

PERFECT DEFENDING

*67 Easy to Coach Drills
for Marking, Tackling & Blocking*



Michael Beale

**BetterSOCCER
COACHING** 

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Introduction

For most coaches, improving defending both individually and as a group is one of the hardest tasks faced.

Young players often find the subject boring and difficult which leads to a lack of energy and enthusiasm from players and inadequate coaching time devoted to defending by coaches.

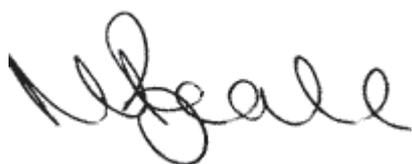
Ask anyone about football and what makes a great team and the answers you will regularly receive will include the ability to score goals, quick passing and skillful dribbling. A good defence will rarely be in the top 3 answers.

However, when you look at how often your team doesn't have the ball in a game it shows that it is vitally important to develop your team's understanding and effectiveness when defending.

In this book we aim to change players' attitudes towards defending by making the practices fun and showing the rewards of good defensive play. We then build this up to develop individual, small group and team defensive play.

The practices aim to cover all aspects of defending such as pressuring the opponent; making play predictable; blocking crosses; dealing with crosses; close marking; defending in 1s, 2s, and 3s; dealing with high balls; forcing the direction of play; holding a line; tackling; clearances and more.

Yours in coaching



Michael Beale

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How to use this book

The setup

Area

You may not be able to exactly recreate the suggested area for any number of reasons. The size is by no means an absolute but should not be deviated from too excessively. As a general rule 10 yards is equal to 7 strides. You can use this simple equivalent to mark out the area you need; 20 yards = 14 strides, 30 yards = 21 strides etc.

Equipment

One of the beauties of the game is that it can be played almost anywhere with a reasonably flat surface. If you do not have some of the equipment listed in the Set up section, you can, of course, substitute equipment you do have. Training tops become cones, corner flags become goalposts, parents and coaches become mannequins.

The steps

For the most part the steps required to run each drill have been broken down into 3 sections, each relating to a numbered illustration showing what movements should be made within each step.

What to call out

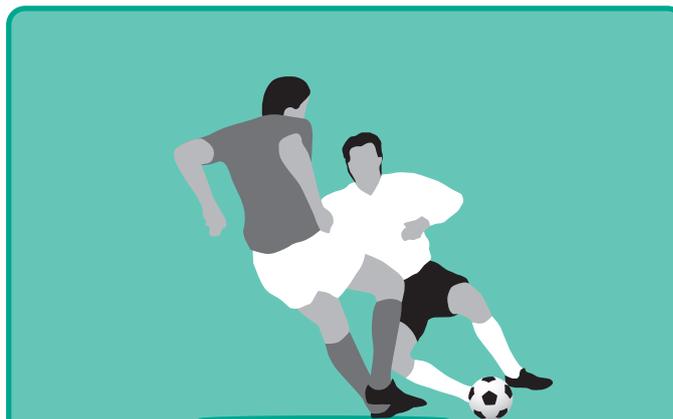
Never be lost for words with these concise and constructive phrases. Remember, this is “what to call out” not “what to shout”, you should deliver these plans in a way that your players respond to. Always focus on the positives.

The block tackle and slide tackle are fundamental to defending.

Distribute this page to your players so that they can learn the key steps to successfully execute them.

The block tackle

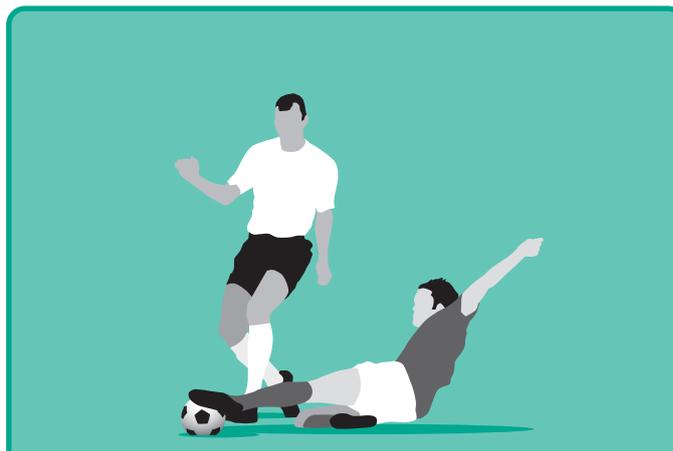
1. Head down over the ball.
2. Knees bent.
3. Planting the non-tackling foot firmly to provide an anchor
4. Tackling foot making contact with the middle of the ball – like a side-foot pass – and in an L-shape.
5. The knee and ankle locked solid.
6. A committed attitude.
7. If the ball becomes stuck then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



The grey player stays on his feet and locks his right knee and ankle.

The slide tackle

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 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.



The defender follows the correct technique with the nearest leg tucked under his body.

SECTION 1

Individual defending

In the modern game it is crucial that players can defend 1v1 against a range of opponents. Matches at all levels are made up of a series of 1v1 situations so it is important that adequate time is spent working on individual technique in training.

The experience of playing against different types of players is also important as each player has their own playing characteristics (big, small, fast, strong, skilful etc).

The beauty for coaches is that their own team will have these different types of players and therefore as coaches we already start in a position of power.

Key factors:

- Pressure the opponent quickly and then edge in to defend
- Be patient
- Keep your eyes on the ball
- Stay on your feet and jockey the attacker as this will delay the attack!
- Can you show the attacker towards a team mate or away from danger?
- Can you force the attacker to pass the ball sideways or backwards?
- Use your arms and body to compete physically to win possession
- Can you win the ball?

1v1 defending technique

This practice develops the understanding and technique of pressuring your opponent. Players must listen to the coach's call of: 1 – jockey, 2 – show right, 3 – show left, 4 – stop turn, and quickly run to take up the correct position.

The set up

Area: 15x15 yards

Equipment: 4 cones, 1 mannequin

The steps

1. In fast, slow down and edge in. Keep eyes on ball and jockey backwards.
2. Arc your approach by running slightly to the left and then force your opponent to the right.
3. Arc your approach by running slightly to the right and then force your opponent to the left.
4. In fast and get touch tight to the mannequin.

What to call out

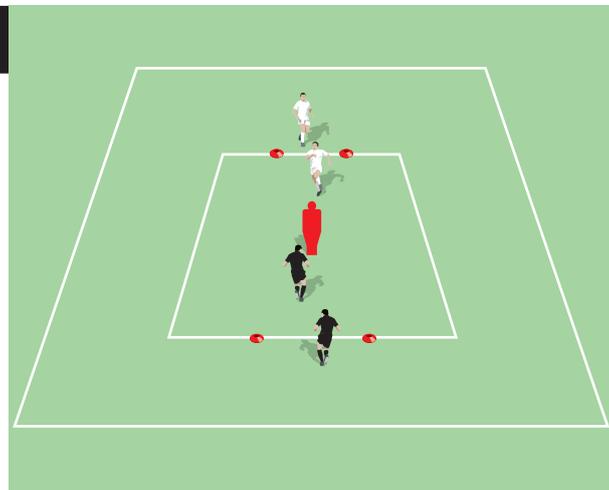
- "Pressure"
- "Be patient and jockey"
- "Show right/left"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

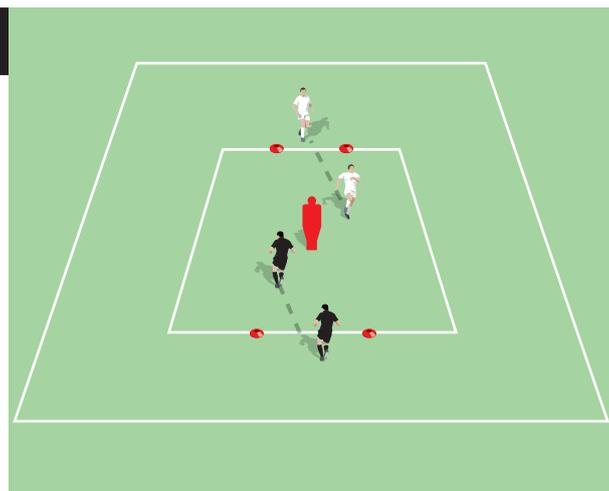
—————>
Ball Movement

1



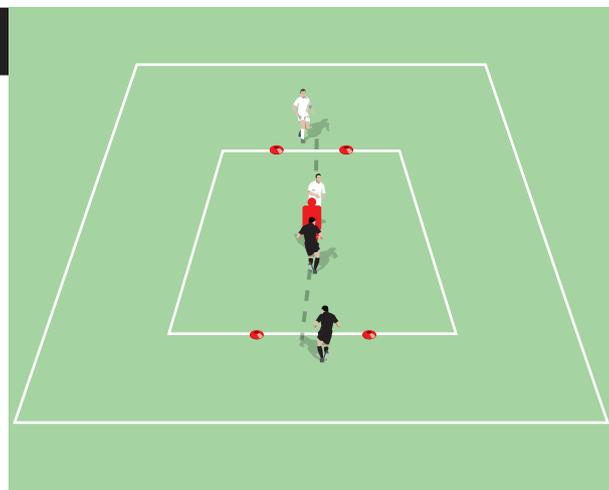
The players start by taking up a position to jockey the mannequin.

2



The players practice forcing the direction of play to their right.

3



Now the defenders get touch-tight in order to stop the turn.

Dribble with danger

The defender in this practice must work hard to force the attacker out of the area or into a mistake in order to win the ball.

The set up

Area: 10x10 yards

Equipment: 6 cones, 6 balls

The steps

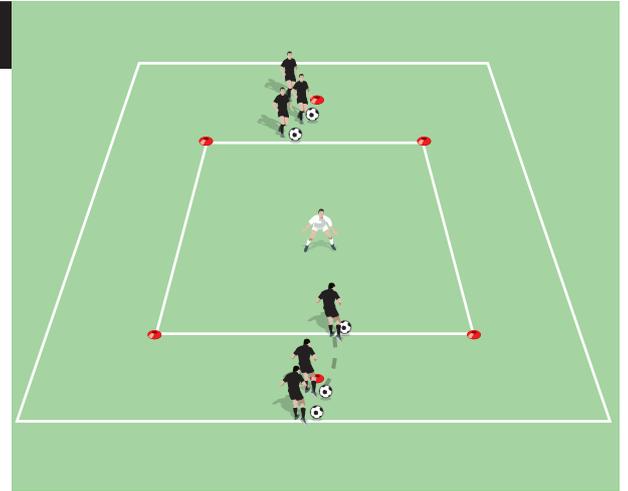
1. The attackers take it in turns to dribble across the area.
2. The defender must try to win the ball or force the attacker out of the sideline of the square.
3. The defender must remain in the square until they have won possession from the attacker or forced them wide.

The game is played for a set time period.

What to call out

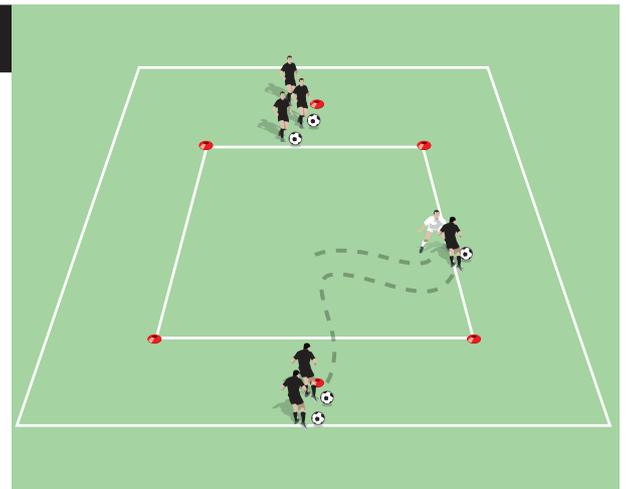
- "Pressure"
- "Force to one side"
- "Can you win the ball?"

1



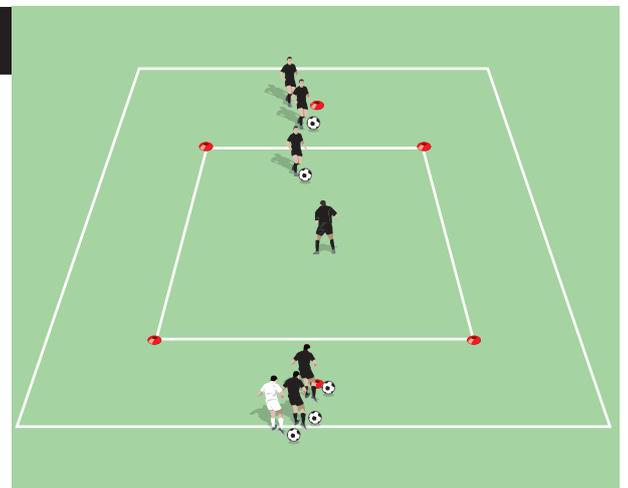
The attacker tries to dribble across the square.

2



The defender is able to force him out of the playing area.

3



The defender is rewarded by joining the attackers. The unsuccessful attacker becomes the new defender.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

1v1 defending skill

This drill gives players a chance to work on technique before an opposed situation in the sequence passive, passive, live.

The set up

Area: Two grids 20x15 yards

Equipment: 4 balls, 2 goals, 4 mannequins

The steps

The players work on the coach's whistle.

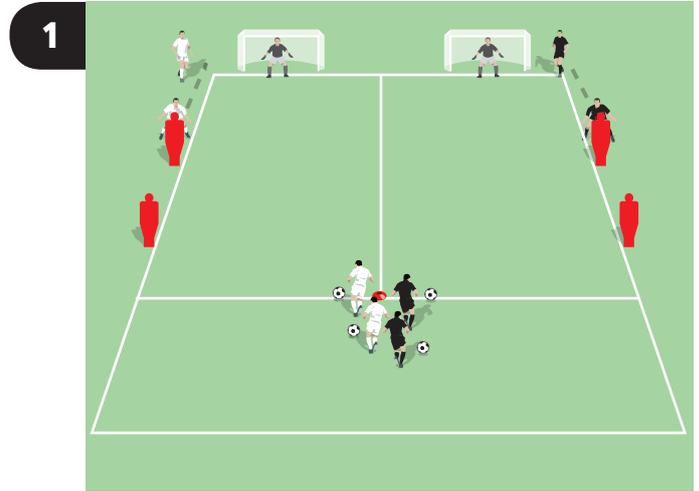
Whistle 1 – the defender must sprint and jockey the 1st mannequin.

Whistle 2 – the defender must sprint and show the 2nd mannequin inside.

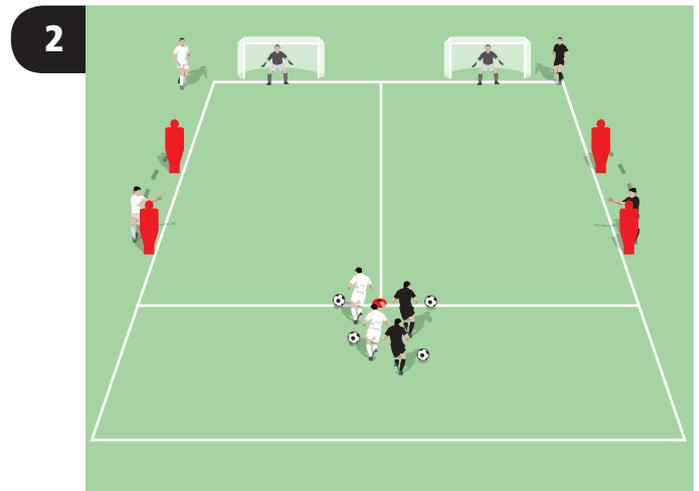
Whistle 3 – the attacker dribbles onto the pitch and the defender must defend a 1v1 situation.

What to call out

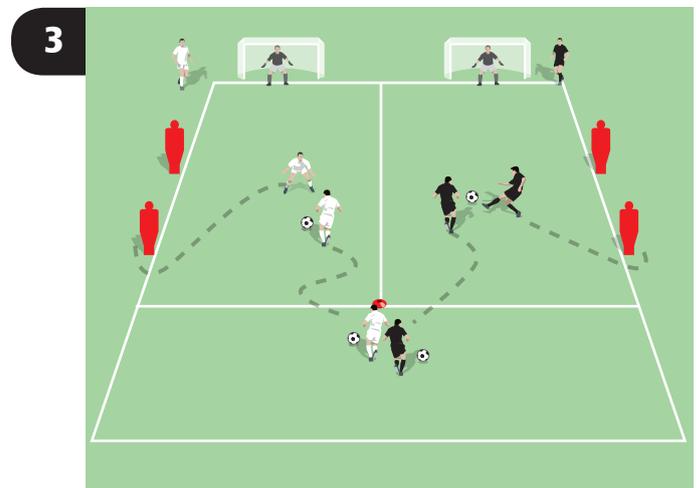
- "Pressure"
- "Show towards your mate"
- "React and defend 1v1"



The players must jockey the first mannequin.



Then show second mannequin inside.



Before entering a 1v1 where they use the positional skills learnt.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Race to challenge

This drill develops speedy reactions and forces players to engage in physical confrontation to win the ball, building a competitive edge.

The set up

Area: 20 yards from goal

Equipment: 1 ball, 1 goal

The steps

1. The players stand to the side of the coach and face away from the goal.
2. The players must react to the coach's throw and race to the ball.
3. The first player to get to the ball becomes the attacker, the second player is the defender and must use their strength to compete physically to win the ball.

What to call out

- "React quickly to the ball"
- "Fight for the ball"
- "Can you make the challenge?"

1



The players start with their backs to goal.

2



The players race to get to the ball.

3



The defender must be strong to stop the attacker getting a shot away.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

Light on your feet

The term “light on your feet” is used for defenders who are always on their toes, ready to react and move to cut out an attack.

The set up

Area: 20x10 yards

Equipment: 2 cones, 2 balls, 2 target goals

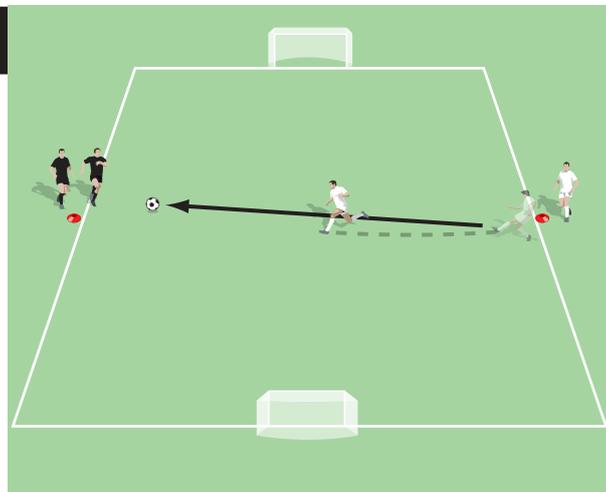
The steps

1. The defender passes across to the attacker and races to defend.
2. The attacker must use disguise and then try to dribble and score a goal.
3. The defender must try to anticipate the attacker’s movement and challenge to win the ball.

What to call out

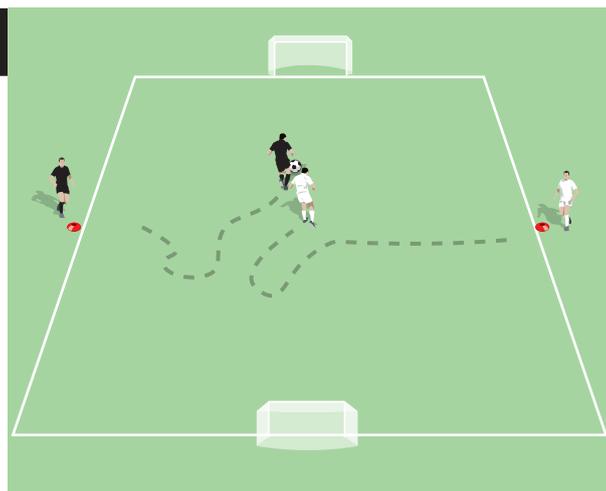
- “Pass and pressure”
- “React quickly”
- “Win the ball”

1



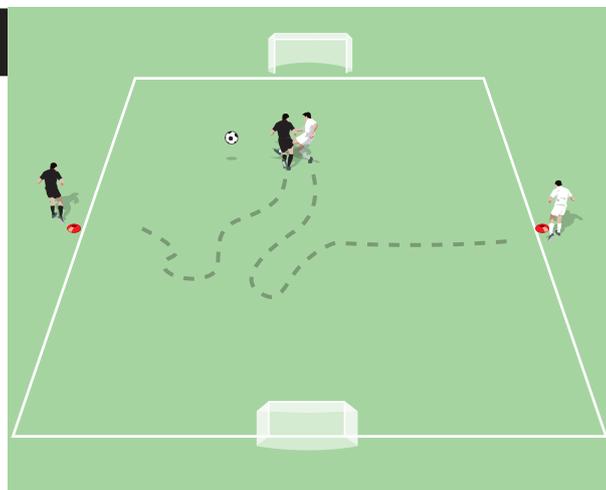
The defender follows their pass to begin.

2



The defender must track the attacker and not fall for their feints.

3



By staying in touch with the attacker the defender can successfully make a tackle.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

Random defend

The defender must react to the opponent's starting position, think quickly and defend accordingly.

The set up

Area: Half pitch

Equipment: 4 cones, 4 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. One player works as the defender and starts in the middle of the pitch. The other players stand by a numbered cone and get ready to react to dribble into the area.
2. To start the practice, the coach calls out a number and immediately the attacker attempts to score whilst the defender must react and try to defend.
3. For the next attack, the attacker replaces the defender and the defender becomes a new attacker.

What to call out

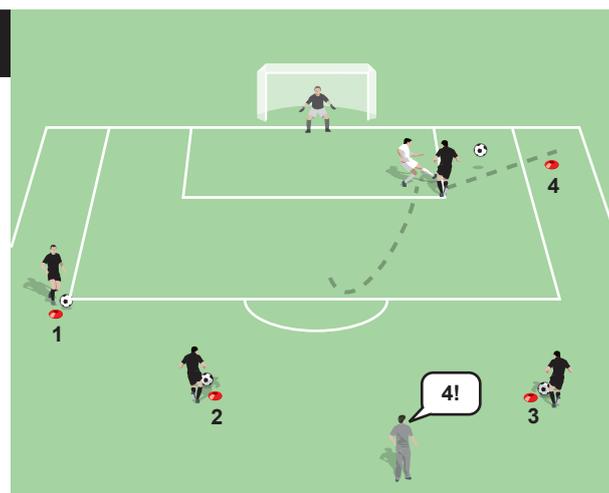
- "React quickly"
- "Pressure the opponent"
- "Force away from danger"

1



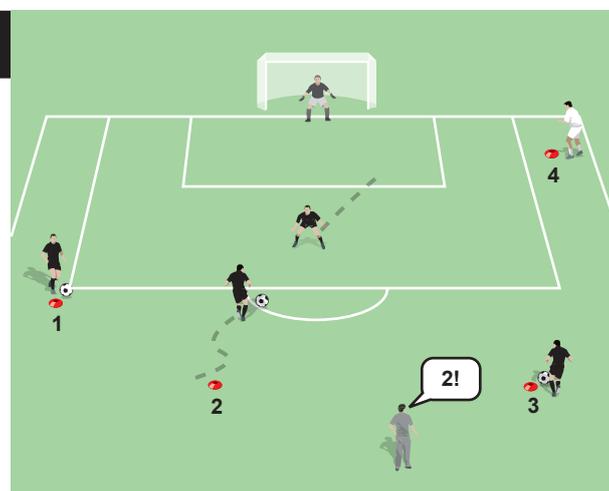
The layout allows for four different angles of attack.

2



The defender reacts to defend an attack from player 4.

3



Having been tackled player 4 now moves to defend against player 2.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Stay with your opponent

The defender must react quickly to the attacker's movements. Use of arms and body are essential to stopping the attacker.

The set up

Area: Penalty area

Equipment: 4 cones, ball between 2, 1 goal

The steps

Players get into pairs and rotate between attackers and defenders.

1. The attacking player must attempt to lose the defender and receive a pass.
2. The attacker must then attempt to score using a maximum of two touches.
3. The defender must legally use their arms and body to hold off the attacker and make a tackle to cancel out the goal scoring opportunity.

What to call out

- "Use your arms and body to get across the attacker's path"
- "Block the pass into the attacker"
- "Block the shot"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

1



The defender takes a position marking the attacker.

2



The defender must track the attacker's run as he moves to receive a pass.

3



If the defender has stayed with his opponent he will have a chance to make a tackle.

End zone alleys

The defenders in this drill must have a “no one will pass” mentality in order to stop the attacker and have a chance to attack themselves.

The set up

Area: Two 30x10 yard alleys with end zones

Equipment: 6 balls

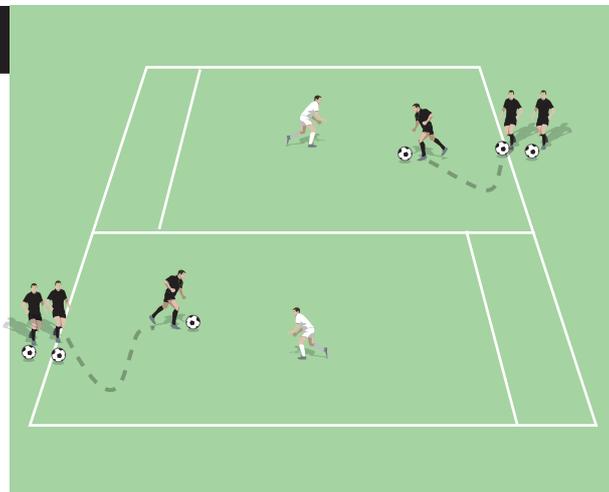
The steps

1. The attackers attempt to dribble past the defender to the opposite end of the alley.
2. If successful they wait and join the line coming in the opposite direction.
3. However, if they are tackled then the roles are reversed with the defender joining the line and attacker becoming the new defender.

What to call out

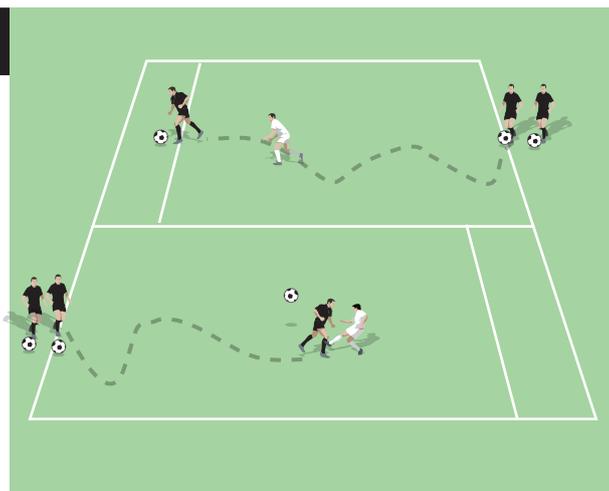
- “Pressure away from end zone”
- “Force the play to one side”
- “Be patient, don’t over commit”

1



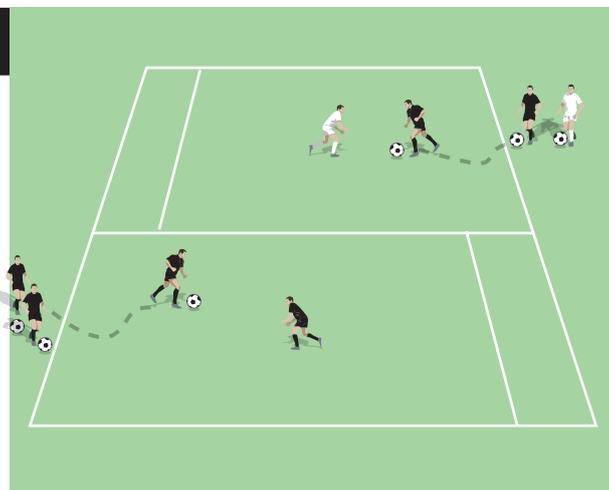
The defenders must keep their eyes on the ball.

2



The defender in the lower box makes a successful challenge.

3



The defeated attacker now takes the place of the defender.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

Stop the turn – 2 goals

The defender must pressure quickly as the ball is played and stop the opponent from turning to face the goals.

The set up

Area: 20x20 yards

Equipment: 1 cone, 1 ball, 2 target goals

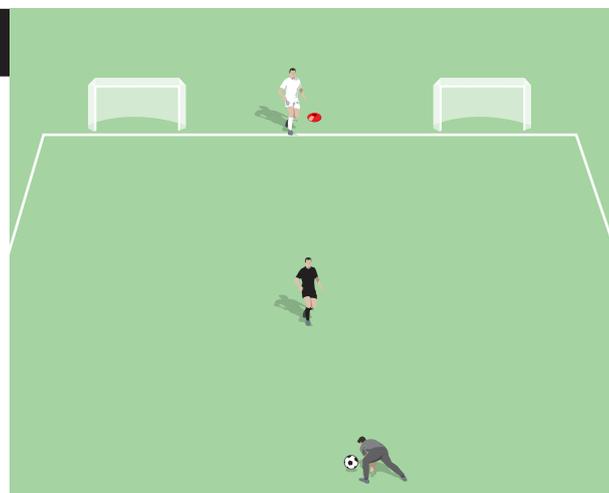
The steps

1. The coach passes into the attacker. As the ball is travelling the defender quickly runs out to defend.
2. The attacker has to try and lose the defender and score in one of the target goals.
3. The defender should take up a position goalside of the attacker and deny him the space to turn easily.

