

ELITE SOCCER

Exclusive
Training
practices from
top professional
managers

LEICESTER CITY

BRENDAN RODGERS

PENETRATION IN BEHIND



BRISTOL CITY WOMEN

**TANYA
OXTOBY**
Defending
principles



LMA AMBASSADOR

**KEVIN
BOND**
Attacking and
defending



EVERTON

**ROBBIE
JOHNSON**
Defending against
high balls



CRE8 FOOTBALL ACADEMY

**AHMET
AKDAG**
Attacking forward
runs

EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEWS WITH DONCASTER MANAGER DARREN MOORE

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ISSUE 111 / OCTOBER 2019: **FROM THE CHAIRMAN**



Professional training blueprints that will improve any football coaching session

Dear Coach,

We're honoured to kick off this issue of Elite Soccer with a series of training activities written by one of the most highly respected coaches working in the Premier League. Currently manager of Leicester City, and formerly the boss of both Liverpool and Celtic, Brendan Rodgers has focused his session on developing the ability of players to arrive in behind an opponent's defence when attacking.

We're also delighted to share a training session by Tanya Oxtoby, the manager of WSL team Bristol City Women. In this issue she has presented a series of activities aimed at improving decision making and encouraging players to execute her team's defending principles at the right times and in the right areas. Her session works on 1v1 defending and reading the triggers.

We have a general session from Kevin Bond, who until recently was manager of EFL League One side, Southend United. He has selected several of his favourite practices that focus on attacking, defending and keeping hold of the ball.

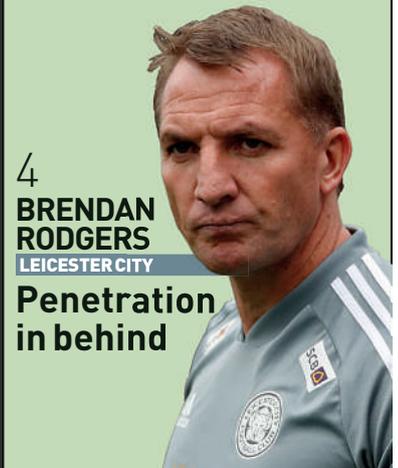
At Elite Soccer, we like to showcase the work of some of the best coaches in the British academy system and this month is no exception, as we bring you a session by Robbie Johnson of Everton Academy. Teaching young players how to defend against balls played at them off the ground, his session puts teams under pressure when they are trying to retain possession from forward passes into or over their defensive line.

We close this month's issue with a session from Ahmet Akdag of Cre8 Football Academy, who encourages young players to perform different types of attacking forward runs.

I hope you find that the activities in this issue will be of help to your coaching. Elite Soccer will return next month with five more training practices from some of the best professional coaches working in the British game.

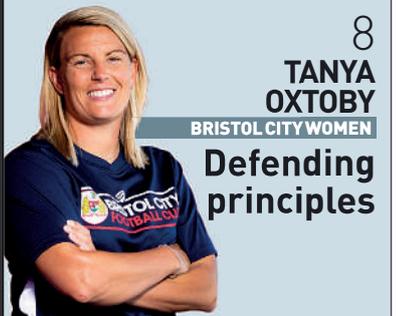
Howard Wilkinson

Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman



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LEICESTER CITY

Penetration in behind



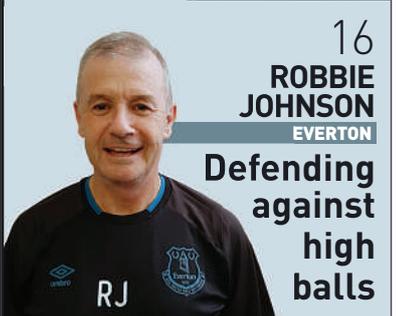
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Attacking forward runs

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...interview with Doncaster Rovers manager Darren Moore

MANAGER PROFILES

Here are the five managers and coaches we're delighted to welcome into this issue of *Elite Soccer*

BRENDAN RODGERS

LEICESTER CITY

Currently the manager of Leicester City, Brendan Rodgers returned to the English Premier League this year after a notable stint in Scotland where he achieved the historic feat of securing back-to-back trebles with Celtic. Rodgers started his career as a youth coach at Reading, but his horizons were broader. He travelled around Spain studying different coaching methods, and was eventually invited by Jose Mourinho to leave his role of academy director at Reading and join the Chelsea academy as their head youth coach in 2004. He was promoted to reserve team manager just two years later. In November 2008, Rodgers left Chelsea to become the manager of Watford – at just 35 years old, he was the youngest manager in the Championship at the time. He guided the club to a mid-table finish in his first campaign before taking on the role of manager of Reading. Joining Swansea for the start of the 2010-11 season, he enjoyed immediate success, leading the Swans back into the top flight of English football for the first time since 1983 – but it took a victory over his former club, Reading, in the Championship play-off final to achieve this. A fantastic season followed as Swansea finished 11th in the Premier League, recording 14 clean sheets in the process and playing attractive football. For this success, Rodgers was nominated for the LMA Manager of the Year Award. Much in demand, in the summer of 2012 he was appointed manager of Liverpool and in his first season in charge at Anfield, he guided the club to a seventh place finish in the Premier League. The following season he did even better, as the free-scoring Reds notched over 100 goals to finish Premier League runners up, the club's highest finish for five years. In recognition of his outstanding work at the club, Rodgers was named the 2014 LMA Manager of the Year – the first time the accolade had been given to a Liverpool boss. Joining Celtic in May 2016, in his first season in charge he led the club to only its fourth ever domestic treble. He repeated the club's treble winning success the next season, becoming the first manager in Scottish football history to achieve the feat.

TANYA OXTOBY

BRISTOL CITY WOMEN

In 2012 Tanya Oxtoby was appointed manager and head coach of Nottingham Forest, a role she combined with playing for Doncaster Belles in the Women's Super League.

The following year she accepted a coaching role with the reserve team of WSL club Lincoln Ladies, before returning to her home country, Australia, in 2014 to set up her own coaching business. Soon after, she was appointed assistant coach for Perth Glory Women. She also spent 18 months working with the Australian Women's U20s as an assistant coach and video analyst. She joined Notts County Ladies in early 2016 as their director of development and first team assistant coach, and also became head of women's football at the University of Nottingham.

In 2017 Tanya was recruited by Birmingham City Ladies to become an assistant coach. She has also served as the talent identification and transition manager for English Colleges Women's National Team. She was appointed manager of Bristol City Women in July 2018.

KEVIN BOND

LMA AMBASSADOR

The son of highly regarded football manager, John Bond, Kevin's coaching career began as reserve team coach at his former club, Manchester City. His first role as manager in his own right came with Stafford Rangers in 1997 and he subsequently served as Alan Ball's number two at Portsmouth. After working in a series of roles with Harry Redknapp at Portsmouth, Southampton and Bournemouth, he was appointed manager of Bournemouth in 2006. Reunited with Redknapp once again, Bond enjoyed a long stint

as assistant manager of Spurs. He served QPR as assistant manager, caretaker manager and first team coach, before moving abroad for two spells as manager of Hong Kong Pegasus. He was most recently manager of League One club, Southend United.

ROBBIE JOHNSON

EVERTON

Currently a coach at the academy of Premier League club Everton, Robbie Johnson previously worked at Tranmere Rovers as lead foundation phase coach, focusing on the U9 to U12 age groups. He spent 15 years as an academy coach at Liverpool, working with a number of players who progressed to the Liverpool first team. He also spent four years as manager of Liverpool Ladies and enjoyed a spell as an academy coach at Wigan Athletic. In international football, he took over as the head coach of Jordan women's U17s national team in 2016, leading them through that year's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup Finals.

AHMET AKDAG

CRE8 FOOTBALL ACADEMY

Starting his coaching career as a community sports coach in Southwark, Ahmet Akdag enjoyed several years as a coach for Fulham FC, working with the club's elite youth players. He has subsequently served Crystal Palace as an academy scout and Charlton Athletic as a coach with the academy U14s. He has also held several roles as a coach and assistant manager for clubs in non-league football. He currently runs Cre8 Football Academy, working to nurture the talent of youth players and progress them into professional academies.

LEICESTER CITY

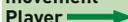
**Brendan Rodgers
Penetration in
behind**

SET-UP
AREA
Up to full pitch
EQUIPMENT
Balls, bibs, cones, 2 small goals, 2 full size goals
NUMBER OF PLAYERS
Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers
SESSION TIME
Eliminating opponents: 5mins Small space penetration: 15mins Big space penetration: 15mins 11v11 game: 20mins

Overview
For any attacking team, exploiting space behind defenders is vital. This session is focused on developing players and teams to arrive in behind the opponents' defence, either with or without the ball using the different ways you can do that, either by combination play or individual skill or running to receive a pass. The idea is to improve the patterns in order to go beyond the oppositions' defence. It's an engaging session for the players because it's about

creating and scoring goals and that's what players love to do. It's an attacking theme, based on expression and creativity with combination play, so players really enjoy it.

KEY

- Ball movement 
- Player movement 
- Dribble 

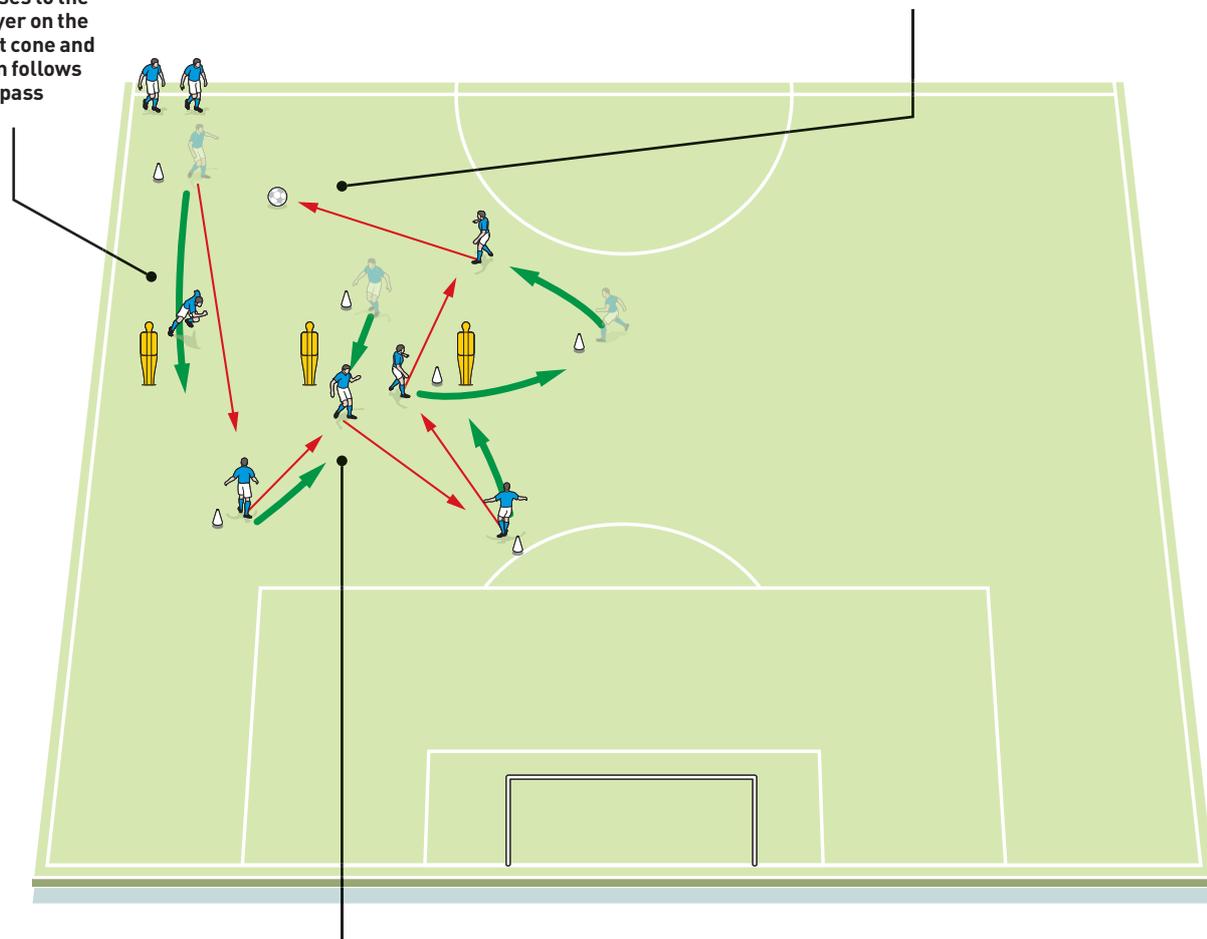
**What do I get the players to do?
Penetration: eliminating opponents**

We set up a playing area of approximately 35x35 yards, positioning six cones as shown [1] and three mannequins representing opposition defenders. We're using eight players, with three starting on

1 PENETRATION: ELIMINATING OPPONENTS

1 Each player passes to the player on the next cone and then follows the pass

3 After the ball completes a circuit, the first waiting player steps in to make the starting pass again and play continues



2 The passing should allow players to make one-touch lay offs and to avoid the presence of the mannequins

BRENDAN RODGERS: PENETRATION IN BEHIND

the first cone and one each on the remaining cones. Players pass the ball in the sequence shown and then follow their pass with a run to the next cone. The passing should be directed to allow one-touch lay offs and to eliminate the presence of the mannequins.

Small space penetration

We set up on half a pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end. We mark out a

20x20-yard square near to the halfway line. We're using 12 players split evenly into three teams of four. Two teams battle for possession in the square, while the third team has two players inside the square and two players outside it, all of whom play for the team in possession.

We start play with a pass into the square by the coach, as shown [2]. Players in the square are two-touch while

the pair outside the square are restricted to one-touch. The team in possession has to make eight passes before one of its players can break out to attack the goal. The breakout player has only five seconds to score after receiving the final penetrating pass out of the square. The attacking player is all in during the final phase. We play three games of four minutes.

