

Paris Soccer Club  
Basic Coaching Manual 2008

## DEFENSIVE TATICS



# Basic Guide to Formations and Positional Training

## Basic Defensive Positioning in a Nutshell

The 3 basic positions of players on defense are best described by the acronym "**PCB**" (Pressure-Cover-Balance).

The person closest to the ball is called the **First Defender**, and his job is to provide **PRESSURE** on the ball.

The second-closest person who is *goal-side of the ball* (meaning closer to his team's goal than the opponent) is called the **Second Defender**. His job is to provide **COVER**. That is, to be in a position to immediately become the pressure person if the attacker gets by the First Defender. In addition, the Second Defender will frequently have the additional job of guarding (called "marking") another off-ball attacker to whom the ball might be passed for a shot.

The Second Defender will normally choose to take up a position ball-side of his mark if possible, but will mark goal side if the ball-side position makes it impossible for him to provide support for the First Defender. Goal-side marking is also used if a defender knows that his mark is much faster than he is, as it gives him the lead that he needs to keep from being beaten.

The defender who is in the deepest position (closest to goal) if a line were to be drawn directly from the attacker to the goal is called the **Third Defender**. His job is to provide **BALANCE** to the defense. In essence, he is providing additional cover for the two primary defenders, and also watching out for additional incoming attackers making runs towards the center or far post areas of the goal.

All players should be taught these basic principles, and how to apply them in a game setting. It's also very important that players understand their supporting duties to those players who are immediately around them. For example, someone who is a midfielder must know that they must automatically and immediately assume the role of the "pressuring defender" if they're the closest player to the ball.

Additionally, they must understand that they need to loop around to provide cover for the defender behind them and pick up his mark if they're initially beaten by the attacker. Sometimes, young players mistakenly believe that, unless they have been given the job title of "defender", they do not have defensive duties.

Indeed, some coaches refuse to even use the label of "defender" in order to avoid this confusion, and just refer to the players at the back of the group as "backs", in order to reinforce the idea that everyone is a "defender" when their team does not have the ball.

It is normally easier for players to learn this basic positioning in terms of "**Pressure-Cover-Balance**", rather than using terms like First Defender. Thus, all that a young player needs to know is that the closest player to the ball is the Pressure player and to know what the job of the Pressure player is. Ditto for the Cover player and the Balance player.

## Basic Offensive Positioning in a Nutshell

There are also 3 basic positions in the attack. The person with the ball is called the **First Attacker**. His job is to **retain possession** while getting the ball as *close to goal as possible by dribbling, passing or shooting*.

The player(s) within an easy ground pass of the First Attacker are called **Second Attackers**. Up until the time when the ball is advanced to within scoring range of the goal, the primary role of the Second Attacker(s) is to **prevent loss of possession**, while still allowing the ball to be advanced forward if at all possible. Prior to getting into scoring range, a single Second Attacker typically will position himself so as to *allow short relay* passes between himself and the First Attacker in order to move the ball around the defenders). Of course, the goal of the attackers is to get the ball past all of the defenders into unobstructed space within scoring range of the goal and then, ultimately, into the goal itself.

Therefore, as the ball moves into scoring range, the role of the single Second Attacker switches from a "safety-first" orientation of keeping possession, which may even involve moving the ball away from the goal in order to keep it. Instead of "safety", the Second Attacker's role is to set up a shot on goal for himself or the First Attacker.

At this point, the Second Attacker's needs to move into a position that will allow the First Attacker to pass the ball into "scoring space" behind or to the side of the defenders, i.e., space from which an immediate shot can be taken. The positioning of the single Second Attacker will depend on the number of defenders to be beaten. Normally, however, a single Second Attacker will position himself on the far side of the defenders and set up within scoring range of the far post area. This allows him to distract and/or pull one defender away from the central goal area or, if unobserved, to sneak in the "back door" while everyone is watching the attacker with the ball.

Where there are two Second Attackers (i.e. close supporters) available, they will position themselves to form a *moving triangle* with their on-ball teammate, by moving into space between or to the side of the defenders so that the ball always has a clear path to their feet. As the ball is moved into scoring range, one of these players will often abandon his close support role and will become a Third Attacker although this job also may be taken up by any other off-ball teammate who can fulfill the duties.

The **Third Attacker's** job is to *unbalance the defense by making deep runs*, usually to the far side of the goal. By doing this, the Third Attacker pulls defenders away from the goal mouth; distracts the keeper and defenders in front of the goal; and opens up space in front of the goal which can be exploited by incoming teammates.

All players need to be taught these basic principles of attacking support. In particular, they need to learn the concepts of setting support triangles (basic keep away) and how to move to create basic 2-man and 3-man attacking support, because these tools are essential weapons used by all soccer players to maintain possession in tight spaces and create scoring chances.

## Understanding Individual Defensive Principles

All defensive systems depend on the individual defensive skills of each player. Simply put, unless a player has solid individual defensive skills, the player is unlikely to be able to understand or apply group defensive principles very well.

The following individual defensive skills should be learned by all players, regardless of the playing position:

- good defensive footwork (quick movements in all directions, as well as quick stops)
- proper positioning to slow, contain and shepherd an attacker with the ball
- how and when to try to win the ball ("tackling")
- how/where to move next if beaten by an on-ball attacker

Once these individual skills are learned, then the player must learn group skills, such as:

- when/where/how to provide backup support for a teammate who is the primary defender of the on-ball attacker
- how to double team to win the ball
- proper positioning when guarding ("marking") an off-ball attacker
- how/where to move next if beaten by an off-ball attacker

The most important beginning skills to teach a defender are placement, positioning and footwork in a 1 v 1 setting.

Why are these skills so important? Defense by definition is a reactive state, where the attacker causes the defender to take steps to stop some action. Because of this, the defender must be able to move quickly in all directions. The player must be able to stop and restart his movement in reaction to actions by the attacker. To do this, the player must be in a balanced position as often as possible, and the feet must be trained to move in the quickest and most efficient manner possible. The defender also must maintain the optimal distance from the attacker to give himself time to react before the attacker has gotten around him and is heading for goal.

Once properly placed in relation to the attacker, the defender must learn to position his body/legs in a manner which will block the attacker's best scoring options while also allowing quick reactions on his part. Next, the defender must learn to use his body to channel the attacker into less favorable areas of the field while patiently waiting for an opportunity to steal the ball. Of course, he also will need to learn techniques for winning the ball when the chance arises, and learn how to recover in the event that he is beaten by the attacker.

## **Placement in Relation to the Attacker**

What is the correct placement of a defender who is guarding an attacker who has the ball? Normally, the defender will place himself a bit ahead of the attacker, at an angle so that he is between the attacker and the goal. This is called getting goalside of the ball.

If at all possible, the defender wants to place himself so that he is turned to face the attacker, because this placement allows him to keep a closer eye on the attacker and make more rapid adjustments so that he can stay in the way of the attacker.

The optimal distance of the defender from the attacker is determined by the attacker's current pace and potential speed. Usually, the defender will want to move within about 2 strides of the attacker or closer - and then maintain this distance by retreating using short quick steps.

Of course, occasions will arise when the attacker already has gotten up to speed, and the defender is not fast enough to get ahead of the attacker, so the defender has no choice but to simply run alongside of the attacker. Training on the ways to handle these situations will come after training on basic placement, positioning and footwork, so this will be discussed later.

## **Learning Defensive Stances and Footwork**

Once in place, the position of the body itself, along with the footwork used to maintain this position, become vital. Because the defender is moving backward, it is essential that the center of gravity be lowered so that the defender does not lose his balance and fall over. Likewise, it is essential that the defender use his body/legs to create obstacles in the way of the attacker, so as to lure the attacker to head into the channels which the defender has chosen to leave open.

There are two basic defensive stances. The first (and most used) stance is similar to that used by boxers or fencers, and is called the "sideways-on" stance. This stance is used near the boundary lines, or in situations where it makes sense to try to steer the attacker in a certain direction. The knees are bent; center of gravity is lowered; rear foot is turned sideways; weight is balanced over both feet. Movement is made backwards or forwards by very quick shuffle steps. Movement to the sides is made with a galloping motion. Correct instruction in this basic defensive footwork is essential, so the coach should spend the necessary time to be sure that all players can move properly.

The second stance is the closed or blocking stance, which is used when the ball is in the middle section of the field or in the final defensive third where the primary object is to prevent a successful shot/cross from being made. In this stance, the feet are kept fairly close together (with the heels often angled inward), and the torso bent forward with the knees bent so as to allow most of the weight on the toes. In this stance, the defender usually will get fairly close to the attacker, and move backwards with small quick steps.

Especially with younger players, the coach likely will teach these different stances in different sessions, and will start with teaching the footwork for a sideways-on stance. After spending some time on the basic

footwork involved, the coach will begin to teach the player how to apply these skills in order to close down an attacker who had just received the ball.

The defender usually wants to come in quickly and hard in order to try to fluster the attacker and force an error. If the attacker is flustered and turns his back on the defender to try to protect the ball, then the defender must learn how to close the attacker down from the back and try to win the ball. But, the defender first needs to know how to handle an attacker who is confident on the ball and who is going to try to beat him. As a result, when the defender comes pouncing in - and does not manage to fluster the attacker- the defender must put on the brakes while a few yards away and go into the defensive stance (more experienced defenders often will get even closer and then quickly retreat back - but it is so easy to misjudge the timing of such a move, or the speed of the attacker, that coaches should not introduce this until much later in training).

On the field, the first thing a defender must decide when he is closing down the attacker is where he will want to try to steer the attacker. In general, the defender will want to steer the attacker towards the nearest touchline. Why? Because what the defender wants to do is to try to trap the attacker against the touchline. In essence, the defender wants to use the touchline as an extra defender to help to bottle up and contain the attacker in a place where the attacker cannot score.

To accomplish this, the defender will come in at an angle which blocks off the central part of the field, while leaving space towards the touchline. The attacker naturally will want to try to escape into space away from the defender, and will tend to move towards the touchline. However, if the defender leaves too much space along the touchline, the attacker will try to move underneath the defender and go down the line to get away from the defender. And, if the defender shuts down too much of the space along the touchline, the attacker may try to come over the top of the defender and move into the central part of the field. As a result, the defender will need to experiment a bit to see the optimal angle and distance from the attacker which will keep the attacker moving towards the touchline, but which also will keep the attacker from being able to beat the defender.

Factors which will influence the distance and angle used will include the relative speed/quickness of the attacker as compared to the defender; the relative skill of the attacker compared to the defender; and the "footedness" of the attacker (whether the attacker is particularly weak in using one particular foot).

