

instructional and audible'. I like my players to talk to each other constantly for the duration of the defensive play phase, I like their talk to be instructional and as specific as possible to their team mates, and I like them to talk loudly, not only so their teammates can hear their instructions, but also as loud noise created by the defence puts mental pressure on the offence.

In regards to the instructions that your athletes give each other on the court, I like to work on the following theory. I believe that there are two ways for your players to communicate with each other on the court. The first is that a player will tell their teammates what they themselves are doing or what they are going to do, eg 'help right/left', 'I'll take high' etc. The second way is that a player will tell their teammate what they want them to do. For example 'force her right', 'you bump that cut' etc.

Both forms of communication are equally as important and equally as valuable. However, it is when your players and your team use a combination of both forms of communication that your team has the best chance of becoming a well functioning defensive unit. For example, 'channel sideline, I'm coming to trap'.

GOOD DRILLS FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE DEFENDERS

1. Mass Slide Drill

- Players form 3 lines and spread out on the court in front of the coach
- The coach calls the defensive actions, i.e. stance, slide left, slide right, close out, take a charge, deny right, deny left etc
- This is a great drill for getting right back to basics with your athletes, and working with them on their stance and technique without the added pressure of an offensive player. It is also excellent as it forces athletes to work at a good tempo and therefore helps with conditioning, and it provides a forum for you to 'chain' many defensive skills together in the one action.

2. 'Fly with the Ball Drill'

- Whilst the Mass Slide drill primarily works on developing on ball defensive skills, this drill is excellent for drilling off the ball skills, particularly jumping to the ball.
- One offensive player starts at each side of the free throw line extended down one end of the floor. Players form 1 line on each side of the court in front of each offensive player. The simulation here is that each player in the line is defending the offensive player in front of them.
- One offensive player starts with the ball, with the defenders on that player in their on ball defensive stance. Those defending the other player are in a denial stance. The ball is then passed to the player on the other side of the floor, and the defensive players must adjust to the movement of the ball.
- Once the athletes have mastered this movement, the offence can begin to bring in different movements, such as dribbling at the middle of the floor or dribbling towards the sideline, as well as passing back and forth. Either way, the defence should adjust their stance and hedge to the movement of the ball.
- As discussed earlier, with adjusting to the ball I like the trigger to be that as soon as the ball is released from the passer or dribblers fingers, the defence begins to adjust.

3. 4 on 4 Shell Drill

- 4 on 4 (4 out) Shell Drill is one of the most simple defensive drills to set up, and I believe it is still one of the most effective at providing opportunities for your players to improve their on ball and off ball defensive skills within the one drill, as well as helping to develop your team defensive rules and concepts.
- **Stage 1;** Offence is only allowed to pass the ball amongst themselves, either through ball reversal or skip passing. Defence must jump to the ball, and adjust to the movement of the ball.
- **Stage 2;** Offence is allowed to cut as well as pass. As well as adjusting to the movement of the ball, the defence must now also adjust to the movement of their player, bump cuts etc.
- **Stage 3;** Offence is now also allowed to look to penetrate off the dribble. This is now a highly game specific drill, with the athletes having to manage their own player, be aware of the position of the ball, and be prepared to help out defensively if required.
- We haven't touched on team defensive concepts in this edition of Building Better Basketball. As your team rules and concepts develop though, you can include all kinds of restrictions into this drill, i.e. deny all ball reversal, no middle penetration allowed etc.

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Defence



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This month, the Building Better Basketball Coaches Series focuses on Defence.

As a general rule, approximately half of a game of basketball is played when your team does not have the ball. Despite this, a lot of young kids fall into the trap of focusing primarily on their offensive skill development, and more importantly will judge their contribution to their team only on what their offensive output is. In a sport where the team that scores the most points wins, this is not an unusual mindset for young players to form, so as coaches it is our responsibility to educate our youngsters on the value and importance of defensive development and performance, both individually and as a team.

As defence is such a large component of our game, it understandably contains many different and complex parts, from developing individual skills such as containment and closing out, to implementing team defensive concepts such as extending up the floor and defending screens. Before your team can be a solid defensive unit, each of your players must understand their individual defensive responsibilities and must have a sound defensive skill base, so therefore in this edition of Building Better Basketball, I will focus on how I like to teach and develop these individual defensive areas.

1. KEY TEACHING POINTS FOR DEFENCE

The following key teaching areas apply to any defensive movements your athletes make, whether they are defending on the ball, denying a pass or jumping to the splitline on weakside etc;

1. **STANCE** Once again, as with all basketball skills that we have addressed so far in this series, a good, low, wide, balanced stance is essential to being an efficient defender. Not only does your position. It is also important that you ensure that your athletes maintain this low stance as they move. Quite often you see defenders start low, but once they need to adjust their position in the act of defending their man, they begin to bob up and down with each step. This slows down their movement and negatively affects their ability to change direction quickly.
2. **FOOTWORK** It is highly important that the athlete moves the foot closest to the direction they want to travel first, then moving their trail foot but maintaining their low, wide stance. This footwork is often referred to as 'Big to Bigger to Big'. Quite often you see young kids stepping with their athlete take up more space on the court this way, but more importantly they are able to react and move more quickly from this low, 'loaded' (i.e. ready to perform) other foot first, which usually results in them crossing their feet, thus affecting their balance and movement efficiency. The same rules regarding staying low and wide, and the 'big to bigger to big' philosophy should also apply when teaching dropstepping (defensive change of direction) to your players.
3. **MOVEMENT SPEED** We want our athletes to make small, quick movements with their feet when playing defence. Keeping in mind that their stance should be low and wide, this will allow them to cover more ground more quickly, and again it makes change of direction actions easier.
4. **CARRY HANDS** The use of hands is a vital and valuable defensive tool for our players, but it is also a highly under used one. So often you see players moving around defensively with their hands hanging uselessly by their sides. Any time that a player is in a defensive stance, their hands should be up and active. Additionally, for every defensive movement the feet make, the hands have a corresponding responsibility. For example having a hand in a passing lane when denying, or carrying a hand to a shooter when closing out.

2. DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSIVE PLAYER

Once your players are comfortable with the basic techniques of defence outlined above, the next challenge is for them to be able to transfer those skills effectively into the following game specific defensive situations;

1. Defending the Ball Carrier

Most coaches of young players will generally teach containment of the player with the ball before they teach any other defensive component to their teams. I have no problem with this, as containing the ball carrier is the starting point for all team defences. It is very difficult to stop the opposition team from scoring, regardless of you're off the ball or help and rotation skills, if your players cannot defend the player with the ball. It will generally be up to you as the coach to decide whether you would rather your players make the ball carrier turn as often as possible in the back court, or channel their player to their weak hand or just out of the middle. This will depend a lot on the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition player, and also on what your defensive strategy is. In the front court, whilst it is still the coach's call, defending middle penetration and channelling baseline are generally the most popular and most efficient forms of on ball defence.

2. 1 Pass Away

Generally, when defending a player that is one pass away from the ball the defence should be in a denial stance, also known as a closed stance. The arm and leg that is closest to the ball should be in the passing lane looking to deflect a pass, with the other

arm forming an armpit for balance purposes, and if in the half court, for maintaining contact with their man. In order to maintain vision on both the ball and their man, I like my players to look down their denial arm and use their peripheral vision. When in the denial position, your athlete should be 2/3 from the ball and 1/3 from their man as a general rule, and should always be closer to the basket than the player they are defending. As your team defence develops, you can begin to incorporate further responsibilities to each player on the floor. For the players defending 1 pass away from the ball, this could include hedging to help contain penetration.

2 or More Passes Away/Weakside Responsibilities

When defending a player who is on the weak side of the floor, your athlete must have a 'help and rotation' mindset. As for position on the floor, if the ball is below the foul line extended I like my players to be on the splitline. This will enable them to be in the best position to step into a driving lane and help out should their teammate defending the ball get beaten. When on the splitline, the athlete should be down low in their defensive stance with the back of their head to the basket. When the ball is above the foul line extended, I like my athletes to jump to the lane line, rather than all the way to the splitline. This enables them to be in a good position to hedge to the ball and help out should penetration occur, but it also gives them enough time to recover back to their player should the ball be passed to them. If they were on the splitline and a skip pass was made to their player, this passing angle would create a difficult close out situation for your player to try to manage. Again, when in this help position athletes must ensure that they stay closer to the basket than the player they are defending, and assume the 'Flat Triangle' position between the ball, them, and their opponent.

3. KEY DEFENSIVE SKILLS TO ENFORCE WITH YOUR PLAYERS

1. Jumping to the Ball

'Jumping to the ball' when your player has made a pass will get you out of most tricky defensive situations. I like to teach my players that as soon as the ball is released from the hands of the player they are defending, they must begin the movement of 'jumping to the ball', with the aim being that they are in their 'Flat Triangle' position by the time the ball arrives at its destination.

This action helps to make your players proactive defensively, and enables them to be in a good position to deny the ball from coming back to their player, hedging to the ball if it is penetrated towards them, or bumping any cut their player may try to make after passing.

2. Adjust to the Movement of the Ball

Further to jumping to the ball, it is important that your players understand that for every movement the ball makes, they have responsibility for a corresponding defensive movement, i.e. if the ball is moving (through the pass or dribble), so are you! This is not only applicable when it is their player that has instigated the action as outlined above, but is also important when defending away from the ball. Once again, I like my players to be proactive defensively by moving on the release of the ball if it is a pass, or immediately the dribble starts, so that they are in defensive position once the ball reaches its destination.

3. Bumping Cuts

One of my favourite defensive techniques to teach is bumping cuts. Bumping cutters is a great way to teach your players to be aggressive defenders, and is an excellent way for your team to stamp their authority over their opponents, and the game in general. Bumping cutters starts with jumping to the ball. Your player must be between their opponent and where they want to cut to in order to bump the cut effectively, and this starts with jumping to the ball. The aim of bumping a cut is generally to try to send the player to an area of the court where their cut is no longer threatening. If this is consistently the case through a series of cuts, the defence will generally have established ascendancy in the play phase.

4. Closing Out

Closing out is widely regarded as the hardest skill to perform in the game of basketball. Closing out is generally defined as any situation where a defensive player wishes to close the gap between themselves and an offensive player. This most commonly occurs when closing out a shooter, but also happens in the open court when running to contain the player with the ball or hedging to trap the ball, and also in rebounding situations when looking to get a block out. Coaches have different ways of teaching closing out. A good way I have found to help players understand the technique, is to encourage them to 'close out a spot on the floor' rather than a player. So often you see athletes close out a player, only to have the offence blow by them easily. By closing out the spot on the floor in front of the offensive player, the defence will have more time and be in a better position to adjust their movement should they need to. I generally teach my players that when closing out they should cover the first 2/3 of the distance in the quickest way possible, i.e. running, and then cover the last 1/3 of the distance in a more controlled stutter step action.

5. Talk

Defensive talk is a crucial and essential element to developing an assertive and effective defensive team. Although being a good talker on court comes more easily to some players than others, every player on your team must take responsibility for contributing in this area. The key words that I like to use when teaching defensive talk are that it should be 'constant,