

play" prior to 1910, there had not been much defensive "team play." Shortly after 1910 the offense began massing its players under the basket. This concentration was countered by placing the defensive team in the back court. This was called the "five man defense."

The defensive history of the game has been the story of the alternate rise and fall of the "man-to-man" and the "zone" defense. Around 1920 the "zone" defense was about to be recognized as superior. Stalling tactics of the offense then countered this popularity and the "man-to-man" style regained its standing. However, the "zone" received a blood transfusion in 1932 when the rules committee curtailed the effect of stalling through the medium of the ten-second rule. This regulation forced the team in possession to advance the ball across the middle of the court within ten seconds after its recovery.

Before this new rule was adopted, teams using the "zone" defense and behind in the score, were forced to abandon their position under the basket and play the ball in order to make their opponents attack. When defensive teams refused to come out from the zone and endeavored to secure the ball a stalemate was caused and low scores resulted. This spoiled the game for everyone. The ten-second rule reversed the procedure, because it forced the attacking team to advance the ball into zone territory. Dr. Naismith contended that the offense was unfairly penalized by this rule and held that the burden of action was upon the defense who should try to secure the ball.

The legislators completed the job in 1936 when they placed a three-second restriction upon the pivot play in the free throw area, with or without the ball. When this rule became effective, the offense lost one of its most potent weapons with which to attack the zone. This "no parking" ordinance took a great deal of strain away from the defensive guards in a dangerous scoring area. The center of the court directly in front of the basket was thus protected by the rules. Coupled with the fact that the opposition had to cross into defensive territory within ten seconds, the three-second restriction added further to the advantages of the zone defense.

Additional impetus to the use of the "zone" defense resulted from the development of block and screen plays. The "man-to-man" defense is peculiarly susceptible to this offensive maneuver. A great many coaches now meet these types of offense with some form of the "zone" defense. Although blocking and screening tactics may be employed in attacking a "zone," they are more effectively used against the "man-to-man" defense.

The defense has weaknesses, but it also possesses strength, and a good "zone" will give most teams and coaches a headache. It usually develops that players and coaches who denounce the "zone" defense in basketball are those unfamiliar with its use and methods of attacking it.

The cry that the use of the "zone" defense would ruin basketball was loudest five years ago. Yet basketball is more popular today than ever before, even though 40% of all basketball teams now use some form of the zone defense.

At Long Island University, "man-to-man" has been the basic defense. Yet there have been games in which the speed of the opposing team, screening plays, or the pivot attack have made the use of a zone defense imperative. Naturally it has been necessary to attack various types of the zone. Although the scores of those games in which a "zone" was employed have not been consistently as high as those in which the "man-to-man" defense was utilized, it would be unfair to say they were less interesting.

It is not difficult to have low scoring games under the present rules. Stalling tactics can still be used in the front court. Most teams today, however, are offense minded, attacking quickly and eagerly. Then, too, teams now employing the "zone" are prone to regard the defense offensively by attempting to secure possession quickly and score. This desire leads to an open "zone"; rushing the offense and taking chances, rather than use of the ancient formula of retreat and mass under the basket.

Both types of defense, with their many variations, have a place in the game. If a game is closely contested and both teams are trying to put the ball "through the hoop," I fail to see what influence the type of defense can have upon the future of the game. It is the writer's belief that the intelligent coach recognizes the strength and weakness of each defense and impartially adapts either, both, or a variation, to the material he finds available.

To use the zone defense on certain occasions would be to court disaster, while not to employ it under other circumstances would be sheer folly. I have always endeavored to suit the remedy to the illness, or the defense to the attack rather than hold fast to any set standards or patterns of play.

So long as teams are offense-minded, as virtually all are today, zone defense will not take from the game any of its attractive features or its appeal. Obviously no coach can afford to hold strictly to one type of defense.