

# **An EDJBA guide to the “No Zone” policy in U8 to U14 competitions**

## Using this Guide

This guide is designed to assist with the implementation of Basketball Australia's "no zone defence" rule in the EDJBA U8 to U14 competitions. It provides:

- Explanation of why the rule is important;
- Practical examples to determine whether or not a team is playing "zone";

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This guide will help parents, coaches and players understand how the rule is implemented and this guide may be freely reproduced, copied and distributed.

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## Part 1 – What is the “No Zone” rule?

Basketball Australia has implemented a “no zone” rule at the Australian Under 14 Club Championships. Basketball Australia recommends that this rule be implemented in all U14 (and younger) competitions.

### EDJBA Definition – Zone Defence

Any defence played inside the three-point line which does not incorporate normal man to man defensive principles shall be considered to be a zone.

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.

### EDJBA approach and penalties

The EDJBA approach is one of communication and education:

- If a team is playing Zone, then feedback should be provided to the EDJBA, please click here: [EDJBA Zone Defence Feedback](#)
- NO action should be taken during games.
- Do NOT approach the referees, they are not responsible for enforcing this policy
- Do NOT approach the Venue Supervisor, they are not responsible for enforcing policy
- Do NOT approach or speak to the coach playing zone
- There are NO in game penalties
- If there are concerns about the defence played by a particular team during the season, then this should be communicated to the EDJBA here > [EDJBA Zone Defence Feedback](#)
- If the team is playing a zone defence, this will be communicated to their Club, who will be required to provide education to the coach on acceptable man to man principles

### 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 penalize:

- 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.

## Part 2 – Why has the policy been introduced?

The “no zone” rule was introduced to the Australian U14 Club Championships in 1996, after considerable discussion by both Basketball Australia’s Coaches Commission and Junior Commission.

Prior to the rule being introduced the views of coaches from around Australia were canvassed, with the majority of those coaches supporting the exclusive use of man defence at U14 and younger age groups. Coaching resources produced by FIBA (basketball’s international body) also support this view.

Prior to the rule being introduced a number of teams at the U14 Championships played zone defence and research indicated that proportionately few players from these teams (even when those teams had been successful) went onto national development programs such as the Australian Junior Camp.

The defensive principles of rotation, “help and recover”, containment, vision of the entire court and positioning relative to both your player and the ball are important fundamentals that underpin most, if not all, defensive philosophies.

The basis for the introduction of the “no zone” policy is that zone defences at those age groups can limit the development of individual and team skills. For example, driving opportunities are limited and players often do not have the muscular strength and coordination to shoot, with good technique, from the perimeter or throw “skip” passes. This reduces the need for defensive skills such as “closing out” and positioning.

Whilst the “no zone” rule focuses on the defence, it was introduced to enhance the development of both offensive and defensive skills. Indeed, as you will see later in this manual – it is up to the offence, through ball and player movement, to “prove” that it is a zone defence.

It is important to remember that the “no zone” rule applies only inside the three-point line and zone presses and trapping defences are allowed, if they fall back to man to man principles inside the three-point line.

## Part 3 – How is the Rule Implemented?

### Not a decision for the Referees

Basketball Australia does not recommend placing the responsibility for determining whether the defence is acceptable upon the referees. They have enough to do!

It is not the role of the referees to adjudicate whether or not a zone defence is being played.

### Not a decision for the Venue Supervisors

It is not the role of the Venue Supervisor to adjudicate whether or not a zone defence is being played.

### An honour system?

At junior domestic level it not feasible to have someone at every game, adjudicate whether zone defence is being played.

The EDJBA has adopted the philosophy that zone defence should not be played from Under 8 to Under 14 level. As a competition rule, most coaches are unlikely to knowingly, deliberately breach the rule by playing a zone defence.

If there are concerns about the defence played by a particular team during the season, then this should be communicated to the EDJBA. If the team is playing a zone defence, they will be provided with education for the coach on how to teach acceptable man to man principles. Where the coach may be a mother, father or older brother or sister, it would not be surprising if they needed some help.

