

Basketball strategy of 'The Klopper' sound as ever

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Those who don't recognize the name may not know it, but they see Kloppenburg all the time, all over the world — especially when they watch the women's game, where fundamentals are applied more often than in male hoops.

It's his defense, the "SOS defense," which calls for contact switching on every screen, trapping and extreme ball pressure. Bob, now 84, has made a nice living off it. Tarkanian hired him at UNLV; he worked 17 years in the NBA with the Rockets, Clippers and the Sonics, and has given clinics all over the globe.

"He was 100 percent basketball, nothing but basketball, a terrific coach," says Tarkanian, the master defensive strategist (Tark being snubbed by the Hall of Fame is a disgrace) who is just concluding his summer stay in San Diego. "He switched every screen — instead of fighting through screens, you switched — which we hadn't done. He stuck with it, always. He was great."

Bob now resides in Seattle (he hopes he and his wife, Gayle, can move to La Costa next year), and I bring him up today for a couple reasons. For one, he has kind of slipped through the cracks around here. Two, a group of his former Cal Western players is honoring him with a roast Saturday night at the Mission Valley Marriott.

"We never had full scholarships at Cal Western," Kloppenburg says. "We were NAIA, but it was strong then, and we held our own with San Diego State and Division II and Division III schools. We built the program from nothing. It was an exciting time.

"It's going to be great to see the guys Saturday. I haven't seen some of them in 50 years. It's a shock they're doing this; I didn't expect it."

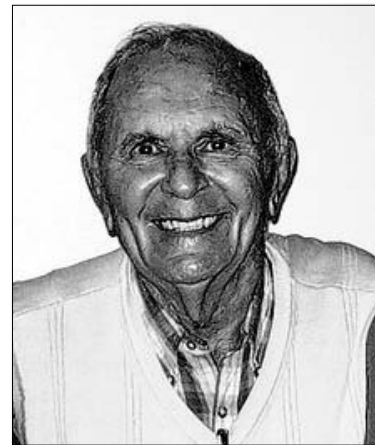
Kloppenburg doesn't travel like he used to, but he remains busy. He has a website —

Hooptactics.com — which covers his defensive tactics.



Written by

Nick Canepa
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“It’s a system that a lot of teams use around the world,” says Bob, who played college ball at USC and Fresno State and is the only pre-1950 L.A. prep (Marshall High) named to the Los Angeles Times’ all-time team. “I’ve done so many clinics; I’ve been in 17 different countries teaching the SOS pressure defense.

“I first implemented it at Cal Western and I built it from there, all the trappings and switching on screens. A lot of teams use phases of it and it’s really popular with women’s teams. It’s disruptive and it can fit into basic systems. It’s hard to play against it, which is why so many coaches around the world use it.”

With the recent success of San Diego State, it’s easy to forget we’ve had some outstanding basketball coaches in this area, with the likes of Kloppenburg, George Ziegenfuss, Morris Gross and Charlie Hampton. They were master basketball coaches in what never was considered a basketball town until the Aztecs’ Steve Fisher turned it up about a thousand notches.

Men such as Kloppenburg coached the game the way it was meant to be played. Some college coaches still are capable of teaching it the right way. Fisher, if you’ve paid attention, even when he had the Fab Five at Michigan, always has stressed defense. When people think of Tarkanian at UNLV, they see the high-scoring Runnin’ Rebels, but his best teams — even when he was at Long Beach State — played marvelous defense.

Kloppenburg doesn’t care much for the way the game to which he basically devoted his life is being played today.

“The NBA was exciting, but more of a business; you don’t get close to the players,” he says. “The most fun I had was at Cal Western because of the relationship with the players. I don’t like the pro game now. It’s too individual, everything’s one on one, and major college ball is moving in that direction. I like the women’s game because they’re really disciplined.

“But this is amazing after 50 years, all the memories. You remember the last shot, the last point.”

It’s good to remember Bob Kloppenburg, a coach whose points still make too much sense.