

# Defending as a unit

In this session we look at developing teams ability to defend as a unit.

## What you tell your players the session is about:

- Working hard together to win possession.
- Pressing, supporting and covering as a team unit.

## What you tell your players to do:

- Demonstrate a positive, aggressive but controlled attitude.
- Remember and apply the work on individual pressing.
- Observe the opponents positions and your team mates.
- Keep compact as a unit.
- Cover spaces as well as players.
- Seize the opportunity to challenge correctly for the ball.

## What to shout:

- "Press quickly."
- "Keep together and work as a unit."
- "Get tighter and close the gap."
- "Stay on your feet."
- "Don't dive in."
- "Win it!"

## What to look for:

- Slow reactions and movement.
- Gaps between players.
- Lack of positive mental attitude.
- Failure to intercept or challenge when there is a chance.
- Rash challenges, fouls, going to ground.
- Lack of communication and specific information.

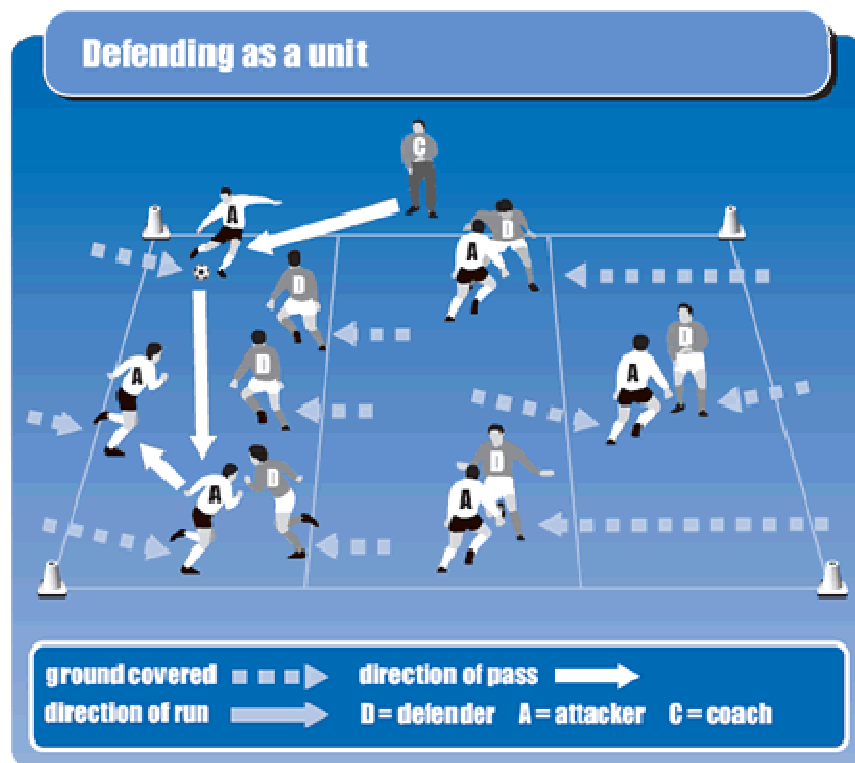
## What to think about:

Are they working "smart" or just hard? Are they applying the lessons learned in marking and covering? Think about rotating tired players, as done well this is a hard session. Drinks and rest pauses are advisable. Relax the 8 pass rule in the game after a while and it will be less frantic. Think about letting them defend deep as a team and counter attack. Applaud all goals and good attempts deriving from good defending.

## What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: Use an area approx 30m x 20m. Three players stand outside the area at both ends. Three other players from each team stand in the middle third. The coach plays a ball into one end and the players at that end step into the grid to receive. Now they must make 3/4/5 passes before they can pass into the other team at the far end. When they do they get a point and their team mates in the middle can now pressurise

the opponents who are receiving the ball. Each successful long pass gets a point. Rotate the players in the middle.



### Development

When the ball is played in by the coach one white player can move into the attacking third. His team mates must now make 4/5/6 passes in the other two thirds before passing to him to get a point. All the grey players now work as a team to intercept before the final pass can be made. If they do, it is their turn in possession, if not, whites retain the ball and start again.

### How would I put this into a game situation:

Play 5 v 5 on a 30m by 45m area with goals. Divide the pitch into thirds. The goalkeeper in possession must distribute in his defending third. A team making eight passes gets a goal. A normal goal also counts.

This encourages the defenders to hunt as a pack and try to win the ball back early. They must work as a team.

## Never Concede from a Corner Again

Giving players specialist positions during matches can be extremely effective. Tell them where to stand, what to do and how to do it, particularly in situations where your team is under pressure. Are you conceding a lot of goals from corners? Then you need a player to stand BIG at the front of your penalty area to block the corner taker. Do this properly and you need never concede from a corner again.

One of the most important positions when defending a corner is the person nearest the corner taker. Position him/her on the edge of the box right in front of the intended flight of the ball. If you put one of your strong players here, it will prevent short corners and put off the player taking the corner. That player is then faced with a one man wall which the ball has to get over or around. It's not easy, try it yourself!

