

Defending the goal —●— or the space

Session overview

Part 1: 6v2 + 2 GKs – possession and finishing

Part 2: Slid play into 1v1 situations

Part 3: 5v5 +GKs possession-based game – counter-attacks

Part 4: 10v11 game – breaking down a deep 4-4-1 structure

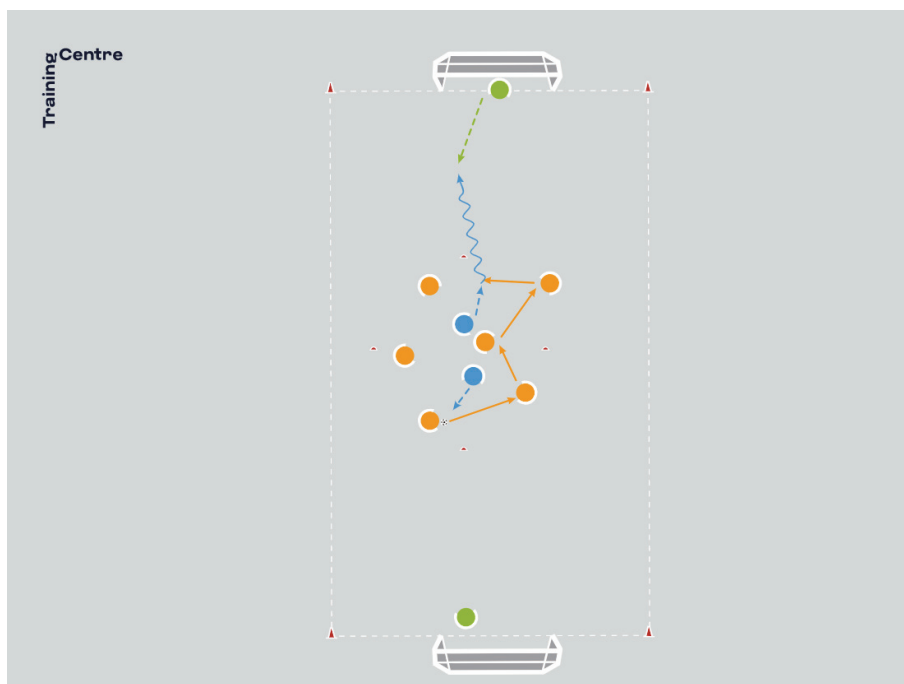
Key coaching points

- It is important for goalkeepers to link positioning to decision-making, and decision-making to action, to optimise their preparation for shots and 1v1 scenarios.
- The space in which a goalkeeper operates should be considered. If the area is larger, bigger movements are required.
- Tracking the movement of the ball and the team in possession puts goalkeepers in positions that allow them to adjust quickly and accurately.
- Working in smaller spaces requires better passes into the striker and sharper touches from the attackers to set themselves up for high-quality finishes.
- Reacting quickly in transitions gives the defending team a greater opportunity to create goalscoring chances at the other end.

In sum, this session is designed to give goalkeepers and attackers the ability to work with space more effectively when in goalscoring scenarios.

PART 1: 6V2 + 2 GKs - POSSESSION AND FINISHING

This exercise allows goalkeepers and outfield players to work on their reaction time in tight spaces. The goalkeepers will have to decide between defending the goal and defending the space. Since the outfield players are playing quick passes a short distance from goal, goalkeepers can improve their positioning, preparation and reaction time as they face shots from point-blank range. The exercise also helps attackers to adjust to different shooting scenarios (i.e. various angles, close range, limited space) by playing at a high level of intensity.



The six attacking players move the ball quickly inside the diamond-shaped area, whilst the two defenders press to win the ball back. The two goalkeepers position themselves in anticipation of shots.

Organisation

- Set up a small pitch with 2 goals, as shown in the image.
- Mark out a diamond-shaped area that is large enough for 8 players to fit into but, at the same time, is small enough to make the exercise challenging for the players in possession.
- The diamond-shaped area needs to be placed so that one of its boundaries is 9 metres from one goal and its other is 3 metres from the other goal.

