

DEFENSIVE ORGANISATION IN MID-BLOCK

AGE PHASE: U17+

LEVEL

- U17-First team

SESSION OBJECTIVES

To improve a team's defensive organisation in a mid-block by:

- Denying passes between the lines
- Applying pressure and covering spaces
- Shifting as a unit

PART 1: POSSESSION PRACTICE

- This practice is a Rondo-based possession practice, beginning to layer the details of pressing from the first line and covering in the second line.
- The practice requires a minimum of 12 players.

PART 2: TACTICAL SITUATION GAME

- This practice is a tactical situation game to improve the collective defending between the midfield line of four and two forwards.
- The practice requires a minimum of 19 players and is position-specific.

PART 3: CONDITIONED 11v11

- This practice is a conditioned 11v11 with three zones to link all of the concepts trained to a game-specific context.
- The attacking team will be in a 1-4-3-3 formation, while the defensive team will be set up in a 1-4-4-2 formation.
- The practice requires 22 players.

KEY

.....→
Ball movement

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Player movement
without the ball

→
Player movement
with the ball



Players



Cones



Flat marker



Cones with
flat marker



Goal



Mini-goal



Mannequin



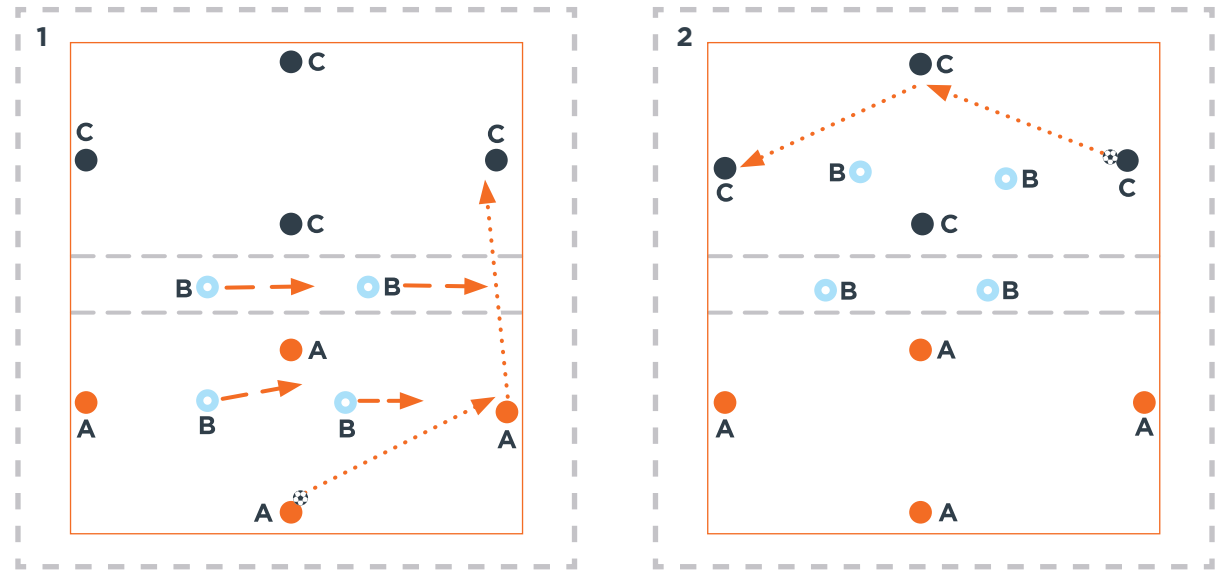
Pole



Football

FUNCTION 1

- This is a 4v2+2 possession practice made up of three teams of 4.
- The practice begins 4v2 in the lower zone as pictured. **Team A** are opposed by two players from the defending **Team B**, and must complete **3 passes** before transferring the ball to **Team C** in the upper zone.
- Players on the team in possession are allowed a maximum of **2 touches**.
- The pass into the upper zone must be below the knees, as the defending team (**B**) will have two players positioned in the middle zone. They shift as **Team A** build up, to deny passing lines to the upper zone.
- The objective is for the two **Team B** defenders to apply pressure against the four **Team A** attackers, as they attempt to recover the ball by forcing play towards the sides. Their two teammates between the lines defend in the second line.



FUNCTION 2

- Diagram 2** shows the movements when **Team A** is able to successfully transfer the ball to **Team C** in the upper zone. The two **Team B** defenders in the middle zone jump to the upper zone to apply pressure, while the other two defenders drop into the middle zone.
- If the defensive team (**B**) recovers the ball, they try to connect a pass with one of their teammates. The coach will then play a new ball in.
- Six blocks of work will allow each team of four play as the defensive team twice.

