DEFENDING IN A BACK THREE

Stay compact -> cover centrally -> shift together -> manage width -> defend the box

SESSION OVERVIEW

SESSION AIM

Develop a compact, coordinated back three that protects central space, shifts together and manages wide attacks, depth and

THEME	PRACTICE 1	PRACTICE 2	END GOAL
Back Three Defending	**3v2 Delay**	**Back Three Shift**	**8v8 to Goal**

ACTIVITY 1 | 3V2 DELAY & COVER

ORGANISATION

Create a 20 x 25-yard area with a target line at one end. Play 3 attackers against 2 defenders. Start each repetition with the attackers in possession.

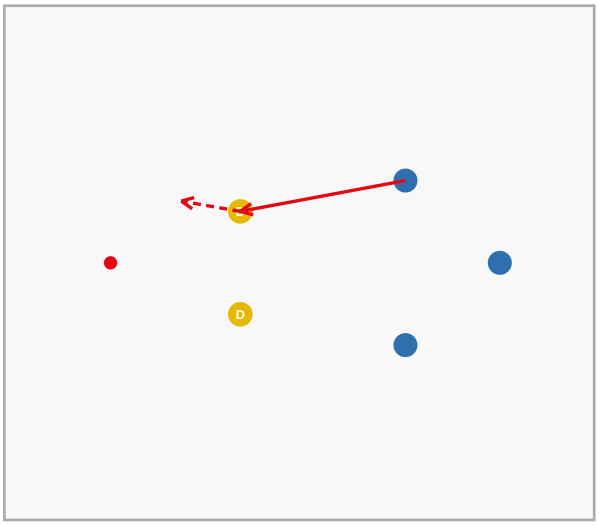
HOW IT WORKS

The attackers try to dribble or combine across the target line. The first defender delays and shows play away from the most dangerous central route. The second defender provides cover, protects the inside pass and adjusts as the ball moves. Rotate defenders frequently.

COACHING POINTS

- Nearest defender delays and controls the speed of the attack.
- Second defender provides cover at an angle, not directly behind.
- Protect the central route first and encourage play outside.
- Communicate early: pressure, cover and hold.
- Do not get split by a simple pass between defenders.

DIAGRAM



Delay the attack, protect the inside pass and provide angled cover.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Allow the attackers to score two points for splitting the defenders, increasing the demand on compactness.
2. Add a recovering third defender who joins after the first pass.

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ACTIVITY 2 | BACK THREE SHIFT & COVER

ORGANISATION

Use a 40 x 35-yard area. Position a back three across the lower half and four attackers across the top. Attackers circulate the ball from side to side before looking to play forward.

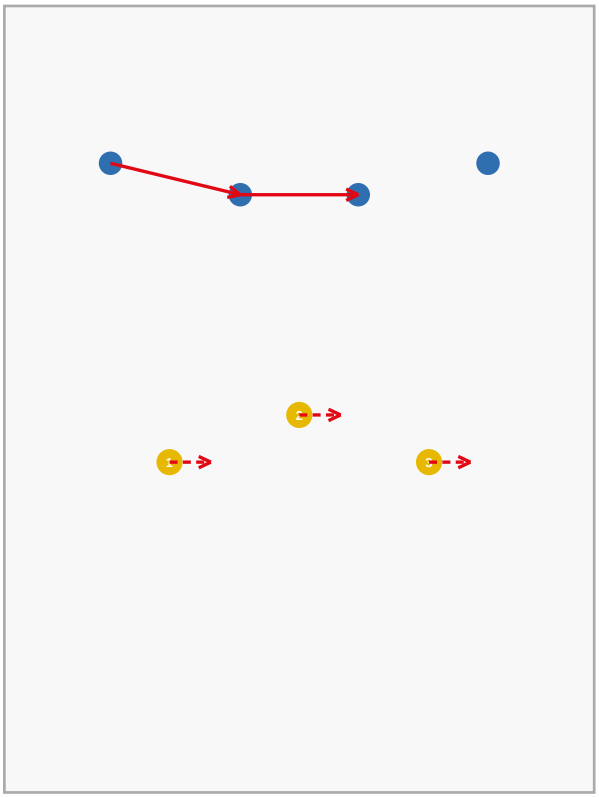
HOW IT WORKS

The back three shifts together as the ball moves. The outside centre-back nearest the ball can step toward the wide threat while the central defender and far-side centre-back squeeze across to protect the middle. The unit should remain narrow enough to protect central spaces but ready to expand if the ball is switched.

COACHING POINTS

- Move together as the ball travels.
- Nearest outside centre-back engages; the other two cover centrally.
- Central defender controls depth and keeps the unit connected.
- Far-side centre-back must tuck in and protect the box.
- Communicate every change of responsibility.

DIAGRAM



The back three shifts as one unit, with the far side narrowing to protect central space.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Allow one attacker to dribble forward if a gap appears between defenders.
2. Add a central striker who can pin the middle defender and force clearer communication between the three.

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ACTIVITY 3 | BACK THREE + WIDE SUPPORT

ORGANISATION

Use approximately half a pitch with one goal and goalkeeper. Organise a back three with two wide support players and two midfield screeners against seven attackers.

