



The Art & Science of Coaching Series

THE COMPLETE BOOK OF MAN-TO-MAN OFFENSE

John Kresse
Richard Jablonski



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Dedication

*To our families:
John, Ryan and Sue Sommer-Kresse,
and Christian and Pat Ring-Jablonski*

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge those coaches, players and observers of basketball who have influenced their careers and contributed concepts and ideas to this book.

For John Kresse, there are too many to mention individually. But no such list would be complete without his former coach at St. John's University, Joe Lapchick, and his fellow coach at St. John's and with the New York Nets, Lou Carnesecca. Kresse also recognizes the collective impact and contribution of the many assistant coaches and players he has worked with during 19 years at the College of Charleston.

For Richard Jablonski, professional influences include those journalists in New York and elsewhere whose writing he still studies and enjoys. His career path in writing is largely the responsibility of his father, Edward T. Jablonski, who never failed to bring home a newspaper at the end of the day.

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Contents

Dedication	3
Acknowledgments	4
Foreword	6
Introduction: How This Book Will Help Your Program	7
Chapter	
1 Basic Principles: Rules to Win By	11
2 The Balanced Machine	23
3 Planning Each Trip Downcourt.	29
4 The UCLA Series, Charleston Style	35
5 More Set Plays: Something for Everyone	57
6 Breakdown Offense: Flex Plus	87
7 Breakdown Offense: Motion	99
8 Three-Point Shots: Hitting the Home Run	115
9 Inbounding the Ball: Another Way to Beat the Defense	123
About the Authors	135

Foreword

One of the great joys of coaching basketball is the many people you get to meet and know through the game. Nearly 40 years ago, when I was an assistant coach under the legendary Joe Lapchick at St. John's University, I met John Kresse. It didn't take long for me to see that this kid was an incredibly hard worker who loved the game of basketball. So I asked him, "Would you like to get involved in coaching?" That summer, John went to Clair Bee's camp, the granddaddy of all basketball camps. I think that's where he really started to get involved.

John took his first job in 1964 at Christ the King High School in New York. A year later, when Coach Lapchick retired from St. John's and I was fortunate enough to succeed him, I asked John to join me as one of my assistants. It's a great story. The first game I ever coached at St. John's was the freshmen against the varsity. John took the freshmen and beat me. He felt so bad he wouldn't come to practice the next day. That was the start of a long professional relationship. John was my assistant for the next 14 years¹¹ with St. John's and three with the New York Nets of what was then the American Basketball Association.

In 1979, John left St. John's for the College of Charleston, where he has enjoyed nothing but success on and off the court. He has a wonderful family, a marvelously successful basketball program, and a loyal following of thousands of Charlestonians. Among his peers, he is regarded as one of the top coaches in the college game a man with a keen eye for basketball and the ability to translate that vision into a remarkable winning percentage on the court. He and his team are no longer two of the best-kept secrets in college basketball.

None of this surprises me. You could tell at an early age that John was a real student of the game. He always had a certain flair for basketball. Sometimes, you can develop that in a person, but in John's case, you could see it was more than that. It was inherent. You can see that John still has a special feel for the game by the way he handles situations. A lot of people can learn basketball from a book. But to be really successful, you must have a feel for the game. John has that gift.

John's whole life is dedicated to basketball. His love for the game is reflected in this book about man-to-man offense a book which, combined with his previous book on zone offense, provides a valuable resource for coaches at all levels.

LOU CARNESECCA
FORMER HEAD COACH, ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
1992 INDUCTEE, NAISMITH MEMORIAL BASKETBALL
HALL OF FAME,
SPRINGFIELD, MA

Introduction

How This Book Will Help Your Program

During more than three decades as a basketball coach at the high school, college and professional levels, I have witnessed many changes in the game I love. The sheer athleticism of players at all levels is at times astonishing. Thirty-five years ago, you could count the players with the power and grace of Elgin Baylor on two hands and still have a couple of fingers left over. Nowadays, it seems as though every time I look out on the court during a College of Charleston game, I see 10 players with speed, quickness, power, leaping ability or, in some cases, all four of those athletic traits. The game is routinely played at a faster pace and above the rim.

