

Exclusive Training Drills From Top Professional Coaches

Professional **DEFENDING** TACTICS



Antonio Conte
José Mourinho
Mauricio Pochettino
Roy Hodgson
David Moyes
Mauricio Pellegrino
Roberto Mancini
Sam Allardyce
Alan Pardew
Paul Lambert
Steve Bruce
Quique Sanchez Flores

**IMPROVE
YOUR TEAM'S
DEFENSIVE PLAY**

**ELITE
SOCCER**

In partnership with



Professional **DEFENDING** TACTICS

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Exclusive Training Drills From Top Professional Coaches



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CONTENTS

Antonio Conte Back three tactics	1	Steve Bruce Defending as individuals and pairs.....	34
José Mourinho Defensive organisation	4	Aidy Boothroyd Defending 1v1.....	36
Mauricio Pochettino Pressing initiation	7	David Moyes Segmented training spaces.....	39
David Moyes Improving defending	9	Ian Holloway Penetrating or protecting the defensive line.....	44
Mauricio Pellegrino Defending as a midfield or back four	12	Alan Pardew Pressing and blocking lines.....	46
Roy Hodgson Defensive principles.....	15	Mark Hughes Playing out from the back.....	49
Roberto Mancini Decisive defending.....	17	Slaven Bilic Defensive pressing and offensive possession under pressure.....	51
Quique Sánchez Flores Compactness when defending overloads.....	19	David Moyes Defending against a switch of play.....	54
Sam Allardyce Defending the box.....	23		
Alan Pardew Defending crosses.....	26		
Paul Lambert Defensive dexterity.....	28		
Mick McCarthy Attacking and defending in counter-attack situations.....	30		
Owen Coyle Preparing The Back Four.....	32		



ANTONIO CONTE

Antonio Conte Back three tactics

SET-UP

AREA

Just over half a pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Tactical circle: 12mins

Tactical game: 30mins

Overview

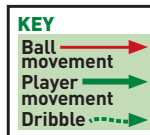
The back three is a vital part of the way we play at Chelsea – they provide the forward motion in attack and squeeze play in the central areas in defence, with options for passing routes and wide play. Although focused on tactics for the back three, this session rehearses many aspects of our game. It gives players the opportunity to defend the box as a three, and move the ball

forward, either by playing through the midfielders, passing out to the wingbacks, or playing the ball directly to the forwards through the channels either side of the midfield.

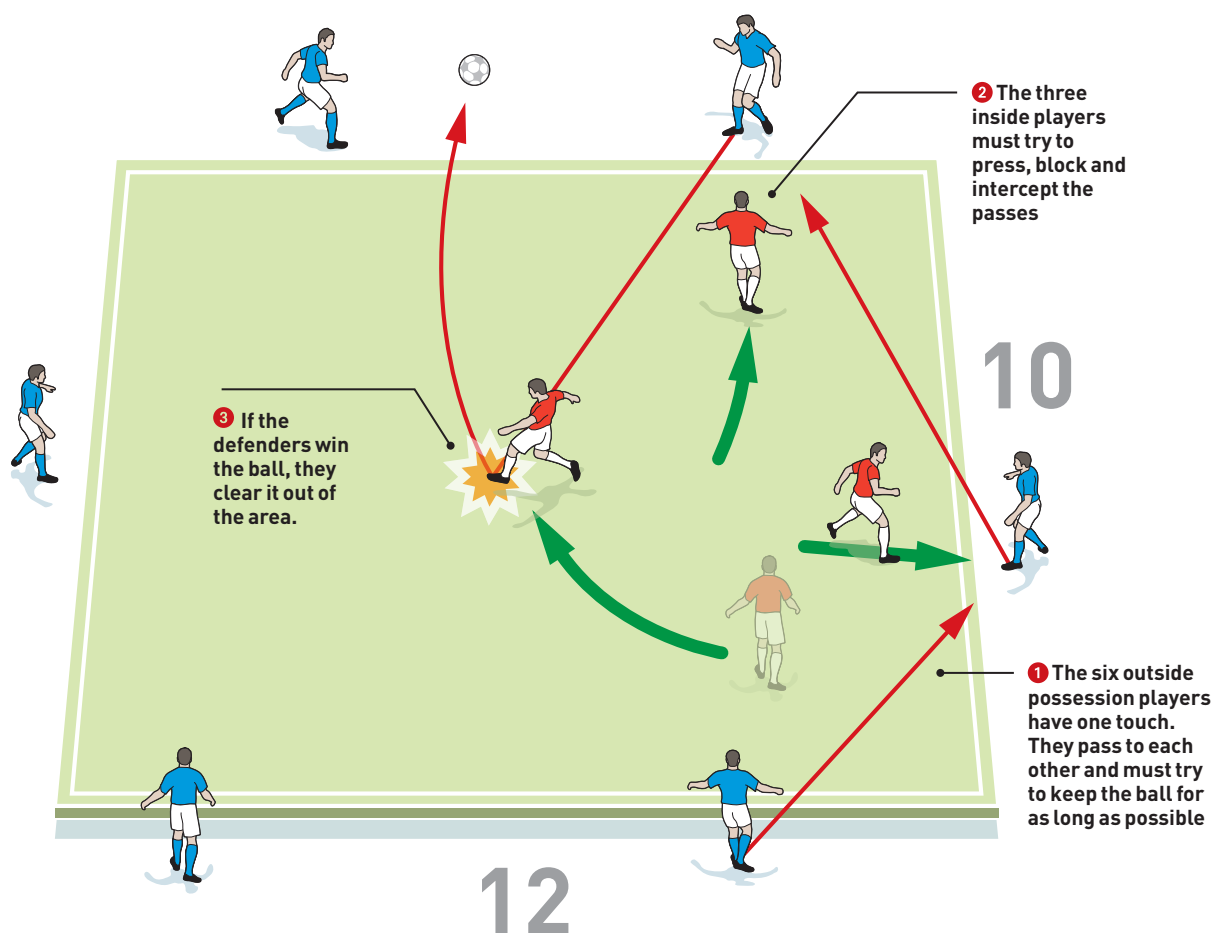
What do I get the players to do?

Tactical circle

This session would begin with a warm-up of 10 minutes and a technical warm-up of 10 minutes [not shown]. Next we



1



▲ **Tactical circle:** This is a passing and possession activity for nine players. It's 6v3, but the team of six is made up of two teams of three that each take a turn in the centre.

set up an area of 12x10 yards. We are using nine players, split into six possession players, who are positioned outside of the area, and a team of three, who play inside the area, as shown [1]. The six outside possession players have one touch and must pass between

themselves, trying to keep hold of the ball for as long as possible in the time allocated. The three inside players must try to press, block and intercept the passes. If they manage to gain possession, they should clear the ball out of the area to score a point. Play six rounds of two

minutes, swapping the pressing players with three outside players each time. The three players that win the most balls when in the centre are the winners of the challenge.

What are the key things to look out for?

Support and positioning

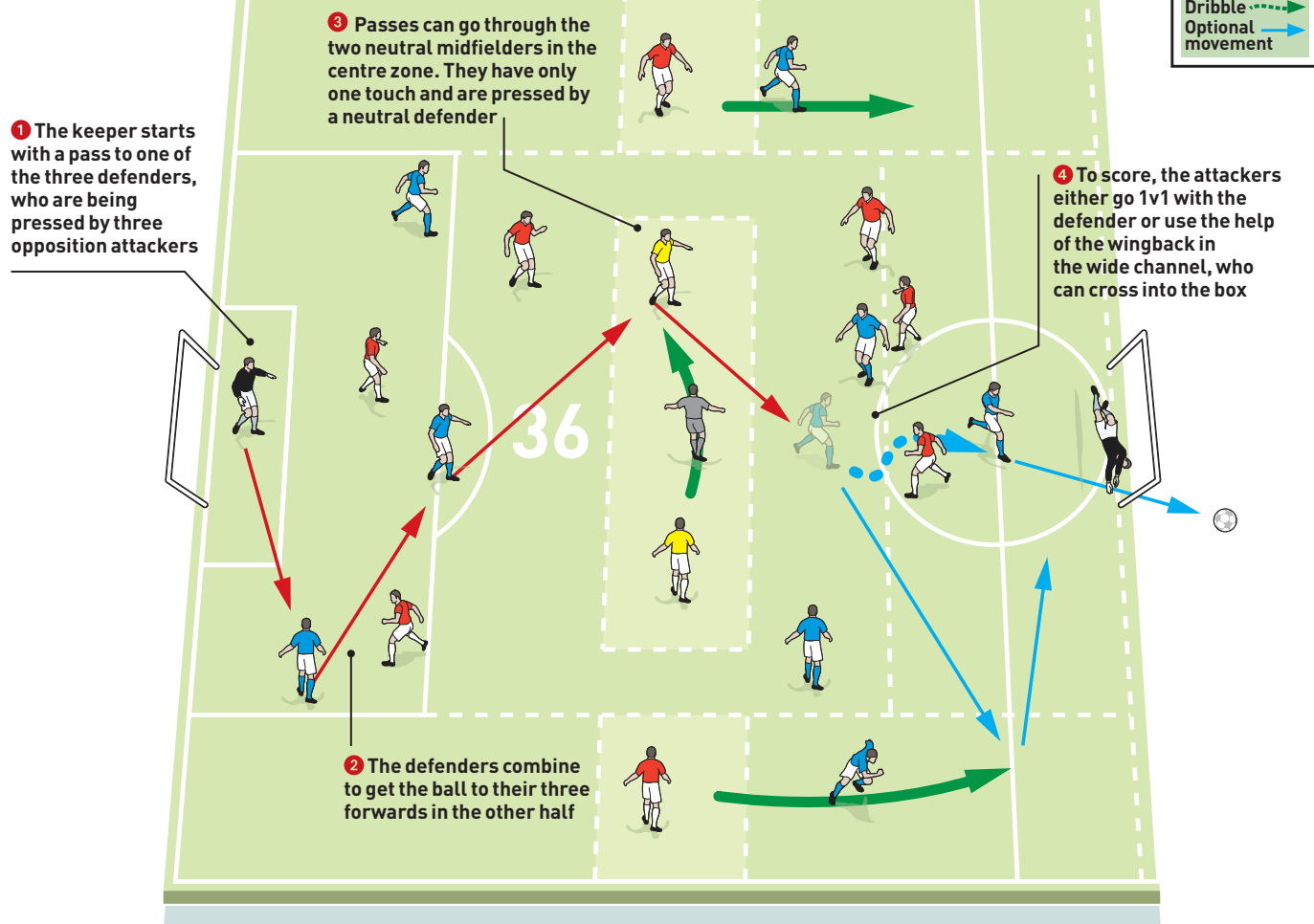
are important for the three pressing players, as they must be in the right position to block or intercept passes. They must also show a level of anger to win the ball. Players will have to be aggressive and be clever when covering, so they are able to



ANTONIO CONTE

BACK THREE TACTICS

2a



10

- ▲ **Tactical game:** Although only using 19 players plus keepers, this is effectively an 11v11 game, because the neutral midfielders play for the team in possession and make each team's formation 3-4-3 when attacking with the ball.

intercept any through balls. Communication is vital and they must help each other by passing on useful information.

What do I get the players to do next?

Tactical game

We set up on just over half a pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper at each end. We mark out a 36x10-yard central zone and create two crossing channels on the wing, as shown

"The back three is a vital part of the way we play at Chelsea – they provide the forward motion in attack and squeeze play in the central areas in defence"

[2a]. Each team has three defenders in the defensive half of the pitch and three attackers in the attacking half. The central zone contains three players: two neutral midfielders who play for the team in

possession, and a neutral defender who presses the midfielders. Each team has two wingbacks on the halfway line, one on each side of the pitch. Play starts with the goalkeeper, who passes

out to one of the three defenders in front of him. They are put under pressure by three opposition attackers, who must try to win the ball and counter-attack. Playing a 3v3 in their defensive zone, the aim for the defenders is to combine to get the ball to their three forwards in the other half of the pitch. Passes can go either through the two neutral midfield players in the central zone, who



ANTONIO CONTE

BACK THREE TACTICS

only have one touch, or directly from defence to attack through the inner channel between the central zone and the wide channel, as shown **[2b]**.

When the forwards receive the ball, they should either go 1v1 against a defender, combine with each other to create a

shooting opportunity, or use the assistance of their wingbacks in the wide channels. The wingbacks are tied to their channel but can cross into the box.

If the defenders manage to win the ball from the attackers, they can counter-attack but can only play the

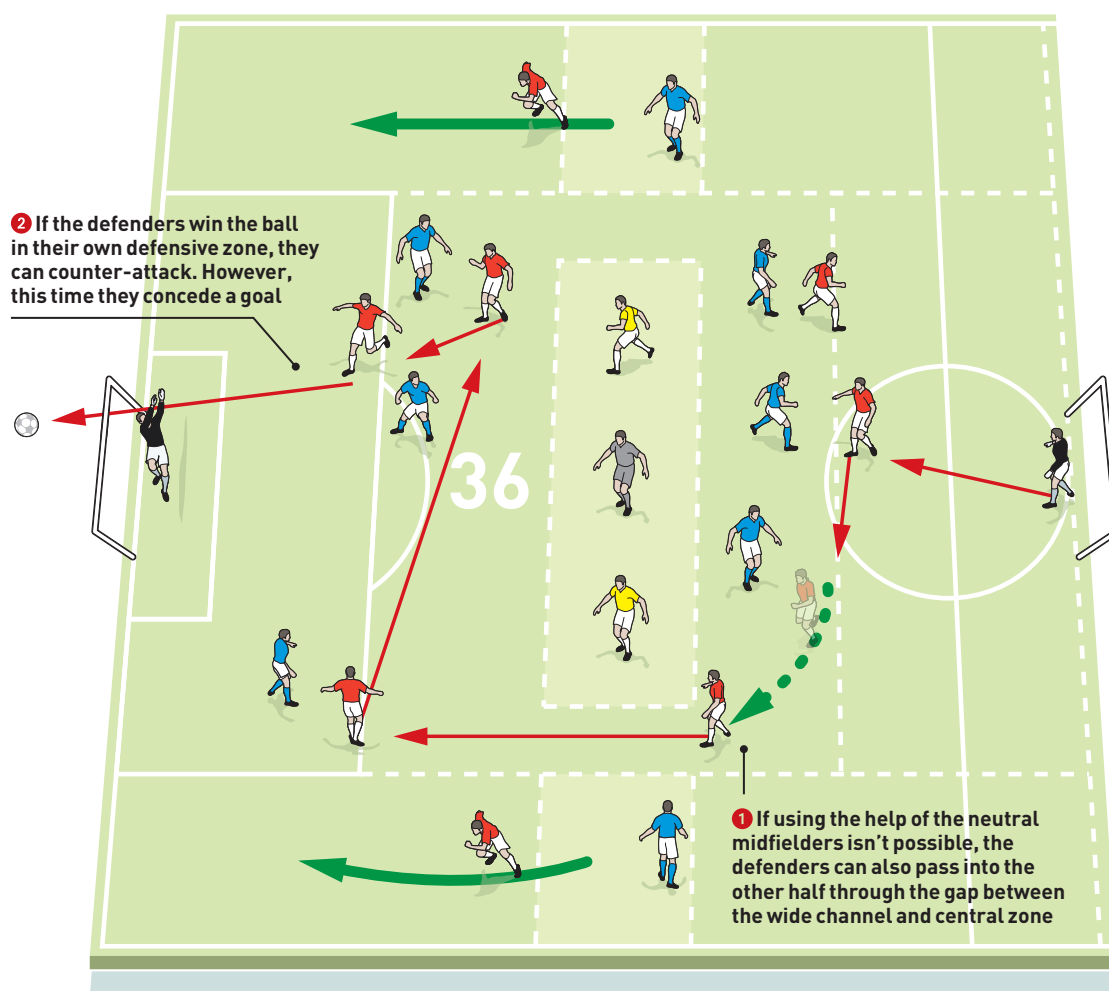
ball into the forward half of the pitch using the same passing options as before. Play two 15-minute games.

What are the key things to look out for?

When under attack, look for the three defenders to help each other through

good communication. They should also be able to defend 1v1 or, if possible, 2v1. If the attackers play the ball out wide to the wingback in the wide channel, it's important for the defenders to get in the right position and to mark accordingly in case of a cross.

2b



10

“When under attack, look for your three defenders to help each other through good communication”



José Mourinho Defensive organisation

Overview:

This session is about defensive organisation, and specifically two points: depth control and double marking.

Its importance depends on the principles contained within a team's tactical model. The session is important for teams with a high defensive block, who allow space in behind the defensive line – this is a familiar situation in defensive transitions.

Ultimately, the coach has to work what he feels is right into the team dynamic.

While this organisation is simple in terms of training method, the complexity comes through the fundamentals of team tactics.

In the session, we go from a smaller area to a larger one in the final exercise – giving a global application of the principles we train.

What do I get the players to do?

Each of the principles we rehearse is practised in the same way.

The ball starts with an attacking central midfielder and is played out wide.

When the ball goes dead play restarts with the central midfielder. If defenders win the ball they aim for the target goal on the halfway line.

DEFENSIVE ORGANISATION

Principle 1:

Depth control by defenders

Reading the cross from deep defenders make a collective decision to retreat as a unit – in this way offside is a collective decision.

The defenders must communicate at all times, moving closer together where necessary but never stretching more than 10 yards apart.

SESSION TIME

90mins total:
15mins warm-up,
15mins for each defensive principle,
15mins game, plus
15mins cool down and individual feedback

KEY
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble - - - - -
Optional run - - - - -

Defensive midfielders must be aware of the space between themselves and the defence. They should try to compress the area so that the distance between themselves and the defenders is 10-15 yards, as well as denying attackers space to receive passes between the lines.

The defenders control depth by holding their line at a predetermined distance relative to the perceived threat from opponents.

Principle 2:

Controlling defensive areas

The full-back nearest must decide whether to press the wide player or drop back to cover. He will get the call when the central defender's line of vision to the ball is disturbed, at which point he presses the winger. If the winger has moved past this line, the full-back retreats.

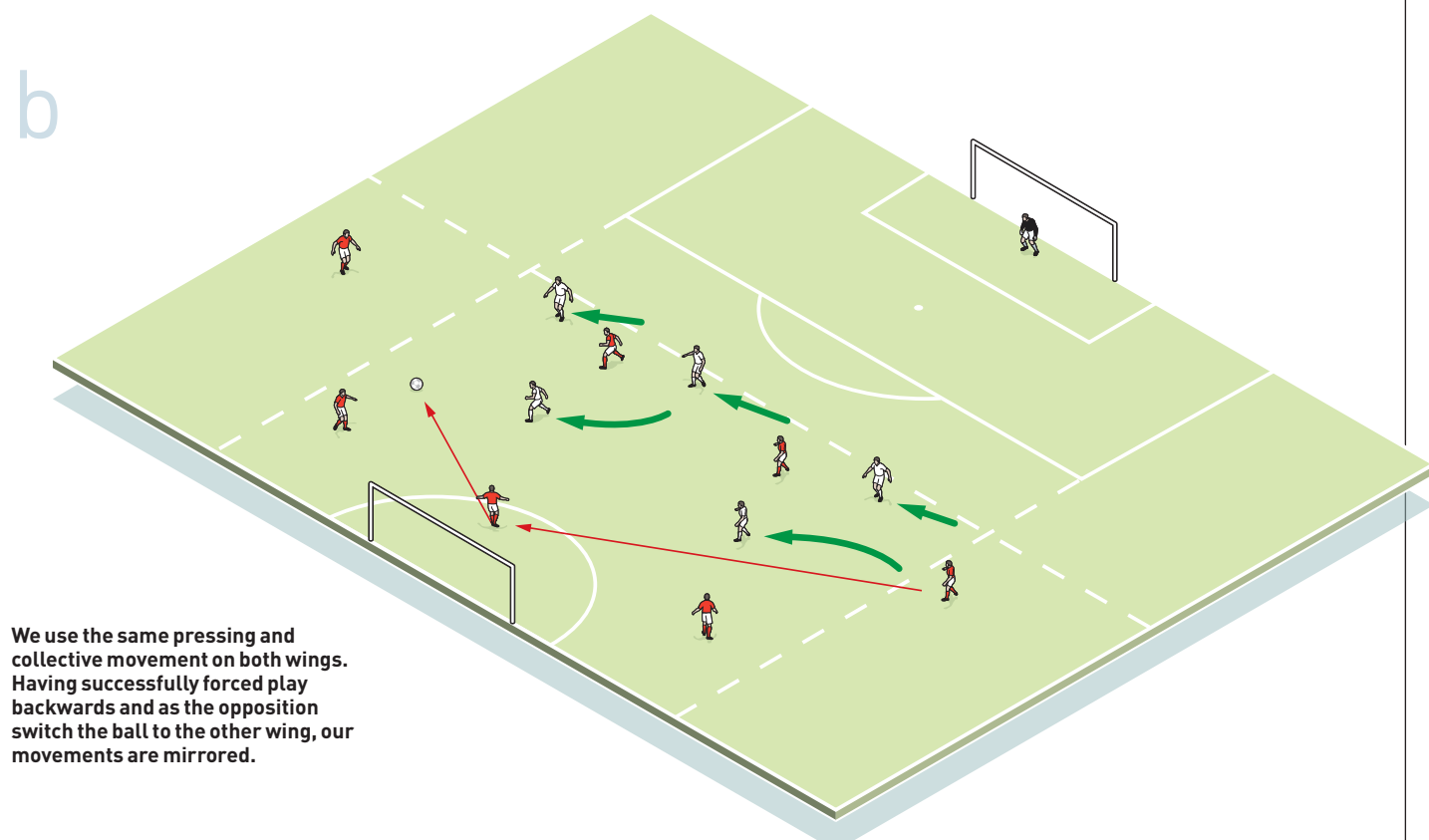
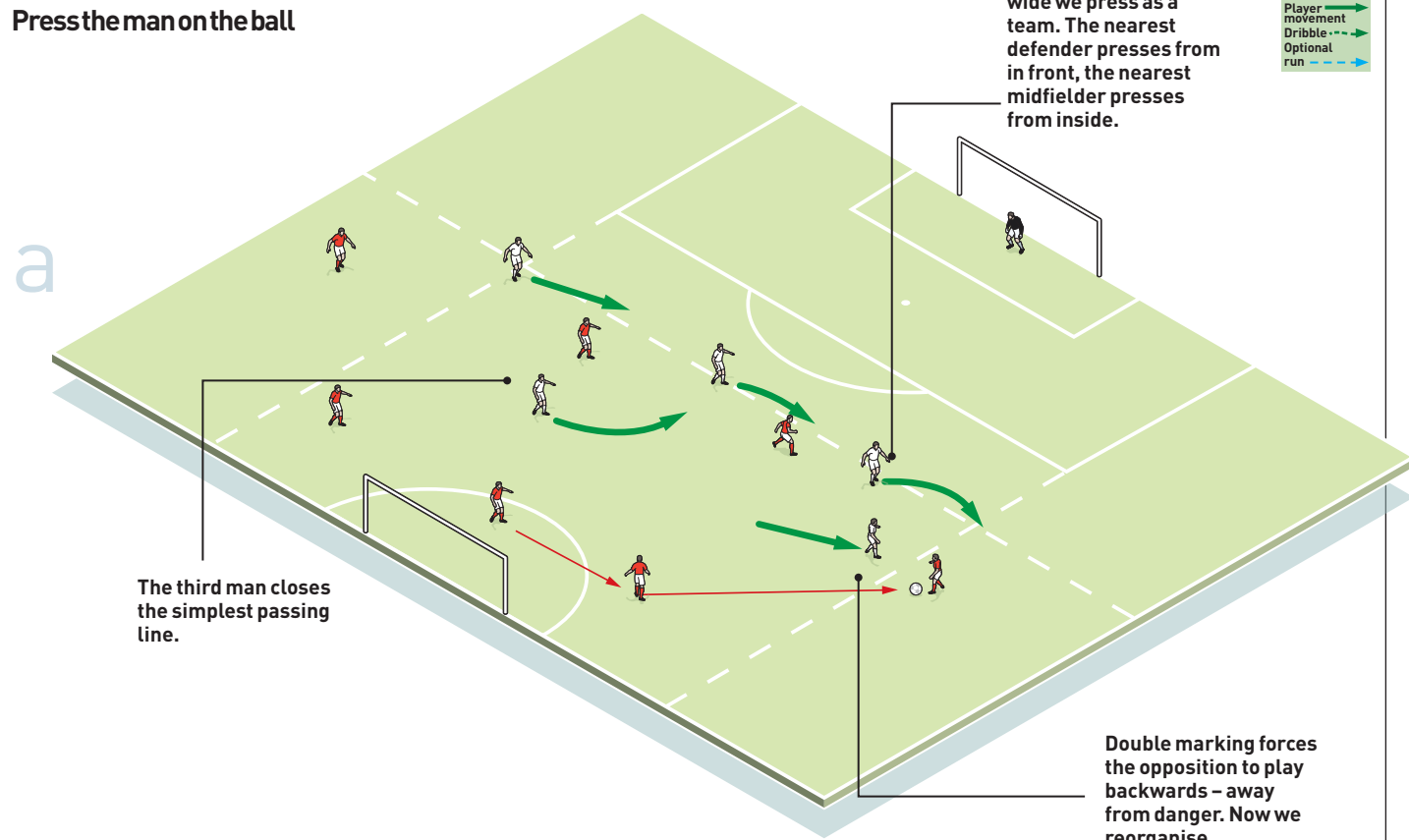
The defenders must anticipate the strikers' movement and move to cover all finishing areas. They must expect a striker to make a run across the near post and one central, as well as being aware of the possibility of the opposite winger moving in on the far post. They cover the areas accordingly.

One of the central midfielders drops to cover the pull back and any late breaking midfielders. They are also well positioned to collect any second balls and launch counter attacks.



DEFENSIVE ORGANISATION

Principle 3: Press the man on the ball





JOSÉ MOURINHO

Application of principles trained before

Play 11v11 on a full-width pitch from box to box. Players must put into practice the elements rehearsed up until now.

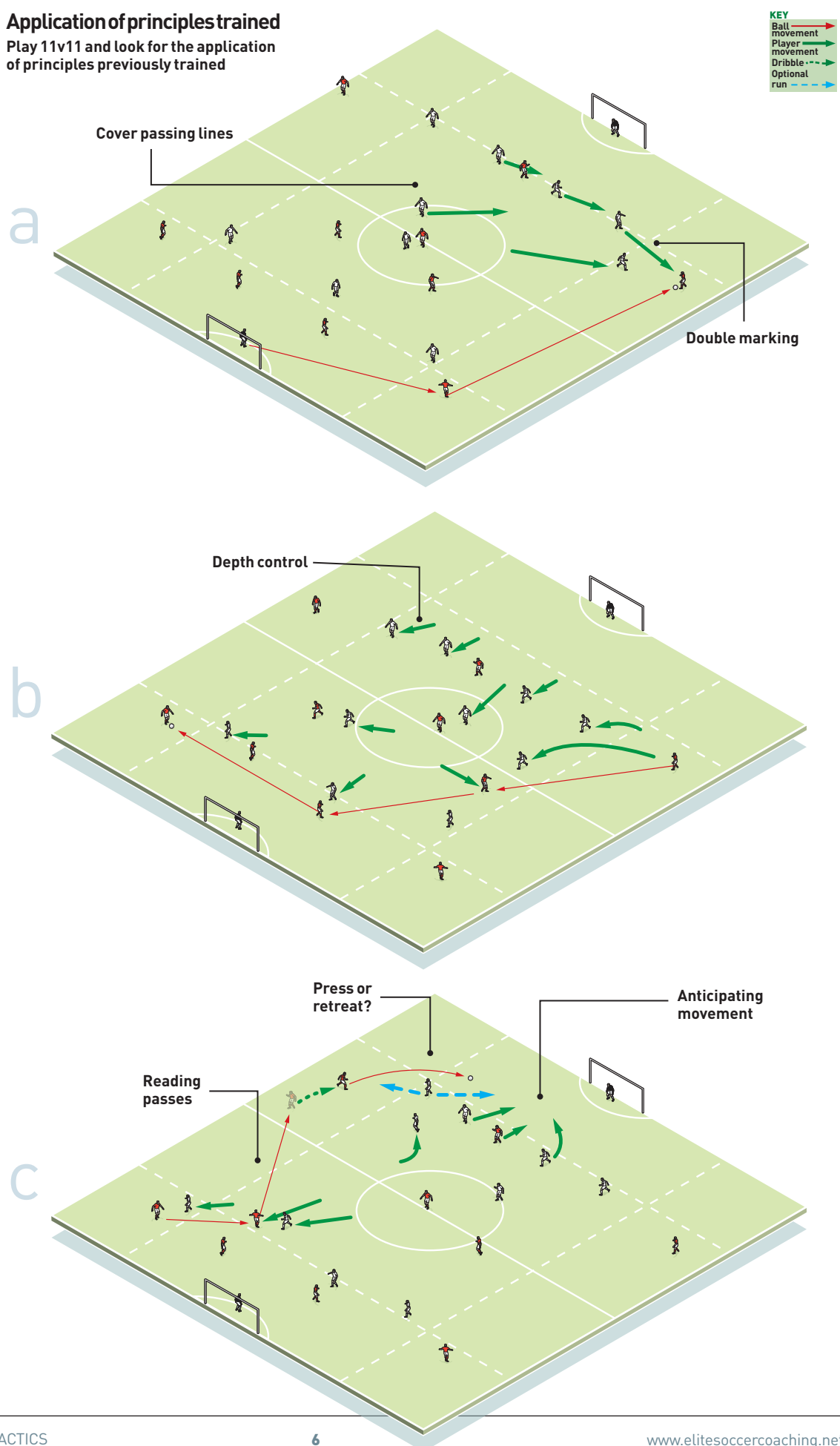
Attacking moves must come from the flank, with defenders showing depth control, the skill and organisation to double mark, and the confidence to move across in closing down the threat from the flanks.

This is a continuous game played for 15 minutes. All normal laws and restarts apply. ■

DEFENSIVE ORGANISATION

Application of principles trained

Play 11v11 and look for the application of principles previously trained





MAURICIO POCHETTINO

Mauricio Pochettino Pressing initiation

Overview:

This session coaches players on understanding defensive pressing. It's important to practise the key elements to identify how, when and where we can apply pressing technique, and that includes adopting the right shape tactically and togetherness of the group, as well as being able to identify the right moment to close down.

We see the benefits of this session paying off every week – indeed, good pressing technique is central to the intense brand of football we play.

“As soon as the ball is moved to a new area of the pitch, defenders must regroup and press quickly.”

PRESSING INITIATION

SET-UP

AREA

Half pitch plus 15 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

10v10 plus two keepers

SESSION TIME

60mins

What do I get the players to do?

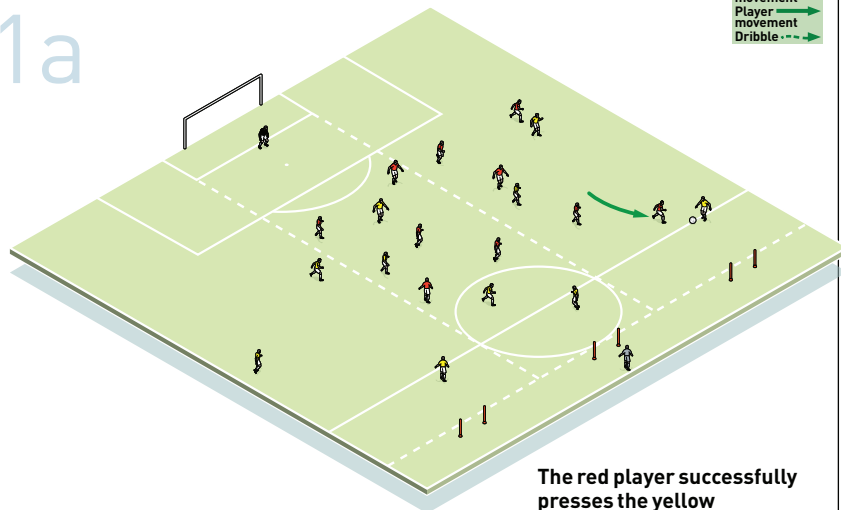
We divide our practice area into three, with three poles (five yards wide) spaced out evenly at one end, and a full-size goal at the other. There are two teams of 10, plus keepers.

Yellows attack the top goal, while reds score by passing through the poles at the other end of the pitch. Pressing opponents closely at all times is imperative (1a).

There are no more than three passes allowed in each area and players are limited to three touches each. Reds must spread out and switch play, making use of all three areas. They score one point for scoring through the poles and three points if the keeper can anticipate which gate the ball will be scored through by gathering.

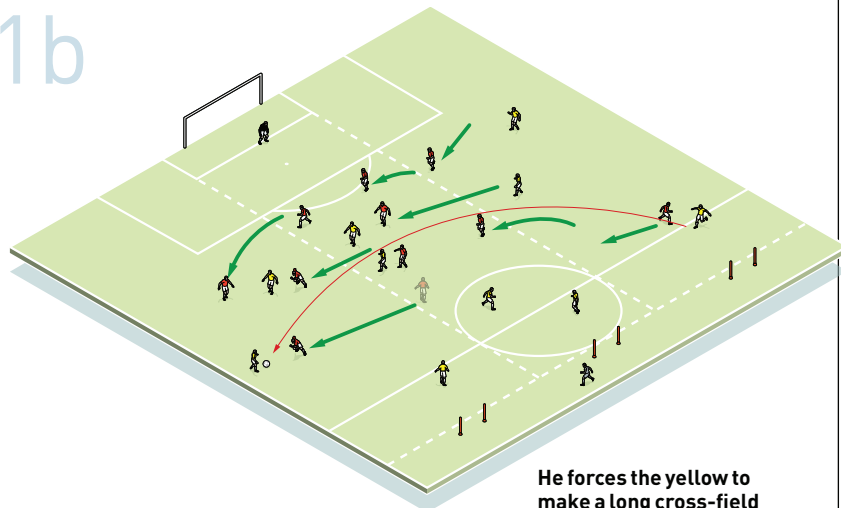
Yellow defenders must press at every opportunity, closing down space in front of attackers and jockeying opponents in looking to force an interception or error. We condition the practice so that if the ball is in one wide channel, the team out

1a



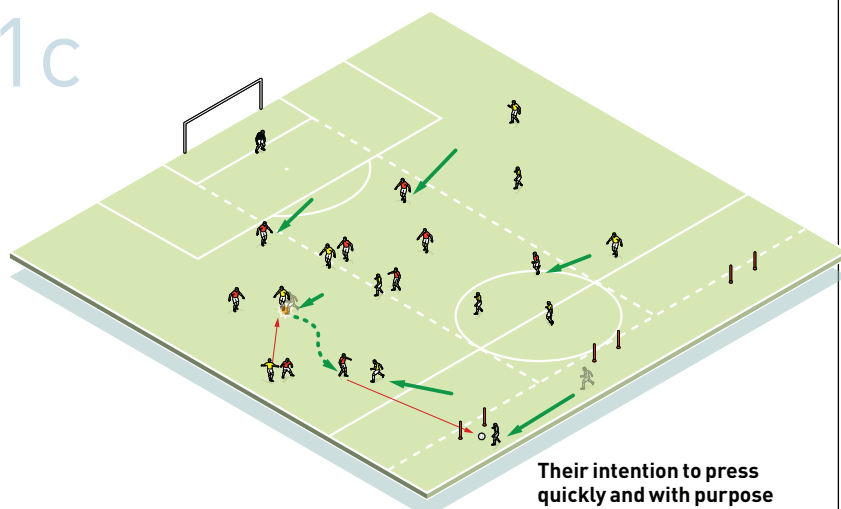
The red player successfully presses the yellow defender

1b



He forces the yellow to make a long cross-field pass, which means all reds must vacate the opposite wide channel

1c



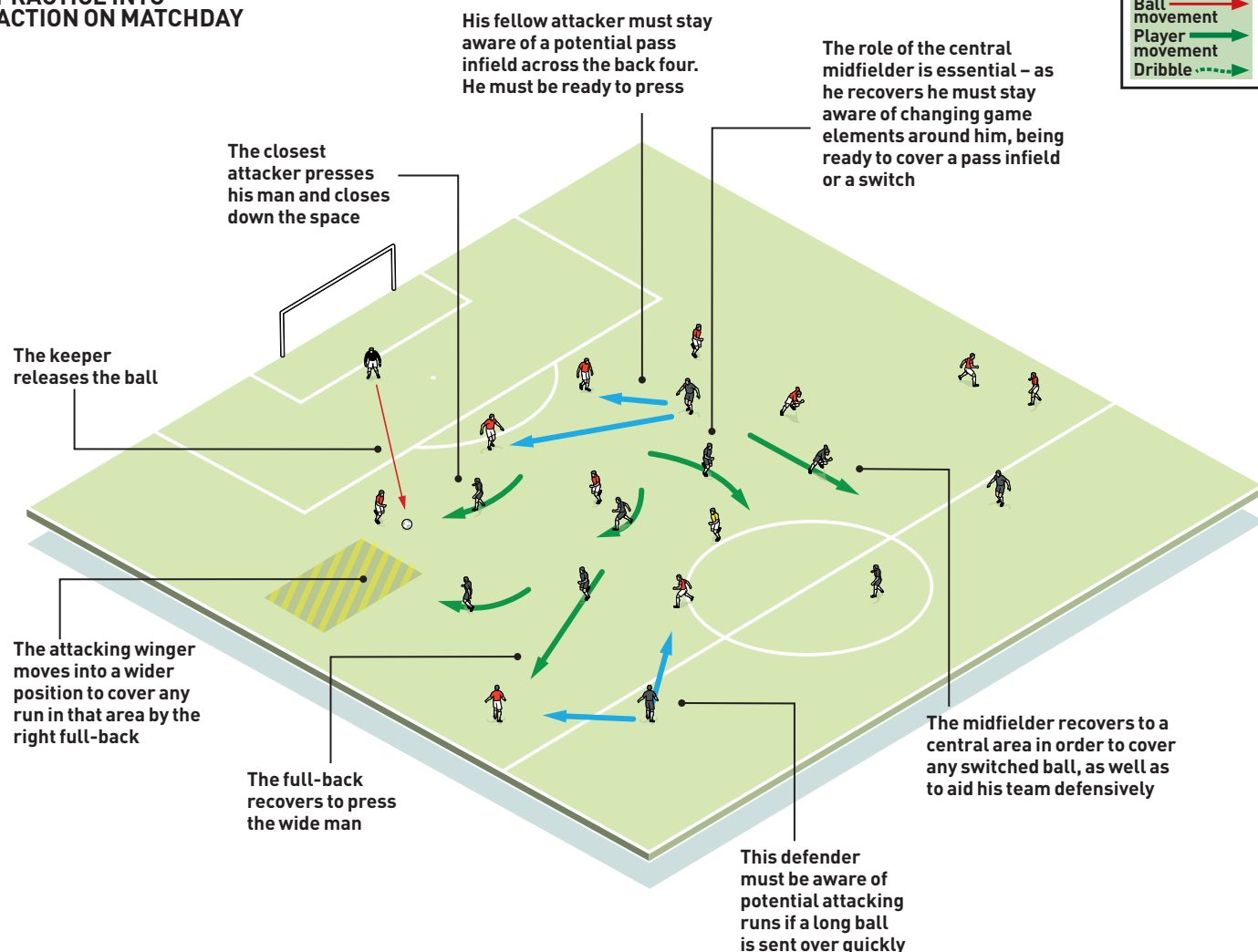
Their intention to press quickly and with purpose immediately prompts an interception, and a threaded pass to the keeper sees the reds score three points



MAURICIO POCHETTINO

PRESSING INITIATION

PUTTING THE PRACTICE INTO ACTION ON MATCHDAY



of possession must vacate the opposite channel (1b). Not only does this encourage plenty of opposition players near to the play and the opportunity to press tightly, but when the ball is switched back to the 'empty' flank, it quickly tests defenders' ability to regroup, close down and, hopefully, intercept (1c).

