



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS - FORT SMITH

PACK LINE PRESSURE MAN to MAN DEFENSE

- We employ the PACK LINE PRESSURE MAN to MAN DEFENSE at The University of Arkansas Fort Smith in order to not only compete in one of the nation's best NCAA Division II basketball leagues, the Lone Star Conference, but to compete vs. the very best NCAA Division II programs across the nation.
- By employing our theory of defense play, we will **lower our opponent's field goal percentage**, we will improve our **rebouncing**, and we will **reduce their opportunities for lay-ups and easy baskets rather off dribble penetration or transition**.
- The greatest negative of our system; and it is a system of play, is that it can have a tendency to allow lesser talented programs to compete. We can not beat them on the advantage we hold due to our talent level or athleticism, our system is built upon execution – therefore, we have to out execute our opponent.
- Our offense compliments our defense, although this is not completely necessary for our defense to be successful. We work very hard to get what we want offensively and not what the defense decides to give us. Therefore, we are constantly exploring the defense in an effort to get the ball inside, to achieve a great shot, and or to get to the foul line. We want to make our opponent defend!
- Rather than running plays and confine our players to certain areas; we define their roles and demand that they play to their roles. We are an offensive system that is grounded upon execution and the fundamental development of our players.
- I think it is more important on the offensive end that you take great shots, what ever you do – take great shots. Conversely, I know that our defense will frustrate offenses into taking bad shots.
- Every team struggles to score, I do not care who you are or what you do, you will struggle to score in league play. It's an ongoing battle to find ways to play in such a way so as to use your talent to score. Coaches are so much more in-tuned today in stopping offense, defense is important and it shows.
- The two most important stats to UAFS Lions Basketball are Defensive Field Goal Percentage and Trips to the Foul Line. We want to force our opponent into tough contested shots, limit them to one shot, and we absolutely do not want to foul!
- **REBOUND – REBOUND – REBOUND:** You must rebound to win! We emphasize rebounding in everything we do, everything! We will work on blocking-out every night in some form. We will drill our team 1-on-1, 2-on-2, 3-on-3, and 4-on-4, as well as emphasize this very important objective in our 5-on-5 play.
- **Defense is outcome oriented.** Ask yourself: Did we stop the ball. We teach this very important concept through our drills – our players must get stops, anything else is unacceptable!
- **In the PACK LINE PRESSURE DEFENSE**, you only have to recover because we line-up in help. Remember the words of the great Chuck Daly – It's not the help that gets you beat, it's the recovery or lack thereof. We work recovery, over and over and over again.
- Our defense is zone oriented on the ball-side. The idea is to build a fence, and to keep the ball out of the PACK area.
- This is a **Defensive System of Play** that can only succeed when all five players work together as one, when they trust each other, and they allow the synergy of TEAM to take over.
- **TEAM UNITY:** Do not allow anyone to come in and break-up the **FAMILY**. The unity of our team must be **protected and nurtured**.

“Now this is the law of the jungle,
As old and as true as the sky;
And the wolf that shall keep it may prosper,
But the wolf that shall break it must die.
As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk,
The law runneth forward and back
For the strength of the pack is the wolf,
And the strength of the wolf is the pack.”

Ruyard Kipling

Lions Pack-Line Pressure Defense

Philosophy

ALONE with OTHERS

Our first principle is to **Stop the Ball**, which means to stop all penetration to the lane - keep the ball out of the lane. This responsibility falls squarely upon the player defending the ball, alone. He must pressure the ball, defend his man in an aggressive manner, thus creating a level of discomfort for the ball handler. Our pressure must be significant enough to make it difficult for the offensive player to shoot, pass, or dribble the ball. Failure to do this gives the offensive player the advantage, as he can see the floor clearly and has time to anticipate the action on the floor. This is much like the quarterback in football that is allowed to drop back and pass at his leisure without any pressure from the defensive line or blitzing defensive backs. However, this pressure defensive attack can place the defender in a very vulnerable position, especially if the offensive player is quicker. Therefore, the strength of our defense is also based upon the level of confidence the defender “on the ball” has, in knowing that he will receive help from his teammates “off the ball” if his man gets past him; **with others**. This confidence in his teammates, in turn, allows him to concentrate entirely on our principle of **Stopping the Ball!** We simply cannot be effective in stopping the ball without this unity on defense.

