

COACHING *THE* 4-3-3



BY KEITH SCARLETT



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The “What” of Formations?

Formations are described by how the players are categorized in accordance to their positioning along; and not across, the pitch, with the more defensive-oriented players listed first. For example, the formation 4–3–3 means four defenders, three midfielders and three forwards. Typically, goalkeepers are not included in these types of descriptions. However when they are, they are simply listed first, such as 1-4-3-3, using the example above.

Traditionally, those within the same category; the 4 midfielders in a 4–4–2, for example, would generally play as a fairly flat line across the pitch with those players in the wide positions often playing in a slightly more advanced role. However, in many modern formations this is no longer the case, which has led to modern formation interpretations splitting certain formations down into in two separate categories, some even being broken down even further into four or even five additional numbered formations. A common example is the 4–2–1–3, where the midfielders are split into two defensive and one offensive player. This formation is also considered a kind of 4–3–3.

It was not until the 4-2-4 system was developed and then implemented in the 1950s that the numbering system was put into place.

The “How” of Formations?

Every formation can be separated into one of four different types. However, each can be included in one or all four of the different categories, dependent upon how the formation functions. In addition, the different aspects of a single formation can also be broken down into the same four different criteria. The choice of formation is often related to the type of players available.

The four different categories that formations can fall into or be broken down into are: *Narrow formations, Wide formations, Attacking formations and/or Defensive Formations.*

- **Narrow formations.** Teams with a surplus of central midfielders, or teams who attack best through the centre, may choose to adopt narrow formations such as the 4–1–2–1–2 or the 4–3–2–1, which allow teams to field up to four or five central midfielders in the team. Narrow formations however depend on the outside backs (the flank or outside players in the "4") to provide width and to advance up field as frequently as possible to supplement the attack in wide areas.
- **Wide formations.** Teams with a surplus of forwards and players who are best suited for outside attacking positions may choose to adopt formations such as 4–2–3–1, 3–5–2 and 4–3–3, which commit forwards and outside attacking players high up the pitch. Wide formations allow the attacking team to stretch play and cause the defending team to cover more ground.

Teams may change formations during a game to aid their cause:

- **Change to attacking formations.** When chasing a game for a desirable result, teams tend to sacrifice a defensive player or a midfield player for a forward in order to chase a result. An example of such a change is a change from 4–5–1 to 4–4–2, 3–5–2 to 3–4–3, or even 5–3–2 to 4–3–3.
- **Change to defensive formations.** When a team is in the lead, or wishes to protect the score line of a game, the coach may choose to revert to a more defensive structure by removing a forward for a more defensive player. The extra player in defense or midfield adds solidity by giving the team more legs to chase opponents and recover possession. An example of such a change is a change from 4–4–2 to 5–3–2, 3–5–2 to 4–5–1, or even 4–4–2 to 5–4–1.

Formations can be deceptive in analyzing a particular team's style of play. For instance, a team that plays a nominally attacking 4–3–3 formation can quickly revert to a 4–5–1 if a coach instructs two of the three forwards to track back in midfield.

A Brief History of Formations

In the early 19th century, football matches were not very defensive-minded and the line-ups at the time reflected the all-out attacking nature of these games.

In the first recorded international game, Scotland against England on 30 November 1872, England played with seven or eight forwards in a 1–1–8 or a 1–2–7 formation and Scotland played with six, in a 2–2–6 formation. For England, one player would remain in defense, picking up loose balls and one or two players would hang around midfield and kick the ball up field for the other players to chase. The English style of play at the time was all about individual excellence and English players were renowned for their dribbling skills. Players would attempt to take the ball forward as far as possible and only when they could proceed no further, would they kick it ahead for someone else to chase. Scotland surprised England by actually passing the ball among players. A pairing of the Scottish field players allowed them to attempt to pass the ball to their assigned partner. Ironically, with so much attention given to attacking play, the game ended in a 0–0 draw.

A Quick Glance at Some of the Classic Formations

2–3–5 (Pyramid)



The Pyramid formation

The first long-term successful formation was recorded in 1880. However, in "[Association Football](#)" published by Caxton in 1960, the following appears in Vol II, page 432: *"Wrexham ... the first winner of the Welsh Cup in 1877 ... for the first time certainly in Wales and probably in Britain, a team played three half backs and five forwards ..."*

The 2–3–5, known as the "Pyramid," based upon its numerical formation when referenced retrospectively, was the standard formation in England and had spread all over the world by the 1890s. With some variations, it was used by most top-level teams up to the 1940s.

For the first time, a balance between attacking and defending had been achieved. When defending, the two defenders would watch out for the opponent's outside players in the attacking, while the midfielders would watch for the other three forwards.

The centre midfielder had a key role in both helping to organize the team's attack and marking the opponent's centre forward, supposedly one of their most dangerous players.

This formation gave rise to the convention of shirt numbers.

Danubian School

The Danubian School of football is a modification of the 2–3–5 formation in which the centre forward plays in a more withdrawn position. As played by the Austrians, Czechs and Hungarians in the 1920s, the Austrians took it to its peak in the 1930s. It relied on short-passing and individual skills. The Danubian School was heavily influenced by the likes of Hugo Meisl and Jimmy Hogan, the English coach who visited Austria at the time.

Metodo (2-3-2-3)



Metodo formation

Vittorio Pozzo, coach of the Italian national team in the 1930s, devised the Metodo. It was a derivation of the Danubian School. Based on the 2-3-5 formation; Pozzo realized that his midfielders would need some more support in order to be superior to the opponents' midfield, so he pulled two of the forwards back until they were just in front of midfield, creating a 2-3-2-3 formation. This created a stronger defense than previous systems, as well as allowing effective counter-attacks. The Italian national team won back-to-back World Cups in 1934 and 1938 using this system. It has been argued that Pep Guardiola's Barcelona used a modern version of this formation. This formation is also similar to the standard in table football, featuring two defenders, five midfielders and three strikers.

WM



WM formation

Herbert Chapman of Arsenal created the WM system in the mid-1920s to counter a change in the offside law in which as implemented in 1925. The change had reduced the number of opposition players that attackers needed between themselves and the goal line from three to two. This led to the introduction of a centre-back to stop the opposing centre forward and tried to balance defensive and offensive playing. The formation became so successful that by the late-1930s most English clubs had adopted the WM. Retrospectively, the WM has either been described as a 3–2–5 or as a 3–4–3, or more precisely a 3–2–2–3 reflecting the letters that symbolized it. The gap in the centre of the formation between the two outside midfielders and the two inside forwards allowed Arsenal to counter-attack effectively. Subsequently, several English sides adapted the WM, but none could apply it in quite the same way Chapman had.

This was mainly due to the comparative rarity of Alex James in the English game. He was one of the earliest playmakers in the history of the game and the hub around which Chapman's Arsenal revolved.

WW

The WW was a development of the WM created by the Hungarian coach Márton Bukovi who turned the 3–2–5 WM into a 2–3–2–3 by effectively turning the M "upside down." The lack of an effective centre forward in his team necessitated moving this player back to midfield to create a playmaker, with a midfielder instructed to focus on defense. This created a 2–3–1–4, which morphed into a 2–3–2–3 when the team lost possession. Many have described it as a type of genetic link between the WM and the 4–2–4. Fellow compatriot Gusztáv Sebes in the Hungarian national team of the early 1950s used this formation successfully.

3–3–4

The 3–3–4 formation was similar to the WW, with the notable exception of having an inside forward (*as opposed to centre forward*) deployed as a midfield schemer alongside the two outside-midfielders. This formation would be commonplace during the 1950s and early 1960s. One of the best exponents of the system was the Tottenham Hotspur double-winning side of 1961, which deployed a midfield of Danny Blanchflower, John White and Dave Mackay. FC Porto won the 2005–06 Portuguese national championship using this unusual formation under manager Co Adriaanse.

4-2-4



The 4-2-4 formation

Conceived as a reaction to WM's stiffness and considered a further development of the WW, the 4-2-4 attempts to combine a strong attack with a strong defense. The 4-2-4 was the first formation to be described using numbers.

While Márton Bukovi devised the initial developments leading to the 4-2-4, the credit for creating the 4-2-4 lies with two different people: Flávio Costa, the Brazilian national coach in the early 1950s, as well as another Hungarian Béla Guttmann. Developed independently, the Brazilians discussed these tactics while the Hungarians put them into motion. The fully developed 4-2-4 was only "perfected" in Brazil, however, in the late 1950s.

Costa published his ideas, the "diagonal system", in the Brazilian newspaper *O Cruzeiro*, using schematics and for the first time ever, the formation description by numbers. The "diagonal system," created to spur improvisation in players, was another precursor of the 4–2–4.

Guttman himself moved to Brazil later in the 1950s to help develop these tactical ideas using the experience of Hungarian coaches.

The 4–2–4 formation, aiming to use six defenders and six forwards, with the midfielders performing both tasks, made use of the players' increasing levels of skill and fitness. The fourth defender increased the number of defensive players but mostly allowed them to be closer together, thus enabling effective cooperation among them, the point being that a stronger defense would allow an even stronger attack.

The relatively empty midfield relied on defenders that should now be able to not only steal the ball, but also hold it, pass it or even run with it and start an attack. So this formation required that all players, including defenders, are somehow skillful and with initiative, making it a perfect fit for the Brazilian player's mind. The 4–2–4 needed a high level of tactical awareness, as having only two midfielders could lead to defensive problems. The system was also fluid enough to allow the formation to change throughout play.

4–2–4 was first used with success at club level in Brazil by Palmeiras and Santos and was used by Brazil in their wins at 1958 World Cup and 1970 World Cup, both featuring Pelé and Mário Zagallo, the latter of which played in 1958 and coached in 1970. The formation was quickly adopted throughout the world after the Brazilian success.

A Quick Glance at Some Common Modern Formations

Common modern formations

Used in modern football, the following formations are flexible allowing tailoring to the needs of a team, as well as to the players available. Variations of any given formation include changes in positioning of players, as well as replacement of a traditional defender by a sweeper.

4-4-2



The 4-4-2 formation

This formation was the most common in football in the 1990s and early 2000s. The midfielders are required to work hard to support both the defense and the attack. Typically, one of the central midfielders is to go up field as often as possible to support the forward pair, while the

other will play a "holding role," shielding the defense; the two wide midfield players must move up the flanks to the goal line in attacks and yet protect the outside wide defenders. On the European level, the major example of a team using a 4-4-2 formation was Milan, trained by Arrigo Sacchi and later Fabio Capello, which won three European Cups, two Intercontinental Cups and three UEFA Super Cups between 1988 and 1995. Under Milan's example, it became very popular in Italy in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

At the highest level, other formations such as the 4-2-3-1 have begun to replace the 4-4-2. In 2010, none of the winners of the Spanish, English and Italian leagues, as well as the Champions League, relied on the 4-4-2. Following England's elimination at the 2010 World Cup by a 4-2-3-1 Germany side, people criticized England National Team coach Fabio Capello (*who was notably successful with the 4-4-2 at Milan in the 1990s*) for playing an "increasingly outdated" 4-4-2 formation.

~~4-4-1-1~~

A variation of the 4-4-2 with one of the strikers playing "in the hole," or as a "second striker," slightly behind their partner. The second striker is generally a more creative player, the playmaker, who can drop into midfield to pick up the ball before running with it or passing to teammates. Fulham most prominently used the system during the 2009-10 season, with midfielder Zoltan Gera playing behind forward Bobby Zamora as they upset many teams across Europe on their way to the 2010 Europa League Final.

4-3-3



The 4-3-3 formation

The 4-3-3 was a development of the 4-2-4 and the Brazilian national team played it in the 1962 World Cup. The extra player in midfield allows a stronger defense and the midfield could be staggered for different effects. The three midfielders normally play closely together to protect the defense and move laterally across the field as a coordinated unit. The three forwards split across the field to spread the attack and may be expected to mark the opposition outside-backs as opposed to doubling back to assist their own outside-backs, as do the wide midfielders in a 4-4-2. When used from the start of a match, this formation is widely regarded as encouraging expansive play and should not be confused with the practice of modifying a 4-4-2 by bringing on an extra forward to replace a midfielder when behind in the latter stages of a game. This formation is suited for a short passing game and useful for ball retention.

A staggered 4–3–3 involving a defensive midfielder (*usually numbered four or six*) and two attacking midfielders (*numbered eight and ten*) was commonplace in Italy, Argentina and Uruguay during the 1960s and 1970s. The Italian variety of 4–3–3 was simply a modification of WM, by converting one of the two outside-midfielders to a “libero” (*sweeper*), whereas the Argentine and Uruguayan formations derived from the 2–3–5 and retained the notional attacking centre-midfielder. The Dutch team of the 1974 and 1978 World Cups made this famous, even though the team won neither.

In club football, the team that brought this formation to the forefront was the famous Ajax team of the early 1970s, which won three European Cups with Johan Cruyff and Zdenek Zeman with Foggia in Italy during the late 1980s, where he completely revitalized the movement supporting this formation. Norwegian manager Nils Arne Egged won 15 Norwegian league titles with this same formation.

Most teams using this formation now use the specialist defensive midfielder and Barcelona are the most famous recent example.

4–3–1–2

A variation of the 4–3–3 wherein a striker gives way to a central attacking midfielder. Massimiliano Allegri adopted this formation for the 2010–11 Serie A season for Milan. The formation focuses on the attacking midfielder moving play through the centre with the strikers on either side. It is a much narrower setup in comparison to the 4–3–3 and is usually incredibly dependent on the “1” to create chances.

4-4-2 diamond or 4-1-2-1-2



The 4-4-2 diamond formation

The 4-4-2 diamond (also described as 4-1-2-1-2) staggers the midfield. The width in the team has to come from the outside-backs pushing forward. Sometimes, the defensive midfielder plays as a deep lying playmaker. Its most famous example was Carlo Ancelotti's Milan, which won the 2003 UEFA Champions League Final and made Milan runners-up in 2005. Milan was obliged to adopt this formation to field talented central midfielder Andrea Pirlo, in a period when Rui Costa and later Kaká occupied the position of offensive midfielder. Gradually this tactic was abandoned by Milan after Andriy Shevchenko's departure in 2006, progressively adopting a "Christmas Tree" formation.

4-1-3-2

The 4-1-3-2 is a variation of the 4-1-2-1-2 and features a strong and talented defensive center midfielder. This allows the remaining three midfielders to play farther forward and more aggressively and also allows them to pass back to their defensive mid when setting up a play or recovering from a counterattack. Considered an attacking formation, the 4-1-3-2 gives a strong presence in the forward middle of the pitch. Opposing teams with fast wingers and strong passing abilities can try to overwhelm the 4-1-3-2 with fast attacks on the wings of the pitch before the three offensive midfielders can fall back to help their defensive line. Valeriy Lobanovskiy is one of the most famous exponents of the formation, using it with Dinamo Kyiv, winning three European trophies in the process. Another example of the 4-1-3-2 in use was the English national team at the 1966 FIFA World Cup, managed by Alf Ramsey.

4-3-2-1 (the "Christmas Tree" formation)



The 4-3-2-1 formation

The 4-3-2-1, commonly described as the "Christmas Tree" formation, has another forward brought on for a midfielder to play "in the hole," so leaving two forwards slightly behind the most forward striker.

Christian Gross and Terry Venables used this formation during their time in charge of Tottenham Hotspur. Since then the formation has lost its popularity in England. It is however most known for being the formation Carlo Ancelotti utilized on and off during his time as a coach of Milan.

In this approach, the central midfielder acts as a playmaker while one of the forwards plays in a free role. However, it is also common for the three central players to be energetic shuttlers, providing for the individual talent of the two forwards ahead. Considered relatively narrow, the "Christmas Tree" formation depends on outside-backs to provide presence in wide areas. The formation is also relatively fluid. During open play, one of the side central players may drift to the flank to add additional presence.

5-3-2



The 5-3-2 formation

This formation has three central defenders (*possibly with one acting as a sweeper.*) This system is heavily reliant on the outside-backs providing width for the team. It is their job to work their flank along the full length of the pitch, supporting both the defense and the attack.

5-3-2 with sweeper or 1-4-3-2

A variant of the 5-3-2, this involves a more withdrawn sweeper, who may join the midfield and more advanced outside-backs.

3-4-3



The 3-4-3 formation

Using a 3-4-3, the midfielders are expected to split their time between attacking and defending. Having only three dedicated defenders means that if the opposing team breaks through the midfield, they will have a greater chance to score than with a more conventional defensive configuration, such as 4-5-1 or 4-4-2. However, the three forwards allow for a greater concentration on attack. More offensive-minded teams use this formation. The formation was famously used by Liverpool under Rafael Benitez during the second half of the 2005 UEFA Champions League Final to come back from a three-goal deficit.

3-5-2



The 3-5-2 formation

This formation is similar to 5-3-2 except that the two outside mids are oriented more towards the attack. Because of this, the central midfielder tends to remain further back in order to help prevent counter-attacks. It differs from the classical 3-5-2 of the WW by having a non-staggered midfield. It was used for the first time at international level by the Argentine coach Carlos Bilardo. Terry Venables notably used this formation (*along with a 4-1-2-1-2*) during England's campaign in Euro 96, with Gareth Southgate or Paul Ince acting as centre midfielder. Many teams also use a central attacking midfielder and two defensive midfielders, so the midfielders form a W formation.

Sebastião Lazaroni used this formation for Brazil during the unsuccessful participation to the 1990 FIFA World Cup.

Although it had fallen out of favour with most coaches who now prefer four at the back, it has recently had a renaissance in both club and international football. At club level, Juventus coach Antonio Conte under whom Juventus won three back-to-back scudetti between 2012 and 2014 has effectively used it.

At international level, it has been used as an alternate formation on two notable occasions to nullify the challenge of possession football used by the Spanish national side. Cesare Prandelli used it for the Italy's 1–1 draw with Spain in the group stage of UEFA Euro 2012, with some commentators seeing Daniele De Rossi as a sweeper. The Netherlands used it to greater effect against Spain during the group stage of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, completing a 5-1 win.

