

Player Responsibilities

When you call a young soccer player a defender, for example, they think that is their only job - to defend.

That's because players up to the age of about eleven find it hard to grasp that they can have more than one job to do at the same time.

And labeling players 'defender', 'attacker' etc. is one reason you see youngsters playing statues on the pitch instead of running around, learning how to play the game.

The other reason that children play statues instead of soccer is poor quality coaching and/or coaches who are trying to win games rather than encourage their players to learn in the most effective way - by making mistakes.

So over the years I've found it useful to move away from labeling players as 'defenders' or 'attackers' and give them jobs to do instead.

The only fixed position in my teams is goalkeeper (and even she has been known to dribble the ball to the half way line!).

To begin with, we discuss the jobs that the team as a whole has to do:

- Create as much space as possible, both width and depth;
- Keep possession! So if you can't pass the ball forwards easily, play square or back - don't force a pass that isn't really on. If you do, you'll lose possession. It's better to pass square or back and start again;
- Try to maintain good team shape.

We then move onto individual responsibilities.

These guidelines are designed for teams who play 7-a-side but should still be useful for 8/9 or 11-a-side teams.

1. **Goalkeeper.** Positions himself in relation to the defender. Restarts play (roll, throw, kick). Also acts as an extra outfield player whenever possible - don't be afraid to take risks!

2. **Full-backs.** Position well apart, make the playing area as wide as possible. Play the ball to the midfield or the attackers. If there is room in front of you move forward with the ball and participate in the attack. If you're playing left back, play to the left of the rest of the team. This might mean you're in the middle of the pitch when the rest of the team is playing on the right but you're always playing on their left. The same goes for the right back. Don't let the opposition score. Be brave.

3. **Central Defender.** When the opposition has the ball you should be the last player back. You should be able to see every other player on the pitch apart from your own goalkeeper. When you have the ball and there is space, go forward and attack. Try to score if the opportunity arises but you will need to get back quickly if we lose the ball. Don't let the opposition score. Be brave.

4. **Midfield players.** Take the ball towards the opposition goal as quickly as you can or pass to a teammate who is in a better position than you. If you're playing left mid or right mid play to the left or right of the rest of the team (as described above). Try to score.

5. **Attackers.** Position as far forward as possible (make playing area long), while still being in a position to receive a pass. Try to score but don't forget you are the first line of our defense if we lose the ball in the opposition third. Don't let their ball carrier get past you.

Tell your players that when we have the ball EVERYONE is attacking. When the opposition has the ball EVERYONE is defending.