Another big factor is the available support. For example, a forward who is near the goal of an opponent can afford to be beaten, because all of the rest of his team (as well as most of the field) is between his goal and an opposing defender with the ball. Thus, there is little risk in going for the ball, so this player can afford to be much more aggressive in trying to win the ball than an unsupported defender could be. Finally, the choices which the defender will make may depend on the area of the field in which the ball is (particularly when support is available).

Before learning how to defend when support is available, however, the new player must learn how to defend as if there is no support is available. In general, if an attacker is fast compared to the defender, the defender will need to get farther away from the attacker. Likewise, if the attacker is very quick, the

defender must stay fairly far away in order to keep from being beaten. If the attacker is along the touchline, the angle to be set runs from a point about 2 yards inside the near post thru the defender to the attacker. Basically, what the defender is trying to do is to move inside and back at an angle which will allow him to traverse the shortest distance possible and still remain between the attacker and the goal. As the illustration shows, a line drawn from inside the near post will go through the defender (d) and the attacker (a).

Where the defender is slow, he will move farther in along the line toward the goal, as this positioning will permit him to run less distance than the attacker, which compensates for the speed differential and allows him to still remain in the way of the attacker. Because he is forced to fall off of the defender to keep from being beaten, he has weighed the risks of being beaten against the potential reward of getting close enough to steal the ball, and has opted for safety. When unsupported, or when close to your own goal (even if support may be available), "Safety First" is the number one rule for defenders.

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As can be seen from the positioning of the defender, the attacker would have to make an arc over the top of the defender to be able to get around him. However, a right-footed attacker typically will prefer taking the ball down the touchline to trying to carry it around the top of the defender on the unfavored foot. By the same token, a left-footed attacker may be completely unable to go down the touchline, and will be forced to try to escape by going around the top of the defender. Thus, the defender can use this information to predict the movements of the attacker, and allow more space on the side which the attacker will refuse to use because of his footedness problem. Of course, this fact will illustrate to the intelligent coach why it is so important to train players to dribble, pass and shoot with both feet.

### **Learning When & How to Steal the Ball**

In soccer, any type of ball-stealing is usually called "tackling". This can be confusing to Americans because tackling in American-style football involves an attempt to knock the opponent down (which is a major foul in soccer). The mechanics of basic standing soccer tackles are covered in the Practice Plans, and will not be repeated here. We will focus here on when to use those skills - and, more importantly,

when not to use them. The first thing to teach defenders is the importance of PATIENCE in the timing of any tackle. The defender will want to try to steer the attacker into the safest space, with the greatest support available, before considering a tackle (unless the attacker makes a major mistake which allows the defender to take the ball back with little risk). Usually, if the defender can delay things long enough, the attacker almost always will make a mistake and allow an opening to an alert defender to steal the ball - or support will arrive which will allow a double team. It usually is not the time to attempt a tackle when:

- the defender is not in a good balanced position
- the attacker is skilled, and is in a balanced position
- a missed tackle could result in an immediate shot attempt
- a successful tackle or tackle attempt will not result in gaining possession (i.e., knocking the

ball out

of play or to another attacker)

- a successful tackle attempt will not result in an advantage to the team
- if teammates have not yet moved into position to provide support.

Good opportunities to make a tackle attempt are when:

- there is a very good chance of gaining possession
- due to field position and available support, a missed tackle attempt will not put the team in harm
- the attacker is offbalance or unaware, and the chances of success are good
- attacker is moving into such a dangerous situation that a failed tackle attempt would be the same

as no attempt (tough decision)

- a teammate is available for a double-team.

When any tackle attempt is made, the defender should commit totally to the ball. If the defender is able to get his support foot beside the ball on the tackle, then the defender is in a great position for making the tackle. If the defender must reach for the ball, then the chances of success are less, and the best the defender often can do is to knock the ball away. This does not necessarily mean that this is a bad choice. There are many times when a defender may wish to knock a ball over the touchline for a throw-in, as this will give time to other teammates to get back to help. And, even in 1 v 1 games, this may allow the defender some extra time to catch his breath. So, while the coach will want to teach ball-winning skills, players also need to be taught when it can be useful to simply knock the ball out. Often, coaches will cover these ideas in basic sessions in defense, with the general rule to get the ball if you can do it safely and to knock it out if you cannot.

Once the defender is in control of the attacker, forcing him in the defender's direction of preference, it is important that the defender continue to maintain a high level of pressure on the attacker. The defender

often does not need to confront the attacker with a tackle attempt, until the defensive support is in place and the defender is ready. When in doubt, the best course is usually to delay; use patience; and wait for support and/or an opportunity to arise.

The feint tackle is one way to keep the attacker off-balanced. The defender feints a reach for the ball, yet maintains excellent balance and position. The defender should not actually get caught with the body weight going forward, only the feinting foot.

The attacker will have to react (if there is a reaction) in one of two ways. First, he may protect the ball by pulling it back or stepping in with a shielding motion. Or secondly, he may attempt to push the ball past the defender, assuming that the defender has dived in and is off balance. As a result, in the first case, the defender is forcing the attacker to focus totally on the ball, which cuts down on the attacker's ability to give the ball to a teammate and increases the chances that he can win the ball with heavy pressure. In the second case, the defender has tricked the attacker, and should be in good position to cut-off the attempted pass and may even be able to step between the attacker and the ball.

## **Learning What to Do If Beaten**

In the course of any game, there will be times when the defender "bites" on a feint by the attacker, and dives in toward the direction in which he expected the ball to be, while the attacker merrily goes around him and heads towards goal. This is always upsetting to the defender, but is going to happen from time to time.

So, what does the defender do next? Usually, if there is a teammate available, the teammate will have slipped into a support position behind him. In such a situation, he simply swaps places with his teammate, and drops into a position as the supporting defender (this is called "recovering into a supporting position"). But, what if he was the only or last defender?

While the situation is not good, all is not lost. If the defender is faster than the attacker, he may be able to pursue the attacker and use his shoulder to push/steer the attacker away from the goal. This is entirely legal, and is called a "shoulder charge".

Even if the attacker is much faster, or has a head start, the defender must never give up - and should set an

immediate course for the inside of the near goalpost. This action is called a "recovery run" - and what the defender is doing is called "recovering". Often, because of the angle originally set by the defender, the attacker must make a looping run to get into an area of the field where the angles are right for a shot on goal. As a result, the defender often has less distance to cover than the attacker, and can get into a position where he can cut off the easy angles for a shot - even if he cannot entirely block the shot.

Furthermore, many attackers are not very good at shooting at a dead run, so they will tend to slow up in order to set up their shots. As a result, a defender often will be able to catch up to them - and knock the ball away just as they were getting ready to take a shot. This is particularly true when the attacker allows the ball to get too far ahead of him.

In addition, new attackers often will get nervous when they hear the pounding of feet right beside or behind them, and will rush their shots. Likewise, they may take their eyes off the ball, and mis-hit the shot. Finally, of course, strange things can happen. The ball may hit a clod of dirt, or the attacker may trip, or the attacker may even run over the ball. Therefore, defenders must be taught always to recover towards goal at top speed, and never to give up until a goal has actually been scored.

Learning the full range of individual defensive skills takes time, and lots of actual experience with all different

sizes/shapes and skill levels of opponents. While new defenders often will be taught initially by pairing them with another player of similar size and skill, the coach must be careful to expand the horizons of the defender as quickly as his confidence level will permit. Even a very small player, or one who may be chunky/slow, can learn to do a good job against an opponent who is considerably faster if exposed to these situations regularly. Likewise, even if a player has such outstanding dribbling skills that he seems destined to become a striker in later years, the coach is well-advised to force this player to spend considerable time in learning basic defense. After all, this player may have the luck to get on a team which already has Ronaldo and Baggio (or their twins). If so, the player can end up in the midfield with solid defensive skills. Otherwise, this promising player may well end up on the bench.

□ □ If defender manages to turn the attacker, get in tight & don't let turn and face you again! Award goals if not quick enough pressure on the ball. Then demonstrate how easy it is for the attacker to turn the defender if too tight. Get distances correct with regard to the speed of the opponent. First of all passive defending. Then let the defender tackle. If they win the ball, go for opponent's goal. Teams keep scores. Play for five minutes or so. Coach defender in the game. Ask other players to keep concentrating on what the on-field defender is doing well and doing poorly. This way they have the opportunity to learn from each other. Disallow goals if rest of team are not paying attention to what is going on the field.

Once concepts have been determined, introduce 2 v 2. Coach the defensive shape and concept of keeping 2 players at angle goal-side to support. Let the first defender know that the way he/she approaches the ball will determine what position the second defender takes up. There is no offside! If attackers run goal-side of the last defender award a goal. The supporting defender must have both opponents in front of him at all times.

## **Shielding**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### **Warm-up**

Do some basic ball control moves, along with your stretches. Introduce rolls, pullbacks, and circle turns, if you have not done so, as these techniques will be used in this session. Then, to fully warm up the players, put the players in pairs so that their arms are linked and they are leaning against one another,

and have them try to roll the ball around with their outside foot. Have pairs switch sides periodically, so that they can work with both feet. Have a "sackrace" kind of activity, where the pairs try to walk/hop from one line to another, while controlling the ball with the outside foot. Have one race going forward; one going backward; and two going sideways (left-to-right and right-to-left).

One of the first skills which young players will need is the ability to shield the ball in order to keep a nearby

opponent from stealing it. Confidence in the ability to shield the ball is critical to later success as a player – because a player who does not believe that he can hang onto the ball usually will get his head down, get flustered, and just blindly kick the ball away ("hot potato" clearance).

### **When should you shield the ball?**

Common reasons to decide to shield the ball instead of trying to take the defender on by dribbling are that your opponent is bigger/faster or there is so much traffic past him that it doesn't make sense to keep going ahead (so you need to stop and find one of your teammates who is facing less traffic) or you are in your defensive third where it is too risky to dribble when you could lose possession.

### **How do you shield the ball?**

By using various techniques to put your body between the opponent and the ball, so that you can gain time to give the ball to a teammate or take advantage of a mistake by the defender to get past him.

### **What are the basic rules of shielding?**

The first rule of shielding is to avoid turning your back on the incoming defender if at all possible. It is much harder to hang onto the ball if you cannot see what your opponent is doing - so try to keep one shoulder pointed at the defender at all times. About the only time that you want to turn your back on an opponent is when you know that you have back support and you will be able to play the ball back to a teammate very quickly.

The second rule of shielding is to take control of the situation yourself. If the opponent is coming in hard, it is

generally a good idea to be the one to make the first contact.

