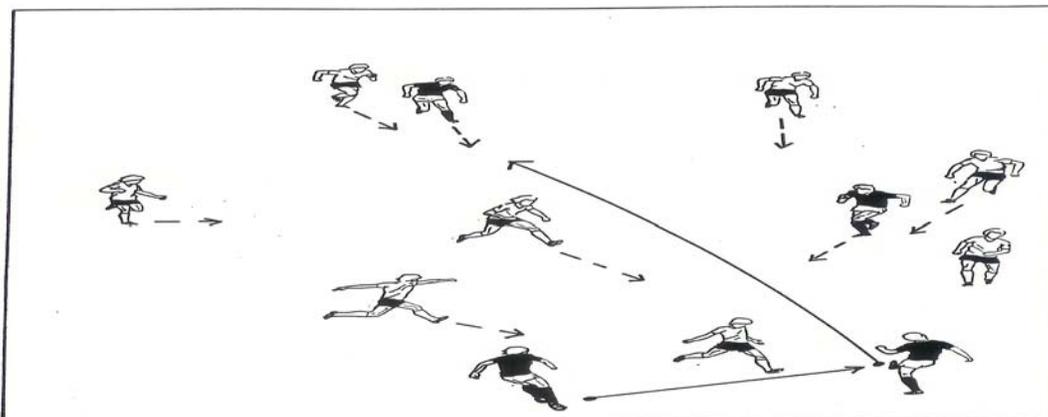


DEFENDING ... How To Intercept Passes

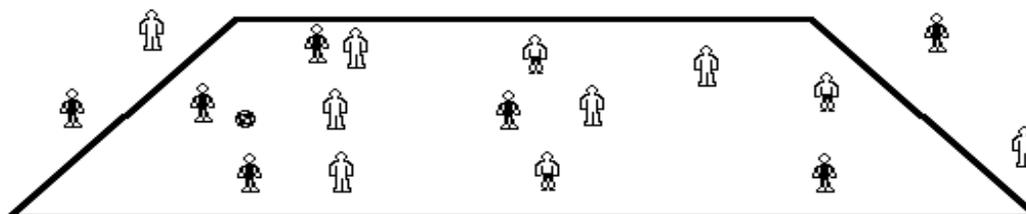
Sam Snow – Director of Coaching Education for US Youth Soccer



Two teams of four to eight players – one team of four to eight plays possession soccer while the other using only half of its players at a time defends – after one minute the defending team replaces the players who have been in action with their remaining resting players – after another minute the teams change roles. Scoring: the total number of interceptions achieved by a team will dictate the result of the activity.

Coaching Points:

- Read the head and eyes of a potential receiver. Has he taken a look to see where you are or is he unaware? Can you get in on his blind side and intercept with him being unaware until it is too late?
- Read the receiver's body posture. Are his hips turned toward the passer? If so then he may have lost vision of the field and is vulnerable to interception.
- Read the receiver's feet. If he is flat footed and/or immobile then you can run around him to get between him and the ball to intercept.



