

BIELSA

COACHING THE BIELSA WAY



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THEFOOTBALLCOACH

A fascinating insight into football's use of the rondo practice and how it can be used to better effect. The book also offers over 100 pages of content including best practice rondos that can be used to develop players understanding and ability to play the game.

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Welcome to **Coaching The Bielsa Way**. Before reading this book it is important to have an understanding of what to expect and what the book is going to offer. This book is going to look at critiquing the playing philosophy of Bielsa and then try to articulate it to you in a few simple principles. This means that we are going to try and avoid looking at formations, and focus on the principles that define them.

This book is specifically made for Football coaches and those of you who are interested in understanding the next level detail that exists around the professional game. We are going to look at a few tactical concepts that define Bielsa as well as a few training methods that help to support these principles.

As the book progresses we will try to provide you with methods to train the principle we describe. For example, if we talk about a specific idea, we will articulate it, show examples of it and provide practices on how to train it. This is where our books are unique. We do not just offer analysis of formations and then provide sessions, we look to critique philosophies and provide coaches with meaningful practices.

The book then finishes with a huge bank of easy to use practices for coaches to use if they want to create a similar playing style to Marcelo Bielsa. The sessions are based around different components of the game, and can provide coaches with an understanding of what elite coaching sessions look like and what to look for in those sessions.

We hope you enjoy the rest of the book and have some interesting takeaways that can challenge and support your development as a coach. It is important that when you use these sessions, you are adapting them and manipulating them to suit your club, your players and your personality.

WHO IS MARCELO BIELSA?



“ Marcelo is like my father, My second father. My relationship with him started when I was 12 or 13 years old. He's a great coach. I will always love him because he was a very important person in my career. ”

Mauricio Pochettino

Marcelo Alberto Bielsa Caldera, a man who has developed a reputation for his chaotic and enthusiastic approach to football, but who is Marcelo Bielsa? He was born in 1955 in the Argentinian city of Rosario, the city is the largest in the central Argentinian province of Santa Fe. He is one of three, with both an older brother and sister.

A young Marcelo had already developed a studious need for information, with family members recalling his ability to read a book a day from such a young age. Bielsa's approach to reading is said to have come from his Grandfather, who is said to have had 30,000+ books in a personal library. His desire for information was supported by his mother and father who, both held academically demanding jobs. His mother was an excellent teacher, whilst his father was a lawyer.

Bielsa was not born in to any old family, his family have had a rich history in Argentina for Law and Politics. His siblings have also gone on to great things, living successful working lives as politicians. Both his brother and sister have held important government positions in the past. Their successful academic background, mixed with his Grandfathers love of reading, has clearly had an influence on a young Marcelo Bielsa. However, this was not the only influence his parents had.

Bielsa's parents were not just connected by their academic background, but also by their love of football, and more specifically local club Rosario Central. Marcelo is said to have played football from a young age in the local youth leagues of Rossario, he showed signs as a better than average centre-back who would look to stand at over six foot tall. However, in order to pursue a future in the game as a player, Bielsa would need to move to accommodation at Newell's Old Boys.

However, having moved across the city to live in Newell's Old Boys accommodation, things didn't go to plan for Bielsa who was just 15 at the time. Having arrived at Old Boys, Marcelo was about to experience his first fall out and the footballing world's first experience of the strong principled man that is Marcelo Bielsa. After just two days, Marcelo was thrown out of accommodation after refusing to leave his two-stroke motorcycle outside. This rebellious or strong willed personality would continue to be a feature in his career.

Having been removed from accommodation, Bielsa's footballing journey continued. He progressed through the youth setup and continued to play as a defender who was comfortable in possession, knew and understood the game. However, it was clear Bielsa lacked pace and after just a handful of games for his beloved Newell's Old Boys, he moved on at just 21 years old. He then continued to play through the lower leagues for four more years before moving to Buenos Aires.

For Marcelo, football and education were not two separate entities, they were one connected and constant value. Whilst playing the game, he continued to read day in day out and subscribe to as many as 40 magazines that he had indexed from a young age. Bielsa's educational values continued and during his twenties he studied agronomy and physical education. It was this qualification tied with his move to Buenos Aires that created his first move into coaching.

It was at the local university in Buenos Aires that Bielsa first became a head coach. In typical Bielsa fashion, he watched over 1000+ players before selecting a squad of 20. He also insisted on carrying a thesaurus around with him, and addressed players formally to match their academic and professional environment.

Those who were fortunate enough to find themselves in the squad noticed a completely different approach to university football. He provided a new added professionalism to the training and expected professional standards

from every player and person involved within his squad. The players who had worked with him, spoke of his passion, intensity and the volume of work they were expected to perform. Even at this age, Bielsa has a clear understanding of the need for verticality on a football pitch and also had an idea of what good looked like.

Bielsa was not going to be a University head coach for long, that was clear to everyone. With a career high of beating Boca Juniors B team, he was off and with that, he was back off to Rosario. This time Bielsa has some theories that he wanted to put into place. Marcelo returned to the club that had released him at age 25, and they had given him control of some of the youth setups. It is said that every youth team Marcelo had the chance to influence, went on to be successful at some level, winning some competitions in Argentinas youth format.

Bielsa was made responsible for recruitment, and was challenged to find and develop the best talent across Argentina. In typical Bielsa fashion, he took the job seriously and worked tirelessly to be successful. It is claimed that he racked up 25,000 miles in three months in his Fiat 167, because he was scared of flying. Bielsa was making journey after journey looking to find the future talent of Newells Old Boys.

In more typical Bielsa fashion, he took a unique approach to recruiting players, dividing Argentina into seventy sections and then critiquing each area for the best talent. In his searches he was able to find a certain Mauricio Pochettino, and after driving to his house to check his legs and feet, he signed him for Newells Old Boys. Pochettino was not the only talent that Bielsa was able to find, Argentine legends such as Gabriel Batistuta were also found through the inquisitive methods of Marcelo Bielsa.

After years of hard work, the continuous watching of games and a huge amount of miles on the car, Bielsa progressed through the club and

became the first team head coach of Newells. Instantly, Bielsa took the young players through to the first team with him. He experienced success quite quickly winning the Argentine title and qualifying for the South American equivalent of the European Cup. His Newell's side worked hard and were combative but eventually fell short, losing in the final in a penalty shoot-out.

As Marcelo Bielsa began to find success on the elite senior level, his stock in South American football began to rise. His team was recognisable, and his approach was well discussed. It was not long before international sides began to look for Bielsa's services, and after just two seasons in charge, he was off.

In 1993, Bielsa appeared in Mexico working for Club Atlas, he was recommended to Atlas by Argentine coaching legend Cesar Luis Menotti. Bielsa would go on to spend four years in Mexico, working within the top division. Quite quickly Bielsa made headlines, by making unusual requests when arriving. In his first season at Atlas, he demanded that he only take over the youth teams in the first season, and then in the second season he would lead the senior team. The approach he delivered to the youth players is still in operation in many places in Mexico today.

Bielsa's extensive scouting program and approach to player recruitment was clear at Atlas, he was able to recruit a huge quantity of talent that littered the Mexican national team for many, many years. It is said that during the 90's, it was impossible to look at the Mexican national team and not see a player Bielsa had recruited to Atlas. Players such as Rafael Marquez, Osqueldo Sanche and Juan Pablo Garcia are some of the hugely successful footballers Bielsa has inspired.

Although Bielsa's time at Atlas could be considered a failure based on the failure to win a trophy, Bielsa's time is remembered fondly for other reasons.

It was his approach towards player development and player recruitment that put in the foundations for a golden period of success in Atlas's history. The early 90's saw a Bielsa lead revolution to the approach they made in recruiting young talent, and in the late 90's those players found success without Bielsa around. The club were even able to reach the final of the Verano in 1999, the competition that decides the league winners.

Bielsa would go on to spend two more years in Mexico before returning home. He found himself at Club De Futbol América, otherwise known as 'America'. During this stage of his career, Bielsa was already having a lasting effect on the players around him. Players spoke of how training 'dramatically changed' and how training became shorter, but the intensity went through the roof. Players were now having more demanded of them. One player commented on how Bielsa's methods in 1992, resemble what modern day coaching might look like, he was ahead of his time.

Bielsa also introduced an approach that is very rarely used, and is very much against the footballing traditions. In his time in Mexico, he began to break the teams up in to smaller micro sessions, training individuals whose roles linked. For example, he would take players away in small groups and perform repetitive exercises, these would be specific zonal exercises.

The exercises would often be numbered and he would shout to players, we will perform 6,8 and 10, for example, and the players would know what this meant. This was one of his rationales for taking the youth team before the senior team, an approach to install his DNA in the fabric of the club.

Bielsa's love for reading and his failure to understand why other people did not feel the need for reading was clear from the start. When coaching at America, he would employ the youth team players as opposition analysts, challenging them to watch footage and report back to him. This approach helped the young players understand the game, and understand the opponent. However, there was one catch, this was not like the opposition

today, no, players had to read the newspapers - all of the newspapers, and compile feedback for Bielsa from that. This feedback would then help structure his training week. With most games on a Sunday, Bielsa would give the players Monday off, dedicate Tuesday to physical fitness and then begin with detailed tactical analysis on the Wednesday.

Bielsa's training week in Mexico then included a training game on he Thursday, but in shorter periods. But this match always had the intensity of a cup final and Bielsa demanded it. Players spoke of their desire to win on Thursdays and this became what often would be called 'Murderball' later in his career.

Fridays held a very specific task for Bielsa, he would use this day to provide very in depth tactical information. It is claimed he would share with his team nearly 250 tactical moments, around 120 in possession and 120 out of possession. It is claimed that everything he shared held a purpose, everything was around movement, and co-ordination. Bielsa's model was clearly already very tactical, very positional and very directed.

These principles maintained themselves throughout Bielsa's coaching journey, from what we can see, hear and read Bielsa was a huge fan of self-development and self-investment. He made little to no decisions without a huge thought process backed up by hours upon hours of research, thought and critique. It is this approach that allowed for him to go from a university head coach, to a first team manager very quickly.

Having put an end on his time in Mexico, Bielsa headed back to his native Argentina and took control of Vélez Sarsfield Winning the Clausura in his only season in 1998. But it was at this moment that the Bielsa brand started to rise and the interest in him began in Europe. Coaches spoke of Bielsa and were 'interested' by the rumours and the stories that players were telling and it was in 1998 where Bielsa first made the trip across Europe.

Having arrived in Catalonia as the head of coach of Espanyol, there was excitement across South America and Europe as Bielsa arrived. However, things did not last long and after just six games, Bielsa was off. He had played just six league games and six inter-toto cup games before accepting the job as Argentina manager. Bielsa had won just one of his six league games in charge.

It was with the Argentinan national team that Bielsa first found longevity. He arrived back in Argentina in 1998 and continued to be the National team coach through until 2004, completing seven years in charge. Bielsa's time in charge of Argentina did not start particularly smoothly, in the 1999 Copa America, Bielsa ran into trouble. It was his first major competition and they were beaten 3-0 by Columbia in one game, in that game Bielsa was sent off and Argentina missed three penalties.

Things did however improve for Bielsa and Argentina, they were able to get out of the group of the 2002 World Cup but were knocked out in the first knock out round. However, this was the moment where Argentina found a little more success, with Argentina finishing runners-up in the 2004 Copa America and winning Olympic gold in 2004. It was at this point Bielsa decided to walk away from Argentina and decided to take on a new challenge.

Bielsa's time in charge of Argentina will often have mixed feedback when speaking to Argentine supporters. His time at the 2002 World Cup is often considered 'unlucky' but ultimately a failure. His time however, is fondly remembered by others as it was Argentinas first Gold medal in football at the Olympics. It was also the start of an eight year dominance on the medal as Argentina were successful at both Athens and Beijing.

Life in international football must have suited the needs of Marcelo, who after a short break found himself again in International football at South

American nation Chile. He would go on to leave a lasting memory on coaches and football fans through out the world in his time there. Bielsa's Chile were energetic, enthusiastic and dangerous, they were admired from across the world for their energy in and out of possession, but they did not encounter a simple linear journey.

Bielsa, in typical Bielsa fashion, experienced record highs and lows in his first year. They were able to take a point from Uruguay for the first time in Montevideo. Although, this was backed up by record home defeats of 3-0 to both Paraguay and Brazil. This did not change Bielsa's approach, but just intensified his need for success. In 2008, Bielsa Orchestrated Chiles first victory over his home nation of Argentina, the 1-0 forced Argentina's manager Alfio Basile to resign.

However, Chile's first win over Argentina was just the start of the Bielsa-ball approach that spread quickly. In the build up to the 2010 World Cup, Chile continued to show progressive and record breaking performances. His Chile side were able to destroy Peru 3-1 in Lima, a location they had not won in for nearly 20 years.

This was backed up by a comprehensive 2-0 victory in Paraguay, for the first time in nearly 30 years. The road continued to be lined with success for Chile who then completed a 4-0 victory of Bolivia and a point in Venezuela. Chile then needed to beat Colombia for the first time in order to qualify, and in typical Bielsa fashion, they were able to.

Bielsa instantly gained huge popularity in Chile after taking the nation to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. At this moment, Chile had been in football exile, after failing to qualify in 2002 and 2006 and being banned and disqualified in 1990 and 1994. So Bielsa had achieved their first qualification since France 1998. However, his achievement went further than just footballing success, his influence on Chilean football was long lasting.

Bielsa's long lasting success was still built from that World-Cup success in 2010, his side beat Honduras in the group stages, before beating Switzerland in the second game. This then setup a mouth watering final group game between Spain and Chile. Spain ran out 2-1 winners in a tight game, and then went on to win the tournament.

Chile's journey continued through after finishing second ahead of Switzerland. They then drew tournament favourites Brazil and were put to the sword in a 3-0 defeat in Johannesburg. This ended up being Bielsa's final game in charge of Chile, as he walked away with a disagreement with the National team Bosses.

However, as previously mentioned the 2010 legacy was only a small part of Bielsa's influence on football in Chile. He was able to do much more. He was able to blood young, creative and energetic players into the national team, playing key roles in the development of players such as Alexis Sanchez, Arturo Vidal and Gary Medel. Who were all able to go on and make great careers in Europe.

Following his exit from Chile, Bielsa returned to club football and this time he returned to Spain for a much longer period of time, than his previous tenure of just six league games. This time it was Athletic Bilbao, and this time it was a memorable experience for everyone. His side adjusted fairly quickly to his methods, and as the season progressed, they showed more and more consistently that they were able to deliver the principles. Bielsa scored early points with the fans with a victory over local rivals Real Sociedad.

Bielsa's first season continued to be successful with great performances and draws against big Spanish sides such as FC Barcelona and Valencia. It was however, in European competitions where Bielsa's reputation really ignited. His side finished top of their Europa league group having won four of their six games. Bielsa's side were up against Salzburg, PSG and Slovan

Bratislava. Bielsa's men were able to beat the French giants Paris Saint-Germain at home 2-1, they were also able to record an outstanding 2-1 victory at home to Bratislava before progressing through the group as winners with four wins, one draw and one defeat.

It was likely in the next round where Marcelo Bielsa's fame hit its proverbial jackpot. Bielsa's side drew tournament favourites Manchester United, who had dropped into the Europa League after failing to make it through their group in the Champions League. At the time Manchester United were defending Premier League champions, were beaten finalist in the previous Champions League final and were managed by legendary coach Sir Alex Ferguson.

It was described by English journalists as a 'Sensational game for the purists' and it saw Bielsa's Athletic put Sir Alex Ferguson to the sword 5-3 over two legs. Goals from players such as Fernando Llorente helped put the game to bed. Bielsa's side had a very deliberate three man attack, who positionally were excellent with and without the ball. They took up positions in between lines and exploited United on the counter-attack constantly.

Manchester United just could not find a method of attack, without being hit dynamically on the transition by Bielsa's men. In fact if it was not for the heroics of David De Gea, the game could have finished six or seven-one. United struggled in the first half, constantly turning possession over as Bielsa's men pressed and pressed and pressed. Forcing United players to turn back and find more pressure from Llorente and his partners.

But it was not just the pressure that confused and destroyed Manchester United, it was the use of unique man-marking system that United had not come across before in the Premier League. At times in the game David De Gea would stand with his foot on the ball, look up and just see nothing but the blue and white Blackburn Rovers style away kit of Bilbao.

In attack, Athletic Bilbao were able to deliver wave after wave of attack, the intensity and the tempo of the attack was mesmerising to English football fans, who might have just been receiving their first dose of Bielsa-Ball. The biggest take away for fans who were watching were the number of sprints, the intensity of the sprints and the players willingness to sprint.

This desire to run and the willingness to run, forced Manchester United players to try and match the volume of work, naturally they were not able to, and the fatigue both physically and mentally was obvious for all to see. Manchester United's Premier League winning back four, could clearly be seen to tire and make mistakes that would lead to goals by Bilbao's attacking three.

Bielsa's side did not just out work Manchester United, they were able to play a unique and ball-centred approach to possession. They moved the ball quickly in short combinations, going from back to front quickly but keeping the ball glued to the floor. This kind of combination play was something that looked like it had come from a Dutch side of yesteryear.

It was this game that propelled Bielsa side into the quarter-finals, and this time it was an away trip to Germany and to Schalke. Bielsa's men were rampant in a 4-2 victory, which again contained intensity, volume and courage. In the return leg, they were able to hold onto a 2-2 draw that saw Athletic Bilbao into the last four of the Europe League.

In the semi-final, Bilbao headed to Portugal to play Sporting and were beaten 2-1 in a dramatic game where Bilbao threw away a lead in the last 15 minutes. In the return leg, Bielsa's side took an early advantage before being pegged back a minute before half-time. In what was a huge moment before half-time Lbai scored a stoppage time goal to hold a 2-1 advantage at half-time. In what was maybe Bielsa's most important team talk, his team needed to find a winner or fear conceding another goal and facing a mountain to climb on away-goals. The second half was cagey and Bielsa's

side continued to attack on the break with an intensity that Sporting struggled to deal with. With only two minutes left on the clock, Fernando Llorente struck home a winner that sent the 37,598 into delirium inside the San Mamés Stadium.

Having already finished sixth in the league, missing out on fifth on head to head results, Athletic Bilbao headed to Bucharest to play Atlético Madrid in an all Spanish final. Athletic were quite simply blown away on the night by a clinical Atleti. Although Bilbao were able to dominate the ball, the quality of Atleti shined through with a brace from man of the match Falcao, and a late goal from Diego.

This was to some extent the end of the good days for Bielsa and Athletic Bilbao as the 2012 season began with major disappointment as key players were sold to major European clubs and after a 12th place finish, Bielsa was not offered a new contract and his journey at Bilbao came to an end after just two seasons, but the Bielsa profile had blossomed and boomed across Europe.

From here Bielsa's future became more choppy and unpredictable, or predictable, depending on how well you think you know Marcelo Bielsa. He arrived at French club Marseille in 2014 and got off to a fast start, his side were top at the half-way point. The side showed a huge amount of potential to go on and win the French league. However, after a turbulent second half to the season, Bielsa side ended up finishing a modest fourth place.

In his second season the problems really began to tell, and after just one game he walked away, resigning quoting issues with changes in his contract and dispute with management within the club. This again showed the strong willed and strong principles that Bielsa held from such a young age.

Following this journey, Bielsa arrived in Lazio in Italy with a new challenge

but after just two days, Bielsa quit as the manager sparking legal action and a law suit of €50 Million euros. When questioned by the media Bielsa claimed that Lazio had made promises on transfer targets, and then had failed on recruiting them. This period of just two days increased the confusion and mystery around Bielsa and his next challenge would occur back in France.

Arriving in France with a fresh opportunity, Bielsa took charge of Lille in May 2017. His job was to rebuild what he saw as a very aged squad. He looked to move on players such as Mavuba and Eder and replace them with younger more fitting players to his model. However, this did not go to plan. It is claimed he told players that he intended on leaving before pre-season had even finished. But after just 13 games in charge, Bielsa was suspended by Lille and found his contract being terminated.

Lille sporting adviser Luis Campos spoke about how letting some of the senior players go was one of the key reasons in letting Bielsa go. It was seen as a shock and a poor decision by many in the media, as recruiting Bielsa as a coach must involve allowing him to recruit his own players for his unique style. Recruiting him and attempting to limit him, will only cause a chaotic and quick ending.

Following his departure from Lille, Bielsa found himself signing as manager for Leeds United, a club lurking in the second division of English football, a club who had fallen from grace, having been in the champions league just a decade or so before. Bielsa arrived on a two-year contract with an option for a third, with a really simple aim, get Leeds and their huge fan base back to the Premier League.

The task ahead for Bielsa was not easy. He was in fact the 21st manager to take over Leeds since they were relegated in 2004. This meant the average tenure of a Leeds manager was just 36.5 games, just over half a season in total with a 46 game season, and two cup competitions. With the average

manager departing with just 15 wins in their tenure. This matched with just an average win rate of 30% really showed the challenge that was ahead for Bielsa.

With Bielsa in charge, Leeds got off to a flying start winning their first four games, a club record for a new manager. The perfect start for Bielsa's need was upon us and Bielsa was the Championship manager of the month for his first month in English football. As the season continued, the injuries piled up for Leeds, the questions of the Bielsa approach began to appear, was his philosophy too intense for the hectic nature of English Football?

As the injuries continued, Bielsa looked to the academy, like he has through his time in coaching. The young players filled the needed gaps and the level of performance was still reasonable as the season continued. The squad was almost bare by Christmas, with 10 players under the age of 21 receiving a debut in the Championship. With Leeds top at Christmas, Bielsa-Ball seemed to be well and truly working in England's second division, however, there was still a long way to go.

In early January, a storm swept through English football, as Bielsa admitted to sending a spy to Derby County's training ground to watch training. This created a huge backlash from Derby manager Frank Lampard, Bielsa was backed up by Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino (an ex-player of his) and Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola. The saga dubbed 'Spygate' by the media continued to rumble for a few weeks.

This was until Bielsa announced a press briefing where he provided a detailed analysis on a slideshow, the onlooking media were amazed by the detail and the quality of the work. Journalists left calling Bielsa a 'Genius'. Leeds were then handed a £200,000 fine, which Bielsa insisted he paid and forced Leeds to let him pay this out of his own pocket. Again, this was another moment that showed the strong-willed and strong-principled Marcelo Bielsa.

If you thought that was enough drama for one season at Leeds, think again. Things were about to become even more dramatic and memorable for Leeds fans and football fans. It started first by Leeds falling away from top spot and slipping into second place. They then lost 2-1 to Wigan Athletic in a shock game, where Wigan even had 10 men for well over an hour.

But the strangest and most memorable moment was about to arise. With Leeds still mathematically able to achieve automatic promotion, they took on Aston Villa at home. With just under 20 minutes remaining, Jonathan Kodja went down just inside his own half, under a tackle that did look a foul, but was not given. The game then seemingly came to a stop as the Aston Villa players called for medical attention.

However, Leeds continued (with the right to) and let Klich run down the left hand side and cut in and score. This caused a riot inside the stadium as the players came together instantly in a brawl as the ball hit the back of the net. The goal was huge, it would at least give Leeds an advantage in the play-offs. The managers seemingly clashed on the side, the stewards came on to the pitch and Kodja remained on the floor from some time.

Whilst this occurred, a very calm Marcelo Bielsa, spoke with his translator and the Villa manager, whilst the crowd looked on. Bielsa continued to shout to his captain Liam Cooper. It was at this point remarkably Marcelo Bielsa forced his side to let Aston Villa walk through and score to equalise the game to 1-1. This again showed the strong willed nature of Marcelo Bielsa, a man who wants to see football in the perfect way he expect and nothing short.

Following this incident, Bielsa was awarded the FIFA FairPlay award and the game that finished 1-1 ultimately ended Leeds' chance of automatic promotion. Bielsa's season then came to an abrupt end after failing to beat sixth place Derby County in the play-off semi-finals. Bielsa faced criticism of his methods, the English media challenged the intensity and volume of

work, claiming his players were burnt out and fatigued. As the 2019-20 season began, Leeds fans were optimistic that it would be second time lucky under Bielsa. However, with everything we know about him, the unknown can be unpredictable and the future can be chaotic.

In tremendous fashion, Leeds started their second season with the same (if not more) energy than before. The season was highly affected by covid but the performance level remained high. Bielsa's team continued to make very few permanent signings, but did rely on young loan talent to assist in their process.

Leeds started quickly, like in his first season, and was manager of the month for November. Leeds were unbeaten in their first seven games, but this year they were not top on Christmas Day. Normal service did resume for Bielsa and Leeds, as they took their pole position back on December 29th with a fantastic win over Birmingham City.

Leeds continued to perform as the season continued, and took a key point from top of the table rivals West Bromwich Albion late in January. Bielsa's season looked unstoppable as Leeds remained in pole position as they approached the middle of March, Leeds were in fact seven points clear of the play-offs and seemingly promoted with nine games to go. However, Bielsa would encounter a problem he could not control, the Coronavirus pandemic saw the league suspended and Leeds' chance to win promotion hanging in a balance they could not control.

Fortunately for Leeds, the season was resumed and they were able to win the Championship, but with no fans able to be in attendance. Bielsa had become the first manager to return Leeds to England's top division since their financial collapse all those years ago. However, for Bielsa the work had only just began, the pressure of being Leeds United manager would mean the fans would expect the side to compete in the Premier League, not just survive.

With the side back in the Premier League, Bielsa's work had begun and his skills could be tested against the biggest and best managers and clubs in the world, including Guardiola and Klopp. In fact the season started with a trip to play Klopp's title winning Liverpool Side.

Bielsa's side came off second best in what can only be described as a game for the ages, the game finished 4-3 with Liverpool being pushed to the limit, but both sides defensive frailties exposed. Bielsa had already engaged and excited the English football fan after just one game in the Premier League. Leeds continued to excite, finding themselves on the other side of a 4-3 this time at home.

As the season continued, Leeds continued to compete and cause problems to sides with their energetic and man-orientated approach to defending. They were able to wrestle a point at home to Manchester City and break teams like Aston Villa apart 3-0. There was however some limitations to Leeds in the Premier League, and sides such Leicester were able to pick them apart, in crushing defeats. Bielsa's approach was chaotic, organised and decisive. Regardless of the score or the opponent, the approach was the same, to attack with and without the ball.

As Bielsa's first season in the Premier League came towards an end, they were able to reflect on a truly successful season. Leeds were able to finish ninth and secure a very comfortable and safe finish. The results could be viewed as chaotic and unpredictable, with wins at Tottenham and Manchester City, yet defeats at Crawley Town and Brighton and Hove Albion. There were, however, many plaudits for Leeds who seemed to approach the Premier League with an enthusiasm and a tenacity to want to compete and beat every side they played. However, they were dubbed by others as naive and erratic, for failing to adapt to the opponent and play the situation they were dealt. It is probably in the next few chapters where we look to expose and understand the method behind the madness.

THE PRINCIPLES OF PLAY



“ A man with new ideas is
mad until he succeeds ”

Marcelo Bielsa

Before we go into detail on Marcelo Bielsa, it is important to recognise the difference between a philosophy and playing principles and a formation. A Formation is quite simply just the way a team is lined-up on a team sheet. It holds no real value in modern coachING, the animation of play or the way in which a formation behaves is much more important to a coach.

For example Marcelo Bielsa has used multiple formations throughout his careers from 1-4-2-3-1 to 1-3-3-3-1. These formations are very different on paper but can behave in similar (or not so similar) ways depending on the people, the players, the insurrection given etc. For example, two teams can play each other in a 1-4-3-3 formations, yet the system of play or style of play can be significantly different. For example, in possession the full-backs might go high and a central midfield player might drop in. Does this mean the team is now playing 1-3-4-3 instead of 1-4-3-3?

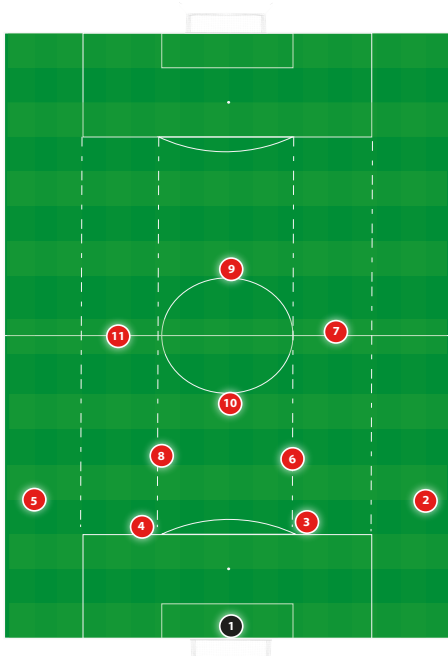


Figure: 1-4-3-3 on a team sheet

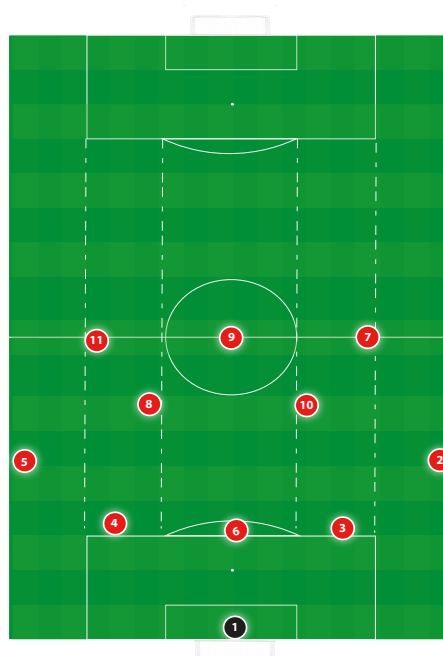


Figure: 1-4-3-3 In Possession

As the two figures show on the previous page, the same formation can look very different based on the scenarios explained. So it is important to recognise that when we discuss Marcelo Bielsa's philosophy and the principles of his play, we understand that these do not include the formations, the formations and animations of play are just a product of the principles.

Through each chapter you will be able to see how flexible Bielsa's formations are based upon his principles of play. One of the key factors to think about when choosing a formation is how can you fit the individuals you have, the principles of play you have and the oppositions strengths and weaknesses into a shape that gives you the best opportunity to perform.

We will see through out the the use of a 1-3-3-1-3 but this can change week to week depending on how many strikers to opposition play with as Bielsa doesn't want his strikers to matchup in a 1v1 situation, he is always trying to have the numerical overload of +1. So this means if the side start with just one attacker he will often switch to his 1-4-1-4-1 formation. This means the principles are still the same and the information to the players remains consistent. But importantly his team will have a +1 on the defensive line.

Without giving too much away for the remaining chapters, it is important to understand far more about a team than the formation they play. What are a teams strengths and weaknesses and what are they trying to achieve? Mixing this with your own philosophy and your own intentions you can better plan, prepare and deliver coaching sessions. Which in turn will better prepare your players for game day.

Marcelo Bielsa's Principles

There are believed to be a few very clear principles to Marcelo Bielsa's sides, although there will be some discussion over these principles, there are a few principles that cannot be disputed when trying to understand the philosophy and approach of the great Argentine Coach.

1.) Work Rate - This is not tactical and is not clever, but it is at the heart of everything Bielsa tries to achieve. His football is aggressive, is based around hard work and in order to be successful in and out of possession you must be able to sprint, run for long distances and make good decisions under huge amounts of fatigue. The last point is very important, because being able to run is not enough in a Bielsa team. You must have a high enough fitness level to make good decisions in possession, there is no place for poor decision making under the onset of fatigue.

2.) Overload +1 - This a tactical element of Bielsa's build up play. When he switches from a 1-4-2-3-1 or a 1-3-3-3-1 the fundamental reason is often to create the moment of +1 in build up play. For example, if the opponent plays with two centre-forwards, then his sides will look to have three centre-backs to ensure there is always a spare player. If the opponent attacks with one striker, then he is comfortable with two centre-backs to allow that +1 to assist them in building play out from the back.

The overload +1 is not just specific to build-up play, it also relates to Bielsa out of possession. Whenever a team is in possession, his teams like to press in a man to man system (explained later). However, Bielsa always likes to have a +1 in the defensive line, for example, if his team play against a front two, he will use a back three. If the team attacks with a single striker, his team will use a back four. Ensuring that the principle of +1 is consistently maintained through out.

3.) Rotation - The importance of rotation is obvious within all Bielsa teams, his teams do not just perform semi-static rotations when playing out from the back, but complex and positional rotations both vertically and horizontally to support ball progression through to the final third. Like all of Bielsa's key principles of play, they accommodate each other to allow for success in possession.

His teams ability to rotate to create space and support his teams desire to break through lines is obvious in all moments of the game. This rotation can occur in any area of the pitch but is commonly seen in the attacking areas to move the opponent and open up more progressive opportunities to score.

4.) Pressing - Bielsa's teams are extremely aggressive with every action they take both in and out of possession. As expected, pressing plays a significant role within the philosophy. His pressing cannot really be defined by any simple definition. It is always tactically orientated, meaning they press the opponent to make them weak and concede possession in dangerous area. How they deliver this press will be dependent on the opponent, the situation and the hours upon hours of analysis that has occurred.

Fundamentally, Bielsa's teams press in a unique and intense man to man coverage press, meaning every player is responsible for another player on the field of play. Once a player applies pressure to his or her opponent then pressure comes from the surrounding players. This is quite a unique approach as teams will often look to press with weak sides and strong.

However, still apply the principles of overload by combining this principle with his +1 principle. This means that if the opponent has two up, his side has a spare defensive player, meaning there is defensive stability in case the press is broken in its first phase. This mixture of tactical pressing, physical and mental intensity and the principle of +1 make Bielsa's side incredibly difficult to play against.

5.) Verticality - This might be the fundamental principle that sits within the core of Marcelo Bielsa's philosophy. It is simply described as the desire to play forward. This is where Bielsa's philosophy is fundamentally different to that of those who used Tiki-Taka football. Bielsa's side are possession based, but they have the desire to play forward at all times, where Tiki-Taka would often look to use time in possession as a tool.

Bielsa's team are constantly looking to achieve two things when in possession, this is to create a high quality finishing chance. This means a chance on goal where the player is expected to score because of the ease of the situation. The second is to play through the opponents first defensive line with a central pass. This links the two aims. The first is to create central chances, the second is to create passes in central areas.

This requires players to be able to think about the game on a deeper level than most other players. His players are required to be thinking about the game 'in-possession' when they aren't even in possession of the ball. Meaning his players are taking up strong counter-attacking positions and his other players are thinking about how quickly they can get the ball to them if the moment develops.

WORK-RATE

You are probably sat there right now thinking, how is work-rate a principle of play, how is it specific to Bielsa? Isn't work-rate a fundamental for any player in and system, and you would have a point. However, what Marcelo Bielsa demands from his players is fundamentally different to what you would see and expect to see from the 99% of other professional teams you might see. His players are forced to work harder in and out of possession, and be tougher and more resilient.

His Leeds team have reset the standard for running in the Premier League, his team averaged 115km per game in 2020. This was more than any side have ever averaged since this statistic became available. Leeds' running data is not just mindless running either, they have become famous for the ferocity of the sprinting that they perform consistently. In 2020/21, they averaged an average sprint distance of 2234.3, more than any top flight club in the world. The likes of Manchester City could not even come close, with way below 2000.

This requirement to sprint is a core principle of what Bielsa tries to achieve, his players make the playing environment very difficult for opponent players. They have to play under the pressure of the Leeds players, who they know are going to be pressing, sprinting and change them through out the game. But they also have to play knowing that this style of play will last until the game ends, it will not be a 10 or 15 minute spell to survive at the start of the game. Bielsa's players will keep the intensity going until the final whistle.

