

How to Introduce Coordinated Defending to Young Players

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(related link: <http://www.footy4kids.co.uk/123defending.htm>)

1-2-3 defender and attacker concepts are (IMHO) critical to playing soccer the way that it should be played. It also plays into the natural tendencies of young players, which is to play relative to the ball. Young players mob the ball because they want to be "part of play", "where the action is", and "they want to help". They migrate to the ball like metal shaving to a magnet because they do not know of other ways to accomplish these goals. So they do it in the most elementary way - go to the ball..... As the coach of a young team, it is up to me to give these young players a sense of control, participation, and importance when they are filling crucial roles not only near the ball, but away from it as well. This is a milestone achievement for the young players, their team, and their coach.

With young players, the hardest, and in my opinion, the most important single aspect to get across is that the closest person to the opponent with the ball DOES NOT have the responsibility to win the ball! This eliminates about 90% of the diving in, and makes the attackers job so much tougher. It also reinforces the next most important concept: that somebody had BETTER be moving to cover the space behind the closest defender! That is the player who will, most often, wind up winning the ball.

You can demonstrate this quite easily by selecting the best defensive player on the team, placing that player isolated out on the pitch, point to a goal for him or her to defend, and then tell them to "get the ball" from you. Then, simply dribble up to the player, push the ball past, into space, and run onto it. If you can get the defender to step towards you, you can do this quite easily. Ask the team why this was so easy. Now ask how you can prevent it from happening. Somebody should come up with having a teammate behind the pressuring defender. Now repeat the demonstration with another opponent who has been instructed to cover the space. Also ask the closest (pressuring) defender to not win the ball unless a mistake is made by the attacker. Run it again and you should see a huge improvement.

Now, you have gotten their attention. They have seen that "Hey, this COULD work." Now go over the roles on the field.

Closest person to the opponent with the ball: **PRESSURE** - "I've got ball!"

1. YOUR JOB IS TO SLOW THE ATTACK, NOT WIN THE BALL
2. Moves to pressure the ball.
3. Slows the attacker down
4. Applies just enough pressure to get the attackers head down
5. Makes the attack predictable and pushes the attack to the least dangerous part of the field.
6. Only attempts to win the ball if the attacker makes a mistake and you are sure to win it. **BE PATIENT!**

Next closest person to the ball: **COVER** - "I've got your back!"

1. YOUR JOB IS TO BACK UP THE PRESSURING DEFENDER.
2. Cover the space behind the pressuring defender.
3. Adjust your distance based on the speed of the attack, and the skill and speed of the attacker.
4. Communicate with the pressuring defender, let him or her know that you are there, tell them which way to push the attack, if necessary.

Others: **BALANCE**

1. Mark any nearby attacking threats who could receive the ball directly from the ball carrier.
2. Track and other attackers who are moving, or could move into threatening positions.
3. Cut out any passing lanes. This can often be done while marking or tracking opponents.
4. Communicate with your teammates. Point out any unmarked threats, or any opponents making runs.
5. Be ready to assume the role of pressuring or covering defender if the situation changes.

Now practice the ever-shifting roles as the run of play changes the position of the ball and players. Start with only one attacker and 3 defenders. Begin with a static situation (ball not moving). They should be able to adjust quickly to the position of the attacker. Listen for them to call out "I've got ball!" and "I've got your back!". At least at first, this is VERY useful for the entire team, so that they get into the habit of assuming one of the critical roles IMMEDIATELY, and so that more than one player do not assume the role.