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

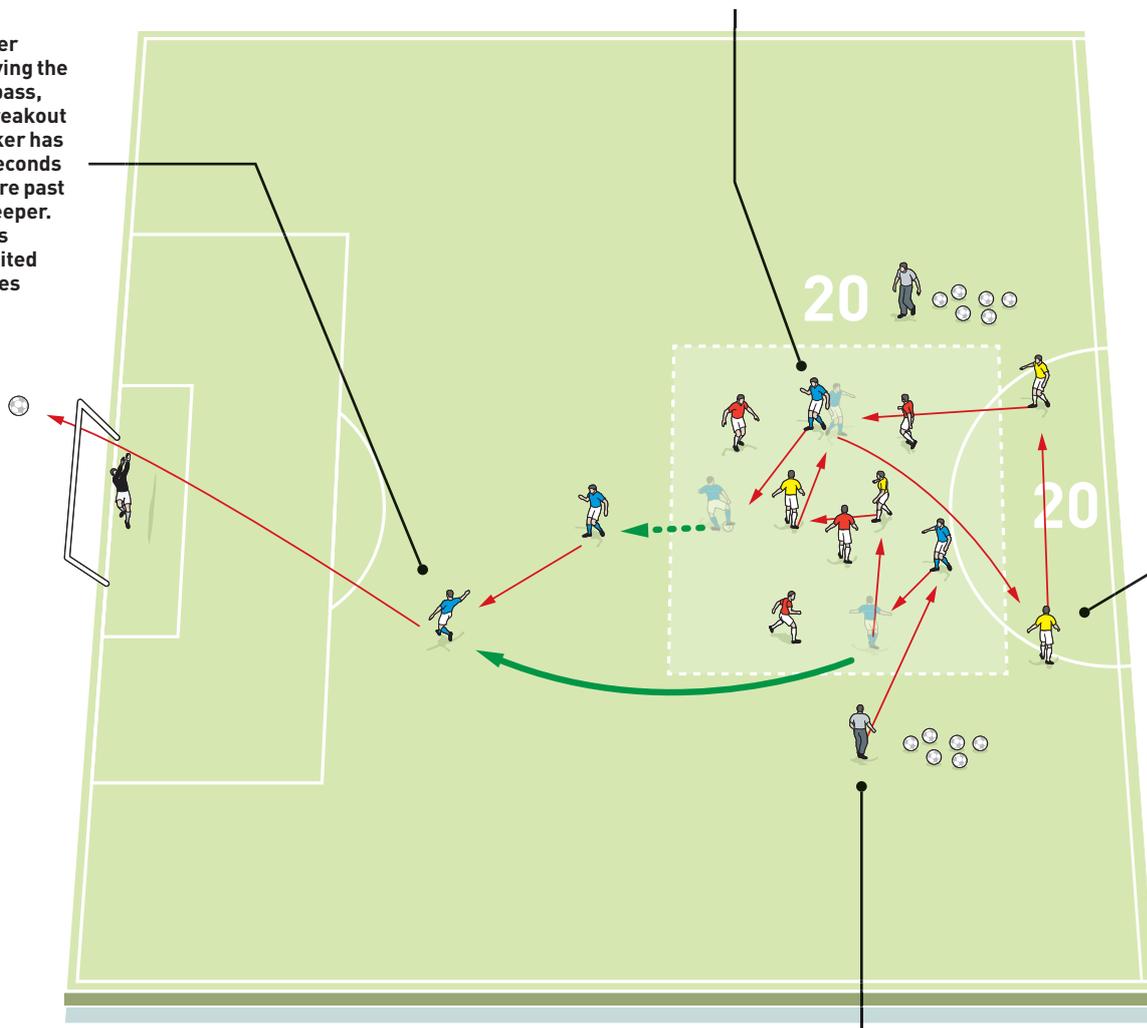
“This session is focused on developing players and teams to arrive in behind the opponents’ defence, either with or without the ball”

2 SMALL SPACE PENETRATION

4 After receiving the final pass, the breakout attacker has five seconds to score past the keeper. He has unlimited touches

3 The possession team has to make eight passes before an attacker can break out. Players in the square are two-touch

2 The yellows play for the team in possession. Two are outside the square and they are one-touch



1 The coach starts play with a pass into one of the teams. It's 4v4 between the blues and the reds in the square

BRENDAN RODGERS: PENETRATION IN BEHIND

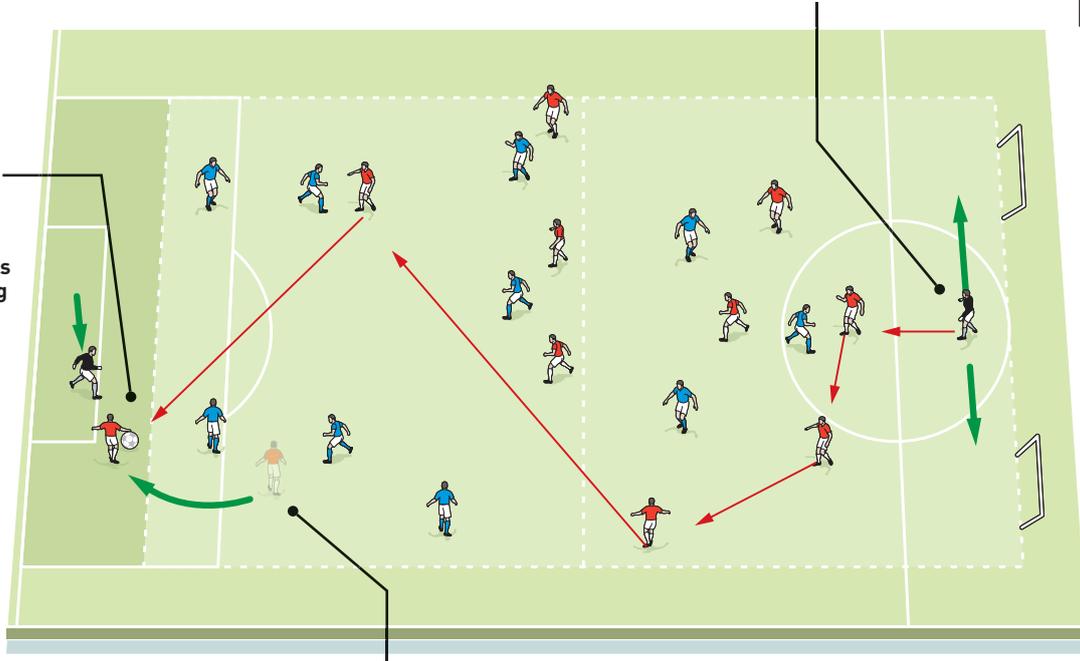
3a BIG SPACE PENETRATION

3 Here the reds score two points for receiving a pass in the end zone. Players can only enter the zone to receive a pass or if dribbling the ball in

1 Play starts with a pass out from the goalkeeper. The reds attack the end zone with no goal

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→



2 Players should make blind side runs in behind the defensive line

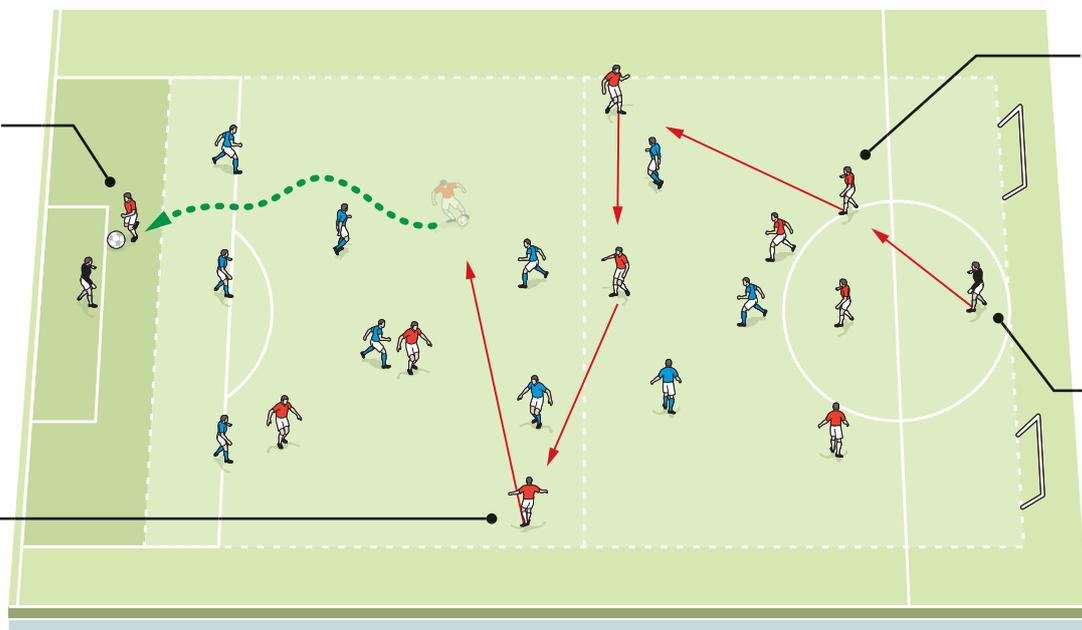
3b

4 Here the reds score one point for dribbling into the end zone

3 There is no limit on the number of touches in the opposition half

2 Players are limited to three-touch in their own half

1 Play restarts with a pass from the goalkeeper



What are the key things to look out for?

We can replicate an attack around the penalty area by making sure the pressing team includes two centre backs and the possession team is made up of forwards and central midfielders. We want players making simple

passes to retain possession. When off the ball, we expect to see blind side movements to penetrate behind the defenders. If the possession team loses the ball we want to see fast and aggressive pressure from the attackers in transition to defence.

What do I get the players to do next? Big space penetration

We set up on just over half a pitch coned off to the width of the penalty area. A goalkeeper is at one end in a 10-yard end zone, but he has no goal. Two small goals are positioned at the other end with one goalkeeper to guard both.

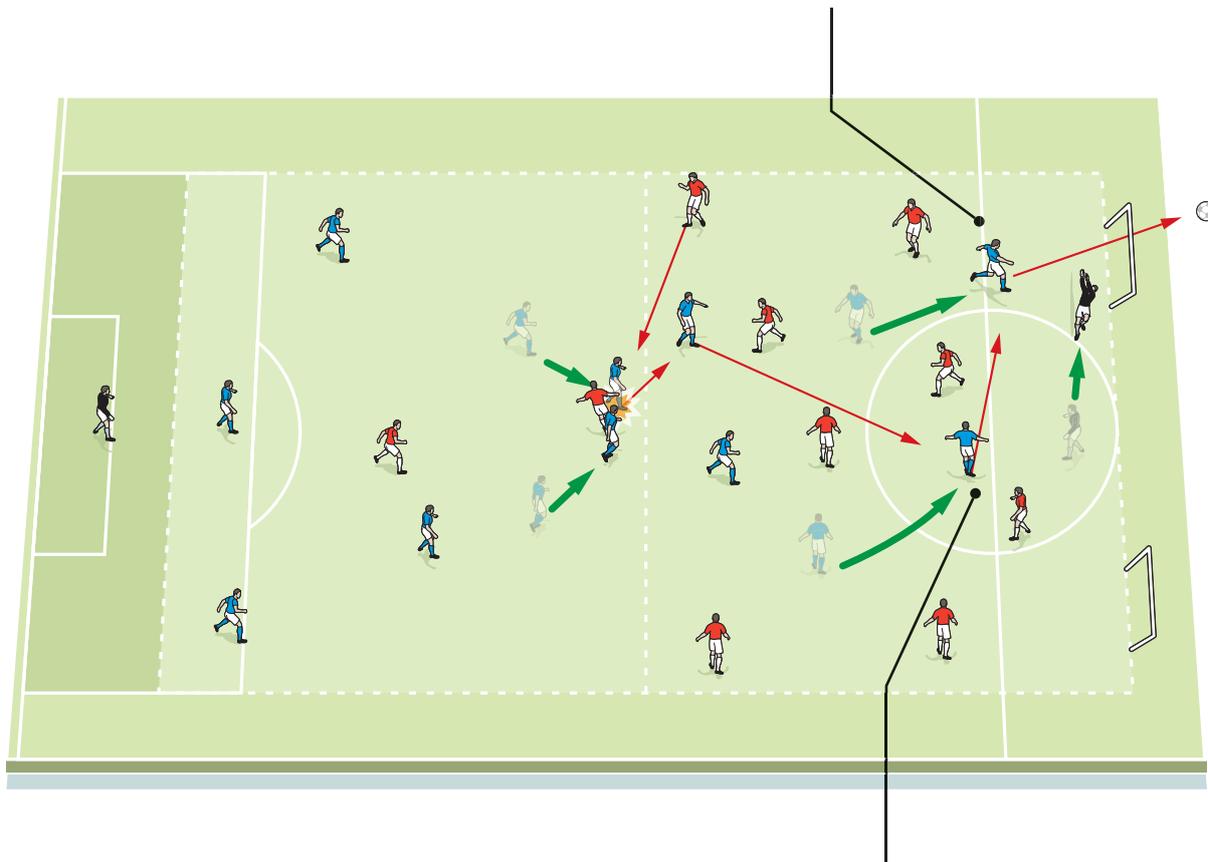
BRENDAN RODGERS: PENETRATION IN BEHIND

3c

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

1 If the other team wins possession, they must try to score in one of the small goals for one point



2 Players should use high quality passes to penetrate the opposition team's defence

“We want to see players running in behind the defensive line and using high quality passes to penetrate the opposition”

We play a game of 10v10 plus goalkeepers. One team attacks the end zone and defends the end zone and defends the two small goals. They score two points for receiving a pass in the end zone, as shown [3a], and one point for dribbling into the zone, as shown [3b]. Players can only enter the end zone to receive a pass or if dribbling the ball in. If the other team wins possession, they must try to score in the small goals for one point, as shown [3c].

