The benefits of 2-2-1 control defense

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While the three-point concept has changed the way we think offensively in basketball, it is another story defensively.

At every level of play, the offensive goal seems to be get the ball out of bounds as quickly as possible, dribble penetrate to the offensive end of the floor, and attempt to shoot the basketball from somewhere between the 10-second line and the three-point line.

Meanwhile, the defense will allow the three-point shot and hope it is missed so that they can continue the same strategy in the opposite direction. In other words, if we can make more three-point shots than the opponents, we will win the game.

We’d have to say that it’s time to revise our defensive strategies to take away the things our opponents want to do. Make them stop and play us.

One of the best methods of doing this is by using the control defense a 2-2-1 zone defense that will enable you to dictate game tempo, give your opponents the opportunity to turn the basketball over, and level the playing field if your opponents are quicker than you.

The control defense is a replication of a 2-2-1 zone defense, defending 80% of the basketball court (see Diag. 1). Your goal is to make your opponent pass the basketball two to three times to get the ball across the 10-second line.
A motivational quote: “If we give them a chance, they will turn the basketball over.” This will emphasize that we are not trying to hard trap or steal the basketball but use floor positions to make your opponent stop and play.

Your players must understand the difference between creating tempo and controlling tempo. This defense is only used to control tempo, dead balls, free throws, and made baskets.

Place your players in the positions shown in **Diag. 1:**

- **Player D3, large forward.**
- **Player D4, quick forward.**
- **Player D1, large guard.**
- **Player D2, quick guard.**
- **Player D5, center.**
**Player D3 responsibility:** Force the dribbler toward the defensive left sideline. Attempt to make him pick up his dribble and pass the basketball crosscourt. If he continues to dribble, force him into a double team with D1.

**Player D1 responsibility:** Shadow the dribbler and maintain floor spacing. As player D3 forces O1 toward sideline, D1 gets into position to double team O1 and forces him to pass the basketball.

**Player D4 responsibility:** Drop one step below the line of the basketball toward the middle of the floor and maintain a position so you can see your man and also any player moving to the middle of the basketball court. Deny any passes to the middle of the floor.

**Player D2 responsibility:** Move toward the middle of the floor as the dribbler is forced to the sideline. You must drop quickly to defend your floor responsibilities as the double team occurs. Look for any offensive player moving to the middle and as D4 moves to cover the middle, slide toward the sideline to discourage any sideline pass.

**Player D5 responsibility:** Protect the basket. Do not let any offensive player get between you and the basket. Once you see that the dribbler is being forced to the sideline move to the line of the basketball and discourage any long pass up the floor. If a long pass is completed you must contain and stop penetration to give your teammates time to recover.

**Defensive player positions to force sideline, stop dribble penetration and encourage crosscourt pass (Diag. 2):**

To stop dribble penetration all defensive players must get to their assigned positions to discourage any pass up the sideline or to the middle. D3 forces basketball down sideline. D1 waits, moves up to trap basketball. Players D2, D4, and D5 move into the passing lanes to look for steal. Encourage the crosscourt pass. Remember the defense goal is to control tempo and make them stop and play.
Defensive adjustment to basketball reversal, (Diag. 3):

Once the crosscourt pass is made, defensive players slide back to the set. D4 funnels O2 toward the sideline or into the double team with D2. D1 and D3 discourage middle or sideline pass. D5 drops to line of ball to protect the basket. If you force O2 to make another cross court pass, you have taken away dribble penetration and now you are able to set up your basic defense.
**Defensive Adjustment to dribble penetration to middle, (Diag. 4):**

D3 and D4 chase the basketball and try to deflect the basketball to D1 and D2. If the basketball is not deflected, D1 and D2 move to stop dribble penetration and force ball reversal. D5 protects basket.
Defensive adjustment to middle pass, (Diag. 5):

The most difficult pass to recover from is the middle pass. D1 and D2 must continually deny any pass to the middle. If a middle pass is completed, the closest defender must defend the receiver so the other defenders can drop below the line of the basketball. Get into the passing lanes to prevent another forward pass.
**Defensive adjustment to sideline pass, (Diag. 6):**

D1 and D3 drop and double team O2. D4 slides to cover middle. D2 slides to the line of the ball. D5 protects basket and doesn’t let anyone behind him.
Fundamentals to emphasize in practice:

1. Stress deflections. Deflections will create recoveries.

2. Don’t let the basketball get past you, force the dribbler to the sideline.

3. Keep arms and hands high and keep them active to deflect passes.

4. Don’t leave your feet in a double team as long as the offensive player has his dribble.

5. Stop dribble penetration by moving your feet.

6. Deny all flashes to middle.

7. If the basketball is passed over your head sprint to the line of the ball.

8. Never loose sight of the basketball.

Summary:
This control defense will enable you to control the tempo of the game. It especially irritates a running team, makes them make extra passes, and do things they aren’t comfortable doing that causes confusion. This levels the playing field, especially if they are quicker than you.

It is not a complicated defense and can easily become a pressure defense if the need arises. Players like to play full court defense and this system will definitely make them stop and play.