

Drills That Teach Aggression

Appropriate aggressiveness in sport is something every coach wants their players to show.

Games that can develop physicality?

1. **Body usage (Game 1)** – used to prepare players for contact, help to develop strength and teach players how to use their bodies effectively.
2. **Shielding and Protecting (Game 2)** – this is coaching players to use their bodies when under pressure from an opponent.
3. **1 v 1's to teach aggressiveness: (Game 3)** A 1 v 1 format when facing a defender and a 1 v 1 format when the pressure is behind the receiver.
4. **Blocking and interceptions: (Game 4)** Drill 4 is set up to allow players to practice screening, blocking and intercepting as opposed to pressing and tackling, players are paired up and score points for every interception.
5. **Pressing and tackling: (Game 5)** A closing down and pressuring game. Defending team score points for winning back the ball. Each team go against each other to see who can come out on the top.

How to coach aggressiveness?

In order to be really successful at coaching “aggressiveness” The following three attributes should be present:

NOTE: Aggressiveness is not foul play or intimidation, it's the desire to win the duel between you and “them”.

1. Anticipation:

1. Predicting the actions of the opponent based on

visual cues such as a body position, the location on the ball, or the movements players make. The defender would take these things into account then act accordingly.

2. Use anticipation and aggression to block runs, block space, block passes, mark a player, intercept a pass before it arrives, or even press a player at high speed in anticipation of the ball's arrival.

2. Determination:

1. Trying to do everything you can to influence or control the outcome of a situation. It is important to encourage players to keep trying to find a way to be successful and not give up if something does not quite work for them.
2. A determined player does not get intimidated by mistakes or setbacks they are inquisitive about how they can learn and turn their mistakes into success.

3. Desire

1. The feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen, desire is tough to measure but players who have high levels of desire demonstrate this trait by showing intent. Players can show a desire to be aggressive through their actions such as a tackle, a sprint, marking a player closely and not losing them, winning a shoulder to shoulder battle, not being pushed off the ball when under pressure.
2. Coaches should help each individual to show a desire to win the battle.

Players come in all different shapes and sizes so to try and coach everyone to be aggressive in the same way will probably not work very well.

As coaches, it is important to look at each individual in the

team and try to help them be aggressive in their way, for example, some players love to tackle and they are really brave in doing so, other players are not so brave, being aggressive to them could simply be through the use of pressure on the ball.

Some players read the game better than others so interceptions of the ball or blocking passes or runs could be a way for them to be aggressive. Small agile players who change direction quickly might use close marking or screening to be aggressive. Coaches should be mindful of this stuff and relate it to their players.

Sustained effort and tempo are not necessarily something you would coach but more something you should constantly encourage when players are practicing. When a player executes an act of aggressiveness in a firm but fair way the coach should praise the player for their effort 'Well done Dave that was great closing down, *you forced a mistake there, can you do that again?*'.

At times players will come up against teams or players who are stronger than them and again the coach should encourage players to look for ways to be effective. Encourage them to keep trying to win the duel regardless of the outcome. This way players are learning how to compete and be competitive.

Competition is an important part of developing sustained effort and a high tempo, if players are regularly exposed to competitive situations they begin to bring this type of mindset with them to training and games. For coaches I would suggest adding competitive elements to practices such as keeping scores, winner stays on, knockout activities, playing out of balance (6 v 4) for periods to see if they can hang on in there.

That way practices naturally challenge the players to be competitive and create an environment where everyone in the

team has to contribute something to be successful.

Competition evokes many different emotions for players and coaches can begin to teach players to be resourceful during competitive moments as opposed to dwelling on negative things that have occurred.

Here are five drills to improve the aggressiveness of the players you coach

Drill 1 Physical Primer

The physical primer is about players working in pairs to develop sports-specific strength. Pair up the players and start alongside each other in a shoulder-to-shoulder fashion (see image below). Players work for 3 sets of 15/20 seconds. The aim is to unbalance your opponent using your shoulders, arms, and legs to push your opponent away. The key message to the players is that the pushing should be within the laws of the game. Players should work on both sides of the body.

Players start in this position

A progression to this physical primer drill is to get the players standing opposite each other then they hold each other's wrists. From this point, both players resist being pulled forward by their opponent. Again 3 sets of 15/20 seconds should be enough to help players improve their strength.

These types of drills help to prepare players for contact and get them used to using their bodies to not be pushed off the ball easily. There are many different variations of this activity so get creative and build on these. I would not recommend doing much more than 6 – 8 sets of this type of work at a time, as the players will fatigue quite quickly.

Drill 2 Shielding and Protecting

HOW IT WORKS: Set up a square and pair players in each square, The aim of this game for the black and whites is to get through 4 sets of 20/30 seconds of shielding, limiting the touches of the defender. The black and white players start with the ball and they are trying to stay as close to the center of the small square they are in.

