

Team Defending

Team Defense is a Dance

Dancers must learn individual dance steps, but must also learn to dance in rhythm with other dancers, and must never miss a beat.

Team defense is a dance. The individual defenders must not only learn individual defending, including marking, covering, and tracking, but must also learn to move in concert with the rest of the team, at the moment the team moves, not later.

Individual and Group Defending Terms

Understand the terms that describe the roles of players and parts of the field.

Mark	The person you are marking.
Marking	Guarding your mark goal-side and ball-side to prevent your mark from getting the ball, from turning with the ball, or from moving with the ball toward our goal.
Covering	Guarding a space on the field so that the other team wants to use. This is usually behind another defender.
Tracking	Running with your mark to prevent your mark from gaining possession of the ball in available space behind or beside other defenders.
Penetrating	Attacking with the ball by trying to dribble past defenders into the penalty area for a shot.
First attacker	The attacker with the ball.
First defender	The nearest defender goal-side of the ball.
Second attacker	Attackers in available space close enough to the ball to provide support for combination play.
Second defender	Defenders close enough to support the first defender by covering the space behind the first defender are second defenders.
Third attacker	All other attackers.
Third defender	All other defenders.

Available Space	Space where the first attacker can play the ball.
Center of the Field	An imaginary line drawn from goal to goal.
Delay	The first defender stops the first attacker from penetrating by marking and delaying, not by diving in for an attempted tackle.
Support	The second defender covers the space behind the first defender.
Balance	<p>Third defenders covering space away from the ball are providing balance.</p> <p>If the ball is switched, the third defenders must decide between winning the ball or closing the space between themselves and the attacker who will receive the ball.</p>
Tuck In	Move closer to the ball and to cover for the defender closer to the ball.
Stand Up	Delay the first attacker. Don't dive in. Hold ! Keep space between you and the first attacker by backing up and matching speed.
Match Speed	<p>When the first attacker runs at you with the ball, you must back up as fast as the attacker runs forward, or you will lose the space between you.</p> <p>If you do not keep enough space, you will be forced to attempt a tackle, and may get beat.</p>
Dive In	<p>Jumping at the first attacker or taking a wild swing in an effort to tackle the ball.</p> <p>Except when they must tackle to stop a shot, good defenders do not tackle unless they have support, that is, someone covering the space behind them. Diving in is a good way to get beat.</p>
Get Beat	What happens when you dive in on a tackle and the first attacker is able to get behind you with the ball. Stand up instead.

Ball Watching

Staring at the ball as your mark drops the ball or as the ball is being played on the other side of the field, forgetting to *instantly* back off your mark when the ball is away.

Not backing off instantly creates available space behind you that the attackers can use. If you do not back off your mark *instantly*, the attackers will play the ball into the space behind you.

Chipped

When your mark drops the ball to a midfielder, your mark will wait for the midfielder to chip the ball into the space behind you, and your mark will sprint into the space behind you to be first to the ball. If you lose, you were chipped.

To avoid this, you must back off your mark a step or two after your mark drops the ball.

No Get

Don't allow your mark to receive the ball. Step in front and take the ball away.

No Turn

If your mark gets the ball with back to our goal, don't allow your mark to turn toward our goal. Track your mark at about arm's length making sure that you can see the ball. If your mark starts to turn, tackle hard and tackle through when your mark is about half-turned. Make sure that you can see the ball before committing to the tackle.

No Move

If your mark has the ball facing our goal, hold. This means delay your mark (stand up) by quickly adjusting your position to remain between our goal and the ball.

No Shoot

When really close to the goal, keep your hips near (but just off) the line of play between the ball and the goal so that the attacker facing you can not shoot. The attacker will use deception and change of pace to try to move you far off the line of play to create space for a shot. Remember, only the ball has to see the goal for there to be room to shoot.

How To Defend As A Team

Check the Ball First

We check ball first. This means that the first we stop the progress of the ball by marking and delaying the first attacker.

Cover Our First Defender

The first defender must always have a supporting second defender who can cover the space behind the first defender.

Pick Up Near the Ball

Pick up 1 for 1 near the ball starting with ball.

Let the Far Side Go

We let far side player go, staying just close enough to recover the space (makeup the distance and close the player down) while the ball crosses.

