

Defense Quick Start

See Complete Defensive Guide for
more information and drills

Jeff Brand
jeff.brand@outlook.com

Philosophy

- Core
 - Man to man foundation – shares concepts of Pack Line
 - Play inside / on the arc and guard 2/3 of court
 - Defend the house – i.e., the lane – the ball moving around the perimeter is ok – moving to the middle is danger
- Full Court Press
 - Recommend to press only when losing by 8+ with less than 5 minutes to go in a game
 - Work on your press only as part of working on your press break
 - Spend time you would spend teaching a great press on instilling other fundamentals
- Half Court Trap
 - Start at 6A/B level / 7th Grade
 - Change of pace
- Zone
 - Never a primary defense
 - Change up defense for older grades (7th and 8th) only

Coaching Thoughts

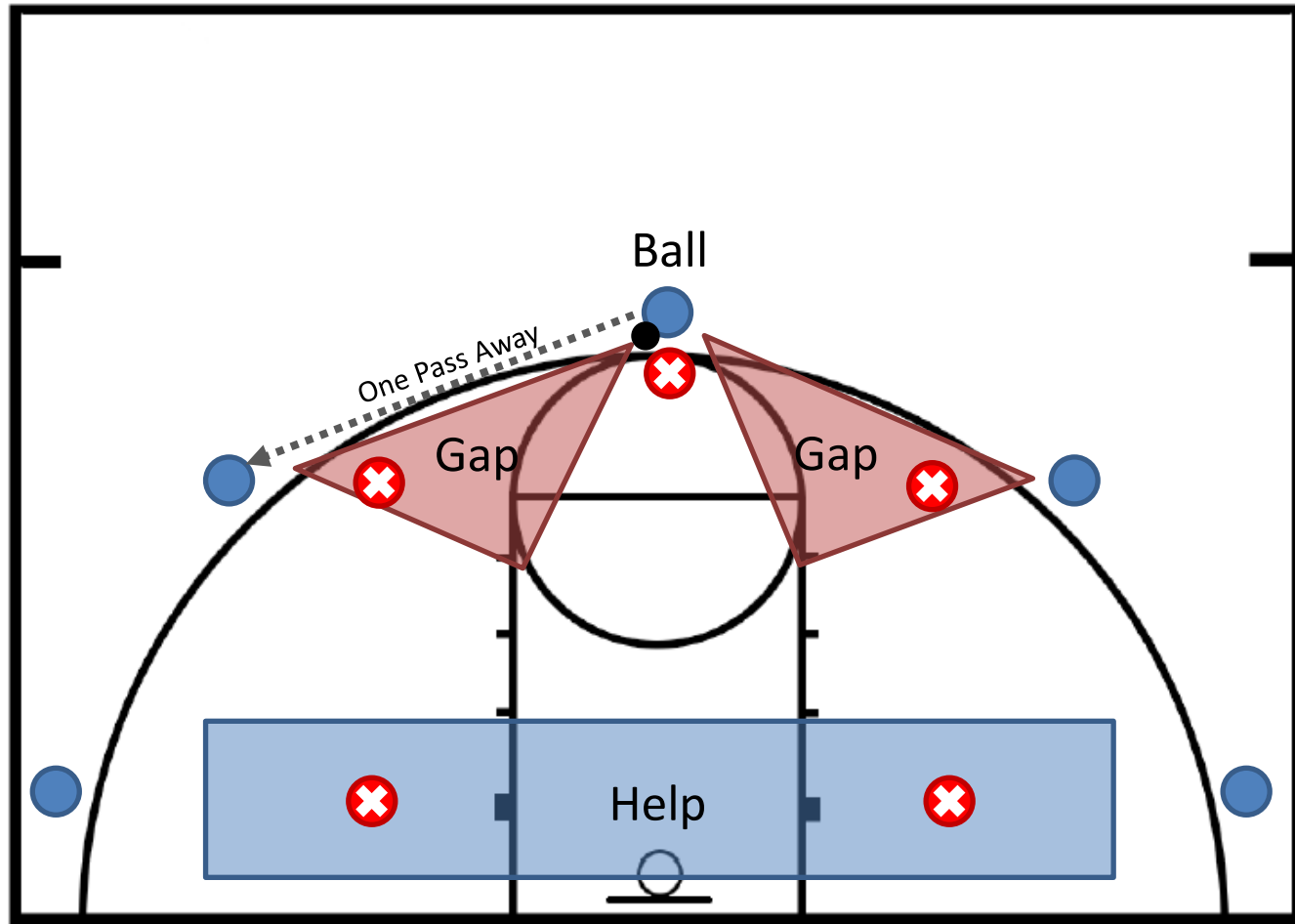
- M2M sets the best foundation for young players
- It doesn't take a good coach to run a good press because of player limitations in youth basketball – be a good coach

