



## ROLE OF THE FIRST DEFENDER

The role of the first defender is to apply pressure to the first attacker. The intensity of this pressure is determined by several factors, including where on the field the ball is, and the support being received by one or more second defenders.

As soon as a defender's direct opponent receives the ball, the first defender should apply pressure. If possible, the first defender might take advantage of a bad first touch and steal the ball as the attacker tries to control it. If not, the player should sprint to the first attacker, but stop 1-3 yards short to avoid being passed and having his own momentum used against him.

Once in position to apply pressure, the first defender should be sideways on, with one foot in front of the other. The knees should be slightly bent to give the defender a low center of gravity and he should take short quick steps which allow the player to react quickly in the event of a fake. The player should maintain his distance to the player, the whole time watching the ball and not the defender. When support is in place, the defender may try a feint to throw the attacker off balance, putting the latter in position to lose the ball.

When support is in place, the second defender should communicate with the first defender as to which way to show the first attacker, and when to apply more pressure. If the support player is late in arriving, the first defender's body language will tell the second defender where to provide support. The communication between these two defenders is critical in stopping the first attacker.

First defenders must have an idea of which way to move particular opponents. In deciding this, players should consider the technical and tactical abilities of both teams. For example, a defender might try to force an attacker in the direction of the attacker's weaker foot or the defender's stronger foot. He might force the attacker toward the sideline, or toward the better of two defenders. Obviously, if there is a choice between forcing a player to wide open space or to a cluttered area of the field, the latter is the best defensive option.

The list goes on and on, but it is imperative that defensive players identify the strengths and weaknesses of the team they are playing and try to disrupt that team offensively to prevent successful patterns of play from developing again in the same way. Because you only play most teams once, it is crucial that players be able to do this "on the fly" while the game is in progress. First defenders and second defenders should be ready to switch

roles at any time. They should also be ready to become third defenders and supply necessary balance should the ball be switched to the opposite side of the pitch.