The third rule of shielding is to be aggressive in holding onto the ball. It is okay in soccer to use your arms,

shoulders, body and legs to keep an opponent from getting the ball (you just cannot push with your hands or

kick/push with your feet), so don't be afraid to hold your ground or to use your body to push the opponent away.

### **Individual Work**

There are four basic shielding moves which you will cover in this session. They are the simple step across; the roll; the pull-back; and the circle turn (Note: younger players may have trouble with the circle turn, but it is a good idea to introduce it anyway - and, for older players, it may be possible to add pull-back/taps behind the support leg and the stepover).

Put the players into pairs, and put each pair in a long/narrow grid with one ball (one player on one end and one at the other). The player with the ball will serve the ball to the other player, then act as the defender. This same grid will be used to teach each of these moves. Put the spare ball at one end of the grid.

## **Step Across**

This is the most basic shielding move - but is amazingly useful. The player simply steps over the ball to put either one or both legs between the ball and an incoming opponent.

There is a trick to it, however. In stepping across the ball, the player usually wants to end up being positioned to face the direction where there is the best chance of finding support players (i.e., toward the open field- not the touchline).

In general, the only time that you want to turn towards the touchline is when it makes sense to kick the ball off of the opponent's shin guards to get a throw-in.

Obviously, the direction that the player will end up facing will depend on which foot is used to lead off.

Let's say that the open field is to his left. He will want to step across the ball in the direction of the defender, starting with his right foot - and then lifting his left foot so that it rests on the ball or comes over beside his right foot. Some coaches recommend that the player get in the habit of swinging the lead foot around the face of the ball, instead of stepping directly over the ball, so that the ball is shielded at all times. However, this may be an extra complication for young players (who can get confused with multiple decision), so you can leave this for later if it seems like a good idea.

After learning the basic step across, the player needs to know when/how to use the move. However, give the players some time to experiment on actually doing the move before you get into this.

Put two players at opposite ends of a small grid. Have one player pass to the other player, then walk towards the receiver to start shutting him down. Have the receiver step across the ball to put himself between the opponent and the ball - and end up with his back foot (the foot farthest from the opponent) resting on top of the ball. Once they have this basic idea down - and have learned the mechanics, it is time for the next step - which is to make actual contact with the opponent.

The basic shielding posture is:

- Knees bent and bottom down to lower center of gravity;
- Body in a fencer's or boxer's stance (turned sideways with weight balanced on both feet);
- Arm/elbow of side which will make contact tucked well in to protect ribs;
- Other arm spread out for balance;
- Time the step across so that shoulder aggressively makes contact with opponent (bump him slightly), transferring weight to front foot so that back foot is free to pass/control ball.

Now, return to the grid and allow players to practice making the shoulder-to-shoulder contact (or getting their shoulder into the opponent's chest, depending on the angle). The idea is to aggressively hold the opponent on one shoulder while you get your head up to find a teammate to give the ball to. In the warm-up, the players experimented with moving the ball while leaning into the partner, so they should have some ideas of their own which they should be allowed to explore.

## **Rolls**

When in the basic shielding position, the ball is moved around either with the side of the foot or the sole of the free foot. The way to move it with the sole of the foot is by rolling the ball back and forth, periodically putting the foot down to movement of the plant foot.

There is a knack to doing this successfully, which is only gained by practice. Allow the players some time to work on this in the grid - and also suggest to players that they can work on this at home by pushing one shoulder against a wall, and simply rolling the ball back and forth to move in a circular fashion. After some experimentation, play a game where the defender gets 1 point if he can steal the ball or kick it away before the count of 5, while the attacker gets 1 point if he can hold the ball to the count of 5. Increase the holding time to 7 or 9 as you get success.

## **Pull-Back**

The pullback move is used when an opponent is coming in so quickly that it will be hard to step across the ball in time to shield it, so the ball is basically snatched to one side using the sole of the foot. Once the ball is snatched back, the basic shielding posture is used to lean into the opponent - but the player will need to be more braced for the contact, as he likely will not have time to initiate the contact himself.

After illustrating this move, have the receiver move up into the middle of the grid (which will reduce the time

needed for the server to get to him), and work on using the pull-back to get ready to shield the ball. Play the same game of points for holding the ball or stealing it.

## **Circle Turn**

There are two types of circle turns - one by using the inside of the foot and one by using the outside of the foot. The latter is the one which is most commonly used - although both can be practiced. In an outside circle turn, the foot used to turn the ball is cocked outwards and somewhat back, and the ball is tapped 3-4 times to allow the player to make a complete circle.

Usually, a circle turn will be used in a pressure situation to spin off of an opponent and explode away on the last tap. Therefore, when practicing circle turns, add an explosion to the last tap so that the ball is pulled with the foot in the new direction. Note that it is fine to do partial circles (and, in games, most "circle" turns actually are about  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a full circle). The key to using circle turns well is to be able to look up as the taps are being made so that the ball can be laid off to a teammate if close support is available - as the ball almost always should be laid off in such situations, since the natural position of the first player will serve to obstruct the opponent. When you observe a player actively obstructing the opponent, however, you

need to bring up the difference between just holding your ground (which is legal) and active movement to prevent the opponent from getting to your teammate with the ball (which is a foul).

Return to the same grid to work on the circle turn. Put the receiver on the back end line (to give him more time to control the ball once received, and allow him to initiate the circle turn as soon as the opponent gets within contact range. Instruct the server to act more like a shadow, just slightly crowding the receiver from the rear as he makes the circle - but not really make an effort to steal the ball. Remember: you are just introducing the idea of this move at this stage. Young players are unlikely to be able to execute this move under full pressure until they have spent more time working on dribbling (especially on explosions), so simply encourage effort.

### **Small Group Work**

Split up every other pair, so that you now have 3 players in a grid. Leave the server at one end, put the receiver in the middle, and put the other player on the far end of the grid (he will serve as the support player). Then, serve the ball into the receiver; allow the defender to close him down; and, as soon as the defender is on him, have the support player start counting slowly to X (which is the amount of time that most of your players could successfully hold off an opponent by shielding). Once the count is reached, the support player then can move in to accept a drop pass and the team then can try to dribble across the opponent's end line.

After 3 tries, swap out roles. Then, play a game of 2v1 - encouraging the inside player to hold the ball and wait for support unless the defender makes a clear goof which will allow him to get by.

### **Large Group Work**

Station a line of players at the midline, and a line of players on both sides of the goal. When you serve a ball into the middle, the first players on the goalline can start for the ball. The midline player starts after the count of 3 and acts as a support player for whichever goalline player wins possession. The player who wins possession may try to score himself, or can hold the ball and lay the ball off for the incomer (going 2v1). Defender scores by dispossession, and attackers score by getting a goal. You will want this game to move quickly, so use two goals if you have more than 9 players, as you don't want more than 2-3 in line. Have players move to a different station after their turn.

### **Scrimmage**

You can play a regular scrimmage, or can continue to play with lopsided teams (creating various restrictions to provide for arrival of late support). Regardless of your decision, praise all efforts to shield the ball and look for support. Encourage teammates to talk to one another, and to call for the ball if available. Remind them that, when under heavy pressure, players may be afraid to look up - so they will need to YELL and get close to offer any meaningful help.

## Introduction to Heading

**NOTE:** I would NOT do an entire practice on heading at any level as, truthfully, too many repetitions can begin to hurt! I would, rather, run through the basic steps in 1-5 below as a part of practice over the course of a few weeks. I would then move to the more "advanced games", which incorporate not only the basics but tactics and service of the ball, as much as necessary to be sure all is going well. Everything through item #9 below is appropriate for players U-10 and above. #10 is more for U-12 while # 11 is definitely for older players, primarily because of the difficulty in getting good service from the wings. While the basics of heading should be introduced early, be aware that the ball simply does not get up into the air enough to require heading until somewhere around the U-12--U-14 age groups.

The basic guidelines are:

1. Eyes OPEN!
2. Mouth CLOSED!
3. Hit ball with the forehead area between hairline and eyebrows.
4. Tense the neck muscles.
5. HIT the BALL! Don't let it hit YOU!
6. Power comes from your hips and back, NOT your neck.

The two basic types of headers are defensive and offensive. As a general rule, defensive headers should go HIGH, WIDE, and FAR while offensive headers should be aimed towards ground.

To start with a group of 12 U-12's, every player should have a ball and gather around the coach.

1. Everyone holds ball in front of face in two hands and gently taps ball against forehead a few times.

Concentrate on eyes open, mouth closed. [Note: eyes WILL reflexively blink when ball is struck but should

be open up until that point.

2. Everyone now "heads" the ball out of their hands and catches it. Ball should start being held against player's forehead. Player then pulls head/upper body BACK while holding ball stationary and then STRIKES ball. Again concentrate on eyes open, mouth closed, hit with proper part of forehead.

3. Everyone get a partner, 1 ball per pair, stand about 5 yards apart. Player 1 heads ball to partner using technique described in #2 above. Partner catches and heads back. Again, coach repeats eyes open, mouth

closed, strike through the ball.

4. Player's now all drop balls and face coach in a basic "boxer's stance", e.g. one foot forward, one back, well balanced. (To get players in this stance, coach asks players to bounce around on toes pretending to be

boxers, throwing imaginary jabs, etc. On "Freeze", players simply hold their stance and will be in proper position.) Coach: "Now look at that big iron bar right in front of you and reach out and grab onto it with both hands about shoulder width apart. Like this (coach demo). Feel it? Big and solid. Now hold on to the bar and lean your upper body back like this (coach demo). Then use the bar to PULL your body forward.

Repeat this a few times and toss in blood-chilling karate scream ("yaaaaggggghhhh!") when body comes forward. Correct those who don't get their arms out far enough, those that don't get a good lean backwards,

those that merely drop their hands to their sides when their body comes forward.

5. Everyone get a partner. Working player assumes proper stance, gets backward lean, and partner tosses

underhand lob to be headed back. Repeat 5 times and switch. Coach circulates and corrects eyes open, mouth closed; hit with forehead; being sure that working player stretches arms FORWARD, leans upper torso BACK, and uses arms to PULL upper body through ball.

End basics. A few additional exercises for varying skill levels follow:

1. Set up in threes, two balls per trio, players in a triangle with about 3-5 yards between them. Working player receives underhand lobs alternately from partners. Lobs from partner A must be headed up to partner's head; lobs from partner B must be headed to partner's feet. Run for a minute and switch working player. Coach corrects the basics as above; emphasizes also good serve.

2. Same formation, 5-7 yards between players, one ball per trio. A serves underhand lob to B who heads to C. C serves A who heads to B, and so on. The difference here is that players are getting a ball coming from

one direction and heading it in a different direction as opposed to the simple back-and-forth in the basic work. Emphasize moving entire body to enable powerful headers struck with forehead.

