The Unbeatable Basketball Defense

1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this defensive structure to all of the coaches and Basketball clubs who have accepted my challenge to use this defense for studying purposes.

I would also like to dedicate this book to all of the coaches who did not believe in this defensive set without allowing me to explain the full potential of the 1-4 Matchup Zone Defense.
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Definitions

**Man to man defense:** Man to man defense is a defensive set that has one player guarding a single player on the other team.

**Zone defense:** Zone defense is a defensive set that has a player defending an area of the court.

**Double team:** A double team is when 2 defensive players guard 1 offensive player.

**PG:** Point Guard  
**SG:** Shooting Guard  
**SF:** Small Forward  
**PF:** Power Forward  
**C:** Center

**High Post:** Also known as the elbow and the corner of the freethrow line, this is located at each end of the freethrow line.

**Baseline:** The lines at the ends of the court.

**Sideline:** The lines on the side of the court.

**Setting a screen:** Setting a screen (also called setting a pick) is when an offensive player stands beside a defensive player who is guarding a player on his team so to stop the defensive player from following and guarding the offensive player.

**Examples of Types of Zone Defense:**

- **2-3:** The 2 means 2 players on top and 3 on the bottom

- **3-2:** The 3 means that there are 3 players guarding the top of the zone and 2 players guarding the bottom.

*(Examples on next page)*
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

2-3 Zone Defense

3-2 Zone Defense
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

Player Running

Passed Basketball
1

Man vs. Zone

Man to man and zone defense’s are both great however there are times to use each, for example to confuse the opponent.

*Man to man defense* is when a player matches up with an opposing player on the other team who is the same position. This defense works good if you are playing against a team that matches up good with yours, however if your team does not match up well with the opposing team you will need to use a zone defense.

The best defensive teams who use a *zone defense* will actually look like they are playing a man to man defense. This is because some offensive plays will not work well against a zone defense. If a man to man offense is run against a zone you will have an extremely hard time getting baskets. The downfall of a zone defense is that there are always players left open if a zone offense is played against it. Another downfall of a zone defense is that it can be broken down by lots of passing or a point guard who drives and dishes the ball off to the open player, this is because if one player gets beat off the dribble in a zone defense the whole defense collapses on him.
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The Beginning

My first team I was the head coach for was an interesting mix of players. For a grade 8 team there were some very skilled players and 2 very tall players for their age. Offensively we could score with ease but had troubles on defense because of their height and athleticism.

With that first team I had a pair of starting guards who were very good shooters (during one game the SG shot 9 for 11 from the three point line). I also had 2 huge centers that were 6 foot 4 and the other who was 6 foot 2, and both were great defensive players in the post, until a player drove at them or were faced with stronger players.

During a game against the Hamilton Wildcats we were getting killed in the post and the Wildcats were not a great shooting team which meant my wings could leave their players for a double team in the post.

That is when I thought of trying this 1-4 matchup zone defense I was previously thinking about. At the time the defense was a bit different than it is today. During this first game there were no double team on the 3 point line and only a double team in the post.

Throughout that final fourth quarter we outscored Hamilton 17-4, but we still lost 68-52. I was obviously not happy with my teams defense, however I did find a defense that seemed to work good and that is when the 1-4 defense was born.
The next game we played had a great shooting starting line and I was intending to make the 1-4 defense our primary defensive set. This was an exhibition game so I used this game to try the 1-4 on a very good shooting team. We lost this game (lost by 1) because of a terrible first half from learning how we can evolve this 1-4 defense into a great perimeter defense. During this game the defense evolved from a double team in the post, to a double team everywhere under the freethrow line extended.

Throughout my coaching career I have used this defense on and off depending on which players were on the court. I have learned from over the 4 years of running this defensive structure that you will need athletic players and player height does not matter.

After three years of using the 1-4 matchup zone I have had many comments (some more colorful than others) but they were all asking the same thing “what type of defense were you using? Zone or Man?”. When faced with this question it’s hard not to smile and laugh, but all I say is “I would tell you but then I would have to kill you”. With all laughter aside this is a deadly defense.

