Proven, Easy to Use Soccer Drills

NEW

DEVELOP CORE SKILLS

> BASIC BALL CONTROL
> EFFECTIVE MARKING

DEFENDING IN SMALL GROUPS

> INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM DEFENDING

GOLD MEDAL SUCCESS

> WHAT A COACH BRINGS TO THE PARTY

WARM UPS

> ADVANCE YOUR SIMPLE RONDO

FIVE MINUTE WORKSHOP

> ANATOMY DRIBBLE
> THE TUCK JUMP

PLUS THESE GAMES:

> CONE COUNTDOWN
> HALF FIELD POSSESSION

4 TIPS FOR PLAYER POTENTIAL

GOT A COACHING PROBLEM? LET DAVID CLARKE SOLVE IT FOR YOU
Funny how we get used to the early Saturday and Sunday morning routine again after the summer break – I would miss the drama of it all! I bumped into a guy who used to coach his son’s teams over the weekend. He was saying he really missed the Saturday morning buzz.

He was one of those dads who helped put the nets up and was always very keen to coach the ‘right way’. I always found it surprising that he would never go on a coach education course.

But he would always say that he got all the information he needed through me and got all the support he needed from the club. At the time the club had qualified for Charter Standard with the Football Association and it was keen to have all its coaches gain the basic qualification.

However, I could understand why he wasn’t interested in coaching badges. He only planned to coach for the years his son was playing and could see no reason in spending time on a course that he felt would be of little use to him.

One of the ways he learnt was by watching other coaches and their different intervention methods and ways of encouraging players and dealing with problems. He also benefited from an impressive club coaching syllabus, where he only needed to look up the date to see the relevant topic and a session that he could use.

He also benefited from Soccer Coach Weekly, which gave him lots of ideas – interestingly, I looked back at some of those early issues and the advice I gave back then. It was all very relevant but having advanced my coaching education to Level 3, the information now goes a lot deeper and is more targeted at technique, skills and tactics.

One element of those early issues was having fun, and as I have become more focused on coaching and developing the individual, I have tried to retain that fun element. I’ve learnt the importance of repetition, which at one time I would have seen as the antithesis of fun, but now I have managed to make it fun.

There is a need for every level of coach and I am always working with new coaches to make sure my sessions are not too complicated. That is to the benefit of every coach using the sessions. I love going on courses and go on as many as I can. I use what I have learnt to expand my coaching influence – and meeting up with that coach and hearing how the team he had worked with had gone on to become successful on the back of using my knowledge, rather than a coaching course, was one of the best compliments I could receive.

To subscribe to Soccer Coach Weekly call Duncan Heard on +44 (0)1483 892894 or subscribe online here.
Defending In Small Groups

Whether your defenders work individually or as a unit, they should always understand how to defend when they are caught out with small numbers at the back from a counter attack or good play by the opposition. By David Clarke

Knowing what to do when under attack is the first part of building a defensive strategy. Often it will be a counterattack and your players will be in small groups protecting the route to goal. Within this attacking threat players must understand both their individual responsibilities and their team responsibilities or the opposition will break through and take advantage of slow or poor technique.

With youth players it is easy to make activities too difficult, so the sessions must be simple enough to help youngsters understand the fundamental defending principles much easier. Simple sessions can be quickly repeated over and over again, making it much easier to understand the principles behind them and allowing players to achieve success with them.

The two sessions in this Core Skills section will help coaches educate their players in how to defend against breakaway moves individually when the overload is in their favour, and how to defend in a team when outnumbered with players both attacking on the wings and down the centre. In the first session players learn all about what to do when under attack: where to go and how to control the situation.

With an overload in the defenders’ favour, players can easily experience success in covering and winning the ball in the defending situation. Constant repetition of the activity helps to keep it in a player’s mind so that in a match they can do it without thinking.

In the second session the players have to defend with the addition of two wide attackers, giving the overload to the attacking team (if the attackers can get the ball to the wide men). In this session it is vital that defenders work as a team to cover all areas of the pitch – they need to work out whether they should go to block the pass to the wide players or cover the centre where the cross will come in.

