

How to Coach Using Basketball Zone Pressure Defense

Glenn Brown's *Secrets of the Zone Press*, published by The School Aid Co., of Danville, Illinois, in 1962 provides good material for the coach wishing to install team pressing tactics. Brown writes, "Zone pressure defenses use basic principles to force opponents either full-court, three-quarter-court, or half-court areas in order to upset their offense."

Zone Pressure is Used:

1. as a surprise.
2. to disrupt their offensive plan.
3. to trap or double-team situations.
4. to force bad shots
5. to set a faster pace.

"Although a team may never use a zone press, teaching it to your team has three advantages:

- Your players need to understand the principal enough to attack the opponent's zone press defense in a successful manner.
- Most players like it.
- It's use just may win you a game or two.

"Initiated zone pressure at the following game conditions:

- after a score or successful free throw by your team.
- when the opponents have the ball out of bounds.
- after a time-out.

"Zone pressure, like normal zone defenses, is played with either an even or odd front. All can be initiated at full-court, three-quarter-court, or half-court. All zone presses flex in similar ways after the ball is in-bounded.

1-2-1-1 three-quarter-court or full-court zone press basic alignment.

All players in a zone pressure defense should be identified by **position** as well as by **number**. In the beginning, defensive player **#1** positions himself in the front half of the near foul circle.

#2 and #3 are on opposite ends of the foul line extended, between the actual edge of the foul line and the sideline.

#4, called the center-fielder, is at the front of the center circle, and **#5, the back man**, is at the head of the far key.

Note: To conserve space all the following Diagrams are reduced to thumbnails. If you would like to see a larger view click on any thumbnail. To return to this page, click your browser's <BACK> button.

Defensive player #1, the middle man is usually a guard. He should be a smaller player with good speed and quick hands. He forces the opponents to move to the advantage of the team. The middle man, #1, is limited to double-team or lateral movements in the backcourt, and he must get back to the head of the key quickly whenever necessary. The wing men, #2 and #3, are taller players, usually forwards. The more athletic forward should be placed in the #2 position, as the defensive team should force the attack in his direction. #2 or #3, depending on the position of the ball, must go back to the defensive basket area frequently to protect underneath from the weak side.

The Centerfielder, #4 should be the quickest player on the team with good court sense and anticipation. Whenever possible, he is the taller guard. #4 is given a great deal of latitude, as he has the greatest range of responsibility and must be overprotective of the middle area. The back man, #5, is usually the center, the biggest man and best rebounder. The last line of defense protecting the basket. His primary responsibility is to prevent easy shots by the opposing players.

Following are play by play procedures for each player as the ball moves from the out-of-bounds position toward the basket.

Player #1

1. Direct the first pass-in, usually to the defensive left. If necessary, over-guard to the right to effect this pass-in-bounds.
2. Prevent a return pass to the in-bounder by cutting off the passing lane to the foul-lane area.
3. Double-team with either wing, closing the backdoor trap.
4. If the wing man forces a dribble-turn, attack the ball aggressively as the opponent turns, denying the dribbler the alley between the wing man and your position. (In simple terms don't let him split you.)
5. If the ball is returned to the in-bounder, use the same trapping technique to the other side, trapping with the other wing. This trap will take longer to spring because of the distance the other wing man must travel back to the initial position. Be very patient.
6. When the ball passes over the front line of defense, sprint to the defensive end, determining the most advantageous position by observing the offensive and defensive deployments and anticipating open passing lanes.

7. If the ball goes to the middle of the high post area at the defensive end, attack it aggressively to force a pass back toward mid-court, a misplay, or a double-team situation.
8. If the ball goes to a frontcourt corner, protect the medium-pivot area on the ball side.

Players #2 and #3

1. If the pass-in is allowed to be made uncontested, it should be in front of #2. Player #3, if no opponent is in front of his initial position, drops back toward the nearest offensive player on his side, or into the middle of the backcourt to prevent a pass over #1 and the other wing.
2. Allow reception in your corner, stand back far enough to prevent a pass-in to the backcourt sideline area behind you. If the in-bounder hesitates on his pass-in, delaying for a few seconds, attack the near corner opponent aggressively to force a 5-second violation or a long hurried pass.
3. If reception is made on your side, approach the alive or dribbling opponent quickly, but under control, using good fundamental man-to-man defensive approach techniques.
4. **Never** allow the dribbler to get between **you and the sideline**.
5. Attack aggressively if the dribbler stops, preventing a good up-court pass opportunity along the sideline passing lane. Arms should be up to force a lob or deflection.
6. If the ball is in-bounded opposite your position, drop back into the center of the floor in the opponent's backcourt, between mid-court and the foul circle. Anticipate and play intercepting position on the in-bounder and any other opponent in the backcourt away from the trap area, decoying the ball handler into an apparent safe pass. Intercept cross-court or lob passes.
7. If the ball is passed back to the in-bounder from the side opposite you, double-team with the middleman, being careful not to overextend your defensive position. Getting into position hurriedly may prevent an effective double-team. Be sure to protect your sideline against the dribbler.
8. If the first in-bound receiver on your side passes up your sideline while you are double teaming him, react immediately, following the pass along the sideline for a possible double-team with #4.
9. Continue following the ball to the deep defensive corner if it is passed there. Double-team with #5.
10. Cover the under-basket area as quickly as possible if the ball is in the opposite defensive corner. Cover in the middle of the foul lane if the ball is in the opposite sideline area.
11. Anticipate and try to intercept a centering pass to the high pivot if the ball is just over mid-court at the opposite sideline. (**Note:** Wing men can usually read the offensive zone pressure pattern after it is used a few times and make invaluable contributions through imagination and hustle.)
12. Sprint back under the basket if the ball breaks the front line of the press quickly on the opposite side.

