

# Coaching Defensive Play



## **Coaching Defensive Play in Gaelic Football**

### **Philip Kerr and Paddy Flynn**

Tackling is at the core of good defensive work, but so are principles like delay, control, balance, concentration and depth.

These exercises bear this in mind and are different to purely tackling drills and link exercises [drills and games] to observation of real play. Whether it is through watching live football or a video recording, opportunities exist where coaches may glean information about individual players or groups of players and their defensive frailties.

As you read the transcript of the session, think how you might observe some matches this coming season and use aspects of them and design drills and games in order to improve one or more players in your squad.....and remember... DRILLS ALONE will not solve your problems!

*Observing Aspects* - spot and fix problems

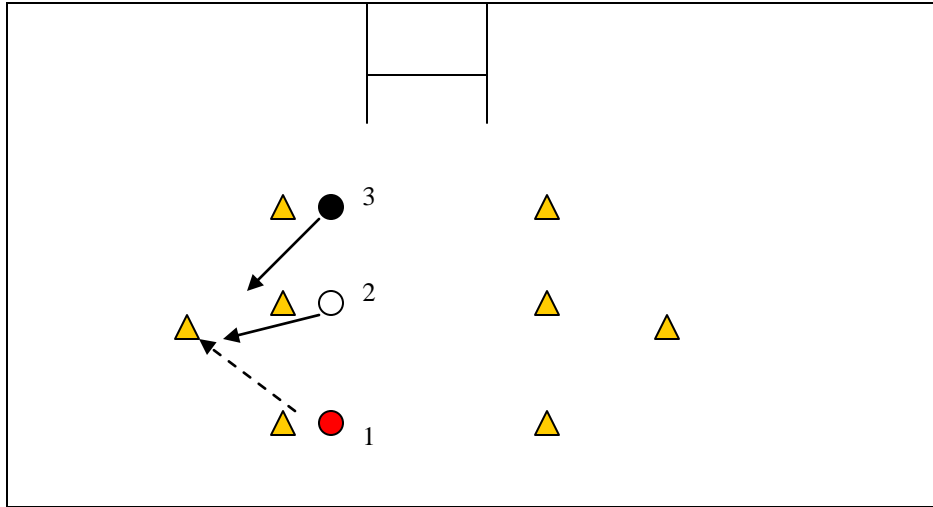
Taking the Tyrone v Dublin All-Ireland Semi-Final 2005 (drawn game) as an example two defensive plays have been chosen to analyse.

Both situations from that particular match are chosen to help us design some practical exercises to highlight observation Aspects and effective “Spot and Fix” Coaching.

The first two match situations were run as drills, i.e. **(a)** and **(b)**

**(a)** The ‘**Sherlock v McMenamin**’ play – it happened twice in the first half (8th and 29th minute) Sherlock scoring on both occasions.

Instead of playing the ball from a 30m kick pass, shorten the delivery into the one-v-one drill to reduce the chances of the ball going astray. Main coaching points were about footwork, focus on midriff, knowing if opponent favours a particular foot.



Red player (1) is the feeder [shortened to 5m from the action]. White is Sherlock (2) and the Black player (3) is McMenamin.

White (2) starts the drill by moving quickly to the cone set at an angle to the rest.

Black (2) responds to close white (1) down.

White (1) turns to feint and side step, trying to throw Black (2) off balance and make room for the shot.

The action all takes place on or about the 20m line.

Players rotate to suit.

The main coaching point is that the defender (Black) should stay balanced and focused on his opponent's midriff rather than follow the feint.

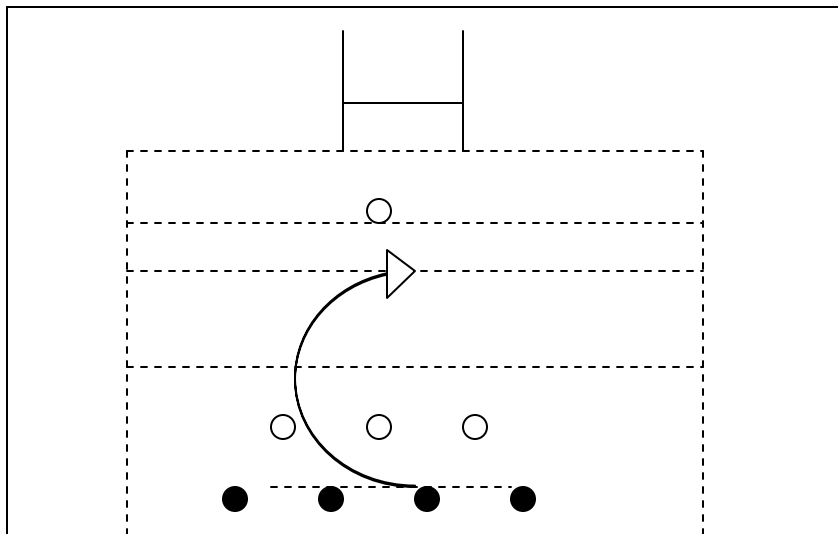
Repeat the drill on both sides or the pitch

