

Defence

10 ready made coaching sessions



Defending as a unit

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Working hard together to win possession.
- 2 Pressing, supporting and covering as a team unit.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Demonstrate a positive, aggressive but controlled attitude.
- 2 Remember and apply the work on individual pressing.
- 3 Observe the opponents positions and your team mates.
- 4 Keep compact as a unit.
- 5 Cover spaces as well as players.
- 6 Seize the opportunity to challenge correctly for the ball.



what to shout

- “Press quickly.”
- “Keep together and work as a unit.”
- “Get tighter and close the gap.”
- “Stay on your feet.”
- “Don’t dive in.”
- “Win it!”



what to look for

- Slow reactions and movement.
- Gaps between players.
- Lack of positive mental attitude.
- Failure to intercept or challenge when there is a chance.
- Rash challenges, fouls, going to ground.
- Lack of communication and specific information.



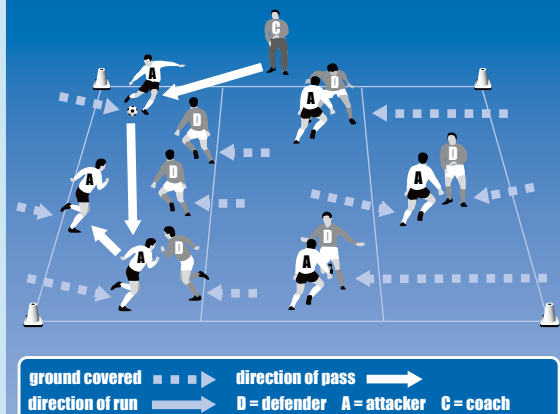
what to think about

Are they working “smart” or just hard? Are they applying the lessons learned in marking and covering? Think about rotating tired players, as done well this is a hard session. Drinks and rest pauses are advisable. Relax the 8 pass rule in the game after a while and it will be less frantic. Think about letting them defend deep as a team and counter attack. Applaud all goals and good attempts deriving from good defending.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: Use an area approx 30m x 20m. Three players stand outside the area at both ends. Three other players from each team stand in the middle third. The coach plays a ball into one end and the players at that end step into the grid to receive. Now they must make 3/4/5 passes before they can pass into the other team at the far end. When they do they get a point and their team mates in the middle can now pressurise the opponents who are receiving the ball. Each successful long pass gets a point. Rotate the players in the middle.

Defending as a unit



Development

When the ball is played in by the coach one blue player can move into the attacking third. His team mates must now make 4/5/6 passes in the other two thirds before passing to him to get a point. All the red players now work as a team to intercept before the final pass can be made. If they do it is their turn in possession if not blues retain the ball and start again

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play 5 v 5 on a 30m by 45m area with goals. Divide the pitch into thirds. The goalkeeper in possession must distribute in his defending third. A team making eight passes gets a goal. A normal goal also counts.

This encourages the defenders to hunt as a pack and try to win the ball back early. They must work as a team.

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Preventing crosses

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Stopping your opponents from crossing.
- 2 Defending against crosses.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Move early into the path of the cross.
- 2 Stand up and stay on your feet.
- 3 Block attempts to cross with your feet.
- 4 Work in pairs and cover each other.
- 5 Challenge fairly.



what to shout

- “Get there quickly”, “Stand upright”, “Don’t turn your back”.
- “On your toes”, “Block it”.
- “Move again”, “Talk”, “Cover each other”, “Work together”.



what to look for

- Players moving in too quickly and being beaten too easily.
- Failure to anticipate and move when the ball travels.
- Late or dangerous challenges.
- Turning backs to the ball especially when jumping.



