

When to use an Open Defence and Why?



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Many teams have used this form of defence In the last few years, especially, the teams from Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia) and also some of the Arab Countries.

This has not been a tradition in Europe, but recently some teams used what they call «activated defences», sending forward one or two players to do different kinds of pressing in the offensive zones.

Very often, the teams and coaches, that are not used to this kind of defences, consider them chaotic or anti-handball defences, but my first objective with this article is to explain that they are not chaotic or lacking methodology, but rather to the contrary, they are well worked out with many hours of training dedicated to their objectives, principles and strategies.

It is difficult for the mentality of the European coaches to think of using this kind of system because normally it is considered as a defence where too much is at risk, which is true, but it is a calculated risk, because with a great amount of training and tactical discipline, we can reduce the number of errors. This kind of defence, no doubt, has risks, but also provokes many mistakes in the opponent's attack. I would like to explain what I understand as open defence:

1. First of all, they are zone defences. The zone to be defended has been increased in depth and width, but regardless of that, it continues to be a defensive zone because the idea of help between the defenders still remains, unlike the individual defence, (man to man), which does not have that help.
2. These defences are characterised by the anticipation over the attackers, instead of re-

acting to the movement of the offensive players.

These two concepts are very important for the comprehension of the functioning of the open defence.

The purpose of this article is not to explain any particular defensive systems, either « 3 – 3» or « 3- 2 – 1» or « 1 – 5», but there are a series of aspects that are common to all of them.

Fundamental Principles

1. Basic position: 8 – 9 m, this returning to 6m, if necessary (and not the opposite).
2. Depth of 10, 11, 12 m invading the offensive zone.
3. Retain the following as much as possible:
 - depth
 - width
 - density
4. To invade the areas of creation attack, assuming the initiative and trying to break the offence:
 - To stop the attack completely
 - To slow it down
 - To break the liaison between the lines (first and second lines, right and left sides, or isolate certain players).

Requirements

1. Physical
 - Displacement capacity: frontal, lateral or backwards
 - Power: change of direction, sudden stops, etc.
 - Agility
 - Aerobic and anaerobic endurance.
 - Coordination: legs, upper body, arms, etc.

2. Psychological

- Self-confidence
- Concentration
- Control of the aggressiveness
- Spirit of sacrifice
- Tactical and technical discipline:
 - global and special situations
- Adaptation of the referees' criteria

Types of Open Defence

1. Offensive Zone (Help)

- More deep and wide but keeping all the principles of the defensive systems, playing against the man and the ball.

2. Man to Man

- Individual defence, playing against the ball, positions and defensive work in the passing lines and working without help. As we have said before, this kind of defence is not the one we are discussing in this article.

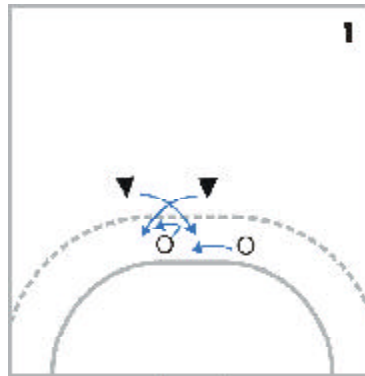
3. Special Strategic Situations

- «Isolations» in the wings or any other position with surprising double guarding (2:1)
- Provoking interceptions in certain positions by pressing others, (eg.: press the centre to force the pass from back to back and intercept it).
- Pressing all the positions after a player dribbles and takes 3 steps and jumps.

In order for these defences to be successful, there are certain actions that the players must be very familiar with and be trained extensively so they will be able to master them without any problems.

Exercises

1 x 2 – Against crossing



2 x 2: Against Pick and Roll (counter-blocking)



At the front:

- no change of opponent
- to warn the advanced player
- to control the pivot
- to break the block anticipating and gaining the space.

From behind:



- to warn the advanced player
- to control and accompany the pivot
- the advanced player makes a step back.
- change of opponents



At the front with change:

- to warn the advanced player
- to control and accompany the pivot
- to change the opponents
- to intercept the pass, going in front of the pivot.

Any of the three are valid but we encourage the use of the first solution to provoke more anticipation and aggressiveness.

Change of opponents

It has to be done in the same defensive line. It will be initiated by the defender whose opponent does not have the ball.

In situations one 1 x 1 and 1 x 2 with final actions there are no changes.

Lines of help

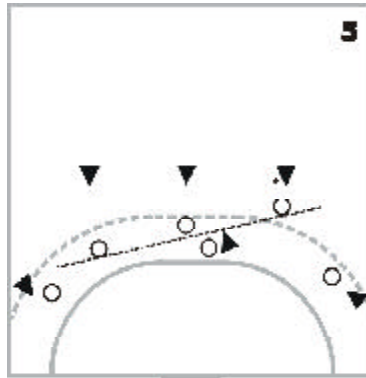
It is important that the work of collaboration among defenders, depending on the different defending systems, involves a series of movements and strategic positions of the defenders. The defenders whose opponents do not have the ball must move in order to help the defenders whose opponents have the ball.

