

TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING FULL COURT
PRESSURE DEFENSE IN BASKETBALL

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Basketball has become increasingly highly organized as the level of education increases. The players who participate have greatly improved their ability to shoot and score goals since Dr. James A. Naismith originated the game at Springfield College in 1891.¹

The importance of good defense has always been a strong factor in good basketball. Good defense is needed to keep pace with the improving offensive efficiency. Strong defense is desirable to maintain a healthy balance between offense and defense. Greater defensive variety is also evident. More pressure defenses, including various types of zone and man-to-man presses, present additional problems to the offense and hence reduce their efficiency.²

The practice of applying excessive pressure to the offensive players has been responsible for a number of upsets in the basketball world. Perhaps it will become a part of every basketball coach's defensive plan.

¹Don J. Odle, Basketball Around the World (Berne, Indiana: Economy Printing Concern, 1961), p. 54.

²John H. Harvey, "Statistical Trends in Basketball," Scholastic Coach, Vol. 36 (1966), 22.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was to establish criteria for instruction of high school basketball players in the use of a full court press defense. This study is concerned with the following:

1. Explanation of the instruction techniques in the teaching of the full court press, and
2. To illustrate the many strategies and situations that enhance the use of the full court press.

Importance of the study. In the teaching of high school boys individual and team techniques of a full court press, special assistance is necessary for apprentice coaches as well as veteran coaches who are interested in employing a full court pressure defense, because of the unusual and complicated patterns that must be learned. The idea that a defense exerting maximum pressure over a large percentage of the basketball court, causes each player to develop new skills for success in the area of basketball. General disagreement arises, however, as to the proper teaching techniques of pressure defense. In the study the writer will attempt to present some answers to this by establishing guiding principles for teaching the full court press.

Procedure. The source of information used in this report included an interview with John Wooden, a personal association with outstanding basketball coaches in the Missouri Valley area. The writer had opportunity to visit at length with John Wooden, basketball coach at UCLA, after his teams had won the National Championship in 1964 and again in 1965.

Philosophies, styles, methods, and other aspects of the pressure defense were gleaned from books and coaching clinics. The writer relied heavily on five years of high school basketball coaching experience. During this time numerous pressure defenses were employed in compiling an 112-14 record and two State Championships.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Double-team. Two defensive players are guarding one offensive player.

Full court press. Defensive pressure applied over the entire court.

Half-court press. Defensive pressure applied over one-half of the floor closest to the opponents goal.

Man-to-man press. Each individual defensive player is assigned to guard one offensive player exerting defensive pressure.

Pressing defense. Excessive pressure applied upon the offensive team by the defensive team in an effort to cause mistakes and gain ball possession. This may also be referred to as forcing tactics.

Zone press. The application of defensive pressure by players assigned to cover certain areas of the court.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Pressing defenses have been used for a number of years but especially so during the past three years. This can be emphasized by the teams that have won championships in the last few years.

The values of the press are discussed to help explain why full court presses can become an effective weapon. There are many different ideas as to when during a contest one should use a full court press. Whether at the start of the game for psychological reasons or at the end of the game to overcome an opponent, it is up to the individual coach to decide if and when to employ a full court press.

History of pressing defenses. The full court press is not a new defensive weapon. The press has been used since in the early 1930's. Gene Johnson, who coached the McPherson Globe Oilers, McPherson, Kansas, in the 1930's used a full court pressing defense. This defense paid big dividends for the Globe Oilers. When they played in the National play-offs in Madison Square Garden in New York City, the New York newspapers played up what they called a "Fire Department" type

of play. Johnson's theory on defense was to get the offensive opponent off balance as soon as possible.¹

The ten second rule also played a part in establishing the full court press. When the ten second rule was adopted in 1932,² some coaches realized that by applying defensive pressure over the entire floor some basketball teams would not always be able to cross the mid-court line within the ten second period. Therefore, the adoption of the ten second rule encouraged the use of a full court pressing defense.

Many times a press was used at the end of a game when a team was apparently beaten. It appeared that the coach assumed the attitude, "Well, we're beaten anyway, so I guess we might as well press." But in the early fifties, Pennsylvania State College came to the semi-finals of the NCAA tournament and employed a full court press in an effective manner. A year later Kansas University forged its way to the finals of the NCAA with an effective half court press. Then San Francisco University with Bill Russell in full charge of the goal, sent K. C. Jones and Co. scampering

¹Leland Lindell, editor, McPherson Sentinel, Incorporated, McPherson, Kansas, in a personal letter of May 20, 1967.

²National Federation of State High School Athletic Association, How the Basketball Rules Developed (Chicago: National Federation of State High School Athletic Association, 1966), p. 48.

aggressively for the ball in a full and three-quarters court press to the devastation of their opponents.³

The press may serve a number of diversified forms according to Jack Gardner.

For many years the press was used only in the final minutes of a game when a team was behind in the score and hoped to catch up by means of interceptions and daring plays. Today the press is used by all teams in some form or manner and, not infrequently, as a combination offense and defense for the entire game.⁴

John Wooden in his new book, Practical Modern Basketball, makes the following statement:

I sincerely believe that the pressing defense tactics was the principal contributory factor as far as style of play on either offense or defense is concerned for the NCAA championships won in 1952 by the University of Kansas, in 1955 and 1956 by the University of San Francisco, by the University of California in 1959, by the University of Cincinnati in 1961 and 1962, and UCLA in 1964 and 1965.⁵

When these nationally prominent teams demonstrated the effective possibilities of pressing tactics, other coaches began to take notice and to explore the possibilities. As a result, the press has now become an important part of defensive basketball.

³John Bunn, Basketball Techniques and Team Play (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1964), p. 140.

⁴Jack Gardner, Championship Basketball with Jack Gardner (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1961), p. 161.

⁵John R. Wooden, Practical Modern Basketball (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966), p. 282.

A player who uses man to man pressing defenses and zone pressing defenses is a more versatile player than one who plays the different types of slow, dropback defenses. The former has a much better chance to develop more skill in more different areas.⁷

There are advantages and disadvantages of both the man to man and the zone press. A pressing defense can cause the opponent much panic and confusion in moving the ball down the floor. Whether using a zone or man to man press it must be stressed that if not employed properly or against certain types of teams it may react in favor of the offensive team.

Robert Dwyer favored the zone press but cautioned that the results may be unfavorable.

Some form of press should be mastered by every team. In my opinion, the zone press is the best, and affords the greatest chance to shake up and confuse the opposition. A press will always react violently either for the team that is using it or for the opponents. There isn't any middle ground.⁸

One of the values of the full court press is to overpower a team that is leading late in the game. This seems only logical that a team would put forth an all-out effort over the entire floor to secure ball possession and over take their opponent. There are different ideas as when to press

⁷Neal Basi, Coaching the Zone and Man to Man Pressing Defenses (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1961), pp. 13-14.

⁸Robert Dwyer, How to Coach and Attack the Zone Defenses (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1963), p. 105.

in the last part of the game. Many coaches do not press soon enough and find they are gaining on their opponents but run out of time. Fouling should be avoided and if necessary only certain players should be fouled.⁹

Alvin Julian would use the press when behind late in the game.