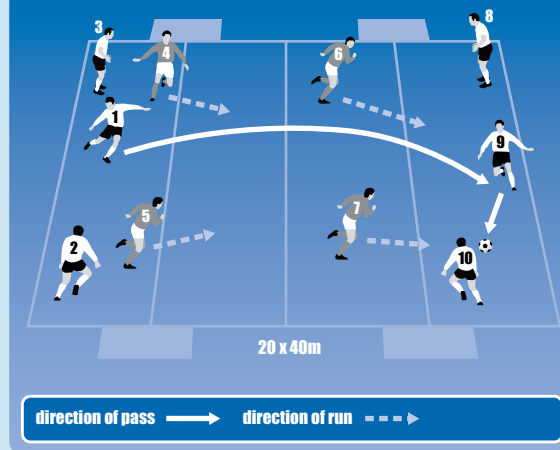
what to think about

Preventing crosses is done by closing down early and using the pressurising techniques described in earlier smart sessions. Patience and discipline are paramount. Timing is crucial when challenging for the ball in the air. Ensure that the players are capable of pressing first before developing this practice closing down correctly in the first instance is the key.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: Inside a 20 x 40 grid, the practice begins with players 1, 2 & 3 passing the ball between them under pressure from 4 & 5 until they create enough space to make a long pass over the middle zones into the far end zone for players 8, 9 & 10 to receive. While the ball travels players 6 & 7 enter the end zone and press 8, 9 & 10 to prevent the long pass back again. Players 4 and 5 return to the middle to rest until the ball is transferred again.

Preventing crosses



Development

- 1 Place small goals at the side of the grid and allow the receiving players to score if the cross is successful.
- 2 The defenders must now defend the cross as well as preventing it.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a game with three teams on the same area, 3 v 3 v 3. A goal can only be scored following a cross or shot as a result of a cross. In any of the four goals. Use goalkeepers if available or make the goals smaller. Give plenty of rest periods and prohibit rash challenging and fouling.

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Individual defending

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Outsmarting attackers in 1 v 1 situations.
- 2 Preventing penetration.
- 3 Making the opposition's build-up predictable and easier to counteract.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Cover ground quickly once the ball is on its way to the attacker.
- 2 Edge in slowly once attacker has control of ball.
- 3 Get into line between the ball and goal to stop the ball being played forward.
- 4 Force attacker down the touchline.



what to shout

- "Stay on your feet" or "Don't dive in" or "Be patient".
- "Watch the ball, not the feints."



what to look for

- Speed and angle of approach.
- In balanced position as the ball arrives at the attacker's feet.
- Distance from attacker should be about approx 2 metres.
- Body shape – side on, slightly crouching.
- Feinting to tackle to make attackers focus on the ball, therefore gaining the initiative.
- Timing of the tackle.



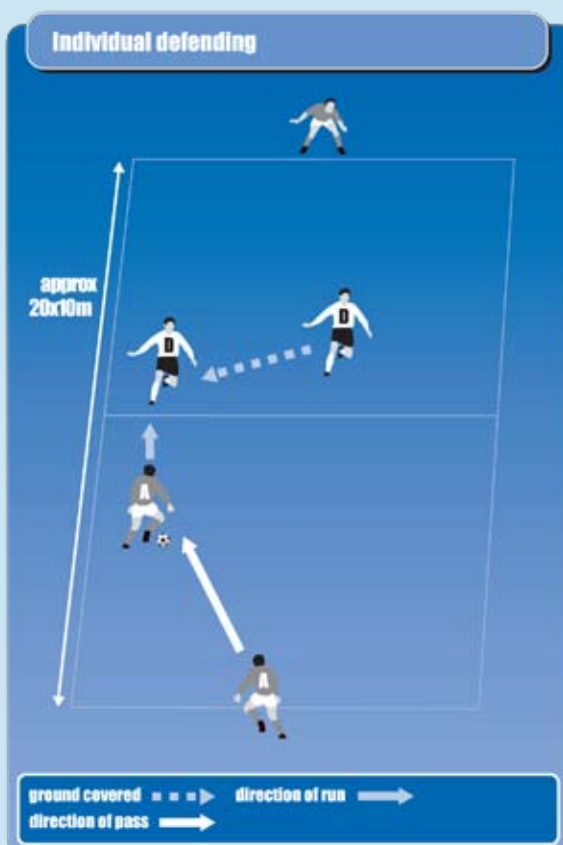
what to think about

It may be that your overall defensive team tactic is to force attackers inside where you can win the ball, in which case you should adjust the defender's approach and body shape accordingly. In a game scenario, if a tricky opponent is particularly strong on one foot, why not encourage your defender to show them on their weaker side? And coach players not to go to ground unless they can put the ball out of play.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: In an area approx 20m x 10m one attacker passes the ball to a teammate who is in a wide position. As soon as the ball is played the defender may begin closing down the wide attacker. The wide attacker now tries to dribble past the defender and over the line where the third attacker is standing.

