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THE ZONE DEFENSE

STOP—LOOK—LISTEN, and if the discussion centers about the effect of the zone defense on basketball—say nothing. Any statement you make will usually be misquoted or misunderstood, and discretion may well be the better part of valor.

Many coaches contend that continued use of the zone defense will ruin spectator interest in basketball and that it violates all defensive principles. Others claim it is the only defense which strict interpretation of the rules permits. It is not difficult to search back through the historical pages of basketball and find authority for both "man-to-man" and the "zone" defense.

It is the writer's belief that a man-to-man defense is being used when a defensive player is assigned or lines up opposite a particular opponent and during the rest of the game personally endeavors to keep this respective adversary from scoring. A temporary shift or switch of men may be permitted when the defensive player is blocked or screened. At the first opportunity, however, the original opponent is again played defensively.

A zone defense can be defined as one in which the defensive players station themselves in front of their defensive basket, thereafter shifting with the movement of the ball, but maintaining more or less set positions. No particular player is opposed except when he moves into the defensive men's zone. Then all of the "man-to-man" tactics are used in keeping him from scoring or receiving the ball. In fact a good zone defense plays the man as well as the ball.

Dr. Naismith intended basketball to be an open game with as little personal contact as possible. What defense existed in the early days of the game was of the "man-to-man" type. Each defensive man endeavored to contact his opponent as quickly as

possible when his team lost possession of the ball. This defensive type of game continued until about 1910. Thereafter styles in defense began to appear.

Much confusion has arisen because Dr. Naismith stressed that defensive players should "play the ball." He certainly meant that the opponents should also be played. The use of the term "play the ball" resulted in a philosophy which adopted the phrase as authority for the use of the "zone" instead of "man-to-man" as the basic theory of defensive basketball.

Until 1910 basketball resembled the type of game which today is known as playing all over the floor. This occurs when teams employ a "pressing" defense. During the past few years Rhode Island State has made a scoring history under the expert coaching of Frank W. Keaney, using this style exclusively. His teams have become so adept that their pressing defense has really developed into an offense.

Contrasting the 1 to 0 games which have resulted from the use of the "zone" defense with one played under the "man-to-man" pressing defense may prove interesting. In a game played February 24, 1940 at Kingston, R. I., Rhode Island State defeated Connecticut 102 to 81. Both teams were undefeated until this game. Rhode Island scored 64 points in the first half. Seven of the players in this game scored 40, 30, 27, 24, 17, 16, and 12 points respectively.

Somewhere between the "zone" defense game of 1 to 0 and the "man-to-man" contest of 102 to 81, defense should possibly strike a balance. I say possibly, because the spectators who support the game with their interest and financial backing much prefer high scoring games.

Just as there had been little offensive "team