

# ELITE SOCCER

**Exclusive**  
Training  
practices from  
top professional  
managers

**RANGERS**

# STEVEN GERRARD

## BEATING THE BLOCK

hummel

SG



STOKE CITY

**NATHAN  
JONES**

When to press  
and when to drop



TRANMERE ROVERS

**MICKY MELLON  
& MIKE JACKSON**

Attacking and  
defending transitions



SOUTHAMPTON

**PAUL  
BUCKLE**

Press and  
protect



LMA AMBASSADOR

**TERRY  
BUTCHER**

Match  
preparation

**EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW** WITH BRISTOL CITY WOMEN'S TANYA OXTOBY

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## ISSUE 105/APRIL 2019: FROM THE CHAIRMAN



### Thought-provoking training sessions that will help to improve the way you coach

Dear Coach,

Welcome to the April issue of Elite Soccer, which features five ingenious training sessions from some of Britain's best professional coaches.

In this month's issue we are thrilled to welcome two England legends to the pages of Elite Soccer. Although the two football icons – Steven Gerrard and Terry Butcher – are at different stages of their managerial careers, they both have coaching wisdom to share with us.

Steven Gerrard is in his first season as manager of a senior team after his appointment last summer as the boss of Rangers and he has written a session on beating the block. This will teach players how to read your opponents' defensive block and identify the space to attack.

In contrast former England captain, Terry Butcher, has 28 years experience of management and in this month's issue he has given us an insight into his preparation for match day, explaining how he introduces his players to the tactics of their next opponents.

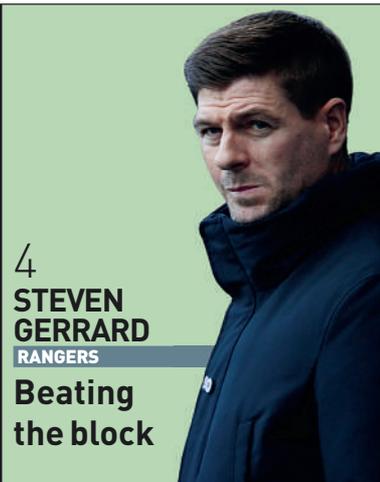
We also have two interesting practices from the training grounds of the Football League. Manager of Championship side Stoke City, Nathan Jones has penned a defensive session that will teach players when to press and when to drop as a defensive unit and how to identify and respond to the visual triggers shown by opponents. Meanwhile, Tranmere Rovers manager, Micky Mellon, and his assistant, Mike Jackson, have shared a session on attacking and defending transitions, which focuses on the key moments when the ball changes hands and how teams can either exploit these opportunities or defend against them.

Former Luton Town manager, Paul Buckle, is currently assistant manager of Premier League Southampton's U23 team. In this month's issue he has written a simple defensive session that encourages teams to press high and press aggressively, while also conditioning players to react quickly to a successful turnover of possession.

I hope you find that the training sessions in this issue will be of benefit to your coaching in the weeks ahead. Elite Soccer will return next month with five more thought-provoking training ground practices.

*Howard Wilkinson*

**Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman**



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...with Bristol City Women manager, Tanya Oxtoby

# MANAGER PROFILES

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

## STEVEN GERRARD

### RANGERS

One of the most respected players in English football history, Steven Gerrard made over 700 appearances for his home club of Liverpool, winning the FA Cup twice and the League Cup on three occasions.

Most notably he lifted the Champions League trophy as captain in 2005, inspiring Liverpool to an incredible second-half comeback from 3-0 down to AC Milan. That year he also finished third in the Ballon d'Or vote, the annual award to recognise the best players in Europe.

He left Liverpool in 2015 as the only footballer to have scored in an FA Cup final, a League Cup final, a UEFA Cup final and a Champions League final, finishing on the winning team on each occasion.

As an international, he represented his country 114 times, making him England's fourth most capped player ever.

Winding up his playing career in the USA at LA Galaxy, he completed two seasons in Major League Soccer. On returning to the UK, he was linked with the vacant manager's position at MK Dons, but instead he returned to Liverpool in 2017 to serve his apprenticeship as a youth coach. He was soon promoted to manager of the club's U18 side and was subsequently put in charge of Liverpool's U19s for the start of their 2017-18 UEFA Youth League campaign. Ahead of the 2018-19 season, Gerrard was appointed manager of Scottish giants, Rangers, signing a four-year deal. He made his senior managerial debut on July 12, when he led Rangers to a 2-0 Europa League win over Macedonian side Shkupi. Under Gerrard's management, Rangers went 12 matches unbeaten in all competitions from the start of the season.

## NATHAN JONES

### STOKE CITY

A defender as a player, Nathan Jones began his career with Luton in 1995 but after a year at Kenilworth Road, he left for a 12-month spell in Spain, playing for Numancia and Badajoz. On returning to the UK he played for Southend, Brighton and Yeovil, winning promotion three times with Brighton.

It was with Yeovil that Jones began his coaching badges, and in 2009 he became the club's assistant manager. After a brief spell as U21s manager at Charlton, he was appointed assistant head coach at Championship side Brighton in 2013. Going on to serve the club as first team coach, he also enjoyed a brief spell as caretaker manager.

Appointed manager of Luton Town in January 2016, he saved the club from relegation in his first season and oversaw promotion to League One a year later. He was appointed Stoke City manager in January 2019.

## MICKY MELLON & MIKE JACKSON

### TRANMERE ROVERS

Amidfielder with West Brom, Blackpool, Tranmere and Burnley, Micky Mellon turned to coaching in 2006 when he was appointed assistant manager of Lancaster City. He soon returned to Burnley as a youth coach and initially combined this role with managing non-league Fleetwood Town. After making the move to Fleetwood full time, he led the club to two promotions in three seasons, winning the Conference Premier title in 2012.

Mellon served Barnsley as assistant manager and caretaker manager, before being appointed boss of Shrewsbury Town in 2012. He led the Shrews to automatic promotion to League One in 2015. Becoming manager of National League side, Tranmere Rovers, he took the club

back into the Football League as play-off winners in 2018.

Mike Jackson is assistant manager of Tranmere. He got a taste for coaching with Shrewsbury, where he stood in as manager at the end of the 2013-14 season. He was retained as assistant to Micky Mellon and followed Mellon to Tranmere.

## PAUL BUCKLE

### SOUTHAMPTON

Currently assistant manager of Southampton's U23s, Paul Buckle began his coaching career at Exeter City before being appointed manager of Conference Premier side Torquay United in 2007. He helped Torquay return to the Football League and subsequently enjoyed a stint as manager of Bristol Rovers.

In April 2012 he became manager of Luton and led the club to the Conference Premier play-off final. Moving to the USA, he was appointed technical director of the Met Oval in New York in 2013. After a spell in charge of Cheltenham Town in League Two, he returned to the USA to become head coach of Sacramento Republic.

## TERRY BUTCHER

### LMA AMBASSADOR

One of the most iconic footballers of his generation, Terry Butcher accepted his first management position with top-flight Coventry City just months after reaching the World Cup semi-finals with England in 1990. At 31, he was the youngest manager in the Football League. He went on to manage Sunderland in the Premier League, Brentford and Newport County in the Football League, and Sydney in the Australian A-League. He managed in Scotland, with Hibernian and led Motherwell to the 2005 Scottish League Cup Final. He also took Inverness to promotion to the Scottish Premier League in 2010 as First Division champions.

**RANGERS**

**Steven Gerrard  
Beating the block**

**SET-UP**

**AREA**

Up to full pitch

**EQUIPMENT**

Balls, bibs, cones, mannequins, four small goals, 2 full size goals

**NUMBER OF PLAYERS**

20 players + 2 goalkeepers

**SESSION TIME**

Practice 1: 16mins

Practice 2: 24mins

**Overview**

This session is designed to improve player and team awareness within the game. The specific awareness we are looking to improve is how to read an opponent's defensive block and identify the space to attack.

Over the course of a season we will play against different types of defensive block. Some teams will come after you in a high press, others will set traps in a medium press, and some teams might sit back in a low block to condense space so they can regain the ball and launch counter-attacks.

The type of defensive block used might be set for the whole game or it could change within the game due to the score. However, we like our players to clearly understand what to look for in each scenario, so they can react accordingly.

We generally want our players to think about two important questions. Firstly, where is the space to attack? Is it on the sides, through the middle, or behind the opponents? We use the term "over, around or through".

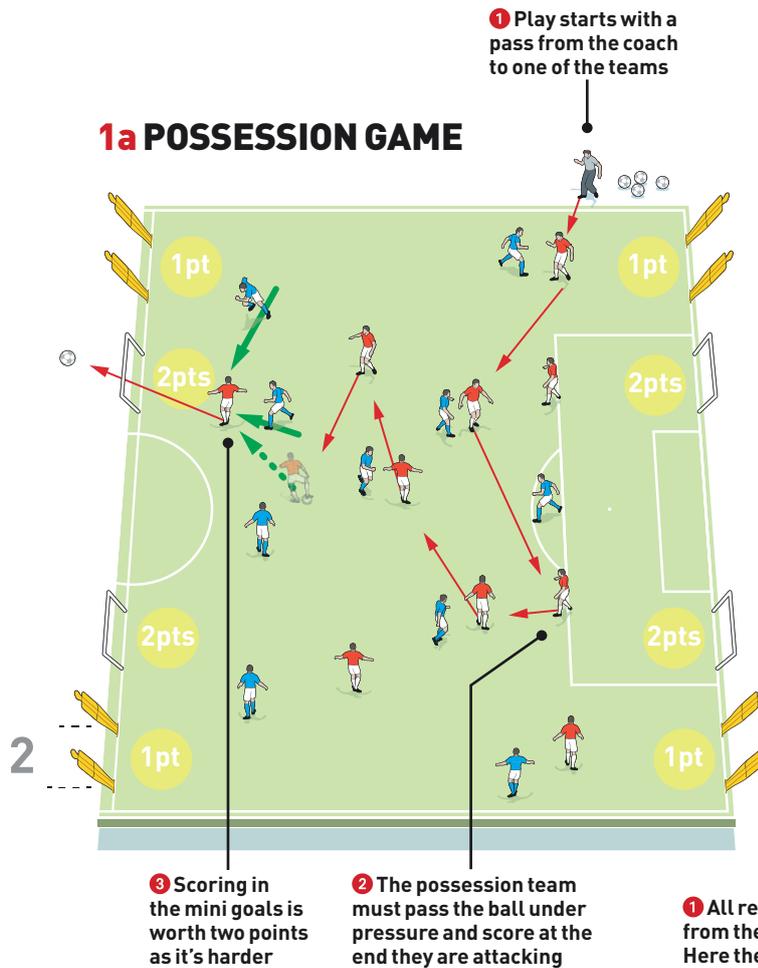
Secondly, we like to ask them how can we get our most influential attackers on the ball as much as possible and in the right areas of the pitch?

