



COUNTER- ATTACKING FROM DEEP

SESSION OVERVIEW

In this session, we will focus on the principles of play for young players aged U12 to U16. The main areas of emphasis will be running with the ball, recognising space, and speed. We have designed a series of exercises and small-sided games to develop these skills and enhance players' overall understanding of the game.

PART 1: 1v1

The first part of the session will concentrate on 1v1 scenarios, where players will work on both their defensive skills to win the ball back effectively and their attacking abilities to showcase creativity. This exercise will provide players with opportunities to challenge and improve their individual abilities while under pressure.

PART 2: 2v2 STAGGERED

In the second part, we will introduce 2v2 staggered situations that require attackers to exploit available space. Time will be limited, and speed will be crucial in this exercise. Defenders, on the other hand, will face the challenge of managing large spaces while being underloaded. This exercise will help players understand the importance of utilising space effectively and making quick decisions.

PART 3: 3v2 TO GOAL

Moving on to the next phase, we will engage in a 3v2 practice aimed at scoring goals. This exercise will focus on the speed of attacks and decision-making. Players will learn to work together, make efficient use of their numerical advantage, and capitalise on goal-scoring opportunities.

PART 4: SMALL-SIDED GAME

To conclude the session, we will play a small-sided game that emphasises defending deep and winning the ball before launching attacks into space. This game will provide players with a realistic match-like situation where they can apply the principles of play learned throughout the session. It will also encourage teamwork, communication, and strategic thinking.

By the end of this session, U12 to U16 players should have a better understanding of running with the ball, recognising space, and the importance of speed in different game scenarios. They will have practiced their individual skills, decision-making abilities, and teamwork, all while enjoying an engaging and challenging training session.

1v1 (PART 1)

In this practice, we will focus on developing players' 1v1 skills in an opposed setting. The objective is for Player A to beat the defender (Player B) and dribble over the end line, while Player B aims to win the ball and attack the opposite side of the grid to do the same.



The practice continues until the ball leaves the grid or either active player successfully dribbles over the end line. This ensures that there is constant engagement and opportunities for both attacking and defensive play.

After each round, players will rotate roles: Player B becomes the new defender, Player A rests, and Player C takes on the role of the new attacker. This rotation allows all players to experience different positions and challenges within the practice.

To progress the practice and add complexity, you can adjust the pass angle and starting positions of the players. This variation will test their ability to adapt to different scenarios and make decisions based on the changing dynamics of the game.

For further progression, if the necessary equipment is available, you can introduce mini goals to the practice. This addition will provide an additional challenge for the players, as they will need to demonstrate passing skills under pressure while still maintaining the objective of beating the defender and dribbling over the end line.

By the end of this session, players will have honed their 1v1 skills, decision-making abilities, and adaptability in a competitive and dynamic setting. They will also have had the opportunity to practice passing under pressure if mini goals were incorporated.

COACHING PROCESS

During the coaching process, it is crucial to focus on the technical aspects of the game to enhance players' skills and decision-making abilities. Here are some key coaching points to consider:

TYPES OF TOUCHES

- **Efficient Distance Travel:** Emphasise that during counter-attacks, players should aim to cover distances quickly. Encourage them to use fewer touches over the same distance rather than multiple small touches that can slow them down.
- **Outside-of-the-Foot Touches:** When players are running at high speeds, advise them to utilise the outside of their foot to take touches. This technique enables them to maintain their speed while executing more efficient running movements.
- **Changing Defender's Body Position:** In 1v1 situations, attackers should aim to move the ball to change the defender's body position and disrupt their balance. This will create opportunities to drive past the defender and exploit open space.

USE OF HIPS

- **Shielding the Ball:** In 1v1 scenarios, encourage attackers to quickly position their hips and shoulders between the ball and the recovering defender after nudging the ball past them. This technique allows the attacker to shield the ball effectively and continue moving forward.

DEFENSIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Intense Defending:** Encourage players to defend with intensity, emphasising the importance of winning the ball back and launching quick attacks into space during counter-attacks. Highlight that this is crucial for a successful counter-attacking strategy.