If it is late in the game and you are behind in the score, it is wise to gamble and disregard assigned men. Here, opposing the nearest opponent, talking, pointing, and hustling are imperative. Players should not foul. The objective is to hurry the opponents and to try to force them to make bad passes and give your team the opportunity to make an interception.¹⁰

A number of philosophies and formation have been developed in press usage with the defense being applied on man to man or zone principles. The chief objectives are to force bad passes and secure the ball, to create confusion as a surprise weapon, to force a stall or possession-type team to play freely, to upset the poise and confidence of opponents when they are leading and the score can be overcome, and as a team attack by combining a number of types of presses.¹¹

⁹Bunn, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁰Alvin F. Julian, Bread and Butter Basketball (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1961), p. 183.

¹¹Dwyer, op. cit., p. 102.

It must be recognized the press has the potential to take the form of an offense itself. It can create excellent scoring opportunities for the team that uses a full court press effectively.¹²

A full court press can be useful against a tall team. The outstanding post man can be held down considerably if his team has difficulty bringing the ball across the mid-court line. If the post man cannot receive the ball near the goal it may upset his scoring ability. This could cause his team to call many time-outs early in the game to adjust to the defense.¹³

Frank McGuire stated that the press is particularly useful in upsetting a team that relied on the tall post man.

Against a particular opponent, the press may cause the players to use of valuable time-outs early in the game; perhaps it will force them to remove their big man or men even though they are left in the game, and it may give us a psychological edge.¹⁴

Basically the pressing defense is not founded on the inherent strength of the defense, but operates on the inability of the offensive team to function against the defensive strategy. Many teams employ forcing tactics when they are

¹²Bunn, loc. cit.

¹³Dwyer, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁴Frank McGuire, Defensive Basketball (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1959), p. 196.

unable to counter the offensive tactics by the use of massed defensive formations in the defensive half court.

The late Blair Gullion has been recognized as an outstanding observer and coach of the game of basketball. His approaches to problems encountered, both offensively and defensively, are based on a plan of strategy. Gullion emphasized that the weakness displayed by the offensive team will dictate the pressure to be employed.

It is evident that the spread defense all over the court should not provide as sound a check against scoring power as the procedure of massing near the defensive goal, but the lack of sound offensive patterns and the loss of poise in combating the defense causes the forcing tactics to be effective.¹⁵

Teams coached by Fred Winter, head basketball coach at Kansas State University, have consistently won the Big Eight Conference Basketball title. Winter's teams have used the press during the entire course of a contest on a number of occasions. During the 1964-65 season Kansas State defeated a much taller and stronger University of Kansas team with an all out man to man full court press for the entire game. In the 1963 Big Eight Tournament, Kansas State defeated a ball controlling Oklahoma State team. In this contest Kansas State employed a full court press for the entire game. Winter indi-

¹⁵Blair Gullion, Techniques and Tactics of Basketball Defense (St. Louis, Missouri: Mardgett Printing and Publishing Company, 1953), pp. 174-175.

cated a varied and versatile employment of the press when he wrote:

Pressing tactics are used for the following purposes:

1. To force a team out of its usual style of play.
2. To open up a game so that speed, quickness, and agility become more important aspects of the game than size.
3. To force a team into fundamental errors which create scoring opportunities for the pressing team.
4. When behind late in the game.
5. A pressing defense can have a demoralizing effect on the opponents.¹⁶

Emphasis on a full court press in practice has a double purpose. Not only do players learn defense, but they gain experience in bringing the ball up court against a press.¹⁷

Employment of the Press During a Game

Top physical conditioning is of utmost importance if a team is going to use a full court press to its best advantage. Pressure defenses demand a great deal of hustle and extra effort.

Ed Jucker's two time National Champions of Cincinnati have used pressure defense to good advantage. In the following statements Mr. Jucker indicated some of the more apparent

¹⁶Fred Winter, The Triple Post Offense (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Incorporated, 1962), p. 88.

¹⁷McGuire, op. cit., p. 202.

physical attributes developed through pressure defense.

Practicing man to man press drills teaches a player to think quickly, accustoms him to the tremendous physical effort needed to keep pressure on an opponent throughout a game, makes him hustle at all times on defense and develops the knack of playing a man without losing sight of the ball.¹⁸

The question of when to employ the press during the course of the game is of utmost importance. It is up to the individual coach to decide if he wants to use the full court press as his main defense. A full court press may not be effective against all opponents, especially those that are excellent ball handlers and those that have good quickness. Different coaches express various philosophies concerning the use of the press. Robert Dwyer does not favor the press as a team's main defense.

One cannot press a team successfully unless the pressing team is at least as fast as the opposition, preferably faster. Ordinarily, I am not in favor of using the press for the entire game against all of your opponents. In other words, making it your main defense.¹⁹

The press may work as a worthwhile surprise element early in the game. A quick press at the opening whistle might swing a lost cause to a victory.²⁰ It might cause a

¹⁸Ed Jucker, Ed Jucker's Cincinnati Power Basketball (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1962), p. 26.

¹⁹Dwyer, op. cit., p. 106.

²⁰Winter, op. cit., p. 90.

superior opponent to tighten up and to begin making errors that continue even after you remove the press. During the course of the game the press can be used effectively if used for short periods of time to upset the offensive team.

Jack Ramsey relied heavily on the press as his primary defense.

On occasion we have started the game with an all out, aggressive, risk taking full court zone press and have found it to have an electrifying effect on our opponent. On other occasions we have reserved the use of the zone press and brought it into play for as little as ten seconds in a game and it often gave us the desired possession of the ball.²¹

During a game the situation could develop that would call for a full court press for psychological reasons. If a team seems to be unorganized or unprepared a full court press may be the answer for a victory.

Ray Rubin, head basketball coach at Long Island University, relies on a full court press for psychological reasons.

No matter what kind of personnel you have or how well you have coached your team, a pressure defense is bound to cause uncertainty and anxiety.²²

²¹Jack Ramsey, Pressure Basketball (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1963), p. 80.

²²Ray Rubin, "Posting the Full Court Zone Press," Scholastic Coach, Vol. 36 (1966), 8.

Another strategic use of the pressing game can be found in end-of-game situations. The defensive team should try to prevent the opponent from controlling the play of the game. This is especially true at the end of the game and at the end of the half. If a team is going to take one shot, then it seems logical that the defensive team can assume greater risks in their efforts to gain possession knowing that the opponent is unlikely to shoot anyway.²³

The press is often effective when used during the last two minutes of the first half whether your team is ahead or behind in the score. In view of the fact that your team will be headed for the dressing room and a rest very shortly. They can put every ounce of effort into a full court defensive effort. So the press is effective as a surprise tactic at the end of any period of play or at the beginning for a short interval.²⁴

Garland Pinholster suggested a diversified use of the press.

In general, we might say it is time to begin thinking of the press any time your team falls behind as much as fifteen points. Another rule of thumb would be to employ the press any time your team is behind by as much as ten points with eight minutes to play.²⁵

²³Ramsey, op. cit., p. 76. ²⁴Gardner, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁵Garland F. Pinholster, Coaches Guide to Modern Basketball Defenses (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1961), p. 123.