We have a “**Pack-Line**”, an imaginary line that is positioned at 17’ from the basket. The only player outside of that line, that arc, is the player defending the ball. All other players are occupied inside the arc. Therefore, we do not have a “**Help**” mode, only a “**Recovery**” mode to our defense. Our players are already positioned in help, a “**Gap**”. We are positioned in a slightly-closed stance, inside the Pack-Line, up-the-line but off the line, maintaining a Ball-You-Man relationship. However, when the ball is being passed to our man, we must “**explode-out**” of this position, and closeout to the ball.

A critical element of our execution defensively becomes our “**Close-out**” to the ball. We believe the most important key in our close-outs is to get “**high-hands**”. We must break the shooters rhythm, we cannot allow the offense to catch and shoot.

There is a second extremely important element of our defense that is best described by **the alone**, with others symbolic terminology. That fundamental is the action of defending screens, whether on or off the ball. A screening situation consists of a cutter and a screener defender. The moment when the cutter breaks off the screener, the defender is completely alone. He has no responsibility at that moment other than to get through the screen. When we are being screened we are no longer a team defender. No matter how good a defender is, he simply cannot fight through a screen and worry about helping his teammates at the same time. Therefore, our cutter defender turns his full attention solely to his man. But even then, verses a good offensive team he will momentarily become separated from his man.

During this moment of separation, he must defend with others, receiving help from the screener defender. Our screener defender must jump momentarily into the path of the cutter, staying within touching distance of his man, and take away his cut. The cutter then has only one option available to him, to move away from the basket. This is a critical element of our success in defeating screens. Successful execution of this principle is difficult, but when done correctly separates good defensive teams from great defensive teams!

TRUST and SERVANTHOOD

There are two intangible concepts that make the above execution possible. The player defending the screener must give total complete help to his teammate, thus allowing him to successfully get through the screen. Any hesitation on his part will cripple the effectiveness of the defense and give the offensive cutter the opportunity to catch and shoot a rhythm jump shot. At this moment, he must serve his teammate and stop the cutter. His priority of helping his teammate becomes greater than that of defending his own man. There is a component of trust which must be present when the two defenders properly execute this technique. Our screener defender jumps out to stop the cutter, but he cannot stay too long. He must return to his own man, the screener, before that player becomes a scoring threat himself. He must trust that his teammate will get through the screen and recover to his own man, the cutter. Therefore, we actually leave the cutter open for a split second while both defenders return to their original players. At this point of transition, both the screener and the cutter are open, but for such a short period of time, that when coupled with our pressure on the ball, neither of them can take advantage of the opening.

This can only be executed successfully when both players work together and trust each other. The instant that one player fails to serve or trust his teammate while defending a screen, the timing of the maneuver breaks down and our defense becomes porous.

COMMUNICATION

For our team to be effective defensively, we must talk, we must communicate! This is never more important than when defending a screener or when positioned in the "gap" off the ball. The best example of this is simply to compare a poor defensive player with a very good defender. A great defender communicates well with his teammates, while a poor defender rarely talks. The contrast is obvious, and the reason very evident. The poor defender has a difficult time communicating because he does not have a sense of what is about to happen next. He lacks the ability to anticipate the movement of the offense. As a result, he is always one step behind and in a perpetual state of catch-up. This makes it impossible for him to have the presence of mind to communicate with his teammates. A player with this limitation may be a great one-on-one defender, but he will cripple a team defense.

A great team defender has a feel for what the offense is about to do. He can anticipate the action, and thus communicate to his teammates what is going to happen next, before it actually happens. He is not always right, but he is rarely caught off guard by the offense. The most obvious physical characteristic of a great team defensive player, one who communicates well, is that he is rarely out of position to help his teammates. His awareness allows him to maintain a Ball-You-Man relationship that is the crux of our defense. Moreover, and just as importantly, he now has better "Vision" of the offense and the ball.