- **Striking Distance:** Instruct defenders to maintain proximity to the attacker, ensuring they remain within "striking distance." This enables them to make timely tackles as soon as opportunities arise, putting pressure on the attacker.
- **Keep the Attacker's Head Down:** Emphasise to defenders the importance of keeping the attacker's "head down" throughout the play. If the defender allows the attacker to raise their head and assess the situation, it indicates that the defender is not close enough to their opponent. Encourage defenders to maintain close proximity and apply pressure consistently.

By focusing on these technical details and providing specific coaching instructions, players will develop their skills in areas such as touch control, speed, body positioning, and defensive awareness. This will ultimately enhance their overall performance in counter-attacking situations.

2v2 STAGGERED (PART 2)

This practice is designed to challenge attackers in making positive decisions during 2v1 situations, while also testing defenders in managing space and initiating forward movements after winning the ball.

SET UP

- The practice involves two teams of two players each, Team A and Team B, with Team A defending and Team B attacking.
- The session begins with a driven diagonal pass to an attacker. As the ball surpasses the highest defender, that defender can start to apply pressure on the attacker.
- The attackers engage in a 2v1 scenario in each half of the playing area, with each defender limited to their respective half.
- The objective for the attacker team is to run with the ball over the end line from which Team A started.
- If the defenders successfully win the ball, they then attempt to carry it over the end line that the attackers started on.
- Once an outcome is reached, the teams swap roles, with the attackers becoming defenders and the defenders becoming attackers.

PROGRESSIONS.

- To add variety and challenge, you can adjust the type of initial pass played, such as lofted, volley, half-volley, faster, slower, etc. This variation will test the players' control and adaptability in different receiving situations.
- Further progression can be achieved by allowing the defenders to defend in both halves of the playing area. This adjustment will increase the difficulty for the attackers, forcing them to make even more precise decisions and exploit any available space.
- Throughout the session, the focus should be on encouraging attackers to make effective decisions in 2v1 situations, using their skills to create scoring opportunities. Defenders, on the other hand, must exhibit the ability to manage space, apply pressure at the right time, and transition quickly into attacking positions upon winning the ball.

By practicing these attacking and defensive concepts, players will enhance their decision-making abilities, spatial awareness, and the skills required to succeed in both offensive and defensive transitions.



COACHING PROCESS

When focusing on technical aspects during coaching sessions, there are key points to consider for both defensive and attacking decision-making. Additionally, managing the practice effectively will contribute to players' development. Here are the coaching details:

DECISION-MAKING: DEFENSIVE

- **Timing and Angle of Press:** Emphasise that defenders need to consider the timing and angle of their press. They should be aware of when to apply pressure on the attackers and from which direction, ensuring they create difficult passing options for the opponents.
- **Defending as a Pairing:** Encourage defenders to work together as a pairing. Their objective should be to make the area their opponents can attack into as small as possible. They can achieve this by splitting the pitch and directing attackers towards their defensive partner.
- **Secondary Defenders:** Instruct secondary defenders to position themselves where they can take advantage of a poor touch or pass from the attacker. They should also aim to screen space behind the first defender, acting as a backup option if the initial defender is bypassed.

DECISION-MAKING: ATTACKING

- **Maximising Space:** Guide attackers to consider the available space during the 2v1 situation. They should prioritise maintaining width and speed, which will create room to counter-attack effectively.
- **Varying Movement:** As the practice progresses, encourage attackers to vary their movement to disrupt the defensive structure. If defenders are positioned as a flat two, attackers can employ strategic movements to drag them apart and create gaps to exploit.

MANAGING THE PRACTICE

- **Progression with Defenders in Both Halves:** Introduce the progression where defenders can defend in both halves of the playing area. This will challenge players when defending deeper and transitioning to win the ball before launching an attack. It is a crucial aspect of learning to counter-attack from deep positions.
- **Varying First Passes:** Change the type of first pass played to test players' first touch, anticipation, and ability to handle different ball trajectories. Bouncing or bobbling balls can be included to replicate unpredictable situations that occur in real games.
- **Quality of Service:** Do not overly concern yourself with the quality of service during the first pass. Players should adapt and respond to varying situations, just as they would in a game. Unpredictable serves can also act as different pressing triggers or simulate defensive scenarios following a corner clearance

By focusing on these technical details and effectively managing the practice, players will enhance their decision-making abilities, defensive coordination, attacking awareness, and adaptability in unpredictable situations. This will contribute to their overall development and success in game-like scenarios.