So, tighten up your defence – get your players using these simple games to learn all about defending in small groups.

Dele Alli at Spurs is a fantastic player when his team are defending in small numbers. He has the defensive ability and energy to work as a box-to-box player, but his eye for goal, passing ability, and technical ability make him far more than a typical box-to-box midfielder. More importantly his impressive positional awareness allows him to both make plenty of interceptions and cover his teammates when they drift out of position – which they often do under Spurs fluid structure.

LEARN FROM HOCKEY SUCCESS

Danny Kerry’s star is shining bright. He has just steered the England women’s hockey team to Olympic Gold.

But Great Britain and England’s guiding light has had to endure gloomier times as Head Coach.

His darkest hour came in the aftermath of The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games when he stood at a crossroads in his career following a brutal debriefing session that saw him being criticised by his own athletes. It proved to be a lightbulb moment, setting him on a completely different direction with respect to his coaching style and philosophy.

“I thought I had given everything for the team,” says Danny. “But in the review process, the athlete group and the staff I worked with really tore me to pieces. They pretty much called me grumpy, miserable and unapproachable. I felt betrayed. There was a lot of soul-searching at the time. The feedback was pretty harrowing.”

The answer to setting the team back on the right path was reinforcing the message of collective ownership, says Danny, and: “To create a space for people to lead in, build a common sense of purpose and get more mutual understanding within the group.”

His coaching story stands as a glowing example of how hard work pays off and how, in sports coaching, knowledge really is power.

TOP TIPS FOR DEFENDING IN SMALL GROUPS

Make sure your players follow these defending tips to stop the opposition attackers from over running your defence...

> The nearest player to the ball should press.
> The second player must add support.
> The third player gives cover.
> In an overload situation, players should look to close down quickly.
> Defenders should position themselves to block passes out wide.
> Players should cover quickly when the wide player has the ball.
Individual Technique

When your players are defending a two-man attack in small numbers, use this activity to show them how they are individually responsible for stopping the opposition threat. By David Clarke

WHY USE IT
This session helps defenders to use an overload to their advantage when attackers run centrally at them – they must press their opponents into making a mistake and win possession back.

SET-UP
Set up a 30x30-yard area with a goal at one end. We used 10 players in the session including a goalkeeper. You need balls, bibs, cones and a goal.

HOW TO DO IT
Split your players into six attackers, three defenders and a goalkeeper. The attackers work in pairs and each pair has two attacks against the three defenders. As each pair finish their first run, the next pair go quickly, putting the defence under maximum pressure. Attackers must try to get behind the defence and take a shot on goal. Change the defenders after each pair of attackers has made two attacks on goal.

TECHNIQUE
Defenders should press and cover each other so the attackers have little opportunity to get shots in. The attacking pairs attack quickly, so defenders must be ready for the next wave of attack.
Team Play and Tactics

Now your players know how to defend a two-man attack in small numbers with individual defending, use this session teach them how to tackle the same situation as a team with movement key to the tactical situation. **By David Clarke**

**WHY USE IT**
This should be run after the Ball Watching session. The addition of the pass gives the defenders more to think about. No longer have they got the simple 3v2 overload in their favour.

**SET-UP**
Set up a 30x30-yard area with a goal at one end and five-yard crossing alleys on the sides. We used 12 players including a goalkeeper.

**HOW TO DO IT**
Split your players into six attackers, three defenders, two wide players and a goalkeeper. The attackers work in pairs and each pair has two attacks against the three defenders. As each pair finish, the next pair go quickly putting the defence under maximum pressure. The defenders must try to stop the pass to the wide players or get into a position to block the cross, but they cannot go into the wide zone. Wide players have two touches to cross or pass. Change the defenders after each pair of attackers has had two attacks.

**TECHNIQUE**
This is good for defending technique and making decisions to either press early to stop the pass to the wide players or to press the wide players and defend tight to stop any attacks.

