DEFENDING IN A BACK FOUR

Delay -> shift together -> stay compact -> protect the box -> defend the cross

SESSION OVERVIEW

SESSION AIM

Develop a compact, connected back four that shifts together, protects central areas and defends crosses and runs with clear

THEME	PRACTICE 1	PRACTICE 2	END GOAL
Back Four Defending	**1v1 Delay**	**Back Four Shift**	**8v8 to Goal**

ACTIVITY 1 | 1V1 DELAY & SHOW AWAY

ORGANISATION

Create several 8 x 15-yard channels. Place one attacker with a ball at one end and one defender in the middle. Mark a target line or cone at the far end.

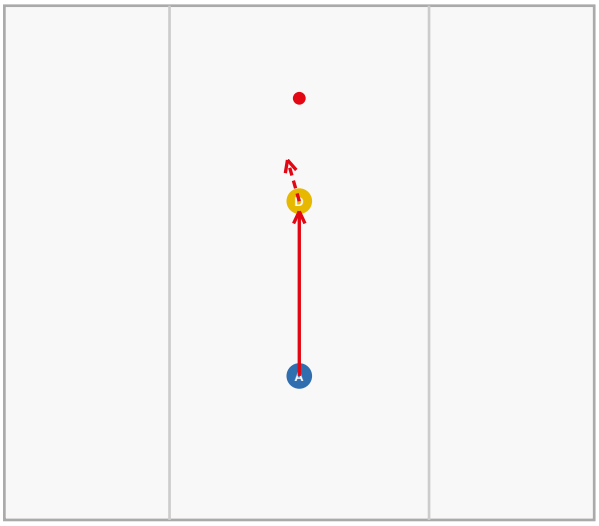
HOW IT WORKS

The attacker tries to dribble over the target line. The defender closes down quickly, then slows on approach and tries to delay the attacker rather than diving in. Encourage the defender to angle the body to show the attacker away from the centre and toward the outside. Rotate roles frequently.

COACHING POINTS

- Close the space quickly, then arrive under control.
- Stay side-on with a low centre of gravity.
- Delay first - do not over-commit.
- Show the attacker away from the dangerous central area.
- Tackle when the touch is loose or the attacker becomes predictable.

DIAGRAM



Close quickly, slow down on approach and show the attacker away from the centre.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Add a second attacker to create a 2v1 and reinforce delay while waiting for support.
2. Award the defender a point for forcing the attacker outside without being beaten.

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ACTIVITY 2 | BACK FOUR SHIFT & COMPACTNESS

ORGANISATION

Use a 40 x 35-yard area. Position a back four across the lower half and four attackers across the top. The attackers circulate the ball from side to side without initially attacking the goal.

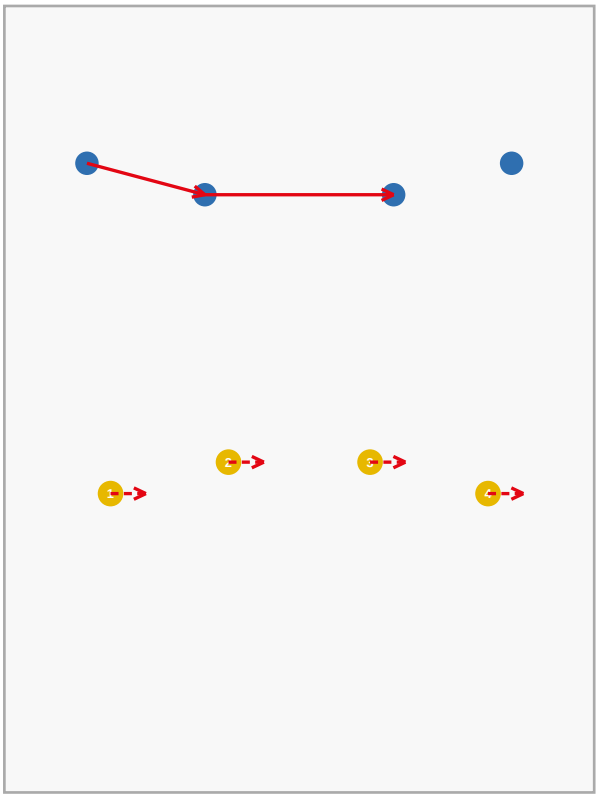
HOW IT WORKS

As the ball moves, the back four shifts together. The nearest defender applies controlled pressure while the other three cover and squeeze across. Distances between defenders should stay compact, with the far-side fullback tucking in rather than staying wide. Reset if the unit becomes stretched or disconnected.

COACHING POINTS

- Move as a unit as the ball travels.
- Nearest defender presses; the others provide cover and balance.
- Keep small, consistent distances between defenders.
- The far-side defender must tuck in and protect the middle.
- Communicate constantly: press, cover, hold and squeeze.

DIAGRAM



Shift together as the ball moves, keeping the unit compact and protecting central space.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Allow attackers to dribble forward if the back four leaves a clear gap.
2. Add a central forward between the centre-backs so the unit must shift while tracking a striker.

