

Dynamic Athletes

Being a defensive stopper

Teams need defensive stoppers. Coaches want players that will make an impact defensively. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of glamour in being a good defensive player. Good defense means holding a player below his scoring average, making the opposition take shots from areas they do not want and contesting shots, whilst protecting the lane. This doesn't get you on the stats sheet or on the highlight reels and as such very few players commit to it.

Make no mistake about it though, if you are a good defensive player, your coach will find a spot for you on the team and work you into the teams' rotation. You'll have a bigger responsibility than most of your teammates and be charged with slowing down the opposition's best player. There is no bigger compliment and sign of trust from your coach than this.

Here are a couple of things that can help you become that defensive player your team needs and your coach wants.

- You've got to have a sense of pride in playing defense; pride in knowing that you're going to help your team get a stop in each possession; pride in knowing that you'll do whatever it takes to slow down your opponent; pride in knowing you'll win this defensive battle.
- You have got to be verbal. Communication is of the utmost importance when playing defense. Communicate that you have a certain player, or that someone is cutting through the lane and give reminders constantly. Remember to be Early, Loud and Continuous as you communicate.
- You have to play smart. Being the quickest player or the strongest player on the court isn't a requirement of good defense, but you must play smart. Understand your coach's system; understand score and time situations. Understand who you are guarding. If you're guarding a quick and explosive driver, then don't step into his bubble, because he will more than likely just blow by you.
- Be active on defense; good defensive players don't just stand still; you should move constantly and adjust your position so that you can see your player and where the ball is. Move your feet and also your hands to clog up the lane which will prevent drives and cutters.
- When setting traps, don't reach in and get tempted to steal the basketball. Understand what your coach requires of you, but most traps are designed so that the ball handler throws a bad pass and your teammate picks this off. Don't worry about the stats.

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- Pressure the ball handler so that he doesn't get to set the offense he wants. Pressure the ball without giving up a lane to allow penetration to the basket. Understand how fast you are and judge the distance that you need to be in to do this properly.
- Do not allow anyone to cut to the spot they want. Always front the cutters and beat them to the spot. Have active hands to deny any passes.
- Get a hand up on every shot attempt. This doesn't mean trying to block shots, but rather challenging the opposition to take a shot without giving up your defensive position.
- Ball side defense is important, but not as important as help-side. Your teams' success is dependent on help-side. If you're two passes away, try and get both feet in the lane, so you're in a position to help when needed.
- When playing in the help-side lane, adjust your position so that you appear broad and not narrow. This simple step will make the lane look smaller and deter potential drives.
- Understand your coach's defensive philosophy and play in that system. Do you force baseline or do you force middle? Do your job for your team to succeed.
- Be pro-active when playing defense. A lot of players wait for the offense to initiate an action, and then try reacting to it, which is too late. Make the offense take the option that you want them to take.
- Do not jump on defense. Nothing good ever comes from defensive players falling for every shot fake or trying to block every shot. Maintain good defensive position.
- Every defensive possession finishes with a box-out. You have to commit to boxing out if you want your team to succeed.
- Defensive teams win games. Offense may be exciting to watch, but if you want to win games and championships, then you've got to buy into your coach's defensive system and work as a team to achieve your goals.