Over the past year I have asked 14 teams (16 coaches) to implement this 1-4 matchup zone defense to see how it works, and if it works with each of their teams because we as coaches all know that every team is different.

At the end of last season I spoke to the 16 coaches for their input of some small changes they were implementing, but instead they offered which full court presses worked best with the 1-4 matchup zone defense which I will elaborate on later in this book.
This is a Zone Defense but also has a Man to Man component also, below is the zone positions:

I know what you’re thinking, “this isn’t going to work! Why did I buy this book?” Well let me explain how this will work.

The next image is 1 of the highest used offensive sets (X’s are the offensive players), the SF and SG move up to guard the wing players on each side. Notice at this point the offence currently looks like man to man.
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

**POINT GUARD**
Each player has their own area to guard while playing the 1-4 matchup zone defense, and in the zone they are guarding each player will have many different jobs. Let’s start with the Point Guard, in this defensive structure you will need a Point Guard who will not tire out quickly because this is the most active spot.

![Diagram of Point Guard area]

The feint yellow box is the zone area that the Point Guard will be guarding, however if there is a player who has the Basketball along the black line the point guard will be in a double team situation. *(The black line is along the freethrow line extended)*

Below is the most common areas where the Point Guard will be called upon to double team an opponent:
**SHOOTING GUARD/SMALL FORWARD**
The wings in the 1-4 matchup zone defense are difficult to learn but highly effective. The major problem that teams have while playing against the 1-4 matchup zone defense is that when the Basketball is under the freethrow line extended the ball will get double teamed.

In the above image you will see the zones for the Shooting Guard and Small Forward. Each of the black lines are the most common double team areas.

**POWER FORWARD/CENTER**
The Power Forward and Center are very important, for this defense to work to its potential.

The Center and Power Forward is the heart of the defense. The above picture shows the zone and the common double team areas.
THE FULL ZONE FOR ALL PLAYERS:

During the next chapter I will explain the rotations of each player in different situations.
The 1-4 Matchup Zone Defense has a lot of running and shuffling, if you are going to run this defense make sure to get your team running during non practice days. 1 thing to remember is that this is unlike any other defense you have ever seen.

Like I mentioned before this is the basic set up for your team.

The following are a few offensive sets that some teams will start with and how the 1-4 matchup zone defense will look playing against these different offensive sets. PLAYER NOTE: If there is a player in your zone without the ball you must guard him, and if there are 2 players in your zone you must guard the player who has a higher chance of scoring. If there is a player with the Basketball in your zone or your side of the zone you must guard him!
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

AGAINST A HIGH-LOW OFFENSIVE SET

At the beginning if the opposing team is spaced out properly like the offense is above, your 1-4 matchup zone defense will look like a man to man defense however if there are any screens you will not need to worry because this is a zone. Remember that any ball possession gets double teamed below the freethrow line.

An example of this would be if the ball was on the wing. If this is the case then the Point Guard will be guarding the high post and/or the player who is 1 pass away on the perimeter. The Small Forward and Power Forward would be double teaming the Basketball while the Center slides over to cover the Power Forward and the Shooting Guard covers the Center.

At this point the 1-4 Matchup Zone Defense still looks like a man to man defense with a double team added to the mix. **Player Notes:** The Shooting Guard will be covering the whole opposite side of the Basketball court. This means that he will be watching for cutters and the high post and wing player as you see in this diagram.
If the offensive player on the weak side wing starts to move towards the baseline the Shooting Guard must position himself to cut off the pass to the high post and also be able to cut off the wing player. (see picture below).

If there is an overload on the ball side the Point Guard will need to cover the high post and the perimeter player in his zone (see picture below).

If the Basketball is passed to the high post player or the perimeter player the Point Guard will need to get into position to steal the ball. **Player Note:** While the Point Guard is waiting for the Basketball to be passed he will be in position so he would be able to see both the high post and perimeter player. Meanwhile the Shooting Guard is watching his player in case he cuts to the basket the Shooting Guard will also be watching the high post player in case he cuts to the basket.