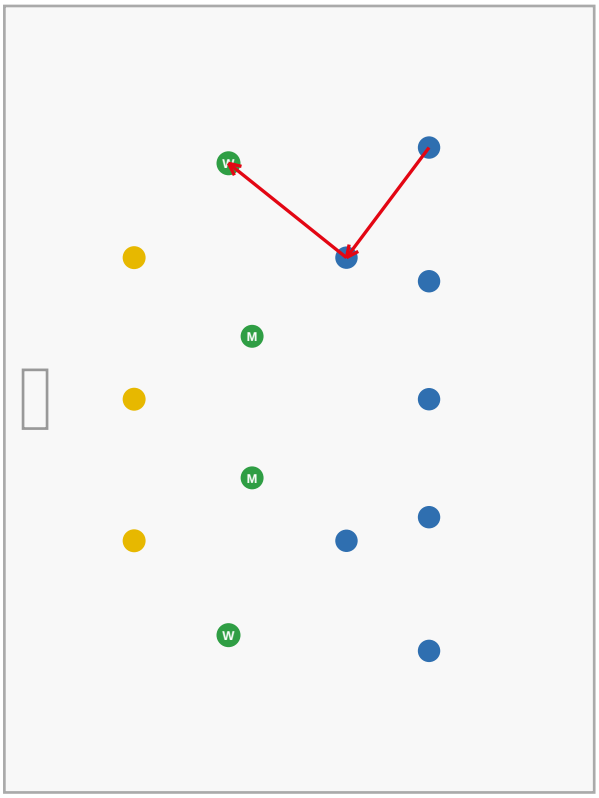
HOW IT WORKS

The attacking team builds from outside the penalty area and looks to create central combinations or wide crossing opportunities. The defending group protects the centre first. When the ball goes wide, the nearest wide player applies pressure while the back three squeezes toward the ball and prepares to defend the cross. If the wide player is beaten, the nearest outside centre-back engages while the remaining two cover the box.

COACHING POINTS

- Protect central space and force the attack toward predictable wide areas.
- Wide support players must recover quickly and communicate with the outside centre-back.
- The central defender controls the line, depth and box organisation.
- When one centre-back steps out, the other two narrow and cover.
- Track runners and defend the most dangerous spaces in front of goal.

DIAGRAM



Use the wide player to pressure, while the back three narrows and protects the box.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Allow quick switches of play to test the recovery of the far-side defender and wide player.
2. On regaining possession, defenders must find a target within three passes to encourage a positive transition.

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FINAL GAME | 8V8 + GOALKEEPERS

ORGANISATION

Play 8v8 plus goalkeepers on a suitable pitch. Encourage each team to defend with a recognisable back three supported by wide players or midfielders.

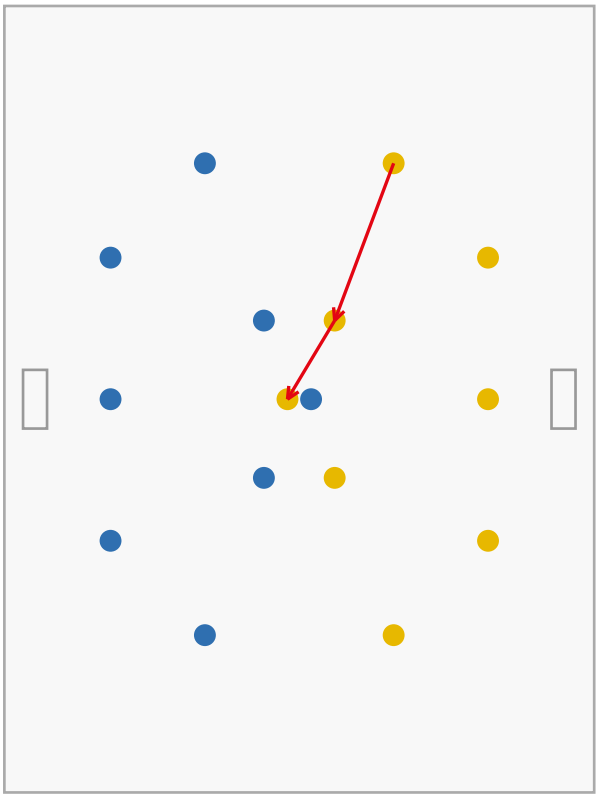
HOW IT WORKS

Play a normal game and apply the session principles in realistic situations. The back three should stay connected, protect the centre, shift as a unit and communicate clearly when an outside centre-back has to step into a wide area. Encourage the wide players to recover quickly so the back three does not become stretched unnecessarily.

COACHING POINTS

- Keep the three defenders compact and connected.
- Protect the centre before stepping into wide areas.
- When one defender engages, the other two provide cover and balance.
- Manage depth and runners with constant communication.
- Defend crosses with strong positioning and awareness of ball, goal and opponent.

DIAGRAM



Final game to transfer back-three compactness, shifting and wide-area decisions into match play.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Award a bonus point for regaining possession and finding a forward pass within three actions.
2. Finish unrestricted and observe whether the back three keeps its shape without reminders.