What to call out

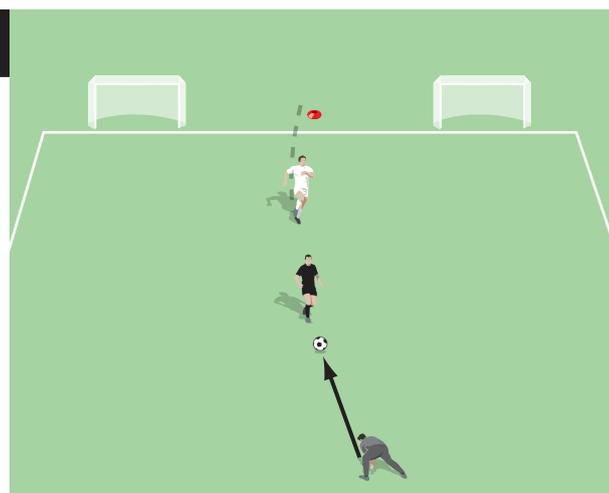
- "Pressure, get touch tight"
- "Stop the turn"
- "Delay play and force a mistake"

1



The attacker sets to receive the ball with his back to goal.

2



The defender must close down quickly.

3



Close marking stops the attacker from turning.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

Front and back

This drill forces the players to react to the two most frequent defending and attacking situations.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 2 balls, 1 goal

The steps

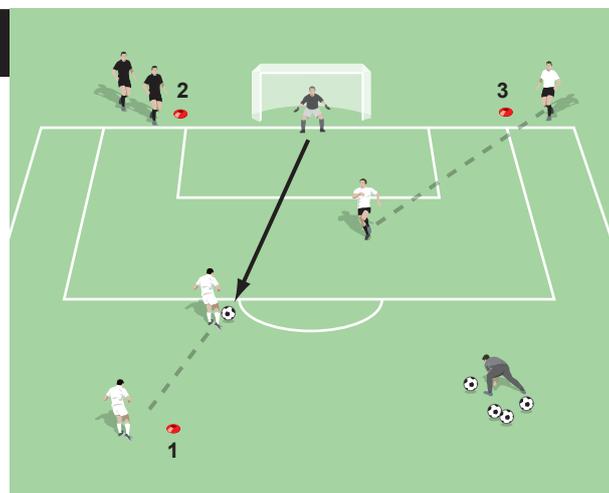
1. The goalkeeper passes to player 1 who attacks 1v1 against player 3.
2. Immediately after this attack, the coach passes to player 3.
3. Player 2 must now run out and stop player 3 from turning to shoot.

For the next attack, player 1 becomes player 2 and player 2 becomes player 3.

What to call out

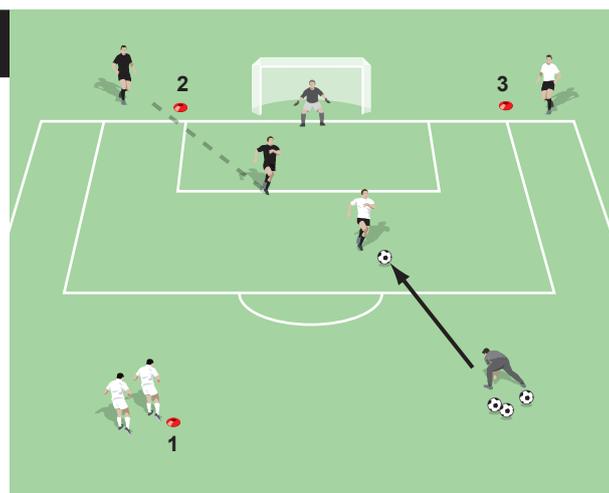
- "Pressure"
- "Force away from goal"
- "Stop the turn"

1



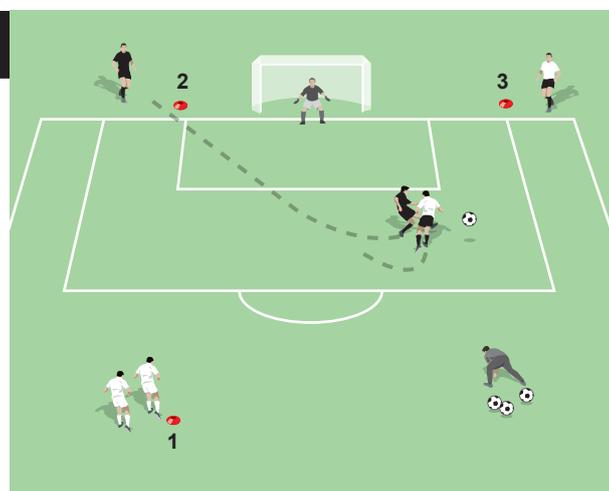
Player 3 races out to defend against player 1.

2



Player 3 now turns to attack against player 2.

3



Player 2 is out quickly and makes a tackle to stop the attack.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

Delay the attacker

Give your players the comforting thought that by delaying an attack, their team mates will be back to support.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 2 goals, 4 cones, ball between 2

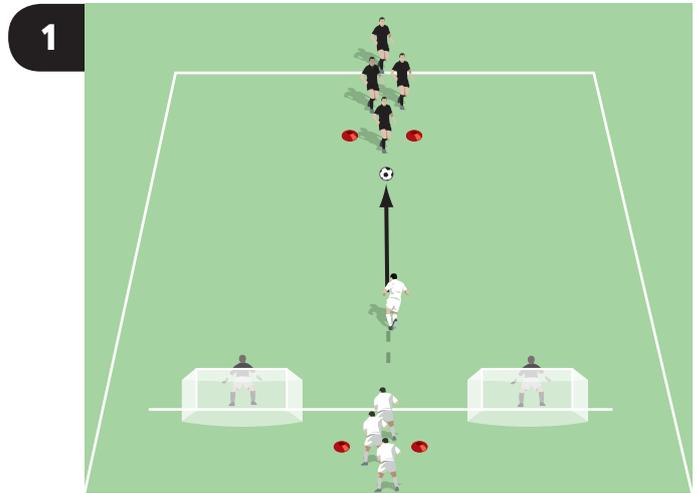
The steps

1. The defender passes the ball to the attacker and races out to defend.
2. The attacker must show a disguise and try to score in one of the two goals within 5 seconds of receiving the ball.
3. The defender must be light on his feet and stand up. Without committing himself he should try to force the attacker into a mistake and delay play.

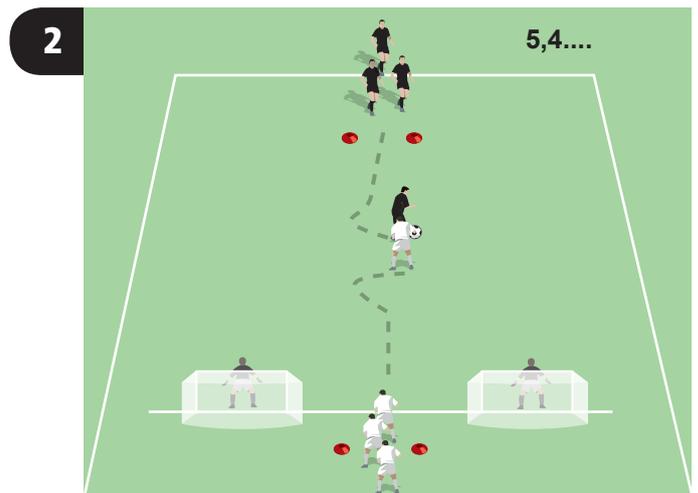
For the next attack, the players rotate positions.

What to call out

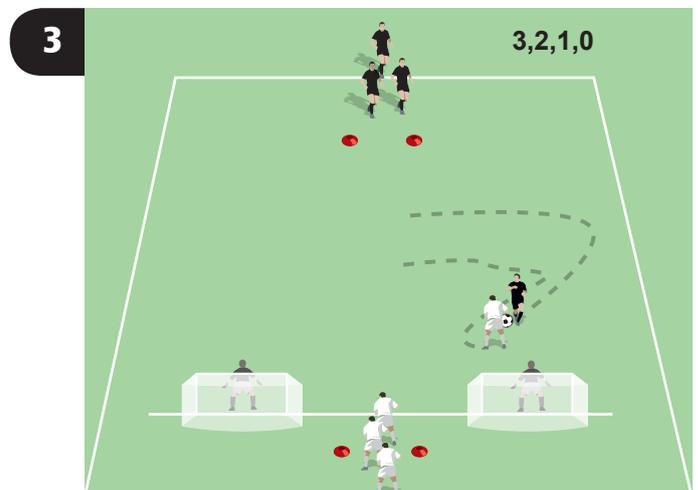
- "Pressure quickly"
- "Stay on your feet and force wide"
- "Delay the play"



The defender follows their pass.



The attacker tries to lose the defender.



But the defender delays the attacker and runs down the timer.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Keep the attacker wide

This drill teaches defenders how to keep play away from goal and in wide areas. This minimises goalscoring opportunities and allows team mates to recover and take up supporting positions.

The set up

Area: Half pitch

Equipment: 3 cones, 2 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The defender starts the practice by passing a ball into a wide area of the pitch (diagonal pass in a match situation). Immediately the defender must race back whilst the attacker chases the ball.
2. The defender must pressure the opponent quickly and take up a position goalside of the attacker.
3. The defender must now keep the attacker out wide by showing him up and down the touchline.

What to call out

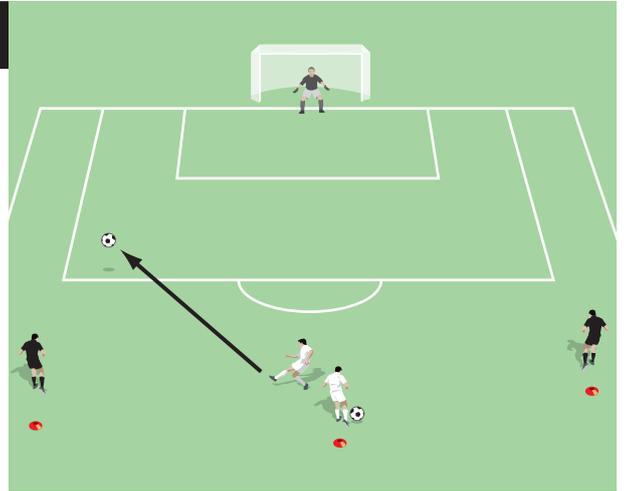
- "Keep play in wide areas"
- "Stay on your feet"
- "Block the cross or shot"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

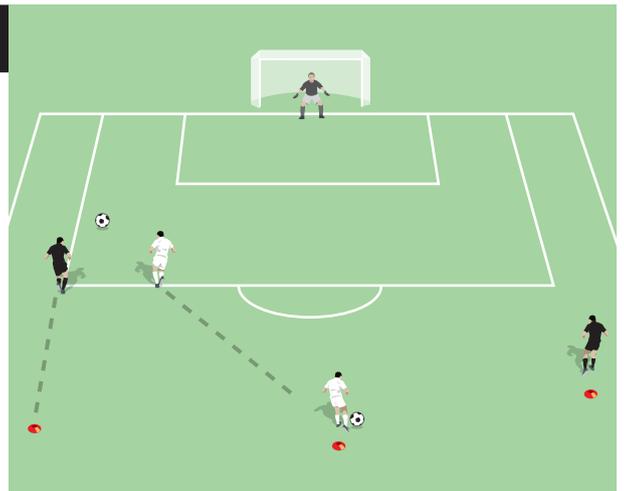
→
Ball Movement

1



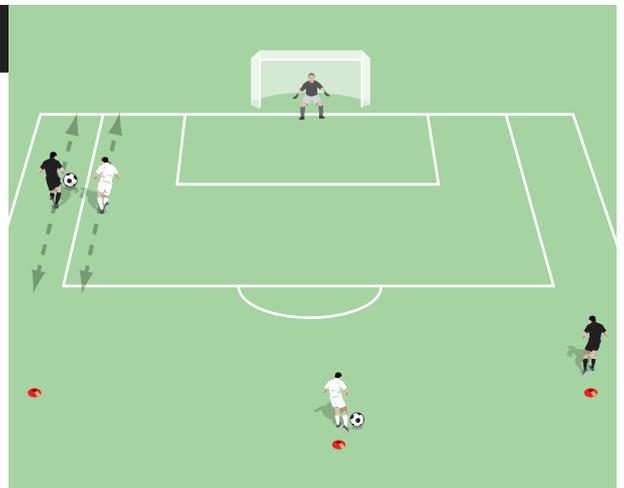
The defender plays the ball into a wide area.

2



The defender and winger race to the ball.

3



The defender keeps the attacker wide and denies a shooting opportunity.

Get goal-side

This drill shows defenders that they don't need to go chasing in wide areas. The attacker has to come back inside to present a goalscoring threat. Therefore, getting goal-side quickly is more important than chasing the ball.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 3 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The attacker passes back to the defender who plays the ball into space on the right or left.
2. Immediately the attacker runs to collect the ball and then attempts to score.
3. The defender must run through the gate and then attempt to stop the attacker from scoring.

What to call out

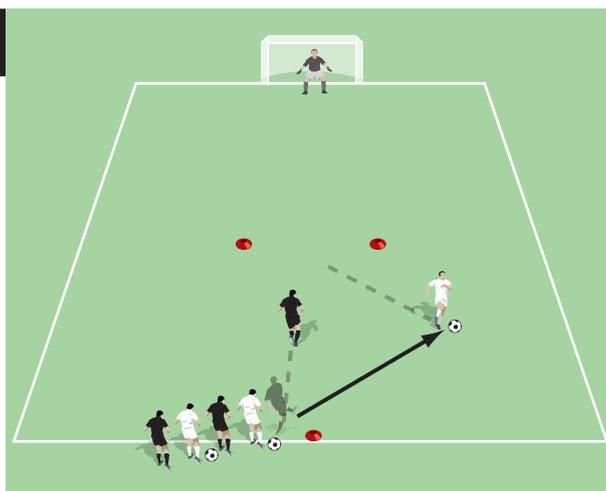
- "React quickly"
- "Get goal side"
- "Force the attacker wide of goal"

1



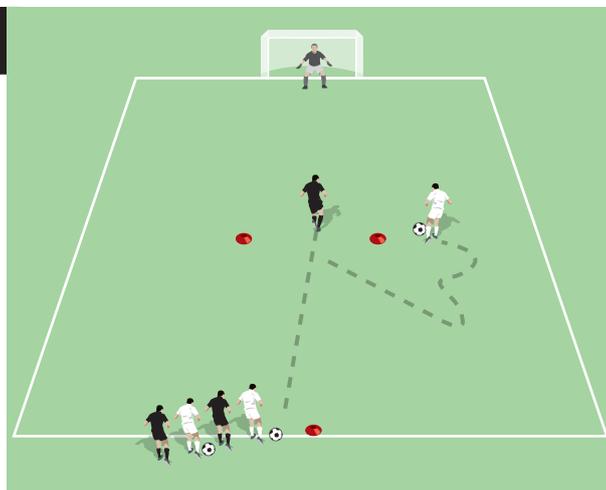
The attacker plays the ball back to the defender.

2



The defender plays the ball wide and heads for the gate.

3



The defender must get into a position goal-side of the attacker.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

Block the shot

The defenders in this drill must work at match speed in order to get back a position to block the shot.

The set up

Area: 30x10 yards

Equipment: 2 cones, 3 balls, 1 target goal,
1 mannequin

The steps

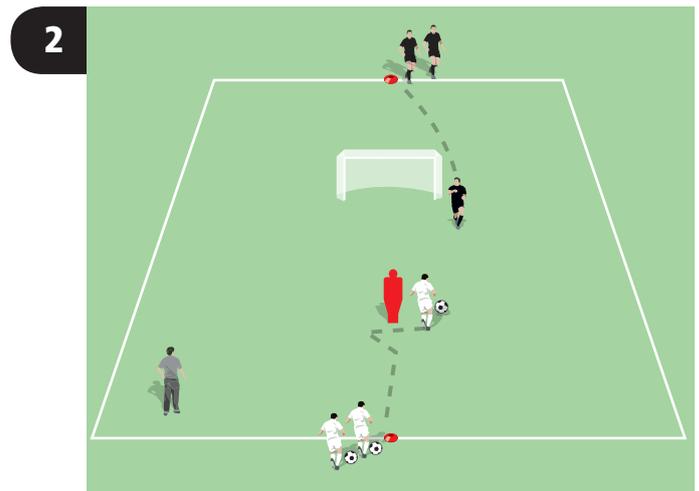
1. On the coaches call, the attacker dribbles towards the mannequin and completes a skill such as a feint or a stepover.
2. The defender runs as quickly as possible to get in front of the goal.
3. The attacker shoots once he has passed the mannequin and the defender must attempt to block the shot.

What to call out

- "React"
- "Get in line with the ball"
- "Stop the shot"



The players set off on the coach's call.



The attacker beats the mannequin and prepares to shoot.



The defender must get in front of goal and block the shot.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Penalty area battle

This 1v1 drill is both physically and mentally demanding for the players as they compete to win the game. They must show strength and patience in order to win the battle.

The set up

Area: 18 yard box

Equipment: 6 cones, 6 balls, 1 goal

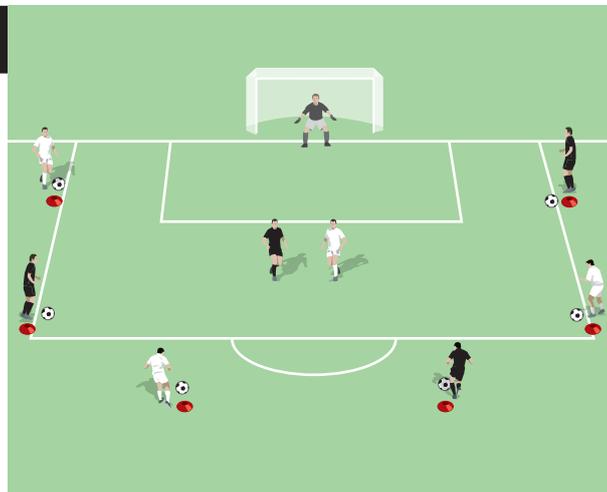
The steps

1. One player from each team goes into the penalty area. The other players surround the outside of the area with a ball each.
2. The black player starts by receiving a ball from one of his team-mates and attempting to score. The white player must try to defend.
3. The players then switch roles for the next ball. The game continues until all the balls have been played into the area.

What to call out

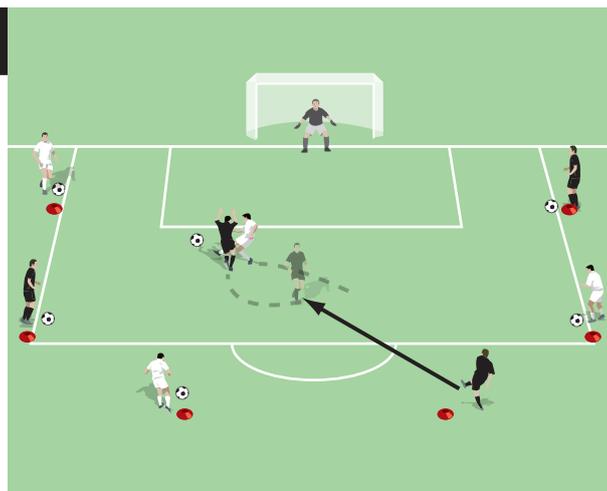
- "Get tight"
- "Stop the turn"
- "Can you block the shot/win the ball"

1



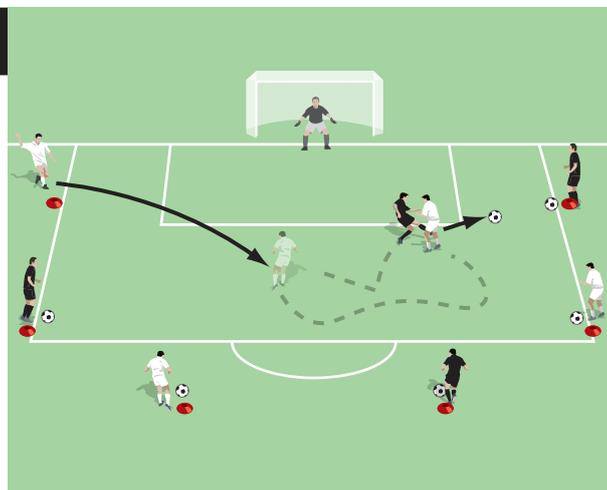
Two players will do battle inside the penalty area.

2



The defender makes a tackle to stop the attacker scoring.

3



The roles are reversed for the next ball in. Again the defender is successful.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

None shall pass

The defender must defend each line and stop the attackers one by one using different defending skills.

The set up

Area: 10x10 yards

Equipment: 4 cones, 4 balls

The steps

1. Player 3 serves player 1 for a header. The defender must stop the ball from going past the line. Immediately, player 2 passes a ball towards the opposite line, the defender must react and run to slide and stop the ball crossing the line.
2. Now player 3 dribbles onto the pitch and attempts to get to the line opposite and the defender must stop him.
3. Finally, player 4 throws the ball over the defenders head and attempts to get it the other side, the defender must shield the ball.

The defender gets 1 point for each ball successfully defended.

What to call out

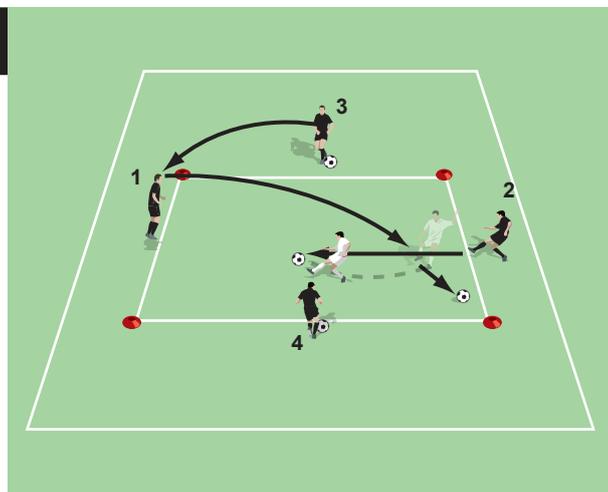
- "React to each ball"
- "Defend strongly"
- "Win each ball"

KEY

..... Player Movement

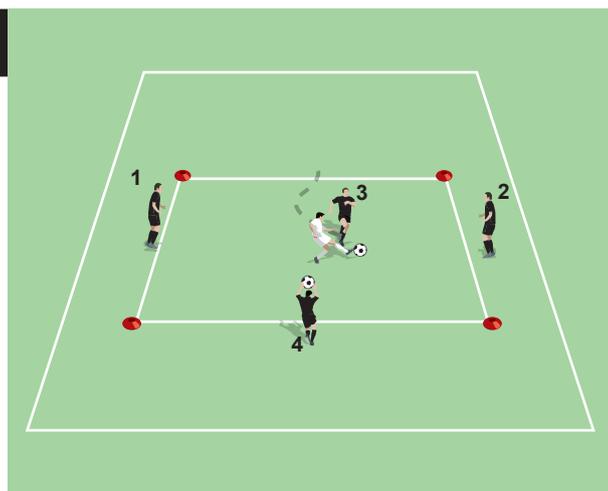
→ Ball Movement

1



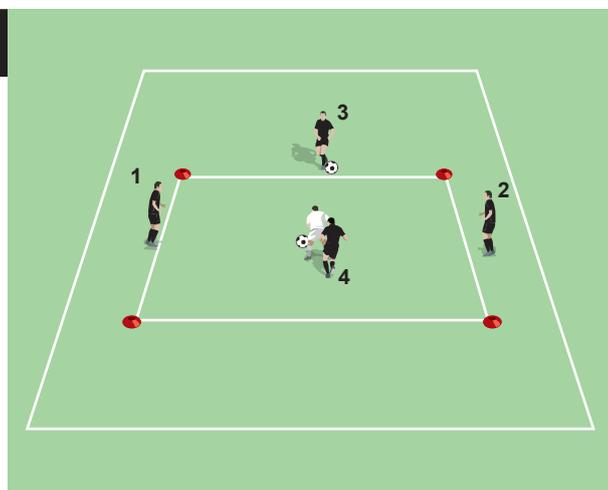
The defender stops the header then chases down player 2's pass.

2



The defender stops player 3 in a 1v1.

3



Finally he shields the ball from player 4.

Defenders circuit

This defending circuit demands concentration, quick reactions and multiple game-related defending skills to come out on top.

The set up

Area: 30x50 yards

Equipment: 4 cones, 1 ball, 1 goal

The steps

Four stations A, B, C, D.

Station A is the defender.

1. To start, the player at station B throws a ball for the defender to make a headed clearance.
2. Immediately, player D dribbles and crosses for player B, the defender must recover and attempt to stop him from scoring.
3. Once this ball has been played, player C dribbles into the box and attempts to score, now the defender must react and defend 1v1.

What to call out

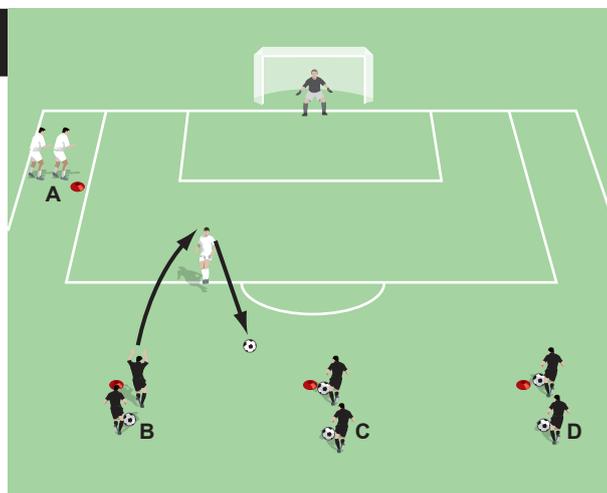
- "Height and distance on the clearance"
- "React to defend the cross"
- "Pressure to defend the 1v1"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

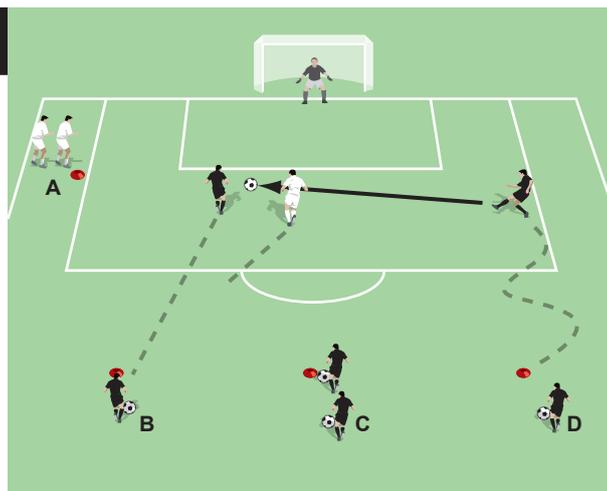
→
Ball Movement

1



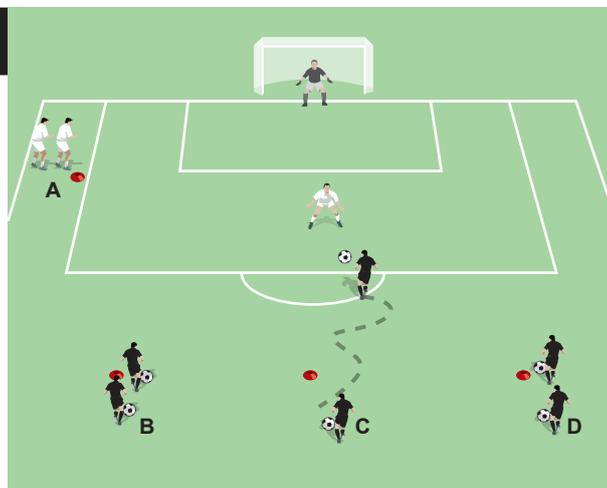
The defender must get height on the ball with their headed clearance.

2



Can the defender get back in position to defend the cross?

3



The circuit ends defending 1v1 against player c.

Pressure the opponent and react to defend

This is a chance to work on strength in a passive challenge. This drill is all about the speed of recovery and reaction to the middle player's pass.

The set up

Area: Two grids of 20x10 yards

Equipment: 1 cone, 3 balls, 2 target goals

The steps

1. The defender passes into the middle player and goes to pressure. The middle player shields the ball from the defender.
2. The middle player then listens for the call of their team mate and passes to the player on the pitch they run to.
3. Now one of two rules can come into place: either the team mate must shoot first time into the target goal and the defender must try to block; or the team mate must play a 1v1 against the defender.

