

WIN THE BALL BACK THE MINUTE YOU'VE LOST IT!

PRESSING

SPECIAL TRAINING GUIDE



12 TECHNICAL GAMES TO COACH MATCH-WINNING PRESSING TACTICS

Pressing – Principles of Play

SOCCER COACH WEEKLY

Soccer Coach Weekly offers modern and easy to use football (soccer) drills, coaching sessions, practice plans, small-sided games, warm-ups, training tips and advice. The resources are created for the grassroots youth coach following best practice from around the world and insights from the professional game.

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Every coaching point you need

In this special report on how to coach pressing, I introduce the top managers who coach this tactic and use it to spectacular effect with their teams.

Pep Guardiola gets his **Bayern Munich** team to aggressively press high up the pitch forcing play when his team has not got the ball working at a high speed.

Jürgen Klopp has brought his gegenpressing tactic to **Liverpool** to win the ball back immediately after his team has lost it – he talks about understanding when to press and when to stop to utilise the tactic to its full potential.

Luis Enrique wants **Barcelona** to press as soon as they lose the ball in the other team's half – working on the intensity of play when they don't have the ball.

Diego Simeone is slightly different as he knows his **Athletico Madrid** team will have the ball for less time than other teams – they press in packs flooding the midfield to force the opposition back.

In this report with diagrams and illustrations I explain How Pressing Works and the sessions that follow mirror the ones used by the top teams.

There are sessions from **Justin Neese** the centre of excellence manager at **Houston Dynamo**, **Ricky King** the coach education administrator of the **New York Red**

Bulls and **Mike Smith** youth academy director at 2015 MLS Champions **Portland Timbers** – plus sessions from myself.

At the beginning of each section featuring sessions from all the coaches is advice on how the specific sessions on pressing work. To understand the benefits of pressing players need to learn how to work as and individual and how to put that into practice as a team.

Every player needs to be singing from the same song sheet or the tactic will not work and players will be

caught out of position. These sections also feature Top Tips for Effective Pressing as quick bullet points you can use to remind yourself of the important points before you coach the sessions.

This really is a complete manual on how to use pressing as a tactic and how to set up your team to use it with confidence and success.

David Clarke

As Director of Coaching for *Soccer Coach Weekly*, David Clarke provides thousands of subscribers worldwide with drills, insight, interviews and webinars covering all aspects of coaching.

Soccer Coach Weekly is now in its ninth season with over 420 issues produced.

David has coached grassroots teams for 20 years, from U9s to U16s and has always had as his goal to help young players to be the best they can.

He is the author of *Soccer Tactics Made Simple*, *The Ultimate Set-piece Play Book*, *Play Like Barcelona*, *Master Coach 1, 2 and 3*, *Touch of Genius* and many other soccer titles.

David's qualifications include: UEFA B license, FA youth module 1, 2 and 3 the Coerver Youth Module,

and he has been a lecturer and presenter for the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA).



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THE MANAGERS

Pep Guardiola

Jürgen Klopp

Luis Enrique

Diego Simeone



Pep Guardiola

Pep Guardiola teams do not play in conventional positions they look to best occupy the space on the field... it takes Total Football a step further

Pep Guardiola made Barcelona one of the greatest sides the world has ever seen. He played a 4-3-3 formation as his favourite during his time at the Camp Nou, though the 3-2-5, 3-4-3 formations among others were also used. Between 2009-2012, Barca dominated almost every opposition with and without the ball. Guardiola prioritized having possession of the ball and movement into space to receive the ball.

Now at Bayern Munich, Guardiola has taken team-play even further forward. He rarely lines up with the same XI from game to game, and hardly ever with the same strategy. Every match is planned out meticulously. Bayern will play according to the strengths of the opposition.

In his book, *Pep Confidential*, author Marti Perarnau, who spent the entirety of Guardiola's first season at Bayern by his side, described the five elements that the coach values most as a result

of his time in the Bundesliga. Working out how to counter counter-attacks, how to defend and attack aerially, aggressive pressing high up the pitch, and the exploitation of space on the flanks. It is no longer enough to say that Bayern plays with a 4-3-3 or a 4-5-1 or a 4-2-3-1.

Guardiola said recently about his team: "I like to change. We need intelligent players to know when to change position, when another player you know can use this position."

Bayern has lined up with two, three and four defenders. They have lined up with similar variations in midfield and up front. It's about meeting the opposition in possession high up the pitch and winning the ball back quickly. When Bayern have the ball, it's about stringing enough passes together to disrupt the organization in the opposition ranks and find space for the attackers.

Guardiola has shown what he intends

to do with Bayern Munich, and how he will use his tactical mastery and innovation, which will only get better as his players get familiar with his ideology and system. It's an ideology where every player can play in any position that needs to be filled on the pitch. Total football and then some.

Words by:
David Clarke

"I will like to play in a high, high speed. To change the rhythm you must play at a huge speed, because it's only when you play with a huge speed that you can change the rhythm. You have to try to stay aggressive without the ball and with the ball we try to play quickly but in the right moment to make a change in rhythm"

PEP GUARDIOLA, BAYERN MUNICH



Jürgen Klopp

Jürgen Klopp wants the ball back every time it is given away – so he came up with the best way to do that. He calls it gegenpressing

When Jürgen Klopp was appointed manager of Liverpool many claimed the Premier League would not be caught out by his pressing style of play. How wrong that was,

Klopp believes no player or system in the world creates more chances than gegenpressing.

It is his faith in the style and his ability to instil its principles in his players when he was the manager of Borussia Dortmund that allowed his team to compete with far wealthier clubs in the Bundesliga.

Pressing is a brilliant way to stop being caught out by counter attacking, which has become one of the key ways to score goals from open play. Indeed in the latest European Champions League reports the effectiveness of counter attacking has fallen year on year since its height in 2005/6 when 40% of goals in the ECL came from counter attacks. Last year it had fallen to 20% due in part to gegenpressing.

According to Klopp: “The best moment

to win the ball is immediately after your team just lost it. The opponent is still looking for orientation where to pass the ball. He will have taken his eyes off the game to make his tackle or interception and he will have expended energy. Both make him vulnerable.”

This statement could have come from a 1960s manual on coaching but what Klopp and Bayern Munich’s Pep Guardiola, who was also a pioneer of gegenpressing, did with this information was to push high up the pitch and co-ordinate how the hunt for the ball was conducted.

Most importantly, the team has to be compact. If there are spaces when a team presses, then the opponent can thread passes through those spaces. That applies both vertically and laterally.

At Bayern, Guardiola has one of the training pitches divided into zones to help players work on their spacing. At Barça he operated a principle of “one and three”: when the ball is lost, one man goes straight to the ball and three race to the scene to try to cut out passing angles.

A team also have to understand when to stop pressing. When Guardiola talks about hunting in packs to win the ball back he also realizes that if his midfield is bypassed quickly there must be cover available behind the pack, which is one of the reasons goalkeepers such as Víctor Valdés and Manuel Neuer, who can sweep behind their defence, are so valuable.

It is not always the player in possession that is pressed. Other players and passing lanes can be pressed – that is, getting between the ball and possible recipients of a pass.

Klopp’s version of what he calls “full throttle football” is having a big effect on the Premier League, and I for one believe it can have a huge effect in the youth game.

Words by:
David Clarke

“The best moment to win the ball is immediately after your team just lost it. The opponent is still looking for orientation where to pass the ball.”

JÜRGEN KLOPP, LIVERPOOL



Luis Enrique

From out of the shadow of Pep Guardiola Luis Enrique has put together a wonderful team that has taken pressing and possession to new highs

Barcelona manager Luis Enrique What Barcelona do without the ball is equally important as what they do on it. Luis Enrique is a coach who focuses very much on the defensive aspect of the game by being proactive. He demands that his team are very aggressive without the ball. He demands intensity.

He said: "We can't press by decree – you have to be organized and targeted. It's important to have the ball but it's also important to win it back as soon as possible".

His advice for coaches is this: "Teams have to be effective at both ends of the pitch. If the team attacks well but defends badly, they're not doing their job. The best way to defend is to have the ball in the opposition half – pressing the ball high up the pitch will achieve this."

Enrique said the way Barcelona press the opposition as a team is the key to their success, after their 6-1 demolition of Roma in the Champions League.

They scored six goals but Enrique

focused on their work rate. "We go into each game with the knowledge that we need to pressure and the more that you do that then the better you get at it."

"We found it easy to find space and we had a lot of possession. It is not easy to keep pressuring but this is what we are good at as a group and it is the key."

For your team to copy this pressing style you have to make sure the team understands the mentality of the pressing game. It has to be done by all 11 players, otherwise it doesn't work. The players have to move in formation together.

Enrique says: "A great trainer must convince his players to believe in his vision and make sure they do. If a player only does it because the trainer says so, that's not good enough! The players must believe."

Pressing should start as soon as you lose the ball in the other team's half. You want to win the ball back as quickly as possible.

"I'd like my team to have 100 per cent of the ball if possible. If your team is well positioned, if you've got the ball, the other team gets tired. Once you regain possession you need quality on the ball, otherwise it will go back and forth."

"I like my teams to press: it's a way to force the opponents into making mistakes. But if one player does not execute the pressing – including your goalkeeper – you've got a big problem. The opposing team may escape your trap with their quality or by playing the long ball, so your goalkeeper must be out of his box and ready to sweep up."

Words by:
David Clarke

"To concede just 19 goals in 37 league games, you need everyone to work hard and work together, and to press as a unit and do whatever we decide to at any given moment."

LUIS ENRIQUE, BARCELONA



Diego Simeone

According to Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti, Atletico Madrid play like their manager Diego Simeone – tough, focused and tactically perfect

Argentinian midfielders know how to tackle – and they know when to tackle. Think Javier Mascherano, such a good tackler he plays centre-back for Barcelona. He started out, much like the manager of Atletico Madrid Diego Simeone, as a defensive midfielder where he harassed the attacking players of his opponents.

Simeone too was a fantastic tackler. He has instilled this into his team, coaching them in the defensive tactics he has always been so good at himself.

If you look at his team they play his favoured 4-4-2 to perfection. They stay compact with the two strikers dropping deep to prevent the ball being played through the centre of the pitch. An important part of their play is to keep narrow with the wide midfielders tucking in and the wingbacks staying tight to the centre-backs.

And the one thing that comes up during every report on a Simeone team is how hard working they are. They are astonishingly good without the ball, keeping the two banks of four tight

together to prevent teams like Barcelona playing through them.

This is where the tackling comes in with Atletico often winning the ball in their own half and unleashing fast counter-attacks, catching their opponents out with aggressive forward play to score against the run of play.

Simeone has created this mentality at the club where the whole group lives his idea, his tactics. Unlike a lot of top managers he works very hard on the training pitch – Atletico play like they train, driven by their manager. What is interesting about the Atletico midfield is that they are set up in a similar fashion to Spanish teams like Barcelona – but whereas Barcelona's is an attacking ideal, the set up for Atletico is a defensive one. They dominate the zone to block attacks and set themselves up for the counter, whereas Barcelona will set up like that to keep possession of the ball.

In attack they use very quick combinations to set up counter attacks, quickly getting wide or deep into the

opposition half – rarely keeping the ball for long, their speed catches out the best defences.

Simeone has proved to be an outstanding coach with a perfect strategy for his team, dominating games without the ball, forcing play, enticing moves then taking the ball up the other end in a flash.

It is a strategy that works well in grassroots when youth teams play against stronger teams. But it takes a lot of work and discipline. Check out the sessions that follow and give your team some of the attributes of Atletico Madrid.

