

WORKING WITH DEFENDERS

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With changes evolving almost on a daily basis, the nature of the game and therefore the responsibilities and requirements of the modern-day player are different from yesterday. Most of the large clubs who operate at the stellar levels of the game and some other smaller clubs, recognize the significance of preparing players to their optimum for forthcoming games and their future in the game.

Positional coaches have long been employed in the game of American football but soccer has been both dilatory and negligent in doing so. Some clubs toy with the idea of enhancing the positional capabilities of players and on a regular basis delegate this task to the sports scientist/athletic trainer as opposed to a football teacher or coach. Whilst sports scientists will no doubt enhance many of the athletic capabilities of the player the finer arts of teaching the defender the positional technical and tactical requirements may well be secondary in their work.

The purpose of this session is to examine and develop the positional and movement requirements for defenders in general, and in some cases for specific positions. Minimal equipment is necessary and high numbers can be catered for. The contents of the session could be the catalyst curriculum for a club's defenders who are assembled every coaching session for specialist attention, before they return to work with the rest of the team in their technical and tactical program.

Every activity conducted in the session is specific for defenders and is directly related and relevant to the defenders role and responsibility. His ability to move quickly into position and the signals to do so, his ability to influence opponents activity, his ability to respond to ball movement, his ability to shift both position and balance and his understanding of just how to ready himself and make the necessary movements will be examined.

This is not a team "tactical" session; it is largely although not exclusively directed at the defenders response once he has made his decision as to how to defend. Some of the activity is about decision making and operating as and when the ball moves and changes location but primarily it aims to cover the important facets of a defender's specialized movements and actions where he is confronting an opponent.

Defending is as much an art as creative attacking play but seemingly invites less time and attention from coaches. All and any of the activities involved in this session can be taken away by any coach working at almost any level of the game and used in the development of quicker, more agile, more assertive and more responsive defenders. Much of defending is about dictating and denying as well as it is about dis-possessing opponents and those aspects will be covered along with positioning and tactical adaptability in the challenge for supremacy against a determined opponent.