### **Cutting off supply**

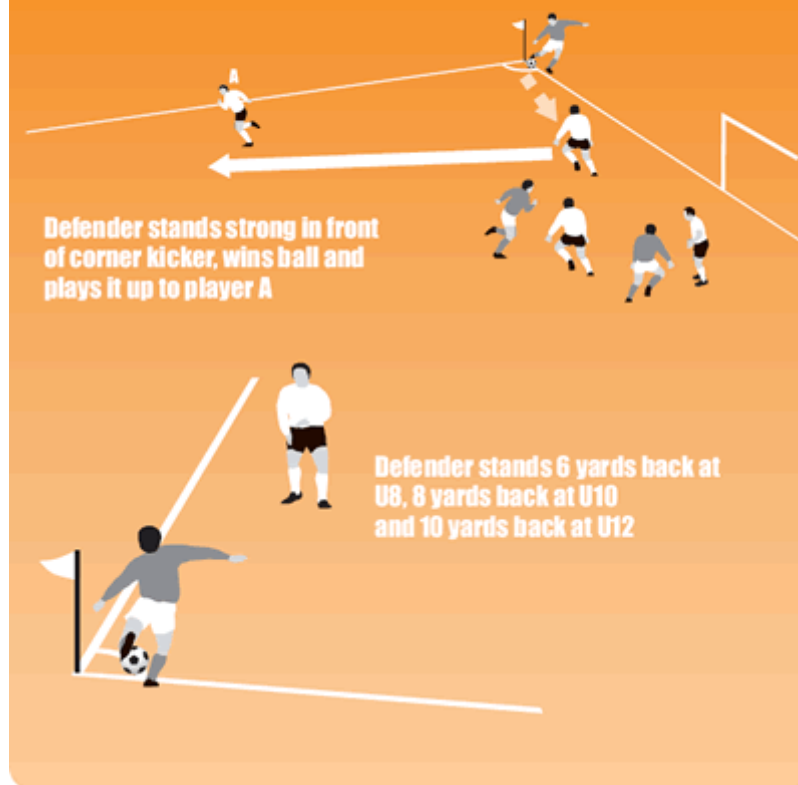
The player in this position effectively cuts off the supply into the box. This also protects your goalkeeper and defenders. The player might also be able to win the ball from poor or short corners and set up a quick counter attack.

THE DEFENDER STANDS 6 YARDS BACK AT U8, 8 YARDS BACK AT U10 AND 10 YARDS BACK AT U12.

### **Leave a man upfield**

Once this position has been claimed by one of your players, use tactics on match day so that when they win the ball you leave a player upfield in the same position at each corner and your specialist player will be able to take the ball and find that player, immediately setting up an attack.

## Blocking the corner kick



### During training

Practice corners where the player in this position is constantly having the ball hit hard towards them. They can use chest, head and feet to rob the opposition of chances to put balls into the box. Use only two players, a corner taker and a defender to practice this specialist position. You can kill two birds with one stone here, the corner taker has to clear the defender and the defender needs to win the ball. You can also put an attacker in position A ready to receive the ball won by your defender.

### Make your corner defenders SMART

If you want to make sure you're giving your players targets that they have to meet, do it the SMART way.

SPECIFIC  
MEASURABLE  
AGREED  
REALISTIC  
TIMED

The SPECIFIC target for your players is to clear the ball when it enters the penalty area at corners during training. Make it MEASURABLE by telling your players 50 per cent of corners must be cleared. AGREE it with them in training. Is 50 per cent REALISTIC? I think so. Make it TIMED by agreeing it for a particular training session. Tailor the SMART sessions to your individual players and get them to tell you if they have reached the target.

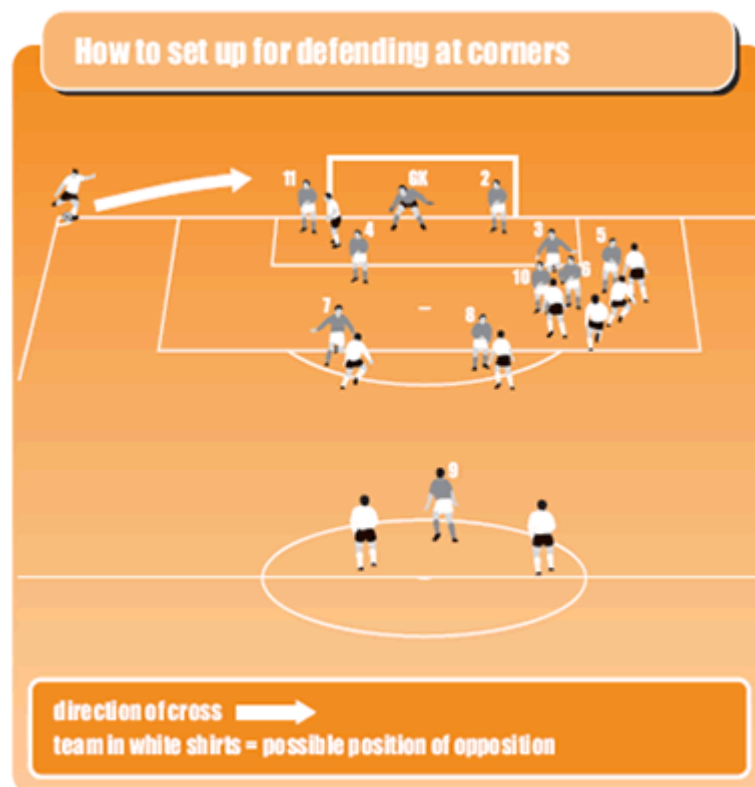
## Tony Carr on Defending Corners

One of the key elements of a defensive strategy for your team is getting your players to know their positions at corners, says Tony Carr, Academy Director at West Ham United.

