

AFC WIMBLEDON

Neal Ardley Defending principles in units

Overview:

This session is about working with team mates to stop opposition teams playing beyond you, by simple balance and communication that can be taken into a bigger realistic practice.

Players at all levels need to be reminded of the principles outlined in this session. After all, more and more now, opposition teams are playing good football between the lines, so poor defensive shape and balance can leave players and defences exposed.

We saw the positive elements of this session come forward in our recent FA Cup second round match at MK Dons. Although we lost the game in injury-time, we succeeded in nullifying the hosts' significant attacking threat in central areas.

DEFENDING PRINCIPLES IN UNITS

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 44x43 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goal

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 11

SESSION TIME

35mins

What do I get the players to do?

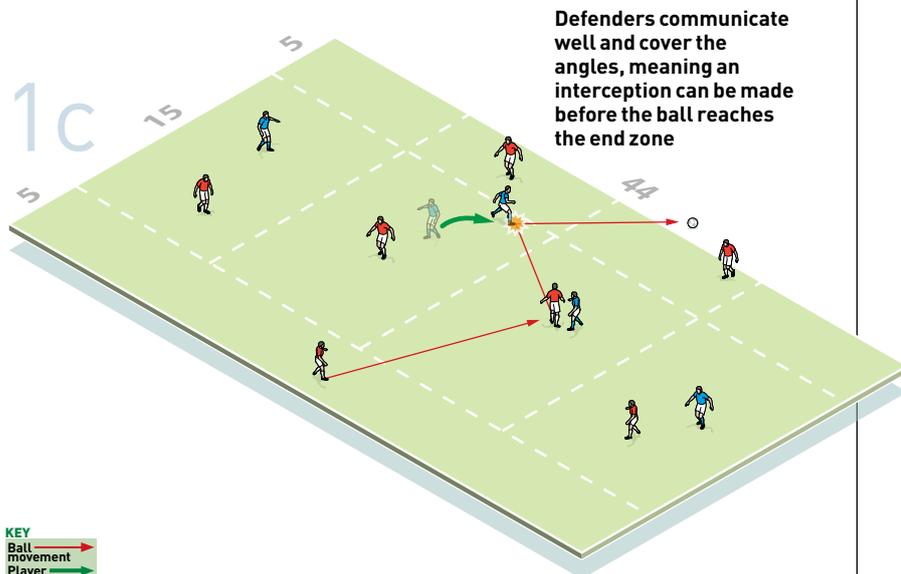
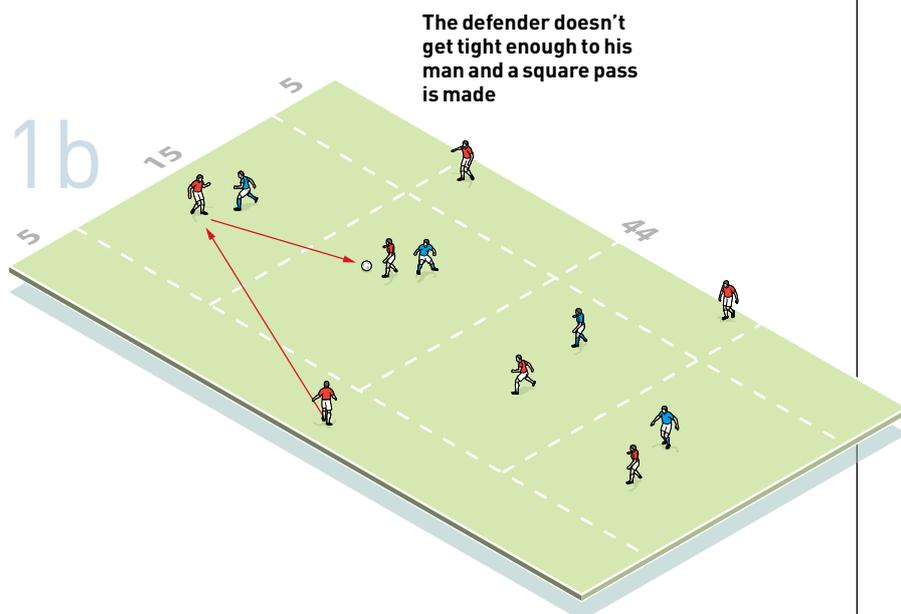
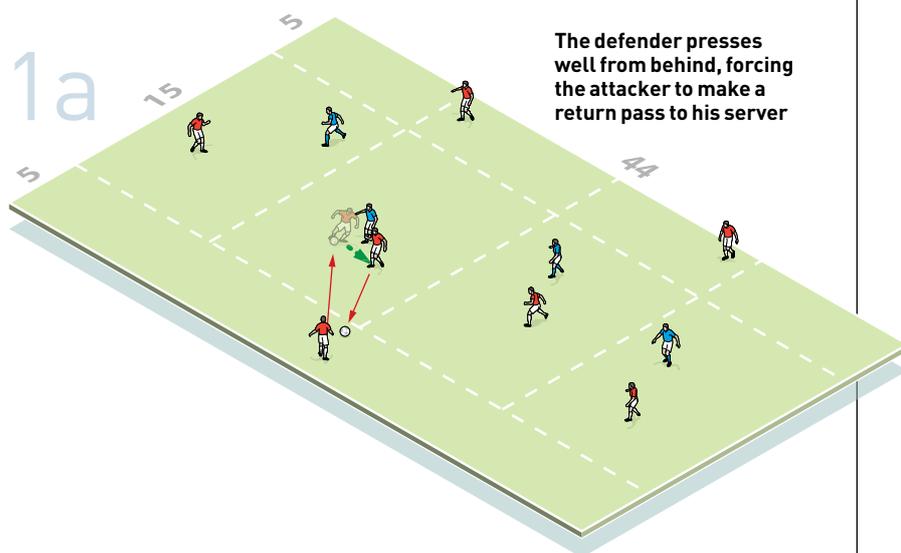
Using a 44x25-yard area, we set up as shown. In the bottom channel is the server, while in the other we place two centre-forwards.

