

Defensive Cover

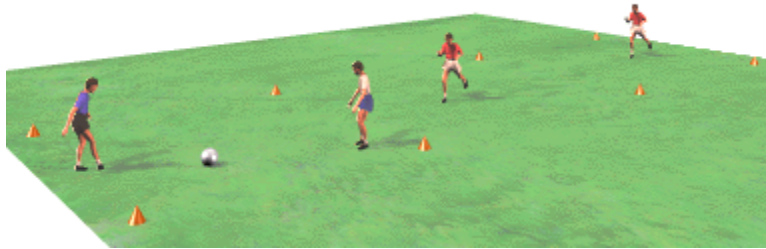
by Robert Parr

If the role of the first defender is to apply pressure on the dribbler, the second defender must support the first defender by providing **cover**. At the simplest level, this requires the second defender to take an **angle of support** to the first defender while also providing **depth of support**. Should the dribbler get past the initial defender, then the covering defender must now step up to become the first defender and put pressure on the ball to deny further penetration.

The covering defender should also assist his pressuring teammates through clear and constant **communication**. Because he can see more of the field, the second defender is well-positioned to direct the defensive effort in front of him and enhance the awareness of his teammates through his verbal guidance. Also, whenever the covering defender decides he needs to step up to press for the ball, he should call out to let his teammate know he is taking responsibility for the dribbler (comments like "I've got ball!" work well).

To improve your players' understanding of how to provide defensive cover, begin with the following 1v2 activity:

482: 1v2 in a Channel



Using cones, mark off a 10x30 yard grid. Position a server with a ball at one end, an attacker 10 yards away facing him, and two defenders at the far end. The server initiates action with a pass to the attacker who turns and attempts to exit the lower end of the zone. As soon as the ball leaves the server's foot, the two defenders work together to force a turnover.

Note that the principle of **immediate chase** is a corollary teaching point for this activity. Whenever the initial defender is bypassed by the dribbler, he needs to recover as quickly as possible to trade places with the teammate who had been providing cover. This way,

the two players preserve their defensive shape for as long as possible, thus making it much more difficult for the dribbler to penetrate successfully.

Once the defenders have solidified their coordination in the numbers-up situation, you should increase the complexity of the activity by adding a second attacking player and taking the game to goal.

494: 2v2 in Central Attacking Space



Using cones, mark a 20x30 yard channel down the middle of the field. Place a goal and goalkeeper at one end, two lines of defenders along the middle, and two lines of attackers at the other end. The first attacker advances with the ball as he and a teammate attempt to penetrate and score. The first two defenders use pressure and cover to deny the penetration. Play continues until the ball is sent out of play or a goal is scored.

In this situation, the covering defender must also stay aware of the movement of the second attacker while continuing to provide appropriate depth and width from the first defender. He will need to be close enough to the second attacker so he can step up to press should the first attacker pass the ball to his teammate. Should this happen, the two defenders will generally trade roles (one stepping forward, and one falling back) to ensure that they still have both pressure and cover relative to the dribbler.

To determine whether the covering defender has taken an appropriate position, ask the following questions. Can the first attacker beat both defenders by splitting them with a single touch of the ball? Is the covering defender close enough to intercept the dribbler quickly should the first defender be beaten 1v1? Is the second defender both ballside and goalside (relative to both attackers)? If the answer to any of these questions is "no", then you need to adjust the positioning of your second defender accordingly.