3v2 TO GOAL (PART 3)

This practice focuses on developing attacking and defensive transitions, encouraging quick decision-making and efficient play. Here is the revised session description:

SET UP

- The practice begins with a long pass from the goalkeeper (GK) to one of the three attackers (Team A). As soon as an attacker touches the ball, the two defenders (Team B) become active and engage in defending.

OBJECTIVE.

- The three attackers work together to quickly attack the goal and attempt to score.
- If the defenders win the ball, their objective is to pass it into one of the mini goals located at the other end of the playing area.

RESTART

- Play always restarts with a long pass from the GK, ensuring consistent and efficient transitions between attacking and defensive phases.
- Coaching Points:
- Encourage overlaps, underlaps, and third-man runs among the attacking players. Emphasise the importance of coordinated movement and creating opportunities to break through the defence.

PROGRESSION

- Introduce limits on touches or time to increase the tempo and urgency of play. This will challenge the players' decision-making abilities and encourage quick and efficient actions.
- Progress further by adjusting the starting point of the practice. Incorporate throw-ins, free-kicks, or other set-piece scenarios to simulate game situations and provide additional variety and challenge for the players.

Throughout the session, focus on developing players' ability to transition quickly between attacking and defensive phases. Emphasise effective communication, teamwork, and the ability to exploit open space during fast-paced attacks. By practicing these aspects, players will enhance their decision-making skills, attacking prowess, defensive awareness, and adaptability in various starting scenarios.

Note: Adjust the size of the playing area, the number of players involved, and the difficulty level according to the age and skill level of the participants.

COACHING PROCESS

When focusing on technical aspects during coaching sessions, there are key points to consider regarding speed, angle and length of touches, the purpose of the practice, and defending. Here are the coaching details:



SPEED:

- **Types of Touches and Passes:** Emphasise the importance of quick touches and limited backward or sideways passes during counter-attacks. Encourage forwards to make decisive runs that exploit spaces and keep the attack moving with speed.
- **Overlaps and Runs:** Highlight the significance of overlaps, in-to-out runs, and out-to-in runs. These movements are crucial in manipulating defenders' positions and creating openings to play through.

ANGLE AND LENGTH OF TOUCHES:

- **Diagonal Forward Touches:** Emphasise how diagonal forward touches can attract defenders into 1v1 situations, providing opportunities for attackers to exploit spaces elsewhere on the pitch.
- **Escaping Defenders:** Instruct attackers to use longer touches and bursts into open space once they find themselves in a 1v1 situation. This helps create distance and separation from the defender.
- **Utilising Off-the-Ball Runs:** Encourage attackers to utilise the off-the-ball runs of their teammates to maintain the speed and fluidity of the counter-attack. These runs can create additional options and opportunities to penetrate the defence.

PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICE:

- Make sure both the attacking and defending players understand the main principles of the practice. Focus on attacking at speed and encouraging players to make intelligent runs to create space. While the attacking team may have more success, the focus should be on developing the key principles for both sides.

COACHING DETAIL: DEFENDING

DISTANCE BETWEEN PLAYERS:

- **Managing Defensive Spacing:** Guide defenders to manage the space between them, making it difficult for the attackers to split them with a pass. Encourage compactness and teamwork to force attacks out wide, thereby requiring attackers to find creative ways to penetrate through the middle.

WINNING THE DEFENSIVE BATTLE:

- **Aggressive Defending:** Emphasise the need for defenders to defend aggressively and seize opportunities to recover the ball. Encourage quick and decisive actions when creating 1v1 or 2v2 situations, urging defenders to actively look for opportunities to steal the ball.