What to Coach When

- 4th / 5th Grade – Man to Man Only
- 6th Grade
 - Primary: Man to Man
 - 6A introduce containing ball to one side of floor with denial of pass back to the top of key
 - Change Up: Half Court Zone Trap (6A/B)
 - Situational: Full Court Press
- 7th / 8th Grade
 - Primary: Man to Man and with M2M trap opportunities and defensive rotations
 - Change Up: Half Court Zone Trap or Match Up Zone or Traditional Zone
 - Situational: Full Court Press

Ball, Gap, Help

- Man
 - The player with the ball
- Gap
 - The space between the player with the ball and one pass away to either side. The defender one pass away is responsible for controlling the Gap
- Help
 - All defenders two passes away are in Help



The Rules

- The Most Dangerous Player on the court is the one with the Ball
 - Everyone must always know where the ball is and be able to see it
- Always know if you are on the Ball or have a Gap – if neither, you are in Help
- The ball is not allowed to go into our House (the lane)
 - Stop dribble penetration

Coaching Tip

When running defensive drills involving Man / Gap / Help responsibilities, always have players call out what role they have. This helps players a) understand their roles, and b) helps the ball defender hear where his/her support is

Defensive Fundamentals

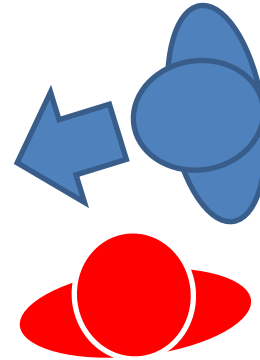
- Butt Down – Athletic Base – Do Not Slouch
- Arms out and hands active
 - Off ball hand to offensive players face. Ball side hand outstretched to side
- Eyes on the ball handler's belly button
 - Ball handler must always take their belly button with them
 - Watching the belly button makes the defender less susceptible to ball fakes, head fakes, jabs, etc.
- Positioning
 - Guard – You – Basket: Stay between your guard and the basket
 - At younger levels – nose on nose. Young players have tough time understanding shading, taking away strong hand, etc. Also forces them to learn to defend without a built-in advantage
 - Older Levels – start to teach shading to ball handler's dominate side to force the dribbler to use his/her weak hand
 - Ball handler picks up the dribble, get inside the bubble (see next slide) with wide, active hands
 - DO NOT REACH

Pressuring the Ball

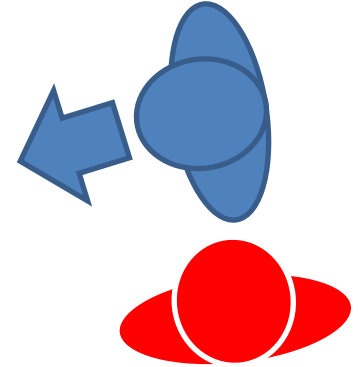
- The ball defender needs to be aggressive on the ball – make the ball handler uncomfortable
- Use The Bubble to explain pressure to players
 - The Bubble is an imaginary bubble that extends from the player's chest to the front edge of the basketball when a player is holding the ball in front of them
- Three levels of pressure
 - **Inside The Bubble:** Defensive player can reach their hand Inside The Bubble. Quicker players would be close enough to almost touch the ball handler's chest. Players with a quickness advantage over their guard should be Inside the Bubble
 - **On The Bubble:** Defensive player could touch the basketball with an outstretched arm if held in front of the offensive player. Players with evenly matched quickness should be On the Bubble
 - **Off The Bubble:** Defensive player is far enough away that they could not touch the basketball with an outstretched arm. Players that are slower than their guard should be Off the Bubble to give space in exchange for better containing dribble penetration

Defensive Slides

- Try and maintain chest to ball positioning
 - When dribbling, this means defender's nose should be in front of offensive player's chest
 - Shoulder to chest means the offensive player is winning – i.e., ball handler's shoulder is square to center of defender's chest
- Modern teaching is you slide with the ball handler only if you can maintain chest to ball positioning
 - If you lose control, turn and start running with ball handler trying to get back in front/cut off the dribble
 - This is called “turn and run” defense
 - The days of slide, slide, slide are over – you can never slide as fast as a good ball handler can dribble after the first few steps/slides



Chest to Ball



Shoulder to Chest

Coaching Tip

Chest to chest vs. shoulder to chest is a great teaching point when working with offensive players attacking the basket. If your shoulder is in your defender's chest, you are winning – FINISH!

