



# DRILLS FOR DEVELOPING DEFENSIVE TACTICS





Igor Kovacevic

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Belgrade, 2021.



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**DRILLS FOR**  
**DEVELOPING**  
**DEFENSIVE**  
**TACTICS**







**I** see this book as an encyclopedia of defensive basketball drills. Every coach can find at one place, no matter which competition level team he is coach, some new drill from a large variety of displayed ones, as well as to remind himself about the drills that he might forgotten about or hasn't been using them for a while. While reading this book you can see that a great effort is put into it since different coaching philosophies and ways of thinking have been sublimated.

Drills are shown in a great methodical order according to different defensive segments. Very clearly and concisely. For development of any team individual development of each player is necessary and those are basketball fundamentals. This publication is dealing with basic defensive elements in basketball, but also "touches" group tactics which is something we can use while practicing with our teams.

While reading this book, dear colleagues, maybe one drill, one detail or even one idea can refresh your practice. This book is definitely worth a spot in your own basketball library, because as you read it on and on you will always find something that will make you fill like you are reading it "for the first time".

**Igor Kokoskov,**  
Head Coach of Men's National Team of Serbia





# INTRODUCTION

**C**oach is, following his own philosophy and potential of the players that he has on his roster, choosing a kind of defense he wants to play, and which his team will be playing in the actual season. During the game most of coaches are using different kinds of defensive systems, and they are doing all of that with a goal of finding the best way to make the best possible result. What the practice has showed us over the time till the day today - the best and most commonly used defense has been men to men defense. No matter what the age or level of the competition is using it, this defense has become a primary defense and takes a dominant place in training.

Although each of the players has a responsibility of taking care of his "own" player on offense, but at the same time he has to be ready to help and rotate when the situation dictates such a move. It is necessary to put in a hard work in it for a long time in order to have this kind of defense successful. In the process of learning there is great number of tasks that need to be mastered. Drills that are shown are making the usage of the defensive principles easier, from the defensive stance and moving, pressuring the player with the ball and defending rest of the players on offense, helping, switching and rotating, defending from screens to transition defense.

Basic rules of men to men defense are:

1. Pressure on the offensive player with the ball and preventing him from bringing the ball from one

- side to the other through the middle of the court in the fast way.
2. Forcing the player with the ball to go towards the sidelines and baseline of the basketball court. In this way the opponent is being limited in choosing the solutions, and at the same time it is easier for defense to help and rotate. While doing this you must pay attention not to open up to the opponent a vertical path that he can go through and make the advantage.
  3. You are not allowing the opponent to make a front cut, and if the opponent is making a cut - we are allowing him to make a back door cut - since there is a help provided from the other teammates. A special attention is paid when the ball is being passed that the defender jumps to the ball (moves slightly back when his designated player on offense receives the ball) since he is not allowing a front cut with such defensive position taken.
  4. While defending one pass away most of the coaches agree that you always help and afterwards recovers back fast to his own player. In that way you are making it hard for the player on offense to make penetration or drive since you are "shrinking" the court. The other coaching concept is play deny defense and it should be played in a closed defensive stance.
  5. All the defenders are moving as the ball is moving on the floor.
  6. Not allow the reversal pass into the middle of the floor.
  7. Drills for defensive basketball stance are sorted depending on who you are using defense against. Situations are different, and at the same time the ways and task for defense on the player with the ball, defending one pass away or two passes away, or the way you are helping in defense.

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## 1.1

# DRILLS FOR BASKETBALL DEFENSIVE STANCE AND DEFENDING A PLAYER WITH THE BALL

**P**recondition for any good defense is a defensive basketball stance which is providing balance, quick reaction on offensive players' activities and fast moving. Basic defensive stance is being established with a feet set wide (distance between feet equals the width of the shoulders), weight of the body is on front parts of the feet, legs are bent in knees, back are slightly bent and straight, head is set upside, with arms bent in the elbows. Distance between the feet should not be too wide in order not to lose the quickness for reaction. On the other hand, if the distance between the feet is too narrow - then you lose balance. Practice showed that the distance is an individual thing, but the distance between shoulders is an orientation point in defining the stance, which is giving the best results.

