



THREE OF A KIND

Course 01: Coach Ettore Messina

Lesson 18: Zone Defense 2

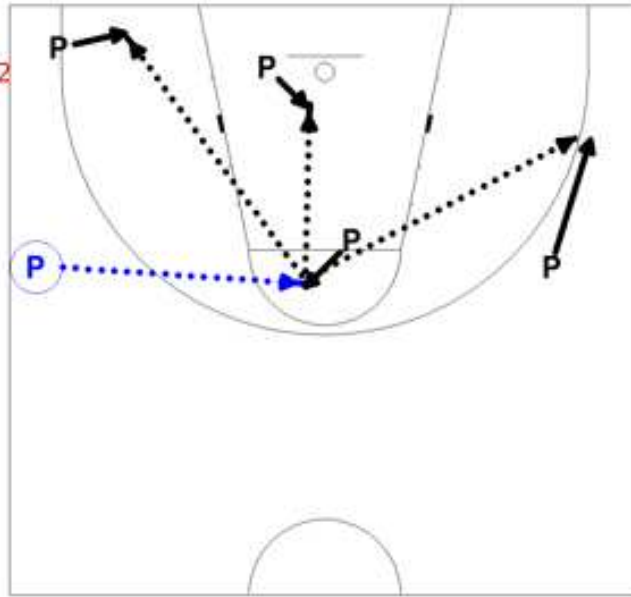
Language: English

ZONE DEFENSE 2

4. ZONE DEFENSE AT THE HIGH POST

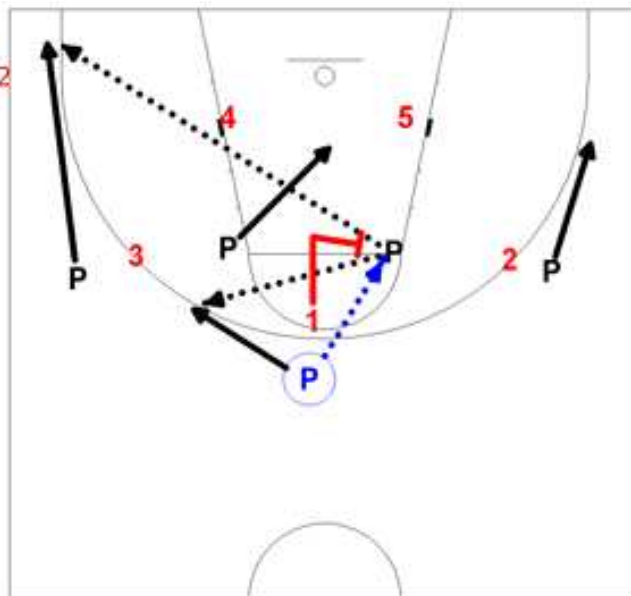
The high post is a key position on the court to break down a zone defense, not only because it is possible to shoot with a high percentage, but particularly because there many passing lanes open towards the low post or shooters. The high post also increases the chances of capturing an offensive rebound, be it a small forward or a center who can rarely be blocked out by a smaller guard (**diagram 18**). I think it is important to clarify the defensive responsibilities should the ball reach the high post so players know whether it is the responsibility of the front line or the back line. A good example is a 3-2 zone when the ball has been passed into the high post.

ZONE DEFENSE 2
DIAGRAM 18



If the top player in the zone goes to defend the ball a 2v1 situation is created on the help side as can be seen in **diagram 19**.

LESSON 18
ZONE DEFENSE 2
DIAGRAM 19

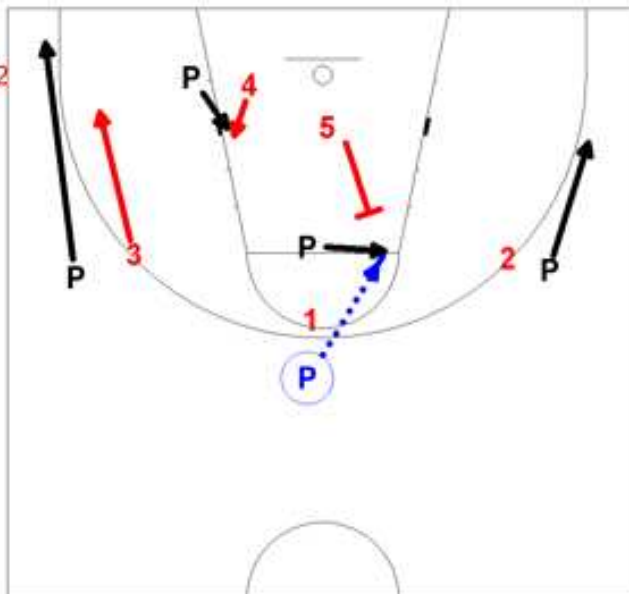


For this I consider it preferable to have the second line of the defense step up and have them match up with the two inside players until the second pass (**diagram 20**), or if we are faced with one high post and one low post, adjust our zone to a 1-3-1 to avoid being poorly positioned after the first pass (**diagram 21**).

