

# ***SETTING A DEFENSIVE TRAP***

## ***Individual to Small Group to Team Defending***

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Modern defending tactics involve the following three strategies:

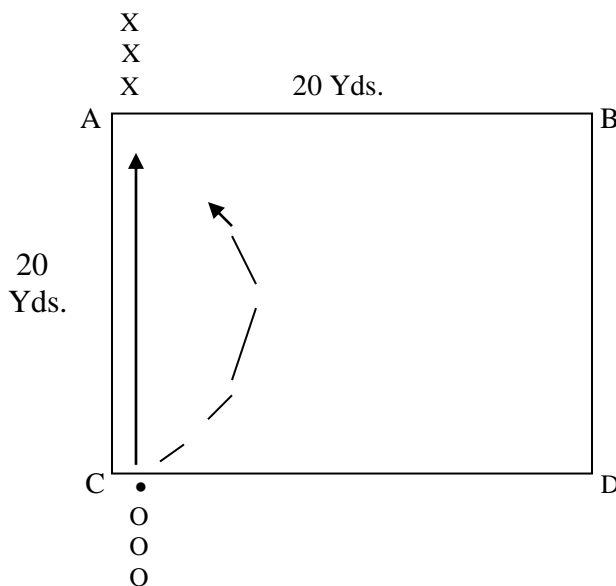
- 1) Making play predictable by channeling the ball into certain zones of the field (this is usually the duty of the forwards)
- 2) Pressing: Flooding the zone in question with players to create compactness and a 'numbers-up' advantage (midfielders have an important role here)
- 3) Blocking penetration by clogging the passing lanes to the opposing forwards. Essentially, the opposing forwards are 'sandwiched' between defenders who mark them from behind and midfielders who position themselves in front of them. Alternatively, opposing forwards are sandwiched between two defenders.

The three strategies, when worked in unison, form the basis for modern team defending. when properly executed, these strategies cause opponents to bring the ball into a 'dead end' trap and, ultimately, lose possession.

When confronted with the challenge of teaching their team the above strategies, coaches can introduce the concept via individual and small group activities before moving on to the more functional 11v11 team defending. In fact, some aspects of the above strategies are better taught in individual and small group settings while others are best taught using the whole field with 11v11 or as close to 11v11 as possible.

The following series of activities suggest one way to progress from individual to small-group to team defending whilst attempting to teach the three above strategies

### ***A. Individual Channeling and Defending***



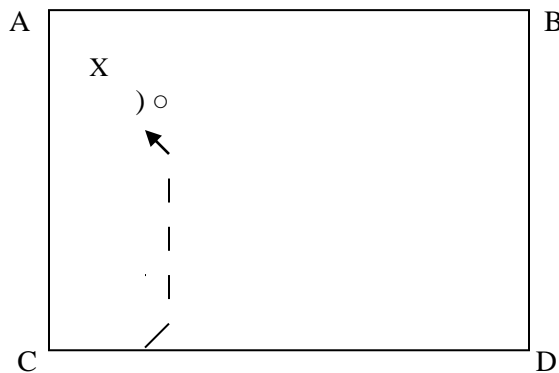
**Organization:** 'O' passes the ball to X and comes out to pressure the ball. X dribbles the ball towards line CD. At the end of each turn, 'O' goes to the back of line X and X goes to the back of line O (rotate roles).

### **Warm-up (channeling and jockeying)**

At first, the 'O's are instructed to just jockey the attacker and not tackle the ball. As X dribbles to line CD, O stays with him, keeping goal side of him within tackling distance but not attempting to win the ball. This allows the players to warm up prior to the intense 1v1 duels while the coach can start introducing some of the coaching points related to closing down the ball and channeling.