3-6-1



The 3-6-1 formation

This uncommon modern formation focuses on ball possession in the midfield. In fact, it is very rare to see it as an initial formation, as it is more useful for maintaining a lead or tie score. Its more common variants are the 3-4-2-1 or the 3-4-3 diamond, which uses two outside midfielders. The lone forward must be tactically gifted, not only because he or she focuses on scoring but also on playing the ball back towards the own goal to assist with back passes to his teammates. Once the team is leading the game, there is an even stronger tactical focus on ball control, short passes and running down the clock. On the other hand, when the team is losing, at least one of the playmakers will more frequently play in the edge of the area to add depth to the attack. Guus Hiddink is one of the few coaches who has used this formation, recently for Australia during the 2006 FIFA World Cup,

4-5-1



The 4-5-1 formation

4-5-1 is a defensive formation; however, if the two outside midfielders play a more attacking role, it can be likened to 4-3-3. The formation can be used to grind out 0-0 draws or preserve a lead, as the packing of the centre midfield makes it difficult for the opposition to build up play. Because of the "closeness" of the midfield, the opposing team's forwards will often be starved of possession. Due to the lone striker, however, the centre of the midfield does have the responsibility of pushing forward as well. The defensive midfielder will often control the pace of the game. Dick Advocaat used the very same formation for the Russian national team twice in the UEFA Euro 2012 Group A tournament: first time in the game against Poland, and second time against Greece.

4-2-3-1



The 4-2-3-1 formation

This formation is widely used by Spanish, French and German sides. While it seems defensive to the eye, it is quite a flexible formation, as both the wide players and the outside-backs join the attack. In defense, this formation is similar to either the 4-5-1 or the 4-4-1-1. It is used to maintain possession of the ball and stopping opponent attacks by controlling the midfield area of the field. The lone striker may be very tall and strong to hold the ball up as his midfielders and outside-backs join him in attack. The striker could also be very fast. In these cases, the opponent's defense will be forced to fall back early, thereby leaving space for the offensive central midfielder. This formation is used especially when a playmaker is to be highlighted. The variations of personnel used on the flanks in this set-up include using traditional wingers, using inverted wingers or simply using wide midfielders.

At the international level, this formation has been used with success by the French national team, the Dutch national team and the German national team in an asymmetric shape and often with strikers as wide midfielders or inverted wingers. The formation is also currently used by Brazil as an alternative to the 4–2–4 formation of the late 1950s to 1970. Implemented similarly, to how the original 4–2–4 was used back then, use of this formation in this manner is very offensive, creating a six-man attack and a six-man defense tactical layout. The front four attackers are arranged as a pair of wide forwards and a playmaker forward who play in support of a lone striker. Mário Zagallo also considers the Brazil 1970 football team he coached as pioneers of the 4–2–3–1.

In recent years with outside-backs having ever more increasing attacking roles, the wide players (*be they deep lying forwards, inverted wingers or attacking wide midfielders*) have been tasked with the defensive responsibility to track and pin down the opposition outside-backs.

Managers all over the world in the modern game have very frequently used this formation. One particularly effective use of it was Liverpool F.C. under Rafael Benitez, who deployed Javier Mascherano, Xabi Alonso and Steven Gerrard in central midfield, with Gerrard acting in a more advanced role in order to link up with Fernando Torres, who acted as the central striker. Another notable example at club level is Bayern Munich under Jupp Heynckes.

4–6–0



The 4–6–0 formation

A highly unconventional formation, the 4–6–0 is an evolution of the 4–2–3–1 in which the centre forward is exchanged for a player who normally plays as a “trequartista” (*that is, in the 'hole'*). Suggested as a possible formation for the future of football, the formation sacrifices an out-and-out striker for the tactical advantage of a mobile front four attacking from a position that the opposition defenders cannot mark without being pulled out of position. Owing to the intelligence and pace required by the front four attackers to create and attack any space left by the opposition defenders, however, the formation requires a very skillful and well-drilled front four. Due to these high requirements from the attackers and the novelty of playing without a proper goal scorer, the formation has been adopted by very few teams and rarely consistently. As with the development of many formations, the origins and originators are uncertain, but arguably, the first reference to a professional team adopting a similar formation is Anghel Iordănescu's Romania in the 1994 World Cup Round of 16, when Romania won 3–2 against Argentina. The

first team to adopt the formation systematically was Luciano Spalletti's Roma side during the 2005–06 Serie A season, mostly out of necessity as his "strikerless" formation and then notably by Alex Ferguson's Manchester United side in the 2007–08 Premier League season (*who won the Premier League and Champions League that season*). The formation was unsuccessfully used by Craig Levein's Scotland vs Czech Republic to widespread condemnation. At UEFA Euro 2012, Spain coach Vicente del Bosque used the 4–6–0 for his side's 1–1 group stage draw versus Italy and their 4–0 win versus Italy in the final of the tournament.

5-4-1



The 5-4-1 formation

This is a particularly defensive formation, with an isolated forward and a packed defense. Again, however, a couple of attacking outside backs can make this formation resemble something like a 3-6-1. One of the most famous cases of its use is the Greek National Team.

1-6-3



The 1-6-3 formation

The 1-6-3 formation was first utilized by Japan at the behest of General Yoshijirō Umezu in 1936. Famously, Japan defeated the heavily favoured Swedish team 3-2 at the 1936 Olympics with the unorthodox 1-6-3 formation, before going down 0-8 to Italy. The formation was dubbed the "kamikaze" formation sometime in the 1960s when former US national team player Walter Bahr used it for a limited number of games as coach of the Philadelphia Spartans to garner greater media and fan attention for the struggling franchise.

4-2-2-2 (*Magic Rectangle*)



The 4-2-2-2 formation

Often referred to as the "Magic Rectangle" or "Magic Square," it has been used in France in the 80s and for a whole generation in Brazil with Telê Santana, Carlos Alberto Parreira and Vanderlei Luxemburgo. Arturo Salah and Manuel Pellegrini in Chile and Francisco Maturana in Colombia have also used it. The "Magic Rectangle" is formed by combining two box-to-box midfielders with two deep-lying ("*hanging*") forwards across the midfield. This provides a balance in the distribution of possible moves and adds a dynamic quality to midfield play. This formation was used by former Real Madrid manager Manuel Pellegrini and met with considerable praise. Pellegrini also used this formation whilst at Villarreal and Málaga. The formation is closely related to a 4-2-4 previously used by Fernando Riera, Pellegrini's mentor, which can be traced back to Chile in 1962; who (*may have*) adopted it from the Frenchman Albert Batteux at the Stade de Reims in the 50s. In addition, before Pellegrini, Vanderlei Luxemburgo most infamously used this formation during his failed stint at Real Madrid in the

latter part of the 2004–05 season and throughout the 2005–06 season. This formation has been described as being "deeply flawed" and "suicidal."

At first Telê Santana, then Carlos Alberto Parreira and Vanderlei Luxemburgo proposed basing the "Magic Rectangle" on the work of the wing backs. The rectangle becomes a 3–4–3 on the attack because one of the wing backs moves downfield. In another sense, the Colombian 4–2–2–2 is closely related to the 4–4–2 diamond of Brazil even though the style is a bit different from the French-Chilean trend and is based on the complementation of a box-to box midfielder within the 10 classic positions. It emphasizes the triangulation, especially in the surprise of attack. The 4–2–2–2 formation consists of the standard defensive four (*right back, two centre backs and left back*), with two centre midfielders, two support strikers and two out and out strikers. Similar to the 4–6–0, the formation requires a particularly alert and mobile front four to work successfully. The Brazilian national team, notably in the 1998 FIFA World Cup final, has also used the formation on occasion.

3-3-1-3



The 3-3-1-3 formation

The 3-3-1-3 was formed off a modification to the Dutch 4-3-3 system of which Ajax had developed. Coaches like Louis van Gaal and Johan Cruyff brought it to even further attacking extremes and the system eventually found its way to FC Barcelona, where players such as Andrés Iniesta and Xavi were reared in the 3-3-1-3's philosophy. It demands intense pressing high up the pitch especially from the forwards and an extremely high defensive line, playing the whole game inside the opponents' half. It requires incredible technical precision and rapid ball circulation since one slip or dispossession can result in a vulnerable counter-attack situation. Cruyff's variant relied on a flatter and wider midfield, but van Gaal used an offensive midfielder and midfield diamond to link up with the front three more effectively. Marcelo Bielsa has used the system with some success with Argentina and Chile's national teams and is currently one of the few high-profile managers to use the system in competition today. Diego Simeone had also tried it occasionally at River Plate.

3-3-3-1

The Triple Three-One system is a very attacking formation and its compact nature is ideally suited for midfield domination and ball possession. It means a coach can field more attacking players and add extra strength through the spine of the team. The attacking three are usually two wide strikers or wide Midfielders with the central player of the three occupying a Central Attacking Midfield (*CAM*) or Second Striker role behind the Centre Forward. The Midfield 3 consists of two Centre Midfielders (*CM*) ahead of one Central Defensive Midfielder (*CDM*) or alternatively one *CM* and two *CDM*'s. The defensive three can consist of three Centre Backs (*CB*) or one *CB* with an outside back on either side.

The 3-3-3-1 formation was used by Marcelo Bielsa's Chile in the 2010 World Cup, with three centre backs coupled with two outside midfielders and a holding player, although a variation is the practical hour glass, using three wide players, a narrow three, a wide three and a centre-forward.

4-2-1-3

José Mourinho developed the somewhat unconventional 4-2-1-3 formation during his time at Internazionale including in the 2010 UEFA Champions League Final. By using Captain Javier Zanetti and Esteban Cambiasso in holding midfield positions, he was able to push more players to attack. Wesley Sneijder filled the attacking midfield role and the front three operated as three strikers, rather than having a striker and one player on each wing. Using this formation, Mourinho won The Treble with Inter in only his second season in charge of the club.

As the system becomes more developed and flexible, small groups can be identified to work together in more efficient ways by giving them more specific and different roles within the same lines, and numbers like 4-2-1-3, 4-1-2-3 and even 4-2-2-2 occur.

Many of the current systems have three different formations in each third, defending, middle, and attacking. The goal is to outnumber the other team in all parts of the field but not to completely wear out all the players on the team using it before the full ninety minutes are up. Therefore, the one single number is confusing, as it may not actually look like a 4-2-1-3 when

a team is defending or trying to gain possession. In a positive attack, it may look exactly like a 4-2-1-3.

Incomplete Formations

When a player is sent off (*i.e. after being shown a red card or taken off the field due to injury or tactical reasons*), the teams generally fall back to defensive formations such as 4-4-1 or 5-3-1. Only when facing a negative result will a team with ten players play in a risky attacking formation such as 4-3-2 or even 4-2-3. When more than one player is missing from the team, the common formations are generally disbanded in favour of either maximum concentration on defense, or maximum concentration on attack.

'Coaching the 4-3-3' – Who Uses It

The 4-3-3 is one of the most popular and successful formations in use in the game of football, with both international and domestic teams mastering it. Here, before we get our hands dirty with how it works, let us spend a little time exploring who uses it.

It is up to the manager how he wants to manipulate his players inside the shape, so how have we seen notable figures use the formation?

Example #1: Paulo Bento's Portugal at Euro 2012

Paulo Bento set a standard for the 4-3-3 in 2012 with his Portugal side.

He looked at his players in qualifying, realized what talent he had at his disposal and picked the perfect formation to utilize their strengths.

His two outside-backs, Fabio Coentrao and Joao Pereira, roamed forward liberally and connected with flanking front-runners Cristiano Ronaldo and Nani, respectively.

With Ronaldo cutting inside from the left, Coentrao found himself with 90 yards of space down the left-hand touchline. He used it well and was easily one of the better players in the tournament.

The midfield, consisting of Joao Moutinho, Raul Meireles and Miguel Veloso, was also a perfect fit.

Veloso was the anchor, sitting deep, collecting the ball from his centre-backs and initiating attacks. Moutinho and Meireles did a lot of running, stretching the midfield both horizontally and vertically to create options for the pass.

Czech Republic manager Michal Bilek decided to man-mark Ronaldo with Theodor Gebre Selassie in the quarterfinal. It was not the right choice. The movement of Ronaldo pulled his mark so far out of position Coentrao must have thought he had stumbled upon a deserted field of daisies.

Example #2: Nigel Adkins' Southampton in the English Premier League

Domestically speaking, Southampton's 4-3-3 has been among the best. While the Saints have not always flown high in the EPL, they have found their feet and have produced some absurdly good free-flowing football.

At times, they seem to be using a 4-4-1-1, but the South Coast club mix it up so well it gives opposing managers nightmares.

Nathaniel Clyne was Adkins' Pereira, but the former Scunthorpe man had a problem on the left. The 4-3-3 is a delicate balance, meaning you need two premium quality outside-backs or it is better to use none at all.

Danny Fox has been woeful for several years now, so Adkins looked at Luke Shaw from their academy. All of a sudden, Southampton had two players capable in both areas of the pitch and the formation came to life.

The engine room housed two hard workers in Morgan Schneiderlin and Jack Cork and a flair player in Gaston Ramirez, while the forward line saw Rickie Lambert become the focal point.

You see, the 4-3-3 is an excellent formation, provided you have the right players to fill it.

Perhaps that is why Jose Mourinho used a carefully selected 4-5-1? Did he entirely trust Paulo Ferreira at right back to give the balance his side would require?

Southampton is an excellent study in how that balance is crucial to a formation. Not picking on Danny Fox's individual errors, his general lack of ability saw the Saints become very lopsided.

His teammates did not trust him to provide attacking width or defensive solidarity, causing a realignment of the entire team.

Bento had no such problems, as Pereira and Coentrao were evenly matched and formed the very framework in which his entire team would play.

Two other examples are Barcelona and Arsenal. Both of these sides have employed the attacking 4-3-3 formation and have been two of the most attractive teams to watch in world soccer over recent years. The formation works best when a team is going forward and attempting to win a match, rather than simply trying to contain the opposition. However, the respective managers of Barcelona and Arsenal, Josep Guardiola and Arsene Wenger respectively, did their best to ensure they had enough players defending when their teams were on the back foot. The attacking 4-3-3 formation is still used by many clubs in world soccer, but rarely with such devastating effect as was the two Spanish and English sides.

The national side of Brazil used this attacking formation back in 1962 and more recently it has been used by the national teams representing Portugal and Holland. Amongst the more notorious of coaches Jose Mourinho, Zdenek Zeman and Jesualdo Ferreira have effectively deployed it while Ajax, Rosenborg and Chelsea are included in the many club sides that have used this system of play.

'Coaching the 4-3-3' – How it Works

Some often mistake a 4-3-3 for a 4-5-1, so first it is important to distinguish between the two setups.

The 4-3-3 is a fluid template that allows players to contribute in every phase of play. It will house a left back who bombs forward to overlap the outside front-runner, but also tears back to defend their own byline.

In the corresponding 4-5-1 that left back would be purely defensive, rarely venturing forward to contribute to the attacking phase of play and instead sitting on the midstripe.

The midfield houses one anchor whom is accompanied by two pure central midfielders who are scour the pitch like crazy contributing to every move.

The lone forward works in tandem with the flank players and, in turn with the two central midfielders advancing. Thus, a varied style is used, as the formation's expanded tendencies allow crosses, inverted wingers, long shots and through balls.

The Basic Ideas

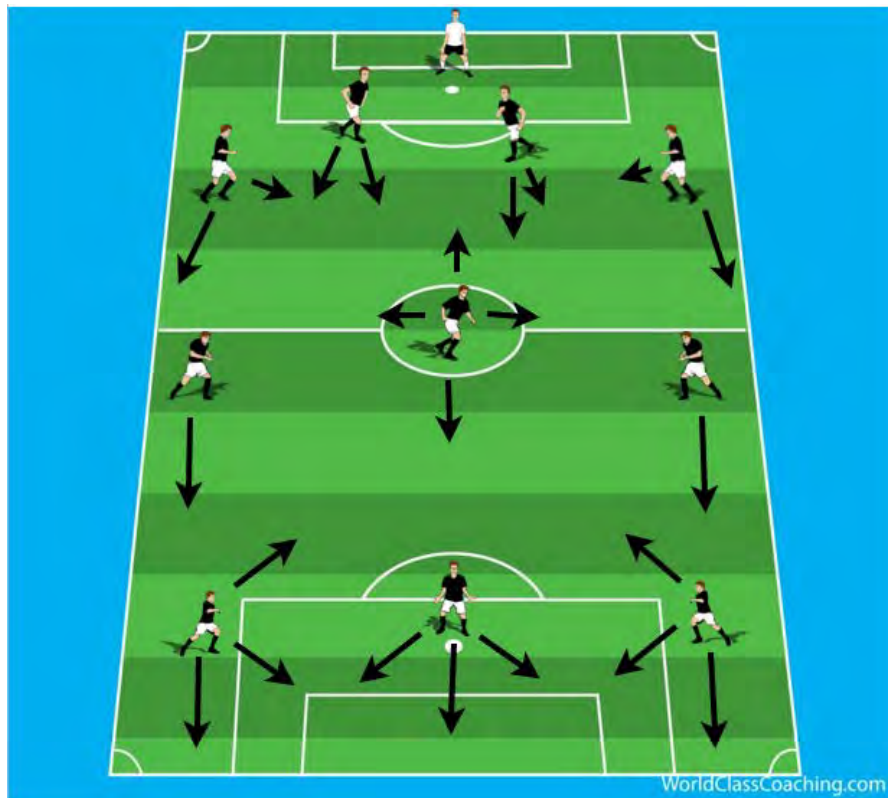
So what exactly is this 4-3-3? How is it normally used, what benefits does it have and what are its drawbacks?

4-3-3 Set Up

The 4-3-3 was a development of the 4-2-4 and was played by the Brazilian national team in the 1962 World Cup. The extra player in midfield allowed a stronger defense and the midfield could be staggered for different effects.

The calling card of this formation is "attack." Some of the best teams from Brazil, Portugal and Holland have used this formation. The 4-3-3 uses this particular lineup to accomplish its primary goal: one keeper, four defenders (*1 right back, 1 left back and 2 center backs*), three midfielders and three forwards. That primary goal is to "attack."

4-3-3 is normally set up in the following way: Goalkeeper, Right back, 2 Centre backs, Left back, 3 Central midfielders (*one holding*), 3 Attackers (*one out wide to the Right and another out wide to the Left, as well as a central striker*).



This formation favors teams boasting a good central defensive midfielder who is able to hold their position, disrupt the oppositions attack and maintain possession offering support in front of the defensive line and support behind the two other central midfielders and attackers. The defensive central midfielder should be able to read the phases of play effectively and have good awareness of passing options and they must be disciplined in maintaining and organizing shape, balance and depth to their team.

Flank Players in the 4-3-3

Teams that use the 4–3–3 formation typically have two lively flank players who provide width in attack and defensive support when not in possession. These 2 flank players should like to run with the ball and also like to dribble but in addition, they should they be comfortable dropping back to support the defensive line when needed. The wide positions in this formation can be physically demanding roles and thus demands a high quality product so the personnel a coach has available can limit their effectiveness.

Central Striker in the 4-3-3

The central striker can play several roles in this system depending on their strengths as an individual and the tactics and weaknesses of the opposition back line. Some managers use the striker as a 'touch the net' player who will create depth to each side by making their runs between the opposition's two centre backs and thus keeping these two defenders occupied. Doing this creates space for the two outside strikers to attack the outside backs in one on one situations. This 'touch the net' run creates an immediate outlet when possession is regained and suits a strong, robust striker.

One potential drawback with the three attackers

One potential drawback with the three attackers occurs when the ball is switched to the wide players and the central player can become isolated in and around the penalty area when the cross is delivered. In this scenario, it is imperative that the opposite flanking striker joins the central striker in the danger areas, as does at least one of the two attacking midfielders, whilst the other attacking central midfielder will look for drops and knock downs a little deeper than the attacking runs, which are higher up into the penalty area.

What if the opposition holds their defensive line high?

If the opposition back four hold their defensive line high up the pitch and do not allow the central striker to create depth then a combination of: **A.)** the striker coming short to draw a centre back further up field, **B.)** the two outside strikers keeping wide to stretch the back line and **C.)** forward runs from the two attacking midfielders beyond the defensive line, can all be used to open-up the defense. If, in this scenario, the centre back does not follow the striker then the striker can turn on the ball and play through to either attacking centre midfielder or behind the outside backs for the outside strikers to attack. Due to the numbers of players who can become involved in the attacking third this system of play can become a very attacking formation.

The Back Four

The back four essentially play a traditional role when not in possession by denying space and pressurizing in key areas, but all with the defensive central midfielder on hand to help with second balls and compacting the opposition's midfield play. When in possession and the ball has to be switched wide to one of the outside strikers, the opposite outside back should push forward to fill the space left by his own outside striker who will be make attacking runs inside to support the central striker. As this occurs, the defense will start sliding across to maintain balance and shape.

Key to a successful 4-3-3 formation

When not in possession, the 4-3-3 formation almost becomes a 4-5-1 system as the two outside strikers should 'sag' back in to the middle third to compact the opposition's midfielders. If the opposition is playing a 4-4-2 system there is also opportunity to press for the ball higher up the pitch in the attacking third. This can force the opposition to play more directly through to their forwards and allow more chances to regain possession. The key to a successful 4-3-3 formation occurs in the moment of transition in play between the opponents' possession and regaining the ball. Immediately when possession is gained the team must be prepared to create width, depth and support at pace and can sometimes be seen as a counter attacking tactic against strong teams.

'Coaching the 4-3-3' – Attack

The 4-3-3 has inherent weaknesses and strengths. During the course of running it throughout a match, it does not hold its 4-3-3 shape the entire time. The formation molds and bends based on match situations, such as if the team has the ball or not, etc... For example, when not in possession of the ball it just about morphs into a 4-5-1.





Regardless, however, this formation is quite an attacking one.

The 4-3-3 system, that is four defenders, three midfielders and three attackers, allows you to attack with three players while still maintaining a strong midfield presence.



The three midfielders will normally play quite closely together to give protection to the defense and so the opposition cannot pass around them. The three strikers will split across the pitch to provide width to the attack.



Usually you would have a central attacker with one to either side of him.

These three players need to play very well together in order to stretch the defense and pull them out of position. They need to do this by creating width and making sure that the opposition's outside backs are stretched out as much as possible.



Depth is also very important, meaning that they are not all lined up across the field in a straight line.



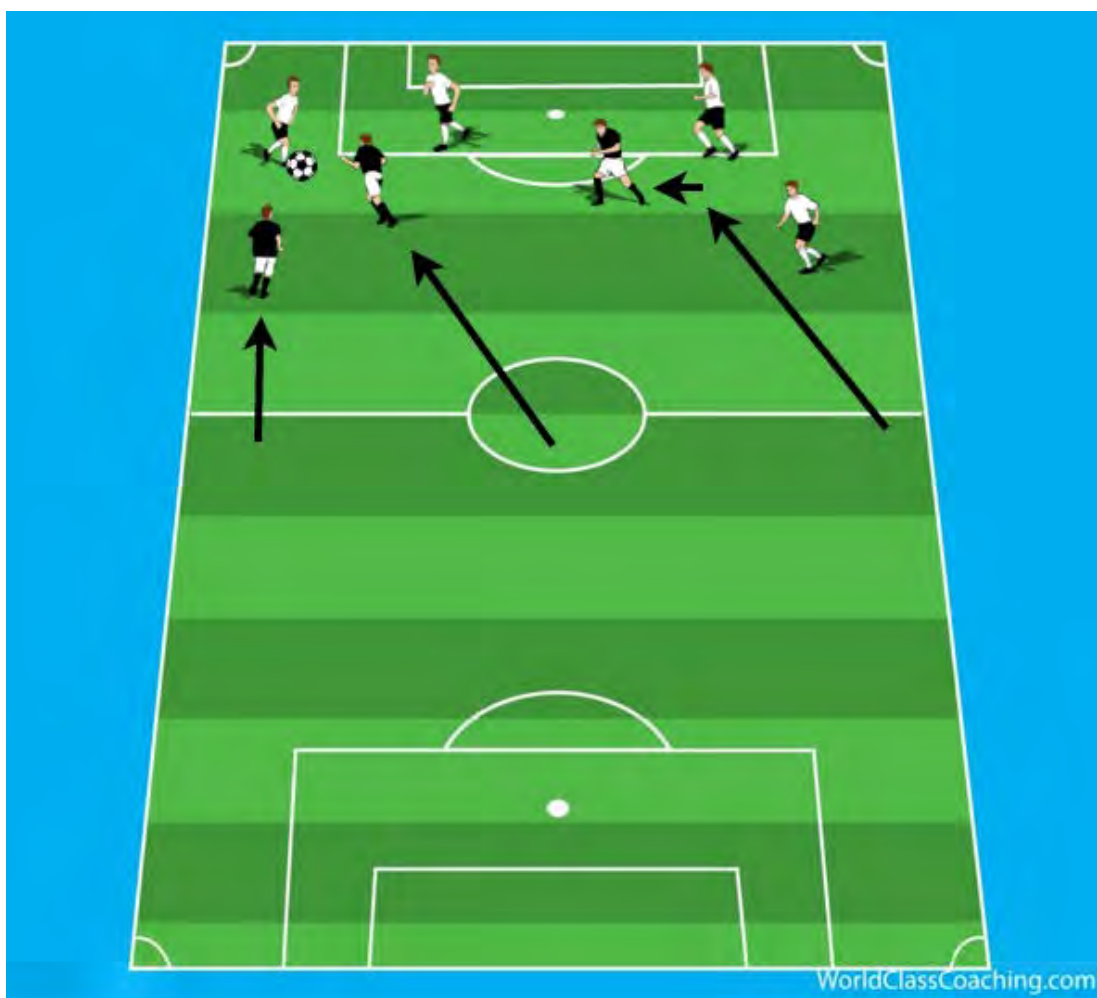
The three attackers need to be constantly on the move, often interchanging with each other. For example, the right outside attacker and the left outside attacker can switch or maybe the center striker can drift out wide and one of the outside attackers comes into the middle.





Such switching of play is designed to cause the opposition some confusion as to who is marking what player and as a result, can create space and goal scoring opportunities.

A significant advantage of playing with three forwards is that it will increase the chances of scoring goals simply because there are more players in the attack. In addition, because there are three forward players it will be easier for them to close down the opposition's defenders when they are defending from the front. That will stifle the opposition's attacking play (*for example, it will be harder for outside backs to join the opposition's attack with overlapping runs*) and it will also lead to the team regaining possession of the ball in the attacking third which will lead to the possibility of more goals being scored.



The big disadvantage of playing with three forwards when playing the 4-3-3 formation is that once the opposition has advanced the ball past them when they are attacking, the team will often be outnumbered in midfield and will potentially concede more goals as a result.



Barcelona, for example, once played with the following system: **Samuel Eto'o** was on the left, **Ronaldinho** was in the middle and **Ludovic Giuly** was on the right.



Interestingly, very few teams actually start with this line-up, as you need to have specialist attackers in order to make it work as your base or rhythm system.

However if a manager needs a goal late on in a match then he may opt to move to three up front.

In contrast with itself, the 4-3-3 formation can also provide more numbers in the central areas of the field for possession. The formation allows width and dangerous attacking options centrally, as well as high up the field.

The high and wide attackers have plenty of opportunity to take on outside backs, penetrate the back line and put crosses into the penalty area.



The central midfielders will have numbers up against many formations, freeing one midfielder up to join the attack centrally.

Now let us look at how it works from an attacking standpoint.

The Central Striker

The formation relies on an out-and-out striker to play in the center of the front three, capable of holding the ball up and bringing the two players on either side of him into the play.



In Barcelona's hey-day, this was often David Villa, while Robin van Persie undertook the role for Arsenal. Their other primary function was to be on the end of any chances created.

Wide Attackers

Wide players on either side of the striker are instructed to use their pace to get at outside-backs and serve the ball in for the central striker and advancing midfielders. It is important that these wide players have the skill and technique needed to beat opposing defenders.

In Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Arsenal's Andrey Arshavin, we have two prime exponents of this art. Often you will see these types of players cut inside and run at the central defenders, regularly playing quick passing exchanges with teammates before getting into the penalty area and releasing a shot. Messi, for example, plays on the right of the central striker but being left-footed, he loves to cut inside before shooting or passing. While it is the central striker's job to score goals, these players are also expected to weigh in.

Defensive Midfielder

The three midfielders perform different defensive and offensive roles. Centrally, often playing just in front of the four defenders is a defensive midfielder whose job it is to break up opposition attacks before releasing the ball to teammates.



Sergio Busquets or Javier Mascherano perform this role for Barcelona and it is Alex Song's responsibility in the Arsenal team. Neither score many goals, but their role in the team should

not be understated as their teammates can attack in the knowledge that they have a dependable tackling midfielder behind them.

All-Round Midfielders

There are two players flanking the defensive midfielder whose duty it is to both defend and attack. These “box-box” midfielders should be getting into the opposition's penalty area regularly with the aim of finishing off the chances created by the wide attacking players. It is also their job to construct attacking moves once they have received the ball from one of the four defenders or the defensive midfielder.



For these roles to be executed well, such players need to have superb passing abilities, like Barcelona's Xavi Hernandez and Arsenal's Jack Wilshere.

The narrow 3-midfield formation should make it possible for a team to keep possession in a central area, with the wide forwards providing an outlet in high, wide positions.



The high and wide forwards should look to receive balls in the channels between the central defenders and outside backs, or to receive the ball into feet and attack the outside backs in one vs. one positions.





Other Responsibilities

Of the six players we have looked at in this 4-3-3 formation, you will see five regularly going forward, but they must also be mindful of their other responsibilities.



A team cannot always be on the attack and when you see a side under pressure from the opposition, it is not uncommon to witness their formation switch to a 4-1-4-1 as the wide midfielders drop deeper to win the ball back.

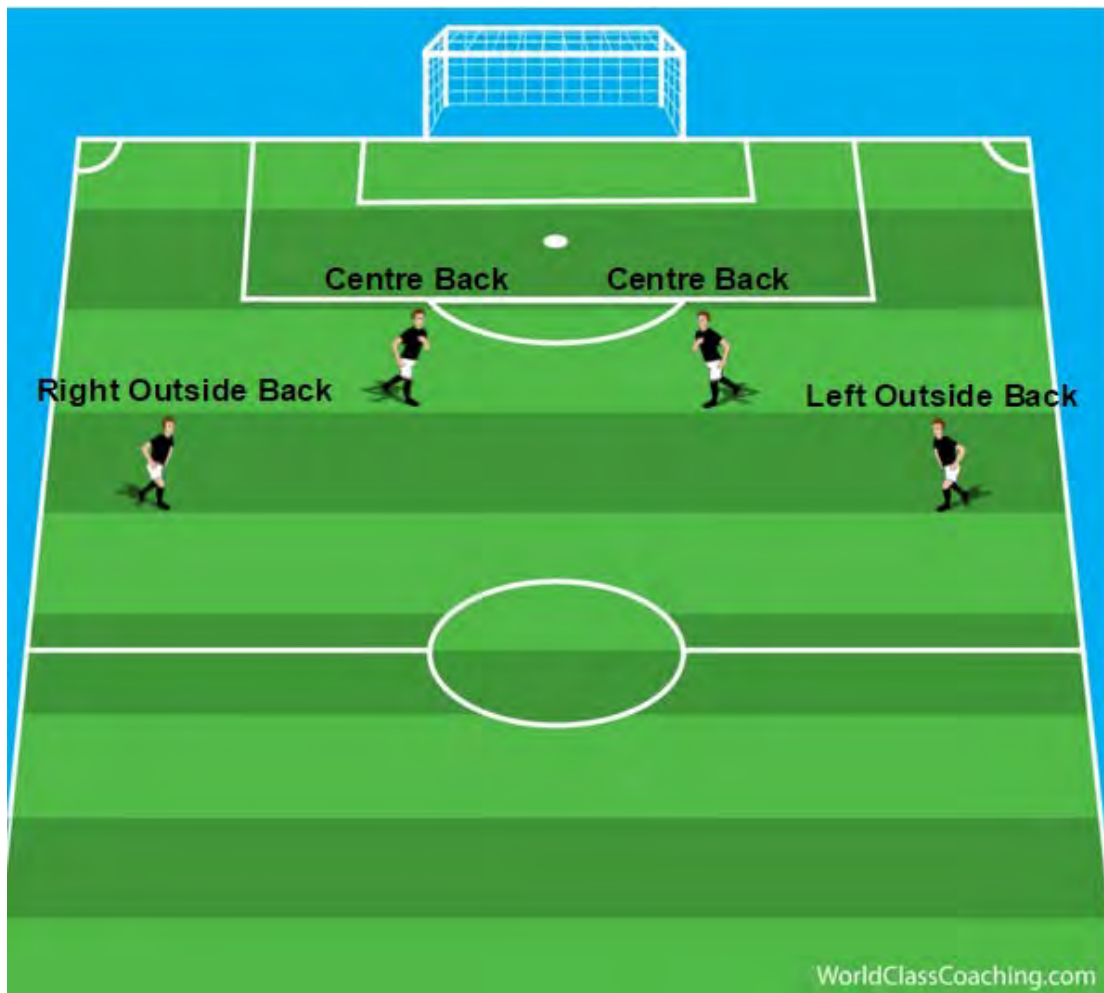


'Coaching the 4-3-3' – Defense

The 4-3-3 has inherent weaknesses and strengths. During the course of running it throughout a match, it does not hold its 4-3-3 shape the entire time. The formation molds and bends based on match situations, such as if the team has the ball or not, etc... For example, when not in possession of the ball it just about morphs into a 4-5-1.

Defending in the 4-3-3 Formation

In the 4-3-3 formation, the defenders will play a typical flat back four with a right outside back, a left outside back and two central defenders.



The outside backs will join the three-midfield players when possible in attacking play, often providing an overlap run to get crosses into the penalty area.



The outside backs will drift into the middle to cover the two central defenders when the ball is being advanced down their opposite wing.

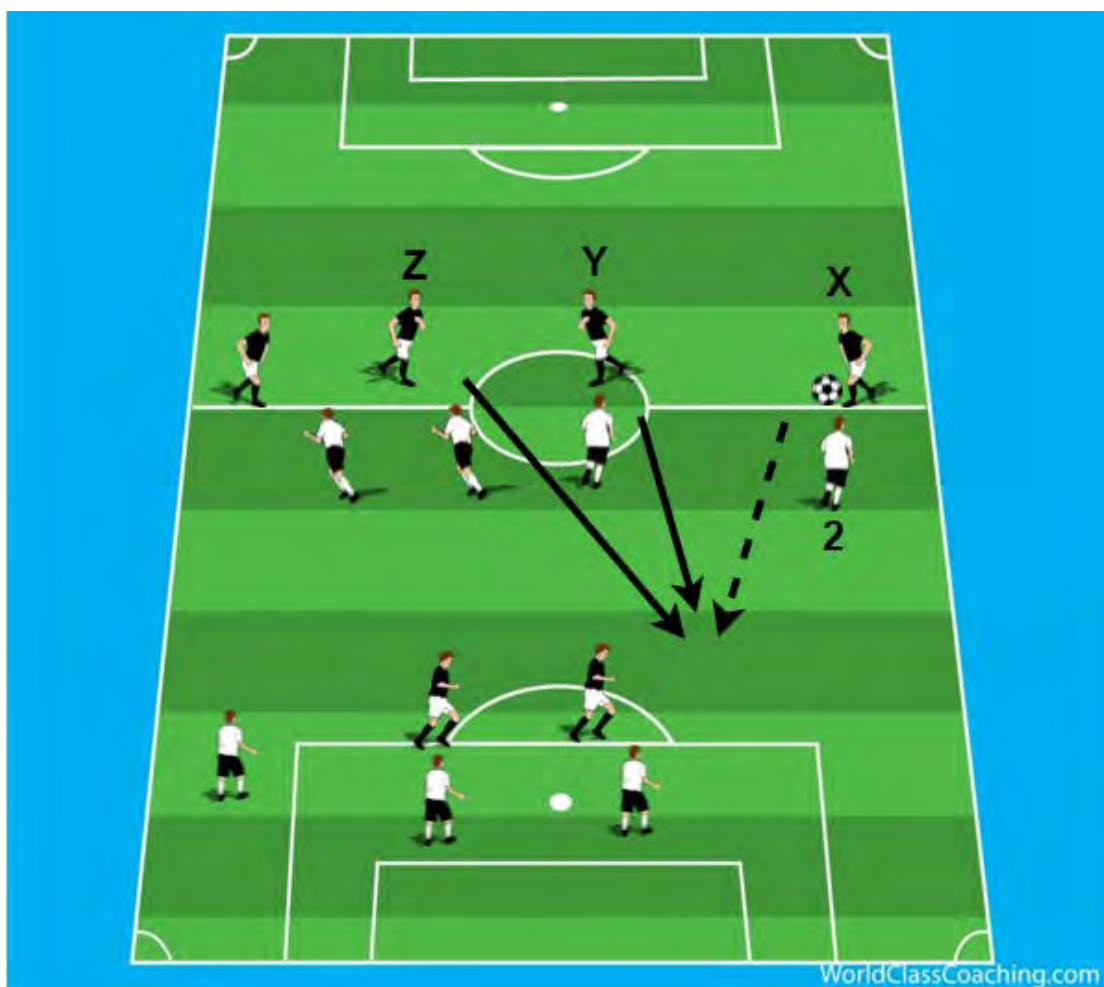


One of the positives of playing four at the back is that it is very common and the players involved in the four positions at the back will likely have played in flat back fours many times, so they should be very experienced in this formation. It really is the standard defensive formation around the world.

The back 4 is able to defend the width of the field while maintaining good shape and balance. The 3-man midfield provides good cover and numbers up in the central area. When defending wide attacks the midfield must move dynamically as a cohesive unit. If the outside back is forced too high to pressure the ball, it can cause problems with the shape of the backline. This potential downfall of the 4-3-3 system is illustrated in the following diagram:



Here we see that X has possession of the ball with 2 applying pressure. This leaves a lack of balance to the defensive shape of the team. The space behind 2 is easy to exploit with a through ball for Y or Z running through.



In this situation, it would be better for 6 to pressure the ball if it is too far in front of 2.



8 and 11 should also slide over to avoid a large gap for the opposition to exploit in between the central and the wide midfielders.



This will leave A in space, but when play is switched, the midfield unit must adjust laterally again, remaining as a cohesive unit.



The 4-3-3 formation is very strong in the central areas. For example; if we take a look at the same diagram once again and this time place the ball in possession of Y who is in a central position then we can see that the team has the numbers to create a solid barrier. 6 could pressure the ball and 11 could adopt a cover position on Z.



This would allow 8 to sit in a sweeper type of midfield position cutting out balls into the feet of the forward players.



Strengths

- Very strong defensively in the central areas. Numbers allow a midfielder to cover behind two other central midfielders pressuring the ball.
- Numbers in central midfield to win the possession battle. Also enough numbers for a central midfielder to join the attack without exposing the team to a swift counterattack.
- The three high forwards have the ability to put a lot of pressure on the opposition high up the field and pin the opposition in their own half.
- High and wide forwards can easily get in position to take on the outside backs and serve balls into the area.

Weaknesses

- Outside backs can be caught out of position as illustrated in the above diagram. This can happen when they pressure the ball on the flanks, or if they push up to provide width and the team loses possession.
- Width behind the forwards can be non-existent if the outside backs sit deep.

- The narrow midfield three can be vulnerable to a quick switch of play.

Requirements

- Wide forwards with the ability to beat an outside back off the dribble and provide quality crossed balls.
- Defense and midfield must communicate to cover defensively if outside backs get sucked high.
- Midfielders with the passing ability to take advantage of the numbers up in central midfield.

The outside backs in a 4-3-3 must provide width in the deep midfield positions. However a team must be aware if an outside back is caught high and out of possession, on a turnover, then the defense must adjust and slide over to avoid being caught out on a quick counter attack.

'Coaching the 4-3-3' – Sessions

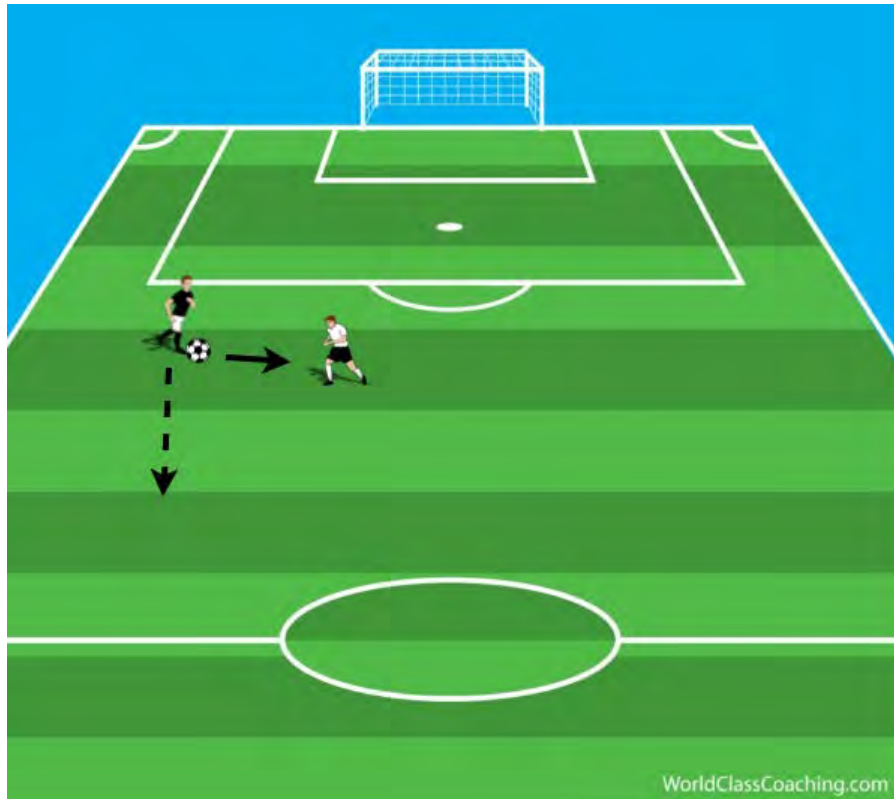
Following are a series of training sessions designed to teach the 4-3-3 system. These sessions are progressive; intended to build-off of each other. They can be used as stand-alone training-sessions, but are intended to be progressive in their nature.

These training sessions contain the bulk of the activities that relate to the 4-3-3. For example, most of them don't include a warm-up. This is because I believe the warm-up should be technical in nature and I leave that to you to decide what you choose to do.

All of the training activities in these sessions are tried and tested. They have been used at the college, club and high-school level.

Session 1

Jog and pass – (half-field) – Half the players start with a ball and they jog around and pass to those who don't have one.



3 vs. 3 plus keepers to goals. (half-field) – done to practice playing in groups of three.



6 vs. 6 – (half-field) - Three teams. Teams stay on for five minute periods or until they are scored on. The team that gets scored on goes off and the third team waiting comes on. The team that scored doesn't wait, gets the ball out of the net and attacks the other goal.

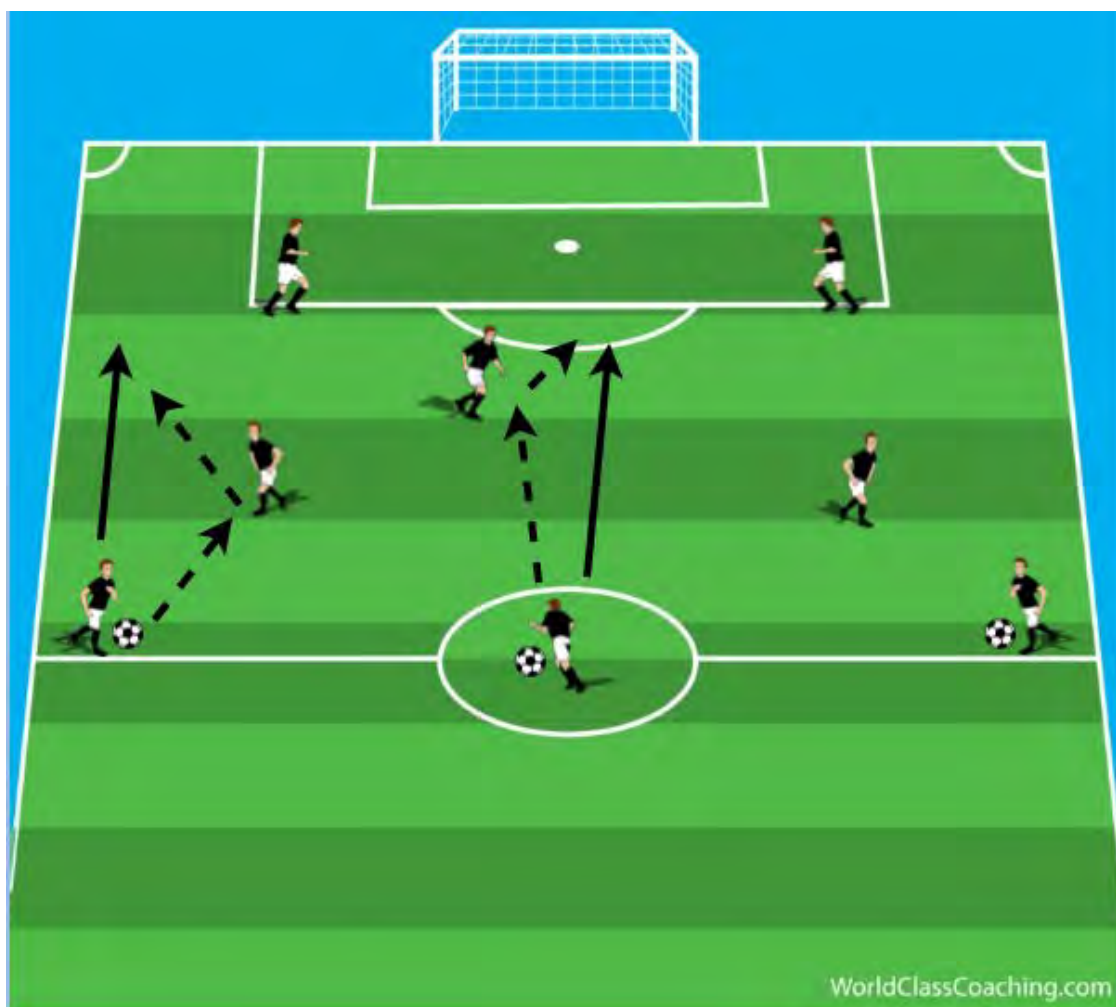


Session 2

1 vs. 1 Activity – Four lines. Two on each post with balls and the other two at the corners of the “D” without balls. The line besides the goal plays the ball to the first person in the opposite diagonal line and then goes out and defends. The person receiving the ball goes and meets the ball and attacks 1 vs. 1 to goal.



Rhythm Activity – (half field) – done to begin working together within the system - The ball starts with the CM who combines with the center striker for a shot on goal. Then an outside midfielder hits the target player and gets the ball back for a cross. Then the same-thing happens on the opposite side. As soon as a player touches a ball they are considered live in the action. The ball always starts back in the middle.



Session 3

3v3v3 - (20 x 30) – done to practice playing in groups of three.



3 vs. 3 plus keepers to goals. (half-field) – done to practice playing in groups of three.



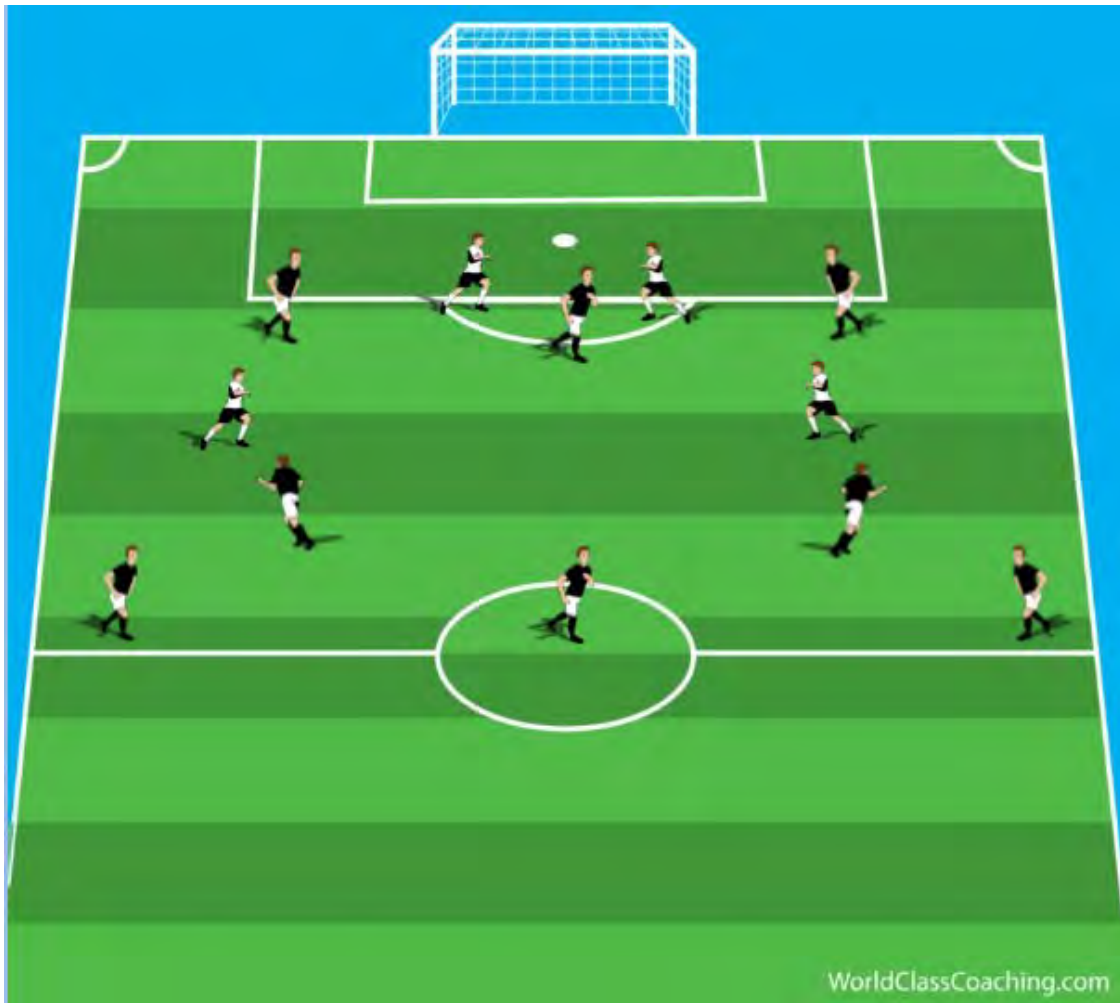
3v3v3 to goals - (20 x 30) – done to practice playing in groups of three. Every change of possession is a change of direction.

Session 4

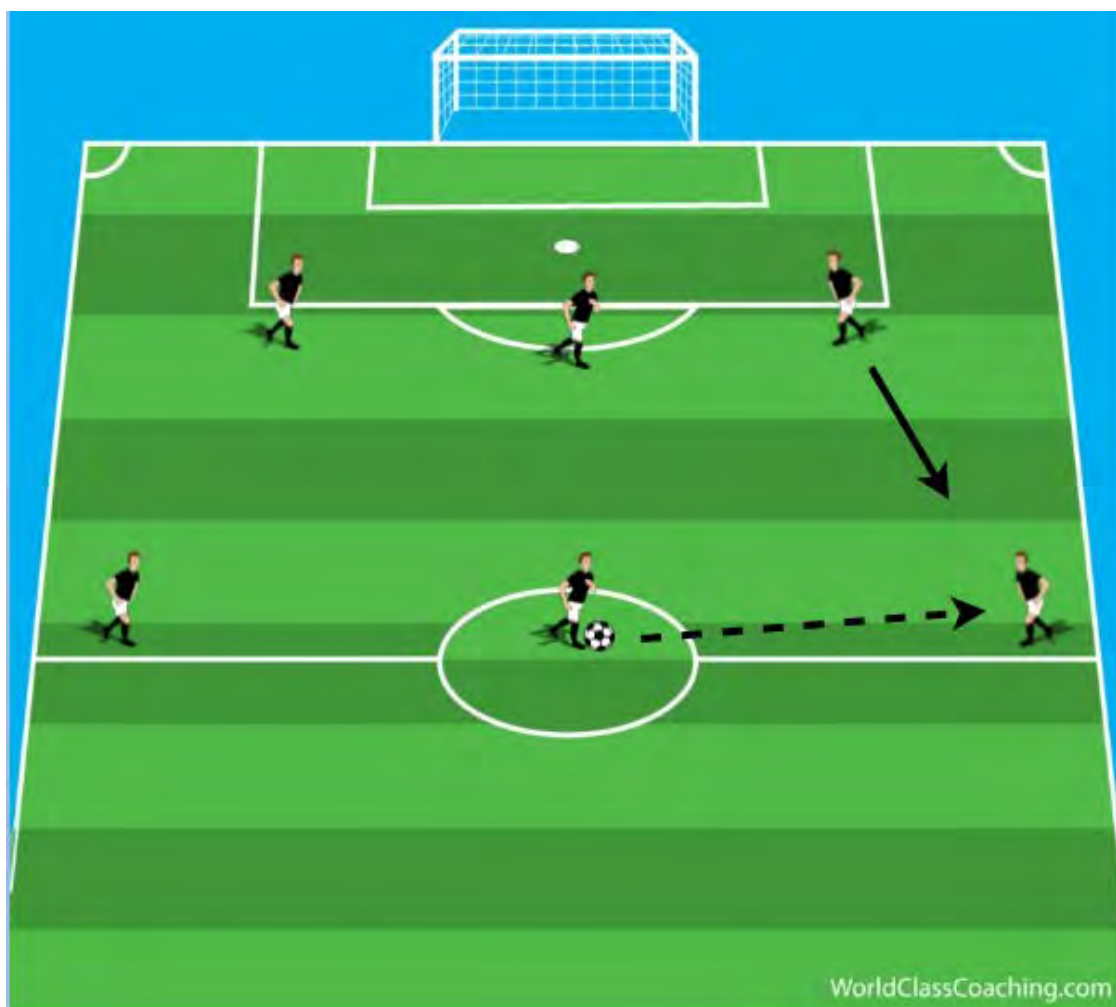
3v3v3 - (20 x 30) – done to practice playing in groups of three.



Rhythm Activity – (half field) – done to begin working together within the system – Same as before. Add in four defenders. Two to defend centrally and one each to defend the flanks, respectively.

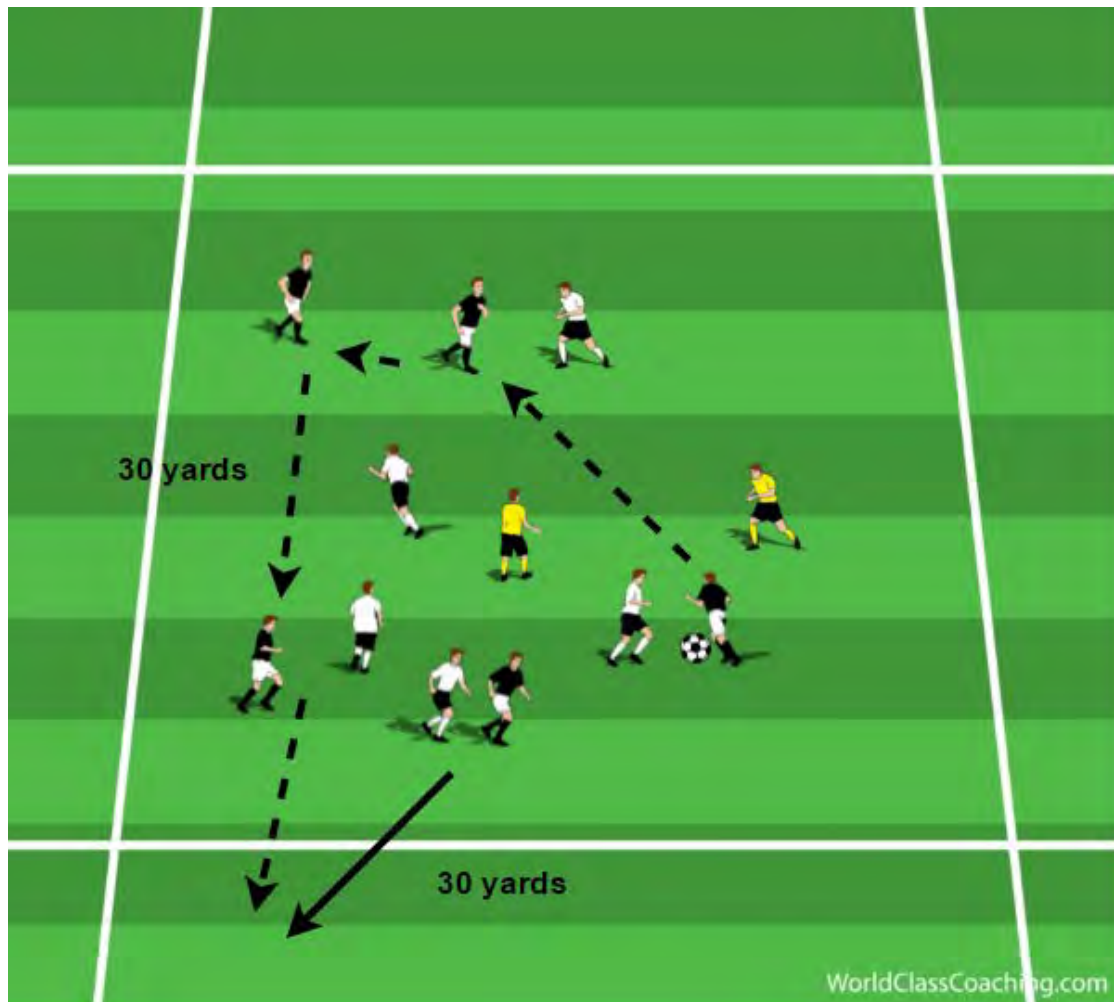


Rhythm Activity – (half field) – done to begin working together within the system – Same as before. Remove defenders and target players and change the pattern. This time the ball starts out with the central midfielder who plays it wide to an outside midfielder. When this happens, a striker checks out wide, receives the ball from the wide midfielder and serves it down the line for a cross.



Session 5

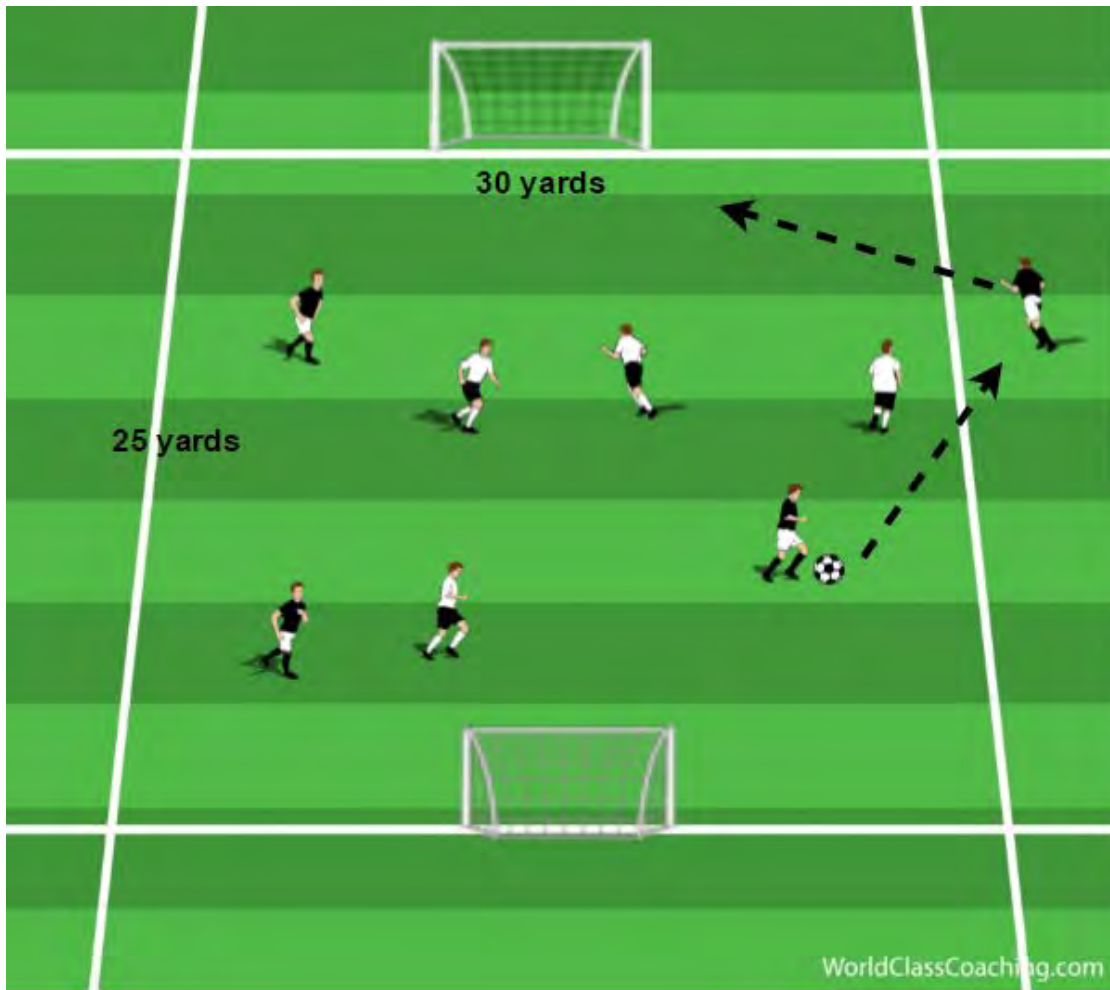
Possession - (30 x 30) – Play 5v5 plus 2. The two neutral players are all-time offense. The team in possession must make three consecutive passes and then can play a ball into their offensive end for a teammate to receive.



Possession to penetrate - 8 v 8

Session 6

Learning to use width - 4 v 4 to big goals. The two goals are 25 yds. apart. The field is 30 yds. wide. The ball must be played out wide before anyone can score.



5v4 - Defending in Defensive Third

This activity works on defending, timing of tackles, covering angles and decision-making.

In this crucial section of the pitch, defending needs to be precise and perfect! One of the biggest things that players need to learn is how crucial interceptions are to keeping the ball out of the net. There aren't too many better ways to teach this aspect of the game than to simply throw them into the deep-end with an activity like this.

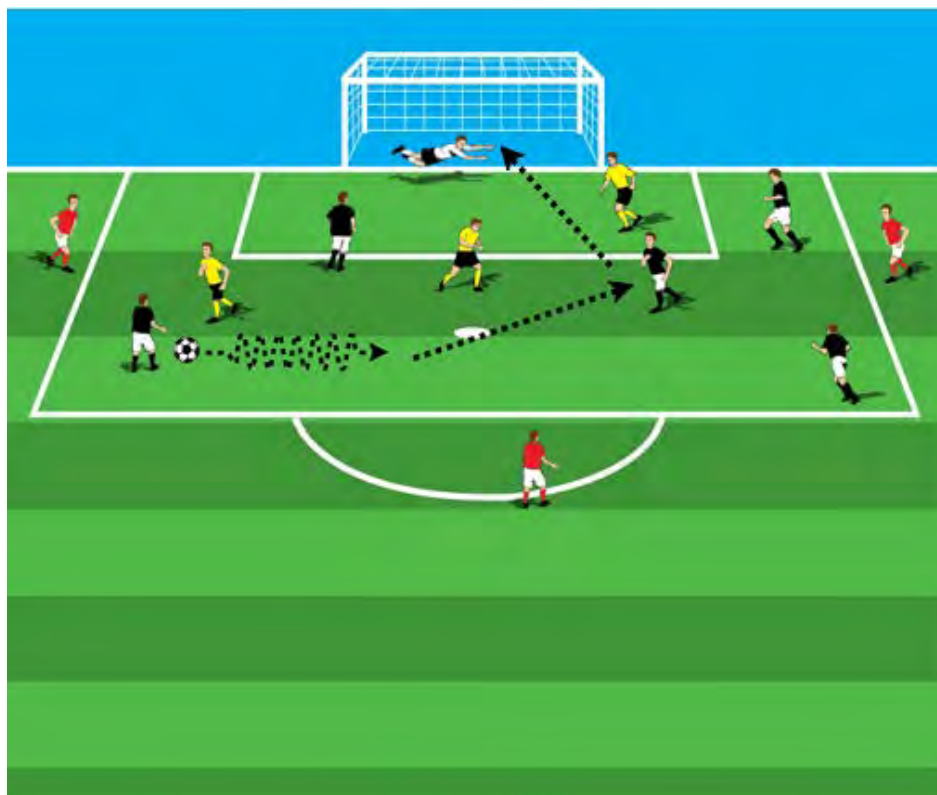
Set-up: The playing area is 44 x 18 metres (*basically the size of the penalty area; can use the penalty area if you choose*). Place a regulation sized goal in the middle of one of the long (44 mtr) end-lines (*similar to where it would be if using a penalty area*).



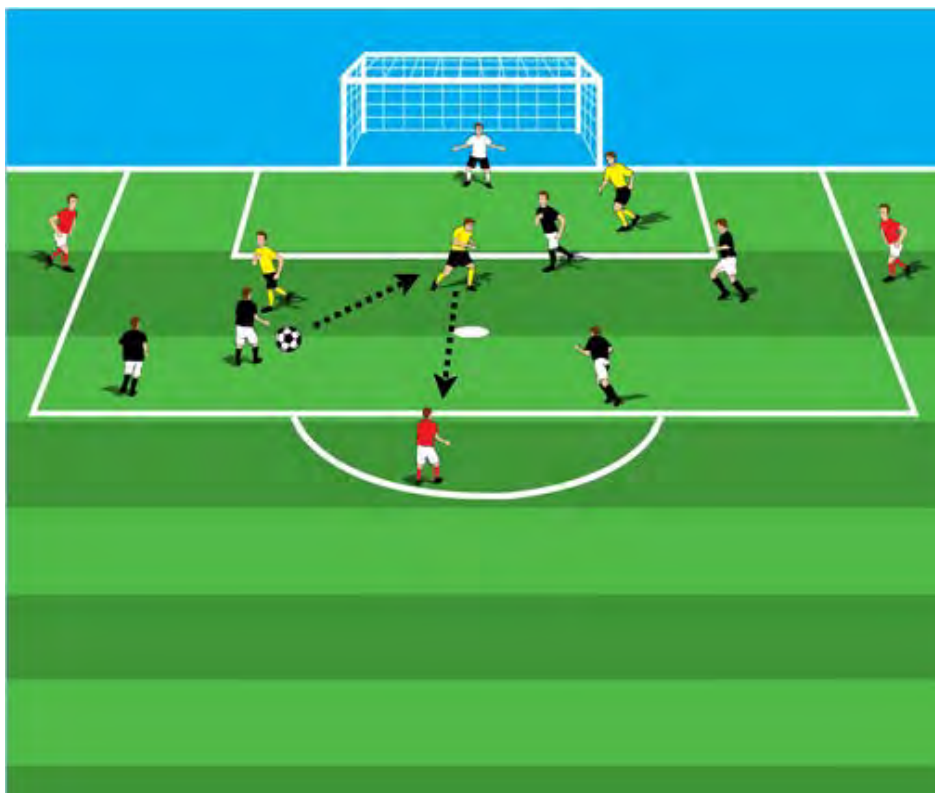
The attacking team has 5 players which include 3 midfielders (*M*) and 2 strikers (*S*) while the defending team has 4 players made up of 3 defenders (*D*) and a goalkeeper (*G*). There are 2 support players on either flank outside of the playing area/penalty area and a third support player is stationed off the pitch and opposite the goal (*or at the top of the penalty area*). Only one ball is in play at a time.



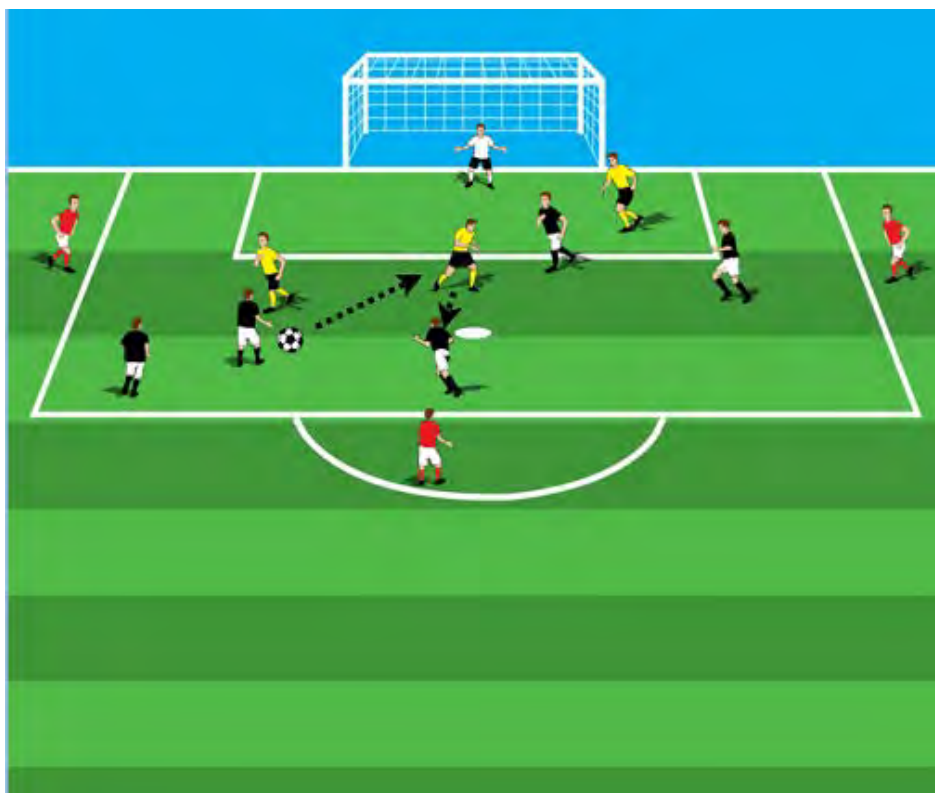
How it Works: The game basically requires the attacking team to maintain possession of the ball and get a shot at goal in an attempt to score. The defending team needs to try and win the ball back and prevent the attacking side from scoring.



If the defending team wins the ball, they need to pass it out to a support player as quickly and accurately as possible.



The attacking team needs to try and prevent the defenders from getting the ball out to the support players.



The support players aren't allowed to enter the playing area, but are allowed to move up and down the sides of the playing area around their positions.



After a fixed number of rounds, rotate the support players with the attacking/defending teams in such a way that every player gets to play in every position.

Progression:

- Enforce 1-touch or 2-touch passing.
- Allow a support player to “fall-back” after a set duration of time to force the attacking team to hurry-up.
- You can also add another defender (4v5) to diminish the ratio so defenders will really have to choose who they will leave open.

Coaching Points:

- Verbal and non-verbal communication must be clear and precise.
- Passing needs to be quick.
- The attacking team needs to create chances as quickly as possible.
- The defenders need to practice “SWITCHING to STICKING” and “TRACKING to TACKLING.”

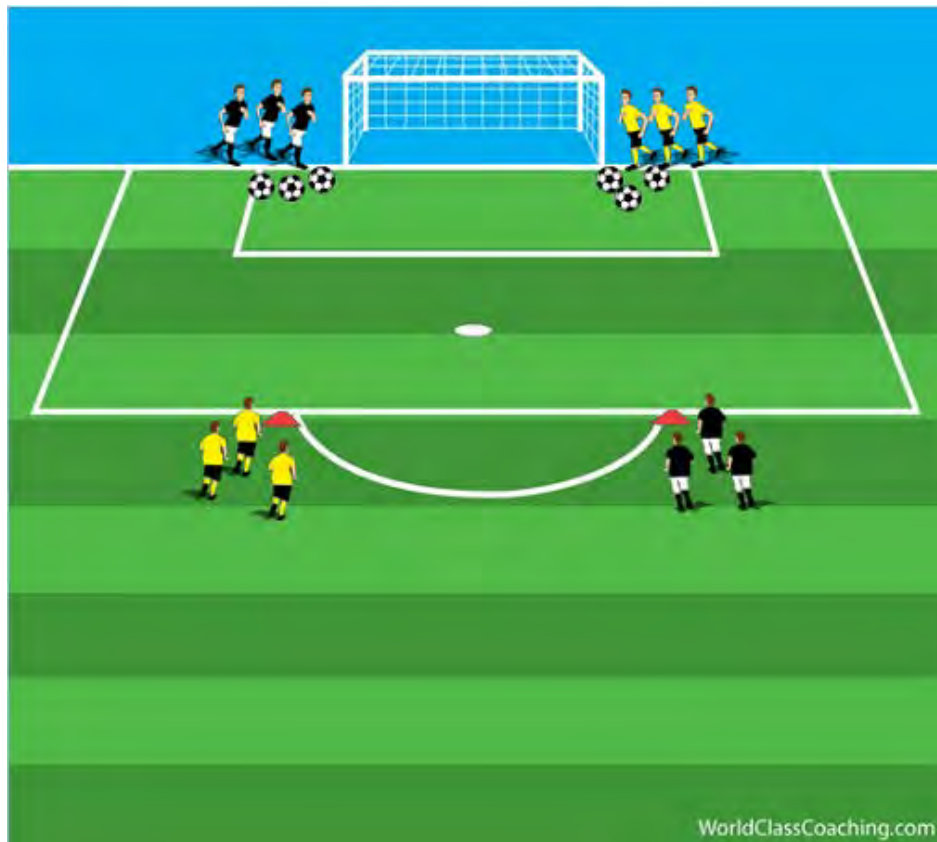
- Defenders should remain patient and not dive-in to tackles.
- Passing out to the support players needs to be accurate and sharp, with as few touches as possible.
- Players of both sides need to be alert for transition of possession.

Session 7

1v1 Post to Post Activity

This activity works on 1v1 attacking and defending in close quarters, 1st touch, intensity and to see who is willing to get stuck in on tackles. The exercise is done at top-speed, is a quick moving exercise and there is a good deal of contact.

Set-up: The playing area is 18 x 44 metres (*roughly the size of the penalty area*). There is a goal on one of the 44 metre end-lines (*where the goal would be if you were using an actual penalty area*) and two markers should be 18 metres out directly opposite the goalposts (*or roughly the location where the half-circle intersects with the top of the penalty area if using an actual penalty area for this activity*). Players break into four lines. Two lines are on each post with balls and two lines are at the 'markers' or the corners of the "D" without balls.



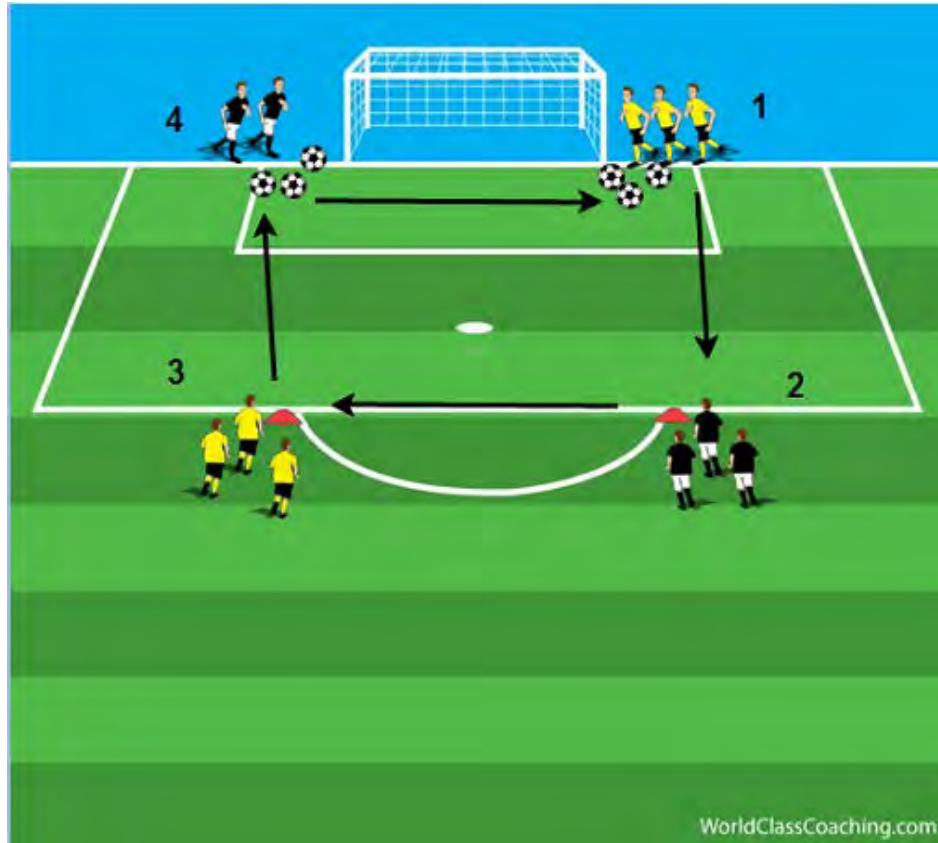
How it Works: The line besides the goal drives the ball to the first person in the opposite diagonal line and then goes out and defends.



The person receiving the ball goes and meets the ball and attacks 1 vs. 1 to goal.



The players switch lines clockwise after they are done



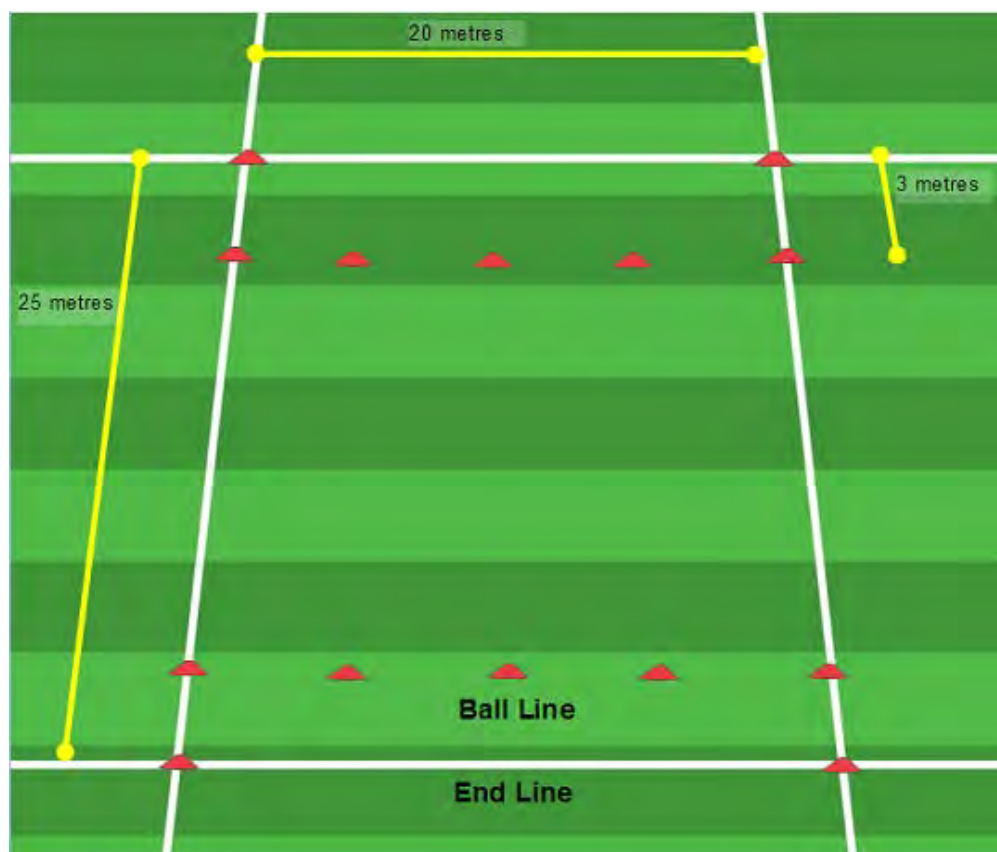
Both lines are doing this BOTH at the same time and there are **NO** keepers in this activity.

2 v 2 Forced Man-Marking Activity

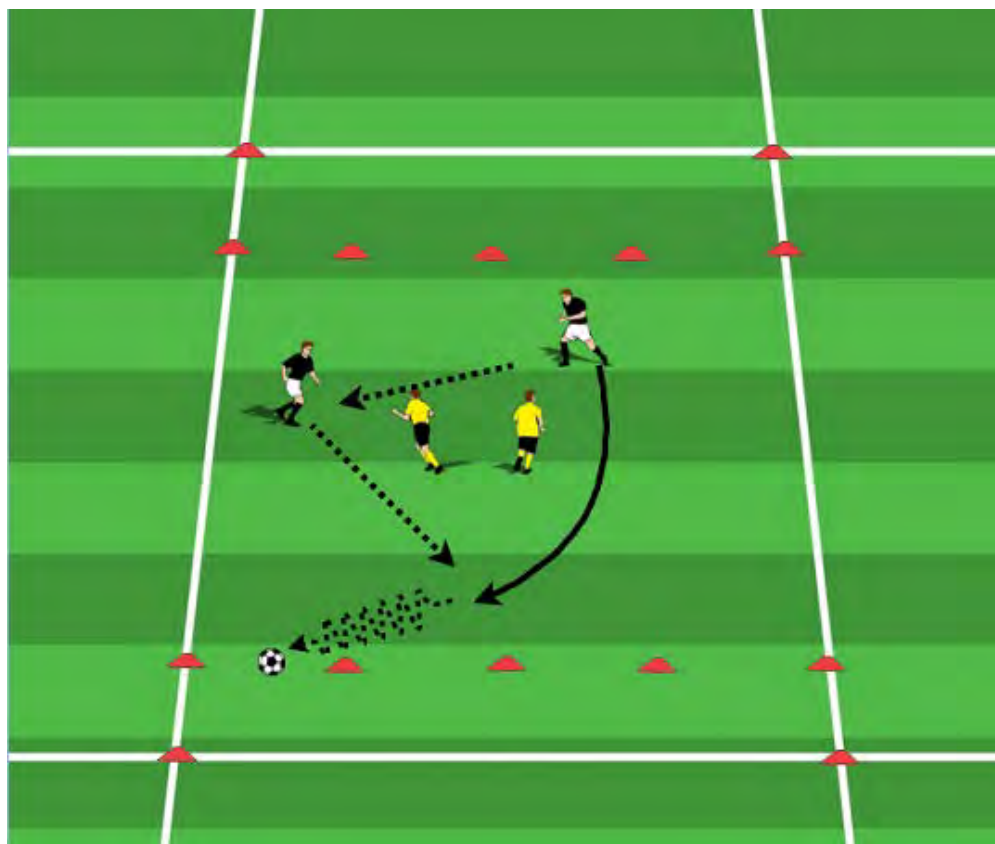
This activity works on 1v1 defending, pressure, cover, recovery and defensive communication.

When moving up the pitch to attack the opposition's goal, losing possession can lead to a counter-attack. This technical training activity is designed to help players understand the importance of falling back to defend their own goal. A couple of players will need to pass around or dribble past opposition to score a point and when they do, or if things don't work out; they need to get back quickly and help out on defense. REMEMBER: **the BALL is the MOST IMPORTANT THING!**

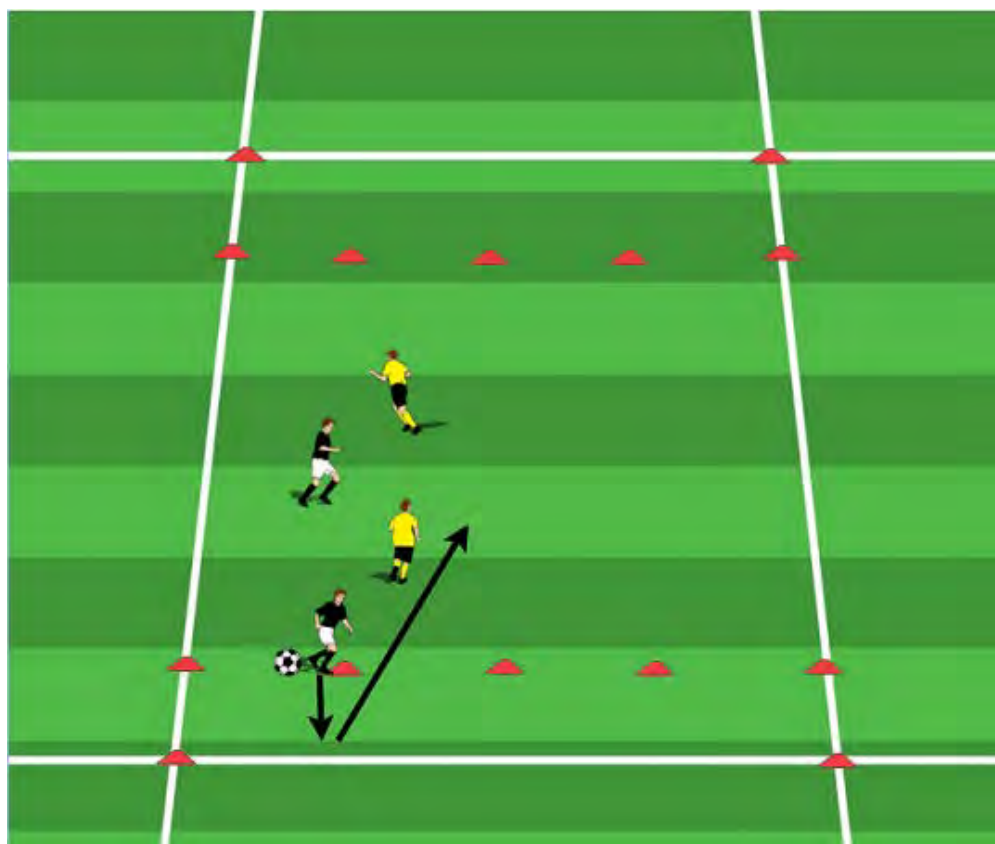
Set-up: The playing area is 25 x 20 metres. Only one ball will be in play at a time. There are two-lines on either end of the pitch, the end-line; which is at either end of the playing area and the ball-line; which is 3-metres inside the playing area; per the diagram.



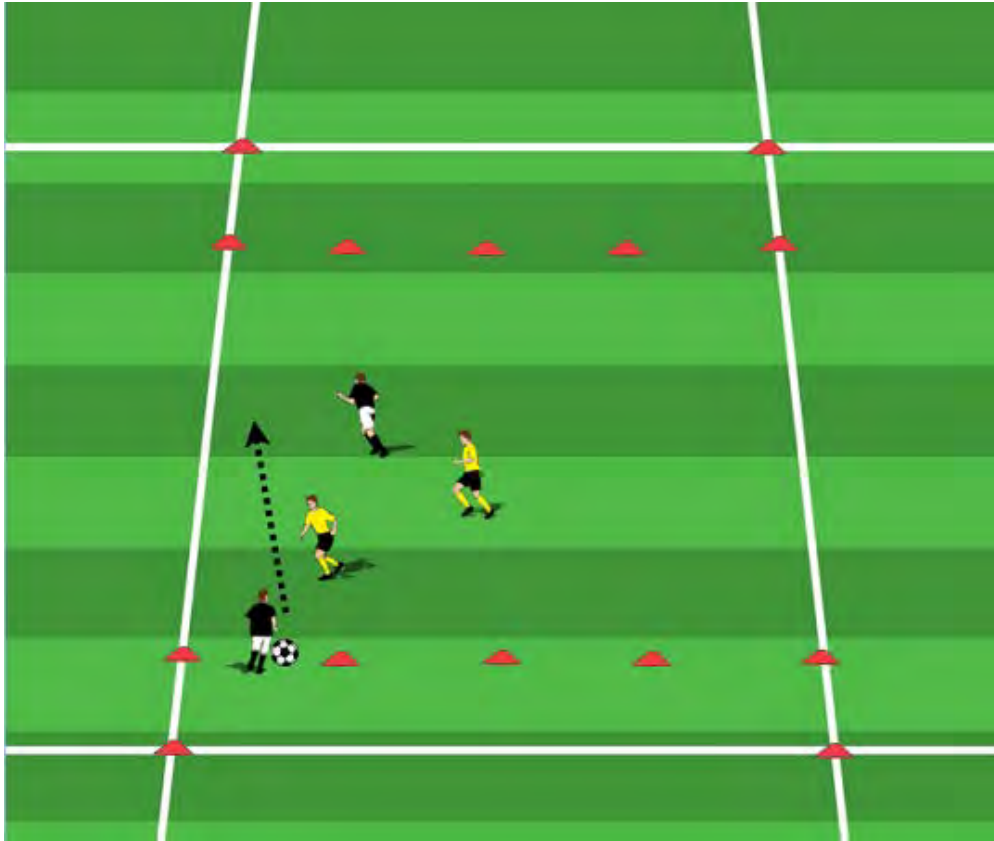
To start this activity, one team starts with possession of the ball, at random. This team's (*the attacking team*), players need to pass or dribble past their opponents to reach the "ball-line." The ball **MUST** be stopped 'DEAD' on the "ball-line" for the attacking side to win a point.



Once the ball has been brought to a complete halt, the attacking player who stopped the ball now becomes the defensive player who has to keep running on towards the edge of the playing area, touch the end-line and come back in to defend with their teammate.



The other team, who was previously defending, now takes possession of the ball as soon as it is stopped on the “ball-line” and must restart as quickly as possible to take advantage of the superior numbers.



This can become an extremely high-intensity game, so be sure to rotate teams on and off every 90 seconds-2 minutes allowing them recovery time.

Progression/Variations:

- Increase or decrease the gap between the ball-line and the end-line without increasing the playing area length.
- Add another player to each team and make it 3v3 with the same rules, only a bigger playing area.
- If possession is lost in any part of the pitch, then the player who is tackled or whose pass is intercepted, has to go all the way to the opposition's end-line, touch it and return to defend.

Coaching Points:

- Encourage good verbal and non-verbal communication between the defenders.
- Defending players need to chase, even if they are beaten. This allows them to restart, if the opposition scores a point, as quickly as possible and take advantage of the opposition being out of position.
- When waiting for reinforcements, the solitary defending player needs to “get stuck-in,” getting to the ball FAST, TIGHT and HARD, forcing the attacker to drop their head, getting their shoulder on the ball and driving the attacker to the spot.

- Defenders must make sure they are not cut-out of the game with a pass, which means they need to lock-up immediately and gets their HANDS ON!
- Returning defensive reinforcements need to recover into positions where they can mark, "BALL SIDE WIDE and GOAL SIDE MIDDLE, always pushing mark away from goal.
- Defenders should be using their body to get between the opponent and the ball; using their arms and hip rotation to get proper positioning: ELBOW-DEEP!
- Quality of passing and movement to ensure quick counter-attacks.
- Players need to make space to receive the ball.

3v3v3 Penetration and Defense Activity

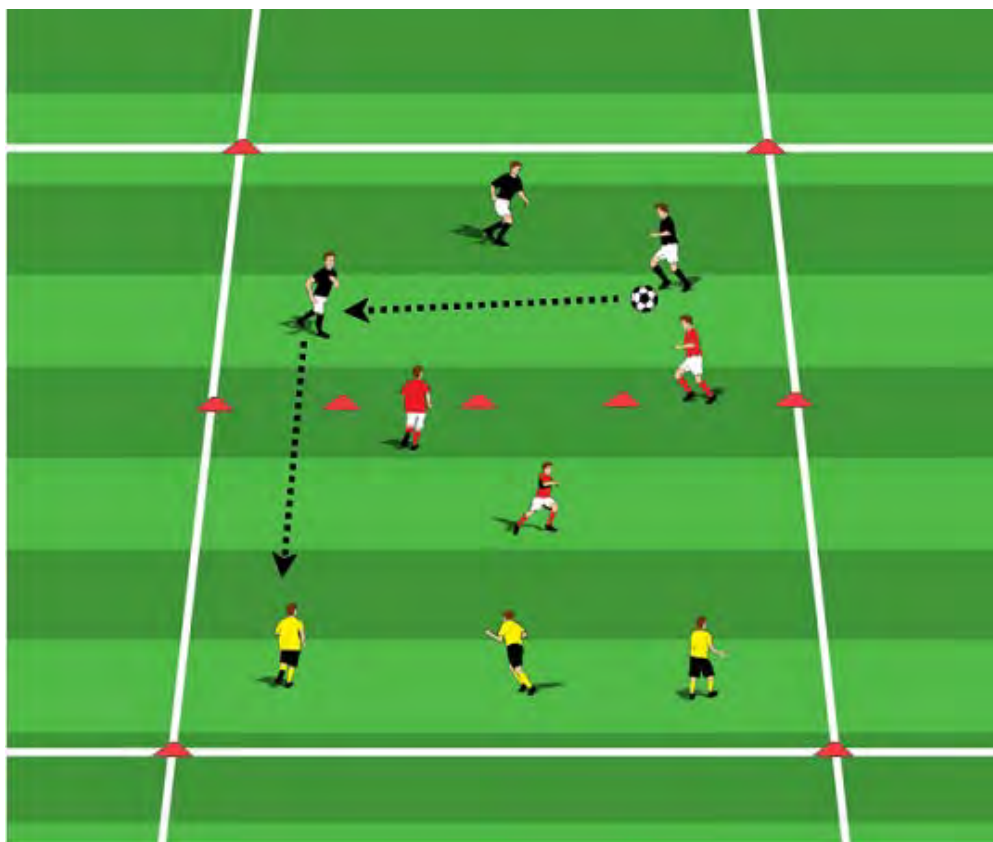
This activity works on possession to penetrate, combination play, defending, pressure, cover, recovery and communication.

It is important for all the players to be on the same page. Both attacking and defending requires teamwork and that means every single player has to be on the same page. In this activity, we put the players under pressure from all sides and if they don't play well as a unit, chances are, they're going to be letting in quite a few in the game. The exercise is about playing your responsibility and staying on top of things. REMEMBER: **the FIRST pass is of the utmost importance!**

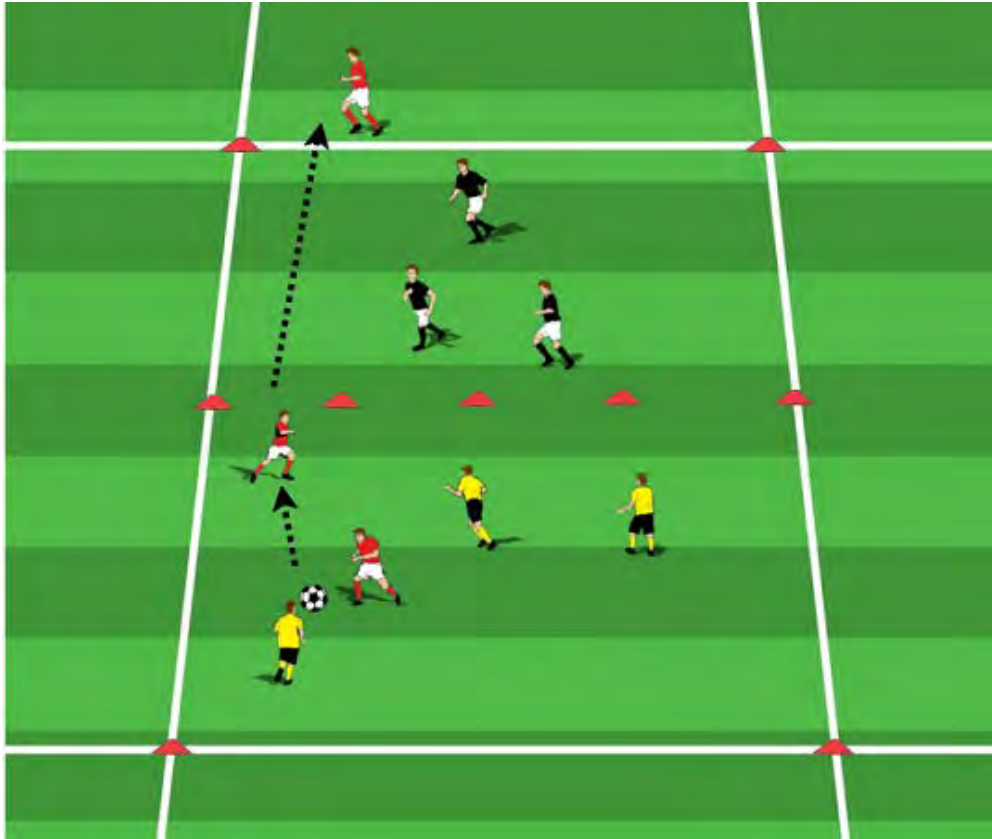
Set-up: The playing area is 30 x 20 metres, divided into two halves of 15 x 20 metres. One ball is used. There are three teams of three players each.



How it Works: The game begins with one team (*Red*) standing in the middle while the other two teams (*Black and Yellow*) stand at opposite ends of the playing area. The ball is given randomly to one of the outer teams, say *Black*. The objective is for the team in possession to pass the ball amongst themselves before passing it across to the other team, *Yellow*, in this case.



Team Red has to try and stop the ball from reaching Team Yellow, either by intercepting the pass or by tackling a player in possession and winning the ball. If Team Red wins the ball, they need to dribble/pass it beyond the boundary of either Black or Yellow's side.



- The Team in possession has to pass the ball, inside the area, a minimum of 5 times before they can switch the ball to the other team.

- The ball has to be played on the ground.

- The attacking side cannot cross the mid-stripe.

After a specific time period, switch player roles with adequate rest-ratio interrupting consecutive sessions of play.

Progression: The “Attacking” team or the team in possession must pass with their first-touch or increase the minimum number of passes a team must make before they can pass it over to the other side.

Coaching Points:

- Good verbal and non-verbal communication.

- Cutting off angles or passing opportunities.

- Covering the player and keeping an eye on the ball.

- Explain how covering the pass that changes the point of attack is equivalent to goal-side defending in this scenario.

- Sharp and decisive passing.

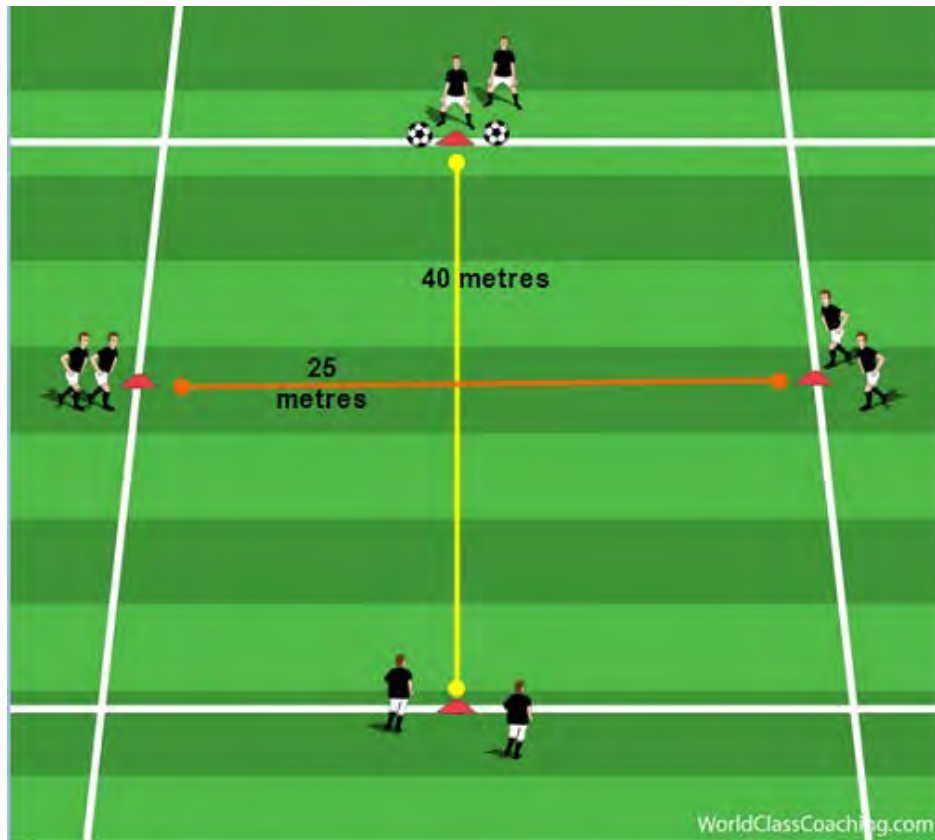
- Good quality of movement.
- Defensive shape - team must move around as a unit; pressing or falling back at the same time.
- Choosing the right time to press - decision-making as a defender. Need to close-down quickly and make play predictable.

Session 8

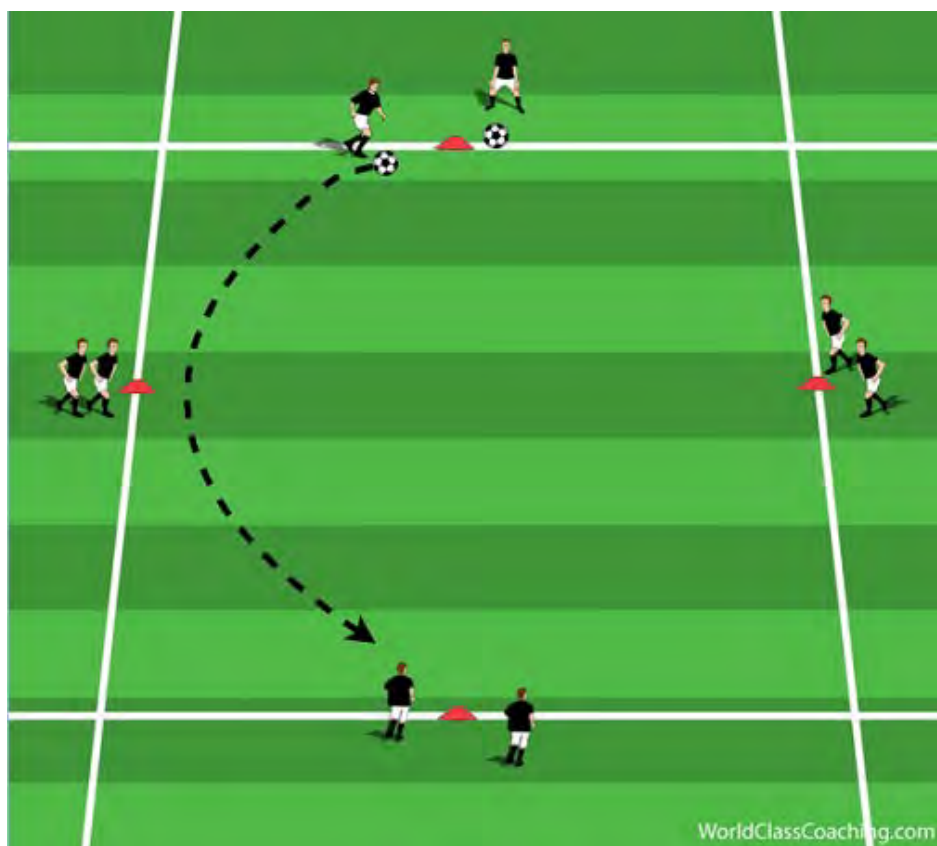
Technical Diamond

This activity works on technique of playing and receiving long balls both in the air and on the ground, first-touch, passing, receiving and striking a driven ball approximately 30 metres.

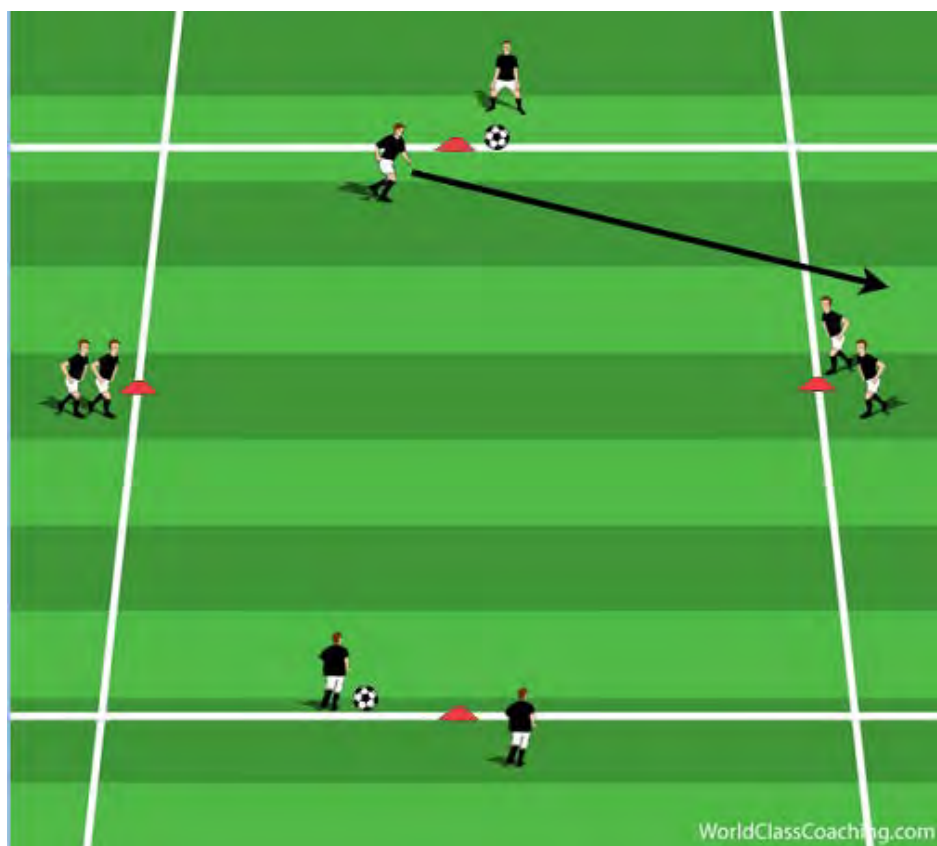
Set-up: 4 cones are set up in a diamond. The top and bottom cones are 40 metres apart and the two side cones are 25 metres apart; per the diagram. Players should be broken up and evenly placed at each cone. All balls should begin at one of the cones that are 40 metres apart.



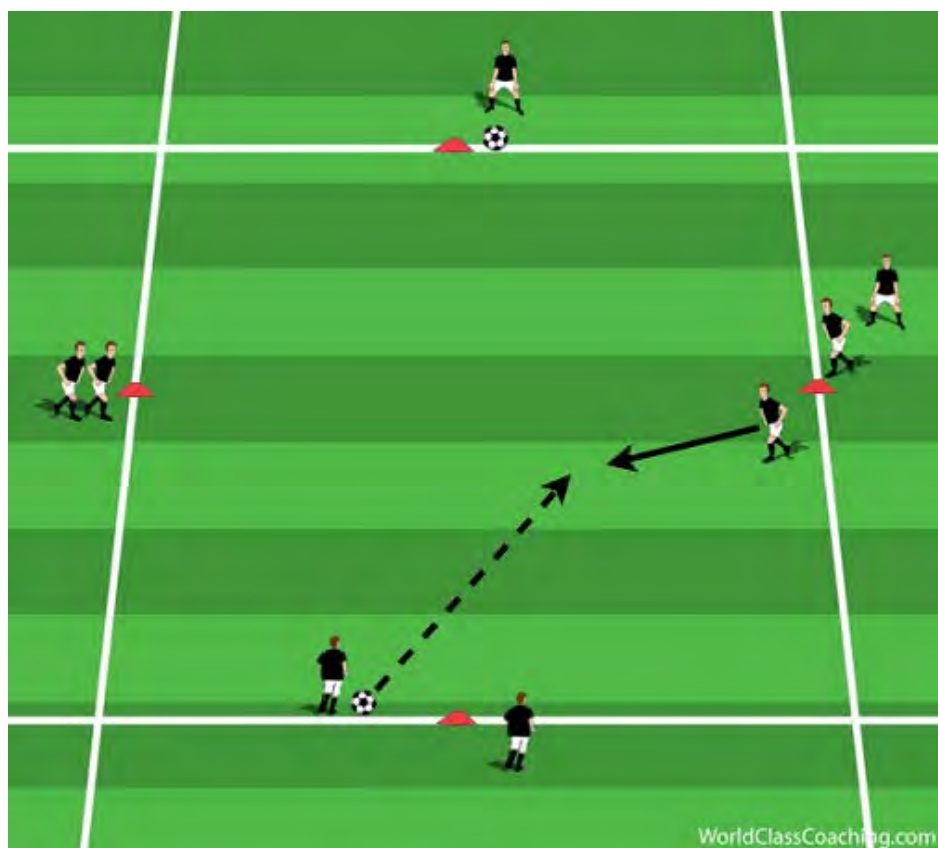
How it Works: The player starting at the top cone starts with a ball and plays a lofted ball to the player at the far, opposite cone (*bottom cone in the diagram*).



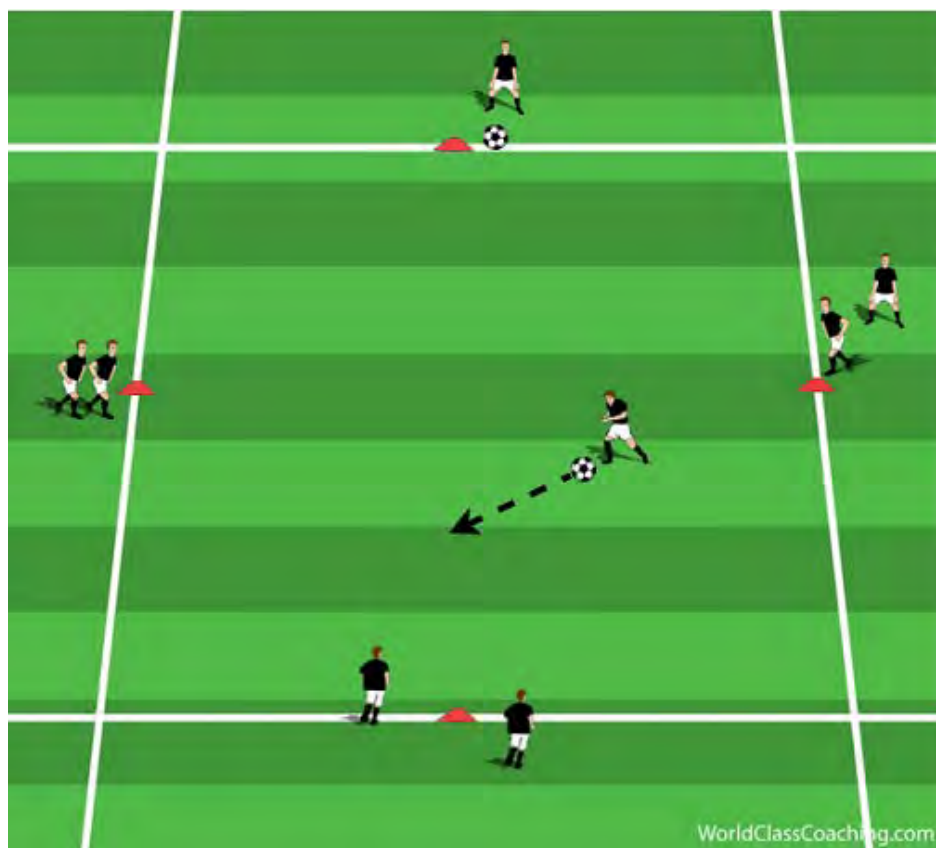
After passing the ball, the player sprints to the back of the line to their left.



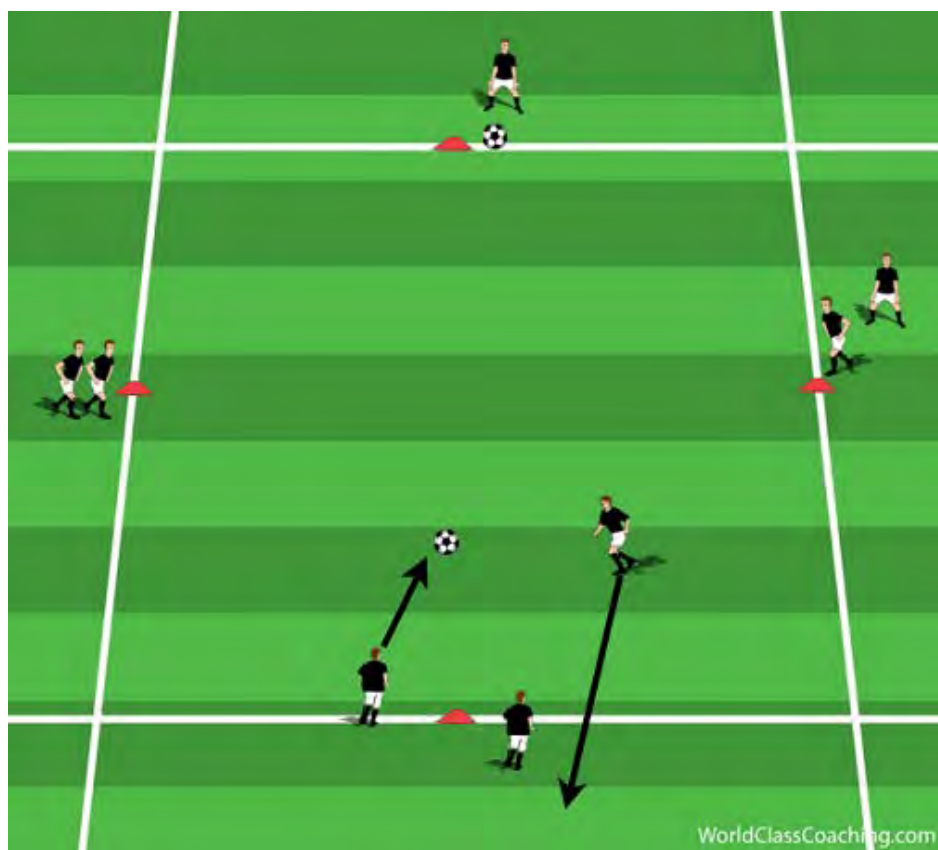
The player receiving the ball plays it with one touch to the player to their right.

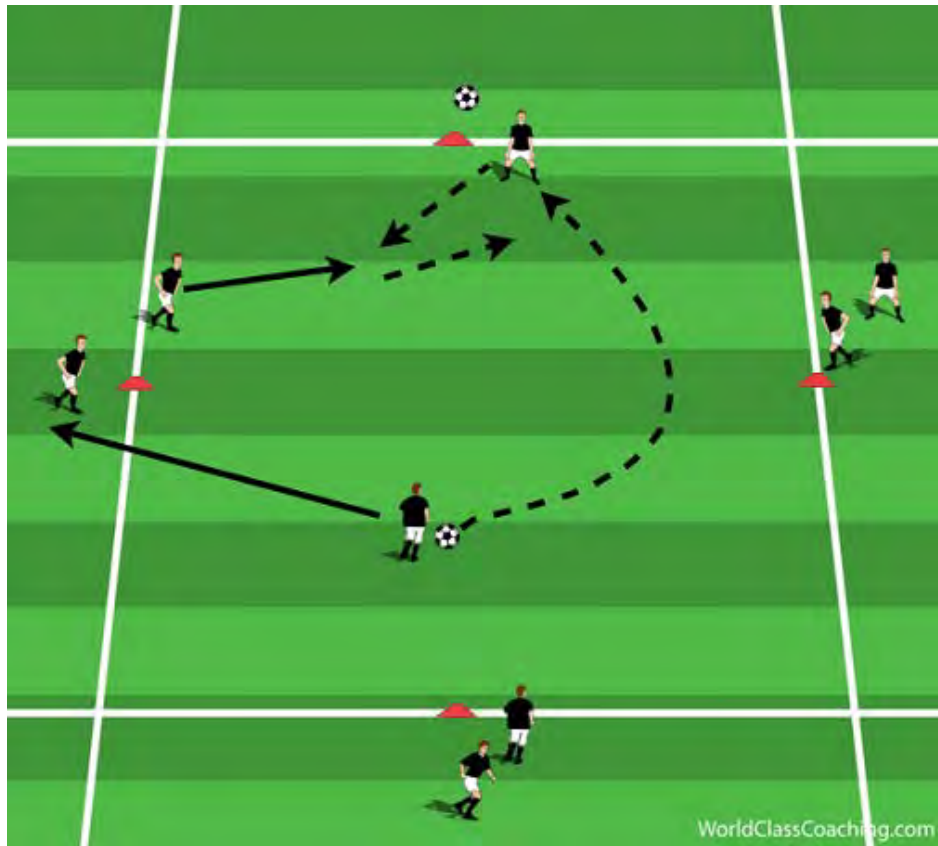


This player then plays the ball with one touch back to the middle as a lay off.



The player who received the initial pass then steps forward and plays this lay-off ball to the original line (*preferably in the air*) and the pattern continues in the other direction.





All players rotate to their left.

Progression: The next-step is to play a driven ball either on the ground or below waist height rather than a lofted ball.

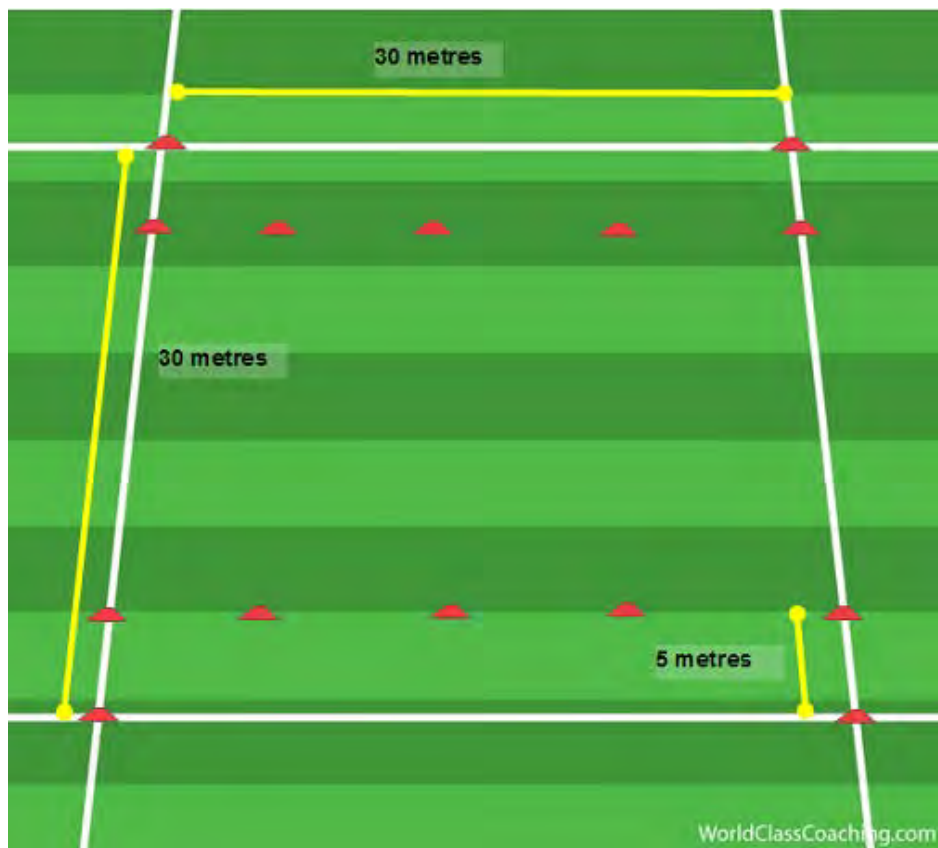
Coaching Points:

- The emphasis should be on playing accurate long balls with both their left and right feet.
- The players must concentrate on getting over the ball and striking the ball with a locked ankle with their laces.

Possession to Penetrate and Finish

This is a possession game that works on playing in a specific direction as opposed to just keeping possession. It also helps work on the timing of the final ball with the runner to avoid being offside.

Set-up: The team is split into 2 groups. Each group plays 5 vs. 5 plus 2 in 30 x 30 metre grids. Each grid has a 5 metre end zone on each end.





How it Works: The two neutral players are all time offense. The team with the ball must make 3 consecutive passes and then may play a ball into their offensive end zone for a teammate to receive. Players may run into the end zone before the ball is played in and the defenders can go in as well to defend.



They play this for 10 minutes.

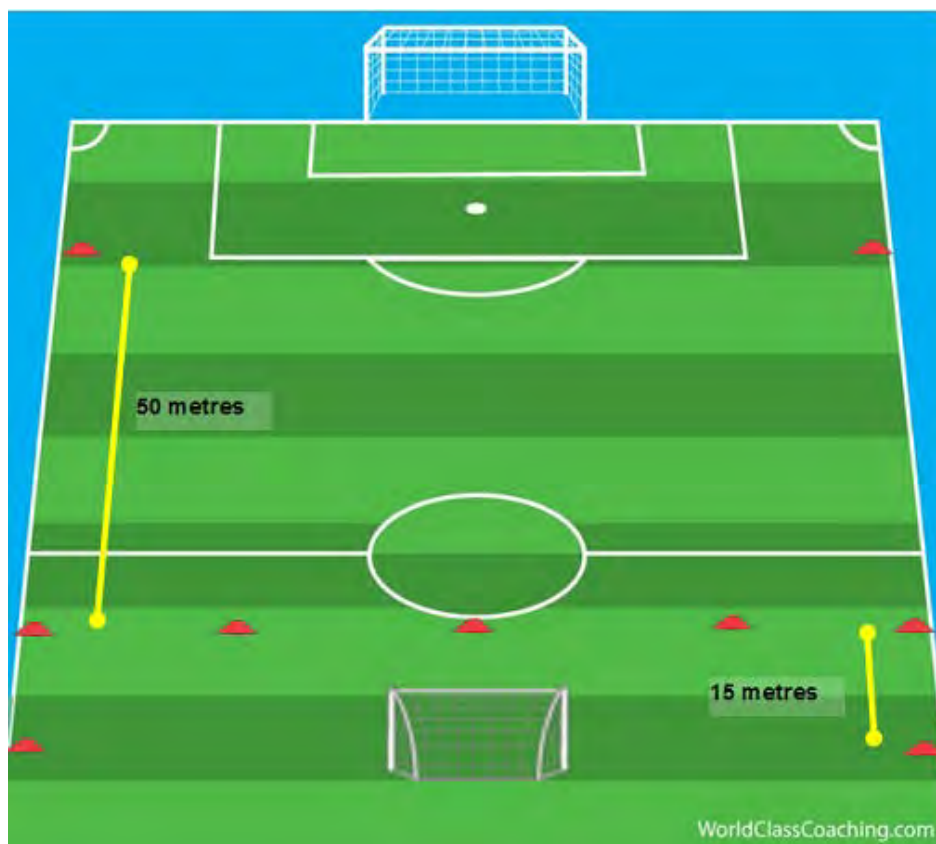
Progression: Now we add the restriction that NO players are allowed into the end zone until the ball has been played into the zone.





This helps work on the timing of the final ball with the runner to avoid being offside. This is done for 7 minutes.

Progression: Bring both groups together and play 8 vs. 8 in a 50 metre long grid with full width. The goals are 15 metres beyond the length of the field. Goalkeepers are used.





There are 2 target players and 1 defender in each end zone.



The ball has to be played into one of the target players before they can score.

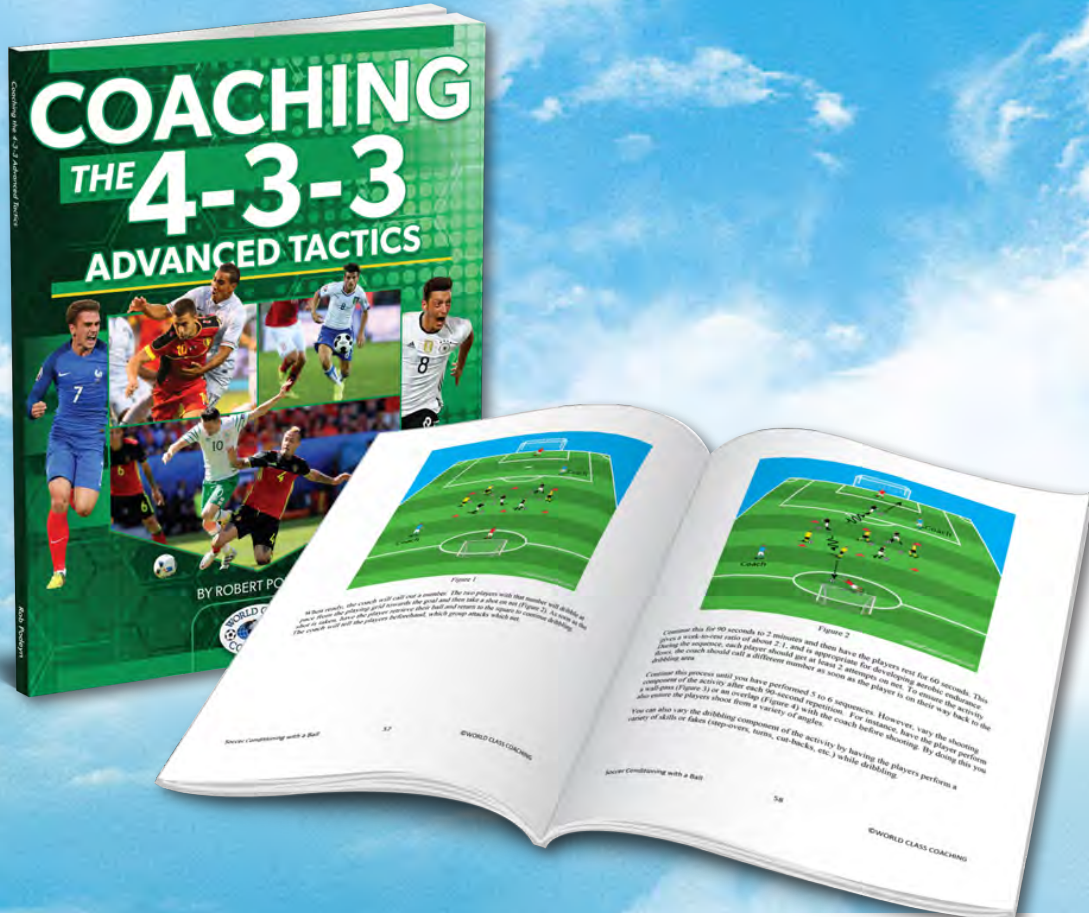


One additional attacking player can enter the final zone with the target players and defender.



Play this for 10 minutes and then remove all restrictions and allow them to play straight-up 8 vs. 8. for another 6 minutes.

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