

ELITE SOCCER

Exclusive
Training
practices from
top professional
managers

ASTON VILLA

DEAN SMITH

DEEP RUNS FROM MIDFIELD



WEST HAM WOMEN

**MATT
BEARD**

Reinforcing team
fundamentals



CAMBRIDGE UNITED

**COLIN
CALDERWOOD**

Developing
combination
play



LMA AMBASSADOR

**LUKE
SWINDLEHURST**

Attacking 4-3-3
against 4-4-2



LMA AMBASSADOR

**CHRISTOPHER
EVANS**

Compact
defending

EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW WITH SHEFFIELD UNITED MANAGER CHRIS WILDER

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ISSUE 112/NOVEMBER 2019: FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Engaging training ground activities to improve the play of any team

Dear Coach,

This month, as the season gets really busy, we are pleased to present an attacking session penned by Dean Smith, the manager of Premier League club Aston Villa. It is designed to encourage attacking midfielders and wide players to disrupt the opposition back line by making deep runs in behind the defenders.

We also have a back-to-basics session from Matt Beard, who led West Ham Women to the FA Cup final last season. It will make sure your players are comfortable on the ball and confident in possession, and as it progresses it works on other elements of the game, such as counter-pressing, counter-attacking and making penetrating forward runs. Cambridge United manager Colin Calderwood offers a series of activities to improve combination play in tight areas and develop decision making when in possession of the ball, while Luke Swindlehurst, formerly the head coach of London Bees women's football team, has written a training session that will help teams that use a 4-3-3 formation to attack opponents that play with a 4-4-2 system.

We close the issue with a session from Christopher Evans on compact defending – it's one that he used in the Bangladesh Premier League while head coach of Mohammedan Sporting Club. It teaches teams to defend in their own half of the pitch, while tactically forcing the opposition into wide areas.

I hope you find that the training sessions in this issue will be of help to your coaching. Elite Soccer will return next month with five more training practices to make your players think about the way they play.

Howard Wilkinson

Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman

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DEAN SMITH
ASTON VILLA

Deep runs from midfield



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MATT BEARD

WEST HAM WOMEN

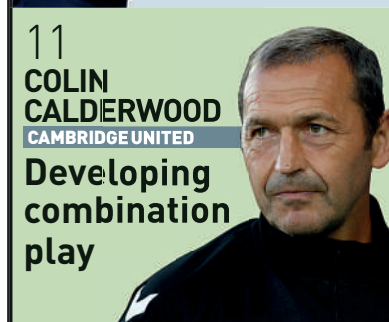
Reinforcing team fundamentals



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COLIN CALDERWOOD
CAMBRIDGE UNITED

Developing combination play



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LUKE SWINDLEHURST
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Attacking 4-3-3 against 4-4-2



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CHRISTOPHER EVANS
LMA AMBASSADOR

Compact defending



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...interview with Sheffield United manager Chris Wilder

ELITE SOCCER NOVEMBER 2019

MANAGER PROFILES

Here are the five managers and coaches we're delighted to welcome into this issue of *Elite Soccer*

DEAN SMITH

ASTON VILLA

Dean Smith is currently the manager of Aston Villa, having arrived at Villa Park in October 2018. He successfully led the club back to the Premier League after victory in the play-off final at the end of his first season in charge. He started his career as a defender with Villa's near neighbours, Walsall, and went on to play for Hereford United, Leyton Orient, Sheffield Wednesday and Port Vale, scoring 54 goals in 566 league games during a 16-year career.

After hanging up his boots in January 2005 he returned to Leyton Orient as a youth coach before soon being appointed assistant manager, a position he occupied until January 2009.

In July 2009, he became head of youth at former club Walsall, but in January 2011, with the team nine points adrift at the foot of League One, he accepted the role of caretaker manager. He successfully lifted the club out of the relegation zone before the season's end and he was given the job on a permanent basis when safety was assured.

