

How the Offside Trap Works

By Alan Maher

We must begin by explaining the purpose of the offside trap. It is not to trap players offside, but rather to win the ball and counterattack.

Once this purpose is understood, the execution is easier to learn and use. First a quick story:

Imagine a small village where a tiger has threatened the lives of the people in the village. They know that the tiger is in the forest and they want to flush it out, so they send all the warriors to one side of the forest armed with spears. On the other side of the village the women and young children gather with pots and pans. They form a line and march into the forest banging the pots and pans.

All the small animals run away from the noise and towards the warriors and the spears. The warriors must be strong and fearless. They must ignore the small animals as they run by. Finally, when they see the tiger, they all converge on the tiger and kill it with their spears.

The game tactic

The trap is sprung when the ball moves away from the goal. It matters not who sends the ball away from the goal. The keeper, a defender

or even an attacker may send the ball away from the goal. Now the defenders run to possess the ball. They apply pressure where the ball is located. While there is pressure they continue to move at the ball. As an example, if the player with the ball is looking down at the ball, keep up the pressure by going to the ball. If the player with the ball turns his/her back to the goal, keep up the pressure and go to the ball.

If an attacker assumes full control of the ball, stop moving to the ball. If the ball crosses over the midfield line, stop running at the ball. The purpose is to win the ball and keep going. Ignore the attackers left behind in an offside position. Go to the ball. Swarm the ball and the player with the ball. Kill the tiger! Ignore the small game.

Somebody has to call the trap when it is "on." Normally that responsibility falls to the goalkeeper as he is the last defender on the field. He/she must push up his/her teammates to get beyond the opponents. Every opponent left behind is a player out of the game. One trick is to run in front of an opponent and then go to the ball. This prevents the player with the ball from passing upfield.

How is this done?

1. On half a field organize four attackers against six defenders. The coach delivers a ball into the mix. A defender, including the goalkeeper, delivers the ball upfield. The call is made. "Up!" Now the defenders move to the ball and look to carry it over the midfield line in preparation for a counterattack.
2. Remember that the ball should be under pressure. Strip the player of the ball and counterattack or intercept a bad pass.
3. Do this over and over until the players respond correctly. Attackers must be left behind in an offside position. The usual problem is that the defenders do not move fast enough.
4. The goalkeeper has to come off the line and play as a sweeper.
5. The trap is not for the faint of heart. It needs courage to execute.

Variations

1. Just pass the ball to the attackers and let them try to work it in for a shot.
2. In the beginning, the coach should call the trap from the sidelines.

There are other ways to trap people offside, but this is more than enough for the beginning. Learning this much is a great stride in tactics.