

Playing Between The Lines - Part 1

Written by The Coaching Manual

In this article we focus on the importance of playing in between defensive lines/units and how soccer coaches can use a Rondo practice to facilitate learning.

Playing in between defensive units

Playing in between lines is an important part of football. Defences will often organise in units and have specific instructions to defend against your team. Here are 3 possible set ups in which teams could organise themselves in.

High line

In a high line, the defensive team (Red) will look to hunt down the attacking team and regain possession up the field. This is something that we see in teams such as Barcelona and Tottenham Hotspur. If the high line is not executed well, then gaps can appear between units which can create space for the attacking team (Blue).

Medium block

Here we can see a medium block, where the defensive team (Red) will look to defend their own half and be aggressive, while keeping the opposition away from their penalty box. The lines between the units become narrower and more difficult to penetrate and turn in between the lines. We can see this with teams such as Atlético de Madrid.

Low block

In a low block, the defensive team (Red) look to restrict the space in-between the lines and defend their own box. This can be difficult for attacking teams (Blue) as there isn't much space in and around the box, often resulting in attacks from wide areas.

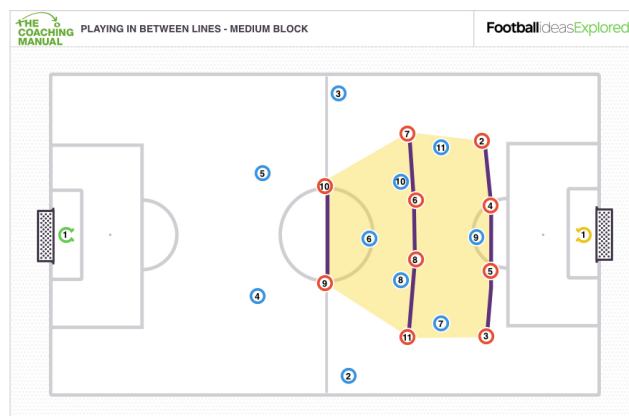
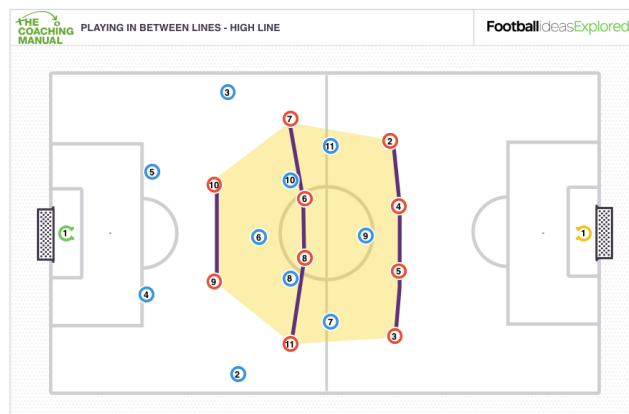
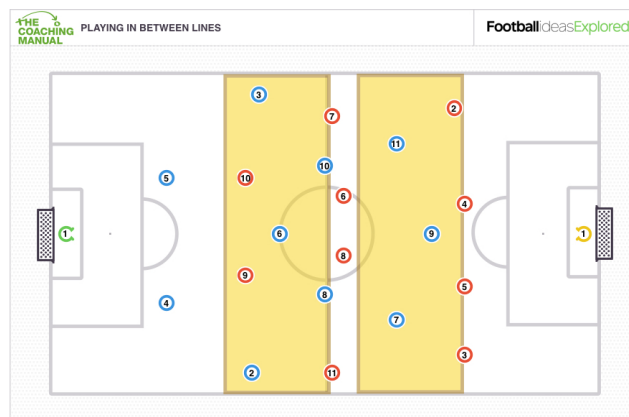
Understanding the set up of the defensive team is vital for the attacking team, as it gives an indication of how difficult it can be to play through the lines. This can affect the Rondo as you can edit the length and the depth of the exercise. However, there are many defensive systems that your players will face when in possession, and in these examples we will concentrate on a defensive system of 4-4-2.

Players used

As we can see, there are 3 lines (3 units) of defenders in this example (Reds).

In between these lines, we can see 4 players who could be critical to the build up play of the game. In the lines between the attack and midfield, the Pivot (Blue 6) will be the spare man who can potentially move the ball forward. Three Blue players (Blue 7, 9 and 11) can also receive between the second line of the midfield and the defence (Reds) to move forward, with the Full Backs (Blue 2 3) in the wide positions.

Though players are ultimately able to go wherever they please, Blue 8 10 would most commonly look to move in between both lines and units to create positional and numerical advantages in these areas. This could be dropping into those space, running beyond a line or even working to create openings through waiting and maintaining possession.



This could also be the case with the frontline dropping in quickly to play between the lines, rather waiting in the line to receive the ball.

This quick movement can often pull out players and effectively leave gaps for other players to exploit, something we saw in the [wide rotation rondo](https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/6085272372510720) (<https://www.thecoachingmanual.com/Content/6085272372510720>).

This is only one way of disjuncting the defence, but shows a clear idea of how moving in between the lines quickly can have positive effects for finding available players, behind and beyond the units of play.

