Defend deep to counter-attack

Age: 14 - Adult

Number of players: 18 (two teams of 9)

Difficulty: Medium

Area/Time: 80 x 50 yards (30-45 mins.)

Drill objective(s):
1. Learn how to regain possession in the own half.
2. Learn how to counter-attack in different ways.
3. Develop understanding when to counter-attack.

Organisation:
Small Sided Game 9v9

Mark out 80x50 yards pitch as on diagram. Prepare min. 4 spare balls. Two teams play in specific formations. Provide tactical instructions for each team:
Attacking team:

1. 9 players
2. 1-2-3-2-1 formation
3. Attack should be made patiently (GK building up from the back, team plays through the thirds as a priority)
4. Players number 2 and 5 act as a full backs as well as wingers
5. Rotation among three central midfielders (numbers 6, 8, 10)

Defending team:

1. 9 players
2. 1-2-4-2 formation
3. See tactical instructions in Key Coaching Points section

Instructions:

Game starts when the ball is played in by player no. 1 of the attacking team. There are no corners for the attacking team and no goal-kicks for the defending team (game starts from attacking player no. 1 from the goal kick). After 20-25 mins move to SSG with no conditions. Two teams compete and attempt to score.

Scoring:

Both teams score into the full sized goals.

Key Coaching Points:

1. Compactness in defence
   - Main roles of the strikers (9, 10): prevent playing through the defensive midfielder (6), intercept forward passes into the midfield, force central defenders to play through full backs, isolate full backs and block their passing options. Additionally, one of the two strikers should drop deeper and mark defensive midfielder when the ball is in between striker and midfield formations.
   - Main roles of the midfielders (2, 6, 8, 5): prevent forward passes to strikers, track runs of the opponent midfielders (around own zone), restrict space for opponent midfielders (prevent turning, dribbling, passing, shooting).
   - Main roles of the defenders (3, 4): restrict space for opponent striker (prevent turning, dribbling, passing, shooting), provide support for midfielders, prevent long ball played in behind.
   - Main roles of the goalkeeper (1): cover space in behind defenders, prevent scoring.
   - Apply pressure on ½ of the pitch. Strikers start to pressurize players around the middle circle.

2. Forcing play.
• Force opponent into wide/middle areas.
• Block passing options when the ball is in the wide/middle area. Prevent switching play if the ball is wide. First priority is to regain possession. If not possible, force opponent playing backwards. That gives time to shuffle sideways without opposition progressing forwards.
• Regain possession (prior to SSG, practice technique and skill of 1v1 defending, intercepting and tackling)

3. Recognize situation. Is it the right moment to counter attack? Where is the space? How many players do we have up front? How many defenders does opponent have? Is the opponent organised/disorganised?

4. Transition to attack. Priority is to progress forwards (immediate or delayed).

First options (depending on player characteristics, available space, organisation of opponents, score, zone of regaining possession etc.):
- Pass forward into space behind defenders
- Pass forward into striker’s body
- Run with the ball/Dribble
- Pass/RWTB sideways/backwards followed by forward pass.

4. Support. On regaining possession (better players can predict it), support should be offered immediately for player in possession (after forward pass is made).

5. Squeeze. As the ball travels forwards, the team needs to move towards the direction of the attack.

6. Speed and quality. Every action should be made at maximum pace. However, quality should be still high. Even if the simple pass is made inaccurately, counter-attack will not be effective.

7. End product. Finish the counter-attack with shot on the goal or switch into positional attack (possession based) in the final third.

**Progressions:**

1. Challenge striker (Can you receive in behind of the defence? Can you turn against a defender? Can you win 1v2 situation?)

2. Challenge midfielders (Can you provide immediate support? Can you receive the ball and win 1v2 situation?)

3. Coach counter-attacking from set-plays.

4. Set more difficult challenges for units and team (Can you score after counter-attack? Can you make a right decision whether to counter or settle?)

5. Move to 11v11 game.
Diagrams:

Diagram 1 – Compactness in defence. See roles of formations in Key Coaching Points section.

Diagram 2 – Forcing play. When the ball is played to fullback, players number 9, 10 and 6 block the nearest passing options.
Diagram 3 – When the ball is in the defending half, players number 10 and 9 don’t attempt to be in front of the ball line unless defensive midfielder (6) or one of the central defenders (3, 4) made a forward run. Two players positioned in behind of the ball line provide the opportunity to counter-attack more effectively.

Diagram 4 – Pass in behind the defence. When defending deep and opponent is playing through the thirds, there is a lot of space created in behind of the opponents defence. If the ball is played to the striker into free space, it is always a danger for slow defenders who can’t read the game well.
Diagram 5 – Pass into strikers body. This option provides the team with more time to offer support (players number 2 and 10 on this diagram) and use other players to progress forwards. It can also be used as an opportunity for striker to turn and exploit the space in behind.

Diagram 6 – RWTB/dribbling. On regaining possession the ball can be also moved forwards by running with it or dribbling depending on situation.
Diagram 7 – When possession is regained in the middle area, there is often a space created in wide areas which can be effectively exploited. On this diagram, we can also see a specific movement of player number 9 who creates space for player number 10 to run into.

Diagram 8 – Pass/RWTB sideways/backwards before progressing forwards. When regaining possession, first pass doesn’t have to be necessary played forwards. If the ball is played sideways/backwards, opposition mindset (usually it means pressing) is not prepared for the following quick forward pass and counter-attack. That can be used to create space in behind of the opposition defence and on the other side of the pitch (switch play). If it is not the right moment for counter-attack, then the team can start to attack through the thirds.
Notes:

As pressure is mainly applied on the own half, make sure spaces are tight and opposition players are well marked (between formations as well). That will enable the team to regain possession effectively. During the defending phase, ensure all players are communicating with each other. In addition to tactical content, players should switch their mindset into attacking when they regain possession. The best players can even predict when the team will regain possession and react (movement to counter-attack) just before it happens.