



UNIT-SPECIFIC SESSION: CENTRE-BACKS

SESSION OVERVIEW

OBJECTIVES

- Enhance defenders' proficiency in passing forward and breaking lines.
- Develop defenders' capabilities in defending wide areas and during crossing scenarios.

PART 1: PLAYING FORWARD AND DEFENDING WIDE AREAS

This practice introduces the fundamental concepts of passing forward and defending effectively as a centre back. The initial play-forward element is conducted in a semi-opposed manner. Once the pass is executed, the centre-back must swiftly recover to engage an attacker in a wide 1v1 situation, testing their defensive skills in the wider areas of the field.

PART 2: 5V5 (+1) ZONED GAME

The focus of this segment is on playing out from the back in a 3v2 situation favouring the centre-backs. The ball is then transitioned into a 3v2 situation favouring the attackers. Defenders are challenged to find ways to work the ball to the spare player in possession, and to effectively defend against the overload when out of possession. Players must understand how to press the ball to force play wide, sharpening their defensive awareness and decision-making.

PART 3: 5V5 (+2) GAME

In this small-sided game, centre-backs collaborate with their wing-backs or full-backs to defend the box. They face more players in and around them during attacking and defensive phases, creating confusion and testing their ability to mark and play zonally effectively while defending. When playing out from the back, there are additional passing options available to advance forward, requiring the defenders to coordinate and reduce the spaces between them.

Through this comprehensive session, defenders will improve their passing accuracy and decision-making, enhance their defensive capabilities in wide areas and crossing situations, and develop a deeper understanding of team defensive strategies. Regular practice of these skills will make the defenders more reliable assets on the field, contributing significantly to the team's defensive solidity and attacking build-up play.

PLAYING FORWARD AND DEFENDING WIDE AREAS (PART 1)

This unopposed technical practice is designed to enhance a centre-back's ability to execute forward passes and defend in wider areas. The session is set up on a pitch with the width of the 18-yard box and 30 yards in length. Two target goals are positioned on the top line, a few yards in from the touchline. An end channel is designated for a second defender (Player B), approximately eight yards deep.

The session commences with a centre-back (Player A) receiving a pass from the goalkeeper. Upon receiving the ball, Player A dribbles to the edge of the 18-yard line and attempts to play a precise pass into one of the top target goals, as depicted in Diagram 1. Player B aims to intercept or block this pass, simulating defensive pressure.



Once Player A has attempted to score in the target goals, an attacker positioned outside the box (Player C) dribbles forward and endeavours to score into the goal. Player A quickly recovers and assumes a defensive position to engage in a 1v1 situation, as shown in Diagram 2.

For variety, Player A and Player B can rotate after each repetition, particularly if both are centre-backs. Alternatively, if an additional attacker is available, they can join the rotation with Player C.

PROGRESSION

- To further challenge the centre-back, if Player B successfully intercepts the pass into the target goals, they can initiate an attack. In this scenario, the centre-back must defend in a 2v1 situation, with the wide player joining the attack, requiring quick decision-making and defensive adaptability.
- The coach can also modify the position of the attacker who dribbles into the box after the initial pass into the target goals. This variation introduces different challenges for the centre-back in terms of recovery and defensive positioning.

Through this dynamic practice, centre-backs will refine their forward passing abilities, develop crucial defensive skills in wider areas, and enhance their adaptability in varying scenarios. Regular practice will make them more well-rounded players and valuable assets to the team's defensive strategy and attacking build-up play.

COACHING PROCESS

IN POSSESSION

FIRST TOUCH

- **Emphasise First Touch:** The centre-back should prioritise their first touch before passing. Directing the ball into a position that allows them to pass into either target goal will make it harder for the defender to anticipate the pass.

PASS DETAIL

- **Utilise Disguise:** Encourage the centre-back to disguise their passes to achieve success in the practice. Playing with an open body, as if they intend to pass into the wider goal, and then, at the last moment, closing their body to pass into the central goal, should be encouraged.
- **Firm Passing:** Encourage players to deliver firm passes throughout the practice, increasing the likelihood of beating the defender.
- **Ground Passes with No Spin:** Advise players to play ground passes with no spin, as this will benefit the receiving player in a game situation.

OUT OF POSSESSION

MIRRORING THE ATTACKER.

- **Encourage Mirroring:** Defenders should be motivated to mirror the movements of the attacker. Quick adjustments of their feet and maintaining proper positioning to change direction swiftly will lead to successful 1v1 defending.



PATIENCE

- **Stay Patient:** In and around the box, defenders should be encouraged to exhibit patience and refrain from diving into tackles. This makes them difficult to beat and prevents the attacker from finding an easy route to goal.
- **Strategic Engagement:** Defenders need to understand when the attacker is too close to the goal to keep backing off and when it is appropriate to engage with the ball-carrier.

By focusing on these coaching details, centre-backs can elevate their performance both in possession and out of possession. Their improved first touch, disguised passing, and firm ground passes will enhance their ability to contribute to the team's build-up play. Moreover, their mirroring skills and patience in defence will make them more effective at nullifying attacking threats and ensuring defensive solidity. Consistent practice and reinforcement of these techniques will help centre-backs become more well-rounded and valuable assets to the team's overall performance.

5V5 (+1) ZONED GAME (PART 2)

In this dynamic and engaging game, the focus is on centre-backs crucial role in advancing the ball into the opposing half while ensuring solid defensive play within the box. The game takes place on a 44 yards x 40 yards pitch, with the halfway line actively in play.

Players are strategically positioned on the field, as illustrated in the diagram. Each team has two centre-backs and two strikers, who remain in their respective starting halves throughout the game. Additionally, there is a neutral player (N) who has the unique ability to play in both halves, creating intriguing 3v2 situations.