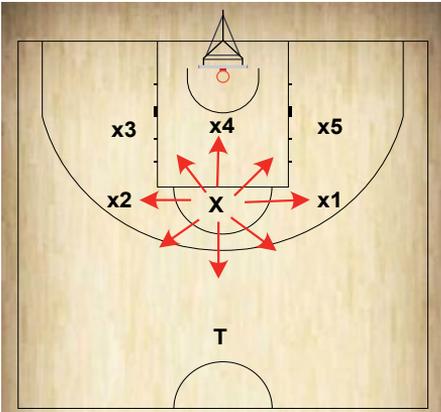
Big difference is when taking the stance when you are guarding a player with the ball and player without the ball, when the player is situated on the ball or on the weak side, when player is on the low post position or defense is played on a player on the perimeter. In all of these situations defensive stance has to provide movement which is in most cases with sudden changes of direction and rhythm. Full control of moving means first of all a fast moving with a balance well established. Drills in this area have a task to perfect the footwork technique and moving in a defensive stance, and also to help players to gain ability of anticipation of offensive player's moving (reading defense). Moving in a defensive stance

resembles the gliding movement, as much as the foot closer towards the direction of moving - the other one is covering the same distance by gliding (respecting the width of the stance). Players should always be corrected if they are using jumps or if their feet are colliding. Movements should always be short and quick.

Defense on the player with the ball has a task to stop fast movement of the ball, penetration to basket, taking shot and/or passing. Ideal situation is if the player on offense is being forced with good defense to stop the dribble and after stopping the dribble to make the pressure on the ball and to disable a successful pass or shot. Strategies of defending the player with the ball can be different:

1. Continuous turning the dribbler on his moving path. Defender is using his footwork to be able always to be for half of his own body on the moving path of the player with the ball ("chests on the ball") and trying to move the player with the ball back to previous position.
2. Forcing the player with the ball to the side line, or if this player is below the free throw line - pushing him to the base line. Not allowing the return back into the middle of the floor.
3. Good defense is forcing the player with the ball to use his weaker hand while dribbling the ball. Turning the dribbler using the defensive stance on the dribblers weaker hand side is forcing the player with the ball to use his weaker hand while ball handling.