### Key Coaching Tip

The key is concentration and to make sure you are first to the ball!

Using the diagram below show your players the positions for basic marking responsibilities. Some players need to mark man for man, others will need to use zonal marking.



**Assuming the corner is being taken on the left by a right footed player swinging the ball in towards the goal, the set up you should employ is as follows:**

- Your best four headers of the ball should man to man mark (numbers 3, 5, 6 and 10 in the diagram) and their job is to mark the opposition's main heading threat, marking slightly in front, and being first to the ball.
- No 11 should mark in front of any opposition standing on the near post or mark the space (zone) in their absence.
- No 4 marks the space in front of the main markers, keeping a look out for any opposition standing in front of the goalkeeper. If this is the case he may have to adjust his position so he is standing in front of the attacker.
- No 2 marks the far post.
- Nos 7 and 8 mark any opposition on the edge of the box.
- No 9 stays upfield, occupying two defenders and hoping to help spring a counter attack

## How to Pass the Ball Out from the Back

Good teams can pass the ball out from the back in a structured controlled manner. Tony Carr, Academy Director at West Ham United, explains how to coach your players to do it.

### Key Coaching Tip

Give your players the confidence and encouragement to do it!

Passing out from the back of defence, whether a back 3 or back 4 requires, first, that the players are comfortable in possession of the ball, and second that the coach gives the players the confidence and encouragement to do it.

In Diagram 1 below, set up with 3 defenders in each half versus 2 forwards. Before the ball can be played into the attacking half, all 3 defenders have to touch the ball. This makes them involved in the first phase of the attacking movement and hopefully the attackers will receive a more controlled pass.



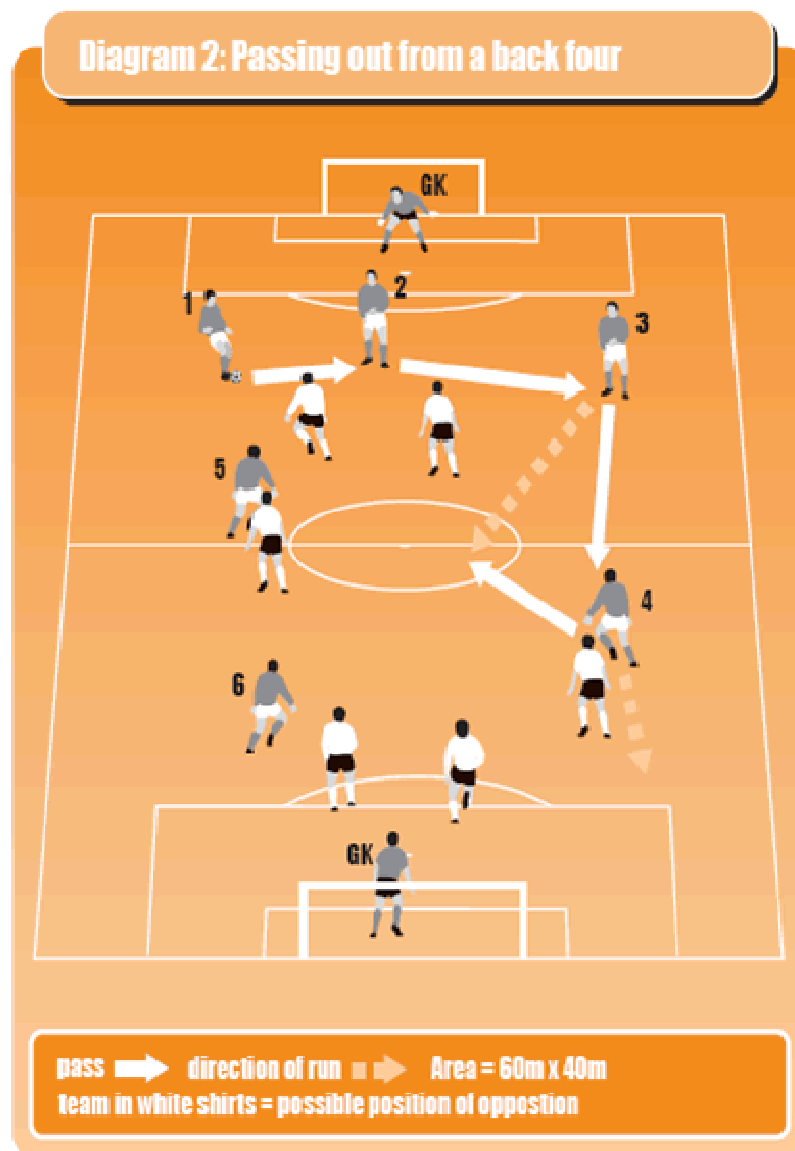
1. Defender 1 passes to defender 2, 2 to 3 and 3 passes forward to 4.
2. 4 and 5 try to score. When they have either lost the ball or shot at goal repeat the process.

### Pass out from the back to create 3v3

If we advance Diagram 1, after all the defenders touch the ball allow 1 dark shirted defender or 1 white shirted defender to break into the attacking half making 3v3.

### Get your midfielders to accept the pass

Finally, as Diagram 2 shows, add a midfield section allowing a midfielder or defender to break into the attacking third of the pitch making 3v3.



