

## **2v2 Defending: Pressure and Cover**

The 2v2 situation is the smallest form of teamwork in the game of soccer, but remains one of the most important situations for a player to master no matter what their level of play. A coach 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. Assuming that proper pressure to the ball is exhibited, now the role, responsibilities and positioning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender becomes important.

### **Considerations for the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender:**

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> defender or “covering defender” should position himself in a way that he can pressure the ball if the 1<sup>st</sup> defender is beaten on the dribble, but remain in a position that he can “close the space” on the 2<sup>nd</sup> attacker if the player on the ball chooses to pass.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> defender must communicate with the player pressuring the ball (the 1<sup>st</sup> defender). Simple and concise instruction is vital! Force right, Force left, Contain are all good examples of communication from the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender.
- The distance between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defender is of the utmost importance. The 2<sup>nd</sup> defender mustn't get too close to the 1<sup>st</sup> defender. He should never position himself in a way that the 1<sup>st</sup> attacker can beat both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defender in the same movement. However the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender must not be too far away from the 1<sup>st</sup> defender. This will leave the 1<sup>st</sup> defender isolated and actually create a 1v1 situation.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defenders must be prepared to reverse roles regularly when the ball is passed. It is important that both players are on the same page of when to reverse roles and don't get caught chasing the ball.

The roles and understanding of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defenders responsibilities can only become cohesive through repetition. The best way to provide these opportunities is through small sided games where players are constantly confronted with opportunities to be the 1<sup>st</sup> defender (pressuring) and 2<sup>nd</sup> defender (covering).

Below we'll look at a few visuals of incorrect and correct positioning between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> attacker. I have chosen to keep the visuals in a 2v2 setting to simplify the concepts, but the same principles apply all the way up to the 11 v11 game.

## Incorrect positioning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender:



In the picture above you see a common mistake made by the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender gets too tight to the 2<sup>nd</sup> attacker (supporting the 1<sup>st</sup> attacker) he provides no cover to the 1<sup>st</sup> defender. This creates a 1v1 situation which is a favorable situation for the attacking team. **In the picture below you see a much better positioning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender.** By being “pinched in” and slightly deeper than the 1<sup>st</sup> defender the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender protects the 1<sup>st</sup> defender if he is beaten in the 1v1 challenge, can communicate with the 1<sup>st</sup> defender, and remains in a position that he can pressure the 2<sup>nd</sup> attacker if he is to receive a pass.



## Changing of defensive roles:



As stated earlier, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defenders must be prepared to reverse roles when the ball is passed. It is important that both players are on the same page of when to reverse roles and don't get caught chasing the ball. The key to this situation is that the defenders change roles as the ball is traveling. As the 1<sup>st</sup> attacker passes the ball to the 2<sup>nd</sup> attacker, the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender must quickly close the space on the player receiving the ball eliminating the option to penetrate. The original 1<sup>st</sup> defender must now "pinch in" and "drop off" into a covering position and fulfill the role of the 2<sup>nd</sup> defender. New proper defensive positions pictured below.



**Summary:**

As you can see the cooperation between the 1<sup>st</sup> defender and 2<sup>nd</sup> defender is vital to the success of team defending. If we do a poor job of applying pressure to the ball and “cover” for the player doing so, the whole defensive system will suffer. It is very important that we spend time teaching each player the principles of both individual defending and small group defending. The 2v2 confrontation offers players to learn the most basic concepts of teamwork with continuous opportunities to experience the roles of both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defender. Once players are comfortable recognizing proper positioning in this format a coach should progress to 3v3 or 4v4 games where the same principles apply, but may be more difficult for the players to recognize.

**Note:** It can be helpful to apply the offside rule when teaching defensive concepts. This will prevent the defender from unnecessarily chasing an attacker when he runs into a deep offside position. However the concepts of pressure and cover should remain the top priority, it shouldn't be a time to teach an offside trap.