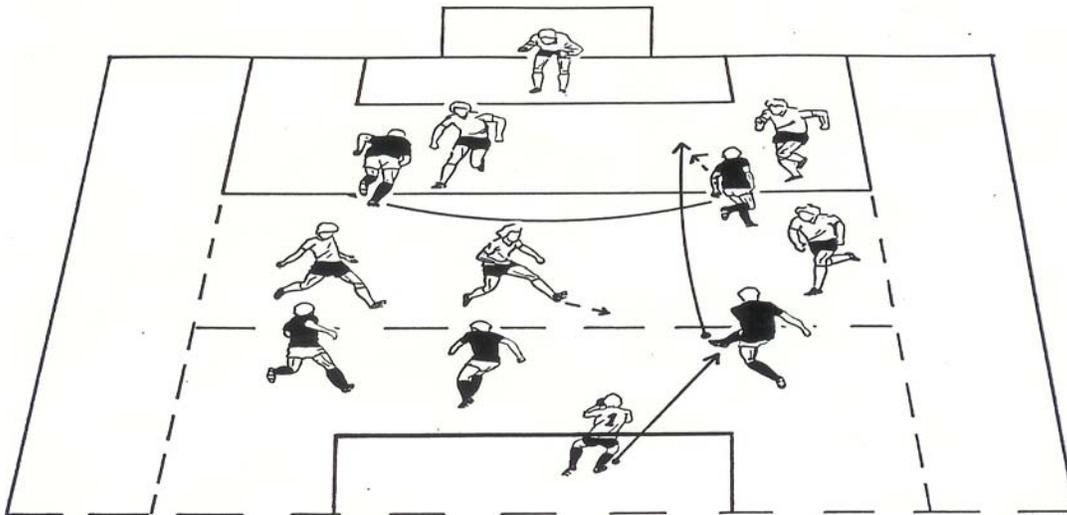
5 v 5 + 3 - have target players of each color on each end line. The game is played with three neutral players. The team in possession plays to the target of their color on an end line. The player who plays the ball into a target then replaces the target who comes on to the field as the team then attacks in the opposite direction. Teams score by playing the ball into one target and then, in the same possession, play the ball to the opposite target.

If the play becomes too direct, then each team must make five consecutive passes before they can score.

The game then progresses to 7 v 7 plus 3. Teams defend an end line, and the ball turns over when a point is scored. Stopping the ball on the end line scores points.

Coaching Points:

- Body shape when pressuring the ball as the first defender. Speed and angle of approach will also affect whether the first defender should jockey, shepherd or tackle the first attacker.
- Does the first defender recognize the possibility of interception? Teach how to step in-between the ball and the dribbler.
- Defensive team shape, positioning as opposed to positions, to create the proper distance and angle of support to the 1st defender. This will require verbal and visual communication on the part of the defenders, so look at the players' heads to see if they are scanning the field.
- Do the defenders recognize when to mark up goal side and when to mark up square on? Do they understand how to get ball side of their mark?
- Are the defenders working as a group in a numbers down situation by staying compact?

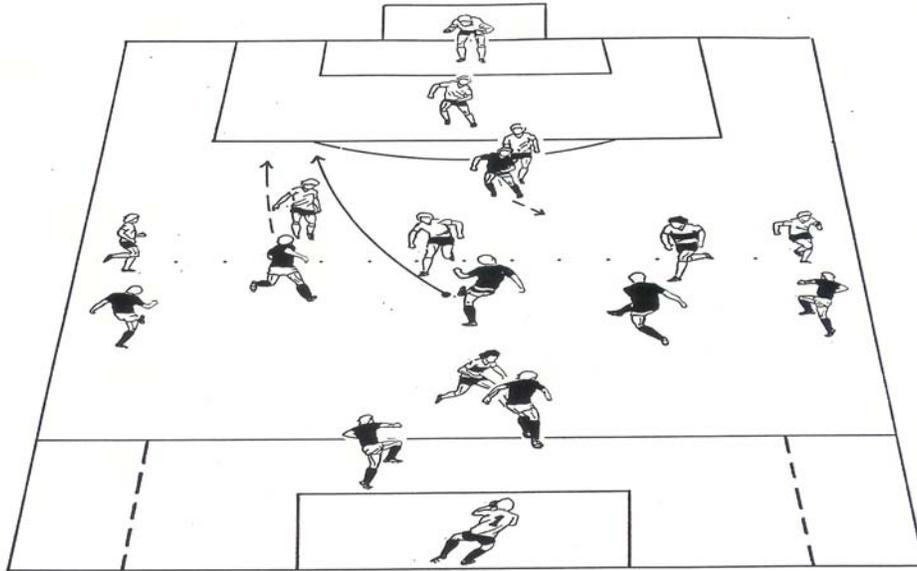


Two teams of five plus goalkeepers play a normal game until a team scores. When a team scores they cannot score again until they lose a goal. The winning team tries to play possession soccer. The losing team plays high-pressure defense to regain the ball and score. When an equalizer is scored the activity returns to normal.