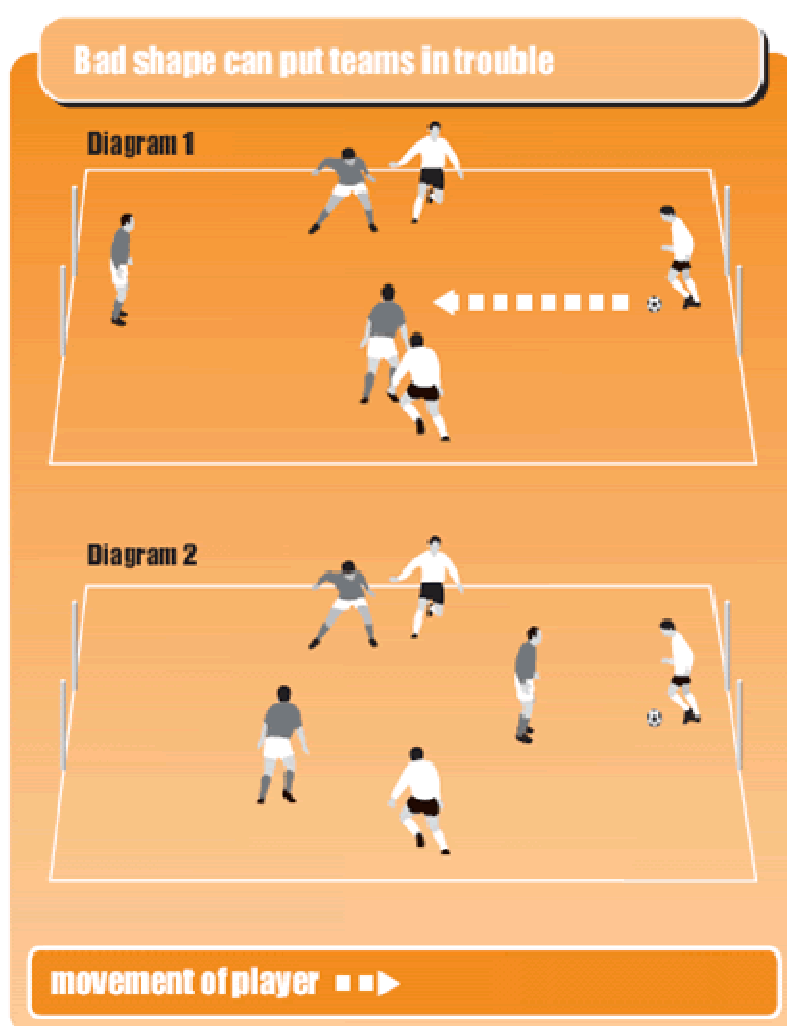
YOU'RE NOW PASSING YOUR WAY TO THE OPPOSITION GOAL!

## Shape up your team to defend all over the pitch

Shapes are important in football. They happen all over the pitch, but you must make sure your players know how they work. Playing 3v3 matches shows you how to use triangles, says David Clark

### 3v3 helps your players keep shape

Playing 3v3 brings up situations that often occur in 7-a-side or 11-a-side. It illustrates how poor shape has an effect on the other players, making their own job much harder. The triangular shape in midfield is very much something coaches can use to great effect all over the pitch. But you must use it properly. Have a look at the diagrams and I'll show you what I mean:



In the top diagram the white team have the ball and have to bring it out from their own goal. The grey team has adopted the shape of a triangle, however, the middle player has dropped back deep to protect his goal, in effect becoming a sweeper behind the other two grey team players. This means that the white player bringing the ball out is unmarked and can either directly attack straight down the middle or create 2v1 situations with his team mates. The two grey wingers have a problem. Do they mark their player or go towards the man with the ball.



### **A simple wall pass opens the path to goal**

By moving away from the player they are marking they leave themselves open to a simple wall pass and leave the goal at their mercy. If they stay, this creates a 1v1 directly in front of their own goal. Or the white player can elect to move towards one of his teammates creating a 2v1.

### **Problem for the man on the ball**

In the bottom diagram the grey team is still in a triangle but the middle player has moved up to the man on the ball. This gives the man on the ball an immediate problem as he tries to bring the ball out. He is under pressure to pass the ball because he dare not dribble past him. Passing is difficult so the grey team are more likely to win the ball. The grey player can also force the player to pass one way or another by moving slightly to one side, forcing a pass and allowing a grey team mate to intercept.

The difference in these two situations highlights not only how bad shape can make effective team play more difficult, but also how important communication is. If you don't explain how it works young players might conclude that the situation in the first diagram is reasonable. They can play like this for quite a while believing they are following your coaching, and then blame one another for any mistakes that lead to goals.

**Key coaching tip:** Teach your players by showing them both these situations.

## How to Keep Attackers at Bay

When your defender is the last man, if he jumps into a tackle and doesn't win it, the attacker is through on goal. So, you need to teach your players ways to hold up an opponent until help arrives, says David Clarke.

You don't always need to tackle an opponent to dispossess them or slow their progress. Jockeying denies your opponent time and space, and it's a good tactic to allow your team-mates to get back in position.

### Jockeying an opponent to keep him out



1. Tell your players to adopt an almost side-on position, with shoulders opened out slightly so that you provide a barrier to your opponent. This keeps the opposition in front of your player so he can see them.

Your players should keep their knees slightly bent, with their weight on the front of their feet, which makes it easier to change direction while they move backwards.

