

The defensive midfielders

In the World Cup, the successful teams played formations including two holding midfielders in front of the defence. Their role was to stop passes into opponent's forwards and break up attacks. This session shows how to coach this style of play with your own team.



What you tell your players the session is about

1. Stopping passes being made to the opponent's forwards.
2. Working with your midfield partner to protect the defence and regain the ball.
3. On regaining possession, look to start the counter attack.

Session planner

Warm up 10 mins	Session 10 mins	Developments 15 mins	Game 20 mins	Warm down 5 mins
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Activity	Kit	Outcome
Warm up	Poles, cones or mannequins	The midfielders react to pressure the ball. From <i>The Ultimate Football Warm-Ups Manual</i> , exercise 23
The session	Balls, cones	Midfielders work together to block forward passes
Development	Balls, cones, four mini goals	Midfielders are now defending 1v1 and 2v2 situations in order to stop the opponents scoring
Game	Balls cones, two goals	Midfielders work together to defend. On regaining possession, they look to counter attack quickly
Warm down	n/a	Gentle jogging and stretching exercises

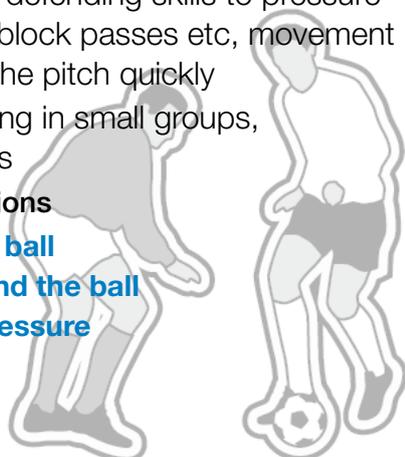


Where it fits

Individual skills: 1v1 defending skills to pressure opponents, jockey, block passes etc, movement skills to get across the pitch quickly
 Team skills: Defending in small groups, communication skills

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What to think about

- The two defensive midfielders give protection to the defence and stop forward passes.
- Once their team is in possession, the defensive midfielders look to start a counter attack by playing good forward passes to keep possession.





Set-up

Create a 30 yards by 15 yards playing area with a line across the middle. Increase this to 60 yards by 40 yards for the game.



What you get your players to do

Players work in pairs and each have a turn at being the defensive midfielders. The aim is to work along the line and stop passes being made by the outside players from one side to the other. You should encourage the players to be light on their feet and constantly on the move.



What to call out

- "Be light on your feet and move quickly to pressure the ball."
- "Work together and take up positions to cover and support your team mate."
- "Stop forward passes."
- "Stay on your feet when making tackles."



Development

Now play 2v2 with two target players standing at opposite ends of the playing area, in between two mini goals. Each pair of defensive midfielders defend their goals and attack the goals opposite. They can use the target players to keep possession and create scoring chances. Encourage the players to keep the ball in front of them and not allow the opponents to pass to the target player. Once all the teams have played, the target players can be moved to the sides of the pitch and used for one-twos rather than backward and forward passes.

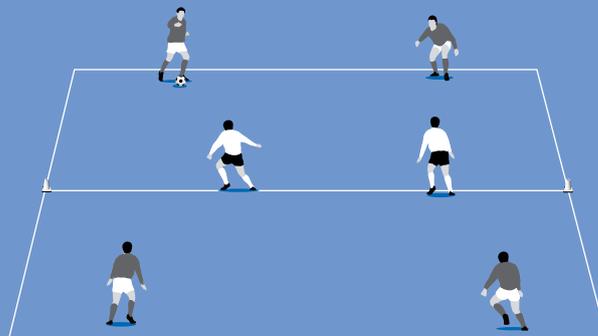


Game situation

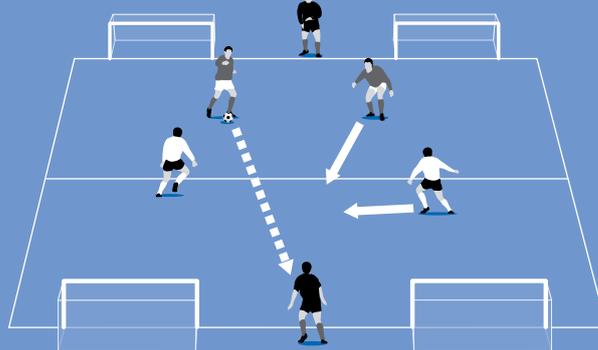
Three defenders and three attackers enter the pitch. These players remain on the pitch for the whole game. Now select three pairs of midfielders. The midfielders work on a rotation of two helping the defenders, two helping the attackers and two being used as target players. The two attacking midfielders start by passing into the attackers and joining in. The aim for the defensive midfielders is to stop the attacking team from scoring, regain the ball and pass to one of the target players. Once completed, the groups rotate positions.

The defensive midfielders

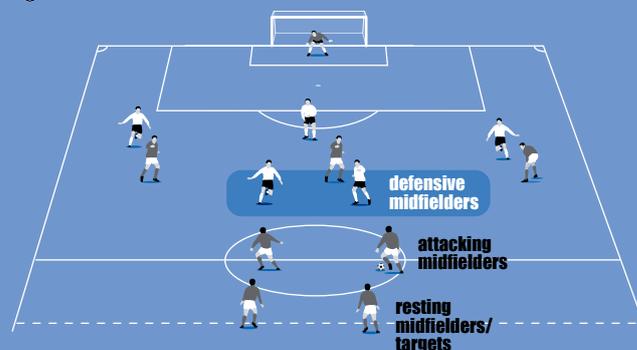
direction of run \Rightarrow pass $\square\square\square\Rightarrow$



The midfielders move along the line to block the forward pass.



A 2v2 game to keep possession of the ball using the targets, and then score in one of the mini goals.



The midfielders rotate from defending to resting to attacking.