JUNIOR DOMESTIC COACHING GUIDE

No Zone Defence

A guide to player-to-player defence for coaches, team managers and families in U8, U10, U12 and U14 basketball.

What the rule asks of teams

Westgate's Operations Manual requires player-to-player defence, which it calls man-to-man, throughout games for U14 and younger. See the source note on page 3. Each defender starts with an opponent and adjusts as the ball and players move. In a zone defence, the primary assignment is an area of the court and defenders pick up whoever enters it.

Why it matters

Player-to-player defence gives juniors practice containing the dribbler, moving on the pass, helping teammates and recovering under control. It gives the offence more chances to drive, cut, pass and make decisions close to the basket.

Four habits to teach

Match up early

On a change of possession, protect the basket first, then find and call your matchup. In half-court player-to-player defence, be ready to pick up at halfway, subject to the mercy rule.

See your player and the ball

Pressure the ball under control. Off the ball, move closer to your player as the ball gets nearer. When your player is away from the ball, move towards the middle to help.

React to cutters and screens

Follow a cutter or briefly cover their path while a teammate recovers. If you switch, call it and take the new matchup. Both attackers should remain accounted for.

Help, then recover

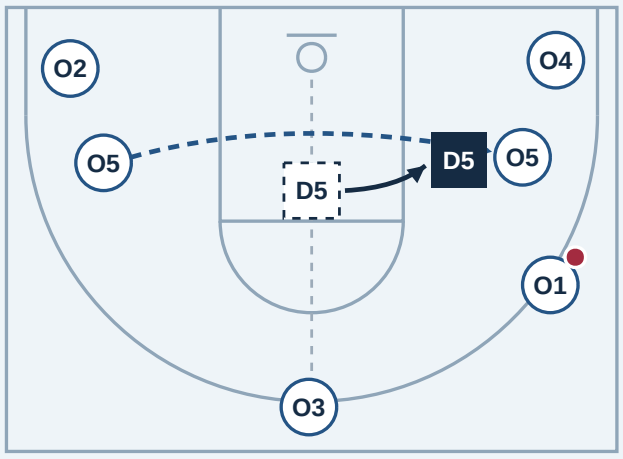
Step across to stop a drive. As the danger passes, recover to your player or rotate to an open opponent while a teammate takes yours. Close out under control by slowing down as you reach the player with the ball.

Westgate game conditions

Short-handed teams. The No Zone rule exempts a defending team with fewer than five players on court. **Mercy rule.** For U10 to U14, a team leading by 20 or more falls back inside its defensive three-point arc and plays player-to-player, unless the trailing coach opts out. The referee may stop play to apply the mercy rule.

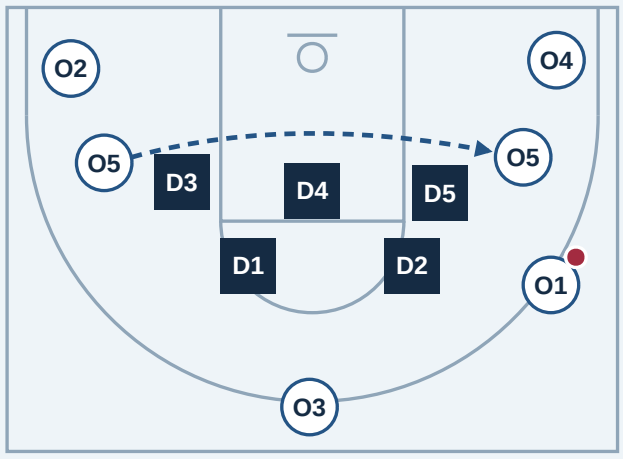
How to recognise a zone

Watch what defenders do when the offence cuts or passes. A defender can be in the key to help, especially when their player is on the far side. The response to movement shows who they are guarding.



Player-to-player help

D5 starts on the split line, the imaginary line down the middle of the court. As O5 cuts towards the ball, D5 leaves the key to track the cut. The other defenders are omitted here to show the matchup.



Area defence in a 2–3

Two defenders are high and three are low. O5 makes the same cut through the key, but the defenders repeatedly hold their areas through cuts like this, leaving the cutter untracked.

O = attacker. D = defender. Red dot = ball. Dashed blue arrow = cut.

What to watch over several possessions

Positioning after a pass
The ball changes sides and a defender repeatedly holds the same area even as their likely matchup becomes a threat.

A cut through the key
A cutter repeatedly crosses the lane without being followed, briefly covered or picked up on a switch.

Recovery after help or a trap
Once the drive or trap ends, defenders keep covering areas without trying to find matchups.

Matchups after a press
Once the offence is set near the basket, defenders keep the press's area assignments and never match up. Follow Westgate's game rules on whether and where to press.

Give the defence the benefit of the doubt

A missed switch, a scramble back to the basket or one late recovery can happen in player-to-player defence. Look for a repeated pattern when the offence moves people and the ball. A static attack gives you little to judge. A defender can give their opponent room to receive a pass and still be matched up.

If you suspect a zone

Keep coaching your team and raise the concern through your club representative. That is Westgate's published first point of contact for junior domestic matters.

1. **During the game, create movement.** Ask players to pass from one side to the other or cut through the key and out towards the ball. Watch the defensive response across several settled possessions.
2. **Note what happened.** Record the fixture, age group and division, date, venue, teams and approximate game times. Describe the offensive movement, which defenders reacted and whether the same pattern repeated.
3. **After the game, contact your club representative.** Send a written report to your club representative, who can forward it to Westgate. Families can start with their coach or team manager. Keep the concern within your club and away from the opposition.

> **Example of a useful report**
> "U12, second half, about 9:10 and 7:45 remaining. We passed from the left wing to the right wing and one player cut across the key. On both possessions the low defenders held their spots and the cutter reached the ball side without a defender following or switching."

What Westgate reviews. Westgate reviews the written and video evidence provided and tells both teams its findings. For a confirmed first breach, the coach and team receive a warning. A second or later breach by the team results in a game forfeit. If you have footage you're permitted to share, send full possessions privately through your club.

Practise it in 3-on-3

Start with the ball at the top and an attacker on each wing. Have the passer cut through after a wing entry. Pause once to ask each defender who they have and where the ball is. Restart with a drive so the nearest helper stops the ball and the group recovers to matchups. Rotate who defends the ball, helps and recovers.

Sources and further viewing

- Basketball Australia, *Zone Buster Manual* (2009), the basis for the defensive examples.
- EDJBA, *An EDJBA Guide to the No Zone Policy* and current EDJBA No Zone Policy.
- Westgate Basketball Association, Operations Manual, section 6 (copy available in May 2026) and Competition By-Laws, clauses 12.1 and 13.1.
- Basketball Victoria, *VJBL No Zone Information* video with on-court examples.

Before publication. Confirm the local rule and reporting details against the September 2026 Operations Manual. This draft uses the preceding accessible copy.