

Basic Defending

Introduction to Defending

The concept of defending is one of the more overlooked items in teaching players the game of soccer. We will break this section on defending down into team principles, individual principles and drills so that you can get an idea of how what concepts to get across and how to get them across.

What you will usually see with younger players is everyone going for the ball at once.

As the players get a little older the more aggressive steal the ball consistently from the less aggressive, and the less skilled, simply by running straight at them.

This of course works at the younger levels, but as the players develop, and the skill differential decreases, this type of play actually becomes a detriment. Overly aggressive players who try to simply run down their opponents and strip the ball at the travel level often times find themselves missing completely and watching the backs of their opponents as they head down field.

This is not to say that aggressiveness is not important, merely to say that controlled play, especially on defense, is what we want to teach them at a young age so that they carry it forward with them as they progress.

What we need to get across to our youngsters is that defense, like the entire game, is dependent upon their teammates, as well as themselves, to do their job.

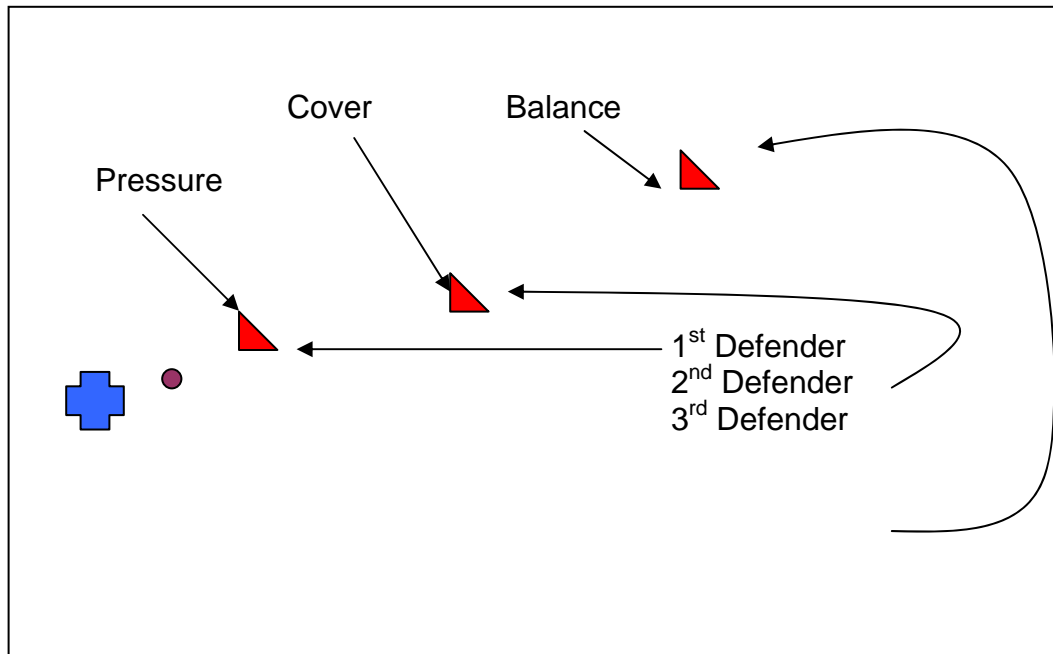
Concepts of Defending

You will hear the terms ***First Defender***, ***Second Defender*** and ***Third Defender*** used in this manual and in any LIJSL coaching course that you take. The ***First Defender*** is the person nearest the attacking ball carrier. The initial job of the first defender is not to steal the ball, but to delay the opponent until his teammates arrive to help.

The ***Second Defender*** is the second person to arrive at the scene. The job of the second defender is to provide ***cover*** for the first defender. That is to cover up any mistake that the first defender might make.

When the second defender arrives on the scene, the job of the first defender changes from ***delay*** to ***pressure***.

The job of the ***Third Defender*** is to provide balance. The positions and jobs of all three defenders is shown in the simple diagram below:



Pressure – Cover – Balance (PCB)

Team Principles of Defense

The basic principles of team defense are as follows

- Collapse - Entire team collapses into less space in front of opponent's point of attack.
- 1st defender guides ball carrier into thickest part of defense or away from middle.
- Covering defenders cut off "through" spaces.
- Together, First and second defenders squeeze attack into tight, difficult space.
 - Concentrate - Gather forces in middle of the field and near the ball before attempting to dispossess the ball.

Individual Principles of Defense

The principles of individual defense are as follows:

- **Delay Then Pressure-**
 - Player nearest the ball is "the 1st Defender":
 - Get ball carrier's head down by putting him under *close enough* pressure to make him worry about controlling the ball and so he cannot look for passing options, **but not close enough to be beaten**; (delay)
- Player(s) not nearest to the ball, get into position to intercept all short or desired passing options; (Provide **Cover**)
 - Leave open most difficult and longest passing options as long as there is good pressure and cover on the ball carrier and his nearest passing options.
- The first defender should not run straight at ball carrier, but should come in at an angle that would force the ball carrier to pass back or to attack toward our

covering defenders or toward a touchline. This makes the opponent's attack predictable and easy to read by covering defenders.

