

SESSION PLANS

# Defending

# How to use this guide

## Understanding the session

This session guide assumes you have 60 minutes with 16 players but as our guidelines point out, this can be adapted based on the number of players you have in your team.

As your confidence grows you may adapt or experiment with the practices provided, but these tasks are designed to follow a process which gradually ramps up the challenge for the players from minute one to minute sixty.

The key below outlines what the images mean on the diagrams. We have created a series of themed practices which allow players to experiment on the ball under no pressure, limited pressure and full pressure.

From a coaching perspective, understanding the level and needs of your players will help you decide when you should ramp up the challenge, or potentially reduce it.

If you have questions about the practices, contact the PDP Team or share your views on the [Player Development Project Slack Community](#).

## Interpreting the diagrams



Cone



Pancake/Disc



Pole



Ball



Mannequin



Goals



Ball movement/pass



Without the ball



Varied movement



Curved run



LESSON

## Defending

Supporting young players with the defensive side of the game is a huge factor in developing game understanding. Coaches often focus on what players do on the ball, but players will spend much more time without the ball than with it, so it's important to include defensive themes in your coaching.

Like any practice, it's important to ensure realism and incentives for players involved. Setting up defending practices that include goals so that defenders can counter attack if they are successful is valuable. Also bringing in collective or collaborative focus to encourage players to work together is valuable in developing team work and problem solving.

This session will focus on various elements of defending from 1v1 into small units and finally into a small sided game.

Each practice include attack, defence and transition which ensures realism. Be mindful that 1v1 practices can be very physically demanding so managing rest and recovery is important. Allow players ample time to understand the practice and try to avoid over-coaching. If the practices are designed well, the players will be presented with problems to solve individually or collectively.

Lastly, some players may be less motivated than others to work on defensive areas of the game, so try and make it competitive and fun to ensure player engagement.



DEFENDING

## 1 v 1 Pressing

**Topic:** 1v1 Defending

**Practice type:** Skill Practice

**No. of players:** 4-16

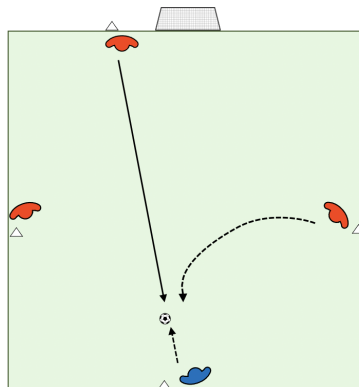
**Offsides:** N/A

**Timing:** 15 minutes

**Goalkeepers:** N/A

**Pitch Size:** 15 x 15m

**Age group:** All Ages



### Objectives

Pressing the ball and defending 1v1. Emphasis should be placed on getting up to the ball quickly. First priority is to win the ball (and drive out over the end line). Second priority is to delay and deny the attacker the chance to score.

### Organisation

This is a great practice to start a defending session with. Players work in groups of 4. If you have 12 players, set up 3 stations of 4 players. Player 1 punches a pass out to the attacker. This player then rests. Player 2 (right) reacts and goes out to press. This pass simulates a turnover and transition moment. Player 4 (left) rests. The attacker goes 1v1 with the defender trying to score in the mini goal. Encourage creativity and skill. The defender must stop the attack, win the ball and drive back over the line from which the attacker started. The game stops when the ball is out or a goal is scored. All players rotate one place. It is most important to encourage the defender to get up to the ball and win it as the first priority.

### Observations & Interventions

#### What you might see

Players pressing too slowly, players diving in to tackles or players failing to drive forward when they win the ball.

#### Actions you might take

- Introduce a halfway line for defenders to sprint over when the ball is played.
- Encourage players to speed up and slow down
- Reward defenders with a bonus point if they win the ball and drive over the end line.

#### Adaptations:

- Add competition, get players to keep their own score of attacking or defending points
- Allow a 1v2 scenario which includes the player making the pass. The attacker now has a bigger challenge and the defenders have to work together
- Adapt to a 2v2 session if you have more players and limited space
- Change the angle of service (e.g. from the side) and which player steps in to defend



