



Coaching Clinic

Individual and Small Group Defending

One of the most important technical/tactical soccer skills for the older player is the art of defending. A team cannot lose a game if the other team does not score! Defending combines both technical (body position and tackling) as well as tactical application (knowing when to tackle and which side to force your opponent).

Skills of Defending

1. Block Tackling

- Approach the ball when opponent “offers” it to you
- Low center of balance, knee bent, toe up, ankle locked.
- Block tackle the ball **HARD** using the ankle by forming a block, or rigid wall with the leg against the ball.
- If done correctly the tackles can be hard, and will make a ‘thud” against the ball as the opposing players foot pushes on the ball from the other side.

2. Defending

- Passive Defense – defender approaches under control and keeps space/cushion between them and the attacker/ball. **DO NOT DIVE IN** or attempt tackles unless you are sure you can win the ball. The object is to keep the attacker/ball in front of you and not to get beat. Used to delay attacks in order to get more defenders back behind the ball to support you.
- Attacking Defense - defender approaches under control but tightens up a bit more putting more pressure on the attacker. **DO NOT DIVE IN**. Tackles attempted more aggressively than during passive defending. The object is to keep put pressure on the defender to force them into mistakes. Used to attack the ball when it is far from your goal, or when you have support, or when your goal is under extreme pressure.
- Put pressure on the ball as quickly as possible, but come under control when approaching.
- Stay in line between goal and ball, and do not “dive in” or a quick attacker will leave you in the dust.
- Be aware of where sidelines are – know which way you want to jockey (press up tight and “ride” the attacker out of an area).
- Know when to use passive and attacking defense.

3. Defending 1v1 Tactics

- Know which foot your opponent favors, curve your approaching run in and force to opposite side.
- Do not commit yourself or “dive in” – keep eyes on the ball.



- Get in tight (extreme attacking defense) denying the turn if attacker turns away or has his/her back to you and your goal. “Don’t let them turn”

4. Two Defender Tactics (basic 2 defender defensive rotation)

- First defender (defender A) denies opponent (with ball) time and space similar to above.
- The second defender (defender B), provides support approximately 5-7 yds behind defender A in case defender A gets beaten.
- If/when defender A is beaten, the support - defender B yells “you’re beat”. This communication lets A know B is “stepping up” to challenge the attacker and signals A to retreat **DIRECTLY and IMMEDIATELY BACK TOWARDS GOAL** into the supporting position (the retreating defender does **NOT** continue to “puppy dog” chase the attacker). Again, the communication “you’re beat” signals this rotation.
- At this point defender B steps up to challenge the attacker (essentially becoming the first defender) leaving defender A now in the support position.
- Mastering this 2-person defender rotation, including the communication, is **CRITICAL** to success in further Small Group Tactics.
- Emphasize that communication by the supporting defender (defender B) is the key and “you’re beat” signals the defensive rotation.
- Emphasize that the beaten defender **MUST IMMEDIATELY RETRAT BACK TOWARDS GOAL INTO THE SUPPORT POSITION**. If they make even 1 or 2 steps in “chase” of the attacker they are not performing the rotation properly.

5. Small Group Tactics (3 defender defensive rotation)

- First defender, defender A, denies opponent (with ball) time and space as before.
- The second (supporting) defender, defender B, provides close cover or support in case first defender gets beaten, as before.
- The third defender (in triangle), defender C, provides weak side balance, preventing shots or passes.
- If/when the defender A gets beat defender B says “you’re beat” signaling the first to retreat **IMMEDIATELY BACK TOWARDS GOAL** (this defender does **NOT** continue to chase the attacker) as defender B steps up to challenge the attacker (essentially becoming the first defender in the defender A spot) as before.
- However, in a 3 defender defensive rotation the beaten defender does not go directly into the support position of defender B. Now he/she must key off the third (weak side) defender (defender C) whose movements will dictate what happens next. If defender C steps in to take the supporting position the beaten defender (defender A) recovers to the weak side (the third defenders, defender Cs spot) providing balance and picking up marks. If defender C does **NOT** step in to take the supporting position (he/she was too far away from the play or was following a mark) the beaten defender (defender A) recovers to the supporting position.



- Mastering this 3 defender defensive rotation is critical to small group defensive success and will especially deny attacks attempting to breakdown defenses by using wall passes, takeovers and overlapping runs.

The Tactics of Defending

Individual Tactics (1 v 1)

- Deny opponent time and space
- Prevent shot or forward pass
- Force opponent to make a mistake

Small Group Tactics (2 v 1), (2 v 2), (3 v 3)

- Immediate pressure by nearest defender
- Support of covering players (begin with 2 v 1. Coach for success!) Angles and distances
- Coach the 1st, 2nd & 3rd defenders (keep players in a triangular shape) 1st - pressure & deny; 2nd - cover & support; 3rd - Depth & balance
- Communication - “you’re beat”

Team Tactics (5 v 5), (8 v 8)

- Ensure players continue to perform single defender, 2 and 3 defender rotations correctly.
- Specific role responsibilities by thirds of the field.
- Restarts - priorities change in different areas of the field
- Coach locally (player on ball).
- Coach globally (team shape/movement off ball).

Some fun games to help teach players to defend

Death on the Nile!

