

When and Where to Play a Trapping Defense

The trick to playing a trapping defense is to have a signal as to who will trap, and who will cover the remaining positions. In general on any trap with two players the trapper committing should have a code name, something like FIRE or STRIKE. This man commits to the double, while the remaining three players must leave their man coverage momentarily to form a zone triangle up to anticipate the pass out and protect the basket weak side. Normally this zone triangle must put two floating players in the paint high and low whenever a trap occurs outside of the lane to cover any quick passes to cutters down the middle which might result in a quick score. The same would be true if you called 25 RED CORNER, 1 and DONE where you would pick up at half court, and trap the first deep corner pass. Regardless your three remaining players must zone up to protect the high and low basket and the most dangerous pass back out.

Now comes the second critical teaching point. Once you double down anywhere, there will eventually be a free player left open on the perimeter. The success of your double downs will be reflected not only in how quickly you can trap down to make the pass out more difficult, but equally as well in you rotate out and cover up open attackers on the perimeter when the ball is kicked back out. Most teams do a good job of covering up the first or second pass out and moved around the perimeter but often the trapping player is late recovering back out to handle the third open perimeter player. It takes a considerable amount of physical effort to trap hard and keep rotating until every is sufficiently covered up again, but with today's great offensive players this type of defense is a virtual necessity for most teams to be successful. At the minimum it must be in your repertoire of defensive tactics to off-set a hot player.

As I have said against many teams if you use the trap you will have to react and cover up the perimeter by rotating players. One teammate must rotate toward the player left open by the 2nd trapping player. The next adjacent teammate must then rotate to cover up the perimeter player left open by the first rotating player and so forth. Because you are trapping your team will have to be aware of things like who are hot shooting perimeter players. You will not gain any player confidence by having the defender of the opponents best perimeter shooter on the side of the low post leave their man to trap if no one rotates to cover up the shooter. You may want to trap with a different player. In fact it is not a bad idea to institute a trapping signal besides say RED with a defensive number. Let's say we want to send the Point guard down to trap instead of the 3 man on the wing. The call might be RED 1 POST. In general the trapping player on the post will rotate out and to the weak side to cover the last remaining open perimeter player once the ball is passed back out from the low post.

There are some positive advantages to having a different player trap on different possessions. By designating a CAPTAIN or CHIEF on the defensive court (your defensive captain) they can make the call early in the set play to keep the attacking team from becoming settled in how to handle the trapping defense. For example one trip down it might be RED 3 POST, and the next RED 2 POST. You can also label a specific player to be the only trapper for all situations which might occur if the opponent has a particular poor perimeter shooting player. Simply call this person a code name such as HOSE (the defender who puts the trap out) and they will trap which ever location you wish to trap. In addition to having a label for who traps it is important to label the three positions who will create the ZONE TRIANGLE outside of the trap. Call one BASKET, Call the second LANE, and the third

FLOATER or something like this. The two zone spots in the lane must be set as soon as the low post trap is set. The remaining player will be the floater looking for the pass back out. Assigning names to the zone areas will allow you, as the coach, to clearly signal which players have what specific responsibilities on any given trap location. Normally the FLOATER will take the most obvious pass back out to the perimeter while the zone remaining zone defenders BASKET and LANE have responsibility for the three remaining offensive players on the court.

The responsibilities of defending perimeter players and cutters are assigned by the coach. They are somewhat more complex than space or time allows in this Ask the Coach question but you may want to refer to an excellent book on this subject by former NBA Head Coach Del Harris in a book titled Winning Defense we reviewed a few years back which is the best I have read on the subject to this date. Bob Kloppenberg's, and his book or video SOS Pressure Defense (another NBA Coach) also is an excellent source for these more complex defensive schemes. Note that you will need intelligent and capable players to run these more complex defenses, but you can run simplified versions of them with success if you adhere to some of the basic rules I have already provided.

Here are some general rules of when to trap:

1. Trap when the pass is in the air going to a low post man who is having a big night.
2. Trap when a specific player catches the ball in a prime time scoring area near the basket or low post.
3. Trap when an opponent makes more than one dribble to attack the basket from the wing.
4. Trap when opponents are running isolation plays or when you have an opponent who are very effective at playing pick and roll.
5. Trap only when you are three steps or less to the ball to increase the level of surprise and reduce the time the offense has to react.