

AN EXAMINATION OF FULL COURT PRESSURE DEFENSE AS RELATED
TO TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL TEACHING TECHNIQUES

by

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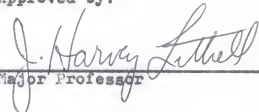
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED	1
The Problem	1
Statement of the problem	1
Importance of the study	2
Procedure	2
Definitions of Terms Used	3
Pressure defense	3
Full court press	3
Man to man press	3
Zone press	3
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	3
Justification of the Use of the Press	3
When to Employ the Press	8
INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS	10
General Principles of Learning	10
Mental Preparation	12
Individual Physical Preparation	15
Defensive stance	15
Defensive footwork	16
The sprint	17
The glide step	18
The drop step	18
The close-out	19

Individual defensive learning situations . . .	20
The mass defensive drill	20
The one-on-one defensive drills	21
The one-on-one line drill	21
The three man one-on-one drill	22
The one-on-one stationary screen drill . . .	23
The one-on-one press drill	23
Individual pressure learning situations . . .	24
One-man press drill	24
Two-on-one press drill	25
Two-on-two press drill	25
Three-on-two press drill	25
Team Defensive Teaching Techniques	26
Types of full court pressure defenses	
employed	26
Strategic use of the press	29
Pressing principles	33
Communication	36
Double team	37
The break-away	39
Organization of the press	40
CONCLUSIONS	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	45

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Basketball has become highly organized from the grade school level to the ranks of the professional. The players who participate have greatly improved their ability to shoot and score baskets since Dr. James A. Naismith originated the game at Springfield College.¹ Basketball players however have continued to play against basically the same defenses but the offensive phase of the game has continued to improve. In recent years leading coaches have begun to emphasize a new philosophy toward the application of basketball defenses. This philosophy includes the practice of applying excessive pressure to the offensive players.

The Problem

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to seek answers to the following questions: (1) Does a pressing defense influence the outcome of the game? (2) What pressing defenses may be employed? (3) Under what strategic situations are pressing defenses most influential? (4) What psychological advantages result in the use of a full court press? (5) During what phase of a contest is the press more desirable? (6) What individual and team

¹Neal Basi, Coaching the Zone and Man to Man Pressing Defenses, p. 13.

techniques must be acquired to successfully press? (7)
What seems to be the best instructional procedures to
install a team pressure defense?

Importance of the study. The idea that a defense exerting maximum pressure over a large percentage of the basketball court, will influence the outcome of a contest is becoming more widely accepted by authorities in the field. General disagreement arises, however, as to the proper teaching techniques of pressure defense, strategic use of the press and how much and how often the press should be utilized. In this study the writer will attempt to present some answers to these questions.

Procedure

The sources of information used in this report included interviews and personal association with outstanding basketball coaches in the field. For a period of two years this writer was associated with the basketball staff at Kansas State University. During this time much information and experience was obtained concerning pressure defense.

Philosophies, styles, methods, and other aspects of the pressure defense were gleaned from books and coaching clinics. The writer relied heavily on four years of high school basketball coaching experience. During this time numerous pressure defenses were employed.

Definitions of Terms Used

Pressure 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.

Full Court Press. Defensive pressure applied over the entire court.

Man to Man Press. Each individual defensive player assigned to guard one offensive player exerting defensive pressure.

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

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Justification of the Use of the Press

To find justification for the full court pressure defenses, this writer examined the writings of a number of outstanding coaches. Their opinions varied somewhat as to the importance and contribution pressure defenses offered the total basketball program.

Neal Basi felt the pressure defense increased the overall ability of the individual player. He further indicated that pressure defense is necessary as a deterrent to

the shooting ability players of today have developed.

It is my belief that practicing and playing pressing defenses more thoroughly develops basketball ability in the individual player than any other method.

The shooting ability of modern basketball teams is becoming so effective that one must press, at times, in order to hinder their shooting by keeping them constantly off balance. Also, the intricate screening plays and patterns that are now being employed more and more, are getting the offensive team the good shot. This is true only when a team has time to set up its offense. The pressing defenses are designed to prevent this. Properly organized it tends to disorganize the opposition, especially the play-making guards.

A college 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, drop-back defenses. The former has a much better chance to develop more skill in more different areas.¹

Bob 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.²

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

¹ Neal Basi, Coaching the Zone and Man to Man Pressing Defenses, pp. 13-14.

² Bob Dwyer, How to Coach and Attack the Zone Defenses, p. 105.