3. Groups of four with two balls, players in a diamond with approx. 5 yards between players. Single working player receives underhand lob serve, locates player without ball (other than server), and heads to him.

Next

lob comes immediately. This results in the working player having to deal with balls from a variety of angles, identify a target, and perform header. As players improve, increase distance and allow non-working

players to move around.

4. 6 players plus coach and assistant (or a couple of parents), each with a ball set up on the outside of an area about 20\*20. Working players set up in center of area. On "start", working players make eye contact with outside player and check to them, receive underhand lob for [coaches choice: attacking header, defensive header, leaping header, diving header for more advanced players], then continue on around outside of server and re-enter grid to look for another server with ball. Run for a minute and then have players switch roles.

5. In a field 30\*40 yards with small cone goals, divide into two teams of 6 with different color pinnies and play "toss-head-catch" as follows: Sequence MUST be a "toss" followed by a "head" followed by a "catch".

Object is to move down field and score on header. Ball turns over to other team if player goes out of

sequence.

6. Put 4 servers with ball pool on right touch line about 25 yards out from goal, coach stands about 20 yards

out and 5 yards infield from same line. Put two cones goal-width apart on center line, 1 about 10 yards in from left touch and 1 about 15 yards in. Remaining players line up, 4 on each cone. Server executes wall pass with coach and continues on down touch line towards goal line and chips ball to center. Point of aim is

center of goal and between 6 and 12 yards out from goal line (the "second 6"). First two players on center cones time their runs to meet ball and finish with header into goal with player nearest server making a looping far post run and player furthest from server making a straight near post run. Adjust field width as necessary to allow for crosses to reach target area. Further adjustment with coach serving balls or even initially tossing balls in is also possible. As proficiency is achieved, add a third attacker making a delayed center run.

## Heading

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls, several old pair of pantyhose; Players: 4+**

### Warm-up

Any type of warm-up activity can be used which will get the players working. An extended warm-up game is

advisable for younger players, as heading work tends to be more sedentary and younger kids pay attention better if a bit tired.

### Individual Work

Start by letting some air out of several balls to make them a bit soft. Take an old pair of pantyhose, and tie a ball in the crotch area, then tie the ball to the top of the goal with the legs. Put up several balls at varying heights. As players arrive, give them a quick illustration of the basics of heading and then let them experiment with the hanging balls.

The key coaching points for heading are:

- Put feet in a wide fencer or boxer stance, with knees bent and weight centered evenly (see a good description below on teaching this stance)
- Keep the neck stiff, and use the waist/back to move the head toward the ball.
- Eyes OPEN!
- MouthCLOSED!
- Hit ball with the forehead area between hairline and eyebrows.
- If you hit the ball on its bottom half, the ball will go up.
- If you hit the ball on the upper half, the ball will go down.

As a general rule, defensive headers should go HIGH, WIDE, and FAR, while offensive headers should be aimed towards ground (as ground balls are harder for keepers to handle). So, defenders usually will

aim for the bottom half of the ball, while attackers usually will aim for the top half. Initially, of course, what you really want is the courage to try the technique, so don't get too concerned about where the ball is hit. If you don't have any pantyhose available, another option is to do the following:

1. Everyone holds ball in front of face in two hands and gently taps ball against forehead a few times.

Concentrate on eyes open, mouth closed. [Note: eyes WILL reflexively blink when ball is struck but should

be open up until that point.

2. Everyone now "heads" the ball out of their hands and catches it. Ball should start being held against player's forehead. Player then pulls head/upper body BACK while holding ball stationary and then STRIKES ball. Again concentrate on eyes open, mouth closed, hit with proper part of forehead.

3. Everyone get a partner, 1 ball per pair, stand about 5 yards apart. Player 1 heads ball to partner using technique described in #2 above. Partner catches and heads back. Again, coach repeats eyes open, mouth

closed, strike through the ball.

4. Players now all drop balls and face coach in a basic "boxer's stance", e.g. one foot forward, one back, well

balanced. (To get players in this stance, coach asks players to bounce around on toes pretending to be boxers, throwing imaginary jabs, etc. On "Freeze", players simply hold their stance and will be in proper position).

Coach: "Now look at that big iron bar right in front of you and reach out and grab onto it with both hands about shoulder width apart. Like this (coach demo). Feel it? Big and solid. Now hold on to the bar and lean

your upper body back like this (coach demo). Then use the bar to PULL your body forward. Repeat this a few times and toss in blood-chilling karate scream ("yaaaaggggghhhh!") when body comes forward."

Correct those who don't get their arms out far enough, those that don't get a good lean backwards, those that merely drop their hands to their sides when their body comes forward.

Everyone get a partner. Working player assumes proper stance, gets backward lean, and partner tosses underhand lob to be headed back. Repeat 5 times and switch. Coach circulates and corrects eyes open, mouth closed; hit with forehead; being sure that working player stretches arms FORWARD, leans upper torso BACK, and uses arms to PULL upper body through ball.

## **Small Group Work**

When the players have had several minutes to experiment with heading, put them in pairs, with one partner between a set of flat cones about 3 yards apart and the other outside. Have the "keeper" toss the ball to the outside player, who then tries to head the ball back across the line. Let them try to score on the

"keeper", as this turns the drill into a game, and the partners can have a contest over who can score the most out of 5 tosses.

Once good success has been achieved, divide the pairs up so that you have groups of 3. Use the extra player as a shadow defender, who just stands behind the receiver. Rotate players around after 5 headers. Now, introduce the idea of getting your arms up to shield your face and head from another player who may be trying to get the ball too.

Allow the shadow to start jostling and trying for the ball (but only at about half speed). Continue with rotations.

**Progression 1:** Set up in threes, two balls per trio, players in a triangle with about 3-5 yards between them. Working player receives underhand lobs alternately from partners. Lobs from partner A must be headed up to partner's head; lobs from partner B must be headed to partner's feet. Run for a minute and switch working player. Coach corrects the basics as above; emphasizes also good serve. This progression may be too advanced for younger players, who tend to do better by learning one specific skill at a time (e.g., heading downward).

**Progression 2:** Move players farther apart (about 5-7 yards), and put one ball down. Player A serves underhand lob to B who heads to C. Player C serves A who heads to B, and so on. The difference here is that players are getting a ball coming from one direction and heading it in a different direction as opposed to the simple back-and-forth in the basic work. Emphasize moving entire body to enable powerful headers struck with forehead. This progression, and the progressions which follow, probably will be too difficult for players under about age 10-11.

**Progression 3:** Groups of four with two balls, players in a diamond with approx. 5 yards between players. Single working player receives underhand lob serve, locates player without ball (other than server), and heads to him. Next lob comes immediately. This results in the working player having to deal with balls from a variety of angles, identify a target, and perform header. As players improve, increase distance and allow non-working players to move around.

**Progression 4:** 6 players plus coach and assistant (or a couple of parents), each with a ball set up on the outside of an area about 20\*20. Working players set up in center of area. On "start", working players make eye contact with outside player and check to them, receive underhand lob for [coaches choice: attacking header, defensive header, leaping header, diving header for more advanced players], then continue on around outside of server and re-enter grid to look for another server with ball. Run for a minute and then have players switch roles.

## **Large Group Work**

**Option 1:** Put several players around the edges of a large circle, with about 2-3 players inside circle. All of outside players have balls. Inside player asks for service, then heads ball back to server, and moves to another server. Swap out inside players after 5-6 headers. Then, add shadow players who tag along, and then gradually allow increased pressure from shadows (but allowing receiver to cut back or break to get

serve). Jump in quickly if you see any player not getting arms up for protection, as serious facial injuries can occur in head collisions.

**Option 2** (for more advanced players only): Put 4 servers with ball pool on right touch line about 25 yards out from goal, coach stands about 20 yards out and 5 yards infield from same line. Put two cones goal-width apart on center line, 1 about 10 yards in from left touch and 1 about 15 yards in. Remaining players line up, 4 on each cone. Server executes wall pass with coach and continues on down touch line towards goal line and chips ball to center. Point of aim is center of goal and between 6 and 12 yards out from goal line (the "second 6"). First two players on center cones time their runs to meet ball and finish with header into goal with player nearest server making a looping far post run and player furthest from server making a straight near post run. Adjust field width as necessary to allow for crosses to reach target area. Further adjustment with coach serving balls or even initially tossing balls in is also possible. As proficiency is achieved, add a third attacker making a delayed center run.

## Scrimmage

**Option 1** (for younger players): Allow a regular scrimmage, but count any goals off of headers as 2 points.

Alternatively, count ANY header as a 1 point. If you taught headers and chest traps consecutively, you might count either a chest trap or header as a goal.

**Option 2** (for players 11+): Set up a field 30x40 yards with small cone goals, divide into two teams with different color pinnies and play "toss-head-catch" as follows: Sequence MUST be a "toss" followed by a "head" followed by a "catch". Object is to move down field and score on header. Ball turns over to other team if player goes out of sequence or ball is not caught off of the header or header is not done correctly. Variation: If you combine the teaching of heading/chest traps into one session, or did consecutive sessions, you can modify the rules to allow either header or chest trap. For older players, you can add flat chest trap, followed by flick-up of ball for header by another player, into the sequence.

## Instep Drive

When a player wants to kick a ball with optimum power, the instep drive is the technique that is most often used. On the center top of the foot, towards the inside is a hard bone. This is the primary contact point for the instep drive.

Because of the proximity on this point to the shoe laces, some refer to this as the "laces" kick which may be a good reference point for young players, even though the contact point may be just inside of the laces.

If a player wants to keep the ball low, toe of the foot must be pointed at a downward angle when contact is made.

The upper leg (thigh) must be the prime muscle group moving the lower leg through the ball on this kick.

Some of the key technical points for the instep drive are:

- support foot beside the ball and pointed at the target
- kicking foot pointed down and locked throughout the shot and follow through
- body weight is moving forward and through the shot, landing on the kicking foot

## **Instep Drive Training**

The following exercises are submitted not as one or two training sessions, but as examples of exercises that can be used in a training session, based upon the age and skill development of the players.

### **Warm-up**

- two man pass and move.
- stretch the ankles by rotating them while standing on one foot; then press the toes into the ground and try to drive the front of the foot forward and down with the upper leg; this should give the player a sense of driving the lower leg with the upper.
- by standing sideways to and grabbing onto a stationary object, swing a leg slowly until maximum swing is reached; switch legs; stress the leg swing being driven with the upper leg.