- When the attacker has been contained, but still maintains possession of the ball, the defender would do well to force the attacker to move to the side or even backwards. By forcing laterally, the supporting defenders can gain time to recover. Once recovered, the supporting defenders can enhance their positions as they have more time to adjust. An attacker that is allowed to go forward, causes the whole team to adjust their vertical defensive positions.
- If the defender can force the attacker to go backwards, the defender must try to maintain close pressure to keep the attacker from opening up space. The supporting defense should use this opportunity to push forward as well, compressing the attack away from it's own goal. If the on ball pressure is not there, then the supporting defense would do well not to compress as the attacker will have time and space to find and take advantage of the defensive weak spots.

The 1st defender, in applying pressure to the attacking ball-handler, should:

- **Delay**
 - Staggered stance, alternating front and back foot, feet shoulder width apart, legs bent, body bent, on your toes (don't get flat-footed).
 - Feints and stabs but do not commit until ball-carrier makes a mistake.
 - Concentrate on player, not the ball, look at ball carrier's hips, not his feet or upper body.
 - With peripheral vision, see the space between the ball and ball carrier. If the ball gets away from feet
- **Deny**
 - Deny the shot;
 - Deny penetration by denying "through" spaces which ball carrier desires to penetrate.
 - Close distance between self and ball carrier. Get close enough to force ball carrier to alter course of attack and to force his head down to concentrate on not losing possession of the ball.
 - Choose angle of approach to guide ball carrier away from dangerous space.
 - Block any attempted shot.
- **Destroy**
 - Win possession by tackling **if** ball carrier achieves even position.
 - Win possession by stepping between ball carrier and ball **if** ball gets away from his feet.
 - Tackle also if ball carrier allows ball to be between his own feet. Tackles should be fully committed through center of ball carrier's position.

- The 2nd defender(s), those next nearest to the ball, are those who are marking up to close passing options. They must cover " the space behind teammate who is pressuring the ball; and if numbers are up than extra defender might decide whether to risk double teaming the ball carrier to win the ball.
- The 3rd defender provides **Balance** .- The 3rd and other defenders cover deep and attacking spaces which may be used by the opponent to switch their point of attack, for example, by playing to the opposite wing.

The following are good "rules of Thumb" from Gary Rue – a high school coach from Kentucky:

1. do not allow dribbler to get behind or past the first defender
2. stop or slow down dribbler
3. take away shooting or passing behind the defense options
4. force dribbler sideways or backwards
5. force dribbler to a certain area determined by these factors:
 - field position of the dribbler
 - ability of the dribbler (uni-footed, fast, etc.)
 - location of supporting defender(s) or boundary
 - location of supporting attacker (passing options)
6. keep dribbler's eyes on ball, not allowing the dribbler to look around
7. look for and take advantage of opportunities to tackle the ball
8. maintain defensive presence with dribbler that goes forward after releasing the ball
9. recover quickly into second defender support position when dribbler releases the ball.

1 v 1 Defending – Containment

After the defender has been positioned to prevent the attacker dribbler from getting into paradise (behind the defense), step 2 is to contain the dribbler. That is, to stop or slow down the attack so the defense can recover and organize.

When the attacker is "stopped," the defender can get closer by inching forward via a side-on shuffle, keeping balance or slightly leaning backwards to react to any forward movements by the attacker. The defender should be in constant movement with short hops to keep the feet alive.

If the defender can get the attacker to turn his back, then has won that battle. There are two schools of thought on how to deal with an attacker that has turned his back. The first is to get close with minimal contact, so as not allow the attacker to know exactly where the defender is. Skilled attackers can easily turn on a defender by feeling which side is not being pressured.

The other theory is to apply extreme pressure by charging through the back. The decision making of the referee comes into play on this technique. The defender should be okay, if enough pressure can be applied to keep the attacker off balance, so as not to turn and can keep from pushing or charging in a dangerous manner.

A compromise to the two extremes is the "pop and release" technique. As the attacker turns, the defender "nudges" the attacker and bounces off a little, keeping the feet active. After a second or two, the defender bounces into the attacker again to make him aware of the defender's presence and bounces off to stop the attacker's turn attempt.

In a team defensive scheme, there should not be supporting defenders and perhaps a teammate to double team the attacker. Once support is there, the defender can be more aggressive in an attempt to take the ball from the attacker.

1 v 1 Defending - Pressure

Once the defender is in control of the attacker, forcing him in the defender's direction of preference, it is important that the defender continue to maintain a high level of pressure on the attacker. The defender need not confront the attacker with a tackle attempt, until the defensive support is in place and the defender is ready.

The feint tackle is one way to keep the attacker off-balance. The defender feints a reach for the ball, yet maintains excellent balance and position. The defender should not actually get caught with the body weight going forward, only the feinting foot.