Stage 2: Rotate positions so everyone has a go at defending.



Development

The attacker can either dribble past the defender or pass to a third attacker positioned at the far end. The third attacker can't enter the field of play. Once the defender is executing the skill well, try varying their start position so they have a bit further to travel to close down the wide attacker.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Develop this session into a 2 v 2 – the third attacker becomes a second defender – using the same start positions, plus goals or scoring end zones.

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Covering defenders

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Providing cover for a team-mate against an opponent.
- 2 Directing attackers away from goal.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Force the attacker down the touchline.
- 2 Stop the ball from being played forward.
- 3 Stand at a slight angle goalside of the first defender.
- 4 Communicate early and clearly.



what to shout

- “Show them wide”, “Talk to each other”.
- “Stay on your feet”, “Concentrate”.



what to look for

- The covering player being in position to make an effective challenge if the first defender is beaten.
- Good communication – for example, the covering defender advising their team-mate to “get closer” or “force them down the line”.
- Making the forwards’ play predictable.



what to think about

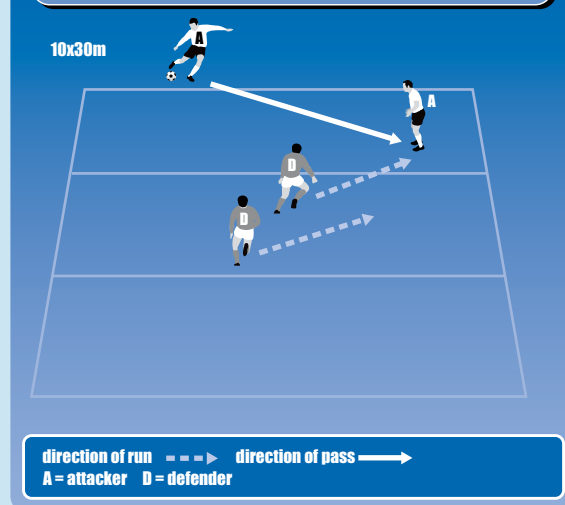
On a full-size pitch, the distance between defenders depends on what part of the pitch the ball is in. In the defending third, it’s about 4-6m (or even less); in the middle and attacking thirds, roughly 8-10m. The covering defender has to also take into account the attacker’s ability – for example, if the attacker is particularly quick, the covering player may want to leave more space than usual so as to be passed at the same time as the challenging defender.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: In an area approx 10 x 30m, the ball is played to an attacker, who must try and dribble to the end-line. The two defenders must prevent the attacker from doing so by forcing their opponent down the line. The first defender challenges the attacker, the second defender provides cover.

Stage 2: Switch positions so everyone gets a go at being the covering defender.

Second defender



Development

The attacker playing the first pass joins in the attack to make a 2 v 2 situation. The defenders will now have to constantly switch roles depending on who is nearest the ball, with the covering defender becomes the main defender and vice versa.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a 4 x 4 match with goalkeepers in an area 30 x 20m. Encourage both sides to shoot at every opportunity as this will force players to close down their opponents as well as provide cover.

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Defensive clearances

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Defending techniques near to your own goal.
- 2 Clearing the danger.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Defend the end zone by covering all spaces.
- 2 Work together as a unit talk and encourage.
- 3 Get to the ball quickly, don't let it bounce, get it up in the air.
- 4 Play the ball forward over opponents and into space.



what to shout

- “Get there quickly”, “Get to the ball”, “Close the gaps”.
- “On your toes”, “Get it up”, “Go long”, “Support each other”.
- “Head it!”, “Talk”, “Push forward”, “Work together”.



what to look for

- Alertness or lack of it.
- Failure to get to the ball quickly or push out quickly.
- Heading, volleying techniques.
- Good team work.



