

MANCHESTER CITY

PEP GUARDIOLA

Creating and
finishing

**+
MICHAEL
BEALE**
Improving
the central
diamond



**+
DARREN FERGUSON**
Defending and attacking
skills when overloaded

**JIMMY FLOYD
HASSELBAINK &
DINO MAAMRIA**
Attacking transitions

CHRIS DAVIES
Building an attack
against a high press

INTERVIEW: LUTON TOWN'S MANAGER NATHAN JONES

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to the June 2021 issue of *Elite Soccer*. As many coaches start to turn their attention to their plans for next season, this month we have another selection of inspiring training sessions written by some of the professional game's top managers and coaches.

In this issue we are thrilled to welcome Pep Guardiola to the pages of *Elite Soccer*. In the run up to Manchester City's first ever Champions League final appearance, he has been kind enough to share a training session that is all about creating and finishing from a variety of distances and positions in and around the penalty box.

Darren Ferguson has just achieved promotion to the EFL Championship for Peterborough United and he has shared a session that he uses regularly with his team. It's an activity that encourages players to make clear attacking decisions and then quickly switch to defence and again make the correct decisions, this time whilst facing an overload.

Manager Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink and his assistant Dino Maamria have transformed the form of Burton Albion since taking on the team at the beginning of this year and they have penned a tactical session

based around pressing high, reacting quickly to the attacking transition and rehearsing the players to counter-attack with speed.

We're delighted to close the issue with sessions by two highly respected coaches, Leicester City assistant manager, Chris Davies, and Rangers first team coach,

"Pep Guardiola has shared a session that is all about creating and finishing from a variety of distances and positions"

Michael Beale. Chris Davies looks at building attacks by playing out from the back and beating the high press, while Michael Beale outlines the best way to improve a team's use of the midfield diamond.

I hope you find that this month's sessions will assist your coaching and please let us know how you get on. We will return next month with five more sessions to help develop your team.

Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman

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CONTENTS

4

MANCHESTER CITY

PEP GUARDIOLA

Creating and finishing



11

PETERBOROUGH
UNITED

**DARREN
FERGUSON**

Defending and
attacking skills
when overloaded



15

BURTON ALBION

**JIMMY FLOYD
HASSELBAINK &
DINO MAAMRIA**

Attacking transitions



19

LEICESTER CITY

**CHRIS
DAVIES**

Building an
attack against
a high press



23

RANGERS

**MICHAEL
BEALE**

Improving
the central
diamond



28

SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Looking at the positives

30

INTERVIEW

Luton Town manager Nathan Jones

**MANAGER PROFILE****PEP GUARDIOLA**
MANCHESTER CITY

After spending the majority of his playing career with Barcelona, it was with the club's reserve team, Barcelona B, that Pep Guardiola kick-started his coaching career. After winning the Tercera División title in his one season in charge, he was promptly promoted to manager of the club's first team in the summer of 2008.

In his debut season as manager, he guided Barcelona to the treble of La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the UEFA Champions League, becoming the youngest manager to win Europe's premier club competition.

In his four-year stint in charge at the Camp Nou, he won 14 major honours, including three league titles. He also won the Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup twice each and was named the FIFA World Coach of the Year in 2011.

After a year away from the game, he joined Bayern Munich as manager in June 2013 and he won the Bundesliga in each of his three seasons in Germany, as well as two domestic doubles.

He moved to England in 2016 to join Manchester City and guided the club to a Premier League title in his second campaign, breaking numerous domestic records as City became the first team to achieve 100 league points in a season. In 2018 Guardiola was honoured by his peers when he was named the LMA Manager of the Year. He won a second consecutive Premier League and EFL Cup double the following season, as well as the FA Cup, becoming the first manager to win the domestic treble in English men's football.

He led City to the club's first ever Champions League final in the 2020-21 season, in addition to winning another Premier League title and receiving the LMA Manager of the Year award.

SESSION**CREATING AND FINISHING**

This training session is all about creating and finishing from a variety of distances and positions in and around the box. The majority of chances created will be from crosses but scoring opportunities also arise from both through balls and combination play.

This session is good preparation for leading into tactical work, or to reinforce some coaching points before a game.

What we want to try to do is to build solid connections and relationships between certain positions and the players that play in those positions.

The aim is to give the players a clear understanding of the way we want them to move, both with and without the ball, and to help them appreciate the decisions they have to take in certain areas of the pitch, depending on the situations that arise.

Within this practice we can try to correct our tempo and the timing of certain aspects of our play, while trying to be as clinical as we can around the box.

This type of session would be key to our training each week and it is usually typical of any of the days leading into a match. We will look to repeat the same ideas and cover similar principles and concepts each week in order to improve the overall level, tempo and intensity of our play. This way it allows us the opportunity to add more detail as we return to it again in the future.

"The aim is to give the players a clear understanding of the way we want them to move, both with and without the ball"

PEP GUARDIOLA CREATING AND FINISHING

Set-up

Area:

Up to half a pitch

Equipment:

Balls, bibs, cones, training hurdles, poles, hoops, 8 mannequins, target goals, 1 full size goal

Number of Players:

Up to full squad

Session time:

Warm-up: 10mins

Boxes: 15mins

Unopposed movement

patterns: 25mins

Tactical patterns: 25mins

WARM-UP

We begin with the players warming up by performing physical exercises in a circuit, going through all four different stages at moderate pace, as shown [1].

Stage 1: Each player runs to the mannequin and goes around it before zigzagging through a series of poles to the end. They then join the back of the queue at the next exercise.

Stage 2: Each player runs to the mannequin and goes around it before jumping over six training hurdles. They then join the back of the queue at the next exercise.

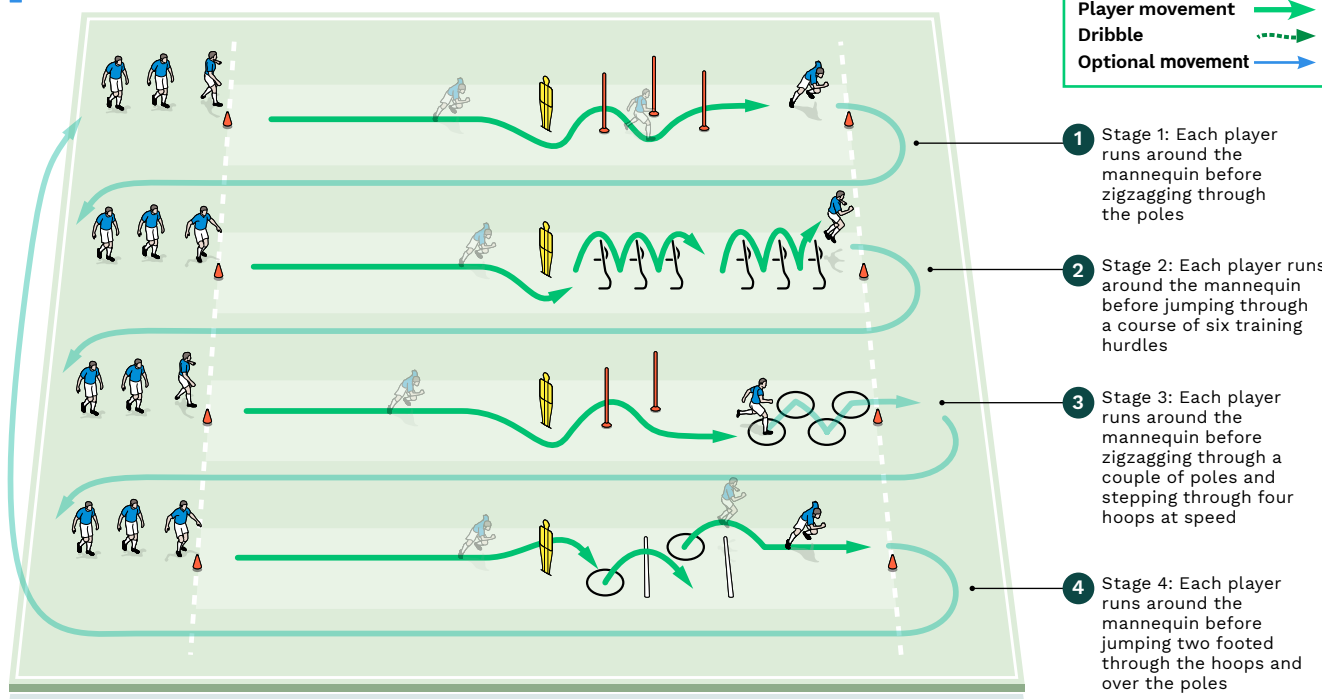
Stage 3: Each player runs to the mannequin and

goes around it before zigzagging through a couple of poles and stepping through the four hoops at the end. They do this at speed with the right foot stepping in each hoop on the right and the left foot stepping in each hoop on the left. They then join the back of the queue at the next exercise.

Stage 4: Each player runs to the mannequin and goes around it before jumping two footed through the hoops and over the poles on the ground. They then join the back of the queue at the first exercise and go around the course again.

We would run this activity for 10 minutes.

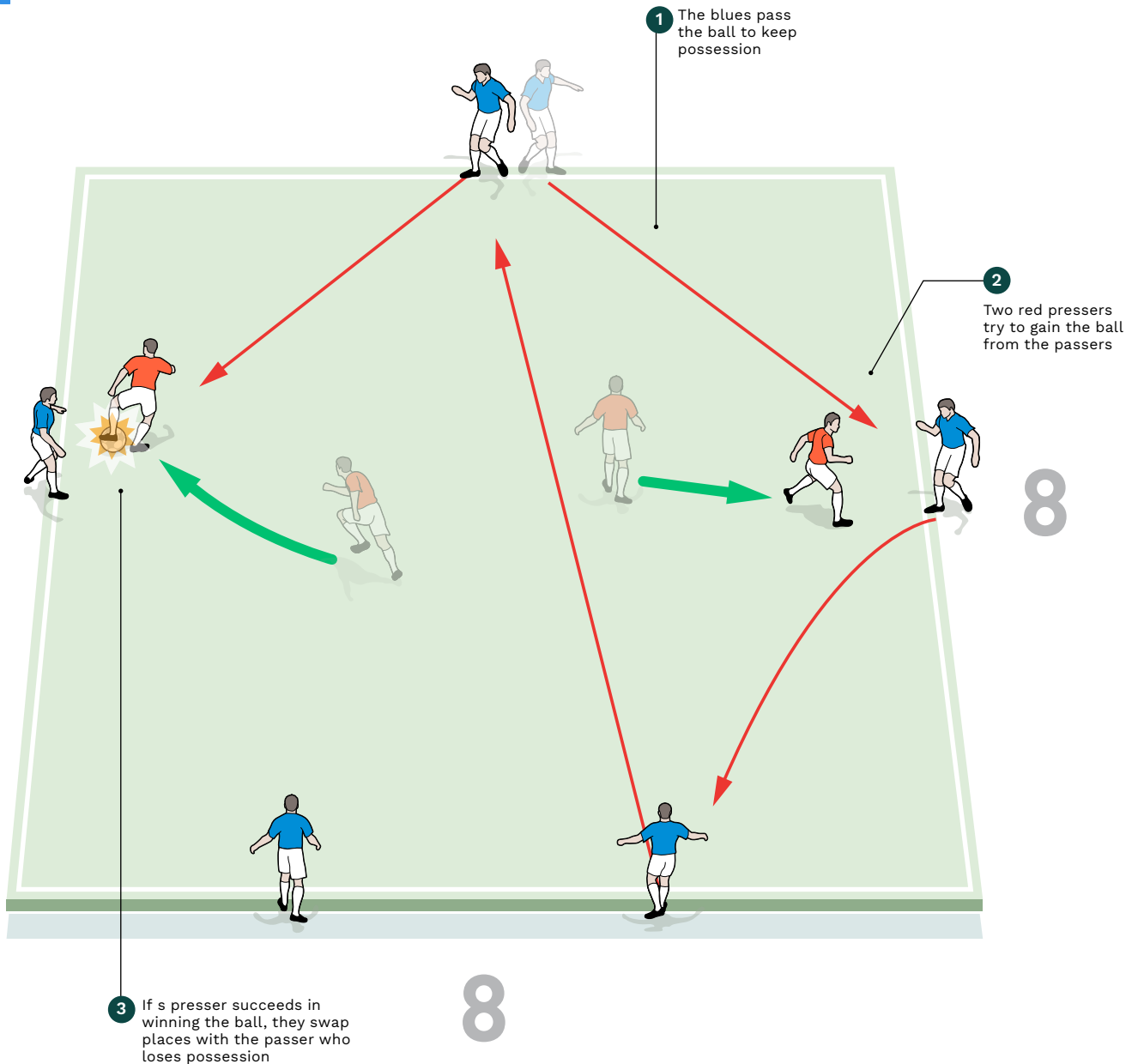
[1]



"We begin with the players warming up by performing physical exercises in a circuit, going through four different stages"

BOXES

[2]



We progress the warm-up further with a rondo, as shown [2], either in a 5v2, a 6v2, or a 7v2. This gets players working under pressure in a small space, with two pressers trying to gain the ball from the passers and swapping places with the passer who loses possession if they succeed in winning the ball.

We're showing an area of 8x8 yards with a 5v2 rondo but the size of the area can change depending on the degree of difficulty required. If we want to make it easier, we make the area larger and vice versa. This rondo is a fundamental exercise that links to many aspects of our game. We would run this for 15 minutes.

