

SE Minnesota Youth Basketball Defensive Rules

Definition and Enforcement of the Person-to-Person Defense Rule:

Person-to-person (also known as man-to-man) defense is utilized by the majority of youth basketball leagues in Minnesota and across the nation. This rule is implemented for a number of very valid reasons: to teach footwork, agility, speed, defensive position, screens, and switches to our players. While some of these aspects certainly are learned with zone defenses, most agree that a zone is an easy way out of playing defense, especially at the youth level where you can dare most teams to try to shoot from 15 or more feet out because very few players can do so accurately and consistently.

For these reasons, we have defined in our league rules the requirement of always playing person-to-person defense. Two specific areas will be addressed: defensive switches and defensive positioning.

Defensive Switches:

During an offensive set (i.e. the offense is not on a fast break), defensive switches may only be made when a screen/pick is attempted by the offensive team.

If an offensive player rotates from one position on the court to another (i.e. high post to low, low post to high, left wing to right, right wing to left), the defensive player with that assignment must also move to an appropriate position and remain as the defender for that offensive player. However, if the offensive player sets a screen for a teammate, then the defenders may switch assignments with the player being screened.

The switching guideline does not prevent the defensive player from providing help defense; however, the help defense must be on an offensive player with the ball. Double teaming a player with the ball is allowed; double teaming a player without the ball is not allowed.

Defensive Positioning:

During an offensive set (i.e. the offense is not on a fast break) all defensive players must be guarding or assigned to an offensive player. The defensive position of the player must be within a reasonable distance and on a line between the offensive player and the ball or the basket.

Examples of reasonable distance and line:

For defense of an offensive player who has the ball, if the offensive player is outside the three point line, defend no further away than the three point line and on a line between the player and the basket; once the offensive player is within the three point line, defend within 3-5 feet.

For defense of an offensive player who does not have the ball, the defensive player may defend away to a point where they are just outside the free throw lane, on a line between the player and the basket or the ball. For example, a player on the bottom right of the three point line would be defended from the low right block outside the free throw lane; a player at the top right of the three point line would be defended from the high right block outside the free throw lane.

Defensive players must adjust their positioning when the player they are guarding or assigned takes possession of the ball. Switching assignments without a screen/pick is not allowed.

Enforcement Guidelines:

Below are suggestions for teams and officials to use to address enforcement of this rule:

- 1) Coaches, if you know that what you are doing is a variation of a zone defense, change your defensive strategy.
- 2) Defensive switches on screens off the ball should consist of the defensive players maintaining the switch and remaining with the new defensive player. Defensive switches without a screen/pick are not allowed.
- 3) A defensive switch does not always need to occur on screens. Players should be taught how to effectively fight through or around these screens while maintaining their defense against the original player. Teams who constantly switch on cross screens and down screens (not ball screens) are effectively playing a zone defense.
- 4) A situation to look for as a referee is to watch the two defensive players at the bottom of the free throw lane. If these players don't switch positions occasionally, even though offensive players have moved through their zones, warn them about person-to-person defense.
- 5) On inbound plays under the basket, check to see that the defense has matched up to each offensive player. If not, warn them.

Enforcement of these rules is quite difficult in our league, especially given that many of our schools use high school players as referees and their ability to both recognize and enforce these rules is usually limited. It is up to us as advisors and coaches to work to the 'fairness' of the rule. However, our referees should do the following to enforce person-to-person defense:

- Blow the whistle to stop play, and stop the clock. In an area away from the team benches, the head coaches and officials should have a 'calm' discussion regarding the infractions that are being seen. Only the head coaches should be involved; no players or assistants. Attempt to come to a consensus on the proper form of defensive play that should be occurring. A discussion of this type should only occur once in a game.
- A referee has the option to assess technical fouls on subsequent violations. However, recognize this is a teaching league and often the violations are inadvertent. If a referee feels the defensive violation is intentional or blatant, they may assess a technical foul, awarding two free throws and the ball at half-court to the offensive team.

Ultimately the responsibility for the proper utilization of the person-to-person defense rule is left to the coaches. Please make every effort to follow these guidelines.