

ChalkTalk

Zone and Man-to-man Marking

Zone marking or zone defense is when a defender is responsible for an area of the field. You probably did this when you played recreation soccer. If the ball came into your area, it was up to you to clear it. Zone does not work well when several players come into your area with the ball. When teams do this to a defender it is called overloading.

Man-to-man is when each player picks another to mark. A team using man-to-man will never be outnumbered, but if one defender gets beat, a shot on goal could result.

Most teams use a combination of zone and man-to-man.

Let's say that the other team is taking the ball down the touchline. The defenders between the ball and the near-post should be man-to-man, the defender on the far post can be in a zone (at least until help arrives from the midfielders). If the ball gets crossed to the other side, hopefully the defenders can switch sides quick enough.

When marking man-to-man it is very important to determine the speed, skill, and habits of the player you are marking.

When marking a very fast player, you may want to mark back a few yards so that you are always goal-side from the player. Although she may receive the ball easier because you are not putting immediate pressure on her, you are in a good position to shepherd her away from the goal. A player with a good "first touch" should also be marked this way.

A player that is very slow, with little skill, or one that traps the ball dead every time they receive should be marked very tight.

Exception: A very good player may have man-to-man marking on her that is very tight. This is because other defenders are supporting this marker in case the other player breaks loose.