

Defending Principles for 1v1-4v4

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From 1v1 recovery to 4v4 organisation, this cheatsheet breaks down the key defending principles behind every number format.

Use it to coach reading the game under pressure, not just tackling technique.

GENERAL TIPS

Coach the decisions, not just the duel.

If you see a lot of mistakes, start with one clear focus and coaching point, don't overload the setup or the players.

Use each format (1v1 to 4v4) to coach decisions, not just execution.

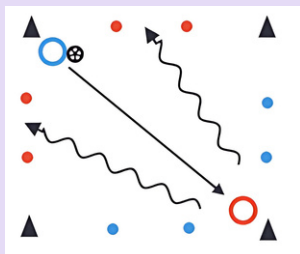
Stretch the space to create options, then add pressure to test them.

Encourage players to keep compact and connected.

Return to the same formats regularly, recognition builds confidence.

1V1

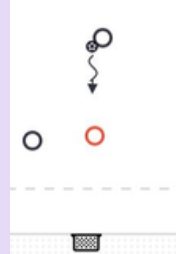
WIN WITHOUT DIVING IN



- **Own Your Shape** (Low and ready)
- **Eyes on the Ball** (Focus with intent)
- **Don't Overcommit** (Patience)
- **Time Your Tackle** (Wait for your moment)
- **Stay on Feet** (Avoid diving in)
- **Recover Fast** (Bounce back & delay if beaten)

1V2

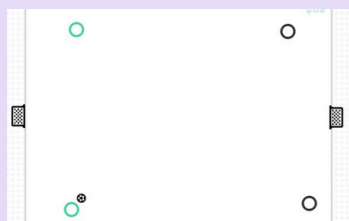
SURVIVE THE OVERLOAD



- **Delay as Long as Possible** (Buy time for recovery)
- **Force One Way** (Channel into a weaker option)
- **Read the Pass** (Intercept if possible)
- **Don't Dive In** (Stay up & in control)
- **Recover on Split** (React if beaten, stay in play)

2V2

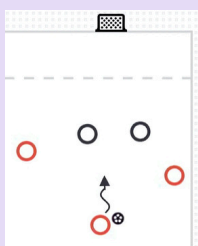
PROTECT IN A PAIR



- **Delay with Pressure** (1st def slows play)
- **Cover Smart** (2nd def supports)
- **Stay Compact** (No gaps)
- **Force One Way** (Channel play)
- **Talk Constantly** (Stay connected)

2V3

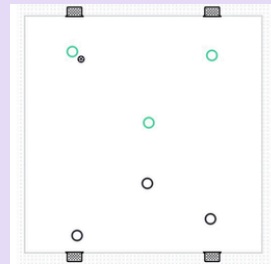
PROTECT THE MIDDLE



- **Delay the Attack** (Slow them)
- **Protect the Middle** (Deny them)
- **Stay Compact** (Work as a tight pair)
- **Track Runners** (No free runs)
- **Clear Communication** (Decide who presses and who covers)

3V3

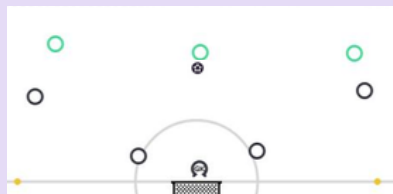
DEFEND AS A UNIT



- **Pressure** (1st def presses early)
- **Cover** (2nd def supports centrally)
- **Balance** (3rd def protects gaps)
- **Stay Compact** (no gaps in lines)
- **Track Runners** (Stay switched on at all times)

4V3

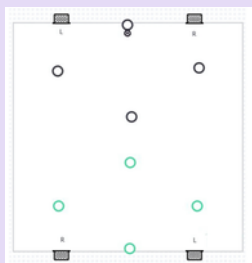
PROTECT THE ADVANTAGE



- **Press with Purpose** (First defender leads pressure)
- **Slide as a Unit** (Shift across together)
- **Stay Compact** (Deny central access)
- **Track the Free Player** (Always mark the spare)
- **Secure the Transition** (Keep the ball if you win it)

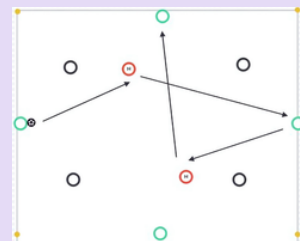
4V4

STAY ORGANISED, STAY COMPACT



- **Press Early** (First defender leads with intent)
- **Cover and Balance** (Support behind the press)
- **Protect the Centre** (Deny access to dangerous spaces)
- **Track All Runners** (Everyone has a job)
- **Communicate Constantly** (Keep the shape connected)

PRINCIPLES THAT STICK FROM 1V1 TO 4V4



- **Start with Delay** – Slow the attack, create time to recover & organise
- **Defend as a Team** – Pressure, cover, balance. Work together
- **Stay Compact** – Gaps invite danger; tight units control space
- **Be Ready to Recover** – If beaten, react fast and rejoin the play
- **Communicate Clearly** – Talk early, talk often, talk with purpose

All content is from the [How To Coach Technique](#) course, available in our [online coaching community](#).

For more 1v1 sessions and small-sided game plans, visit the store:

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