

**Chris Mack**  
**Head Coach, Xavier University**  
[mackc@xavier.edu](mailto:mackc@xavier.edu)



### "Drills to Build the Pack Line Defense"

\*Regardless of what you run on offense or defense, you must have a defined system you believe in

- ❖ Your team must have an identity
- ❖ Everyone in your league should know what you're about
- ❖ When you have a system, it gives your players answers and accountability to what they're doing
  - For example, we don't give up baseline – if you give up baseline you understand you're coming out of the game
- ❖ It simplifies scouting
  - Identify the common offensive actions you face and teach a standard way to defend
  - Start at the beginning of the season practicing these actions in your shell drill
  - This allows you to focus on your opponent's offensive concepts (rather than detailed set plays) when going over the scouting report
- ❖ Your system should create "Regenerative Learning" (Tony Dungy), where upperclassmen can teach underclassmen

\*Why play the Pack Line?

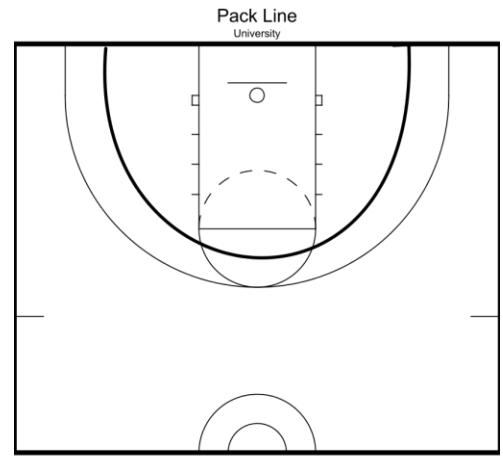
- ❖ On offense, kids are way better ball handlers and way worse without the ball in their hands compared to 20 years ago

\*There is nothing "soft" about Xavier's Pack Line:

- ❖ Aggressive
- ❖ Ball pressure
- ❖ Smart positioning off the ball

\*Pack Line

- ❖ 16-17' from the basket, mirrors the 3 pt line
- ❖ Tape it down every day before practice



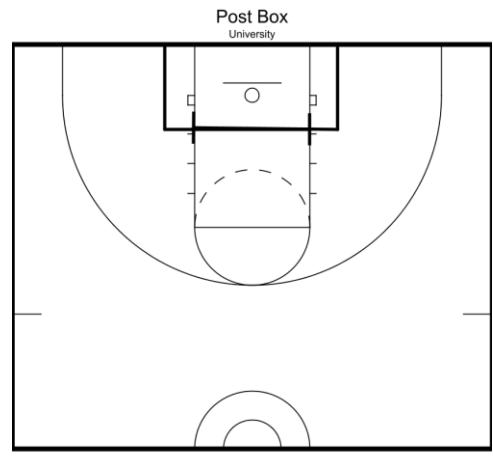
Pack Line: 16-17' from basket

\*Rules

- ❖ GOLDEN RULE: You must have two feet inside the PL when your man does not have the ball
  - Only two exceptions:
    - Your man becomes a cutter
    - Your man becomes a ball screener
- ❖ On-ball defender must play with extreme ball pressure
- ❖ On-ball defender CANNOT get beat baseline under any circumstances, nor can he get beat in a straight line (from a poor close out)
  - It's all about what you emphasize: A Xavier basketball player WILL NEVER get beat baseline – this is non-negotiable!

\*Post Defense

- ❖ Tape the "Post Box" down every day before practice also
  - Rectangle 1.5' off the lane running across the 2<sup>nd</sup> hash mark

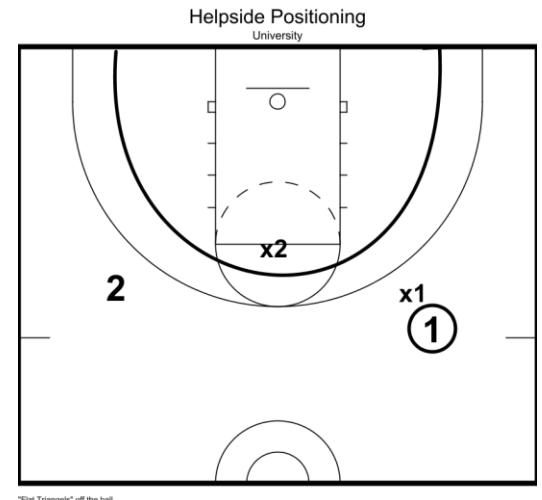


Post Box: 1.5' feet outside of lane across 2nd hash

- ❖ General Rule: Post defender should be positioned “¾ on the high side”
- ❖ The post defender uses a clenched fist arm bar to push his man out of the “Post Box”
- ❖ If your man catches the ball in the post:
  - “Pop Back” (jump to play from behind) and “Wall Up” (show the referee your hands)

