



COUNTER-ATTACKS FROM DEEP

SESSION OVERVIEW

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Develop players' understanding and execution of key principles of counter-attacking.
- Familiarise players with the physical demands of quick attacking from deeper areas of the pitch.

PART 1: COUNTER-ATTACK COMBINATIONS

- This practice focuses on passing combinations and movements that relate to the principles of counter-attacking.
- Progressions provide consistent challenges, culminating in players having the freedom to combine as they choose.

PART 2: COUNTER-ATTACKING FROM DEEP

- Position-specific exercise covering three-quarters of the pitch.
- Players experience realistic scenarios and repetitions of counter-attacking situations from deeper areas.
- Adjust the playing area size based on player level.

PART 3: CONDITIONED COUNTER-ATTACKING GAME

- Full-pitch exercise that replicates a game while removing full-backs and attacking wingers.
- Full-backs and wingers alternate between attacking and defending roles.
- Game progresses from the earlier parts of the session, ensuring consistent scenarios and realistic gameplay.

COUNTER-ATTACK COMBINATIONS (PART 1)

This practice focuses on developing a range of combinations that involve quick forward play, high ball speed, diagonal passes, and various runs and movements, such as straight runs, overlaps, underlaps, and third-man runs.

- Players are introduced to three defined patterns to work on, as shown in the provided image, while also being encouraged to showcase their individual creativity
- The player positioned in the middle of each variation should aim to receive the ball on the quarter-turn to facilitate effective combination play and enable the advancing players to make forward passes with a cushioned touch or by setting the ball in front of the attacker's feet.
- After completing their passes to the next attacking pair, the advancing players continue their run and join the back of the line, eagerly awaiting their next opportunity to participate.

COACHING PROCESS

The first pass – and subsequent passes – of each combination should reflect the urgency and speed of a counter-attack.

- Emphasise the need for quick and accurate passes, highlighting the importance of precision. Poorly placed passes can disrupt the momentum of deep counter-attacks



- Encourage players to play with one touch whenever possible. This may require executing first-time, around-the-corner passes to keep the play flowing smoothly.
- The central player in each combination should use one touch to set or redirect the point of attack. Their touches should be skill-fully weighted, allowing the receiving player to run onto the ball without breaking stride.

COACHING DETAIL: TIMING OF RUNS

- Players making forward runs to receive the ball should time their runs to arrive precisely when the ball is played. Arriving too early can hinder the central player's ability to make an immediate touch or set.
- Players making supporting runs to receive the ball should arrive with pace, contributing to the building momentum of the attack. Their well-timed runs will help drive the attack forward effectively.

COUNTER-ATTACKING FROM DEEP (PART 2)

This counter-attacking practice focuses on quickly transitioning from defence to attack. The setup involves a deep, central box with opposing midfield threes.

- Once the counter-attacking team regains possession, their objective is to rapidly move the ball forward and create scoring opportunities against the opposition goalkeeper.
- The preferred options for advancing the attack are playing wide to the wingers or playing into the feet of the striker (9).
- The advantage is with the counter-attacking team as it is a 3v2 situation, with the two wingers and the forward facing two opposing centre-back). The midfielders remain inside the box, except for the nearest attacking midfielder, who can step out to combine with the striker or distribute the ball to the wingers with a maximum of two touches, as shown in the diagram.
- After each play ends, the centre-backs and the forward swap with their counterparts who are resting for the next play. The wide players recover and wait for their next turn, while the midfield threes switch roles in terms of attacking and defending.

DEVELOPING THE PRACTICE

- Remove the full-backs from their counter-attacking responsibilities and pair them with the opposing wingers, positioning them on the outside of the pole. When the wingers are released to counter, they will face a recovering full-back, creating a 4v3 situation in favour of the defending team against the counter-attack.
- Allow one of the midfielders to break into the opposition half during the counter-attack, creating a 4v4 scenario.

COACHING PROCESS

- Emphasise the importance of making the first pass quickly upon transition to increase the likelihood of creating a counter-attacking opportunity. This first pass should be played forward whenever possible, but sideways or backwards passes are acceptable if it enables the subsequent pass to be played forward.