The attacker will have to react (if there is a reaction) in one of two ways. First, he may protect the ball by pulling it back or stepping in with a shielding motion. Or secondly, he may attempt to push the ball past the defender, assuming he is off balance.

In the first case, the defender is forcing the attacker to focus totally on the ball. In the second case, the defender should be in good position to cut-off the attempted pass and possibly be able to step between the attacker and the ball.

1 v 1 Defending -Shepherding

Once the immediate threat of the dribbler beating the defender subsides, the defender should force the attacker towards an area that favors the defender and his team. Referring to the rules of thumb above, in this case #5, there are a few factors that must be considered. If the attacker is in his own defensive third of the field, the defender would do well to force the attacker towards the middle. A lost ball in this area would surely be a scoring opportunity.

If the attacker is in the middle third of the field towards one side, the defender would do well to force the attacker towards the touch, thereby restricting his options. If the team defensive strategy is to funnel the attacker in towards the middle, then that should be the choice.

In the defensive third, almost always take the attacker as wide as possible or keep him wide. If the attacker is in the middle, the defender would do well to stay between the attacker and the goal and to keep the attacker moving laterally. If

possible, take the attacker towards his weaker side (if he has one), but do not give up a shooting angle by getting to one side of the attacker to force him in a direction.

1 v 1 Defending – Maintaining the Mark

If a defender is able to get an attacker wide deep in the defender's territory, the defender should not over commit and allow the attacker to beat him, i.e. allow the goal line. This is one of the worst attacking situations to have to defend.

One of the best ways to break down a single defender is the one-two combination. That is, the attacker plays the ball to a teammate, runs forward and receives the return pass. Usually, the attacker is able to get around and behind the defender, as the defender will stand and watch the ball or chase the ball after the pass. You may want to review the 1-2 combination practice in the Passing and Receiving section.

The defender is obligated to continue to maintain the mark on an attacker that goes forward after a pass until one of several things occur: *

- the attacker's position is not considered dangerous any more
- another defender can or should take over marking responsibilities
- the attacker on ball is free and un-pressured
- support for the defender on ball is needed

The most important time is immediately after the pass. It is recommended that the defender turn with the attacker (taking his eyes off the ball), try to beat the attacker to space he is going and turning back to find the ball. An extended forearm touching the attacker can help the defender know where the attacker is. The defender must not slow down his turn with the attacker, as he may obstruct the attacker.

The beauty of this defensive reaction is that it takes the defender automatically into a supportive position. Once the immediate threat of a return pass is defended, the defender can decide whether to continue a close mark on the attacker, support his teammate who should have closed down the ball by now or close down the ball himself.

1 v 1 Defending – Closing Down the Angles

Once the defender has applied pressure and contained the attacker, he should prevent as many forward passing options as possible. The responsibility of the through pass still remains with the supporting defender (if present), but the first defender can help the team by also being attentive to the dribbler's passing option. The closer a defender can get to the attacker without compromising his containment position, the fewer passing options an attacker has.

As the defender is keeping the attacker under control, he should try to stay aware of the near ball runs made by supporting attackers. An overlap run will be the easiest to see by the defender and a slight shift towards the overlapper's side

could be enough to discourage this option. . Again, the defender needs to be careful not to give the attacker the angle to fake the pass and drive by the defender to the other side.

One other passing option is the nutmeg. Defenders that maintain a side-on position and keep their feet from getting too spread apart, greatly reduce the possibility of this pass being successful.

Proper Stance

The proper stance for a defending player is shown below:



Coaching Points

Get Low – you are harder to fake

On Balls of your feet with knees flexed – Ready to Pounce

Hands at your side for balance

One foot forward, the other back

Play “side –on” rather than head on. This channels the attacker where **YOU** want him to go not where **HE** wants to go.

Take small quick, shuffling steps

Maintain a “correct” difference (usually about a yard). Too close and you will be beaten with no time to recover. Too far and you don’t deny the opportunity to pass.

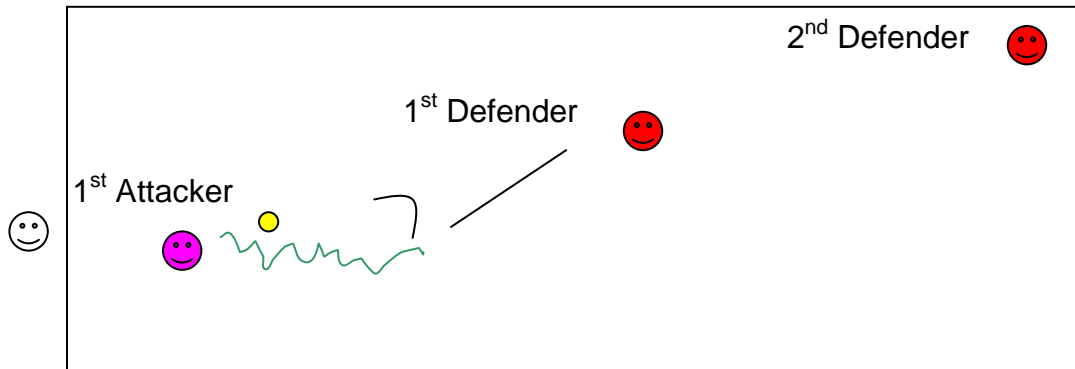
Basic Defender Drill/ warm-up

Organization

Split the team into groups of two. Each group with a ball. Player A passes to Player B who is ten yards away. Player A is the defender, Player B the attacker. Player B takes on Player A. Play at 50% speed working on foot placement, small quick step, playing side on, balance and keeping the correct distance.

