

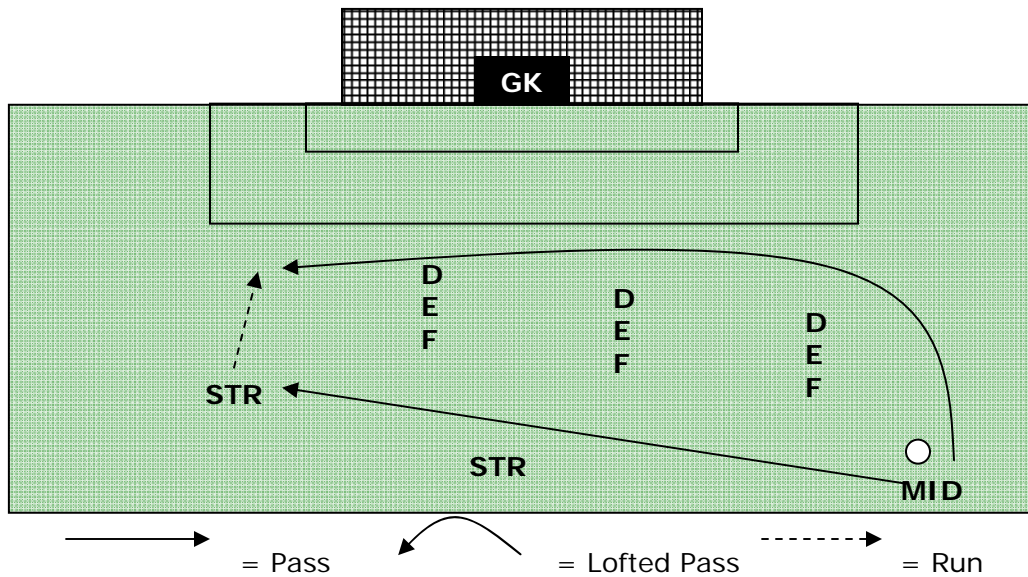


**Defending against Speed**  
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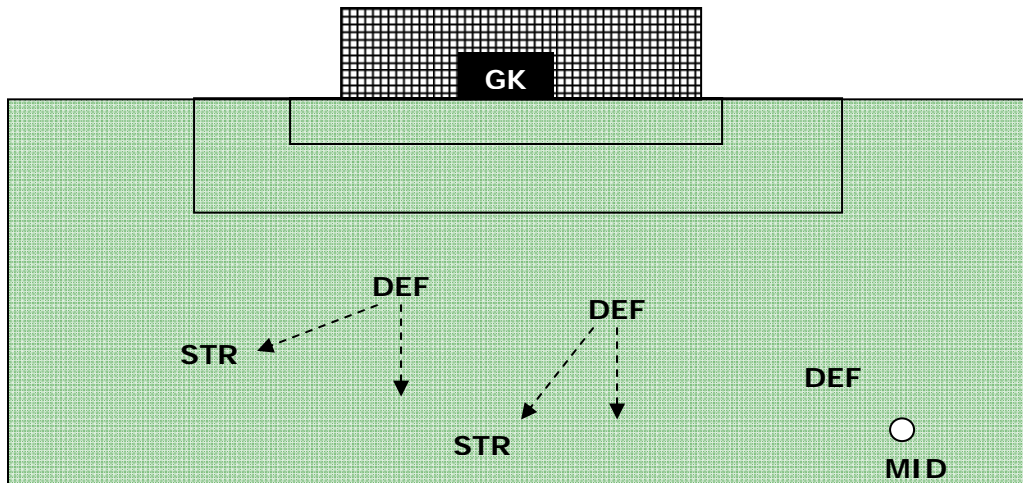
One of the most difficult challenges I have experienced both as a player and coach is how to defend against a player that is quicker than yourself. When young players are placed in this situation, I often see them dropping back and allowing the attacking player space. With all of this time to receive the ball, the player will turn and take you on with speed.

Sometimes I have seen coaches ask the defender to mark tight but this allows space for the ball to be played over the top and a footrace is on between the two players. Both are situations you need to avoid as quick players have the ability to win games using their pace. So the less space a fast player has to work with, the more opportunity you have of denying their speed advantage.

Far too often defenders will be square on to the ball and neglecting where the attacking player is. When this happens, as shown in the diagram below it makes the decision making easier for the player with the ball.



A simple correction of turning the player's body to be facing both players will help cut down the opportunities for the player with the ball to exploit the striker into any kind of space, as shown in the diagram below.





## Defending against Speed

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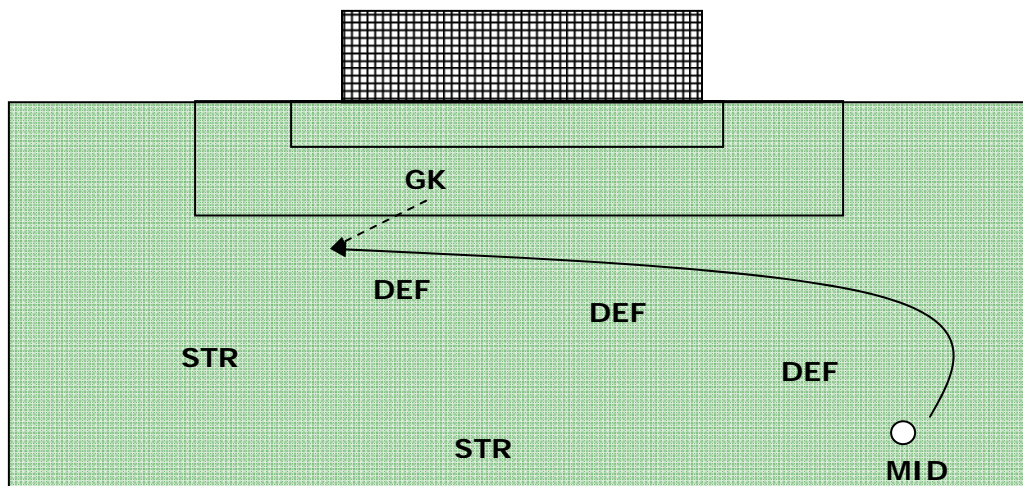
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The last and second defenders now have to be able to read the keys of the player with the ball. If it looks like the midfielder is going to pass short into the striker's feet, then they have the opportunity of trying to cut out the pass or move in tighter denying the player space. Make sure your players don't over commit, as a smart striker will skip round the defender into a 1v1 situation with the Goalkeeper.

A visual cue to notice that the midfielder is going to play the ball over the top into the space behind the defenders is you will see their head go down before striking the ball. This is now a key that the defender can step up to be in front of the striker to catch them in an offside position. The offside trap has some risk and also is a difficult tool to teach; that is why you start by teaching your last defender to have the intelligence and ability in reading the game to frustrate the opponents.

Another risk may be that the striker is smart and beat's the offside trap, therefore it is important that your Goal-Keeper is moved up with the play and willing to cover the space in behind his or her back line, therefore sweeping up any ball that falls into that area. As shown in the diagram below



It may be hard to convince the player to step up on a faster player. Nine times out of 10 quick players are like a blinkered race horse and only look to go forward, so if that last player reads the keys of the passer, they have the option to move back sooner allowing them a better opportunity to reach the ball first.

If you have confidence in your team to play against a fast player using these options, support your players. During the game you need to be evaluating the opposition to observe if you will be playing against a speedy player. Do not be so quick to criticize your players or the officials for making bad decisions; this will certainly stop your players from playing with thought and making decisions for themselves. Be open minded to possibilities but allow your team to play to their strengths.