

Defensive Drills

Successful defense in basketball depends on player's learning and executing a set of fundamental skills to defensive play. Any kid can be a good defensive player and can contribute to the team. Defense is a mentality and a choice. There is technique involved, but more importantly than learning technique is learning to consistently work hard and give maximum effort. It is important for the coach to make an extra effort to encourage and reinforce the development of defensive skills.

Defensive Ready Position

The previously mentioned "Ready Position" is basically the defensive ready position. It is a balanced stance that allows the player to initiate movement in all directions, some coaches may refer to the stance as sitting on a chair. Assuming this position enables a player to maintain a position between the offensive player and the basket and react to the offensive players movement.

When in a Defensive Ready Position emphasize the following:

- Feet shoulder width apart
- Weight distributed evenly
- Bend ankles, knees and hips
- Head up, back straight
- Arms wide and big (comfortable)
- Balanced

Defensive Slides

The defensive slide enables players to move laterally while maintaining the ready position. Players should maintain this stance unless they have been beaten, in which case they turn and run to cut the offensive player off and then reassumes the defensive stance.

When teaching the Defensive Slide emphasize the following:

- Point toe in the right direction of the slide
- Push off the back leg and reach with the front leg while propelling the body with a strong lateral push
- Make sure the feet don't come together or cross – maintain a wide base
- Don't bob the head... the head should stay level

If the offensive player changes direction, the defensive player must perform a drop step in which the trail leg is dropped back to a 45-degree angle, while the lead foot is used to push off into the new direction

Defending the Player with/without the Ball

When guarding the dribbler, the following points should be followed:

- Get low and ready to move in any direction
- Stay at least one arm's length away from your player
- Keep eyes on the mid-section of player
- Stay between the ball and the basket

- Once the offensive player has started to dribble, drop-step and perform defensive slides to maintain proper defensive positioning
- Pressure the dribbler to reverse direction or pick up his/her dribble
- If beaten, turn and sprint to regain position between the dribbler and the defensive basket

When guarding a player without the ball, the defender must do the following:

- Be between their man and the ball
- Be in the Ready Position
- Point to the ball and to their man
- Be below the ball so that they can see the ball and their man

Defensive concepts:

Players are often over taught the details of team defense to the point that they forget the basic concepts.

Some of the basic concepts we want to teach the players on the ball defense:

- To “mirror” the offensive players movements.
- To turn the ball handler in a new direction.
- To channel the ball handler in one direction.

Defensive Footwork Drills:

“Foot Fire” (All Grades): Spread players around the floor in a ready, defensive position. On your command, yell “Heat em up”. This signals to your players to start pumping their feet like pistons of an engine. When you say right your players will turn to the “right”; when you say “left” they will turn to the left. You can make this a game by mixing up your cadence, and the players who turn the wrong way will be “out”. Add variations to this drill by having the players slide to the specific direction you point to. Introduce the defensive drop-step and slide by pointing to the back corners of the gym (diagonal).

“Military Drill” (All Grades): On your command of “stance!”, everybody slaps the floor and yells “stance”. This is a good time to walk around to kids and give them a light nudge to make sure they are balanced. On next command, yell “choppers”. On this command, players are to run on the spot (foot fire) while remaining in their stance. Coaches can then instruct players to perform the required movement based on the hand signals: If coach points left, kids’ defensive slide 3 times to the left (maintaining foot fire motion). If coach points right, kids’ defensive slide 3 times to the right (maintaining foot fire motion). If coach points up, kids jump up with a hand in the air and yell “shot” – this simulates a shot challenge. If coach points down, kids jump on floor and back to their feet. This drill encourages kids to become familiar with the concept of a defensive ready position, defensive slides, hard work and gets them to be vocal.

“Lane Slides” (All Grades): Players line up on one side of the key and perform lateral slides – slides from one side of the key to the other. Players may make this drill competitive by recording the number of slides in a specific period. Make sure they keep the correct form. Chest up, butt down, short choppy steps.

“Partner Zig-Zag Drill” (3rd—6th Grade): Players form pairs: one offensive and one defensive player. The offensive player dribbles the length of the court in a zigzag pattern while the defensive player uses drop steps and defensive slides. Defensive players should stay one arm’s length away from the ballhandler. When reaching the baseline, reverse roles and continue the drill. As players become better at this drill, they can increase the speed and intensity at which it is performed.

Team Defense (3rd – 6th Grade) Team defense means that everybody on the floor is working together to prevent the other team from advancing the ball to an advantageous position (on the floor) and denying them an opportunity for a good shot. It is not the player who is guarding the basketball that is responsible for stopping that player from scoring – it is all five defenders on the court. These defenders work as a cohesive unit, providing support for teammates wherever needed. Nowhere else in the game of basketball is communication as important as on the defensive end. When teaching the concept of team defense to younger players, the most important concept they need to grasp is that of **seeing the ball**, regardless of its position on the floor. For example, if a player’s man is on the side of the floor opposite to the ball, they must be able to not only see their man, but the ball as well. So that if their teammate gets beat off the dribble, the off-ball defender can be there to help. Therefore, the **“help side defender”**, as they are called, must be in a **Man-You-Ball relationship**, meaning that the defender is between the man they are guarding and the ball. They can see both. He is in a position called a **“Pistol Stance”**, in which he has both fingers pointing: one at their check and one at the ball. If a player is in this stance, they will be aware of where the ball is and where their person is. To see both the ball and defender’s check, that defender must be below the line of the ball.

The line of the ball is as follows:

- If player 2 has the ball, player 1’s defender is a step back of the line of the ball.
- In being a step back of the line of the ball, 1’s defender is able to see what 2 is doing.
- If 2 happens to drive the ball to the basket, 1’s defender may provide help to stop the dribble.

“Defend the House” (K - 2nd Grade): Split kids into two teams: one offense and the other defense. The offensive team will start at half-court, while the defensive team will begin at the baseline. Set offensive “spots” (i.e., cones, lines, etc.) around the three-point line for the offensive players to run to. On coach’s command, “Defend the House!”, the offensive players will run to their “Spots”, while the defense will run out to defend the offensive player their designated to defend. When all players have “closed” out on their man, the coach will pass the ball into the offense and they will play out one possession. You can also modify this drill to run in a full court setting. Both teams will be on the same baseline. When the coach yells “Defend the House”, the defensive team will run down to the opposite key, while the offense is running to their “spots” simultaneously. Once the defense has matched up the coach will pass the ball in and players will play out the possession

“Man to Man Defensive Mirror Drill” (All Grades) - Pair off players with one on offense and one on defense. The offensive player has the ball and tries to dribble to the baseline. For the defender, the object of this drill is to prevent the offensive player from reaching the baseline. Make sure the defender is in the proper defensive stance sliding the feet as well as trying to make the dribbler go to his/her weaker side.

“Box-Out Drill” (3rd-6th Grade) - A coach shoots and players pivot with the shot, trying to box-out the opposing player behind them as they rebound the ball. If the offensive team gets the rebound, the

player immediately puts the shot back up. If the defensive team gets the rebound, they immediately pass it to the outlet. This may also be used as a fast break drill if there is access to a full court.

“Steal the Bacon” (All Grades) - A coach starts with the ball under the hoop while players form two lines on either side. The coach can throw the ball, roll it, bounce it, etc., and the first two players in line scramble to get the ball and score. The player who fails to get the ball in on defense, and the two teammates play until a basket is made.