

## Cross the Ball Early When Attacking a Flat Back Four

**You often find with young soccer teams that the defenders are drawn forward when they are on the attack, leaving space behind them for your team to exploit. An early cross is the best way to do it, says David Clarke.**

I normally like my wingers to get to the goal line and pull the ball back to the near post or onto the penalty spot. Or for the older age groups and the ones that can kick it far, I coach them the long cross to the back post.

However, if you are playing a team with a flat back four, one where the players are static in a line, you should get your players to use the 'early cross' as a way of crossing the ball from the wings.

This is best used when the defenders are being attacked by a winger and are running back towards their own goal. The technique for the early cross is quite different than that used for the goal line cross.



The winger keeps the goalkeeper out of the equation by crossing the ball so that it lands in the space between the D of the penalty area and the penalty spot. The ball should come in at waist height or below so that retreating defenders have difficulty clearing it.

### **Key coaching tips:**

1. Tell your winger his hips should be facing forward in the direction he is running;
2. Get him to strike the ball with his foot around the outside of the ball;
3. He must make sure his big toe is pointing up — essential in putting spin on the ball.

You must make sure your winger does not turn his hips inside otherwise the ball will be driven rather than hooked.

Coach your players to recognise when a space has opened up behind the retreating back four.