Words by:
David Clarke

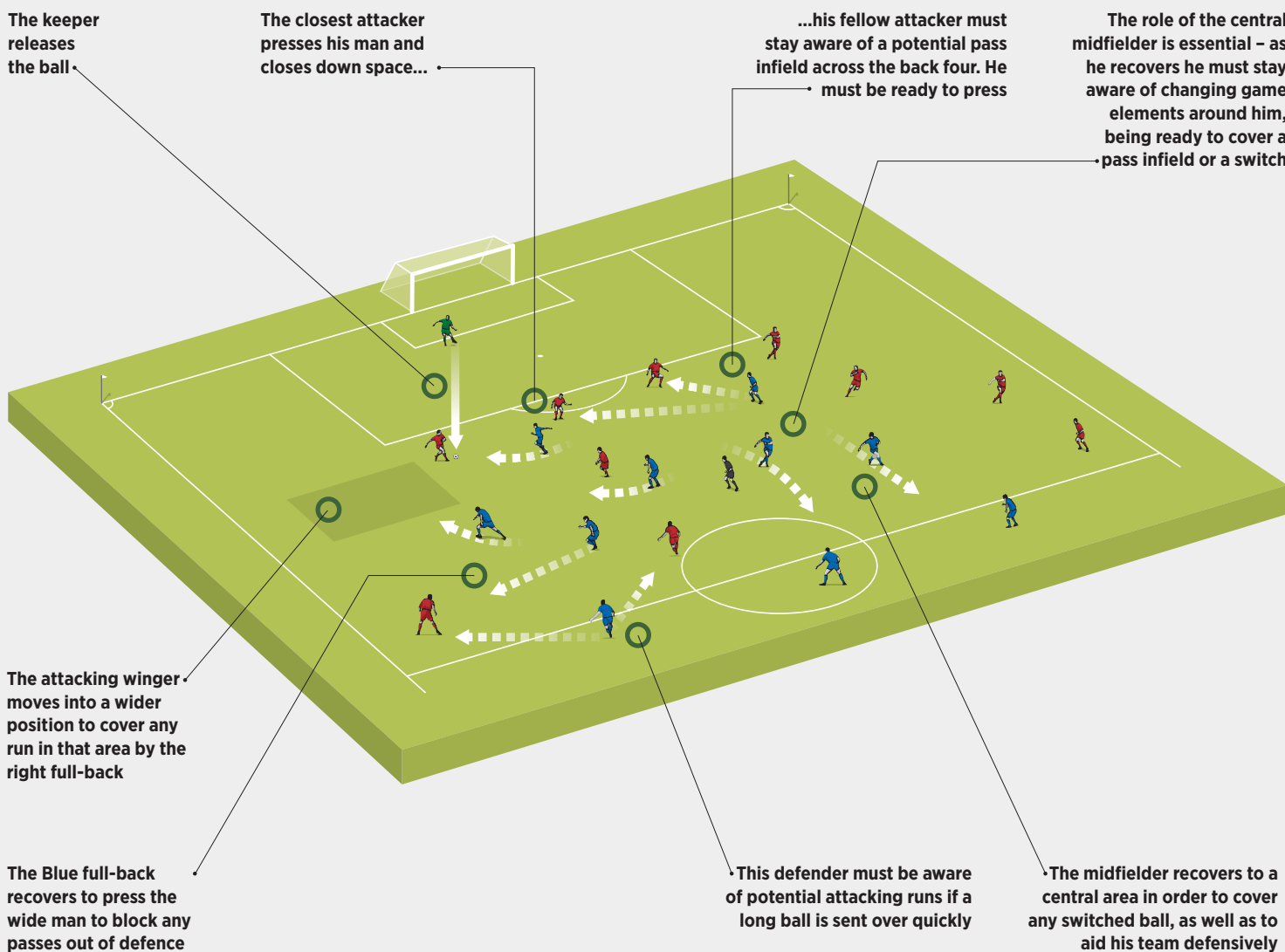
“Everybody at Atletico sits together at a long table. This way, they can't avoid looking at each other in the face. There are no secrets. Everybody together, everybody talks. This sends a message”

DIEGO SIMEONE, ATLETICO MADRID

THE TECHNIQUE

How Pressing Works

Reds playing out from the back. Blues press early to stop them and cover all areas to win the ball



How Pressing Works

Pressing is an important part of the modern game with teams like Barcelona and Bayern Munich pressing quickly when they lose the ball before the opposition can create with it

It is important that coaches and players understand defensive pressing. It's necessary to practise the key elements to identify how, when and where players can apply pressing technique, and that includes adopting the right shape tactically and togetherness of the group, as well as being able to identify the right moment to close down. This diagram should help coaches to understand how pressing works – good pressing technique is central to the intense brand of football my teams play.

The diagram represents a team playing out from the back and highlights the roles of players without the ball and the areas they should cover.

THE PRINCIPLES OF PRESSING

- > Pressing may be done by the individual, but it requires player unity and a shared understanding.
- > There are three generally accepted types of positional pressing: ultra-offensive (in the opponents' defensive third), offensive (in the opponents' half or around halfway) and defensive (in your own half).
- > Invited pressing is a technique linked to stand-by pressing, which forces an opponent to play the ball in a certain direction so that an aggressive phase of pressing can then be undertaken.
- > Stand-by pressing is pressing carried out by one player, while team mates stay 'short' and concentrate on covering the spaces. Aggressive pressing is typically done on flanks, where space is tight and multi-player pressing can see possession turned over.



- > Pressing players will usually move at pace towards their target and slow when a couple of yards away.
- > Pressing is as relevant and necessary for attackers as it is for midfielders and defenders.

Where And When

A pressing session with different variations and overloads to get players to move and recognise when to press and where to press to force mistakes

WHY USE IT

This is a great session for passing, receiving and pressing to force mistakes.

SET UP

You need balls, bibs and cones. Set up an area 15 x 15 yards with a 10 yard square inside it. We used 10 players in the session.

HOW TO PLAY

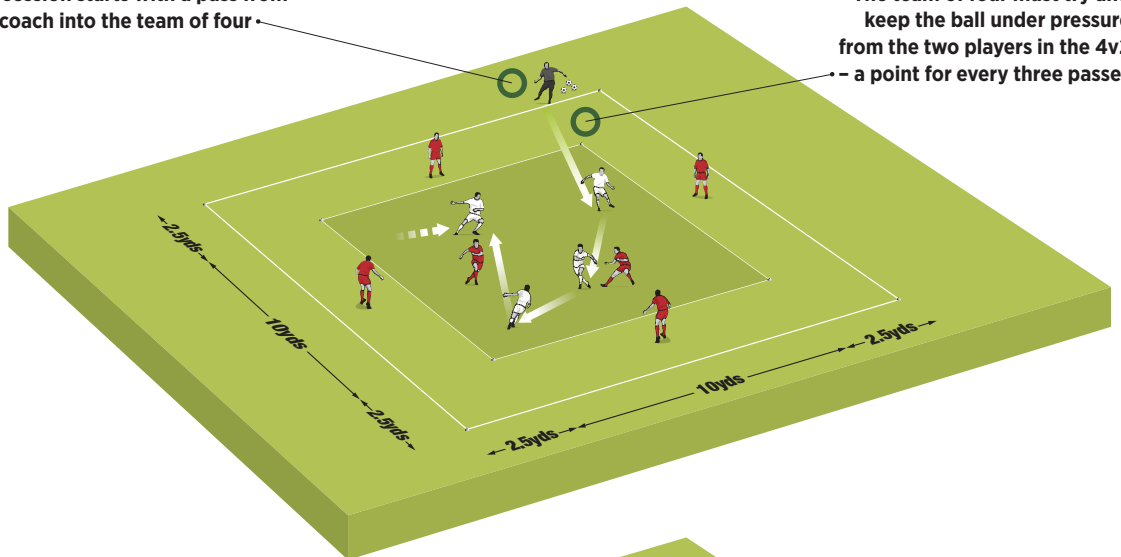
Split your players into two teams, one of 6 players and one of 4 players. The team of four plays in the smaller square against 2 of the opposition. The other four players are in the larger square but cannot go into the smaller square. The coach passes to the team of 4 who must keep the ball from the two pressing players. Coach the pressing players to work together to win the ball back. The passing team gets a point for every three passes. When the two players win the ball they combine with the outer players – every pass must go through the small square. No pressure in the outer square at first but you can open the game out once they have done it a few times.

TECHNIQUE

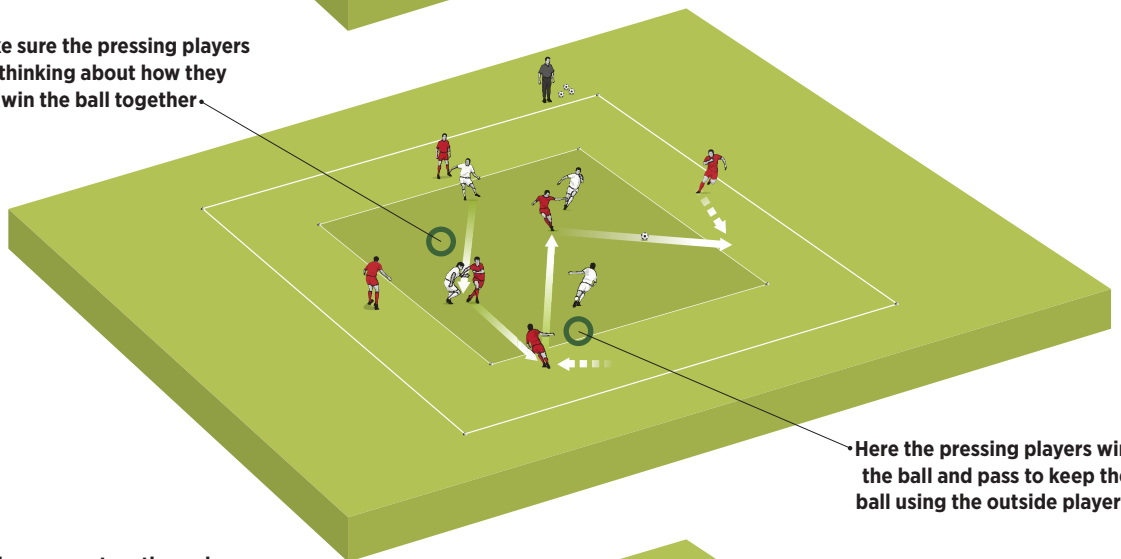
Pressing is the key coaching point but body position, passing, receiving and movement are all important

The session starts with a pass from the coach into the team of four

The team of four must try and keep the ball under pressure from the two players in the 4v2 – a point for every three passes

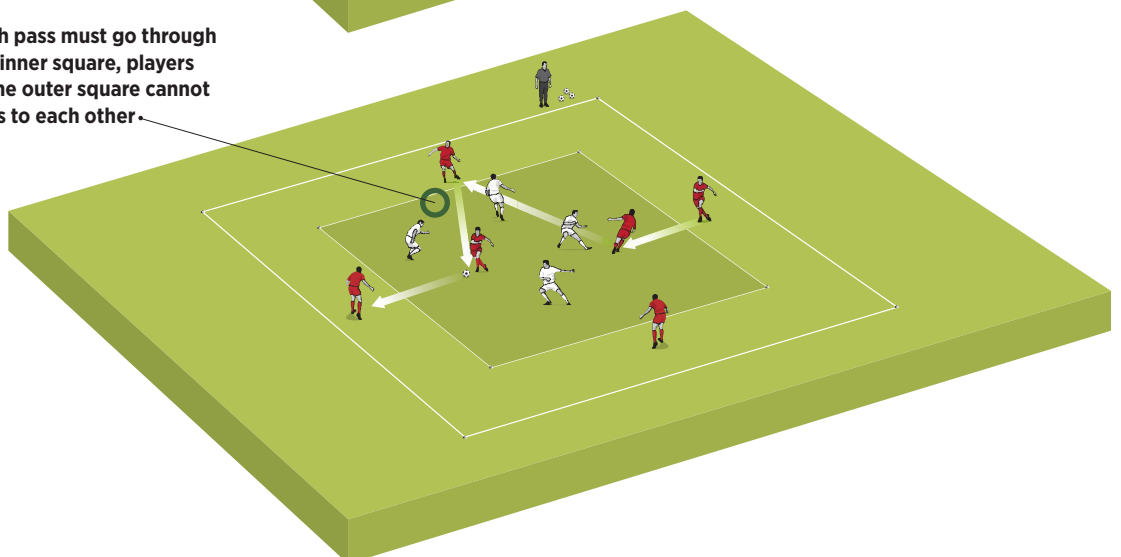


Make sure the pressing players are thinking about how they can win the ball together



Here the pressing players win the ball and pass to keep the ball using the outside players

Each pass must go through the inner square, players in the outer square cannot pass to each other



Player movement ■■■➔

Ball movement ➔

Run with ball ■■■➔

Shot ➔

Strikers Press Defenders

Often a lone striker will be pressing a three man defence which can be a frustrating job. Get your strikers to practise their pressing techniques against three defenders

WHY USE IT

Pressing high up the pitch often means a striker is outnumbered by the defence – but they can still force errors and win the ball.

