



**BASKETBALL NSW**

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# No Zone Rule Implementation Guide

A guide to implementing the *No Zone Rule* in Under 12s and Under 14s  
Basketball NSW Competitions & Tournaments

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Basketball NSW acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout New South Wales and their connections to land, sea and community in which we gather, meet and play. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

## Using this Guide

This guide is designed to assist with the implementation of the no zone rule in Under 12s and Under 14s competitions and/or tournaments run by Basketball NSW. It provides:

- Explanation of why the rule is important;
- Practical examples to determine whether or not a team is playing “zone”;
- Guide for the supervisors who implement the rule.

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# Part 1 – What is the No Zone Rule?

As there is general acceptance that the consistent use of zone defences in the younger age groups adversely effects the development of both defensive and offensive skills in younger athletes the use of a zone defence is banned.

## Definition – Zone Defence

Any defence played in the half court which does not incorporate normal man to man defensive principles shall be considered to be a zone. For this purpose, trapping defences which rotate back to man-to-man defensive principles are acceptable.

## Violations of Man-to-Man Defence

The use of man-to-man defence is integral to the development of Junior athletes in New South Wales. 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.

## Benefit of the doubt with Defensive team

This 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 or not a team is playing acceptable man-to-man defensive principles, the benefit of the doubt will be given to the defensive team.

## Implementing Penalty

Who can enforce penalties for playing zones?

Neutral observer(s) who are qualified to determine whether or not a zone is in place e.g., court or referee supervisor, experienced coach, etc. Note it is not to be the referees officiating the game.

Notes for observers – in any judgement

- i. Take into account the intention of the defensive team.
- ii. Take into account the time and the state of the game.
- iii. Deliberate and premeditated use of zone defence at a critical time in a game should be acted upon immediately.
- iv. Where there is any doubt, the benefit of doubt must be given to the defence, i.e. be sure of the violation.
- v. If a zone is in effect, observers must warn the head coach and call an official's time out to allow the coach to notify their players.

As per the Waratah Junior League By-Laws the following procedure/penalties will be applied:

### 1. Warning

Once reviewed, if the neutral observer(s) believe that a violation has occurred it is recommended that they first speak to the coach prior to a penalty being imposed, however the deliberate and premeditated use of a zone defence at a critical time in a game may be penalised immediately.

### 2. 1st Violation

If a coach is found to be using a zone defence after the warning, the Court Supervisor or Basketball NSW representative will approach the Score Table Chairperson for an official's time-out to stop the game. The referees will then be informed that a violation of the NO ZONE RULE has occurred. The offending coach is then informed and subsequently charged with a Technical Foul.

### 3. 2nd Violation

If a coach is found to be using a zone defence for the second time during a game, the Court Supervisor or Basketball NSW representative will approach the Score table Chairperson for an official's time-out to stop the game. The referees will then be informed that a second violation of the NO ZONE RULE has occurred.

The offending coach is then informed and subsequently charged with a second and disqualifying Technical Foul and will be required to leave the playing area.

If a team has been penalised for playing zone defence on multiple occasions then BNSW may take further disciplinary action against the coach and/or team.

## Video Review

If a team believes that a zone defence was used throughout a game and the no zone rule was not implemented then the following process can occur.

1. Provide video evidence of at least three (3) instances of zone defence being played in the game.
  - a) The video must be accessible to BNSW staff for review e.g., MP4, private or unlisted YouTube link, Dropbox, etc.
  - b) Time-stamps of the three instances must be provided and demonstrate an obvious breach of the No Zone Policy.
2. This information must be sent by the association delegate to BNSW and received no later than 9 am Wednesday after the game has been played. Note any submissions after this deadline will not be reviewed. Also, submissions that do not provide all of the required information will not be reviewed.
3. Once received, the suspected breach will be reviewed and a ruling made within ten (10) business days.
4. Once a decision is made, if a coach is found to have breached the no zone rule then BNSW will deal with the coach and/or association accordingly which may include but is not limited to an official warning of the breach, compulsory coach education, standing down the coach, etc. Note there is no further appeal of final decisions made upon review.