COACHING DETAIL: OUT OF POSSESSION

4v2 SITUATION

- The two defenders apply pressure on the ball while the second line of defenders position themselves to deny inner passing lines.
- Recognising moments to apply strong pressure is important; slow and bouncing passes could be cues.
- Forcing play towards the sideline means you can use it as an extra defender.
- The first defender should accelerate to initiate pressure, and then decelerate as they approach the ball-carrier.

TWO DEFENDERS IN MIDDLE ZONE

- Organise covering positions in relation to the press.
- Give clear and concise information to the two defenders in the first zone: “Force right” or “force left”, for example.
- React quickly to press if the team in possession is able to transfer the ball to the far zone.

DEFENDING AFTER PASS TO FAR ZONE

If the team in possession is able to transfer the ball to the far zone:

- The defenders in the middle zone must react quickly to apply pressure and cover.
- The defenders in the first zone must quickly provide information to the defenders in front to reorganise their 2-2 press.

COACHING DETAIL: IN POSSESSION

POSITIONING

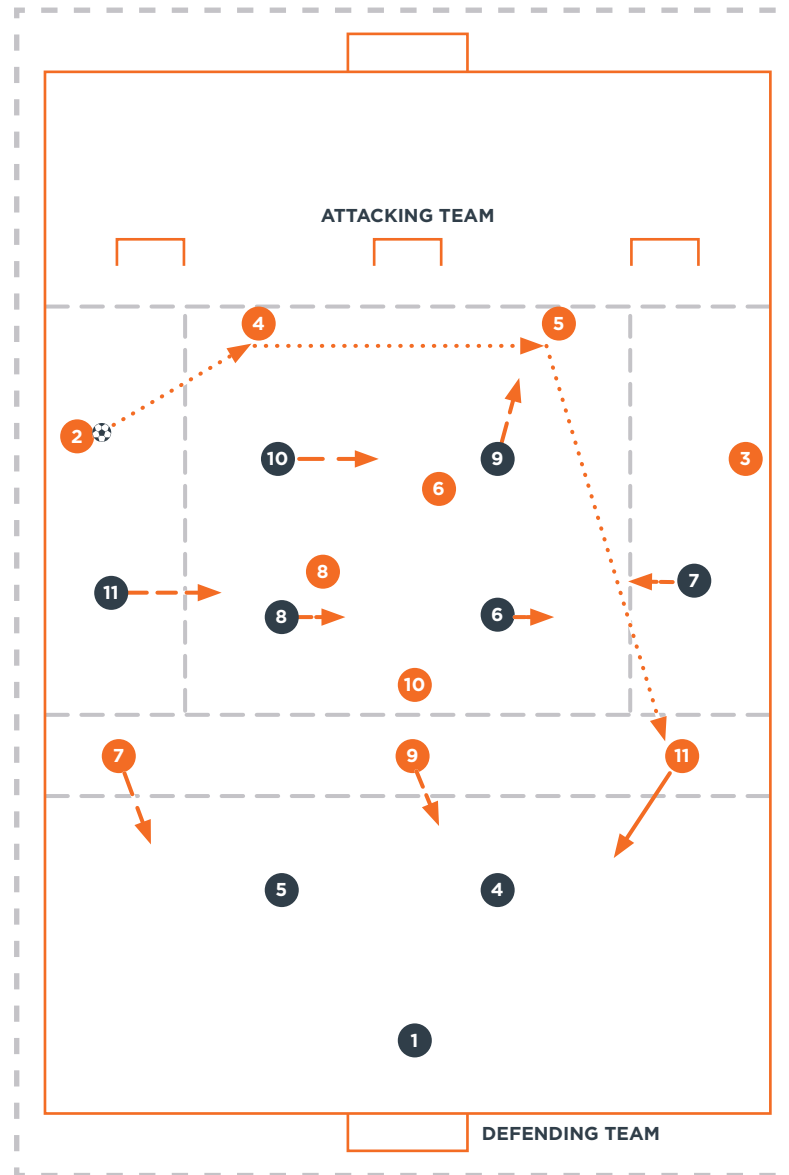
- When in possession, the four attackers must occupy all spaces on each side of the box, ensuring three passing options at all times.

4v2 SITUATION

- Each player should be allowed a maximum of two touches, but be challenged to utilise one touch when possible to circulate the ball rapidly.
- After three passes, the team in possession must be aware of when to attempt to transfer ball to other side:
 - 1. After a ball rotation from one side to the other.
 - 2. After utilising a third-man combination, look for passes between the lines to the far zone.

