

THE PUSH MAN TO MAN PRESSURE DEFENSE

By: John Carrier



INTRODUCTION

Problems with Pressure Man to Man

I love pressure man to man, but the issue with pressure man to man is that we are asking players to do too much. They need to deny the passes, help on the drive, and then recover. We also ask players to pressure the ball and not get beat. Asking a defense to do all of this is impossible. What ends up happening is that players stop pressuring the ball and either don't really deny the pass (so they can help) or don't help well (because they are denying). What do we do about this? Well there are several options.

One of the options is to run the PACK man to man. In the PACK you don't deny passes. This allows you to pressure the ball and have four people behind the ball ready to help. It allows the help to just help and recover and not have to worry about denial. We've ran this before in programs I have been in and I like the concept. The only problem is that you cannot pressure and push the tempo with this defense. It also allows the offense to quickly reverse the ball and get to the middle of the floor.

Another option that has come out is rotational defenses such as the SWARM defense. I like the SWARM also (and do play some of it at times). Rotational defenses allow players to pressure the ball because on the dribble they rotate over to the ball and don't have to recover. This type of defense is hard to play because players are constantly switching men. If I were to play a different defense, it would be a rotational defense.

So there are some good options to address the problems of traditional man to man. But I felt that we could have it all, we could help, we could recover, and we could pressure. So by stealing a little bit of information from a lot of sources, the Push defense was formed and I think this defense becomes very hard to play against because it allows players to truly pressure the ball and deny without worrying about getting beat or having to help – the reasons that regular pressure man to man defense fails.

Why the Push Defense is Different

As I say with anything I write, none of this is new or revolutionary. This defense will never be a craze that sweeps the nation, will never be played by an NCAA Champion, this is not going to turn an average team into league champions and this is not the answer to all of your defensive problems. It's a simple idea we use to solve some common man to man problems. I couldn't have come up with this defense without stealing ideas from a number of coaches such as: Coach Knight, Vance Walberg, Coach Huggins, Coach Bennett, Coach Thorson (DeLaSalle HS, MN), Larry McKenzie (Academy of Holy Angels HS, MN), Coach Novak (Hopkins HS, MN), Todd Fergot (LaCrosse Central HS, WI), Coach Liesener (St. Croix Prep HS, MN), and Coach Walters (SWARM) among MANY OTHERS. I would like to thank these coaches and mention that I couldn't do these things without watching and learning from them.

The difference in philosophy of the defense isn't anything amazing. What the defense does is simplify the roles of players in pressure man to man. It allows players to concentrate on one job at a time – pressure, deny, help. We have done that by:

- Extreme ball pressure because the help is lying in wait.
- Overplayed the ball to force it in one direction – toward the baseline.
- Extreme pressure on the ball without worrying about getting beat.
- Defenders off the ball toward the sideline/baseline will sag off and PACK
 - This allows them to concentrate on helping only.
- Defenders off the ball toward the middle will deny chest to chest and not allow the reversal pass.
 - This allows them to deny the reversal hard without having to worry about helping. .
- Players two passes away or more are in strong help on the mid line.

So this is no different than a traditional man to man pressure defense except that we are forcing the ball one direction, sagging off the ball in that direction to be in help, and denying all reversal (dribble and pass) very hard. Again, we have just simplified the roles of the defenders so they know what they have to do and can concentrate on one thing. We used it at the JV level last year as an experiment with permission of my head coach. We liked it and found it very helpful for us, especially as the year went on. We could contribute a lot of our success to this defense.

DEFENSE OVERVIEW

Basics of the Defense

One of the more important things to the defense is how we play the ball. Most defenses play the ball and “influence” the ball or play it square up. **In order for our defense to work we need to “push” the ball.** What that means is that their shoulders are basically parallel to the sideline. If the defender tries to go middle, the defender does not drop step, but slides up to cut off the dribble. **The player on the ball needs to pressure the ball and force it to the sideline/baseline. There also needs to be TREMENDOUS PRESSURE on the ball.** If we don’t pressure the defense sucks. And I am talking all out, 6 inches away pressure. Really make the ballhandler uncomfortable.