## Part 2 – What is a “Zone Defence”?

*Credit to previous work completed by Basketball Australia (2009)*

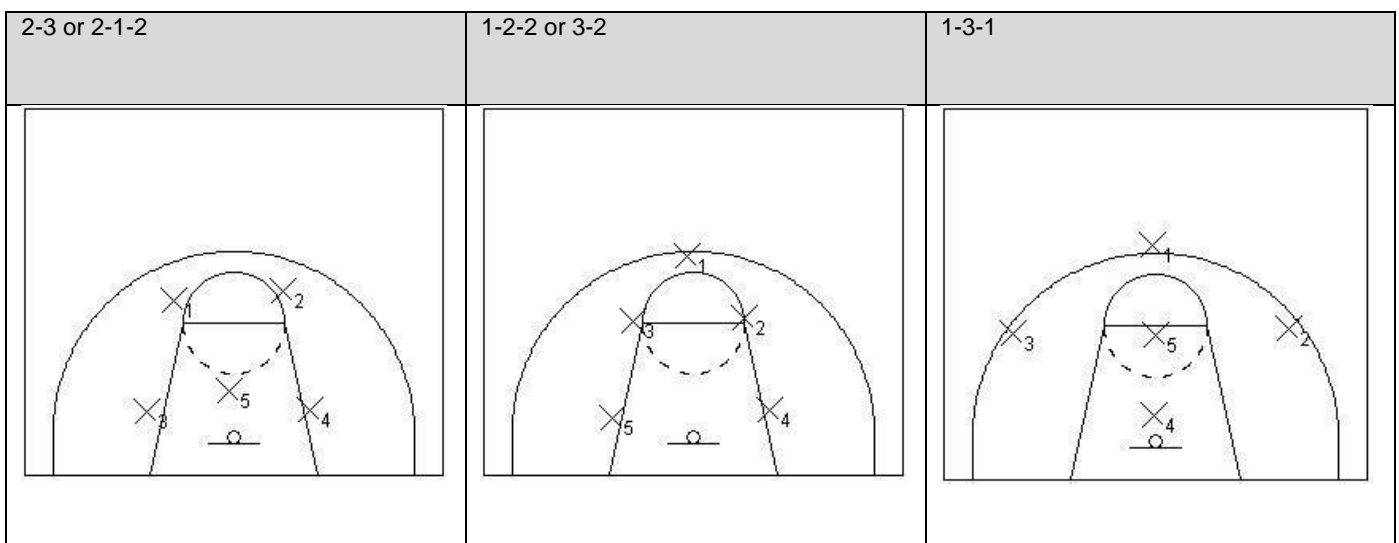
### Guarding an Area

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:



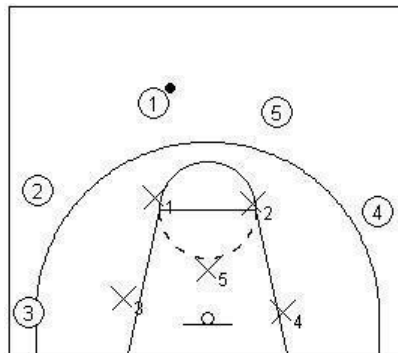
These defences when played in the quarter court stay typically within the boundary of the three-point line and primarily clog the keyway area. This often forces the offensive team to shoot from the perimeter (and indeed are designed to have this effect), which can be detrimental to the technique development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

## Guarding Many or Guarding No One

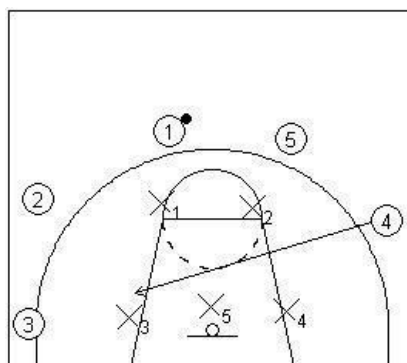
The result of the zone defence is that one player may be responsible for guarding a number of players, or may not have anyone in their area at all.

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

- X1 would guard O1 or O2 if they receive the ball
- X3 would guard O3 if they receive the ball
- X2 would guard O4 or O5 if they receive the ball
- X4 and X5 have no particular defensive responsibility



It would be particularly obvious that X4 is not guarding a specific player if O4 were to cut.



Commonly X4 and X5 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 3 – Guidelines for implementing the No Zone Rule

## What to do first:

At the beginning of the game introduce yourself to the head coaches and ask if they have any questions regarding the no zone rule. Explain that during the game if you have concerns about a zone defence being played, you will bring it to their attention. Ask them whether you should speak directly to them, or to their assistant.

You should also introduce yourself to the referees and whoever is doing the score table, so that if you have to impose a penalty, they know who you are.

## Speaking to the Coaches

Many problems during a game can be resolved by politely speaking with the coaches. For example, “Player X needs to show me that they are playing man-to-man”.

Be prepared to be specific as to what your concerns are. For example, if a defensive player is standing in the middle of the key and not sufficiently reacting when their player cuts, tell the coach that. It may be the player is tired, playing poor man-to-man or they could be playing a zone.

Keep your conversation as short as possible and don’t get into an argument with the coach. Explain your concern and hopefully they will then speak to the player. You should be prepared to discuss with a coach after the game if they want clarification from you, provided that they are polite and professional in approaching you.