Usually from there the team will try the post, so if the Basketball gets passed into the post the Center and Power Forward will be double teaming the ball, the Small Forward will be covering the kick out pass, the Point Guard will be covering the kick out pass to the players above the freethrow line extended, and the Shooting Guard will be covering the opposite post and protecting the cutting player (see image on next page).
As seen in the above image the Shooting Guard is in perfect position to steal a pass and to cut off a player cutting to the net. **Player Note:** The Shooting Guard should be able to see every player on the court.

As I mentioned before the Point Guard works very hard in the defensive set. At this point the Point Guard will need to watch his two perimeter players and watch the post player for hints on where he is passing the ball or trying to score. **Player Note:** The Point Guard will have his head on a swivel nonstop watching all three players. Also watch the perimeter players for hints they are receiving a pass.

**Player Note:** The Power Forward and Center will need to play big with their hands straight up in the air and steal the ball every chance they get. As a post player you own your own space just like any other player, however this means if you reach over top of a player or around a player on the opposite team you will get called for a foul. Lets also remember that hitting a player is a foul, so when you are attempting to steal the ball you must grab the Basketball out of the opponents hands with both of your hands without contacting with their arms.
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

The last most common place that the Basketball will be to break your defense is the high post. If a team suspects your playing a zone defense they may try to pass the Basketball into the high post, because to break a zone you need to feed the ball into the high post, but does this work for the 1-4 matchup zone defense?... Well let’s see.

With the Basketball in the high post the 1-4 matchup zone defense looks almost like a man to man defense, however the Point Guard will drop off from his man a bit to put a bit of pressure on the ball (I guess you could call this a 1 ½ man double team). This creates a stressful situation for the ball handler and will create many turnovers.
6 Against Actual Offenses

Well we now see that this defense can be deadly, but what about when it faces an actual offense?

Let’s look at a baseline swing offense first:

(Image above)
If the offensive player who is being guarded by the Small Forward is able to get himself open for a pass the Point Guard will pass the Basketball to him.
If the pass does get through to player 2, player 5 will set a screen for player 3 and player 3 will run along base line and using player 4 as a screen.

The Point Guard will cover player 2 on the same side as player 1 is on, so to stop player 2 from passing to player 1 and the Shooting Guard will cover the passing lane to player 1 if player 1 floats away from the Point Guards guarding area. When player 5 screens for player 3, the Shooting Guard will switch with the Center and when player 3 uses 4 as a screen the Power Forward will switch for the Center. Meanwhile the Small Forward will stand between player 2 and where player 3 is heading too. The Small Forward is standing there because he is defending against the pass as there is no player in his zone and player 2 is close to his zoned area.

If the pass did get through the play will be essentially dead because there will be no player to pass to and the ball handler will be double teamed.
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

So the 1-4 Matchup Zone works on a baseline swing which is one of the hardest plays to defend for younger players (I have had a player score 9 straight three point shots on a baseline swing, 9 consecutive times down the court).

However, what about a **5 out offense**? Can the 1-4 Matchup Zone Defense work against a 5 out offense?

![Diagram](Image above)

At the start the defense will look like a 3-2 zone or a strong help defense. **Player Note:** The Center and the Power Forward need to be far enough from their player for the defense to look like a 3-2 zone, however they also need to be close enough to be able to pick off a skip pass.

![Diagram](Image above)

If the opposing team uses a pass-cut-fill 5 out offense, player 1 would pass to player 2 and cut to the net. The Point Guard will follow player 1 until the freethrow line and then the Center will take over and the Point Guard will return back to the three point line and partially cover player 2.
As player 3 fills in where player 1 started the defensive Point Guard will pop back out and cover player 3. **Player Note:** The Point Guard needs to be very quick so to take away the passing lane.