The blues have to try and get a touch on the ball, each time they do this they get a point. Once 20/30 seconds have elapsed the blue players move around clockwise to the next square and the practice continues until they have met each player. Roles then reverse with the blues shielding and the black and whites trying to get a touch on the ball.

The key in this drill is to reinforce the message of players using their bodies to deny the opponent a touch of the ball, they should use their bodies to hide the ball, use their arms to keep the defender at a distance, and have a wide staggered stance to ensure they remain strong but balanced.

A progression on this drill could be to make it a game against the clock so each team gets timed trying to protect the ball as long as possible with the highest team scoring a point. Once a ball has been touched by a defender the attacker can help a teammate who still has a ball and the defender can go after a second ball. The practice will turn into a 4 v 4 on any part of the pitch. Play the first team to three points.

Drill 3: Two Way 1 V 1's

HOW IT WORKS: Both drills are to try and teach the defenders to be aggressive in terms of pressure on the ball (set up A) or marking opponents and not letting them turn (set up B). Both drills require an end zone at each end of the field as shown on the diagram.

Drill (A), The defender (blue 7) starts the practice by telling the attacker they are ready, black and white player 2 dribbles at the blue defending player (7), black white player (2) must get into the end zone before they can pass the ball into the black and white player (3). The attacker has 10 seconds to get into the end zone or the game resets and the next attacker, black and white player (3) starts.

The blue defender (7) defends 6 attacks (two from each player) then a new defender replaces them in the middle. This drill is about aggressive pressuring of the ball and trying to delay the attacker to elapse the 10-second limit.

Drill (B), The defender (black and white 4) marks the attacker (blue 9). The Black and white player (5) starts the practice with a pass into the attacker (blue 9), the attacker (blue 9) must turn the defender (black and white 4) and escape by dribbling into the end zone.

The defender must prevent the turn, regain the ball and escape into the end zone they are facing. The attacker has 10 seconds to score or the game resets. In this practice players move up one position so the original defender (black and white 4) leaves the pitch, the attacker (blue 9) becomes the new defender, and the player that started the practice becomes the next attacker (black and white 5). Each player defends 6 times.

This drill is about preventing players from turning, marking them closely, and slowing down the attack.

Drill 4 Blocking and Interceptions

HOW IT WORKS: Split the pitch into four channels and set two teams up as shown in the diagram. Each team has two footballs each and they must pass the ball to each other across the opponent's channel. The players in the two middle channels must intercept the ball or block a pass for a point.

If a player intercepts a ball they turn out and play the ball to a spare player in the team behind them. The practice continues like this for a set period, then the players in the outside channels rotate with the players on the inside channel. Each player should keep a running score of their interceptions.

As a progression give each team one ball each so more players are focusing on the interceptions and it becomes harder to play through. This drill focuses on showing aggression through determination to win the ball, block passes, and intercept through balls.

DRILL 5 Pressing and Tackling

HOW IT WORKS: Set up the playing field as shown, with one black and white player in each small box. The black and whites try to retain the ball as long as possible. One defender goes in to chase the ball (blue 10), if they win the ball they can score in any of the mini-goals.

If the blue defender is unsuccessful then and the black and whites achieve 3 passes, a second defender (blue 7) joins the first defender. Again two defenders try to win the ball off the four black and whites. If the black and whites achieve another three passes the third defender (blue 9) joins the practice.

The practice continues like this until the black whites make enough passes to have all defenders in the square (they then retain the ball for as long as possible) or the blues win the ball and score in any of the 4 min goals. This practice allows players to show aggression through pressure on the ball carrier and trying to win it back and score.

In Summary

The way a player shows aggression looks different some players

can do it because of their strength and size whereas others use their speed and agility. As coaches we must consider the way that players show aggression and help them to understand that aggression doesn't always mean contact, it can be pressure, blocking, or intercepting.

Anticipation, determination, and effort will be required on behalf of the players and coaches can develop these traits using some of the practices suggested above which all have a competitive element to them and allow players to practice aggression in different ways.

Frequent Questions

Can you teach aggression? Yes, children can be taught to be more aggressive through coaching, effective practice design, and exposure to situations that require them to show elements of aggression towards an opponent, the key is to individualize what aggression looks like for each player then work with them to develop this quality.

How do you create aggression in soccer? It is mostly around the demands you place on the performers. If you demand determination and effort every session from the players that will lay the foundations, then you must think about the inclusion of competitive situations in your session to ensure players get to practice aggression. Try to ensure that players practice aggression in different ways, and as their coach help the player find a way or a couple of ways that work best for them. Trying to teach everyone to Show the same type of aggression just does not work.