2. Make sure your players stay goal-side, and also in front of your opponent. They do this by turning off their back foot as they move backwards.

3. Tell them to stay within an arm's length of their opponent to increase the pressure on them. They should have their arms slightly out to create more of a natural barrier. But make sure they don't use them to push!

**Key coaching tip:** Don't jump in!

## How to Coach Effective Marking

**What you tell your players the session is about:**

1. How to mark opponents effectively.
2. When to mark players and when to cover spaces.

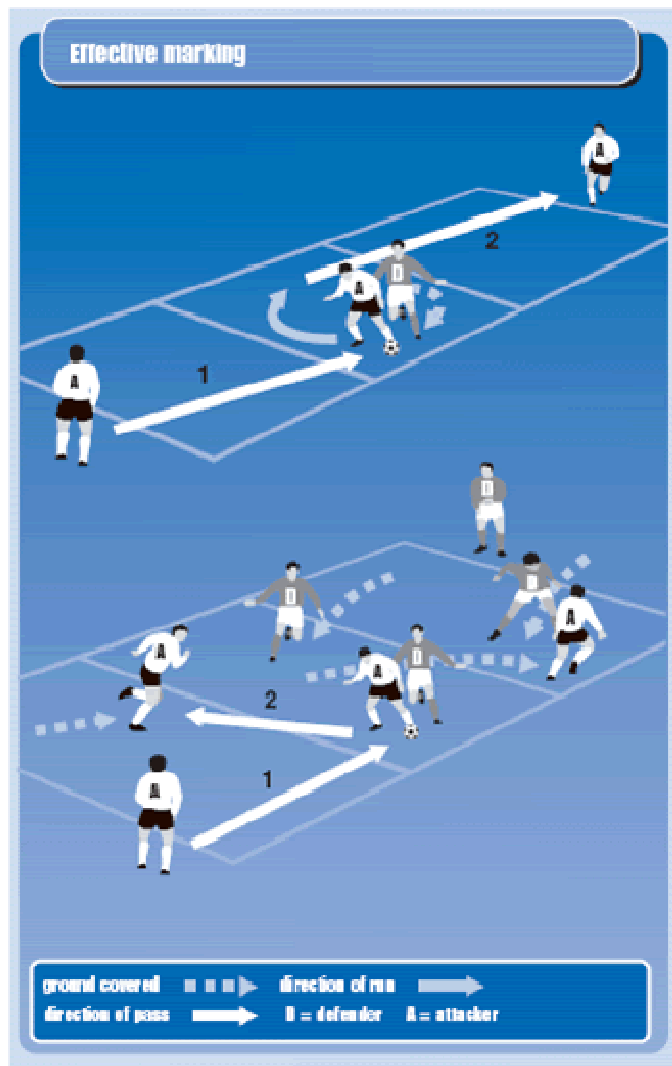
**What you tell your players to do:**

1. Move quickly into position when the ball changes hands.
2. Position between your opponent and your goal.
3. Position to see both the ball and your opponent.
4. Closer to the ball or goal; closer to the opponent.
5. Be ready to intercept the ball but don't commit unless you are sure.
6. Adopt a slightly sideways on body position to move quickly in any direction.
7. Don't allow the opponent to receive and turn.

**What you get your players to do:**

In a 30m x 10m grid, play this 2v2 target zone game.

The players on the outside act as servers and targets. The players on the inside start in the middle third. One player receives from his partner and the objective is to turn and pass to the target player at the other end. The process is then reversed. Players are rotated so all get to practice marking.



## Development

Bring two grids together and increase the numbers to 2v2 in the middle and 2 targets at each end. Increase this again by allowing one of the outsiders to join in after the first pass to make 3v3 in the middle. Now they will develop marking and covering.

## How would I put this into a game situation:

Increase the pitch size to allow for a 5v5 game with end zones. There are no goals or keepers so the team in possession must try to achieve penetration into the opponents end zone.

## What to shout:

- "Move quickly" "get tight" / "not too tight"
- "Watch the ball" / "don't dive in"
- "Sideways on" "can you intercept?"
- "Watch the space" / "don't let them turn".

## What to look for:

- Players moving too late allowing players to receive under no pressure; marking too far away allowing opponent to turn.
- Players getting too close allowing opponents to turn around or allowing a pass into space behind them.
- Exposing the goal by marking on the wrong side.
- Marking directly behind an opponent and not seeing the ball.
- Marking flat or square; unable to move in any direction.
- Failing to intercept / attempting to intercept at wrong time.

### **What to think about:**

Are the players concentrating when they are in possession?

Are they working as a unit / team? Do they communicate?