13. If the ball is passed over the front line on your side, react immediately for possible double-teaming with #4.
14. If you intercept, call "Ball!" and look immediately for a guard, usually #1. Give him the ball and break. Be aware of a ten-second violation possibility. Dribble only if you have a clear path to the basket.

Player #4

1. Know how the opponents position themselves to attack the zone press. Prevent a pass over the front line by playing an intercepting angle on an opponent near the mid-court area. The arm and body positions of the opponent's in-bounder signal his intention. If he turns sideways, he may be preparing to make a long pass. If he is square to you with the ball in both hands, the pass normally will be short.
2. When the ball comes in-bounds, move toward the sideline on the side it comes in on, approximately in line with the ball.
3. Be in an intercepting position on a man in the mid-court area near that sideline, but be alert for cutters coming up the middle and for cross-court lobs or short passes.
4. If there is a good double-team at the front line, anticipate the most likely passing areas and try to intercept or deflect the pass.
5. If a dribbler gets through on a sideline past your near wing, approach cautiously and anticipate a pass. If the pass is made, bother or deflect it. If the dribbler continues, attack to stop him and double-team with the near wing man in the backcourt, as #1 and the other wing man might become uncertain of floating responsibilities.
6. Attack the ball if it is passed to the middle from the mid-court side area on your side. **This is dangerous territory.**
7. If the ball gets past your position on the **far sideline**, sprint to the pivot area ball-side and anticipate.
8. If the ball gets past your position on the **near sideline**, sprint to the pivot area on your side, observing the offensive opportunities as you move.
9. If the ball passes to a defensive corner, sprint to the lower medium-pivot position on that side and front an opponent in this area. Stay on the side of the ball in low position if there is no pivot. Be prepared to box anyone in the pivot area on a shot.

Player #5

1. Never allow a long pass to go over you to an opponent.
2. If there is no offensive player in frontcourt, move up to mid-court opposite ball position. Teammate #4 should be covering on that side to deny a pass over the front line into the mid-court area.
3. Double-team the ball in either front-court with a wing man.
4. Cover a pivot man to discourage a pass to him from the side mid-court area.

5. Protect the basket from quick, offensive penetration, never allowing a lay-up. Use good defensive delaying tactics when out-numbered two-on-one or three-on-one. Fake and feint, allow the outside shot, and rebound.
6. Intercept long passes with caution. If you miss-time the pass or misjudge it, the opponents score.
7. Analyze ball movement, offensive player movement, and double-teaming by teammates to determine your most advantageous position. Go to passes in your area that you can intercept.
8. Play to the side of the foul lane as the ball crosses mid-court on that side, and anticipate a corner double-team if the ball goes there. Use swarming, aggressive tactics, but protect the baseline, as the ball handler may be more agile than you.
9. Play a pass into the pivot aggressively, but be alert for free cutters to the side who can receive a dropdown pass for a lay-up. Use delaying zone tactics in this case, giving up the outside shot if necessary.

Basketball Zone Pressure - Continued (part 2)

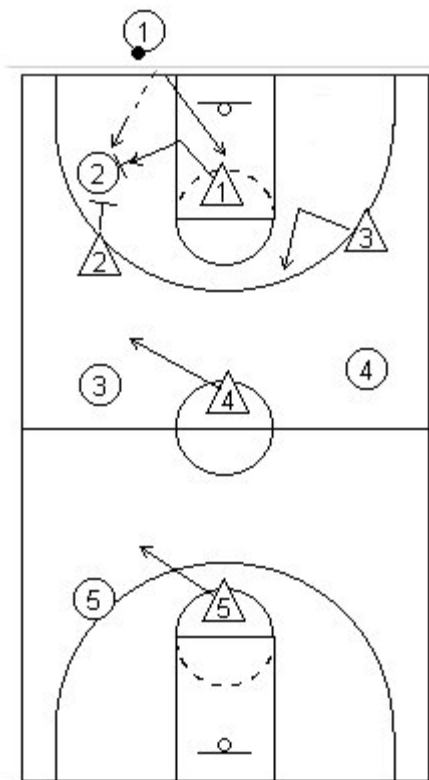


Diagram 2: One-Two-One-Two Zone Press, Full Court, Movement after the Initial Pass.