What are the key things to look out for?

This session is all about

decision-making, so defenders must communicate well with each other at all times. As soon as the ball is moved to a new area of the pitch, defenders must regroup and press quickly.

How do I progress the practice?

We can progress this practice by adding normal goals instead of poles. We can also increase the size of the middle area to make the challenge more difficult for the defending team.

THE PRINCIPLES OF PRESSING

- Pressing may be done by the individual, but it requires player unity and a shared understanding.
- There are three generally accepted types of positional pressing: ultra-offensive (in the opponents' defensive third), offensive (in the opponents' half or around halfway) and defensive (in your own half).
- Stand-by pressing is pressing carried out by one player, while team mates stay 'short' and concentrate on covering the spaces. Aggressive pressing is typically done on flanks, where space is tight and multi-player pressing can see possession turned over.
- Invited pressing is a technique linked to stand-by pressing, which forces an opponent to play the ball in a certain direction so that an aggressive phase of pressing can then be undertaken.
- Pressing players will usually move at pace towards their target and slow when a couple of yards away.
- Pressing is as relevant and necessary for attackers as it is midfielders and defenders.



DAVID MOYES

David Moyes Improving defending

SET-UP

AREA

Up to half a pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 1 full size goal

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 19 players + 1 goalkeeper

SESSION TIME

Practices 1 & 2: 15mins each

Practices 3 & 4: 20mins each

Overview

This session is all about establishing and improving defensive principles. It is essential that players know how to defend in all situations: in 1v1s, as a defensive unit, and as a team.

This practice allows me to show them how I expect them to defend, both as an individual and in conjunction with their team mates.

I will regularly use parts of the session throughout the season, in order to remind players of their roles and responsibilities.

What do I get the players to do?

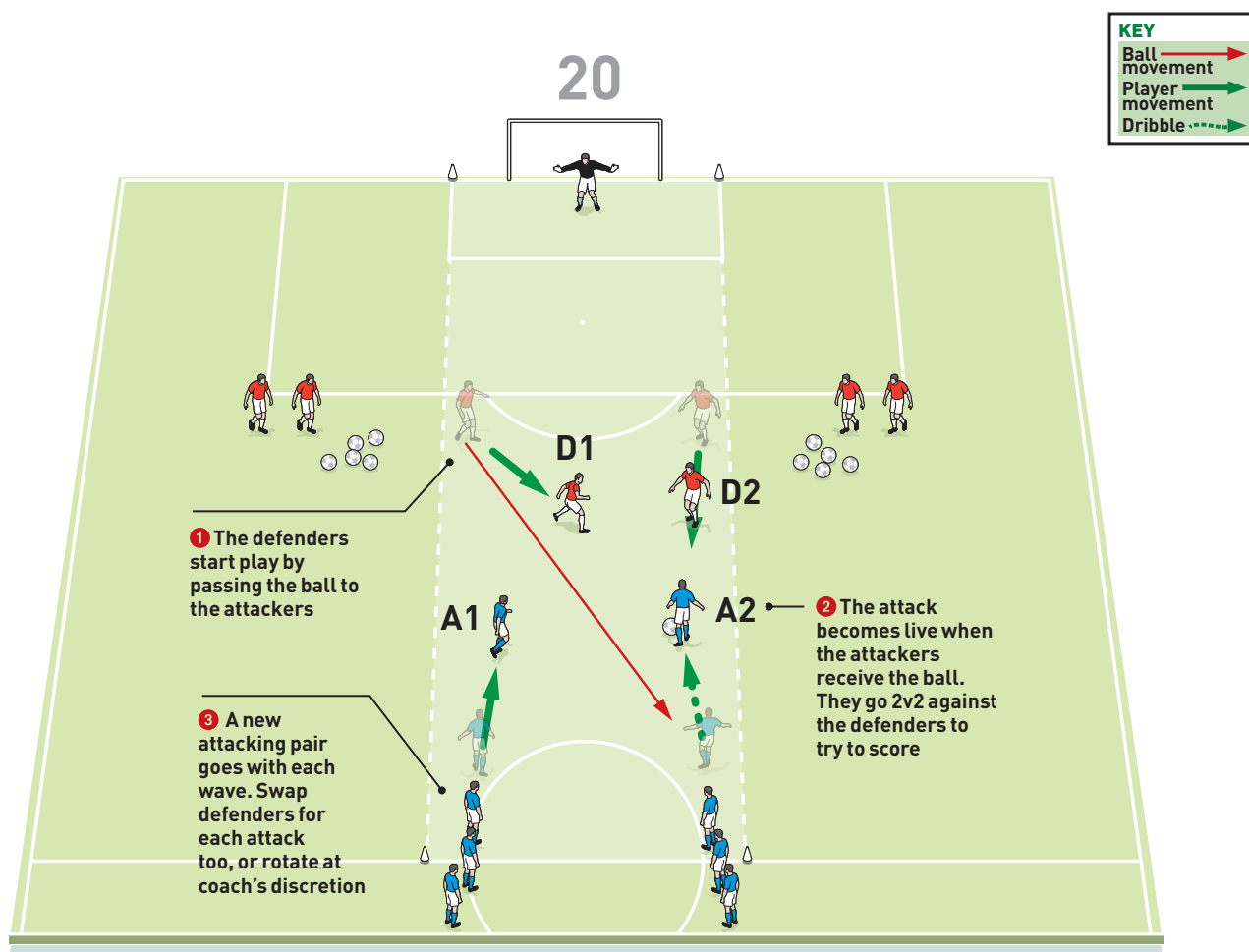
Practice 1: 2v2

We set up on half a pitch with a 20-yard channel marked out and a goal at one end, as shown [1]. We

are using a goalkeeper and outfield players, divided into attacking pairs and defending pairs, who go 2v2 against each other in waves. The attacking pairs wait at their starting point in the centre circle and the defending pairs wait just outside the penalty area. A defender starts play with a pass to one of the two attackers, who combine to go 2v2 against

1

20



the defenders to try and score. The offside rule applies. New attacking and defending pairs rotate at the coach's discretion. To progress this practice, we can add a third attacker who takes up the position of a striker to go 3v2 against the defenders.

Practice 2: 3v3

The same basic principles

apply, but this time we widen the channel to 30 yards and are using waves of three defenders and three attackers. Play again starts with a pass from one of the defenders to an attacker, who receives the ball and combines with team mates to attack in a 3v3. The offside rule applies.

To progress this practice, we would add a fourth attacker, as shown [2], who takes up the position of a striker to make it 4v3 in favour of the attackers.

Practice 3: 6v4

For the next practice, we make the channel the width of the penalty area, and we play six

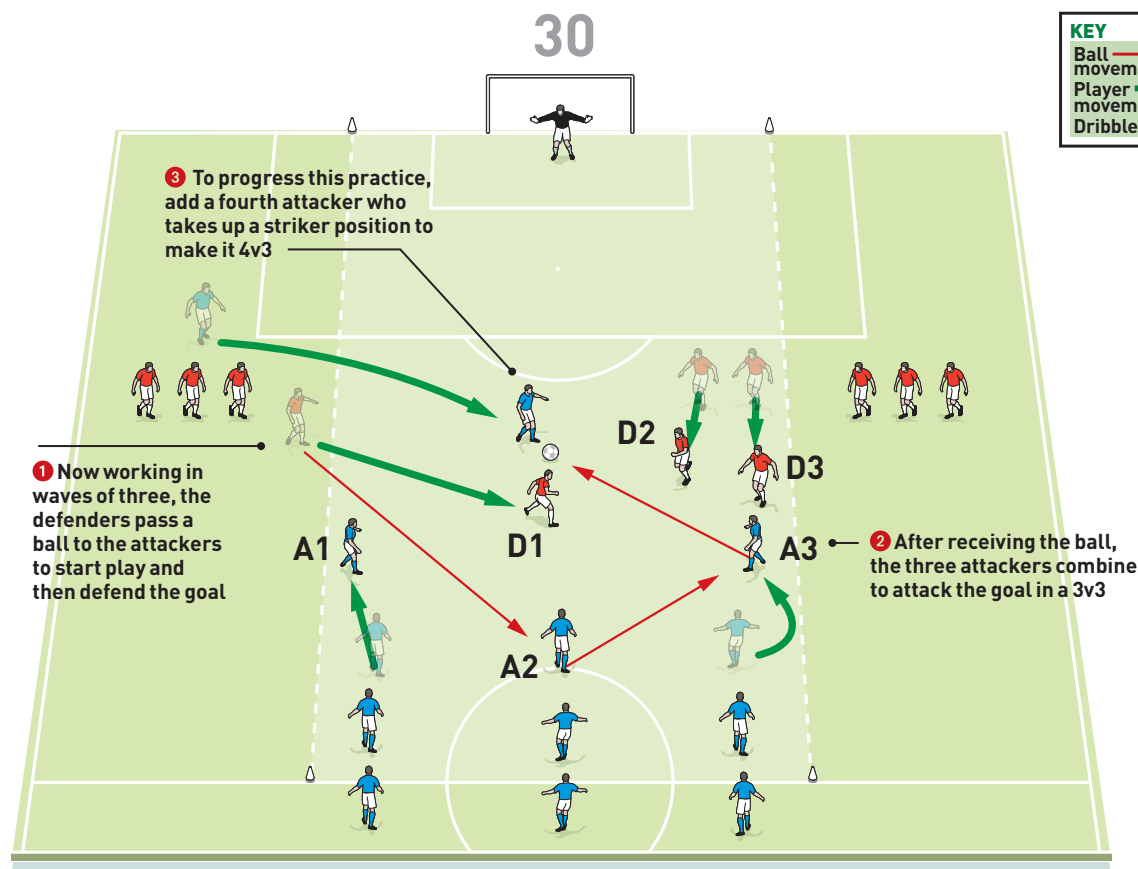
attackers against four defenders, as shown [3]. The coach starts play by passing a ball into the defenders, who must clear with a first-touch header or volley. If the clearance is picked up by an attacker, the attack starts from there; but if the clearance goes out of the playing area, the



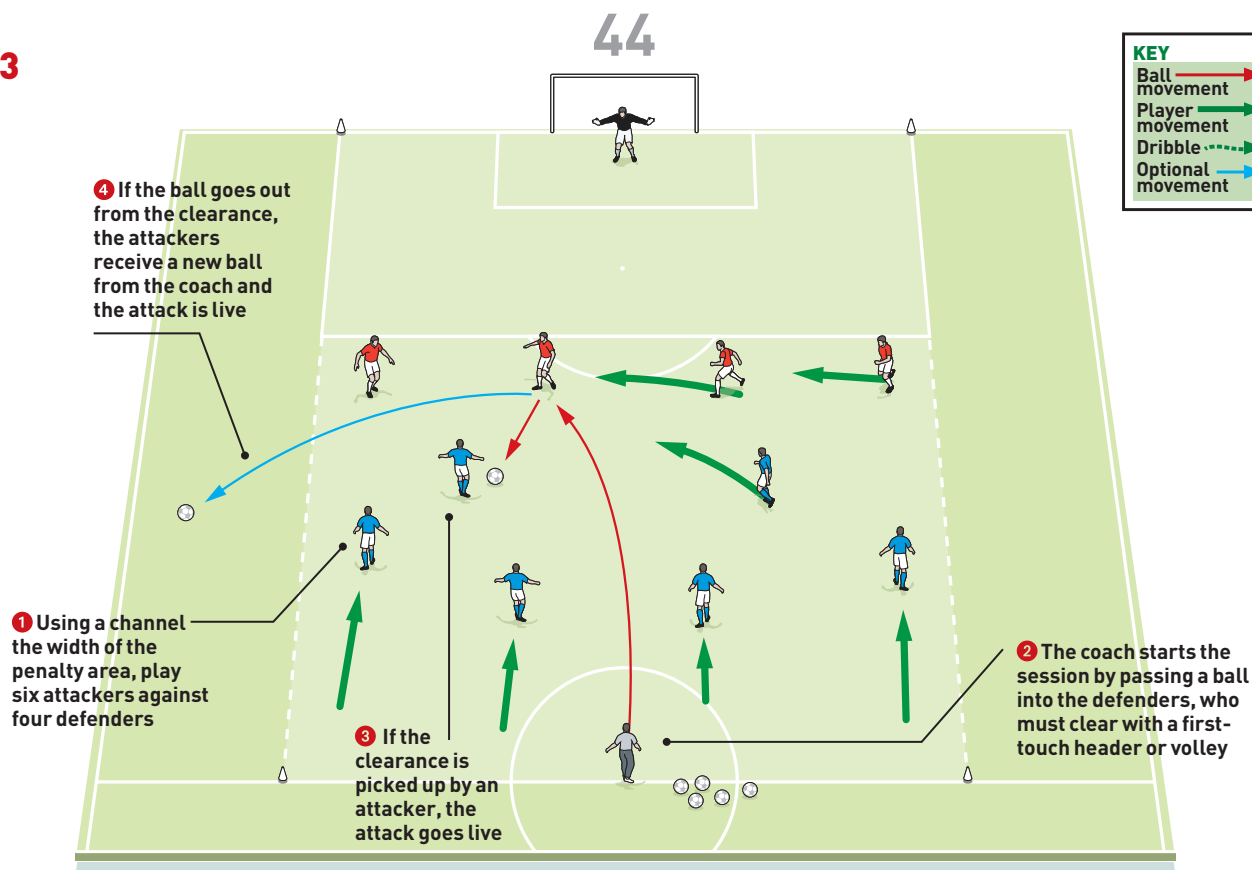
DAVID MOYES

DAVID MOYES: IMPROVING DEFENDING

2



3





IMPROVING DEFENDING

coach passes another ball to an attacker to start play. If the defenders win the ball back, they must try to play it to the coach.

Practice 4: 8v6

We now use the full width of the pitch, setting up to play an 8v6 in favour of the attackers, as shown [4]. The coach again starts the activity with a pass into the defenders, who try to clear with a first-touch header or a volley. The attack starts from where the attackers win the ball, or if the defenders clear

the ball into touch, the coach plays a new starting ball to the attackers. If the defenders win possession, they try to get the ball back to the coach.

How do I progress the session?

We would build on practice 4, progressing the practice to a 10v8 and finally to an 11v11.

What are the key things to look out for?

We expect to see all the individual defensive

principles in action in this session, plus covering, screening and marking. Also important are angles and distances when working in pairs, plus the movement as units in relation to the ball and the opponents.

What are the typical mistakes that players might make?

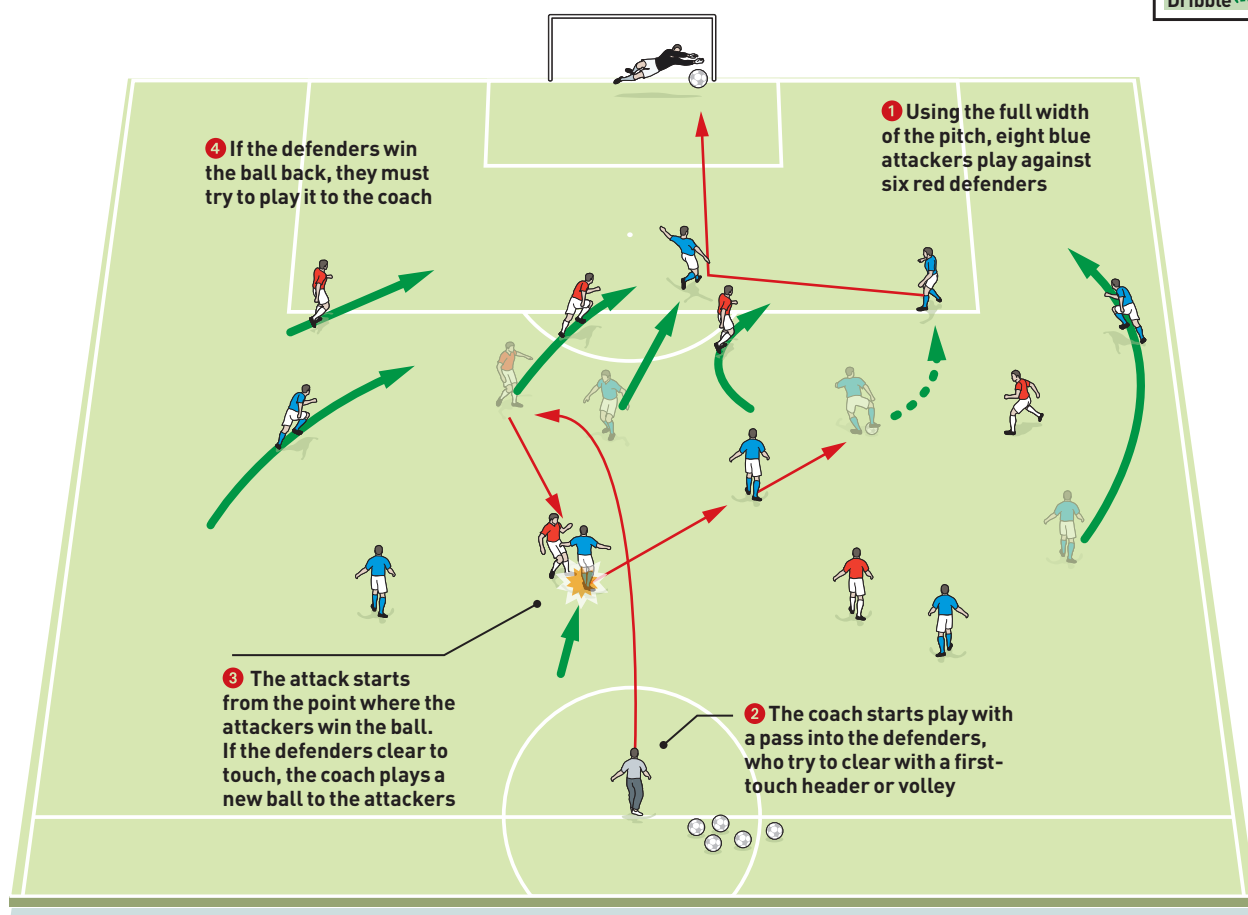
Individually players can have problems with 1v1 principles, and collectively they may not get angles and distances right, or their basic

movement may not be co-ordinated well enough.

How long does the session last?

It depends on the level and performance of the players, as you cannot progress the session until you are satisfied that the players have mastered the basics of the practice.

4





MAURICIO PELLEGRINO

Mauricio Pellegrino Defending as a midfield or back four

SET-UP

AREA

Up to full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 6 small goals, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Total: 60mins

1v1 & 2v1: 15mins

Defending three goals: 20mins

Progression: 25mins

Overview

We use this session to practice defending against teams that attack from all areas of the pitch at speed, like counter attacks, or teams that use wide players to try to pull defences apart.

Individual and team defending are both crucial when faced with opposition teams that pass their way into the final third and it needs good covering and defending all around the penalty area.

We build the session up using 1v1 and 2v1 defending, working through an activity where the focus is on the wide areas and not leaving space on one side of

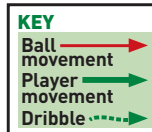
the pitch for teams to exploit.

We take this into a game of six attackers against four defenders that replicates the back four, or the defensive midfield. This game works on keeping the ball out of the space behind the defence with good squeezing and covering by team mates.

What do I get the players to do?

1v1 practice

We start by setting up an area of 24x12 yards with a small goal at one end and two small goals in the corners at the other end, as shown [1]. A defending player (the red) passes down the pitch



1

1 The red defender passes to the blue attacker and then moves in to defend the single goal

3 If the red defender wins the ball, he should clear it towards one of the two small goals in the corner

2 The blue attacker receives the pass and must attack the single goal

2

1 Use the same set-up as before but introduce a second attacker

2 The blue attacker receives the starting pass and combines with his team mate to beat the defender and scores in the top goal

“Individual and team defending are both crucial when faced with opposition teams that pass their way into the final third”

to his opponent (the blue), who receives the ball and attacks the single goal at the top end of the pitch. On playing the opening pass, the defender enters the area and attempts to stop the attacker scoring in the main goal. If the defender wins the ball he concentrates on clearing it away from the area he is defending

towards one of the two small goals in the corner.

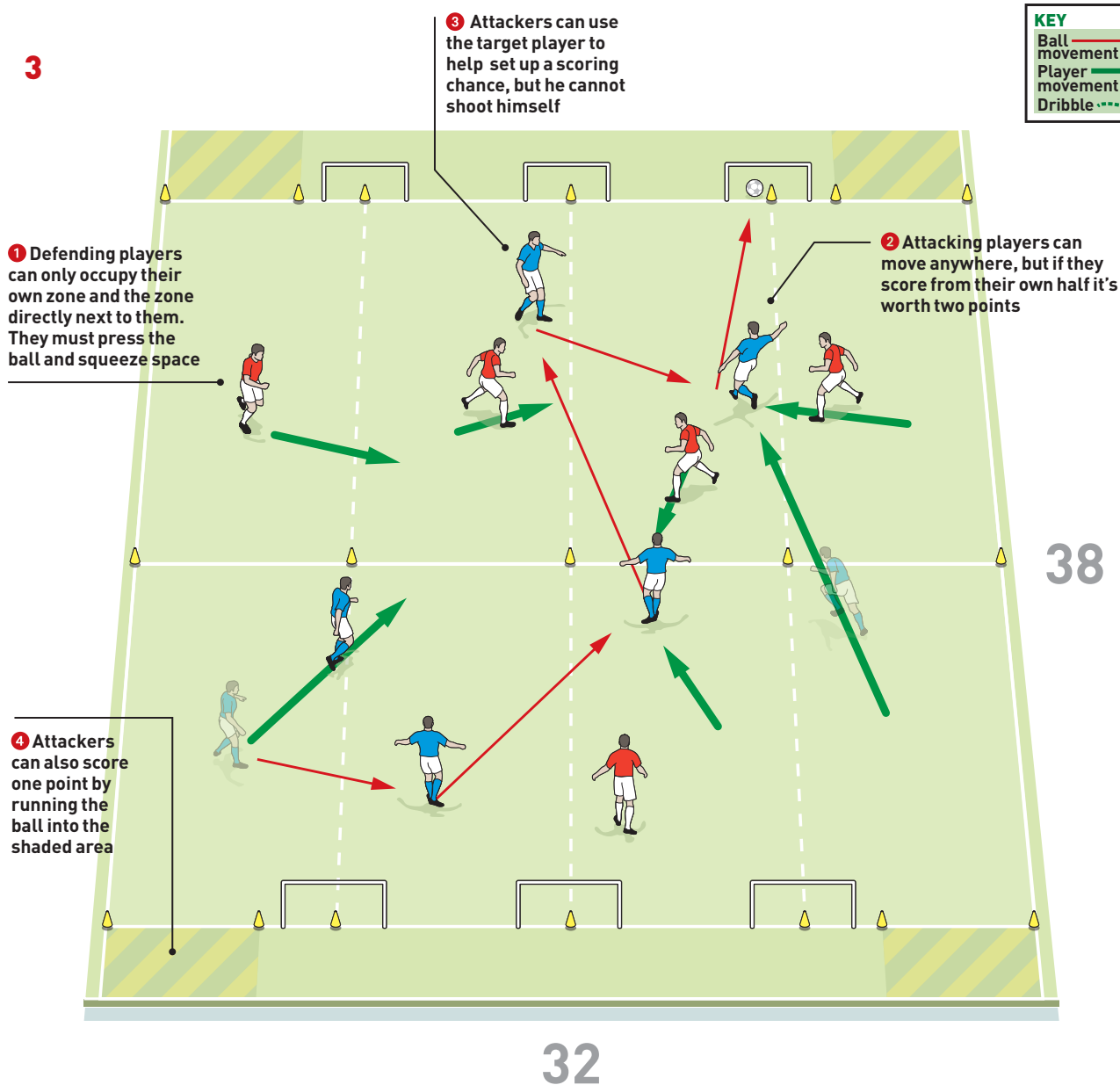
2v1 practice

We use the same set-up but this time the defender has two attackers to defend against, with a second one starting from the top of the area, as shown [2]. The starting defender again plays

the ball down the pitch to the first attacker, who must combine with his team mate to get past the defender and score in the single small goal at the top of the area. Again, if the defender wins the ball he should be focused on clearing the ball towards one of the two small goals in the corner.



DEFENDING AS A MIDFIELD OR BACK FOUR



What do I get the players to do next?

Defending three goals

We set up an area of 38x32 yards, divided into eight zones of 19x8 yards each, and with three mini goals at each end, as shown [3]. We are using 10 players in this activity split into two teams of five. We begin with four players from each team in their defending half of the pitch, with one starting in each of the four defensive zones.

The fifth player from each team starts as a target man in the attacking half. This is a 5v5 game but defending players can only occupy their own zone and the zone directly next to it, whereas attacking players have the freedom to go anywhere on the pitch. Teams score two points by shooting directly into one of the small goals from their own half (this is to force the defenders to come to the ball). They

can also score one point by running the ball into the shaded zones.

The team in possession can use the support of the target man in the attacking half, who cannot score himself but who can set up a goalscoring opportunity with a lay-off to team-mate.

There are no offsides.

The target man can only defend in the opposing half, so that means he can remain high up the pitch.

What are the key things to look out for?

When a team is out of possession and defending, we want to see players pressing the ball, squeezing the space and defending their area. Players should also cover the movement of their team mates.

How do I progress the session?

To progress the session we set up on a full size pitch,



MAURICIO PELLEGRINO

DEFENDING AS A MIDFIELD OR BACK FOUR

with a goal and a keeper at each end. We mark out the playing area as shown [4]. We use 20 outfield players split into two team of 10. Each team has six attackers in one half of the pitch and four defenders in the other half, and we play separate 6v4 battles in each half. The teams play 4v4 in the zone between the centre circle and

the 'D' of the penalty area, and the attacking team must try to break the line of the defending team by passing to one of its two strikers in the scoring zone in front of the goal. When they receive the ball, the strikers go 2v1 against the goalkeeper and try to score. There are no restrictions on the number of touches players can take.

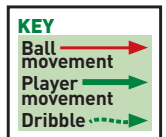
“When a team is out of possession, we want to see players pressing the ball, squeezing the space and defending their area”

4

3 The defenders must press and squeeze to try to stop the attackers passing to their strikers

1 Separate games are played at each end of the pitch, with the attacking teams trying to break the lines of the defending teams

2 Each attacking team has two strikers, who go 2v1 against the keeper in the penalty area when they receive the ball





Roy Hodgson Defensive principles

SET-UP

AREA

Up to two thirds of pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

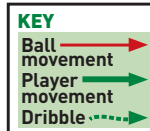
Total: 55mins

3v2 practice: 20mins

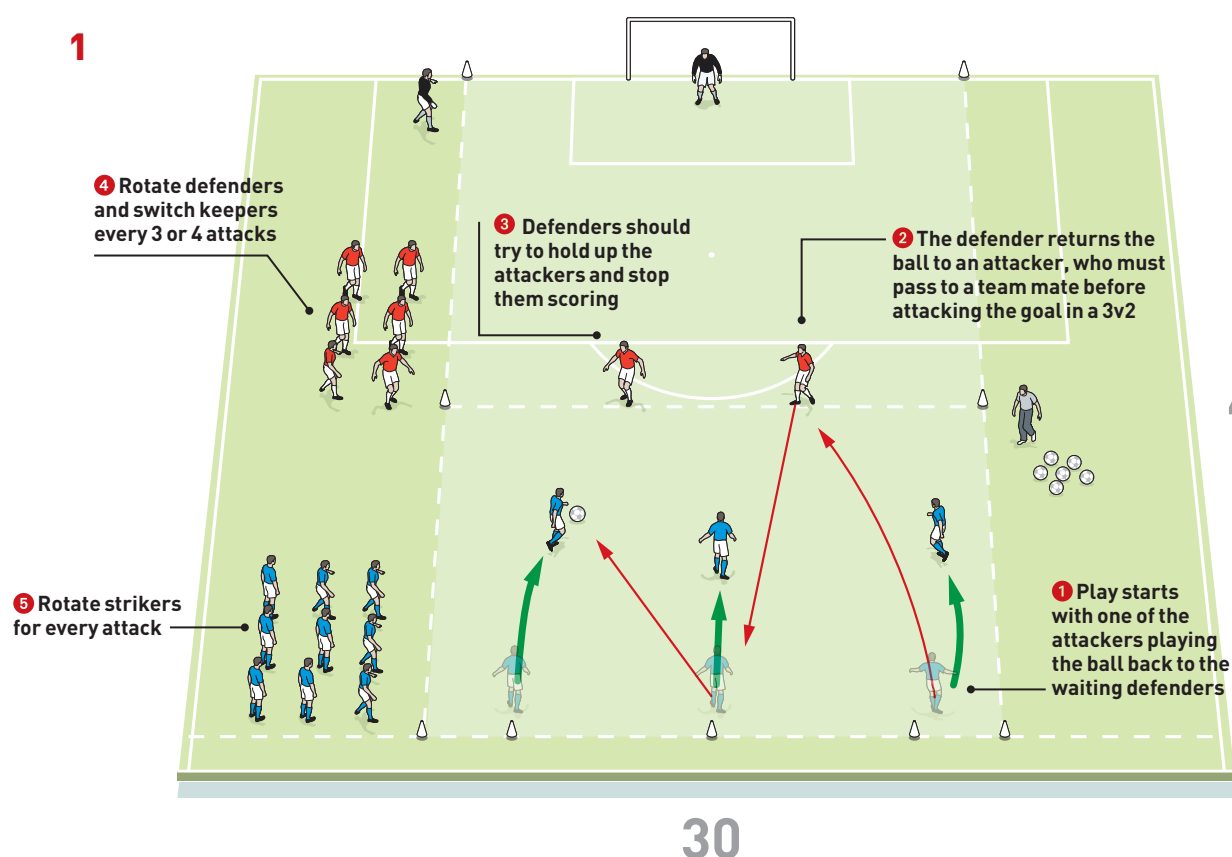
Round & round: 35mins

Overview

This session can be used for working on both attacking and defending principles, but here I am focusing on the defensive side of the activities. All basic defending principles can be developed and practised with this session, particularly holding up attacks, pushing up from the back, covering over, getting out quickly to meet the wingers, tracking midfield runs into the box, blocking shots and crosses, and being aware of counter-attacks.



“We want to see players are capable of holding up attacks and that they can resist making the first move until it’s necessary to block a shot”



What do I get the players to do?

3v2 practice

We set up an area of 25-30 yards wide and 40 yards long, with a full size goal at one end. The players are split into pairs of defenders, with attackers in groups of three and two goalkeepers. We start with three attackers at one end ready to attack two waiting defenders in front of the goal, as shown **[1]**. One of the attackers starts

play by passing to the first pair of defenders. The ball is passed back to one of the attackers, who become live when the defender touches the ball. The attacker who receives the ball back must pass it to a team mate before they can attack the defenders in a 3v2 with the aim of scoring past the keeper in the goal. After three or four attacks, change the defending pair and switch goalkeepers. The attacking trio change after every wave.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see players are capable of holding up attacks and that they can resist making the first move until it is necessary to block a shot. They should also stay on their feet. Defenders must keep the attackers going away from goal and making the only possible shot a ball struck towards the near post, which would

favour the keeper. Defenders should push out together when the ball is cut back in the box and not crossover to expose the third attacker. We look for the goalkeeper to be quick off his line if needed, coming out as a sweeper to cover any through balls.

What do I get the players to do next?

Round & round

We set up a playing area of



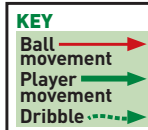
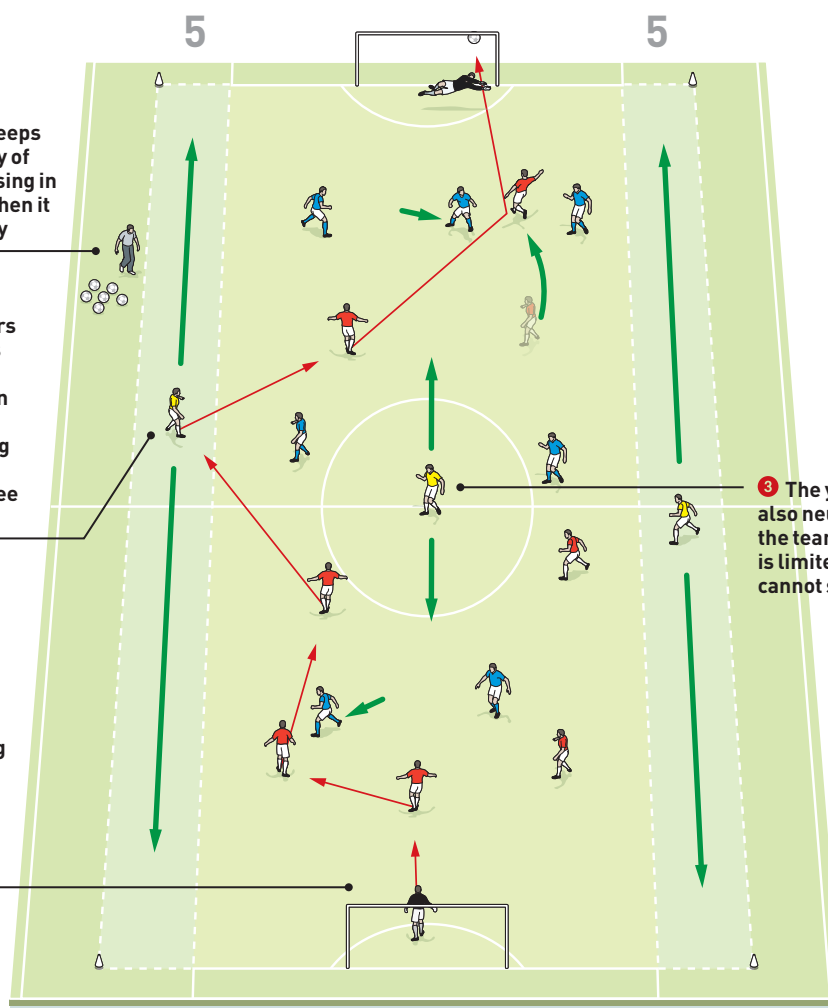
DEFENSIVE PRINCIPLES

2

4 The coach keeps up the intensity of attacks by passing in another ball when it goes out of play

2 The yellow wingers in the wide channels play for the team in possession. They can only receive the ball when in the attacking half. They cannot receive from the three defenders

1 Play 8v8 including keepers, who can only distribute with hands. They cannot kick the ball unless it has gone dead



3 The yellow midfielder is also neutral and plays for the team in possession. He is limited to two touches and cannot score a goal

70x54-yards, or between the two penalty boxes, with an additional five-yard wide channel on each side of the main area, as shown [2]. We have a goal and a goalkeeper at each end and split the players into two teams of seven outfield players and three neutrals, who play for the team in possession. Two of the neutrals are locked into the unopposed wide channels, one in each, and they can only receive the ball in the attacking half of the team in possession. They can also only receive the ball from attackers or midfielders, not from the three defenders. The third neutral operates in the main area as a

central midfielder but is limited to two touches and cannot score a goal. Keepers can only distribute the ball with their hands; they cannot kick it unless it has gone dead. With the exception of the outlined conditions, it's a normal game, with the neutral players giving an overload to the attacking team. Play starts with the coach feeding the ball into the 3v2 in midfield (the neutral midfielder giving the overload), or with a ball played directly to one of the strikers. The coach can keep attacks going and maintain the intensity by passing in another ball when it goes out of play. The coach may also want

to prevent the attacking team's defenders from crossing the halfway line in order to concentrate on making it a 5v6 in the attacking half. Forwards should be encouraged to pressure the defenders at all times.

What are the key things to look out for?