SET UP

You need balls, bibs and cones. Set up an area 50 x 30 yards including two 5yd end zones. We used 8 players in the session.

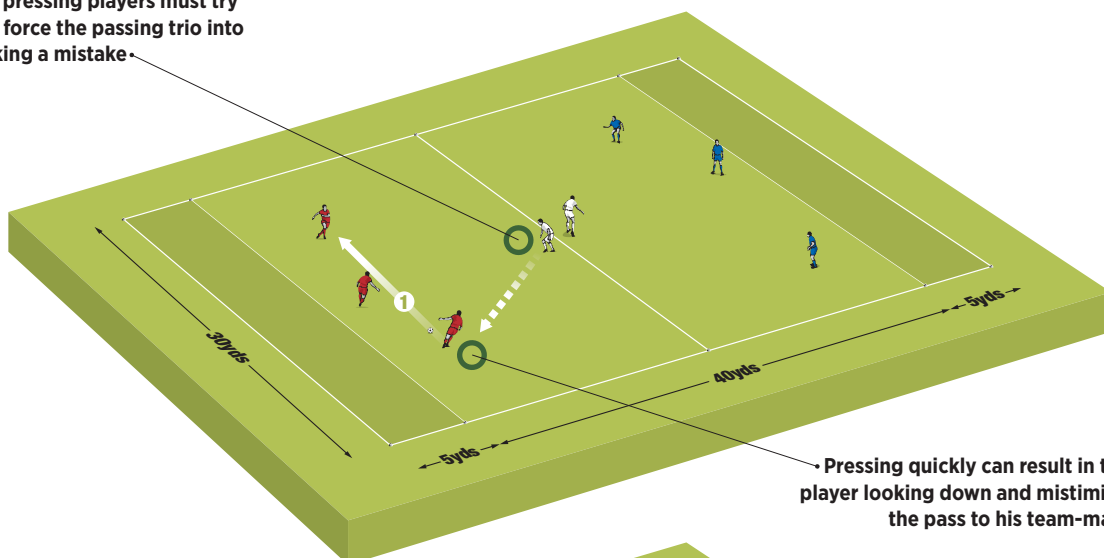
HOW TO PLAY

Split up your players into two teams of three passers and one team of two defenders. The red passing team goes into one half of the pitch and the blue passing team goes into the opposite half. The defenders must start on the central line. To start, the coach passes to the red team and one defender immediately runs onto the pitch and tries to defend. The red team completes three passes and then looks to transfer the ball to the blue team. Play for 10 minutes – new defenders are selected after two minutes. If the ball leaves play, then the coach serves a new ball into the pitch. Allow both defenders to go together if the pressing is not working. If the defenders win the ball they can try and get it into the end zone.

TECHNIQUE

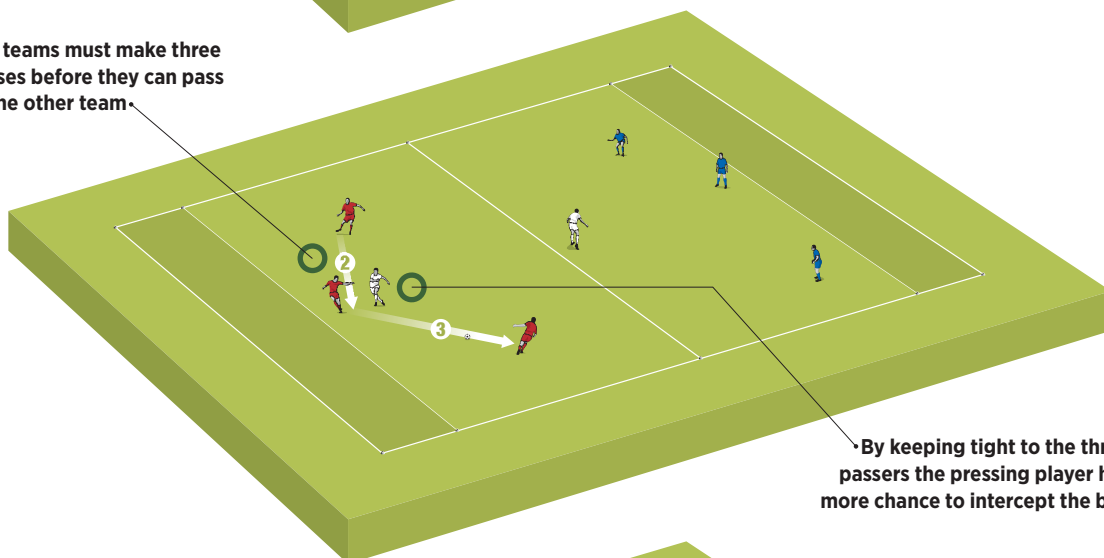
Important to emphasise the pressing aspect of the game. Passing is important.

The pressing players must try and force the passing trio into making a mistake



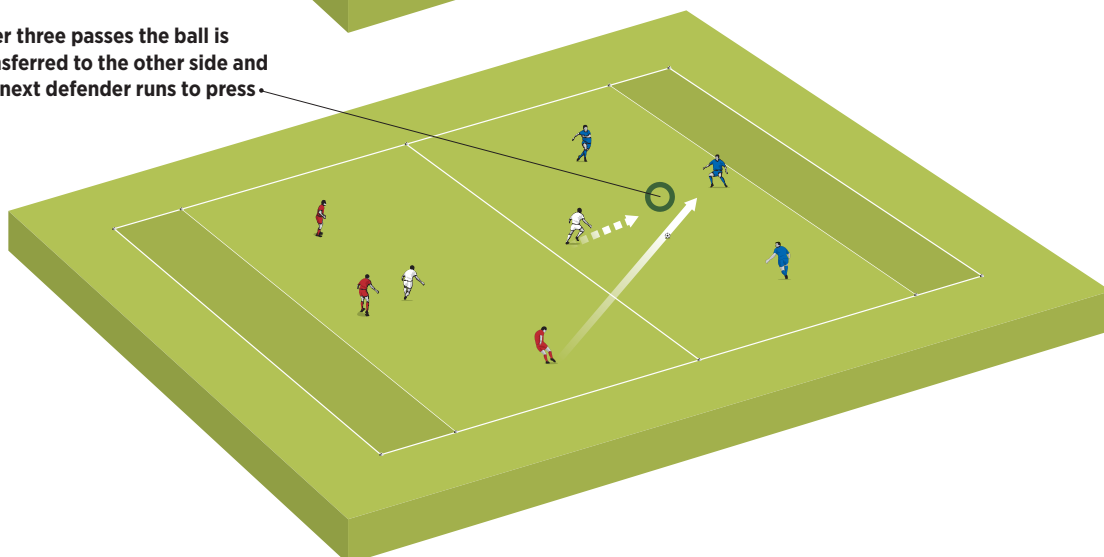
Pressing quickly can result in the player looking down and mistiming the pass to his team-mate

The teams must make three passes before they can pass to the other team



By keeping tight to the three passers the pressing player has more chance to intercept the ball

After three passes the ball is transferred to the other side and the next defender runs to press



Player movement ■■■➔

Ball movement ➔

Run with ball ■■■➔

Shot ➔

Organise Defence To Counter

Diego Simeone organises his 4-4-2 formation so the defence is a solid two banks of four which can hit the two forwards with accurate passes when they win the ball

WHY USE IT

A strong defence is a great foundation to launch counter attacks. In Simeone's Atletico team the strong tackling defensive set up wins the ball and wins games by capitalising on counter attacking.

SET UP

You need balls, bibs, cones and goals. Mark out a 40x30 yard area with one half divided into nine equal squares and a goal at each end. We used 12 players in the session.

HOW TO PLAY

Split your players into two teams of six players. The defending team plays in the half with the squares in it and only one defender can be in each square at any one time – they can move squares but a player must vacate the square if the team mate enters it. The attacking team can only shoot from their opponents half of the pitch and they must make three passes before they can shoot. If the defending team wins the ball they counter attack quickly and must score within three passes or the ball is given back to the attacking team.

TECHNIQUE

Defenders should use the halfway line as the first point of pressure but the key areas defenders must protect are those spaces immediately in front of and behind their team mates. They have to make decisions about when to tackle and when to drop deep. On the counter they have to be switched on to quick passing and not get caught on the back foot.