## Part 4 – What is a “Zone Defence”?

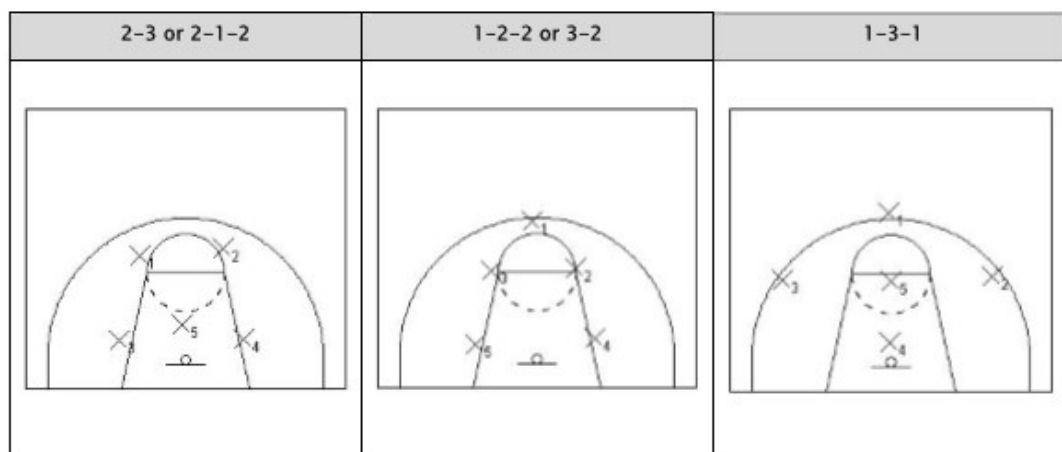
### Guarding an Area

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 within the boundary of the three-point line 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.

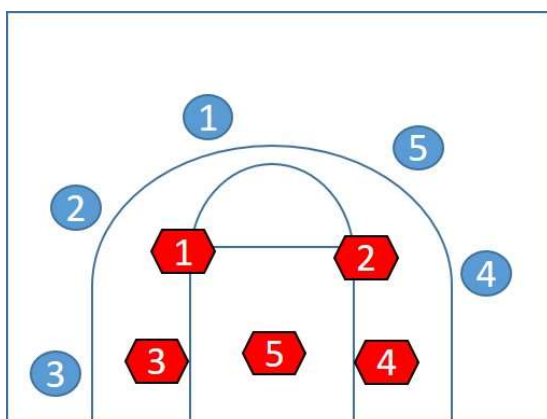


## Guarding Many or Guarding No One

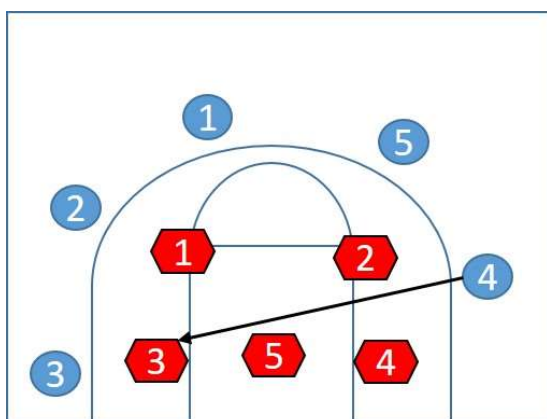
The result of the zone defence is that one player may be responsible for guarding a number of players, or may not have anyone in their area at all.

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

- Red 1 would guard Blue 1 or Blue 2 if they receive the ball
- Red 3 would guard Blue 3 if they receive the ball
- Red 2 would guard Blue 4 or Blue 5 if they receive the ball
- Red 4 and Red 5 have no particular defensive responsibility



It would be particularly obvious that Red 4 is not guarding a specific player if Blue 4 were to cut.



Commonly Red 4 and Red 5 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 5 – How to identify a Zone

### Onus of Proof

- 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 the defence is playing man to man principles.
- If the offensive “big” stays on the weakside, their defender can legitimately stay in a “split line” position.

### Watch a Number of Play Phases

- Often the ball is shot or turned over before you can properly determine if a team is playing a zone.
- 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.

### Don't worry about the full court

- The rule is only concerned with playing man to man principles inside the three-point line. Teams can play any defence they want in the full court.
- 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

- 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

- The rule does not require teams to be playing “denial” defence, where every pass is contested.

### What is the team trying to do?

- Do take into account the intention of the defensive team – what is the coach telling their players to do?

### Teams can Trap

- 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.

## Part 6 – Proving it's a zone

### Moving a Split Line Defender

A basic principle of man to man defence is that they 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.

To prove a defender is playing zone defense 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 is being played as many teams guard a post player from behind.

By moving to the perimeter, the defender 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.

### Have player trail high in transition

Quite commonly, a team's centre 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 the defender can stay in the key!

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

### Pass and Cut to the Basket

If the person passing the ball then makes a strong cut to the basket, it will quickly be obvious if their defender does not follow them.

### Overload the Ball Side

By having players cut to the ballside, the defence needs to adjust. If the low weakside defender was to stay where they are, it would not be apparent who they were guarding!