This way we reduce the spaces between defenders next to the ball as much as possible, at the same time keeping good strategic positions against their direct opponents (possible receptors of the following pass) or also interfering in the lines of passes.

Table 5 and 6 are examples of lines of help in the defence 3 – 3 which is perhaps the most typical system of the open defences.

Table 5: With ball in the left back, the defender against the central and the right back will move back to “close space” and at the same time the defender in the centre is ready to intervene helping the defender of the left back in case there is an error 1:1.

Table 6: The same with the defender on the left moving back even to help the work against the pivot. The first and second defender on each side must work together not to facilitate the 1:1 with big spaces.



Advantages

- It will give us the opportunity of stopping the other team in case we have smaller sized players.
- We will put greater pressure on the ball carrier and possible receivers.
- We have constant initiative in defence against the man and the ball.
- Could be very useful if our goalkeeper is not very good from the 9 m.
- Psychological pre-disposition:
 - No rest
 - Less help
 - Continuous concentration
- We are in very good position for the fast-break after we recover the ball.

Disadvantages

- Less density, which means bigger spaces among defenders
- Less possibility of help
- Bigger physical and psychological effort
- Higher risk around the 6 m line
- We have to pay attention to the referees' criteria
(possible risks of disciplinary actions if they are not used to this kind of defence)

When and Why to Use This Type of Defence

I think these two questions must be answered in connection with the advantages we described before and we will use this type of defence when we can use the positive points to improve our chances of success in the game.

Therefore, we use it:

1. When we do not have a very tall and strong team so our chances of stopping and blocking the attacker of the opposite team are low.
2. If we play against a very organised and tactical team, we stop or bother their tactical work or at least make them change their tactical system.
3. If our goalkeeper is not very good against shots from the 9 m.
4. If we want our team to anticipate and become more aggressive against the trajectories of players and ball when we are in defence.
5. If we need to change the score of the game and we do not have much time left and we do not want to wait for the other team to decide the rhythm or the initiative of the attack.
6. If we want to surprise the other team changing the pace of the game for some minutes, or to change the way they are playing in attack to provoke some errors before they adjust to this kind of defence.

There are two more reasons that I consider very important in these kinds of defences:

- a) We can use it as a way of training, in any way (physical, technical and tactical), the philosophy is very clear, we prepare our players to defend a bigger zone which goes to the 12-13 m increasing the difficulties of space / time / opponent, which will facilitate when they will be defending more closed defences. The physical component of the training, the displacements, distances, speed and speed reaction is bigger and the intensity of the work is higher.
- b) It is essential that this kind of work is done at the beginning of the learning process of the development of the players. The younger players should be exposed to all these experiences in bigger spaces and working and guarding the opponent at close distances but also becoming aware of attacking and interfering with the line of the passes.

Examples of Practical Sessions:

Warm up: each player with one ball, working in pairs

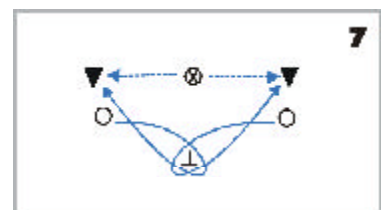
1. Dribble keeping the distance (one metre) in all directions
2. Dribbling : at signal each player leaves his ball and starts dribbling somebody else's ball.
3. One in defence, one in attack – different contacts
4. Lateral contact with arm – changing ball from hand to hand
5. Four players : Passes A – C and B – D. A and B try to touch the others passing ball when they do not have the ball.
6. Running and doing all kind of coordination exercises keeping the ball, executing all kinds of technical movements (dribbling, feinting, auto-passes, different rhythms, different directions).

Games:

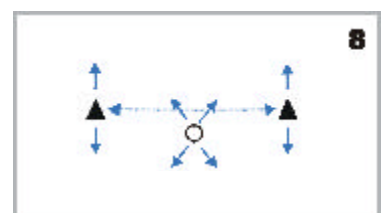
1. Seven players with ball and dribbling, plus one extra player without ball. At signal, change the balls.
2. Two players passing the ball, trying to touch each other, when they do that he/she will join the first two and continue chasing the rest of the players.
3. Two teams of four players (area of 9 m) do 10 passes between themselves. The rest of the players try to intercept. When they do that, the four players will start counting the passes from zero again.
4. The same, but the team in defence must touch the attacker when he has the ball.
5. The same, but the passes must be done while jumping continually and with two hands.
6. 4:3 interceptions

