

# **PACKLINE DEFENSE**

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## **ULTIMATE GUIDE**

### **PART 1**

Packline Overview and Drills  
Chris Mack, Xavier Basketball

### **PART 2**

Packline Defense: Do What We Do  
Mike Neighbors, Washington Basketball

### **PART 3**

Packline Pressure Defense  
Jim Boone, Delta State University



**CHRIS MACK**  
HEAD COACH  
6TH YEAR  
XAVIER '92



**TRAVIS STEELE**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
6TH YEAR  
BUTLER '04



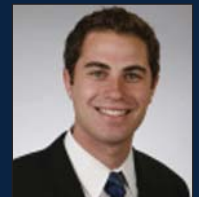
**MIKE PEGUES**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
3RD YEAR  
DELAWARE '00



**RICK CARTER**  
ASSISTANT COACH  
2ND YEAR  
MICHIGAN STATE '02



**MARIO MERCURIO**  
DIR. OF ADMINISTRATION  
11TH YEAR  
XAVIER '03



**JEREMY GROWE**  
DIR. OF OPERATIONS  
6TH YEAR  
INDIANA '09

# **PACKLINE DEFENSE**

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## **ULTIMATE GUIDE**

### PART 1

Packline Overview and Drills  
Chris Mack, Xavier Basketball



**Chris Mack**  
*Head Coach, Xavier University*

**“Drills to Build the Pack Line Defense”**

**Introduction**

Regardless of what you run on offense or defense, you must have a defined system you believe in

- Your team must have an identity
- Everyone in your league should know what you’re about
- When you have a system, it gives your players answers and accountability to what they’re doing
  - o For example, we don’t give up baseline – if you give up baseline you understand you’re coming out of the game
- It simplifies scouting
  - o Identify the common offensive actions you face and teach a standard way to defend
  - o Start at the beginning of the season practicing these actions in your shell drill
  - o This allows you to focus on your opponent’s offensive concepts (rather than detailed set plays) when going over the scouting report
- Your system should create “Regenerative Learning” (Tony Dungy), where upperclassmen can teach underclassmen

**Why play the Pack Line?:**

- On offense, kids are way better ball handlers and way worse without the ball in their hands compared to 20 years ago

**There is nothing “soft” about Xavier’s Pack Line:**

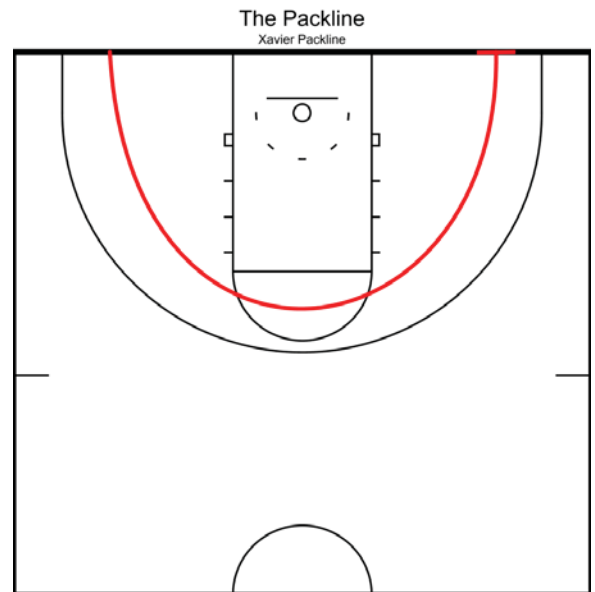
- Aggressive
- Ball pressure
- Smart positioning off the ball

**What is the Pack Line?**

- 16-17’ from the basket, mirrors the 3 pt line
- Tape it down every day before practice

**Rules**

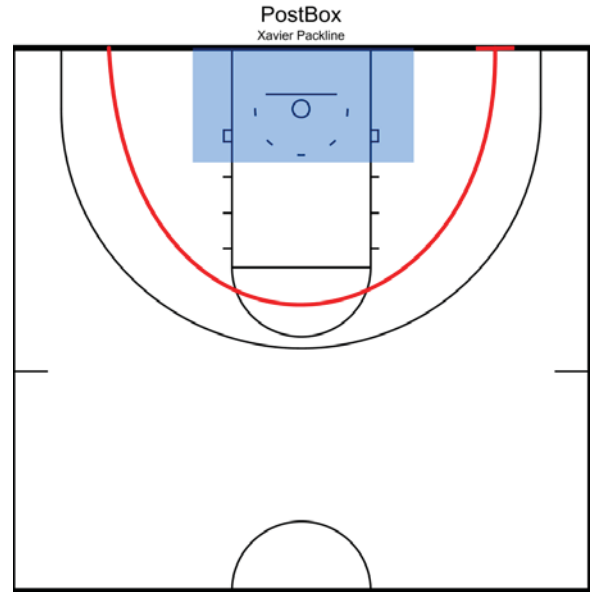
- GOLDEN RULE: You must have two feet inside the PL when your man does not have the ball
  - o Only two exceptions:
    - Your man becomes a cutter



- Your man becomes a ball screener
- On-ball defender must play with extreme ball pressure
- On-ball defender CANNOT get beat baseline under any circumstances, nor can he get beat in a straight line (from a poor close out)
  - It's all about what you emphasize: A Xavier basketball player WILL NEVER get beat baseline – this is nonnegotiable!

**Post Defense**

- Tape the “Post Box” down every day before practice also
  - Rectangle 1.5’ off the lane running across the 2nd hash mark
- General Rule: Post defender should be positioned “¾ on the high side”
- The post defender uses a clenched fist arm bar to push his man out of the “Post Box”
- If your man catches the ball in the post:
  - “Pop Back” (jump to play from behind) and “Wall Up” (show the referee your hands)



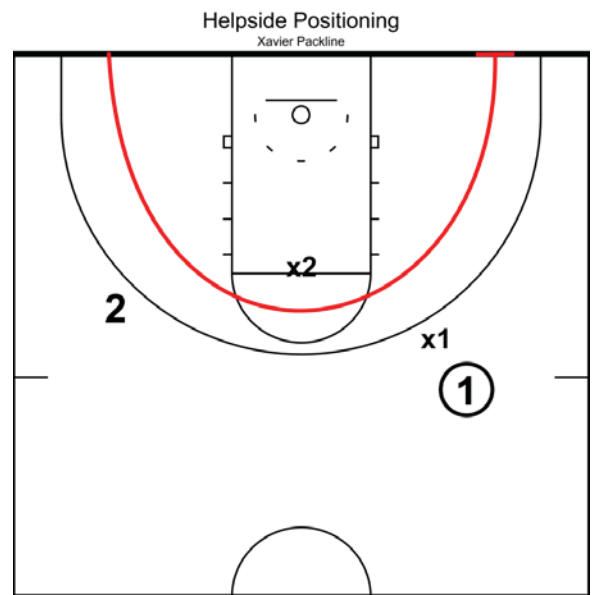
**Fundamentals & Drills**

**Positioning on the ball**

- Extreme ball pressure – make the dribbler as uncomfortable as possible
- Take away vision
- Unacceptable to ever get beat baseline or in a straight line

**Positioning off the ball**

- Player must have two feet inside the PL
- “Open” stance in helpside positioning
- Helpside defender wants to form a “Flat Triangle” between his man and the ball
  - This is called “being in your gap”
- Because the off-ball defender’s gap is always changing, he must be able to see both man and ball at all times – he must “be in two places at once”
- “Jump & Swipe” when moving from on-ball to off-ball position... Why?
  - Puts you in better help position



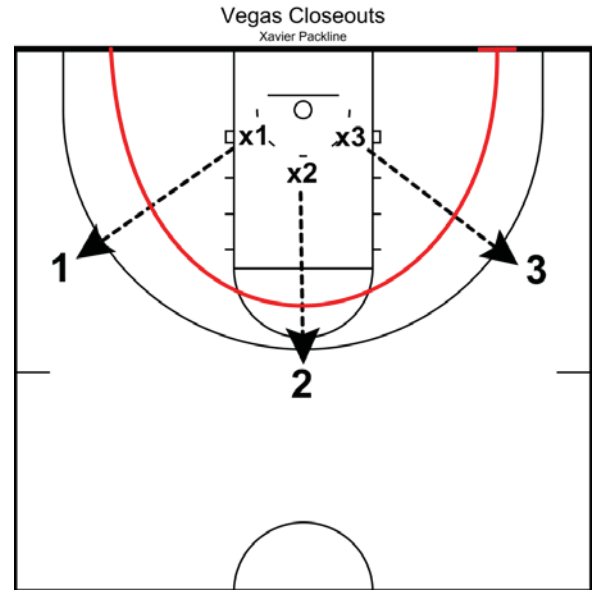
- May get a piece of the ball (Ronald Nored from Butler made a career off doing this)

## Close Out

- One of the most important fundamentals to this defense! You must work on this every single day (including pre-game warm-ups)
- Xavier Way: "Close out with two high hands"
  - Why "two high hands" instead of one?
  - Discourages rhythm shots and quick passes over the top
  - Creates a mentality to "take away vision"

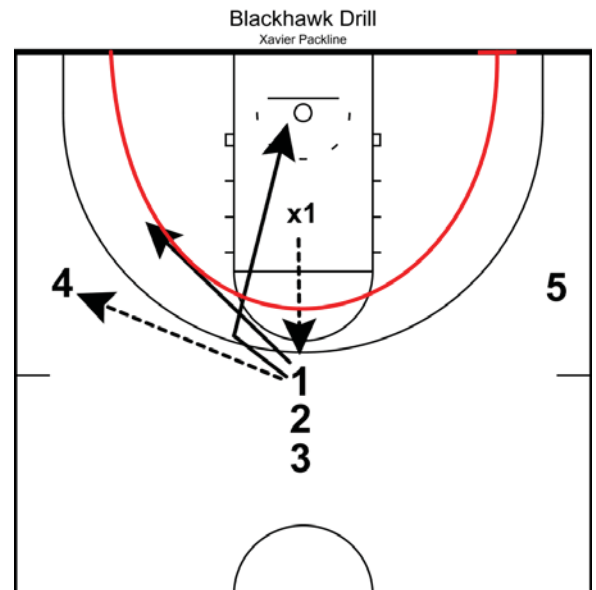
## Drill: "VEGAS CLOSE OUTS"

- We do this drill every single day (practice, shoot around, pre-game warm-ups, etc.)
- Each defender tosses the ball to offensive player
- Xavier Way to close out:
  - 2 High hands
  - Elbows bent
  - Low stance
  - Short/choppy steps
  - Stay square
  - Yell "SHOT" early
- The offense will catch, triple-threat, jab step and rip the ball through a couple of times



## Drill: "BLACKHAWK"

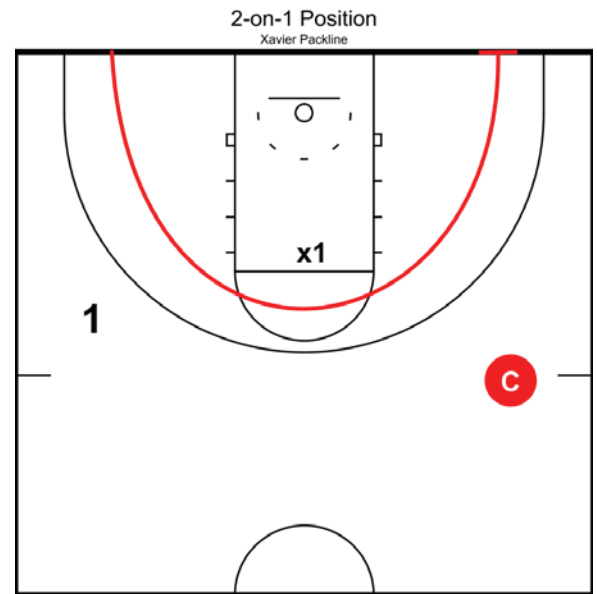
- Great drill that incorporates closing out, ball pressure, jumping to help position, fronting cutters, and closing out from help position
- \*\*\*Closing out from a help position is one of the toughest fundamental to master defensively\*\*\*
  - x1 throws ball to first offensive player (1) inline and close out
  - 1 can pass to either wing, x1 must "jump and swipe" to get to appropriate help position, 1 basket cuts, x1 must use arm bar and "bump cutter" to the logo (below the FT line)



- Wing will pass to next offensive player in line (2), x1 must close out again – this time from a help position
- After two or three passes from wing to top to wing back to top, the Coach will yell “LIVE”
  - Two players play 1-on-1 off the close out
  - Offense has 2-3 dribble max to score
  - x1 must get a stop to complete the drill – if offense scores, x1 restarts drill
- Coaching Points:
  - Make sure x1 keeps proper fundamentals during the dummy period of the drill

**Drill: “2-on-1 Position”**

- Coach starts with the ball, x1 is matched up with 1
- Coach can pass to 1, dribble him out, cut him through, etc. forcing x1 to play on and off the ball
- Drill lasts for a prescribed amount of time, no one looks to score – just focus on constant offensive movement
- Coaching Points:
  - Make sure x1 plays with proper fundamentals throughout the drill:
    - Close outs from ball to help & help to ball
    - Jump & Swipe
    - Bump Cutter
    - Protect against baseline & straight line drives
- Intense ball pressure



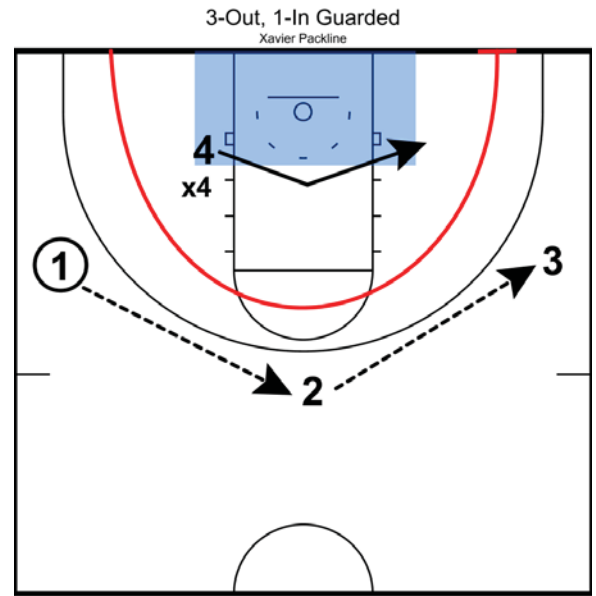
**Post Positioning**

- Golden Rule: NEVER GIVE UP POST FEEDS FROM THE TOP
  - Post defender should always be “on the line, up the line” when ball is up top
- A post defender’s work should be done before the ball is ever passed
  - Use an armbar to push the post player out of the “post box” before the catch
  - Play ¾ on the high side (except if player flashes to the high post)
- On a post catch:
  - “Pop Back”
    - Move from ¾ high-side position to behind, keep a boxer’s stance
  - “Wall Up”
    - As post makes move, show the ref your hands and hold position with your lower body and try to walk through the offensive player

- “Walk through the shooter!”
- “Walling up” also provides great box out positioning and prevents easy offensive rebounds
- “Show the ref your hands and foul the hell out of him with your hips”
- Undisciplined post defenders try to block their own man’s shots
  - The on-ball post defender should never leave his feet when walling up, even when the shot goes up
  - For every one block a player may get, he’ll pick up three fouls
  - Great shot blockers get their swats from a help position

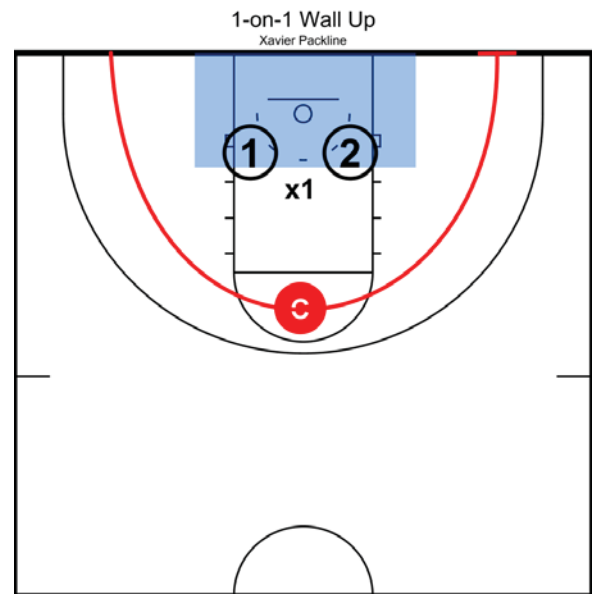
**Drill: “3-out, 1-in Guarded”**

- Drill begins with ball on the wing
- Offensive post tries to get position inside the box, post defender plays  $\frac{3}{4}$  on the high side and uses arm bar to force a catch outside the box
- On a pass from wing to top, post defender plays “on the line, up the line” as offensive post tries to leg whip and seal, post defender can’t play too high and give up lob
- On a pass from the top to opposite wing, the post defender hits offensive post with an arm bar and “peels” to resume  $\frac{3}{4}$  high side positioning outside the post box



**Drill: “1-on-1 WALL UP”**

- Drill works on “walling up” against shot attempts from offensive rebounds
- Coach will lob ball up off of backboard to offensive player 1
- 1 will offensive rebound the ball, x1 will “wall up” and try to push 1 out of the post box with his hips
  - “Show the ref your hands”
  - Do not leave your feet!
- 1 does not try to shoot, rather just battle for shooting position inside the post box
- After a few pivots, 1 will pass the ball back to Coach who will then repeat the drill on the opposite side with player 2
- Run this drill for a prescribed number of reps
- Optional conclusion to drill: x1 has to



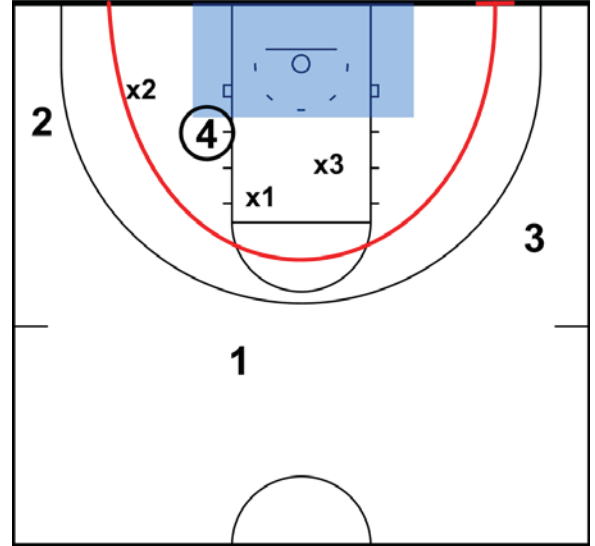
finish drill by taking a charge from either 1 or 2 lowering their shoulder

- Coaching Point:
  - o So many offensive players will throw up bad lay-up attempts either because their feet aren't set, or because their positioning is poor in relation to the basket

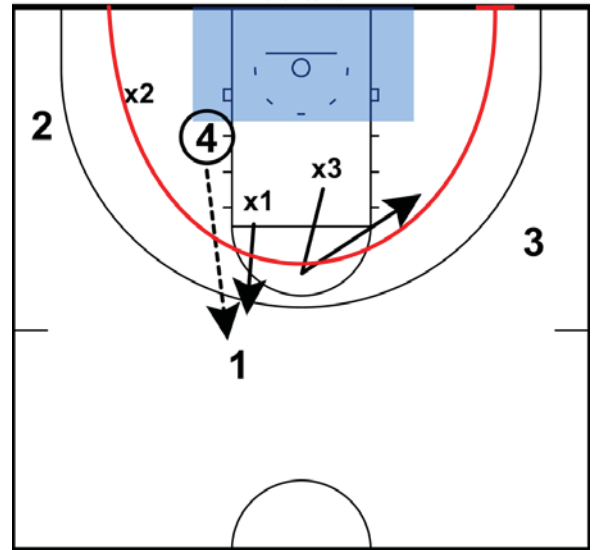
**Defending the Post from the Perimeter**

- "Crowding the Post"
  - o Requires great COMMUNICATION!
  - o All defenders have an open stance
  - o Must be in "two places at once"
- "See both" post player and man
  - o Be able to close out correctly on pass out
- x2 has "butt to baseline"
- x3 will help on x2's man:
  - o Most likely pass out of post is to top
  - o x3 will "jump and swipe" on x2's man to hold him up until x2 closes out

Crowding the Post  
Xavier Packline



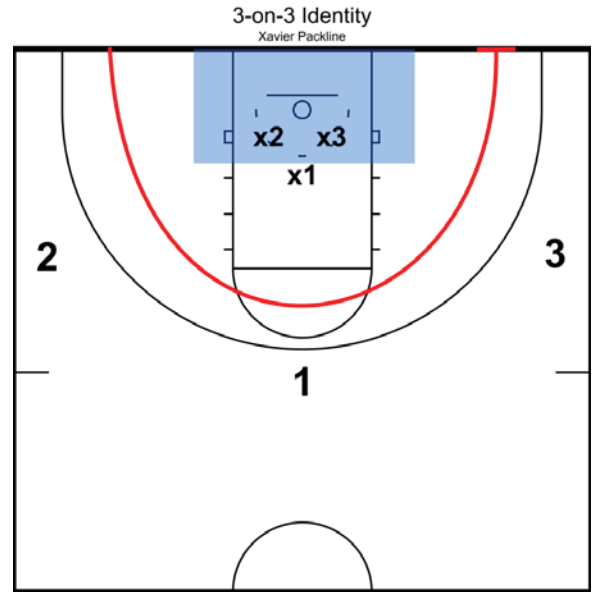
Crowding the Post 2  
Xavier Packline





**Drill: “3-on-3 Identity”**

- Great drill Xavier runs through almost daily
- Coach is under basket and passes ball to one of the three offensive players
- Offense has :20 to score
  - o Offense can do whatever they want to score but ball screen
  - o 3 dribble max per touch
- Early season practice: 4-5 possessions for each team
- In-season practice: 2-3 possessions for each team
- Scoring:
  - o 3 pt shot = +3
  - o 2 pt shot = +2
  - o TO = -1 for offense
  - o Foul = -1 for defense (still same possession)
  - o Off. Rebound = +2
  - o If ball ever goes inside of post box (not including offensive rebound) = +2 (still same possession)



**Drill: “3-OUT, 1-IN IDENTITY”**

- Same rules as above, just add post player and post defender

**Transition Defense**

- 1/3 of all possessions in a game are transition
- It is virtually impossible to put any pressure on the ball in these situations
- Xavier Way: 1 & 2 never offensive rebound, always sprint back – no exceptions
  - o Coaches get themselves into trouble when they start making exceptions for certain match-ups

# **PACKLINE DEFENSE**

## **ULTIMATE GUIDE**

### **PART 2**

**Packine Defense: Do What We Do**  
**Mike Neighbors, Washington Basketball**



# **What We Do**

## **We Value Team Chemistry**

- Respect each other**
- Input from players/coaches**

## **We Play with Mental and Physical Toughness**

- No excuses**
- Preparation/Scouting**

## **We Play Tenacious Team Defense**

- FG% defense**
- Rebounding margin**

## **We Play FAST and SHARE the Ball**

- Team first**
- Fast**
- Good decisions and shot selection**

## **We Play Anybody, Anywhere, Anytime**

- Tough travel**
- Tough turnaround**
- Tough environments**

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Our base defense in the half court is popularly referred to as the PACK LINE DEFENSE. It gained recognition when Dick Bennett installed and used it with his teams at the University of Wisconsin. It has been copied, adapted, and modified through the years by coaches at all levels. While it is a man to man defense, it is NOT an individual defense. It is a true team defense that relies on five people working together to accomplish the ultimate goal of a defensive stop.

The Husky PACK LINE is a proven winner for us. It meets all the standards we have for anything that we do within our program philosophy wise.

1. Can it put you position to BEAT the BEST teams on your schedule?
2. Can it win on the Road?
3. Do you improve as the season progresses?
4. Can you advance in post-season tournaments?

The key measurable stats that determine success in the Pack Line Defense are easy to find from any post game stat sheet and over the course of a season are statistics that are actually directly correlated to wins/losses and success in NCAA Tournament.

- A) Field Goal Percentage Defense: This is the percentage of made FG's your opponents are able to achieve against your scheme. This stat is more reflective than points allowed per game. This stat directly supports your defenses ability to contest shots and force teams to take shots they don't want to take.
- B) Rebounding Margin: Once your defense forces a contested missed shot it is imperative that you complete the STOP with a defensive rebound. Teams with a low field goal percentage defense and high rebounding margin consistently make the Sweet 16 and Elite 8.
- C) Fouls per game: When executed properly this defense limits fouls per game therefore limiting BONUS situation opportunities for opponents. This defense is designed to reduce the number of lay-ups and free throws your opponent gets.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

### LANGUAGE

Our ability to communicate as a team comes down to the LANGUAGE that we use to teach/talk the defense in practice and game situations. Our language is specific and it is consistent. With such importance placed on the terminology that we use it is a must to clearly define each term into their simplest form and then consistently use them with each other.

The first thing we introduce are two areas of the court.

**PACK LINE:** An area one step inside of the painted three point arc. We will tape this area down in early practices to help us learn where this area is located

**Rule of Pack Line:** if your player does not have the ball you have BOTH feet inside

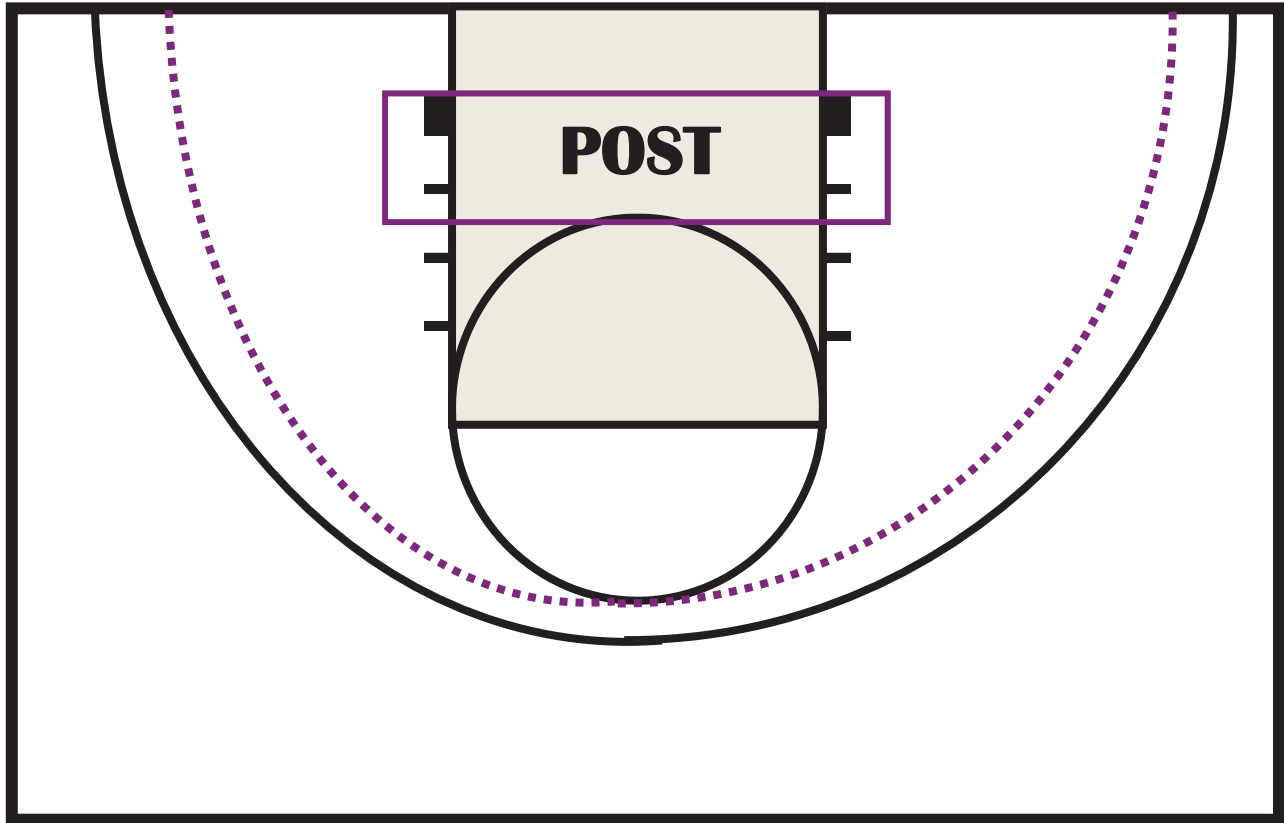
**POST:** An area step out of the three second lane and one step up from the second FT spot.

This area extends across the lane to the opposite side of the court and runs parallel with the backboard.

**Rule of the Post:** NO two feet inside this area catches, push outside the post then chin on shoulder outside the post area.

(SEE DIAGRAM ON NEXT PAGE FOR VISUAL EXPLANATION)

**PACK LINE DEFENSE**



Two areas that are defined from Day 1:

**Pack Line:** An area one step inside of the painted three point arc. We will tape this area down in early practices to help us learn where this area is located

**Rule of Pack Line:** if your player does not have the ball you have BOTH feed inside

**Post:** An area step out of the three second lane and one step up from the second FT spot. This area extends across the lane to the opposite side of the court and runs parallel with the backboard.

**Rule of the Post:** NO two feet inside this area catches, push outside the post then chin on shoulder outside the post area.

These two areas are the basis of the PACK LINE defense. The marriage between our perimeter defense and our post defense are keyed by these two areas. As time progresses, these areas will not require being marked but until they are clearly defined the time and money spent to tape these areas will some of the best you spend.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

### DEFINE YOUR POSITION IN THE PACK LINE

Once again simplicity is the key here. In basketball, your player either has the ball or they don't. In the pack line, that basketball certainty defines your responsibility and your position. We will introduce the various positions and responsibilities as they would occur during the flow of a game and progress through an entire possession.

When your player has the ball on the perimeter (any area outside of our defined **POST**)

- 1) You were there on the catch
- 2) You were there with high hands to take away quick shot or quick pass
- 3) You were close enough to pressure without getting beat off the bounce
  - A. We don't get beat to the **OUTSIDE**
  - B. We don't get beat in a **STRAIGHT LINE**

**OUTSIDE:** This is our term to define toward the baseline when the ball is on the wing and also define the area toward the sideline when the ball is in the middle of the floor.

**STRAIGHT LINE:** Term describing an opponent drive that is in a straight line from the spot they received the pass to the rim. There is no effective defense to help in drive situations like this.

This situation is referred to as **GUARD YOUR YARD**. This gives our players the confidence to apply ball pressure and the individual accountability that we are only asking them to be really effective in containing the dribble three feet in either direction. With the other 4 players properly positioned, the ability to **GUARD YOUR YARD** is a non-negotiable skill in our attack.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

When your player does NOT have the ball on the perimeter :

- 1) You are about half way between the ball and your player
- 2) You are on the line, a step off the line that would connect the ball to your man
- 3) You are actively able to see both ball and man

This position is simply defined as the **GAP**.

This imaginary line connecting the ball to our player applies to ALL areas of the court outside of the post. It is constantly changing with offensive player movement which dictates our defensive movements. BUT, we are always on that line and off that line a step. It is this positioning in the **GAP** that defines a standard of the PACK LINE... “POSITIONING IS YOUR HELP”

When your player does NOT have the ball in the post:

- 1) You have constantly fighting for space to keep offense out of **POST**
- 2) You have **CHIN ON SHOULDER** as you fight to keep them from having two feet in the **POST**.

**CHIN ON SHOULDER:** A visual term that describes our defensive body position as we are fighting to keep an opponent from catching the ball in the POST area defined earlier. By placing our chin, on our opponents TOP SIDE shoulder, we have placed ourselves in good position to win the battle for that valuable space. We are maintaining contact with opponent around the basket and also discouraging a quick entry pass. This position combined with our perimeter players NOT getting beat to the outside eliminates the most common passing lanes and keeps our opponents from catching the ball deep in the post.

This simple terminology defines EVERY scenario that occurs in the half court when players are in a static position. Obviously your opponents are not going to simply stand still like in a shell defense, but these basic principles are a must to learn before every progressing.



## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Basketball is obviously NOT a static movement sport. It is dynamic. And with the athletes these days it's becoming increasingly more dynamic every year. Now that your players understand where to be on the court and understand your expectations it's time to introduce to them their responsibilities as the ball and players begin to move. To me, this is where the real coaching/teaching begins and your ability to connect with each player is important. It is also the point where your LANGUAGE must be clear and consistent.

As the ball is passed, once again your players will each fall into one of two categories:

(A) Ball being passed to their player or (B) the ball is NOT being passed to their player

Ball being passed to their player:

1. **Move on the Air Time of the Pass:** the instant the ball leaves the fingertips of the passer it is a non-negotiable factor that all five of our players are on the move to their next responsibility on the court.
2. **Start with a sprint and end with a chop:** As we are moving on the air time of the pass as mentioned above, we must make sure our first step is explosive and we are on a sprint the entire time the basketball is in the air and not in the hands of an offensive player. As we close the distance between our original position and our player who is about to receive the ball, we begin to chop our feet to gain our balance and keep the soles of our shoes in contact with the court. This allows us to arrive in an athletic position so that we can assume our responsibilities of guarding a player with the ball.
3. **High hands to active hands:** This actually is happening simultaneously with the chopping of our feet. As our feet begin chopping, our hips are lowered and we throw our hands up into the air as our player is receiving the pass. This takes away vision for another quick pass and also contests a quick catch and shoot. That is why #2 and #3 are so important in that they work together... We are taking away quick pass and quick shot leaving the drive as the last option so it's very important we are prepared to defend that action.

The above technique of moving on the air time of a pass, starting with a sprint and ending with a chop, and having high hands/active hands is a technique we call a **CLOSE-OUT**. Close-outs are a fundamental building block of the PACK LINE DEFENSE and must be perfected.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

The ball is being passed but NOT to their player:

1. **Move on the Air Time of the Pass:** This concept is the same as if the ball were being passed to our player. It is still imperative that we utilize every second the ball is not possessed by an offensive player as time to adjust our defense.
2. **Sprint to the GAP:** As defined previously, this is the position about half way between our defender and where the ball is being passed. It is the position of being a step off the imaginary line that connects the ball and our player.

If all five defensive players execute the above techniques, our entire defense should have shifted as the ball was in the air and should be perfectly positioned to defend the next action.