1. The game starts with the pairs of attackers taking on the defenders, this time with target players out wide.
2. The defenders must make decisions about when to try to block the pass out wide or to block the cross.
3. Here one of the attacking pair has passed the ball wide and the defenders must now get into position to block.
4. As one defender goes to block the cross from wide, the other two must now cope with the central attacking pair in a 2v2.
5. The covering player does well and heads the ball away before it can be a danger in the penalty area.
5 Minute Warm-up: Anatomy Dribble

**SET UP**
Create a playing area big enough so that your players can move around without colliding with one another. Each player has a ball.

**HOW TO PLAY IT**
- On your whistle, players start to move dribbling the ball.
- Call out a body part – such as “left foot”, “right arm”, “lower back”. Players must quickly put that part of the body on the ball.
- Vary the body parts and let the anticipation build between calls by changing the length of time players are dribbling for.

**ADVANCING THE WARM-UP**
Develop the task by using two or more body parts – i.e. “nose and right elbow”, or “left knee and both thumbs”. Then for older players, you can include combinations that require teamwork, such as “two left hands”, or “six right feet and three touches of both knees”.

**WHY THIS WORKS:**
The focus of this five minute warm-up is to cement the link between dribbling the ball and displaying quick reactions by the players. It uses unconventional methods, but players will find it fun and they’ll be on red alert throughout listening and reacting to your call.

5 Minute Fitness: The Tuck Jump

**How to do it**
- Start by bouncing on the balls of the feet.
- Drive up explosively with the arms and pushing hard off the ground with the feet.
- Pull the knees up as high as possible to the chest.
- Land on the balls of both feet and bounce twice before repeating.
- As the knees are pulled into the chest players should tighten the core muscles around the stomach to maximise the conditioning effect.
- The tuck jump develops explosive power in the legs for jumping and sprinting.

**Workshop**

**Set up**
Create a playing area big enough so that your players can move around without colliding with one another. Each player has a ball.

**How to play it**
- On your whistle, players start to move dribbling the ball.
- Call out a body part – such as “left foot”, “right arm”, “lower back”. Players must quickly put that part of the body on the ball.
- Vary the body parts and let the anticipation build between calls by changing the length of time players are dribbling for.

**Advancing the warm-up**
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**101 Soccer Warm-ups**

No.32: Triangle Keep Ball  This is a simple 5v2 keep away game made harder by having a triangle in the middle which the 2 defenders must protect or stay in the middle longer.

1. The ball starts with the passing team who must try and keep the ball away from the pressing pair.

2. As the ball is passed around the team must try and pass through the triangle to score a point.

3. The defending pair must try to press and win the ball to take a point off their score. The pair in the middle with the least points against them wins the session.

4. The pair in the middle should have one player pressing the ball and the other player supporting behind.

5. Make sure the game is played at a fast tempo and that players are using good technique to pass and receive the pass. Pressing from the two in the middle should be quick to block passes.

**WHY USE IT**

This is a great warm up to get players’ thinking and reacting.

**SET-UP**

Set up an area 10x10 yards – you need balls, bibs and cones with a 2 yard cone triangle in the centre. We used 7 players in the session.

**HOW TO DO IT**

Teams work in a 5v2 with the 5 players in a circle inside the area and the 2 players inside that. Place the 2 yard triangle in the centre of the area. If the passing team can keep the ball and get it through the cones they score a point, and if the defending pair win the ball they take a point off the score. Play for 30 seconds and see how many points the team can score then change the 2 players in the middle. The pair in the middle with the least points against them wins. You can advance the session by adding 5 seconds to the time whenever the team has success playing through the triangle.

**DIFFICULTY RATING**

The addition of the triangle to this 5v2 rondo makes it much more difficult and adds factors into the game like awareness and communication.

**TECHNIQUE**

Players must be making quick, crisp passes with good communication and awareness to get the ball through the triangle. The pressing pair in the middle must be supporting each other as one goes to the ball to block passes and one drops back to cut out any loose passing.
It’s natural that in every team you’ll have some players who are better than others. While players of every level deserve equal attention and guidance, here are Soccer Coach Weekly’s tips designed to get your ‘weaker’ players maximising their potential.

