

11 v11 Defensive Team Shape

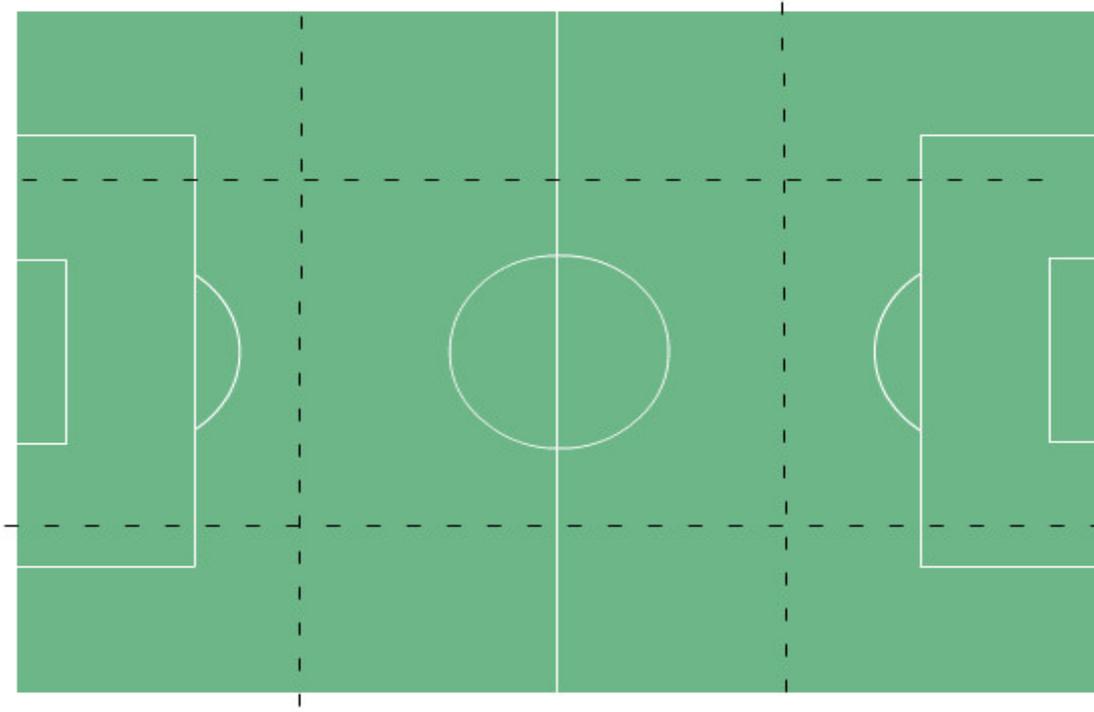
No matter what formation you choose to play, Team Shape is a vital component to how successful your team will play on the weekend. In this picture you can see two teams playing in the 4-4-2 system. The white team (attacking) should attempt to maximize the space on the field while the Red (defensive team) wants to minimize the space white can play in by remaining compact.



Let's focus on the Red team. Notice how the Red players that are nearest the ball remain tight to the attackers in the area, while the players on the "weak side" pinch in to a more central position to crowd the attacking teams space. One important thing to note is the Red backline. It tries to remain close to the red midfield. The space behind the backline and the goalkeeper (not pictured) is the area we concede, but if the goalkeeper and defenders are on the same page we should be able to recognize visual cues (head down, ball out of the feet, etc.) of when the white team is preparing to knock a ball behind us. In the picture above the goalkeeper would be somewhere between the penalty spot and top of the box.

Although there is no sweeper in this picture (it's a semi-flat back four) the rules of compactness still apply. If you chose to play with a sweeper, you should encourage that player to be no deeper than 7 to 10 yards (max) from his/her teammates. Most teams will place an attacker directly on the sweeper if that player is playing deep. This stretches the field for the attacking team which is what they want to do. Let's try to train our teams to limit the attackers' space.

Here is a way to teach Defensive Team Shape.



Set-Up: Divide the field into thirds both horizontally and vertically.