(b) 'Over the Top' game – across the pitch and with 3v3, 4v3, 3v4 and 4v4 combinations to replicate the first-half long pass in from Paul Casey, which flew over the Dublin forwards and was swept up by Chris Lawn. Players [both forwards and defenders] found themselves chasing towards Lawn – how do the backs work it out? Are forwards drawn to the ball? Where will the extra man go?

### Over The Top (Game)

A 4v4 exercise where 4 attackers (Black) line up along the halfway line and 3 defenders (white) face them 5m away. [Defenders may even start in press-up position].

The final defender stands some 20m behind their teammates.



The width of the playing area is set at 30m-40m [use multimarkers and one sideline].

One attacker has the ball and lobs it over the line of defenders towards the lone player.

Defenders are forced to turn and find support positions.

The attackers close down the defenders who must work it out over the halfway line to earn a point.

Should the attackers win the ball back, they must work it over the 20m line to score.

Swap roles, repeat, give players the chance to work out moves etc.

To make the link between the “Over the Top” game and the situation that existed for the Dublin goal (14 passes etc. 36th minute) the “Lose it/Win” it game may be used. Brian McGuigan’s shot had landed in the goalkeeper’s hands and Dublin moved the ball upfield to score a goal.

Players often find themselves drawn to the ball when they have little or no chance of reaching it – leaving an opponent free to continue the move.

### **Lose it/Win it (Game)**

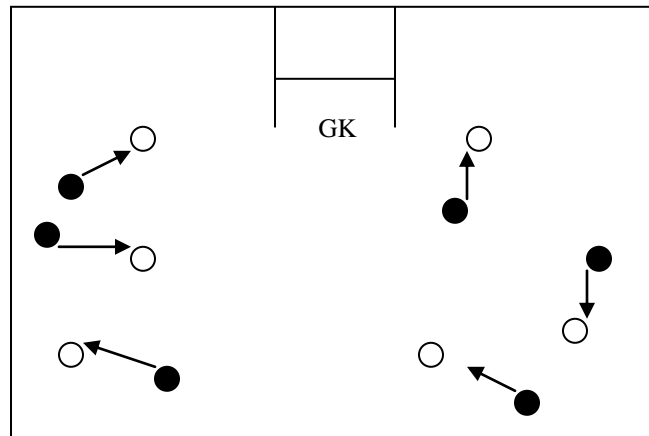
Simulates those match situations when forwards have made good runs to get a pass from midfield but the pass has been misdirected and ended up with the opposition goalkeeper.

To properly copy this, force forwards to stand at multi-markers at least five or six metres away from any backs.

The ball starts with the goalkeeper. The ‘keeper throws it in the air and catches it to signal ‘game on’.

The forwards (Black) immediately try to stop the backs (White) getting the ball out easily and carrying it over the halfway line.

Do this over and over to work on suppressing a forward’s instinct to simply watch where the ball goes and to improve their ability to close an opponent down.



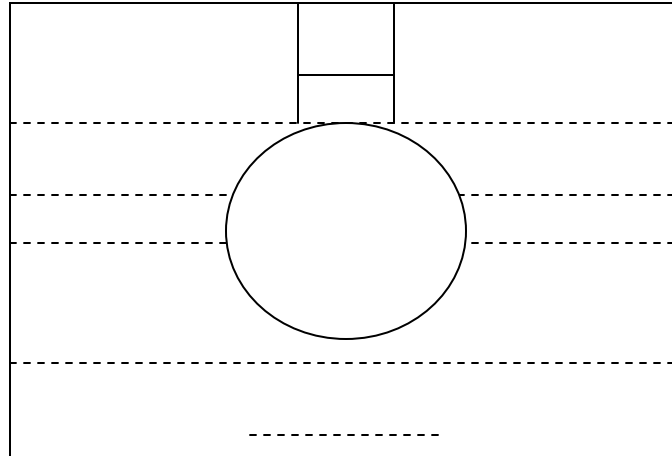
Pay the Price – with reference to a number of situations where both Tyrone and Dublin ran at opposition defences – one in particular - 47th minute- Dublin 1-11 Tyrone 0-10

Dublin kickout, ball broken down to Sean Cavanagh – he runs at Dublin and is forced wide - all other players are picked up - he is 25m out and posing no real danger – Paul Casey shoves him in the back – Stephen O’Neill scores

Pay the Price is designed to make players do their jobs and refrain from fouling in the scoring zone.

