

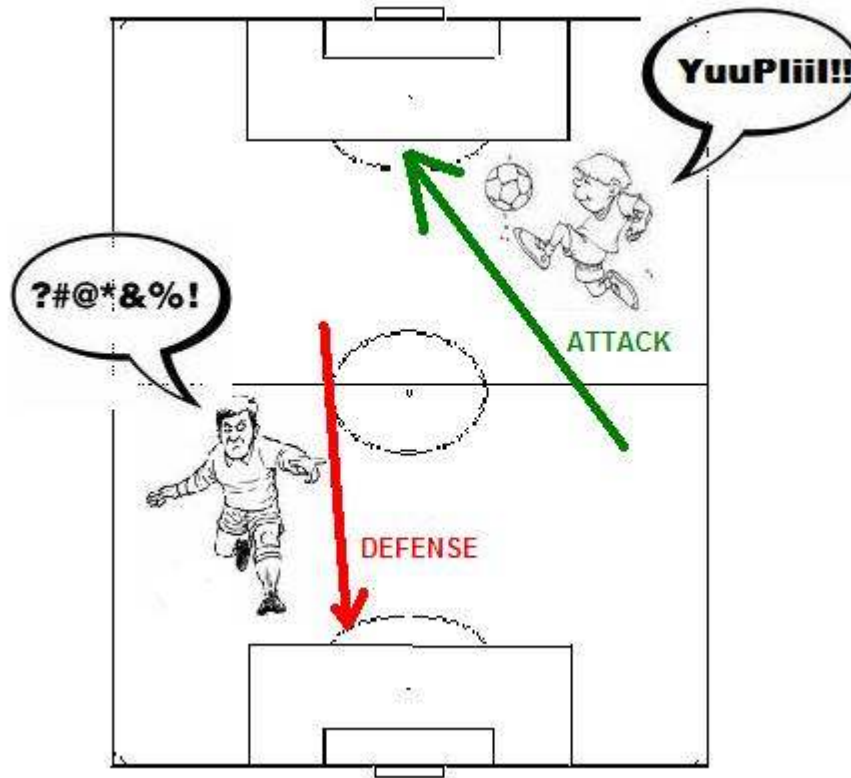
# Improving The Defensive Skills Of Your Players

*By Andre Botelho - "The Expert Soccer Coach"*

When I was a young player, I just loved to run with the ball "glued" to my left foot. When the opposite team gained possession and I had to run back to defense, it wasn't that fun anymore... my feet seemed to weight a ton.



This happens all the time and usually who suffers is the team. Later I started to correct this behaviour and helped others do the same. It's important that everyone realizes how important defensive activities can be in modern soccer.



A good defense mindset is an art that can be perfected with understanding the issues involved and with practice. You must explain what is meant by setting up a defense with your players and develop these skills in 1 vs. 1 and in group defense situations.

Players must work as a team to break up the opponents' attack by preventing passes to areas from where attacks can develop or by not allowing attackers to reach areas from where they can mount an attack on the goal. The trick is to use the manpower available on site to delay the attackers till more defenders arrive to help win back the ball.

## **"Everyone" Is A Defender**

You must impress upon your players over and over that there are no pure attackers and defenders in soccer. Every player at some point in time may be required to be a defender. A player standing idly at his position waiting for the ball to be won back by his team mates may as well not be playing for that time since he has no contribution to make at that point. All players have to defend and they must understand this.

### ***Examples...***

#### **Example I - Basic Defensive Training**

- To begin with, train your players in defensive skills in a 1 v 1 situation and progress them to 2 v 1 (both advantageous and disadvantageous numbers).
- Further training should go up to 2 v 2 and 3 v 3 situations. Following this format, players learn individual field craft and teamwork.

#### **Example II - Teaching The Right Stance**

- It is important that you teach your players the right stance to adopt when they are on the defensive and are covering an attacker. Since defenders often move backwards in relation to an advancing attacker, it becomes important that they do not lose balance and fall backwards.
- It is best if the defender crouches a bit so as to lower his center of gravity.
- He should also move along an imaginary line between the attacker and the far corner of the goal to deny him a clear opportunity shot.