01 KEEP IT SIMPLE
Many young players are pushed too hard, too soon. All too often they are made to practise complicated moves and tactics before they can pass the ball accurately. This failure to embed the basics can produce players who always seem to struggle to control, receive and pass - the so-called ‘weak’ players. So make their skill foundations really strong. Take however long you need to get all your players passing comfortably and accurately with either foot. Make sure they know how to shield the ball and receive it softly before you move on to more complicated skills.

02 MOTIVATE, MOTIVATE, MOTIVATE
Youngsters who are struggling know they are struggling. They don’t need you to tell them they aren’t as good as their friends. What they do need from you is praise. Quiet congratulation for effort - not necessarily achievement - works wonders. You can even consider awarding motivation patches to reward your players as they improve. It’s sometimes all a child needs to make their day, and will often ensure they try harder in the future. But praise has to be genuine. Children aren’t stupid - they know when it’s deserved and when it isn’t. So don’t go overboard.

03 PLAYERS NEED TO PLAY
None of your players will improve if they don’t get the opportunity to practise their skills on match day, and this can be a really difficult thing for coaches to handle, because it’s natural to want to give the best players the most match time. However, if you keep your ‘weak’ players on the subs’ bench week after week, you shouldn’t be surprised that they don’t improve. Ideally, you should have an equal playing time policy - all players play for the same length of time on match day, regardless of the match situation. But that’s a difficult position to defend when you start losing games you know you could have won. To make this policy succeed requires good communication with parents and, sometimes, a thick skin. So if you do decide you need to win matches and can’t risk putting on certain players if the game is tight, fine. But don’t kid yourself that you have the best interests of all your players at heart. It will be kinder to release the players you know won’t get much of a game rather than keep them on the bench.

04 IMPROVE YOURSELF FIRST
All of us want to be good coaches, so that makes it vitally important that we take every opportunity to learn. Watch other coaches - you will benefit as much by noting and avoiding mistakes as from watching good practice - read widely (soccercoachweekly.net) and attend as many courses as possible. Also, invite feedback from players and their parents and change the way you coach if you have to.

MOVING FORWARD
If you do all of these things, you will be in a better position to help all your players to be the best they can - not just the ‘natural’ footballers in your squad. Remember, all children deserve the opportunity to experience success. But success is relative. For a child with poor coordination, one accurate pass is success. For a child who struggles to make friends, just being in the team is success. You have the power to make all your players - including the ‘weak’ ones - feel special. It’s a big responsibility, and one we must all try to live up to.
Cone Countdown

Improve your players’ passing and shooting accuracy with this fun game that has players trying to knock the balls of each others cones like a giant coconut shy. But you can only take as many touches as there are balls on cones. By Steve Watson

HOW TO PLAY IT

• This is a game for six- to 12-year-olds that improves passing and shooting accuracy. For six-year-olds, I would use a 20x15-yard area, while for Under-12s, expand this to 40x30 yards.
• In the example given, I’m using 10 players, five per side.
• Set up as shown in the diagram, with four cones placed in each ‘exclusion zone’, at either end of the practice.
• The object of the game is to knock over opponents’ cones with the ball, which must be kept below head height at all times, or possession is given to the other team.
• Players must stay outside the exclusion zones, except when defenders are taking a goal kick.
• Players can only take as many touches on the ball as there are cones still standing in their opponents’ exclusion zone. i.e:
  4 cones standing - 4 touches
  3 cones standing - 3 touches
  2 cones standing - 2 touches
  1 cone standing - 1 touch (very difficult – suitable for older players!)
• If too many touches are taken, give a free kick to the other team. All free kicks are indirect.
• If the ball goes out of play, start with a kick in from the side line, or a goal kick from inside the exclusion zone.
• Play for 10 minutes, or until one team knocks over all four of their opponents’ cones.