"This rondo is a fundamental exercise that links to many aspects of our game"

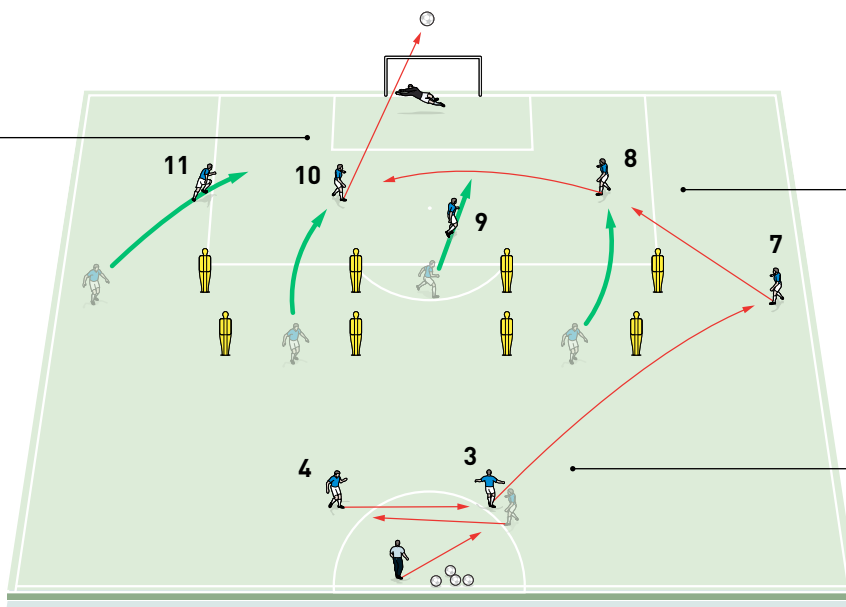


UNOPPOSED MOVEMENT PATTERNS

[3a]

3

The attacking midfielder 10 and the centre forward 9 make runs to meet a cross from the winger 7 and one of them finishes with a shot on goal



2

The attacking midfielder 8 makes a run in behind the mannequins to receive a pass from the winger 7

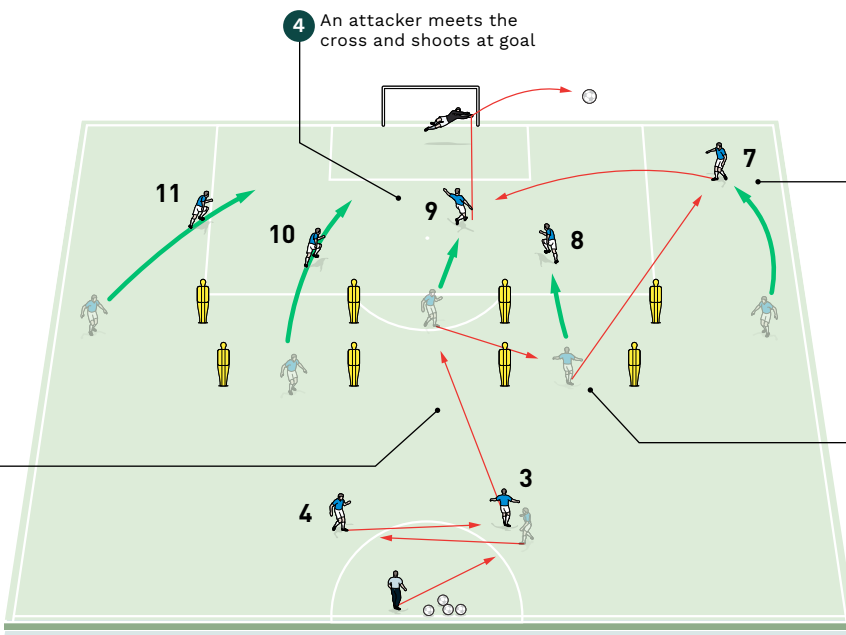
1

The central defenders combine with each other before passing directly to one of the wingers

[3b]

4

An attacker meets the cross and shoots at goal



3

The wingers make runs in behind the mannequins and the attacking midfielder 8 slides a pass for one of the wingers to cross

2

The number 9 sets the ball back to attacking midfielder 8

1

The central defenders combine before playing the ball to the number 9

We set up on half a pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper in their usual positions at one end. We place eight mannequins outside the penalty area to represent the opposition. We're using a team of seven blue attackers with players in their positions, as shown, but we can double up in certain positions if needed.

The aim is for the forwards to use the mannequins as a reference point for them to practice unopposed attacking sequences, resetting after each finish on goal.

Sequence 1: We start play with a ball served from the coach to one of the central defenders. The defenders combine with each other before playing the ball directly

out to one of the wingers. The attacking midfielder then makes a run in behind the mannequins to receive a pass from the winger and he crosses for an attacker to finish with a shot on goal, as shown [3a].

Sequence 2: After receiving a ball from the coach, the central defenders start by combining with one another before playing the ball to the number 9, who sets it back to either of the attacking midfielders. The wingers have made a run in behind the defence and the attacking midfielder slides a pass in behind for one of the wingers to cross. An attacker meets the cross and shoots at goal, as shown [3b].

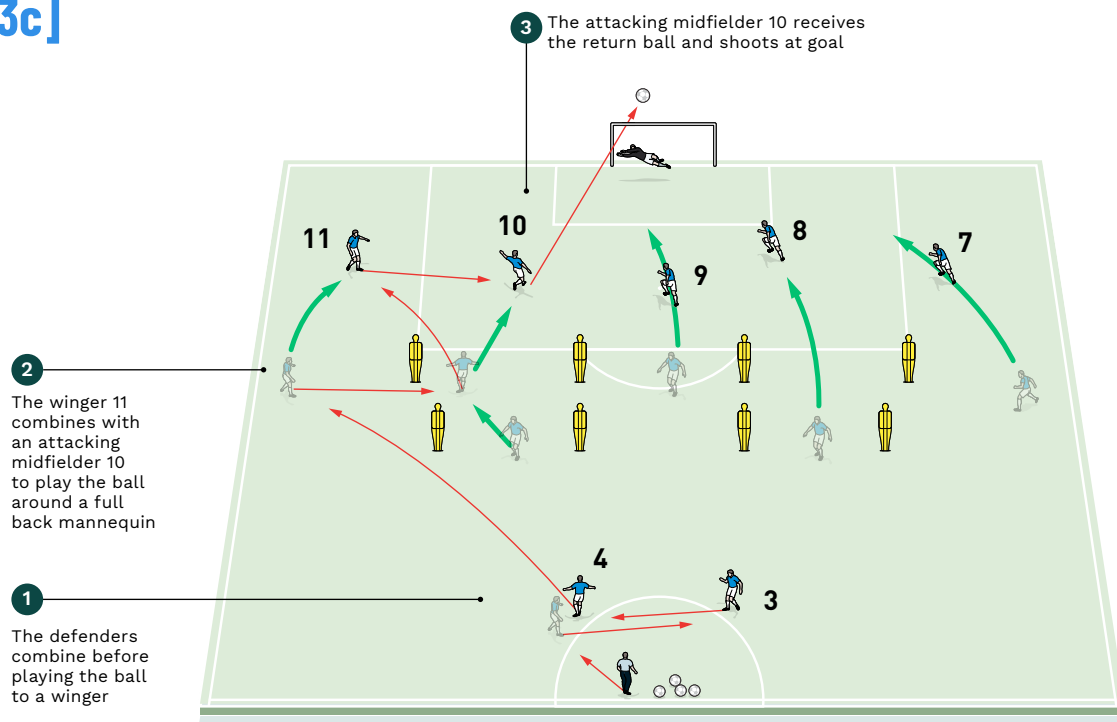
Sequence 3: The defenders combine with each other before passing the ball directly to a winger, who combines with the attacking midfielder to play around a full back mannequin. The attacking midfielder receives the return ball and shoots at goal, as shown [3c].

We progress this part of the session by adding live defenders, who defend the goal from inside

the penalty area, as shown [3d]. We still run the sequences as described previously, but we allow the attacking players to respond creatively in the penalty area to beat the live defenders. Adding opposition defenders will increase the focus of the forwards and sharpen their movements and finishing.

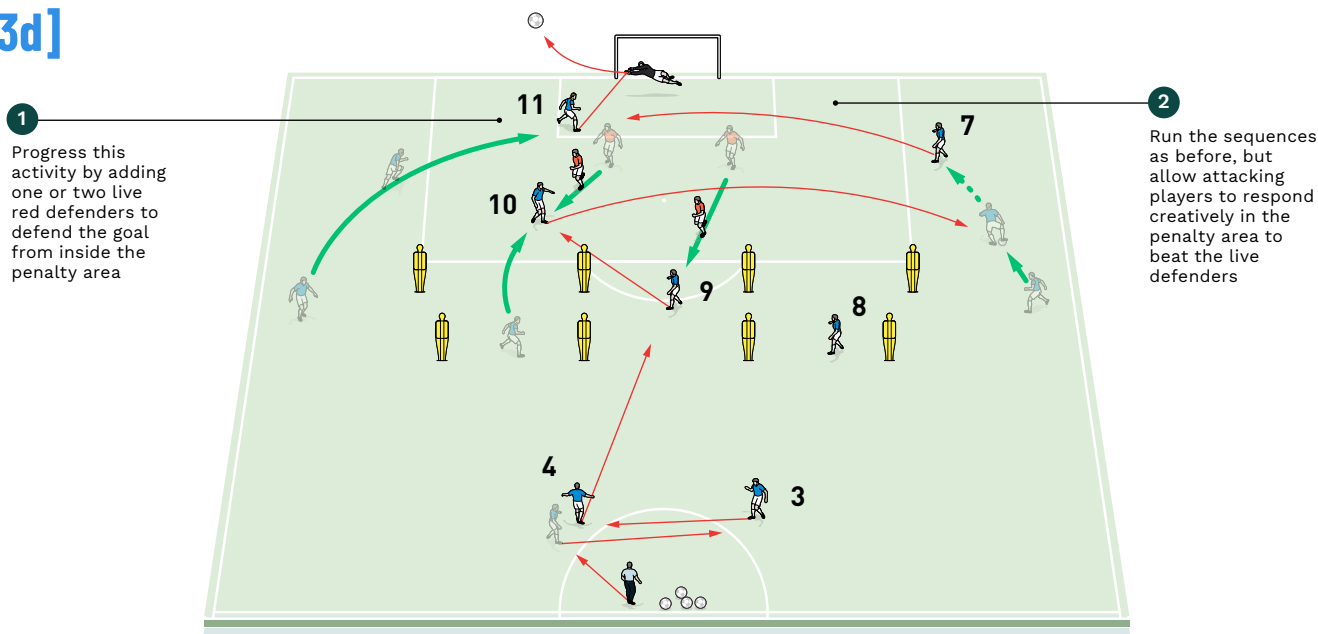
We run this for 25 minutes.

[3c]



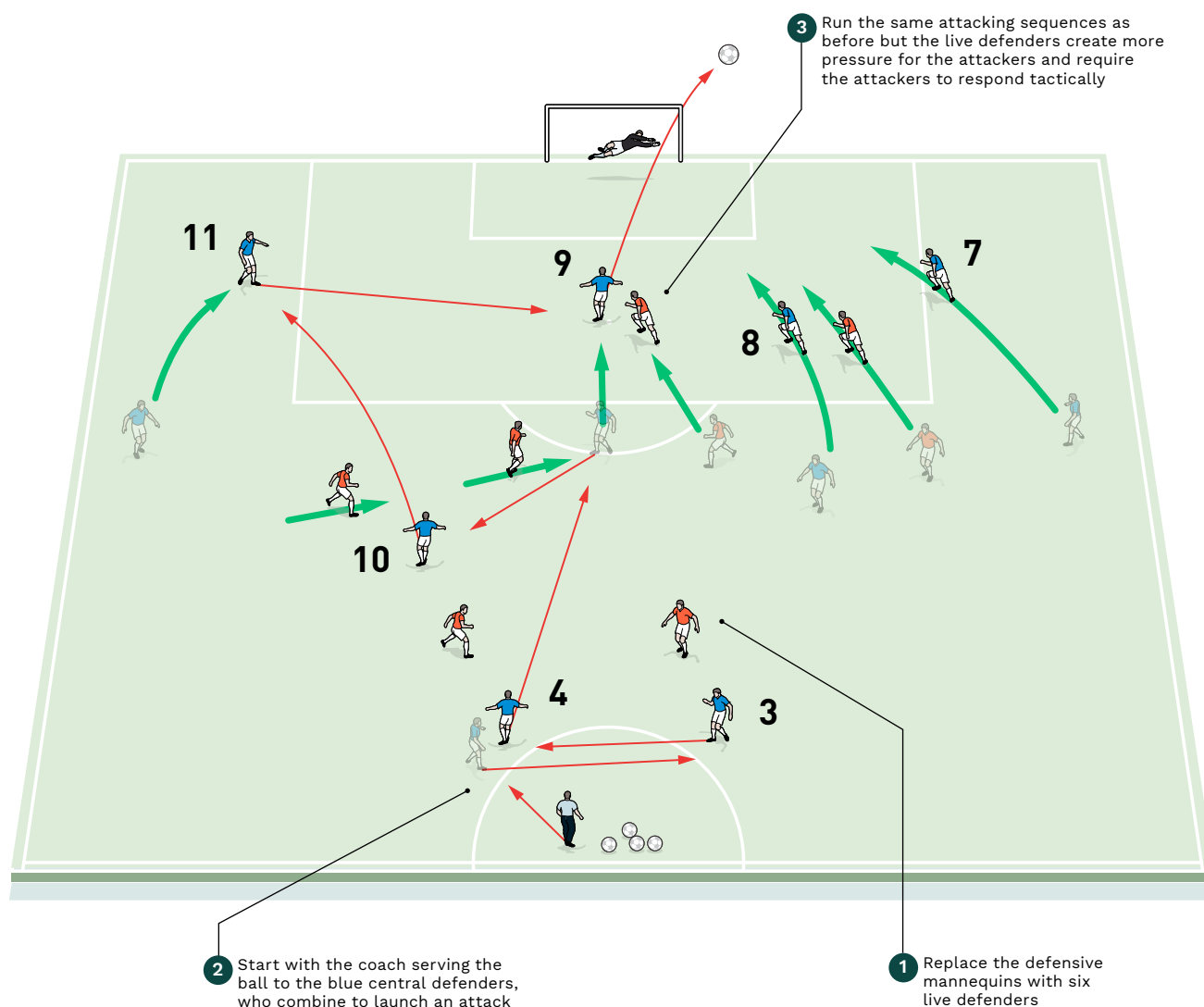
"We want players to attack the space behind the mannequins quickly and look to pick out a team-mate to finish the move off"

[3d]



TACTICAL PATTERNS

[4a]



“The introduction of live defenders creates more pressure for the attackers and adds some realism to the sequences”

Now we replace the defensive mannequins with six live defenders. We run the same attacking sequences as before but the introduction of live defenders makes the exercise more tactical and both creates more pressure for the attackers and adds some realism to the sequences. Each time an attack has finished, start

again with the coach serving the ball to the central defenders, who combine to launch an attack, as shown [4a].

Occasionally the coach should vary the starting ball by serving to one of the live opposition defenders. This creates a transitional opportunity for the attacking

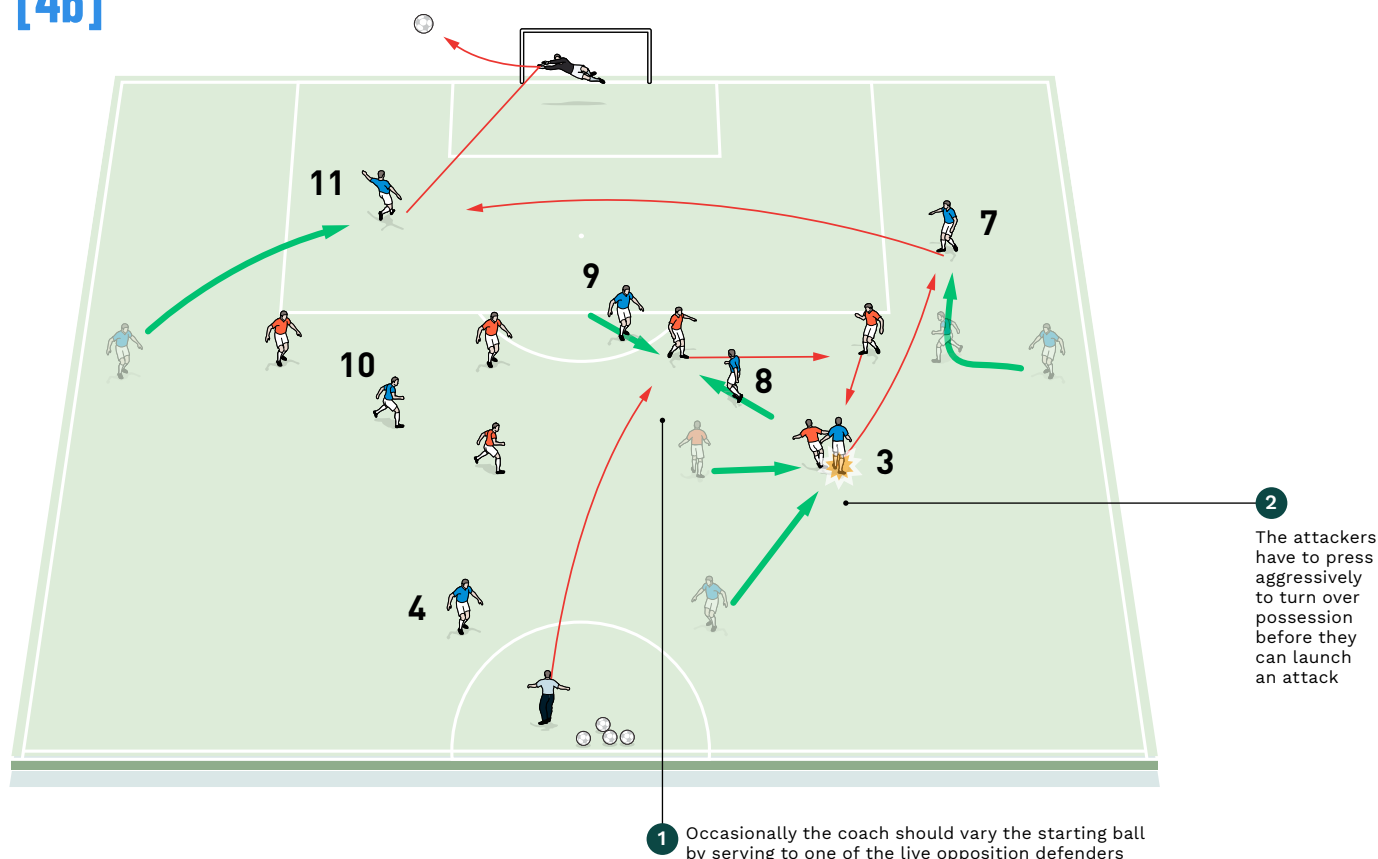
team, requiring the attackers to aggressively press the opposition to turn over possession before they can launch an attack, as shown [4b].