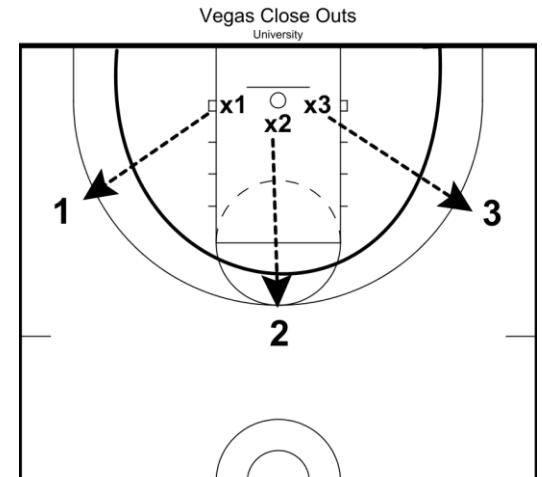
#### \*Fundamentals & Drills

- ❖ Positioning on the ball
  - Extreme ball pressure – make the dribbler as uncomfortable as possible
  - Take away vision
  - Unacceptable to ever get beat baseline or in a straight line
- ❖ Positioning off the ball
  - Player must have two feet inside the PL
  - “Open” stance in helpside positioning
  - Helpside defender wants to form a “Flat Triangle” between his man and the ball
    - This is called “being in your gap”
  - Because the off-ball defender’s gap is always changing, he must be able to see both man and ball at all times – he must “be in two places at once”
  - “Jump & Swipe” when moving from on-ball to off-ball position... Why?
    - Puts you in better help position
    - May get a piece of the ball (Ronald Nored from Butler made a career off doing this)

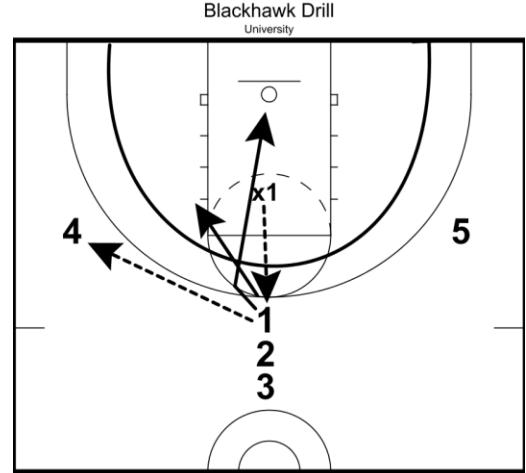


"Flat Triangles" off the ball

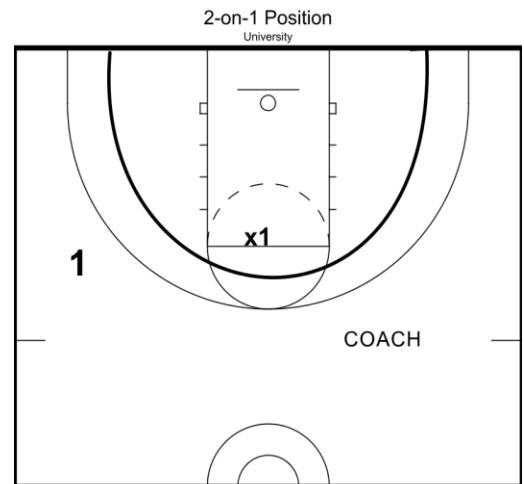
- ❖ Close Out
  - \*\*One of the most important fundamentals to this defense! You must work on this every single day (including pre-game warm-ups)
  - Xavier Way: “Close out with two high hands”
    - Why “two high hands” instead of one?
      - Discourages rhythm shots and quick passes over the top
      - Creates a mentality to “take away vision”
  - Drill: “VEGAS CLOSE OUTS”
    - We do this drill every single day (practice, shoot around, pre-game warm-ups, etc.)
    - Each defender tosses the ball to offensive player
    - Xavier Way to close out:
      - 2 High hands, elbows bent, low stance, short/choppy steps, stay square, yell “SHOT” early
    - The offense will catch, triple-threat, jab step and rip the ball through a couple of times



