



Mike Brown gets defensive about his Cleveland Cavaliers



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Mike Brown has three defensive rules: 1. Protect the paint. 2. Five guys on a string. 3. Give multiple effort. (Lonnie Timmons III / The Plain Dealer)

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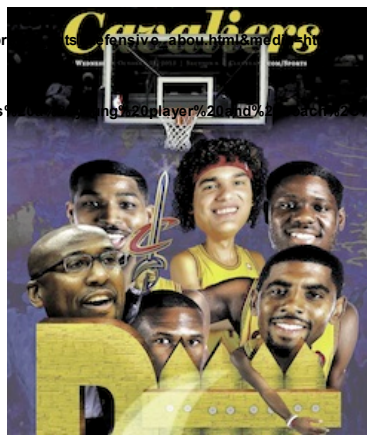
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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Mike Brown's affinity for defense goes back to his days as a player in high school in Germany, in junior college in Arizona, and in college at the University of San Diego.

"That's all I could do," the Cavaliers coach said, laughing. "I wasn't a natural scorer or shooter. But I was always the type that felt if I outworked this person just in life in general, then I'd give myself or my team a chance to win.

"If I could take somebody's heart, I tried to take their heart that way. I'd try to make them quit. I don't know any other way."



Mike Brown gets defensive about his Cavaliers
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When Brown arrived at Mesa Community College, coach Tom Bennett had never seen him play in person or on tape. Bennett accepted Brown on the advice of a friend who played and coached in Europe. Not long after the coach and player shook hands for the first time, Bennett started remaking Brown's shot, which he pulled back too far.

"When we first met and I watched him play for a little while, when he was done I said, 'How serious are you about this?'" Bennett said of Brown. "He said, 'Very.' I said, 'Then we've got to change your shot.' He said, 'When do we start?'"

But Brown doesn't remember Bennett for fixing his shot. He says Bennett is the coach who truly taught him to love defense.

"He stands out as ... one of the first guys to coach me who really appreciated that end of the floor and for me, mentally and physically, took it to another level about how to be a great defender or a great defensive team," Brown said.

Bennett doesn't remember a big heart-to-heart with Brown about the importance of defense.

"We sold the same Kool Aid to all of them -- we had to be good defensively if we were going to be a good team," Bennett said, laughing. "Some nights you're not going to shoot well, so we had to be good defensively."

The Thunderbirds were good. They won 30 straight games and were ranked No. 1 in the country while Brown was in school. Six players on the team, including Brown, went on to start at NCAA Division I colleges.

But none of them took defense to heart the way Brown did. For the Cavaliers coach, defense has become a way of life. What began in earnest at Mesa Community College only increased at Brown's NBA stops in Denver, Washington, San Antonio and Indiana.

"When I was in San Antonio and we were good -- we happened to win a championship while I was there -- it was all predicated on our defense," Brown said. "[Gregg Popovich] has kept the defensive identity but he has expanded the game offensively for that group. But defense was the mainstay and I saw it work on nights when we couldn't make shots. So I really believed in it after being with those guys and hearing all the statistics that you hear.

"If you look at the past 20 NBA champions -- I showed this to our team -- there's only one team that finished out of the top 10 defensively. They finished 11th. Two or three teams finished eighth. Other than that, everybody else basically finished in the top five. So that's something that I believe in, not only because I've been through it and lived through it, but also because of what the statistics say in black and white."

Brown's statistics in his first stint with the Cavs -- his first head coaching job -- prove his point. His record was 272-138 from 2005-10 and his teams consistently ranked near the top of the NBA in defense. Among all NBA head coaches who coached their team(s) 400 games or more during the same period of time Brown was coaching, Brown's teams held opponents to the fourth-lowest shooting percentage per game (44.5 percent) and the second-lowest 3-point shooting percentage (34.5 percent). His teams also had the highest rebound rate (52.3 percent), which is often cited as a measurement of a team's defense, hustle and intensity.

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11/4	vs. Min <small>(http://stats.cleveland.com/nba/teamstats.asp?teamno=16&type=totstats)</small>	7:00 ET
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11/8	@ Phi <small>(http://stats.cleveland.com/nba/teamstats.asp?teamno=20&type=totstats)</small>	7:00 ET

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After three years near the bottom of the league defensively, the Cavs brought Brown back to rectify that problem.

"He is going to instill a much-needed defensive-first philosophy in our young and talented team that is going to serve as our foundation and identity as we continue down the path of building the kind of franchise that competes at a championship level for many years to come," Cavs owner Dan Gilbert said in a press release when Browns was rehired in April.


The basics of Brown's defense have not changed. He is teaching Kyrie Irving and Tristan Thompson to play defense the same way he taught LeBron James. When asked to explain his defensive philosophy, Brown takes a deep breath and recites the three principles he knows by heart.

"The first thing is, we want to make sure that we protect the paint," he said. "We don't want to give up middle drives. Our help comes from the bottom weak side defender. So we want to keep the ball out of the paint or the middle of the floor. If we're giving up anything, we're giving up contested twos. So we want to shrink the floor. It's almost like a zone that we'll play. We want to shrink the floor, play boxes and elbows and protect the paint. The last thing is we want to be a physical defensive team. We want to make our opponents to feel us. We don't want them cutting through the paint or making any sort of move at all without feeling our bodies.

"The second thing is, we want five guys on a string. It's impossible for one guy to guard his man in this business. So it's five guys guarding the basketball. It's not, 'Kyrie, you guard Derrick Rose,' or 'Tristan, you guard Tim Duncan.' It's five guys guarding the basketball. So when the ball moves or an individual moves, all five guys should move on defense.

"The third and last thing we preach is we want to give multiple effort. Sometimes you have to shrink the floor and help tag the cutter. Then I may have to close out. Then I may have to cut the drive off. Then I may have to box out. Or I may have to go contest and box out for the rebound. We want to contest every shot to rebound.

"In a nutshell, that's our defensive philosophy. At the end of the day, the biggest thing for us is, if all that goes out the window, then we've just got to cover for one another, keep scrambling, communicate, give effort and trust that your teammate is going to be there to help you."



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Kyrie Irving had 15 points and nine assists to lead the Cavaliers past the remodeled Nets in coach Mike Brown's first game back with Cleveland. **More CineSport videos »**
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