This session is unique because we can use the formation we want to adopt for our next game and also the formation that our opponents will use. Therefore, this type of training is constantly changing and adapting due to the different opponents we will

**KEY**

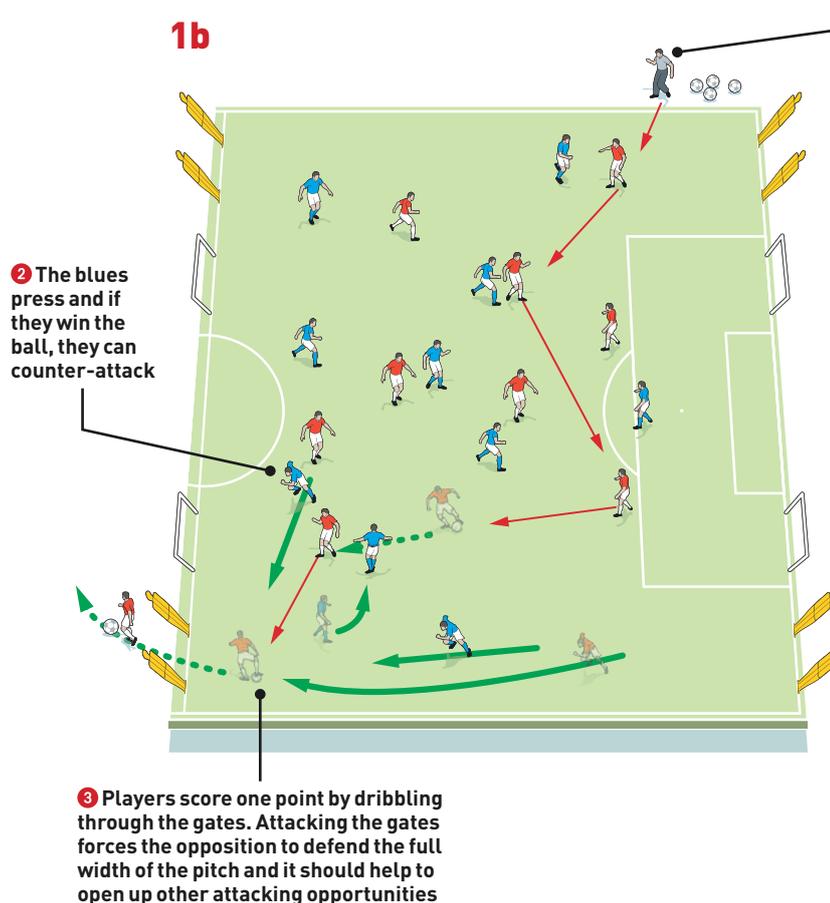
- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

**1a POSSESSION GAME**



**1** All restarts are from the coach. Here the reds are attacking again

**1b**

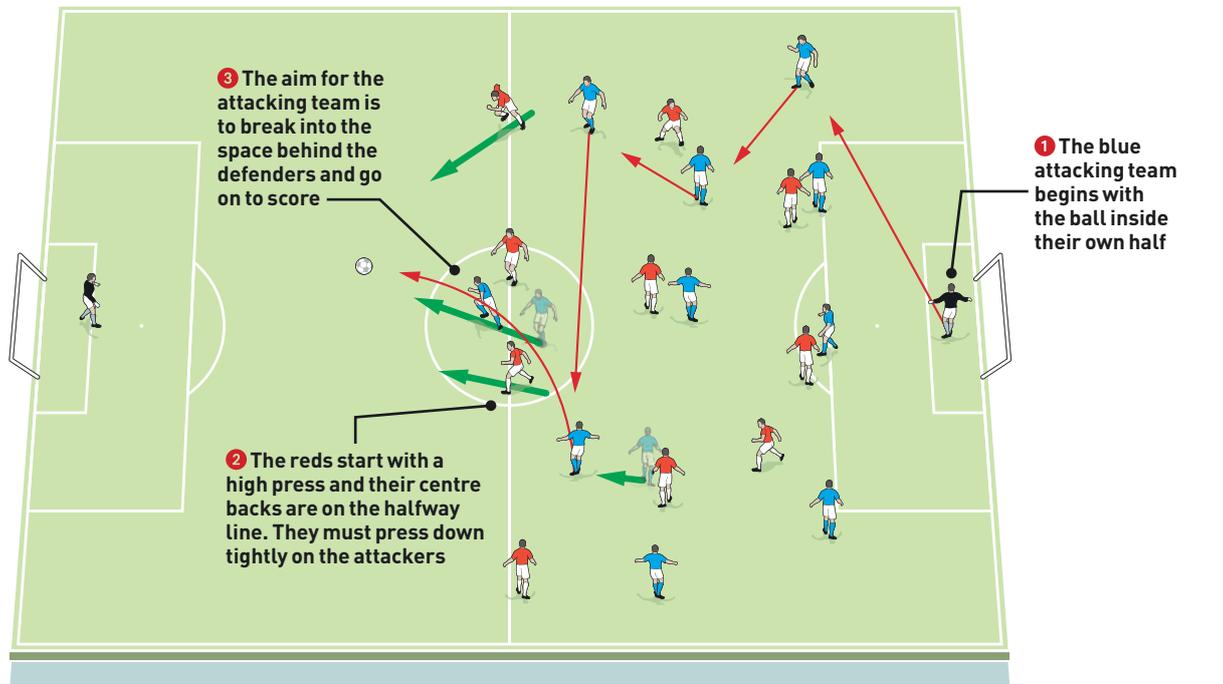


**2** The blues press and if they win the ball, they can counter-attack

**3** Players score one point by dribbling through the gates. Attacking the gates forces the opposition to defend the full width of the pitch and it should help to open up other attacking opportunities

**STEVEN GERRARD: BEATING THE BLOCK**

**2a ATTACK A HIGH PRESS**



**4** Play continues until the ball goes dead or a goal is scored. Then players quickly reset for the next part of the practice

“We are looking for players to read an opponent’s defensive block and identify the space to attack”

face and the tactics they are likely to use in defending.

**What do I get the players to do?**

**Practice 1: Possession game**

We set up on half a pitch. At each end there are two centrally positioned mini goals. There are also two two-yard gates marked with mannequins that are positioned out wide. We are using 20 outfield players divided into two teams of 10. We play a 10v10 directional game, with each team trying to score in the mini goals and the gates at the end they are attacking. Scoring in the mini goals, as shown [1a], is worth two points because it is more difficult to achieve due to it being more congested in

the centre of the pitch. Scoring by dribbling through one of the wide gates, as shown [1b], is worth one point.

This practice is used to emphasise the constant need for attacking with width, as it will force opponents to defend the full width of the pitch.

The attacking team must search for spaces around, through or behind their opponents.

We play the game for two periods of eight minutes.

**What do I get the players to do next?**

**Practice 2**

We now practise game scenarios against the three different types of defensive block...

**PRACTICE 2 – ORDER OF PLAY**

- Blues – attack high press
- Blues – attack medium block
- Blues – attack low block
- Repeat if necessary or 8mins free play*
- Reds – attack high press
- Reds – attack medium block
- Reds – attack low block
- Repeat if necessary or 8mins free play*

**Position A: Attack a high press**

We set up on a full pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper at each end. We’re using 20 outfield players divided into two teams of 10. The attacking team (in the diagram, the blues) begin with the ball inside their own half, with play starting from their keeper. Their opponents (the reds) are looking to press the ball and turnover

**STEVEN GERRARD: BEATING THE BLOCK**

possession but they must defend with a high line, with their centre backs on the halfway line.

The aim for the blue team is to break into the space behind the red team and go on to score, as shown [2a]. The game continues until the ball goes out of play or a goal is scored, then the players reset for Position B.

**Position B: Attack a medium block**

Following directly on from the conclusion of Position A, the players reset for Position B. The red defending team is now set up in a medium block and is trying to set traps for the blues in order to regain

the ball and launch a counter-attack. The blue attacking team begins with the ball at the midway position inside their own half, approximately 36 yards from their own goal. They must try to break past the medium block and score in the opposition goal, as shown [2b]. Again, the game continues as an open play match until the ball leaves the pitch or a goal is scored. When the ball is dead, the players reset for Position C.

**Position C: Attack a low block**

Following straight on from the conclusion of Position B, the players reset for Position C. The

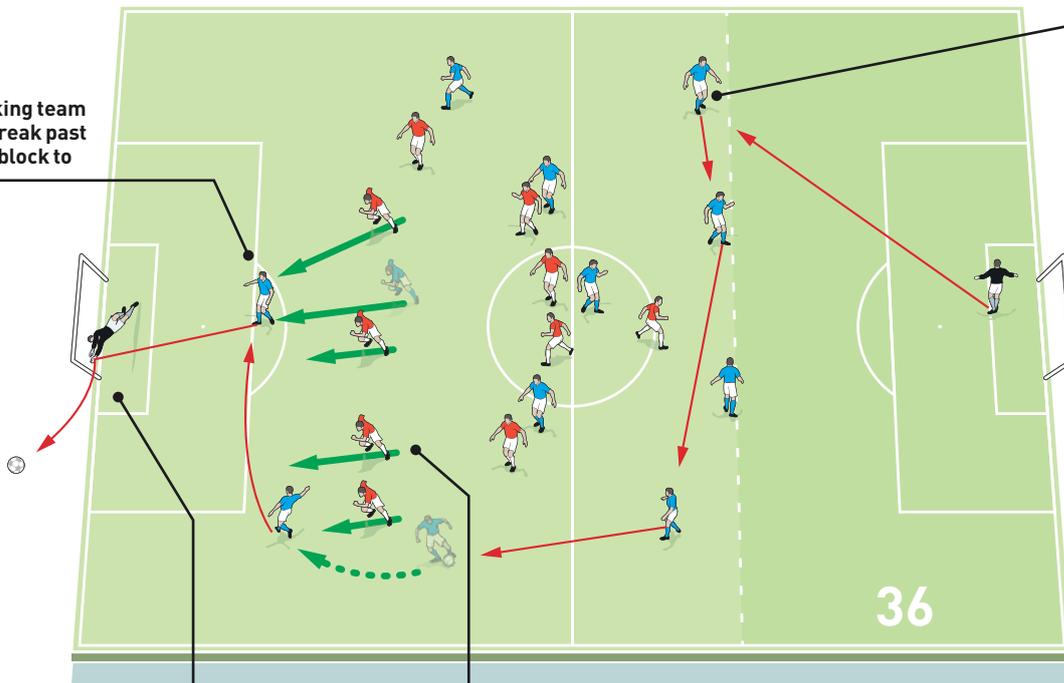
red defending team are now sitting deep in a low block, while the blue attacking team begins with the ball on the halfway line. The blues must now try to build an attack and score against the low block, as shown [2c]. Again, we play until the ball leaves the pitch or a goal is scored.

After the three balls have been played, we either repeat each scenario again, or progress into a free play game for eight minutes to complete the first half of this practice. For the second half, the roles are reversed and now the red team begins with the ball and has the attacking initiative.

