

Mass Youth Soccer Defending Specialty Clinic

Defending is often the most ignored part of the game and yet is the area in which we can improve performance most quickly. Just as attacking is a skill, proper defending is as well. Although we often fall into the trap of thinking our defenders should “just work harder” it is not typically the case that effort is failing our players. More regularly they struggle defensively because they do not know how to defend appropriately.

In this clinic we will go over the primary roles of the first and second defender in detail. We will slightly touch on the role of the third defender and a back four. Please understand it is important to teach your players how to defend 1 vs. 1 before you do anything else. It is recommended that you then build up your numbers from that point so that players can learn the challenges of the defensive game at a pace that will allow them to fully understand these concepts. If we jump right in and ask our players to understand the roles of all defenders at once, they will be overwhelmed and both your team and individual defense will suffer.

Try not to stray to other topics when teaching defense. Keep the practice focused on defensive play. A basic concept of team defense will be that you want your team to try to make the field as compact as possible when on defense. Before you can discuss that however, you need to talk about the roles of the individual defenders. If you follow these main coaching points, you will find that your players will improve their defensive play:

- Defenders need to have the correct stance---be on their toes, with knees bent, one foot forward, one back, trying to anticipate when to close down their opponent
- 1st defender needs to bend their run to “take away” (block the path to) the goal, or force the ball in the direction of the second defender
- The first defender then needs to “approach fast, arrive slow”
- First defender orders of priority--- a) try to win ball off first touch of opponent, b) delay progress of opponent by jockeying the player with the ball, and try to force them out of play or in the direction of the second defender
- Once opponent goes where the defender wants them to go, they should tackle with front foot, not back foot
- 1st defender says “I have ball” and 2nd defender says “push left/right”
- Make sure that the 1st defender gets the head of the first attacker down by getting close (within arms length) to the 1st attacker ASAP
- 2nd defender needs to be at approximately a 30 degree backward angle to the first defender on the side to which the first defender is showing the ball towards
- Second defender tells 1st defender which way to push attacker and gets ready to step towards the second attacker and if the ball is passed to her
- The defenders’ roles reverse will sometimes reverse when the ball is passed and the previous 1st defender needs to be ready to drop off and cover (now serving as 2nd defender)
- 3rd and 4th defenders serve as communicators and players who balance the field in order that your team does not get beat on “the back side”
- It is important that you do not play your 3rd and 4th defenders too deep as that will allow the offense more space and leads to more offensive success

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1) 1v1 to cone---Each pair of players have one ball and two cones between them. The cones are placed approximately 6 yards apart. One player on each side of the imaginary line created between the two cones. The player with the ball is the attacker, the one without the ball is the defender. The attacker has to dribble the ball to one of the cones before the defender can react to step on the cone. Work on stance, being on toes. Can only score points when you have the ball. If you tag the cone before the attacker dribbles to the cone, you get to be the attacker and can score points. Good chance for both the attacker and defender to introduce feints. (10 Minutes)

2) Defensive stance---In two's, pass the ball back and forth one touch from about 7 yds apart. When either of the players stops the ball with the bottom of their foot, their partner responds by making a bending run and closing down the player on the ball as a defender would. After arriving, the defender backs off, and the exercise continues. *Variations:* 1) Player stops ball with sole of foot, other player goes and circles opponent, backing away as a def would. 2) If one player lets ball through their legs, they turn shield it and the other player goes to press the ball and doesn't let player 1 turn for a few seconds. 3) Covering player, 2v2. Same set up as for 1v1, but now each player has a partner standing directly behind them. When one player stops ball with sole of foot, 1st player of opposite pair, closes the ball down as in 1v1, and player two becomes a covering player. Players should talk... "I have ball" is what 1st defender says, 2nd says keep it right/left. (14 Minutes)

3) Multiple Balls---10 players make two teams of five playing in a space of approximately 25x30 yards. There are five balls, and the team with the most balls at the end of a 2-3 minute period wins. 1v1 and 2v2 defensive skills can be practiced. (14 Minutes)

4) 2v2 soccer golf---This game is played in a space 22 yds X 17 yds, with two 2 yd flag goals in diagonally opposite corners. Two teams of 6 players are at the adjacent corners of the grid from where they are defending their goal. The supply of balls is there too. Game starts by one team passing the ball to their opponents. Play 2v2 until the ball is out of play. A team can dribble through the goal (3 pts), pass through the goal (2 pts), or dribble over the end line (1 pt.) (20 Minutes)

5) 2v2 to goal Tournament---In 17x22 grids with two yard goals. If space is too small, have team teams of four, with 2 on 2 off, and switch every 2 minutes.

