



Five Favourite Practices of Les Reed Director of Technical Development, the English FA

Working with the Back

The following article is from Insight Magazine and was first published in Fall 2000.

Much has been made of the use of a back four as opposed to a three, especially during Euro 2000. Many pundits, coaches and former England players discussed the virtues of one over the other.

It was interesting that all four semi-finalists and World and European Champions France used a back four and before you say Italy played with five they certainly employed four when defending really mattered and they demonstrated that switching during the game or even during a phase of play to four defenders could be used to great effect.

For me a back four enables better defending of the full width of the pitch and secondly it actually does have good attacking options when employed properly.

PRACTICE 1

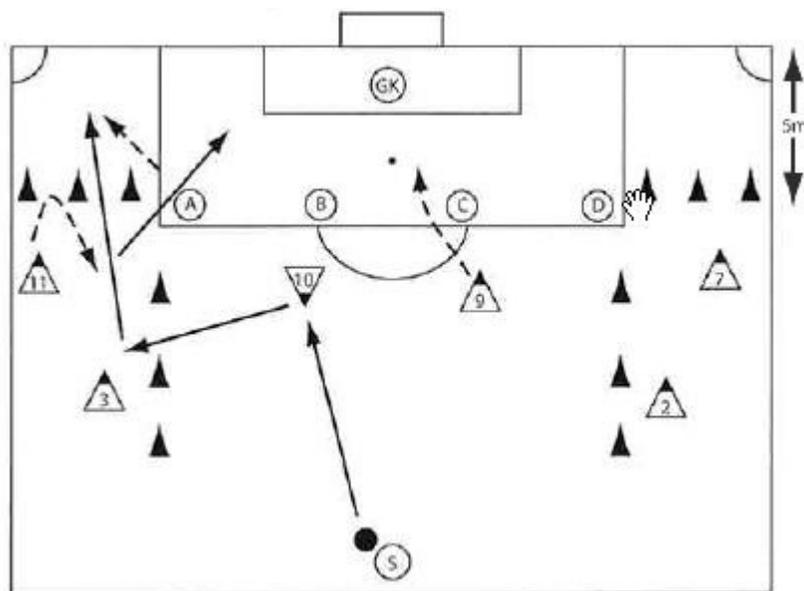
Objective: Holding the line - defending from flank attacks.

Organization

A line of cones is placed five meters in from the edge of the penalty area down the sides. Another line extends the sides of the box.

Wide attackers 2, 3, 7 and 11 start in the zone outside these markers. The back four A, B, C and D mark up against 10 and 9 in the central area.

A server (S) plays a ball to the left sided striker 10, who must lay off to 3, who plays the ball into the zone beyond the markers. Player A must put 11 under pressure as he retrieves the ball. 11 must now bring the ball back across the line of markers before crossing into the box for the run of 9 attempting to strike at goal. The practice is then repeated to the right.



Practice 1

Coaching Points

- The movement of the back four up and down as a unit (ie adjusting to the movement of the ball and the pressurizing of A.)
- Distance between the players (what is it they are defending?)
- The positioning of the second defender (where does B go?)

- The relationship with the goalkeeper (where does C go?)
- Defending the far post (where does D go?)

Progression

- Allow 11 to pass back over the cones to 3, who can deliver. Back four will now have to push up quicker.
- Allow 3 to go back to server, who can switch play to 2. Back four must now move up and across.
- Speed the switch up by allowing 3 to hit a diagonal to the other corner (i.e. 7).

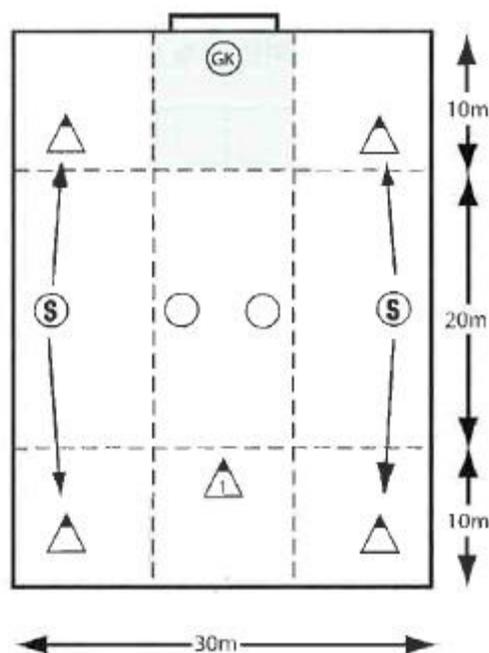
PRACTICE 2

Objective: Technique practice for players in the above exercise.

