

ZONES ARE MORE PREVALENT NOW – IS IT TIME TO SWITCH?

BASKETBALL COACH

WEEKLY

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GUARDS
MUST FIGHT
THROUGH
SCREENS

SHUT DOWN BALL SCREENS

6 DEFENSIVE
TECHNIQUES

DOUBLE-TEAM WITH 'BLITZ'

ATTACK THE BALL HANDLER

FLASH & RECOVER

'HEDGE' DISRUPTS

AN OFFENSE'S
TIMING, COHESION

SIDELINE OOB PLAY

WIN WITH THIS
PROVEN SET



KEEP YOUR COOL UNDER THE MOST EXTREME CONDITIONS

Know When To Zone Them



Basketball Coach Weekly
Issue 69

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Sideline Stories

As coaches, you emulate (fancy word for "copy" or "borrow") what is working for the most successful teams. Right now, it appears zone defenses are gaining more credibility beyond what is played in Syracuse, NY.

For years whenever you wanted to discuss zone defenses, the conversation began and ended with Jim Boeheim and Syracuse's 2-3. Now, not so much. Zones are being played everywhere in college hoops.

I just watched the Oregon State men's

"The best way to teach defense to young players is through hard-nosed, man-to-man principles ..."

team knock off then-No. 7 Arizona with a feisty zone defense. My alma mater, Marquette, led by former Mike Krzyzewski disciple (and man-to-man proponent) Steve Wojciechowski has shifted into a zone coach as the team attempts to overcome size limitations.

Thad Matta's Ohio State team played man defense on 99.5 percent of its possessions last season (this according to material quoted from Synergy Sports Technology by *Sports Illustrated's* Seth Davis in December) but shifted almost exclusively to zone this year. Matta explained why to Davis:



Ohio State's Thad Matta has switched from primarily man defense to zone this year ... should you?

"I like the fact that I can put my best offensive players on the floor and not worry about who's guarding who."

Best offensive players on the floor? Less-athletic teams competing with the best squads in the country? Sounds great and I'm sure youth coaches have noticed this shift as well.

In fact, I received an email from a fifth and sixth grade girls coach recently about our new Pack Line Defense report. He liked the ideas in it and wanted to know about implementing them with his teams.

Despite more college coaches shifting to zones and the immediate potential benefits, at the emailer's level of play, I'm not in favor of it. You can't play a good zone if your athletes aren't capable of defending. The best way to teach defense to young players is through hard-nosed, man-to-man principles.

While zones at the highest levels are frenetic and fast-paced, I've seen lower-level teams try zones only to watch as players become more concerned with their exact area of responsibility rather than simply defending.

Plus, as a youth coach, you don't have the time necessary to dedicate to

proper zone principles. Players at this level still need extra fundamentals time — they're learning dribbling, passing and shooting — you can't waste valuable gym time on intricate defenses required for the sole purpose of winning, which isn't the goal at this level anyway.

I love watching well-played zone defense at the high school and college level. But, when watching those players move, shift, slide, recover, help and defend, I know those abilities came from years of man-defense repetitions earlier in life.



Michael Austin

Michael Austin
Editor-in-chief

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Only focus on one or two of them but understand them all so you can pick the best ones for your squad's talents

4 BLITZ & DOUBLE-TEAM THE BALL

The blitzing strategy is perfect for teams already accustomed to running full- and half-court traps

5 HEDGE & PUSH AWAY

Move the point guard in the opposition direction of the offense to disrupt timing and cohesion

6 NEAR-SIDE SCREEN SETS UP LOB

Add this sideline inbound play to your playbook immediately so you have a proven set late in your next close contest

QUICK HITTER

The Climax-Fisher High School (Minn.) girls varsity team, riding an 84-game losing streak, found itself in the unenviable position of having to play 3-on-5 during part of its double-overtime game last month.

And the team won.

The squad only dressed nine players. Five fouled out. Another player had logged her allotted junior

KEEP COOL IN ALL CASES

varsity/varsity minutes by halftime.

