

# First Defender Responsibilities & Techniques

## Responsibilities:

Above all else, your primary responsibility as the first defender is not to get the ball but to contain the ball and either stop or delay its movement towards our goal. Do not jump in, leave your feet, overrun, or stab at the ball. Those are all great ways for you to make the attacker look good when, in fact, it was you who made the mistake. Force the ball laterally (sideways) across the field or back. Even if you don't get the ball, if your mark does not succeed in getting the ball closer to our goal or in taking a shot, you have done your job.

When you're containing the ball, you want to pressure your mark just hard enough so she begins to worry about being able to keep the ball in her possession. At this point, she'll take her eyes off you (and her other options on the field) and begin to look down at the ball. This is the point where you can begin to make your move to tackle the ball and win it back for our side.

While your job as first defender is defensive (duh!), you also have to be thinking about what you would do with the ball when you regain possession. Know where your teammates are on the field. Have a plan about what to do when you get the ball. If you gain possession but come under quick pressure from the defense, knowing where your teammates are will help our team maintain possession now that we've gotten the ball back.

## Techniques:

1. **Pick an angle.** Rather than run straight towards the dribbler, take a step to either side before you move toward the attacker. By doing this, you will automatically be "taking an angle" relative to the dribbler. In turn, this limits the attacker's options by "cutting the field in half", even if she is still yards away.
2. **Communicate.** You must let your teammates know that you are going to mark the attacker with the ball. Yell **Ball!** or **I've got the ball!** to make sure that they know your intentions.
3. **Close the gap quickly but don't dive in.** Get to the ball quickly. If the attacker is somewhat distant (more than a few yards) from you, you must sprint to reduce this space quickly. As soon as the spacing between has narrowed to just a few yards, slow your approach to avoid being bypassed with a simple cut or feint by the dribbler. Don't dive or stab at the ball. You must now re-emphasize your angle of approach by bringing one foot ahead of the other, thus "channeling" the attacker away from the lead foot and toward the trailing foot side.
4. **Pressure and contain the ball but be patient.** Now that you are in position to challenge the attacker, focus on slowing penetration by the dribbler. The most effective way to do this is simply to stay between the ball and your own goal, maintaining a small gap between yourself and the ball. Again, be patient, don't dive in or stab at the ball. Make the attacker make the mistake. Typically, this form of tight marking will cause the attacker to drop her eyes down toward the ground, which yields the added benefit of reducing her awareness of attacking options farther away.
5. **Time your tackle.** Finally, you must understand when to try to get the ball from the dribbler, and when to remain patient. Step in for the challenge immediately if the attacker has made a poor touch on the ball or is about to take a shot. Similarly, if our team has recovered defensively such that you now have at least one or more covering defenders (that is, a **second**

**defender**) around the ball, you should also look to tackle. This where it's important for any player who is in position to be a **second defender** to let you know she's there by yelling **I've got your back!** or **Got you covered!** or something similar. Otherwise, it is normally smart to continue delaying the dribbler until a better opportunity presents itself.

There is an easy way for you to remember your primary responsibilities as first defender: **The No-No-No-No defense.**

### **No Get!**

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

### **No Turn!**

If your mark gets the ball with her back to our goal, don't allow her to turn towards 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.

### **No Move!**

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

### **No Shoot!**

When really close to our goal, keep your hips near (but just off) the line of play between the ball and the goal so that the attacker facing you cannot shoot. The attacker will use deception and change of pace to try to move you far enough 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.