Aim 1 to get into shaded area- onside- to score.

S can serve forward or backward Defenders (circles) must defend the goal in relation to the ball and attacker (1)

The defenders and 1 must stay central. Attacking players can switch play square or diagonally.



Practice 2

Coaching Points

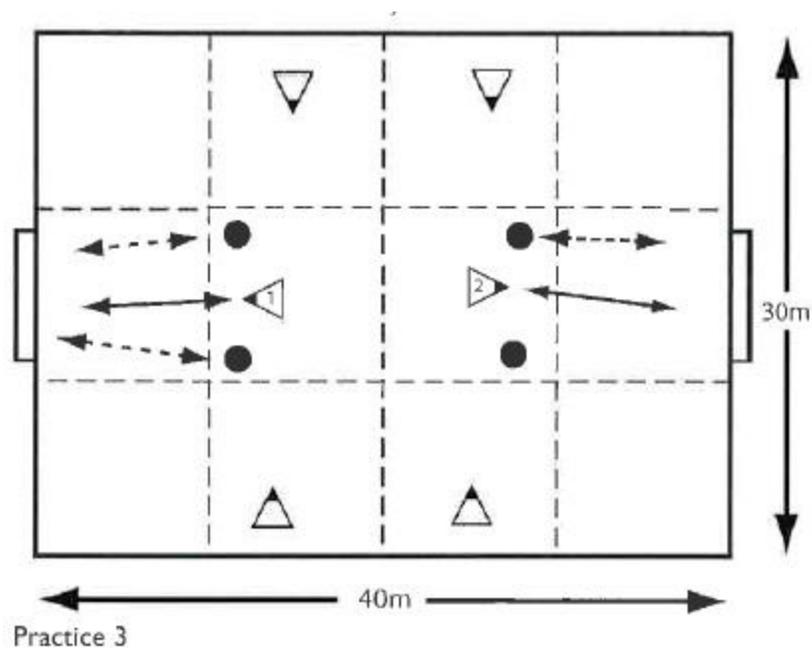
- Body shape and position
- Feet positioning
- Movement of defenders
- Defending critical space
- Defending against the attacker
- Relationship with goalkeeper Heading, blocking, tackling, intercepting

PRACTICE 3

Objective: Switching on/off – concentration

Similar practice to the previous one but attacking players can switch attack in either direction.

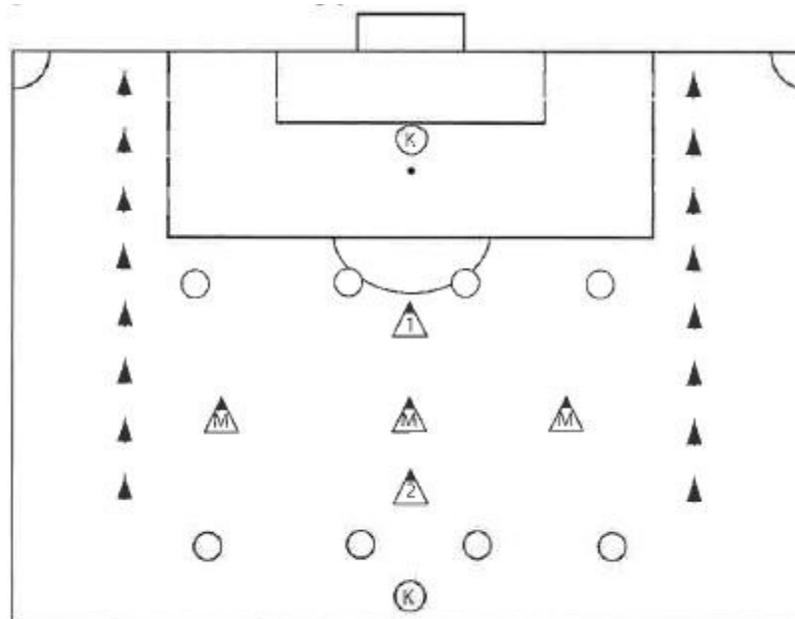
Defenders and strikers only work in one half



