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teaching the basics of defending

a soccer coaching practice plan from the very useful footballcoachingcourses.com

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"I have one child on my U6 team who regularly misbehaves even with his parents around...



I had a couple of heart to hearts with him, but that didn't seem to help much.

Then I started giving [footy4kids patches](#)... He earned one for bravery at the last game for getting up so quickly after falls. I had told him that he would get something for that. He was so excited. After I gave the patches out..I told him about a special patch he could earn for listening and following directions. We worked on a couple more practice games, he listened, did what he was told and said: "I've followed directions!" I gave him a gold star.

It is amazing what a little thing like a patch can do." *Lee*

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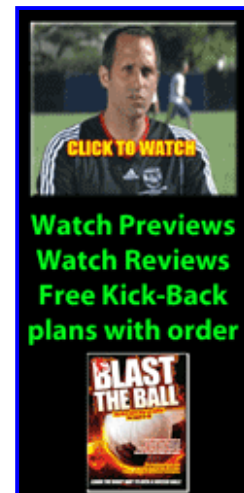
This session is suitable for players aged 8 and upwards.

Skills required: the players should be able to [control](#) and [pass](#) with some confidence

Equipment required: cones and footballs.

Number of players: groups of three, four and five.

Start the session with a suitable [warm up](#) and finish with a [SSG](#).



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Organisation

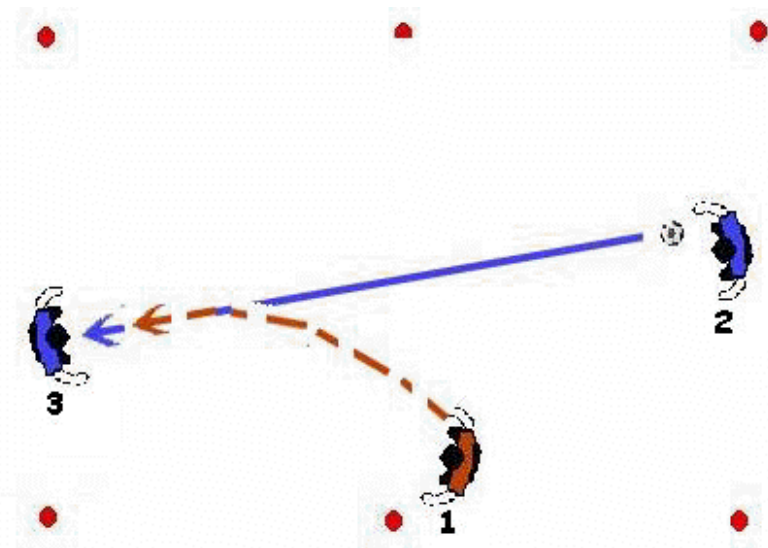
- Grid size: 20m x 10m
- 1 server and 1 receiver face each other on opposite sides of the grid. A defender (player 1 in the diagram below) waits just outside the grid halfway along the side line.
- The server (player 2 in the diagram) passes the ball to the receiver (player 3). The player waiting outside the grid runs into the grid to defend and stop the attacker passing the ball back to the server.
- The receiver must try to beat the defender and return the ball to the server.

Rule

- The defender only moves after the receiver has touched the ball.

Coaching points

- The defender must start with good strides and end with short steps.
- He should show the attacker the side he wants him to go, (the defenders best foot).



Key Points

1. **Switch on, concentrate (attitude).** When and where does defending commence? As soon as possession is lost you must be mentally prepared to defend. You must be able to read the situation, the player in possession and other attacking and defensive players activity. We are at our most vulnerable when the ball is lost because players have been drawn out of position.
2. **Nearest man to the ball** should apply pressure on the ball by moving into a position within 2-3 yards of their opponent.
3. **Angle of approach** in order to adopt the correct challenging position the defender must make up ground while the ball is travelling (travel as the ball is travelling) and get into line between the ball and the goal or target area. The defender's job is to reduce passing angles and space for the man on the ball to play in and to make passing targets predictable.
4. **Speed of approach.** The defender should approach his opponent as fast as he can while the ball is travelling in order to make up ground. It is important, however, for the defender to have slowed his approach by the time the football has reached the opponent. If he continues at speed when the the opponent has the ball under control he will find it difficult to change direction, so the attacker will be able to beat him with a trick or a sudden side movement. The approach by the defender should be slowed, and a balanced position should be adopted, just before the ball is brought under control. Quick closing down can force technical and tactical errors by making opponents perform quicker than they are capable of. Make sure he doesn't beat you on the first touch, therefore don't close down too close or too fast or he will nick it past you. Be aware of give and goes with supporting players.
5. **Closing down the last few yards** by slowing down (small strides). If the defender is five to six yards away from the attacker when the ball is brought under control, his task is to close down the last three to four yards.
6. **Side on approach,** inch in, face the same way. Slightly crouching, the defender should adopt a sideways on position and edge in slowly towards the attacker. Gain the initiative by pretending to tackle or

