

HOW TO TEACH DEFENDING: PART 1

Jacob Daniel, Georgia Soccer Director of Coaching, March 2020

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of defending system and formation used, when teams defend, they should follow a few key general guidelines. Part 1 of this article focuses on these general guidelines. Part 2 will go into more specific principles as they relate to defending in a 4-3-3 formation.

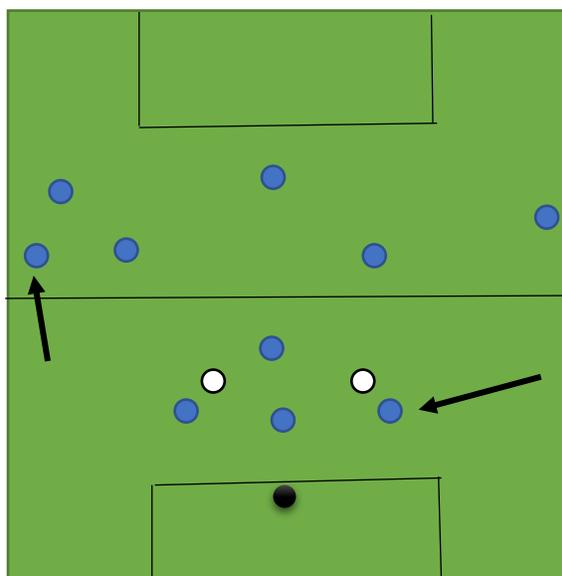
PREPARING FOR TRANSITION TO DEFENSE

While our team has possession and is attacking, the back line should maintain numerical superiority. If the other team leaves one forward up, our team will need to keep at least two defenders at the back. If the other team has two forwards, we need to keep at least three defenders in the back. In addition to that, our defensive midfielder should not join the attack and should be positioned just in front of the back line to protect the back line by applying pressure on the ball if the other team counterattacks and block the passing lane to the forwards.

When we are in possession, the back line should stay connected to the midfield by stepping up and keeping a compact shape. The keeper should also move up to stay connected to the back line and position himself where he can get to through balls that might be played by opponents.

When one wide back overlaps in attack, the other wide back should stay with the back line and slide inside to provide cover.

Diagram 1 illustrates these points. The opponents leave two forwards, so we have three defenders. The left wide back overlaps so the right wide back slides inside to cover. The defensive midfielder stays in front of the back line to provide defensive cover. Diagram 1 however, shows that the team is not following one of the key principles mentioned above. Can you guess which principle is not being applied below? The answer is: the back line is not stepping up with the team to stay connected to the midfield and keep a compact shape. Good coaches should be able to notice that and fix it quickly by instructing the back line to step up and eliminate the huge gap between the defenders and attacking midfielders.



DIAGERAM 1

TRANSITION TO DEFENSE

The moment we lose possession, whoever lost possession must chase and pressure the ball. At the same time, the closest player to the ball who is able to pressure the ball from a goal-side position should press the ball to prevent a forward pass or a dribble. If we can press and win the ball back quickly, we should do that. If not, then all the other players (except the center forward) must make recovery runs towards our goal and pick up players. Central defenders and defensive midfielder should organize everyone quickly with clear instructions on marking assignments.

The wingers should recover into a position in midfield about ten yards in front of the wide back. Our wingers are also responsible for tracking down the opponents' wide back if they overlap. Our center forward is responsible for tracking the opponents' central defender if he steps into midfield. Our midfielders are responsible for tracking down the opponents' midfielders if they make forward runs.

DEFENDING SHAPE WHEN OPPONENT HAS POSSESSION

When the other team has possession in the back, or their keeper has the ball, our team should adopt a compact shape and position themselves as shown in Diagram 2. The center forward takes up a central position and waits to see who gets the ball from the keeper. The wingers slide inside and invite a pass to the wide backs. If the keeper passes the ball to their central defender, our forward applies the first pressure and channels the ball to the flank. This makes the next pass predictable and allows our players to mark tighter and close the passing lanes to the forwards. In Diagram 2, the center forward applies first pressure and pushes the ball wide. The right winger moves to block the passing lane to the opponent's winger and is ready to pounce on the wide back if he gets the ball. If the opponent's center back passes to their left back, The back line shifts to the right. The right winger drops to a position in front of the right wide back. The end result is a very compact team shape that presses the ball against the sideline and is able to win the ball.

The next page outlines a practice session that can be used to train pressure-cover-balance when defending.

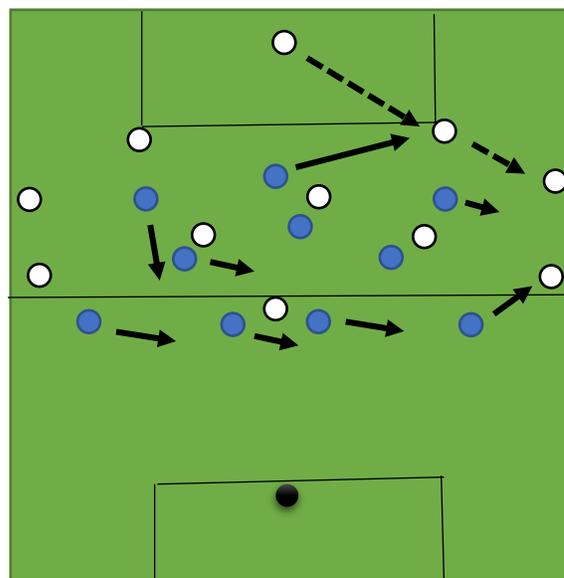
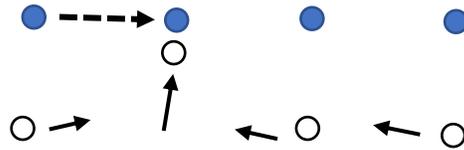


DIAGRAM 2

DEFENDING ACTIVITIES

WARM UP

Players divided into groups of 4. Two groups of 4 face each other. One group passes the ball square passes. The other group works on defensive shape of pressure-cover-balance. Switch roles.



MAIN ACTIVITY: PRESSURE-COVER-BALANCE

Two teams of 4, 5, or 6 players in a grid that is wide. In the diagram below, it's 5v5 to targets. Each team tries to play the ball to the target player standing outside the grid. In the diagram, white target player has the ball and he serves the ball to the white team who will score by playing the ball to the blue target. If the blue target gets the ball, he will serve to the blue team who will try to score by finding the white target. The target players can move laterally but not into grid. In the diagram below, you can see how the blue team shape invites a lateral pass and prevents a vertical penetration pass to the highest player. Once the pass is made, the blue team will pressure the ball and everyone on the blue team should move to provide cover and block passing lanes to the target player.

Part 2 of this article will focus on the defensive role of each player in a 4-3-3 formation.