### **Pay The Price (Game)**

What about a game to allow defenders to work on tackling without fouling? What if the same game gave forwards the incentive to get closer to goal and even draw 'frees' from the opposition?



Set up a large circle [diameter 40m]. Play backs v forwards to the halfway or far 45m line.

The goalkeeper plays for the defenders. Start each play with a kick-out. Let the forwards take possession and attack. Only points count.

Should the attackers shoot and score from outside the circle, they are awarded 1 point.

A score from inside the zone earns 2 points. A 'free' scored from inside the zone earns 3 points.

Defenders must work to keep the scores to a minimum, so they must make sure they do not commit fouls inside the zone and that they mark tightly enough to keep down the number of 2 point scores. Defenders can earn scores for themselves, by winning the ball and working it up the pitch to cross the halfway line or far 45m line while still in possession. The coach can determine how many points should be given. This shows defenders that if they are too rash and if the defence lacks balance they will pay the price!

Having looked at defensive play from forwards and from backs, take a situation from the middle part of the field – from kickouts – the best example from the match came on the 60th minute – Dublin kickout- 1-12 apiece – Brian Dooher is under the flight of the ball but doesn't contest it – instead, he breaks free from the midfield bunch to take a pass – no Dublin player follows as all. They are in the middle, still drawn to the ball– Dooher kicks a point. A 4v4 exercise called 'Breakout' works on defending against this.

### **Breakout**

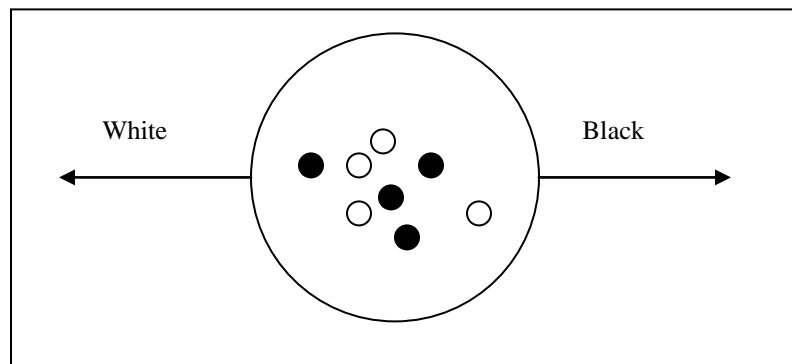
Set a circle along halfway line. 8 players inside. Lob the ball in [instead of kickout]. Team that wins the ball must work it with max. two-touch football over the 20m line.

Emphasis is on team that loses ball. Players must develop defensive instincts where they are NOT drawn to the ball player, but can switch quickly to mark another opponent and cut the ball player's options.

Only one player needs to tackle the ball player head on.

Once a play is finished, have 8 more ready to step in.

Keep rotating.



### **The 'Two Players' game.**

This allows most to take part in a normal game, while two players [in direct opposition – e.g. one midfielder from each side] are taken aside before the game and quietly given the following rules by which only they must play:

Should one or the other score during the game, the actual score will be trebled [e.g. 1 point = 3 points...1 goal = 3 goals].

Should either assist a score [i.e. final pass], the score will be doubled.

This is best used to force 'lazy' player who only likes going forward to work harder and learn the value of covering back.

Remember, should any coach have two 'lazy' [but talented] players in the team and not address the problem during sessions, the chances of success on the pitch are minimal!

### **Coaching Card**

Things to look out for in defensive play:

Does your player tend to rush into the tackle?

Are they easy to evade? (poor footwork)

Do they forget to cover back for teammates?

Do they tend to follow the ball and lose track of their direct opponent?

Are they caught out of position very often?

At the end of the short game, you should give constructive but positive feedback to your players. Defensive play takes effort, practice and willingness to listen to be improved.