Teams are three-touch in their own half and have unlimited touches in the opposition half. We play two games of six minutes.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see players running in behind the defensive line and using high quality passes to penetrate the opposition. If players are failing to do this, we reinforce the importance during coaching breaks.

How would you put this into a game situation?

11v11 game

We set up between the penalty boxes of a full size pitch with a goal and goalkeeper at each end. We're using 20 outfield players split into two team of 10 plus keepers. We play a normal game [not shown] to put the session into focus and look to see if the coaching points have been learned. We play two games of eight minutes.

BRISTOL CITY WOMEN

**Tanya Oxtoby
Defending
principles**

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 80x60 yards

EQUIPMENT

Ball, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 16 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Counter-pressing rondo: 16mins
Defending transition rondo: 14mins
9v9 game: 30mins

Overview

This session is about players developing their decision-making skills by executing our defending principles at

the right times and in the right areas. It incorporates 1v1 defending, reading cues and triggers, making play predictable, and winning the ball back in the first, second or third lines.

It is a high tempo session with constant decision-making for the players, which in turn means there will be mistakes, which makes it a great learning tool for the group. This session is adaptable to be specific enough to the opposition we are playing against, as although where and when we apply the principles may vary, the fundamentals of what we are looking to do doesn't change. The players enjoy this

session as it keeps them constantly thinking, and it gets very competitive.

What do I get the players to do?

Counter-pressing rondo

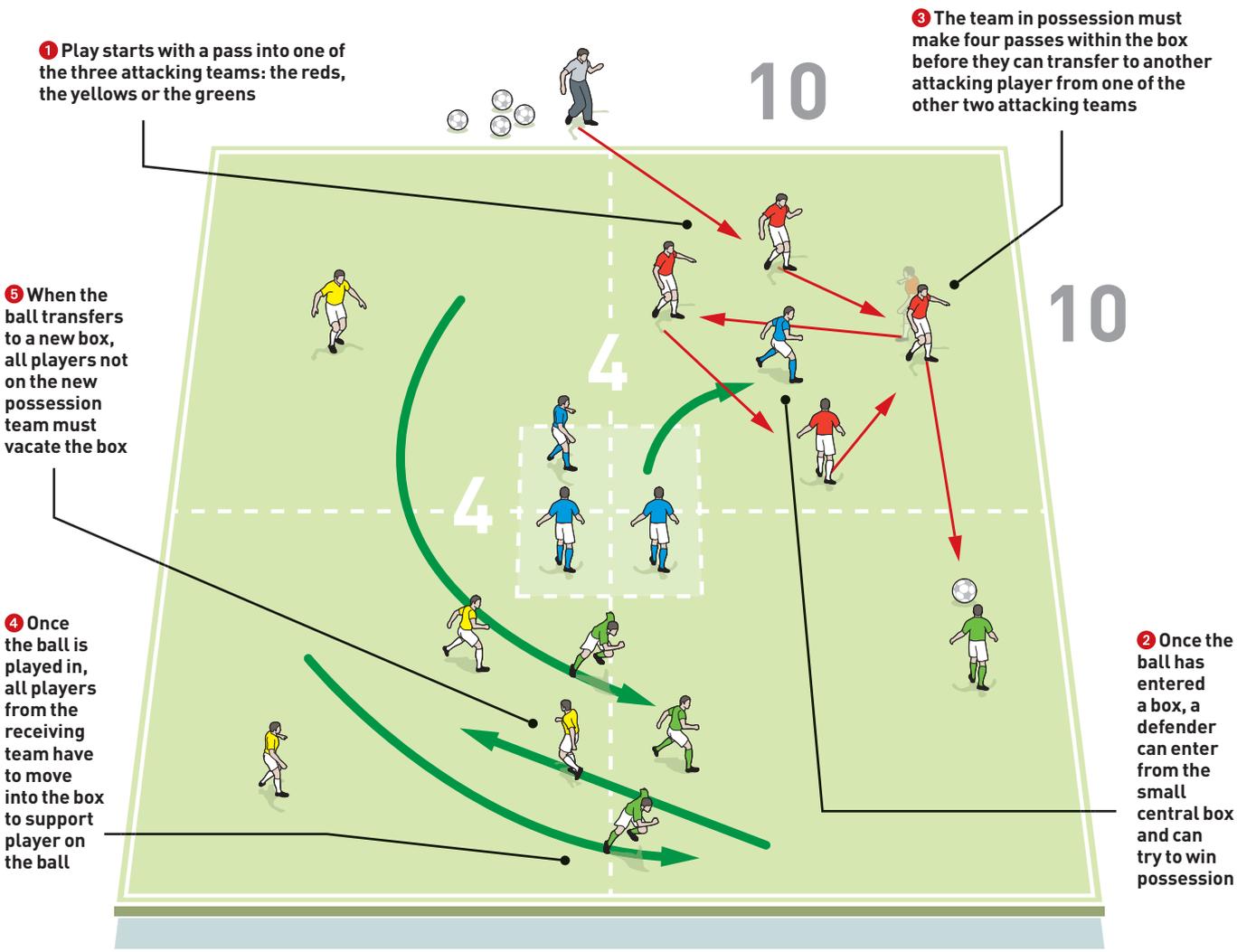
We set up an area of 20x20 yards, made up of four 10x10-yard boxes with a smaller 4x4-yard box in the centre. We're using 16 players split into four teams of four. One team is in the defending role in the small box, while players from the other three teams can be anywhere else in the playing area.

The coach starts play with a pass into one of the 10x10-yard boxes. All the team mates of the receiving player have to quickly move into that box to

KEY

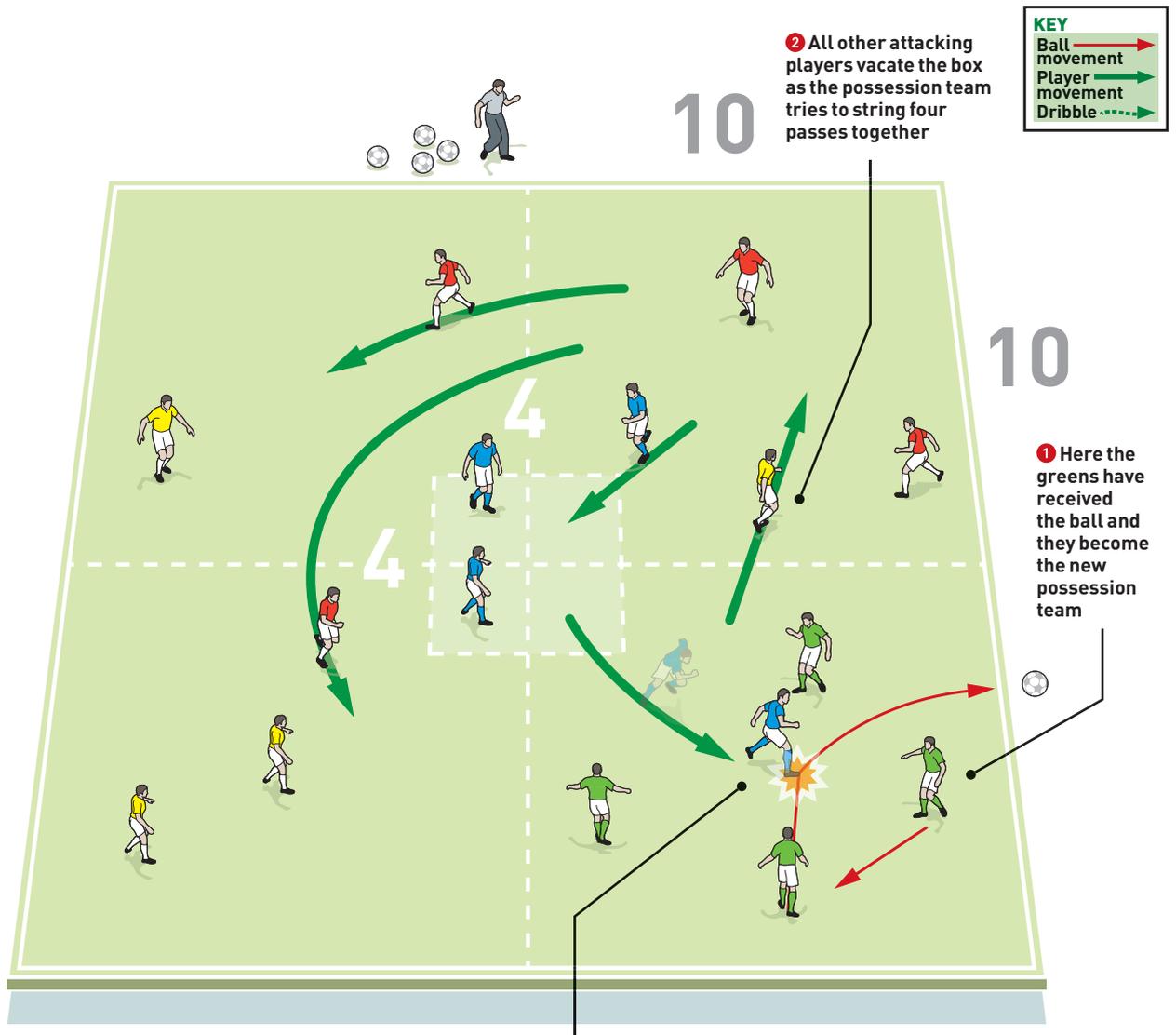
- Ball movement
- Player movement
- Dribble

1a COUNTER-PRESSING RONDO



TANYA OXTOBY: DEFENDING PRINCIPLES

1b



3 A blue defender enters the box. Here he wins possession and clears the ball out of the area. Play restarts with a pass into another box by the coach

“The players enjoy this session as it keeps them constantly thinking and it gets very competitive”

support the player on the ball, The possession team must then make four passes within that box before they can transfer the ball into another box, passing it to a player from one of the two other attacking teams. When this happens, players from the team receiving the ball must all move quickly into that square and all players from the other teams must vacate it, as shown [1a]. Each time the ball is played into a new box, one defender can enter from the small central box and must try to win the ball back, as

shown [1b]. If the ball is won by the defender, it should be cleared out of the area. A second ball is played into a different box by the coach and the game continues. Each team has two rotations in the defending role. We play eight 90 second games with 30 seconds of rest between games.

How do I progress the activity?

After four passes, if the team in possession doesn't transfer the ball out of their square then another defender can enter and join

their team mate in pressing. The remaining passive defenders in the small square can now try to cut out any balls close to their area. If the defenders win the ball and can play one pass between them, they quickly swap roles with the team that gave the ball away.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see the correct shape of press and shadow press, plus good 1v1 defending with acceleration and deceleration. We also want to

TANYA OXTOBY: DEFENDING PRINCIPLES

see effective passing from the possession team to ensure the defending team has to work hard to win the ball.

What do I get the players to do next?

Defending transition rondo

This is a first and second line defending transition rondo. We set up in an area of 36x25 yards divided into three 12-yard zones. We're using 15 outfield players split into three teams of five. One team starts in each zone. The team in the central zone is always

the pressing team and the teams in the two end zones must work together to keep possession and should transfer the ball across the central zone without it being intercepted. The central pressing team can send two players into the end zone to chase possession. The team in possession must make four passes before transferring the ball to the other end zone. The ball can't go over chest height while being transferred. The team supporting from the other end can drop into the middle

box to help support play and create angles, as shown [2a]. If the defending team wins the ball back, or if it goes out of play, they switch roles with the team that lost possession, as shown [2b]. Play always restarts from the coach. We play three four-minute games with one minute's rest in between.

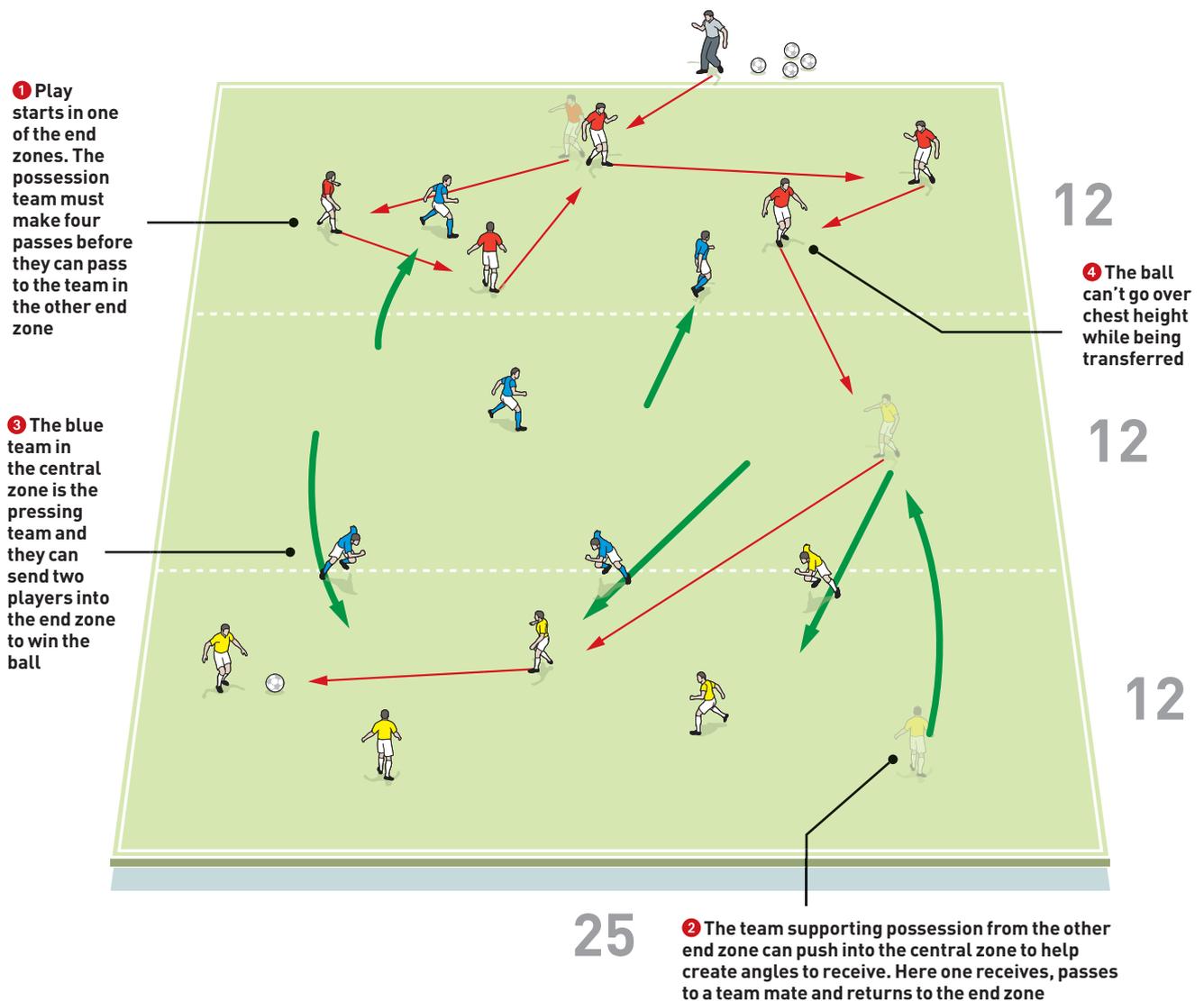
How do I progress the activity?