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.¹

The press may serve a number of diversified forms according to Jack Gardner. He further recognized the potential of the pressure defense to take the form of an offense itself.

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.

A number of philosophies and formations 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 in the score with a period of time remaining in the game, to check the momentum of a team which is steadily creeping up in the score, and as a team attack by combining a number of types of presses.²

Frank McGuire felt the press 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 up 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.

We use the full court press as a strategy move if we feel that it may upset our opponents, and we also

¹Alvin F. Julian, Bread and Butter Basketball, p. 183.

²Jack Gardner, Championship Basketball With Jack Gardner, p. 161.

use it as a full game defense against certain opponents.¹

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 scientific. Mr. Gullion emphasized that the weakness displayed by the offensive team will dictate the pressure to be employed.

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

With coaching methods so shackled by tradition, coaches generally have given little consideration to the fact that players in orthodox defensive position are frequently out maneuvered by their offensive men. The most astute coaches are reviewing the traditional definitions of orthodox and unorthodox defensive position in terms of defensive objective as related to defensive risk and are reconciling their thinking more to the use of forcing tactics.²

Tex Winter has afforded this writer much insight into the game of basketball. His teams consistently have

¹Frank McGuire, Defensive Basketball, p. 196.

²Blair Gullion, Techniques and Tactics of Basketball Defense, pp. 174-175.

won the Big Eight Conference Basketball title, and he has been chosen "Coach of the Year" during his tenure at Kansas State University.

Coach 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. Coach Winter indicated 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 by spoiling the timing and normal operating positions of the offensive team.
2. To open up a game so that speed, quickness, and agility become more important aspects of the game than does size.
3. To force a team into fundamental errors which create scoring opportunities for the pressing team. In this way a press becomes a team's most potent offensive weapon.
4. When behind during the late stages of a game.

. . . . a pressing defense can have a demoralizing effect on the opponents if they are not prepared to combat it.¹

Ed Jucker's two time National Champions of Cincinnati

¹Fred Winter, The Tripple Post Offense, p. 88.

have used pressure defense to good advantage. In the following statement he indicated some of the more apparent 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.

Actually our emphasis on the full-court press in practice has a double purpose. Not only do our players learn defense, but they also gain experience in bringing the ball up-court against a press.¹

When to Employ the Press

The question of when to employ the press during the course of the game is of utmost importance. Different coaches express various philosophies concerning the use of the press. Robert Dwyer does not favor the press as a team's main defense.

If you are thinking of using the press as your number one defense, there is a very important consideration to keep in mind. 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. I believe in this case its defects far outweigh its benefits.²

¹Ed Jucker, Ed Jucker's Cincinnati Power Basketball, p. 22.

²Robert Dwyer, How to Coach and Attack the Zone Defenses, p. 106.

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.

Another strategic use of the pressing game can be found in end-of-game situations. We have always tried to prevent our 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 defense can assume greater risks in their efforts to gain possession knowing that the opponent is unlikely to shoot anyway.

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 chances of winning.¹

Garland Finholster suggested a diversified use of the press.

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. It might cause a superior opponent to tighten up and to begin making errors that continue even after you remove the press.

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

¹Jack Ramsey, Pressure Basketball, p. 80.

that your team will be headed for the dressing room and a rest very shortly. They can put every ounce of effort into a fanatical 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.

In general, we might say it is time to begin thinking of the press any time your team falls behind by 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.¹

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 chances of winning, the press should be applied. Many coaches feel this decision will come somewhere near the close of the game.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

General Principles of Learning

The author has attempted to incorporate some general principles of learning in the instructional methods to be presented. For comprehension, understanding, and learning to take place the basketball player must experience some of the same learning process that the classroom student would experience.

The following general principles for the learning

¹Garland F. Pinholster, Coaches Guide to Modern Basketball Defenses, p. 123.

process have been adapted from a list given by William Burton:

1. The learning process is experiencing, doing, reacting, undergoing. The actual pattern to be learned is the chief aim but a multitude of varied learning activities and outcomes also occur.
2. The learning process occurs through a wide variety of experiences.
3. The individual's responses during learning are modified by their consequences.
4. The learning situation is dominated by a purpose or goal set or accepted by the learner.
5. The learning situation to be of maximum value, must be perceived by the learner as realistic, meaningful, and useful.
6. The learning process proceeds best when the learner can see results.
7. The learning process and achievement are materially affected by the level of aspiration set by the learner.
8. The learner will persist through difficulties, over obstacles, and through unpleasant situations to the extent that he perceives the objectives to be worthwhile.
9. Tolerance for failure is best developed through a backlog of success.
10. The learning process is stimulated to best effort when it operates within a rich and varied environment.¹

¹William H. Burton, The Guidance of Learning Activities, pp. 18-19.

