

Playing Tough

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Coaches are often heard to lament that today's player don't play "tough". They get pushed around, they don't take the ball strong to the hoop they allow an aggressive defender to dominate them. What does this mean to play tough? I have defined it as being able to play in small spaces where contact from an opponent often occurs. We don't want to teach our players to always react to contact in an aggressive manner. This can lead to unnecessary fouling and a wrestling match that players can not always win. Instead I believe we want players to be able to deal with close quarter contact in a positive way that allows them to operate efficiently on offense and defense. It is Zen basketball. use your opponents energy against them.

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Teaching players how to be tough

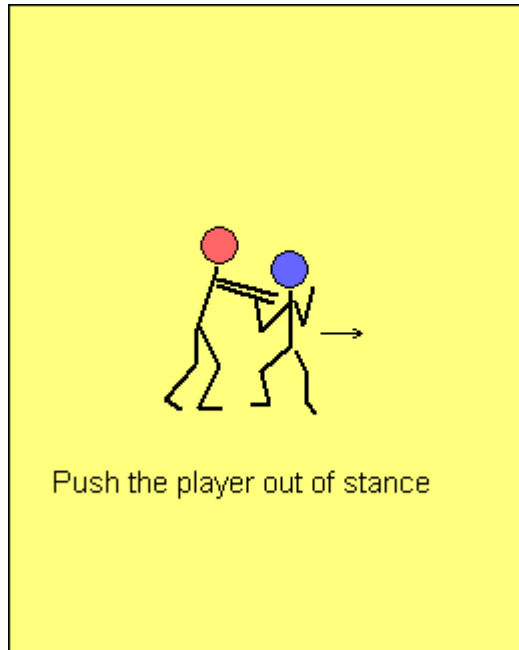
This is not a natural thing for many players, especially for young players who are going through puberty. It is much easier for an early maturing male/female to be tougher on a long lean late maturing player.

Matching up these two players in a "man" maker drill is archaic and usually does not produce the intended results. Being a "man" is not about getting in a fight and pushing back when someone pushes you.

We often do not help children with this gradual increase in physical contact. I content that it is one reason why we lose players to the sport of volleyball. The tall slender athlete is now expected to go to war under the boards yet this player's body is the least ready for this skill. Also in today's society touching is often frowned on. All of a sudden someone is telling a children that they must lean their body on someone and enjoy the contact.

Confidence plays a key role. It starts with helping the player with their core strength and movement skills. This allows the player to see they will not get injured. Through gradual loading of drills the player develops skills and techniques that he/she can add to his/her arsenal to counter aggressive play.

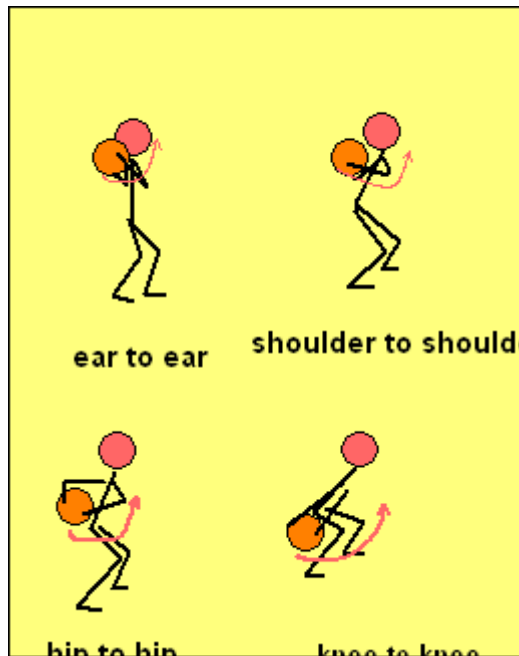
Tough stance



It starts with a solid stance. Players need to get low in a 'grizzly bear' stance. The coach can push on the shoulder and hips to see if the player is stable. Push in different planes of the body to load the drill. Then have other players push. use football blocking shields.

Have players move in a crowded space. Place 12 players in the key and have them move about being used to the close space.