FUNCTION

- This is a 10v9 practice, with the objective of improving middle-block defending.
- The game begins with the attacking team in possession. They try to play through the opposing defence into their **7, 9 and 11** – who are positioned in a middle zone – with **3 touches** maximum.
- Once the ball is played into the attacking **7, 9 or 11**, only the opposing centre-backs (**4 and 5**) can defend them.
- Before passing into the **7, 9 or 11**, the attacking team must complete **3 passes** in the first zone. The challenge is to connect passes in each of the three vertical zones before moving forward.
- Once the attacking team plays into one of their three forwards, it is a 3v2 attack against the opposing centre-backs for **8 seconds**.
- The pass into the attacking **7, 9 or 11** must be below knee-height.
- After a goal, block, save or out-of-bounds, a new ball will begin with the attacking team.
- If the defending team recovers the ball in the first zone (**7v6**), then they try to score in one of the three small goals behind the attacking team.
- The first zone is marked with three vertical zones; the target for the defending team is to shift across as a compact unit to ensure their block of **6 players** are positioned across only two of the three vertical zones at any given time.
- The challenge for the **7 attacking players** in the first zone is to provide maximum width and depth. The **10** should be positioned behind the defending team's midfield line (**11, 8, 6 and 7**) while the full-backs (**2 and 3**) should be positioned with heels on the touchline.



COACHING DETAIL: OUT OF POSSESSION

7v6 ZONE

- Two forwards and four midfielders shift across the field to deny space between players.
- They should engage in collective pressing as the ball travels into the side lanes.
- It will be important for all players to shift across at similar running pace to maintain close distances in the defending block.
- As the ball travels from centre-back to full-back, the forward on the ball-side must quickly drop to deny the pass into supporting midfielders.
- If the team in possession can successfully rotate the ball from one side to the other, the block must sprint diagonally backwards to deny space and reorganise shape.

POSITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Forwards are responsible for pressing centre-backs and protecting space in front of the midfield line.
- Wingers are responsible for pressing full-backs diagonally to deny option of straight pass down the touchline to the 7 or 11, and staying connected to their central midfielders on the weak side.
- Central midfielders are responsible for providing coverage to their wingers as they press the full-backs, denying passing lines into 9 and 10, and stepping to defend the opposing central midfielder on the ball-side.
- Centre-backs should communicate with the block of six in front of them, helping them to identify appropriate marks and positioning to protect space.
- Centre-backs should also force their opponent wide in the 3v2 situation.

COACHING DETAIL: OFFENSIVE TRANSITION

- Simulate securing possession in a game by scoring immediately or within the first two passes upon regaining possession.
- Utilise forwards as options to play into, in order to commit defenders and thus free space in wide areas.

COACHING DETAIL: IN POSSESSION

7v6 ZONE

- Circulate the ball rapidly by using one touch when possible.
- Challenge the 10 to position in depth behind the defending team's midfield line.
- Challenge the defensive line to alternate playing through each player and skipping players, so forcing the defending team to make different decisions.

3v2 ATTACK

- Run with the ball to commit defenders.
- Utilise overlaps and diagonal runs between defenders.

COACHING DETAIL: OUT OF POSSESSION

MIDDLE BLOCK

- Out of possession, the teams will defend in a 1-4-4-2 block, forcing play towards the sidelines.
- As the ball travels into the sidelines, the team must shift across to position in two of the three vertical zones.
 - The weak-side central midfielder must be aware if a centre-back is dragged out of position by a forward, to know when to position in the defensive line in order to rebalance it.
 - If the opponent is able to successfully rotate the ball to the other side or in behind the defensive line, the whole team must sprint diagonally backwards to reorganise their shape.
- When the full-back steps to mark or defend the winger in the side lane, the centre-backs and opposite full-back must slide and drop to create an L shape of coverage.

PRESSING MOMENTS

- The main pressing moments for the team are:
 - A bad pass or touch
 - A long horizontal pass
 - If the opponent plays a straight pass from full-back to winger in side lane, the winger must sprint back to create a 2v1 defensive superiority to regain the ball
- When the opponent plays backwards, that is a moment to reduce spaces between lines and positions.

COACHING DETAIL: OFFENSIVE TRANSITION

- Secure possession by connecting first two passes in order to buy time for the centre-backs to provide depth.
- Utilise forwards as options to play into, in order to commit defenders to free space in wide areas.

COACHING DETAIL: IN POSSESSION

BALL CIRCULATION

- Circulate the ball rapidly by using one touch when possible.
- Challenge the 10 to position themselves behind the defending team's midfield line.
- Challenge the defensive line to alternate playing through each player and skipping players to force defending team to make different decisions. .

RUNS IN BEHIND

- Ensure 7, 11, and 9 co-ordinate their movements to drag defenders out of their positions to unbalance the opposition's defensive line.