Gap Principles

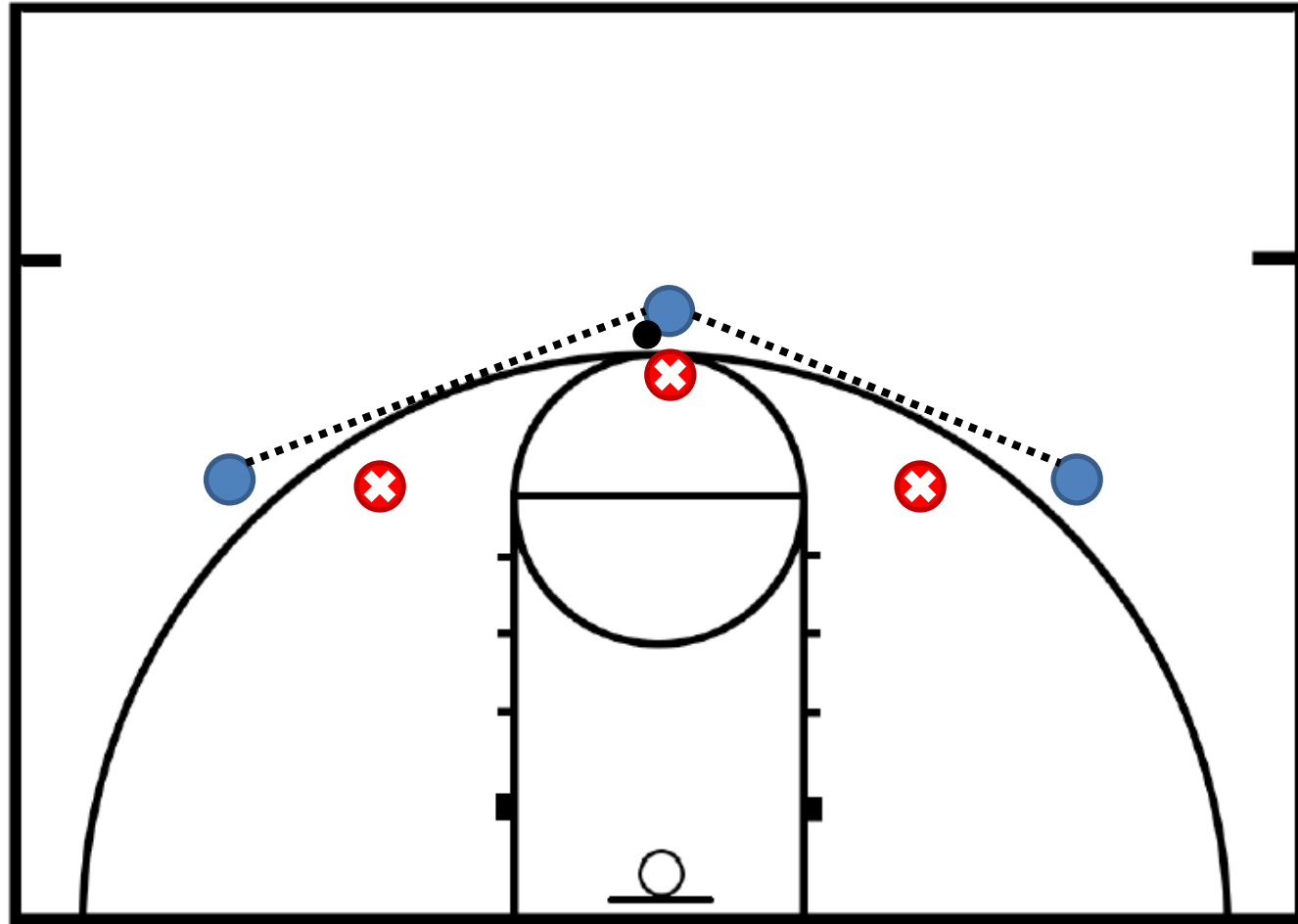
- Stopping dribble penetration is priority
 - May change as players get older / better and opponents show viable drive & kick and/or 3-point shooters
- Positioning
 - Defender is one-third to halfway between man and ball
 - Distance is dictated by ball handler speed, defender speed, and on/offline position
 - Offline position is usually an arm's length to arm-and-a-half underneath the line between the guard and the ball
 - Adjust based on defender's quickness

Coaching Tip

- At the younger ages, the team that can get the most shots inside the lane usually win. Keeping an opponent out of the lane goes a long way to winning a game. Work on gap defense and rebounding!
- Recommend off-the-line positioning instead of denial of passing lanes. Off positioning makes defending the gap easier and helps prevent back cuts. Unless you are the quicker team, on-the-line positioning makes defending the lane much harder