This also gives extra motivation for the defending team to continue to work well off the ball.

We can progress this activity by placing small goals on the halfway line to add a transitional target for the defending side to pass into should they win possession of the ball.

We run this activity for 25 minutes.

[4b]



COACHING POINTS

What are the key things to look for?

The aim is for the players to try to use full coverage of the pitch and maintain good positional distribution. It also encourages players to pass to one another with the right tempo, using one-two touches whilst watching one another to see how and where players need to move.

In this session we want our forwards to maintain their height and width on the pitch, which will help them with good movements to receive both in front and behind. We want them to attack the space behind the mannequins quickly and look to pick out a team mate to finish the move off.

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

Typically we would see wide players coming too close to the ball to receive. We would also see

misdirected passes, while the timing of runs and the weight of pass could be slightly off. These things happen and we just need to ensure that the wingers maintain their position with good body shape and we correct the other aspects as soon as we can.

How would I put this in a game situation?

The ideas in this session can lead you into a live tactical practice with opposition players. We use mannequins in the first instance to give players confidence in the ideas we want to instill in them. When we add opposition, we want to increase the tempo to get it as close to the game as possible and to create a lot more scenarios for the players to make decisions. We can do this by creating an 11v11, or chopping it down to create overloaded phases of play with an 11v10, a 10v8 or a 7v6, depending on the players we have available.

**MANAGER PROFILE****DARREN FERGUSON**
PETERBOROUGH
UNITED

Darren Ferguson is in his third stint as the manager of Peterborough United. As a player, he was coached at Manchester United by his father, Sir Alex Ferguson. He won the Premier League with the club, before going on to spend much of the remainder of his career in the lower divisions with Wolverhampton Wanderers and Wrexham.

His first managerial appointment was as player-manager of Peterborough in 2007. He led the club to successive promotions, guiding them to the second-tier of English football for the first time in 17 seasons. He was also voted the LMA's League One Manager of the Year in 2009.

After a spell at Preston North End in 2010, he returned to Peterborough and led the club to promotion back to the Championship via the League One play-offs. After two seasons in the Championship, he joined Doncaster Rovers in 2015 and led the club to automatic promotion through a third place finish in League Two in 2017.

He subsequently became Peterborough United manager for a third time in January 2019 and returned the club to the Championship as League One runners up in 2021.

SESSION**DEFENDING AND
ATTACKING SKILLS
WHEN OVERLOADED**

A progressive, multi-directional drill, this session is based around players attacking quickly whilst recognising and exploiting the space to finish with a shot on goal. They must then immediately transition to defence, recovering quickly to get behind the ball and approach it with the correct body shape to show the opposition around, not through.

A high intensity activity, it consistently mirrors the tempo that our players need to perform at. It also stretches the players in terms of the psychological aspects of the game because there is a constant flow to the session that requires players to attack and make clear decisions and then switch to a defending situation and again make the correct decisions whilst being overloaded.

The continuous flow of the session ensures we are getting the required physical outputs, whilst also ensuring good player engagement.

We use this as a reminder session to get players working at the intensity we require. It would be used on a match day -3/-4 and the focus would be on the physical aspect of the practice, as well as the technical and tactical details required within our playing principles.

"A high intensity activity,
it consistently mirrors the
tempo that our players need
to perform at"

DARREN FERGUSON

DEFENDING AND ATTACKING SKILLS WHEN OVERLOADED

Set-up

Area:
30x20 yards
Equipment:
Balls, bibs, cones,
2 goals

Number of Players:
8 players
+ 2 goalkeepers
Session time:
Session: 30mins

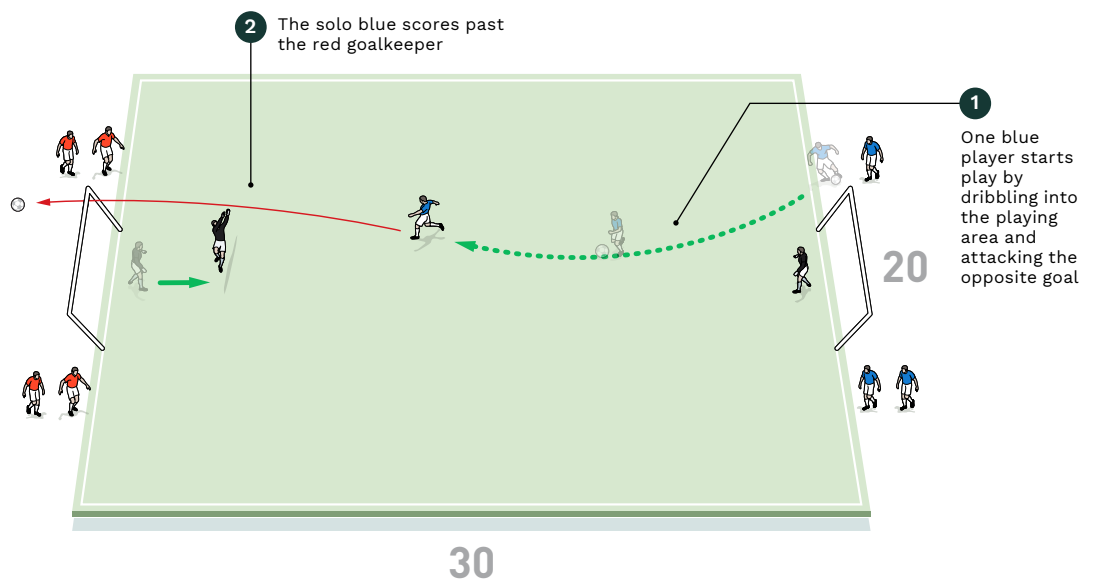
OVERLOAD GAME

We set up a playing area of 30x20 yards with a goal and a goalkeeper at each end. We're using eight outfield players split into two teams of four. The reds start either side of the goal at one end of the playing area and the blues start either side of the goal at the other end.

One blue player starts by dribbling into the playing area and attacking the opposite goal, trying to score past the goalkeeper, as shown [1a].

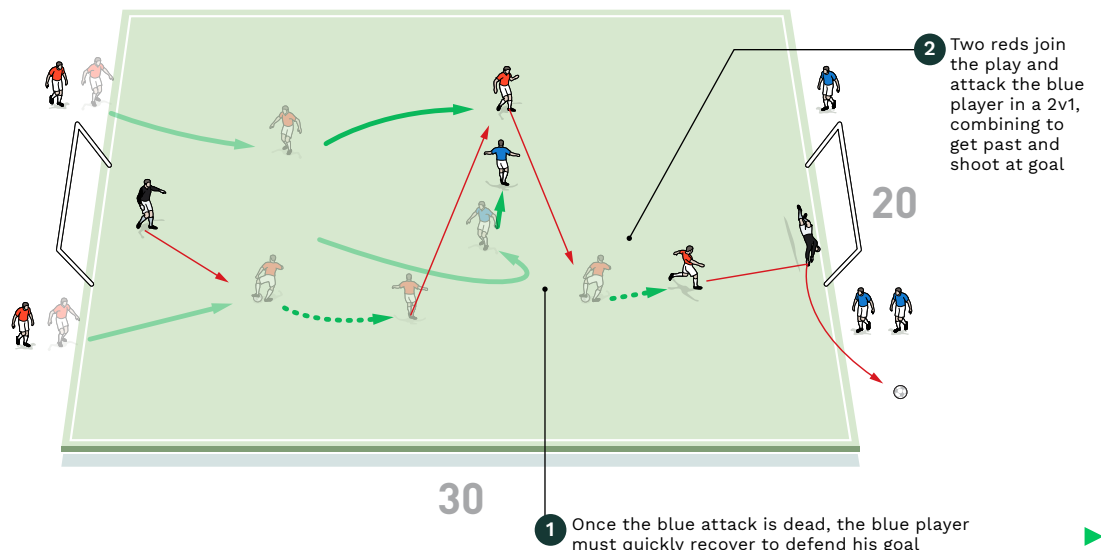
Once the blue player has shot he must quickly get back to defend his goal against two red players who attack the blue player in a 2v1, as shown [1b].

[1a]



"When in possession, we want to see players attacking with pace and making decisions quickly"

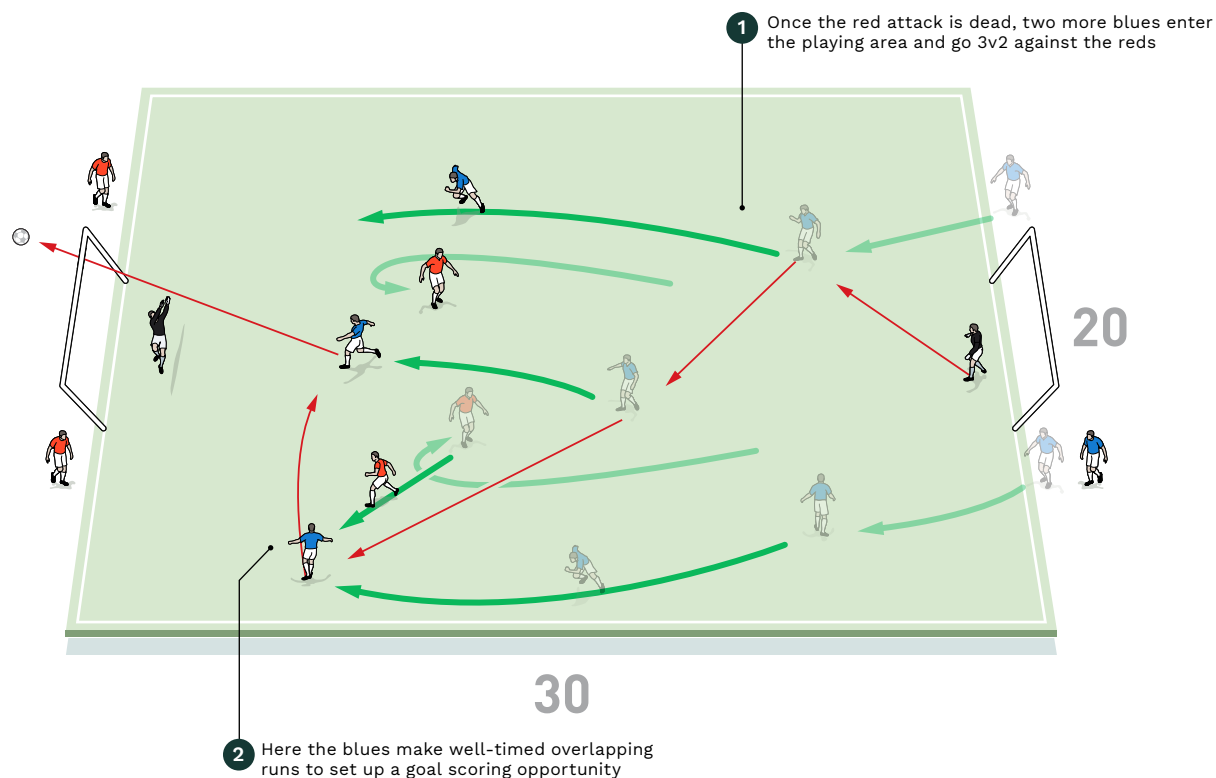
[1b]



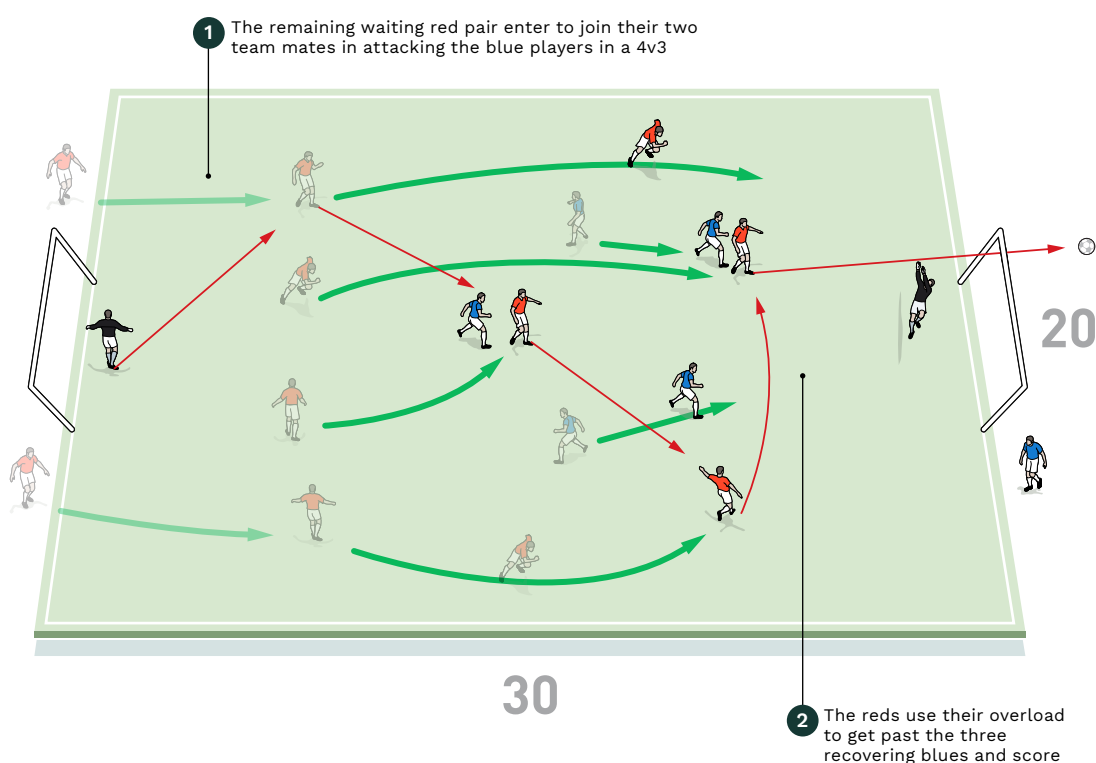
KEY

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

[1c]



[1d]



Now two more blues join the active blue player to attack the reds in a 3v2, with the aim of scoring in the goal that the reds are defending, as shown [1c]. Once the blue attack is dead, the remaining pair of waiting red players join their two active team mates to attack the blue players in a 4v3, as shown [1d], scoring in the goal that the blues are defending.