We look for the two central midfielders to screen the ball up to the centre forwards, staying together but not too flat. The same applies to the centre forwards, who need to prevent passes into the midfield and should force the possession team's defenders to play square passes across the back. We want to see the wider

of the three defenders choosing the correct moment to confront the opposition winger and attempt to block crosses, or to force the winger to play back into midfield. The two remaining defenders should push across to cover the space in behind and aim to mark the two opposition centre forwards. We want to see the central midfield pair drop back to support their three-man defence, especially covering the space in the penalty area where a cross could be cut back. After a cross is cleared, the defenders should push out and must immediately exercise renewed pressure on the attacking team.



Roberto Mancini Decisive defending

Overview:

Being decisive at the back is vital, because the stronger the defensive principles the more defenders can make opposition attacking play seem predictable.

We use this session to focus on showing the opposition outside from the front, incorporating solid formation play and effective covering of team mates. The emphasis is always on getting the ball to the relative safety of the wing.

This practice also relies on midfielders and forwards being aware of their role in the defending process. It's a complete team mentality.

“Being decisive at the back is vital.”

DECISIVE DEFENDING

SET-UP

AREA

60x90 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones (or poles)

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

16

SESSION TIME

Netball 5mins,
diagonal goals 5mins,
gates game 30mins,
11v11 game 25mins

What do I get the players to do?

Netball

To focus players on moving well to receive passes, we start with the ball in hand, playing a 3v3 throwing and catching game in a 15x15-yard area. Teams score by receiving a pass in either 3-yard wide goal, placed in diagonally opposite corners. A player in possession cannot move with the ball, and must rely on other players to make space for themselves (1).

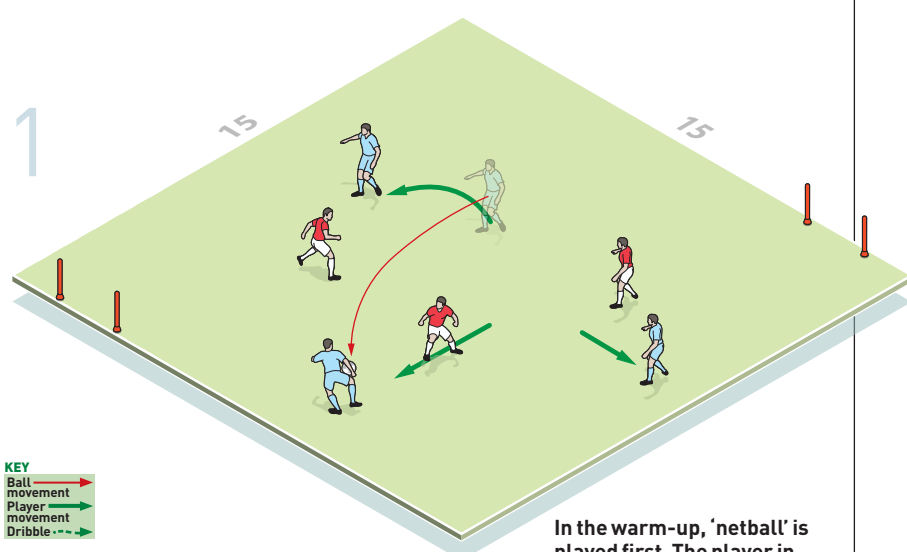
Diagonal goals

We now progress to a normal football game, with each team looking to score by passing to a team mate in the goal (2).

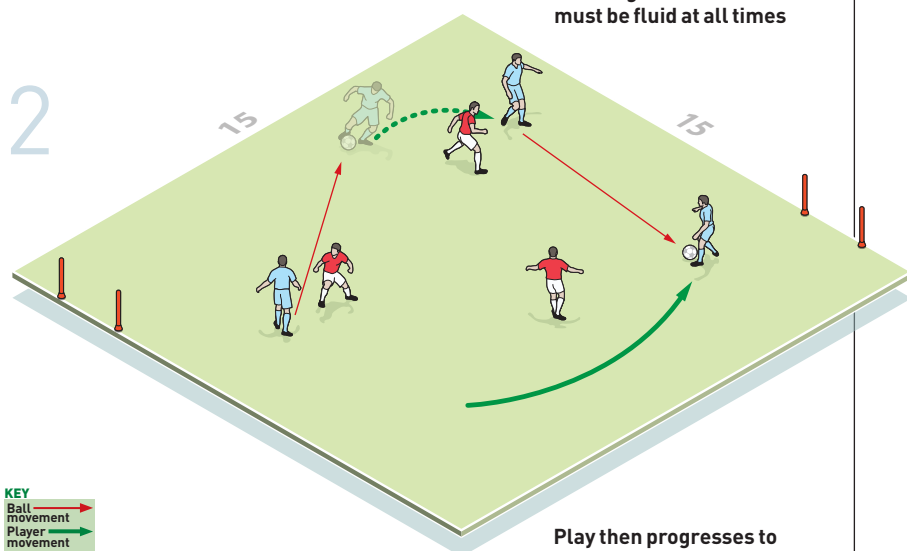
Gates game

We now create a 60x90-yard playing area. Using cones or poles, three 3-yard goals are spaced evenly along the longer sides - one centrally with the other two 10 yards in from each edge. This is an 8v8 game with no restriction on touches.

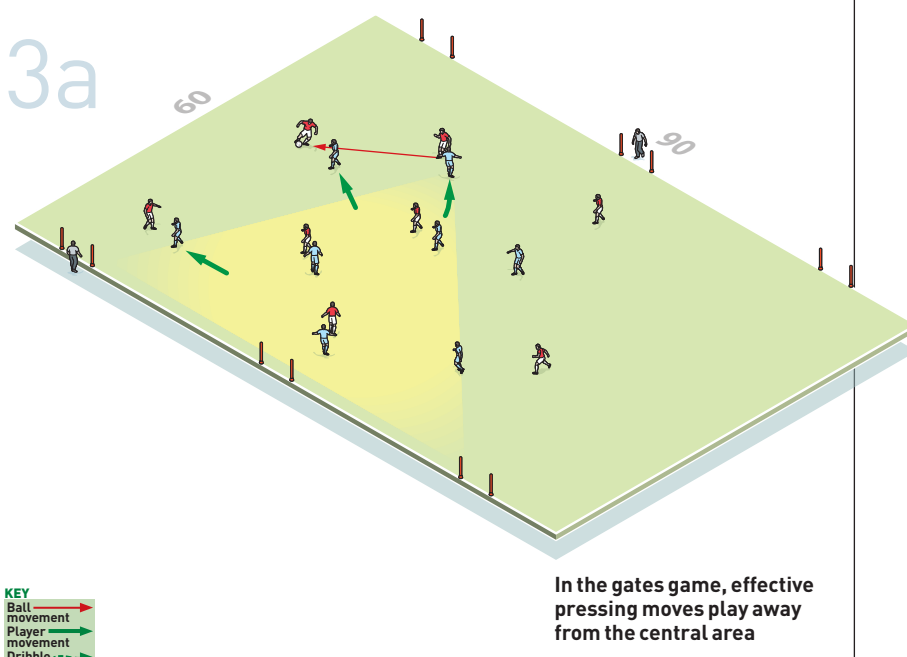
The formation players adopt depends on whether we want to rehearse a high



In the warm-up, 'netball' is played first. The player in possession cannot move, meaning that his team mates must be fluid at all times



Play then progresses to normal football



In the gates game, effective pressing moves play away from the central area



DECISIVE DEFENDING

press (emphasis on attacking numbers) or mid press (emphasis on midfield numbers). A coach stands on each side, behind the line, and moves in relation to where the ball is. Players cannot score through a gate that a coach is covering.

What are the key things to look for technically/tactically?

We expect defenders to force play to one side, with supporting team mates in turn pressing to keep the ball in that area (3a).

Defenders need to be aware of attackers switching play, and must track runners without compromising the guarding of gates (3b/3c).

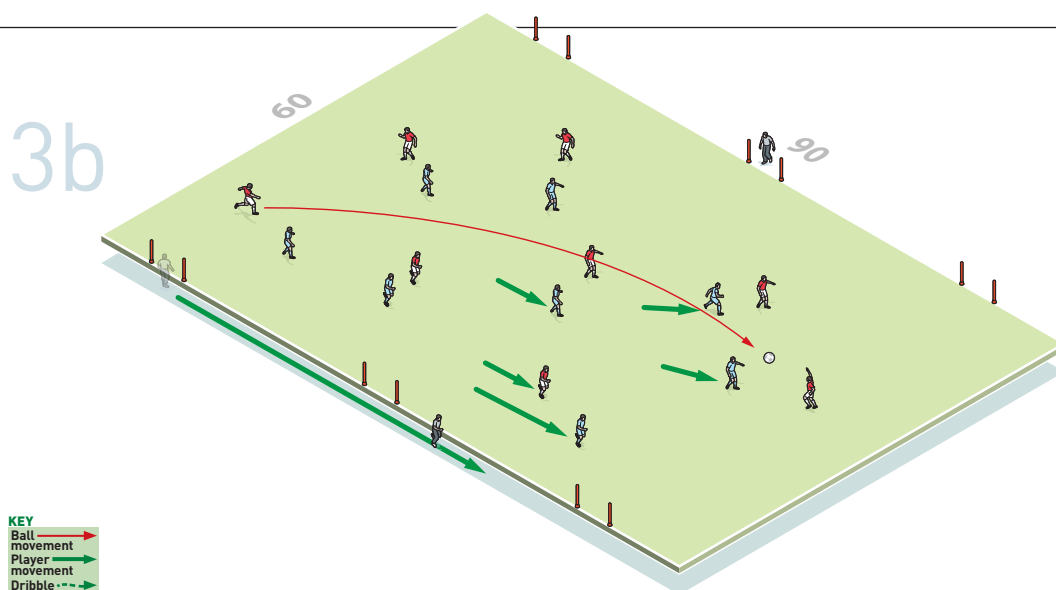
We regard it a defensive lapse if a goal is scored by any method other than a counter-attack.

How do I progress the session?

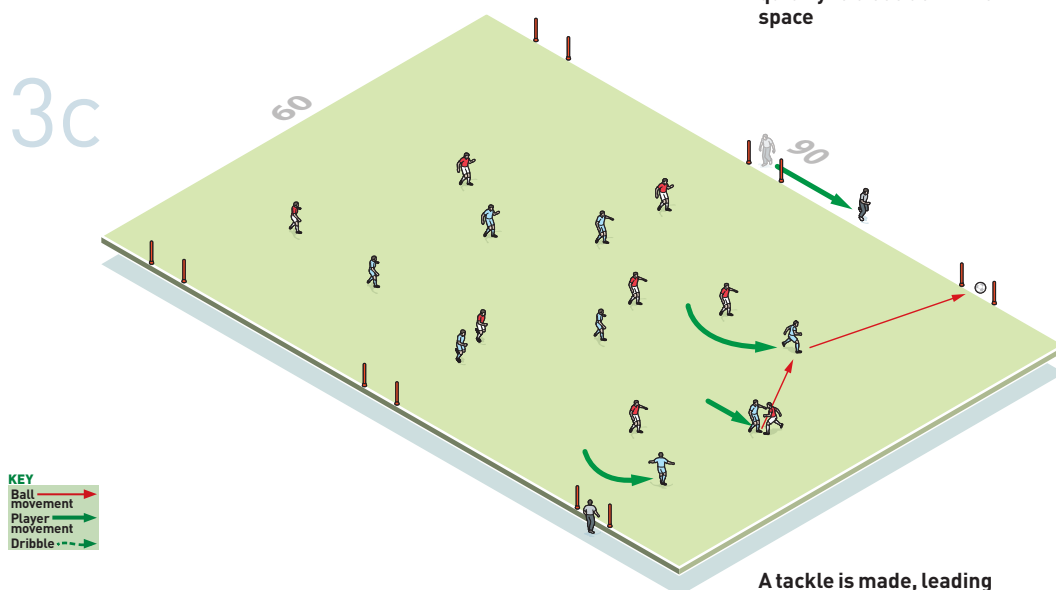
We progress by moving play into an 11v11 game. The premise here is to isolate space in the centre by forcing the ball to one side. This applies to defenders primarily, but we look for midfielders and attackers to do likewise, flooding the midfield and keeping play away from central danger areas (4).

How do I put this into a game situation?

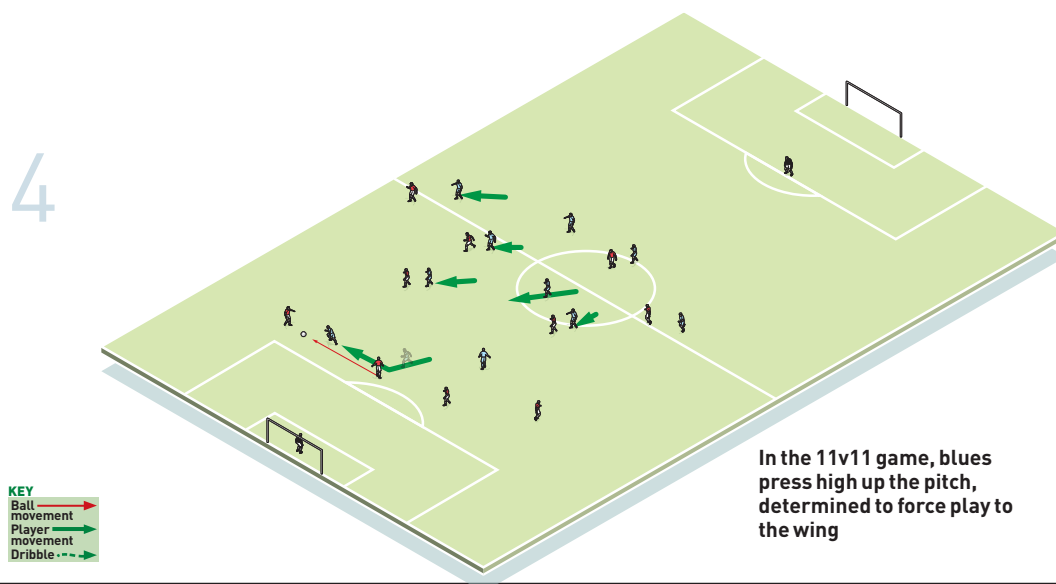
We play an 11v11 game, with midfielders and attackers helping defenders isolate central danger areas whenever possible. (4). ■



A clever switch creates danger but blues press quickly to close down the space



A tackle is made, leading to a counter-attack and subsequent goal



In the 11v11 game, blues press high up the pitch, determined to force play to the wing



QUIQUE SÁNCHEZ FLORES

Quique Sánchez Flores Compactness when defending overloads

SET-UP

AREA

Full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, bibs, 4 small goals, 3 large goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

20

SESSION TIME

Total: 60mins

Warm-up: 15mins

2v3: 10mins

3v4: 15mins

4v5: 20mins

Overview

This session teaches your players how to defend as a unit and how to delay an attack, even when faced by attackers who outnumber you. It works on improving individual defensive

skills and reinforces the need for speed to stop an attack, but by the end of the session it will have encouraged your defence to keep its shape and your players to support one another through good communication, always reacting to the position of the ball as it moves around the pitch – when one defender goes to the ball the other defenders move to cover the space. The beauty of this session is that although it is aimed at improving your defence against an attacking overload, it also works as a good test for your offensive players too, encouraging them to keep possession and take advantage of their numerical superiority.

What do I get the players to do?

Warm-up rondo

Begin by setting up a 25-yard circle for a high intensity warm-up rondo,

as shown [1]. Position seven players around the edge and get them to play a possession game by passing the ball between themselves while keeping their shape around the circle.

Have three chasers in the centre who must pressure the outside players in order to intercept the ball. When a chaser wins the ball, he swaps places with the outside player who lost possession. Play for 15 minutes.

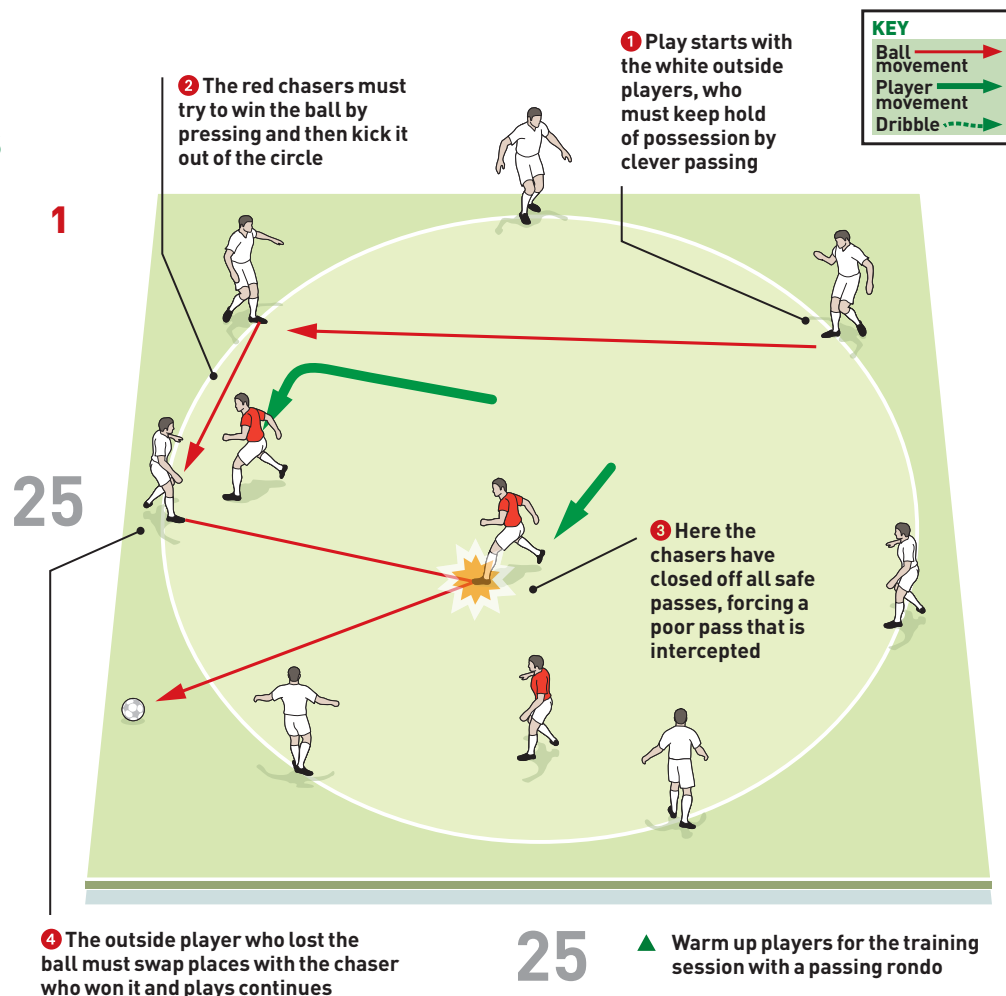
If you have 20 players, run two warm-ups at the same time.

Part 1: Defending 2v3

For the first part of the session set up two 23x16-yard areas, one on either side of the penalty box. Each area should contain one mini goal,

“By the end of the session it will have encouraged your defence to keep its shape and your players to support one another through good communication”

as shown [2a]. It is the job of the two defenders to prevent the three attackers from scoring, while the attackers must try to make use of their overload. Play starts with a defender playing the ball into the feet of the furthest attacker, as shown



[2b]. As soon as the first attacker touches the ball play goes live and the defenders must quickly push out to prevent the attackers from scoring. Their speed out to the ball is vital for the success of this practice, as is their bodyshape and balance when approaching the attackers. The defenders must also communicate with one another. Play for 10 minutes.

If you have 20 players this can be set up in all four corners of the pitch and run simultaneously.

Part 2: Defending 3v4 wave game

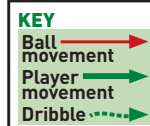
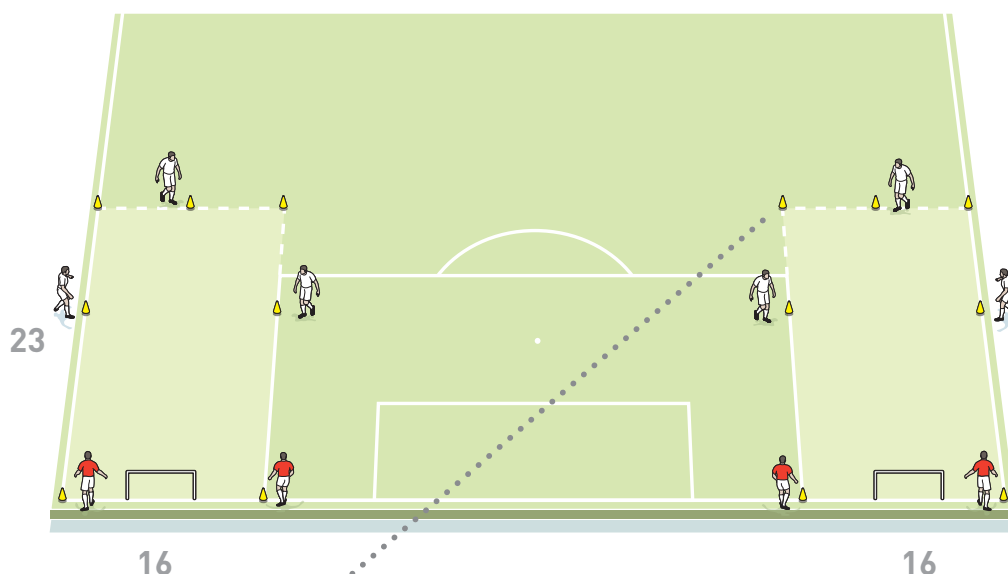
Set up an area of 44x30 yards between the edge of your penalty area and the centre circle, using two full-size goals, as shown [3]. Position four teams



QUIQUE SÁNCHEZ FLORES

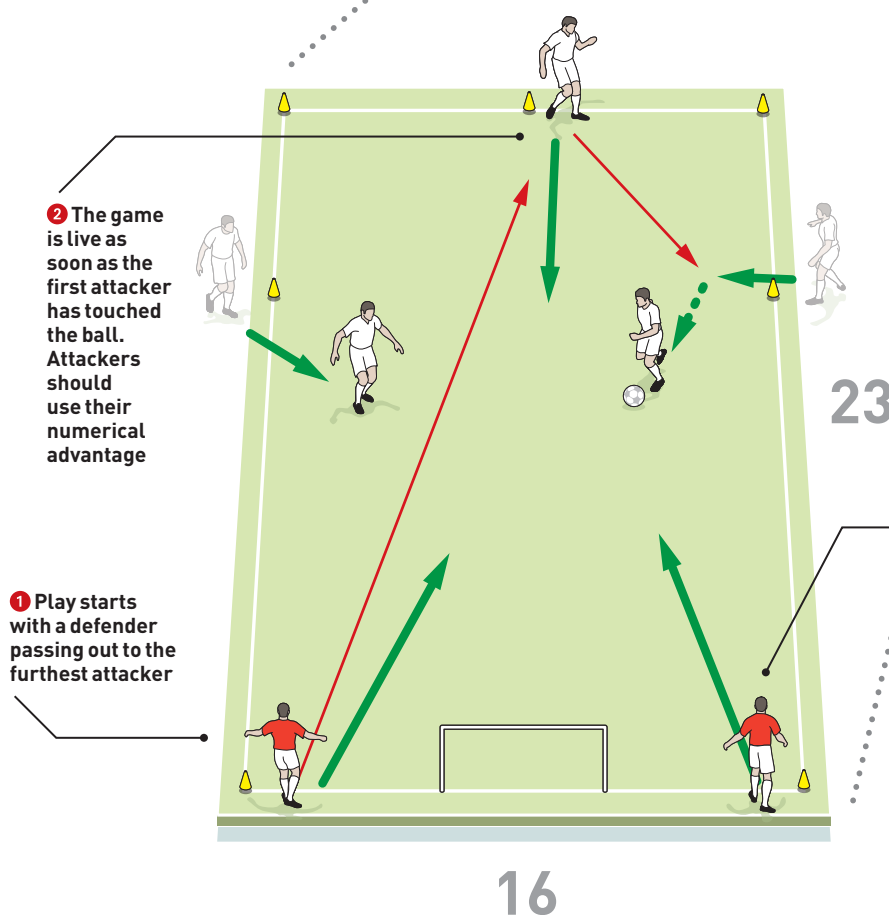
COMPACTNESS WHEN DEFENDING OVERLOADS

2a



Defending 2v3: set-up for this practice by marking out an area on each side of the penalty area, with one small goal in each. Then run the practice as shown in the diagram below.

2b



2 The game is live as soon as the first attacker has touched the ball. Attackers should use their numerical advantage

1 Play starts with a defender passing out to the furthest attacker

3 Defenders must use speed to get up the pitch and good decision-making and communication to prevent the attackers from scoring

of three to enter the pitch in waves from the sides of the goals, with a fifth team (the reds) starting on the pitch. A supporting striker is stationed on each side of the area.

Play starts with the ball being pinged up the pitch to the red team, which attacks the first wave of defenders (the greens) and attempts to score in the goal the greens are

defending. As soon as the first red player touches the ball, the greens rush out to defend, but one of the supporting strikers joins in to give the red attackers a 4v3

advantage. After the ball has gone dead, the greens become attackers and play now goes in the opposite direction with a fresh attack. Each wave of defenders turn



COMPACTNESS WHEN DEFENDING OVERLOADS

3

1 The greens start by playing the ball out to one of the red attackers

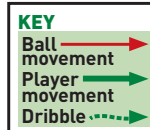
2 As soon as the reds touch the ball, play is live and the greens quickly rush out to defend their goal

44

4 When the attack goes dead, the greens become attackers and the blues are the new defenders. Play starts again with a ball played out from the defenders. Repeat with each new wave of players, alternating the end of attack

3 A neutral striker joins the attackers to give them a 4v3 overload

30



▲ Defending 3v4 wave game: progress the ideas in the first part of the session by running this practice in the area between the penalty area and the centre circle.

to attack the opposite end once the ball has gone dead, receiving a starting pass from the next wave of defenders. A supporting striker comes on to give the attackers the overload each time. Play for 15 minutes.

Part 3: Defending 4v5

For the final part of the session, set up in one half of a full pitch with four defenders, two on each

side of a full-size goal, as shown [4]. An attacker is positioned on each side of the pitch and two more start in the six-yard box. On the blow of a whistle, an attacker in the centre circle starts play by passing the ball forward towards one of his team-mates, both of whom are pushing quickly out of the area to receive the pass. They are supported by the wide attackers who move

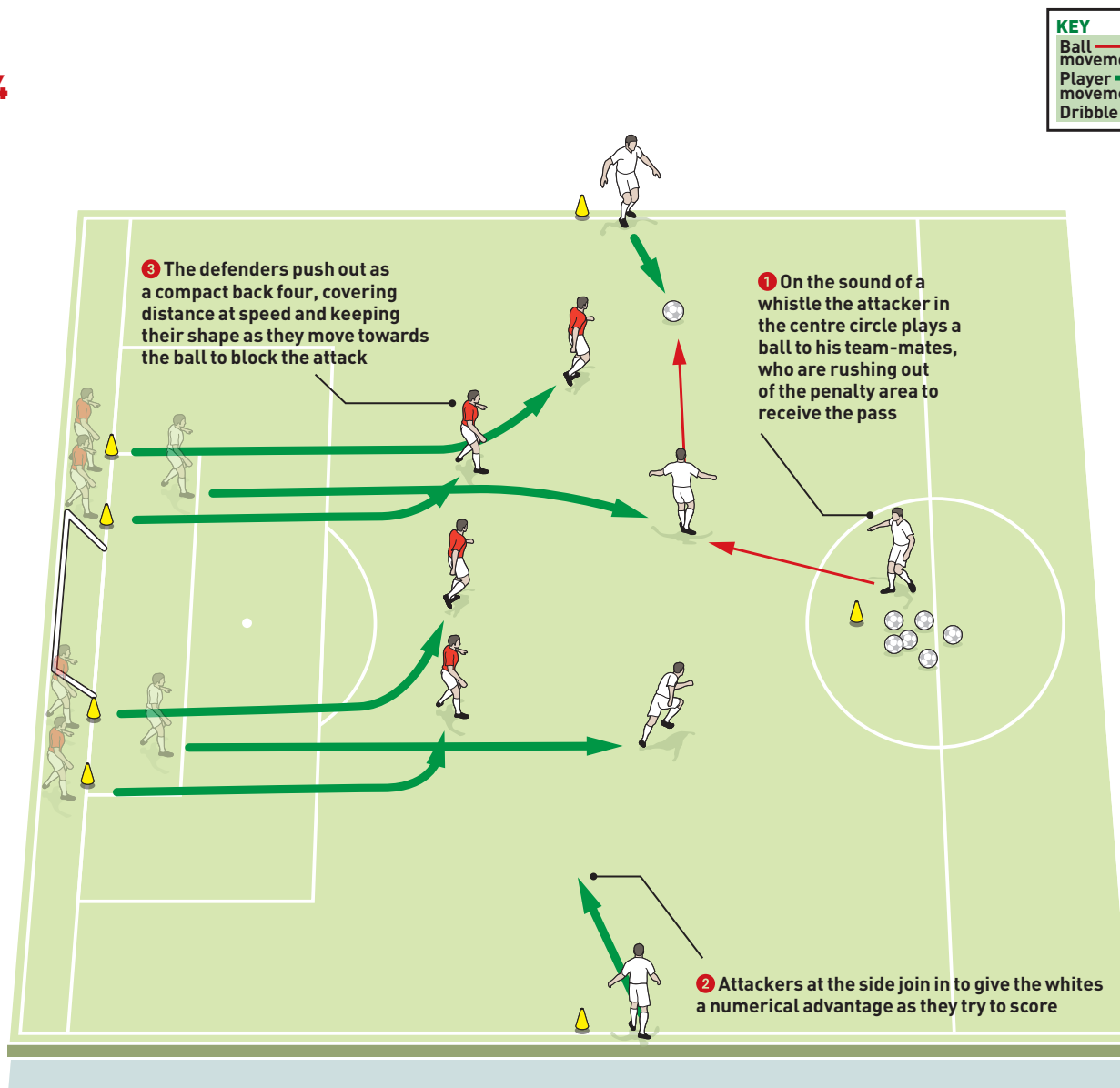
in from the sides to join the attack. At the same time the defenders quickly squeeze out of the penalty area as a back four, staying compact and trying to move as a block to stand in the path of any attack. They must cover the distance at speed but keep their shape by talking to one another. If they are successful they will prevent the attackers from scoring. Play for 20 minutes.

“Each wave of defenders turn to attack the opposite end once the ball has gone dead, receiving a starting pass from the next wave”



COMPACTNESS WHEN DEFENDING OVERLOADS

4



▲ Defending 4v5: the final part of the session sees a back four working together to try to prevent the scoring threat caused by attackers with a 4v5 overload

What are the key things to look out for?

We look for player understanding of the defensive structure when facing an attack, as overloads are a common occurrence in match play. Defenders must read the situation as individuals working in a team. So

as shown in part 3 of the session [see above], if one player goes to the ball, say the left wingback, the other defenders move across – so the central defender would cover the wingback's position and the other defenders move across to cover the central position. Individually players must

support play, keeping themselves in the correct position to cover the ball and the goal should the attack get past the first defender. Covering the overload player needs good communication between the defenders so any gaps that are created by moving positions are quickly covered.

“Covering the overload player needs good communication between defenders, so any gaps are quickly covered”



Sam Allardyce Defending the box

Overview:

The session looks at the core ideal of defending the box, and with it, the goal. It uses 1v1, 2v2 and 3v3 systems working in a unit, highlights crosses into the box and works on phase of play against attacking formations.

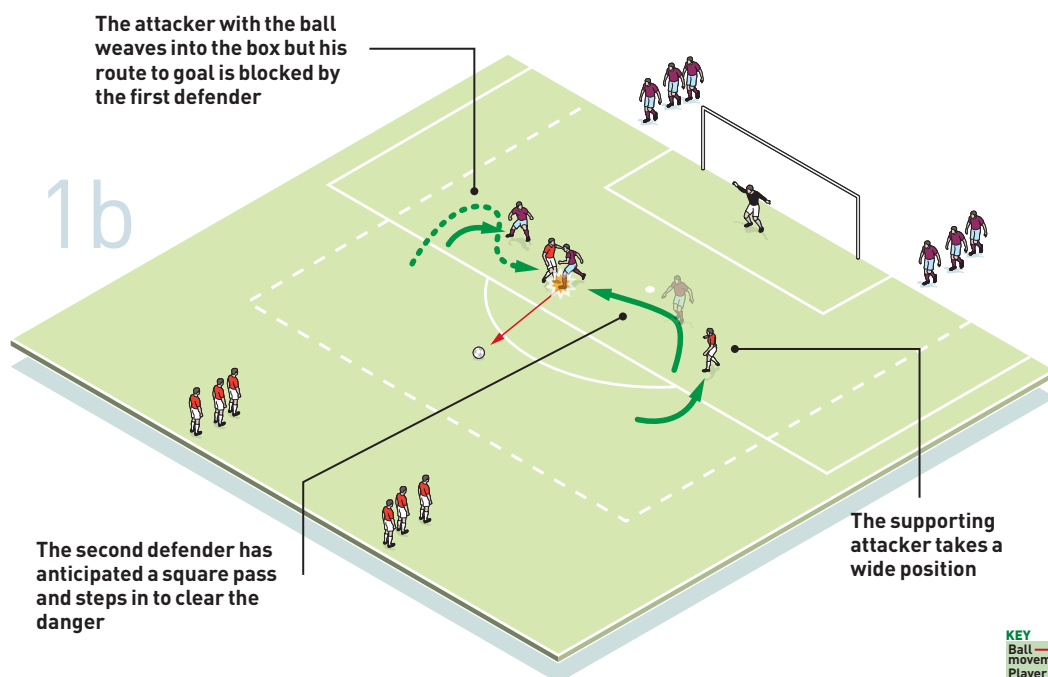
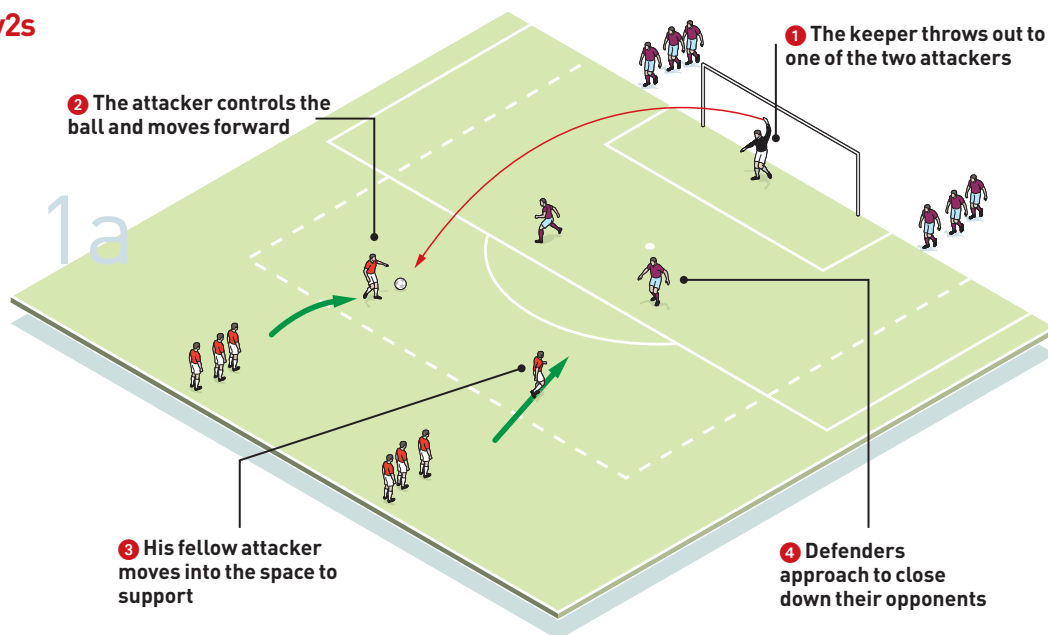
It's important to practise this in the first place to achieve what I deem the first step in winning a game – namely keeping a clean sheet. If you can do this the likelihood is you will win the game.

It's also vital to forge partnerships in defending, with players always knowing where to be when dealing with a ball in the final third. This cements our defensive thinking whilst also providing the platform for the other key element of the game, attacking.

“Forging partnerships in defending cements our defensive thinking whilst also providing the platform for the other key element of the game, attacking.”

DEFENDING THE BOX

2v2s



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

SET-UP

AREA

Half pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 16 plus keeper

SESSION TIME

10mins each practice

What do I get the players to do?

2v2s (1a/1b)

In the first practice we set up as shown on a half-pitch in 2v2 situations. The keeper begins by feeding the ball in to the attackers, who approach the box. Defenders' first priority must be to ensure any shot is prevented, and to try to work play so they

force a 2v1 situation against the man with the ball, using good communication and adjustments in position.

3v3s (2)

Moving into 3v3s, as shown, attackers must now make a sideways pass on the way to attacking the goal.