This having been said, certain things about the game not only haven't changed; they're even more central to a team's success. First and foremost among these is defense—especially man-to-man defense. At a time when more and more players are offensive threats, and average perimeter shooters score points three at a time, the ability to play man-to-man defense hard and well is paramount. At the professional level, man-to-man defense is the rule. At the college level, it may as well be, considering how many teams play it on a fulltime basis.

Yes, there are exceptions. Temple Coach John Chaney is renowned for his commitment to zone defense. Many successful programs include zone defense in their bag of tricks. At the College of Charleston, we mix match-up zone in with our man-to-man, depending on time, score, individual match-ups and foul trouble. We believe the ability to change defenses contributes greatly to our success. However, when the chips are down, especially when trailing, we rely heavily on man-to-man defense to produce the results we need.

This strategy puts us among the vast majority of teams at the college level and an increasing number of high school teams. I am hard-pressed to recall the last time one of our opponents played 40 minutes of zone defense against us. Certainly, it hasn't happened during the last three or four seasons. During the 1996-97 season, we played 62 games, against the likes of Arizona, Kentucky, Stanford, Maryland, Oklahoma State, Arizona State and Massachusetts. Every team we faced, big or small, played some man-to-man against us. Some teams

played man-to-man exclusively. The teams that played a lot of zone often used a match-up philosophy, incorporating many man-to-man principles in their zones.

There is no single explanation for this phenomenon. Certainly, the presence of a shot clock and a makeable three-point shot has affected the game's strategy. Ask yourself, why concede open shots to an opponent pressed for time by a shot clock? Why allow a strong shooting team to launch uncontested three-point shots over a zone? The answers to these questions point to a man-to-man defensive philosophy.

Time and score also determine defensive strategy. When trailing late in a game and time is your greatest enemy, you can't afford to let an opposing team milk critical seconds from the clock by passing the ball around the perimeter of a zone. When leading by two or three points late in a game, you'll probably want to play man-to-man defense to contest, rather than concede, a potential tying or winning shot from the perimeter.

The success of programs like Duke and Indiana also contributes to the prevalence of man-to-man defenses. Coaches Mike Krzyzewski at Duke and Bob Knight at Indiana have collected multiple national titles in large part due to the stinginess of their teams' man-to-man defenses. This certainly gives coaches collectively some of the greatest copycats you'll ever meet reason to install man-to-man defenses in search of Duke-like results.

But, none of that matters when the game is on the line and your opponent is playing man-to-man defense. That's when you face the bottom line. You might as well face it now. If your team can't attack man-to-man defenses systematically and effectively, it won't win as many games as it should. If you're going to develop a consistent winner at any level, from grade school to pro, men or women, your team must be able to attack man-to-man defenses.

At the College of Charleston, we have installed a multi-faceted system that incorporates elements of inside and outside offense to attack and defeat man-to-man defenses in the halfcourt setting. We present that system in this book for those coaches who want to take their teams to the highest possible level. I want to help you get the job done.

Take the correct approach, and your offense will consistently produce high-percentage shots. You can free up your top scoring threats where they can do the most damage. You can create exciting isolation opportunities to take advantage of individual mismatches. You can enable offensive rebounders to anticipate shots, work for prime rebounding position and score stick-back baskets.

Make no mistake about it, man-to-man defense has come a long way in recent decades. With the help of videotape scouting and an evolving understanding of the game, coaches have become increasingly sophisticated in their strategies, fine-tuning their defenses to stymie high-scoring opponents. Sagging, helping defenses take away inside opportunities. Overplaying, double-teaming defenses pressurize shooters and ballhandlers. But no

defensive team can do all things on every possession. Each concedes openings to a well-schooled team. The trick is taking advantage of those opportunities through rigorous preparation and game-time execution.

This book is about preparation, which leads to execution.