Verbal communication is also important for the defense to be successful. Players should be constantly talking about their position and what the offense is doing. They should call all cuts, passes, screens, skips, etc. If you can get players to communicate you will win.

Players need to move on “air time” to be successful in this defense. Air time means that as the ball is in the air or being dribbled the defense **sprints to position**. We only slide when we are on the ball – we sprint everywhere else.

Another important part of the defense is “stunting” when in help (1 pass to the baseline/sideline or 2+ passes away). Stunting is simply being in a stance and quickly jumping to and away from the ball. This makes the help look bigger and the driving lanes look smaller. It also keeps the players in their stance and ready to help quickly.

Positioning

It’s important to remember that you teach this defense with **RULES not spots**. Rules are flexible and allows you to teach players how to defend any offense with your defense. If you teach “when the ball is on the wing you...” it makes it harder for players to learn the defense. You also can’t teach your players that “the guards do X” because it’s not about guards, forwards, and posts. It’s about playing the defense **in relation to the ball**. The rules of the defense are below:

Rules Based on Position

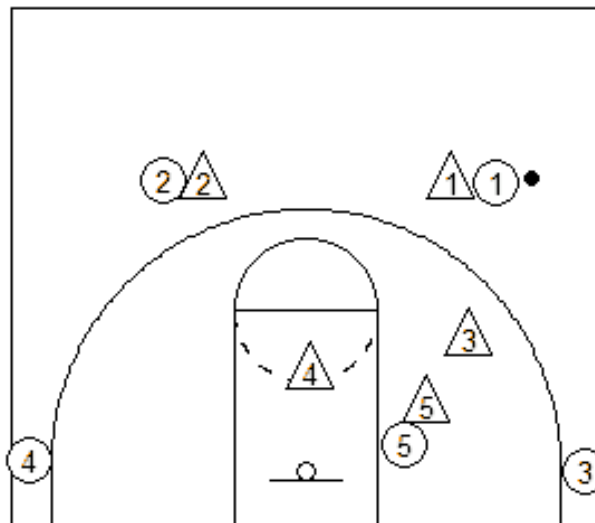
- **On the Ball**
 - Responsible for pressuring the ball hard and forcing the ball to the sideline/baseline.
 - Push position
 - Shoulders parallel to sideline and pushing the dribble to the sideline/baseline or the weak hand if in the middle.
 - Parallel to the sideline is important. If you open up and give up the baseline, you give up layups. **You need to force dribbles parallel to the sideline.**
 - Verbal: PRESSURE, PRESSURE, PRESSURE – Loud, aggressive
- **One Pass Away to the Baseline/Sideline**
 - In help position off the line (1 step below the 3 pt line) and up the line halfway between the ball and their defender.
 - Responsible to help on the drive and the recover to their man.
 - Verbal: HELP!

- **One Pass Away to the Middle**
 - In strong denial position (chest to chest with a hand out)
 - Is not responsible for helping on the drive because of how the on ball defender is forcing.
 - Also, because of the help is not worried about being back cut to the rim.
 - Verbal: Deny!
- **More than One Pass Away**
 - On the help line (middle of the lane) if on the opposite side of the ball.
 - On the ballside block if on the ballside
 - Is responsible for protecting the rim, back cuts, lobs, helping the helper, etc.
 - Verbal: HELP!
- **Ballside Block**
 - 3/4 Side Front with hand and foot around.
 - Top when ball above FT line and below when ball is below FT line.
 - Be ready to help on the baseline drive