## Guidelines for watching the game

### Onus of Proof

1. The onus of proof lies with the offensive team, which means that they must pass the ball and move so that you can determine whether or not they are playing man to man principles.
2. If the offensive “big” stays on the weakside, their defender can legitimately stay in a “split line” position.

## Watch a Number of Play Phases

3. Often the ball is shot or turned over before you can properly determine if a team is playing a zone.
4. 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.
5. Do not guess. If you are unsure, let the play continue and keep watching.

## Don't worry about the full court

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

## Don't penalise bad man-to-man defence

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

## It does not have to be aggressive defence

9. The rule does not require teams to be playing "denial" defence, where every pass is contested.

## What is the team trying to do

10. Do take into account the intention of the defensive team – what is the coach telling their players to do?
11. Do take into account the time and state of the game. The deliberate and pre-mediated use of a zone defence at a critical time in the game should be acted upon immediately.
12. Do NOT take into account the opinions of players, coaches or spectators.

## Teams can Trap

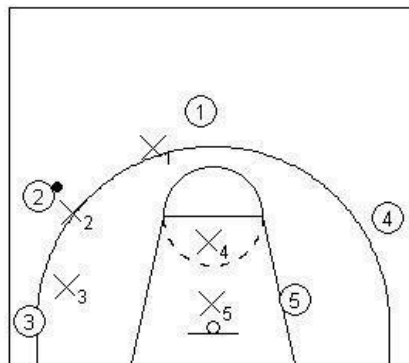
13. Teams may trap in the quarter court and may stay in a “zone” alignment for one pass, after which all players must resume man-to-man positions. For example, on the trap, 2 players are on the ball and the remaining 3 players may rotate to protect the basket. As 3 players are now guarding 4, they will legitimately “zone”.

## Part 4 – The “Xs and Os” of proving it’s a zone

*Credit to previous work completed by Basketball Australia (2009)*

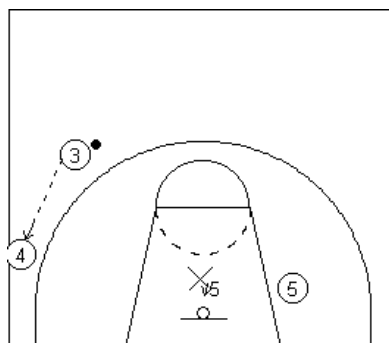
### Moving a Split Line Defender

A basic principle of man-to-man defence is that the closer the player you are guarding is to the ball, the closer to them you need to be. Conversely, the further away they are from the ball, the further away you can be.



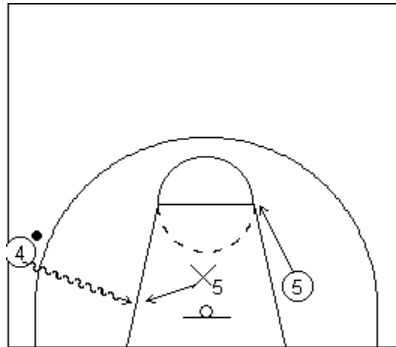
When players are on the weakside (opposite to the ball) a man-to-man defender will adopt a split line position – in the middle of the court. In the diagram below, both X4 and X5 are playing on the split line.

Below are some examples of situations, where it might look like the defence is playing zone, but the offence has not done enough to “prove” zone.

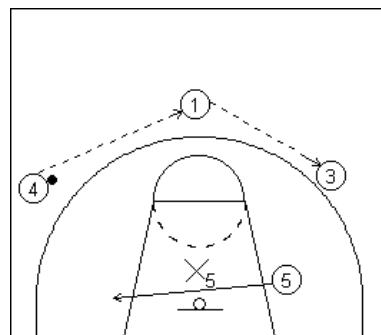


When O3 has the ball, X5 can adopt a “split line” position in the middle of the key. If the ball is passed to O4, X5 can maintain this split line position.

If the ball stays on one side and O5 stays still, X5 is adhering to man-to-man principles even though they are just staying in the middle of the key.



Having O5 cut from low to high can be a useful way to prove a zone. However, the timing of the cut is important. If O4 has already started to drive to the basket, X5 can rotate to help and not react to the cut by O5.

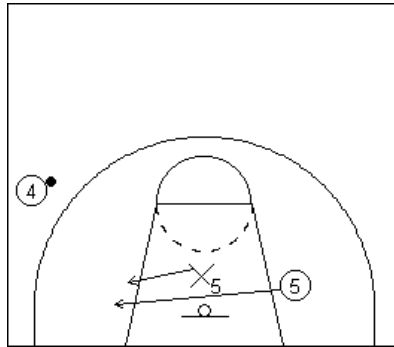


Moving the ball from one side of the court to another can be effective in establishing whether a defender is playing a zone.

