"Defense wins you championships!" *James Naismith, 1898.*

Ok, James Naismith did not actually say that when he invented [stole the idea for] the sport of basketball.

The only reason I suggest Naismith said this is because it seems as though this cliché has been around since the dawn of the game that Lambert Will actually created .

But does that fact make this cliché true?

If you asked Mike O'Antoni [because there really shouldn't be a "D" in his name], that is hogwash. The Lakers next casualty, along with a bevy of new wave "AAU" style coaches would have you believe the opposite. Their claim would be that the object of the game is to outscore your opponent.

Thus the cliché, "the best defense is a good offense!"

We either are at a crossroads with what to believe, or simply that you can find a cliché for anything, especially in sports.

So which is it? Does defense win championships as Charles Barkley suggests, or does outscoring your opponent get the job done, as Paul Westhead would have you believe?

What about both? Some would suggest that the simplification of combining both ideologies is obvious. Well, you know what William of Ockham said after he shaved…

The fact is, you can make good arguments for both philosophies, and you might even be able to prove them and disprove the other. That's the problem; both arguments can be proven and dis-proven to a degree. That is why they call it philosophy, and why a lot of people drop that class due to the migraines from over-thinking.

So in regards to basketball, which is correct, because nobody likes being wrong and everyone likes being right? Any answer that lies in the middle is just not acceptable.

Let's oversimplify then, shall we?

If you could score 1 point, and keep the other team from scoring, you win! What does that mean? It means you need to, at the very least, score a point, so you need to be able to score. **Y eah Offense!**

But wait a second! Don't you also need to ensure that the other team does not score more than you, requiring you to stop the other team? That would be defense. **Yeah Defense!**

Some argue that it isn't about winning or losing, but about being fun to watch. Certainly an offensive onslaught is a lot of fun, especially compared to a grind it out defensive juggernaut. **Y eah Offense!**

Yet others would say, who chants "Offense! Offense! Offense!"? Nobody, that is who. **Yeah Defense!**

Does the truth lie somewhere in between?

I have coached somewhere around 28 teams [not really sure of the exact number, have to count] and have had offensive oriented teams, defensive oriented teams, teams that could do both well [i like those teams] and teams that couldn't do either [ugh!].

Looking back at my experience from those seasons helps me develop my thoughts on the philosophy of offense versus defense. Certainly teams that could play on both ends of the floor were very successful teams, while those that were not particularly skilled on either end struggled mightily. Taking those situations out of the equation, what can we learn from the teams that leaned one way or the other?

My teams that played well on offense, but not so on D, could at times blow opponents out in spectacular fashion. When we were rolling on the offensive end, it would seem we were unbeatable. Shots were falling and forced teams into scrambling around trying to focus on stopping us, which would prove the adage that our offense was our best defense. Making a high percentage of shots allowed us to avoid getting beat in transition, put the opponent on their heels, and frankly demoralized them which also played into their lack of confidence on the other end of the floor. **YEAH OFFENSE!**

Unfortunately, at times those teams would also get blown out of the gym themselves. When our shots weren't falling, we would start to force the action, resulting in easy transition opportunities by our opponents. We were on *our* heels trying to get back to stop the other team from getting easy looks. *Our* heads were down and we were demoralized. There were games against inferior teams we shouldn't have lost, and then games against superior teams we probably shouldn't have won. You never knew which team would show up, and were inconsistent in terms of wins/losses and frankly effort. They were also frustrating teams.

I have also had teams that were not offensively proficient, yet were defensively skilled. While looking at it from a pure wins/losses perspective, I am not sure the record of the defensive team was that much different than the offensive team [although I think on the whole, my defensive teams did win slightly more games]. Yet from a competitive standpoint, one thing was very clear; my defensive oriented teams competed much better than my offensive oriented teams, and it was not even close. Sure, we would lose games, but I don't think we were ever blown out. In fact, in many of the games we lost, we had chances to win, but couldn't pull it out [ironically enough due to our lack of ability to score].

From game to game, it was much easier to predict outcomes based on the level of our opponent. Unlike the offensive oriented teams, our ability to defend was consistent. There weren't games where we were not effective on that end of the floor, and that allowed us to stay close with superior teams. Our inability to play well offensively would certainly be the blame for the losses, yet we competed on a much higher, more consistent level. While there were frustrations, these teams were much more enjoyable to coach because they players put in great effort and you can't get too down when your players do that.

The conclusions I draw from these experiences have shaped my philosophy. If you have a team that is good enough to compete for a championship, it is impossible to do so without proficiency on both ends of the floor. Sure, a very skilled offensive, but mediocre defensive team may compile a very daunting record [or vise versa]. However, my experiences with those teams showed that at the point where you are in playoff competition, teams have weeded the weaker element out of the tournament and your team will face only very good basketball teams from that point on. If you are deficient on one end of the floor, regardless of the fact you might have handily beaten almost every opponent that regular season, the top two or three teams in the league will challenge you because they are probably equal to you or better on one end of the floor or the other.

So, all of that and you say "Both!" Jason?

Well, yes!

But I will say this… Defense may not necessarily win you a championship, but it will absolutely allow you to compete. Offense may make your games fun and exciting, and you might even blow some people out.

CLICHÉ WARNING: William Osler said, " What is the student but a lover courting a fickle mistress who ever eludes his grasp? " I think the mistress he was talking about is offense.

There are many things that can affect your ability to score. You can be having a good or bad night. Your confidence can be diminished. The defense might match up well against what you do. Any number of things can cause your offensive game to tank from one game to the next.

Defense is constant. It is a mentality of competing. Sure, you might physically be tired or injured, but from a mental standpoint, defense relies less on confidence and feel, and more on aggression and effort. Those two things allow teams to compete at a high level.

When it comes to a team that is bad at both, it is much more appropriate to focus on the defensive end of the floor, because watching a team consistently compete hard every game is better than watching a team that looks good one night and is embarrassing the next, when record-wise there is not much difference in wins and losses.

For a better part of the last decade, Suns fans have endured this debate. Charles Barkley was proven correct, as he noted so boisterously on last night's TNT telecast, about the fact that an all offense, little defense philosophy is fun but gets you nowhere. While nobody brought up the fact that all defense and little offense is no fun and gets you nowhere, it does illustrate exactly why the Suns front office deems it important to inject defense into their culture.

But doing so takes more than saying so. It will be interesting to see the ongoing changes that will be made to begin the transition into a more defensive mindset. Part of that means forgoing players that can score in favor of player that defend. It remains to be seen whether that philosophy will actually translate onto the court and into rotations. Certainly guys like Beasley, Brown, Johnson, Morris and Marshal, all not known to be even adequate defenders, would likely see less floor time than guys like Dudley, Dragic, Tucker, Scola and O'Neal, who all have shown a tendency to put more effort to that end of the floor. Alvin Genrty finally figured that out by going to a lineup of Dragic, Dudley, Tucker, Scola and Gortat. We shall see whether that lineup dominates and holds it's rightful spot under the Hunter regime and whether they are going to be true to their word about defense, or if it is all just words.