



COUNTER-ATTACKS FROM THE FINAL THIRD

SESSION OVERVIEW

In this session, the focus is on the principles of play, specifically restricting passing lanes, recognising space, and speed of attack. The session is divided into three parts to enhance players' abilities in these areas.

PART 1: 1v1 SIDE BY SIDE

The objective of this practice is to improve the players' capability to maintain the speed of a counter-attack while facing direct pressure from a defender on one side. Emphasis is placed on quick decision-making and executing effective attacking moves.

PART 2: BREAK-OUT GAME

This game involves two teams. The first team consists of five players who aim to retain possession within a small grid and score in one of two mini-goals. The opposing team, with four players, strives to win the ball and break out into a 2v1 overload situation to ultimately score past a goalkeeper positioned at the far end of a longer grid. The coach can introduce additional challenges to make it more difficult for the counter-attacking team once they break out.

PART 3: PRESSING FUNCTION

In this 7v7 practice, one team focuses on maintaining possession, playing out from the back, and scoring in one of three mini-goals. The opposing team's objective is to press aggressively and win possession as high up the field as possible. Their aim is to score past the opposition goalkeeper positioned in a full-sized goal. This exercise helps players understand the dynamics of pressing and the importance of organised defending.

By incorporating these three parts into the session, players at the U12-U16 level will develop their understanding of the principles of play, enhance their ability to recognise and exploit space, improve their speed of attack, and gain valuable experience in dealing with different game scenarios.

1v1 SIDE BY SIDE (PART 1)

This session is an opposed 1v1 practice conducted within an approximate playing area of 20m x 12m. The objective of the practice is to simulate a through ball scenario where the attacker (Player A) receives a pass in front of them from a spare player or the coach (Player C). The pass aims to replicate a pass played behind a defensive line.

Simultaneously, the defender (Player B) initiates their recovery run with the intention of regaining possession. If the defender successfully wins the ball, they pass it back to Player C. The practice concludes under the following conditions: if the attacking player carries the ball over the end line, if the defender wins possession and passes to Player C, or if the ball goes out of the designated playing area.



Player roles are rotated regularly to ensure everyone gets a chance to play both as the attacker and defender. The practice is organised in blocks of time, such as 90 seconds, followed by rest periods to allow for practice reset and recovery.

PROGRESSION

- To progress the practice and add complexity, starting positions of the players can be altered. This provides defenders with opportunities to recover from both the left and right sides.
- Further progression can be achieved by introducing mini-goals into the practice. These mini-goals test the attacker's ability to shoot or pass under pressure. If mini-goals are not available, two cones can be used to create a goal-like structure.

By implementing these variations and progressions, players will develop their skills in attacking, defending, decision-making, and executing accurate passes and shots under pressure.

COACHING PROCESS

To optimise the counter-attack, it is crucial for the attacker to use touches that align with the objective of speed. Longer touches into open space enable the attacker to accelerate into that area and exploit the opportunity.

When in possession and running with the ball, the attacker should strive to keep the ball on the opposite side from where the pressure is coming. This strategic positioning increases the likelihood of maintaining possession or drawing a foul from the opponent.

To maintain speed, the attacker should utilise the front of the foot and laces to push the ball forward. This technique enables the player to sustain their momentum and also allows for the execution of disguised or early passes to teammates, keeping the defence guessing.

USE OF BODY:

- An effective technique for the attacker is to position their hips and shoulders between the ball and the recovering defender. By doing so, the attacker can shield the ball from tackles and maintain forward movement, denying the defender the opportunity to regain possession.
- The arm closest to the defender should be used to hold off pressure. Extending the arm straight without bending the elbow provides greater strength and effectiveness in fending off the defender's attempts to regain control of the ball.
- When making contact with the ball, the attacker should strive to use the foot farthest away from the defender. This approach makes it more challenging for the defender to execute a successful tackle, giving the attacker an advantage in retaining possession and progressing forward.

By emphasising these techniques and coaching points, players can develop their ability to use appropriate touches to enhance speed and maintain possession during counter-attacks. Additionally, understanding the effective use of body positioning and contact will empower the attacker to protect the ball and create favourable situations for their team.



BREAK-OUT GAME (PART2)

In this practice, two teams, Team A (the counter-attacking team) and Team B (the team aiming to play out from the back), are involved. The pitch is divided into two sections: a small possession grid measuring 20m long by 40m wide and a longer zone measuring 65m long by 40m wide.

Team B consists of four players positioned on the perimeter lines of the possession grid, while a fifth player starts inside the grid. The objective for Team B is to maintain possession and pass the ball into one of the two mini-goals located at the far end of the possession grid.