After the possession team makes four passes, progress the activity so the defending

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

2a DEFENDING TRANSITION RONDO



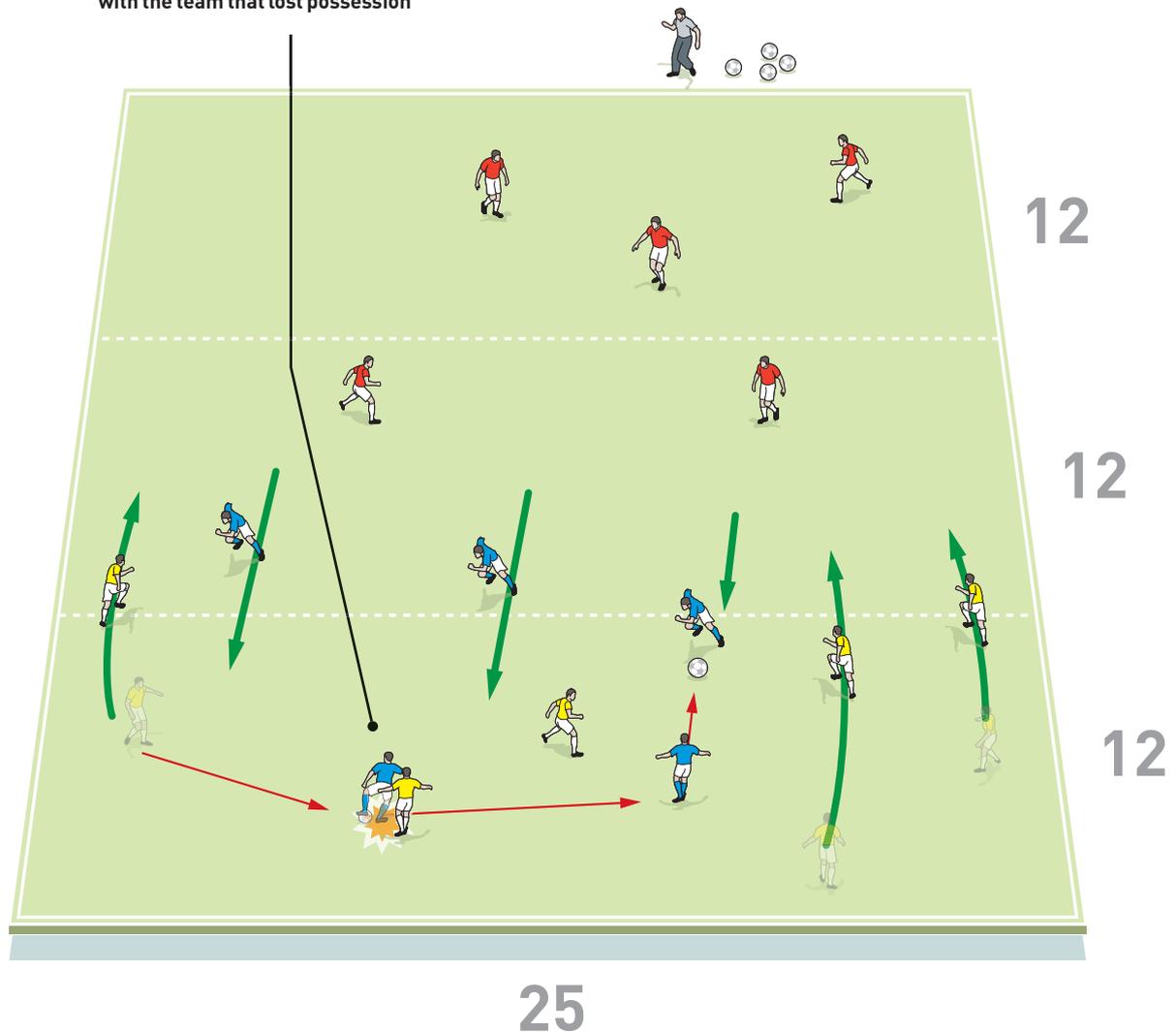
TANYA OXTOBY: DEFENDING PRINCIPLES

2b

1 If the defending team wins the ball, or if it goes out of play, the defenders switch roles with the team that lost possession

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →



team can send as many pressers into the end zone as they like. To progress further, still allow the defenders to press with as many players as they need, but now take away the passing target for the possession team – they can now transfer the ball as soon as the opportunity arises.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see defenders closing down on the ball early and putting pressure on the possession players. We want to

see effective 1v1 defending and players taking up a good shape of press to force opponents into an area for the next line to win it.

How would you put this into a game situation?

9v9 game

We set up in an area of 80x60 yards with a goal and a goalkeeper at each end. We also add zones to the pitch, as shown [3], to help the players know which area they are in and to help guide them on the pressing zones. These are for guidance only and players are

not restricted to the zones.

We play three games of eight minutes each, with two minutes rest between games.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see players making good decisions on when to press and when to set the trap, based on a number of factors including the zone the ball is in. We also want to see players using what they've learnt in the previous activities, including good 1v1 defending and keeping an effective shape for the

TANYA OXTOBY: DEFENDING PRINCIPLES

press to force opponents into an area for the next line to win it.

What are the typical mistakes players might make and how do I avoid them?

To make this session work properly, our possession principles must be present and the passing players should be moving the ball with quality and in the manner that the opposition will in our next game.

It's vital that this occurs, so that the session is realistic to what the players will face on a match day and so that the speed at which the players will have to make decisions replicates a game scenario. Once this is happening, then the pictures we want to see will start to appear and we can begin to solve the problems that are likely to occur in the next match. The reason we add in the progressions is so players

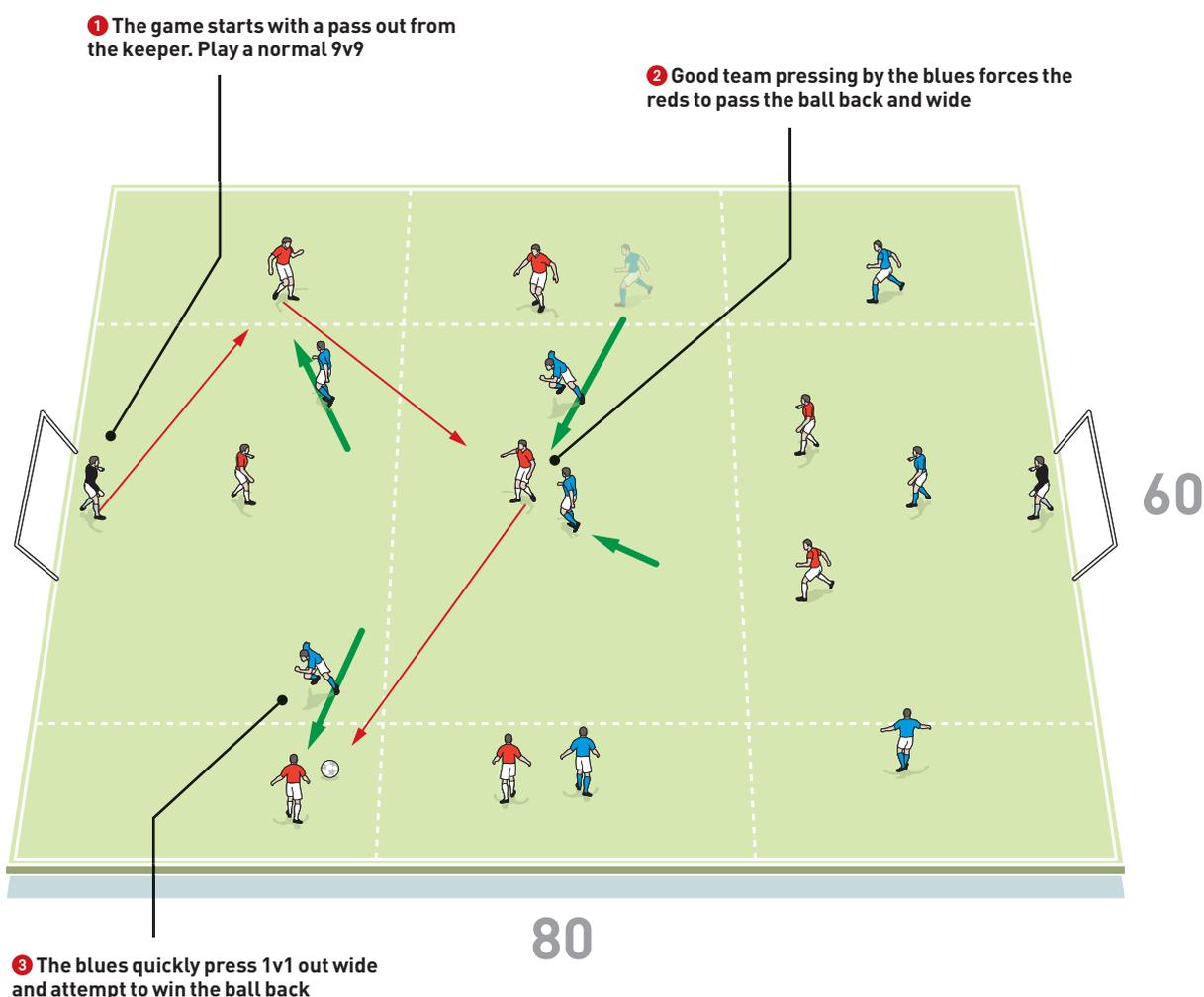
don't fall into the trap of pressing everything all of the time, because this is when they can get themselves into trouble. We speak to the players continuously about not always having to be the one who directly wins the ball, but to shape the press to help the next line – the midfield or the defence for example, so they are able to be on the front foot with their defending and step in and win the ball.

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

“To make this session work properly, our possession principles must be present and the players should be moving the ball with quality”

3 9v9 GAME



LMA AMBASSADOR

**Kevin Bond
Attacking and
defending**

SET-UP

AREA
Up to full pitch
EQUIPMENT
Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full sized goals
NUMBER OF PLAYERS
Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers
SESSION TIME
Directional possession: 15mins
11v11 attack: 20mins
Defending 2v3: 20mins

Overview

This is a general session that is made up of various practices that I like to run with teams at training on a regular basis in order to form good habits. The focus of these activities is on attacking, defending and

keeping the ball. They are competitive and enjoyable for the players and we hope they provide an engaging learning experience.

Some of the activities, such as the directional possession warm-up, are performed on a daily basis, while the remainder are probably run at least weekly.

What do I get the players to do?

Directional possession

We set up in an area of 35x25 yards. We're using 15 outfield players, split into three teams of five. One team are floaters and they play for the team in possession – they have two players at each end and one in the centre. The other two teams are also in the main area, as shown [1].

Play starts with a ball played from an outside floater into one of the teams in the main area and they have to work the ball from one end to the other, using the help of the central floater to give them an overload. They do so under pressure from the other team. If the defending team wins the ball, they can play to either end to start with but they must then play back to the other end to score.

What are the key things to look out for?

This activity makes players turn out and they do not always play the way they are facing, which is an easy habit to get into. To run this successfully players must develop a much greater awareness of what is around them.