Explanation

- The 6 attacking players and 2 defenders take up a space inside the diamond-shaped area.
- The 2 goalkeepers position themselves in opposing goals.
- Play starts with 1 of the goalkeepers, who passes to the attacking team inside the area.
- The attacking team have to complete 6 passes before they can shoot at goal.
- Alternatively, they can complete 15 successful passes to score a goal.
- The defenders try to win the ball back before the attacking team score.
- When they win the ball back, the defenders have to leave the area and shoot in the direction they are facing.
- If the defending team score, it counts as 5 goals.
- Switch the 2 defenders for 2 attacking players after 90 seconds.
- Swap the goalkeepers so that they both face shots from short and long distances.

Variation

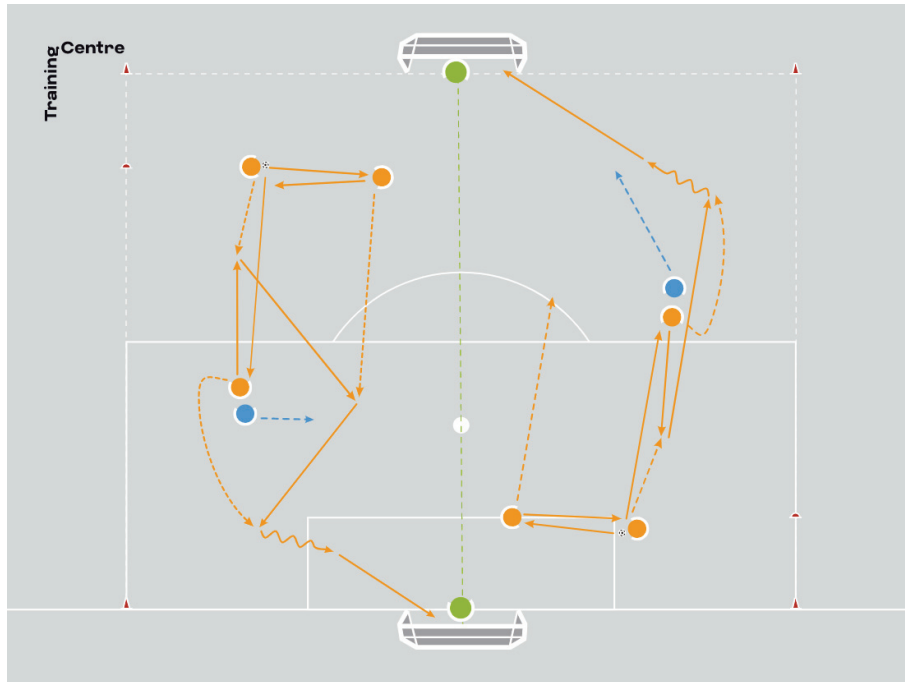
- Allow the attacking players to shoot at goal after only 4 passes.

Coaching points

- Allow the exercise to continue uninterrupted for 1 minute so that players can familiarise themselves with the distances and what they need to do to be successful.
- Giving the attackers a variety of shooting positions and scenarios will allow them to apply different types of finishes (chips, placed shots, low drilled strikes, driven shots, etc.).
- When losing the ball, players should react quickly to prevent shots.
- Encourage the players to move the ball quickly and to shoot to catch the goalkeepers out.
- The goalkeepers should pay attention to distances. If they are within 3 metres of the attacker, they should adopt a low posture and if they are further away, they should be ready to react with their feet.
- When the passes are being completed, the goalkeepers need to constantly adjust their position to follow the direction of the ball.
- Taking small or "micro" steps and moving quickly enables the goalkeepers to adjust and make quicker decisions to either set themselves or go and engage.
- By trying to close the distances and being on the front foot, the goalkeepers will have a greater chance of making saves.
- Teach goalkeepers to watch out for the following triggers/cues:
 - Passes leaving the possession box
 - Players breaking out of the possession box
 - Different types of passes
- Potential action for goalkeepers to take:
 - Smother
 - Block
 - Spread
 - Reaction save (hand and foot)

PART 2: SLID PLAY INTO 1V1 SITUATIONS

This drill heightens goalkeepers' understanding of how to react quickly to through-balls. At the same time, it gives the attackers the opportunity to work on their finishing from different close-range angles. In these goalscoring scenarios, the goalkeeper and the striker face off in a game to see who makes the first move. By working on the goalkeeper's positioning and feints, as well as the attacker's first touch or action, they can both be better prepared to succeed in these scenarios.