Another strategic use of the man to man press is when your team has a one or two point lead with very little time (less than fifteen seconds) remaining, and the opponent is in possession in his back-court. In situations like this, the opponent is faced with a limiting time factor. If the defense can force the opponent to use a significant portion of this time with a confining, no foul press it will enhance its chance of winning.

Ted Owens, head basketball coach at the University of Kansas, used a full court press during the entire course of many games in winning the Big Eight Championship in 1966. This was also the pattern used by Texas Western, who won the National Championship in 1966.²⁶

There seems to be a certain amount of agreement among basketball coaches as to the use of the press during certain game situations. Whenever it becomes apparent the opposition has gained a lead that decreases the chance of winning, the press should be applied. Many coaches feel this decision will come somewhere near the close of the game.

When the nationally prominent teams used the full court press in winning championships other coaches began experimenting with the possibilities of using full court

²⁶Topeka Daily Capital, March 21, 1966, p. 1.

pressure defense. The press has now become a widely used weapon as a major part of defensive basketball.

There are many values of the full court press. Some of these values are:²⁷, ²⁸, ²⁹, ³⁰

The press teaches individualsto be better all-around players.

It can cause confusion and panic, although it should be cautioned the results can be unfavorable for the team using the full court press.

The press can be used to overpower a team leading late in the game.

The full court press can create excellent scoring opportunities for the team that uses the press effectively.

It can be used against a tall team or against a team that has an outstanding individual.

A full court press can be used to gain a psychological advantage over your opponent.

The full court press operates on the inability of the offensive team to function against the defense. A defense

²⁷McGuire, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁸Winter, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁹Jucker, loc. cit.

³⁰Bunn, op. cit., p. 40.

spread over the entire floor should not stop the opponent from scoring as well as a defense that is massed near the defensive goal. A press may not work against a team that has one or more big men that can throw the outlet pass to their teammates.

It is very important to determine when to employ the press during the course of a game. The press can be used effectively at the start of the game or during the game for short periods. The press can be used to control the play of the game, especially near the end of the half or near the end of the game. The individual coach must determine when his team should use a full court press.

CHAPTER III

STRATEGY INVOLVED IN PRESSING

A definite type of team to press can not be clearly stated but there are several factors that contribute to the effectiveness of a full court pressure defense. These would include:

1. For psychological reasons
2. Teams which are slow or inexperienced
3. To control the tempo of the game
4. To combat the stall game
5. Against teams with superior height advantage
6. Teams that play strictly pattern basketball
7. To help stop an exceptionally skilled player
8. Against teams that are not well-conditioned
9. Against a dribbling team.

Defensive philosophy. It is easy to play passive defense during a basketball game. It is easy to sit back and wait for the opponent to set up a pattern, and concede him position, the pass, and the shot. If this is the defensive philosophy one adopts, one can only hope that the opponent is missing his shots. This type of defense is a lazy way of playing the game and will result in a poor defense. Ramsey stated that the defensive objective should be to force the

offensive team to depart from their offensive objectives.

The over-all defensive objective as a team is to force our opponent into a type of game at which he operates at less than maximum efficiency. The further we force him to depart from the offensive objectives which he seeks, the more likely we are to win the game.¹

The effective defense is a challenging defense. It is a defense that is willing to take a certain risk to obtain possession of the ball. It is one that is willing to challenge the opponent on every pass, on every dribble, and will limit greatly the number of good shots that the opponent takes in the game. The team with this attitude is the team that will win the big games and create the upsets. It will win because of its defense.

Game conditions pertaining to the press. The following strategic situations might provide guidelines of employment of the press. These situations will vary as different opponents are encountered. The second time the same opponent is encountered different strategy may be necessary.

Psychological reasons. The use of the press may be utilized for its psychological effect on certain opponents. Teams which are not fundamentally sound as ball handlers

¹Ramsey, op. cit., p. 29.

often become unnerved or upset by defensive pressure. This type of team may become over-cautious or lose their poise. The psychological effect of the press may take effect in the early movements of the game or it may not show up until later in the game. A team defense can take advantage of a team that is composed of several individuals that are inexperienced if special emphasis is given to placing extra pressure on these individuals. This press may have a greater psychological effect on the inexperienced player.

John Toomasiam stated the press could be effective for the following reasons:

Many a well-coached team has met defeat by faltering in the face of pressure, or surprise, imposed by the defense. Confusion and panic frequently ensue when a team is compelled to change its game--to play a style of ball for which it isn't geared.²

Rubin favors pressure defense.

No matter what kind of personnel you have or how well you have coached your team, a pressure defense is bound to cause uncertainty and anxiety.³

Pertaining to the team's offense. A press may be used to get the offense moving. A team's offense can become

²John Toomasiam, "The Best of Basketball from Scholastic Coach," Scholastic Coach, Vol. 36 (October, 1966), 92.

³Rubin, loc. cit.

effective from using a full court press due to better movement of the offensive patterns. Many times teams that are not effective on defense will not be effective on offensive. Players may have a tendency to stand and not operate the offense with good movement. The full court press can cause a team to start getting proper movement of their offensive simply because they must move to play defense correctly.

Bunn favors the use of the press for this reason.

The press is used as an antidote for your team. A team which for some reason or other does not measure up to its normal standard of play can use the press effectively to regain its accustomed tempo. Pressing seems to act as a tonic for both offense and defense. It starts a team moving in all aspects of the game.⁴

Squads with superior manpower, both physically and numerically may utilize a pressing defense to eliminate the possibility of allowing their opponents to play a deliberate type of game.

The press may be employed merely as a nuisance factor. A team may gain the reputation of using a press thus causing future opponents to spend much practice time in preparation for the press.

⁴Bunn, op. cit., p. 142.

Wayne Dobbs and Garland Pinholster favor the press because it keeps the opponents guessing as what to expect.

Pressing defenses will allow more versatility and greater flexibility to your offensive approach. It keeps the offense thinking; opposing teams never know what to expect. They cannot afford to spend preparatory practices concentrating their offensive work against one defense. They must be prepared to meet anything. Pressing defenses can be important weapons in your defensive arsenal.⁵

Pertaining to the opponent. Teams which are slow or inexperienced are vulnerable to the press. Many slow and inexperienced teams function effectively against passive styles of defense, but lack the qualifications and offensive tools and patterns to combat the aggressive type of defensive play.

Branch McCracken would favor the press against a team that is slow or inexperienced.

A pressing defense is often used against a slow mechanical team using set plays and teams composed of poor ball handlers. Surprise makes this defense double effective. By surprise, I mean the use of the press against a team that is not looking for it and is not prepared.⁶

Pressing tactics may be used to control the tempo of the game. By using this maneuver the offensive team may be

⁵Wayne Dobbs and Garland Pinholster, Basketball's Stunting Defenses (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1964), p. 17.

⁶Branch McCracken, Indiana Basketball (New York: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1955), p. 173.

forced to change from their usual offensive patterns to another formation or style of attack which is less efficient.

Bunn stated that the defense can set the tempo of the game by using a full court press.