### **Technical Exercises**

- have the players pass back and forth in the two man groups using the instep; move through the technical points above, individually focusing on each one; the players should not one-touch their kicks at this point; increase the power of the pass and distance between the players gradually
- have one player hand serve the ball to an area below her partner's knee; this is to reinforce the foot-down kicking position throughout the kick
- ghost kicking to reinforce the support foot beside the ball, place a ball in front of a goal and have the players plant their foot just wide of the ball and pretend to kick an imaginary ball just beside it; the coach should watch that the plant foot is in the proper position, i.e. neither too far behind nor too far ahead of the ball; that the kicking foot is pointed down; and that the follow through is well forward. In some areas, coaches emphasize that the player should land on the kicking foot and keep moving towards the target, which helps with a proper follow-through.
- shoot and tend goal set up cones 6-8 yards apart, with groups of 3-5 players; one player is between the cones facing another player with ball; the player with ball dribbles a step or two and takes a shot; the shooter then trades places with the goalkeeper as the player on the other side of the goal collects the ball and shoots on the new goalkeeper, becoming the next goalkeeper after his shot

□ □ close in shooting--on a goal, have the players take a short dribble and shoot from about 6 yards out with

"some" power; the purpose is to develop some confidence of hitting the goal during the learning phase; the

coach should stop all bad habits that start to form as the players try to increase their power; stress keeping

the ball low through proper placement of the plant foot and by getting the body over the ball; gradually increase the distance of the shot on goal

□ □ pass and shoot--set two cones about 20 yards out from each post; divide the team into two groups, one on

each post; one player starts his run from a post to around the cone in front of him; the player at the far post

passes to the player as he rounds the cone; after receiving the pass, the player sets up his shot with as few

touches as possible and shoots; the shooter collects his shot and goes to the other line and the original passer starts his run around his cone to receive a pass from the other post player.

### **Tactical Exercises**

□ □ off the dribble--half the players are dribbling a ball in an area above the penalty area; each player has a

number, starting with one; the other half are behind the goal collecting balls; they are numbered as well, starting with one; when the coach calls out a number, that player quickly dribbles the ball into the penalty area and shoots; the player behind the goal with the shooter's number collects a ball and switches with the

shooter

□ □ back angles--have a player dribble to the goal line then pass the ball to a player running in on goal

□ □ through ball--player A has ball just wide of one goal post about 35 yards out from the goal line and passes

the ball to player B who is making a run towards the opposite post from about 35 yards out; B is to shoot on

the second touch

□ □ wall pass--one player is 25 yards out from the goal line between two groups of players who are 35 yards

out, the first player of group one dribbles and plays a wall pass (i.e. "give and go") combination with the middle player and shoots the return pass; immediately after the wall pass the first player in the second group plays a wall pass combination with the middle player on the other side; after a series of passes, the middle player is switched out

### **Match Related Exercises or Games**

#### □ □ Keep Your Yard Clean

Set up two parallel lines of cones far enough apart so that it will take a reasonable shot to get across. The area between the cones is "no mans land". Divide the team in two groups, one group on either side of "no mans land", each player with a ball. Instruct the players to get rid of all the balls on their side by kicking them as hard as they can to the other team's side. No one can go into "no mans land". Play for 3 minutes. Whoever has the least number of balls on their side wins. Watch for kids backing up, and lining up the ball like a goal kick. Stress getting rid of the ball as quickly as possible. You may need to even up teams if it seems unbalanced.

#### □ □ 4v4 Shooting Game

Move two goals about 20 yards apart; play teams of 3 or 4 with goal keepers. Start with all balls in the goals, evenly divided between the two either keeper starts play by tossing a ball on the field. When a ball goes out of play, the nearest goal keeper puts another ball in play as soon as possible; players are urged to shoot on their attacking goal as often and as they can.

#### □ □ 5v5 on One Goal

10 players in the penalty area, remaining players on outside as servers with multiple balls. Servers toss balls into the area where players contest possession and shoot as often as possible. Emphasize need for players that gain possession of the ball to quickly turn and shoot.

## Standing Tackle

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### Warm-up

Play basic keepaway, requiring the attacker to become a defender when the ball is stolen from him. Use enough defenders so that the players are forced to move around quickly.

### Individual Work

In soccer, the term "tackling" is used to describe any effort to steal the ball or knock it out. Thus, in soccer, a tackle can be on the ground (a slide tackle). It also can be done upright, either by knocking the ball out as you run along one side of the attacker or done from the front by blocking him from dribbling the ball forward. Unlike American football, a tackle really is not supposed to bring the opponent crashing to the turf. Indeed, in many cases, the tackle will be judged as a foul if you do so. As a result, your first job as a coach will be to explain the terminology to your players and make the point that the player is tackling the BALL ITSELF and not the opponent. Alternatively, you can simply use a term like "ball-stealing", so that they don't have the idea that they will playing American-style tackle football with a pointy pigskin instead of a soccer ball.

## **Knock-Out**

The easiest tackle to learn is the knock-out tackle, which is used to hit the ball away when the attacker gets the ball too far in front. Teaching tackling is usually begun right after basic work on First Defender skills and the defensive stance.

Use the same grid and follow the same ideas of patience and delay, but give permission to go in for the ball when the attacker allows it to get out too far in front of him. In this exercise, the defender gets a point for sending the ball out of the grid in any direction while the attacker gets a point by dribbling over the opposing end-line. This tackle is used when you want to buy time for your teammates to get back and is particularly popular with wing defenders.

## **Bump**

The next tackle, which is also very easy to learn, is the bump. To do this, quickly move into the attacker from a slight angle, lifting your lead foot over the ball so that your lead foot will end up between his legs. At the same time, turn into him with your shoulder/hips so that you can bump the him off the ball with your backside and take the ball away with the outside foot.

Once you commit, the key is to pounce aggressively and go in hard. The lead foot comes across the ball just when your shoulder/hips are firmly against the attacker. Try to time the move in so that the attacker is momentarily looking down at the ball and is standing on his dribble foot so that he is temporarily frozen.

This exercise also can be done in the same grid, using the same procedure as before. One point for stealing the ball and one point if the attacker can get around the defender and dribble across the opposing end-line.

## **Block Tackle**

The next tackle is the front, or "block", tackle. The purpose is to block the ball into the attacker's foot, then to

drag/lift the ball over the attacker's foot. Body weight must be over the ball to prevent the attacker from getting any leverage.

Key coaching points are: ankle of blocking foot locked, to make foot into an L-shape (hoe-shape) to use as a drag; keep body weight over ball; put support foot well to the outside.

Put the pairs back into their grid, one ball per pair. Have the attacker stop, with the ball just to the inside of his right foot. Now, have the defender step in so that his shoulder presses into the attacker just as his right foot blocks the ball into the attacker's right foot so that the ball cannot go forward. As soon as the block is made, the defender will try to lift the ball to the outside and bring it over the toes of the attacker by getting his locked foot under the ball and lifting/rolling it over. Note that the support leg must be sufficiently wide of the attacker to allow the blocking leg/foot and the ball to come across.

This is a more difficult tackle to learn, so give the players ample time to experiment. Most young players can block the ball easily but have trouble with the technique of dragging it over. Some will try to put the outside leg too far forward, and bump knees and/or give the attacker room to push the ball through their

legs. Others will try to put the outside foot too far to the back so that they have no leverage to use against the attacker. It takes some time to figure out the best place to put the plant foot so that the ball is quickly blocked, and then lifted across. Once some success is achieved by both players, start with some very slow dribbling and let the players try to do just a block. When most have made a good block, then let them try to lift the ball across.

Now, simply let the players play 1 v 1 in their grids, as follows. The players stand at opposite ends of the grid, taking turns on who is the server. After serving the ball to the opponent, they close him down defensively and try to tackle the ball. Play until the defender has made 3 successful tackles, then switch. Do two full rotations.

### **Match-Related Work**

Next, play a game in which each successful tackle is worth 1 point. The attacker scores 1 point if he can dribble across the opposing end-line without having the ball tackled away. Play until one player reaches 5 points, then switch roles. Note: Be sure to watch carefully to make sure that you are getting success.

Reassign partners; or place restrictions on above-average players; or make the grids narrower if necessary in order to be sure that the defenders win more often.

Now, combine the kids in adjacent grids, and make a hexagon with some cones. Put a player between the cones at every other leg of the hexagon meaning that they will be in basically a triangle. Put the last player in the middle of the triangle, and play keepaway with the outside players restricted to movement only between their cones. This makes their movement more predictable for the defender. Play until the defender kicks the ball out 3-5 times, then switch. Counsel the defender to use patience when he sets an angle to bottle somebody up as his success is guaranteed by the placement of the outside players once he sets his angle properly.

### **Match Condition Work**

Play keep away in a small grid, with 1-2 defenders and about 4-5 attackers (the small space will favor the defenders).

Give a point to the defenders for each time that they tackle the ball away or steal it and pass it to the other defender.

Give a point to the attackers for each time that all of them can touch the ball without an intervening tackle by the defender. Play to 5 points and switch.

## **Shoulder Charge and Side Tackle**

**Ages: 6+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### **Shoulder Charge**

The shoulder charge is one of the most useful skills which a defender can have in his arsenal - and all young players should be able to learn this without difficulty. All that there is to a shoulder charge is to place your shoulder squarely against the shoulder of the opponent, and push against him. To start off, make sure that everyone's elbows are tucked in and pair kids by size/aggressiveness when to avoid injury. Simply allow the players to walk around without a ball, while pushing into one another with their shoulders. Show them that they can push very hard, even against the Coach, if they get their weight down and use their far leg to give additional power.

Next, have one player start to slowly jog, and have the other player close down on him until he is running side-by-side with the opponent. When coming onto another player to do a shoulder charge, it is VERY important to be sure to jog/run alongside for a few steps, so that your speed is matched with his. If you don't match speeds, it's easy to come in too hard and send the opponent flying which is a foul (and also not a good idea). Once you have made sure that your speed is matched, move over to make shoulder contact and start trying to push the other player away. To avoid sending the opponent flying, it is better to wait to start the contact until he is standing on his near foot (the foot closest to you), so that a push causes him to catch himself with his far foot. If started when he is on his far foot, it is much easier to knock him over and makes it more likely that the Ref will call a foul.

One of the main uses of shoulder charges is to legally push the opponent into touch. Be aware that shoulder charges are permitted only when the ball is in playing distance. For example, you cannot just push an opponent into touch just to slow him down so that he won't be able to run towards the goal to help his on-ball teammate. Shoulder charges can also be used in the middle of the field to steer an opponent towards one touch-line or simply tie him up so that it is harder for him to get off a pass. As players get older, they can learn how to spin off a shoulder charge in midfield, so it tends to become less useful over time when the opponent has space to spring away. Therefore, the primary focus should be on training the players for use of the shoulder charge when near a touch-line.