Tuck In

When the ball is on the wing, the outside defender on the opposite side must “tuck in” to cover the space behind the nearest inside defender.

Outside defenders stay close enough to the attacking wing player to make up the distance to the player as the ball is crossed.

The outside defender should keep a position far enough off the wing attacker so that the outside defender can be first to the nearest goal post in case the ball is crossed to the attacking wing for a shot or header.

Ball-side, Goal-side

Outside defenders play closer to the center of the field and closer to the ball than their marks.

Back Off on the Drop

Wing defenders on mark with ball back off rapidly and instantly when their mark drops the ball so that they can't be chipped. No ball watching when the ball is dropped !

Centers Work Together

The central defenders, stopper and sweeper, work together as central defenders instead of playing with the stopper 10 yards in front of the sweeper.

Center Midfielders Track

Center midfielders track back with their mark into the top of the penalty area

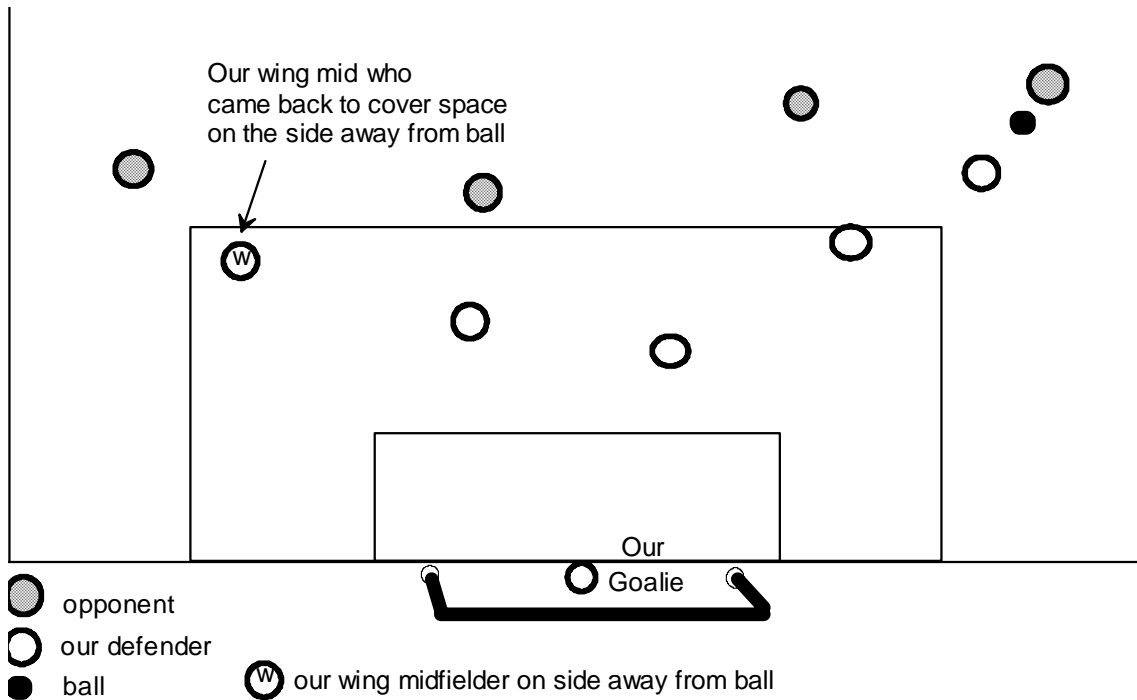
- to stop their mark from shooting from the outside on balls dropped back, and
- to stop their mark from getting the ball behind our other defenders.

Opposite Wing Mid Covers

The wing midfielder on the side *away from the ball* comes back to cover space left by our outside defender on that side. The wing mid covers space, opposes *both* the other team's wing mid *and* wing striker, and wins and clears balls played into the space in front of our goal on the side away from the ball.

Keep Our Shape

All the defenders, together, are arranged on the field in the shape of a C opened toward the center circle. Look at the picture. When the ball is switched to the other side, all our defenders must slide to the other side of the field as fast as the ball travels, so that the new first attacker has a mark when the ball arrives, and so that the new first defender has a supporting second defender.



Recover Relentlessly

We must be relentless, quick, focused, and determined to always keep recovering our shape, no matter how many times the other team switches the ball from side to side. This requires both mental focus and physical conditioning.