10x30 grid. 3 teams of 4 players, and 3 balls. Each team gets one minute in the middle (river). Count # of interceptions. Other 2 teams (one on either side of the river) have to play the balls across the ‘river’ back and forth. Introduce calling for the ball, then passing to a teammate on same side to open passing ‘channels’. Techniques being used include; passing & receiving, chipping, defending etc. We have to challenge our players cognitively. Other changes can include; points for passes, keep ball moving, time limit to play ball.

Jurassic Park

30x20 or 30x30 yard grid, with 6 mini goals around border. Start with 5 Orange inside grid with balls, Blues are outside. On command they have to come in and steal the balls to score. When scored the ball is dead. Time how long it takes to kill all 5 balls. Swap roles.

Other interesting alternatives for this game include, making each defender responsible for one attacker (so they cannot tackle anybody else). They get absorbed by the even sided game and often lose the



player they are responsible for, thus providing the opportunity to penetrate with the ball.

Practice to Encourage Defensive Play

Warm Up

Give all players a ball. Get players to dribble in a 10x15 yard grid. The grid can also be made larger depending on the ability of the players. On command 'CHANGE' players have to leave their own ball and find another to continue dribbling. Gets kids to be aware of what is going on around them.

Stretches: Stretch hamstring and calf muscles. Dribble again. Stretch calf and Achilles tendon. Get a partner to put pressure on the ball with the ball of the foot, with their heel on the ground. Dribble again. Lift inside of foot to groin to stretch the glutinous maximus (butt!)

Play 6v1 with 6 balls. Player without a ball has to try and steal one. Players stay within the grid. After 1 minute or so, the player without the ball gets a quick exercise. Then take one more ball out so it is 5v2 with 5 balls. At end of a minute, 2 players will be without a ball and get an exercise.

Then take one more ball out so it is 4v3 with 4 balls. At end of a minute, 3 players will be without a ball and get an exercise. This helps players to dribble keeping their ball within the frame of their body, and to hold off an opponent.

"Ka-boom" – The Block Tackling Drill

Coach may want to introduce the block tackling drill at this point, for timing, rhythm etc. Coaching points include: Low center of balance, knee bent, toe up, ankle locked. Tackle/block the ball using the stiffened ankle. To drill this have two players stand across from each other as they would to shake hands. Players may want to start with a hand on their partners shoulder. Place a ball between them. Starting with the right foot first, players count "1,2,3" in unison to develop a rhythm then both try to tackle the ball, striking it at the same time. If done correctly the tackles can be hard, the ball will make a "thud" but will remain in essentially the same spot. Do 5 repetitions each foot per set. Complete two sets.

"Get out of Here!"

Play "Get out of here" (works for 10-14 year olds) -Two teams in a line stand either side of the coach (standing on the half way line with all the balls). Name them team USA and team Brazil! Play 1v1 in a 10 x 15 area grid to 2 yard goals, with the first player from each side coming out as soon as the coach puts a ball on the field. The coach is boss of the balls! Introduce penalty for encroaching! When a goal is scored or the ball goes out of play, the coach shouts 'Get out of here!' and the players have to go to the back of their line. As soon as the coach yells, he can put another ball on the field for the next player from each team to play. The game is continuous 'til the coach has no balls left. He can then ask the players what they can do to rectify the situation... They will soon collect all the balls back!



Let players go through once each without any instruction.

Then introduce the Coaching points:

- Pressure quickly, but then coming under control
- Do not over commit
- Curve defensive run
- Do not have to win ball, just keep between the attacker, ball and goal – block shot on goal
- If defender manages to turn the attacker, get in tight

Award goals if not quick enough pressure on the ball.

Then demonstrate how easy it is for the attacker to turn the defender if too tight. Get distances correct with regard to the speed of the opponent.

First start with passive defending. Then let the defender tackle. If they win the ball, go for opponents' goal. Teams keep scores. Play for five minutes or so. Coach defender in the game.

Once concepts have been determined, introduce 2v1, and then 2v2. Coach the defensive shape and concept of keeping 2 players at angle goal side to support. Coach will still find that he/she has to coach the first defender also!

There is no offside! If attackers run goal side of the last defender award a goal. The supporting defender must have both opponents in front of him at all times.

Linking Arms Game

This game-like drill can be used with an emphasis on single and group defending if worked as a progression (i.e. 1v1, then 2v2, then 3v3, etc). Set up a 35X25 field with 3-4yd flag goals. Divide team in half and put each team in each goal with their arms linked. Have each team count off so they are numbered. Teams in goals are goalies and must keep arms linked when stopping shots. Coach calls out numbers (i.e. "three" – each number 3 player from each team are "in" and go 1v1) the rolls ball to center of the field and players try to score. If a score or ball goes "out" players need to sprint back to their respective goals and link arms. First team back with arms linked gets the next ball service. Numbers can be called in multiples (i.e. "two-four" for 2v2; "one-two-six" for 3v3, etc).

Chip and Dale Game

Then develop to play 4v4 to targets in a 20x30 yard grid. Have to score by chipping the ball into a semi-circular end-zone for resting teammates to catch.

Then play 4v4 on field with both teams also having a goalkeeper. In this stage it is best to let the game flow and not stop it every time a mistake occurs. A coach can call out what to do next time as the game continues!