**2b ATTACK A MEDIUM BLOCK**

3 The attacking team must try to break past the medium block to score a goal

2 The blue attacking team begins with the ball at the midway point of their own half, about 36 yards from their goal



4 The game continues until the ball leaves the pitch or a goal is scored. Then players reset for the next part of the practice

1 The red defending team is now set up in a medium block and it tries to set traps to regain the ball and launch a counter-attack

**KEY**

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

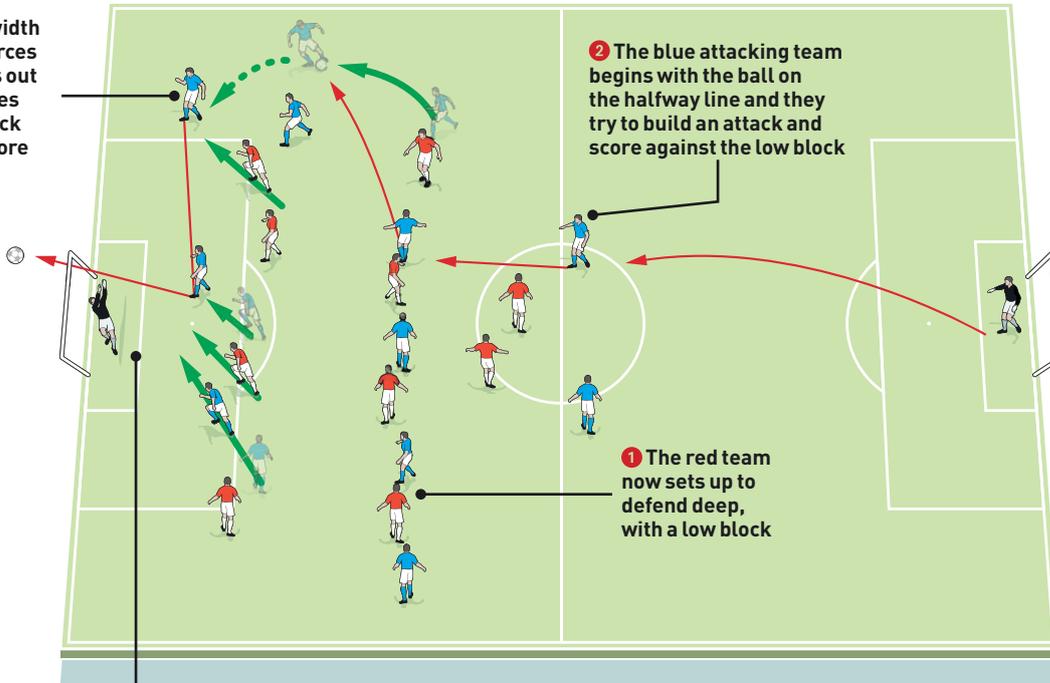
**STEVEN GERRARD: BEATING THE BLOCK**

**2c ATTACK A LOW BLOCK**

**KEY**

- Ball movement
- Player movement
- Dribble

**3** Using the width of the pitch forces the defenders out wide and leaves spaces to attack and exploit more centrally



**2** The blue attacking team begins with the ball on the halfway line and they try to build an attack and score against the low block

**1** The red team now sets up to defend deep, with a low block

**4** Play until the ball leaves the pitch or a goal is scored

“Each team is different. Therefore, we need to identify which defensive tactic our team struggles to play against”

This gives the blue team a chance to work on the different defensive organisations and also ensures that all players in the squad are developed in the same ideas of play. For certain opponents, we may repeat one of the game scenarios more than the others, but it's important that all scenarios are covered and solutions are given to the problems we might face in the game. There will be a lot of opportunities for the coaches to observe and guide the players during the session.

**How do I progress the session?**

This style of training is a bridge between tactical development and an open play 11v11 game. The session enables us to improve both team and player clarity and awareness.

The next stage is to play an open game and observe the team and players.

**What are the key things to look out for?**

Which game scenario do our players have the most issues with? Each team is different due to the make up of the players. Therefore, we need to identify which defensive tactic our team struggles to play against: the high press, the medium block or the low block? We also need to help them understand what is needed to be successful.

Width is essential, as the different types of defensive block and the offside rule means that although your opponents can shorten the length of the pitch, they can never

shorten the width of the pitch. Therefore we like to encourage attacking players to understand the need to occupy the full width and then search for the spaces between or behind the lines.

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

In all of the scenarios, the team needs width to give players the option of going around an opponent's block to dribble or cross.

Players must also create movement in the last line of the opponent's defence. This is key to making space for the players on the ball, whilst also disrupting the defence to receive passes into the space behind or down the sides of the centre backs.

**STOKE CITY**

**Nathan Jones**  
**When to press and when to drop**

<b>SET-UP</b>
<b>AREA</b> Up to 55x40 yards
<b>EQUIPMENT</b> Balls, bibs, cones, 1 full size goal, 3 small goals
<b>NUMBER OF PLAYERS</b> Up to 11 players + 2 goalkeepers
<b>SESSION TIME</b> Visual triggers: 20mins Progression 1: 15mins Progression 2: 15mins

**Overview**

This session is all about teaching players when to press and when to drop as a defensive unit and it encourages them to identify and respond to the visual triggers shown by their opponents. As a practice, it allows for the consistent repetition of the key triggers but within varied circumstances, helping players to quickly reference the visual information available and select an appropriate response. It influences the fundamental skill of pattern recognition, which allows players to become proactive in their behaviour through the early identification of potential threats and the selection of appropriate responses.

**What do I get the players to do?**

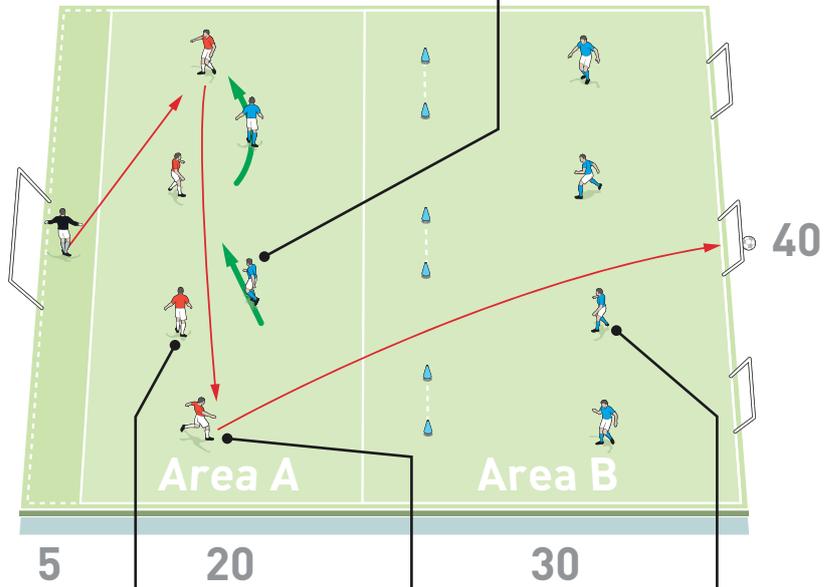
**Visual triggers**

We set up an area of 50x40 yards, with the length divided into two separate areas, one of 20 yards in length (Area A) and the other of 30 yards in length (Area B). We position a full size goal and a goalkeeper five yards outside the end of Area A. In Area B, we mark out three small gates approximately six yards from the line separating the two areas, and we position three small goals at the end of the area. We're using 10 outfield players divided into an attacking team of four (the reds) and a defending team of six (the blues). The four attackers and two of the

**KEY**

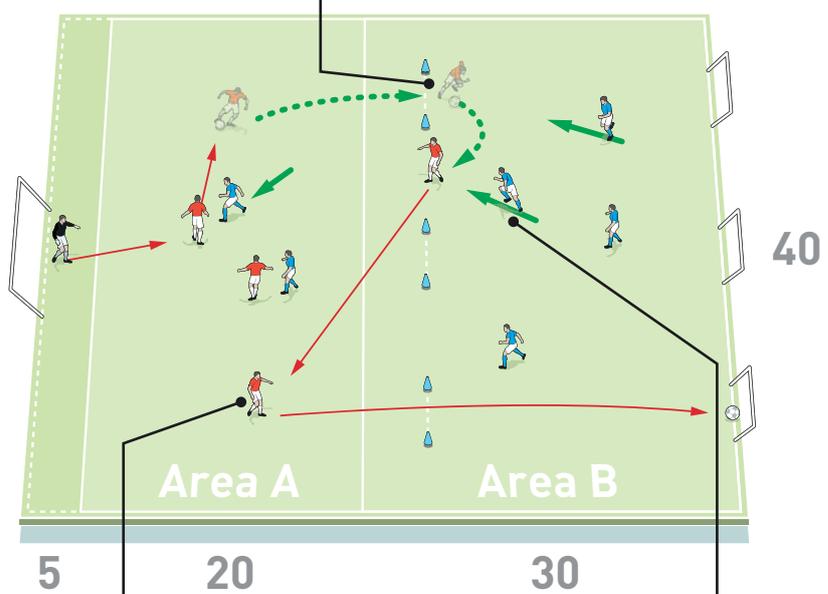
- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble - - - - - →

**1a VISUAL TRIGGERS**



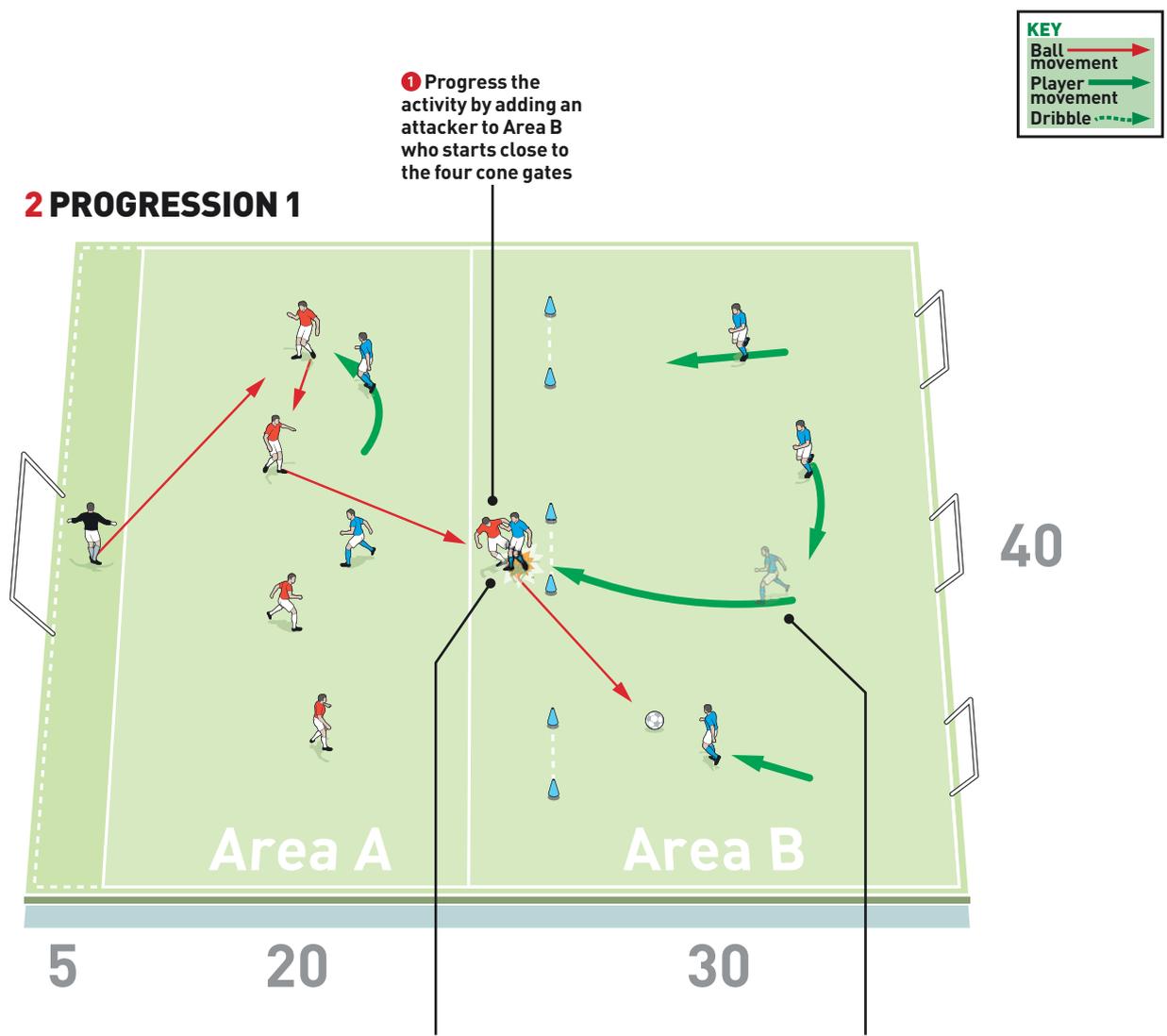
- 1** The red attacking team keeps possession in Area A until creating an opening to score
- 2** Two blue defenders press the ball in Area A and should try to restrict the attacking options of the reds
- 3** The reds have two ways to score. Here they score by passing into one of the goals in Area B
- 4** The four blue defenders in Area B work as a unit to stop the blues scoring. They should respond to the visual triggers. Here they stay deep and try to prevent a pass played in behind

**1b**



- 1** Here a red attacker scores by dribbling through a cone gate. He can't now score in the small goal and must try to recycle the ball
- 2** The four blue defenders in Area B work as a unit and respond to the visual triggers, pressing high as the attacker dribbles into their area
- 3** The reds score another point with the recycled ball because the blues don't recover their shape quickly enough
- 4** If the blue defenders win possession, they must try to play the ball into the full size goal in Area A as quickly as possible

**NATHAN JONES: WHEN TO PRESS AND WHEN TO DROP**



**2 PROGRESSION 1**

**1** Progress the activity by adding an attacker to Area B who starts close to the four cone gates

**2** The extra red attacker receives a pass. He can either try to score by dribbling through a cone gate or by passing into a target goal

**3** Here the blue defenders respond to the threat of the extra attacker and press high to win the ball

defending team start in Area A, and the four remaining defenders begin in Area B. The attackers in Area A must pass the ball to retain possession under pressure from the two defenders. When the opportunity arises, the attackers should look to play a long ball forward in the direction of one of the target goals at the opposite end of Area B, as shown [1a]. If they are successful in hitting the target, they score a point. This is aimed at testing the players' technical competency. The attackers can also score a point by driving forward into Area B and dribbling through one of the cone gates, as shown [1b]. However, once they have dribbled through the gate they can no longer score in the target goals at the end of the area,

but if pressed by the defenders, who must react accordingly to any threat, the attacker can turn and pass back to a team mate in Area A and play continues. If the defenders gain possession, they should look to play the ball into the full size goal as soon as possible.

**How do I progress the session?**

**Progression 1**

Using the same basic set-up as in the main practice, we would progress by adding an attacker to Area B, who stays close to the four cone gates, as shown [2]. He can receive from his team mates and can either score by passing into one of the target goals or by dribbling through a cone gate. By adding an extra attacker, this means the defenders have

to consider an additional threat and it requires an adaptation to their defensive line and a greater prioritisation of risk.

**Progression 2**

An alternative progression would be to replace the three target goals in Area B with a two-yard end zone. A goalkeeper is positioned in the end zone, as shown [3], and to score a point the attackers must pass the ball for the keeper to receive at below head height. The keeper is free to receive anywhere in the end zone. All other rules and principles would remain the same.

**What are the key things to look out for?**

This is a defending session and the

**NATHAN JONES: WHEN TO PRESS AND WHEN TO DROP**

key consideration for the players is to use the available visual triggers to help them understand the risks – in other words, we want players to be able to read the game successfully. We want to see the two defenders in Area A pressing the ball and restricting the options of the attackers. If the attackers manage to beat the press and make either a long pass or a forward run into the other area, this would provide the visual trigger for the four defenders in Area B. In response to the circumstances of their opponents' possession, the four defenders would be required to either sit deep and protect against a pass behind, or press high because an attacker is free to run through a gate, or to split their defensive line and narrow off more as both attacking options may be present. It's important that the defenders

work well as a unit and communicate with one another. They should also recover well when necessary and be composed on winning back possession, so they make their shot at the opposition goal count for them.

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

Sometimes players don't spot the visual triggers. This means they fail to recognise the threat and don't understand how to prioritise their response to an attack. Another typical problem is that players fail to co-ordinate the movement of their defensive line and don't work together as a unit.

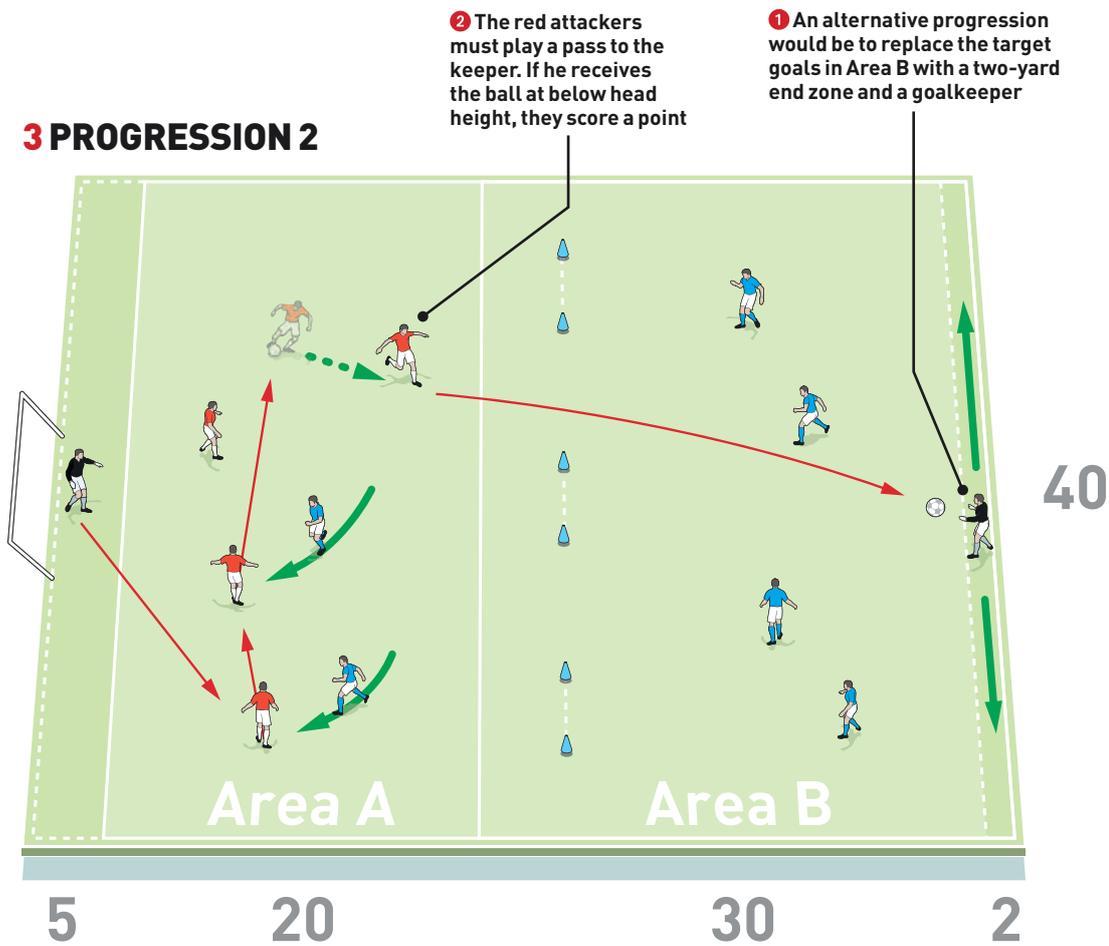
**How can I adapt the session?**

If changes are needed, the basic principle of the session – pattern

recognition – can be maintained, whilst allowing coaches to adapt the organisation in order to suit personal formation preferences, such as playing with a back three or using three defensive midfielders in Area A. The relevance for players coached in any format of the practice remains valid if they are then required to operate in a different defensive shape. They simply transfer their ability to recognise patterns to slightly varied circumstances, but the key decisions remain the same.

**How long does the session last?**

The timings and duration of the session can vary and are dependent on player progress. The challenges set by the practices can be adjusted through the depth of information and subsequent performances expected.



**KEY**  
 Ball movement →  
 Player movement →  
 Dribble .....→

“This session encourages players to identify and respond to the visual triggers shown by their opponents”

**TRANMERE ROVERS**  
**Micky Mellon  
& Mike Jackson**  
**Attacking and  
defending  
transitions**

<b>SET-UP</b>
<b>AREA</b> Up to full pitch
<b>EQUIPMENT</b> Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals
<b>NUMBER OF PLAYERS</b> Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers
<b>SESSION TIME</b> Transition – 2v2 into 3v2: 15mins Attacking waves: 20mins Transition 11v11 game: 20mins

**Overview**  
This session is about attacking and defending transitions, focusing on the key moments when the ball changes hands. We work on how we can defend and exploit these most exciting and important phases of the game, either by building a fast attack with the support of the full backs or by playing the ball early to the forwards. We practise this type of session because the league we play in is quite physical and has a good mixture of playing styles, with a high number of turnovers and restarts. This session has high physical demands and requires intensity