Head coach Jonathon Vonesh told the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* defending with four players wasn't as difficult as you might expect (think about your four-player shell drill at practice). But, once he was down to three players, then he had to go deep into his coaching mind. He went with a makeshift zone with a player pressuring the ball, another handling

the wings and the third near the hoop.

Are you ever going to play 3-on-5 in a real game? Probably not. Weird things happen, however, in our game. When they do arise, keep your cool and give the appearance you are in complete control. Your players feed off this and may even be inspired to win despite the long odds.

— Michael Austin

The NBA uses a lot of "hard hedge" defense where the ball handler's defender must fight through the screen and recover to the ball



Learn The 6 Techniques To Defend Ball Screens

The key is to be great at just 1 or 2 of the suggested strategies but having an understanding of them all allows you to employ the best defense for your talent

The best way to approach ball-screen defense is to become strong in one or two tactics, and not trying to cram too many variations into your players' heads.

Check out these six strategies for defending the ball screen, then determine what works best for your squad. The first two, Blitz and Hard Hedge, are diagrammed on the following pages as a place to start.

BLITZ

This is a double-team of the ball handler on the screen. If you like to trap in a full- or half-court setting, then this is a great option for you. The result is getting the ball out of the point guard's hands and pressuring the ball screen, all of which disrupts the offense.

HEDGE

The "hard hedge" (shown on page 5) is a favorite at the NBA level. The screener's defender aggressively slides high and forces the ball handler into retreat mode (rather than attacking) coming off the screen. The screened player recovers to the ball, then the screener's defender recovers with high hands. Michigan State's Tom Izzo uses a "feather" or "soft" lateral hedge, meaning the screener's defender uses a lateral step to flatten the ball handler and prevents a big man from getting caught in the long recovery of a hard hedge.

SWITCH

Is your team all the same height and possessing the same athleticism? If so, switch the ball screen because being similar means no mismatches when changing defenders.

JAM

When going against a great athlete who isn't a great shooter, jam up against the screener (straddle the outside leg) and not allow the roll, then the ball defender goes under and meets on the other side.

STEP BACK

The screen defender gives room for the ball defender to go under. This is similar to "Jam" but the screen defender sags against a screener who isn't a great shooter rather than jams.

DOWN (OR ICE)

A favorite of Phil Jackson, this strategy prevents the ball handler from getting to the screen by cutting him with help from the screen defender. This works well on a side pick-and-roll and when the screener is a non-shooter.

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Blitz & Attack The Point Guard

Perfect for teams already committed to trapping in the full- or half-court setting, blitzing the ball screen means running a hard double at the point guard

WHY USE IT

Offenses rely up on their point guards to make things happen. By blitzing the offense's ball-screen action, the point guard is forced to get rid of the ball before he or she wants, which throws off the offense's timing.

SET UP

In this instance, the ball is on the wing as a screener is positioned high. X1 knows the screen is coming and readies to fight through it.

