After a playing career that took in stints at Clyde, Hartlepool, Falkirk and St Mirren, Jack Ross started coaching at Dumbarton in his native Scotland. He initially served the club as assistant manager but he also enjoyed a spell as caretaker manager of the first team. He subsequently moved to Heart of Midlothian to take charge of the club’s U20s.

At the end of 2015 he was appointed manager of Scottish Championship side Alloa Athletic, but he was unable to prevent the club’s eventual slide to relegation. However, he turned the fortunes of the team around and they were second in the League One table when he left Recreation Park to take over as manager of his former club, St Mirren.

In 2018 Ross led St Mirren to the Scottish Championship title and promotion to the Scottish Premiership. In recognition of this achievement, he was named PFA Scotland Manager of the Year.

He took over as manager of Sunderland in May 2018 and in his first season, he led the club to the final of the League One playoffs.

He returned to Scotland in November 2019 to manage Premiership club Hibernian.

**SESSION**

**IMPROVING THE DEFENCE**

This training session gives your players the opportunity to rehearse different kinds of defending, setting up situations where they are: defending individually in 1v1s; in pairs defending against a 3v2 overload; and defending as a unit against a 6v4 overload.

It is a physically challenging session, particularly aimed at developing the most pensive of players.

While it is primarily a defending session, there is plenty in it to keep the attacking players engaged throughout, as the onus is on them to create chances and score goals. Given that the attackers have an overload advantage for much of the session, it should give them plenty of encouragement.

The physical nature of the session for the defenders means that mental and physical fatigue will become a factor and should influence decision making and defensive solidarity.

Common themes to coach throughout this training session are body shape to defend, aggression, communication, organisation, the desire to defend, the role of the goalkeeper within games, and maintaining the correct distances so the back four shifts as a unit and doesn’t leave gaps.

We could finish the session by taking the principles that we have worked on into an 11v11 game, with the focus on coaching the back four. The game could be adjusted to 11v10 to ensure that one team faces a defensive challenge.
DEFEnding 1v1

We set up an area of 45x30 yards with two goals at each end. The playing area is divided into zones: a 15x15-yard box is marked out in front of each goal and there is a 15x30-yard central zone between the end zones, as shown [1].

We’re using 10 outfield players divided into two teams of five. Each team has three players in the central zone and one player in each of the two boxes at the end it is defending.

The coach starts play by passing into the central zone. The possession team with the ball are joined in the central zone by one of their defenders, giving them a 4v3 overload. The object of the game is to get an attacker from the possession team into a position to dribble into one of the end zone boxes to go 1v1 with an opposition defender. The attacker must then try to score in the goal in that end zone.

Once the players become accustomed to the game, we can progress this activity by allowing the other defender to slide across into the box that the attacker has entered to make it 2v1 in favour of the defenders.

We play two games of four minutes each.
DEFENDING 3v2 OVERLOADS

We set up a playing area of 50x70 yards divided into two side-by-side areas of 50x35 yards. Each of the two areas has a goal at the top end, as shown [2].

We’re using 10 outfield players split into a defending team of four and an attacking team of six. It’s 3v2 in favour of the attacking team in each of the areas and play starts with the coach passing into the attackers on one side.

The attacking team must then try to score in the goal in their area, but if the defenders make it hard, the attackers can switch play to the attackers in the other area if they can see a player in space to receive. We want to see the defenders focusing on handling the overload by showing attackers wide, using good communication and demonstrating a desire to defend.

We play four games of five minutes each. We can progress the activity by joining the two areas together and making the game 6v4 in favour of the attackers. This means the defenders have a decision to make: should they slide over to protect the goal under attack, or leave players in front of both goals to protect against the switch of play.

“"We want to see the defenders handling the overload by showing attackers wide and using good communication"
We set up a playing area of 60x40 yards with a goal and a goalkeeper at each end. We’re using five outfield players split into a defending team of two and an attacking team of three.

Play starts and restarts from the attacking team’s goalkeeper. The attackers must try to turn their 3v2 overload into goal scoring chances. We want to see the defending pair respond by showing the attackers outside, with the player nearest the ball going to defend. The defenders must work together to force play wide and communicate well with their goalkeeper to keep organised and clear the resulting cross, as shown [3].

If the defending team gains possession, they should counter-attack the opposition goal.

We play four games of five minutes each.

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We set up a playing area of 50x70 yards with two goals at the same end, as shown [4]. Both goals have a keeper and we are using 10 outfield players, split into an attacking team of six and a defending team of four.

Play starts and restarts with one of the keepers, who kicks the ball to the attacking team to receive and build an attack. The attackers can score in either of the goals. The defending back four should be encouraged to communicate with each other and keep well organised, moving across as a unit to react quickly to any switches of play.

We want to see the defenders keeping the correct distances between one another and they should demonstrate a high work rate to help them to combat the overload.

We play four games of two minutes each.

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We set up a playing area of 50x70 yards with two goals at the same end, as shown [4]. Both goals have a keeper and we are using 10 outfield players, split into an attacking team of six and a defending team of four.

Play starts and restarts with one of the keepers, who kicks the ball to the attacking team to receive and build an attack. The attackers can score in either of the goals. The defending back four should be encouraged to communicate with each other and keep well organised, moving across as a unit to react quickly to any switches of play.

We want to see the defenders keeping the correct distances between one another and they should demonstrate a high work rate to help them to combat the overload.

We play four games of two minutes each.
DEFENDING THE BOX

We set up a playing area in the final third of the pitch, with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end. We are using eight outfield players, split into an attacking team of six and a defending team of two, with a pair of attackers and a wide defender on each side of the penalty area and two central attackers in the centre.

In the first attack, the first wide left attacker goes 1v1 against the defender to try to cross the ball into the central attacker, who finishes on goal, as shown [5a]. After the first attack is dead, the second wide left attacker makes a run at goal against the same defender and tries to score with a shot, as shown [5b].

After the second attack is dead, the two central attackers play a bounce pass with each other and one attempts a shot at the goal. The same wide defender must be alert to come across and cover the attack and should try to block the shot, as shown [5c].

Repeat the three attacks on the other side of the pitch and then rotate attackers and defenders.

We want see the defenders focused on stopping crosses and blocking shots. In this drill, the body shape of the defenders is important and they should show aggression and try to make physical contact with the attackers.
The defenders should focus on working together as a back four, using good communication and aggression to prevent each attack.

The blue defenders should focus on working together as a back four, using good communication and aggression to prevent each attack.

One at a time, the coach feeds the red attacking players with a succession of different passes.

We set up a playing area in the final third of the pitch, with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end. We are using ten outfield players, split into an attacking team of six and a defending team of four. The attackers are set up as a front two, with two attacking midfielders and two wide players, while the defenders set up as a back four, as shown.

The coach feeds the attacking players with a succession of different balls for the opposing back four to try and clear. The attackers should create different kinds of attack: from wide areas, from central areas, from midfield, and they should also attempt aerial attacks.

The defenders should focus on working together as a back four, using good communication and forming triangles when one steps up to close down the ball. They should show aggressive play when defending against shots and crosses.

The players should reset after each attack is dead. We play for ten minutes.

“The defenders should focus on working together as a back four, using good communication”