DEFENDING THE BOX

3v3 plus wingers (3a/3b)

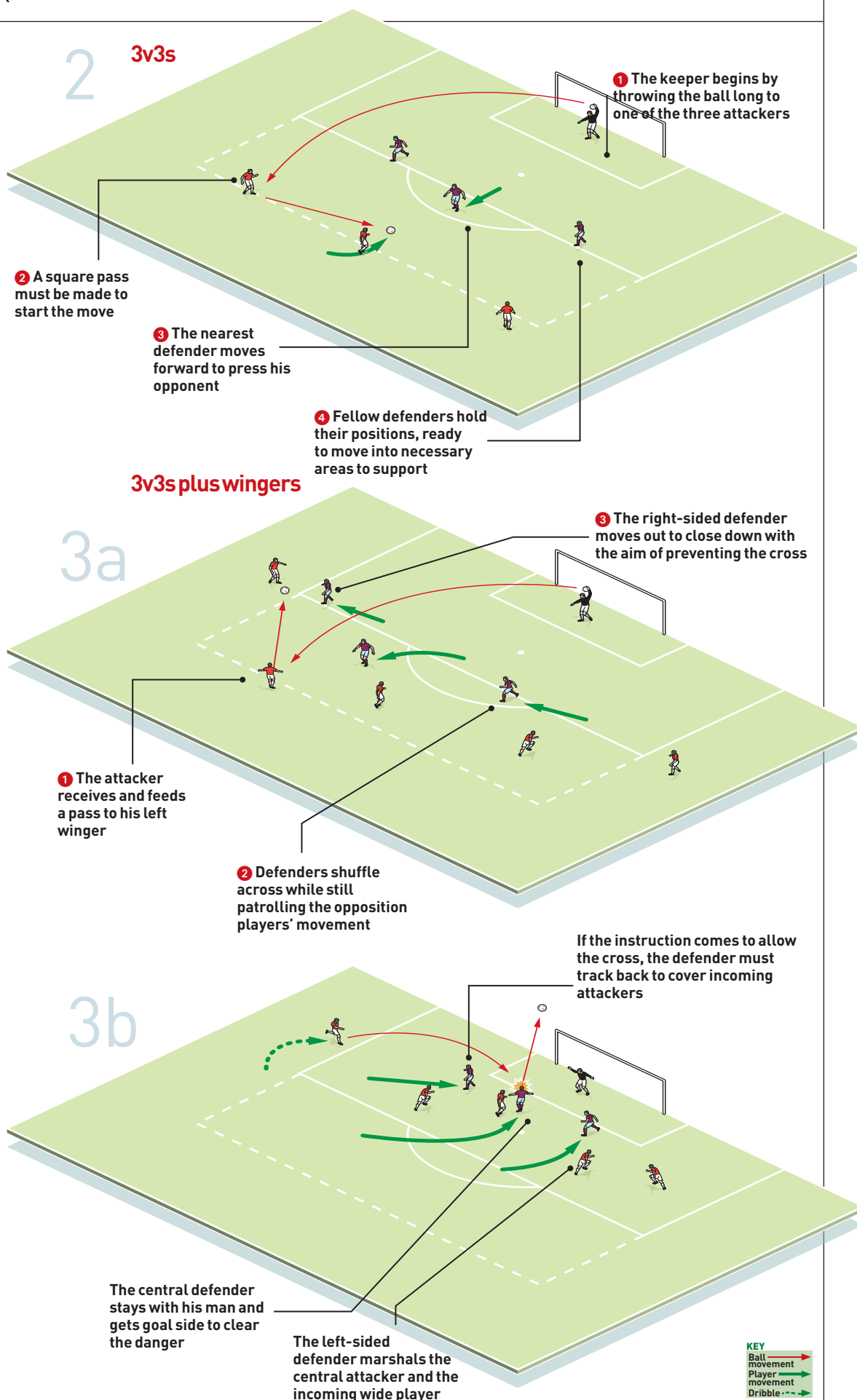
Now we add a wide attacker on each side, meaning defenders must patrol what's in front of them as well as protecting space left and right. They must adjust and squeeze from the keeper's serve, preparing to reposition should a crossing situation develop.

Phase of defending (4a/4b/5)

The final practice is 8v7 plus a keeper, and we set up with two defensive midfielders in front of a bank of four plus a midfield pivot who keeps play variable and the tempo high. Wingers are supported by overlapping team mates who must cross or drive inside, while midfielders support and drive forward into the lone striker.

What are the key things to look out for?

Initially our focus is on players defending as individuals – we want them to assume excellent technical control, clarity of thinking and patience. Next we want to see smart supporting roles with players being able to adjust positions without relinquishing a tight and resilient defensive mindset. Players must know the key areas to defend, particularly when the threat comes from crosses, and all the time playing in a way





that ensures they are compact and hard to break down.

How do I put this into a game situation?

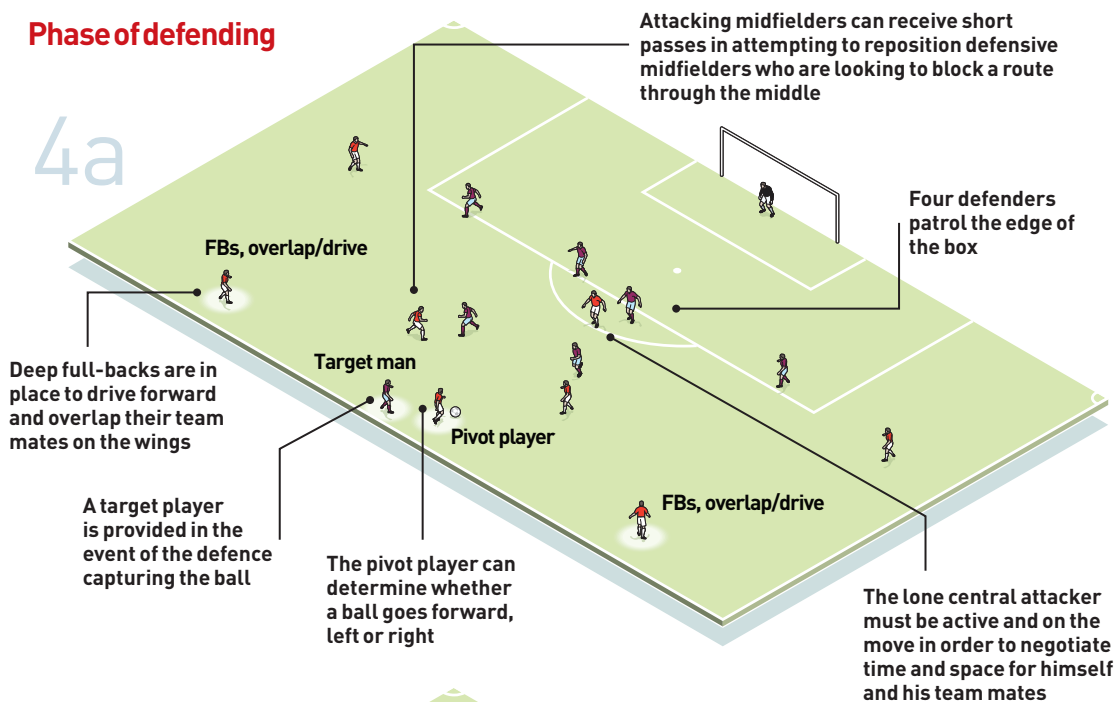
Running this as an 11v11 is important because it brings about match realism. We will use a standard set-up but condition players to defend in certain ways – namely inviting the ball into the final third with those further out being passive, then instructing defenders to protect the goal; or going to the other extreme and defending from the front. Either way the defensive operation must be organised, strict and decisive. ■

“Players must be able to adjust positions without relinquishing a tight and resilient defensive mindset.”

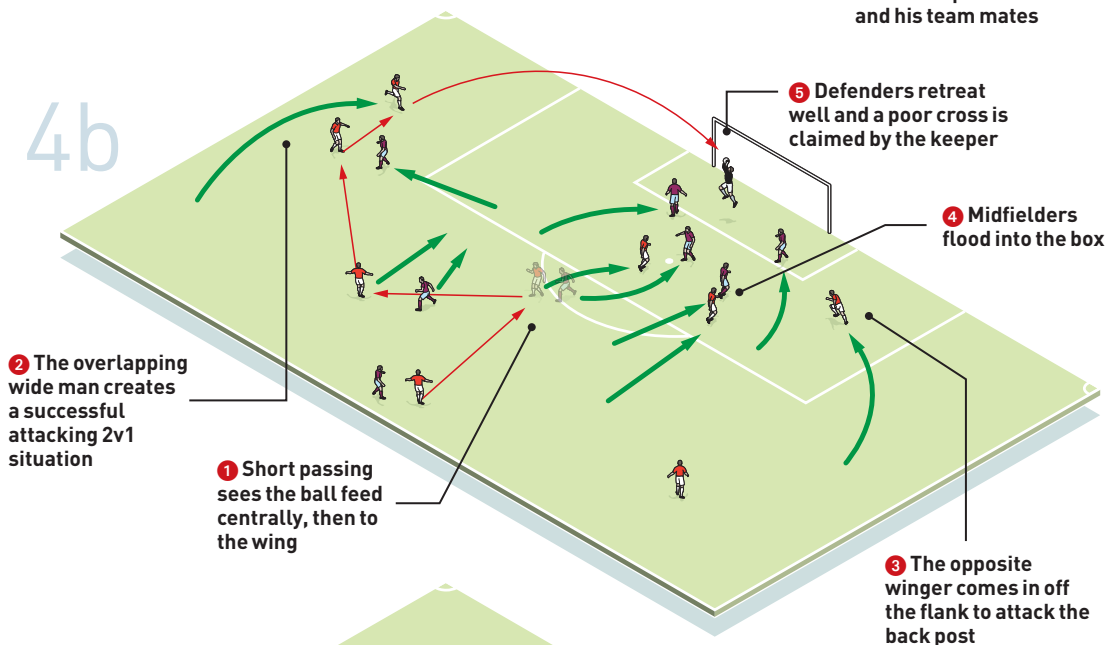
DEFENDING THE BOX

Phase of defending

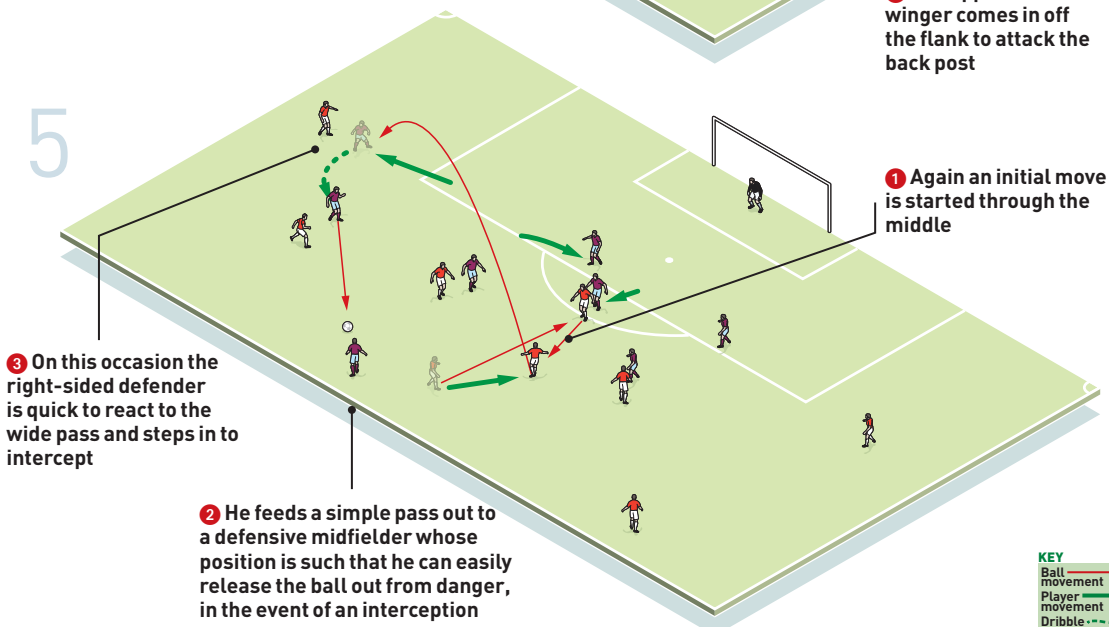
4a



4b



5





Alan Pardew Defending crosses

Overview:

You only have to look at the number of goals scored from crosses in the Premier League to know why it's important for us to practise this session.

It works primarily on players' recovery runs when out of possession, and teaches the best runs to make out of possession in protecting the goal. It also incorporates player mentality, and we can bring other team scenarios and philosophies into the practice too.

We'll run the session in the days leading up to any game in which we know the bulk of the other team's attacking threat is going to come from the wings.

DEFENDING CROSSES

SET-UP

AREA

Half pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 22 (11v11)

SESSION TIME

Practices 10mins each,
game 20mins

What do I get the players to do?

Central defenders: body position

Setting up as shown in the diagram (1), centre-backs run towards their own goal to defend the crosses coming from alternating sides. They must have an open body position so that, in practice, they can see any potential attackers.

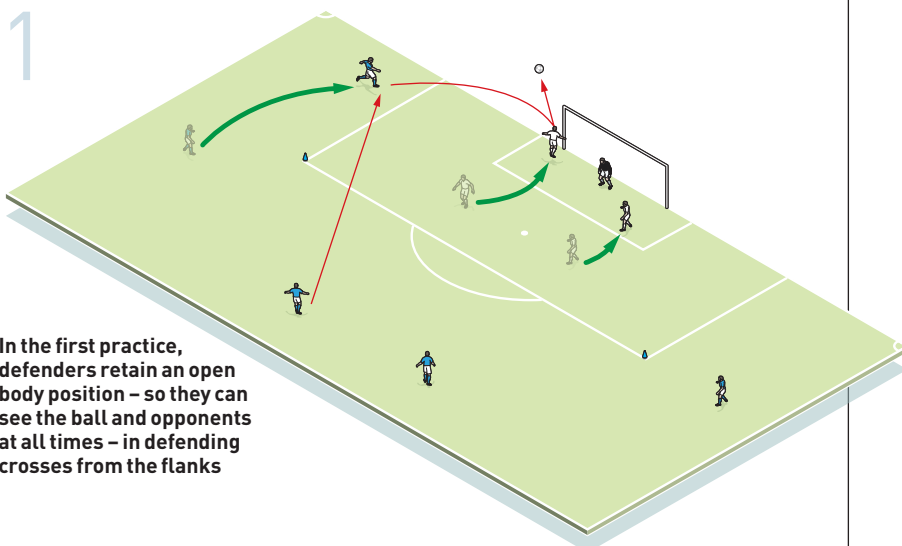
Progress with attackers in place - the centre-back must be 'touch tight' and goalside.

Back four recovery runs

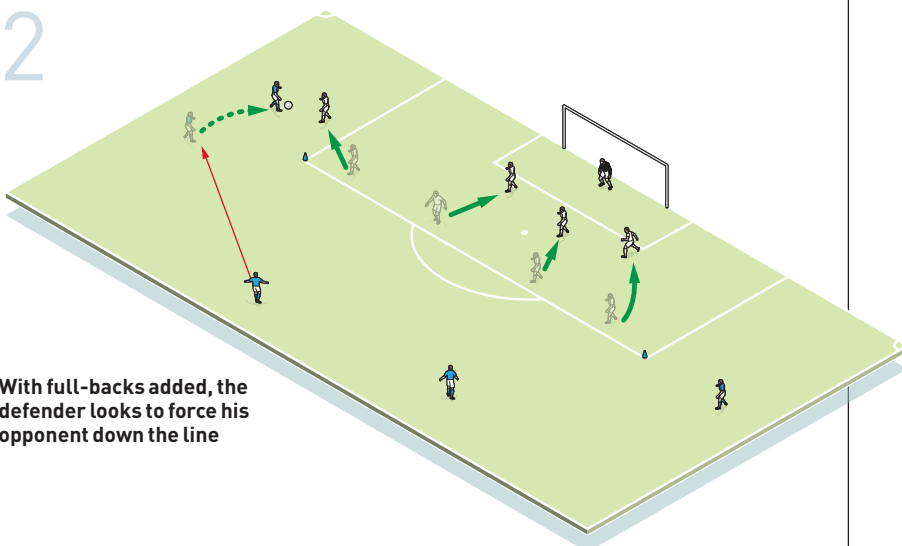
This time, full-backs are added. In the example shown (2), the right-back must force his opponent down the line. This allows the other defenders to take up good crossing positions. The two centre-backs will recover centrally and defend the cross, while the left-back also recovers into the box. Progress by using attackers.

Push up and condense

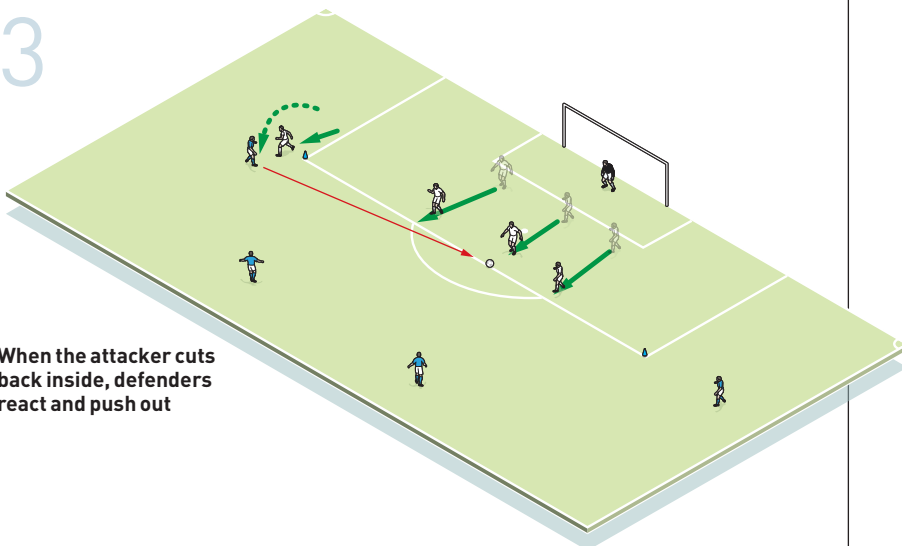
With the same set-up, if the attacker cuts back onto his right foot, centre-backs and the opposite full-back must push up and condense the space (3). It is important that



In the first practice, defenders retain an open body position - so they can see the ball and opponents at all times - in defending crosses from the flanks



With full-backs added, the defender looks to force his opponent down the line



When the attacker cuts back inside, defenders react and push out



DEFENDING CROSSES

the opposite full-back is switched on, so communication and awareness of players is key. Again, progress as opposed.

Recovery runs

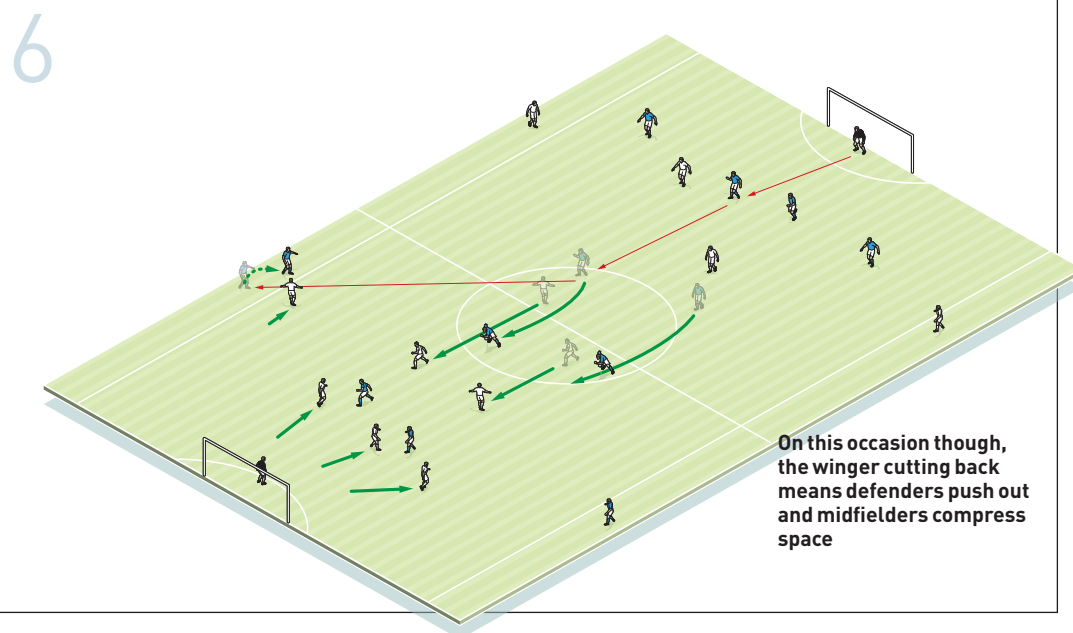
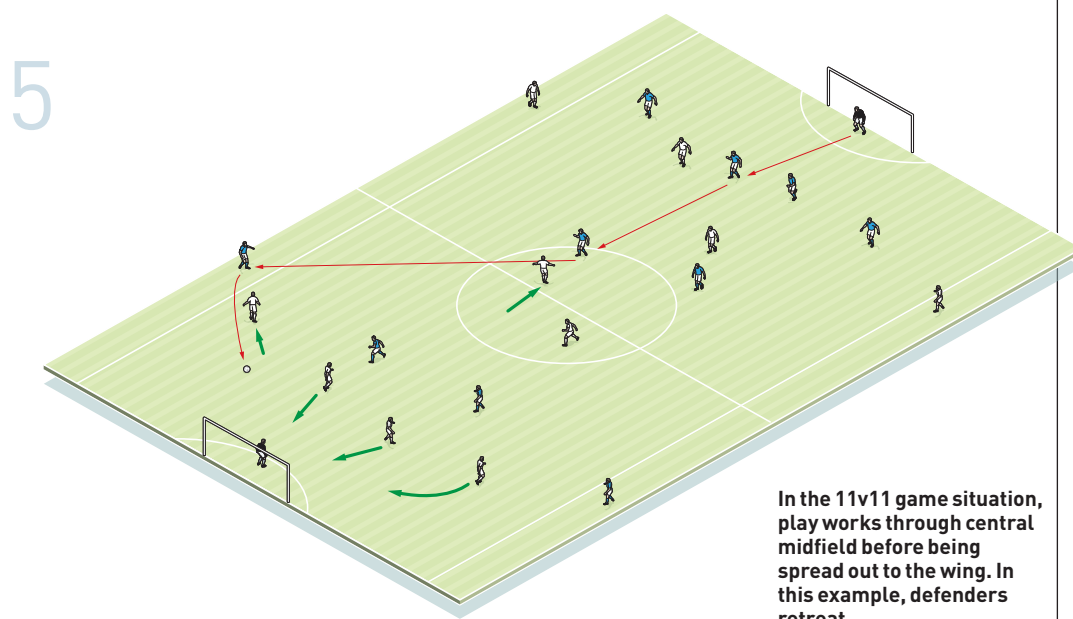
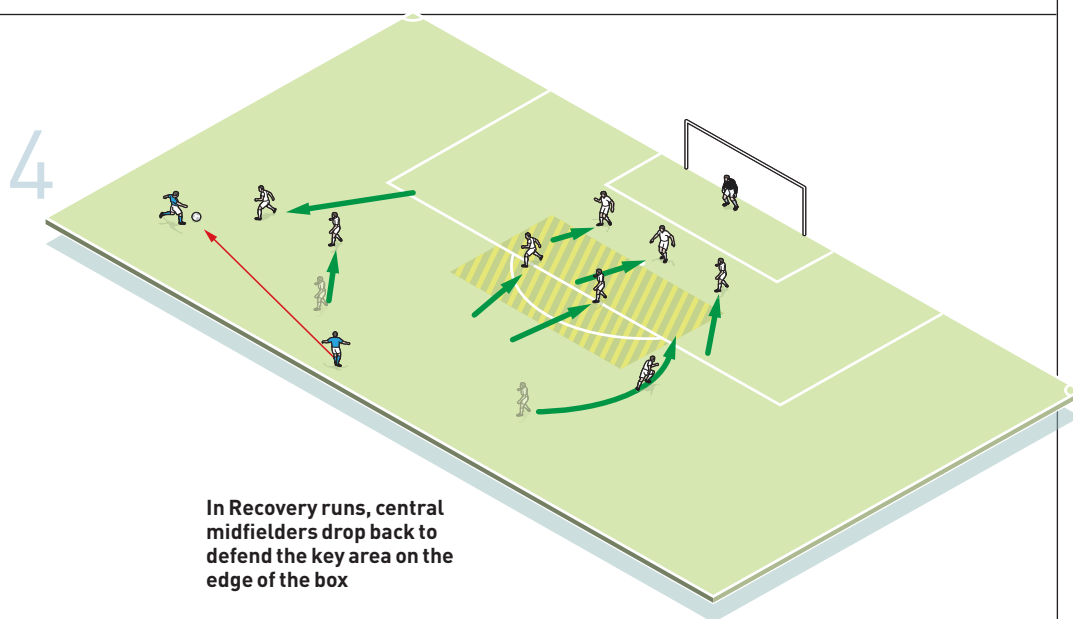
We now add in four midfielders (4). An attacking player serves the wide player, who will cross into the box. The defending team must make recovery runs – central midfielders defending the key area on the edge of the box, while the wide midfielder doubles up with the full-back. The opposite wide midfielder makes a recovery run to the edge of the area. Progress as opposed.

11v11 game situation

We move to an 11v11 game situation played in the space between the two penalty boxes. A player from each team occupies the attacking half of each left and right channel. The ball must go through the central midfielders, who then pass it wide for the cross – wide players in their channels cannot be tackled. The opposing team must defend the cross using the tactics and runs rehearsed (5/6).

What are the key things to look out for?

We're looking for good organisational skills, positional sense and positive defensive play. Players must be versatile and reactive to different types of attacking threat. ■





PAUL LAMBERT

Paul Lambert Defensive dexterity

Overview:

This session is about defending, both individually and as a unit. It's crucial we practise this because we need defenders to recognise when to move forward and challenge an opposing striker, and when to hold back.

The session examines the relationships between defenders, and rehearses players in picking up opponents quickly and effectively. It's a practice that builds, encouraging players to adapt their understanding to new situations and challenges, as well as refining basic defensive principles including staying on their feet, being aggressive and recovering to good positions.

"This practice encourages players to adapt their understanding to new situations and challenges, as well as refining basic defensive principles."

DEFENSIVE DEXTERITY

SET-UP

AREA

Half pitch plus 10 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

16

SESSION TIME

Defending practices
20mins each,
7v7 game 20mins

What do I get the players to do?

8v4 defending

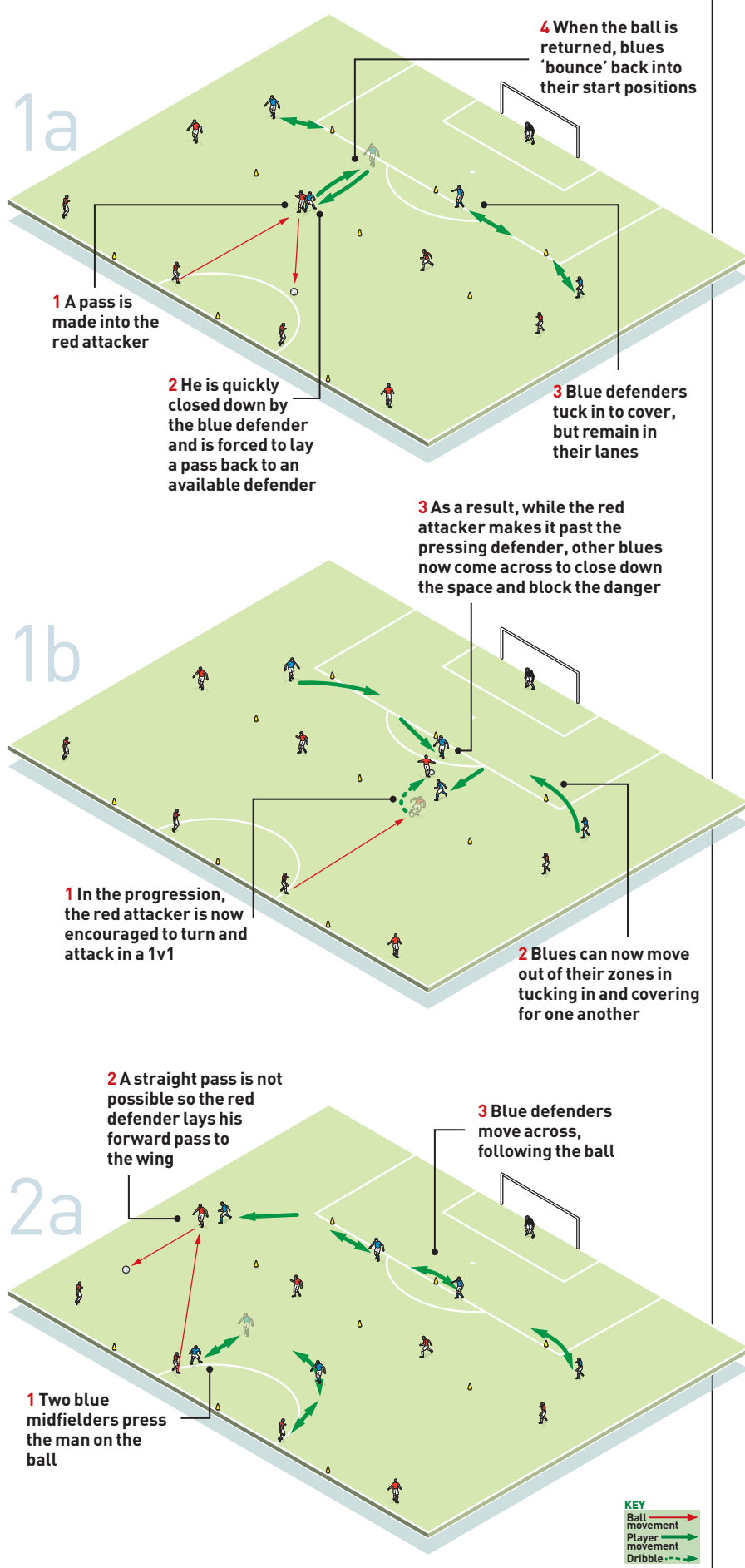
Setting up 8v4 plus a keeper, as shown, the practice begins with a ball on the halfway line. Red defenders must play forwards to any attacker. Now, one blue defender comes forward to engage the red attacker, forcing him to play back to a defender (sideways passes are not allowed). After the pass is returned, blue defenders bounce back into their original positions. Players must stay in the lanes marked out by the cones (1a).

How do I progress the practice?

Now the 8v4 is made 'free' – we allow red attackers to turn and attack the goal when they receive the ball, thus creating a 1v1 situation. In addition, blue defenders can now move out of their lanes, assisting each other with the closing down of an opponent (1b).

8v6 defending

We now add blue midfield players, whose job it is to press the four red defenders.





DEFENSIVE DEXTERITY

Red defenders can now play sideways (2a), but the aim remains to release a pass into an attacker, who then turns and moves towards goal. Blue defenders must engage the red attacker with the intention of winning the ball or forcing a backward pass (2b).

What are the key things to look out for?

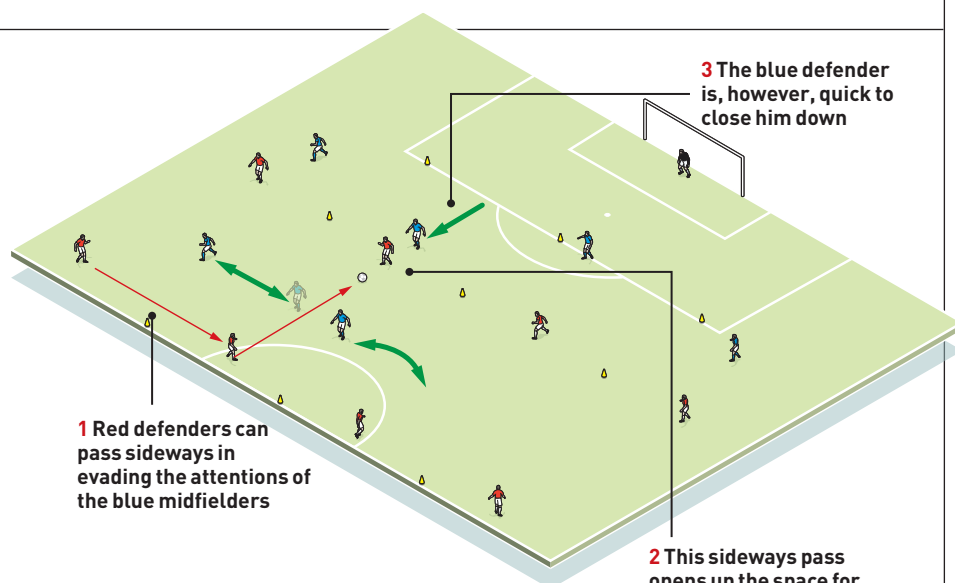
Blue defenders must aim to prevent an opponent from turning. Defenders not engaged with the play tuck in to cover, being aggressive, and staying on their feet at all times. And as soon as a move breaks down, they must recover into their initial defensive positions. Good communication is vital in maintaining organisation.

How do I put this into a game situation?

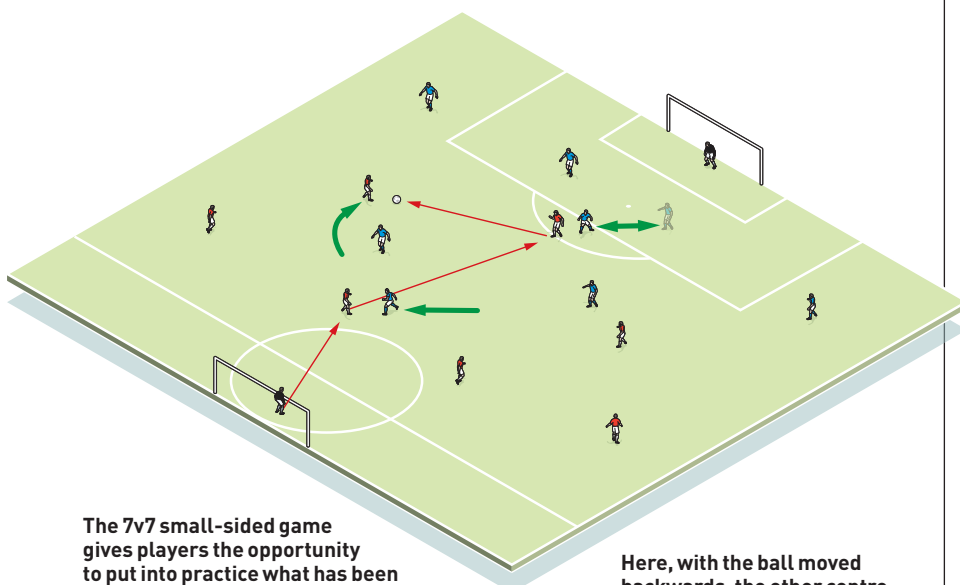
On a half-pitch, set up a 7v7 small-sided game (plus keepers) with a goal at each end, as shown (3a/3b). Encourage players to play forwards and make sure defenders are 'bouncing in and bouncing out' when balls are played into attackers.

Players should utilise the individual and team/unit defending skills rehearsed in the first two practices, putting them into use in a full game situation. ■

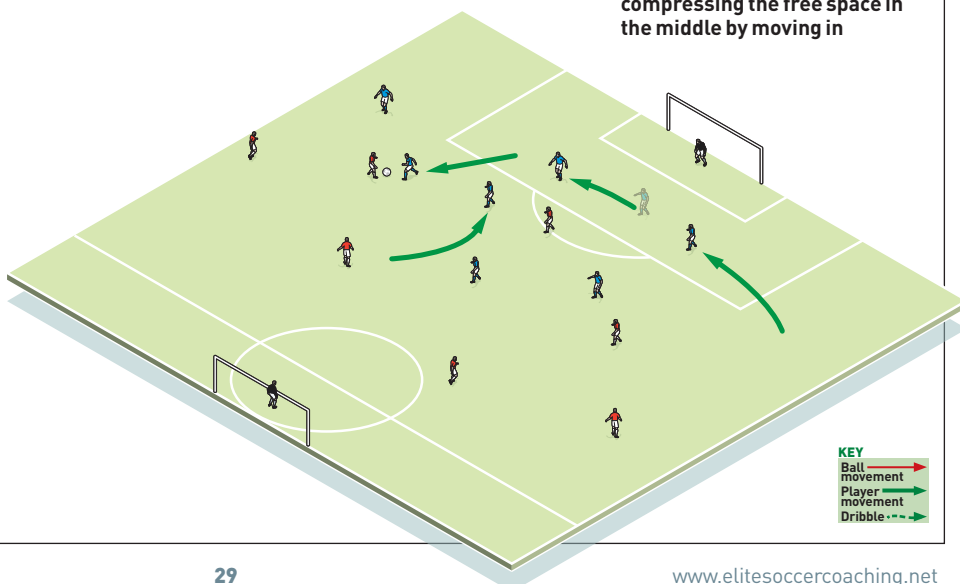
2b



3a



3b



KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble



Mick McCarthy Attacking and defending in counter-attack situations

Overview:

This session looks at the principles behind attacking and defending counter-attack situations quickly. It's important to practise this because counter-attacks occur regularly in matches, particularly in the English Premier League.

We construct this session as three separate practices – each slightly different, and each building on the tactical points outlined previously.

“We’re looking for strong communication, intelligent support play, and good recovery runs.”

ATTACKING AND DEFENDING IN COUNTER-ATTACK SITUATIONS: MAIN SESSION

SET-UP

AREA

Full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Squad

SESSION TIME

Practices 3x20mins, game 20mins

What do I get the players to do?

Practice 1

We mark out a 20-yard channel down the pitch and place attackers in the centre circle. Defenders start from behind each goal, which is protected by a keeper.

An attacker is served a ball from behind the goal. As he controls and advances towards goal, a defender takes up position to play out a 1v1 situation (1a).

