

A Western Port Basketball guide

to the “No Zone” policy

in U8 to U14 Competitions

Using this Guide

This guide is designed to assist with the implementation of Basketball Australia's "No Defence" rule in Western Port Basketball competitions. It provides:

- Explanation of why the rule is important.
- Practical examples to determine whether a team is playing "zone".

This guide is an adaption of the guides developed by Basketball Australia and the Eastern Districts Junior Basketball Association (EDJBA), to suit the needs and environment of the Western Port Basketball Association.

The aim of this guide is to help parents, coaches and players understand how the rule is implemented.

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Part 1 – What is the “No Zone” rule?

Basketball Australia has implemented a “no zone” rule at the Australian Under 14 Club Championships. Basketball Australia recommends that this rule be implemented in all U14 (and younger competitions).

WPBA Definition – Zone Defence

Any defence played inside the three-point line which does not incorporate normal man to man defensive principles shall be considered a zone.

Violations of the “No Zone” rule will generally fall within one of the following categories:

1. One or more players were not in an acceptable man to man defensive position in relation to the player they are guarding and the player with the ball;
2. A cutter moved all the way through the key and was not defended using acceptable man to man defensive techniques (for example, “bumping” the cutter, following the cutter or switching);
3. Following a trapping or help and recover situation the team made no attempt to re-establish man to man defensive positioning;
4. The team zone pressed and did not assume man to man defensive positioning once the ball had been advanced into the quarter court.

WPBA approach and penalties

The WPBA approach is one of communication and education:

- If a team is playing ‘Zone’, then feedback should be provided to WPBA, please visit <https://wpba.com.au/no-zone-policy/>
- NO action should be taken during games
- Do NOT approach the referees, they are not responsible for enforcing this policy
- Do NOT approach the Venue Supervisor, Customer Service Officer, or Referee Coordinator, they are not responsible for enforcing this policy
- Do NOT approach or speak to the coach playing zone
- There are NO in game penalties
- If there are concerns about the defence played by a particular team during the season, then this should be communicated to WPBA here https://wpba.com.au/no-zone-policy
- If the team is playing a zone defence, this will be communicated to their Club, who will be required to provide education to the coach on acceptable man to man principles. Coaches from Independent Teams (not affiliated to a Club) will be required to complete training provided by WPBA.
- If a coach is found to have breached this policy for a second or more time, WPBA has the right to overturn the result of the game.

Benefit of the doubt with Defensive team

The rule has been introduced for the development of individual and team skills. It has not been introduced to penalise:

- Lazy defence
- Poor coaching
- Tired players
- Poorly executed man to man defence

Accordingly, if there is any doubt as to whether a team is playing acceptable man to man defensive principles, the benefit of the doubt will be given to the defensive team.

Part 2 – Why has the policy been introduced?

The “no zone” rule was introduced to the Australian U14 Club Championships in 1996, after considerable discussion by Basketball Australia’s Coaches Commission and Junior Commission.

Prior to the rule being introduced the views of coaches from around Australia were canvassed, with the majority of these coaches supporting the exclusive use of man defence at U14 and younger age groups. Coaching resources produced by FIBA (basketball’s international body) also supports this view.

Prior to the rule being introduced a number of teams at the U14 Championships played zone defence and research indicated that proportionately few players from these teams (even when those teams had been successful) went onto national development programs such as the Australian Junior Camp.

The defensive principals of rotation, “help and recover”, containment, vision of the entire court and positioning relative to both your player and the ball are important fundamentals that underpin most, if not all, defensive philosophies.

The basis for the introduction of the “no zone” policy is that zone defences at those age groups can limit the development of individual and team skills. For example, driving opportunities are limited and players often do not have the muscular strength and coordination to shoot, with good technique, from the perimeter of throw “skip” passes. This reduces the need for defensive skills such as “closing out” and positioning.

