

## SPALDING POSITIONAL OUTLINES

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of some of the responsibilities of each position, as it relates to what we're trying to do at Spalding. I will sometimes use terms that may be new to you but are located in the "terms" section of this communication.

**GOALKEEPER (GK)**- Of course the GK is responsible for being adept at the specific skills that are unique to his/her position, such as catching the ball, or diving etc... (I will use the masculine form from here on). Beyond that, in our system he is also required to assist us in several key ways:

- A) *Communication*- Our keeper is important in verbally assisting the defenders in their **marking** and their defensive tactics when we are not in possession of the ball. Not only must he communicate who should mark which player, but he can also assist the defender who is **pressuring the ball**. For example, if our defender is **closing down** an opponent who's running down the wing with the ball, our GK should remind him to use **FASA** and to go in easy and try to "**stand the player up**". Of course our keepers are also responsible for calling "keeper" loudly, clearly, and confidently on plays when they are calling off our defenders.
- B) *Distribution*- Our keepers are important distributors of the ball. While it is not a requirement, it is very helpful to have a GK who can take at least some of the **goalkicks**, and can consistently get the ball upfield. This requires a player who is confident in his form and has spent time developing his form, so as to acquire that level of consistency. More important than the ability to take goalkicks, is the ability to punt the ball properly and for good height and distance. Unlike goalkicks, this is a requirement for our keepers. Again this requires hours of practice to develop good technique and leg strength. Of course a third area of distribution is the throw. A good GK has a variety of effective throws. These include: a) a little soft roll where the keeper bends low to release the ball, similar to bowling; b) A strong overhead line drive throw that picks out an open MF or F, this throw can be very effective in starting a quick counter-attack; c) the high arcing overhead throw picks out our forward, but is really designed more to get the ball into an upfield position rather than start an attack per se. It is also very important that our goalkeepers are able to make good decisions regarding distribution. He must decide when it's best to throw or punt, or to simply hold the ball for a few seconds to allow all the other players to clear out. Furthermore, he must be sure of himself when he chooses to throw the ball. There's nothing worse than having a GK's throw intercepted by an opponent, this always results in a dangerous situation if not a goal.
- C) *Support*- When we are in possession of the ball, our keeper must be able to play a role in support. He should act as our deepest **support player** a second sweeper (SW) in a way. He must be able to handle the ball with his feet fairly comfortably. Most plays will only require the keeper to make two or three touches with his feet on the total play. He might need a touch or two to settle the ball comfortably, and the third touch should be the release. The release should generally be a long high ball that just gets the ball out of relative danger. There may be some instances where the keeper will play a short pass to an open player, but

he must be very sure that there's no chance of an interception. If there is, bang it out of there.

As I discuss the roles of the field players. I will try to outline some of the defensive responsibilities as well as their desired function when we are in possession of the ball.

**MARKING BACK (MB)- A) *Opponents Ball-*** The primary responsibility of the marking back is to mark and **track** and the opponents' forward players. MB's have to be unafraid to attack the play aggressively when called for. At the same time on plays where they can't get to the ball first, they have to understand that it is better to pull up and **contain** the player rather than **overcommit**. MB's have to be able to win punts and goalkick's from the opposing team. This requires a courageous and determined attitude. It helps if MB's are fast. They don't have to have world class speed, but they can't be slow. Remember, a huge part of their job is to keep up with opposing forwards, and these players are likely to be quick. In addition, MB's have to have endurance. You are not useful to me if you are gassed after one or two sprints. You'll have to take your summer conditioning seriously if you intend to come in and play this position at Spalding.

**B) *Our Ball-*** When we are in possession of the ball, the positioning of the MB's is very important: 1) When the ball is played to the sweeper or keeper, the MB's must provide wide support. Get into a position where you can receive the ball and turn it upfield quickly. 2) When balls are played thru or over our defense, and our sweeper is sprinting back to get to the ball, the MB's (or at least the nearside MB) must also sprint back to give a wide support angle. 3) When the wing midfielder (WMF) has the ball, the MB on that side of the field must give deep support so that the WMF can drop the ball if necessary. On this play the MB should look to make a central pass to either the stopper (ST), one of the central midfielders (CMF), or if necessary play another angled drop to the SW. If the ST or a CMF are used, we will hopefully be able to maintain our attack because we have changed the "point of attack". When the SW is used we will likely reverse the ball to other side of the field, reorganize our support positions, and begin our attack anew. 4) When our CMF or ST have the ball, the MB is looking to support in a wide and deep position. Note, he should not stray too far from his "man". Remember, the ball can easily be turned over in this position and marking his man is the number 1 priority for the MB.

