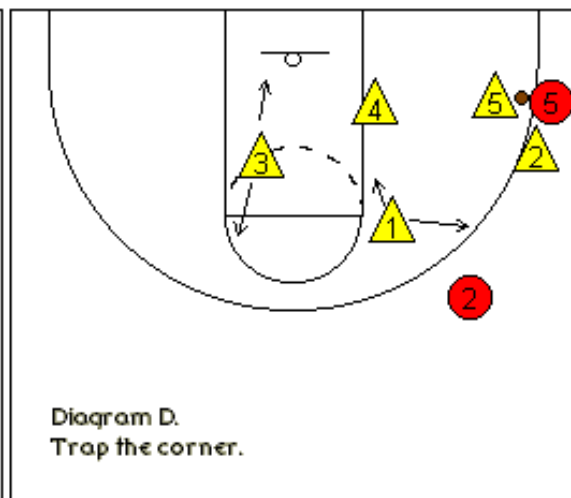
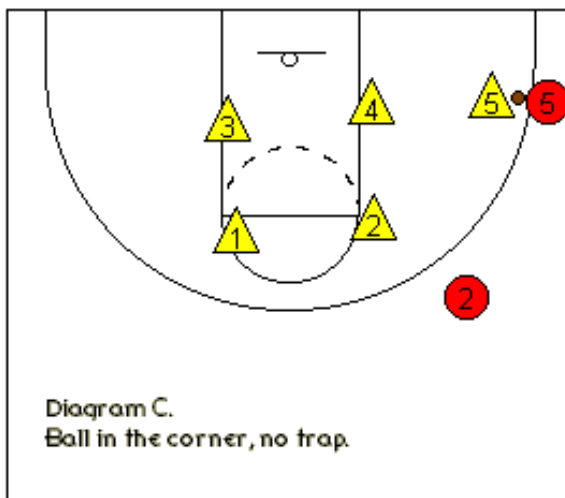
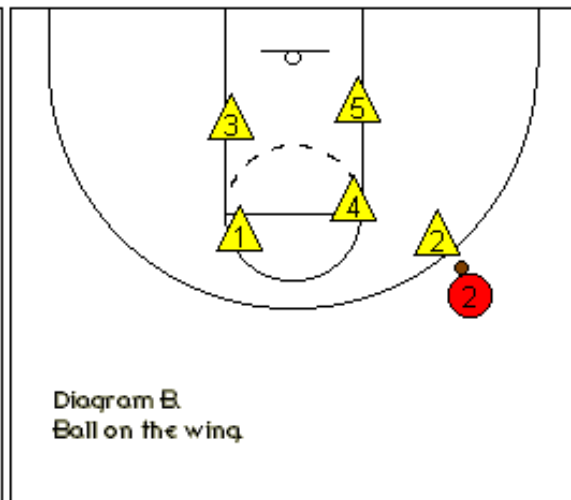
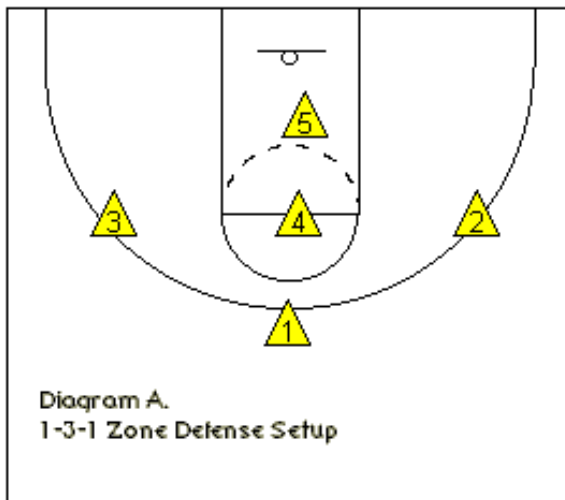
### **1-3-1 Half-Court Zone Defense**

Study the diagrams below to understand the how the zone shifts, or moves. Although not diagramed here, any time the ball goes to the high-post, #1 should drop back and double-team the ball.