Position Diagrams

Ball at the Guard

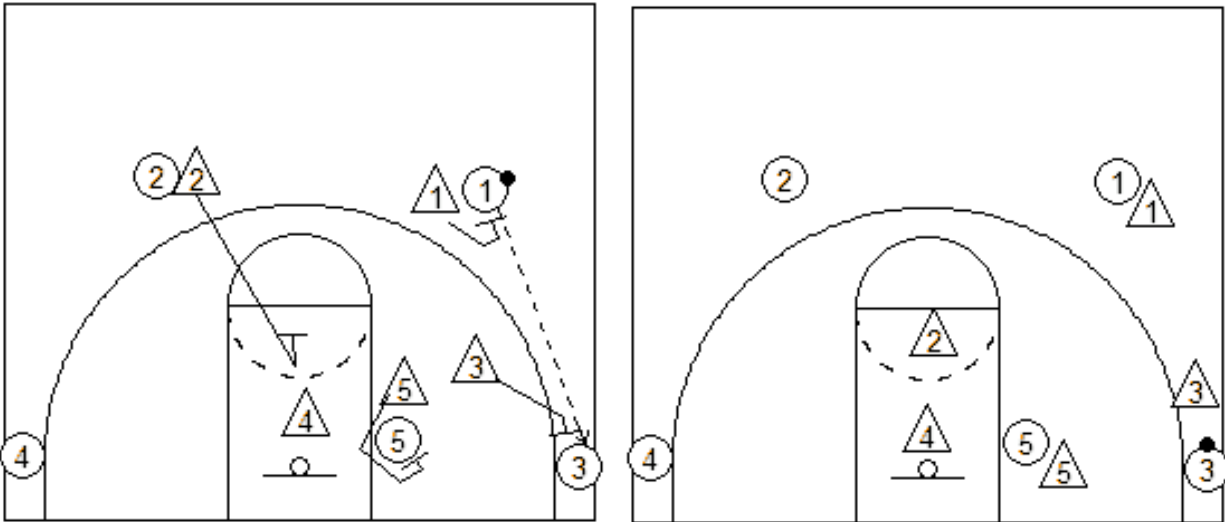
Below is a diagram showing how the defense would look against a four out. As you can see the player on the ball (1) is forcing to the sideline/baseline. The Player one pass away toward the middle (2) is in hard denial – he can be in hard denial because he doesn't have to worry about dribble help or back cuts. The player one pass away to the sideline/baseline (3) is in help position up the line and off the line (think PACK). The post (5) is $\frac{3}{4}$ front on the top. The player 2 passes away on the backside (4) is in the help on the magic line.



Ball at the Wing

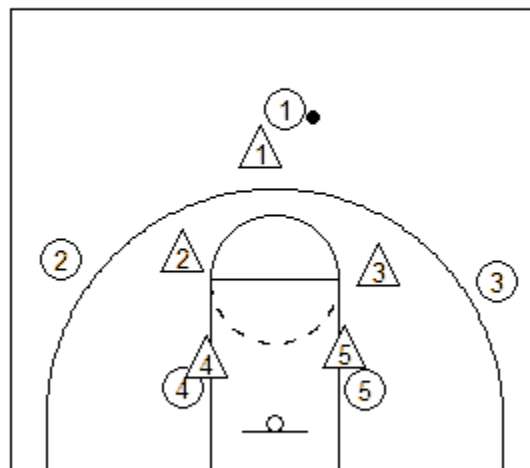
Below is a diagram of when the ball is on the wing.

- On the pass to the wing, the player defender of the receiver (3) closes out forcing the ball to the baseline. When he is closed out he is in “push position”.
- The player who was on the ball (1) jumps to the ball on air time and gets into denial position.
- The player who was in denial (2) one pass away to the middle now sprints to the help side on air time to get into mid-line help.
- The player who was guarding the backside wing (4) stays in the off ball help on the help line.
- The post (5) goes behind and gets into $\frac{3}{4}$ front below.
 - We have to do this or give up baseline drive layups.



Ball at the Point (Odd Front Offense)

This diagram shows an odd guard front. The point (1) pressures the ball to the offensive player's weak hand. The wings (2, 3), are sagging off to help on the drive. The posts are $\frac{3}{4}$ front high. (NOTE: if it were a 1-3-1 we would also 3-4 low the high post). If the ball were passed to the wing, the wing would close high to force baseline, the point would jump to denial, and the backside post and wing would jump to the help line.