The four goalkeepers rotate the ball between themselves in a diamond shape. Two goalkeepers move between the four boxes in front of the goals whilst the other two goalkeepers behave as centre-backs.

Organisation

- Mark out a pitch that is 30 metres long and 18 metres wide (see image).
- Use 2 full-size goals and position a goalkeeper in each one.
- Split the pitch into 2 lanes.
- Mark out a through-ball halfway line so that it is 18 metres from one goal and 12 metres from the other.
- On the through-ball line, place 2 cones in each lane, as shown in the image.
- Finally, in each lane, place a different-coloured cone before the other cones to mark a starting point, as shown in the image.
- Position 4 players in each lane: 3 attackers and 1 defender.
- 2 attackers start at the starting cone.
- The other attacker occupies the space between the 2 cones on the through-ball point, taking the striker's role.
- The defender marks the attacker occupying the space between the cones.
- The through-ball line marks the offside line.

Explanation

- The exercise is the same in each lane, but is played in opposite directions.
- The 2 attackers at the starting point have to play up to 4 one-touch passes.
- At any point during this sequence, 1 of the attackers passes to the striker by the through-ball line.
- The striker then lays the ball off to the initial passer.
- The striker and the spare attacker now have to make a run towards goal, aiming to receive the ball between the cones and before the through-ball line. The offside rule applies.
- The defender may not leave the line between the cones.
- The goalkeeper has to decide whether to come out and block or stay put and save.
- Once the exercise has been completed in 1 lane, the exercise starts in the opposite lane.
- Play 2 minutes each way and then swap the defender for an attacker.

Variations

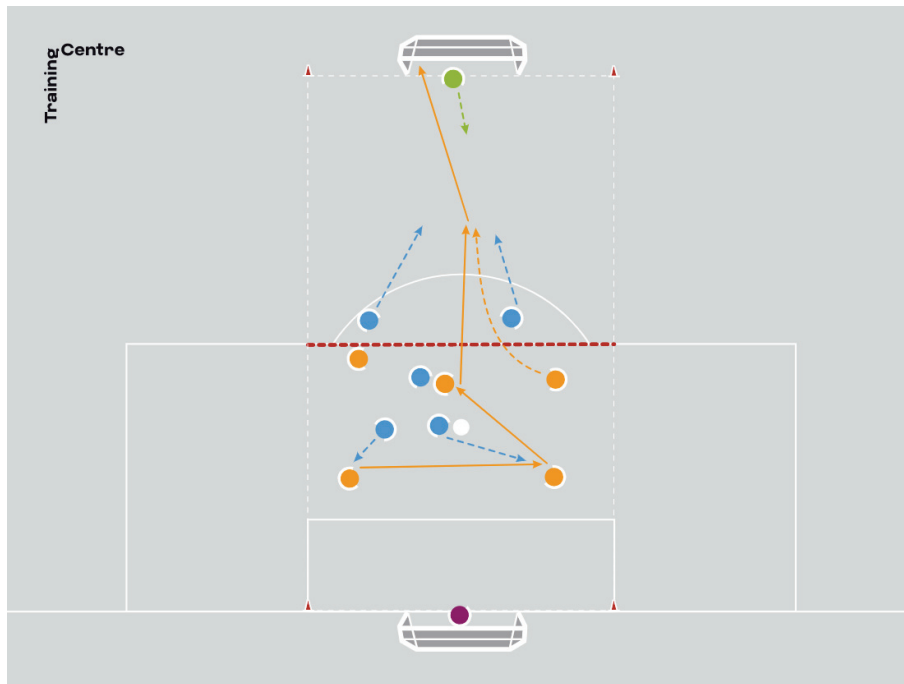
- Alter the distances between each goal to give the goalkeepers and attackers different spaces to work on.
- Work both sides and different angles.