Coaching Points:

- Read the pace of passes. Is the pass too slow giving the nearest defender a chance to step in and intercept? Is the pass too hard and a chance may occur where the ball is not fully controlled by the receiver and a chance to step in between him and the ball may occur?
- Read the angle of passes. Is the pass putting the receiver into a position away from his support? If so then a chance may occur to intercept or tackle the ball away.

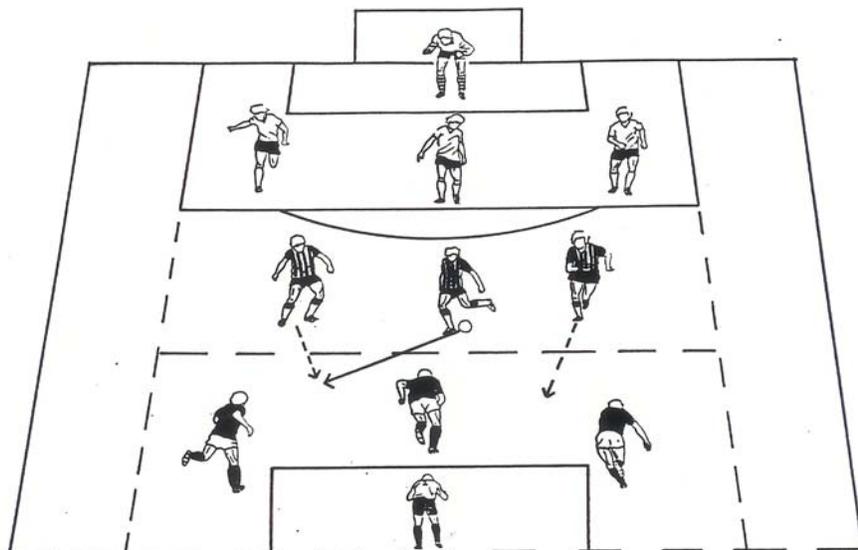
- When playing high-pressure defense in this activity look to play even with your mark and ball side to increase the chance for interception.



Play 8 v 8 plus goalkeepers and each team nominates two key players (a schemer and a striker). These players must be clearly identified and must be strictly marked during the activity. When in possession a team must play through either of their key players before they can score.

Coaching Points:

- Does the eye and head movement of the passer give away the intended receiver? If yes then you might be able to anticipate the pass and move in for the interception.
- Are the key players making runs to get open to receive the ball or immobile?
- What type of off-the-ball runs are the key players making? Is there a pattern to the runs, which you can anticipate and then move in for the interception?



Three teams of three to five players place themselves in three zones. Designate two neutral goalkeepers. The team in the middle zone starts with the ball and begins an attack. The defending team must remain in their back third until they gain possession. If the attacking team loses the ball they then defend and try to regain possession and score. If the attacking team scores they try to stop the new team in possession from reaching the middle zone and if possible regain the ball and score again. Once in the middle zone the team in possession launches an attack towards the group at the opposite end.

Winners: team competition – group with the most goals wins

Goalkeepers: keepers with the fewest goals against wins

Coaching Points:

- Are defending players getting goal side?
- Are defending players getting ball side?
- Are defending players physically ready and mentally alert to the chance to intercept passes?
- Are defending players scanning the field and reading the body language of the attackers?
- Are the defending players recognizing technical errors by the attacking team and pressuring those mistakes and thus creating chances to regain possession of the ball?

Many of the coaching points are written in query format to encourage coaches to use guided discovery as their main coaching method. This means the coach will need to think about how to form guided questions to bring out good tactical thinking on the part of the players.

