



Football Coaching and Player Development

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Working with the Back Four - A Training Session

The back four of any team is a key component and not conceding goals is vital, making sure that they are capable of working together takes time and effort. Considering I like my teams to play very open and attack minded, defending becomes even more crucial and is an area of the game that I feel needs a special focus and must be as detailed as possible. Here is a session that I use to try and improve my back four and their ability to defend as a unit.

Part A) Defending in fours



Set up

- Four teams of four players in a grid (40yds x 30yds) as shown above.
- Blue is defending against red, they attempt to stay compact and prevent red from playing the ball over the line and into yellow. If yellow receives the ball they will then attack red, who will try and prevent them from playing the ball into orange.

Focus and Objectives

- The focus here is defending as a unit of four. We attempt to disallow the team in possession to play through us in any way. We do this by making sure there is always immediate pressure on the ball and the space between the four

defenders remains compact.

Part B) Defending with the back four against four



Set up

- Continue using the grid from Part A.
- Place a goal and your goalkeeper on one end.
- Assign your back four.
- Place two cones at the midway mark of the grid, this is your restart point and offside line (offside can only take place after this point).

Focus and Objectives

- The objective of the back four is to work collectively to prevent the four attackers from scoring.
- If the ball is won by your back four, the goalkeeper, or goes out of play, it should be played into the next group of attackers who will then commence their attack.
- Before every new attack begins, the back four must reset themselves at the restart point (this allows them a few seconds recovery before the next group attacks).

Part C) Defending out wide and centrally with the back four



Set Up

- Using the half of a pitch, place one goal with a goalkeeper on the goal line.
- Set your back four.
- Set your attacking team (2 strikers, 2 wide midfielders, 2 central midfielders).
- Mark a line (using cones) that extends from the edge of each corner of the 18 yard box, as shown above. Place a tall cone on each of the lines, 15 yards in front of the box. This is your restart point and also marks the no advance/retreat line, meaning the 2 central midfielders cannot advance past that point and the wide midfielders as well as strikers cannot retreat further back than that point.
- The wide midfielders must stay in the outside lanes, as shown above.
- Have one player stand at the half, they will be used to restart play.

Focus and Objectives

- Always working with your back four defenders, the objective here is to prevent the attacking team from creating chances on goal. If the back four win the ball, they quickly look to play it into the player standing at the half who will then restart the next attack.
- Here the focus is on two aspects, how your back four will react when the ball is pushed out wide to one of the outside midfielders, or how they will react to a ball being played into one of the two strikers.

Part D) Defending with the back four in a 6v6 situation



Set Up

- Here we have created a 6v6 game, using just less than a full half of the pitch (as shown above), place 2 goals with goalkeepers on either end.

- Both teams use a 4-2 formation.
- Always use offside.

Focus and Objectives

- The focus remains the back four, here we are trying to take what we focused on in Part C and apply it here without the use of any restrictions.

Part E) Progressing to 8v8



Set Up

- Same as Part D, however we now add two more wide players and both teams play in a 4-4 formation.
- Always use offside.

Focus and Objectives

- The focus always remains the back four, as highlighted above. The objective is try and prevent the attacking team from scoring even though we have now added more options and variables without restrictions.

Part F) Ending with 11v11



Set Up

- Using the entire half we now end with an 11v11 match.
- Be sure to use the offside rule.

Focus and Objectives

- Of course the focus remains the back four and now we can see how/if they are able to apply what we have focused on during the session and apply it into a full 11v11 scenario.

Defending Principles - Remember these throughout your session

1. Pressure - needs to be applied immediately by the closest defender at all times.
2. Delay - when caught out of position at any point, the delay tactic is required. Patience is essential here.
3. Cover/Support - after pressure is applied to the man on the ball, cover/support must be provided by other players in the back four. Make sure to encourage proper recovery runs if a defender is beaten.
4. Balance - often provided by the furthest player from the ball in the back four, they must be in a position that still offers support to teammates but also allows him/her the opportunity to shift across if the ball is switched onto their side in order to provide pressure.
5. Compactness - the back four must be reminded to remain compact. It is very important that these four players remain a unit and learn to work cohesively.
6. Concentration and Communication - the back four must stay focused and use communication skills in order to remain as one unit. A lack of communication or a slip in concentration are errors that often lead to goals being conceded.

Victor Satei at 11:18

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