- The other team will move the ball from side to side until we make a mistake that causes us to lose our shape. They only need one mistake.
- It is a mistake to ball watch, to fail to check the ball, to forget to back off quickly from a player who has dropped the ball, to fail to track, or to be slow to slide over to ball-side.
- It is a mistake to mark closely on the side far away from the ball, or to fail to tuck in and provide cover for a player nearer to the ball.
- If we make a mistake and don't recover our shape, we create available space for the other team. The other team will use the space to penetrate or shoot.

Get Up and Back

Center defenders must work together to put pressure on the ball and to always cover for each other. One defender is up on the ball, the other back.

- When the ball is in the center, the nearest center defender checks the ball and marks the attacker to stop penetration and to stop the shot.
- The other center defender becomes a second defender, and takes a position to cover the space behind the first defender and to loosely mark the second attacker in the middle, if there is one.

Switching Roles

If the ball is passed from the first attacker in the middle to a second attacker in the middle, the defenders must instantly change roles.

- The second defender must instantly and rapidly close the space to the second attacker getting the ball immediately, but not dive in.
- The first defender backs off the original first attacker instantly so this attacker, who passed the ball, can not receive the ball behind the defense.
- The defenders have changed roles. This must be accomplished instantly and without fail, as often as needed.
- If the second defender closes down the center attacker who gets the ball but the original first defender fails to back off the original first attacker, the attackers can use a wall pass, through ball, or chip to beat the original first defender, who is now too close to the mark to track the mark, and who is too far away to be able to cover the space behind the new first defender.

All About Defending in Four Easy Pictures

Pictures following show 4 defending situations.

In each pictures there are 4 defenders. This could be 2 wing backs with 2 central defenders, or 3 defenders with a defending midfielder dropping in. This means we can defend from a 4-4-2 or a 3-5-2 in the same way.

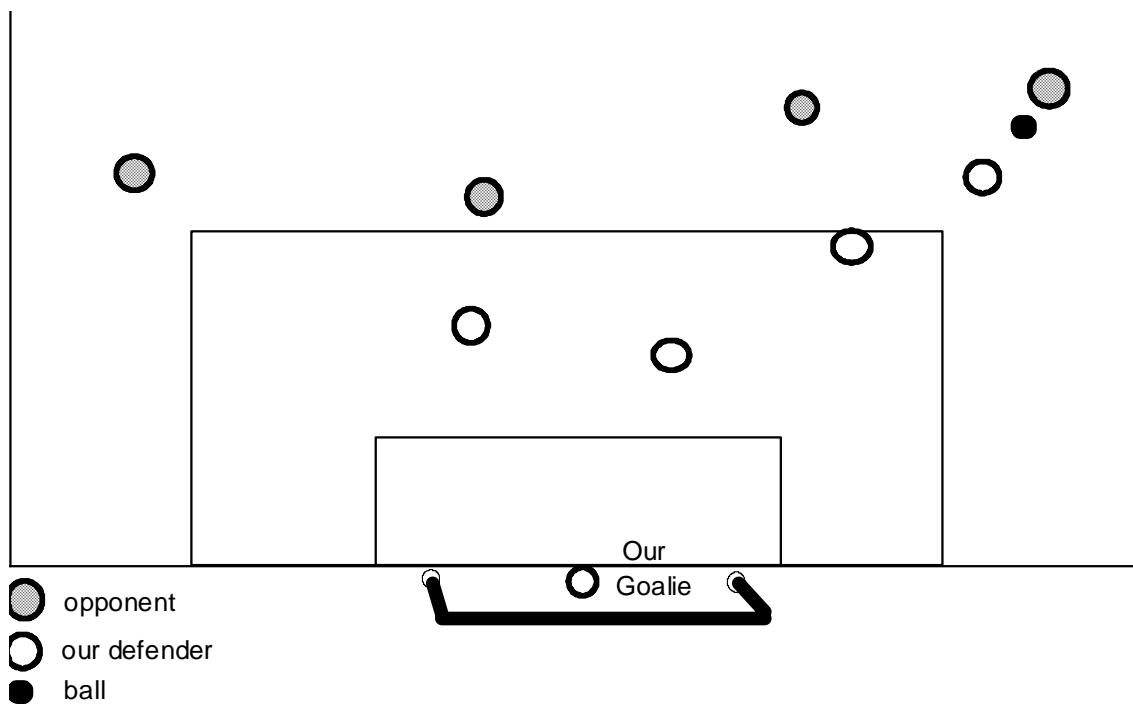
Our defenders are drawn as circles, and opposing attackers are circles with an X in the center. The ball is drawn as a solid black dot.