The objective for the in-possession team, let's call them Team A, is to advance the ball into the opposition half. Once there, they are determined to score, as demonstrated in the diagram. On the other hand, if the defending team gains possession, their goal is to swiftly counter-attack and aim for the opposition's goal.

PROGRESSION

To develop the practice and enhance players' skills, consider implementing the following challenges:

- Limit the number of touches allowed for the defenders when they are in possession of the ball. This restriction will test and refine their first-touch abilities, encouraging precise ball control and distribution.
- Introduce a rule that prevents players from progressing into the opposition half until the neutral player has touched the ball. This rule fosters strategic thinking and coordination, as players must work collaboratively with the neutral player to create attacking opportunities.

With these practice enhancements, participants will not only strengthen their technical and tactical skills but also gain a deeper understanding of the importance of centre-backs in both offensive and defensive aspects of the game. Get ready for an exciting session filled with learning and competitive spirit!



COACHING PROCESS

IN POSSESSION

FIRST TOUCH

- Players must prioritise their first touch before passing. Emphasise directing the ball into positions that enable them to pass to any teammate in the opposition half, making it harder for opponents to predict the next move.

PASS DETAIL

- Encourage possession teams to excel in disguising passes. Players should adopt an open body shape, feigning passes to certain players but switching at the last moment to pass to others, creating confusion among the opposition.
- Players should be motivated to deliver firm passes throughout the practice, increasing the chances of bypassing opposing defenders. Additionally, focus on playing ground passes with no spin to aid the receiving teammate

OUT OF POSSESSION

MIRRORING THE ATTACKER

- Defenders should be guided to mirror the movements of the attacker effectively. Quick adjustments of feet and positioning are vital to succeed in one-on-one defending situations.

PATIENCE

- Encourage defenders to exhibit patience when defending around the box, avoiding hasty challenges. Being difficult to beat and denying attackers an easy path to goal are essential goals. Defenders should learn to identify when to maintain distance and when to engage the ball-carrier based on their proximity to the goal.

FORCING PLAY WIDE

- The angle of approach for defenders is crucial in safeguarding central areas around the goal. Pressing from the inside to the outside, starting moderately narrow but not too narrow, allows defenders to apply pressure as attackers move wide. Proper body positioning aids in directing play towards the wider areas.

Through this coaching process, players will refine their technical skills, tactical awareness, and decision-making abilities, enhancing their overall performance both in possession and out of possession. The focus on disguised passing and mirroring attackers will make the team more unpredictable and challenging for the opposition, while patient defending and strategic play will fortify the defensive line and protect the goal effectively.



5V5 (+2) GAME (PART 3)

Welcome to this exciting conditioned small-sided game played on a 44 yards x 40 yards pitch, divided into halves. The teams consist of four players each, along with goalkeepers, and to add an interesting twist, two neutral players (N) operate in the wide areas.

When in the defensive phase, each team should adopt a formation with a back three and a holding midfielder, just like Team A illustrated in the diagram to the right.

The objective for the attacking team is to score by advancing all their outfield players (except the goalkeeper) into the opposition half. Wide players have the freedom to dribble inside the pitch upon receiving the ball, adding an element of unpredictability to their attacks.

A significant reward awaits the attacking team if they manage to score through a well-executed cross from a wide player, netting them two points. In case of a successful goal, the team that scored restarts the game from their goalkeeper.

When the defending team regains possession, they instantly transition to the attacking phase, attempting to build up play and score, just like their opponents.

PROGRESSION

- To elevate the practice and enhance attacking efficiency, consider introducing the following adjustment: If the attacking team can pull off a first-time cross from a wide player, followed by a first-time finish resulting in a goal, they earn three points. This modification will emphasise quick and precise execution, rewarding well-timed teamwork and clinical finishing.

Through this exhilarating session, players will sharpen their tactical understanding, teamwork, and creativity in attacking from wide areas. Get ready for an action-packed experience that will undoubtedly elevate everyone's skills on the pitch!

COACHING PROCESS

IN POSSESSION:

FIRST TOUCH.

- Emphasise the importance of players' first touch before passing. Encourage them to direct the ball into positions that allow for passes to any teammate in the opposition half. This strategic placement will make it challenging for opponents to anticipate the ball's destination.

PASS DETAIL

- To achieve success in possession, players should work on disguising their passes. Promote the use of an open body shape, giving the impression of passing to a specific player, only to switch and pass to another at the last moment. This element of deception will keep the opposition guessing.



- Firm passing is key to beating opposing defenders consistently. Encourage players to play their passes with the right amount of force to increase accuracy and effectiveness. Additionally, emphasise playing balls along the ground with no spin, as this benefits the receiver when the pass is delivered.

OUT OF POSSESSION:

CLEARANCES

- When defenders are clearing the ball, they should opt for low-risk techniques to avoid unnecessary turnovers. Encourage them to clear the ball away from the box and out of the danger zone to reset the defensive structure.

POSITIONING

- Positioning is critical when defending in and around the box. The centre-back nearest the ball should focus on defending the near-post space, while the other defenders mirror the movements of the attackers they are marking. This coordinated effort minimises scoring opportunities for the opposition.

PATIENCE

- Defenders should display patience and refrain from diving into tackles when defending near the box. This approach makes them harder to beat and prevents attackers from finding an easy route to the goal. Defenders must also discern when it's appropriate to maintain distance from the attacker and when to engage with the ball-carrier based on the proximity to the goal.

By honing these essential skills in possession and defensive play, players will elevate their overall performance on the field. The focus on disguised passing will make the team more unpredictable in attack, while low-risk clearances and intelligent box defending will strengthen the defensive line and protect the goal effectively. Emphasising patience and smart decision-making will further enhance the team's tactical acumen and resilience in challenging situations.