CONSTANT REPOSITIONING

The rule of Ball-You-Man is constantly being broken, therefore constant repositioning off the ball is absolutely essential. We must constantly battle to reestablish our Ball-You-Man position. This is simply the "backbone" of our defense. Offenses do not stand stationary. Therefore, when the ball moves, or when players move on the floor, the defense must continually adjust to the ever-changing environment. The reality in basketball is that the defender will constantly get knocked off track in the course of a defensive possession. That is why it is imperative that each player perpetually work to regain the correct defensive position. Failure to do so by any of the five defenders will create a breakdown in the team defense, and, moreover, a potentially good scoring opportunity for the offense. Essentially, getting "broken-down" on defense does not guarantee failure, but giving up at that point does!

EVERY WHEEL MUST HAVE A HUB

The hub of our defense is defending the low post. The most important decision that any coach has is to how he will play the post. Our post defense keys everything else we do, it is the hub to our defense, it dictates everything else. Great low post defense may be even more important than playing great defense on the ball. Although, these two key ingredients must work hand-in-hand. Furthermore, good post defense is more about toughness, determination, aggression, and a relentless effort than it is about technique.

There is no glamour in post defense, it is hard work, banging and pounding, it is a relentless effort. It is something that cannot just be turned on and off, it must be present all the time, in practice and in the game. Our defense will only be as good as our post defenders!

Our basic method of defending the low post is to play on top of the offensive player, with the ball on the top and the player positioned in the low post area. There will not be a feed from the top, this cannot and will not happen. As the ball approaches the side, we move into a three-quarter denial position. We instruct our players to be aggressive, to be physical, but to show our hands, do not foul - and "see the ball", we must have vision.. We should be positioned in such a way as to have our top arm thrown across the post in a denial position, with our head in front of the post shoulder, but our lower leg and a portion of our body behind the post and thus, disallowing the lob pass. We only allow a baseline pass that takes the post away from the lane. We tell our players this is our time, not the offense's time, but our time. We do not go for the steal or deflection, we immediately use "our time" to establish a position behind the post, take away the baseline drive, prepared to contest a shot, and to defend a drive.

If the offensive low post attempts to move us up the lane, we must know our slip point - in other words, when to move under the post and stay between him and the basket. We absolutely cannot give-up an angle to the basket or an easy lob, we must force the post to play through us, and not over or around us.

When the ball does get into the low post, it is a disaster! We have to do everything we can to get the ball out of there. We have two methods in which to achieve this objective. We can "**Choke**" the post with a perimeter player or players, in order to force the ball to be passed out of the post, or we can "**red the post**", double the post big to big.

Excerpts taken from the book, A SEASON WITH COACH DICK BENNETT, by Eric Ferris.

Lions Pack-Line Pressure Defense

Key Teaching Points of the PACK LINE PRESSURE DEFENSE

Conversion Defense

There are two critical areas in regards to being an effective defensive team that you as the coach must be accountable. The first is conversion defense and the second is defending the low-post.

In our Conversion Defense we are not assigned a specific player necessarily, but rather, we are defending positions on the floor in order to stop the ball and our opponents transition offense.

Our conversion defense begins as the ball is being shot by our offense. We send two guards back on defense as the shot goes up – we feel that the benefit of having our guards back on defense to **STOP the BALL**, is of a far greater benefit than any advantage that may be derived by having one or both rebound the offensive glass.

We designate which guard is our “Rim Defender” and which guard is the “Ball Defender”. The lane defender sprints to paint, finds the ball and takes the lane-line on the side that the ball is being entered into play. He positions here in order to take away any cuts into the lane and will closeout to a “Gap Position” or to the ball, as soon as the lane is secured. The ball defender works to contain the ball-handler at half-court, and preferably get the ball out of the middle of the floor. Again, he must contain the ball first and foremost, and of course, his point of pick-up can change due to our opponent’s personnel.

The remaining three players sprint back to paint as soon as our opponent gains possession of the ball. We teach their first three sprint steps to be with total disregard to vision; turn and sprint three steps, and then locate the ball as they continue to the lane. We will position toward the ball-side as deep as the ball. We cannot express enough the emphasis that we place upon our team of not giving-up transition baskets, NO LAY-UPS!