The press is used by some teams to force the opponent to play at a pace faster than he is accustomed to. The purpose is to run the opponent down before the end of the game. Pressing teams are always well-conditioned teams with tremendous endurance.⁷

The pressing action must be utilized to combat the stall game. There is an absolute necessity for developing strong defensive measures to counteract the stall game. The defensive team which is behind late in the game must press and make every legal effort to obtain the ball. This is one of the most important uses of the press.

It is often possible to reclaim an otherwise lost game by the use of aggressive defensive pressure. When the margin of difference in score is significantly in favor of the offensive team the defensive team has little to lose by changing from a passive to an active style of defense. In using the press under such circumstances the margin of victory may be increased, however once momentum can be gained by the defense the tide can quickly change.

Ramsey would use the press when behind late in a game.

⁷Bunn, loc. cit.

Of course the most obvious time to resort to the press is when your team is many points behind and time begins to run short. This isn't as much a matter of strategy as it is of necessity.⁸

The full court press can be very effective against a team which has a superior height advantage or skill. As the offensive team becomes spread throughout the court in an effort to combat the full court press, their effective height becomes drastically reduced. The same principles apply to the team that depends on a tall outstanding player. As the patterns are disrupted and the tall player is forced to receive the ball in positions on the court other than he is accustomed to, his effectiveness can diminish.

Dobbs and Pinholster favor the use of the press in stopping a tall player from scoring.

Pressure defenses have changed the game as much as the jump shot. They have helped to take the play away from the big boy by forcing a wide-open type of play where speed and aggressiveness can be utilized.⁹

The team which prides itself in smooth operation of pattern play can be upset by a pressing defense. Most pattern play is dependent upon certain players being in certain spots on the floor. The success of their patterns is also dependent upon the floor positions being occupied with a

⁸Ramsey, op. cit., p. 81.

⁹Dobbs and Pinholster, op. cit., p. 87.

definite timing factor involved. The pressing defense may cause the pattern type offensive team to disrupt their timing, throw passes longer than usual, and assume unnatural floor positions. All of these factors may well contribute to mistakes and missed shots by the offensive team.

The press has individual as well as team advantages. Aggressive pressure may be used to minimize the offensive abilities of an exceptionally skilled offensive player.

A full court press may be used effectively against a team that is not well conditioned. The speed of the game will be increased and a team needs a great deal of endurance. Odle stated, "If a team is slow, has poor ball handlers and passers, or is not in good physical condition the press will wreck their hopes."¹⁰

A dribbling team can be double-teamed more easily than a passing team. A press can be effective against a team that would dribble the ball down the floor rather than move the ball down-floor with passes.

There seems to be a great deal of reservation on the part of many coaches to base their entire defensive attack on the full court press. The use of these tactics however, seem to have proven to be beneficial to coaches such as Wooden of

¹⁰Odle, op. cit., p. 220.

UCLA, Gary Thompson of Wichita, Ralph Miller of Iowa, Ted Owens of Kansas, and others.

Wooden, basketball coach at UCLA, won the National Championship in 1964 and again in 1965. His basketball team pressed the entire game every game of the season. They used the press whether ahead or behind. In 1964, John Wooden won thirty games without a defeat. Wooden's 1965 team won twenty-eight while losing but two.¹¹

Gary Thompson, in his first year at Wichita State University, employed the full court press the entire game. He won the Missouri Valley Championship, the Midwest Regionals, and went on to finish fourth in the country.¹² Thus, during the National Championship at Portland, Oregon, in 1965, two of the four teams present employed the full court press as their primary defensive weapon.

Ted Owens, basketball coach at Kansas University, used a full court press in winning the Big Eight Championship in 1966. His team went on to finish second in the Midwest Regional, losing to Texas Western. Texas Western, also a team that used a full court press, went on to win the National Championship in 1966.¹³

¹¹Topeka Daily Capital, March 21, 1965, p. 1.

¹²Wichita Eagle, March 14, 1965, p. 1E.

¹³Topeka Daily Capital, March 21, 1965, p. 1.

In viewing the successful use of the press, the writer does not advocate the use of the full court press throughout every contest, for every basketball coach. The personnel available will not always lend itself to the extensive use of pressing tactics. The successful use of the full court press during the entire game however, certainly causes one to critically examine the belief held by some coaches that such employment of the press would prove detrimental. This author would conclude that every team should have a full court press available when the need for it arises.

The defense that will take a certain risk to obtain possession of the ball is a challenging defense. If a team can limit the amount of good shots that the opponent takes in the game and will challenge the opponent over the entire area of the floor the chances of winning are increased.

CHAPTER IV

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES

This chapter will be divided into four areas:

1. Organization of the press
2. Team Defensive Teaching Techniques
3. Individual Defensive Teaching Techniques
4. Areas of Special Consideration.

When instructing individuals in the many areas of defensive basketball it is necessary to have sound mental preparation. Along with mental preparation individuals must be taught a proper defensive stance and footwork. To play effective defense one must be in excellent physical condition.

Along with the criteria mentioned above there are numerous individual as well as team defensive teaching situations. Special consideration needs to be given to such things as communication between coach and players, communication between players on the floor, and the possibility of excessive fouling.

Organization of the Press

Planning the defense. To have an effective pressing defense whether man-to-man or zone, there must be a set plan and pattern to follow. Certain and definite times to press

must be understood by all team members. Many teams press following a violation or loss of ball possession in the opponents back court. Many teams press following each made basket by their team. Other occasions might include: following made free throws, following missed free throws, following a violation or loss of ball possession in the opponent's back court. Not all teams employ the full court press on all of these occasions. Some however may press any-time their opponents gain ball possession. Here again, the important thing is for each player to know and understand on what occasion the press will be applied.

Consideration should be given to the direction the press will attempt to influence the offensive team as they attempt to bring the ball up the court and across the center line. When the offense is allowed to gain a path down the middle of the court, they also fill the outside lanes and gain numbers on the defensive team. With the ball in the middle, the offensive team has three routes it may take. They may keep the ball in the middle and continue an organized break or pass the ball to a player cutting toward the basket from either of the outside lanes. If the defense encourages the offense to bring the ball up the left side of the floor it will force the dribbler to dribble with his left hand if he keeps his body between the ball and the defensive man.

Many players cannot dribble as well with their left hand as they can with their right hand.

The pressing team will want to decide if it wants to allow the offensive team to make the first pass in bounds from their back court. The defense may choose to allow the first pass in bounds and then apply a double team to the player taking the ball out of bounds. The defense could however, closely guard the offensive player taking the ball out of bounds. With this approach they would cut off all passing lanes and cause the offenses to give up the ball after holding it for five seconds.

Practice is the place to iron out team defensive troubles. Using simulated offenses to break down the defense to be employed is a practical teaching procedure. As soon as a mistake is made in the defense or when the offenses scores a basket, the scrimmage should be immediately stopped and the steps of each player retraced until the mistake is found. The error can then be pointed out and the necessary correction and adjustments made. When this is done the offensive team should run the same pattern several times to make sure that the defense has remembered the adjustment. Without this type of team defensive instruction, chaos may exist and the pressure defense will be more harmful and less effective.