Offensive player 1, out of bounds, passes to 2. Defensive #1 steps toward 1, then moves left toward the ball position.

Defensive player #2 approaches 2 cautiously as 2 dribbles with the ball, initiating a double-teaming movement by #2 and #1.

#3 adjusts position slightly toward offensive 1, then after 2 makes his move, drops back into the middle as a floater.

#4 overplays offensive player 3 in an intercepting position. #5 adjusts slightly toward 5.

1-2-1-1 Full-Court Zone Press (Continued from Previous Page)

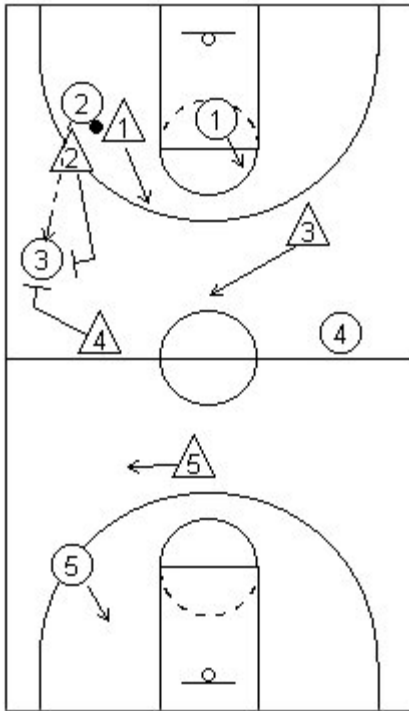


Diagram 3: One-Two-One-Two Zone Press, Full Court, Movement when 2 Passes up the Sideline to 3.

2 passes from the trap position to 3 who has eluded #4 or #4 did not get in cutoff position quickly enough. #4 approaches cautiously and sets the rear trap.

#2 follows the ball along the sideline and traps with #4.

#1 becomes a floater in the backcourt, guarding against a pass back to 2 or over to 1.

#3 adjusts up in an intercepting angle on 4.

As the ball reaches 3, #5 moves over so that he can cut off a pass to 5, if necessary, without allowing a long pass over his position.

1-2-1-1 Full-Court Zone Press (Continued from previous page)

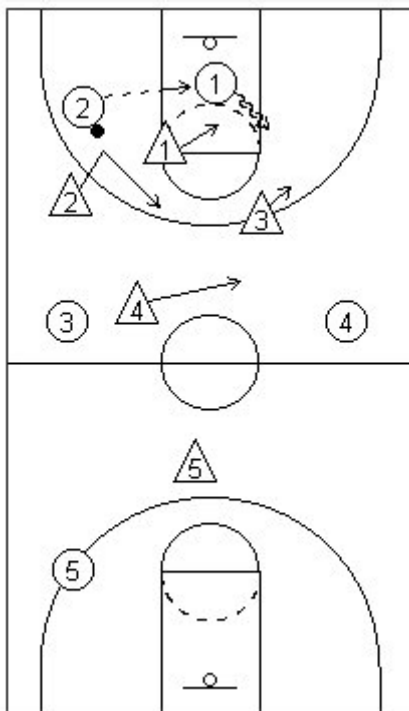


Diagram 4: One-Two-One-Two Zone Press, Full Court, Movement when Ball is Passed Back to the In-bounder.

This is a continuation of Diagram 1, an alternative to the offensive tactics shown in Diagram 2. Offensive player 2 passes the ball back to 1, who has come inbounds.

#1 adjusts from his position, staying on the side of 1 and forcing him, if possible toward #3 at the opposite sideline.

#3 adjusts back toward the sideline and up, cautiously, in an attempt to cut off 1.

#1 and #3 will double team 1.

#2, who had stepped up as 2 received the ball, retreats back toward the middle to become the floater as 2 passes back to 1.

#4 quickly adjusts toward the opposite sideline in line with the ball.

#5 moves to the head of the key, still playing deep intercepting position on 5.