He went on to lead Walsall to the final of the Football League Trophy in 2015 before leaving to manage Championship club Brentford in November of the same year. After a ninth place finish in his first season in charge, Smith substantially rebuilt the Brentford side over a couple of seasons and earned praise for creating a team that played attractive, passing football.

He was appointed Aston Villa manager in October 2018 and took the club from 14th in the Championship to the Premier League in his first season.

Twice a winner of the League One Manager of the Month award with Walsall, he was also voted Championship Manager of the Month with Aston Villa. He is a graduate of the LMA's Certificate of Applied Management at Warwick University and a member of the LMA Board.

MATT BEARD

WEST HAM WOMEN

Matt Beard started his coaching career as reserve team manager at non-league Kingstonian. He worked with Charlton Athletic Ladies before becoming manager of Millwall Lionesses, who he guided to the FA Women's Premier League Southern Division title in 2009. He led Chelsea Ladies to the 2012 FA Women's Cup Final, the FA Premier League Cup semi-finals, and a third-place finish in the FA National Premier League. He then took over as boss of Liverpool Ladies and was named FA WSL Manager of the Year. After a stint in the USA with the Boston Breakers, he returned to England to take charge of West Ham United Women, who he led to the Women's FA Cup final in 2019.

COLIN CALDERWOOD

CAMBRIDGE UNITED

After a long career as a player for Swindon and Tottenham amongst other clubs, Colin Calderwood started his coaching career as reserve team manager at Spurs. Becoming manager of Northampton Town in 2003, in his first two seasons the club reached the play-offs and finally won promotion in 2006 by finishing second in League Two. In doing so, they set a new club record for clean sheets in a single season.

He then became manager of Nottingham Forest, helping the club win promotion to the Championship in 2008. Calderwood has also been known for his close working association with Chris Hughton, acting as Hughton's assistant

manager at Newcastle United, Birmingham City, Norwich City and Brighton & Hove Albion. He was appointed manager of Cambridge United in December 2018.

LUKE SWINDLEHURST

LMA AMBASSADOR

Most recently the head coach of the professional development phase at Barnet FC, Luke Swindlehurst was previously the head coach and general manager of the club's sister team, the London Bees, competing in the FA Women's Championship. With extensive experience in the women's game, he has also managed Fylde Ladies and enjoyed two spells as the manager of Preston North End Women. He held the position of first-team coach with Liverpool Ladies and was previously assistant manager of Manchester City Ladies. He is a UEFA A Licence holder.

CHRISTOPHER EVANS

LMA AMBASSADOR

Most recently head coach of Dhaka based Mohammedan Sporting Club in the Bangladesh Premier League, Christopher Evans is a UEFA A licenced coach and sports development consultant. He has previously coached at Norwich City, working with the centre of excellence U13s and U14s, and with the club's shadow academy. Prior to that, he served as academy team manager in non-league football and as technical director for West London Schools FA. He also worked for Chelsea as a development centre head coach.

ASTON VILLA

Dean Smith Deep runs from midfield

SET-UP

AREA

Up to two thirds of pitch

EQUIPMENT

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

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 15 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Intensive midfield circuit: 5mins
Breakthrough play: 10mins
Breakthrough play progression: 10mins
Attack v defence: 20mins

Overview

This session is designed to encourage attacking midfielders and wide players to make deep runs in behind

the opposition defenders.

The biggest worry for defenders is the space behind them and unless we have runners penetrating these areas, we will not be able to disrupt the opposing team's back line and create space in behind or in front of them.

This is a session that creates plenty of goal scoring opportunities and players tend to enjoy it as they take great pleasure from scoring goals and assisting.

I would tend to run the first couple of practices at least twice a week, to be included in the individual development programme of the midfield players. I always try to make these smaller sessions position specific.

What do I get the players to do?