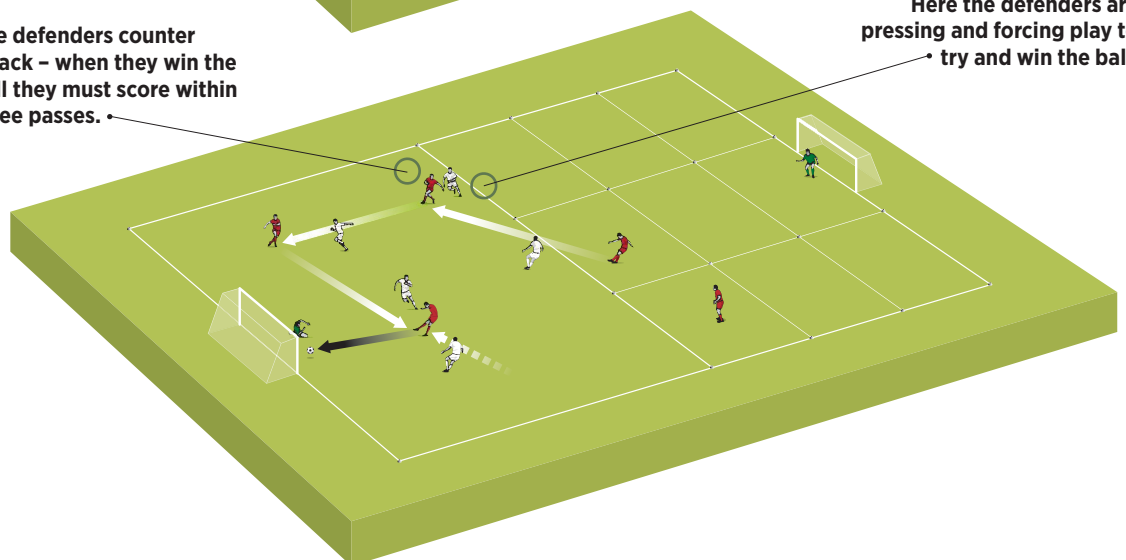
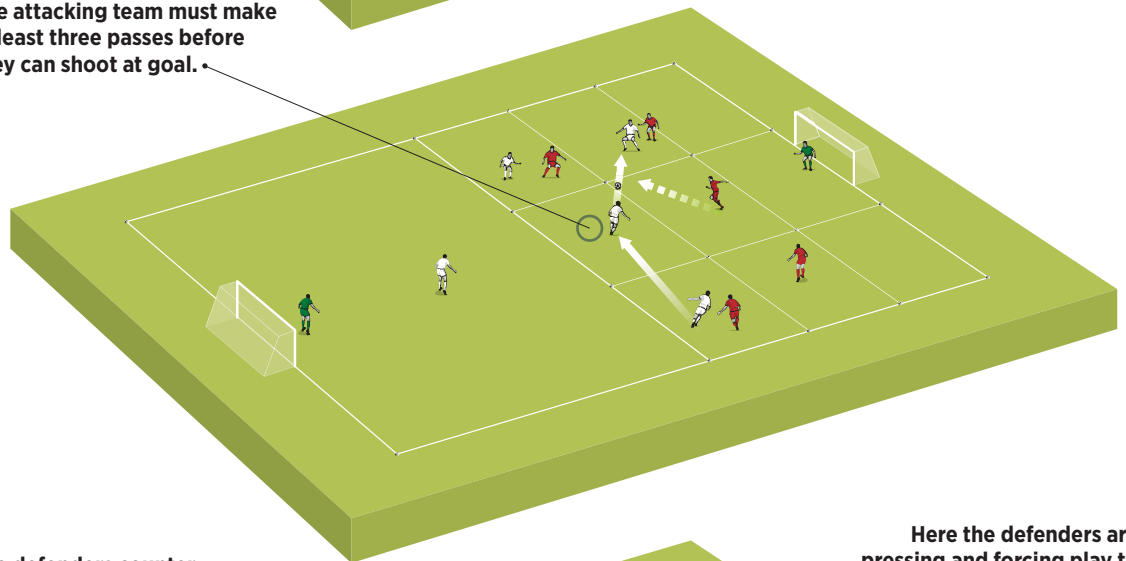
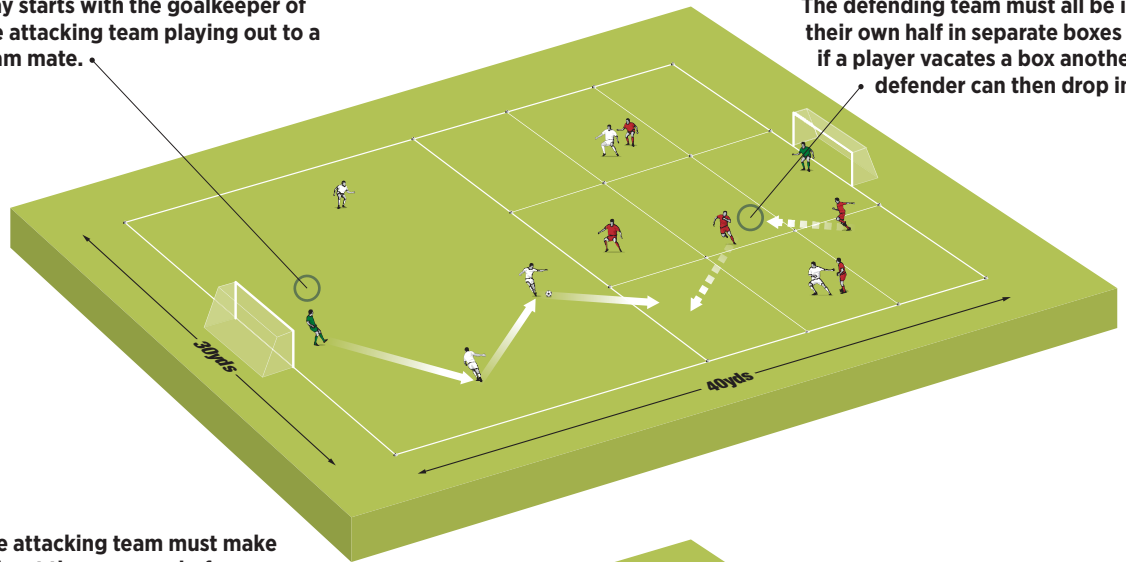
Play starts with the goalkeeper of the attacking team playing out to a team mate.

The defending team must all be in their own half in separate boxes – if a player vacates a box another defender can then drop in.

The attacking team must make at least three passes before they can shoot at goal.

The defenders counter attack – when they win the ball they must score within three passes.

Here the defenders are pressing and forcing play to try and win the ball.



Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →

THE PRACTICE

How To Coach Pressing

HOW TO
COACH
PRESSING

Pressing To Win

To understand the benefits of pressing, your players need to learn how their individual roles work and how to put it all together to make the tactic work as a team

Pressing is an ideal tactic for youth teams when they haven't got the ball. Taken to its basic level some teams now have central midfielders focused almost entirely on breaking up play. It's a huge defensive slant on how to win the game – just ask Jose Mourinho.

Mourinho's Chelsea concentrate on pressing teams and forcing them to misplace passes, allowing his team to win the ball through mistakes made by the opposition; then his team will hit on the counterattack. This means opponents will often bypass midfield, so the defensive unit has to be aware of how their pressing affects team play.

The pressing game relies on individual players recognising their role within the team shape. As a tactic it works well for Jürgen Klopp. Liverpool's entire midfield presses effectively: pushing up, getting tight and forcing the opposition into sloppy passes. Philippe Coutinho is the Premier League's best defensive forward because of his energy in pressing high up the pitch – the midfield behind him has responded by pushing up to take advantage by picking up loose balls.

In this role the most effective player has been Jordan Henderson, whose decisive contributions have come because of his stamina and work rate rather than his creativity. Those two players led the

pressing, and with Firmino and Lucas Leiva backing them up and squeezing the opposition inside their own half, pressure mounts and mistakes are inevitably made.

For youth teams looking to adapt this tactic, they have to have players who can slot into these roles. It is important they understand the tactic and why it is effective. If you look at the sessions on the following pages we have the focused game to help the individual, followed by the full team pressing game to help with an understanding of the bigger picture.

In our first activity, players learn about position and how they affect the ability of their team to force mistakes with pressure. Angles of support and cover are vital to boxing opponents in and forcing play, resulting in mistakes.

For the team as a whole this then has the problem that their opponents may well

try to play long balls through and around the midfield, meaning the defence must push up and midfielders drop to help.

This is where Coutinho is at his most effective. When the players at the back are cut off from midfield and feel they need to play longer balls, by giving them no time on the ball he forces them to make quick decisions – long balls need great accuracy or the ball is just given back to the opposition and high pressing makes accuracy very hard.

Our second session is focused on full team pressure and highlights the effects of individual pressing on the play of the team as a whole and how cover is vital.

Try the following sessions written for us by Justin Neese of MLS club Houston Dynamo, and see how effective your team becomes at winning the ball back.

Words by:
David Clarke

Activities by:
Justin Neese

TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PRESSING

These are the key things to remember when coaching your players to press, support and cover...

- > The nearest player to the ball should press first, the second player supports and the third covers.
- > Pressing players should close down quickly as the attacker receives the ball.
- > Pressing players should avoid diving in and giving an easy get out for opponents.
- > Pressing players should get tight to prevent the attacker turning.
- > Pressing players should stay sideways on to make it hard for the opponent to wrong foot them.
- > Angles are important for the pressing, supporting and covering players so the opponent can't pass the ball between them.



Hot Press

This activity will teach individual players to understand their roles in defensive pressing by applying the general pressing cues in a functional and geographically specific context

WHY USE IT

This activity encourages the defensive players to squeeze the attack.

SET UP

Organize two side-by-side 47x35-yard areas from the top of the penalty area to the bottom of the centre circle in the opposite half. In the far corner of the top end of each, build a four-yard cone goal. We've used seven players.

HOW TO PLAY

Play three attackers against four pressing defenders. Two defenders and an attacker are at each end, with an attacker in the middle. Start with a pass from the attacker at the end opposite the goal to the attacker in the middle. As the pass travels, the receiver can attack the goal, with support from the other two attackers.

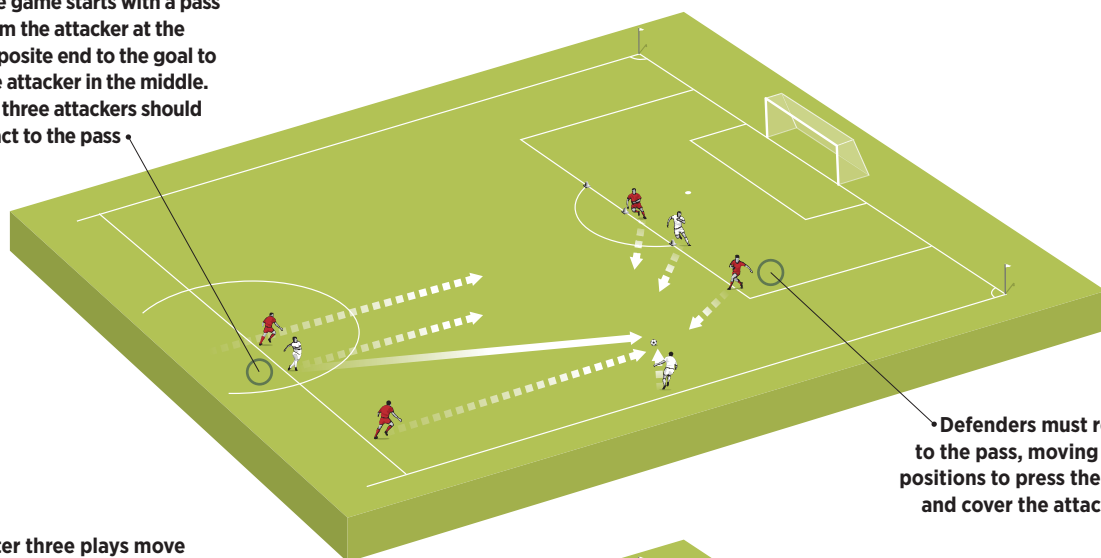
As the pass travels the defensive players read cues and attempt to press to win the ball. Defensive players score by winning the ball and dribbling over the top line, while attacking players score by dribbling through the cone goal. After three plays move to the other grid.