Whilst the “no zone” rule focusses on the defence, it was introduced to enhance the development of both offensive and defensive skills. Indeed, as you will see later in this document – it is up to the offence, through ball and player movement, to “prove” that is a zone defence.

It is important to remember that the “no zone” rule applies only inside the three-point line and zone presses and trapping defences are allowed, if they fall back to man to man principles inside the three-point line.

Part 3 – How is the Rule Implemented?

Not a decision for the Referees

Basketball Australia does not recommend placing the responsibility for determining whether the defence is acceptable upon the referees.

It is not the role of the referees to adjudicate whether a zone defence is being played.

Not a decision for Venue Supervisors (including Customer Service Officers)

It is not the role of the Venue Supervisors to adjudicate whether a zone defence is being played.

An honour system

At junior domestic level it is not feasible to have someone at every game, adjudicating whether zone defence is being played.

The WPBA has adopted the philosophy that zone defence should not be played from Under 8 to Under 14 level. As a competition rule, most coaches are unlikely to knowingly, deliberately breach the rule by playing a zone defence.

If there are concerns about the defence played by a particular team during the season, then this should be communicated to WPBA. If the team is playing a zone defence, they will be provided with education for the coach on how to teach acceptable man to man principles. Where the coach may be a mother, father or older brother or sister, it would not be surprising if they needed some help.

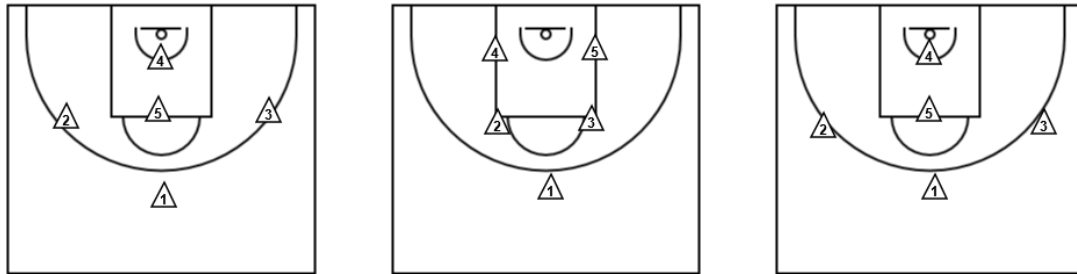
Part 4 – What is a “Zone Defence”?

Guarding an Area

Zone defence is a form of team defence where each player becomes responsible for defending both an area of the court, and any opponent who may be in that area. When five players work together in a zone it can become a very formidable defence.

Zone defences are primarily designed to protect the area near the basket. This essentially means that the offensive team will be forced to take lower percentage, perimeter shots.

Common examples – There are a number of common zone defence alignments, such as:



These defences when played within the boundary of the three-point line primarily clog the keyway area. This often forces the offensive team to shoot the perimeter (and indeed are designed to have the effect), which can be detrimental to the technique development of younger athletes. It also reduces driving opportunities which hampers the development of close-out and rotational skills.

Guarding Many or Guarding No One

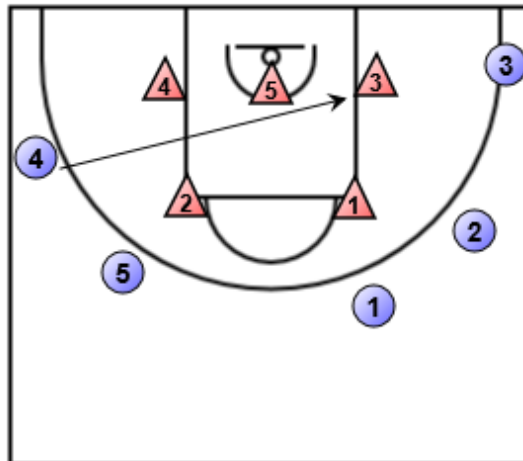
The result of the zone defence is that one player may be responsible for guarding a number of players, or may not have anyone in their area at all.

For example, in the diagram below, the following defensive assignments would probably apply, if the defence were in a zone:

- Red 1 would guard Blue 1 or Blue 2 if they receive the ball
- Red 3 would guard Blue 3 if they receive the ball
- Red 2 would guard Blue 4 or Blue 5 if they receive the ball
- Red 4 and Red 5 have no defensive responsibility.



It would be particularly obvious that Red 4 is not guarding a specific player if Blue 4 were to cut.



Commonly Red 4 and Red 5 will “ball watch” rather than maintaining vision of their area (as there are no players in this area). This is poor defensive technique, which is accentuated by playing a zone defence. In man-to-man defence, whilst some players will undoubtedly “ball watch” there is always a clear responsibility for who they should be seeing.

Part 5 – How to identify a Zone

Onus of Proof

- The onus of proof lies with the offensive team, which means they must pass the ball and move so that you can determine whether the defence is playing man to man principles.
- If the offensive “big” stays on the weakside, their defender can legitimately stay in a “split line” position.

Watch a Number of Play Phases

- Often the ball is shot or turned over before you can properly determine if a team is playing a zone.
- You cannot judge a zone from one offensive or defensive phase. You will need to watch a number of game phases before determining if the defence is playing appropriate man to man.

Don't worry about the full court

- The rule is only concerned with playing man to man principles inside the three-point line. Teams can play any defence they want in the full court.
- Just because a player or several players run back to their defensive key does not make it a zone defence.

Don't penalise bad man to man defence

- The intention of the rules is to teach good defensive principles and avoid passive, stagnant defences where a big player gets hidden. This rule is not intended to penalise:
 - a) Lazy or poor defence
 - b) Poor coaching
 - c) Tired players
 - d) Players lost in defensive rotation

It does not have to be aggressive defence

- The rule does not require teams to be playing “denial” defence, where every pass is contested.

What is the team trying to do?

- Consider the intention of the defensive team – what is the coach telling their players to do?

Teams can trap

- Teams may trap in the quarter court and may stay in a “zone” alignment for one pass, after which all players must resume man to man positions. For example, on the trap, 2 players are on the ball and the remaining 3 players may rotate to protect the basket.

Part 6 – Proving it's a zone

To prove a defender is playing a zone requires specific movement from the offence. Here are some ways to do it:

Moving a Split Line Defender

A basic principle of man-to-man defence is that they go to the player they are guarding rather than to the ball – the closer you need to be to the ball you can be and conversely, the further away from the ball, the further away you can be.

When players are on the weakside (opposite to the ball) a man to man will adopt a split line position – in the middle of the court.

Cut to the ball side

Once you have identified a defender that you think might be playing a zone, have a player cut to the ball side. This will require movement by the defender, and they cannot stay on the split line.

Move to the perimeter - ball side

If the offensive player cuts to a post position, it may be difficult to determine what defence is being played as many teams guard a post player from behind.

By moving to the perimeter, the defender must leave the key – they do not need to be in a denial position, but they must be outside the key.

Cutting from low to high

Having a player cut above the foul line forces the defender to step away from in front of the basket.

Although the defender may stay on the split line, if the offensive player cuts as high as the top of the circle, the defender must clearly react to the cut.

Have a player trail high in transition

Quite commonly, a team's centre will run back to the basket once their team has lost possession. If the player he is guarding also runs straight down the court into a post position, then the defender can stay in the key.

However, if the centre "trails" the break and stays high once the ball reaches the wing, the defender must move away from the basket.

Reverse the Ball

Simply reversing the ball from one side of the court to the other requires the defence to move. This movement can help to identify who each defender is guarding (or whether they are playing a zone defence).

Pass and Cut to the Basket

If the person passing the ball, then makes a strong cut to the basket, it will quickly be obvious if their defender does not follow them.

Overload the Ball Side

By having players cut to the ball side, the defence needs to adjust. If the low weakside defender was to stay where they are, it would not be apparent who they were guarding.