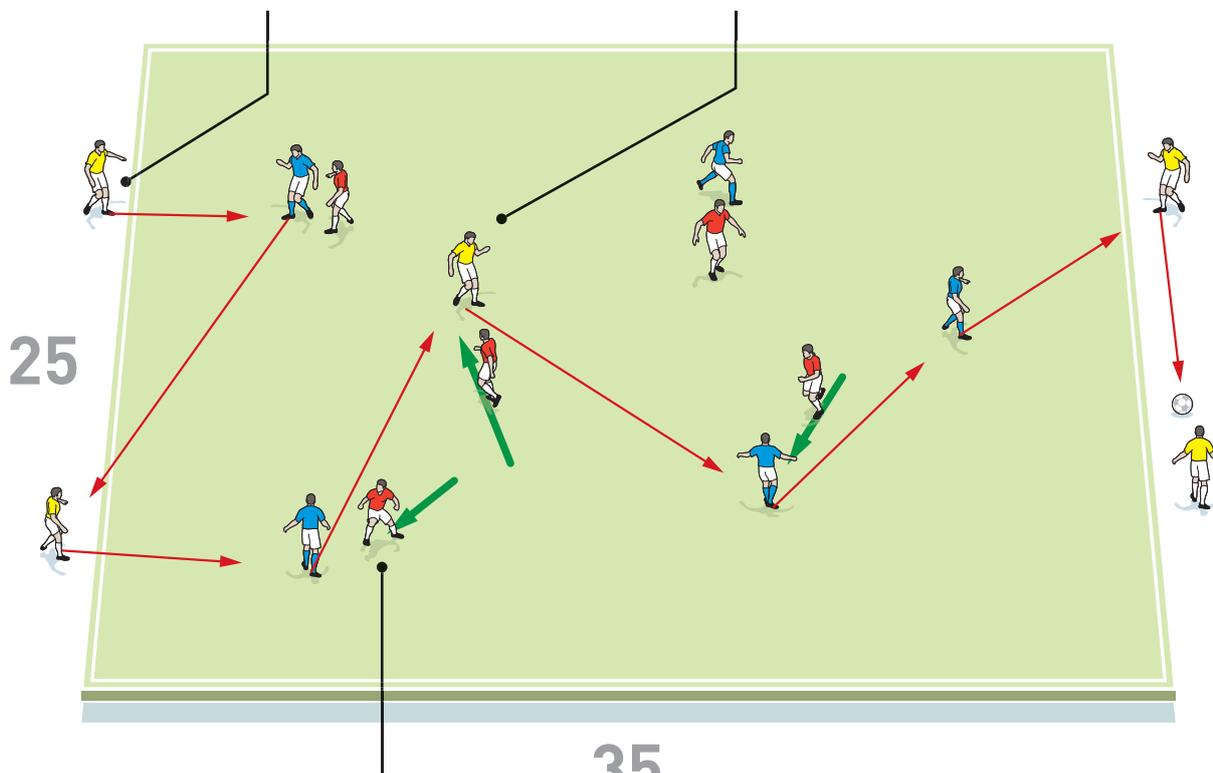
KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

1 DIRECTIONAL POSSESSION

1 The yellow floaters play for the team in possession. They have two players at each end and one in the centre. Play starts from an end floater

2 To score, the team in possession must work the ball from one end to the other, using the central floater if needed



3 The defending team presses to win the ball and if successful, they can play it to a floater at either end. They then become the new possession team

KEVIN BOND: ATTACKING AND DEFENDING

2a 11v11 ATTACK: UNOPPOSED

3 To begin with the attack is unopposed and the defending team do not press or tackle

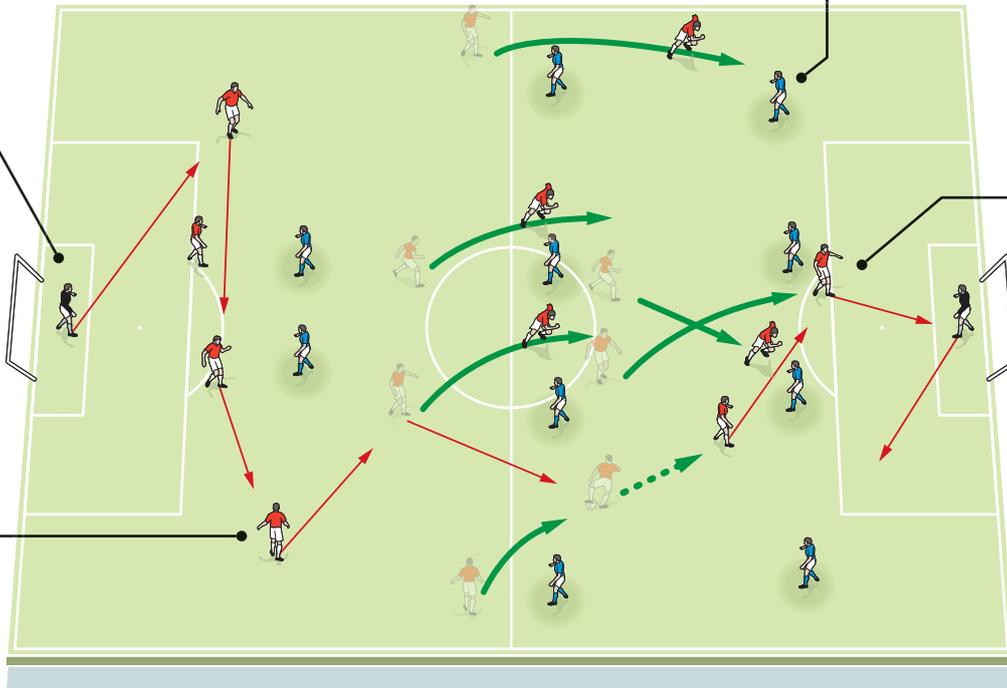
KEY

- Ball movement
- Player movement
- Dribble

1 Play starts with a pass from the keeper

2 The attacking team builds up play by passing through the thirds

4 The attackers are not allowed to shoot but must pass to the opposition keeper, who then launches an unopposed attack in the other direction. Play five minutes unopposed and five minutes slightly opposed

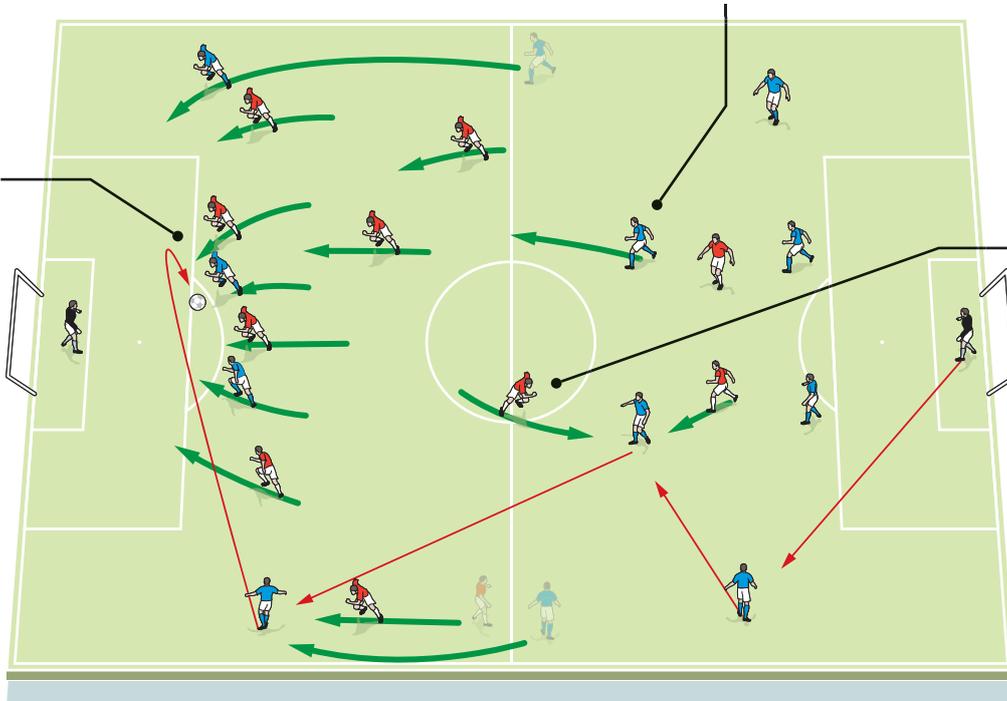


2b 11v11 ATTACK: OPPOSED

1 To progress the activity, teams should attack with match pace and intensity

3 The attackers are now allowed to shoot and score

2 The defending team can now press and tackle



What do I get the players to do next?
11v11 attack

Next we set up on a full size pitch. For this activity we're using 20 outfield players and two goalkeepers, split equally into two teams.

The teams line up for an 11v11 game and play starts with a pass out from the keeper. The team in possession initially attacks unopposed and must build up play from the goalkeeper to the final third, as shown [2a]. To start with the attacking team are

not allowed to shoot, so each attack should end with a pass from the attacker to the defending team's goalkeeper, who then launches an unopposed attack in the other direction. We play for five minutes and then progress the practice for

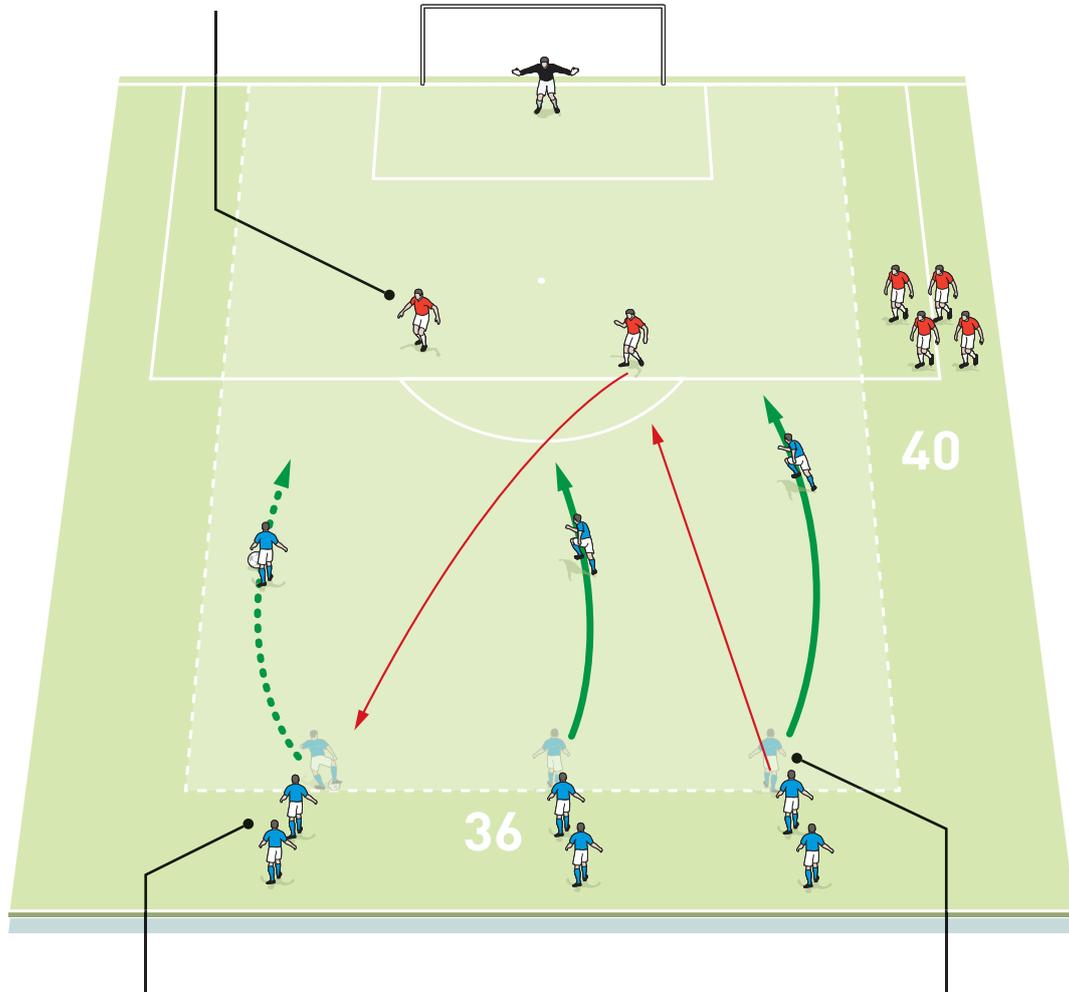
KEVIN BOND: ATTACKING AND DEFENDING

3 DEFENDING 2v3

3 The defending pair should try to delay, forcing the attackers wide and away from goal if possible

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→



2 The attackers work in waves of three, taking on two defenders and trying to score in a 3v2

1 Play starts with a pass from an attacker to a defender. The defender then passes back to one of the attackers and play is live

“Each wave of attackers must combine to go against the defenders and they should attempt to score”

a further five minutes, now making each attack slightly opposed. For the final progression we introduce finishing, making sure the teams attack with match pace and intensity for 10 minutes, as shown [2b]. As this is now opposed, it can either be an attacking or defending session and we would concentrate on our key principles, stopping to coach the players when necessary. Play still starts and restarts from the keeper.

Defending 2v3

We set up in an area of 40x36 yards with a goal and goalkeeper at one end. We're using 15 outfield players split into nine attackers and six defenders. The attackers work in waves of three and the defenders work in waves of two. Play starts with a pass from an attacker to a defender, who passes back to one of the three attackers. The attack then begins, as shown [3].

Each wave of three attackers must combine to go against the defending pair and they should attempt to score. For their part, the defenders should try to delay the attack rather than win the ball, driving the attackers wide and away from the goal if possible. This is good for basic defending principles as well as providing a lively test for the goalkeeper. The coach should call offsides. We play two games of 10 minutes.

EVERTON

**Robbie Johnson
Defending against
high balls**

SET-UP

AREA

UP to 80x35 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

18 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

6v6 with target zones: 10mins

7v7 with target zones: 15mins

9v9 with target zones: 15mins

10v10 with goals: 15mins

Overview

This session helps to develop the technique of young players when they are dealing with balls played at them off the ground.

It also creates opportunities for players when defending in groups and helps them with unit co-ordination.

It creates repeated match-type situations that will put young defenders under pressure and it allows them to be challenged by the conditions, testing players when they are trying to retain possession from the opposition's long forward passes into or over their defensive line.

The techniques looking to be developed are required to prevent a loss of possession either in the first or second phase of an attack. These skills are expected at the highest levels of the game. For the team in possession, the size of the target zone

helps to improve the kicking techniques of the players who have to pick out spaces with their longer passes. When out of possession, the session encourages the midfielders to recover in support and it helps the defensive unit to cover and tuck around the player attacking the ball. Besides the obvious technical competencies that will be developed, it also works on compactness, communication and the reactions of the supporting players.

KEY

- Ball movement
- Player movement
- Dribble

What do I get the players to do?

