BACK FOUR ZONAL DEFENDING

Individual defending -> overload defending -> defending as a unit

SESSION OVERVIEW

SESSION AIM

Develop the defensive habits needed to delay attacks, stay balanced, protect central areas and work together as a connected unit.

THEME	PRACTICE 1	PRACTICE 2	END GOAL
Defending	**1v1 -> 2v1 -> 2v2**	**Back four unit defending**	**Build to 11v11**

PRACTICE 1 | 1v1 DEFENDING

ORGANISATION

Set up 10 x 12 yard grids. Four players work in each grid: two compete while two recover.

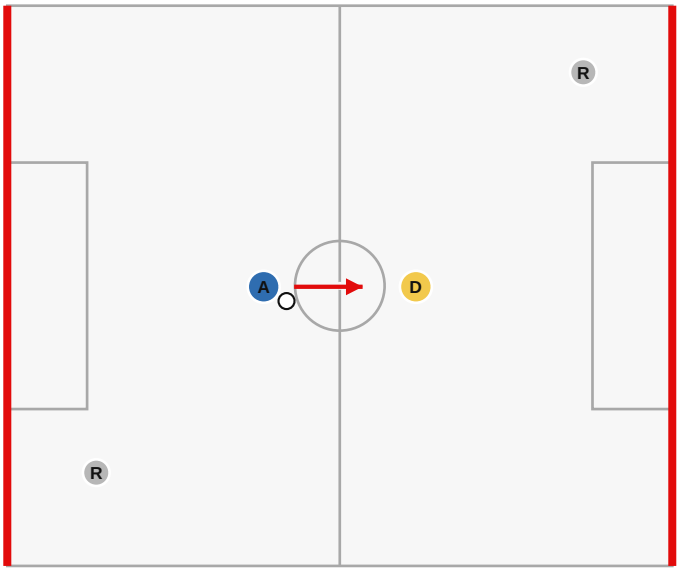
HOW IT WORKS

Players compete 1v1. The attacker scores by dribbling over the opponent's end line. The defender tries to stop or delay the attack.

COACHING POINTS

- Stay side-on and balanced; avoid crossing your feet.
- Move your feet to match the attacker rather than reaching in.
- Be patient - delay first, tackle when the moment is right.
- Keep a low centre of gravity and remain ready to react.

DIAGRAM



A = attacker D = defender R = recovering player

PROGRESSIONS

1. 2v1 overload

The defender serves the ball to two attackers, then closes down immediately. Defend by delaying and steering the ball carrier away from support.

2. 2v2

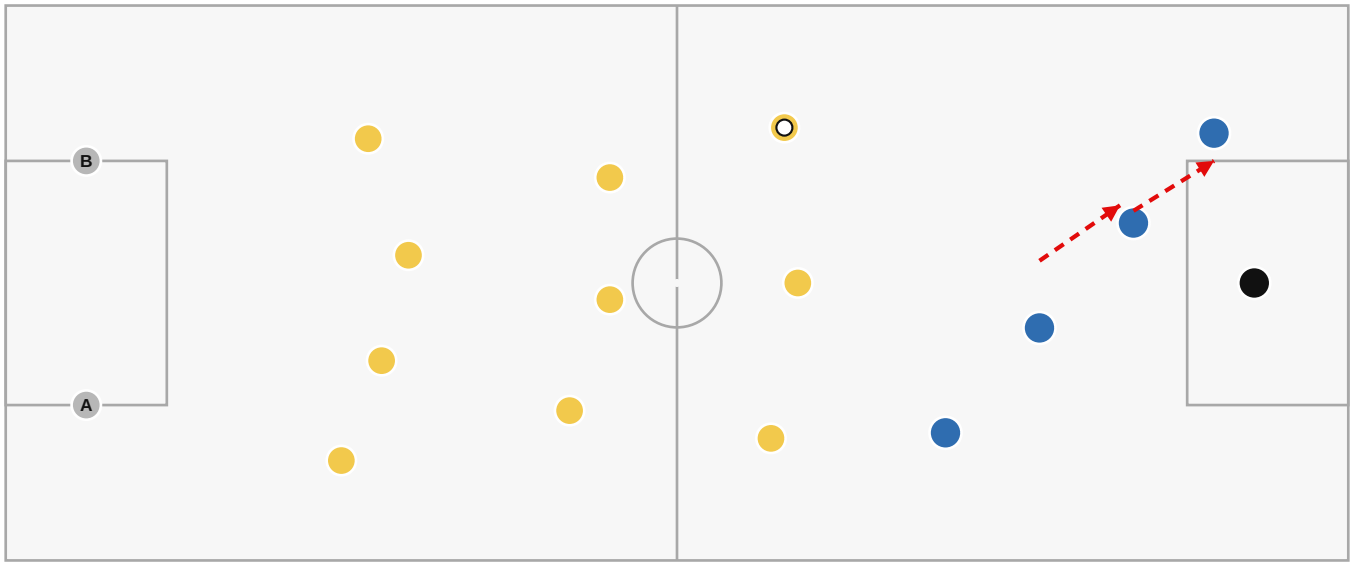
Add a second defender. Encourage both defenders to communicate, cover one another and prevent a clean route over the end line.