Bielsa's teams volume of work has been praised by many, but it is fundamentally linked to the way he trains. He demands that his players run, run and run some more, and this can only be created with overload training and high volumes of training. Some players have described his philosophy as 'ruthless', saying that El Loco demands his players to work at crazy intensities for small periods of time. Others have said it is "relentless and, just consistent" suggesting Bielsa never allows the intensity to drop and

keeps training feeling like a game at times.

Bielsa's training looks to not only improve players technically and tactically, but improve players capacity to train, both physically and emotionally. He is known to demand double sessions from players, with them often training once in the morning and once in the evening (often in pre-season), he wants players not only to train physically together to prepare them for the work-rate, but also to train together emotionally, spending time together and bonding. He sees the training and time around the club as an opportunity to develop a brotherhood or a bond.

Because Bielsa's philosophy requires lots of high-intensity running, his training naturally demands that players are to perform these sprints during the training week. He provides quite a repetitive training schedule with the players performing similar tasks with similar demands over and over again. Ensuring the players have clarity in their training schedule. The schedule is very important to Bielsa's model, as too much training could be dangerous and players have to be capable of coping in the environment. In order to train in his squads. If a player does not reach his standards in terms of weight, size muscle mass etc. Players simply will not train with the first team until they have met the expected standards and there is simply no exceptions.

Although, you might now be thinking this is a simple principle to an elite coaches philosophy, it is in fact the hardest and the most important. You must be able to create an environment where players are willing to push their bodies to the limit day in and day out for the team, without question. But you as the coach must also be so consistent in how you plan and design your practice, they must not only develop your technical and tactical principles but train the physical demands that players need in order to become athletic and fit enough to play in the system. Every other principle in Bielsa's philosophy requires this principle to be trained and developed day in day out.

CREATING THE +1

Creating the +1 is fundamental to a Bielsa team, both in and out of possession. The idea of having an overload provides a team with a numerical advantage in the game of football. It simply means that if a team has an extra player, they have an extra opportunity to provide support going forward or offer protection when defending. For Bielsa, creating the +1 situations is a tactical requirement that he needs from his players both with and without the ball. When attacking, his teams will look to use the rotations previously mentioned, in order to isolate opposition players in 2v1 moments.

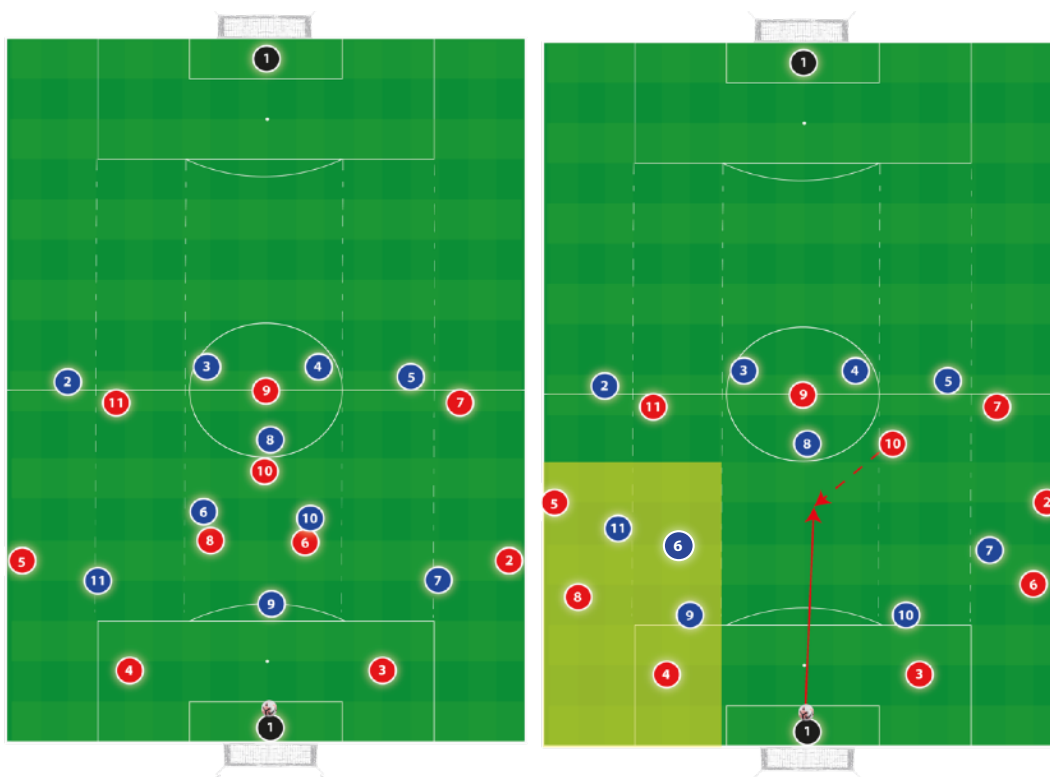
These 2v1 moments and overloads are heavily linked to rotation, and from an in possession prospective could be linked to 'rotation'. However, for this section we are going to split it. Overloads are simply created to generate numerical superiority for Bielsa's team in order to feed two of his key objectives. One, to create good shooting opportunities in central areas and two, to create penetrative passing opportunities in central areas. The overloads support his tactical requirements of playing forward and vertically through the opponent.

One tactical use of overloads by Bielsa is to pre-occupy the opponent in areas Bielsa does not want to use the ball. For example, when playing out from the back, his side might want to use the centre of the pitch, in order to use the centre of the pitch, they will often overload a particular wide area in order to vacate the centre of the pitch. Once they have created the overload on one side of the pitch, they wait for a situation and a reaction. If the opponent comes over to match his team up and remove the overload, then the principle of rotation occurs and his sides then overload another area (likely the centre). If nobody matches his team up, then they will use the overload in the wide area.

This is a tactical ploy to create space and dominate specific areas of the pitch in order to develop better ball progression through the thirds of the pitch, in the next few images, we can see how this might be used within a

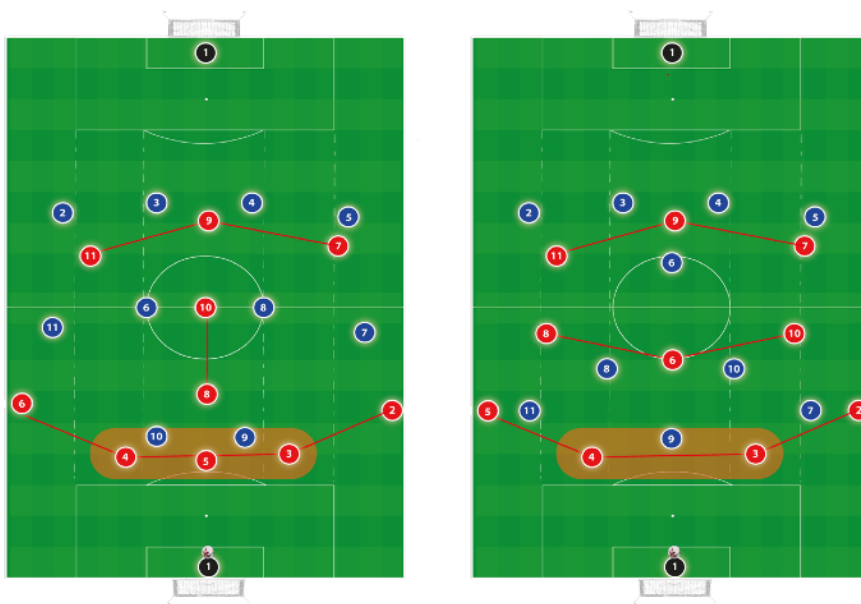
build-up play situation. Here we can see in the images, on the left how build-up play might look in a standard 11v11 game with a side pressing Bielsa's team, so there is no option to play out. Whilst the image on the right shows how his team might use the Principle of +1 and overloads to manipulate the opponent and create numerical opportunities to play vertically through the opponent.

This situation is of course slightly exaggerated to make the tactical principles clear on a small image, but the idea remains the same, create an overload to support the forward progression of the ball through the centre of the pitch.



As previously mentioned, creating the +1 is not specific to being in possession of the ball. In fact, it is more common that this principle is linked to being out of possession. Bielsa likes to ensure that on the defensive line, his side organise to create a +1 situation. This means we are always defending with an extra player in the defensive line. For example, if the opponent attacks with two centre-forwards, then we must have three centre-backs to ensure we have numerical superiority to defend the centre of the pitch.

Like Bielsa's attacking principles of wanting to attack centrally, Bielsa does not want the opponent to attack him centrally, and this +1 principle is an effective way of trying to force the opposition sides into the wide areas or into underloaded situations where they risk turning possession over and conceding the ball back to Bielsa's sides. The idea of a man oriented defensive system, where players defend 1v1, can leave you very exposed if you do not all perform your jobs correctly. So with this in mind, Bielsa has created a system where the last line of defence is overloaded in a numerical way.



As you can see in both the images on the previous page, Bielsa will almost base his playing system around the opponents shape to ensure he is always able to create those +1 moments. In the first image we can see how Bielsa is playing against an opponents 1-4-4-2 shape. This produces a problem with the forward players playing against Bielsa's defensive line. In order to combat this, Bielsa switches his side to a back three, in order to ensure that the centre-backs are able to play with a numerical overload of +1. In this situation, it would become a 3v2 situation supporting the side in and out of possession.

When a team attacks Bielsa's sides with a single striker, in a formation such as a 1-4-3-3, Bielsa is comfortable switching to a back four (as shown in the second image) to ensure that the opponents single striker is out numbered by the first defensive line in Marcelo Bielsa's team. If you are wondering how he would deal with a front three playing very attacking football, it is very simple. The use of a back four against the front three will still create a +1 moment. So there is no need to adapt to create a solution for this problem. It would just require some simple adjustments to positions to ensure the front three are effectively dealt with.

The +1 principle is a simple principle that can be used by coaches in order to simplify the game for their players. This principle can be used to adjust the way you setup against sides, just switching from a back four to a back three depending on the shape of the opponent. This will also make players aware of the tactical situation around them and challenge them to make their own decisions. If you are wondering how, it can be done as simple as this.

Ensure you give your players two clear ways of playing with a back four and back three, and then provide them with simple instructions, when you recognise the opponent is using a one or a two striker system, change our shape to the appropriate formation to deal with the threat and problem that has been put upon us by the opponent.

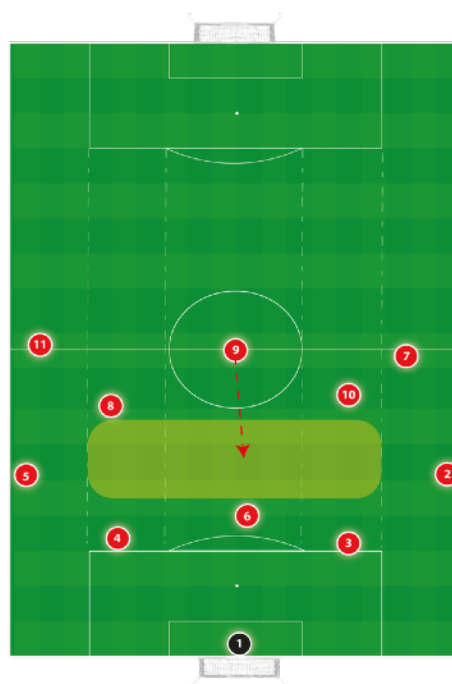
ROTATION

Rotation - This is a key principle in the philosophy of Marcelo Bielsa. He has often said that attacking or possession is simple, you look to score unless you are not able to, then find a team mate who is able to. Bielsa uses rotations in order to open up space to create goal scoring opportunities. Attacking rotations are not unique to Bielsa, coaches like Guardiola use them to dominate the centre of the pitch, but for Bielsa it is about dominating and opening up all areas in the attacking part of the pitch.

Bielsa's use of rotations can be simplified into two categories one as vertical rotations and one of horizontal rotations. Bielsa has used different types of rotations to open up space through out his career, but these are two extremely popular and used methods. They are linked to his individual demands of players, that they must be able to beat a player 1v1, and must be recognise how to create space

Bielsa will often use vertical rotations, and has done exquisitely well with Leeds United. He has displayed the willingness to vacate the centre of the pitch and move players into the peripheral of the pitch stretching the game, and although he has left the centre of the pitch, he still understands its importance. Once he has tactically left the centre of the pitch empty, his attacking players would work down the line to receive possession.

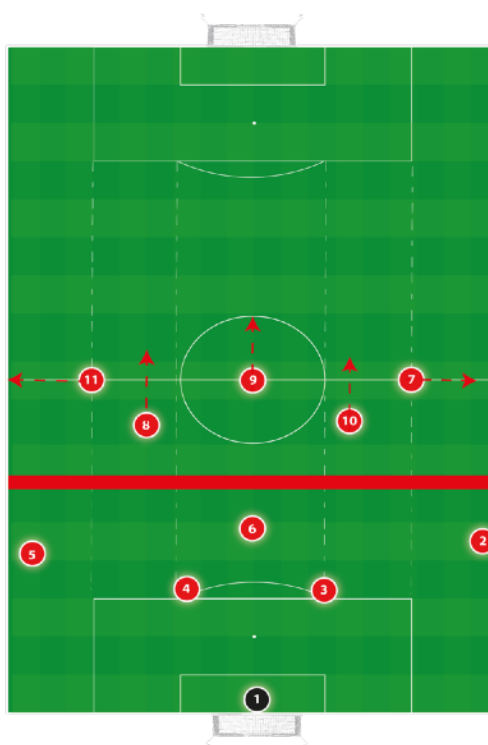
Working down the line is a simple concept, it involves attacking players making movements from a high position into a lower position between the opponents lines. The vertical rotations are only possible with effective control of space and dominance of the pitch both vertically and horizontally.



The vertical rotation did not just occur with movements towards the ball, Bielsa's team are intelligent in how they move around the pitch and their use of vertical moments away from the ball in order to create more space to play, and more opportunity to play forward. The important thing to remember here is that the movements are always made in order assist the progression of the ball forward through the pitch.

As we can see in the figure to the right, the players are making movements away from the ball. The 8 and the 10 have pushed into the attacking line and the 11 and 7 have pushed into the wide channel stretching the game and leaving the space in the centre of the pitch.

This movement is not made by Bielsa's team in order to play direct into the attack half, but instead the rotation is to stretch the opponent and support the principle of verticality and principle of +1 as the opponent have now most likely been stretched into a position where they are not able to deal with the split formation of 5 and 5 and the Bielsa side will breakout of the first line with their full-backs.



This process might be a simple view on a tactic board with no opponent, but it is in fact a strategy used by Bielsa commonly to cause chaos in the opponents shape. When you watch this principle used effectively with the combination of verticality and +1 you will often see basketball match like situations, where the game is seemingly going back and forward. This is because this simple principle has forced the opponent to defend in a shape

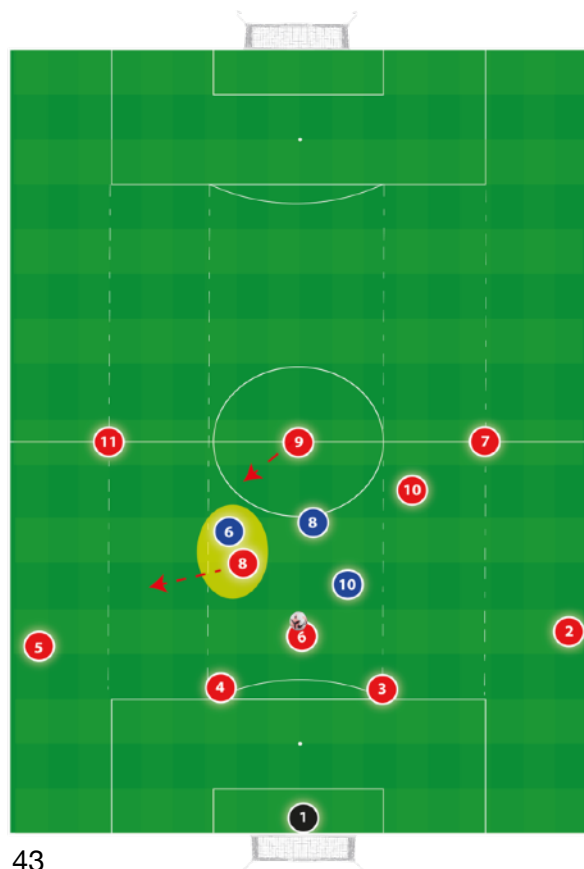
The principle of rotation does also occur to horizontal rotations as previous mentioned, horizontal rotations are a method used to help Bielsa's side progress the ball through the opponents lines and towards goal. The method is often used as a system to unlock compact defensives, something a Bielsa side seem commonly. The idea of horizontal rotation is significant, it sees one player make a movement horizontally across the pitch for multiple reason

- 1.) To receive individual possession
- 2.) To manipulate the opponent
- 3.) To help a team mate gain possession
- 4.) To open space for an opponent
- 5.) Or a combination of the above

Whatever the reason, the players will ultimately only make these movements with the end goal of progressing the ball through the thirds and lines towards the opponents goal.

In the example shown we can see how the 6 is in possession, but cannot find the +1 on the next attacking line, the method to solve this is horizontal rotation.

The 8 makes a movement in-front of the opponent six, forcing the six to follow and match the movement of the red. When this happens the nine then moves horizontally to receive a pass through the



opponents shape. It is very important that the movement is in front of the opponent player to ensure that the player is forced to see and react to the movement.

Horizontal rotation also occurs in different areas of the pitch and is not exclusive to the centre of the pitch, where it might be with other coaches, this is the difference with Bielsa. You will often see horizontal rotation used as a method by the number 9, in order to bring other players into the attack.

For example, you will often see the nine peel away from the centre backs and make a movement to the outside shoulder of the defender. Attracting pressure from them and leaving space to be exposed behind the opposition.

In the example to the right, we can see how the movement of the nine across the face of the opponent defensive line will attract pressure and hopefully force the defensive line to step out and make a positional mistake. The location of the horizontal movement is also key as the team are exploiting the half-space as a method of making defence player make decisions in uncomfortable spaces between positions.

The 11 will then use the movement of the nine as a trigger to go and exploit the space behind the opponent. This is just another example of how a Bielsa side might use the horizontal movement to exploit space and support the other principles as the ball moves through the pitch.



The wide player will often be involved in horizontal rotation when the ball is moved into the half-space in a moment where the opponent are in a block or have made ball progression difficult. Bielsa's sides like to make the rotation when the ball is in the half-space because it is a difficult location to exploit with play able to move on both sides of the ball carrier.

This horizontal rotation has now created space for Bielsa's full-back to go and exploit, the key to the ball progression here is the rotation, it is the manipulation of numbers to create moments that can support forward thinking and forward moving football.



PRESSING

Pressing is naturally one of the most discussed components of any modern coaches philosophy. It has become a more and more important component of the game in recent years, with coaches such as Jurgen Klopp at Dortmund, having huge success in highly aggressive pressing systems. There is of course no right or wrong way to press, pressing is a very personal strategy that must suit your needs, in order to be effective.

Throughout the years, grassroots and youth coaches have performed hours upon hours of analysis to try and see trends and techniques in elite game pressing. But, as expected every coach will have an individual approach that takes into account their intentions, their beliefs, their needs, their players. Their opponent and their environment. Only once they are aware of all of those factors, then a pressing system can be used.

We also know that coaches will use pressing as a weapon in a slightly different way depending on their beliefs. Some coaches such as Pep Guardiola, are more likely using pressing as a defensive strategy to protect the goal and maybe prevent the opponent from using their physically. By locking them into tight areas, his less physically dominant team can use the press as a method to win possession back. For coaches such as Jurgen Klopp, the press is the attacking catalyst, it represents an opportunity to attack, and almost becomes the playmaker in his system. He was once quoted saying the best playmaker in the game is the counter-press.

Marcelo Bielsa is no different to any other coach, in that his pressing can be very stimulated by the moment and what the tactical plan is to exploit the opponent. In Chile and Mexico, his teams were known for being ferociously aggressive in their pressing, making life very uncomfortable for the opponent and winning the ball as high as possible at all moments. However, he has shown the ability to be more adaptable, in more recent times with Leeds.

His Leeds side still adopt the basic Bielsa principle of having a +1 on the first defensive line, this means when his teams attack, they will always hold an overload in the defensive line. The +1 principle is not the only numerical principle to Marcelo Bielsa's playing or pressing system. When his team look to press the opponent (more recent Bielsa with Leeds) his side always look to concede an under-load of -1 on the most attacking line. This means he is happy to give the opponent a numerical advantage when playing out from the back.

This means Bielsa's side will adapt the formation and approach to their press depending on the system of the team they are playing. Here in the first image we can Bielsa's side in red pressing the blues. The blues have three centre-backs as they look to play out and they are being pressed by two forwards from Bielsa's team. In this situation, he would expect his two attackers to do the job of three attackers by taking up positions that split the pitch and limit the opportunity of a switch of play. Numerically limiting the strength of the opponent.

What conceding the -1 allows is for a man to man orientated system to occur. It also allow for the +1 to appear on the defensive line. As we can see in this animation to the right, Bielsa's side have switched to a back four in order to match up the opponent, and maintain the two consistent principles that they want to achieve when they are out of possession of the ball. This shows that the pressing system is based on principle rather than systems. The system just changes based on the needs to support the principles of the defensive and attacking philosophies.



In the second image you can see how Bielsa's side will adapt if their opponent switches to a back four, in order to build out from the back. Here we can see the four and the five hold the first defensive line for the red team. They are matched up with the one attacking nine. This creates the principles of -1 on the attacking line. However, with effective positioning, moment and pressure, Bielsa's nine is capable of forcing the ball carrier to play one way, by cutting out the number three by sitting in a position between them.

This will force the blue to play into one side of the pitch, where Bielsa's team will have the ability to go man-to-man on this side of the pitch and look to win possession back quickly by applying pressure to the ball and players around the ball. Pressing is often a mentality exercise, where players are forced to work under pressure and apply pressure, the players who can cope with it survive. This is why Bielsa trains at such a high intensity to create players who win those 1v1 situations because they can cope with the intensity.

Here we are also able to see how the first defensive line has been adjusted in order to maintain the equilibrium needed through out the system. The team are now playing against what is most likely a 1-4-4-2, and this system sees two strikers on the first defensive line. In order to deal with this, Bielsa's side have switched to a back three or back five depending on the game. But most importantly, they now have three centre-backs on the first line ensuring they have been able to keep the +1 principle in order throughout.



Pressing in a Marcelo Bielsa team is based upon a few key components that come together, in order to deliver success in winning the ball back from the opponent. You are probably at this point starting to see a pattern, this pattern is that every principle supports the other, and without successful implementation of every principle, the opportunity to be successful is limited.

Conditioning

One of the key components of this press for a Bielsa team, is effective conditioning. His players are required to compete in a very deliberate and specific man-to-man system. In order to do this, he requires his players to be physically better than the player they are playing against. This means that if Bielsa's six is playing against the away teams number six. Bielsa must be able to trust his player to match every run made, every change of direction and every sprint. In fact, his player must ensure that his opponent is not able to live with the physical demand put on him or her.

Behaviour

The second thing we must accept, is that pressing is not just a physical and tactical structure, it is actually a psychological one. Our players must want to press, they must understand that pressing is a behaviour that we perform as a group, and without the collective approach and desire to win the ball back, we will be exploited and punished by effective teams.

Other great coaches have spoken about how pressing is a behaviour, this is also because of how quickly our players must be able to react. The press reaction is 90% of the press, if our first player takes 1.5 seconds to recognise the transition, then the press from the other 10 is worthless, and the opponent will punish us. However, if the first player is able to apply pressure and recognise the transition within 0.5 seconds, then the movements around him will be perfect for winning the ball back, or forcing the opponent away from our goal.

Triggers

Like all coaches, Bielsa will often have triggers that initiate the way his teams press, a trigger is simply a moment that occurs within the game that is the catalyst for his players to press. For example, coaches might say that the first centre-back receiving possession of the ball is the 'trigger' moment to initiate the press. Others might have more tactical situations such as individuals who have been targeted receiving possession of the ball.

However, for Marcelo Bielsa there are often triggers based upon tactical analysis, but there are two stand out triggers in more recent times. The first is when a vertical pass by the opponent finds a player facing his own goal. This becomes a trigger to apply pressure and either look to steal possession of the ball or force the opponent backward.

This is a more recent trigger and something that only occurs in the central areas of the pitch, so when the opponent plays a straight pass through the centre of the pitch and the opponent receives with his or her back to goal, there is a belief that they are receiving in an overloaded area, and are likely unaware of the pressure around them. This provides us with a meaningful attempt to apply pressure instantly.

As we can see in the image to the right, the ball might have been played through the lines into the 10, and this becomes the trigger point for our players to apply pressure to the ball and block the passing lanes. Both are strategies to suffocate the opponent and increase our chances in winning possession back quickly and effectively without risking conceding a goal.



The forward central pass, is not the only trigger to which you can try to win possession back. Bielsa's sides in recent years have also tried to press the ball as it has been played wide. In order to get the opponent to play wide, you must first dictate play and force the opponent to play into the wide area, this is where Bielsa's genius system comes into its dominance again.

We have already discussed how Bielsa creates a -1 on the first attacking line, and this creates a potential problem, his team are instantly overloaded. However, this is also the strength of the system. It means that on every other progressive line on the pitch, Bielsa's team have an overload, as the goalkeeper has possession.

The centre-forward set-up forcing the goalkeeper to play one way, once the goalkeeper plays the pass, the nine applies passive pressure. The pressure is in the line of the opposite centre-back, meaning there is no opportunity to switch possession from one side to the other. It also means the centre-back now has little to no option than to play wide, into the fullback.

Once the ball is played to the full-back, the pressure arrives instantly. As the ball is moved from the four to the five, the red seven applies aggressive pressure to win the ball from the five. This alone is not enough to win possession of the ball, there still needs to be a series of individual factors in order to win possession back.

The centre-forward (9) must be quick to come across the number four to ensure that the full-back is not able to switch back inside, the detail is very important as to what position the nine takes up. For example, the nine needs to take up a position where they



are goal side on the shoulder of the four, to make the pass across goal to the three even more complex. As the image to the right shows, the nine ensures that both centre-backs are removed the possession.

The ten has now moved across to the ball side of the blue eight to ensure that the ball cannot go back inside. Whilst this happens, the red eight is chasing down the blue six to apply as much pressure as possible and apply the man-to-man marking approach that is so famous. The red six is also blocking the ball into the feet of the striker. This is ensuring that every individual has a role within the system, every player has a clear understanding of their role and how to prevent the blues moving the ball.



Whilst this is happening, the red seven starts to apply pressure to the five, the mentality has to be can I win the ball, if I cannot win the ball can I force the blue five to make a mistake and give it to another team-mate who is applying pressure. The strategy is complex with a simple strategy, they now begin to lock the blues into a corner of the pitch and make their roles easier by limiting the space they have to cover.

The difficult moments for the reds will come if the pressure is broken and the blues find a player who is able to play away from pressure. This will expose the reds and provide opportunity to the blues. However, with the +1 rule, there is still a chance to defend with structure even when the opposition are able to break the press and attack.

The movement of the nine is extremely important as previously mentioned in Bielsa's system. It is worth showing some examples of how the underloaded striker must perform to mitigate the overload and allow the man-oriented system to be successful behind him or her.

As the image shows here, the movement when play in the 2v1 is not just a straight run to apply pressure to the blue, but it must be curved or arched. This will force the blue to move wide and allow the team to isolate the opponent in a single area of the pitch. This is an attempt to control the game without the ball, the side in possession have lost control of the game at this point because Bielsa's team have forced them to play into an area of the Red's strength.

When a team build up with a three the challenge is the same but the plan changes slightly. The red front three are ready to jump but they are narrow and compact, ensuring the ball is played on the outside this prevents the five been able to play in to the central overload they might have with the blue ten.



As the ball is played to the two, the 11 jumps and applies as much pressure as possible looking to win possession of the ball. Whilst this happens the nine cuts the switch to the five. But more importantly, there is rotation behind the ball to ensure that the side has numerical dominance centrally. The opposite three would tuck in to offer compactness to the shape, whilst the seven and eight would drop slightly deeper to ensure they could cover the movement of the three, six and ten. This all depends on the initial press not being successful.

MAN-TO-MAN MARKING



“ My admiration for Bielsa is immense. I have never met a player who has worked with Bielsa and has spoken badly of him. For me he is the best coach in the world. ”

PEP GUARDIOLA

Man-to-man marking, or man-orientated marking as it is often known, is a staple in the Bielsa approach. Bielsa is not the first coach to use a man-marking approach within the game of football, however his approach is rather unique. Firstly, it is important that we understand what man-marking is.

It is generally excepted that teams either man-mark or zonally mark, or a mixture of both. Man-marking simply refers to marking a single opponent player. This means that wherever the opponent goes, the player responsible for marking that individual goes. For zonal making, players are responsible for defending space, and they then deal with players as and when they enter their space.

In professional football in general, we see most coaches use a mixture of both systems. For example, they might operate a man-marking approach in one area of the pitch. With the two central forwards marking the two centre backs and the two wide players marking the two full-backs. But then the two centre-backs might be responsible for the central space and they will not leave their slot to mark a player. These players are 'zonally' marking a space.

Others might use it in a different way, with the strikers responsible for defending specific spaces, and the player engages the ball and space when the ball is in a specific area, whilst other players are responsible for marking a specific individual who offers a threat. A perfect example of this would be from international football during the Nations League.

England played Spain at Wembley and attempted to prevent Busquets picking up possession at any point during the build-up. The system involved compromise by allowing Spain to switch the ball, with Harry Kane zonally defending the centre of the pitch and the two wingers, zonally applying pressure as the ball went from wide area to wide area. Although England allowed Spain to switch play, crucially England used a man-marking

approach to prevent Sergio Busquets ever getting involved during the build-up phase. This was a tactical decision to decide that removing his influence from build-up with a man-marking approach, was more important than stopping the switch of play. The man-marking saw the England number ten follow him around the pitch. If he was able to wiggle free of pressure, then the closest England player would recognise to perform that role and prevent him getting on the ball in the build-up phase.

If you are new to the idea of man-marking and zonal marking, this should give you a basic understanding of how defending might look in different systems by different coaches. Bielsa's system as we will see, is much more driven by individual defending and a man-orientated defensive approach.



Bielsa's system combines the two numerical rules of +1 and -1 which we have previously discussed with an intense man-marking approach. With his striker creating a -1 on the first attacking line, the players behind the ball then lock onto to their opposite player. This means that in theory every passing line should be cut out by the pressure being applied around the ball by the blocked passing lanes.

Bielsa's players will not simply mark the player next to them, but will have an opposite number within the opponent they know is their responsibility beforehand. For example, Bielsa's number eight might pick up the opponents number six. We have been fortunate enough to speak to players who have recently played under Marcelo Bielsa at Leeds united as well as that of interviews in the media with Phillips, and have been given great

insight into the thought process without the ball for Leeds. In the transition moment, the players are thinking about their player and their responsibility. The players have not openly spoken about winning the ball back early, but about knowing where their marker is. If your marker is close, then you are in a good position to defend and a good position for the team.

The players have also said if the opposition player is not too far away, then can you adjust your body position to block the passing lane and still have an influence. If you are not near your player then you are in trouble and you must react quickly to prevent your opposite number getting in possession of the ball.

The man-marking approach, like all systems, does have limitations. It provides a very individual approach to defending where players are trusted to perform their roles. It also allows for sides who are fluid in possession to exploit and challenge the structure of a Bielsa team. To counter this, Bielsa's teams are very fluid and comfortable moving and rotating as the game demands.

One great example of this is the season opener for Leeds in the Premier League. They lost 4-3 in a dramatic game at Anfield where the structure of both sides was destroyed by the fluidity of the game. One interesting tactical moment that occurred within the game, was Leeds' willingness to always defend +1 and always stay with their marker.

Roberto Firmino challenged this more than anyone else, by playing as a withdrawn forward. This provided a huge challenge to Leeds, as Firmino would drop from the highest line to the line of the deepest midfield player to pick up possession. Now its important to think of the principles we have discussed. Every player has a personal responsibility, the team must maintain a +1 on the defensive line.

Once you have followed those rules the outcome and what follows was

Actually very simple, the Leeds centre-back travelled 60 yard to stay with the Liverpool number nine and prevent him gaining possession. This is because Leeds still had the +1 on the defensive line, with just one solitary striker against no centre-forward. So their approach and consistency to their approach allowed for the centre-back to run all over the pitch picking up the Liverpool number nine.

This is however a very difficult system to master and is the reason why very few coaches and players in world football even attempt this. It only takes one player to switch off and not perform his or her role, to cause a great issue to the system. Within Bielsa's system we have seen moments where players have broken away from their opposite numbers and attacked the defensive line.

When this happens, it is important to recognise that Leeds are prepared, coached and ready for these moments. They recognise that a player must leave his or her marker in order to deal with the player who is the threat (the player in possession). This player however must come usually from the wide areas in order to deal with the ball carrier. This is because only at last resort do Bielsa's sides want to surrender their +1 on the defensive line.

The +1 on the defensive line, is also another reason why his teams are so reliant on that +1 rule to ensure that even when the man-marking fails and the opponent attacks through the centre of the pitch, his players we still have an opportunity to defend in some kind of defensive balance. This is because if the +1 theory is maintained, Bielsa's team will still get the opportunity to defend in a numerically balanced situation such as a 2v2.

“THE PARTIAL LIBERO”

As we have previously mentioned, Bielsa is prepared to accept that his man-orientated system will at times fall apart, if an individual is able to break the man-to-man marking. Bielsa uses a terminology and a principle with his players known as ‘The Partial Libero’. This roughly means in English ‘Partially Liberated’, meaning the opponent is partly free of their pressure. This principle will look to provide a system that deals with the opponent when the pressure has man-orientated system fails and the opponent is able to run through and score.

Bielsa has been quoted to tell his players that you can not stay marking a player, if the player that is hurting us is another. So for example, if you are responsible for marking the opponent wide player, but it is the unmarked number eight who is hurting us, you must make changes to your role and go and defend against the player who is causing the problem.

As the first image shows here, the opponent eight has broken the pressure of our 10. This has left us a huge issue with the eight able to attack our goal, this is where Bielsa would expect his number three to leave the widest player and apply pressure to the opponent number eight.



This situation can occur all over the pitch, where players break free of the initial pressure from their man-marker and the side must adapt to protect the integrity of the teams' shape and deal with the players who are able to cause the most damage to his team.

Secondly, it is very important that the team are willing to accept some vulnerability when the partial-libero occurs, it will not be possible immediately to cover every individual player. For this reason, there must be principles as to who to leave. Ultimately, Bielsa would want to still keep the principle of +1 if possible. His sides are then more likely to leave the opposite wide player, or the players on the opponents defensive line.

It is fundamental that when a player leaves his or her marker to deal with a player, that another team mate does not move to cover the space left, if they are in a more important position. This is a difficult principle to explain, so we will use a graphic to support this.

Here we can see the progression from the previous moment. The eight has now been picked up by our number three, and the opponent number seven is free.

It would be detrimental for our number four to instantly cover the position left, as this would leave the number nine spare, who is far more dangerous and far more likely to score. Now if the pass is played wide by the number eight, then Bielsa's team might be forced to surrender their principle of +1 by the four sliding across and the six and five tucking in. But it would be very dangerous for the defensive line to perform this without the ball being already played into that area.



Here we see another situation where the opponent has broken free of pressure, our number 11 has lost a 1v1 dual against the opponent number two and now we will see the opponent try to drive through the middle of the teams shape. It is important now that players employ the ‘Partial Libero’ in order to deal with the largest problem.