Pressure on the Ball

We must place pressure upon the basketball, we cannot allow the ball handler to play comfortably, to easily look over the court. Offenses today will pick your defense apart if you allow them to do what they want to do with the ball. This is a great myth in the Pack Line Pressure Defense, that we do not pressure the ball – that we are all about containment. Yes, we must contain and our players must know their limitations, but we must pressure the ball.

It is much like the football quarterback; the passer that has all the time needed to drop back and throw the ball, any NFL quarterback will pick apart a defense that does not pressure – the same holds true with our game. With this being said, we cannot allow the ball to get into the PACK AREA. **Our point of pick-up is at half court, in the play area it is determined by whom you are guarding – your game and his game.**

As much as we want and demand pressure on the ball, we must also understand a very important axiom I our defensive game planning; **“Sometimes to not guard, is to guard”**. In other words, there are players that you are better served to not defend, and therefore, utilize this defender as a helper.

We do not force the ball in a specific direction. We simply tell our players, **“DO NOT GIVE-UP THE BASE-LINE”**. We do not want them to feel that it is OK to force the ball to the middle, we just cannot get beat baseline. We will emphasize that our **players must have their baseline foot positioned outside of the offensive player’s baseline foot**.

We will drill a lot of one-on-one in order for our players to learn their limitations, to understand how to keep the ball out of the PACK, and to learn how to force contested jump shots.

We deny inside the arc and we will work on this more from a whole method standpoint more so than a 1on1 break-down drill, but we absolutely do not want to allow the ball inside the PACK AREA (16 foot mark).

Footwork is of paramount importance in our pressuring the ball, we want to **Step** (point our toe) in the direction that the ball is being dribbled, and **Push** with our opposite foot. We use the term, “**Guarding a Yard**” with our players, if we can execute two quick slides, we can arc and defend the ball. Use quick, short, steps without bringing our feet any closer than 12 inches, there is an imaginary ruler between our heels, no **Heel Clicking**.

If we can force a **Dribble-Used situation**, we now leave the PACK area with all of our defenders, in an effort to all-out deny all four offensive players. This is a great opportunity for us to create a panicked, and hopefully a turnover situation for the offense. The player defending the ball must verbalize the dribble used situation by calling out “**FIVE – FIVE – FIVE**”.

Jumping to the Ball

We do not jump to the ball per say, our **first move is to jump back into the PACK AREA** and then move toward the ball to preserve our **Ball-You-Man** relationship. Therefore, the nature of this position places our defender closer to the ball than the man who passed it.

We assume a **flat triangle position, slightly open** and inside the PACK AREA when our man does not have the ball and is one pass away.

Closeouts

Closing out to the ball is the key to our recovery mode, sprint the first two to three steps, with the last couple being short, choppy, steps. We must accomplish two objectives in our closeout; first we must closeout “**Hard & Short**” with our weight back prepared to absorb the dribble (**we will not get blown away by the dribble**), and secondly, we must have **High Hands**. We teach our players to keep their hands high, with elbows bent, for a 1001 count. We must create the illusion that there is no shot to be had. We cannot allow the offense to have rhythm jump shots.

Gap Defense

All Non-Ball Defenders are located inside the Pack Line – This is the most critical part of our defense. We do not believe that our defenders can accomplish three things: they cannot **Deny, Help, and Recover**. Therefore, we have eliminated the denial, and we now focus entirely on the other two factors – **Help and Recovery**. Because our defenders in the Gap are already positioned in Help, they are now quicker in their recovery to the ball – there is no negative movement, away from their recovery.

We are constantly “Re-positioning” in the Pack area:

Position Up the Line, but Off the Line – slightly closed to the Ball
Vision is of the utmost, we must see both Man and Ball
Do not Help to Take a Charge, but rather with our **Near Arm and Leg**, we do not want to become **Blind to our Help**, by losing sight of our man
Bluff help as much as possible, we cannot become sterile in our positioning.
We must be **Active & Energized** in our Gap – **We are Zoning the Ball**

Flash Post

We are positioned in a flat triangle with our **closest foot to the ball slightly forward, therefore we are in a denial position to begin and better equipped to take away the flash.**

VISION is key, **WE MUST SEE BOTH MAN and BALL!**

Upon the offensive players flash cut, **we intercept it with our forearm**. We teach our defender to use his forearm, to bump or force the offense away from the lane **without extending the forearm**, which would be a foul, in order to deny.

