

## 10 Keys for Beating a Pressure Defense

During the course of a season you are going to face teams that are looking to speed you up by using pressure. It may come in the form of a man press, zone press, or a team that simply likes to trap and gamble at different points throughout the game. Whatever type of pressure defense you are facing, you need to have a game plan with your team, and that plan needs to be have been prepped in practice.

The goal of this article is to give you some focus points that are going to be pivotal in handling pressure. Here are 10 keys for beating a pressure defense and giving yourself the best chance of success.

### 1) Make them Pay

One of the biggest mistakes that teams make against a pressing defense is automatically pulling the ball out to run offense every time after they have beaten the press. Don't get me wrong, this is a great option sometimes; and depending on time and score needs to be used. But, if you have the ability to make a pressing team pay by getting to the basket for a quality finish, do it!

The best way to get a team to back off on the pressure is to make them pay with easy baskets. If you pull the ball out every time and reset after beating the press, why should they ever stop pressing you and gambling for steals? There becomes no penalty for pressing you, so they will continue to do it. Make them pay.

### 2) Strong with the Ball

It doesn't matter what your game plan is if players aren't being strong with the ball. This means not only holding the ball with strong hands, but it also means being able to operate from a position of strength. Players need to catch the ball and IMMEDIATELY square their defender up in triple threat; this will be the only way that they will be able to make the defender pay for over pressuring.

The reason it must be immediately is because if you don't, the defender will eat up your space and force you to pivot backwards. You must battle for the first 12 inches on every catch and square up the defender. Doing this will allow you to pivot to make a dribble move or make a straight line pass to a teammate, no looping passes.

### 3) Pass Fakes

Defenders off of the ball are going to be playing the passing lanes and trying to jump passes. So one of the biggest tools to beating a pressure defense is the simple, but extremely effective pass fake. In a press, the players off of the ball are like free safeties in football.

They are reading the passer and trying to anticipate where they are going to pass the ball. Throwing in pass fakes will freeze them or cause them to jump out of position before you make the pass. Fake a pass, and then fire a pass to an open teammate.

#### 4) Get Open

I have watched way too games where a point guard has turnover after turnover trying to get into the offense. The average fan would put all the blame on the ball handler. However, this is not always the case. The players off of the ball needs to do a great job of getting open on the wing to create a target for the ball handler. You can't leave your ball handler out to dry by not getting open.

This does not mean dancing back and forth with your defender trying to fake them out. Simply step across their high foot, seal them off like a post up, give the ball handler a target to hit by showing your hand, and then go meet the pass as it comes to you. And, if the defender is drastically over playing you, back cut them. Nothing will soften up a defense like getting some easy backdoor layups and dunks.

#### 5) Meet Every Pass

Tips and deflections are what pressure defenses live off of. So it is extremely important that the receiver comes back to the pass and meets it with two hands every time. If you sit back and wait for the ball to come to you, you allow the defender more time to the ball and also a better angle to jump in and get a deflection. Make it a habit to meet every pass.

If a player is being trapped and is in trouble, you must sprint to them and make yourself an open receiver. At this point you aren't as concerned about running offense as you are with giving them an outlet pass to prevent a turnover. When you do catch the ball, look opposite to reverse the ball. Make the defense pay for loading up on one side of the floor and trapping.

#### 6) Hard Cuts

A great way to make a pressure defense pay is hard cuts. Set up your defender, and then make a hard cut to get open. If you are running a specific play use the cut that you need to to get open, but if you are just running motion offense, really read the defender and the make the correct cut.

You may set them up by walking away from the ball and then cutting hard across their face, or you may act like you are trying to get open on the wing before cutting hard backdoor to the basket. Whatever type of cut you use, be sharp with it.

The better your cuts are, the more worried the defense will be about them, and that takes away from their ability to pressure you.

#### 7) Play at Your Pace

Pressure defenses are designed primarily to do one thing, and that is to speed you up. By speeding you up they force you to be sloppy with the ball and take quick low percentage shots. It is important that you play at your speed and refuse to let the defense force you to get out of control.

A lot of this falls on the point guard. They need to be able to understand game flow and know when they should be making the defense pay by being a little more aggressive and when the ball needs to be pulled out to run offense.