### **Key coaching points**

- ▶ 'O' should quickly close the distance between himself and X while the ball is traveling. This can be accomplished by a quick-start sprint by O towards X immediately after the pass and slowing down to a balanced boxer stance just before the ball arrives at X's feet.
- ▶ The closing down run by O should be a bent run towards the inside of the grid. This run trajectory communicates the intention of O to channel X down sideline AC. O's body position upon arrival near X should be sideways, boxer stance, inside of X, as shown below:



### **Progression: 1v1**

Now the players are allowed to win the ball from X. The objective for X is to dribble the ball across line CD. The objective for 'O', in order of 'damage control', is to:

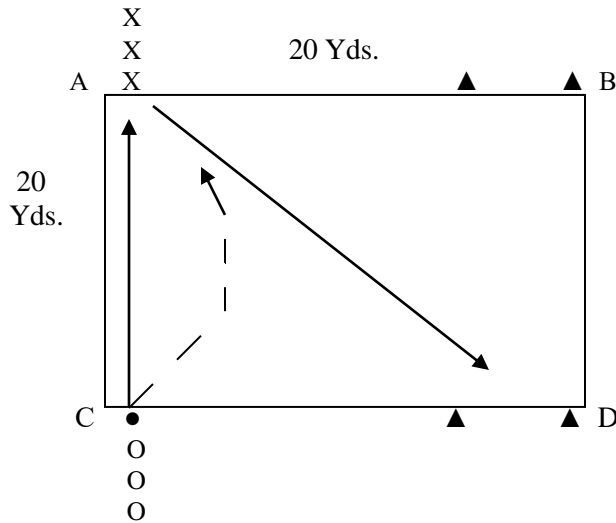
- prevent X from cutting inside towards corner D.
- tackle the ball towards the outside (line AC) thus, 'conceding a throw-in'.
- win the ball.

### **Key Coaching Points:**

- ▶ Whatever 'O' does, he must not let X cut inside of him towards line BD. Although in the context of this 1v1 duel, this point seems irrelevant, the ability of 'O' to keep X on the outside is crucial for keeping play predictable and will assume more importance as we progress (see strategy 1 at the beginning of this article).
- ▶ 'O' should be patient and stay on his feet and only tackle when X shows too much of the ball.
- ▶ Any tackle attempted should be forceful as opposed to a half-hearted stab with the foot.

- ▶ If X succeeds in cutting inside, O should refrain from tackling unless he is sure he can win the ball and, if at all possible, re-adjust his body position to try and force X to the outside again. A tackle that pushes the ball inside the grid can be risky since the end result is a loose ball in the grid while 'O' is sprawled on his backside. If 'O' is going to be beaten by X to line CD, it might as well be on the outside near corner C.

### **Progression 1v1 with goals**



Add goals at corners B and D. Now X must score through goal D. If 'O' wins the ball he can score at goal B.

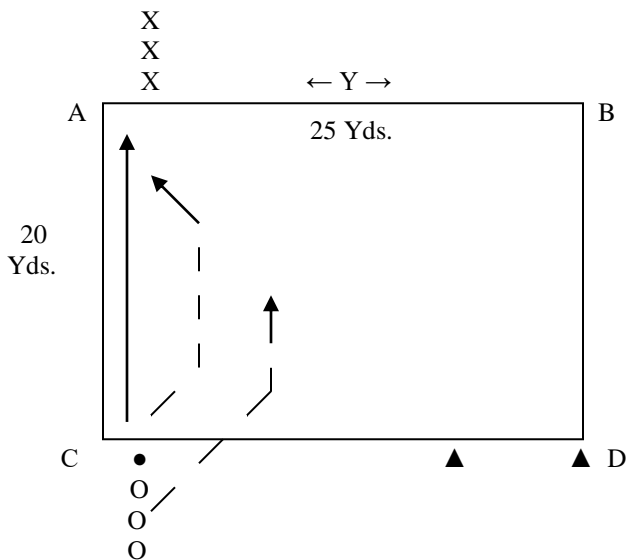
### ***Key Coaching Points:***

- ▶ 'O' should get quickly into the line between the ball and 'D' in order to block an early goal attempt by X.
- ▶ All other coaching points as before with the addition of the transition aspects of play i.e. X needs to defend immediately upon losing possession, unless the ball goes out of bounds. Defenders are still trying to channel play towards the corners away from the goal.

