

Defending as a unit

This week Better Soccer Coaching is taken from Les Reed's *Soccer Coach Smart Sessions*. You only need six players to complete one of his sessions, though it can easily be expanded to meet your needs. With lots more players you could have a number of grids working at the same time.

Simply Print the session and take it to training. It should take you less than five minutes to read the instructions, set up the session, and then you are ready to communicate what happens to your players.

What you tell your players the session is about:

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

What you tell your players to do:

1. Demonstrate a positive, aggressive but controlled attitude.
2. Remember and apply the work on individual pressing.
3. Observe the opponents positions and your team mates.
4. Keep compact as a unit.
5. Cover spaces as well as players.
6. 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:

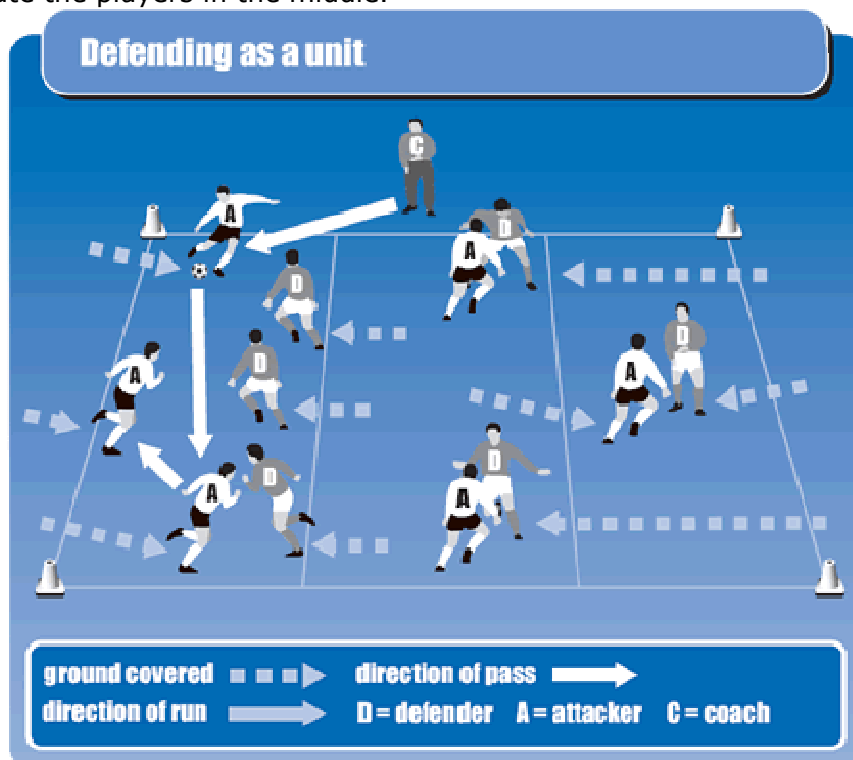
- Slow reactions and movement.
- Gaps between players.
- Lack of positive mental attitude.
- Failure to intercept or challenge when there is a chance.
- Rash challenges, fouls, going to ground.
- Lack of communication and specific information.

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 blue 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 red 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 blues 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.