

Three strategies for defending corners: Zonal, Man to Man and Mixed Zonal/Man to Man

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Zonal Marking

Zonal marking is where defenders are given responsibility for an area of the pitch (for example, a specific section of the penalty box at corners), whilst defending. Coaches are increasingly using the zonal marking strategy, because it offers better defensive coverage, when implemented properly.

Positives of zonal marking

- Defenders are always in position to attack the ball.
- Defenders do not get blocked off.
- No gaps for the attackers to exploit.
- Coaches can put specific players in certain zones (for example, the best header of the ball in the near post zone).

Negatives of zonal marking

- Attackers might get a run on the defender.
- Players pass on responsibility.
- The distance between players needs to be correct (no margin for error).
- It takes time to work on this strategy on the training ground.
- Requires excellent communication between players.

Question A – The video below shows an example of the negatives to zonal marking. Can you tell us why in the comments section below?

Roles and responsibilities

Player 1. GK should command the 6-yard box and prepare to make reaction saves.

Player 2. To stay arms distance away from the front post and make the goal as small as possible for the attacking players. If the opposition play a short corner go and press the ball.

Player 3. Defend zone 6 on line with the near post and the penalty spot. Attack the ball.

Player 4. Defend central zone 3 on the 6-yard box. Attack the ball.

Player 5. Defend zone 1, front post space. Attack the ball. If the opposition play a short corner go and press the ball.

Player 6. Defend zone 2. Attack the ball.

Player 7. Defend zone 5 and back post space. Any corner to the back-post attack the ball.

Player 8. Defend zone 4. Attack the ball.

Player 9. Defend zone 7, penalty spot area. Attack the ball.

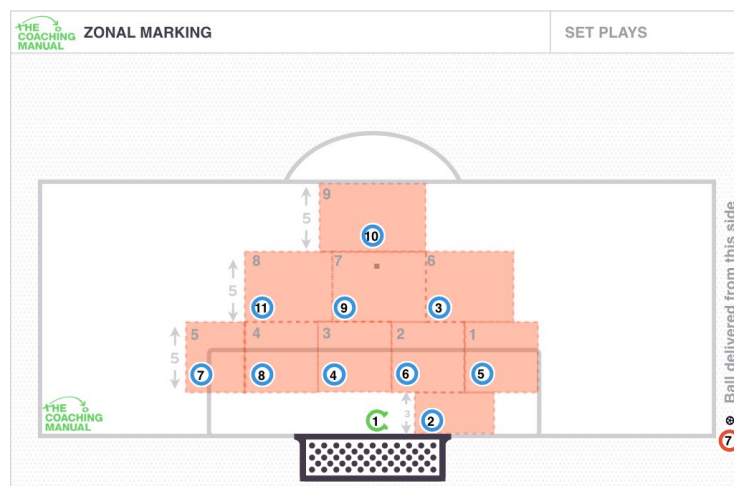
Player 10. Edge of the box space. Win any second balls.

Player 11. Defend zone 8. Attack the ball.

Man-To-Man Marking

When using man to man marking, defenders are allocated an opponent to mark (often before the game) either in normal game play or at set-pieces. It is then the defender's responsibility, when marking a specific player, to always be within touching distance of their opponent and not to give them any space to attack.

Positives of man-to-man marking



- Defenders have clear roles and responsibilities.
- Does not need a lot of preparation time.
- Coaches can match up man for man for example, most capable header of the ball marks the oppositions most dangerous attacker from set pieces or height for height.

Please watch up to 17 seconds of the link below to see how to man mark from corners. Pause on 12 seconds to see the set up.

Negatives of man-to-man marking

- Defenders can get blocked off.
- Risk of holding shirts and giving away a penalty.
- Defenders can lose attackers easily.
- Defenders have to watch the player and not just the ball.

Question B - Here are 3 examples of poor man to man marking, can you tell us why in the comment section below?

Roles and responsibilities

Player 1. GK should command the 6-yard box and prepare to make reaction saves.

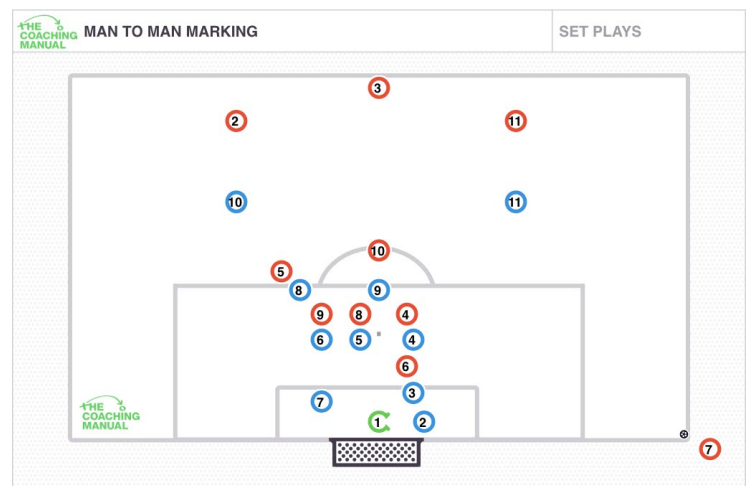
Player 2. To stay arms distance away from the post and make the goal as small as possible for the attacking players.

Player 3. Protect the keeper. Mark any opposition player around the keeper.

Player 4, 5, 6, 8, 9. Mark man for man, touch tight and attack the ball.

Player 7. Defend the back post space.

Player 10 11. Edge of the box space. Win any second balls.



Mixed Zonal and Man to Man marking

Mixed zonal and man to man marking is a blend of two different defensive tactics. When using this strategy, a team uses zonal marking and their three or four best defenders to man mark the oppositions most dangerous attackers.

When man marking is unsuccessful, the players defending zonally can attack the ball and the attacker will not get a free attempt on goal.

Positives of mixed zonal and man-to-man marking

- By man marking players you are stopping the opposition getting a free run and jump on the zonal defenders.
- Still defending key zones with zonal marking.
- Man mark the oppositions best headers of the ball and use the zonal players to create a 2v1 defensive overload.

Here is a good example of Barcelona using mixed zonal and man to man marking. Barcelona use two players which would be #4 and #5 in the graphic below then the spare players mark man to man.

Negatives of mixed zonal and man-to-man marking

- If there is a short corner, the player defending zone 1 is forced to leave their zone whilst the other 2 zonal markers need to move across, leaving the back-post space vulnerable.
- No defenders on the post.
- Players could challenge for the same ball causing confusion in the box.

Roles and responsibilities

Player 1. GK should command the 6-yard box and prepare to make reaction saves.

Player 2. Man mark the player in the near post space (10).

Player 3. Mark man for man (9).

Player 4. Defend zone 1, attack the ball.

Player 5. Defend zone 2, attack the ball.

Player 6. Defend zone 3, attack the ball.

Player 7. Mark man for man (6).

Player 8. Mark man for man (7).

Player 9. Mark man for man (5).

Player 10. Stay on the half way line.

Player 11. Edge of the box space. Win any second balls.

There is no right or wrong tactic when defending corners, the responsibility is with the coaching staff and the players to design the best strategy to suit their team. In the video below, Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher discuss defending corners...

We look forward to hearing your thoughts in the comment section below.