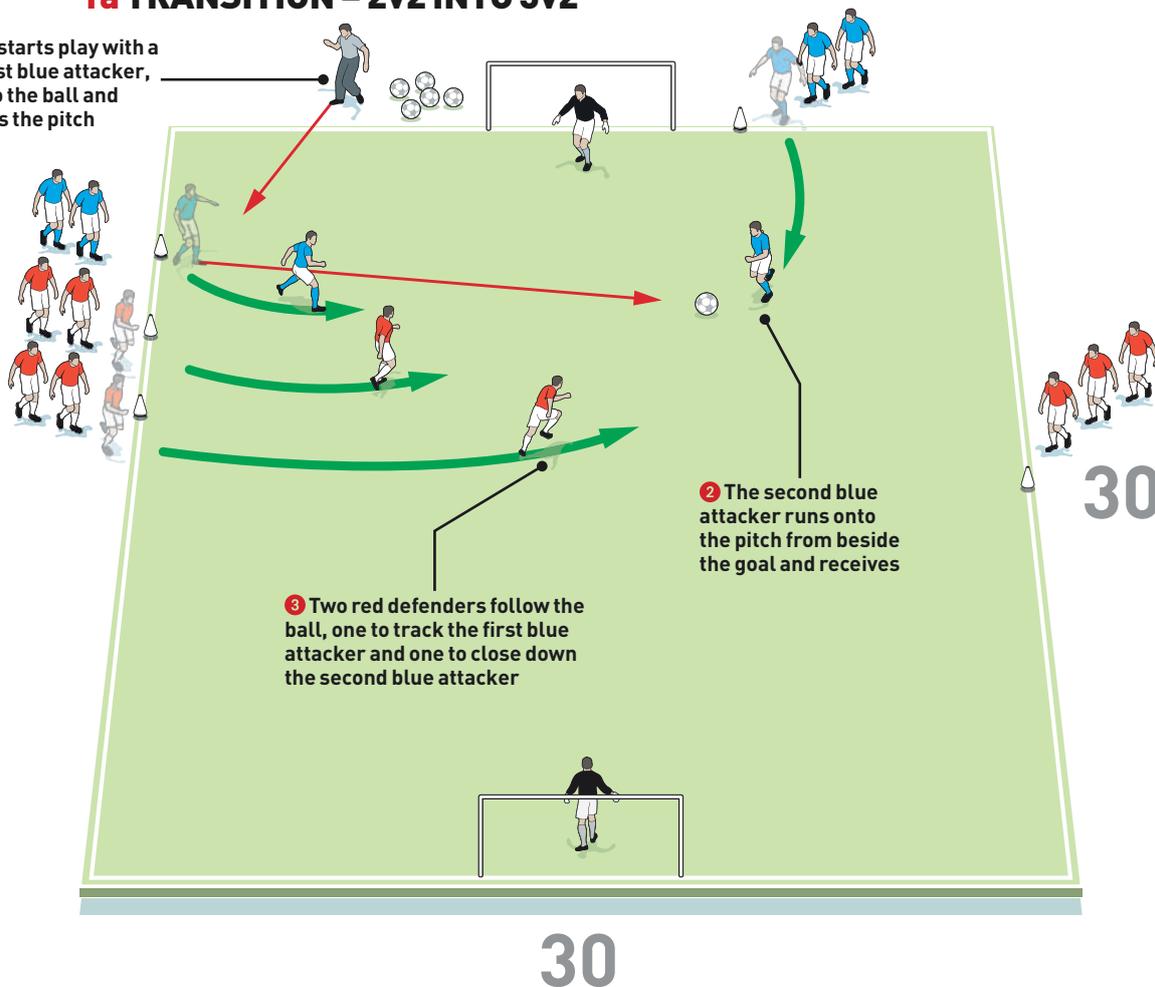
and a strong mentality to make it a success. We believe in challenging the players throughout the session and we provide feedback in the rest periods and discuss problems and solutions that are occurring within the practices as we progress. We also demonstrate to the players, and discuss with them, their roles and responsibilities and the importance of being in control in these situations. We tend to adjust the numbers and set-ups used in the session based on the style of our future opponents but it is always linked to the basic principles of how we play.

**KEY**

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

**1a TRANSITION – 2v2 INTO 3v2**

1 The coach starts play with a ball to the first blue attacker, who moves to the ball and passes across the pitch



2 The second blue attacker runs onto the pitch from beside the goal and receives

3 Two red defenders follow the ball, one to track the first blue attacker and one to close down the second blue attacker

“This session has high physical demands and requires intensity and a strong mentality to make it a success. We believe in challenging the players”

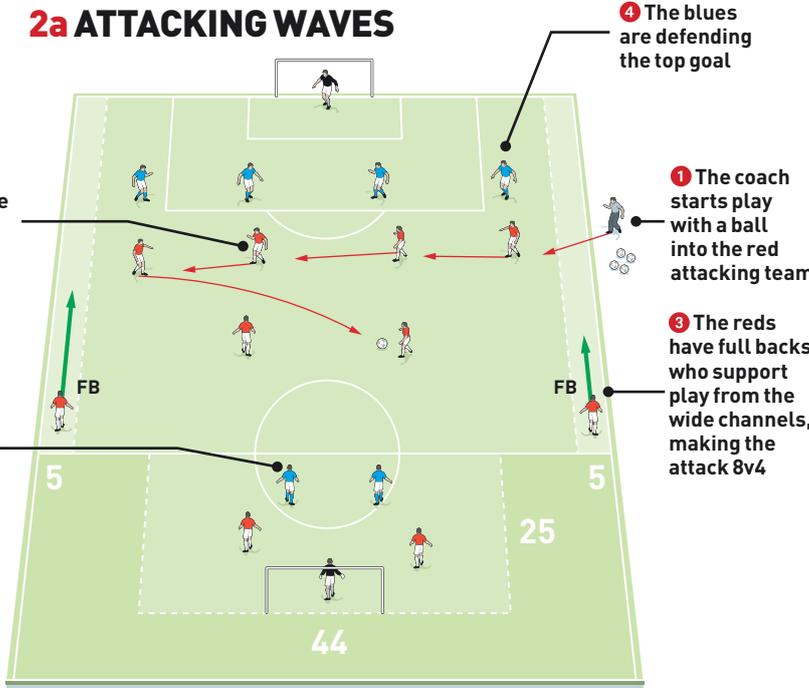


**MICKY MELLON & MIKE JACKSON: ATTACKING AND DEFENDING TRANSITIONS**

**KEY**  
 Ball movement →  
 Player movement →  
 Dribble - - - - - →

**2a ATTACKING WAVES**

- 2 It's 6v4 in the main area and the reds pass the ball from side to side until the coach calls for them to attack
- 5 The blue defending team has two strikers in the small box at the bottom, who anticipate the forward pass on transition

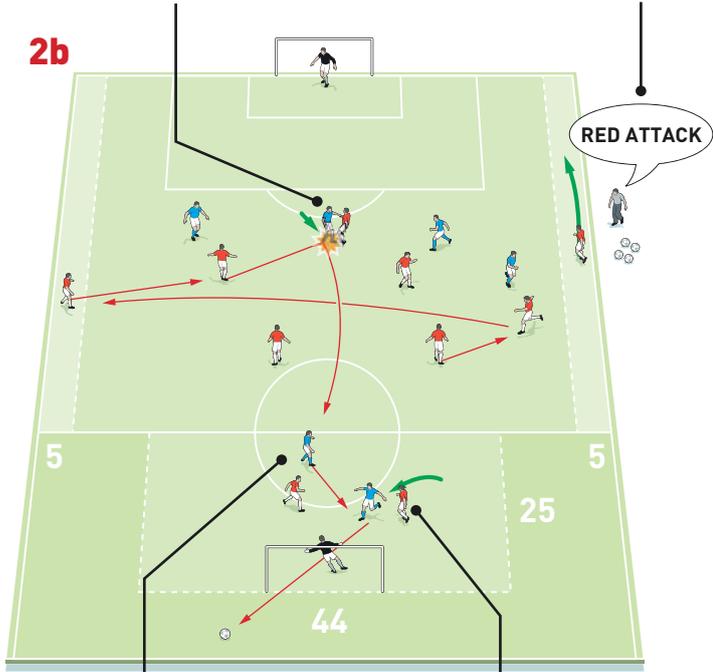


- 1 The coach starts play with a ball into the red attacking team
- 3 The reds have full backs who support play from the wide channels, making the attack 8v4
- 4 The blues are defending the top goal

- 2 If the blue defending team wins possession, they play long to their strikers in the small box over the halfway line

- 1 On the coach's call, the reds can attack the top goal in an 8v4, with support from the full backs in the wide channel

**2b**



- 3 The blue strikers can attack the goal in a 2v2 against the reds
- 4 The keeper and the red defenders can quickly feed their attackers at the other end if they win the ball

channel, plus two more players in the box over the halfway line acting as defenders for the attacking team. They are pitted in a 2v2 with two blues who are the strikers for the defending team.

Plays starts with a pass from the coach to the red attacking team in the main area. The attackers play the ball quickly from side to side, as shown [2a], until the coach signals that they can attack the top goal in a 6v4. The red full backs can join the attack, supporting play from the wide channels and giving the attackers an 8v4 overload. If the blue defending team wins possession, the red attacking team must immediately try to win it back or recover into a good position for the transition, while the blues must look for a quality forward pass to their strikers, as shown [2b]. The blues then try to score in the bottom goal, going 2v2 against the reds in the box. If the reds win the ball back in the 2v2, they can launch an attack from the back. If the ball goes out of play, the coach should quickly play a second ball into the main area for the attacking team.

**How would you put this into a game situation?**

**Transition 11v11 game**  
 We set up for the game between the penalty areas of a full size pitch, with a goal and a goalkeeper at each end. The width of the playing area is coned off five yards in from each touchline and an offside line is marked at each end. We're using 20 outfield players split into two teams of ten. Each team has two midfielders and four forwards in their attacking half of the pitch and four defenders in the defending half. The coach starts by playing the ball into one of the teams, who then attack the opposing defenders in a 6v4. If the defenders win possession, they can look to exploit the spaces, on turnover, into



**SOUTHAMPTON**  
**Paul Buckle**  
**Press & protect**

<b>SET-UP</b>
<b>AREA</b> 25x20 yards
<b>EQUIPMENT</b> Balls, bibs, cones, 6 mini goals
<b>NUMBER OF PLAYERS</b> 12 players
<b>SESSION TIME</b> Press & protect: 16mins 6v6 game: 16mins

**Overview**  
This is a simple defensive session that encourages players to press high and press aggressively. It also conditions players to respond with speed to a successful turnover of possession, resulting in quick counter-attacks. The players really enjoy this session, as it's fast and intense and it relies on quick reactions. When their team is in possession, players have to make the extra man count before transferring the ball through the central zone. Off the ball, the pressing team