At first, have players work on shoulder charges without a ball, by simply running along a touch-line and trying to force each other across the line with a legal shoulder charge. Then, give one player a ball to dribble (it feels weird to try to dribble when somebody is pushing you from one side), and let them experiment. Be sure to have them switch roles periodically.

Next, have the dribbler start jogging down the line with a ball, and have the defender catch him; jog right beside him for several steps to be sure that speeds are matched; and then move in for a shoulder charge and try to steer him across the line. After several tries, switch places.

Once the players have learned to do a shoulder charge properly, they are ready to learn how to do a standing side tackle. There are two ways to do this.

One is with the outside of the foot that is nearest to the ball. This tackle works best if you can slightly ahead of the dribbler (so that your inside hip/leg will be free), then come in and nudge him slightly in front of his shoulder as you step in to knock the ball away with the outside of the foot. Time your run so that you push him just before he puts his weight on his outside (far) foot. This will force him to come down on his far foot too quickly as he tries to keep his balance which will make his dribble foot come down too wide and too far behind the ball for him to keep control.

The other is with the inside of the foot that is farthest away from the dribbler. As you come in for the shoulder charge, time your run so that you can step into the dribbler just as he has put his weight on his near foot. This will keep his leg out of the way as you swing your leg across your body to knock the ball out. Note that there is a slight difference in the timing of this tackle.

Have the partners try these tackles at a very slow jog, so that they will not get hurt if they get tangled up with one another. If done properly, the shoulder will push the dribbler over just enough to allow the ball to be knocked away, while both players can continue jogging. However, if not timed well, the tackler easily can trip the dribbler - so it is important to do this in slow motion. Essentially, the defender is timing his charge to take advantage of natural weight shifts which occur in running as the weight is transferred from one leg to the other, and helping to push the dribbler a bit off-balance so that he can get to the ball more easily. Because the dribbler is going to be somewhat off balance naturally it does not take much force to send him flying - so tacklers must be cautioned to be careful - and to go for a light bump only.

The final step is to try to actually win the ball instead of just knocking it out. This step probably is not advisable until players get to about U-10, because there is a good likelihood of some hard physical contact as the players fight for the ball. Until the players are mentally ready for such contact, this can be too intimidating. Moreover, until players learn to judge the size/strength of their opponents and gain some experience in lowering their centers of gravity, there is an unacceptable risk of injury. This is especially true if little David makes a mistake as he tries to take on Goliath and winds up in front of, or under, a steamroller instead.

### **Small Group Work**

Divide into groups of 4. Put 3 players slowly jogging around a circle (one after another). Add a defender, who must use a shoulder charge or side tackle to get all of the balls out of the circle. Have various size players in the circle but stay alert to caution big players when charging small dribblers. All knocked-out players to get their balls and go back into the circle but turn it into a contest by counting how many dribblers the defender can get knocked out in 2 minutes.

### **Large Group Work**

Play 4v4, with a forbidden zone in the middle of the field leaving about 20 feet of full field in front of each goal. The forbidden zone forces play to the wings which increases the opportunities for shoulder charges.

Only the ball can go through the forbidden zone. Simply let the kids play for awhile to get used to the setup and praise any shoulder charges that you see.

Now, tell the kids that the area beyond the touch-lines is full of Moat Monsters and that anyone pushed into the Moat by a legal shoulder charge will be held by the Moat Monsters until the count of 10 while his team has to play short briefly. However, if the coach considers the shoulder charge to be too rough, the charging player will be held by the Moat Monster for 20 seconds.

## **Scrimmage**

Remove the forbidden zone, and play a regular game. Praise any successful shoulder charges, but allow the players to play normally. Because shoulder charges are fairly easy to learn, it is likely that you will see these in the game. Side tackles are harder, so players are more likely to reserve them for times when the ball is fairly far ahead of the dribbler (and often will simply decide to dart ahead to win the ball instead).

Find a chance to talk briefly about decisions to either hold the ball or kick it ball out and when it is a good idea to consider this during the course of the game. For example, if you're in your defensive half, have no other defenders nearby for support, and are faced with other attackers around to gang up on you, put it out! Conversely, if you're near their goal with most of your players available and plenty of space to stop a counterattack, hold! Do not spend much time on this - just introduce the idea and get them thinking about it.

## **First Defender and the Defensive Stance**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: cones/balls/scrimmage vests; Players 12+**

### **Warm-up**

1. Set up cones to mark the start and finish of the race which ends the warm-up. The distance apart will vary

with the age of the players. For example, 25 m (25-30 yds) is a good distance for most U10s.

2. With your players facing you, demonstrate the **defensive stance**. Stress the "L" shape and proper balance.

While you back up, have them advance, while you advance, have them back up.

3. Increase speed to the forward and backward "**gallop**".

4. Move them side to side with a **shuffle step** keeping the stance. Then progress to a **crossover** step.

5. Finish with a race forward from the beginning line to the finish line you had set up. Then race back -- backwards.

### **Individual Work**

#### **Circle Game**

Set up a large circle with all but two players around its circumference. The other two players are defenders within the circle. The players outside the circle pass to one another through the circle. The defenders must stay within the grid and use proper defensive stance to cut down the passer's options. When the defender intercepts he gives the ball to the intended receiver and continues. Same if the defender clears it. 3 points for an interception, 2 for a clear, 1 for a FORCED bad pass. Either rotate everyone quickly through the defender role or else just rotate some through.

### **Coaching points:**

- Side on, front foot points defender, back foot points to the side (make an "L").
- Shade to one side of the passer. Cut down his options.
- Patience! You cannot stop every pass, but you can deny the easy one.

Hints:

1. Keep the passers moving. Tell them to receive and then pass right away. Don't let them "tee up" their passes or this will take forever. You can limit the touches to three, then two or one to help keep the flow going
2. Recruit parents to shag errant passes and clears have spare balls ready to keep the exercise moving.
3. Coach the technique, not the drill. If a pass doesn't go through the circle or the defender moves a little outside, make a quick correction and get on with it
4. You will see lots of things you want to correct as the outside players pass & receive, but keep focussed on the defender and draw the attention of the others to what the defender is doing.

### **MIG Alley**

Set up cones for 4x10 m (5x10 yd) "alleys" for 1 v 1 play. In each alley, put a defender at one end and an attacker at the other. Game starts with the defender serving the attacker the ball and then moving to shut him down. The defender counts "1-alligator, 2-alligator" etc. to 7. If the defender keeps the attacker from crossing the end-line, he gets a point. If not, the attacker gets a point. Play till someone gets 5 points and then switch roles. Variation for an odd number: In one alley have 2 players at one end and 1 at the other. After each match-up, the players in the alley go to the end opposite the end at which they started. The player going to the end where the "odd" player is gets in line behind him.

### **Coaching Points:**

- Close down the opponent as fast and as close as possible. Advance by big steps when farther away shortening the stride as you get closer.
- Use body position to force the attacker to the sideline.
- Keep the ball in sight and keep backing up so you can stay between the ball and the endline.

□ □ Watch for someone who is doing just what you are looking for, or even something close, AND PRAISE IT! Be positive and don't always look for the negative. We do not want the kids to stop trying because they don't want to risk failing.

Hints:

1. An alternative to calling out numbers is to change roles every minute or so, or to reverse roles each time.
2. Be alert for mismatches. This game works best with players of equal ability facing each other. Be prepared to swap partners.
3. If you see the same mistake being made by several players, call a halt and BRIEFLY correct it. Then resume.
4. Common mistakes:
  - □ Trying immediately for a steal. Encourage using body position for this game.
  - □ Flatfootedness. Keep them balanced and on their toes.
  - □ Clumsy backward gallop.
  - □ Getting faked out because they were watching the attacker, not the ball.

## **Small Group Work**

### **Numbers (a.k.a. Steal the Bacon)**

Set up by moving the cones in the set of alleys to make a large grid with goals. Put half the players in scrimmage vests to create two teams. Assign numbers 1-6 to the team members. Place teams along opposite end-lines. Game starts with the coach serving a ball in, closer to one side than the other, and calling a number. Players with that number enter the grid. Then call a second number. Players with that number enter as second attacker and second defender. Continue play until a goal is scored, the ball goes out, or you as coach call "Back". Players then return to the line. Continue, varying attackers and defenders and combinations of players. Some hints are listed below.

### **Coaching points:**

- □ Reinforce stance points (they tend to forget once they are in a more open field.).
- □ Call "Ball", or another word/phase that everyone agrees on, when you are taking responsibility for the player with the ball.

Hints:

1. Younger players will tend to zoom in on the ball, even the second attacker and second defender. Be prepared to offer advice to the second attacker to avoid "the clump."
2. Be patient if they clump up anyway. Keep showing and explaining.
3. Praise the defenders liberally if they delay the attack.

4. If the attackers tend to run to the ball and try for long shot right away, change the rule so that they must dribble it over the end line to score.

5. Discourage the second defender from appointing himself goalkeeper.

## **Larger Group Work / Scrimmage**

Expand the field to accommodate 6v6 and let them play. Watch the defenders, but save the comments for the end.

## **Techniques**

### **Stance**

1. Side-on, front foot points defender, back foot points to the side. This is sometimes called "making an "L".

Do not take this too literally. The point is not to have the feet at right angles, but to achieve a balanced stance.

2. Often compared to a fencing stance, a boxing stance, or a martial-arts "fighting stance".

3. Weight is kept low.

4. Be up "on your toes" (on the balls of your feet) and balanced (watch you don't get all your weight on your front foot).

5. Set up at an angle to force the attacker to the nearest sideline or towards a supporting defender.

### **Gallop**

1. Maintain the fencing stance.

2. Going forward, push off rear foot and step forward with front foot. Rear foot moves up to regain stance.

3. Going backward is the reverse.

4. Defender's stride is shorter but steps are quicker than attacker's.

### **Shuffle**

1. Used to move laterally when very close to defender.

2. Feet do NOT cross over.

### **Crossover**

1. Used to move laterally when it is necessary to stay facing the ball, but not when close to the attacker.

2. Foot away from direction to travel crosses over in front of other foot.

3. Other foot then crosses over behind it.

## **Second Defender**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

Defensively, the main players involved are the First Defender ("Pressure player") and the backup supporting player (called the Second Defender or the "cover" player). The job of the Cover player is critical to the success of the team from a defensive standpoint. Only when Cover arrives and is in proper backup position is it possible for the Pressure player to move in to win the ball. Why? Because the backup player is available to instantly become the Pressure player if the first player is beaten. Of course, this means that the beaten player must loop around and become the new Cover player, so it is extremely important to work on this transition.