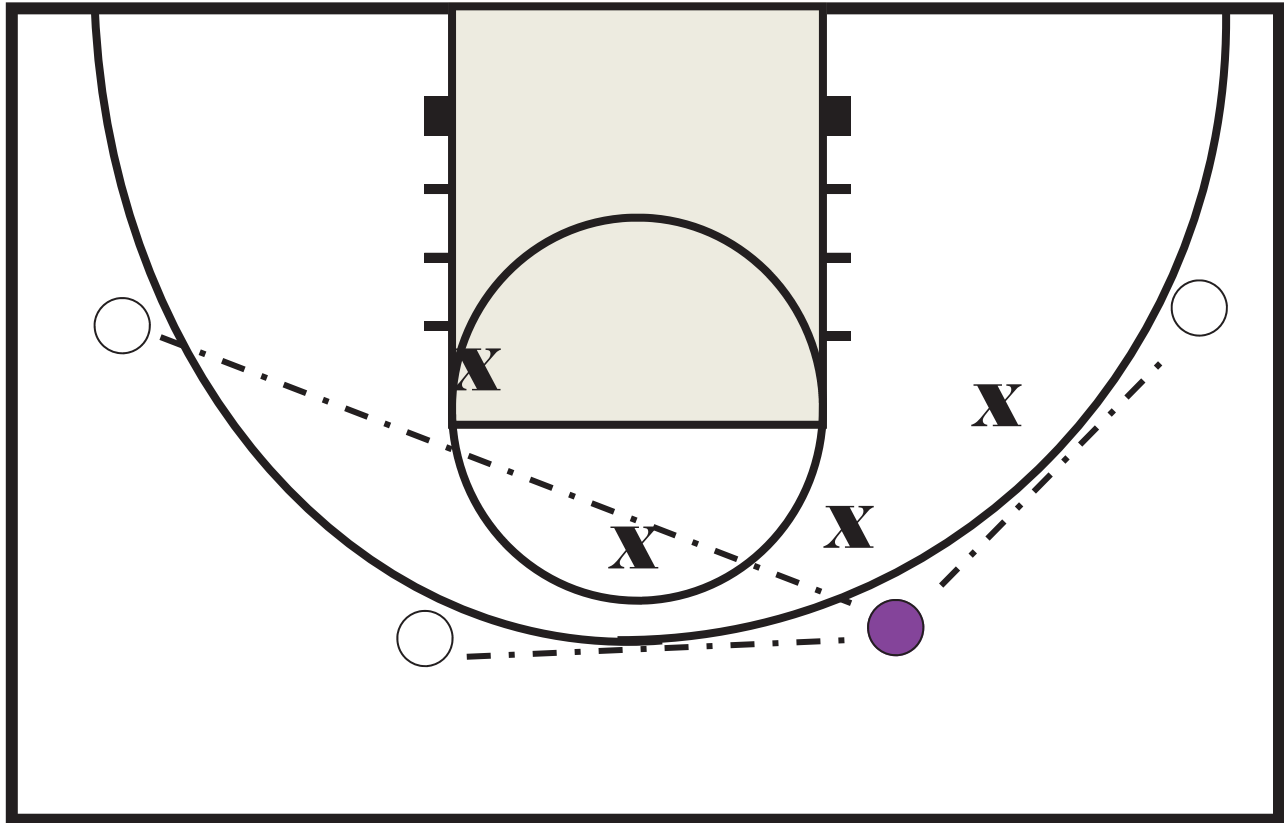
Now that we have defined certain areas of the court and explained the basic responsibilities and positions of our defenders we are ready to practice it in drill format.

It may be the oldest defensive drill in the game but it's the most effective and is a staple of every practice schedule you will ever see with WASHINGTON attached to it. It's the SHELL drill. And we introduce the concepts above with it being all perimeter oriented (no player in the defined post area).

We are simulating the before mentioned static positions of the PACK LINE. Each of the 4 players are either ON BALL or NOT. The offensive players do NOT move in the initial drill. They simply pass the ball to each other and hold it for a couple of seconds. This allows us to evaluate the players individually in their positioning and their effort as well as evaluate the cohesion of the team defense.

SHELL DRILL 4 AROUND 0 is diagrammed on the next page.

## SHELL DRILL 4 around 0



### TEACHING POINTS:

- 1) Players must begin in the proper position
- 2) Players must be vocal in communication of their responsibilities
  - A. Ball— this call means I have the player
  - B. Gap- this call means my player does not have the ball but I am in your dribble GAP
  - C. Help- this call means my players does not have the ball but am on the opposite half of the court than the ball is
- 3) Hold each player accountable for the proper technique and the communicating from Day 1

We use a variety of reminders to hold players accountable. If a player isn't able to do this basic drill they will never be a successful player for you in the PACK LINE. Although a simple drill in format it is THE MOST important drill in the implementation of your team defense.

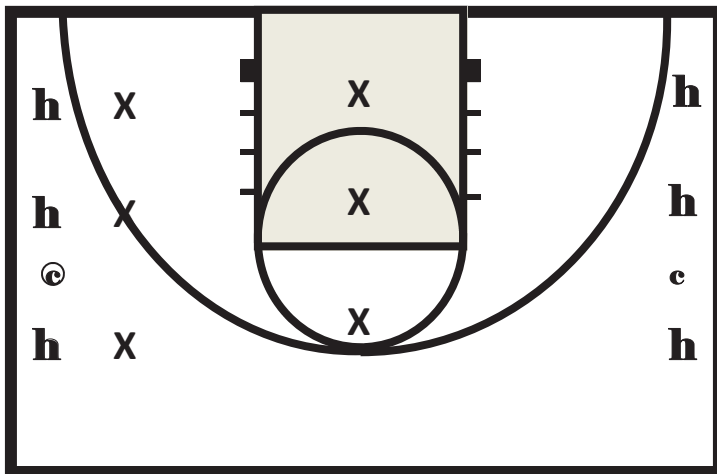
## CHAIR CLOSEOUTS

With the importance of CLOSE-OUTS we work on them daily. A staple drill of our plan is Chair Closeouts. This stretches our defenders from sideline to sideline and puts them in the worst case scenario when it comes to drilling the techniques we have taught.

This drill forces players to move the on the air time of a pass and cover the maximum distance possible in the half court. Coach holds the ball long enough to evaluate the positioning and efforts of individual players. It easily exposes a player who is late to move on the air time of pass. It exposes a player who does not properly execute chopping feet or high hands.

We usually go for 25 seconds of a shot clock to simulate a possession. Those 6 players sprint off the court and six more sprint on.

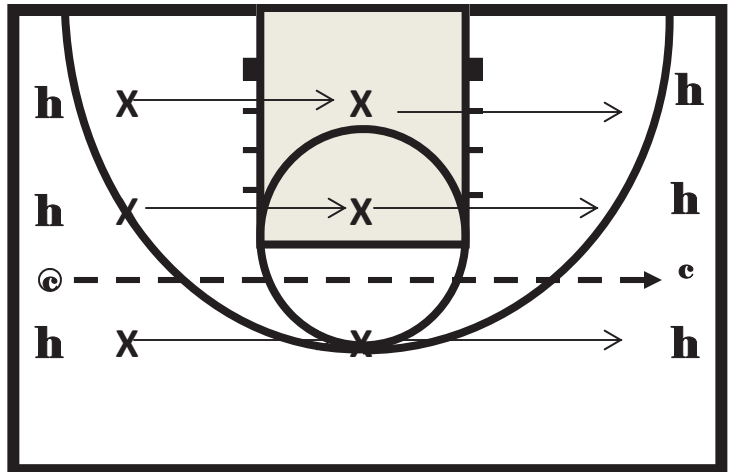
**YOU WILL GET WHAT YOU TOLERATE.** If you allow players to practice less then perfectly, don't be upset with them when in a big game they don't perform to your standards. Set, expect, and enforce a high level of execution and enthusiasm in this drill and it will carry over into game situations.



**A** Position 3 chairs along each sideline. We place a ball in the seat of each to simulate that chair as a player being a ball handler.

Coach on each side between the chairs

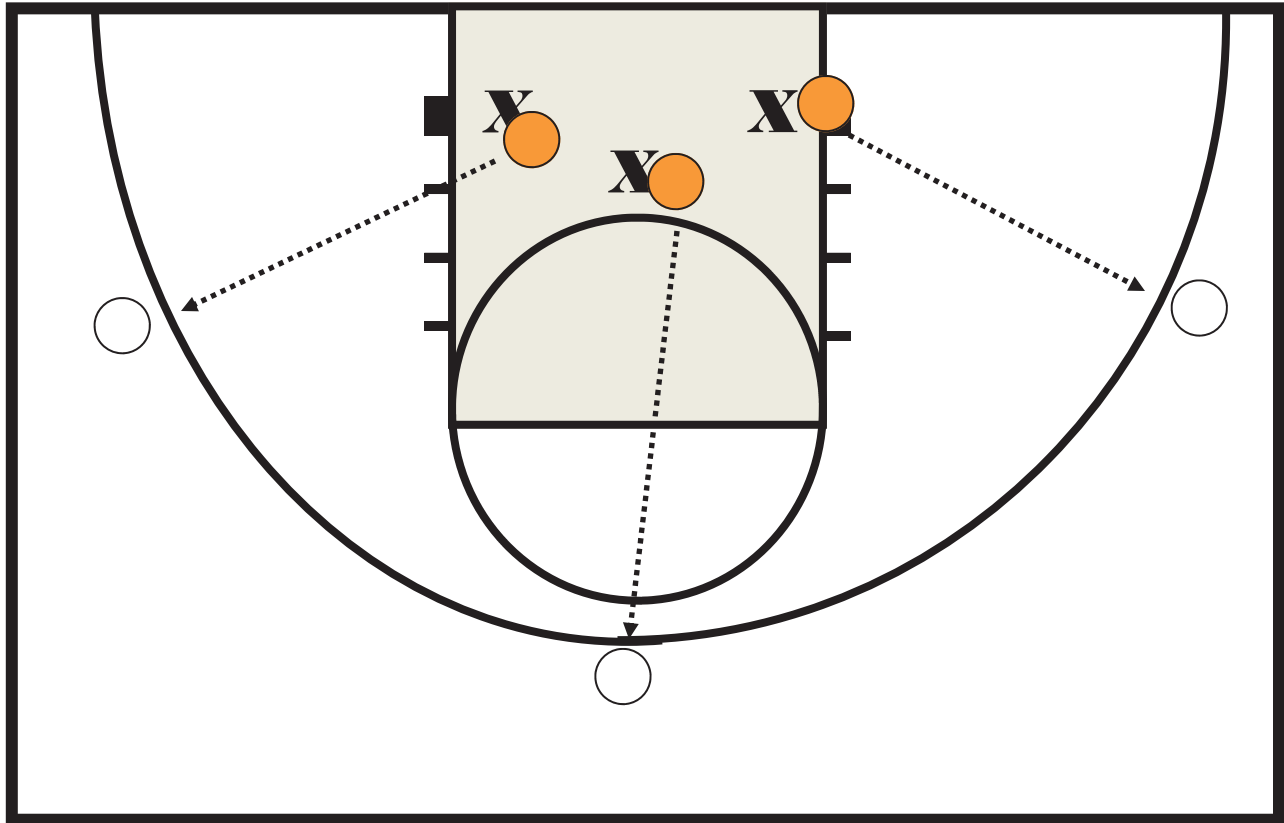
Three defensive players at "on the ball", three



Coach with ball passes across court to other coach.

Defensive players that were in "help" sprint to close-out to the chairs on the AIR TIME of the pass.

**VEGAS CLOSEOUTS**



Three offensive players around the arc. Two on the wings with one at the top of the key.

Three players with balls under the basket with a foot in the post area. These three players roll ball out to players on the arc.

As the ball is rolling they start with a SPRINT and CHOP their feet as they approach the player now with the ball.

We are looking for a SPRINT, CHOP, and HIGH HANDS on the **CLOSE-OUT**.

We are listening for shoes squeaking on the chop and “ball, ball, ball” from the mouths of the players as they are closing out.

After the defensive player gets into the proper position, we blow whistle and defender goes to offense and next three players around the basket are ready to start drill again.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Let's add the POST defense component at this point. Remember we have defined the POST area on the court with our players from Day 1 as the area a step outside the paint in each direction and a step above the lowest FT block.

This is an area not a position. This means any player can be asked to defend in this area and we use basically the same technique regardless of whether they are a 5-2 point guard or a 6-6 post player.

Earlier we stated we never want to allow any offensive player to catch it with two feet planted in this area. To do that we utilize **CHIN ON SHOULDER** position and fight with our entire body to make sure it does not happen. Pushing the offensive player out of this area has obvious benefits in that the offense is not getting the ball close to the basket. It also has many more benefits that will come into play later as we build onto the base foundations.

But despite best efforts the ball does make it to this area from time to time. When it does we teach the player defending the post to **POP BACK** on the catch. **POP BACK** means we can from chin on shoulder quickly to a spot between the player and the basket. This move eliminates any angle the offensive player was hoping to gain with their positioning. **POP BACK** gets the defender into an athletic stance close enough to maintain contact with offensive player but far enough away to not allow the offensive player to feel their body. From this athletic stance we are able to defend the offensive player from a quick shot or a quick drive to the basket. We stay in this stance until the player passes the ball back outside the post or begins to attack.

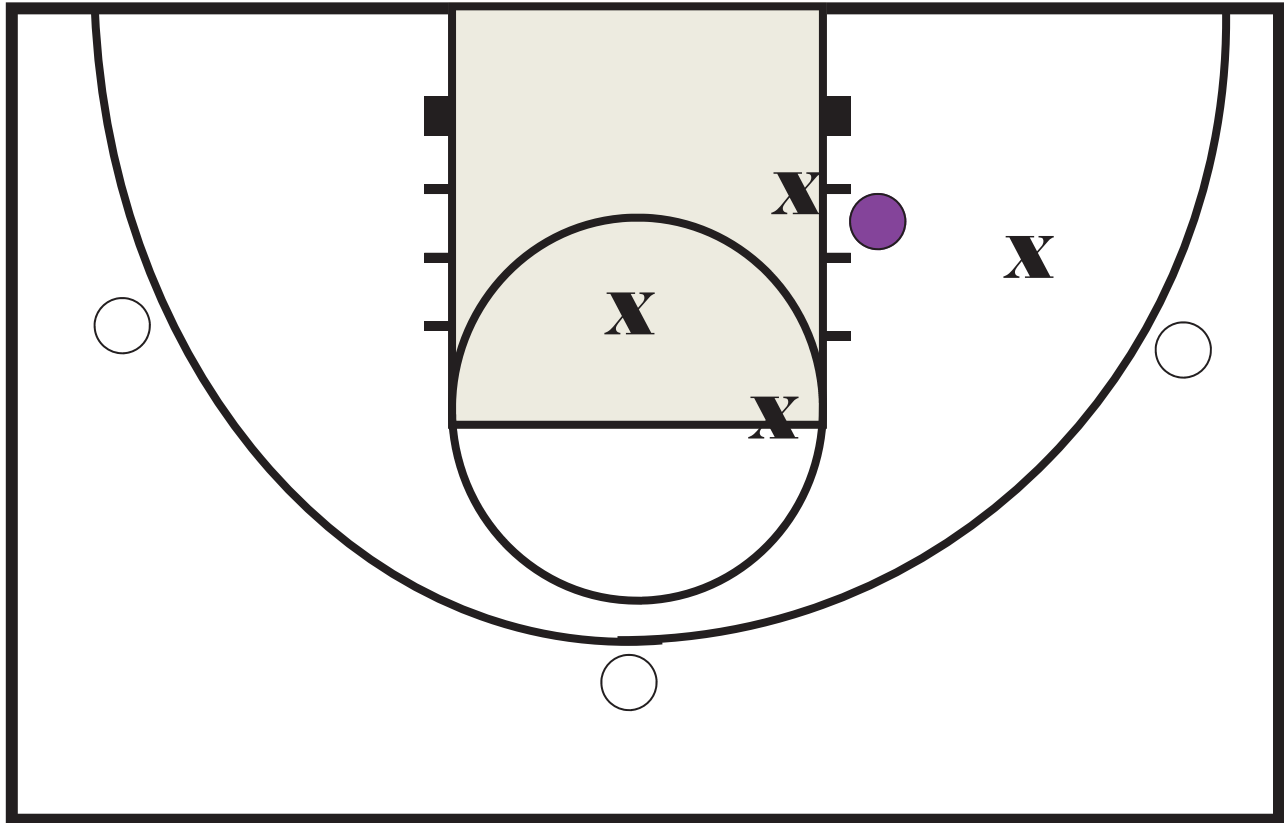
On a pass out of the post, we simply go back into CHIN ON SHOULDER and try to fight them out of the post area with our body.

If they dribble the ball while being in or near the post area, the post player is taught to stay in their athletic stance and not allow the offensive player to get nearer the bucket. This dribble also engages our players who are defending players outside of the post area.

PLAYERS OUTSIDE POST responsibilities when a post dribbles the ball:

- 1) On the initial pass into the post, the perimeter defenders should have jumped to half way point between their player and the ball as usual.
- 2) On the dribble of the post, the perimeter player **DIGS** onto the post. This is technique in which with their back to the baseline the perimeter defender uses their arm closest to the post player to strike at the ball. It's our simple intention to make the post player pick their dribble up before they can hurt our defense. We are NOT doubling the post, we are **DIGGING**. The instant the ball is picked up, the perimeter defender must return to their original position.

## SHELL DRILL 3 around 1



Shell 3 around 1 gives us the best scenario to teach our actions when the ball is passed into the post. 3 perimeter players are stationary. The offensive player in the post is working on following the ball to force her defender to maintain **CHIN ON SHOULDER** position and work with her body to force as far outside the POST area as possible.

We pass the ball around the perimeter as we diagrammed earlier in SHELL 4 on O. After a few passes the ball is passed into the offensive post player.

The on-ball defender **POPS BACK** between man and basket and perimeter players get to **GAPS**.

The offensive post player dribbles the ball a couple times to allow perimeter players to execute a **DIG** and then recover to their **GAP**.

When the ball is entered into the POST area we want that player to feel surrounded and uncomfortable to the point that they can NOT attack the basket and must pass the ball back to the perimeter where are team defense is waiting on the catch.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Now that we have covered our static positioning and our dynamic positioning, it's time to allow the offense to look like an offense and let them begin moving without the ball and working on their attack actions.

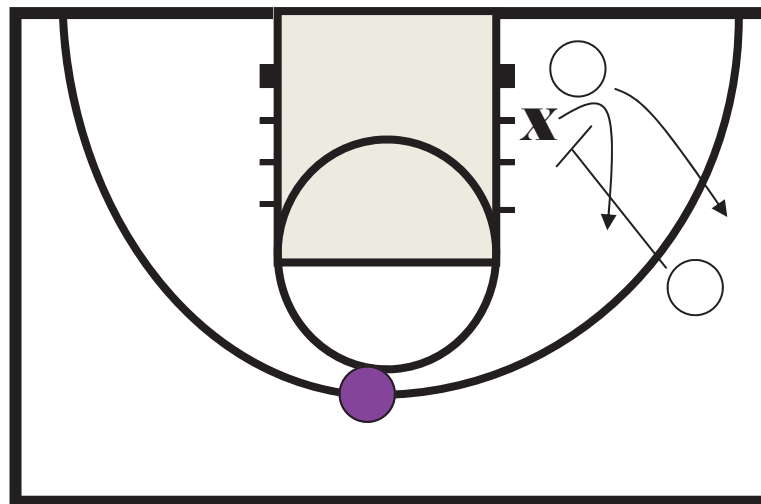
To effectively do this, we first need to introduce some new **LANGUAGE**. These will be the terms that we use to communicate our defensive actions from player to player as the players begin cutting and screening.

Our system is numerically based. We feel it is consistent to all actions that offensives utilize. We feel it allows us to make adjustments game to game and also play to play. We feel it breeds confidence in our players and their ability to defend any action an opponent attempts to use.

The first concept is that the ball is where we begin numbering. In all situations of screening or cutting the player we are guarding is always **FIRST**.

With our player always being the **FIRST** it is the next number that pertains to our defensive positioning. **SECOND** then becomes defined as placing our defensive player between their man and the action. Man is **FIRST**, defense is **SECOND**. When we tell our defensive player to go **SECOND** on an action, they immediately understand to place themselves between their man and a screen or the ball or another cutter. This is most commonly a down screen so we will use this to illustrate our basic **LANGUAGE**.

Diagrammed below is what **SECOND** looks like on a down screen.



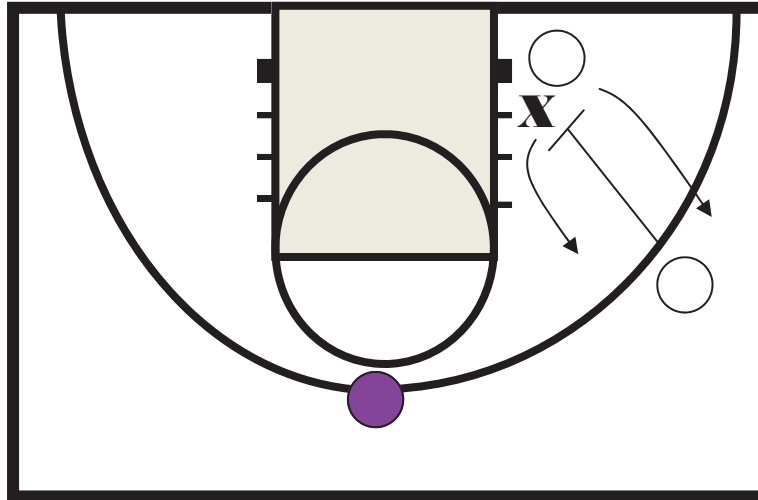
Here the man is **FIRST**, and X is going **SECOND** to guard their cutting opponent. This action can be moved to any area on the perimeter without changing our ability to communicate how we are defending the action.



**PACK LINE DEFENSE**

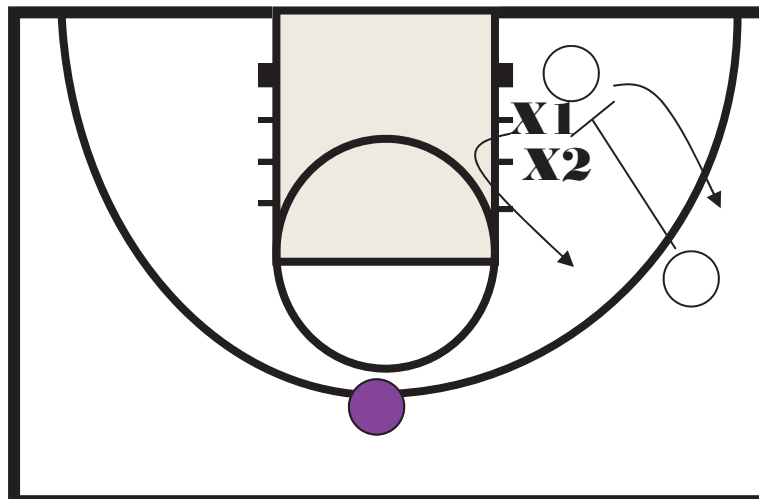
**THIRD** will then be defined as placing our defensive player in a position where the man is **FIRST** as always, the action is **SECOND**, and we are **THIRD**.

Diagrammed below is what **THIRD** looks like on a down screen.



Here the man is **FIRST**, the action is **SECOND**, X is **THIRD** to guard their cutting opponent.

The last possibility in our action defense is **FOURTH**. It rarely happens in actions not involving the ball but will illustrate it here as we have been . **FOURTH** will be used much more when we reach Ball Screen defense. **FOURTH** is when the ball is **FIRST**, the action is **SECOND**, our teammate guarding the action is **THIRD**, and our defender is **FOURTH**. Our defender guarding the action **JAMS** the action with their body allowing their teammate to go **FOURTH**. Again this is not best illustrated or utilized on a down screen but for consistency in teaching we introduce it now so it will be even clearer when we advance to Ball Screen Actions. The **JAM** by X2 is a technique of forcing the screen lower and not allowing that screen to be moved allowing teammate to slip through in the **FOURTH** position to their **GAP**.



## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Armed with the ability to communicate and defend offensive actions you can now begin to work situational things that occur within an offensive possession as players begin to move without the ball and execute set plays or their motion attack.

Our LANGUAGE stays the same throughout the 1000's of "what if a player does this" questions you get from your players. It is now up to you as a coach to identify the most common actions you are forced to defend and practice those scenarios to insure you have a clear understanding of how the PACK LINE is designed to defend them.

We progress in a specific order based on how it pertains to overall scheme of PACK LINE and the number of times a defense must deal with the action in game situations. Again we will build from the perimeter to the post. These are mainly cutting actions and the actions that are NOT ball screens. Screening actions involving the ball will be our next building block.

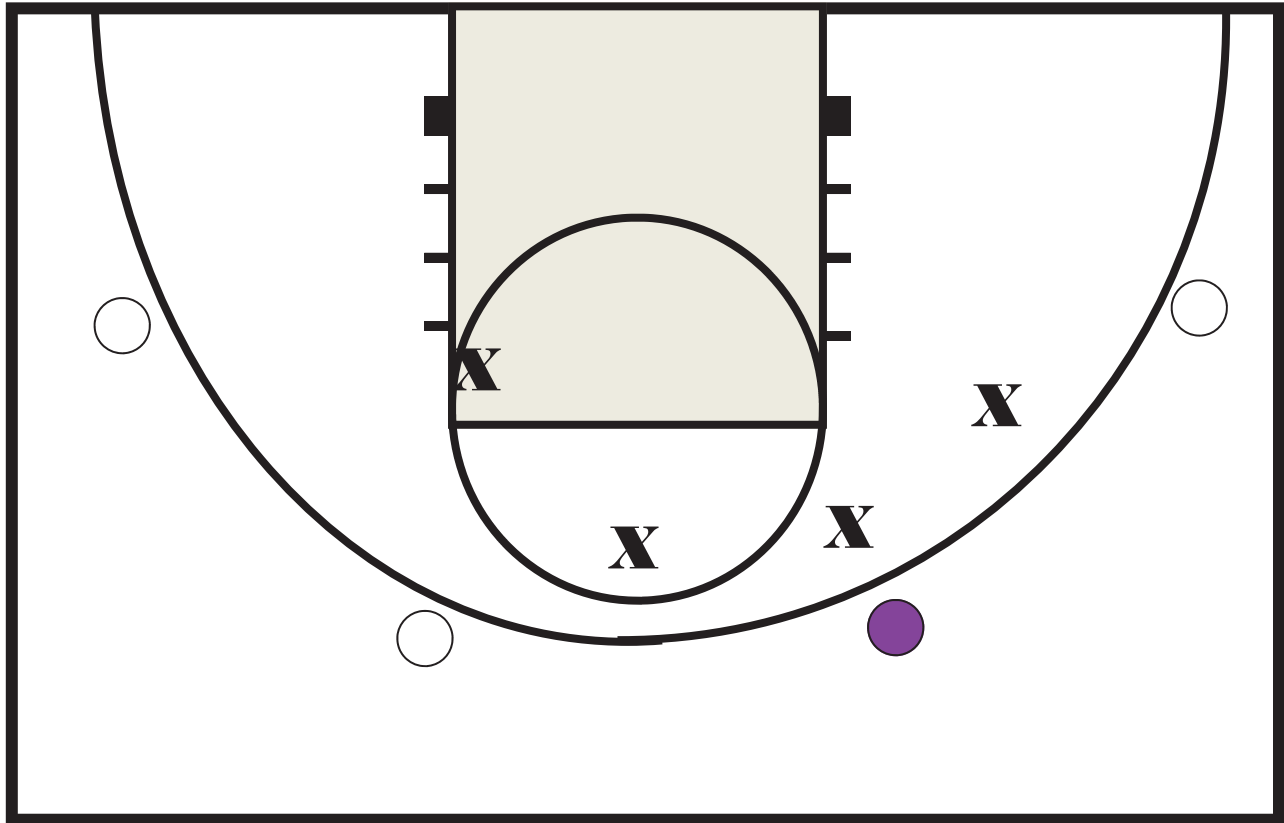
**BASKET CUT:** In theory this is the easiest one for us to defend in the PACK LINE because the essence of what we have already instilled in the perimeter defense is to always move on the air time of the pass to the **GAP**. If we have properly taught and practiced this skill from Day One, when a perimeter player tries to cut to the basket we should already be in the proper position to defend such action. A lot of defensives call this "jumping to the ball" or "jumping to the pass".

We teach our defender to be very physical on the cut and never allow the offensive cutter to cut to the **POST** without being punished with contact.

**WEAKSIDE SCREEN AWAY:** A lot of motion offenses involve a pass and screen away or a simple exchange screen on the weak side in an attempt to occupy help side defenders. If we properly shifted into **GAPS** positions on the air time of the pass we should already be in the proper position to effectively defend this action. We are in **GAPS** seeing both the ball and our player. When the screen arrives the player guarding screen calls screen and opens up allowing her teammate to slide between **THIRD**. The defender guarding the cutter sprints through the open space and takes position in the proper **GAP**. This action was actually diagrammed on the previous page as we were introducing the **SECOND**, **THIRD**, and **FOURTH** language.

**FLARE SCREEN:** Flare screens are very difficult to set against teams that use the PACK LINE because on the air time of the pass they have already jumped to the **GAP**. But when the flare screen does arrive, the defender guarding the screener yells FLARE to alert her teammate. We yell the specific types of screen to mentally trigger the countless times we worked on them in practice settings. The person being screened goes **SECOND** with the hands up as they fight over the top of the action. With confidence ball pressure is begin applied this is a tough pass to throw.

## SHELL DRILL 4 around 0 Actions



Our most effective drill for working on the various actions is the SHELL DRILL. We can control the offense and evaluate our defensive efforts against each of the actions.

- 1) Basket Cut- Player with ball passes to wing then makes a basket but with the other offensive players filling up a spot. We cycle through on the right side the pass the ball across the top then complete a cycle on the left side.
- 2) Weak side Down Screens or Exchanges– On any pass across the top the weakside players execute and exchange or down screen with defense communicating and adjusting. Again work both sides to complete a cycle for each individual player in each spot
- 3) Flare screen: On any pass across the top the wing player on the ball side sets FLARE screen for the player who just passed the ball.

4 on 4 without a post allows for the best possible evaluating of the action for you as a coach. It also places defense in a worst case scenario situation to develop toughness and resolve.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Let's add the Ball Screen here on Day 4. It's becoming a MUST in any defense as more and more women's teams are incorporating variations for the pick and roll into their offensive attack.

We are now dealing with a situation directly involving two defenders. For writing purposes we will use screenee and screener as we "talk" through them here on paper and discuss the responsibilities of each defender. On the court, it's much easier to differentiate players but we will stick with those terms here. We will also begin our teaching on WING BALL SCREENS and progress later to different areas of the court which bring slight variations. There are also five things that we do in WING-ON Ball Situations so we will tackle them one at a time. Obviously there are three other players on the court as well and they will have roles in the action as well but can not discuss them until we introduce and master the main action.

So, an offensive players has the ball on the wing. That defender assumes responsibilities taught on Day 1. We were there on the catch with high hands, we now have active hands applying ball pressure , as we are **GUARDING OUR YARD** (not getting beat to outside and not getting beat in a straight line). All other players moved to the **GAP** on the air time of the pass there.

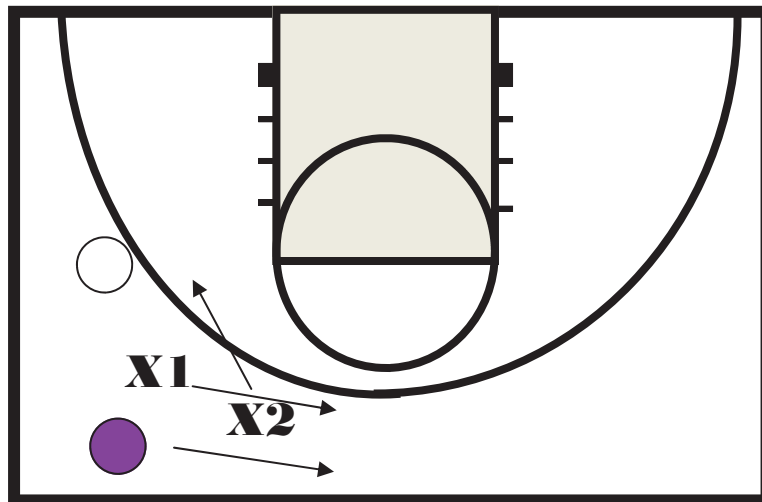
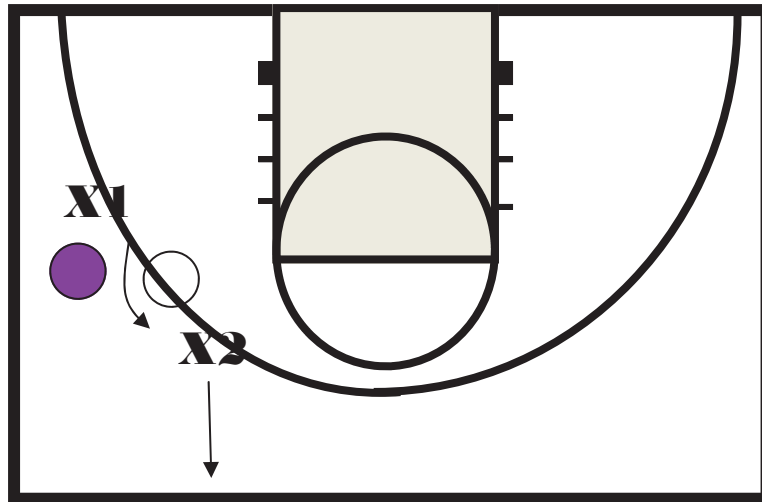
We start introducing our scheme with **SECOND** and **HEDGE** because it is the most difficult:  
**SCREENER DEFENSE:**

- 1) **CALL** ...the type of screen coming as the offensive player begins in that direction to screen
- 2) **SPRINT**... to the action. Arriving before the screen is set gives us the best chance to defend
- 3) **HEDGE**... this is an action in which the defender of the screen maintains contact with the hip of the screener as the screenee is utilizing the on ball. As the ball handler comes off the screen, the HEDGE defender is in an athletic stance with shoulders parallel to sideline of the court. Her goal is to force the ball handler TWO hard dribbles toward the half court line.
- 4) **RECOVER**... to the **GAP** of their player

**SCRENEE DEFENSE:**

- 1) **ON BALL**... responsibilities as always
- 2) **FORCE**...into the screen. The instant they hear SCREEN called by teammate, she will position her body to insure the ball handler has no option but to use the screen. This takes away all reject options.
- 3) **SECOND**...if they were tough on the ball it is easier to fight SECOND (between the ball and the screen)
- 4) **RECOVER**... under the HEDGER. As the HEDGE defender is releasing from their two dribble force to half court, we should be shaped up and ready to defend on ball again.