What to call out

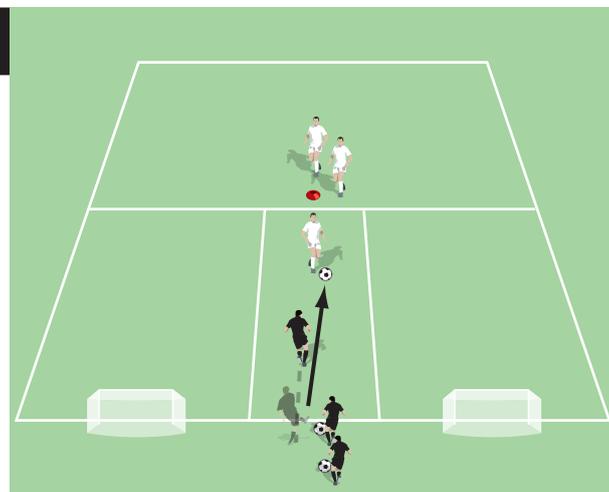
- "Pressure quickly"
- "React to the pass"
- "Block the shot"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

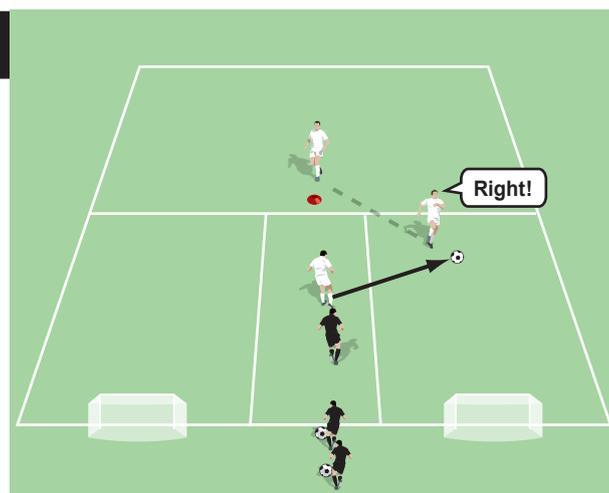
→
Ball Movement

1



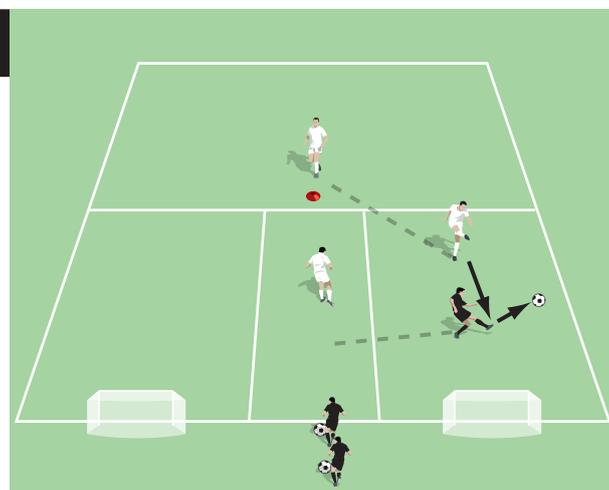
The defender passes to the middle player and goes to pressure.

2



The middle player sets up the attacker on their choice of pitch.

3



The defender reacts to the call and is able to block the shot.

Continuous - 4 goals

This drill is fantastic as it enables the players to defend against a number of different players with different playing characteristics in a short period of time.

The set up

Area: 40x40 yards with 5x5 yards central square

Equipment: 4 cones, 4 target goals, lots of balls

The steps

1. One player starts in the middle, the other four players start in front of the goals. The player that starts in the middle collects a ball and attacks a goal of his choice.
2. If the player scores, they race to retrieve a new ball in order to attack a second goal.
3. However, if the defender stops the attacker scoring, the roles are reversed and the defender runs out to receive a ball and attack. Without defending well you do not get the chance to attack and score.

What to call out

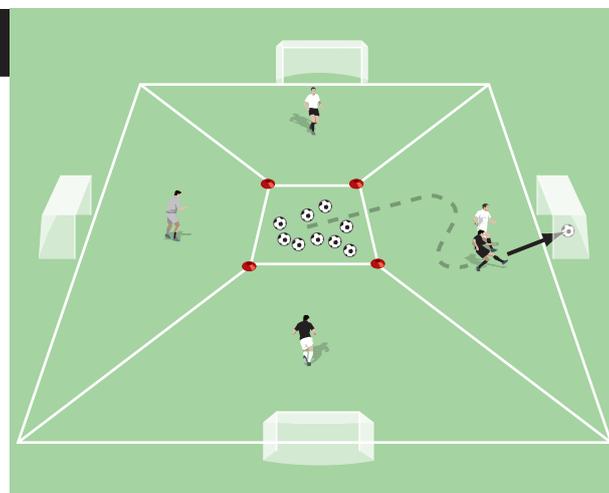
- "Pressure the opponent"
- "Stay on your feet to win the ball"
- "Defend well and you get the chance to attack"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

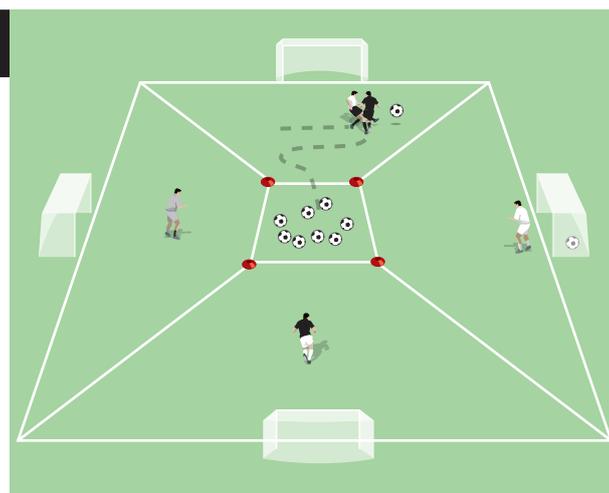
→
Ball Movement

1



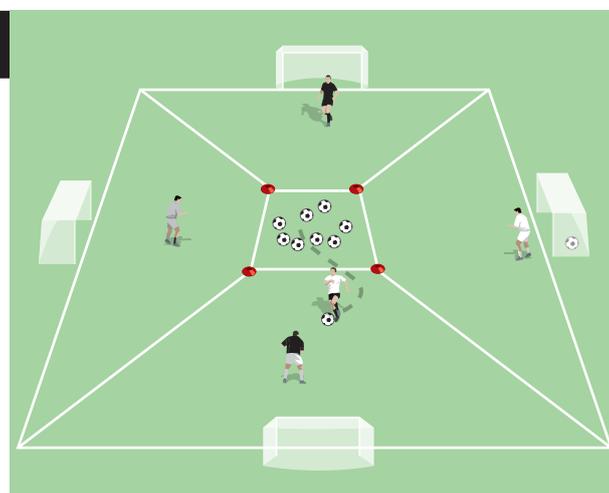
The attacker scores against the first defender.

2



But is tackled on his second chance in the top goal.

3



The successful defender collects a ball and starts an attack on the bottom goal.

SECTION 2

Defending in twos

When working in pairs players need to supplement the individual defending skills learnt with the addition of support and communication that is crucial to successful defending.

In 2v1 situations the pressuring defender can afford to be more aggressive in winning the ball as they have the supporting defender. However, it is important that they do not over commit, delaying the attack is the main priority. The supporting defender can offer vital information to the pressuring defender that will make the attacker much easier to defend against.

Key factors:

- Nearest player must pressure the ball
- The next player must take up a supporting position
- The pressing player must be patient and stay on their feet
- Can the supporting player communicate to the pressing player?
- Can the pressing player listen to the supporting player's advice and show the opponent towards the team mate or away from danger?

2v2 defending technique

This passive drill gives players valuable experience working together in order to pressure an opponent. It also gives you time to coach positioning and communication between your players.

The set up

Area: 20x20 yards

Equipment: Balls

The steps

1. Two players are nominated as defenders and the remaining players dribble around the area with a ball each.
2. The two defenders take it in turns to put passive pressure on the ball. The player not pressuring must take up a supporting position and communicate to their team mate.
3. The defenders should not complete a tackle, the drill is intended as a means to practice the technique only.

What to call out

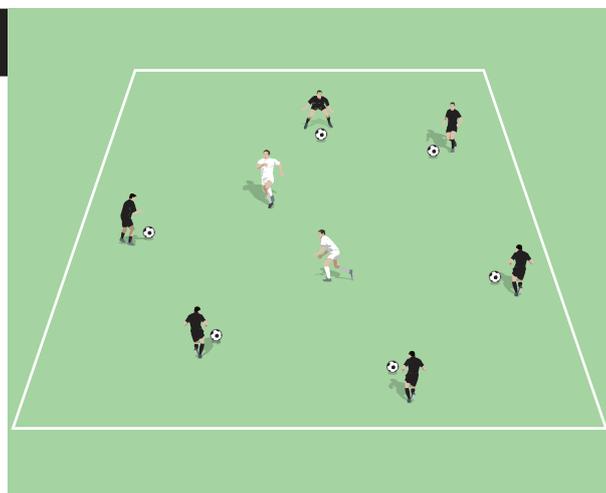
- "Who is going to press?"
- "Where is the support?"
- "Talk to each other"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

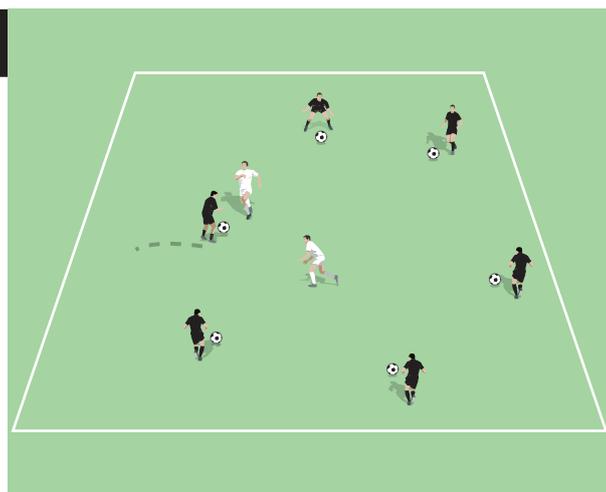
→
Ball Movement

1



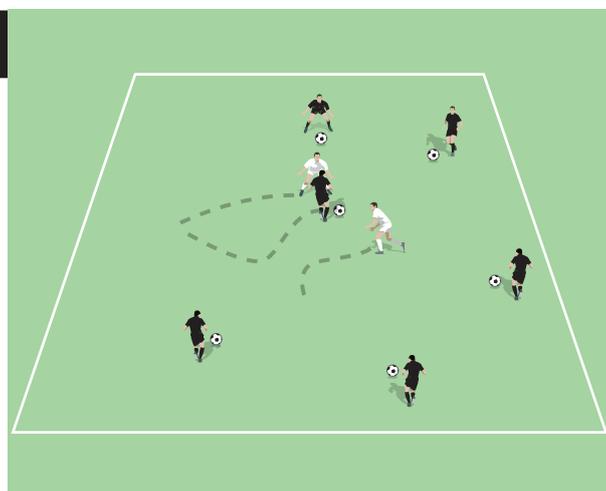
The defenders must rely on each other to perfect their technique.

2



They start by isolating the player they want to tackle.

3



One defender applies pressure while the other takes up supporting position.

2v2 technique into opposed

This drill allows the defenders to work on the techniques of 2v2 defending and then react to a "live" opportunity to use the skills learnt.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 2 balls, 1 goal, 4 mannequins

The steps

The practice works on the coach's whistle.

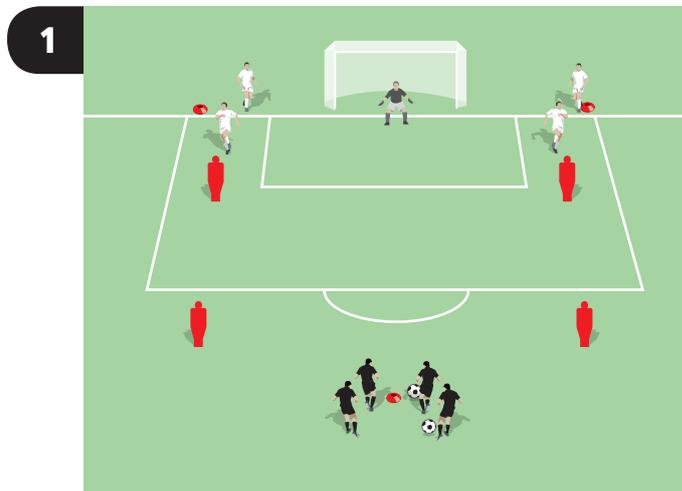
Whistle 1 – both defenders race out to pressure their mannequin.

Whistle 2 – both defenders show their mannequin towards their team mate.

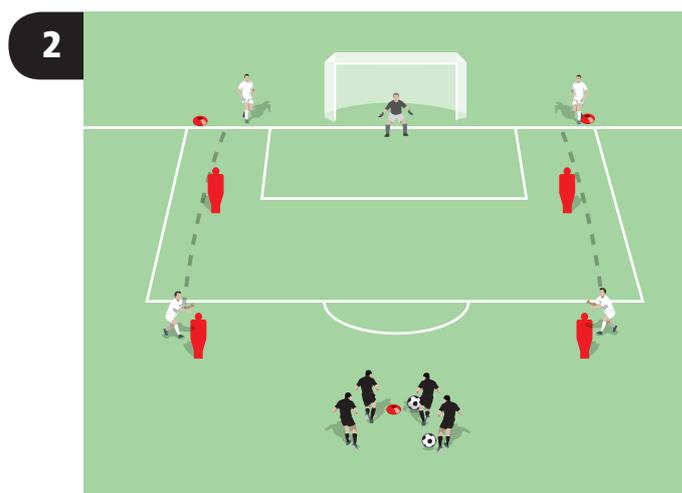
Whistle 3 – the attackers dribble into the pitch and the defenders react. The nearest defender should pressure and show towards their team mate while the second defender takes up a support position.

What to call out

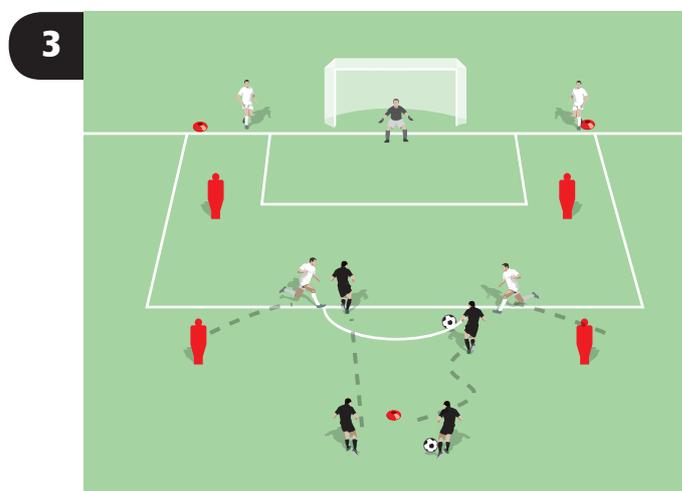
- "Pressure"
- "Show towards your mate"
- "React quickly to defend"



The defenders apply pressure to the first mannequin.



The second mannequin is shown inside.



The defenders take the techniques into a 2v2 attack.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

2v1 communication support

This drill is 1v1 on the pitch but the defender receives verbal support from his team mate which is crucial to developing a 2v1 defensive understanding. Without communication you have to assume you are defending alone and cannot pressure the attacker.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 2 cones, 1 ball, 1 goal

The steps

1. The midfielder passes the ball into the attacker, and a 1v1 commences with the supporting defender giving advice to his team mate.
2. The coach should give examples for the players to call such as "get tight", "stop the turn", "show left", "win the ball".
3. Once the ball has been played the attacker and defender are replaced and a new supporting defender gives advice.

What to call out

- "Stop the turn"
- "Listen to your team mate"
- "Give your mate some advice"

KEY

..... Player Movement

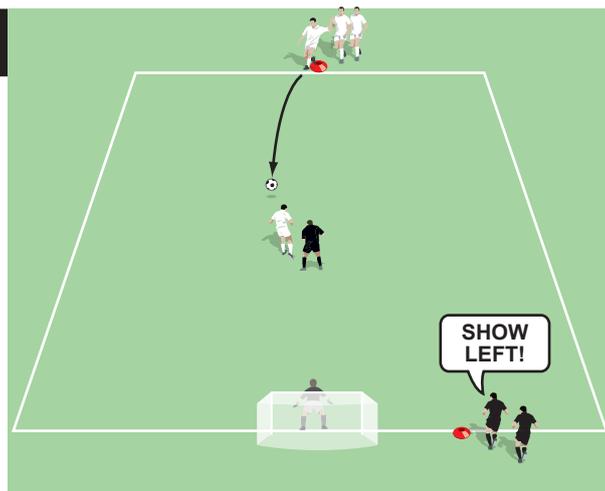
→ Ball Movement

1



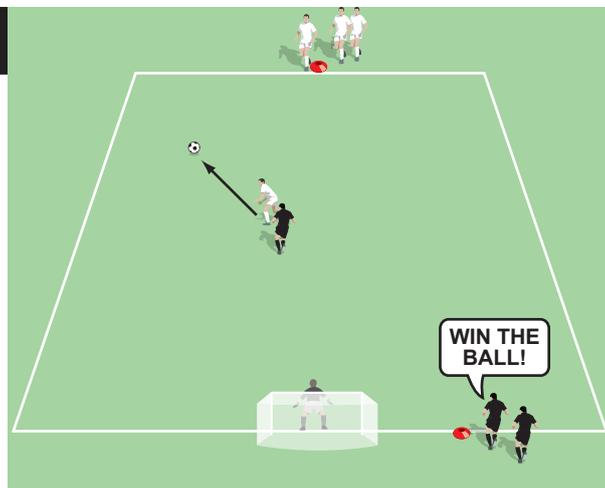
The attackers and defenders line up on opposite sides of the area.

2



The defender's team mates must give directions to help the active defender.

3



The drill is only 2v1 because of the verbal support.

2v1 random defend

The defenders must react to where the attackers arrive into the game. The nearest defender must pressure whilst his team mate reacts to take up a supporting position. Communication is vital to working together and stopping the attack.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 3 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The goalkeeper controls this drill by calling out the name of the attacker to dribble and try to score.
2. The defenders must react to where this player dribbles from with the nearest defender pressuring the ball whilst the 2nd defender gives advice from a supporting position.
3. As soon as the ball is dead the goalkeeper calls for a new attacker and the defenders must quickly adjust their positions to defend the next attack.

What to call out

- "React to the attack"
- "Nearest to pressure"
- "Can you get into a support position?"

KEY

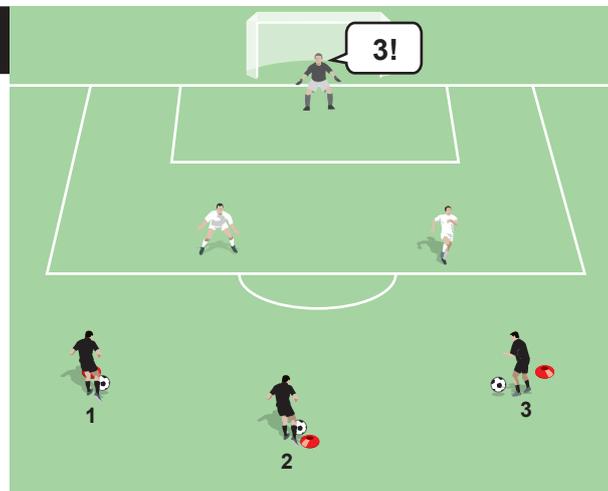
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→

Player Movement

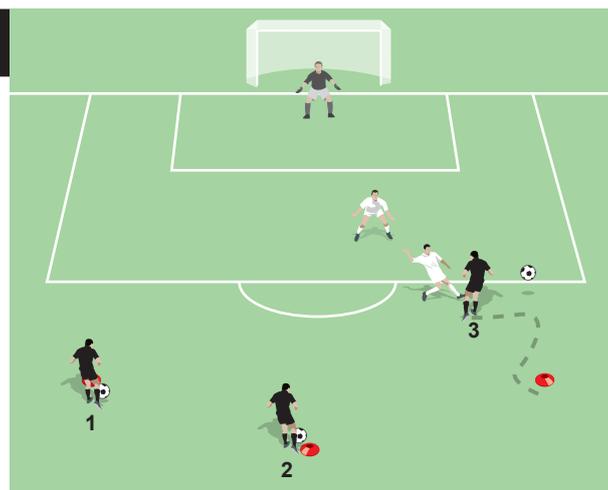
Ball Movement

1



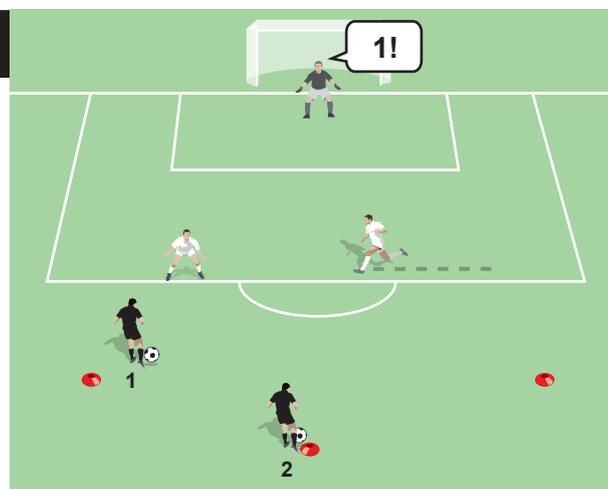
The goalkeeper controls the practice by calling for an attacker.

2



One defender pressures to make a challenge and the other provides cover.

3



With a new attacker called the defenders must adjust their position quickly.

Front and back

This drill looks at two of the principle defending situations in a short time. The players must adapt the skills they have learnt to defend both situations.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 4 cones, 2 balls, 1 goal

The steps

Groups of two players take it in turns to defend and then attack. Each turn works for two balls.

1. The goalkeeper starts the practice by throwing a ball out to the attackers. Whilst the ball is traveling the two defenders must run out to defend.
2. After the initial ball is played (either a goal scored or defenders win possession) the players must quickly react to the second ball that is played onto the pitch by the coach.
3. This ball comes from behind and therefore the attackers receive possession with their backs to goal. The defenders now have to keep them facing away and stop them scoring for a 2nd time.

What to call out

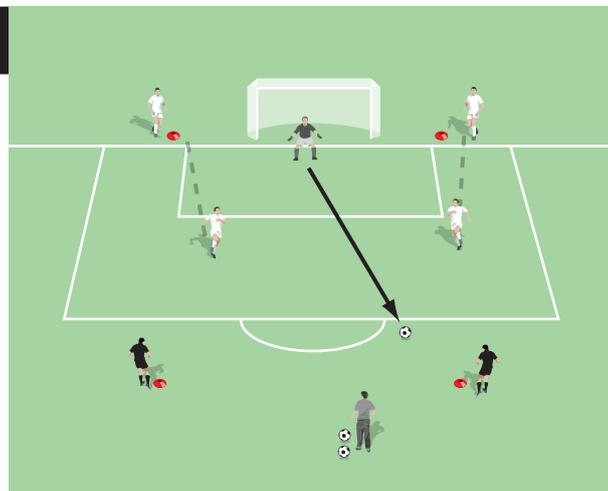
- "React to both balls"
- "Pressure the opponent"
- "Force play wide and stop any turns"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

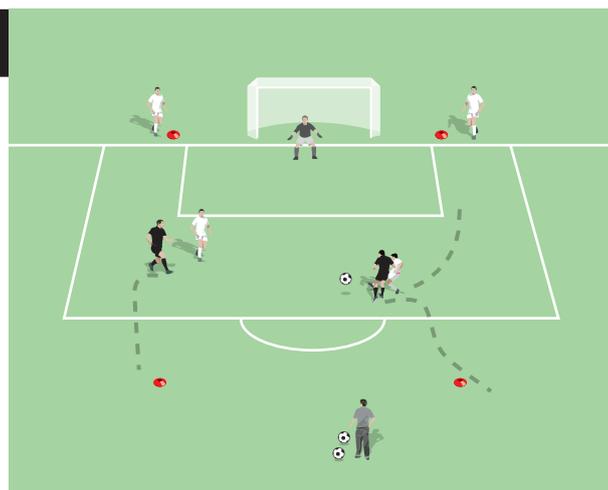
—————>
Ball Movement

1



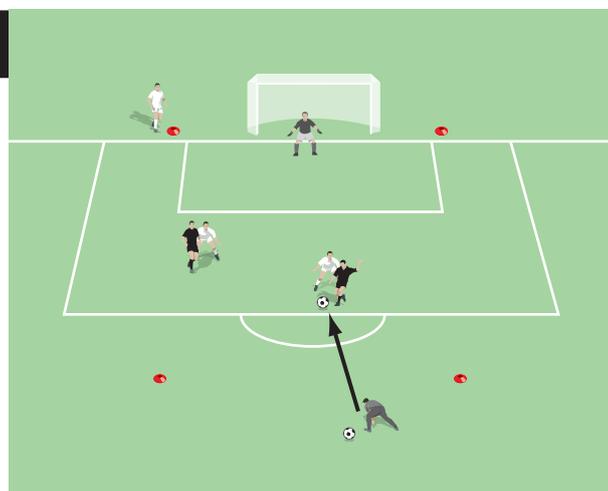
The attackers receive the ball facing the defenders goal.

2



The defenders must close down the space quickly to deny a goal scoring chance.

3



The next ball is played to the attackers with their backs to goal. The defenders must mark closely.

Front, right, back, left

The game lasts for four balls and includes a 2v2 attack facing the goal, facing away from the goal and crosses from both the left and right wings.

The set up

Area: 30x50 yards

Equipment: 6 cones, 4 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The goalkeeper throws the ball out to the two central attackers. The defenders must run and defend 2v2.
2. The passer on the right plays a ball down the line for the right midfielder to cross into the box. The defenders must adjust their position to defend the cross.
3. The coach passes a ball from the back of the pitch for a 2v2 with the attackers facing away from the goal.
4. The left passer plays a ball down the line for the left midfielder to cross and the defenders must again adjust their positions.

What to call out

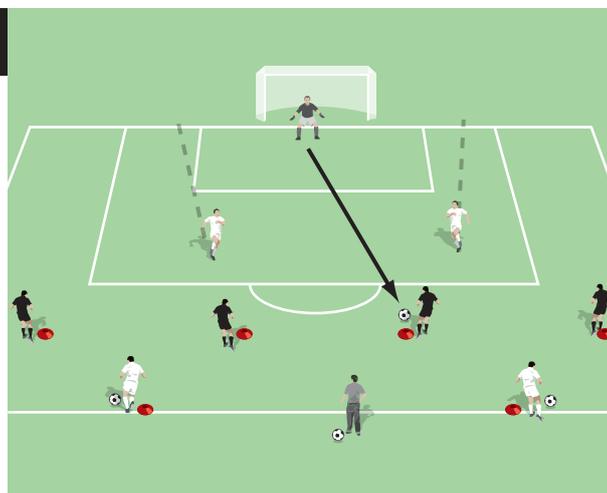
- "React to each ball"
- "Always stay on your feet and delay play"
- "Force play wide, track runners on crosses"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

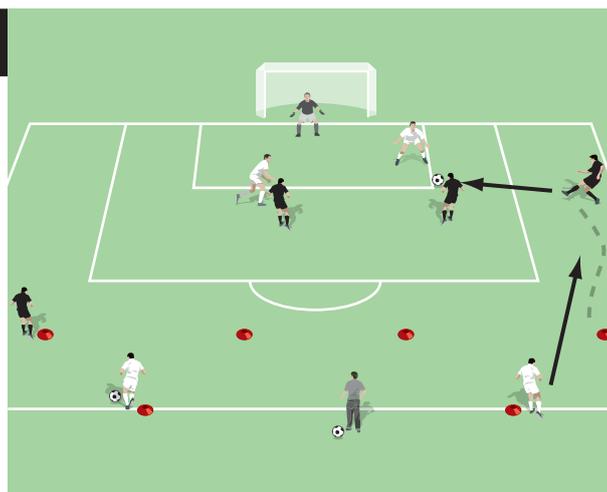
→
Ball Movement

1



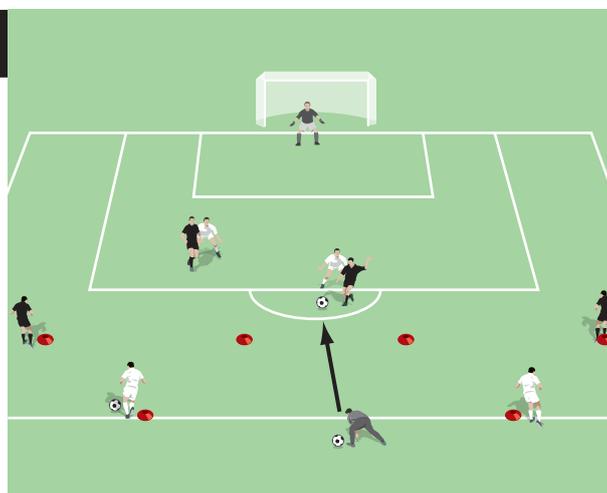
The first of four attacks comes head on.

2



The second and fourth attacks come from crosses.

3



The final attack comes with the ball passed into the attackers with their backs to goal.

2v1/1v2 continuous

When coaching this drill concentrate on the team of two. We know that they will attack together as a team but do they defend together? Do the players react quickly and communicate? Which player pressures the ball?