“When in possession, we want to see players attacking with pace and making decisions quickly”

Finally, the remaining blue player joins the play to make it a 4v4 attack against the goal that the reds are defending, as shown [1e].

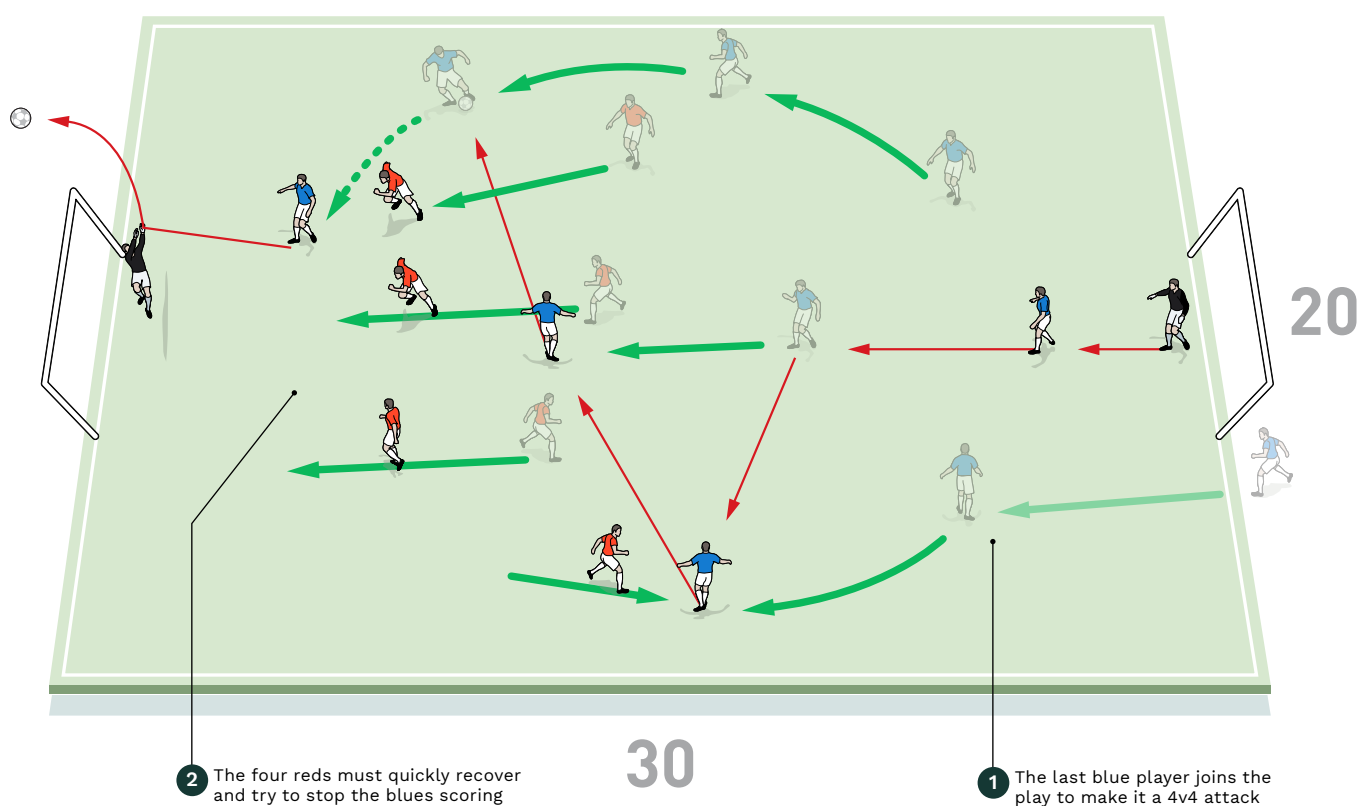
This can be competition based – we keep score and the team with the most goals is the winner. We would first run two seven-minute games with a two-minute rest break, followed by three three-minute games with one minute's rest between games.

I would explain the session to the players beforehand,

outlining the key points that we are looking for because I don't want to stop the flow or the intensity of the session once the game is underway.

If we decide that we are not getting the required outcomes, in terms of intensity and quick decision making, then we would put a time limit of six seconds on the attacking team to finish their attack. This hopefully would ensure a high intensity game and players would have to make the correct decisions quickly.

[1e]



COACHING POINTS

What are the key things to look out for?

When in possession, we want to see players attacking with pace and making decisions quickly, plus using the correct timing and detail in passing and making well-timed overlapping and underlapping runs. Calmness in finishing is also vital, with players needing to demonstrate composure to find the corners of the goal.

When out of possession, we want to see players using clear and concise communication and remembering a 'fast-slow-side-low' approach when

getting up to the ball. Players should show that they know how to delay and to use the correct body position when doing so, showing attackers outside.

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

Some players can show a reluctance to defend aggressively and get up to the ball when required. Sometimes they fail to defend with the correct distances between the defender and the ball.

Another typical mistake is for players to make decisions too slowly when attacking with a numerical advantage and failing to appreciate when a team mate is in a more advantageous position.

**MANAGER PROFILE****JIMMY FLOYD
HASSELBAINK
& DINO MAAMRIA**
BURTON ALBION

After a stellar playing career that saw him represent Leeds United, Atlético Madrid, Chelsea, Middlesbrough and the Dutch national team, Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink turned to coaching. After serving as part of the backroom team at Nottingham Forest, in 2013 he was appointed manager of Royal Antwerp in the Belgian Second Division.

The following year he returned to England to become manager of Burton Albion and in his first season he led the club to promotion as champions of League Two. After a stint as manager of QPR in the EFL Championship, he managed Northampton Town before returning to Burton Albion for the second time in his career.

Dino Maamria is assistant manager at Burton Albion. Making the transition to coaching while still a player, he was appointed manager of Northwich Victoria. He saved the struggling club from relegation and was voted Football Conference Manager of the Season.

After serving as first team coach at both Stevenage and Preston North End, he was appointed manager of National League side, Southport. A spell in charge of Nuneaton Town followed, and in 2018 he returned to League Two side, Stevenage, this time as manager. He also managed Oldham Athletic before teaming up with Hasselbaink at Burton Albion in January 2021 and together the pair have transformed the form of the League One club.



Pic: Epic Action Imagery

SESSION**ATTACKING
TRANSITIONS**

This is a tactical training session based around reacting quickly to the attacking transition and it rehearses players to win the ball and counter-attack fast.

In the modern game, most teams focus on building play from the back, leaving themselves exposed to the counter-attack if facing a team that presses aggressively and high. This presents attackers with a huge opportunity to create scoring chances with a direct route to goal.

We would run this session at least once a week, especially when we are due to play against a team that is focused on playing out from the back.

We also use it as a means of practising defending against transitions because it's a good activity to train our defenders to stop counter-attacks.

"In the modern game, most teams build play from the back, leaving themselves exposed to the counter-attack"

JIMMY FLOYD HASSELBAINK & DINO MAAMRIA ATTACKING TRANSITIONS

Set-up

Area:

Half pitch

Equipment:

Balls, bibs, cones,
1 full size goal

Number of Players:

13 players + 1 goalkeeper

Session time:

High press game: 25mins

HIGH PRESS GAME

We set up on half a pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end and a scoring zone marked across the width of the pitch on the halfway line at the other end. We're using 13 outfield players split into a blue attacking team of six and a red defending team of seven plus keeper.

The game starts with a pass out from the goalkeeper to a team mate in the red defending team and the reds must build up play from the back, scoring a point if they manage to receive the ball in the scoring zone in the red defending team, as shown [1a].

[1a]

KEY

Ball movement



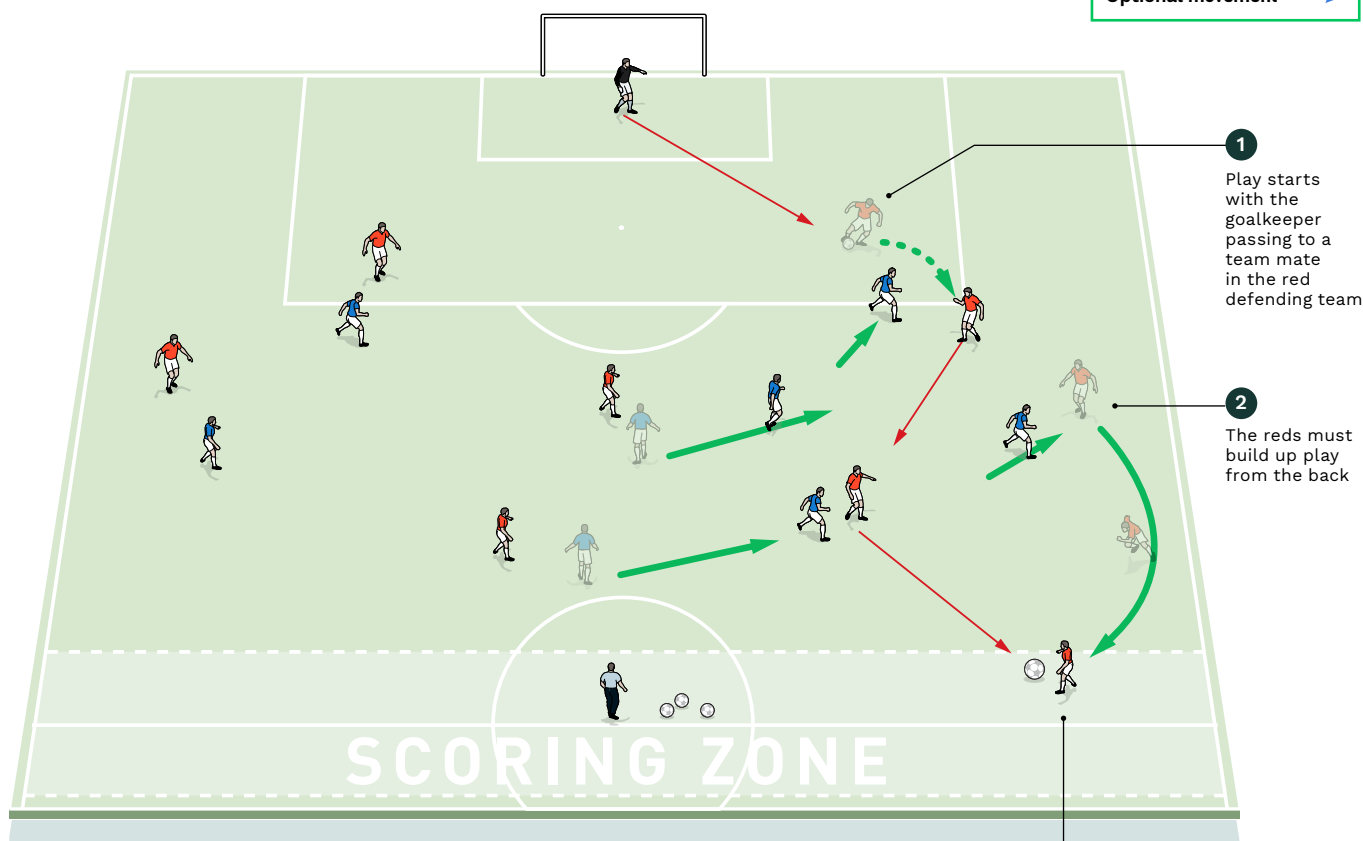
Player movement



Dribble

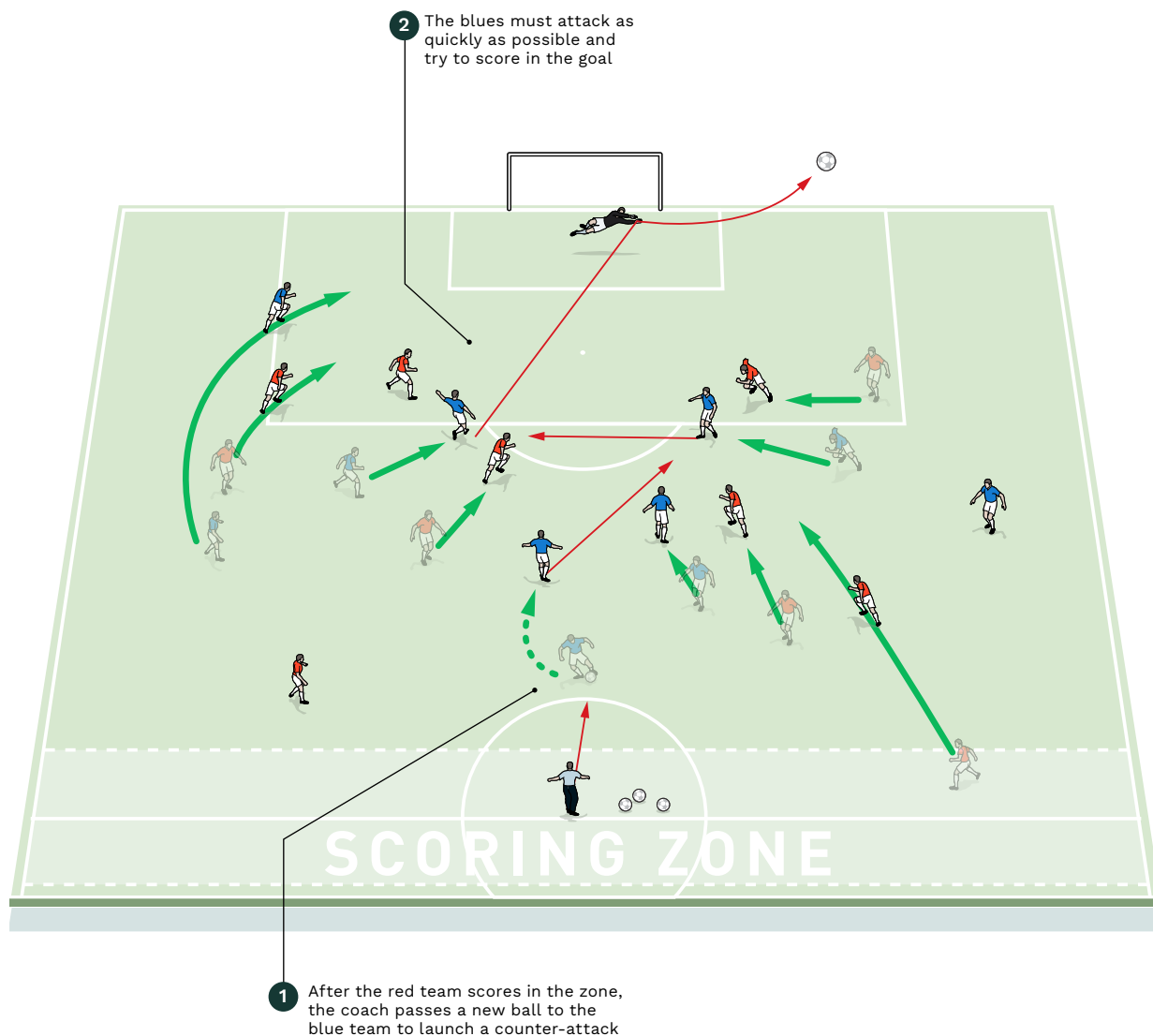


Optional movement



"The reds must build up play from the back, scoring a point if they receive the ball in the scoring zone"

[1b]