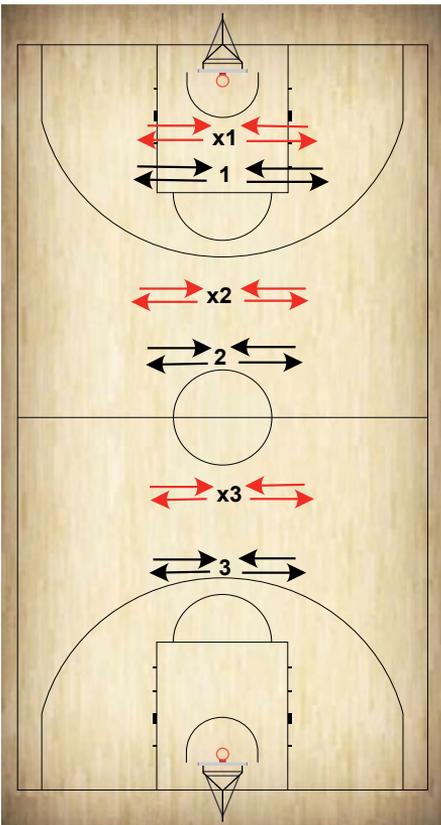




**DRILL 1a**

**DRILL 1a**

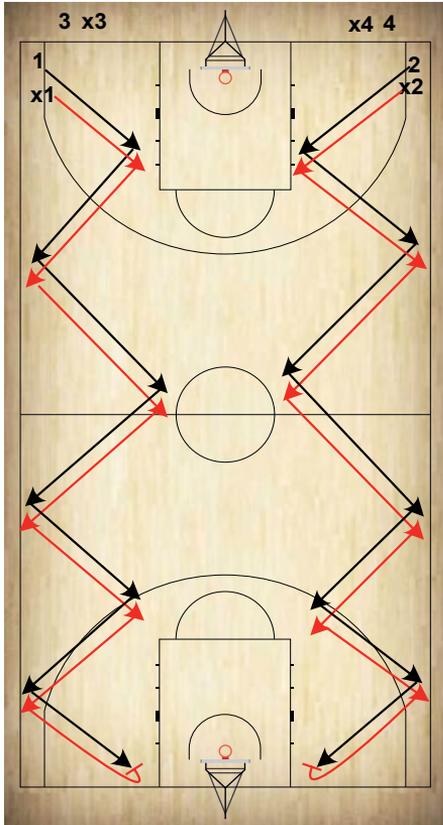
Group of players is taking basic defensive stance. Coach is giving visual instructions for the direction and players are moving in a stance.



**DRILL 1b**

**DRILL 1b**

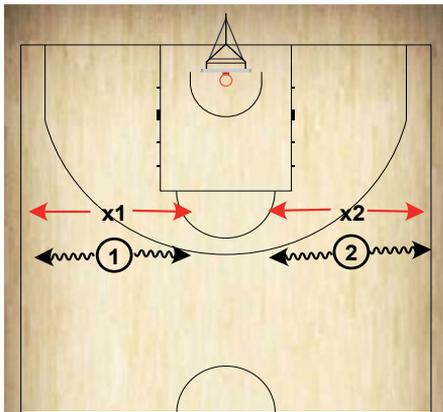
Players on defense are taking care of their opponent on offense. Players on offense are moving in a straight line on the width of the floor, and defenders are reacting by moving in a stance. Speed of reaction is depending on the correct defensive stance and moving. Players on defense are not allowing player on offense to gain advantage with their defensive reaction, even though the players on offense are making decision on changing the direction of moving.



**DRILL 1c**

**DRILL 1c**

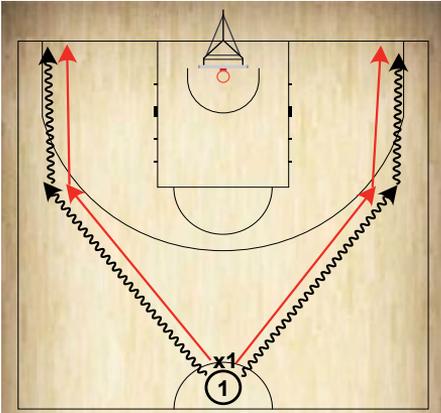
Player on offense is without the ball and he is moving within the corridor (in a conducted way), changing the rhythm and direction of movement. Defender is using his stance trying to get on moving path of the player on offense.



**DRILL 2**

**DRILL 2**

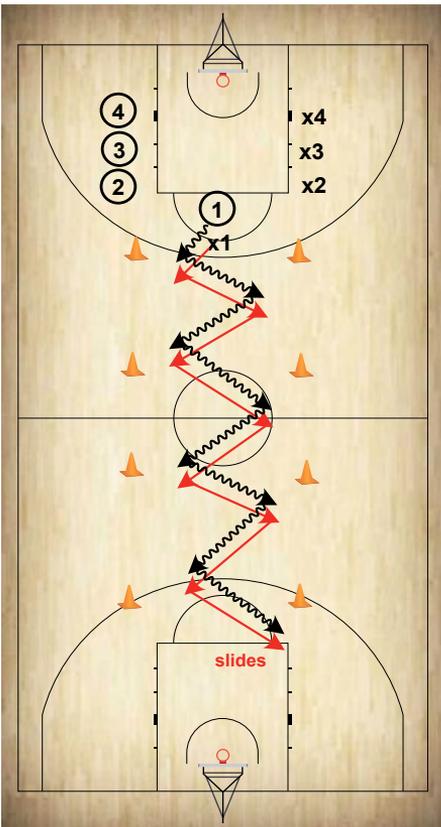
Player on offense has the ball and he is moving in a conducted way in the corridor, while changing direction of moving using the dribble. Defender is using his reaction in a defensive stance to try to always be in the line with the ball, not allowing the ball handler to make advantage.



