

## Principles of Zonal Defending

Defending in a zonal organization is a popular team tactic in today's game. When done properly it can be a very effective means of defense. The benefits of a "zone" over other types of team defending include:

- Defensive coverage of dangerous spaces
- Economy of physical demand placed upon the players
- Efficient means to defend when playing numbers down
- Efficient means to defend when playing against a superior opponent.

Zonal defending is dependent upon good organization and communication between players. Most player movement in a zonal defense is keyed upon the movement of the ball. The closer the defending team is to the ball, the more the basic principles of man-marking are applied.

### Activity #1:

#### Set Up:

A 4v2 is organized inside a 20x10 yard grid as shown below in Diagram (a).

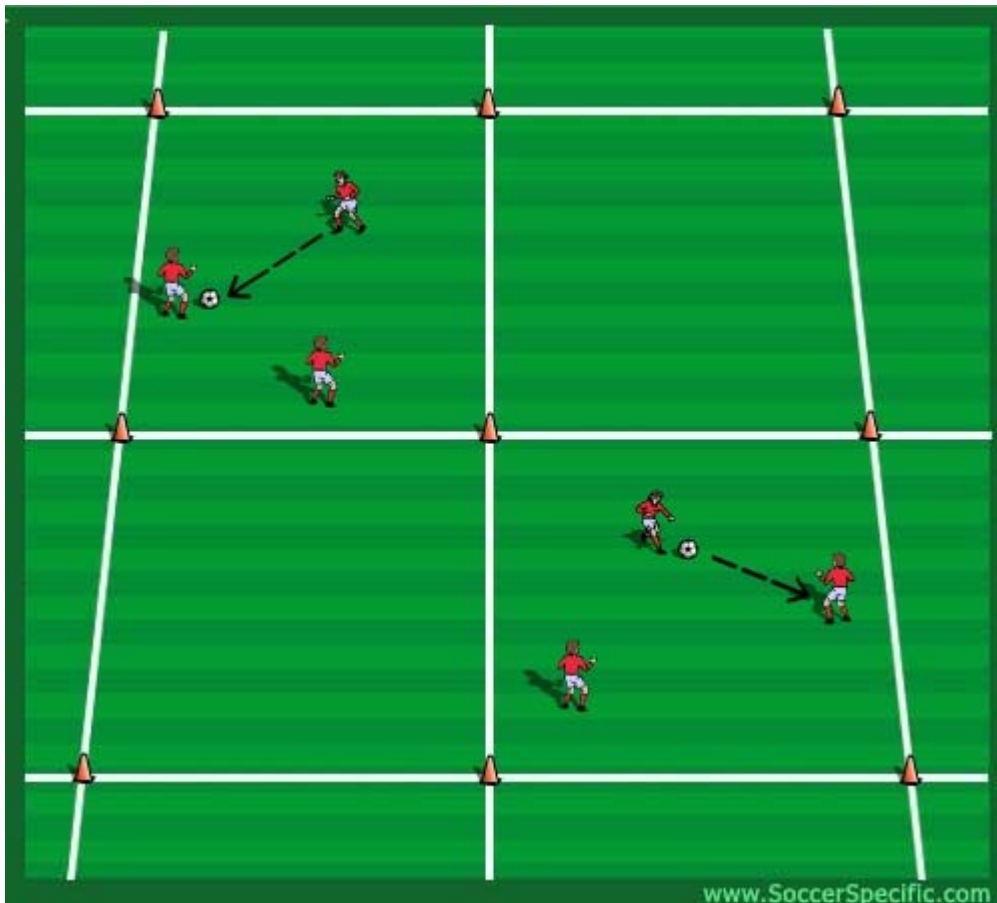


Diagram (a)

#### Objective:

The 4 "attacking" players must attempt to keep possession of the ball. Emphasis is placed on the 2 "defenders" working as a cohesive unit to win possession of the ball.

#### Restrictions:

(1) 2 touch play for "attackers"

### Coaching Points:

- Defend in “pairs”
- Work as team to regain possession of the ball
- One player must pressure the ball while the other must cover
- Defenders should try not to allow “splits” between them
- Visual and verbal “cues” can help defenders coordinate efforts

### Activity #2: Basic Defending in a Grid - “Numbers Down” and “Even Numbers”

#### Set Up:

Players are organized in a 30 x 20 yard grid as shown below. The following progressions are performed inside the playing area;

- 1 v. 2
- 2 v. 2
- 2 v. 3
- 3 v. 3



Diagram (b)

#### Objective:

The defensive player(s) must attempt to prevent the attackers from crossing the end-line. In Diagram (b) above, 2 defenders (red) are attempting to prevent 3 attackers from crossing the end-line. In this numbers-down situation the 2 defenders must work as a cohesive unit if they are to be successful. Defender (A) is putting slight pressure on the ball while defender (B) is in a covering position.

### Coaching Points:

- When defending “numbers down”, withdraw and keep play in front of you
- Defenders must cover ground quickly as the ball is moving
- One defender must always pressure the ball while other defender(s) provide cover
- Patience is necessary when challenging for the ball, especially when “numbers down”
- Visual and verbal cues are important to coordinate the efforts of the defenders

### Activity #3: 7 v. 7 - Attack and Defend Three Small Goals

#### Set Up:

A 7v7 is organized as shown in Diagram (c) below. 3 mini-goals are created using flags at each end of the playing area as shown below.