Additional Defending Activities

1) Intro Technique of 1 v1---One person with ball who dribbles at defender (DOES NOT TRY TO BEAT DEF) from endline to 1/2 field. Defender works on positioning and footwork. Then switch roles (do a couple of times). *Variations:* 1) Same as above, except now defender reaches down and touches the ball with their hand when they think they can win it. Defender works on footwork, stepping forward with front foot, getting low, and patience. Again-person with ball does not try to beat yet and safety when def. is reaching down to touch ball; 2) Same as above, except now defender tries to toe poke ball-with front foot-if get ball off players foot, get it back and start again where they were on the field; 3) Can have person with ball now try to beat defender and if defender toe pokes away, or wins possession, give it back to person with ball and start again where they were on the field.

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2) Truck and Trail Warm-up---Balls are spread around the playing area. Players jog around in two's and pressure (press) any ball, and their team-mate covers them. Then roles switch. Variation: can't go to a ball that another pair is pressing. *Variation:* if another pair gets to the ball first, they can dribble at/past you and you play it live for 5 seconds.

3) Force em' back---In a 15 x 10 grid-all players are on one of the 10 yard endlines. Two players are next to each other with server in between them with the balls. Server plays ball into area-one defends the endline they left and the other attacks the endline they left. Defender works on getting attackers head down, forcing away from endline and preventing turn (can simply get ball of attackers foot or kick out of bounds. Rotate positions. *Variation:* Defender now tries to win ball and cross opposite endline. *Note:* rotate through players so all players are serving at some time.

5) 2v2 Flying Changes---Four goal game in grid 21X22. Goals are one yard wide, and about 9 yards apart, with 5 yards outside each of the goals. Each pair of goals is 22 yards from the opposite pair of goals. There are two groups of balls, one group behind one goal at each end. One pair brings ball out...one player from each line, to play 2v2 against one player from each of the two lines opposite. If ball is played over end line, the team defending that end go off, and immediately the next two players come on for that team **with** a ball. The team that had played the ball over the end line stay on, and now must transition to defense. If the ball goes over a side line, it's "all change", and the coach points to one of the two teams to say which team brings the next ball in. Should have at least 4 players behind each goal, for a total of 16 players. Keep game going at fast pace once players understand. Coach at end of game, rather than stop the fun.

6) 3v3 to a line---3 defend one end line and 3 defend opposite end line. Try to score by dribbling across opposing end line. Focus on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Pressure on ball, cover behind, and balance to pick up any other players and/or passes coming through.

7) 4v4 to a line---4 defend one end line and 4 defend opposite end line. Try to score by dribbling across opposing end line. Focus on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. Pressure on ball, cover behind, and balance to pick up any other players and/or passes coming through.

Advanced Activities

1) 4 v3---Two teams are playing 4 v 4 to two goals on each end line. The attacking team is playing with four players, but the defending team must drop one player back to the end line while under attack. This prevents the defending team from playing man to man and must solve the problem with zonal play. When the defense wins the ball they must first play the ball back to their teammate on the end line while the other team removes a player from the field.

2) 4 v 4 + GK's---A typical three goal game that emphasizes pressure, cover and balance. The activity includes goalkeepers who play behind the goals. If the 'keeper can play the ball before it passes him, then the goal is negated. When the ball is in the 'keeper's hands he can either play the ball to his team or volley it at the opposition's goal. It may be necessary to help the attack see the opportunities to switch the play in order to force the defense to balance the field.