#### **Example III - Pressure Is The Key**

- The first principle of successful defense is that there should never be a moment when an attacker is allowed to move freely with the ball.
- Whoever is closer to the attacker must move in instantaneously to impose a delay on whatever the attacker plans to do. This first defender is also sometimes called a pressure player to make his role absolutely clear.
- The aim of the pressure player is to disrupt the plan of the attackers and to deny him time to look around and think. It also provides time for the defense to regroup and move to retake possession of the ball.
- With the role of the pressure player clear, it is evident that he is not yet tackling the attacker with the ball but slowing him down, forcing him to dribble excessively and denying him a good look around for a pass.
- Once the defenders have arrived on the scene, the pressure player is free to engage.
- The next defender on the scene (between the attacker and the goal) is a backup to the pressure player and he covers the attacker in case he is able to outmaneuver the pressure player. Rightly so, he is called the cover defender.

#### **Example IV - Common Training**

- You must train all your players in the concepts of pressure players and cover players.
- Players must be able to take on these roles immediately and judge who is best positioned to take on these roles.
- Cover players must be able to ensure the following:
  - Supporting the pressure player in his actions
  - Closing down other attackers so that effective passing is not possible
- Another basic principle of maneuvering in this team is that the pressure player devotes his entire attention to the attacker with the ball while the cover player is the one who has a good opportunity to position, look around and think.
- If required, the cover player should be passing instructions to the pressure player.

### **Example V - Using The Touchline**

- You must be able to make your players image the touchline to be another defender because it restricts the freedom of movement of the attacker.
- The pressure player attempts to get the attacker closer to the touchline by positioning himself to one side and funneling the attacker in that direction.
- The cover defender stays a little to the side to provide backup but also helps to force the attacker to move into the funnel.
- Once the defenders have got the attacker restricted, they can move in to gain possession or force him to make an awkward pass.

### **Example VI – Circle Defense**

Circle Attack can be a good drill to improve the defensive skills of the players. This drill has been developed in a way that you can also use it as a warm up drill.

**Age Group:** 6 – 13 Years

**Level Of Difficulty:** Beginner

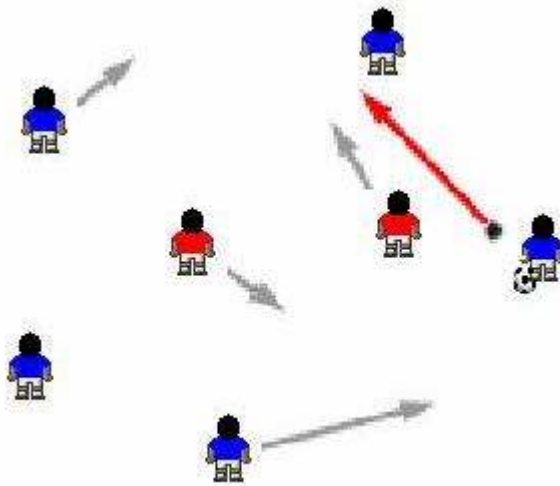
**Time Duration:** 5 – 10 Minutes

#### ***Step By Step Instructions:***

- Create a circle using cones with at least 15 yards of diameter.
- Ask five players to stand on the border of the circle at even distance between each other. These are attackers.
- You will need two more players for this drill. Ask them to take position inside the circle. These players are the defenders.
- Two of the attackers will have a ball.
- As soon as you blow the whistle, the attackers start passing ball to each with an objective to keep the ball away from the two defenders.

- If a defender manages to steal the ball, he/she becomes an attacker and the attacker who lost the ball will become the defender.

**Diagram:**



**Key Points:**

- You are recommended to start the drill by asking the attackers to pass the ball to their closest players. Later on, when you see that the players have become comfortable with the concept, you can ask the attackers to pass the ball to the farthest attacker on the other side of the circle – it means they will be playing the ball between the defenders.
- Encourage the players to keep their heads up while passing the ball, as it will help them be aware of the circumstances around them and they will be able to take better decision.
- The defenders should also be encouraged to keep moving with the ball in an attempt to steal the ball.

I'll get back to you soon with more important soccer coaching tips...



Dedicated to improving your coaching skills,

*Andre Botelho*  
*"The Expert Soccer Coach"*

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