

How to execute an effective Man-to-Man Basketball Defenses

Do your kids a favor and start with the very basic man-to-man defense. Zone defenses have no place in youth basketball. In fact man-to-man defenses can be played six or more different ways. Start with normal and teach it well. They can learn the others, later on.

Normal Man-to-Man Defense

Each defender has two duties:

1. **Guard the player assigned by the coach.** This is his most important responsibility and under normal conditions, he should not expect help from teammates. When guarding a player who is dribbling, the defender must never lunge, but must move the man away from the advantage he, or she, seeks. The person guarding the screener should call out any switch. Both players should be aggressive staying with the player they have switched without retreating. In case of a mismatch where a smaller defender must cover a taller player, a teammate should collapse to help. The smaller player should play in front of his opponent in a pivot position knowing he will get weak-side help from alert defensive teammates. The players should switch back to their original opponents as quickly as possible under safe conditions, again calling the switch.
2. **Cooperate with teammates.** In case of a mismatch where a smaller defender must cover a taller player, a teammate should collapse to help. Players away from the ball should collapse toward the screen to help

To coordinate his, or her, movement to those of the team, each player has the following responsibilities:

1. **Force the opposing dribbler in a predetermined direction.**
2. **See both the designated opponent and the ball.**
3. **Be prepared to pick up opponents who are free coming off a screen or a backdoor cut.**
4. **Collapse to the middle to prevent easy reception in the pivot area when you are on the weak-side of the floor.**
5. **Be vocal.**
6. **Get back on defense quickly.**
7. **Be alert to double team opponents.**
8. **Be mentally and physically alert to avert any opponent's scoring opportunities.**

9. **Get inside rebound position on every shot by the opposing team.**
10. **Help the pivot defender in the following three ways:** First, do not allow a pass into the pivot area; second, float into this area to discourage the ball from being passed when your opponent is on the weak side; and third, try to tie up a good pivot player from the front by following the pass-in if the ball does get into the pivot-player's hands.
11. **Know your opponent's strengths and weaknesses and play him, or her, accordingly.**
12. **Intercept or deflect if possible.**

Here are a few diagrams to help you get started. I can think of a hundred others, but space is limited. Surely this will give you the idea.

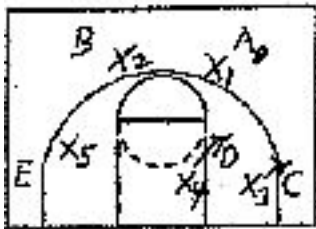


Diagram #1a - *Against a Two-Three Offense:* **A** has possession of the ball. **A**'s defender is playing him, or her, close on line between **A** and the basket. The corner defender, **X₃**, guarding **C** is up the line a little toward the ball, but close to **C**. **X₂**, defending against **B**, has dropped off a step toward the ball. Pivot defender, **X₄**, has taken a half-fronting position toward the ball in guarding **D**. **X₅**, defending **E**, has loosened normally and moved up to prevent **E** from cutting to the high post to get a pass. He is also in position to help defend **D** should a pass get to the corner player, **C**. (**Note:** all defenders away from the ball are inside their man-ball-basket triangle.)

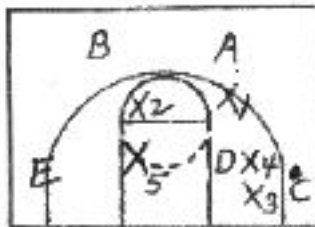


Diagram #2a - The ball has been passed to **A** to **C**, the corner player. **X₃** is playing **C** to the baseline side to prevent a drive in that direction. **X₁** has moved to a position where he, or she, is overplaying slightly toward the ball. **X₂** has dropped off **B** into the foul-lane area. **X₅** has dropped off **E** the weak side forward into the area between the foul lanes. **X₄** is fronting **D** in the low-post position to prevent him from receiving an easy pass into the pivot area. (**Note:** all defenders away from the ball are inside their man-ball-basket triangle.)

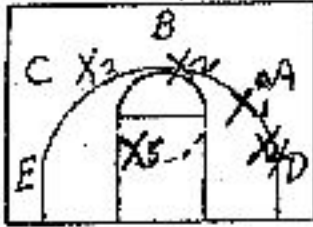


Diagram #3a - Against a Three-Two Offensive Alignment: **A** has the ball and is guarded by X_1 , who is up close between **A** and the basket. **B** is guarded by X_2 , who has dropped off slightly toward the ball. X_3 has dropped off **C**. X_5 has dropped off **E** and is a little high on him, or her, so that he, or she, can not get good pivot position on the outer-half of the free-throw circle. X_4 has moved closer to **D** to prevent a pass in or to pick him up if he cuts along the baseline without the ball. (**Note:** Here is the exception to the all defenders away from the ball are inside their man-ball-basket triangle for X_5 .)