Mental Preparation

A basketball player must have 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 team member must feel it is a worthwhile endeavor.

Blair Gullion suggested certain psychological factors are more important than physical factors.

Several psychological factors are involved in the use of forcing tactics. These psychological factors probably are more responsible for the success of the press than are the physical factors.

Youth by nature is aggressive and adventurous; he craves action. Players who experience reasonable success in the application of forcing tactics do not evidence the usual distaste for defensive play and seem to enjoy the privilege of guarding in an aggressive rather than a passive manner. The action is more sustained when the forcing tactics are used, and the increased tempo of play results in a more rapid turnover of the ball, less sustained periods of defensive play, and more immediate scoring opportunities.¹

Jack Ramsey and Neal Basi indicated the importance of the proper mental attitude on the part of players to perform well defensively. Coach Ramsey indicated:

At St. Josephs we feel that defense is the foundation and heart of our game. It is primarily through the medium of defense that we manifest the hustle and aggressiveness expressed in our philosophy. We try to

¹Blair Gullion, Techniques and Tactics of Basketball Defense, p. 175.

promote a positive defensive attitude among our players. We want them to feel that our kind of defensive attitude will win games for us.¹

Coach Basi reported:

The player's attitude is the most important single factor in playing the man to man press and the zone press defenses. His attitude must be one of complete dedication. We like boys who are quickly and easily challenged.²

Coach Frank McGuire feels the coach must sell his players on the idea of defense.

All coaches like to teach and supervise offensive drills. The players like offensive play, will run and shoot and cut and dribble and screen and fast break with everything they have. But when it comes to defensive drills the coach finds that not only do the players experience a let down, but that he also loses a lot of enthusiasm.

Here it is the job of the coach to attack the defensive problems and drill with enthusiasm; to sell his players on the importance of this phase of the game. Some coaches begin their early season practice with defensive work, holding out offensive drills and plays as an incentive for good work in the defensive side of the game.³

The establishment of a defensive tradition will greatly enhance motivation factors of players to put forth their best efforts on defense. The following may add inducement and enjoyment to the learning and execution of

¹Jack Ramsey, Pressure Basketball, p. 3.

²Neal Basi, Coaching the Zone and Man to Man Pressing Defenses, p. 3.

³Frank McGuire, Defensive Basketball, p. 2.

the defensive phase of the game:

1. Fifty to sixty per cent of the practice time should be devoted to defensive play, thus emphasizing the importance placed upon it.
2. Defensive drill should be made competitive, as this will add to progress and development of the player.
3. A team defensive goal may be set. This would include the attempt to hold opponents to a certain number of points per game.
4. The coaching staff should attempt to praise individual defensive effort to the press and communication media.
5. An individual may be selected each week for his outstanding defensive play, with a small award presented.
6. The outstanding defensive player of the year should be honored in some manner.
7. Individual defensive statistics should be kept indicating each player's ability to prevent his defensive assignment from scoring. Stolen passes, fouls, deflections and rebounds will figure in the individual player's defensive average. Such a system might operate on the addition and subtraction of points. When the

defensive player's assignment scores (whether this be in a man-to-man defense or in his area of a zone) the player would lose four points. When he commits a foul he would lose two points. The player would gain points at the rate of: two points per rebound, two points per stolen pass, and one point per pass deflection.

Unless proper mental preparation takes place in the teaching of pressure defense, teaching individual techniques and teaching of team techniques will be folly.

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 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. Most coaches agree that the feet should be spread apart slightly more than a shoulders 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 would be carried over the balls of the feet. The rear foot is the weakest side of the defensive player. The weakest side is characterized by the lack of defensive help from teammates.

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 extreme flexed position.

The tail 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 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 foot work 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. Defensive footwork is divided into four classifications.

(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 an all out running sprint or stride is necessary to engage the defensive assignment. Other occasions might justify the sprint. These would include that 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 when the offense penetrates the press, the sprint will be required.

(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 tail must stay down to maintain the highest possible degree of mobility.

(4) The close-out: The close-out describes the action in which the defensive player, using the glide step action, moves into the lap of the offensive player. This is necessary to thwart an attempted pass reception or discourage a shot at the basket. As the close-out is executed the rear foot should not become the front foot with a pivot on the opposite foot. Instead the shuffle type action will take place with the rear foot remaining the rear foot. If this is not done the offensive player may gain one long step past the defensive player while the pivot takes place.