### **Warm-up**

Start with some basic ball-control movements, such as rolls, vees, toe-taps. Introduce tic-toc, if you have not already

. Do your stretches, interspersed with assorted ball control moves that you want to practice.

### **Small Group Work**

To illustrate the concepts of proper cover, put all of the players in a large circle, except for 2 players (coach can be one player for illustration). Outside players try to pass ball around, while Pressure player goes in and sets an angle to try to contain, and Cover player moves in to shut off more outlets.

### **Coaching Points:**

1. Cover player must sprint into position with a looping run to the outside of the direction in which the Pressure player is steering the attacker, and then shout "Cover" very loudly once in place, but not before.
2. Appropriate cover must be a distance of about 6-8 feet.
3. The outside of the Covering player's shoulder should be aligned with the inside of the shoulder of the Pressure player so that the attacker sees a wall of two players in his way. Basically, the two defenders are trying to create a funnel that locks the attacker at the touch-line.
4. Cover player's stance will be slightly more square, as he must be prepared to leap quickly to outside side if the attacker tries to spin around the outside of the Pressure player.

It is the Pressure player's job to watch the ball and the Cover player's job to watch the attacker and to give directions to the Pressure player. After showing the basic principles by using the circle, divide players into groups of 3. Make long/narrow grids (about 10' by 25'). Put an attacker inside the grid and a defender at both ends, one with a ball.

Have the on-ball defender play the ball into the attacker and immediately come in to close him down (he is the Pressure player). Then, have the Cover player (i.e. the defender at the other end) make a looping run to get into position to cover. Do 4 reps with the same player as the Cover player, then switch off.

As soon as he is in position, he must shout "Cover", which is the Pressure player's key to start closing down and/or jockeying the player to the nearest touch-line. The Cover player's job is to give helpful

instructions, including "Not yet" or "Don't dive in" if the attacker hasn't been pushed close enough to the touch-line to use the touch-line as an extra defender and "Now" or "Take him" when it is time to close in. It also can be useful for the Cover player to shout "Hold Him" or "Contain" as he is making the circle around, so that the Pressure player knows that help is on the way.

Note that the kids seldom talk if they are too busy concentrating on what to do, so you have made progress if you can get them to simply announce "Cover." Additionally, younger children seldom can learn more than 1-2 things at once, so you will have to judge your group. You may want to just work on the positioning, while leave training on communications for another practice if you are giving them too much to think about. Older players, or ones with more experience, may be able to handle additional training on communications.

As soon as you are getting good positioning and some communication, start working on the recovery process. To work on recovery, tell the Pressure player to dive in just before the Cover player gets into position, which will force the Cover player to become the new Pressure player. The former Pressure player then must make a proper covering run.

## Large Group Work

Play 5v2 keep away in a narrow grid to encourage use of the touch-lines as an additional defender. Give the defenders a point for every successful steal, and give the attackers a point for 6 consecutive passes. Adjust the size of the grid to keep work-rates high. If the attackers can never be successful, the grid is too narrow while if they always seem to be successful, it is too big. Play to 3 points by either side, and then switch out defenders.

## Scrimmage

Play 2v2 in a narrow grid with small cone goals at each end, with 2 extra players waiting on the sides. Rotate one fresh player to each side in after 2 minutes; play another 2 minutes; and rotate the resting players in to replace the 2 remaining players. Let the players experiment with providing defensive support versus marking.

**Coaching Note:** You will repeat some variation of this practice several times per year, both to refresh memories and to add additional concepts. You will find further information on fundamentals of **2v2 defensive support** elsewhere in the manual .

## Defensive Tips for More Advanced Players

1. Speed of movement

Sprint! Be moving a split second after the ball is lost!

2. Angle of run

Run on a curved line that will bring you within a few strides goal-side of your pressure man and then close

down on a goal-side line to the ball.

### 3. How close to get

Close enough to help choke off dangerous passing lanes on your side of the ball. Close enough for the challenger to hear and feel your support. Close enough to apply pressure immediately if the challenger is beaten.

### 4. Why communication is so important

Your position gives you a wider picture, so you can make better decisions. When the Pressure player knows

his support is in place, he can work without seeing you, as long as he hears you. Continue giving encouragement and quick, clear, confident instructions. As a general rule of thumb, say nothing unless you

are in position to back it up! Your teammate doesn't just need support; he needs to KNOW that he has it. If

he tackles and is beaten and you're not in position to cover, you're both beaten and out of the game until you can recover from behind the ball. Let the Pressure player know when he is Covered. Announce your arrival loud and clear.

### 5. Giving directions

□ □ One of the most common directions that the Cover player will give is "Take him wide" or "Line, line". This instruction means that the Pressure player is being instructed to steer the attacker towards the nearest touch-line. He does this by showing him more space to the outside. The Cover player will be goal-side of the ball, and also goal-side of the Pressure player, so that he can quickly move to provide Pressure if the attacker manages to cut inside of the Pressure player. He is dropped down about 2 yards, so that he also is available to close down the touch-line run if the attacker accelerates past the Pressure player.

□ □ Another popular instruction, used mostly by older players, is "Turn him in", meaning turn him towards the center area of the field. If you see you cannot cover effectively if play goes wide, or you realize the defense is being stretched across the field, tell the challenger to show the inside path where cover can more easily be provided and the defense can retain depth and compactness. Take position a few strides closer to goal than the challenger, inside him in the direction you want play to go.

### 6. When to encourage the steal

As soon as you have steered the attacker within about 1-2 feet of the touch-line, it is time to consider a counter-attack. In addition, if the attacker appears to be losing courage and is considering turning his back

on your group, it is time to shout "Go in!" or "Close" or "Take him". When your Pressure player is on the counterattack, the Cover player must stay balanced, alert, and ready to close down and pressurize if the tackle fails.

### 7. What if the opponent succeeds in making a pass

If the ball carrier manages to make a pass, your response will depend on whether the pass is forward, square or back. With the changed situation, you must decide whether your job is now to pressure, support, track down, mark, or destroy opponent's support.

## **Common Mistakes**

1. The decision to provide cover is made too late.
2. Player doesn't work hard enough to achieve effective covering position and supports from too far away  
-  
which is no support at all.
3. Covering player doesn't tell the challenger he is in position, or tells him that he is covered while still too far away.
4. Covering player doesn't encourage the challenge.
5. Covering player doesn't maintain concentration and fails to react quickly to the play.

## **Marking an Opponent**

### **Ages: 7+: Materials: Cones, balls, pinnies: Players: 4+**

One of the most important defensive skills which players will learn is how to properly mark an opponent so that he does not appear "open" to his teammate. This is a difficult skill for beginning players to learn, because they tend to watch the ball instead of their marks. Furthermore, because it is only necessary to mark your man when your team doesn't have the ball, younger players can get confused about when to mark and when to get away. As a result, it is necessary to break these skills down into manageable steps, starting with just staying with your man and teaching some tricks on how to do this.

The first basic rules of marking are to be stay within 2-3 feet of your man. Start by putting players in pairs, with one player in each pair as the attacker. It is the job of the attacker to try to get away from his marker, and the job of the marker to stay with his attacker. Do not bother using a ball. Just put the players in a grid and play it like tag. When you blow the whistle, everyone must freeze and any defender who is not within 3 feet of his mark must do a "special exercise". Pick silly special exercises, like doing a duck walk for 3 steps, quacking "mark, mark, mark", etc.). Play for several minutes, then switch roles between defenders and attackers. Reinforce the idea that those who are sticking with the opponent are "defenders" and that attackers can go anywhere and should try to lose their marks.

Now, introduce the idea of transition which means the switch from offense to defense when possession is lost. Put pinnies on one member of each pair and give them a team name. Also give a team name to the kids without pinnies.

Put them back in the grid, and periodically shout out a team name for the kids who are to act as defenders. Require that they find their marks and get within 3 feet of their marks by the count of 2 which

requires them to always have a good idea of where their marks are, even when trying to lose them). Once again, use a silly "exercise" for those who do not quickly switch off.

Now, introduce a ball and make the team without the ball the defenders. Put small cone goals at the ends of the grid so that each team has a goal to defend. At this point, things will fall apart with new players, as they will start watching the ball and stop watching their marks. Expect this. It is normal. Let them play for 2-3 minutes, and find the kids who have gotten the concept down. These are the kids whom you will name as captains.

Blow your whistle; stop the game; and assign captains for each side. Their jobs are to yell "Rockets, mark" or

"Rockets, attack", depending on whether or not their team has the ball. Always try to have 2 captains for each side, as somebody will get tied up in the excitement and forget to shout instructions.

Play the game again, and watch the transitions. Don't interfere, just let things sort out for 3-4 minutes.

Then,

announce a new game, where the entire team has to do a "special exercise" if, when you blow the whistle, they are not marking properly. The use of a team special exercise is important, as you want the entire team to learn to look out for somebody who is not marking his man. This will be crucial in games when, for instance, a defender falls down and it is essential that another player pick up his mark, so get them used to the idea of watching each other.

Let them play for about 1 minute, then blow your whistle. Resume, and blow again when the other side should be marking. Now, play a game where a goal counts for 1 point, and good marking counts for 2 points. Be sure that you give equal chances as you blow your whistle for both sides to get 2 points. At this stage, do not give out any "special exercises" as the loss of the chance for 2 is quite sufficient to get the point across. Additionally, and you don't want to do anything more to single out the poor kid who messed up.

For younger players, this may be as much as you can handle in one session. However, for older players, you can proceed to the next step, which is learning where to stand in relation to your opponent, assuming that teams are equal in numbers. In general, the safest place for a defender to stand is goal-side AND ball-side of his mark. In the midfield, it is more important to be ball-side than goal-side. When in the penalty box, you normally should be ball side unless your attacker is considerably faster/quicker in which case you should be goal-side. Inside the goal area, you should always be goal-side if standing still, and ball-side if you are running in towards the goal with your attacker.

By ball-side, we mean that the defender is standing between his mark and the ball, so that the ball cannot "see" the feet of his man. "Ball-side" marking looks like this:

**Square:**

Attacker (A) Defender (D) Ball(B)

**Diagonal:**

A

D

B

"Goalside" marking looks like this:

[ Goal ]

D

A Ball

Marking which is both goalside and ballside looks like this:

[ Goal ]

D

A

Ball

### **Small Group Work**

Put a pair of players in a grid, with one goal at one end, and put another pair in a long narrow grid that runs along one sideline. To score, the team in possession must have passed to a teammate on the sideline, then shot on goal without an interception by the opposing side. The use of the alley forces ball-side marking - and helps to show why it is effective. It also shows the players that, to succeed, they must play to space ahead of or behind the marked teammate and immediately move to accept a quick pass back. In the meantime, once a pass has been made to the outside, it places great urgency upon the inside defender to either intercept the ball before it can come back in or to get between his mark and the goal. Play for about 3-4 minutes, then switch inside and outside players.

