

Basketball Coach Handout

Zone Defense Basics

When you play Zone Defense you are assigned to a designated area of the court, or zone, rather than to an individual offensive opponent. Your zone position changes with each movement of the ball. Zones may be adjusted from sagging inside to pressuring outside shots, overplaying passing lanes, and trapping the ball. Zone defenses are named according to the alignment of players from the top toward the basket and include the 2-1-2, 2-3, 1-2-2, 3-2 & 1-3-1 Zones.

Each zone defense has strength & weaknesses. The 2-1-2 & 2-3 Zones are strong inside & in the corners, but are susceptible on the top & wings. The 1-2-2 & 3-2 Zones are strong against outside shooting, but are vulnerable inside & in the corners. The 1-3-1 protects the high post & wing areas, but it can leave openings at the blocks & corners and is also susceptible to good offensive rebounding.

Strengths of Zone Defense

1. Protects the inside against a team with good drivers and post-up players, and poor outside shooters.
2. More effective against screening and cutting.
3. Defenders may be positioned in areas according to size and defensive skill. Taller players can be assigned to inside areas for shot blocking and rebounding, while smaller, quicker players can be assigned to outside areas for pressuring the ball and covering passing lanes.
4. Players are in a better position to start the fast break.
5. Easier to learn and may overcome weaknesses in individual defensive fundamentals.
6. Protects players who are in foul trouble.
7. Changing to a zone may disrupt an opponent's rhythm.

Weaknesses of Zone Defense

1. Susceptible against good outside shooting- especially 3pt shooting- that can also stretch your zone, creating openings inside.
2. A fast break can beat the zone down court before it sets up since it takes time to get players in their assigned zones.
3. Quick passing moves the ball quicker than zone defenders can shift.
4. Weak against penetration (draw & kick).
5. The opposing team may stall more easily against a zone, causing you to change to individual defense if you are behind late in a game.
6. *Individual defensive skills are not developed.*

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 offence 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.