PRACTICE THEME: Improve Midfield Defending – Starting a Counter Attack

- Pre-Training – Pre Match Warm Up – Work On Soccer Specific Muscles – Hydrate If Necessary – If Players are Sore – Extend It.
- Discuss The Importance of: Forcing the Player Away From The Middle Of The Field – Defending Players Are “In Charge” of Attackers
- Proper Defending Pressure, Cover, Balance – Forcing the Attacker To Where You Want Them To
- Proper Reading of the Flow of Play – Anticipation – Head On A Swivel – Vision – Players Need To Anticipate The Ball Offensively and Defensively 2,3, or 4 passes in advance. Train The Players To Keep The Ball On The Ground and Simply Redirect The Ball.
- Speak Briefly About the Topic and Specifically You Are Looking For – Encourage The Players Positively – Remind Them To Work Together

Communication: The Key To The Activity – Verbal and Non Verbal Communication – Work Rate – Consistency – Focus

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**DIAGRAM**

**Stage 1**
- Coach – Train in the Flow of Play

**ORGANIZATION**
- Divide Players into 2 Teams, working on forcing the Players to play into your Strength and work with the proper Defensive organization of Pressure, Cover, and Balance.
- Attackers are looking to be certain you are playing good crisp and accurate passes, making supporting runs to help the Player you pass it to so you can maintain Possession of the Ball. You have to be crafty and find a way to take a Defender on 1 v 1, make them commit and then lay a “useable” ball off.
- Player with the ball looking to find Time and Space and not allow the Players with the Ball to get the ball back into the middle of the Field. Defensive Players work together to make the play predictable and cause problems for the Attacking Team.
- Depending on Weather, the last Match or Session Players need to Hydrate encourage them to drink and stretch.
- Remind Players about anticipation of the Ball and Players need to preview information 2, 3, or 4 passes in advance both Offensively and Defensively.
- Everything is set up for Session to run Simple – Complex.
- Before activity you can work through to “Paint a Clear Picture” for what you want to see.
- Make certain Players operate as if it is a Game like situation.
- Encourage Players to have composure and check the ball. Receive, Turn, and Know Where to Play the Ball to Maintain Possession.
- Players are understanding debrief with both their Voice, Body Movement & Coerver Moves to create separation and maintain possession. Limit Their Touches – So they Play Quicker.
- All Players must understand as the ball is coming to them they have to take a look at where the best option to play the ball is to maintain Possession.
- How quickly can you read the flow of play and anticipate when to step in and when to make the activity difficult for the Attacker.
- What can you do to ramp up the consistent effort and consistent work rate by your Players?

**KEY COACHING POINTS**
- Communication, Organization, Proper Timing of the Players when to play the Ball to win it back and begin a Counter Attack. Use sidelines as an extra Defender.
- Defenders should have the mentality of not allowing the Attacking Team to stay in control and allow them to play into your Strength. Increasing the Opportunity To Win The Ball.
- Players have to have the mentality that the Player with the ball is the most dangerous Player.
- Pressure Defender closes the Player down rapidly with the Cover, and Balance Defender Communicating in “Force Right” or “Force Left”. Make a bending run without overrunning the Attacker forcing the Player to be uncomfortable with the way you are closing them down and if the misplay the ball it goes out of bounds and now it is your ball. The Cover and Balance Defenders work together preventing the Attacker from going to the middle of the Field.
- GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE!!
- Use the whole grid, remind them to get Loose – REPETITION BUILDS GOOD HABITS!! If too easy make the grid smaller encourage Players to get into a Rhythm.
- Do whatever is at the Highest Quality!!
- Players need good anticipation of what a Attacker will do, as they go through the activity monitor and criticize the Players and have them act as if it is a game realistic.
- This is the opportunity to get out of your comfort zone and Players are strongly encouraged to exploit toward the Attacking Team and make the Attacker nervous and have Touch Tight Defending physically touching them and making them uncomfortable.
- Key Factors – bending Defensive Run, Cover and Balance Defender telling you where to force the Player into your Strength.
- Players need to know when to step in and win the ball and begin the Counter Attack or be patient and guide the Attacker towards your Teammates.
- Communication: The Key To The Activity – Verbal and Non Verbal Communication – Work Rate – Consistency – Focus

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**Stage 2**
- Coach – Train in the Flow of Play