## **The Attacking Defender**

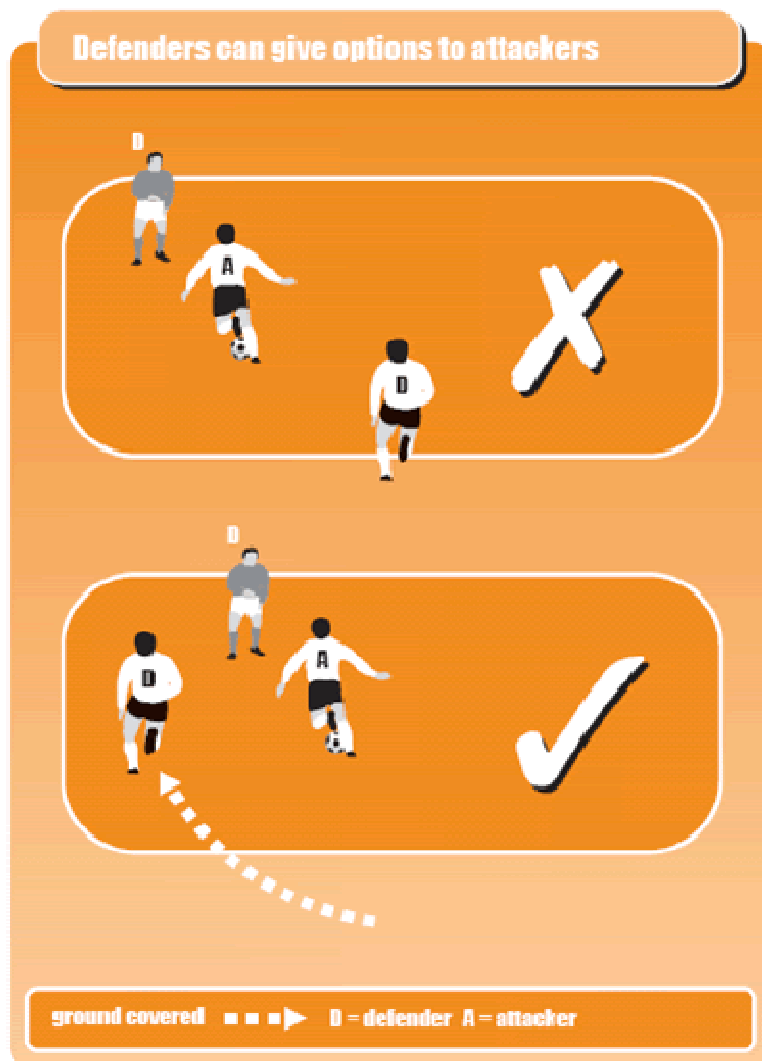
When a defender plays the ball out of his penalty area to one of his midfielders or attackers he should not stop running. He should run outside the attacker, to help put pressure on the opponents, says David Clarke.

### **Running at the opposition**

When defenders play the ball up the line to their attackers they need to support them by running alongside them so they can get past players by playing a wall pass or they can put the supporting defender in so he can cross the ball into the box.

### **Defenders can support attackers**

Support play is essential when you have players running with the ball. If you are an attacker going one-on-one with the defender you want to have the option of passing past the defender you are facing.



### **The attacker increases his options**

It also means the defending player is up against two, rather than one, attacking players, so he will have to make a decision whether to jump in or wait to see what the attacker does. In this way your attacker's clever skills will be even more effective.

### **Support players give options to score goals**

When you watch teams in the top leagues around the world, there is always a support player who is running with the attacker. The more options your team has the more chances they have of scoring goals.

### **Key coaching tip**

Tell your defenders to run outside their attackers to offer support.

## Coping with Aerial Bombardment

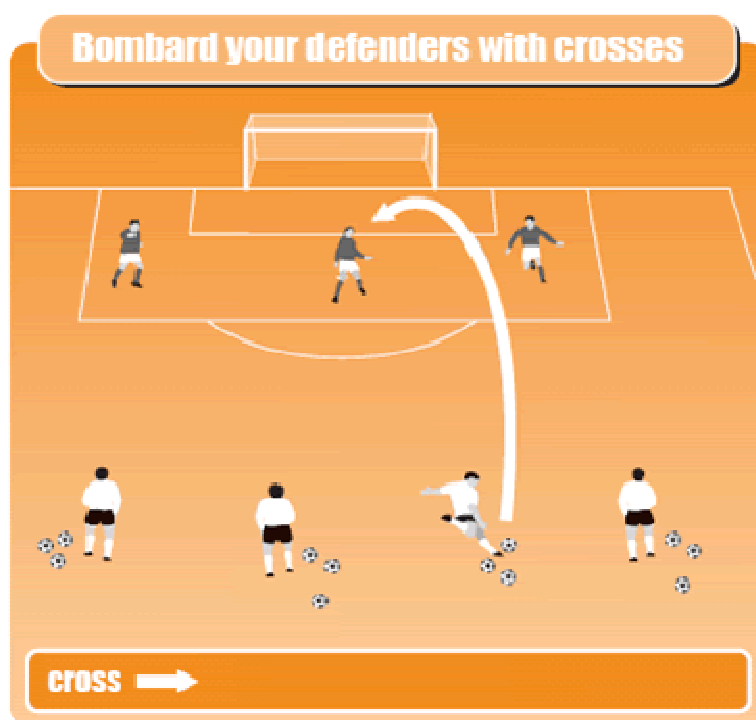
A great way to put your defenders under pressure at training is to get your players to bombard your best three defenders with high balls into the penalty area so they are constantly having to clear them, says David Clarke.

### Prepare to defend against long ball tactics

You often find on match day that you have prepared your team for everything except an aerial bombardment from a team with big, strong players who, whenever they get the chance, blast the ball into the penalty area. It's no good having great defenders who can take the ball off an attacker if they cannot head it away when they are under attack.

### Players need to generate power

When heading the ball tell your defenders they must have plenty of power. Tell them to arch their backs and swing their heads forward to get the power from their shoulders to head the ball away, or to judge the flight of the ball to volley it away.