PRACTICE 4

Objective: Concentration - defending from central attacks. This practice takes place on half a pitch with the flanks coned off. The back four stays compact and narrow. They must stay alert at all times.

The practice can be quite exerting and frequent rests should be given. This is a squad practice using eight defenders. Central midfield players could and should be given practice in the defending positions.



Practice 4

The goalkeeper (K) starts by throwing a long ball into the opposing back four. It is headed out by a defender. The strikers and midfield players pick up the loose ball.

If striker I gets to the back he can turn and attack the goal or lay the ball off to a supporting midfield player. The defenders must defend the action.

If the defenders win the ball, they hit the striker in the other half and the opposite back four begin to defend

If the move breaks down in any other way, GK starts the practice again.

The key to the practice is that the midfield trio can change the direction of attack at will so both sets of defenders must be prepared. This will also involve being ready to push on to players in midfield, something back four players can be reluctant to do. This is an excellent practice for coping with playing against one up front

PRACTICE 5

Objective: Playing out from the back with a back four. The essence of back four defending is holding the line, getting narrow and compact and closing all the gaps. Many back four players are comfortable with this and all by nature reluctant to do the opposite in possession of the ball.

The first thing to affect if you want to pass the ball well from the back is attitude - not just the players', but your own! There appears to be an inbuilt fear in many of us that is triggered when our players play tight football at the back, yet we praise and admire it in others. By conquering this fear and affecting attitudes, we can open the door to a host of passing opportunities for our defenders without risk to security and improve their image and self esteem rapidly. It does however, need practice. This final practice is only the beginning!



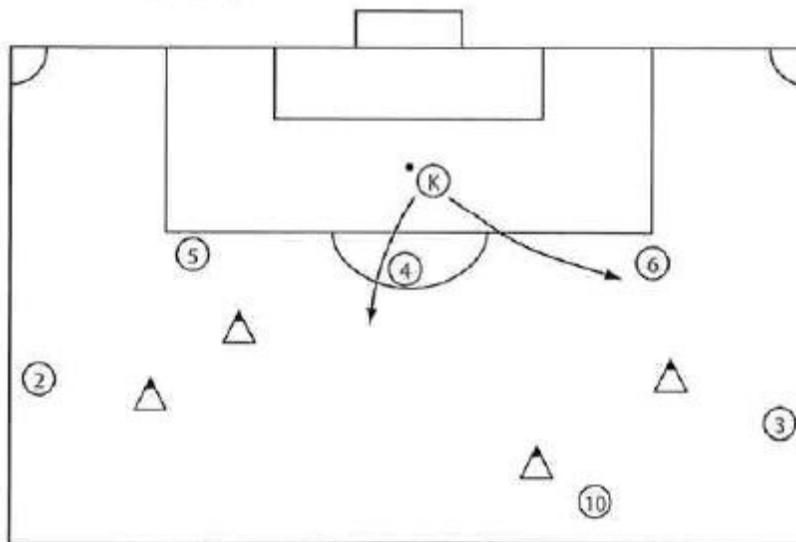
Practice 5-1: Set-up.



