

Defense—the Stabilizer

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THE technique of guarding is the backbone of good defensive play, regardless of the type of team defense. The success of any defense is first dependent upon individual defensive ability. Defense is a more constant factor than offense, which accounts for the stabilizing influence of good defensive play. It is like good free-throwing for keeping a team in the game when the offense bogs down. A weak defense places a great burden on the offense, hence the importance of a dependable defense.

Mental Defensive Qualifications

The mental requisites for good individual defense play are equally as important as the physical. Without doubt, determination is about fifty per cent of defense. Fine skills and technique in defense are valueless without the mental quality of determination. The determination of a player to out-play his opponent, to shut him out, to be a fine rebounder, to be a great ball "hawk", and to do more than his part toward a good team defense is the thing that brings about his maximum development.

Mental alertness and aggressiveness are the mental factors determining defensive efficiency. Offensive players always have the guards at a disadvantage because they know the next move, while the guards are forced to anticipate the play and to react to it. Most players like to play an aggressive defense which gives them an opportunity to cut loose. Big players like to be aggressive on the defensive boards, while small, fast forwards like to rove and gamble in the front line by playing for interceptions, both of which are plausible defensive attitudes.

Physical Defensive Qualifications

One of the main physical requisites for individual defense is the mastery of a good fundamental defensive position. Illustration 1 shows this position with the weight low and well distributed. The boxer's step is demonstrated, showing the player's readiness to retreat to an even stance for his shuffle steps, if necessary. The knees are bent which help maintain this alert position. The arms are in a position to guard a pass or shot. The arms are to be extended at all times and should be kept moving, since stationary hands, and arms are not the least disconcerting to the opponent. Illustration 1, shows good hand position against the shot. Illustration 2 shows the hand position in attacking the ball. Illustration 3, shows

the arms outstretched to the side in the act of "windmilling" to knock down or discourage passes.

Defensive footwork and balance are so interrelated that they cannot be separated. The proper stance may call for a different spread for each individual. The stance must be comfortable and natural, with the weight balanced and slightly forward on the balls of the feet. The boxer's step with the shuffle is the most commonly used footwork. The shuffle is used well with the wrestler's stance. The best defensive fakes are combined with the boxer's step. This step permits a safe and quick approach to the defensive man.

Much time should be spent on this fundamental defensive position, for it is the first essential in individual defense. Diagram 1 is a mass drill which we use early in the year to develop good defensive form. This drill calls for the squad to follow the leader. Balance, agility and quick reactions are developed. The accompanying list of forty-five defensive