After each turn the players switch roles. Run this about 10 minutes and each player should be getting 10 to 20 repetitions at the defender spot.

The Delaying Game



The object of this game is to teach the 1st Defender to delay his opponent. The 1st defender is backed up by a second defender located on the far touchline. The 1st attacker, person with the ball starts to dribble towards the far touchline. His job is to get it across under control.

The 1st defender's job is solely to delay the 1st attacker until his teammate arrives. The 2nd defender has to be artificially delayed. Make him do ten juggles, or ten foundations or ten of any other foot skill before he enters the field of play.

Score the game so that the concept of delay is rewarded. If the 1st defender gets beat and the second defender is not on the field, award 5 points to the attacker.

If the first defender simply knocks the ball out of bounds give him a point, but give him 5 points if he delays the 1st attacker and, together with his teammate, dispossesses the ball and takes control.

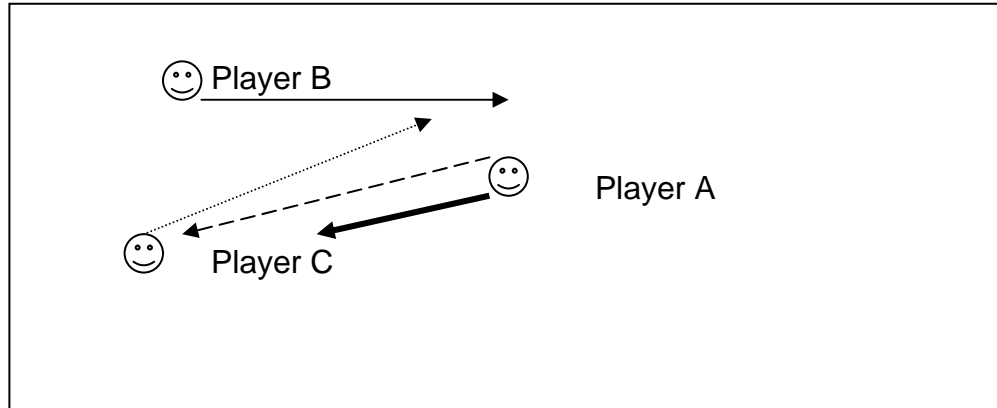
Coaching Points

Praise delay over deny and destroy

Look for the 1st defender to angle his opponent towards the touchline. The touchline acts as a third teammate.

Make sure that the 1st defender just doesn't dive in and stab at the ball

Pressure (Under 7 Game)



The game of “Pressure” is played in groups of three, one ball per group. Player A rolls the ball (receiving ground balls) or tosses the ball (receiving air balls) to either player B or player C. In this example, player C must control the ball and get a completed pass to player B. While this is occurring, player A immediately challenges player C and tries to win the ball back.

After successful pass, player C would then pick up the ball and repeat the activity as the defender. The defender is awarded a point for winning the ball back and gets to throw again.

Coaching Points

Encourage defender to pressure quickly after the toss.

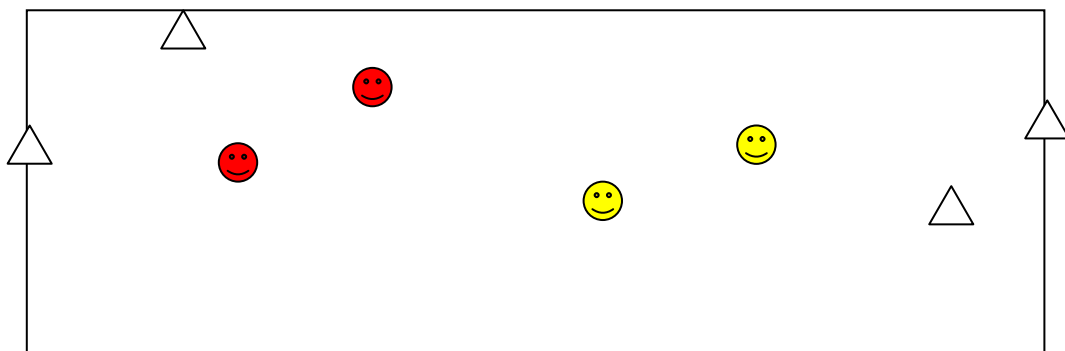
Defender needs to work hard at closing down the space while the ball is in flight.

Receiving player's first touch should be away from the pressuring defender.

Player receiving the pass should move to create a clear passing lane.