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

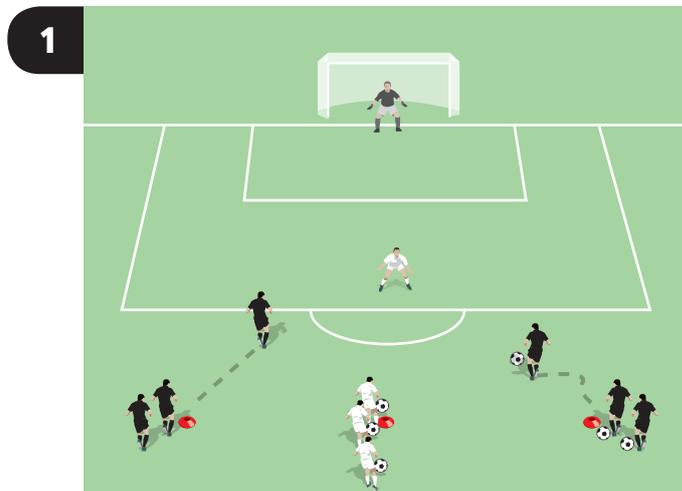
Equipment: 3 cones, 6 balls, 1 goal

The steps

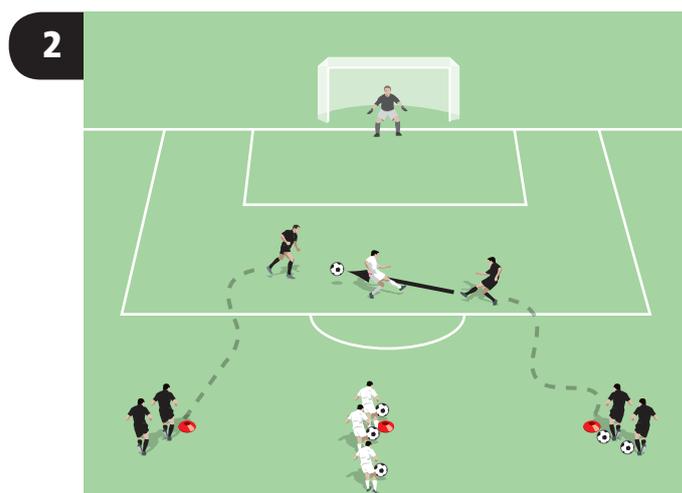
1. The black team starts by attacking 2v1 against the white defender.
2. Now the white team must attack 1v2 and the two black players that started the drill must react to become defenders.
3. The game works continuously for a set time period. Ensure that all players have the opportunity to defend 1v2 and 2v1.

What to call out

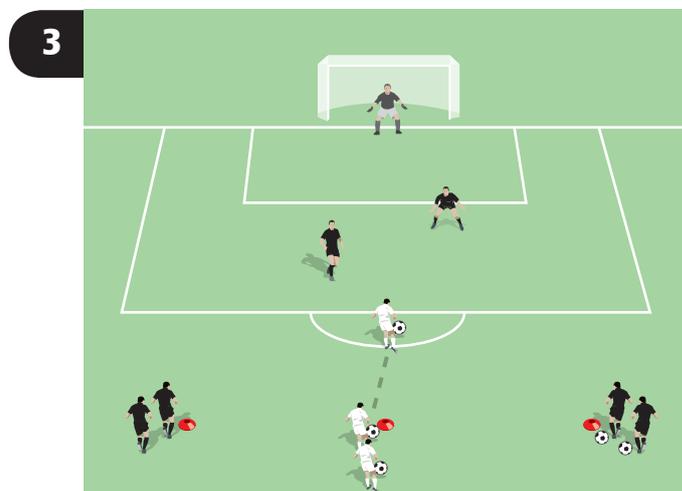
- "Work together to score"
- "React to the next ball"
- "Work together to defend"



The first defender competes with two attackers.



It will be difficult for the defender to cut out the options.



The black defenders have an advantage as they can work as a pair.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

2v1 defend well and receive the reward

This drill shows defenders that by working together to stop the attack they will be rewarded with a chance to attack their opponent.

The set up

Area: 50x30 yards

Equipment: 1 ball, 2 goals

The steps

1. The coach starts the drill by passing into the attacker who is on the central line and the attacker attempts to score in a 1v2 situation.
2. The defenders must pressure and try to stop the attacker. If they manage to win possession of the ball then we do not want the defenders to just kick the ball to safety.
3. Once in possession the defenders attack the opposite goal 2v1 against the attacker's team mate. However, if both defenders attack 2v1 and then lose the ball, the lone attacker can pass back to his team mate in the other half of the pitch for a free shot at goal.

What to call out

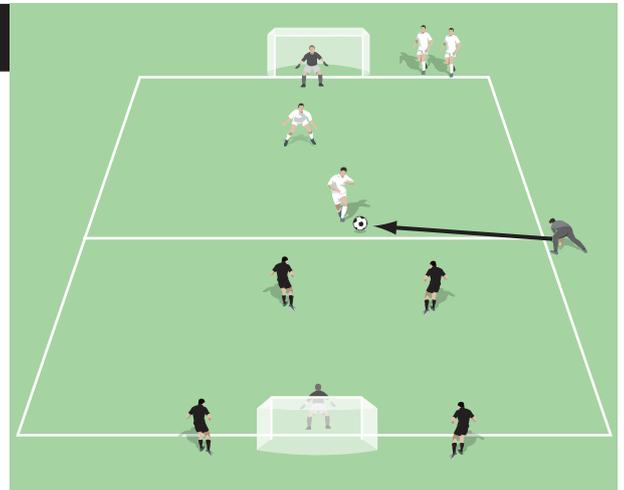
- "Nearest to pressure"
- "Work together to win the ball"
- "Attack quickly and score a goal"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

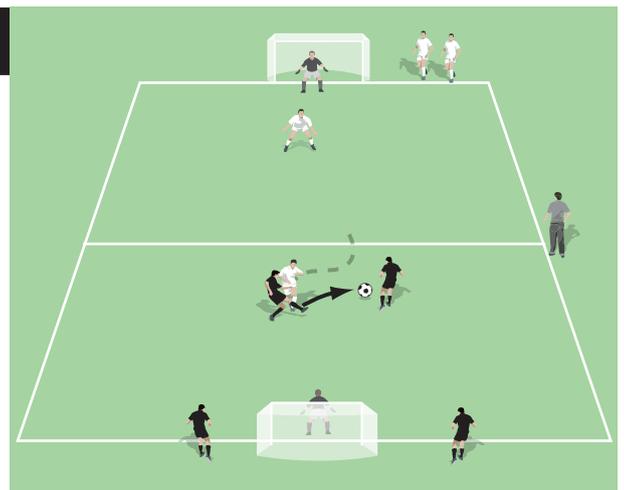
→
Ball Movement

1



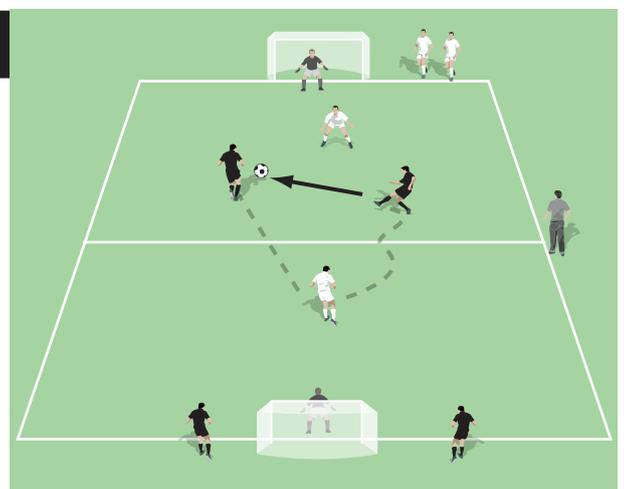
One of the white team players receives the ball and attacks 1v2.

2



The defenders win the ball and can now launch a counter attack.

3



Their reward for defending well is a 2v1 attack. Can the defender win the ball back when outnumbered?

Recovery run

This drill replicates a game situation where your attack breaks down and the team has to defend a quick counter attack. The first player is vitally important in delaying play and blocking passing options to buy the defence valuable time.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 3 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. Divide your players into two teams with an attacking team split between two starting points and a defending team starting at the bottom of the area.
2. The deepest defender must pass a ball to one of the attackers and a 2v2 commences. However, due to the deepest defender's position the attackers have a temporary 2v1 advantage. In this situation the defender must try to delay play and let his team mate recover to get back behind the ball.
3. Can the defender then pressure and isolate this player to allow his team mate to recover and into a good defensive position?

What to call out

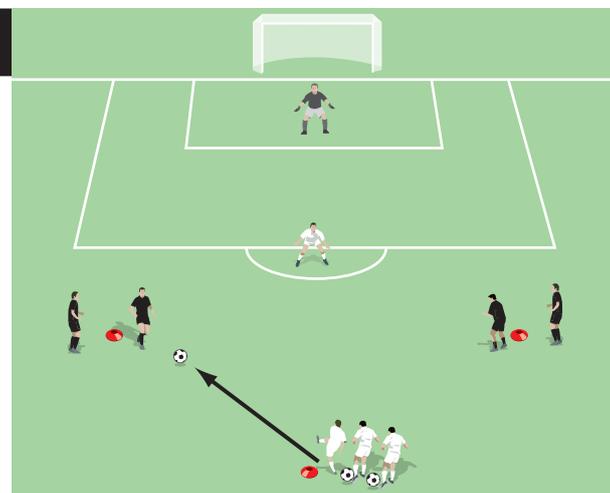
- "Can you delay the play?"
- "Cut off the passing option"
- "Allow your team mate to recover"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

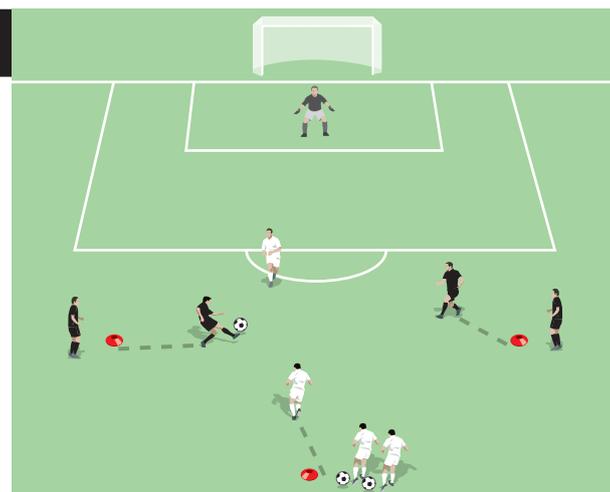
→
Ball Movement

1



The defender passes out wide to start the drill.

2



The second defender moves down to pressure the attacker.

3



The starting defender makes a recovery run to provide cover and cut off the passing option.

Support from deep

*How does a midfield runner affect the defenders?
Does one player go to mark him? Or, do the
defenders wait until the pass is made?*

The set up

Area: 40x20 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 1 ball, 2 goals

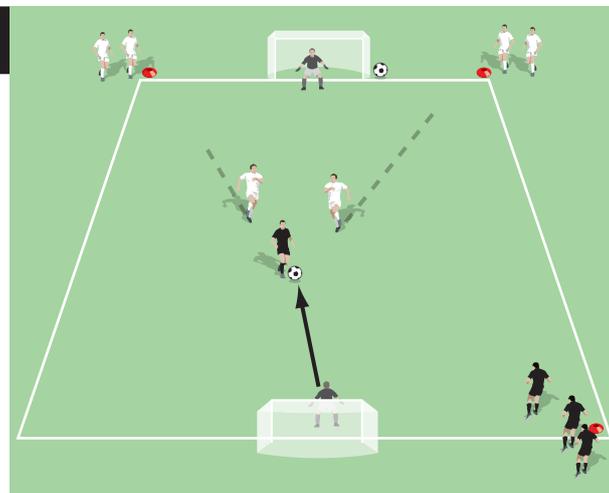
The steps

1. The goalkeeper throws the ball into the attacker who has their back to goal. The defenders must allow the attacker to have one touch before they can tackle.
2. A supporting midfielder runs onto the pitch to join the attacker and a 2v2 game commences.
3. The defenders must adjust their positions to cover the midfielder's run from deep and prevent the opposition from scoring.

What to call out

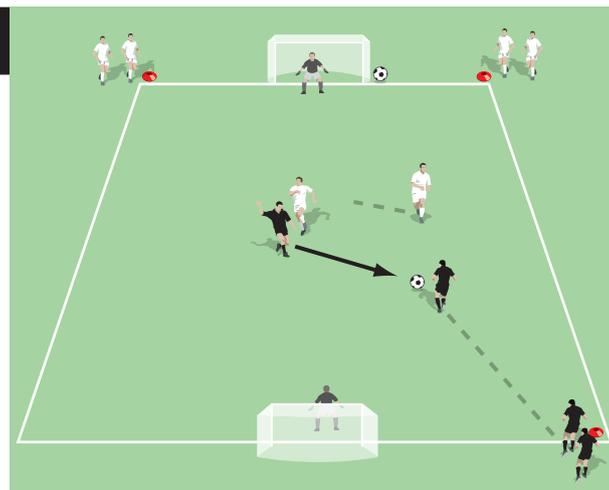
- "Stop the turn"
- "React to the midfielder's run"
- "Be patient, delay play and force a mistake"

1



The attacker receives the ball with his back to goal.

2



A team mate runs out to join the attacker.

3



The defenders must adjust their positions to account for the late run.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

2v2v2 continuous

This continuous game gives the teams valuable experience of defending 2v2 situations in and around the penalty box. The only way to win this game is by winning possession of the ball and then counter-attacking the opposite goal.

The set up

Area: 50x30 yards

Equipment: 3 balls, 2 goals

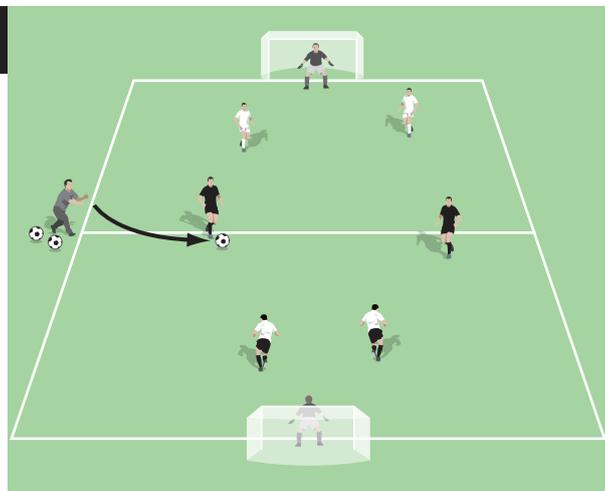
The steps

1. The black team starts by receiving a ball from the coach and attacking one of the goals.
2. If successful they receive a second ball from the coach and attack the other goal.
3. However, if tackled, the roles are reversed and the defending team breaks out to receive a ball and counter attack.

What to call out

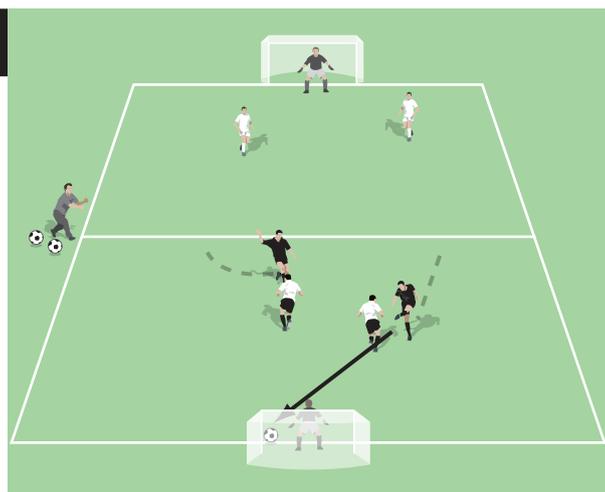
- "Put pressure on the ball"
- "Cover around each other"
- "Win the ball and you get to attack"

1



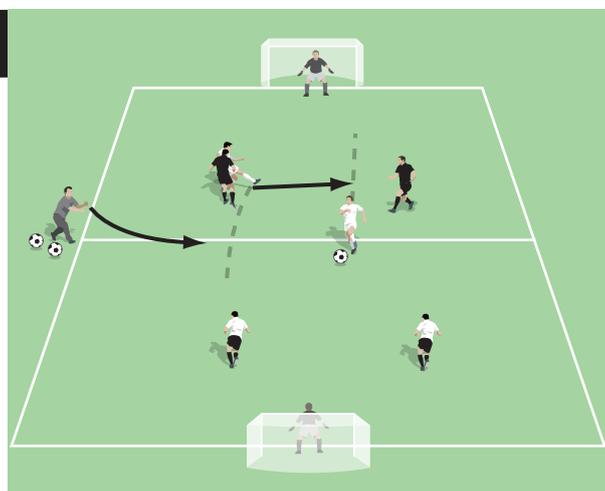
The team on the central line gets the game underway.

2



The black shorts are unable to stop the attack.

3



The black team attacks the top goal but the white defenders tackle and break out to attack the bottom goal.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

2v2 continuous defend from crosses

Using a channel down one side of the pitch ensures that players experience crosses coming from both the right and left sides of the pitch. When playing in attack, what do the players learn that they can use in defence?

The set up

Area: 50x30 yards

Equipment: 1 cone, 3 balls, 2 goals

The steps

1. One team is nominated to work as the two neutral crossers in the outside crossing alley. One team starts in each half of the pitch whilst the remaining team starts on the centre line.
2. To start, the coach passes into the central team who must combine to play out wide to the crosser. The team must now attack the cross and attempt to score.
3. If successful, they receive a 2nd ball and attack in the opposite direction. If they are tackled, the defenders break out for their turn to attack from a cross in the opposite direction.

What to call out

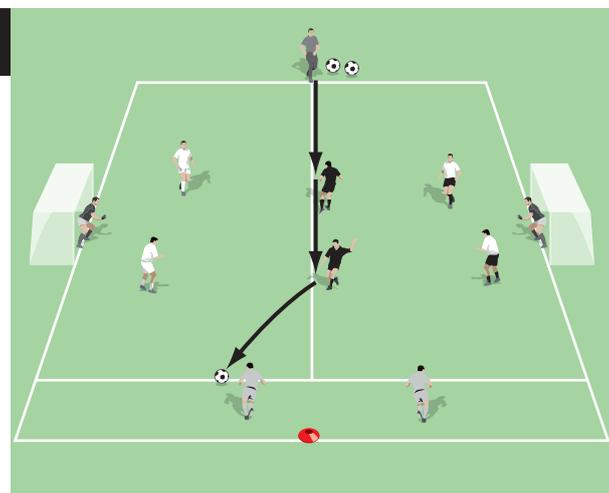
- "Make sure you can see the man and the ball"
- "Track the runners"
- "Height and distance on clearances"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

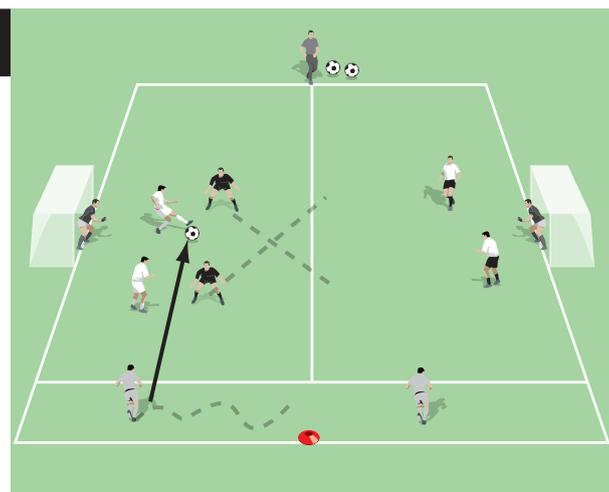
→
Ball Movement

1



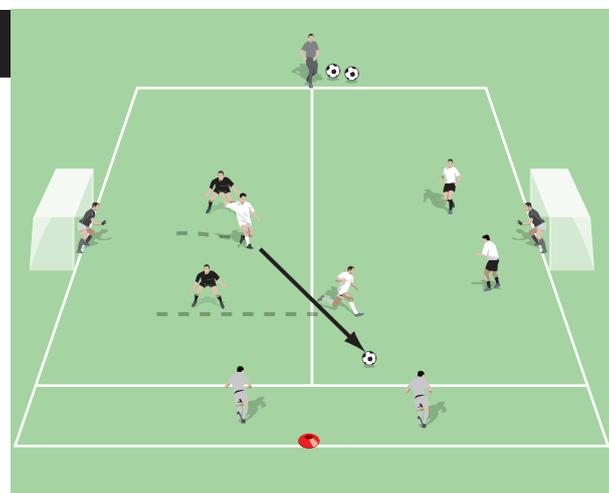
The starting team moves the ball wide to a crosser.

2



The defending team takes up good positions and cut out the cross.

3



The white team can now pass to the other crosser and attack the right goal.

Defend the dribble, defend the cross

The players are given two defending situations to prepare for and then execute successfully in order to stop the attack.

The set up

Area: 55x30 yards with 25x5 yard wings

Equipment: 3 balls, 2 goals

The steps

1. One team works as the crossers and go into the two crossing alleys. One team starts in each half of the pitch and the remaining team starts in the central zone.
2. To start, the coach passes to the central team who attack the goal of their choice. The defenders in the bottom half of the pitch have a straight 2v2 battle.
3. The defenders in the top half have to contend with the addition of the two crossers who add more attacking options. When one crosser is about to cross the other crosser can come out of the alley and try to help the team score.

What to call out

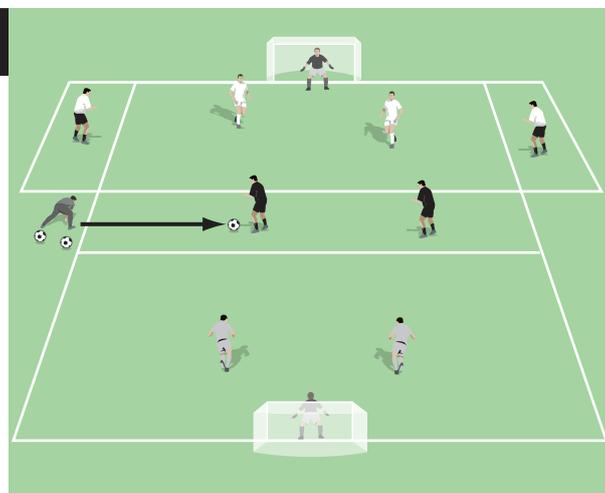
- "Pressure the ball"
- "Force play away from goal"
- "Track your man on crosses"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

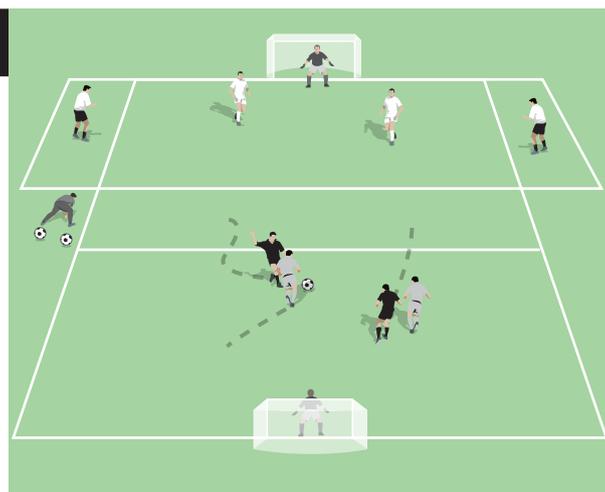
—————>
Ball Movement

1



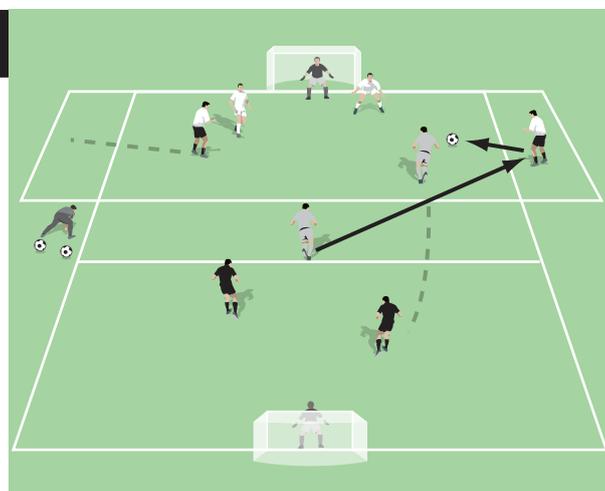
Crossing alleys are only used in one half of this pitch for this drill.

2



The black team dribbles to attack the bottom goal.

3



The grey team defends successfully. The white team now has to defend from a cross against the grey team.

Crossways

This continuous drill is played at match speed with the teams switching from attack to defence immediately. The players will arrive at different angles and speeds which makes each attack unpredictable.

The set up

Area: 25x25 yards

Equipment: 6 balls, 2 goals

The steps

1. Each team attacks the goal they are facing 2v2 and then turns to defend the other goal.
2. This drill ensures that players practice defending from different angles, speeds and levels of fatigue due to the attack that has just taken place.
3. Each attack finishes when the defending team wins the ball, the goalkeeper saves, or a goal is scored. The game runs continuously.

What to call out

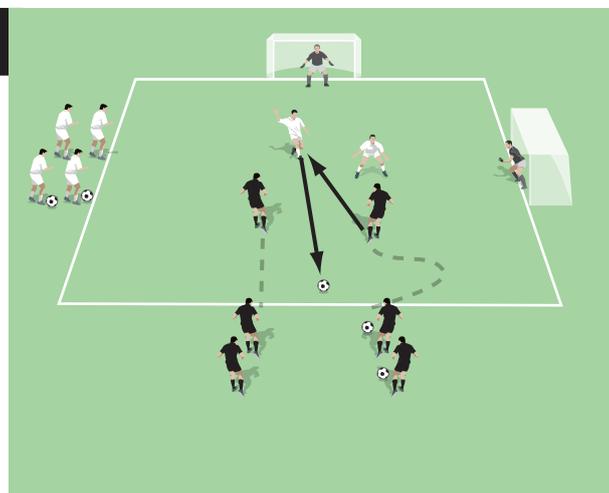
- "Attack 2v2"
- "Now react to defend"
- "Stop the shot"

KEY

..... Player Movement

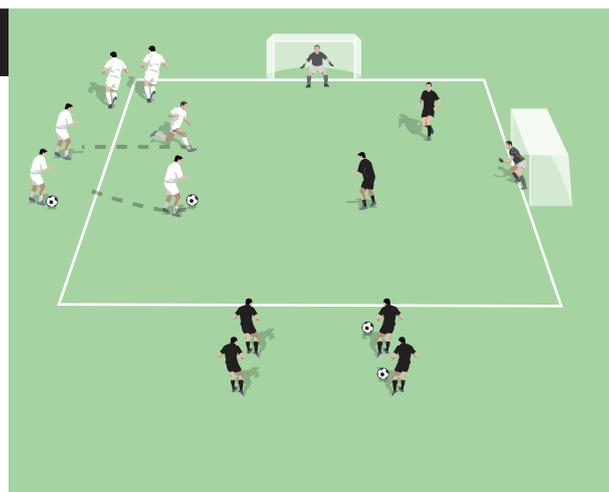
→ Ball Movement

1



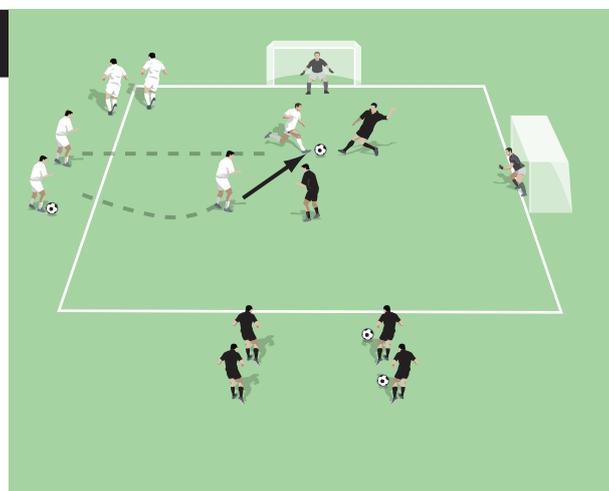
The white team defends 2v2 and makes the challenge.

2



The failed attackers adjust their position to defend an attack on their own goal.

3



The attacks alternate direction, forcing constant repositioning from the defenders.

Around the world

This drill ensures that players arrive onto the pitch at different angles, speeds and levels of fatigue due to the attack that has just taken place.

The set up

Area: 25x25 yards

Equipment: 6 cones, 5 balls, 2 goals

The steps

1. With goals on three sides of the pitch the teams defend the goal occupied by their goalkeeper and attack the goal they are facing. The white team starts by defending their goal.
2. Next, the black team adjusts its position to defend their goal against the grey attackers.
3. The first round is completed when the grey attackers switch to defend against the white team.

Play for a set time and rotate the teams to start in each position.

What to call out

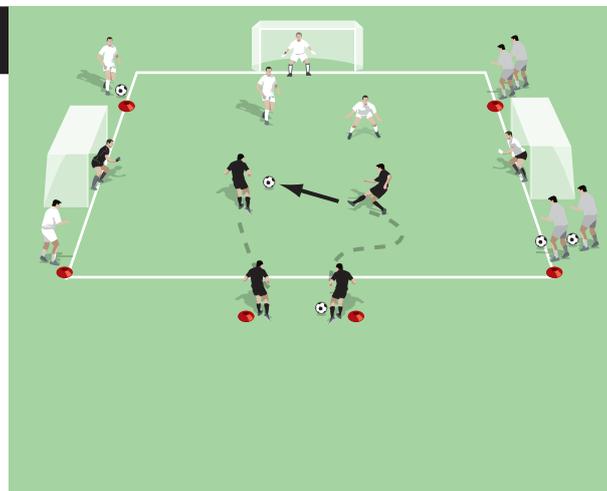
- "React quickly to defending"
- "Reposition quickly"
- "Remember, nearest to pressure, next to cover"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

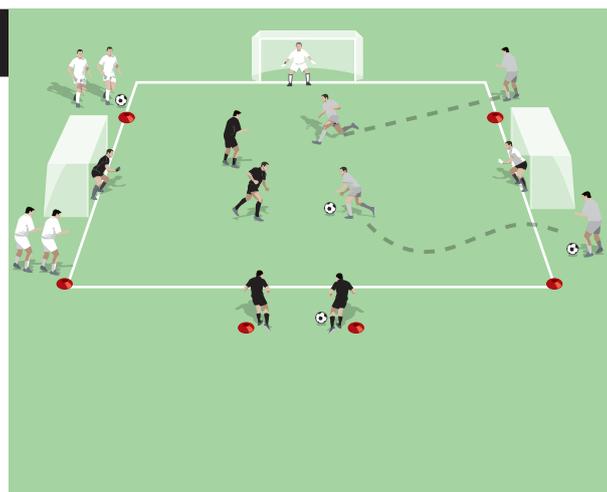
→
Ball Movement

1



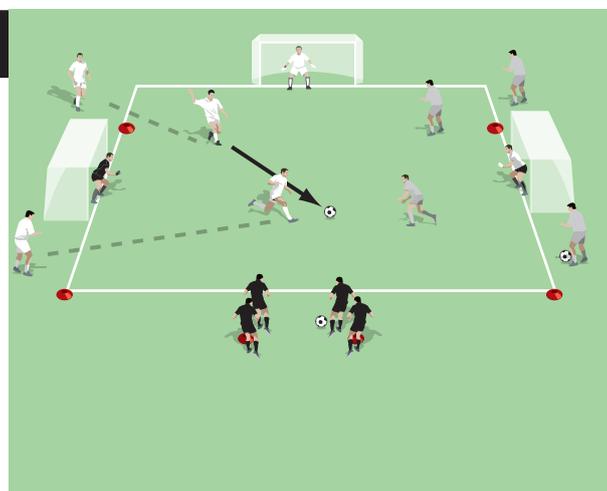
With three goals the attacks come from a range of directions.

2



After the black team has defended the top goal they defend the goal on the left.

3



To complete the round the white team attacks the grey goal on the right.

Around the world crossing game

Now the players must react from crosses rather than a dribbling attack.

The set up

Area: 25x25 yards

Equipment: 6 cones, 3 balls, 3 goals

The steps

1. With goals on three sides of the pitch the teams defend the goal occupied by their goalkeeper and attack the goal they are facing. The white team starts by defending their goal from a cross.
2. Next, the black team adjusts its position to defend its goal against a cross for the black shorts attackers.
3. The first round is completed when the black shorts attackers switch to defend a cross against the white team.

Play for a set time and rotate the teams to start in each position.

What to call out

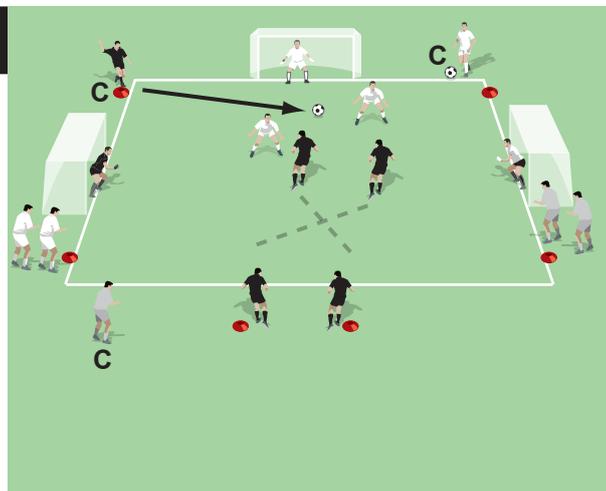
- "React to defending"
- "Make sure you can see the ball and your man"
- "Track the runners and clear the cross"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

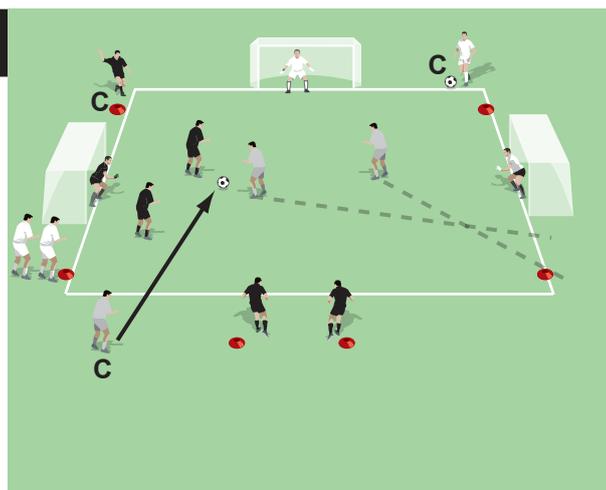
→
Ball Movement

1



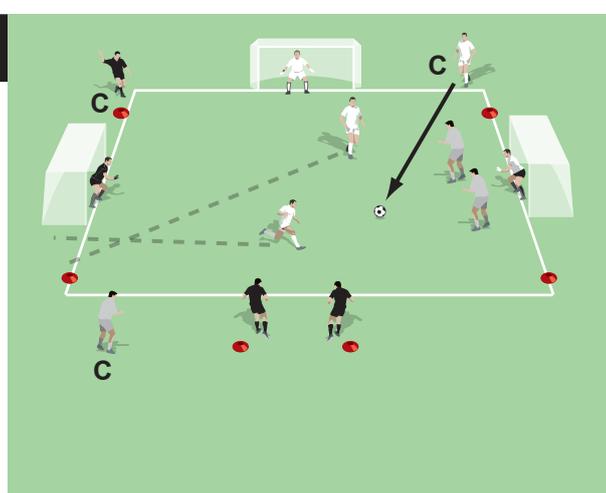
Defenders will do well to keep reacting in this fast paced game. The black team attacks the top goal.

2



They then turn to defend their own goal against the grey team.

3



The grey team must then defend the right goal from a cross for the white team.

5v2 three goal defend

The defenders must work to their maximum in order to pressure their opponents and block shooting opportunities.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 poles, 1 ball

The steps

1. The pitch has three goals marked out by a triangle of poles which the defending team (goalkeeper and two defenders) must defend from the 5 attackers.
2. The attacking team attempts to pass the ball quickly in order to create a goal scoring opportunity.
3. The defending team must work as a unit, pressing the ball and constantly re-positioning in order to stop the attackers scoring.

What to call out

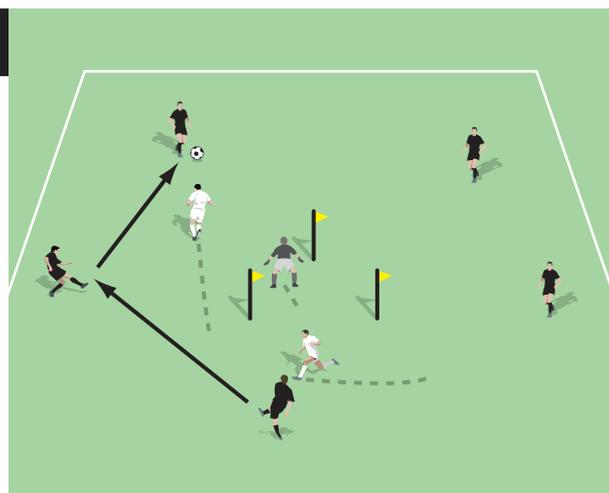
- "Work together"
- "Cut out the options"
- "Goalkeeper must communicate"

1



The interesting layout of goals will test your defenders decision making.

2



The defenders will have to move quickly and hedge their bets as to where the ball will be played.

3



The defenders will do well to get in many blocks like this one.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

SECTION 3

Defending in small groups

In the context of this section the term small groups refers principally to the defending unit or midfield. However, the principles behind defending in groups also apply to forwards who must close down the opposition's defence when they are in possession of the ball.

Therefore the number of players involved in each drill will be determined by the formation that your team plays. For instance, if you play a 4-3-3 then you may work with 3 midfielders on a midfield pressure game compared to a 4 player midfield if your preferred formation is 4-4-2.

With this in mind we have made each practice adaptable for you and your group of players.

When defending in groups it is important that the players work together as a unit to stop the opponent. This means that the players must support each other verbally and positionally even if they are not directly involved in attempting to win back the ball. The nearest player pressing whilst the others give support

It is vitally important that players remain disciplined when defending as a unit. If one player goes chasing the opponents alone they will easily be able to go past them and break the defensive structure. In this situation, one defender is often taken out of the game and the opponent now has an overload situation. This spells "danger" for any team of players regardless of their abilities as individuals.

Key factors:

- Nearest to pressure, next to cover, next to support and add depth
- Movement to block passing channels
- Transition to attack when winning back possession
- Face the attacker towards your team mates
- Communicate with team mates

Group defending technique

This drill develops the understanding of pressure, support and depth when defending in 3s.

The set up

Area: 20x20 yards with 10x20 yard end zones

Equipment: 3 cones, 3 mannequins

The steps

On the coach's call the players must take up the correct defensive shape.

1. Left – the left defender pressures and shows inside, the central defender supports and stops the forward pass, the furthest defender gives support to the central player and provides depth.
2. Centre – the central defender pressures the ball while the two wide defenders take up supporting positions behind and to either side to stop the forward pass.
3. Right – the right defender pressures and shows inside, the central defender supports and stops the forward pass, the furthest defender gives support to the central player and provides depth.

What to call out

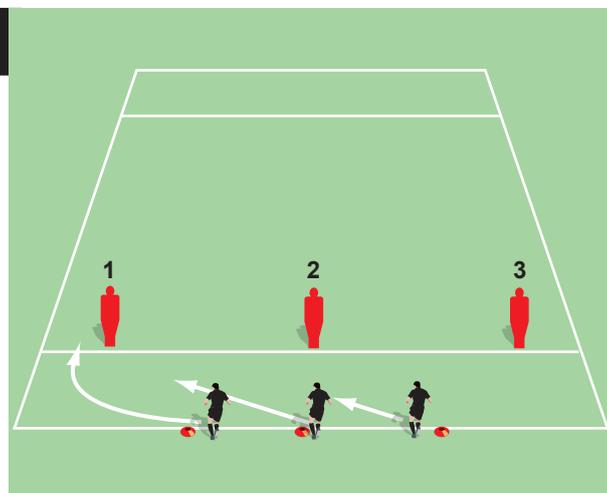
- "React to the call"
- "Pressure"
- "Cover, depth"

KEY

..... Player Movement

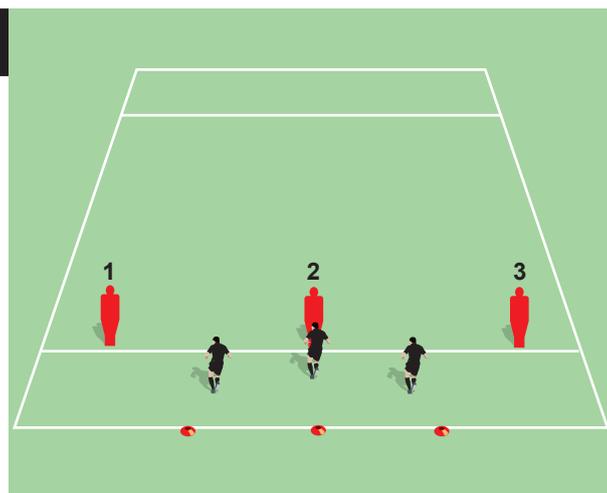
→ Ball Movement

1



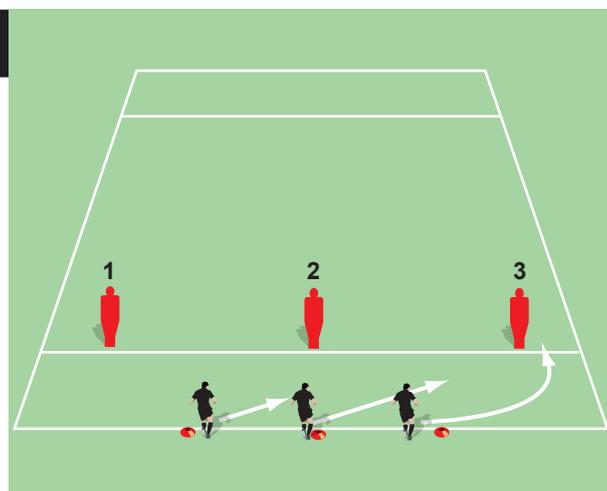
The group pressure the first mannequin showing it inside from left to right.

2



In a central position the two supporting defenders position behind and to either side of the pressuring defender.

3



Finally, the right side mannequin is shown inside.

Group defending skill

This drill develops the understanding of pressure, support and depth when defending in 3s and then gives your players a chance to show their newly learnt skills.

The set up

Area: 20x20 yards with 10x10 end zones

Equipment: 3 cones, 3 mannequins, 1 target goal

The steps

1. The defending team completes the defending technique task.
2. The coach passes a ball to the attacking team at the opposite end.
3. Immediately, the defenders must run onto the pitch and use the group defending technique to stop the opponents from scoring in their target goal.

After each game the roles are reversed.

What to call out

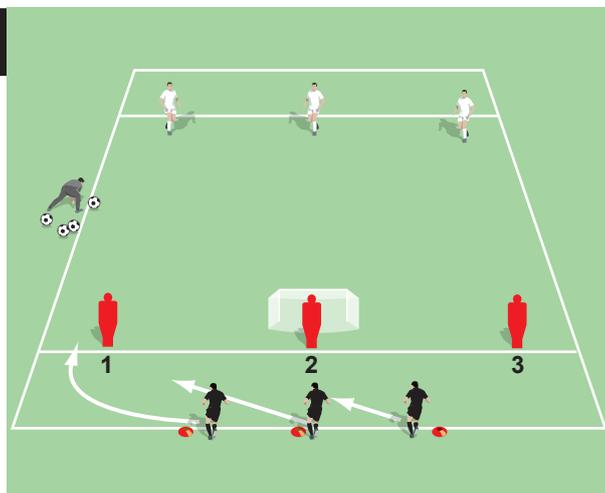
- "React to the call"
- "Get the right shape"
- "React to defend"

KEY

..... Player Movement

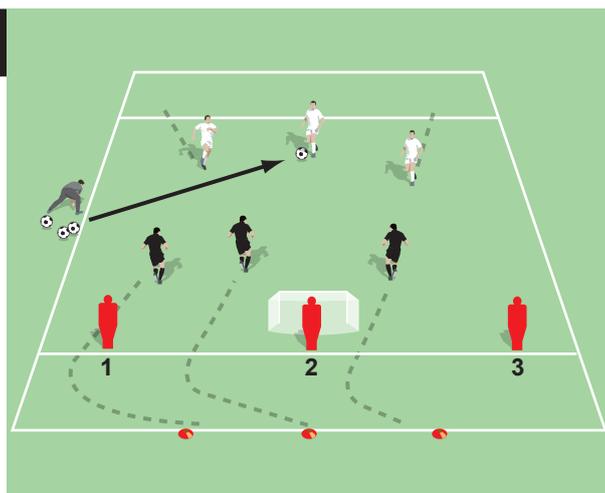
→ Ball Movement

1



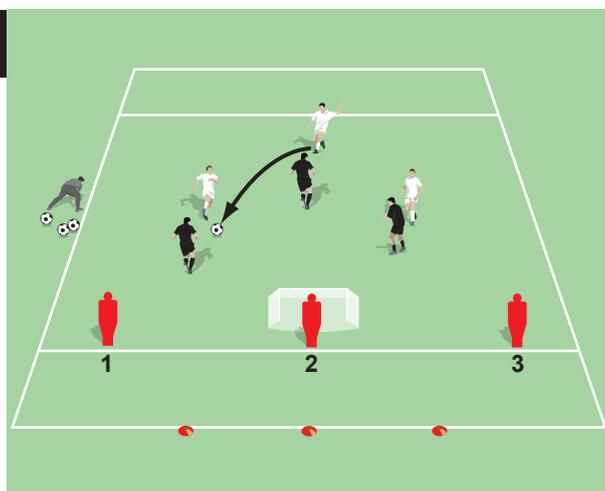
The coach can call for any of the defending positions to begin (this time left).

2



On completion of the technique the coach serves a ball to the attacking team.

3



The defending team must use their defensive techniques to stop a goal.

Group defending game

This drill develops the understanding of pressure, support and depth when defending. The game situation will see possession being won and lost. How do the players react and re-organise themselves to defend?

The set up

Area: 20x20 yards with 10x20 yards end zones

Equipment: 6 cones, 2 target goals, 1 ball, 6 mannequins

The steps

1. The two teams have to complete the group defending technique tasks.
2. The coach passes a ball to the team that shows the best defensive shape in the technique work.
3. Immediately both teams must run onto the pitch and now use their new techniques in a "live" environment to win the game.

What to call out

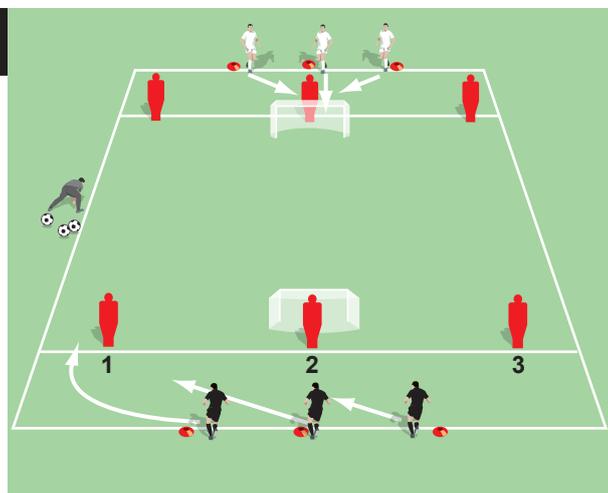
- "React to call"
- "Get correct shape"
- "React to game"

KEY

..... Player Movement

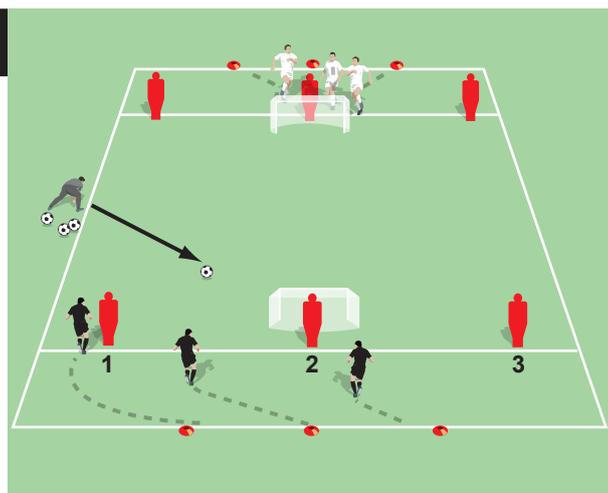
→ Ball Movement

1



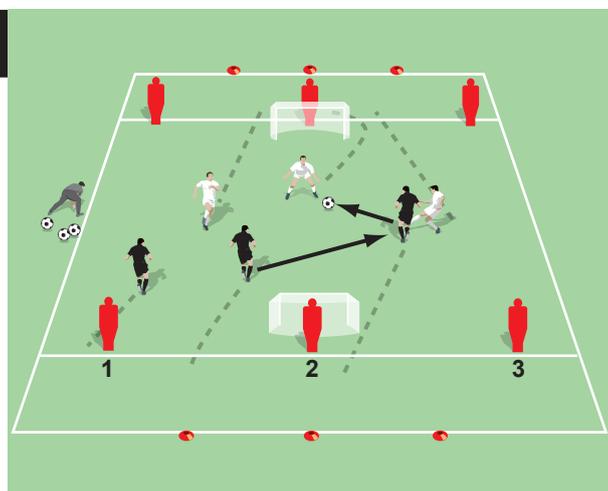
The coach calls for the technique. Both teams do not have to take the same positions.

2



The coach serves the ball to the team showing the best positioning.

3



Both teams must use their techniques in a game situation. Here the white team shows the attacking team inside.

Defending in small groups

2v3 – attack

The defenders must use their overload advantage in order to pressure the opponent into a mistake and win back possession.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 3 cones, 1 goal, 3 balls

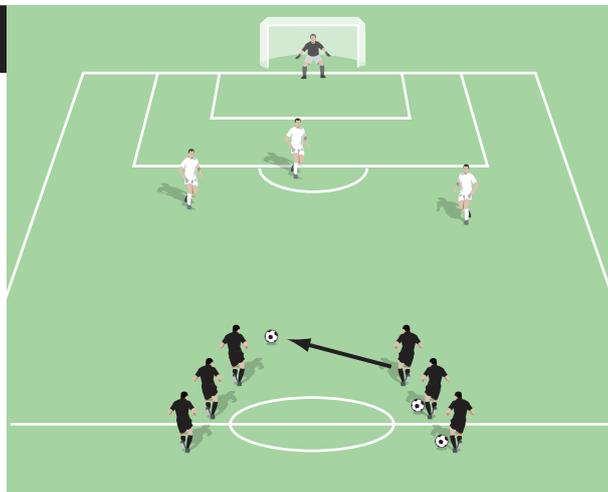
The steps

1. Each attacking pair has two attacks. Therefore, in the game illustrated the defenders have to defend 6 attacks in total.
2. The game works continuously with the attackers trying to score in a 2v3 situation.
3. After each ball is completed the next pair of attackers immediately enters the pitch. This ensures that the defenders continuously switch on to the next ball.

What to call out

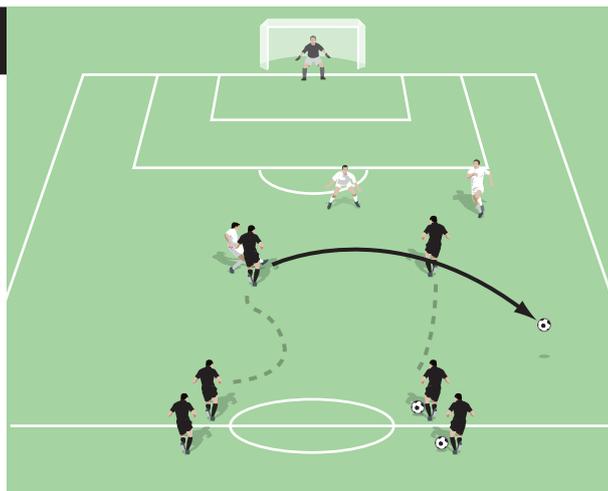
- "Nearest to pressure"
- "Does he have support?"
- "Stay with the runner"

1



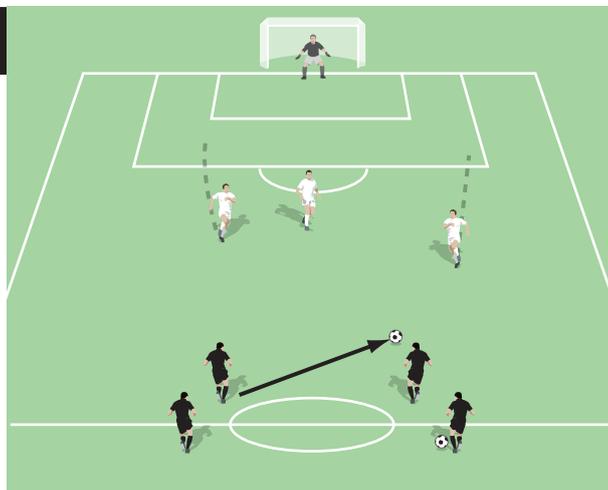
The defending group faces 6 attacks with a 3v2 advantage.

2



The correct technique should make this practice very straightforward for the defending team.

3



The defenders must switch on to a new attack when the ball goes "dead".

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

Defending in small groups

2v3 with wide players

The defenders must try to stop the wide pass as this cancels out their overload advantage. If the ball moves wide the nearest defender must try to block the cross.

The set up

Area: 30 x 50 yards with 5 x 50 yards crossing alleys

Equipment: 3 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. In this game there are two wide players who play outside of the pitch. The wide players are allowed two touches on the ball to cross or pass onto the pitch.
2. The nearest defender is allowed to go and block the cross. However, he is not allowed to go into the wide player's zone.
3. The defending group must retain their shape when faced with an attack from a different approach.

What to call out

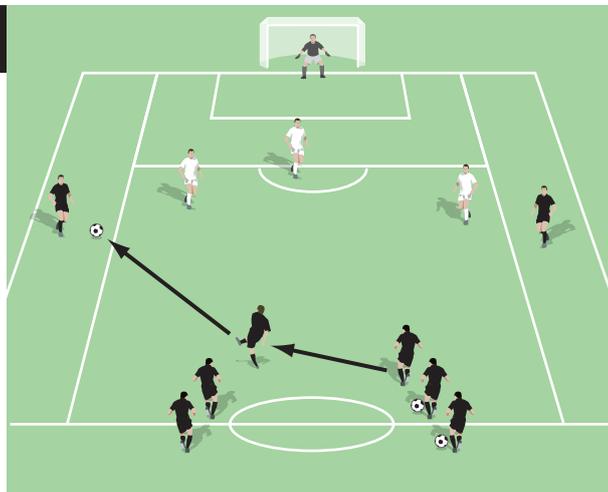
- "Nearest to pressure"
- "Stop crosses coming into the box"
- "Track your runners"

KEY

..... Player Movement

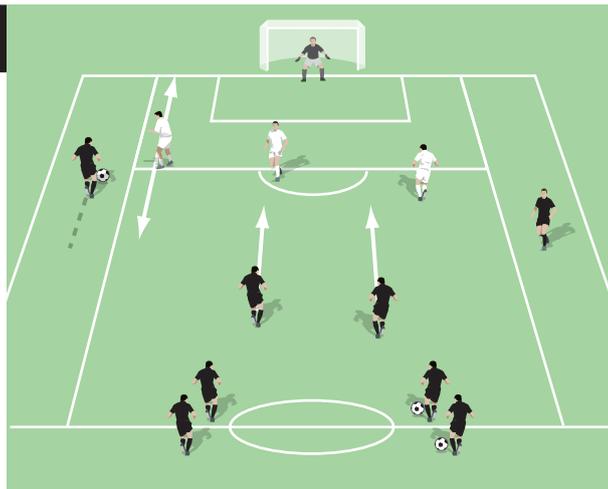
→ Ball Movement

1



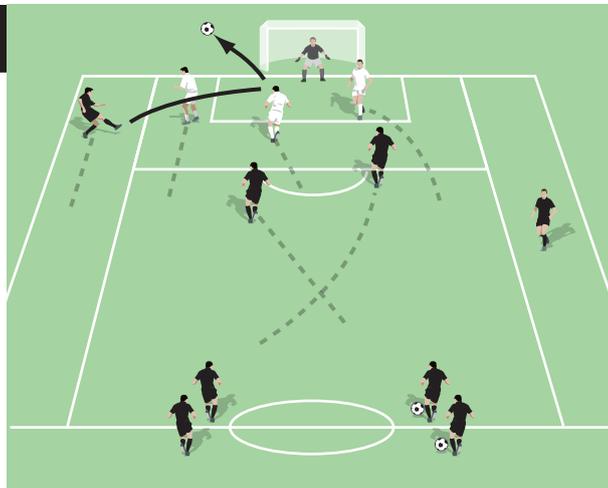
The attacking team move the ball wide to one of the crossing alleys.

2



The nearest defender must move towards the channel to try and block the cross.

3



The remaining defenders have tracked the attackers' runs and can clear the ball.

Conductor

The two teams must defend their end zone. The "conductor" of the defence communicates what actions his team mates should take. This builds confidence when communicating and trust when defending.

The set up

Area: 20x30 yards with sweepers 10 yards behind

Equipment: Supply of balls

The steps

1. Divide your players into two teams with one player on each team nominated to be the defensive "conductor". This player goes off the pitch and must communicate to their team mates and give defensive instructions.
2. The aim of the game is to prevent your opponents from dribbling into end zone.
3. The conductor provides verbal support to their team mates. "Get tight", "someone support", "get goal side", "show inside" etc. All players should have a turn as the conductor.