Here you can see how our number 10 and number three and both challenged to deal with this problem, we can see here how the number 10 tries to do what a lot of coaches will refer to as a ‘job and a half’ this is where he or she looks to apply pressure to the player in possession without leaving the player they mark. This is by just blocking the passing lane and narrowing the space.

However, the number 10 would not completely leave their player due to the opponent six playing in the centre off the pitch. The full-back (number three) then does the same, but this player is more willing to apply pressure because their player in the man-marking system is not as dangerous positionally as the opponent number six.

These decisions are made within the moment, but are fundamentally based on simple principle as to who needs to be prioritised and who can be left.



FORMATIONS

As previously mentioned, this book wants to avoid analysing performances and team shapes. The book looks to provide insight for coaches based on principles and trainable moments. However, we will provide a brief overview of some of the systems used by Marcelo Bielsa in recent times.

Traditionally Bielsa's sides have played a 1-3-3-1-3 formation, this formation might be familiar to you from the work of Dutch coaches such as Louis Van Gaal, or Rinus Michels.

The formation used by Bielsa allows for nature width across different lines and created multiple vertical and horizontal lines across the pitch. It is this creativity across lines that allows for the principle of verticality to be used, because there are forward options. But it is also the method that allows Bielsa's team to create overloads and +1's in different areas.

Other formation have been used by Bielsa in his time at Leeds such as a 1-4-2-3-1, however the most common has been the use of a 1-4-1-4-1 formation. This formation can be used to play against a single striker to allow the creation of the +1 principle, whilst not removing their need for flexibility and verticality in possession. We know out of possession, Bielsa's team will provide a man-orientated formation. This means that the formation you see, is almost exclusive to his team in possession.



BEATING YOUR MARKER

Having now made your way through over 60 pages of technical and tactical detail, you are probably not surprised to hear, being in a 1v1 dominant is a key skill for any player who wants to play within a Marcelo Bielsa system. His players must be able to beat an opponent quickly and dynamically, understanding how to attack centrally and create goal scoring opportunities.

On the flip side, his players must be able to defend 1v1, they must be able to match a physically dominant player. They must be able to recognise how to win the ball back, and how to force a player away from pressure. All these skills are vital in a system that is built upon the foundations of an individually responsible defensive system.

His players must also be very effective within transitional moments, for example recognising when to leave their market to come inside and deal with the ball carrier, when to pick up their opposite player and when to block the passing lane. These are all components of successful players in the transitional moments of the game. It is always important to remember that it is time that is important in transition, how quickly can you react and recognise the defensive or offensive transition

The next chapter is going to demonstrate five ways in which a player can beat an opponent in a 1v1 situation by using their first touch effectively.

- 1.) Profiled turn
- 2.) Receive Behind the Opponent
- 3.) Attack the Castle
- 4.) Receive against the Opponent
- 5.) Receive using the air

These are five tools that players can use to exploit the opponent in 1v1 moments using their receiving skill set. The skillset is varied here, and will involve receiving in different moments to support the attacking principles of play.

Receiving Skill: The Profiled Turn

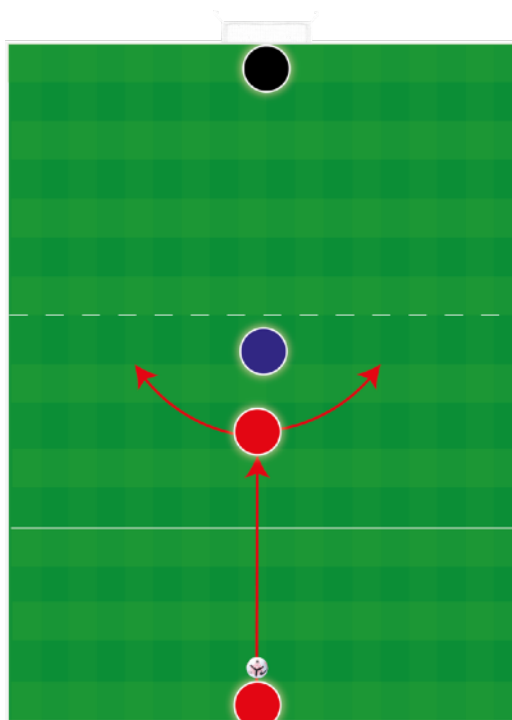
A turn to isolate and fix an opponent before running off their shoulder

Key Coaching Point:

It is important to remember within a development environment that players will not be able to achieve all of these instantly, and they will need to be trained within a game

Here we have one of the fundamental skills a player must have to beat an opponent 1v1, this involves the player simply taking their first touch around the opponent in a 1v1 situation when their back is facing goal.

For example here, the player must look to take a touch away from the blue, whilst encouraging the pressure from behind. We often talk about encouraging the pressure and then killing the pressure with the use of an effective first touch.



In order to be able to perform this turn, players must be comfortable of receiving possession under pressure from the opponent. Once they are under pressure they must have scanned to be able to recognise where the space is and how to access this space. Essentially the first touch needs to remove the opponent player from the situation with the weight of it.

Receiving Skill: Receive Behind the Opponent

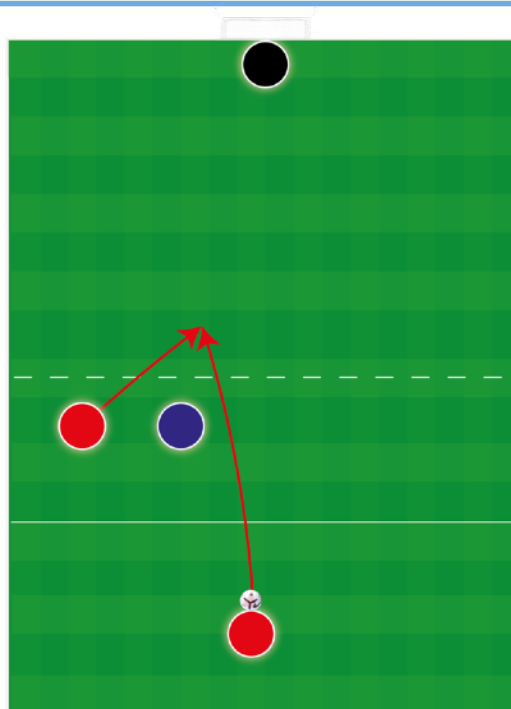
A turn to try and open the space behind the opponent, unlocking more central space.

Key Coaching Point:

It is important when coaching these receiving moments, that there is tactical detail that matches the technical detail. Every moment in the game is situational and matching the situation to the technique is key.

Here we can see how the red looks to receive possession on a different line to the blue although they start on the same line to begin with. The receiving skill is an effective way to try and create overloads centrally, and increase ball progression through the centre of the pitch.

In order to do this, the players must be aware that we want the receiving to occur on the inside shoulder of the defender, limiting his or her opportunity to recovery and apply pressure. This effectively breaks the line.



For players to be able to do this, they must have an effective body position to start with, they must be aware of how to scan behind and around the line they are playing on. Secondly, they must be dynamic in their movements to receive on the outside shoulder, with a quick change of pace to ensure the opponent cannot move and block the space left.

Receiving Skill: Attack The Castle

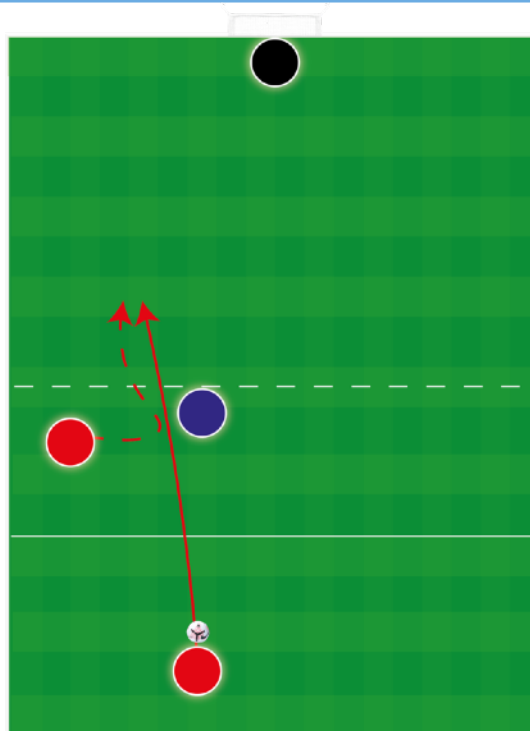
A method of receiving behind the defensive line to try and attack the opponents most central space.

Key Coaching Point:

The castle is a Spanish term that refers to attacking the opponents goal. This challenges our most attacking players to receive behind the opponent and to try and score.

In this moment we are looking to attack the opponents goal, we are using a simple movement to unlock space in the 1v1. The red first makes a dummy towards the defender to provide confusion to their decision making before then peeling of the defender and overlapping them on the outside.

This double movement is an effective way of confusing and stopping their movement to then receive in the space behind. This is common movement for one of Bielsa's attacking players such as a centre-forward.



For our potentially young players, this is an easier skill to practice, looking to make movements of a player to then run into the space behind. In this practice, our player will require some strong physical components of their game, such as balance, co-ordination and the ability to change direction very quickly.

Receiving Skill: Receiving Against The Opponent

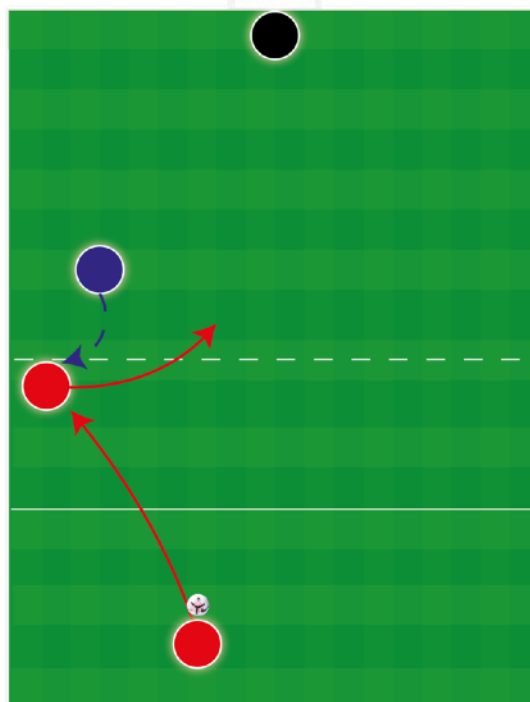
A method used to receive possession to feet before exploding with pace inside of the pitch

Key Coaching Point:

Receiving against the opponent is an important skill for wide players to have, it allows them to be successful and effective with possession even when the wide space is not available.

In this moment, we are just looking for the red to receive possession under some pressure from the blue, as the blue applies pressure vertically the red is going to explode laterally across the pitch on either their first or second touch.

First touch if the pressure is already tight and the player is technically able to. Second touch if the pressure arriving, for example, the player is four yards away and they are just getting close, the player might take a touch to slow the defender and then move with the second touch.



When replicating this with our players, we must again be physically dynamic in how our players are able to move. Are our players able to move laterally on their first touch, this will involve a level of explosiveness that might come with physical development in adolescent players. However, the technique alone is important to train, once combined with the power it will be effective.

Receiving Skill: Receiving Using the Air

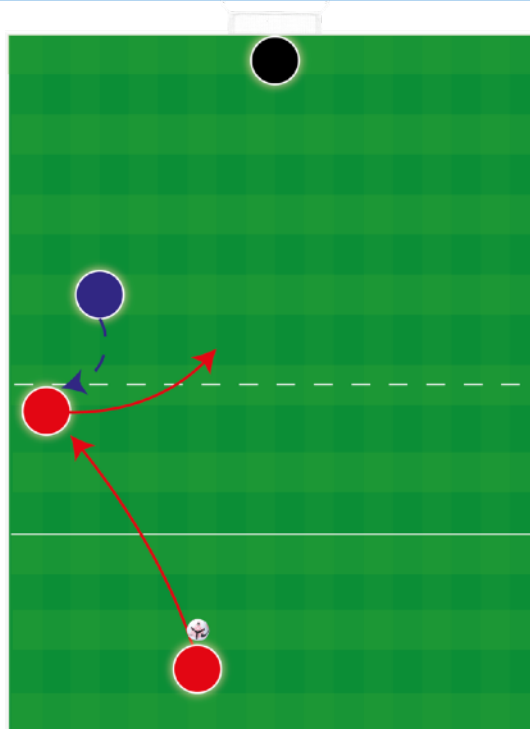
A method of playing through the opponent quickly and centrally, playing over the defensive line.

Key Coaching Point:

Remember the pass does not always need to be in the air, we should only play the ball into the air as a method of avoiding the opponent and preventing them intercepting possession of the ball.

When training this, our players might use it when the opponent is using a high offensive line, Leeds used it against both Liverpool and Manchester City. The attacker must be comfortable using a dummy to pull the defender towards the player in possession. Once this has happened, the attacker changes direction and runs in behind the opponent.

The ball carrier then plays the ball into the space behind for our attack to run onto. As said in the key coaching point, the ball only goes in the air if there is no opportunity to play on the floor.

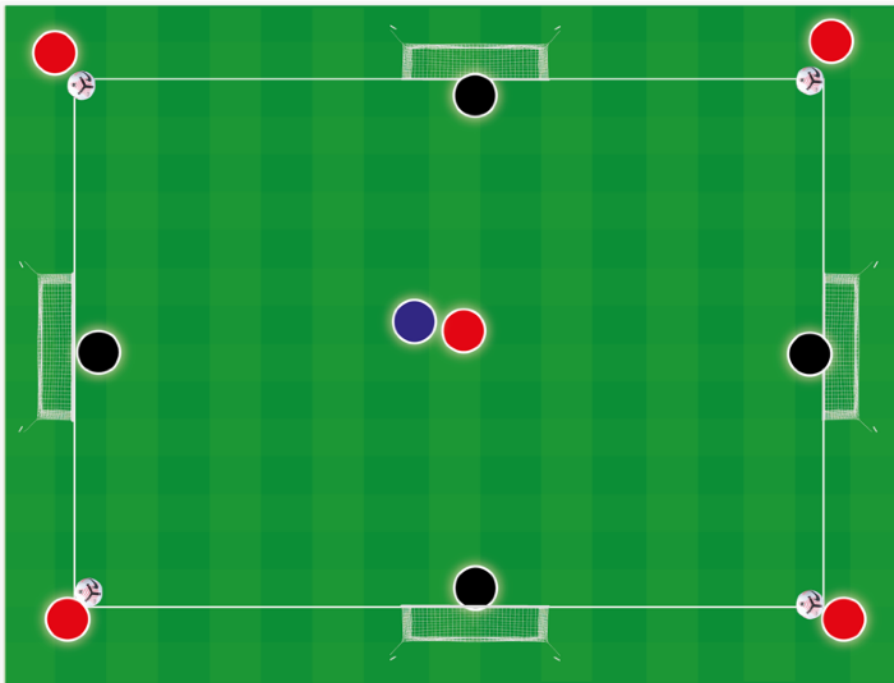


This is a method that is easy to train in 7v7 and smaller, because the defensive lines are often weak, unorganised and high. We are asking the players to make double movements towards the ball and then away. Whilst the ball carrier slides a pass into the space behind to create the goal scoring opportunity.

Receiving Practice: Receive, Spin and Turn The Opponent

Key Coaching Point:

The player has to take a minimum of three touches. This means that the player must receive, beat the opponent and then score. This makes a finishing practice a receiving and finishing practice.

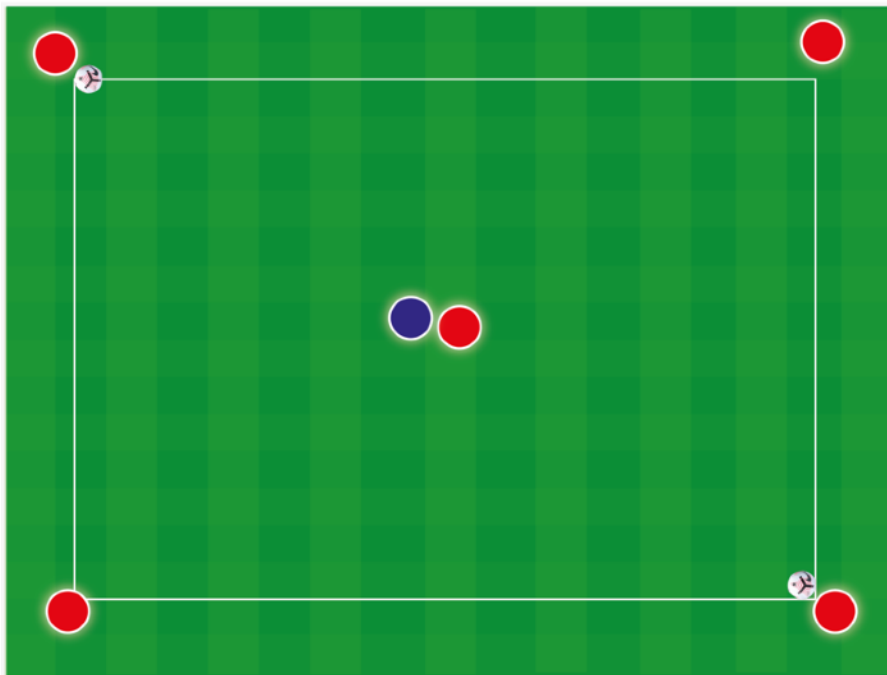


The session is very simple the outside players have possession of a ball each, the central players compete in a 1v1 battle. The player in the middle can only shoot in each goal once and can only get one ball from each outside player. So they must be effective in using their receiving skills in order to move the opponent and score.

Receiving Practice: Receive and Retain Under Pressure.

Key Coaching Point:

Players must recognise where and when to turn in order to beat the player they are against and attack the spaces on the pitch that provide us with the greatest opportunity.

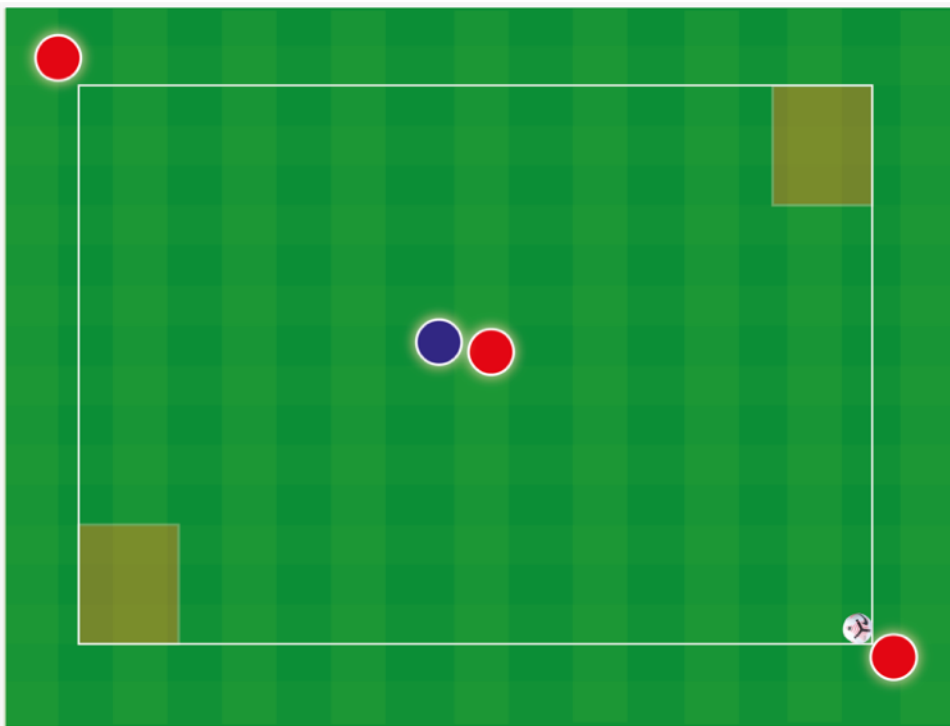


This is an adapted version of the previous session, here players are receiving possession and playing out to the spare player. You can choose to have three balls or two balls. Players must be aware of where the spare player is and receive possession, retain possession and then find the spare player on the outside of the practice.

Receiving Practice: Receive and Retain Possession in all Areas.

Key Coaching Point:

Our players must recognise which receiving skill they use in order to move the ball from one side of the practice to the other. Different turns will open up different areas of the practice.



The red simply plays into the 1v1, where the receiving player will be challenged to enter one of the red zones. They then have to think of what receiving skillset will support them and assist them in moving the ball into this area. They might also be challenged to go from one end to the other directly with the use of another skillset.

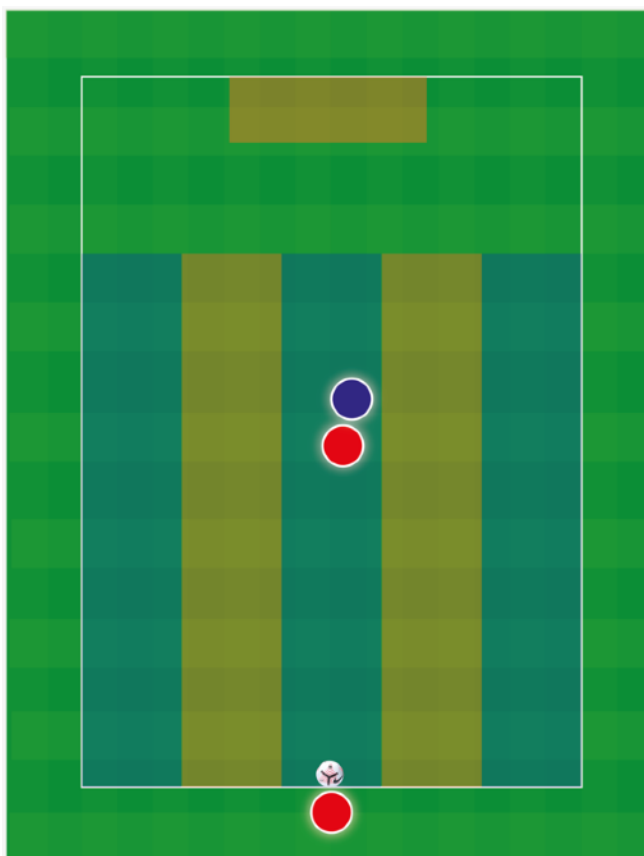
Receiving Practice: Developing the Profiled Turn in Practice.

Key Coaching Point:

We must allow failure to occur to have success, the players will find it hard to move the ball into the wide area without either over or under hitting it. We must as coaches accept this.

This is a great practice to develop players who can perform the profiled turn. In the blue areas the blue is able to tackle in the red areas the blue can't tackle but can just defend with their body.

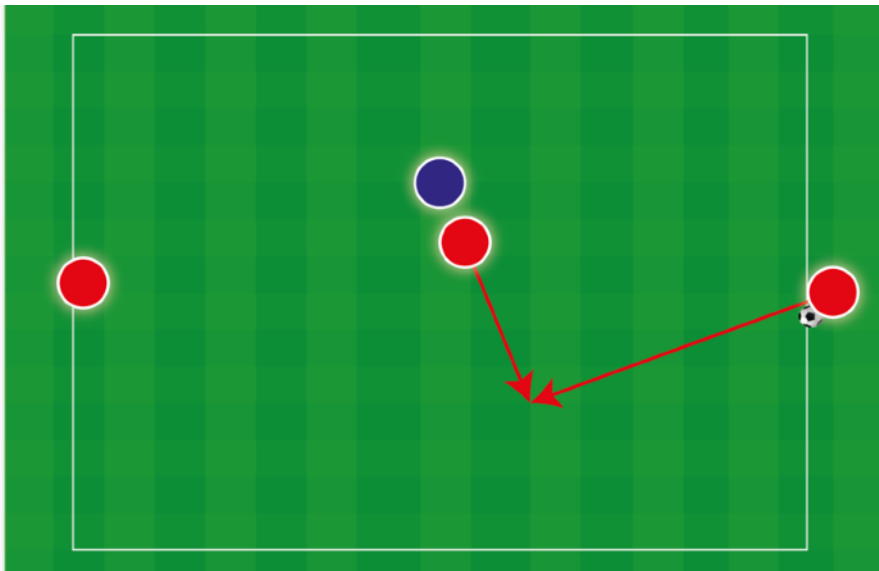
The red receives possession and tries to use the profiled turn to move the ball into the red space and drive into the red box behind the blue. If the red takes a heavy touch, they will move into the far lane where the blue can defend against them. This is encouraging our players to take a strong but controlled touch away from the opponent and into the space behind.



Receiving Practice: Developing Players to Use the Space.

Key Coaching Point:

We must control the defensive pressure in order to manage their ability to have success. For example, if the pressure is too intense for the players, begin by forcing the blue to start from the outside. Progressing to an open 1v1



This is a great way to challenge players to perform fixing moves such as the profiled turn. The 1v1 in the central space is just challenging our player to be able to receive and move possession from one end to the other. The stages are clear, we must be able to receive, once our players can receive can they play forward or retain depending on the situation in front of them.

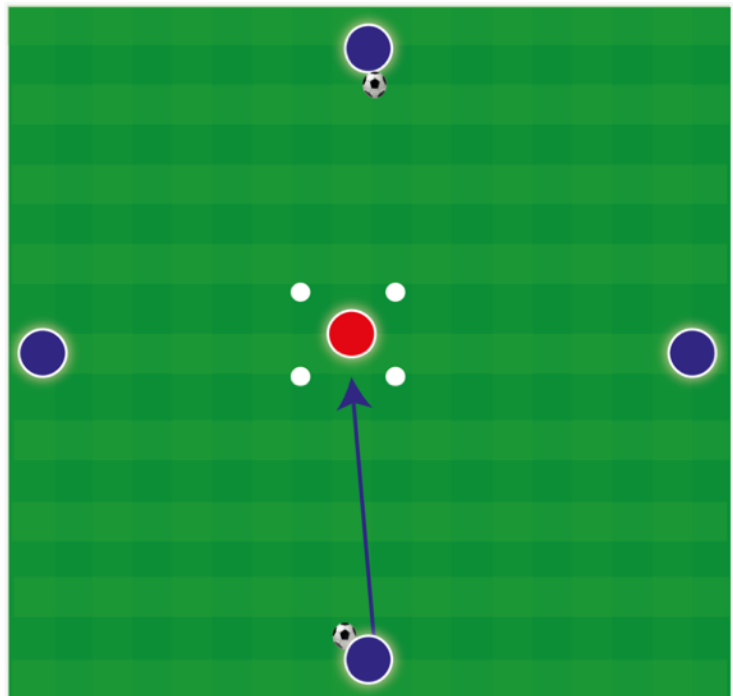
Importantly, these practices offer a level of decision making that is paramount to the development of footballers. We cannot complete tasks in isolation and expect them to be successful within chaos.

Receiving Practice: Receiving to Attacking the Opponent

Key Coaching Point:

Receiving within this practice will provide a natural challenge, of adjusting your body, your position and your momentum to receive and play in the desired location.

The practice is very simple for players. There are two balls and four outside players. One ball is fired into the red, who then must take one touch through the gate towards a team mate without a ball, and then go back and receive one from the other team mate who has possession. This is challenging our players to scan, receive and pass within a tight and compact areas of the pitch.

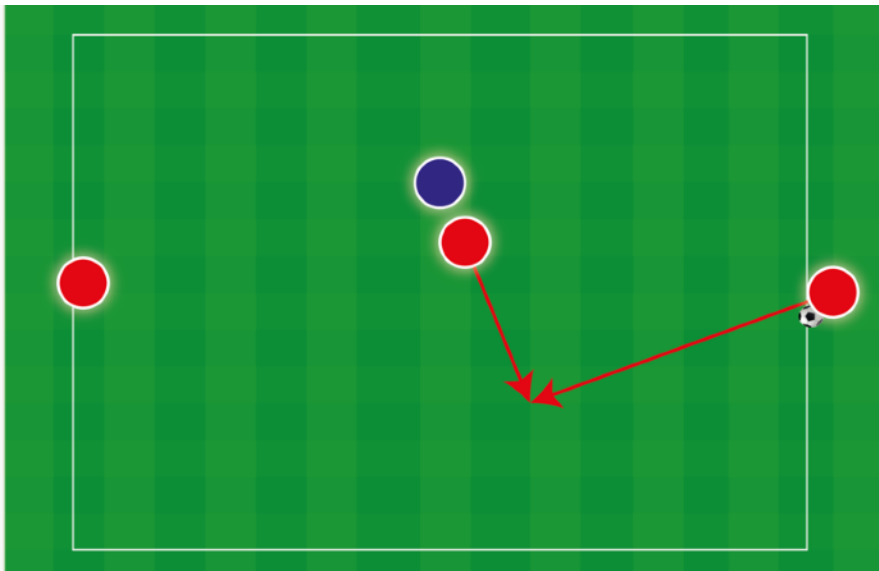


This practice can be made even more relevant to our players, we can provide tactical information and game relevance to them. This might be the centre-back playing a pass into the holding midfielder who takes their touch around the opponent and plays a pass into the full-back who can attack the opponent.

Receiving Practice: Developing Players to Use the Space.

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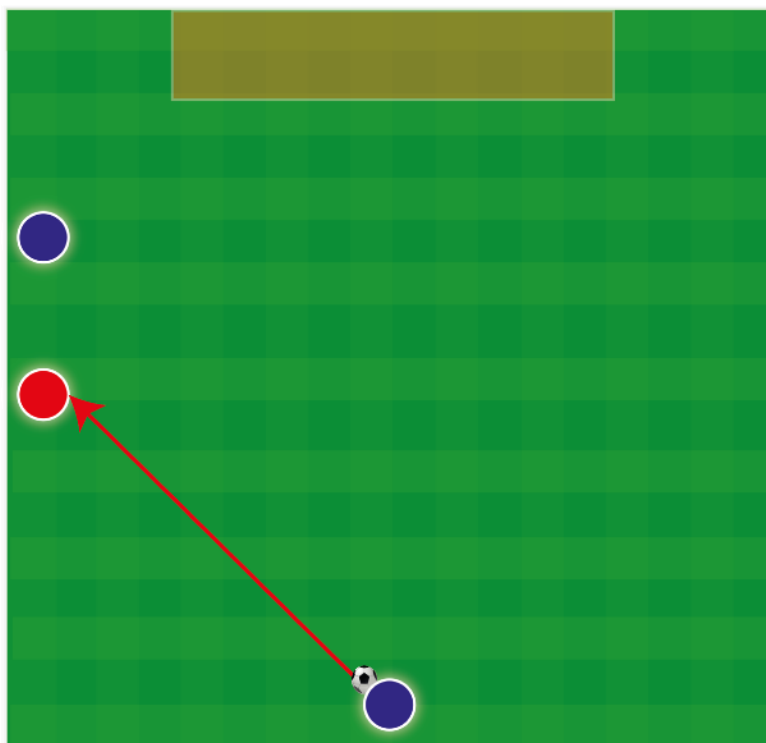
Receiving Practice: Receive Against or Beyond on the Opponent

Key Coaching Point:

When play is in the wide area, we have to try to find a way to bring it inside. This might be a cross in the final third, but earlier on we might need players who are capable of receiving against or beyond the fellow wide player.

The blue plays wide into the red, who simulates receiving the ball on the touch line within the wide area. We are then challenging our wide player to either receive with their back to goal and try to play against the opponent player.

If not, can they attract the pressure and play beyond the opponent and look to run in to the red space behind.



For our individual players, this is relevant at all times, even our midfield players might need to find a way out of tight spaces when one side of the pitch is shut down. We will have to ensure we are mixing the delivery up, to ensure that the practice remains realistic and challenging.

DEFENDING 1V1

1V1 PRACTICES

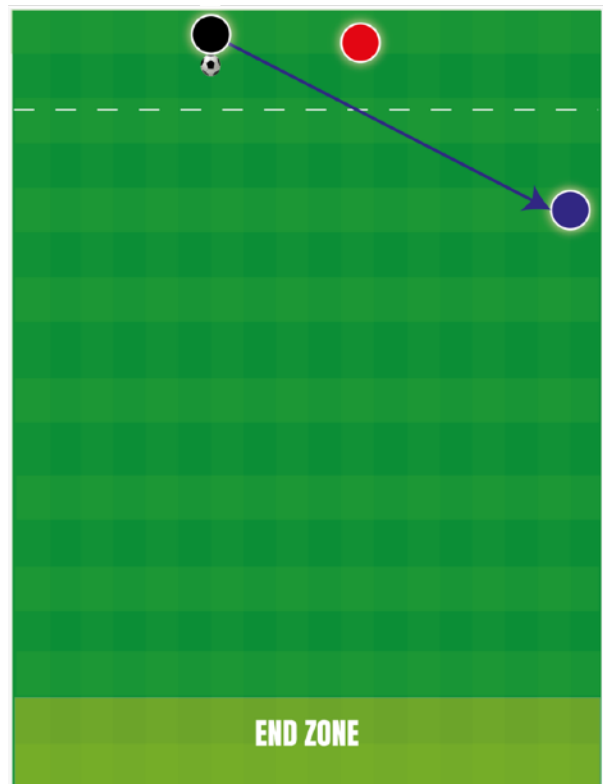
1V1 Practices: Making Recovery Runs to Defend 1v1

Key Coaching Point:

Within our player profiles, we must drive to create athletic players capable of making high intensity run in a repeated fashion. This practice will create players who are willing to recover and make contact

This is a fundamentally simple 1v1 practice, that will allow you to train a very specific moment within the game. Here we see the coach play to the blue, as the ball travels we are challenging the red to make a recovery run and get along side the blue.

The blue must then look to run into the end zone to successfully beat the red. We are challenging the red to work harder, make contact and slow the progress of the blue. Contact is an important component of the practice, for both the attacking and defending players.



- Can our players make contact with hands and arms, looking to get their shoulder ahead of the opponent making it possible to get our body between the ball and the opponent.
- The coach might choose to be loud in these moments, becoming demanding.

1V1 PRACTICES

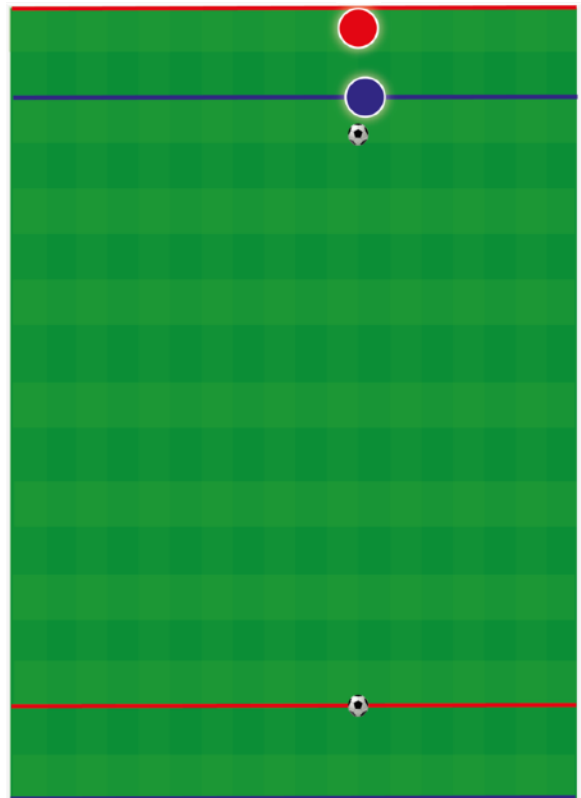
1V1 Practices: Recovering to Make High Intensity Runs.

Key Coaching Point:

Ensure that the players are aware of the technical demands and expectations, even when in isolated practices such as this. At times, our players will take excessively large touches to play the ball and not the game. We must avoid this.

The red and the blue are separated by around 6 yards, there is also two lines 6 yards apart at the other end. The blue must race out with the ball and look to stop the ball on the opposite blue line.

