

Defending long balls

When defending long balls, it's important that one player attacks the ball whilst the other defenders drop behind in order to cover him and offer support. This session improves your defenders' understanding in these situations.



What you tell your players the session is about

1. Defending long balls.
2. Getting height and distance on your clearances.
3. Good defensive shape and cover.

Session planner

Warm up	Session	Developments	Game	Warm down
15 mins	10 mins	10 mins	20 mins	5 mins

Activity	Kit	Outcome
Warm up	Balls. Cones, flags or poles to use as temporary goal posts	Continuous heading. From <i>The Ultimate Warm-Ups Manual</i> , exercise 52
The session	Balls, cones, mannequins / poles	Players are attacking the ball in the air and clearing with height and distance
Development	Balls, cones, mannequins / poles	Players are reacting to cover around the defender attacking the ball
Game	Balls, cones, goals	The defending team has to effectively deal with a long ball and retain the ball to attack
Warm down	n/a	Gentle jogging and stretching exercises



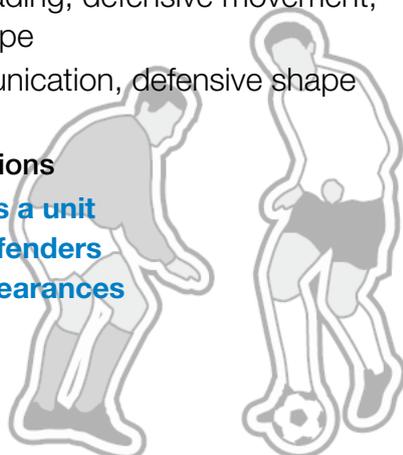
Where it fits

Individual skills: Heading, defensive movement, positioning and shape

Team skills: Communication, defensive shape and positioning

Related Smart Sessions

- 8 [Defending as a unit](#)
- 23 [Covering defenders](#)
- 26 [Defensive clearances](#)



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What to think about

When a long ball is played towards your defence, it's important one of your defenders attacks the ball and doesn't let it bounce in and around your penalty box. It is also important that the header is cleared with height and distance.

The other defenders must always anticipate that the opposing attacker might win the header and flick the ball towards goal. Therefore, your other defenders must drop off behind the defender attacking the ball in order to provide cover and support.





Set-up

- Create a 50 yards by 30 yards area with four mannequins/poles spread along the half way line.
- For the game, remove the mannequins/poles and include a goal at either end with two goalkeepers.



What you get your players to do

The defenders are numbered 1 to 4. You call out a specific number. The server throws the ball over the mannequins and the numbered defender must react to attack the ball in the air.

The aim for the defender is to head the ball into the opponent's end zone in order to score a point for gaining height and distance on their clearance.



What to call out

- "React and go to attack the ball"
- "Height and distance on the clearance"
- "Drop off around your team mate to cover"



Development

Now the opponents throw the ball along their line. The defenders must take up a defensive shape and position in relation to the ball. The opponents can randomly throw a high ball over the mannequins for a defender to clear.

This time, the team gets one point for an effective clearance into the end zone and an extra point for the covering positions of the remaining three defenders.



Game situation

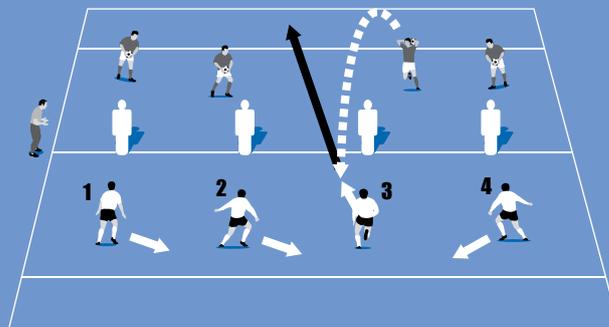
The grey team line up with a goalkeeper, back four and three midfielders against the white team's goalkeeper, midfield three and two forwards. The white team has two servers who they can pass to.

To start, the grey team's back four must be on their defensive line and receive a long ball from a server.

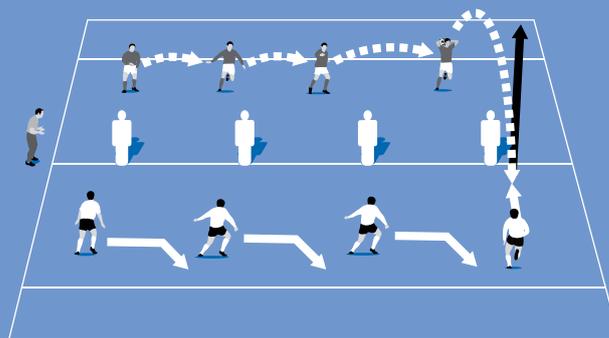
Play normal football and re-start with a long ball if a goal is scored or the ball goes out of play.

Defending long balls

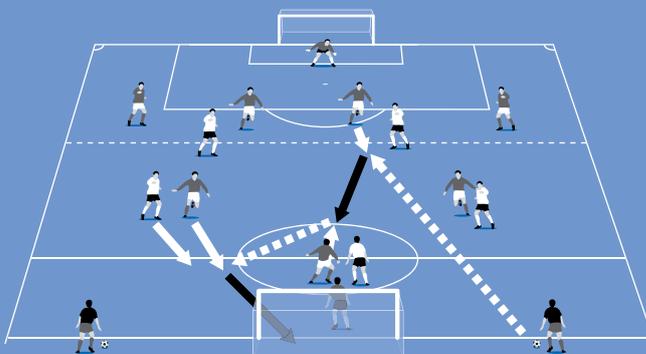
player movement pass/serve shot/clearance



You call out a number and the server quickly throws the ball for that defender to head clear.



The grey team randomly throw a high ball into the opponent's half. The nearest defender heads clear and the other defenders cover.



A server starts the game with a long ball. Can the defenders win the ball and build up to score?