### **Large Group Work**

Add another inside player for each team so that they are 2v2 inside, and put a goal at both ends. This is the stage where the players start to learn to balance the defensive principles of Pressure/Cover with the concept of marking. When outside of scoring range, it is more important that the other inside player act as Cover so that, if the Pressure player is beaten, the on-ball attacker does not have a free run at goal. As a result, he will drop off vertically from his man, so that he is goal-side of his mark and also slightly goal-side of the Pressure player. He does this so that he can keep an eye on both. (The section on "Understanding Basic Individual and Team Defensive Principles" has more discussion of these concepts.) If the Pressure player can bottle up the opponent at the touch line away from the outside support, he will turn his efforts to winning the ball since the opposing inside player should drop back to provide an outlet pass for the beleaguered attacker and also to provide instant cover for his own goal if possession is lost. However, as the attackers start to come within scoring range, the off-ball inside attacker becomes a much greater threat, so he will close down on him in an effort to be both goal-side and ball-side. He will be sure to choose goal side if he does not believe that he can stay ball-side on a run towards goal. The outside defender, on the other hand, will generally try to stay ball-side because he knows that the outside player is just a relay person who will try to cross the ball in quickly if he ever gets possession.

After quickly discussing these ways in which marking decisions change as you add a third person, let the players experiment. The game is truly the best teacher for these concepts, as the kids will learn much more quickly from trial and error than by any extended lecture. So, just stand back and watch for at least 5 minutes. Praise good marking decisions and good interceptions, and overlook the poor decisions. To mark well is a skill that will take many years to develop properly, as there are a number of very complex variables that enter into the equation in a split second. Errors are common and the kids can see for themselves when they make an error so give lots of reassurance and encouragement.

## **Scrimmage**

Add an alley on both sides of the field; put a pair of opponents in each alley; and put the rest in the middle. Require that a team must use one set of alley players before scoring and that goals count double if they use both alleys. Then, sit back and enjoy yourself, as the players go about teaching themselves the reasons why good marking is so important.

## **Beginning Take-On Skills**

**Ages: 6+; Materials: Balls, Cones, Pinnies; Players: 4+**

In this practice plan, players will learn the beginning principles of attacking by use of acceleration and a simple outside cut, followed by an inside cut.

### **Warm-up**

As a warm-up, you may want to work on doing the "snake", as well as doing some work on basic outside of the foot cuts and straight-ahead dribbling. Don't overdo the warm-up, however, as they will get lots of work today. Pay lots of attention to stretches of the quads and hamstrings, as it is easy to injure quads when doing acceleration work if the muscle has not been warmed and stretched properly.

### **Individual Work**

There are 4 basic steps involved in learning to take-on a defender. The first is to aim directly at him, so that he is forced to commit to you. The second is to shorten your stride, pull the ball into close control so that the knee is over the ball with dribbling step, and to lower your center of gravity so that you can explode in any direction. As you enter this phase, the player automatically will start to take mincing steps, almost like he is prancing. The third step is to explode into the move selected like you are leaping through a door into safety, and the final step is to slam the door on the defender by cutting back into his path. Smaller kids can enjoy the idea that they are exploding to get away from the ball-eating monster, and then slamming the door on the it.

For younger players, it may work well to practice on some explosions without the ball so that they aim at a cone defender, come at him, come at him, come at him, then explode past, take 1-2 control steps and cutback in. Older players may be able to begin with a ball. In either event, use the following illustration and coaching points:

Get the ball on the front of the foot and start closing on the defender

As you get within about 10 feet, get your weight down and start prancing

When you are within 57 feet of the defender, plan the side where you are going to explode and get the ball

on that foot

Keep your head up and control the ball by touch

When you are almost within the reach of the defender, move your weight onto your exploding leg quickly

Keep going at the defender: DO NOT STOP

As you are ready to explode, move your dribbling foot to the inside of the ball and, as you explode, pull the

ball with you so that the ball never leaves your foot

After you get past the defender, cut inside as quickly as you can, usually as soon as you have put your

weight on the exploding foot and can drag the ball over with the inside of the dribbling foot

Many players need to go through these steps in slow motion in order to get the footwork down. This is often useful and should be encouraged. Some will want to keep their heads down to watch the ball. Do your best to discourage this habit as it is easy to acquire and hard to break. They need to "see" the ball with their feet. If they take short prancing steps, keep the knee over the ball, and explode by pulling the ball with them, there is no need whatsoever to look at the ball. Their eyes belong on the defender's face, particularly on his eyes, because the defender usually will signal what he intends to do with his eyes.

Common errors of beginners are:

to look down at the ball;

to fail to explode quickly enough or with enough power;

to try to kick the ball instead of pulling it;

when making the cutback, to bring the exploding foot up too far so that it is difficult to pull the ball across with the inside of the dribbling foot.

All of these mistakes are curable with practice and most of the players should have the basic mechanics down after one practice although it will take years and years to perfect the art of dribbling. Dribbling is like ballet; the basic pirouette probably can be "learned" in 5 minutes, but to do this move with the grace and timing of a professional dancer will take years. So, don't be discouraged as a coach that your players have little grace when first learning these moves. Time and practice will make great improvements in their skill, once you provide them with the proper foundation and learn to keep on nagging them to pay attention to the basics like keeping their heads up and slamming the door on the monster.

Initially, have each player working with a cone defender so that they get maximum touches on the ball. Do not add a real defender too early. They must have the basic ideas and footwork down, or they will never be successful. Of course, this practice assumes that the players have learned cuts and straight-ahead

dribbling and also have done some basic ball touch work. These skills are essential to take-on work, so make sure to practice on those skills before attempting this practice.

## **Small Group Work**

Once the basics are down, divide the players into pairs and put them in a medium grid. Remember that space favors attackers, so don't make the grid too small or narrow. Initially, put one player in the middle of the grid, along with a cone that will serve as his anchor. Have the other player come directly at him, take him on, explode by him and cut back. Once at the end of the grid, the dribbler comes back the other way and repeats the sequence. The defender must keep one foot anchored on the cone, but should try to kick the ball away if the attacker comes too close.

Because the defender is not a normal defender, he does not have to keep his eyes on the ball so use him as an extra coach to watch the eyes of the attacker and to shout "head up" if the attacker puts his head down. This also helps you as a coach to hear where you are having problems. After both have tried, you can make a game out of this by giving points to the defender if the defender kicks the ball away or catches the attacker not looking at him during the take on and giving points to the attacker if he does the take-on successfully.

Next, put the defender at the end of the grid with the ball, have him play the ball to the attacker and then start to close him down at walking speed . If your defenders are reluctant to cooperate, make them crawl or duck-walk, as the whole idea is very low pressure defense. Repeat the exercise, rotating positions after about 4-5 tries.

**Coaching Note:** Depending on the age of your players, you may want to start to introduce the concepts of dead-leg to your players. For more information, see the practice plan on Fakes or the discussions in Principles of Individual Attacking. Most players are ready for these concepts by around age 9 and some players can learn the ideas as early as age 7. Continue to allow more freedom for the defenders as the attackers gain confidence. However, it is likely that most players will not be ready for full-pressure defense after their first session on take-on work, so keep as many restrictions as necessary to get success and build confidence.

## **Large Group Work**

You will now create a Tunnel of Death (a.k.a Ladder of Death), which is a series of 3-4 medium grids in a row, one directly after the other. Remember this drill because you will use it many times for all sorts of lessons on attacking. At the top of each section of the Tunnel, put a defender who is anchored to a cone. If at all possible, use parents as the defenders so that you can free up players to work on these skills.

And, if you have lots of players, make 2 or 3 sets of Tunnels so that the lines are very short.

The object is to take on the first defender, cut back and then immediately take on the next defender, and so forth. You can stagger the defenders to mimic actual game situations. Allow the defenders to be silly and to stab/lunge but keep them anchored to make things easy.

Then, start the players on going through the Tunnel. As soon as one player has cleared the second grid in the Tunnel, the next player can start down the Tunnel. Try to have only about 4 players in line, so that you have 2 in the Tunnel, one jogging back and one ready to go at any given time. If you need to use players as defenders, switch them out after the first group has run the Tunnel about 3 times.

Now, permit the defenders to move along the top line of their grids at a slow walk, and repeat. If you are still getting good success, allow the defenders to actually start to defend- but keep them restricted to the top line of the grids.

Show your attackers that, if they attack at speed and then quickly explode into a cut, they can get by these defenders quite easily. In your first practice, it is doubtful that you will be able to permit the defenders to defend anywhere in their grids. However, eventually, you will want to get your players to the point where they can run the Tunnel against fairly stiff opposition and regularly beat 3 defenders.

## **Scrimmage**

If the exercises have gone well, the players may be too tired for a regular scrimmage (although it is fine to play 3v3 or 2v2 to encourage lots of take-on tries, if they are still ready to go). If the players seem tired, then consider holding some take-on contests at the end.

You can start with some 1 v 1 work, still using the grids from the Tunnel. Put one player on one side of the grid with the ball, and put the other player on the other side. As soon as the on-ball player starts into the grid, the opposite player can enter the grid and start to close the attacker down. In this game, the on-ball player must take-on the defender, but only has to be able to get around him sufficiently to be able to pass the ball through a small goal on the opposing end-line. However, he cannot pass until he is at least even with the defender. If he does this successfully, he scores 1 point. Alternate roles, and play until someone has 5 points (or play for X minutes). Find out the points scored by each player. Put the players who scored 5 against others who scored 5, and put the ones who scored 1 against the others who scored 1. Play again.

The final game uses a real goal if one is available. Divide the players into two equal groups, and give each team numbers from 1 to X. Put players on goal-line, with teams on opposite sides of the net. Now, as you serve a ball out into the field, call out a number and both players with that number race out and try to win the ball, then score on the goal. You can use a keeper or play on the open goal or allow goals only to the corners. As a coach, be sure to try to pair the better players against the better ones to keep things even and give the less athletic players better chances to feel like a success.

There are lots of variations on how to play this game, including elimination and non-elimination games, and games where you call out several numbers at once. In all truth, the kids simply enjoy a contest, so it is fine to ask their opinions or to let them help make the rules.