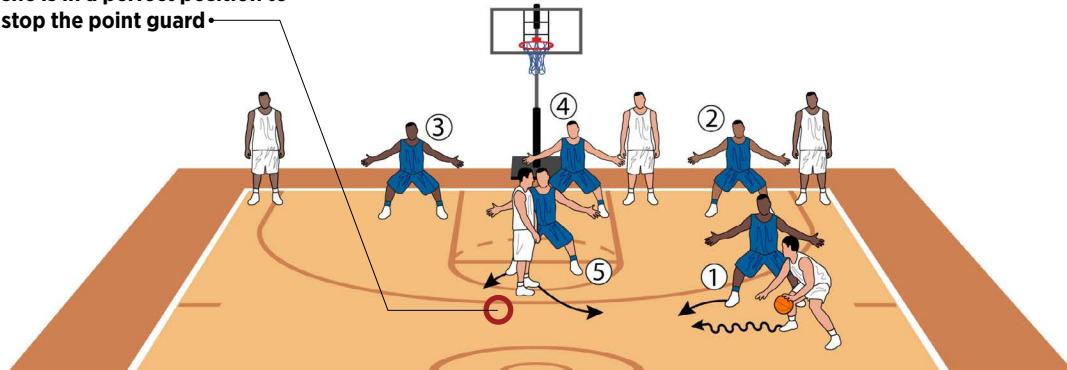
HOW TO PLAY

As the point guard dribbles left, the ball screener starts to come high. Rather than chasing the screener, that player's defender (X5) moves behind and looks to double the ball handler at the top [1]. The ball handler continues toward the top and is met by X5. X1 has fought through the screen to double-team the point guard. X3 shifts into a passing lane. X4 comes high to pressure the screener. X2 replaces X4 as the rim defender [2]. The point's only options are to pass to the screener (typically not a creator) or try and force a long pass to the right corner. The defense has cut off all options [3].

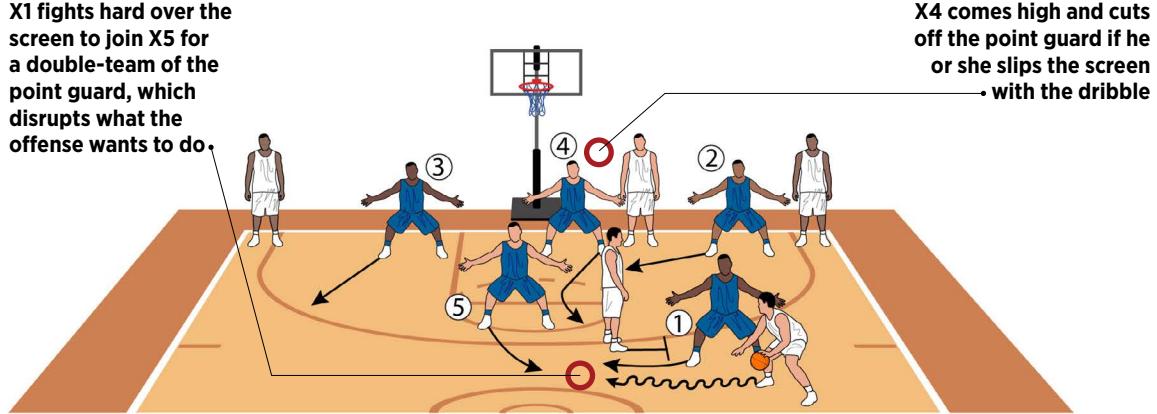
TECHNIQUE

Even if the point guard tries to attack the rim before the screen to avoid X5, then X4 is coming high and is waiting.

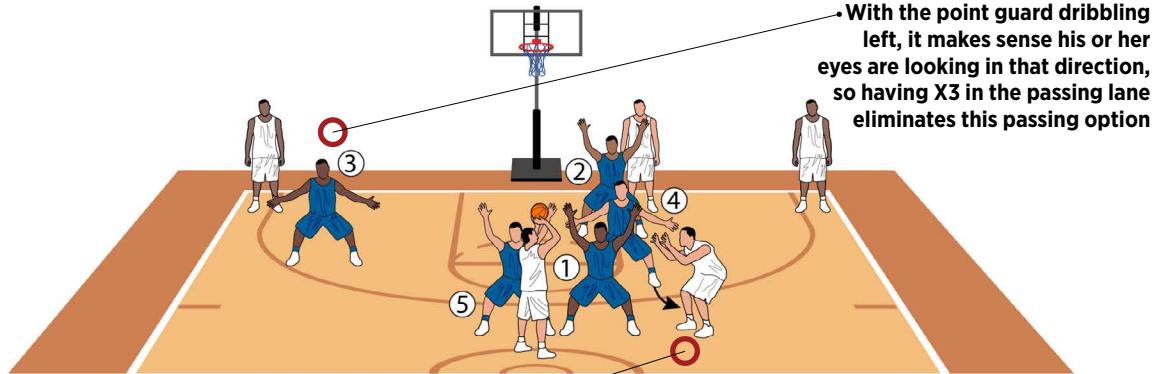
- 1** X5 comes around the screener rather than following so he or she is in a perfect position to stop the point guard.



- 2** X1 fights hard over the screen to join X5 for a double-team of the point guard, which disrupts what the offense wants to do.