Individual stance, footwork, drills and techniques are essential before an entire defensive team can operate as a unit. Following the development of these fundamentals however, much time must be spent on the defensive unit functioning as a whole. Each man must at all times know his relationship with his teammates, his defensive man, and the ball in any given situation. The defensive man must know his own and his teammates' weaknesses. A defensive player must know the general and specific movements of the opposition. When scouting has not been possible he must quickly anticipate the moves of his opponents and with the correct application of fundamentals, counteract the offensive movement. With the use of pressure defense the defensive player must be continually ready to help his teammates. Playing for the interception and stopping the dribble are two of the most important aspects of the pressing defense. Whatever the organizational plans, these two objectives must be accomplished

Individual Physical Preparation

Defensive stance. The primary step in building a sound and workable defense is the execution of a proper defensive stance. The stance must be one in which the defensive

¹Basi, op. cit., p. 14.

player can move rapidly in a lateral movement. This movement must halt the progress of the offensive player. Because of the demands placed on the defensive player to move in any direction with the offensive player, the defensive stance must lend itself to the utmost mobility.

There is not a great deal of disagreement among basketball coaches concerning the proper defensive stance.² Most coaches agree that the feet should be spread apart slightly more than a shoulder width. The feet are staggered with the front approximately twelve to fourteen inches ahead of the rear foot. The major portion of the body weight should be carried over the balls of the feet. Some individuals are able to move effectively by making small adjustments in their own particular stance.

The legs are bent and flexed, causing a good deal of stress on the thigh muscles. Many defensive players fail to bend the knees sufficiently. The flexed position, although easier on the legs, lacks the mobility of the more extreme flexed position.

The buttocks is carried low, almost as if a chair had been pulled out from under the player. The trunk of the body is almost straight, with the head held up. The eyes should

²Dobbs and Pinholster, op. cit., p. 29.

be focused in the area of the mid-section of the offensive player.

The hands and arms are very important in the defensive stance. The arm and hand on the side of the forward foot, should be held forward with the palm up. The fingers point directly at the ball and attempt to flick at the ball from underneath upward. The upward motion is superior as it avoids the chopping foul. The arm on the side of the rear foot is extended downward and to the side in an attempt to discourage the bounce pass.

Defensive footwork. With the defensive stance established the proper movement to guard the offensive player must be examined.

Defensive footwork involves the performances of a variety of specific fundamental steps or movements which represent the most effective and economical manner of adjusting position and stance to meet the changing tactical situation. Since the defensive player must be prepared for movement in any direction from his base, the complete repertoire of footwork must include sound fundamentals for the entire range of movement.³ Defensive footwork is divided into four classifications.

³Wooden, op. cit., p. 233.

1. The sprint: The sprint must take place whenever the ball changes hands. When the offensive team scores or gives up the ball, the offensive team immediately becomes the defensive team. On this occasion it is necessary for the defensive break to take place. Each player must sprint to that floor position or to the offensive player he will guard. At this short, critical period the defensive stance is not employed. Instead on all out running sprint or stride is necessary to engage the defensive assignment. Other occasions might justify the sprint. These would include the time when the offensive player has slipped away from the defensive player and the defense must sprint to retain him. In the use of the pressing defenses when the defensive team attempts to cover a large percentage of the court, the sprint will be used. Here interception attempts, double team opportunities, and other defensive situations will require the sprint.

2. The glide step: The glide step resembles the boxer shuffle. Here the defensive stance is used as the defensive player glides or shuffles without crossing his feet. The glide is used by the defensive player guarding the man with the ball, as well as the defensive players away from the ball. The lateral glide by a player from right to left might be described in the following manner. The left

foot is picked up and moved directly left. The instant the left foot touches the floor the right foot is picked up and closes the distance to the left foot, then the process is repeated. The properly applied glide step with the correct defensive stance should enable the defensive player to establish an adequate guarding position.

3. The drop step: Sound execution of the drop step presents one of the most trying of defensive fundamentals. The need for the drop step occurs when the offensive player attempts to move toward the basket via the defensive player's front foot. When the offensive player attempts this, the defensive player must cause the front foot to become the rear foot. This is necessary to gain a position in front of the offensive player and halt his progress toward the basket. If the rear foot initially is the left foot, the left foot then will be the pivot foot. The front, right, foot will be lifted and placed again becoming the rear foot. As this is taking place it is important that the body be carried low. The buttocks must stay down to maintain the highest possible degree of mobility.

4. The cross-over step: The cross-over step resembles the drop step but one extra step can be gained on the defensive man if it is executed properly. The need for the cross-over step occurs when the offensive player attempts to move

toward the basket via the defensive player's back foot, or his weak side. If the defensive player's right foot is the forward foot he must cross it over the back foot. He must do this by moving the right foot close to his body and directly backward to gain a step on the offensive player. The instant he gains this position he assumes his natural guarding position.

Conditioning. For a team to full court press successfully they must have a great amount of physical conditioning. It is up to the coach to determine the correct method to condition his squad. (Refer to the appendix for suggested conditioning drills.)

Individual defensive learning situations. The foundation of individual defensive play is developed through mastery of the stance and footwork. As the player has learned the stance and footwork he must then be able to apply these essentials to game situations. These game situations might be simulated by the use of drills which would provide the learning situations later to be encountered in live game action.⁴ The more realistically drills can approximate a game situation, the greater the chance the

⁴McCracken, op. cit., p. 149.

defensive player will fulfill his responsibilities.

1. The mass defensive drill: The mass defensive drill has been used as a conditioning exercise to play defense. In this drill the entire squad lines up across the floor in rows. The players are spread at approximately an extended arms length apart. The coach is stationed in front of and facing the group. As he blows the whistle, he indicates the direction for the squad to travel. It should be emphasized that as the group shuffles forward and then is directed to reverse, a drop step should be used. However, if the group is directed to move forward following the reverse, the front foot remains the front foot and a cross-over step is not used. The mass defensive drill should be used two or three minutes at a time followed by a thirty second rest. This can be repeated four or five times. This drill is an excellent conditioner and might be best utilized at the close of the practice period.

2. The one-on-one defensive drills: The one-on-one defensive drills are varied and versatile. It is with the employment of the one-on-one defensive drill that the coach can determine the abilities of his players to cover or guard an offensive player. Basically in the one-on-one drills an offensive player with the ball is guarded by a defensive player. The coach should carefully observe the defensive stance and footwork in the one-on-one situations.

3. One-on-one hands behind the back drill: This drill is used to emphasize the practice of maintaining body position while defending the dribbler. The coach matches players according to speed and ball-handling ability. Players will surprise themselves at their ability to check their dribbler. The dribbler's lateral movement is limited from side line to foul lane. The offensive player attempts to go the length of the court for the field goal. This drill will help to avoid needless fouls caused by slapping and reaching because of not having good defensive position. This is also a good conditioning drill.

4. The one-on-one line drill: The one-on-one line drill is a primary drill developing defensive guarding techniques over the entire floor. Four lines are formulated at one end of the court. The first player in the line is the defensive player with the second player being the offensive player. The offensive player dribbles the ball working from side to side, to the opposite end of the floor. The defensive player, maintaining the proper footwork and stance, guards the offensive player to the end of the floor. At the opposite end of the floor the offensive player becomes the defensive player and the defensive player becomes the offensive player. When the entire line has moved from one end of the floor to the other, they start back. The drill might move along more

rapidly if alternating lines began initially, with the remaining two lines beginning when the first players reach the half court line.