Do not allow the receiving player to one touch the incoming toss. This is a receiving drill, as well as a drill that serves as a good warm-up for practices dealing with defenders.

Pressure / Cover Defending (Under – 8 Game)



2 v. 2, with goals marked out in the corner of the grid.

Have a regular game with periods of about 2 - 3 minutes in duration.

Have plenty of extra balls ready to keep the game flowing

Coaching Points

Pressure on the ball, do not let the first attacker's head to come up

Second defender must cover the goal as well as be aware of the second attacker

First defender tries to channel the attacker into the sideline and away from the second attacker. (This is easier to do since the goals are in the corners of the grid, the sidelines come up quicker.)

When first defender has made the play predictable, second defender tries to double team.

Make sure the defenders stay balanced, that they do not become too spread out, enabling the attacking team to make "splitting passes".

As soon as the ball is won, can they shoot? This is the best time to do so because the attacking team is not in a good defending posture

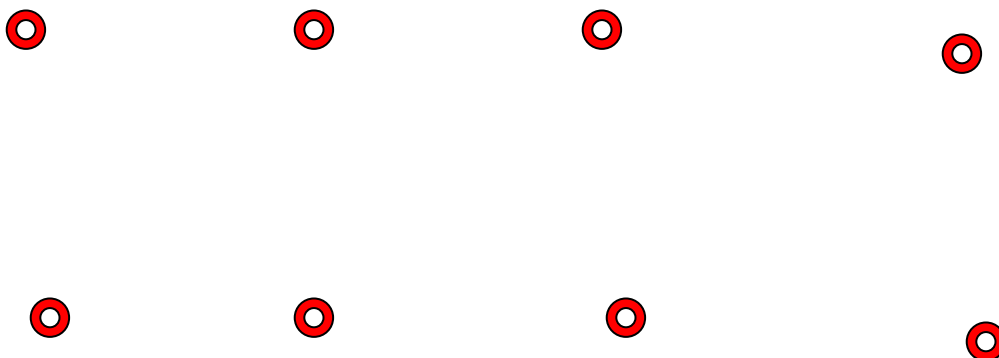
Defending the through Ball

This section deals with stopping penetrating Through balls in a flat back defnse. It was supplied to me by Gary Rue , a high school coach from Kentucky and frequent contributor to several coaching forums.

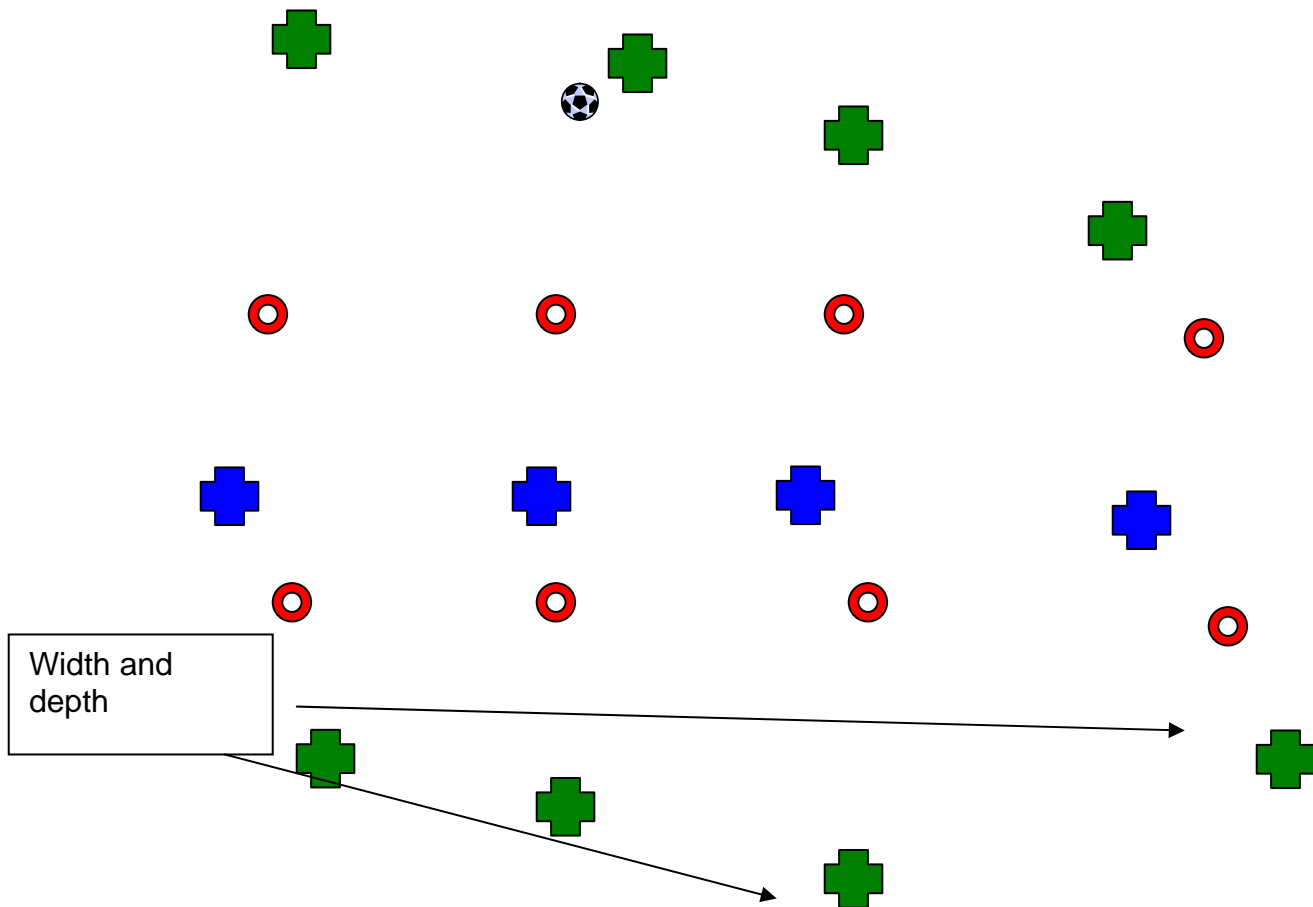
One of the prime positioning responsibilities of the flat back is to stop penetrating through balls. The following exercise helps a flat back learn, shift and position themselves in the face of passes out of the opponents' midfield.