**DRILL 3 a**

**DRILL 3a**

Player on offense is in the middle of the circle on the center of the floor with the ball and he is moving in a conducted way (not with maximum speed). Goal for defense is to force the player with the ball to the nearest side line, not allowing him penetration to the middle of the court. From the free throw line player on offense is forced to the base line.



**DRILL 3 b**

**DRILL 3b**

Player on offence is limited with the space on the court - only able to move in the central corridor., and defense is not allowing a direct penetration through the middle and turning the dribbler.



## 3.2

# DRILLS FOR DEFENDING HAND-OFF SITUATIONS

**H**and off is a kind of screen to a team mate with the ball with a wide range of use in modern basketball. Defending hand off situations is thereof similar to defending on ball screen situations, and we are recognizing following kinds of defense:

1. Through
2. Behind
3. Hedge (and recover back)
4. Switch
5. Trap
6. Jump on the movement path of the player that is receiving the ball from hand off

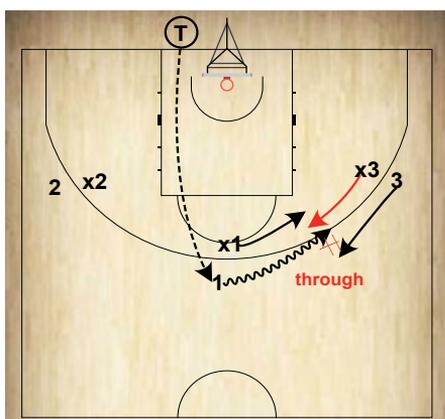
By using hand off players on offense are hiding the basic idea of the offense, because in combination with the other elements of game tactics on offense is confusing defense. Player on offense with the ball can penetrate to basket, but after he hands off he can roll to the basket or pop up for shot. Player which is receiving the ball from hand off can just fake movement towards the hand off, but his real intention is to cut to the basket or to open up for shot from the distance.

Teaching defense from hand off starts from forcing the player with the ball to use his weaker hand - he is under the pressure and not feeling comfortable in making hand off. In choosing kind of defense distance of the ball from the basket is a decisive element. Hand offs in the paint are most often defended with switching,

while hand offs on outside of the perimeter are defended by going under or through.

Mutual hand offs between perimeter or hand offs between inside (big) players are defended by switching. Combination of perimeter and big players (or the other way around) mostly requires defense to go under or through. As a surprising factor a trap can be used and very often is used in young categories.

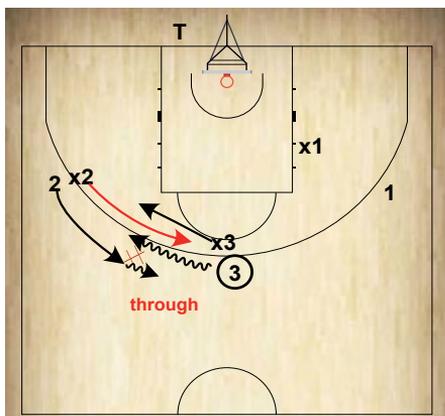
Drills for defending screens and hand offs are used on an every day basis with clear and loud communication of players.