what to think about

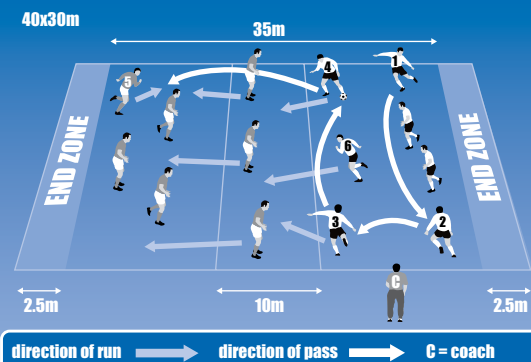
This game is designed to develop the techniques for clearing the ball when defending. Essentially think about improving heading and volleying techniques. It is important for defenders not to let the ball bounce so this helps them to be alert and get quickly to the ball. When one defender is clearing a ball it is crucial for his nearest colleagues to support and cover him in case of a mistake.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: The team in possession has 7 players in their area of the field. The opponents defend their area with 4 players and 3 players in the centre zone. The team with the ball has to make at least three passes in the air before playing the ball over the centre zone landing it on the floor of their opponent's area. This gets them a point.

Player 5 is trying to prevent the ball touching the floor and retain possession by making an aerial pass to a team mate. When this team is in possession, the game goes on like head tennis. The 3 players in the centre zone forming the ‘net’ must retreat into their own area and the other team must send 3 players in. (3, 4 & 6). The 3 “net” players can intercept the ball and score a point this way.

Defensive Clearances



Stage 2: If the players become very good, you could allow 1 or 2 of the net players to go into their zone and put pressure on them.

Two points could be scored by playing the ball back on one touch and landing it in the end zone, however failure to hit the target means a point lost.

How would I put this into a game situation?

This is a fun game in its own right, experiment with the rules and conditions on the game to make it varied, play around with the numbers and size of the pitch.

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Defensive headers

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Heading the ball away from goal.
- 2 Getting height and distance with headers.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Provide a decent, accurate throw.
- 2 Move into the ball's line of flight.
- 3 Use the forehead.
- 4 Head the ball back as far and as high as possible.



what to shout

- "Keep your eyes open."
- "Get up", "Attack the ball".



what to look for

- Eyes on the ball.
- Taking off on one foot.
- Use of the arms to help take-off.
- Body almost side-on.
- Arched back before heading the ball.
- Make contact at the highest point of the jump.
- Heading the bottom half and the middle of the ball.
- Use of the neck muscles for power.
- Landing on both feet.



what to think about

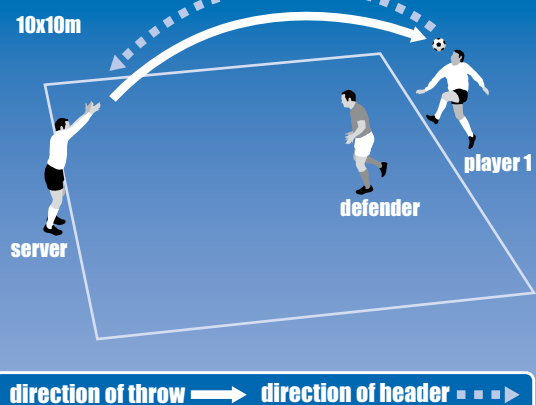
For safety reasons only begin heading sessions with young players when they're aged eight or nine, but even then don't overdo it. Try a softer ball to help build confidence, and make the distances you're asking players to head the ball suitable for their age. Finally, don't introduce opposition until kids are confident and old enough to cope with physical contact.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: In an area approx 10 x 10 metres a server stands between two players, and throws the ball to player 1, who heads it over the server's head to player 2. Player 2 controls the ball with either foot, head or chest and returns it to the server to repeat the practice.

Stage 2: Rotate the players so everyone has a go at heading, serving and controlling the ball.

Defensive header



Development

This time the server, standing no more than 5 metres away from player 1, throws the ball over the head of a static defender for player 1 to head it back (see diagram). The defender stands 1 metre in front of player 1. To increase difficulty, get the defender to take a step back when the ball is served; to make it even harder for player 1, the defender can jump to try to win the ball, although the server must favour player 1 with the throw.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Split the group into two teams and play a game of Throw, Head, Catch. For a team to win a point they must complete the following sequence: one player throws the ball to a second teammate who heads it to a third teammate. A team is awarded a point if the opposition doesn't intercept the ball to begin their own sequence and the ball doesn't hit the ground.