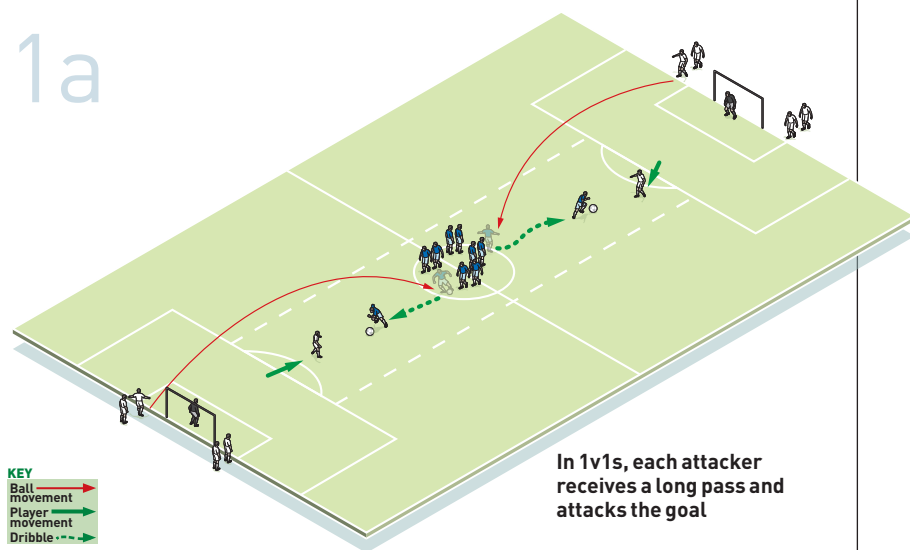
At the end of the move, players continue their runs so attackers become defenders and vice versa. We then progress this to 2v2s, looking for players to communicate, cover and support recovery runs (1b).

Practice 2

We now narrow the pitch by 10 yards, remove the channel, and mark a 20-yard zone across the middle. Within this central zone there are two unopposed teams of four. Four additional players from each team position themselves outside the zone as defenders.

The ball is served in and the team in possession must

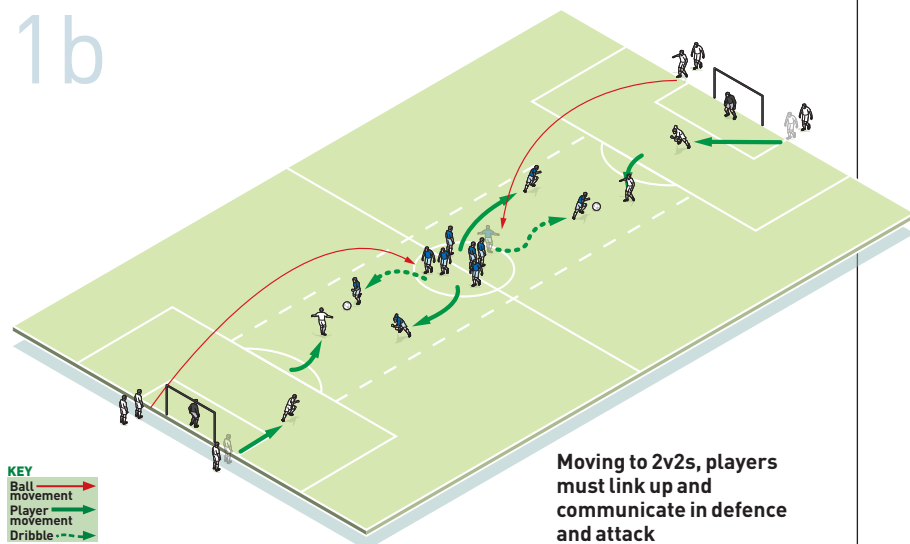
1a



KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble

In 1v1s, each attacker receives a long pass and attacks the goal

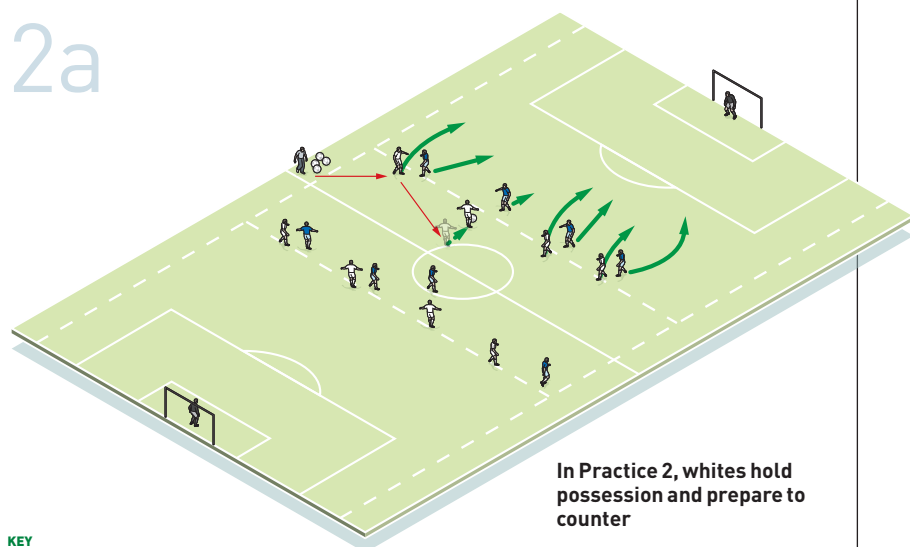
1b



KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble

Moving to 2v2s, players must link up and communicate in defence and attack

2a



KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble

In Practice 2, whites hold possession and prepare to counter



ATTACKING AND DEFENDING IN COUNTER-ATTACK SITUATIONS

break quickly, looking to score (2a). If the opposing team wins the ball, they counter-attack 4v4 towards the other goal (2b).

Practice 3

Now we add a holding midfielder for each team in the middle. This player attacks with his team mates but supports from deep, and also tracks back when defending (3a/3b).

How do I put this into a game situation?

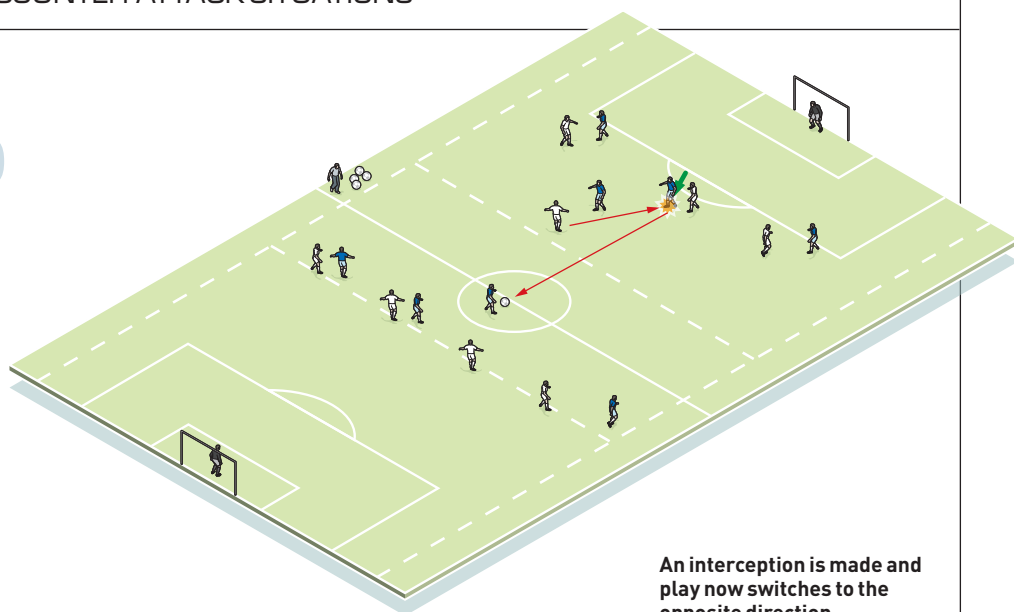
In the game, we remove the width restrictions and the central zone but shorten the length so that play is between the two penalty boxes. We play 10v10 including keepers, but retain a solid back four, encouraging teams to attack in numbers. The small area and large number of players creates numerous opportunities to counter.

What are the key things to look for technically/tactically?

We're looking for composure from all players, while attackers must come forward at speed, using technical skills such as dribbling, a slick final pass or a clever finish.

Defenders must stay on their feet, delay the speed of the attack, and tackle. We require good communication, intelligent support play and good recovery runs. ■

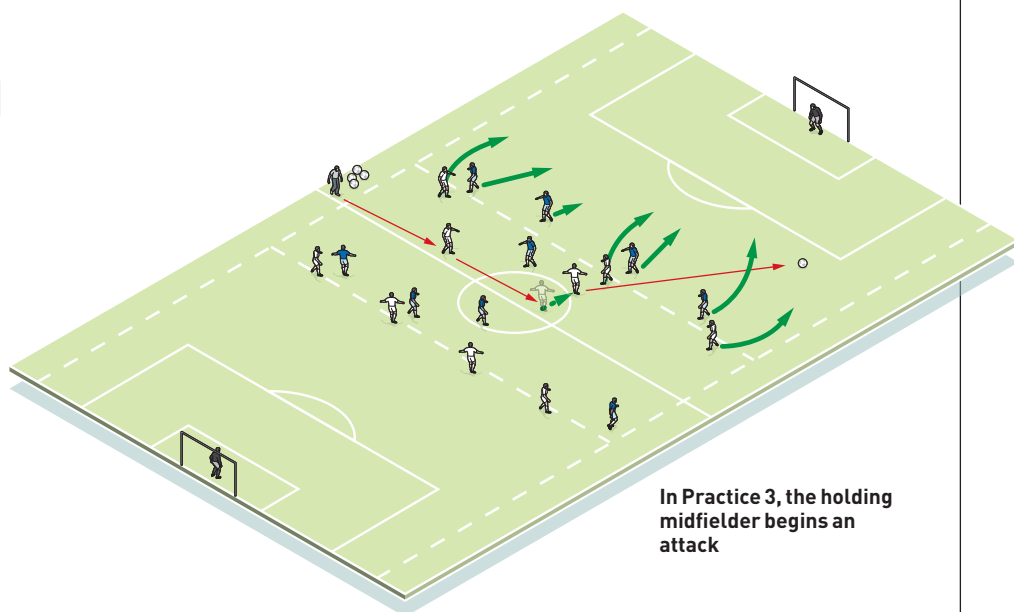
2b



An interception is made and play now switches to the opposite direction



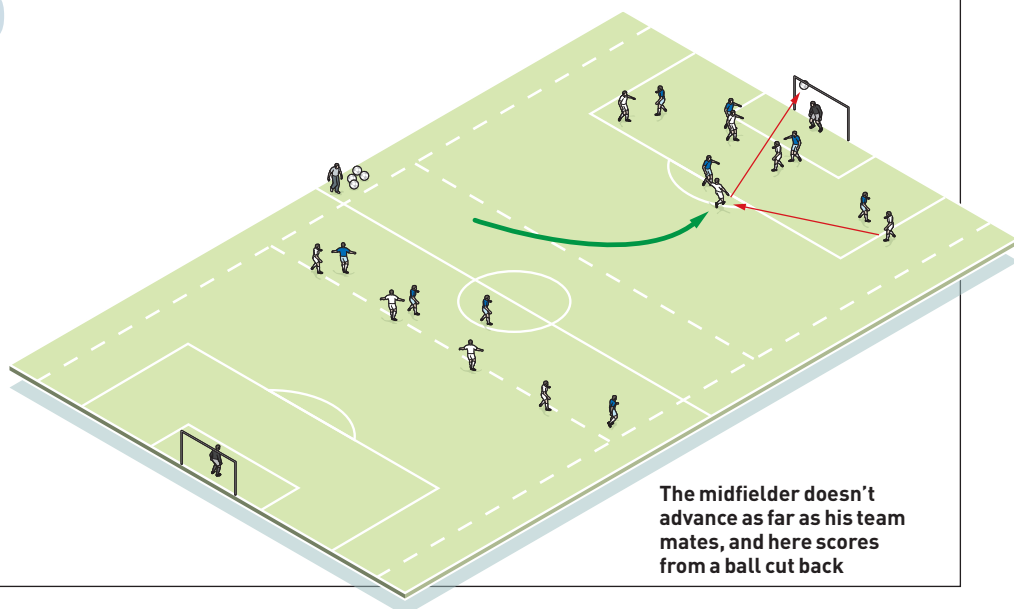
3a



In Practice 3, the holding midfielder begins an attack



3b



The midfielder doesn't advance as far as his team mates, and here scores from a ball cut back





Owen Coyle Preparing The Back Four

Overview:

This is a purely defensive session in which we structure the back four against opposing attacks with different formations. It is an excellent session when preparing for matchday.

It is game realistic and enables us to prepare for the forthcoming opposition's formation by practicing against two or three forwards, or a lone frontman.

PREPARING THE BACK FOUR: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

Half pitch

EQUIPMENT

Goal, balls

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 12

6 attackers
(4 midfielders
2 forwards)
5 defenders
(2 centre-backs
2 full-backs
1 defensive
midfielder)
1 goalkeeper

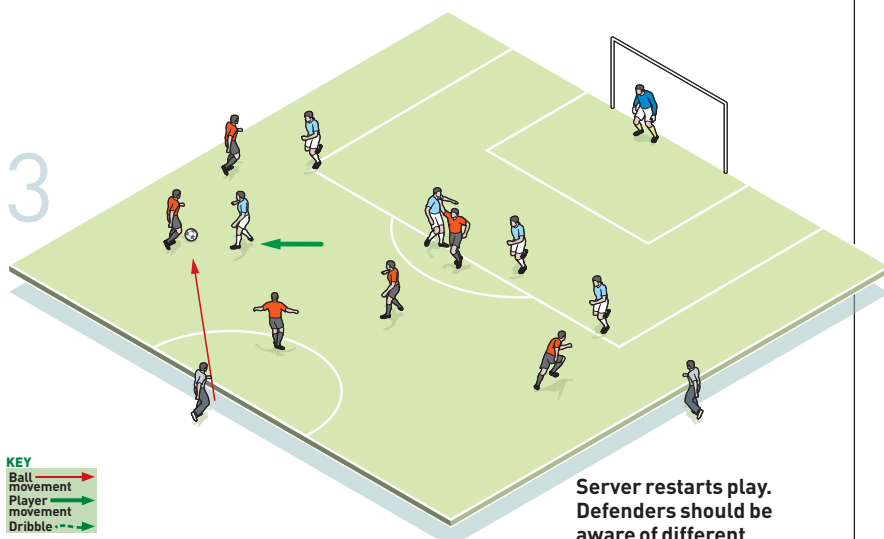
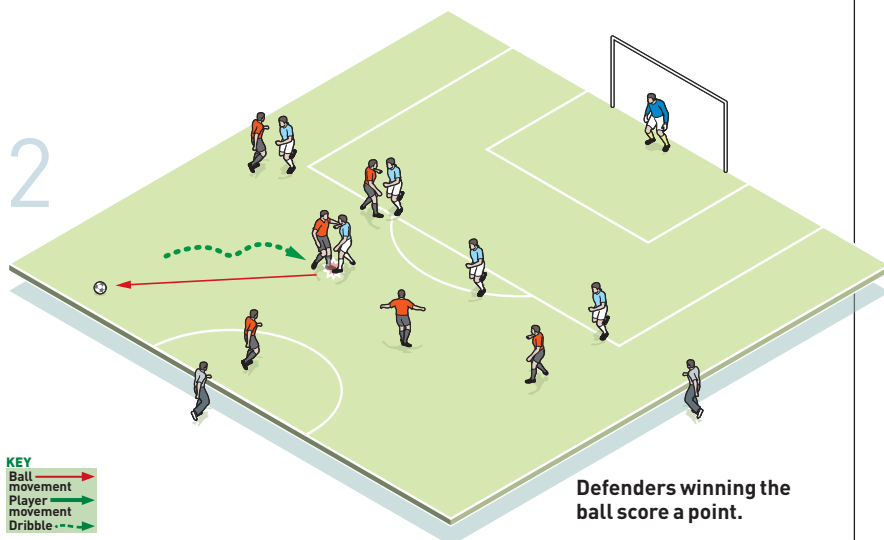
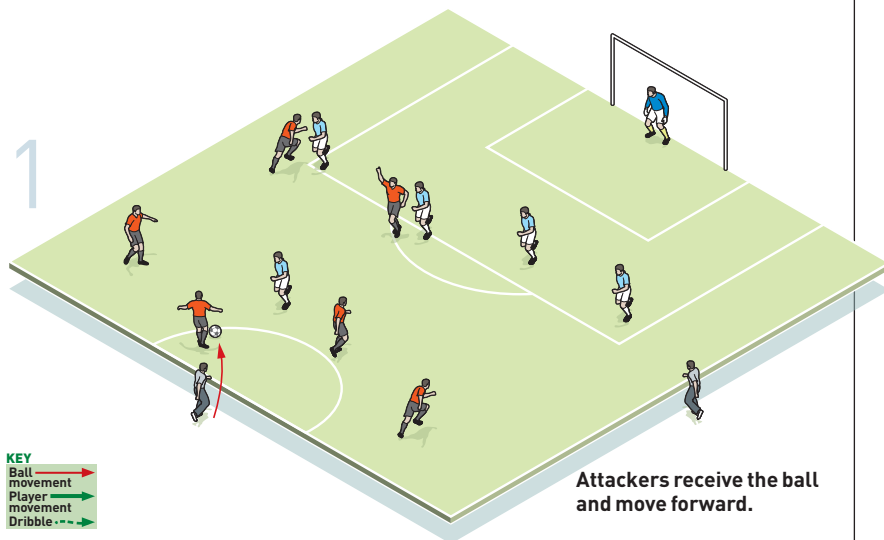
What do I get the players to do?

We play 6v5 in the attackers' favour. The number of players can be altered depending on specific team formations, but at Bolton we work on a back four, adding in one defensive midfielder to make five defensive players.

Serve a ball to any of the attacking players. Defenders approach and tackle, attempting to win possession.

When possession is gained, either a point is won automatically, or the defender has to play the ball between two poles placed four metres apart on either side of the pitch.

The ball then goes back to the coach.



“Make sure every defensive player is clear in their role and their decision-making.”



PREPARING THE BACK FOUR: **PROGRESSION**

How do I progress the session?

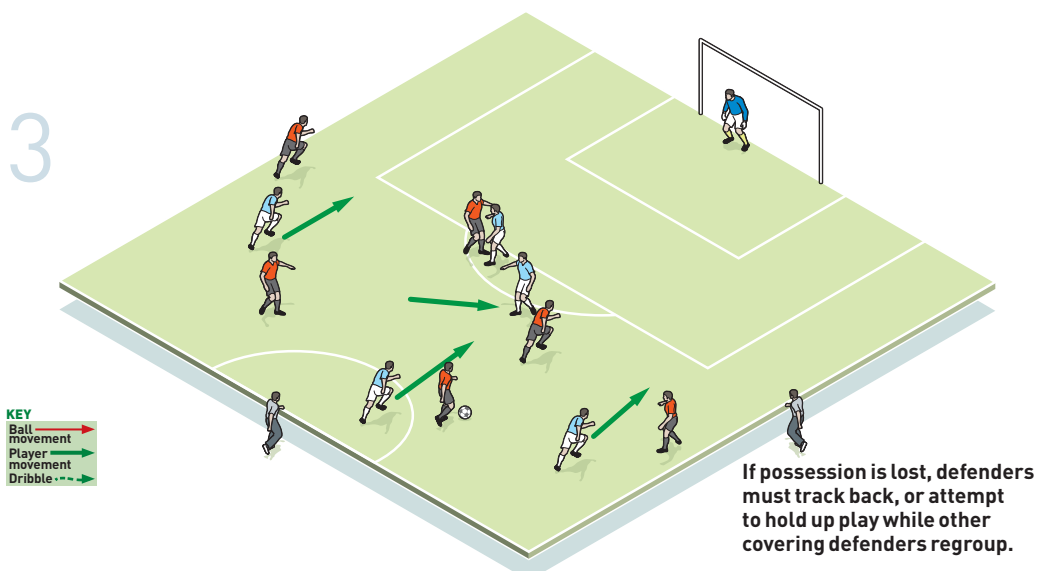
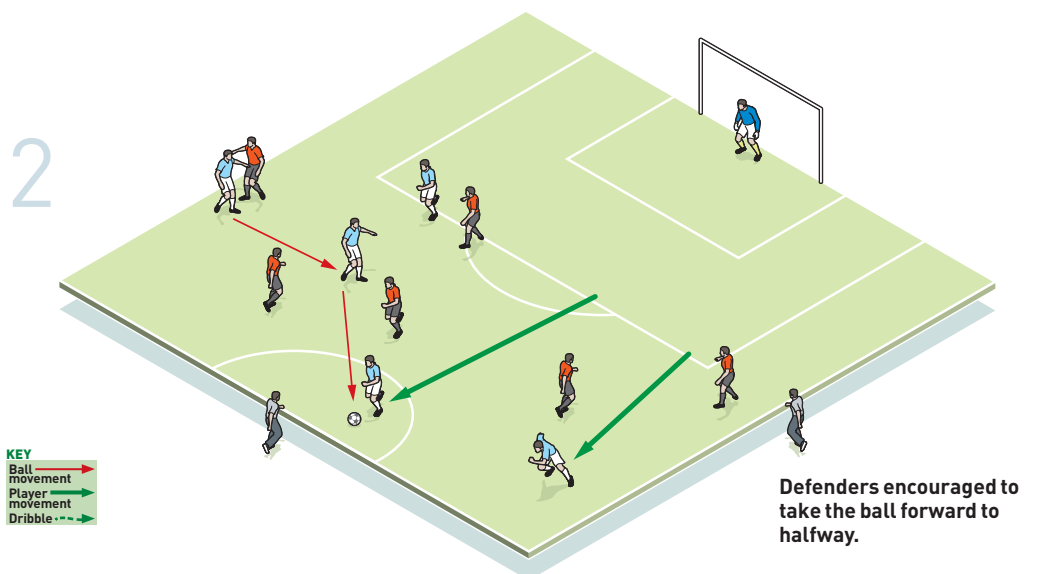
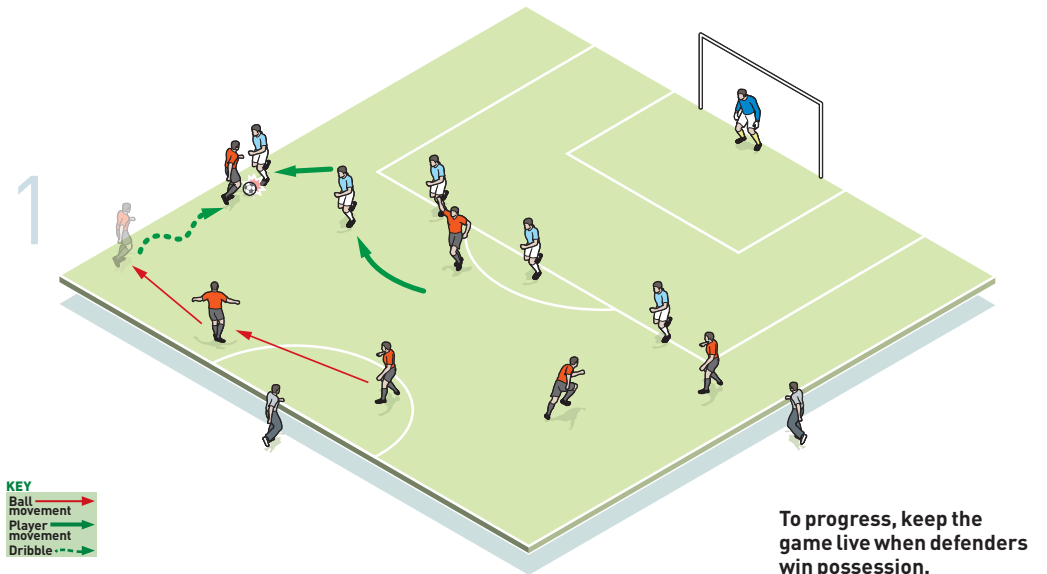
If defenders are increasingly winning the ball, they need to be encouraged to take it to halfway, keeping possession. If they are intercepted though, the game remains live. Repetition of this session allows players to build confidence and gain a clear understanding of their role.

How would you put this into a game situation?

Add more players, for example 7v5 or 8v6, building up to 11v11 when working on full team shape.

What are the key things to look out for technically/tactically?

We're looking at the relationship of the back four, and within that, the movement and positioning of the full-backs, plus each player's recovery position. We need to make sure that every defensive player is clear in their role and their decision-making. We will look as well for each defender's ability to delay the progress of the opposition when not in possession, so allowing time for fellow defenders to retreat.





STEVE BRUCE

Steve Bruce Defending as individuals and pairs

Overview:

We often think of the defence as a unit comprising four or more players, but it's common for one or two defenders to find themselves in situations where they are exposed to an overload of attackers.

This session is performed regularly, and is one where concentration and communication are absolutely essential.

DEFENDING AS INDIVIDUALS AND PAIRS: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

40x30 yards, two full-size goals, 2 cones marking the halfway line, 4 more marking entry gates

EQUIPMENT

Goals, balls, cones

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

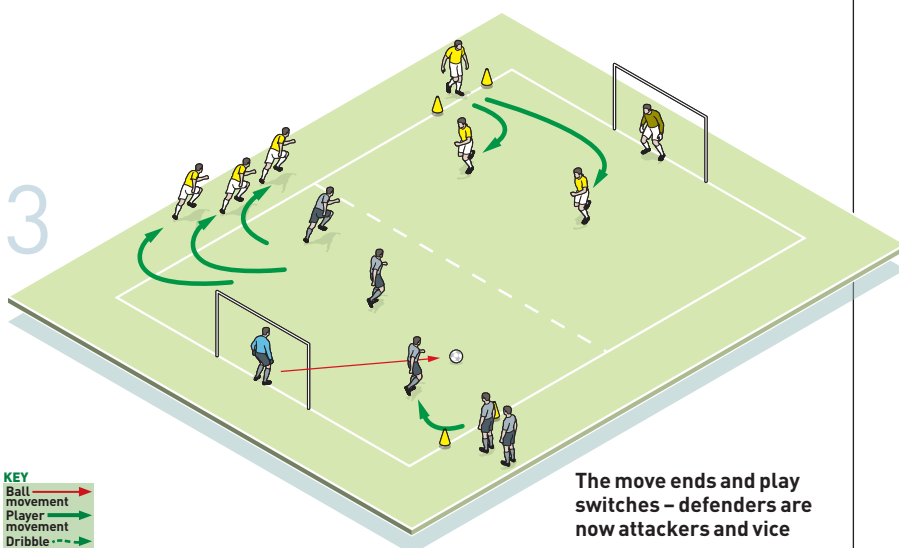
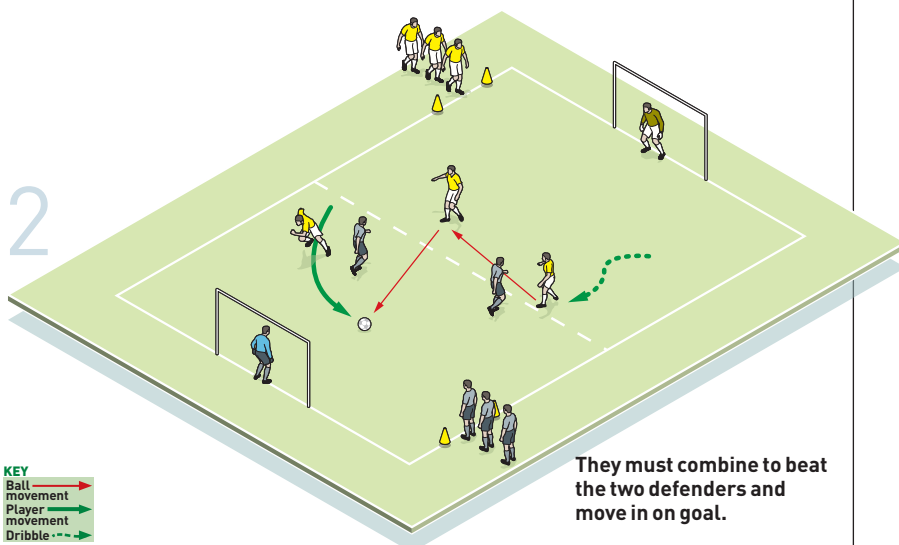
12 to 20

What do I get the players to do?

The keeper throws the ball out to one of his three attackers. Ahead of them are two defenders. The attackers must progress into the opposing half, exchanging passes and looking to fashion a shot on goal.

Defenders must organise themselves well, tracking the ball but also looking for attackers running into space. The move will end either with a goal or a defensive clearance.

Now switching direction, the two defenders become attackers and are joined by another player from the side. The three initial attackers exit the pitch and return to their gate. They are replaced by two players who now act as defenders, thus creating a new 3v2 overload, where the attacking keeper begins play. Keep rotating this set-up for 15 minutes.





DEFENDING AS INDIVIDUALS AND PAIRS: **PROGRESSION**

What are the key things to look for technically/tactically?

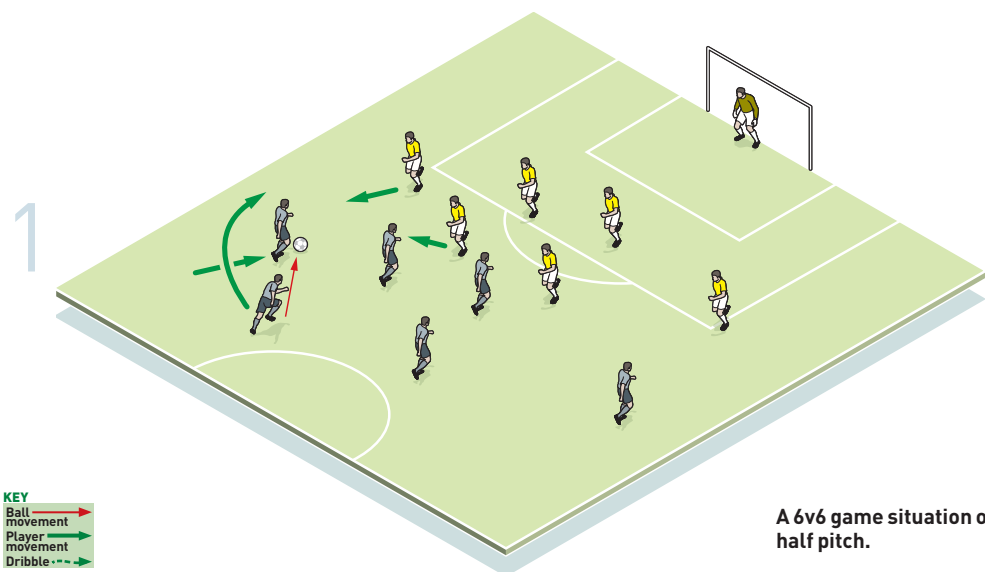
Although a simple attacking drill, this is very intense for defenders. Jockeying and back-tracking techniques work muscle groups, particularly as defenders have to adopt a low body stance whilst moving backwards. Quick feet are essential, as is good shot-blocking. We also look at position, distance from the ball, directing of the opposition, plus communication and knowledge of when to cover and when to press.

How do I progress the session?

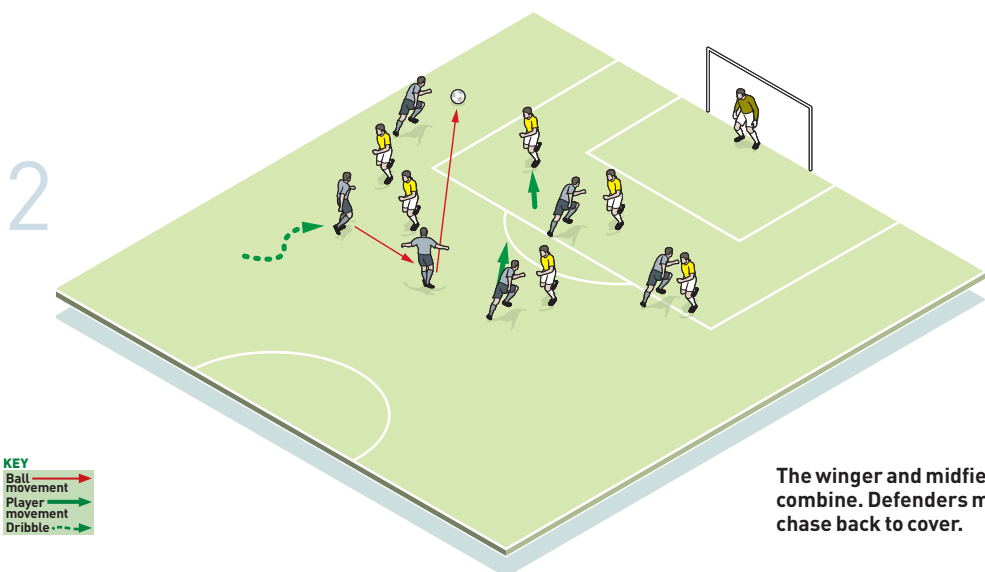
Change the width of the pitch as this dictates the level of difficulty for defenders – the wider, the more challenging. Also look at the number of touches allowed – a two-touch game for attackers works defenders as a pair, while all-in for attackers provokes 1v1 dribbling for defenders to adjust to.

How would you put this into a game situation?

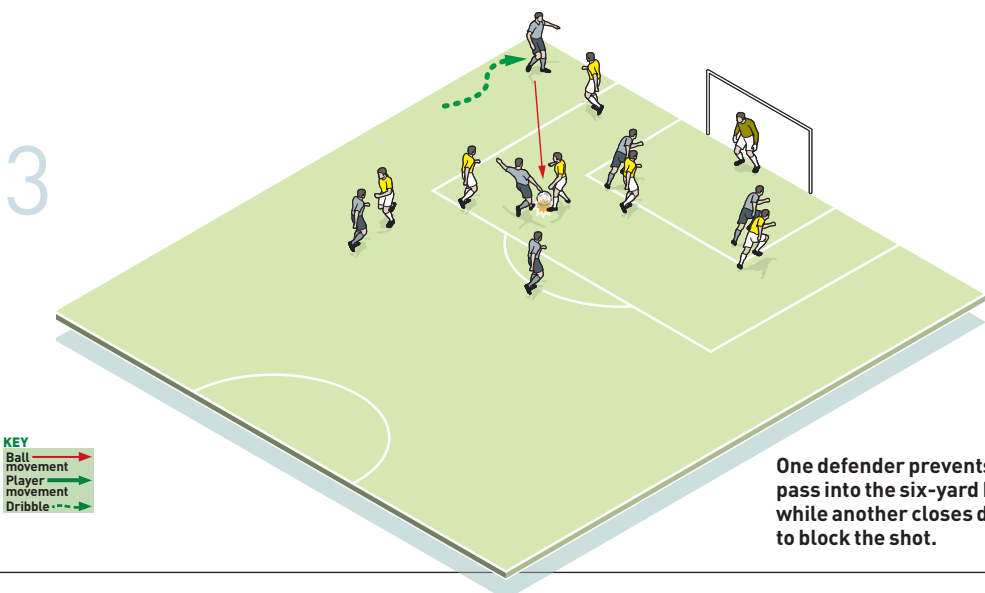
Play 6v6 attacking one goal on a half pitch, with the emphasis on full-backs and centre-backs finding and holding position. Attackers must produce overload scenarios, but the defensive line needs to counter the threat by pressing as individuals, or closing a man down in tandem.



A 6v6 game situation on a half pitch.



The winger and midfielder combine. Defenders must chase back to cover.



One defender prevents a pass into the six-yard box while another closes down to block the shot.



AIDY BOOTHROYD

Aidy Boothroyd Defending 1v1

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 60x40 yards

EQUIPMENT

Ball, bibs, cones and small goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

12 players

SESSION TIME

Total: 85mins

St Georges Cross 1v1: 15mins

Progression 1: 15mins

Progression 2 (with goals): 20mins

Small-sided game: 35mins

Overview

This session is focused on 1v1 defending, which is a dying art. If players can take the ball off their opponent anywhere on the pitch, the team is better equipped to deal with an attacking overload.

I have chosen this session because too often I see a big emphasis put on players "on the ball" rather than highlighting the importance of their work "off the ball". Being a good 1v1 defender in every position allows your team to be more attack-

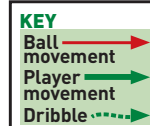
minded, with players being left further up the pitch.

What do I get the players to do?

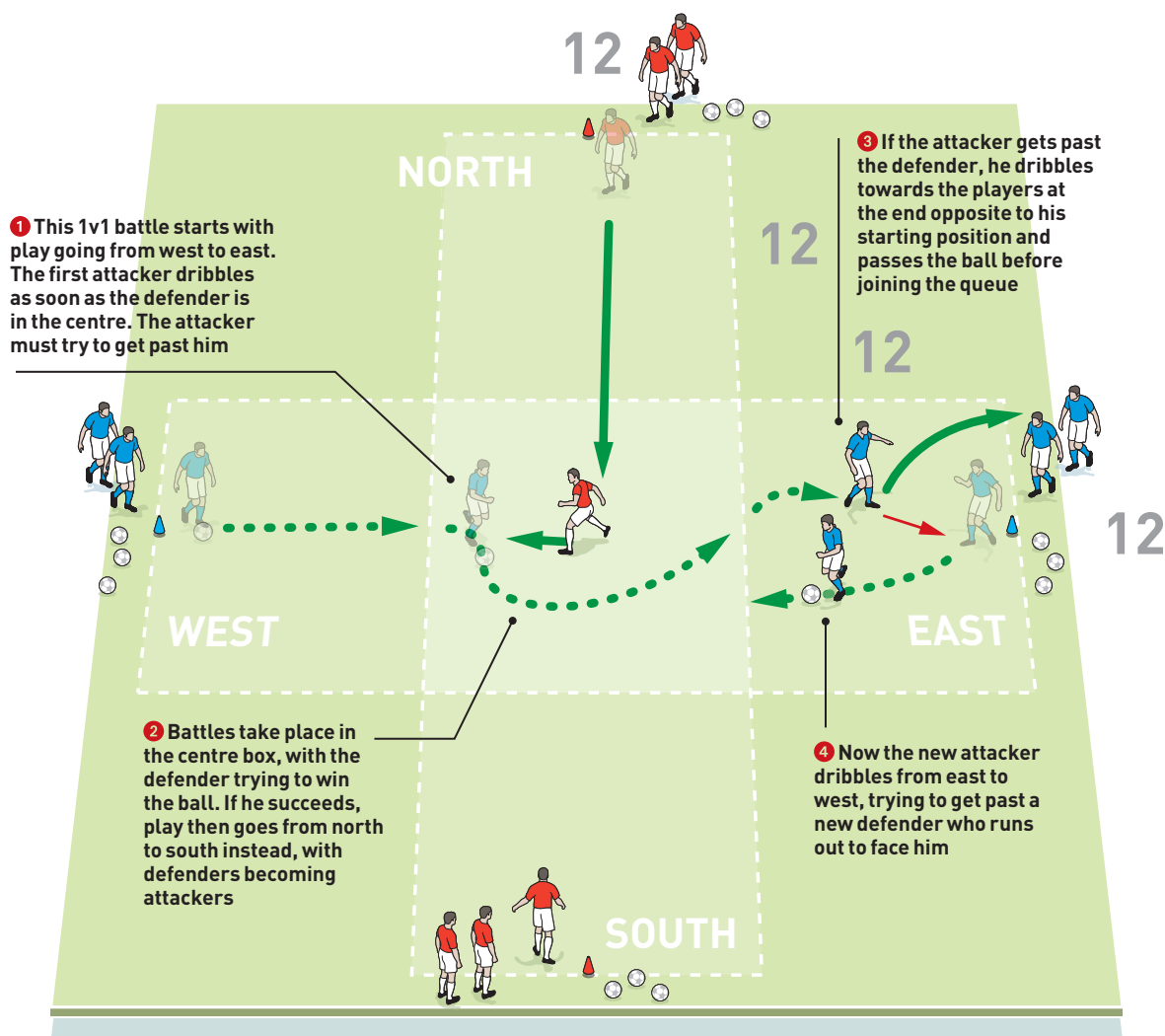
St George's Cross 1v1

Set up an area consisting of five boxes of 12x12 yards each, laid out in the shape of a cross, as shown [1]. Name each end of the cross after the four points of the compass: north, south, east, and west.