**PACK LINE DEFENSE**



In top diagram:

X1 jumps to the outside to force ball into the screen. X2 is in stance but still in contact with the player setting the screen. X1 fights over SECOND on the screen.

In the bottom diagram:

X2 forces the ball two hard dribbles toward half court. X1 who went SECOND on the screen recovers to the ball UNDER the HEDGE of X2

We will use the SECOND and HEDGE when the player using the screen is a good shooter that can also hurt us as a driver AND the person setting the screen is NOT a great threat to shoot a 3 pointer. There are other instances but that is the most common in the women's game.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

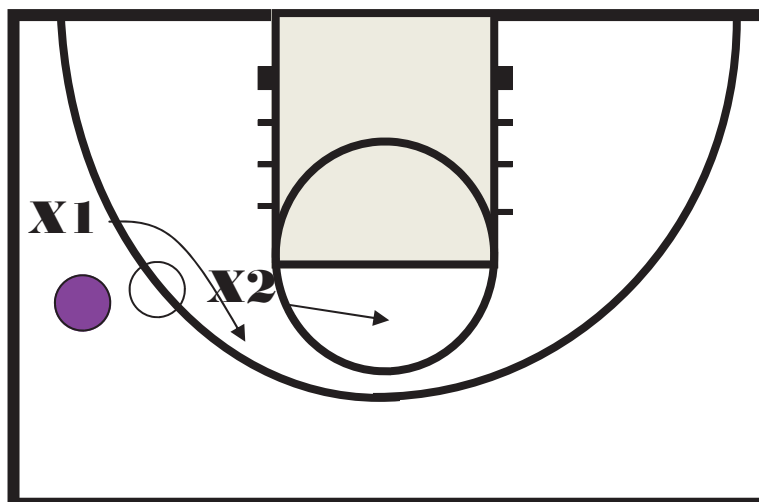
The next method to teach is **THIRD** and **PLUG**.

### SCREENER DEFENSE:

- 1) **CALL** ...the type of screen coming as the offensive player begins in that direction to screen
- 2) **SPRINT**... to the action. Arriving before the screen is set gives us the best chance to defend
- 3) **PLUG**... this action by the defender guarding the screener is best utilized to neutralize a player using the screen who is a strong driver but not a threat to shoot behind the screen. As the screen is being set, the PLUG defender still maintains contact with the screen but now her shoulders are parallel to the half court line and her goal is to force her from sideline to sideline and NOT allow her to quickly turn and attack the middle of the court or the basket.
- 4) **RECOVER**... to the **GAP** of their player after they defend the action and teammate has recovered to guard the ball.

### SCREENER DEFENSE:

- 1) **ON BALL**... responsibilities as always
- 2) **FORCE**...into the screen. The instant they hear **SCREEN** called by teammate, she will position her body to insure the ball handler has no option but to use the screen. This takes away all reject options.
- 3) **THIRD**...knowing their player is not a threat to shoot the ball behind the screen we now go **THIRD** to control the ball
- 4) **RECOVER**... over the **PLUG** to their assignment and take up On-ball responsibilities.



**PACK LINE DEFENSE**

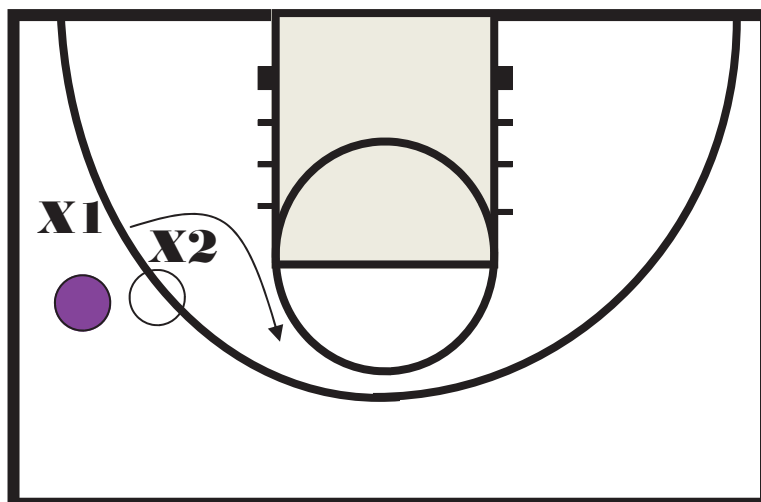
The next method to teach is **FOURTH** (this explains the action of both defenders)

**SCREENER DEFENSE:**

- 1) **CALL** ...the type of screen coming as the offensive player begins in that direction to screen
- 2) **SPRINT**... to the action. Arriving before the screen is set gives us the best chance to defend
- 3) **FOURTH...** this action by the defender guarding the screener is best utilized to neutralize a great driver that can't shoot the three behind the screen **BUT** the player setting the screen **CAN** shoot the three ball. The defender guarding the player setting the screens jams her body against the screen as closely as she can to give our other defender maximum room to also go **FOURTH**. This action also keeps the screener from being able to move the screen further down inside the arc to allow ball handler a better angle to drive or shorter shot.
- 4) **RECOVER**... to the **GAP** of their player after they defend the action and teammate has recovered to guard the ball.

**SCREENEE DEFENSE:**

- 1) **ON BALL**... responsibilities as always
- 2) **FORCE**...into the screen. The instant they hear **SCREEN** called by teammate, she will position her body to insure the ball handler has no option but to use the screen. This takes away all reject options.
- 3) **FOURTH...** we sprint under all the screening action. Must be a sprint and we must go hard to be able to get ball back under control.
- 4) **RECOVER**... to get the ball handler under control and become **ON-BALL**.



## PACK LINE DEFENSE

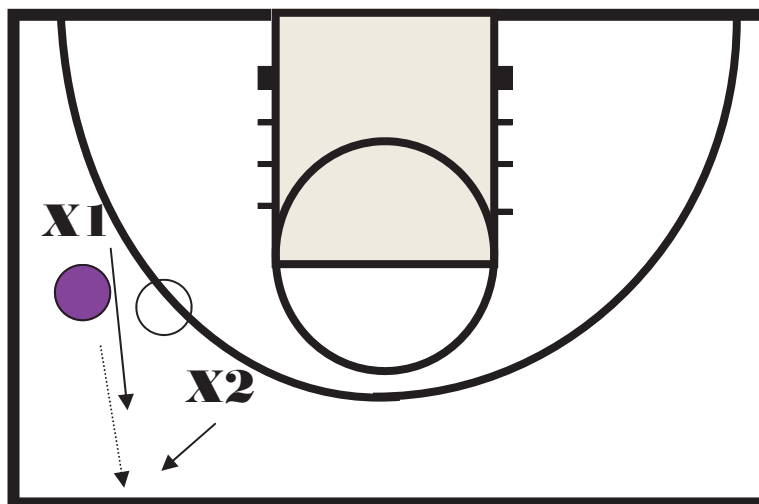
The last ball screen situation we drill is the **TRAP** (we change this call throughout the season) mainly to keep teams off balance and unaware as to when we will utilize it.

### SCREENER DEFENSE:

- 1) **CALL** ...the type of screen coming as the offensive player begins in that direction to screen
- 2) **SPRINT**... to the action. Arriving before the screen is set gives us the best chance to defend
- 3) **TRAP**... this action can be used against a variety of personnel involved in the PNR and also as an element of surprise that can force turnovers. The defender guarding the screener does the same thing they did in **HEDGE** described earlier. Expect in TRAP we stay with the ball handler until we steal the ball or they pass it out of the double team.
- 4) **RECOVER**... most of the time this is NOT to their original matchup because of rotations that we will cover later.

### SCREENER DEFENSE:

- 1) **ON BALL**... responsibilities as always
- 2) **FORCE**...into the screen. The instant they hear **SCREEN** called by teammate, she will position her body to insure the ball handler has no option but to use the screen. This takes away all reject options.
- 3) **TRAP**... our player guarding the ball performs the actions we described in **SECOND** earlier. Knowing their teammate is setting the TRAP it is up to the ball defender to close the trap and not allow the ball handler to split the trap and attack.
- 4) **RECOVER**... to the **GAP** created by a pass out of the double team.





## PACK LINE DEFENSE

We can call any combination of the mentioned actions to create a variety of options as to how we will defend the PNR action. Communication of the call is key and must be executed properly by both of the defenders involved in the action. The decision of how to defend the PNR will depend on the strength and weaknesses of the personnel involved in the offensive action. That comes through scouting as well as in game adjustments.

Armed with these varieties and an easy manner in which to communicate them, we have had success over the years making calls on the spur of the moment when we get a “call” on a set play or see an action being set up in a last second situation.

To recap actions of defender guarding the ball:

- A. Second— over the screen
- B. Third- under the screen
- C. Fourth- under the screen and teammate jamming the screen
- D. TRAP- again we have a call that varies throughout the year for this

To recap actions of the defender guarding the screener:

- A. Hedge- force ball handler two dribbles toward half court before recovering
- B. Plug- force the ball handler side-line to side-line
- C. 4th- jam the screener as not to allow her to move screen down and stay connected to her
- D. TRAP- stay with ball handler and trap with teammate until stolen or ball passed out.

Obviously incorporating the other three defenders is a huge key, you must first master the two player defending of the various offensive actions. We will work two or three days incorporating ball actions with non-ball actions in our 4 around o Shell Drill before introducing the three remaining defenders.

We are relentless in our teaching the precise LANGUAGE and the manner in which the teammates communicate them to each other as well as the manner we communicate them to players. Not talking on defense is a non-negotiable for us and is not tolerated from DAY ONE

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

At this point you should be able to scrimmage and maybe even play a game. You have the basics in and accountability assigned in the half court. It's now a perfect time to begin working on perhaps the most important aspect of our defensive package... TRANSITION DEFENSE.

The reason I say TRANSITION DEFENSE is the most important, is because over the course of a game, teams are in transition situations more often than they are in a HALF-COURT set. Rarely if ever in the women's game do you shoot over 50%. And if you do, when you combine your live ball turnovers with your missed shots you will find your transition defense is tested more than your half court set.

I still believe you need to teach and install your half court LANGUAGE and ACTION first, but once it is in place, your practice time should be focused on TRANSITION to HALF COURT. Our goal from Day One is to force an opponent to go against our half court set up defense. So our ability to stop quick transition and an opponent's early offense is key to us reaching that goal.

TRANSITION DEFENSE begins the instant our opponent secures a defensive rebound, creates a live ball turnover, or we score a made basket. The instant any of these occur we have one player assigned to be our **FULLBACK**. This is usually our Point Guard and it is her responsibility to protect our basket by getting fully-back. At this same instant, a second assigned player becomes our **HALFBACK**. This is usually our 2 guard and she is responsible for getting to the half court area ready to pick up the ball as it is being advanced in transition. Our remaining three players are crashing the offensive boards until this instant and then sprinting back to stop our opponents transition. It is the **FULLBACK** and the **HALFBACKS** responsibility to begin **POINTING** and **TALKING** to their teammates who are sprinting back. This communication is key our success in stopping transition attack. This ability to effectively communicate allows us to **BE ON ASSIGNMENT** and set our half-court defense as quickly as possible.

This sounds like a simple task for a team but it is anything but. It is a challenge and there are countless "what if this happens" situations that you can only work through in practice situations. It is a true test of the PACK mentality to work together to quickly retreat and organize so that we force our opponents to score against our half court set that we work so hard on. I will diagram the family of drills we use to work on these situations but first want to go over some of the terms in our **LANGUAGE** that you will hear being yelled during our practices and games.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

**SPRINT:** Our radio guy at Xavier, Mike Schmaltz, actually kept a tally sheet on how many times he heard me yelling SPRINT during our Sweet Sixteen game versus Gonzaga in 2010. They were the nation's best transition team and had Courtney Vandersloot at the point. She was leading the country in assists and the Bulldogs were the NCAA's leading scoring team. That tally sheet reached 75 in the first half so he gave up keeping it in the second half so he could concentrate on calling the action, but I assure you it was at least 150 by the end of that game!

It is our players reminder that we don't tolerate anything but a dead sprint in transition. We are intolerant of back pedaling. We are intolerant of pouting after a missed shot or turnover. We are intolerant buddy running (running side by side with our match-up). We are intolerant of jamming a rebounder. If it's NOT a dead out, all out SPRINT back, we assume that player is tired and needs to sit on the bench and rest for a while.

**AHEAD OF THE BALL:** This takes care of itself if players are sprinting. But this specifically addresses what we called buddy running earlier. This is the situation where a player makes the excuse for themselves by saying they were running with their man. That's not good transition defense. We want as many players as we can get AHEAD OF THE BALL. This allows illustrates our point that we don't have match-ups in transitions. There is no "that wasn't my girl" excuse in our transition defense.

**POINT AND TALK:** Mentioned on the previous page, this is the action initiated by our full back and half back then continued by the three other players as they **SPRINT** back to get **AHEAD OF THE BALL**. Pointing is the non-verbal component of this scheme. It is physically using our fingers to point in the direction of attacking opponents so that the players who are retreating on a full sprint can run in the direction their teammates are instructing them to run. Talking is the verbal component. This is the act of speaking AND listening so that we effectively and efficiently slow or stop the transition attack of our opponent. When our team effectively Points and Talks it is very frustrating to our opponents. I have seen very, very good transition teams become demoralized early in a game to the extreme that they virtually stop attempting to run on us. Conversely, when we don't Point and Talk, a very average transition team gains confidence and scores easily on us.

**BUILD A WALL:** This is our ultimate goal in transition. To get back ahead of our opponents so that we are able to effectively take away all passing and driving lanes. We want the ball handler and the attacking players to see a WALL of jersey's with WASHINGTON across the front. This can only be accomplished when all the above actions have occurred.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

**BE ON ASSIGNMENT:** Now that we have a wall built we must be ready to work as a PACK to defend the open man. As we mentioned, there are NO match-ups in transition so there will often be situations where a post player has picked up a guard and vice versa. Transition is not the time to try and fix those problems. OPEN SHOTS beat you way more often in women's basketball than do mis-matches. If you want to see our coaches go crazy on the bench watch for the time when we have two players on the ball leaving a player open in trail for an uncontested 3!! Make or miss I can assure you there will be a visible explosion so that our players understand this is unacceptable.

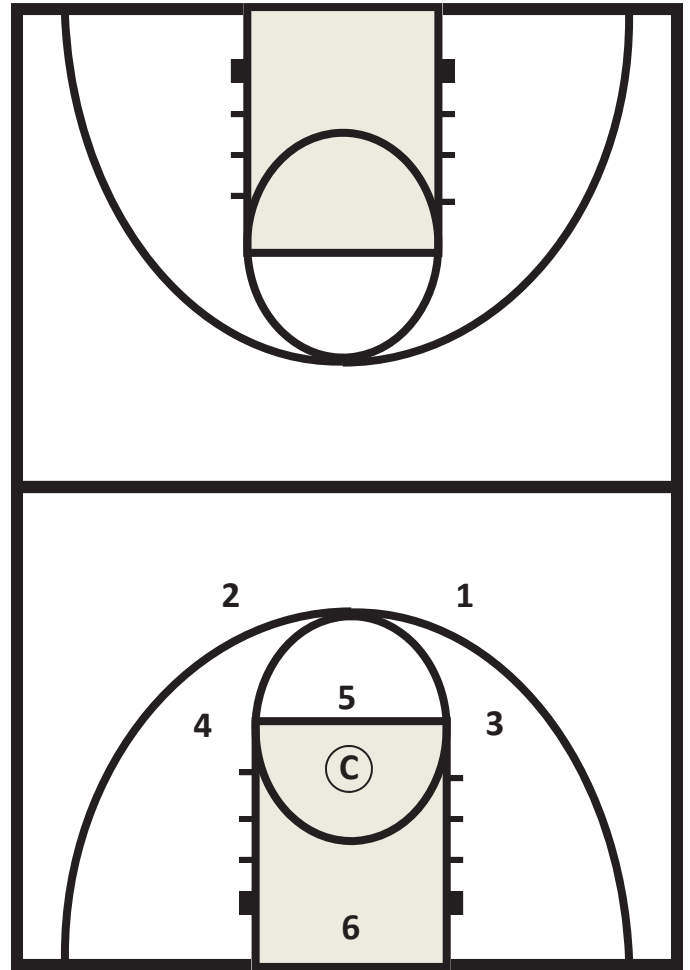
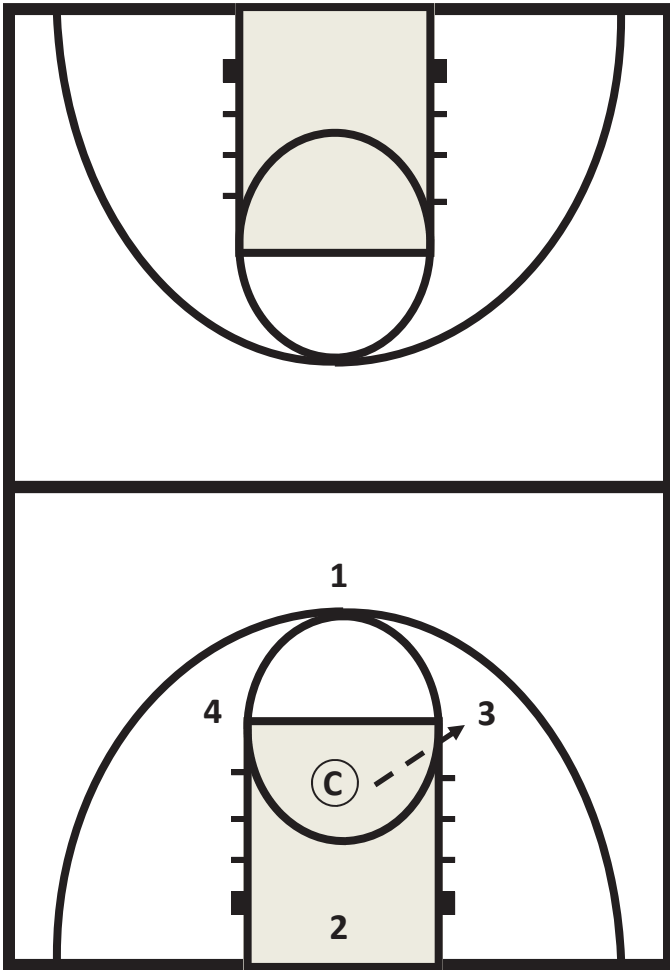
**KNOW WHERE THE BALL IS:** There are countless ways that our point guard influences the on court action of our teams. But her ability to effectively communicate to her teammates how to quickly BE ON ASSIGNMENT is an art that never, ever shows up on a stat sheet. While it begins with her it is every player's responsibility to know where the ball is as transition is happening.

**DON'T FOUL IN THE BACKCOURT:** We are intolerant of players who foul someone 80 feet from the basket trying to steal a pass, pick a ball handler, or jam a rebounder. With all the effort the other four players are exerting, it is a selfish play to foul someone who is not a threat to score.

There is actually one exception to this rule that we do teach and drill with our players who are ready for a next level type play. When we turn the ball over in a situation that we have virtually no chance to defend we will teach our player to take a foul before the ball can be advanced. We call these "turnovers for touchdowns". The reason I say this is a next level play, is because the player must be aware of the foul count, their individual foul situation, and also have the maturity to forget they just turned it over. The poise to make this play comes with experience and confidence but it's won us a couple of games over the years. It's a great play self-less play that often times rallies our defense and also helps us recover from the turnover we just made. Don't expect your freshmen to make this play if you don't explain it to them and drill them on it. Put players in these situations during scrimmages so that they can practice them.

Now that you have your LANGUAGE in place and your tactics explained, it's time to begin implementing your strategies. Your ability to simulate transition defense in practice will directly relate to your player's ability to defend it in games. We use a lot of drills that put our players in the worst case scenario to take them out of comfort zones and force them to PACK together. Be creative in planning your drills so that players are forced to SPRINT, BE AHEAD OF THE BALL, POINT and TALK, and BE ON ASSIGNMENT. And when they do all of these make a big deal out of it and celebrate their accomplishment.

**GET BACK DRILL**



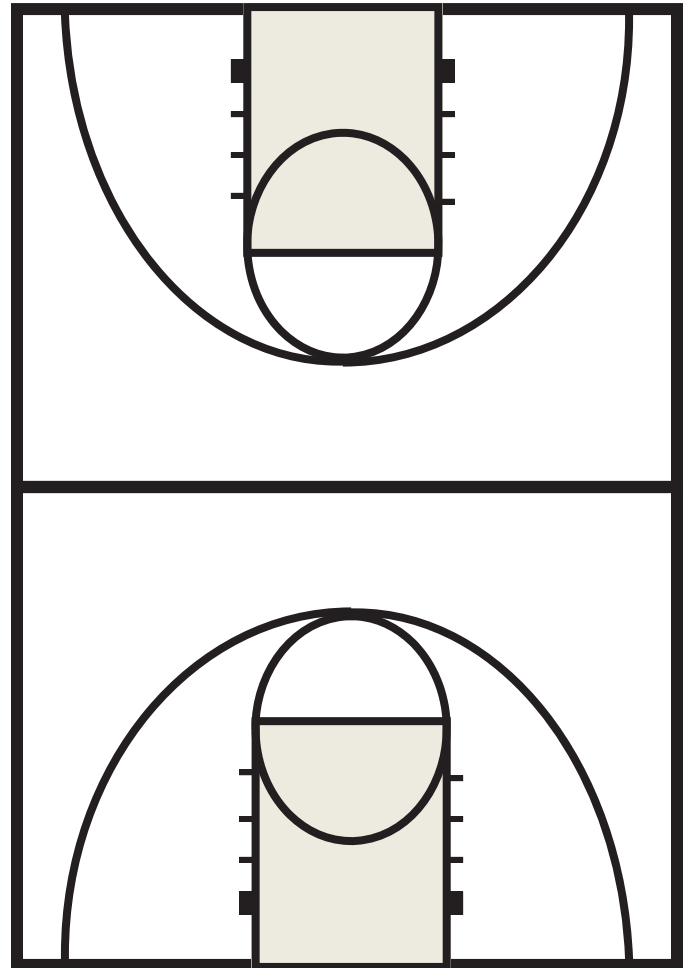
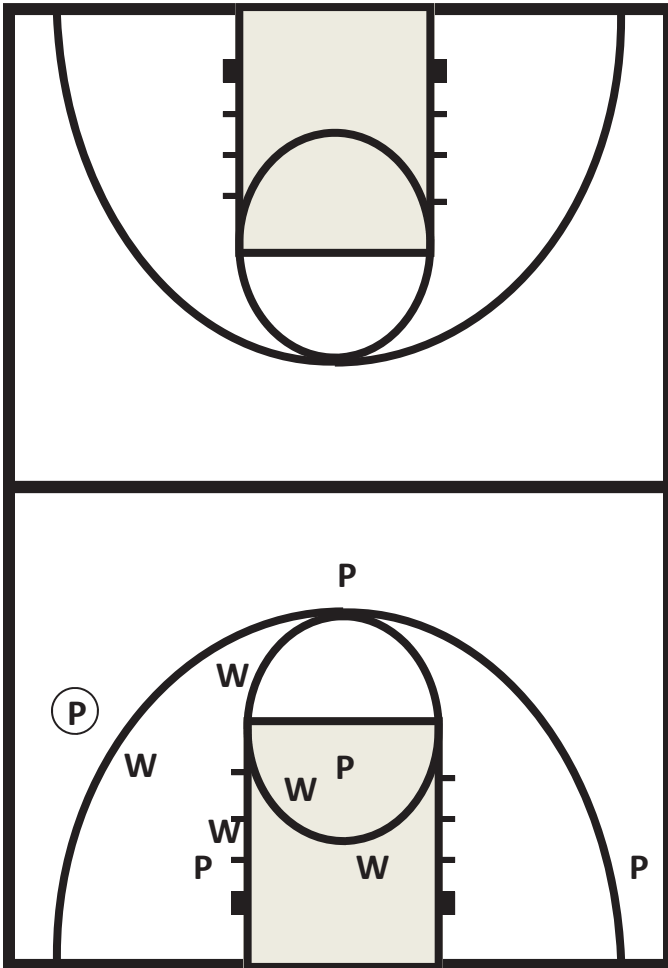
Players 1 and 2 are on defense. Players 3 and 4 are defenders. Coach has the ball. Tosses the ball to 3 or 4. 1 turns and SPRINTS back as the FULLBACK. 2 then must SPRINT back to get AHEAD of the BALL and try to slow the attack.

In diagram 2, we have added player 5 on offense and player 6 on defense to simulate 3-on-3 play.

We will slowly begin to add players and manipulate the number of defenders to get the advantage/disadvantage situations in which we drill.

To add to fun of the drill, after the coach passes the ball to the offense we will turn and using a blocking pad try to impede the progress of the last defender.

**CHANGE DRILL**



Drill begins with teams divided into two colors... Purple and White for the Huskies.

Purple is on offense and white is on defense. Purple is executing a motion offense and white is defending. This can be shell like action or you could be working your own half court attack. As the action is progressing... Coach yells “CHANGE”...

CHANGE means the person with the ball simply drops it and the offense goes into transition mode. A white team player retrieves the ball and initiates transition attack.

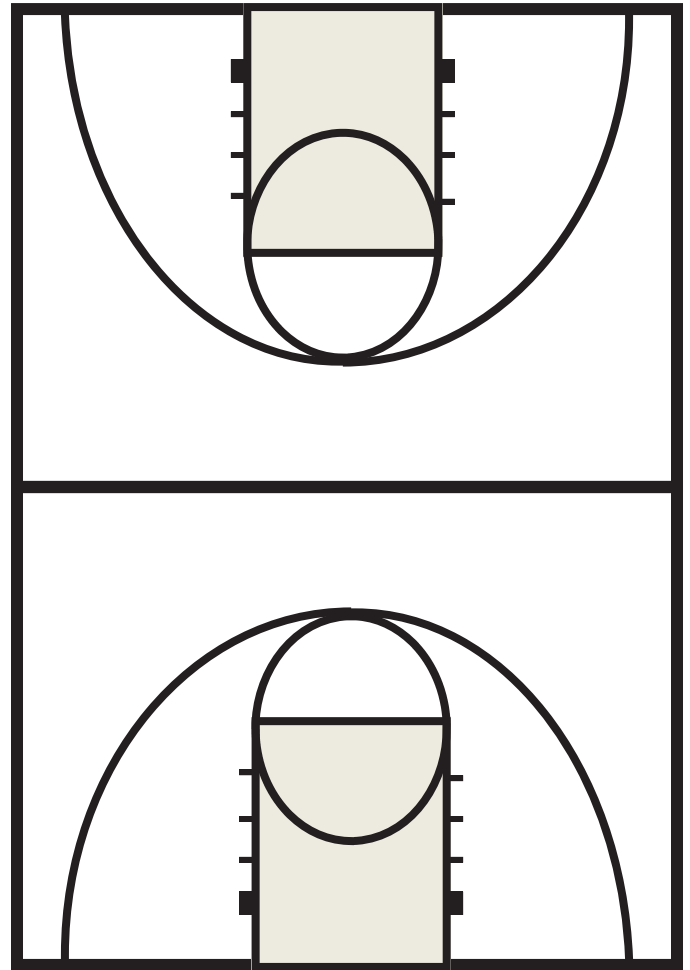
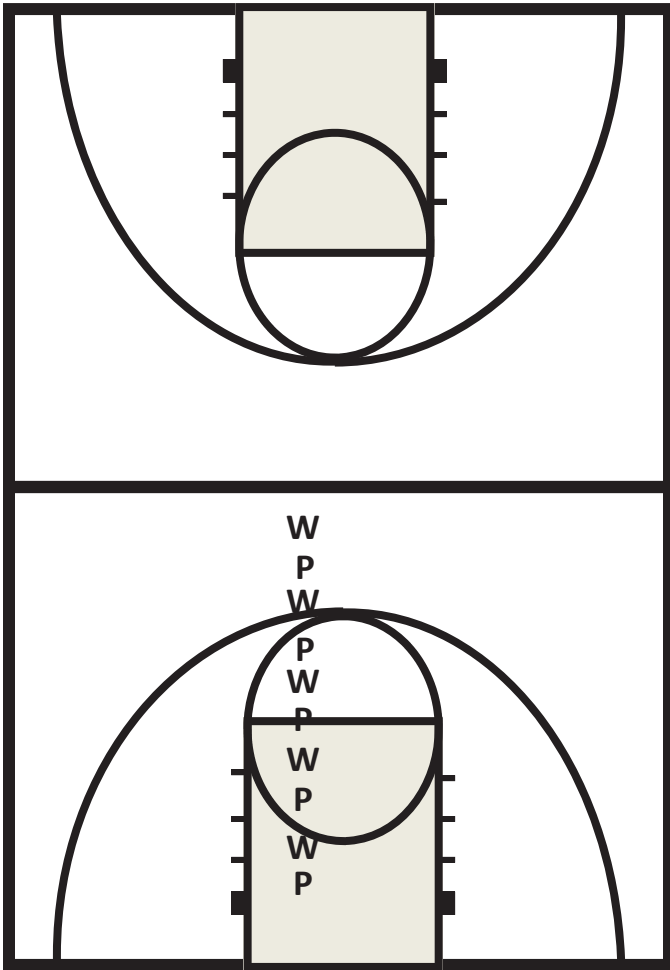
PURPLE team SPRINTS back, gets AHEAD of the BALL, BUILDS a WALL, and gets on assignment.

WHITE team tries to score as quickly as possible. We don't usually work on our early offensive attack but it is an option should you choose.

Make drill competitive by keeping score and flipping from offense to defense equal times.

To add variation, we will designate one player to touch the baseline before retreating to defense. We will also have a coach with a ball to throw to offense rather than having them pick it up off the floor to speed up the attack.

**TIP DRILL**



Drill begins with teams divided into two colors... Purple and White for the Huskies.

The are lined up alternating colors in a line stretching toward half court. The ball is being tipped off the glass with players going from front of line to back of the line.

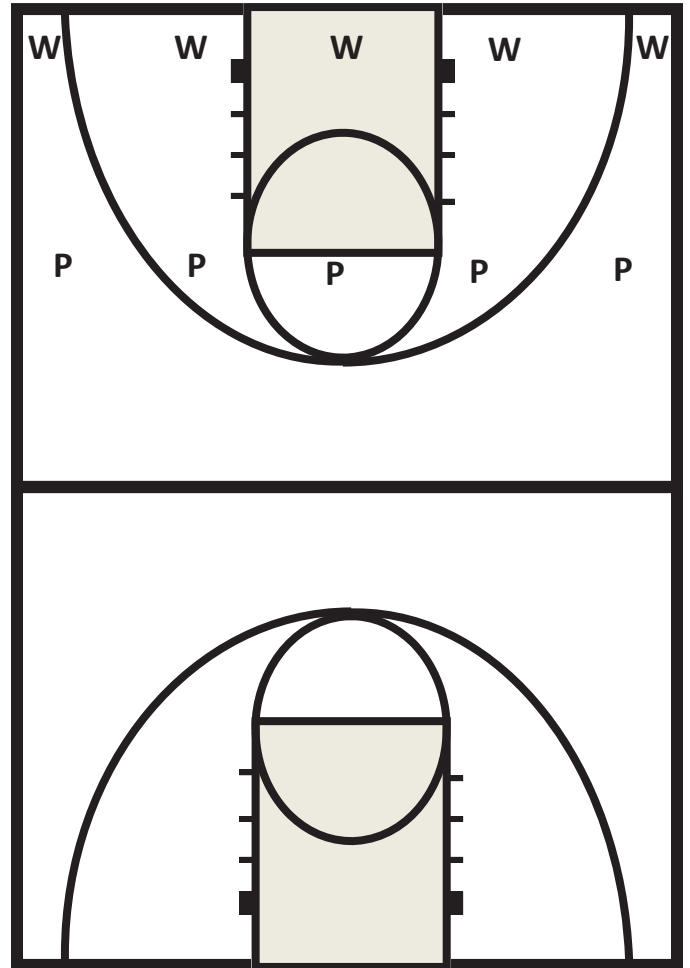
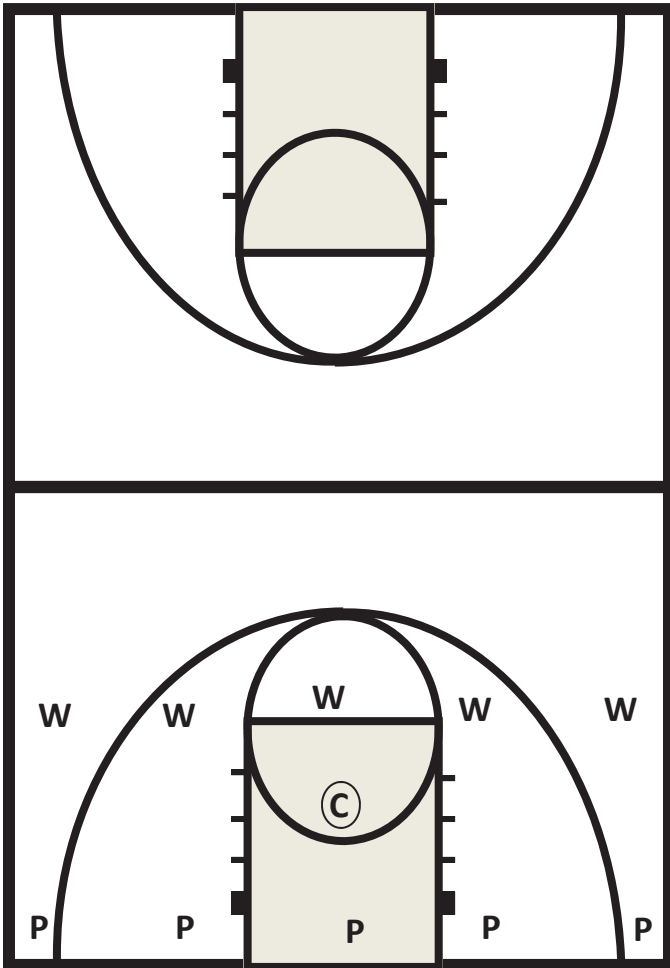
On the whistle the player with the ball becomes offense with the rest of her colored team. The opposite team retreats in TRANSITION defense as they attack.

Repeat on other end.

For variation, we tip in circular motion. For variation, we will designate a certain number of players to already be back in transition. For variation, we predetermine a certain number of players to touch the sideline or baseline before they can retreat to defensive. All designed to force communication.

To make competitive, score the drill with losers having a consequence.

**PUSH DRILL**



Drill begins with teams divided into two colors... Purple and White for the Huskies.

White lined up free throw line extended side line to side line. Purple along baseline side to side.