**ORGANIZATION**
- After Players go through Stage 1 – Have Players Play 8 v 8 using the Rules and Guidelines of forcing the Player to the out of bounds line rapidly to make them cough up the ball and have difficulty advancing towards the Goal.
- After Players win the ball by forcing them to Play into your Strength, look to find the most open Player and keep the ball moving to cause problems for the Defending Team. It is important to constantly find the open space, play throughline to touchline and maintain possession.
- If Defending Team wins the ball they Counter Attack and again look to find the most open Player forward, backward, or sideways. Always looking to play useable ball the Players can simply redirect the ball.
- Defense instructed to have Touch Tight Defending. Defenders work together and know when to step in and win ball back, Don’t hesitate to ramp up your speed of play and your speed of thought to make a high intensity activity. Read the Flow of Play and listen to what your Teammates are telling you in order to constantly create problems for the Attacking Team.
- Communication and runs on and off the ball and good quality touches are critical to the success of this activity. You have limited time to force the Attacker to Play into your Strength.
- Use Communication Skills to organize and force the Attacking Team to Play where the Defending Team wants you to play.
- DO NOT PLAY THE PREDICTABLE BALL – Attackers are trying to maintain possession and Defenders are trying to gain possession. Must be crafty and find a way to take a Defender on 1 v 1, make them commit and then lay a “useable” ball off.
- Communication and quick combinations are the key to this activity for Attacking Players and Defensive Players.

**KEY COACHING POINTS**
- Need a close the Attacker down rapidly which will cause them to become uncomfortable and potentially play the ball quicker than they want to play. Grid is small and you will be closed down rapidly. Train your Players to have composure and confidence no matter how many Players are trying to close them down.
- Communication, Organization, Proper Pace and Timing Of Pass and Runs off the Ball. Listen to the Defenders behind you and tell them which way to force the Attacker.
- Focus on quality repetitions with the Ball being played on the ground – communicate to the player receiving the ball to “paint a picture” for the Player receiving the ball. The ball on the ground will help the Player to control the ball and make a decision on who is open and can you get the ball to them for a quality opportunity.
- Keep your Head on a Swivel – run to quickly close the Player down, approach the Player with the Ball running Fast to Slow and your Body Stance High To Low.
- Encourage the Players to organize themselves both Offensively and Defensively, jockey the Player and if they misplay the ball disrupt the Attack quickly.
- Can you organize your Players and create a 1 v 1 situation or a 2 v 1 situation? Be patient and wait for the Player to misplay the ball and be confident to step in win the ball and Counter Attack.
- Communication, Communication, Communication
- Defenders look to win the ball quickly, find the most open Player either diagonally, switching the point of Attack and take advantage of the Attacking Team that lost the ball.
Consistent Work Rate?  Head On a Swivel?  Communication?  Good First Touch?

### Stage 3  Coach – Train in the Flow of Play

- Now in Stage 3 go to Goal encourages Players to ramp up their Speed of Play and Speed of Thought and Focus On Defending.
- Using the Skills Worked On in Stage 1 and Stage 2 instruct Players to raise their level, Speed of Play and Speed of Thought.
- The GK and the Defenders should be the key to organizing the Defenders and the Midfielders – if they are organized properly – there are no shots and there are no Goals.
- Can you isolate a Player or Players to reinforce: 1v1’s, 2v1’s, 2v2’s etc. How quickly can you close the Player down with the ball in numbers and make them make a mistake?
- Remember the focus is Midfield Defending – which requires knowing when to step in and win the ball, counter attack with speed and quickly get the shot off and follow the shot.
- Defending Players properly anticipating where the ball will end up and limiting time and space by the Attacking Team. Reading the flow of play and meeting the Player receiving the ball at the same time. This will make the Player receiving the ball uncomfortable and potentially give up the ball – Defending Team after winning the Ball becomes the Attackers and go to Goal.
- Have a supply of balls ready in case ball goes out of bounds to not allow the Players Mental Switch to turn off.
- Stay spread out while Attacking – opening up lanes and seams come back behind the ball (ALL PLAYERS) to stay compact while Defending. Defending Team takes charge of Attacking Team.
- Play is continuous until 5 Goals are scored – then switch up Teams. Rotate 2-3 Players per team. Train Players NOT to panic and have composure and confidence in TIGHT SPACES.
- Players need to read the Game and know when to step in and when to Jockey the Player with the ball until they misplay the ball. Make the Player with the Ball as uncomfortable as possible.
- Transition is important in this activity – Attack in Numbers, with the proper Speed of Thought and Speed of Play and Defend in Numbers.
- Players Counter Attacking are looking to switch the point of attack constantly and maintaining Possession to make the Defense work very hard to chase the Players down and win the ball back.

### Stage 4  Coach – Train in the Flow of Play

- Play full sized Game 6v6 or 8v8 or 11v11 with Goalkeepers.
- 3 Seconds to get the ball back in Play or it is the other Teams ball.
- Observe the Learning Curve from Stage 1, Stage 2, and Stage 3.
- NO RESTRICTIONS!!


- Good First Touch?
- Head on a Swivel? Aware of Teammates / Opponents?
- Good Communication?
- Proper Passing and Receiving?
- Runs on and off the ball?
- Players assisting the Player receiving the ball with at least 2 options?
- Look to recycle the ball by Shifting the Players and the Ball “if you can’t go forward."
- Patience while Defending however, closing down at Speed when you see a bad first touch, hesitation, etc.
- Take The Shot & Place The Ball Away From Keeper.
- Follow Your Shot!!