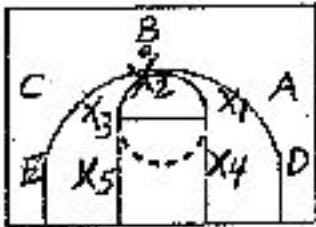


Diagram #4a - The ball has been passed from **A** to **B**. X_2 is guarding **B** between him, or her, and the basket. X_1 has dropped off slightly from **A**. X_4 has dropped off and up on **D**. X_5 has dropped off and up on **E**. X_3 has dropped off and toward the ball against **C**. (**Note:** all defenders away from the ball are inside their man-ball-basket triangle.)

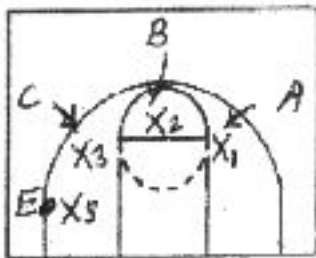


Diagram #5a - The ball is passed to the corner player, **E**. X_5 , guarding against **E**, must prevent a baseline drive. X_5 has dropped off **C** slightly toward the ball. X_2 has dropped off a distance from **B**, as **B** is two passes from the ball. X_1 and X_4 have dropped off **A** and **D**, since **A** and **D** are so far from the ball.

Tight Man-to-Man Defense

This defense can be used as a full-court, three-quarter-court, or half-court pressure defense. Such a defense is most effective when sprung as a surprise and used for only short periods of time. Use more passive defenses in-between. You will find this defense to be most effective against inexperienced teams or a team who has poor ball-handlers.

The tight person-to-person is a great defense for a quick, small team. Use it to move the opponents point of attack farther out than they normally like. This defense is an excellent defense to use when trailing, late in the game.

Defensive players play closer than normal to their assigned opponent. They must go after him, or her, in an aggressive manner whenever they have the ball. When playing the dribbler force him, or her, to their weak hand, not attempting to steal the ball. Stay in his, or her, bubble faking and jabbing to **stop** the dribble.

As soon as the dribbler stops, the defender moves up quickly getting as close to the opponent as possible, without fouling, waving arms to block vision, and shouting, "Dead! Dead! Dead!" The teammates, hearing this, get into the passing lane to the person they are guarding to prevent them from receiving an easy pass.

If the dribbler does pass off, his defender must drop off immediately toward the basket in the direction the pass was made.

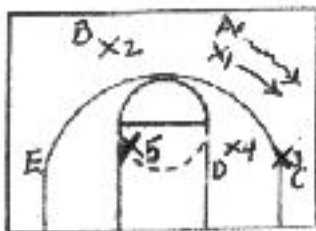


Diagram #6a - Against a Two-Three Offense - **A** has possession of the ball and is dribbling to the left. X_1 is closer to **A** than normal and is attempting to force **A** to the sideline in order to cut down on his, or her, passing lanes. All other players are guarding their assigned player closely, except X_5 who has moved off toward the ball to be in a good intercepting position and to be able to help X_4 , who has fronted **D**, in case of a long lob pass to the basket. X_3 has overplayed **C** to the

ball-side to prevent **C** from receiving a pass. X_2 has overplayed **B** to the ball-side to prevent **B** from receiving a pass.

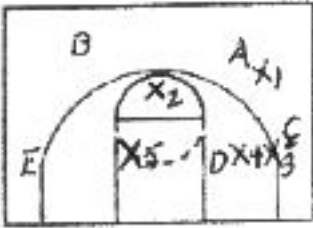


Diagram #7a - **C** has come back toward the ball and received a pass from **A**. X_3 , **C**'s defender, has closed in on **C** very aggressively. X_1 is overplaying **A** on the ball side. X_4 is still fronting **D** between **D** and the ball. X_5 has dropped down to stay between **E** and the ball, far enough to help X_4 in the event of a lob pass over the head of X_4 . X_2 has dropped off **B** who is two players away from the ball, toward the position of the ball to prevent a cut by **B**, and to help X_1 if uses a reverse cut to the basket. Both X_2 and X_5 are in good positions for interceptions.

Loose Man-to-Man Defense

As the name implies, the loose person-to-person defense is played in a looser fashion than a normal person-to-person. In the loose defense the players collapse preventing penetration of the lane.

The pick-up point of this defense is just outside the 3-point line. This is an excellent defense to use against poor outside shooting opponents, a good cutting team, a team that changes direction to the basket well, or a much quicker team than yours. It is also good for a taller team that is playing person-to-person defense for good rebounding strength. It places a burden on the offensive team to score from the outside.