Divide your 12 players into two teams of six and start with one team split evenly between the north and south ends of



1



“Being a good 1v1 defender in every position allows your team to be more attack-minded, with players being left further up the pitch”



AIDY BOOTHROYD: DEFENDING 1V1

the cross and the other team split between the east and west ends. In our diagrams, the blues are working west to east (and back again), while the reds are working north to south (and back).

The first blue player must try to dribble the ball from west to east, but before he starts, a red defender runs into the central box and waits to engage the attacker. The coach calls out whether the defender should come from north or south.

As soon as the defender is in position, the attacker can move forward and must try to get past the defender in the central box so he can reach the other side of the cross.

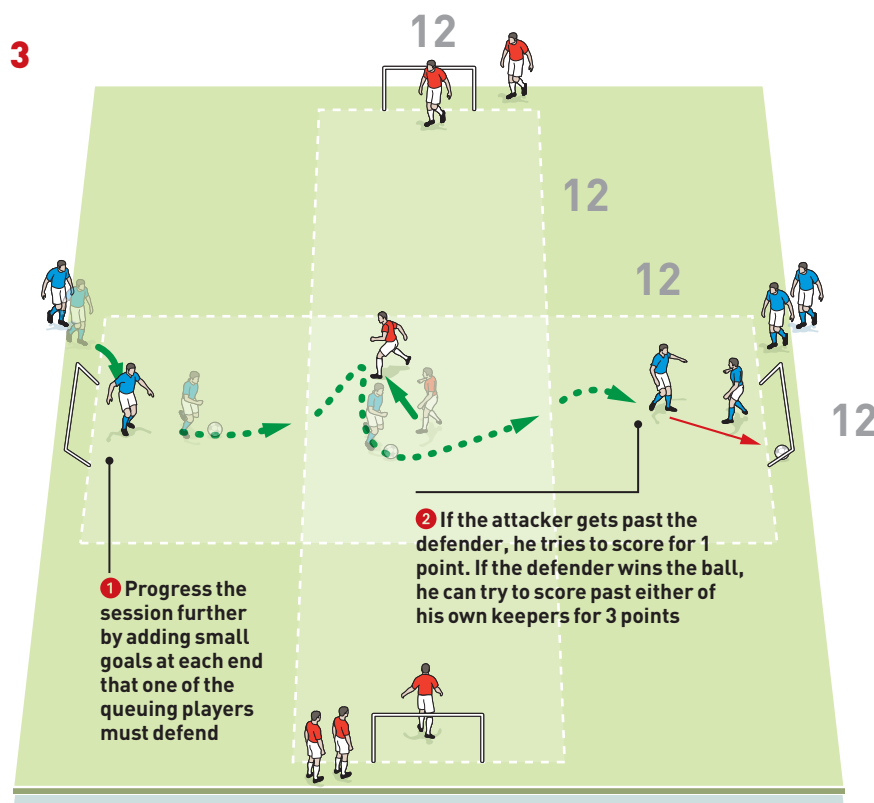
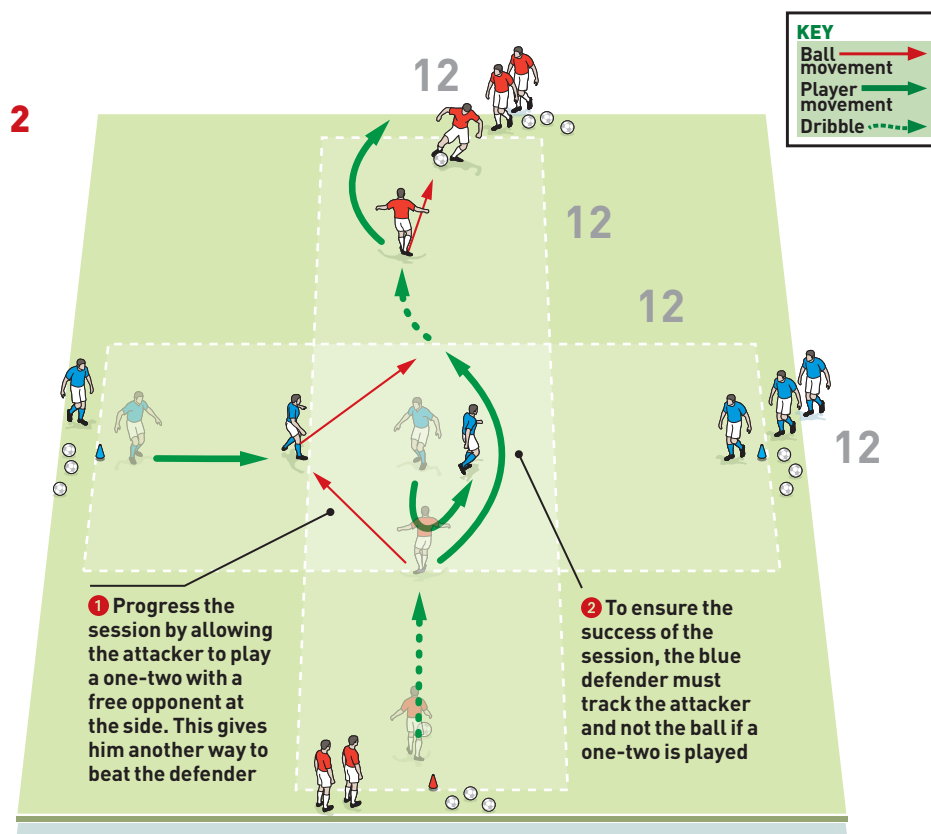
If the attacker gets past the defender and exits the central box with the ball, he passes to his team mate at the east end before joining that queue of players. The blue that receives the ball then attacks in the opposite direction, from east to west. However, if the red defender wins the ball in the central area, play must then go from north to south and back, with the blue east/west players now becoming defenders. Play for 15 minutes.

How do I progress the session?

Progress the session using wall passes. The attacking player should make a one-two with a member of the other team to help him get past the defender, as shown [2]. For the success of the session, ensure that the defender follows the player rather than the ball during the one-two. Play for 15 minutes.

To progress the session further, position small goals at each end of the cross, as shown [3].

The principles of the practice remain the same, but when the dribbling attacker gets past the defender he must now try to score past the goalkeeper for one point. However, if the defender wins the ball he can try and score in either of the





AIDY BOOTHROYD: DEFENDING 1V1

goals on the other part of the cross for three points. Play for 20 minutes.

The addition of the progressions means that the decision-making becomes more difficult and more varied due to the option of the wall pass and the prize of a goal at the end of the sequence.

What are the key things to look out for?

Attackers must be positive and mix up their dribbling skills and wall pass options to keep the defender guessing. For the defenders, the coaching points are...

- **Speed:** the defender must get to the attacker quickly.
- **Decelerate:** the defender should slow down as he approaches the attacker.
- **Keep weight on front**

foot (reset to ball): make sure the defender keeps his weight on the front foot on the side the ball is on, so if the attacker has the ball on his right foot, the defender has his weight on his left foot.

- **Threaten:** move towards the attacker, pressing and forcing play.
- **Patience:** the attacker has to beat you, so no need to commit to a tackle too early.
- **Steal, track or tackle:** the defender has three options in the 1v1 – steal the ball, track the movement of the attacker, or commit to a tackle.

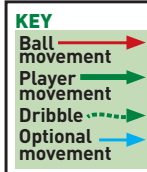
What are the typical mistakes that players might make?

Defenders can get over eager and dive in when

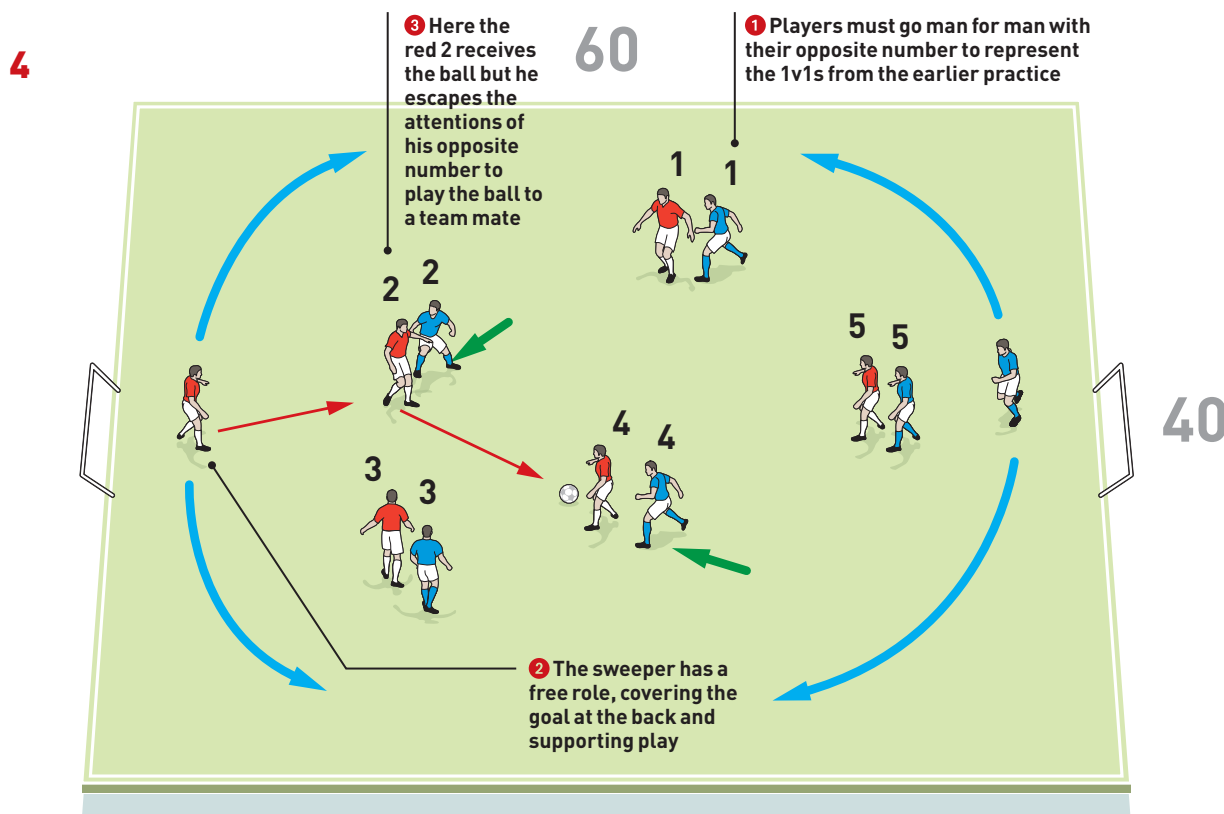
making a challenge, leaving their foot outstretched and thus losing balance, or they can overcommit and allow the attacker to catch them out with a feint.

How would you put this into a game situation?

Set up an area of 60x40 yards, with a small goal at each end, as shown [4]. Split your player into two teams of six and number the players in each team from 1 to 5, with the sixth player performing the role of a sweeper who cannot score. Play a 6v6 game, with the numbered players going man for man with their equivalent numbers and the sweeper having a free role covering the goal at the back and supporting play. Rotate roles, changing the sweeper every three minutes. Play for 20 minutes.



“The defender keeps his weight on the front foot on the side the ball is on, so if the attacker has the ball on his right foot, the defender has his weight on his left foot”



- ▲ Finish the session with a 6v6 small-sided game. Number each team from 1 to 5, with one player on each team taking turns to be a sweeper who cannot score. Change the sweeper every three minutes.



DAVID MOYES

David Moyes Segmented training spaces

Overview:

I have always sought out simple visual solutions when communicating ideas and principles to players.

One really effective method for coaching team shape and pattern has been to segment our training pitches. This enables us to practise compactness, pressing, positional and directional play, and also improves understanding of roles and rotation.

The lines on the pitch allow us to perform individual work with players in their set position – be that possession games, 2v1s in wide areas, or other attack versus defence set-ups – after which we move training onto a standard pitch to ensure that what we've practised is now applied.

While the pitches provide a valuable coaching aid that allow us to work on any number of specific elements of performance, they only act as a template, and still require coaching staff to apply knowledge and imagination to the detail of the session.

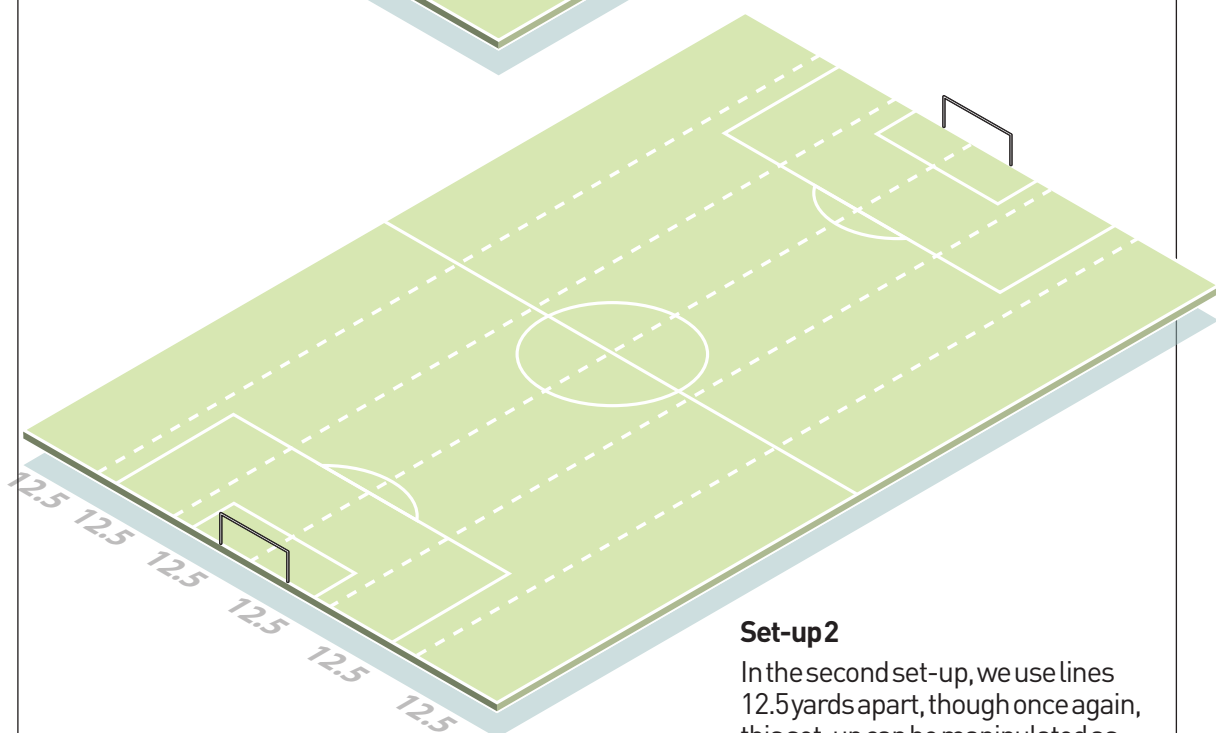
SEGMENTED TRAINING SPACES

Pitch set-up

Below are the two alternative pitch set-ups

Set-up 1

In the first set-up, we have two lines 40 yards out from either goal, marked through the centre of the pitch and down both 18-yard boxes. These distances can be altered to suit the coaches' specific requirements.



Set-up 2

In the second set-up, we use lines 12.5 yards apart, though once again, this set-up can be manipulated as required by the coach.

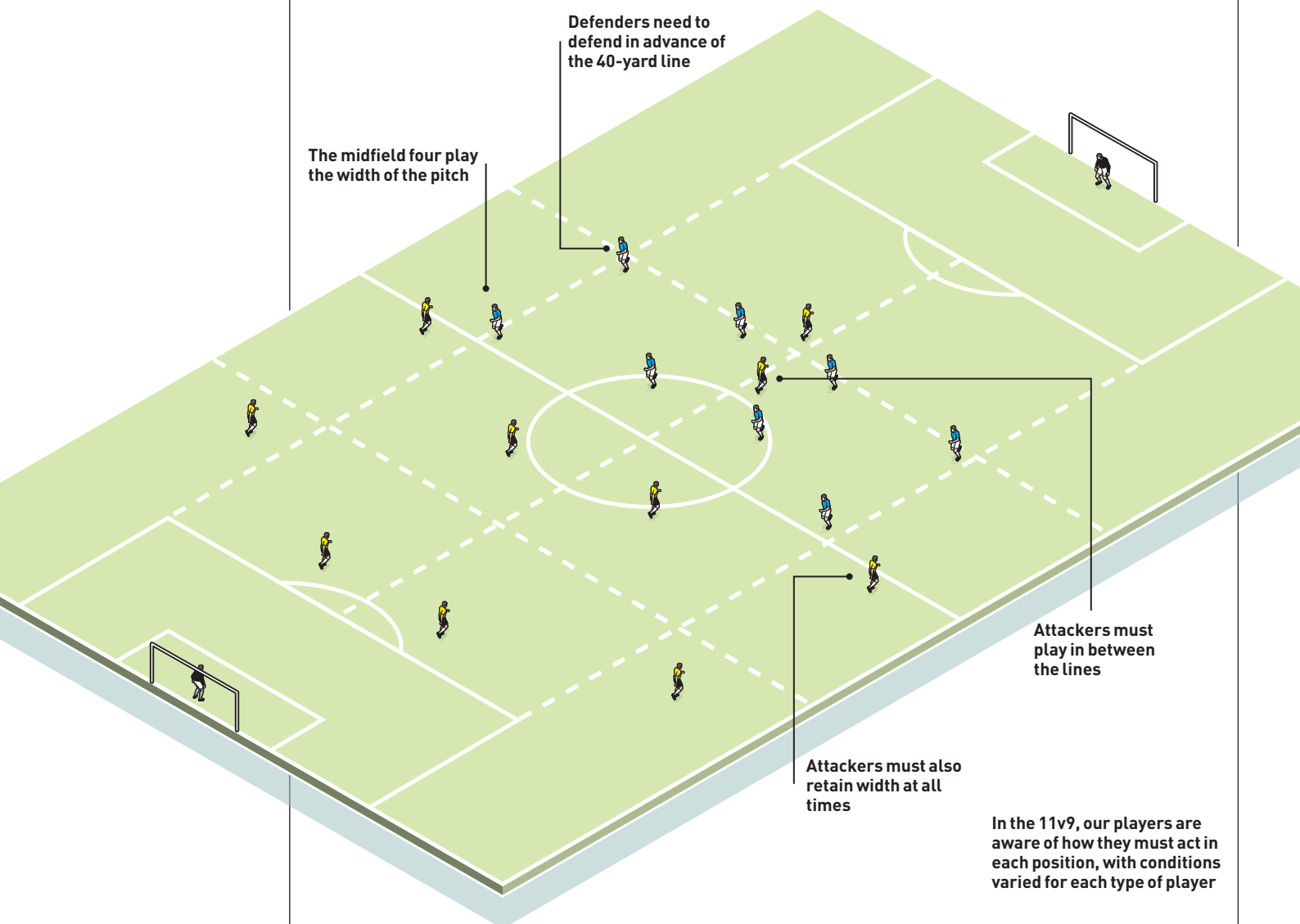
The lines on the above illustrations are dotted for illustrative purposes, but should be solid lines in the actual practice.



DAVID MOYES

SEGMENTED TRAINING SPACES

Practice 1: 11v9



“We like our attackers to retain width whilst ensuring team mates still occupy space in the middle of the field.”

The practice has to be designed around what the coach requires from the session – an offensive or a defensive drill, for instance. It can be altered to incorporate a greater or lesser number of players, as well as different formations.

At Everton, we want to see the movement of defenders to

be relative to the movement of the ball. And we may decide to play a high back four, meaning the defenders need to defend in advance of the 40-yard line.

The midfield four may be asked to play the width of the box, thus waiting for the ball to be passed wide before they press.

In terms of attacking

play, we generally look for intelligent and original attacking angles and options, with players maintaining good distances between each other, whilst also rotating positions and continually moving into different zones on the field.

We like our attackers to retain width whilst ensuring team mates

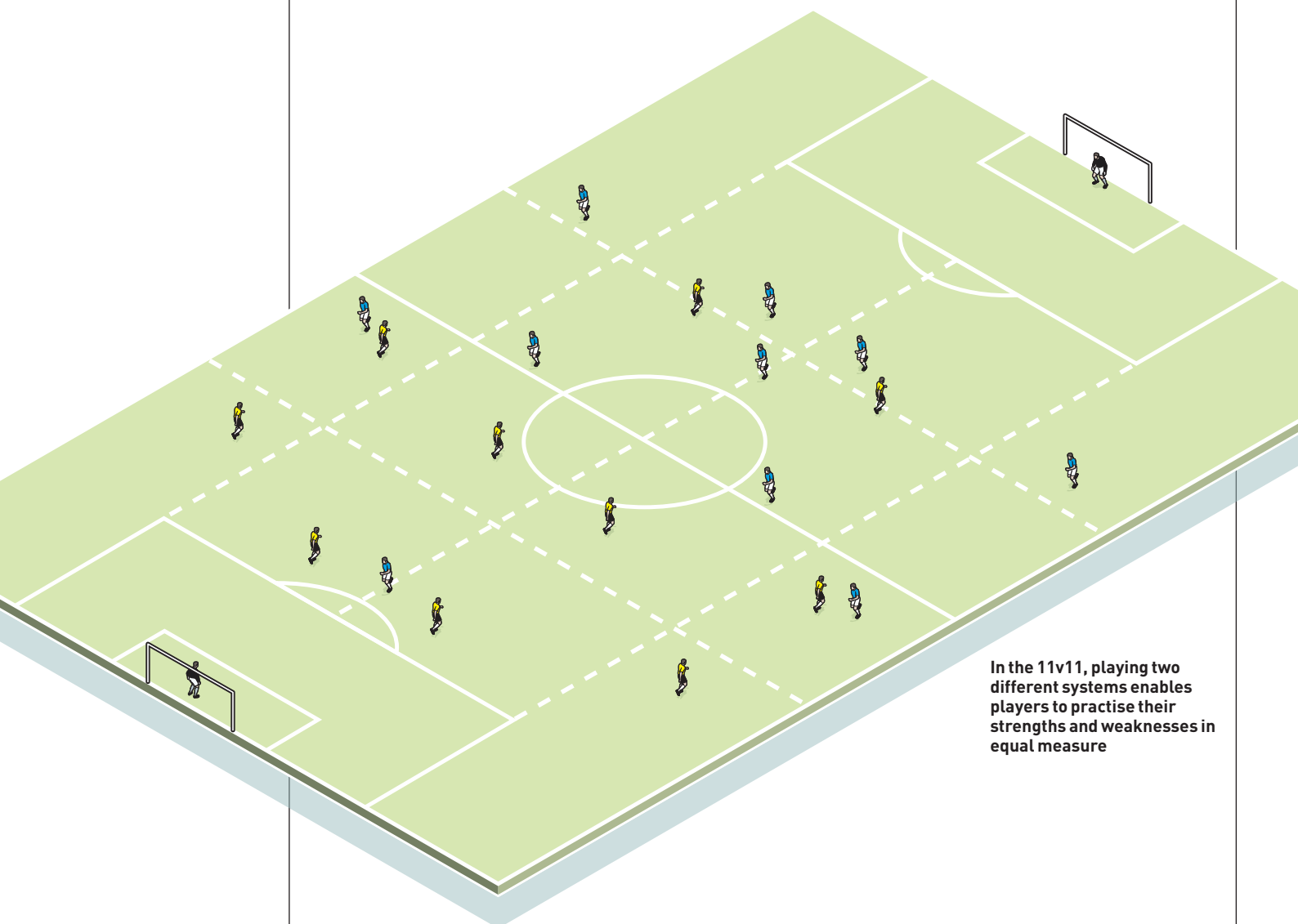
still occupy space in the middle of the field. They must also play in between the lines of the opposition, with forwards showing willingness in making threatening runs from deep.

These are just a few examples of how the drill may be manipulated in order to test the players.



SEGMENTED TRAINING SPACES

Practice 2: 11v11



In the 11v11, playing two different systems enables players to practise their strengths and weaknesses in equal measure

“It’s important players build understanding both with and without the ball, as well as positional intelligence during transitions.”

This practice highlights our desire to play with teams in two different systems – here, it’s 4-4-2 (yellows) against 4-1-4-1 (blues). Varying formations enable us to test the strengths and weaknesses of our own team, building

players’ tactical knowledge of attacking and defending positions. It’s important players build understanding both with and without the ball, as well as positional intelligence during transitions.

The advantages of training with different formations

Training with two or more different formations gives you the coaching opportunity to work on whatever area you specifically wish to:

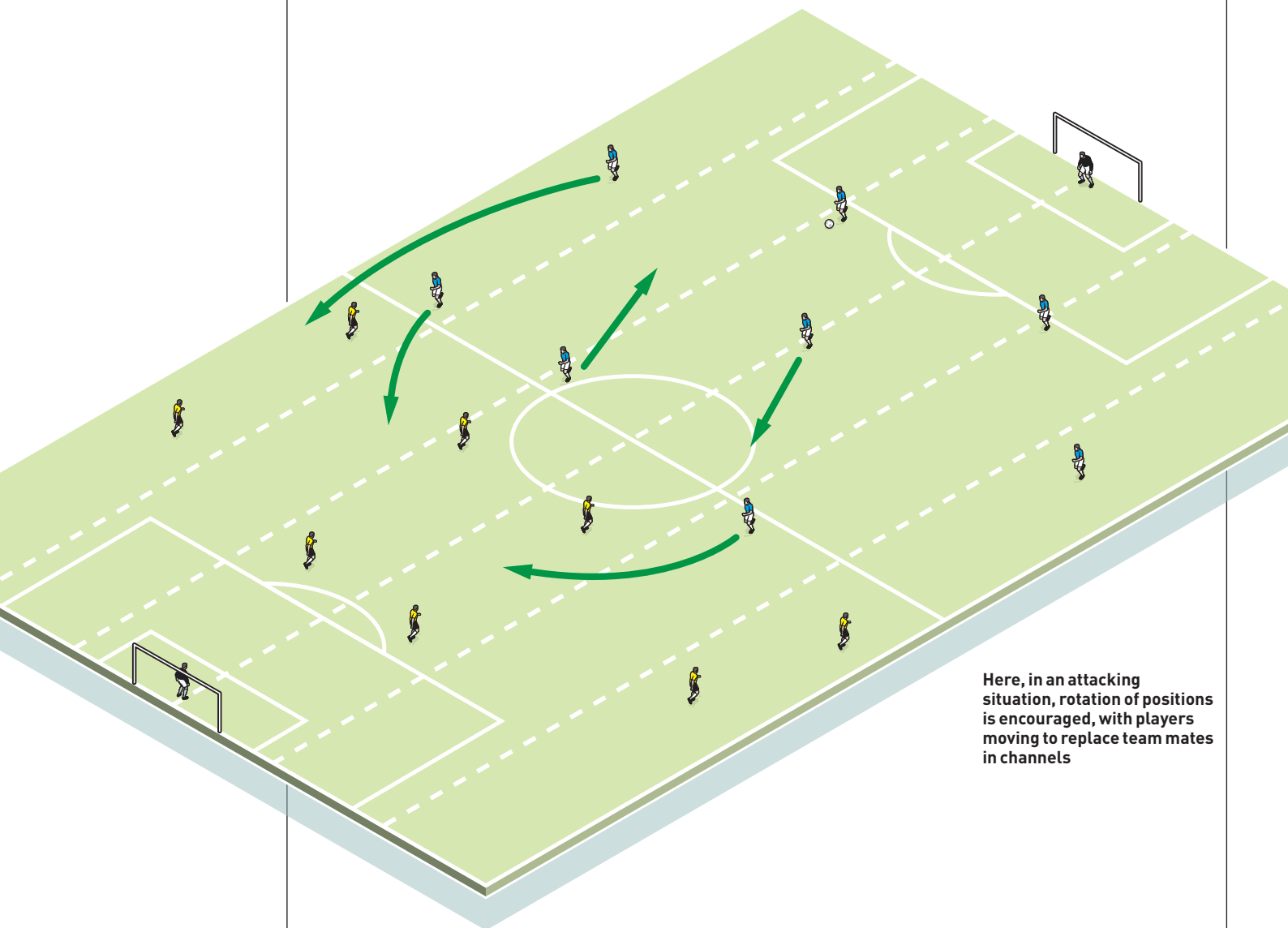
- Defensive organisation with and without the ball
- Positional importance in transitioning
- Attacking organisation having players ahead of the ball providing width and depth
- Interchange of positions when in possession
- Quickly reorganising after losing the ball



SEGMENTED TRAINING SPACES

Practice 3: Attacking drill

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



Here, in an attacking situation, rotation of positions is encouraged, with players moving to replace team mates in channels

“By practising in this way we are beginning to form patterns of play and movement patterns for the players.”

The same pitch set-up can now be used in an attacking practice session. Now, with the other team in possession, players are encouraged to rotate their positions and react to the movement of other team members by taking up positions in

different channels on the pitch. The various distances between players are also a key theme during this drill, using the grid lines as a reference for the players when deciding exactly where they should position. Again, this pitch set-up

helps the players to visualise where exactly they are required to be on the pitch at different times. By practising in this way we are beginning to form patterns of play and movement patterns for the players. Applied to a match situation, this

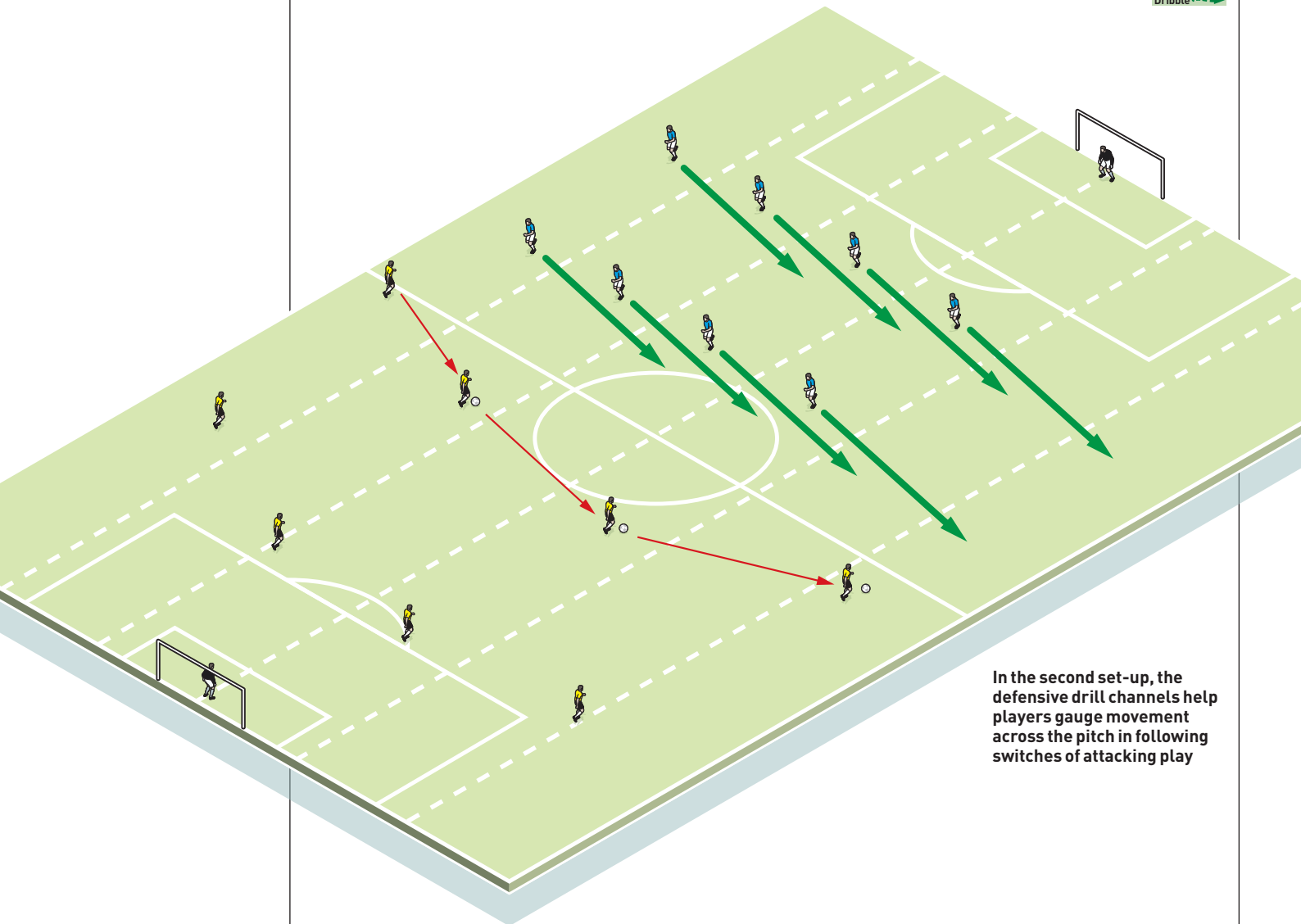
makes us a more fluid attacking team.



SEGMENTED TRAINING SPACES

Practice 4 : Defensive drill

KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble



In the second set-up, the defensive drill channels help players gauge movement across the pitch in following switches of attacking play

This drill is used to try to help players understand the positions they might encounter when the ball is transferred from one side of the pitch to the other by the attacking team. The gridlines provide the players with a clear

visual aid as to what is required of them in varying scenarios. And using this set-up allows coaches to organise and instruct players into a clear and structured method of defending in the specific shape. ■



Ian Holloway Penetrating or protecting the defensive line

Overview:

This session is about penetrating or protecting the defensive line, and is a blueprint that works attackers and defenders in equal measure.

We're looking for attackers to fashion goalscoring opportunities both when in and out of possession, while defenders must concentrate on defensive compactness, discipline and communication. This resilience is a feature of every successful team, and being able to penetrate this line effectively on a consistent basis is central to winning football matches. We use this session in the lead-up to every match, with players transitioning in their roles throughout the practice.

PENETRATING OR PROTECTING THE DEFENSIVE LINE

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 86x50 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, flat cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 9v9 plus keepers

SESSION TIME

6v4 plus keeper
4x2mins, 1min rest;
Game 4x3mins,
30secs rest

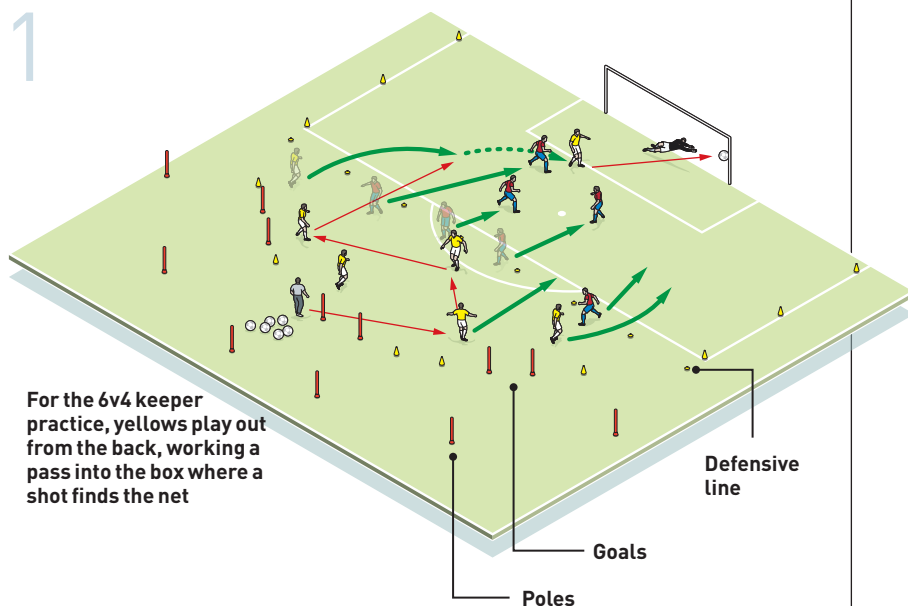
What do I get the players to do?