- 3**



The screener is the first available pass for the point guard, X4 comes high to take away this option

Player movement →

Ball movement - - - →

Dribble ↘

Shot →

Hard Hedge Forces Retreat

Move the point guard in the opposite direction of the offense to disrupt the opposition's timing and cohesion while still covering rolling screener

WHY USE IT

Once again, the goal is to keep the offense from running what it wants, as well as forcing the point guard to make a non-attacking pass.

SET UP

This set of diagrams shows the ball starting on the right wing with a center at the top of the set.

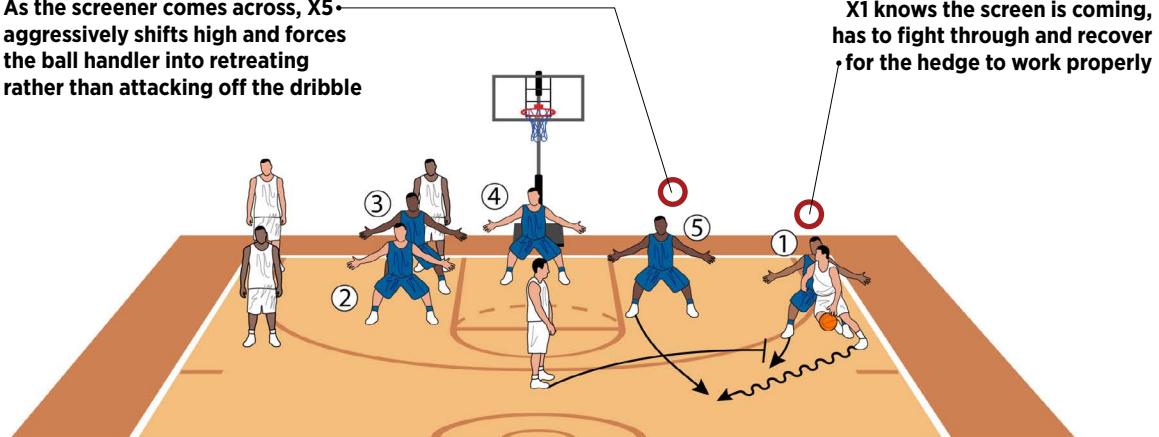
HOW TO PLAY

The screener comes to the wing and sets the ball screen. X5 aggressively slides up and forces the ball handler into a retreat dribble toward mid-court. X1 fights over to recover [1]. Once X1 has recovered to the ball handler, X5 recovers back with high hands toward the screener [2]. When the screener rolls all the way to the hoop and X5 doesn't have time to recover fully, X4 steps out and cuts off the rolling screener. X1 aggressively pressures the point guard to keep the offense out of rhythm. [3].

TECHNIQUE

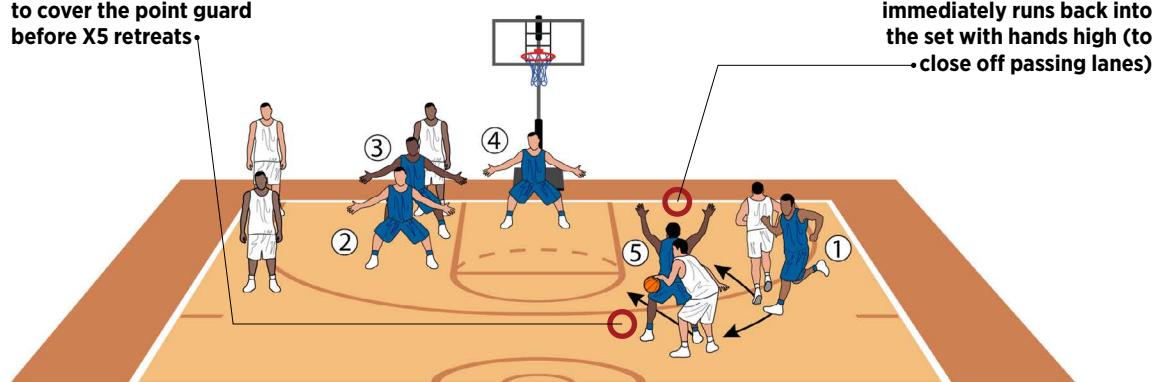
Your scouting reports come in handy here. If you know the screener rolls hard to the hoop every time, then X4 knows to step to him right away. If the screener flares to the wing or remains on the perimeter, X5 has time to recover to him with high hands.