Foot Work

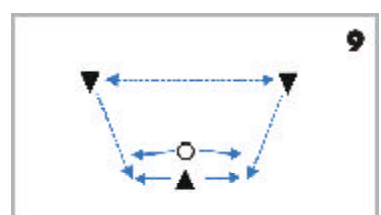
Guarding / Interceptions



In front / lateral / From behind

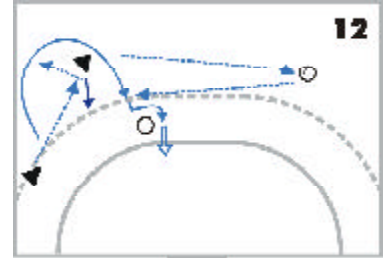
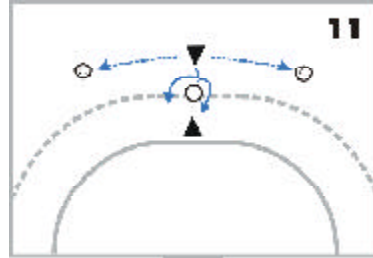
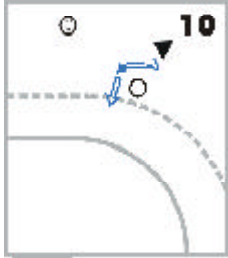


Different Orientations



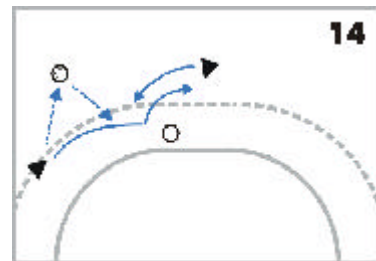
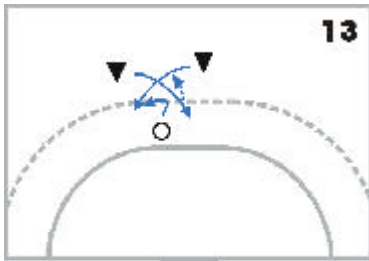
1 x 1 Feints and Shooting

One player turning back passes the ball between his legs, turns around and defends 1 : 1. Continuation of this exercise will be if the player decides not to finalise the feint and passes to the coach, who will pass to the pivot and the player must defend. This can be done in any specific position.



1 x 2 Crossings

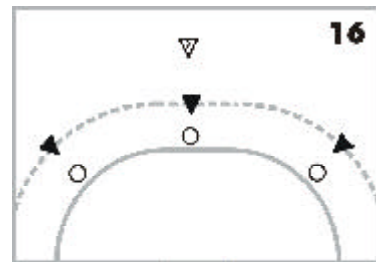
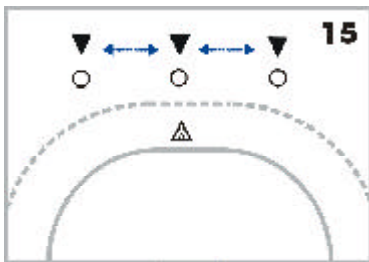
Other positions – wing / back shooting from the first line or passing to the pivot in the same side.



3 x 3

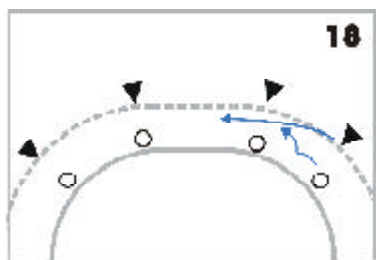
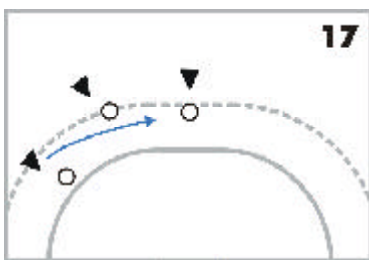
a) pivot only passing

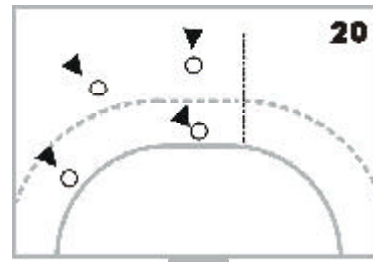
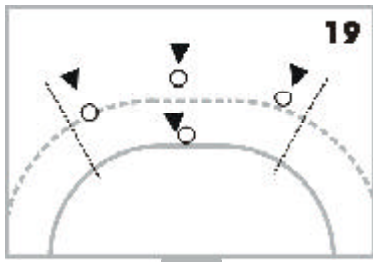
b) centre only passing



c) wing always circulating

4 x 4

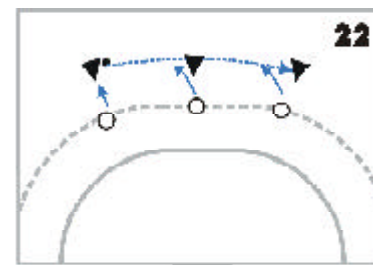
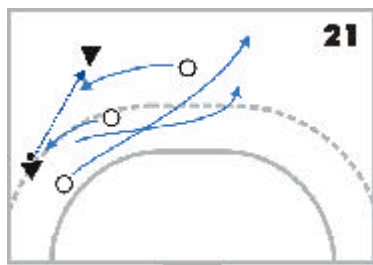




Exercises for the "special situations":

3 x 2: pressing the wing

4 x 3: pressing the centre, intercepting the backs



Global Situations

5 x 6

7 x 6: to improve the 1 x 2 in each position.
Extra work in each position