This drill may be amended as defensive players gain competence. The alteration would include the offensive player's attempt to score as he reached the far end of the court. A competitive score between the two players may be kept to increase their interest in the drill and encourage stronger defensive play.

5. Finding the screen drill: Ten or more obstacles can be placed at random on the floor. Chairs make good obstacles but players can also serve the same purpose. The squad should be arranged in five equal lines at one end of the floor. The first five players turn their backs to the opposite end of the floor and slide back on the sound of the whistle. This drill should teach players to feel for screens and should teach them the importance of defensive peripheral vision.

6. The three man one-on-one drill: The three man one-on-one drill incorporates an important principle of pressure defense. This principle includes the attempt to prevent the reception of a pass by an offensive player. The defensive player must learn that if a pass is overplayed the defensive player is vulnerable to a reverse to the basket by

the offensive player. This drill is set up by placing an offensive player at the free throw line extended and the defensive player guarding him at that position. Another offensive player is placed fifteen feet away toward the half court line and nearer the middle of the court. The offensive player occupying a normal guard position attempts to pass the ball to the offensive player at the free throw line extended. The defensive player attempts to thwart the pass. The rear foot of the defensive man is nearer the baseline. If the pass is successfully completed to the offensive player, the defensive player must recover in time to prevent the drive to the basket.

7. The one-on-one stationary screen drill: The one-on-one stationary screen drill provides an opportunity for the defensive player to encounter a screen while attempting to guard an offensive player. An offensive player is stationed at the end of the free throw line and the edge of the free throw lane. The offensive player is the "screener" and occupies a stationary position. Another offensive player begins to maneuver with the ball at the top of the free throw circle. The defensive player must guard the offensive player with the ball and be alert to the stationary screen. The offensive player with the ball may or may not use the screener as he attempts to score. The defensive player maintains

proper defensive position and as the screen is encountered, attempts to go over the top of the screen. The defensive player will use both his hands to feel for the screen in guarding the player with the ball.

8. The one-on-one press drill: The one-on-one press drill provides for part of the conditioning necessary to utilize full court pressure defense. Two boys of equal ability and speed are placed at the free throw line. All other players are paired and await their turn. The coach tosses the ball against the backboard. Both boys go for the ball. The one who gains possession becomes the offensive dribbler and the other becomes the presser. The dribbler breaks for the other end to score. When he shoots it is a free ball again. The player who gets the ball is the offensive player and breaks for the other end of the floor to attempt a shot. The ball is free on each shot whether it goes in the basket or rebounds. Also, the defensive player may steal it at any time. These two players continue until one of them scores six points. Then two new men take their place.

9. One man press drill: The one man press drill calls for offensive player one to take the ball out of bounds in back court and attempt to complete a pass to offensive player two. Defensive player one will guard offensive player

two and prevent the pass reception. If offensive player two receives the pass he will attempt to dribble the ball across the half court line. Defensive player one will attempt to prevent the same.

10. Two-on-one press drill: In this drill, offensive player one takes the ball out of bounds and attempts to pass to offensive player two. Defensive player's one and two double team offensive player two and attempt to prevent the completion of the pass. If offensive player two is able to receive the pass both defensive players attempt to prevent the offensive player from advancing the ball across the center line. The defensive players will also be alert for a return pass to offensive player one and prevent the same.

11. One-on-one picking up the dribbler: Divide the squad into two lines. Place one line at a free throw line and the other line at the opposite end of the gym. The first man on the free throw line starts dribbling toward the other goal. The first man on that end moves out to pick him up just as he crosses the center line. The defensive man attempts to stop the dribbler from reaching the other goal. The dribbler is instructed to drive by the defensive man for a lay-up if the defensive player over commits himself. The players would alternate lines.

12. Two-on-two press drill: In some full court presses, the defense will guard the offensive player taking the ball out of bounds and attempt to prevent the initial pass in bounds. The purpose of this drill is to prevent the initial pass in bounds. Offensive player one takes the ball out of bounds in back court with defensive player two closely guarding him. The defensive player should play with both hands held high to prevent the long pass and cause the offensive player to throw a high, lob pass which can be intercepted. Offensive player two attempts to free himself for the pass reception, with defensive player two attempting to prevent the same.

13. Three-on-one press drill: This drill begins to incorporate the principle of the full court zone press. Offensive player one takes the ball out of bounds in back court. Offensive players two and three are stationed on different sides of the court, in back court. Offensive player one is not guarded by the three defensive players. Defensive player two guards offensive player two and defensive player three guards offensive player three. Defensive players two and three attempt to prevent the pass inbounds from offensive player one. If the pass is successfully completed, defensive player one double teams with the defensive player guarding the offensive player to whom the pass was

completed. The defensive player guarding the free man then drops off to cover the offensive player who put the ball in play from out of bounds. The offensive players will attempt to advance the ball across the center line and the defensive and the defensive players will try to prevent the same.⁵

Team Defensive Teaching Techniques

General objectives. Once the individual players have acquired a reasonable amount of the basic fundamentals of defensive play, the next objective is to incorporate these individual skills into a team defense. The objectives called for on a team come from these which were stressed individually. The over-all team objectives are to force the opponent into making mistakes and gaining possession of the ball.

Necessity of team play. The pressing defense is necessarily a team defense. Unless there is harmonious team play among all five defensive players, the results can be disastrous. If there is a great deal of team play the results can be satisfying to the coach, to the players, and to the spectators.

⁵Garland F. Pinholster, Encyclopedia of Basketball Drills (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1964), pp. 173-187.

Types of full court pressure defenses employed.

Numerous types of pressure defenses are employed by coaches. Basically however they fall into two broad and general classifications. These classifications include the zone press and man-to-man defensive principles are applied. Likewise in using a man-to-man press, coaches often incorporate zone principles.

Zone full court press. In using some form of the zone press, the defensive player must be able to guard and halt the progress of the offensive player in his area. Thus the defensive player must possess that skill necessary in man-to-man defense.⁶ The zone press affords more opportunities to place more than one defensive player on the man with the ball. This is possible as the remaining defensive players zone the other floor areas in which offensive players are located. Many different alignments may be used since the court is divided into zones for coverage. These alignments include: the two-two-one zone press, the one-two-one zone press, the three-one-one zone press, the two-one zone press, the three-two zone press, and other variations of these basic formations.

⁶ McCracken, loc. cit.

Man-to-man full court press. The man-to-man full court press is just as its name implies. Each defensive player is assigned to guard an offensive player over the entire court. The defensive player, as in the zone press attempts to halt the progress of the offensive players. The man-to-man full court press is considered by some coaches to be the most difficult to execute. A good dribbler can have an adverse effect on a man-to-man press. This takes place when all offensive players are in the forecourt area except for the player with the ball in the back court area. With the playing floor cleared the skilled dribbler is able to maneuver into the forecourt.

