

# Chapter 6

## Organization Starts With the Defense

Organizing the team's defensive duties is easier than organizing its attacking functions. First, defenders don't have supplemental tasks; they only need to be concerned with the most important basic task at the moment. Some coaches simplify these by restricting a player's freedom — telling a child to play on a specific spot or line; limiting a player's 'job' to defending the goal; telling kids to just kick the ball out of play when they're under pressure, and/or that they should never go ahead of the ball and join in the attack.

The problem is instructions like this paint a negative picture of the player's role in the game. They can help set up the party, but they're not invited to it.

Still, there's no question that defenders do the heavy lifting for the more glamorous attackers. Identifying players, especially talented players, who will accept and want to excel in the job will be difficult.

The bottom line is that the opportunity for fame and glory begins the moment that we lose the ball because until we get it back we're out of business. And individuals who can excel in this skill are worth their weight in gold.

### Essentials: Goal Side, Sideways on, Distance and Angles

To win the ball back, the defender first should be on the goal side of the ball.

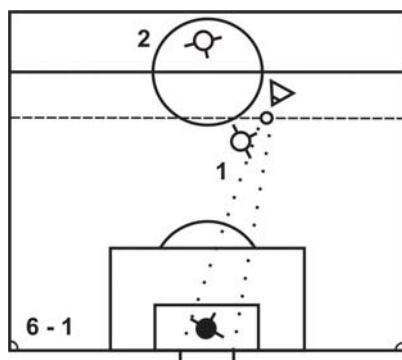


Diagram 6-1 shows two defenders, goalkeeper and one attacker. Defender number 1 is goal side of the attacker with the ball. He is on a line between the attacker and the goal, creating a problem the attacker will have to solve. Defender number 2 is not goal side of the ball and doesn't present any problem to the attacker. Defender number 2 has to decide if he should recover goal side, across the dotted line, or hold his position. If Defender number 1 can handle the situation he doesn't need to. That saves Defender 2 the run back. When the back players are effective defending in 1v1, the

rest of the team can play more aggressively and it saves everyone a lot of energy.

But just being goal side isn't quite enough. The pressurizing defender also needs to be at the correct distance and angle from the attacker. Young players usually stand square to the attacker, literally toe-to-toe on parallel lines, with the defender's right foot across from the attacker's left and vice versa. This can cause additional problems for the defender.

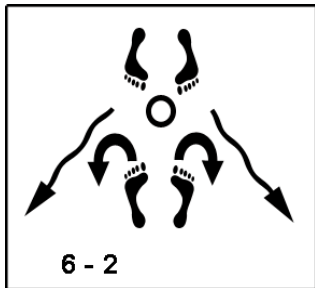
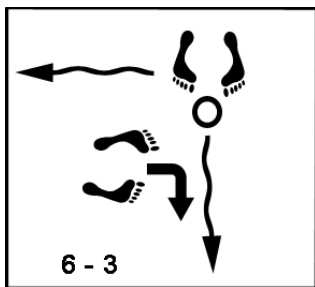


Diagram 6-2 illustrates this situation and the problems the defender faces. This position is called “being square” and gives the attacker these advantages: They can go around the defender on either side or play the ball between the defenders legs, the dreaded nutmeg. While the defender is already ahead of the attacker she will have to turn 180 degrees and that makes her a step slower. Add to this, the attacker controls the start. They get to say “Go” in the race between the two.

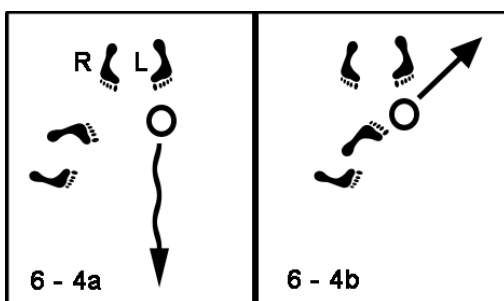


In Diagram 6-3, the defender is “sideways on” to the attacker — she’s still ahead of them, still in the space the attacker wants to move into.

But now the attacker can’t beat the defender going to her right, that way all she can do is go square across the field, and it’s no longer possible to go between the defenders legs. If the attacker wants to dribble past the defender, the only option will be to go in front of her. Now the defender only needs to turn through 90 degrees at the most. This gives her a greater degree of control and limits the attacker’s options to one, a big advantage to the defender.

Neither 6-2 nor 6-3 shows a static situation. The attacker will move forward, and try to dictate what will happen. The defender will try to slow the attacker, while her teammates organize to meet the threat. The defender will trade space for time, exercising self-control and restraint and the attacker will be looking for the right moment to either take her on or to call off the whole affair and pass the ball to a supporting player.

Sideways on offers the defender other benefits. It can take away one of the attacker’s feet and if it’s the attacker’s dominant foot it’s another advantage to the defender.



In Diagram 6-4a the attacker will try to keep the ball as far away as possible from the defender, and in doing so will be forced to favor her left foot. If the attacker’s right-footed, this will add to their problems and help the defender.

If the ball gets ahead of the attacker, the defender’s nearest foot might slide in for a toe-poke tackle (Diagram 6-4b). This can put the ball behind the attacker. With the defender’s weight and momentum going in the direction of the ball, and the attacker’s away from it, it’s another advantage of being sideways on.