### Don't let the ball bounce

In the diagram the defenders are faced with balls into the box which they must prevent from bouncing. It is good for communication, movement, volleying and heading.

### How to coach it

1. Use three defenders and put four other players around the 18 yard box with three balls each.

2. Players kick the ball into the box from various angles trying to get the ball to bounce in the area.
3. They can use a drop-kick, high cross, or driven cross.
4. Defenders must not let the ball hit the ground.
5. Play until all the balls are used up then change players.

### **A great way to teach younger players**

A fun way to learn heading is to head the ball over a tennis or volleyball net. Players need to direct the ball upwards to clear the net which is great for practising defensive heading. It also helps you teach how to control and direct a ball properly.

## **Providing cover for a team-mate against an opponent**

There's nothing worse for an attacking player than getting past the defender only to find another one in his way. So how do you get your players to cover?

You can get past one defender, but two? The odds are stacked against it. It also means the attacker will veer away from a direct route to goal - the second defender can 'steer' the attacker wide of the penalty area.

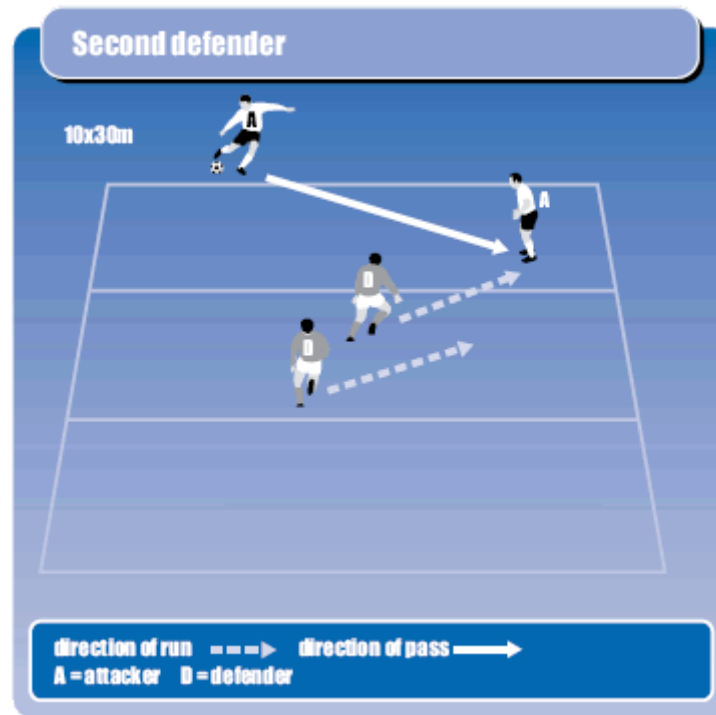
So how do you get your players to cover? Here is a great way to coach defensive positions:

### **What you get your players to do**

**Stage 1:** In an area approx 10 x 30m, the ball is played to an attacker, who must try and dribble to the end-line. The two defenders must prevent the attacker from doing so by forcing their opponent down the line. The first defender challenges the attacker, the second defender provides cover.

**Stage 2:** Switch positions so everyone gets a go at being the covering defender.





### **What you tell your players to do**

Force the attacker down the touchline.

Stop the ball from being played forward.

Stand at a slight angle goalside of the first defender.

Communicate early and clearly

### **What to look for**

The covering player being in position to make an effective challenge if the first defender is beaten.

Good communication – for example, the covering defender advising their team-mate to “get closer” or “force them down the line”.

Making the forwards’ play predictable.

### **Development**

The attacker playing the first pass joins in the attack to make a 2 v 2 situation. The defenders will now have to constantly switch roles depending on who is nearest the ball, with the covering defender becomes the main defender and vice versa.

## Defending against attacking wingers

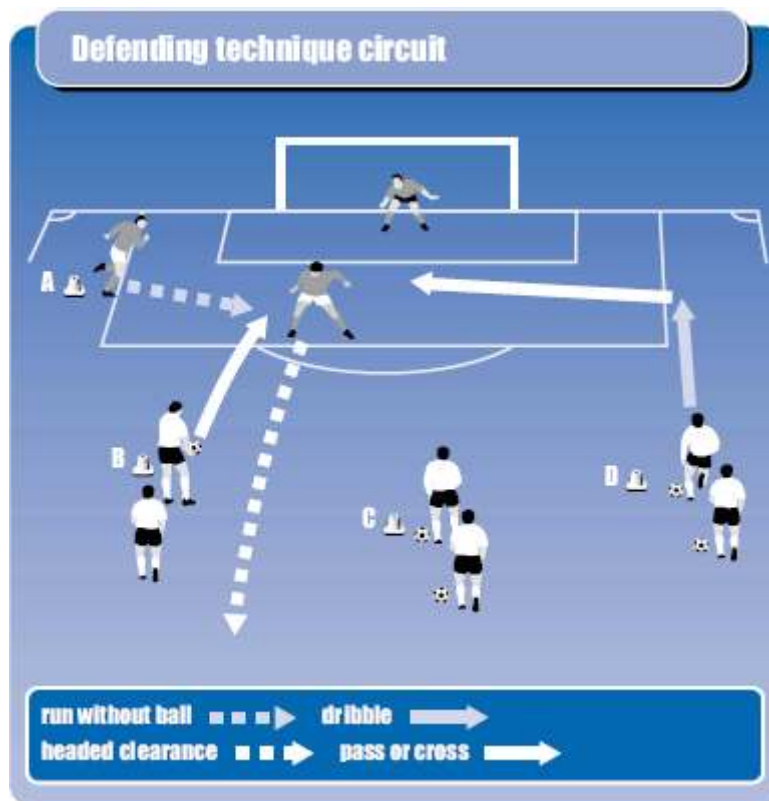
A great drill to get your players clearing the ball.