A major weakness in the 1-3-1 zone defense is when the offense attacks at the low posts and from the corners. Coaches may differ on who covers what, but you have to decide which is best and make sure your players all understand how you want them to shift and defend. With the pass from the point to the low post, I personally would have #5 defend the low post player. Then have the center high post "sag" down to help some, and the weak-side wing also give help down low. If the ball is on the wing, #5 should be defending the ball-side low post, and #4 covers the ball-side elbow, and the weak-side wing slides down to the opposite low post (see diagram B). Then when the pass from the wing to low post occurs, you should be in pretty good position to stop them.

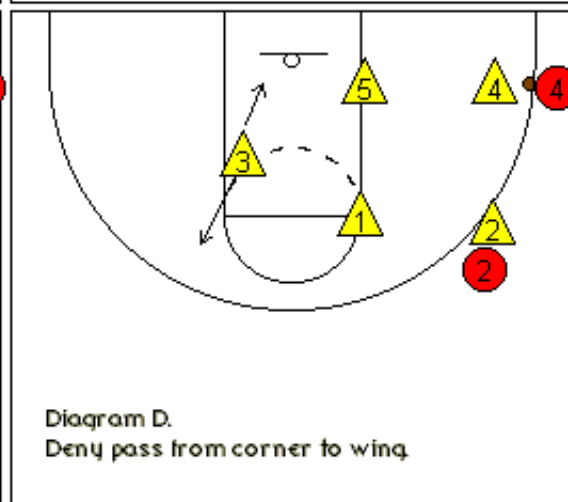
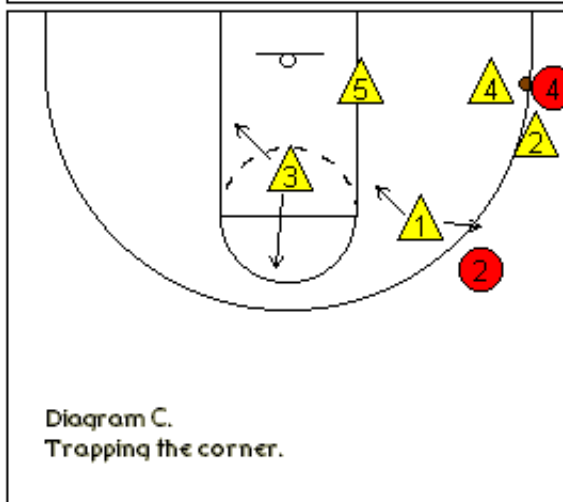
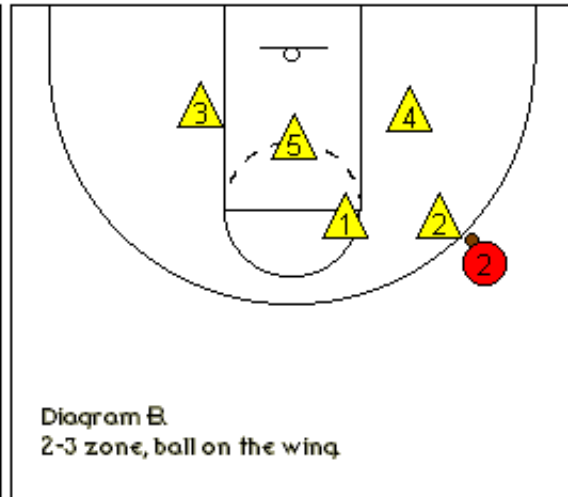
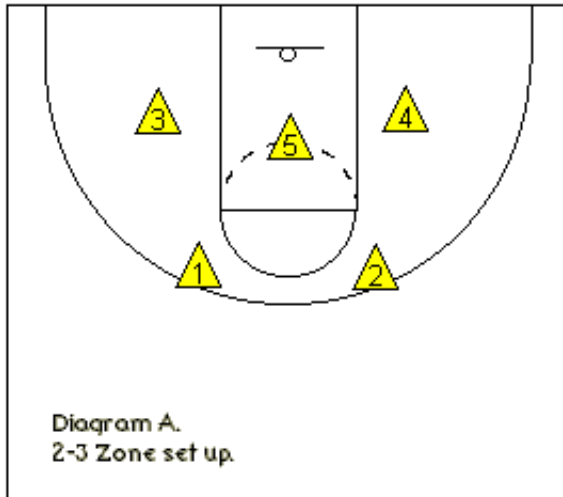
Now, when the ball is in the corner (diagram C), I have #5 go out and defend the ball-handler, and #4 goes to the ball-side low block, and the ball side wing sags toward the ball-side elbow. Diagram D shows how to trap the corner.

