

The Watchdog of the Basket

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THE guard is the bipedal watchdog of the basket. It has often erroneously been said that a good offense is the best defense. It has been my experience that a sterling defense, coupled with a better-than-average offense, will more often than not defeat a sterling offense possessed of a near-superior defense.

The common conception of teamwork is that it applies only to the offense. In reality, however, it operates at its best on the defense. This misconception can be attributed to the fact that, in the early development of the game, the players in possession of the ball were the centers of attraction, and the players not in possession drew very little attention. In this ever-changing kaleidoscopic speed game of basketball, new variations of defense must be improvised.

The hyper-fast break has placed new burdens on both the guards and the officials. The present game is much more difficult to officiate. In the present game, it is also much more difficult for a team to acquire the proper guarding technique. To ease the burden of the guard, the rules committee now permits a player five personal fouls instead of four before ejection from the game.

Much of the offensive drills are sheer fun because there is the ball-handling connected with this fundamental feature. But guarding technique is work, and *hard work*. A young player will practice, even alone, goal and free shooting by the hour because it is fun. Few players, however, in off moments will ever attempt to practice guarding technique to improve their defensive prowess. All players want possession of the ball so that they can shoot at the basket. Therefore, a versatile coach will improvise competitive fundamental drills wherein the guard is glorified. During these practice sessions an opportunity is given the coach to drive home needed lessons.

A good guard will hound the ball. He should always be found between his opponent and the basket. This is the first fundamental that should never be neglected.

A wily guard will never let the opposition slip in behind him. He will play the ball and not the man. A crafty guard always knows how to use his weight to advantage without fouling. All prospective guards should take boxing lessons. The boxing skills develop finished guarding technique. The guard should always be on top of the ball, and when he cannot get it, he should cover his opponent. The boy who spends the greater part of his childhood romping with a playful dog may be-

come, in his college years, a star basketball guard, for he has learned from the animal certain instinctive movements which will aid him in diagnosing the fundamental movements of his opposing forwards and centers in his future basketball career. By learning how to meet these instinctive feints and bounds of his early animal companion, the intuitive guard will in varsity competition be more able to divine the next movements of his basketball opponent. Some coaches describe this uncanny sense of the guard as the sixth sense. Truly, it is an instinctive reaction which is developed to a high degree. These instinctive reactions must be stronger in the guard than in his opponents, or he will not succeed.

A versatile guard outthinks his opponent and beats him to position play. A successful guard knows his areas so well that he may intentionally leave a position apparently unguarded for the purpose of drawing his opponent into a trap. By having perfect confidence in his own strength and agility, the guard will feign a certain inertia or lassitude to encourage his opponent to attempt a shot in supposedly uncovered territory.

Much after the manner of a cat lying near a rat hole watching for the escape of the rodent, does the guard torment his opponent. The cat, thoroughly relaxed and at a distance from the hole, will encourage the rat to attempt an escape. Being instinctively possessed with a confidence in her own power, the cat will leap upon her prey and exterminate it. So should the basketball guard know his own physical powers and the territory that he can successfully control. Such a guard will have poise and power and confidence and a contagious enthusiasm that bodes ill for an opponent who attempts an offensive thrust into his territory. A versatile and aggressive guard will combine all the qualities of leadership at his command to ward off the offensive thrusts of two opponents. Only when outnumbered in manpower is the guard in danger.

A highly successful coach uses neither a straight man-for-man nor a strictly zone defense. He uses a combination of both because a straight man-for-man has its weaknesses, but not as many weaknesses as a zone, and a straight zone has weaknesses that are easily overcome. A man-for-man defense with the zone principle will pay splendid dividends.

When a single guard is forced to play two offensive men, he learns to play the principle of the zone defense, yet he plays the man with the ball and also keeps a weather eye for the other potential scorer.

I prefer to teach my defensive fundamentals through competition. We place this primary guard seven feet under, and in front of, the basket. He can thwart any close drives to the basket, and at the same time harass his opponents, should they attempt to shoot.

The two offensive men in Diagram 1 are to locate themselves in any favorable position that they prefer before the ball is tossed to one of them by the coach. They are expected to dribble, pivot, pass and cut in, and endeavor to draw the guard out of position before shooting. Five tries are permitted these offensive men. If either one of the offensive men illegally starts a dribble, commits a violation or makes a foul, then one point is scored for the defense. As long as there are no fouls by either side, play continues. If the guard fouls, one point is scored against the guard. There is a total of five points counted for five successful tries.

If the guard is successful in breaking up the play of the two offensive men without a field goal being scored upon him, the guard wins. If the offense scores two goals out of the five, the offense wins. A tie score would result, when the offensive side scores one goal out of five tries. Naturally the more goals scored by the offense, the more emphatic would be the offensive victory in the five tries.

The men are rotated, each man on the squad taking the guard's position. This rotation also includes the offensive men until every man on the squad has had both offensive and defensive training on attack and defense. The scores of each performer's effort should be recorded. Consistently outstanding performers will invariably attract attention. There is no better method of teaching team fundamentals than through such competitive practice drills.

During the defensive drills, the coach centers on defensive pedagogy teaching that the defensive guard is a wary performer. Never will he let either of the two forwards slip in behind him, nor will he go out too deep and leave his goal undefended. As new situations arise, he will know just when to advance or to retreat. Should the offense attempt a shot from out in front, he will constantly project his physique and his personality into both the visual and the mental paths of the shooter. Neither will he ever turn his back upon either opponent for a moment. As an aid to efficient footwork, he will interchange between the first baseman's step and the boxer's stance, as occasion demands.

The plan of teaching defense, using five
(Continued on page 32)