6v6 with target zones

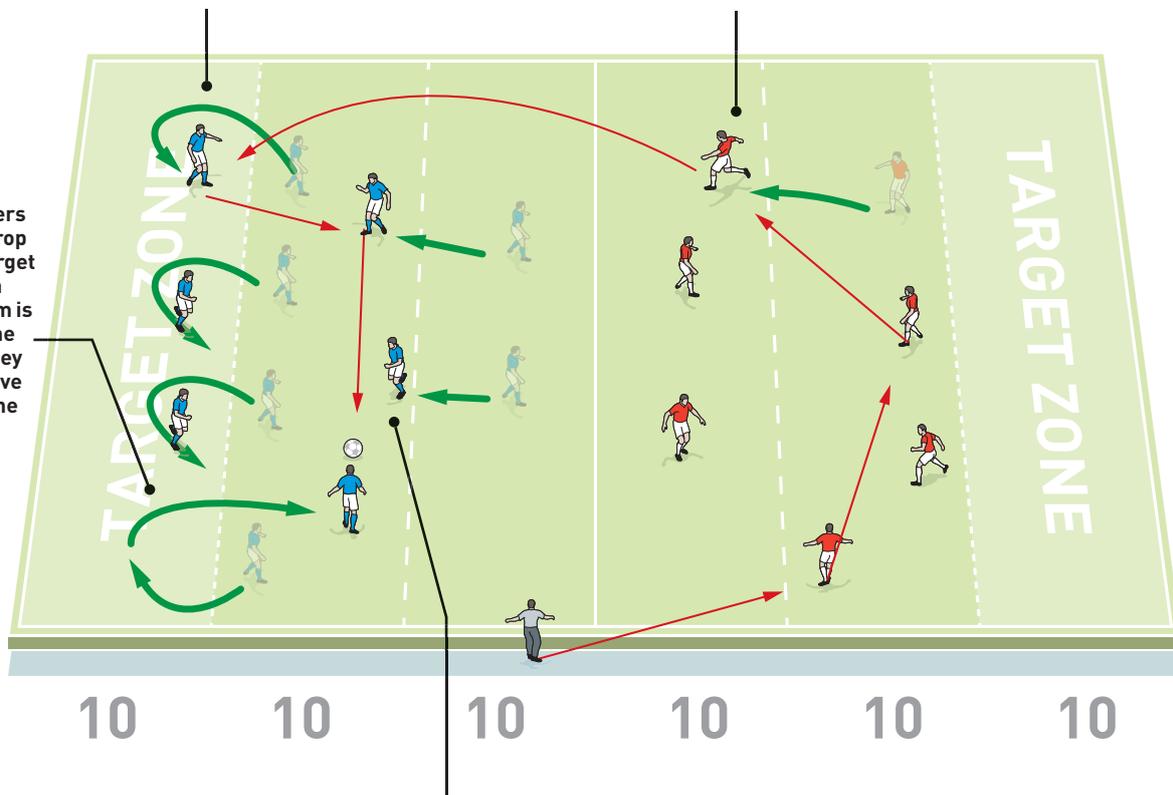
We set up an area of 60x35 yards, divided into zones as shown [1] and with a target zone at each end. We're using

1 6v6 WITH TARGET ZONES

2 The opposition defenders must drop into the target zone to clear the ball without it touching the ground, using either a header, a volley or by chesting it

1 The red defenders pass until creating a chance to play the ball into the opposite target zone. Points are scored if the ball lands on the ground inside the target zone

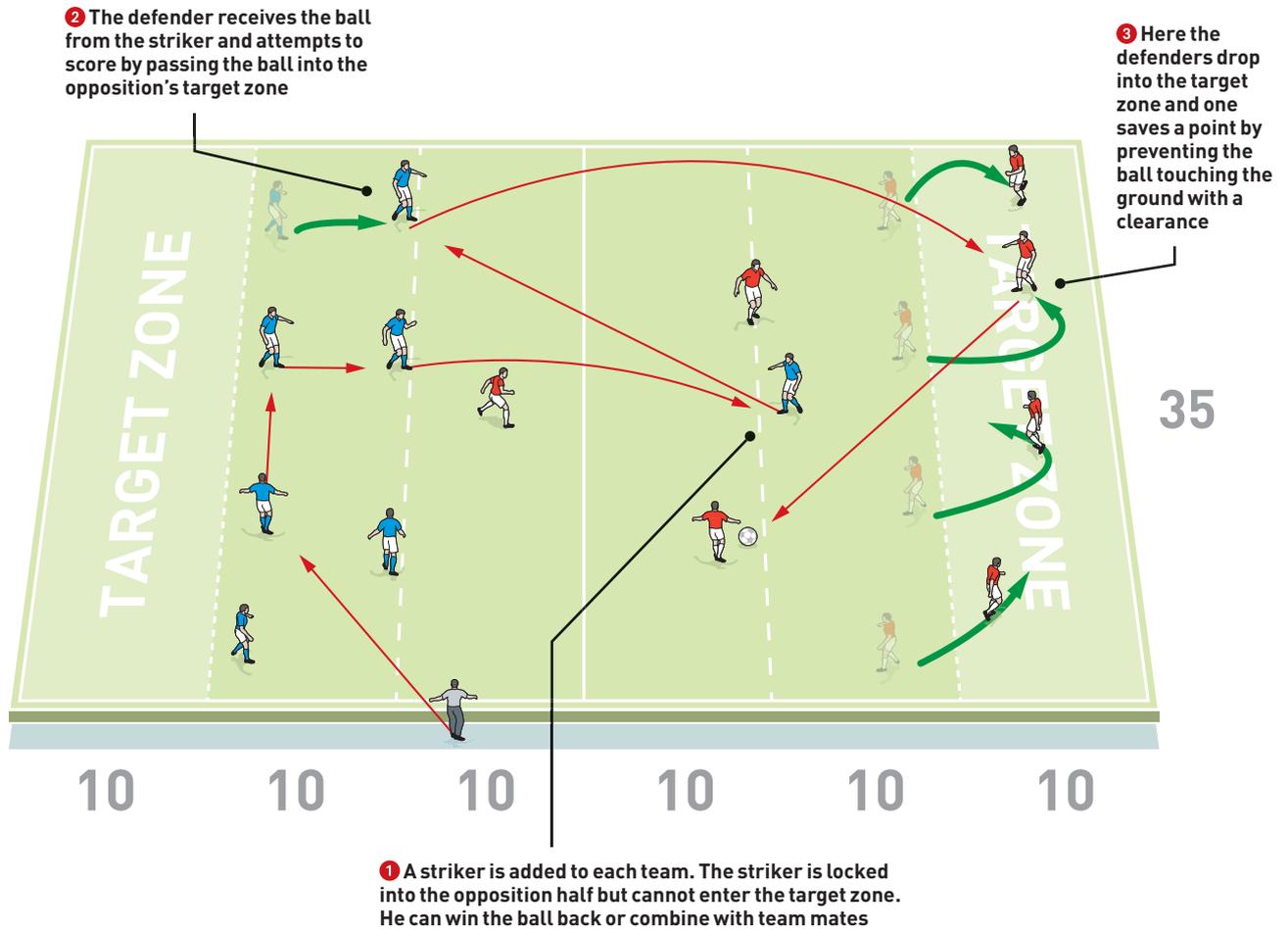
3 Defenders can only drop into the target zone when one of them is clearing the ball and they should move out after the clearance



4 The midfield pair should support the clearance and combine to set up their defenders to launch a scoring ball into the opposite target zone

ROBBIE JOHNSON: DEFENDING AGAINST HIGH BALLS

2 7v7 WITH TARGET ZONES



“This session helps to develop the technique of young players when they are dealing with balls played at them off the ground”

12 players, split into two teams of six. Each team is made up of four defenders and two midfielders. Play starts with the coach, who passes into the main area. The defenders pass the ball around until setting up an opportunity to play the ball into the opponents' target zone. Points are scored if the ball lands on the ground inside the target zone but it is the job of the opposition defenders to stop this happening and they must try to clear the ball without it touching the ground, using either a header, a volley or by chesting it.

The defenders can only drop into the target zone when one of them is clearing the ball and they have to follow the ball out of the area after the clearance. Their midfield should support the clearance by receiving the out ball and then combining to set up their defenders to launch the ball into the opposite target zone. The midfielders can go in either half of the pitch but not into the target zones.

**How do I progress the session?
7v7 with target zones**

We use the same set-up and rules

as before but a striker is now added to each team, as shown [2]. In this progression, the striker is not allowed in the opposition's target zone, but if he wins the ball back he can combine with his own midfielders to quickly recycle the ball back to the defenders. Then the team can attempt to score by playing the ball into the opposition's target zone. The striker is locked into the attacking half of the pitch, whereas the midfielders can go in both halves but not into the target zones.

ROBBIE JOHNSON: DEFENDING AGAINST HIGH BALLS

9v9 with target zones

We use the same set-up and rules as before but a second striker is now added to each team, along with a third midfielder. One of the forwards is now allowed into the opposition target zone to try to win the ball back but strikers are not allowed to go beyond the last defender without the ball, as shown [3]. After the defenders play the ball forward to the opposite target zone, they must now all step up past the defensive

line, which is between the defensive zone and the midfield zone. They should communicate the step up with each other and reset their line ready for the next attack.

How would you put this into a game situation?

10v10 with goals

We use the same set-up and rules as before but the playing area is extended by 10 yards at each end. A goal and a goalkeeper are also added

to each end. Play starts and restarts with the goalkeeper, and the defenders of the possession team are still encouraged to play balls into the opposition's target zone (conditioned to do so within four passes if necessary), but if the forwards win the ball from the opposition defenders, they can now attack for real and try to score in the goal, as shown [4]. Defenders can actively work to stop them scoring and will have to react quickly to any loss of possession.

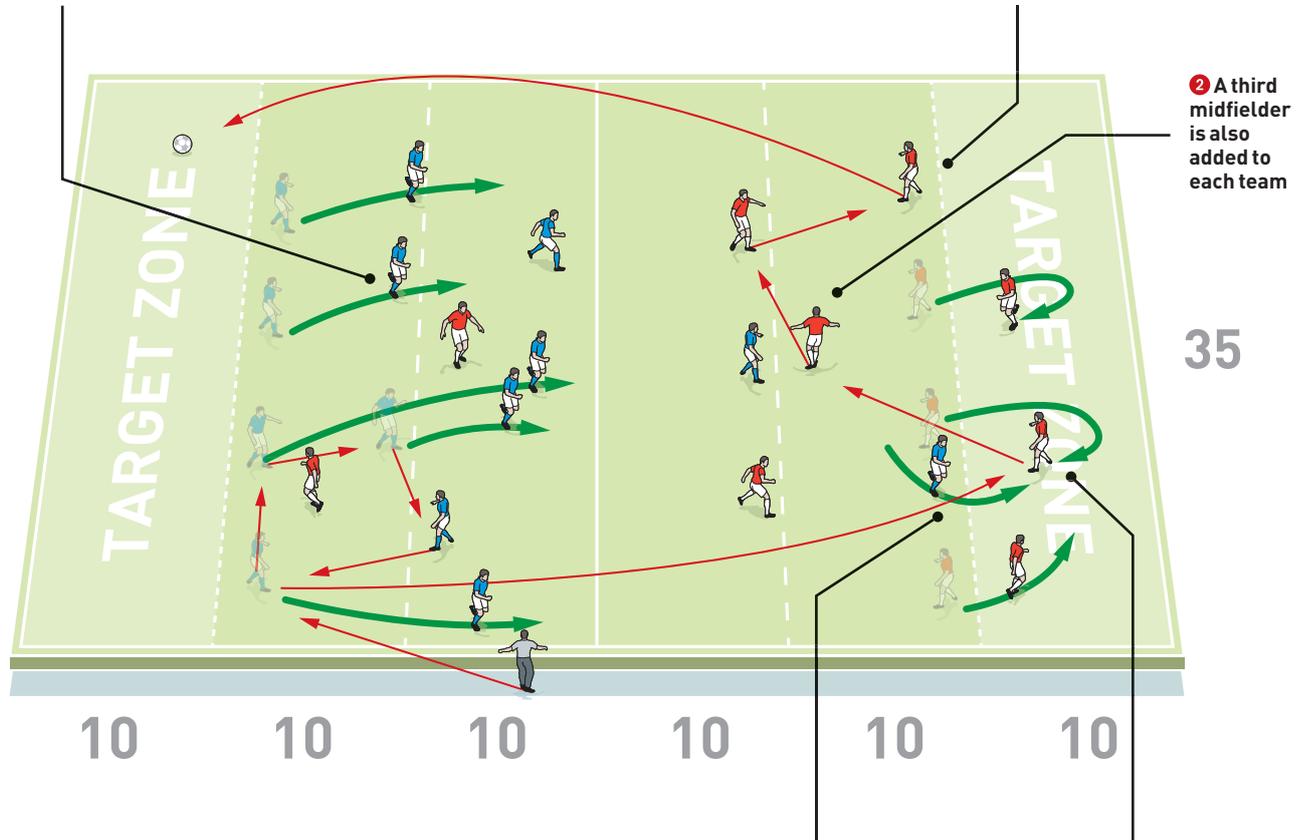
KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

3 9v9 WITH TARGET ZONES

3 After the blue defender plays the ball forward towards the opposite target zone, his defensive unit must step up over the white line between the defending zone and the midfield

5 The space created by the blues stepping up over the defensive line encourages the reds to launch a quick counter-attack and they score a point