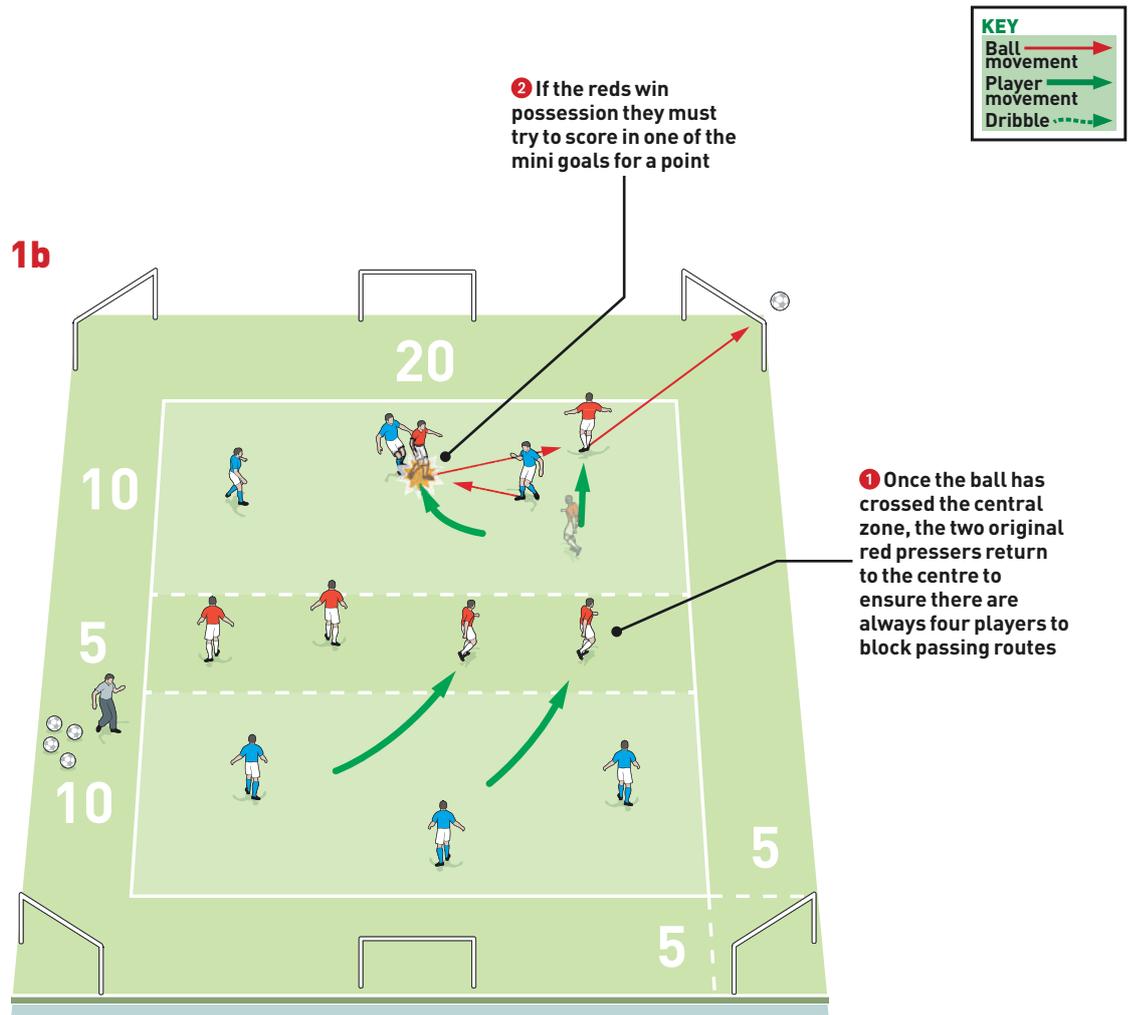
works really hard to force errors and steal possession, before trying to score in one of three mini goals. This session also teaches defenders to work as a team, shuffling across the central area as a unit to block through balls. We will run this session once a week, close to match day. Although it uses a small area, it has everything in it that we want to see from the players in an 11v11 game: pressing high with aggression, regaining possession, and attacking quickly into the central or wide areas of the pitch.

**KEY**

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →



**PAUL BUCKLE: PRESS & PROTECT**



“Players really enjoy this session, as it’s fast and intense and relies on quick reactions”

**What do I get the players to do?  
Press & protect**

We set up an area of 25x20 yards, with the length of the area split into two 10-yard end zones and a five-yard central zone. Three mini goals are positioned at each end, five yards outside the main area, as shown in the diagrams.

We’re using 12 outfield players, divided into two teams of six. The blues are the possession team and they start with three players in each end zone. The six red players all start in the central zone and they are the defending team.

The coach kicks off the game by passing the ball to the blue team in one of the end zones. As soon as the ball is live, two defenders from the centre can enter that end zone to

press the ball, making it 3v2 in favour of the passing team. The possession players must make their overload count and should create an opening to pass the ball to a team mate in the opposite end zone to score a point, as shown [1a], either by passing through or over the centre zone. The four remaining defenders in the centre should work together to try and block all passing routes.

As soon as the ball enters the end zone, two of the defenders from the centre can enter that zone to try to force a turnover of possession. If they succeed, the pressing pair must try to score in the one of the mini goals to earn a point, as shown [1b]. As soon as the ball has crossed the central zone, the original pressing pair must return to the middle from the

opposite end, so there are always four defenders in the central zone to block passing routes.

In each game, teams press for two minutes before switching roles. Teams play four games in each role.

**How do I progress the session?**

We can progress the session by restricting the possession players to passing through the central zone on the ground only, ruling out balls played over the top. We can also limit the team with the ball to two touches. If the possession team keeps the ball for too long without transferring it across the centre, we allow a third defending player from the centre to join the press, eliminating the numerical advantage of the passers and forcing them to work quicker. ▼

**PAUL BUCKLE: PRESS & PROTECT**

Another progression is to allow a third central player to join his two team mates in the end zone when they regain the ball, making it 3v3 when they try to score in the mini goals.

**How would you put this into a game situation?**

**6v6 Game**

We use the same basic set-up as before but we remove the zones, leaving one 25x20-yard playing area. The two teams play a 6v6 directional game and attempt to win possession and score in one of the three mini goals at the end they are attacking, as shown [2a/2b]. We can progress this by playing a 9v9 game on a 60x40-yard pitch or an 11v11 game on a full pitch.

**What are the key things to look out for?**

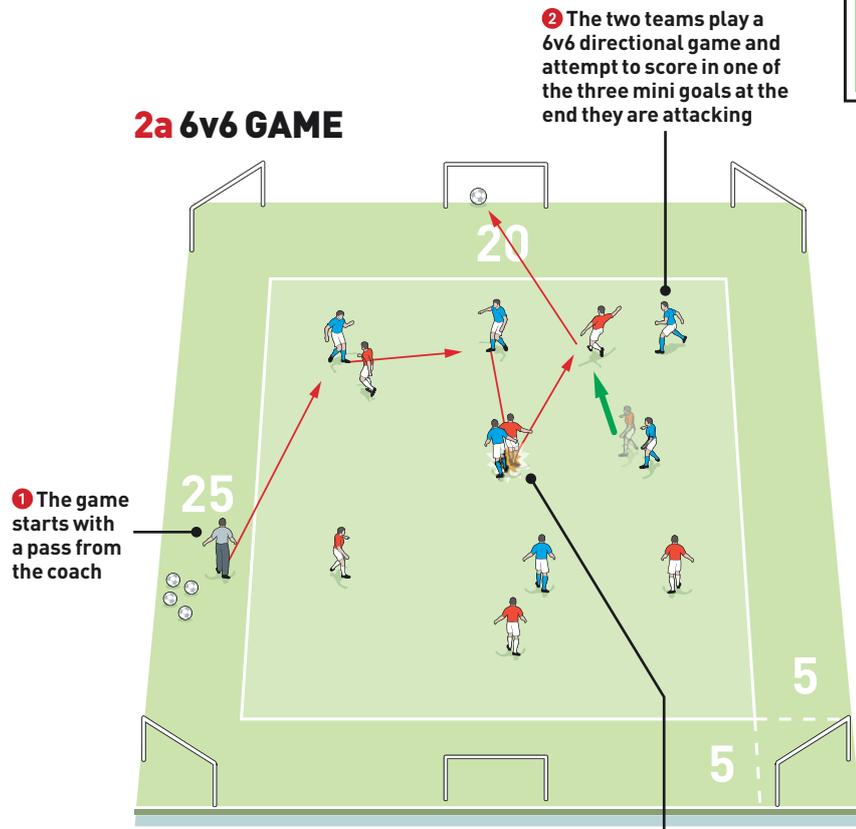
With the ball, we want to see players passing quickly, making space as big as possible and punching their passes through the lines. We also want to see them clipping the ball over the top of the central zone when necessary. If they lose possession, we want to see players react with speed, pressing or recovering as required.

Without the ball, we want to see players pressing as a team and blocking passing lanes as a unit. We also want to see players aggressively chasing the ball and counter-attacking quickly when they win possession.

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

With the ball, players can often show slow decision-making, make a poor choice of forward pass, and use the incorrect weight of pass. Without the ball, players don't always press as a team, they fail to communicate with each other, and can show slow reactions to the transition.

**2a 6v6 GAME**

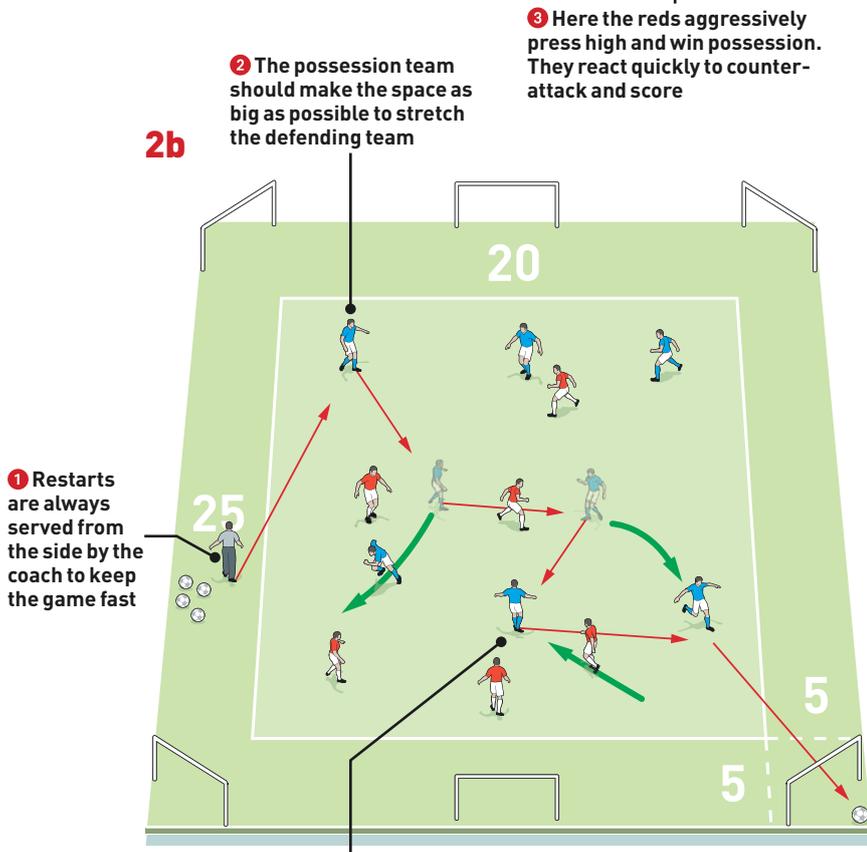


1 The game starts with a pass from the coach

2 The two teams play a 6v6 directional game and attempt to score in one of the three mini goals at the end they are attacking

**KEY**  
 Ball movement → (red arrow)  
 Player movement → (green arrow)  
 Dribble → (dashed green arrow)

**2b**



1 Restarts are always served from the side by the coach to keep the game fast

2 The possession team should make the space as big as possible to stretch the defending team

3 Here the reds aggressively press high and win possession. They react quickly to counter-attack and score

3 Look for players to punch their passes through the lines

**LMA AMBASSADOR**

**Terry Butcher  
Match preparation**

**SET-UP**

**AREA**

Up to two thirds of pitch

**EQUIPMENT**

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals

**NUMBER OF PLAYERS**

Up to 16 players + 2 goalkeepers

**SESSION TIME**

Passing drill: 10mins

Shape practice: 30mins

Small-sided game: 15mins

**Overview**

This is the kind of training session I run with my teams in the build up to a match. It helps to rehearse the formation and shape we are going to use and it also introduces the shape and tactics that we expect our opponents to employ.

