2 Defender

Background

The most essential and obvious function of a defender is to protect his goalkeeper from goal threats and to prevent opposition players getting forward with the ball. The most common defensive line-up is to have four defenders in a line in front of the goalkeeper: one right-back, two central defenders, and one left-back. The left-backs and right-backs are often referred to collectively as full-backs.

In November 2012, in the lead up to a Premier League game between Manchester United and Arsenal, many ex-players and journalists voiced their concerns about Arsenal’s selection of a particular left-back for what was such a big game. The phrase that was used repeatedly was “defending is the worst part of his game.” Fans on radio phone-ins were not so kind. “He can’t defend” was the typical comment from the supporters. The player in question was in fact a Brazilian international left-back. Now, to become a Brazilian international is no mean feat so how could it be that this player’s ability as a defender was questioned so much?

The answer is that the typical English idea of a full-back differs greatly from the classic South American idea of the same position. In Brazil, for example, a full-back is required to receive the ball and run at the other team. He does also have defensive responsibilities but there is an understanding that other players will cover his area of the pitch because he is so frequently out of position. So it’s clear that for teams to be strong defensively, they need a defensive system in which players work together, rather than relying on the individual quality of each player.

Jargon buster

away game n a game played on the opposing team’s pitch

clear v to kick or head the ball away from the goal in a situation in which there is a danger of the opposing team scoring (and clearance n)

five-a-side game n a game featuring five players on each side, as opposed to eleven

goal kick n method of restarting play once the ball has come off an attacking player and crossed the byline; it is usually taken by the goalkeeper and is taken from inside the six-yard box.
**home game** *n* game played on your team’s pitch

**mark** *v* to prevent an opposing player from controlling the ball or getting to the ball; players shadow or **pick up** opposing players

**nutmeg** *n* when a player kicks the ball between an opposing player’s legs. This is a prestigious ‘trick’, often regarded as a humiliation of an opponent

**penalty** *n* (also **penalty kick**, or **spot kick**) type of direct free kick taken from the penalty spot, 12 yards (10.79m) from the goal

**set-piece** *n* situation in which the ball is returned to open play following a stoppage; penalties, goal kicks, free-kicks, corners and throw-ins are set-pieces

**throw-in** *n* means of restarting play when the ball has exited the side of the field of play; the throw-in is taken from the point where the ball crossed the sideline

**training** *n* team’s preparation for games, concentrating mainly on skills, fitness, tactics, organization and discipline; teams prepare at the **training ground** *n*

**warm up** *v* to warm and stretch the muscles before playing a game (and *n*)

**Activity assistant**

1) Ask the students why defenders are important. Use this as a speaking activity to get the students to speak about what a defender does, using the present simple tense.

2) Ask the students about their routine before they play a game. What do they eat before a game? Do they go to bed early before a game?

3) Ask the students to write two sentences using each of the adverbs of frequency (page 17) to talk about the role of football in their lives: *I sometimes go to the stadium. I often watch football on TV.*

4) Explain to the students that the verb **take** is very important in football. When play stops in a football match due to the ball going out of play or a foul occurring, it always restarts with a player ‘taking’ something: a corner, a throw-in, a penalty, a free-kick, a goal-kick.

5) Ask the students to think of their favourite goal, and then write a TV commentator’s commentary of the goal, using the present simple tense. If possible, use the Internet to find famous goals and, after turning down the volume, ask your students to take turns being the commentator.