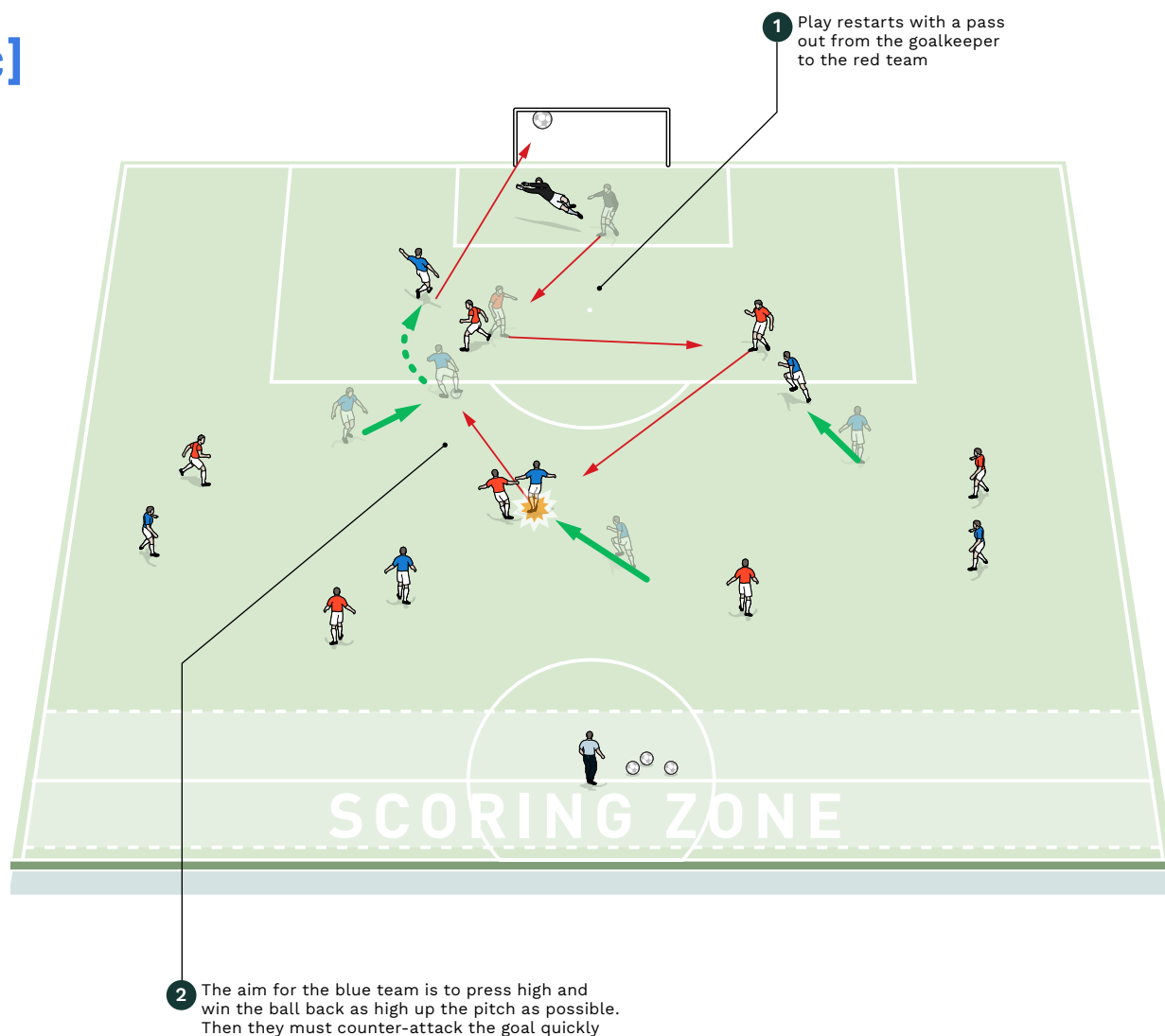
After the red team scores in the zone, the coach restarts play by passing a new ball to the blue team to launch a counter-attack. The reds must now get back into shape and try to cover the counter-attack, while the blues should use fast passing to get the ball quickly up the pitch and into the danger areas so they can try to score in the goal, as shown [1b].

“The reds get back into shape and try to cover the counter-attack while the blues move the ball quickly up the pitch”

Play restarts with a pass out from the goalkeeper to the red team. The blue team's objective is to press high and win the ball back as high up the pitch as possible in order to score quickly in the goal, as shown [1c].

"We want to see attacking players pressing with aggression and purpose to win the ball high up the pitch"

[1c]



COACHING POINTS

What are the key things to look for?

We want to see our attacking players pressing with aggression and purpose to win the ball high up the pitch. When they win possession, the attacking players should react quickly to pass forwards or make supporting forward runs.

The movement of supporting players is vital and at least one player must run beyond the defenders to break the line.

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

The attacking players can become too passive in the press and react too slowly to counter-attack after regaining the ball. They can also fail to support the counter-attack with off-the-ball movement.

How would I put this in a game situation?

We would progress this practice into an 11v11 box-to-box game, emphasising the right moments to counter-attack and the right moments to retain possession of the ball.

**MANAGER PROFILE****CHRIS DAVIES**
SESSION
LEICESTER CITY

Chris Davies came through the Reading FC academy, also representing Wales as a youth international. Whilst at Reading, he captained the youth team when it was coached by Brendan Rodgers. After injury brought a premature end to his playing career, he began studying for his UEFA coaching licences while also securing a Sports Science degree at Loughborough University.

After working in various youth coaching roles for several years, including a two-year spell at Leicester City, Davies was recruited by Rodgers as Swansea City assistant coach in 2010. In his first season at the club, Swansea were promoted to the Premier League. Davies subsequently moved with Rodgers to Liverpool, completing his UEFA Pro Licence and the LMA Diploma in Football Management while at the club, before returning to Reading as first team coach in January 2016.

In June 2016, Davies moved to Scottish giants Celtic, becoming assistant manager to Rodgers. In their first season in charge, Celtic won the domestic treble for only the fourth time in the club's history. In 2019, Davies moved with Rodgers to Leicester City, again as assistant manager, winning the FA Cup for the first time in the club's history in May 2021.

SESSION**BUILDING AN
ATTACK AGAINST
A HIGH PRESS**

The build-up phase can be defined as the process of progressing the ball into the opposition's half. In modern football, more teams than ever want to build attacks from their goalkeeper, and in turn more teams than ever are looking to counter this by pressing high.

The development of the new goal kick rule coincided with the arrival of Pep Guardiola to English football, and this particular phase of the game has increased immensely. As more teams build short, the question is posed to the defensive team: do you press high or retreat back?

My topic here is based on the idea that the opponent has chosen to press high to stop ball progression and win possession back.

One key thing that I ask players to consider is around the concepts of 'opportunity' and 'risk'. Of course, there is naturally a feeling of risk in build-up play, but this is anxiety-inducing language. Instead, I reinforce with the players that if we build well and break through the press, we have big spaces to attack between and behind the opposition lines. By doing this we can create high value attacking situations. So therefore, this moment is really an opportunity for us, not a risk.

"In modern football, more teams than ever want to build attacks from their goalkeeper"

CHRIS DAVIES

BUILDING AN ATTACK AGAINST A HIGH PRESS

Set-up

Area:

Up to full pitch

Equipment:

Balls, bibs, cones,
4 mannequins,
2 full size goals

Number of Players:

20 players + 4 goalkeepers

Session time:

Free man to progress:
15mins

Build-up against a high
press: 15mins

FREE MAN TO PROGRESS

We set up on half a pitch coned off to a width of 40 yards, with a full size goal at each end. We position four mannequins in a central zone marked out across the width of the playing area. We're using 10 outfield players and two keepers split into two teams of five. Each team has three defenders and a keeper in the end zone it is defending and two attackers in the end zone it is attacking, meaning the defending team has a 4v2 overload including the keeper.

Players are restricted to three-touch in their own end zone but can have unlimited touches when attacking in the opposition's end zone. Play starts with the defenders combining with the goalkeeper in order to progress the ball beyond the mannequin line. The two opposition attackers press the ball high, in order to win the ball and score. In the diagram below [1], the full back is free and dribbles through the central zone. The free player will change depending on how the red attackers decide to press. The exercise is designed so the blue team have to understand which of their players are free to progress

with the ball. When a blue player dribbles through he makes it a 3v3 attack against the three defenders and the goalkeeper in the opposition's end zone.

Once the attack has played out, the defender recovers to his original position and the attack is now run in the opposite direction, with the opposition building play from the back in a similar fashion.

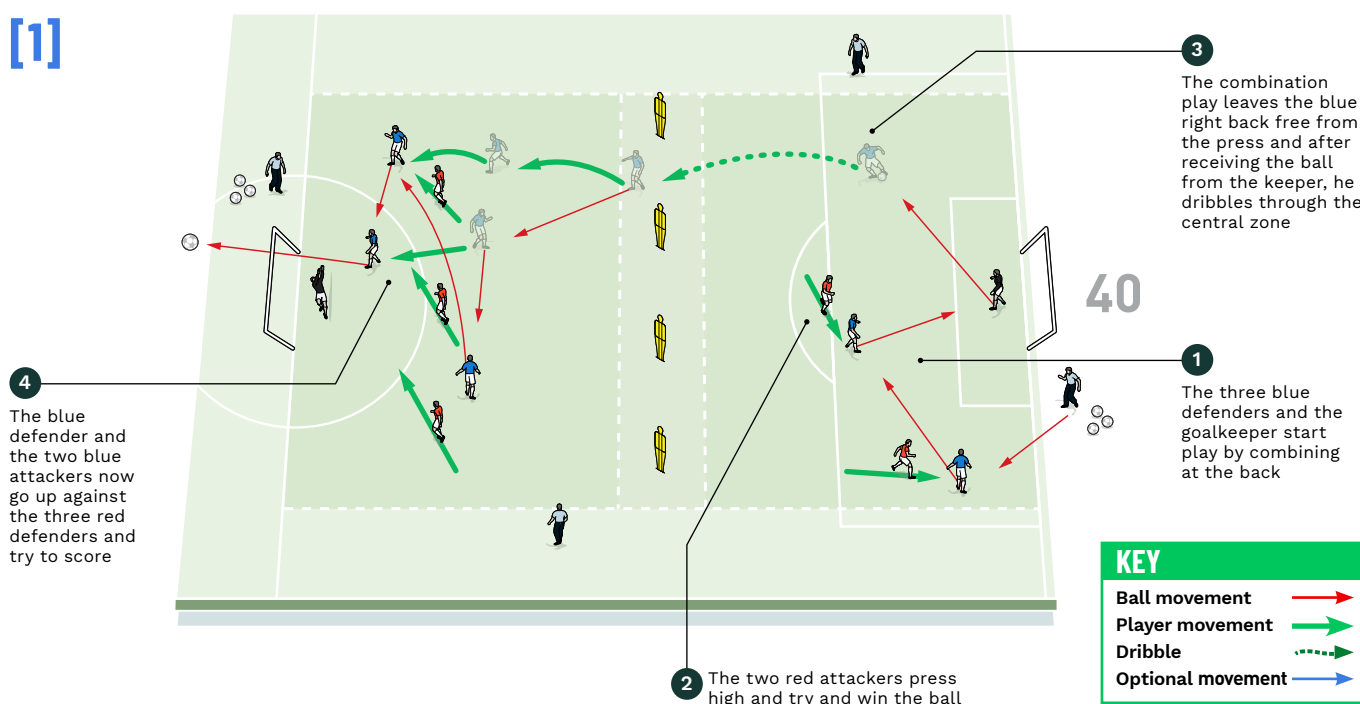
We play for 15 minutes, using two different groups of 10 players simultaneously on adjacent playing areas.

What are the key things to look out for?

The emphasis is on the process of positional play to get one man clearly free to progress the ball up the pitch. Good technique is important in ensuring the passes are made with the correct weight and accuracy. We also want to see players using efficient and simple build-up play from the back, with clean, fast, quality passing.

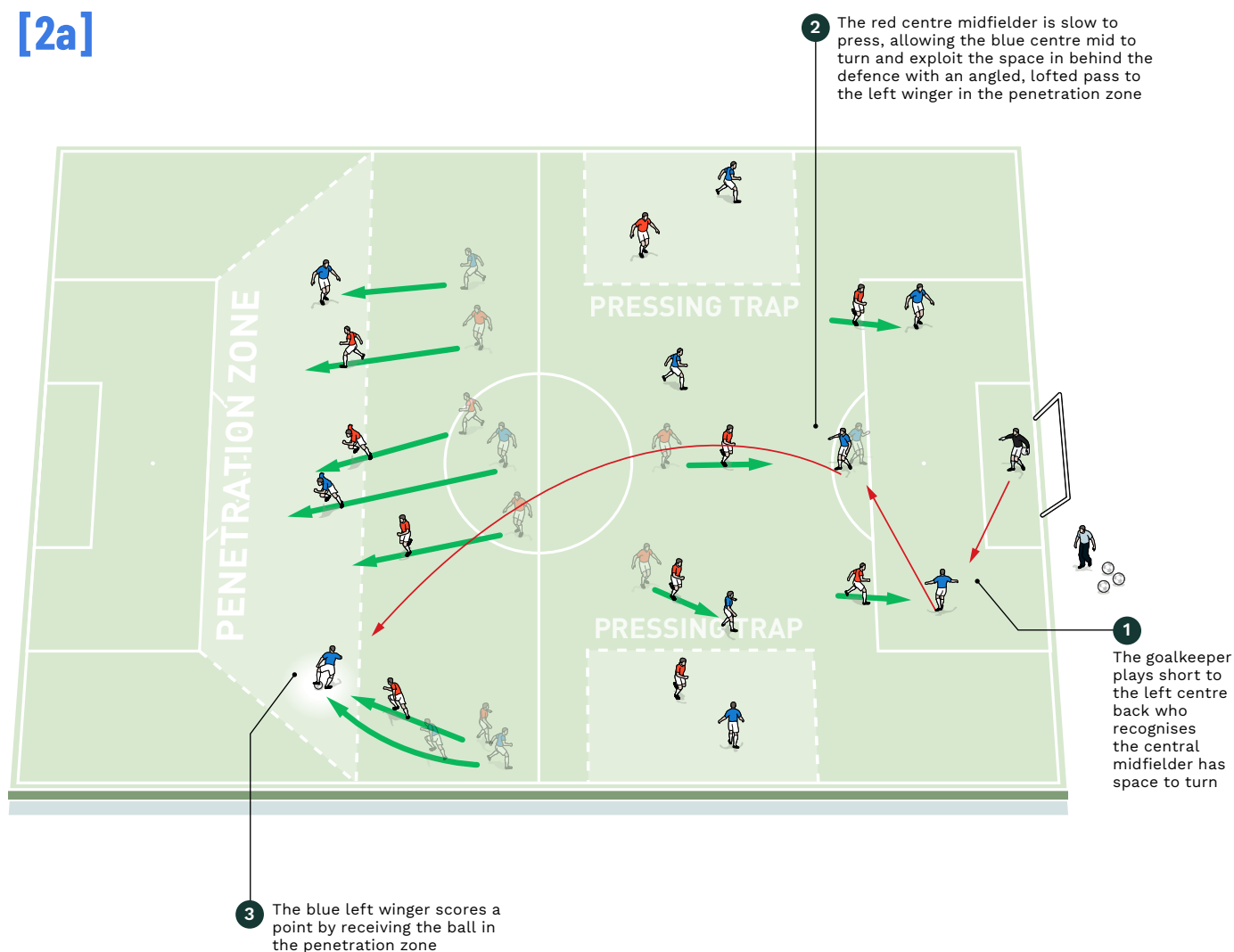
When attacking in 3v3 situations, we want to see good receiving skills, imaginative combination play and inventive movement off the ball.