6v4 plus keeper practice

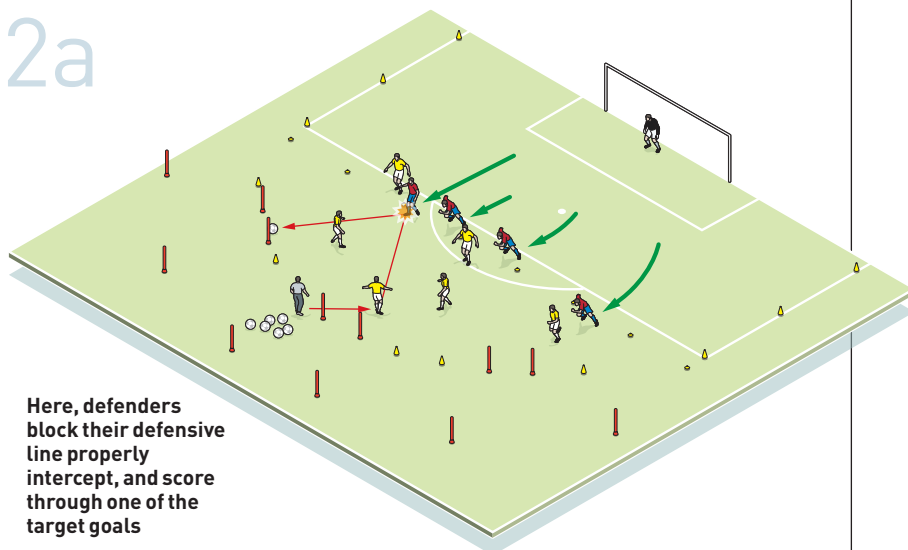
We set up as shown (1), with three target goals across the width, each 1.5 yards wide, and 'deep' poles placed at the bottom of the area, which is 35 yards long. Two yards outside the box, a defensive line is marked with flat rubber cones. The practice requires a keeper and four defenders, who go up against six attackers.

We serve the ball in to the attacking team, who attempt to penetrate the defensive line and score. When the ball goes out of play, defenders must push out past the defensive line as quickly as possible. A new ball is then served in to the attackers. If defenders win possession, they attempt to pass the ball into a target goal (2a). Scoring offers them a 10-second rest, with each attacker having to run around a deep pole before coming back into the area (2b). These

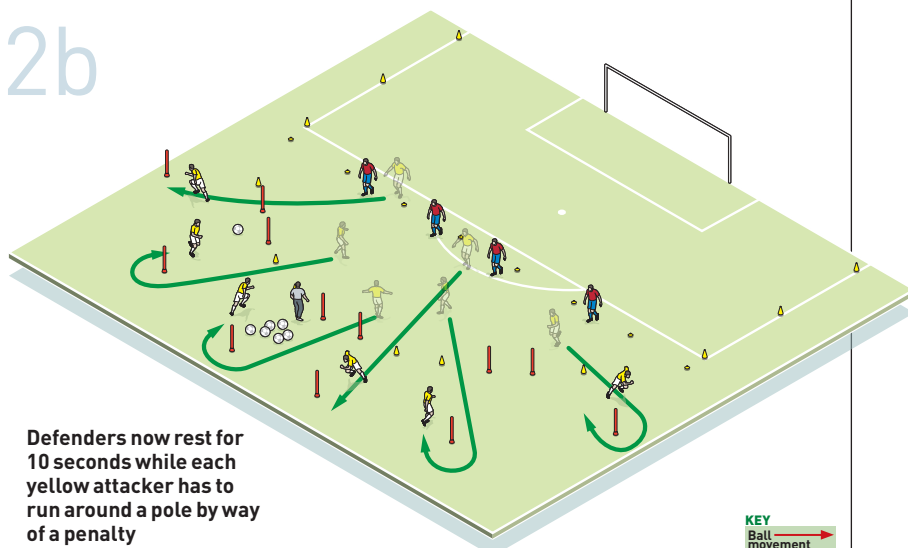
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2a



2b

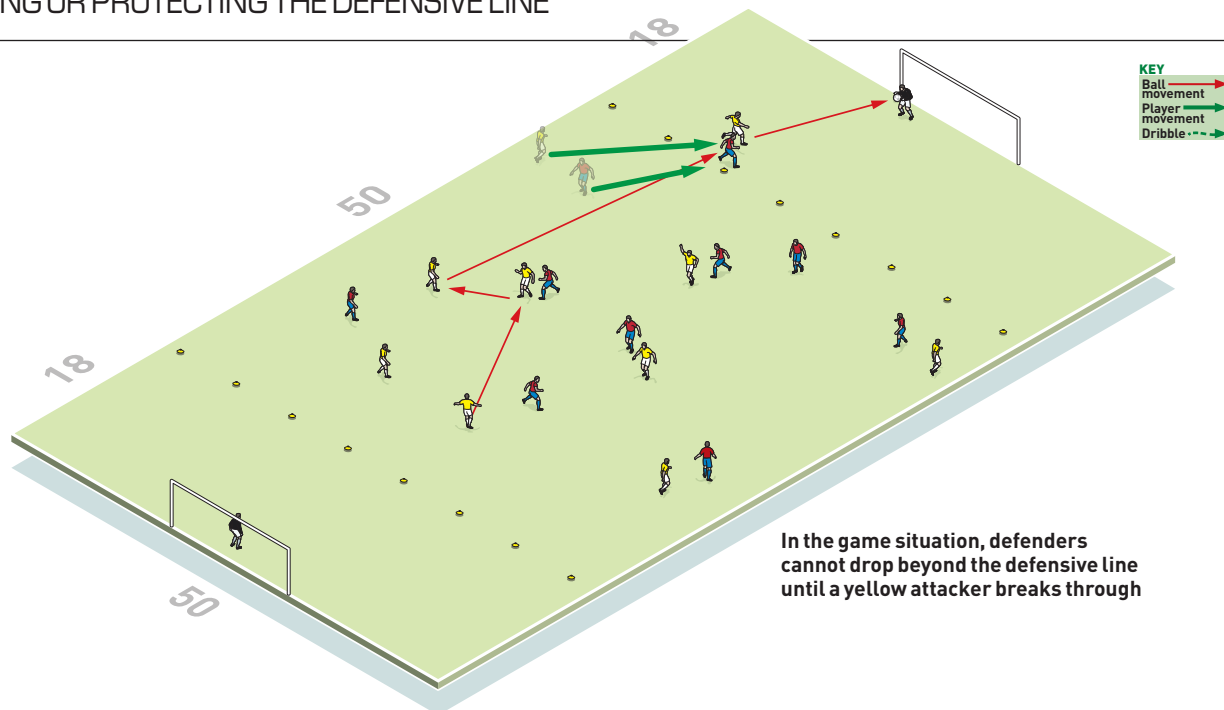


KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble



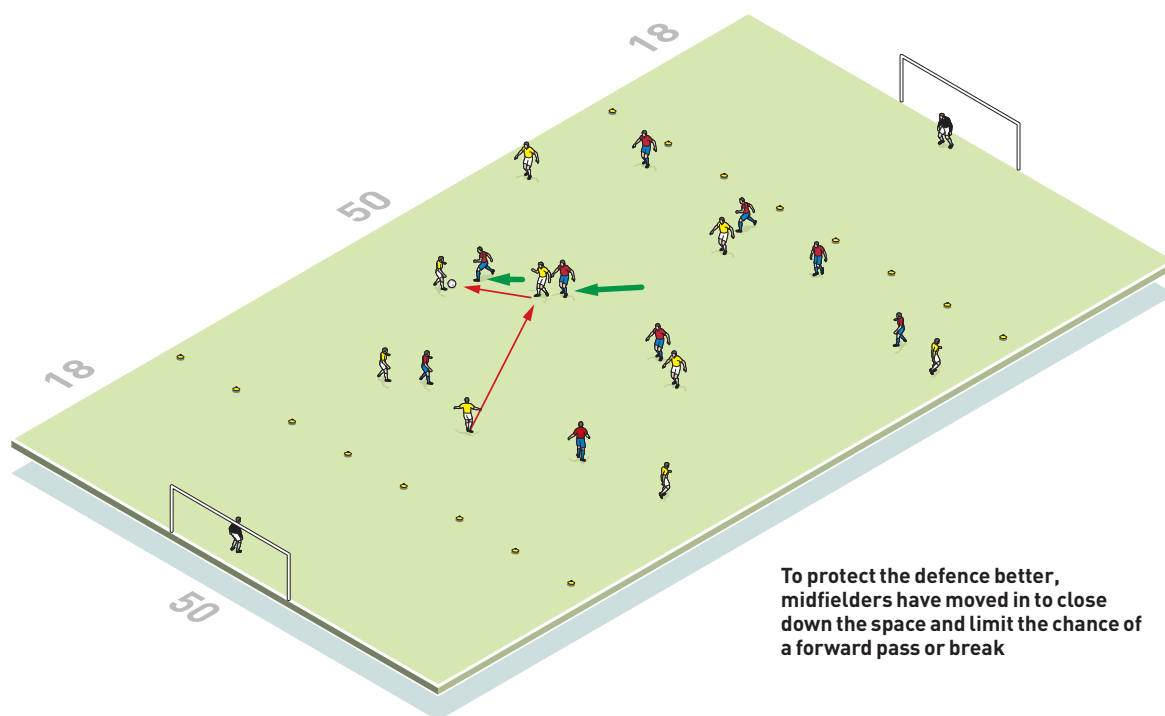
PENETRATING OR PROTECTING THE DEFENSIVE LINE

3a



In the game situation, defenders cannot drop beyond the defensive line until a yellow attacker breaks through

3b



To protect the defence better, midfielders have moved in to close down the space and limit the chance of a forward pass or break

actions replicate instances in a game – the 10-second rest represents defenders making a successful pass out of defence, while attacker movement around the poles mimics recovery runs.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want attackers to disrupt the back four, penetrating the defensive

line and executing a positive finish on goal. Within that, connectivity and good decision-making are vital. Defensively, players must work together, recognising that winning possession is not the end task, but the start of the transition which needs to finish with them scoring in one of the target goals. We also find it useful to introduce a holding midfield player who plays for the

defending team.

How do I put this into a game situation?

Setting up as shown (3a/3b), we create a small-sided game – 9v9 plus keepers in an 86x50-yard area, with two 18-yard end zones. Again, attackers attempt to penetrate the defensive line but can only play one-touch in the end zones. Defenders are not allowed deeper than

the defensive line until the ball enters that area.

Teams must play at high tempo. Any team that scores regains possession, but missing the target means relinquishing possession.

How do I progress this game?

We can reduce space in order to increase the need for accuracy and speed of thought. ■



Alan Pardew Pressing and blocking lines

SET-UP

AREA

Standard pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 16

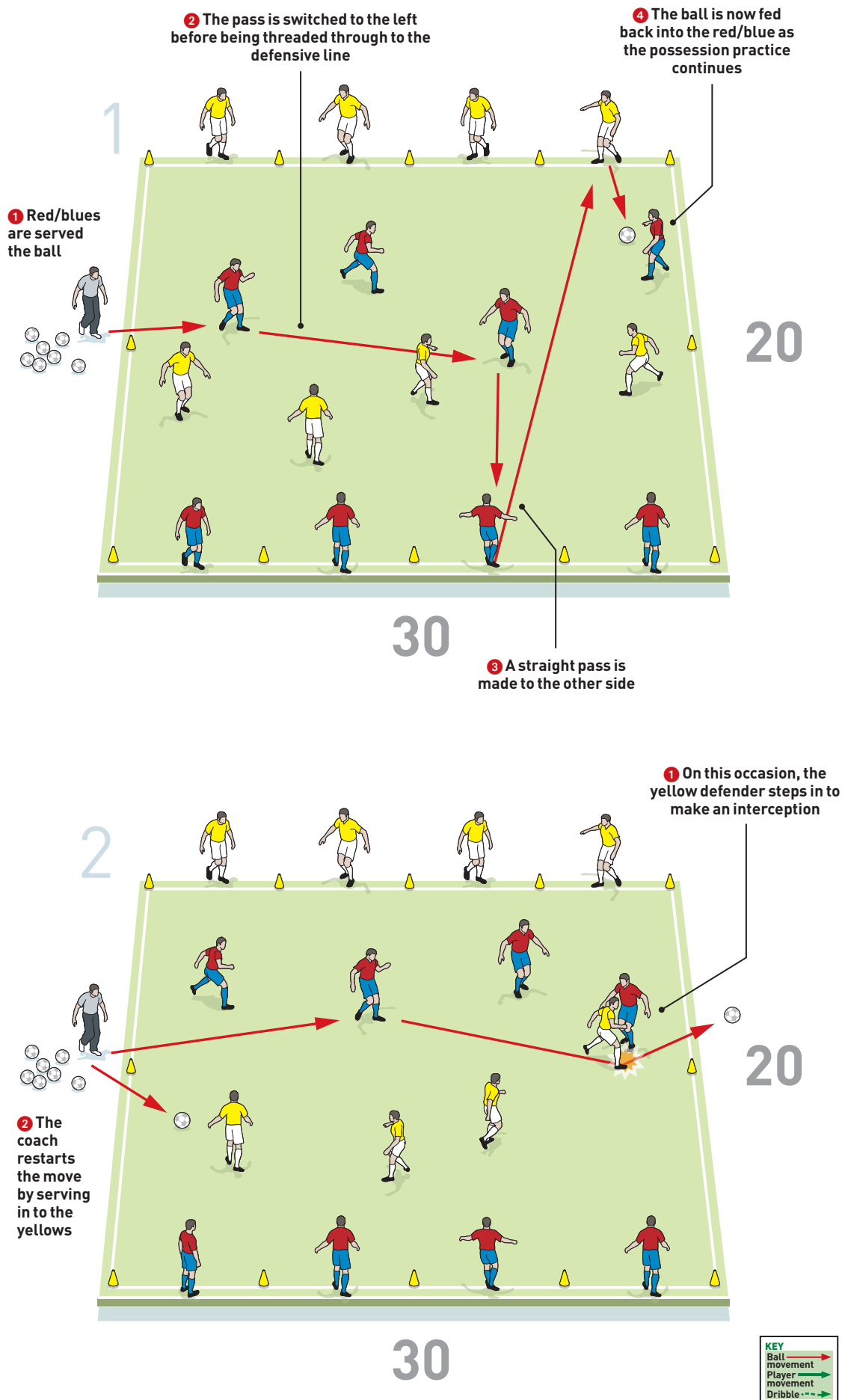
SESSION TIME

4v4 possession,
Progression and Game
15mins each

Overview:

This session is about pressing, both as individuals and as a unit. Specifically, it focuses on the prevention of opposition forward passes and blocking the lines of attack. It's important to practise and perfect the elements and ideas shown in order to force turnovers in possession. Even if the full turnover doesn't succeed, the principles still exist as a way of unsettling the opposition and getting players out of their comfort zones. So, in an ideal situation, we're looking to regain possession in good areas, taking the ball on immediately and creating genuine counter-attacking threat. In every division, pressing to regain is a potent weapon that, when mastered by players, is extremely satisfying for a coach.

PRESSING AND BLOCKING LINES





What do I get the players to do?

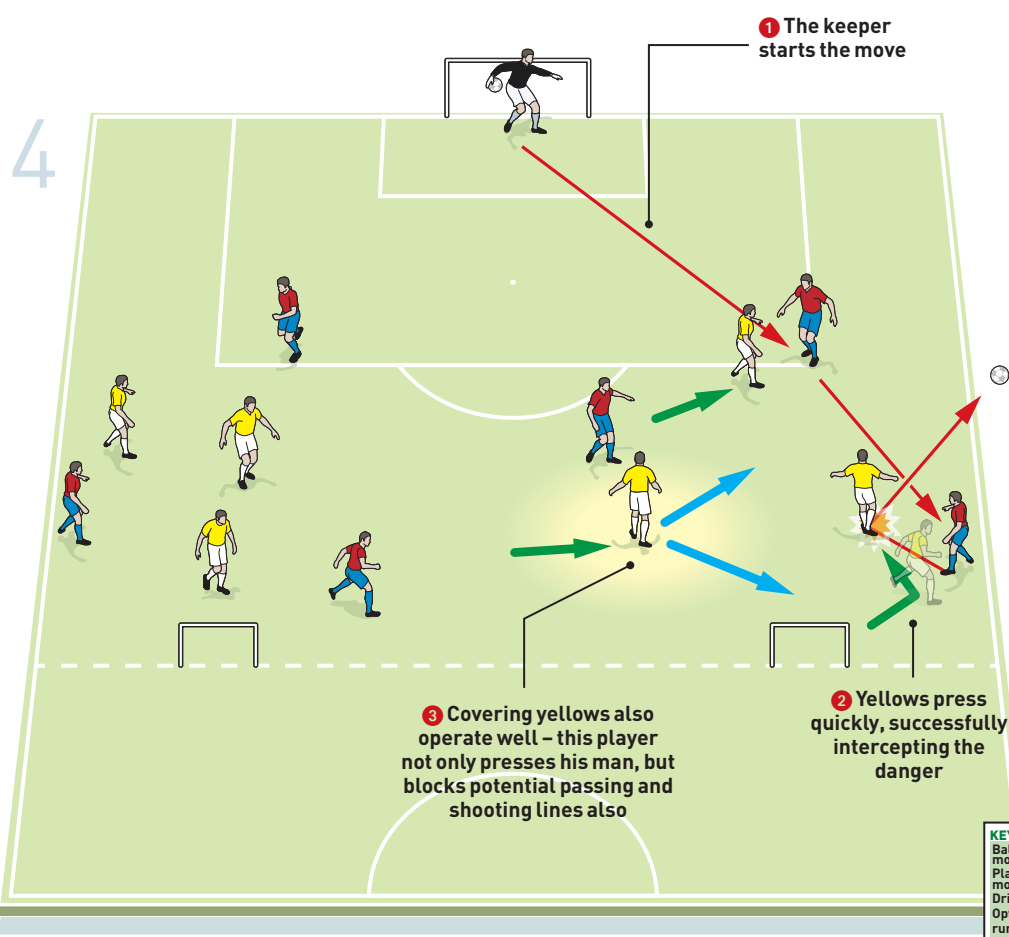
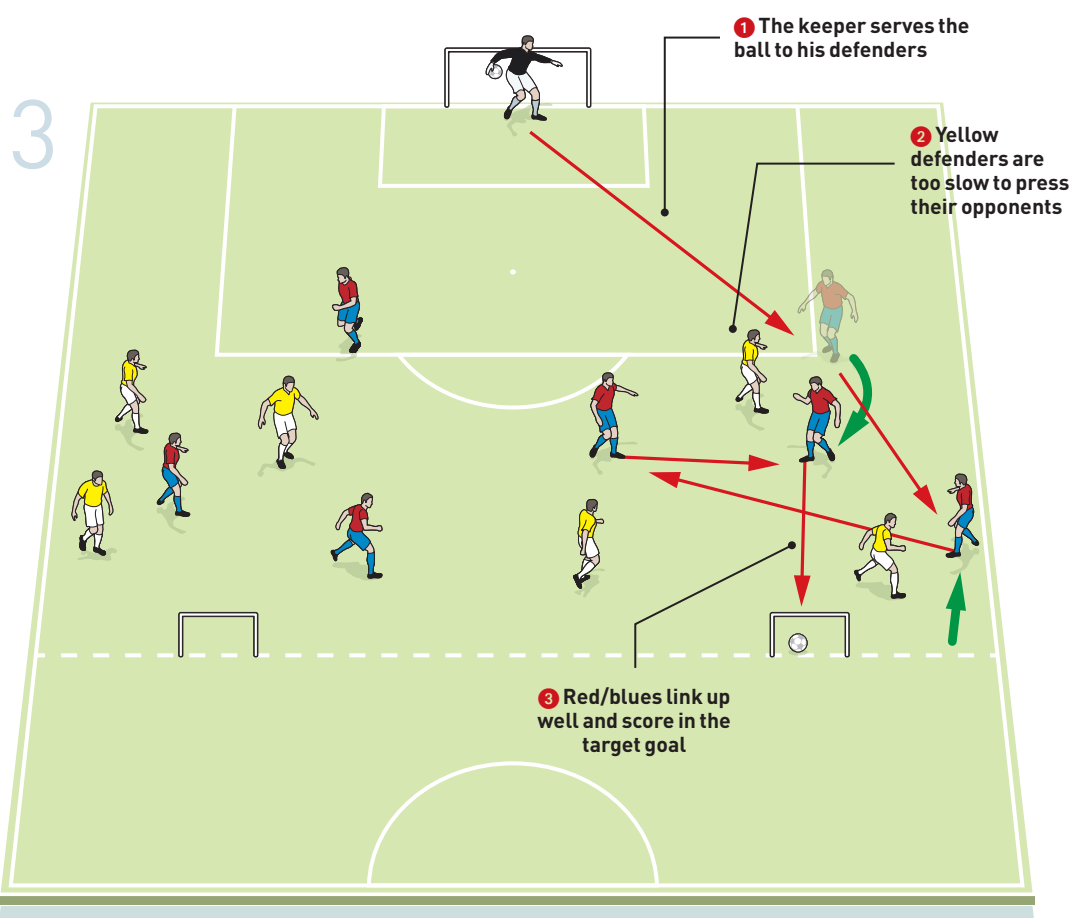
4v4 possession

Setting up as shown (1) we use 12-16 players in an area that's 30x20 yards in size. We can adjust the area for different ages and skill levels, but the premise is the same, namely to play 4v4 centrally with four target players at each end. The coach serves the ball in from the side and this prompts a 4v4 possession game inside the area. Each team attempts to play forwards into their target players. If successful, target players will switch to the opposite side, and possession is then recycled back into the same team. If unsuccessful in making the switch, or the ball goes out of play (2), the coach serves a ball in to the opposing team who now attempt the challenge. Players inside the area rotate with target players at the end of each set.

How do I progress the session?

We now move into a third of a pitch, as shown (3), with a match-specific practice. Essentially we have two working units (one on each side) that, together, represent four defenders and two midfielders attempting to play out into the target goals or players. Opposition players can confront them in a preferred formation (for instance, two forwards, two wide players and two midfielders), and upon gaining possession may attack the goal.

PRESSING AND BLOCKING LINES





What are the key things to look out for?

For individuals, the task helps fine-tune the art of reading triggers to press, along with blocking the line of the pass into the target and pressing with intensity (4).

For the units, the practice is about communication and encouragement, plus rehearsal of depth and cover behind the press.

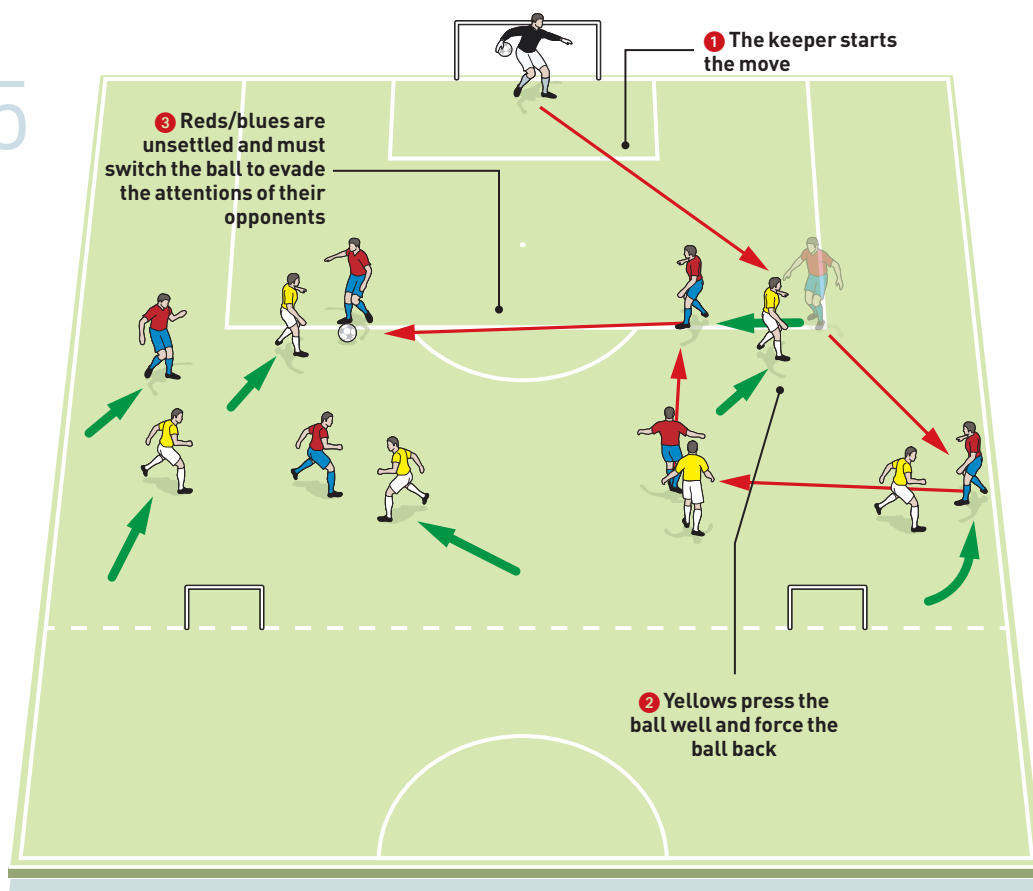
There are a few common faults that we tend to see, namely that players don't get close enough to opponents and allow passes to be played forwards. In contrast, players can press quickly but don't block the line of the pass into the target player. Finally, attackers must be encouraged to switch should the need arise (5).

How do I put this into a game situation?

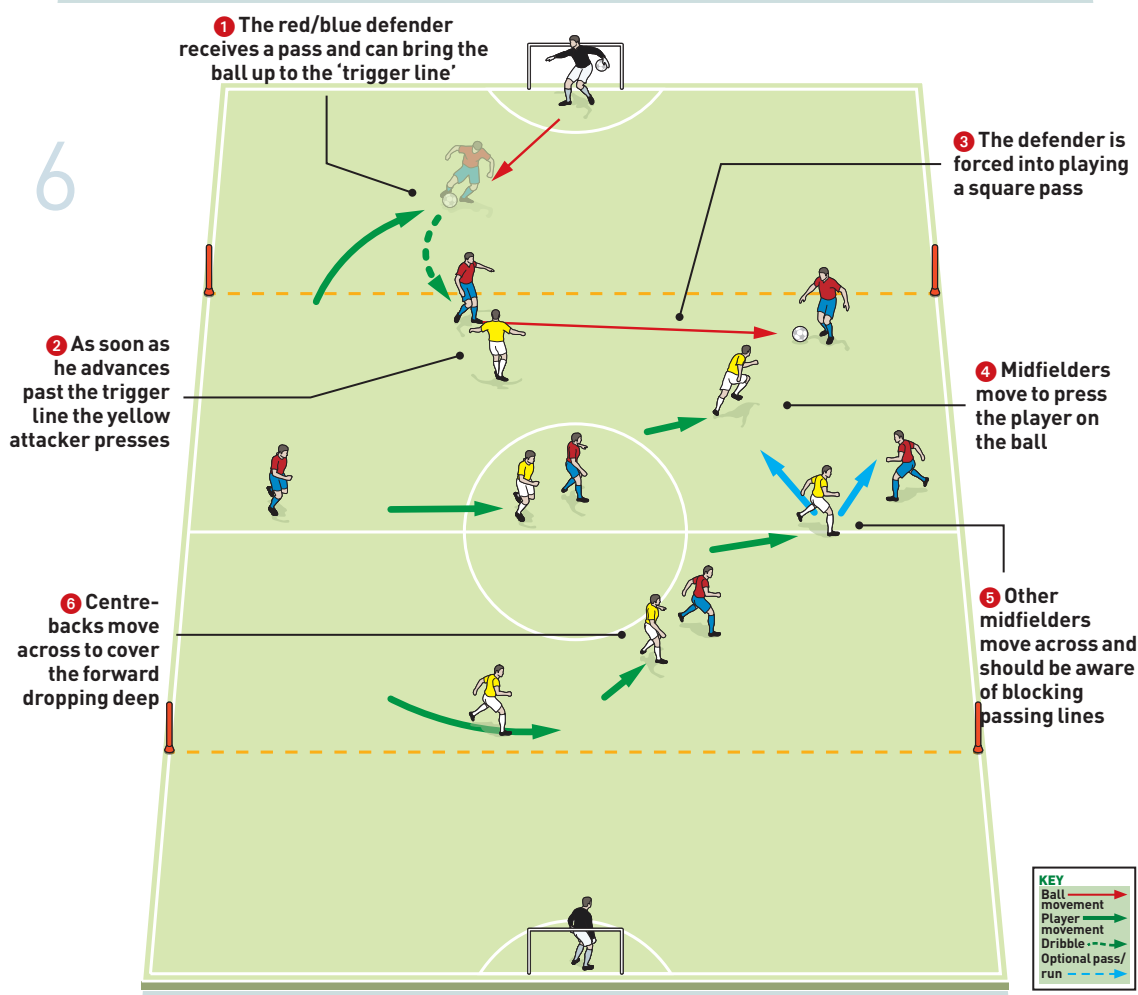
We set up as shown (6) in the space between the penalty areas, using a 6v6 plus keepers. We play as we would a normal game, though players are encouraged to use the defensive line(s) as a trigger point to press from. ■

PRESSING AND BLOCKING LINES

5



6



KEY	
Ball movement	→
Player movement	→
Dribble	→
Optional pass/run	→



MARK HUGHES

Mark Hughes Playing out from the back

SET-UP

AREA

Up to a full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals, mannequins, poles (optional)

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 11v11

SESSION TIME

Main practice 10mins,
Progression 10mins,
11v11 15mins

Overview:

This session highlights the key fundamentals of playing successfully out through the defence to midfield. It helps build understanding and awareness between goalkeeper and back four so that, when it matters, the correct option is always selected.

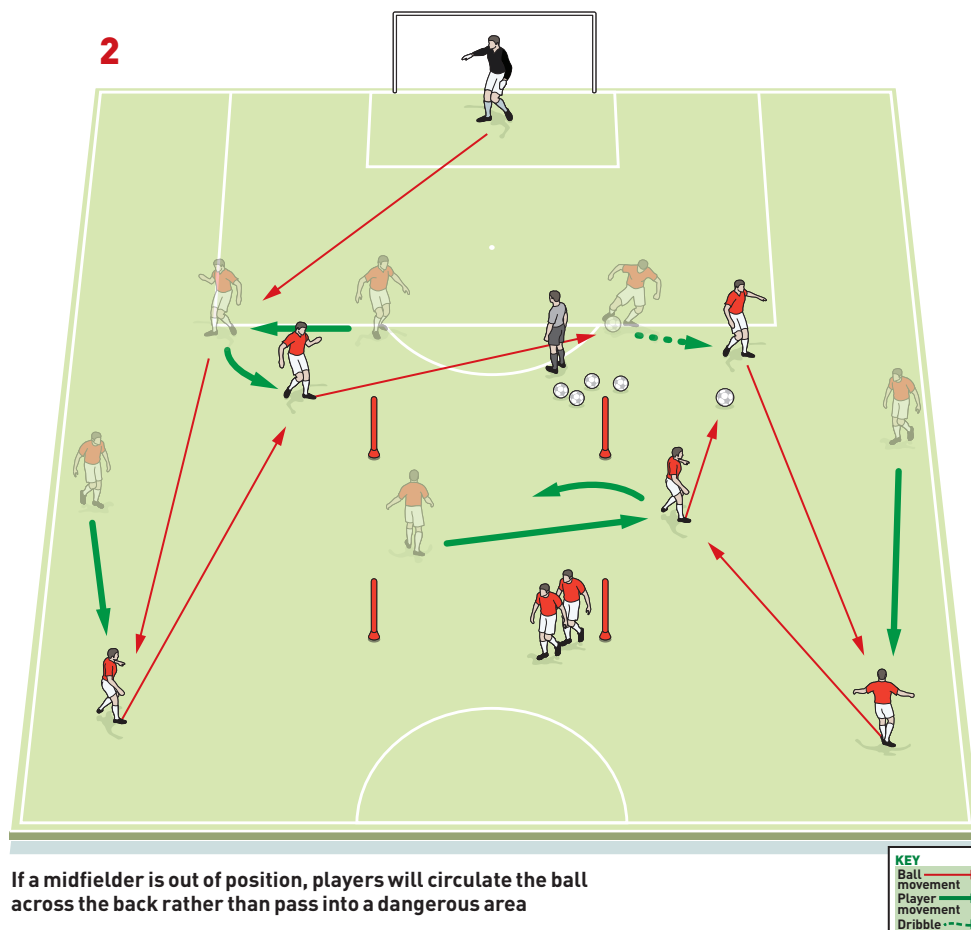
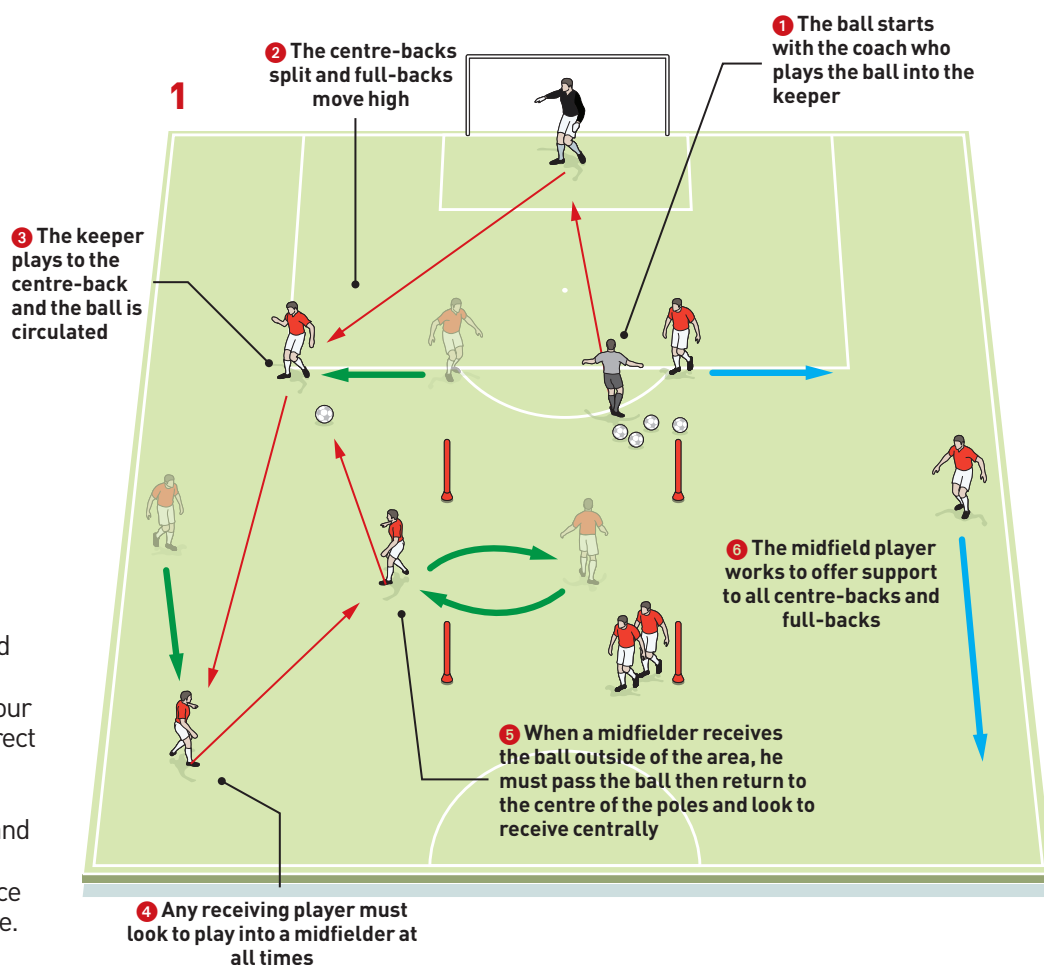
The relationship between the keeper and the back four is key and has to be practised on a regular basis to instil trust and confidence when playing out under pressure. Enjoyment comes from picking the correct option to play through, and that in turn enables the team to progress up the field without risk, all the time taking out opposing players with accurate passing. The day before a match we will touch on the key fundamentals as we practise football patterns through mannequins.

What do I get the players to do?

Main practice

We set up as shown (1) using a half-pitch with a poled (or coned) area in the centre measuring 10x10 yards. There are two back fours - one working, one resting off the pitch - and three midfield players, one working, the others resting. The aim is to work the ball out of defence and into the three midfielders, who will each rotate around the key central area.

Each midfielder works for 30 seconds then changes with another. The back four remains in place until all midfielder players have had a turn (usually this will be around 30secs each), then they change.



If a midfielder is out of position, players will circulate the ball across the back rather than pass into a dangerous area





PLAYING OUT FROM THE BACK

What are the key things to look out for?

The 'take out' for defenders is to know who to play into and when. Similarly, the 'take out' for midfielders is positional play and knowing when to make themselves available for a pass.

The skills we're looking to see in motion here are good angles to receive, accurate and quick tempo and passing, as well as the use of dynamic movement to get into a position to receive early (and thus have more time on the ball).

Players must be positionally correct in relation to both the ball and team mates, and when under intense pressure the safest and best option is a ball back to the keeper, who will then clear his lines. Similarly, passes should never be made to a midfielder who is out of position or off balance (2).