All these movements have to be made quickly... a split second too late can make the difference in the opponent scoring. Defenders must "get there" quickly.



### 2-3 (or 2-1-2) Half-Court Zone Defense

Study the diagrams below to understand the how the zone shifts, or moves.



## **Defending a team with a “star” player**

Defending a team with superior talent or a star player is always a challenge. There are a variety of “junk” defenses that can be tried in this situation, or a coach may simply choose to make some adjustments in his usual man-to-man or zone defenses. Whatever the situation, through good scouting, know what your opponent likes to do on offense and try to neutralize or take that away from them. Go for the heart...the heart of their offense, whether this is their fast break/secondary break, or a good low-post game, or good outside shooting. You probably won't completely stop them, but if you can make them work harder, or go to a second or third option, you have a better chance.

No matter what kind of defense you play, make the “star” player work hard, and not only for his shots on offense, but also make him play defense. Don't let him rest on the defensive end. Take the ball at him and force him to play defense, and expose him to picking up some early fouls. If they try to protect him by using a zone defense against you, put your better shooters on his side of the floor, and try to get most of your shots in his “zone”. If they play man-to-man, find out which one of your players he is guarding. As soon as the opponent shoots the ball, send this player down court on the quick breakaway. This may cause the “star” to drop back on defense, and not pursue the offensive rebound, and may be a constant worry to him, perhaps affecting his offensive play.

If it is your style, and not his, fast break every opportunity to tire the star, and make him less of a factor than he is in a “half-court” game.

On defense, know the “star's” tendencies. With a perimeter player who likes to drive to the hoop, or who is very quick, have your defender drop back an extra step. If he prefers going right, overplay him and force him left. If his main forte is outside shooting, deny and stay up tight on him. A low post player who likes the baseline drop step, take that away and force him to the lane.

### **Man-to-man defensive adjustments against a “star” player**

As coach, if you have confidence in your team's man-to-man defensive ability and quickness, you might just consider some adjustments in your man defense. First, explain to the rest of the team, that the person who has the assignment of guarding the “star” will not be able to help out on team defense, as he must stay with the star at all times. Through good scouting, find out which of their offensive players is not a real scoring threat (usually not all five players are good shooters). Your player guarding this non-scorer can be positioned on the court to give help and double-team the star... I'll call this player the “helper”.

#### **Situations:**

##### **1. The “star” is the point guard.**

Try to take him out of triple-threat position by forcing him to dribble. Try to keep him from penetrating. Have your “helper” set up at the top of the key, three-point arc area. By playing here, he will be able to help double team the star, or pick him up if he gets by

your main defender. Also, try to confuse him...trap him the first couple times down the floor, then back off and don't show the trap for a few minutes, and then do it again. Keep him off-balance.

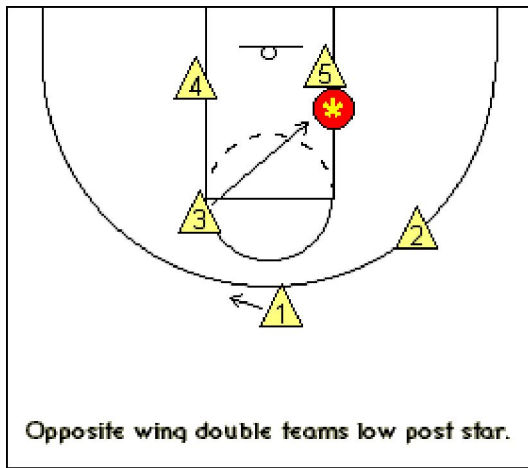
2. The "star" is a wing-forward player.

Try to deny him the ball. Stay between him and the ball ("on the line" --- see "Basic Defense"). Force him to back-cut into traffic, where your low post defenders can help out.

3. The "star" is a low post player. Several points:

(1) Box-out and keep him off the offensive boards.

(2) Deny the pass to him. There are several components to this. The low post defender can three-quarter front him to keep the pass out. Your "helper" can front him. Your perimeter defenders must harass and guard the perimeter tightly to prevent the easy pass into the post. They must move their arms and feet and try to block the passing lanes.