The red chases the blue and tries to win the ball before the blue crosses the red line. Once the red gets to the red line, he or she then takes the second ball and repeats the practice in the opposite direction. This creates repetitive high-intensity runs for both players.



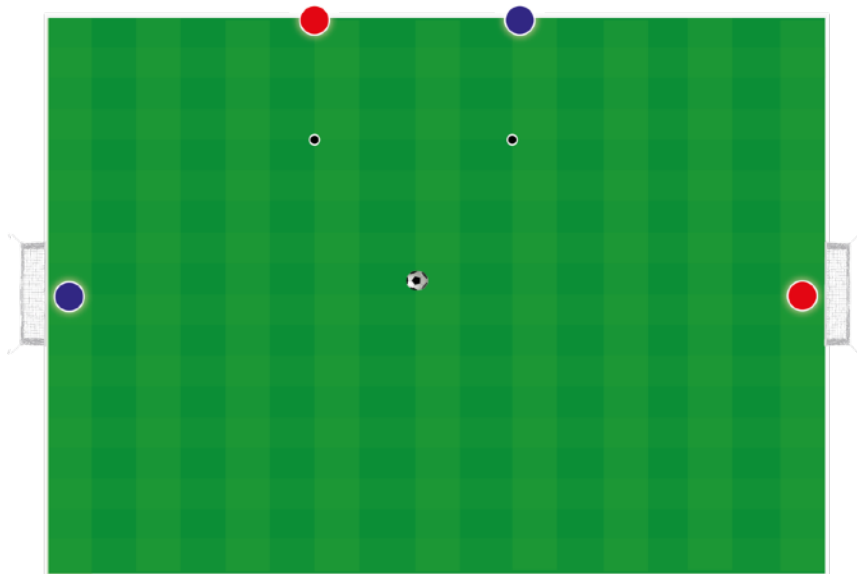
- Ensure that the change of directions is quick and explosive.
- Take larger touches, moving the ball out of your feet to ensure that you can run with the ball at pace (be aware of the difference between dribbling and running with the ball)

1V1 PRACTICES

1V1 Practices: Strength Based Shuttles into a 1v1 Finishing Set.

Key Coaching Point:

Ensure that players feel the competitive challenge of being in a physically demanding battle. Once the battle is won or lost, we must ensure that the hard work is rewarded encouraging players to continue the hard work through the session.



Here we have the red and the blue, both in a shuttle race. We are looking for them to race out to the cone ahead, and back and forward for 4 or 5 times. This creates a repetitive change of direction task. Then, once the players have completed the race, they sprint out to the ball and attack the opposite goalkeeper.

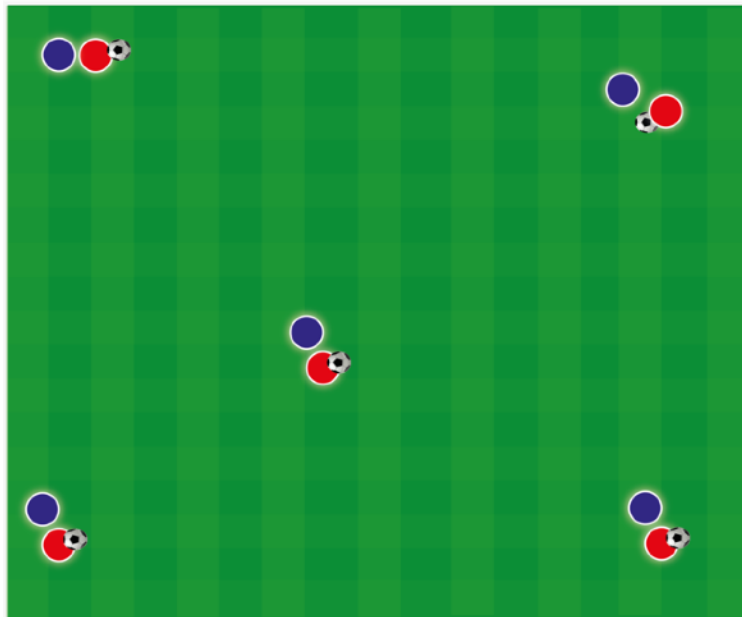
The first one out to the ball attacks and the second player defends. If the defender wins possession back, then they get the chance to go to the opposite end and shoot.

1V1 PRACTICES

1V1 Practices: The Collective 1v1 Dual Game.

Key Coaching Point:

Can players focus on being hard to beat, looking to use their body to get between the ball and the opponent, keeping the opponent at bay. This naturally keeps our possession of the ball safe.



Here we are creating five 1v1 duals in a small area. The practice is competitive and very simple. Firstly, all the reds have possession and they look to keep the ball from their blue opponent. The stopwatch stops when the last red ball leaves the area.

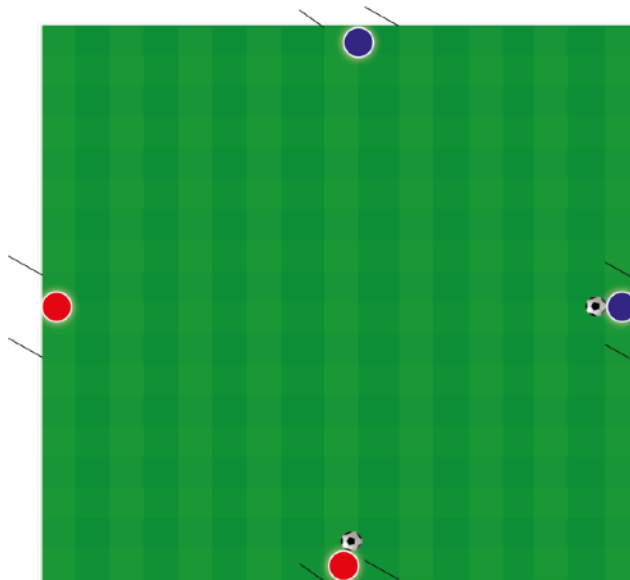
Once this has been completed the reds and blues switch roles. Then the stopwatch restarts and the blues simply try to beat the time set by the reds during the first attempt. We must ensure our players are using their body to protect the ball and do their job for the team.

1V1 PRACTICES

1V1 Practices: Creating the Transition Based 1v1

Key Coaching Point:

In order to be effective in these 1v1's, players must be quick to recognise both the defensive and offensive transition.



This is an easy to use practice. There are four lines of players, behind each gate, situated in the middle of four sides. Firstly, the red attacks the blue from the bottom to the top of the practice. If the red scores then the next red attacks on the left hand side. However, if the blue wins it back and scores or kicks the ball out. The blue attacks the red on the right hand side attacking the left hand side.

This means the practice is constant and transitional, not only do players need to defend efficiently in 1v1 moments, but they must also recognise the transition.

PLAYING VERTICALLY

Whenever we as coaches think about designing practices, creating tactics or putting plans together, we must always start with 'How are we going to score?' This is ultimately the question that must be answered if our teams are going to be successful. We have to be able to picture what our attacking moments look like and then work backwards to find the key elements.

Within Marcelo Bielsa's philosophy, vertical passes and the principle of verticality are fundamentally important to creating overloads higher up the pitch, these higher overloads can create the goal scoring opportunities needed to win games.

Through the next chapter we are going to detail a range of sessions that can be used to develop vertical passing lanes in teams in a few different ways. Firstly, how do we create players who can make movements ahead of the ball to create enough space to receive. This is a key component, we can't just have players who want to play forward, we must have players who are technically able to create enough space ahead of the ball to receive.

Secondly, we must have players who are willing to receive the ball, making a movement is one thing, and showing for the ball is another. It takes a certain brave player to be willing to receive what can often be straight passes through the centre of a team under pressure.

Now we have focused on creating players technically and tactically brave enough to receive possession, we must now focus on the passer. We will require a player who has the technical skills to pass a ball with pace through the lines of the opponent. They might also need to use disguise to reverse a pass into a dangerous area without the opponent being able to defend against this.

Lastly, we will need to create players who are tactically aware of when to play vertical passes, this is because they are not always available or advisable. We have to be thinking of the bigger picture, am I playing vertically as a method to create a goal scoring opportunity or am I just playing forward because I perceive a forward pass as a better pass.

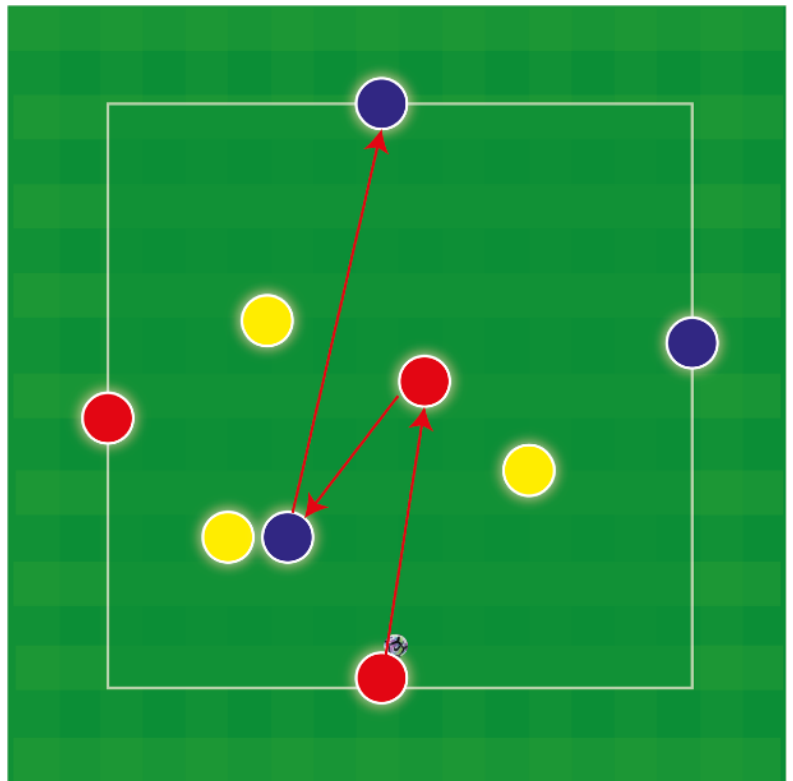
Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: The Forward Passing Rondo Practice

Key Coaching Point:

Movement is the key to success in so many aspects of the game. This practice is no different. Can we challenge our central players to move between the opponent lines in order to receive possession through the middle of the pitch.

Importantly, once the forward pass has been played through the lines, are our players intelligent enough to create a second angle to set and play through the middle.



The practice is very simple, it involves nine players, who are split into three different teams. One team sit on the inside as defenders, whilst the other two work together. The practice sees each team submit one player to the middle essentially creating 3v2 in the middle and a 6v3 in total. Whichever team gives away possession transitions to the outside of the practice and becomes the defending side.

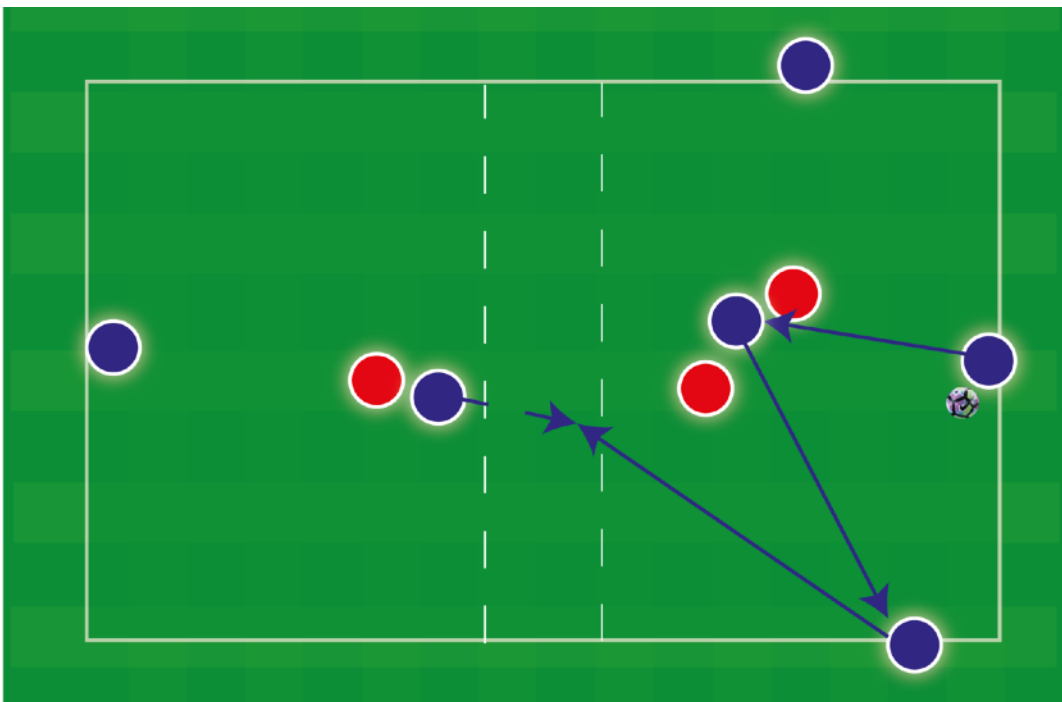
It is important that the transitions are quick and effective, this means pace and power in the transition, to force the opponent to surrender possession of the ball.

Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 6v3 Vertical Ball Progression Rondo

Key Coaching Point:

The key to this moment of the practice is to attract pressure in the centre of the practice so that the wide players can get possession of the ball.



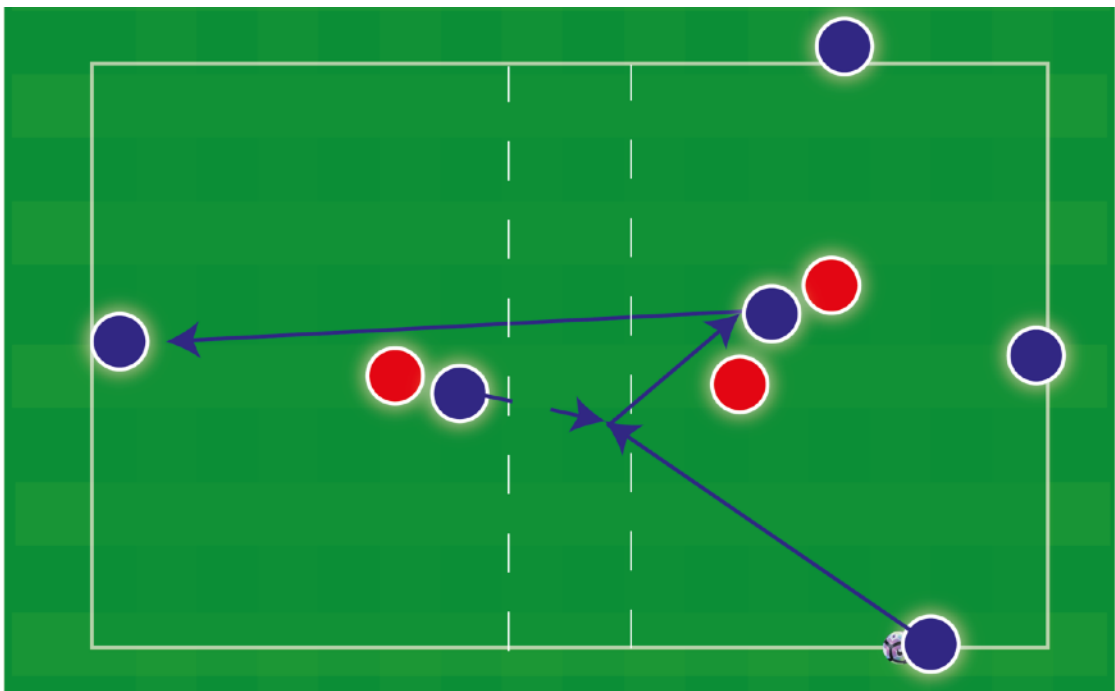
The practice is a 6v3 rondo, where 4v2 occurs on one side, and a 2v1 occurs on the other side. The idea of the practice is to move the ball within the 4v1, before using the wide player to play the through pass. So we see the up, back and through occur in the centre of the pitch with the use of the wide player to complete it. This session will focus around the central player attracting the pressure in order to play forward. The end player must then drop into complete the progression of the ball.

Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 6v3 Vertical Ball Progression Rondo (Adaptation 1)

Key Coaching Point:

When the middle player receives possession, they must be aware of how to time their movement in order to create the required amount of space and time.



This is another adapted 6v3 rondo that requires a slightly different skill set compared to the previous practice. Here we have changed the rules of the practice to ask the end player to drop in and become part of our combination instead of the end of our combination. Now the 4v2 must use the ball effectively and then play forward when the top player makes a movement back into the central area. Once that has happened, how quickly can the third player react in order to offer the back and thorough motion of the move.

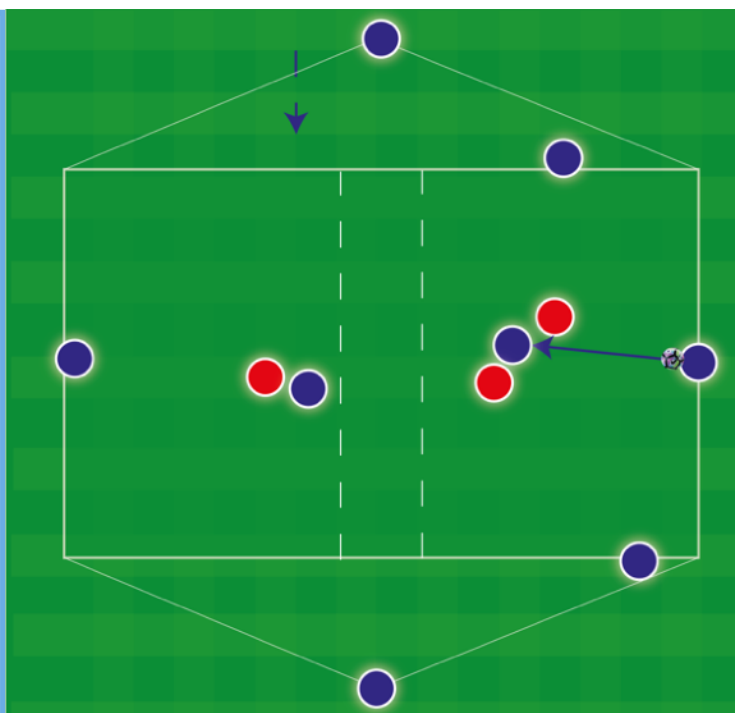
Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 8v3 Vertical Ball Progression Rondo (Full-Back's Role)

Key Coaching Point:

Here we are challenging the full-back to play a role in the progression of the ball.

Can we find a threaded pass through to the full-back to run on to, as the dashed arrow shows at the top, this will match the principles of Bielsa's play, with the full-back driving in to receive possession beyond the opponent's line.



This is now an 8v3 rondo, where the two full-backs have clear roles in the practice. The combinations still occur as before with the middle player dropping into help create up, back and throughs when required. However, we are challenging our players to now play threaded passes into the full-backs in the space beyond the opponent's middle three players.

There is an important rule which is the centre-backs, who are fixed on the vertical line can not pass to the full-backs on the outside of them, this is to prevent what would be a very unrealistic pass, where a player under limited pressure plays to a player under no pressure. The full-back should only receive within the oblong and not the triangle areas.

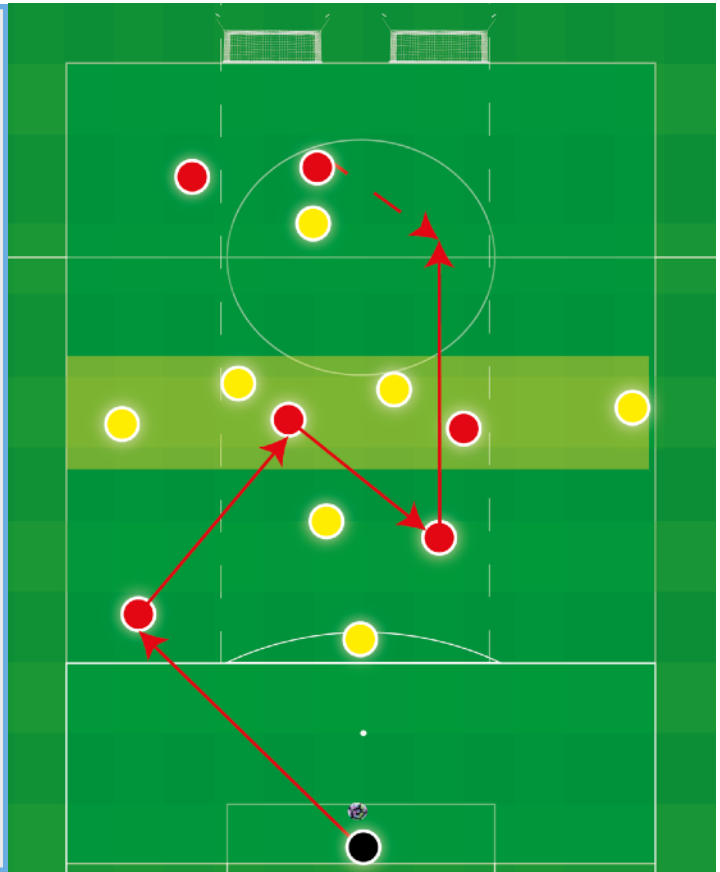
Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 7v7 Playing Through the Heart of The Opponent

Key Coaching Point:

Can we challenge players to play through the central zone using the up, back and through that we have previously spoken about. As the ball goes into the yellow area, can we pass information on to the players to encourage them to turn and play forward if possible.

If it is not possible can we develop the up, back and through to find the space between the midfield unit. This will give us two different opportunities to play through the heart of the the opponents shape.



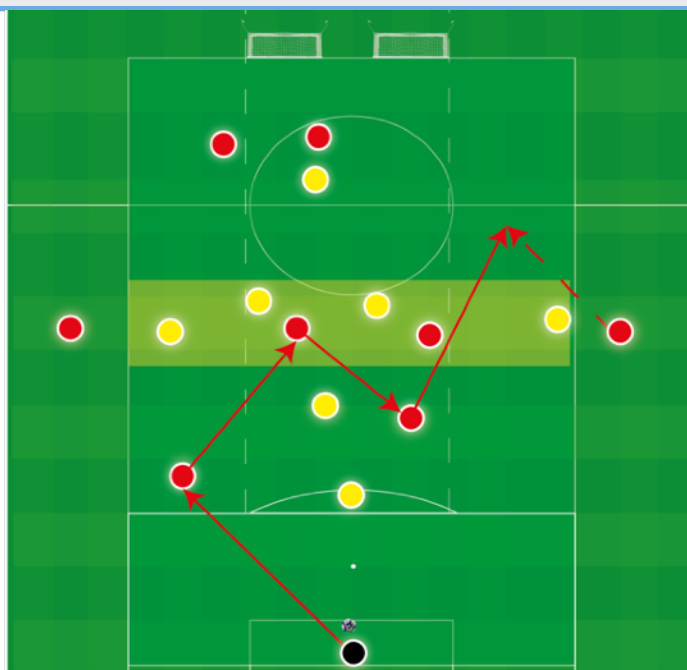
The goalkeeper plays into a 2v2 in the first part of the practice, there is then a 4v2 on the midfield line. The reds look to play into the middle zone where the yellows have an overload, making it difficult to stay on the ball. This means the reds should then look to bounce the ball back into the 2v2 and then through in to the 2v1 advantage they have in the attacking half. This will not only force our players to defend compactly centrally, but force them to be aware of the up, back and through in and out of possession.

Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 7v9 Using Wide Players to Exploit Space in Behind.

Key Coaching Point:

Remember, the central space can be exploited by the wide players when they are left free to make out too in runs from the outside channel into the half space.



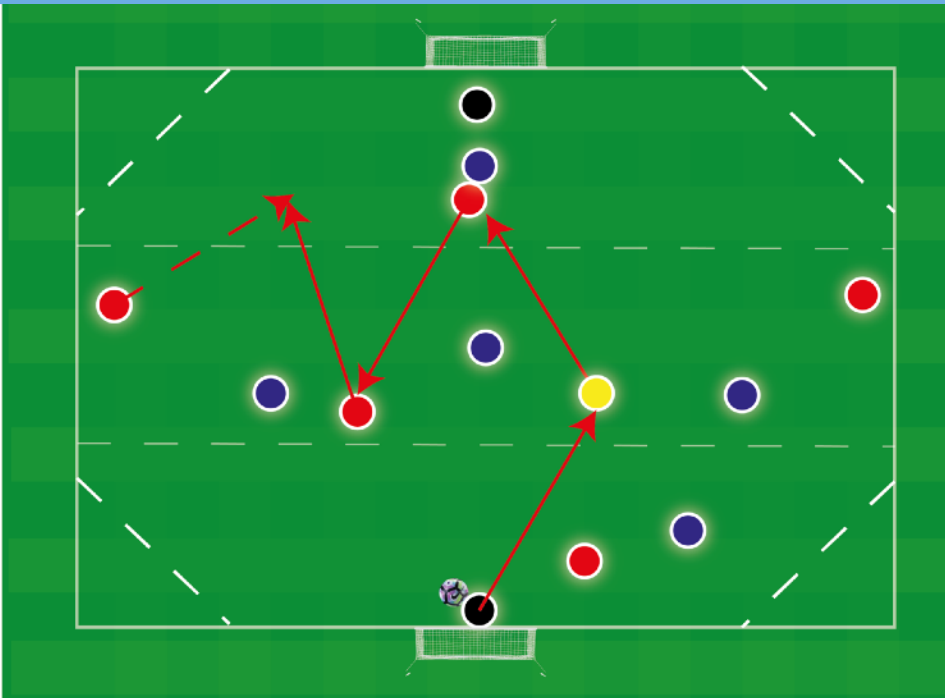
This is a progression of the previous practice, this one now includes wide players. Importantly, the wide player cannot play forwards, unless they receive possession in the centre of the practice (e.g. middle three lanes) if they receive the ball wide, they must play sideways or backwards. What we want to achieve is the wide players making out to in runs, receiving possession behind the opponents midfield 4. This will help us create up, back and through progressions using the outside channel.

Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 6v6+1 Creating the Up, Back and Through

Key Coaching Point:

Use the neutral player to be able to create overloads in the centre of the pitch, once you have the overload can you exploit it to enter the final third of the practice and score.



Here we see the Goalkeeper create a 2v1 advantage for the side in possession in both the first third and the third third. In the central area we see a 3v3+1. The idea of the practice is to move the ball through the thirds from back to front using each third. In order for a player to join the final third and create a 2v2, the ball must be bounced into the striker for the player to set a team mate. This continues to create the principle of verticality within our session.

Remember, it is easy for players to play through central space when we create it for them with session design. It is however, a challenge when we make the middle of the pitch compact and difficult to play through.

A diagram of a soccer field with green grass and white boundary lines. The field is populated with 14 players represented by colored circles: 10 yellow circles and 4 red circles. A small soccer ball icon is located near the center-left. Three yellow arrows indicate movement paths: one from the ball to a yellow circle in the center, another from that circle to a yellow circle on the right side, and a third from a yellow circle at the bottom center to the same yellow circle on the right. Two black goalposts are visible at the top and bottom edges of the field.

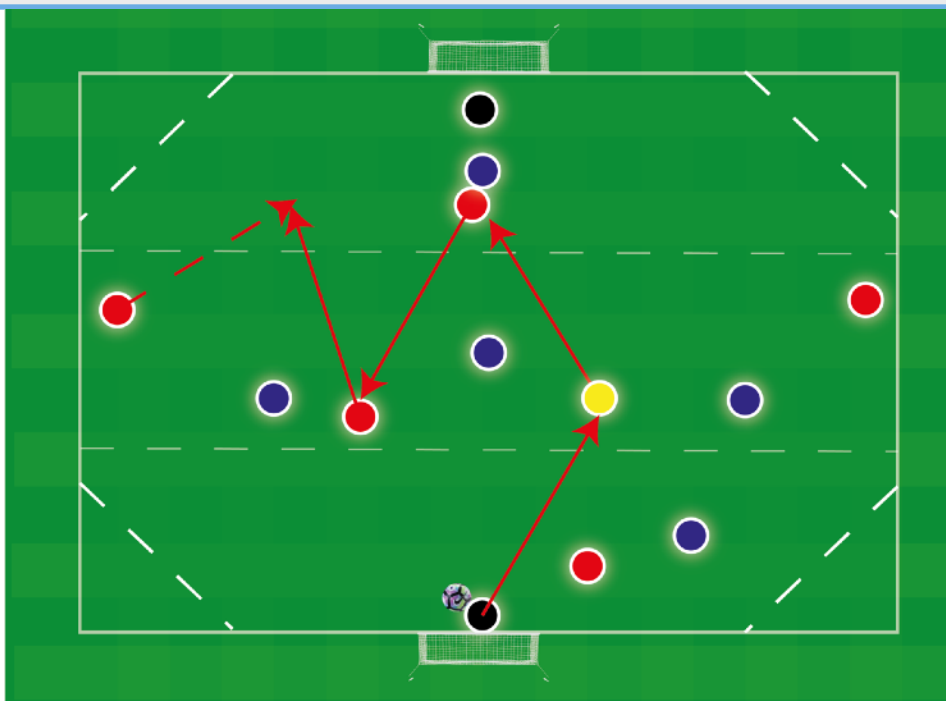
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Creating Vertical Passes

Playing Vertically: 6v6+1 Creating the Up, Back and Through

Key Coaching Point:

Use the neutral player to be able to create overloads in the centre of the pitch, once you have the overload can you exploit it to enter the final third of the practice and score.



Here we see the Goalkeeper create a 2v1 advantage for the side in possession in both the first third and the third third. In the central area we see a 3v3+1. The idea of the practice is to move the ball through the thirds from back to front using each third. In order for a player to join the final third and create a 2v2, the ball must be bounced into the striker for the player to set a team mate. This continues to create the principle of verticality within our session.

3RD MAN RUN'S

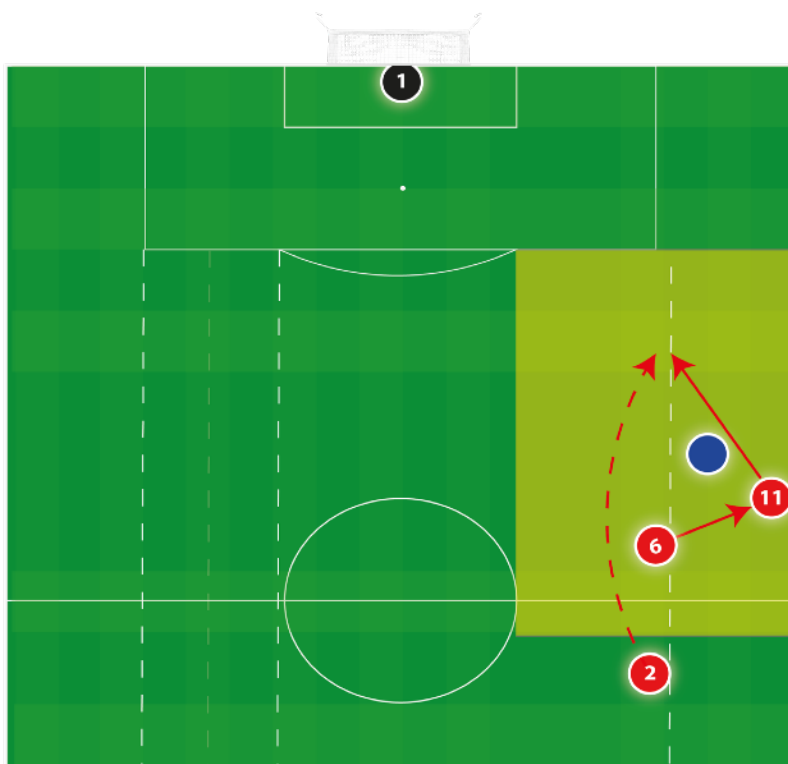
Creating Vertical Passes

What are Third Man Runs?

How do we use them and Why are they important?

Quite simply, Bielsa focuses on players being able to make third man runs as a method of attacking the opponent. It is a method that can overload an opponent in specific area and threaten the most important lines within the opponents shape. For example, for there to be a third man run, we naturally need three players.

In its most simple form, the third man run involves two players who pass the ball in-front of the opponents line, and then a third runner who attacks the space behind and is passed the ball by one of the two passing players. In the image above, we can see an example of what a third man run might look like in a realistic situation. In this example, the red six has passed the ball to the wide player who has received it in front of the opponents line. As the ball travels to the 11, the full-back makes a run inside and receives the ball beyond the opponent.



This is a perfect example of how a third man run might be used to attack the opponent and how it differs from that of the previously shown up, back and through. They do both hold similar characteristics but are different.

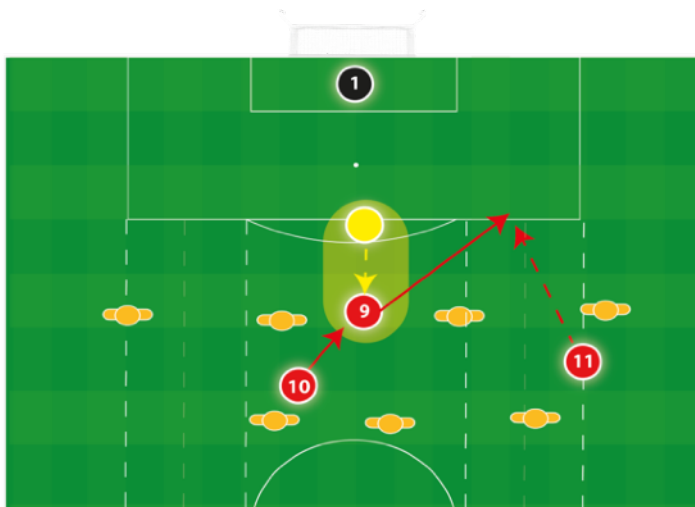
What are Third Man Runs?

How do we use them and Why are they important?

One thing that is vital when trying to create a third man run, is to have good attacking structure. This means our players must be playing on different vertical and horizontal lines. Why? Because in order to play through opponents spaces, we must be able to stretch the opponent and create those gaps. By having players play across five channels, naturally we increase the shape of the opponent out of possession. By using multiple vertical lines, we create space on different lines allowing our players to move freely up and down the pitch.

The second part that we must teach our players in these moments is to learn to attract pressure. For example if a player is in pressure and they are not comfortable attacking in a 1v1 moment, they might attract the pressure of the opponent, in order to invite the third man run. For example, if the player on the ball slows in their actions it attracts the pressure of the opponent.

As the example to the right shows, the nine takes their time and delays, attracting the pressure of the opponent, giving space to their team mate to run in too. Once the opponent has made the run the attacker can play the ball into the space behind. If our player is slow to run into the space then we might use an up, back and through to open the space up with a similar combination.



What are Third Man Runs?

How do we use them and Why are they important?

Timing is another key factor in performing the third man run movement. It must have a level of awareness of all three players in a seamless fashion. For example, the runner will likely have to start their run from the moment the first pass is played. Timing is also a key component for the player releasing the second pass, this is because they must play the pass with a few key thoughts in mind.

Firstly, is their team mate in an advanced enough position to run on to the pass they are playing. Secondly, they must try to play the pass with the most pressure from the opponent without the opponent being able to step in and win the ball. The balancing act between these two moments will define if the third man is successful or not.

Location is another important factor when playing a pass to a third man because the pass will often be into space, this means the ball will need to be often behind the opponents defensive line to give the attacker a chance to run on to the ball and attacking the opponent goal.