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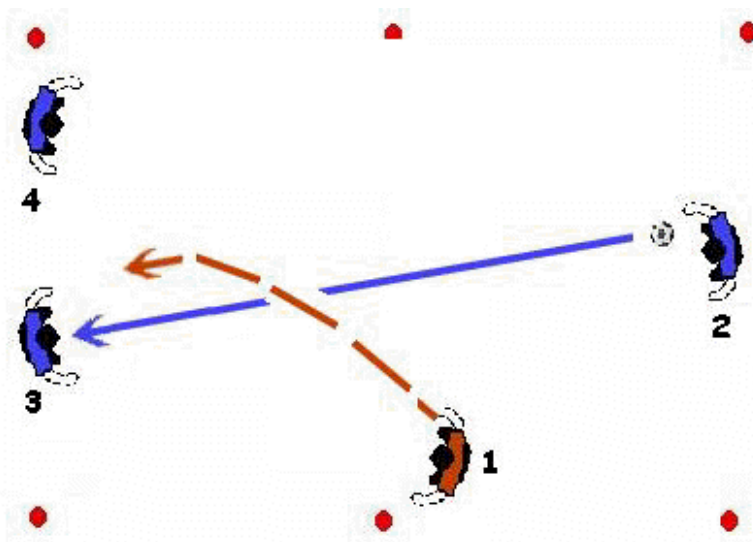
feinting so the attacker looks down and the ball and tries to defend it.

7. **Force him one way**, onto your best foot, into players, down the line or across the field. Make play predictable. Show where you want him to go and make him go by getting there early.
8. **Closing down**. Get in position with a gap between your legs, get down and stay down and resist putting first foot forward. Is he too tight too soon or too loose so that the attacker can easily control the ball?
9. **Jockey the attacker**. The idea of jockeying is to delay or break up the attack by preventing the player on the ball from playing forward (or sometimes sideways) by keeping in front of him or by getting your body between the attacker and the goal. The defender backs off slightly and waits for the attacker to commit himself, keeping their eyes focused firmly on the movement of the ball and not the player. The defender must get low, slightly half turned and stay balanced on their toes with their body weight evenly distributed between both feet so they can edge close to the ball, have the option of tackling or springing off if required. Keep your opponent at arm's length so you are a good distance to tackle if possible. You don't need to tackle the important thing is to prevent them playing forward. Don't make it easy for the attacker by diving in or moving too fast or too close, be patient and track the attacker who is in front of you.
10. **Be Patient**, don't jump in and wait for the Cavalry. Time, in these situations, time always favours the defender. If the attacker has control of the ball, the temptation to try to win the ball must be resisted by the defender. Remember, fools rush in, usually fall over, and present the opposition with a numerical advantage.
11. **End product**. Intercept and create, spoil and recover, contain and stick and tackle. Clearances you must you be first by meeting the ball as early as possible with determination. Look for height, distance or width. Height favours the defence and buys time.
12. **Recovery Runs** with lots of positive attitude. Recovering defenders should understand their lines of recovery. The run should be a direct line to their own goal. When the ball is put into wide areas wide full back furthest from the ball should run in line with the back post, far post should run mid goal, mid goal should mark near post, near post should go to the ball. Once goalside the options are can I win the ball, can I cover a challenging player, can I mark someone or can I mark space.
 - Remember...if you can win the ball, tackle decisively but don't jump in.