If your players are prepared to handle everything a defense shows, if they know they have a specific, tactical response to every situation, they will play with the confidence and peace of mind needed to dissect stingy defenses. Ultimately, they will put the defending team on the defensive, not only physically, but strategically and emotionally. Through their

effectiveness on the offensive end, your players will force opposing players and coaches to make difficult, often incorrect choices. In an ideal situation, you may force an opposing coach to get away from what his team does best and switch to an alternative defensive strategy. As a coach, you know this seldom works.

The following chapters contain elements of what has worked for some legendary coaches: Clair Bee, Nat Holman, Joe Lapchick, Lou Carnesecca, Red Holzman, John Wooden and Denny Crum, among others. In my years as a player for Lapchick at St. John's University, and as an assistant to Carnesecca at St. John's and with the New York Nets of the American Basketball Association, I was blessed with the opportunity to meet, listen to and observe some of the game's great minds. I learned a lot of basketball watching fellow coaches frantically moving furniture around an office to simulate game situations. I did a great deal of learning at dining tables, where salt and pepper shakers were put to offensive and defensive tasks and napkins were used to create now-famous diagrams.

And then, there was the actual game experience whether coaching or watching. This book presents an evolving philosophy and outlook, as I learn more and more about the game by coaching against the likes of Gary Williams at Maryland and Lute Olson at Arizona. In the second round of the 1997 NCAA Tournament, the College of Charleston faced Olson and his eventual national champions, Arizona. The Wildcats got the better of us, 73-69, but not before I had the privilege of coaching in a classic battle between two teams with diverse, well-schooled, man-to-man offenses. As many plays as we called, it seemed as though Coach Olson called just as many, or more. That experience, and Arizona's subsequent march to a national championship, reinforced my strongly held belief that access to a comprehensive man-to-man system is a must for success at the highest level of college and professional basketball.

What about other levels? I know that coaches at the high school level simply don't have the practice time and staff support to install every concept and play presented in this book. Who does? In any given year, we incorporate all major elements presented here, but certainly not every play and wrinkle. Each coach must evaluate his program's needs and resources. As a coach, you must prioritize. If you need a set-play offense, it's here. If you're looking for a breakdown offense, it's here. Special situations? Covered. Basic principles?

Right here. Use this book to improve your program in those areas where you need work. Pick and choose those plays and concepts that mirror your philosophy, resources and beliefs.

Fundamental beliefs are a big part of any successful program. I know all games are won or lost on the court, but every coach should be a little bit of a dreamer. I hope this book encourages you to think about the gameto daydream a littleand gives you the tools to fulfill those dreams on the court.

John Kresse
College of Charleston

Chapter 1

Basic Principles: Rules to Win By

Over the course of my career, I have collected and refined a list of basic principles for attacking man-to-man defenses in the halfcourt setting. Some of these principles are strategic; others deal with technique; still others are philosophical in nature.

There's no mystery to the fact that the best way to attack any half court defenseman or zone is by outrunning it. The most successful teams install, practice and refine their fastbreak attacks, knowing when and how to push the ball upcourt to their greatest advantage. I'll leave it up to each coach to install his or her fastbreak attack. This book is about what your team should do when the break is not available and the players settle into a halfcourt chess match.

Here, then, are 12 basic principles for attacking man-to-man defenses in the halfcourt setting. Study these principles. Incorporate them into your thinking and teaching. They'll help you understand material presented in subsequent chapters, and they'll give you and your players a foundation upon which to develop a potent man-to-man offense.

Recognize The Defense

Yes, some teams play nothing but man-to-man defense. Others play nothing but zone. In those cases, recognizing an opponent's defense is a fairly straightforward matter, even though you'll still want possession-by-possession confirmation that nothing has changed.

But what about those opponents who play a variety of defenses? Even more complex, what do you do when an opponent initially shows one defense, then plays another?

Clearly, when facing a team that runs multiple defenses, you and your team must quickly "crack the code." By this, I mean you must recognize the opponent's defense, call an appropriate play, organize for the play, then run it. For now, let's work on the initial issue: recognizing the defense. It's not always as easy as it sounds.