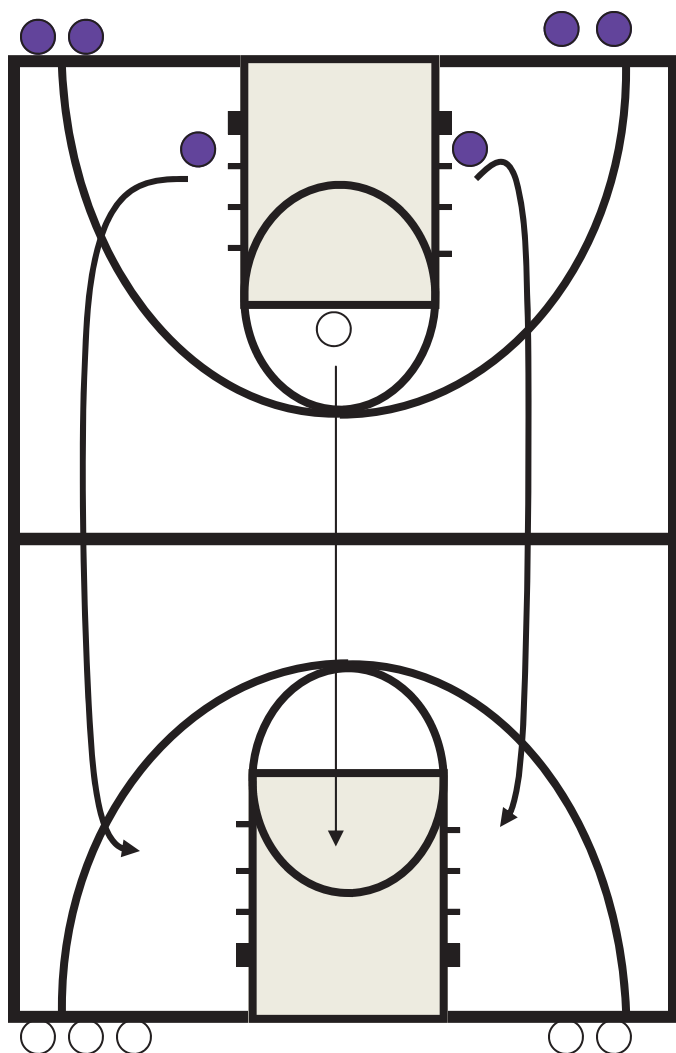
Coach with the ball. Coach passes ball to Purple player while calling out the name of at least one white team player. That player must touch baseline before coming back onto defense. Repeat coming back with teams flipped.

Variations: Offensive team runs on offensive set until they score, the coach then gives ball to a purple player who begins the offensive attack.

Competitive: Score it with each team getting equal number of possessions on offense and defense.



**PROGRESSIVE FASTBREAK**

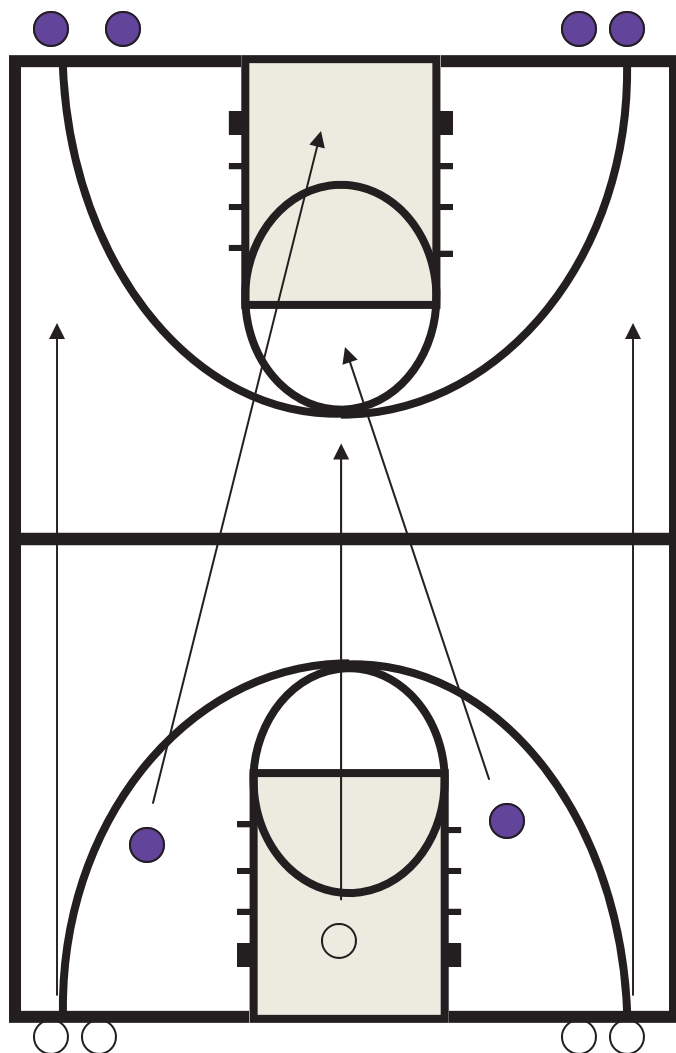


Great drill for teaching transition offense and defense simultaneously. Also stresses importance of making FT's, taking advantage of "numbers" situations.

Divide team into two colors. Try to get even number of guards and forwards if possible but not critical. We score the drill as a normal game with 1s, 2s, and 3s.

White team player attempts a FT. Two Blue defenders play the make/miss. The white player who attempted FT retreats into a 2 on 1 defensive situation against the two blue players.

They play the possession until a basket is scored or the defensive player comes up with the stop.



Once the possession is complete without stopping the action, two additional white team players come from the baseline to join the original white team player as they attack the two blue team players who are retreating into a 3-on-2 advantage/disadvantage situation. Complete this possession then without stopping add TWO blue team players and they attack in a 4-on-3 situation... this continues until you have built it into a 5-on-5 situation. At the completion of the 5-on-5, start again with BLUE team player attempting a FT.

We like to play until each player on each team has attempted a FT or to a certain number of total points. The main thing is that each team has equally number of opportunities to score.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

With the basics of our half court scheme and the basics of our transition defensive philosophy we are almost ready to play a full game. One concept that we need to install the basics of is our BOB defense (Baseline Out of Bounds).

In women's basketball there are seven basic ways that teams score:

- 1) Transition
- 2) Offensive Rebounding
- 3) Free Throws
- 4) Penetration
- 5) Ball Screens
- 6) Half court actions with cuts/screens
- 7) BOB plays

We have enough of our philosophy in place to compete for 40 minutes against the first 6 ways, but if you do not spend time working on BOB defense you can find yourself losing the special situations aspect of a game and in turn losing the game.

Just like our Transition philosophy and Pack philosophy, we have a very specific plan to take away scoring opportunities when the ball is being inbounded from dead ball situations.

The very first point we make with our team is that there is never an acceptable time to give up points on bounds plays as we are defending 5 on 4. If you can't stop a teams actions 5 on 4 your defensive identity and culture are soft and you should never expect to be a good defensive team. With that thought in firmly ingrained in your players heads they will adapt an attitude and have an awareness every time there is a BOB play. Too many teams don't address this as a special situation and therefore do not prepare a plan of attack or practice them. This awareness starts the second a dead ball situation occurs. Our team rallies and organizes quickly before the offense does so that we are never susceptible to quick entry passes for easy baskets. Organizing early also allows our players to begin communicating early so that they can best anticipate actions.

The second concept of our BOB philosophy is **STICKS**. This is our language that has dual meaning. The first is that the four players on defense who are guarding players inbounds are **DOWN** and **READY** and **STICKS** on their match-up. **DOWN** in a stance with a forearm in the body of their match-up. **READY** with their head on a swivel, anticipating actions of the play from scouting or just general knowledge based on set alignment. **STICKS** is their reminder that when the play is initiated we are **STICKING** to our player... never switching, never helping, never hedging.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

With these four players in **STICKS**, the player defending the inbounder is very vocal calling out alignments and preparing herself for her role. We use our “extra” in a couple of different ways which we will discuss in time, but first we teach them to **HELP IN THE DIRECTION OF THE FIRST CUT**. This concept is self explanatory in that we want our free defender to anticipate the actions of the play and help take away the initial quick hit action. She then quickly recovers and might even be able to help in the direction of the second cutter or action. This also allows her to get back into position in the event the play is designed for the inbounder to be a scoring option after inbounding the ball.

If you study inbounds scoring actions you will quickly see that most quick hit scoring plays are designed to take advantage of players who over help on screens or players who switch... pick the picker actions, double screens with slips, pin actions, straight isolations. With that being the case **WE NEVER HELP** on screens... NEVER, EVER, NEVER... we are **STICKING** on our player. We have our extra playing already helping so this gives us trust in each other and individual accountability.

Being in **STICKS** position, it is very easy for us to go **SECOND** on all screens. This allows makes us very difficult to set screens onto. The only exception we have in the screens is when screens occur that are taking the offensive player away from the basket. In this case we will allow players to use their basketball IQ and go **FOURTH** so as not to be susceptible to secondary actions once the ball is inbounded.

By rule, once the ball is inbounded we are no longer in **STICKS** and we are back to our half court philosophy. This is communicated by inbound defender yelling **BALL-IN** so that we trigger all defenders back into PACK mode.

In certain time/score situations we will put max pressure on the inbounders pass rather than help in the direction of the first cut. The other variation is that with this defender she will help on cuts for three seconds then jump hard onto the ball for the remaining two seconds trying to force a violation or errant pass.

To practice this situation, we use opponents plays to prepare against. We don't EVER run our own plays versus our defense. It hurts our confidence in our own plays when they don't work!!

There are certain BOB special situations (i.e. ahead 3 points with under 2 to play) that we will cover before the first real game of the season and we will address those in a SPECIAL SITUATIONS section of installing the PACK LINE.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

It's at this point where we have tried a couple of different methods as far as introducing new information to our teams. One side of the argument is to begin working on guarding some of the most common actions we tend to defend on our schedule. The opposite of this argument is to begin installing portions of our PACK ATTACK (our change of pace defense). We have done it both ways with pretty much equal effectiveness. The argument is usually solved by what our early season schedule looks like and how quickly your players have picked up on the other aspects of your overall defensive scheme.

For Newsletter purposes, we will begin to install how we defend certain actions that we most often encounter in women's college basketball. You should take a few moments here to reflect on your past seasons and make a few notes. Start with the last game of your season last year. What did the team do offensively that you struggled with the most. Work your way backwards through your losses until you have a working list of areas you struggled to defend through out the season. Turn your attention now to your upcoming schedule. Do you know any patterns or actions some of your early opponents might employ on offense? This should give you solid list to begin working on in your practices.

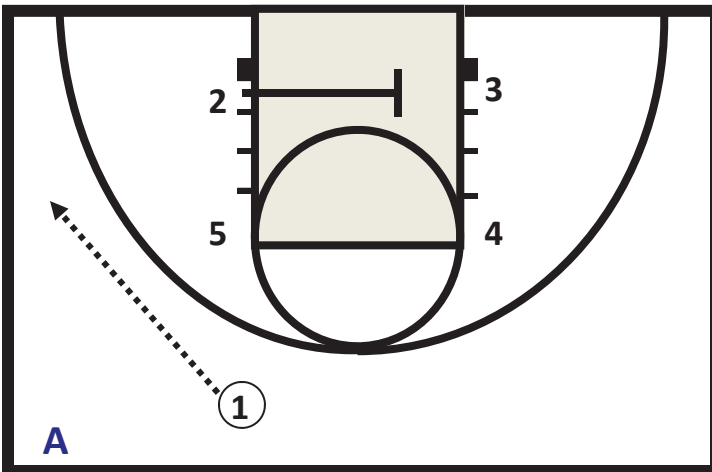
The introduction of these schemes allow you to install your tactics with your **LANGUAGE**. Then as the season progresses it is very easy for your players to draw upon those practices in which these actions were perfected.

For practice purposes and teaching method, we use the whole-part-whole method. We show the entire action 5-on-5. Then break it down into the fewest number of players possible to force us to work with maximum spacing (aka... Worst case scenario). Then go back and build it back up to full 5-on-5.

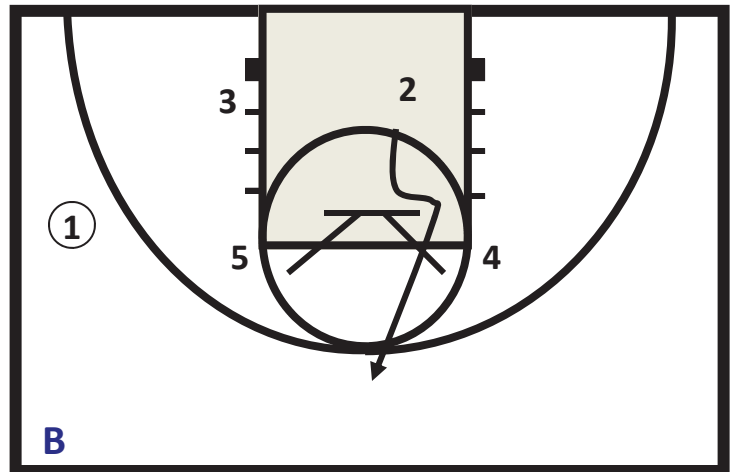
Tell your players that this is base way that you will defend certain actions and that through scouting there might be slight adjustments based on personnel, but this is **WHAT WE DO** when a team tries to execute this action.

Armed with you list of actions to defend and a plan, go to work...

**DEFENDING AMERICA'S PLAY**



- 1 dribbles to the wing
- 2 cross screens block to block for 3



- 3 posts quickly as 2 goes off the 5/4 double screen...
- \*\* it's become popular recently for 2 to cut between the 5 and 4 in an elevator screen action

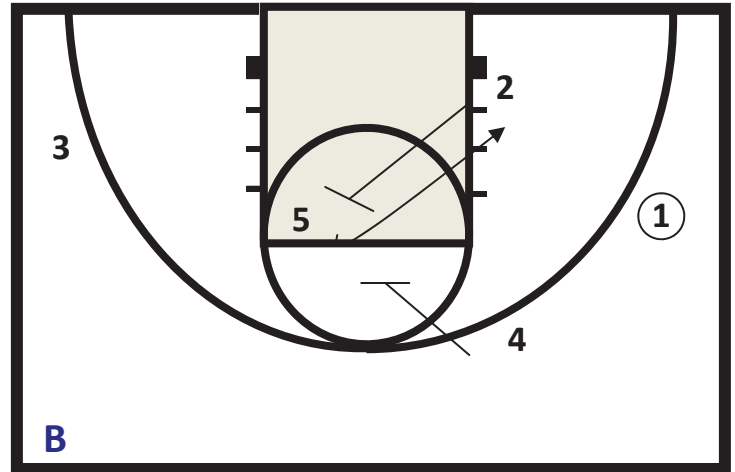
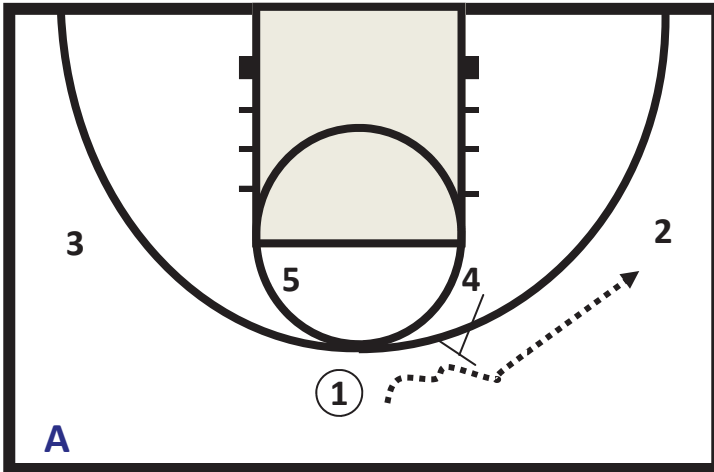
**How We Defend**

- X1 tough on ball make entry pass tough
- X2 calls the screen and protects the basket as long as needed
- X3 gets to the screen, **hit and peel**, recover to chin on shoulder post defense
- X4 is in the middle of paint seeing both
- X5 is as low as needed to help or deny elbow if 5 player is more of threat than 3

- X1 tough on ball make entry pass tough shaded toward baseline forcing action middle
- X2 recovers to cutter and goes second on the double screen action
- X3 maintains chin on shoulder on top side
- X4 is zoned up ready to take any slip action
- X5 steps out to take the top of the double ready to recover to player on the catch

**HIT and PEEL:** Technique we teach that we use mainly on cross screens and some back screens. Person guarding person setting the screen calls the type of screen while also seeing the ball incase there is a drive. Person guarding player using the screen **GETS TO THE SCREEN** (physically goes to the screen before the cutter gets there and feels for the screen with her body and arms). As the cutter uses the screen, our defender **HITS** her with a non extended forearm. She then **PEELS** in the direction that the cutter goes. With our screener defense in the **GAP** position it most often forces the cutter to go low side.

**DEFENDING UP/DOWN**



Lots of teams run this action and get into from several sets... this is from 1-4 high  
5 steps out to ball screen for 1  
1 dribbles 2 out to the wing

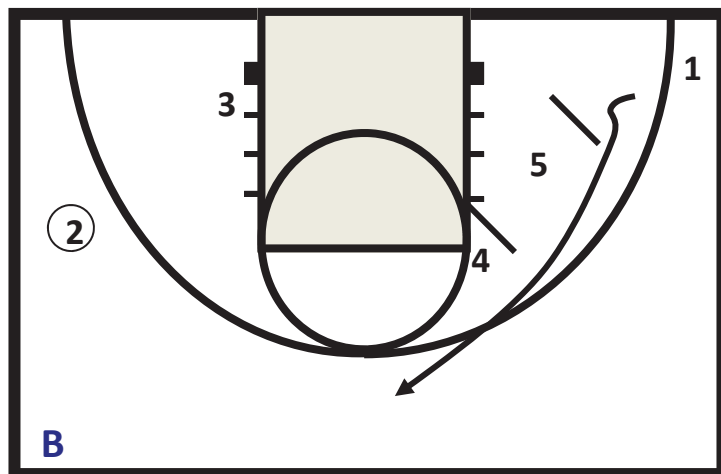
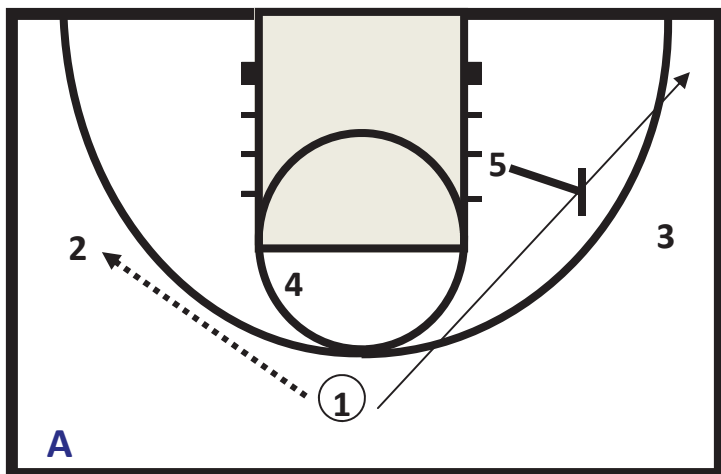
As 1 gets ball to the wing, 2 sets up screen on 5 who posts up...  
4 sets down screen for 2...  
A lot of people end this action with 4 re-screening for 2 as an on-ball if there was no catch and shoot...

**How We Defend**

X1 stays tough on the ball with pressure  
X2 cuts when 2 cuts to back door  
X3 is big in **GAP**  
X4 calls screen and **PLUGS** in case 1 turns corner  
X5 is in **GAP** jumped to ball when dribbled away from her side...

X1 active hands to take away vision of passer and active feet as not to get beat outside as the post area is emptied  
X2 calls the back screen and protects basket as long as needed  
X3 huge in **GAP** with all action in paint  
X4 see's ball and calls the down screen on 2  
X5 gets to the screen by 2, hit and peel to chin on shoulder as she works 5 out of the post  
  
X2 must now read the down screen... We teach them to go 2nd but allow a quick 3rd if they move the screen since X4 is available to be there **ONLY** if the ball is passed to 2 and X2 is hung up...

**DEFENDING BACK STAGGER-DOUBLE**



1 passes to 2 and sprints to weakside corner...

5 drops on the cut to get angle for initial backscreen on 3

**HOW WE DEFEND IT**

X1 goes with cut but stays in pack line

X2 close out and apply ball pressure

X3 gets to the screen, **hit and peel**, recover to chin on shoulder post defense...worst case scenario and we are late she will touch and look on the cut as X5 is protecting...

X4 has jumped to ball

X5 calls back screen, protects as much as needed since stagger is coming and she'll be lowest... Also ready as the lowest person if 2 penetrates

All of the action on the weakside of this play allows you to really protect basket...

X2 is on her own to guard her yard. She can't get beat to the outside on this set with all the action being in the middle

3 posts quickly as 2 goes off the 5/4 stagger....

On 2 to 1 reversal 3 will then come off double screen set by 5 and 4 back to ball side. (this part not diagrammed)

**HOW WE DEFEND IT**

X1 cuts when 1 cuts, 2nd on first screen, read next one (2nd if possible but 3rd if they move it)

X2 Ball pressure

X3 maintains chin on shoulder on top side

X4 has the top of stagger and should be there on catch if X1 gets hung up

X5 is zoned up if anyone slips on the stagger action

On the 2 to 1 Pass

X1 has ball pressure to make any pass tough

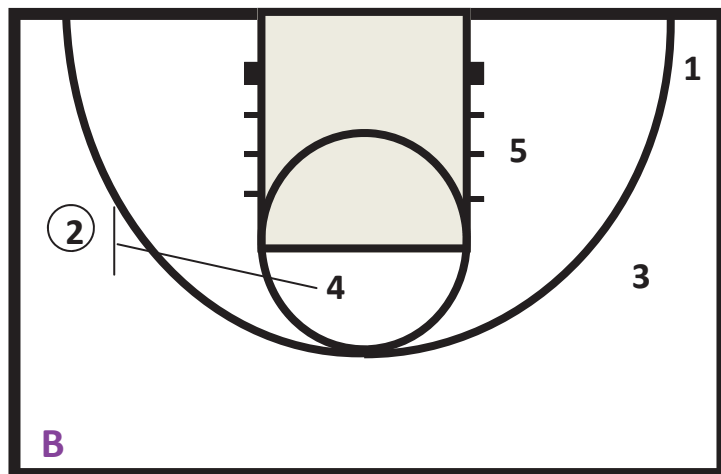
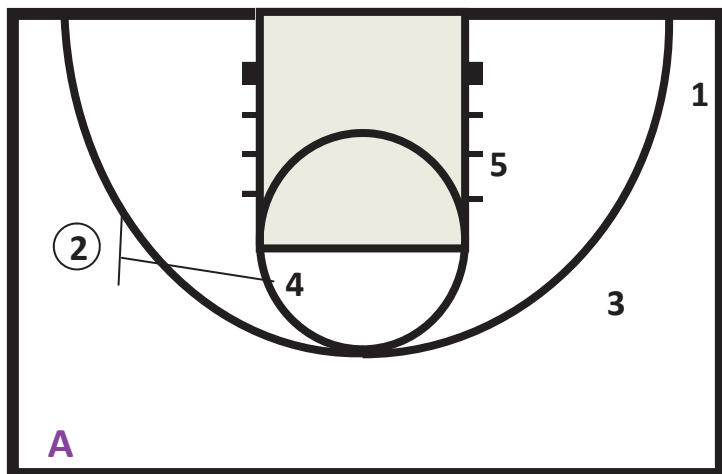
X2 has jumped inside pack line

X3 cuts when 3 cuts going 2nd chasing

X4 is calling Double Screen zoned up for slip

X5 also calling Double Screen and taking away the tight curl by 3

### DEFENDING WING ON-BALL (empty corner)



In this diagram the offense is setting up for a wing ball screen with an empty ball side corner.

Here it is with the 4 player setting the screen on-to the 2 player. The abilities of the 2 and 4 will determine how we play this action.

For this diagram: 2 is a great shooter, 4 is not

#### HOW WE DEFEND IT

X2 jumps to sideline to force ball into screen

X4 calls "ball screen" and sprints to beat screen

X3 is in GAP as is X1 and X5

X4 HEDGES, X2 goes 2nd...

After X4 pushes ball handler two hard dribbles toward the half court line, she recovers to her player and X2 gets the ball under control.

X3 being heavy in GAP gives the ball handler no room to drive it.

Same as first diagram.

Here 2 is a great shooter and 4 is also

#### HOW WE DEFEND IT

X2 jumps to sideline to force ball into screen

X4 calls "ball screen" and sprints to beat screen

X3, X1, X5 are in the GAP

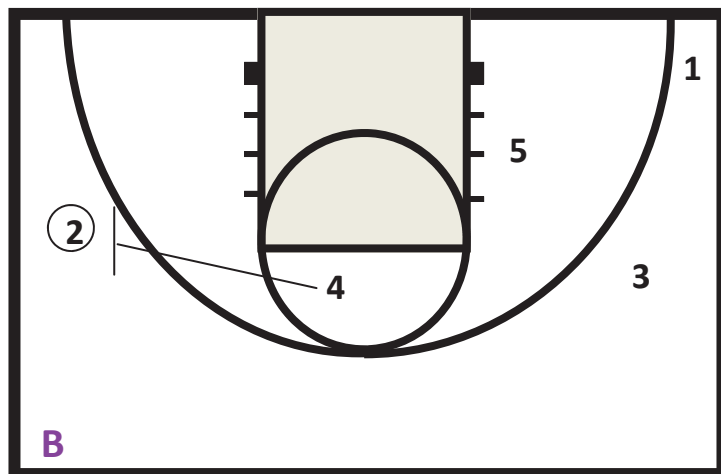
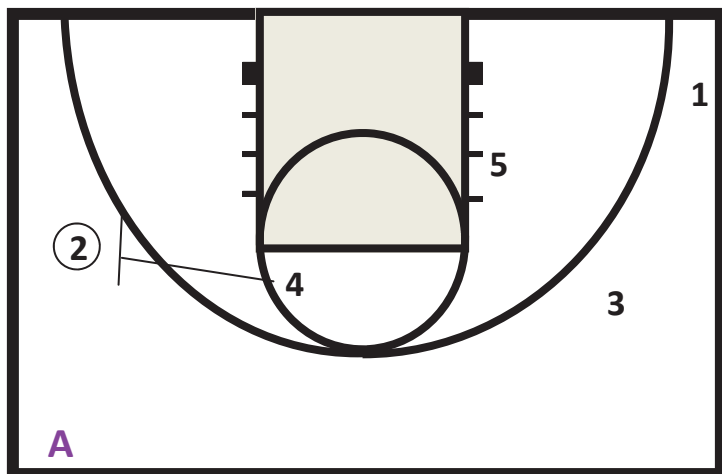
X4 HEDGES, X2 goes 2nd...

As X4 Hedges and X2 goes 2nd, a great shooting 4 player usually slips to space on the arc. In this case X5 communicates "X" to X4. X5 sprints out to take the slipping 4 player.

X3 and X1 being in the GAP are already providing help with the positioning but now are heavy watching the ball to help on 5 player until X4 can recover to the 5.



### DEFENDING WING ON-BALL (empty corner)



For this diagram: 2 is NOT shooter, 4 is not

Here 2 is NOT great shooter, 4 is a great shooter

#### HOW WE DEFEND IT

- X2 jumps to force ball into the screen
- X4 calls "ball screen" and sprints to beat screen
- X3, X1, X5 are in the GAP

With 2 being a NON shooter, X4 PLUGS. We teach X2 to 2nd but can go 3rd if they move the screen lower.

This attack contains a non shooting, driving guard and allows us to maximize pressure and run shot clock down.

#### HOW WE DEFEND IT

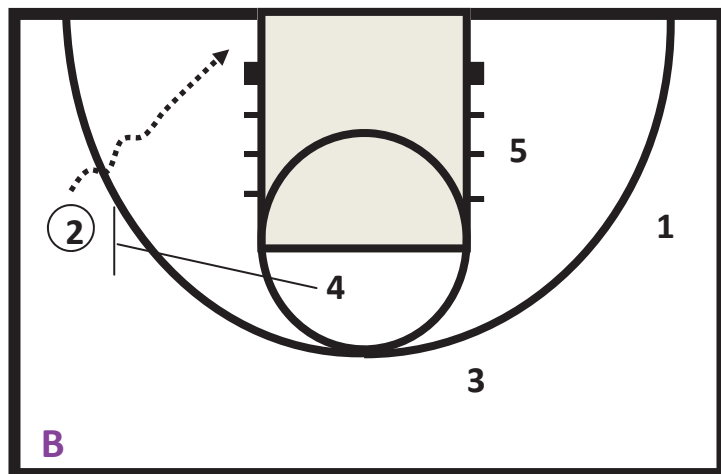
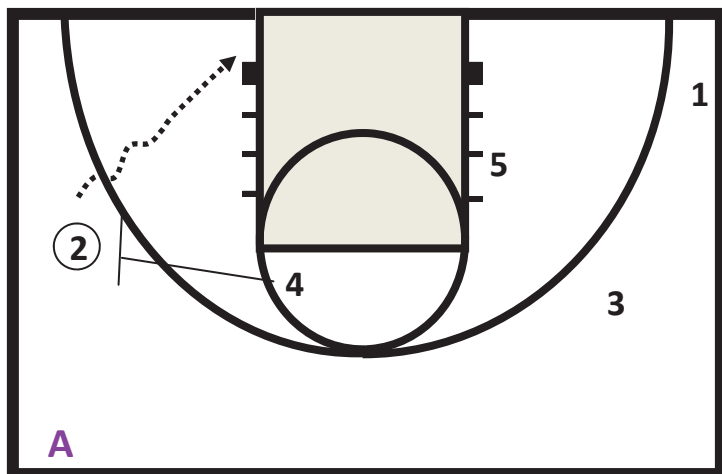
- X2 jumps to sideline to force ball into screen
- X4 calls "ball screen" and sprints to beat screen
- X3, X1, X5 are in the GAP

This personnel is an automatic 4th situation for us

With 2 not being a shooter, the offense is trying to get us to forget about the great shooting 4 player.

Going 4th negates that action and still allows us to control a good driving 2 player without having to work on rotations or provide early help anywhere.

### DEFENDING WING ON-BALL (empty corner)



We will work on the situation in which X2 does get beat outside for teaching purposes but all X2's know if this happens they are coming out!!

#### HOW WE DEFEND IT

X2 blows their assignment and allows 2 player to beat her outside (reject the screen in other defensive terminology).

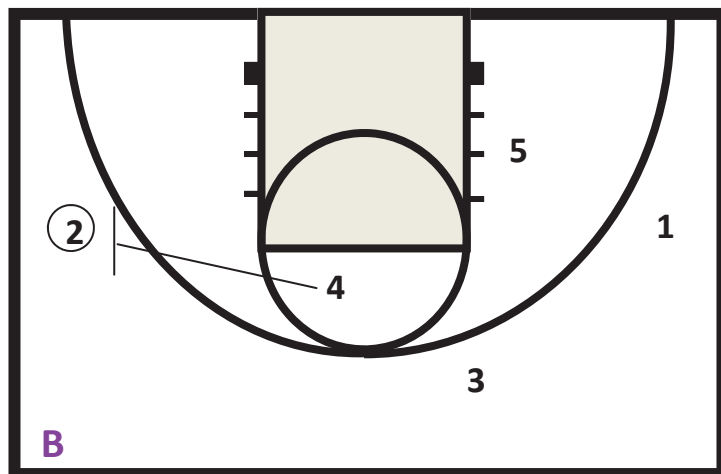
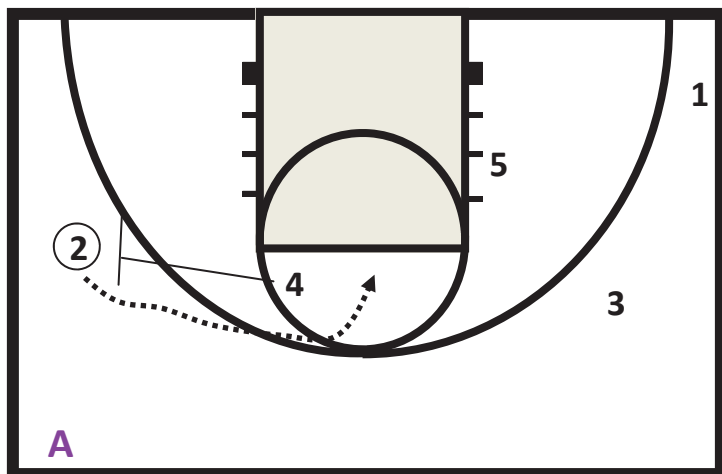
It is in this case that we teach the **LOWEST PERSON** in the **GAP** to provide help onto the ball.

In this alignment it is most likely X1 but she and X5 must be communicating to make sure they are both aware of who is lowest.

The lowest person must get to ball handler before they reach the **POST** area and force ball to be picked up. X2 had better be fighting to get back in position and defend the ball after the dribble is picked up. With X1 rotating to **HELP**, X5 can stay on the post player around the basket. X3 must then get to the **LEVEL OF THE BALL** and be ready to take the first pass out as X1 is recovering.

In the case that X5 was lowest as in the B diagram, X1 is responsible for getting on top of the 5 player around the basket as X5 is helping on the penetration. X3 is again responsible for the first pass out.

### DEFENDING WING ON-BALL (empty corner)



The other situation that we will work on that we hope rarely occurs in a game situation is IF the ballhandler using the screen draws help from GAP defender as she uses the screen.... Poor **HEDGE**, bad **PLUG**, or miss communication.

#### HOW WE DEFEND IT

Something goes wrong with X2 or X4 in the ball screen action and the 2 player attacks the paint and draws the GAPPED defender X3...

X3 dodges and fakes to make the ballhandler pick up the ball.