In each of the 4 pictures, the attackers are in the same place on the field. A different attacker has the ball in each picture.

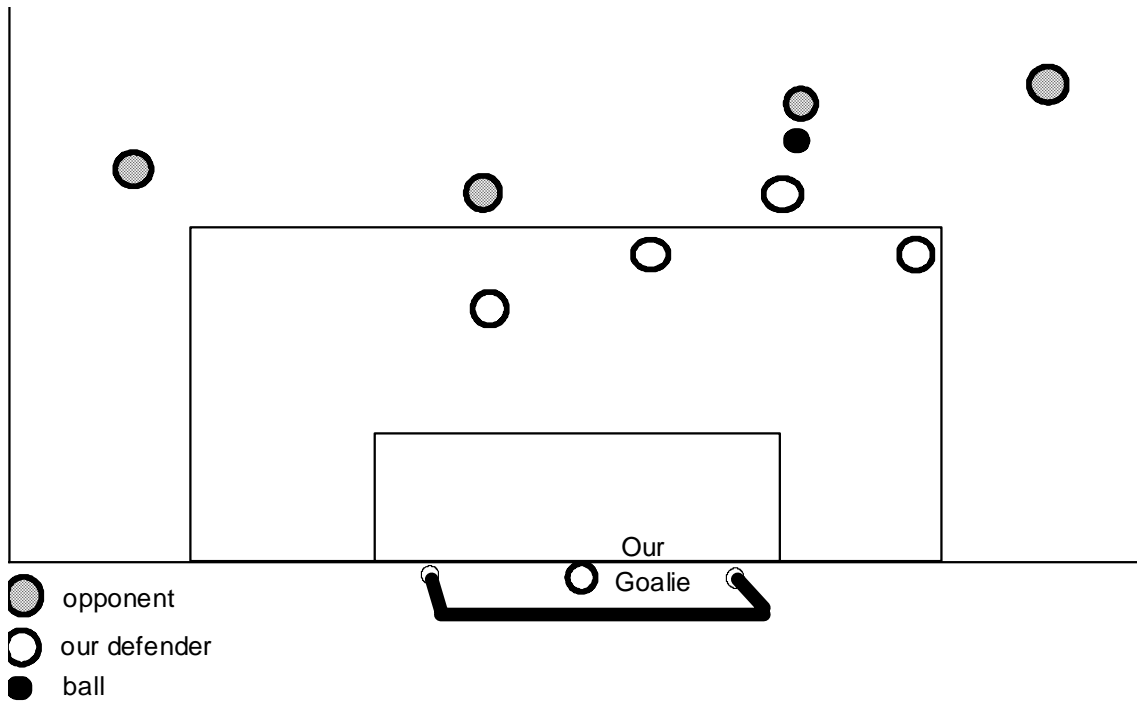
The attackers want to use the space behind the defenders. The defenders could be 2 marking backs, a stopper and sweeper, or they could be 2 marking backs, a central defender, and a defending midfielder dropping back. It makes no difference.

Look at each picture. See how the defenders should adjust to protect this space.