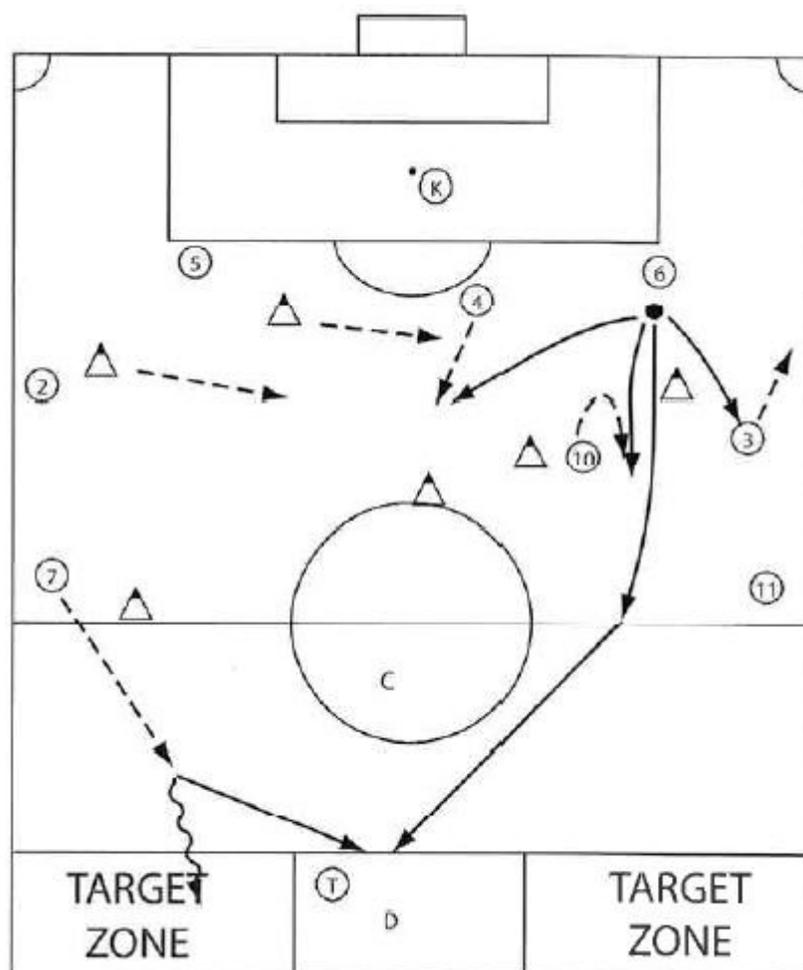
Practice 5-2

Phase of play - spreading out to create space and passing angles.

- Coach delivers to K (Practice 5-2). While the ball is traveling and clearly in safe possession, Os spread out and stretch. They must do this positively and with complete confidence, no half measures.
- Central defenders 5 and 6 run to the corners of the box (at least); 2 and 3 (fullbacks) more wide (touchline) and behind the outside shoulders of the wide opponents; 7 and 11 (wide flank attackers) move as far wide and as far forward as they can go without running offside; 10 (left midfield player) pushes forward beyond the outside shoulder of his opposing midfield player.
- The triangle players will react to this movement and leave up to two free players to whom the keeper can deliver the ball (Practice 5-3). If the defenders try to go half and half, they will leave several more delivery options.
- The movement of 4 is dictated by the movement of the striker, who cannot mark both central defenders - one of 4, 5 or 6 will be left open.
- Once the ball is delivered, the triangles will react again, allowing further passing opportunities for the O team.
- In Practice 5-4, 6 has plenty of forward passing options from which the attack can be sprung.



Practice 5-3



Practice 5-4

The object is for an O player to be played into the target zone through combination with T, who can join in once the play has moved over the halfway line. The practice is designed to achieve:

- Good possession in the middle third
- Spaces through which to pass
- Spaces in which to run

- Good passing angles
- Controlled forward play

Coaching Points

- Positive movements
- First touch
- Quality of delivery
- Body positions
- Passing angles and distances (support)
- Timing (runs and deliveries)
- Decision making
- Security movements.

This practice must be developed to I I v. I I

Title	Five favorite practices of Les Reed, Director of Technical Development, the English FA: working with the back four.
Author	Reed, L.
Source	Soccer journal (Mission, Kan.)
Publisher	National Soccer Coaches Association of America
Vol Iss	50(1)
Date	Jan/Feb 2005
SIRC Article #	S-984291

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