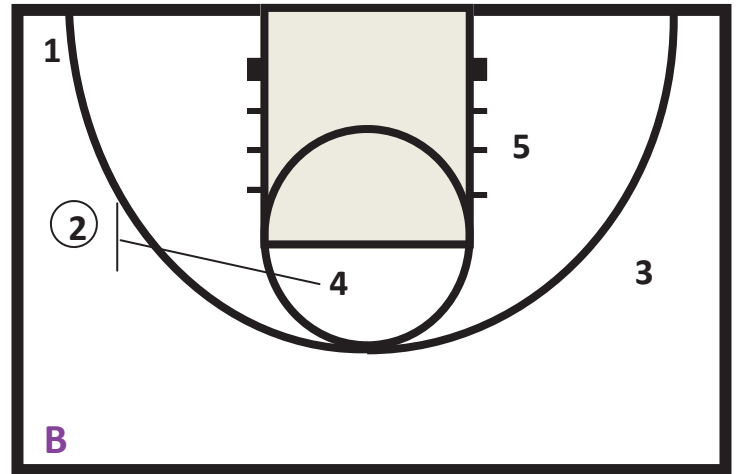
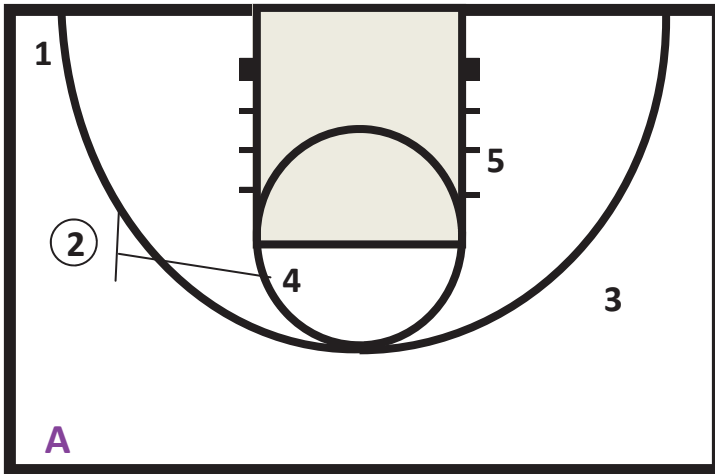
X1 provided **EARLY HELP**. This is the action of moving a couple of steps higher than her normal GAP position so that she can play both the 1 and the 3 offensive players as X3 is recovering from her HELP.

Some defenses refer to this as Help the Helper. For us it's **EARLY HELP**.

The key aspect of all these "rotations" is that they are minimized by being the proper position to start with and also moving on the airtime of any pass to the next proper position.

When we are moving as a **PACK**, these actions are a thing of beauty even though we hope they rarely happen.

**DEFENDING WING ON-BALL (occupied corner)**



In this diagram the offense is setting up for a wing ball screen with an occupied ball side corner.

All of our actions with X2 and X4 are the same as empty corner again based on the personnel that is using the screen. Here we diagram 1 being in the corner but it could be any player.

**HOW WE DEFEND IT**

X2 jumps to sideline to force ball into screen as there is no where for them to drive it to outside

X4 calls "ball screen" and sprints to beat screen

X3 is in GAP as is X1 and X5

X4 HEDGES, PLUGS, or goes 4th

X2 goes 2nd, 3rd, or 4th.

The presence of X1 in the GAP on ball side allows her to provide **EARLY HELP** on an X4 roll or Step Out. **EARLY HELP** is provided by X1 who dodges and fakes between 1 and 4.

This action again strings out the offensive action and eliminates direct passes that lead to baskets.

It is with an occupied corner that we get VERY aggressive from time to time and TRAP the ball screen action. Have a special call for this play that you can vary from game to game to keep opponents guessing. We have called it MOUSE, FIRE, STORM, FLOOD in the past. One season we used the mascot of our opponent.

**HOW WE DEFEND IT**

X2 jumps to sideline to force ball into screen

X4 calls "ball screen" and sprints to beat screen

X3, X1, X5 are in the **GAP**

As 2 uses the ball screen, X4 meets her in a stance and actively pushes toward half court AND the sideline. X2 aggressively closes the TRAP.

X1 takes away the most direct pass back to 4 or back to 1. X5 and X3 are "zoned up" looking for any pass out of the TRAP.

We expect any tipped or deflected pass to be stolen and turned into a transition basket.

This action is the first component of our PACK ATTACK which we will begin to introduce now.

## PACK LINE DEFENSE

Before we begin to introduce some components of PACK ATTACK, let's take a quick inventory and revamp a couple of things that you have been doing daily up until this point.

Hopefully by now your team is developing some very good habits. Their CLOSE-OUTS are solid. Their COMMUNICATION is loud and enthusiastic. They have begun to master the WALL UP concept. They can adjust to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th calls on the fly. Your FULLBACK and HALFBACK are consistent in their efforts to sprint back to POINT and TALK. They build walls in GAPS and are really starting to develop a culture of toughness.

You as a coach should be noticing in your other drills and scrimmages that your team has begun to do these three things:

- 1) Eliminate transition lay-ups
- 2) Drastically decreased your number of fouls
- 3) Limit the number of uncontested shots the offense is getting

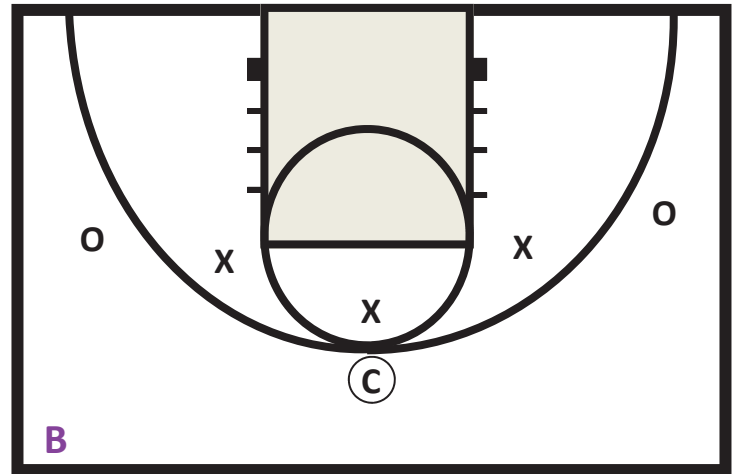
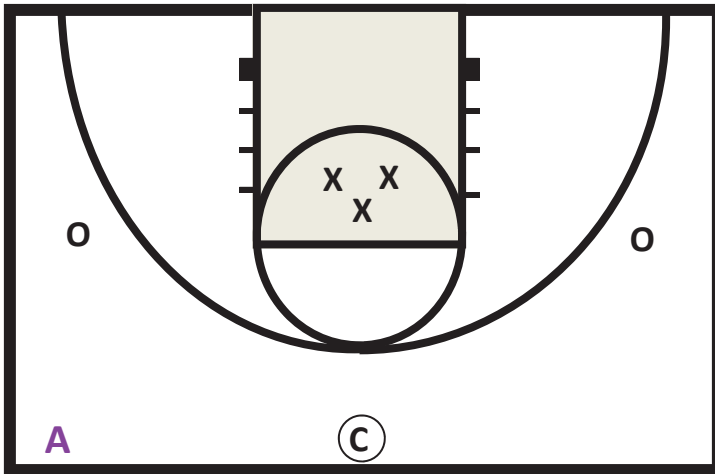
It is probably at this point too, that you are growing VERY frustrated with your team's offense execution!! If you have, then your PACKLINE is working. This is THE exact effect you want. YOUR OFFENSE can't score on YOUR DEFENSE!! Some coaches panic at this point. Some coaches begin to think they need to work on their offense more. Some coaches begin to worry they won't be able to score enough points to win games. DON'T BE THAT COACH.

This is a GOOD thing.

In fact, through the years we have learned NOT to run our set actions against OUR defense so that we don't lose confidence in them. To combat this, use a practice squad if you have one. Use a JV team or simply just put some offense in that you know some of your opponents will use against you. Whatever you decide, make sure you take this frustration as a compliment and also as a sign of how difficult your team is going to be come tourney time!!

I would also guess that you have now been doing many of the same drills for a couple of straight weeks. It's time to introduce a couple of new drills teach the same things you have been but with a new twist. Keep it fresh. This will energize your team and they will never know that you are really just working on the same techniques that you have been.

**HUSKY CLOSEOUTS**



Great drill to work on Close-outs, GAPS, guarding the ball, and rebounding. Also morphs into a good transition defense/offense drill.

**HUSKY CLOSEOUTS**

Three defensive players begin with both feet in the paint. Coach with ball around the half court line.

Coach initiates drill with a dribble that defenders react to by picking up the ball before it is dribbled to the arc and the other two by getting to their **GAPS**. Coach passes the ball to one of the wings and defense adjusts. Offense rules are that only the ball handler can attack inside the three point arc and no ball screens.

The ball is passed and dribbled until Coach is satisfied with defense. Coach takes a shot. Both offensive players crash the boards hard. Coach does not rebound as they are the “get back girl” for the other team. Her defender sprints to the LOGO to get any loose ball, tipped rebound.

The three original defenders now go in transition offense against the two original offensive players.

Now you can work both sides of the ball as you teach your **TRANSITION DEFENSE** concepts as well as work your offensive players on making good decisions in a 3 on 2 situation.

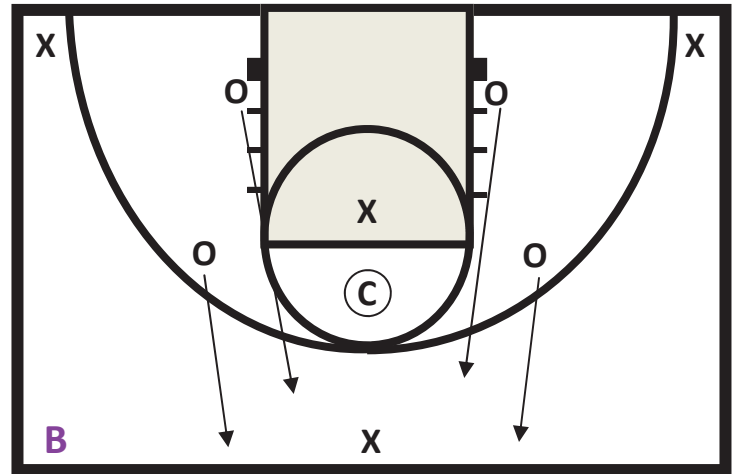
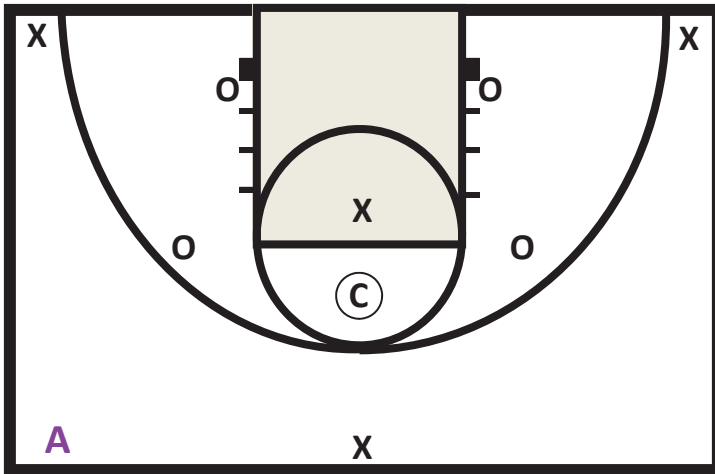
Flip it over on other end and recycle the drill.

You can make this drill competitive by scoring it.

You can build it up into 4 on 3 as well.

This drill can replace **CHAIR CLOSEOUTS** or **VEGAS CLOSEOUTS** for a couple of practices.

**TURNOVER TRANSITION**



Designed to work on transition situations off turnovers rather than rebounds. A teams ability to organize quickly to stop easy basket is key.

**TURNOVER TRANSITION**

Two offensive players on the block and two offensive players a step off the elbow.

A defensive player in each corner, one on the nail, one at half court.

Coach with ball initiates drill by dropping it to any of the offensive players. Offense scoops the ball and attacks in transition.

Defenders must **SPRINT** back. **POINT** and **TALK**. Get **ON ASSIGNMENT**.

This drill can replace Change Drill, Tip Drill, Get Back, and Push.

Easy to make competitive with scoring system and easy to tweak to work specific types of turnovers that might be plaguing your squad.

## PACK ATTACK

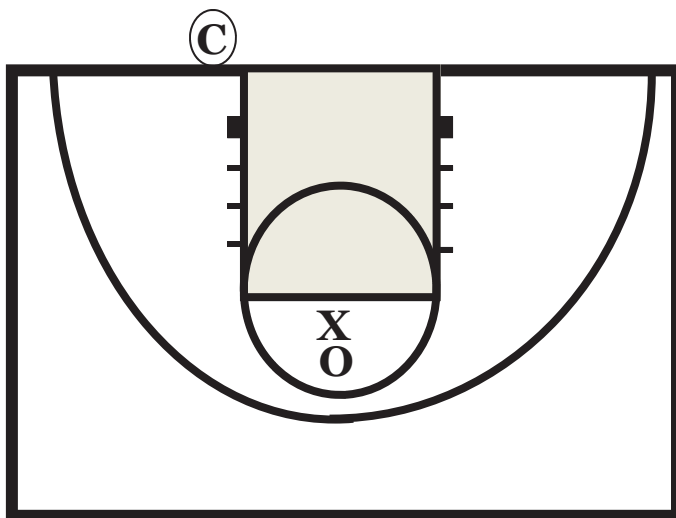
**PACK ATTACK** is our language for our change up defense. Rather than tweak aspects of our basic PACK LINE into a more pressurized scheme, we teach a completely separate tactical plan. We feel this allows our players to separate them in their minds eliminating confusion and keeping accountability much more consistent. We are either in a PACK LINE situation or a PACK ATTACK situation. There is no gray area. It is cut and dry.

We use the word ATTACK because this is our defense we employ when we are trying to aggressively turn our opponent over for easy baskets. We want our players in ATTACK mode. This defense can be used if we are trying to change the tempo of a game, as an element of surprise, or as a come from behind defense. Which ever the case may be, we want our players to be able to switch their thinking seamlessly.

The first phase of the ATTACK is the introduction of a full court press. We typically use this after a made FT or a dead ball situation in the back court.

There is nothing earth shattering about our plan. We want to apply great pressure on the inbounds passer and deny any initial entry pass. Our initial thoughts are very similar to those we expressed in our earlier discussion on BOB plays. We want our players to be **DOWN AND READY** and in **STICKS** position. We will allow some switching as teams attempt to entry the ball. It is something that requires great communication and practice time. It is always our goal to force a five second violation or a turnover.

We begin with a very basic drill of one on one deny. Since we don't work on denying passes in the half court, this is a completely new concept in our practices. As with all our drills we try to teach "worst case scenarios" or "hardest possible situation" so that games are easy. This is all we teach on Day 1 of the PACK ATTACK.



Coach with the ball.

Defense in STICKS position.

Offense has entire half court to get open

Defense must deny any direct entry

Lob passes are not allowed

If defense steals inbounds they attack the basket and finish (without defense).

We want to instill quick score mentality.

Then jump right back into denial.

We will add a second offensive and defensive player to allow them to begin working on communication of switches. We do not progress from this drill until we can effectively DENY entry.



## PACK ATTACK

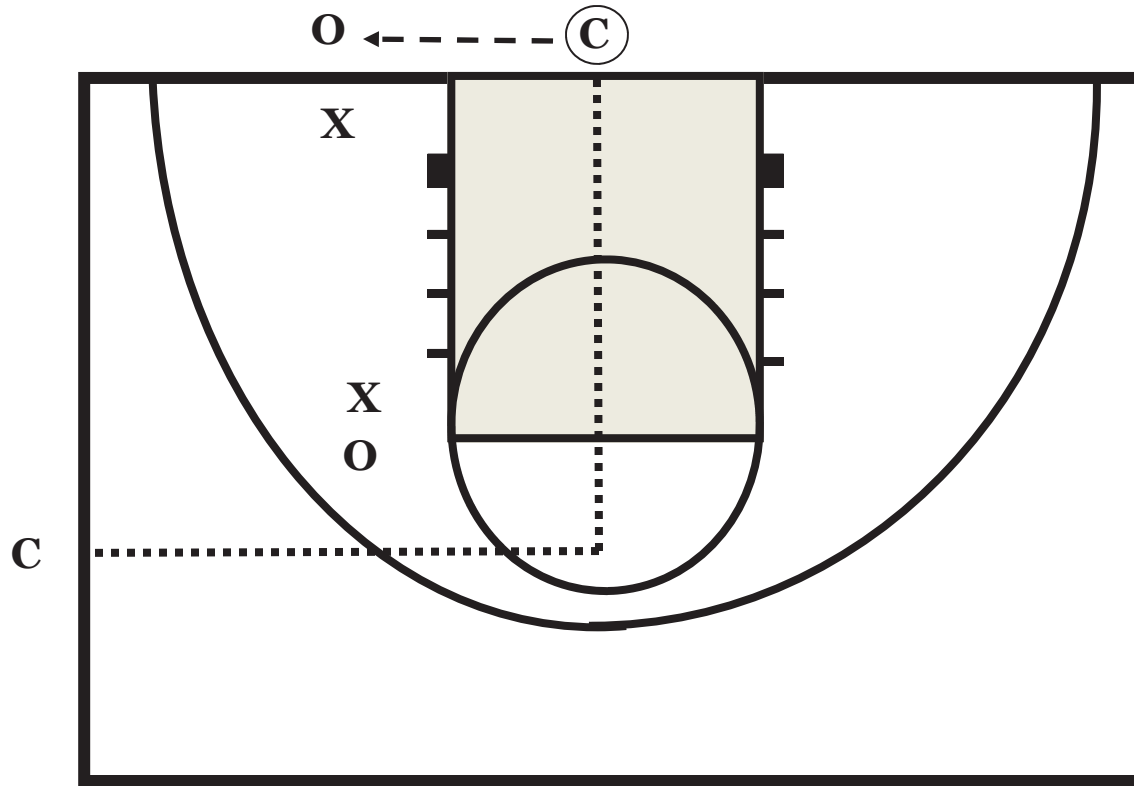
With our initial mindset installed for the **PACK ATTACK** mentality, we are ready to start building on that and toward 5-on-5 situations. Today, we add the element of pressure on the inbound passer. In time, we will have four different ways we defend the inbound passer but we begin with the theme of staying in our ATTACK mode... intense ball pressure.

As mentioned earlier, we employ the full court on full court dead ball situations in which the inbound passer is NOT allowed to run the baseline. We put our tallest, most athletic player in this role. Ideally, it's your 4 player with size, long arms, leaping ability, great timing, and high energy. In the absence of all these traits, err on the side of energy. An energetic player on the ball can greatly effect the success of your press. Depending on who the offense designates to be the inbound passer, your other four players must quickly match up to their most logical match-ups. This most often is simply solved by having your 3 and 5 player communicate so that we best match with the opponents press break attack. We will get to drilling that later, but for now we simply let your designated player work on their skills of pressuring and tipping balls.

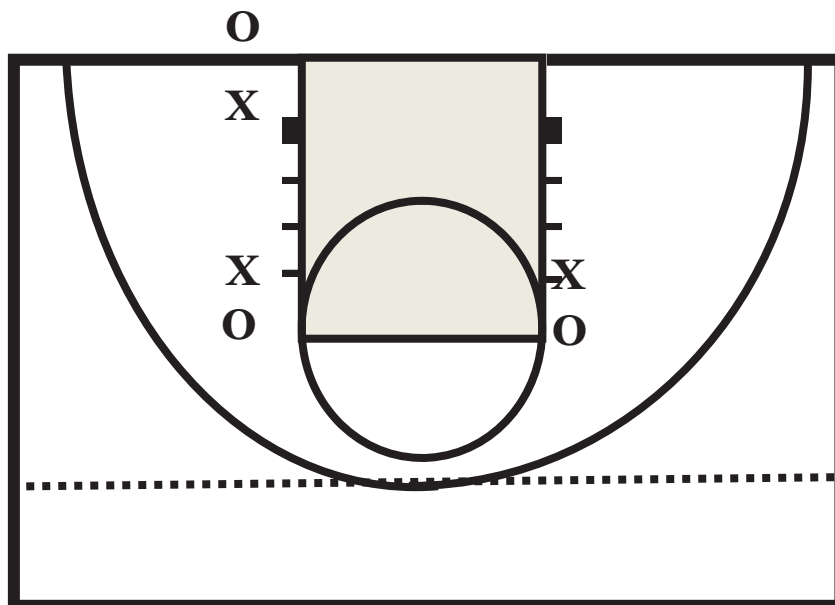
We use the drill on the next page to teach this. Divide team in two colors. One team on offense and one will be on defense for five possessions then we will flip it over. Since we are building from 2-on-2, we shrink the court a little. Place a Coach or Manager or even players from the defense team in position to make sure the offensive player does not receive and entry pass outside our designated area. Coach will toss the ball to inbound passer as if she were an official so inbound defender can work on timing her pressure. I will begin counting as soon as the passer touches the ball and continue the count until the ball is successfully inbounded. It's the defenses goal to deny the entry pass as long as possible!! Even though 5 seconds creates a violation we reward the defense by letting them continue denying as long as possible. The defense is awarded a POINT for each second they deny the successful inbound pass. Making the idea for the defense to pressure and deny as long as possible which we hope in time eliminates the natural response to losing focus as the five second count nears. The defense is also rewarded with a bonus score IF they force a turnover. This keeps your offensive team from trying to "beat the drill" by risking an inbound pass that could be stolen. If we steal the inbounds pass, we start from drill #1 teaching them to take it to score. If they steal it, they lay the ball in and the offense must inbound the ball again still counting as the same possession... This rule is important in keeping your offense from just quickly trying to inbound the ball in few seconds.

Each team gets five possessions on defense and we determine a winner.

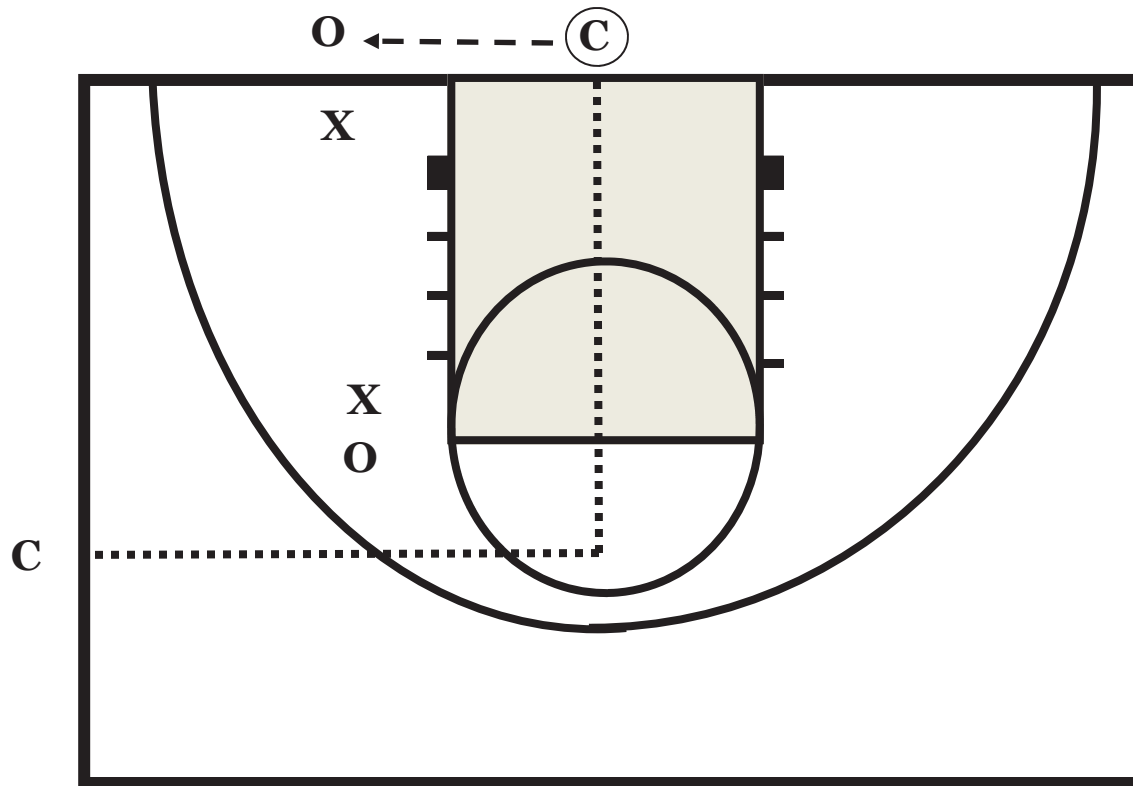
**PACK ATTACK**



Next we will add another offensive player and another defensive player. We expand the CATCH area slightly but the rules will be the same. For teaching purposes, we will tell the two offensive players where they will start and how they will initially try to get open. Teams normally run a stack/pop or a screen/roll scenario. This does give the advantage to the defense but allows us to teach how we guard specific actions that we see during the season. As the year progresses, we will eliminate this advantage from the defense and allow the offense to do whatever they want to get themselves open.



**PACK ATTACK**



Our next building block is to switch our pressure ATTACK of the inbound defender. Again, we go back to our 2-on-2 framework to begin introducing and drilling.

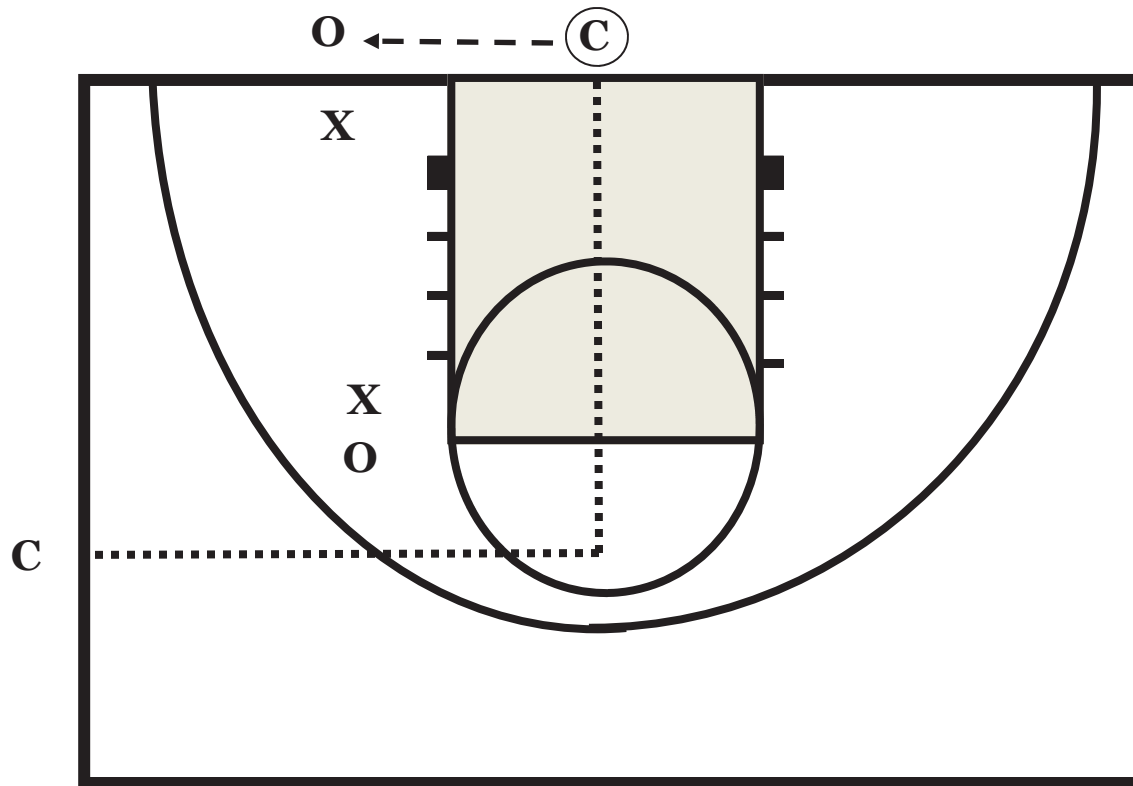
The variation teaches the inbound defender to turn and deny cuts rather than apply pressure to the inbound passer.

This action keeps the inbound passer guessing and also changes how teams must break your pressure.

As the coach is tossing the ball to the inbound passer, the inbound defender turns and helps her teammate deny the entry pass to the offensive player. We use the same GAME rules to make this a competitive situation.

Again we build this drill into a 3 v 3, 4 v 4, and 5 v 5 situation as the year progresses. We can introduce specific press break actions that we routinely defend and through scouting ones that might be utilized by upcoming opponents.

**PACK ATTACK**



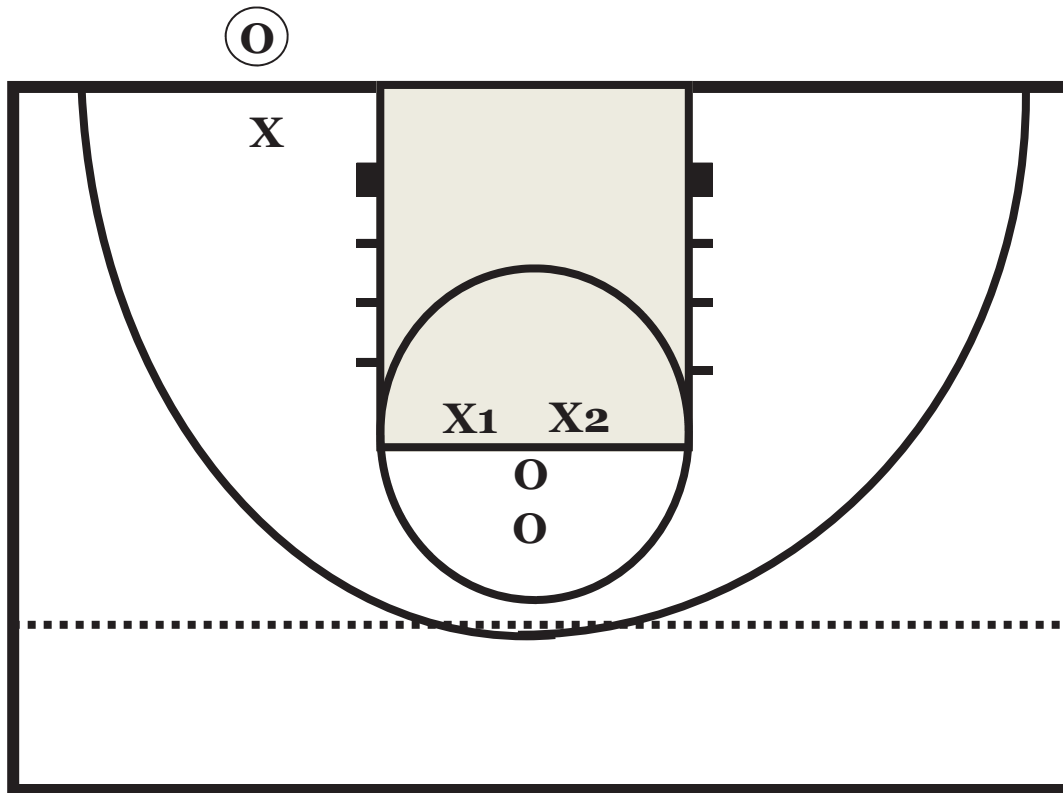
The last two tactics we introduce are the same actions just performed in opposite sequence of each other.

Tactic One: The inbound defender turns around and denies the cutters as we just drilled for the first three seconds of the count. She then turns and puts intense on ball pressure for the remaining seconds of the count. Not only does this hopefully disrupt and distract the inbound passer, it will also sometimes effect her location on the court. If you are a team that presses every possession, you will notice the inbound passer continually backing up further and further from the baseline. If you don't have a wall or a line of cheerleaders there you will see them back up as far as the band!! When we had Amber Harris at Xavier on the ball, players would be 8-10 feet behind the line. Each step she takes back the more time our defenders guarding cutters have to react to passes. If the inbound passer notices there is no one contesting her, she may inch closer to the line and then be more effected by our pressure as the count gets late forcing her into a pressured, quick decision.

Tactic Two: The inbound starts on the ball for the first three seconds then turns and denies.

These variations don't allow a team to get comfortable against your attack. They require your opponents to prepare for each scenario in their scouting preparation. They require a lot of your opponents than they require of you in practice time. And when you mix them up effectively during a game you are well on your way to having a strong base for your PACK ATTACK.

**PACK ATTACK: Defending Stack and Go**



The first action we work against is the STACK and GO attack that many teams use to break presses. The offense gets into a two player stack and through some form of communication, one breaks in one direction and the other goes opposite. They could utilize some screening sequence as well.

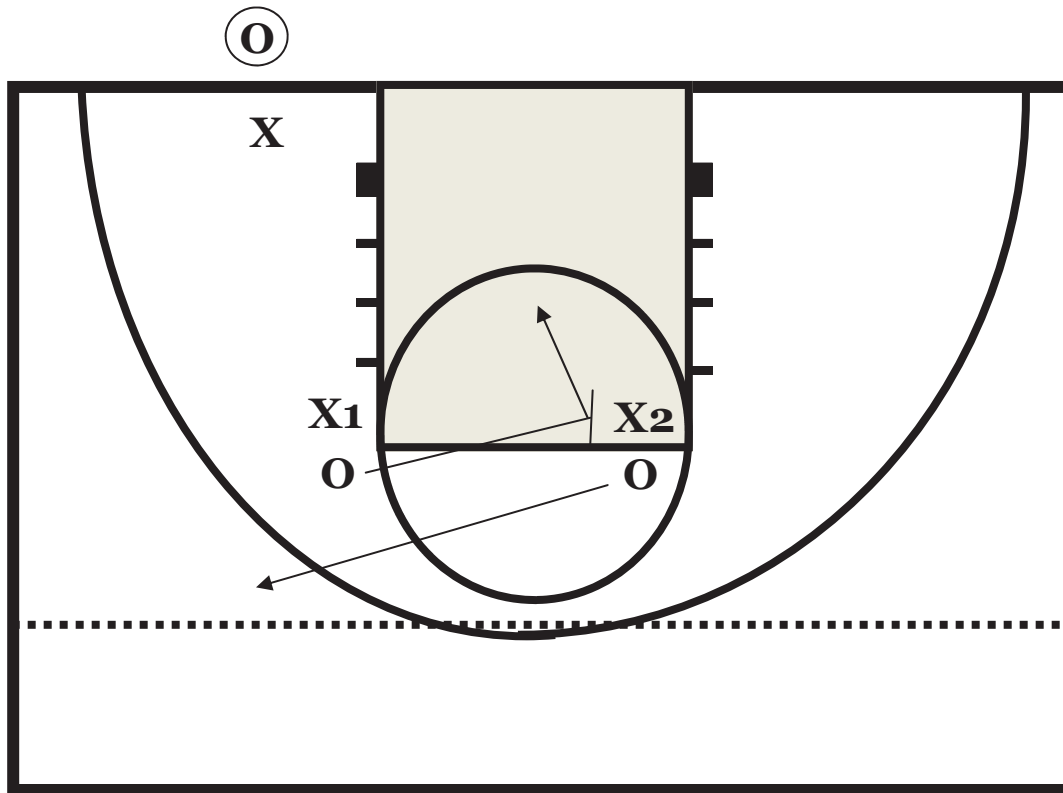
Either we, we teach/drill our players to communicate as well. X1 will take first cutter in their direction. This means X2 must TOUCH the second offensive player and deny. If she doesn't go TOUCH, then it will be very difficult to deny if this player might break long or in the same direction of the first cutter.