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ACTIVITY 3 | BACK FOUR + MIDFIELD SUPPORT

ORGANISATION

Use approximately half a pitch with one goal and goalkeeper. Organise a back four plus two midfield screen players against six attackers.

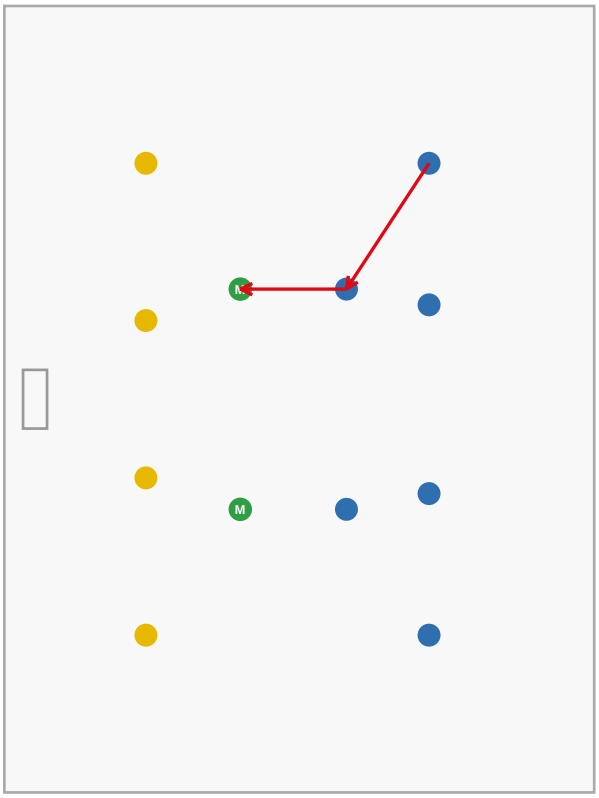
HOW IT WORKS

The attacking team builds from outside the penalty area and tries to create a shot or crossing opportunity. The defending group works as a connected block. Midfielders screen central passes while the back four controls depth, tracks runners and shifts toward the ball. If the ball goes wide, the nearest fullback engages while the rest of the line narrows and prepares to defend the cross.

COACHING POINTS

- Protect the centre first and force play wide.
- Midfield screeners must slow passes into dangerous central areas.
- Centre-backs manage depth and communicate the line.
- When the ball goes wide, narrow the opposite side quickly.
- Track runners in the box and defend the space between ball and goal.

DIAGRAM



Back four and midfield screen protect central areas, shift together and defend wide attacks.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Allow attackers to switch the ball freely to test recovery and weak-side positioning.
2. On regaining possession, defenders must complete three passes or find a target to encourage a positive transition.

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FINAL GAME | 8V8 + GOALKEEPERS

ORGANISATION

Play 8v8 plus goalkeepers on a suitable pitch. Each team should use a recognisable back four whenever defending.

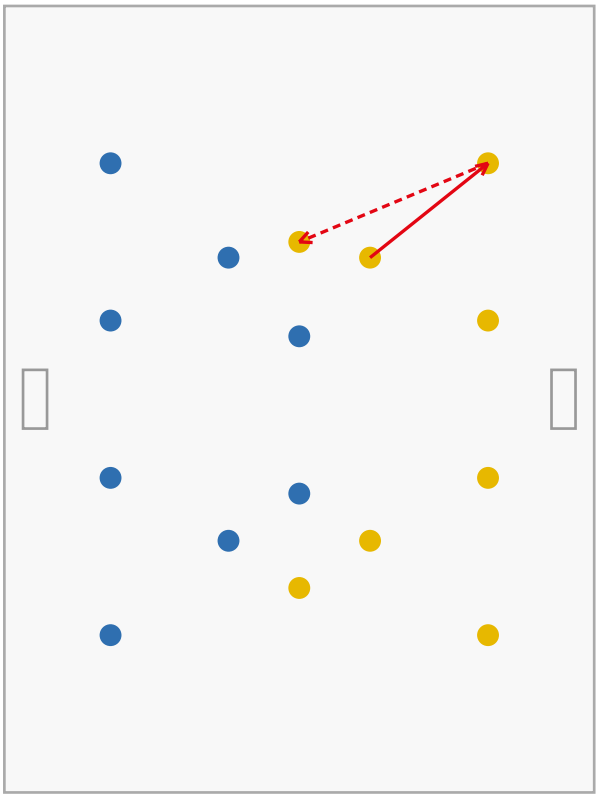
HOW IT WORKS

Play a normal game and encourage both teams to apply the session principles. The back four should remain connected, shift with the ball, communicate early and protect the central route to goal. Allow the game to flow, using brief interventions only when the defensive line becomes stretched, flat or disconnected.

COACHING POINTS

- Stay connected across the full width of the back four.
- Pressure, cover and balance must change as the ball moves.
- Protect central space before worrying about wide areas.
- Track runners and communicate responsibility early.
- Defend crosses with strong body position and awareness of both ball and opponent.

DIAGRAM



Final game to transfer compactness, shifting and back-four communication into realistic play.

PROGRESSIONS

1. Award a bonus point for regaining possession and playing forward within three passes.
2. Finish unrestricted and observe whether the back four maintains its shape without reminders.