## **B. Channeling into a 'Dead End' in Small Groups**

### **Progression: 2v2 (with one goal and one support player)**

Place an attacker (Y) on line AB. Y cannot enter grid. Y serves as support for attacker X in the grid. X attempts to score on goal D. X can pass the ball to Y. Y can score on goal D from line AB or pass it back to X. Add a second defender to create 1v2 in the grid. (rotation: Covering defender becomes challenging defender on the next turn, while the first defender goes to the back of line X and X goes to the back of line O as before).

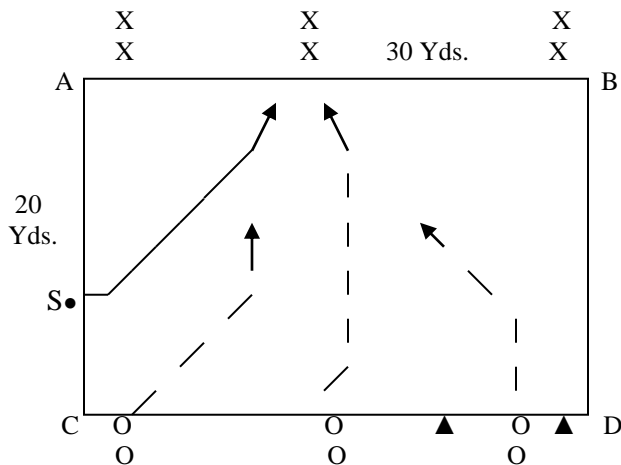


**Key Coaching Points:**

- ▶ Again the first defender channels the ball towards line AC.
- ▶ The objective for the two defenders is to corner the attacker and, once cornered, win the ball or at least tackle it out of bounds.
- ▶ Covering defender needs to communicate to the first defender when to tackle. The distance and angle of the covering defender should be consistent with the objective of channeling towards corner C yet close enough to the first defender to provide cover and pounce on a loose ball or on a ball played behind the first defender.
- ▶ The two defenders must choose the right moment to commit themselves to winning the ball, the 'point of no return', bearing in mind that if the defenders let X off the hook and allow him to pass it back to Y from corner C, Y could punish them by scoring on the open goal.

This activity impresses upon the defenders the advantages of numbers-up defending and the potential damage of letting attackers off the hook.

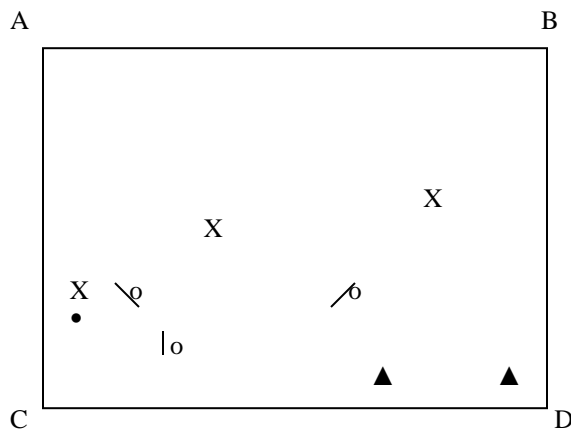
**Progression: 3v3 (with one goal)**



Play starts with server serving a ball to any one of the 3 X's who try to score on goal at corner D. As soon as the ball is served, the 3 O's come into the grid to defend. Play stops when the ball is won by defenders or goes out of bounds. (A note about rotation: At this point it is better to allow players to repeat the defending role a number of times as opposed to constantly rotating from defending to attacking. This is because the 3v3 scenario has a lot more decision options and teachable moments than 1v1 and players need time to absorb and practice the coaching principles. In the diagram above, the 6 O's can rotate by defending 3 at the time. Once the coach is satisfied with the amount of defending practice these 6 O's experienced, he can switch to X's defending).