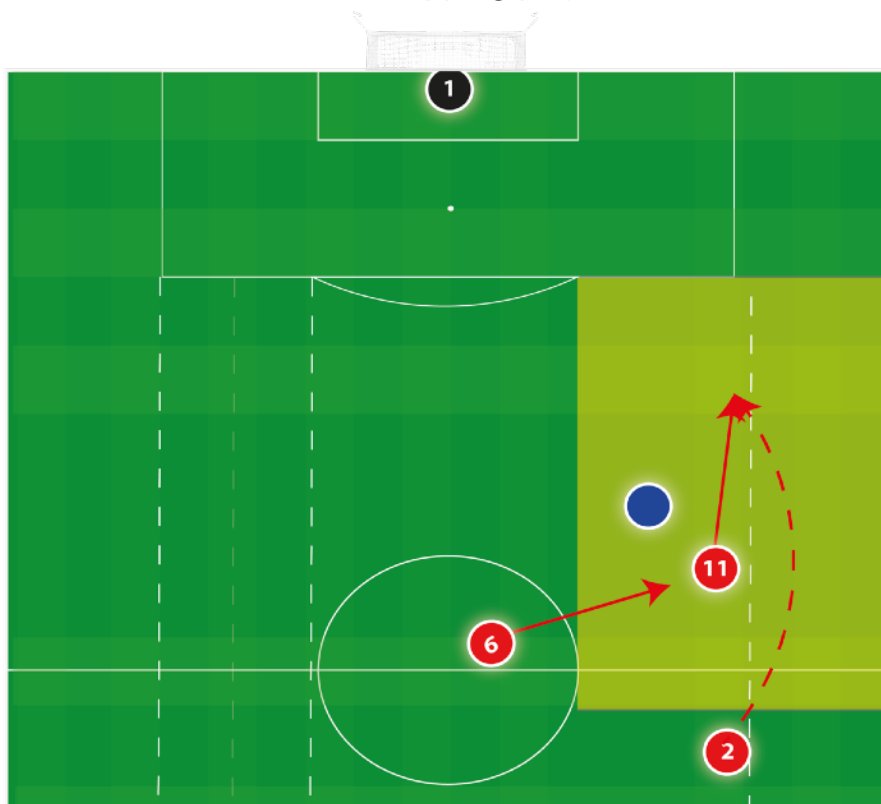
Now it is important to look through a few tactical situations where our players might be able to use a third man runner in order to attack the opponent, most of the examples use the attacking players and wide players in order to combine and exploit the opponent. When coaching this topic we have a variety of methods that we can use. The first can be a technical practice, where players combine around opponent players and run in behind. The second will be around mannequins, in a more tactical situation where we put players into realistic players and make them make meaningful combinations that they will do during game situations.

What are Third Man Runs?

How do we use them and Why are they important?

In this example here, we can see the midfield player has played a horizontal pass across the midfield from the central midfielder player to the wide player. Importantly, the wide player is in the inside channel leaving the outside channel free. As the ball is played wide into the number 11, the 11 needs to attract the pressure of the opponent defender to create space in behind.

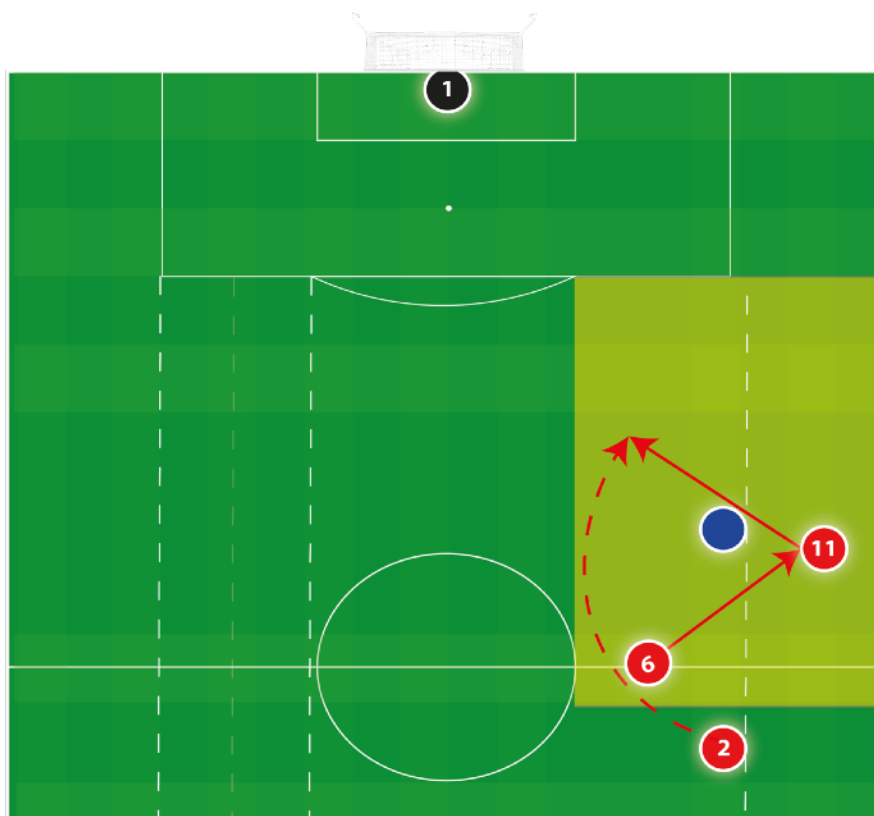
Once the six has pulled their foot back to play the pass, the number two should overlap and attack the space behind. The 11 then holds the ball and threads the ball inside for the overlapping player to attack.



What are Third Man Runs?

How do we use them and Why are they important?

Here is another example of a way the third man run can be used to attack the opponent. Here we can see the six play the same pass but this time the pass has gone into the outside channel and has naturally invited the pressure of the defender. This now means there is space for the full-back to attack by performing an under-lap rather than an over-lap. It is important that the number two makes a run off the shoulder of the blue and attacks the most central space that is available. For example, if the centre-back leaves a space to run into we must encourage our players to attack this most central space.



Finding the runner in behind

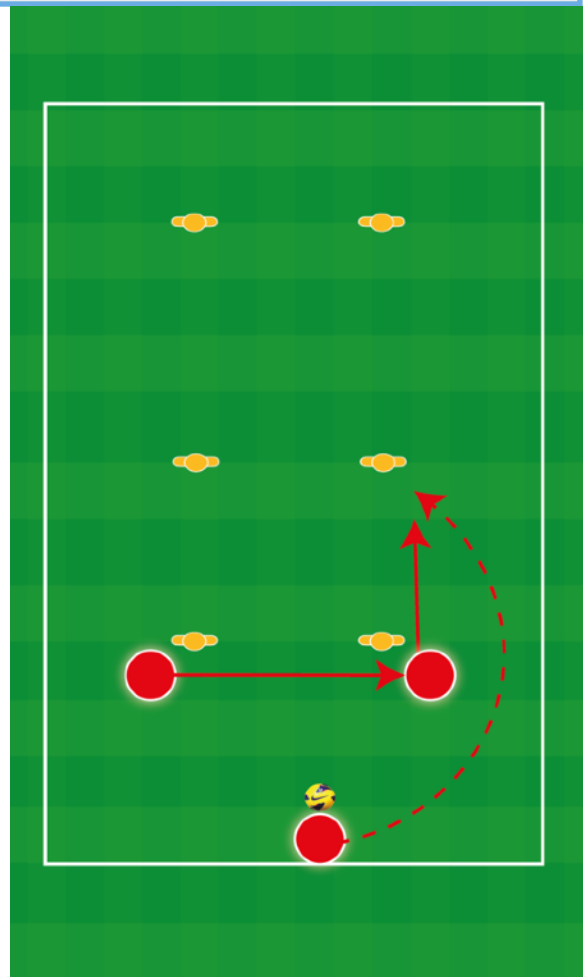
3rd Man Runs: Unopposed Third Man Running Practice

Key Coaching Point:

Timing is the important trait to train within the unopposed practice, as the player goes to pass the ball and the foot goes back, the runner should begin their run.

Here we have a very simple unopposed practice to develop the third man run. In this example, there are six mannequins, and the players look to combine around them. The ball is played into the left player who then looks to pass the ball horizontally across the mannequins, before the third player makes a run around the outside of the player and receives the ball on the next mannequin.

This process can be done slowly, and timing can be the key factor in the practice. It does not have to be done quickly and breaks the practice up. The repetition can be done slowly to build understanding in the players.



Finding the runner in behind

3rd Man Runs: Unopposed Third Man Running Practice (Continued)

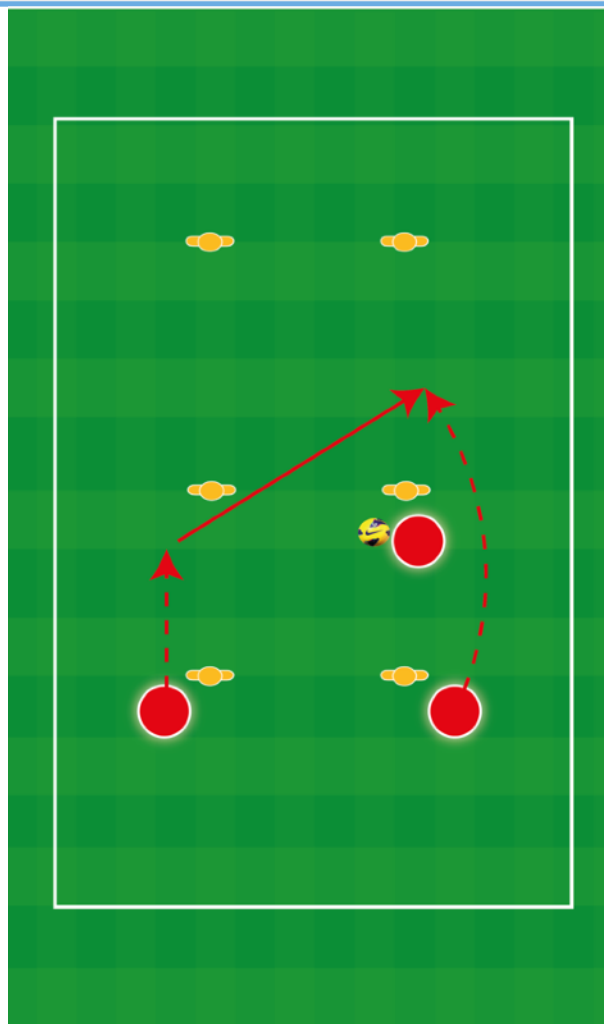
Key Coaching Point:

Timing is the important trait to train within the unopposed practice, as the player goes to pass the ball and the foot goes back, the runner should begin their run.

The second part of this practice just shows how the practice develops as the ball goes forwards. Here we can see the player who has performed the overlap is now in possession.

Once this player has possession the practice reoccurs one of two ways. Firstly, it can occur by the player on the left pushing up and the overlap occurring on the left hand side.

To progress it the bottom right player, pushed to the top left cone and the bottom left player progresses the practice by creating the overlap on the outside of the practice.



Finding the runner in behind

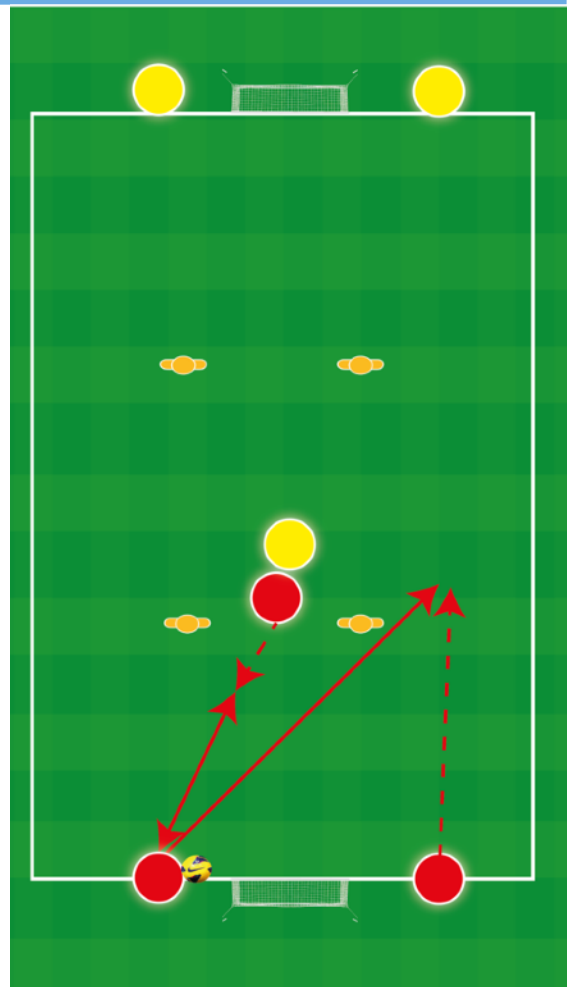
3rd Man Runs: Third Man Attacking Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point:

Here we are training with limited pressure and it is these moments that will provide the greatest test of when to release the ball and when to stay in possession and wait for more pressure.

This is a 3v3 practice where we look to develop the third man run with limited pressure from an opponent player. For example, here we look for the first player to play into the central player and then look to pass into the overlapping player on the outside.

The ball then goes to the opposite end by the overlapping player scoring and the yellows complete the same practice going the other way. Importantly, as the practice develops, the players need to make a decision if to play a up, back and through or try to find a third man runner in the space behind.

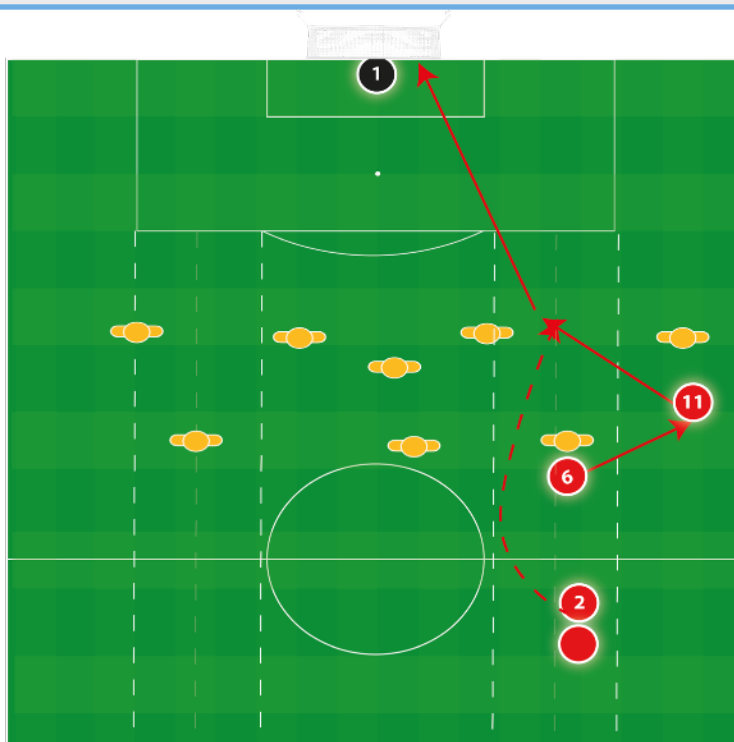


Finding the runner in behind

3rd Man Runs: Attacking Combination Practice 1

Key Coaching Point:

The angle and timing of the final pass are key here, wait for the overlapping player to arrive and ensure they are still onside and has not ran ahead too early.



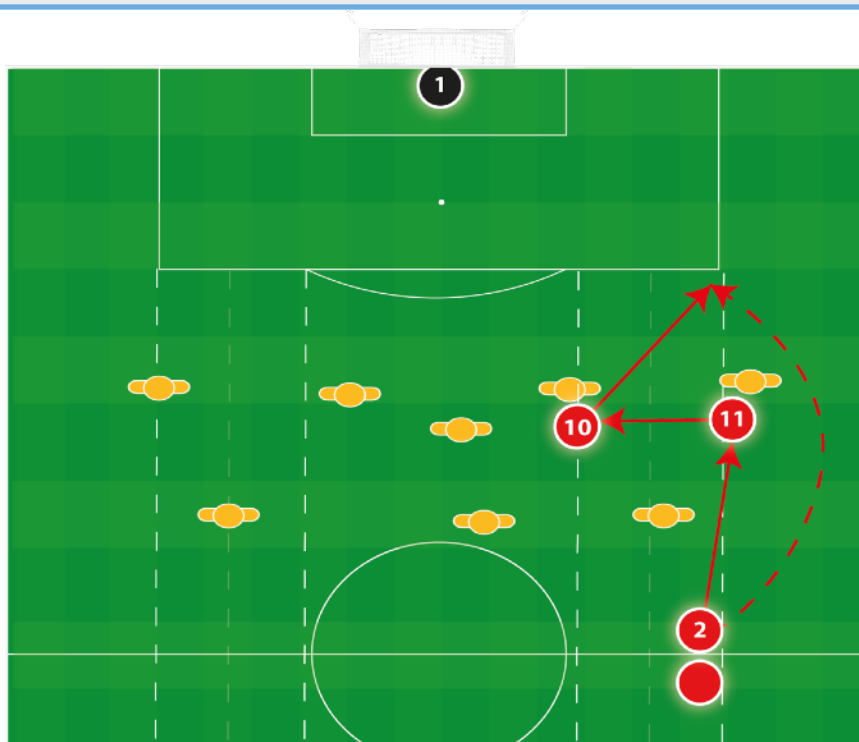
Here we are attacking the mannequins through the right hand side of the setup and going to practice some rotations around the mannequins. Here we see the ball played by the red six into the wide area, where the 11 receives possession on the touchline. And then opens their body up to receive the ball across their body and then plays the pass into the space behind the full-back and centre-back for the two to run on to.

Finding the runner in behind

3rd Man Runs: Attacking Combination Practice 2

Key Coaching Point:

Weight of the pass is very important in all three passes, the final pass might require spin to allow the ball to travel in behind and still slow to stay on the pitch.



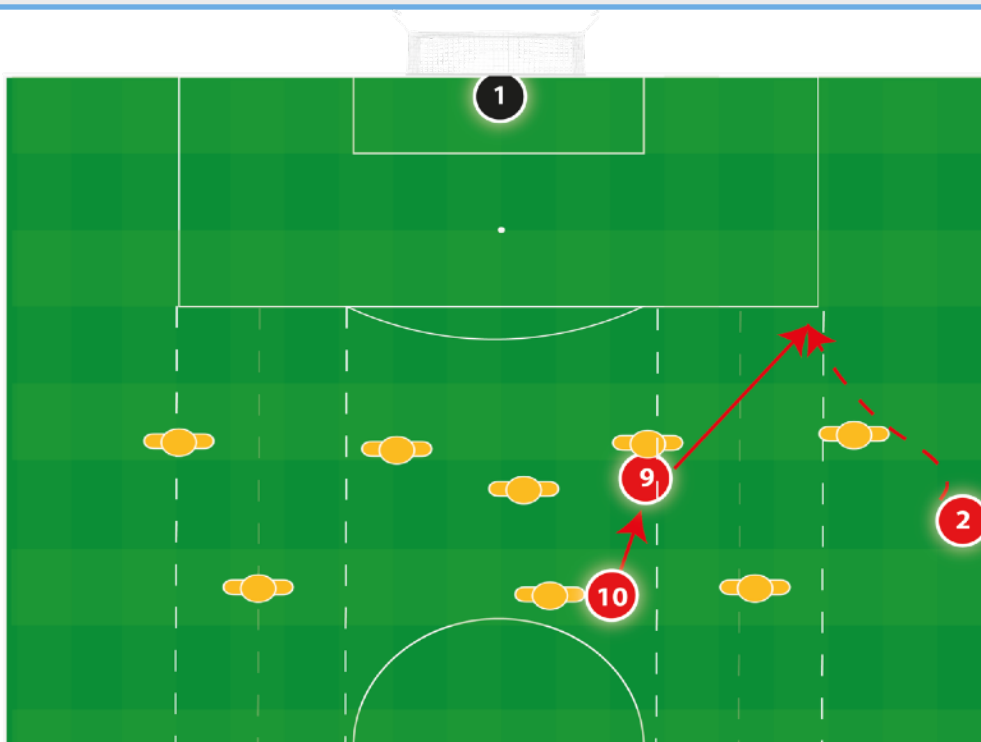
Here the number two plays the first vertical pass through the opponent lines, the 11 then plays a horizontal pass into the feet of the 10. At this point the two should already be running in behind and attacking the space on the outside of the 11. Once the 10 receives possession, the two should be travelling at pace but behind the ball. The 10 then threads the ball into the space behind for the two to attack.

Finding the runner in behind

3rd Man Runs: Attacking Combination Practice 3

Key Coaching Point:

Weight of the pass is very important in all three passes, the final pass might require spin to allow the ball to travel in behind and still slow to stay on the pitch.



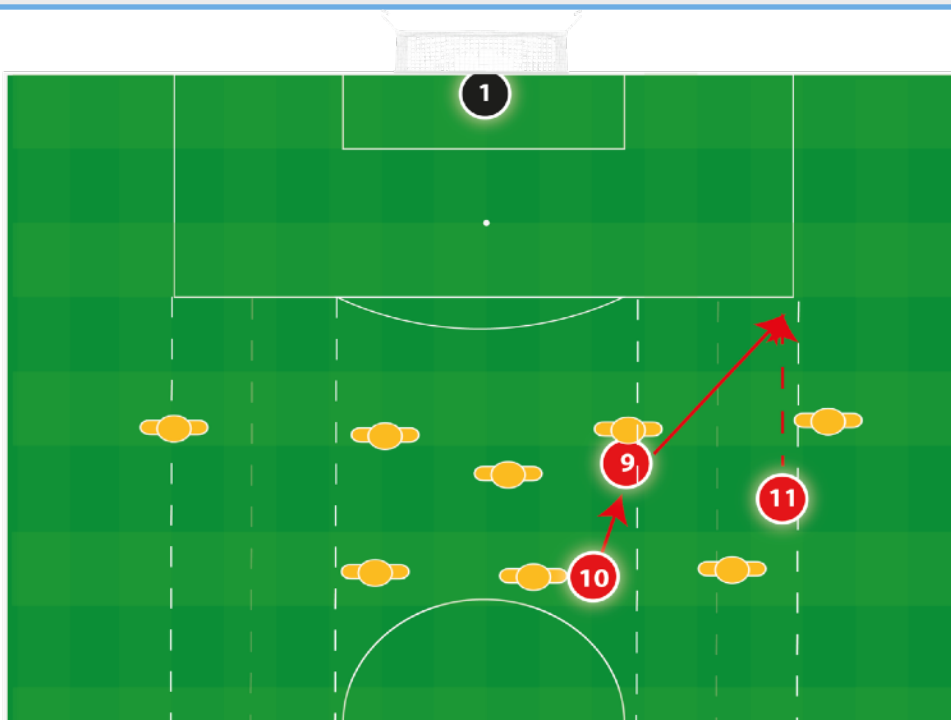
This is a slight adaptation on the previous practice with minor differences here. This time, the full back is in the outside channel and going to make their movement from out to in to attack the inside channel. The nine must recognise how to make a movement away from the mannequin to create space for the two to penetrate.

Finding the runner in behind

3rd Man Runs: Attacking Combination Practice 4

Key Coaching Point:

Ensure the number nine is comfortable receiving away from the mannequin with one of the five beat the marker moves. This will open space to allow the nine to play forward.



This is another tactical change from the previous two practices. This time the width in the practice comes from the inside channel and is the number 11. The 10 plays the first forward pass, then the nine needs to create a margin of space and play a pass into the space for the 11 to attack the opponents goal.

FINISHING PRACTICES



“He’s especially vocal and demanding in these games (MurderBall) and he doesn’t care about the tactical side. The games are just for the physical side.”

Iraola

The finishing phase of the game is ultimately the make or break area for the results element of the game. Performance levels can change throughout the season, dependent on 1000's of things. But ultimately, results are based upon our ability to be successful in both goals.

As you would expect, Bielsa's finishing practices seem to be guided by his incredible quantity of research and analysis. His practices that we are aware of are not meaningless finishing practices in front of the goal. They are structured practices where cross and passes come from the most common cross and pass locations in games. The players then finish from the areas they are most likely to score in during games.

We have previously spoke about this method during the book 'Transitional Finishing Practices' which speaks about using Xg as a method to guide practice design. If over 85% of goals are scored from within the box, should over 85% of our finishing moment need to occur from this moment? I

The same is correct for Xa, if the expected assist data suggests that we are more likely to assist from specific locations, should we as coaches use this data to build our most repetitive and meaningful practice. Of course this does not mean just train these moments, but it must in our opinion be the bulk.

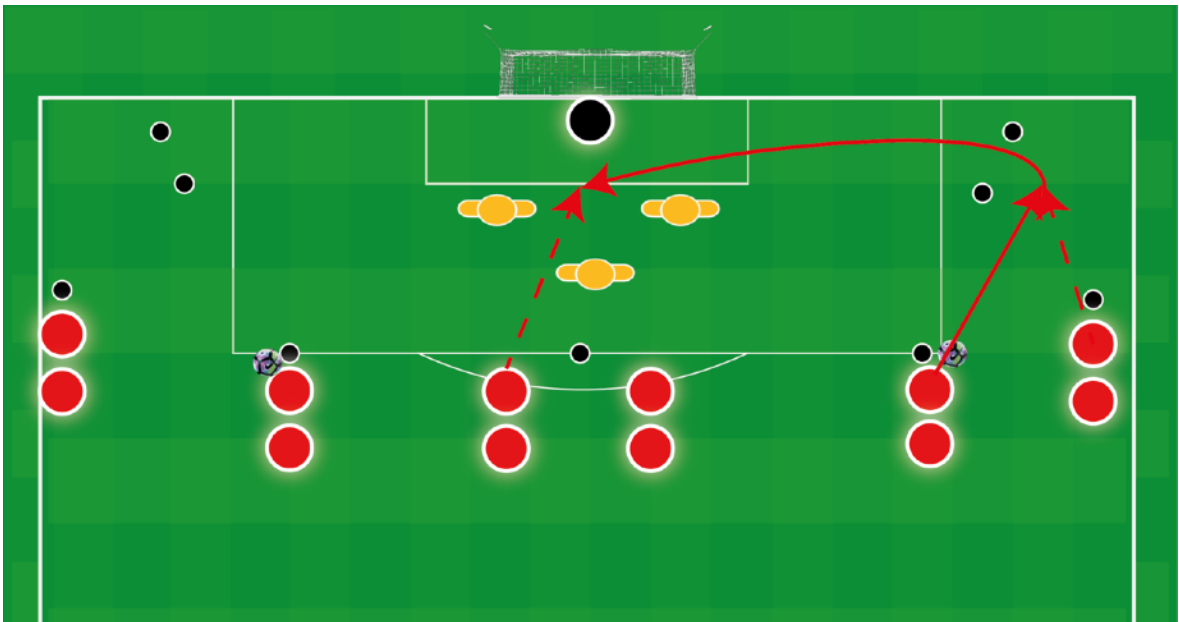


Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Finishing from Cutbacks and Threads

Key Coaching Point:

A great bit of advice given by one of English football's greatest strikers was to lock the ankle and to look to fire the ball across the goal back towards the crosser when dealing with finishing cutbacks.



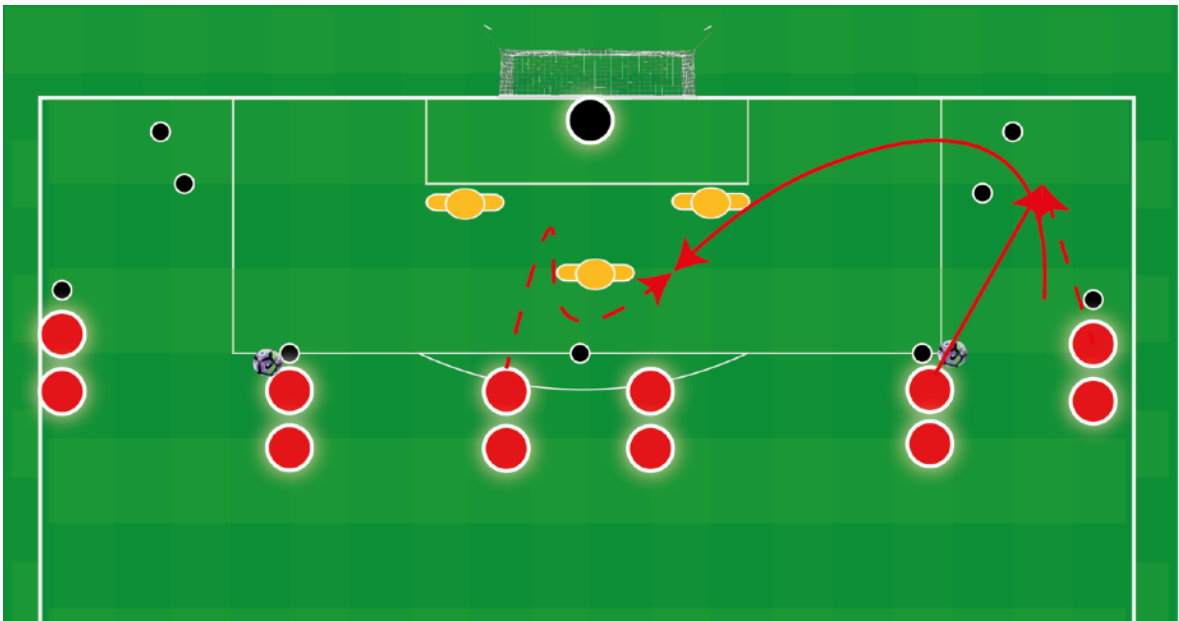
Here we have a very simple finishing practice, looking to create assists from the highest xA area and finishing within the highest xG area. For example, here we are looking for the player in the inside channel to thread the ball towards the touchline. Then the player on the outside channel run on to the ball and play a cross low and hard across the box and a striker run on to it and score. The same is then repeated from the opposite side, the player in the inside channel then goes to the inside and the opposite for the inside.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Finishing from Cutbacks and Threads 2

Key Coaching Point:

When making a double movement to receive deeper, our player must still be travelling towards the ball in order to finish with pace. So timing for both the pass and the movement is key.



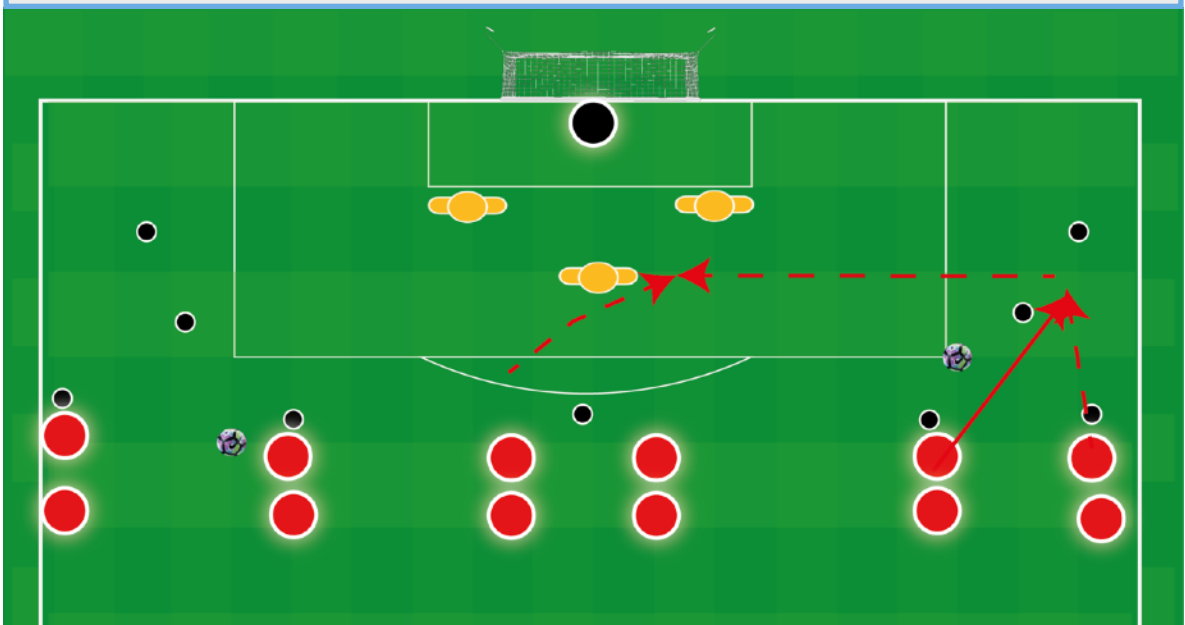
The finishing practice remains the same but the movement inside the box is now very different. We are looking for our striker to make a double movement, one beyond the defender, and the next deeper to receive the ball around the 12 yard mark and finish. Importantly, this finish must be struck hard and the cross must be with good detail, for example, if the ball is bobbling from a poorly struck pass, then the finish will be more difficult and our chance in scoring will diminish.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Finishing from Cutbacks and Threads 3

Key Coaching Point:

Recognising the early cutback is key. The player breaking the box must be quick to recognise the opportunity or need to cross early and make movement across the defender to receive.



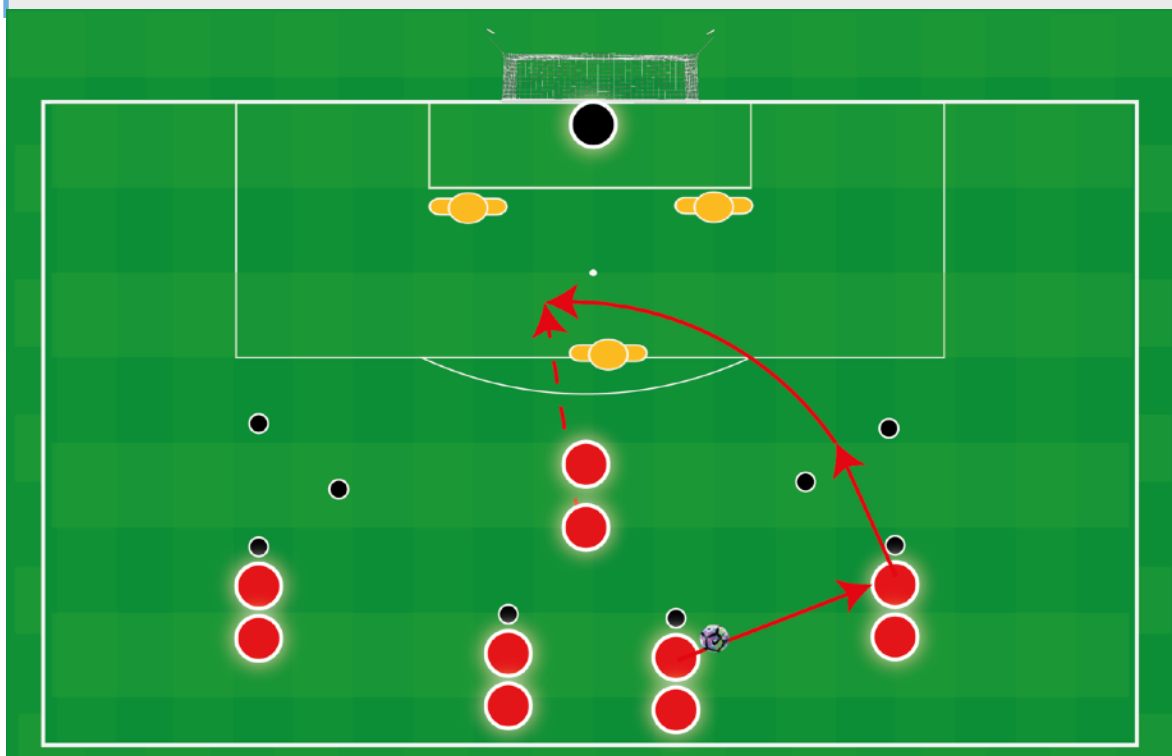
The third variation of this practice sees the crosser, cross the ball much earlier. Here the player is crossing early because either they have to or they can see an opportunity to play the cross earlier. As this happens, we are looking for the furthest centre-forward to make the movement across the mannequin and look to strike the ball first time. This will require a firm strike into the bottom right corner. This will be using the weight of the cutback to fire the ball in.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Finishing from Cutbacks and Threads 4

Key Coaching Point:

For sides such as Manchester City who believe greatly in using the half-space this is an important task. How do we attack threaded spaces in behind the opponent's back line.