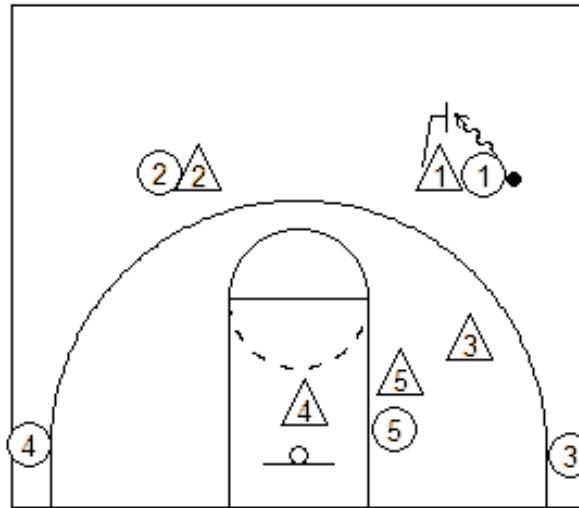


Against the Drive

It is important to know that there are three drives – middle, sideline, and baseline.

Middle Drive

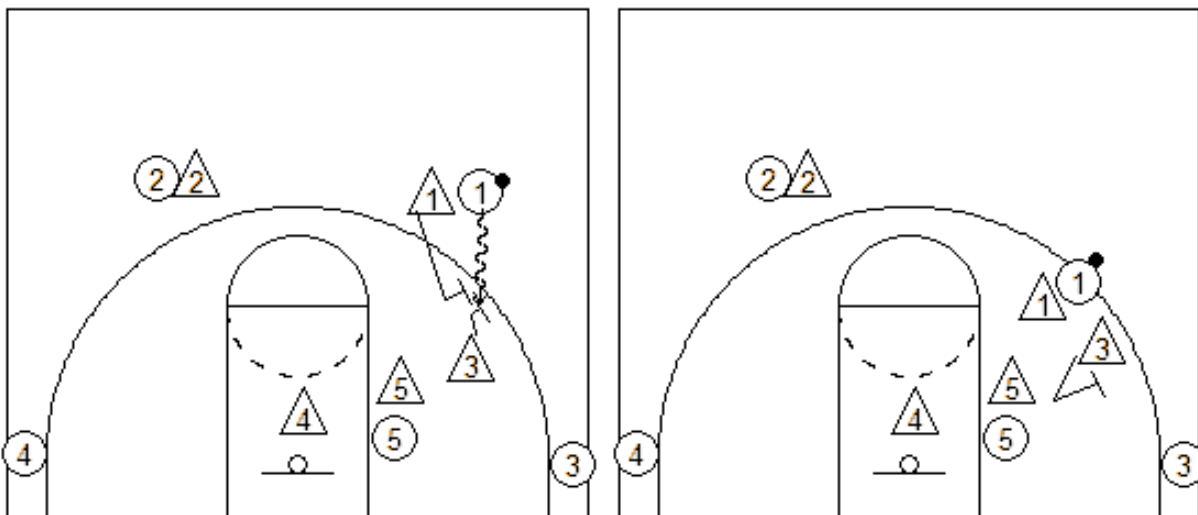
This diagram shows what happens when the ball is dribbled to the middle of the floor. If the offense tries to go middle, the on ball defender (1) slides UP and cuts off the dribble. He can also take a charge if the offense lowers their shoulder. The help can also move up a little bit to prevent the turn and go if that becomes a problem (not shown on the diagram). Successful middle drives are a cardinal sin of the defense.



Sideline Drive (Wing Help)

When the guard drives, the defender (1) slides with him keeping on the offensive player's back hip so they cannot crossover and go middle (if they do it's a charge). The wing lays in wait and then helps with his hip. He sprints to the help and then turns so that he can help with his hand and hip to stop the ball. He keeps turned sideways so that he can recover quickly to his defender (PACK idea). If you turn your body to help you will get beat badly on the corner pass.