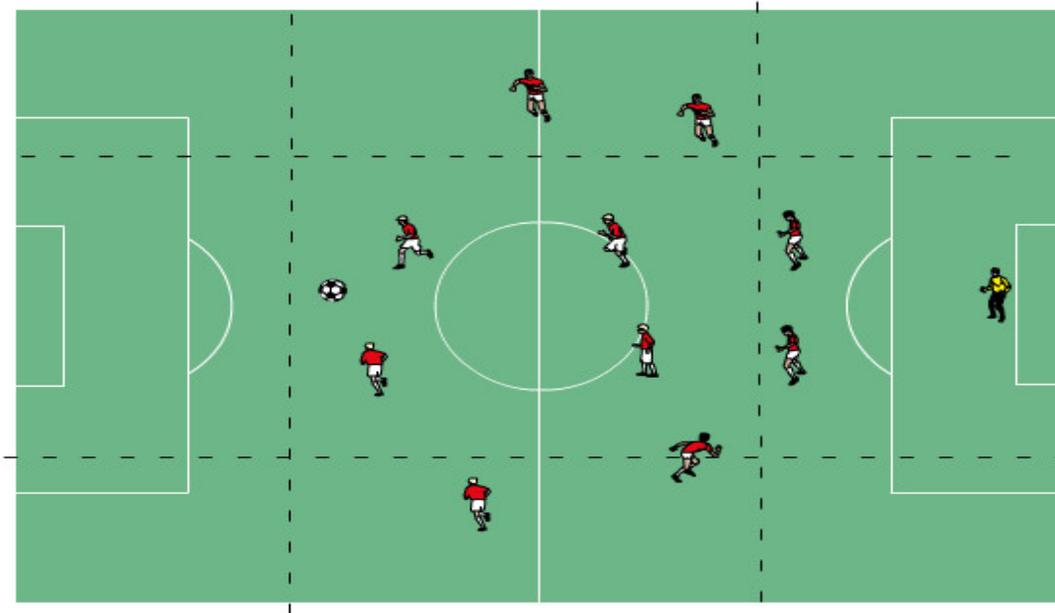
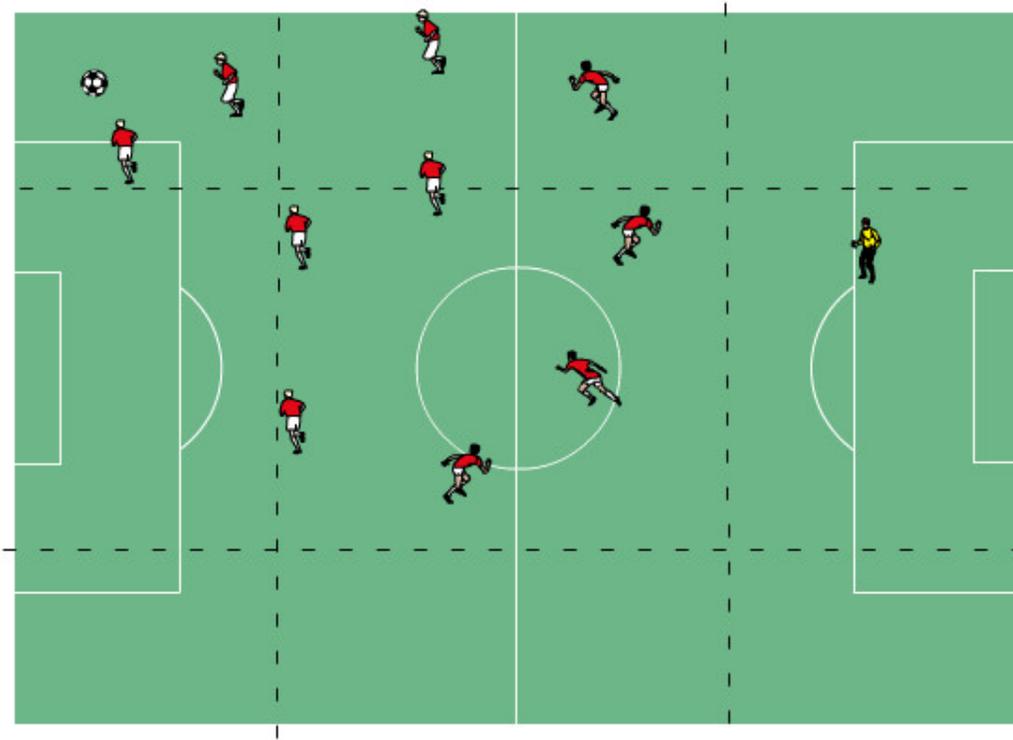
The Focus: Staying Compact defensively.

The Game: You can play a normal game (even numbered teams), but the defensive team must only occupy four boxes. (The goalkeeper should adjust to the location of the ball, but doesn't need to occupy one of the four boxes).

This will force the team to remain compact. The strong side players will get tight to the attackers while the weak side players will "pinch in" and occupy space.

The pictures just show basic defensive positions in relation to the ball. Attackers were omitted to present a clear picture.

You can use this exercise over a smaller field, the same principles would apply.



As mentioned in the article on 1v1 defending (on the coaches' page of the website) good team defending begins with the ability of individuals' to defend in the 1v1, but team defending also involves covering spaces. If we have good pressure to the ball, players away from the ball can loosen up their marking and "pinch in" to cover the more

dangerous spaces on the field. The better our team shape defensively the quicker we can “widen out” and “stretch the field” when we regain possession.

The key for successful team shape is that individuals’ players don’t chase the ball (this leaves gaps in the team), instead you should move as a group/team to regain possession. There are many considerations and opinions on where and how to defend as a team, but one constant is that the various lines (Forward/Midfield/Defense/Keeper) try to remain close to one another in an effort to limit the attackers’ space and to outnumber them at “the point of attack”.

Feel free to send me an email if you’d like to discuss Defensive Team Shape further.

Enjoy your season!
Brendan