LESSON 18
ZONE DEFENSE 2
DIAGRAM 20



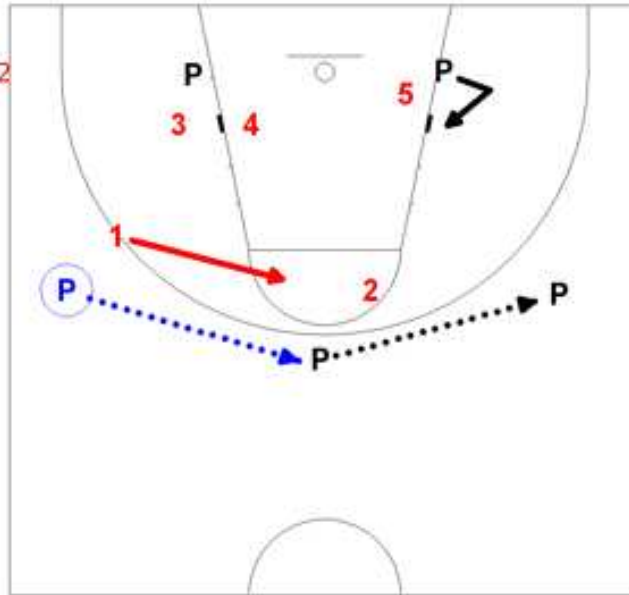
LESSON 18
ZONE DEFENSE 2
DIAGRAM 21



If the ball arrives at the high post from the wing position, we again need to clarify whether it is the responsibility of the center (in my opinion this is almost never the case) or of the guard. I think the high post should be defended by the guards without either of them ever turning their back on an outside player (**diagram 22**).

LESSON 18
ZONE DEFENSE 2
DIAGRAM 22

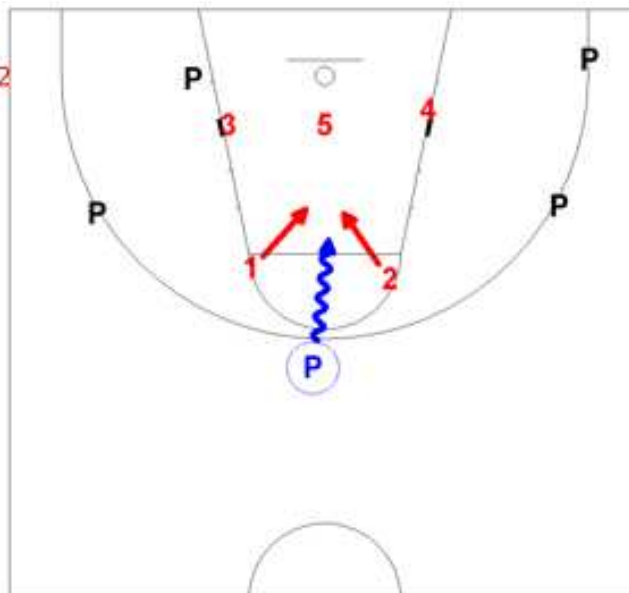
NO



Except for in a few cases, the majority of players who receive the ball in the high post will have to choose among a jump shot, a high-low pass, a pass to an outside shooter or a dribble penetration.

If the first line of the defense play as illustrated in **diagram 23**, with one arm contesting the high post and the other in the passing lane they can create a lot of uncertainty for the ball handler, and if he should decide to put the ball on the floor they would have a good opportunity to try to steal the ball. The idea is to not over play the high post and leave an outside shooter wide open, this way forcing a difficult decision between shooting the ball or making a contested pass.

LESSON 18
ZONE DEFENSE 2
DIAGRAM 23



5. FAKE PRESS

Having our players come out from their areas of responsibility can be very advantageous when defending in a zone. I have sometimes used a fake

press particularly against teams who do not have big men with good passing vision. The two guards in the front line of the 2-3 zone when the ball handler comes towards the half court line will double team him (**diagram 24**). The goal is to make the opponents lose a few seconds in their offense and also push their outside players away from the free throw line extended to receive the first pass. If we force our opponents to make the first pass into an area that is outside of their shooting range, they will need at least two more passes before being a scoring danger, and therefore the timing of the play has already been affected. This cannot be done every time down the court in order to keep a surprise element intact, but after a made free throw or a timeout it can be very effective. Breaking down the timing of the opponent's play and disrupt the spacing of our opponents are our primary goals.



6. ZONE DEFENSE MENTALITY

I believe it is important to clearly explain the goals of our zone defense to avoid becoming demoralized should our opponents score a couple of three point baskets. We want our opponents to modify their tempo and their tactics. Are they causing problems with their dribble penetration? A few minutes playing zone defense can change this dynamic. Do their shooters score coming off hard screens? It may seem contradictory to use a zone when the opponents are "hot", but it is not possible to set the same screens against a zone as against a man and so must change their tactics.

The idea is to force our opponents to think and change to a different situation than that which they were facing until that moment. From a strictly tactical point of view it is vital that the zone, as is the case in man defense, does not allow uncontested shots or low post shots, allow penetrations or offensive rebounds. The zone is usually not broken down by three point shots alone, but by a combination of outside and inside shots. This is why if shortly after switching to a zone defense the opponents score three points it is best to change the defense and try the zone later on.

Often the team who prefers not to face a zone thinks that after scoring a couple of threes they have finished their work, and they are not ready the next time around to look to get the ball inside and therefore keep shooting three's. In order to construct a strong zone defense requires a mastery of individual technical fundamentals, clarity in the organization of the team, a good mental preparation as well as attention to the detail of when to use the zone.

REMEMBER

- A good zone defense depends on having mastered the individual defensive fundamentals, such as the positioning of the body of the outside defender on the help side
- Never double team the ball: we look to create strong 1v1 situations using an aggressive switch on the ball handler

(Video of a zone defense well lined up with the offense)

- The zone must be prepared to defend the pick & roll and all other screens. Forcing the dribbler to the baseline it is possible to prevent dribble penetration into the middle of the restricted area

(Video of zone defense vs. pick & roll)

- The psychological aspect is vital in the application of zone defense. Knowing correctly when to use it during the course of the game can force a change of tempo and a scoring run that may be decisive