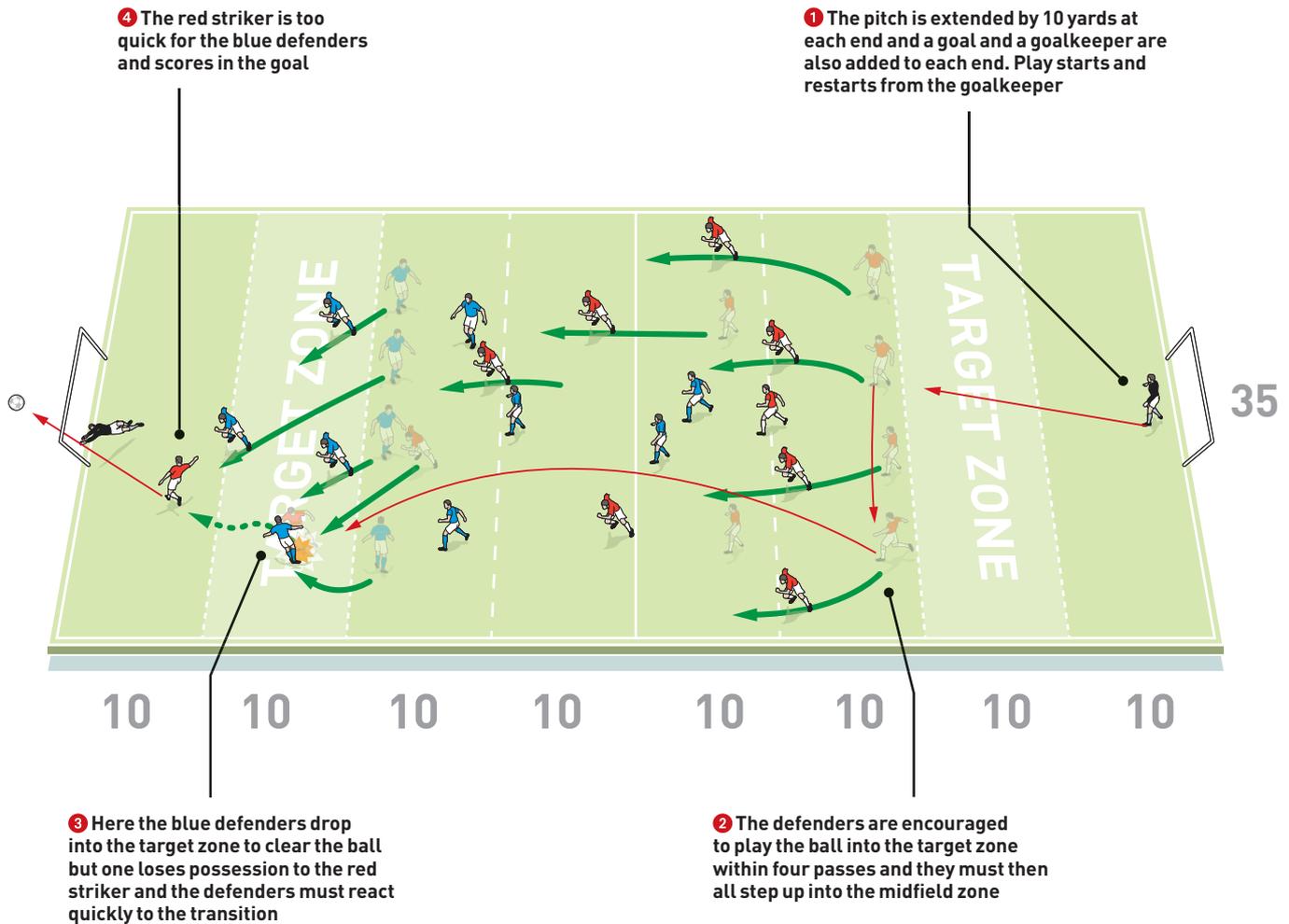


1 A second striker is added to each team. One striker is allowed into the opposition target zone to win the ball but they are not allowed to go beyond the last defender without the ball

4 Here the red defender saves a point by clearing the ball out of the target zone to a team mate

ROBBIE JOHNSON: DEFENDING AGAINST HIGH BALLS

4 10v10 WITH GOALS



“When he makes the first touch out of his feet, the defender should be ready to drop and react to the pass”

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see the defenders reacting quickly to the triggers when the opposition player is making the pass. If his head is down or when he makes the first touch out of his feet, the defenders should be ready to drop and react to the pass. Once the ball is played towards their own scoring zone, defenders should not let the ball bounce;

they should attack the ball in the air, either with their head or with a clearing volley. They should make sure their first touch does not drop in the scoring area but it must be played to supporting midfielders or defensive partners. The attackers are introduced once the basic principles of the session are understood and are being achieved. Initially they are restricted in their contact but, as the session progresses, they can play for real.

What are the typical mistakes players might make and how do I avoid them?

Sometimes we see defenders reacting too slowly to the triggers and struggling with the quality of their first contact with the ball, resulting in a failure to play to the supporting players. Clearing into dangerous areas is a problem, as is a failure to scan for team mates and opponents prior to the ball arriving.

CRE8 FOOTBALL ACADEMY

Ahmet Akdag Attacking forward runs

SET-UP

AREA

Up to full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

20 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

4v4 + targets: 15mins

10v10 + goalkeepers: 25mins

11v11 game: 30mins

Overview

This session is about players demonstrating that they can perform different types of

attacking runs: runs in behind, diagonal runs, runs from deep or overlapping runs. It enables players to take decisions independently and to look for the right opportunities to be creative in the types of forward runs they make.

The session demands players constantly make decisions that will affect their physical, technical, tactical and psychological state in a match specific situation.

I like to deliver this session every week as it gives me the opportunity to make players understand my philosophy and the key principles of the way we play. The session structure is also flexible and

can be easily transferred from an attacking session to a defending session without having to change the set-up. To make it relevant to match day, I can also have one of the teams set up in a specific formation or playing style and create a scenario that replicates our forthcoming opponents.

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

What do I get the players to do?

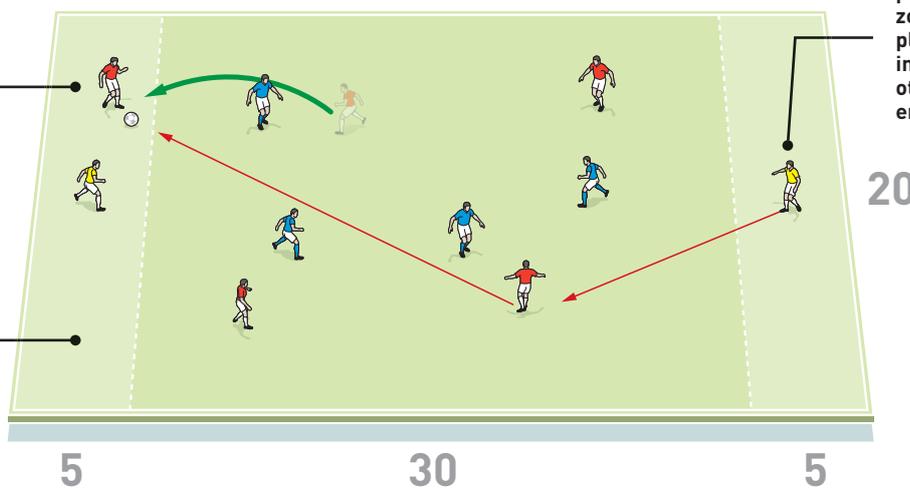
4v4 + targets

We set up in an area of 40x20 yards with a five-yard zone at each end. We're using groups of 10 outfield players split into two teams of four, plus two neutral target players. One target player starts in each end zone.

1a 4v4 + TARGETS

3 One point is scored for dribbling into the end zone. Here two points are scored for a pass received by a team mate in the end zone

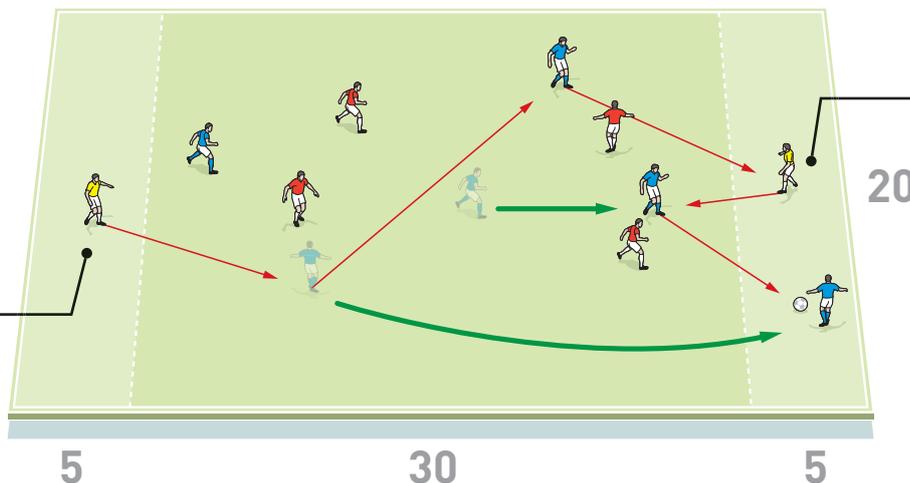
2 Play 4v4 in the main area. Teams score points by getting the ball into the end zone they are attacking



1 Play starts with a pass from the target players in the end zone. Only a target player can stand in the end zone but other players can enter to receive

1b

1 The target players restart the game with a pass to the other team as if there has been a transition



2 Teams score three points if they pass to the target player who plays out to the same team and they make a through pass into the end zone which is received by a team mate running in

AHMET AKDAG: ATTACKING FORWARD RUNS

We play a 4v4 directional game in the main area starting with a pass from one of the target players. Teams must try to score points by getting the ball into the end zone that they are attacking – only the target player can stand in the end zone but players can make a forward run into the zone with the ball or make an attacking off the ball run into the zone to receive a pass from a team mate. The possession team scores one point for dribbling the ball

into the end zone and two points for a pass into the end zone that is received by a team mate, as shown [1a]. Three points can be scored for a pass to the target player, who plays out to the same team and they make a through pass into the end zone that is received by a team mate running in, as shown [1b]. If the ball goes out of play or if one team scores, the target players restart the game with a pass to the other team to replicate a transition.

10v10 + goalkeepers

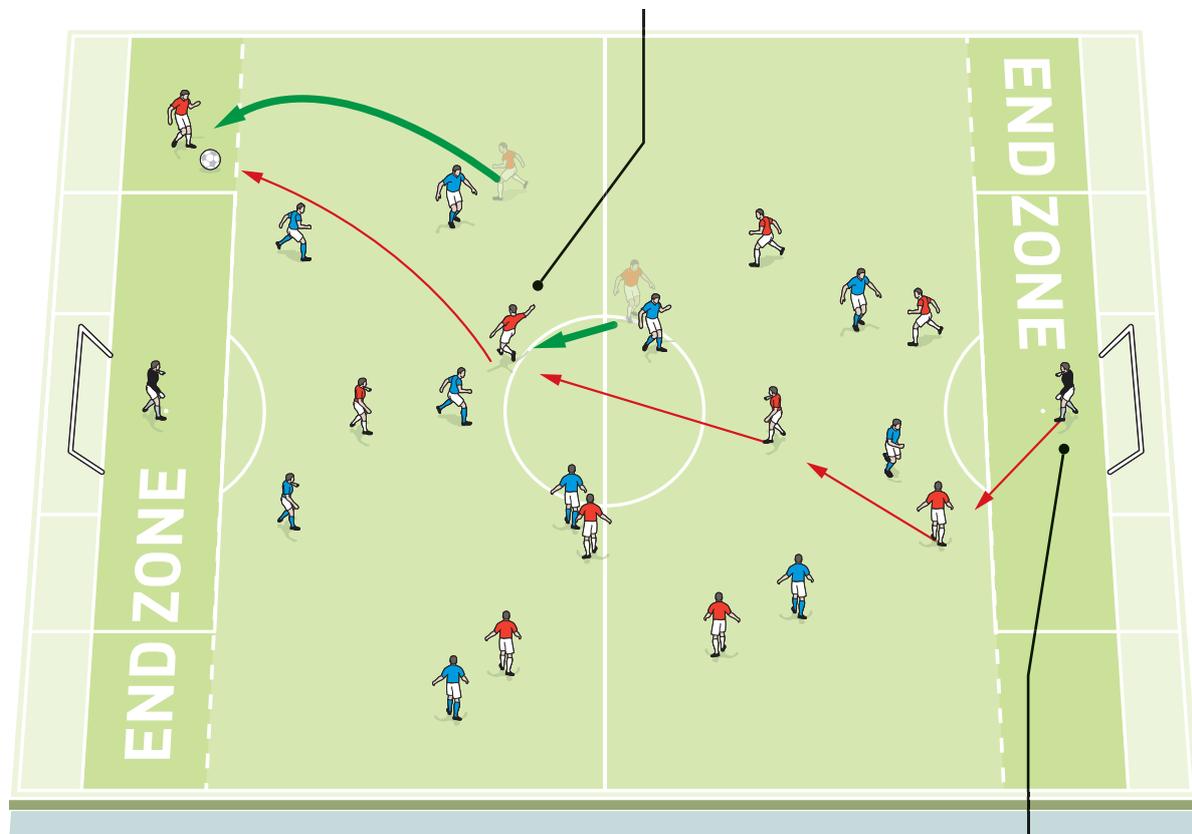
We set up between the penalty areas of a full size pitch, plus we add two end zones that each contain a goal and a goalkeeper. We're using 20 outfield players, playing 10v10 in the main area. Teams are in formation and play starts with a pass out from the keeper. As in the first activity, the possession team scores one point for dribbling the ball into the end zone and two points for a pass into the end zone that is



“This session demands players constantly make decisions that will affect their physical, technical, tactical and psychological state”

2a 10v10 + GOALKEEPERS

2 Teams score one point for dribbling the ball into the end zone and two points for a pass into the end zone that is received by a team mate, as seen here