Coaching points

- The ball should be slid through the 2 cones with precision to ensure the attacker can take a high-quality touch before shooting.
- Highlight the importance of the attacker's first touch when receiving the through-ball; they need to make it hard for the goalkeeper to react or predict where the shot will go.
- Early strikes will leave goalkeepers with little time to react, whereas delayed shots may force goalkeepers to move first.
- Reading the ball coming through and anticipating the angle will give the goalkeepers a better chance of stopping the shot.
- If the attacker takes a good touch before their shot, the goalkeeper should hold their position.
- If the goalkeeper leaves their final decision late, they can fool the attacker. They can feign a low posture to tempt the striker to lob them, only for the goalkeeper to stand up late and block.
- At a distance of 0-3 metres, goalkeepers should look to smother.
- Teach goalkeepers to watch out for passes played through at varying distances and angles.
- Potential action for goalkeepers to take:
 - Smother
 - Block
 - Spread
 - Reaction save (hand and foot)

PART 3: 5V5 + GKS - POSSESSION-BASED GAME - COUNTER ATTACKS

In this exercise, the focus is on springing the offside trap to create 1v1 and 2v1 chances, as well as breaking out in transition. The objective is for the team in possession to work the ball behind the defensive line using through-balls to create 2v1 chances. The game also encourages players to react quickly and make better decisions with the ball during the attacking transition to put team-mates through on goal. At the same time, it gives goalkeepers the opportunity to work on decisions when defending the goal and the space and to think about what action to take.



All of the outfield players play in one part of the pitch to begin with. The team in possession are looking to play through the defensive line, whereas the team out of possession are looking to win the ball back and break out quickly.

Organisation

- Mark out a pitch that is 30 metres long and 18 metres wide (see image).
- Mark out the offside line so that it is 18 metres from one goal and 12 metres from the other.
- Use 2 full-size goals, positioning a goalkeeper in each.
- Divide the group into 2 teams of 5 outfield players.
- To start with, position all of the players in 1 part of the pitch.

Explanation

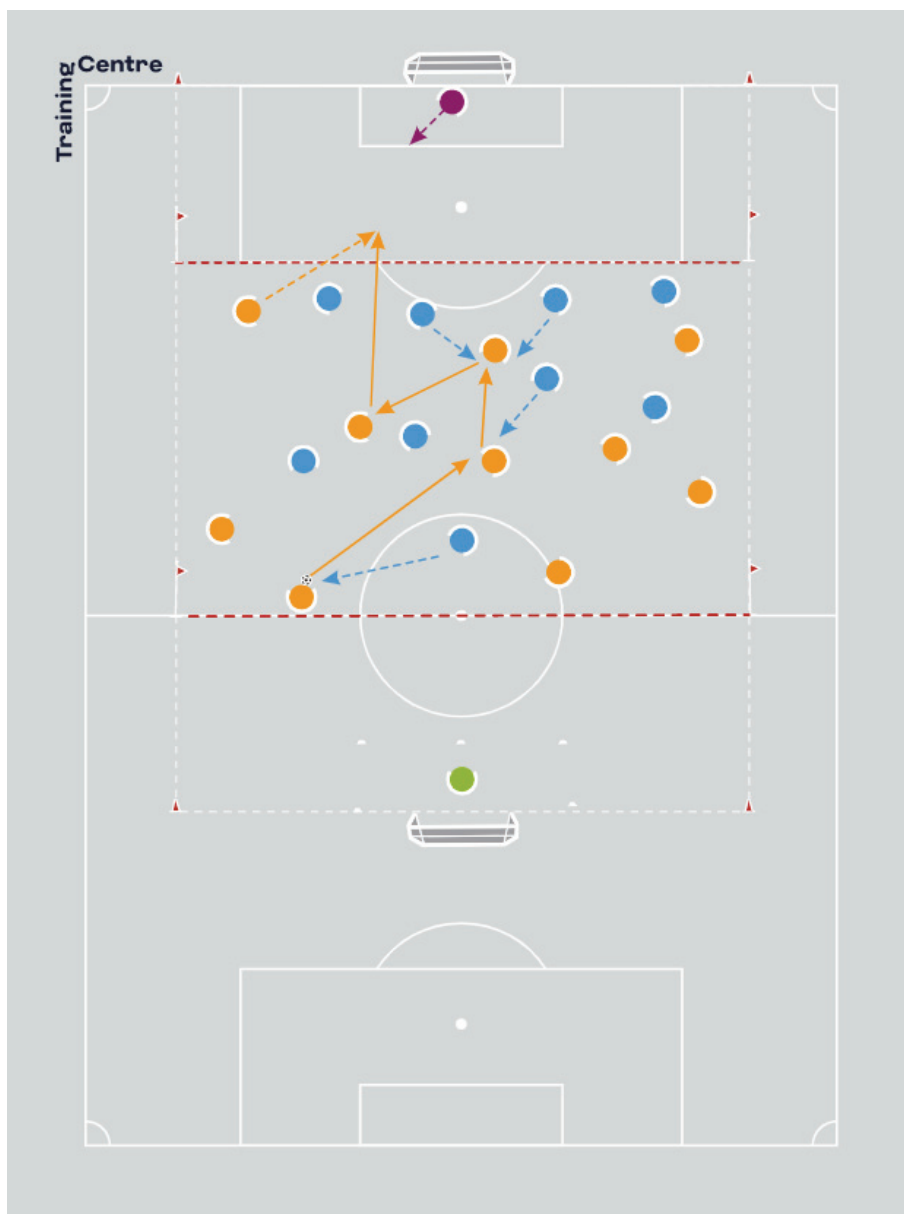
- The game starts with the coach putting the ball into play.
- Players from both teams start play exclusively in 1 part of the pitch.
- The halfway line acts as the offside line and the offside rule applies.
- The team in possession look to play in an attacker behind the offside line.
- Once the ball passes the offside line, the defending team are not allowed to follow play into the other part of the pitch.
- If the team out of possession win the ball back, they should break out quickly and try to score in the side they were defending. The defenders essentially become attackers to "play in" on goal.
- Once a goal is scored or the ball ends up with the goalkeeper, all of the players transition to that side of the pitch.

