

Effective Defending

Bob Christensen, May 6, 1999

Mandan Braves 8th Grade Soccer Handout

There is only one way to win soccer games: To score more goals than your opponent. Obviously, you need the ball to score. When the other team has the ball, it is most important to keep them from scoring. Then, get the ball back so that your team can score. There are a few principles of defending that can help make these goals easier.

A common situation is when an opponent near you receives a pass from a teammate, or recovers a free ball. First, are you the closest defender?? If so, you will want to close down on the opponent quickly. You can run full steam towards the opponent while the ball is in the air, or if you are far from the player. But, as you close down on the opponent once they have the ball, you will want to slow down as you get close, probably the last 5 yards or so. This is so that the opponent cannot use your momentum to beat you. It is easy to push the ball past a rapidly approaching defender, then chase it down and continue on towards goal. This is because it is tough to change directions quickly when running fast. So, as you get closer to the opponent with the ball, slow down, assume the one foot in front of the other defending stance, keep your eyes on the ball, and use short, small steps so that you can react to any sudden changes in direction (fake).

If you can get to the opponent before the ball gets there, try to intercept the pass, but also try to stay between the opponent and your own goal, so they cannot beat you too easily. If you get to the opponent just as the ball arrives, try to tackle the ball away as it gets to the opponents foot. This is a tough time to control the ball, and it is essentially a 50-50 ball (could be either yours or theirs). If you cannot get to the ball before or as it arrives, do not dive right in for the tackle until your help arrives. Try to stay a little bit towards the center of the field, so that the opponent with the ball is forced to go outside, towards the side line. This puts them farther from your goal, and it also cuts down on the angle they have on the goal, making their shooting harder. It is very important to be patient until your teammates arrive to help out. If you are the last defender, you are almost guaranteed to give the opponent a shot on the goal.

Once help arrives, you will want to continue to force the opponent to the outside, and when they make a mistake, such as touching the ball a little too far, then you can dive in for the tackle. If you are beaten, you have a teammate in supporting position behind you to slow them down and keep the opponent contained. You should then run back to support that teammate. Quickly! Then you can repeat this pressure-cover-tackle until you have won the ball.

Once you have the ball, try to dribble or pass the ball towards the sideline, not towards the center of the field (unless you have a REALLY good reason for doing so). If you are in your own penalty box, or just outside it and there is a lot of pressure, it is OK to clear the ball high and WIDE, or better yet, to your teammates down field.

Then, after the ball is clear from your defensive third of the field, get back into your defensive shape (compacted towards the center of the field for the two backs). When we are attacking, move up the field to push back the other teams forwards. DO NOT let the other teams attacking forwards perch in our half of the field! If this happens, call back a defending mid or two to help contain them. This is their job. Defending mids should be marking the attacking forwards. The two backs are really sweepers who should not have to mark attacking players.

Finally, backs (sweepers) and defending mids should be doing a lot of talking on the field. They need to tell their teammates if they have TIME (no immediate pressure by opponents defenders), TURN (if they have time to turn upfield with the ball), HOLD IT (if passing lanes are blocked), or even GO! GO! GO! (If there is a break away opportunity). Any time that you see something that your teammate cannot, you should LET THEM KNOW. Keep it short, clear, and loud enough for them to hear. These are your teammates, HELP THEM OUT.

Coach Bob Christensen