(3) One strategy is this: overplay his baseline so he cannot drop-step to the baseline. Force him to the lane, where your opposite wing defender will double team him. With this strategy, assuming the opponent's outside shooters are only average, I tell our wing defenders that when the ball is in the opposite low post, to drop down into the lane to help double team the star in the lane. If the star is able to recognize this, and is willing to make the pass off to the opposite wing, and if that wing player is able to make the shot consistently, we may have to change this strategy... but that's three "ifs"!

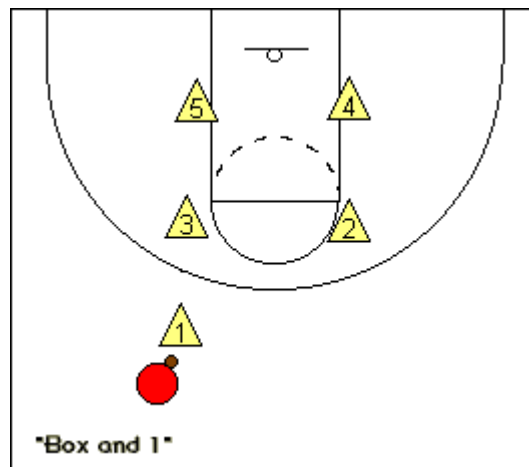
**Junk Defenses**

First, several points about "junk defenses".

1. If your team is better than the other team, there is no need to use a junk defense. Just play your good man-to-man, or your good zone.
2. Do not base your entire season's defensive plan on junk defenses.
3. If you use a junk defense, use it as a diversion, or something to confuse the enemy.
4. If you use a junk defense, realize it is a gamble, can often be easily beaten, and you must be willing to drop it quickly.

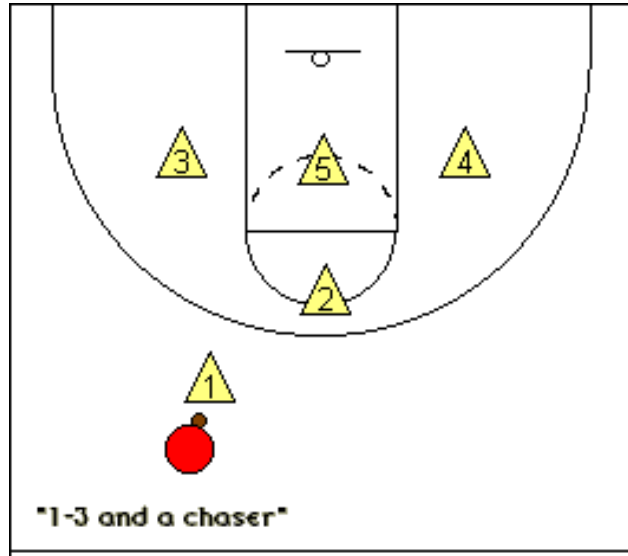
**"Box and 1"**

This defense uses four defenders playing zone defense in the standard "box" set-up. Two defenders are on the low blocks, and two are up at the elbows. The fifth defender plays man-to-man defense against the star player. This defense may work best against a team with a good point-guard or perimeter player.



### **"1-3 and a chaser"**

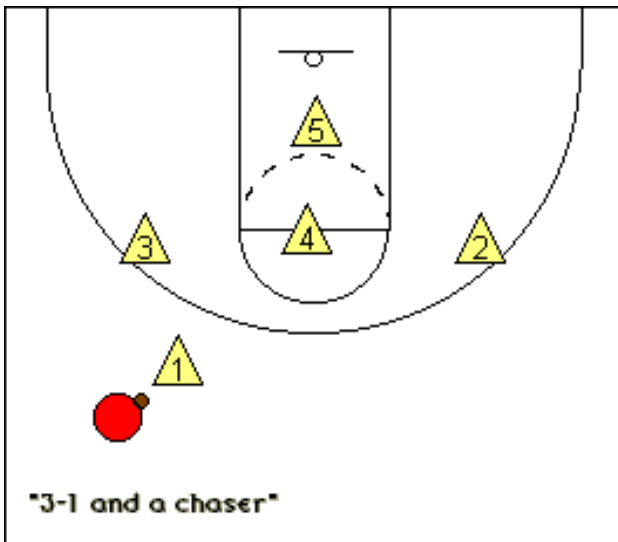
Again, this defense will probably work best against a team with one exceptional perimeter player. In this case, three defenders play across the low blocks as they would in a 2-3 zone defense. The two low block defenders have corner and wing responsibilities. The "1" is set in the middle at the free-throw line, and is probably one of your quickest, best defenders. He has to cover from elbow to elbow above the free throw line, and try to contest the outside shot. Your best defender is the "chaser" who plays their "star" man-to-man.



