



How Avery Bradley became a superstar stopper

"... with defense you can never have an off game"

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By: Anne Stein

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The list of NBA stars who've been thwarted by Avery Bradley is long. From Klay Thompson and Steph Curry to Kyrie Irving, Damian Lillard and Russell Westbrook, few players enjoy an easy game when Bradley's trying to stop them.

The 6-foot-2 guard, now in his ninth NBA season, has always loved playing defense. “When I was growing up people thought it was weird, because when you’re a kid, you watch the NBA and you want to do all the fancy moves. But for me it was a pride thing. I wanted not only to play well on the offensive end, but to be able to shut down whoever I was playing against as well.”

The soft-spoken Bradley says defense is all about effort. It’s his mentality going into every game.

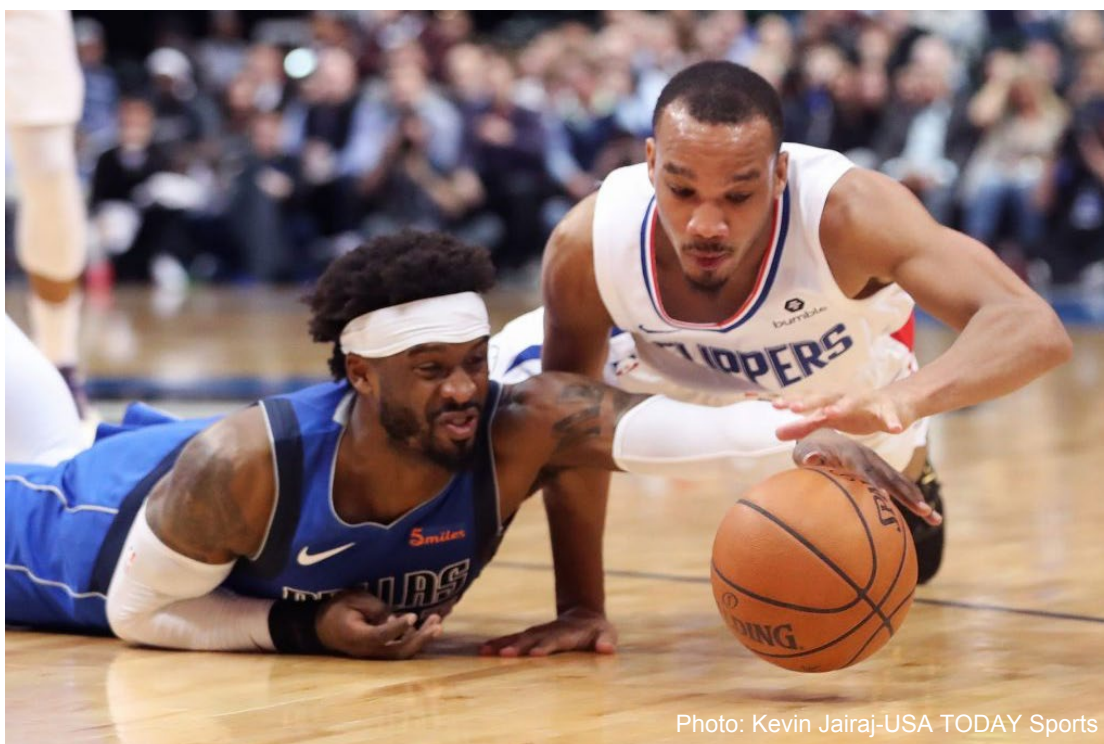


Photo: Kevin Jairaj-USA TODAY Sports

“If you want to be a good defender you can be. You just have to have the mentality to go in there and play as hard as you can on the defensive end.”

“For me,” continues Bradley, “offensive players read and set up moves based off of what they can make you do. As a defender, I force offensive players into moves so I can get steals or stops, so it’s the same thing.”

Now playing for the Memphis Grizzlies, Bradley grew up in the Seattle

area and was inspired by the Seattle SuperSonics' Gary Payton, the only point guard to win the NBA's Defensive Player of the Year title. "Just watching his defensive abilities and mindset every single game motivated me," Bradley says. (His offense, by the way, was inspired by Detlef Schrempf).

Twice named to the NBA All-Defensive team, Bradley got a huge thrill his second season, when a journalist came up with "The Rip List." "I think I ripped (pressured, forced turnovers, stopped) every point guard in the NBA and they made that list," he says. "For me that was a big-time accomplishment to finally see that my defensive abilities were being recognized."



The best drills for being a good defender are closeout drills, says Bradley. Here's what to focus on:

Closeout drills

Be able to chop your feet, stop short, know who you are guarding (know

your personnel), know if the guy is slow or fast, a driver or a shooter, or both. Be able to close out short or close-in so you can dictate what you want the player to do. Don't let the player get to the middle.

Here's more advice from an NBA assistant coach:

- Closeout drills are more about technique. **It's about footwork and rate.**
- If I'm defending a shooter I have to get closer. **If he's a non-shooter I'm a little bit farther away to stop the drive.**
- Closeout drills are very critical in today's game **because of the ability of all five positions to stretch the floor out to three-point areas.**
- We don't want the ball to get to the middle of the floor. **You have to try to run out there and push everything down to the sidelines so the closeout is important because if it goes back to the middle, it opens up all kinds of options on the drive and kick.**



Photo: Greg M. Cooper-USA TODAY Sports

Avery's training tips:

- I always tell people that with defense you can never have an off game. **You can have an off offensive game, where you just don't make shots, but to me defense is all effort.**
- Your hard work (in practice and training) doesn't kick in right away but once it does, you'll know it and you'll start having fun. **This is the most important thing I live by and I know it's true. You have to fight through and persevere through all the ups and downs of training. The work you put in during the summer and off season won't kick in right away, but eventually it will.**
- Believe in yourself. **Confidence is key and it comes from working on your game. I took a public speaking class in high school and they said the easiest thing to talk about is yourself, because you know yourself best. I feel like it's the same thing with basketball. Work on your game until you're so familiar with it and confident in it that you will play your best.**
- Just like you work on your offensive game, you need to work on your defensive game. **It's never not cool or weird to work on your defense. I caught a few college players off guard last summer who were watching me work out and doing defensive drills. They were like, "Huh? Who does defensive drills in the summertime?" It's about being sharp and always trying to improve.**

Anne Stein is a contributor for Mars Reel based in Chicago

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