- Encourage players to play the ball in front of advancing teammates to maintain the flow of forward movement. This allows the receiving player to take fewer touches before dribbling, passing, or shooting.

COACHING DETAIL: DRIBBLING

- Promote dribbling when space is available in front of the player.
- When a winger is dribbling from the outer areas towards the centre of the pitch, encourage the forward to make threatening runs behind the defence and receive a slip-and-slide pass, especially if the winger has drawn a defender towards them.
- Train players to use different surfaces of their feet to execute quick and effective slip-and-slide passes, such as a right-winger cutting inside on their left foot and then delivering a pass with the outside of their right foot.

COACHING DETAIL: RUNS

- In situations where the ball is played into the forward (9) from the central area, the forward should show for the ball at their feet.
- When the ball is coming from either wing, the forward should consider making first and second movements to lose their defender and threaten behind or show for the ball accordingly.
- Highlight the significance of timing the first movement to deceive the defender and allow the player on the ball to identify the second movement. If the winger is driving inside with their head down, the forward should make a penetrating run behind the defence, creating space in the middle and on the opposite side of the pitch.
- The wingers and number 10 should recognise when the forward is showing for the ball to combine and threaten behind, stretching the defenders and creating space for themselves or other teammates in behind.

CONDITIONED COUNTER-ATTACKING GAME (PART 3)

In this conditioned game, the focus is on Team A's defensive strategy, as they set up in a 4-2-3-1 formation with a low block. However, the full-backs (2/3) are not included in the defensive setup. This creates an opportunity for Team B to play out from their goalkeeper with a 2v1 or 3v2 overload in their attacking half, as the wide attackers (7/11) are not present in their formation.

The objective for Team B is to break down Team A's defence despite being underloaded with only six players in their attacking half. On the other hand, Team A aims to counter-attack as quickly as possible once they regain possession. They are challenged to take a shot or score within 10 seconds of winning the ball back. Progressions can be introduced to increase the difficulty by reducing the time limit or requiring a certain number of passes in the counter-attack buildup.

If Team A regains possession but loses the ball during their counter-attack buildup, they must quickly transition back into their low block defensive shape. The game restarts with the goalkeeper of Team B playing the ball when it goes out of play.

To further develop the practice, the coach can introduce variations such as funnelling the opposite half or swapping the positions of the full-backs and wingers depending on which team is defending or attacking. This allows both teams to experience counter-attacking situations from deep areas of the pitch.



COACHING PROCESS

PASSING:

- Emphasise the importance of making the first pass quickly during transitions to increase the likelihood of creating counter-attacking opportunities. This initial pass should ideally be played forward, but sideways or backwards passes are acceptable if they enable a subsequent forward pass.
- Encourage players to pass the ball in front of advancing teammates, as it helps maintain the momentum of the attack and allows the receiving player to make fewer touches before dribbling, passing, or shooting.

DRIBBLING:

- Promote dribbling when there is open space ahead. Encourage players to take on defenders and exploit gaps in the opposition's defence.
- In situations where a winger is dribbling from the outside towards the centre of the pitch, the forward should position themselves to threaten behind the defence and potentially receive a slip-and-slide pass, especially if the winger has successfully engaged a defender.
- When executing slip-and-slide movements, players should be comfortable using different surfaces of their feet to perform the action quickly and effectively. For example, a right-winger cutting inside on their left foot may then deliver a pass using the outside of their right foot.

RUNS:

- In scenarios where the ball is played into the forward (number 9) from a central area, the forward should show for the ball by presenting themselves to receive it with their feet.
- When the ball is coming from a wide area, the forward should consider making first and second movements to create separation from their defender and threaten behind the defensive line. Alternatively, they can show for the ball to receive it too feet.
- The timing of the first movement is crucial for the forward to lose their defender and allow the player in possession to spot and execute the second movement. If a winger is driving inside with their head down, the forward should make an attacking run behind the defence, creating space in the middle and on the opposite side of the pitch.
- The wingers and the number 10 have a shared responsibility to recognise when the forward shows for the ball to combine and threaten behind the defence. By stretching the defenders and creating space, they also create opportunities for themselves or their teammates to exploit the gaps in the opposition's defence.