If the pass was not made to player 3 but instead the Basketball got passed to player 4, player 2 would cut to the net and the defensive Small Forward would follow until the Center comes to help out with the defender. At the same time as the Center helps out. The defensive Shooting Guard would step backwards to cut off the back door passing lane, however still be close enough to cut off a pass to player 5.
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

(Image above)
After the Center covers player 2 the Small Forward will double team the ball handler while on the offensive side player 3 will fill player 2’s spot, player 5 will cover player 3’s spot and player 1 will cover player 5’s spot. On the defensive side the Point Guard will guard player 3 tight so that he does is not open for a pass. The Shooting Guard will then step back to over player 1 and player 5 and close enough to both so to pick off any skip pass to either one.

At this point the play will essentially be dead as there is a double team along the sideline and there is no open player, that is if the defense is being run properly by the players.
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Press Defense to 1-4

Throughout the research into the 1-4 matchup zone defense there were some full court and half court press defenses that worked extremely well due to the how the players fall back into the 1-4.

The 3-1-1 full court defense works great as a press defense and transitions into the 1-4 very nicely.

The above image is a 3-1-1 zone press transition into the 1-4 matchup zone defense.
Another popular full court press that I personally found worked well transitioning into the 1-4 matchup zone was the 1-3-1 full court zone. This is my personal favorite full court defense mainly because this is the best full court press that transitions the easiest into the 1-4 matchup zone. However that is not the only reason, the second reason I like this press is because of the many turnovers that have been created along the sideline at center court.

Half court press defenses also transition nicely into the 1-4, my personal favorite half court defense that transitions nicely into the 1-4 is the 3-2 half court press zone.
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense

When running a press defense with the 1-4 matchup zone defense you will benefit from a deep bench. The 1-4 matchup zone defense is lots of running and shuffling for your players, and combined with a full or half court zone defense your players will become extremely tired.

When running the 1-4 matchup zone defense you will need to have a 10 player deep bench at least, however if you use a half or full court zone you will need an 11 or 12 player deep bench.

Players get tired, some easier than others so just keep in mind that the better defense your team runs the lower the score will be. But if you use your bench your players will not be too tired to score for you.
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Drills for the 1-4

The 1-4 matchup zone defense is a very deadly defense and can stop many different types of teams and every offence, however it has proven to take a lot out of your players. To prepare your players to play the 1-4 the following are some drills that have been molded to suit the needs of the 1-4.

**Box Shuffle**

In this drill the coach will start with the Basketball on top of the three point line. When the drill starts the players will start pattering their feet and the coach will point in the direction that he would like the players to shuffle to. When the coach drops his arm the players will return to their starting spots and stutter their feet and continue for 30 seconds while the coach continuously points in the directions he want his players to go.

You may be asking why the players are colored red and black. Well the red players are on the same team and the black players are on a team. After the 30 seconds are up the coach will pass the ball to the player who worked the hardest and they will go 2 on 2 down to the other end of the court (play only until 1 shot has been taken).

You can also have the player run forwards and back during this drill.
**Old School Defensive Shuffle Drill**

I bet everyone remembers this drill, and I bet everyone hated this drill just like me and my teammates years ago.

As you probably know this drill is done without a Basketball and really works on your cardio.

The coach will stand in front of the team and when the coach says start all players will begin stuttering their feet, when the coach points in a direction the players will shuffle in that direction, when the coach drops his hand the players will shuffle back to the spot they started. Continue for 30-60 seconds.

The coach can also add loose ball and shots up. When the coach yells loose ball all the players will stop and do a push up and continue what they were doing. If the coach yells shots up, all of the players will stop and jump up acting like there is a shot being taken by the player their defending and then continue what they were doing before.
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Conclusion

I hope the 1-4 Matchup Zone Defense will work for you, there has been lots of research into this defense over the past few years and has made great strides during that time.

The 1-4 Matchup Zone has worked very well for me over the past 4 years and I will continue to use it until I officially retire from coaching Basketball.

The next few pages are for your use to keep track of any notes.

If you have any questions about how to utilize this defense you can email myself directly at probballtraining@gmail.com
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Notes:
1-4 Matchup Zone Defense