Gap Player Position

- One to one-and-a-half steps off the line
- $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the distance between man and ball
- Must be able to slide horizontally to close the gap and stop dribble penetration



Teaching Help

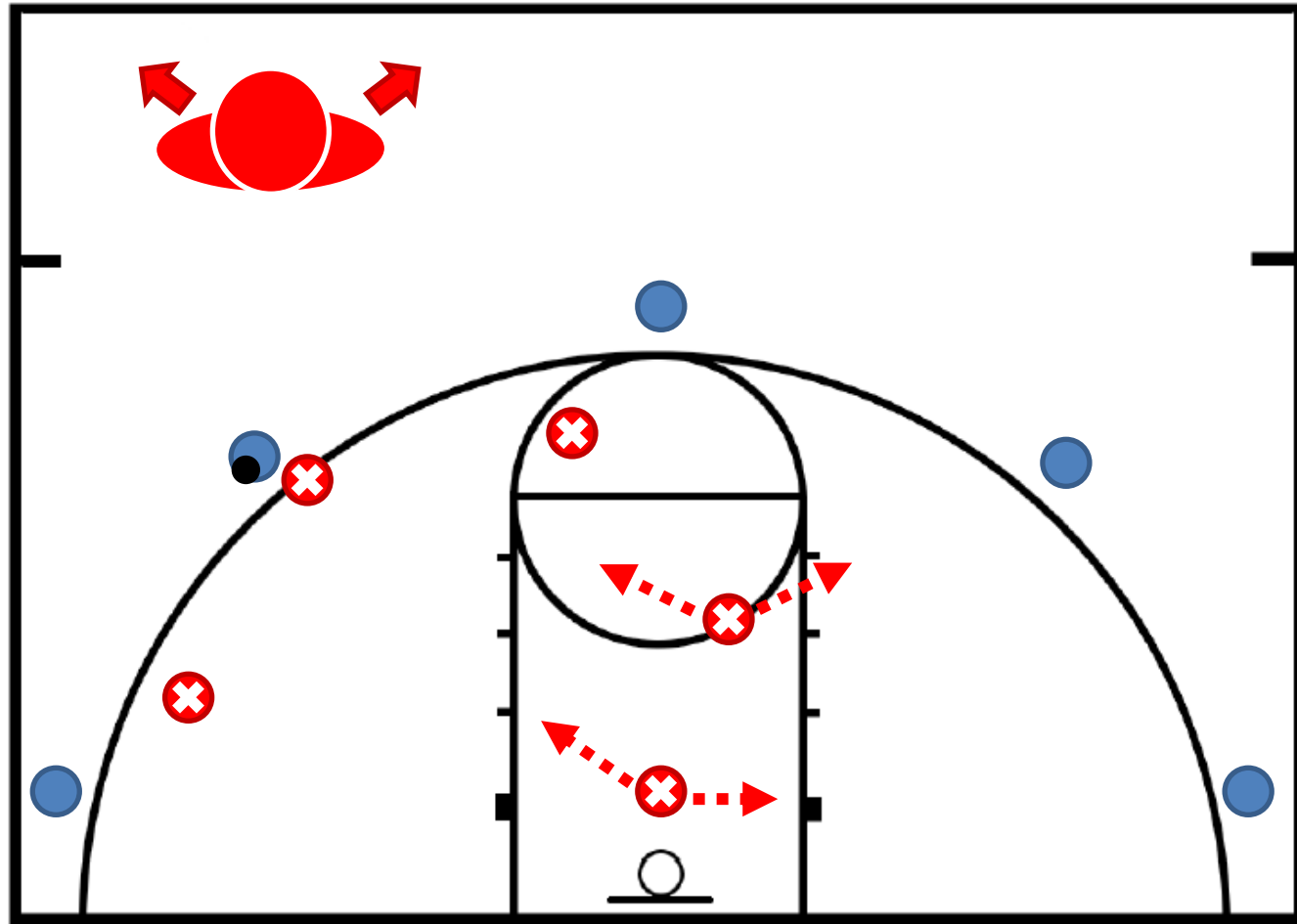
- There are different ways to teach help positioning
 - Cowboy – 4/5th grade
 - Corner Line – 6th+ grade
 - Quad – 7th/8th grade
- Some approaches work better for some teams. See the complete Defensive Guide for information on Corner Line and Quad positioning
- The goal is to get weak side defenders into high / low help positions (“zone”)
- At younger ages, it is just about getting players to the correct spots. Older players can be taught high/low positioning and varied responsibilities (i.e., trapping baseline drives)