Clearing the ball when you have players running at you is never easy. It often needs a calm head and a reminder not to jump into the tackle and make it easy for the attacker to get past you.

So in your next coaching session run this:

### What you tell your players to do:

- Have a "no one is going to pass" attitude.
- Concentrate on each separate activity.
- Make each move as realistic and difficult as it would be in a real game.



### What you get your players to do:

- A – defender comes across to receive thrown pass.
- B – serves a ball to A.
- A – makes headed clearance with height and distance.
- D – immediately dribbles down the line and crosses for B.
- B – gets into the box to score.
- A – must react after initial clearance and get back to defend the cross.
- C – once cross is defended, dribbles into the box and tries to score.
- A – defend 1 v 1 against player C.

The defender gets one point for each successfully cleared ball but the attackers get two points for each goal scored. This will add to the competitiveness, concentration and intensity of the practice.

## Choose exercises that are fun and challenging

One of the ways I find to make coaching more fun for my players are the kind of exercises I choose.

If you use ones that are more than just standing in a row running through a few cones to the other end your players will not only have more fun, but their learning experience will be enhanced.

Take this exercise from West Ham academy director **Tony Carr's *Smart Sessions***. Players have to react to the next ball from a variety of positions - not only that, they also have to turn and be involved in the next part of the exercise. So if they shoot at goal and miss, rather than sink to the floor or put their hands on their heads, they must turn and get ready to defend the next part of the exercise.

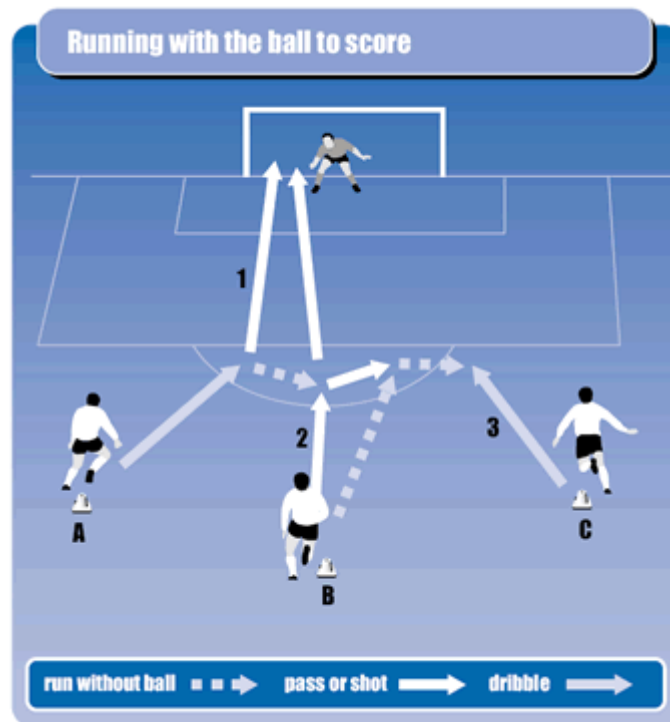
In this way they are playing and thinking about what they have to do next. This will help them in matches and make them a better team player, because they will always be looking to help out the next move whether in defence or attack.

Your players should be working at match pace for this one, and be totally focused on what they are doing. Reacting to the next ball is key to the exercise.

What is happening in this exercise covers all the corners of player development:

- Technique (skills, passing, shooting)
- Physical (power, running, strength in 1v1)
- Mental (decision making)
- Social (communication, combining with team mate)

### **How to set it up**



As in the diagram. Once you have shown the players what to do, stand back and let them work it out.

- **Player A** – Dribbles and shoots - looks to help player B.
- **Player B** – One-two with A and shoots.
- **Player A** – In for the rebound.
- **Player C** – Dribbles in to attack 1v1 against B.
- **Player B** – Reacts from shot and defends 1v1.

You can then develop the session, using the same set up, like this:

- **Player A** – Dribbles and shoots
- **Player B** – Dribbles to attack 1 v 1 against A
- **Player C** – Has a choice of team mate. Calls team mates name and dribbles to make a 2 v 1 situation
- **Player A** – React to player C's choice
- **Player B** – React to player C's choice

## **Using a warm up to get your players focused - attackers versus defenders**

This is a great warm-up you can employ during a session to get your players' minds back in focus. After the two games above they will need a bit of fun to get them back into coaching mode. This warm-up is a skills game with a competitive angle but one that is fun to play.

In a 15m x 15m square put four cones on the corners with a ball on each of them. Put your two teams on either side outside the square. One team are attackers and the other defenders.

They go head to head in the square one player from each side at a time.

The defender must mirror the attacker's movements.

The attacker tries to lose the defender and race to knock a ball off one of the cones. Can the defender react and beat the attacker to the cone?

The defender is allowed to go shoulder to shoulder or use their arms to hold off the attacker but he must not commit a foul. Switch roles for the next attack.