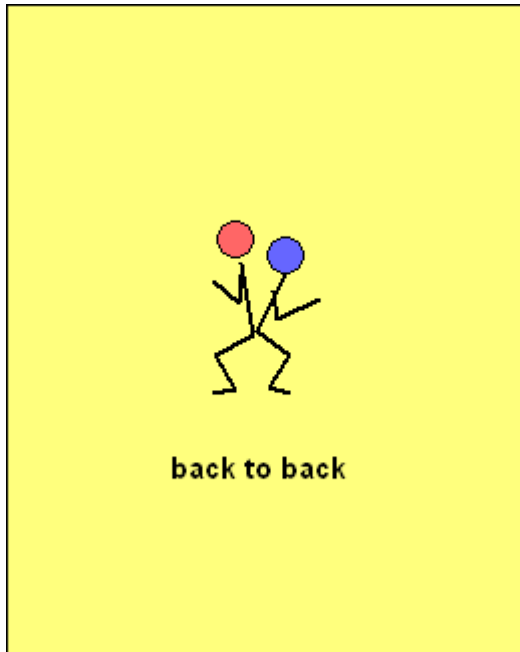
Pivots



Players need to be able to pivot in this stance while not being knocked off balance. The player needs to pivot in 1/4 turns as to not lose balance. The player needs to keep their vision. A brief dropping of the head will occur, but cannot be allowed to persist. The ball can be ripped through at different planes of the body:

- Ear to ear
- Shoulder to shoulder
- Hip to hip
- knee to knee
- Combination - ear to hip, shoulder to ear

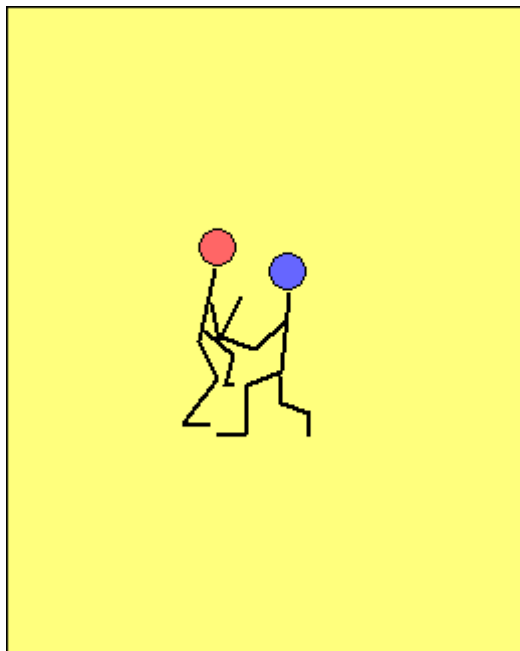
Load the athlete by adding progressive physical and mental pressure.



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Pushing

Players also need to learn to use their body to push and seal. See the notes on pushing in different planes of the body as a reference.

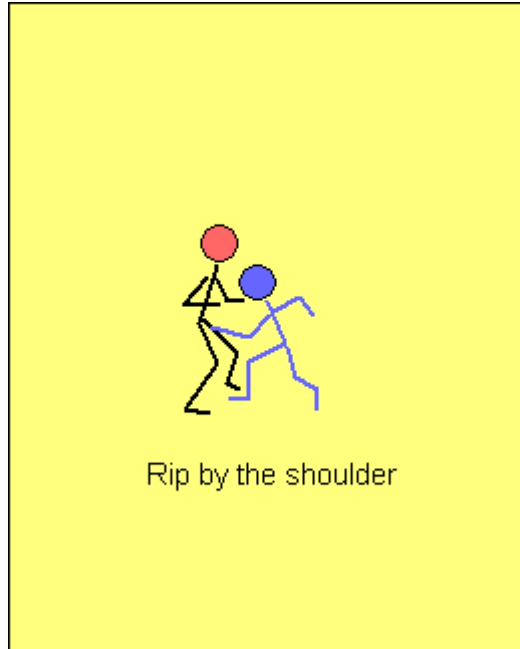


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Remove contact

Players also have to learn how to remove or not fight through aggressive contact. Remove the forearm from the body by using the thumb and index finger.

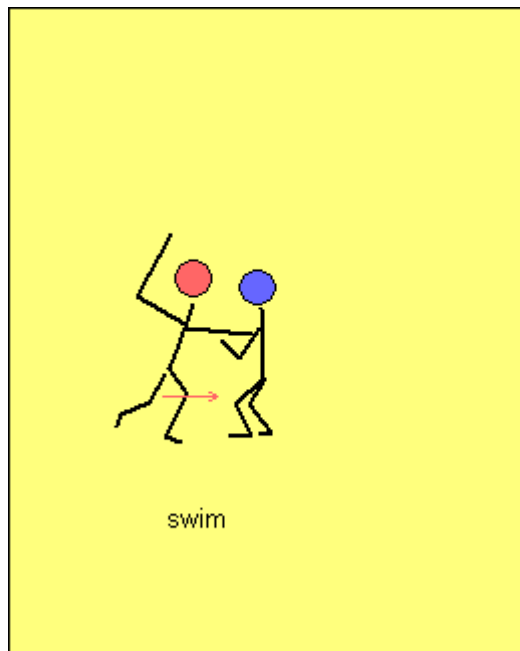
Don't attack the chest of an opponent. This is their strength. Too many players when faced with a chest turn it into a wrestling match. A chest means to stop or change direction. Players need to learn how to attack arms and shoulders.