Tactics are not always set in stone and my approach to a match can change depending on the opponents. This training session allows a coach to look at the best blend of players for the upcoming challenge and to examine how comfortable a team is playing against the kind of shape they are likely to face. Players respond well to the

session and they will try to impress because they know that the next match is coming soon. I would run this kind of session every week. Even if my team won the previous week, it's still good to reinforce the needed structure and introduce an understanding of what's required for the next match.

**What do I get the players to do?**

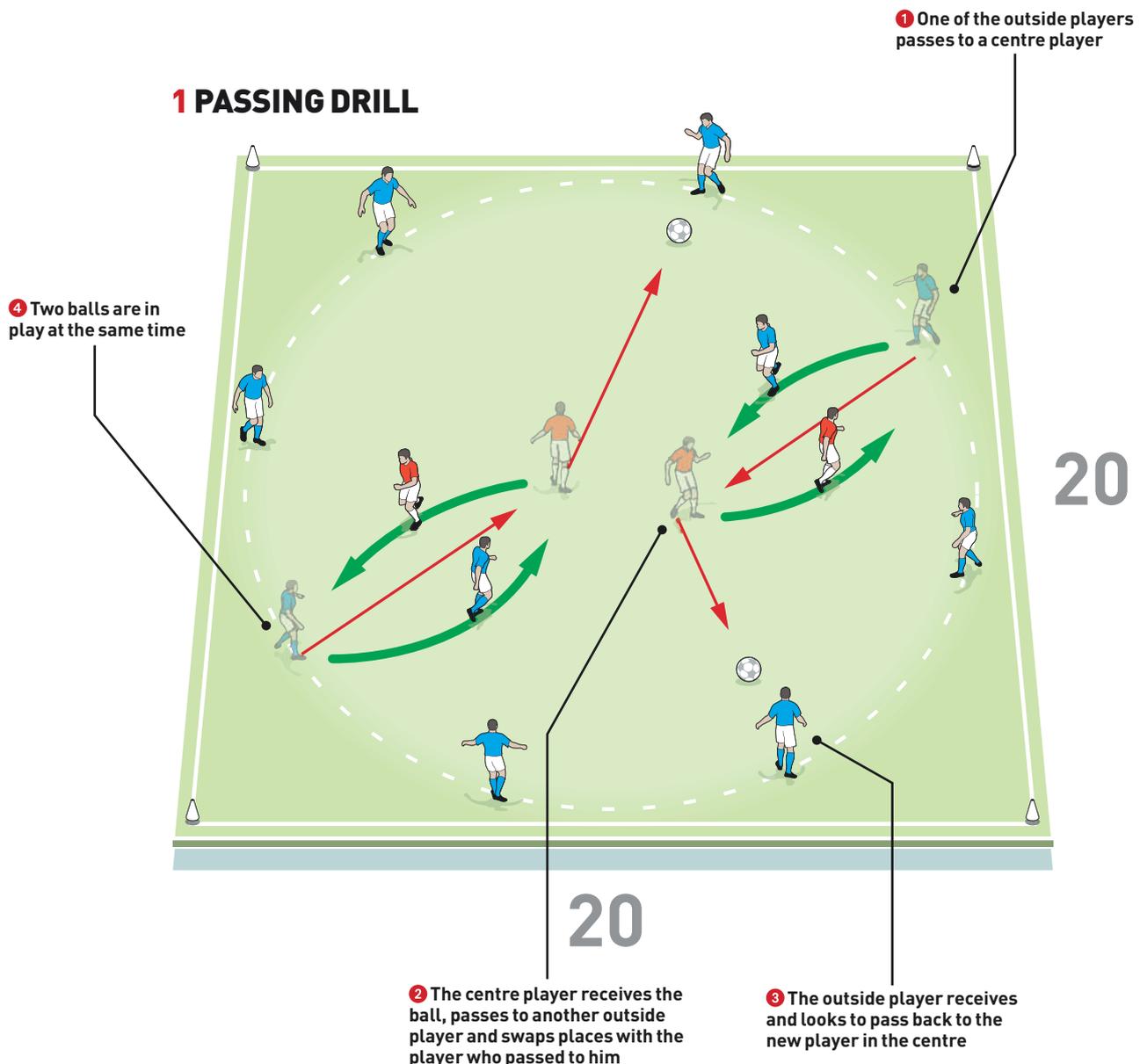
**The biscuit run**

After a warm-up, and before the main session, I like to ease players into training with something I call 'the biscuit run', which is a fun fitness exercise [not shown].

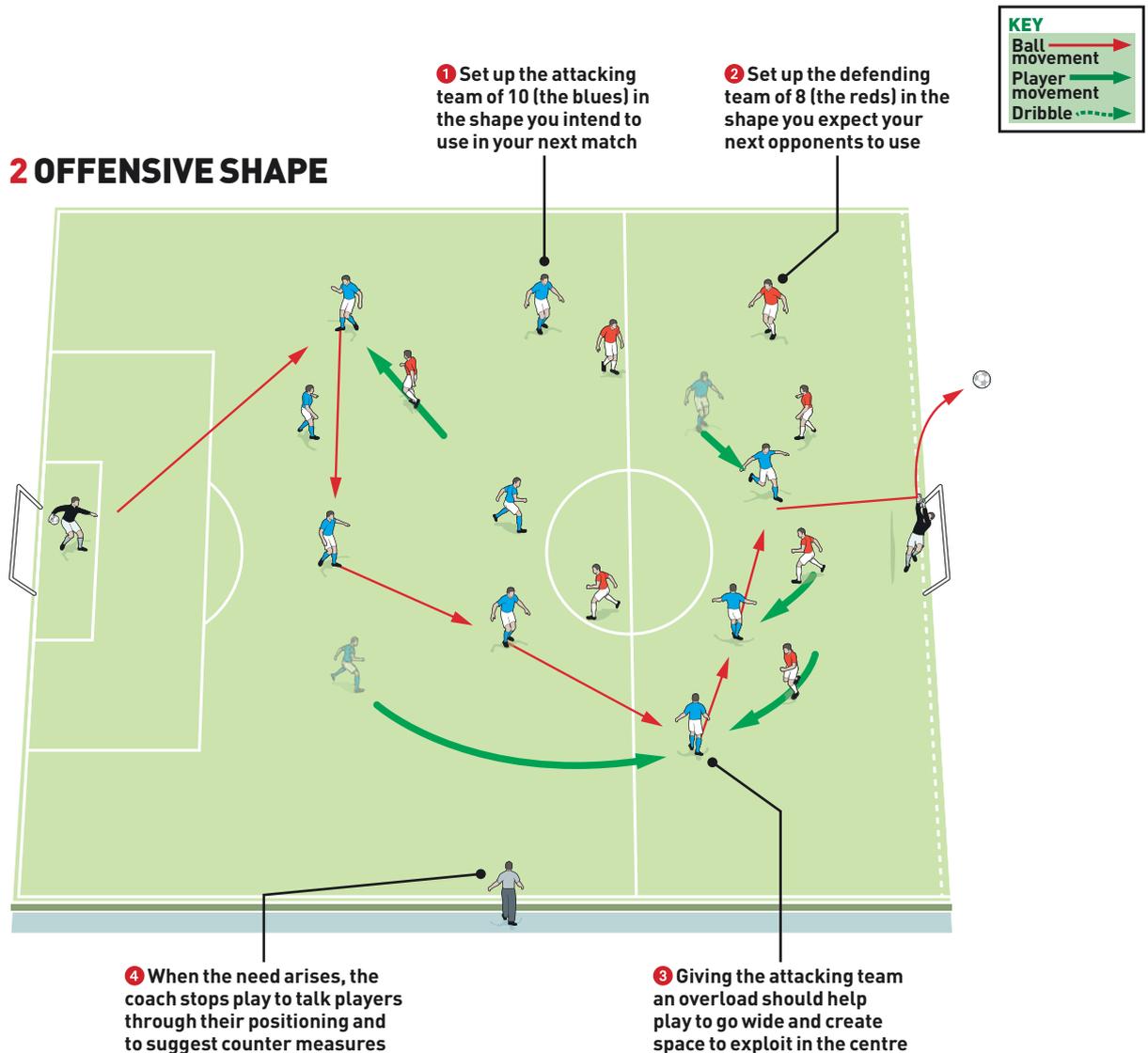
**KEY**

- Ball movement
- Player movement
- Dribble

**1 PASSING DRILL**



**TERRY BUTCHER: MATCH PREPARATION**



Players race against each other in pairs, with both starting on the goal line. The coach calls out a number, which is attached to a specific action, such as touching the crossbar or touching the post. The players complete the action and then race to the edge of the penalty area. The losing player returns to race again until, eventually, there are just two players remaining. The forfeit for the eventual loser is to buy biscuits or cakes for the team the following day. This is great for team spirit and great for sharpness. It's a fun session and everyone joins in.

**Passing drill**

We set up an area of 20x20 yards. We're using 10 players for this passing drill. Two players start in the centre of the area and the remaining eight players form a circle around them. We're using two balls at the

same time, which start with two of the outside players. Each one plays a pass into a centre player, who receives the ball, controls it and then passes out to another player, as shown [1]. Each centre player then swaps places with the player who passed to him and play continues around the circle, with the two balls constantly active. To start with the centre players can have a maximum of three touches. Then, as the drill progresses, limit them to two touches, and finally allow just one touch, which means players would need to let the ball run across them before laying it out to the spare player on the outside.

**What do I get the players to do next? Shape practice**

Set up on three quarters of a pitch, with a goal at each end. We're using 16 outfield players and two keepers,

split into an attacking team of ten and a defending team of eight. This practice is all about playing with the shape we want to use in our next match, both with and without the ball, so we start by talking our players through the expected shape and the strengths and weaknesses of our opponents. We then split the practice into the following two parts...

**Part 1: Offensive shape**

In the first part of the practice we are coaching the attacking team of ten, setting them up in the shape we intend to use on match day. We set up the team of eight in the defensive shape of our next opponents, as shown [2].

In this practice the overload should help the attacking team to go wide, creating space in the centre. Combination play in all areas will be the preferred outcome, with off

**TERRY BUTCHER: MATCH PREPARATION**

the ball movement key to capitalising on the numerical advantage.