Coaching Note

- At the younger ages, DO NOT teach players to “stick to their person” regardless of where the ball is. It develops bad habits and delays learning how to play team defense

Cowboy Positioning

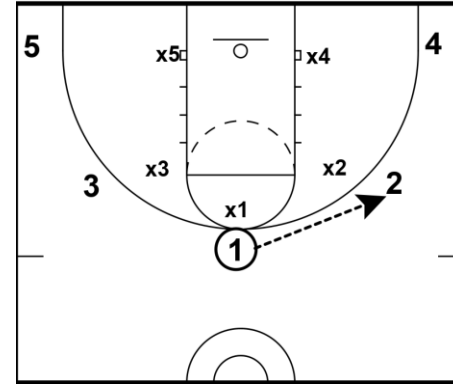
- Cowboy positioning
 - Player imagines he/she is a cowboy/cowgirl with two pistols
 - Player uses his/her hands as a pistol, holding them at roughly 45-degree offsets from body center
 - Keep sagging back in the direction of the basket until the defender can point one pistol at the ball, and one pistol at his/her person.
 - The resulting spot is help position
- Pros
 - Easy to explain and do
- Cons
 - Wing defenders get deep but not close enough to midline (not a big con when players can't skip pass)
 - Bottom defenders will get turned away from ball slightly if done correctly



Example

Ball at Top

- Gaps are contained
- Corner defenders are in help near blocks
- Do not deny pass from 1 to a wing
 - You want the ball to get to one side so you can more easily cover and help



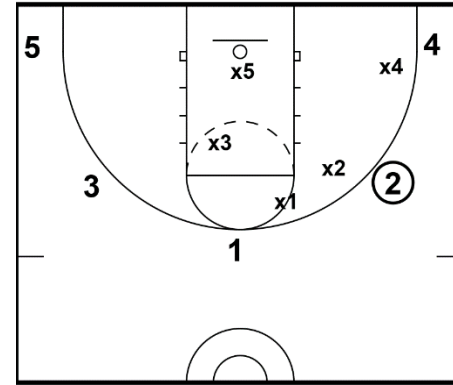
Coaching Notes

- When ball is at the top, it is critical that X2 and X3 contain the gaps.
 - Penetration from the top is very hard to defend once the ball handler is in the lane
- Older teams can try and keep the ball on one side of the floor once the offense commits to a side
 - Deny the pass back to the top of the key
 - May give up middle gap containment

Example

Ball on Wing

- Gaps are contained
- Weak side defenders are in help
 - Bottom defender near front of rim
 - Weak wing defender towards middle of lane



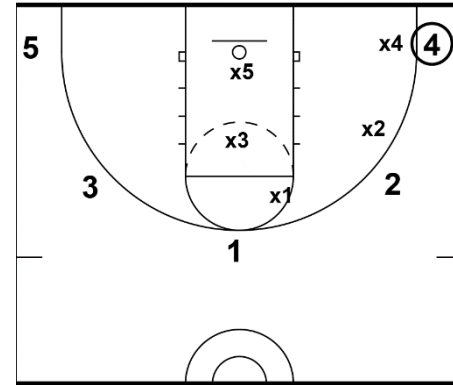
Coaching Notes

- Younger teams can move X3 closer to the middle of lane because there is less danger of a skip pass
 - Help defender's belly button on the far basket is a good visual reminder for the player
- Older teams will have X3 one or two shoes just inside the lane if opponents can throw a skip pass
- Teams that want to deny ball reversal will have X1 pressed out on 1 to deny reversal
 - X3 should be closer to middle of lane in this case to help control middle gap
 - Extreme denial can be applied by X2 shading 2 on the high side to keep that ball on that side of the floor and encourage pass to corner

Example

Ball in Corner

- High side gap is contained by X2
- Weak side defenders are in help
 - Bottom defender near front of rim
 - Weak wing defender at middle of lane
 - X1 near ball side elbow



Coaching Notes

- Teams that want to deny ball reversal will have X1 pressed out on 1 to deny reversal
- Teams that want to apply extreme contain will move X2 onto 2 to deny one pass away as well
- Older teams looking for trapping opportunities will put X4 on high side of 4 to encourage baseline drive and trap with X5
 - Must have good defensive rotations to do this

Force Baseline vs. Force Middle

- Neither is right or wrong – it is what you want to do as a coach
- Force baseline uses out of bounds as an extra defender
 - Players must be drilled in cutting off the baseline dribble or else you are immediately in a defensive rotation
 - Provides trapping opportunities
- Force middle leverages gap defenders immediately without affecting help coverages
 - No trapping opportunities
- Pictures at right show how the gap/help defenders would respond if containment is lost