One way to recognize and prepare for specific defenses is by scouting. If you

have the manpower and time to scout future opponents, you can gain a substantial edge. Rather than waiting for the game to begin and making a trip downcourt to determine

what defense an opponent is playing, scouting allows you to observe and prepare for specific defenses in advance. Chances are, an opposing coach will use many of the same defenses from game to game because he has tailored his defensive gameplan to his players' skills. Those skills don't change from game to game. Whatever small refinements he makes in his defensive gameplan will be dictated by your team's individual and collective skills on the offensive end. You may be sure that, whatever your team does best, your opponent will try to stop, or at least contain it.

While scouting is a valuable tool, it doesn't take the place of a well-trained eye, especially when the scouting trip reveals that your future opponent uses both man-to-man and zone defenses. Man-to-man defense is just that an individual defender is responsible for an attacking player, one-on-one, all over the court. In zone defenses, defenders match up with attacking players within a prescribed area or section of the court.

Most of the time, you'll be able to tell by simple observation whether your opponent is playing man-to-man defense. On those occasions when you have a doubt, run a man-to-man set play and observe your opponents' reactions. If a defender follows a cutter from one side of the floor to the other, chances are pretty good that you're facing a man-to-man defense.

There are exceptions to this general rule. As defenses have evolved, more and more teams play aggressive, match-up zone defenses. Most match-ups deploy defenders in areas where the offense originates. For example, if your offense originates from a 1-3-1 set, the defense will take on a 1-3-1 look. This can be confusing to the untrained or less experienced eye. Don't be discouraged. In theory, you can run your man-to-man offense against a match-up zone. We occasionally do this at College of Charleston as another means of promoting the kind of ball and player movement we need to defeat match-up zones.

Also, be alert for combination defenses, such as the box-and-1, the diamond-and-1 and the triangle-and-two. These defenses combine elements of man-to-man and zone defense deploying three or four players in zone defense, with the remaining players matched up man-to-man.

Study Opponents' Tendencies

At the risk of oversimplifying, different teams play the same defense differently. One team's sagging, inside-oriented, man-to-man defense presents

a substantially different challenge than another team's hyperactive, overplaying defense. Yes, both are playing man-to-man, but each concedes unique opportunities to the attacking team.

As you observe your opponents' individual and team defensive skills, whether on a scouting mission or during a game, take mental notes and try to answer the following questions:

- How aggressive and physical is your opponent on the defensive end?

Some teams are very aggressive, overplaying perimeter players and passing lanes, or trapping ballhandlers with quick double-teams. These ploys imply one-on-one matchups inside, the opportunity for perimeter players to move to the basket with and without the ball, and open shooters on the weak side of the floor (away from the ball). Players off the ball must be prepared to move to outlet positions to help a double-teamed teammate. Conversely, some teams prefer to take away inside play with sagging defenses. Your inside players must be aware of potential double-teams by perimeter defenders. When this occurs, perimeter shooters must step into high-percentage spots on the floor and look for inside-out passes.

- Does your opponent sustain a consistently strong defensive effort throughout each possession, and from possession to possession?

In this book, I'll detail two approaches to attacking man-to-man defense: the quick-hitting set play and the breakdown offense. If the set play doesn't produce a high-percentage shot, we reset into a breakdown offense that uses as many passes and screens as time allows to produce an offensive opportunity. Many of our best looks come late in a shot clock when an opposing team or player fails to sustain a high intensity level and concentration. At the high school level, where there is no shot clock, if you're well-schooled and handle the ball well, you can force an opponent to sustain an effort for minutes at a time.

- How well do opposing players help each other, if at all?

Despite its name, man-to-man defense is a team proposition. The best man-to-man defenses work as a unit, with all four players off the ball prepared to help a teammate should he be beaten by a strong one-on-one move. Attacking players must understand that effective helping defenses concede open shots with one or two more passes. Also, attacking players must be prepared to come to a jump stop to avoid charging calls. The jump stop and pass and the quick pull-up jump shot are effective tools for attacking man-to-man defense.

- How well do your opponents play screens?

Our man-to-man offenses generally incorporate a screen or series of screens to free up scorers for high-percentage shots. As you know, there are several ways for a defender to cope with a solid, well-timed screen. He can go over the top of