

introducing 1-2-3 defending

With young players, the hardest, and in my opinion, the most important single aspect to get across is that the closest person to the opponent with the football DOES NOT have the responsibility to win the ball! Once defenders understand this, about 90% of diving in is eliminated and the attackers job becomes much harder.

It also reinforces the next most important concept: that somebody had BETTER be moving to cover the space behind the closest defender! That is the player who will, most often, wind up winning the ball.

You can demonstrate this quite easily by selecting the best defensive soccer player on the team, placing that player isolated out on the pitch, point to a goal for him or her to defend, and then tell them to "get the ball" from you. Then, simply dribble up to the player, push the ball past, into space, and run onto it. If you can get the defender to step towards you, you can do this quite easily.

Ask the team why this was so easy. Now ask how you can prevent it from happening.

Somebody should come up with having a teammate behind the pressuring defender.

Now repeat the demonstration with another opponent who has been instructed to cover the space. Also ask the closest (pressuring) defender to not win the ball unless a mistake is made by the attacker. Run it again and you should see a huge improvement.

Closest person to the opponent with the ball (the first defender) applies the PRESSURE

- YOUR JOB IS TO SLOW THE ATTACK, NOT WIN THE BALL
- Slow the attacker down
- Apply just enough pressure to get the attackers head down
- Make the attack predictable and push the attack to the least dangerous part of the field
- Only attempt to win the ball if the attacker makes a mistake and you are sure to win it. BE PATIENT!

Tips for the first defender

Pressure the ball IMMEDIATELY!

- Do not dive in, just slow the attack down and make it predictable. PATIENCE!!
- Eyes on the ball
- Weight even between legs, and forward on toes, knees bent
- Feet shoulder width apart, one foot forward
- Do not mark too close until you have help - a wall pass may beat you.
- Mark close enough that the attacker has to keep her head down looking at the ball.
- Herd the attacker towards the touch-line
- Tackle only if you are sure you will win the ball.
- Risk tackles more in the offensive third of the field (closer to the opponents goal)
- Tackle if the attacker is alone and outnumbered.

- Tackle if you can touch the ball before the attacker can.

The next closest person to the ball provides the COVER

- YOUR JOB IS TO BACK UP THE PRESSURING DEFENDER.
- Cover the space behind the pressuring defender.
- Adjust your distance based on the speed of the attack, and the skill and speed of the attacker.
- Communicate with the pressuring defender, let him or her know that you are there, tell them which way to push the attack, if necessary.

Others provide the BALANCE

1. Mark any nearby attacking threats who could receive the ball directly from the ball carrier.
2. Track and other attackers who are moving, or could move into threatening positions.
3. Cut out any passing lanes. This can often be done while marking or tracking opponents.
4. Communicate with your teammates. Point out any unmarked threats, or any opponents making runs.
5. Be ready to assume the role of pressuring or covering defender if the situation changes.

Tips for the second and third defenders

2nd Defender:

1. Cover the space behind the 1st defender. LET THE 1st DEFENDER KNOW YOU ARE THERE!
2. Be a little bit toward the goal side usually.

3rd Defender:

Cut off passing options; especially square (cross-field) passes.

1. You can either mark the receivers, or the space between them and the ball.
2. RECOVER - It is never too late to run back and help your team-mates.
3. STAY COMPACT - Do not be drawn out of shape.
4. Make sure that the far post area is covered as the ball nears your goal.
5. Do not be caught ball watching. Track players moving forward.
6. Do not release your mark to go after a back pass unless you are CERTAIN that a team-mate is there to cover, AND does not have a mark of his own to cover! Usually this means the covering player TELLS YOU TO GO. **So communicate!**