Good outside shooting teams can quickly rip apart this defense, but if the shots aren't falling, this can be an effective defense. Opponents will usually counteract this by using a two-guard front in order to split the defender out front. If this happens, you can change to the "box and 1" (above).

### **"3-1 and a chaser"**

This defense can work well against a team with a good point guard, but only average low post play. It is essentially like a 1-3-1 zone defense, except that the chaser out front plays the point guard man-to-man, and the other four defenders play a 3-1 zone. This defense enables you to play the star point guard man-to-man, and still allows you to put pressure on the wing shooters and the high post. The low post is its weakness.

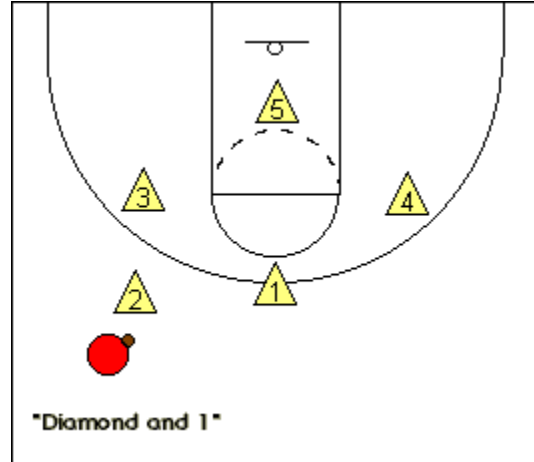


This is about the opposite of the "1-3 and a chaser" (above). Both can be used against a star point guard. You would consider using the "1-3 and a chaser" against the team with weak outside shooting and stronger inside post play. Use the "3-1 and a chaser" against the team with the star point guard and good outside shooting, but only average low post play. You can also consider alternating between these defenses. If you are in the "1-3 and a chaser" and they start hitting the outside shot, change to the "3-1 and a chaser".

### **"Diamond and 1"**

This defense would work best against a team whose star is an all around good athlete who not only plays the wings and corners, but will also go inside. Again, your chaser is your best defender, and plays man-to-man against this star player.

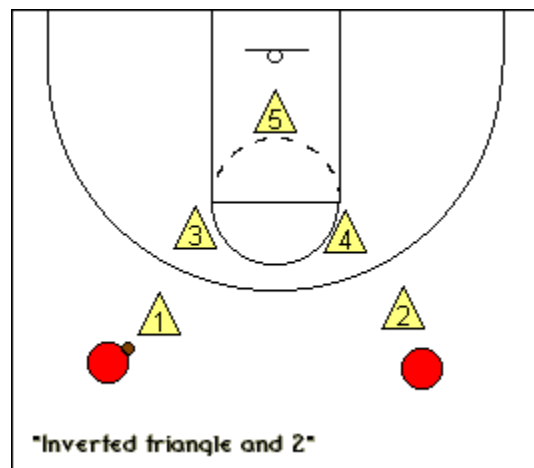
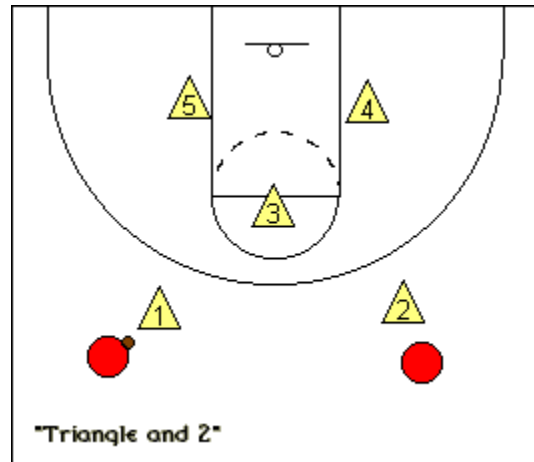
The other four defenders are set up in a diamond formation and play this as a zone. The diamond consists of a defender at the point, two wing defenders and a low post, middle defender. This defense is weak in the high post area and corners. If you are getting burned in the high post, or the star goes out and plays the point, consider switching to the "3-1 and a chaser" (above).