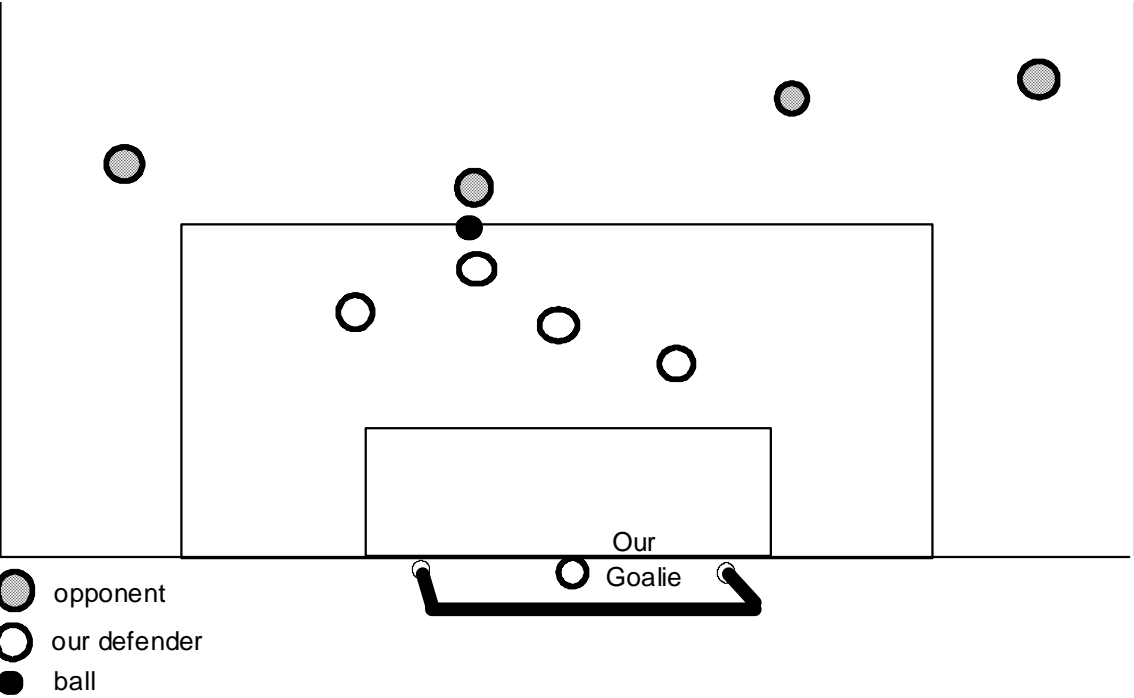
Ball on the Wing Defenders slide to the right and tuck in. Far defender steps up to shape the defense as a "V".



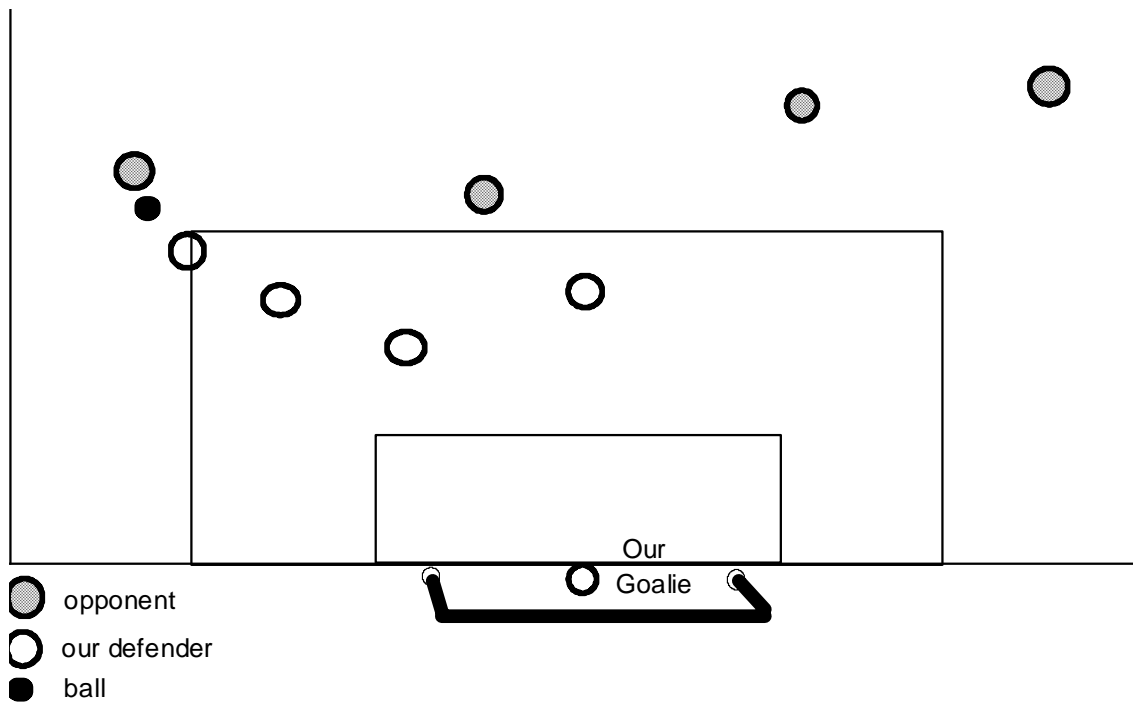
Ball in Center One center defender up, one back. Outside defenders tuck in to shape the defense as a "C" open toward our goal.