TECHNIQUE

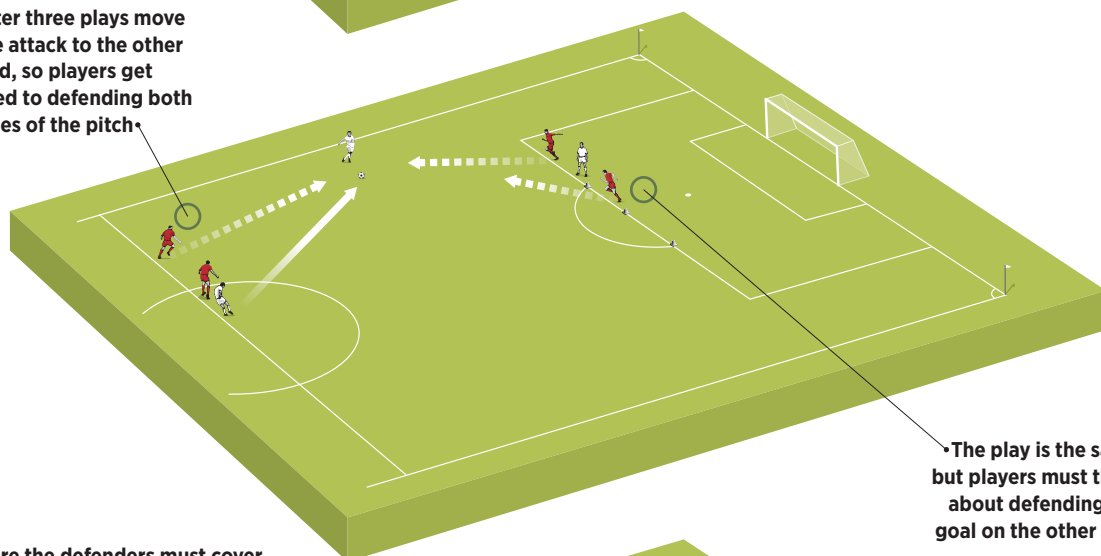
Focus on defenders reading cues before the ball is played, attempting to arrive as or before the receiver's first touch. Defenders should adopt an angle of approach that denies options.

Activity by: Justin Neese,
centre of excellence manager
at Houston Dynamo

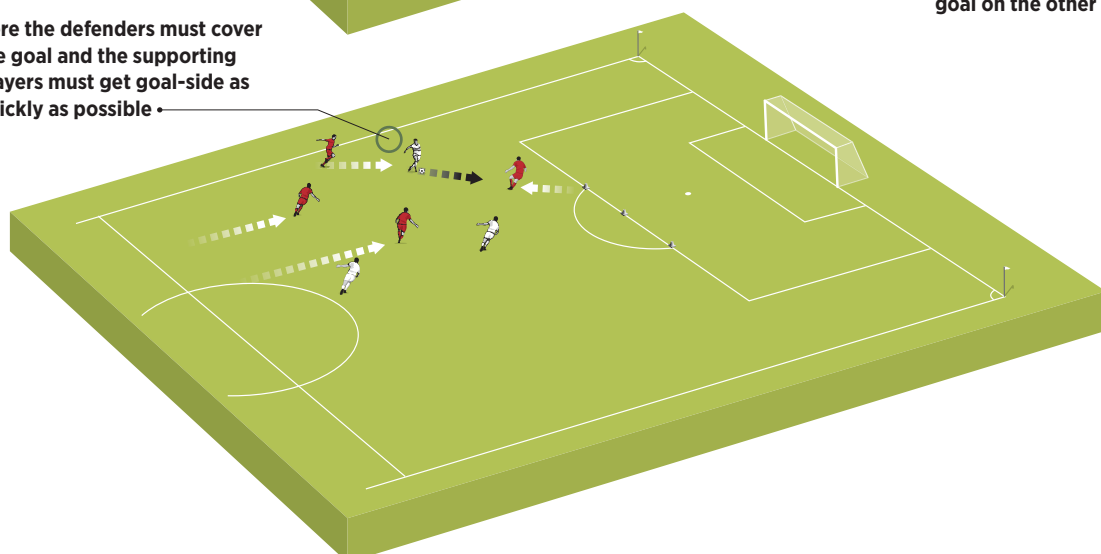
The game starts with a pass from the attacker at the opposite end to the goal to the attacker in the middle. All three attackers should react to the pass.



After three plays move the attack to the other grid, so players get used to defending both sides of the pitch.



Here the defenders must cover the goal and the supporting players must get goal-side as quickly as possible.



Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →



Full Pressure

This is a good training session to show players how to use defensive pressing in a team context in order to squeeze the attack

WHY USE IT

Working with individual techniques, players must learn to press as a team rather than leaving gaps all over the pitch.

SET UP

Use half your normal pitch. The attacking team scores in the goal while the defending team must win the ball and dribble over the centre line. We've used 18 players.

HOW TO PLAY

Split your players into 11 defenders including the keeper and seven attackers. The attacking team attempts to score in the goal while the defending team attempts to win and keep the ball to pass to a player running across the halfway line. Play with the offside rule.

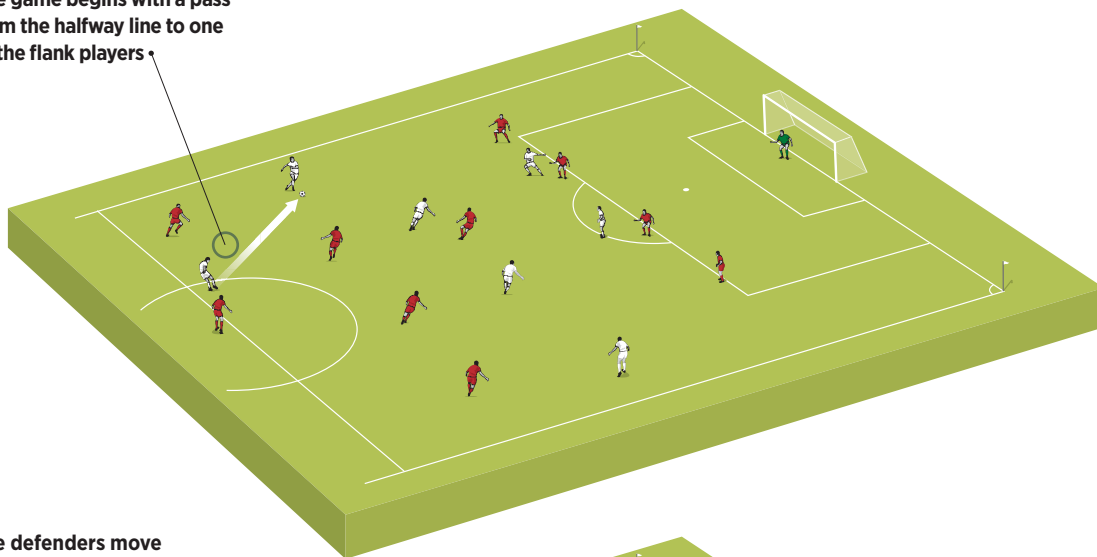
Defensive players have six seconds to apply pressure or the opposition wins a point. If a goal is scored or the ball leaves the grid, players go back to the starting positions and a new ball is played in. Play for five balls and then switch attack and defence.

TECHNIQUE

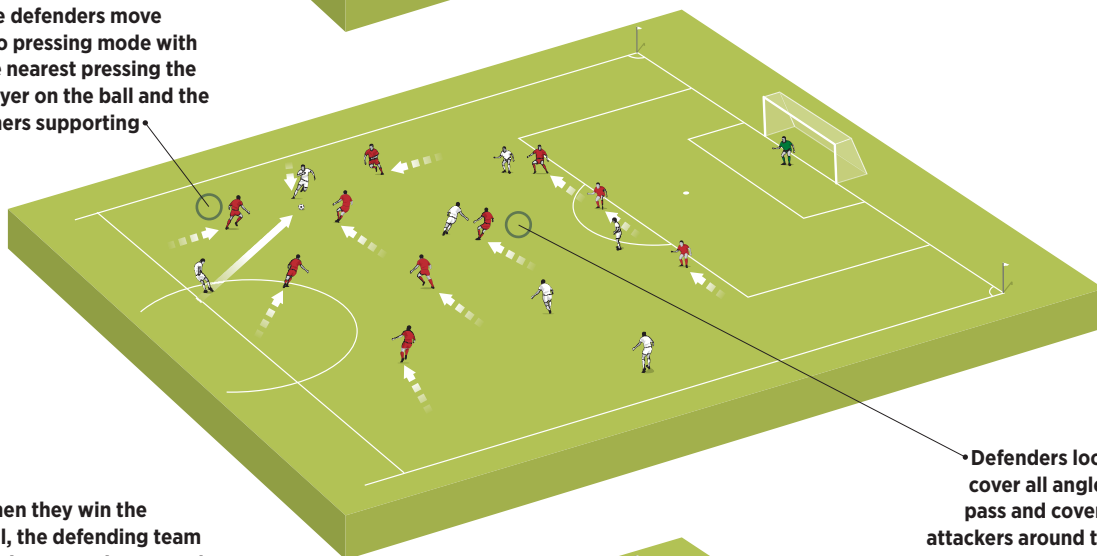
Defenders should read cues before the ball is served and attempt to arrive as or before the receiver's first touch. Defenders should adopt an angle of approach that will protect vulnerable areas of the pitch.

Activity by: Justin Neese,
centre of excellence manager
at Houston Dynamo

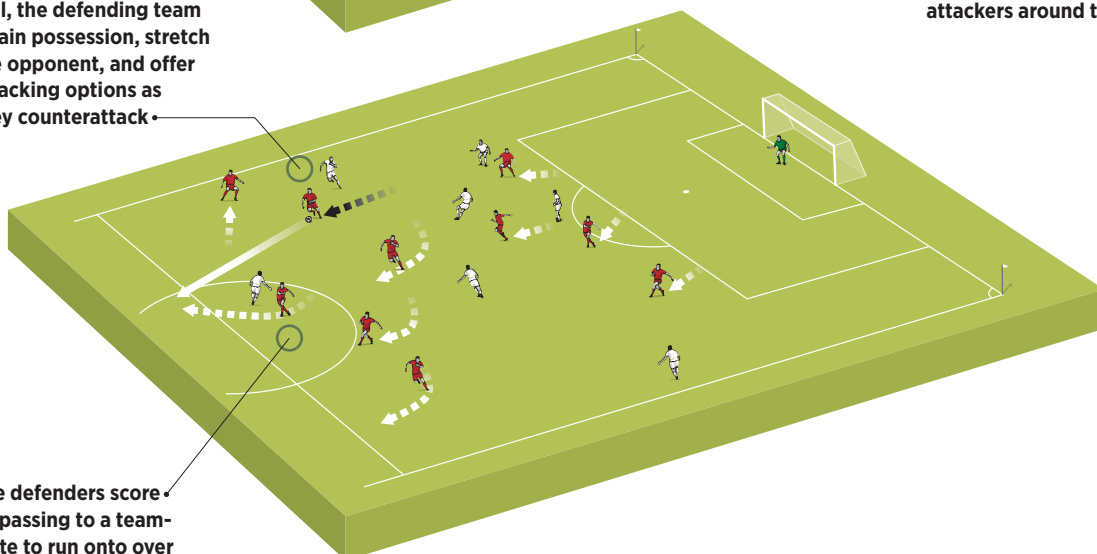
The game begins with a pass from the halfway line to one of the flank players



The defenders move into pressing mode with the nearest pressing the player on the ball and the others supporting



When they win the ball, the defending team retain possession, stretch the opponent, and offer attacking options as they counterattack



Defenders look to cover all angles of pass and cover the attackers around them

The defenders score by passing to a team-mate to run onto over the halfway line

Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →

HOW TO
COACH
PRESSING

Pressing Matters

If you want to win matches, you have to be solid at the back – these next two sessions will show you how to tighten up your defence. This is defensive pressing...

Pressing is vital to the modern game. In fact, it is one of the key defensive strategies left as a legacy of Pep Guardiola's all-conquering Barcelona side of 2010. "Without the ball we are a disastrous team, a horrible team, so we need the ball," he admitted that year. As a consequence, when they lost it, his players were drilled to win it back very quickly.

Guardiola has changed clubs but hasn't forgotten this basic principle. Check out his Bayern Munich team of 2015, and you will see the same tactic deployed at an alarmingly quick rate. The mantra is: lose the ball, win it back.