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Delaying attackers

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Slowing down an attack until support arrives.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Get between the attacker and the goal.
- 2 Force the attackers into making as many sideways passes as possible.



what to shout

- “Get back quickly!”
- “Get goalside!”



what to look for

- Blocking the attackers’ route to goal.
- Closing down the ball.
- Forcing the play across the field and preventing the ball from being played in behind the defence.
- As the ball is played between the attackers, the defender zig-zagging back along a straight line of retreat towards goal.
- Keeping the ball and attackers in view at all times.
- Maintaining the space between themselves and the attackers.



what to think about

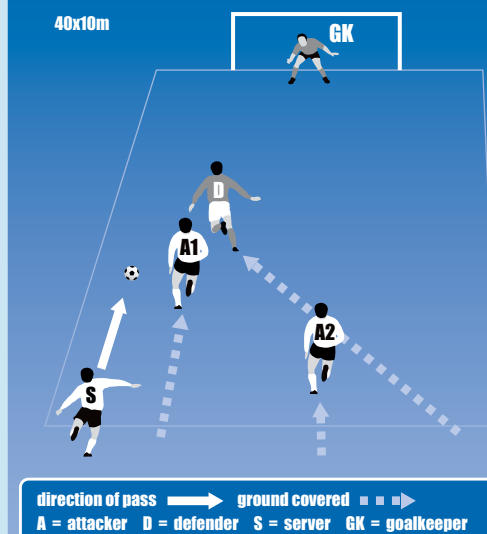
There comes a time when a defender can't retreat any more and the space behind is mostly covered by the goalkeeper. At this point the defender should drop off the player with the ball to tempt them to shoot rather than have the ball passed behind them. That's because the player with the ball will be shooting from a greater distance and ideally a wider angle.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: In an area approx 40 x 10 metres start with the attacker near one touchline and the defender near the other. A through ball is served down the touchline for the attacker to run onto and dribble to the far end. The defender is to recover, then close down and delay the attacker.

Stage 2: When the defender has closed down the first attacker, a second attacker can join the play.

Delaying attackers



Development

Add a goalkeeper and a full-size goal. Tell the attackers to try and score, and get the defender to draw a shot from as far out and as wide as possible. As a further progression a second defender can be added on a particular signal.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play 2 v 2 in an area approx 40 x 10 metres. Each team has to try to score by passing or dribbling the ball over their opponent's end line. But if a player loses possession they must leave the field of play from the touchline and re-enter at the end line they are attacking. This will leave their teammate in a temporary 2 v 1 situation.

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The ‘block’ tackle

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Stopping your opponent.
- 2 Winning back the ball.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Get in range.
- 2 Put all your strength and weight behind the ball.



what to shout

- “Be patient”, “Stay on your feet”
- “Keep your eye on the ball”



what to look for

- Head down over the ball, bent knees.
- Planting the non-tackling foot firmly to provide an anchor
- Tackling foot making contact with the middle of the ball – like a side-foot pass – and in an L-shape.
- Head down over the ball.
- Bent knees.
- The knee and ankle locked solid.
- A committed attitude.
- If the ball becomes stuck then putting a foot under the ball to lift it away.



what to think about

Tell your players to try not to allow the tackling foot to make contact with the top of the ball. If they do, they will find it tough to put any force behind the challenge, and also risk missing the ball and fouling the attacker, which could mean a yellow or possibly red card. A serious injury might result too.

What you get your players to do:

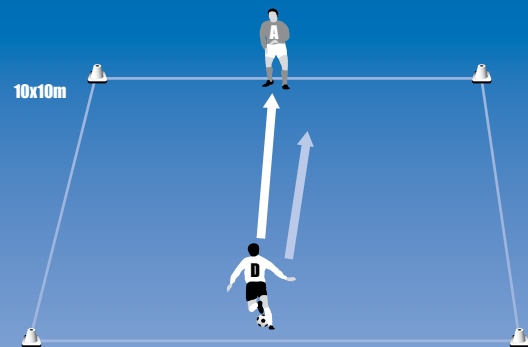
Stage 1: In an area 10 x 10 metres two players stand 1 metre from a ball that is equidistant between them. On a signal both try to win the ball.