Setup

Using flat cones as markers, create a horizontal channel of 10x60 yards across the field as shown.



Inside the channel are the four defenders. On **each** side of the channel are 4-6 attacking players spread out across the whole width.



Execution

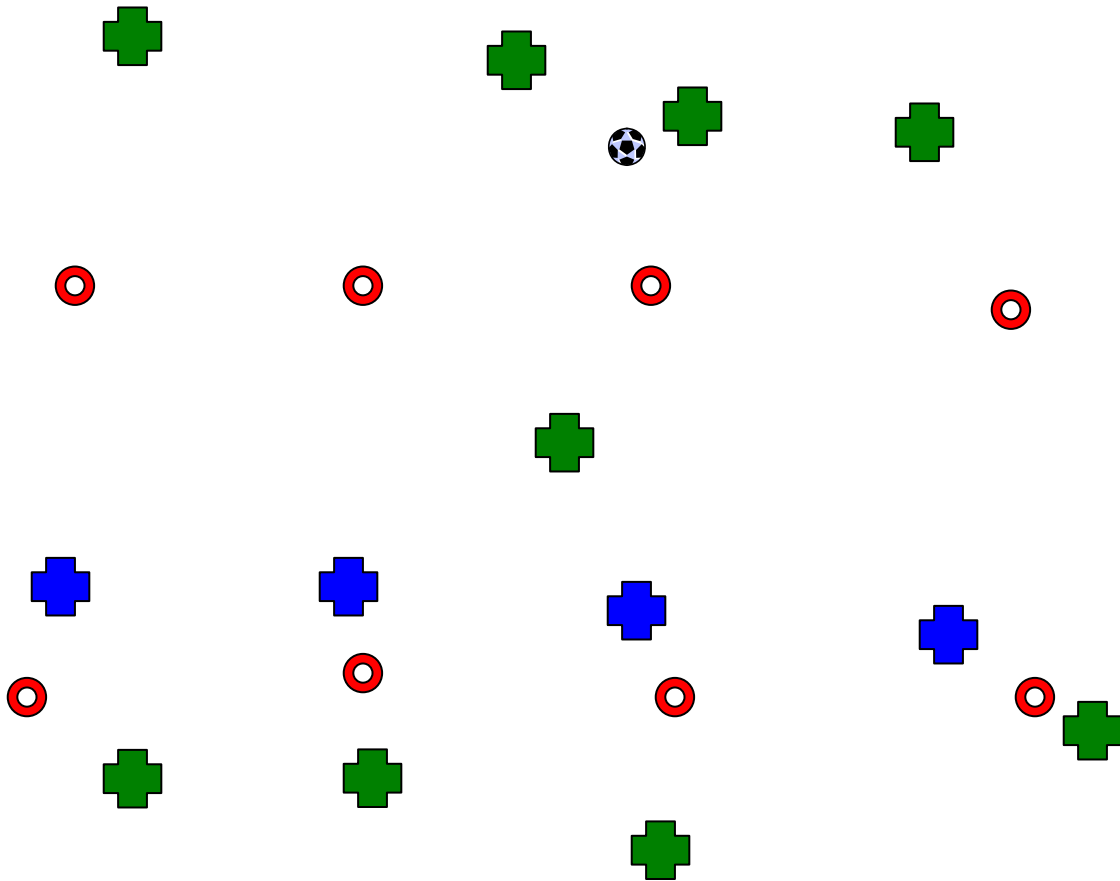
For ease of switching the point of attack, the attackers may want to position a player forward with back to the channel (as if he was a checking forward player). The attackers should not be in a flat shape, but have some depth and width.

