

A Killer 1-3-1 Half-court Trap John Beilein Would be Proud of

Posted by bruchu Labels: [Presses and Traps](#), [Zone Defense](#)

I've never run the 1-3-1 half-court trap myself but with the right personnel, I think it's a potential game changing killer trap that can be employed. A couple of years ago, the number one varsity team in our state ran it in certain situations and it just wreaked havoc.

Now, probably the most famous current college coach to run the 1-3-1 half-court trap is John Beilein now of Michigan and formerly of West Virginia. In fact, coach Beilein runs it as his base defense.

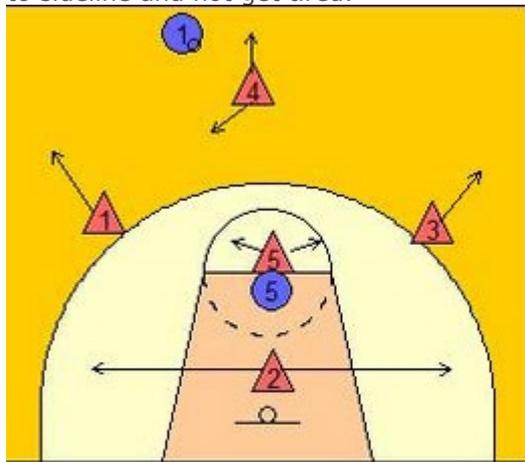
The 1-3-1 trap that Beilein runs is probably more conservative than I would employ, which is understandable as he runs it as his base. The more aggressive you are, the more turnovers you will generate, but the more holes there will be should the other team break the trap.

I don't think I would run the 1-3-1 trap as my base as it requires your players to constantly adjust to passes and ball reversals. I would choose certain times within a game to run it, like right out of the half or beginning of the fourth, basically anytime you want to change the momentum or tempo of the game. With the 1-3-1, here is what you want to accomplish:

1. Put a ton of ball pressure on their point-guard. You can really rattle their guard with this trap, it's all about breaking his/her confidence which will make them even more susceptible to turn it over or make bad decisions.
2. Force the terms. Make the other team adjust to the defense, don't allow them to run their sets.

Setup:

In my opinion, there are 2 key positions you need to run the 1-3-1 effectively. You need a very athletic X4 who has long arms, great instincts and can finish on the break. You also need a great all-around defender in X2 (or whoever you designate to play baseline). You want your best defender at X2, someone who is hard-nosed, can take charges, rebounds well, and can run sideline to sideline and not get tired.



In the diagram above, X4 is your primary trapper and stealer. X4 should be parallel to the sideline facing it with arms outstretched. The team I described above had a 6-foot-7 SG (NBA potential) who just terrorized his opponents with this press. If you have a player like that, you want him playing up top trapping and getting steals and finishing on the other end. In one game I watched, district championship, they switched to the 1-3-1 at the start of the 4th with the game virtually tied, X4 terrorized the other all-state PG into 4 or 5 turnovers and had 2 tomahawk thunder dunks the other way and just brought down the house. They never looked back and went on to win by 12.

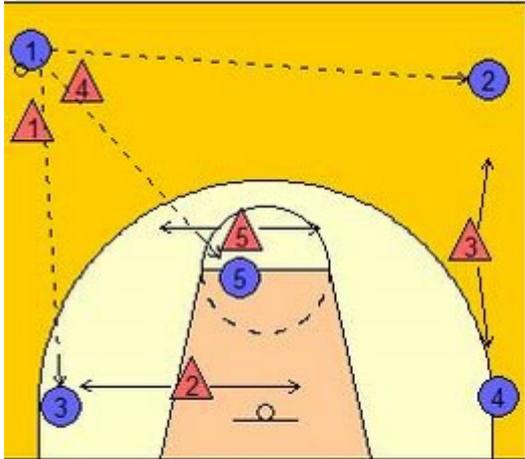
X2 is your best overall defender playing down low, key is to minimize layups. You want to trap with

all four corners. You will give up some 3-pointers but you want to contest all layups. If the other team hasn't scouted you properly and hasn't prepared for the 1-3-1, they'll likely be so out of sync they won't even hit the gaps.

Your other 3 that make the line through the middle, X3 and X2 must be good trappers and work the sidelines while 5 must front his man preventing the pass in the middle. Usually your X5 is your tallest player covering that middle area.

Trap the corners:

The trap is a slow one to develop, you don't want X4 and X1 or X4 and X3 to run at the point-guard.



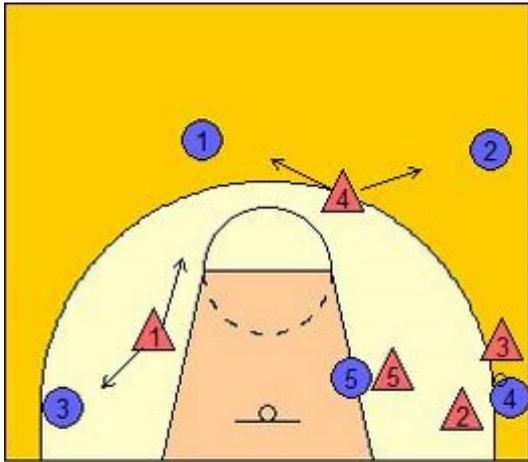
What you want is your X4 slowly funneling the point to X1 or X3 (X3 or left side if possible, but most point guards will try to force right). Once their point takes the bait and dribbles to the sideline, you aggressively trap him forcing P1 to pick up the dribble. Before the trap is set, the 3 defenders making the line want to keep their arms out looking to intercept a lazy pass through the zone.

Most of the time, X4 will be able to either flick the ball and get a turnover, or deflect a pass. The only easy pass you want to allow is the reversal back to P2. If this happens, X4 and X3 will attempt to set the trap on the other sideline, SLOWLY.

If the pass goes down the sideline to the other corner, you want to trap them again before they shoot the 3-pointer.

Secondary Trap:

Obviously, this trap is vulnerable at the baseline after ball reversals. Once the ball goes there, you have a couple of choices, trap the ball in the corner or shift and wait for help. I prefer the trap since the whole purpose of this defense is to create turnovers.



A team that hasn't prepared for the 1-3-1 will not look for the 3-pointer in the corner, so trap them there with X2 and X3 or X2 and X1 on the other side. Force them into another turnover.

X5 again protects the middle by fronting his man. X4 is splitting P2 and P1. Again, he's your best athlete so he should be able to intercept the pass from the corner if the trap set is a good one. X1 is covering the skip pass but is probably shading a little towards the key for help defense.

Summary:

The key areas you want to force the turnover is at the top near the sidelines. If you have a great X4 that can intimidate your opponent, this is a great defense to run.

Like I said, I wouldn't want to run it as my base like coach Beilein runs, but I think in certain situations, this is a game breaker. One of the other reasons why I wouldn't run it as a base is because teams that scout you will prepare specifically on how to break it. They will scheme to adjust for open 3-pointers and layups down low exploiting the gaps.

Unfortunately, John Beilein has not created a DVD with his 1-3-1 half-court trap, but [this DVD from Seth Greenberg](#) of Virginia Tech appears to teach it similarly.

Go over the [Coaching Basketball Forum](#) to discuss.