The inside player plays the pass behind the first cone to the wide player. The wider player then takes a touch between the black coned gate, and then threads a pass between the three central mannequins.

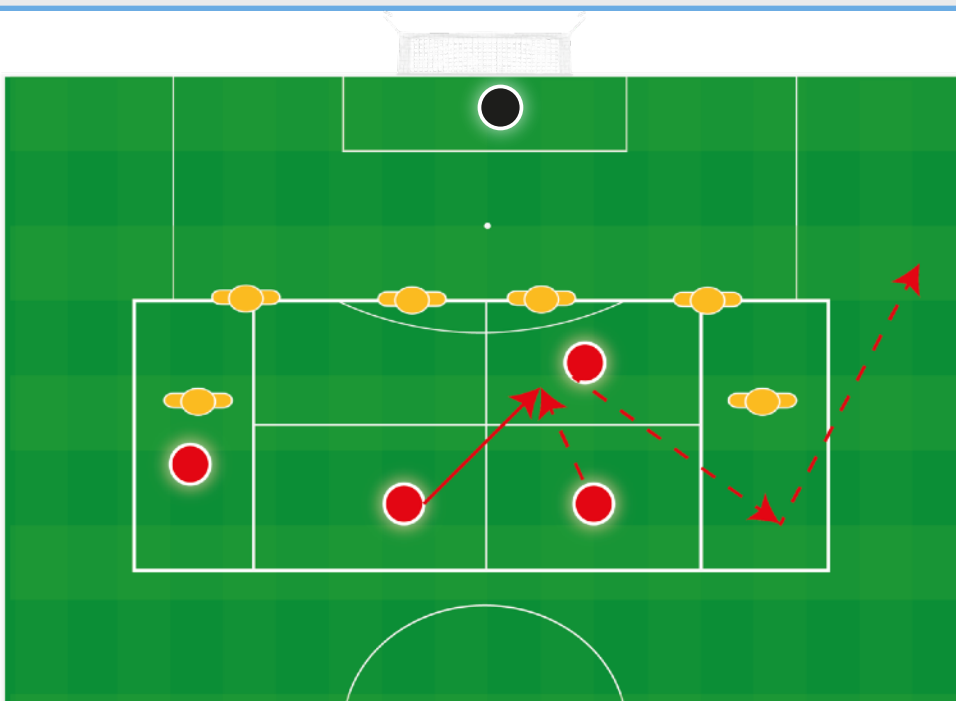
Once the ball has gone through the gate can our striker make a movement and receive in the central space and finish. This will need to be a quick finish of one or two touches. This will give the attacker the best opportunity to be successful in front of goal.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Grid Combination Practice 1

Key Coaching Point:

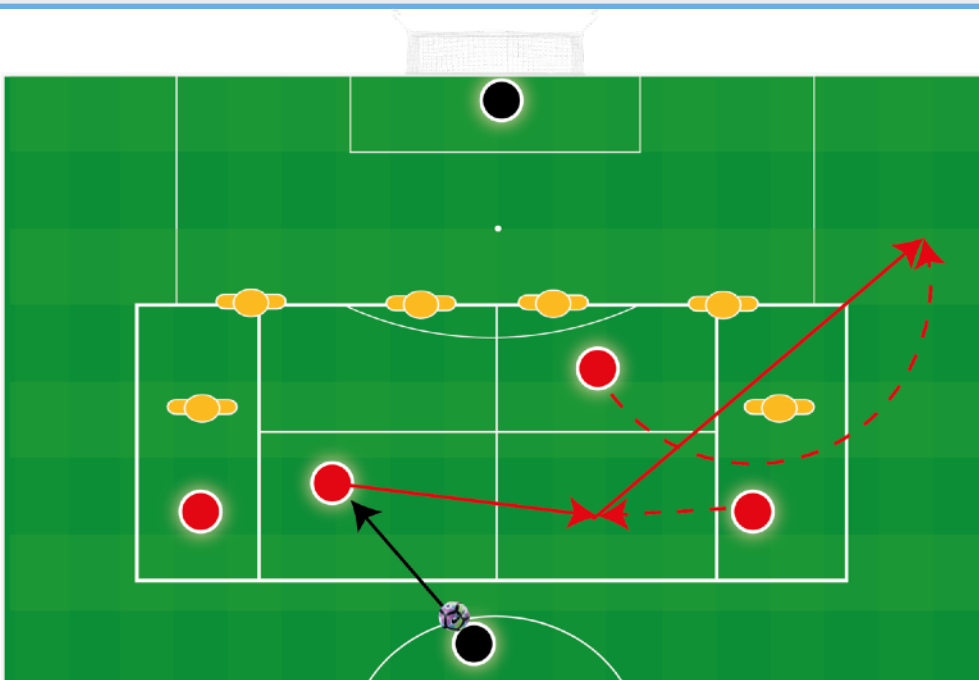
Ensure that the rotations are specific to your team, players and philosophy. Then repeat these rotations as a method to create realistic finishing practices.



Here we are looking to create different rotations to exploit the space behind the opposition's line (or in this case the mannequins) we are looking for the deepest midfield player to move into the higher grid to receive possession of the ball. As the player makes this movement, the second player makes a run deeper and then around the mannequin. The ball is then threaded into the outside channel and into the space for the wide player to run on to. The two central players then penetrate the box.

Finishing Practices: Gird Combination Practice 2

Ensure our players arrive in the box as the ball comes in. We do not want our players to arrive too early as they cannot attack the ball with pace. This makes it more difficult for them to strike the ball with pace and beat defenders in 1v1 moments.



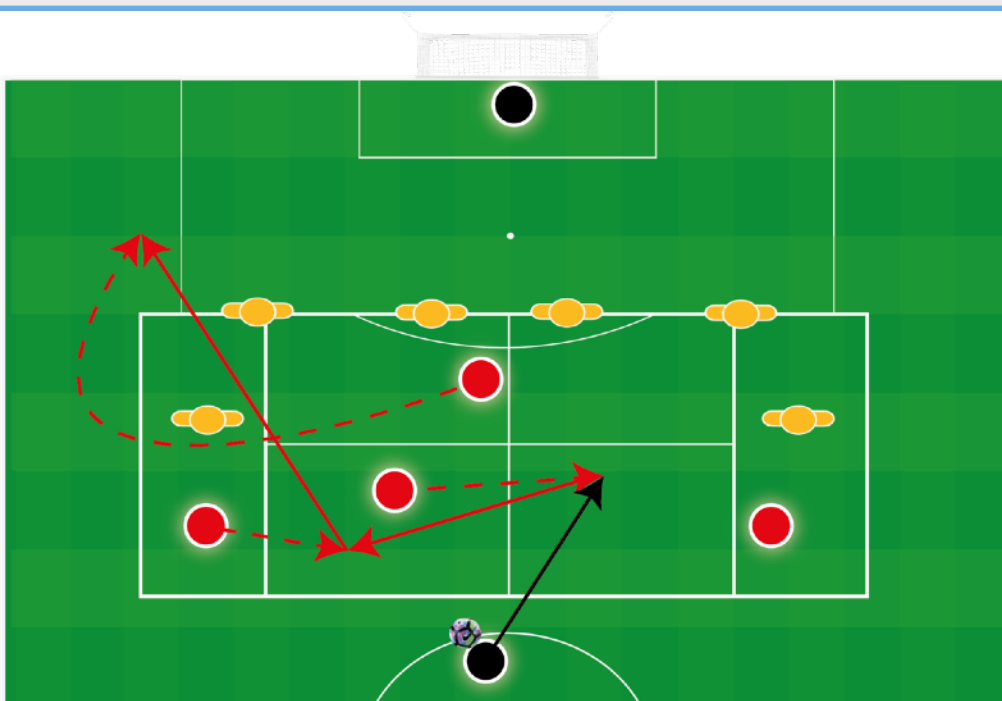
120

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Grid Combination Practice 3

Key Coaching Point:

When our players make the movements to create crossing moments they must be aware of where and when to sprint and when to run. Jog/Run slowly to attract pressure and delay. Then create a quick change of direction to exploit the space behind.



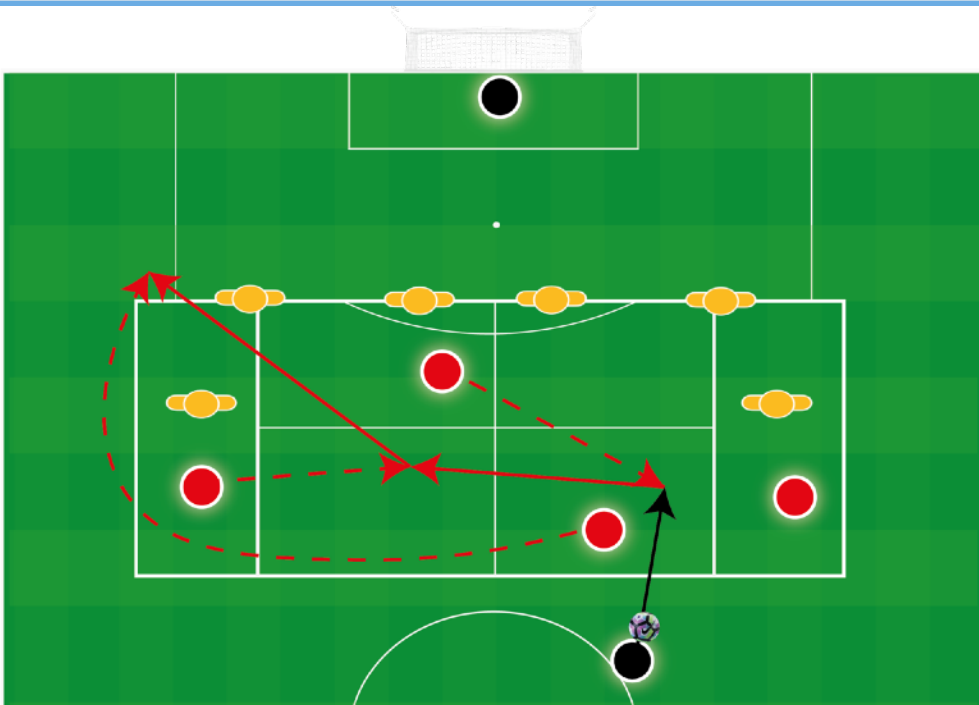
Here we see the first central midfielder move into the right centre part of the grid. The wide player then moves into the left centre grid. Then the nine spins beyond the defensive line and receives possession in behind. Then the three attacking players make movements to attack the box and look to score. Again, make sure that the three players attacking the box, look to attack on three different lines. So that we are able to attack three different types of pass or cross.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Gird Combination Practice 4

Key Coaching Point:

Do not forget about the opposite winger, they hold the key to overloading the box during crossing moments. They offer an option for crosses at the back post, this might be a tactic or an option to exploit the back post space in crossing moments.



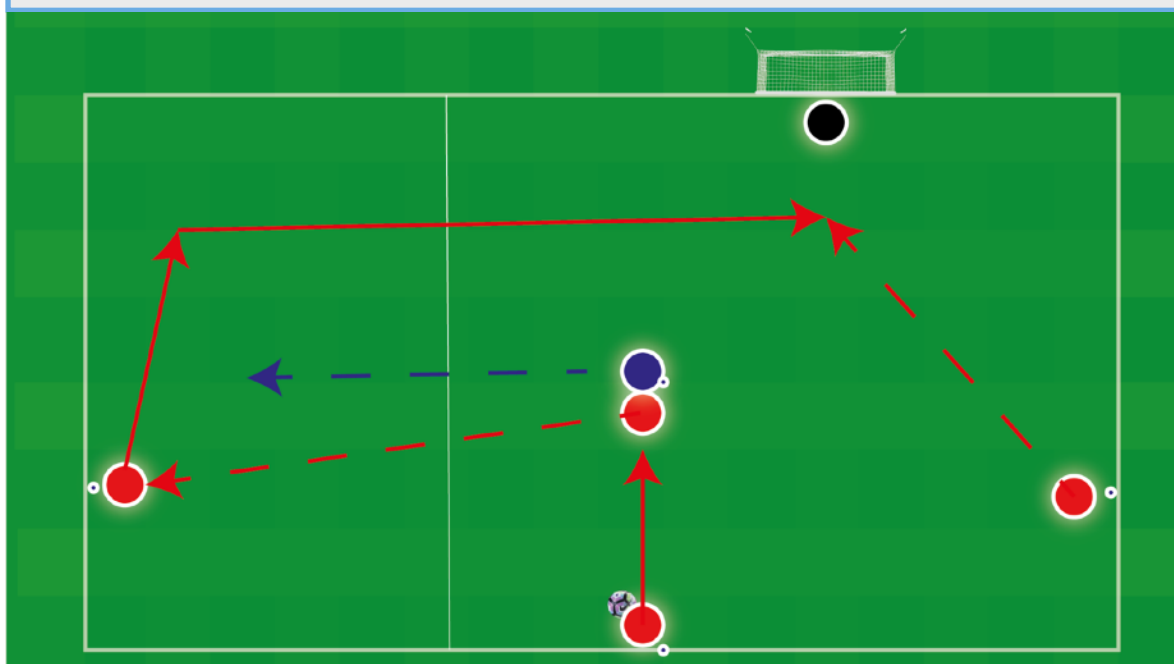
Here we see quite a bit of rotation occur. Firstly, the nine comes down to receive possession and the eight spins wide into the space behind. We also see the wide player come inside. The ball then goes across the midfield and into the overlapping wide player to put a cross into the box. Once the ball has been played wide, then the three other players must look to penetrate the box looking too attacking with pace and power.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Wide Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point

This practice is physically difficult for players, they must be able to perform at a high level technically and tactical under the physical stress of the practice design.



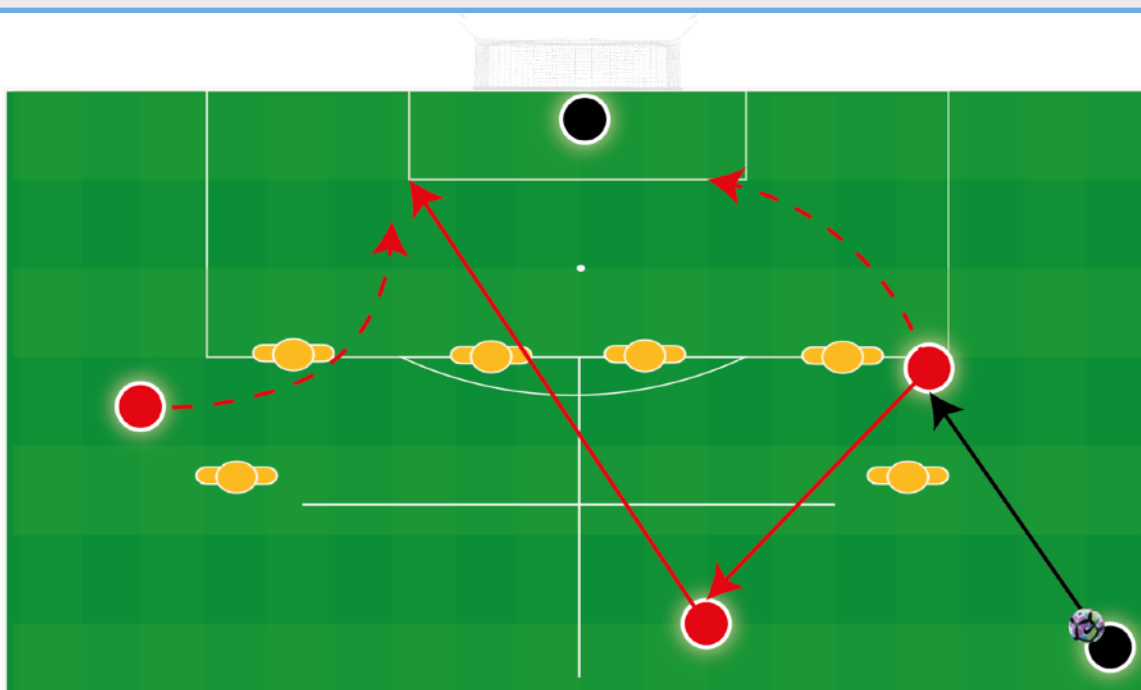
The bottom of the diamond, plays the pass into the top of the diamond. This player then plays the ball to the left hand side, where the blue then presses the outside player and try to block the cross. The opposite wide player then makes an out to win run into the box and attack the cross. Once this has ended, each red player runs to the next cone in the diamond and perform the next action. For example, the wide right player becomes the player who starts the practice.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Wide Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point

The finishing moment will be more difficult for players with a pass played across the lines. They might have to score with a first time volley, take a touch and finish or even potentially perform a cross.



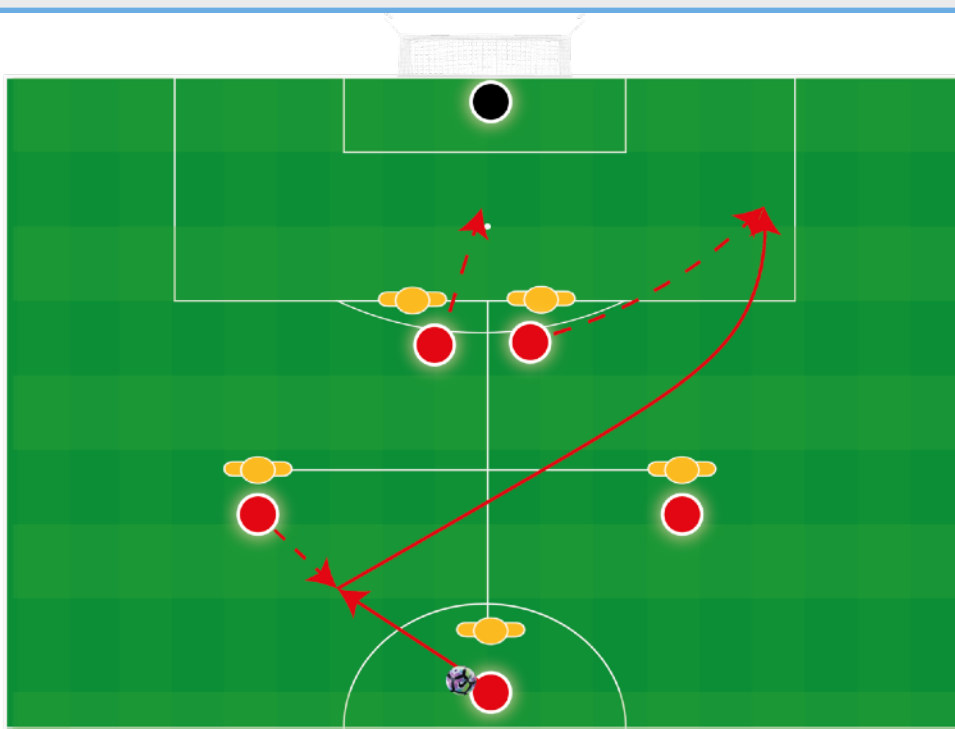
Here the coach passes the ball into the wide player, who then plays the ball back into the midfield player. From here, the deepest midfield player, plays the ball over the defensive line into the opposite wide player. Once the ball has gone wide, can the wide player finish first time. If they cannot finish first time, can they take a touch and finish. Or they could potentially play a pass across the goal to the opposite wide player.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Wide Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point

First time finishing is key within the box. Most goals are scored with one or two touches, and we must ensure that we keep to these principles when creating finishing practices.



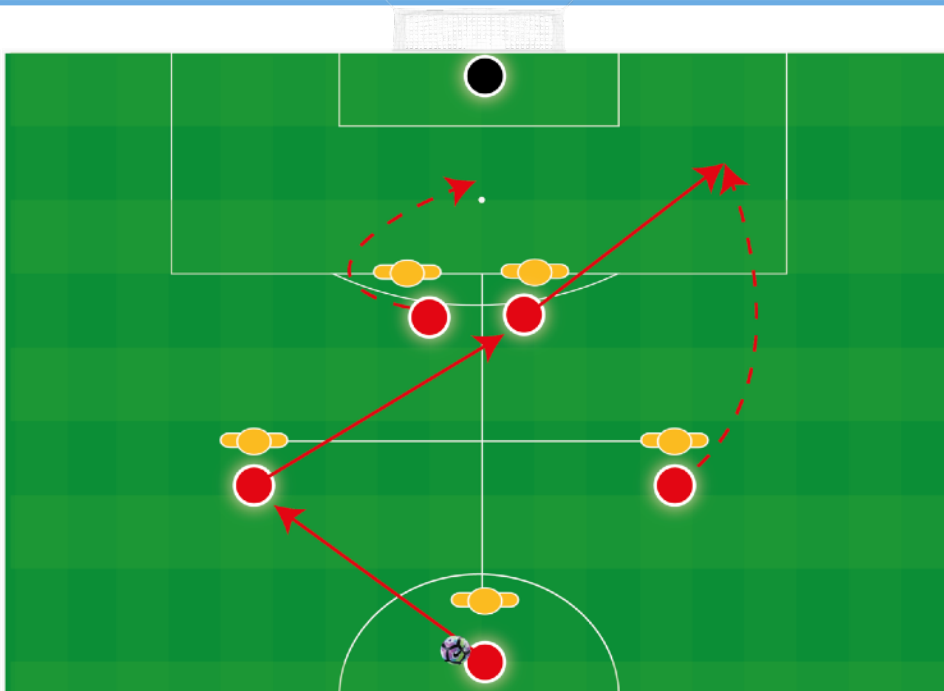
Firstly, the ball is bounced from the bottom of the practice to the player on the outside of the diamond. This player then plays a reverse pass into the pace for one of the strikers to attack. Then the second attacker runs in behind to finish the cutback or threaded pass. We require a realistic weight of pass during every moment to ensure the practice retains the realism we require.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Central Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point

Attacking movement is complicated, players must understand the game enough to know when to make movements away from the ball and when to come towards the ball. Here the left hand striker, makes a movement to the blind side of the attacker and then they make the movement across the defender.



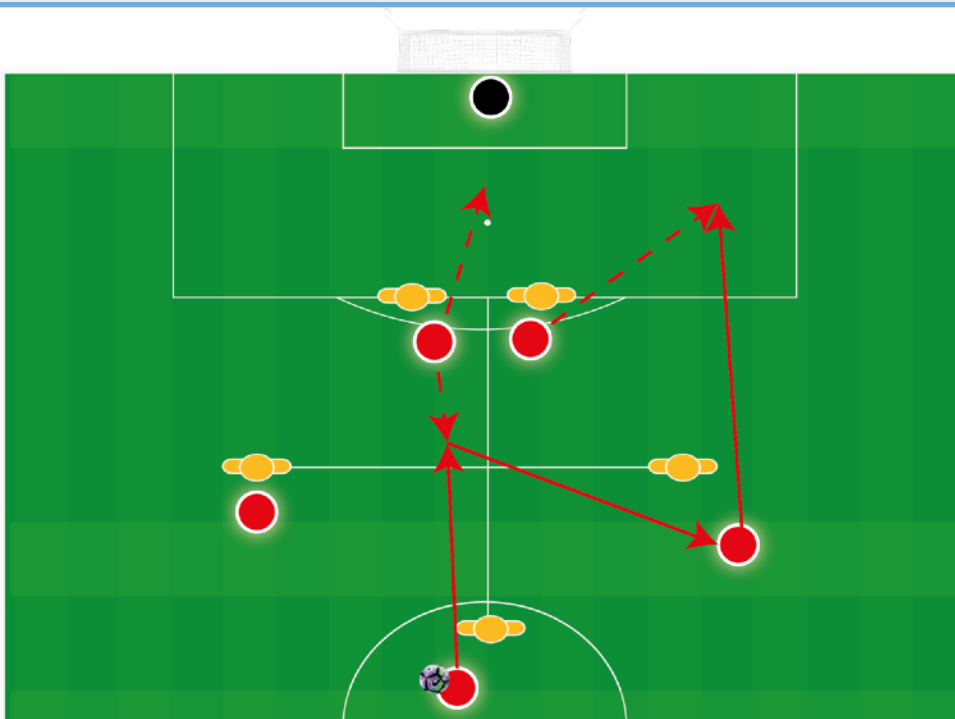
The first pass goes wide into the central midfield player, the ball is then passed into the striker who holds the ball up before threading the ball wide to an overlapping player. Both strikers then need to make an attempt to break into the box and score. The opposite striker then needs to make a movement across the box attacking from the back space to the front space. Making sure they are arriving at pace when the ball comes across the box.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Central Combination Practice 2

Key Coaching Point

Attacking movement is complicated, players must understand the game enough to know when to make movements away from the ball and when to come towards the ball. Here the left hand striker, makes a movement to the blind side of the attacker and then they make the movement across the defender.



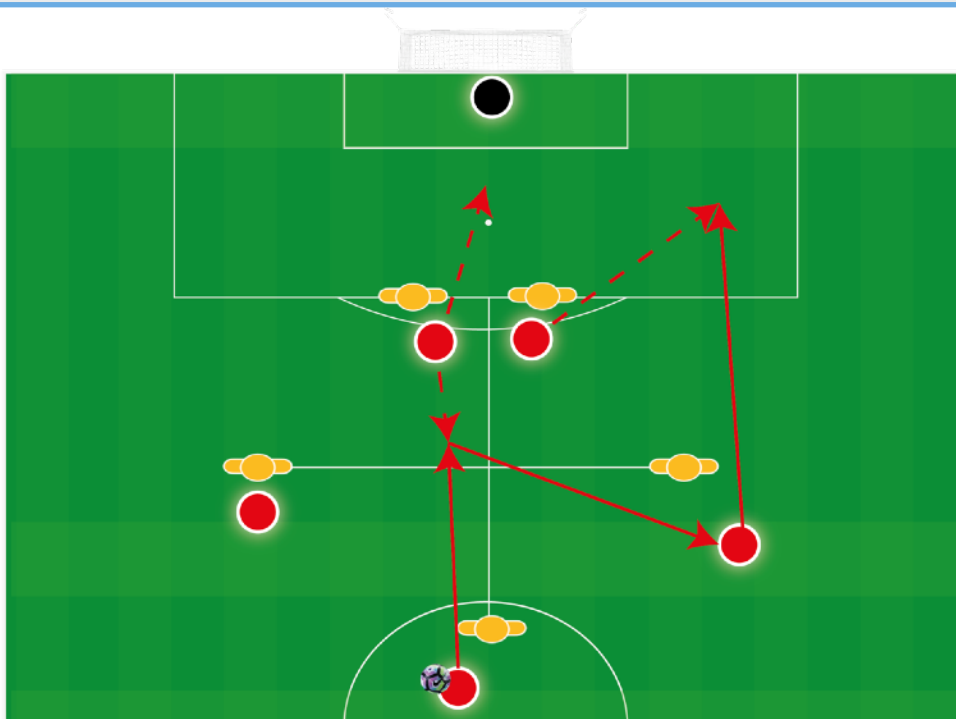
Here we are looking to create a slightly different rotation. The first pass is a vertical pass, something that we know is important within the Bielsa philosophy. The ball is then bounced wider into the inside channel, the pass is then played in behind into the striker to run on to. Once the ball has gone wide, we are then looking for the left sided striker to run in behind and look to finish from a cross or cutback.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Central Combination Practice 2

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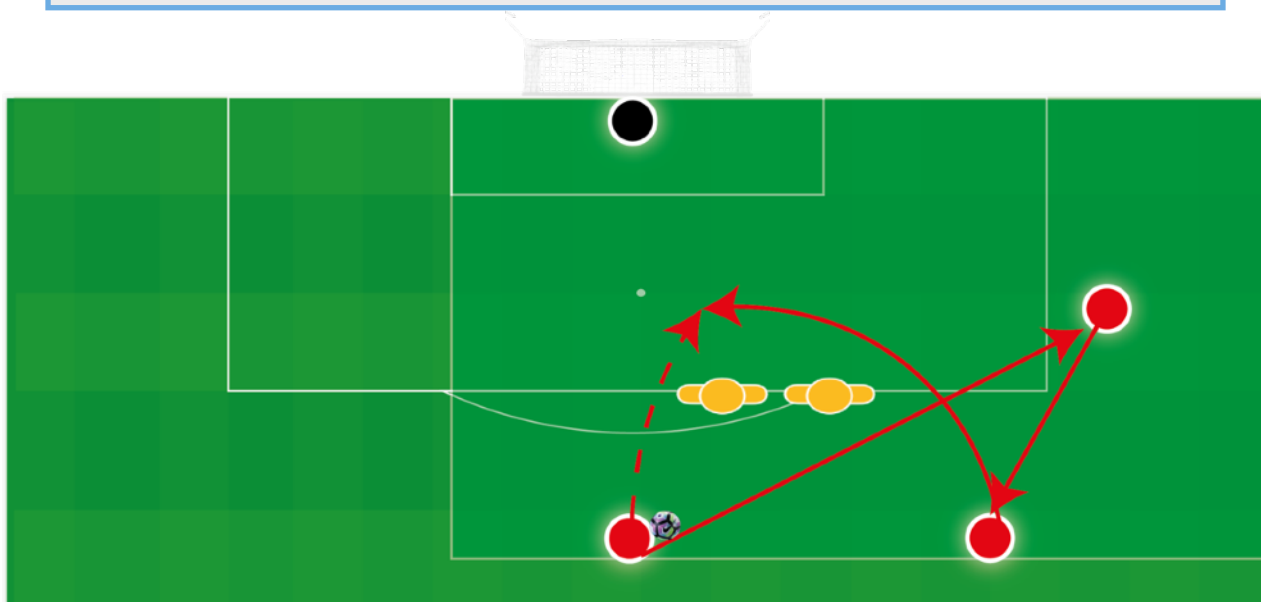
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Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Wide Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point

Make sure that the player finishing, is looking to finish first or second time as the situation must be realistic and challenging for the attacking player.



The ball starts with the striker who plays into the wide player who then sets the ball back into the inside midfielder. That player then slides the ball over the mannequins for the attack to run on to and score. This is realistic finishing practice for a side who use all five lanes. The attacker must then look to finish quickly under pressure with one or two touches limited.

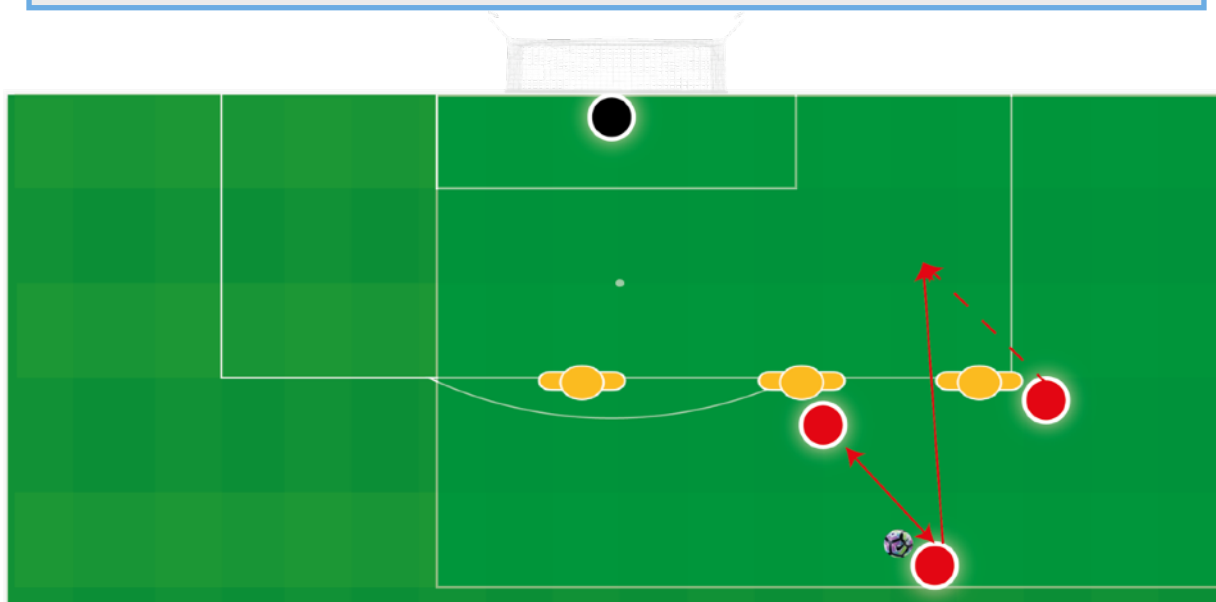
An easy progression for this practice, is for the wide player to apply pressure to the striker and make the practice slightly more realistic and challenging for the attacking player.

Scoring from Realistic Areas

Finishing Practices: Wide Combination Practice

Key Coaching Point

Scoring from a wide area is challenging but important. Although these situations might produce low x. They are still important to strike the ball across the goalkeeper and produce deflection across the ball.



This practice is not about upgrading the shooting opportunity but about being more effective at finishing from these wide areas. The practice involves three attacking players and they follow a simple passer routine to score. The ball starts with the deepest player, who bounces the ball off the player on the mannequin and then the ball is threaded between the inside channel. The winger then makes a run off the outside mannequin who then runs into the box and finishes from a tighter angle. The angle is intentionally quite tight and this is to train the wide finishing moments.

THE PARTIAL LIBERO SESSIONS

Partial Libero: Shifting Players to Recover from Lost 1v1's

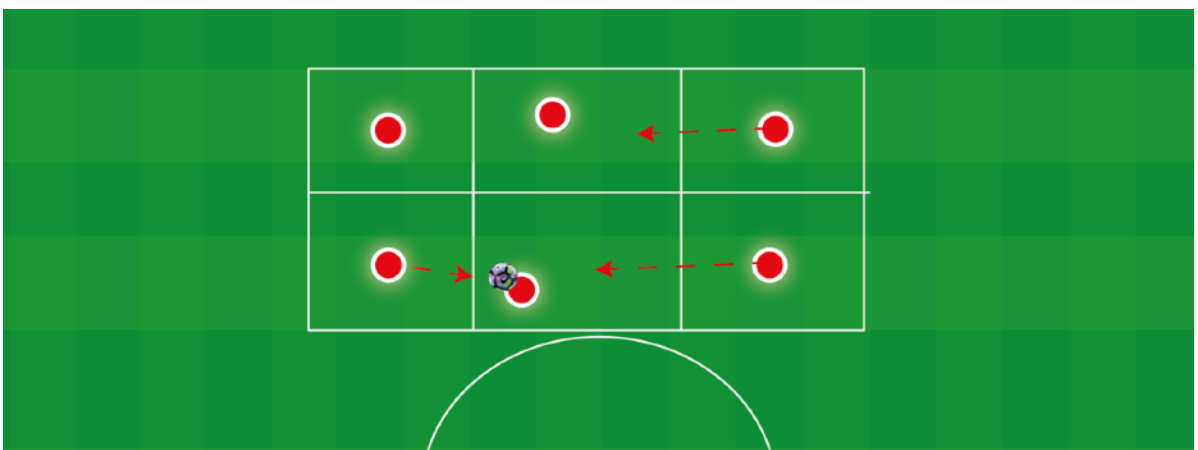
A Central player in possession

Key Coaching Point:

Remember this practice is low intensity, it isn't about creating high volume running. It's about players understanding the pictures and plans provided to them by the coach.