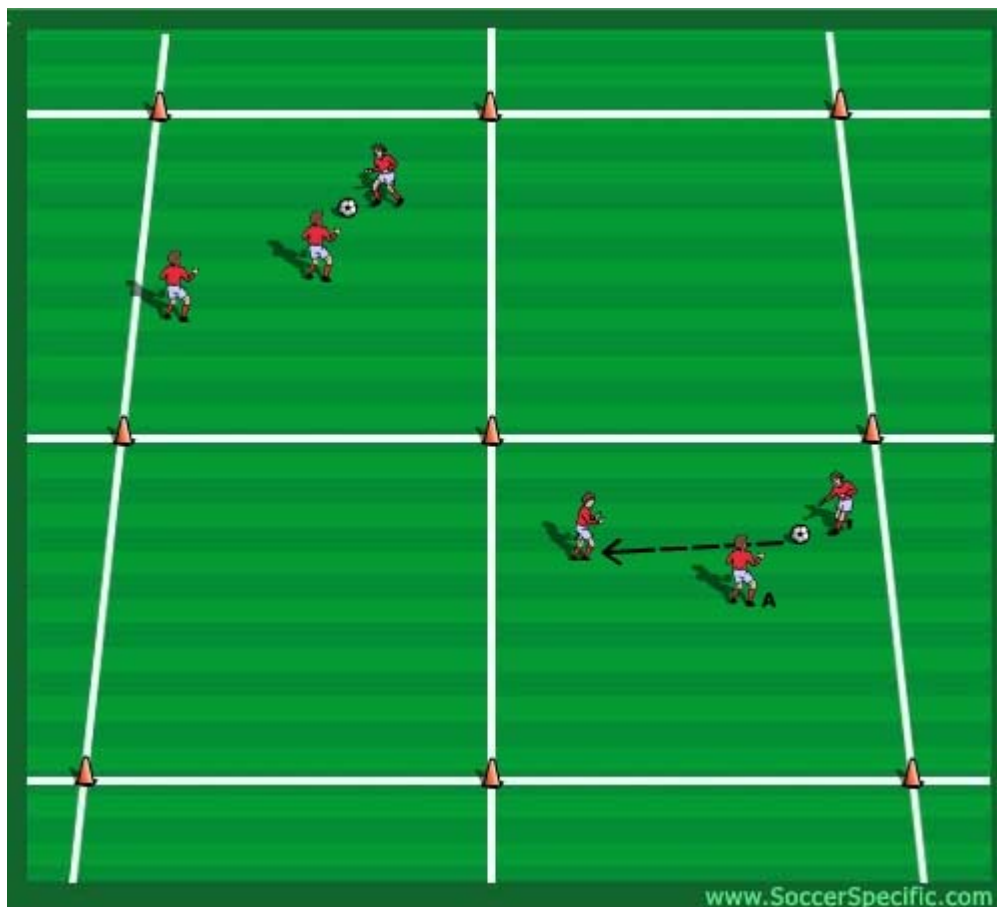


Diagram (c)

#### Objective:

Both teams compete for possession of the ball and attempt to score by dribbling through their opponents goal. Emphasis is placed on the defensive team working together to prevent the other team from scoring. Game is continuous for a designated period of time or for pre-determined number of goals.

#### Progression:

1. Attacking team can score a point by passing the ball through a gate

#### Coaching points:

- Defensive team “slides” as a group towards the ball side - defend the two “closest gates”
- Defending team “pinches in” when being attacked down the middle
- “Weakside” defenders need to be aware of their positioning and able to defend against the “switch”
- Visual and verbal cues must be understood to help coordinate defending efforts.

#### Activity #4: 7 v. 5 “Zone Press” Game

##### Set Up:

A 7v5 is organized on a half-field as shown below in Diagram (d). Goalkeepers are in each goal.



**Diagram (d)**

##### Objective:

Both teams compete for possession of the ball and attempt to score in their opponents goal. The 7 “attackers” are limited to two-touch play. Emphasis is placed on the defensive shape and cohesiveness of the 5 “defenders.” No touch restriction is in place for the team of 5 players. In the above Diagram, the team of 5 (red) defenders have adjusted their positions as the ball travels. If the team of 5 wins possession they should look to counter-attack quickly.

##### Coaching points:

- Team of five should “low press” and look to look to counterattack
- Team of seven should make quick use of the ball and look to “high press’ when available
- All the principle of zonal defending should be applied.

### Final Activity: 11 v.11 - “Shadow Play” with Zones marked on the Field

#### Set Up:

Players are organized on a full field as shown below in Diagram (e). Vertical and horizontal channels are marked on the field as shown. 11 players are organized to defend against 4 players (shadow play). The 4 players are in possession of a ball as shown and must move the ball across the back-four to allow the 11 opposing players to slide and adjust their positions.



Diagram (e)

#### Objective:

The 11 players are “defending” against the 4 players of the opposing team. The 4 players make up the back-four of the attacking team. The 11 players must adjust their team shape as the ball travels across the opposing back-four. In the above Diagram the defensive team has travelled according to the positioning of the ball – Note, the entire team has shifted to one side of the field. The grid lines are used as a reference point for the players to highlight the shifting and sliding in different areas of the pitch.

#### The following progressions are then followed;

- 11v8 (11 players defend against a back-four plus three or four midfield players)
- 11v11 (game with emphasis placed upon defensive “team shape”)
- 9v11 – (Numbers-down situation - defending team’s back-four and midfield four vs. a full team)

**Coaching points:**

- Defensive team “slides” as a group towards the ball side.
- Defending team “pinches in” when being attacked down the middle
- “Weakside” defenders need to be aware of their positioning and able to defend against the “switch”
- Visual and verbal cues must be understood to help coordinate defending efforts