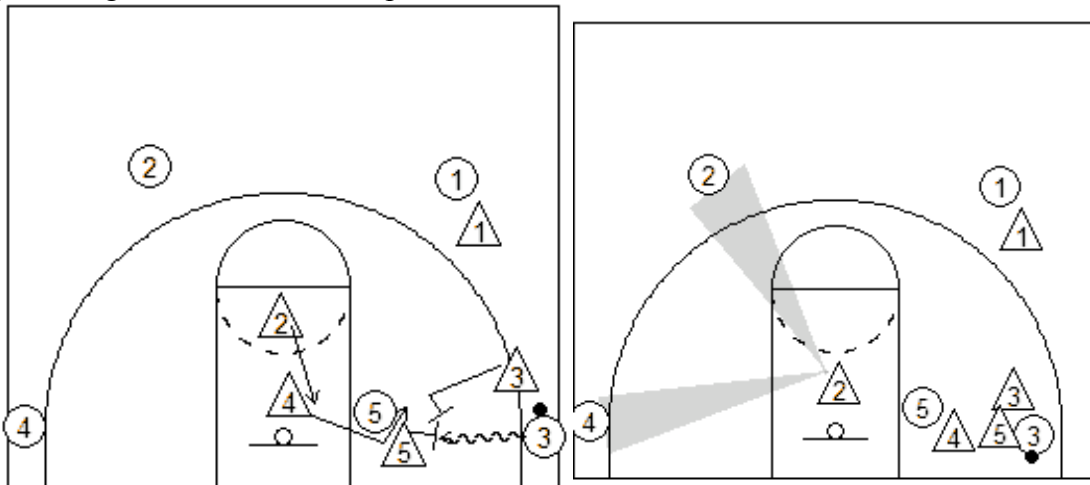
On the pick up it's important for the help to release and SPRINT back to his offensive player (he can even deny on the pick up if you want).



Baseline (Post or Help Line Help)

When the ball is dribbled and a player on the baseline (usually post or backside perimeter) has to help. There are some coaches who don't want to rotate and help the helper. That works if there is a post because the help is behind and the post defender can help sideways with only a step between him and his defender. It breaks down in a situation where the post is backside, or there is no post and we have to help across. If we are not teaching help the helper we will give up layups. The backside player (2), as shown in diagram 2, has the responsibility of taking any skip pass out of the drive and the reversal (1) is denied.

On the drive, the player closest to the baseline (5) helps. The next player in the help (4) comes over and takes his player. The other player(s) in help drop to the ball and we protect against the baseline skip across.



Everyone rotates back as soon as the ball is picked up (not passed out) and we are in our regular defense.

Against the Cut

It is important that we don't get beat on cuts. In order to keep this from happening, we need to make sure we are in proper position, jump to the ball on the pass, and **sprint** with the cutter with a hand to the rim contesting the pass to the cutter. Sagging off on the pass toward the baseline also helps not getting beat back door on a dribble over or open post back cut. We are sagging off, seeing both man and ball, and simply dropping with the cutter.

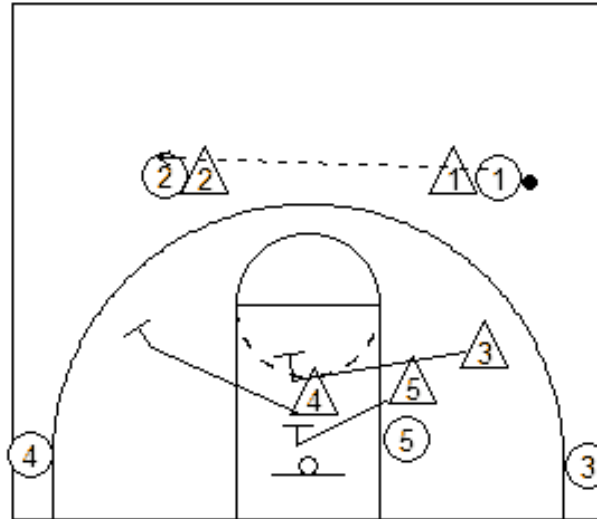
Also, our help defense is going to take away a lot of the cutting and back cutting options. Because we sag way off on 2 or more passes away there should always be three players ready to help on a cut. This is also why it's important to move on air time and sprint to spots.