These days most successful sides like to regain possession as soon as they can. When teams are quick to close space it puts a huge amount of pressure on the player with the ball, making it more likely they will allow the defending team to intercept or steal the ball. Pressure makes simple passes very difficult and a misplaced pass surrenders possession.

The way teams like Barça and Bayern press is almost like a blanket – they move as a unit and smother the opposition. They will press the wings to keep the ball out there and away from danger zones.

However, pressing zaps energy and

most teams won't be able to press the opposition for long periods of time. Usually pressing is at its height when the game first kicks off and teams are hungry for the ball. This is a great time to put pressure on opponents, forcing them back and claiming the psychological advantage.

If a team starts the game with full pressing, almost hounding the opposition to give up the ball, this will be followed up by 'half pressing', when the pressing team waits until opponents have crossed the halfway line with the ball before reacting, thus saving energy and being much more solid at the back. Teams will also 'fake press', where just one player will chase the man with the ball while the others rest.

Pressing should be looked on as a tactic to be used at certain times in a match –

this selective use of pressing will enable teams to get the benefit at key points, while not tiring too soon.

What teams must work out is when to press and when to sit back and let the ball come on to them as it crosses the halfway line. As individuals, each defender will have to practise their own approach: when to press, how quickly and how tight. Body shape is important too, half turned to one side or the other, with knees bent and weight forward. They must also learn when and where to support – which side to open up and how close they should be.

The following two defending sessions are by Justin Neese, the centre of excellence manager at MLS club Houston Dynamo, and they look at where and when to press in order to regain the ball.

Words by:
David Clarke
Activities by:
Justin Neese

TOP TIPS FOR DEFENSIVE PRESSING

If you want your team to concede fewer goals, you need your players to close down the space and press to get the ball...

- > Players must close down quickly while the ball travels.
- > They should slow down as they approach the attacker in possession.
- > It's important to get tightly in touch to prevent the attacker from turning.
- > Body shape is key. The pressing player should bend their knees and stay sideways on to the ball.
- > When pressing, players should mirror the feet of the attacker.
- > Pressing players should always be prepared for the next action, whether it's to delay or tackle.

Wing Pressure

If you want to be rock solid at the back, use this activity to teach your team to use pressing techniques to keep play out on the wings and away from the goal

WHY USE IT

This teaches pressing cues and encourages pressing on the flanks, so when a team is under attack they can keep play on the wings and stop direct attacks.

SET UP

Set up a 60x55 yard area, with two wide channels of five yards. We've used 12 players in this session.

HOW TO PLAY

Pick a defending team of five plus a keeper. They play against an attacking team of five (two are in the half with the goal) plus a target player.

The target player always starts and must play into a team-mate in the same half. Attackers score in the goal and defenders score by passing to the target player.

The attacking team are locked into their starting half and only one of them can be in the wide channels when the ball is wide. The defending team may move freely. Offside is enforced.

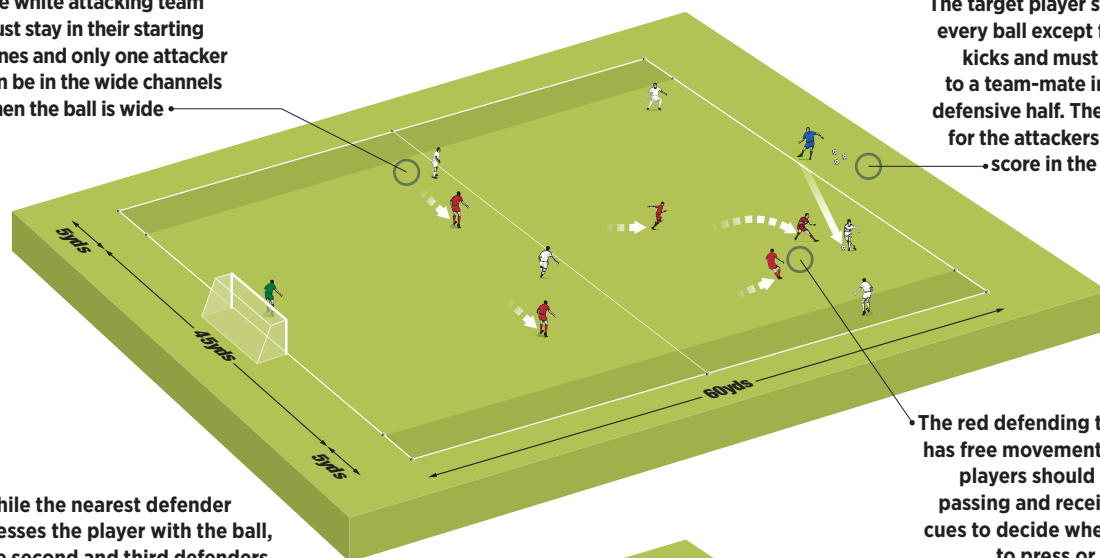
Allow each team eight repetitions and swap.

TECHNIQUE

Coaches should focus on: defenders reading cues before the ball is served, arriving at or before the receiver's first touch; defenders taking an angle of approach that denies options and protects vulnerable areas; and recovery if the press fails.

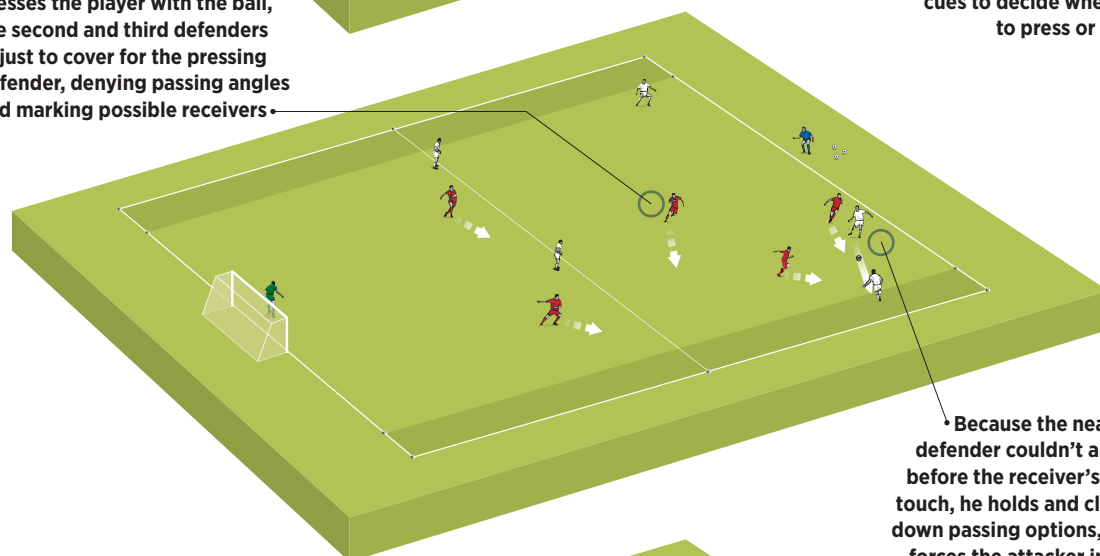
Activity by: Justin Neese, soccer programmes manager of Houston Dynamo

The white attacking team must stay in their starting zones and only one attacker can be in the wide channels when the ball is wide

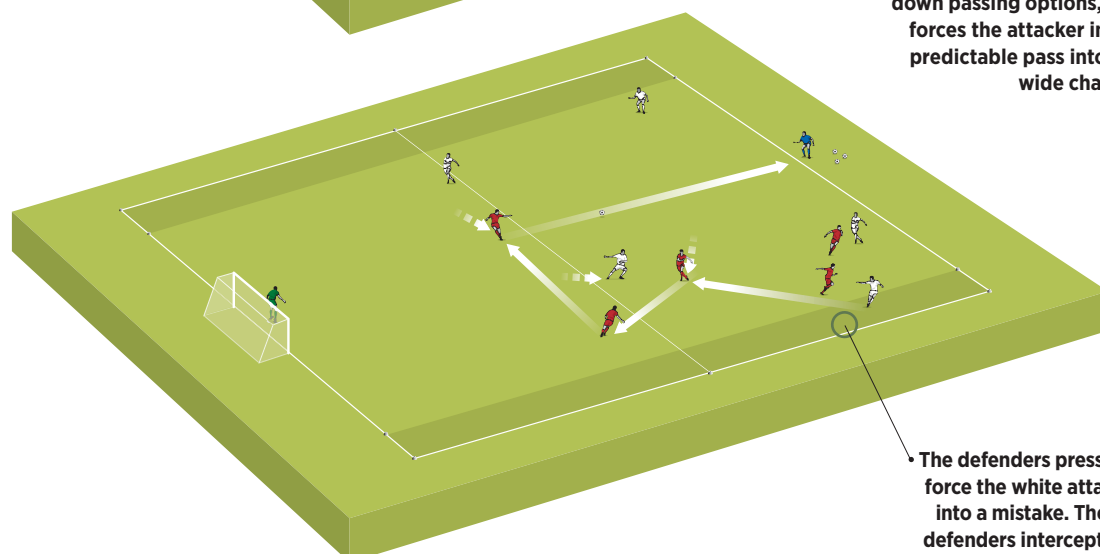


The target player starts every ball except free-kicks and must play to a team-mate in the defensive half. The aim for the attackers is to score in the goal

While the nearest defender presses the player with the ball, the second and third defenders adjust to cover for the pressing defender, denying passing angles and marking possible receivers



Because the nearest defender couldn't arrive before the receiver's first touch, he holds and closes down passing options, and forces the attacker into a predictable pass into the wide channel



The defenders press and force the white attacker into a mistake. The red defenders intercept and counter to score with a pass to the target player

Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →

Press Or Hold

If you want to improve your team's defensive performance, use this activity to teach players when to press and when to hold, so they can control play even if they don't have possession

WHY USE IT

This teaches players when they should press or hold, so during a match they can control play without the ball and so they don't dive in with an ill-judged tackle and allow attackers past.

SET UP

Set up a 60x50 yard areas with two 15-yard end zones. We've used 10 players.

HOW TO PLAY

Place a target player at both ends and play 4v4 in the middle. Start with a pass from a target man to a player who enters the end zone to collect it. Each team tries to move the ball from one end to the other, playing it to a runner in the end zone who scores by passing to the target. The target player returns the ball to the scoring team who attack in the opposite direction.

All points must be scored with passes made in the end zone. If the ball is won in the middle, the team can counterattack; if it is stopped in the end zone, it results in a turnover, starting with the opposite target player.

TECHNIQUE

Defending players should read the pass so they reach the receiver before his first touch. Other defenders should take up positions that prevent passes that endanger the goal.

Activity by: Justin Neese, soccer programmes manager at Houston Dynamo

The target player starts by playing the ball into the defensive zone. A player runs into the zone to collect it

Defenders should read passing and receiving cues and also assess their team-mates positioning to determine if they can press or if they need to hold

If the defenders can press, they move quickly together to force a mistake or win the ball and begin a counterattack

If the defenders nearest to the ball cannot arrive before the receiver's first touch in the end zone, they move to close down the attacking options and make it harder for the player on the ball to pass

Here the whites counter by playing the ball to a team-mate who runs onto the ball in the end zone and passes to the target player for a point

Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →

HOW TO
COACH
PRESSING

Pressure And Support

This set of sessions will show you how to tighten up your defence so you can win more matches – the next two sessions are how to support while pressing for the ball

Getting your young defenders to understand the art of defending can be difficult because it is not the glamour end of the game – it's about working without the ball and we all know how much youngsters love having a ball at their feet.