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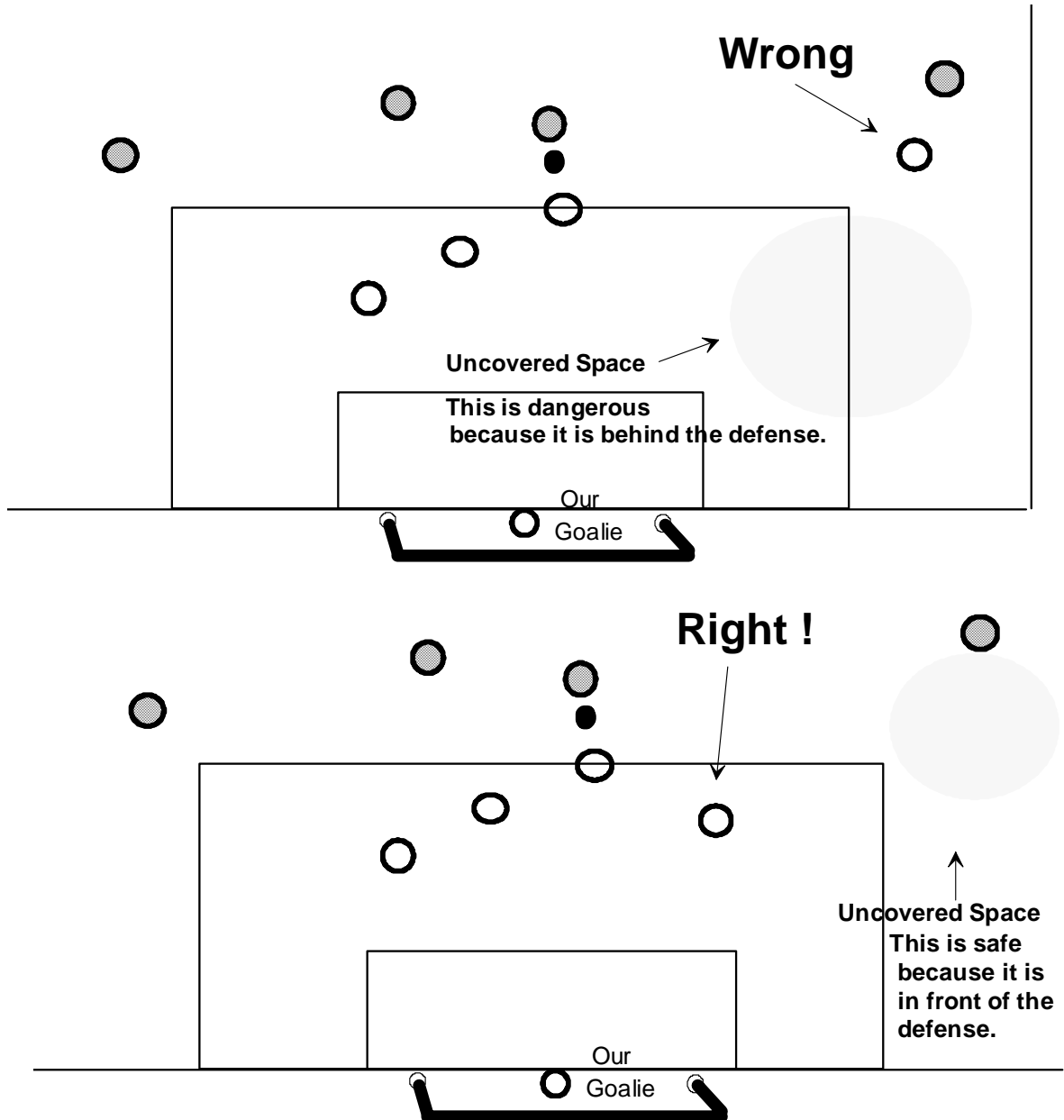
Ball on Wing Nearest outside back up, others tuck in, far side steps up a bit to shape the defense as a "V".