It is a reality that our defender will momentarily lose sight of the ball, this occurs whenever we are defending a cutter, weather a screen is involved or not.

Defending the Low Post

You must have a very clear and concise philosophy of defending the low post. How you defend this area dictates everything else you do defensively.

There are only two areas to be defended; the low post and the perimeter. Everything that occurs in our **Post Box** (Approximately two steps off the lane and below the first hash mark on the lane) is considered the low post, everything else is the perimeter.

We $\frac{3}{4}$ Deny on the High Side of the Post, we tell our players to **“Smother”** the Low Post. Activity is our biggest key, **WE MUST BE ACTIVE!**

We can play $\frac{3}{4}$ high because we allow no baseline penetration. This also places us in a better position to take away the “High-Low” entry into the low post.

We must know our **slip-point** in the low post; it can vary from player to player, depending upon size, length, and quickness. Anytime the ball is on the side and the offense tries to move us up the lane, upon approaching the mid-lane area we must slip behind to the baseline side to avoid being pinned high.

Anytime a player steps away from the post, we then treat him as a perimeter player and deny inside the **PACK AREA**.

There can never be a feed to the low post from the top, no exceptions!

On a catch, we tell our post that this is our time, not the offensive player’s time, but our time. We must quickly slide behind the post on **“air-time”** – do not reach or gamble for a steal, but work to immediately position ourselves slightly to the baseline side with a half-step of cushion between our defender and the offensive player, maintaining a position between the post and the basket.

From our position behind the low post, we will defend the ball in one of three ways:

Play the post one-on-one from behind – do not give up a scoring angle forcing the offensive player to score over our defender, not through our him. Our post defender must keep his hands at shoulder height with his fingers pointed upward. We teach our post to employ a one step cut-off in this area, using his chest to level off the dribble, **take the hit and force the tough shot.**

Choke the Post – our perimeter players located on the ball-side will open to the ball as it is passed and give help to the post defender. We can dive in and out to bother the post and choke the post only if he puts the ball on the floor, or we can full-out choke the post, immediately diving to the ball and digging it out, forcing him to throw the ball out to the perimeter. Obviously, if our perimeter defender is defending a dead three or a great scorer, we may determine not to choke with his defender, but only to bluff help.

RED THE POST – Double the post Big to Big. This is probably our most often utilized method of defending the post, and our most effective. It is a way in which we can force the ball back out of the scoring area, while creating turnovers.

RED in the Post

We employ our **Red** if we cannot handle a player one on one. Everyone, because of the **PACK**, is within one giant step of the low post. Therefore, it becomes much easier to double Big to Big, than if we were a denial defense.

The passer must absolutely deny the pass back out, this pass cannot occur!

The remaining two perimeter players sprint to occupy two areas, the Rim and the X-out positions. The Rim defender must not allow anyone to cut between himself and the basket – he becomes the sole protector of the rim. The X-out defender is positioned just inside the free throw line, opened to the ball. Again, vision and communication are absolute essentials. On a pass out of the low post; our X-out defender takes the initial pass and closes out to this player, our Rim defender has the next pass. We always want to think “Inside-Out” with our Rim Defender. Our perimeters will give support help until our Big arrives from doubling the post.

The defender on the low post will create a cushion and **move slightly to the baseline** side on the pass, to allow the double and to take away a baseline spin move.

The double must be on the pass, we move on “**air-time**”. The trap must be toe to toe – **shoulder to shoulder**. We want to **take away the cross-court pass to the open man with the position of our trap from the double**. “**Close the Door**” with our trap, do not allow the offensive post to look over the floor, be aggressive, but aggressive without fouling.

We want to be as high as we can be with our hands in the trap. We want to avoid at all cost the temptation of reaching for the ball, keep those hands-up! Hands down will create the path for the pass out, hands down will increase our opportunity to foul.

On a “**Release Dribble**”, we will leave the ball and immediately look to recover back to our assigned man. We could adjust, and stay with the offensive post on the Release Dribble, but our basic rule is to immediately leave on the **Release Dribble**.