The attackers move the ball around trying to off balance the defenders where they can deliver a pass past the defensive line to the attackers on the other side.

In this exercise, we will assume that the mids are applying appropriate pressure and the backs are just in support of the halfbacks. In the example above, the ball is central and so are the backs. They have gotten closer together and moved towards the center. As the ball moves wide, they should shift to that side as well.

Notice the defenders have moved to closer to their back restricted line. This is because they are trying to stop the through ball. **In a flat back, you want to create space between you and the ball when possible.** If the ball is close to midfield, the space is 10-15 yards. It is 5-7 yards when the defense is backed up

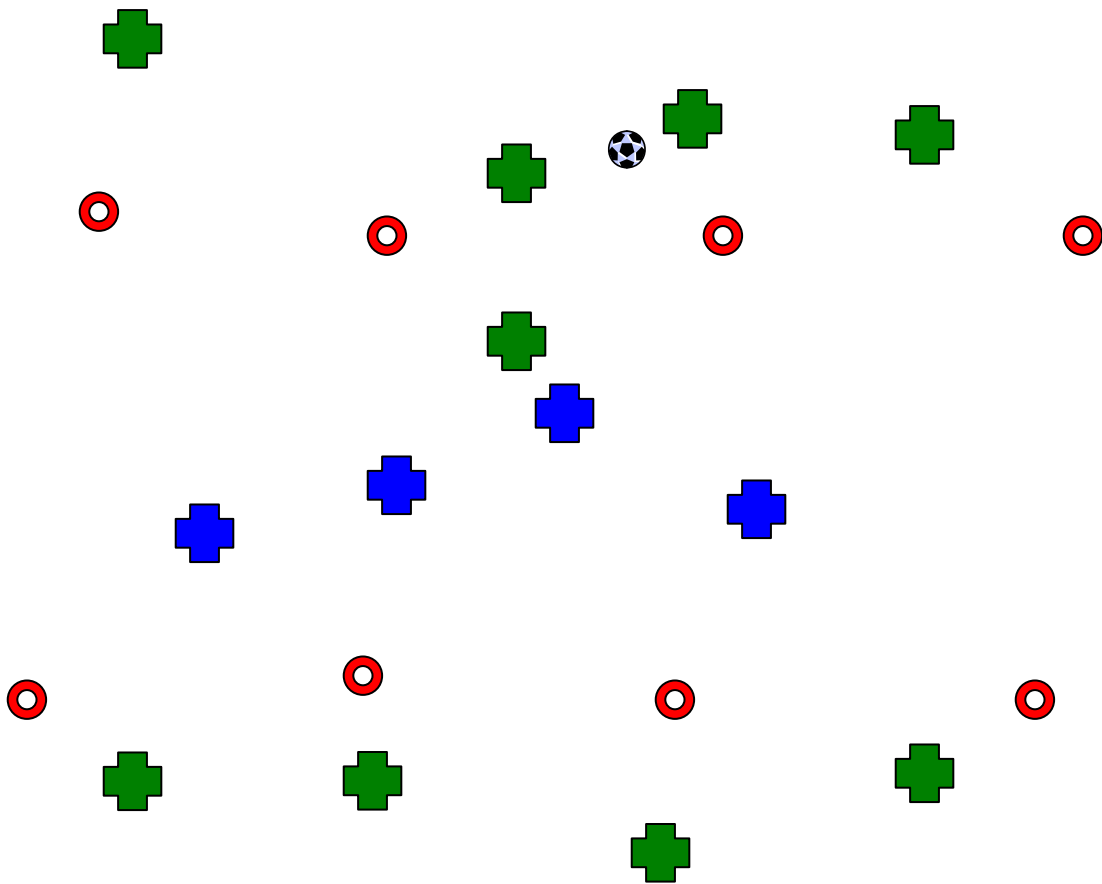
to its 18. If the ball is dropped further away, they should move forward. As the ball comes forward, they should move back.



Once the basic movement is trained, an attacker can be added to inside the channel. Now the defenders must mark this attacker, passing him on as the attacker moves side to side.

Balls can be played into the attacker who can turn and pass or drop it back.

If a defender must move forward to mark an attacker, the other backs must adjust their positions forward in order to not create too much space between the marking defender and the rest of the backs. This space creates angles for through balls. The diagram below shows the slight difference in positioning when an attacker must be marked in the channel.



Slide Tackling

There is a debate on within the youth soccer community as to when to teach, or even to teach, slide tackling. At many youth, recreation levels, slide tackling is not permitted due to the risk of injury, both to the tackler, and the one being tackled. This is generally because slide tackling is not taught, or taught very little and therefore the execution of this technique is poor, to say the least.

Since slide tackling is part of the game and sooner or later your kids are going to try it, it is probably better if they are taught the right way to do it, rather than let them experiment on their own.

The basics of slide tackling are as follows:

Watch The Ball

When an attacker is running at you with the ball, it's difficult not to concentrate on his body movements. Doing so, however, could cost you a tackle.

