

1st (first), 2nd (second), 3rd (third) Attackers and Defenders

When coaching young soccer players it's sometimes difficult determining what area of the field that we should focus our practice attention. When you dig deep into the game of soccer, everything centers around the ball and moves outward from there.

On the attacking side we have three main level of positions to focus on; 1st attacker, 2nd attacker and 3rd attacker.

The 1st Attacker refers to the player in possession of the ball. Skills such as ball control, dribbling, passing, shooting should be the focus of this level.

The 2nd attackers refer to the attackers closest to the 1st attacker (person with the ball) who offers immediate support to the 1st attacker. This would consist of distance from the 1st attacker, angle of support, and communication with the 1st attacker.

The 3rd Attackers refer to the remaining attacking players who balance the field of play. These players help balance and field by working together as a group to create space in order to utilize this space on the offense. This is the most advanced group of players to coach as you are working with a group of players making creative and unpredictable runs to off balance the organization of their opponent.

On the defending side there are also three main levels of positioning to focus on; 1st defender, 2nd defenders and 3rd defenders.

The 1st defender refers to the closest defensive person to the ball whose main objective is to deny any threats from the point of attack. The 1st defender should attempt to intercept a pass from the offense, prevent the 1st attacker from turning, stop any possible shots, stop any forward passes, and stop any forward dribbling. This consists of the approach of the defender, the angle of pressure, and the distance of the 1st defender from the 1st attacker.

The 2nd defenders offer immediate support to the 1st defender. This consists of the positioning of this defender by focusing on the distance and angle from the 1st defender as well as the communication between the 1st defender and the 2nd defender.

The 3rd defenders are the remaining defensive players whose main purpose is to balance the field and deny space. These defenders should seal off the vital space surrounding the space in front of the goal. These defenders will often defend in the zone or man-to-man depending on the situations such as distance from the goal and players threat level. This consists of the positions of the defenders to balance the defense to align as many players as possible behind the ball.

When teaching youth soccer players attacking or defending skills, coaches generally start with the players on the ball and work to other players away from the ball.