1 As the screener comes across, X5 aggressively shifts high and forces the ball handler into retreating rather than attacking off the dribble



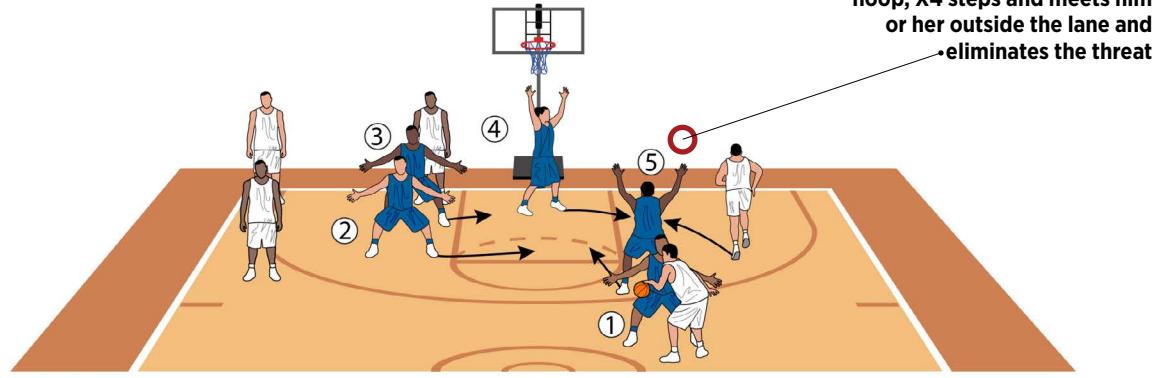
X1 knows the screen is coming, has to fight through and recover for the hedge to work properly

2 X1 must be in proper position to cover the point guard before X5 retreats



Once X1 has recovered, X5 immediately runs back into the set with hands high (to close off passing lanes)

3



If the screener rolls hard to the hoop, X4 steps and meets him or her outside the lane and eliminates the threat

Player movement →

Ball movement - - - →

Dribble ↘ ↗

Shot →

Near-Side Screen Sets Up Rim Lob

Run fake action coming toward the sideline inbound to create space and set up a backdoor lob at the rim for a game-winning shot

WHY USE IT

In a tie game, 89-89, with the Orlando Magic earlier this season, the Washington Wizards ran this sideline out-of-bounds play with just 0.8 seconds remaining to earn a victory.

SET UP

Position two players on the ball side with another two at the weak-side elbow.

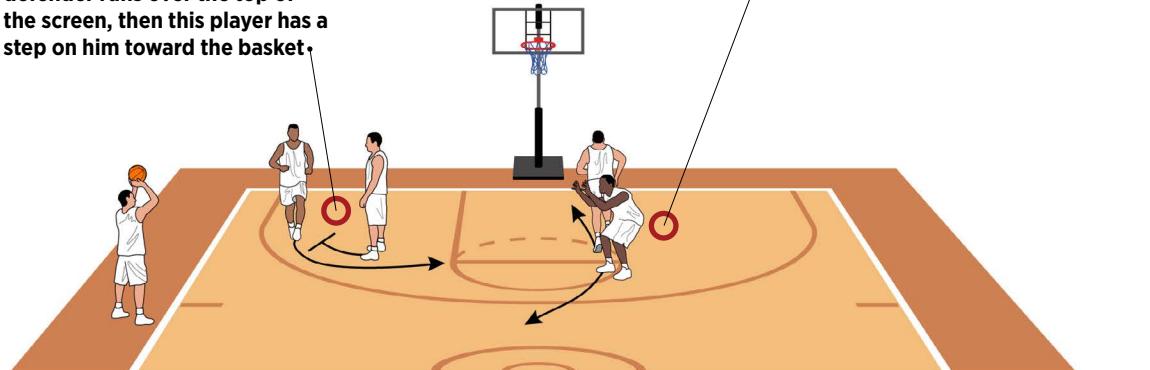
HOW TO PLAY

The higher of the two ball-side players screens down for the lower one, who curls around the screen and heads for the opposite side. The weak-side players space out with the lower one moving lower, and the higher one moving higher [1]. Now both far-side players flash toward the ball side fooling the defense into thinking they are the intended targets. The curling player continues through the lane and leaps toward the rim [2]. The inbounder tosses a pass to the leaper at the rim for a quick catch and shoot before he lands [3].