More than a few flashy forwards have juiced a defender out of his socks while only nominally touching the ball. Such situations, however, can be avoided by keeping your eyes on the ball. If someone is trying to dribble by you and he's

coming right at you, you've got to watch the ball. No matter where the attacker's body moves -- he can go right, he can go left -- the ball always sits still.

Don't Tackle Unless It's Necessary

The best place for a defender to be is on his feet, not on the ground, and so one should resist the temptation to leap at an opponent's ankles any time the opportunity presents itself. It's better to contain the forward and prevent him from penetrating. You should also try to work with your fellow defenders to close off the attack without direct confrontation.

If you are the last line of defense, it is particularly important to remain upright. If your slide-tackle fails, your opponent's path to the goal will be clear.

Any time you dive in, there's a chance of you getting beat. Even if you do dive in and get the ball, it can always bounce or deflect off the guy and get by you.

Wait For Your Opponent To Separate From The Ball

As long as your opponent has the ball at his feet, he's in control and a slide-tackle could be suicidal. Wait for him to knock it ahead two or three feet -if you are fairly close by before diving at his feet.

If you tackle when it's at his feet he can knock it away from you or dribble by you. When he separates from the ball, then you cut in front of him without tackling. And that's perfect because you can keep playing. If you need to tackle, wait for him to separate from the ball, then hook him.

Timing is the crucial ingredient, both for safety and effectiveness. But the quality of the timing is elusive. The most important thing is to get your timing down. If you don't have the right timing, your opponent is going to run right by you

Developing timing requires constant practice, but because training sessions rarely emphasize tackling, games offer the best training ground. Kids always want to practice slide-tackling, but it is not really something you can do in practice. The more you play, better you'll get at it.

Be Decisive

Every time a high level player tries to complete a tackle, he takes the attitude that he is going to get the ball and crush the forward. That's the way you have to think.

Mentality is important, especially at the highest level where the difference between success and failure can be confidence. Players can't hesitate, or they'll be beaten.

When you decide to go down, you have to go down. You can't think twice about it. If you go into a tackle halfway, you can get hurt. Decide 100 percent that you are going, then go.

Knowing when to go requires instinct built through experience, and it requires the ability to read the game.

Attack From An Angle

It is possible to slide-tackle an opponent from behind or from the front. But the risks -- fouls, cards, expulsion -- are great. The best tackles come from an angle. Coming in at an angle also allows the defender to strip an opponent from the ball without tackling.

While racing alongside an opponent, wait for him to separate from the ball. Then step into his path, between him and the ball. Step right into his line. Now you've got the ball, and you can shield it. Chances are, he'll trip you or foul you because you've cut him off.

Tackling from behind, an inexact science which soccer officials are intent on banning, isn't recommended. For every clean tackle from behind, there are four bad ones. You always seem to clip the guy, catch an ankle or something. You might get away with one clean tackle, but many times you are going to foul the guy, and you might seriously hurt him.

Slide-tackling from the front, with both feet, is another matter, and one referees rarely smile upon.

Straight-on, you're going to get the ball first, but obviously you're trying to hurt the guy if you're going in with both feet straight on. That's why referees don't like straight-on tackling. Even if you get the ball, they usually call a foul.

Protect Yourself

The first law of slide-tackling concerns safety, and it begins with shinguards. Full guards may not be as comfortable as smaller models, but defenders don't really have a choice. Nor do they have a choice once the decision to tackle has been made. Don't take it easy! You must go all out.

Mechanics are important. Tacklers should keep their leg unlocked with a slight bend. Then when you get to the ball, extend your leg through it. Make sure you get the ball right on your shoelaces and swing your leg through it.

Give 'Em The Hook

The proper slide should make baseball managers proud -- it's a hook, on your side, with the extension of your leg through the ball. It's like a baseball slide. The only difference is you don't slide straight through. In soccer, you're running at an

angle and sliding, hoping to land on your side. Then you try to swing your leg across and hook the ball.

It requires precision and resolution. Don't just put your foot out there, hoping the ball will hit you as your opponent trips over you. Make sure you swing through it. Try to clear it, or try to kick it away from him.

Get The Ball

This is most important. If you don't get the ball. Your goalkeeper will likely be picking the ball out of the back of the net in a matter of moments. Make sure you get the ball. You can get the ball first and then go through the player

Or don't. Tackling doesn't require a defender to strip the ball from his opponent. Sometimes just getting in the way is enough. If a guy is running down the wing, he's running full speed, and you know at that speed he can't cut it back. You know he is going to cross it. Sometimes if you stick out your leg, you're not going to block it. If you slide and lift your leg, you can block the pass.

Control Your Emotions

Professional fouls are part of the game, mere moves in a chess match. And although players can become frustrated and tempers can flare, one should never take it out on an opponent.

It's important that you control your emotions. Never go out to hurt somebody because you're looking to be thrown out of the game, and that's stupid. Make sure you keep your foot down when sliding -- you don't ever want to lift your foot.