When Team A regains possession, they break out of the possession grid and initiate a counter-attack towards the goal at the far end of the longer grid. Only a maximum of two Team A players are allowed to leave the grid to attempt scoring, while only one Team B defender can recover to defend against the counter-attack.

If Team A successfully scores, the practice restarts as before. However, if Team A fails to score and the goalkeeper or defender from Team B regains possession, Team B can launch their own counter-attack with the objective of scoring in the mini-goals. If the ball leaves the possession grid during the possession phase, a new ball is introduced, and the other team gains possession.

PROGRESSIONS

- To further develop the practice, the coach can introduce the following progressions:
- Allow more than one defender from Team B to recover and attempt to stop the counter-attack by Team A.
- Permit an unlimited number of attackers from Team A to break out and initiate the counter-attack, creating a more dynamic and challenging scenario.

By incorporating these progressions, players will enhance their ability to execute effective counter-attacks, improve their decision-making skills, and develop their defensive strategies. The practice provides opportunities for both teams to work on their attacking and defensive principles in game-like situations, fostering a deeper understanding of transitional play.

COACHING PROCESS

- To optimise the pressing strategy, Team A should focus on cutting off passing lanes, forcing the opposition into areas of the grid where it is easier to regain possession. By strategically positioning themselves, they can remain compact and prevent passes that split the team and create dangerous opportunities for the opposition. When an opportunity arises to win the ball, players must recognise the trigger and work collaboratively as a team to regain possession, creating forward passing options and initiating counter-attacks.



DECISION-MAKING: IN-POSSESSION TEAM

- Team B, the in-possession team, should play with speed and conviction to move the opposition around the grid and create open forward passing lanes. It is crucial for the players to make quick and confident decisions to exploit spaces and find penetrating passes. Perimeter players need to be aware of their defensive positioning, ensuring they are ready to prevent the counter-attack by staying alert and adopting the appropriate defensive postures. As the practice progresses and more than one defender is allowed to recover, teammates must communicate and interact effectively with each other, closing off spaces available to the counter-attacking team and minimising their chances of launching successful attacks.

By emphasising these decision-making aspects for both the pressing and in-possession teams, players will develop their ability to read the game, make effective choices under pressure, and work cohesively as a team. This will lead to improved defensive organisation, efficient ball circulation, and the ability to capitalise on opportunities to create scoring chances.

PRESSING FUNCTION (PART 3)

This practice focuses on two teams, with one team aiming to play out from the back (Team B) and the other team attempting to win the ball and score on the counter-attack (Team A). The practice takes place on a field with approximate dimensions of 65m wide and 40m long.

Team B's objective is to play out from the back and score into one of the three mini-goals positioned at the opposite end of the playing area. On the other hand, Team A aims to regain possession high up the pitch and score past the goalkeeper in the main goal.

Although the diagram shows the practice as 7v7+GK, the session can be adapted based on the number of players available.

To emphasise different principles and areas of the pitch, the coach can incorporate zones, markers, and grids. For instance, a designated area where Team A initiates their press to regain the ball can be marked off, highlighting specific defensive principles.

To progress the practice and introduce realistic scenarios, the coach can create situations such as, "Team B, you are winning by two goals with 10 minutes to go - how do you secure the win?" This scenario may lead to chaos during the session, but it provides valuable learning opportunities for the players as they experience and problem-solve in realistic game situations.

By incorporating these adaptations and scenarios, players will enhance their understanding of playing out from the back, executing effective pressing strategies, and making intelligent decisions in different game scenarios. The practice encourages learning through realistic challenges, enabling players to develop their tactical awareness, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability on the field.



COACHING PROCESS

- The purpose of this practice is to provide the counter-attacking team with valuable learning opportunities in realistic situations. The practice incorporates a risk and reward factor, where the counter-attacking team must actively try to win the ball back, as failure to do so may result in the opposition scoring. This dynamic setup creates an environment that encourages decision-making, tactical awareness, and effective execution of counter-attacks.

MANAGING THE OPPOSITION:

- To ensure the desired outcomes of the practice, it is important to manage the in-possession team in a way that creates realistic scenarios. The coach should guide the in-possession team to play according to their own team's principles, allowing for different patterns of play that benefit the development of all players involved. By introducing a variety of patterns, the counter-attacking team will be exposed to a range of situations, requiring them to make informed decisions based on the specific challenges presented.

By emphasising the purpose of the practice and effectively managing the opposition, coaches can facilitate a learning environment that promotes the development of decision-making skills, tactical understanding, and adaptability for the counter-attacking team. The practice serves as a platform for players to gain valuable experience in realistic game scenarios, ultimately enhancing their overall game intelligence and ability to make effective decisions on the field.