

# Beating the “Cheats”

## Ways to Overcome Opponents Who Teach it Wrong

When our kids want to know how to beat a computer game, they go to the Internet and find a site that spells out the “cheats” – the not-so-secret code words they can enter to get past certain barriers in the game. When an opponent is distorting the youth game by teaching players techniques and strategies that work in the immature game, but would be a disaster at a higher level – approaches that players must soon “unlearn” if they are to play at such a level – there are answers.

*And if you’ve built your team with Power Tools, your players will have the vocabulary of words and mental pictures to understand your instructions – even from the sideline. More important, they will have the tools they need to achieve remarkably sophisticated tactical responses!*

| The “Cheat”  | The Problem   | The Solution  | The Right Power Tools  |
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| <p><b>Potted Plants</b></p> <p>Your opponent’s fullbacks are told to stay back at their penalty area, (or among slightly older players, locked at the midfield line) waiting, like three potted plants, for the ball to come their way.</p> <p>This avoids “bunching”—at least by three players—and prevents defenders from “over committing.”</p> | <p>The team condemns itself to playing “short-handed” – at a three-player disadvantage – to opponents over three quarters of the field.</p> <p>Defenders come to believe their job is only to “destroy,” and never to create or attack. They can’t possibly overlap, help outnumber opponents, or score.</p> <p>Defenders are denied the advantage of nearly half a field of space in which to accomplish their defensive objectives.</p> <p>The opposing team’s job is made enormously easier because they work with very limited pressure in the middle third of the field.</p> <p>Defenders never learn some of their most important defensive responsibilities: marking, denying their opponent the ball, and denying their opponent the ability to turn.</p> <p>A key defensive tool – the offside rule – is wasted, irrelevant.</p> | <p>Always remember to say thank you to the coach who tries the Potted Plan “cheat.” He’s handing you opportunities.</p> <p>Tell a skillful, patient attacker to roam the space in front of the defenders. Move from side to side to collect balls played out, get them under control, and then attack more deliberately (slowly), waiting for teammates to come forward. Tell your players to play the ball to your forward’s feet, when they are playing out of the back, not to the space ahead of him (through balls). Outnumber your opponent by bringing everyone into the attack.</p> <p>Don’t mirror their tactics and keep your own defenders back ... conceding the advantage they are giving you.</p> | <p>First touch: preparing the ball</p> <p>Come back for the ball and turn</p> <p>Playing to space (not to feet)</p> <p>Changing fields</p> |

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| <p><b>Super Striker</b></p> <p>Your opponent has one brilliant player. She's much bigger, much faster, and can really strike a ball. Everyone on the team is told to boot it up, and this works because the Super Striker scores almost every time she comes up the field. The more fast breaks, the better.</p> | <p>Your opponent's attack is limited to one player and one dimension. Others are almost irrelevant – and not learning or contributing.</p> <p>The game becomes a kick-ball contest, with both teams belting the ball as far as they can.</p> <p>Children grow frustrated, convinced they can't possibly win.</p> <p>The Super Star striker – a child with a lot of promise – gets a very distorted idea of what it takes to succeed, potentially delaying their own development as a well-rounded player.</p> | <p>Shut that player down! The Super Striker's physical abilities are exceptional, so you have to make an exception to your normal defensive organization. This is exactly what a professional team would do when they encounter a superstar.</p> <p>Select one of your players to mark the Super Striker everywhere she goes. Leave your regular defenders and maybe even your midfielders in place. Play with one less attacker. The player you choose to mark the Super Striker should not be your best player (thereby neutralizing your own chances). It should be a player who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ is an excellent runner, fit, and fast</li> <li>▪ may not have good attacking skills</li> <li>▪ may be a "tough" player</li> <li>▪ is a disciplined player, someone who can stay focused on this one task</li> </ul> <p>Tell your marking player to stay with the Super Striker everywhere ... stay "goal-side" ... and try to beat them to the ball every time. Their job is purely defensive. They have no attacking responsibilities whatsoever. Just destroy, deny, and frustrate the dickens out of the Super Striker.</p> <p>You may wish to assign another player to make herself immediately available each time that challenge occurs, becoming an outlet or easy pass for the hardworking defensive specialist.</p> <p>If you disable or at least disrupt your opponent's one-dimensional attack, you could turn the tide to everyone's surprise!</p> | <p>Marking goal-side, deny the ball and the turn</p> <p>Delay</p> <p>Shoulder charge</p> <p>Balance and cover using a sweeper</p> <p>Goalkeeping: Coming off your line</p> |