Coaching points

- The defending team should hold their line and make it difficult for the opposition to play through-balls.
- Quick reactions are needed to ensure that the team that win the ball can break away at speed and get a striker in on goal.
- The team in possession should be continuously making runs across the defensive line to look for breakaways.
- Players in possession should be encouraged to play forward and not from side to side.
- Focusing on quick counter-attacks provides a sense of realism and allows players to create more chances.
- Potential action for goalkeepers to take:
 - Smother
 - Block
 - Spread
 - Reaction save (hand and foot)

PART 4: 10V11 GAME - BREAKING DOWN A DEEP 4-4-1 STRUCTURE

To end the session, a 10v11 game is played to further develop some of the aspects previously emphasised. With larger and smaller zones to defend, the goalkeepers have to prepare themselves differently. The smaller space allows the goalkeepers to practise working with a team defending deeper, whereas the larger space gives them the chance to focus on larger movements and playing in a higher line.



The attacking team have to break down the defending team using their extra player. A pitch with two different-sized zones gives the goalkeepers a chance to work on different scenarios.

Organisation

- Mark up a pitch the same size as the one shown in the image.
- Mark a line 6 metres in front of the "unmarked" goal.
- The usual halfway line acts as the offside line for the team with 11 players.
- Use the penalty area in front of the opposite goal to signify the goalkeeper's space to defend.
- This line should also act as the offside line for the team with 10 players.

Explanation

- 9 outfield players plus a goalkeeper defend the goal with the smaller space.
- 10 outfield players plus a goalkeeper defend the opposite goal with the larger space.
- The defending team (team of 10) should use a 4-4-1 structure and be hard to break down.
- The attacking team (team of 11) strive to break down the 4-4-1 structure.
- The goalkeepers should adopt different approaches based on the different spaces in which they are working.

Coaching points

- Attacking players should check the goalkeeper's positioning and look to test them if they see they are vulnerable.
- Goalkeepers have to link their positioning to their decision-making, and their decision-making to their actions, when defending the space. Their positioning will define the decision they make. If they make a decision first, this could cause problems.
- Constantly scanning for triggers and cues will allow goalkeepers to respond better to what is happening.
- Larger movements are needed for the goalkeeper defending the larger space, who has more ground to cover.
- Managing their defenders and giving them information throughout the exercise will help goalkeepers to avoid becoming vulnerable (i.e. having to face 1v1s or 2v1s).
- The attacking team should constantly look for through-balls to create 2v1 situations.