1 Play starts from the keeper. Teams line up in formation and play 10v10 in the main area

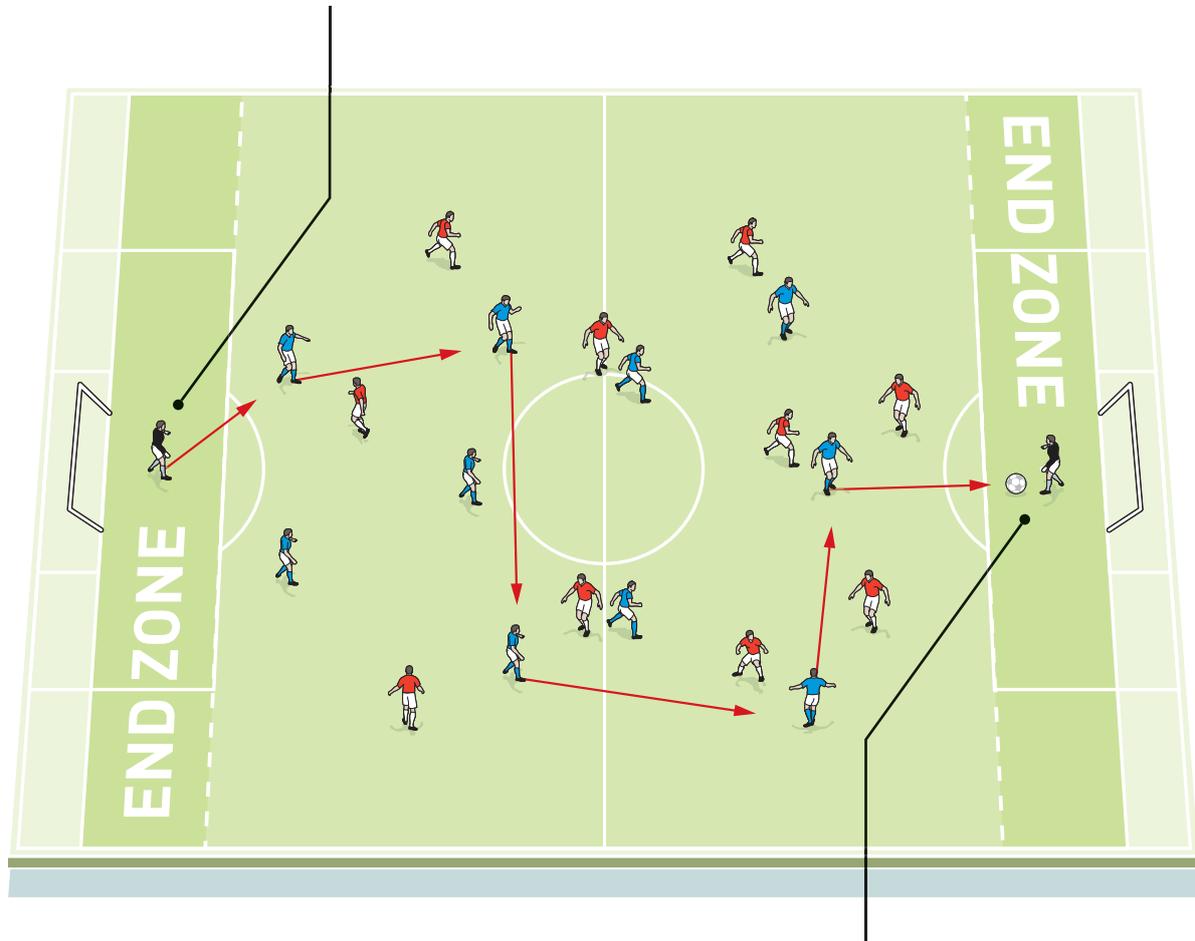
AHMET AKDAG: ATTACKING FORWARD RUNS

2b

① Play always restarts from the goalkeeper

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→



② The possession team can also score two points by passing into the hands of the opposition goalkeeper, as here

“We want to see players making forward or curved runs. They should really commit to the run and attack the space”

received by a team mate, as shown [2a]. The attacking team can also score two points by passing into the hands of the opposition goalkeeper, as shown [2b]. The team in possession can also recycle the ball back to their goalkeeper to change the point of attack. We play two matches of nine minutes each, allowing us to make some key points between matches.

**How would you put this in a game situation?
11v11 game**

This is where we will observe the players to see what learning has taken place and if they are transferring their knowledge and understanding from the previous practices into a game situation. We set up on a full pitch to play an 11v11 game with no added conditions or rules. The diagrams show two examples of the kind of

play we want to see in the game. As shown [3a], number 5 passes into number 7 who links with 8. Number 2 makes a third man run to receive from 8 and crosses into the box. As shown [3b], number 3 plays the ball to 8, who is breaking the line. Number 9 drags defenders out of position with a run towards number 8, allowing number 7 to fool the defenders with a run to receive in the penalty area, setting up a goal scoring opportunity. ▼

AHMET AKDAG: ATTACKING FORWARD RUNS

What are the key things to look out for?

Technically, we want to see players making forward or curved runs. They should really commit to the run and attack the space. Players should angle their bodies

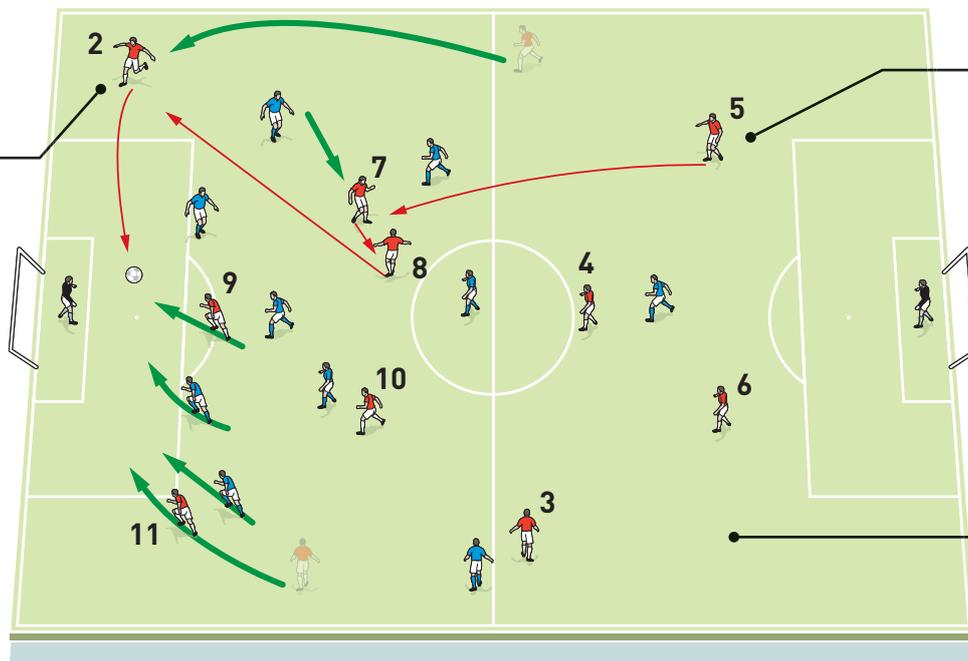
and watch the ball the whole way. The timing and angle of the run is also important. Tactically, we want to see players showing an ability to recognise the space to attack and spot if the opposition are playing a high line. They should also create space for

team mates to exploit and be able to break lines and disrupt the opposition's block. Above all, we want players to be able to recognise when the opportunity to attack arises and make the transition from defence to attack successfully.



3a 11v11 GAME

③ Here number 2 exploits the space and makes a third man run, receiving a pass from number 8 to cross into the box

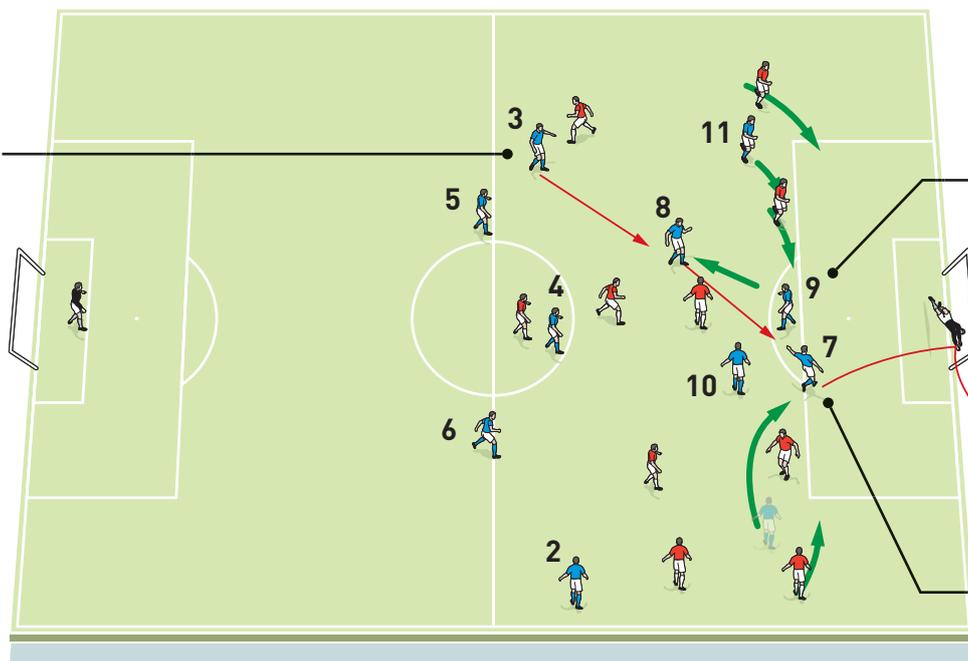


② Number 5 has passed into 7, who links with 8 first time

① Play a normal game with no added rules or conditions

3b

① Number 3 tries to beat the opposition's low block by playing the ball to number 8, who is breaking the line



② The number 9 drags defenders out of position with a run towards number 8

③ Number 7 fools the defenders with a run to receive the ball in the penalty area and shoots

EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: DARREN MOORE

PLAN AND ADAPT

Responding to change is an essential leadership skill. Here, Doncaster Rovers manager Darren Moore reflects on his career journey so far and explains how effective change management has driven his success



There's no quick route to success in management. You have to build yourself up gradually and try to get yourself into situations where you're managing people and gaining experience.

Before moving into management at West Bromwich Albion, I was responsible for loan deals for the club's academy players. That got me talking to managers, watching games, understanding how to manage people and reporting back to others in the club. I learned a lot about the quality and standards required at the top of the game.

By the time I moved into a coaching role, I'd already ticked a number of boxes and built up a rough template of how I wanted

to work. I then continued to build on those skills every day as youth coach and U23s coach, and during the time I was caretaker manager and manager of West Brom. While that period of my career ended

in the spring, I've continued to improve and grow.



I learned a lot about the quality and standards required at the top of the game

Over the summer, ahead of my first season in charge of Doncaster Rovers, I spent time reflecting with my peers on what I learned

at West Brom. For example, in my various roles at the club I became adept at communicating with people at all levels, with the commercial team, club CEOs, staff and players. I developed multi-disciplinary skills and gained a good understanding of club structure and resources. At Doncaster, we're making use of the loan market to try to maximise the strength of our squad and get the right blend of players, so my previous experience as loans manager is a real advantage.

UPS AND DOWNS

Of course, there are times when you develop faster than others and, for me, the learning curve was particularly steep when West Brom were relegated.

The Championship presents very different challenges to the Premier League and it meant huge changes for us. Whereas in the Premier League you'll normally play one game a week on a Saturday, in the

EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: DARREN MOORE

Championship it's two or three, possibly including evening and midweek games. With all of the travel, we had maybe 48 hours to prepare for each match, sometimes only half that.

For a team dropping out of the Premier League into the Championship, it can be a shock, mentally and physically, so I knew I'd have to think carefully about how we'd deal with it. I started not with the players, but with the staff, because suddenly all the routines and systems they'd put in place in the Premier League would have to change. That's always going to be disruptive, so it was important that I found ways to keep them energised, forward thinking and supportive of each other. We had to adapt to our new circumstances.

Players and staff would come in on Sundays to prepare for Monday or Tuesday games, and we trained much later because we needed to get used to playing evening matches. That, of course, then impacted on everyone working at the club.

Travel, recovery schedules and breaks, eating times, everything was different and had to be detailed to precision to help the team adapt



and perform at its best. We were strong throughout the season, never dropping out of the top six, and I think all our hard work and preparation played a big part in that.

A TEST OF CHARACTER

When you're a manager, everyone in the club needs something from you and you have to be there for them. At the same time, however, you have to allow yourself as much space as possible to make decisions and manage your time. That means finding time to switch off, to go for a walk or to the cinema, or to see friends and family, anything that takes your mind off things for a bit.

I learned early on as a manager that it's essential to be adaptable and to keep an open mind, because all kinds of scenarios will come your way, whether concerning the game itself or staff and other stakeholders. But, first and foremost, you have to be able to adapt to

the needs of the players; you can't expect them to adapt to you. Every single member of the squad is important and you have to show your commitment to each one.

I've always tried to be consistent with my staff and players. I think that's important, because people need something they can believe in, relate to and adhere to. At West Brom everyone understood how I worked, their own responsibilities to the team, and the standards, work ethic and competitive edge that I expected from them. Exactly the same is true now at Doncaster Rovers. ■

You have to be able to adapt to the needs of the players; you can't expect them to adapt to you



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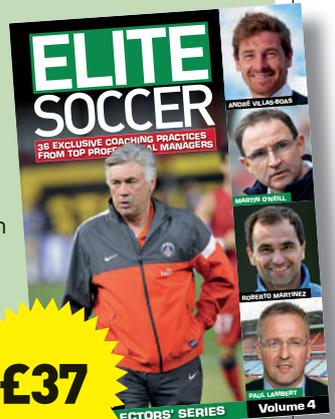
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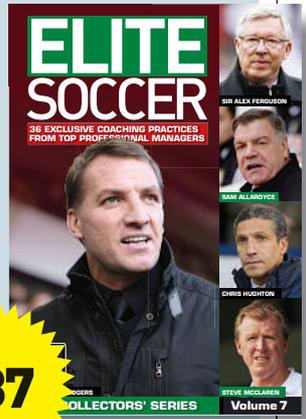
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