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| <p><b>Battling Boomers</b></p> <p>Your opponent is a team of kick-ball kings. Everyone on the team pounds it deep into your defensive area at every opportunity.</p> | <p>Your opponent seeks to take advantage of your low skill levels and hopes to create and capitalize on your mistakes.</p> <p>They willingly turn over possession and the game becomes an ugly, chaotic footrace. Pity your poor midfielders (and theirs) who arrive near the ball just in time for it to be launched to the other end of the field.</p> <p>At the next skill level, your opponent would be punished again and again for giving up the ball.</p> | <p>Tell your sweeper to watch for those long balls and sprint back as they are about to be played. He also could simply play deeper – like a center fielder or a lacrosse player "in the hole."</p> <p>(Better teams might take the opposite approach, pressing forward and turning the offside rule against the boomers.)</p> <p>Ask your front players to immediately pressure opponents ready to boom the ball. You may even take a forward player (not your best striker) and "mark" the opponent's sweeper if he is the source of most of the long balls.</p> <p>Most important, don't get strung out end to end; have your front and midfield players drop back and do your best to play through midfield on the ground.</p> | <p>First touch: preparing the ball</p> <p>Come back for the ball and turn</p> <p>Playing to space (not to feet)</p> <p>Changing fields</p> <p>Overlapping runs</p> <p>Balance and cover using a sweeper</p> <p>Goalkeeping: Coming off your line</p> |

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| <p><b>Beating the Mighty Swarm</b></p> <p>Everyone on your opponent's team is clustered around the ball. The pressure is impossible. You can't seem even to get started!</p> | <p>This really isn't soccer and the opponent is extremely vulnerable to a team that plays only slightly better.</p> <p>The cluster of players frustrates almost every sound soccer principle.</p> | <p>This classic youth soccer challenge can be "cracked" if not broken by using the very approaches you'll need to overcome it on your own team!</p> <p>Designate two of your more patient players as your "Secret Weapons" or "Stealth Players" – one on each wing or outside midfield position.</p> <p>Show them how to remain wide, and instruct all your other players to try to play it out of the ruckus and across to the Secret Weapon. If this proves inadequate, instruct the best ball handler and most dominant player to <i>always</i> look to the Secret Weapon whenever she wins the ball.</p> <p>Very soon the game will open up and you will expose the severe imbalance in your opponents defense.</p> | <p>First touch: preparing the ball</p> <p>Shielding, spin turn</p> <p>Come back for the ball and turn</p> <p>Playing to space (not to feet)</p> <p>Changing fields</p> |

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| <p><b>Three Flat Defenders</b></p> <p>Your opponent is playing three defenders in a line across the back. They're big and fast and denying you every ball. What's more, they have an extra player in the midfield or up front because they have opted not to use a sweeper.</p> | <p>Your opponent is taking an enormous risk by playing without a free back. They are playing without depth (cover) in the event a defender is beaten and are relying on sheer athletic prowess to overcome this tactical exposure.</p> <p>The children are confusing sound soccer with what's working at the moment.</p> | <p>If you have the striker to beat them, then simple through passes can devastate them.</p> <p>If you don't have strong front players, stop trying to play right at the three defenders. Stop playing to their athletic superiority. Start exposing their lack of depth.</p> <p>Ask your front players – your striker and wings – to stop trying to beat them in a footrace. Instead, have them check back for the ball, running back toward your goal to receive passes played to their feet. When possible, they should either turn, and play the ball on for overlapping midfielders ... or change the field and play it to a midfielder or back coming forward on the other side.</p> <p>Pulling your front players back and bringing their defenders even further up will create vast spaces behind them for overlapping midfielders.</p> <p>If there is just one dominant central defender, the answer is to draw the center back out of the middle and change the ball quickly to the opposite field. No player runs faster than the ball.</p> <p>Unless you have dominant athletes, stop trying to play through balls and build through the middle of the field. Play the ball to your wingers and striker coming back for the ball. Urge your midfielders and backs to overlap.</p> <p>When the sweeper comes to meet the play, turn, and change the ball to the center or opposite flank.</p> <p>If you continue to be frustrated, consider "marking" the sweeper with an athletic, if not especially talented frontrunner.</p> | <p>First touch: preparing the ball</p> <p>Come back for the ball and turn</p> <p>Shielding, spin turn</p> <p>Playing to space (not to feet)</p> <p>Changing fields</p> <p>Overlapping runs</p> |