

## WHY ZONE IS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR PLAYERS UNDER 15

*Any defence played in the half court which does not incorporate normal man to man defensive principles (which include help defence) can be considered to be a zone. For this purpose, trapping defences which rotate back to man to man defensive principles are acceptable.*

There are a number of reasons why playing zone defence is not recommended with players under the age of 15. And some competitions specifically prohibit zone defences being played and will penalise teams (by technical foul on the coach) if they do so.

The defensive principles of rotation, “help and recover”, containment, vision of the entire court and positioning relative to both your player and the ball are important fundamentals that underpin most, if not all, defensive philosophies.

The rationale for the introduction of the “no zone” (in the half court) rule is that zone defences with young players can limit the development of individual and team skills.

The reason for this is that the zone defence (particularly with young players) tends to:

- limit opportunities to drive to the basket (as there are 2 or 3 defenders in position at the keyway);
- limit opportunities to pass to players cutting into the key (as there are 2 or 3 defenders in the keyway, young players often struggle to “see” the pass or to make the pass);
- force players to shoot from outside before they have developed the strength and technique to do so;
- players often lack the strength to throw a “skip” pass (from one side of the court to the other).

By having teams play man to man defence provides greater opportunity for offensive players as there will often be less defenders in position directly near the basket. This reduces the need for defensive skills such as closing out and positioning. Accordingly, both offensive and defensive players will miss out on valuable learning and development.

Whilst the “no zone” rule focuses on the defence, it was introduced to enhance the development of both offensive and defensive skills. Indeed, it is up to the offence, through ball and player movement, to prove that it is a zone defence.

It is important to remember that the “no zone” rule applies only in the half court and zone presses and trapping defences are allowed, if they fall back to man to man principles in the quarter court.

Where a “no zone” rule is applied it is recommended that it is not for referees to adjudicate whether or not a zone defence is being played. Instead, an independent official (or “zone buster”) is appointed to each game. This person needs a reasonably high level of knowledge as it can at times be difficult to determine whether or not a team is playing zone defence.