The server begins by playing in to any of his team mates (1a). Receiving players have three options:

- (a) Play back to the server (one- or two-touch)
- (b) Playsideways to a team mate in any of the other three boxes (1b)
- (c) play into a centre-forward in the end zone (1c)

Attacking centre-forwards in the end zone can only receive passes in a different box to the player passing to him. Doing so earns them a point.

Defenders have to stay in their zones until the ball is moved into the end zone, at which point they can recover into any area. Good covering is essential so easy passes aren't allowed into the centre-forwards. Defenders score by turning over possession, then making three passes or laying back to the server.



KEY
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble - - - →



Neal Ardley
AFC WIMBLEDON

Neal Ardley succeeded the popular Terry Brown in charge of npower League Two side AFC Wimbledon in October 10, 2012, having spent five years developing players as Cardiff City's Academy Manager. Ardley's immediate task is to retain the Kingston-based club's Football League status this season, and in his opening months in charge he has succeeded in solidifying a previously leaky defence.

As a player, the 40-year-old midfielder made 245 appearances for Wimbledon, plus had spells at Watford, Cardiff and Millwall.

“Defenders should never be square of one another, and must be ready to make a recovery run after a press and when the ball goes beyond them.”

DEFENDING PRINCIPLES IN UNITS

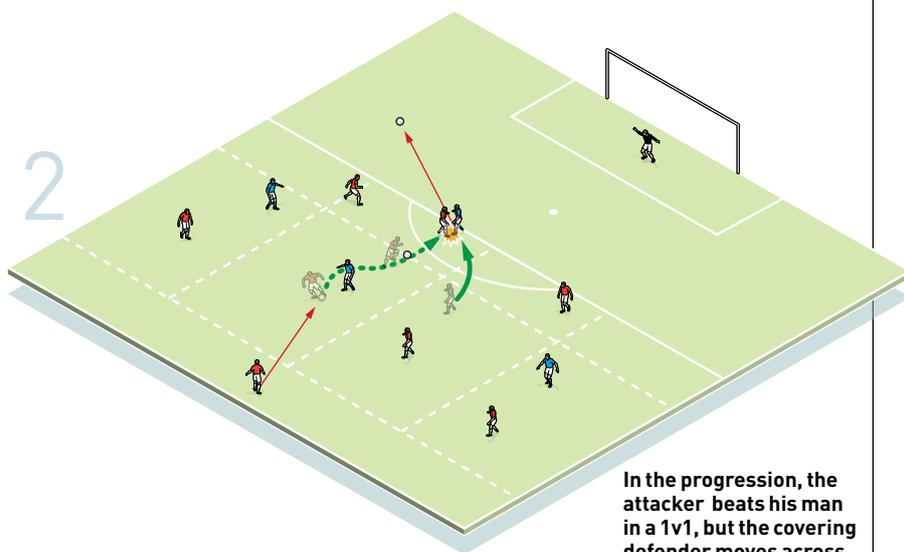
What are the key things to look out for?

