



SOCCER COACH
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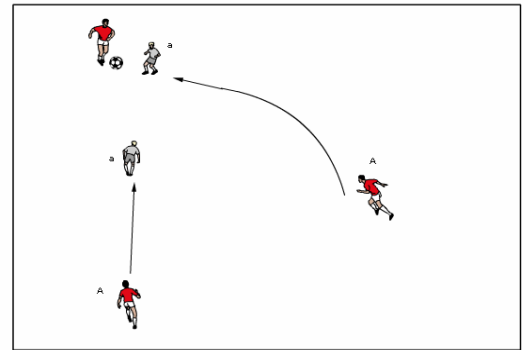
Zonal Defending

by Tom Goodman, M.Ed.

Objective/Explanation: To provide a training environment that will foster a flatter, zone-like defense, especially in the back 1/3. Zonal defending requires focus, discipline, athleticism and quality defensive technique and decision making. This requires functional training for the individual as well as specific units of players. In these activities, if possible, form teams that include the players that work together as a defensive unit, a midfield unit, etc. As coaches, we must give the defensive side of the game much more of our attention.

1) INTERPASSING IN 3's WITH DEFENSIVE APPROACH

(15 Minutes): Player #1 and Player #2 pass the ball back and forth over a 5-10 yard distance while Player #3 drifts 15-20 yards away from the other two players. After 4-5 passes, Player #1 passes the ball to Player #3. As the ball is traveling to Player #3, Player #2 provides immediate pressure to Player #3 and Player #1 immediately moves into a cover position behind Player #2. Player #3 can either try to dribble past Player #2 or player #3 can try to split the two players with a pass. The warm-up activity then continues with Player #2 and Player #3 passing while Player #1 drifts away, etc.

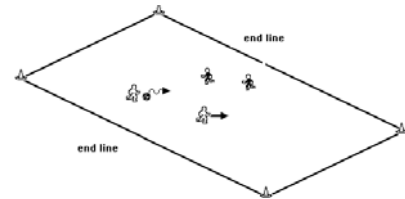


Coaching Points:

- The 1st defender needs to “approach fast, arrive slow”, bend run, have correct stance: be on their toes, with knees bent, one foot forward, one back. The 1st defender “affects” the ball...gets the head of the 1st attacker down by getting close to the 1st attacker, approximately arm’s length
- The 2nd defender needs to be at approximately a 30 degree backward angle to the 1st defender on the side that the first defender is showing the 1st attacker; cannot be too far back or too close to 1st defender. If the first defender is tighter to the ball, the 2nd defender provides closer cover. If the 1st defender is looser to the ball, the 2nd defender is more detached from the 1st defender.
- The 2nd defender communicates where to steer the ball; tells 1st defender which way to push the attacker.

2) 2 v 2 TO END LINES (20 Minutes):

15yd x 20yd grid. (Grid is wider than it is long) This is a 2v2 game. A point is awarded when a team dribbles over the opposite 20 yard end line.



Coaching Points:

- Reinforce 1st and 2nd defender responsibilities as the 2v2 game proceeds. It is crucial that Pressure and Cover, the relationship and connection between the 1st and 2nd defenders, is given plenty of time and repetition.
- Defensive decisions to pressure or cover must be anticipated and made as the ball is traveling (as the attacking players are playing the ball).
- Knowing when to pressure or cover is crucial to winning the ball back. Verbal and visual communication between the 1st and 2nd defenders is imperative!



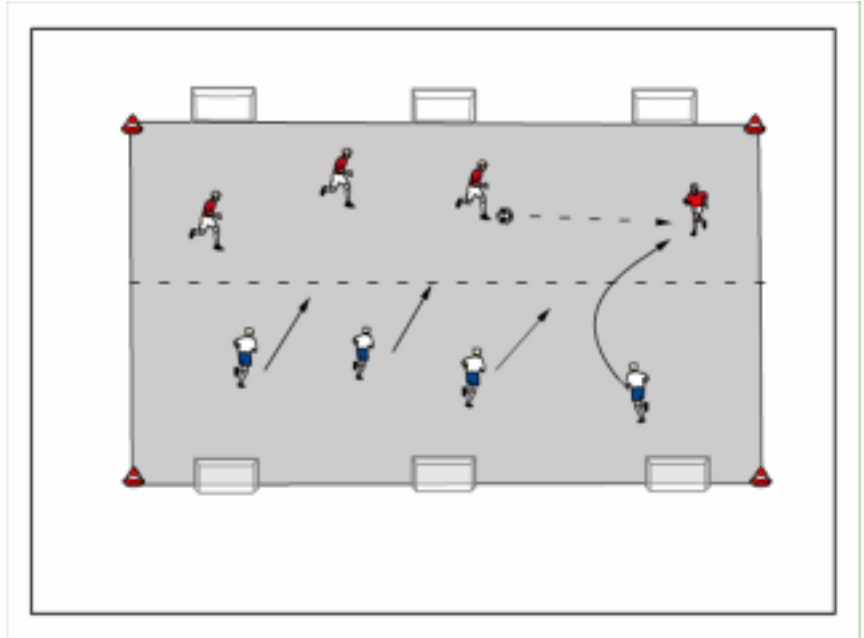
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3) 4 v 4 SIX GOAL GAME (20 minutes): 30yd x 45yd grid. (Field is wider than it is long) The midfield line is the restraining line (offsides line). Simply a 4v4 game. Each team of 4 attempts to score in one of the 3 goals opposite them. Work with one of the teams to help them maintain the flat shape of the defending action.

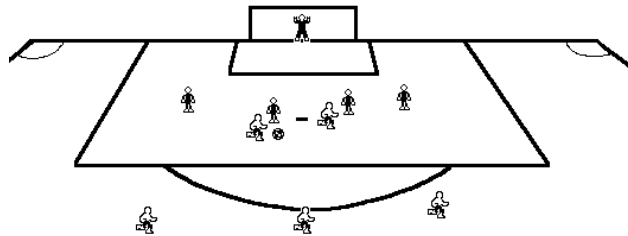
Coaching Points:

- There must always be pressure on the ball. There may be one or two 2nd defenders depending on where the ball and supporting attack players are located.
- 3rd defender play/positioning is now crucial to the defensive success. The 3rd defender must provide balance to the defensive action by being in a position that is not too deep (somewhat flat in relation to the 2nd defender(s)) and not too detached. The 3rd defender works on squeezing space centrally.
- Changing roles quickly as the ball moves is vital to the success of the flat defense. It takes discipline, fitness and tactical speed.



4) 5 v 4 + GKPR (20 minutes): 1/2 field to one goal and 2 counter goals or targets. Defend the goal with the purpose to counter attack. Keeper takes on sweeper role behind the flat back four (4).

Coaching Points: reinforce coaching points made throughout the training session. The coaching points made in these more realistic game-like environments will be more beneficial to the players and will transfer to the game.



5) Match...7v7, 8v8 or 9v9 (30 minutes):

Coaching Points: reinforce coaching points made throughout the training session. The coaching points made in these more realistic game-like environments will be more beneficial to the players and will transfer to the game.

6) Cool-down (5-10 minutes):

Individual juggling; challenge players to see who can juggle the most in a 2 minute period.