The timing of the close-out also is very important. As a pass is on its way to the offensive player, the defensive player must establish his position. This position is established with the close-out step. If the defensive player is late, and the close-out is attempted after the offensive player receives the pass, trouble occurs. The offensive player may move past the defensive player enroute to the basket, as the defensive player closes out. In this step the knees remain flexed, with the tail low. Immediately following the close-out the defensive player should

be ready to retreat and execute a drop step if necessary.

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. The more realistically drills can approximate a game situation, the greater the chance the 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) 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.

(4) 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 in this situation that as he overplays a pass to the man he is guarding, he 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. This 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. His rear foot 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.

(5) 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 apex of the free throw line and the edge of the free throw lane. He 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. This is necessary to take away the shot over the screen. The defensive player will use his hands to feel for the screen as he guards the player with the ball.

(6) The one-on-one press drill: The one-on-one press drill provides 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 waiting 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.

Individual pressure learning situations. The pressing defense originates from home base positions which are assumed once the opponent takes the ball out of bounds. The offense will usually send two men down court, leaving two men to bring the ball across the center line, with the fifth player to throw the ball inbounds. Under the above mentioned premise this writer will offer several drills which will approximate the conditions encountered in the full court press.

(1) 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 two 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 two will attempt to prevent same.

(2) 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 same.

(3) 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 establish that technique. Offensive player one takes the ball out of bounds in back court with defensive player one closely guarding him. The defensive player should play with both hands held high to prevent the high pass. Offensive player two attempts to free himself for the pass reception, with defensive player two attempting to prevent same.

(4) Three-on-two 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 player one is free at the top of the free throw circle. 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 players will try to prevent the same.

Team Defensive Teaching Techniques

This writer in discussion of various team defensive teaching techniques, will offer a brief examination of the various types of presses employed as well as their strategic use. Principles and learning situations will be examined that are applicable to pressure defense.

Types of full court pressure defenses employed.

Numerous types of pressure defenses are employed by coaches.

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Basically however they fall into two broad and general classifications. These classifications include the zone press and man-to-man press. If the zone press is used, many times man-to-man defensive principles are applied. Likewise in using a man-to-man press, coaches often incorporate zone principles.

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. 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 three-one-one zone press, (this is very similar to the one-two-one-one zone press) the two-one-two zone press, the three-two zone press, and other variations of these basic formations.

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 but the one with the ball clear the back court area. With the playing floor cleared the skilled dribbler is able to maneuver into the forecourt.

This type of offensive attack 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 action occurs, the other three defensive players will sag or drift away from their original assignments in order to cover the free offensive players.

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

Neal Basi warned that with the use of the full court zone press a team must be versatile.

Zone presses are the types of defenses that depend upon research and change to maintain an optimum level of efficiency over a period of time. Along the same lines there is no such thing as a team having one zone press. Zone presses demand many variations so that you do not have to stay in several defenses for an entire game. Rather you should have enough variations to change defenses every three or four minutes.

As in any defense, there are weaknesses to be reckoned with and zone presses are certainly no exception. The zone press weaknesses are different from the rest of the defenses because you do not know what they are and under what conditions they will appear.¹

Strategic use of the press. The following strategic situations might provide guidelines for 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.

1. The use of the press may be utilized for its psychological effect on certain opponents. Teams which are not fundamentally sound as ball handlers often become unnerved or upset by defensive pressure. This type of team may become over-cautious or lose their poise.
2. 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.
3. Squads with superior manpower, both physically and numerically may utilize a pressing defense

¹Neal Basi, Coaching the Zone and Man to Man Pressing Defenses, p. 128.

- to eliminate the possibility of allowing their opponents to play a deliberate type of game.
4. The press may be employed merely as a nuisance factor. A team may gain the repetition of using a press thus causing future opponents to spend much practice time in preparation for the press.
 5. Pressing tactics may be used to control the tempo of the game. By using this maneuver the offensive team may be forced to change from their usual offensive patterns to another formation or style of attack which is less efficient.
 6. 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.
 7. 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 defense 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.

8. The full court press can be very effective against a team which has a superior height advantage. 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 used to, his effectiveness can diminish.
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 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.

10. 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.

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 John Wooden of UCLA, Gary Thompson of Wichita, Ralph Miller of Iowa and others.

John 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. His 1965 team won twenty-eight while losing but two.