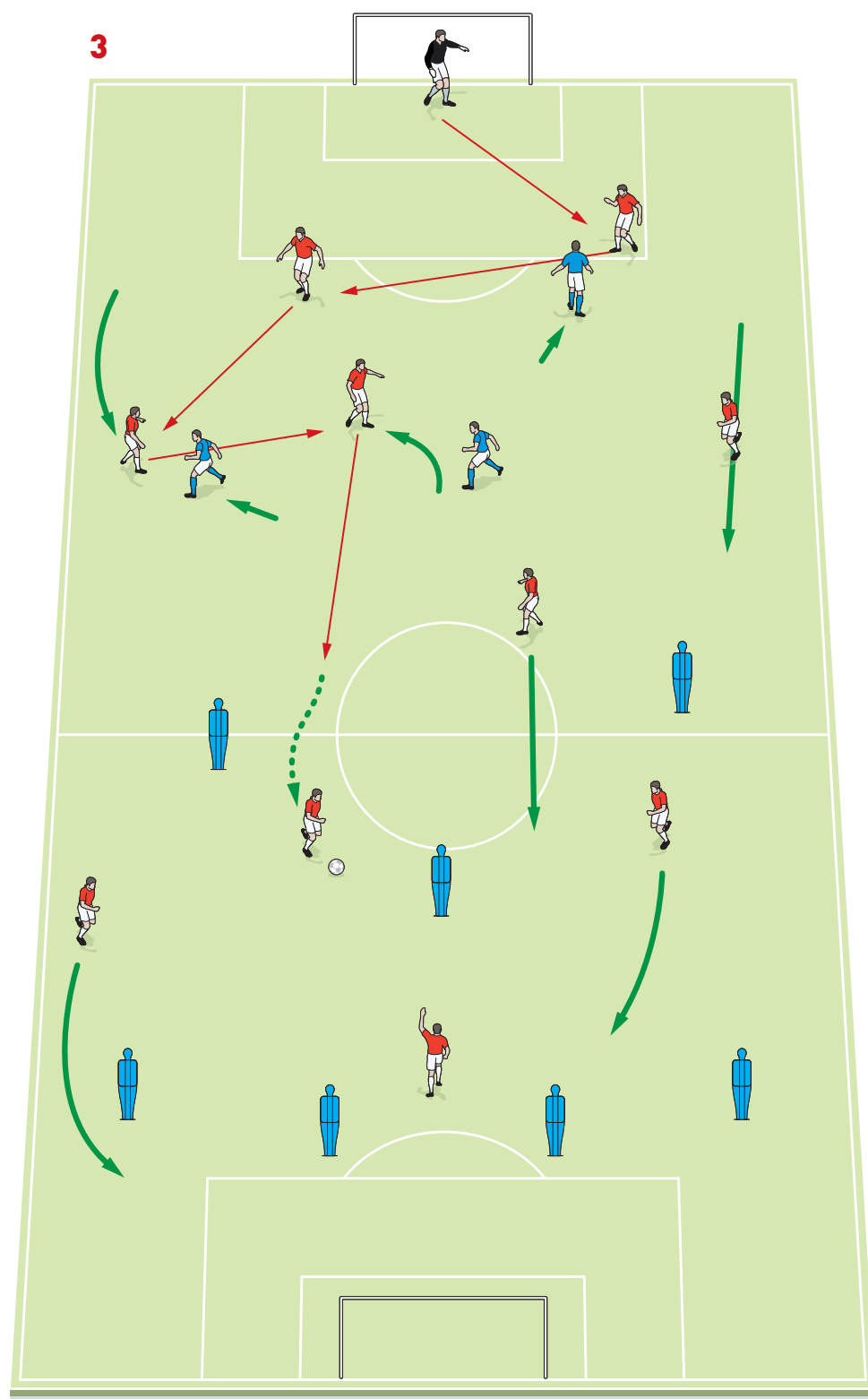
Centre-backs must be confident to bounce balls into midfield and receive back to circulate play across the back four.

Mistakes are usually made when players move too slowly into position. This allows opposition players time to close down and influence available options, which they must not be allowed to do.

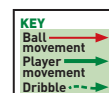
How do I progress the session?

The session is progressed by opening the area up to a full pitch as shown (3), with mannequins placed in opposition formation. We can also add in passive pressure from staff members.

Moving on again we can also put this into an 11v11 game situation. This enables us, as coaches, to see if the practice has been embedded into their thinking and gameplay. Initially we want to see if players embrace this without being prompted. ■



Setting up an 11v11 with mannequins as opponents offers players a realistic 'map' of play around which they can build from the back



**SET-UP****AREA**

Up to a full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals,
mannequins, mini-goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

20 plus 2 GKs

SESSION TIME

60mins

8v2 practice

5 mins

We split the players into two groups of 10. This is one-touch warm-up and played out on a 7x7-yard area, as shown (1). Blues must look to win possession back from reds. In the last part of the warm-up we progress so that reds are one-touch only.

(5mins - 2x2mins with 1min rest in between)

We now use the 7x14-yard area and progress this to become a 5v2, with the use of a floater, as shown **(2)**. Whereas in the last practice the move ended when blues overturned possession, now they must transfer the ball into the other half where, with two players stationed near the back of the area and a further floater, the 5v2 move now switches so they have the overload in possession. Reds, who previously had the 5v2 advantage, transfer the two players who were around halfway as solitary defenders playing against the new blue overload. They must try to block the pass to blue stationed players. And of course, the two blues who have won possession must recover and support quickly.

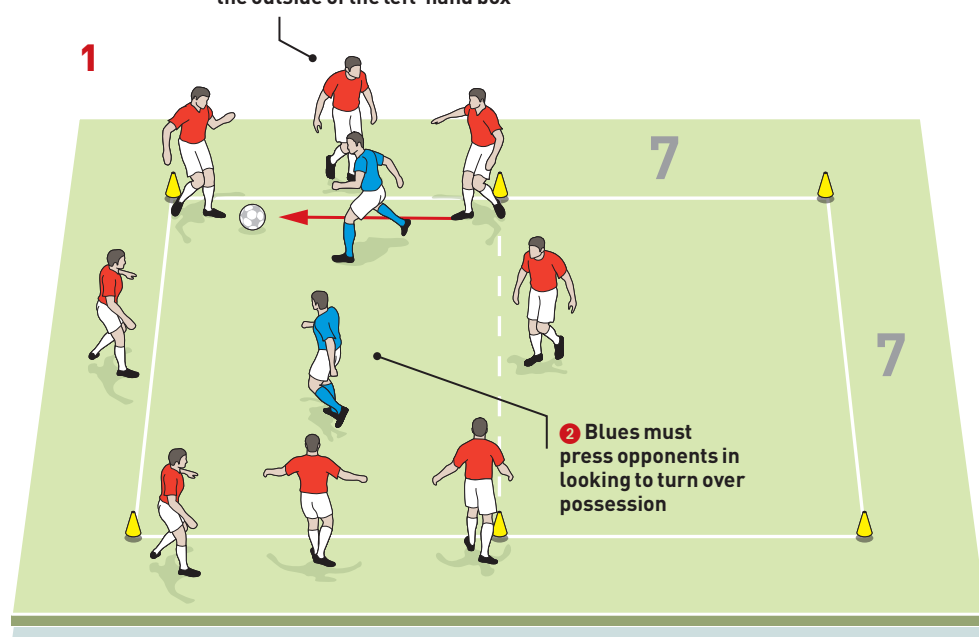
This session is about collective pressing and the actions that occur in first and second phases, namely first impulse of pressing and chasing the ball (in phase 1), moving on to closing passes and through-balls (in phase 2). What makes this session distinctive is the way it explores the reality that pressing is never only

individual action. It also looks at the importance of the first sprint and quick reactions, and appraises the activity of all players in forcing an opponent into an error.

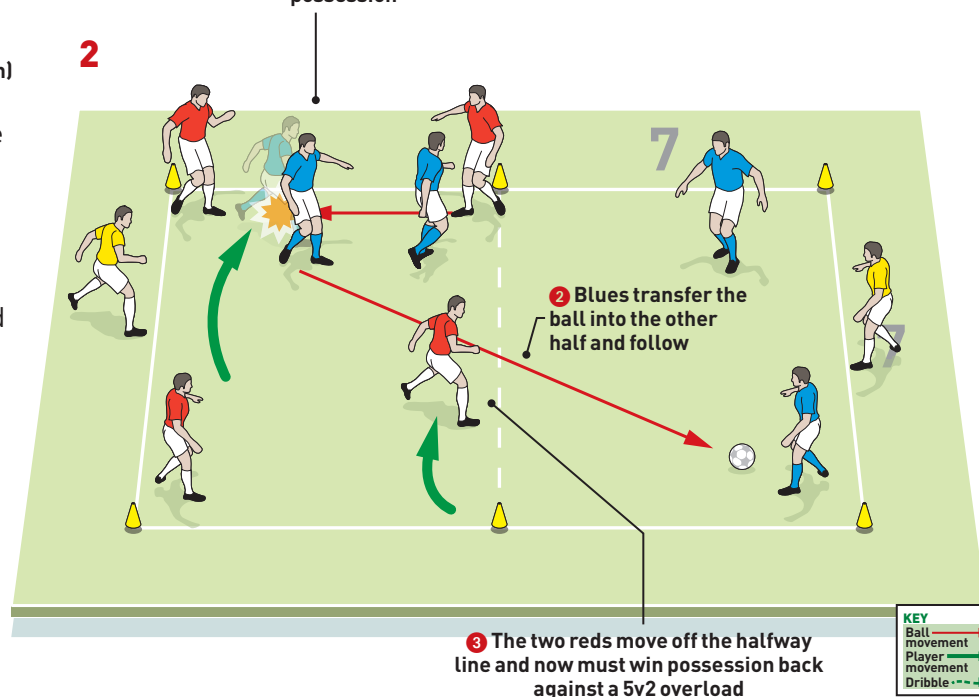
We will run this session once a week, always a good distance away from match day. It is a great option on a double session day (in the afternoon).

We may also run this session depending on an upcoming opponent – for instance if playing offensively against counter-attacking teams (such as Liverpool, AFC Bournemouth or Leicester City), or defensively against a deep defence with the aim of winning back possession and stopping counter-attacks.

1 Reds are positioned around the outside of the left-hand box



1 Blues, playing against a 5v2 overload, intercepting possession





DEFENSIVE PRESSING AND OFFENSIVE POSSESSION UNDER PRESSURE

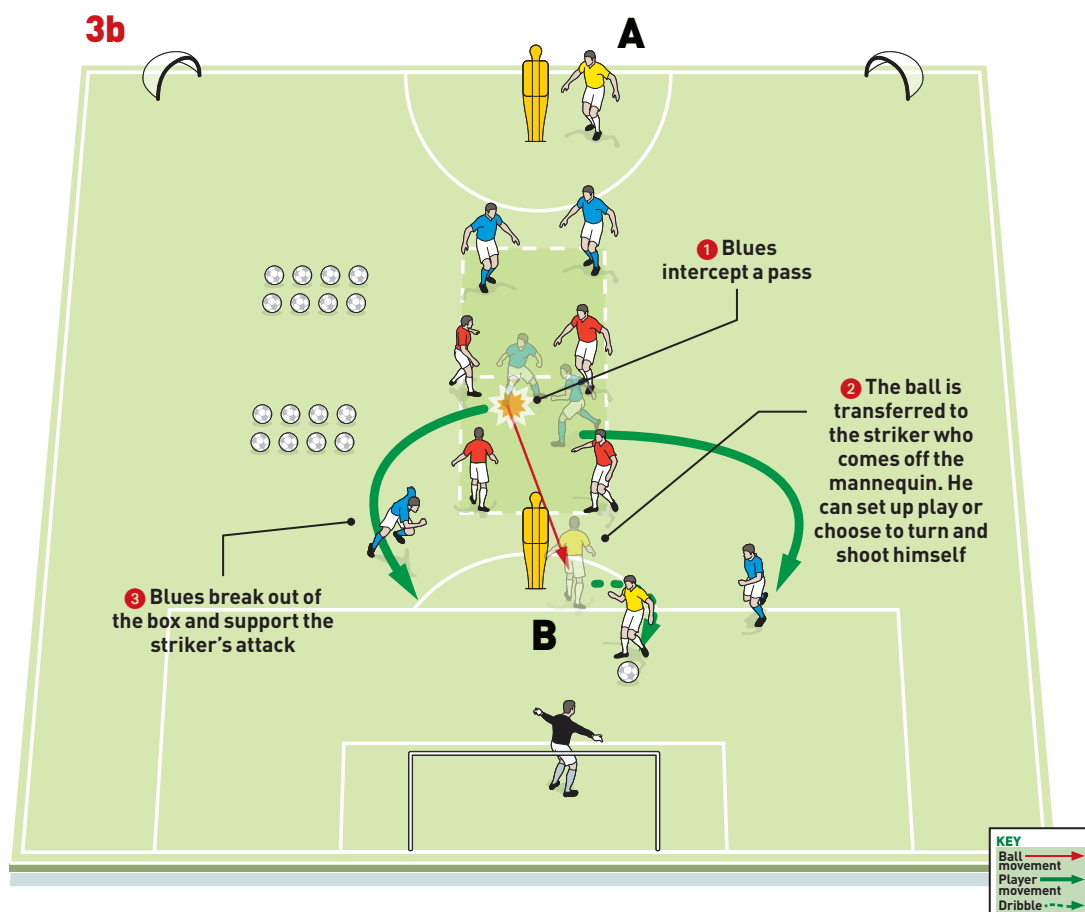
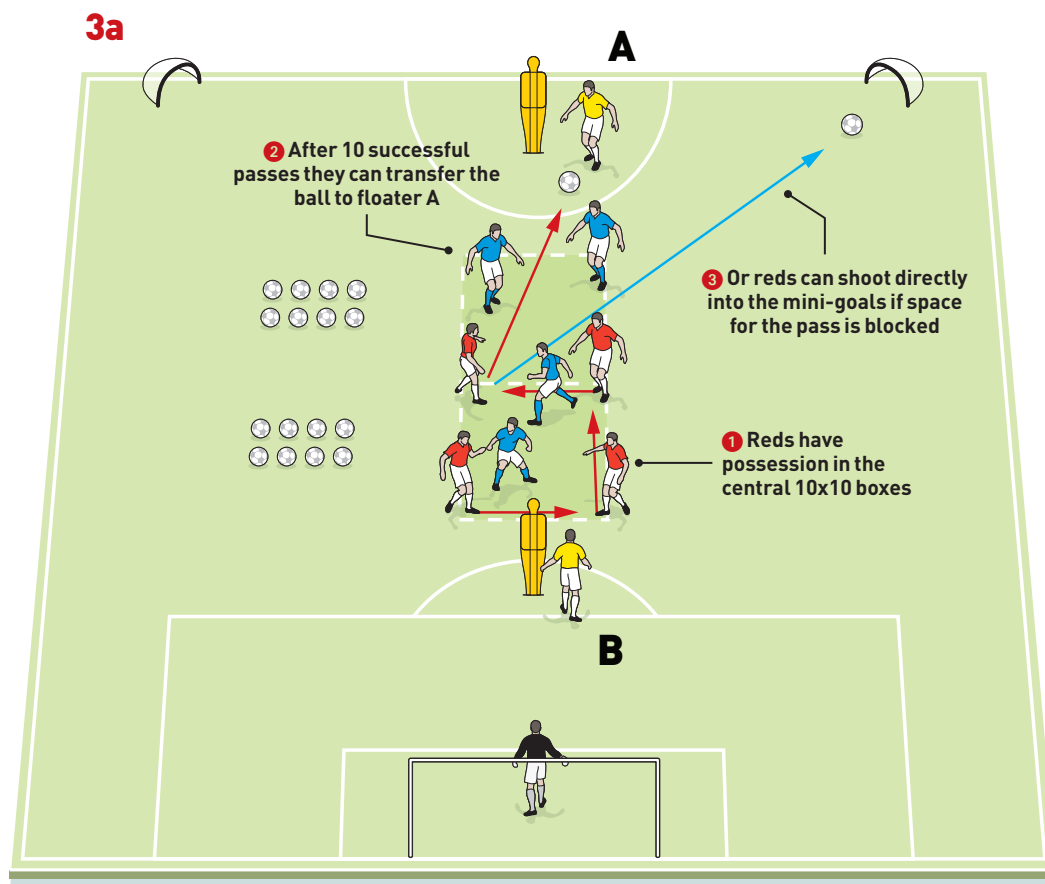
Closing passes

(15mins - 4x3mins with 1min rest in between)

We now set up on a half-pitch, as shown (3a). In each 10x10-yard box there will be an overload either in favour of blues or reds.

Reds start in possession with one or two touches. After 10 passes they can transfer the ball to floater A (who can turn and shoot) or score directly in a mini-goal. Stationed blue players must try to stop the pass to floater A and the mini-goals. If a red player scores, his team keeps possession; if not, blues start the next phase.

If blues have intercepted they can pass down the pitch to floater B and join the attack on the main goal (3b). Reds try to stop both passes (to floaters B and the backpass).





DEFENSIVE PRESSING AND OFFENSIVE POSSESSION UNDER PRESSURE

Hunting and defending passes

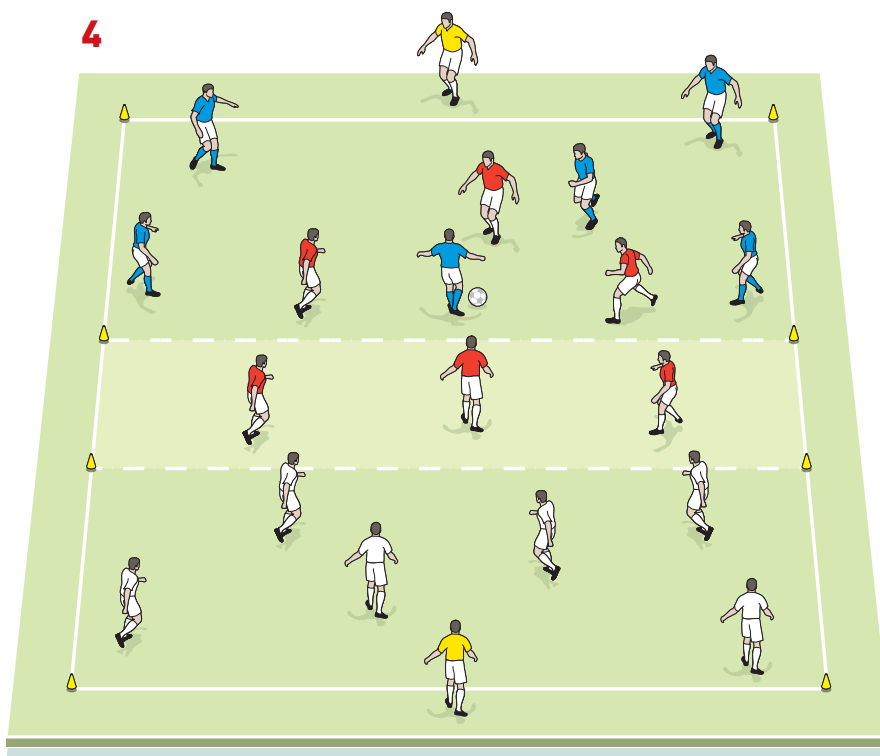
(10mins - 2x4mins with 2min rest in between)

Now we move this into a 65x50-yard area, as shown (4). Here, the aim is for the blue player to play eight passes in his zone and then a low through-ball to the white team. Three reds in the blue zone try to win the ball and pass it to whites, leading to blues counter-pressing in attempting to win the ball back.

If reds pass to whites, the three blues sprint and press whites with three others moving to the middle zone.

If blues play to whites, three reds from the middle zone start pressing whites and three from the blue zone go to the middle to try to stop the through-balls.

4



Blues start the move with the aim of moving it to the whites in the bottom area

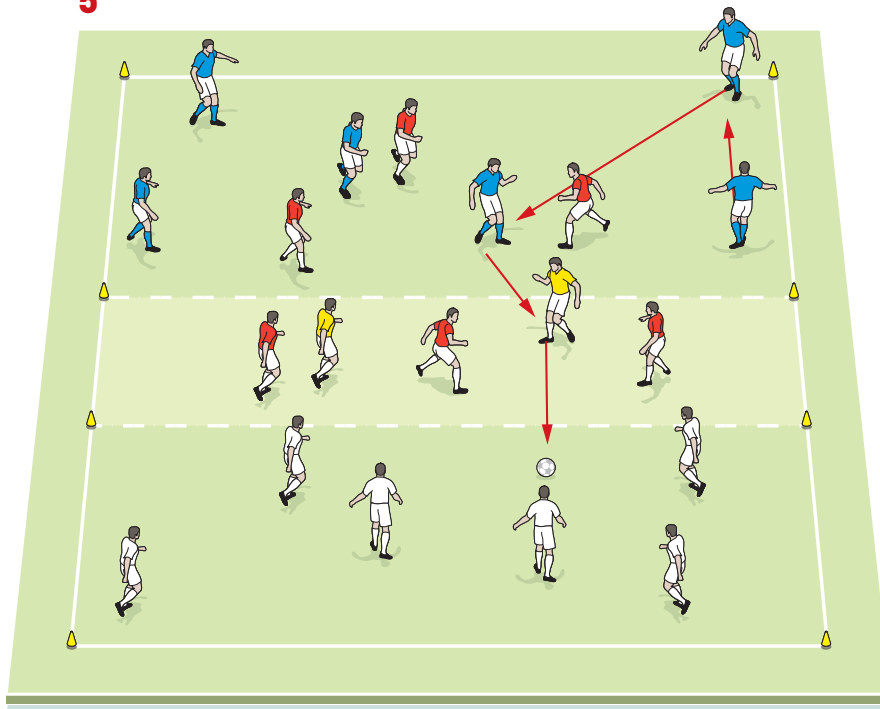
Progression

(20mins - 4x3mins with 90secs rest in between)

In this progression we set-up as shown (5) with a 6v3 and 2v3 combined, and two floaters supporting the transfer in the middle zone.

Blues can still make a through-ball (after eight passes) or use the two floaters at any time to switch to whites. Reds in the middle zone now mark the floaters and try to stop the through-balls to whites.

5



Here, in the progression, neutral yellows work with the team in possession to feed the ball into the bottom box

How do I progress the session?

We can progress the session by increasing the number of players and the duration of the exercise. Alternatively, offensively we use floaters, or can decrease the number of touches allowed, whilst perhaps also creating a point system (such as goals).

What are the key things to look out for?

We want every player to recognise he has a job, and he can only do this effectively by communicating with players around him. If the player starts to chase individually and not in the context of his group, or doesn't

close down or communicate, then the defensive task will obviously fail. Similarly, when looking at this offensively, players must be good distances apart, with good movement and use of both short and long passing.



DAVID MOYES

David Moyes Defending against a switch of play

SET-UP

AREA

Half a full size pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, 4 full size goals,
2 target goal

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

20 players + 4 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Main session: 20mins

Progression 1: 25mins

Progression 2: 15mins

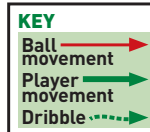
Overview

This session is designed to work on a team's defensive balance, shape and its covering positions when defending against switches of play.

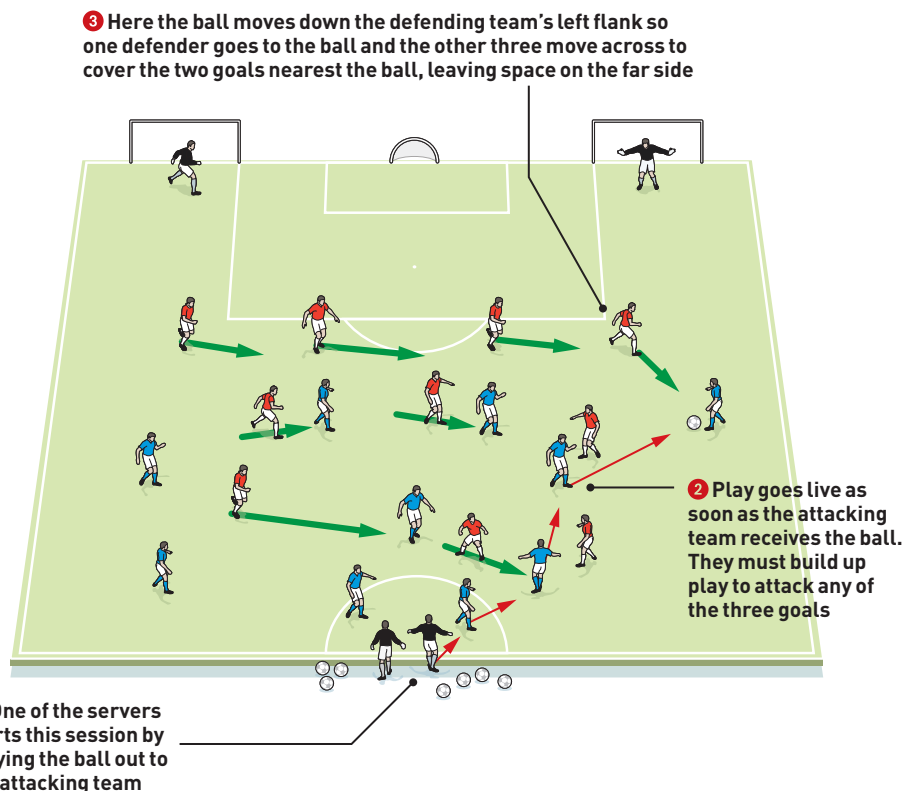
Attacking play looks to exploit space and players will find opportunities to switch the ball and score in a goal that the defending team has failed to cover and protect. This session will encourage your defensive players to guard against that happening.

We would normally use this session when we are on a 'working day' – when we want to achieve specific physical outputs, as well as technical and tactical. Due to the size of the area used it needs quick play, both offensively and defensively, meaning players work at a high intensity throughout. We are looking for a high number of accelerations and decelerations rather than distance covered.

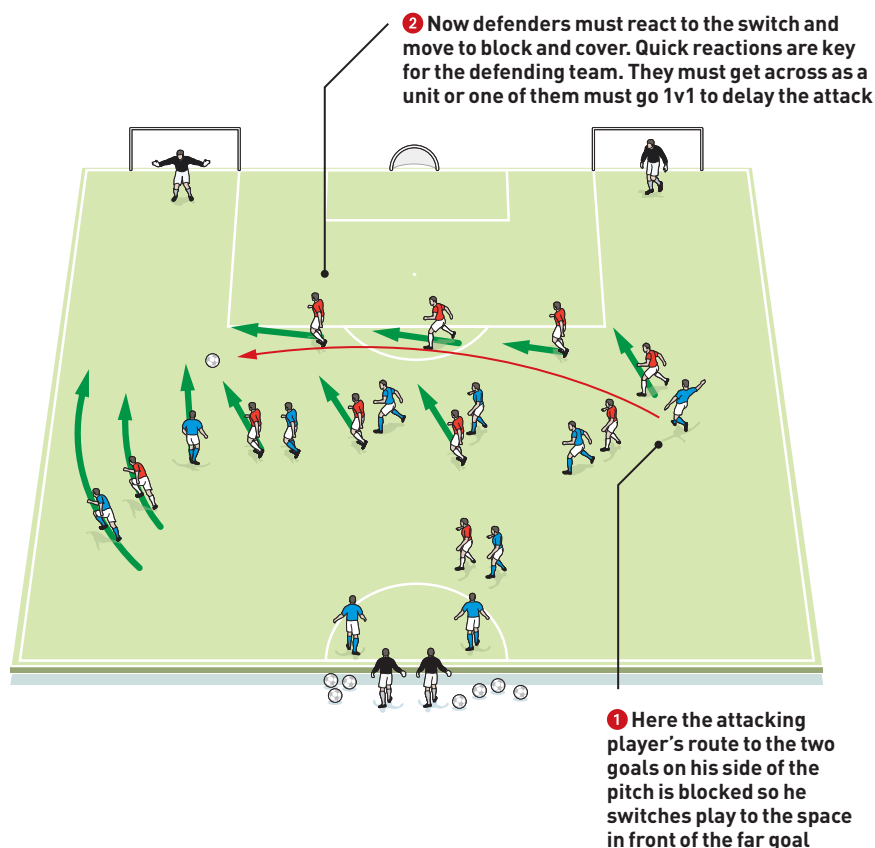
“When defending, make sure your players do not switch off – they must be constantly communicating with one another to protect the goals”



1a



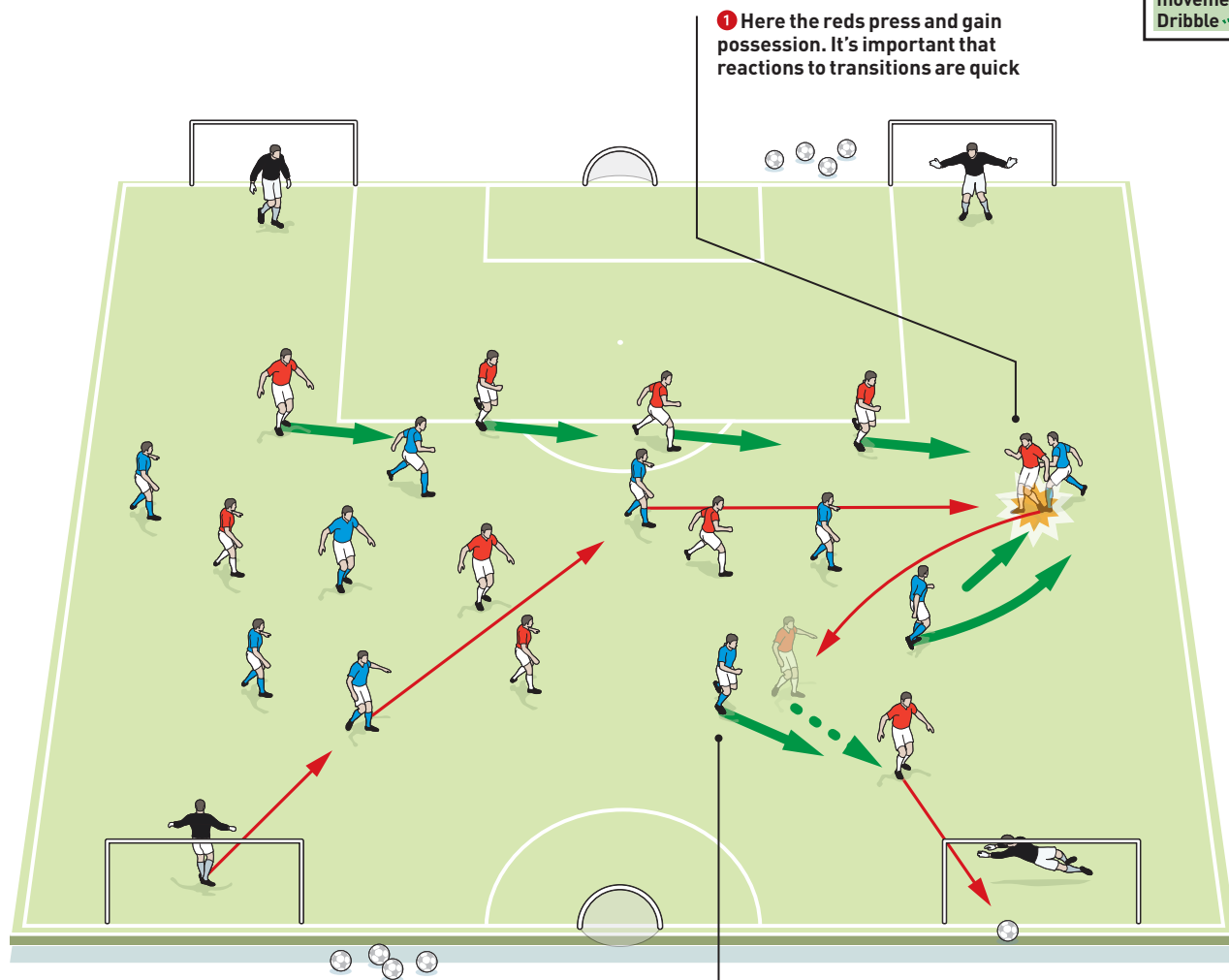
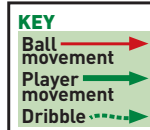
1b





DEFENDING AGAINST A SWITCH OF PLAY

2



▲ To progress the session, turn it into a game. Now each team defends three goals with two goalkeepers each.

2 Look for players reacting to the position of the ball and the goal that is in danger of being attacked. Here the blue defenders aren't compact enough or quick enough to prevent a goal

What do I get the players to do?

Use half your pitch with two full size goals either side of a target goal at one end, as shown [1a/1b]. Divide your squad into two teams of 10, one which will attack (the blues) and one to defend (the reds). Position one goalkeeper in each of the large goals and use the two remaining keepers as servers. Line up the two teams as you normally would.

The game starts at the end opposite to the goals, with one server playing a ball out to a member of the attacking team. As soon as the attacking team receives the ball, play goes live, and they must build up play to attack any of the three goals. The defending team must attempt to stop them scoring, and if they gain possession the defenders must try to run the ball over the halfway line to score.

When defending, make sure that your players do not switch off – they must be constantly communicating with one another to protect the two goals. As the attacking team looks to switch the ball to find scoring opportunities in either goal, that results in lots of 1v1 and 2v2 situations and opens up attacking possibilities. We find the intensity of this practice is very high so when defending, your

players need to be fully focused and determined not to concede.

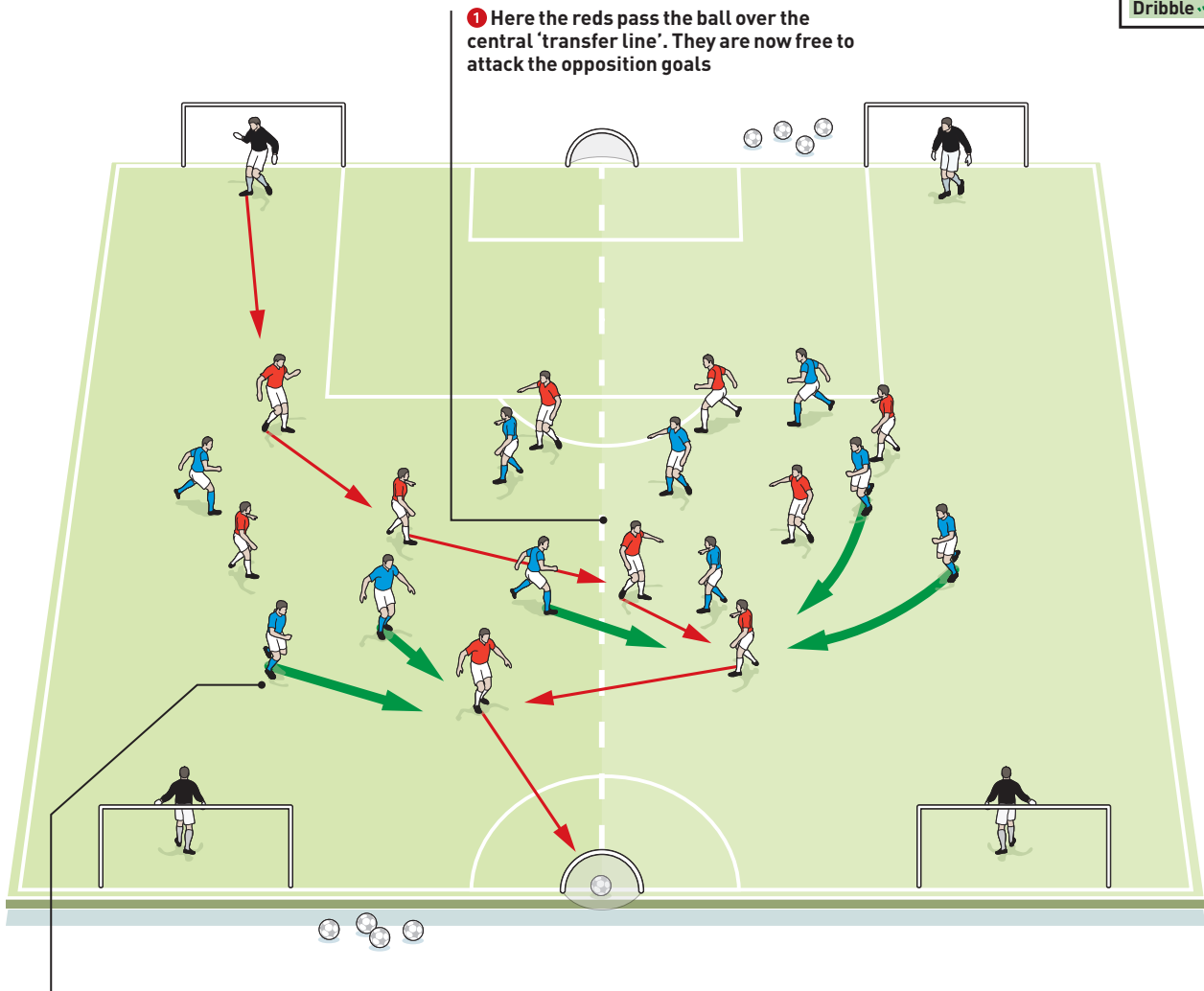
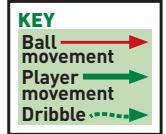
How do I progress the session?

After both teams have worked at both the defending and attacking phase of the initial practice, we would progress the same situation by adding goals at the other end. Both teams now have to defend two large goals and a central target goal,



DEFENDING AGAINST A SWITCH OF PLAY

3



as shown [2]. Each team now has two goalkeepers, one protecting each of the two large goals. For the final progression, use the same set-up but split the pitch down the centre with cones, creating a central line as shown above [3]. Now the ball has to be transferred over the central line at least once before the attackers attempt to score, forcing them to switch the play.

What are the key things to look out for?

Tactically it is vital that the defending units set across the pitch with little spaces between them to protect the goal that is being attacked. Can they be compact if they have enough players or does it require 1v1 defending to delay the attack?

To score, the attacking team needs to move the ball quickly to find gaps and

exploit the space on the other side of the pitch.

What are the typical mistakes that players might make?

Teams fail to recognise the importance of protecting the central target goal. It is there to make the practice more real and stop the defending team from just protecting the wide goals and splitting their back line with a big space centrally.

“Tactically it’s vital that the defending units set across the pitch with little spaces between them to protect the goal that is being attacked”

ELITE
SOCCER