Recovery is on “air-time”. We will support perimeter to post, and we want our post to recover to their assigned man as quickly and efficiently as possible. We will allow a switch by the perimeter out of necessity.

HELP-SIDE RULES

Key Non Ball Pack Line Rules:

- 1) Two Feet in the Pack with a Slightly Closed Stance*
- 2) Positioned Closer to the Ball than the Man You are Defending*
- 3) See Both Man and Ball*

DEFEATING SCREENS

Off the Ball

We do not switch screens, only in special situations or scouting report situations do we switch. **Not switching makes our defense tougher!**

- **Play all off the ball screens the same**. We strive to keep everything we do within our defense as simple as possible. We will spend an inordinate amount of time defending off the ball screens. We spend more time on this than most programs spend on their O/B plays, lay-ups, and shooting combined.

We teach technique first, and then we allow them to play. Our favorite drill to teach this skill, is 4/4 with a release. Thus, allowing the offense to screen as much as possible, in as many ways as possible, and as many combinations as possible.

The Cutter defender: As soon as you know you will be screened, move to your man, getting as close as possible. Once our defender becomes a cutter defender, for this short time, he no longer has help responsibility and thus will lose vision of the ball for just a moment. We must aggressively follow the cutter into our proper defensive position – we want to be as physical as our size and strength will allow us to be. Obviously, if through scouting or playing the game, we can anticipate the offensive players cut, by all means do so.

Screener Defender: We teach our screener defender to jump to the ball and create space between himself and the screener. He must help where necessary in the direction of the cutters action, but while staying within touching distance of his man. We give the screener defender a degree of freedom to help with the cutter.

There are exceptions to the above rules. We want our players to play, we are not as rule oriented per-say as you might think. We want our players to conceptualize what our overall objective is and then play accordingly. We simply do not get caught up as much with this foot must be here, etc. as you must PLAY and Get Stops!

Examples of Defending Specific Screens:

Flare Screen: Chase over the screen and loosen-up with the screener defender to protect the basket. This takes away the pop and rhythm shot by the cutter.

Back Screen: We jump to the ball and back inside the Pack Line, therefore, placing our cutter defender on top of the screener's hip. Here we are in a position to take away the cut to the basket, a cut to the ball, or the pop-out cut. The screener defender gets lower than the screen, protects the basket and closes out to his man as quickly as possible.

Cross Screen: The cutter defender immediately moves to the cutter to take away the high cut, the screener defender opens to the ball, lower than the screen to protect the basket and provide baseline help if necessary. We utilize a "V" move here to move over top of the screen and recover back into the cutters path.

Screen on the Ball

Hard Show: The screener defender gets in the dribblers path and has his "shoulders facing the ball", while the defender on the ball gets over top of the screen and under the screener defender. The screener defender must force the ball handler to pick-up the dribble, go around the high side, or take a charge. We must help the helper with our other post defender, Big supports Big. We use this method of defending the ball screen vs. a great ball handler that can create and score with the jumper behind the screen.

Soft Show: The screener defender positions himself in the lower plane of the screener with his shoulders tilted toward half court, two steps away from the screen (we are in a better position to recover to the screener popping), his job is to force the ball to dribble out and around, thus giving our ball defender ample opportunity to recover. He absolutely cannot allow a dribble around or pull-up jump shot. The ball defender goes over both the screen and the screener defender, over taking and recovering to the ball. We employ this method of defending the ball screen with a great ball-handler that is creative with the dribble, can shoot the pull-up, and the screener can pop and shoot it.

Slide: The screener defender positions himself "2 x 2"; two steps under the screen and two steps away from screen, allowing the ball defender to slide under the screener and over our screener defender. We defend the ball screen in this manner when it occurs outside of the scoring area, or the ball handler is not a threat to score.

Flat: The screener defender pushes up into screener while the on ball defender goes under both. We use this vs. a screener that can shoot-it, or a great screen and role guy.

Defending Specific Screening Movements:

Double Staggered or Side by Side Screens: Defend with screener defender closest to ball extending into passing lane, screener defender furthest away is the zone man, and cutter defender chases hard!

Screen the Screener:

Flex Action:

UCLA Duck-in:

Late Clock 1-4 Down:

Ball Screens:

