

# 1000

S M A L L S I D E D G A M E S

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome and thanks for downloading this eBook.

In 2017 I released my first eBook, "50 Small Sided Games", this was my first ever attempt to pull years of plans and ideas into one place. It was well received by the coaching community and has now been downloaded in 62 countries across the globe.

Small Sided Games have always been a passion of mine as a young player and as a coach. There are so many reasons why, these are the benefits as I see them;

- It looks and feels like a game (direction, opposition, goals...etc.)
- You can manipulate the games to help the individuals, develop themes or shine a light on a certain moment of the game.
- The players are free to play, make decisions and find solutions.
- The level of enjoyment of engagement for the players.

This eBook is an evolution of the 2017 version. In the last 3 years I have explored this topic a little more, both on the grass and off - developing a better understanding of the rationale and academia behind *Small Sided Games*. The outcome is hopefully a deeper, richer and more meaningful piece of work to help coaches and players.

*"It's probably their preferred session I would say because its proper competitive, it's a **small space**, it's a **lot of shooting**, a **lot of finishing**...so they **love it**. And if I would ask at the beginning of the week, 'what do you want to do today?' then probably a lot players say, 'lets play 5 a side'. But in these games, its really important that you as a manager, as a coach, that you make good decisions in your role as a 'referee', because if not...Yeah, it can become quite emotional!"*

*Jürgen Klopp  
Liverpool FC*

# CAN WE PLAY A GAME?

How often do we hear this? Have you ever stopped to think why? At times, it is important to remember why players fell in love with the game. Footballers of all ages want to play. To be with their friends. To explore. To take risks. To fail and to improve.

Small Sided Games shouldn't be considered a treat - something players get to experience when they've completed their technique or drills. If players are asking you to play a game, they are giving you some direct feedback on your sessions - or their motivation for attending practice.

Football is a complex, dynamic and random sport. For young players to learn the principles of the game and the skills needed to play, they should always be playing football by '**exploring, discovering and adapting**'. The link to the game must always be apparent creating a 'why' for the learner. Learning is not a process of repeating a solution, it's repeating the process of finding a solution.

For the vast majority of children this game-related approach is the most enjoyable, logical and player centered way of learning to play football, enabling them to reach their personal potential and stay committed to the game for life.

The coach acts as the architect for this by designing practices that are representative of the game and challenging for the individuals that participate.

Over the next few pages I have tried to demonstrate some of the benefits and rationale of using Small Sided Games - as well as football principles to help young players who are learning the game.

*"Football is the most difficult game in the world because it is open and every situation is completely different and you have to make decisions minute-by-minute"*

*Pep Guardiola  
Manchester City*

# THE BENEFITS OF SMALL SIDED GAMES

Manchester United FC & Rick Fenoglio Manchester Metropolitan University

Small Sided Games are not a new idea. Tales linking five-a-side football to Liverpool FC go all the way back to the first training sessions under Bill Shankly in December 1959. The Dutch have been using them since the mid 1980s. The godfather of football in Holland, the great, late Rinus Michels said: *“Good coaches use the basic criteria of street football for their vision of grass roots development; they realise that these elements produce a natural process which gives the most efficient training for young kids.”*

In May 2002, Les Kershaw, the Academy Director of Manchester United Football Club, was granted permission by The FA Premier League to play an alternative under 9's games format in the Northern Academy League for the 2002/2003 season. Instead of playing a single 8v8 competitive match, players of teams agreeing to take part in the scheme were divided into teams of 4, and then played in four different conditioned small-sided games on a rotational basis. The four different games were;

- Line Ball: 4v4 with a dotted line as a scoring line.
- Two goal game: 4v4 with four large traffic cones as goals. No Goalkeepers.
- Goalkeepers game: 4v4 plus two Goalkeepers. Normal throw-ins and corner kicks applied.
- Four goal game: 4v4 with eight marker cones as four small goals. No Goalkeepers.

## Aims

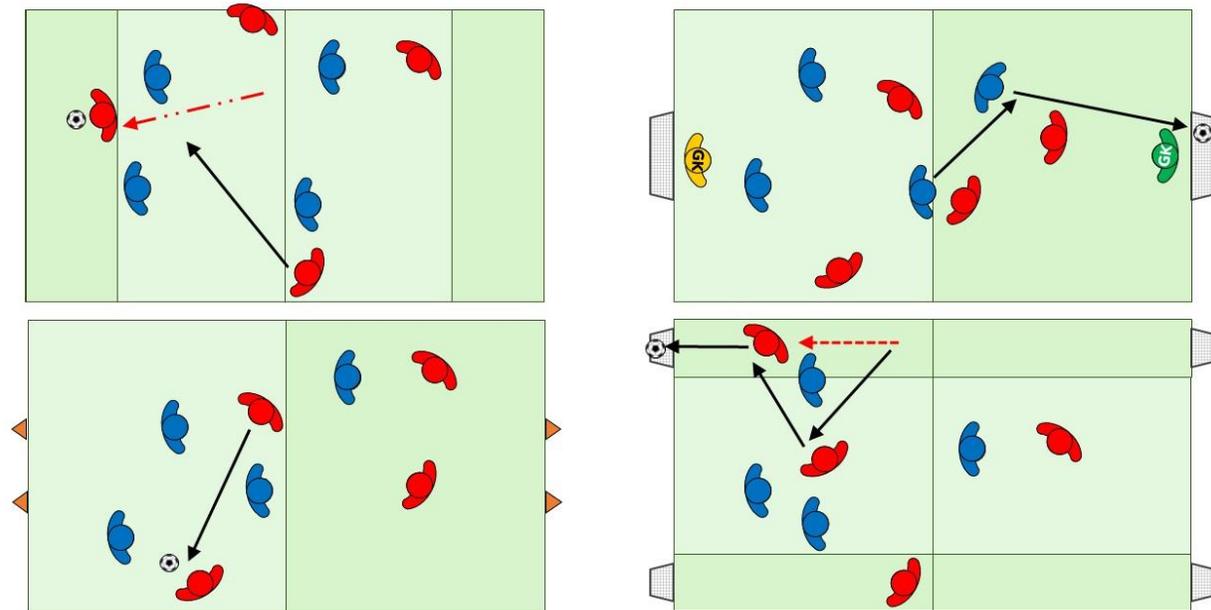
- Plenty of individual possession, ball control and touches
- Trying new skills without fear of ridicule or recrimination
- Taking players on and challenging Defenders
- Little or no pressure from significant others (parents, coaches)
- A vibrant, creative and fun atmosphere

Each game was 8 minutes long and the children refereed their own games. This encouraged them to take responsibility, communicate with the opposition and sort out any problems that emerged. The intention here was to develop individuals' social skills. The coach's role here was to observe and encourage, very much taking a back seat. The rationale here was to encourage children to express themselves more, problem solve and think for themselves.

The study compared the 4v4 format to the 8v8 format, finding the following;

- Number of passes - 585 more passes an increase of 135%
- Scoring attempts - 481 more shots an increase of 260%
- Number of goals scored - 301 more goals an increase of 500%
- Number of 1v1 encounters - 525 more 1v1 encounters an increase of 225%
- Number of dribbling skills (tricks) - 436 more opportunities to dribble or perform a trick, an increase of 280%

When working in youth football, it is worth considering the size of the game and the number of interactions that will occur.



@coachdanwright

# USING THE PLANS

A quick look at the session plans

Here you will find tips around the **set up**; number of players, offside, pitch dimensions, suggested times, goalkeepers and goals.

In this section you will find details of how to **organise** the practice, including the **intention** of the session, how does this link to the **11v11 game**, what you should look out for when **observing** and finally some **progressions** to keep the players challenged.

Here you will find the **title** of the practice as well as the **theme**. In this example, the practice is called "3 team finishing" and it is taken from the "finishing" theme. You can search for different themes using the contents page.

Here you will see a **diagram** of the practice, this shows;

- The playing area
- The goals and equipment
- How to distribute the players
- How the practice might progress or flow

## 3 TEAM FINISHING

Finishing



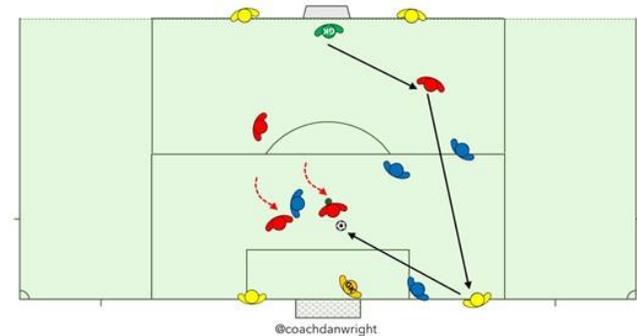
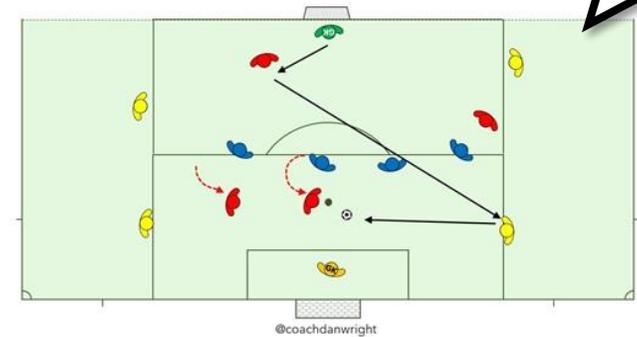
**ORGANISATION** This one is another players favourite. The group is split into 3 teams, in this example its Reds vs Blues, with the Yellow team on the outside as target or bounce players. These games can be structured in a number of ways, I really like first to 2 goals - its competitive and a little more realistic than a 1 goal and off. When 1x team wins, the losing team swap places with the outside team.

**INTENTION** The intention is to recreate goal scoring opportunities that look and feel like the game. This practice encourages a lot of close range and 1 touch finishes.

**LINK TO 11V11** This is all about creating and scoring goals.

**OBSERVATION** This practice will be fast paced, with lots to take in. I would try to look at the movement of the players to evade the Defender and get that precious 'half a yard' to score. There are also lots of psychological and social returns here, how do the players cope with winning, losing, mistakes...etc?

**PROGRESSIONS** The two diagrams show how you could distribute the Yellows. In **image 1**, they could work on crossing or combinations, in **image 2** it allows the team in possession to pass forward and run forward with more ease but perhaps less **realism**.



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S E S S I O N  
D E S I G N



# SESSION DESIGN

## Considerations when planning

I am fascinated by session design. Seeing a session come to life on the grass from some ideas you scribbled down is one of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of coaching football. I also think this is something you never master; you get more skilled but still make mistakes almost week to week. It is important to remember we are talking about people, human behaviour will be different from group to group, depending on a number of dynamic and complex factors. It also means the way I deliver a session might be completely different to you.

Over the next few pages I have outlined some theories, approaches and ideas that have influenced my coaching and session design. These are huge areas and these notes do not do them justice, my aspiration here is two-fold;

- To add some context and rationale behind some of the practices in the eBook.
- To encourage readers to go and learn more about some of the subject areas.

Where appropriate I have highlighted some research or specialists in these areas where you can find out more. Many of these ideas are not mine, nor do I claim that they are - but they have helped shape my session design so might help you too.



# LEARNING IS NON-LINEAR

## Understanding human movement and designing sessions

Traditional approaches that promote an ideal model movement pattern for a certain task, or isolated technical practice to then implement in a dynamic activity such as football, might not be the best or only approach.

In the book, *“Nonlinear Pedagogy in Skill Acquisition: An Introduction”*, Jia Yi Chow, Keith Davids, Chris Button and Ian Renshaw, offer an alternative for coaches. Non-Linear Pedagogy is a learner-centered approach to skill acquisition. An umbrella term for teaching and coaching that uses task and environment design to develop skill acquisition. This approach advocates for individualised learning, even in team sports like football.

It is through exploration, practice and play that both movement, co-ordination, solutions and decision making can be learnt and enhanced, by focusing on the nature of specific learner-environment interactions. If human movement systems are considered as non-linear dynamical systems, then ecological psychology and dynamical systems theory attempts to explain how human behaviour is information driven.

### Ecological Psychology

A field of psychology where perception is considered to be a functional act of picking up information from the environment, to use for regulating movement, not for enhancing its automaticity.

### Dynamics System Theory

Generally, non-linear dynamical systems are highly interconnected systems composed of many interacting parts, capable of constantly changing their state of organisation.

The fundamentals of Non-Linear Pedagogy when looking at session design are shown on the right.

### Representativeness

Representative practice tasks ensure that processes of cognition, perception and action are functionally intertwined and integrated during each athlete’s performance (Pinder et al, 2011). In practical terms what this means is that learners need to develop the capacity to search for and discover functional performance solutions, rather than merely repeat a ‘coach-determined’ movement .

### Task Simplification

Modifying tasks whilst still ensuring that functional information movement couplings are maintained.

### Constraints Manipulation

The adjustment of task constraints to prompt learners to explore and acquire movement behaviours.

### Attentional Focus

A preference for instructions based on external focus of attention to reduce conscious and explicit control of movement.

Buttin, C., Seifert, L., Chow, J. Y., Davids, K., & Aaujo, D. (2020) Dynamics of skill acquisition: An Ecological dynamics approach. Human Kinetics Publishers.

Jia Yi Chow, Keith Davids, Chris Button and Ian Renshaw (2015) Nonlinear Pedagogy in Skill Acquisition: An Introduction. Routledge.

Perception, action, intentions and behaviour are therefore seen to be highly integrated with one another. The combination of these two ideas provides a theoretical framework for ecological dynamics as a rationale for skill acquisition, especially, but not solely, in a team sports context.

Ecological Dynamics considers both individual performers and sports teams as complex adaptive systems (systems that are composed of two or more interacting components) that can self organise. It sees each individual performer as having their own individual set of characteristics, which in turn interact with the information from a dynamic or continuous environment.

## **Its complex!**

Human development is a complex process influenced by many interacting factors. What works for one individual might not work for another.

## **People develop at different rates**

Nonlinear systems do not develop in a gradual or predictable way, but instead they experience sudden jumps, pauses or set backs which are natural and hard to predict. Learning is hard, messy and unique to the individual.

## **Environment and culture**

A major challenge is to understand how environmental constraints interact with task and personal constraints in enhancing skill and expertise in movement.

# A CONSTRAINTS LED APPROACH

Adapted from Newell, 1986

A Constraints-led Approach or CLA is an ecological model centred on the mutual relationship that emerges from interactions of each individual and a performance environment. In the CLA model, more skillful performance emerges through self-organisation under constraints as individuals become perceptually attuned to the key information sources which can regulate their actions in specific performance environments (when performing or learning) (Chow 2013). A distinguishing feature of the CLA is that its practice design and delivery is informed by principles of a Non-Linear Pedagogy (NLP), which provides a powerful theoretical model of the learner and the processes of learning, based on the empirically-verified ideas and concepts of ecological psychology and dynamical systems theory (Davids et al. 2005; Chow et al. 2007, 2009, 2011; Renshaw, Davids, Chow and Shuttleworth 2009; Renshaw et al. 2010).

The provision of pedagogical principles (such as information-movement couplings, representative learning design, manipulation of constraints, infusion of variability, accounting for attentional focus and attunement to affordances) supports the pedagogical channels of modeling, instructions, and design of practice and informational constraints (Chow, 2013). Non-Linear Pedagogy provides an empirically-verified and theoretically rationalised description and focus for the design of learning environments in physical education and sport (Davids et al. 2005; Chow et al. 2007). This learner-environment centred pedagogy recognises the emergent, self-organising nature of learning under interacting constraints. It empowers learners to individually and actively explore and generate specific, functional movement solutions to satisfy the unique combination of interacting task, environment and individual constraints (or boundaries) imposed on them (for more detailed overviews see Handford et al. 1997; Chow et al. 2007; Chow et al. 2009; Chow et al. 2006, 2013; Davids, Button, and Bennett, 2008; Davids, Chow, and Shuttleworth 2005; Renshaw et al. 2010; Araújo, Davids, Bennett, Button and Chapman, 2004).

In brief, a constraints-led approach is based around the idea that movement is influenced by a dynamical system of interacting constraints on either the task, performer or environment. By definition, a constraint is a boundary which encourages the learner to emerge with certain behaviours.

A **task** constraint relates to the activity in terms of the goal, the equipment or rules (e.g. 1 touch finish) a **performer** constraint involves unique structural characteristics including physiological, psychological and emotional aspects (e.g. weight or motivation).

An **environmental** constraint is often very difficult to change and involves gravity, ambience or temperature and sociocultural factors (e.g. peer groups at school).

Within a constraints-led approach, a key factor is how coaches acknowledge and manipulate the constraints (see right) in order to encourage the emergence of skills.

## Performer

These are constraints that are specific to the individual performer, for example;

- Structural or physical aspects of the learner including size, shape, flexibility, fitness etc.
- Functional or behavioural aspects such as training age, motivation, anxiety, confidence...etc.

## Task

These are the constraints that coaches are most familiar with and can include;

- Goal/Purpose
- Space and Boundaries
- Rules and Regulations
- Equipment

## Environment

These are the constraints that the performer operates in;

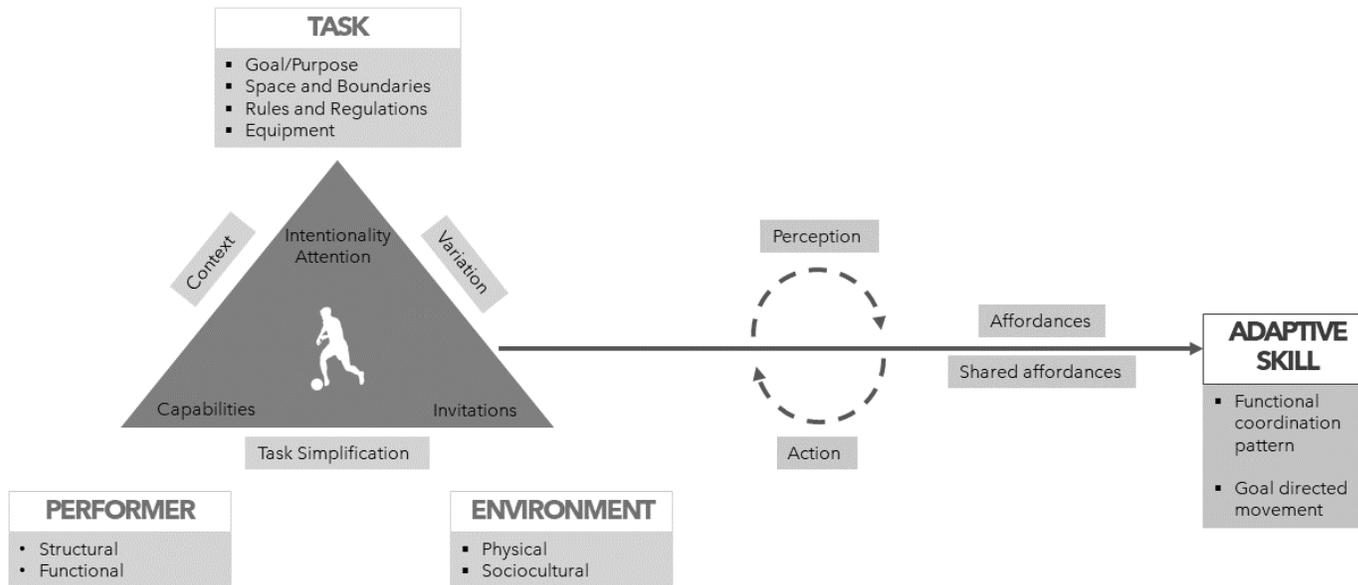
- Physical aspects like pitch, weather, wind, altitude...etc.
- Sociocultural constraints can include national/sporting culture, group, background, peers...etc.

# THE CONSTRAINTS LED APPROACH

Adapted from Newell, 1986

Constraints have been defined as boundaries which shape the emergence of behaviour (Davids, 2010). The interaction of different constraints forces the learner to seek stable and effective movement patterns during goal-directed activity. A small change in one part of the system can lead to the emergence of large scale global changes. Newell (1986) classified constraints into three distinct categories: performer (or individual), environment, and task.

In the book "The constraints-Led Approach" by Ian Renshaw, Keith Davids, Daniel Newcombe and Will Roberts, they introduce the Environment Design Principles (EDP). This is a bridge for coaches between the theory and practice. The key principles are;



### Constraining to afford

Design in constraints to offer, invite, encourage learners to explore the opportunities for action related to the session intention (see *Affordances* page 20).

### Session Intention

The intentions of the session act as an overriding and organisational constraint. What do we want the players to experience? What interactions will take place? Have we considered the individual needs and skill levels?

### Representative Design

Ensure that what the learner is seeing, hearing and feeling in the practice environment is similar to the performance environment. This would suggest decontextualising or breaking the game down might have limitations. This is a change in emphasis from actions to interactions.

### Repetition without Repetition

Design in the appropriate amount of variability and instability/stability to the practice environment. In this approach performers are provided with opportunities to search and explore to create a range of effective and adaptable movement solutions.

A constraints-led approach does not advocate;

- Just playing games
- Coaches sitting back and not coaching
- Letting *'the game be the teacher'*
- That there is a *'textbook'* technique or one way to do things

Benefits of a constraints-led approach could be;

- The coach strives to design representative practices that look and feel like the game
- Players have to think - search, discover and adapt to find a solution
- The sessions challenge individuals to explore and discover the solution, not told what to do and how to do it
- It acknowledges that individuals are part of a system and interact
- It makes sessions engaging and enjoyable (Self Determination Theory)

## Example of interacting constraints on the emergent behaviours in sport.

Performer	Task	Environment
Cognitive skills, emotional capacity, mental attributes, goals, motivations, intentions	Specific rules, markings, boundaries, surfaces	Family support networks
Physical constraints including; strength, speed, flexibility, height, weight, acoustic and visual system	Instructional constraints including coaching methods, types of feedback provided, exposure to discovery learning...etc.	Cultural expectations and attitudes. Social construction of age, gender, race...etc.
Genes	Use of video, images, stimulations and models for practice	Peer group pressure, media images, commercialisation of sport and physical activity
Specific activities undertaken during practice time	Design and scaling of equipment	Access to high quality facilities
Amount of learning and previous experience	Design of practice tasks; task simplification vs task decomposition	Access to high quality learning opportunities and teaching
Develop status of various subsystems including those for locomotion, postural, control, reaching and grasping...etc	Artificial aids and devices	Physical constraints such as gravity, altitude, ambient lighting and temperature

# AFFORDANCES

## Opportunities to act

All coaches would like to work with and help develop skilled individuals. Skill is a huge topic, which has many different definitions.

Successful performance (skilful performance) in sport is predicated on the constraints of an individual's perceptual and action capabilities, selecting among affordances to guide football interactions (dribble, pass, off ball movement...) during performance (Araújo et al., 2006).

Affordance is what the environment offers the individual. James J. Gibson, coined the term in his 1966 book, "The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems". **Affordances** are opportunities for action (Rietveld & Kiverstein, 2014) and are related to an individual's ability to use available information to regulate and organise actions to develop adaptable behaviours that support expert performance (Esteves, Oliveira, & Araújo, 2010).

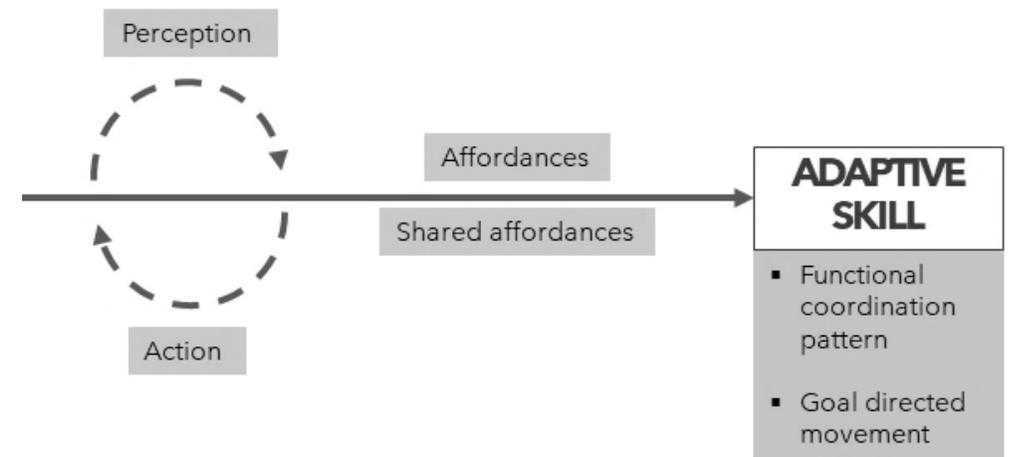
Practice should highlight informational constraints to improve the coupling of perception-action.

*"You cannot adapt to an environment that you don't inhabit"*

Keith Davids  
Professor of Motor Learning at the Centre for Sport & Exercise Science at Sheffield Hallam University

In a practical sense, an example could help explain this more simply. In a closed drill the affordances are limited - the coach decides the routine and prescribes a 'perfect technique' to execute. In a very open or random exercise like a 4v4, the performers can choose to dribble, pass, shoot as well as the moment to do so. The affordances here are greater - more interactions with teammates, opponents causing us problems and a task or aim to exploit space and score. Which practice is more like the game? Which practice requires more skilful performance? Here players have to **explore, discover** and **adapt**.

If we start from the game and work backwards, we can be led by the needs of the individual. If the player needs isolated repetition or refinement away from the game this may aid their performance in the game. Rather than the traditional approach of technique practice, skill practice, game, we can start with something more representative of the game itself.



# AFFORDANCES

Invitations to act

Possibilities for an action to improve ones current situation

- INDIVIDUAL**
- Skilled intentionality
  - Need context
  - Capabilities (actual and perceived)
  - Openness
  - Readiness



- ENVIRONMENT**
- Information
  - Optic array
  - Surface
  - Radiant

- TASK**
- Penetrate
  - Inviting a pass
  - Interception risk
  - Shared affordance
  - Accept invitation
  - Skilled intentionality

INFORMATION

AFFORDANCE 2

AFFORDANCE 1

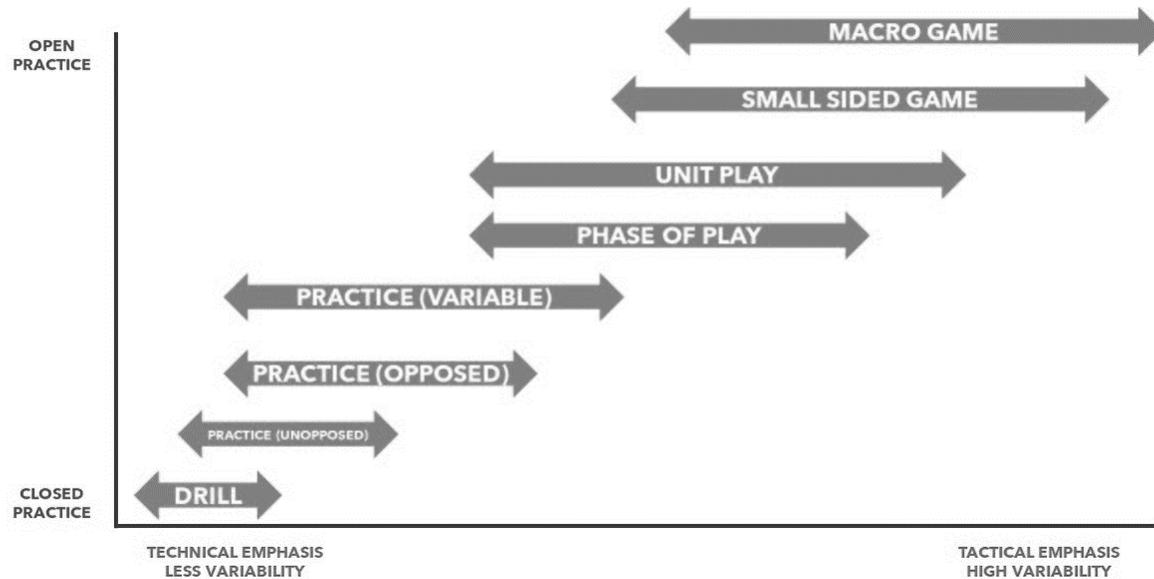
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Credit Ric Shuttleworth @skillacq

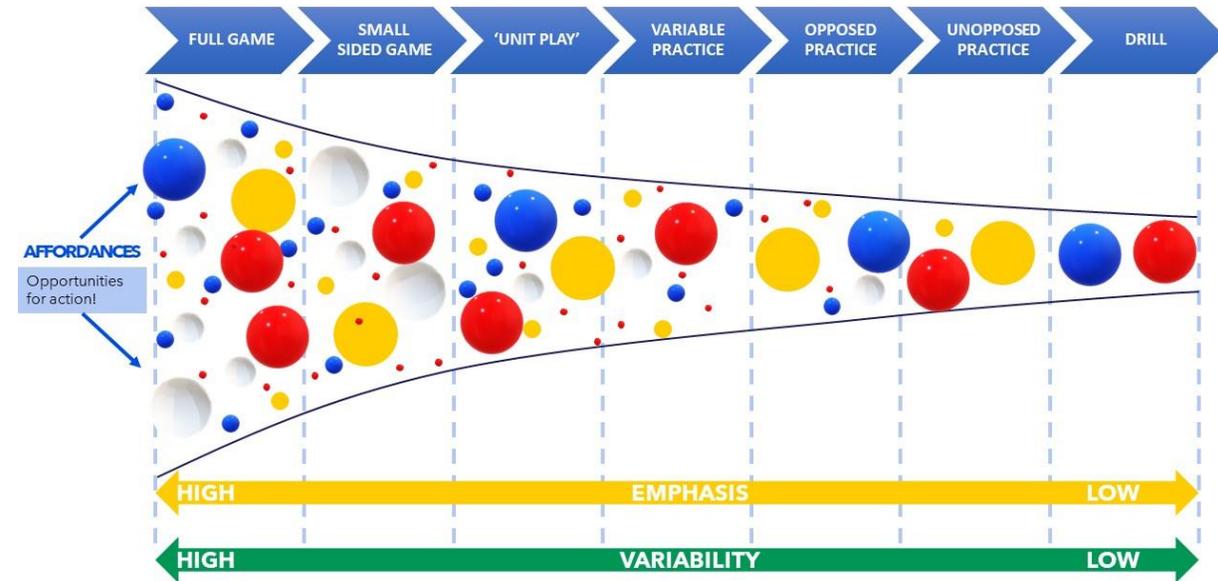
100  
SMALL SIDED GAMES

# A 'FOOTBALLERS DIET'

Unopposed vs opposed



Environment Design Continuum - Invasion Games by Danny Newcombe @dannynewcombe



The vortex of variability by Stuart Armstrong, The Talent Equation @stu\_arm

When planning a session or collection of practices, it is important to consider where the practice sits on the continuum. The models above demonstrate how practices can move from constant to variable to random. These practices will have different returns. The intention of the practice must always be clear in the coach's mind, they then look to design the landscape for the performer to learn. It is not as simple as drills are bad and games are good, it is important to understand the returns of each practice. How much variability do we want the players to experience?

When creating a positive learning environment for the players, the coach might want to consider the level of certainty they are creating. At the lower end of the spectrum there are generally less decisions and therefore lots of certainty. As you move towards the opposite end, the players are placed in more variable and dynamic situations, which will create uncertainty for the performer. The craft of the coach is creating "Safe uncertainty" as "genuine learning is often characterised by significant changes to ways of doing things, not just on-going refinement/optimisation" (Mark Upton).

Finally, when planning and reflecting, it is worth considering how much time we spend on different parts of the continuum. This could depend on several factors such as; how frequently do the players practice? How experienced or skilled are the players? Have the players tried or experienced a practice like this before? How do we balance the development of individuals and collective ideas?

# RESTRICT, RELATE, REWARD

Inspired by Ben Bartlett @benbarts

## Restrict

This is quite a traditional approach to session design, where the coach restricts or constrains the practice. This might be where players can go, how many touches they are allowed or how they score. This will allow for lots of repetition of the theme, but might reduce the opportunity for players to make decisions or recognise the 'when' and 'where' to execute a certain skill or movement solution. A classic example is 'two touch only' - this will get lots of quick passes (high repetition) but removes the decision of when to dribble or slow the game down for example.

**Examples:** *Must win the ball in the opposition's half or must pass the ball into the wide zone before scoring.*

## Relate

This approach looks to build on the players understanding. The player is encouraged to relate the task provided to the situation in front of them and make a decision. The skill of the coach here is to avoid telling, or fixing the problem for, the player. Consider supporting the session design with questions around what they notice or noticed in the situation they were in. For example, *what did you notice when you got success playing forwards? Why did that work?* This might help players to make sense of the situations they find themselves in.

**Examples:** *Starting the game with a 2-0 lead or use the wide zones to set up attacks.*

When the coach is designing or selecting a practice, he or she must decide how they intend to challenge players' actions and decisions. This can be done in a number of different ways.

The **restrict, relate** and **reward** approach from Ben Bartlett is simple and brilliant. Remember the task constraints or conditions could be for all players or tailored to the individual. Tasking or constraining players individually within a game or squad practice can afford players the opportunity to practise something unique to them within the context of the game.

There is no right or wrong here but being aware of the possible outcomes if you select a certain approach is useful. It also might raise your awareness, to reflect on any bias or habits you may have when coaching.

## Reward

This approach looks to reward the players if they choose to engage in the task design. This could be seen as middle ground between restrict and relate, as there is no rule or coaching intervention if they choose not to engage. The structure of the practice or the incentive will encourage the players to make an attempt or have a go.

**Examples:** *Regain possession in the opposition half and score = double goals. Score a goal from a cross = 3 goals.*

# THE THREE R'S

## Realism, relevance and repetition

The 3 R's is a concept used by the Football Association across their coach education and their elite sides.

It's another 'easy to remember' phrase when designing a session which considers;

- Does the practice match the demands of the game?
- Does the practice meet the needs of the individuals in the practice?
- Does the practice allow the individuals to experience repetition?

I often think of these as dials and if one is set to 10 out of 10, it is unlikely that the others will be high. For example, an individual kicking a ball against a wall is 10/10 for repetition but 1/10 for realism and relevance. Alternatively, a 11v11 game will be high for realism but will offer quite limited repetition.

The skill of the coach is to tweak and change these dials throughout the weeks and months, depending on their context and the players they are working with.

## Realism

A practice that meets the demands of the game. Does it look like football? Is football being played?

Consider;

- The environment
- Tactical
- Technical
- Mental
- Physical
- Social

## Relevance

A practice that meets the needs of the players.

Consider;

- Age appropriate
- Ability / stage
- Positions
- Style of play or philosophy
- Motivation
- Physical loading

## Repetition

A practice that offers quality repetition.

Consider;

- The size of the group
- The flow or practice management
- The theme or intention of the session
- The information (affordances)
- The syllabus

# DEVELOP A FEELING

## Feedback for the performer

When players are playing the game there are so many sources of information that can influence their performance. For a coach it is worth pausing and considering how valuable our input is and using an imaginary scale, then deciding where it could sit in comparison to; their peers, the experiences, feedback from the game...etc.

In 2020, I tried to capture some thoughts on this with a blog titled "Develop a Feel", which looked at the redundant argument between opposed and unopposed practice, as well as some of the factors that might help players to improve that **feel** for the game.

*"I feel the moment from game to game, feel the moment and play what feels right."*

Lionel Messi

"I don't think the manager can tell you when to make this run there. When you feel the ball will come here. The manager cannot tell you to feel that...only the player can feel that."

Paul Pogba

**Taken from Develop a Feeling by Dan Wright  
The Player Development Project**

<https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/develop-a-feeling/>



# MODIFYING YOUR SESSION

## Area size

- Bigger might allow for more time in possession.
- Smaller might increase the speed of play or interactions between the players.
- Area size will have a huge impact on the physical returns (frequency / volume / intensity).

## People

- Think about the individual match-ups in the practice?
- How can you plan individual needs / targets into the sessions design?
- How we distribute the players to link to the systems or strategies we choose to deploy.
- Encourage players to strategise on an 1-to-1 and team basis. How will they get success and why?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of putting certain individuals in the same team?
- The use of neutral / floater / jokers or magic-men will increase success but may decrease realism.
- Outside players or targets can be useful, again be mindful to not stray too far away from the game.

## Task constraints / coaching

- There is no right or wrong way to coach, consider how your style or intervention might land with the players and try and meet the players where they are in terms of their learning and understanding.
- Think about progressions to make the practice easier or harder, don't be afraid to ask the players.

By manipulating parts of the practice you will offer different experiences, opportunities for action and challenge for the players. Different federations and organisations have different views on aspects of this, but here are some broad concepts to consider when designing a session.

## Area shape and zones

- This is a big area to consider when designing a session, a small tweak or change here can alter the returns dramatically.
- See page 28 For a detailed look at this topic.

## Scoring!

- Most kids are competitive and want to know how they can get success.
- See page 29 for some ideas around different scoring mechanisms.

## Time or number of attempts

- To manage the practice or the experience for the player consider using a set time or number of go's for each game. If the game has no boundaries or structure it may become aimless or boring for the participants.

## Equipment

- By altering the equipment in the practice you will get different returns, similar to pitch size or shape. The big one here is goals - too small and players might not get success or blast it trying to score, equally too big for the Goalkeeper and it won't offer enough challenge.

There are so many great ideas to steal from clubs, organisations and governing bodies and this one from GB Hockey really covers all the bases of session design. 'CHANGE IT' also references the role of the coach when the session is live - can you adapt on the run to make sure;

- The players are engaged in the practice
- The intention of the practice is being achieved
- All the players are being challenged (too easy, too hard, one-sided...etc)

**C**oaching challenge - what is the task?

**H**ow you score?

**A**rea to play in - size, shape, boundaries

**N**umber of players - equal/overload?

**G**ame rules and point scoring - for actions other than scoring

**E**nter the ball - where is the ball fed from?

**I**nitial positions - where do the players start?

**T**ime limit - sets and reps



*CHANGE IT taken from GB Hockey*

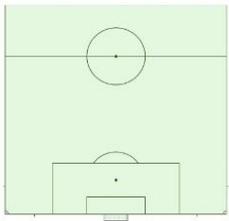
# PITCH SHAPE

Throughout the practices there are different shaped pitches suggested for each game. The shape and size of the pitch will encourage different interactions between the players, opposition and the task. Here are a few different examples of what behaviour we might see when changing the pitch.



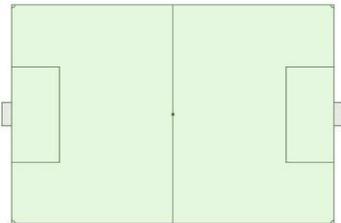
## FULL SIZE PITCH

- High realism but low repetition
- Physically demanding
- Need a lot of players
- Recreate match day



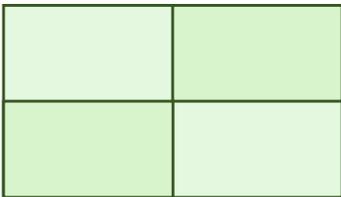
## HALF PITCH

- Unit v Unit
- Position Specific
- Phase of play
- Recreate match day



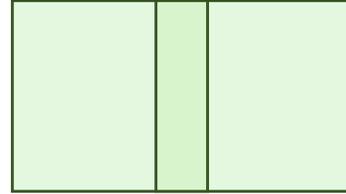
## SMALL SIDED WITH HALVES

- High press / Low block
- Playing out
- Penetrating forward
- Transition



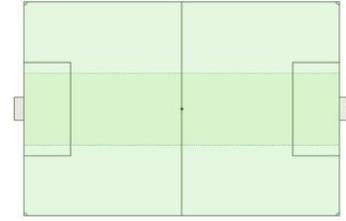
## BOXES / QUARTERS

- Movement
- Rotation
- Combination play
- Awareness of others



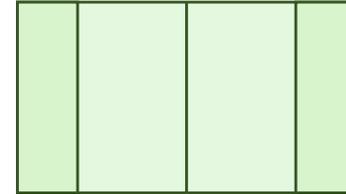
## CENTRAL ZONE

- Safe zone
- Receiving space
- Space between halves



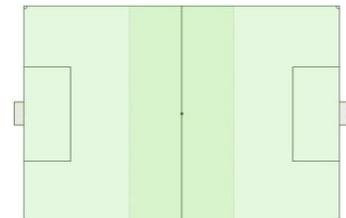
## WIDE ZONE

- Switching play
- Transition
- Defending priorities



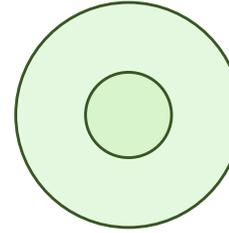
## END ZONE

- Forward pass
- Forward run
- Relate / reward specific action
- No Goalkeepers



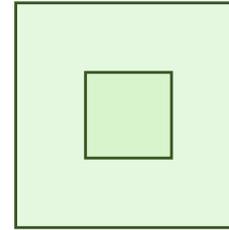
## THIRDS

- Split into units
- Pitch geography
- Playing forwards
- Central play
- Transition



## CIRCLE

- 360° pressure
- Maintain possession
- Scanning



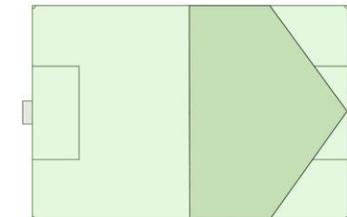
## SQUARE INSIDE A SQUARE

- Transition
- Defending compact
- Attacking small spaces
- Multi-directional



## OCTAGON / DIAMOND

- Attacking centrally
- More space in the middle third
- Diagonal passes / runs

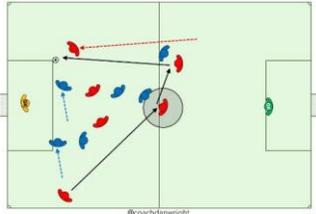


## FUNNEL

- Force play into one area
- Limit backwards passes
- Encourage a breakout

# SCORING

The location and number of goals will really impact the behavior of the players. Below are a few examples of how we might use goals or scoring mechanisms to offer different opportunities.



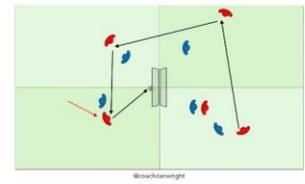
## REGULAR 2 GOAL GAME

- Normal game
- Familiar for players
- Adheres to principles of play



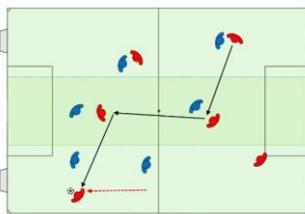
## 1 LARGE GOAL

- 1 Goalkeeper = 1 goal
- Activity in and around the box



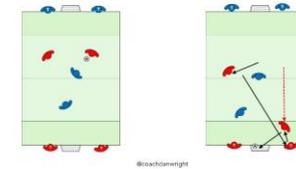
## BACK TO BACK

- Switching Play
- Defending central areas



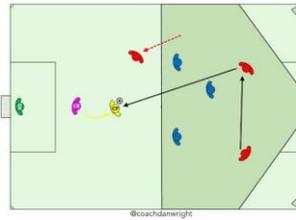
## FOUR GOAL

- Switching play
- Forcing play inside
- More success!



## SMALL 2 GOAL GAME

- No Goalkeepers
- Difficult to get success
- Smaller pitches



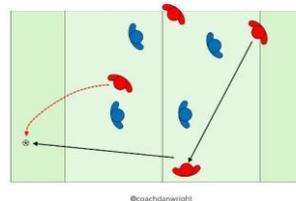
## 1 LARGE AND 2 SMALL GOALS

- Motivation for defending team
- Maintain moments of transition



## 3 TARGET GOALS

- Maintain motivation for defending team
- High chance of success
- Can score wide or centrally



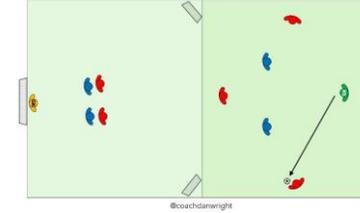
## END ZONES

- No Goalkeeper or goals
- Easy to set up
- Lots of link to principles of play



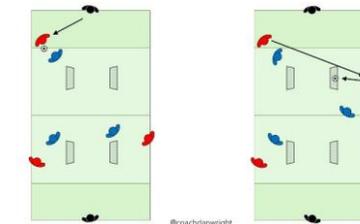
## GOALS OFF THE PITCH

- Encourage longer passes upon regain
- Screening or blocking



## ANGLED GOALS

- Target for team upon regain
- Can score left or right



## GOALS FACING OUT

- High chance of scoring
- Hard to defend
- Attack centrally
- Creates interference

# PITCH SIZE

Here you will find some recommended sizes for pitches depending on the number of players and their age / stage. When altering the pitch size consider what impact this might have for the players playing in the game. Consider;

- How many interactions do we want? (pass, shot, dribble...etc.)
- How physically demanding do we want the game to be?
- What tempo / intensity do we want the game to be?
- How realistic are these interactions in comparison to a competitive fixture?

Age Group	Format	Recommend size of goals (height x width) ft		Maximum recommendation (length x width) yards	
Mini-Soccer U7/U8	5v5	6	12	40	30
Mini Soccer U9/U10	7v7	6	12	60	40
Youth U11/U12	9v9	7	16	80	50
Youth U13/U14	11v11	7	21	90	55
Youth U15/16	11v11	8	24	100	60
Youth U17/U18	11v11	8	24	110	70
Over 18/Senior	11v11	8	24	110	70

The Football Association

No. of player	Small (m)	Medium (m)	Large (m)	Pitch-area (m <sub>2</sub> )
1v1	5 x 10	10 x 15	15 x 20	100
2v2	10 x 15	15 x 20	20 x 25	400-800
3v3	12 x 20	15 x 25	18 x 30	240-2500
4v4	16 x 24	20 x 30	24 x 36	240-2208
5v5	20 x 28	25 x 35	30 x 42	240-2500
6v6	24 x 32	30 x 40	36 x 48	240-2500
7v7	50 x 35-45			875-2200
8v8	60 x 40-45			2400-2700
9v9	60 x 50			3000
10v10	90 x 45			4000

*Aguiar, M., et al. A review on the effects of soccer small-sided games. 2012.*

*Dellal, A.C., K.; Pintus, A.; Girard, O.; Cotte, T.; Keller, D., Heart rate responses during small-sided games and short intermittent running training in elite soccer players: a comparative study. Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 2008.*

*Hill-Haas, S.V.D., B. T.; Coutts, A. J.; Rowsell, G. J., Physiological responses and time-motion characteristics of various small-sided soccer games in youth players. J Sports Sci, 2009.*

*Kelly, D.M. and B. Drust, The effect of pitch dimensions on heart rate responses and technical demands of small-sided soccer games in elite players. Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 2009.*

# GAME INTENSITY INDEX (GII)

Renshaw et al. (2012)

Another way to think about the size of pitch you use is to link the practice area to the pitch size the players use on a match day. Renshaw et al. (2012) put forward the concept of the “Game intensity Index (GII)”, which is one way to quantify the game intensity the players experience.

$$\text{GAME INTENSITY INDEX (GII)} = \frac{\text{PITCH AREA (M}^2\text{)} / 2}{\text{NUMBER OF OUTFIELD PLAYERS}}$$

For example, the GII at Old Trafford, Manchester;

$$\text{GAME INTENSITY INDEX (GII)} = \frac{1785 \text{ M}^2 / 2}{10 \text{ PLAYERS}} = 89$$

If a coach would like to design a small six-a-side game to replicate the GII at Old Trafford, he / she would need a pitch of 40m X 25 to create a GII of 83, slightly higher than the demands of the Old Trafford pitch.

The benefits of this approach might be;

- The coach can design Small Sided Games (SSG's) that are similar to the 'real game'
- The coach can objectively determine the ability of the group of players and design learning environments that are matched to their abilities

FORMAT	NUMBERS	OFFSIDE	FIELD SIZE (M)	GAME INTENSITY INDEX (GII)
Under 6 & 7	4v4	No	30x20	75
			25x18	56
Under 8 & 9	7v7	No	40x30	100
			50x40	167
Under 10 & 11	9v9	No	50x35	109
			60x40	150
			70x50	219
Under 12+	11v11	Yes	105x68	89

Australian Football Federation Small Sided Game Guidelines (FFA, 2010)

\*For these calculations you need to remove the goalkeeper, so the 9v9 for example is 8v8 (16)

As you can see from the example above, different formats have a significant impact on the intensity of the game.

Its may also be worth considering;

- Maturation could play a huge role here, what might be suitable for one 12 or 13 year old might be too physically demanding for another.
- 11v11 youth football will not look the same as adult youth football, as players are still learning the game. The amount of interactions (touches, shots, dribbles...etc.) will go down in a larger format of the game.

# DEVELOPING INDIVIDUALS

## The role of a youth coach

It could be argued that the role of the coach can differ in different settings. For example, a first team coach striving to keep a team in the Football League might use different approaches or prioritise different things in comparison to a coach working with 7-year old's in a grassroots setting.

For a coach working in development football, the priority should be process driven rather than outcome focused. Continuing with the example, for the coach working in first team football the result and 3 points might be the only measure of success - style or individuals in the team improving might take a back seat as the outcome is the only focus. In development football the aim is to help the players improve, as people and footballers. This means that coach's focus is on the process - everyday, every session, every game. With the outcome only focus - you either win or you lose, there is no middle ground. With a process focus you might improve in certain moments of the game or meet indicators that show improvement...but still lose the game.

*"In football you always play two games. The first one you see on the scoreboard. The second one is 'our way' and 'our style'. The first one you can lose, sometimes, but the second one, never ever. It is not possible, not allowed. And this is where our focus lies."*

*Pepijn Lijnders  
Liverpool FC*

## Strength based approach

A youth coach should focus on what players can do rather than what they can't. Try to avoid becoming 'deficit detectives' and looking for faults and things to fix. In a high performance setting think about why that individual was selected or recruited into the club or system, if they are an good dribbler can we help them make this a super strength. If we try and make them outstanding at 1 or 2 things they are more likely to achieve and progress.

## Individual Development Plans

Players and coaches can co-create plans or targets to put the journey into the players hands. The plan can be framed in a number of ways, with the ultimate aim of raising self awareness of the player's strength and areas to develop. This process can encourage reflection on performance, effort and practice. These plans can be reviewed and updated in both formal and informal ways.

## Rate Limiters

Rate limiters can be described as "factors which may be limiting current performance levels" this could be fixed or something that could be worked on with practice and training. For example, Messi could improve his heading but would struggle to compete with 6ft 2 Central Defenders. What might stop players progressing to the next level? Can we help develop things they may need to compete in the future?

## Coaching individuals within a group session

When designing practices for groups or teams, how do we shine a light on individuals within that team setting? As Ted Dale (The FA) puts it *“Who is James Bond in the practice?”* so for example, if we are working on defending in and around the box, who are the key individuals? What are they specifically working on? How do we plan to interact with them? How will we support or challenge them? How will we manipulate the constraints to meet the needs of those individuals?

## Match Day

When using this individualised approach, it is vital that we maintain this through match days and pressurised moments. This might be as simple as interacting in the same way; **positive, frequent, consistent, repetitive** and **unconditional**. It is also worth considering how we can use games as an extension of training, that could include things like the position(s) they play, technical aims or psychological goals.

## Reflect and Review

When using a player centred or individualised approach we need to regularly reflect and review, is each individual getting what they need? This will drive decisions around the whole development process; how frequently do they train, the groups they train in, their individual plan, the practice habits and their experiences on game day.



100

SMALL SIDED GAMES

*“When Demarai was an U16 within the U18 group, in U18 league games, we played him centre midfield.*

*He was a less physically developed player and if we were look at a results point of view, having him there would’ve hindered our chance of getting a result but we had to play him in there for him to gain a great understanding of defensive responsibility and team shape.*

*Does it matter we lost 2-1 on the day? No it doesn’t. It all comes down to perception”*

*Krisitjaan Speakman  
Birmingham City Academy Director on Premier League Winner, Demarai Gray*

**Taken from Redefining Success: An Individual Approach by Dave Wright  
The Player Development Project**

<https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/redefining-success-individual-approach/>

# WHAT IS THE GAME ASKING YOU TO DO ?

Originally written for The Player Development Project

Over the last few months I have found myself using the question used as this article's title a lot. I've done so with an aim to challenge players to think about their game, or perhaps more specifically what they had noticed whilst playing the game.

Let me start from the start. I believe that football is played by the players. Coaches are just there to assist, guide and nudge them in the right direction. I believe our role is to help players to understand the game and how they interact with others to achieve, particularly in youth football.

I also believe, if we want skilful individuals who make great decisions, we have to expose them to random and dynamic situations where they can search, decide and execute. As a coach sometimes this means holding back solutions, so players can go through the messy and sticky "working it out" phase. Oh, and make lots of mistakes.

If we dive even deeper, there are key components to encourage skill development when designing a session.

- What is the intention of the practice. What is it we want the player to get better at?
- Has the environment been adapted to draw learners' attention to key information and important opportunities for action?
- Is the practice representative of the game. Does it feel like a game? Is there competition? Consequence? Whilst remembering "game-like" doesn't always mean a game.
- Does the practice allow for lots of repetition with lots of random variation?
- Does the coach's behaviour invite and encourage these interactions?

As coaches, we are constantly looking to improve and develop in all these areas. Part of the attraction of coaching is that you never really master all of these areas! There's always room for improvement. One component that I find fascinating is coaching interventions - both type and frequency.

I have become a big advocate of questioning and over the years and I'd like to think my questioning skills have improved. When I started, I asked mostly closed questions which didn't really challenge the players to actually think or reflect on what happened.

This progressed, only slightly, to a scenario where players were asked questions which they could answer with generic replies like "Space", "Width" or "Support". This felt better, I thought, because players' answers were slightly more specific. But in reality, there were probably 10 different answers that players rotated session to session, as if they were spinning a wheel of fortune in their heads, they had a fair chance of guessing the right answer.

When tutors or senior staff asked if I used a variety of interventions, I was sure I was. In reality I was probably manipulating the wording of my questioning to get the answers I wanted to hear. "What do we need to do before receiving the ball?" would be met with "scan!". Hmmm, if everyone knows this why doesn't it happen?! I think there's a significant link between session design and questioning. Perhaps, the sessions weren't creating the need. Players telling me they need to scan and designing a practice where players actually scan, are two different things. Perhaps, the questions and manufactured positive replies pasted over the fact that players weren't learning or developing skill. I don't think this questioning approach was adding value for the participants, it was for show. Players were merely reciting or filling in the blanks.

The next step was to ask what I would describe as linked questions, for example "If X does this, what would you do?". I still use this method and with some players in the right context it works well. I tend to use it for big picture stuff, with more focus on tactics and team stuff like 11v11/Phase of Play, video sessions or 1-2-1 chats, sometimes with a tactics board.

**ME:** "The ball goes back to the goalkeeper, central defenders show me what you'd do?"  
[Players answer and move]

[Coach could now paint a few different "What if.. or "What next?" scenarios]

**ME:** "Great. The goalkeeper chooses to play wide, into Full Back, what would you do next?"

I found this approach particularly useful when reviewing game footage. After a few weeks, players can lead their own debrief and tell us what went well, what they would change, and the skills they need to go away and work on. Bingo!! We might be getting somewhere. Sometimes, I'd need to tease the answer out with "Tell me more" or "Can you explain more?"

This approach then evolved into asking questions but not waiting for the answer. I didn't realise I did it until I recorded my sessions and watched them back. It was actually pointed out by one of my mentors, who said he loved it as it kept the kids engaged. "Is this a question Dan actually wants me to answer?"

This is something I find works when players are right in the middle of their stretch point so either there is a certain level of competency or they experienced this moment of the game before. The question might prime the players to think about the practice and their role within it.

This almost leaves the player hanging - hopefully with answers and ideas fizzing around their brain. This can be done on a group level or in a fly-by intervention, perhaps just in the ear of the individual. Examples below, these could be to check their understanding, challenge players or set an individual task constraint.

"What will excellent receiving look like?" This might get the individual to think about angles, body shape and distances of support.

"If Barcelona did this practice what would the ball speed look like?" This comparison seems to work well with teenage players. It's almost like asking: is that your best effort?

To challenge the players to think about defensive balance: "What will happen if everyone runs forward?"

"How do you know whether to play to left or to the right?" To start players thinking about scanning to switching play. This would give you a platform to talk about overloads and creating 2v1 situations.

For a specific individual challenge: "Do you think you can beat your defender on both sides?"

And with the right age group, relationship and personality, you can use the "I don't think you can..." strategy. So, perhaps with a confident forward "I don't think you can score 2 goals in this game?". Set a challenge and review it almost instantly.

As with all interventions, there is not a silver bullet or one-size-fits-all approach here. Some players don't enjoy the uncertainty that questioning might present. They want answers and solutions. As we've discussed before, there are different times where other methodology might be better, be that command, guided discovery, trial-and-error or free play.

Think of these approaches on a spectrum, from certainty to uncertainty. Some enjoy the search and solve style, some will need more support and guidance. You might move up and down this scale depending on the context - your players in your environment. You might also consider;

- How much stress do we want the players to feel today?
- What is the current level of understanding around this area?
- Which individuals do we want to affect today?

Also in the mix is the lazy learner. The one who can't be bothered and knows if they wait either a teammate will provide an answer or the coach will give up and share the answer. It's important to try and distinguish between those who don't know versus those that lack confidence or want to coast through sessions.

So, in sessions, game day or debriefs I've started using **"What is the game asking you to do?"**

### I like this because...

- There's not a one-word answer, so it tends to start a conversation. The spinning wheel of answers won't work here.
- It works on the premise that the ideas are already in the players' heads. If practice has been representative of the game, we *should* have experienced something like this before.
- The question asks the learner to consider the opposition and the game; the opportunities and threats they pose and some strategies to overcome it!
- It encourages players to communicate without the coach. What are they noticing that they can share with their mates? You then hear conversations emerge, "If you played wider I think we could switch the ball to you quicker." When I hear young players communicate like this I get excited.
- It brings the individual back to their "super strength". What are they good at and how will they get into a position/situation to use it? For example, if I'm good at crossing the ball, what will I need to do to deliver the ball consistently? Answers could be endless, but might include: winning my 1v1, receiving the ball behind the line of pressure, playing with fewer touches...etc.
- If a player uses this approach game-to-game they will be able to draw on these experiences, self organise and "find a way" to get success, without a coach. As if, learning is cool and makes us better at stuff.
- In a stealth way, it can help the players learn the principles of play. With the ball - create and exploit space and without it - deny space and regain. If your team has a game model or game principles you can refer them to this. "Which principle is the most important today and why?"

- Another idea that has landed with me recently is **"the opposition decides how we score"**. For example, If the space is behind the defensive line, how will we exploit it? If the opposition man mark in the middle third how will we play out? Again week-to-week we will build shared experiences, and this will allow us perceive shared affordances - opportunities and potential opportunities for action.

### What the research says

"Questions that promote critical thinking require players to consider a number of responses before selecting an answer they feel to be most appropriate (Daniel and Bergmann-Drewe 1998; Wright and Forrest 2007). However, for players to be able to consider their responses, rather than expecting immediate responses, coaches need to allow time for reflection (McNeill et al 2008) and allow players the opportunity to discuss answers amongst themselves. Wiersema and Licklider (2009) talk about the need to provide opportunities for learners to ask questions of themselves and others as this results in greater levels of learning; to think and reflect more deeply about their performance.

Time is required for critical thinking and reflection to happen (Chambers and Vickers 2006). The conversation analysis showed that coaches in this case rarely provided players with time to think about their responses. As already discussed, when an immediate response was not forthcoming, coaches filled the silence with an answer or re-initiated through a re-phrased question. McNeill et al. (2008) argues that inexperience tends to produce too many questions in quick succession, and this does not allow time to reflect on possible answers and their consequences."

**Are my players thinking "What is the game asking me to do?" And have they got the skills to do it. If not it's probably down to me.**

### References:

COPE, E. ... et al, 2016. An investigation of professional top-level youth football coaches' questioning practice. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 8 (4), pp. 380-393.

### What is the Game Asking You to Do?

By Dan Wright The Player Development Project

<https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/what-is-the-game-asking-you-to-do/>

# QUESTIONS?!

Asking the right question at the right time

A mentor of mine uses the phrase *"the quality of your feedback is directly linked to the quality of intervention."* The way I interpret this is, the behaviour or response we get from the player is shaped by how we intervene and interact.

Asking the right question, to the right person at the right time, is a real skill. When coaching you will often know when you get this right and you certainly know when you get it wrong...I know I do!

Questioning is such a powerful coaching tool. It is worth thinking about the type of questions you are asking;

- Consider how the question will 'land' with the player. Do they want or need it in that moment? Consider the psychological state and whether the question will aid learning / performance or add frustration and confusion.
- Questions can be asked to frame the session, help players in the session or reflect on performance.
- Try to avoid questions that are easy or too simple. When the players shout 'space' or 'time' are they really showing us what they know or telling us what we want to hear?
- Consider whether the question is for the team or individual? This might influence when and where you ask it.
- Try to link 2 questions, to start conversations or probe understanding. *"What did you notice about their defence?"* followed with *"..And how do you think we could hurt them?"*

	<b>IS?</b> PRESENT	<b>DID?</b> PAST	<b>CAN?</b> POSSIBLY	<b>WOULD?</b> PROBABILITY	<b>WILL?</b> PREDICTION	<b>MIGHT?</b> IMAGINATION
<b>WHAT?</b> EVENT						
<b>WHERE?</b> WHERE/WHEN	<b>FACTUAL</b>			<b>PREDICTIVE</b>		
<b>WHEN?</b> CHOICE/TIME						
<b>WHO?</b> PERSON						
<b>WHY?</b> REASON	<b>ANALYTICAL</b>			<b>EVALUATION</b>		
<b>HOW?</b> ACTION						

From the Coaching Lab @The\_CoachingLab

# COACH COMMUNICATION

## Coaching styles and interactions

There are many different ways to coach and teach sport. Although coaches might be familiar with 'conditioned' games or task constraints, they may be less aware that verbal information can also shape or constrain a practice, and that even the most experienced or skilled practitioner can struggle to recall what they said during a session. Millar, Oldham and Donovan (2011) found a 40% difference between what coaches reported they said versus their actual behaviour - even when being observed. Filming your sessions and observing yourself in action is one of the most powerful ways to develop your coaching. You will see; how often you intervene, your preferred coaching style, how long your interventions are, which individuals you interact with and how often, what you coached versus what you planned and what you might have missed.

Below are some of different coaching types or methods, although there maybe more these are broadly accepted as the core five.

Coaching Methodology	Command	Question and Answer	Observation and Feedback	Guided Discovery	Trial Error
Player coach intervention	Coach tells and shows required solution	Coach leads with a question to gain a response or check for understanding.	Coach observes the players in the practice and offers feedback.	Coach asks a question or issues a challenge through the set task.	Player and / or coach decide on the challenge
Description	Coach is king. Coach tells, explains and shows how to do something. Often implies there is only 1 way!	Coach poses questions and players offer verbal solutions to the practice or challenge.	Players and coach discuss what happened and why. This could be completely coach led, completely player led or co-created. Consider the framework or <b>ask-offer-ask</b> .	Coach challenges and players demonstrate solutions or possible solutions through the practice design. ( <i>Link to page 43 "Setting a mission"</i> ).	Players are encouraged to find solutions with minimal or no support from the coach.
Example	"I want you to..." "Stop. Stand still!"	"What did you think you could do in this situation?" "When might you play over their press?"	"What did you notice when the ball was in central areas?" OR "When the ball was in a central area I noticed..."	"Can you show me..." "Which part of the pitch are they struggling to defend and can you recognise how to exploit it?"	No instruction at all or just enough to play.  "In this game you get 3 points if you switch play before you score. Off you go"

The role of the coach can be a difficult tight rope to navigate. Not only are there pitfalls with physical session design considerations (size, shape, players...etc), how and when we speak can have a huge impact.

*"The information contained in an instruction acts as a boundary (constraint) that shapes the emergent intentions, perceptions and actions of each individual. Specifically, instructions provide boundaries for spatial and temporal properties of a to-be-performed movement."*(Newell & Ranganathan, 2010)

In non-linear pedagogy the role of the coach is to provide instruction and feedback to key information that facilitates the search for task relevant coordination and control solutions in action, during the learning. However, there is an incredibly fine line between instruction and feedback, as the message could be used to guide the next action - or feed forward. Difficult stuff!

The coach has to be mindful and strike the right balance, consider;

- **Directing the search when we know the key information sources**
- **Directing the search when we think we know the specifying information**
- **Sharing information or capturing expert instructional knowledge**
- **Directing the search when we don't know!**
- **Staying quiet! When not to talk**
- **Directing through questioning**

This is the craft of coaching, blending your personality, in the context to meet the demands of the learners. It can take years and years to improve, much like any skill. One way to approach this is to become more aware of when you are prescribing and when you are guiding. A coach who prescribes might use the EDIP approach **explain, demonstrate, imitate** and **practice**. The guiding coach tends to use the EDA approach **explore, discover** and **adapt**. When designing and offering 'free exploration' the coach sets the task but doesn't provide the solution. In a prescribed approach the coach gives the solution and doesn't ask the learner to search. This framework might allow coaches some flex in their style, depending on the moment and the individual they are interacting with.

## Prescribe (EDIP)

Common movement / Decision Making Model

**Explain** - Prescribe - tell - instruct model  
**Demonstrate** - Movement Decision Making Model  
**Imitate** - Simulate Model  
**Practice** - Execute-Perform Model

Observe - compare  
 Error-Detection - Correction  
 Repetition - quantity  
 Feedback - Feedforward

Plan - Do - Review  
 LINEAR

## Guide (EDA)

Individual - Situation Movement - Decision Making Model

**Explore** - search for information  
**Discover** - Functional Solution  
**Adapt** - Dexterity - adapt ability

Trial & Error (learn) - task feedback  
 Self directed - guesstimation / summary feedback  
 Guide using analogies, cues, constraints, questioning

Outcome - problem based  
 Constraints - manipulate - adapt  
 NON-LINEAR

# HIGH CHALLENGE HIGH SUPPORT

## Developing resilience

Looking at the work of Dr Fletcher and Dr Sarkar in their study of Mental Fortitude Training, of fundamental importance to developing high levels of resilience and subsequently performance, are the notions of challenge and support. What do these mean to athletes and what role does the coach play?

### Challenge

- Having high expectations of people
- Increasing accountability and responsibility
- Stretching people outside of their comfort zones

### Support

- Enabling people to develop their personal qualities
- Building trust
- Providing guidance and feedback

### What does a facilitative environment look like?

Now this is the million-dollar question. In my opinion this phrase sums it up:

*“Prepare the player for the journey, not the journey for the player”*

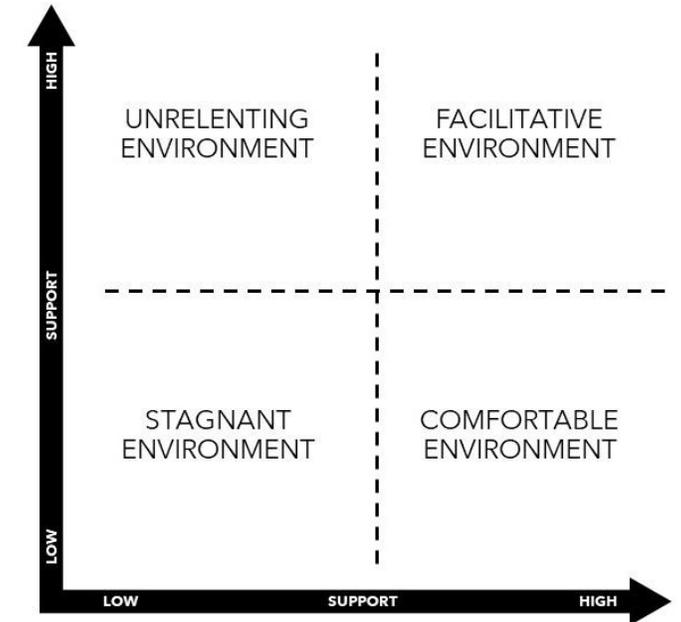
This statement perfectly aligns with the ideal characteristics of a facilitative environment. As coaches we can be guilty of smoothing out this process and removing bumps or challenges.

In order to facilitate both excellence and welfare in elite sport, the environment must balance both high levels of support and challenge. Therefore, coaches need to have an exceptional awareness of their athletes as an unrelenting environment can be detrimental to an athlete’s well being.

However, for many coaches there is still a question of whether welfare should come before winning? In football the ‘win at all costs’ approach is prominent even in youth sports. Due to this, academics at Loughborough University have identified the following characteristics of a facilitative environment

- Supportive challenge towards a goal
- Individuals have input into and task ownership of goals
- Healthy competition
- A psychologically safe environment which encourages risk-taking
- Learn from mistakes and failure
- Good relationships between performers, leaders or coaches

A CHALLENGE SUPPORT MATRIX FOR DEVELOPING RESILIENCE



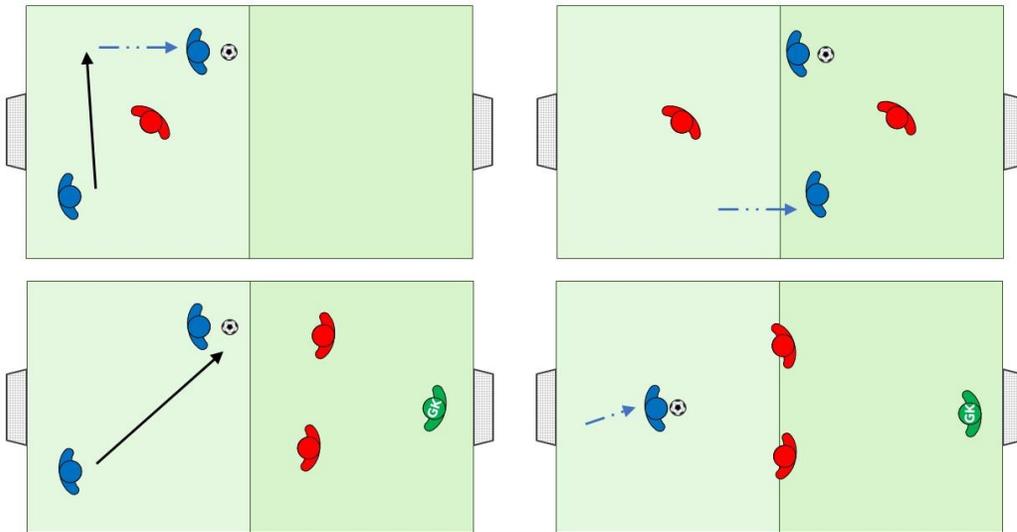
# HOW **HOT** DO YOU WANT YOUR SESSION?

## Coaching in the psychological corner

On pages 15-18 we briefly looked at the importance of representative design. For learning to transfer from practice to games, practice needs to be representative of the game itself. "Representative tasks ensure that the processes of cognition, perception and action are functionally intertwined and integrated during each athlete's performance" (Pinder et al 2011).

One area that is often overlooked or misunderstood is the designing in of psychological or social themes in practices. Essentially these are skills, and whilst we would expect players to develop their technical skills through practice (team and individual) we often don't touch on skills like emotional control, communication or resilience. However, we know that these skills are vital for young people in both participation and high-performance settings. Many coaches would point at these mental skills as the difference between good and great players.

Whilst most coaches are not trained psychologists, they are aware and skilled in session design and dialing up or down challenge. One approach that has landed well with young players I've coached is the analogy of the Nando's Peri-Ometer. For those that don't know, this is used in a UK chain of restaurants to decide how hot and spicy you would like your chicken. I've used this to frame the session or ask the players how challenging they would like the practice to be. It is also useful to reflect; how often do players practice in moments that look and feel like a game? How do we strike the balance between fun and competition?



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**A practical example of how to turn the heat up in a practice. Players can choose how difficult they want the practice to be.**

**Extra Mild:** Top left, a 2v1 very easy for the attackers to get success

**Mild:** Top right 2v2 but each defender is 'locked in' to create two 2v1 moments, Again, quite easy and high chance of success.

**Medium:** (not pictured) The defenders are not locked in and it's a regular 2v2 game, with normal football rules...but no Goalkeepers.

**Hot:** As above, but the attackers play to a goal with a keeper, but if they lose possession the defenders counter to an unprotected goal. High risk if they make a mistake!

**Extra Hot:** Instead of a 2v2, the attacker players individually in a 1v2 scenario. This is incredibly difficult and super challenging. Almost guaranteed failure!



# THE PRINCIPLES OF VIDEO GAME DESIGN

## What can coaches learn from Sonic the Hedgehog?

I was the perfect age when video games hit the UK in the early 1990's. The emergence of the SEGA Mega Drive and the Nintendo SNES meant if I wasn't outside kicking a ball I would be attached to one of these. The design of games like Sonic the Hedgehog or Super Mario is what made them mildly frustrating, compelling and so fun.

Professor James Paul Gee of Arizona State University has considered video game design in education and what design features school education programmes can take from video game design. I was first introduced to this principle by **Amy Price** (@AmyPrice\_10) who is doing some incredible work in this space. She took Gee's 16 principles and condensed them to **five key design principles** that coaches and teachers can use to create great games. This is underpinned by a theory of metacognition which no other coaching method really offers, it also offers coaches another approach to their toolbox when designing practices.

This approach essentially promotes three metacognitive game skills which are based around the opposition - **how much you know about them, how you can get that information** and **how you can make the most of it**. It all boils down to strategising, and that's what a well-designed video game is all about. It gets the player to think, "*how will the computer respond if I do this?*"

This is a move away from things like game plans, coach led themes or telling players the answer all the time.

### THE 3 METACOGNITIVE GAME SKILLS

1. Planning ahead. Are players considering their next move as the game is going on around them?
2. Setting problems. Can players see what effect they can have on the opposition, and how that can be used to block what the opposition is trying to do?
3. Knowing what information you need, and setting out to find it. For example in football, a Striker will want to know whether they are quicker than the Defender who's marking them. Can that Striker, and their teammates, plan for a ball to be played behind the Defender early on to create that test?



# THE PRINCIPLES OF VIDEO GAME DESIGN

Amy Price FA Women's National Coach Developer

## MISSIONS

This is moving away from the traditional ideas of **technical / tactical / skill learning outcomes** or **session focus**, which coaches have generally been asked to consider when planning sessions. There is still an outcome with this approach, via the three metacognitive game skills, but it's not as clear as an outcome like a type of pass, an interception or creating a goal. So therefore, when we are **devising a mission**, avoid sport specific language because this will automatically imply that you're asking players to focus on something specific to do with the game.

## LEVEL UP

How can we break this down into a series of simple-to-complex **problems for players to solve?** Once a problem has been solved that player or team can move up a level and a new set of problems are posed. This can test the skill and imagination of the coach, as these problems can't just be random, they need to be well designed and structured in a way that meets the needs of the players as they improve. This challenges traditional forms of coaching where we look to progress the practice. Instead, **Level-ups are automatically woven into design**, meaning that the task is made more difficult by levelling up - not when the coach decides it's time to progress or move on.

## SUPER POWERS

When I used to play Sonic the Hedgehog, I'd always look out for the fast speed power (which was really well hidden!), it gave me the ability to run faster and jump high over the lava, which I could never do without that super power. So on any level I'd have to think: where do I need that power? What do I need to do to earn it? As it only lasts a few seconds, how do I make best use of it while I have it? **That makes players plan, set and solve problems and find out key information.** It is important that players must earn the power first (not just be given it by the coach)!

## PAUSING

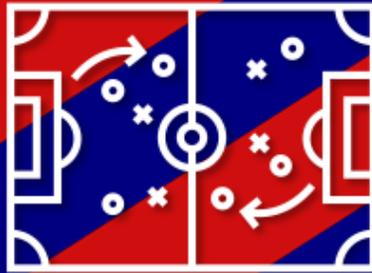
Often these games can be really challenging and you don't always get success at the first time of trying. The pause button puts the power in the players hands to decide when they will stop the practice and why. You might need to scaffold this approach for players, as it can be daunting or not seen as traditional coaching!

Amy suggests a **'4C' framework** during the pauses, to encourage players to strategise about when, how and why they use their pause. They can choose to use **CHEAT** (giving an answer or example), **CHANGE** (how the game is designed to your advantage), **CLUE** (questions or prompts) or **CHALLENGE** (make the task more difficult).

## SAVE PROGRESS

It's quite common practice to work on one thing with players in training, then come back the next session with a new or slightly different focus- perhaps following a curriculum. But part of the reason why video games are so successful at developing learning and performance is that **when you return to play the game, you start from where you left off last time.** For example, training ends on level three, and next time training starts on level three! That means you're offering players the time to master problems that are in the game. Not having to spend time starting from scratch also allows them to be more creative and bold with where they are.

# FOOTBALL PRINCIPLES



# FOOTBALL PRINCIPLES

People say the same thing, but do they mean the same thing?

In 2008, I took the UEFA B / Level 3 through the Football Association. On this course at the time you were encouraged to start and develop a "Football Philosophy". This was a broad project which could include your values, playing style, systems of play, player characteristics and so much more! At the time this was quite daunting and I ended writing something very 'wordy' but pretty meaningless.

In this section I have tried to unpick some of this. Although its semantics I like to call this football principles, as that is the language I use when coaching younger footballers. This is just my way, its not the answer or an all-encompassing piece of work, but it should highlight some language you might see when using these plans.

Through the session plans you will notice there is lots of 'football language', although these phrases are meaningful for me, they might appear foreign or jargon for other coaches. The intention here is to explain a few of these principles and what they might look like in training and games.

A few points to consider;

- Although these ideas might work in my context, they might not work in yours. I would encourage you to build your own document of ideas / principles of how you coach and what you coach. In different regions or sociocultural settings, you might prioritise different things or select more appropriate language.
- These principles are not complicated, but the idea is to have a common language so when we are discussing a specific situation, we are all talking about the same thing. This could be coach-player, coach-coach or coach-parent.
- Some of these principles will work with players of all ages, whereas some are a little more advanced. Again, understanding the context (age, participation or performance, motivation of the group...etc.) will be vital.
- I didn't invent football, so some of the ideas have been influenced by other coaches - but perhaps adapted or simplified for youth football.



# OUTPLAYING 1v1

## Winning your 1v1's and outplaying using your super strength

I could write hundreds of pages on 1v1's - they are such an integral part of the game. They are often misunderstood and delivered in a way which is not always representative of situations players face in the game.

### STARTING POINT

Outplaying 1v1 is the starting point for footballers. They need a relationship with the ball and the ability to beat or 'outplay' their direct opponent. I prefer using the term 'outplaying' - as it removes some of the tradition around 1v1s or a 1v1 player. When someone says "1v1" they are often only talking about a specific skill or 1 type of player - a dribbler, a risk taker...etc, but in reality, all players face 1v1 moments in every game they play.

### FIND A WAY

For players to get success, they need to understand their super strength. What is it that allows them to compete and how can we make this skill razor sharp? Neymar, Lukaku, Van Dijk and Iniesta are all great players, but they find different ways to get success. The idea of prescribing one technique or one way to outplay your opponent is redundant when you consider how different players play the game.

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF 1v1

It is widely accepted that there are 6 types or variations of 1v1 duels in the game;

- Pressure from the front
- Pressure from side
- Pressure from the back
- Recovering defender on an angle
- No defender due to movement
- Aerial duels

From a session design perspective, it could be helpful to think about; which of these do our players need? Which are most likely to occur in the practice? What are the skills needed to compete?

### THE GAME IS NOT 11x 1v1

Another misconception or extreme approach is that the game is **only** about 1v1. I think its important to consider that football is a team game, players need to collaborate to get success. Of course at younger ages the focus should be on skill development, which often links to actions and touches of the ball. In my opinion we are doing the players a disservice if we don't shine a light on the shared opportunities or affordances to interact with teammates. From simple pictures like 2v1 or 3v2 with very young players to more complex ideas in the 11v11 game, deconstructing the game to just 1v1 is means we are only learning one aspect of it.



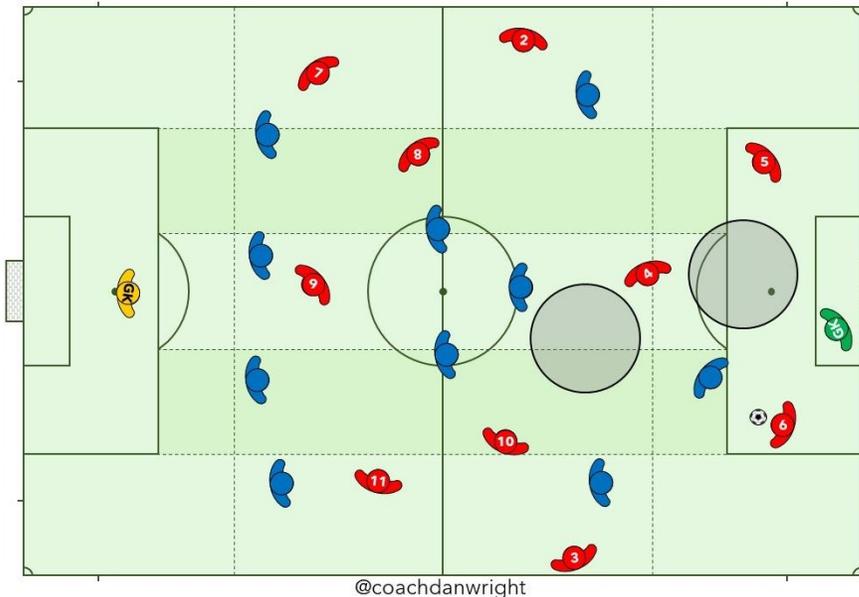
# PASSING AND RECEIVING

## Remembering your ABCD!

This is a nice "sticky" for young players - the A,B,C,D is easy to remember, its not all inclusive but it points at some of the key factors or important parts when passing and receiving the football. I will try and explain these using these 3 diagrams.

**ANGLE:** In the diagram below left, the central defender is bringing the ball out from the back, due to the pressure from the Blue forward it is very difficult to play into the #4 (DCM). The 2x highlighted areas suggest positions where he / she could adjust his / her **angle of support** to create a clear passing line for the #6. Interestingly both of these are diagonal from the ball carrier - that's not to say straight passes don't work, there are just a ton of positive returns from supporting and passing diagonally.

**BODY SHAPE:** In the bottom right diagram, we have a slightly different challenge. Here the ball carrier (#4) has a clear passing line to the central midfielder (#10), however his body shape is closed. This makes it difficult to play forwards. In the diagram bottom left, the #10 is in a great spot - he / she is open and with the right weight of pass could dribble or pass forward into the final third.

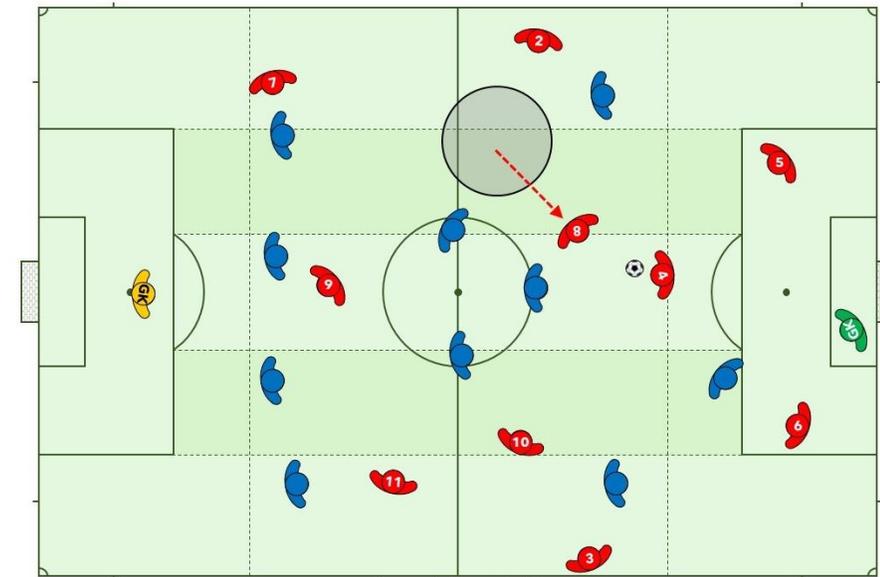


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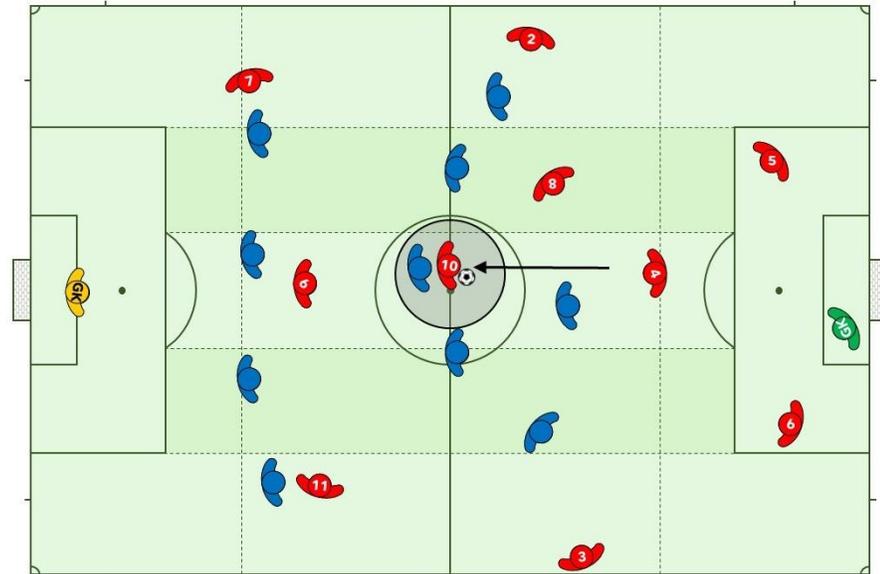
**CHECKING:** In the bottom right diagram, the #10 might not have 'checked his shoulders' or 'scanned'. He or she is outnumbered by defenders and is unlikely to play a penetrative pass from this position. (For more on scanning see page 57).

**DISTANCE:** Finally, this is a topic which is tied into angle of support and one which young players find quite difficult. In the diagram top right, the #8 has come too close to the ball carrier and left a superior position (highlighted). Of course, this is subjective, but the highlighted position might be superior because;

- It is higher up the pitch and therefore closer to the opposition's goal
- It pinned back 2x players making space for others
- He or she was able to play through 360° there
- It allowed the ball carrier to pass into a bigger area or to switch play



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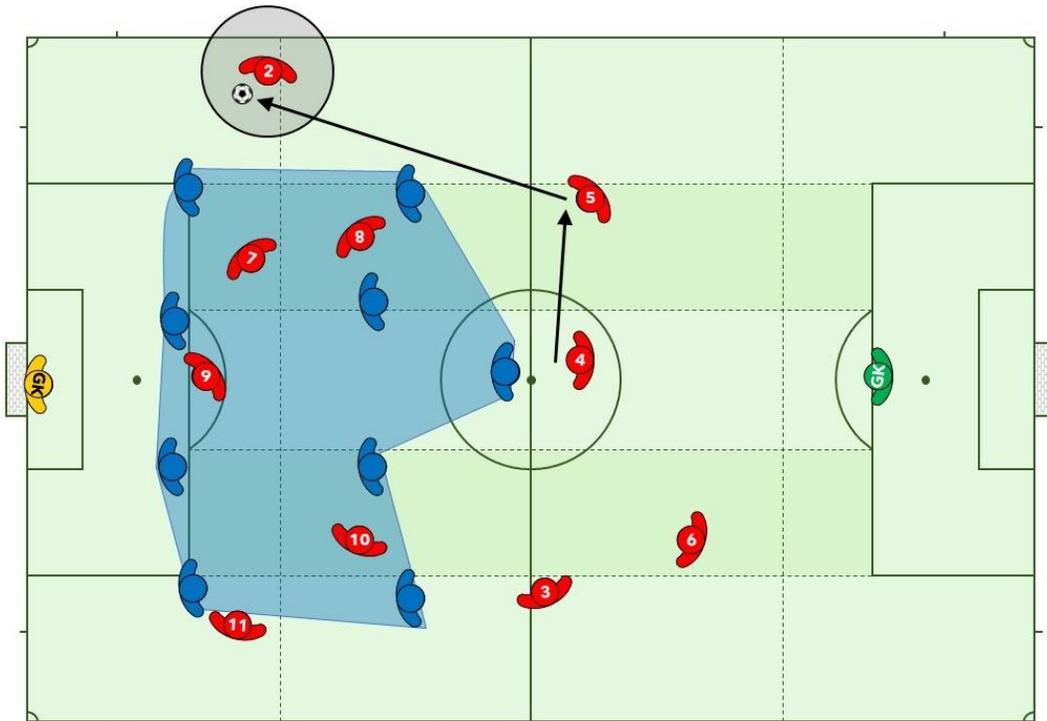
# THE OPPOSITION DECIDES HOW WE SCORE

Where and how can we get success?

On page 34, I shared a blog where I discussed the benefits of posing the question “*What is the game asking you to do?*” As a club or team, you might use some ideas, principles or shared language when playing the game for speed and efficiency. These buzz words or quick phrases can be underpinned by sessions, analysis and informal chats, but as the game emerges it gives us all a common language. The biggest constraint on our performance is the opposition, as they decide how we score...

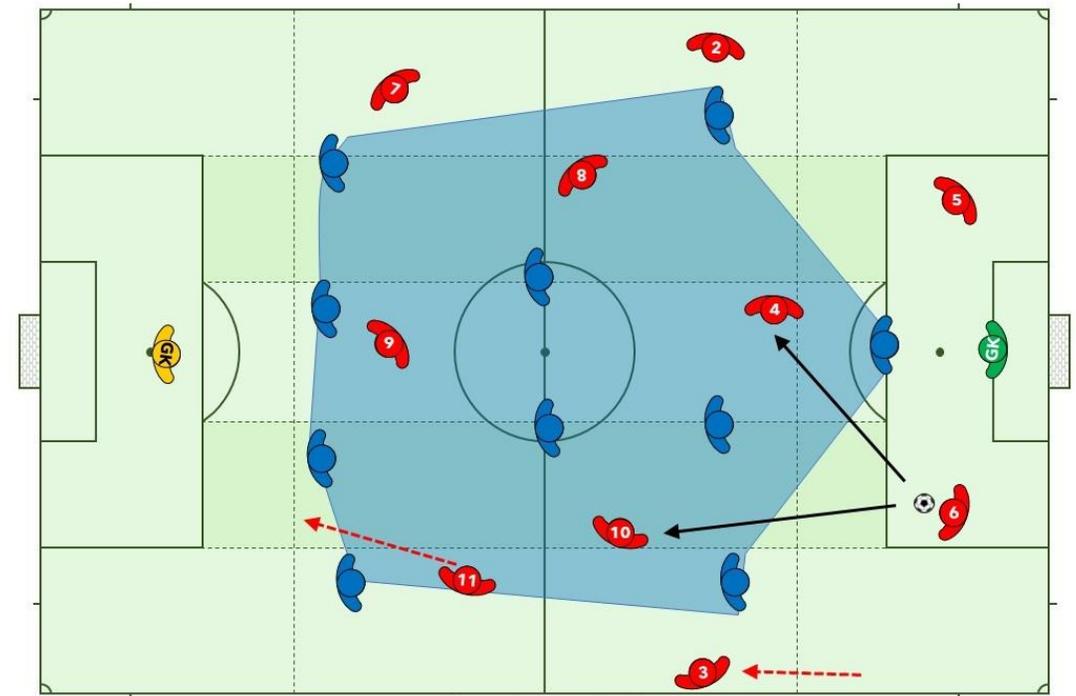
This is an idea introduced to me by Jose F. Tavares of FC Porto. He believes “*always the opposition tells us how we score, so we are not coaching the exercise, we are coaching our principles.*” I understand this to mean that when the coaches are working in the academy they do not just copy and paste their coaching sessions or interventions, they are coaching their style and helping to create the context for the young players to learn.

**Image 1:** A deep block denies space centrally, but there is space out wide



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**Image 2:** A high but uncoordinated press creates an opportunity to play through.

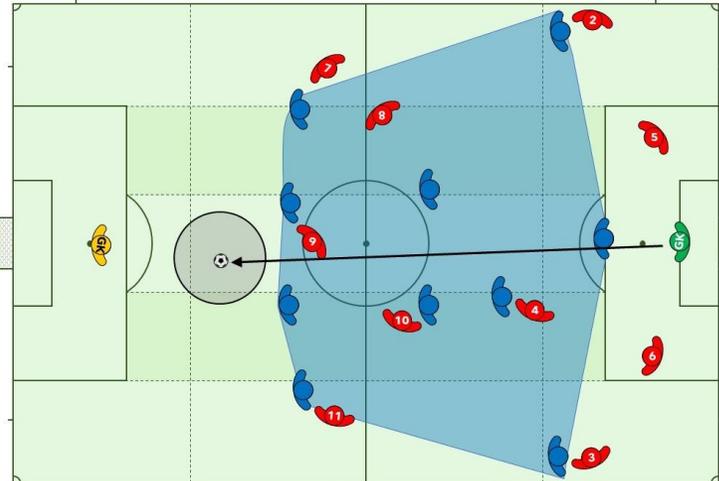


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# OVER, AROUND OR THROUGH

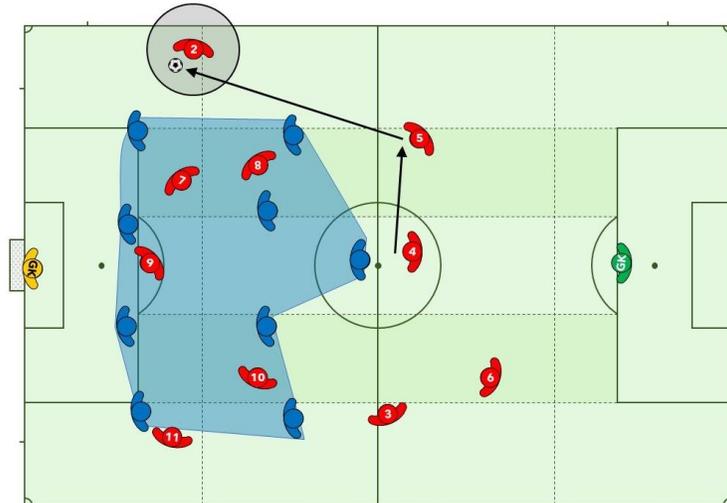
Where is the space?

A simple way to frame penetration, specifically passing forwards is to use **over, around** or **through**. Again, this could be broken down into more detail with older players, but it creates a really broad understanding and encourages the players to explore the opportunities...where is the space and how could we exploit it.



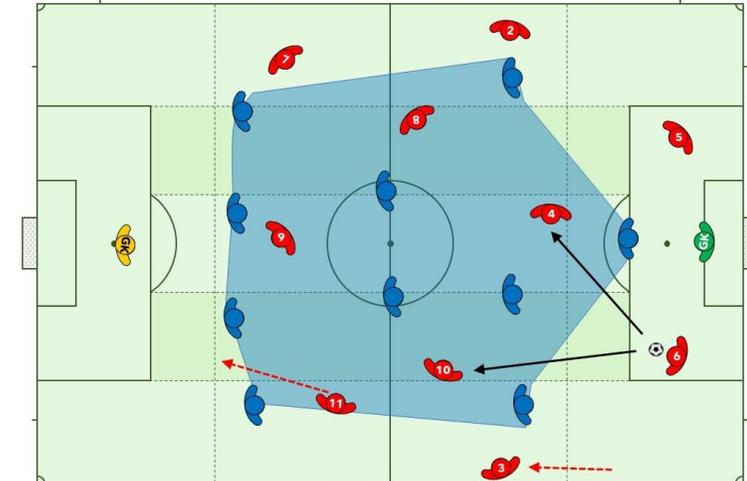
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**OVER**



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**AROUND**



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**THROUGH**

<b>WHAT?</b>	Playing over their defensive shape.	Playing around their defensive shape.	Playing passes through their defensive shape.
<b>WHEN?</b>	When there is lots of space behind the defensive line.	When there is lots of space out wide.	When there are lots of gaps or pockets of space inside.
<b>HOW?</b>	Forward runs and movement. Recognise space beyond the defensive line.	Stretch the opposition out across all 5 lanes. Quick or long passes into these areas. Support wide player to create overloads.	Stretch the opposition out across all 5 lanes. Movement and rotation. Skill to receive and combine in tight spaces between Defenders.

# THE GAME WITHIN THE GAME

## Winning your positional battle

A useful way of looking at SSG is to think what they might look like in the 11v11 game. Essentially every player is constantly playing in an SSG whether that's 1v1, 2v2, 3v3, 4v4 or underloaded/overloaded.

By looking through this lens we could design the practice in a number of ways;

- What are the players **experiencing** in the 11v11 game?
- Who is **involved**?
- Where does it take **place** and in what **space**?
- What **skills** do they need to get success?
- What are the **demands**? (psychological / physical)

In **image 1** the teams are 'matched up in a GK-4-3-3', the scenarios here could be;

**WHITE:** A Goalkeeper and Central Defenders playing out from the back against a 1-man press.

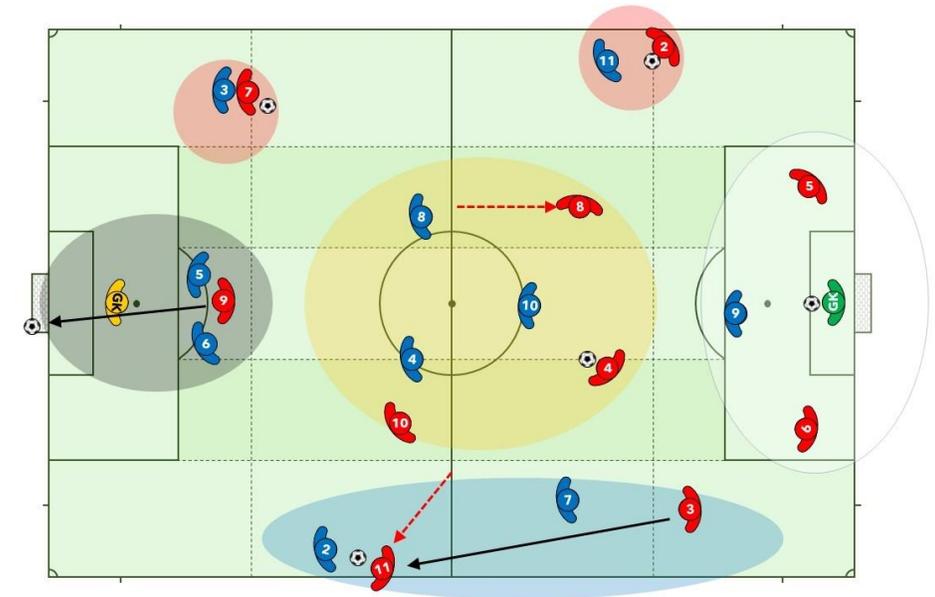
**RED:** 1v1's face to face and with pressure from behind (other examples exist too!)

**BLUE:** A 2v2 in a wide area, how does the winger get free to receive the ball from the full back?

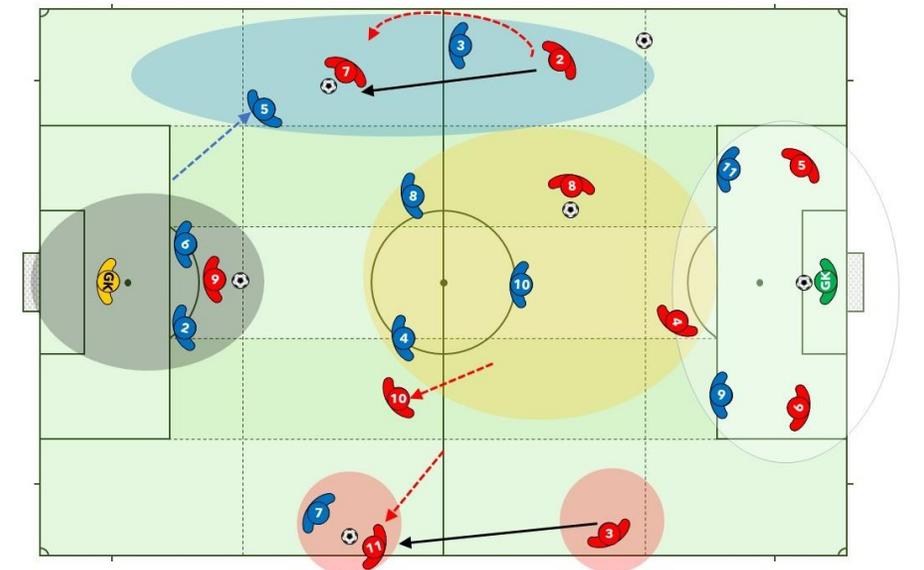
**YELLOW:** A Midfielder 3v3 match up - this could cover man marking, zonal marking, rotation, forward runs, weight of pass...the list is virtually endless.

**GREY:** A Striker underloaded near the goal 1v2 / 1v3 with the Goalkeeper. How does he / she hide the ball? Does he / she go for goal or wait for a Midfielder runner?

Think how these scenarios might change against different shapes or quality of opposition, **image 2** looks at a GK-3-5-2 against a GK-4-3-3. What changes? What remains? What gets more difficult? Where might we find a free man?



**Image 1:** GK-4-3-3 vs GK-4-3-3



**Image 2:** GK-3-5-2 vs GK-4-3-3

# THE GAME WITHIN THE GAME

Taking inspiration from the game



Left, Wolves' Raúl Jiménez leads the counter before releasing Adama Traoré. A 2v2 with a recovering Defender.



Right, FC Barcelona find a way through in the remarkable comeback in the Champions League. There is a 1v2 for the player in possession and a 4v8 in front of him!

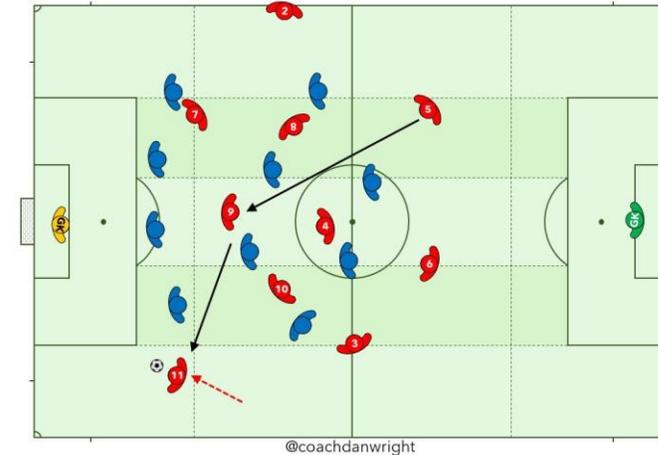
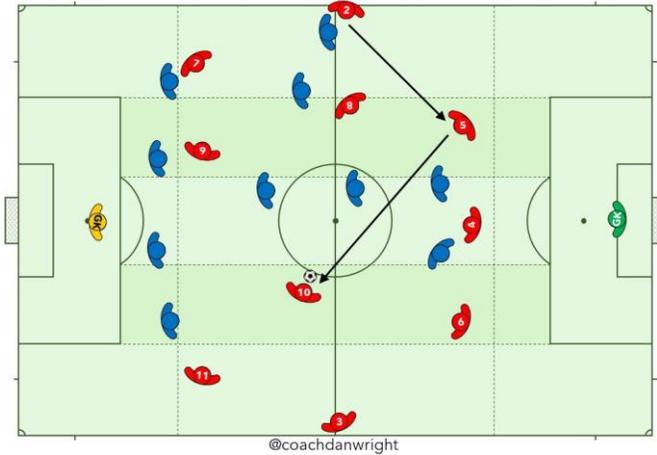
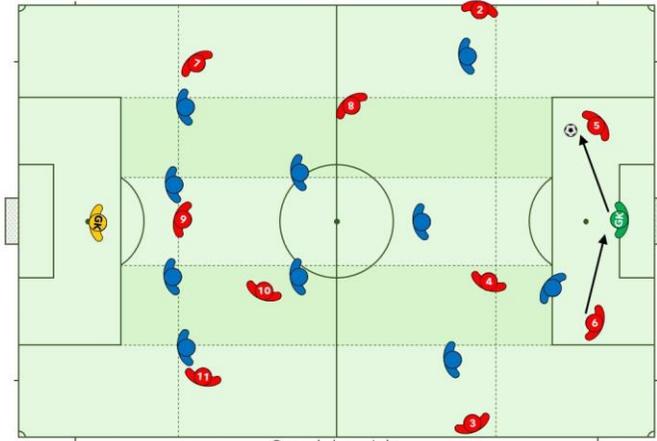


Left, Liverpool vs Atlético Madrid this could be viewed as a 2v3 or a 4v6 - in either scenario the forwards are outnumbered, although there is quite a bit of space.



Right, Inter Milan builds from the back against Juventus. Here Inter are looking to use their Goalkeeper to create an overload and play through the press.

# THE PIVOT PLAYER



Building on the concept of the 5 lanes / 3 thirds, we can start to develop collective ideas or mental models which might help players. One of these is the concept of a pivot player. For some coaches this might be a designated role in the team - I prefer the understanding that the concept is important and needed, and any player can perform this role...at any time.

A **PIVOT PLAYER** when switching play...

## A PLAYER OFTEN DEEPER THAN THE BALL

This will allow the player to see more of the pitch and make better decisions around where the opportunity is to play into a 1v1, free man or overload.

## A PLAYER THAT CAN SEE BOTH SIDES OF THE PITCH

To see both sides of the pitch, the player will need to take up a good body position so he / she can see; the player in possession and where he / she would like to play next.

## A PLAYER THAT CAN SWITCH PLAY

This could be a simple 10m pass or a 30m lofted diagonal ball. Does the pivot player possess the technical skills to perform the switch?

## ANY PLAYER CAN PERFORM THIS ROLE... IN ANY THIRD

Although its more likely to be a central midfielder, central defender or goalkeeper, anyone could perform this role. Firmino at Liverpool is a good example as is Kyle Walker at Manchester City, both help the team play around and through the opposition.

# 5 LANES + 3 THIRDS

## Speaking a common language

With the influence of foreign coaches on the English game, it has become more commonplace for coaches to divide their training pitches to help players understand their idea of football. This has infiltrated coach education via The Football Association although I believe this has been commonplace for a number of years in Germany and Spain.

Different coaches, clubs and federations will have different rationale behind the pitch markings, for example Louis van Gaal's choice was to cut the pitch into 18 rectangles, 6 vertical by 3 horizontal, in which players have certain tasks and responsibilities. This approach and ones similar led to the concept of 'zone 14' being the key area to penetrate to score goals.

Guardiola (below right) prefers to split his pitch into 20 zones, with 5 vertical lanes - this is broadly used to coach his players positioning in relation to the ball carrier, hugely influenced by the work of Johan Cruyff. This has led to English football fans becoming more aware of concepts like the 'half space'. This is a term Jurgen Klopp has used in post match interviews - which might have baffled English fans in the past.

The current RB Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann, favours splitting his pitch into 6 vertical lanes - and when in charge at Hoffenheim even installed a 40 square metre video wall to review footage. "We can leave the players in their positions during most match situations, but still show them solutions," says Nagelsmann. "For this, I have an iPad in my hand that I can use to control the cameras. When I stop a situation, I have the opportunity to draw my solutions and suggestions for improvement all from the iPad."

In youth football these zones or marking can be really useful to help players learn the game and their role in the team, within different moments of the game. We must be cautious not to use them to over constrain or confine individuals within the team so that the coach is king and almost acts like a puppeteer to replicate something he or she has seen on TV.



# 5 LANES + 3 THIRDS

In this eBook we will simplify some of these approaches using 5 vertical lanes and splitting the pitch into 3 thirds. The idea of this approach is to help players understand some key concepts, both in and out of possession. These broadly tie into what traditional coach education would call the **Principles of Play**. For young players these concepts could be simplified for example:

- In possession we aim to make the pitch as big as possible (width, length and depth)
- We strive for players to take up good supporting positions of each other and the ball carrier (See page 55-56)
- Recognise when to switch play and have a pivot player at all times (See page 52)

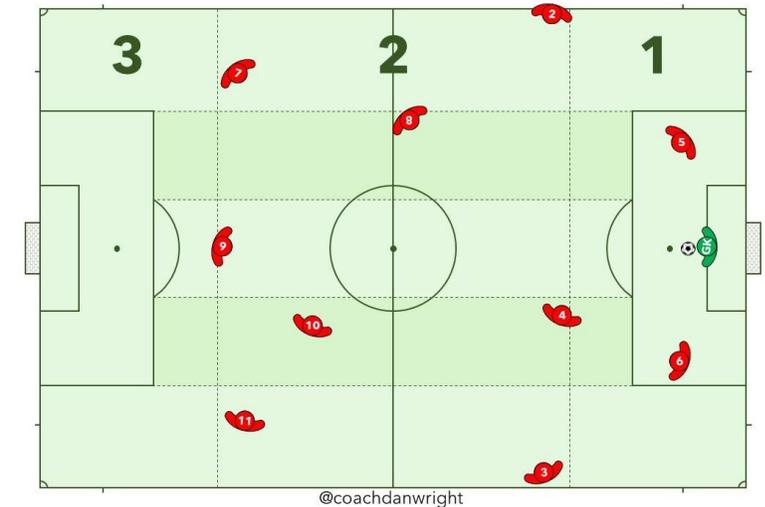
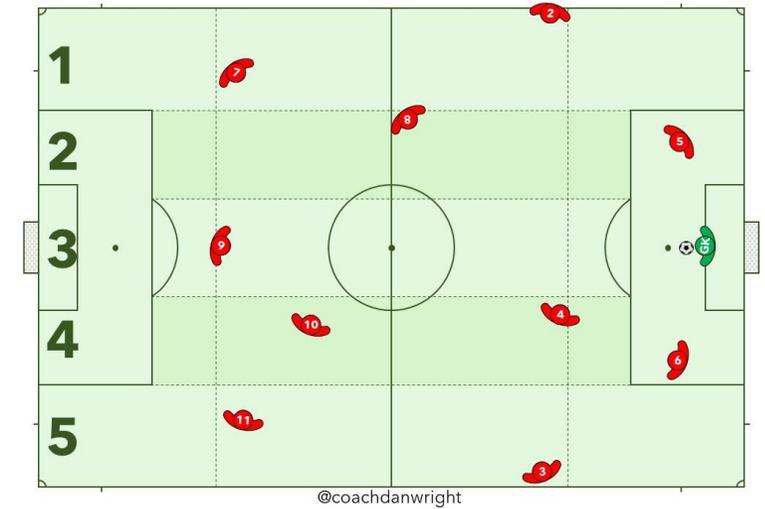
By using the 5 lanes and 3 thirds we can help players understand their role in the larger game, as well as a loose framework as the game unfolds. For example;

## 5 VERTICAL LANES

- In possession **attack across 5 lanes** - creating as much width as we need!
- Encourage players to **"Play on different lines"** - Maximum of 2x players vertically and 3x horizontally.
- Out of possession **defend 3 lanes of the 5 lanes.**

## 3 HORIZONTAL THIRDS

- The thirds can be used to talk about positioning in possession, so for example when playing out from the back, are we threatening or pinning back the opponent so we **occupy all three thirds**?
- The thirds are a great visual to talk about overloads (numerical superiority) where do we need support and who can offer it?
- Out of possession alter your defending approach depending on where the ball is. This can be explained as 'traffic light defending' - when the ball is near the opposition's goal, green light - press hard, as its high reward and low risk. In the middle third. Amber - think about where to show them? To tackle or force play? Finally, in our defensive third, Red light - high risk so defend intelligently to stop penalties and dangerous free kicks.
- The thirds can wrongly (in my opinion) be used to talk about risk - don't take risks in your own third for example.



# SUPPORT

## The 4 B's of support

When young players are learning the game, their use of space is vital. As players learn to create and exploit as an individual, they start to discover the skills needed create space for their teammates too.

This can be a complex process - but one key area is body shape and support. This **4x B's** method is quite easy to remember and tends to cover all the necessary positions to help the player in possession.

### SUPPORT BEHIND

This can be explained as a player positioning themselves behind the ball carrier, so if he or she can not play forwards they have a safety pass to start again. Often the Goalkeeper and Central Defenders are well placed to offer support from behind. With older players you can add more detail - offering support diagonally away will allow the Goalkeeper to play around quicker than support straight behind the ball.

### SUPPORT BESIDE

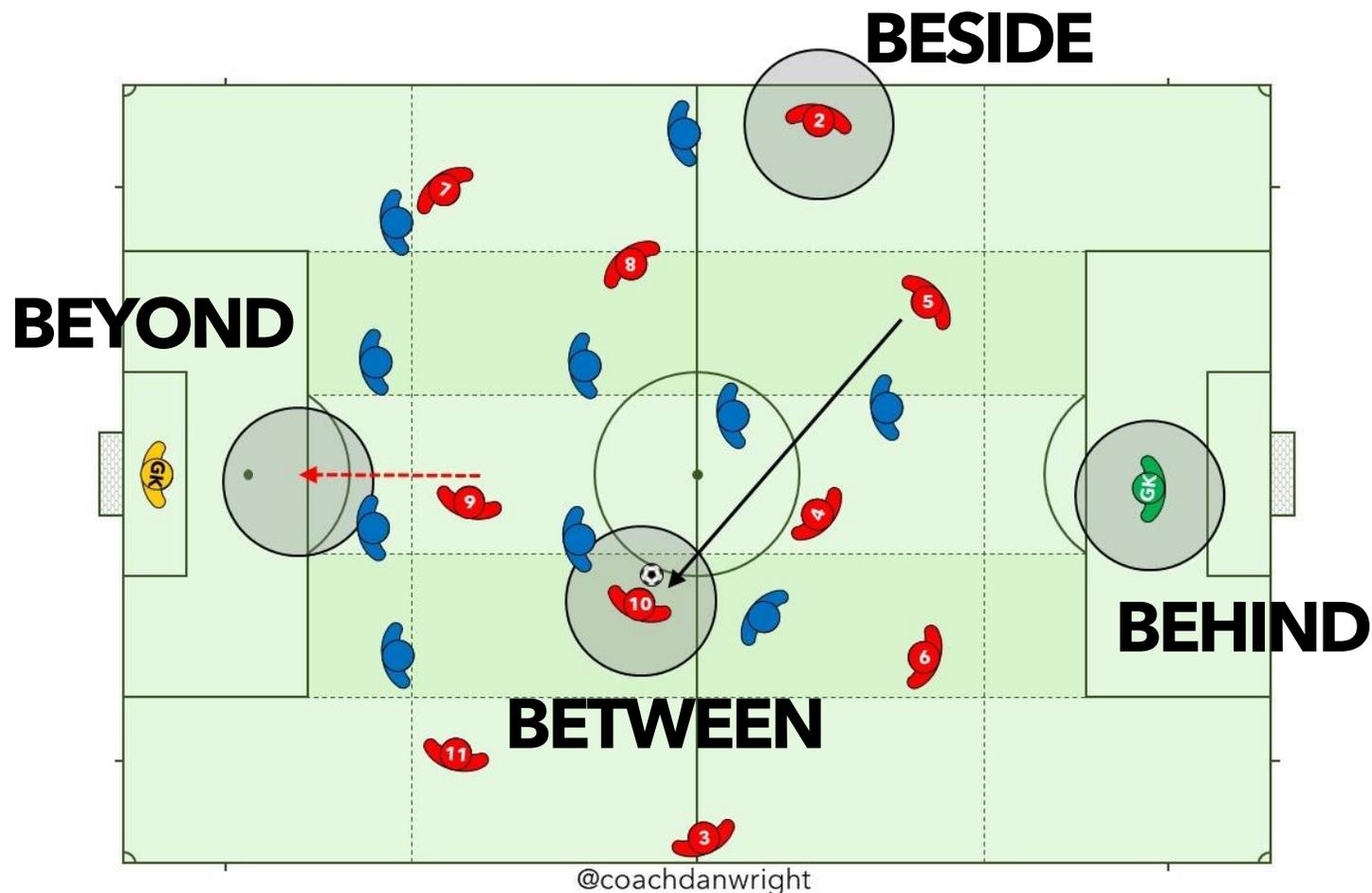
In the diagram the full back (#2) is offering support beside. This can be a tricky decision for players, do they support inline, slightly behind or slightly ahead? For me, it would depend on the type of pressure and if we have good (secure) possession of the ball.

### SUPPORT BETWEEN

In this picture, the midfield 3 (#4, #8 and #10) are playing in between the defensive lines. By pinning the opposition back or flattening out their press it can allow the player in possession to pass forward and break lines.

### SUPPORT BEYOND

This is the space available beyond the last Defender. This is the best pass as it puts the forward in front of goal - but the hardest to complete! However, if we threaten beyond it can stretch the opposition and create space for others to receive between the lines.



LIV 2-0 CRY

43:46

SETANTA  
LIVE

BEYOND

BESIDE

BETWEEN

BEHIND

# THE 4 B'S OF SUPPORT

Liverpool vs Crystal Palace 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020 - Fabinho sets up Salah for the second goal



# SCANNING

## Visual Exploratory Activity

Scanning, checking your shoulders, taking pictures or awareness, it has lots of different names. Visual exploratory activity, in which the movement of the eyes, head and body allow perception of affordances provided by teammates and opponents, is a key component to skilled perception-action (Reed, 1996). This exploratory behaviour informs a player about the environment and supports performatory behaviour, in which the player interacts with and manipulates the environment (Gibson, 1979). Indeed in football, increased exploratory behaviour before a player receives a pass leads to improved performance with the ball (Jordet, Bloomfield, & Heijmerikx, 2013).

*“The key findings of the study reveal that the players performed more forward passes, more attacking-half passes and performed more turns when opportunities arose; as well as experiencing less defensive pressure when the players had performed visual exploratory activity prior to receiving the ball compared to when they did not conduct visual exploratory activity. The results suggest that visual exploratory activity prior to receiving the ball, can aid players in their next action during a game. It would be suggested that coaches should encourage players to conduct visual exploratory activity prior to receiving possession of the ball. Coaches should be aware that visual exploratory activity can influence the technical and tactical aspects of performance and could aid player development.”*

Eldridge, David, Pulling, Craig and Robins, Matthew T. (2013) Visual exploratory activity and resultant behavioural analysis of youth midfield soccer players. *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 8.

How do we break down this complicated language to help the young players we coach? The role of the coach is to speak in a simple and age appropriate manner that resonates with the players he / she coaches. A good chess player sees the next move before it happens, how can we help players to think one step ahead and **“play in the future.”**

One phrase that I have found useful is “*scanning for BOTS*”, I’ve adapted this following a conversation with Briac Williams, Technical Development Manager at South West Football Queensland . Football is a random and dynamic sport, which asks the performer to perceive and act very quickly. To help players make decisions or recognise these moments in training and games, there are 4 reference points\*;

**BALL:** Where is the ball now and where do we want to go next?

**OPPONENT:** Where are the opposition and how will we (individually and collectively) outplay them?

**TEAMMATES:** Where are my teammates - For my next pass? So I don’t block a passing line? So I take up the correct supporting position?

**SPACE:** Where is the space to exploit? Where is the space to stand in? Where is the space to attack? Where is the space to take my first touch?

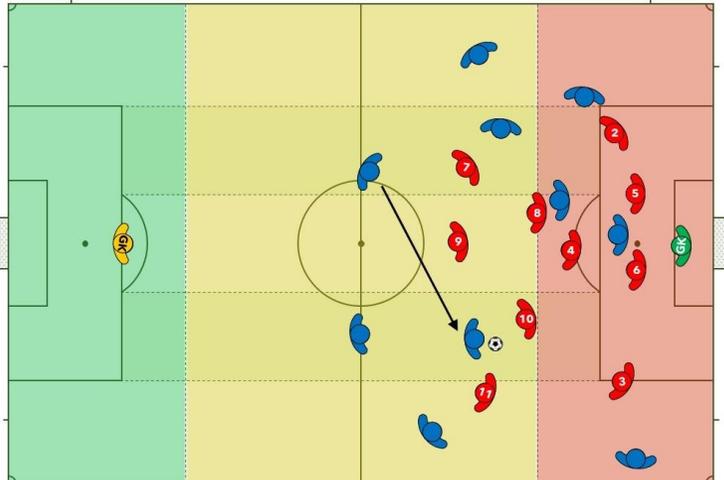
\* A fifth could be the goal, this doesn’t move so I’ve not added it in. Plus it ruins the acronym!

*“The problem in football is that you learn how to play the wrong way round – first execution, then decision making and perception last... As a player whenever I get the ball I have to analyse, then decide and finally execute!”*

Arsène Wenger

# OUT OF POSSESSION

Simple language when defending



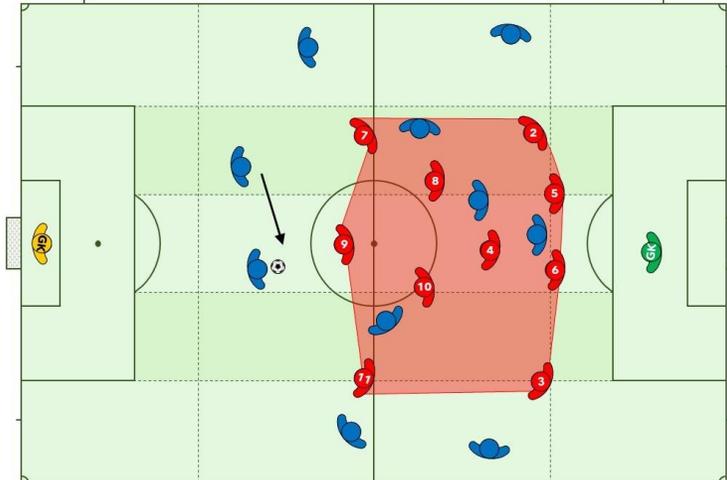
## TRAFFIC LIGHT DEFENDING

This principle uses a traffic light system to help players when defending - it broadly uses the thirds of the pitch but there is some detail needed in different situations such as overload / underload or in moments of transition.

**RED** - Danger zone! This is high risk, if we dive into tackles here, we might concede a free-kick, penalty or a goal.

**AMBER** - This is the most difficult zone, here we must think about where to force players and to make smart choices about balancing numbers to delay or regain.

**GREEN** - Low risk if we make mistakes and high reward if we press with a plan, if we get it right, we could score!

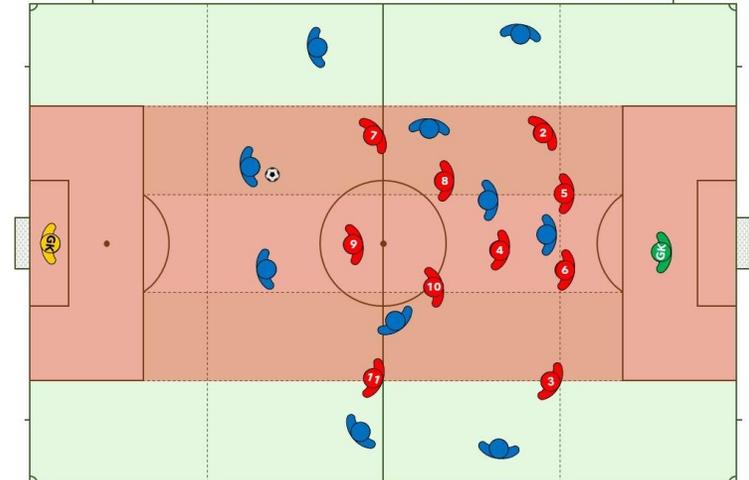


## THE NET

This is a visual for how much of the pitch we are defending and how compact we are. In the 2018 World Cup, Croatia (437m<sup>2</sup>) and France (542m<sup>2</sup>) had very small and effective 'nets'. A more expansive team like Brazil had out of possession shape that covered 679 m<sup>2</sup> - a big net has more holes! I like this wording as it is quite simple but also layered;

- How big is our net? Why? Who is not making it small?
- It implies we are connected and play together.
- It touches on distances vertically and horizontally.

11  
IE 2



## DEFEND 3 LANES

Using the 5 lanes out of possession builds on players' understanding and again, uses pitch geography. There is context - but generally we would ask the group to defend 3 lanes at any given time.

In the diagram the ball is central, so we have protected the central lane and the 2x half spaces or inside lanes. If the ball shifted out wide, we might protect the wide lane, the inside lane and the central lane. This isn't an exact science but helps the players in terms of recovery and holding shape if required.

# SMALL SIDED GAMES



# BUILDING FROM BACK

Playing out from the back

 5v4	 Central area or half pitch	 1 Goalkeeper
 Optional	 10 minutes	 3 goals

**ORGANISATION** In this game the Reds are playing out from the Goalkeeper into the target goals or gates. The Blues look to intercept, counter and score in the large goal past the Goalkeeper. The 2x Red Defenders and the Goalkeeper are 'locked in' to one zone versus the Blue Striker, with the Midfielders in a separate zone playing 3v3.

**INTENTION** For the Reds there is lots of repetition of playing out from the back, with a 3v1 scenario into a 3v3 scenario, replicating limited pressure to high pressure. For the Blues, intercepting the ball and attacking the big goal.

**LINK TO 11v11**

- Starting the attack from the Goalkeeper
- Defenders playing into midfield
- Midfielders receiving to play forwards (overload or underload)

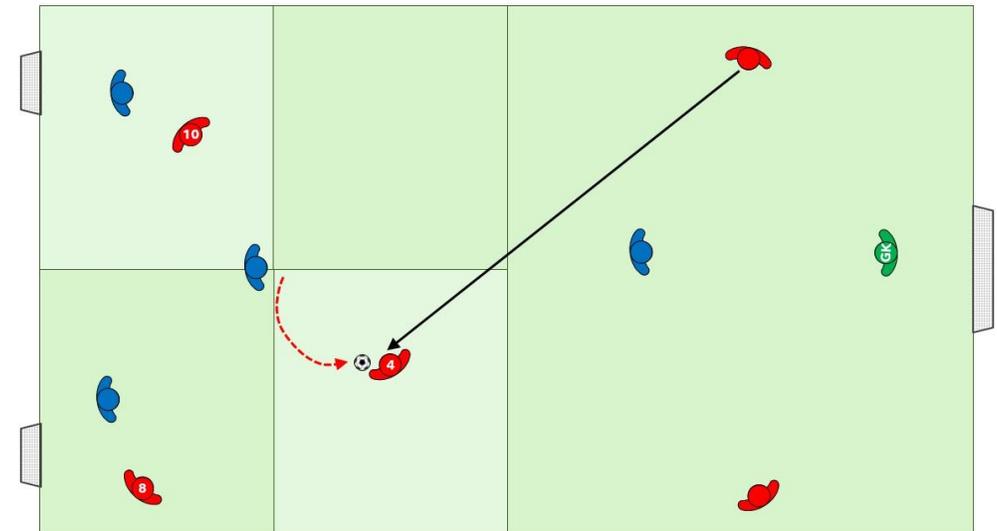
**OBSERVATION**

- Width to play from the Goalkeeper by 'splitting'
- Patience to build up and pass forward at the right time.
- In midfield - playing on different lines, receiving to play forwards and when to combine. (Play **around** or **through**?)

**PROGRESSIONS** You can remove the zones to increase the instability and challenge for the Reds. This will increase the realism and **relate** it to the real game.

Adjust the numbers to suit your players and the formation you play in matches.

Challenge or **reward** the central defenders, can they play directly into the target goals when the opportunity presents its self?



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# WHEN TO PLAY FORWARDS

## Playing out from the back

 Flexible	 Rectangle	 2 Goalkeepers
 Yes	 2x 6 minute halves	 2 goals 2 target goals

**ORGANISATION** A 2 goal pitch with a halfway line and 2 smaller target goals in the one half for the defenders to play into.

**INTENTION** The Red team are playing out from the back with an 4v2 overload, so a Goalkeeper, 2x Central Defenders and a Central Midfielder, against 2x Strikers. The Reds are looking to play forwards into their Strikers who are in a 2v2. If the Blue Defenders win back possession they can play into either target goal.

**LINK TO 11v11**

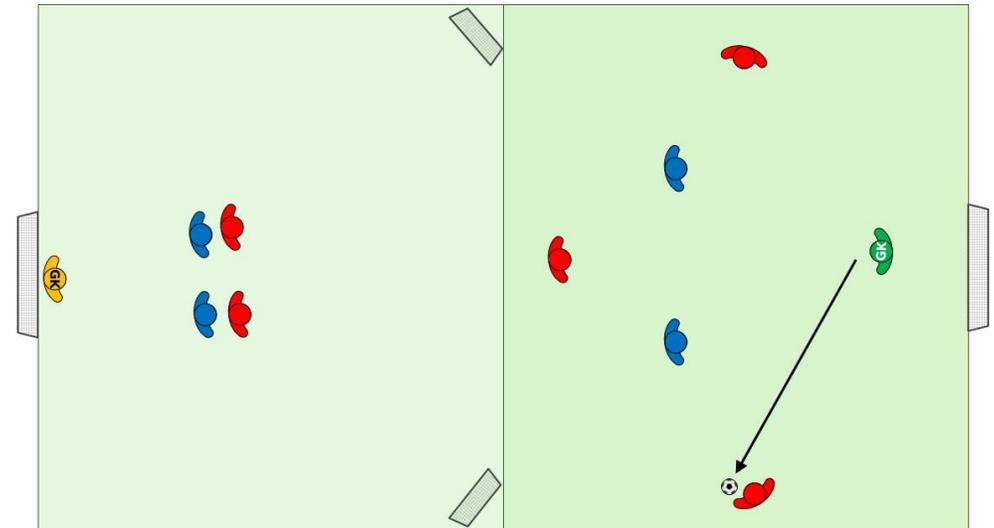
- Building the attack from the goalkeeper
- Play **around** or **through** the press?
- Recognising when to connect and when to create.
- Supporting positions (**4 B's**)
- Goalkeeper as a **pivot** player

**OBSERVATION**

- Goalkeepers supporting position behind the ball and distribution with feet.
- In possession; switching play, changing the tempo and finishing.
- Out of possession; securing possession and counter attacks.

**PROGRESSIONS** There are a few different variations to explore with this practice;

- When the Blue Defenders win back possession they counter via their Strikers
- The Central Midfielders can join in the attack to make it a 3v2 in the opposition's half
- Alter the set up to reflect your teams shape or the opposition, for example pressing with 3 players in the top half.



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*This game was contributed by Mark Lyons @MarkLyons14*



# GOALKEEPERS HANDS OR FEET?

Playing out from the back

 4v4 upwards	 Rectangle with corners	 2 Goalkeepers
 Not required	 2x 6 minute halves	 Not required

**ORGANISATION** Use an area suitable for the number of players and their age/ability. There are two target areas marked out in the corners at each end. A larger pitch might allow the players to get more success and repetition of longer passes, a smaller pitch might increase the intensity and make it more difficult.

**INTENTION** Goalkeepers support the team in possession using their feet between the target areas (Yellow Goalkeeper). To score players must play the ball in the air to a Goalkeeper who catches inside their target area (Green Goalkeeper). Teams can score in either direction, if you score you keep possession.

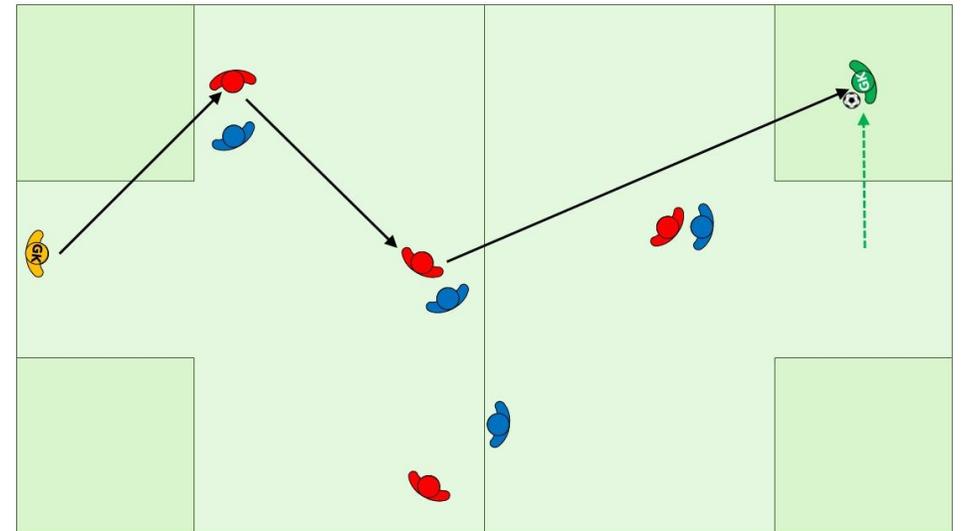
**LINK TO 11v11** Improving the Goalkeepers distribution and starting attacks from the back.

**OBSERVATION**

- The Goalkeepers supporting position behind the ball
- Goalkeeper's distribution (type and distance)
- Recognising the moment to support and score
- The Goalkeeper acting as a **pivot** to build or switch play

**PROGRESSIONS** You can make the game directional, so the Reds play left-to-right and the Blues play right-to-left.

Can structure the scoring mechanism by **restricting** or **rewarding** a specific type of pass into the Goalkeeper.

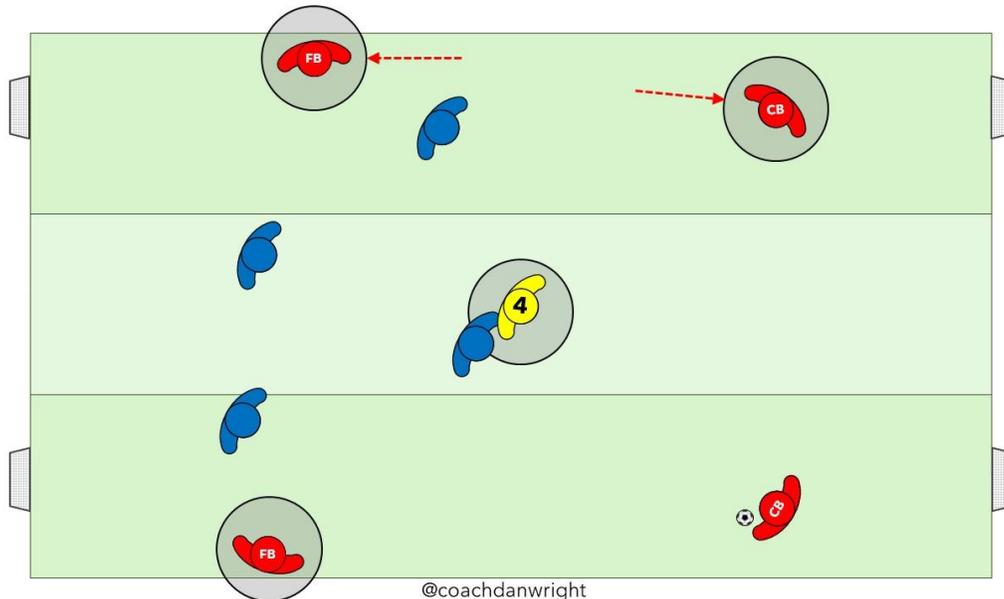


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# PLAYING OUT USING THE HOLDING MIDFIELDER

Playing out from the back

 4v4+1	 Rectangle with wide zones	 No
 No	 2x 6 minute halves	 4 target goals



**ORGANISATION** In this practice each team attacks 2x goals and defends 2x goals – similar to the Four Goal Game (page 70). The holding Midfielder (#4) is the primary player in this game and he / she makes it a 5v4 scenario in possession. The Reds are set up with 2x Central Defenders and 2x Full Backs or Wide players.

The fact that the Blues have to defend 2x goals, should allow the Reds to pin them back and makes it difficult to press the ball carrier. If the Blues do press hard they can be drawn into a 2-2 formation, this will allow the Reds to play **around** or **through** the opposition.

**INTENTION** The intention of the practice is for the team in possession to get repetition of playing out from the back in central areas.

**LINK TO 11v11** Playing out from the back using the holding Midfielder (#4).

**OBSERVATION** For the **Full Backs**

- Offer width occupying the wide zones
- Pin back the Blues to make space for the Central Defender and holding Midfielder
- Adjust their position in relation to the ball, opposition and teammates

The **Midfielder/#4**

- Receiving the ball in the 'opposite diagonal pocket'
- Support **beside** and **between**
- Passing choices; to switch? To break lines? Into the target goals?

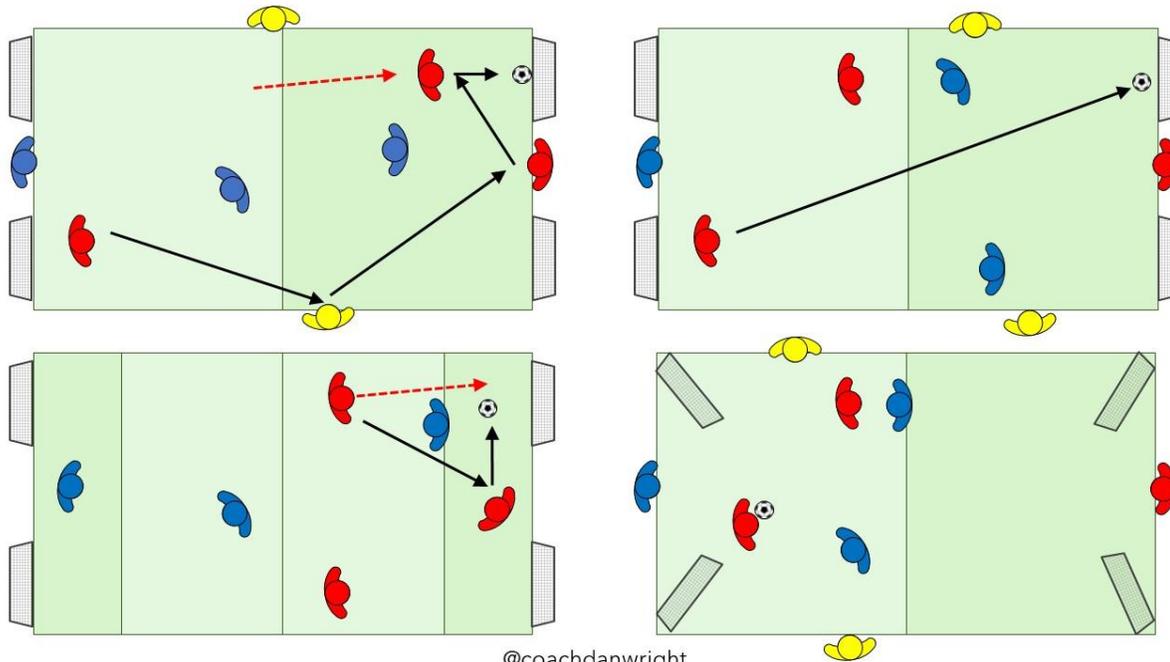
For the **Central Defenders**

- Playing forward passes into compact and congested areas
- Recognise when to play **around** or **through**
- Stepping in / carrying the ball to draw the first man out

# PASS AND JOIN

Playing out from the back

	6 -8 players		Rectangle with end zones		No
	No		6 minutes		4 target goals



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## ORGANISATION

Here we have 4 slightly different versions of a similar game. They all have; 2v2 on pitch with a target player between the target goals. Each game invites slightly different opportunities;

**Top left:** 2v2 + targets and 2x wide players (Yellow). In this game the team in possession can score from anywhere, but must visit either a wide player or their target player.

**Top right:** Similar to before, but no restrictions on scoring - so if the Blues defend poorly, the Reds can score directly.

**Bottom left:** There are no wide players in this version. In this practice all goals must be scored in the end zone, the target player is 'locked in' the end zone. You could progress this by saying you have to play off your target player and / or score with a 1 touch finish.

**Bottom right:** Similar to the first game, but by angling the goals, it makes it harder to score. The team must make intelligent runs, often diagonally, to score.

## INTENTION

To encourage forward passes and support, 'pass and join'.

## LINK TO 11v11

This practice develops players' understanding when playing out through central areas.

## OBSERVATION

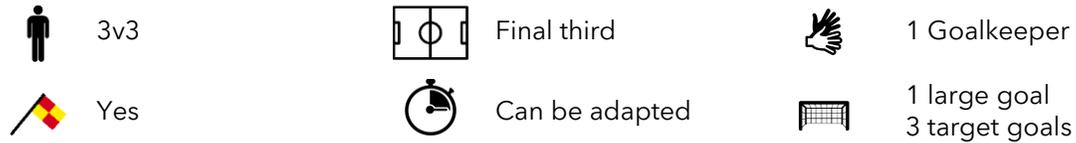
- For the **Yellows** (wide players)
- Repetition of when to play **around**
  - Weight and accuracy of pass to assist
  - Supporting positions (**behind, beside** and **beyond**)

For the **Reds / Blues**

- Try to have at least 1x player 'high' in the opposite half
- Try to have at least 1x player lower in the half nearest the ball
- To recognise the movement and position of your teammates
- To play forwards and run forwards

# 3v3 HIGH PRESS

Playing out from the back



**ORGANISATION** This is a wave practice, where players work in groups of 3. The practice takes place in a central area, so the wide zones are not used - this could be added as a progression. The practice starts by the coach or Blue team firing the ball into the Goalkeeper (**image 1**), this is the trigger for the Blues to press the Reds. The Reds are set up with 1x Goalkeeper, 2x Central Defenders and 1x Central Midfielder. The Reds are looking to play out from the Goalkeeper and score in 1 of the 3 target goals. The Blues are looking to press high, with the aim of stealing possession and attacking the large goal. When the ball is dead - a goal or it leaves the practice area...etc., the Pinks enter the practice and the process restarts.

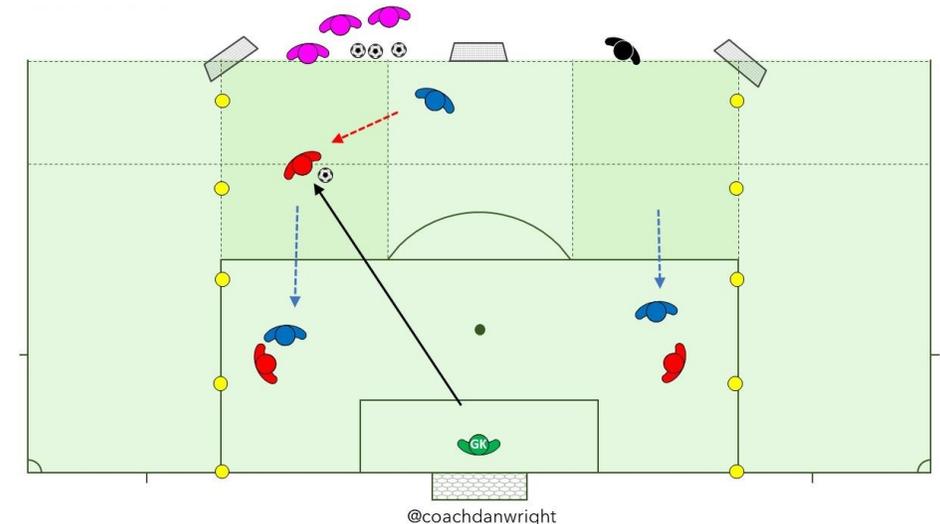
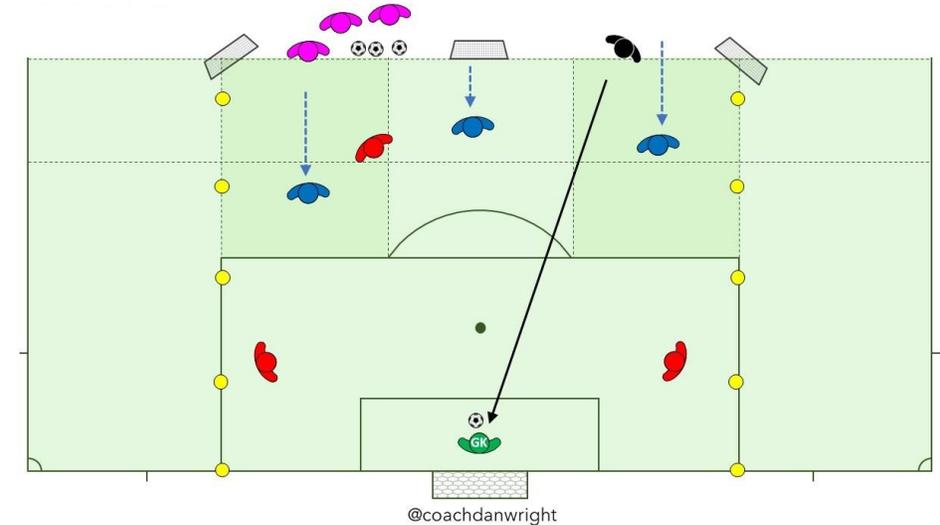
**INTENTION** For the Reds to explore solutions to play **through** a high press in central areas.

**LINK TO 11v11** This game is designed for the Reds to get comfortable in moments where the opposition will press high and to find solutions to play **through** central areas.

**OBSERVATION** The Goalkeeper is vital in this practice as he / she is the 'free man' and creates a 4v3 scenario. He / she may be used as a **pivot** so the team can play **around** the press or cold practice breaking lines playing straight into midfield (**image 2**).

**PROGRESSIONS** You can adjust this practice in several ways;

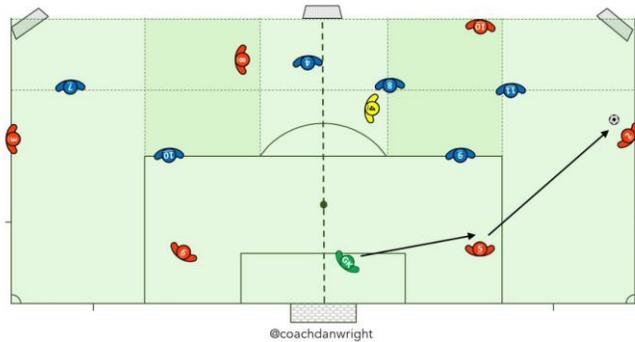
- Prescribe a way the Blues must press, for example man mark the Central Midfielder. This will create repetition without repetition for the Reds.
- You can allow the Blues to press however they like; this will create a little more uncertainty for the Red team.
- You can challenge the Goalkeeper to score directly into the target goal, this might free up a player as 1x Blue might drop to protect the space / goals.
- Adapt the numbers to suit your team shape or the opposition you are going to play against.



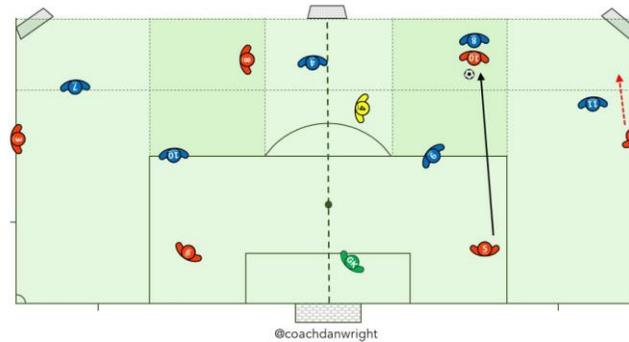
# PLAYING OUT CREATING A DIAMOND

Playing out from the back

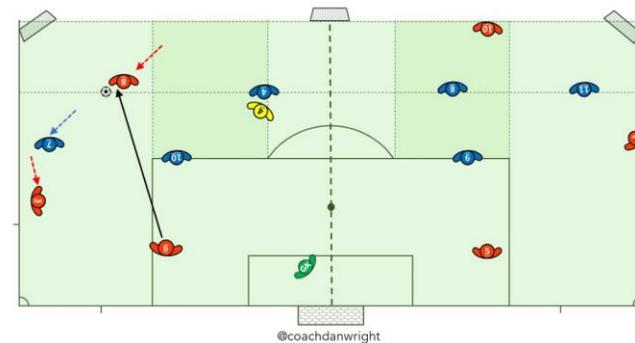
	Unit vs Unit		Final third		1 Goalkeeper
	Yes		Can be adapted		1 large goal 3 target goals



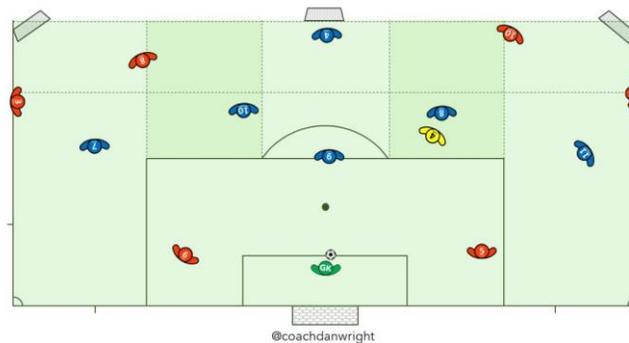
1: RCB playing **around** using the Full Back



2: RCB plays **through**, CM can bounce to #4 or FB



3: High Press, CM adjusted position to play **through**



4: Using the full width, unit vs unit

## ORGANISATION

This game can be used to help players understand their role when Playing out from the back. This practice is for older players who are playing 11v11 football. The area is split vertically so the right side and the left side practice independently, the practice alternates left side, then right with the holding Midfielder (#4) and Goalkeeper being the only players who play in both sets of the practice. The other players are 'locked in' to their respective side.

The Reds look to play out into the target goals, the Blues press from the front and if they regain they attack the large goal.

## INTENTION

The players are looking to create a diamond between CB-FB-CM-CM. On the right side this would be 5-2-4-10 and on the left 6-3-4-8. This shape allows the team to play **around** or **through** the pressure from the Blues.

## LINK TO 11v11

**Image 1:** Here the Blues block the central space and deny passes **through**, this allows the Central Defender to play **around** into the Full Back.

**Image 2:** Here the Blues have pressed more aggressively, the Central Defender can play **through**, although the #10 is tight marked this '**up-back-through**' move can release the Full Back or #4.

**Image 3:** In this picture the Blues have tried to man mark high up the pitch, the Red #8 must adjust his supporting position to allow the Central Defender to play **through** the press.

## OBSERVATION

This practice is quite advanced, but it will give the players opportunity to practice some of the ideas / concepts in the Playing out from the back section (pages 60-66). This practice links well to pictures players will see in a 11v11 game.

## PROGRESSIONS

**Image 4:** To progress you can join the two sides together into a Phase of Play. Now the Red team can use the full width of the pitch, it may allow for switches of play using the Goalkeeper or Central Defenders as a **pivot** player.

# PLAYING WITH WIDTH

## Switching play

 4v4 upwards	 Rectangle with wide zones	 2 Goalkeepers
 Can be added	 2x 6 minute halves	 2 goals

**ORGANISATION** A regular 2 goal pitch, with wide zones on either side. These areas can have different task constraints, such as; the number of Defenders allowed to enter, the number of touches in possession...etc.

**INTENTION** To encourage the team in possession to use the width of the pitch, the ball must visit a wide area before a goal can be scored. (**Restrict**)

**LINK TO 11V11**

- The need for a **pivot** player
- Attacking across 5 lanes (having width)

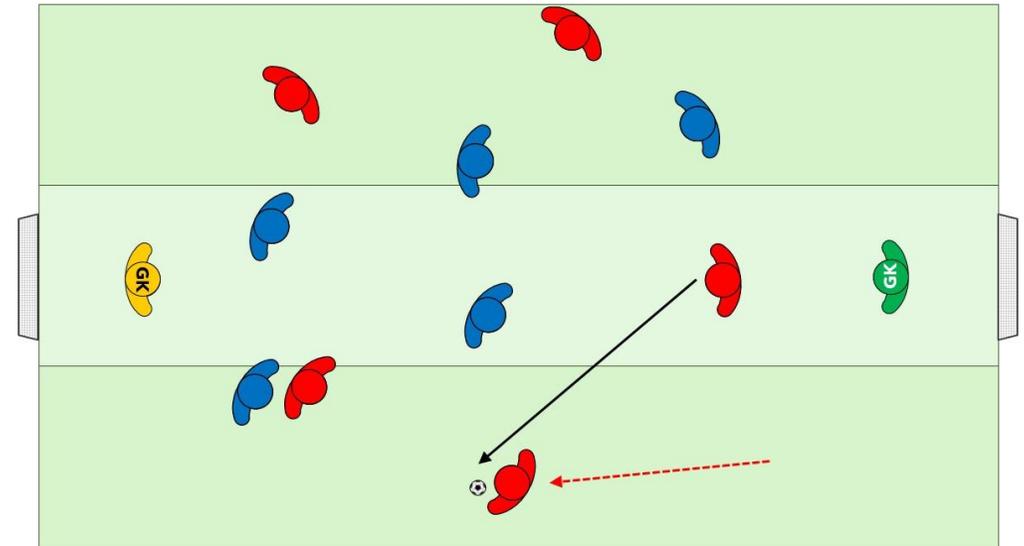
**OBSERVATION**

- The variety of pass to get the ball into the wide zone
- Dispersal - have we got at least one person in each zone?
- The relationships in wide areas (overlap / underlap)
- Supporting positions (**4xB's**)

**PROGRESSIONS** Remove the condition that the ball **'must'** go into the wide area and **reward** a goal scored if the ball goes wide with double or treble points!

Adapt or alter the number of defenders allowed in the wide zone.

For younger groups, if a player receives the ball in the wide zone he / she has a **super power** - he / she can't be tackled, unless he / she chooses to come into the central area.



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# CLASSIC SWITCHING PLAY

## Switching play

 4v4 upwards	 Rectangle with wide zones	 2 Goalkeepers
 Can be added	 2x 6 minute halves	 2 goals

**ORGANISATION** A regular 2 goal pitch, with wide zones on either side. These areas can be conditioned by changing who is allowed to enter, the number of touches or rewarding a specific action in the wide zone.

**INTENTION** To encourage the team in possession to switch play, the ball must visit **both** wide areas before a goal can be scored.

**LINK TO 11v11**

- Dispersal - Have we got at least one person in each zone?
- Variety of pass to get the ball into the wide zone
- The relationships in wide areas (overlap / underlap).

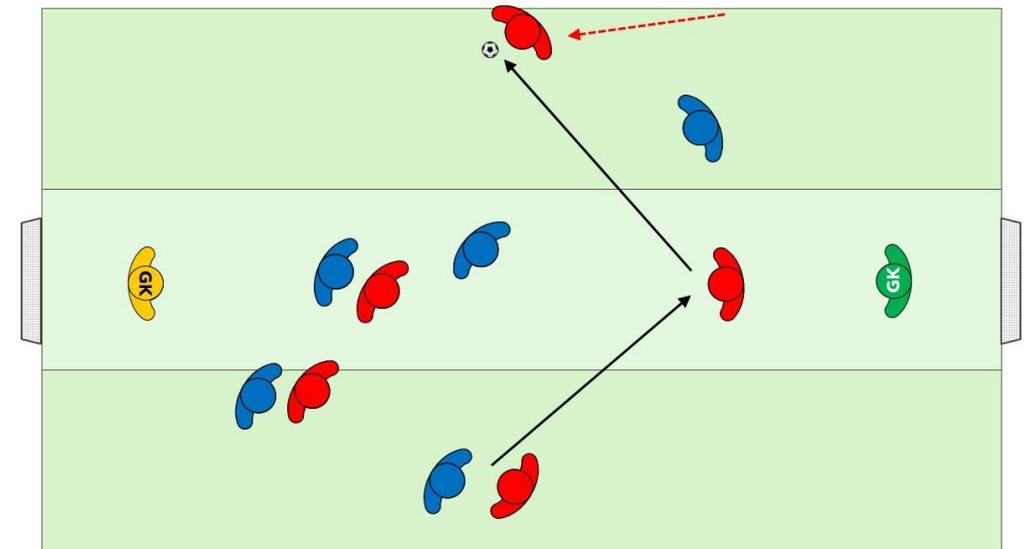
**OBSERVATION** Dispersal - Have we got at least one person in each zone?  
Using a **pivot** player to link the sides - GK? DCM?

**PROGRESSIONS** Remove **'must'** and **reward** the team if a goal scored when the ball goes wide; 1 zone = 2 points, both zones = 5 points.

Remove all constraints, do the group recognise when and how to switch play? (**relate**)

If the team wins possession high up the pitch there is no need to switch play, to increase **realism**.

This might be a good game to practice using the pauses (see page 42-43), this will protect space for the players to strategize and find solutions without the coach.



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# THE FOUR GOAL GAME

## Switching Play



4v4 upwards



Rectangle with wide zones



No



Can be added



2x 6 minute halves



4 target goals

**ORGANISATION** A 4 goal pitch, with a few different variations.

**INTENTION** Each team defends 2x goals and scores in 2x goals. This is a great set up to encourage dispersal and switching play. Out of possession, a good one for defending as a team, which goal to cut off?

**LINK TO 11v11** Switching play in the middle third.

**OBSERVATION** In possession

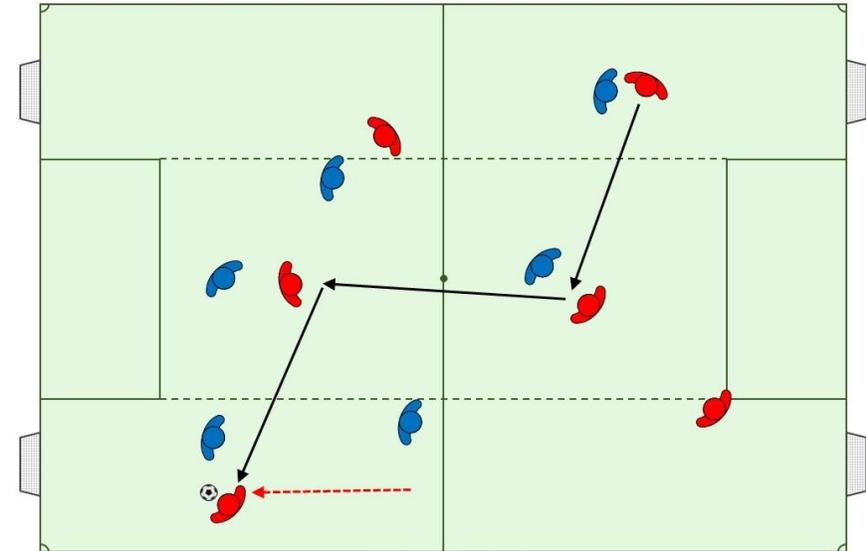
- Disperse and use the full width of the pitch
- Have the ability to switch play through a **'pivot'** player in the centre
- Recognise when to switch from a highly concentrated area to a low area

Out of possession

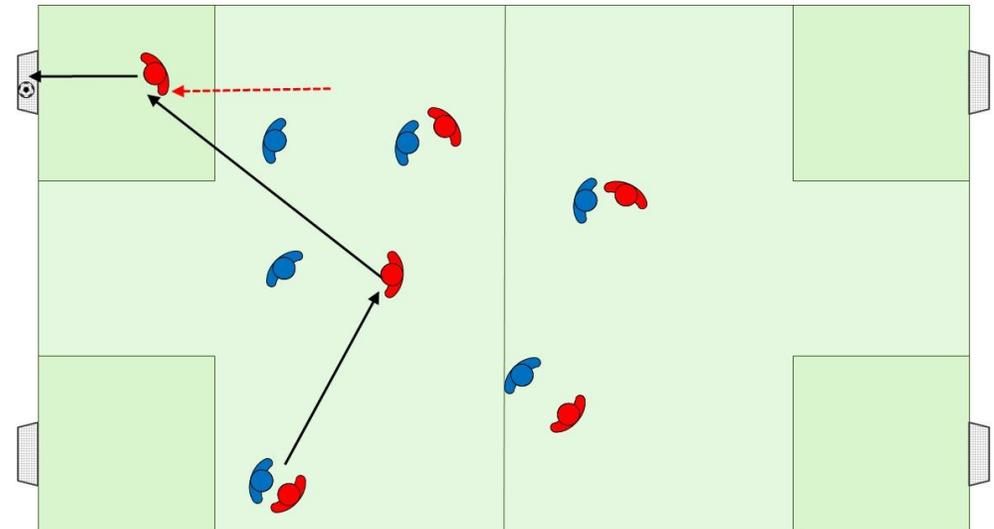
- Dictating the area the attackers can play into
- Defending in 1v1 / 2v2 around the goal
- Emergency defending to block and stop shots

**PROGRESSIONS** This game also works well with a wider shorter pitch, this might allow for more success and / or encourage the team out of possession to defend with more structure.

You can use zones to **relate**, **restrict** or **reward** specific interactions between players. In the second diagram (bottom), we've added scoring zones so players must 'arrive' and score. In the top diagram you can score anywhere in the wide zone...adapt it to suit your players and their needs.



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# FOUR GOAL: DRIBBLE OR PASS?

## Switching Play

 4v4 upwards	 Rectangle with wide zones	 No
 Can be added	 2x 6 minute halves	 2 target goals 2 gates

**ORGANISATION** Similar to the 4 goal game, but with two of the goals replaced with gates for the team to dribble through.

Normal directional practice - each team defending 1x gate and 1x goal.

**INTENTION** The players can focus on when and how to switch play. On a successful switch they must choose whether to dribble through the gate or pass into the target goal.

**LINK TO 11v11** Switching play in the middle third.

**OBSERVATION**

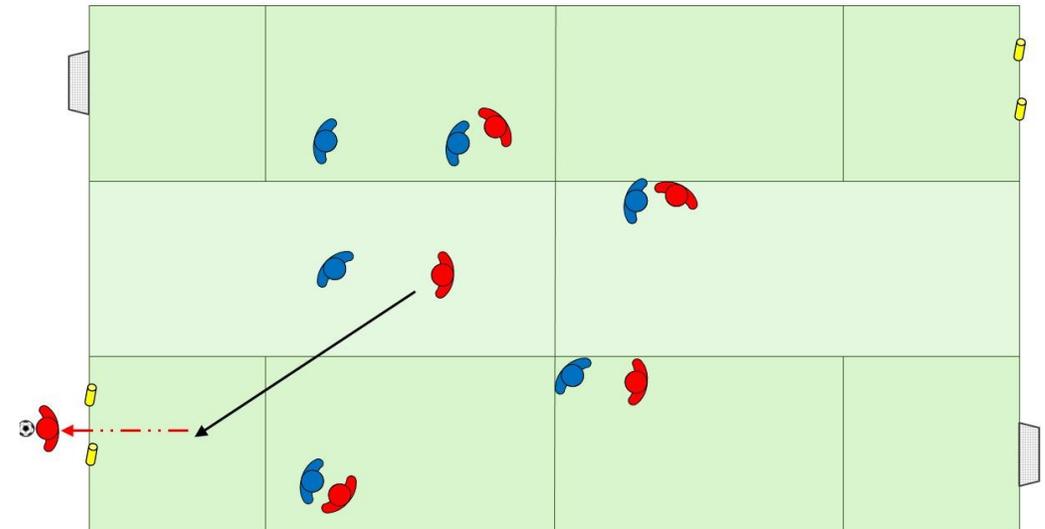
In possession

- Disperse and use the full width of the pitch
- Have the ability to switch play through a **'pivot'** player in the centre
- Recognise when to switch from a highly concentrated area to a low area

Out of possession

- Dictating the area the attackers can play into
- Defending in 1v1 / 2v2 around the goal
- Emergency defending to block and stop shots

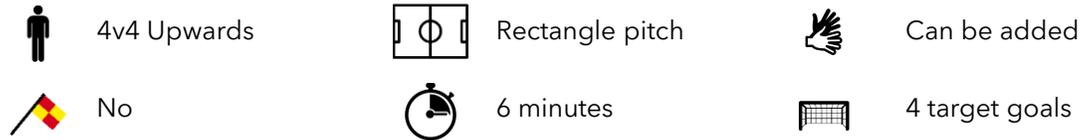
**PROGRESSIONS** You can add scoring zones in front of the goal / gate so players must be inside that area before they can score or dribble.



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# FOUR GOAL SWITCH

## Switching Play



**ORGANISATION** This game takes place on a rectangle pitch, which is split into 2x halves. Each half has two goals - each team defends two and attacks two. The diagrams shows two different versions which have slightly different returns. In **image 1**, the game starts on the left in 3v3 with a 1v1 on the right, the idea of the game is to encourage a switch of play. In **image 2** a neutral player plays in the free half - the team in possession look to switch and join the attack.

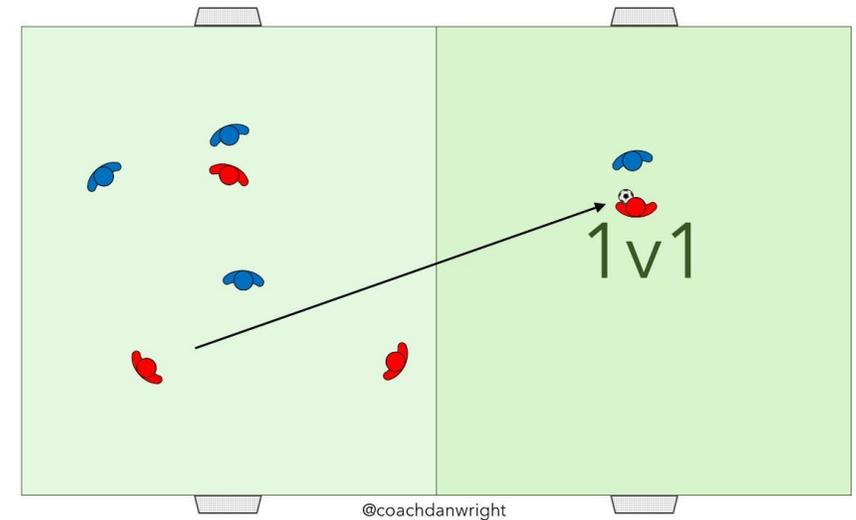
**INTENTION** To switch play to score.

**LINK TO 11v11** I see this as a switch in the middle third, perhaps out to a Winger or wide player in a 1v1. The second diagram could be used to focus on overlaps from a Full Back. This game links well to the principle of creating width and **"attacking across 5 lanes."**

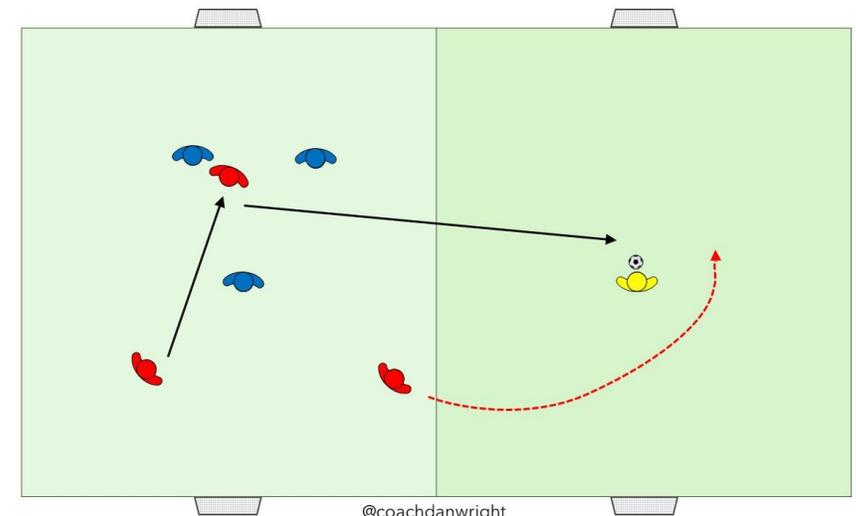
**OBSERVATION** By playing around with the constraints you will invite different ways to get success. Think about the pictures you are trying to encourage and / or the needs of the players. Who needs practice attacking in a 1v1? Which players need to work on their range of pass to switch?

**PROGRESSIONS** Variations to this practice could be;

- Goals can be scored without a switch of play, this would challenge the players to recognise when to switch (**relate**) or **reward** a switch with extra goals
- Are the players locked into their zones (**restrict**) or does the switch trigger a 'normal' game?
- In **image 1**, can the players join in the 1v1? Maybe just one attacker to create a 2v1 - this could easily be adapted.



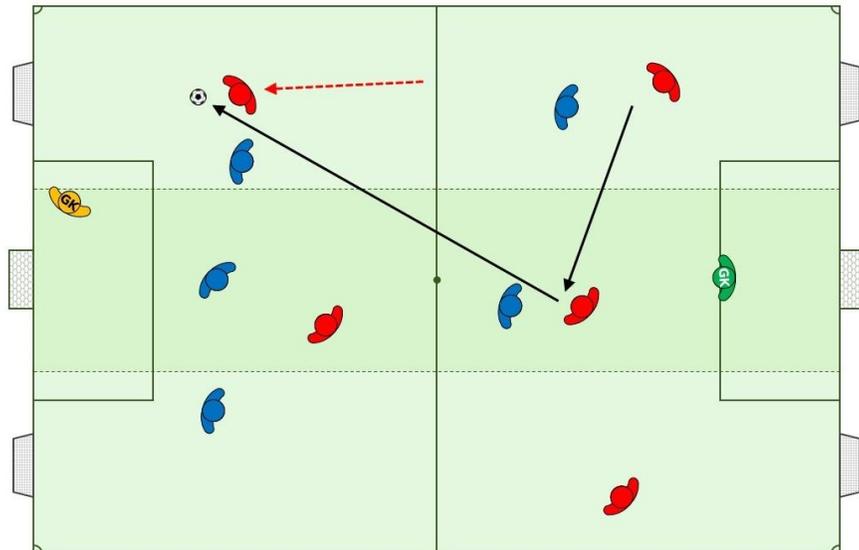
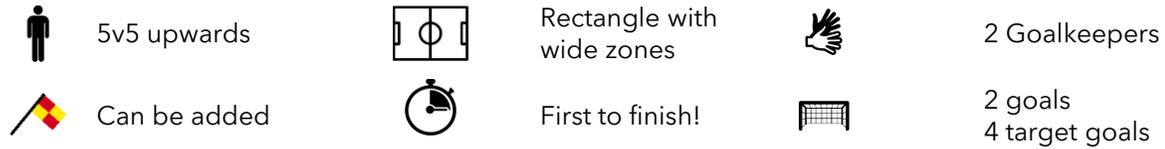
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# 6 GOAL GAME

## Switching Play



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**ORGANISATION** Similar to the switching play game but with an added twist! In this version there are 6 goals and we have adopted a video game approach using 'level up', so each team is competing to complete all 4 levels first.

- Level 1: Score 2 goals in either of the wide goals
- Level 2: Score in the large central goal
- Level 3: Score a goal with a switch of play (using the wide zone)
- Level 4: Score from a cross

For level 1, the goals must be scored inside the wide zone to count.

The Goalkeeper can defend all three goals!

**INTENTION** In this game we are challenging the players to explore different ways to switch play and complete each level. The aim is that the session design achieves this rather than the coach giving or guiding them towards the answer.

**LINK TO 11v11** Different strategies to switch play.

Strategies to win!

**OBSERVATION** How do the players communicate and organise themselves to achieve the challenge?

Does their strategy cover in and out of possession?

Which technical and tactical aspects do individuals struggle with?

**PROGRESSIONS** Modify the levels - ask the kids they always have great suggestions!

Encourage the kids to use the **pause button** to discuss their approach.

# 6 GOAL GAME V2

## Switching Play

 7v7 upwards	 Rectangle with wide zones	 2 Goalkeepers
 Yes	 First to finish!	 2 large goals 4 target goals

**ORGANISATION** In this version of the 6 goal game, the large goal is pulled forward and the 2x smaller goals are tucked around the side. It looks a little crazy, but creates some great opportunities for the players.

This game can be played in 2 different ways;

1. Similar to the 6 goal game on page 73, score twice in either wide then attack the central goal.

OR

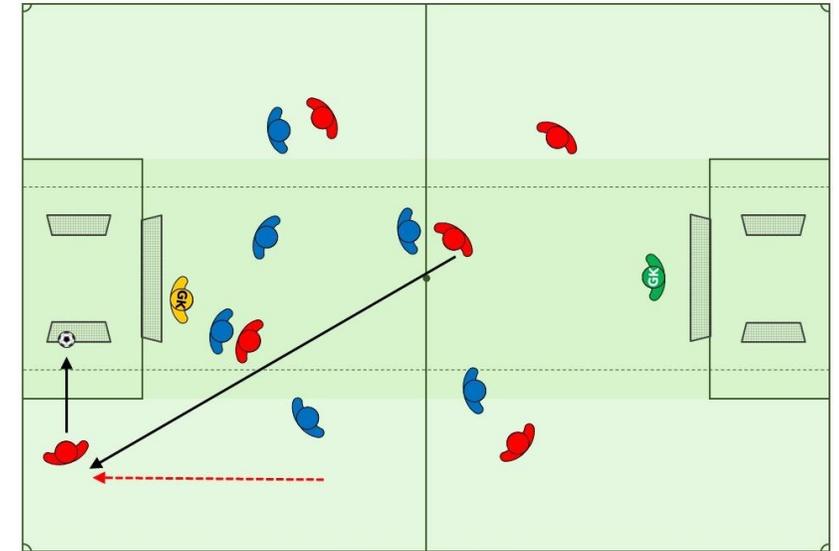
2. Each team attacks and defends all 3x goals.

**INTENTION** The idea here is to encourage runs from 'outside to in', so rather than playing super wide the Winger will make more aggressive and purposeful runs, similar to Raheem Sterling for example.

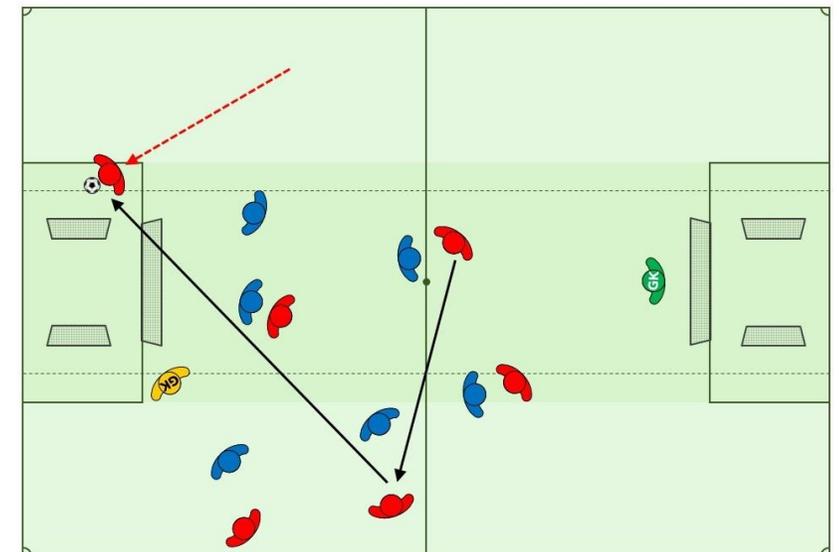
**LINK TO 11v11** Different strategies to switch play.

Forward runs to get behind the defensive line

**OBSERVATION** This game is a little less traditional so it might take players a while to get comfortable with the structure. When I've tried it teams have organised to switch one way, then fake and open the other side. As the defenders block the goal on the right, the attackers open with a longer diagonal pass to score in the left. This also caused the Goalkeeper problems as he / she moves around the corner, he / she can't protect the other goal in the time that the attackers can move the ball there!



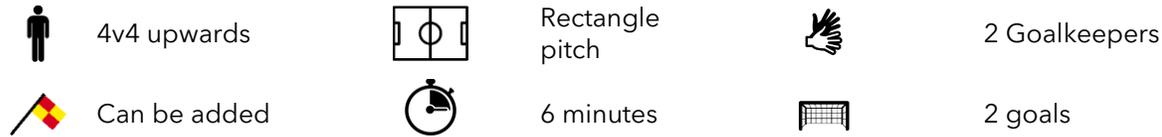
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# HALF PITCH SWITCH

## Switching Play



**ORGANISATION** This game takes place on a rectangle pitch, split vertically down the middle (goal to goal) with flat markers ideally. The idea of the game is when your team regains possession on one side of the pitch you switch and score on the opposite side.

**INTENTION** To encourage a switch of possession upon regain

**LINK TO 11v11**

- Attack across 5 lanes
- Support the attack quickly

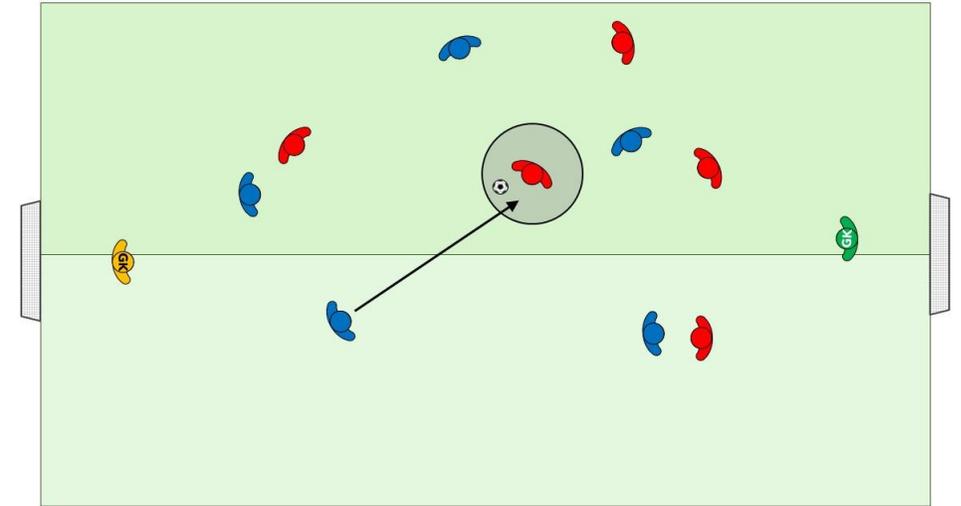
**OBSERVATION** This game is great to watch for moments of transition (defence to attack and attack to defence), as teammates will need to support the attack quickly to enable the ball carrier to switch.

The hidden learning here is interceptions. It is easier and more effective to intercept than to tackle. How do the players position themselves (collectively and as individual) to intercept the pass?

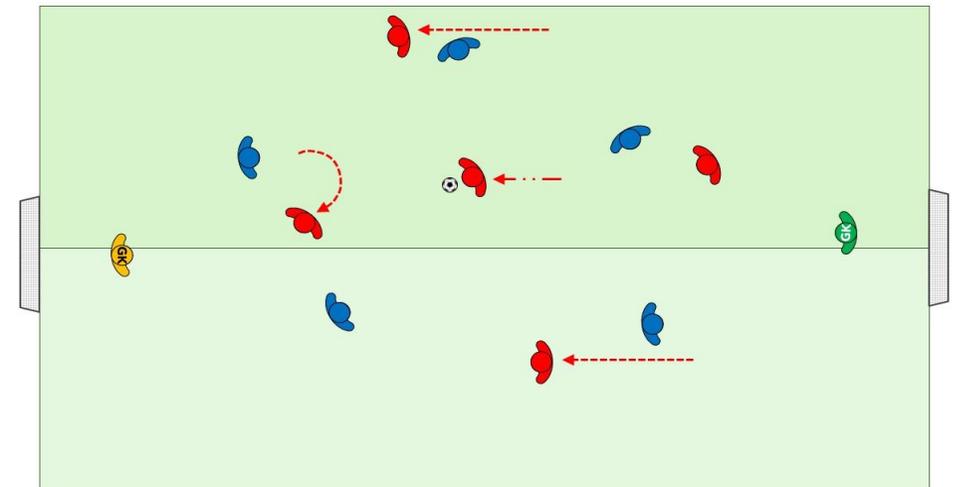
**PROGRESSIONS** Remove the restriction of 'you **must** switch' and consider;

**Reward** - "If you switch and score it is worth double!"

**Relate** - "Can you recognise when to go directly to goal and when to switch?"



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# BACK TO BACK GOALS

## Switching Play

	4v4 upwards		Rectangle		Can be added
	Not required		2x 6 minute halves		2 goals

**ORGANISATION** A 2 goal pitch, but with goals back-to-back in the centre of the field.

**INTENTION** Each team can score in either goal, on a turnover of possession you can tweak the rules to suit your players. Options could include; score straight away, have to complete 'x' number of passes or have to dribble to the edge before they can attack. I quite like must switch zones before you can score!

**LINK TO 11v11**

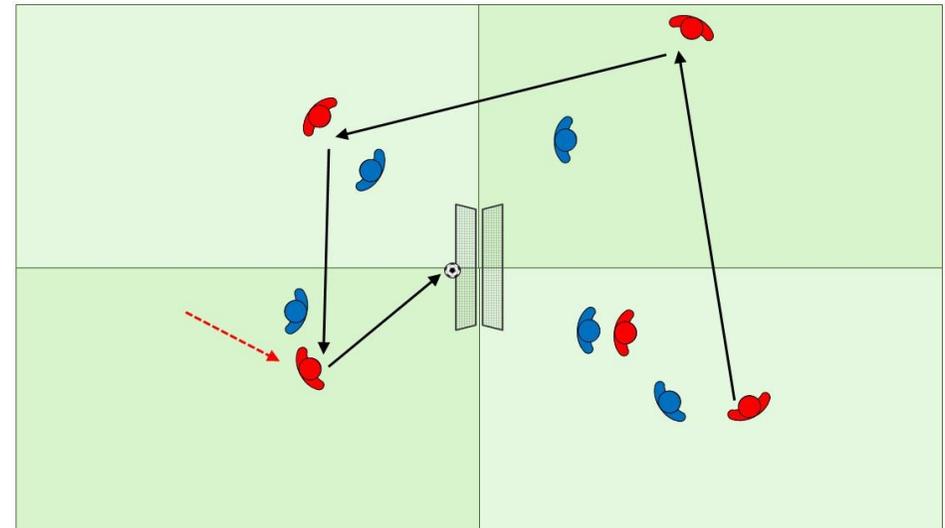
- Moving the ball or switching the point of attack
- Support play to create overloads or 1v1 moments
- Compact when defending

**OBSERVATION** This is a great game for switching play and supporting the ball carrier.

**PROGRESSIONS** Think about;

- Scoring mechanisms as above or add 1 touch finish
- The size of goals

For a **reward** or challenge "can you play through all 4x boxes before scoring?"



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# OCTAGON SWITCHING PLAY

## Switching Play

 4v4 upwards	 Octagon Pitch	 1 or 2 Goalkeepers
 Not required	 2x 6 minute halves	 2 goals back to back

**ORGANISATION** An octagon pitch with target players at each end, the 2 goals are placed back to back inside the pitch, facing out - not towards the target players. The pitch is split into quarters to help players with spacing and recognising the moment to switch to a free space.

To score teams must visit both target players, before scoring in either goal.

**INTENTION** Switch play to create a goal scoring opportunity

**LINK TO 11v11** A number of aspects of switching play or playing **around** can be touched on here;

- Support or positioning to switch play. Around the ball or away?
- Switch with a number of short passes, dribble or a longer direct switch?

**OBSERVATION** In this game there are lots of decisions for the players both in and out of possession;

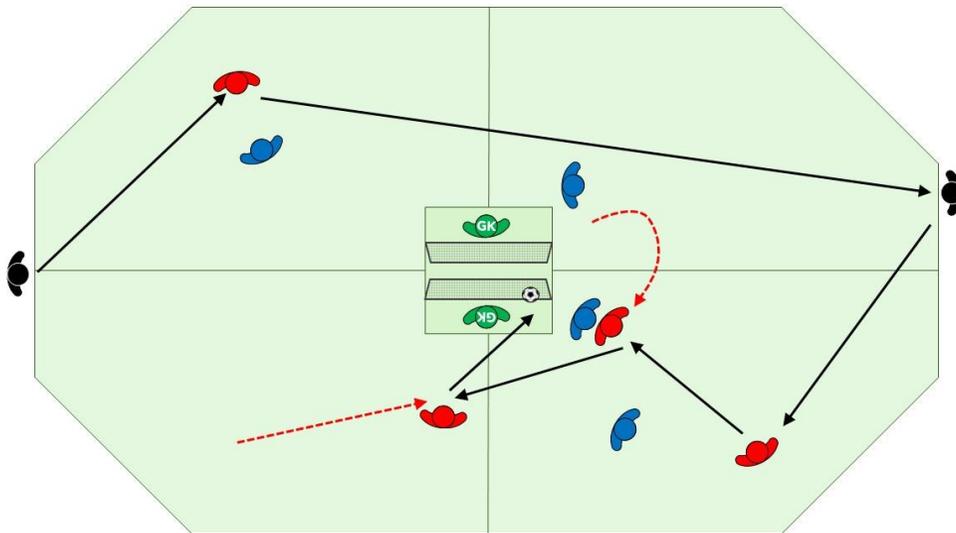
- Where is the free space or free man?
- Will we switch quickly or use a number of passes to get success?
- Out of possession, preventing gaps and forcing play to prevent the switch
- Finally, stopping the ball going in the goal!

**PROGRESSIONS** Modify some of the rules for the target player (**restrict** touches).

Modify the type of finish, for example a 1-touch finish (**reward**).

To get more success you could consider adding a neutral / magic man / joker to create overloads.

There is lots going on here, so might be a good game to use the **pause button** or play in short bursts to create space for conversations.



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# SWITCH OR COUNTER?

## Switching Play



5v5 upwards



Rectangle with  
2 gates



2 Goalkeepers



Not required



2x 6 minute  
halves



2 goals

**ORGANISATION** A 2 goal pitch with 2x gates (coned, markers or poles) on the halfway line.

**INTENTION** One team (Blues in the diagram) look to press the opposition, win the ball and score in either goal past the Goalkeeper. The Reds will focus on switching play through either gate, by dribbling or passing through, before scoring in either goal. Rotate roles at half time.

**LINK TO 11v11** Overload to isolate, can we drag the opposition to one side and exploit the space on the opposite side.

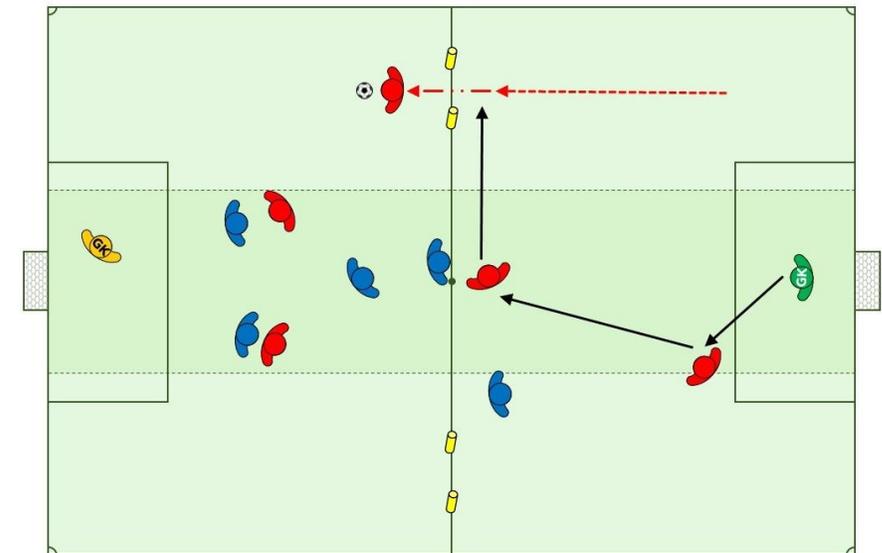
**OBSERVATION** For the **Blue** team;

- Pressing together
- Countering quickly (early pass, dribble, forward runners!)

For the **Red** team;

- Do they have depth and width to retain possession and switch appropriately?
- In possession do they use the Goalkeepers to build effectively?
- Do they have a **pivot** player to link the game from side to side?

**PROGRESSIONS** A variation could be to make the game directional, so both teams are looking to score once they've played through a wide gate, or alternatively a 'normal' game but goals that come from switching through the gate are worth treble (**reward**).



# SWITCH TO SCORE

## Switching Play



8-12 players



Final third



1 Goalkeeper



Yes



6 minutes



1 goal

**ORGANISATION** This game works like a rondo, with a breakout. The set up is as follows; the Reds and Blues are matched up in a 3v3 in one of the boxes on top of the penalty area. In the opposite box there is a 1v1 – these would be in the same colours as their teammates, I've just marked them like this to make their role obvious. At either side of the boxes there are 2x Wingers to represent a #7 and #11 (Yellow). Finally there is a Goalkeeper in the goal.

The idea of the game is to switch and score. This can be done in a variety of ways. In **Image 1** the Reds switch using their #10 (1v1 box) then into the Winger.

In **image 2** the Red player bypasses this option with a longer pass straight to the Winger.

Once the ball has been switched successfully the attack is played out to a finish (see progressions). If the Blues steal possession the game continues, and the roles are reversed.

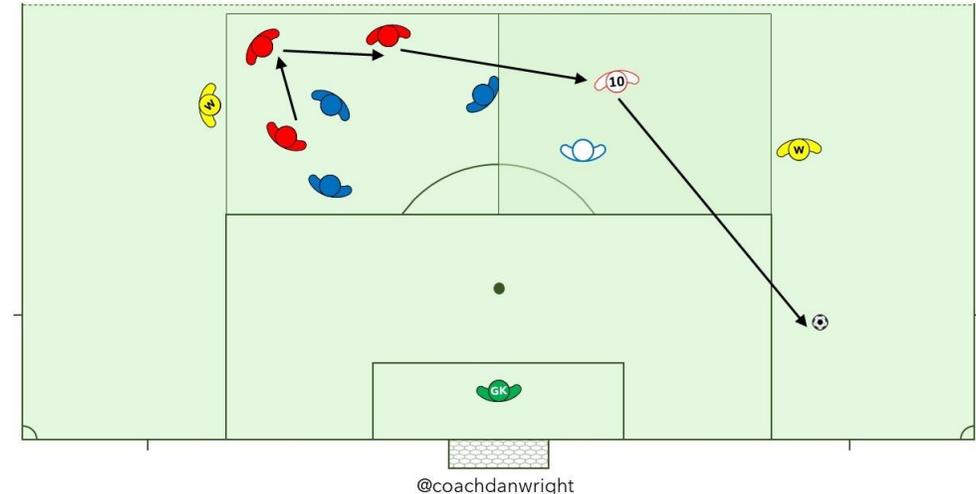
**INTENTION** To recognise the moment to switch and highlight the need for support away from the football.

**LINK TO 11v11** Switching play, creating width and supporting position away from the ball

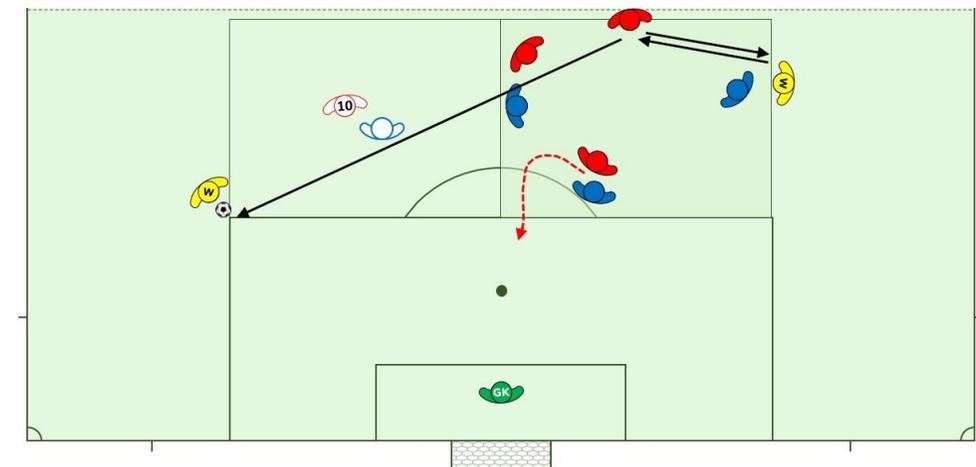
**OBSERVATION** Which players can get their eyes off the ball to see the switch? (**Scanning**)  
How do the players switch? (long pass, short pass, via the 10, directly...etc.)  
What is the approach of the Winger? (dribble, touch and cross, go for goal?...etc.)

**PROGRESSIONS** Here are a few ways to link this practice to the 11v11 game;

- Must visit the Winger in your box before you can switch to the opposite side (**restrict**)
- Defenders can track and recover to stop the attack
- Winger can go directly to goal, doesn't have to assist
- Add a 1v1 in the penalty box - so a #9 vs a Central Defender, increasing **realism**



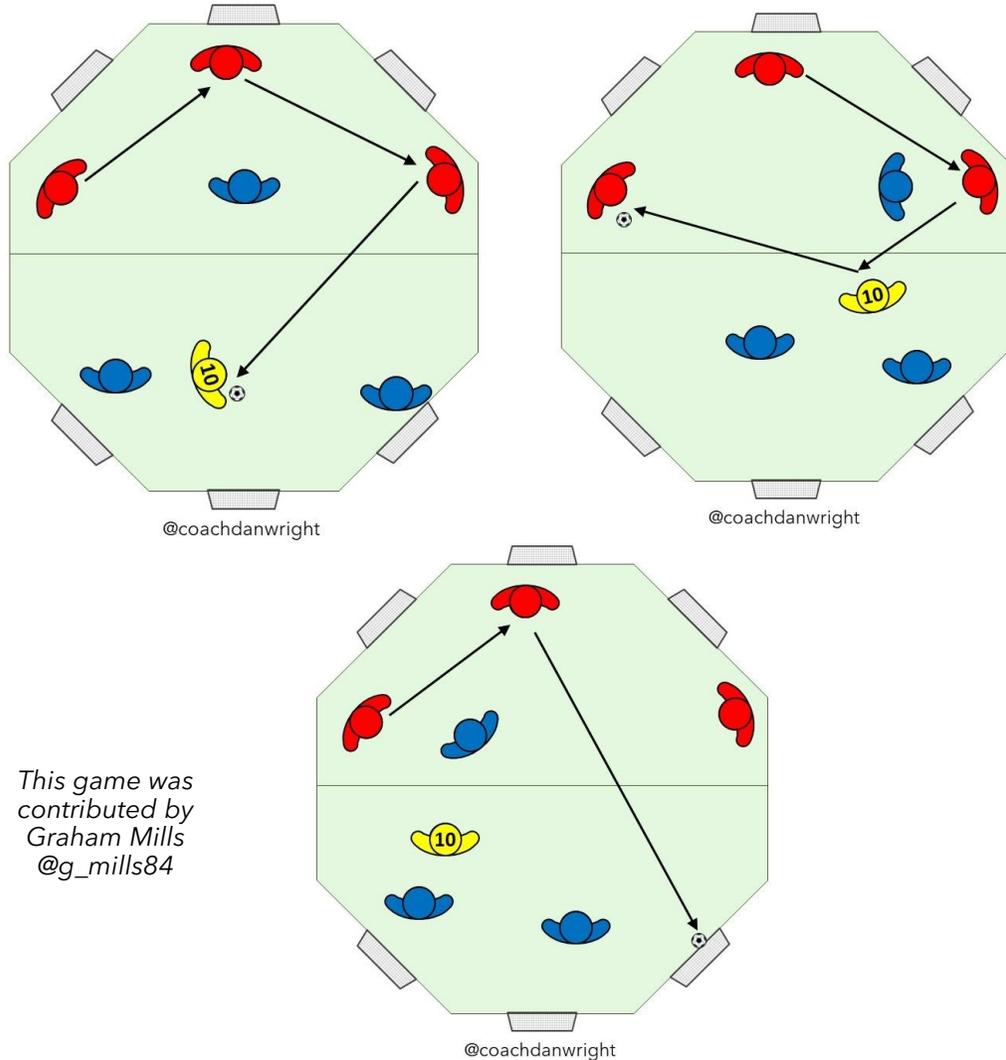
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# PLAY AROUND OR THROUGH ?

## Switching Play



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This game was contributed by  
Graham Mills  
@g\_mills84

 3v3 +1

 Octagon pitch (small)

 Not required

 No

 4 minutes

 6 target goals

**ORGANISATION** This practice looks quite complicated, but players pick it up quickly. This is a 3v3 (Reds vs Blues) and 1 neutral player in Yellow. The practice starts with a 3v1 'keep away' scenario - the #10 (Yellow player) always plays in the opposite half and always for the team in possession.

Reds look to score in any of the 3 goals in the opposite half, they can pass in directly from where they are or use the Yellow player. If the Blues regain possession they can score in any 3 of the target goals in the Red's half. The practice would start again, but this time it would be a mirror image - so 3x Blues vs 1x Red, with the Yellow now in the top half.

**INTENTION** The practice will provide opportunity for the team in possession to play **through** or **around** the press to score.

**LINK TO 11v11** This game links to a few principles in possession; playing out from the back into midfield, breaking lines to switch or score and keeping possession under pressure.

**OBSERVATION** **Image 1:** Reds play **around** the press and **through** the defenders into the #10, who has found space between the Blues.

**Image 2:** Blues have forced play well, the Reds use the Yellow to 'bounce' and unlock on the opposite side, the Red could now score in the unprotected goal.

**Image 3:** Here the Red player can play directly though into the free goal, as the Blues are preoccupied by marking the #10 and covering the other goals.

**PROGRESSIONS** For more passing and receiving, keep count of which team can make the most consecutive passes in the 3v1 scenario, in a set time or with a certain number of balls / go's.

Make the central goal more valuable, for example goals scored in the central goal are worth 3 points. This will adding **realism** as often the central area is the most difficult to penetrate.

# LINEBALL

## Combination & Movement

 4v4 upwards	 Rectangle with end zones	 Not required
 Yes	 6 minutes	 No

**ORGANISATION** A pitch size to suit number of players and age / stage. This game needs no goals, so great for an arrival activity or if you are struggling for equipment.

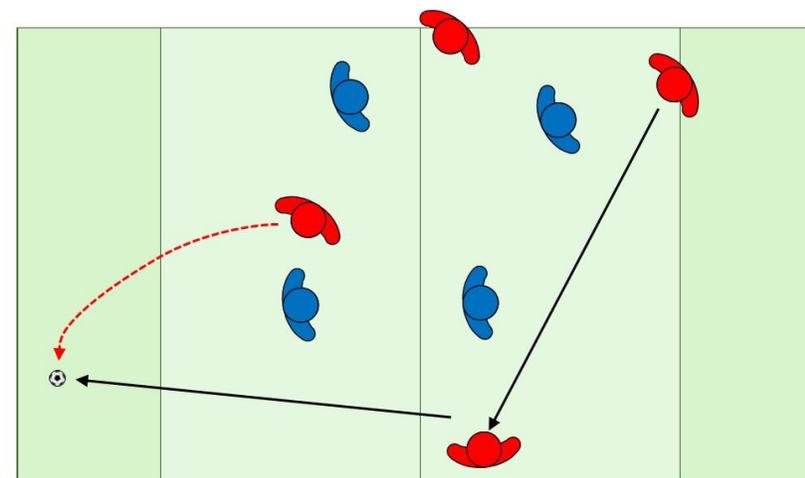
**INTENTION** The aim of the game is for the team in possession to penetrate the end zone, by running with the ball or receiving a pass inside. The ball must be under control inside the end zone for the goal to count!

**LINK TO 11v11** Forward pass and forward run (playing **through** or **around**)  
Supporting positions (**4x B's**)

**OBSERVATION** In this game, some of the following may emerge;

- The balancing of running with the ball and passing, to score a goal
- Recognising the space available to carry the ball into
- Drawing in opponents to release a teammate

**PROGRESSIONS** Manipulating the area size offers different returns in this practice, if it is large it can encourage individuals to drive into the space, running with the ball taking larger touches. If it is tighter, you might see more combination play, as players utilise teammates more frequently.



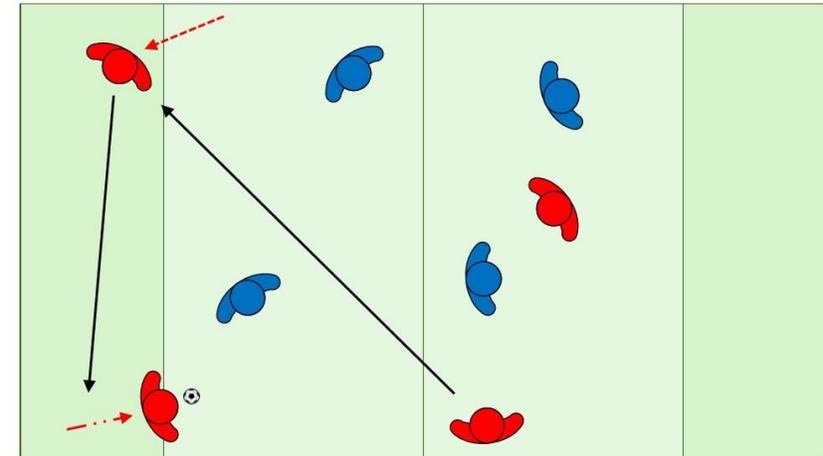
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# FORWARD PASS AND FORWARD RUN

## Combination & Movement

 6v6 upwards	 Rectangle with end zones	 Not required
 Not required	 6 minutes	 No

- ORGANISATION** A rectangle with 2 small end zones. To score a team must make a pass into the end zone to a player that has made a forward run, a second player must make a supporting run into the end zone to receive a pass. They maintain possession and attack the opposite end.
- INTENTION** Recognising when to support around the ball or away from the ball.
- LINK TO 11v11** When and how to offer support (**behind, beside, between** and **beyond**).
- OBSERVATION** This is a good practice to observe the team in possession, but not necessarily the player in possession. We can look at the behaviour of the players around the ball, do they recognise when and where to support?
- PROGRESSIONS** Allow the opposition to add a defender who can track and stop the square pass in the end zone.



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# FORWARD PASS AND FORWARD RUN V2

## Combination & Movement

	8-12 players		Rectangle with end zones		Not required
	Not required		6 minutes		No

**ORGANISATION** This version is a little more advanced. A rectangle with 2x small end zones, in each end zone there is a gate made from poles / cones / flat markers. To score a team must make a pass into the end zone to the target player or a player that has made a forward run, then they must pass through the gate to score a goal. They maintain possession and attack the opposite end.

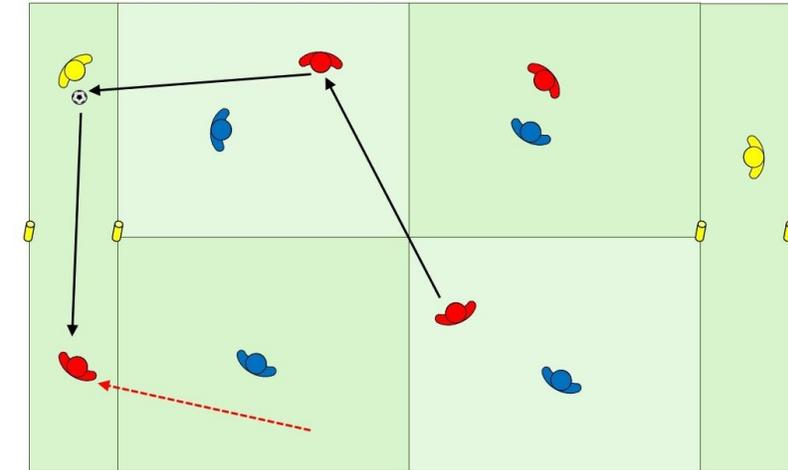
In this version the defending team (Blue in the image) can defend in the end zone, so he or she might block a target player or gate. To stop them blocking both you can reward the team in possession, every 10 passes = 1 goal. This should draw the opposition out to try and regain.

**INTENTION** Recognising when to support around the ball or away from the ball.

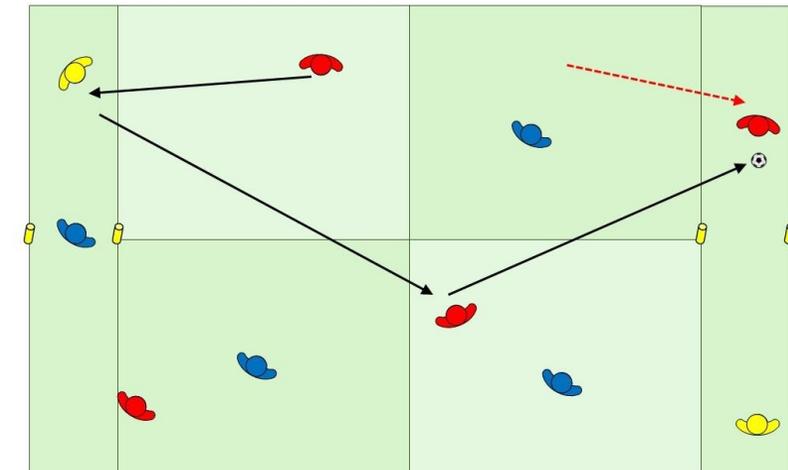
**LINK TO 11v11** Supporting positions in possession (**behind, beside, between** and **beyond**).

**OBSERVATION** **Top image:** The Reds are attacking the left side, the timing to arrive is super important so that the Yellow player can play through the gate, but before the Blue recognises it!

**Bottom image:** The Blue player has decided to block the gate, this gives the Reds an overload in the middle! Here the target player recognises the space and this allows the Red player the time to play through the gate, before the Yellow plays back into the practice.



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# THIRD MAN RUN

## Combination & Movement



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

**ORGANISATION** In this game goals can only be scored from a third man run.

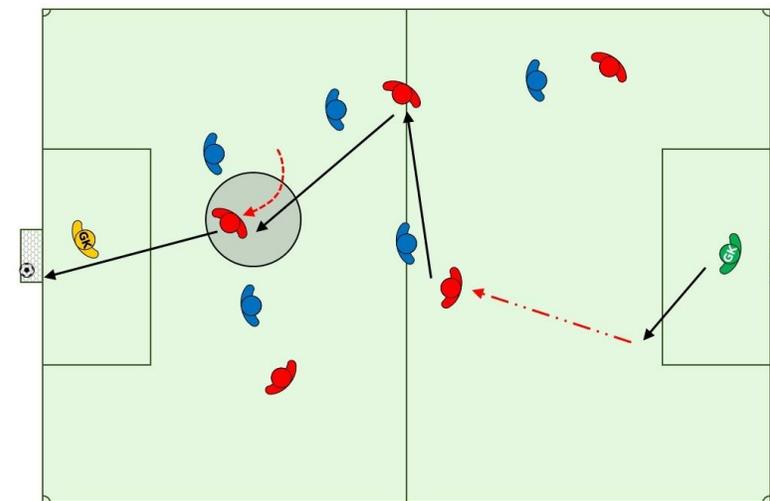
**INTENTION** To improve players movement of the ball to support the attack. For the player who assists, the weight and accuracy of pass will be vital.

**LINK TO 11v11** This practice is great to encourage movement off or away from the football. These runs will often be **beyond** or **between** the defensive line.

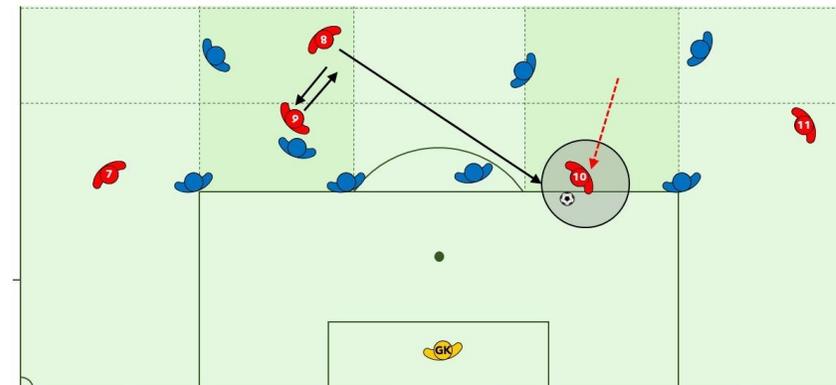
**OBSERVATION** This game is great for timing and chemistry between players. When supporting the attack the players will need to 'play in the future' and think 2-3 passes ahead.

**PROGRESSIONS** Think about using the **reward** and **relate** approach, rather than goals can only be scored from a third man run. Can we reward a goal scored in this way, with double or treble goals?

A nice way to frame this game is using a video of goals scored from a third man, you could use your phone or tablet to show different ways of joining the attack and arriving into key areas.



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**Link to the 11v11 game:** This is called a third man run because the runner is the *third man* in the play. The third man can sometimes start the passing sequence, and sometimes he / she is on the blind side of the play and not involved at all when the run starts.

# 3v3 WITH END ZONE

## Combination & Movement

 3v3 upwards

 Rectangle pitch (small) with end zones

 Not required

 Yes - in the end zone

 6 minutes

 2 target goals

**ORGANISATION** A small pitch with 2x end zones near the goals. This can be played with target goals or with Goalkeepers in larger goals.

**INTENTION** To score players must release their teammate with a forward pass into the end zone, teammates must time their run to score.

**LINK TO 11v11** This game encourages two main ideas;

Breaking lines with a forward 'killer pass' (**over, around or through?**)

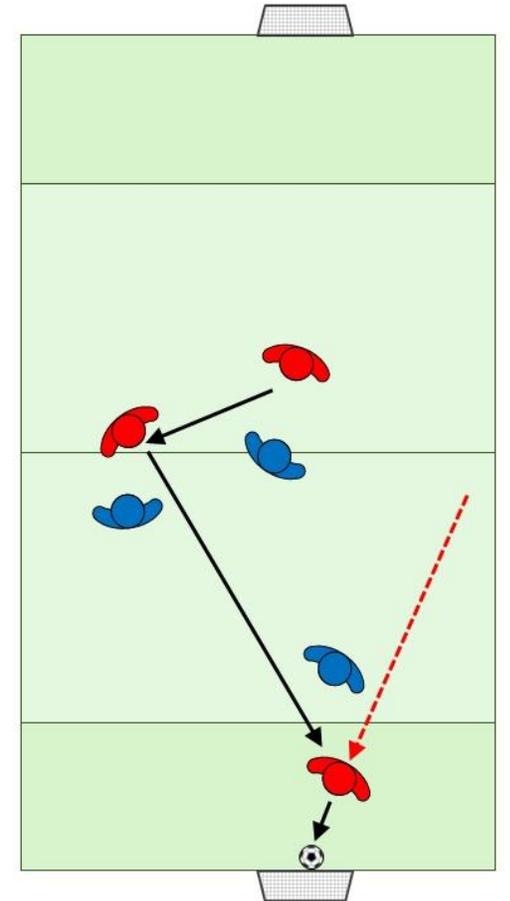
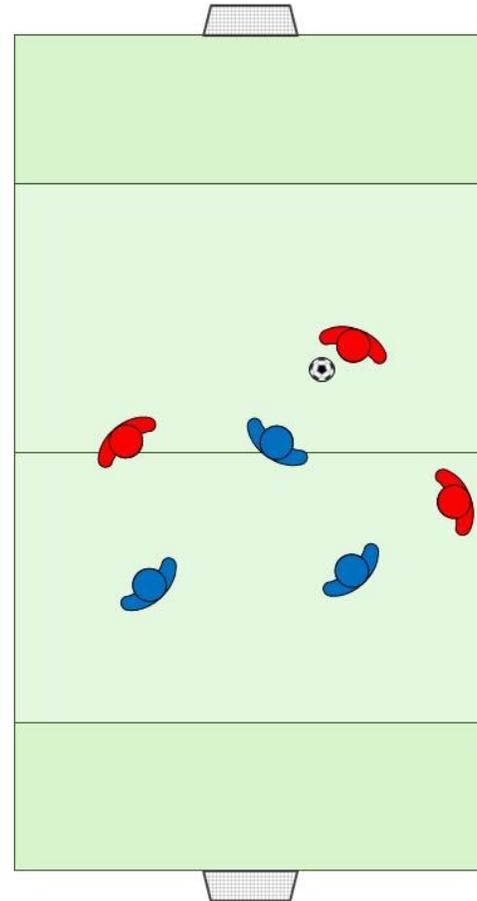
The importance of timing of your run to score

**OBSERVATION** Things to observe here;

- Variety of forward pass - split, scooped, curled, driven...etc.
- Variety of forward run - straight, curved, double movement, blindside...etc.

**PROGRESSIONS** To increase the challenge you can add in an additional pass in the end zone, so now the attacker needs a supporting run to square the ball to apply the finish.

To add **realism** allow defenders to recover into the end zone.

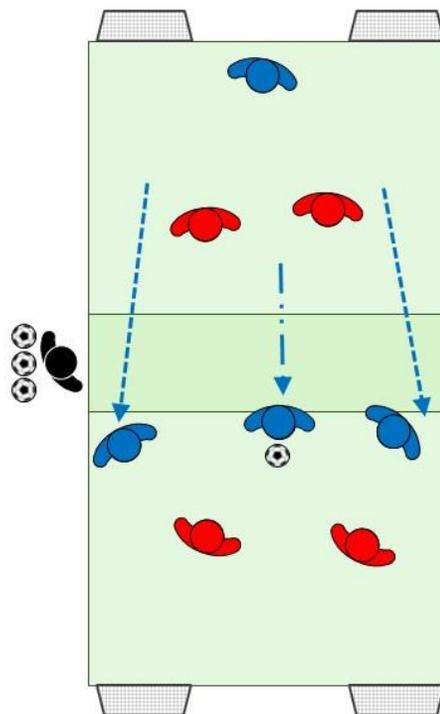
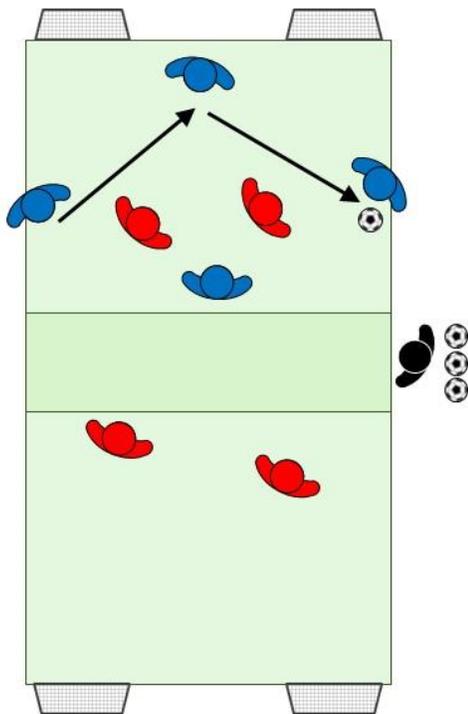


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# THE TRANSFER GAME

## Combination & Movement

-  3v3 upwards
-  Rectangle pitch (small) with end zones
-  Not required
- Yes - in the end zone
-  6 minutes
-  4 target goals



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100  
SMALL SIDED GAMES

### ORGANISATION

This game has a few variations, some of which might be a bit difficult for younger players. Version 1 (left) is the easiest. Here each team has 4 players who start in their own half. The coach feeds the ball into 1 team (Blues), the out of possession team (Reds) send 2x players to press and win the ball back in a 4v2 scenario.

The Blues score a goal by completing 10 passes, the Reds score by winning back possession and either scoring in the target goals behind the Blues, or transferring the ball back to their teammates in the opposite half and maintaining possession.

If the Reds force a mistake, they retreat back to their box where the coach fires in a new ball - and the process starts again, 2x Blues come in to create a 4v2 against the Reds.

### INTENTION

In possession, there is a focus on passing and receiving in tight spaces - this is technically demanding. Lots of repetition without repetition!

Out of possession the focus is pressing in a pair, to ultimately win back possession or force a mistake.

### OBSERVATION

This game has lots of psychological returns, every player will make a mistake or face adversity being 2v4 when trying to win it back.

### PROGRESSIONS

Version 2 (right), is a similar structure to the first game, but instead of the Blues keeping possession, they break out and try to score past the remaining Red Defenders. This links to playing **through** or **around**, but is quite advanced for younger players.

# 4v4+3

## Combination & Movement



11 players



2x 12x12m



No



No



Can be adapted



Not required

### ORGANISATION

This positional game is a favourite of Pep Guardiola. The normal set up is a 4v4 with 3x neutral players. The team on the outside (Red) keep the ball working with the 3x neutral players (Yellow), Blues are defending. When the outside team lose possession they immediately press and the other team (Blue) take up the positions on the outside. There is opportunity for the Yellows to play in positions they might experience in a game - the end player could be a Central Defender, the inside player a DCM/#4 and the other end player could be a Central Striker (#9).

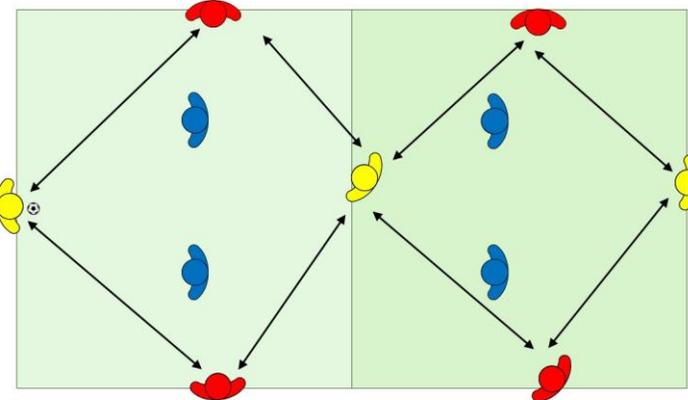
### INTENTION

This game is fantastic at shining a light on positioning and simple pictures of when to play **around** or **through**.

### LINK TO 11v11 / OBSERVATION

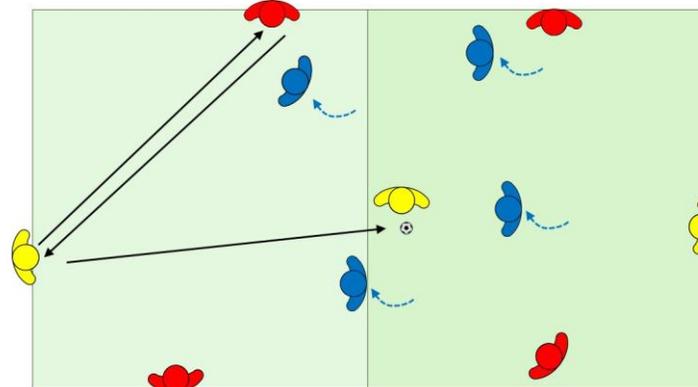
- To develop 3 passing options for the ball carrier (**image 1**)
- Supporting positions (**behind, beside, between** and **beyond**)
- Players awareness of ball, opposition, teammates and space (**BOTS**)
- For the inside neutral player, a focus on supporting **between** or receiving inside the **net** of the blues
- Whether to play **around** or **through**
- Weight and accuracy of pass

Supporting positions and potential passing lines



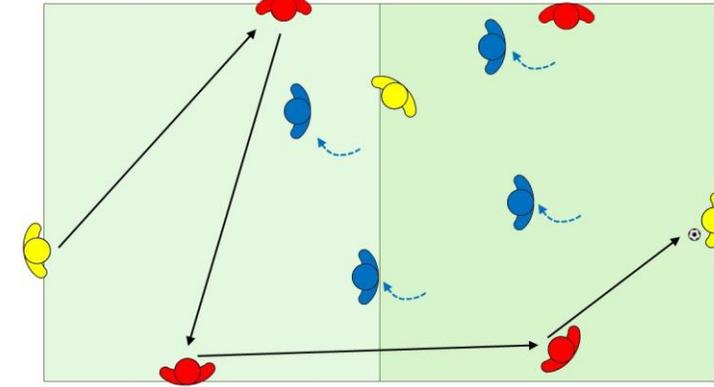
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Moving the opposition creating an up-back and through



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Moving the opposition and playing around

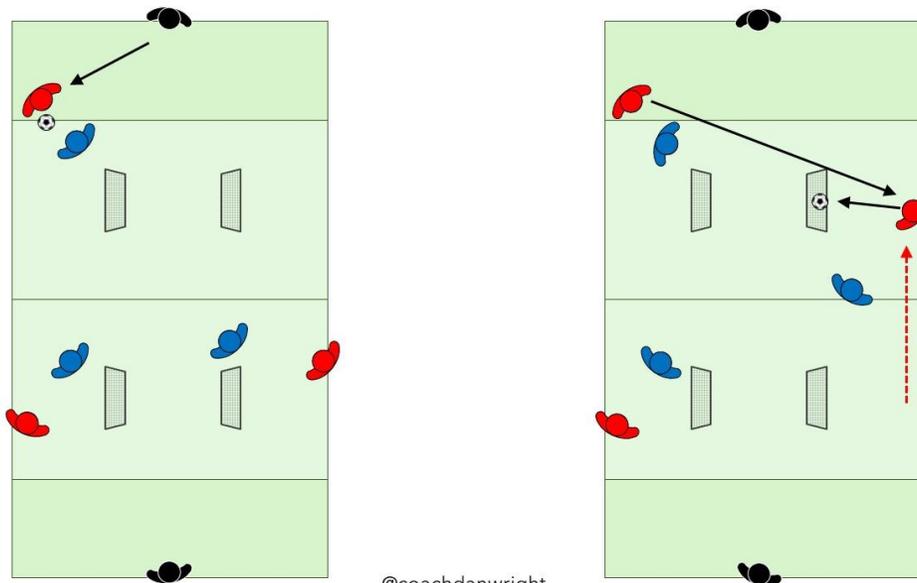


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# 3v3 MIDFIELD MOVEMENT

## Combination & Movement

	3v3 +2		Rectangle with end zones		Not required
	Not required		2 minutes		4 target goals



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This game was contributed by Graham Mills @g\_mills84

**ORGANISATION** This game is played in a tight space with 4 target goals facing outwards, as per the diagram. The team in possession can score in any of the goals, but only with a 1 touch finish. Its important to note they must receive the pass from the target player (Black) in the end zone, otherwise it can be too easy to score.

With older players the target players are just feeders - who start the practice, this will increase the interactions between the 3 players inside. You could remove this constraint with younger or less able players to get more success.

**INTENTION** The aim of the game is to move and combine quickly to find the spare goal. As there are only 3 defenders - they can't block all four goals, can the attackers move the ball quickly to find the gap?

- LINK TO 11V11**
- Positioning of a midfield 3
  - Support (**4'Bs**)
  - **Scanning** for BOTS
  - Movement as an individual and awareness of my teammates

**OBSERVATION** Initially players might find this game challenging, there are quite a few new 'bits' that take a while for them to adapt to. In time they will start to move the ball with a clever pass or dribble and find solutions.

**PROGRESSIONS** This practice can work with larger numbers in a wave style practice, so the resting team enters when the team scores - knocking the other team off.

# MIDFIELD ROTATION

## Combination & Movement

 7v7 upwards	 Thirds pitch with quartered central area	 2 Goalkeepers
 Not required	 Can be adapted	 2 goals

**ORGANISATION** This game takes place on a 2 goal pitch, split into thirds, with the middle third split into 4x quarters, as per the diagram. The end third represents "attackers vs defenders" (1x Striker vs 2x Central Defenders), the central areas are replicating the Midfield in a 4-3-3 so is 3v3.

**INTENTION** In possession the Midfield 3 must look to occupy different spaces using the 4 grids so that they play on different lines and create different passing lines for the ball carrier.

**LINK TO 11v11**

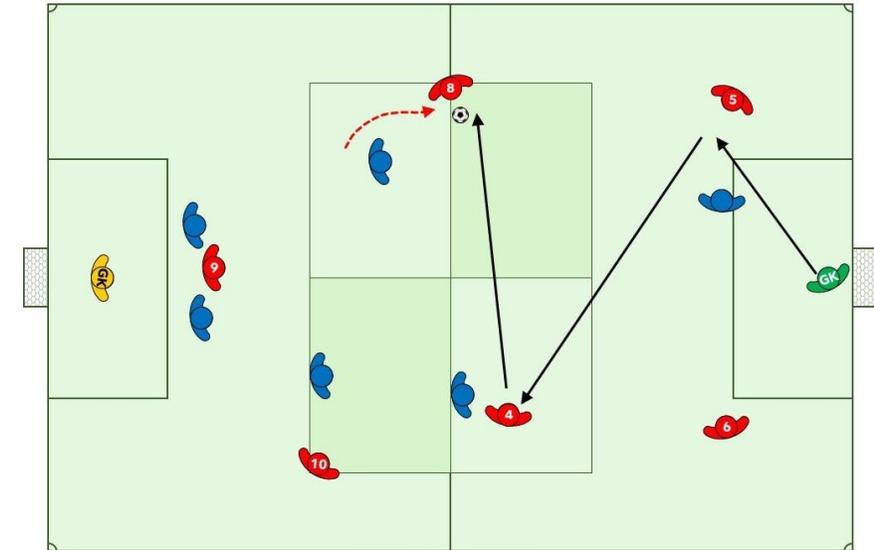
- Movement and rotations in midfield
- Spatial awareness and timing to 'empty and fill' space
- **Scanning** for BOTS

**OBSERVATION** In this practice I would look for;

- The movement / rotation and relationship between the 3x Midfielders
- Playing in different spaces and off different lines
- When playing from the Goalkeeper, use the 3v1 to build with patience and support from **behind** once the ball is played forward.
- When the ball is in advanced areas, encourage running forward, whilst maintaining 'balance'.

**PROGRESSIONS** Start this game with players 'locked in' zones, but progress as you see fit;

- Can move up / down 1 zone in possession
- Pass forward / run forward to create a 2v2 in the end zone (**reward**)
- Out of possession, Midfielders can track their runner
- Remove the zones for complete freedom! (**realism**)



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# #10 IN THE DIAGONAL POCKET

## Combination & Movement

 9 players can be adapted	 20x20m grid	 2 Goalkeepers or target players
 No	 8 mins	 Not required

**ORGANISATION** This practice looks complicated, but it is essentially a possession box, with a few constraints added. A 2v2 (Reds vs Blues) takes place in one half of the grid. The game is directional with the team in possession looking to play from target player to target player (Goalkeepers in this version). The Yellow players play a vital role in this practice, always playing for the team in possession - 2 of which play on the side to replicate 2x Full Backs and finally the #10 (also Yellow) always plays in the opposite half.

**INTENTION** The team in possession (Red or Blue) look to play from end to end using the #10. The #10 can only receive in the opposite half **and** on the opposite side to the ball (diagonal pocket).

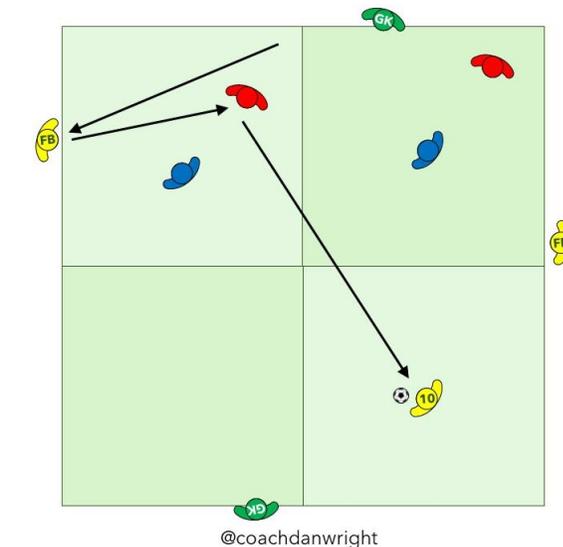
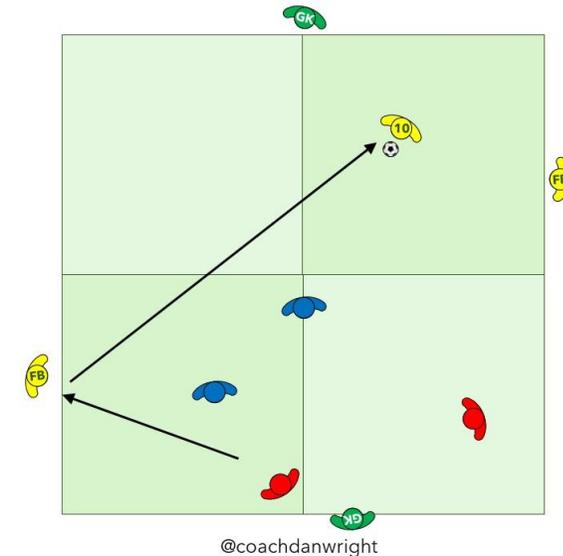
**LINK TO 11v11** This game is designed to encourage the teams understanding of when to play **around** or **through**. For the #10 to focus on helping the midfield by supporting away in the 'diagonal pocket'.

**OBSERVATION** For the team in possession this game is all about breaking lines by playing **through** or **around** - do they recognize the moment to do this?

For the Full Backs, they must focus on their distances when offering support - come close to help the ball carrier or further way to stretch the opposition? When in possession, are they aware of their next pass to play **around** the press?

**PROGRESSIONS** This is quite an advanced practice, it can be made more difficult by:

- Adding competition and keeping score
- For the pass that breaks a line, from half to half, to be 1 touch (**restrict**)
- Full Backs can only play forwards using 1 touch (**restrict**)



# THE COMBINATION CORRIDOR

## Combination & Movement



5v5 upwards



Thirds pitch



2Goalkeepers



Yes - in the final third



2x 6 minute halves



2 goals

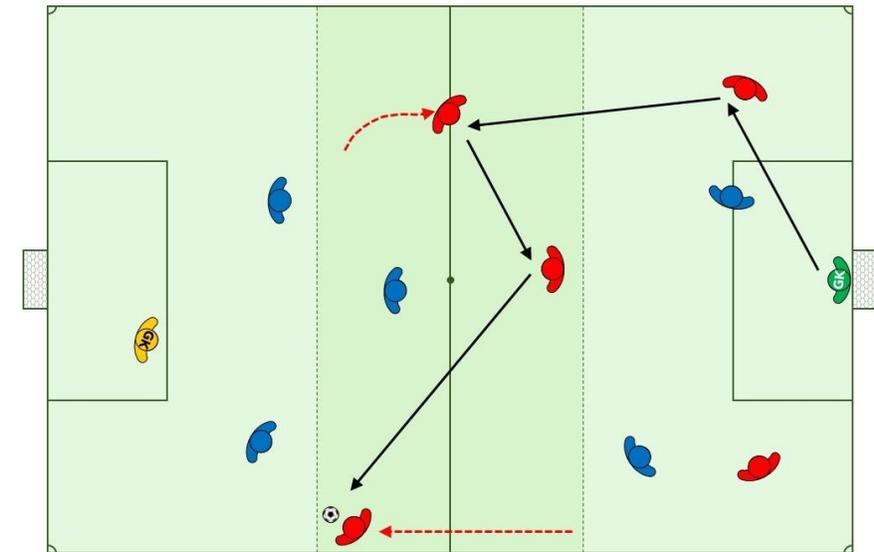
**ORGANISATION** Regular 2 goal pitch with the middle third designated as the "combination corridor". Within the middle third the coach **restricts** the players touch (1 or 2) to encourage clever and quick combinations. No conditions in the end zones, where players can dribble and control the tempo.

**INTENTION** To encourage clever and quick combination play to score!

- LINK TO 11v11**
- A Midfielder or attacker receiving the ball in congested areas, high up the pitch (**between**)
  - Recognising when and how to change the tempo

- OBSERVATION** I really like this practice for a number of reasons, things to observe here include;
- The players **scanning** habits especially in the central areas, are they aware of the space / teammates / opposition and their next move?
  - The individuals ability to play off 1 or 2 touches and adapt their ideas to what is emerging in front of them.
  - The groups movement and support to allow combination play in the central third. (**4x B's**)
  - The teams strategies to build up to play through the corridor, will they play slowly or quickly? How many passes?

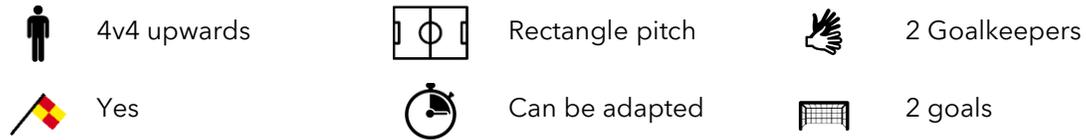
**PROGRESSIONS** Alter width of the middle third, to make it easier or harder. Increase / decrease number of touches, be mindful this can alter the **realism**. Remove the condition and check the transfer to the real game. (**Relate**)



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# EVERYONE IN THE OPPOSITION'S HALF

## Combination & Movement

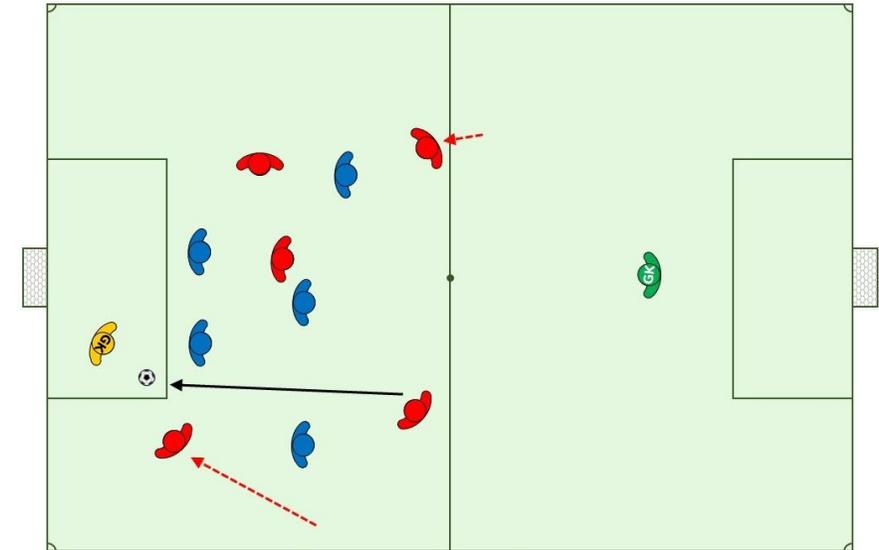


**ORGANISATION** A very simple constraint here, for the goal to count the attacking team must have every outfield player in the opposition's half.

**INTENTION** To encourage the team to maintain distances in possession.

**LINK TO 11v11 / OBSERVATION** The benefits of this constraint could be;

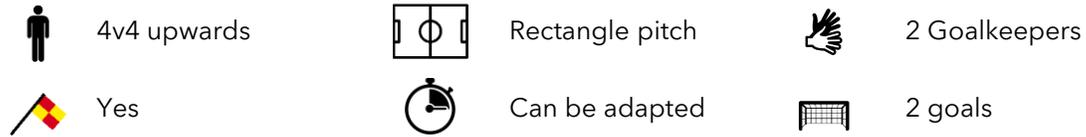
- There are physical benefits to the team having to be in the opponent's half
- There can be moments of transition as the Reds push up, if the Blues steal possession and counter attack
- It challenges the teams understanding of how and when to support the developing play (4xB's - **behind, beside, between** and **beyond**)



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# KILLER PASS

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** This game takes place on a 2 goal pitch, with a halfway line with flat markers or cones.

**INTENTION** All outfield players must play in one half, so in this diagram the Blues are looking to press high and score, whilst the Reds are looking to play a 'killer pass' into the opposition's half, breaking the press and creating a goal scoring opportunity.

**LINK TO 11v11** This game encourages two main ideas;

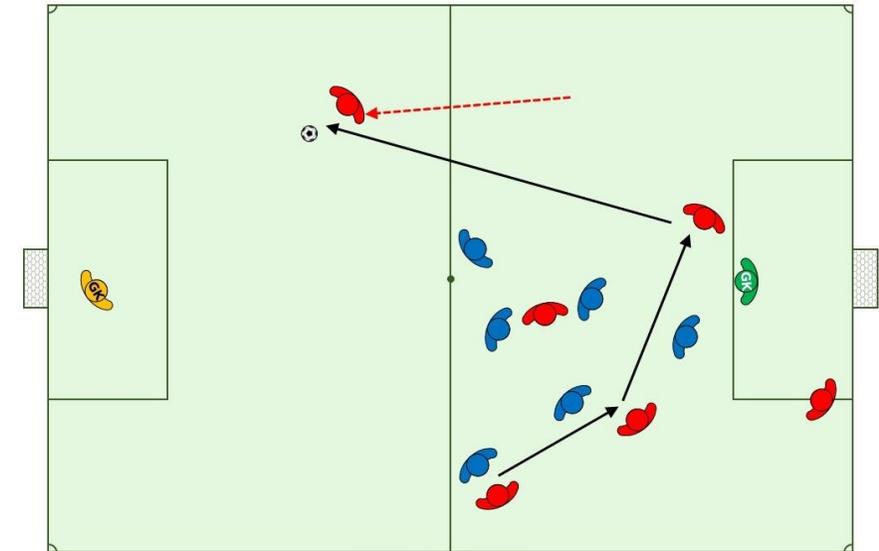
Breaking lines with a forward 'killer pass' (**over, around** or **through?**)

Running forward from deep to get **beyond** the defensive line

**OBSERVATION** In this game the following things might emerge;

- A variety of forward passes; curled, driven, stabbed, lofted, fast/slow...etc.
- The types and timing of forward runs; blindside, curved, clever, late...etc.
- Retaining possession under pressure when playing out (Reds).
- Pressing with a plan (Blues).

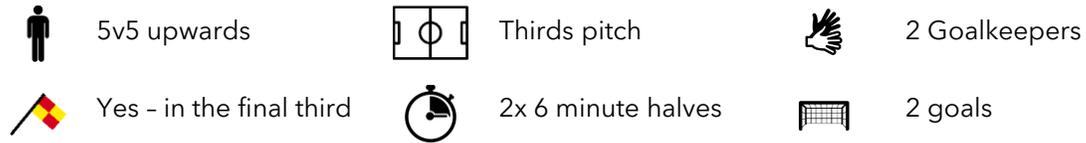
**PROGRESSIONS** Allow the defenders to recover and track the runner. (**Relate**)



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# BREAKOUT... MIDFIELD RUNNER

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** In this game all the outfield players play in the middle third, to score the team look to break the line with a forward pass and a forward run.

**INTENTION** To encourage runners from the middle third and develop the passing range and awareness to assist.

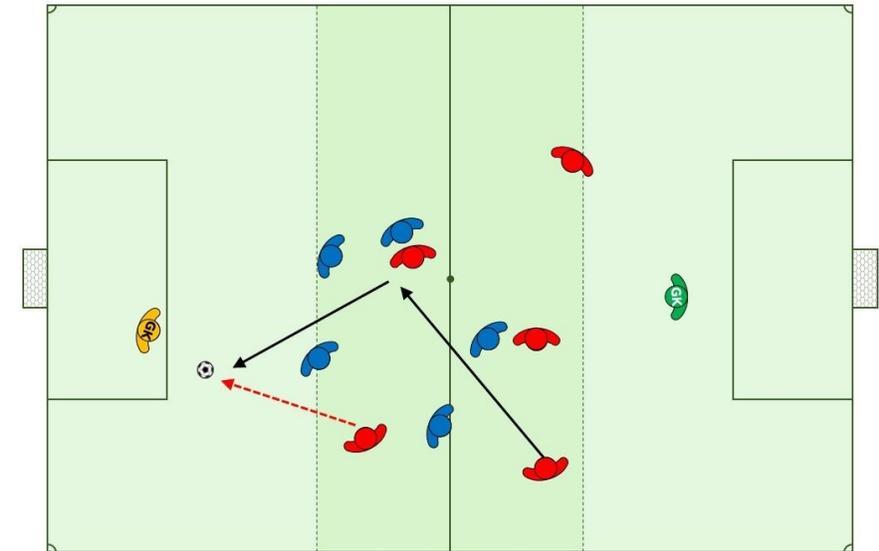
**LINK TO 11v11** For the player in possession of the ball;  
- Forward passes (short, long, through, over, around, reverse...etc.)  
- Choosing to play **over, around** or **through**?  
- Awareness to see these passes

For the goal scorer;  
- Recognising the moment to run forwards  
- Different types of run (blindsides, between, curved, opposite movements...etc.)  
- Finishing

For the defending team;  
- Preventing gaps  
- As a progression, tracking / recovery runs to prevent shots

**OBSERVATION** Sensing the moment and trusting your teammates is important in this game. If I'm the runner, will my teammate spot the pass? For the player playing the pass, will my teammate commit to the run?

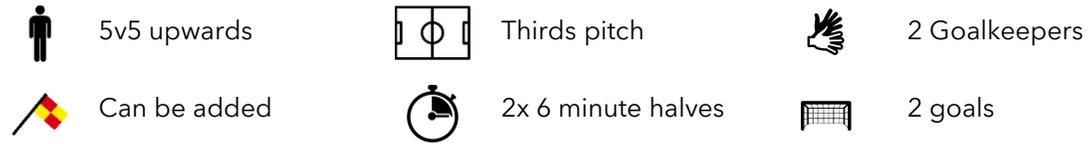
**PROGRESSIONS** Allow the defending team to track - how many?  
Once the line is broken it's a 'normal' game - other attackers can join and defenders can recover.



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# THROUGH THE THIRDS

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** This game demonstrates another way to use a thirds pitch. Here the players are locked into their zones. Whilst this lacks **realism** it can allow the players to get lots of repetition.

**INTENTION** In this example, the Reds are playing against an overload (3v4) this makes it hard to play **through** midfield into their 1v1 in the final third.

**LINK TO 11v11** Playing out from the back into a congested midfield.

**OBSERVATION** Think about what players will experience by playing in different positions. Consider their individual needs - technical, tactical, social, psychological or physical?

### Strikers

- Red Striker is in 1v1, whereas the Blue striker is in a 1v2

### Midfielders

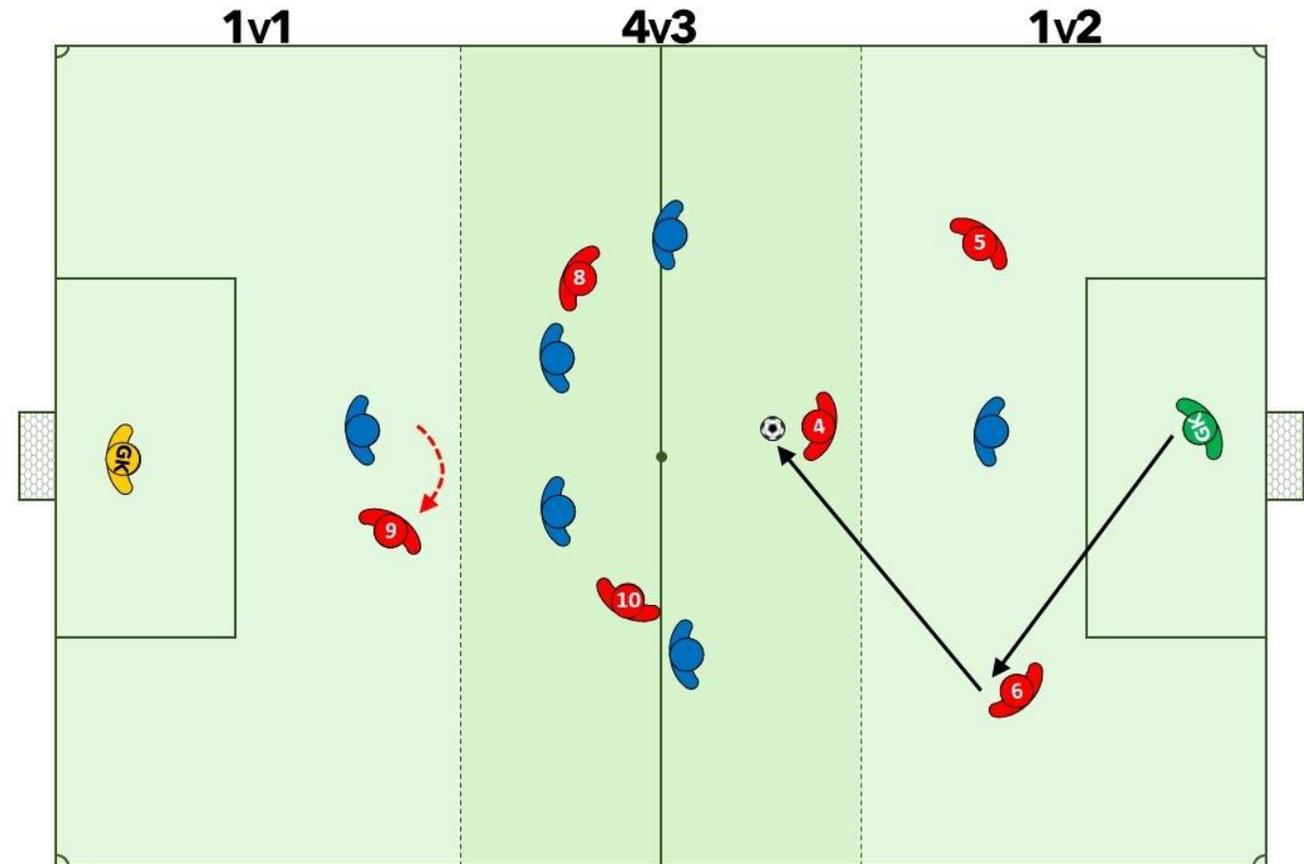
- Reds under constant pressure 3v4
- Blues screening and intercepting passes

### Defenders

- Reds lots of repetition of playing into midfield
- Blue Defender is in a 1v1 situation - with no cover!

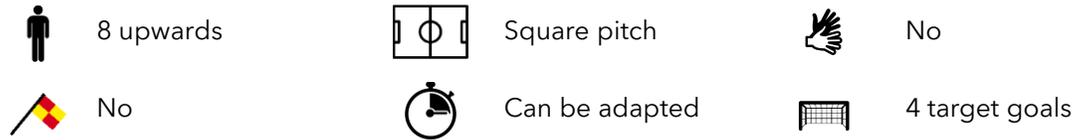
**PROGRESSIONS** This template can be adapted in almost any way you like.

You can also release some of the constraints to allow players to move up and down the thirds. (**Relate**)



# MESSY FOOTBALL

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** A small tight square pitch, with 4 target goals or coned goals. I tend to play without Goalkeepers for this one. This works well as an arrival activity. This is a basic 2v2, with 2 games going on simultaneously on the same pitch. In this diagram, the Reds are playing the Blues (North to South) and the Yellows are playing the Pinks (East to West). The interference and chaos from the other game allows players to dribble and pass under no, some and full pressure.

**INTENTION** The inference and lack of space encourages lots of scanning, dribbling and adapting on the move.

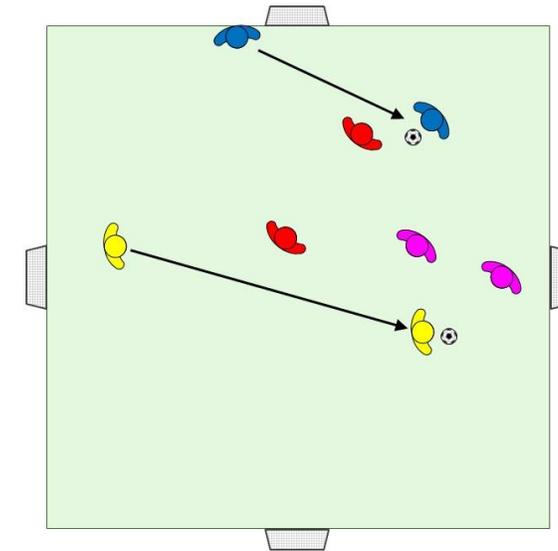
**LINK TO 11v11** Lot of technical returns; receive, run, release or retain.

**OBSERVATION** Observations for this one;

- When to play as an individual when to combine?
- Playing with your head up (awareness)
- 1v1 / 2v2 / 2v1 playing with a underload and overload

**PROGRESSIONS** You can play each game with a time limit or "first to...".

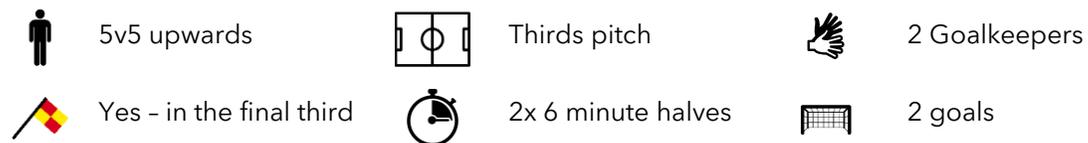
You can keep score of games won, draw and lost...or just play for fun!



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# THREE, TWO, ONE!

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** In this game the players are restricted to the number of touches they can take in each third. In this version the Reds can take 3 touches in their defensive third, 2 touches in the middle third and 1 touch in the final third.

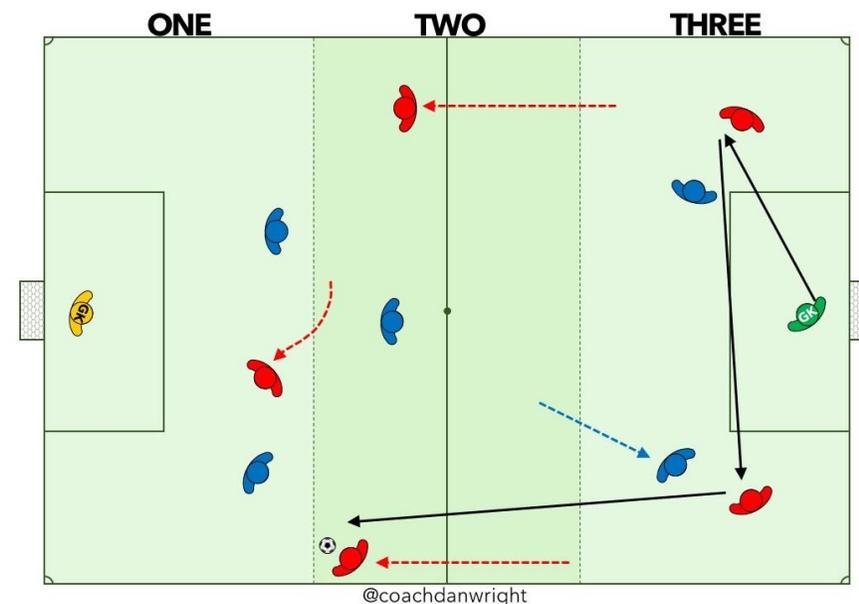
**INTENTION** For the team in possession to strategize how they will play in each third to progress up the field of play.

**LINK TO 11v11** The idea here is that the speed of play will increase as you get closer to the opponents goal, hence the decrease in touches as you get closer.

**OBSERVATION** Support will be key in this practice, as you get higher the need for options and combinations will be vital. (4xB's)

**PROGRESSIONS** This game lacks **realism** but will allow for **repetition** of combination play in the middle and final third. It would be worthwhile removing this constraint as see if the players can **relate** the principle of managing tempo.

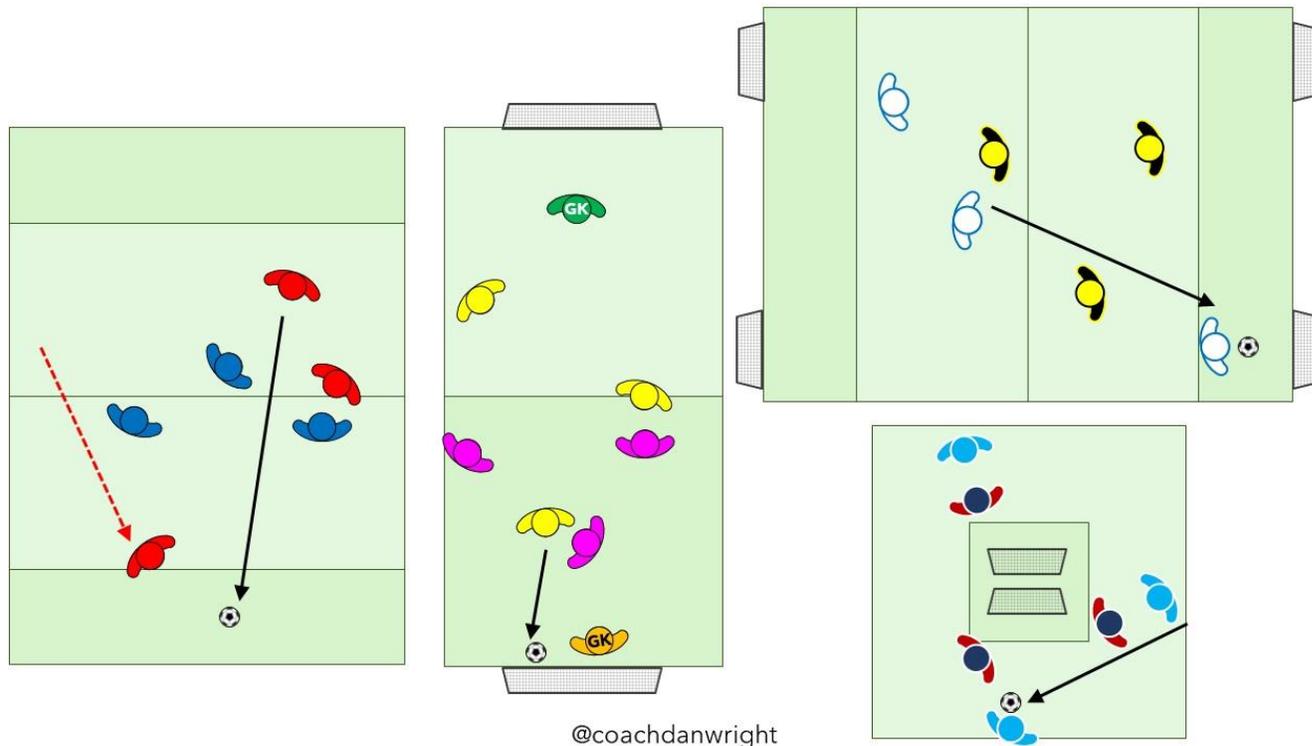
A word of caution, this game will not suit the dribblers in your group - it can be overly restrictive, so use sparingly.



# RECREATING STREET FOOTBALL

## Combination & Movement

-  Squad practice
-  4 pitches
-  2 Goalkeepers
-  No
-  2-3 minutes
-  2 goals  
6 target goals / gates



**ORGANISATION** In this practice we split the squad into small teams this could be 2's, 3's, 4's or 5's. The coach prepares a number of different pitches for the players to play. In this version we've selected; 3v3 Lineball, 3v3 with Goalkeepers, 3v3 4xgoal game and a 3v3 Back-to-back game.

**INTENTION** For the players to play and the coaches to observe. There will be lots of pass, dribbles and shots in these games compared to 7v7/ 9v9 or 11v11. (See Manchester United Study page 4)

**LINK TO 11v11** These games will focus on individuals and connections between individuals rather than 11v11 pictures.

**OBSERVATION** Lots to observe here for coaches.

### Technical

- More touches than a larger format of the game
- Different games posing different questions, have the players got the skill to get success? Where are their strengths and gaps?

### Social

- How do teams organise to compete and get success
- As a larger group, how do they decide who plays on which pitch?
- As there are no set positions how will they decide who does what?

### Psychological

- Although this session is really fun, there will be lots of challenge
- Games are quick so the players will need to refocus quickly after every game
- This will be super competitive, it will challenge players resilience in adversity...made even more difficult as its against their peers

### Physical

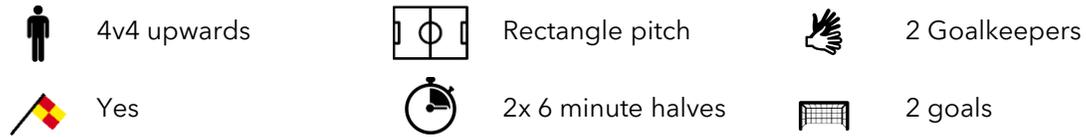
- The spaces are small so lots of accelerations/decelerations and change of direction

**PROGRESSIONS** Add competition - scores, league tables, promotion/ relegation...etc.

Constraints could be added to any of these pitches depending on the intended themes.

# 1 TOUCH OR 4 OR MORE

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** In this game players can only play using 1 touch, or 4 or more. If they use 2 or 3 touches it is a freekick and the opposition regain possession.

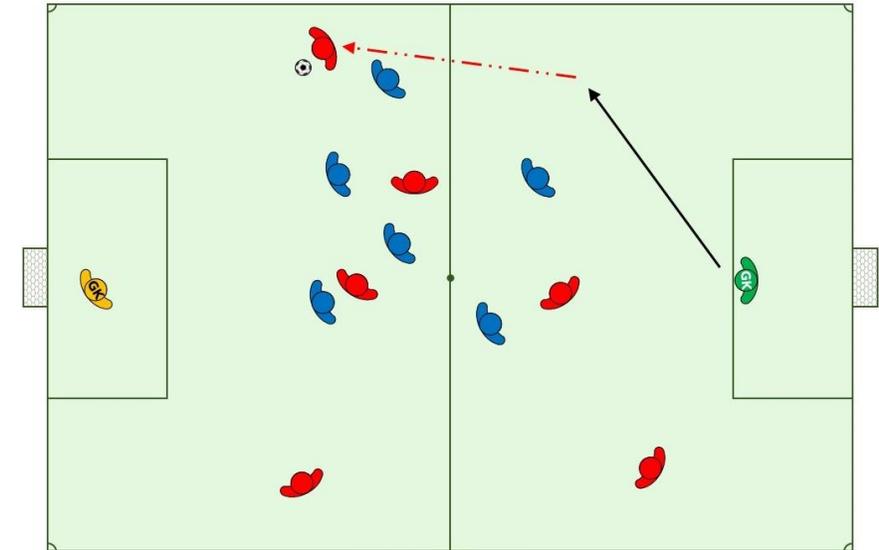
**INTENTION** The idea here is to encourage quick combination play - using 1 touch. The fact they can't play with 2 or 3, means they must scan effectively, and teammates must support. Players can play with more than 1 touch - using 4 or more, this might allow dribbles but will also highlight moments where they could have combined with 1 touch.

**LINK TO 11v11** This game works well when looking at combination play and movement, especially when trying to create or score, where time / space is limited.

**OBSERVATION** The constraint of 1 touch or 4 or more, means there is very little need for command or instructional coaching. As players miss the opportunity to play with 1 touch, do they self correct and improve with more exposure to the game?

**PROGRESSIONS** I like to use this constraint in a whole-part-whole / play-practice-play approach. This allows for players to experience the constraint, then see if they can recognise moments to combine - without the restriction.

Alternatively, teams could be encouraged to use a pause to search for solutions.

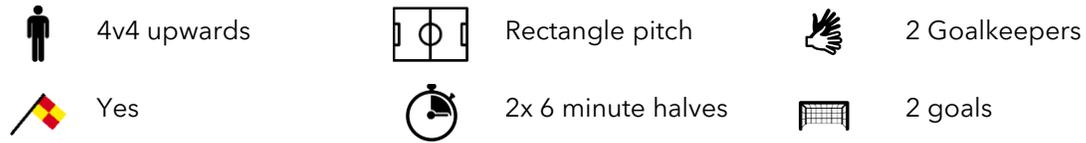


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*This game was inspired by Ben Bartlett @benbarts*

# NO BACKWARDS PASS

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** In this game a regular 2 goal pitch is used, the constraint on the game is that once your team is in possession, they can not pass the ball backwards.

**INTENTION** This constraint will encourage forward play; passing, running and individual possession

**LINK TO 11v11**

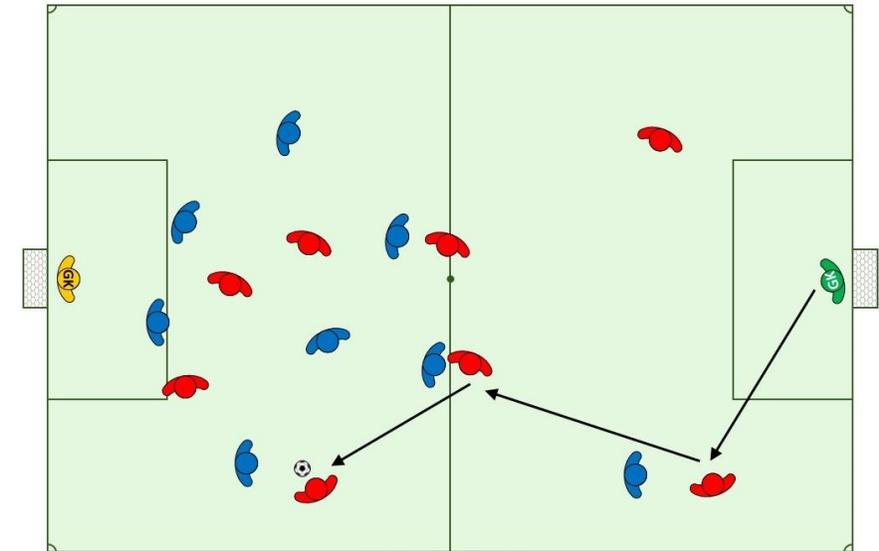
- Encouraging inventive and creative play to score
- Encouraging players to take risks with forward passes and dribbles

**OBSERVATION** For this game look out for the following;

- The players ability to play as an individual when needed and combine effectively (**outplay**)
- In possession the dispersal of the players to make the pitch wide and long. Do they have a structure to play out and forward?
- The support ahead of the ball for the player in possession

**PROGRESSIONS** Some progressions for this game could include;

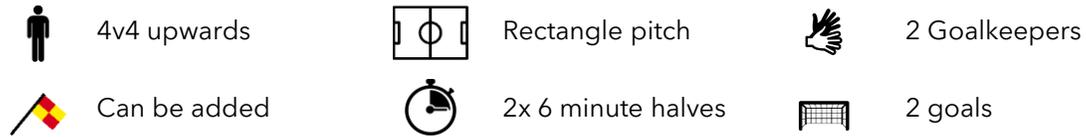
- If the group are finding it too difficult allow 1 backwards pass per possession
- Remove the condition, can the players recognise when to play positively and when to recycle. (**Relate**)



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# ONE TWO TO SCORE

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** This is one of my favourites! The constraint here is you must perform a one-two / wall pass to score.

**INTENTION** In my eyes there are two types of one-two;

- To tease (**image 1**); to draw the opposition out of position to allow a forward pass or movement from a teammate
- The classic "wall-pass" to play **around** and eliminate the defender (**image 2**).

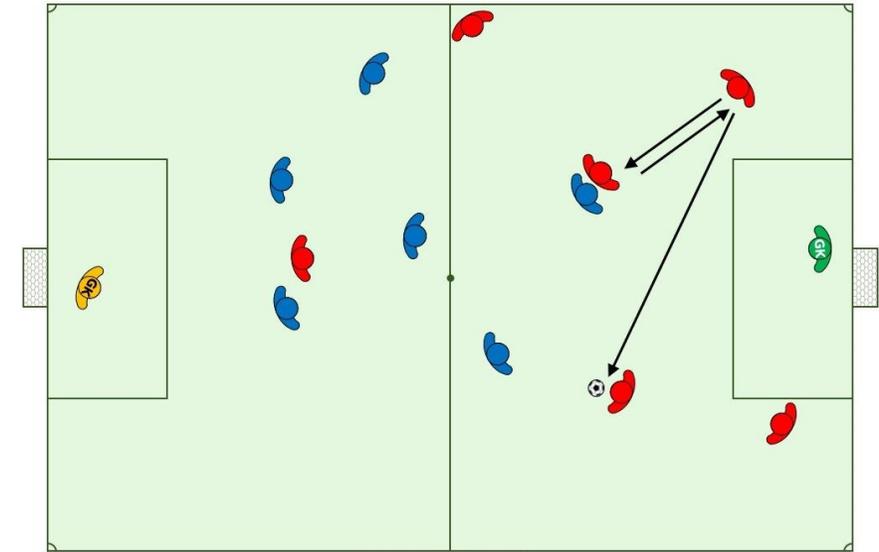
**LINK TO 11v11** This links to combination play or triggers for players to move / rotate.

**OBSERVATION**

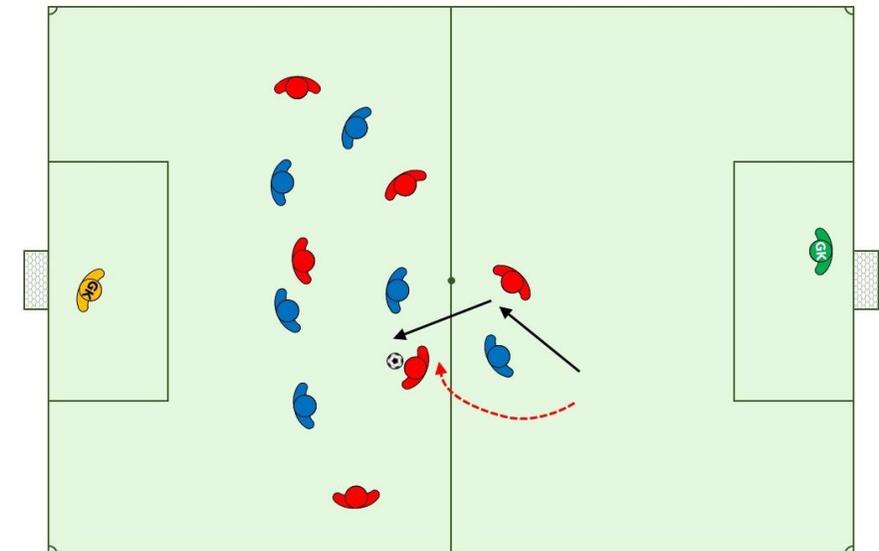
- Recognising when to change the tempo. (Slow - fast)
- Eliminating the opposition with clever combination play (**through**)
- Lots of forward runs / support to break lines
- In terms of technical aspects you could look at when and how players retain, run and release the ball

**PROGRESSIONS** Progressions for this one could include;

- Split the pitch into thirds, can the team perform the one-two in the final third?
- Remove '**must**' and reward a goal scored after a one-two, with double or treble points!



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# 2v2 COMBINE TO SCORE

## Combination & Movement



2v2 + 4



Small / tight pitch



Can be added



No



First to 2 goals wins



2 target goals or larger goals with GKs

### ORGANISATION

A great game for quick and clever combination play. This practice uses a tight 2 goal pitch, with a 2v2 or 3v3 with 'bounce' players either side of a goal. The bounce players play using 1 touch. Goals must be scored with 1 touch inside the scoring zone - you don't have to use the 'bounce' players, you can combine with your partner.

### INTENTION

The pair on the pitch must work together to combine and score within the end zone, can use the outside players if needed.

### LINK TO 11v11

Forward passes and forward runs

### OBSERVATION

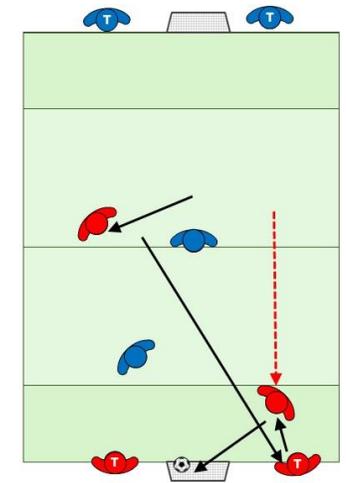
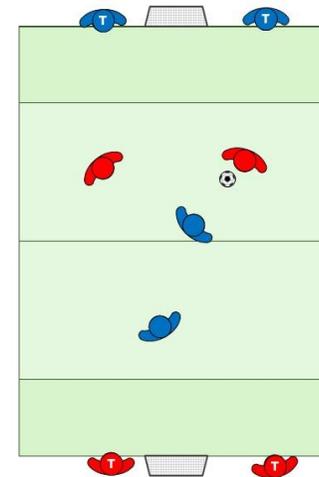
This game will give the players lots of repetition of;

- Clever and quick combination play with limited touches
- Eliminating the opposition by playing **through, around** or **over**
- Lots of forward runs to support the attack or break lines
- Finishing with variety (inside, outside, headed, volley...etc.)

### PROGRESSIONS

To add variety the bounce players could play from one end to the other and miss out the midfield, be aware this might lead to more direct play and less combination, but it can be good for recognition of movements away from the ball.

You can play a larger version of this practice, using Goalkeepers and larger goals.

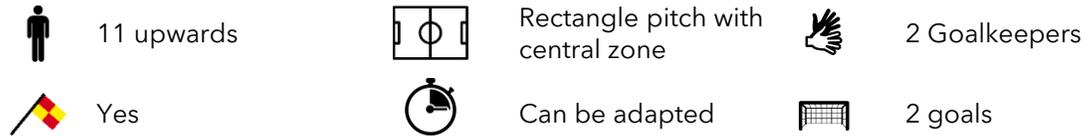


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# MIDFIELD OVERLOAD

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** A 2 goal pitch, with a central zone 3-5m wide. The game starts with a ball into the Pink player (CM) from the coach. This players starts an attack with a pass or dribble to immediately create a 3v2 scenario.

**INTENTION** The Midfielder's (Pink) role is to create an attacking overload 3v2 scenario to assist the 2 Strikers. This game can be good for transition (defence to attack) when the Defenders dispossess the attackers and counter.

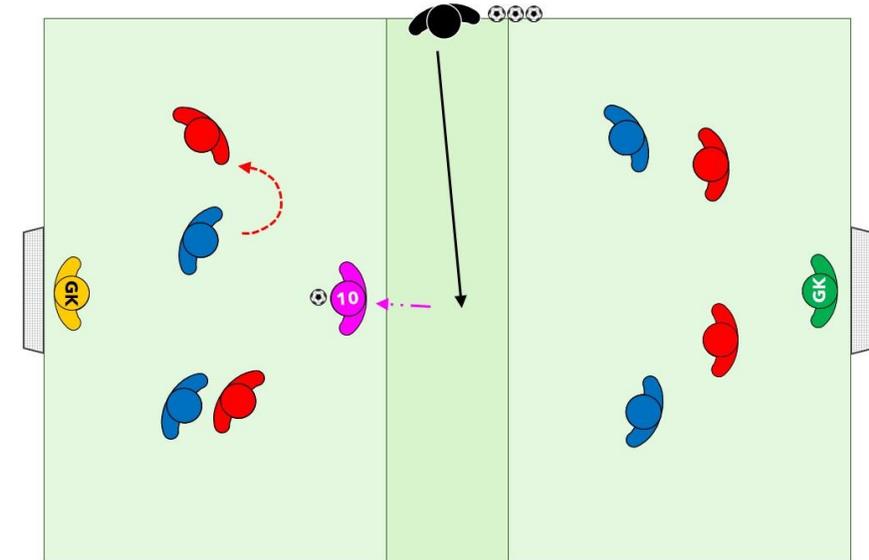
**LINK TO 11v11** This game can replicate lots of 3v2 scenarios, touching on when to pass, dribble or shoot.

**OBSERVATION** This game allows for repetition of attacking and finishing with numerical superiority (overload).

For the Defenders there is lots of emergency defending; blocks, tackles...etc to prevent efforts on goal. If the Defenders win possession they can counter by playing into the attackers in the opposite half.

**PROGRESSIONS** At the start only the Pink player can play in both halves, to progress, on the turnover you could allow the Defender to drive into the opposite half to create a 4v2.

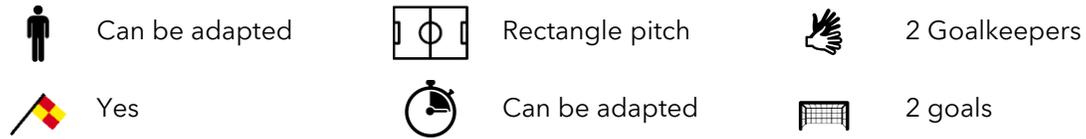
Another way to alter the practice is to play a 1v1 in the central zone, removing the overload. (**Realism**)



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# IMPROVING MIDFIELD RELATIONSHIPS

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** A regular 2 goal pitch suitable for the age and stage of your players. The diagram on the right shows an example for players who play the 11v11 game, but it could be adapted for younger ages and different formats. This is a normal game, except that the Midfield two (Yellow) always play for the team in possession. This creates a constant attacking overload, for more success and lots of repetition of Midfielders receiving the ball and making decisions.

**INTENTION** This game creates lots of repetition for the Midfielders, both starting the attack and supplying the final ball.

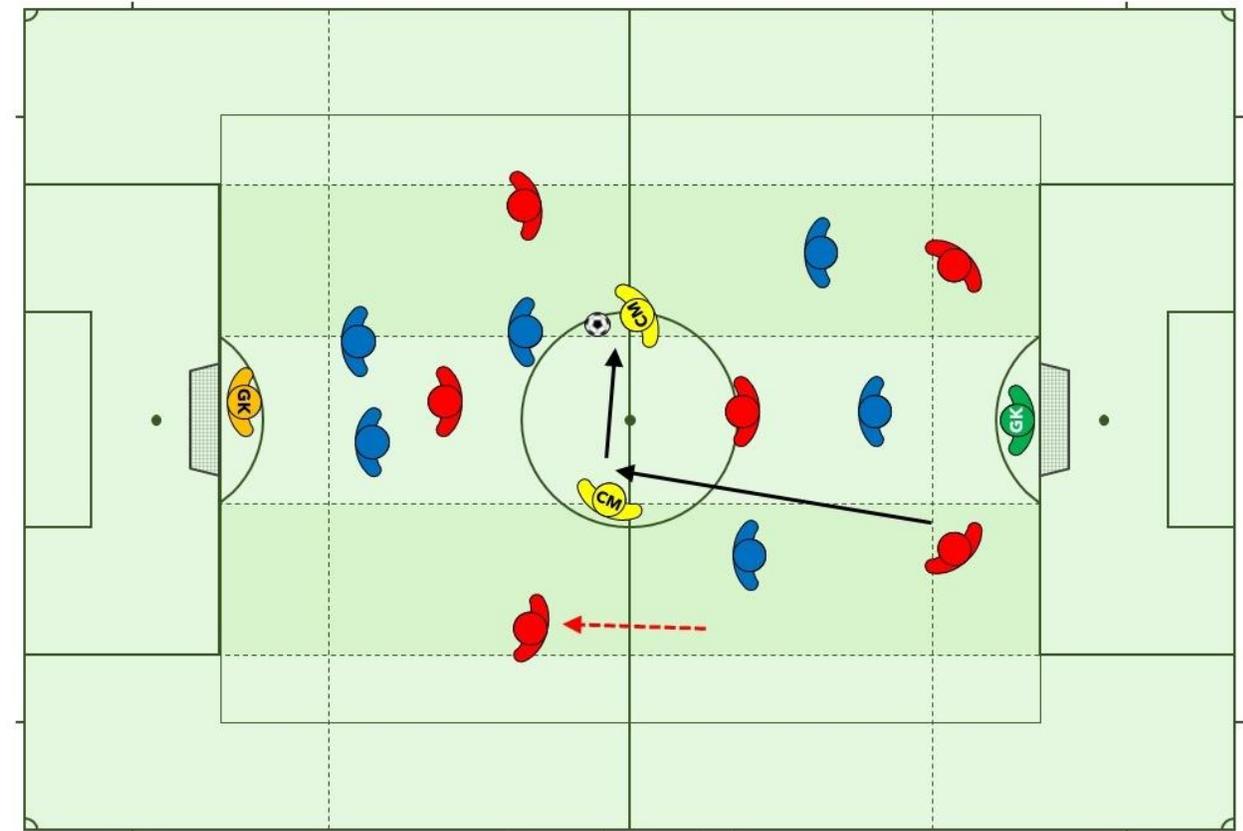
**LINK TO 11v11** For the team in possession;

- The distances and relationship between the Midfielders in Yellow.
- When do the Midfielders retain possession and when do they risk progression? Play **over, around** or **through**
- Intent and execution of killer passes and assists

For the team defending, lots of repetition of defending outnumbered.

**OBSERVATION** How do the team in possession utilise the overload?

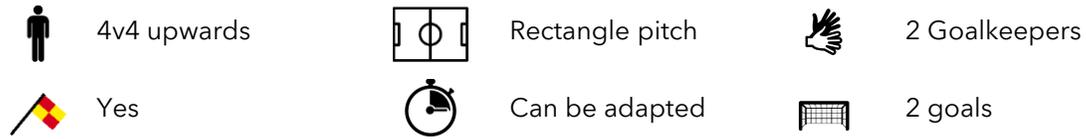
**PROGRESSIONS** **Restrict** the Yellows...They **'must'** combine before the team can score.  
**Reward** the Yellows...if they combine the goal is worth double.



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# 1 TOUCH ASSIST

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** This game takes place on a pitch with 2 goals suitable for the age / stage of the players. With more able players you might want to make this pitch tighter, to restrict the space and time available. A twist on a classic, teams must score using a 1 touch assist. The finish is not restricted in any way.

**INTENTION** To encourage clever and quick combination play, as well as the principle of a 'forward pass and a forward run' to score.

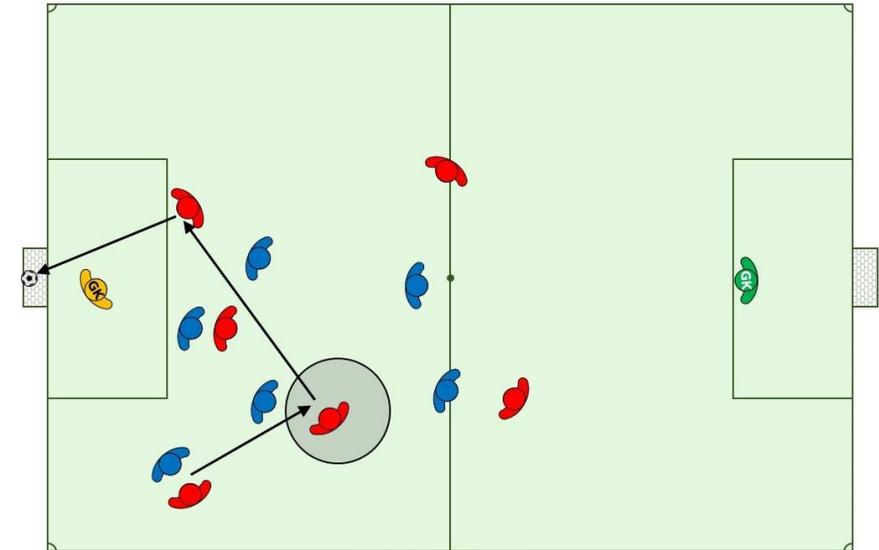
**LINK TO 11v11** Combination play in the final third and/or the use of central striker as 'target' player.

**OBSERVATION** Things to look out for in this game might include;

- This is a great game for combination play; One-two's, third man runs, overlaps / underlaps ...etc.
- Support play is vital in this one (**4xB's**).
- Recognising the moment to change the tempo; are we looking to score or are we looking to keep possession?

**PROGRESSIONS** This game is already quite challenging, but to increase the difficulty you could;

- Add 1 touch finish, so the move is 1 touch assist and 1 touch finish, this is really tough!
- Add an area where the assist comes from E.g. (Zone 14, Wide areas...etc.)



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# THE PLAYMAKER

## Combination & Movement



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

**ORGANISATION** I find players really enjoy this one! A normal 2 goal game, with each team assigning a 'playmaker'. The playmaker must be involved in the possession for a goal to count.

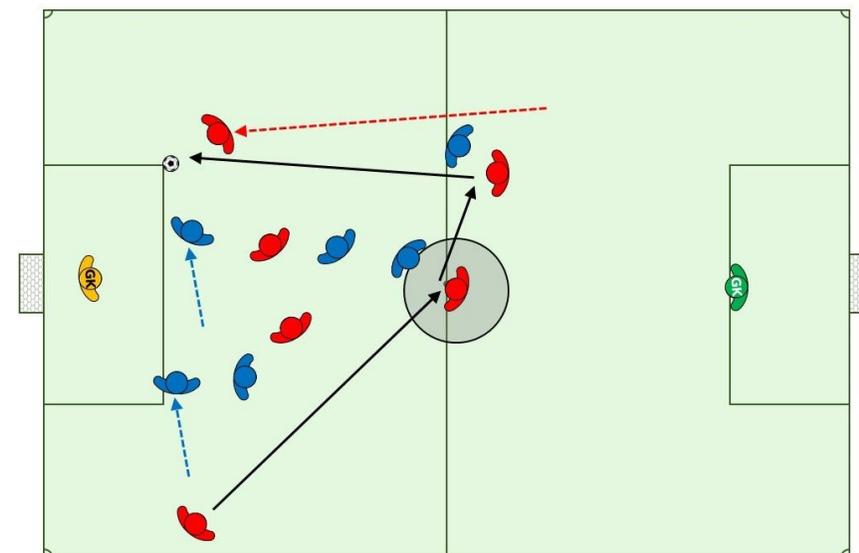
**INTENTION** For the goal to count the 'playmaker' must be involved in the move. This can be interpreted in a number of different ways! For example, the Goalkeeper could be the playmaker and start attacks like Ederson, it could be a ball playing Central Defender, a dribbler, a passer...the options are endless!

**LINK TO 11v11** The principle here is that anyone can start an attack and be a 'playmaker' - its not just the #10 or a 'creative' player.

**OBSERVATION** Observations to look out for;

- How do the team use the playmaker?
- How does the playmaker play - simple and safe or right in the middle of the game?
- How do the opposition stop the playmaker?

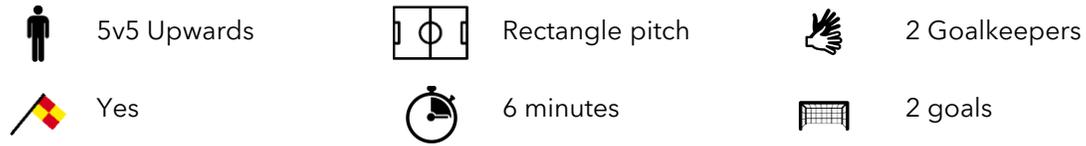
**PROGRESSIONS** This game can be played in 2 different versions. One where everyone knows who the two playmakers are, but its quite fun to play the 'secret playmaker' and see if the opposition can work out who the danger man is!



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# COUNTER ATTACK WITH LAZY WINGERS

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** This template can be used to highlight or develop a number of different themes. In the diagram, the Red team defend with 2x players less so the game is 6v4 (not including goalkeepers). The Blue team are looking to score - utilising their overload and the Reds are looking to defend outnumbered, regain possession and counter-attack using their wingers who are parked on the halfway line. If the Reds counter successfully, the roles flip over - so now the Blues defend with 4 and the Reds start in possession.

**INTENTION** For the defending team to regain possession and counter. For the team in possession, to break down a block and score.

**LINK TO 11v11 / OBSERVATION** For the defending 4 (**Reds**);

- How do the players strategize to defend in a 4v6 situation?
- Who leads this plan and how do they gauge success?

For the 'Lazy Wingers'

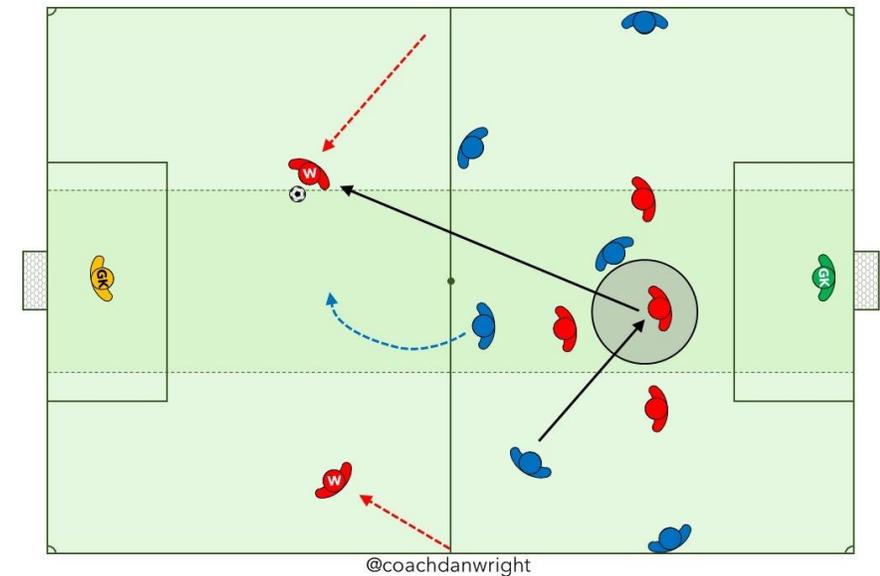
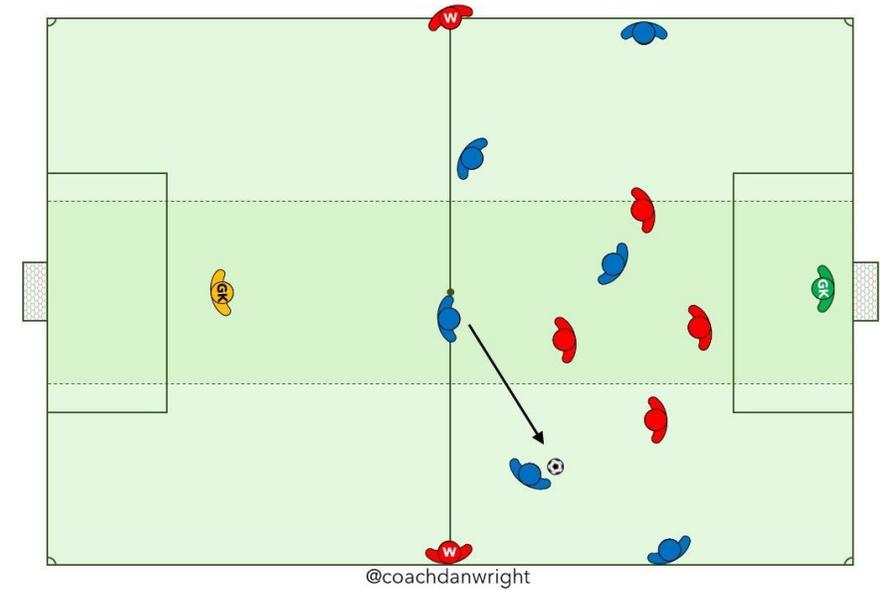
- Staying in the game (onside, alert...etc.) for the **through** ball
- Ability to finish under pressure

For the attacking team (**Blues**);

- Breaking down the deep block
- Do they play **around** or **through**? **Over** might be difficult

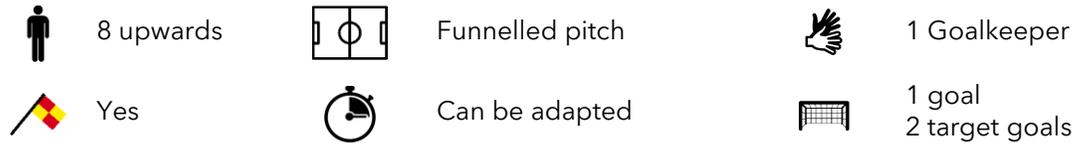
**PROGRESSIONS** A few variations on this practice could be:

- This game can also work with each team having 5 attempts each, keeping score.
- Allow the defenders to track and recover, adding **realism**. (image 2)



# 3v3 MIDFIELD JOIN THE ATTACK

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** In this practice, the area is split up into 2 main sections. Near the goal there is a Goalkeeper and a Defender (Pink) playing up against a Striker (Yellow). In the area at the top of the practice there are a group of Midfielders playing a 3v3 – you can alter these numbers to suit your team's shape or the players you have available for the session. If the Blue team regains – they play out into the target goals, they would then start in possession and the Reds would defend.

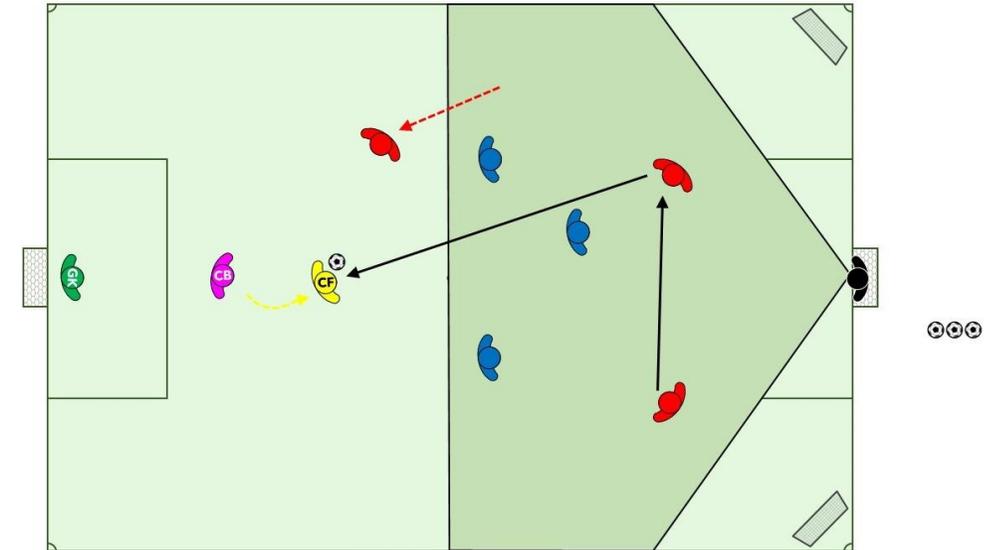
**INTENTION** The Red and Blues look to play into the Striker (Yellow) who plays in a 1v1 or 2v1- with supporting player, ultimately looking to finish in the large goal.

**LINK TO 11v11** The link here is finishing – under pressure and from a variety of different passes. As well as movement to out-think the Defender to score!

**OBSERVATION** In possession Midfielders must develop recognition of what is around them and the moment to play forwards. For the Striker (Yellow) he / she has decide whether to **outplay** the Defender with clever movement, pace or strength.

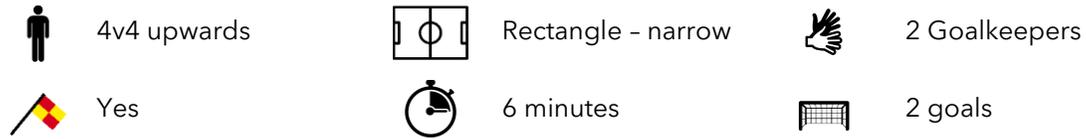
**PROGRESSIONS** Some ideas for progressions could include;

- Don't allow a supporting run, so just a 1v1 to goal. (**Restrict**)
- Allow a Midfielder runner to form a 2v1.
- Allow the Midfielder to make a tracking run to make a 2v2 in the end zone. (**Realism**).
- You can play around with who can join – for example to focus on a third man run, the player who passes in can't join, this challenges his teammate to recognise and anticipate the moment to join.



# COUNTER ATTACK GAME

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** A 2 goal pitch, to encourage the principle of attacking quickly this works best on a long thin pitch, as per the diagram. Here we will see lots of forward passes and transitional moments.

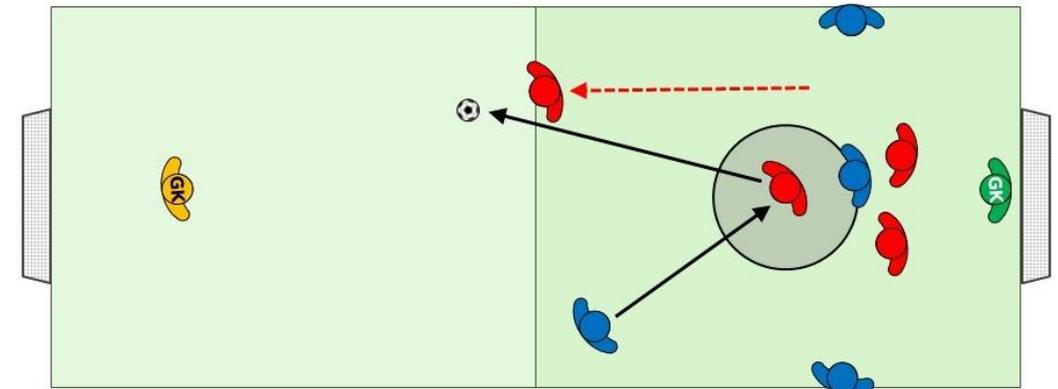
**INTENTION** By removing the width, the opportunity is to play forwards quickly.

**LINK TO 11v11** Regain and counter

**OBSERVATION** Things to watch out for on this game;

- The 'early decision' - Run or release?
- The variety of forward pass, to feet? To space?
- Away from the ball we will see forward running to support the attack.
- For the Goalkeepers distribution on the regain.

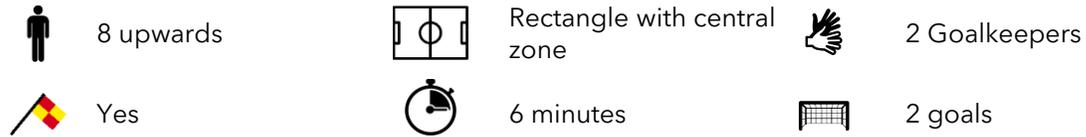
**PROGRESSIONS** You can add a timer in possession, E.g. must score within 8 seconds or number of passes to encourage quick play. (**Restrict**)



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# 3 TEAM TRANSITION GAME

## Combination & Movement



**ORGANISATION** This game works with 3 equal teams on a 2-goal pitch, with a central 'free' zone across the centre. This game works best with Goalkeepers, as they improve the quality of the finish, but more importantly they allow quick attacks once they've gained possession. To start the coach feeds the ball into Blues who attack the Yellows. If the Blues score they turn, receive a new ball and attack the Reds at the opposite end. If they are unsuccessful or the ball turns over the Yellows would carry the ball into the opposite half and take on the Reds (transition to attack).

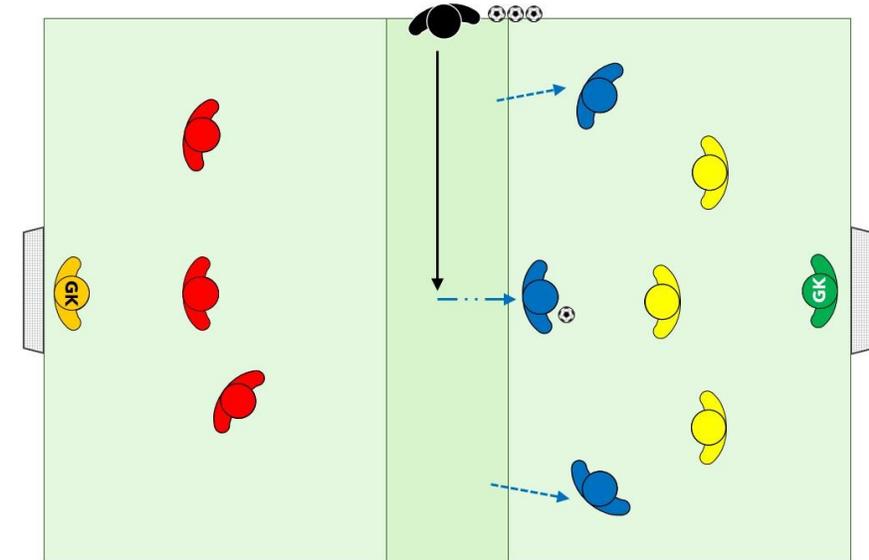
**INTENTION** Challenge players understanding with constant changing pictures for example; IP OOP, supporting the attack, defending 1v1, defending as unit...etc.

**LINK TO 11v11** Constant reaction to transition and in / out of balance moments.

**OBSERVATION** This game is all about transition; attack to defence and defence to attack. In possession look for the players understanding of changing the tempo; are they building, retaining or creating?

**PROGRESSIONS** As the Blues attack, the Yellows defend, if the ball is turned over you can allow the Blues to counter press to regain immediately and stop the Yellows reaching the safe zone. (**Realism**)

You can play this game with a 'x' attempts rather than turning over the attackers on each outcome, so the same team would attack for a set of 5 for example.



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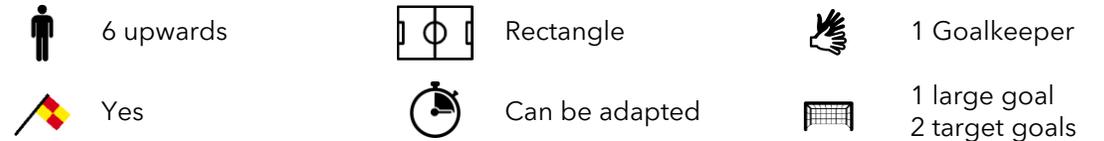
# KEY PASS

## Finishing

**ORGANISATION** A wave style practice, with attackers working towards the large goal and the Defenders looking to regain and score in either target goal on the halfway line. The 2 attackers (Red) play into attacking Midfielders (Yellows) and run forward, before attacking the Defenders (Blue). More pairs could be added for larger groups.

**INTENTION** Exploring different ways to break lines - with forward passes and runs.

**LINK TO 11v11** Recreating assists and key passes in the final third.



**OBSERVATION** For the **Yellows**;

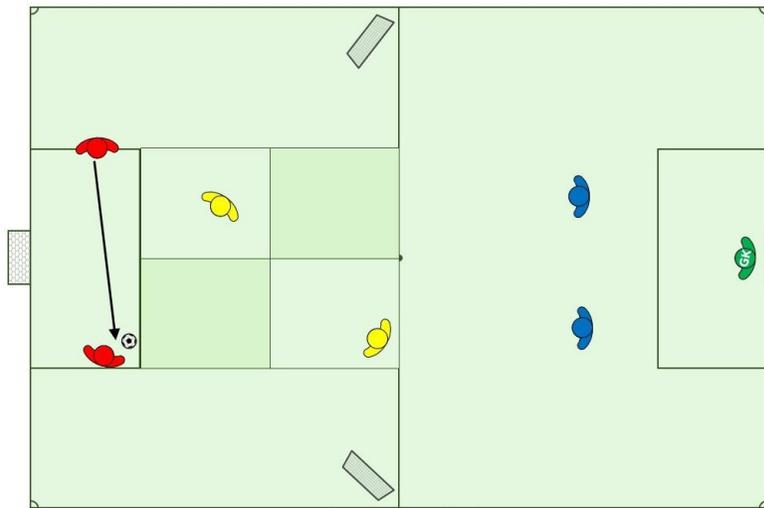
- Repetition of combining to assist (**over, around or through**)
- Playing on different lines and awareness of space

The **Reds** will get repetition of;

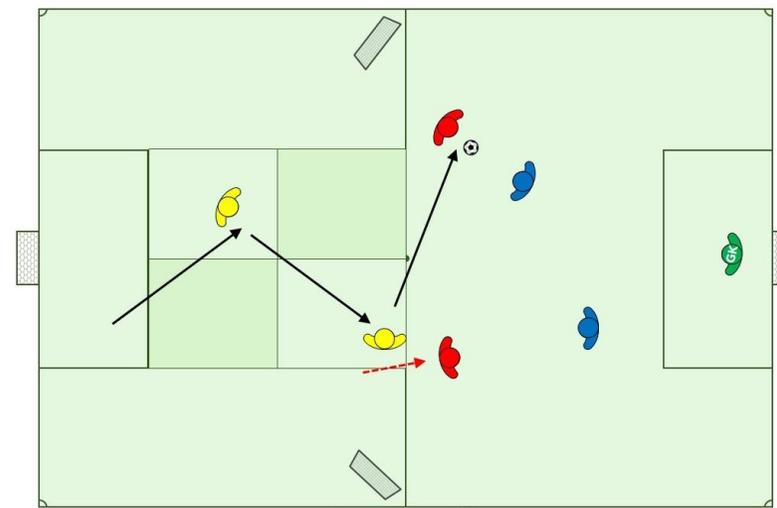
- Passing forwards and forward runs
- Variety of runs (overlaps, through, blindside..etc)

The **Blues** can work on;

- Defending in a pair
- Regain and counter



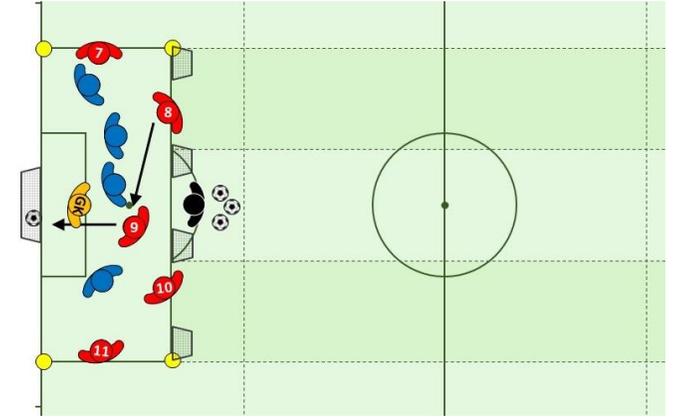
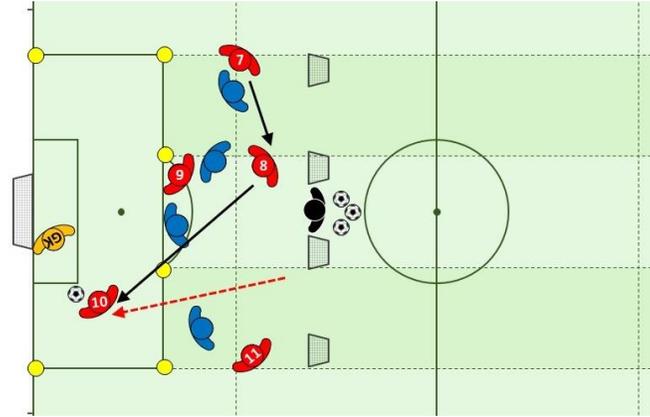
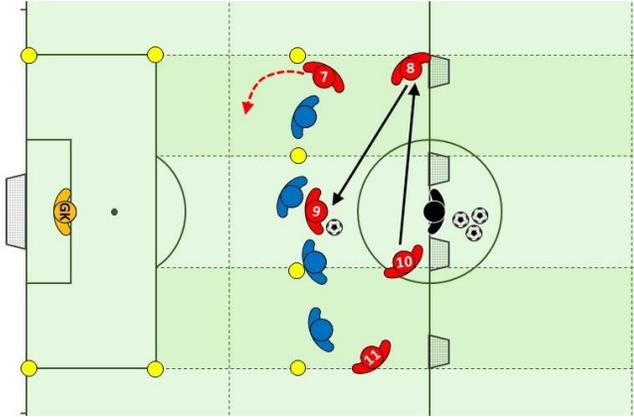
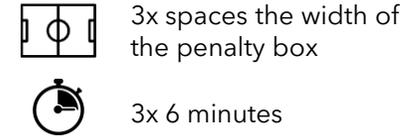
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# OVER, AROUND OR THROUGH ?

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** This game takes place in three different areas - each one the width of the penalty box, with one team attacking (Red) and one team defending (Blue). This game is played in 3 sets each lasting 6 minutes. In each set the Defenders protect a different space - getting closer and closer to their goal. The attackers must find different ways to get success, based on the oppositions approach. You could allow the Defenders to recover or track runners as a progression.

**Image 1:** The Defenders start high so there could be space **behind**.

**Image 2:** Here the Defenders defend on the edge of their box, so there might be space to play **through** or **around**, **over** would have to be very clever!

**Image 3:** in this scenario the Defenders are very deep and are protecting the goal. This might be the hardest challenge!

**INTENTION** To challenge the attackers game intelligence essentially asking them to make decisions of when to play **over**, **around** or **through** the opposition.

**LINK TO 11v11** Defenders are focusing on 'defending as a unit' as well as defending different distances from their goal.

The attacking group must find a way to get success, being attuned to the opposition and the space available.

**OBSERVATION** There are many different ways to deliver this practice in terms of interventions and coach communication - none are right or wrong!

You could choose to nudge the players towards the answer, not tell them at all or even give the answer and see if they can put it into action.

# 1 GOAL AND OFF

## Finishing

- |  |               |   |                 |   |               |
|--|---------------|---|-----------------|---|---------------|
|  | 3 equal teams |  | Rectangle pitch |  | 2 Goalkeepers |
|  | Yes           |  | Can be adapted  |  | 2 goals       |

**ORGANISATION** This one is a players favourite. A good game if you are struggling for space, which tends to get very competitive! A 2 goal pitch with 3 teams, one of which is waiting to come on (Blues).

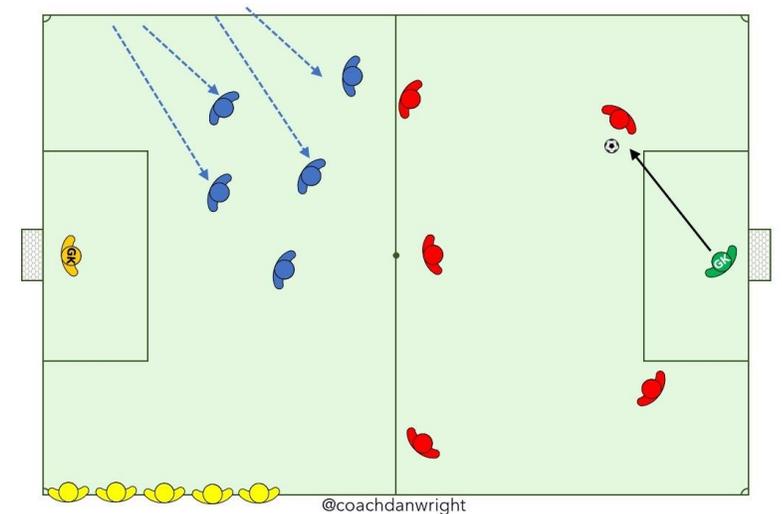
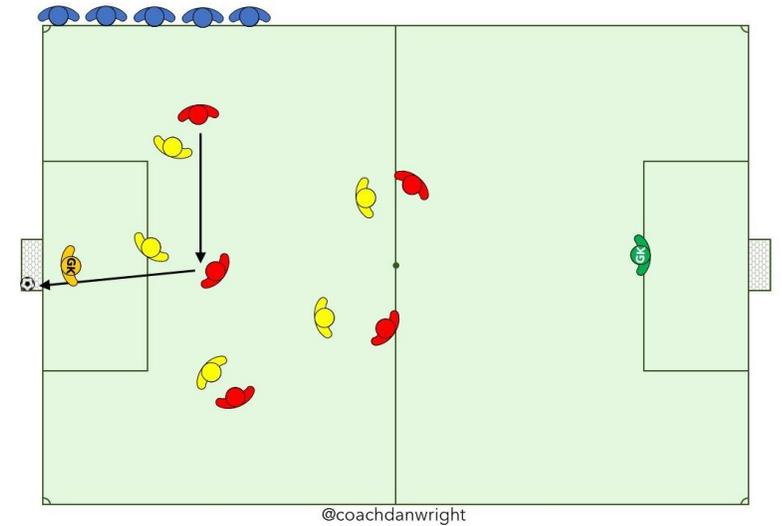
The team that scores first wins the game 1-0 and the next opponent enters the field.

**INTENTION** Finishing under pressure and exploring strategies to win.

**OBSERVATION** In this game you might see;

- Strategies to win!
- Clinical finishes in a game context
- Playing under pressure

**PROGRESSIONS** As per the diagram, the team that score keeps possession and restarts from their Goalkeeper. The team entering the pitch (Blues) have to press quickly to stop the Reds scoring.



# TARGET MAN

## Finishing



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

**ORGANISATION** A normal 2 goal pitch, split in half using cones or flat markers. In this game each team must always keep 1x player in the opposition half (The Target Man). The team in possession must play into their 'Target Man' before they can score.

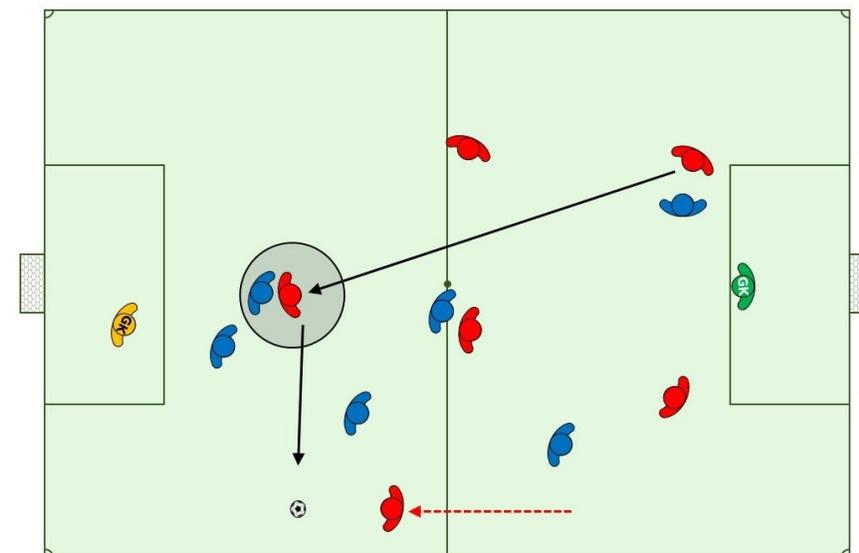
**INTENTION** This practice allows for a lot of repetition of playing into a central Striker, who can develop his/her hold up play. For the others, supporting the attack (**behind, beside or beyond?**)

**LINK TO 11V11** Playing with a single Striker / back to goal skills.  
Pass forward and run forward.

**OBSERVATION** Observations for this game include;

- How does the group decide, who the 'Target Man' is?
- Is there a strategy to use the 'Target Man' ? A style of play?
- There will be lots of defending outnumbered, as the teams are forced to leave one player up
- This may lead to counter attacks on the regain - pass, run with the ball...etc.

**PROGRESSIONS** You can play this game with each team having a fixed 'Target Man' that has to play in the opposition half, or alternatively you can rotate this player within the flow of the game (**relate**). Add a consequence if this condition is broken, I like to use a penalty!



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# FOX IN THE BOX

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** A fun game which is great for improving finishing, players will need to be instinctive and must be able to adapt their ideas quickly. This practice takes place in and around the penalty box, two teams play inside (Blues and Reds) with neutral players on the outside. If the defending team wins possession they must play back to the 'top' players (Yellow). This example works with 4x pairs - but it can be adapted to suit most numbers (see progressions).

**INTENTION** This game is tight and frantic, players need to perceive and execute quickly to be successful. First team to score 2x goals wins, then rotate roles to change the outside team.

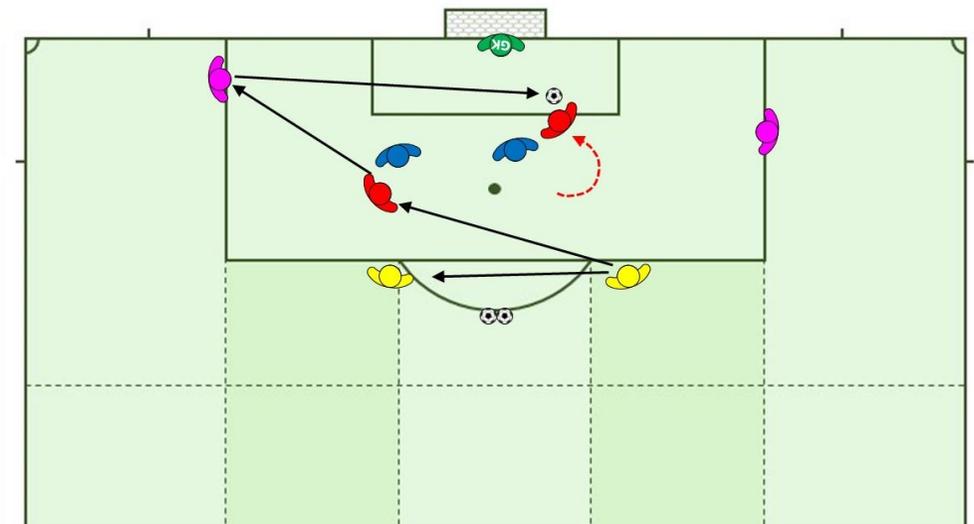
**LINK TO 11v11** The link here is finishing - under pressure and from a variety of different passes. As well as movement to out-think and **outplay** the defender to score!

**OBSERVATION** This game is about;

- Deciding early whether to shoot or assist.
- Utilising the outside support players to create an overload and an assist.
- Variety of finishes - wont always be what you want!

**PROGRESSIONS** You can adapt this practice in a number of ways to suit your group size;  
6x players = 2v2 inside, wide players and coach at the top  
8x players = as per the diagram, players work in pairs  
9x players = 3v3 inside, 2x wide players and 1x player at the top  
12x players = 3 teams of 4, 4v4 inside and 4x outside

**Restrict** the touches the outside players can take - I like 1 touch to keep it quick.



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# 3 TEAM FINISHING

## Finishing

-  4v4 +4
-  Two penalty boxes
-  2 Goalkeepers
-  Optional
-  First to 2 goals wins
-  2 goals

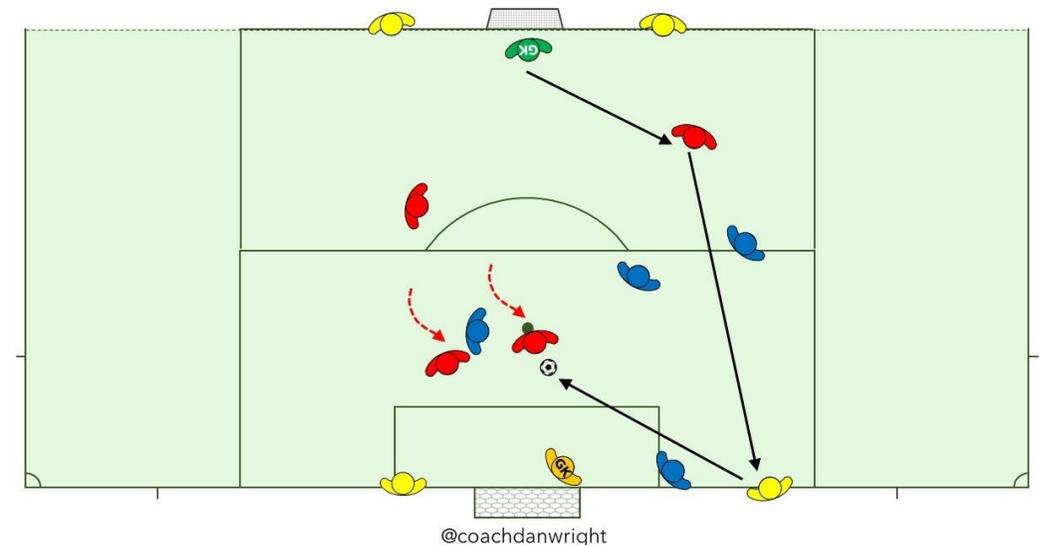
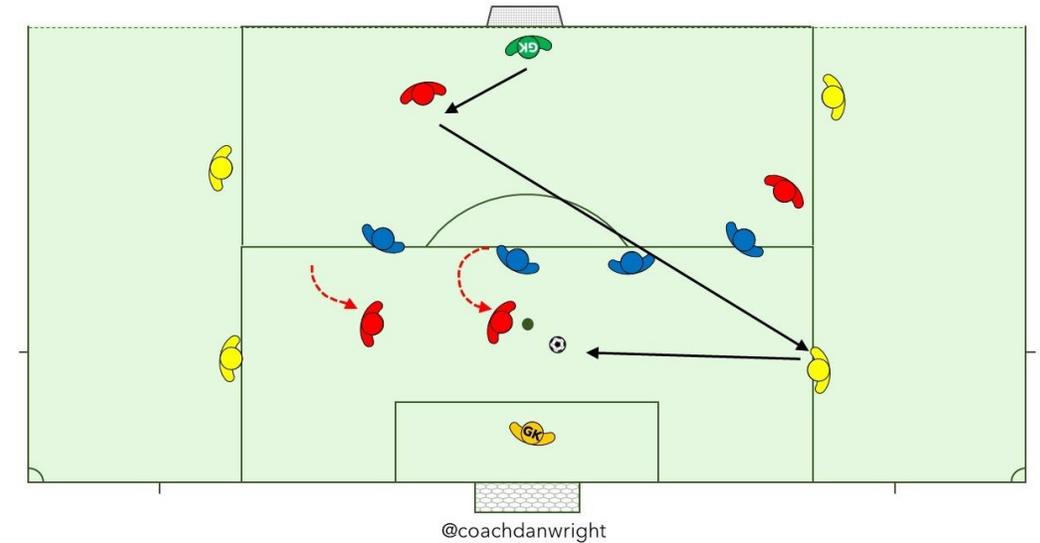
**ORGANISATION** This one is another players favourite. The group is split into 3 teams, in this example its Reds vs Blues, with the Yellow team on the outside as target or bounce players. These games can be structured in a number of ways, I really like first to 2 goals - its competitive and a little more realistic than a 1 goal and off. When 1x team wins, the losing team swap places with the outside team.

**INTENTION** The intention is to recreate goal scoring opportunities that look and feel like the game. This practice encourages a lot of close range and 1 touch finishes.

**LINK TO 11V11** This is all about creating and scoring goals.

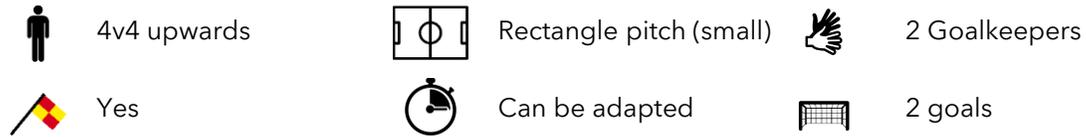
**OBSERVATION** This practice will be fast paced, with lots to take in. I would try to look at the movement of the players to evade the Defender and get that precious 'half a yard' to score. There are also lots of psychological and social returns here, how do the players cope with winning, losing, mistakes...etc?

**PROGRESSIONS** The two diagrams show how you could distribute the Yellows. In **image 1**, they could work on crossing or combinations, in **image 2** it allows the team in possession to pass forward and run forward with more ease but perhaps less **realism**.



# 1v1 KNOCKOUT

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** Two teams (Reds and Blues) are split either side of the pitch. The game starts with a 1v1 as per the diagram. When a goal is scored, the team that conceded replace their player and a new 1v1 game starts. The player that scores starts with a new ball from his Goalkeeper.

**INTENTION** To create lots of 1v1 opportunities close to the goal.

**LINK TO 11V11** The game highlights 1v1 skills or '**outplaying**', both in and out of possession. In possession the focus is beating your direct opponent to score. Out of possession, can you steal possession and counter?

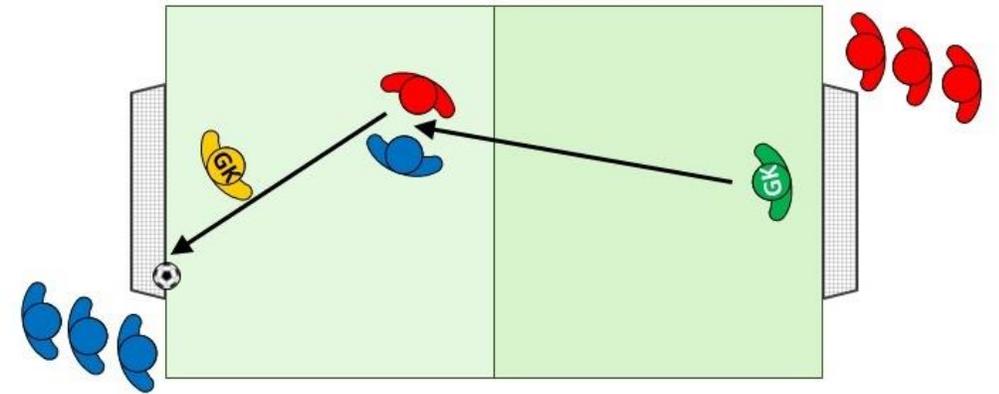
**OBSERVATION** This game will be high challenge for a number of reasons;

- Its 1v1 so there is no place to hide!
- Lots of eyes on the game, could increase the perceived pressure
- High consequence if you concede

**PROGRESSIONS** Add competition;

- Add up the teams scores (Red vs Blues)
- Play as an individual, so which player can win the most games

Be mindful of the queue and the work to rest ratio. This game should be fast paced where the rest is welcomed, with a larger group you could use 2 or more pitches.



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# TURN AND BURN

## Finishing



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

This is a regular two goal game with a rugby inspired twist! Once the goal is scored, the attacker is given a bonus ball and must turn and attack the opposite goal - the play quickly shifts direction and the Defenders have to respond quickly. The 'turn and burn' player can not pass he / she must go on a Messi-style mazy dribble.

### INTENTION

This is a fun game - but might encourage the players to take more risks in their dribbling. Out of possession it will test the Defenders reaction to mistakes.

### OBSERVATION

- How brave are the attackers in possession to take players on in a 1v1 situation?
- How do the Defenders respond? They've conceded but there is always a 'next job'!

### PROGRESSIONS

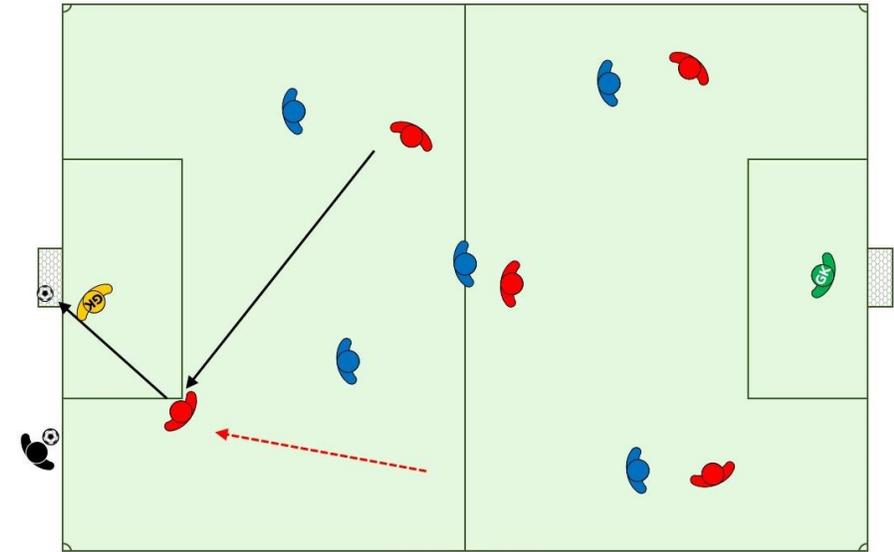
Allow the 'turn and burn' player to assist as well - perhaps adopting the scoring mechanism below;

Score going solo (no pass) = 5 goals

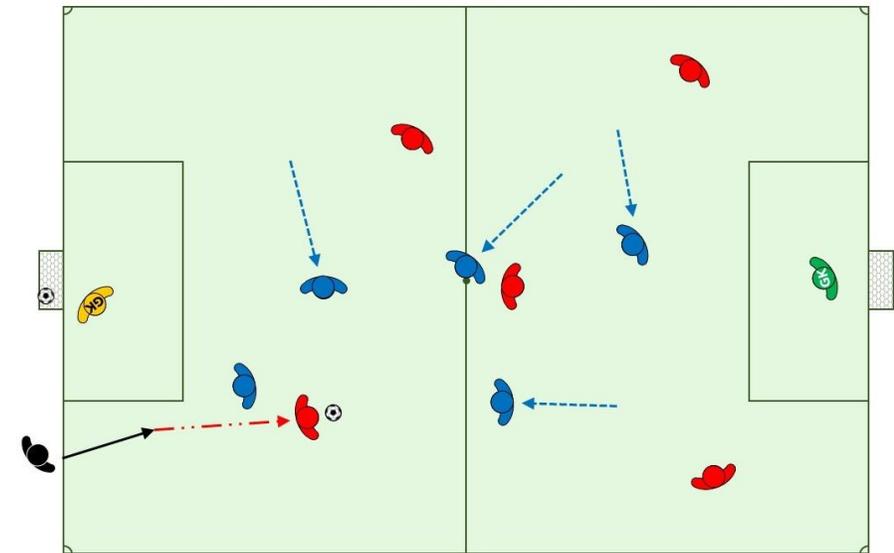
1 pass to score = 3 goals

More than 1 pass = 1 goal, normal rules

*This game was inspired by Russell 'Rusty' Earnshaw @russellearnshaw*



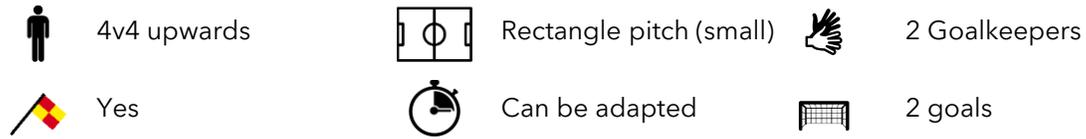
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# LONG RANGE SCREAMER

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** A regular game with the added incentive to shoot from distance. If a goal is scored in open play it counts as normal, but if you score from your own half its worth triple! (**Reward**)

**INTENTION** To encourage players to take more risk and shoot from range!

**LINK TO 11v11** Although this game is fun there can be some strong links to the 11v11 game;

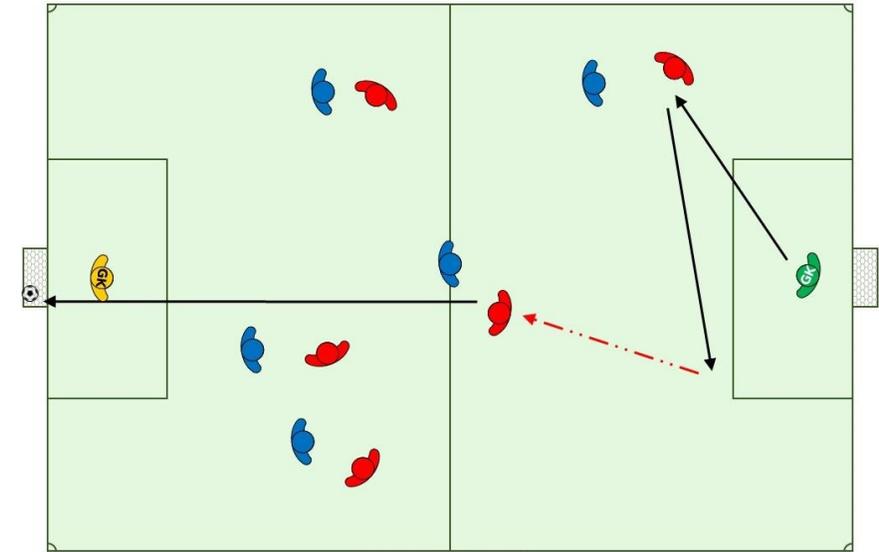
**Image 1:** If the opposition don't press, it allows the player to step out and shoot.

**Image 2:** Here the Blues are in a low block, which makes it difficult to play **over, around** or **through**. One solution could be to shoot from distance!

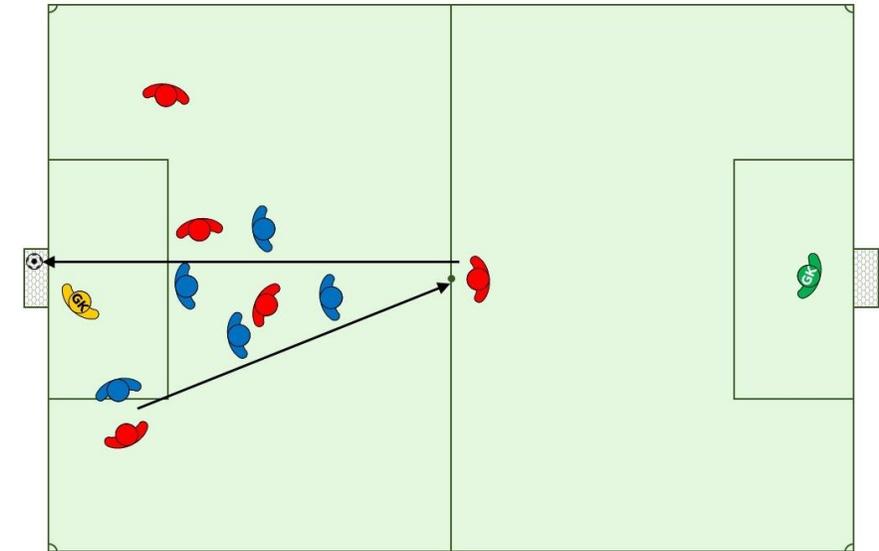
**OBSERVATION** This can be a good game to encourage players to take a little more risk and not worry about missing the target.

As the players grasp the concept, you can start to discuss when to shoot from range and when to try a clever pass to break a line and create a higher quality shooting opportunity.

**PROGRESSIONS** Alter the spaces, perhaps a thirds pitch where goals in the middle third are worth more than the final third.



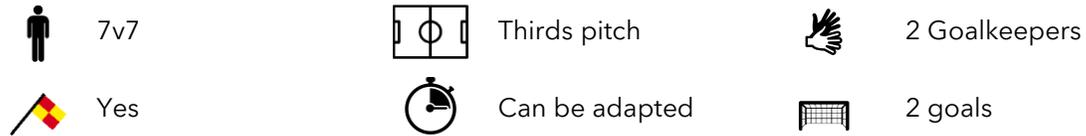
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# IN THE POCKET

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** This game works on a thirds pitch, but without any designated Midfielders. Each team is set up in a GK-4-0-2 formation. So the Strikers are outnumbered. The middle zone is used as a free space for the forwards to 'drop in' or play 'in the pocket' or 'between lines' - to start the Defenders can not follow (see progressions).

The Full backs / wide players can join the attack in the wide zones.

**INTENTION** For central Strikers to work on their receiving skills and movement as a pair.

**LINK TO 11v11** This could replicate a #9 and #10 in the final third. The phrase 'thinking opposites' works well here, so one short and one long, one right one left...etc.

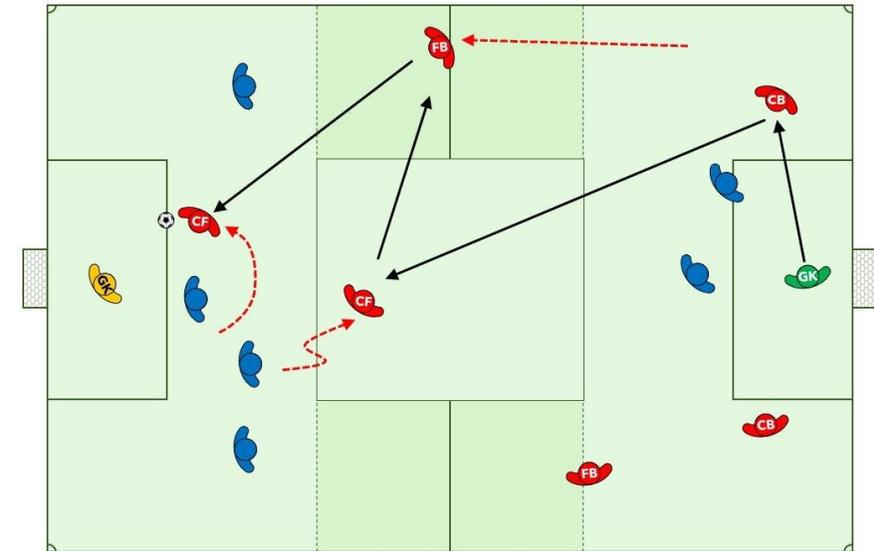
Also great for Full Backs to explore when to support (**beside, behind** or **beyond**) and when to stay connected with the back four.

**OBSERVATION**

- Young players sometimes find it hard to work together or to be aware of their teammates movements
- Are you making the run for yourself (to score) or an unselfish run to create space for your teammate?

**PROGRESSIONS**

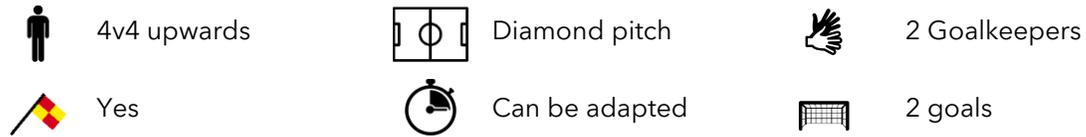
- **Reward** specific types of assists
- Allow Defenders to enter the middle zone on the strikers first touch (**realism**)
- For more success, **restrict** how many Defenders are active to create a 2v2



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# DIAMOND PITCH

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** A 2-goal pitch but marked out in a diamond. The change in shape not only makes the pitch narrower but also forces both defence and attack to focus on the action closer to goal. Instead of putting in crosses, the attacking team will have to use more **through** passes in central areas, which are congested.

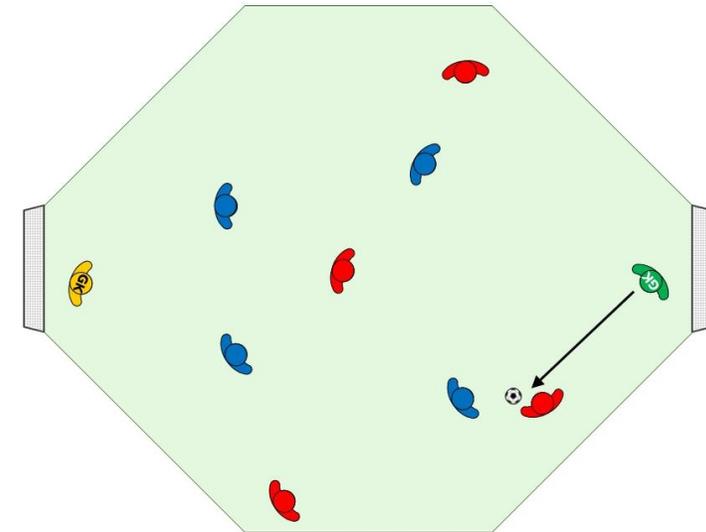
**INTENTION** The teams will learn to maintain possession by providing width in the middle third in order to create opportunities to penetrate in the final third of the pitch. (**Through / around**).

**LINK TO 11v11** Attacking through central areas - either as an individual or collective.

**OBSERVATION** The Goalkeeper and Defenders are looking to play into the midfield third quickly, as there could be limited space near their goal.

Maintain possession in the widest point of the pitch.

Creative and aggressive play in the final third, due to the lack of space. This might include reverse / diagonal passes, clever runs, dribbles and quick finishes.



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# TOP BINS!

## Finishing



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals - with hoops!

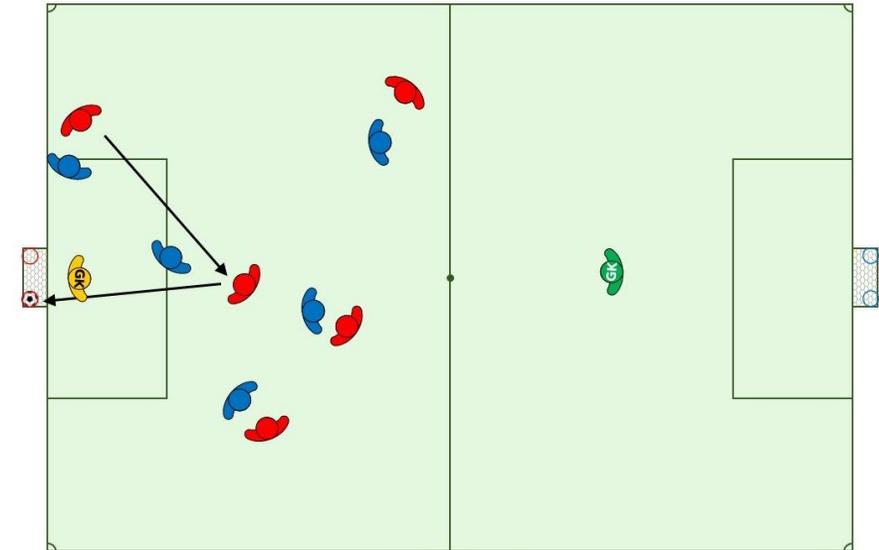
**ORGANISATION** This is a small sided game that the players designed, linked to finishing. They placed hoops into the top corners of the goal - to do this they weaved the net in and out of the hoop, but you could tie bibs to the crossbar to make it easier! The objective is to score a goal that goes through the hoop - this can be worth 'x' amount of goals or even just first to do it wins the game.

**INTENTION** For players to get repetition of finishing! This is quite difficult to do in an unopposed setting, so extremely difficult in a small sided game.

**LINK TO 11v11** To score a goal with a top corner finish.

**OBSERVATION** This game is fun but challenging - it is interesting to see who sticks to the task despite the low success rate.

**PROGRESSIONS** The players always chose top corners - hence the name, but you could move this down towards the bottom corner too. Perhaps, top corner is worth 5 goals, bottom corner is worth 3.



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# SECRET STRIKER

## Finishing



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

**ORGANISATION** In this game, each team nominates a 'Secret Striker' and lets the coach know - but not the opposition. The aim of the game is for the Secret Striker to score. You can adapt this practice to suit your players, some examples could be;

- If the Secret Striker scores its worth 2x goals
- If the Secret Striker scores your team wins!

**INTENTION** For each team to strategise to put their Secret Striker in the best position to score a goal.

**LINK TO 11v11** This is a good game to promote teamwork - this is a team effort, so each player will need to play their part to get success.

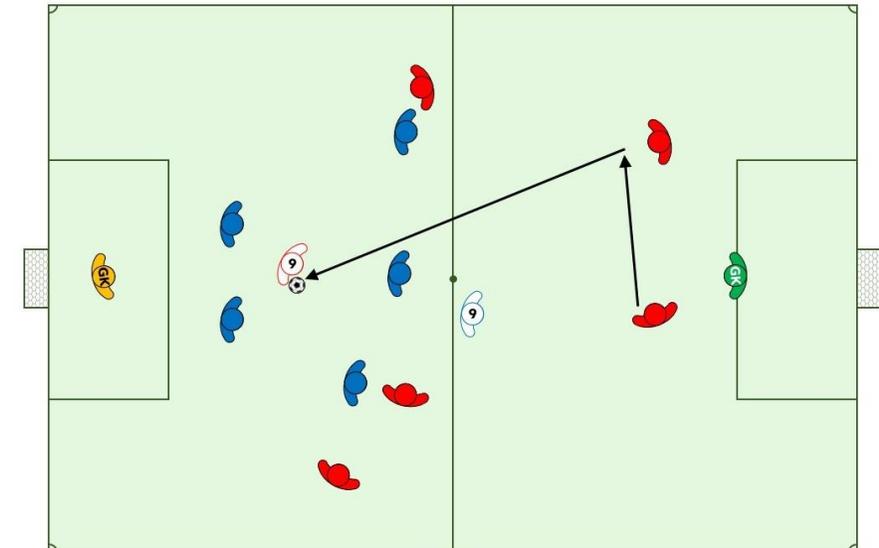
It puts a spotlight and pressure on the player who is tasked with scoring the goals.

**OBSERVATION** In this we can look at how the players interact and self-organise;

- Who do they select as the Secret Striker?
- Where does he / she play?
- How do they work collectively to put the Secret Striker in a moment to score?

**PROGRESSIONS** Variations could include;

- **Only** the Secret Striker can score, nobody else (**restrict**)
- Both teams know who the Striker is, this will increase the level of challenge and add more **realism** or **relate** to the game.



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# 3-2-1 FINISHING GAME

## Finishing



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

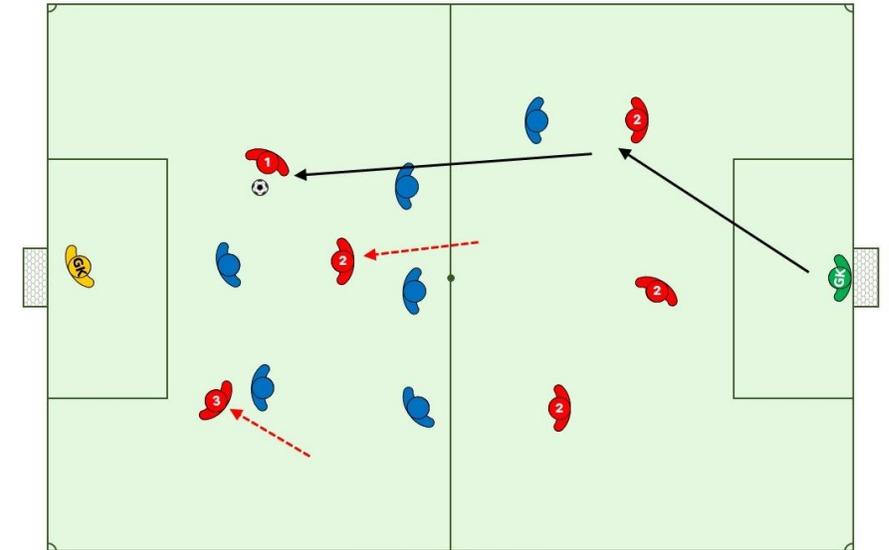
**ORGANISATION** A regular 2 goal game. The game starts 0-0, when a player scores his / her first goal is worth 3, the second is worth 2 and their third goal is worth 1.

**INTENTION** Players might self organise to get their highest value player in front of goal. In the diagram the player in possession could score, but it would only be worth 1 goal, if he / she squares it he / she has teammates who could score a 2-pointer or even a 3-pointer.

**LINK TO 11v11** This game is fun, but can also be linked to creating high quality chances.

**OBSERVATION** Do players make decisions for themselves or the team in front on goal?

**PROGRESSIONS** One variation, the goal is worth the sum of the parts. So two players are involved in the goal, and both are still on 3 points the goal would be worth 6. In the diagram the goal could be worth 6 if the player squares to his teammate (Red Defender 2 + Red Striker 1 + Red Striker 3 = 6).



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# WIDE BREAKOUT

## Finishing



5v4



Final third



No



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

A practice which focuses on a particular moment of the game, here the Blues are looking maintain possession they have a 5v4 scenario (*Diamond Support page 67*). The Reds are looking to regain possession and breakout.

### INTENTION

In possession (Blues) creating a diamond to POFTB and maintaining possession under pressure.

For the Reds, initially how do they press or force play to regain? Then counter via a breakout.

### LINK TO 11v11

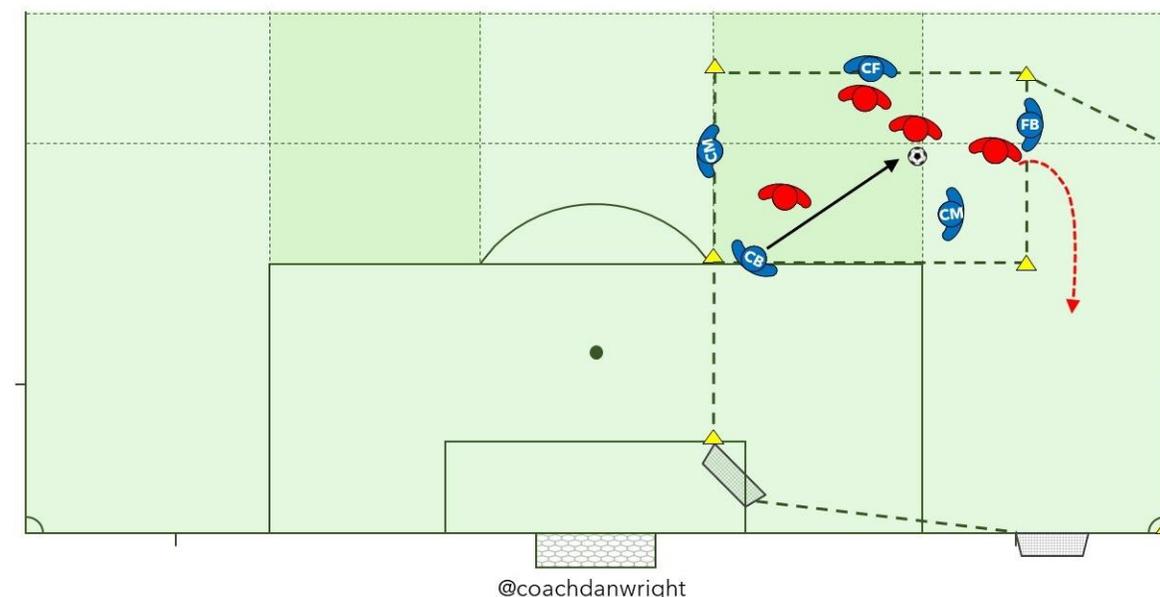
Counter attack in wide areas

### OBSERVATION

The vital moment will be upon regain, the early decision, is it best to pass or run. For the teammates who will support **beyond** and **beside**?

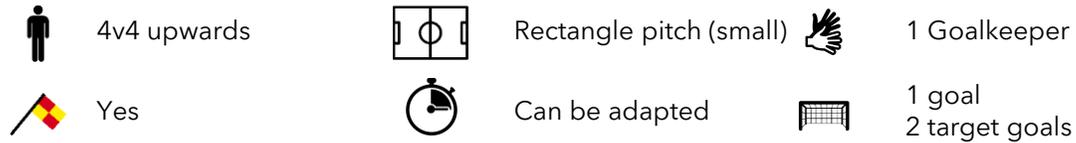
### PROGRESSIONS

Target goals could be added for Blues to increase **realism** and motivation for the Defenders.



# LEVEL UP 4v4

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** A really simple game, where the attacking team (Blue in the diagram) have 5 attempts to get from Level 1 - scoring a goal 4v1 to Level 4 scoring a goal 4v4.

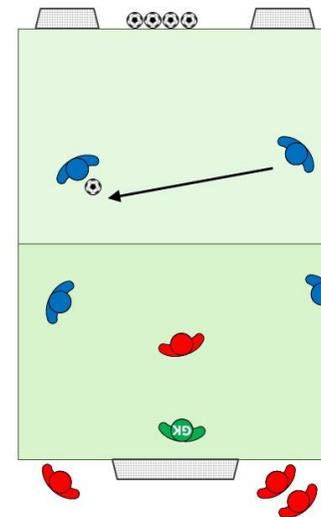
**INTENTION** To increase the difficulty of scoring (See page 41).

**LINK TO 11v11** Finishing in different scenarios - from easy to more difficult

**OBSERVATION** The key in this practice might be the assist, does the ball carrier choose the right moment to release the ball at the right weight so that the attacker can score?

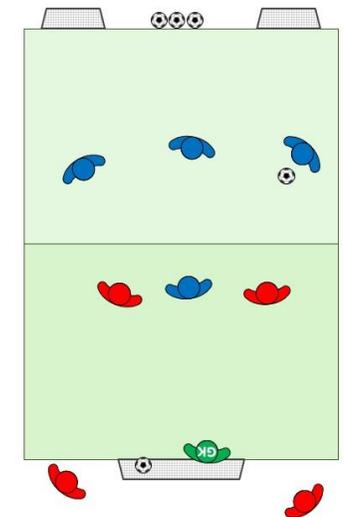
For the defending team, challenge individuals "Who is the best Defender and fancies the challenge of defending 4v1?"

**PROGRESSIONS** Add competition, each team has 5 attempts, can the Reds prevent the Blues from getting to Level 4 with excellent defending?



Level 1: A 4v1 scenario

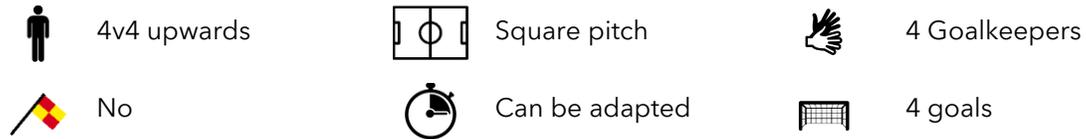
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Level 2: A 4v2 scenario

# FOUR GOAL FOUR KEEPERS

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** This game is quite simple, the winners are the team that score past all four Goalkeepers first.

**INTENTION** In possession, how do we create and exploit space to ultimately score?

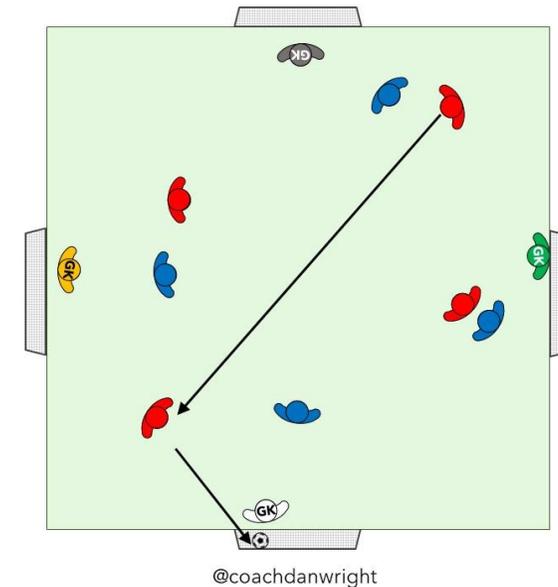
**LINK TO 11v11** This game is all about finishing and creating chances to finish.

**OBSERVATION**

- Do players take risks in 1v1 situations to shoot? (**Outplay**)
- Do they recognise the lack of pressure to shoot from distance?
- Out of possession, do individuals show the desire and competitiveness to regain possession?
- Each Goalkeeper could work on their distribution to help the teams score in the other 3x goals, but not theirs!

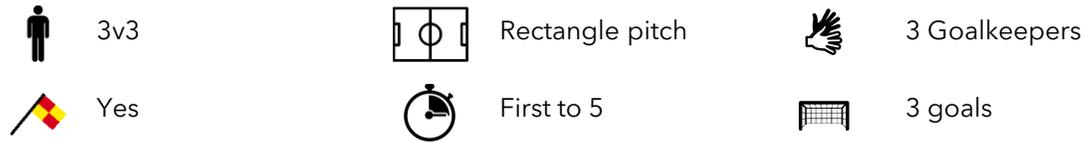
**PROGRESSIONS** With younger players you could split into 3 teams, two teams play 4v4 on the pitch the third team act as Goalkeepers. Rotate roles every goal or every 2 goals.

Another variation can be each team defends 2x goals and attacks 2x goals. For example, the Reds could score in the 'North and South' goals, and defend the 'East and West goals'.



# BEAT YOUR DIRECT OPPONENT

## Finishing



**ORGANISATION** Split the group into two colours (Red and Blue). Teams compete in groups of 3, with the resting players ready to come on. The Red team defend one large goal and attack two large goals and the Blue team defend two large goals and attack one large goal.

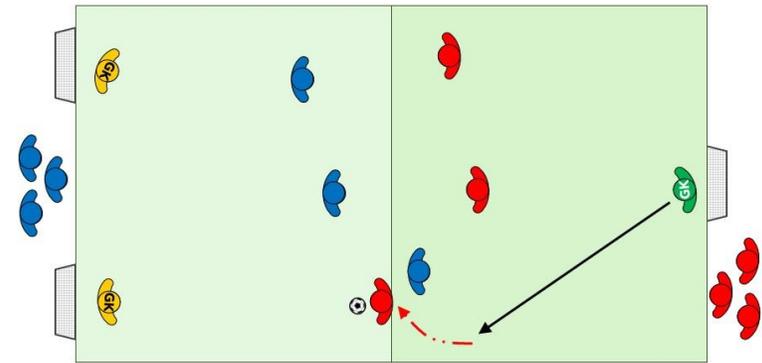
Each game is '1 goal and off', so if Reds score past the Blues they go 1-0 up and a new set of Blues enter the field. The Red team of 3, stay on until they are knocked off.

First to 5 goals wins, swap sides and repeat.

**INTENTION** This game is tight and fast paced with lots of opportunity to beat your man and shoot.

- LINK TO 11v11**
- Winning your 1v1, in and out of possession, **outplaying** your direct opponent
  - Finishing in different scenarios
  - Competition to stay on the pitch

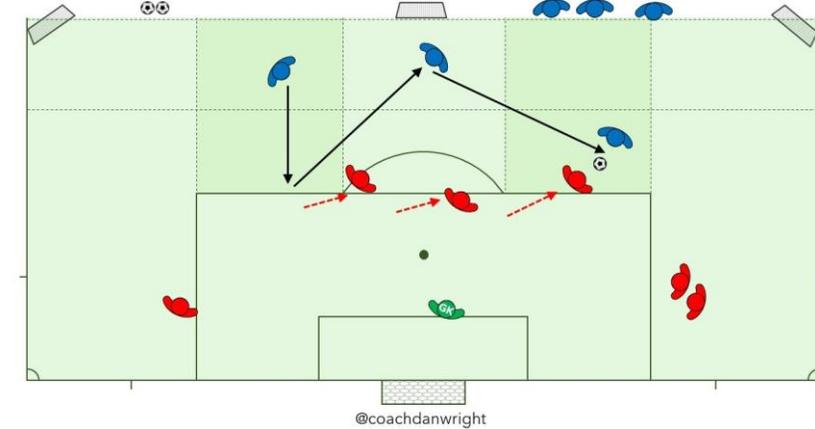
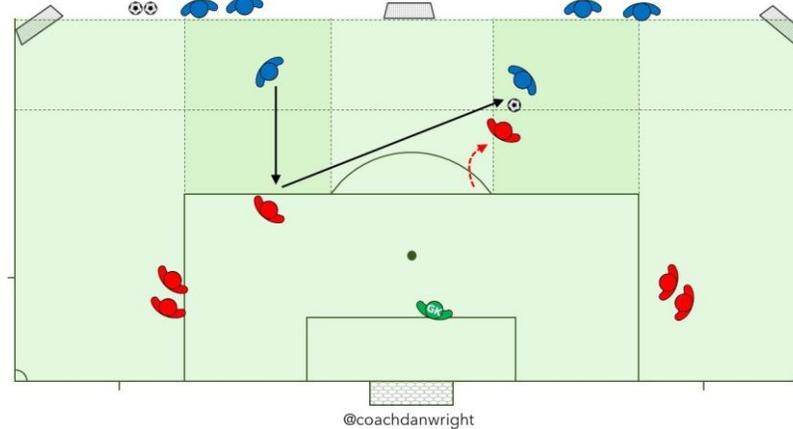
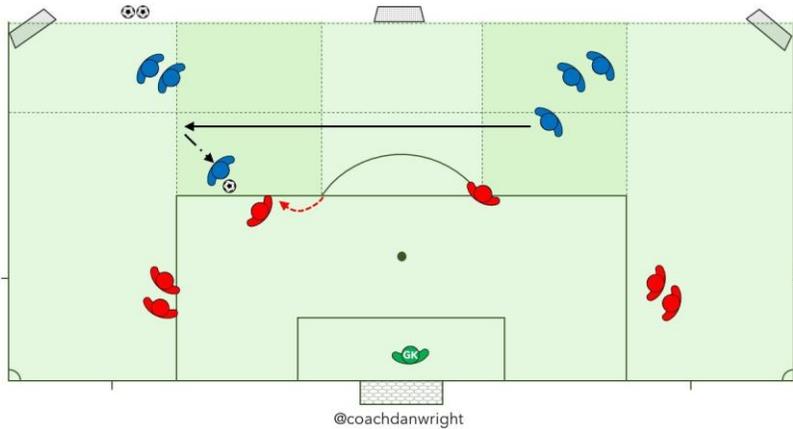
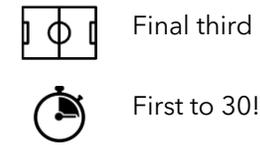
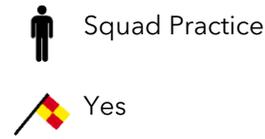
**OBSERVATION** The rationale of using a small team of 3 players, is that it is difficult to get defensive cover once a player is beaten in a 1v1.



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# FIRST TO 30...1v1, 2v2, 3v3

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This game takes place in the final third and is essentially Defenders vs attackers. The practice has a few variations, finishing with a game - which is first to 30 wins. In all versions the attackers are looking to score in the large goal, the Defenders (Reds) protect the goal and if they regain possession, score in the target goals at the top of the practice.

Round 1: 1v1 (**image 1**) the attacker (Blues) takes on the Defenders (Reds). I would recommend starting with a pass to increase **realism**.

Round 2: 2v2 (**image 2**) similar to round 1 but now a 2v2 in a central area.

Round 3: 3v3 (**image 3**). This is the main game! The attackers start 20-0 up, they have to score 10 goals to win. The defending group have to regain and score 30 times to beat them - hence the name first to 30. See progressions for a few variations.

**INTENTION** To recreate **realistic** and **relevant** pictures players face in a game.

**LINK TO 11v11** Progressing from individual (1v1) to small groups (2v2 / 3v3).

**OBSERVATION** This game is very competitive, be mindful of over stressing one side. Adapting the score mechanism will be key to striking the right balance.

**PROGRESSIONS** You can tweak the practice by altering the scoring;

- Making it easier: Shot on target = 1 point, Goal = 2 points
- **Rewarding** actions: For example, score with your weaker foot = 2 goals
- **Relate**: Can you recognise when to finish first time?
- **Restrict**: Defenders must score with a 1 touch finish

# 2v2 FORCING PLAY

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This is a wave style practice, so the Blues and Pinks take it in turn to attack the Reds. To start, the Reds are 'locked in' so 1x player in each box - the attackers have no restrictions, so this creates a 1v2 scenario.

**INTENTION** In this game the focus is on defending as a pair. I explain this as 'Defender #1' - who is closest to the ball and 'Defender #2' who is second closest. This game can be adapted to focus on a few different themes.

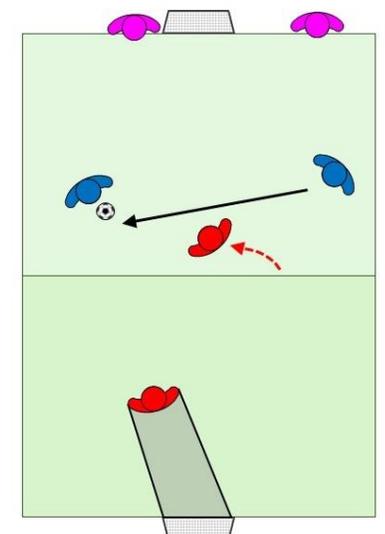
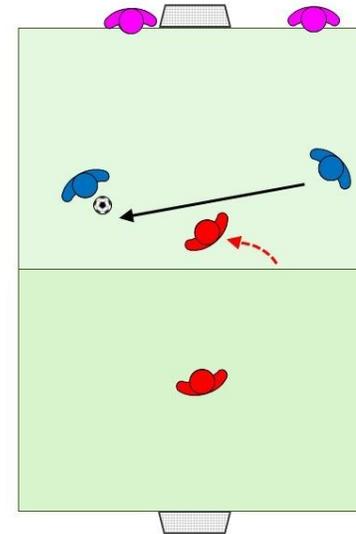
**LINK TO 11v11** The role of the Defender #1 is to force the play one way so his teammate can cover and anticipate the next action (**image 1**).

Defender #2 looks to block the line of the goal and offer cover (**image 2**), essentially doing two jobs at once.

**OBSERVATION**

- How do the Reds choose to defend in a 2v2?
- How can we help Defender #1 fix the overload and turn a 1v2 into a 2v2?
- Can Defender #2 offer cover, intercept and block the line to goal?
- If Defender #1 is played around how does he / she recover? (see progression)

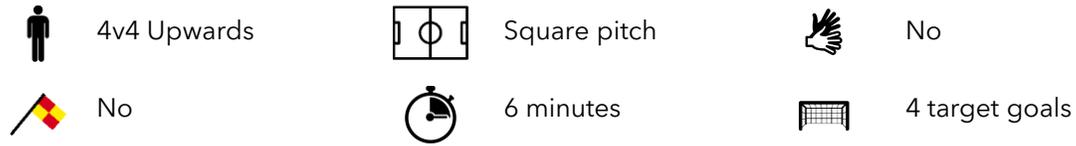
**PROGRESSIONS** To progress the practice, remove the **restriction** - so now the Reds can defend however they see fit. They might choose to be more aggressive and press high or defend deeper. This practice can also be used to coach when and how to 'hand over' the attacker.



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# PROTECT THE SQUARE

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** A 30x30m square with a 8x8m central square inside, adjust the size depending on the age and ability of the group you are coaching.

**INTENTION** To score a goal the team in possession must pass through or receive inside the central square. The defending team looks to win possession and score in any of the target goals.

**LINK TO 11v11** Forcing play and recognising the triggers to press

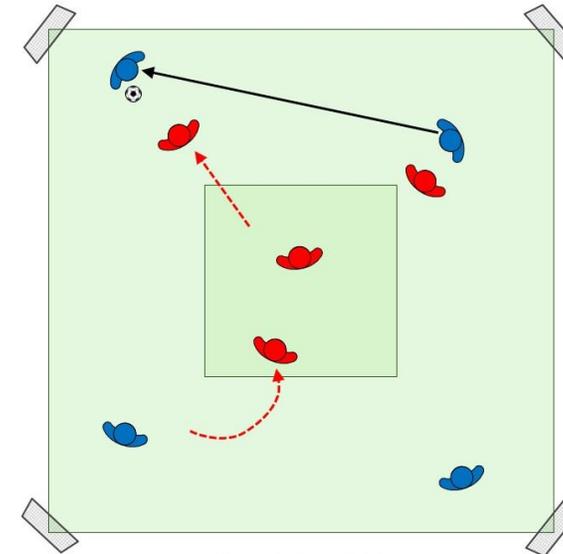
**OBSERVATION** In possession;

- How do the team disperse to allow the team to play **around** and create gaps inside (**through**).
- Supporting positions to create structure to play **around** or **through**.

Out of possession, the team strive to find the balance between screening to protect the central areas and pressing to win back the ball.

**PROGRESSIONS** **Restrict** the number of Defenders allowed outside of the central grid, this is also good for recovering to protect the space when you've been played around.

**Restrict** or **reward** the number of touches attackers can take in the central grid i.e. play out with 1 touch.



# SIMEONE DEFENDING GAME

## Defending



12 upwards



4 zones (small)



No



Can be added



4 minutes



4 target goals

**ORGANISATION** Most of the time I would not suggest lifting practices from the professional game, but this one is superb and a slight variation of a practice lots of coaches use.

The practice is quite easy to explain, to start players are restricted or 'locked in' their zone. Each team is trying to penetrate a wall of 4x screening players to play into their 2x Strikers, who score in the target goals.

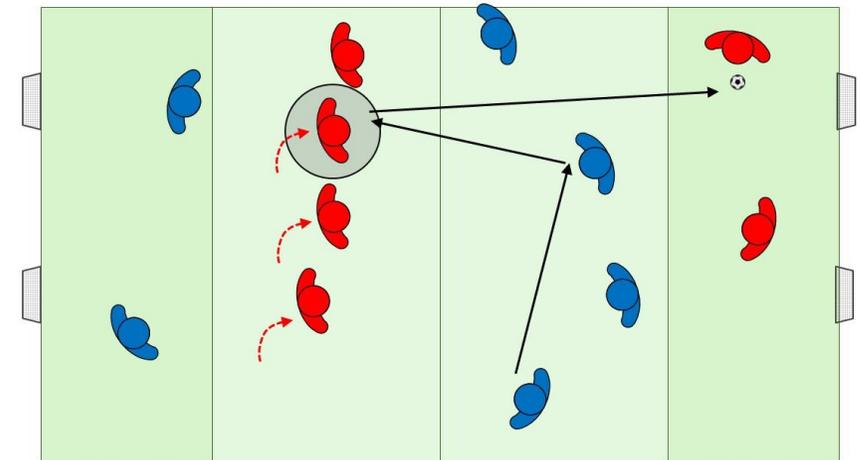
**INTENTION** For the 4x screening players to block forward passes, regain and then penetrate.

**LINK TO 11v11** This is great for coaching distances within a unit.

**OBSERVATION** This practice allows for lots of trial and error. If the 4x screeners are too tight, they can be played **around** with a quick switch of play. If they are too wide, they can be played **through**, this links to the concept of the '**net**' (Page 58).

**PROGRESSIONS** A few progressions to consider;

- Strikers play using only 1 touch, so they can shoot or 'set' their teammate to score
- Allow the Strikers to pop up in the middle third, so now the defending team has two jobs - marking and screening
- Add a Defender in the end zone to create a 2v1
- Play with larger goals and add Goalkeepers



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# 3 TEAM KEEP AWAY

## Defending



9 - 12 players



Square



No



No



4 minutes



4 target goals

### ORGANISATION

Here we can see two versions of a similar practice. In both versions, 2 teams keep possession away from 1. This could work in 3's - 6v3 or in 4's - 8v4. In **image 1** there are no goals, the Blue team must win back possession from the Reds and the Yellows. The Yellows support on the outside in this version.

In **image 2**, the 3 teams play inside the space and we've added 4 target goals. In this version, when the Blues regain possession, they can score in any of the 4 target goals. This could be a trigger to swap roles, or you could keep score over a period of time.

### INTENTION

In possession, lots of repetition of passing and receiving (**A,B,C,D**). The supporting angle and distances are also vital here. Dividing the area into 4 can help players understand their position in relation to the ball, opposition, teammate and space.

Out of possession the team are focusing on pressing or forcing play.

### LINK TO 11v11

Maintaining possession under pressure.

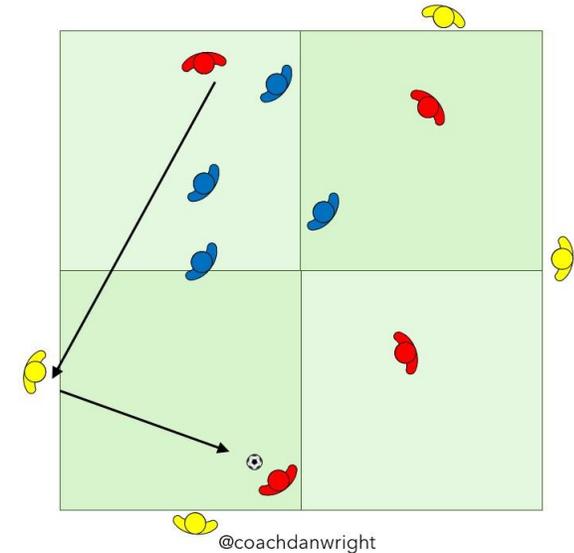
Pressing with a plan / forcing play.

### OBSERVATION

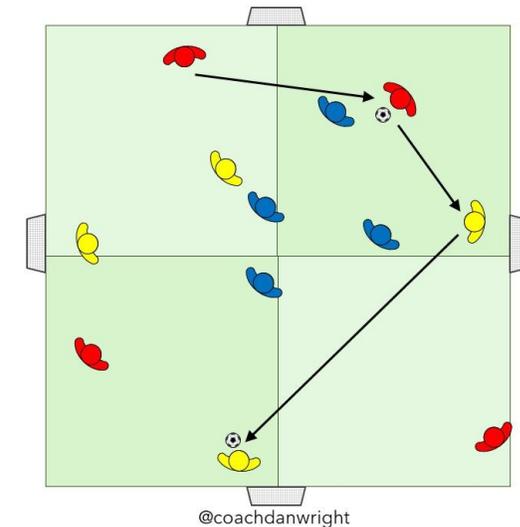
The purpose of the game is for the players to be comfortable maintaining possession and creating a goal scoring opportunity after a good spell of possession. Support (**4xB's**) will be key!

### PROGRESSIONS

Add competition - how many consecutive passes can the teams in possession make?



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# SLIDE AND SCREEN

## Defending



3x teams of 3  
or 4



Thirds pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



6 minutes



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

A twist on a classic defending practice. A small tight pitch split into three thirds, Blues and Yellows work together trying to pass **through** or **around** the Reds who defend the middle third. When the Red team regain possession, they can score in either goal, the other team must react quickly and protect their goal. If the Reds score, they swap places with the team they scored against.

### INTENTION

For the Reds to screen passes **through** and **around**, and upon regain counter-attack.

### LINK TO 11v11

This game has a few different focuses;

Reds - defending and transition to attack.

Blues and Yellows - Breaking lines with passes and transition to defend when required.

### OBSERVATION

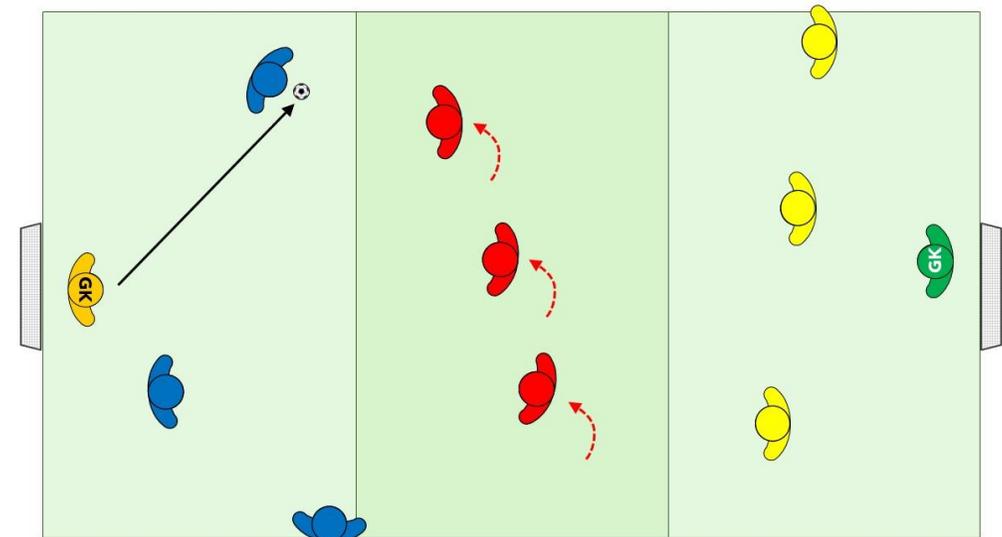
Reds must get compact with correct distances from the ball and each other to prevent passes. (**Net**)

Reds should look for triggers to press in the end third; longer passes, poor touch, lack of support...etc.

Communication and connection to work as a team.

### PROGRESSIONS

Allow the Reds to send a player into the end zone to press or force play.



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# THE SWEEPER

## Defending



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch (small)



Can be added



Can be added



Can be adapted



2 target goals

**ORGANISATION** In this game a 3v3 takes place in the central third. Each team has a Sweeper (marked 'S') who sits in the defensive third to block and intercept forward passes.

**INTENTION** To score the team in possession are looking to breakout from the middle third, the Sweeper is there to stop killer passes and dribbles into his / her third.

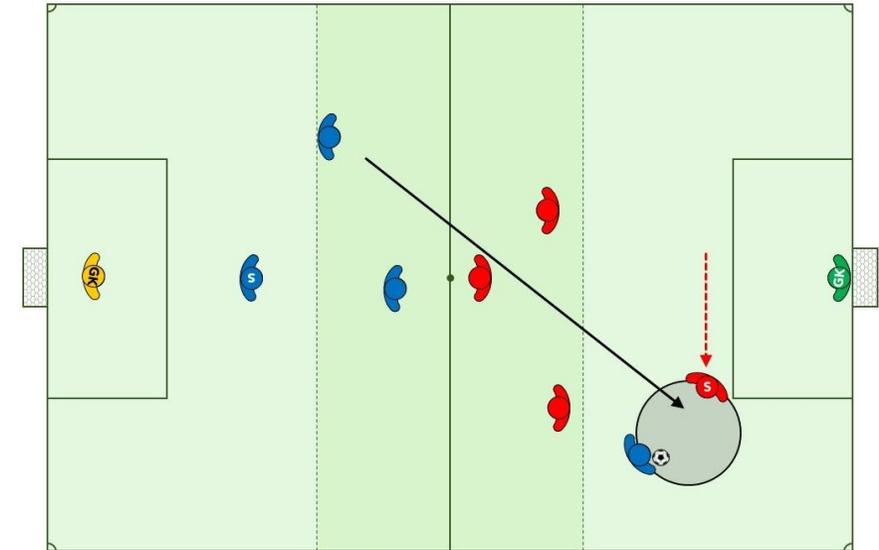
**LINK TO 11v11** For the Sweeper to read the developing play and '*smell the danger*', although this is labelled as a Sweeper game, it's a useful skill for all players especially Defenders. In possession this back player can also support the play from behind as well experience lots of repetition playing into midfield.

**OBSERVATION** I think this game is all about distances. As a Midfield three how do they screen and slide to stop forward passes, and for the back player how does he / she adjust his or her position to intercept the next pass?

**PROGRESSIONS** You can add a central Striker to create a 1v1 in the end zone.

**Reward** - if the Sweeper can intercept a pass (not tackle) he or she wins a point for their team.

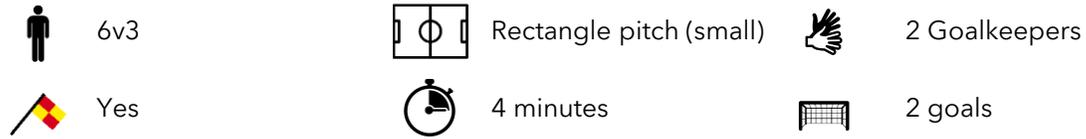
**Reward** - if the Sweeper can intercept and create a goal from the regain, the goal is worth double.



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# DEFENDING OUTNUMBERED

## Defending



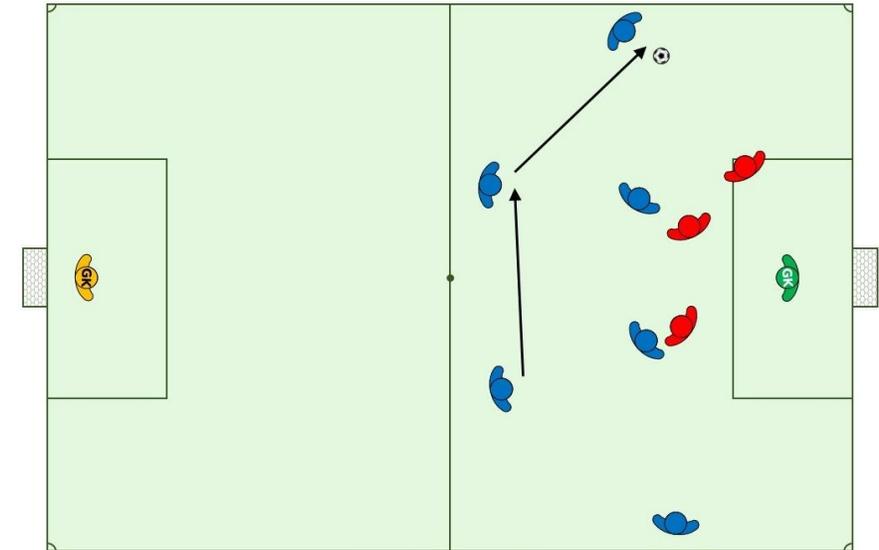
**ORGANISATION** I think a simple practice like this is one of the easiest ways to create the need to defend well! The level of challenge can be adapted based on the needs of the group, but in this example 3x Reds are defending against 6x Blue attackers.

**INTENTION** Creating an overload means the Reds must force the play into less dangerous areas. They must also prioritize who and when to engage in duels or tackles.

**LINK TO 11v11** This could be good for improving individual and unit defending.

**OBSERVATION** This practice is extremely challenging, I would suggest playing for a short period of time and trying to incentivize the defending team. For example, can you keep a clean sheet for 4 minutes?

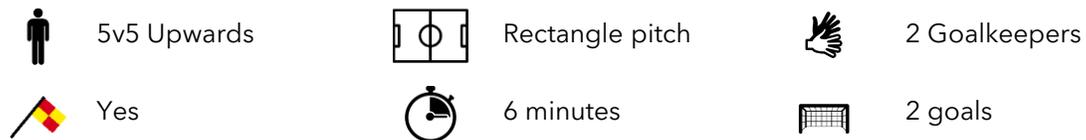
**PROGRESSIONS** This can be a nice practice to focus on the psychological or social returns. How do the group plan to defend? What will they change if they concede?



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# WIPEOUT

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This game is used with a defensive theme in mind, but there are some in possession returns too. The practice takes place on a normal 2 goal pitch, when 1x team score (**image 1**) they restart the game from their Goalkeeper - for that goal to count they must keep possession for 15 seconds. The Blues can cancel this goal out, if they can regain possession before the 15 seconds are up.

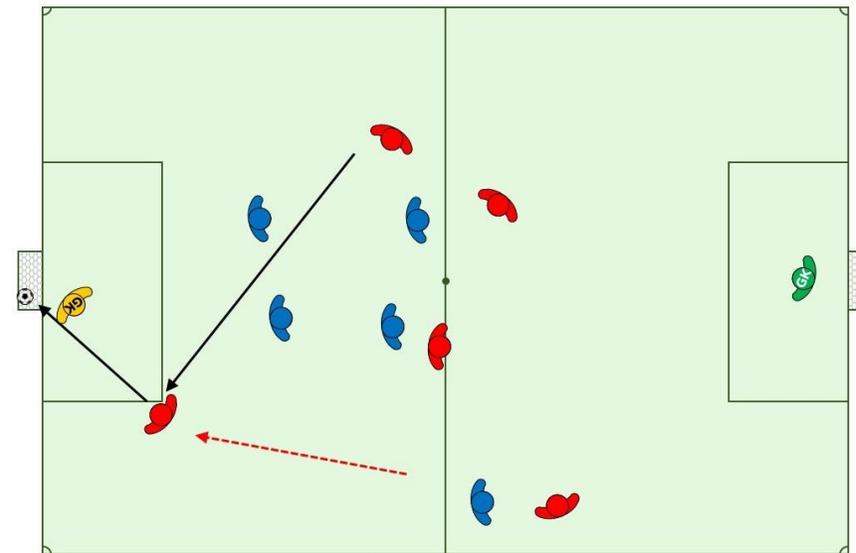
**INTENTION** To improve a team's response and attitude to defending.

**LINK TO 11v11** For the team in possession, once they've scored they have to maintain possession or build an attack under a high press. For the Blues, reacting positively and pressing together.

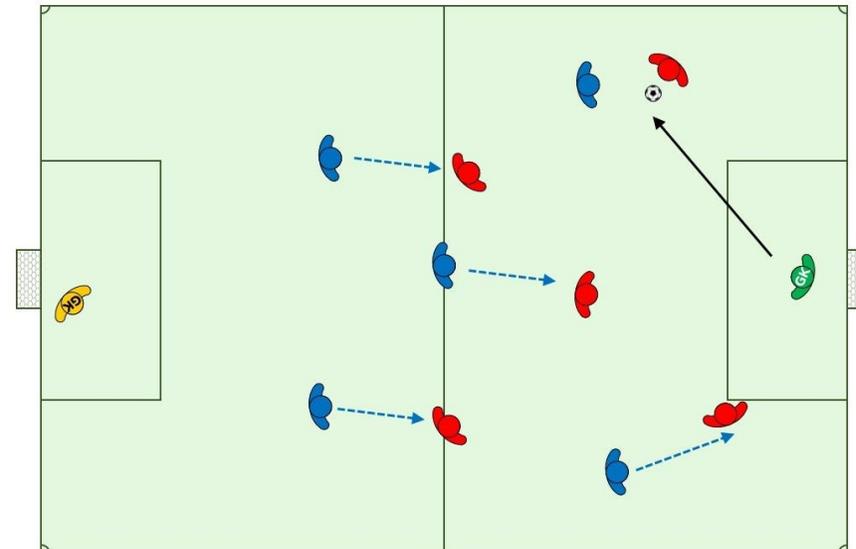
**OBSERVATION** This game has lots of psychological returns, we are looking for individuals who can stay present and switched on to the next opportunity.

**PROGRESSIONS** You can manipulate the 'wipeout' in a number of ways;

- Must keep possession for 'x' number of passes
- Must keep it even longer (time constraint)
- **Reward** the Blues, if they regain and score - after conceding, that goal is worth double. So a positive reaction to a mistake puts you ahead!
- Flip the game around - when the Reds score, the Blues restart the game. For the goal to count the Reds must win the ball back within 15 seconds.



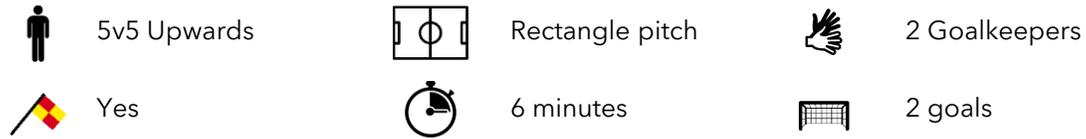
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# OUR HOUSE!

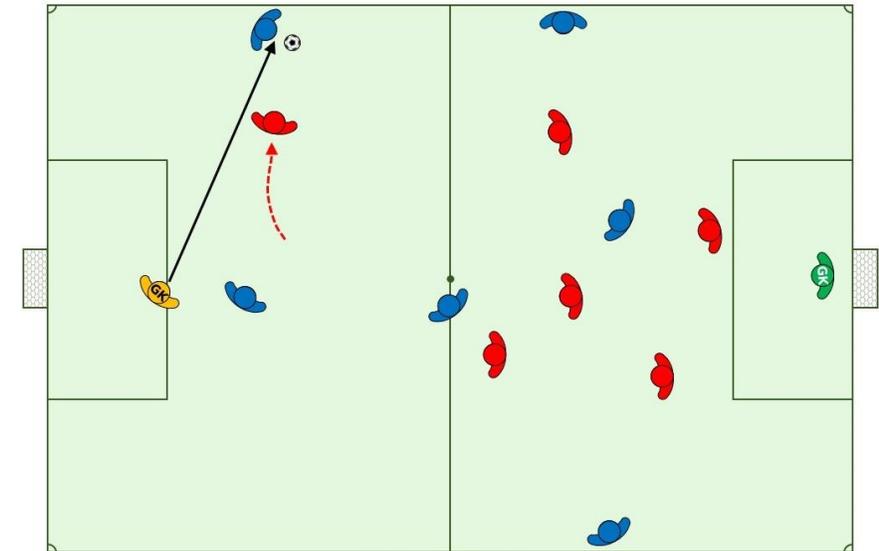
## Defending



- ORGANISATION** A regular 2 goal pitch, split in half using cones of flat markers
- INTENTION** Each team must choose a half for their 'house', its not a problem if they both want the same half. In their 'house' they can tackle (normal rules), in the half they didn't select they can only intercept, so no tackling.
- LINK TO 11v11** This game looks to develop understanding of forcing play, pressing high and building a block.
- OBSERVATION** Do they choose to press high? (**Reward**)  
How do they defend when they can't tackle?  
Do they tackle near their goal (risk?) or tackle high? (**Traffic light defending**)
- PROGRESSIONS** This is a great game if you want to coach pressing, how do we as a group block passing lines...etc? It also works well if you trying to avoid rash decisions and giving away fouls near your own goal / penalty box.

Allow players to discuss; why did they choose that half? Why not the other?

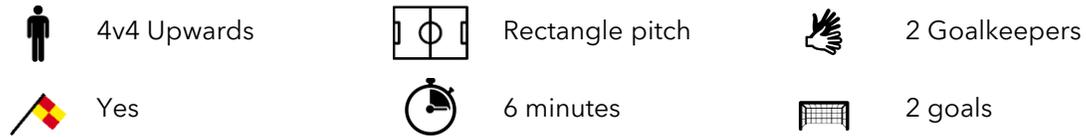
How will they defend in the half they can't tackle in - force play or drop off?



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# MAN MARKING

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This practice is a 2 goal game, with each player given a man marker. If your player scores you are out of the game for 60 seconds.

**INTENTION** Players are paired up so you can only tackle the person you are man marking.

**LINK TO 11v11** Taking responsibility for your direct opponent.

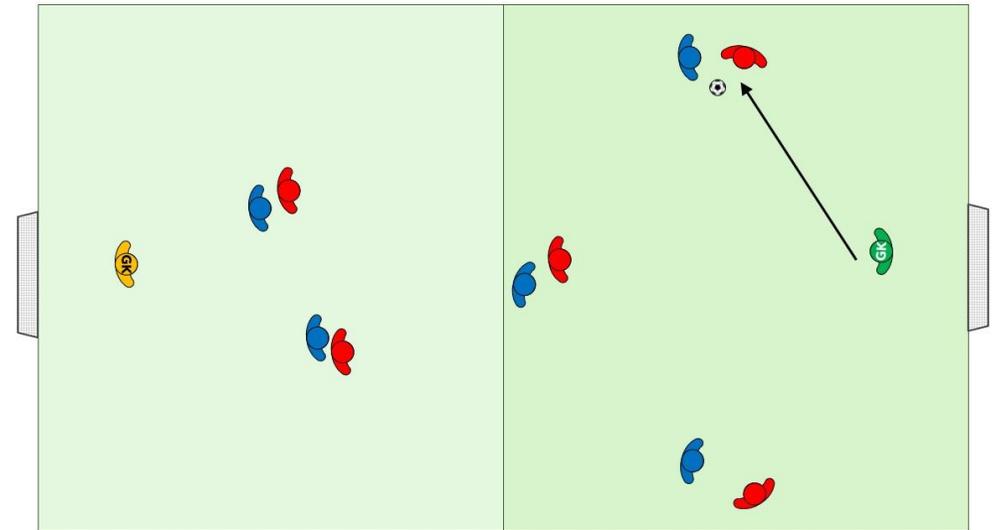
**Outplaying** your direct opponent.

**OBSERVATION** How do players track their opponent and still effect the game in possession?

Can players know where the opponent is AND intercept passes?  
When a player is removed, how do you play outnumbered?

**PROGRESSIONS** To challenge the players further, and promote awareness play the game in silence for a period.

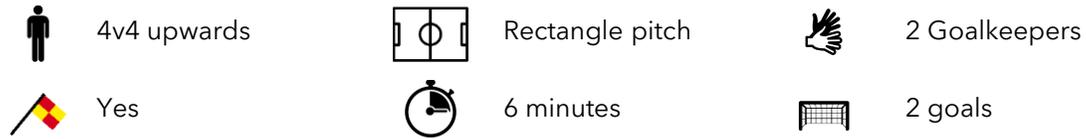
This game can work well as a part in a 'whole-part-whole' or 'play-practice-play' approach.



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# PRESS HIGH = DOUBLE GOALS

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This game works on a pitch with 2 goals with a halfway line marked out with flat markers or cones. The halfway line needs to be visible ideally.

**INTENTION** A simple task constraint to reward proactive pressing, if you win possession of the ball in the opposition's half and score, it's worth **double** goals!

**LINK TO 11v11** Pressing from the front and **traffic light defending**.

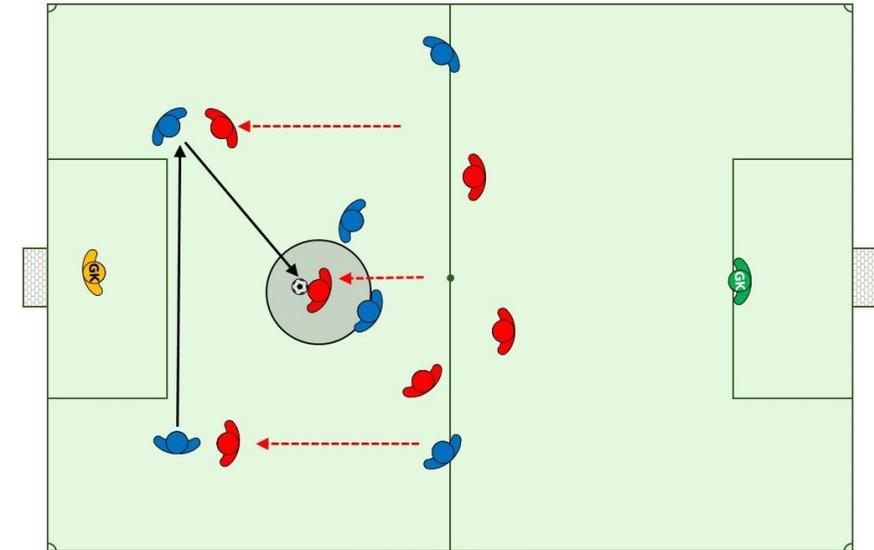
**OBSERVATION** In this game look out for;

- How do the team press together?
- What are the triggers to press?
- What happens if you get the press wrong?

For the team playing out or being pressed there will be opportunity to play either **over, around or through**. Can they execute their idea to cause problems for the pressing team?

**PROGRESSIONS** Think about how you want the players to press on matchdays - will it be focused around areas of the pitch, individuals' errors, pressing with high numbers...etc. Try to **relate** the 11v11 ideas into this Small Sided Game.

Don't forget the Goalkeeper, his positioning as a sweeper keeper is important to anticipate longer passes or through balls in this game.



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# RECOVERING FULL BACK

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This practice takes place in the final third. The Reds are defending the large goal and have a Goalkeeper, the Blues start with the ball and look to attack. If the Reds regain possession they play out into one of the 3 target goals at the top of the practice. The Red Full Back starts outside the practice area and is 'live' on the first Blue pass.

**INTENTION** In this scenario the Reds' defence is unbalanced and outnumbered, how do they choose to defend? There is a nice link to **traffic light defending** and **defending 3 out of the 5 lanes**. (See page 58)

**LINK TO 11v11** The link here is that we are looking to recreate a moment of transition, where the Full Back has been caught high up the pitch.

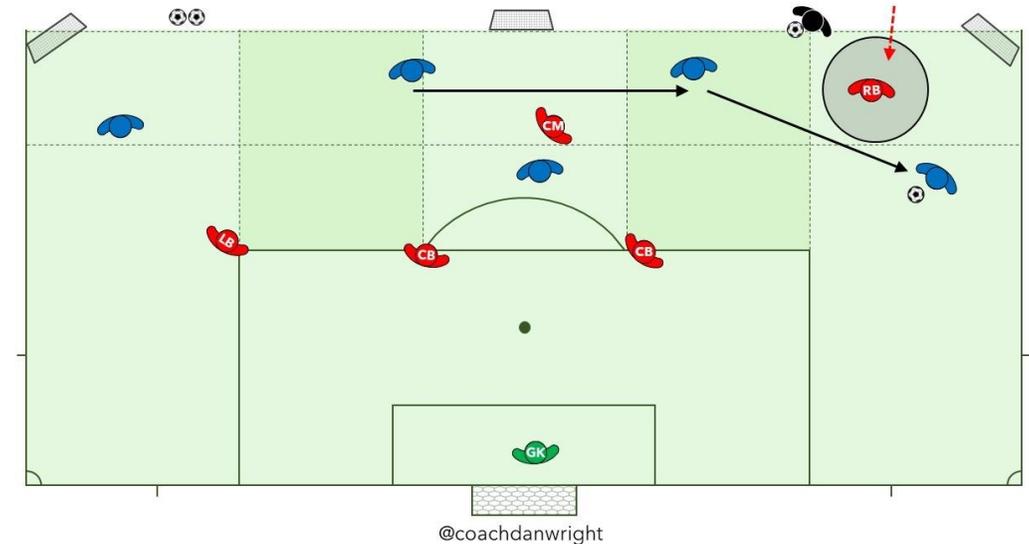
**OBSERVATION** For the **Reds**

- Which play will cover this area and what are the knock-on implications?
- How can we readjust to fix the overload and prevent being played **around** or **through**?

For the **Blues**

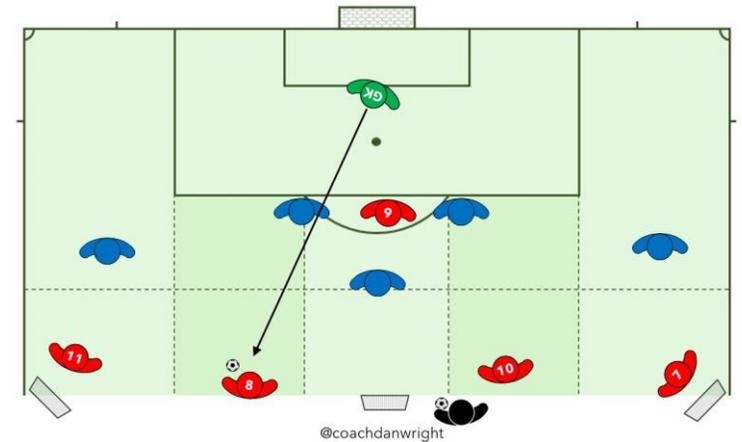
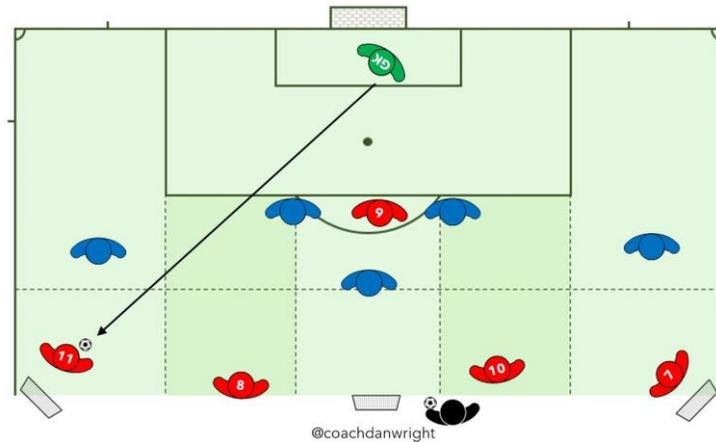
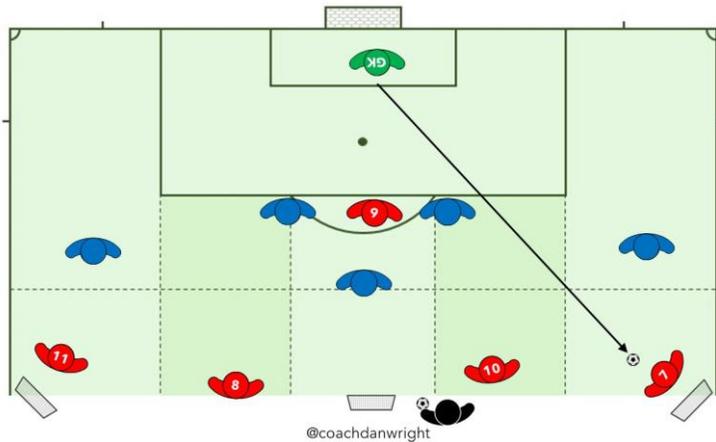
- Repetition of attacking in a moment of transition.
- Finishing the attack - do they play **over**, **around** or **through** the opposition?

**PROGRESSIONS** This template could be used for different players to practice recovering, for example you could remove the Red Midfielder for a different challenge.



# POSITION SPECIFIC DEFENDING

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This practice allows for lots of position specific defending and progresses from individual defending to a phase of play (unit vs unit).

**Image 1:** Goalkeeper distributes the ball to the Right Winger #7, he / she takes on the Left Back looking to score past the goalkeeper. The other players rest and observe.

**Image 2:** As before, but now the Left Winger #11 faces the right back in a 1v1.

**Image 3:** Goalkeeper distributes the ball centrally - coaches choice here, it can be used for 1v1s, for Central Midfielder #8 vs the Central Defender and repeat for #10 and #9. Alternatively you can play a 3v3 with #8,#9 and #10 against the Central Defenders and holding Midfielder.

To progress, put the whole practice together so Reds vs Blues - unit vs unit.

**INTENTION** For players to experience defending situations they might face in a game situation.

**LINK TO 11v11** This practice can be used to highlight;

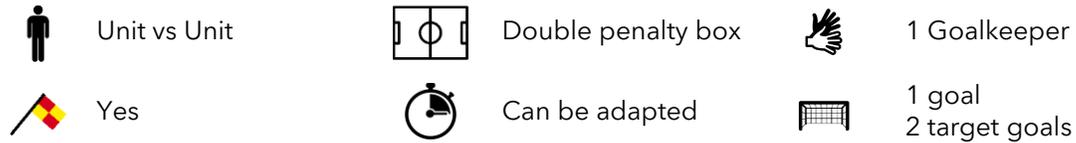
- Defending in a 1v1 (wide or central)
- Defending in pairs or units

**OBSERVATION** This scenario puts the Defenders 'in balance' - they are between the attacker and the goal, which makes it easier. However the amount of space they have to defend can be manipulated to make the practice harder.

**PROGRESSION** **Reward** the Defenders - if they can regain and score. To **relate** this to a game, in the phase of play (unit vs unit) can you set scenarios for each team, for example "Defenders you are 1-0 up, if you can keep a clean sheet for 6 minutes you win!"

# DEFENCE vs ATTACK

## Defending



**ORGANISATION** This is a simple 'attack vs defence' situation using the space of 2x penalty boxes with a free zone at one end. Offside applies inside the penalty area. With older players there might be opportunity to play players in their position, so they experience scenarios similar to a match day.

**INTENTION** The objective for the attackers (Reds) is to score in the big goal, for the Blues defending in and around the box. The free zone allows the Reds to "start again.." and recycle possession, without the risk of losing possession. If the Blues win possession, they can score in either target goal at the top of the practice.

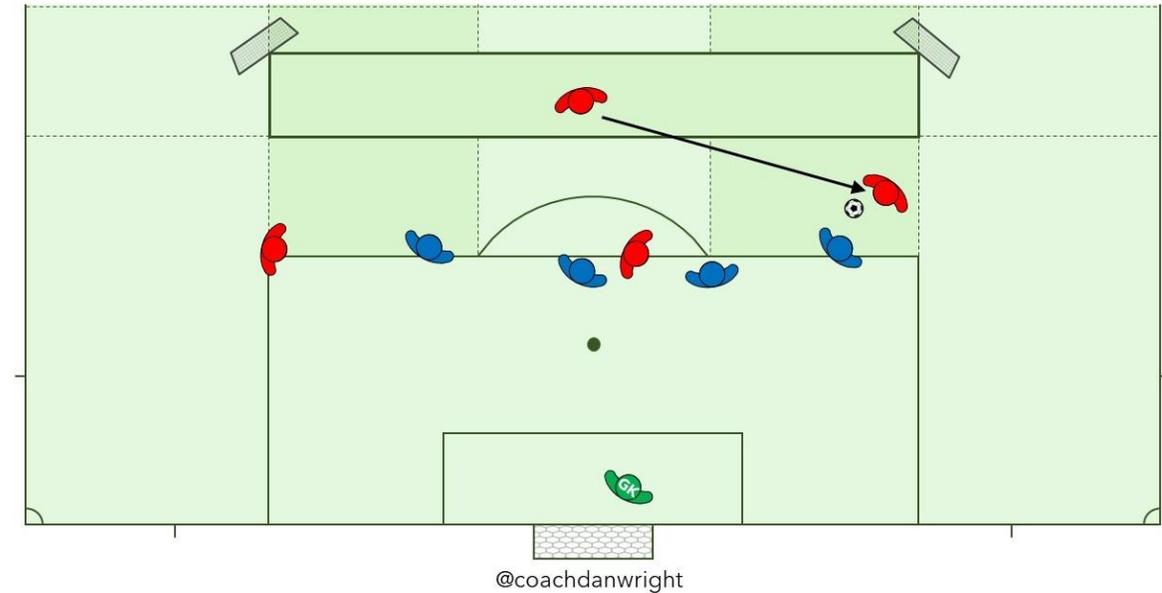
**LINK TO 11v11** Defending in and around the box, this would be 'red' in the **traffic light defending** approach.

**OBSERVATION** In possession the focus is on retaining possession in advanced areas, choosing the right time to penetrate and score. (**Over, around and through**).

Out of possession, we are looking at defending as an individual and as part of a unit, to create cover and balance.

**PROGRESSIONS** You can adjust the numbers to suit your players, be mindful of making it too easy to score - it will be difficult in matches!

One adaption could be, if the Blues win possession and dribble the ball into the free zone, the roles swap over.



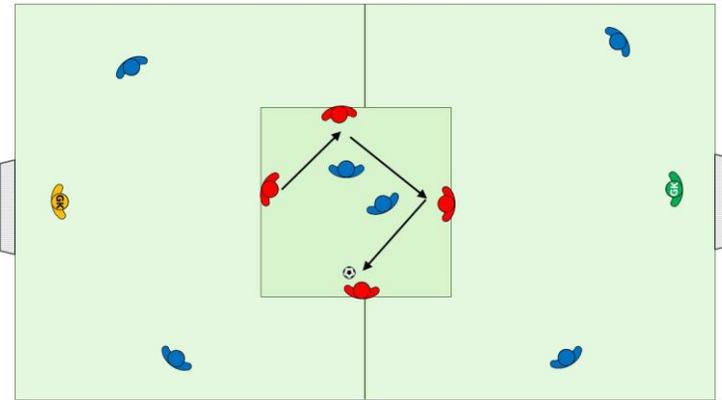
# COUNTER PRESS 4v2 TO 4v6

Defending

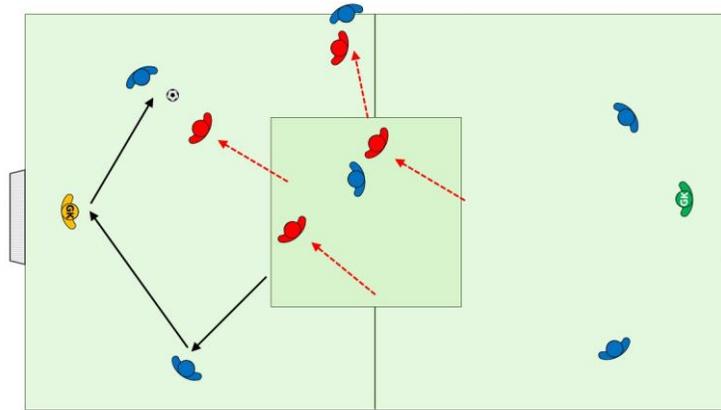
 4v6  
 Can be adapted  
 No

 Rectangle pitch with a central grid  
 5 attempts

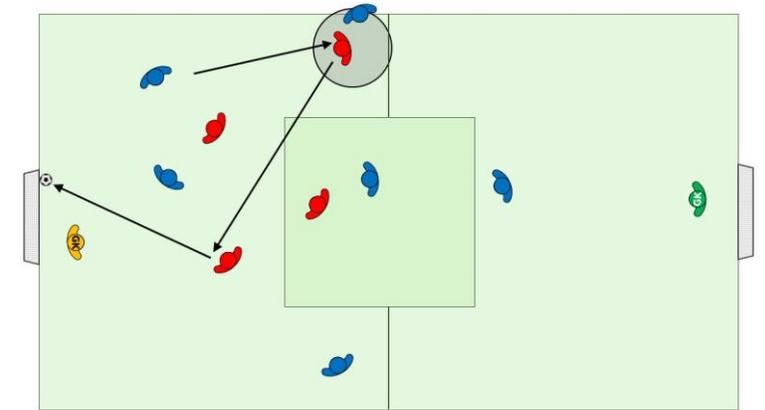
 2 Goalkeepers  
 2 goals



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**ORGANISATION** This game covers a number of themes, so it could be a template for in possession too. In this version, the Red team start with the ball in a 4v2 rondo in the central space (**image 1**). Here the 2x Blues look to regain and limit the passes the Reds make. When the Blues win possession (**image 2**) they look to keep possession, and can use either Goalkeeper to help them. The Reds have to react quickly (counter press) to stop the Blues (**image 3**) with the ultimate aim of scoring! The Reds get 5x attempts then the roles are swapped.

**INTENTION** For the Reds to quickly shift their mindset from in possession to counter press.

**LINK TO 11v11** Counter pressing and pressing from the front.

**OBSERVATION** The Blues might find a solution of playing a longer aerial pass, this might challenge the Reds to be a little less frantic and recognise the triggers to win the ball back, e.g. Slow pass, poor touch, lack of support...etc.

**PROGRESSIONS** Add competition / **rewards:**

- Reds score 1 point for every pass they make in the 4v2 and 3 points if they can regain and score.
- Blue score 1 point for every pass they make in the 6v4 scenario.

These scores can be totalled up, after both teams have had their 5x attempts. This makes the practice feel more important and like a real game.

# CHAMPION TRAINER!

## Scenarios

 8v8 to 1v1

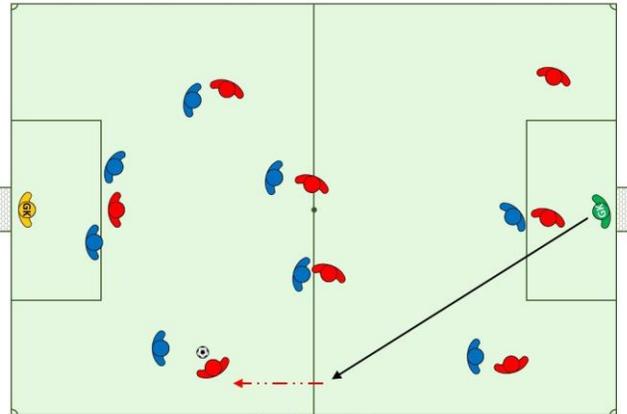
 Rectangle pitch

 2 Goalkeepers

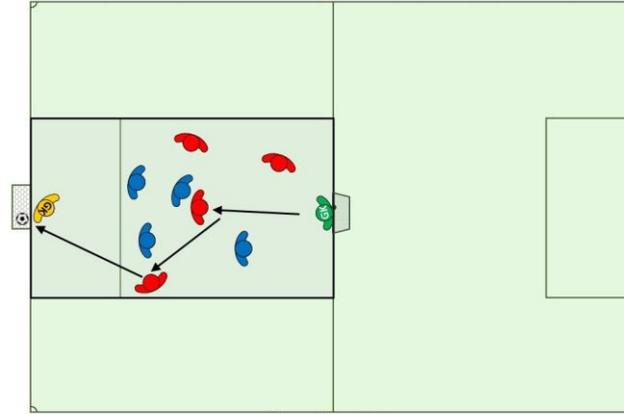
 Yes

 8v8 - 4 minutes  
4v4 - 3 minutes  
2v2 - 2 minutes  
1v1 - 90 seconds

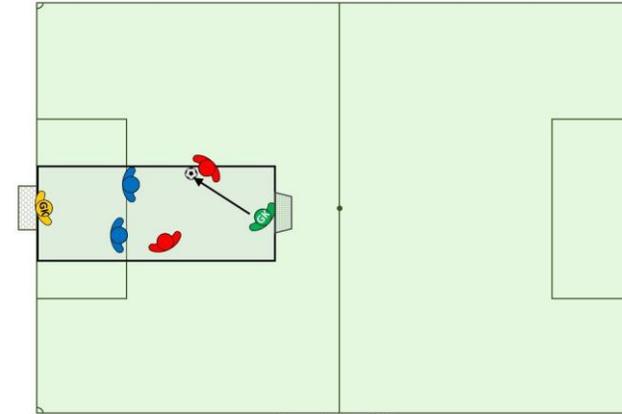
 2 goals



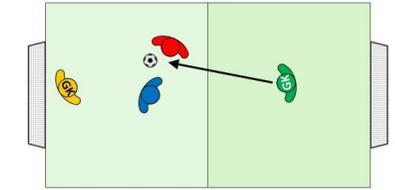
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**ORGANISATION** This game is basically "last man standing".

In this version we start with a 8v8 plus Goalkeepers, the first game lasts 4 minutes. The losing team are eliminated and watch, the winning team is divided into a 4v4. After each game, this process is repeated so the winning team is halved until a 2v2. After this game you have a 1v1 with Goalkeepers. The winner of the 1v1 is crowned "**Champion trainer!**" You can alter the pitch size where appropriate.

**INTENTION** This game is uber competitive, so probably not suitable for very young players. It challenges players to perform under pressure, so can have some good psychological returns.

**LINK TO 11v11**

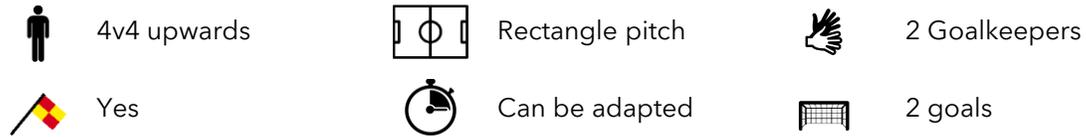
- Emergency defending
- Clinical finishing
- Performing under pressure
- Wining and losing!

**OBSERVATION** Often in development football "winning" can be seen as a dirty word. However, it is part of sport and children actually enjoy this competition and if its framed appropriately there can be some fantastic returns. Often the discomfort of not winning fuels the players, so next time you do it the players will be eager to get to the final!

**PROGRESSIONS** You can manipulate the timings, space and numbers to suit your players.

# PRESSURE PENALTY

## Scenarios



**ORGANISATION** A very simple game, but with some interesting returns. The game starts with a penalty.

**INTENTION** By starting with a penalty there are a few possible returns;

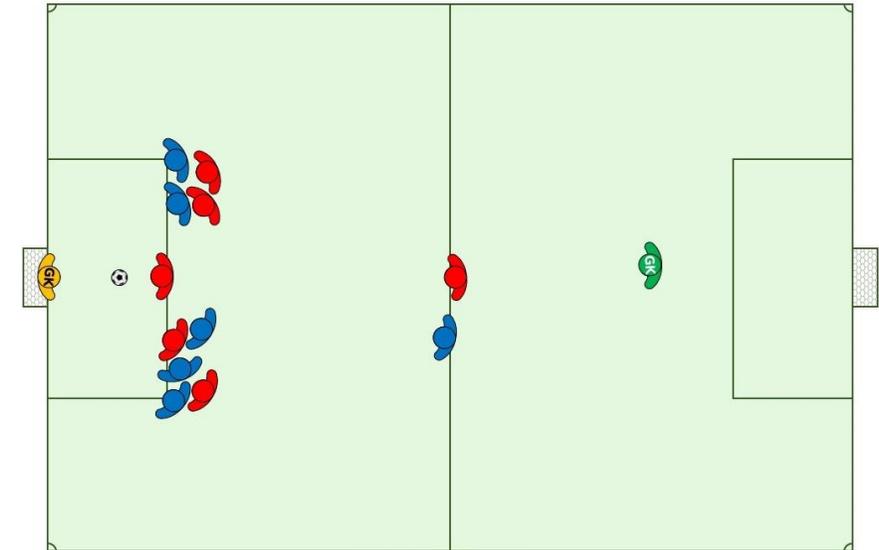
- The taker feels under pressure to score
- One team is possibly 1-0 up or 0-1 down from the kick off
- Alternatively it could be missed, how do the individual and team cope with this?

**LINK TO 11v11** Teams often practice penalties, but in isolation or moments that don't recreate the feel of a game. This is one way to address that!

**OBSERVATION**

- Emotional control in adversity
- Strategising and adapting to the state of the game (1-0, 0-1 or missed pen)

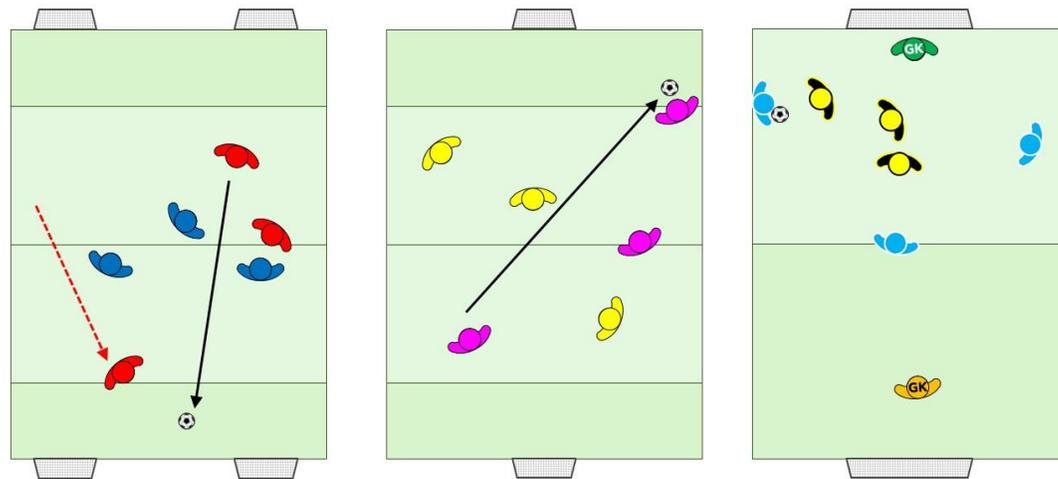
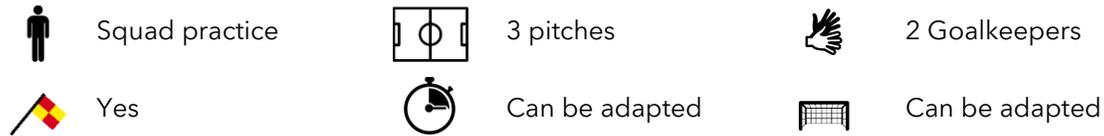
**PROGRESSIONS** You can select which team and individual take the penalty however you like. Once it has been decided that its Red or Blue, it might be best to allow the team to decide amongst themselves who will take it. This will create some social interaction and strategizing.



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# PROMOTION AND RELEGATION

## Scenarios



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**ORGANISATION** This game gets very competitive and is a favourite with players. Essentially the squad / group is divided into small teams of 3, 4 or 5. The coach prepares 3 pitches (it can work with more) - in this version I have a 4 goal game, a 2 goal game with end zones and a normal 2 goal game with keepers.

The pitch on the right is the Premier League, the middle is the Championship and the left is League One.

Games last 2 minutes, winners get promoted moving to the right and losers get relegated moving to the left. The idea of this game is to be the winner in the top pitch at the end of the allotted time.

**INTENTION** Performing and competing under pressure (consequence and time).

**LINK TO 11v11** Linked to the principles discussed on page 42-43, the players will need to strategize to get success. Lots of this will be based on the opposition; how much you know about them, how you can get that information and how you can make the most of it.

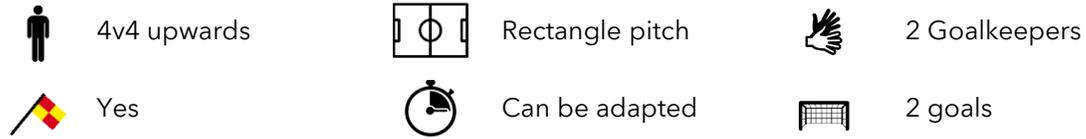
**OBSERVATION** This session gives the coach opportunity to observe the players in action.

Think about what lens you are using to view the players;

- Who is a good teammate?
- Who tries even when its hard?
- Who is brave in possession?
- Who is getting success and why?
- Who is exciting to watch and why?

# FETCH YOUR RUBBISH

## Scenarios



**ORGANISATION** The name of this game might have to be adapted with younger players! Essentially for this game you only use 2 footballs - leave the rest in the bag.

When the Red Striker misses his opportunity as per the diagram, the Blues start with the spare ball. Whilst the Red striker "fetches" his ball, it leaves the Reds a man short.

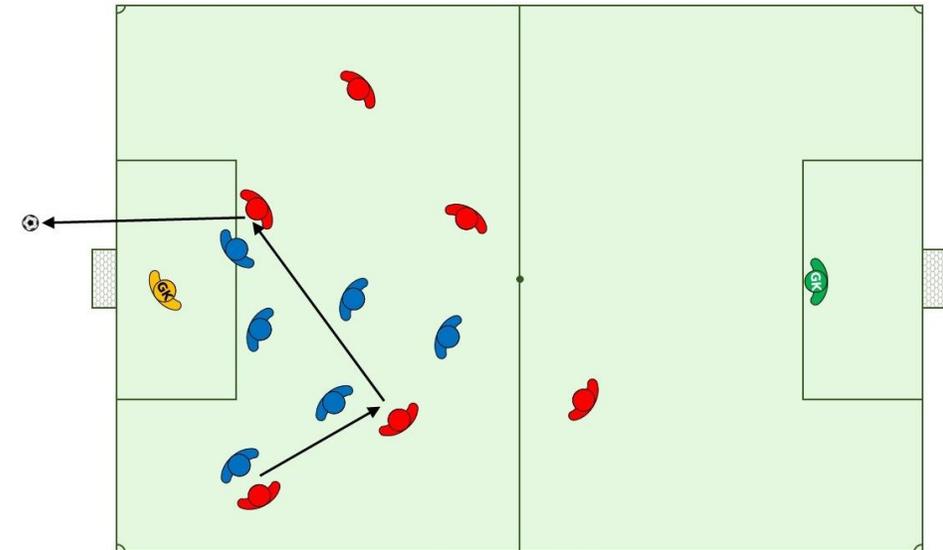
**INTENTION** Creating constant underload and overload situations

**LINK TO 11v11**

- Finishing, there is a consequence if you miss the target!
- Adapting to the state of the game (overload / underload)

**OBSERVATION** How do players adapt the behaviour based on the numbers on the pitch?

How do players cope with the consequence of missing the target?



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# 10 BALL

## Scenarios



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

This is a game that can be used for a number of different themes, but primarily it looks at finishing and managing the game or adapting to the state of the game.

Each team has 5 footballs beside their goal. Each team takes it in turn to start an attack from their Goalkeeper, when the ball leaves the field it is out of action. There are no corners, throws...etc.

When a goal is scored, that ball is left in the net, this makes it easy to count at the end to see who has won!

### INTENTION

To challenge the players' decision making in and out of possession, with some added psychological challenge.

### LINK TO 11v11

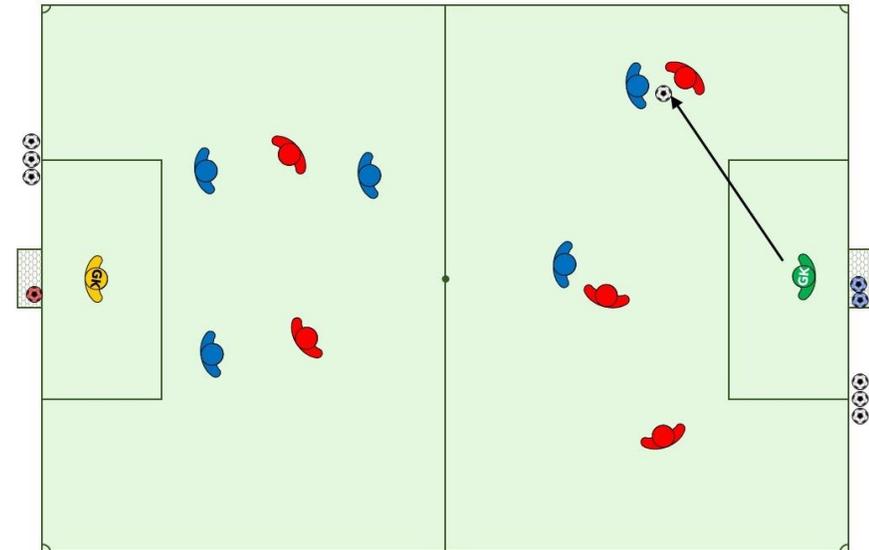
- Finishing, which team can score the most from their 5x attempts?
- Strategies to compete
- Adapting to the state of the game, do teams defend better when more is at stake?

### OBSERVATION

In the diagram the Blue team have scored 2 goals, whilst the Reds have only scored 1. The Reds are just starting their second attempt. How will the Reds fare under pressure of being a goal down? Do the Blues alter their approach now they are winning?

### PROGRESSION

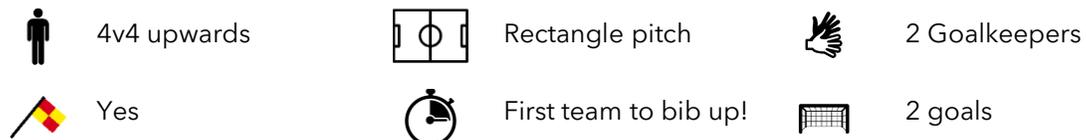
You can **reward** certain actions to link to your theme. For example any goal scored with a weaker foot is worth double or any goal that is scored following a regain is worth double.



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# BIB UP!

## Scenarios



**ORGANISATION** This game is inspired by the video game approach (*Page 42-43*). The concept is simple, every time a player scores, they earn a bib - so the Reds are adding a white bib when they score and the Blues are adding Yellow bibs when they score. To win the game, you have to get every player to score, then score a winning goal. In the diagram, all the Red players have scored, so they're in white bibs - now they score the winning goal to defeat the Blues and win the game!

**INTENTION** This game is fun, but there is strategizing too because you could be 1-4 down and still win.

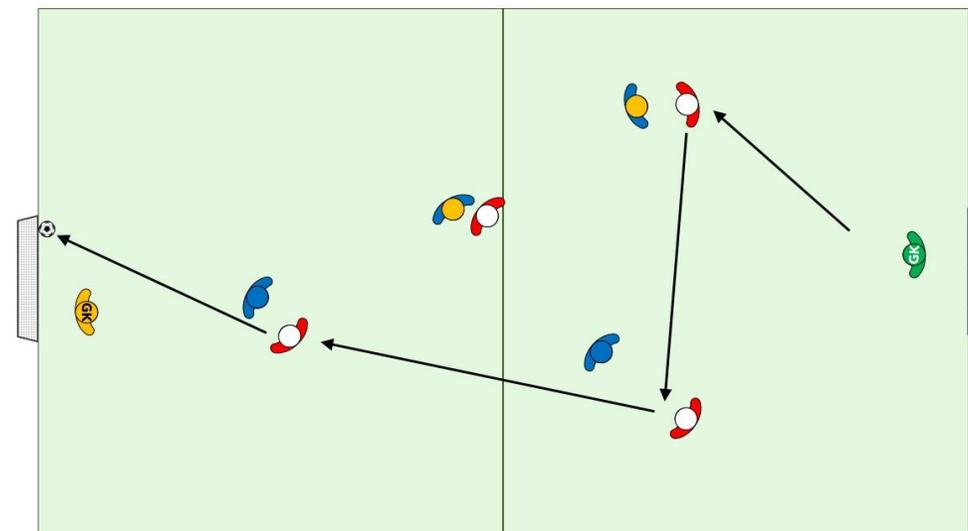
**LINK TO 11v11** Encouraging the players to problem solve without the coach.

**OBSERVATION** This game will get the players thinking and self-organizing;

- Which player do we want to score first?
- Will it get easier or harder as it progresses?
- How will we position ourselves to put the player who needs to score near the goal?
- How do we stop the opposition achieving their objective?

**PROGRESSIONS** You can change this in several ways;

- Challenge the best Striker, he / she must score 2 or 3 times to earn their bib
- The player who scores first gets a superpower, for example, for any goal he / she scores a bib can be gifted to a teammate.
- **Reward** based around the needs of the individual, for example if a player scores using his / her weaker foot its worth 2 bibs.



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# SCORE AND MOVE

## Scenarios



4v4 upwards



1x Rectangle pitch  
1x Rectangle pitch  
(small)



4 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



4 goals

### ORGANISATION

In this game the two teams (Red and Blue) play 2 matches across 2 different pitches. Every time a goal is scored the goal-scorer must "move" to a new pitch, creating uneven teams and constant overload / underload situations. The scores across the 2 pitches are added up to see which team is the winner.

### INTENTION

Creating overload and underload situations to challenge the players both in and out of possession.

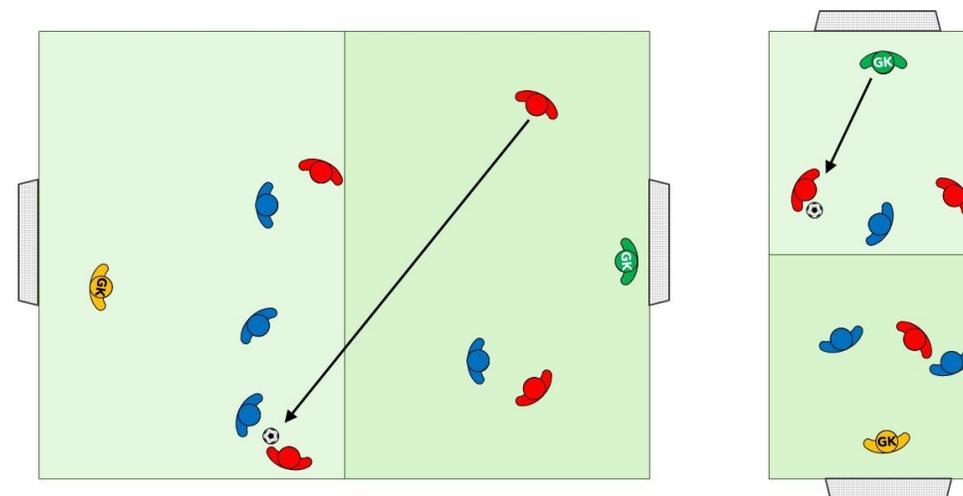
### LINK TO 11v11

Defending outnumbered  
Attacking overload  
Attacking underloaded

### OBSERVATION

Strategies to win;

- How and where do the teams choose to distribute their players at the start?
- How do the players deal with playing with numbers up or down?
- Social side, how do they communicate with their teammates quickly and effectively?
- Encourage the players to reflect, "What would you change for next time, what went well? Why?"



# TWO NIL UP OR TWO NIL DOWN?

## Scenarios



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

A regular 2 goal game, but one team starts with a 2 goal lead. At 2-0 up, do they protect and counter or go for a third? If you are 0-2 down, what is your strategy to get back into the game?

### INTENTION

A simple task constraint to encourage the players to strategize and find a way to either get back into the game or maintain their position.

### LINK TO 11v11

This game will develop game management skills and dealing with pressure!

### OBSERVATION

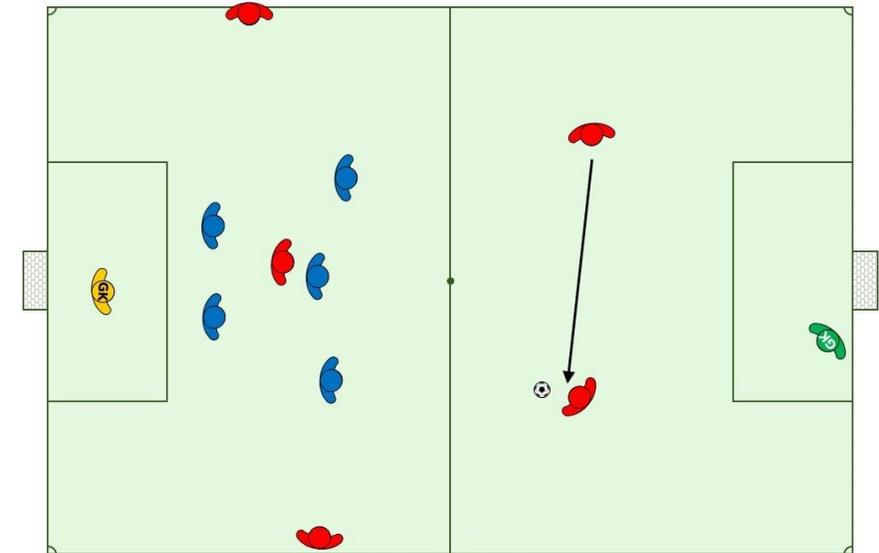
There will be lots of social interaction to discuss and implement a strategy to get back in the game or maintain your lead.

Psychologically the teams will need the ability to follow or adapt the strategy depending on the state of the game. This constraint means players are playing under pressure or in the context of a 'real game' immediately.

### PROGRESSIONS

To add **realism** and excitement, use the players favourite teams, so for example Barcelona are 0-2 down against PSG. This works well with Champions League Semi-Finals and aggregate scores.

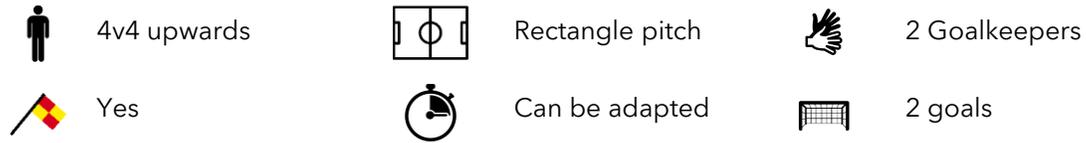
To assist you can add some "Bias Ref" (*page 157*) to assist the team trying to pull back the deficit.



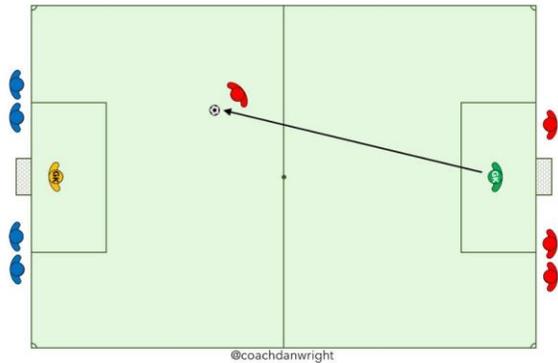
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# CONSTANT OVERLOAD

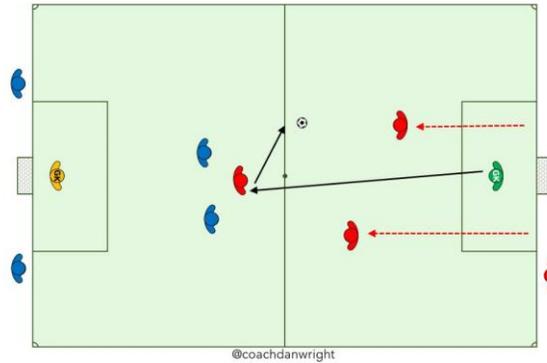
## Scenarios



Level 1: 1v0



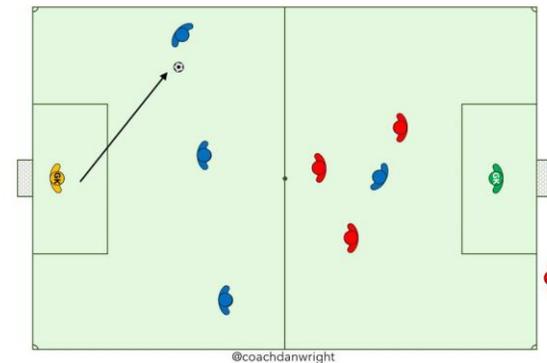
Level 3: 3v2



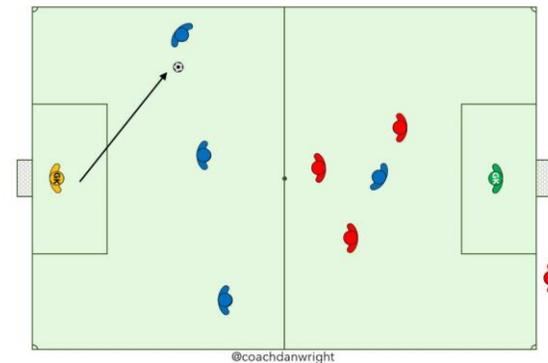
Level 2: 1v2



Level 4: 4v3



Level 5: 4v4



**ORGANISATION** In this game the numbers keep changing to create overload and underload situations. The practice starts with a 1v0 or 1-on-1 with a Goalkeeper (Level 1), this is played out until the ball is dead (goal, missed chance...etc). Each level sees more players enter the field as we progress to Level 2 which is 1x Blue vs 2x Reds, Level 3 a 3v2, Level 4 which 4v3 and finally Level 5 an equally matched 4v4.

**INTENTION** This game is designed to challenge the players' decision making and recreate simple pictures that might be seen in a game. **(Relate)**

**LINK TO 11v11**

- Defending outnumbered / forcing play
- Attacking with an overload
- Creating high quality chances

**OBSERVATION** How do the players adapt their decision making in and out of possession, when they are numbers up or numbers down?

**PROGRESSIONS** This game works well if you play a few 'sets', with the Reds and Blues alternating turns when starting, this will breed familiarity and allow the players to explore a bit more. It is important to change which individual starts too.

I ask the Goalkeeper to restart each time to work on their distribution.

# TEAM BINGO!

## Scenarios



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

Football but with a bingo twist, each team is looking to complete the challenges and be the first to achieve a "Full house". A regular 2 goal game, with a white board or piece of paper to keep track of each team's progress.

### INTENTION

This game is great for the social corner - lots of strategizing and teamwork to get success.

### LINK TO 11v11

You can adapt the bingo theme to the age / stage of your players.

### OBSERVATION

I really like this practice, if you are creative with the challenges you can really test the group across the 4 corners; technically, physically, psychologically and socially.

### PROGRESSIONS

Think about how you can **relate** the challenges to themes you have been working on, so that they consolidate their learning. You could **reward** certain interactions or behaviours.

## BINGO!

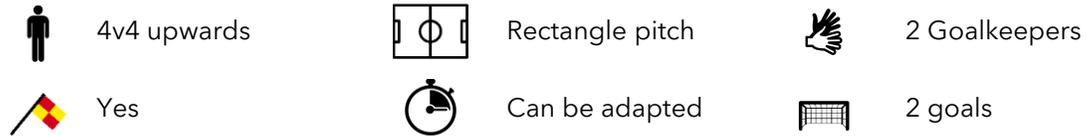
FIRST TO COMPLETE IT WINS!

SCORE WITH 1 TOUCH FINISH	SCORE AFTER A DRIBBLE	SCORE A GOAL WHERE EVERYONE TOUCHES IT
1-2 AND SCORE	NON-DOMINANT FINISH	SCORE FROM A COUNTER-ATTACK
FULL VOLLEY	ROUND THE GOALKEEPER	SCORE FROM A GOALKEEPER'S RESTART

*This template can be found in the 'notes' section on page 163*

# INDIVIDUAL BINGO!

## Scenarios



**ORGANISATION** A normal 2 goal game, with a white board or piece of paper to keep track of individuals progress. Football but with a bingo twist, for an individual to 'win' he / she must be the first to complete all the challenges and earn a 'full house'.

**LINK TO 11v11** You can adapt the bingo theme to the age / stage of your players.

**OBSERVATION** This works really well in a tournament or 3x team scenario, so when 1 group is off individuals can see their challenges. If you think this through individual challenges will need team outcomes - so lots of social corner work!

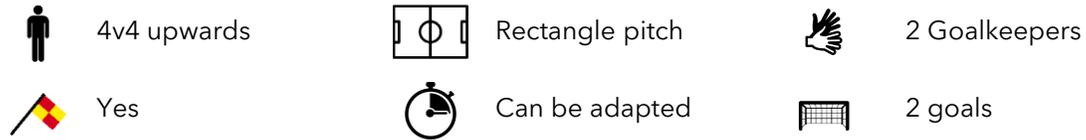
**PROGRESSIONS** Think about how you challenge all the players in the group, what will be easy for some might be hard for others. With mixed ability you could blank out some challenges.

	NICK	KAIRO	LUCA	BRANDON	SAMUEL	SAUL	MAX	RAFIQ
Involvement in a 1-2 that scores a goal	✓				✓			
1 touch finish								
Deep run; Goal or assist	✓	✓	✓		✓			
Score outside the 'D'	✓							
Every player on the team is involved		✓	✓					
Score or assist from your own half			✓					

*This template can be found in the 'notes' section on page 165*

# BIAS REF!

## Scenarios

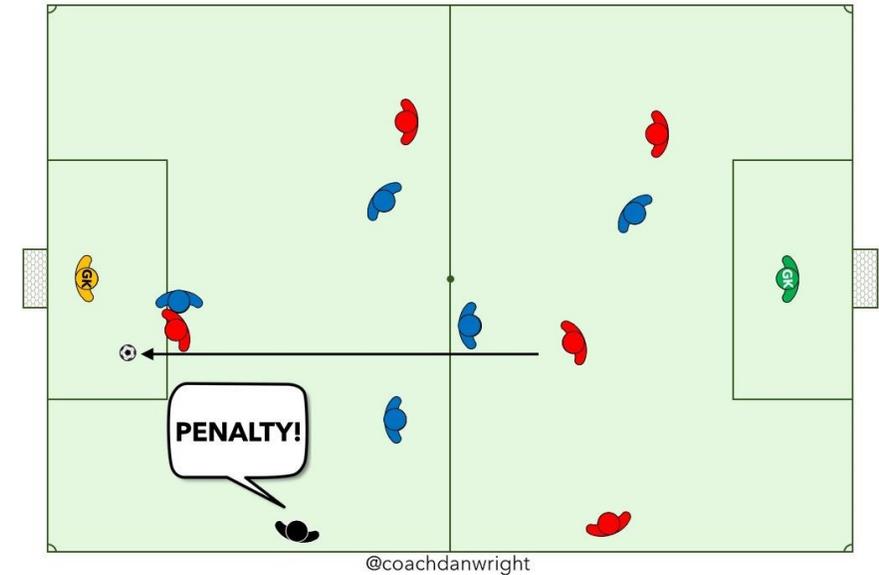


**ORGANISATION** A regular 2 goal pitch, with equal teams. I don't introduce this condition, just say "we are going to play a game"...then let the fun begin! This might mean giving decisions the wrong way like throw-ins, corner kicks, free-kicks...or even give some penalties! In this game, the players will start to find coping strategies and strive to win despite the referee.

**INTENTION** In this game the coach referees unfairly to test one side psychologically.

**LINK TO 11v11** This is great preparation for match days when decisions don't always go your way!

**OBSERVATION** Which players can manage their emotions and who finds it too unfair!



# WIN BY ONE

## Scenarios



4v4 upwards



Rectangle pitch



2 Goalkeepers



Yes



Can be adapted



2 goals

### ORGANISATION

This game takes place on a regular 2 goal pitch, suitable for the number of players and the age / ability. In this game when a team scores they lead 1-0 but can not score a second, they must look to keep possession and run down the clock. However, if the opposition equalise to make it 1-1, both teams are free to try and win the game 2-1. You can only ever win the game by one!

### INTENTION

The challenge in this practice is to adapt to the state of the game.

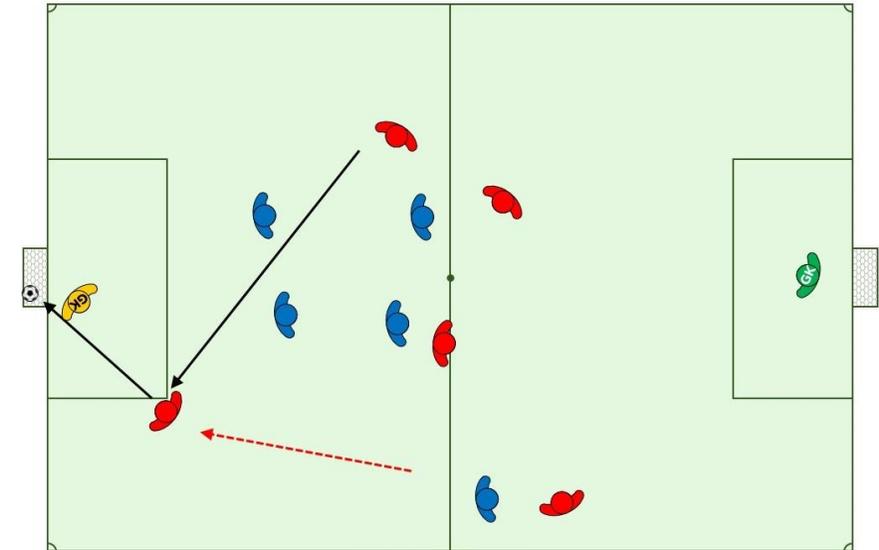
### LINK TO 11v11

If your team is in front: Keep possession or build a block to win the game

If your team is behind: Find a way to score and get back in the game!

### OBSERVATION

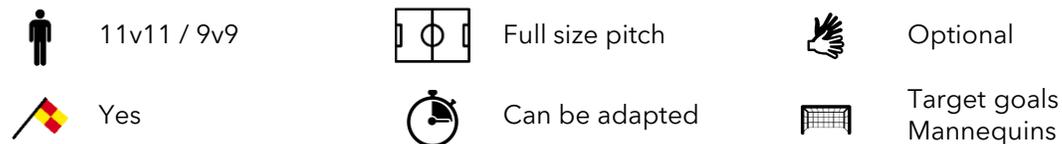
In this practice I would be looking at the psychological and social interactions between teammates. How they build a strategy and adapt it based on the state of the game.



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# TACTICAL POSSESSION

## Scenarios



**ORGANISATION** This game is aimed at older players, who are playing 11v11 or working towards 11v11. The idea here is to use the goals and gates (formed by mannequins) to develop themes of your choice.

**INTENTION** In the diagram, the Reds are trying to penetrate the central space - this is the highest reward but the hardest to do. Conversely the Blues are protecting this area and forcing their opponent outside, away from the most dangerous area.

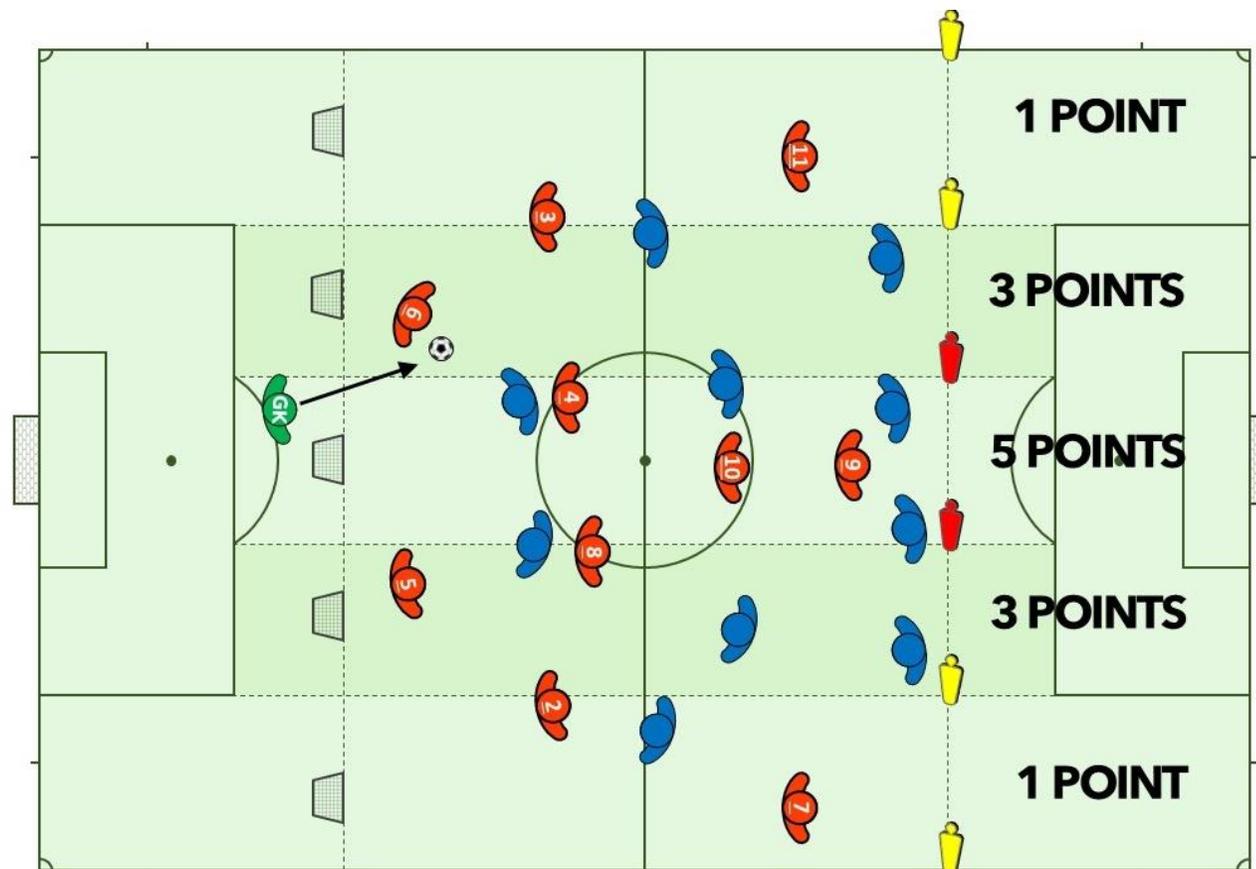
**LINK TO 11v11** In possession this game could look at penetrating key areas with forward passes, runs and dribbles. It could also shine a light on one or more of the football principles (*Pages 40 to 58*). For example, **attacking across 5 lanes** or using a **pivot** player.

Out of possession, the group could be looking at **defending 3 of the 5 lanes**, defending with a tight compact **net** or defending in different areas (**traffic light defending**).

**OBSERVATION**

- How do the attackers self organise to attack the central space?
- How much of the information is given from the coach or do the players explore and then we feedback?
- How do we manipulate the time the players have to achieve the task?

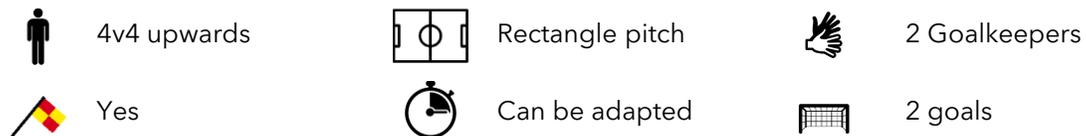
**PROGRESSIONS** This game can be tweaked in lots of different ways. This template is easy for coaches to use and is a twist on a normal 11v11 or larger sided game.



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# GOLDEN BALL

## Scenarios



**ORGANISATION** In this game the coach has a good supply of footballs, one of which is different to the rest - a yellow ball works well. This ball is the 'Golden Ball'. The players are told that this ball is different to the rest - a goal scored with the Golden Ball wins the game, regardless of the score line.

**INTENTION** To add spice to a regular training game! The Golden Ball wipes the score and puts everything up for grabs!

**LINK TO 11v11** This game is just good fun.

**OBSERVATION** How do players adapt their individual and collective strategies when the Golden Ball is in play.

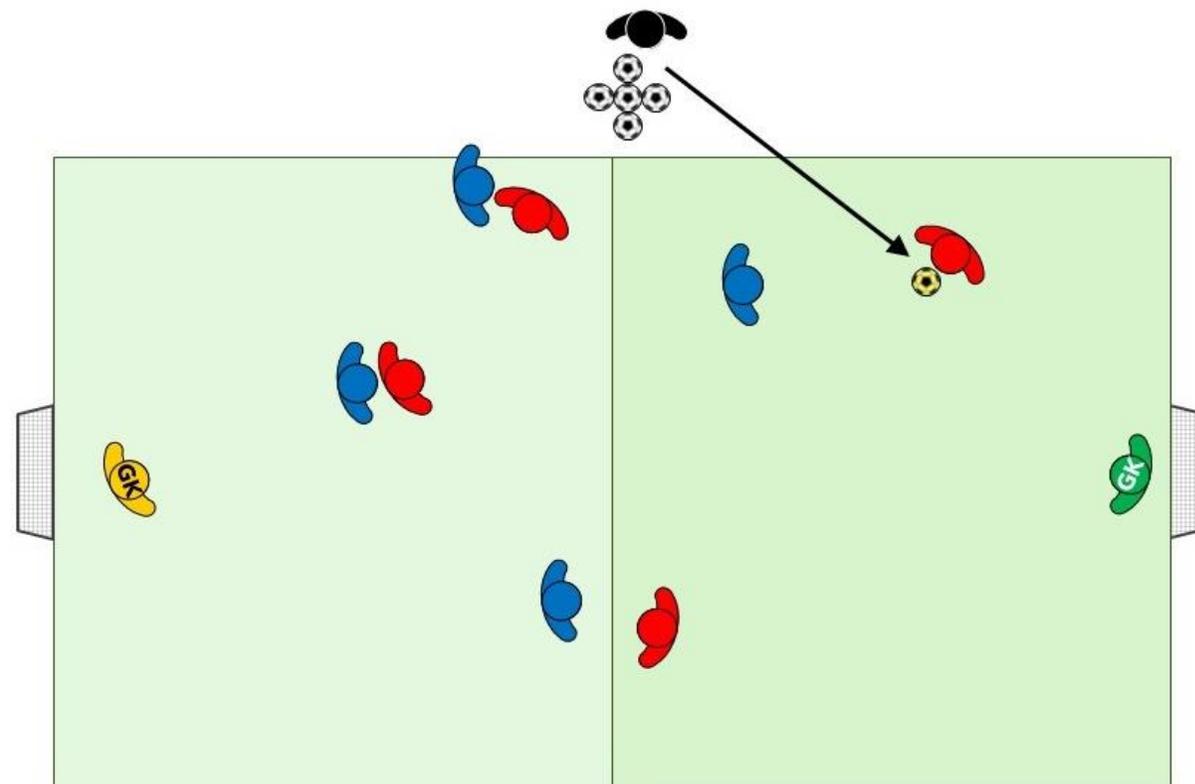
**PROGRESSIONS** The Golden Ball could be used in a number of different ways;

### Restrict

- Goals with the Golden Ball must be; 1 touch, 2 touch, volleys...etc.
- Goals with the Golden Ball must be scored with some collective idea; switch play, up-back-through...etc.
- Only certain players can score!

### Reward

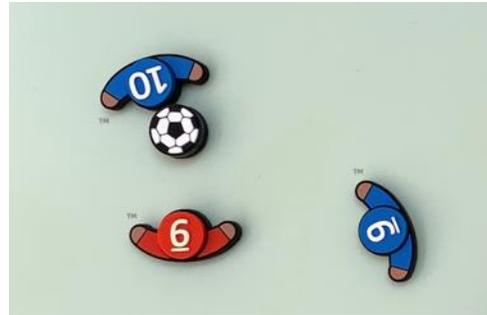
- Goals scored with the Golden Ball are worth more (3 goals, 5 goals...etc. This is great for balancing uneven games.



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# Helping to develop players' understanding of the importance of body position

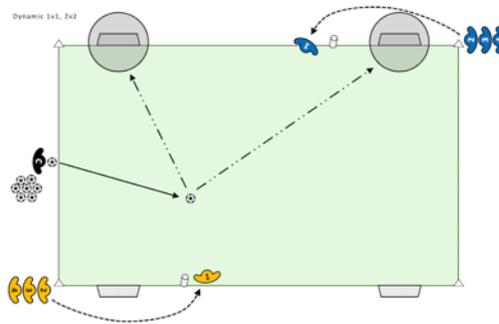
Coaching young players to understand the importance of body position in team sports is critical to them being able to play quickly, and at the highest level.



## Shapers

Shapers were invented to show orientation (body position) clearly and unambiguously. Engage your players and communicate with clarity.

Available in 3 sizes: Shapers MINI, Shapers and Shapers MAX.



## Session Planner

Create high quality session plan images quickly/easily, improving the visibility of sessions for your players, your coaching team and your coaching network.

The images in this awesome eBook were created using our session planner.

# Game Changers™

INNOVATIVE COACHING AIDS



# NOTES



# BINGO!

FIRST TO COMPLETE IT WINS!

<b>SCORE WITH 1 TOUCH FINISH</b>	<b>SCORE AFTER A DRIBBLE</b>	<b>SCORE A GOAL WHERE EVERYONE TOUCHES IT</b>
<b>1-2 AND SCORE</b>	<b>NON-DOMINANT FINISH</b>	<b>SCORE FROM A COUNTER-ATTACK</b>
<b>FULL VOLLEY</b>	<b>ROUND THE GOALKEEPER</b>	<b>SCORE FROM A GOALKEEPER'S RESTART</b>

# BINGO!

FIRST TO COMPLETE IT WINS!



# INDIVIDUAL BINGO!

FIRST TO COMPLETE IT WINS!

	NAME									
CHALLENGE										
CHALLENGE										
CHALLENGE										
CHALLENGE										
CHALLENGE										
CHALLENGE										
CHALLENGE										

# SESSION PLAN:

Theme:



# of players?



Pitch size & shape?



Goalkeepers?



Offsides?



Timings?



Goals?

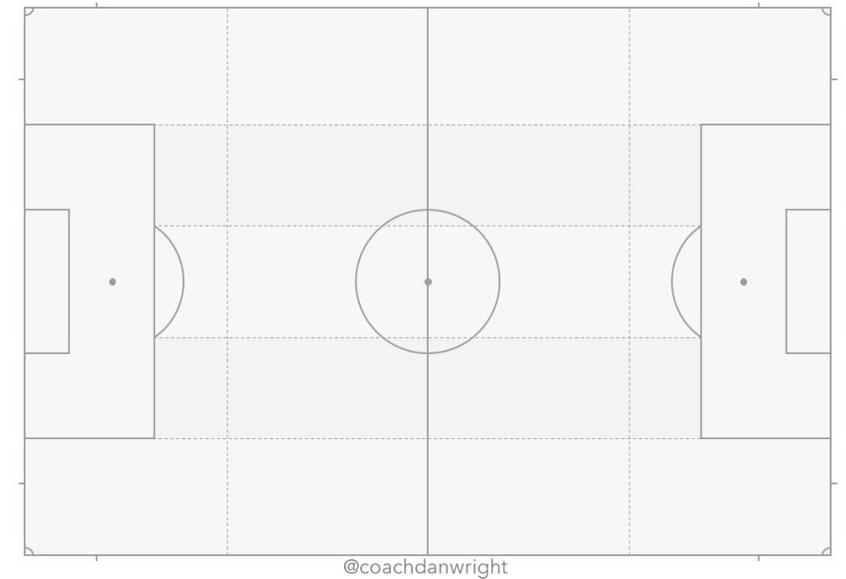
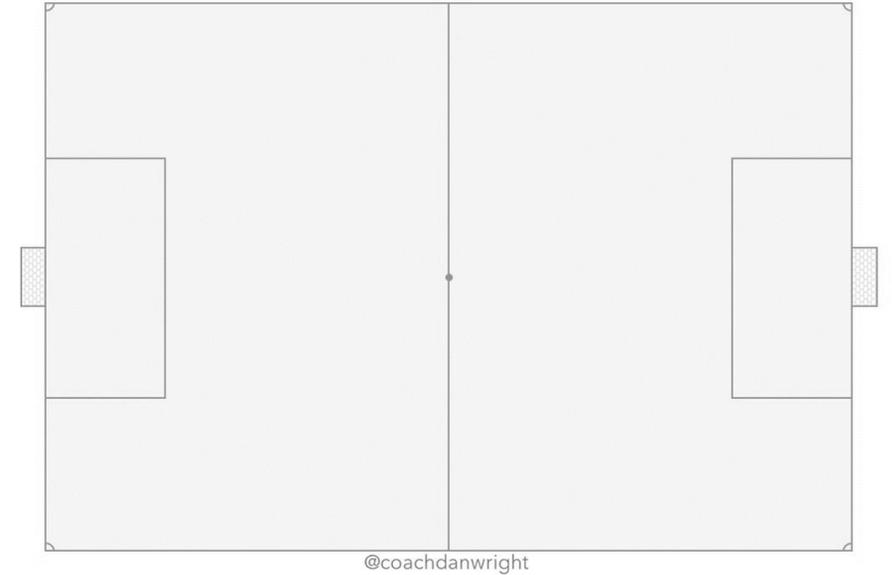
**ORGANISATION**

**INTENTION**

**LINK TO 11v11**

**OBSERVATION**

**PROGRESSIONS**



# ABOUT

UEFA 'A' LICENCE | FA ADVANCED YOUTH AWARD

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100 Small Sided Games (2020)



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Authored by: Dan Wright

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