What to call out

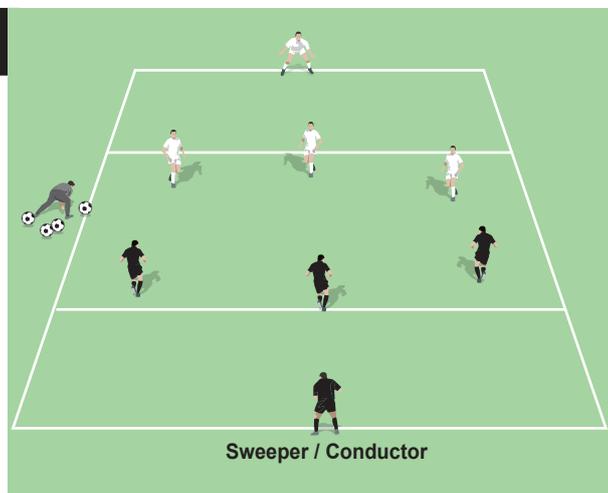
- "Nearest to pressure"
- "Squeeze across to stop the forward pass"
- "Communicate"

KEY

..... Player Movement

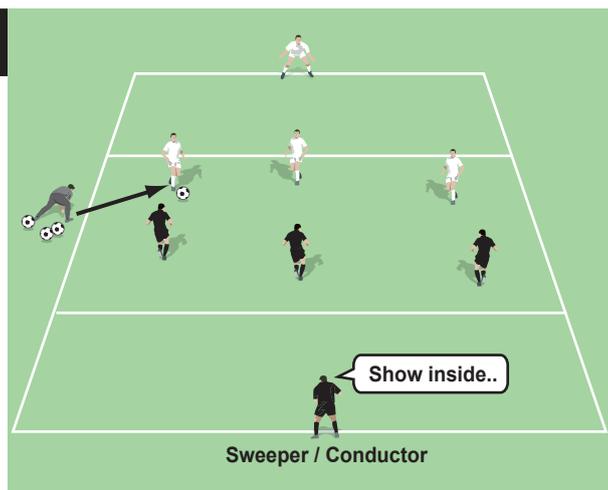
→ Ball Movement

1



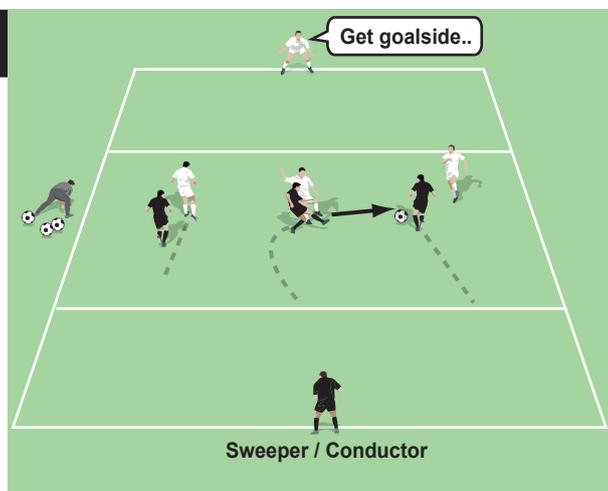
The conductors will learn a lot about group technique by watching and controlling their team mates.

2



The black team's conductor correctly tells his team mates to show the player in possession inside where he has support.

3



Having lost the ball the white players are instructed to get goal side.

Sweeper game

If the communication is poor or the defenders don't listen to their sweeper, the attackers will breakthrough into a 1v1 situation.

The set up

Area: 60x30 yards

Equipment: 2 goals, supply of balls

The steps

1. One player on each team is nominated to be the defensive "conductor". This player goes into the end zone and must communicate to their team mates.
2. The game begins with the coach passing to one of the teams. The conductor provides verbal support to their team mates. "Get tight", "someone support", "get goal side", "show inside" etc.
3. If the attacking team gets past their opponent's defence the conductor acts as sweeper in a 1v1 situation.

All players should have a turn as the conductor.

What to call out

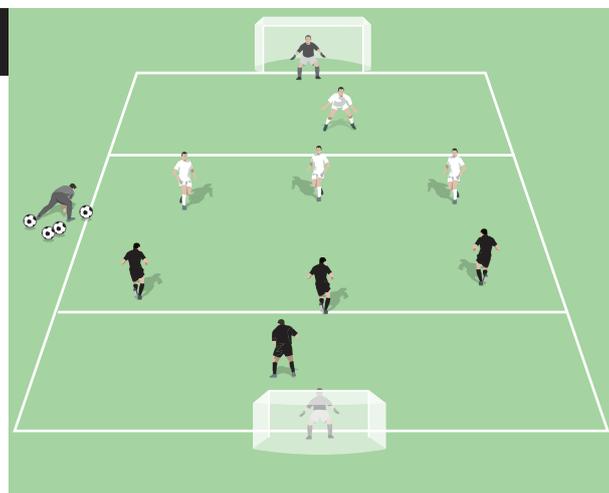
- "Stop forward play"
- "Communicate"
- "Be ready to defend 1v1"

KEY

..... Player Movement

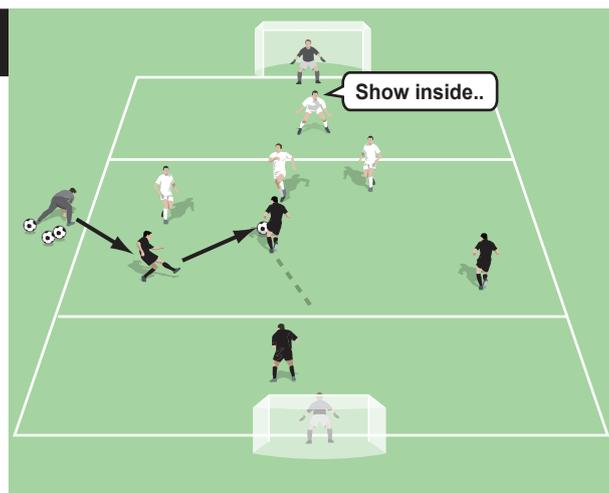
→ Ball Movement

1



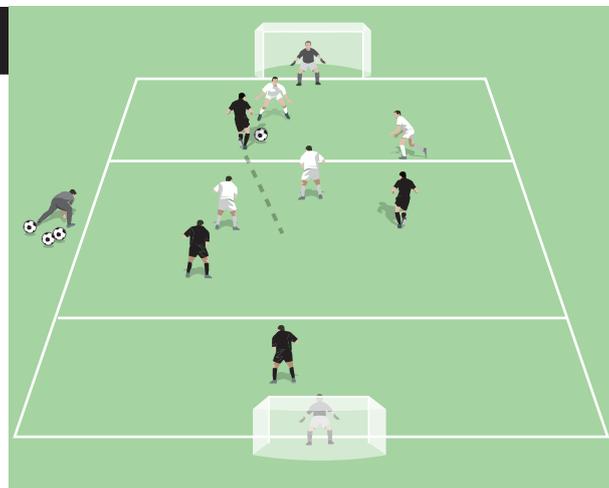
The sweeper acts as the last line of defence and coordinates the players in front of him.

2



The sweeper correctly instructs his team mates to show the attacker inside.

3



However, the attacker breaks through, the sweeper must now step in to prevent a goal scoring opportunity.

3v3v3 defend the line

The nearest player must pressure the ball whilst the others stop a forward pass. This drill is very useful when working with your midfield to stop passes into attackers.

The set up

Area: 30x20 yards

Equipment: 1 ball

The steps

1. One team of players starts in each half, the other starts on the central line and must try to stop passes crossing the line.
2. The players on the two outside teams are only allowed to use two touches of the ball before passing to each other or across to the opposite side. One player from the central team can apply pressure in each half.
3. The team defending the middle line must stick together and shift across the line to ensure that they cover all the gaps and stop passes. If they stop a pass then they switch positions with the team that lost possession.

What to call out

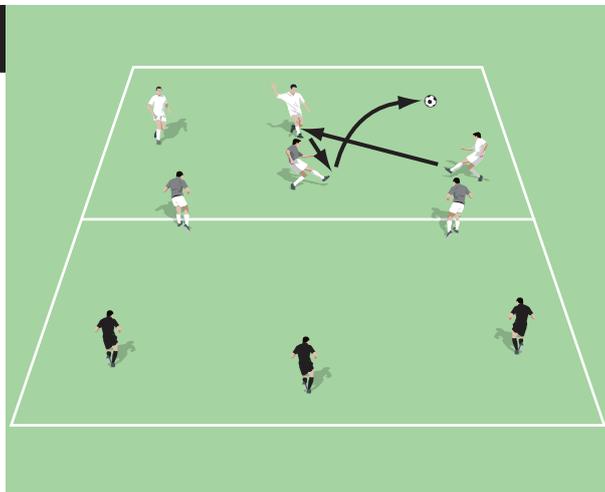
- "Shuffle across"
- "Work together"
- "Stop balls being played through"

KEY

..... Player Movement

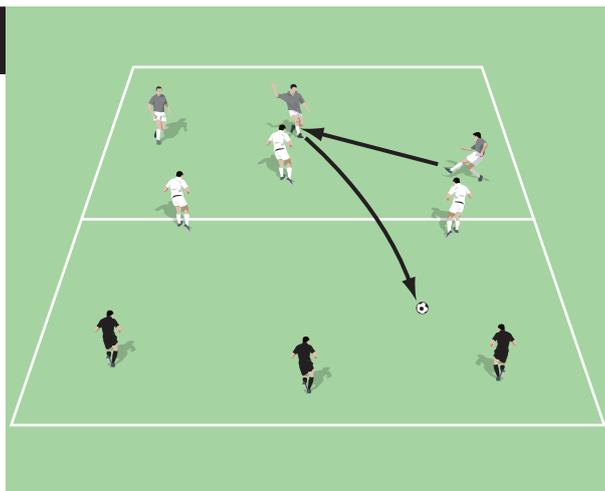
→ Ball Movement

1



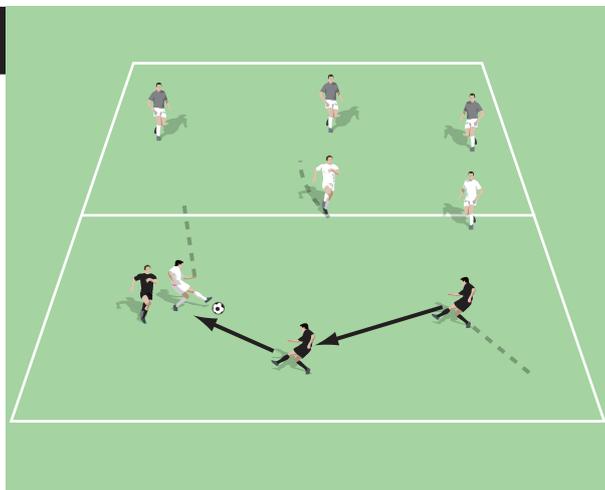
One of the grey team players pressures the ball and forces a mistake.

2



The white team now tries to defend but play is switched.

3



The white team must quickly get into position to win back possession from the black team.

Defending in small groups

3v3v3 defend from the front

If forwards work together the team will win the ball back nearer the opponent's goal and have a greater chance to score. They must get their shape before looking to pressure for the ball otherwise they will continuously have to run.

The set up

Area: 40X30 yards

Equipment: 2 goals, 1 ball

The steps

1. The goalkeeper rolls out to the defenders who must make three passes in a 4v3 situation (3 defenders and goalkeeper) before passing to the opposite team.
2. If a successful pass is made to the opposite team then the defending team must regroup and run into the other half to try and win the ball close to the opposite goal.
3. If the defending team manage to win possession then the roles are reversed and they can go on the attack.

What to call out

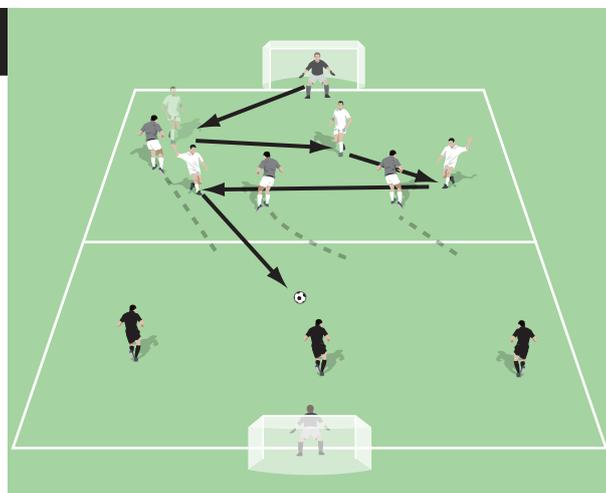
- "Work together"
- "Stop the forward pass"
- "Isolate the defender in possession"

KEY

..... Player Movement

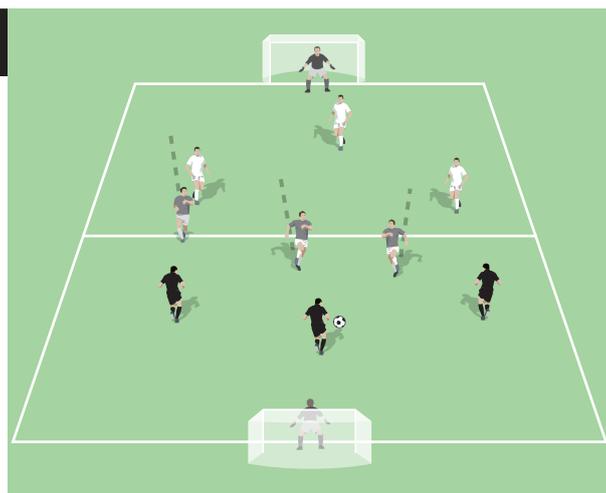
→ Ball Movement

1



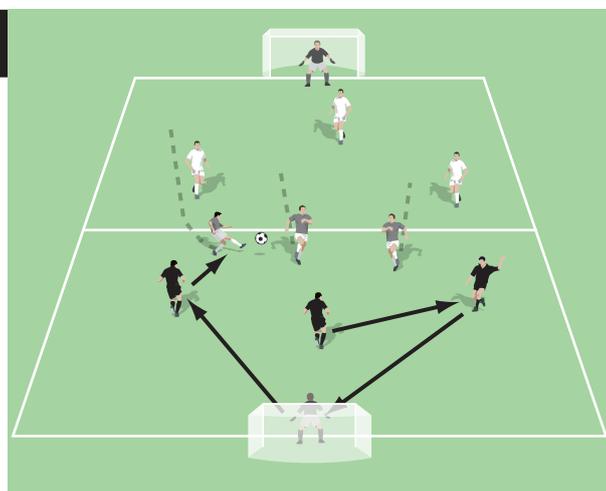
The grey team pressures close to their opponent's goal but are unable to win the ball back.

2



The defenders switch halves and try to pressure close to the goal again.

3



The grey team intercept the ball and can now try to score in the black team's goal.

Defending in small groups

Nearest defender to pressure

The nearest defender must pressure the ball quickly to isolate the player in possession. The other defenders must take up support positions and, if needed, mark the 2nd attacker closely.

The set up

Area: 30 x 50 yards

Equipment: 4 cones, 4 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The coach calls a number and that player dribbles into the area to attack with their team mate.
2. The defenders must react quickly with the nearest defender putting pressure on the ball and the remaining defenders providing cover.
3. If the defenders win the ball back, then that attack is complete and the dribbling player takes the place of the initial attacker for the next attack.

What to call out

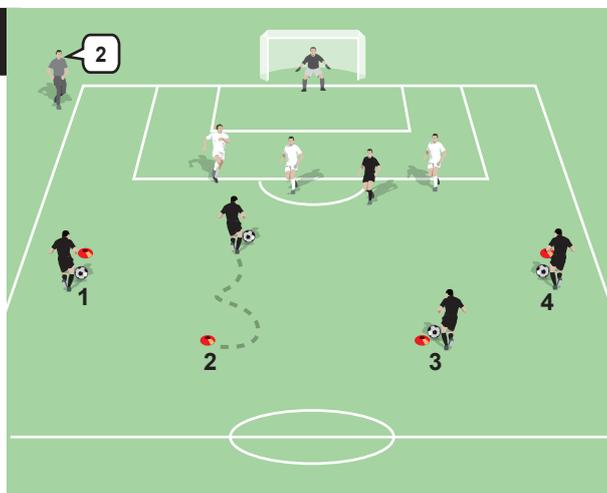
- "Nearest player must pressure"
- "Force play away from goal"
- "Track the runner"

KEY

..... Player Movement

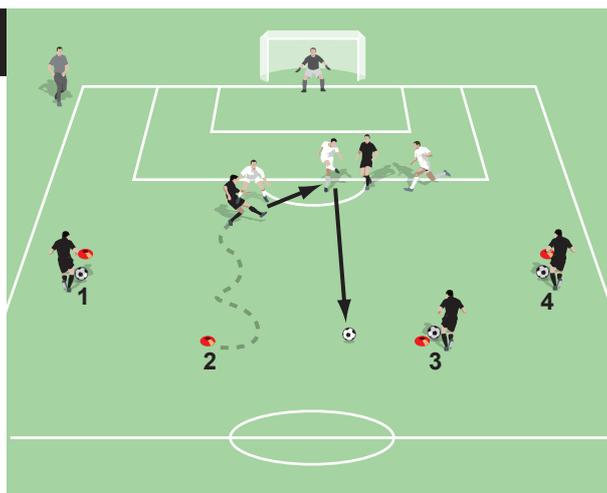
→ Ball Movement

1



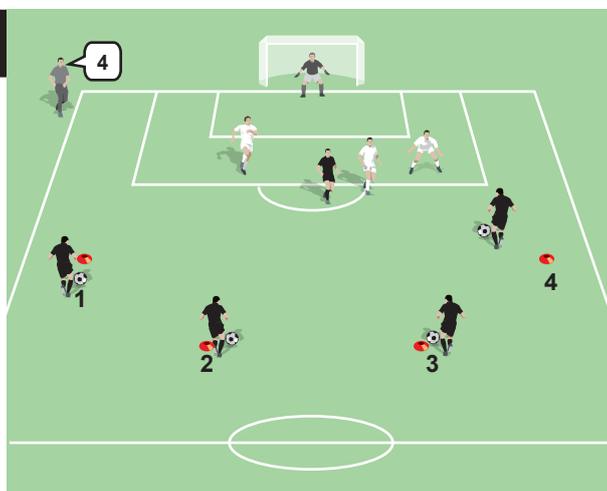
The coach calls for an attacker to dribble in and join their team mate.

2



The nearest defender moves out to pressure and forces a mistake.

3



The coach calls for the next attacker and the defenders must reorganize.

Defending overload

The defenders must defend each situation correctly depending on the numbers of attackers they face. The skills learnt in previous drills are now put into action in quick succession.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 5 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The three defenders must defend against five attacks with an additional attacker dribbling into the area:

3v1 – defender's advantage

3v2 – defender's advantage

3v3 – equal

3v4 – attacker's advantage

3v5 – attacker's advantage

2. The defenders should start by pressing as a group and become more patient and more tactical - defending high and together - as more attackers enter the game.

3. Once the five attacks are complete, count the goals scored and select three new defenders.

What to call out

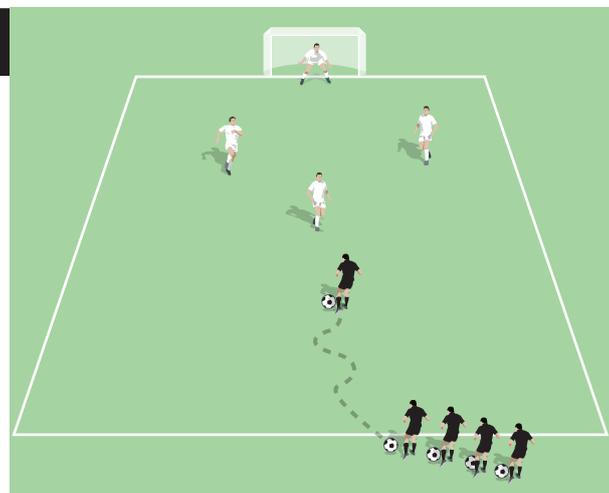
- "Pressure the ball"
- "Work together"
- "React to the different circumstances"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

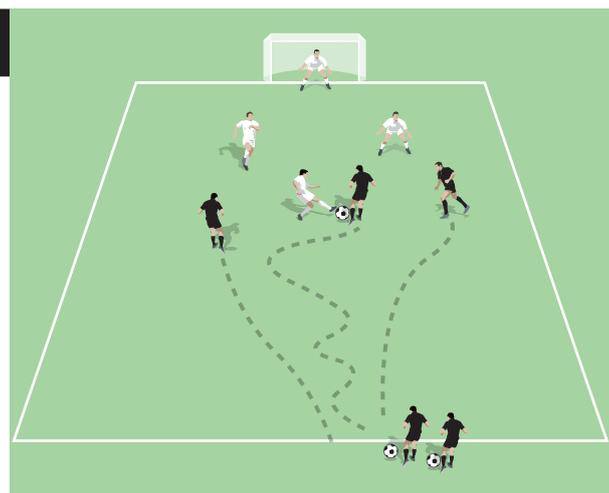
→
Ball Movement

1



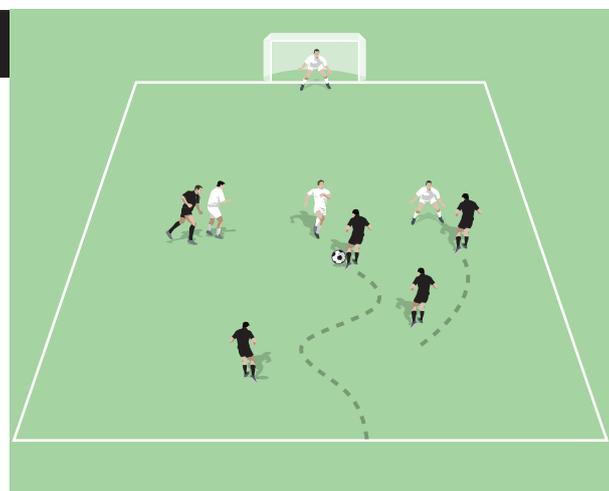
The defending team gets off to a straightforward start against one attacker.

2



As the drill progresses the defenders find themselves evenly matched.

3



In the final attack the defenders will be overloaded and must stick to their proper techniques if they are to stand a chance.

Multi-ball overload

This multi-ball drill forces the defenders to communicate and defend quickly, reacting to help their team mates after each ball is played.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 6 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The three defenders have to react to various attacks consisting of different numbers of players and balls:
 - 1 attacker, 1 ball
 - 2 attackers, 2 balls
 - 3 attackers, 3 balls
2. How do the defenders react to the different situations?
3. After the attacks are complete, count the goals scored and then rotate the defenders.

What to call out

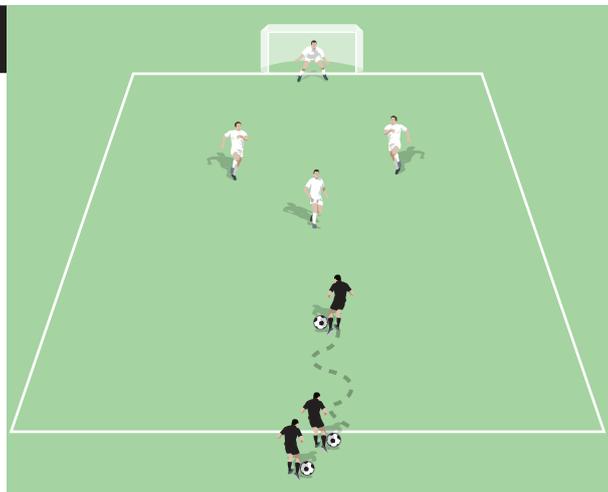
- "Pressure the ball"
- "React to each attack"
- "Recover and help team mates"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

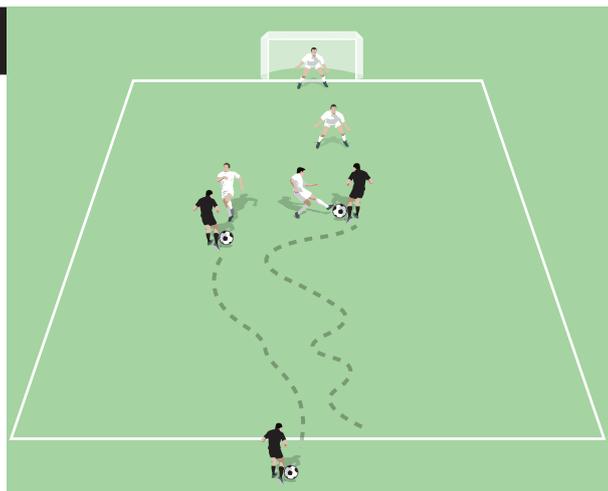
→
Ball Movement

1



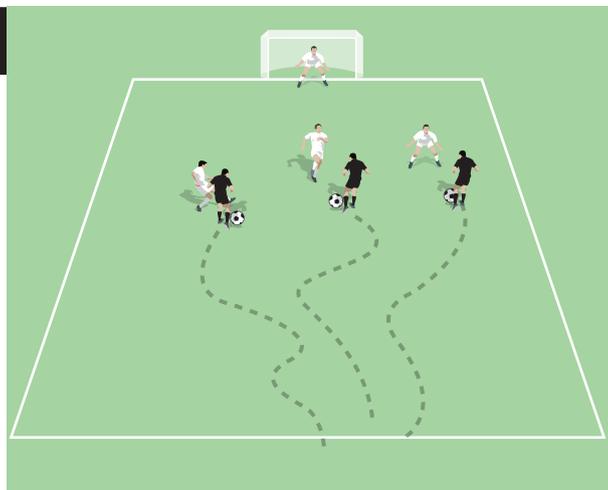
The defenders should easily stop the lone attacker.

2



The addition of a second attacker and a second ball means the supporting defender must cover both attacks.

3



In the final part the defenders should look to contain the attackers before picking them off one by one.

Defending in small groups

3v3 in the box

The players must mark man-to-man and look to be strong, making tackles and blocks to stop shots on goal.

The set up

Area: Penalty area

Equipment: 3 cones, 6 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. Two teams work inside the area with one team attacking and the other defending. The third team go outside the box and take up different positions with two balls to each player.
2. The attacking team receives a ball from outside the area and try to score a goal.
3. The game last for 6 balls depending on number of players in each team.

After the 6 balls are completed rotate the teams.

What to call out

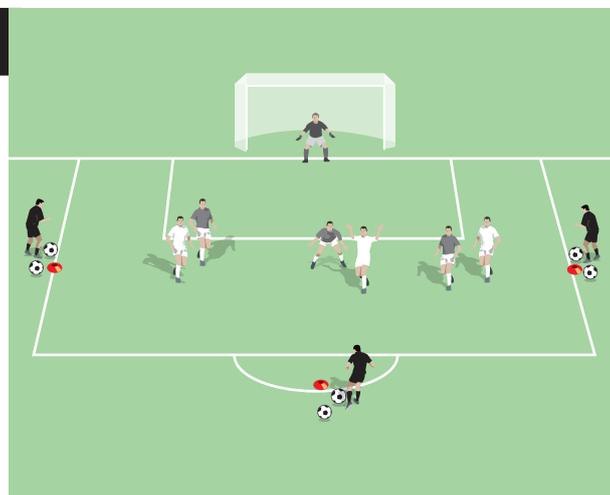
- "Stay with your man"
- "Stop turns and shots"
- "Force away from goal"

KEY

..... Player Movement

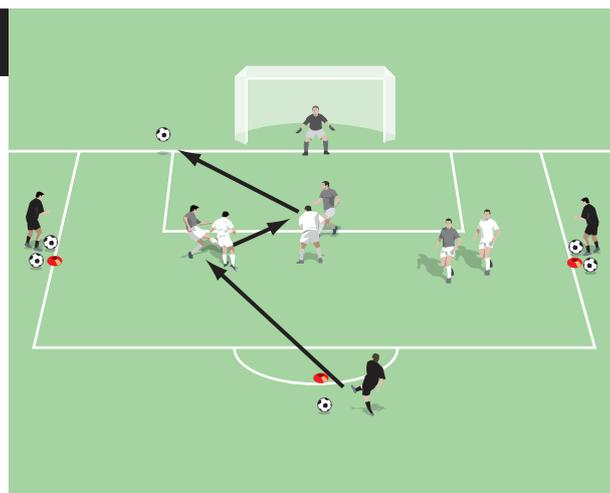
→ Ball Movement

1



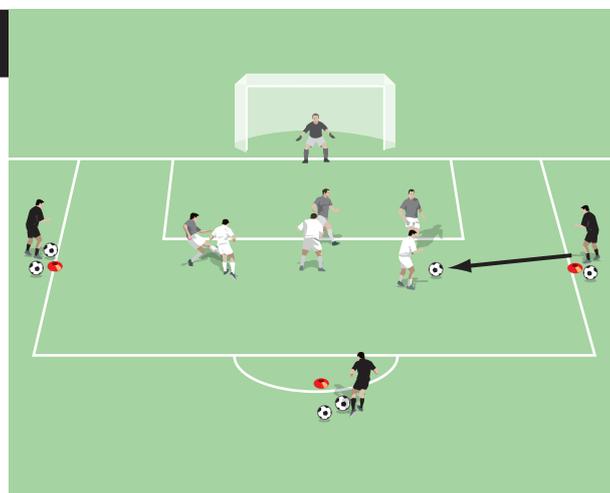
The defending team take up good marking positions.

2



The central defender saves his team mate who had temporarily lost his attacker.

3



Balls should be served quickly to keep a frantic "penalty area pace" to the game.

Defending in small groups

3 goal 3v3

This game improves man-to-man marking, tracking runners, dealing with players dribbling in a 1v1, sliding across to help team mates and much more.