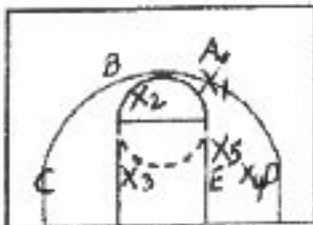


Diagram #8a - *Against a Two-Three Aligned Offense* - **A** has the ball. X_1 is on the 3-point line, playing **A**. X_4 , playing **D**, has floated off, allowing a pass reception.

X₅ is fronting the pivot player, **E**. X₂ has dropped back, playing **B** loosely and X₃, likewise.

Diagram #9a - **D** has received a pass from **A**. X₄ is playing on the 3-point line and on the baseline-side of **D**. X₁ has dropped off **A** and is on the ball-side, nearer the basket. X₂ has dropped farther off **B** and is at the foul-line area. X₃ has dropped off **C** and is in the foul lane. X₅ still fronts **E**.

Turn and Double Man-to-Man Defense

This is an aggressive double-teaming half-court defense, in which the player guarding the dribbler takes him, or her, toward the sideline. As this is taking place the near defensive guard will cheat toward the dribbler between the player he, or she, is guarding and the ball.

As soon as the dribbler picks up his dribble, his, or her, guard forces that player to pivot back toward the mid-court line. The guard who is cheating should sprint toward the player with the ball as he, or she, pivots and attempts to either steal the ball or forms a double-team with the dribbler's defender.

Normally, a player being double-teamed will pass in the direction the pressure comes; therefore, the forward closest to the player who left to make the double-team should shift into an intercepting angle between the ball and the teammate's free offensive player. The strong-side forward should, also, play at an intercepting angle. The center should zone between the two remaining offensive opponents, staying closer to the more dangerous of the two.

If the ball is passed to a forward, the double-team would take place between the defensive forward and a guard. In this defense you should expect the two guards, or a guard and a forward, will be the double-team players, and the center in the middle area using zone principles to protect the area near the basket. The intercepting angles are to be played on the offensive players nearer the ball. The fifth defender zones the basket area as mentioned above.

If the dribbler can get the ball to a teammate, each defender must pick up the nearest opponent. The passer must be played by his, or her, original defender. The double-teamer should sprint toward the basket because the loose opponent is usually the player farthest from the ball.

To negate the offensive opportunities for a mismatch of a small player guarding a big player, a switch may be necessary between the forward who has come to pick up the opponent of the double-teaming guard and the guard who has picked up the weak-side offensive forward.

The best way to effect this switch is to allow the ball to be passed back to the original passer and have the players exchange opponents on the pass. This will not hurt the defense because these players are so far from the ball and the basket, and it will allow the defensive team to adjust to this situation and again attack in the same manner as before.

Good intercepting angles and intelligent play by either defensive player guarding the two offensive players closest to the ball will result in many interceptions. Should the ball reach one of the offensive players on the weak-side, they should have an open shot. The defense should fake at them, allowing the shot rather than an easy lay-up.

The turn-and-double defense is an excellent surprise action that is most effective against a taller team with poor ball handlers. It upsets the opponents plan of attack and increases the tempo of the game. Have this defense ready to use when behind in the late stages of the game.

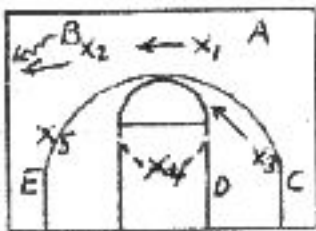


Diagram #10a - *Against a Two-Three Offense* - Player **B** has crossed the mid-court line and X_2 forces his, or her, dribble toward the sideline. X_1 , guarding **A**, starts to cheat toward the same sideline. X_3 coordinates his movement with X_1 and starts to cheat up toward **A**'s position. **E** is guarded by X_5 in an intercepting position. X_4 is guarding **D**, the pivot player on the weak-side in an overplay position toward the ball.

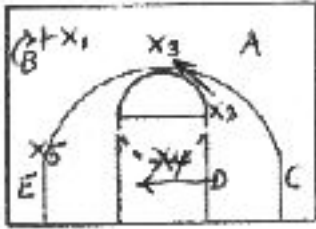


Diagram #11a - **B** has stopped his dribble after being forced to the sideline by **X2**. As **B** pivots back toward mid-court, **X1** rushes to double-team **B** with **X2**. **X3** moved up into an intercepting position between the ball and **A**. **X5** overplays **E** toward the ball. **X4** moved to the center of the foul lane at the lower half of the free-throw circle in a position to defend against **D**, who is moving across the foul lane, or **C**, who is the farthest player from the ball.