Stage 2: The players stand at opposite ends of the grid, taking turns to act as server. After serving the ball to the opponent, they close them down defensively and try to tackle the ball.

Development

Award points for a successful tackle that wins the ball or knocks it out of play, and points for a successful dribble past the defender.

Block tackle



direction of pass → movement of player →
D = defender A = attacker

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play keepaway in a small grid with 1-2 defenders and about 4-5 attackers. Give a point to the defenders for each time they tackle the ball out of play or win it and pass it to the other defender. Give a point to the attackers for each time all of them touch the ball without an intervening tackle by a defender.

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The slide tackle

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Winning back the ball or knocking into touch.
- 2 Last resort defending.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Get in range.
- 2 Slide on the ground to win the ball, approaching from the side and tackling across the path of the opponent.
- 3 Tackle using the leg furthest from the ball.
- 4 Tuck the leg nearest the ball underneath the backside and slide on the outer thigh/hip area.
- 5 Trap the ball on the shoelaces (instep) and swing the leg around in a wide sweep to “hook” the ball with the foot, pulling it towards the direction the tackler came from.
- 6 Get on your feet quickly whether the tackle is successful or not.



what to shout

- “Close down the space.”
- “Time your tackle.”
- “Try not to foul.”
- “Get up quickly.”



what to look for

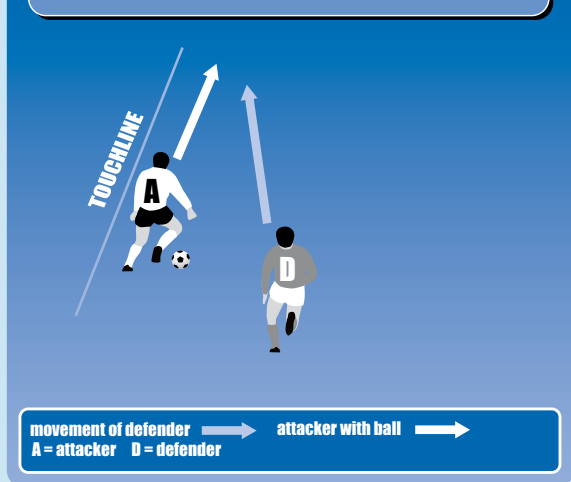
- Jumping up in the air. Your player is more likely to bounce than slide.
- Is the weight behind the tackling leg and making contact with the centre to top half of the ball so it doesn’t roll over the foot?
- Have they made contact with the ball first, not the opponent?

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: Each player is positioned a short distance away from a stationary ball, and runs to it to perform a slide tackle.

Stage 2: The players then roll or pass the ball forward to themselves, chase after it and attempt a slide tackle.

The slide tackle



Development

The players get into pairs. The first player, who is given a head start, dribbles forward steadily at half speed so they can be caught, while the second player runs in from the side and attempts the tackle.

To progress, give the first player an endzone they have to reach without being tackled.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play 1 v 1 with endzones that each player has to dribble into to score.

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Defending technique circuit

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Reacting to different challenges.
- 2 Clearing the ball from danger.
- 3 Coping with sustained pressure.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Have a “no one is going to pass” attitude.
- 2 Concentrate on each separate activity.
- 3 Make each move as realistic and difficult as it would be in a real game.



what to shout

- “React”
- “Height and distance on your clearance”
- “See the ball and the player”
- “Close down the space”
- “Be patient”
- “Stay on your feet”
- “Force wide”



what to look for

- Does the defender react slowly?
- How do they position themselves for the cross?
- How quickly do they get out to pressure the attacker for the 1 v 1 situation?



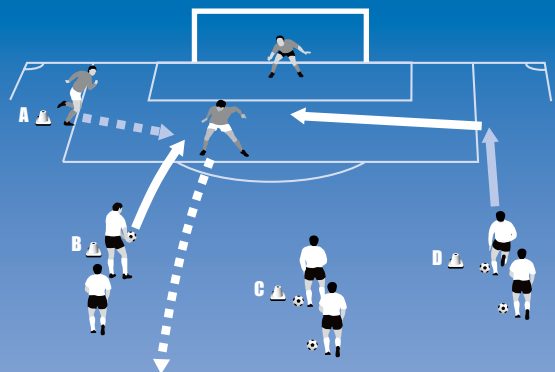
what to think about

Does the defender understand their role?
Are they succeeding down to luck and guess work?
Or do they show good defensive understanding and skill?