BACK FOUR ZONAL DEFENDING

Practice 2 - defending the penalty area as a connected back four

PRACTICE 2 | BACK FOUR UNIT DEFENDING

10 ATTACKERS VS BACK FOUR



Yellow = attacking team Blue = back four Grey = outlet targets Offside applies

ORGANISATION & RULES

Organise 10 attackers against a back four. Place two target players on the halfway line to give the defending team an outlet if they regain possession.

The attacking team circulates the ball and looks to create a goalscoring opportunity. The defenders stay compact, shift together and protect dangerous spaces. Offside is used to keep the practice realistic.

TRANSITION

If the defenders win the ball, play quickly into either target player and reset the practice.

COACH THE DETAILS

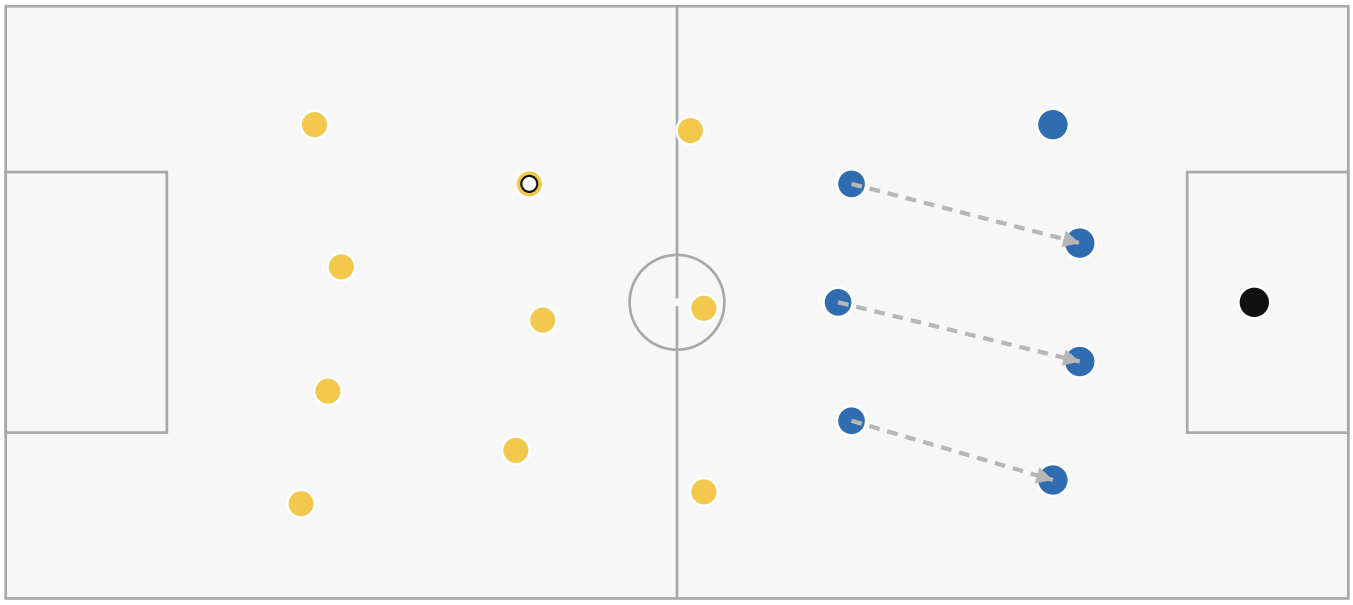
- Shift together as the ball travels - the whole line moves, not just the nearest defender.
- Stay compact and close gaps between defenders.
- Delay the attack rather than diving in.
- When a centre back steps out, the other defenders tuck in and provide cover.
- Maintain the defensive line and keep checking runners.
- Use clear, constant communication between defenders and goalkeeper.
- Protect central areas first; show the attack away from the most dangerous spaces.

BACK FOUR ZONAL DEFENDING

Progression - add midfield protection and build toward the full game

PROGRESSION | 10v7 -> 11v11

ADD THREE MIDFIELDERS



Blue team now has a back four plus three midfielders. Continue adding players until the practice reaches 11v11.

PROGRESSION

Add three midfield players to create a 10v7 practice. The midfield unit is still outnumbered, so they must work together to screen passes into the front line and stay connected to the back four.

Continue adding defenders until the session develops into an 11v11 game. Keep the same defensive principles throughout the progression.

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- Units move together as the ball moves.
- Passing lanes are blocked by good distances and angles.
- The team delays penetration and stays patient.
- Regains are followed by a quick outlet pass.

KEY SESSION MESSAGES

- Delay first. Win the ball second.
- Stay connected - gaps between players invite penetration.
- If one player presses, others cover and balance.
- Move while the ball is travelling, not after it arrives.
- Protect the middle and make the attack play around you.
- Defend together, then break quickly when possession changes.

COACH REVIEW

What improved as the practice became more game-realistic?