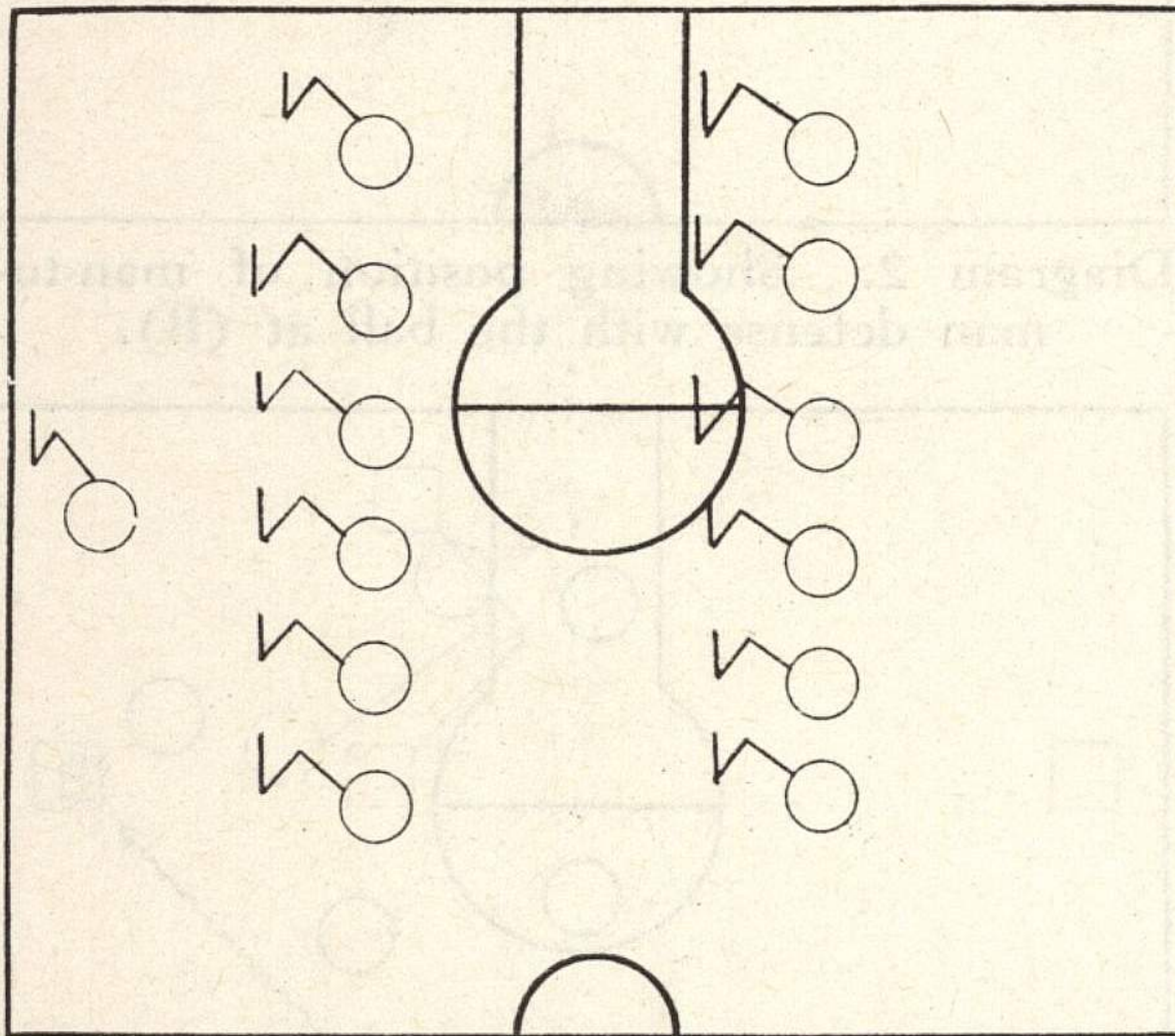


Diagram 1. A drill for the defensive fundamental position.



pointers and fundamentals is placed in the hands of the players, when we start defensive work. The most fundamental of those points are drilled on, before the defensive is assembled.

The type of defense to be used will be determined by the following factors: The training of the coach, the kind of material available, the floor conditions in that conference, and the type of offenses to be encountered. There are many styles and variations of defenses, the working principles of which are correct under certain playing conditions. It is the job of the coach to familiarize himself with each principle and to apply it under the right condition. While it is not a common practice to use a variety of defenses or their variations it is very effective, if the players are sufficiently experienced.

There are several broad fundamentals of defensive play that must be coordinated in assembling a team defense.

Balance: In these days of ultra-fast breaking and fancy, effective one-hand shooting, defenses have suffered. Therefore, the balance between offense and defense has widened in favor of the offense. Fundamentalists will continue to advocate that the ratio between the two should run something like 51:49 or 55:45 or 60:40 in favor of the offense. The material factor will govern that ratio. The stronger the defense, the less efficient the offense need be. Any ratio below fifty for offense, however is not good for the game. Sound defense is such a good stabilizing agent that it looks like a wise insurance against bad nights. Defense should be constant as compared to the many variable factors in aggressive play.

Team Play: A talking defense makes team play much easier. Defensive situations arise where suggestions to another in the defense will clear up plays that would otherwise grow into real problems. Pointing is another form of communication with your team mates. Such signals as "Defense, Defense"; "Follow, Follow"; "I have this man"; "Shift, Bill"; "Scissor, Tom"; "Watch the block, Ed"; "Arms out"; "Cover tight"; "Sag off, Jack"; and others, are helpful to the players if they have practiced and developed the habit of these expressions during daily practice.

Some defenses call for more team play than others, but all defenses to be effective, must be tied together with co-operation and understanding.

Individual Fundamentals: All in all, the team defense should be as strong or as weak as its individuals. To have a good team or organization, it is first necessary to master individual defense. Sometimes