- ❖ Drill: “BLACKHAWK”
  - Great drill from Sean Miller that incorporates closing out, ball pressure, jumping to help position, fronting cutters, and closing out from help position
  - \*\*\*Closing out from a help position is one of the toughest fundamental to master defensively\*\*\*
    - x1 throws ball to first offensive player (1) in line and close out
    - 1 can pass to either wing, x1 must “jump and swipe” to get to appropriate help position, 1 basket cuts, x1 must use arm bar and “bump cutter” to the logo (below the FT line)
    - Wing will pass to next offensive player in line (2), x1 must close out again – this time from a help position
    - After two or three passes from wing to top to wing back to top, the Coach will yell “LIVE”
      - Two players play 1-on-1 off the close out
      - Offense has 2-3 dribble max to score
      - x1 must get a stop to complete the drill – if offense scores, x1 restarts drill
  - Coaching Points:
    - Make sure x1 keeps proper fundamentals during the dummy period of the drill



- ❖ Drill: “2-on-1 Position”
  - Coach starts with the ball, x1 is matched up with 1
  - Coach can pass to 1, dribble him out, cut him through, etc. forcing x1 to play on and off the ball
  - Drill lasts for a prescribed amount of time, no one looks to score – just focus on constant offensive movement
  - Coaching Points:
    - Make sure x1 plays with proper fundamentals throughout the drill:
      - Close outs from ball to help & help to ball
      - Jump & Swipe
      - Bump Cutter
      - Protect against baseline & straight line drives
      - Intense ball pressure

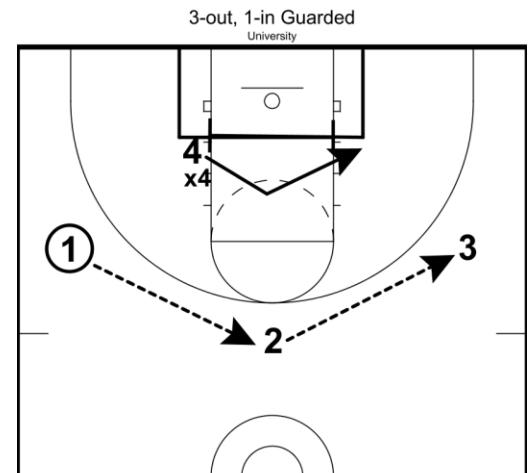


- ❖ Post Positioning
  - Golden Rule: NEVER GIVE UP POST FEEDS FROM THE TOP
    - Post defender should always be “on the line, up the line” when ball is up top
  - A post defender’s work should be done before the ball is ever passed
    - Use an armbar to push the post player out of the “post box” before the catch
    - Play  $\frac{3}{4}$  on the high side (except if player flashes to the high post)
  - On a post catch:
    - “Pop Back”
      - Move from  $\frac{3}{4}$  high-side position to behind, keep a boxer’s stance
    - “Wall Up”
      - As post makes move, show the ref your hands and hold position with your lower body and try to walk through the offensive player
        - “Walk through the shooter!”

- “Walling up” also provides great box out positioning and prevents easy offensive rebounds
- “Show the ref your hands and foul the hell out of him with your hips”
- Undisciplined post defenders try to block their own man’s shots
  - The on-ball post defender should never leave his feet when walling up, even when the shot goes up
  - For every one block a player may get, he’ll pick up three fouls
  - Great shot blockers get their swats from a help position

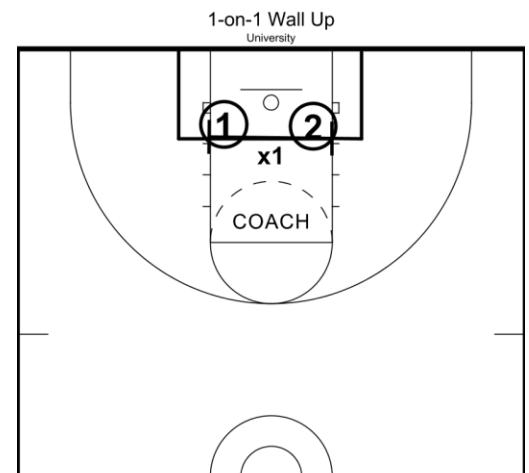
❖ Drill: “3-OUT, 1-IN GUARDED”

- Drill begins with ball on the wing
- Offensive post tries to get position inside the box, post defender plays  $\frac{3}{4}$  on the high side and uses arm bar to force a catch outside the box
- On a pass from wing to top, post defender plays “on the line, up the line” as offensive post tries to leg whip and seal, post defender can’t play too high and give up lob
- On a pass from the top to opposite wing, the post defender hits offensive post with an arm bar and “peels” to resume  $\frac{3}{4}$  high side positioning outside the post box



