

Defending in the 1v1

To begin teaching individual defense to your players you must first teach the players how to defend in a 1v1 situation.

The first defending principle -- Pressure -- refers to the first defender; that is, the defender closest to the opposing player with the ball.

Upon losing possession of the ball, a player must apply pressure to the opponent in an attempt to regain possession. Indeed, as important as it is to win the 1v1 confrontation as an attacker, it may be even more important to win the 1v1 battle as the defender.

Individual defending should be a major part of a practice session and should be an emphasized theme in preseason training.

First and foremost teach the correct stance:

- 1) Stance is not flat-footed, with the feet planted and wider than the hips, weight on the balls and toes;
- 2) One foot ahead of the other;
- 3) Body balanced in a slight crouch;
- 4) Eyes on the ball.

Before emphasizing the defensive portion of the 1v1, run the following drill which teaches not only the correct stance but also the right way to approach an attacker in a 1v1 situation.

Defending Drill -- “Delay-Tackle-Takeaway”

- > All players with a ball
- > Players place ball 10-12 yards away
- > The first run is called “Delay” and involves 3 movements:
 - 1-Players sprint the first 5-6 yards
 - 2-The next few deceleration steps are slow and short
 - 3-The player then stops in the correct defensive position about one yard short of the ball
- This procedure is called “Quick-Slow-Sideways Low” -- Quick (sprint), Slow (deceleration), Sideways Low (defensive stance)

> The **second run** is called **“Tackle”**:

- Here, the players sprint or move quickly and aggressively to the ball
- Upon reaching the ball, the players assume the correct blocking/tackle position --
 - < Feet form a right angle
 - < One foot, the plant foot, is alongside the ball
 - < The other foot, the tackle foot, is placed in front of the ball, the ankle and heel aligned with the center of the ball

> The **third run** is called **“Takeaway”**:

- Players sprint or move aggressively to the ball and, performing a pull-back (bottom of foot is placed on top of the ball and is pulled back and behind the player who then turns and takes a dribble), take the ball away

> Each run should be performed as many times as it takes for the players to become comfortable


> After which the coach could then make it a fitness, competitive drill by calling out any of the 3 segments -- “Delay”, “Tackle” or “Takeaway”.

> After each run, players should return to the starting line by backpedaling.

The “1v1 Competitive Cauldron”

While “Delay-Tackle-Takeaway” is a good way to teach defending in a 1v1 situation it remains a passive exercise. Once comfortable with this non-pressurized drill, players should move into an active drill which offers as much game-like conditions. The “1v1 Competitive Cauldron” offers these conditions.

Divide the players into 2 teams or groups -- one group will begin as attackers, the other as defenders.

The grid size will always depend on the age and/or skill level of the players but a general rule of thumb would be no less than 10 yards and no more than 15, knowing that most 1v1 encounters in a real match take place in less space than that. 

The beauty of the “Delay-Tackle-Takeaway” drill is that it is easy to conduct and emphasizes all there is to know about defending.

Outside of outright winning the ball back, delaying an attack is the most important aspect of defending.

Always coach players to not tackle the ball away or even attempt to tackle a ball away unless he or she is sure of gaining possession.

At all costs, avoid “diving in” to the ball.

I would also recommend instructing not to slide tackle unless it is the only resort possible.

A slide tackle at the youth level often results in a foul and thus a free kick for the opponent.

Delaying the attack enables other defenders to assume proper positioning - support, balance, compactness, etc.

But of course you want your defenders to be aggressive and decisive at getting the ball away from the opponent. You want defenders to be confident enough to go in for a tackle or go in and just take the ball away and get your team into transition.

Master the 1v1 defending skill. It makes it easier to begin coaching group defending tactics.

Group Defending Tactics

The beauty of the “Competitive Cauldron” drill is its ability to teach the 5 Defending Principles as well as the roles of the First, Second and Third Defenders, by simply adding players to the 1v1 battle.

From 1v1 go to 2v2. The First Defender’s responsibility in a 1v1 encounter is to pressure the ball, tackle the ball away at best, or delay the attack at least.

Add another attacker to that battle and the First Defender’s responsibility changes. Delaying the attack becomes the first option.

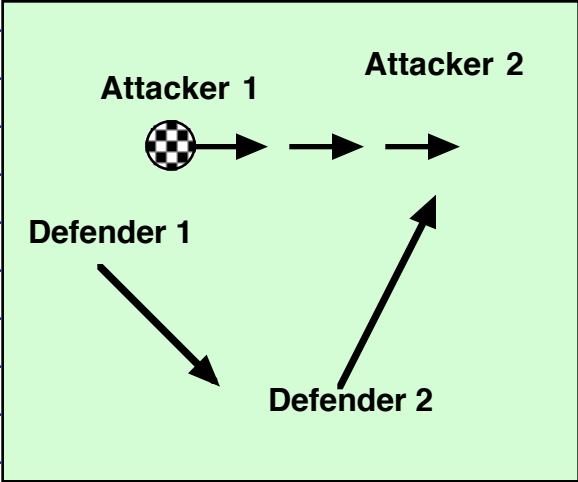
But now add a defender for a 2v2 battle and roles switch depending on which opposing attacker has the ball.