Ball Watching

Outside defenders must back away from their mark *instantly*, and tuck in, when the mark passes the ball or when the other team controls the ball in the center of the field. If the defender forgets, uncovered space is created behind the defender.

The mark can run into this uncovered space behind the defender, and can win any through ball played into the uncovered space behind the defense. If the defender backs off and tucks in, the uncovered space created is in front of the defense and away from the center of the field. This is safe.



Playing With 3 Backs Against 2 Strikers

The examples illustrated on previous pages show 4 defenders, perhaps 2 wing backs and 2 central defenders, perhaps as part of a 4-4-2 system of play.

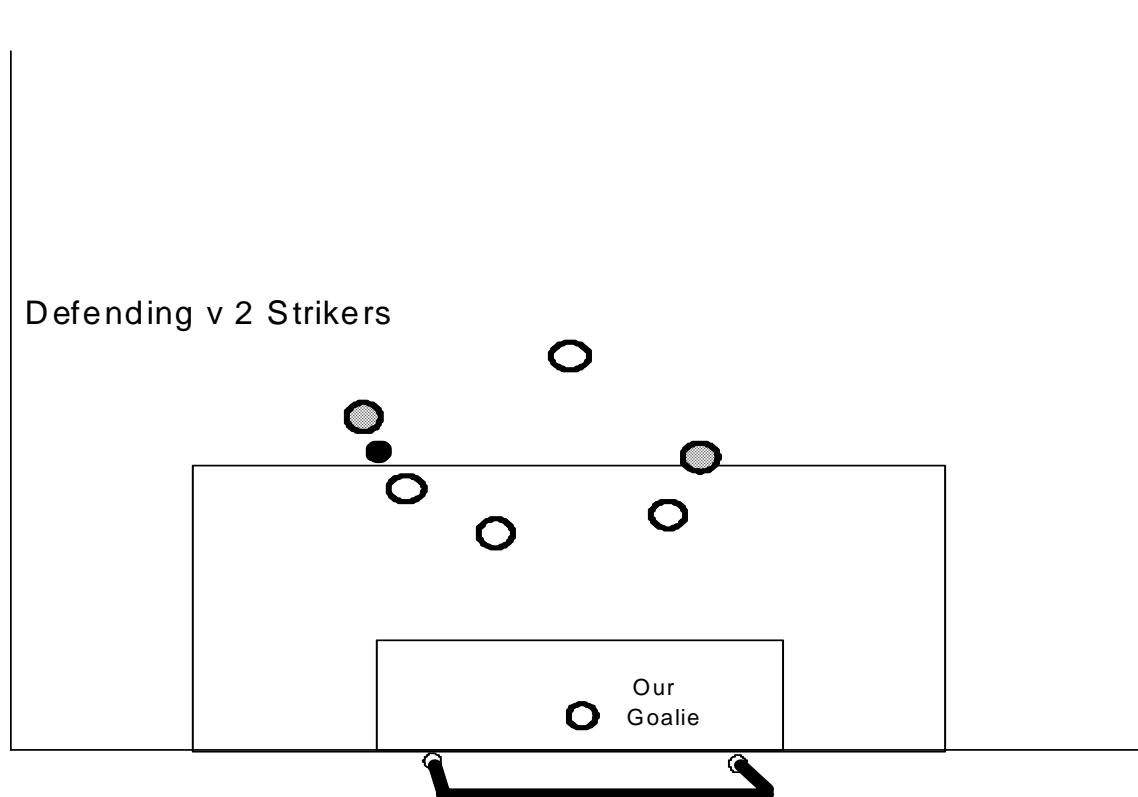
It's also easy to play with 3 defenders and 5 midfielders, with one of the midfielders playing as a defending mid, perhaps as a 3-5-2 system of play.

If the opposing team plays 2 strikers up, we can mark or track the strikers with our wing backs, and play the central defender as a sweeper giving support from behind. The defending midfielder is free to dominate and control the area near the D and to track runners coming through from midfield.

Our wings (not shown) tuck in on the back side as usual.