Here the practice is quite simple, we have six players in a 3x2 grid. The players then pass the ball amongst themselves with no pressure. The practice at this point will seem quite aimless and slow. The coach then blows a whistle and the players around the player in possession, make movements to apply pressure.

For example, in the image here the central players is on the left side of the grid and is not marked. So the nearest wide player comes to apply pressure and the opposite wide player also closes. But the defensive line do not step out, they allow it to become a 1v1 and a +1 behind. This is a slow and easily coached moment.



Partial Libero: Dealign With a Player Between Lines

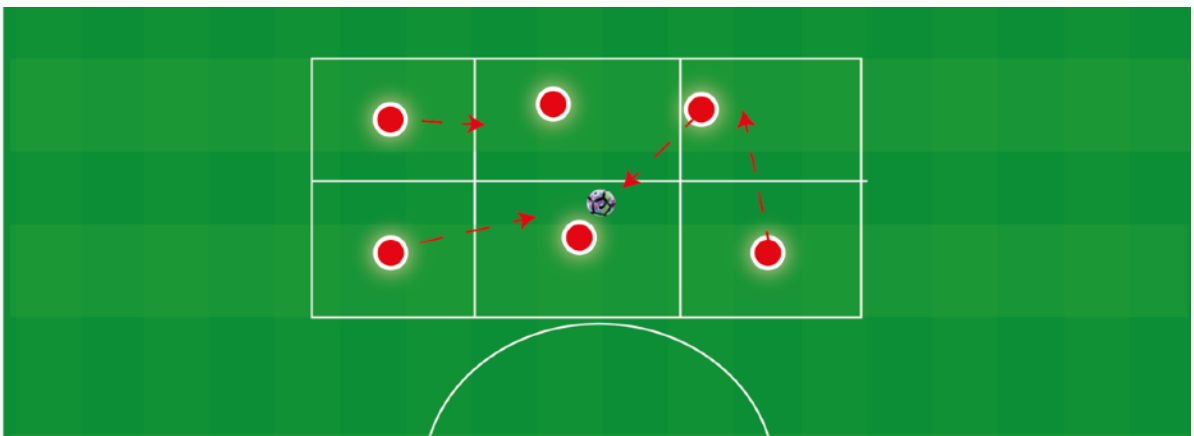
A Central player who is between lines

Key Coaching Point:

Remember to encourage the players behind the ball to still apply pressure, it is important we apply pressure around the ball and ensure that the opponent has limited space and time.

This is a slightly different tactical moment to coach. Here the central player has possession on the coaches whistle, and this time they are ahead of the two wide players and more central. This means that the recovering wide players would have little to no opportunity to recover and apply pressure. This would be the situation where a deeper player applies pressure.

In this moment, the outside centre back has applied pressure to go 1v1, not leaving any central space free. Whilst this occurs the midfield player has recovered into the space behind to cover the defensive line. This means the Partial Libero has been successful in covering 1v1 around the pitch and maintaining the principle of +1 on the defensive line.



Partial Libero: Protecting the Central Space from the Opponent

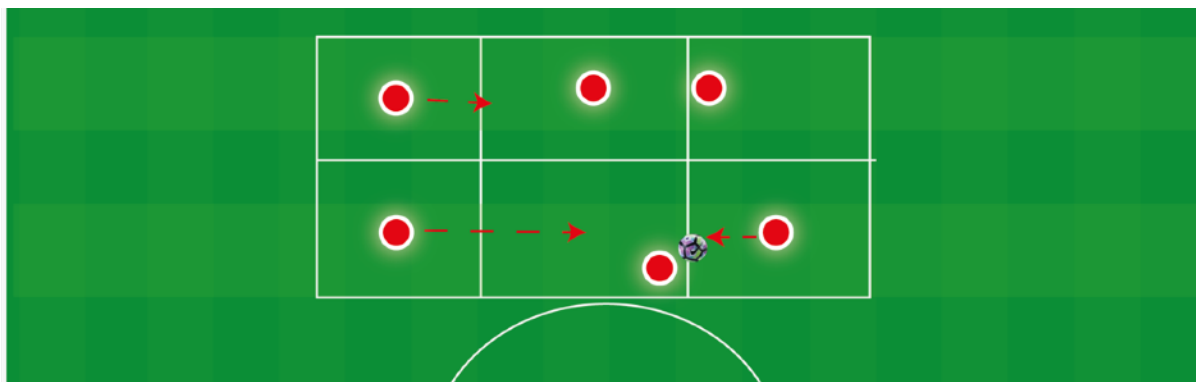
Keeping the Central Space Protected

Key Coaching Point:

Basic defensive principle still always apply when trying to regain defensive balance and structure after the man-orientated system has been broken by the opponent.

This situation is slightly different from the first. The opponent is now still the central player, but we are able to instantly apply 1v1 pressure from the use of the player in the bottom right grid. We then must make sure that the other players do not all apply pressure and leave their marker and cause more chaos.

The player in the bottom left grid must come across and protect the central space. But the other players must just make small adjustments and become slightly more narrow to prevent the opponent playing in the space. For example, the left sided centre-back has just moved into a slightly more narrow position to protect the +1 defensive principle.



Partial Libero: Dealing With Compromised Central Areas

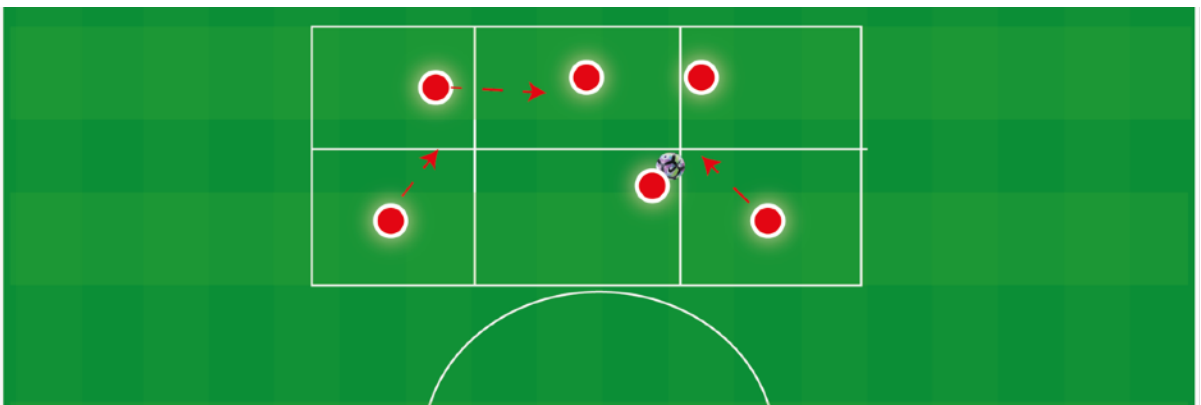
Preventing the Opponent Attacking Centrally

Key Coaching Point:

The most central-defender is always the most at risk, it is them who protects the central part of the pitch. We must ensure we can protect them in all moments, with the +1 Principle.

Here we see a similar, but tactically different situation than earlier. When the whistle has stopped the player in the central bottom grid is ahead of any recovering defender, and has a 1v1 opportunity with our +1 player on the defensive line. In this situation, we must allow this, and expect that our central player applies passive pressure and looks to defend 1v1.

Though as this happens, we should see both outside centre backs cover the space beside the defender to ensure that the shape is compact and narrow. This does not remove our two higher players from the practice, they are still expected to recover and apply pressure. This is because the defensive principle of delaying the opponent, could bring them into the game.



DEFENDING PRACTICES

Defending Practices: Developing the Recovery Run

Learn to defend on the blind side

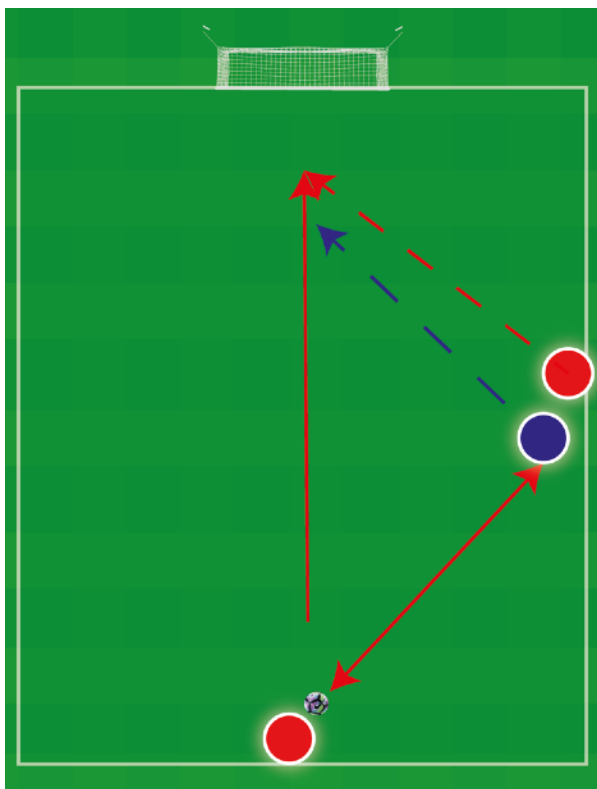
Key Coaching Point:

Learning how to make contact and effect the opponent without giving away a foul is a unique and difficult skill to learn. We must train this to become better at it.

This is a classic Bielsa practice, used to train a very unique and specific moment of the game. It is the first in the phase of defending, and has a slightly more complex beginning.

The red in possession plays a bounce pass with the opposition player, (blue) before the red then plays a pass into the space behind for his or her team mate in red to run on to.

Once this pass is played, the blue then needs to recover and apply pressure to the on running red as they attack goal. In this practice it is a goal to finish the practice, but depending on the physical returns, a coach might switch the goal for an end zone to encourage more 1v1 defending and more opportunity for the defender to recovery and influence the practice and game.



Defending Practices: Blocking the Opponents Cross

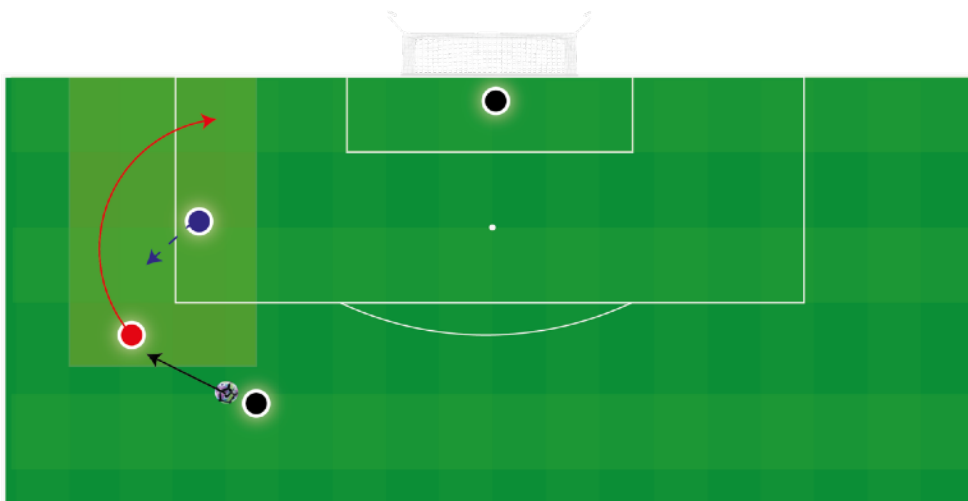
Putting Value on Preventing the Cross

Key Coaching Point:

Learning to defend 1v1 against a player who is looking to cross is important. How do we keep them outside? How to we prevent them entering the box?

Here we can see the coach or player passes the ball into the red in a small wide area, where the red and the blue look to go 1v1. The red has two objectives to either cross the ball, or beat the blue 1v1 and enter the box. The blue must look to keep play inside the yellow box and prevent the opponent crossing.

- Ensure that defender looks to engage the opponent 1v1 and keep them out of the box.
- Get a side on body to ensure the defender can go back and forward or left or right depending on the movement of the attacker.



Defending Practices: Blocking the Opponents Cross

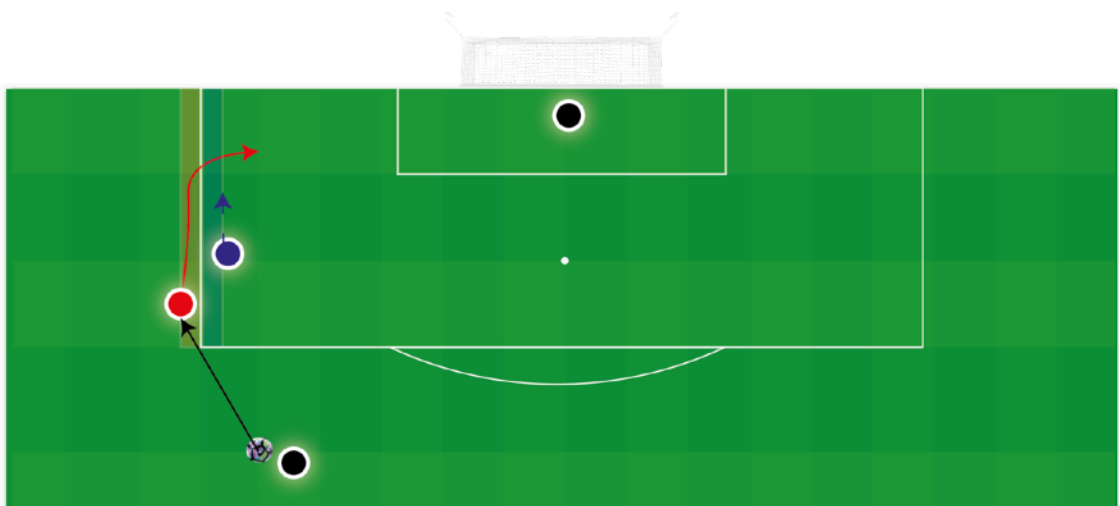
Putting Value on Blocking the Cross

Key Coaching Point:

How to prevent the opponent being able to cross the ball without being able to win the ball back.

Here is a simple practice where the attacker works down the line of the box and the defender works 1 yard inside that. Importantly, the defender can not tackle, they are only able to block the cross and prevent the opponent crossing the ball. It is important that the defender takes up an athletic side on position and keeps their head up to take visual queues from the ball, knee and shoulder off the attacker.

- The defender must not over commit and throw their body at the ball
- If the attacker has a weaker foot the defender might show them on to that foot.



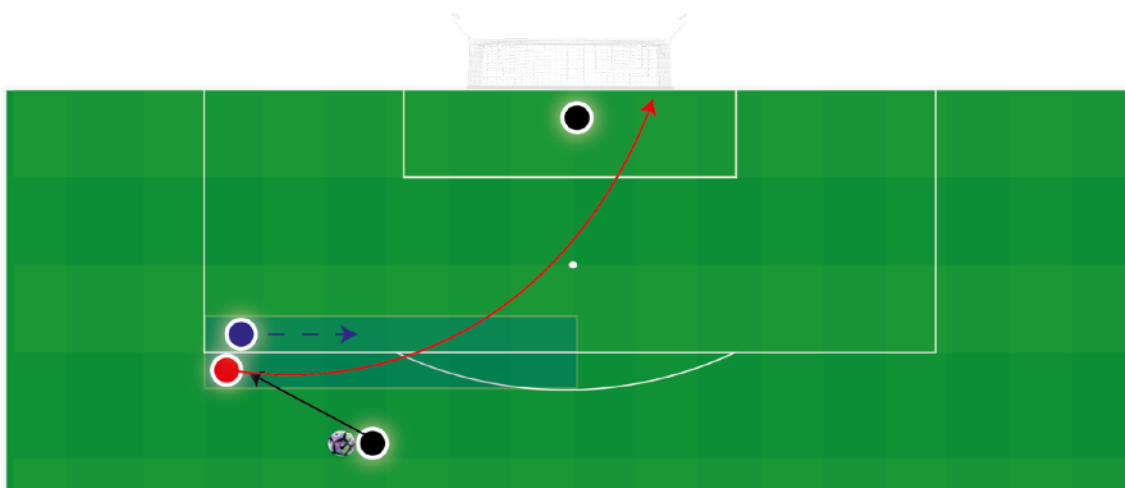
Defending Practices: Blocking the Opponents Shot

Putting Value on Blocking Shots

Key Coaching Point:

Look to keep the attackers head down and keep your body between the ball and the goal. This will give you the best chance of keeping the ball out of the back of the net.

Here we have a simple practice used to develop defensive players who are comfortable defending the edge of the box. Like the practice before, the attacker and defender play on a line just 1 yard apart and the defender cannot tackle. The attacker must move up and down the line looking to create enough space to have a shot on goal. The job of the defender is very simple, move effectively up and down the line, and prevent the opponent creating the extra yard of space they need to take a shot on goal. It is important to keep the attackers head down, and prevent them having enough time to take their leg back and finish.



Defending Practices: Using 'Delay' When Defending

Delaying the Opponents Attack

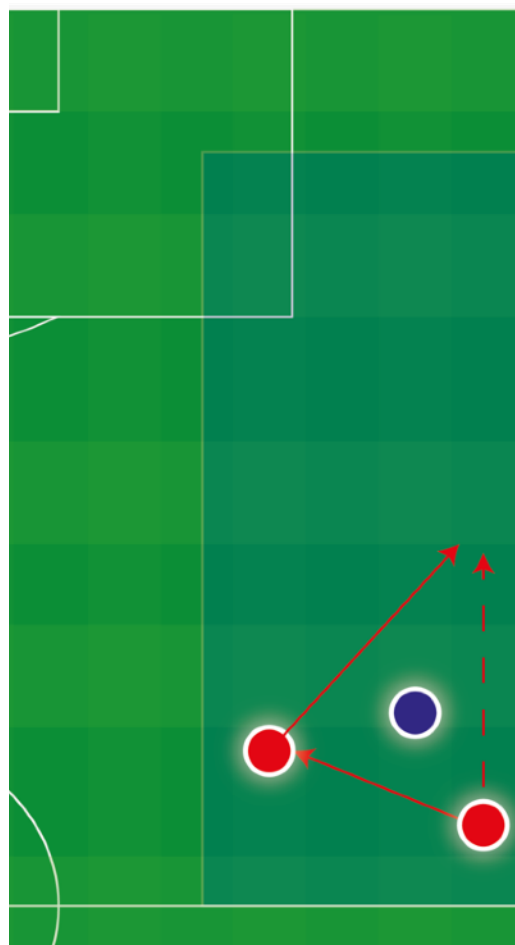
Key Coaching Point:

There will be moments in the game where the opponent create overloads, in those moments our players must recognise how to defend overloaded.

This is a simple 2v1 practice, the reds have possession of the ball, and they look to run with the ball from one end of the practice to the other. The blue has a simple job, that is to slow the opponents attack and keep them wide. The process of delay should give our team mates opportunity to recover and illuminate the overload.

A simple progression of this practice is to add a recovering defender to increase the realism and pressure on the red side as they attack.

The blue should look to take a body position that is open, showing the ball into the wide player and trying to keep possession in front of them. It becomes difficult when the ball is played in behind them and exposes the space behind.



Defending Practices: Training Anticipation In Context

Training Anticipation is Key

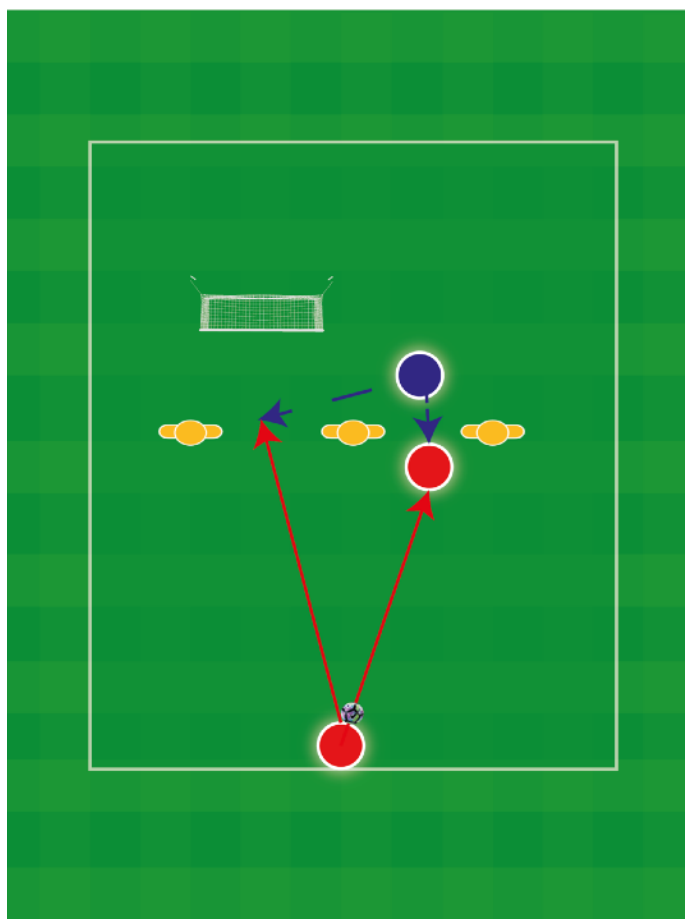
Key Coaching Point:

Anticipation is a key moment in Bielsa's system, his players must be brave and tactically aware of when to step in and try and win possession.

The practice is simple in its setup, but a method of challenging the decision making process of the defender and the attacker. First the red plays a pass into the red, the blue needs to make a decision of if they can step in and win possession in front of the red.

If this is not possible, then the blue must drop and look to defend the goal as the red has a second ball that they will look to fire into the back of the net.

This means the first ball is a chance of an anticipation, and the red might initially provide opportunity. Then the second ball is a defensive block in front of the mini goal to the left hand side.



Defending Practices: Training Anticipation In Players

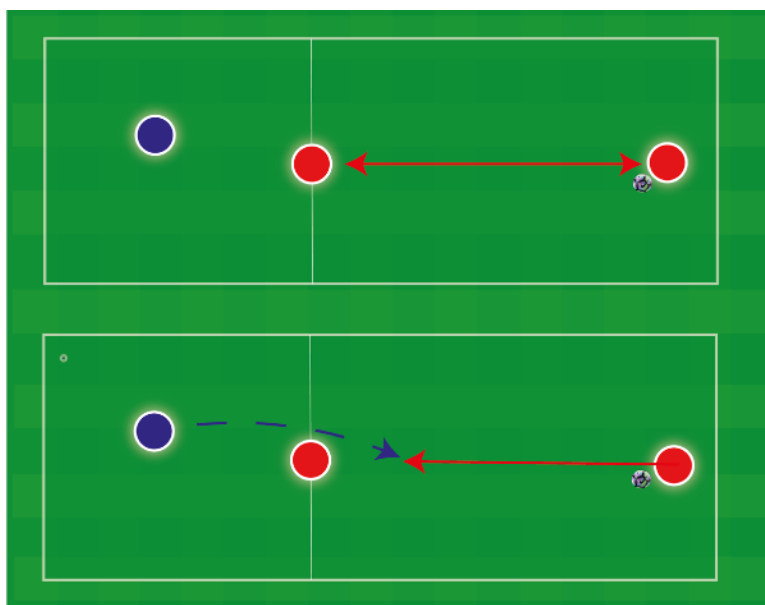
Training Anticipation is Key

Key Coaching Point:

The blue player must take cues from the passing player to realise when to step in and win possession, and when to drop and apply pressure.

This is a very well used practice by Marcelo Bielsa, stretching back to his time in Argentina and is likely one of his numbered practices. The reds are playing passes between themselves with no pressure on the ball, the blue must then look to step in and win possession before the receiving red player is able to receive

possession. This is just training the players to recognise when they are able to win possession and when they are not able to. The problem for the defender is if they step in early or late and do not win the ball, the opponent will be able to turn and attack our goal. This practice is repetitive and offers players a great learning opportunity.



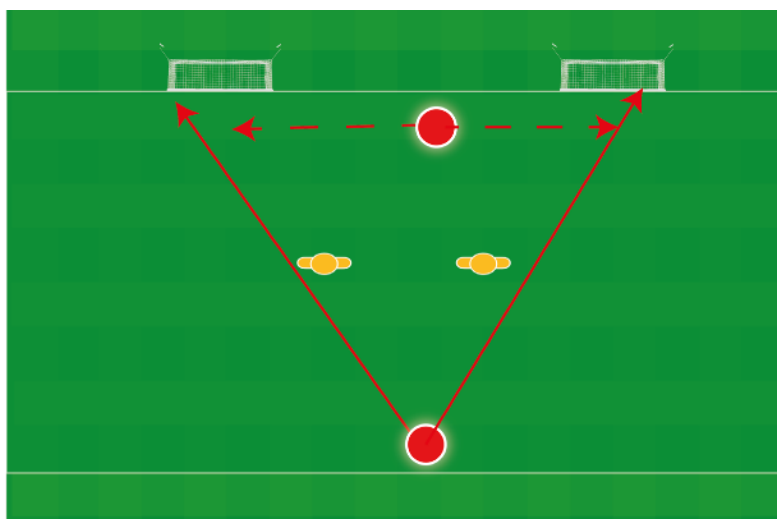
Defending Practices: Blocking the Passing Lane

Creating Aware Defenders

Key Coaching Point:

Ensure our players keep their eyes on the ball as it travels, and the opponent as they play the pass, picking up on visual cues is vital.

This is an easy practice for individual defending. The red at the bottom of the practice will take a touch and then look to fire the ball into either of the two mini goals. The second player then looks to defend both goals, which have to be far enough apart to challenge the players, but not make the task



impossible. The first then takes a touch and fires a ball into one of the goals, the second player then runs and blocks the ball with potentially a sliding tackle. Then the player gets the second ball and fires into the opposite goal. Again, the defender must get across and block the second goal. This is a high intensity practice that can be physically very demanding for the player blocking both goals, but can represent the important emergency defending that is so important.

Defending Practices: Defending the First and Second Phase

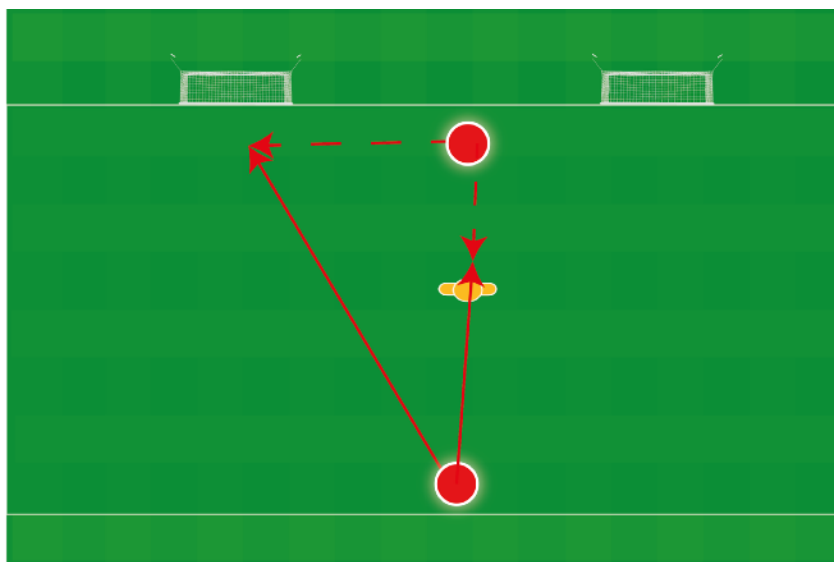
Creating Players Who Love Defending

Key Coaching Point:

Ensure the players see the importance in value in defending the goal, they must value the block as much as they might value a goal. They both have the same value on the game.

This practice is a progression from the previous session. The first red throws the ball in the air over a mannequin. The red then attacks the ball and heads it away. Then the player in possession looks to fire the ball into one of the two goals. The practice has two phases of

defending, the first is the header and then is the emergency defending situation in the second phase. The second phase involves blocking the ball from entering the mini-goal with any means. Of course where possible, the player should look to block the goal and maintain possession. But this is a best case scenario, it might be that the red just blocks the shot and cannot do more than this.



Defending Practices: Defending the Cut-Back Cross

Creating Players Who Love Defending

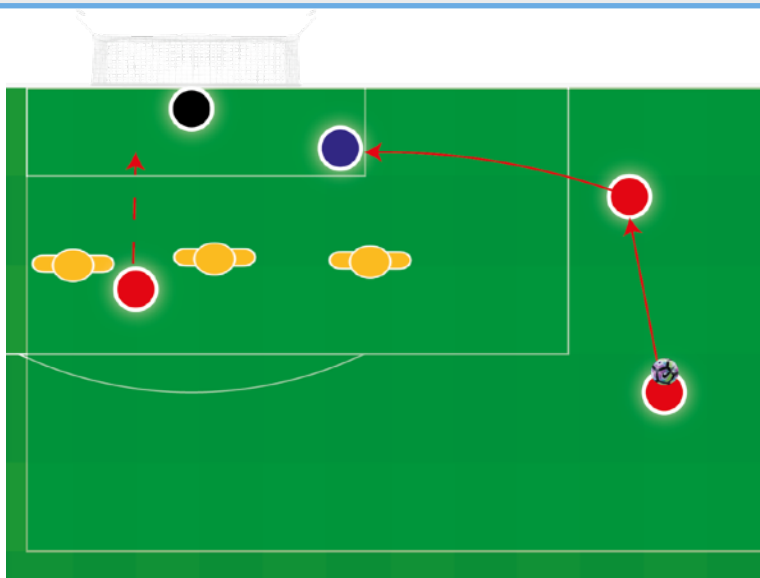
Key Coaching Point:

Blocking crosses is an important skill. Players must have balance, correct body positioning and make good contact with the ball.

This session plan is a way of providing repetition to players crossing the ball, and defenders performing the front space role in the defensive moment. Firstly, the red passes the ball into the wide player, who then looks to beat the front man by crossing either side of them (but the cross must be within the six

yard box) this means the cross can be effective, but will ultimately give the front space player an opportunity to make contact with the ball.

The crosser is not necessarily looking to beat the front post man every time, but to challenge the player to clear the ball away from danger. Making contact with the ball is important and sending the ball away from the danger. Sometimes players do not recognise the importance of making a clearance, an effective clearance eliminates the opponents attack completely.



BUILD-UP PLAY

Build-Up Play: Building Repetitive Patterns Under Limited Pressure

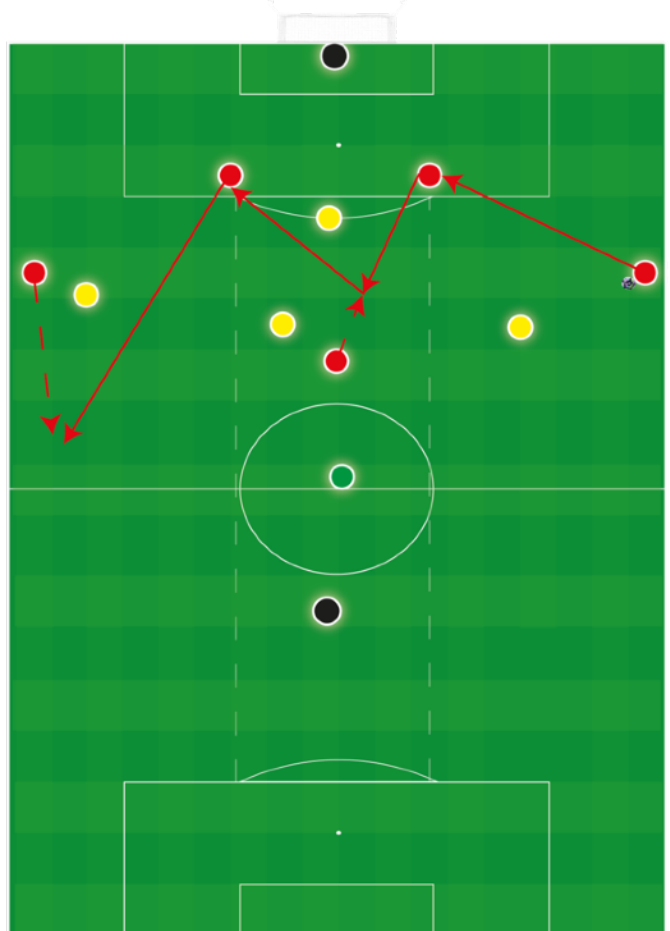
Building Confidence With Repetition

Key Coaching Point:

Ensure the basic technical components are in check, players must receive across the body and look to play forward and create angles to receive possession.

This practice is very simple, very low intensity and easy to replicate for any shape or formation. Bielsa would set up the defensive line of a back four or three depending on the time, with the first midfielder like and the goalkeeper. The team then look to break into the opposition half or play into the green striker.

The practice will then see the defensive shape play with an overload against the yellow front four. The reds look to keep moving the ball, making a minimum of four passes before finding the green. The reds are forced to stay on the ball to make the players make decisions under pressure and find the spare player.



Build-Up Play: Building Up Through Central Areas

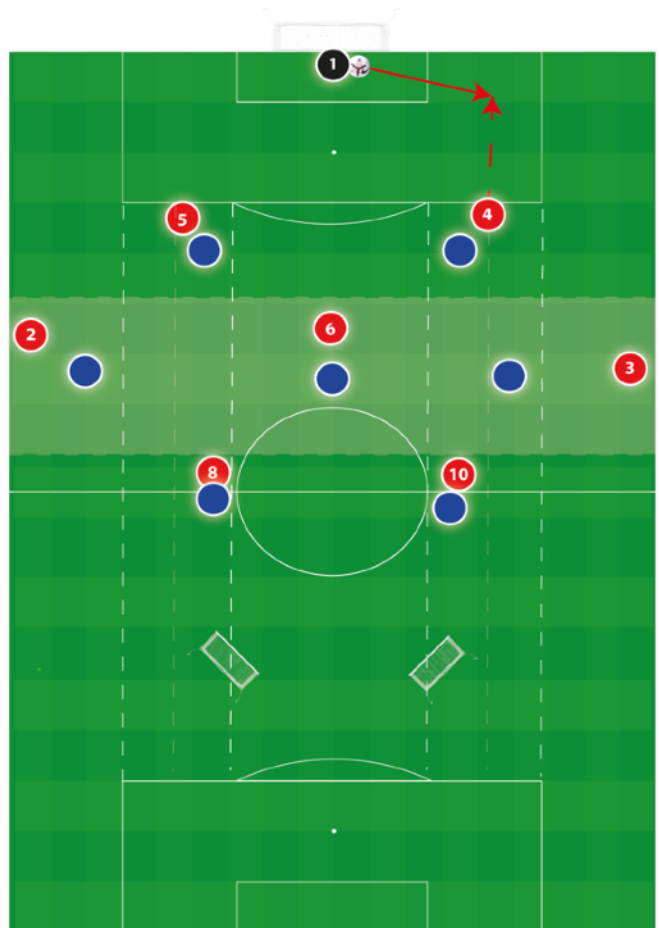
Building Central Overloads

Key Coaching Point:

This can be performed with or without the principle of +1 on the defensive line. For the practice, we have matched the players up 1v1 to increase the demands on the players.

The goalkeeper plays out in to the first phase of the practice, where we find ourselves matched up 2v2 against the opponents strikers. The goalkeeper acts as the overload on this line. The next line we find our players matched up 3v3 and on the next line we find we are within a 2v2.

The challenge is for players to use the receiving skills and 1v1 skills defined in the Bielsa sections before to beat their player and creates overloads. Every time the ball moves forward, a player is able to move forward into the next zone, if the team wishes. When the transition occurs, teams should be man-orientated on both sides. Displaying Bielsa Principles Effectively.