1-2-1-1 Full-Court Zone Press (Continued to next page)

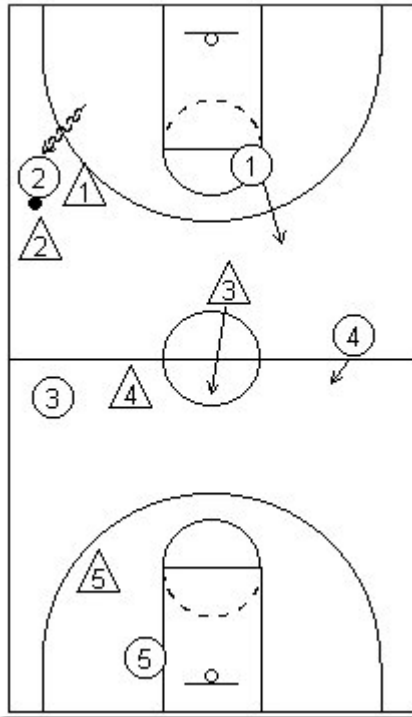


Diagram 5: One-Two-One-Two Zone Press, Trap on 2 half-way to Mid-Court, This Proceeds a Pass along the Sideline to 3.

Defensive players #1 and #2 have trapped 2 after a return pass from 1 in Diagram 4.

In this Diagram the trap is higher than normal. #1 and #2 are trapping after the dribble, and #4 has position on 3.

Defensive player #3 has adjusted his position back over half-court with the movement of 4. If 2 passes back to 1, #3 can assume a position on 1 to the outside, trapping with #1

#5 is low on 5.

1-2-1-1 Full-Court Zone Press (Continued from previous page)

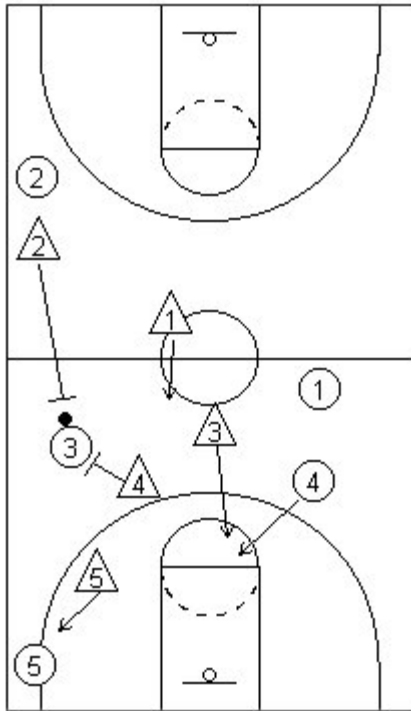


Diagram 6: One-Two-One-Two Zone Press, Trap on 3 in Front-Court Near the Sideline.

Offensive player 2 has passed along the sideline to 3.

Defensive player #4 is the low trapper. #2 is moving into position as the high trapper.

Offensive player 4 has moved toward the high post position and is cut off by defensive player #3.

Defensive player #1 has come back inside the front court area to cut off offensive player 1, who has come over midcourt.

Offensive player 5 is cut off by #5.

It is impossible for 3 to pass back to 2, who is in the backcourt because it would be a violation.

1-2-1-1 Full-Court Zone Press (Continued from previous page)

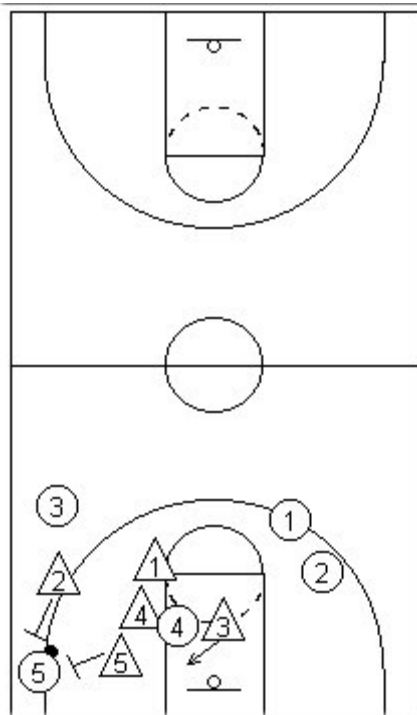


Diagram 7: One-Two-One-Two Zone Press, Corner Trap on 5.

Offensive player 5 has received a pass from 3. Defensive player #2 continues his movement along the sideline to become the high trapper.

#5, the low trapper must close off the baseline to offensive player 5.

#4 has dropped from his trapping position to overplay 4 in the pivot area.

#1 is at the end of the foul line on the ball side, ready for any pass. #3 is in the under-basket area.

After a One-Two-One-One Zone Press

If this defense does not end in a shot or turnover, the defenders should fall back into a predetermined defensive alignment. Normally, a safe outlet pass toward mid-court after the offensive team have attacked a full-court or three-quarter-court zone press is the signal for the defense to revert to an aggressive two-three zone alignment with #1 and #4 as the front players, #2 and #3 as the back men, and #5 in the middle.

"The coach, however, may prefer to remain in the one-two-one-one zone press, using half-court principles. The coach must consider other factors such as personnel of both teams, time left to play, where the game is being played, and the number of fouls on his team."