

## **Playing at the Next Level**

Many players and teams are about to enter new seasons and when you are now being asked to play against a higher level player, it's important to know what to expect.

Whether you are moving from middle school to high school, high school to college, or your club team is playing on a higher level (for example, your team won their league so have qualified to play in a higher league or you switched teams and are playing on a team that plays against better opponents) it's important to understand that teams at a higher level are better. They might be bigger or stronger or faster or more tactical or more technical but in some way, there is a reason they are at this higher level and **it's important that you are prepared.**

Probably the biggest adjustment players find when playing at a higher level is **what happens in two 18 yard boxes.**

As you play with and against players at a higher level, you will find that **mistakes** made near the 18 you are defending will more likely result in a goal for the opponent. While you might have gotten away with a mistake back there against lesser competition, against better players, they will punish your mistakes by scoring goals.

On the other side of the field, the **defending** near your attacking 18 will be much fiercer as you play at a higher level. Harder tackles, tighter marking and less space.

While this might seem like a very obvious thing, it's one of the biggest shocks for most players when they move up a level. They make an early mistake in back and give up a goal and then realize they can't make these kinds of mistakes anymore. Or, they receive a ball near the 18, think they have time to take an extra touch and before they know it, the goal scoring opportunity is gone.

**Those players who truly understand the differences in the various levels are less likely to make these mistakes. Likewise, those players who truly understand the differences will be more likely to train to avoid these problems, rather than having to learn after the fact.**

What worked at one level doesn't always work at the next level. Be prepared for greater focus and intensity inside each 18 and you are more likely to experience success.