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. Thus during the National Championships at Portland, Oregon

in 1965, two of the four teams present employed the full court press as their primary defensive weapon.

In viewing the successful use of the press, this 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 an 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.

Pressing principles. Offensive teams today are preparing for the press. This has become necessary as more and more basketball teams use the press as a definite part of their defensive attack. Thus in teaching the press, a number of principles should be followed related to the use of forcing tactics.

Blair Gullion offered the following principles for forcing action:

1. The defensive position of each player, although unorthodox in nature, must be basically sound in terms of the defensive action which the player anticipates in the specific situation.
2. The efficiency of the pressing defense is related

directly to the ability of each defensive man to carry out his specific duties. The inefficiency of any member of the defensive team in carrying out his assigned duties forces a distortion in the team defensive pattern which reduces the value of the pressing maneuver or forces the defensive team to abandon that type of defensive play in favor of a more passive plan.

3. The intensity of the aggressiveness or the degree of pressure used on the offensive team should be proportionate to the ability of the offensive team to counter such tactics.
4. The pressure defense operates most successfully when the members of the defensive team can establish individual defensive positions before the offensive pattern can be initiated or while the offensive team is in a stationary or semi-stationary formation. The defense functions with greater difficulty when the defensive team must assume initial position after their opponents are in motion.
5. Forcing tactics are most effective when all members of the defensive team apply defensive pressure in unison. When one or more defensive players fail to maintain pressure on their respective opponents, those offensive players provide the best source of an outlet pass which will permit a break in the pressing defense.
6. The degree of aggressiveness displayed by the pressing defender usually is related directly to the quantity and quality of the security afforded by his teammates.
7. The spread of the forcing defense increases the difficulty of individual coverage of offensive players.
8. It is of vital importance that the pressing team concentrate on stopping the outlet or primary pass once the pressing defense is established. When the offensive team is given the opportunity to make the outlet pass, the defensive work of all of the defenders in the back court area is jeopardized. Most offensive teams have a favorite receiver of the outlet pass, and the pressing team should

concentrate on preventing the outlet pass to this man.

9. Increased spread or distance between offensive players provides increased opportunity for the interception of passes.
10. The greater the length of the pass, the slower the speed of the pass, the less the accuracy of the pass, the greater will be the opportunity for interception under forcing conditions.
11. The intensity and degree of defensive pressure should be governed by the established objective of the forcing tactics in the specific situation.
12. Defensive risk should be estimated in terms of potential offensive gain which may accrue to the team applying the forcing action. Factors which must be considered in arriving at such an evaluation include the possibility of a quick score from an interception, the distance of the pressure action from the defensive goal, the opportunity to regain defensive position before the offensive player reaches his objective, and the security afforded by teammates.
13. The intensity of the pressure that may be applied by a defensive man in a given situation is related directly to his location on the court. The distance of the action from the defensive basket, the relation of his location and that of his offensive man to the endline, sideline and centerline, and other factors of this nature enter into the consideration of just how aggressive the individual may be.
14. Risk related to the intensity of defensive force or pressure, must be evaluated in terms of the specific situation.
15. Pressure should not be exerted beyond the interval when such forcing tactics are effective in terms of the established objective. These tactics should be applied aggressively only as long as the pressure is effective. Individually and collectively, the defenders must identify the stage or point in the action situation where the forcing action is ineffective and must abandon such tactics without delay to assume another defensive formation which promises

greater effectiveness in countering the situation.¹

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. Names which describe the action involved seem to be the most easily understood. This writer in employment of the full court, one-two-one-one zone press, assigned the following names to the pressing defensive players.

The chaser, occupied the front position in the offensive team's back court. His responsibility might be described by his title, in that he chased the ball.

The containers occupied the positions on either side of the free throw line in the offensive team's back court. They also carried out assignments similar to their names. The containers would attempt to contain the offensive dribbler in back court so that the chaser could arrive and apply a double team.

The interceptor stationed himself near the midcourt line. Following the double team by the chaser and container he would look for the interception of a pass to an offensive player near the player with the ball.

¹Blair Gullion, Techniques and Tactics of Basketball Defense, pp. 180-184.

The protector, it was hoped would live up to his title and protect the basket area. He stationed himself near the offensive team's free throw line to look for the long pass and attempted to stop an offensive break through until defensive help could arrive.

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

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 the double team is not to steal the ball but to 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 effect a quick steal. On most occasions, the offensive 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 movement to encourage a bounce pass.

It is very important for defensive players to recognize the proper opportunities for the double team. Haphazard chasing for double team attempts can be disastrous against a smart ball handling team.

