

5 SIMPLE RULES

for

*young
defenders*

SoccerCoach 

...and their coaches

defenders' rule no. 1

**THINK AHEAD
INTERCEPT
RATHER
THAN TACKLE**

Coaches' Notes



what to say to your players

- “Try to guess what is going to happen in the game as it unfolds before you”
- “Try to read what the opposition strikers and midfield like to do”
- “Keep alert and alive to the opportunity to snuff out that pass to their winger. Or to block that through-ball from their midfield to their strikers”
- “A timely interception gives you more control of the ball, which will give you more options for what you can do next”



what to think about

- Help your defenders help themselves.
- Instead of them reacting to what the opposition do, encourage them to take control.
- How? Through intelligent reading of the game, by being more aware of what's going on around them.
- This ability to “think ahead” is especially important if a defender is a bit short of pace, or are up against a very fast striker or opposing wing-back.

defenders' rule no. 2

**WHEN YOU TACKLE,
TIMING IS
EVERYTHING
COMMITMENT
IS THE BEST**

Coaches' Notes



what to say to your players

- “Don’t tackle too soon. You’ll look foolish. Don’t tackle too late. The ref could be angry”
- “Tackle at just the right moment and you’ll win the ball nine times out of ten”
- “When you tackle, give it your full attention. Focus on the ball”
- “Don’t focus on how big the player is, or them beating you, or worry about where the rest of your defence is. Don’t worry about what you are going to do next”
- “Just focus on winning the ball, and getting it under control. Everything else is irrelevant”



what to think about

- Learning to tackle is like learning to swim. Some players take to it naturally.
- Some players need their confidence building up.
- The trick is to watch carefully and catch them when they do it right.
- Get them to remember how good it feels to win a 50:50 ball.
- Remind them how their posture was correct, and their balance was strong.
- And how their timing was simply perfect.

defenders' rule no. 3

**CLEAR YOUR LINES
WITH A SHORT
PASS TO MIDFIELD
OR A LONG BALL TO
YOUR STRIKERS**

Coaches' Notes



what to say to your players

- “Unless you’re an attacking wingback, there are only two main options”
- “Option 1: pass the ball to your midfielders”
- “Option 2: launch the ball over the midfield to your strikers”
- “Learn how to master the long pass”



what to think about

- Most young players can’t launch or loft a high ball. This means that their options are cut in half and that they are predictable.
- The defence needs an occasional rest. Help your defenders help themselves earn one. How?
- With a quality pass from defence to a midfielder in plenty of space.
- Or with a nicely-weighted pass for a striker to run onto.

defenders' rule no. 4

**IF YOU CAN'T
TACKLE,
JUST HASSLE**

Coaches' Notes



what to say to your players

- “Sometimes things happen too quickly or just too far away for you to get a solid tackle in on the opposing player”
- “The next best thing in those situations is to “hassle” ”
- “Run shoulder to shoulder with the attacker, block the direct path to goal, and try to shepherd them away from goal and towards the touchline”



what to think about

- Teach young players that defending isn't about doing spectacular things, it's about frustrating the opposition.
- It's about making things difficult.
- So that the opposition can't line up a shot and there are no gaps to exploit.
- So their strikers have no time on the ball.
- So their players have no time to look up, and no time to pick out a pass.

defenders' rule no. 5

**WORK ON YOUR
BALL CONTROL
HACKING THE
BALL ISN'T ENOUGH**

Coaches' Notes



what to say to your players

- “Top defenders have a great touch. Often with both feet”
- “World class defenders have great touch, technique, and pace to burn”
- “In modern soccer, being a defender is no longer an excuse for not having silky skills”
- “Nine times out of ten, the ball should stick to your foot, not rebound just anywhere”



what to think about

- Set high standards for your defenders.
- They need good ball control and good passing skills, to link up smoothly with the midfield, or the attack.
- Don't accept a “hoof and hope” approach for situations where they reasonably could, and should, have played a more measured and accurate pass.
- Explain to young defenders that possession is something to be treasured, not given away lightly.