



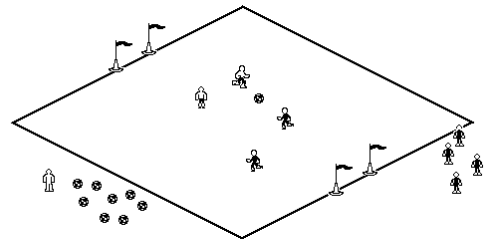
Functional Training of the Central Backs

by Laura Ray, Mass Youth Soccer Development Coach

Objectives: To help improve the decisions of the central defenders in terms of how they defend, where they defend and what they do when they win possession of the ball.

1) 2v2 to small goals (Warm-up – 20-25 minutes):

Set up many small sided fields 20 yards long by 15 yards wide. Organize many 2v2 games. Set up teams by function: **2 central backs** play together as a team, 2 center mids play together, 2 center forwards play together, outside backs play together, etc. At the field where the **central backs** are playing, have an extra team or two on the outside. Rotate these teams into the game to play against the **central backs**.



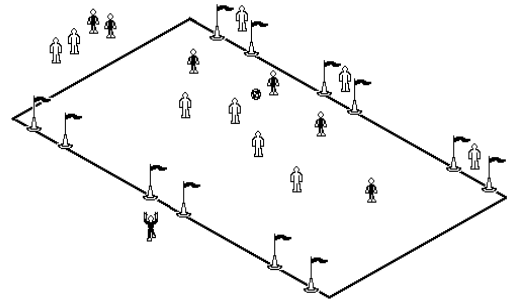
Coach serves balls into the field from the outside and at the mid point of this field. They will play the ball in to the team playing against the **central backs**.

Coaching Points:

- Communication – who should be pressuring ball, which way to force the player with the ball, when to step and put tighter pressure on them (especially in relation to the defensive 1/3 of the field)
- Cues for central backs: Bad touch on the attackers part – aggressive to win the ball, distance of 2nd attacker in relation to goal determines if 2nd defender (central back) can step and double team 1st attacker (if 2nd attacker takes themselves out of the play) or must be dropped off just slightly and about a 30 degree angle
- Central Backs have many technical functions that should be considered: heading; ability to clear the ball with feet and head; tackling; quality first touch; immediate transition with the dribble, pass or shot

2) 4v4 to six goals (20 minutes):

In a field 35 yards long by 50 yards wide (wider than longer), place three goals on each endline (central, left and right). Have 4 backs play against 2 forwards and 2 midfielders. Coach can add in another player or two for each side as play continues. *Use of extra players:* the GK can play behind the goals that the 4 backs are defending to aid in communication. Add in 3 target players behind the goals that the 4 backs are attacking.



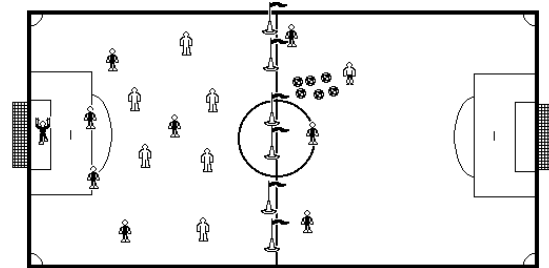
Coaching Points:

- Reinforce coaching points from activity #1
- There must be pressure on the ball! Cues: as ball is traveling, defensive shape (pressure, cover & balance, flatness) must take place!
- Central Backs need to organize the back four as a group defensively through communication – when to step, when to shift, when to drop, etc.

- Decide marking responsibilities and zonal coverage on and off the ball
- Transition...when they win the ball back, do they have a plan to go forward as quickly and efficiently as possible or can they keep possession until the opportunity to go forward is ON!

3) 6v5 plus GK to 1 big goal and three small counter goals (20 minutes):

Use ½ the field for this game and place three small goals (can also place targets behind each goal to get more players involved), left, center and right on the midfield line. Team of 6 will attack the big goal and the team of 5 (plus a GK) will attack the 3 small goals.

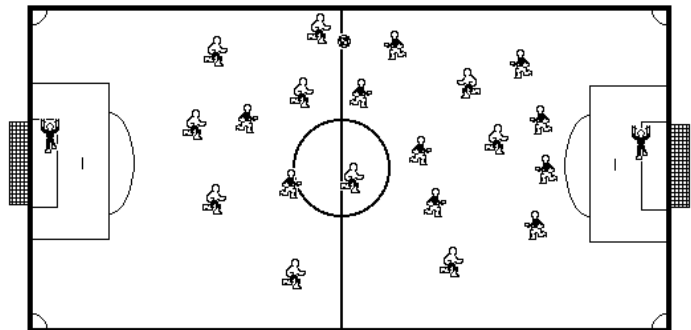


Coaching Points:

- Reinforce defensive coaching points from activity #1 and activity #2
- Central Backs must read that when the ball is being played out (either by themselves, their GK or the outside backs, they must communicate to get their whole defensive line to step up the field and quickly.
- GK must stay connected with the back four and the rest of the team

4) 8v8/11v11 scrimmage (30-45 minutes):

Depending upon numbers, space will change. Ideally, finish with the number you normally play with in games. Play a regular game with goalkeepers. Be sure to finish with 4 backs for either number to ensure continuation of understanding of roles for the central backs.



Coaching Points:

- Reinforce coaching points from activity #1, #2 and #3
- Reinforce positive decision making opportunities (recognizing when to step defensive line up, how to maintain possession if they win it, when to get players (outside backs/selves/midfielders) to pressure ball, etc.)

5) Cool-down (10 minutes):

Juggling; finish cool-down with static stretching of major muscle groups.