By focusing on these technical details, players will enhance their speed of play, decision-making abilities, and ability to create and exploit spaces during counter-attacks. Defenders will develop their defensive positioning, teamwork, and ability to win the ball back efficiently. This comprehensive coaching approach will contribute to the overall development of the players' attacking and defensive abilities.



SMALL-SIDED GAME (PART 4)

In this small-sided game, the focus is on defensive compactness, regaining possession, and exploiting spaces behind the opposition. Here is the revised session description:

SET UP

- The playing area is divided into three zones. The emphasis is on maintaining defensive compactness and utilising counter-attacking opportunities.
- The teams are evenly matched, and there are no specific restrictions on gameplay.

OBJECTIVE AND SCORING

- Points are awarded based on the zone in which the ball is regained and a goal is scored:
- Three points: Regaining possession in the defensive third and scoring.
- Two points: Regaining possession in the middle third and scoring.
- One point: Regaining possession in the attacking third and scoring.

NOTE

- While counter-attacks can start from any zone, a higher point reward is given for regaining the ball in the defensive third. This focus aligns with the topic of counter-attacking from deep.
- Coaching Points:
- Encourage defensive compactness and disciplined positioning to limit the opposition's attacking opportunities.
- Emphasise the importance of quick and efficient ball recovery to initiate counter-attacks.
- Promote awareness of spaces behind the opposition and encourage players to exploit these areas with intelligent runs and passes.

PROGRESSION

- Various conditions can be added to the game to enhance its complexity and challenge the players. However, be mindful of the impact certain conditions may have.
- Consider implementing time or touch limits to increase the intensity of the counter-attacks. Adjust the limits based on the abilities and skill levels of the players, allowing lower-ability players more time or touches to complete the counter-attack effectively.

Throughout the session, the focus is on developing defensive compactness, efficient ball recovery, and the ability to exploit spaces behind the opposition. By practicing these aspects, players will enhance their counter-attacking abilities, decision-making skills, and understanding of defensive organisation. Adjust the size of the playing area and the number of players involved based on the age and skill level of the participants.

COACHING PROCESS

When coaching the technical aspects of counter-attacking and managing space, consider the following coaching details:



SPEED OF ATTACKS:

- **Forward Runs:** Emphasise the importance of quick and purposeful forward runs during counter-attacks. Encourage players to anticipate and exploit spaces behind the opposition, providing options for the attacking team.
- **Forward Passes:** Encourage players to make accurate and direct forward passes to progress the ball rapidly up the field. Highlight the importance of playing with urgency and precision to catch the opposition off guard.
- **Longer and Heavier Touches:** Instruct players to use longer and heavier touches when necessary to create separation from defenders. These touches should propel the player into open space, allowing for faster counter-attacks.
- **Use of Laces:** Advise players to utilise the laces of their boots when dribbling at speed. This technique allows for better control of the ball and facilitates quicker acceleration.

MANAGING SPACE:

- **Defensive Compactness:** Stress the importance of defensive compactness when the team is out of possession. Encourage defenders to stay close to each other and limit the available space for attackers, making it difficult for the opposition to penetrate.
- **Expanding the Pitch:** Once possession is regained, instruct the team in possession to quickly make the pitch big by bursting forward and attacking the available space. This rapid expansion of the playing area can create opportunities for effective counter-attacks.

SESSION AIMS:

- **Focus on Penalty Areas:** Highlight that the session aims and key points primarily revolve around the two penalty areas. This focus ensures that players understand the importance of capitalising on scoring opportunities and defending effectively in the crucial areas of the pitch.
- **Comprehensive Counter-Attacking Experience:** Explain the need to incorporate practices in other sessions that address linking through the middle third quickly and effectively. This holistic approach ensures that players gain a well-rounded understanding of counter-attacking from deep, including both defensive and attacking aspects.

By addressing these technical details, players will enhance their speed of attacks, decision-making abilities, and ability to manage space effectively. This comprehensive coaching approach will contribute to the overall development of the players' counter-attacking skills, enabling them to execute fast and effective attacks from deep positions on the pitch.