[1]



BUILD-UP AGAINST A HIGH PRESS

[2a]



“For the blues, the aim is to attract the reds forward, take advantage of the space and arrive into the penetration zone behind the red defence”

We’re using 20 outfield players split into two teams. We set up on a full pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end. In the defensive wide areas, pressing traps are marked [as shown] to give the red team a tactical emphasis for their pressing. At the other end, a funnel-shaped penetration zone is marked.

For the blues, the aim is to attract the reds forward, take advantage of the space created and arrive in the penetration zone behind the red defence to receive.

In the example above [2a], the pressing red team allows the blue centre midfielder enough time to receive the ball on the half turn and quickly exploit the space in behind the defence with a lofted pass for the left winger to run onto.

If the reds succeed in winning possession, they quickly counter-attack the goal. The reds have the incentive of double points if they force the blues into the wide pressing traps and regain possession before scoring. I do this because almost every team tries to force you out wide with your build up play.

If necessary, we use a varied starting position determined by the coach, meaning that we can start the move from any position on the pitch. For example, we may start with a pass to a different outfield player in order to change the dynamic of the press.

In the next diagram [2b], the red defence has dropped deep to avoid leaving space in behind and the front six have pressed man to man, leaving space ►

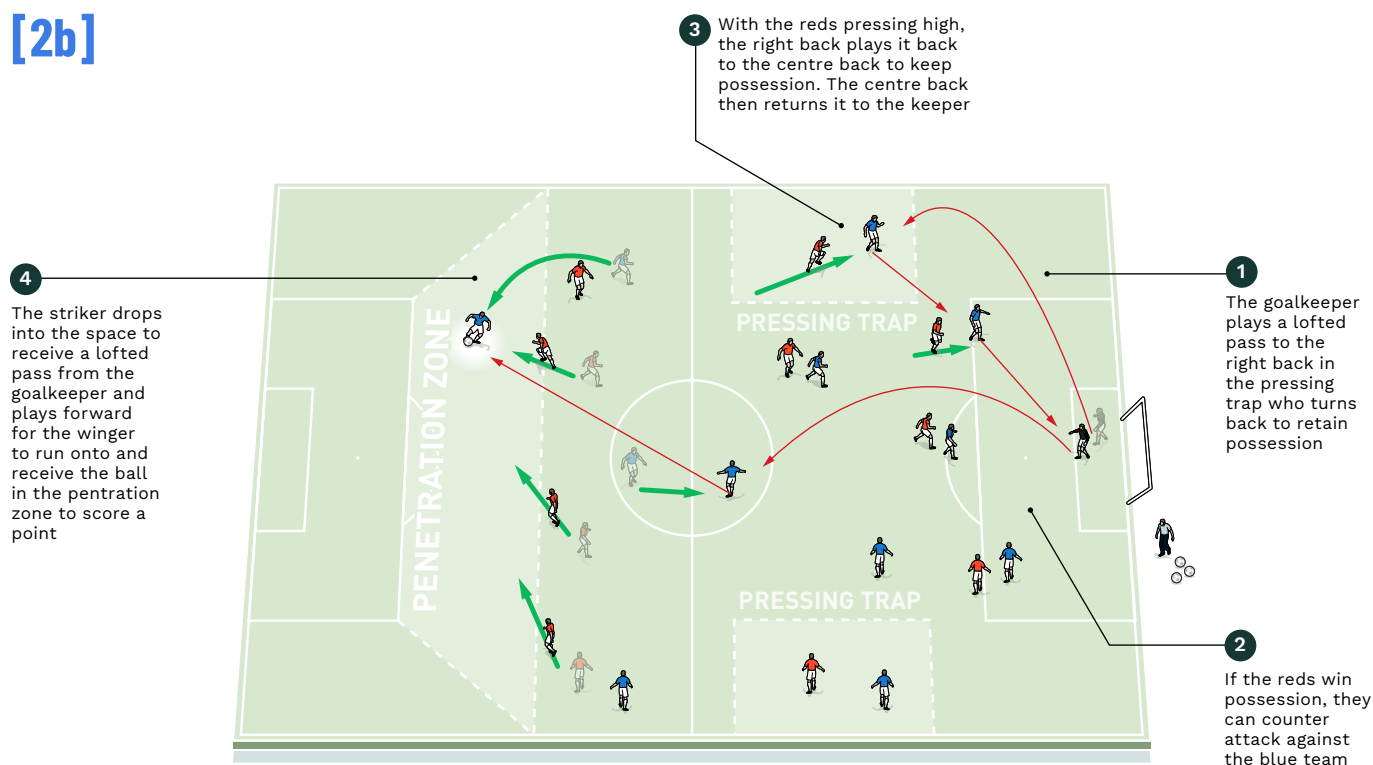
behind the midfield for the blue attackers to drop into in order to receive the ball from the keeper. This is a common example of what could happen if the red defenders are reluctant to squeeze up with the pressing front players.

If the ball goes dead, the play resumes from the goalkeeper and the emphasis is on the blue team to

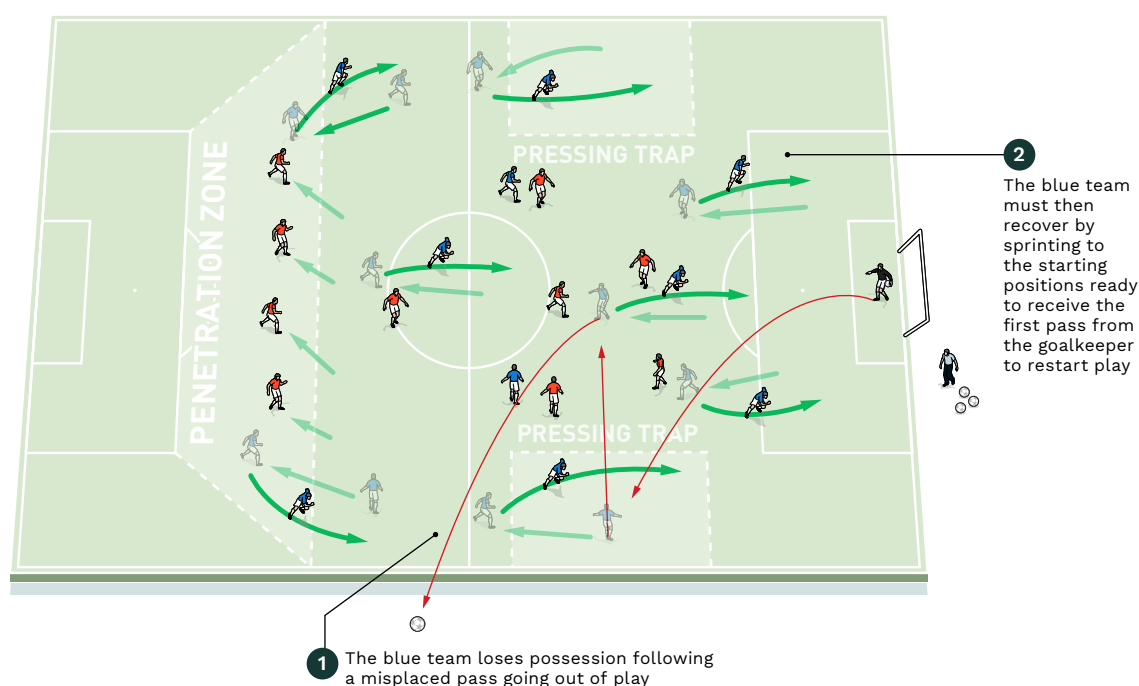
sprint back to the starting build-up positions in quick transition, as shown [2c].

We play two seven-minute games. I like to reinforce to the players the fact that it is the opposition taking the 'risk' by pressing high, rather than us by playing out from the back, as by pressing high the opposition are opening space for us to exploit.

[2b]



[2c]



**MANAGER PROFILE****MICHAEL BEALE**
RANGERS

Michael Beale started his coaching career at Chelsea in 2003 where he played a part in developing the talents of players such as Mason Mount, Callum Hudson-Odoi and Tammy Abraham. After ten years rising through the club's youth coaching ranks he moved to Liverpool FC Academy in 2012, initially to manage their U16 side but shortly afterwards he was promoted into the role of reserve team manager.

He left Liverpool in December 2016 to become assistant manager at Brazilian club, Sao Paulo. In taking the role, he became the first British coach to hold a prominent position at one of Brazil's elite clubs.

On returning to the UK, he rejoined Liverpool as head of coaching for the club's foundation phase, a job that saw him mentoring the coaches who worked with the younger players.

In May 2018, Beale joined manager Steven Gerrard at Rangers to become first team coach of the Scottish giants. He was an important member of the coaching team as Rangers won the Scottish Premiership for the first time in 10 years.

SESSION**IMPROVING THE CENTRAL DIAMOND**

This session is designed to improve team movement and rotations when in possession of the ball. The session shows the example of working with a central diamond consisting of three midfielders and a number 9. A very fluid approach, the movement of this diamond rotates the team's attack into different formations, from 4-3-3 to 3-4-1-2 to a 4-4-2 diamond to 4-3-2-1.

I first began to use this organisation as a youth coach at Liverpool and I have continued to use variations of it in my time coaching at Sao Paulo and Rangers.

By developing this kind of fluid attacking organisation, it can make teams very unpredictable to play against. Naturally, team selections will change during the course of a season due to injuries, form, suspension and through tactical decisions, and this organisation gives teams plenty of flexibility and allows players to bring their own unique qualities to the team when selected. It also allows teams to attack specific areas that have been highlighted as opposition weaknesses.

This type of practice is one that coaches would run regularly both in team sessions, unit sessions and off-pitch video analysis.

"I first began to use this organisation as a youth coach at Liverpool and I continued to use it in my time at Sao Paulo and at Rangers"

MICHAEL BEALE

IMPROVING THE CENTRAL DIAMOND

Set-up

Area:

Full pitch

Equipment:

Balls, bibs, 2 full size goals

Number of Players:

20 players

+ 2 goalkeepers

Session time:

Entire session: 40mins

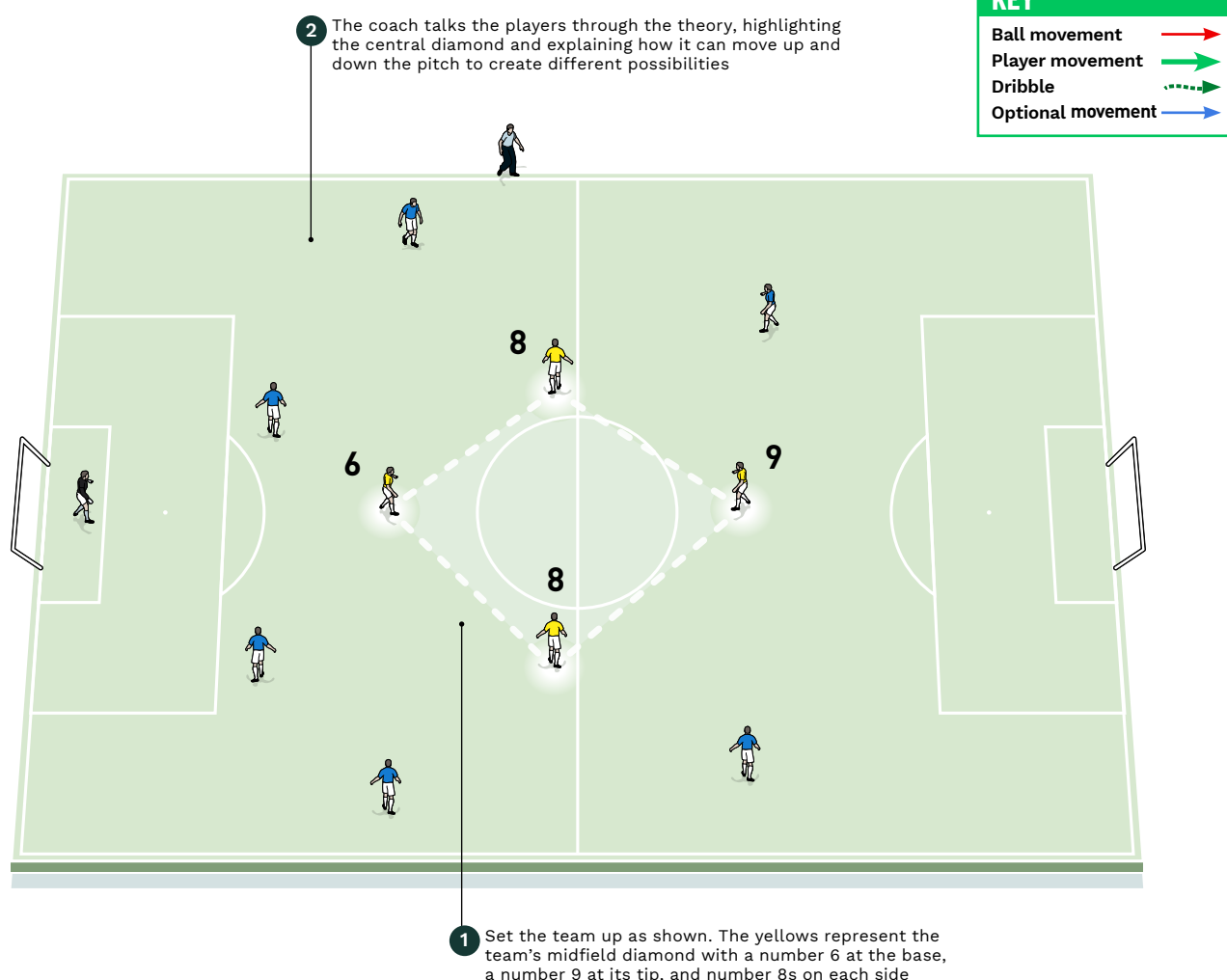
EXPLAINING THE THEORY

We set up on a full size pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end. We're using 10 outfield players, with the four yellow players functioning as the team's midfield diamond and the six blues serving as the remainder of the team.