Progression 1 v 2

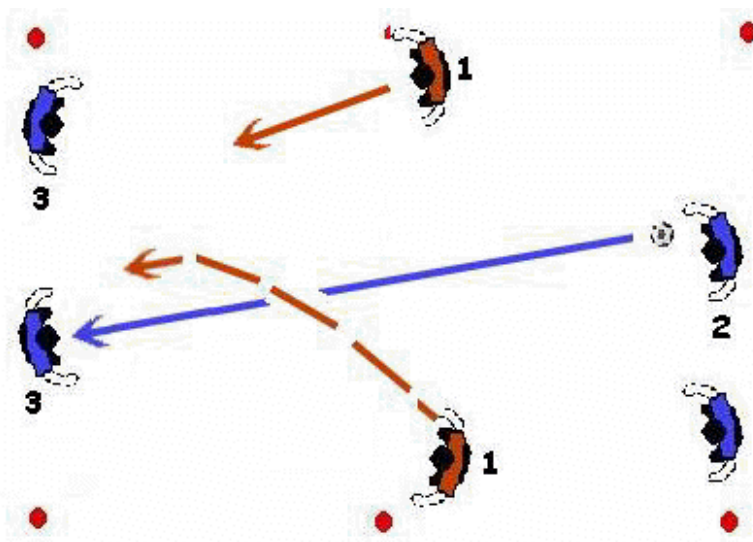
Try to hold them up so players can get back and help. So don't dive in, keep your distance to give you time and ease toward the side of the ball. Open your body so you can see both attackers and the ball and listen to communication around you.

- Organisation as above except now two attackers.
- Defender must look to retreat and recover. Line of recovery.
- Keep distance to give time.
- Ease toward side of the ball.
- Open body stance.
- Show where you want the ball to go.
- Angle and distance between players.



Progression 2 v 2

- Organisation as above except, the extra defender stands on the other side opposite the first defender.
- Defenders should wear bibs.
- Look at forcing play in one direction, angle of approach.
- Support for challenging player. Communication, angle and distance.
- Recovery runs.



Key terms

Closing down

This involves reading the situation, the player in possession, your immediate opponent and any other players' movements. When preparing to close down you should focus on the ball and your opponent and get your stance, movement and readiness to react right. The timing of closing down is important, you should be aware of when the pass is certain and as it is released so you can travel as the ball is travelling. The approach should be fast as the ball travels but slow on approach, where do you want to show him with your angle of approach and observation of receiving players touch or movement. Don't jump in but approach with controlled deceleration.

Pressing

Move quickly into a position within 2-3 yards of an opponent so you reduce his passing angles and space which to operate in. Make passing targets predictable by showing him one way and force technical and tactical errors by making opponents perform quicker than they are capable of. Supporting players must move into position quickly to reduce his decision making.

Jockeying

This involves the defenders intention to show or hold up the player. It takes into account the characteristics of the opponent:

- If he is better on his right or left foot,
- Does he like to come inside or outside
- Does he like to shoot, dribble or pass

This depends on If the play is overloaded and how far are we from goal. It also involves limiting the operating choices and options as well as gaining control of the situation by having correct distances, angles and changes of position. The defender must be aware of possible, and speedy changes of position and balance. Making play predictable by patience and decision making. Decisions to push the opponents in which direction and why, and to work the opponent and when to tackle.

Marking

Marking involves allowing an opponent to receive a pass under limited and controllable conditions as well as preventing him from receiving a pass. Preventing an opponent turning and discouraging the man on the ball to pass to the man your marking. You will have to be aware of marking distance, angle, stance and movement, changes of position as well as body shape. The marker will have to make the following decisions:

- Can I intercept and then create
- Spoil and recover
- Contain,
- Push back and stick

- Tackle

Recovery runs

- Central areas. Get goal side in the most direct route to goal and then reassess your situation. Can you challenge, mark another attacker, cover space or prevent the player running directly at goal.
- Wide areas. Your run should be in a line with the near post if you are out wide and not at the wide man if he is going to cross and you can't get there. If you run in a line towards the near post then you can prevent him from coming inside and maybe you can block the cross.

Stance

Use your arms for balance, you should crouch as low as you can so that you are ready to spring. Your weight should be over your toes so that you can move quickly into action.

Delaying

A very important way of preventing an emergency situation from happening is to delay your opponents as long as possible.

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