(Diagram on next page)



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To start, Attacker 1 has possession, which makes Defender 1 the “First Defender”.

Defender 2 is the “Second Defender” and takes a position to the right of and behind his teammate but within defending distance of Attacker 2.

Once Attacker 1 passes laterally to Attacker 2 Defender 2 steps up and becomes the “First Defender” while Defender 1 drops into a “Second Defender” position.

(Note: This concept above can be designed as an introductory drill, using four players -- 2 defenders vs. 2 attackers. Just have the attackers pass the ball laterally back and forth with the 2 defenders adjusting to the roles of First and Second Defender. Next, set up the entire team into 2v2 battles. Like with 1v1s, begin passively and progress to active 2v2s to lines or small cone goals.)

The Second Defender has to be concerned with making one of three (3) defending options: (1) **Marking**; (2) **Covering**; and (3) **Tracking**.

Marking is simply defending the Second Attacker. **Covering** relates to space. It is what the Second Defender is doing at the outset in the example above, leaving some space between him or her and the Second Attacker. In this case, the Second Defender is covering space that the Second Attacker or even the First Attacker may wish to take up. At the same time, the Second Defender is also in a marking position should the ball be passed laterally to the Second Attacker.

If the ball is passed laterally to the Second Attacker the Second Defender moves from his or her Covering to a Marking position and finally to the First Defender position of pressuring.

Tracking becomes vital when the Second Attacker decides to make a run. In this instance, the Second Defender leaves his or her covering position and follows, or tracks, the Second Attacker.



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Here, the Second Defender also needs to be concerned about being ball-side of the Attacker (placing the body between the ball and the Attacker) or goal-side (between the Attacker and Goal).

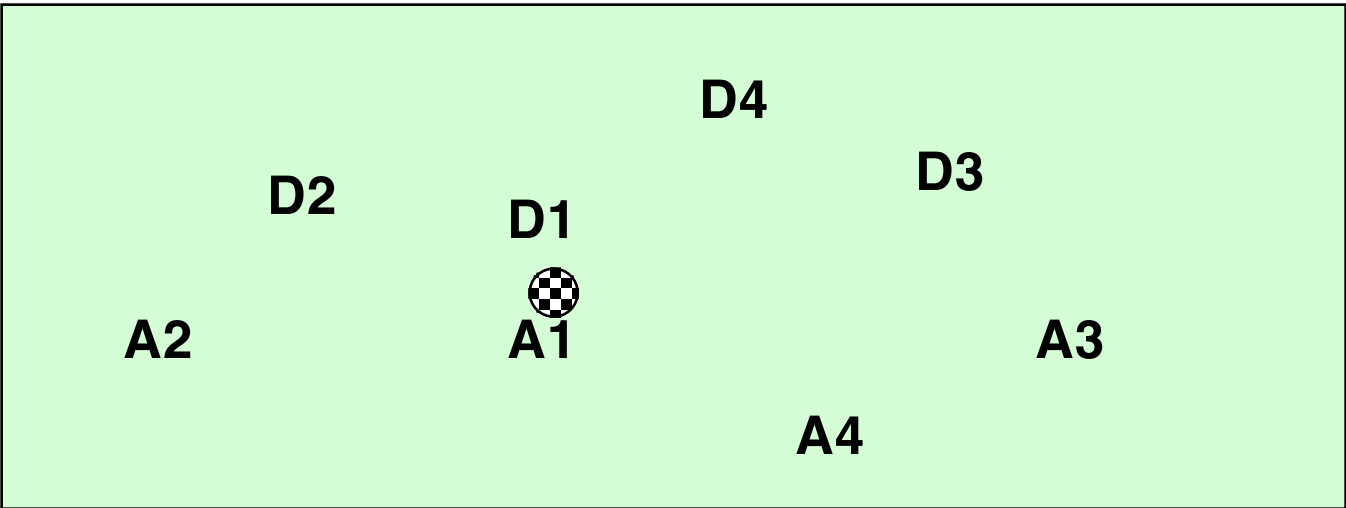
Such decisions are made, of course, in split seconds. The only way to insure your players are going to make the right decisions is to place them into these kinds of situations or by simply playing 2v2 to a goal.

