

Concept Description:

From an early period in the evolution of this game there has been a misguided emphasis on marking up in defence primarily due to the limited numbers on the field. Coaches often reinforce this idea with the language they use by continually asking – “who have you got”? “mark up on your player”, “stay on your man”, etc. etc.

In reality, this is flawed. What is more critical is not who we are marking as defenders, but indeed where is the ball now and which space between defenders are we responsible for? Herein lies the second priority concept. It is critical that juniors understand that we defend spaces on the field not necessarily faces!

Language/ Terminology:

Ensure you use the following terms throughout and explain clearly what is meant by each.

- ✓ Where’s the ball???
- ✓ Defending space
- ✓ Short side
- ✓ Man on
- ✓ Defensive shape

Definitions:

Defending Space refers to an individual’s area of responsibility rather than a specific opponent.

Short side refers to the side with least defenders. A link’s short side has one defender (a winger) whereas the open or long side has 4 other defenders.

Man on means to mark up on your own player.

Defensive shape refers to the positioning and alignment of the defensive line.

Key Coaching Points:

Defending one space.

1. The defender must first identify which side of the field they are defending as this determines their short side and the initial



2. space they are responsible for. (e.g. left link or right link)
3. Secondly, the defender must identify where the attacker with the ball is.
4. The defender opposite the ball takes up a position which is slightly to the outside shoulder of the attacker.
5. Other defenders position themselves to cover the spaces they are now responsible for.
6. At the touch - the toucher protects their short side and remains outside shoulder of the roll ball player.
7. Other defenders move to cover the spaces and maintain the appropriate distances between defenders. (i.e. when a toucher pulls corner, they open the space and the inside players must move to close that distance)
8. Players need to identify the ‘defensive shape’ that has been created by this defence of space. (see diagram below)

Common Faults

- Defenders not aware of where the ball is??
- Defenders tend to stand opposite their opponent regardless of where the ball is situated
- Defenders do not know their short side
- There are large spaces between defenders in the defensive line
- The defensive line does not respond, or slow to respond to ball movement (the ball being passed across the attacking line)
- Defenders try to cover two spaces and thereby exacerbate poor defensive profile
- The defensive line fails to communicate effectively