**DRILL 1a**

**DRILL 1a**

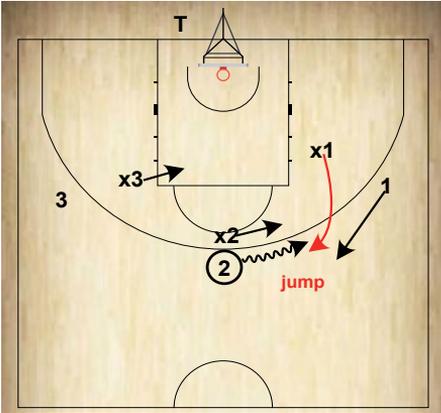
Coach is passing the ball to player 1, which is after using the dribble handing it off to player 3. Defender X3 in the moment of hand off using a gap to go through which defender X1 has provided for him. By going under the player 1 defender X3 is continuing with defending player 3, while defender X2 remains on his player on offense.



**DRILL 1b**

**DRILL 1b**

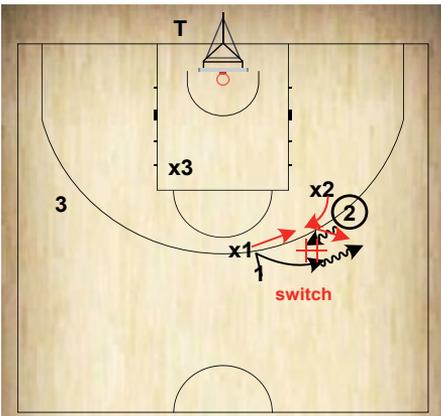
Player 3 is continuing with the dribble to the opposite side and hands off the ball to team mate 2. Defense reacts in the same way with communication - defender X2 is going through the gap left by defender X3.



**DRILL 1c**

**DRILL 1c**

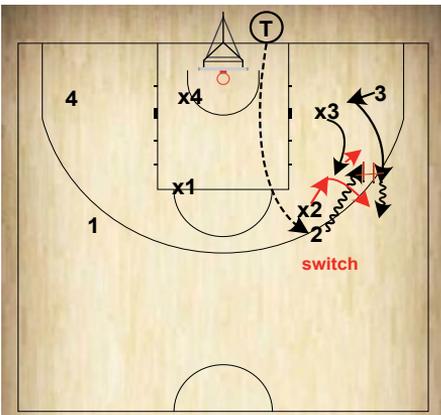
Player 2 is dribbling the ball to the opposite side and hands off the ball to team mate 1. Defender X1 has read (anticipated) the intention and jumps at the right time and disables player 1 from receiving the ball.



**DRILL 1d**

**DRILL 1d**

Player 2 is handing off the ball to team mate 1 and opens up like coach requested - wide or with roll to the basket. Defense is using switching on hand off, so that defender X1 is taking over player 2 and defender X2 is in the player 1 with the ball.



**DRILL 2a**

**DRILL 2a**

Coach is passing the ball to player 2 which is using the dribble to hand it off to team mate 3. Defenders X2 and X3 are communicating and switching on players 3 and 2.



## 4.0

# DRILLS FOR TRANSITION DEFENSE

**T**ransition defense is a very important and demanding part of defense. As a main part of the strategy it has to be practiced on a daily basis. Player must understand the importance of defending the basket in the first seconds of opponents attack. By getting a ball possession opponent is starting with fast break, and that is the moment for all the players to sprint back and defend their basket.

Possibility to defend basket is becoming more realistic if players with their movement are respecting spacing on offense. Key position on offense has to be filled - which is a spot on the top of the paint. It is easy to get back on defense from that position, and also it is the best position to observe and realize what are the priorities. Most often from that position is sprinting back, while at the same time closest perimeter defender is stopping the player with the ball. Main task is not to allow the offense to gain advantage. With the end of the offensive possession, with missed shot, closest big (inside) player is disrupting the rebounder when he is trying to make first pass and afterwards sprints back.

Priorities in transition defense are:

1. Prevent easy scoring (long passes from one basket to the other, layups after penetrations) which means to get back in the paint as soon as possible;
2. Stop the fast ball transition (player with the ball should be pressured as soon as possible, forced to the sides of the floor and prevent outnumber situations);

3. Preventing making first pass in a fast way (force the rebounder to make an additional pivot or even to dribble, to slow down or prevent fast break);
4. Communication among players is necessary since they are not defending players but their own basket. Match up defense is present and players are quickly communicating about the responsibilities.