Defenders must press at high-intensity. They need to know what's behind them to help the angle of the press, and must communicate with and cover team mates to stop the ball being played between them. They should never be square of one another, and must be ready to make recovery runs after pressing, or when the ball goes beyond them.

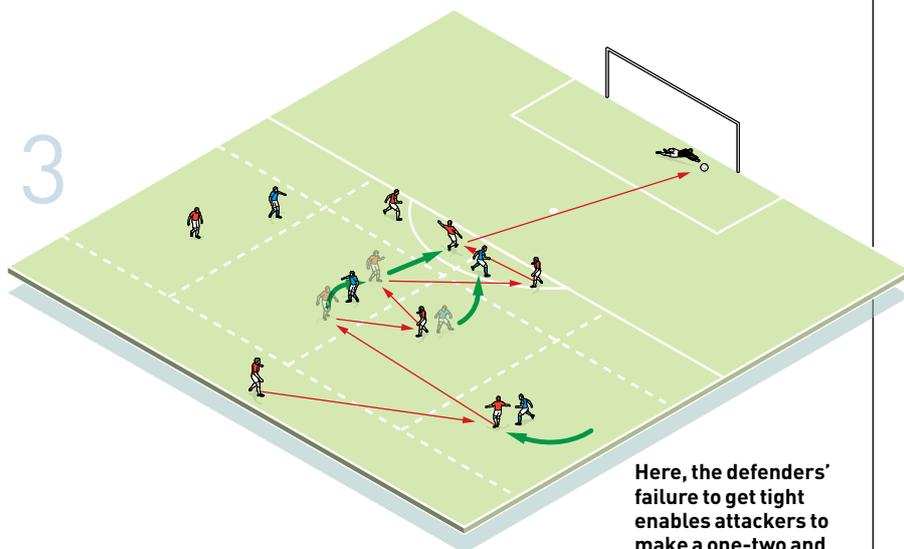
How do I progress the session?

Now add a penalty area beyond the end zone, with a goal and keeper in place (2). Here, we offer an added opportunity for the receiving player who, if he beats the defender 1v1 and moves into the end zone, can have an attempt on goal - scoring earns an additional point.

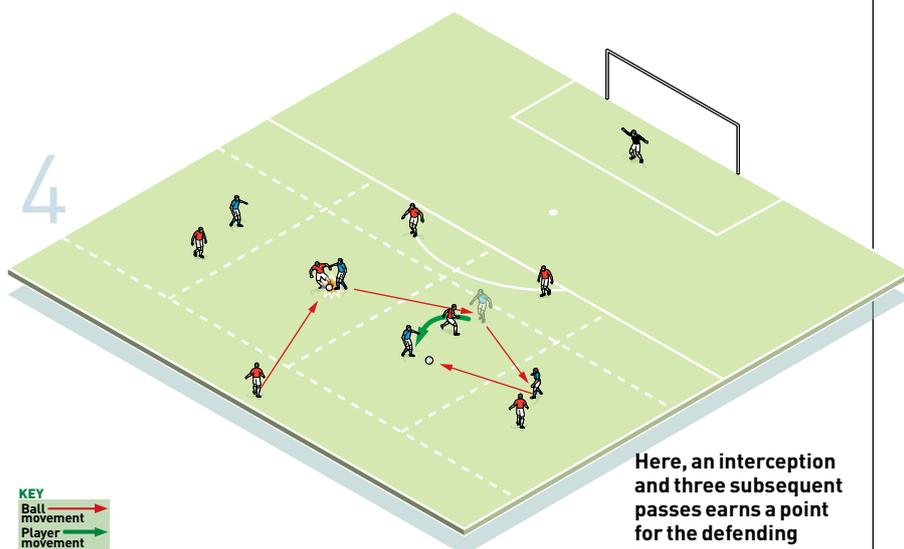
Alternatively, the forward can make a one-two with the centre-forward before an attempt on goal, but centre-forwards cannot turn and score (3). For a point, defenders still need to make three passes (4) or must feed the ball back to the server. ■



In the progression, the attacker beats his man in a 1v1, but the covering defender moves across to block his path



Here, the defenders' failure to get tight enables attackers to make a one-two and attempt a shot at goal



Here, an interception and three subsequent passes earns a point for the defending team

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Dribble →