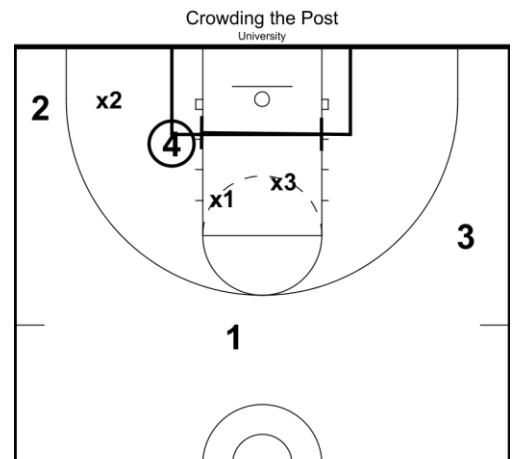
❖ Drill: “1-on-1 WALL UP”

- Drill works on “walling up” against shot attempts from offensive rebounds
- Coach will lob ball up off of backboard to offensive player 1
- 1 will offensive rebound the ball, x1 will “wall up” and try to push 1 out of the post box with his hips
  - “Show the ref your hands”
  - Do not leave your feet!
- 1 does not try to shoot, rather just battle for shooting position inside the post box
- After a few pivots, 1 will pass the ball back to Coach who will then repeat the drill on the opposite side with player 2
- Run this drill for a prescribed number of reps
- Optional conclusion to drill: x1 has to finish drill by taking a charge from either 1 or 2 lowering their shoulder
- Coaching Point:
  - So many offensive players will throw up bad lay-up attempts either because their feet aren’t set, or because their positioning is poor in relation to the basket

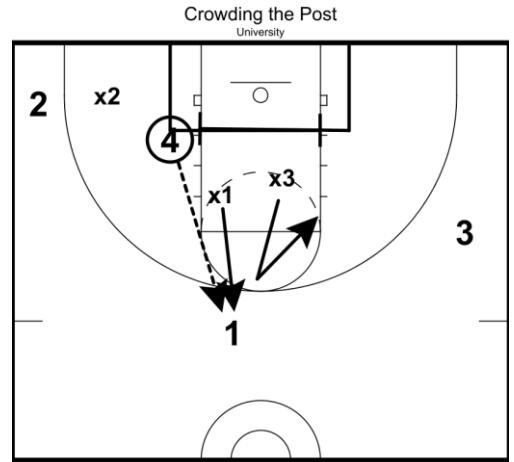


❖ Defending the Post from the Perimeter

- “Crowding the Post”
  - Requires great **COMMUNICATION!**
  - All defenders have an open stance
  - Must be in “two places at once”
  - “See both” post player and man
    - Be able to close out correctly on pass out
  - x2 has “butt to baseline”

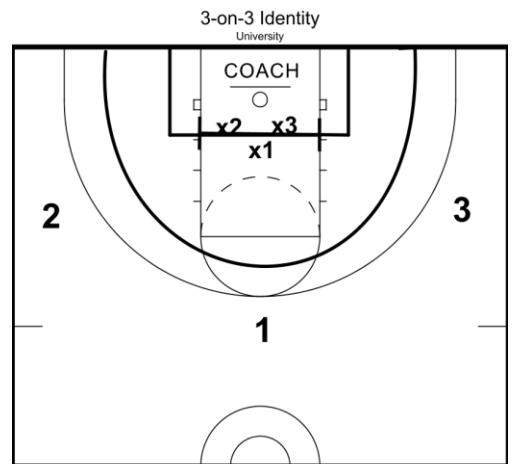


- x3 will help on x2's man:
  - Most likely pass out of post is to top
  - x3 will "jump and swipe" on x2's man to hold him up until x2 closes out



❖ Drill: "3-ON-3 IDENTITY"

- Great drill Xavier runs through almost daily
- Coach is under basket and passes ball to one of the three offensive players
- Offense has :20 to score
  - Offense can do whatever they want to score but ball screen
  - 3 dribble max per touch
- Early season practice: 4-5 possessions for each team
- In-season practice: 2-3 possessions for each team
- Scoring:
  - 3 pt shot = +3
  - 2 pt shot = +2
  - TO = -1 for offense
  - Foul = -1 for defense (still same possession)
  - Off. Rebound = +2
  - If ball ever goes inside of post box (not including offensive rebound) = +2 (still same possession)



❖ Drill: "3-OUT, 1-IN IDENTITY"

- Same rules as above, just add post player and post defender

❖ Transition Defense

- 1/3 of all possessions in a game are transition
- It is virtually impossible to put any pressure on the ball in these situations
- Xavier Way: 1 & 2 never offensive rebound, always sprint back – no exceptions
  - Coaches get themselves into trouble when they start making exceptions for certain match-ups