**Part 2: Defensive shape**

In the second part of the practice we are coaching the defending team of eight and we set up the team of ten in the attacking shape of our next opponents, as shown [3]. Playing against an overload will make it more difficult for our team to defend, so we will concentrate on coaching the players in the defensive danger areas, such as in front of goal and through the midfield, with the focus on forcing play wide. For the defenders, the key will be squeezing the centre and covering spaces.

We will stop the practice as often as is needed, in order to illustrate

positioning to the players and to demonstrate any counter measures. We will also spend time explaining how to win the game, both offensively and defensively. If there are different personnel options in the same position, we will swap players over, so everyone has experienced the tactics.

**How would I put this into a game situation?**

**Small-sided game**

We set up an area of 50x44 yards with a goal at each end. We use 16 outfield players and two goalkeepers, playing a 9v9 small-sided game [not shown]. We look for players to keep team shape in defence and attack.

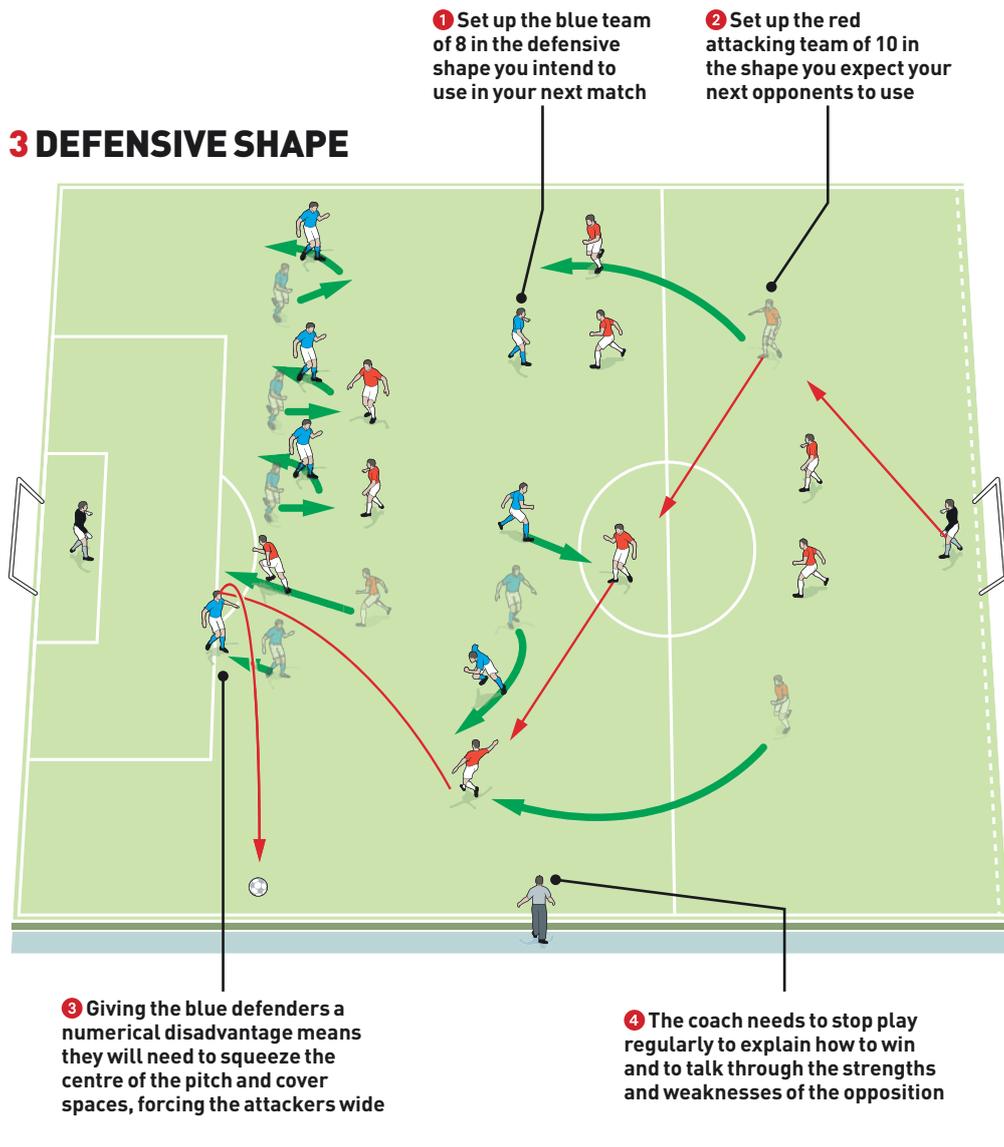
**What are the key things to look for?**

Tactically, I want to see the players

have a good understanding of the team shape we are using and know how to play against the expected tactics of our opponents. Technically, I want to see players making our team shape work through the intensity of their play.

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

Sometimes players can be a bit over cautious. Also, if players are caught in an incorrect position, it undermines the shape of the team. While most players will want to impress, a mistake some make is to try to save themselves for the match and they fail to perform with intensity. Use regular breaks in play to address these issues.



**EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: TANYA OXTOBY**



# AUSSIE RULES

**It's been a long career journey for Bristol City Women manager, Tanya Oxtoby, but the Aussie coach is already proving that she's up to the challenge of the WSL**

**B**ristol City Women manager Tanya Oxtoby has come a long way. Since relocating from Australia three years ago, she has honed her skills in a series of coaching and development roles and shown true mettle during tough times, both personal and professional.

So far this season, Tanya Oxtoby has won the LMA's WSL Manager of the Month award twice in recognition of an impressive start to her first season in charge. To be acknowledged in this way means a lot to any manager but off the back of a particularly difficult period, the reward was all the sweeter.

Oxtoby joined Bristol City Women just months after losing her brother, and having not yet relocated to the West Country, the days were long and arduous. Initially commuting three-to-four hours each way from Nottingham, she would rise at 5am to make it to Stoke Gifford Stadium in time for training, get home late in the evening and then get stuck straight into planning for the next day's sessions.

"It was very difficult and I'm not sure I could have done it without the great support I had, both at home and at the club," says Oxtoby. "Our general manager and some of the other staff here were brilliant, all pitching in and

helping to relieve the pressure."

In spite of, or perhaps as a result of, the difficult start to her tenure, her teams on and off the pitch pulled together, establishing a strong bond that she believes has been the basis for everything since. "That tough period really taught us a lot about ourselves, and showed us just what we're capable of as a group," she says.

**TIME OUT**

Oxtoby discovered a stability and security at the Vixens that she sorely needed. The previous year she had been working full time as a coach and development team manager at Notts County when, just days before the start of the 2017 season, the club withdrew from the Women's Super League. It was a bombshell for both staff and players, to whom Oxtoby's thoughts first turned.

"As I was also head of football at the University of Nottingham at the time, we put on sessions for the first team players while they sought out new clubs," she recalls. "But I didn't know what I was going to do. After all,

I had a mortgage to pay and I was fairly new to the country so I didn't have a large network. There weren't many doors I could knock on to see what opportunities were available."

While she was well supported by the university, it was a difficult and unsettling period, especially as her brother was seriously ill at the time.

"I decided to step away from the game

for a while to give myself time to process it all," she says. "I felt angry and frustrated and I didn't want to take all those negative thoughts and emotions with me to my next role."

**PEOPLE POWER**

That role came at Birmingham City, as assistant to manager Marc Skinner. "He was such a positive and

passionate person, which was just what I needed, as I wanted to enjoy being back in football again," says Oxtoby. "He gave me the flexibility I needed at that time, and it was fantastic to work under him and develop my knowledge of preparing the team. What I learned with him certainly set me up for my role here

**However stressed you might be about things outside of work, you have to be a consistent and stable character for your players**

**EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: TANYA OXTOBY**

at Bristol City and it's something I'll be forever grateful for."

Perhaps unsurprisingly given her recent experiences, promoting good mental wellbeing at Bristol City Women is something that Oxtoby feels strongly about and it's at the heart of the club's ethos. She completed a psychology degree while still a player, and is able to draw on this knowledge when dealing with her players.

"One of the main things it made me appreciate is the importance of self-awareness," she says. "However stressed you might be about things outside of work, you have to be a consistent and stable character for your players. If you want them to perform at their best, you can't be screaming at them to calm down or to relax, because they're feeding off your energy."

This consistency should also carry through into your communication, she adds. "I always try to speak in an open and transparent way and be constructive. That doesn't mean shirking away from things that need to be said, but it's about remembering that these players have a dream. It's my job to help them achieve that dream, rather than tear it down."

Empathy is key, she adds, as is understanding that we all make mistakes. "Ultimately, I'm dealing with people, they're each someone's daughter or sister," she says. "You can always be respectful, even if the message you're conveying isn't a positive one."

**SKILLING UP**

Always suspecting she'd be able to contribute more to the game from the sidelines than on the pitch, Oxtoby took her AFC A Licence as a player.

However, she's now studying once again to complete her UEFA A Licence, conscious that the qualification differs slightly in its delivery and language to its Australian equivalent.

While she's going back over familiar ground in terms of content, she's enjoying seeing the different approaches to coach development, and has found the opportunities to network with other coaches to be priceless. "Any sort of formal professional development is very important as a coach, because you have to continue to grow, go out of your comfort zone and learn from other coaches," she says. "If you don't do that you risk becoming obsolete, because football constantly changes."

**Any professional development is very important as a coach, because you continue to grow, go out of your comfort zone and learn from other coaches**

Even in the relatively short period that Oxtoby has been in this country she's seen considerable growth and development in the women's game, from the number of players and staff going full-time and the strong support network now in place to the high level of professionalism in the Women's Super League.

"The clubs are now on a level playing field in terms of the minimum standards of provision for players, structurally and operationally," she says. "We're all now accountable for providing the players with the best possible environment to help them reach their potential, and with that we're seeing the quality in the women's game go up and up."

The physical side of the game has also progressed rapidly over the last few years, she adds, with players getting bigger, stronger, quicker and more powerful. Gone are the frustrations of having to cram everything into two sessions a week, which means changes on the tactical side as well. "Because we're now working with the players every day, we're able to help them develop their understanding of the game and our philosophies as managers. We can make use of video analysis and opposition analysis to do that, all of the things we didn't have when I first started in this country."

To progress things further at Bristol, Oxtoby wants to focus on maintaining a high level of professionalism, and underpin that with strong talent coming through its academy. "I want to invest heavily in those young players and ensure that the club's vision and philosophy is instilled everywhere, from the first team right down to the youth players," she says. "That's my hope and vision, but in the short term I want to see just how good this squad can be and how good I can be as a manager. I took this job because it was a challenging project and it's been everything I thought it would be, and more." ■



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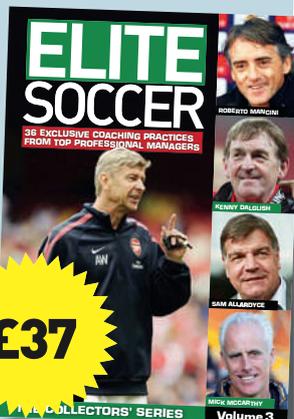
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