TECHNIQUE & TACTICS

• This game requires players to keep their cool with parameters changing throughout.
• It’s a fantastic game to coach, because it goes by the philosophy that the nearer players get to the end, the harder the task gets, and the more they need to work as a team (due to the limited touches).
Half Field Possession

This is all about increasing the pressure as the team in possession gets better at keeping the ball – it may be easy against one defender but player by player it becomes harder and harder and very match relevant. By Michael Beale

SET-UP

• Pitch size: 30x20 yards (minimum) up to 40x25 yards (maximum).
• Two teams of four players.
• Divide the pitch into two halves.
• No goals.

RULES

• To start, pass a ball into one of the teams, and call for a player from the other team to go into that half and defend.
• If the team in possession manages to make five passes, call for another player to go and defend in a 4v2 situation.
• If the ball is dispossessed then the game transfers to the opposite half and the roles are reversed.
• The player guilty of losing possession must now run and defend in the other half.
• The winning team is the one that has all four of their opponents in their half and manages to make five passes.

The aim of the game is to keep the ball against increasing pressure.

As the number of defenders increases the passing must be very accurate or they’ll lose possession...

...at which point possession and roles switch to the other half.
Basic Ball Control

This simple session works on controlling the ball with one and two touches getting the ball into a position where the next skill can be performed more easily and the player can get into the right place to pass.

**WHAT YOU TELL YOUR PLAYERS THE SESSION IS ABOUT:**
1. Getting the ball under control quickly.
2. Controlling the ball to perform the next skill efficiently.

**WHAT YOU TELL YOUR PLAYERS TO DO:**
1. Assess the line of flight of the ball quickly.
2. Move into position into the line of flight.
3. Select the correct controlling surface.
4. Make contact with the ball and cushion the ball on impact.
5. Use the surface to guide the ball to where you want it.

**WHAT TO SHOUT**
- “Move towards the ball”
- “Drop back; let the ball come to you”
- “Use the inside of the foot”
- “Use the laces (thigh, chest, head)”
- “Relax; be a cushion”
- “Change the angle and move away”

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR**
- Players standing still and stretching for the ball.
- Choosing the wrong surface according to the height and flight of the ball.
- Players stopping the ball dead and not moving on.
- Stiff players; not relaxed, ball bouncing away.

**WHAT TO THINK ABOUT**
When do you move away from the ball and not towards it?
When can you make a firm contact on the ball?
When would you take two controlling touches?
When would you receive and move away without touching the ball to control it?
What are the options after controlling the ball?

**WHERE DOES IT FIT:** Individual skills: first touch Team skills: passing and support

**WHAT YOU GET YOUR PLAYERS TO DO:**

**Stage 1:** Inside a 10 x 15 yards grid in pairs, the practice begins with the players passing the ball across the grid on the ground.

**Stage 2:** The receiving player must use two touches to get the ball under control and pass to a team mate. The team mate has two touches to receive the ball and pass back across the grid. This is repeated.

The ball is always played on the ground at this stage. Players are also encouraged to play long diagonal passes.

**DEVELOPMENT**
1. Vary the passes; softer or harder.
2. Vary the passes; to feet or to space.
3. Vary the passes; ground or air.
4. Increase the difficulty “follow your pass and put pressure on the receiver”.

**HOW WOULD I PUT THIS INTO A GAME SITUATION:**
Use a larger grid (15 x 20 yards) and place an opponent between the two pairs (3v3). Do this by joining three groups of four together.

When the first pass has been made the nearest opponent can pressurise after the first controlling touch. Now the team must combine passing and control to beat their opponents and enter the end zone.
Effective Marking

This session works on getting players to mark and cover spaces in the correct technical way. It gives players the correct positions to be in to intercept passes and be aware of the spaces behind that need to be covered.

**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. Be aware of the space behind you.
7. Don’t allow the opponent to receive and turn.

**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.
- Them 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?

**WHERE DOES IT FIT:** Individual skills: defending technique Team skills: marking and covering

**WHAT YOU GET YOUR PLAYERS TO DO:**

**Stage 1:** In a 20 x 10 yards grid play 2v2 target zone. Playing 2v2. 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.