Through clear communication and practice you should expect successful denial from this set 8 out of 10 times.

You can allow on ball defender to experiment with their tactics. Historically this is a quick hitting entry, so I recommend either the full pressure or the turn and deny. The hybrid method works best on slower entry attacks.

We use the dotted line only when working three on three to keep inbound pass from being a simple lob that one of our other players might have a chance to intercept or deflect.

**PACK ATTACK: Defending Screen and Roll**



This is the second most common break we face. The offensive team utilize a screen across/ seal and roll tactic to break our pressure against the switch. When executed properly against an unaware defender this can be very effective.

Through drilling we feel we prepare our players to defend it better than they normally would. We teach X2 to be aware of the roll action and give the freedom to position herself to best fight around to deny the quick entry.

We also teach the inbound pass defender to angle her body at about the count of 2 and half between the ball and this angle of pass. This is also one of those times we might incorporate the hybrid attack. Time your opponent and see at what count they are looking to feed this roller/pinner and simply turn and take it away with inbound pass defender.

You as a coach through scouting and watching a team's attack early in the game can be very helpful in adjusting your second half attack or maybe how you defend in a late game situation.

Practice them a variety of ways to see what best suits your team and know what works best.

## PACK ATTACK

With our Full Court Attack in place, we next turn to our half court Pack Attack actions. We have used a variety of defenses in the half court as our “change up” over the past seasons. Each year we try to best determine the strengths of our team and try to choose the most appropriate Attack.

This is a defense that we will use 5-10 possessions a game to change tempo, create a turnover, or surprise an opponent. Like the full court attack it can be used in time/score situations as well to protect a lead or overcome a deficit.

Another benefit we find is that opponents must spend some of their valuable preparation time addressing it. If it's only ten minutes of their practice or shoot around, that is ten less minutes they can focus on another aspect of preparation or their own stuff. Simply getting it on film forces a coach to at the very least think about it whether they actually prepare their team for it.

With it not being our primary defense we also will not spend as much time on it during practice so we always choose a defense that can be productive without having to work on it daily. Just like a great pitcher in baseball, we will stick with our best stuff but a change up can make us very difficult to play against.

At Xavier we utilized a 1-3-1 due to the abilities of a 6-5 Amber Harris who we could play on the top and a disciplined Senior point guard, Special Jennings, who patrolled the back line. With various trapping schemes and ability to show zone and go man, we were able to keep teams off balance while creating a couple of easy baskets a game from steals with Amber leading the break to finish in transition. I think the 1-3-1 is a wonderful defense given the proper personnel and will write up the 1-3-1 attack we used there in time, but for now I want to address the Attack we are installing at Washington. I believe it is a defense that fits a more standard personnel set that more teams have. ( I know how rare a 6-5 athlete is in women's basketball)

We were inspired by Russ Davis and his Vanguard team's version of the BUZZ DEFENSE. It's a defense that has been around for years and I first saw Jerry Finkbeiner utilize it with his great teams at Southern Nazarene. He has taken it to Oral Roberts with a great deal of success as well. Russ Davis will tell you it was from facing Jerry's teams that led him to tweaking it to fit his personnel and his style of coaching. Mike Divilbiss also had great success with it at Lewis and Clark State and now uses it at Wisconsin Green Bay. You can find some great video's from these coaches and would encourage you to hear them speak at clinics given the opportunity.

After spending time with these coaches and teams, we have modified some things to fit our players here and have slowly been implementing the schemes during this first season here in Seattle.

Other than fitting our personnel, the main reason we choose this as our PACK ATTACK was that it is a complete departure from the mindset we instill with our PACK LINE. When we go to ATTACK from PACK, we want a SWITCH to go off in our players minds that we are in something completely different. Different rules. Different expectations. Different results. Different.

## PACK ATTACK

We don't simply say "Go extend the pressure in PACK LINE, but just do it harder or more aggressive." To us, that doesn't work. It doesn't send the right mental message to our players. As a result of being so totally different, you can sense a change in the mindset of your players the second you make the SWITCH. The SWITCH triggers the players mind to go into a different mode. An ATTACK mode.

The last reason I fell in love with this defense is the very reason I am sharing it with you. It doesn't matter if you know what we are trying to do. It's not a secret. There aren't any tricks to the rotations. If you are playing us, I will send you the exact slides we are going to use. I will send you the diagrams of where we are going to be and where we are going to trap. It will then be up to you to come up with a plan to run against each and decide how much time you need to spend on it with on your team for the 5-10 possessions we might run it against you. And knowing all along that if we have early success with it, you might see it for 20-25!!

Coaches who utilize this defense will tell you that their players enjoy practicing it as much as they love playing it. For us with it being so different from the PACK, our players go into an energized mode that is fun to see.

Before you start making you practice plan for tomorrow with the PACK ATTACK on it, make sure you are okay as a coach with a couple of things:

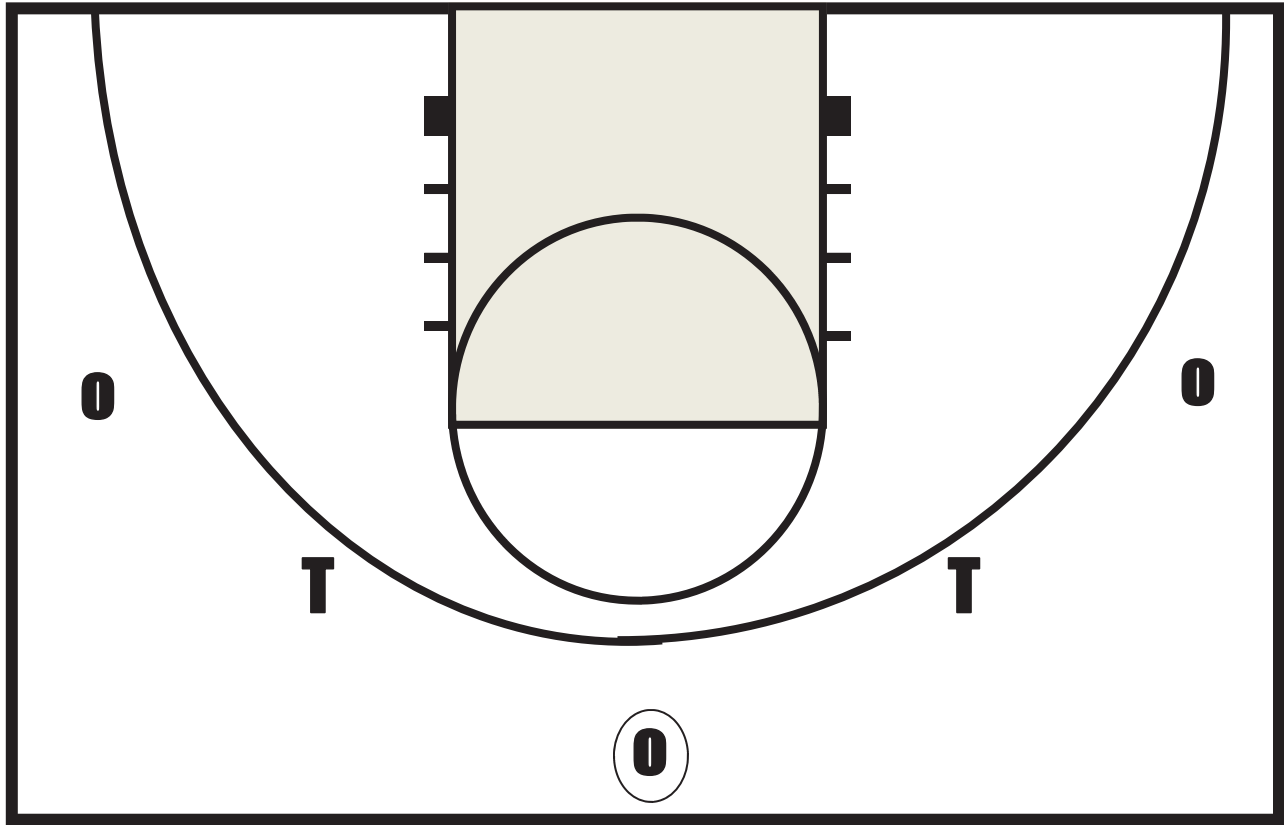
- 1) telling players there are no "WHAT IF" questions EVER when working on this defense
- 2) the ball will get to some places on the court you normally would lose your mind over it going but it won't score nearly as often as you think
- 3) just like with any zone, rebounding is a challenge, so off set by developing great rebounders and live with occasional offensive rebound
- 4) working it 5-on-5. You really can't do "BREAKDOWNS" with it because it truly is a PACK mentality to execute properly.
- 5) make sure you are okay with your coaching buddies to look at it and say "well, all I am going to do is put a player here, and a player here, and one here... do this, do that, and we'll shoot a lay-up or open three. I tell you this because it will happen all the time but in reality what they SAY they would do would rarely if ever work!! It does look open in spots for sure but you really will be surprised how often those open spots really aren't so open!!

If you passed that test , if you believe in it, I think you can run it with just about any combination of players... size, speed, abilities, etc.

If you are still interested, let's go to DAY 1...



**PACK ATTACK**



Day ONE...

Tell your players about the no “WHAT IF” question rule. Tell them they aren’t allowed to ask “what if a team does this” or “what if someone does this” that they are done with it for the day and move onto conditioning. With that said, the same goes for you as coaches at this point as we begin talking through the entire defense. Questions are fine. WHAT IFs are NOT!!!

Tell them that is defense is fun to play and the only way they can really make you upset it is if they aren’t playing HARD and aren't in ATTACK mode.

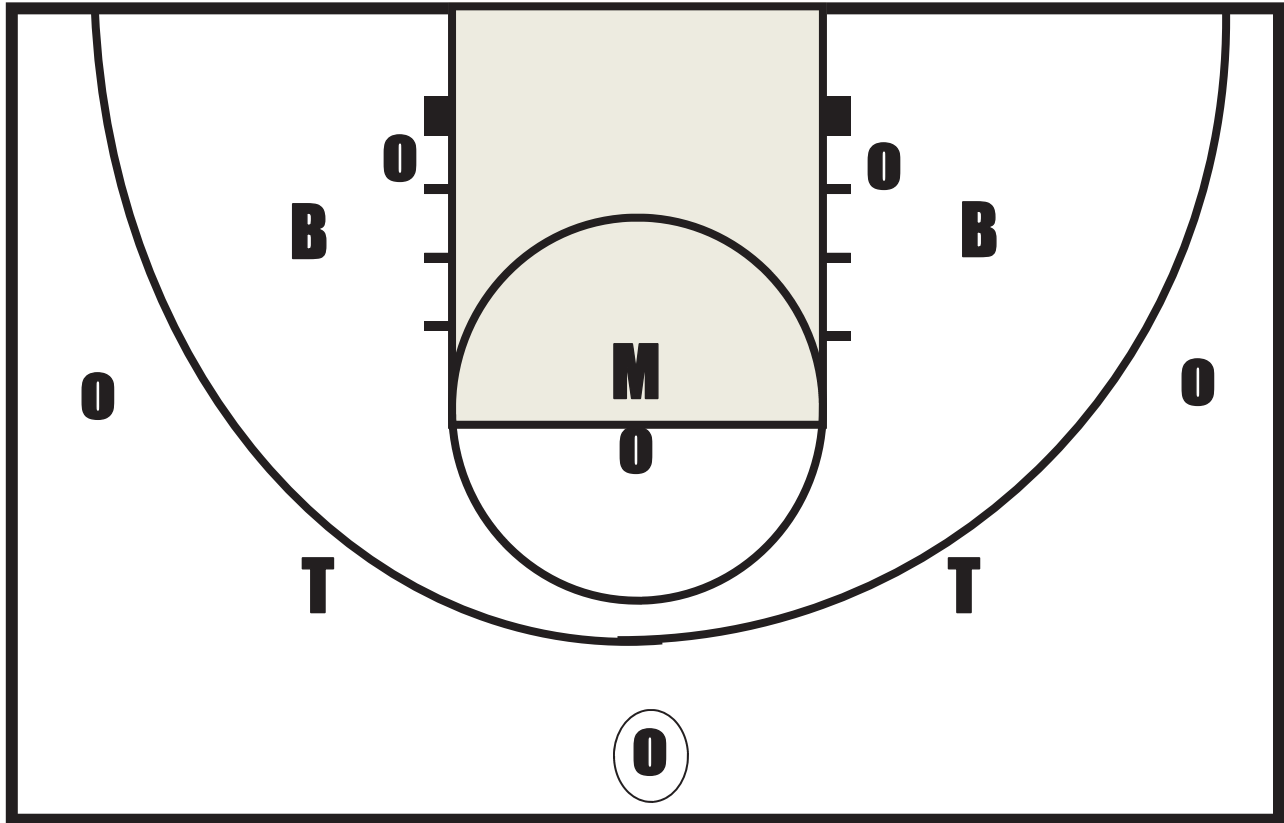
TEACH THIS:

**TOP SPOTS:** Usually guards. These spots are interchangeable in assignments so you can teach their responsibilities simultaneously. If the two players you choose to play here are of similar size and ability it really doesn’t matter who plays which side. But if one is a better rebounder putting them on the left side of the basket being attacked. If one is a little longer than the other, play them on the right. I think you’ll see why later and to be honest early on just learning the slides is the most important thing.

The first job of the TOP defenders is to position their body in the passing lane between the ball and the first player on the wing. They want to be about half way between the ball and the offensive player on the wing. We begin by teaching our ATTACK against a 1 front offense as diagrammed

this is due to first rule of the ATTACK...**NO DIRECT ENTRY PASSES TO START OFFENSE**

**PACK ATTACK**



**TEACH THIS:**

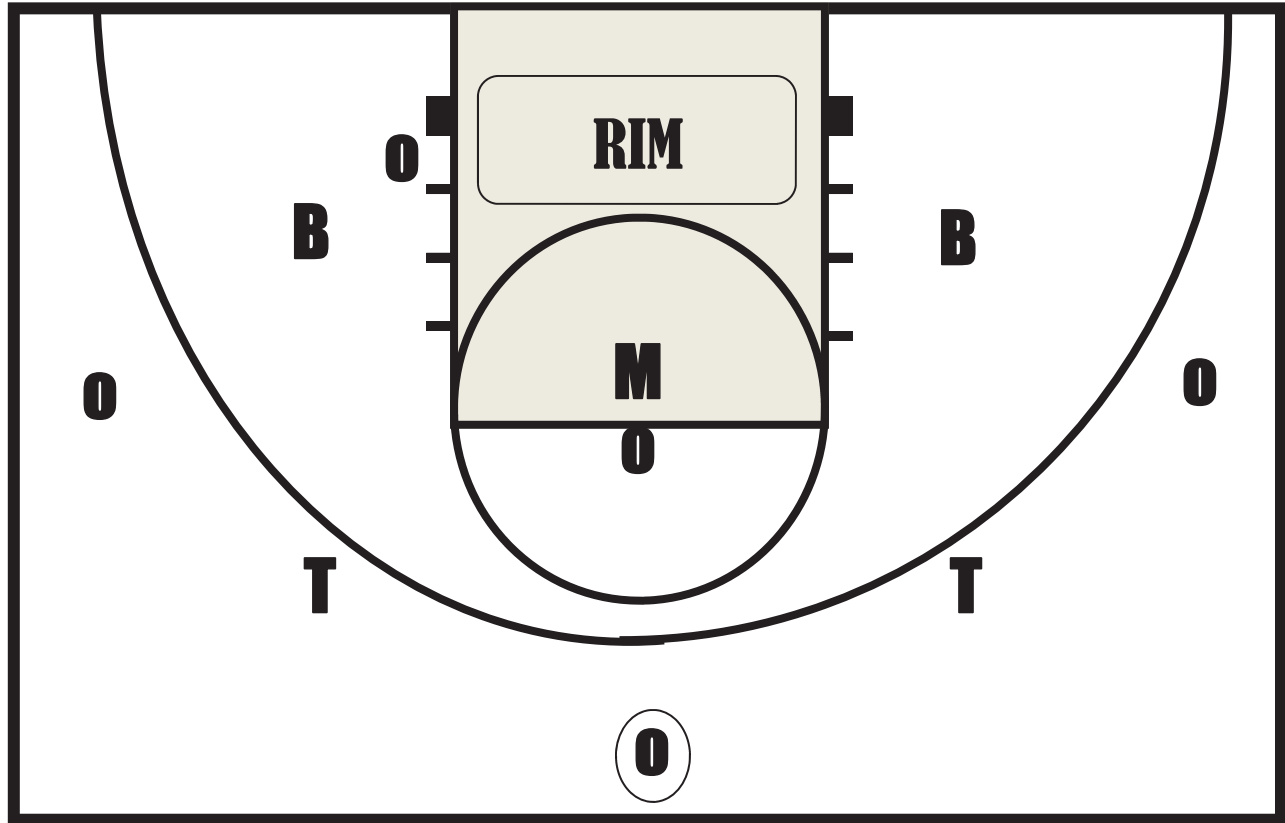
**MIDDLE SPOT:** This needs to be your toughest, hardest working big. If you have a smart, post player that fits that bill, this might be your “out pitch” rather than your “change up.”

Day One rule for her. Stay in line with the ball and the basket. Then do your best to keep the ball from being entered to the middle of the court to a player who can score from where she catches it. So if they want to break a post player to the arc to make an entry pass...fine... if they break a guard in there then we want to take it away.

**BACK SPOTS:** This is best when you can play your BIG guard on the right side Back and your other post player on the left side Back. For DAY ONE purposes we put six offensive players on the court to teach. First thing to tell them is that they should play with their butt to the corners of the court. This gives them a constant visual of how they should have their body positioned... if they have their butt to the corner they will be in the right body position 99% of the time. Their first RULE is to cover the block if occupied on their side. They don't have to deny it, but they have to be close enough that they can tip any lob an offensive player might throw.

We call these spots their **HOME** spots. You will use the phrase RETURN HOME early in teaching.

**PACK ATTACK**



With their **HOME** spots clearly identified and their first RULE in mind. You can move on.

Illustrate to them at this point how difficult it is for the offense to now make a **DIRECT PASS** to initiate their offense. I am willing to bet at this point one of them is dying to say “But Coach, what if they break a player here” and also willing to bet you as a coach are tempted to say “Well, we are just gonna do x, y, and z and lay it in on ya”... totally natural and quite frankly expected... but **DON’T LET EM!!!**

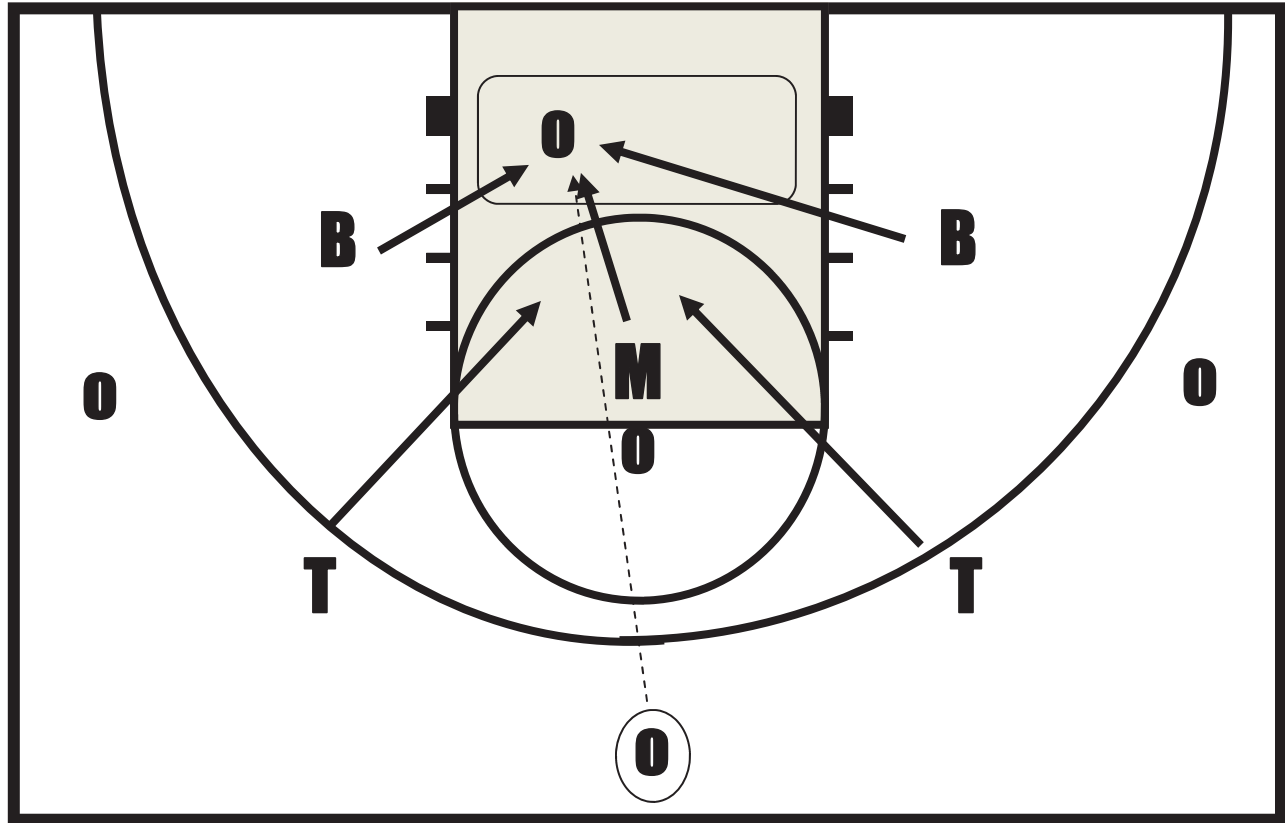
The first thing everyone “**THINKS**” they can do against this widened zone is throw it to the rim. As a result that is the first thing we cover. As stated earlier, this is one of those spots on the floor teams will successfully get the ball to at times. But you will be shocked how rarely it scores from there and how often it actually produces a turnover or a poor shot.

With no defenders between the offensive player and the basket it certainly appears open on paper.

**RIM** is our call when the offense attempts to pass the ball here. If we are in proper starting positions this pass has to be a lob. And we teach players to **TIP** all lobbed passes in our **ATTACK**. With the ball at the top let them try to complete a pass to the **RIM** area. If the players you have in the **BACK** spots can’t at the very least **TIP THE LOB**, then move them to the **TOP SPOTS** or **MIDDLE!!**

With the Middle player in line with the rim the pass must have some arc to it and the anticipation skills of the **BACK** players must be honed enough to **TIP** if not **STEAL** this pass.

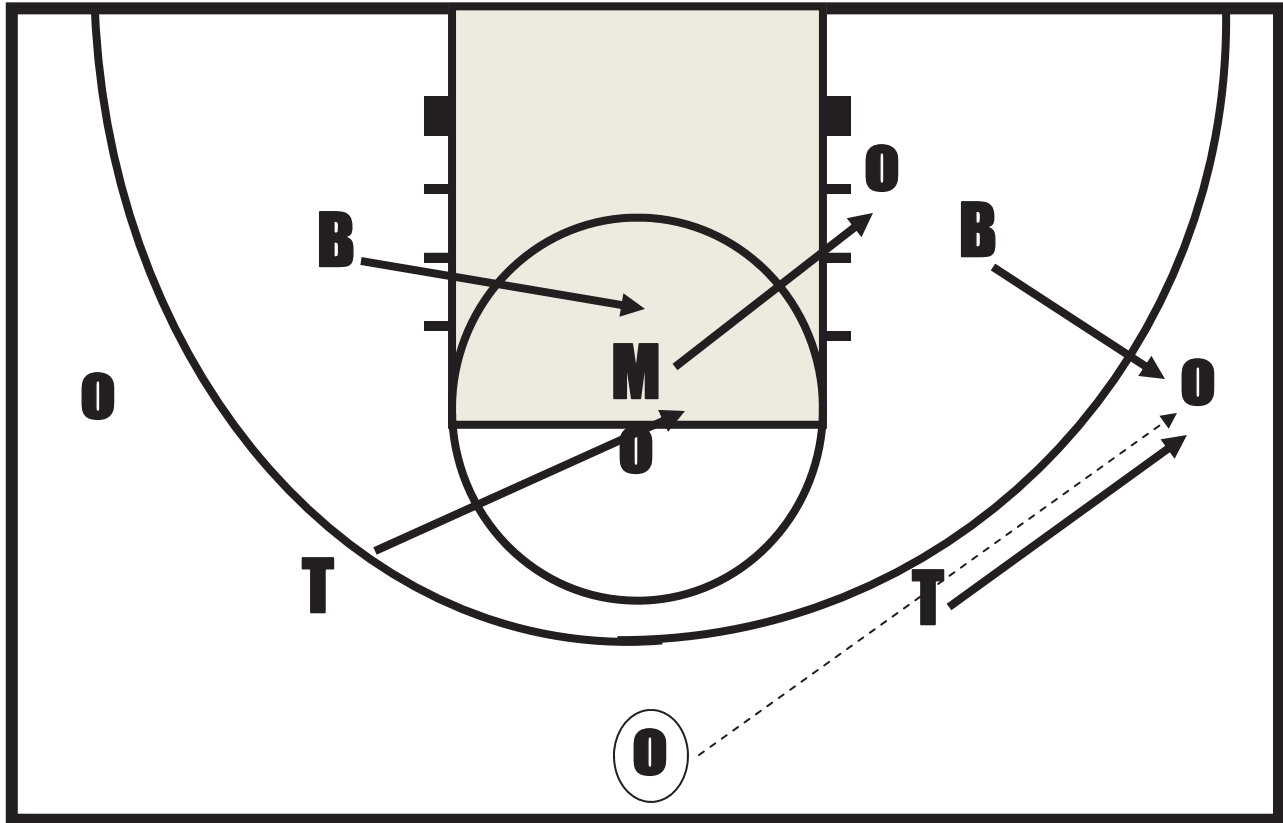
**PACK ATTACK**



For teaching purposes, let's assume there is a total breakdown on the lob and it is completed in the **RIM** area. The **BACK** players should already be there as they were attempting to **TIP THE LOB**. They **WALL UP**. The **MIDDLE** player closes from her spot. **TOP PLAYERS** cover down in the paint to guard any cutter. This action forces the player to at the very least pass the ball back out. It often results in a turnover as they are rushed from being "in the lane" and from being pressured by all five defenders.

While it is the first place people **SAY** they are going to attack you, it in all actuality is one of the rarest places the ball ever gets thrown after you have the entire scheme installed!!! (remember I said that, because I was very skeptical too when I first began exploring this defense).

**PACK ATTACK**



With the **RIM** situation covered, let's cover the pass that actually does occur a lot.

The pass from one guard front to a wing.

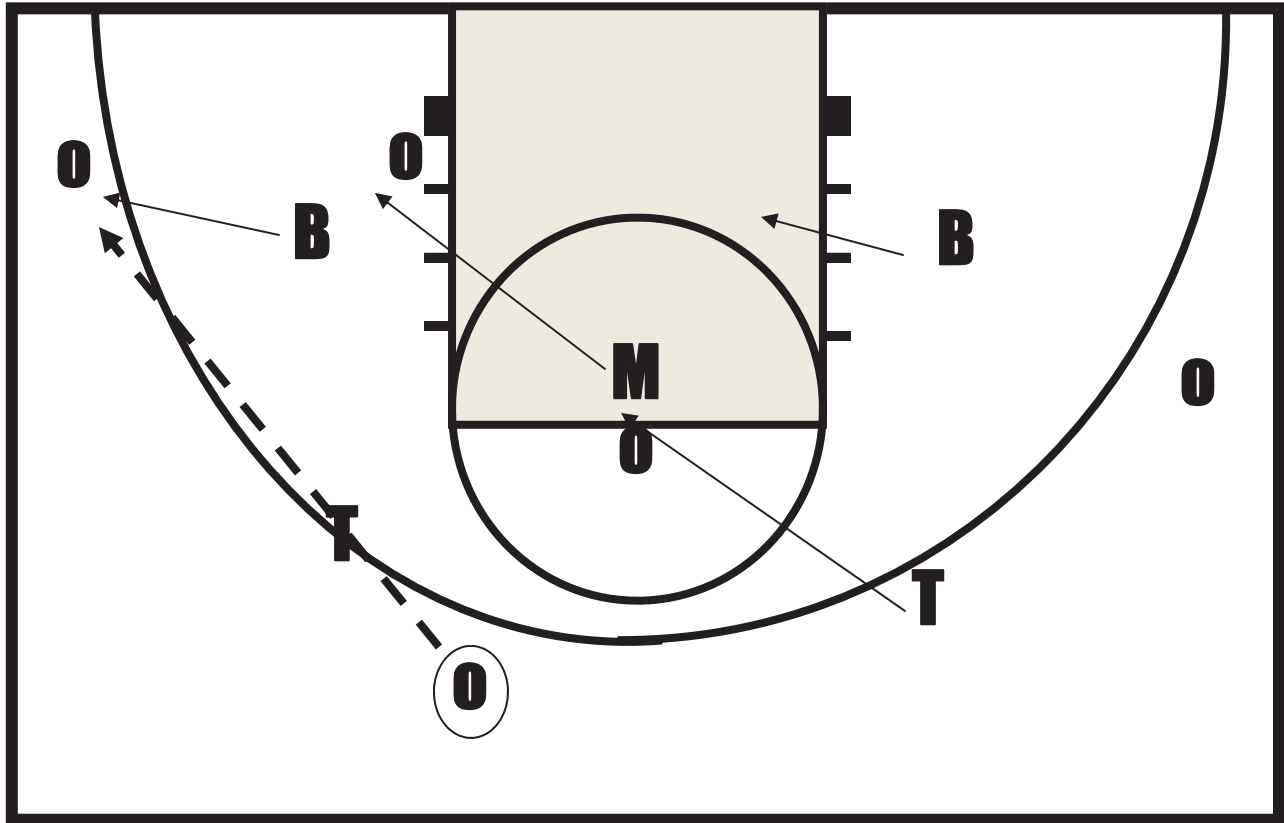
With the **TOP** players bodies in passing lanes between the ball and the offensive players on the wing again this pass **MUST** have some arc to it. That arc is what provides our defenders the extra half second of **AIR TIME** to move into their next position. The **TOP** player tries to **TIP** the **LOB**.

On the **AIR TIME** all other defenders are repositioning... the ball side **BACK** player with her butt facing the corner can easily hold on the block of a count as the ball is in the air allowing the **MIDDLE** to get to the block offensive player and then still close out and be there on the catch of the pass. The **BACK** ball side player is there on the catch with her body in passing lane between ball and the player she just left of the block. She is aggressive on the ball. The **TOP** player who tried to tip the lob comes to join the **BACK** player in an aggressive trap of the first pass. Weak side **TOP** player sprints to elbow/high post area vacated by the **MIDDLE**. The back side **BACK** player keeping her butt to her corner can now become a free safety ready to pick any tipped or skipped ball.

For Day One purposes. We drill this 5-on-5 several times. Review our **HOME** spots.

If you didn't allow any **WHAT IF's** and successfully instilled the proper **ATTACK** frame of mind then you have had a successful day and will be ready to move onto Day 2. If not, simply keep re-**DAY ONE** until you do. It's imperative you get those two things down before progressing.

**PACK ATTACK**



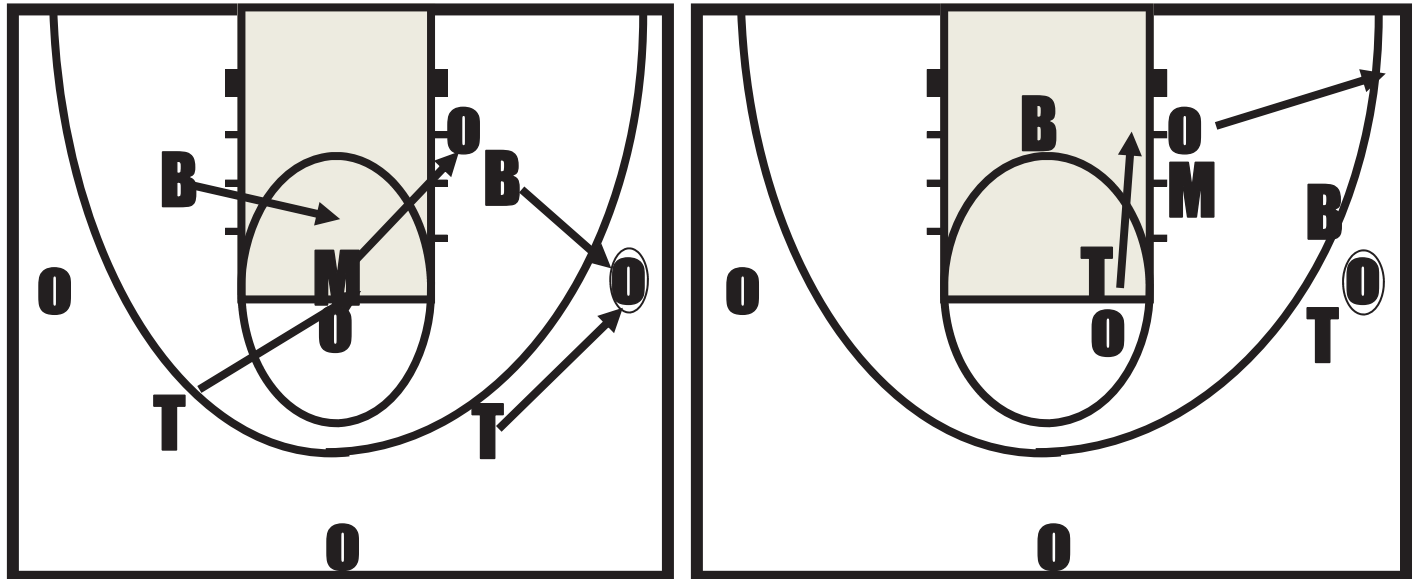
With the basic slides and language introduced it's time to allow the first "WHAT IF... And it's almost always "What happens if they pass it to the corner? Who's is that?" So let's address that first.

The answer is "It depends on where it is passed from?" And this is the very reason we don't allow WHAT IFS from players until now. You have to have some base knowledge and some language in place so that your players can comprehend the answers.

IF the ball is passed from the TOP to the CORNER, by rule it should have some air under it because the T (top player) has her body in the passing lane. This allows the B (ballside player) to leave their **HOME** on the block and be there on the catch. The air time also allows the MIDDLE to slide to ball side post-up and T (top weak side) to slide to the high post. The B (weak side) keeping her butt to the corner can provide help to M on the ball side block and still be able to handle any skip action.