We would set the players up, as shown [1a], using a number 6 at the base of the diamond, a number 9 at the tip of the diamond, and two number 8s, one on each side of the diamond. Then we would walk the players through the basic ideas and theory, pointing

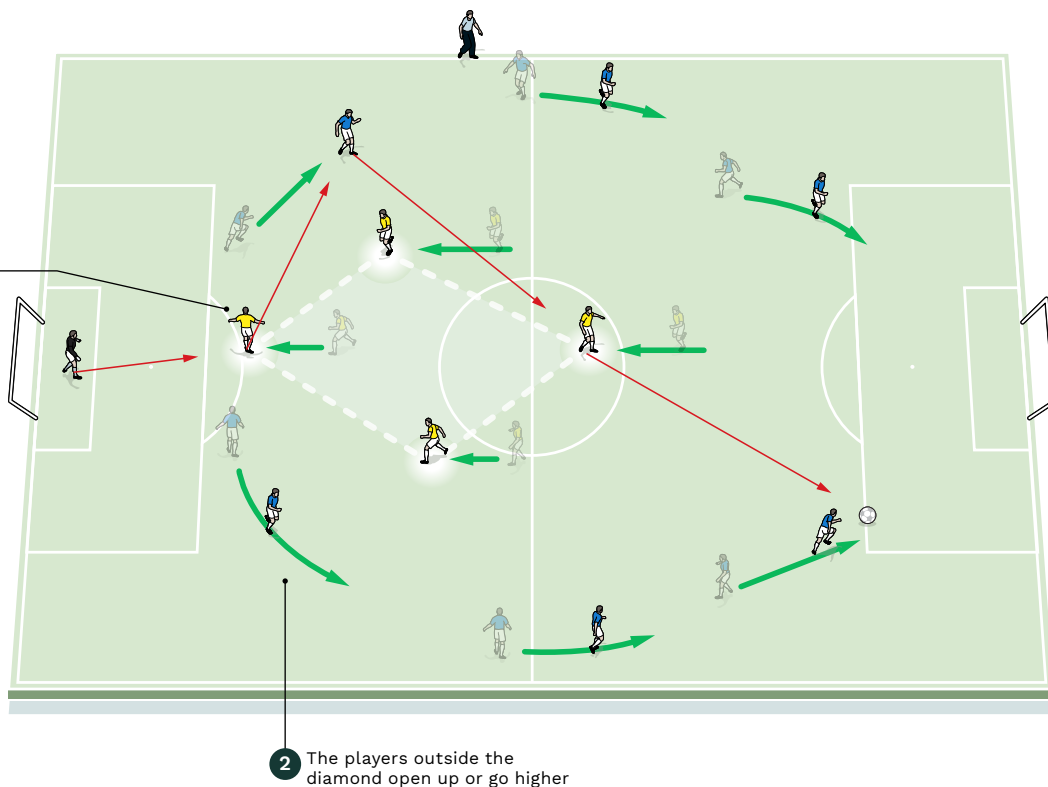
"Walk the players through the basic ideas, pointing out the central diamond and explaining how it can move up and down the pitch"

[1a]

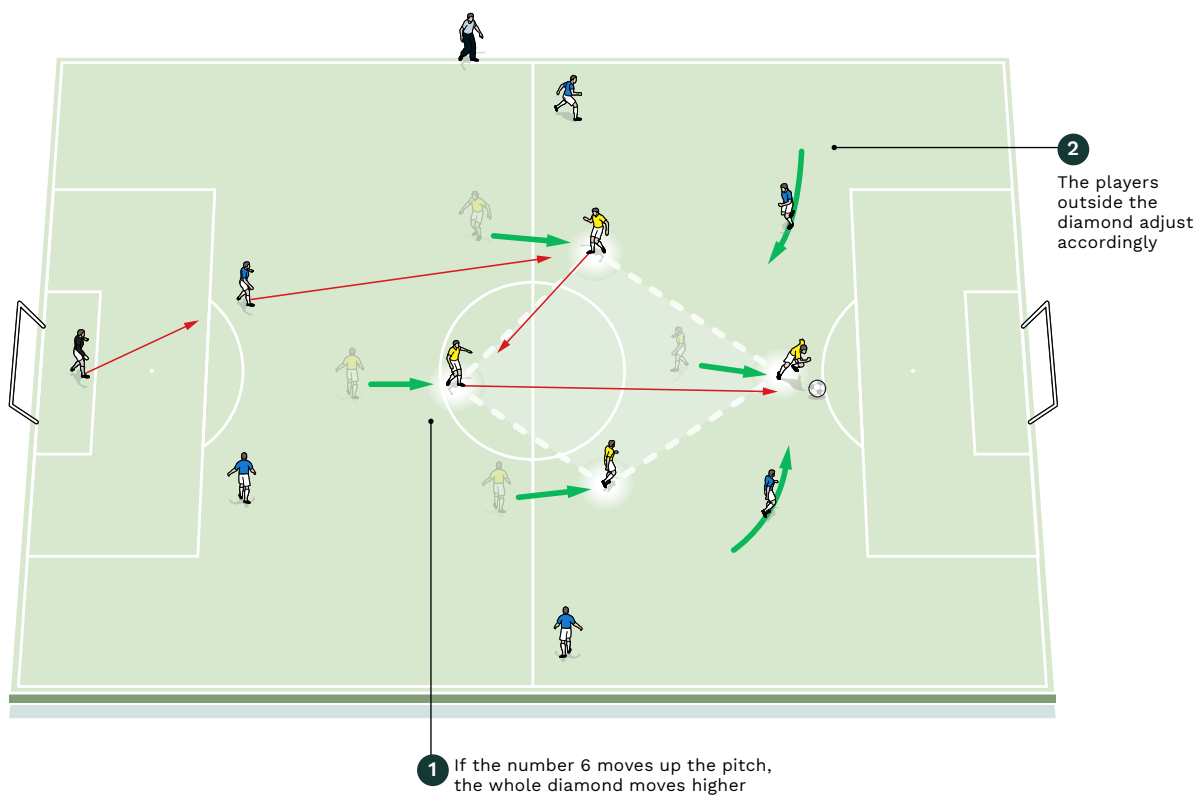


[1b]

1 If the number 6 drops deep between the centre backs to receive the ball, the whole central diamond drops



[1c]



out the central diamond and explaining how it can move up and down the pitch to create different possibilities in each area.

For example, if the number 6 drops deep between the centre backs to receive the ball, the whole central

diamond drops. The players outside the diamond open up or go higher, as shown [1b]. Whereas, if the number 6 moves up the pitch, the whole diamond moves higher and the players outside the diamond adjust accordingly, as shown [1c].

MOVING THE DIAMOND

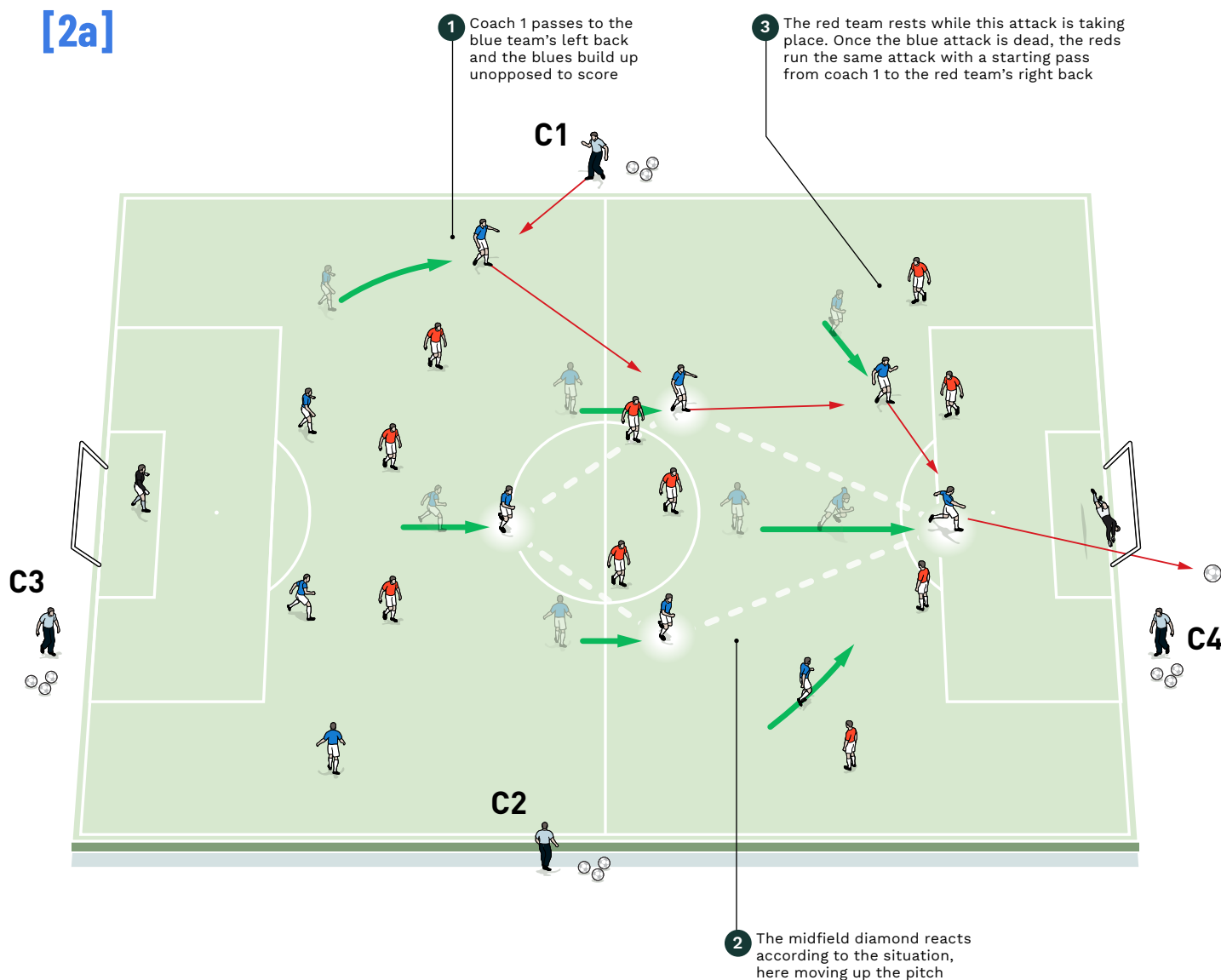
We now practice the movements using two full teams of 11 players, each with a midfield diamond moving as explained in the theory part of the session. The two teams alternate building up to attack unopposed.

Attack 1: Coach 1 passes to the blue team's left back and the blues build up unopposed to score, as shown [2a]. The red team rests while this attack is taking place. After the blue attack is dead, coach 1 launches a second attack by passing to the red team's right back who begins an unopposed attack [not shown],

while the blue team rests. Each team runs four of these attacks, with the teams alternating.

Attack 2: Coach 2 starts an unopposed attack for the blues starting with a pass to the right back [not shown]. The reds remain passive. When the attack is dead, coach 2 starts a second attack by passing to the red team's left back, who begins an unopposed attacking move [not shown] while the blues remain passive. Each team runs four of these attacks, with the teams alternating.

[2a]



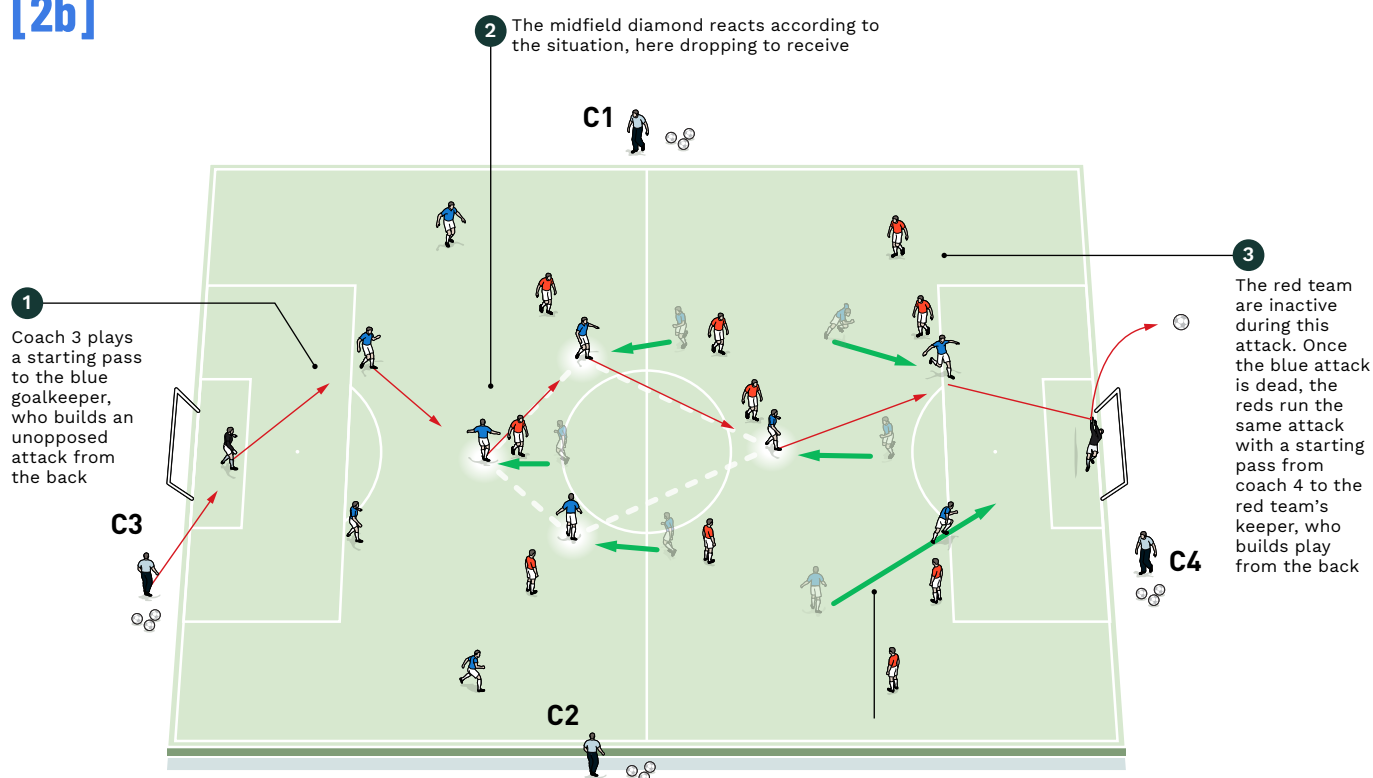
"To help put the theory into practice, a coach is nominated for each team, to speak specifically to their own team and encourage different movements"

Attack 3: Coach 3, who is positioned to the side of the blue goal, plays a starting pass to the blue goalkeeper, who builds an unopposed attack from the back while the reds rest, as shown [2b]. After this attack is dead, coach 4, who is positioned to the side of the red goal, plays a starting pass to the red goalkeeper who launches an unopposed attack by building up play from the back [not shown]. Each team runs four of these attacks, with the teams alternating

and each team's midfield diamond reacting according to the situation.

To help put the theory into practice, a coach is nominated for each team, to speak specifically to their own team and encourage different movements. In total, each team makes 12 unopposed attacks, with their coaches encouraging the players to build up in different ways by moving the central diamond higher or lower on the pitch to force rotations between the team's shape.

[2b]



COACHING POINTS

What are the key things to look for?

The central diamond is linked by some clear rules. Make sure players understand that if the number 6 is down, the number 8s are down and the number 9 is now free. But if the number 6 is high, the number 8s are wider and the number 9 is high.

Width is provided by the full backs who work closely with the wide attackers. If the full backs are higher, the wide attackers can come inside and into advanced positions.

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

In all scenarios, firstly the team needs to have width in order to give it the option of going around the

opposition block to dribble or cross. And secondly, the team must create movement in the last line of the opposition (the defence). This is key to creating space for the players on the ball, whilst also disrupting the defence in order to receive passes into the space behind or down the sides of the centre backs.

How would I put this in a game situation?

Finish the session by playing a normal game [not shown]. We would play two games of 10 minutes. In the first game, whenever the ball leaves play, the game will restart with the blue team. In the second game this rule will be applied to the red team.

The coaches can restart the game from various areas on the pitch to create different situations and replicate the complexity of the real game. The coaches should pay close attention to the relationships in the central diamond as the team build to attack.

LOOKING AT THE POSITIVES

SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST DAN ABRAHAMS EXAMINES A DIFFERENT WAY TO DO YOUR TEAM'S END OF SEASON ASSESSMENT AND START PLANNING FOR THE NEXT CAMPAIGN



The month of June – that time of year when next season's planning starts to kick in. Not that it's been an ordinary year. On the contrary, with empty stadiums, player absences due to Covid, and enormous uncertainty across the footballing pyramid, it's been a tough one to navigate.

Putting aside the uniqueness of what we've all been experiencing, seasonal reflections so often lean towards the negative. It's the natural human thing to do – to question what wasn't good enough, to ponder what didn't go well, and to look towards the inadequate and the less than satisfactory. And, admittedly, a study of the negative may be a great way to conduct an assessment of a season, and to look forward to the next. But it's not the only way.

