

THEORIES ON DEFENDING

“Teaching Defending”

Coaching defense is similar in theory to coaching attacking: you must begin with individual defending before going on to group and team defensive tactics.

The general rule of thumb by which all coaches must coach is this:

“There are no tactics without techniques!”

Players need to learn defending as an individual, in a 1v1 encounter, before he or she can really begin to understand group dynamics. Coach defending, but start with individual skill first.

In his book, *The Soccer Method “Defending”* (©2006 Reedswain Publishing), author Hank Mariman writes:

“The coaching of young soccer players is based primarily on having possession of the ball. Clearly the players must learn how to lay when their team has the ball. However, they must also learn about playing when the opposition has possession. Ultimately they must be able to perform in real games, and in real games their team will not always have the ball... ‘Defending’ is then also a key element.”

Coach defense.

Start by emphasizing the **5 Defending Principles:**


- 1) Pressure-Delay
- 2) Support-Depth
- 3) Balance/Compactness
- 4) Concentration
- 5) Clearing the Ball

Begin the teaching of defense with defending in a 1v1 battle (Principle #1). Progress to small group work -- defending in a 2v2, 3v3 and 4v4 environment (Principles #2, #3, #4). Drill defending in numbers-down situations, such as 3v2, 4v3, 7v4, etc. Then coach team defending. Decide, based on the talent of your players, what kind of team defending you will employ in a given match.

There are 2 basic types of team defending:

1) **Zone Marking** -- players are assigned areas of the pitch and defend within these zones;

2) **Man Marking** -- players are assigned opposition players.

Of course, there is a combination of the two that is popular -- man-marking within a zone. 

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Within these 2 concepts are other tactical considerations, such as how to play your backline -- flat, staggered, in a diamond, etc. *(Note: we will go into more detail about styles of play in upcoming chapters.)*

Most professional and elite teams play zone defense which was not always the case. In fact, as little as 15 years ago, man marking was the popular choice. But now, soccer players have gotten bigger and faster and more skilled technically paving the way for zone defending. Amazingly, many high school coaches have stuck with the man marking dinosaur for whatever reason!

Youth teams should go with a zone defending system. On rare occasions, you may need to man mark an individual player. The drawback there is that by putting a defender on the opposition’s best player you not only *may* take the opposing player out of the game but you are definitely taking your player out of your attack.

Zone defending is better for youth teams because it takes away individual responsibility. A young player asked to man mark an opposing player will be more hesitant about getting into the attack when his other team is in possession of the ball.