This corner catch is not trapped at this point. As we progress there will be times that we will trap it. But at this stage of installing the ATTACK we simply want to instill the coverage slides and the rotations.

**PACK ATTACK**



If the ball is passed to the corner from a wing where we are trapping, the coverage is different.

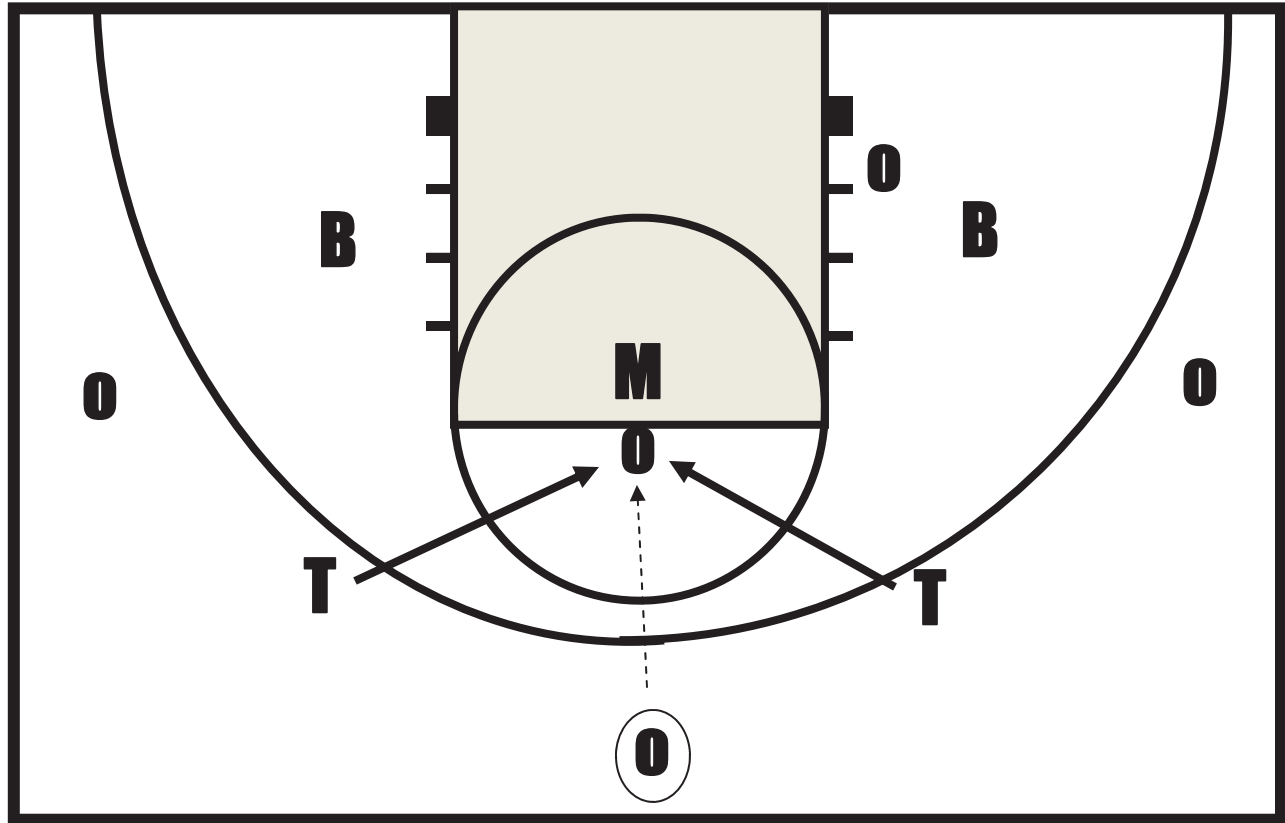
This is a common way teams try to attack zones with an overload as well so it's good to start here. They will cut someone into the corner and then slide the high to low...

With B and T trapping the wing, the M goes with the cutter to the corner. The backside B player has no responsibility at HOME because the offense has overloaded the ball side.

On the pass the M and B trap the corner pass aggressively. The T that was trapping stays and is ready to deny the pass back or steal and tipped ball. When it's trapped in the corner we have our biggest player and longest wing player trapping so it should be very difficult for the ball to be passed out cleanly. We teach the players not trapping to evaluate the quality of the trap and adjust their denial and anticipation accordingly. The better the trap the more aggressive we want them to be in shutting down a direct pass. We have plenty of time to recover to our HOME spots IF the ball is skipped out of a corner.

You need to name the corner trap something. We change ours from year to year so that teams aren't comfortable with the call.... We try to use aggressive sounding calls... Storm, Flood, Fire, Red, Black, Dead, Jail, etc... Have seen some teams simply call it corner. You decide what works best for your team and give it a name so that it's clear to everyone what is expected when the ball is trapped in the corner.

**PACK ATTACK**



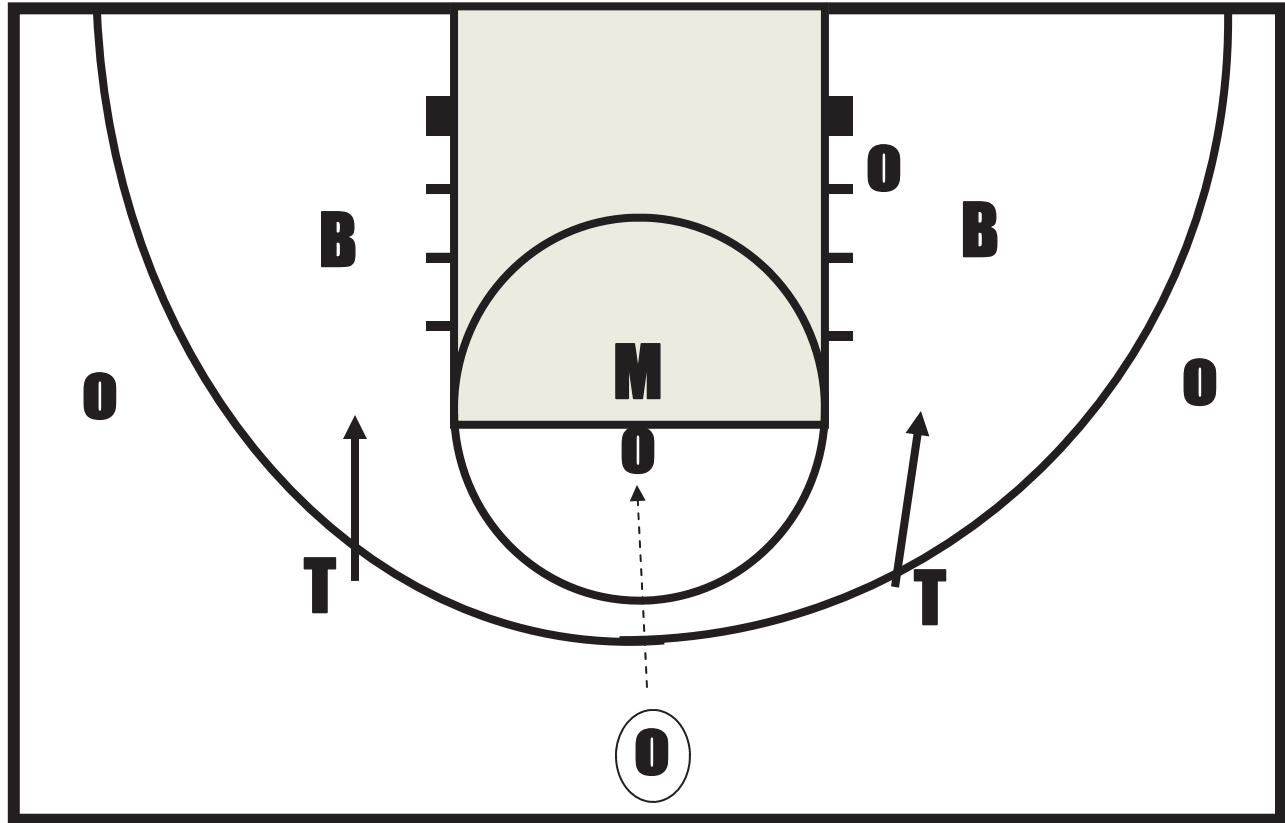
Invariably the next WHAT IF is, what IF ball does get passed to the **NAIL**.

There will ultimately be three ways to play this action. I am not sure which order is best to introduce so I will give you all three and you decide what best fits your particular team.

The most aggressive way is to swarm the pass and get it out of there. The M who wasn't suppose to allow it there in the first place had now better be very intent on not letting something else bad happen, so she should be pressuring the ball aggressively as both of the T's swarm the player. Many times offenses will post a player here who doesn't pass it so well and this is a great place to create a turnover. This method is dangerous IF the ball is passed directly out to a great shooter. You're gambling that with three players swarming that won't happen a very high percentage of the time.



**PACK ATTACK**



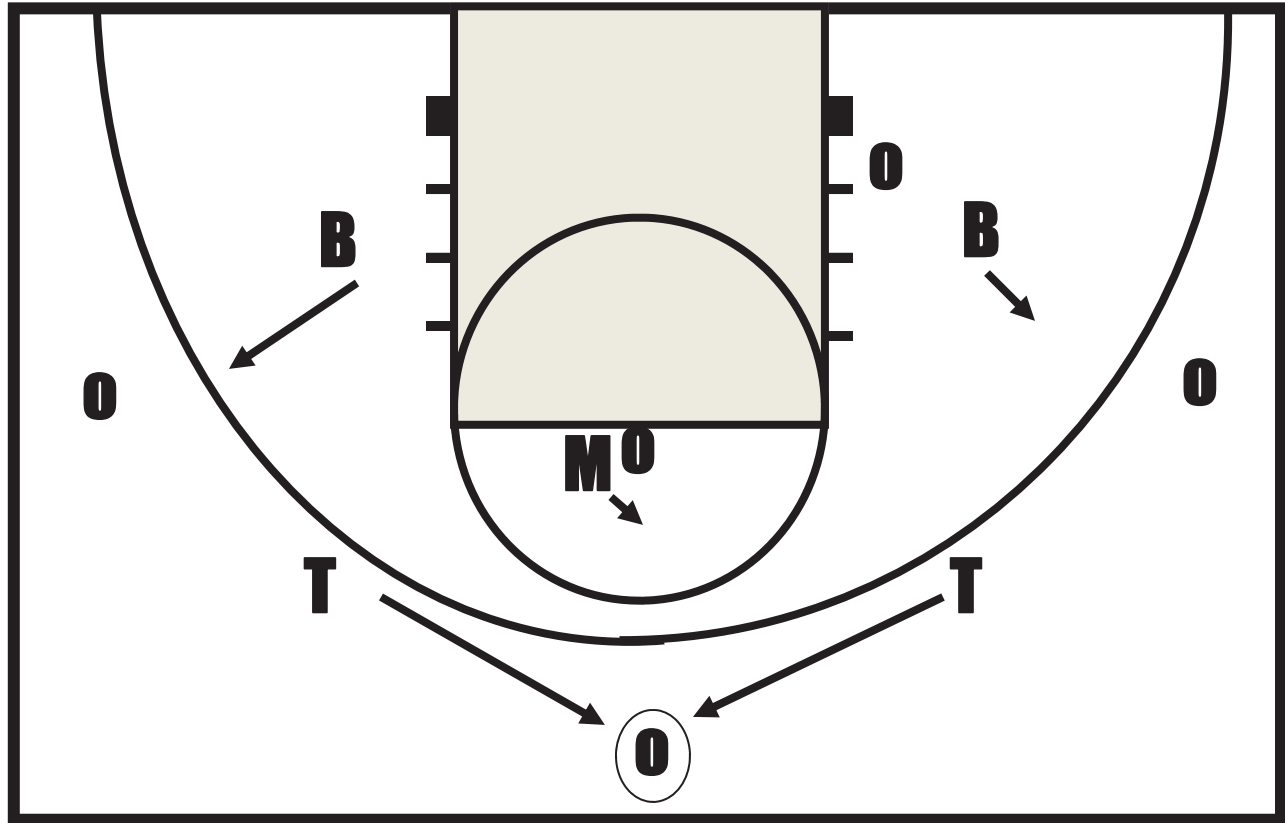
The next method is the most conservative.

It works best with teams who are spotting up great shooters around the arc.

On the pass, both of the T's again place their bodies in the passing lanes between the shooters on the wings. Veteran teams can even get communication from the B players and cover a third guard at the top. As in the diagram above, one of the two B players will most likely have no one in their HOME, so they can take the shooter on the wing allowing one of the T's to be more aggressive on the open player. This is only really a concern if a team has three great shooters on the court at the same time and you not even choose to be in this defense if that is the case.

The third method is a combination of the two and I will NOT diagram it. You designate one of the T's to be a swarmer and one of them to be cover out. This one can create hesitancy and is not my favorite. I prefer the all or nothing look, but experiment with it and see what works for you.

**PACK ATTACK**



With the basics in, let's get to the FUN STUFF!!!

This is the point where I believe you can really begin to create some havoc and at the very least cause some pause in the offense.

First, come up with an aggressive sounding CALL for this action... Let's just call it STORM for teaching seek.

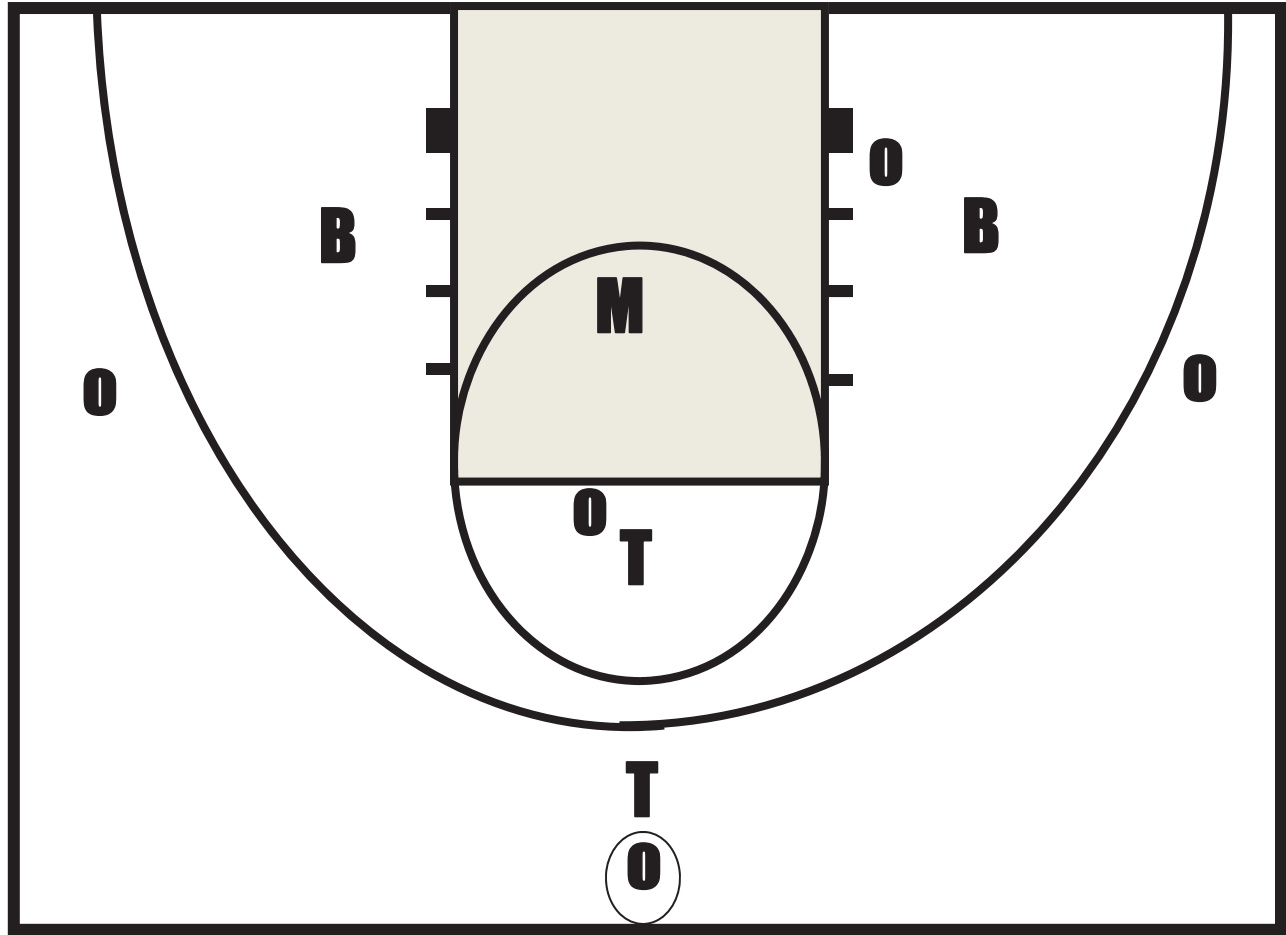
STORM call means the two T's are going to sprint trap the ball handler the second she dribbles the ball across the half court line. As they are sprinting to pressure the ball, the M slides around to deny entry to anyone in the middle. The B's adjust themselves accordingly as well. If they have no one HOME they can be very aggressive. If they do, we teach them to lean toward HOME but knowing that pass will be very difficult if the T's apply appropriate pressure.

This STORM has a ripple effect. The first time you call it you get that element of surprise. And from then on, you cause pause for the ball handler every time they enter the half court.

This is a great plan to use anytime a back-up player is substituted into the game as well.

Utilizing it a time or two also gets it on the scouting report of your opponent forcing them to spend a little of their valuable preparation time scheming for it whether you actually use it or no.

**PACK ATTACK**



The next concept to introduce compliments the STORM action very well.

Again, first step is choosing a call. Make this one a little less aggressive but keep in theme. Let's use FREEZE in our discussion.

In FREEZE, we move our T's into a 1-1 look. With the Top T picking up the ball handler as soon as she crosses half court. The other T drops more the high post allowing M to drop a little as well. This is a good look against teams that attack with a one guard front or a 1-4 High set.

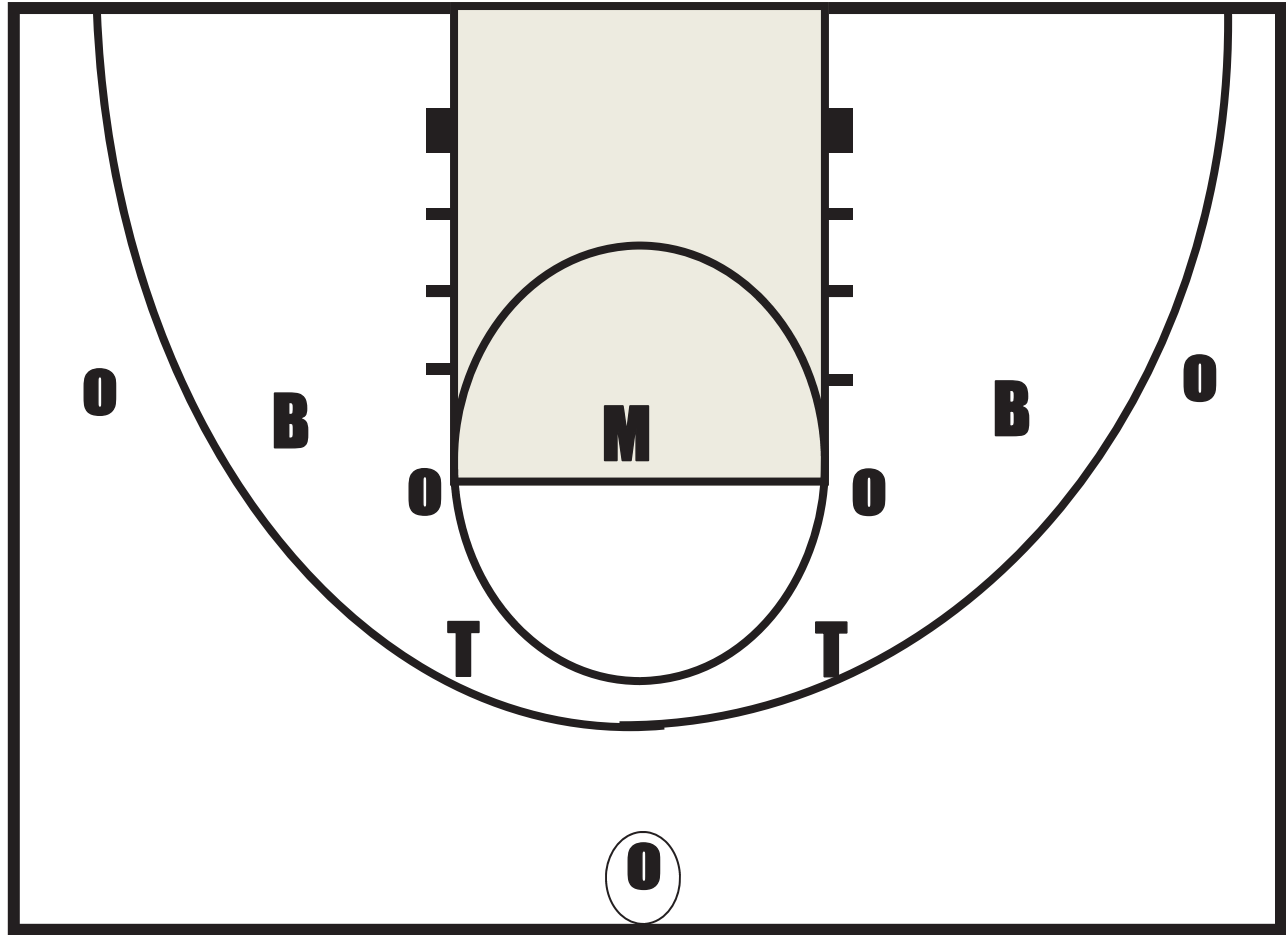
This is also easily disguised as PACK LINE man to man.

Our slides are the same with the back T taking the first pass with a B to either side. If the offensive player chooses to dribble enter, the top T stays with her and we look to trap on the wings as always and the back T stays at the high post as she normally would.

As the season progresses as well or as you see fit with your team, you can go STORM from the FREEZE look. Start in the 1-1 look and then sprint the other T player into a trapping situation.

Again, doing this once or twice a game at the very, very minimum will give even the best point guard another look she must evaluate without changing much in your defensive scheme.

**PACK ATTACK**

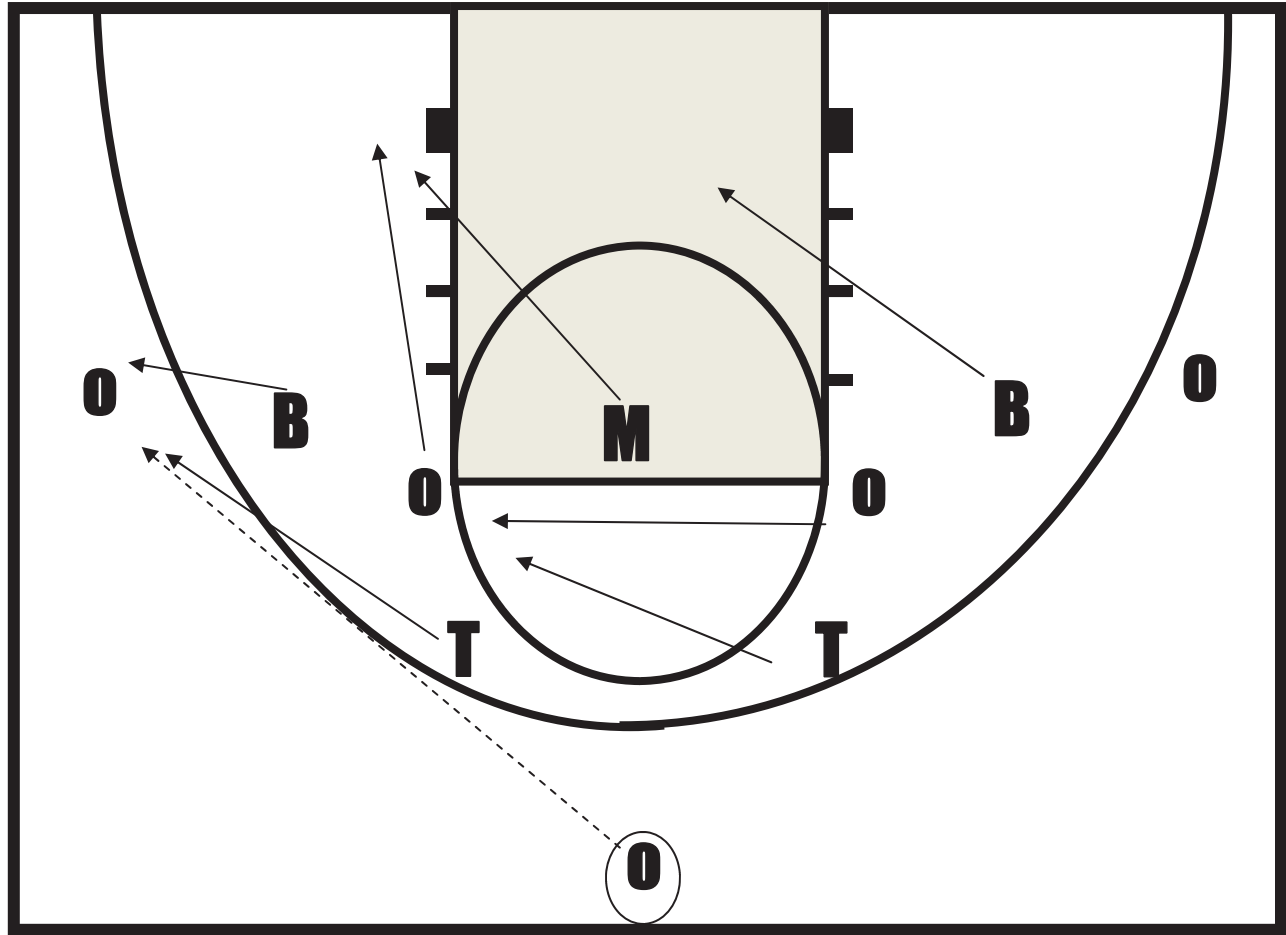


With a few different looks to throw at teams, let's take a day to address a couple of common actions that offensive guru's will draw up to attack your PACK.

The first one most teams try is a 1-4 High Attack...

The first adjustment is changing the passing lanes your T's set up in. They place their body in the passing lanes to the two offensive players at the elbows. The M keeps same rule of keeping her body between the ball and the rim. The B players have no one "AT HOME" so they can also slide up and play between the elbow offensive players and the ones on their wing. This easy, quick adjustment makes any entry pass a difficult one.

**PACK ATTACK**



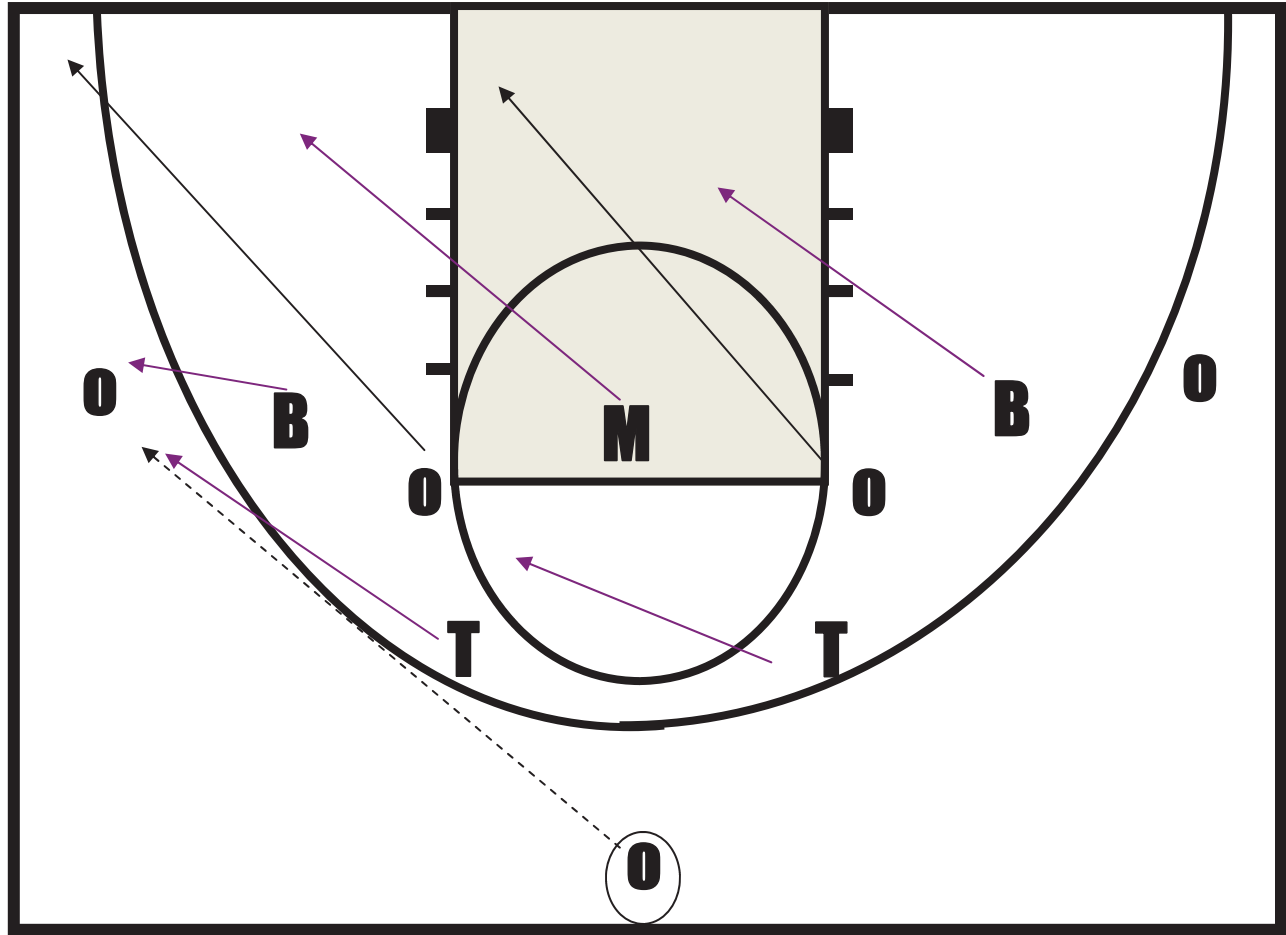
On the pass to the wing, the offense then dives the elbow player to the block. This slide is easy taken by M as B and T are aggressively trapping the first pass to the wing as always.

The other T player is on the way to their HOME at the elbow and is easy there in time to guard any flash to that area.

The weak side B checks HOME first then with butt to corner can see the entire player develop in front of her.

As always, moving on the air time of a pass is key...

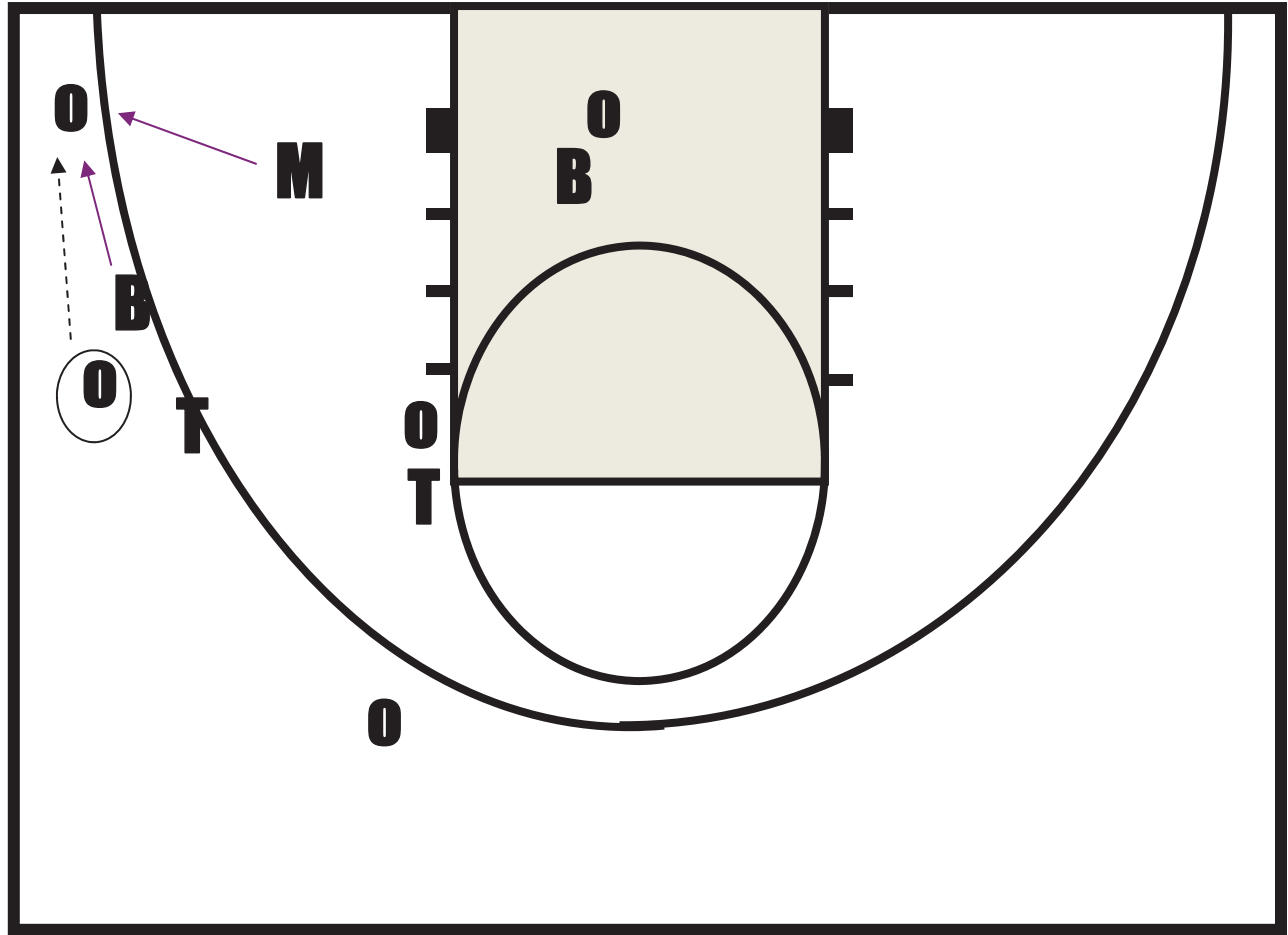
**PACK ATTACK**



Some teams will put a great shooting player at the elbow and try to sneak her to the corner against our M player. This all sounds good in theory and looks good on paper but actually sets up perfectly for us to defend.