Now it’s time to add more players into our tactical discussion and move from our 2v2 to a 3v3 or even the more preferable 4v4.

As discussed in the Defensive Principles, the Third Attacker and the Third Defender may be more than one player. That would be the case in a 4v4.

Third defenders will indeed be facing the three options of Marking, Covering and Tracking. A proper attack will attempt to spread the field, open up space in the middle or on the flanks. A good defense will counter this simply by being organized and obeying the first three defending principles -- pressure/delay, support/depth and, most important, balance.

The four defending players would be in a staggered position, with the First Defender pressuring the ball and the three other players assuming positions that not only take up potential attacking space but provide coverage should the ball be passed.



Team Defending Tactics

The best way to teach zone defense is to play your defenders in a numbers-down situation, such as a 7v5 -- 7 attackers vs. 4 defenders + a goalkeeper -- on a grid that is 54 yards long x 44 yards wide. This can then progress to an 8v6 -- add one attacker and give the defending team a midfielder or forward who acts as a target player -- on half a regulation field.

This drill will emphasize all five defending principles -- 1) pressuring the ball at the point of attack or, at the very least, delaying the attacking until the remaining defenders get organized; 2) adding support at the point of attack; 3) getting balanced; 4) getting organized and getting compact as quickly as possible with concentration on the limiting the attacking options; and 5) clearing the ball out of the scoring area.

Playing numbers down, while giving the attacking team numerous options and potential space, allows the defense to work mainly on the middle three principles -- support, balance and concentration. All three, though, require patience on the part of the players. There is a tendency in youth soccer for players to immediately go to the ball. Youth players will often double or triple team an attacking player leaving too much space for the attacking team to exploit.

As a coach, you want your defenders to be aggressive. Being smart is better. Being patient is better. Maintaining organization is best!

Being organized can also lead to a defense making the opposing attack predictable.

Too often, defense is preached as a reactive concept. If Attacker 1 goes here and Attackers 2 and 3 move there then Defender 1 goes here while Defenders 2 and 3 go there. Good defenses are proactive. They make the attacking play predictable. Defenders 2 or 3 move into positions to force Attacker 1 into a more unfavorable choice, perhaps taking away the passing lane to Attacker 2 and making Attacker 1 pass to Attacker 3. Defender 1 can make the attacking play predictable just by the position he or she takes up against the First Attacker, perhaps forcing the attacker to dribble to the left or pass to the center of the field where there are other defenders.



Making play predictable was one of the many tactics I taught my girls especially my forwards. When applying high-pressure defense (*see below on this tactic*), I instructed my forwards to not give up the flanks (the area along the sidelines). Most youth coaches will instruct their defenders to turn the ball away from the goal and toward the sideline when in danger. I would counter this by telling my forwards to turn the opposing defender in possession of the ball in toward the goal area. If organized, another forward or perhaps the center midfielder will be in the passing lane and able to intercept the pass giving us possession with a potential scoring opportunity.

This is making play predictable. And this is making play predictable by your forwards playing high-pressure defense, an important tactic to teach.

High-Pressure

Very few teams play what is known as “high pressure” defense. “High pressure” defense refers to the area on the pitch where the defense is played not the amount or quality of defense provided.

High pressure, which requires a lot of endurance from the players, is generally applied by your forwards on the opposing team's fullbacks/defenders in your attacking third (your opponent's defensive third) of the field.

This area is considered “high” on the pitch.

Upon losing possession of the ball in the attacking third, forwards should immediately pressure the opposing team's players.

Think of a full-court press in basketball. As soon as a team scores, they apply pressure to the in-bounding team.

You rarely see such a tactic at the professional level but see it a lot at the collegiate and high school and other lower levels.

The same is true in soccer. Youth teams play “high-pressure” defense without even realizing it. Young players just assume that they need to win the ball back all over the field. While at the professional level, defense isn't applied most time until the ball reaches the middle third of the field.

This concept is actually referred to as “Low Pressure” defense and is usually associated with a counter-attacking offensive philosophy.



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Nevertheless, high-pressure defense is a good tactic to emphasize as part of a coaching philosophy for the following reasons:

- High-pressure defense is an excellent weapon if the opposing defensive players (fullbacks, center backs) are technically weak;
- High-pressure defense can change the tempo of the game;
- High-pressure can cause turnovers in your attacking third;
- High-pressure is needed when you are trailing in the game and need to get some goals quickly.

The only drawback or negative -- if there really is one -- about high-pressure defending is that it requires an incredible amount of endurance, especially from your forwards.

>>>>> Coaching Point <<<<<<

If you are coaching a youth team and want to employ a high-pressure defending system make sure to be playing a formation with 3 forwards (4-3-3 or 3-4-3).