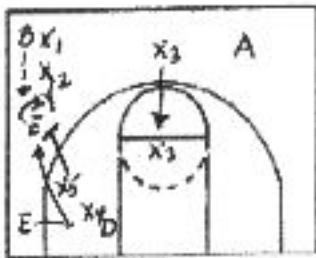


Diagram #12a - **B** passes to **E**, who has faked a cut to the basket and come back to relieve the pressure. Immediately upon **E**'s reception, **X5** plays **E** strong on the baseline side to make **E** pivot. **X2** leaves **B** and attacks **E** to effect the double-team. **X1** overplays **B** on the ball and **X4** overplays **D** who is at the low-post position. **X3** fell back from the position of an intercepting angle on **A** to the lower half of the foul circle to discourage a lob pass to **D** while still in an intercepting angle between **A** and **C** in case of a cross-court pass.

Switching Man-to-Man Defense

A switching man-to-man defense was the main defense Coach Arad McCutchan used while I sat on his bench. Coach McCutchan brought it with him from Bosse High School in Evansville, Indiana. This was the defense used by the Bulldogs when the racked-up two Indiana State championships in a row during 1944 and 1945. This defense is an oldie, but a goodie.

This defense is one in which the defensive players switch on every offensive cross, **except for the player defending the pivot**. If offensive guards are crossing laterally in the backcourt, a jump switch is very effective. The switching players are usually guards and forwards. If the center **must** switch while defending the pivot against a two-three offense, the center **must** call the switch, otherwise, his, or her, teammates will not expect it. If the opponents use a three out and two in, the defenders should switch on all crosses with **all five** players.

The switching defense is extremely effective against the weave, or an offense using good guard-to-guard or guard-to-forward screens. It confuses the offense, as it looks like a zone defense. The weak-side players sag toward the middle, playing their opponents loosely.

The switching person-to-person is excellent for a team that has one big player and four smaller players.

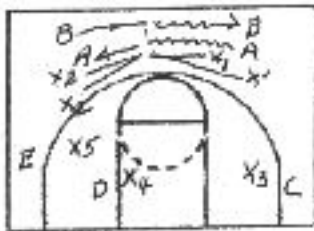


Diagram #13a - *Against a Two-Three Offense* - Offensive guards **A** and **B** exchange the ball in the backcourt. X_1 , guarding **A**, and X_2 , guarding **B**, move together as **A** dribbles and hands off to **B** who is cutting behind. X_1 and X_2 automatically switch with X_1 picking up **B** who has begun to dribble, and X_2 picking up **A**. X_3 is playing an intercepting angle on **C**, X_4 defends **D** in the low-post on the ball-side, and X_5 has floated toward the center and a little higher guarding the opposite corner. If **B** attempts to pass under these circumstances, there is a good opportunity to intercept this pass.

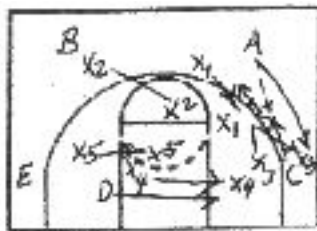


Diagram #14a - **A** passes to **C**, who moves out to meet the pass. **A** cuts behind **C** and X_1 moves with **A**. Likewise, X_3 has moved out with **C**. **C** starts his dribble and as **A** and **C** cross X_1 and X_3 automatically switch, X_3 defending **A** and X_1 picking up the dribbler

Run and Jump Man-to-Man Defense

I don't know who gave this defense its name; however, the concept has been around for ages. The run-and-jump defense is not a team's style of defense. It is really a part of a team's overall style of defensive play.

There are as many variations of the run-and-jump as there are coaches; however, the description here, follows these three rules:

1. It is used only against baseline drives.
2. The player who initiates the run-and-jump is a designated perimeter player who must shout, "Jump!"
3. Upon hearing the shout, the defender of the baseline driver quickly jumps to the weak-side exchanging defensive assignments.

The run-and-jump works best if it is initiated by your most capable and experienced player on the team. If a coach has a quick, smart, hardnosed perimeter player who doesn't mind contact and really likes to draw charging fouls, he is the logical candidate to initiate this play **any time** an opponent drives no matter what his court position. The coach don't even have to tell the team he is using the run-and-jump. All he needs to do, is tell that player to initiate the run-and-jump whenever he feels he can draw the charging foul. This player, of course, must use discretion; however, if he is a smart player, it isn't difficult to pick the spots. If such a ploy brings about two or three charging fouls, or turnovers, early in the game, opponents, sometimes, lose their willingness to drive hard to the basket.

Diagram #15a - Baseline Drive - When **B** attempts to drive the baseline, X_2 tries to force **B** wide as possible before **B** turns toward the basket. X_3 , on the weak-side of the floor, sees **B** making this move toward the baseline, slides farther away from defending **C** in preparation to jump into position outside the lane to stop **B**'s drive to perhaps draw a charging foul or forcing a turnover. (Perhaps you might wonder why X_5 since he is nearer was not chosen to initiate the run-and-jump. There are several reasons for preferring X_3 to X_5 in making the run-and-jump switch: X_3 might be a better defensive player than X_5 , **B** may not be able to find **C** as easily as **E** along the baseline, or the coach may want to