TECHNIQUE

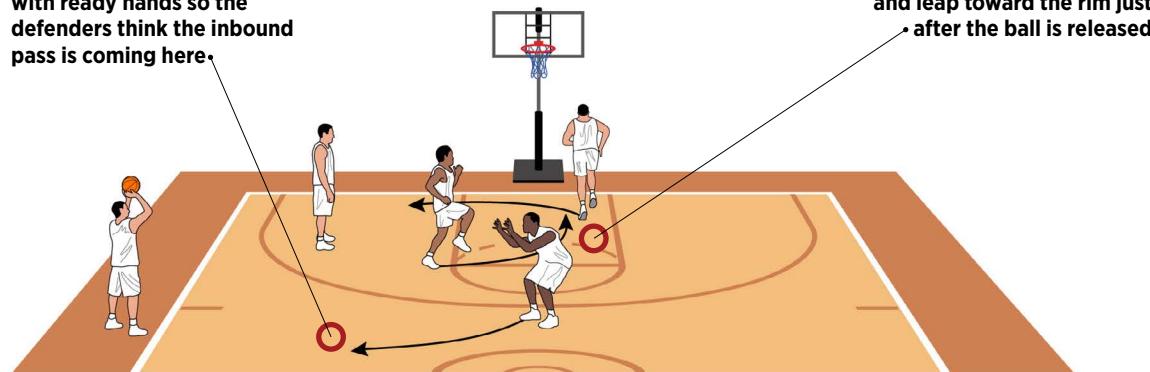
Both players flashing toward the ball come hard with hands in a ready position. Sell this fake to pull defenders away from the hoop. Practice this play so the passer gets a feel for how to throw the ball and the scorer knows when to jump.

- 1** Run the defender off the screener's shoulder — if the defender runs over the top of the screen, then this player has a step on him toward the basket.



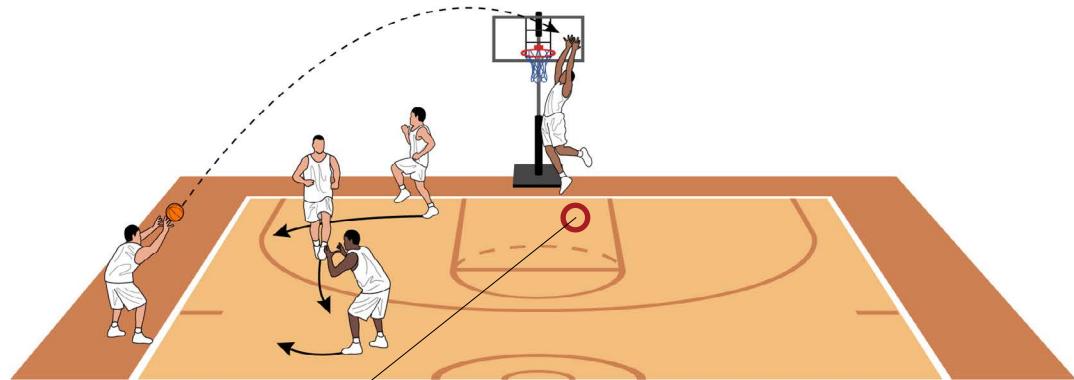
These two players space out and clear out of the way of the impending action

- 2** Sell this flash to the ball with ready hands so the defenders think the inbound pass is coming here.



Maintain a step advantage and leap toward the rim just after the ball is released

- 3**



Catch the ball and shoot before landing to keep the advantage and if the clock is about to expire

Player movement →

Ball movement - - - →

Dribble ↗

Shot →

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