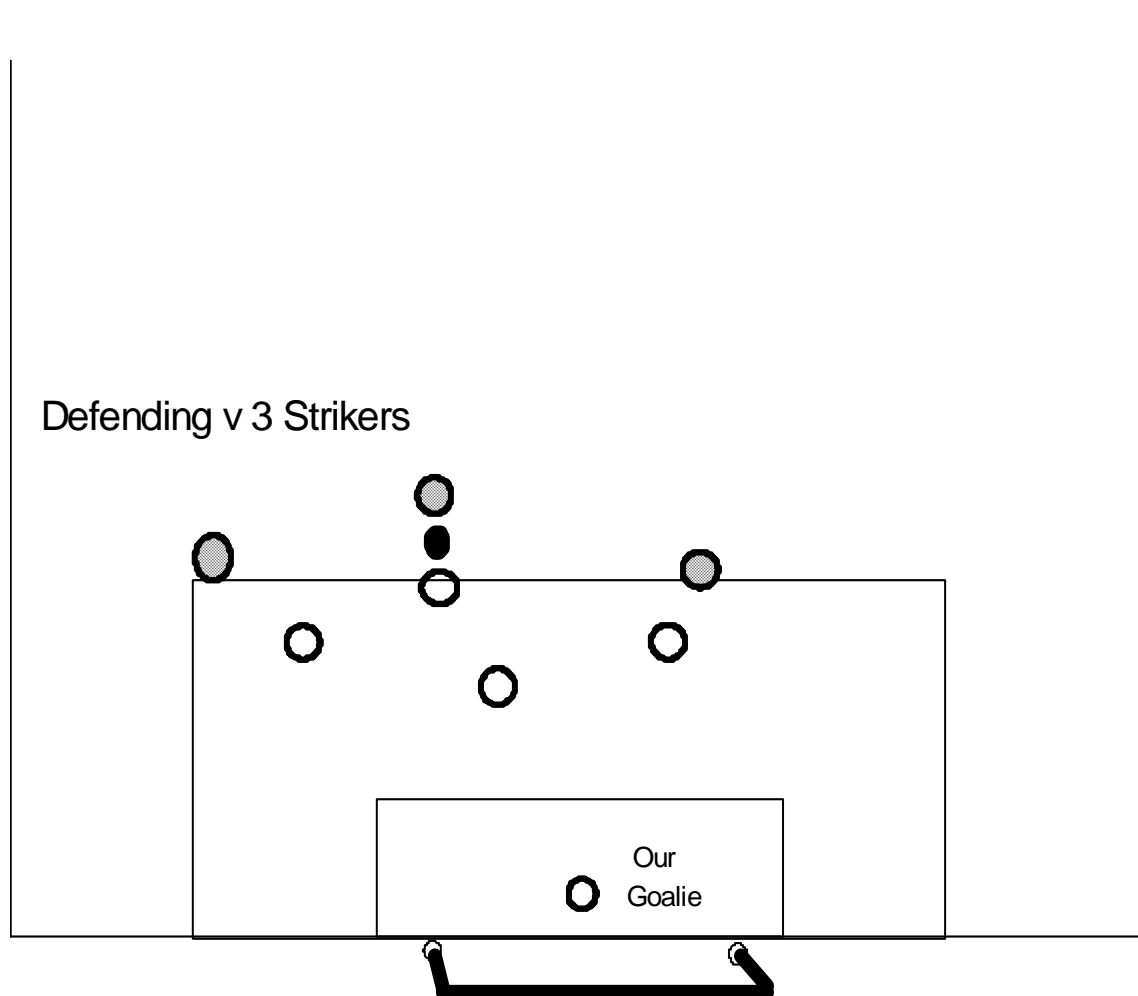
In the illustration below, the attacking side plays with 2 strikers.

For the defending team, one marking back pressures the ball while the other marks the other striker. A central defender covers for both wing backs, and the defending midfielder covers space at the top of the penalty area to prevent shots from this space.



Playing With 3 Backs Against 3 Strikers

If the opposing team plays 3 strikers up, we can pick up the outside strikers with our wing backs, and mark the center striker with a defending midfielder. The central defender plays as a sweeper.



Playing Backs On

Sometimes, the opponents are able to hold the ball in our third of the field and get to many shooting chances. To stop this, we can put more pressure on the opposing strikers by marking 1 v 1 with our wing backs, who then become pure marking backs. The central defender plays as a free back and supports the two marking backs. Shown below, the defending midfielder pressures an opposing midfielder with the ball while the marking backs stay tight on the strikers, wherever those strikers go in our defending third.