**SWEEPER (SW)- A) *Opponents Ball-*** The sweepers main responsibility is to provide deep cover when for our frontline defenders when our opponents are in possession of the ball and beginning their attack. When I say frontline defenders, I mean this: The "diamond defense" that we play is really that in name only. Most of the time it does *not* resemble a diamond formation, but becomes a three man frontline with the fourth defender, our sweeper, a little deeper but still close to the action. The defensive "frontline" is formed by the ST and the two MB's. The SW's main function then is to provide cover for these players. He plays 5-7 yards behind the developing attack. His positioning allows the other defenders to be more aggressive and to step up and meet the attack, because they know that the SW is behind them to provide cover.

**B) *Our Ball-*** When we are in possession the SW becomes our deep support player. He is someone who we can rely on to drop the ball to, when we are under pressure or when we need to switch the point of attack. The SW must constantly be aware of his positioning so that he is able to provide such support.

He must be confident in his skills and sure of himself when handling the ball, as obviously a misplay or turnover by him, would leave us dangerously exposed. Another way that the SW can help us when we are in possession, is by communicating well. With his deep position behind the formation, the SW can be very effective at communicating where the ball needs to be played and helping to position other players in terms of effective support. Lastly, the SW must always be vigilant as to when we might lose the ball. He should be able to anticipate when and where we might turn the ball over and at that critical moment of transition, he must communicate which player needs to shut down the ball, and which players must mark-up, and who they should mark.

STOPPER (ST)- A) *Opponents Ball*- As soon as the opposing team wins the ball, the ST must cautiously move to meet the attack. His job in the initial moments of the counter-attack is to slow the play down long enough that the other team cannot organize a fast break. He does this by using FASA to immediately meet the attack, but then tries to contain it in order to slow it down. The ST is also responsible for marking and tracking the forward-most central attacker that the other team might use. This would be the center-forward in a 3 man line, or the attacking central midfielder in a 4-4-2. The ST's biggest responsibility is to *protect* the SW, that is to ensure that the SW has no one to mark, thus freeing him to sweep.

B) *Our Ball*- When we are in possession, the ST must act as a third center midfielder CM. However, his positioning should be behind the CM's. As the CM's move into position to support the attack, the ST should trail behind say, 7-10 yards. There are two reasons for this; First, the ST is able to provide excellent deep support for the attack. The CM's can lay the ball off, or the ST can corral an errant cross that floats behind the main attack, and he's also in a good position to be first to **weak clears** by our opponents. The second reason for this positioning is that the ST is in good position to present an early challenge to the opponents counter-attack. Thus, even when we are in possession of the ball a good ST is already thinking about his defensive responsibility.

CENTER-MIDFIELDER (CM)- A) *Opponents Ball*- When the opponents win possession our CM's must react immediately. If it's a goalkick or a punt, they must sprint back to a position that's deeper than the kick that's likely to come. There may be situations where they both are unable to accomplish this, but it is *imperative* that at least *one* of them gets into proper position. They provide protection for the ST, and share in the responsibility of meeting the counter-attack. When the ball is lost in general play, the CM nearest the ball should try to apply *immediate* and *aggressive* pressure to the opponent in possession of the ball. While this is occurring, the other CM should be hustling back behind the ball to provide **cover**. This season we will be putting more emphasis on the two CM's working in a defensive tandem. Their job in these situations is two prevent the ball from splitting them. If they maintain a close enough distance to one another, then this should be difficult for the other team to achieve.

B) *Our Ball*- When we are in possession, our CM's act as the engine of our attack. When we first win possession of the ball we will generally need to **relieve pressure**. This is usually necessary because the player who wins the ball is almost always under pressure when he first wins it, and relieving pressure allows us to maintain possession of the ball while we organize ourselves into support positions, in order to begin our attack. Remember, we were playing defense only a few seconds ago, so we are usually *not*

*ready* to attack when we first win the ball. Whenever the ball is in possession of one of our **perimeter** players, it is the job of the CM's to provide central support. These players must **check in** at good support angles. Their job is to be the link between our defenders and our forwards. When our defenders don't have short options they are forced to play long balls out of the back, risking the immediate loss of possession. Thus, it is imperative that our CM's are active in their check-in responsibilities. CM's must be adept at turning with the ball in order to change the point of attack. They must have good ball handling skills and confidence in their ability to handle the ball under pressure. These players are also responsible for intelligent distribution of the ball. While it's great to have a CM who is capable of scoring goals, it's much more important to have CM's who are creative playmakers and can set up opportunities for others.

