

Teaching 1 vs. 1 Defending

This is a summary of an article from the December/January issue of Soccer Coaching International by Christain Lavers

Before deciding on “What system to play” or focusing on your team defending you must recognize that defensive success is first and foremost based on quality 1 vs. 1 defending. Getting pressure on the player with the ball is vital if the rest of the team is to carry out their defensive responsibilities. Only when this pressure takes place can the remainder of the players get “compact” and take away space from the attacking team.

There are **three key principles** to successful 1 vs. 1 defending:

1. **Quick Pressure-** The player nearest the ball must “close the space” as quickly as possible as soon as the ball is played to his opponent. You should close ground on your opponent as the ball is traveling to the attacker, do not wait until he/she has received the ball. Defender has three priorities:
 - Intercept the Pass- if you can anticipate the attackers’ actions, but never commit to this unless you are sure you can get there.
 - Challenge the First touch- Be in a position that you can “steal” the ball off of a poor first touch.
 - Contain the attacker- Deny space to turn or pass in a penetrating manner.
2. **Touch Tight Pressure-** When closing down space, it is important that you don’t overrun the play. As a rule you should slow down about 5 yards from the attacker and gradually take away the remaining space in a controlled defensive position.
 - You want to be in a position that the attacker feels uncomfortable, and if he makes a mistake you can win the ball.
 - You are close enough that you limit the attackers’ vision of the field.
 - You cut off forward passing lanes, making play more predictable for your supporting defenders.
3. **Patient Pressure-** Good defenders will recognize that they do not need to win the ball immediately. If you approach the attacker quickly and under control, taking away his space, you will shift the initiative to the attacker. Most attacking chances are created through poor and impatient defending. General rules for “Patient pressure” are:
 - Don’t Dive In
 - Be Cool and Alert- Ready to take the ball when it’s exposed
 - Tackle with Confidence- Be quick enough to poke the ball away or hard enough to send the ball forward through the attacker.

Something to consider- One of the best times to win the ball back is in the moments after you’ve given away possession. If you can get immediate pressure on the ball from the defensive player closest to the ball, often the player who just lost it, the attacking

team won't be as organized and will likely turn the ball over. In a worst case scenario you can eliminate their ability to play forward.

Common Mistakes in Young Defenders

1. Failure to get touch tight. Concede too many options to the attacker (shots, penetrating passes, etc.)
2. Failure to show patience. Try to win the ball too often and too early. Defenders need to learn to control their momentum. Let the attacker make a mistake and then pounce.
3. Poor Transition. Young players drop their heads on loss of possession and leave their teammates prone to the counter-attack.

Summary:

As you can see the role of the first defender is vital to the success of team defending. If we do a poor job in applying pressure to the ball and taking away the attackers options the whole defensive system will suffer. It is very important that we spend time teaching each player the principles of individual defending. The 1 vs. 1 is the foundation of the game. This doesn't just apply to the attacking principle, but defensive as well.