***Key Coaching Points:***

- ▶ Immediate pressure on the ball must be achieved as the X's inter-pass in order to deny a scoring attempt and/or punish a poor first touch by winning the ball.
- ▶ Communication among defenders is crucial.
- ▶ As before, the defender's first 'damage control' priority is to steer the ball towards line AC away from goal.
- ▶ The objective is to create a 2v1 situation in favor of the defense. This is the 'point of no return' cue for two of the defenders to pounce on the ball and cause a turn-over while the third defender is providing cover/balance. The diagram below illustrates the 'point of no return' scenario.

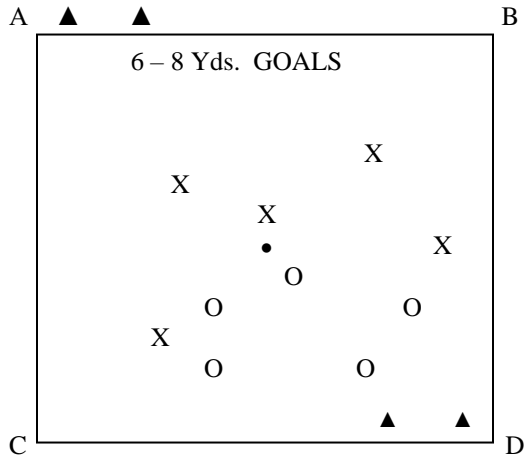


- ▶ Of course, any time an attacker shows too much of the ball, a tackle is warranted regardless of location in the grid.

**C. Team Defending**

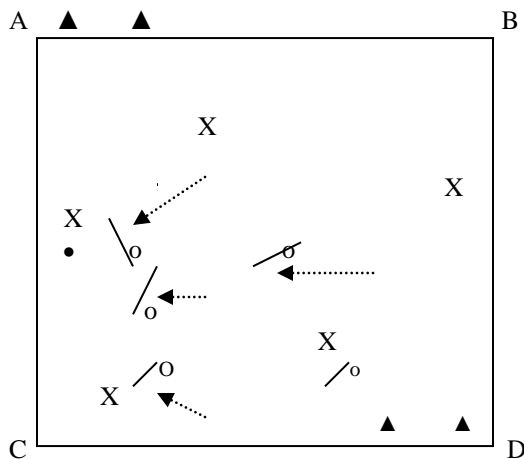
**Progression: 5v5 or 6v6 with 2 goals**

Increase the area of the grid to accommodate 5v5 or 6v6 and play a regular game. The only special arrangement in this game is the location of the goals, with team X defending a goal at corner A and team O defending the goal at point D.



***Key Coaching Points:***

- ▶ As before, each team will try to steer the ball away from their goal and set a trap to win it. The diagram below illustrates an example of a trap.



**Progression: 11v11**

Once the players become familiar with the nuances of channeling play, pressing the ball and recognizing the right moment to pounce on the ball and win it, it's time to move on to the 11-a-side environment and continue to ingrain the correct defensive behavior and instincts in a more functional manner. We will use the 4-4-2 formation as an illustration on how a team would channel the ball into a defensive trap.

The two forwards in the 4-4-2 formation will be expected to apply the first pressure on the ball, whenever the opposing defenders are in possession. The two forwards will usually try to force the ball towards the flank area and keep it down on that flank to make the next pass predictable. The diagram below illustrates a classic 4-4-2 defending. As the ball is passed to opponent 4, forward F1 challenges at an angle of approach that encourages 4 to play it down the flank, and F2 closes down on 3 to prevent the ball from going around the back to the other flank. This type of

pressure on the ball by the forwards makes it easy for the rest of the team because 4's options are limited and predictable. Now D1 can close down the wide midfielder in anticipation and M3 can slide inside since 8 will not be able to get the ball from 4. Midfielder M1 is now free to double-team on 7 or 9 or 5, depending on where the ball is passed. M3 can double team with M2 on 6, or on 10. All these permutations are possible because the forwards applied the first pressure and forced the ball to one side. With play condensed to a small area and the players so close to each other, the ball is essentially pushed into a 'dead end' and possession is easier to gain.

