

U12 - Week 6 - Zonal Defending

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

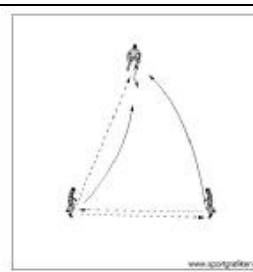
Coaching Points:

- The 1st defender needs to “approach fast, arrive slow”, bend run, have correct stance: be on their toes, with knees bent, one foot forward, one back. The 1st defender “affects” the ball...gets the head of the 1st attacker down by getting close to the 1st attacker, approximately arm’s length
- The 2nd defender needs to be at approximately a 30 degree backward angle to the 1st defender on the side that the first defender is showing the 1st attacker; cannot be too far back or too close to 1st defender. If the first defender is tighter to the ball, the 2nd defender provides closer cover. If the 1st defender is looser to the ball, the 2nd defender is more detached from the 1st defender
- The 2nd defender communicates where to steer the ball; tells 1st defender which way to push the attacker
- Defensive decisions to pressure or cover must be anticipated and made as the ball is traveling (as the attacking players are playing the ball)
- Knowing when to pressure or cover is crucial to winning the ball back. Verbal and visual communication between the 1st and 2nd defenders is imperative!
- There must always be pressure on the ball. There may be one or two 2nd defenders depending on where the ball and supporting attack players are located
- Defenders need to slide together or move as a block. Defenders need to squeeze space anytime the opponent passes side-ways or square
- 3rd defender play/positioning is now crucial to the defensive success. The 3rd defender must provide balance to the defensive action by being in a position that is not too deep (somewhat flat in relation to the 2nd defender(s)) and not too detached. The 3rd defender works on squeezing space centrally
- Changing roles quickly as the ball moves is vital to the success of the flat defense. It takes discipline, fitness and tactical speed
- Any pass or dribble backwards by the attacking team, the defending team pushes up and closes a lot more space
- **Caution:** How much space to squeeze will depend on how much pressure is applied to the 1st attacker (player with the ball). If not enough pressure is applied, defending team can be beaten with a long ball over the heads or a through ball
- Defending relative to match situation - Time, score, etc. How much time is left in the game and what is the score? Do we defend more cautiously to preserve the win or just keep playing the same way?
- **Deny** penetration with a dribble
 - Immediate chase/pressure – The moment possession is lost the nearest player(s) try to regain possession or apply pressure on the ball
- **Delay** – The pressuring defender(s) forcing the attacking team to take time organizing its attack so defenders have time to form a collective defending action behind the ball
- **Cover** – While the ball is being pressured all other players should be recovering into defensive positions. The positions taken should support the pressuring defender in the event he is beaten

- **Balance** – As the team concentrates their defense in the area of the ball, defenders away from the ball (opposite side of field) must position themselves to cover vital spaces (central areas) in order to prevent attackers from making penetrating runs into these spaces in which to receive the ball

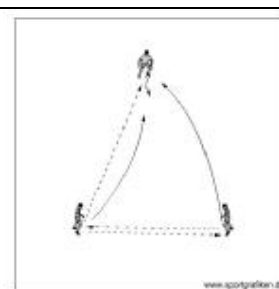
Warm-up - - (15 minutes)

In three's, pass the ball back and forth one or two touches from about 7-10 yards apart. When any of the three players stops the ball with the bottom of their foot (or at the coach's command), the partners respond by 1st player making a bending run and closing down the player on the ball as the 1st defender would and the other player reacts as the 2nd defender and covers the space behind 1st defender. After arriving, the defender backs off, and the exercise continues.



Inter-passing in 3's - - (10 Minutes)

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



2v2 to End Lines - - (10 Minutes)

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



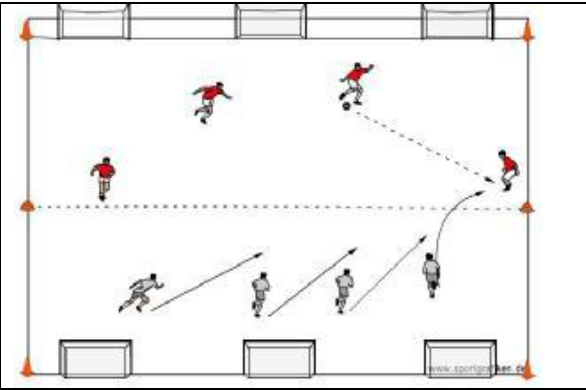
4 v 4 to End Lines - - (15 minutes)

In a 30 x 45yds grid The midfield is divided in half by discs. The offside rule begin at midfield. One team defends and attacks the long side of an end line. Teams score by dribbling ball under control over the end line.



4 v 4 to Six Goals - - (20 minutes)

30yd x 45yd grid. (Field is wider than it is long) The midfield line is the restraining line (offsides line). Each team attempts to score in one of the 3 goals opposite them. Work with one of the teams to help them maintain the flat shape of the defending action.



5 v 4 + Goalkeeper - - (20 minutes)

1/2 field to one goal and 2 counter-goals or targets. Defend the goal with the purpose to counter attack. Keeper takes on sweeper role behind the flat back four.

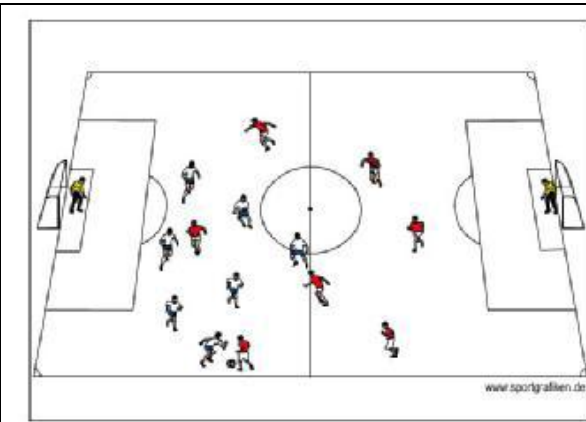


7v7 or 8v8 Game or 9v9 - - (20-30 minutes)

Including Goalkeepers. Use a system of play that has 3 or 4 backs.

Reminder:

Goalkeeper plays a very important role in zonal defending. He or she must come off their line and act as a sweeper as soon as the defenders push up and squeeze space. Be ready to clean up any balls played over or through the defenders.



Cool-down (5 minutes)

Individual juggling; challenge players to see who can juggle the most in a 2 minute period. Players will perform static stretching of the major muscle groups.

Version 2: Juggling in 2's and 3's. Players will perform static stretching of the major muscle groups.