What you get your players to do:

- A – defender comes across to receive thrown pass.
- B – serves a ball to A.
- A – makes headed clearance with height and distance.
- D – immediately dribbles down the line and crosses for B.
- B – gets into the box to score.
- A – must react after initial clearance and get back to defend the cross.
- C – once cross is defended, dribbles into the box and tries to score.
- A – defend 1 v 1 against player C.

Defending technique circuit



run without ball  dribble 
headed clearance  pass or cross 

The defender gets one point for each successfully cleared ball but the attackers get two points for each goal scored. This will add to the competitiveness, concentration and intensity of the practice.

Development

You can add different defending situations depending on the needs of your individual players. For example:

- Goal-line clearance.
- Slide tackle.
- 2 v 1 against a through pass that they must recover from under pressure.
- 2 v 1 against a thrown pass over the defenders head and attacker chasing to score.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Simply playing a normal small sided game will give the defenders opportunities to defend these situations and practice problem-solving in a team setting.

How to use these sessions

Print off the session and take it to training. It should take you less than five minutes to read the instructions, set up the session, and then you are ready to communicate what happens to your players.

Number of players

You only need six players to complete a session, though it can easily be expanded to meet your needs. With lots more players you could have a number of grids working at the same time.

Timings

The timings are for a twenty minute session, but it can be expanded or reduced to meet your needs. It's your call.

As a rule of thumb 10 minutes would be enough time for a well executed first drill, development and feedback. Any shorter and you have not explored the full skill range or asked enough questions of the players. Longer is fine as long as you feel the session is developing. The game related element adds another 10 minutes.

Equipment

The equipment used is simple. A set of cones (or trainers or tops) as markers and a couple of balls.

You can add in other equipment where you feel you need them – we just assume that you don't have them because sometimes the shed is locked or another coach is using them.

Training area

The size of the training area is left for you to decide. Smaller players need a smaller area, but the session will never need more than a 20m x 20m grid for initial drills. The smaller the area the more intense the training.

The standard and age groups

These sessions are based on the core skills of soccer. They will challenge any standard because a player can always perform the core better.

The "development" ideas can be used to differentiate between the different standards of your players; the "think about" section can challenge the more advanced; the "game related situations" can change the contact situations the teams face.

Players should wear shin pads in all coaching sessions. They should be suitable to the player's physique and worn correctly with socks pulled up.

Elements of the session

What to tell your players the session is about:

This is your introduction and outlines the objectives of the session. Just read this out. The players then have an objective. Return to this at the end of the session to see if you have achieved your objectives.

What you tell your players to do:

This is how you want your players to achieve the objectives. You can tell the players straight away how to achieve the objectives, or you can tease it out of them as the session goes on.

What you get your players to do:

This shows you how the session is going to work. Depending on what is going to be achieved, it sets out what actions the players are going to take. There are no exact measurements, or complicated patterns – the approach is "simple, stupid, successful". Slow motion the first few patterns – get the drill right and the skill right first before speeding up. Use the "What to shout" prompts to keep the players focused. Use the "What to look for" to keep your eye on why the players might be failing.

Development

No session is worth doing unless there is some form of progression. Normally there will be an increase in pressure, say by adding more defenders, or by restricting the time available. Other areas for you to think about are: Where do I stand as coach? Do I throw the ball into the grid?

How would I put this into a game situation?

All the elements of the session are geared to the game, but this section puts the session one step away from a full game, with attack, defence and a goal line.

What to shout

Have the words handy, because apart from the usual words of encouragement, it is good to shout the key factors to players. Of course you can hold some of these "shouts" back and ask the players to identify how they can improve.

What to look for

You need to keep your eyes open for "best practice". This section helps you identify quickly where players might go wrong so you can quickly put them right.

Think about

Here you have the chance to challenge the players and situation, either by using feedback or just asking yourself the questions. It is a little more advanced and might not be appropriate for your players.

Where does it fit:

To help you file and order our coaching we have given you the core areas of individual and team skills that the session covers.