M goes with her and as opposite player dives B also goes to the rim area.

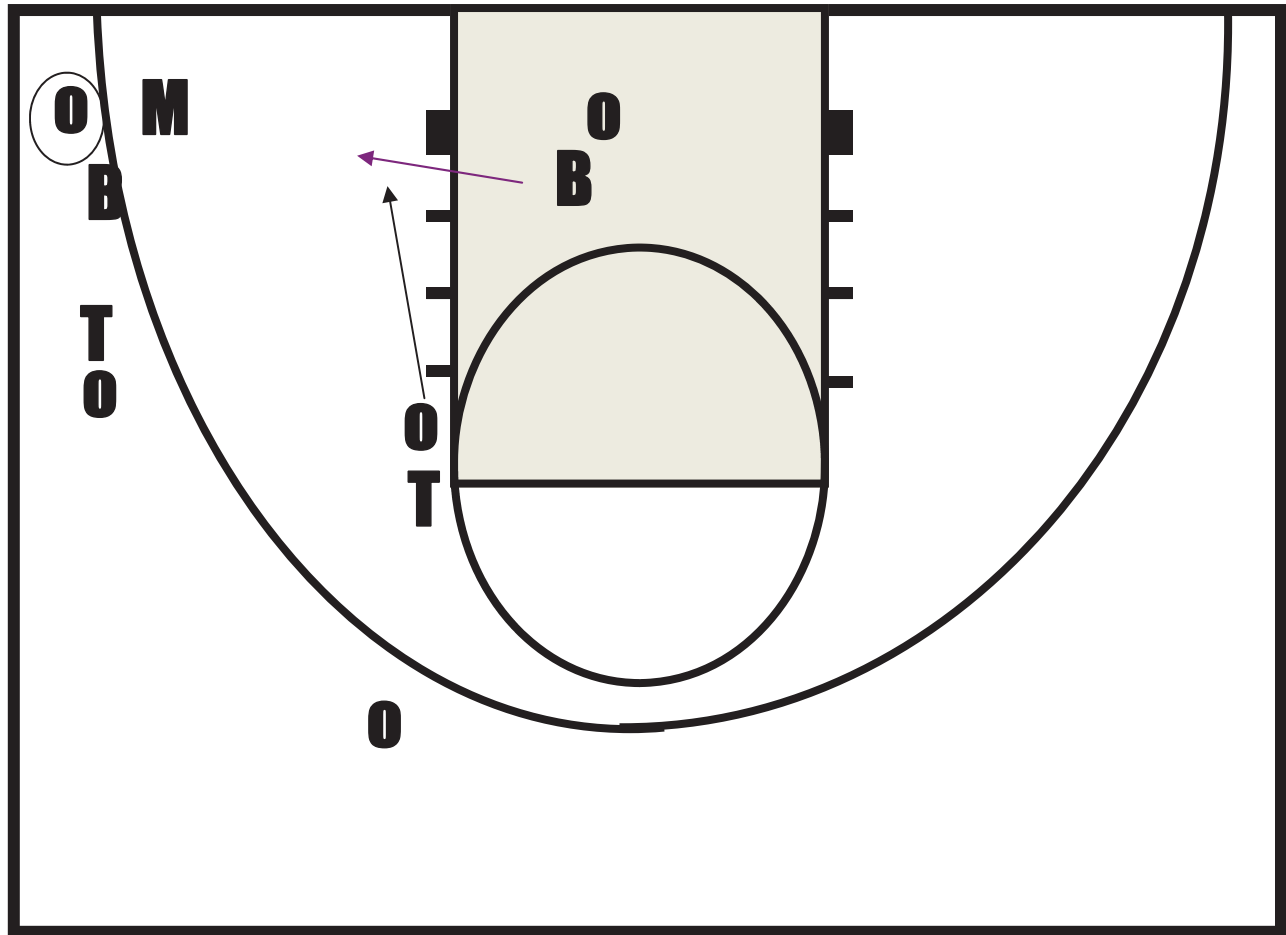
**PACK ATTACK**



As the offense tries to get the ball to the shooter in the corner, our M is there to take away quick shot or drive and contain ball until B can arrive for our trap in the corner.

The T player that was involved in the TRAP stays and denies pass back out of the corner. Our other T and B take the block and elbow in a volleyball coverage formation ready to steal any tipped pass that comes out soft...

**PACK ATTACK**



Many teams will then dive the player at the elbow to the block. Knowing this our B player is able to get many steals by baiting the trapped player to throw it there.

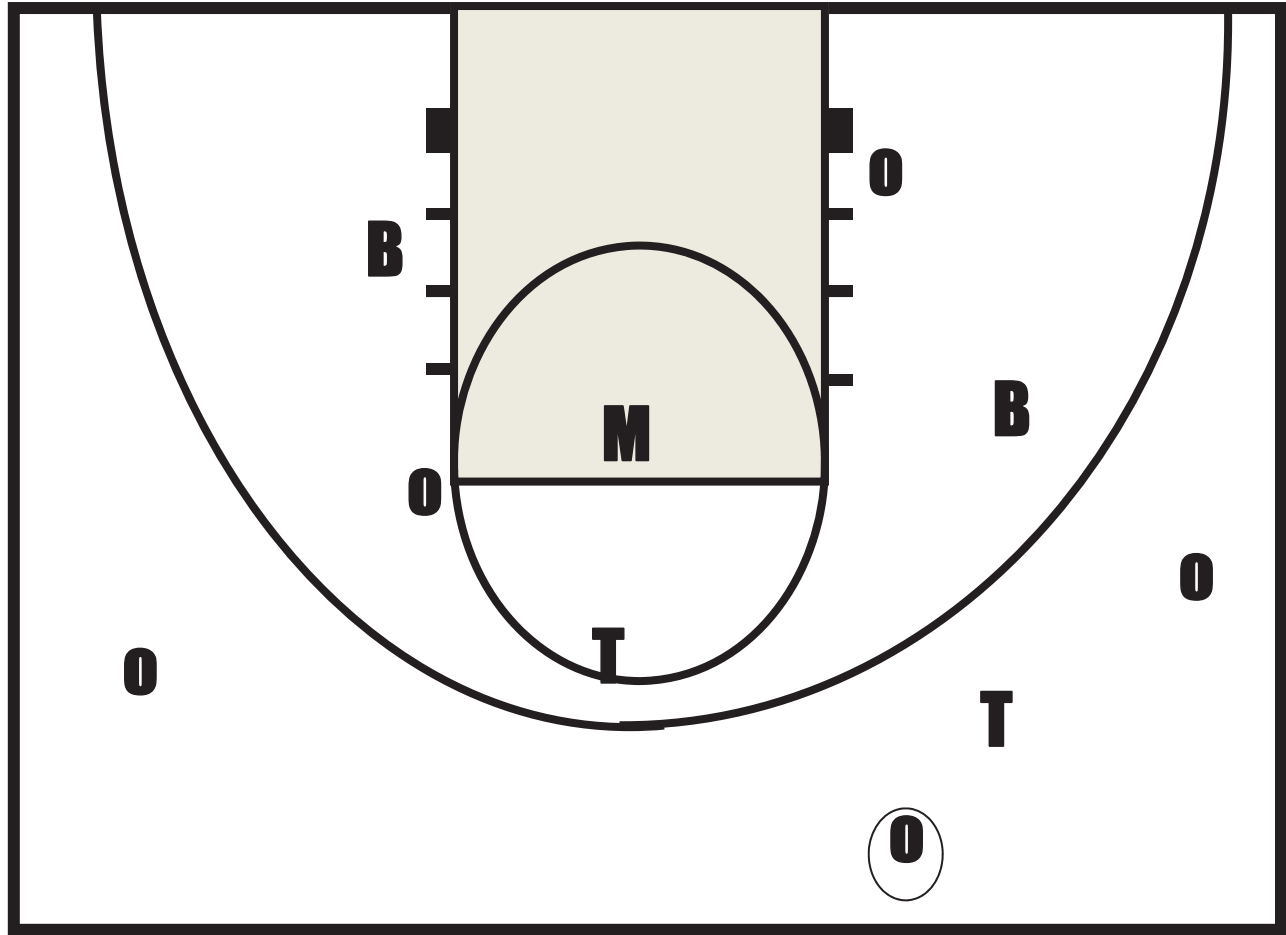
The better the trap, the more aggressive we can be on the block and the elbow.

It's also two post players in a lot of offenses who normally aren't their best passers.

That is another common theme you will see versus this ATTACK. To attack it, many teams have to move their players around to spots they normally aren't accustomed to playing in.



**PACK ATTACK**



Another common attack is what we call a high wing. Teams will break some one out very high to draw our trap away from the basket.

When teams break some one repeatedly to these HIGH WINGS, we adjust and don't TRAP it if they are not in their scoring range. This causes the team to simply pass the ball around the perimeter.

When we make this adjustment you will hear constant calls coming from our bench...either from coaches or players not in the game. You will hear NO echo if the player is NOT in their range and therefore there is NO trap.

If you hear YES, then the player has worked their way into range and we do TRAP these actions.

Once the offense brings the ball into our normal range, we are in the ATTACK spots we have been speaking of since the DAY 1.

# **PACKLINE DEFENSE**

## **ULTIMATE GUIDE**

### **PART 3**

**Packline Pressure Defense**  
**Jim Boone, Delta State University**





NOTE: Written when Coach Boone was at Tusculum College

## **PACK LINE PRESSURE MAN to MAN DEFENSE**

- We employ the PACK LINE PRESSURE MAN to MAN DEFENSE at Tusculum College in order to compete in one of the nation’s best NCAA Division II basketball leagues, the South Atlantic Conference. We simply do not have the same talent pool to draw from as others in our league. Therefore, it is essential that we give our *“overachievers”* the best opportunity to compete.
- By employing our theory of defense play, we will **lower our opponent’s field goal percentage**, we will improve our **rebouncing**, and we will **reduce their opportunities for lay-ups and easy baskets rather off dribble penetration or transition**.
- The greatest negative of our system; and it is a system of play, is that it can have a tendency to allow lesser talented programs to compete. We can not beat them on the advantage we hold due to our talent level or athleticism, our system is built upon execution – therefore, we have to out execute our opponent.
- Our offense compliments our defense, although this is not completely necessary for our defense to be successful. We work very hard to get what we want offensively and not what the defense decides to gives us. Therefore, we are constantly exploring the defense in an effort to get the ball inside, to achieve a great shot, and or to get to the foul line. We want to make our opponent defend!
- Rather than running plays; we confine our players to certain areas, we define their roles and demand that they play to their roles. We are an offensive system that is grounded upon execution and the fundamental development of our players.
- I think it is more important on the offensive end that you take great shots, what ever you do – take great shots. Conversely, I know that our defense will frustrate offenses into taking bad shots.
- Every team struggles to score, I do not care who you are or what you do, you will struggle to score in league play. It’s an ongoing battle to find ways to play in such a way so as to use your talent to score. Coaches are so much more in tuned today in stopping offense, defense is important and it shows.

- The two most important stats to Tusculum Basketball are Defensive Field Goal Percentage and Trips to the Foul Line. We want to force our opponent into tough contested shots, limit them to one shot, and we absolutely do not want to foul!
- **REBOUND – REBOUND – REBOUND:** You must rebound to win! We emphasize rebounding in everything we do, everything! We will work on blocking-out every night in some form. We will drill our team 1-on-1, 2-on-2, 3-on-3, and 4-on-4, as well as emphasize this very important objective in our 5-on-5 play.
- **Defense is outcome oriented.** Ask yourself: Did we stop the ball. We teach this very important concept through our drills – our players must get stops, anything else is unacceptable!
- **In the PACK LINE PRESSURE DEFENSE,** you only have to recover because we line-up in help. Remember Chuck Daly – It’s not the help that gets you beat, it’s the recovery or lack there of. We work recovery, over and over and over again.
- Our defense is zone oriented on the ball-side. The idea is to build a fence, and to keep the ball out of the PACK area.
- This is a **Defensive System of Play** that can only succeed when all five players work together as one, when they trust each other, and they allow the synergy of TEAM to take over.
- **TEAM UNITY:** Do not allow anyone to come in and break-up the **FAMILY**. The unity of our team must be **protected and nurtured**.

“Now this is the law of the jungle,  
As old and as true as the sky;  
And the wolf that shall keep it may prosper,  
But the wolf that shall break it must die.  
As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk,  
The law runneth forward and back  
For the strength of the pack is the wolf,  
And the strength of the wolf is the pack.”

- Ruyard Kipling

## Tusculum College Pack-Line Pressure Defense

### *Philosophy*

#### ALONE with OTHERS

Our first principle is to **Stop the Ball**, which means to stop all penetration to the lane - keep the ball out of the lane. This responsibility falls squarely upon the player defending the ball, alone. He must pressure the ball, defend his man in an aggressive manner, thus creating a level of discomfort for the ball handler. Our pressure must be significant enough to make it difficult for the offensive player to shoot, pass, or dribble the ball. Failure to do this gives the offensive player the advantage, as he can see the floor clearly and has time to anticipate the action on the floor. This is much like the quarterback in football that is allowed to drop back and pass at his leisure without any pressure from the defensive line or blitzing defensive backs. However, this pressure defensive attack can place the defender in a very vulnerable position, especially if the offensive player is quicker. Therefore, the strength of our defense is also based upon the level of confidence the defender “on the ball” has, in knowing that he will receive help from his teammates “off the ball” if his man gets past him; **with others**. This confidence in his teammates, in turn, allows him to concentrate entirely on our principle of **Stopping the Ball!** We simply cannot be effective in stopping the ball without this unity on defense.

We have a “**Pack-Line**”, an imaginary line that is positioned at 17’ from the basket. The only player outside of that line, that arc, is the player defending the ball. All other players are occupied inside the arc. Therefore, we do not have a “**Help**” mode, only a “**Recovery**” mode to our defense. Our players are already positioned in help, a “**Gap**”. We are positioned in a slightly-closed stance, inside the Pack-Line, up-the-line but off the line, maintaining a Ball-You-Man relationship. However, when the ball is being passed to our man, we must “**explode-out**” of this position, and closeout to the ball.

A critical element of our execution defensively becomes our “**Close-out**” to the ball. We believe the most important key in our close-outs is to get “**high-hands**”. We must break the shooters rhythm, we cannot allow the offense to catch and shoot.

There is a second extremely important element of our defense that is best described by **the alone**, with others symbolic terminology. That fundamental is the action of defending screens, whether on or off the ball. A screening situation consists of a cutter and a screener defender. The moment when the cutter breaks off the screener, the defender is completely alone. He has no responsibility at that moment other than to get through the screen. When we are being screened we are no longer a team defender. No matter how good a defender is, he simply cannot fight through a screen and worry about helping his teammates at the same time. Therefore, our cutter defender turns his full attention solely to his man. But even then, versus a good offensive team he will momentarily become separated from his man.

During this moment of separation, he must defend with others, receiving help from the screener defender. Our screener defender must jump momentarily into the path of the cutter, staying within touching distance of his man, and take away his cut. The cutter then has only one option available to him, to move away from the basket. This is a critical element of our success in defeating screens. Successful execution of this principle is difficult, but when done correctly separates good defensive teams from great defensive teams!

### **TRUST and SERVANTHOOD**

There are two intangible concepts that make the above execution possible. The player defending the screener must give total complete help to his teammate, thus allowing him to successfully get through the screen. Any hesitation on his part will cripple the effectiveness of the defense and give the offensive cutter the opportunity to catch and shoot a rhythm jump shot. At this moment, he must serve his teammate and stop the cutter. His priority of helping his teammate becomes greater than that of defending his own man. There is a component of trust which must be present when the two defenders properly execute this technique. Our screener defender jumps out to stop the cutter, but he cannot stay too long. He must return to his own man, the screener, before that player becomes a scoring threat himself. He trusts that his teammate will get through the screen and recover to his own man, the cutter. Therefore, we actually leave the cutter open for a split second while both defenders return to their original players. At this point of transition, both the screener and the cutter are open, but for such a short period of time, that when coupled with our pressure on the ball, neither of them can take advantage of the opening.

This can only be executed successfully when both players work together and trust each other. The instant that one player fails to serve or trust his teammate while defending a screen, the timing of the maneuver breaks down and our defense becomes porous.

### **COMMUNICATION**

For our team to be effective defensively, we must talk, we must communicate! This is never more important than when defending a screener or when positioned in the “gap” off the ball. The best example of this is simply to compare a poor defensive player with a very good defender. A great defender communicates well with his teammates, while a poor defender rarely talks. The contrast is obvious, and the reason very evident. The poor defender has a difficult time communicating because he does not have a sense of what is about to happen next. He lacks the ability to anticipate the movement of the offense. As a result, he is always one step behind and in a perpetual state of catch-up. This makes it impossible for him to have the presence of mind to communicate with his teammates. A player with this limitation may be a great one-on-one defender, but he will

cripple a team defense.

A great team defender has a feel for what the offense is about to do. He can anticipate the action, and thus communicate to his teammates what is going to happen next, before it actually happens. He is not always right, but he is rarely caught off guard by the offense. The most obvious physical characteristic of a great team defensive player, one who communicates well, is that he is rarely out of position to help his teammates. His awareness allows him to maintain a Ball-You-Man relationship that is the crux of our defense. Moreover, and just as importantly, he now has better “Vision” of the offense and the ball.

### **CONSTANT REPOSITIONING**

The rule of Ball-You-Man is constantly being broken, therefore constant repositioning off the ball is absolutely essential. We must constantly battle to reestablish our Ball-You-Man position. This is simply the “backbone” of our defense. Offenses do not stand stationary. Therefore, when the ball moves, or when players move on the floor, the defense must continually adjust to the ever-changing environment. The reality in basketball is that the defender will constantly get knocked off track in the course of a defensive possession. That is why it is imperative that each player perpetually work to regain the correct defensive position. Failure to do so by any of the five defenders will create a breakdown in the team defense, and, moreover, a potentially good scoring opportunity for the offense. Essentially, getting “broken-down” on defense does not guarantee failure, but giving up at that point does!

### **EVERY WHEEL MUST HAVE A HUB**

The hub of our defense is defending the low post. The most important decision that any coach has is to how he will play the post. Our post defense keys everything else we do, it is the hub to our defense, it dictates everything else. Great low post defense may be even more important than playing great defense on the ball. Although, these two key ingredients must work hand-in-hand. Furthermore, good post defense is more about toughness, determination, aggression, and a relentless effort than it is about technique.

There is no glamour in post defense, it is hard work, banging and pounding, it is a relentless effort. It is something that cannot just be turned on and off, it must be present all the time, in practice and in the game. Our defense will only be as good as our post defenders!

Our basic method of defending the low post is to play on top of the offensive player, with the ball on the top and the player positioned in the low post area. There will not be a feed from the top, this cannot and will not happen. As the ball approaches the side, we move into a three-quarter denial position. We instruct our players to be aggressive, to be physical, but to show our hands, do not foul - and “see the ball”, we must have vision.. We should be positioned in such a way as to have our top arm thrown across the post in a

denial position, with our head in front of the post shoulder, but our lower leg and a portion of our body behind the post and thus, disallowing the lob pass.

We only allow a baseline pass that takes the post away from the lane. We tell our players this is our time, not the offenses time, but our time. We do not go for the steal or deflection, we immediately use “our time” to establish a position behind the post, take away the baseline dive, prepared to contest a shot, and to defend a drive.

If the offensive low post attempts to move us up the lane, we must know our slip point - in other words, when to move under the post and stay between him and the basket. We absolutely cannot give-up an angle to the basket or an easy lob, we must force the post to play through us, and not over or around us.

When the ball does get into the low post, it is a disaster! We have to do everything we can to get the ball out of there. We have two methods in which to achieve this objective. We can “**Choke**” the post with a perimeter player or players, in order to force the ball to be passed out of the post, or we can “**red the post**”, double the post big to big.

*Excerpts taken from the book, A SEASON WITH COACH DICK BENNETT, by Eric Ferris.*



## Tusculum College Pack-Line Pressure Defense

### Key Teaching Points of the PACK LINE PRESSURE DEFENSE

#### Conversion Defense

- There are two critical areas in regards to being an effective defensive team that you as the coach must be accountable. The first is conversion defense and the second is defending the low-post.
- In our Conversion Defense we are not assigned a specific player necessarily, but rather, we are defending positions on the floor in order to stop the ball and our opponents transition offense.
- Our conversion defense begins as the ball is being shot by our offense. We send two guards back on defense as the shot goes up – we feel that the benefit of having our guards back on defense to **STOP the BALL**, is of a far greater benefit than any advantage that may be derived by having one or both rebound the offensive glass.

We designate which guard is our “Lane Defender” and which guard is the “Ball Defender”. The lane defender sprints to paint, finds the ball and takes the lane-line on the side that the ball is being entered into play. He positions here in order to take away any cuts into the lane and will closeout to a “Gap Position” or to the ball, as soon as the lane is secured. The ball defender works to contain the ball-handler at half-court, and preferably get the ball out of the middle of the floor. Again, he must contain the ball first and foremost, and of course, his point of pick-up can change due to our opponent’s personnel.

- The remaining three players sprint back to paint as soon as our opponent gains possession of the ball. We teach their first three sprint steps to be with total disregard to vision; turn and sprint three steps, and then locate the ball as they continue to the lane. We will position toward the ball-side as deep as the ball. We cannot express enough the emphasis that we place upon our team of not giving-up transition baskets, **NO LAY-UPS!**

#### Pressure on the Ball

- We must place pressure upon the basketball, we cannot allow the ball handler to play comfortably, to easily look over the court. Offenses today will pick your defense apart if you allow them to do what they want to do with the ball. This is a great myth in the Pack Line Pressure Defense, that we do not pressure the ball – that we are all about containment. Yes, we must contain and our players must know their limitations, but we must pressure the ball.

It is much like the football quarterback; the passer that has all the time needed to drop back and throw the ball, any NFL quarterback will pick apart a defense that does not pressure – the same holds true with our game. With this being said, we cannot allow the ball to get into the PACK AREA. **Our point of pick-up is at half court, in the play area it is determined by whom you are guarding – your game and his game.**

As much as we want and demand pressure on the ball, we must also understand a very important axiom in our defensive game planning; **“Sometimes to not guard, is to guard”**. In other words, there are players that you are better served to not defend, and therefore, utilize this defender as a helper.

- We do not force the ball in a specific direction. We simply tell our players, **“DO NOT GIVE-UP THE BASELINE”**. We do not want them to feel that it is OK to force the ball to the middle, we just cannot get beat baseline. We will emphasize that our **players must have their baseline foot positioned outside of the offensive player’s baseline foot.**
- We will drill a lot of one-on-one in order for our players to learn their limitations, to understand how to keep the ball out of the PACK, and to learn how to force contested jump shots.
- We deny inside the arc and we will work on this more from a whole method standpoint more so than a 1on1 breakdown drill, but we absolutely do not want to allow the ball inside the PACK AREA (17 foot mark).
- Footwork is of paramount importance in our pressuring the ball, we want to **Step** (point our toe) in the direction that the ball is being dribbled, and **Push** with our opposite foot. We use the term, **“Guarding a Yard”** with our players, if we can execute two quick slides, we can arc and defend the ball. Use quick, short, steps without bringing our feet any closer than 12 inches, there is an imaginary ruler between our heels, no **Heel Clicking**.
- If we can force a **Dribble-Used situation**, we now leave the PACK area with all of our defenders, in an effort to all-out deny all four offensive players. This is a great opportunity for us to create a panicked, and hopefully a turnover situation for the offense. The player defending the ball must verbalize the dribble used situation by calling out **“FIVE – FIVE – FIVE”**.

### **Jumping to the Ball**

- We do not jump to the ball per say, our **first move is to jump back into the PACK AREA** and then move toward the ball to preserve our **Ball-You-Man** relationship. Therefore, the nature of this position places our defender closer to the ball than the man who passed it.

- We assume a **flat triangle position, slightly open** and inside the PACK AREA when our man does not have the ball and is one pass away.

### Closeouts

- Closing out to the ball is the key to our recovery mode, sprint the first two to three steps, with the last couple being short, choppy, steps. We must accomplish two objectives in our closeout; first we must closeout **“Hard & Short”** with our weight back prepared to absorb the dribble (**we will not get blown away by the dribble**), and secondly, we must have **High Hands**. We teach our players to keep their hands high, with elbows bent, for a 1001 count. We must create the illusion that there is no shot to be had. We cannot allow the offense to have rhythm jump shots.

### Gap Defense

- **All Non-Ball Defenders are located inside the Pack Line** – This is the most critical part of our defense. We do not believe that our defenders can accomplish three things: they cannot **Deny, Help, and Recover**. Therefore, we have eliminated the denial, and we now focus entirely on the other two factors – **Help and Recovery**. Because our defenders in the Gap are already positioned in Help, they are now quicker in their recovery to the ball – there is no negative movement, away from their recovery.
- **We are constantly “Re-positioning” in the Pack area:**
  - 1) Position Up the Line, but Off the Line – slightly closed to the Ball
  - 2) Vision is of the utmost, we must see both Man and Ball
  - 3) Do not Help to Take a Charge, but rather with our **Near Arm and Leg**, we do not want to become **Blind to our Help**, by losing sight of our man
  - 4) Bluff help as much as possible, we cannot become sterile in our positioning.
  - 5) We must be **Active & Energized** in our Gap – **We are Zoning the Ball**

### Flash Post

- We are positioned in a flat triangle with our **closest foot to the ball slightly forward, therefore we are in a denial position to begin and better equipped to take away the flash.**
- **VISION** is key, **WE MUST SEE BOTH MAN and BALL!**
- Upon the offensive players flash cut, **we intercept it with our forearm**. We teach our defender to use his forearm, to bump or force the offense away from the lane *without extending the forearm*, which would be a foul, in order to deny.

It is a reality that our defender will momentarily lose sight of the ball, this occurs whenever we are defending a cutter, weather a screen is involved or not.

### Defending the Low Post

- **You must have a very clear and concise philosophy of defending the low post. How you defend this area dictates everything else you do defensively.**
- There are only two areas to be defended; the low post and the perimeter. Everything that occurs in our **Post Box** (Approximately two steps off the lane and below the first hash mark on the lane) is considered the low post, everything else is the perimeter.
- We  $\frac{3}{4}$  Deny on the High Side of the Post, we tell our players to **“Smother”** the Low Post. Activity is our biggest key, **WE MUST BE ACTIVE!**
- We can play  $\frac{3}{4}$  high because we allow no baseline penetration. This also places us in a better position to take away the “High-Low” entry into the low post.
- We must know our **slip-point** in the low post; it can vary from player to player, depending upon size, length, and quickness. Anytime the ball is on the side and the offense tries to move us up the lane, upon approaching the mid-lane area we must slip behind to the baseline side to avoid being pinned high.
- Anytime a player steps away form the post, we then treat him as a perimeter player and deny inside the PACK AREA.
- **There can never be a feed to the low post from the top, no exceptions!**
- On a catch, we tell our post that this is our time, not the offensive player’s time, but our time. We must quickly slide behind the post on **“air-time”** – do not reach or gamble for a steal, but work to immediately position ourselves slightly to the baseline side with a half-step of cushion between our defender and the offensive player, maintaining a position between the post and the basket.
- From our position behind the low post, we will defend the ball in one of three ways:
  - 1) **Play the post one-on-one from behind** – do not give up a scoring angle forcing the offensive player to score over our defender, not through our him. Our post defender must keep his hands at shoulder height with his fingers pointed upward. We teach our post to employ a one step cut-off in this area, using his chest to level off the dribble, **take the hit and force the tough shot.**

- 2) **Choke the Post** – our perimeter players located on the ball-side will open to the ball as it is passed and give help to the post defender. We can dive in and out to bother the post and choke the post only if he puts the ball on the floor, or we can full-out choke the post, immediately diving to the ball and digging it out, forcing him to throw the ball out to the perimeter. Obviously, if our perimeter defender is defending a dead three or a great scorer, we may determine not to choke with his defender, but only to bluff help.
- 3) **RED THE POST** – Double the post Big to Big. This is probably our most often utilized method of defending the post, and our most effective. It is a way in which we can force the ball back out of the scoring area, while creating turnovers.

### **RED in the Post**

- We employ our **Red** if we cannot handle a player one on one. Everyone, because of the **PACK**, is within one giant step of the low post. Therefore, it becomes much easier to double Big to Big, than if we were a denial defense.
- **The passer must absolutely deny the pass back out**, this pass cannot occur!
- The remaining two perimeter players sprint to occupy two areas, the Rim and the X-out positions. The Rim defender must not allow anyone to cut between himself and the basket – he becomes the sole protector of the rim. The X-out defender is positioned just inside the free throw line, opened to the ball. Again, vision and communication are absolute essentials. On a pass out of the low post; our X-out defender takes the initial pass and closes out to this player, our Rim defender has the next pass. Our perimeters will give support help until our Big arrives from doubling the post.
- The defender on the low post will create a cushion and **move slightly to the baseline** side on the pass, to allow the double and to take away a baseline spin move.
- The double must be on the pass, we move on “**air-time**”. The trap must be toe to toe – **shoulder to shoulder**. We want to **take away the cross-court pass to the open man with the position of our trap from the double**. “**Close the Door**” with our trap, do not allow the offensive post to look over the floor, be aggressive, but aggressive without fouling.
- **We want to be as high as we can be with our hands in the trap**. We want to avoid at all cost the temptation of reaching for the ball, keep those hands-up! Hands down will create the path for the pass out, hands down will increase our opportunity to foul.

- On a **“Release Dribble”**, we will leave the ball and immediately look to recover back to our assigned man. We could adjust, and stay with the offensive post on the Release Dribble, but our basic rule is to immediately leave on the **Release Dribble**.
- Recovery is on **“air-time”**. We will support perimeter to post, and we want our post to recover to their assigned man as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will allow a switch by the perimeter out of necessity.

### Help-side Rules

- Help-side Positioning:
  - 1) **Ball located above the free throw line extended:** Both feet are positioned outside of the lane, in a closed position – maintaining our **“Ball – You – Man”** relationship.
  - 2) **Ball located at or below the free throw line extended:** One foot in the paint and therefore straddling the lane line, and again with a closed stance – maintaining our **“Ball – You – Man”** positioning.

We can do this because we do not give-up baseline penetration and we do not front the post as a rule. We have placed our help-side defenders closer to their men to closeout and to avoid becoming screen bait. We are in a closed stance to better enable our defenders to deny the flash post or to defeat a screening situation. Because we allow reversal, we must be in this position.

Obviously this could change according to whom we are guarding, vs. a great shooter we would have both feet outside the lane with the ball below the free throw line extended, vs. a great driver we would do the same most likely, however vs. a great post and a non-shooter we may position this defender with both feet in the lane.

### DEFEATING SCREENS

#### Off the Ball

- We do not switch screens, only in special situations or scouting report situations do we switch. **Not switching makes our defense tougher!**
- **Play all off the ball screens the same.** We strive to keep everything we do within our defense as simple as possible. We will spend an inordinate amount of time defending off the ball screens. We spend more time on this than most programs spend on their O/B plays, lay-ups, and shooting combined.

- **We teach technique first**, and then we allow them to play. Our favorite drill to teach this skill, is 4/4 with a release. Thus, allowing the offense to screen as much as possible, in as many ways as possible, and as many combinations as possible.
- **The Cutter defender:** As soon as you know you will be screened, move to your man, getting as close as possible. Once our defender becomes a cutter defender, for this short time, he no longer has help responsibility and thus will lose vision of the ball for just a moment. We must aggressively follow the cutter into our proper defensive position – we want to be as physical as our size and strength will allow us to be. Obviously, if through scouting or playing the game, we can anticipate the offensive players cut, by all means do so.
- **Screener Defender:** We teach our screener defender to jump to the ball and create space between himself and the screener. He must help where necessary in the direction of the cutters action, but while staying within touching distance of his man. We give the screener defender a degree of freedom to help with the cutter.
- **There are exceptions to the above rules.** We want our players to play, we are not as rule oriented per-say as you might think. We want our players to conceptualize what our overall objective is and then play accordingly. We simply do not get caught up as much with this foot must be here, etc. as you must PLAY and Get Stops!
- **Examples of Defending Specific Screens:**

**Flare Screen:** Chase over the screen and loosen-up with the screener defender to protect the basket. This takes away the pop and rhythm shot by the cutter.

**Back Screen:** We jump to the ball and back inside the Pack Line, therefore, placing our cutter defender on top of the screener’s hip. Here we are in a position to take away the cut to the basket, a cut to the ball, or the pop-out cut. The screener defender gets lower than the screen, protects the basket and closes out to his man as quickly as possible.

**Cross Screen:** The cutter defender immediately moves to the cutter to take away the high cut, the screener defender opens to the ball, lower than the screen to protect the basket and provide baseline help if necessary. We utilize a “V” move here to move over top of the screen and recover back into the cutters path.

**Screen on the Ball**

- **Hard Show:** The screener defender gets in the dribblers path and has his “shoulders facing the ball”, while the defender on the ball gets over top of the screen and under the screener defender. The screener defender must force the ball handler to pick-up the dribble, go around the high side, or take a charge. We must help the helper with our other post defender, Big supports Big. We use this method of defending the ball screen vs. a great ball handler that can create and score with the jumper behind the screen.
- **Soft Show:** The screener defender positions himself in the lower plane of the screener with his shoulders tilted toward half court, two steps away from the screen (we are in a better position to recover to the screener popping), his job is to force the ball to dribble out and around, thus giving our ball defender ample opportunity to recover. He absolutely cannot allow a dribble around or pull-up jump shot. The ball defender goes over both the screen and the screener defender, over taking and recovering to the ball. We employ this method of defending the ball screen with a great ball-handler that is creative with the dribble, can shoot the pull-up, and the screener can pop and shoot it.
- **Slide:** The screener defender positions himself “2 x 2”; two steps under the screen and two steps away from screen, allowing the ball defender to slide under the screener and over our screener defender. We defend the ball screen in this manner when it occurs outside of the scoring area, or the ball handler is not a threat to score.
- **Flat:** The screener defender pushes up into screener while the on ball defender goes under both. We use this vs. a screener that can shoot-it, or a great screen and role guy.

**Defending Specific Screening Movements:**

- **Double Staggered or Side by Side Screens:** Defend with screener defender closest to ball extending into passing lane, screener defender furthest away is the zone man, and cutter defender chases hard!
- **Screen the Screener:**
- **Flex Action:**
- **UCLA Duck-in:**
- **Late Clock 1-4 Down:**
- **Late Clock Screen on Ball:**