However, a good defending session can be fun too, especially when you play at a fast tempo and get players to press high up the pitch, giving them the chance to win the ball back and attack. Putting pressure on the ball high up is a brave tactic and needs players to support each other in every position. Indeed, when the first defender goes in to press the ball, the second and third defenders must be ready to step into any gaps created.

High pressure is an excellent tactic because it can stop the opposition providing the ammunition to their forwards by cutting off attacks at the source. In fact, you're always on the front foot if you can impose the way you play on the opposition. You don't necessarily need quick defenders to cover the space, if they are in position they won't have to move far to do it.

Of course this type of defending means the back players have to recover

quickly when the ball is lost, dropping deep and squeezing the space out of the centre of the pitch. In particular young defenders need to protect the area just in front of the penalty area because a lot of traffic will come through there. It will be easier to make the play predictable if the team can keep the ball out on the wings and try to force mistakes there.

It is at this point that support play is vital – if the defence forces play wide, one defender is going to have to go to press the player out on the wing, leaving a hole in the defence in the position he left. Problems will occur if a player is beaten, resulting in the opposing player being clean through. A covering defender must be able to provide pressure and support to his beaten team-mate.

One player who has demonstrated the art of defending by pressure and support is Everton's in demand defender John Stones, who often gives a masterclass in power, pace and positional awareness.

His advice to young defenders is: "if a striker is really quick then you may not want to get close to them at all. It's a matter of judging every situation and it all comes from experience. The more you train, the more you'll work out the answers."

The next two sessions are by Ricky King, the coach education administrator at MLS club New York Red Bulls. By using them your players will get a good grounding in what they have to do when they haven't got the ball – and they will have some fun doing it too.

Words by:
David Clarke

Activities by:
Ricky King

TOP TIPS FOR PRESSING AND SUPPORTING

If you want your defenders to come away with the ball when pressing, they must remember the key points...

- > The angle of approach is important to force the attacker one way or the other.
- > Communication is vital – defenders must be in close contact at all times and should help each other to cover positions.
- > Players must interchange positions so that when the first defender presses, there is cover and support from the second and third defenders.
- > The body shape of the pressing defender is key to ensure that the play goes one way.

Support Worker

This training session is a great fun way of introducing and explaining the concepts of defensive pressure and support play to young players

WHY USE IT

This is for younger players with limited knowledge of the role of the first and second defenders. It starts with how players press the ball and progresses to adding covering players.

SET UP

Set up a 30x20-yard area split into four 15x10-yard zones. To begin with, each area has one central cone at the start line, plus two on the middle line with a ball on each. We've used 12 players.

HOW TO PLAY

Start with a race to the ball on the halfway line – the first player to jump over a ball wins. Players compete with rivals in the opposite square.

In the second set-up the two middle players pass – or dribble – the ball to each other, holding onto it for three seconds before each pass. Play is unopposed and defenders have to take up the correct positions. Switch roles after the ball has been transferred 10 times.

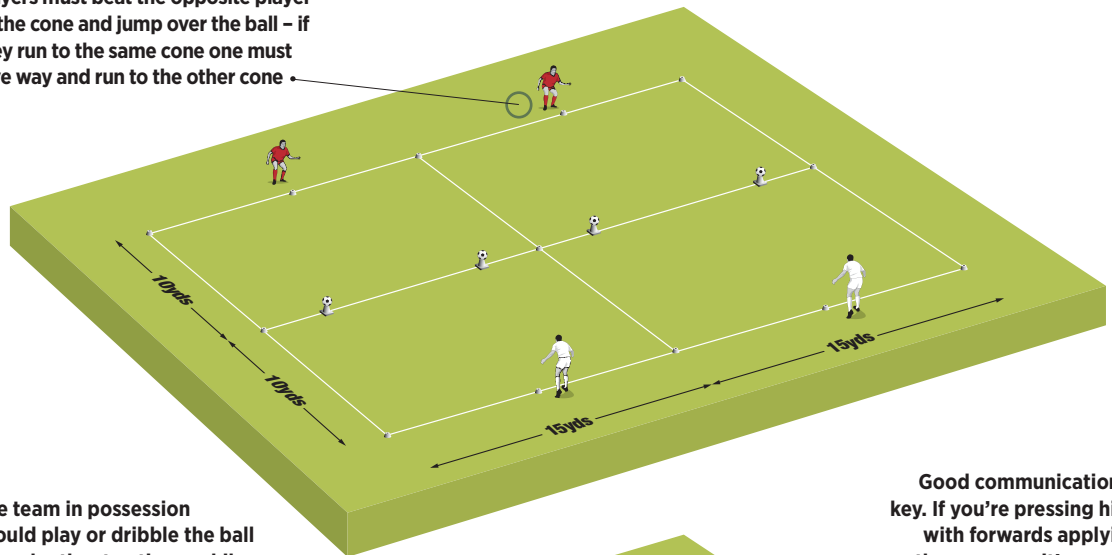
The third set-up is the same but the players with the ball can shoot. If they score they swap with defenders.

TECHNIQUE

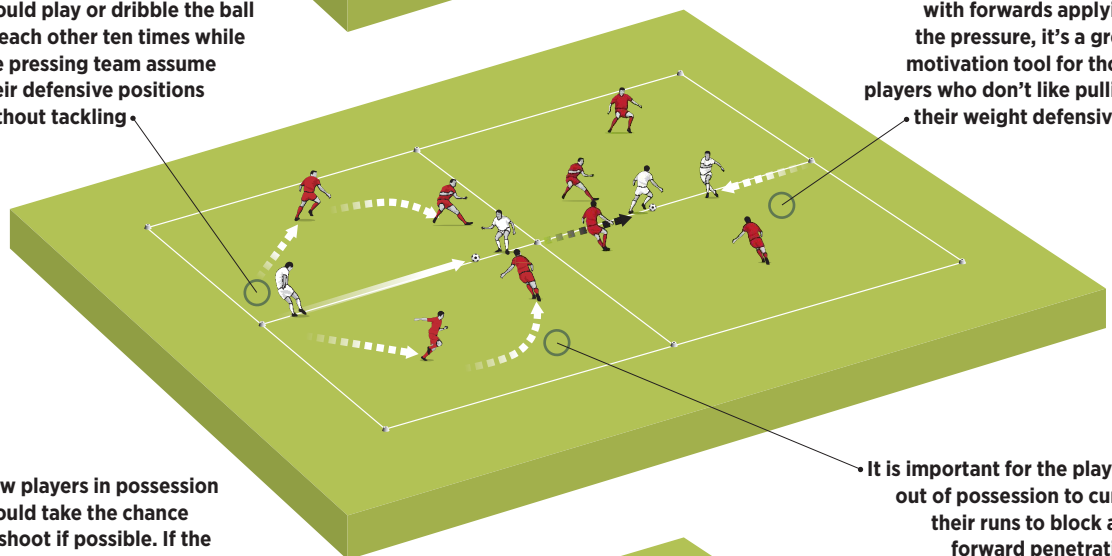
Coaches should be looking for the first defender to put pressure on the ball and the second defender to be in a position where they can block forward penetration.

Activity by: Ricky King, coach education administrator of New York Red Bulls

Players must beat the opposite player to the cone and jump over the ball – if they run to the same cone one must give way and run to the other cone

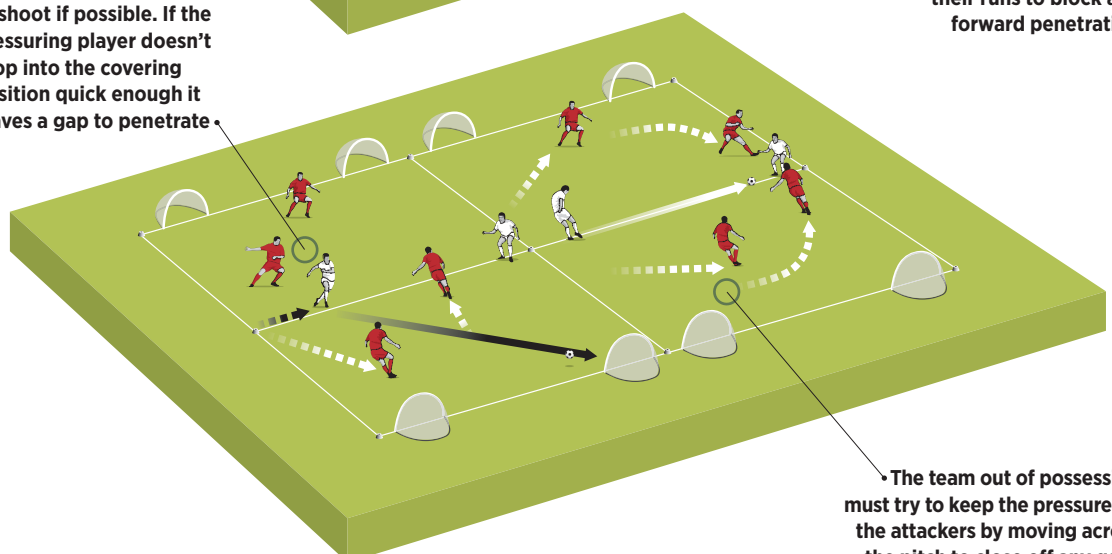


The team in possession should play or dribble the ball to each other ten times while the pressing team assume their defensive positions without tackling



Good communication is key. If you're pressing high with forwards applying the pressure, it's a great motivation tool for those players who don't like pulling their weight defensively

Now players in possession should take the chance to shoot if possible. If the pressing player doesn't drop into the covering position quick enough it leaves a gap to penetrate



It is important for the players out of possession to curve their runs to block any forward penetration

The team out of possession must try to keep the pressure on the attackers by moving across the pitch to close off any gaps they could shoot through

Player movement 

Ball movement 

Run with ball 

Shot 

Cover and Balance

When out of possession, your players need to understand how to pressure the opposition and regain the ball. This session will help explain the different roles involved in pressing

WHY USE IT

This will help players to understand about pressure, cover and balance when they are developing their defensive roles as a team. One player pressures the opponent who has the ball, one supports, and the third balances between the two others so he can react and become either a pressure or cover player.

SET UP

Create a 40x20-yard area split into four 10-yard zones. The activity can be made easier or more challenging by changing the size of the area. We have used 12 players in the session. You need balls, bibs and cones.

HOW TO PLAY

Players must stay in their zones. When the ball leaves the playing area, the coach plays in a new ball. The team in possession is looking to move the ball through the zones to score a point and if the opposition intercept the ball they are looking to score the same way. The first to 10 wins - then each group of three switches places with their team-mates.

TECHNIQUE

The unit is looking to move as one to block all gaps between them but not be too tight so that when the ball is switched they are not beaten down the outside.

Activity by: Ricky King, coach education administrator of New York Red Bulls

The team in possession play the ball around their zone and attempt to find an opening to pass the ball through the zones to their team-mates.

To block gaps in the defensive line, communication between all players is crucial. Here communication between the reds is poor and the opposition score a point.

If the balancing player can read the cues of the passing player, he may be able to get pressure on the ball early.

The defending trio should be looking to cover along the zone to prevent penetration down the side. Here a gap was left on the outside and gives an easy point to the attacking team.

It's important that as the ball moves, the transition of players is instant. If one doesn't transition quickly into their role this will leave a gap to penetrate.

It's important that if the ball is central that the cover player on the weak side quickly shifts with the unit to avoid leaving a penetrating gap for the attackers.

Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →

HOW TO
COACH
PRESSING

Winning The Ball

The aim of these pressing sessions is to show you how to tighten up your defence so you can win more matches. These sessions look at how to regain possession and counterattack

The moment of transition from defending to attacking is a crucial one for young players. If they can take advantage of winning the ball, they are more likely to win games – but all players must understand what they have to do and how to do it.

