

Individual defense, a great challenge for both coaches and players, involves developing fundamental skills that depend less on ability than on determination. Defense can become a consistent part of each player's game. Both mental and physical challenges await players developing defensive skills. The effectiveness of this phase of the game especially depends on what is taught, emphasized, evaluated, and *demanded*.

Basic individual defensive skills are needed in all defensive systems: player-to-player, zone, or combination defenses. These essential skills are the following:

- defensive stance and steps;
- on-the-ball, off-the-ball, off-to-on-the-ball, on-to-off-the-ball defense; and
- special situation defense; screens, traps (double-team), and the defensive charge.

Individual defensive skills need to be blended into a consistent defensive system that includes the level of coverage (full-court, three-quarter court, half-court), pressure, lane, sagging style, and assignments (player-to-player, zone, or combination), and the influence of the dribbler. This chapter discusses individual skills that are geared to an aggressive style of play, but coaches can adapt them to other situations or to a specific defensive team philosophy.

Defense is critical to winning, more consistent than offense, and more controllable. Hall of Fame coach Ralph Miller stated that losses are rooted in defensive breakdowns—individual or team defense, defensive rebounding, or turnovers caused by the opponent's defense. Defense also generates fast-break offense, easy baskets, and offensive confidence.

Fundamentals of Defense

Defense is as much mental as physical. Players should be encouraged to be proactive, rather than reactive. Generally, defenders are at a disadvantage. One way to offset this edge is to use the rule that action is usually quicker than reaction. Coaches can emphasize the active elements of defense by the acronym ATTACK.

A—Attitude. The starting point of all defense is the determination to become an aggressive, intelligent defensive player. Players must develop and maintain control of their playing attitude, especially on defense. Coaches cannot coach unless players decide to *play hard* during each defensive possession. Excellent defense requires that players give maximum physical effort.

T—Teamwork. The collective effort of five defensive players is greater than five individual efforts. The synergy of defensive team chemistry can offset the natural advantage of offensive players; play together to survive and thrive with *team* defense.

T—Tools of defense. The four basic physical tools are the mind, the body, the feet, and the eyes. The hands can be a help or a hindrance. When the other tools are used first, especially body position, the hands can be a defensive plus.

A—Anticipation. Players must use good basketball sense and judgment (mind) triggered by vision. See the man and guard the ball—the ball is the only thing that scores. Players should see the ball at all times and use their eyes to antici-

pate. For example, they should see a careless pass instantly and decide to act quickly. Quickness is based on physical readiness and mental anticipation.

C—Concentration. Players should be alert and ready to play defense at all times. They must assess the situation and be able to take away the opponents' strength. Players must avoid resting, physically or mentally, when playing defense. Communication is an excellent way to aid concentration.

K—Keep in stance. Defensive players must maintain defensive quick stance at all times. They should seldom gamble by making moves that take them out of stance or position, and all players must be constantly ready to take advantage of opponents' mistakes. Keeping in stance is the most important physical readiness concept for defenders. Coaches need to remind players constantly to get in and stay in stance—be ready for the opponent's best move. Coaches and players can use this concept as a subjective measure of defense. Great defensive players and teams can stay in a quick stance during the entire defensive possession.

CRITICAL CUE:
Get in and
stay in stance.

Essentials of Defense

In addition to being proactive defenders, players must know nine essentials of defense: transition, purpose, pressure, position, prevention of penetration, moving, line of the ball, blocking out, and communication.

Transition. The first task is to anticipate shifting from offense to defense, which requires an organized transition with communication among all five players and includes rebounding balance (assume that every shot will miss and get back on defense or go to the offensive boards). Sprint to protect the defensive basket, pick up the ball, find shooters, and recover to all open offensive players. Players going to defense should sprint toward the defensive end of the floor while seeing the ball (look over the inside shoulder—red-light situation) but may run or slide backward (yellow-light situation) once the offense is contained. Defense starts when a shot is taken on offense and ends with a defensive rebound, steal, caused turnover, or opponent's basket. One useful rule for defenders, when the opponents gain possession of the ball, is to sprint at least three quick steps to defense with vision on the ball, looking over the inside shoulder. See the ball during the whole transition. Transition to the defensive basket should be in straight lines parallel to the sideline, which helps the team cover all outside shooters better.

CRITICAL CUE:
On a shot, go to
defense, or go to
offensive rebound.

Purpose. The purpose of defense is to prevent easy scores and to gain possession of the ball through rebounds or steals. Defenders must learn to prevent situations leading to easy baskets by opponents (i.e., prevent *all* layups). Make the offense work to get all shots (and only under pressure; i.e., give the opponents one pressured shot). The overall goal of defense is to prevent the opponents from scoring. Since this is impossible, the best defensive purpose is to allow the opponents only one contested shot.

Pressure. Offensive play has a basic rhythm that can be disrupted by pressure. Defensive play must maintain continuous physical and mental pressure on ball-handlers. Every shot also must be pressured physically and verbally. Bother players