## 8) Avoid Danger Zones

When playing a pressing or trapping team, there are places on the floor that you want to avoid at all costs. These areas are danger zones and will really increase the chances of a turnover. One of these areas are corners of the floor. Here are a few examples of corners being bad in a press.

- **Corners:** It is important that you stay out of corners as much as possible. The spacing is tight, and the out of bounds lines act like two extra defenders.
  - Inbounding Full Court: Make sure that you set up at the free throw line so that you have space to cut to the ball to get open without having to catch the ball in the deep corner.
  - Bringing the Ball Across Half Court: Never dribble or pass the ball to someone that just crossed half court and is standing in the corner. The half court line immediately becomes another defender.
  - Offensive Baseline Corners: Depending on what type of defense you are playing against, these corners aren't as dangerous. However, against some zone defenses, anytime the ball goes to the corner they will trap it. So just make sure you are aware of that.

Another danger zone is over penetration. Don't get sped up attacking the press and then dribble into trouble. As a ball handler you must recognize potential trapping areas or areas that are too congested to dribble into. A great move to avoid these situations is the [retreat dribble](#).

## 9) Release Valve

When you are bringing the ball up against a pressing zone, you always want to have a player behind the ball. This player is the release valve and is going to be there for trapping emergencies and being able to quickly reverse the ball. This action works like a seesaw. If the ball is swung over to the trailing guard, the player who just passed it must now get behind that ball handler to be their release valve.

Obviously, you still need to be looking to advance the ball up the floor because you only have a limited amount of seconds to get the ball across half court, but having a release valve actually helps with this because it spaces the defense out and allows for the ball to quickly change sides of the floor and then be advanced.

## 10) Quality Shots

If you are taking rushed low percentage shots, a pressing defense doesn't have to even get one steal to accomplish its goal and beat you. It is paramount that you get quality shots on every possession. Don't allow yourself to get into an up and down game where you are shooting wild shots. You should be making the defense pay for pressing you like we talked about earlier, but this means taking a great shot.

A big part of this comes down to time and score. If you are on a run and rolling, a dribble down open three from one of your better shooters might be a good shot. On the other hand, if the other team just went on a 6-0 run, this is not a shot you want to be shooting. You are going to want to run a solid set and make the defense have to really guard to get a stop.

## Drills to Use

Here are a few [basketball drills](#) that you can use during practice to help you work on some of these areas. \*Disclaimer\* These drills only work if the defense is getting after the offense!

- **4 on 5 No Dribble:** This drill is great for working on being strong with the ball and meeting every pass. The drill is exactly as the title describes it. You are going to have 4 offensive players and 5 defenders. The offensive players are not allowed to use any dribbles and must complete 10 passes or make a layup/dunk to win the drill. The defense is simply trying to get a steal.
- **Partner Pressure Passing:** This drill will work on being strong with the ball in triple threat and being able to make a pass out of it. You are going to have groups of 3 players and it will be set up like monkey in the middle. The player with the ball must hold on to the ball and stay strong in triple threat for 3-4 seconds while the defender in the middle harasses them. After a few seconds, the player will use a pivot, pass fake, etc. to get the pass around the defender to the 3rd player. The player making the pass is going to follow the ball and become the next defender. Just repeat this pattern for the desired amount of time. \* Players can grab and reach a little bit as well to make the drill harder.
- **3 Man Perimeter Passing:** One of the biggest things that kills a pressure defense is ball reversals, and this drill is going to work on just that. You are going to have 3 players on the perimeter; located on both wings and the top of the key. They are each going to be guarded by a defender. The players on the perimeter must be able to swing the ball back and forth between each other without using any dribbles or getting pushed out away from the 3 point line. They can however back cut for a finish if the defender is completely over playing them. Here are a few variations of this drill.
  - Variation 1: Have the defenders play dummy defense. If you have younger players that aren't used to getting open, you should start here. Go for a set time or a number of passes and then switch offense and defense or rotate new people in.
  - Variation 2: Full speed defense and have it go for a set time or number of passes. After that rotate new people in or switch.

- Variation 3: Full speed defense, and then once you are satisfied with the offensive players ability to move the ball, call out, "live" and then let them play 3 on 3 looking to score (they are now able to use dribbles). Makes it a little more game realistic.