Against Screens

WE SHOULD NOT GET SCREENED. If you are in the proper help position, you are communicating, and you are seeing man and ball you have no reason to get screened. If you do get screened however, we simply call switch and switch with the player switching to the screener fighting to get back into help position.

Against the Accidental Reversal or Skip Pass

If the ball is reversed with the pass, it HAS to be a lob (skip or otherwise). Direct reversal passes are a cardinal sin of the defense. If a reversal pass is made it's vital that we all SPRINT to the spots we need to be in so they do not swing the ball or drive off the reversal. Many pressure man defenses break down on the swing because everyone is in such far help that it leaves the backside open to drive. As the ball is in the air the players all sprint to our spots so we are ready on the catch. If we have good ball pressure, and denial pressure, this should not happen. But it is important to teach it because we all know it will happen.



Against the Backside Flash

Seeing man and ball takes away a player flashing to the high post, low post, or other places from the backside. The defender simply slides up the help line and meets the offensive player as they cross the help line taking away the pass.

Against the Pick and Roll

This is up to the coach as far as how they want to defend it. We found a lot of teams trying to use ball screens to help them reverse the ball. Personally I like to play to looks called hot toast and cold jam.

Hot Toast

- Trap the ballhandler hard, triangle up behind (take away the roll), and force a bad pass. After the pick up, the other players in the triangle sneak out and take away passing lanes. We gamble here and try to get easy steals.

Cold Jam

- The player on the dribbler gets into his high hip forcing him back the way he came. The on ball defender needs to get high hip and pressure, not letting the screen take place. The player defending the roller jams the roller pushing him up a little bit. The jammer also has the job of making sure the dribbler goes back as well and doesn't go middle under the screen.

CONCLUSION

Making the Defense Great

Below is a list of tips that are going to help you make the defense great. These are some trouble shooting tips that I think will help you out. A lot are basic, but are also good reminders.

- HAVE TO PRESSURE THE BALL
- Work on closing out high and force players to the baseline/sideline. Our biggest issues came when we closed out square and allowed the offense to go middle where there is no help.
- Work on help the helper – it's the hardest part of the defense.
- Communication solves problems.
- Always see man and ball (don't turn back)
- Help with your hip and hand not your belly button
- Sprint not slide unless on the ball.
- NO MIDDLE AT ALL – kills teams offensively
- Drill defending the fill cut
 - So many players struggle in this going from help line to denial.
 - Treat it as a backside cut and teach them to meet the offense in denial as they space up. Part of seeing man and ball.
- Make them play hard
 - They need to play hard, and this defense should allow them to play hard and smart.

Conclusion

As I said above, there is likely nothing in here you have not seen before. I am sure you are not sitting there wowed at this point and that's a good thing!

I would encourage you to try the defense as it was successful for us. We started to really be successful when we figured the following out:

- How to all out force one way
- How to apply tons of ball pressure
- How to close out properly
- Chest to chest denial (and not worrying about getting beat)
- Helping with the side not the front

If you are able to engrain these things in your players the defense becomes very hard to play against because it really keeps the ball on one side, forces a lot of turnovers, and makes the offense uncomfortable. It gives you a chance to come back when you are down, and helps to you create an up-tempo style if you want that. Again, it I feel it also simplifies roles for your players and lets them do one thing well instead of trying to do it all. I would love to hear feedback on this, if you care to chat about it, or just talk hoops shoot me an email sometime (JohnCarrier42@gmail.com). I just hope that some of this makes sense and helps you out, even if just a little!