A Multiple Defensive System by Ken Lindsay, Coach, Evansville, Indiana USA

As Coach Dean Smith writes, "Basketball defense is somewhat unique compared to our two other major sports in this country," which provides a good statistical base for this system.

Since changing defenses require more reaction than a constant defense, one of best ways to keep an offense off balance is use of the multiple defenses. Coach Smith illustrates this best by looking at the game of baseball. He says, "A pitcher must keep the batter guessing. If he has nothing but his fast ball working for him some particular day, the batters will soon adjust their timing to his speed. The manager then brings in a junk ball pitcher who will use his slow stuff to catch the batters away ahead of the ball. About the time they get used to the slow stuff, the manager brings in another fast ball pitcher."

This same principle applies to basketball defense, as well. Changing defenses takes teams out of their offenses and lowers their shooting percentages and points-per-possession. Basketball, as played today, requires the use multiple stunting defenses out of sheer necessity; however, my personal preference is a pressure man-to-man as a team's main defense.

In building this hypothetical team, let's make the pressure-man-to-man our basic defense and use it most of the time. Our other defenses are thrown in for their change of pace or strategical value. Don't devote too much time to the other defenses. Consequently, their execution will leave a lot to be desired; however, the results of these junk defenses will amaze you whenever they are sprung on the opponent. This is simply because the offense is unaccustomed to the look and is caught off balance.

As mentioned earlier, many teams do use multiple defenses. Changing zone defenses have been common for years. A team often starts out in a conventional 1-3-1 zone, but if the offense begins to hit shots from the corners, the coach may switch to a 2-3 alignment. I've used this strategy myself by telling the team to start the game with a 1-3-1 zone, but to change to a 2-3 defensive set as soon as the opponent's score reached six points. This had the advantage of slowing a scoring run by the opponent and no time-out is required to change defenses.

Of course, all teams are usually prepared to change defenses if the opponent begins scoring with regularity. I'd rather not wait for that to happen. It is much better to alternate defenses throughout the game which seldom allows the opponents to grow accustomed to any one look.

The multiple system will also help your offensive preparation. By working several defenses in practice you will be exposing your offense to a number of defensive

looks an opponent might use. As a result it would be a rare occurrence for the need to devote valuable practice time simulating a defense for a particular team

North Carolina Defense Numbering System

I have chosen Coach Dean Smith's style of numbering defenses for this notebook. I found it to be simple and easily understood. Of course you can substitute your own favorite defenses which best fit your own personal needs. Coach Smith's system of different defenses is charted in the following diagram:

Diagram D-1

"At first glance it may look as though there are 14 defenses and very complex; however, this is not the case, at all. Players have little difficulty picking it up. Actually there are only 4 defenses in Coach Smith's entire system. **Each defense** is identified by the **first digit** on the above chart. The **second digit** refers to the **point on the court** where that particular defense **picks up the offensive team.** The zones, the 50's defense, vary more in the second digit, than do the 20, 30, and 40 defenses.

"When **4** is used as the second digit, it means **total pressure – prevent the in-bounds pass.** Using **3** as the second digit means to pick-up the offense at **three-quarters court** and using **2** means to pick them up at **half-court.** The use of **1** is the key to applying defense as the opponent begins to set up in the front court. As an illustration, if **23** were called, the defense would initiate our straight man-to-man pressure (identified by the first digit, **2,**) at three-quarters court as indicated by the second digit **3.** They would remain in this defense until the opponent lost the ball, or the clock was stopped. The quarterback, in most cases, signals these defenses by both voice and hand signals

Individual Defenses

Coach Smith's defenses are identified by the numbers 20, 30, 40, and 50. Separate sections will be devoted to each defense in this notebook. A brief description of each defense follows:

1. **"20 Defense –** is a straight man-to-man pressure defense. It is the heart of Coach Smith's system and his predominant defensive attack. He designed this defense to prevent the opponent from running its intended attack. His players do this by **overplaying the offensive player** in an effort to direct them where they don't want to go. Move the ball handler to the sideline, and attempt to cut off the pass to any player who is just one pass away from the ball. At the same time, be ready to support any dribble penetration by an opponent. Coach Smith spends most of his defensive practice time on this defense.
2. **"30 Defense –** is the **run-and-jump defense.** It is a rotating man-to-man defense. Also, it might be described as an attack with some principles of a zone press while remaining man-to-man, which is a much safer defense. The 30 defense starts out straight man-to-man as do the 20 and 40 defenses. Consequently, the offense has no way of knowing the defense will depart from this straight man-to-man defense. In this defense, the change occurs at the first dribble. The dribbler, initially, is covered by his usual **match-up defender**; however, as the dribbler moves in the direction of the next defensive player, the change occurs. The defender toward whom the dribbler dribbles, suddenly, leaves his man and **jumps** the dribbler in an effort to surprise him. The dribbler's original defender leaves immediately and looks to pick up an open man down-court. If the element of surprise is successful, the dribbler may either throw the ball away, charge the defender, travel, or pick up his dribble. Should he do the later, the jumper should get up on him and cut off his outlets. Again, there is no difference between the 20, 30, and 40 defenses, if a dribble does not take place.
3. **"40 Defense –** is often referred to as **The Scramble** and is designed to exploit the **double-team** concept. It might be described as an **extension of the run-and-jump.** Again, you start in a straight man-to-man and jump the dribbler in the same manner described in the 30 defense. In the 40

defense, however, the dribbler's original defender does not leave to look for the open man. He remains as part of the double team. You are attempting two objectives by starting ma-to-man. The first is to disguise your eventual switch to a zone press. The second is to encourage the man with the ball to put it on the floor, since a double-team is more effective once the ball handler has used his dribble. Once the double-team occurs, you are no longer in a man-to-man. The defense, at that time, takes the form of a 2-2-1 zone press. The first pair is the double team. The next two back must move to fill the holes as **interceptors.** The last player back is the **goaltender.** If the player, double-teamed, gets off a perimeter pass, you move to double-team the receiver and continue with the zone press. Should the double-teamed player get the ball to the middle with a **gut pass**, all defenders must sprint back to regroup the defense in order to stop the penetration. **Note:** 40 and 30 defenses are activated **only** if the ball handler puts the ball on the floor. If no dribble occurs you stay straight man-to-man (**20 defense**) even if 30 or 40 defense was called.

4. **"50 Defense –** is a pure zone which, if run in the full-court, takes you into a man-to-man when you get down-court (as though you were defending a fast break). The difference between 43 and 44 versus 53 and 54 is that in the 50 defense, you show the opposition a zone initially and in the 40 defense he is shown a man-to-man until the dribble occurs. It is important that that 53 and 54 go back to the same defense at the other end of the court, as do 43 and 44. That could be either zone or man-to-man; however, it would be difficult to have the 50 defense fall back to a zone while 40 went back man-to-man. Both defenses are identical once the double-team occurs, and having then go back the same way cuts down on the amount of defense your players must learn. The reason for starting out **man-to-man** in the **40** and **zone** in the **50** is to give the opposition another look. The 54 defense puts pressure on the offense to get the ball in play. Coach Smith normally used it after a successful free-throw when the defense can set up quickly. It is similar to the 53 defense, which picks up the ball after it is in-bounded by the opposition. Both **53** and **54** generate the same **2-2-1 zone press alignment** as described in the 40 defense. The **52** defense is a **straight zone** picked up at half-court. It is a **1-3-1 alignment** and remains in this alignment. The 51 defense is what Coach Smith refers to as a 1-2-2 zone. 51 also begins in a 1-2-2 alignment, but bends itself to form more of a match-up zone. This is the only non-aggressive defense in Coach Smith's repertoire.

Conditions Dictating Specific Defenses

As Smith says, "Your quarterback has responsibility of calling all defenses. The only exception being when there is enough time for the coach to signal or confer with the quarterback. Always discuss the opponent with your quarterbacks prior to game time. Based on your knowledge of the opposition it would be appropriate for you to suggest the proper defensive ratios. However, there are certain

conditions which dictate specific defenses. Your players should be so versed on them that the respond automatically. These are:

1. **"Missed Field-Goal Attempt –** always sprint back to the **22 defense** and stay man-to-man for the duration of the play. This represents your defense against the fast break. Coach Smith does not believe in **jumping** the rebounder or **pinching** the outlet pass. Unless he is driving in for a lay-up, your quarterback is always back on defense. In such a case, #2 guard is usually in a position to pick up a long rebound but can still come back quickly. Your three front-court men should be designated rebounders; however, once the opponent takes the rebound, they must get back at top speed. The ability to make this swift transition from offense to defense is an absolute prerequisite for successful defense. If a player fails to sprint back at **top speed**, exercise your authority to substitute. In fact encourage your players to take **themselves** out of the game when they recognize they have reached this point of fatigue. A clenched fist pointed at the bench brings the player a rest and the right to put himself back in the game when he is rested.
2. **"Jump-Ball Situations –** If the opposition gains possession off a jump-ball, the situation is treated as if it were a missed shot. Get back into the 22 defense very quickly to offset a fast break possibility. The same holds true for any situation, such as an interception by the opposition, where they do not have to take the ball out-of-bounds.
3. **"Out-Of-Bounds on the Baseline –** When the opposition has the ball under its own basket, call one of the zone defenses, either 51 or 52 to encourage an outside pass. When the opponent takes the ball out of bounds under your own basket, the defense is called by the quarterback.
4. **"Sideline Out-Of-Bounds –** are called by the quarterback. If the ball is taken out of bounds in the opponent's half-court, your choices are 22, 32, 42, or 52. If the ball is taken out-of-bounds in your half-court, go to 23, 33, 43, or 53. In these situations, your team has a choice. You can put a defender on the player in-bounding the ball or use that defender in another capacity. Coach Smith liked to vary these two options, but generally played off the in-bounds passer. Theoretically, the in-bounds passer has used up his dribble and can't move onto the court. Therefore, you should elect not to guard him. Instead, use the extra defensive player to free-lance or play goaltender.
5. **"After Successful Field Goals –** The quarterback is responsible for calling the defense after each of your team's successful field goal attempts. When a shot is taken by your team, the quarterback is usually running back to mid-court for defensive balance. He can generally be seen by the other players as they turn and move back on defense. The quarterback's hand signals key the specific defense. For example, if the quarterback raises two hands the defense is 22. One hand raised indicates the 30 defense and two hands lowered signals the 40 defense. Three choices are enough to try to remember as sometimes all players

may not have the correct signal. Secondary schools should never run more than three and elementary schools no more than two. Now, how do you inform your players as to the **point** on the court where to initiate the particular defense signaled by the quarterback? Do it this way: Based on his knowledge of the opponent, the coach determines a consistent pick-up point prior to the game. This predetermined pick-up point remains in effect until game conditions warrant a change.

6. **"Opponent in a Bonus Situation –** Game conditions have a bearing on defensive strategy. The bonus situation is a good example. The one-on-one bonus imposes a strong penalty after the sixth foul. Considering the fact that most college players average about 70% at the free throw line, a little math points out that the one-on-one will average a little over one point per possession for the bonus team. This is hard to beat. Consequently, after your sixth foul you should go to some defense that minimizes fouling. It is usually the **Red Series**, composed of 21, 51, and 52 which will only be called after your team scores a field-goal. On a missed shot, regardless of the circumstances, always get back on 22 defense. Therefore, you are never in a zone defense 100% of the time.
7. **"Behind Late In the Game –** If you are very far behind late in the game, you do have a catch-up defense to use. It is a gambling, double-teaming type of defense and you should not use it unless the situation is desperate. Under these conditions, you should be in the **Green Series** if possible, but encourage 40 and 30 defensive calls by the quarterback. On the other hand, should the opponent be desperately behind in the game, go to the **Red Series** to offset the opponent's usual strategy. A desperation offense normally attempts to get the ball to the best driver in an effort to pick up a three-point play and stop the clock. It does take time to run a zone offense properly. Furthermore the zone inhibits this type of strategy.

Summarizing his defensive philosophy, Coach Smith believes "that defense makes the difference between a good team and a great team. Good defense, unlike shooting for example, does not require fine skill. Good defense requires learning and effort. Once learned and applied regularly, it tends to become a habit. Consequently, a well-coached team defensively should be relatively consistent in its play. The team that depends too much on offense, may suffer when its best shooters have an off night. The more effort you put into coaching defense, the more you get out of it."

For a more thorough explanation of Coach Dean Smith's system, I recommend you read his *Basketball Multiple Offense and Defense,* published by Allyn & Bacon, Needham Heights, MA
Coach Smith's 36 years as coach of the University of North Carolina Tarheels produced 879 victories, more than any other collegiate coach in history of the game. This study gives coaches and players at any level, game tested defensive and offensive maneuvers for building championship basketball teams.