



# Reactive footwork

Footwork in defence is often a poor relative of attacking footwork. A well balanced defender can react to changes in attacking lines, close down the space and make more effective tackles. This session builds on individual defensive footwork before putting the skill into a simple defensive system.



### What you tell your players the session is about

1. Keeping balanced as a defender and reacting quickly to the attacking options.
2. Making stronger tackles as part of a dynamic defensive line.

### Session planner

Warm up	Session	Development	Game	Warm down
5-7 mins	10-15 mins	5-7 mins	10-15 mins	7-10 mins

Activity	Kit	Outcome
Warm up	Tackle shields, cones, and/or agility ladders	Prepared for contact and footwork
Session: individual reactive defensive footwork	Two narrow corridors of cones as per the diagram and a tackle shield	Defenders staying balanced and reactive to changes in angle to make tackle
Development: reactive defensive footwork as part of unit	Three corridors as above, side by side, with two cones about 10m in front of the two end corridors. A ball	Units of three defenders using footwork and maintaining against a live attack
Game: small-sided conditioned game	A 30m wide, 20m long box, with two 5m gates at either end of the defending line	Defenders realigning and reading attacking movements

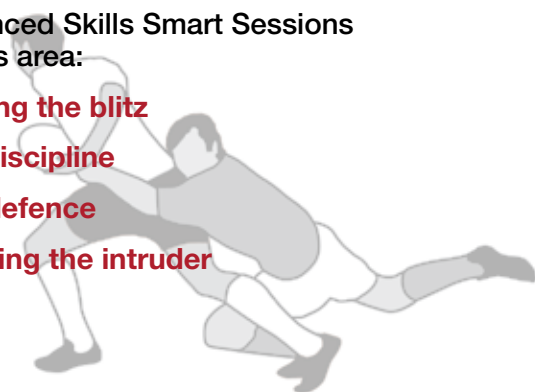


### Where it fits

**Player skill:** Tackle situation  
**Tactical skill:** Defence & defensive systems

Other Advanced Skills Smart Sessions covering this area:

- 123 Building the blitz
- 124 Line discipline
- 137 Drift defence
- 138 Covering the intruder



### What to think about

The triggers or visual clues that defenders can use to work out which way to move.

- Defenders should look ahead and if they are one-on-one, focus on the ball carrier's core.
- They should remain upright until the last moment.
- They must keep their eyes open right through the tackle.
- If part of a system, they should move up in line with their inside and outside player (though this might be different for more sophisticated systems).
- In a system, the triggers to shift are based on the inside player telling the defensive line to move.

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## What you tell your players to do

1. Move quickly to close down the space in front of the attacking team, balanced as individual and in balance with the defensive unit.
2. Drive into the ball carrier, staying on your feet to show you are balanced, and that you are commanding the tackle situation.
3. Be aware of the attackers' movements and your own team either side of you.



## What you get your players to do

Start one player at the end of the longer corridor. He runs through the corridor using very short steps (don't use ladders because it makes players look down). When he comes out at the end of the corridor he drives into a shield carrier who is jogging through the other corridor and out to the side. The tackler must drive at hip height or below, and stay on his feet. You can take away the shield and have the "attacker" carry a ball as a development. Also increase the speed of the "attacker".



## What to call out

- "Look ahead and keep square (shoulders and hips ahead)"
- "Close down the space quickly, but don't leave other defenders behind"
- "Don't confuse talk for action"



## Development

Put three defenders at the end of three corridors. Either side of you, place a group of four players with a ball carrier nearest to you. The defenders run forward, with fast feet through the corridors. When they reach the end, they set quickly and react to tackle the attacking group you tell to go. Set the attacks off at any stage to keep the defenders guessing.



## Game situation

In a larger box, put three defenders in the middle of their try line, and two groups of four attackers each spread about 10 metres from the corners of their end. You indicate which attacking group to go. The ball carrier throws up the ball to himself high in the air and then the defenders run through a gate opposite this group and defend as the attackers move forward.

# Reactive footwork

direction of run → ground covered □□□□  
pass →



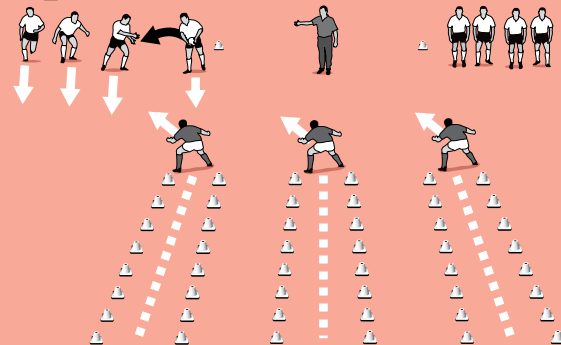
## Reactive defensive footwork



The defender uses fast feet through the corridor and tackles the moving bag at the end.



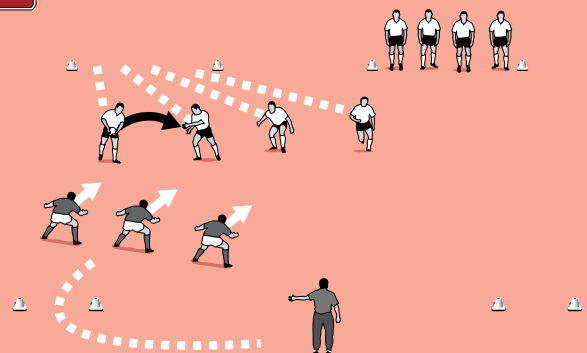
## Defensive footwork as a unit



The defenders react to the attacking options, sliding over if necessary.



## Small-sided game



Defenders run through cones opposite the attacking side who are about to go forward.