WING-MIDFIELDER (WM)- A) *Opponents Ball*- Our WM's must protect our flanks when we are on defense. Thus, it is not only necessary that WM's are fast, it is more important that these players are able to quickly make the **transition** from offense to defense, both mentally and with their actions. If a WM is near the ball when it is lost, he should put immediate aggressive pressure on the ball to slow or stop the counter-attack. Please note, that all MF's and forwards (F)'s operate under this principle: that is, if you are near the ball when it's lost, your job is to provide immediate pressure. WM's are responsible for any player that makes an attacking run in a wide lane of the field. At this point, the WM may be called off by the MB behind him. When that happens, the WM lets the player go (he will be marked by the MB) and the WM takes the next attacking player. Another point to note is the importance of communication amongst all players when we are playing defense. Some situations are going to arise where we may have to **switch** players in the middle of an attack due to good off-the-ball movement by our opponents. WM's should get deep on punt and goalkick situations. They should try to get in position to win the ball (there's no reason that this should not happen on goalkicks as there is usually more time to set up defensively), or at least be retreating to support the defenders behind them. Lastly, WM's must have the same defensive instincts as MB's, that is; they must know how to properly close players down, know when to commit to aggressive defense and when to contain, and be familiar with how to use FASA when closing the player with the ball.

B) *Our Ball*- Our WM's are primarily responsible for providing wide support to the MB's, the ST, and the CM's. An effective WM is constantly aware of and adjusting his positioning to provide a good angle of wide support. WM's play most of the game in a 10-15 yard channel extending from their sideline. Their first attacking option when they receive the ball wide is to play the ball straight up the sideline to a F making the diagonal run. Other attacking options for the WM are to combine with a CM or a F checking in at an angle. These combinations will be effective in pulling opposing defenders out of position and creating spaces for us to exploit. It goes without saying that WM's must be effective crossers of the ball. Thus this is a skill that players wanting to play WM must become very adept at. WM's also must become familiar with the *centering gaps*, how they work, and be able to determine when to use which one. The **weakside** WM is the one who is furthest away from the attack. This player must be very adept at timing his attacking runs in order to support the attack, and get to crosses played to the far post area. He must be able to read the play and understand when to make these support runs, and just as importantly, when not to. If he runs too soon, the cross could end up behind him. If he runs too often, he will tire

himself out too quickly (thus compromising his durability), and take himself out of good defensive positions should the cross be intercepted, as is bound to happen on some of them.

FORWARD (F)- A) *Opponents Ball*- There are two main types of defensive situations that our F's are likely to be in. 1) The first is a situation where a turnover has occurred. When we are on the attack and lose the ball, we are not likely to be in good defensive positions. This is because when we are attacking, we are trying to space ourselves wider, and separate from the opposing players. The first few seconds after a turnover is a time of transition, and thus we use the phrase **transition defense** to describe our defensive actions during this period. The first element of transition defense is to put immediate pressure on the ball. This pressure should be as aggressive as the play allows. The idea is to slow the other teams counter-attack enough to allow us to get in defensive position as a team. This is where the forwards come in. They are generally in position to provide that initial pressure, even if it's from behind the player with the ball. If the F's are not in position to pressure the ball after a turnover, then logic says that a MF or Defender will have to pressure the ball. This is a very dangerous defensive situation for us, so it is imperative that if the F's are not in positions to pressure the ball, they'd better be sprinting back to get in a position behind the ball where they can provide cover for the MF who is pressuring. 2) The other defensive situation that the F plays an important role in is on punts or goalkicks. On punts the F's need to try to track back to an area that allows them to win the second ball off a punt. The **second ball** refers to a play that happens after our defender has won the initial punt on a header. On goalkicks, our F's should retreat to an area 35-40 yards away from the opposing goal. It is inexcusable for the F's to not be in position on a goalkick as they will generally have more time to get there.

B) *Our Ball*- When we are in possession, our F's should act as sweepers in front of the formation. That is to say that they must drift towards the area where the ball is likely to come out of the backfield. F's must be aggressive and active on our own punts and goalkick's. Their job is to at least knock the ball down for a MF to win. The F's job in general play is to make themselves available to the MF's. Our F's are in a constant battle with their markers. They must disguise their intentions and use sudden changes of speed and quick directional breaks to lose their marks. They must be technical enough to handle balls played to their feet, even in traffic. F's must also be fast enough to run down **through balls** or long balls played over the top of the defense. Of course, F's must also have some dribbling moves that allow them to be dangerous in 1 v 1 situations. It is also important that these players are good shooters with both feet. Very often there will only be a small window in which to get the shot off, so F's must learn to release the ball very quickly when necessary, and as the English say "take your opportunities".