Rip

The player takes the near arm and leg (the ones closest to the defender) punching the arm and driving the leg by the defender. The player should lead with a skinny shoulder. KOBBS the defender as you goes by to prevent recovery.

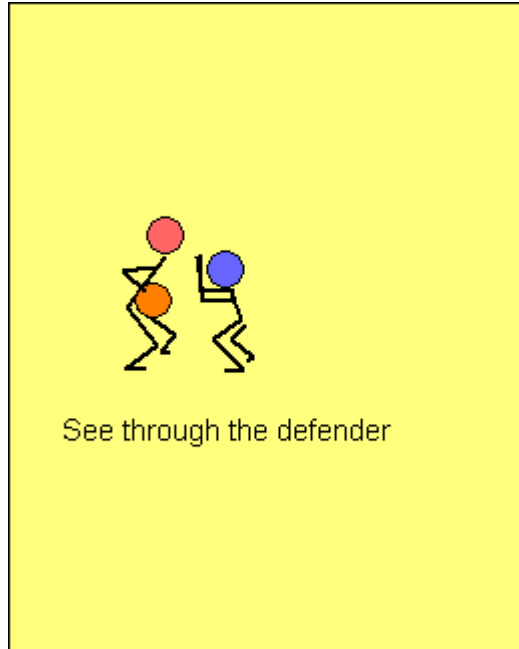
This can be done on a curl cut, a flash cut to the rim, or on a dribble move with the ball. Defensively this is used to avoid screens.



Swim

Against an aggressive defender or when the player trying to avoid the contact is taller a swim is a good move to avoid contact. The player takes the far arm and pushes on the upper arm of the player making contact. At the same time the near arm is swum over the player at the same time the near leg goes by the player.

This is used to avoid contact on offense and defense. Especially in avoiding seals by an offensive post player or box outs.



Tough on the catch

One good drill is to have the defender get very close to the offensive player. the defender protects his/her face by putting their wrists in front of their nose. The offensive players works on pivoting and protecting the ball looking through the defense.

Start drills this way.



Prevent the pivot

This is a more aggressive drill. The offensive player starts with his/her back to the basket. The defender is physically trying to prevent the player from facing the basket. Fouls will occur.

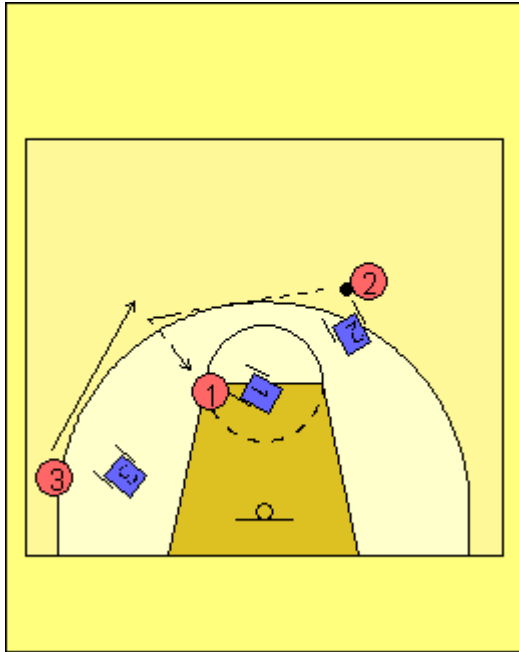
This can start stationary or off the catch.

Tough on the dribble

Players need to be able to dribble with a defender running along beside him/her. The key is to have vision as he/she dribbles. Don't allow the defense to direct you. Defensively we want to be able to funnel or turn dribblers. See the notes from previous articles on dribbling with guided defense.

Tough on the cut

Many players fight the chest when making a cut. Players need to learn to use this to set up relay passes. This three on three drill is an excellent drill to work on relay passes and knowing when to rip hard in front of the defender or use their chest to set up a relay pass.



Tough on defense

Being tough is not just about playing on offense. Defenders need to learn how to get their body in front of offensive players to turn or stop them. It is also about playing on a hip to channel or funnel that player. Defenders also have to avoid contact when playing post defense and avoiding screens. The tougher our defenders become the tougher our offensive players will learn to play. The two go hand in hand.