### **"Triangle and 2"**

You can try this defense against a team with two excellent scorers and three average players. Two defenders play man-to-man against the two scorers. These may not necessarily be your best defenders, but quickness helps. The other three defenders play zone. Two play on the low blocks and have corner responsibilities too. Your very best, quickest, hardest-working defender plays the middle position starting at the free-throw line. He must cover the free-throw line area and above. He must also cover the ball-side low block when the ball goes into the corner.

If the offense splits the middle defender with a two-guard front, then one of your low block players moves up to the free-throw line, and now you have an "inverted" triangle with two players at the elbows and one low in the lane.





### Defense for the Last Few Seconds of the Game

There's only a few seconds left in the game and you are up 1 or 2 points. You could either play man-to-man, or use one of the zones below. Use your tallest players to prevent the long pass and pressure the in-bounder. Use your quickest players on the sidelines and wing areas.

Rule: No fouls, unless you have a foul "to give". Certainly no shooting fouls.

If the ball comes up the sideline, rather than batting it out-of-bounds, try to keep it in play so that the clock keeps running. If you must "bat" the ball, bat it into the back-court.

Diagram A shows a zone defense against the full-court long pass.

Diagram B shows a zone against the half court throw-in. In this situation, #4 and 5 protect against the long pass to the paint. #2 prevents the pass up the sideline for the corner three-pointer. #1 must cover the 3-point arc including the top of the circle and the weak-side, being wary of any weak-side pass (a skip pass to the left side of the 3-point arc).

Of course, if the opponent is down three points, put all four defenders on the three-point arc and give them the two pointer.

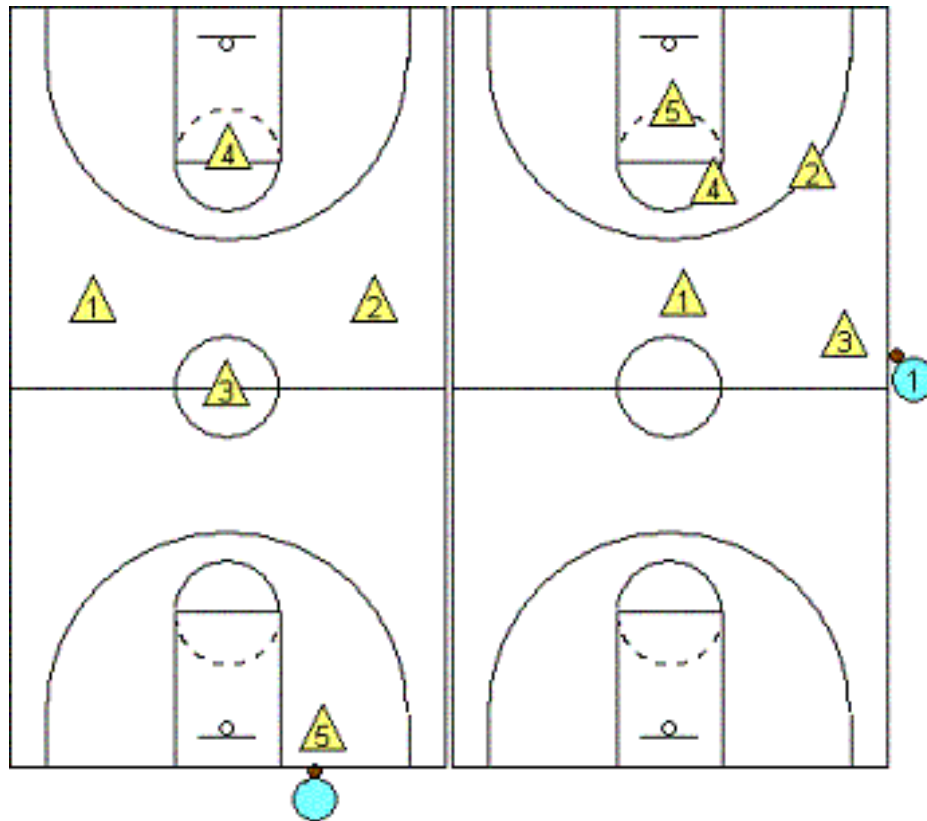


Diagram A, Full court

Diagram B, Half court