Outstanding ball handlers and dribblers against the full court man-to-man press has caused coaches to make adjustments that cause the man-to-man press to appear to be a zone press. When the opportunity presents itself, the defensive player guarding the nearest offensive player to the player with the ball, will leave his defensive assignment and double team the player with the ball. When this type of action occurs, the other three defensive players will sag or drift away from their original assignments in order to cover the free offensive player.

The full court press may take many forms. The types that do appear will vary as coaches choose to employ the press they favor.

General principles for pressing. A full court pressure defense is one of the best teaching methods for developing individual fundamentals and it emphasizes the importance of defensive team play.⁷ Regardless of the type of press employed, certain principles should govern the position and movement of players, if a pressing defense is to be used with success. These principles do not require that all players be extremely quick, although quickness is a very desirable trait for all basketball players.

There must be one person designated as a safety man. This person can be the slowest man on the team. Under no circumstances will this man let anyone get between him and the goal. Since pressing is to a large extent a gambling defense, it is wise to have at least one person, the safety man, guarding the goal for emergency purposes. The safety man will permit corner shots and long shots, but he will not permit an opponent to work the ball to the goal for an unmolested short shot.

It is the job of all players to stay between the ball and the opponent's goal. If the player with the ball can be contained in this manner there is a good chance to cause him to hurry his play because of the opponent's goal can be

⁷Wooden, op. cit., p. 264.

maintained, the opponents gain no advantage by their tactics. This principle implies that if a choice must be made in covering, the pass down court is the one to plan to intercept rather than the pass which leaves the defense between the ball and the goal.

Always force the play to the side line and attempt to two-time the player with the ball at that point. Boundary lines always favor the defense. Therefore, it is to the advantage of the defense to use the side lines whenever possible. If one is using a half court press, one has an additional boundary, the division line, to use for exerting defense pressure on the opponent with the ball.

Defense takes position to the inside. The position forces play to the outside. The defensive position should be to the inside, never behind. The object is to cover closely enough to intercept passes. Offensive players near the ball should be covered closely with the hope of forcing long passes. The position may be relaxed on players far away from the ball. These players must be instructed to play the passing lanes. Always, when sagging from an opponent, sag toward the ball so that an opponent may not use his body to protect against an interception when he is receiving or cutting to receive a pass.⁸

⁸Bunn, op. cit., p. 146.

The defensive formation will depend upon the positions and maneuvers of the opponents. A specific formation from which to start a pressing movement may be used. It must be adjusted in accordance with the position and movements of the opponents.

Team Defensive Drills

Whistle drill. The whistle drill is used to point out mistakes as they occur on the floor. Arrange the squad in a five-on-five half court scrimmage situation with one team on defense. Instruct both teams to stop immediately upon hearing the sound of the whistle. Each player should remain in the position he was in when the whistle was blown. The whistle should be blown and the coach should look for mistakes. Mistakes should be pointed out and correct floor position and coverage stressed. This drill can greatly improve floor position and stress alertness on defense at all times.

Full court press drill. Divide the squad into groups of five. Station one group in defensive positions and the other in offensive positions. The coach stands under the goal and makes a lay-up. The defensive team grabs the ball and takes it out of bounds. The offensive men quickly find their individual opponents and start the full court press.

Two new groups will take their place and each group alternates after its performance so that everyone gets the same amount of practice.⁹

Switching or checking-off drill. Two offensive and two defensive players are used. One offensive player will set a screen for his teammate who will drive off the screen. The defensive players will need to check men to avoid being blocked off the player setting the screen. The defensive players should come shoulder to shoulder before switching. This will not let the opponent split the defense. They must talk to each other so that each understands what the other is doing.¹⁰

Double team. The double team is used by many pressing teams in an attempt to place maximum pressure on the offensive team. This maneuver can be used both in the zone press and the man-to-man press. This tactic requires a great deal of practice. The immediate objective of a double team is not to steal the ball but cause an error by the offensive player. If however the offensive player carelessly makes the ball available, the defensive players involved should make an effort to steal the ball. On most occasions, the offensive

⁹Pinholster, Encyclopedia of Basketball Drills, op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 176.

player should be forced into a position which creates an awkward situation. Then one of the other three defenders may intercept the errant pass. Care must be exercised so that the defensive players involved in the double team avoid fouling the offensive player. They should maintain a close position creating a clamp on the offensive player. The hands should be held high with rapid movements to encourage a high lob pass. If the pass is arched over the hands of the defensive players there is a good chance it can be intercepted.

There are many opportunities when a double team might be used. They would differ somewhat as to whether one is using a man-to-man press or a zone press. When using a zone press the double team could occur when the ball was in certain areas on the floor. When playing a man-to-man press a double team opportunity could develop when a defensive player guarding an offensive player near the man with the ball, can approach the latter while his back is turned. Other double teams could develop when a close lateral hand-off takes place the player with the ball may be double-teamed by both defensive players. An offensive player may drive off a stationary screen creating a double team opportunity for the defensive players involved. Other situations may be advantageous to double team opportunities. These should be defined when they arise. A team which uses the double team should know the circumstances when the weapon will be used.

An important consideration in the double team involves the other three defensive players. When the double team occurs three defensive players will be forced to guard four offensive players. Under these circumstances this problem is approached by the three defensive players away from the ball. They slide from their assignments and are alert for an interception. In reality a three man zone takes place. The area to be zoned would be defined by the position of the four offensive players away from the ball. The farther away from the ball an offensive player is positioned, the farther away from him the defensive player may play.

Special Considerations

Communication. Communication between coach and players concerning the execution of the press is important. This communication should take the form of a terminology of common understanding.¹¹ Names which describe the action involved seem to be the most easily understood. There should also be an understanding of various defensive actions involved in the press. Players should have an understanding of the terms involved in pressing techniques. Where possible the names of

¹¹Winter, op. cit., p. 177.

various presses should be descriptive of the action imposed. The names and terms given are not as important as the comprehension of their meaning and application by players and coaches.

A coach must definitely believe in a full court press if he expects it to be effective. He must sell his ideas to his squad so that they believe that it is the proper defense to play. Only if they believe and have confidence in a full court press will it work effectively for them.

Fouling. It should be pointed out that there may be a tendency to foul more when using a full court press. This is caused partially by speeding up the game, which is always sure to happen when a full court press is used. One should stress that all foolish, unnecessary fouls be avoided. A team that has capable reserves could afford to gamble much better than a team that did not have good bench strength.

During the 1964-1965 basketball season Dwight High School, Dwight, Kansas, pressed some in every game and compiled a 21-2 record. Dwight averaged fouling 18.0 times per game to their opponents 15.8 fouls per game.

In the 1965-66 season Dwight again used a press every game. They did not always press the entire game but they used it in every game, compiling a 26-0 record. During this season they relied heavily on their bench strength as they

averaged 19.5 fouls per game to their opponents 18.0 fouls. During the 1965-66 season only two teams used a full court press against Dwight. These teams both fouled more than Dwight, 16 fouls to 22 fouls to 21 fouls to 31 fouls. This would point out that one may foul more when using an aggressive full court press. When teaching the press every effort should be made to emphasize avoiding unnecessary fouling.