The set up

Area: 25x30 yards

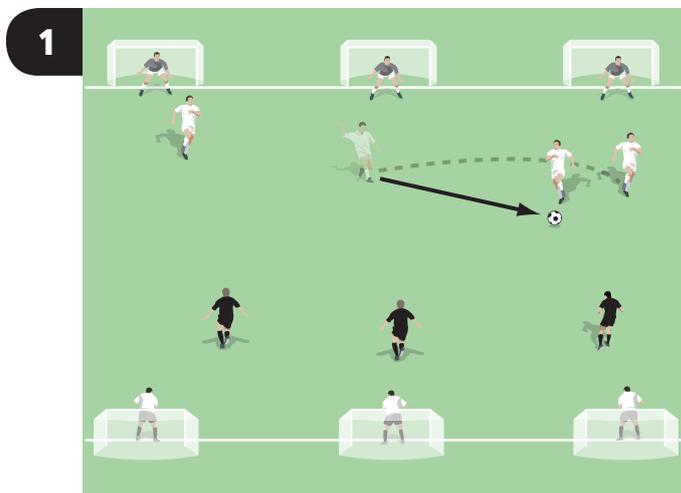
Equipment: 6 target goals, 1 ball

The steps

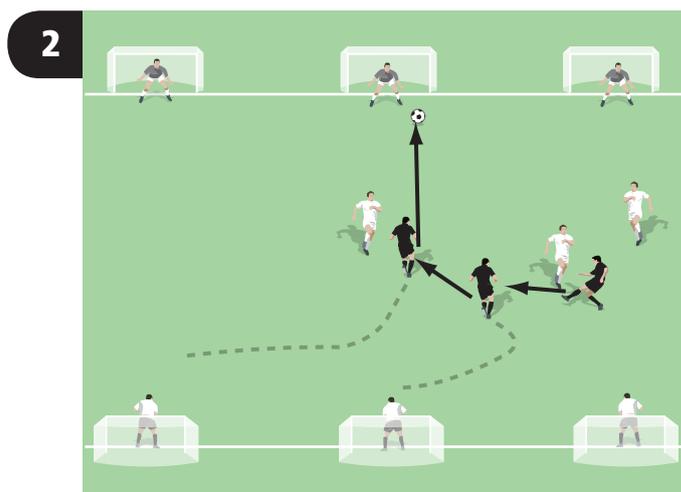
1. Split your players into 4 teams, with the resting teams working as goalkeepers for the two teams that are playing.
2. The defending team tries to win the ball and can attack any of the 3 goals defended by its opponent.
3. The teams play 3v3 for one goal then the teams rotate so that each team has a chance to play against each other.

What to call out

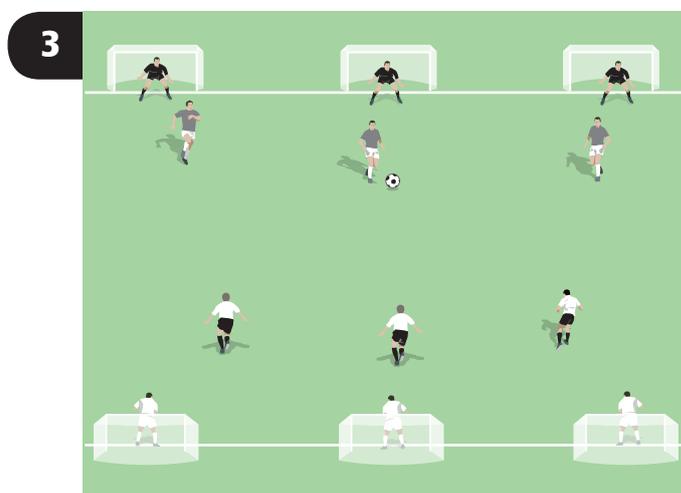
- "Nearest must pressure"
- "Support positions"
- "Stop shots, force play backwards or sideways"



Four teams are on the pitch. The white team attack the bottom goals.



The black team breaks out to attack the top goals, the white team rests.



Try to let the game flow, if a tackle is made allow a counter-attack rather than stopping the drill and bringing in new teams.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

Defending in small groups

4v4 dribble or pass

This game is designed to develop a deep defence that invite attacks in order to quickly counter attack.

The set up

Area: 25x30 yards

Equipment: 12 cones, 1 ball

The steps

1. Two teams of four players play a game and each team has a different way of scoring.
2. The white team drops back to defend their three yellow goals. The black team is aiming to dribble through the gates in order to score.
3. If the white team win possession then their aim is to quickly make a pass forward and through one of the black team's gates. This represents winning the ball in a game and then making a good pass into a midfielder or forward's feet.

What to call out

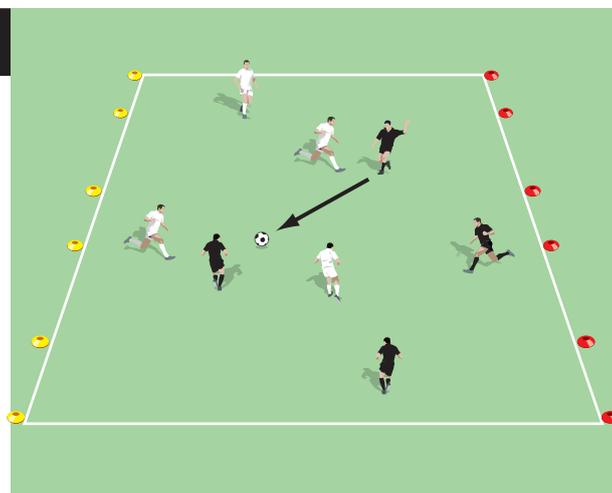
- "Force play towards team mates"
- "Be disciplined"
- "Don't get attracted to the ball, stay with your man"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

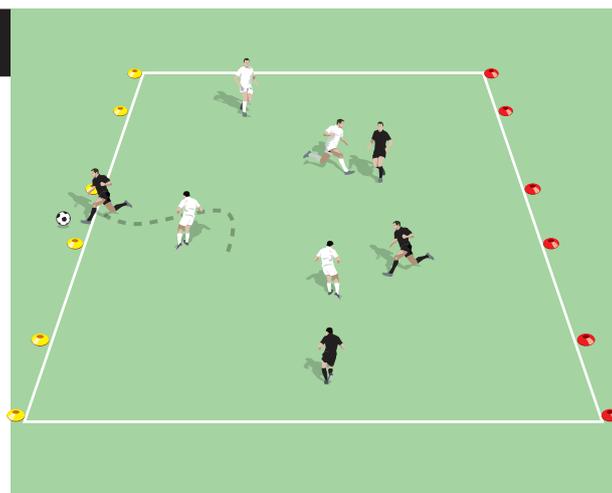
→
Ball Movement

1



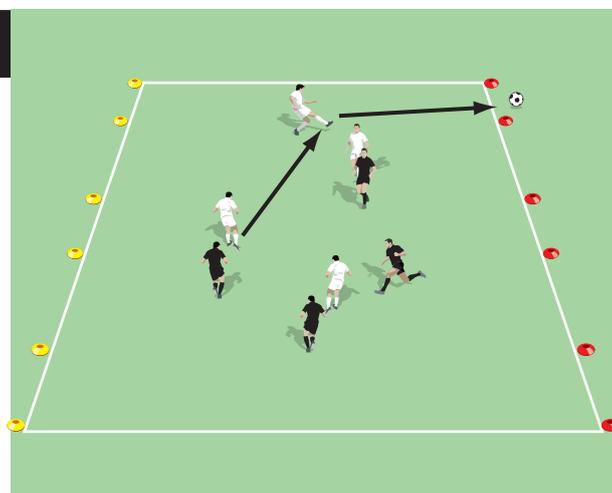
Each team has a different way to score in this gate game.

2



The black team must dribble through a gate to score a point.

3



The white team must pass the ball through a gate to score a point.

SECTION 4

Team defending

In this section we aim to show some examples of team defending. The drills can be modified to suit your team's needs and the tactics you apply.

Team tactics both in are in the majority of cases devised by the coach or management team and can be complex, taking weeks to develop on the training ground, or simple set of basic rules.

Some of the things that coaches have to make decisions on whether their team should:

- Apply high pressure that aims to win back possession high up the field
- Hold a deep line which invites opponents on to counter attack
- Always show players inside or sometimes show them outside
- Mark zonally or man-to-man?
- Play an offside trap or stay with your runners

Factors that may determine how you defend include the types of players at your disposal, the formation played, whether you are playing at home or away, and the opponent you are playing against.

However, some key factors will remain the same no matter what the circumstance:

- Reacting quickly to losing possession
- Working hard individually
- Working as a team
- Maintaining concentration
- Constant communication
- The ability to attack when the ball is regained

Shape walk through

This type of walk through practice is essential for a coach to get across their ideas to the players in a slow, but informative way. It also gives chances for the coach and players to ask / answer questions on areas they are unsure about.

The set up

Area: $\frac{3}{4}$ pitch

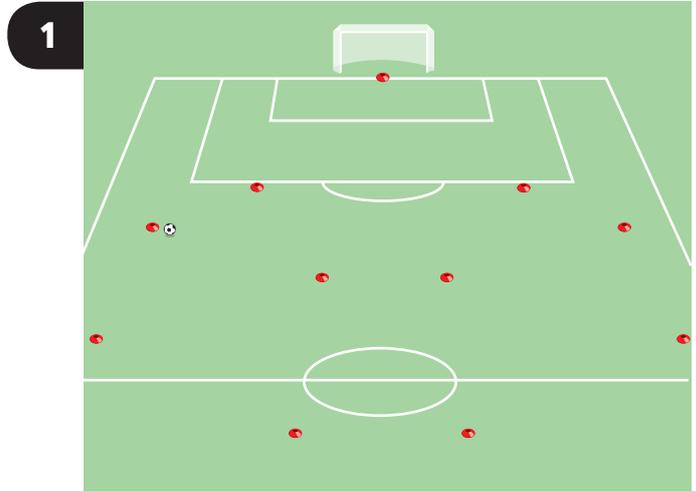
Equipment: Cones to represent opponents

The steps

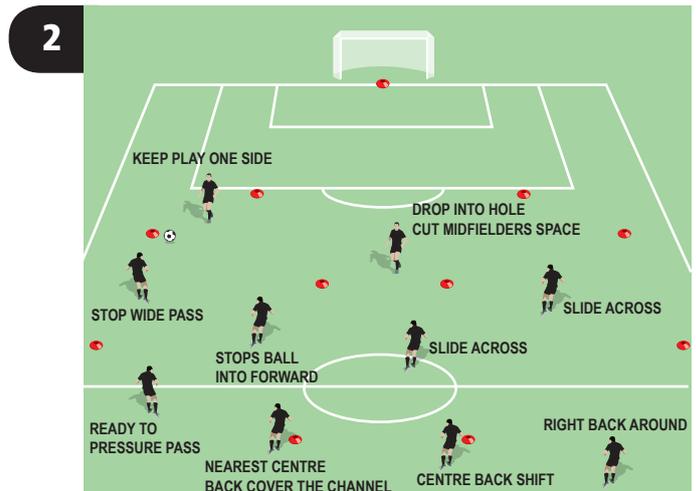
1. Lay out the opposing team's shape using cones.
2. Then with your players in your own formation do a walkthrough of pressure/shape depending on which opposing player has the ball.
3. Once comfortable with the walkthrough the coach should now be able to call out the position of the ball and the team quickly takes up the defensive shape as shown in the diagram example (4-4-2 v 4-4-2).

What to call out

- "Take up the correct position relative to the ball"
- "React to the next position called"
- "Get into shape"



Lay out your opponent's formation.



In this example the right back has possession.



The ball is with the centre forward and the players adjust their positions.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Make play predictable

This drill helps the team to make the pitch small when not in possession of the ball. If used enough, the players will be able to see the zones in their minds when playing in a real match and squeezing of space will be natural.

The set up

Area: $\frac{3}{4}$ pitch

Equipment: 4 cones, 1 ball

The steps

1. When the ball is central all players try to be inside the central zone. This stops the ball being played through the centre of the team and makes play predictable as the pass now has to go right or left.
2. Once that pass has been made then everybody shifts into the central zone and the zone the pass is made into. Now the team must squeeze up and keep the ball inside this zone, again making the pitch small and play predictable.
3. The movements are mirrored when the ball moves into the opposite zone.

What to call out

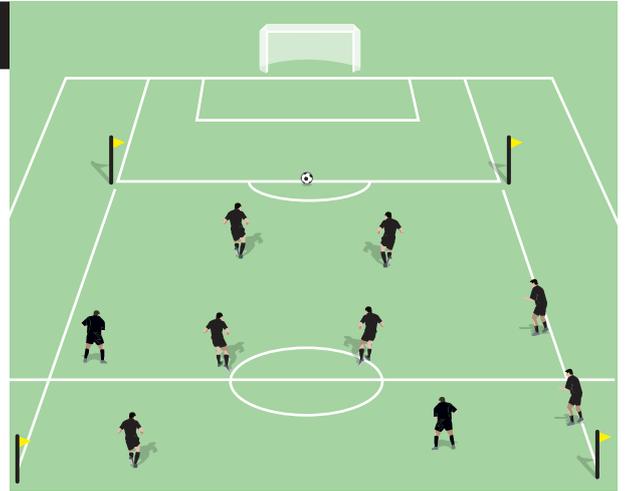
- "React to the ball's position"
- "Shift across quickly"
- "Make the pitch small"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

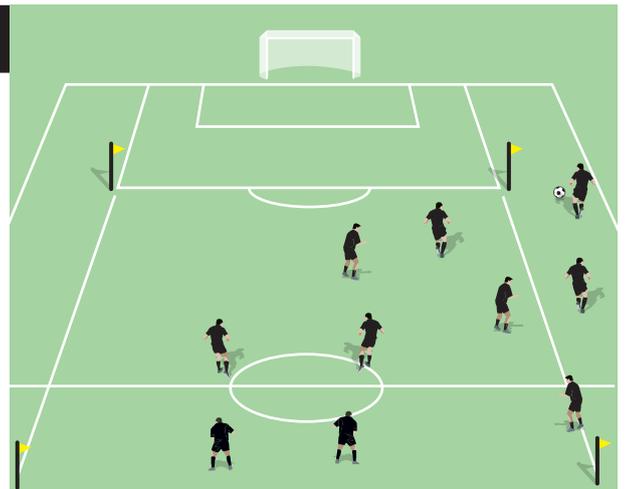
→
Ball Movement

1



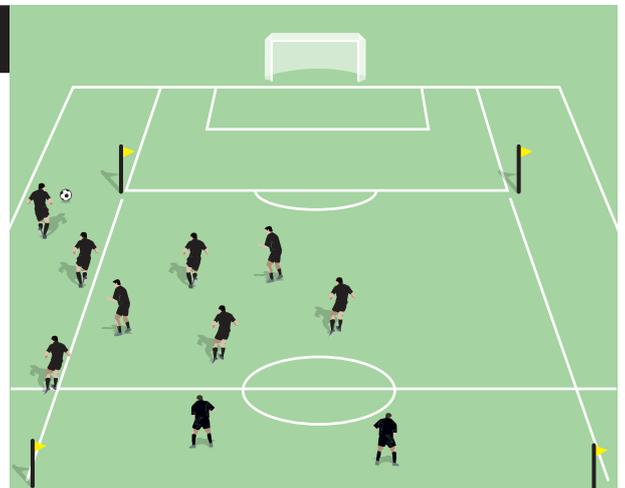
With all players in the central zone the ball must go wide.

2



Nobody should be in the left zone when the ball is played wide.

3



Play switching and the players move across.

Full team pressure

All players must be switched on and concentrating. They must stay on their feet and pressure their opponent quickly to force them to pass backwards or sideways.

The set up

Area: ½ pitch

Equipment: 1 ball, 2 goals

The steps

1. The attacking team starts the practice with their goalkeeper in possession of the ball.
2. The defending team does not have a goalkeeper and therefore must apply full pressure on their opponent in order to stop them getting time on the ball. Otherwise all the attackers have to do is get their head up and knock the ball into the open net.
3. The defenders must close the space quickly and force the opponent to play sideways or backwards. The whole group must slide across together when the ball is down one side of the pitch or push up if the ball is played backwards.

What to call out

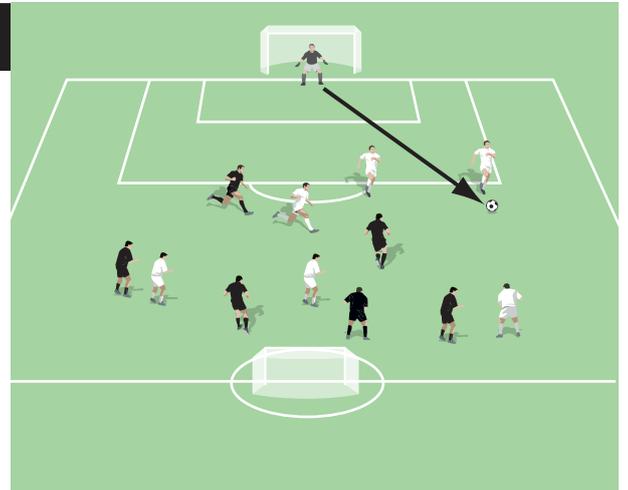
- "Get their head down"
- "Stop the forward pass"
- "Make the pitch small and force a mistake"

KEY

.....

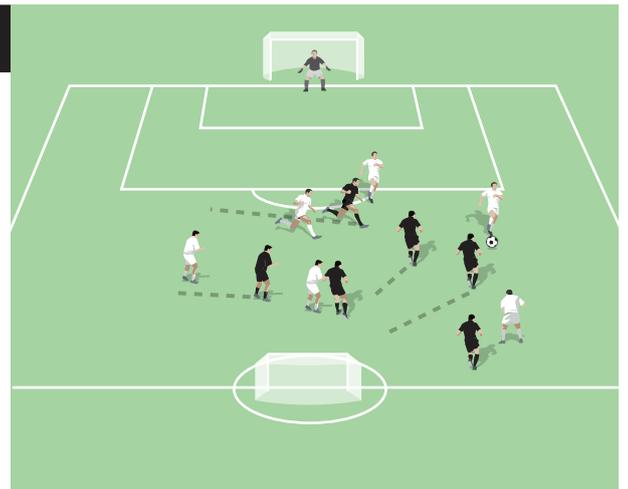
→

1



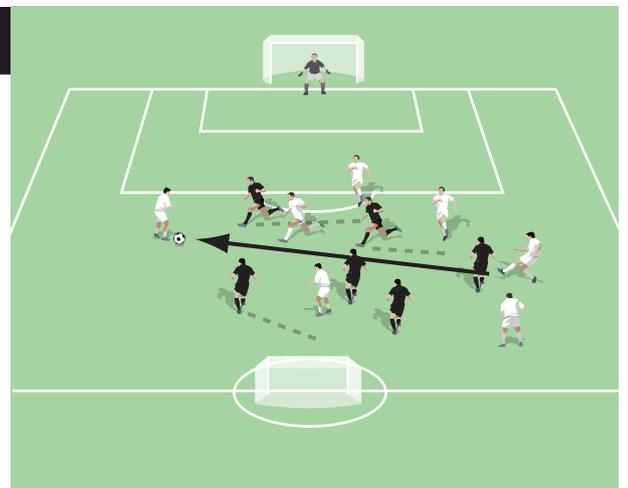
The goalkeeper passes out to start the drill.

2



The defending team applies pressure.

3



They force the attacker's to switch the ball.

Block the passing options

This drill improves how your team block the opponent's passing options into their attackers.

The set up

Area: $\frac{3}{4}$ pitch

Equipment: 1 goal, 4 target goals, supply of balls

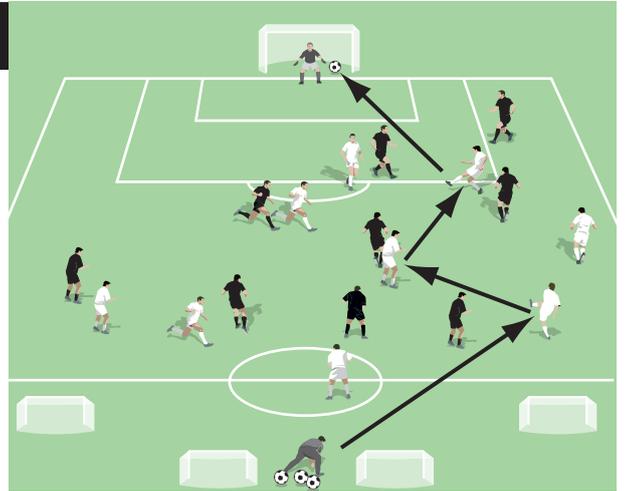
The steps

1. The attacking team continuously receives balls from the coach and looks to attack and score a goal.
2. The defending team must stop them doing this by pressing as a group to block passing options and limit space and time for the player on the ball.
3. The ultimate aim is to win possession of the ball and then score in one of the four target goals.

What to call out

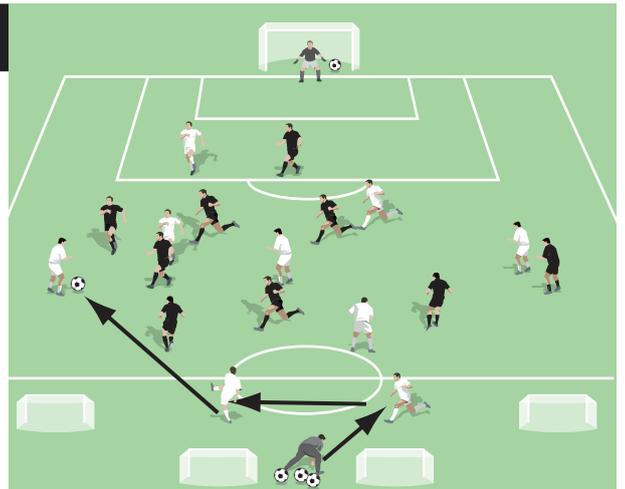
- "Put pressure on the ball"
- "Block the pass options"
- "Win the ball and attack quickly"

1



The defending team has to work hard to block the passing options.

2



They must adjust their positions as a whole unit.

3



Doing so will enable them to win possession and score.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

Balls into the forwards feet

What should your defenders and midfielders do when a ball is successfully played into the opponent's forwards? This drill shows firstly how to react and secondly how to defend this situation.

The set up

Area: ½ pitch

Equipment: 1 ball, 1 goal

The steps

1. The attacking team has 4 midfielders and two attackers. The defending team has four defenders and three midfielders
2. The attacking midfielders must pass the ball between themselves. The defenders and defending midfielders just shuttle across. On the coaches whistle a free pass is made into the forwards feet. now the game is "live".
3. The defending midfield must turn and close the space to win the ball. It is important that the other defenders also close in on the ball giving the player in possession little option other than to pass backwards or lose the ball.

What to call out

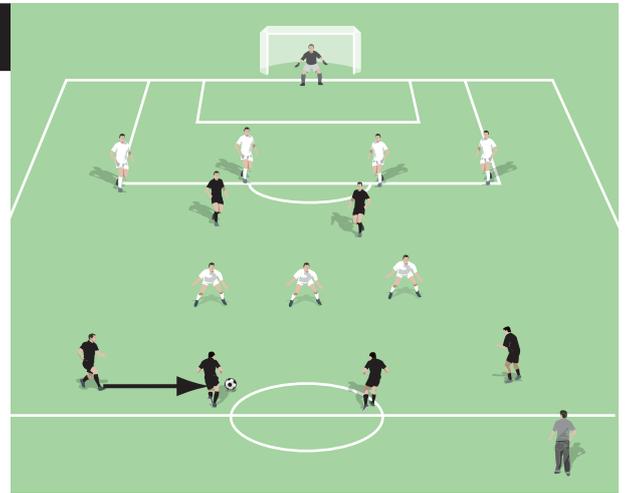
- "Stop the ball into the forwards by forcing play wide"
- "Can we win the ball from the front"
- "Stop the attackers turning and force the backward pass"

KEY

..... Player Movement

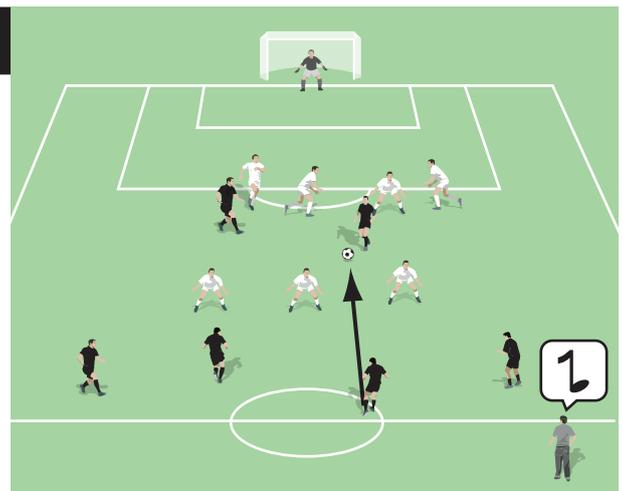
→ Ball Movement

1



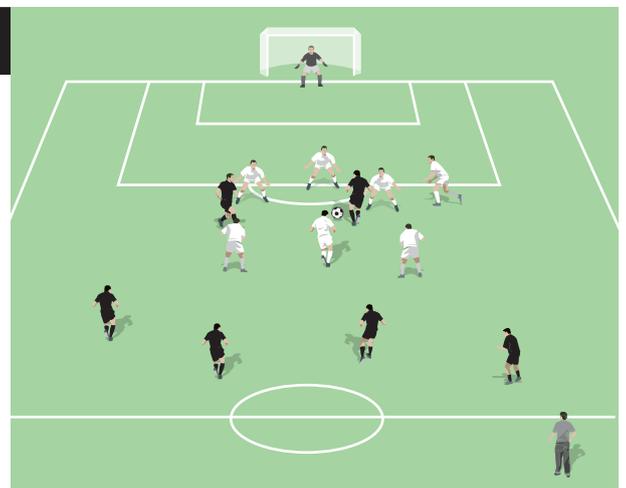
The attacking team waits for the starting whistle.

2



The attackers receive the ball to feet.

3



The defenders must close on the attackers and isolate from their midfielders.

Dealing with long balls

Dealing with a direct style of play is very hard as it forces your players to deal with lots of physical confrontation and aerial battles. It is vitally important your players understand how to react to this type of pressure and are aware that communication is crucial.

The set up

Area: ½ pitch

Equipment: 3 cones, 3 balls, 1 goal

The steps

1. The defenders must push high and get close together.
2. As the ball is played the defenders must decide on who is going to challenge for the ball. The other defenders must drop around this player and cover ready for the ball to drop.
3. The three servers take it in turns to play aerial passes and the defenders must stop the attacker by winning the initial header or picking up the second ball.

What to call out

- "Get together"
- "Drop as ball is played"
- "Who is attacking the ball, where is the cover?"

KEY

..... Player Movement

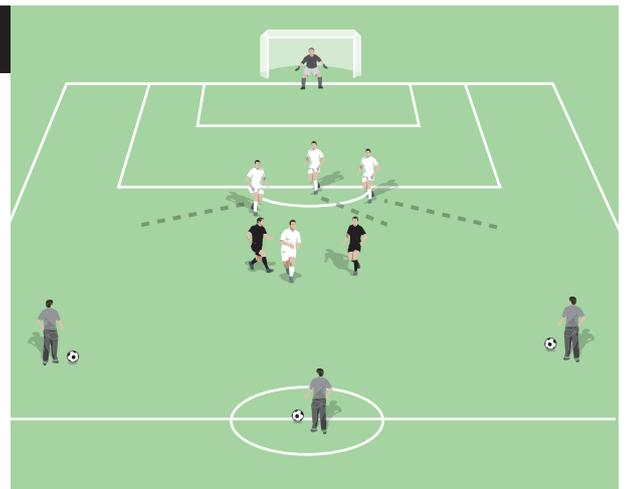
→ Ball Movement

1



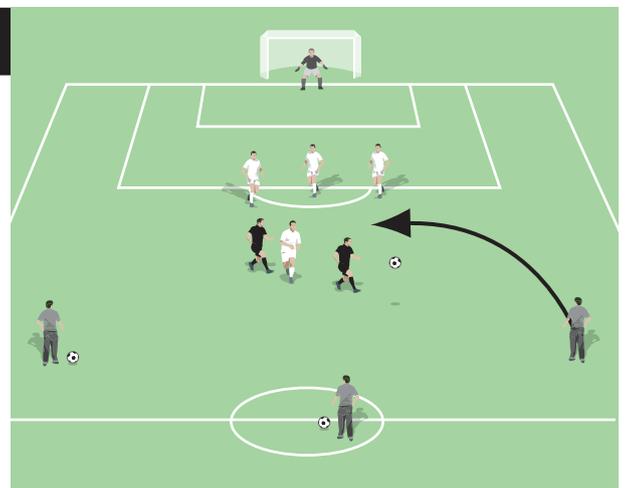
The defenders push high and defend narrow.

2



A defender takes responsibility to challenge for the header.

3



The remaining defenders drop back to collect flick ons and prevent an attack.

Long ball game

This game progresses from the previous one and now looks at how you can relieve the pressure on your defence by pressuring and blocking the opponents long passes. In addition, it is vitally important that midfielder runners are tracked by your midfielders.