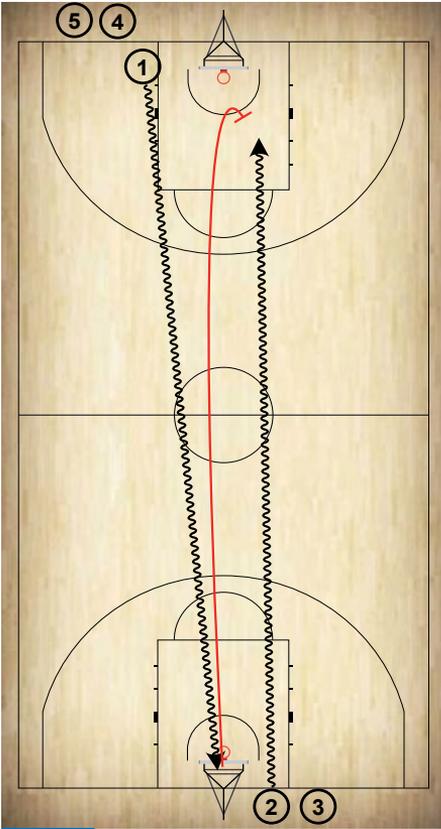
Key thing for defense are the first two players that are coming back. Player which is getting back in the paint is preventing easy scoring from a lay up, because he is preventing a long full court pass. Second player has an exclusive task to stop fast ball transition and in that way he is buying time for other team mates to return back on defense.

Other three players are sprinting back, making a quick judgement on the position of opponents and taking them over using a match up rules. Most important thing is not to allow an open shot for the opponent.

There are some extreme thoughts that after a shot is taken all five players are sprinting back on defense. Players who don't have potential to participate in transition or miss their obligations in this segment of the game are losing their spot on the team.

In the last couple of seasons analysis made in the NBA games showed a new trend of decreased number of offensive rebounds, as a direct correlation with the demands in transition defense. Coaches are choosing to increase quality of their defense, since the shooting percentage in the first 6 to 7 seconds of the possession is extremely high. It is expected that the balance will be obtained between the involvement of players on offensive rebounding and quickly returning back on defense. Selection of tall and fast players which are fulfilling both demands will contribute to this compromise.

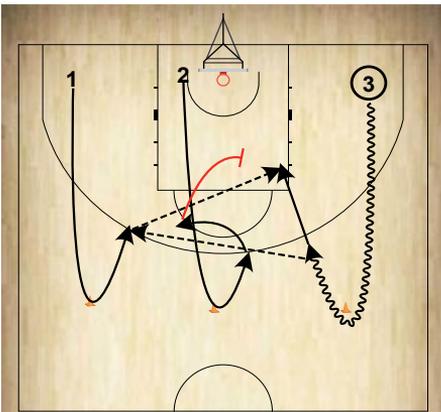
In '2 on 1', '3 on 2' or '4 on 3' situations additional pass made by team on offense is giving an opportunity for defense to get back and get organized. Every shot taken from mid ranges has a less percentage of success than a layup. Those are details that you should focus your player on, since modern basketball is a transition game.



**DRILL 1**

**DRILL 1**

Player on offense is penetrating in "1 on 1" situation and after lay up made he has a task to play a full court defense. Key thing is a fast reaction, to play defense right after the shot is taken. Player with the ball is under the rim and as soon as the ball touches the net he starts sprinting. Goal is to stop the player with the ball as soon as possible and in that way to defend your basket.



**DRILL 2a**

**DRILL 2a**

Players on offense 1 and 3 are running out around the cone, and passing the ball to each other afterwards forming "2 on 1" situation against the player in the middle. Player 2 is trying to prevent direct and easy scoring by closing the passing lanes and setting himself on the moving lanes of players with the ball.

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