

Lacrosse: enter the zone defense.

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The St. Paul School [lacrosse](#) team has achieved a [reputation](#) for hard-nosed offense and a unique and successful zone defense. The zone was the invention of Bud Blake, who was hired in the 50s as athletic director and then discovered that he was also expected to coach the fledgling lacrosse team.

He had never coached lacrosse nor even seen it played, but as an all-around athlete he soon realized that he could borrow from other [sports](#), particularly [basketball](#). Bud felt that lacrosse lent itself to zone defense. After much thought and experimentation, he concocted a simple, effective, and unique zone defense. Bud's successor, Cliff Gillespie, inherited the zone and utilized it almost exclusively in his long and successful coaching career, winning over 200 [games](#).

Since the two St. Paul School coaches had clearly proved out the zone defense, I saw no reason to change the tradition when I took over as coach. The concept of our zone defense is predicated on a few basic [rules](#) and guidelines: We have one defender always playing the ball man to man, four defenders always positioned on the four corners of a large rectangle, and the sixth defender positioned in the crease area.

As you can see in the accompanying diagrams, the rectangle extends 2-3 yards beyond the [pipes](#) of the goal-line extended and 7-8 yards deep toward the midline). The diagrams show how we set up against a 2-3-1 offensive set and how we slide and rotate on the movement of the ball. The M's are the defensive middies and the D's the defensemen. Notice that one man always covers the ball-handler man-to-man and that two middies and two defensemen cover the corners of the rectangle.

Diag. 1: M-1 goes one-on-one vs the ballhandler, while D-2, D-3, M-2, and M-3 form the rectangle.

Diag. 2: When X-1 passes to X-2 on the left side, M-2 slides out of the corner to cover the receiver, while M-1 replaces him in the rectangle. M-2 has to make the slide because if D-2 (the near man) made it, the attackman behind the goal (X) would be able to sneak around on a back-door move.

Diag. 3: When X-1 passes to X-2 behind the goal, D-2 must move [back](#) to cover the receiver, while M-2 must move over to replace D-2 in the rectangle.

Diag. 4: When X-1 runs the ball to the other side of the goal, D-3 must pick him up, while the other defenders rotate as shown to maintain the rectangle -- D-2 sliding to the M-2 corner, M-2 sliding to the M-1 corner, M-1 sliding to M-3, and M-3 sliding to D-3.

Diag. 5: When X-1 passes to X-2 on the right side, M-3 has to slide over to cover the receiver, while D-3 must slide in to replace M-3 in the rectangle.

Diag. 6: If X-2 passes to X-3 on the perimeter, M-1 has to slide out of the rectangle to cover him and M-3 must replace him in the corner.

WE OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES IN PLAYING OUR ZONE DEFENSE:

1. Always keep Your stick in the air when you are in the corners or in the crease. The zone defenders are expected to knock down as many skip passes as possible.
2. Do not slide from ball to ball. If You are covering the man with the ball and he passes, you should slide to the rectangle and one of its corners and not to the next player catching a pass. Someone from the rectangle must slide out to cover the man with the ball.

3. If the ball is on the ground, the two closest defensive players must contest the ground ball, while the remaining four cover the four corners of the rectangle.
4. The man playing the ball must **play** the opponent's stick side. Everyone else must attempt to be in the shooting and passing lanes
5. Defensemen should not cover anyone with in front of the goalline extended. The offensive players should be covered by middles.

AMONG THE MANY ADVANTAGES OF ZONE DEFENSE:

1. It gives your players a greater opportunity to rest on the defensive end of the field.
2. Being a foreign concept to almost all of your opponents, they will be forced to prepare differently against you.
3. It will force your opponents to take shots from more difficult angles, thus creating easier saves for your goalle.