The set up

Area: 60x30 yards

Equipment: 2 goals, supply of balls

The steps

1. One group of defenders has the ball and combines before playing a longer ball into the pair of forwards. The defenders must try to clear the ball out of their half.
2. Once the ball is played (goal scored or ball leaves the pitch), the coach passes a ball onto the pitch to restart the practice.
3. To increase the difficulty, allow the forwards to pressure the defenders to affect the quality of the ball forward.

What to call out

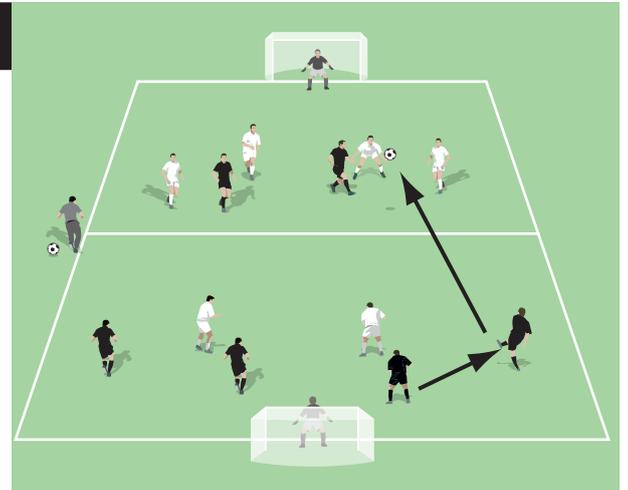
- "Get together and then drop off as a group"
- "Communicate on who is attacking the ball, other must cover"
- "Stay with midfielder runners"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

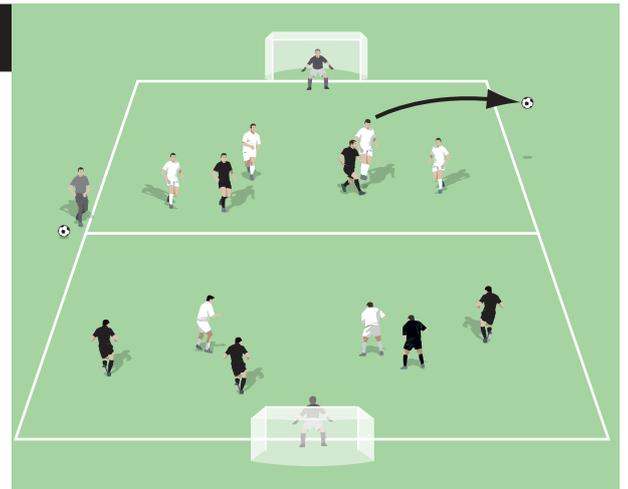
→
Ball Movement

1



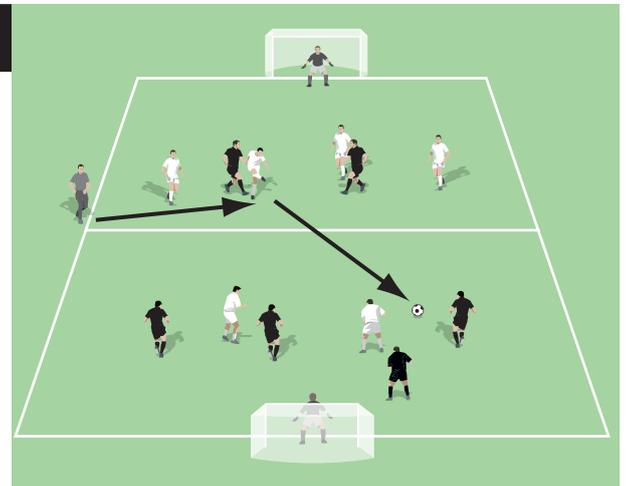
The black team starts with a long ball to the forwards.

2



The white team organises and clears the danger.

3



The black attacker puts pressure on the pass and forces a mistake.

SECTION 5

Fun defending games

A key secret I use when planning my sessions is to ensure that I start and end the session with a fun practice.

The aim of this method is to ensure that all players are integrated into the session, communicating with each other and warmed up for the practices ahead. This way, at the end of the session they are going home happy and really looking forward to the next one.

This secret is a very simple plan of action but one that is crucial to the overall confidence and morale of the teams I coach.

This is especially important when working on defending. The way in which you put across the theme of the session will often dictate the energy and effort of your players.

By starting with a fun game you can slowly build the defending techniques and mindset through laughter and enjoyment.

Key factors

- Get every player involved in the practice
- Encourage hard work
- Try to make the games competitive amongst individuals or teams
- Include a fun forfeit for the losers (10 seconds singing or dancing)

Race to block

This drill works on reactive speed and forces the players to work at match speed in order to be successful.

The set up

Area: 25x25 yards

Equipment: 3 poles, 3 balls, 1 goal

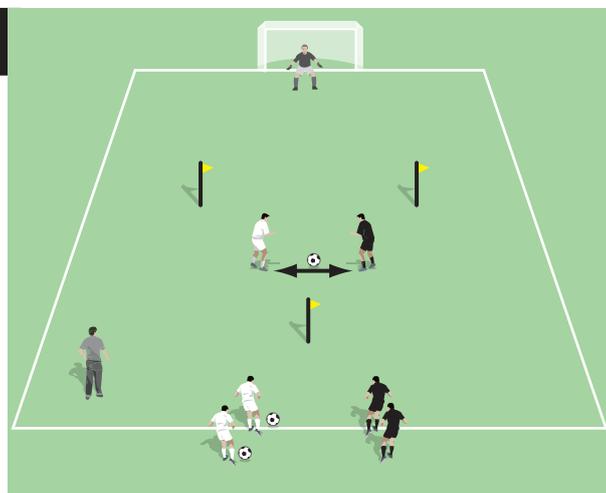
The steps

1. Split your players into two lines, with one line acting as defenders and one line as the attackers.
2. The players pass the ball back and forth. On the coaches' whistle, they quickly run around their poles.
3. The attacker must then shoot first time and the defender must try to clear the ball or block the shot.

What to call out

- "React"
- "Get in line with the ball"
- "Stop the shot"

1



The players pass the ball back and forth.

2



On the coaches shout they race around their poles.

3



The defender recovers in time to block the shot.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

Defend the area

To be effective the defenders should isolate the attacker they are going to stop and then work together in order to win the ball.

The set up

Area: 30x20 yards

Equipment: 8 balls

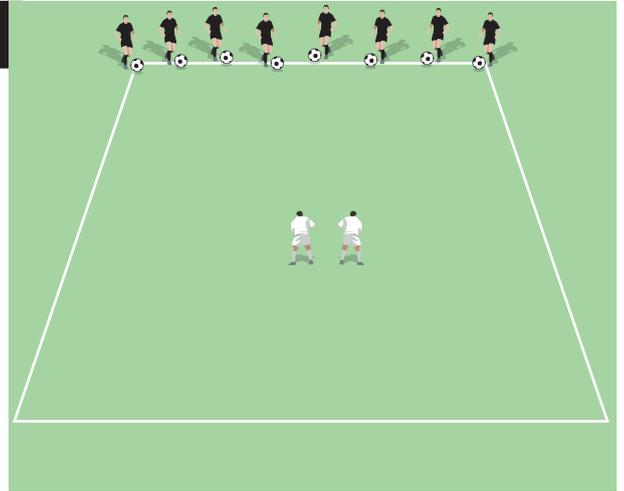
The steps

1. Nominate a player to start as the defender or for larger groups in a bigger area you may wish to use two defenders.
2. The attackers attempt to dribble across the area to the opposite side while the defenders must try to stop them by tackling or clearing the ball.
3. If the attacker is tackled then they become a defender for the next game which begins from the other side.

What to call out

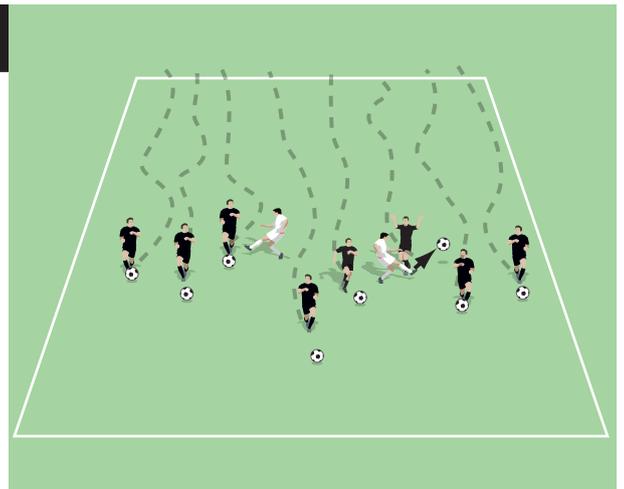
- "Who are you going to tackle?"
- "Pressure quickly"
- "Stay on your feet to win the ball"

1



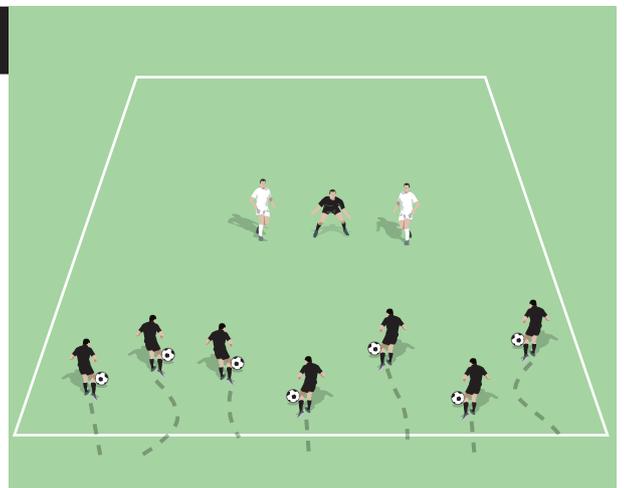
The two defenders face an army of attackers.

2



One defender makes a successful tackle. The other attackers escape.

3



The tackled player joins the defender for the next game in the opposite direction.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

—————>
Ball Movement

Fox and hound

The defenders must be light on their toes in order to react quickly to the attacker's movement.

The set up

Area: 10x10 yards

Equipment: 5 cones, 4 balls

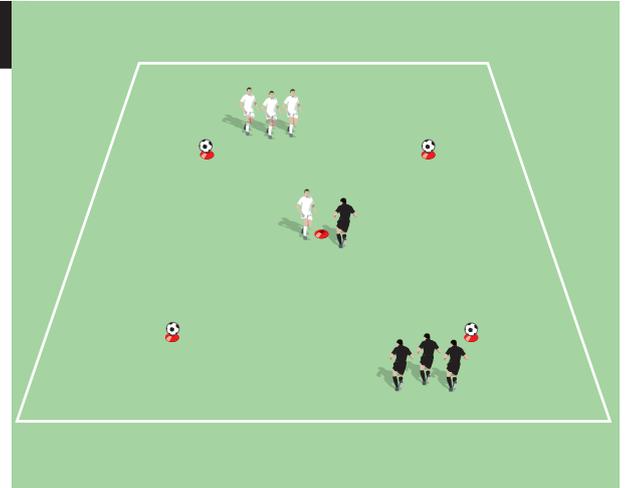
The steps

1. Two players jog on the spot at the middle cone, one is the fox and one is the hound.
2. When the fox is ready he quickly attempts to run and knock a ball off of one of the cones.
3. The hound attempts to catch the fox and tag him before he can knock the ball off.

What to call out

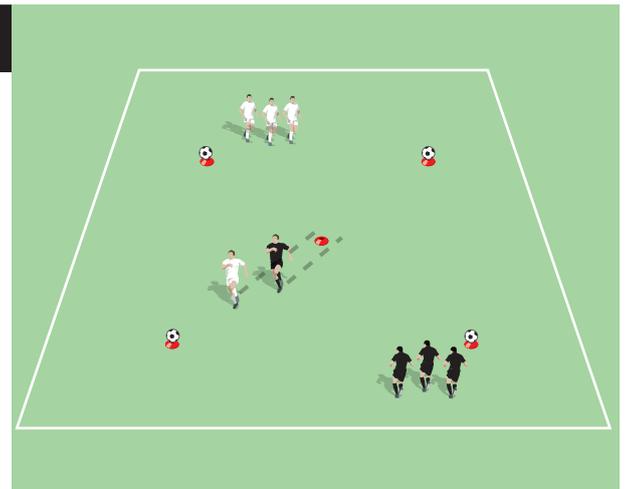
- "Be on your toes"
- "React quickly"
- "Stop the attacker"

1



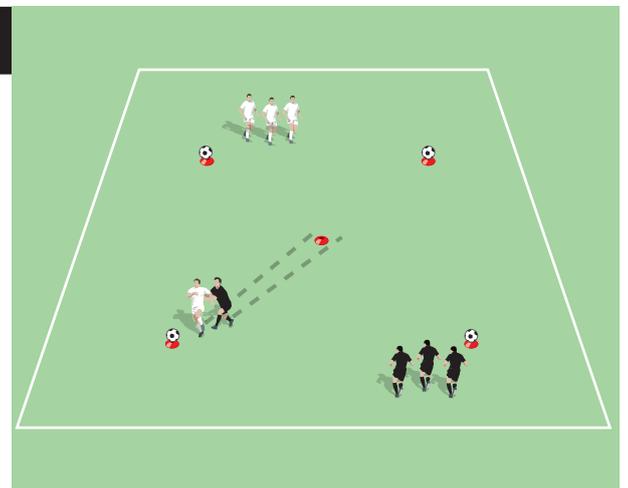
The fox (white) and hound (black) start at the central cone.

2



The fox makes a break to reach one of the outside cones.

3



The hound catches the fox before he reaches the ball.

KEY

.....
Player Movement

→
Ball Movement

The shield

The players with a ball must shield and defend for their life whilst the defender without a ball competes hard to win possession. The different sizes and strengths of your players ensure each physical battle is different and a good learning opportunity for your players.

The set up

Area: 10 yard diameter circle

Equipment: 6 cones, 6 balls

The steps

1. One player is nominated as the defender. The other players go around the outside of the area and place their ball onto a cone.
2. The defender must try and knock a ball off one of the players' cones while the players use their body to shield and protect the ball.
3. If the defender is successful in knocking the ball away then the roles are reversed with the player now becoming the new defender.

What to call out

- "Be strong"
- "Use your arms and body"
- "Protect the ball"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

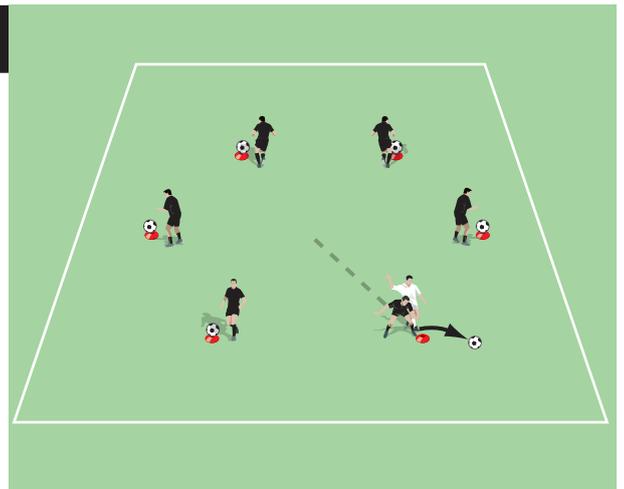
—————>
Ball Movement

1



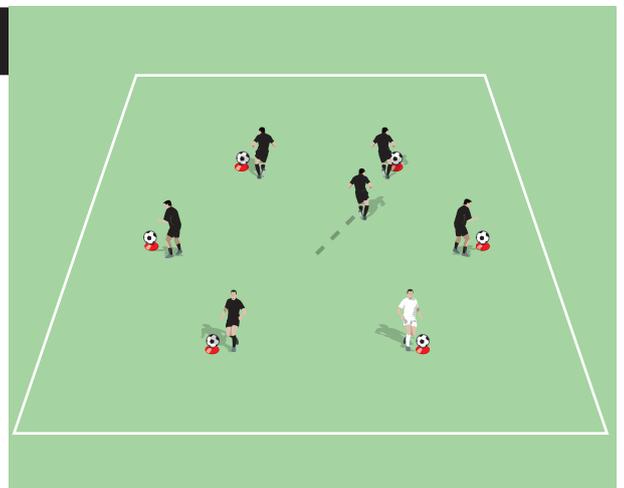
The players shield their balls around a circle.

2



The defender uses his strength to knock a ball off of a cone.

3



The defeated player now has to challenge one of the other players.

King of the ring

This practice forces the players to be very clever in their movements as they have to protect their own ball at the same time as trying to remove their opponent's ball from the game.

The set up

Area: 25x25 yards

Equipment: Ball each

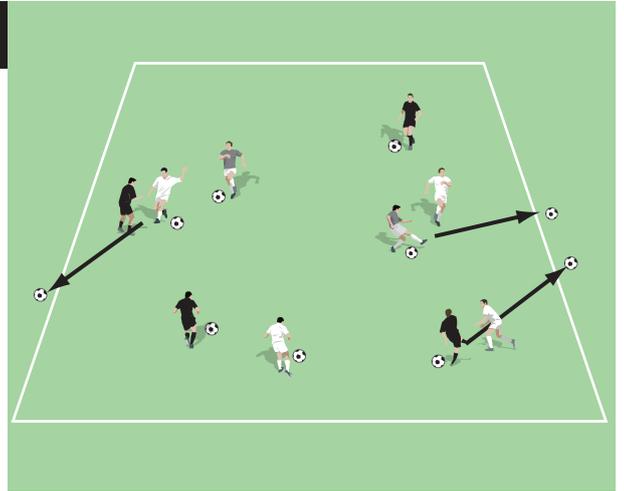
The steps

1. Each player has a ball and dribbles around the area.
2. Players attempt to kick an opponent's ball out of the area while at the same time protecting their own ball from being stolen and kicked out.
3. If your ball is kicked out then you are out of the game. The last player left inside the area is the declared the winner.

What to call out

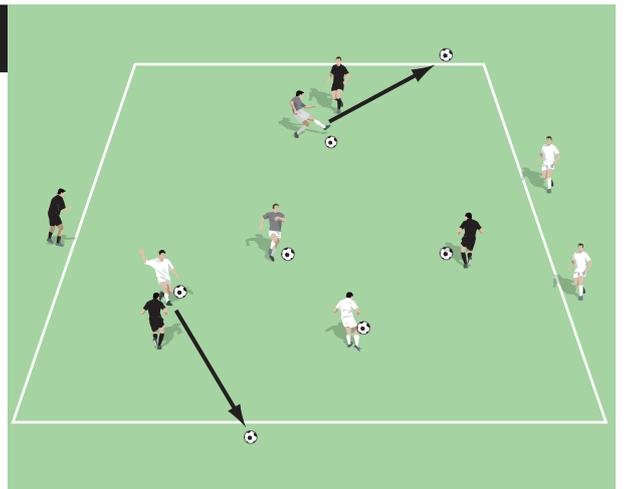
- "Protect your ball"
- "Can you kick someone else's ball out?"
- "Keep on the move"

1



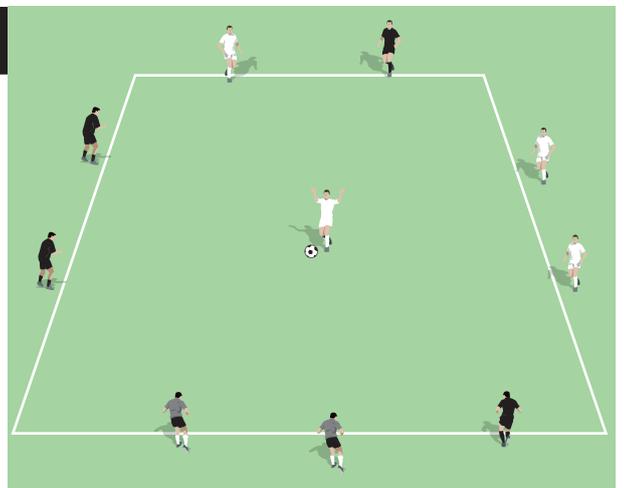
It's difficult to balance attack and defence in the ring.

2



The game becomes more considered as the number of players falls.

3



Who will be crowned King of the Ring?

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Coconut shy

This game improves reactions and the reading of your opponent in order to intercept the pass. The defender must be light on their toes if they are to intercept the pass and help their team to win the game.

The set up

Area: 20x10 yards

Equipment: 8 cones, 14 balls

The steps

1. Players are divided into two teams and each team has four cones and four balls to defend as shown in the diagram.
2. The teams take it in turns to dribble and make a grounded pass towards the opponent's cones aiming to knock one of the balls off.
3. After passing, the player must react quickly and try to block the opponent's pass.

Play for one minute and the team with the most balls still on cones wins.

What to call out

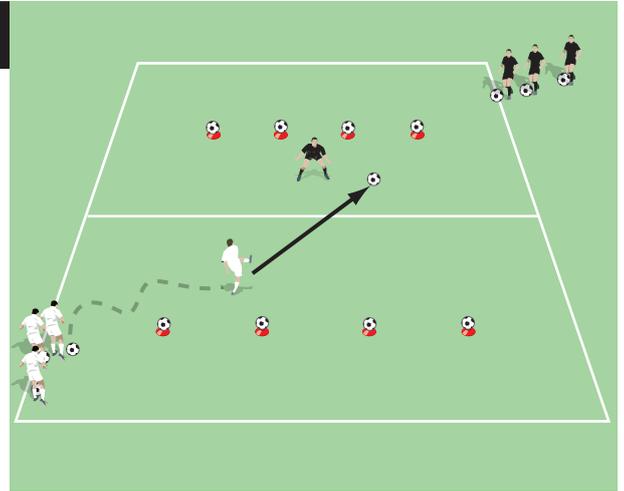
- "React"
- "Get in line with the ball"
- "Stop the shot"

KEY

.....
Player Movement

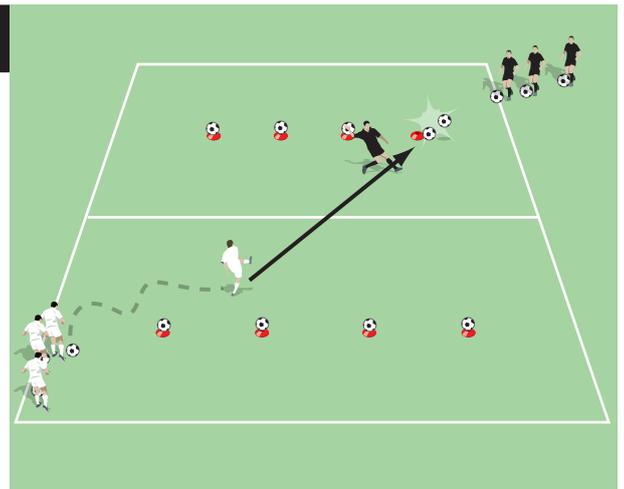
—————>
Ball Movement

1



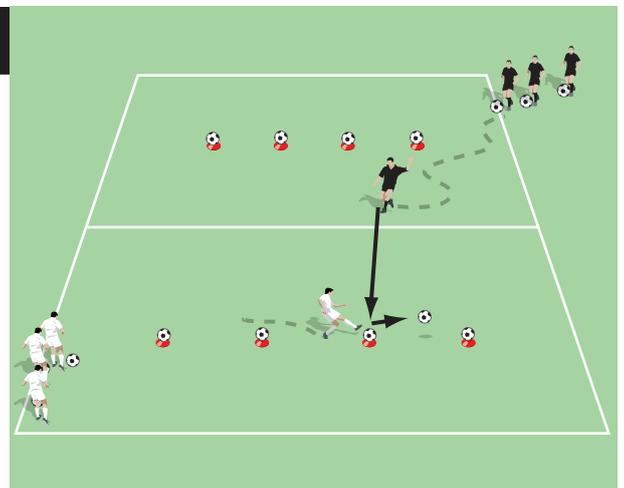
The white player aims for the furthest cone.

2



The defender is slow to react and his team loses a ball.

3



The white player reacts quickly to protect his balls.

Rugby football

This fun game uses elements of rugby in order to teach group defending. Encourage the nearest player to pressure the ball and then once the ball has been passed to get back in line.

The set up

Area: 30x20 yards

Equipment: 12 cones, 1 ball

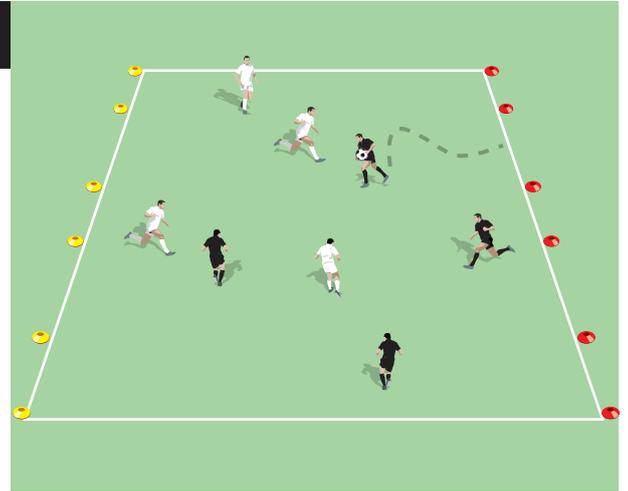
The steps

1. Players are divided into two teams and have to run with the ball in their hands and score by running through the gates while in possession.
2. The players may pass the ball by throwing it to a teammate and avoid interceptions by the opposition.
3. To tackle an opponent you must touch him with both hands and you are given the ball.

What to call out

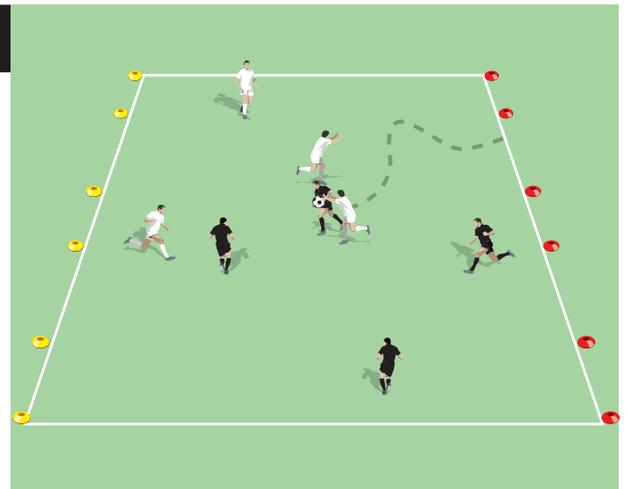
- "Nearest must pressure"
- "Others to cover"
- "Work as a team"

1



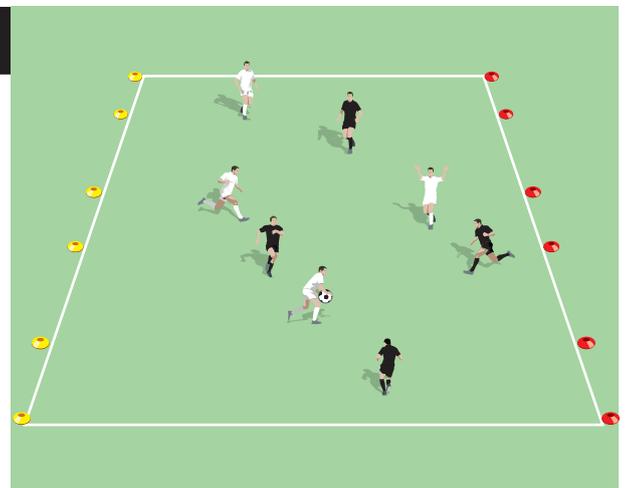
The black player tries to break through the white team's defence.

2



But he's tagged by a defender and loses possession.

3



The black team needs to reorganize its line to stop the white team scoring.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

Multi-ball game

This game will start with many 1v1 situations but as the balls decrease we will see a number of random situations such as 2v2, 3v3, 2v4 etc.

The set up

Area: 30x30 yards

Equipment: 6 target goals, lots of balls

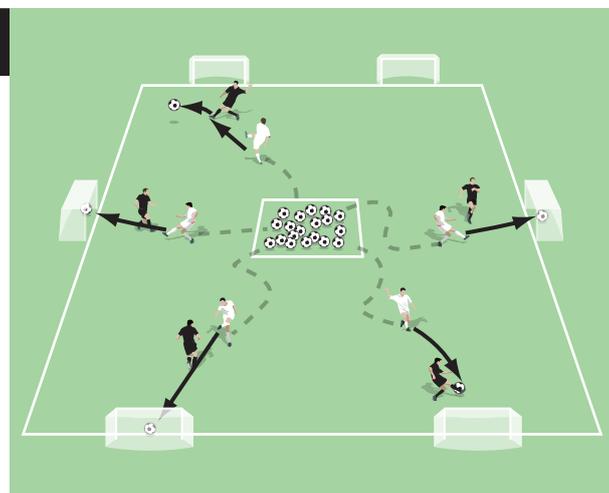
The steps

1. On the coaches whistle the attackers get a ball each and attempt to score in one of the goals.
2. After each shot the attackers return to the middle to get another ball.
3. Once all balls have been played the number of balls in the goals should be counted and then the roles are reversed.

What to call out

- "React to all balls"
- "Pressure the attackers"
- "Work together to win the ball"

1



The game starts with a series of 1v1 attacks.

2



As the game progresses the defenders must react quickly to different numbers of attackers combining.

3



The team that conceded the fewest goals wins.

KEY

..... Player Movement

→ Ball Movement