In 1987 a management academic called David Cooperider wrote an article on a process he called 'appreciative inquiry'. In it he introduced the world to an approach to improve individual and group understanding, visioning and change. Traditional management models can tend to explore what's

"Discovery requires coaches to brainstorm what's been good and what's been working"

going wrong, what's weak and what's not working. In contrast, Cooperider's model was designed to emphasise strengths, areas to celebrate, and successes that already exist within the team or the organisation. It's a positive approach that can set in motion improved performance by reinforcing relationships and culture, creating a common vision and direction, promoting learning and innovation, and energizing collective action.

The great thing about appreciative inquiry is that you can engage with it in the quiet of your mind on your own. You can do it with a fellow coach or a group of coaches. Or you can do it with a number of key stakeholders.

There are a number of steps within appreciative inquiry, but there are two that I recommend every coach engages with – *discovery* and *dream*.



“In this ‘dream’ stage coaches give themselves the space to envision a future they really want”

DISCOVERY

Discovery requires coaches to brainstorm what’s been good and what’s been working. This first energising step allows participants to explore “the best of what is”, identifying the club’s and team’s strengths, best practices, and sources of excellence, vitality, well-being and peak performance. If you have larger numbers in a room, this can be done in small groups, bringing participants together to share findings and discuss experiences. This step alone is a fantastic way to help coaches manage the emotional temperature of the organisation (and can be a useful weapon to use mid-season or during a slump in form).

This first step allows participants to dig for positives and search for clues that are left when success happens and when positive emotions and feelings are experienced. They provide a sound foundation for the kind of habits and behaviours that need repeating in the future, and can be used to improve the culture and environment further. When I’ve engaged teams in this process, example answers have included:

- “Cross departmental communication is strong, honest and open.”
- “During a five game unbeaten run some of the players remarked it was the most they’ve enjoyed playing in their professional careers.”
- “The overall feeling around the club is that players feel cared for, and so do staff members.”

Such collaborative responses provide a positive platform to move forward from. It’s as much about setting a tone of positive feeling as it is anything else. Of course, uncovering concrete behaviours

that produce high performance and strong results are important, but directing coach attention onto the “good in what we do” lays a foundation for the season ahead.

DREAM

If step one utilises memory, then this next ‘dream’ step taps into imagination. As human beings, one of our greatest assets is our imaginative capacity. We can imagine the best and we can imagine the worst.

In this ‘dream’ stage coaches give themselves the space to envision a future they really want – a future where the team, the coaches, the staff and the club are fully engaged and successful around its core purpose and strategic objectives. This is now a discussion around next season – how do we want our leaders to behave? What does exemplary coaching look like? In what ways are our players competing? What resources can we draw from? Who can help us? What does our physical space have to look like?

Just as in step one, exploration is encouraged. Participants can have fun in the dream stage, sharing ideas and stories, as mundane or as wild as is possible. Psychological safety is encouraged so that all participants feel like they can be involved, and so that nothing (however big or small) is left off the table for the vision of next season.

The paradigm of “overcoming weaknesses” may not be the optimal one to use when reflecting on the past nine months and considering next season. Discovering untapped strengths and dreaming of future successes can be twin engines that drive effective solutions to next season’s challenges.

INTERVIEW **NATHAN JONES****TAKING HIS TIME**

LUTON TOWN'S NATHAN JONES TALKS THROUGH SOME OF THE VALUABLE LESSONS THAT HAVE SERVED HIM WELL IN HIS CAREER IN MANAGEMENT



"I was full of energy, but they encouraged me to slow down and take my time. It was an important lesson"

In his first spell at Luton Town, Nathan Jones took the side from the bottom half of League Two to the brink of the Championship in only three years. Now back, after a brief spell at Stoke, he's determined to keep learning and developing.

When Nathan Jones got his first opportunity to coach he imagined he would fly, but the reality of the job brought him back down to earth with a bump. It was 2009 and, armed with his coaching badges, Jones was thrown in at the deep end as player-assistant manager of Yeovil Town, a team he had been part of for the previous seven years. What he lacked in coaching experience he made up for in drive, ambition, and a wealth of knowledge and inspiration gleaned from his coaches, managers and mentors over the years.

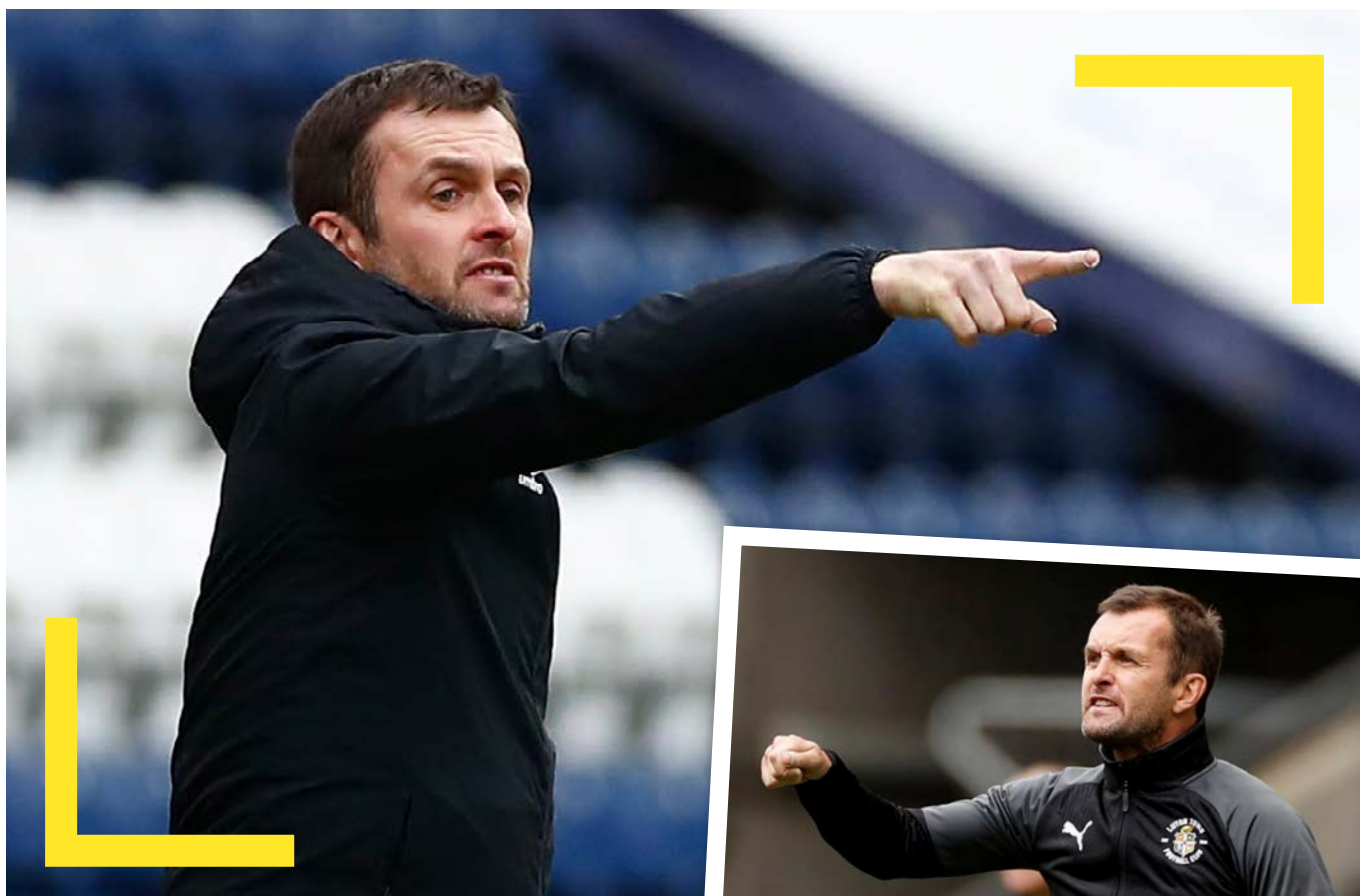
The period Jones spent playing for Spanish sides Badajoz and Numencia in the mid-90s were particularly influential to his approach later as a

manager. It also left him fluent in Spanish, which he believes has been a huge asset throughout his career.

"When I arrived in Spain, I found myself for the first time working within a highly organised set up, with everything focused on what was needed for the next fixture," he says. "I was full of energy, but they encouraged me to slow down and take my time. That was the lifestyle, how they played football. It was an important lesson early on that you have to adapt to your environment."

TIME TO GROW

While Jones learned fast on the job at Yeovil, he knew that to develop further as a coach he'd need to experience a variety of roles and challenges, at different levels of the game. In June 2012, therefore, he joined Championship club Charlton Athletic as U21 professional development coach under manager Chris



Powell and academy director Paul Hart, who became Jones's mentor.

When the opportunity arose to become a League One manager a year later, Jones declined, feeling he wasn't yet ready. "I was ambitious, but also in no hurry," he says. "It's important not to try to run before you can walk, to give yourself time to develop and I knew what I was good at and what I needed to work on."

The opportunity to hone his skills came at Brighton & Hove Albion, then in the Championship, where Jones spent three years as assistant manager to Óscar García, Sami Hyypiä and Chris Hughton. He also acted as caretaker manager for a short spell. The learning curve was steep, as Jones worked closely alongside each manager, as well as having the support of chief executive Paul Barber. "He helped me to gain valuable experience in dealing with the media, in presenting my ideas and career portfolio, and even in practising my interview skills," he recalls.

"When you have that kind of experience around you, you have to tap into it," says Jones, who has also gained a huge amount from mentor Paul Hart, now his assistant manager at Luton Town. "Even if Paul wasn't here with me, I know I'd still have a close relationship with him, and he'd be someone I'd go to for advice and support. When I speak with experienced coaches and managers such as him, for example at LMA events, I always learn so much."



A CLEAR VISION

When, in January 2016, Jones was appointed manager of League Two side Luton Town, his immediate challenge was to avoid relegation, which he did, but he also had a very clear idea of what he wanted to do with the side in the longer-term and how he wanted to do it.

This included a strong emphasis on recruitment and player development, which he put into effect ahead of the following season with wholesale changes to the squad. "When I interviewed for the job I gave an extensive presentation to the club and they really bought into it," he says. "Right from the start we had a clear, ambitious goal – to be a Championship side within four years – and a plan for how we'd achieve it. We wanted to make small steps forward in everything, from our game plan and fitness to our discipline."

With ambition, hard work and focus on that goal, it was achieved in not four years but three. During that time, Jones was awarded LMA League Two Manager of the Month three times and when he left Luton he had the highest points per game ratio of any manager in the club's history.

SELF-REFLECTION

In January 2019, Jones left Luton to take the helm at Stoke City, then mid-table in the Championship. With expectations high and the challenges of competing in the second tier, Jones found it an unforgiving environment.

“In my first six months at Luton we hit the ground running with some decent results and that helped to get everyone on side,” he says. “Sadly, that wasn’t the case at Stoke; I didn’t get the results I needed to buy myself more time.”

While it was to be only a nine-month tenure, Jones believes it was a valuable experience and one he has reflected on, long and hard, even keeping a journal after his departure.

“I found it a really helpful tool for self-reflection after leaving Stoke,” he says. “I was totally honest in the journal; there was no bitterness, no finger pointing. It was just my thoughts on what I could have done better to deal with the challenges I faced and, perhaps more importantly, what I did well, because there were also a lot of positives to come out of my time at Stoke.”

He decided to keep the journal going when, in May 2020, he returned to Luton, who he had left only 18 months previously and who were now struggling to remain in the Championship. “Leaving and then coming

back to the club in this way was far from ideal,” he says, “but I’m confident that the experience I had at Stoke left me a stronger manager and more ready for the challenge of guiding Luton out of their precarious position. It has been a really tough period, and with the pandemic also having an impact the financial implications of relegation would have been grave.”

WORK IN PROGRESS

Looking back, Jones can see just how much he has learned over the past five years, tactically and technically, but also in terms of the softer management skills. “I had, for example, thought that man-management was a strong point of mine,” he says, “but at Stoke I found this was challenged massively because of the variety of characters and attitudes I encountered. I’ve learned that the group is the most important thing and you can’t have any one individual upsetting the apple cart. That’s why at Luton we look to recruit not just good players or good athletes, but good human beings who are ambitious, talented and hungry to learn.”

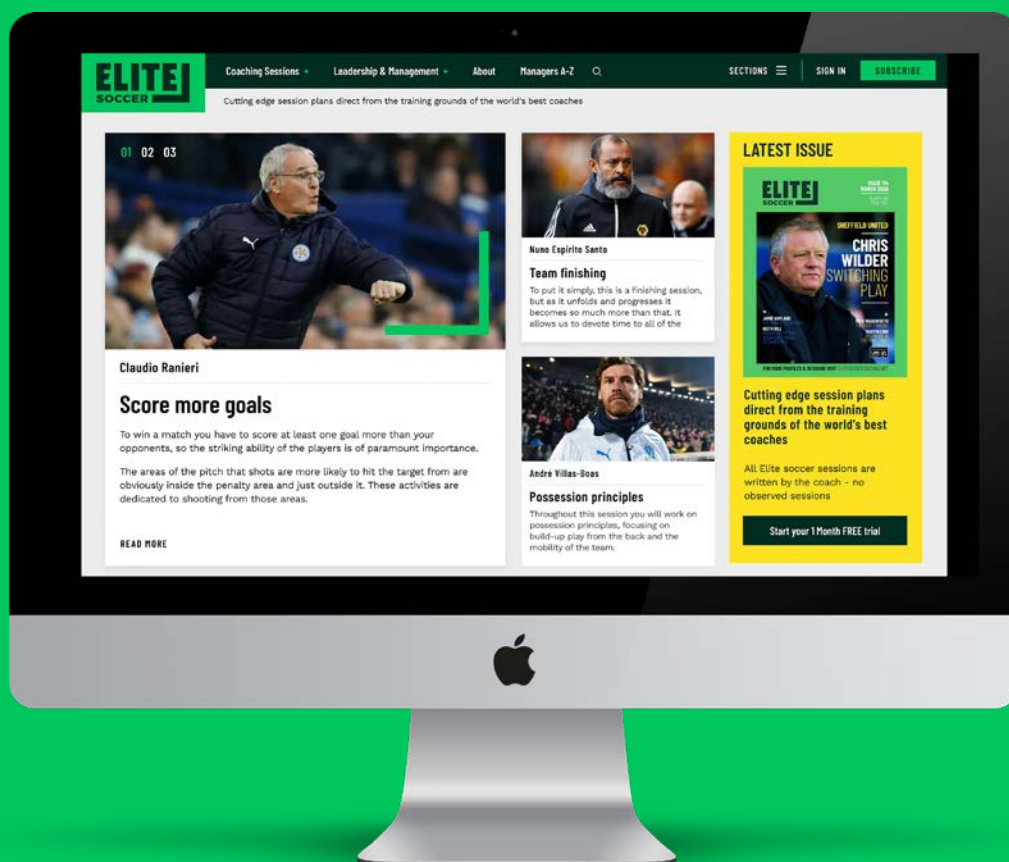
Perhaps most importantly, though, Jones has learned just how valuable it is to have experienced people around him, people he can trust to challenge him and help him to grow and develop. “I’m learning all the time,” he says, “and I never want that to stop.”

“At Luton we look to recruit not just good players, but good human beings who are ambitious, talented and hungry to learn”



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