However, if O5 also cuts from one side to another, X5 can maintain a “split line” position in the middle of the key although X5 should make some movement in reaction to the cut (e.g. bump the cutter).

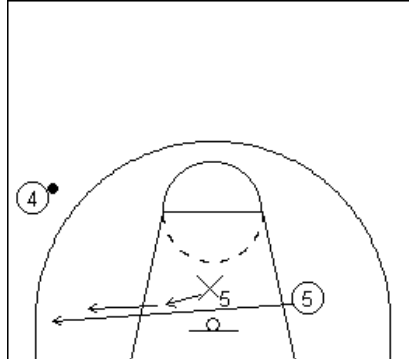
To prove a defender is playing zone defence requires specific movement from the offence. Here are some ways to do it:

#### Cut to the ballside



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

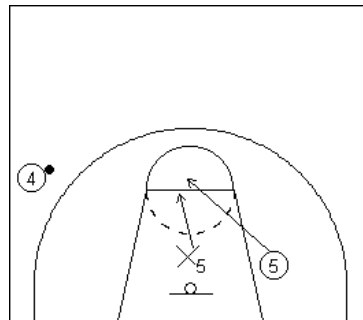
#### Move to the perimeter – ballside



If the offensive player cuts to a post position, it may still be difficult to determine what defence X5 is playing as many teams guard a post player from behind.

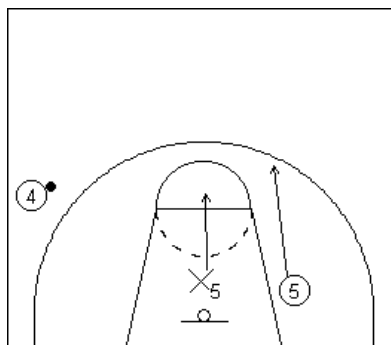
By moving to the perimeter, X5 must leave the key – they do not have to be in a denial position, but they must be outside the key.

### Cutting from low to high

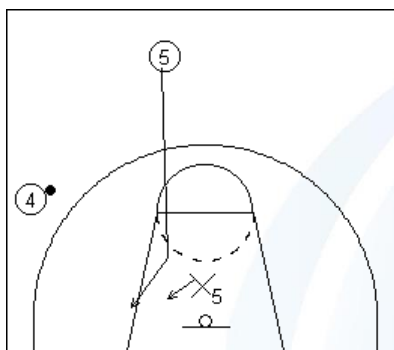


Having a player cut above the foul line forces the defender to step away from in front of the basket.

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 (as shown below).

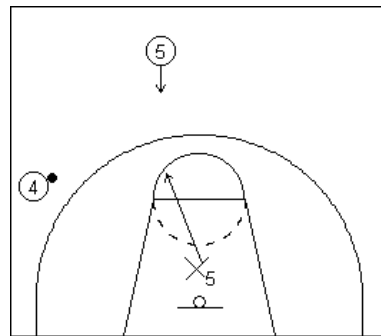


### Have player trail high in transition



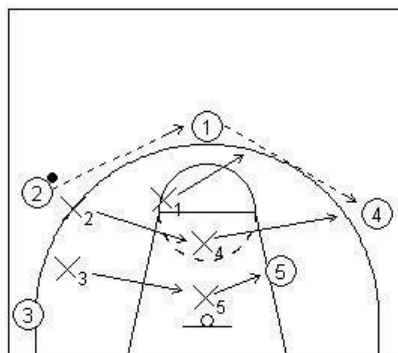
Quite commonly, a team's centre (X5) will run back to the basket once their team has lost possession. If the player he is guarding also runs straight down the court into a post position, then X5 can stay in the key.

However, if O5 "trails" the break and stays high then once the ball reaches the wing, X5 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).







## Additional Resources

*Credit to Hills Basketball Association, Basketball Australia and a number of hard-working coaches for their prior work in this space: Mr Chris Riches, Mr Marty Handson, Mr Peter Lonergan & Mr Brad Dalton.*

### Video Resources -

- <https://youtu.be/nd0wCiltKb0> - Ian Stacker Coaches Clinic | How to teach man to man defence
- <https://youtu.be/YQ5yJz0GsDQ> - Ian Stacker | No Zone Clinic
- <https://youtu.be/HQKAReXto6U> - Dwayne Casey | Developing Team Man-To-Man Defence
- <https://youtu.be/WblbdM4wpAs?si=X1-Jy3d3uBqoFoFf> - Peter Lonergan | Drills for teaching your Defence
- <https://youtu.be/FoV4C9XwtdU?si=b2KjWJRDickyfUfz> - Peter Lonergan | Individual Defence
- <https://coach.basketball.net.au/> - Basketball Australia | BA Coaches Resource