Mental preparation. A basketball player must have a desire to play defense to be successful as a defensive player. The coach must muster all his ability to motivate in order to instill within his players the desire to play defense. If pressure defense is employed then each member must feel it is a worthwhile endeavor.

Since defense is affected so much by desire, it should be stressed that no one should have an off-night playing defense.¹² If a mistake is made on offense by one of the players, a player has a chance to compensate for his mistake by playing more aggressive defense.

The establishment of a defensive team tradition will greatly enhance motivation factors of players to put forth their best efforts of defense. The following may add

¹²Wooden, op. cit., p. 231.

inducement and enjoyment to the learning and execution of the defensive phase of the game.

Emphasis on defensive drills.

1. Forty to fifty per cent of the practice time should be devoted to defensive play, thus emphasizing the importance placed upon it. Many games early in the season can be won if a team can use a full court press effectively. Perhaps it would be wise to spend as much as sixty to seventy-five per cent of the practice time on defense early in the season.¹³

2. Defensive drills should all be as near to the actual game situation as possible.¹⁴

3. Defensive drills should be made competitive, as this will add to progress and development of the player.

Motivation.

4. A team defensive goal should be set. This would include the attempt to hold all opponents to a certain number of points per game. A team can take pride in holding opponents under this goal.

5. Individual defensive statistics should be kept indicating each player's ability to prevent his defensive

¹³Ramsey, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁴Bunn, op. cit., p. 100.

assignment from scoring. Stolen passes, fouls, deflections and rebounds will figure in the individual player's defensive average.

6. An individual may be selected each week for his outstanding defensive play, with a small award presented or special recognition given to him.

7. The outstanding defensive player of the year should be honored in some manner.

8. The coaching staff should attempt to praise individual defensive effort to the press and communication media.¹⁵

It is necessary for squad members to have sound mental preparation for playing full court pressure defense. Along with mental preparation individuals must be taught a proper defensive stance and footwork. To play effective defense one must be in excellent physical condition.

There are numerous individual as well as team defensive teaching situations. Special considerations needs to be given to such things as communication between coach and players, communication between players on the floor, and the possibility of excessive fouling.

¹⁵Floyd L. Ruch, Psychology and Life (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Scott Foresman and Company, 1958), p. 128.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When establishing a full court pressure defense as part of the total defense, one must consider during what stages of the game one will employ the full court press. Certain opponents will be more vulnerable to pressure defense. The effectiveness of a teams' defense will be in relationship to the individual fundamentals such as stance, footwork, and conditioning, both physically and mentally. These individual skills must then be built into a team defense.

A pressing defense can influence the outcome of a basketball contest. The pressing defense does not guarantee that the outcome will be favorable. The personnel available to the coach will be a determining factor in the success of the press. Quickness and mobility are desirable traits to be possessed in the team which chooses to press. An improper understanding of the risks involved and lack of organization can be detrimental. The press can, however, have a desirable influence on the outcome of a contest as demonstrated by the NCAA Champions of 1964, 1965, 1966, and 1967.

The press to be employed will be determined by the personnel of the pressing team as well as the opponents. It would be sound planning to use more than one type of press.

The use of several types of presses not only poses greater problems for the offensive team, but broadens the understanding of the team and coaching of pressure defense.

There is much agreement among coaches as to the use of the press under certain strategic situations. When behind late in the game, few coaches advocate a passive defense. In other situations throughout a contest coaches differ in their application of pressure. There seems to be indication however, that a more extensive use of the full court press is taking place at the high school, college, and professional levels.

The psychological conditioning of players who press seems to have a direct relationship to the success of the press. The nature of the defense calls for the adoption of an aggressive mental attitude on the part of the players. Successful employment of the press, which results in numerous turn-overs of the ball, seems to have an adverse psychological effect on the team losing the ball.

Top physical conditioning is of the utmost necessity to successfully press. This conditioning is best acquired through drills which simulate game conditions. The closer the coach can approximate his instructional procedures with actual game conditions, the better the chance real learning will take place.

The following are recommended possibilities for future studies in this area.

1. What is the comparison between the amount of fouling committed by pressing teams as compared to teams that do not use pressure defense?

2. The comparison of the number of turn-overs, held balls, and violations caused by a team that presses as compared to teams that do not press.

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APPENDIX

CONDITIONING DRILLS

Conditioning. For a team to full court press successfully they must have not only mental preparation but a great amount of physical conditioning. It is up to the coach to determine the correct method to condition his squad. The following are suggested conditioning drills that could be employed.

1. Rope Jumping: The entire team can be spaced so that they have enough room to jump. The squad can jump with both feet at once or alternate by jumping only on the left foot and then only on the right foot. If each squad member is asked to count the number of times he jumps and the amount of time is kept, it will encourage players to jump faster. A special emphasis should be placed on the importance of requiring the awkward and big boys to jump rope.

2. Fingertip push-ups: It is very important to have strong arms and wrists when using a pressure defense. If players are instructed to hold their arms above their heads on the full court press this takes extra conditioning. Line the squad up over the entire floor. On command start the push-up stressing the back is kept straight and that the chest is brought down near the floor. By doing the push-ups on the fingertips the hands will become much stronger and players can handle the ball if passes are thrown harder than

usual. At the beginning of the season start with ten push-ups and work up to twenty.

3. Spot runs: The squad runs in place for ten seconds just as fast as possible. The knees are not lifted high as in regular running in place. They should lean forward and run on the balls of their feet trying to hit the floor with the balls of the feet just as often as possible. On the sound of the whistle they stop and rest for ten seconds. This is continued until they have finished ten different groups of spot runs. A winner can be chosen after the first spot run by the coach. This player will then lead the squad and choose the player he thinks did the most spot runs. This is continued until you have ten leaders, which would mean you have completed ten groups of spot runs.

4. Touch the sky: Players are instructed to jump to a four count cadence. On counts one and two the players take short vertical jumps. On the count of three they jump vertically as high as possible throwing their arms into the air reaching for an imaginary rebound. The count of four is also a short vertical jump. This drill can also be run for a certain number of seconds and repetitions or however the coach wants it run.

5. Sit-ups: A player holds the legs of his partner. At the sound of the whistle the player on the floor tries to

do as many sit-ups as possible for thirty seconds. He must keep his hands behind his head and touch both elbows on his thighs. After one has completed his sit-ups, they exchange positions and the other does sit-ups for thirty seconds.

6. Wind sprints: The squad can be divided into equal groups and lined up at the end of the floor. On the sound of the whistle one group sprints to mid court, reverses and returns to the end line, here they reverse and sprint the length of the floor. When reaching the opposite end of the floor they reverse and sprint to mid court where they also reverse and sprint to the same end of the floor that they just came from. From this point they again sprint the length of the floor. Then the next group is started and the first group rests until the other group is finished with their sprint. Ten sprints each practice can certainly add a great deal to the physical conditioning of a basketball team. If a stop watch is used it can be used to speed up the sprints because each is running against his own time.

These are just a few of the many different drills that can be used to condition a squad. It is up to the individual coach to choose the drills that he feels are best suited for what he wants to accomplish. It must be stressed again that it is of utmost importance to have a squad in excellent physical condition if you plan to use a full court press.