Build-Up Play: Playing Through the Second Line Rondo

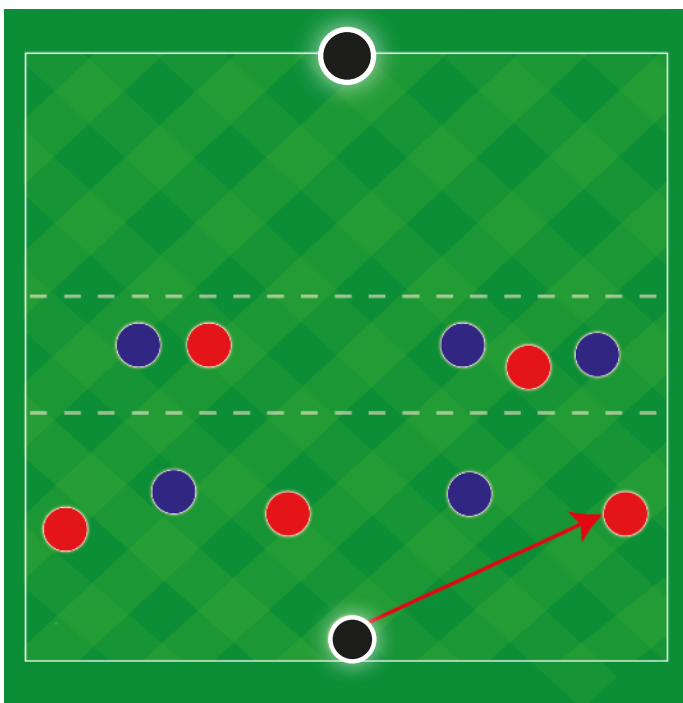
Playing Through Lines

Key Coaching Point:

The second line provides an underloaded area for our players to try and receive possession.

Here is a simple rondo that develops more than one of Bielsa's principles. Firstly, the reds look to keep possession within their half of the practice within their 4v2. This shape represents the goalkeeper and three defenders against two attackers. This would be identical to the way Bielsa's side would set up with a +1 Principle.

Once five passes have been made by the red and their end player, they can look to use the players further forward on the central line, to switch the ball out to the opposite side. For example, the pass can go into the middle red, who uses one of Bielsa's methods of receiving, to beat the blue and play into the opposite end. Ball speed is extremely important to make sure the blues are not able to block areas of ball progression.

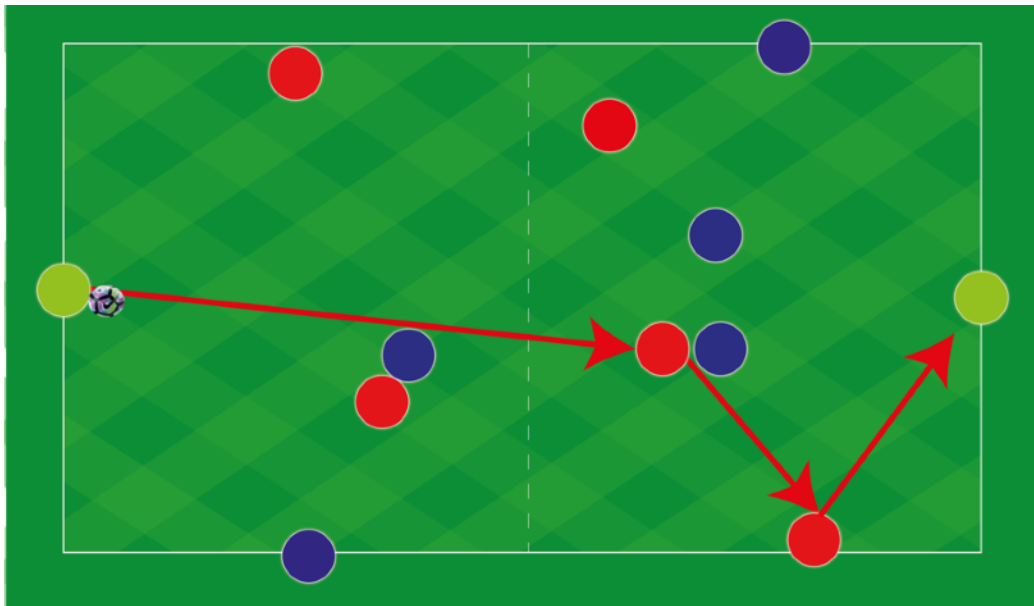


Build-Up Play: Playing Through an Unbalanced Shape

Playing Through Pressure

Key Coaching Point:

The best build-up play related pass might be further up the pitch than expected, it might be playing into the striker or number 10.



This is a simple rondo practice, taking place in a much larger area than a usual rondo. This will challenge the players physically and tactically. It is essentially a 5v5+2, where each of the inside players are able to play freely within a 3v3 in the centre, whilst the outside players play on diagonal lines to each other. This will create the feeling of an unbalanced shape, and force our players to create passing options on different vertical and horizontal lines.

Build-Up Play: Playing Through Limited Opportunity

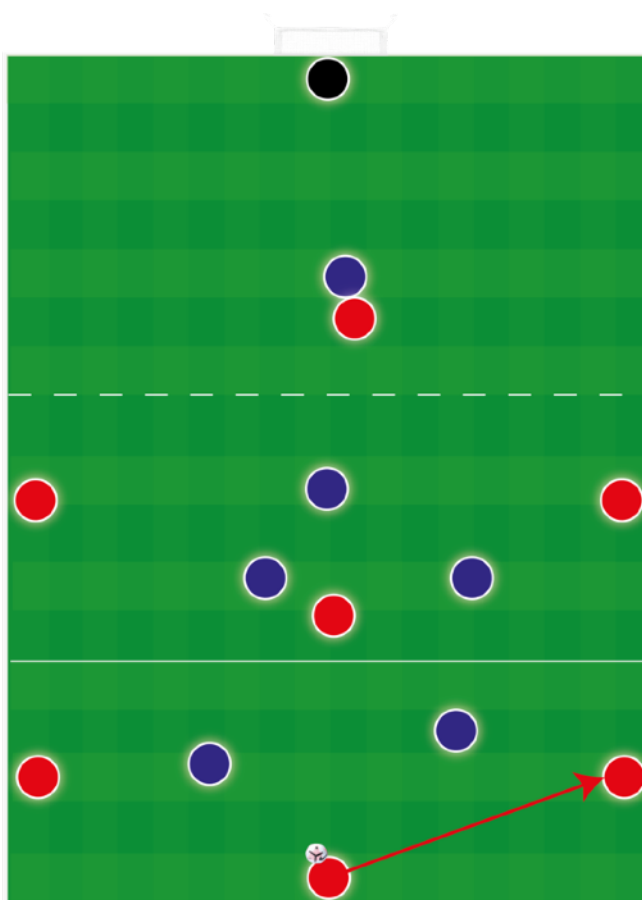
Playing Under Pressure

Key Coaching Point:

In order to be successful here, players will need to be able to beat a player using the five Bielsa approaches.

Here we see the reds attack the blues in a simple practice. The reds are 3v2 in the first area, 3v3 in the second third and 1v1+GK in the final third. The idea of the practice is for our players to move the ball quickly using their overload in the first phase, and to then move in through each line until they can get the ball to the attacker.

Once the ball goes into the attacker, a second player can overload the attacking third to create a goal scoring opportunity. We should encourage the midfield players to pass forward and run forward whenever possible. If needed, can our players create the up, back and through to penetrate the opponents shape.



Build-Up Play: Finding the Spare Player

Carousel

Find the Spare Player

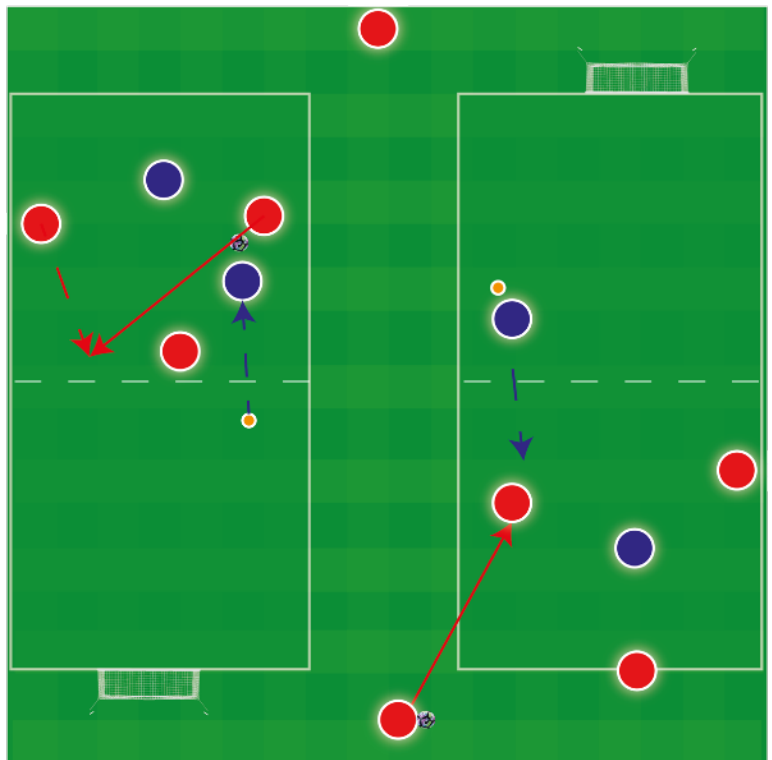
Key Coaching Point:

Ensure players know how to receive under pressure and how to break pressure with passes into the space behind.

Here we have a carousel practice where the same session is repeated on both sides and the reds move through the practice roles into the opposite side.

The bottom red plays a pass into the 3v1 in the start of the practice. As this ball travels into the first half, the second blue is released to create a 3v2. The blue must anticipate if they are able to run in and win possession instantly or do they need to delay and protect the goal.

Regardless of the outcome of the blue, the reds continue to move the ball as quickly as possible and travel into the opposite side of the practice and score and move on to the next side.



Build-Up Play: Breaking Into the Opponents Half

Combining Tactics + 1v1 Dominance

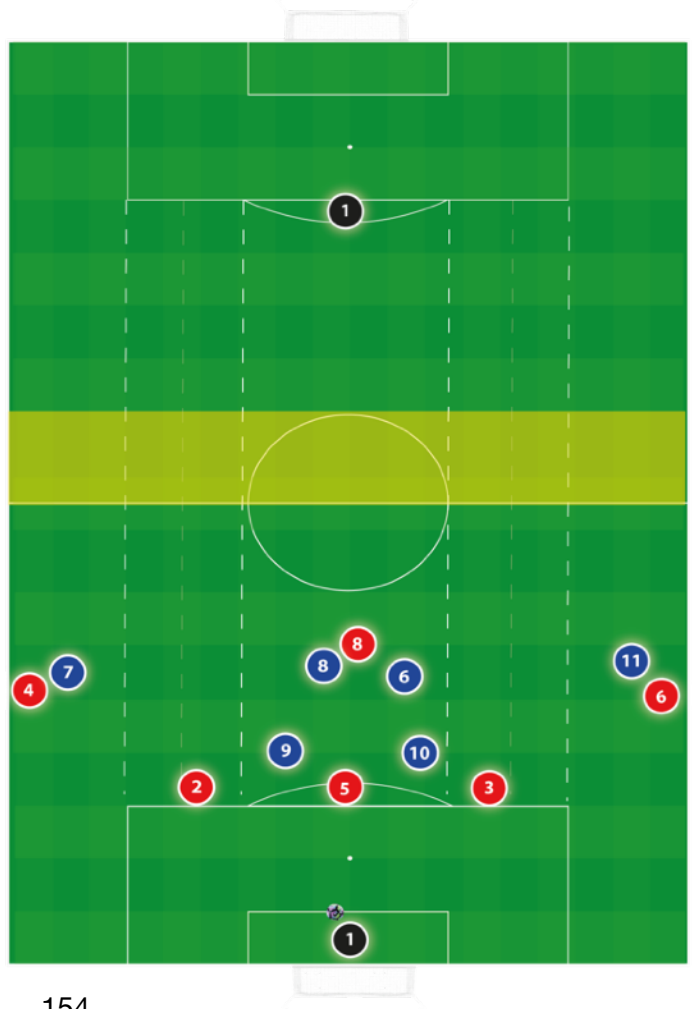
Key Coaching Point:

Encourage players to become comfortable receiving possession of the ball under pressure of opponent players anywhere and everywhere.

This is a simple, yet brilliant practice. It sees the reds play the blues in one half of a pitch. The reds have a 1-3-3 formation, whilst the blues defend within a 4-2 formation (blue GK is only in on the graphic for reference).

The reds look to play out using the +1 principle, moving the ball quickly to try and play into the feet of a midfield player or travel with the ball to break into the yellow area beyond the half way line.

The blues have an under-load on the first line and an overload on the second line, they can change this as the practice develops to manipulate the challenge and the problem for the red team.



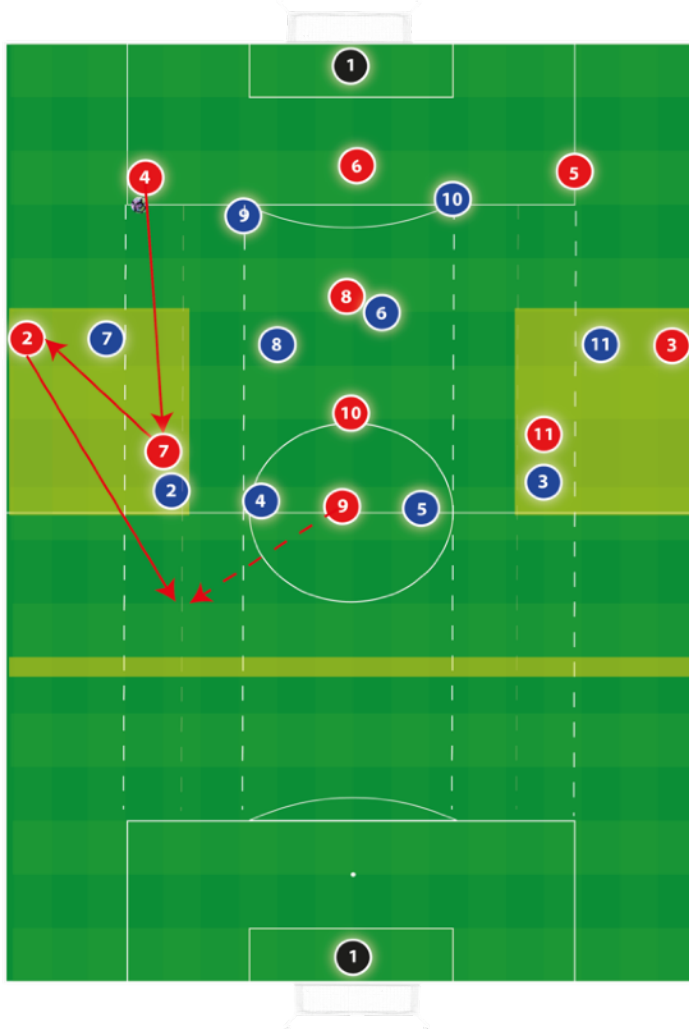
Build-Up Play: Using Overloads to Exploit Space

Exploit Numerical Advantages

Key Coaching Point:

Use the lanes as a reference point to try and control the pitch, controlling the width and the depth will allow our players to create numerical overloads to play forward and attack the opponent.

Here we can see an 11v11 game setup within a full pitch scenario. For this practice, the goalkeeper will start with possession of the ball. This means for the majority of the practice we will only be actively using half the pitch. In this session, we will see Bielsa's team build-up against a 1-4-4-2 with a 1-3-3-3-1 formation. We are looking to lock the wide players 2v2 in each of the wide channels. This will mean numerically we do not have an advantage. However, once the ball goes into these situations can our players either perform a vertical up, back and through. Secondly, can a midfield player break into the zone to support the build-up and create a 3v2 overload.



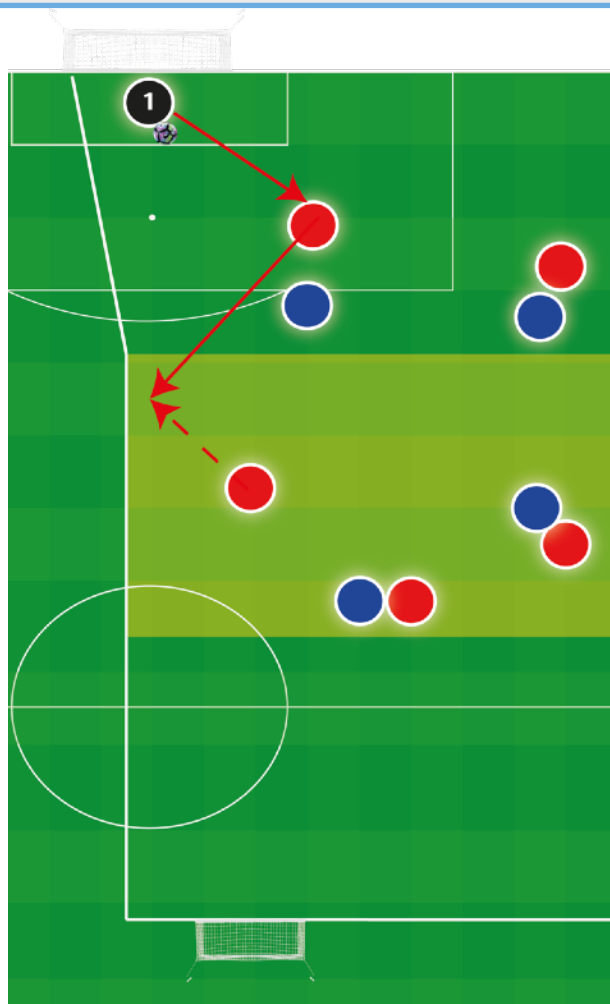
Build-Up Play: Using a Midfield Overload to Play Through

Using Midfield Overloads

Key Coaching Point:

The spare midfield player needs to be effective and dynamic in possession. Can they play on the outside shoulders of the pressing attackers to create additional passing lanes.

The practice starts with the goalkeeper, and then the ball moves into a 2v2 in the first part of the practice. Remember, the blues cannot drop into the box until the ball is moving. The reds then look to move the ball into the middle phase where they hold a 3v2 advantage. The reds then need to penetrate into the final third and score by using one of a few different methods. They are able to run into the final third and score (direct/dynamic runs are an important skill for a Bielsa player) the second will be to use a vertical combination to try and unlock the space behind and score. Once the ball goes into the yellow zone, the blue attackers can recover and apply pressure to the reds and remove their overload, if they are not quick with possession of the ball.



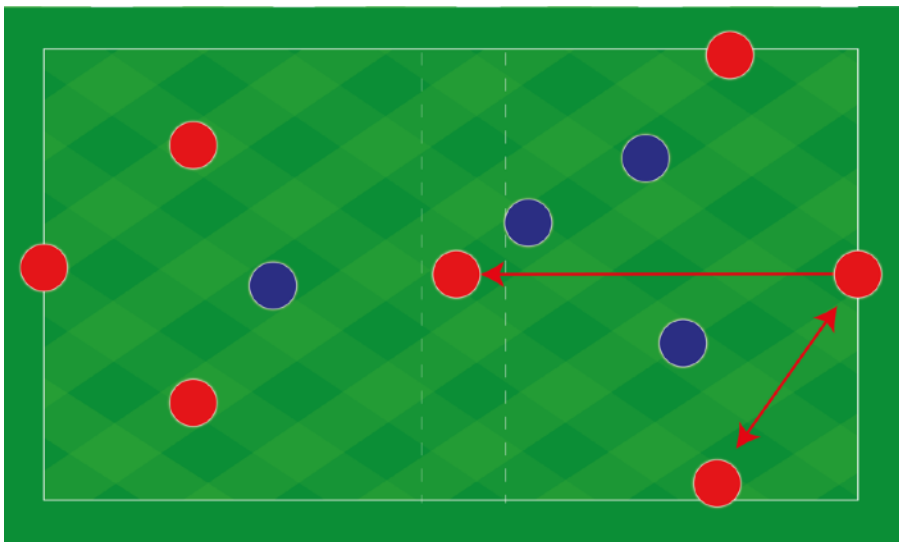
POSSESSION PRACTICES

Possession Practices: 7v4 Playing Centrally Rondo

Developing Progressive Possession

Key Coaching Point:

Here the central player, has a key role in possession of the ball. It is only this player who can progress the ball and they must be aware of when to turn and when to play the way they are facing



This 7v4 Rondo focuses on using positional play to move the ball and find the spare player to progress the ball forwards. The reds need to make three passes in the first half, before playing into the central player who can switch the ball out to the opposite side. Once the ball has progressed two more players transfer to the opposite side of the practice where the same 4v3 occurs within the opposite side of the practice.

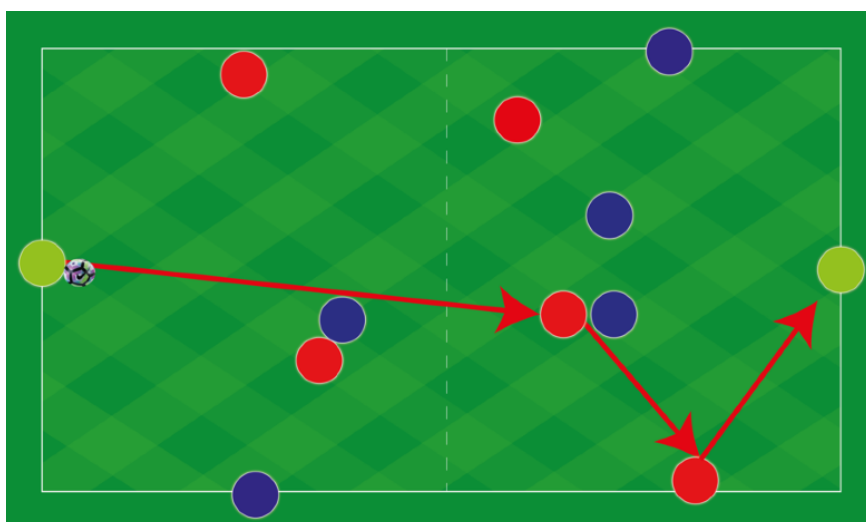
The only difference on this side is the two wide players are within the practice not on the outside. This means there is more flexibility in their movement but also more opportunity for them to make positive and negative decisions.

Possession Practices: 5v5+2 Playing Centrally Rondo

Developing Progressive Possession

Key Coaching Point:

The vertical passes in this practice hold the key to moving the ball from end to end. Progression only occurs when the players are able to move the ball vertically through the opposition lines.



This 5v5+2 practice provides an opportunity for players to play through the vertical lines of the opponent with the ball, whilst trying to control as much space as possible. The players are able to move freely within the practice in a 3v3 whilst, to begin with, four players are locked to the outside of the shape (+ the two end players). The players then look to use the outside players who are on different vertical lines, to create combinations and play from green to green. If there is a transition within the practice, the play simply moves from team to team, with the addition of the outside players for overloads. It is important that players recognise where and when to play first time to increase the ball speed and purpose of the possession.

Possession Practices: 6v6 End Ball Combination Game

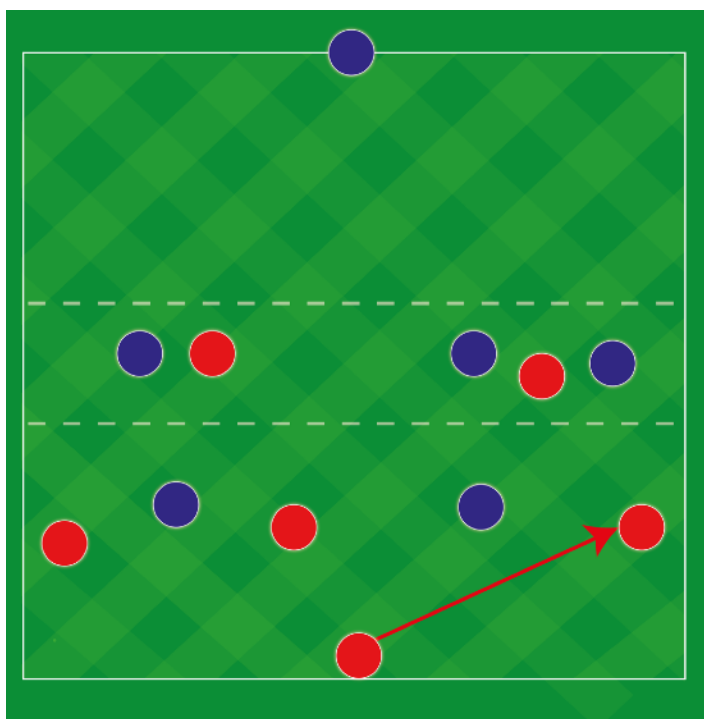
Creating Forward Thinking Players

Key Coaching Point:

We have already discussed five ways in which you can beat your marker, it is important that our players are able and willing to try these moves in areas of this practice.

The ball starts with the reds in this 6v6 practice. The reds move the ball into the first phase, where they control possession using a 6v5 overload, as the end player is locked out of the practice. The second phase sees the reds overloaded 3v2 providing challenge in terms of ball progression. The reds must simply just keep possession of the ball, looking to use the top players to maintain possession, even under their overloaded pressure off 2v3. However, if the blues

win possession back, the practice becomes transition based, and the blues switch into their end player and try to complete the same exercise that the reds just attempted. Here the blues drop into a 6v5 overload with a 3v2 advantage in their first third and a 2v3 under-load in the middle section.



Possession Practices: 8v4+2 Progressive Possession Practice

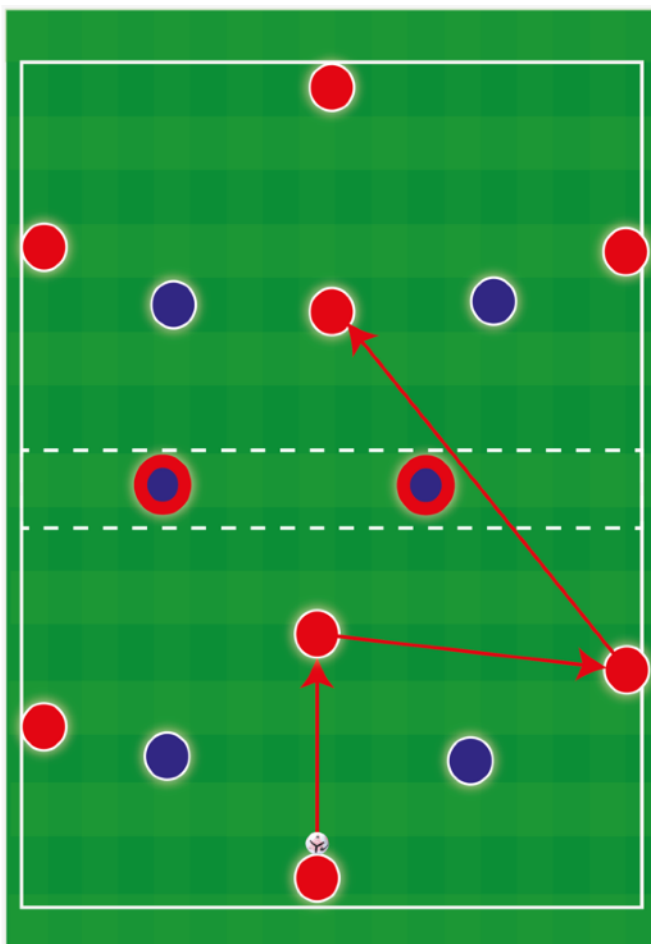
Creating Forward Thinking Players

Key Coaching Point:

Develop players who are comfortable playing through the lines vertically. The pass must be quick and effective to get through the opponents shape.

This is a low intensity practice that focuses on the maintenance of the ball under low to medium pressure. The reds keep possession within the shape overloading the opponents in most phases. The central players are neutral but limited to one touch. So when these players receive possession they are a trigger to be pressed as they know the ball will leave their control with their first touch.

If the blues regain possession, the neutral players join the blues in keeping the ball within a 6v6 setup, with the top and bottom player staying out of the practice and the reds hunting against the blues to win possession back.



Possession Practices: Creating Space to Stay on the Ball

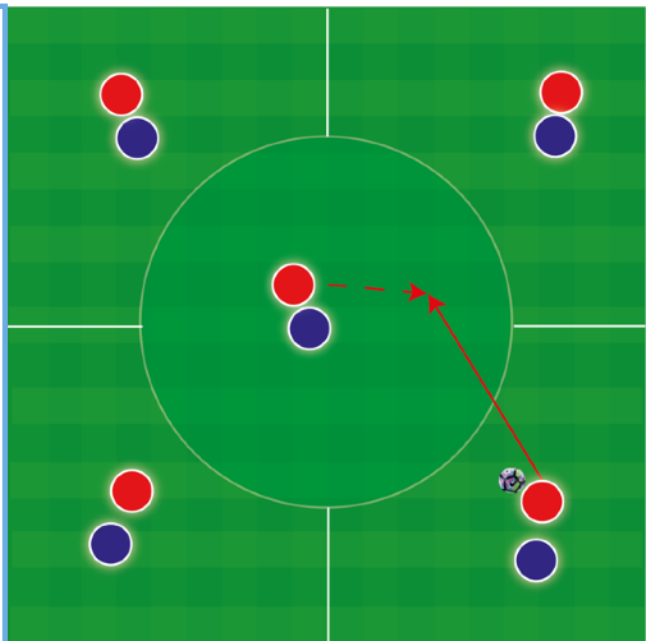
Staying on The Ball

Key Coaching Point:

Do not forget to remind players the importance of being 1v1 dominant in all moments. This involves moments with and without the ball.

This is a 5v5 practice where every player is responsible for a unique element of the pitch. For the central player, we will use a midfielder player who we want to carry possession of the ball and be 1v1 dominant. The side in possession then look to simply keep the ball from the opponent without conceding a transition. If the opponent win possession back, they just look to keep the ball as their opponent previously did.

- Double movements to receive away from the opponent.
- When to play one touch and when to stay on the ball to attract pressure.
- Can our players use the five different receiving skills to beat an opposition player.
- Focus on the weight of pass to beat an opponent during the balls travel time.



MURDER BALL

MURDER BALL

The Famous Large Sided Game Used by Marcelo Bielsa

Over the last decade Marcelo Bielsa has been famous for one practice more than any other, a form of 11v11 that players have discribed as the most intense training session they have ever participated in at any club or with any coach.

Players have spoke about how the practice is more intense, and more competitve than any moment during the week. This means that when the players are challenging physically on the weekend they have already become used to competing at higher intensities than the game asks of them.

Local news outlets around Leeds have said that ‘Murderball’ has become the hallmark of his legacy in Yorkshire, and that the players enjoy this moment more than any in their training week. Even with his intense double training session demands, it is Murderball that is set apart.

Session Design

The practice is essentially an 11v11 on a full size pitch. The players find coaches with balls on the outside of the pitch ready to throw the ball back in as soon as it leaves. The coaches are screaming and demanding the players work harder and harder.

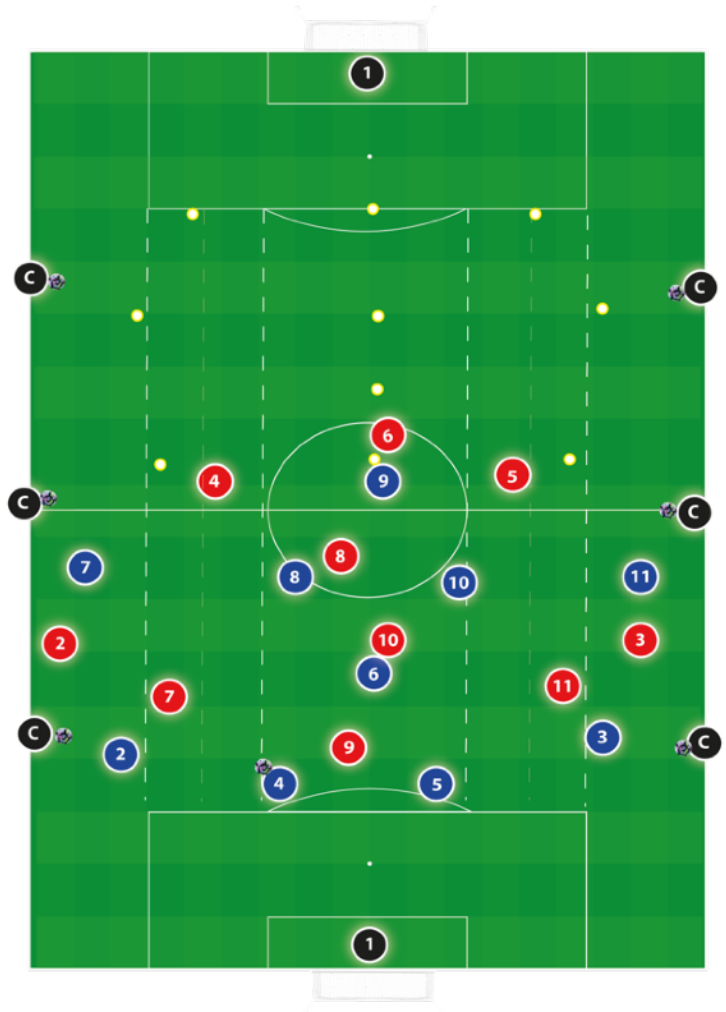
At times there are cones on the pitch, and the players must sprint back to their cone as soon as the ball goes out of play. However, there will be no recovery time as the ball will often start from the goalkeeper, who has 2 seconds to play before the players are expected to sprint again pressing the side in possession.

It is our understanding that the practice holds little rules and no stop-start coaching. The players must work as hard as physically possible for the time period. Although the timings change, players have spoken at working in five minute blocks for 20-25 minutes.

MURDER BALL

The Famous Large Sided Game Used by Marcelo Bielsa

In the image to the right we can see what the practice might look like in its 11v11 context. The coaches are on the outside encouraging and demanding from the players, whilst the cones represent the recover runs the players must make when the ball leaves the pitch.



“That’s the real blowout of the week and I’m not joking you, that’s about ten times harder than a game,”

Patrick Bamford.

“It’s basically playing 11 v 11 with no stops,”

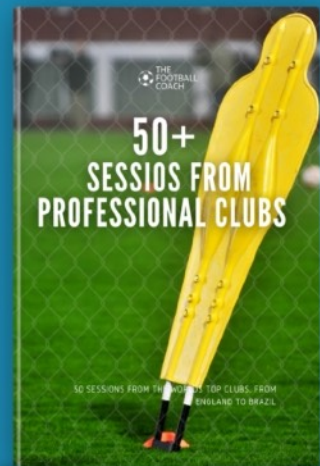
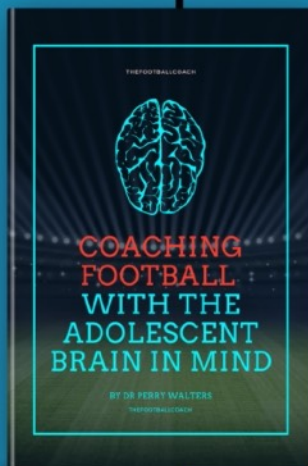
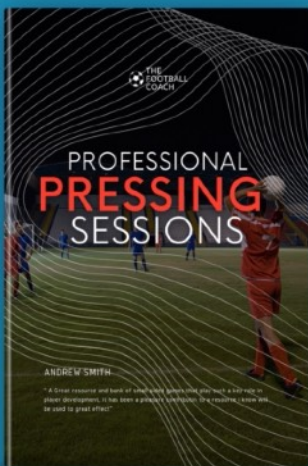
Mateusz Klich.

“At the end, the game is so open, it’s just like basketball”

Ben White.



Thank You For Reading!



THEFOOTBALLCOACH