Suggestions for possible double team opportunities might include: (1) a defensive player guarding an offensive player near the man with the ball, can approach the latter while his back is turned; (2) when a close lateral hand-off takes place the player with the ball may be double-teamed by both defensive players; (3) 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 sliding away from their assignments to look 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.

The break-away. Whenever a full court press is applied, the offensive team will occasionally break the pressure applied in their back court. It is this situation that causes many teams to abandon the full court press. The slower the defensive team, the greater the chance this will occur.

Neal Basi offers the following suggestions as basic rules to follow when a man breaks lose.

1. The loose man should be picked up by the first possible defensive player.
2. All defensive men should drop toward the basket when a man breaks lose.
3. The player who picks up the loose man should attempt to control him and prevent him from advancing too quickly or throwing a good pass. Hands should be kept high to encourage a bounce pass which will give the defense more time to recover.
4. The defensive man who allows his opponent to get by him should retreat to the basket area with all

possible haste and there pick up the first loose man.¹

It might be noted that these rules offered by Mr. Basi would apply more readily to a man-to-man press than to a zone press. Many of the same principles however, will apply to the application of a zone press.

Organization of the press. 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 opponents. Other occasions might include: following made free throws, following missed free throws, following a violation or loss of ball possession in the opponents back court. Not all teams employ the full court press on all of these occasions. Some however may press anytime 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

¹Neal Basi, Coaching the Zone and Man to Man Pressing Defenses, p. 39.

attempt to bring the ball up the court and across the center line. This author has found the most satisfactory plan to be, to force the offense up the side. 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.

The pressing team will want to decide if they want to allow the offensive team to make the first pass inbounds from their back court. The defense may choose to allow the first pass inbounds 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 offense 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 offense 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, confusion and chaotic conditions 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. He must know his own and his teammates' weaknesses. He 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 the defensive player must be continually ready to help his teammate. 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.

CONCLUSIONS

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 by that team which chooses to press. The lack of success by those teams which employ the press can be traced to poor preparation in the areas of individual and team fundamentals. An improper understanding of the risks involved and lack of organization can also be detrimental. The press can however have a desirable influence on the outcome a contest as demonstrated the National Champions of 1964 and 1965.

The presses 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 coach of pressure defense.

This writer has found much agreement among coaches as to their 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.

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 acquisitions 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.

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AN EXAMINATION OF FULL COURT PRESSURE DEFENSE AS RELATED
TO TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL TEACHING TECHNIQUES

by

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The author chose to explore pressure defense as related to the techniques of instruction to seek to answer the following questions: (1) Does a pressing type defense influence the outcome of the game? (2) What pressing defenses are employed? (3) Under what strategic situations is a pressing defense most influential? (4) What psychological advantages result in the use of a full court press? (5) During what parts of a contest is the press desirable? (6) What individual and team techniques must be acquired to successfully press? (7) What are the best instructional procedures to install a team pressure defense?

This writer obtained much of the data and findings from library research on the subject of pressing defenses. A good number of recent books have been written by coaches who have found need to explore pressure defense. This writer also based a number of his findings on four years of high school coaching. During three years of this period, full court presses of numerous types and varieties were employed. Much valuable information was gained as assistant freshman basketball coach at Kansas State University in 1960. Again, in 1965 this author assisted the Kansas State coaching staff. During this period of time spent at Kansas State numerous conferences with Tex Winter were possible, enriching this writer's basketball background.

The increased use and success of the full court press

indicates the influence pressure defense can have on the outcome of a basketball contest. Teams which successfully employ pressing tactics prepare carefully for the use of these tactics. Strenuous physical conditioning is gained by the use of teaching and learning situations that approximate game conditions.

Coaches who introduce a new offense to a basketball team, do so by breaking down the offense into the workings of one or two players. With these reduced number of players they incorporate drills that are an actual part of the offense. Pressure defense is best taught by using the same methods. The defense to be used is thoroughly explored as to its objectives as related to the desired outcomes and drills are created. This method represents sound teaching procedures.

There is yet a great deal of disagreement among coaches as to the type of presses to be employed as well as the strategic uses of the presses. Coaches range from the very conservative use of the press to the liberal use of the press. It should be pointed out however that these diverse view points are many times characterized by the lack of physical characteristics of personnel available to press.

The use of the full court press seems to be on the increase. Coaches need to be completely familiar with the operations and executions of the press. This is necessary

not only to employ the press, but to counter the press as the coach may face its use.