The sessions on the following pages cover this stage of defending and will give players the edge when they win the ball, allowing good movement and the creation of passing channels to get the ball quickly up to the other end of the pitch before the opposition has had time to recover.

When teams are in the defensive position they are squeezing the life out of the pitch so the opposition have no gaps to advance through, but at the moment of transition they must spread out quickly or the benefits of winning the ball will be lost.

Once a team has comfortable possession, then movement is key to advancing up the pitch. Body shape should be on the half turn with backs to the nearest touchline, so players can see the ball, where players are and recognise where the space on the pitch is.

This allows them to then move into

supporting positions to create passing channels. The players must think about distance in relation to how far their team-mate can accurately pass the ball and then time their run into space so they arrive just as the ball does.

The aim of the following sessions is to get everyone moving and passing forward so the players are advancing on the opposition goal quickly and penetrating the defensive zone.

Modern teams like Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Chelsea use the counterattack to great effect, winning the ball in all areas of the pitch and reacting quickly to regaining possession. Players should be adjusting their position on the field of

play in relation to where the ball is. When Cristiano Ronaldo counterattacks quickly, his team-mates will often not be able to keep up with him so he has to go it alone – this happens in youth games, especially when the supporting players are slow to react or don't keep up with play. It's okay to do this if you are Ronaldo, but most players in your side will need a team-mate to help out when they have won the ball.

Reacting to the moment of transition is something all teams have to work on and if you use our sessions, written for us by Mike Smith, director of the youth academy at MLS club Portland Timbers, your team will be able to make the most of winning the ball and going from defence to attack.

Words by:
David Clarke
Activities by:
Mike Smith

TOP TIPS FOR TURNING DEFENCE INTO ATTACK

Once your defenders have regained possession of the ball, they need to know how to launch a counterattack

- > Players must win the ball by intercepting or tackling or by forcing a mistake.
- > There must be good movement to create space – players should spread high and wide, creating passing channels quickly to get behind a retreating defence.
- > Players in supporting positions should transfer from defensive support to attacking support. It is vital that players understand when to support in front and when to come short or support from behind.
- > Passing becomes the key to making the most of the counterattack. Timing and weight of pass are both crucial, as is passing to a team-mate's strongest side so he can hit the opposition defence quickly.

Repel All Raiders



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



National Soccer Coaches
Association of America
www.nscaa.com

This game enables defenders to work on their communication and decision-making, helping them understand when they should press and when they should recover

WHY USE IT

It helps defenders learn when to press and when to recover and mark. It forces visual and verbal communication, as well as understanding shape and utilising offside.

SET UP

Use the penalty area of your pitch. We've used 19 players. You need balls, bibs, cones and a normal sized goal.

HOW TO PLAY

Use two teams of eight plus a keeper and two target players. Players work 4v4.

The keeper starts by kicking the ball to the first row of attackers who stand 10 yards outside the penalty area. The attackers try to score in the goal for a point, and the defenders attempt to stop them and they get a point if they win the ball and pass to a target player.

If the keeper collects, he distributes quickly to the target player on the side opposite to the one that the ball came from.

Play three five-minute games. Play offside.

TECHNIQUE

The four defenders want to make play predictable and win the ball back. Help players figure out how to read the cues that tell them when to step out of line and pressure the ball.

Activity by: Mike Smith,
director of the Portland
Timbers youth academy

The goalkeeper distributes the ball from hands or feet and as the ball is travelling to the attackers, the first row of defenders sprint out to cover the distance and get in good shape

Attackers can only come onto the field once ball gets to their line, then the game is live

The defenders and the keeper communicate to pressure and defenders shift together to deny penetration

If penetration occurs, the back four have to drop into their penalty area and get tight with opponents

Defenders have to get in good balance and react quickly to the body language of the ball carrier. When one steps out of line to pressure the ball, the others must arrange their angles and distance of support and tuck in behind

If the defenders or the keeper win the ball, they must quickly find an outlet pass to one of the two target players.

Player movement ■■■→

Ball movement →

Run with ball ■■■→

Shot →



Tackle and Counter

This activity places players in a game environment where they are set up to win the ball back from the opposition and counterattack quickly to a waiting target

WHY USE IT

The game works on group decision-making and helps players understand when and where to press the ball and tackle. It encourages quick counterattacks.

SET UP

Use half your normal pitch. Set up a 20x25-yard central box between the penalty area and the halfway line, splitting the box in two. We've used 15 players.

HOW TO PLAY

Split the players into two teams of seven plus a keeper. The red defending team has six defenders in the centre box and one high up the pitch near the keeper. Split the attacking players into two waiting groups on opposite sides. The keeper plays for the attacking team.

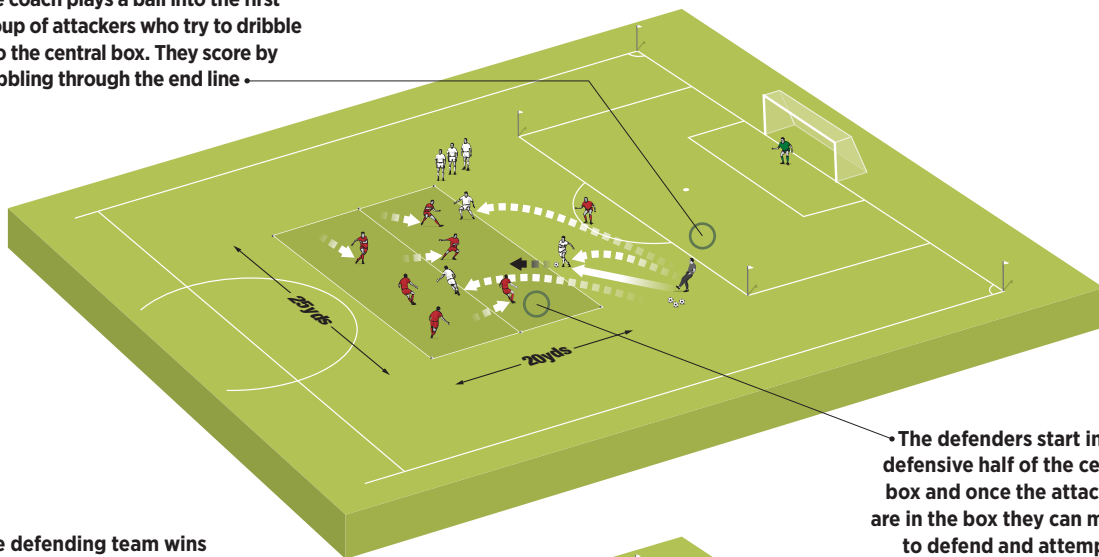
The coach plays a ball into the first group of three attackers, who enter the centre box and try to dribble through it. The six defenders try to stop the penetration by winning back the ball. The player who wins it must make a good pass into the forward, who has three touches to score. Play four three-minute games.

TECHNIQUE

It is a good session for counterattacking with a big overload in favour of the team who are attempting to win the ball and score.

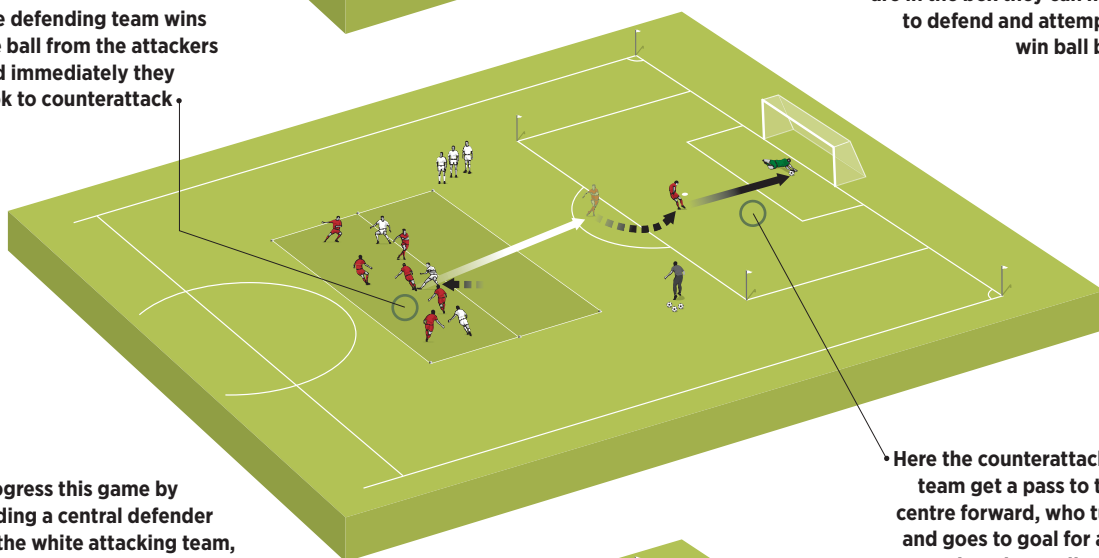
Activity by: Mike Smith,
director of the Portland
Timbers youth academy

The coach plays a ball into the first group of attackers who try to dribble into the central box. They score by dribbling through the end line



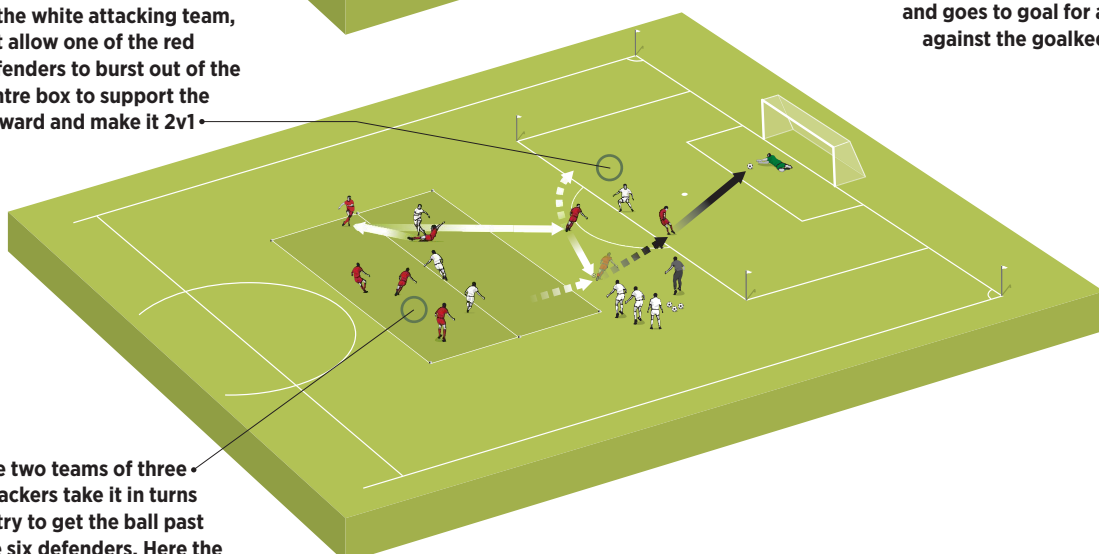
The defenders start in the defensive half of the centre box and once the attackers are in the box they can move to defend and attempt to win ball back

The defending team wins the ball from the attackers and immediately they look to counterattack



Here the counterattacking team get a pass to their centre forward, who turns and goes to goal for a 1v1 against the goalkeeper

Progress this game by adding a central defender to the white attacking team, but allow one of the red defenders to burst out of the centre box to support the forward and make it 2v1



The two teams of three attackers take it in turns to try to get the ball past the six defenders. Here the second team have a turn