



Defending In the Defensive Third

Objective: To help players recognize the transition to defense and the shape necessary to effectively defend in the defensive third. Pressure, cover and balance in relation to this shape are crucial in order to make play predictable and win the ball back.

1) 4v4+GK Pattern Play Warm-up (15-20 minutes including dynamic stretching):

In the defensive 3rd of the field, four attacking players pass the ball side to side, while the four back players + GK shadow their play (movement) by sliding as a unit laterally and providing pressure, cover and balance appropriately. This way, the defending unit visualizes their defensive responsibility changes in a gradual, patterned manner.



Coaching Points:

- Discuss when to pressure, how to pressure and where to pressure ball - Immediate pressure on the ball and ensuring the first defender is making the play predictable by forcing the player with the ball into DEAD space (towards their cover defenders).
- Players in covering positions should be at about a 30-45 degree angle from first defender, communicating to them about which way they should be forcing the person with the ball, etc.
- Player(s) in a balancing position(s) should be behind ball, in a position to see both ball and 3rd attackers and to transition to attack if the ball is won.
- Defensive shape is a key to successfully winning the ball back. – Flat, connected and compact, forcing the ball to where the defensive numbers are.

2) 4v4 + 1 Neutral player – Dribbling Across the end line (15 minutes):

Two teams of 4 try and dribble the ball across the opposing team's end line. Each team is allowed to use the neutral player in order to create a 5 v. 4 attacking situation. (The neutral player does not play defense and only plays with the team in possession.) Defenders learn to shift from side to side and mark the most dangerous players while leaving 1 attacker (the least dangerous one) unmarked. Quick recognition and decision making are the key elements to this activity. Encourage communication amongst the defenders when making quick marking adjustments.



Coaching Points:

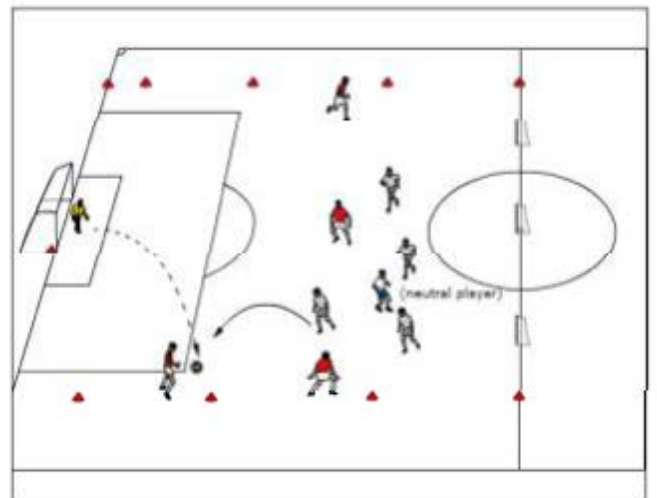
- Pressure on the ball must be applied immediately to delay the progress of the attacking team, allowing the defending action to organize.
- While the ball is being pressured, other back players must get into good defensive cover and balancing positions to prevent penetration to the goal.
- Changing roles quickly, as the ball travels, is vital to the success of the defending action. It takes discipline, communication, fitness and tactical speed.

Visual cues for defenders are:

- If player receiving the ball does not have control, then tackle and win possession of the ball!
- If player receiving the ball does have control, then defender has to make a decision as to how closely to apply pressure, whether to contain or delay because they are numbers down, whether to close down space quickly because they are numbers up, and/or whether to force to cover or to the outside, depending upon where they are on the field and where the goal and their cover is located.
- Defender on the ball also wants to be aware of the attacking team's 2nd and 3rd attacking players.
- If defenders can force the player with the ball into a numbers down situation and cut off weak side players, they are more likely to be effective.
- If there is immediate and tight pressure on the ball, defenders off the ball can squeeze the space centrally, making the field smaller for the attacking team.
- If pressure on the ball is light (loose), then cover and balance are looser, as well.
- The balancing player should recognize third attacker movement off the ball (i.e.: overlapping runs) and shift slightly to weak side if there is loose pressure on the ball. If there is tight pressure, balancing player simply needs to be aware of players coming through, communicating to teammates about when to pick them up, pass them off and when & where to shift on the field defensively.

3) 5v5 +1 Neutral Player + 1 GK to 3 small goals on half a field x 50 yards (15 minutes):

On a 1/2 field x 50 yards to one goal and 3 counter goals. Defend the goal with the purpose to counter attack. Keeper takes on sweeper role when team has possession of the ball. In half a field, the team of 5+ 1 neutral player defends the goal and tries to score on two 3 yard goals placed wide on the midfield line. The opposite team tries to score in the goal and defensively tries to prevent the other team to score on the two small goals. Work with the teams to help them creating a good shape as soon as they regain possession of the ball.



Coaching Points:

- Reinforce coaching points from Game#1&2.

4) Game to two goals with GKs (40 minutes): Play 9v9, 10v10 or 11v11 with goal keepers.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce coaching points made throughout the training session.

5) Cool-down (5-10 minutes):

Individual juggling; challenge players to see who can juggle the most in a 2 minute period.