DEFENDING

## Collective Defending

**Topic:** Team Defending

**Practice type:** Skill Game

**No. of players:** 8-16

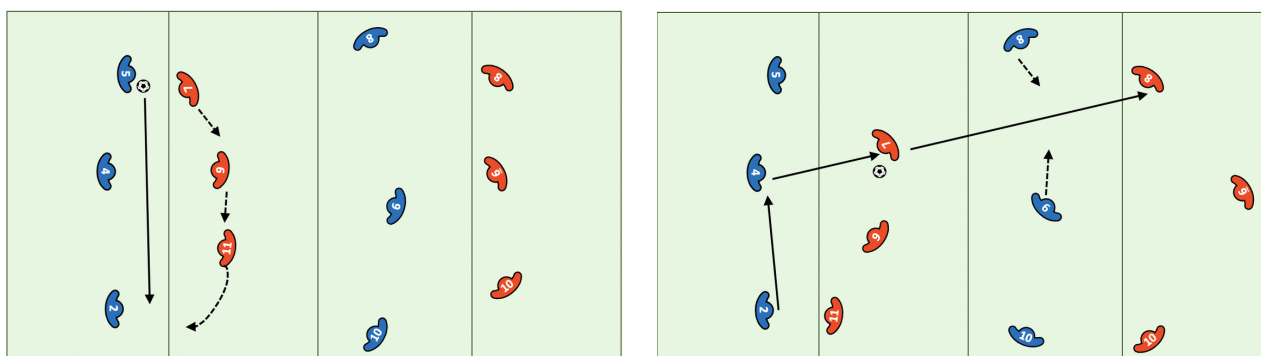
**Offsides:** N/A

**Timing:** 20 minutes

**Goalkeepers:** N/A

**Pitch Size:** 40 x 20m

**Age group:** All Ages



### Objectives

The aim for players in this practice is to screen and block forward passes. When winning possession they need to decide if they can play forward quickly whilst the opposition is disorganised, or whether they should keep the ball before finding a gap to exploit.

### Organisation

Blues aim to play to blues, reds play to reds. The objective of the practice is to encourage the defending group to self-organise, choosing whether to press (to the line) or hold. All players are locked into zones to begin with. The focus is to prevent split passes, forcing play wide. If red wins it off blue, they secure the ball and play forward to red team mates. Defensive principles of pressure, cover and balance should emerge.

### Observations & Interventions

#### What you might see

Players forcing forward passes, players not communicating, players allowing big gaps between them and their team mates.

#### Actions you might take

- Encourage players to focus on preventing passes down the middle first
- Adjust the area size. Bigger is harder to defend, smaller is easier to defend
- Provide an incentive to encourage team communication

#### Adaptations:

- Ensure you swap groups so they experience playing in central channels and end channels
- Make the space wider or narrower to make the defending challenge harder or easier
- Adapt for more or less players - this works from 8 players (groups of 2) to 16 players (groups of 4)
- Progress to allow one player to press into the attacking teams area
- Progress to allow more than one player to press
- Add an extra channel at each end with a GK and allow the front line of players to score on transition



DEFENDING

## Our House

**Topic:** Defending

**Practice type:** Small Sided Game

**No. of players:** 8-16

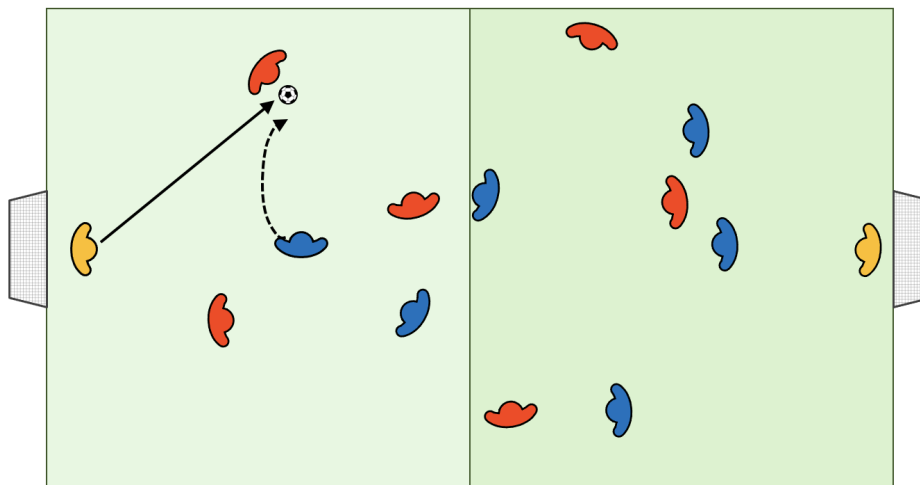
**Offsides:** N/A

**Timing:** 25 minutes

**Goalkeepers:** N/A

**Pitch Size:** 40 x 20m

**Age group:** All Ages



### Objectives

To support players with defensive decision making in a small sided game – for example, when and how to press, and when and how to delay or screen to regain the ball

### Organisation

Set up a pitch in two halves with two goals appropriate to the age and stage of your players. Each team has to choose a half (or house). It's OK if both teams choose the same house. In their 'house' they can tackle (normal football rules). In the half they didn't choose they are only allowed to intercept the ball (no tackling). These rules help players understand how to press the ball as a team and how to delay and intercept as a team.

### Observations & Interventions

#### What you might see

Teams choosing to press (normal rules) in the oppositions half. If so, observe how they work together to get success. Teams choosing to press in their own half. Observe how they decide to defend.

#### Actions you might take

- You may choose to link this to a team style of play. Asking players if their choice is relative to how the team normally plays may provoke thought.
- Allow time for teams to drive their own team talks to discuss their strategy.

#### Adaptations:

- Create breaks in play for team talks
- Make the pitch bigger or smaller depending on how the game is going (too hard for defenders or too hard for attackers).