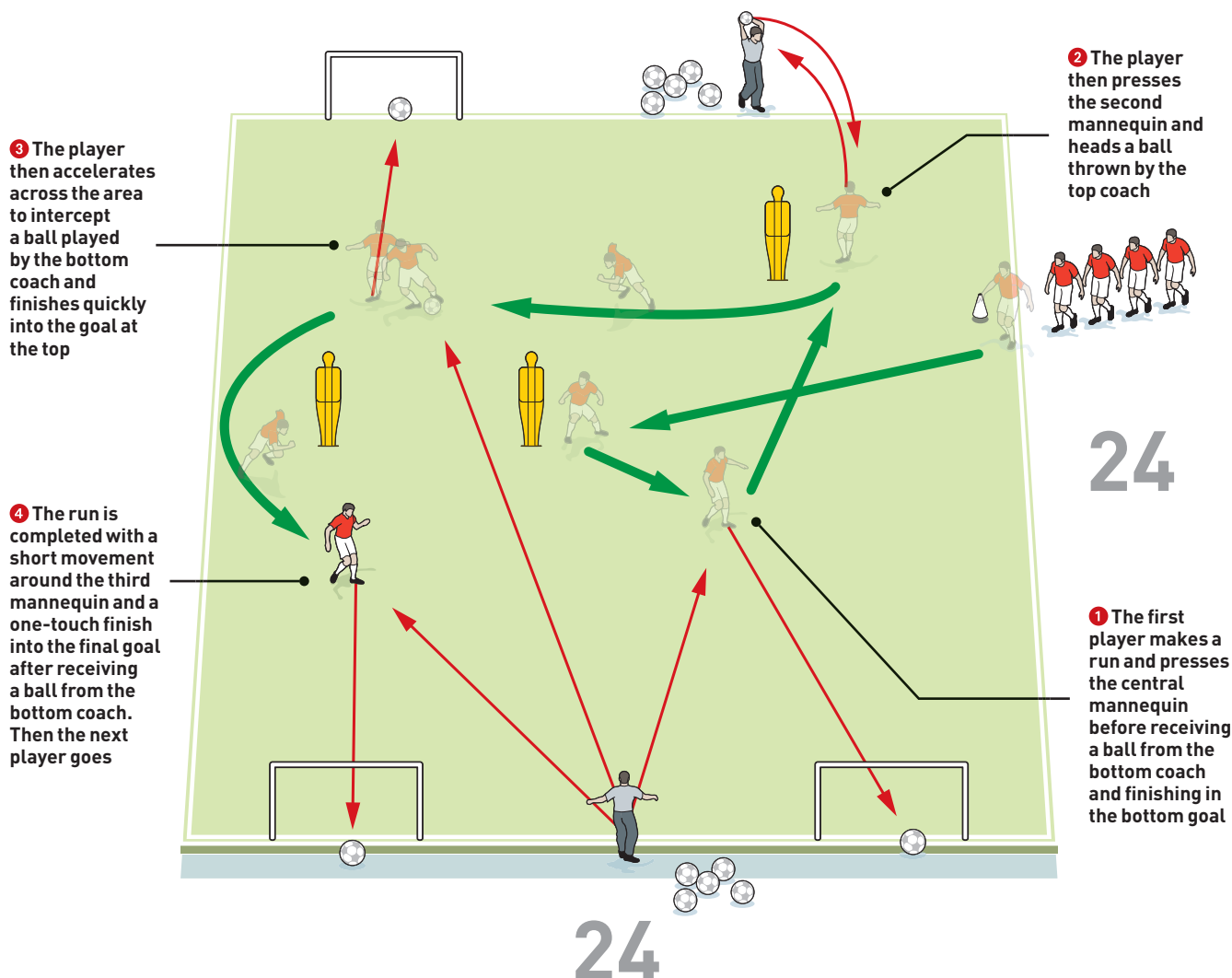
Intensive midfield circuit

After a warm-up [not shown], we set up in an area of 24x24 yards with three small goals and three mannequins positioned as shown [1]. We're using five players, who wait in line at the side of the area to take their turn to run through this midfield circuit. Two coaches set up the play – one is positioned at the top of the area and one is at the bottom. The first player begins the sequence by making a run to press the central mannequin before receiving a ball played from the bottom coach and finishing in one of the mini goals at the bottom of the area. Following this, the player immediately runs to press the

KEY

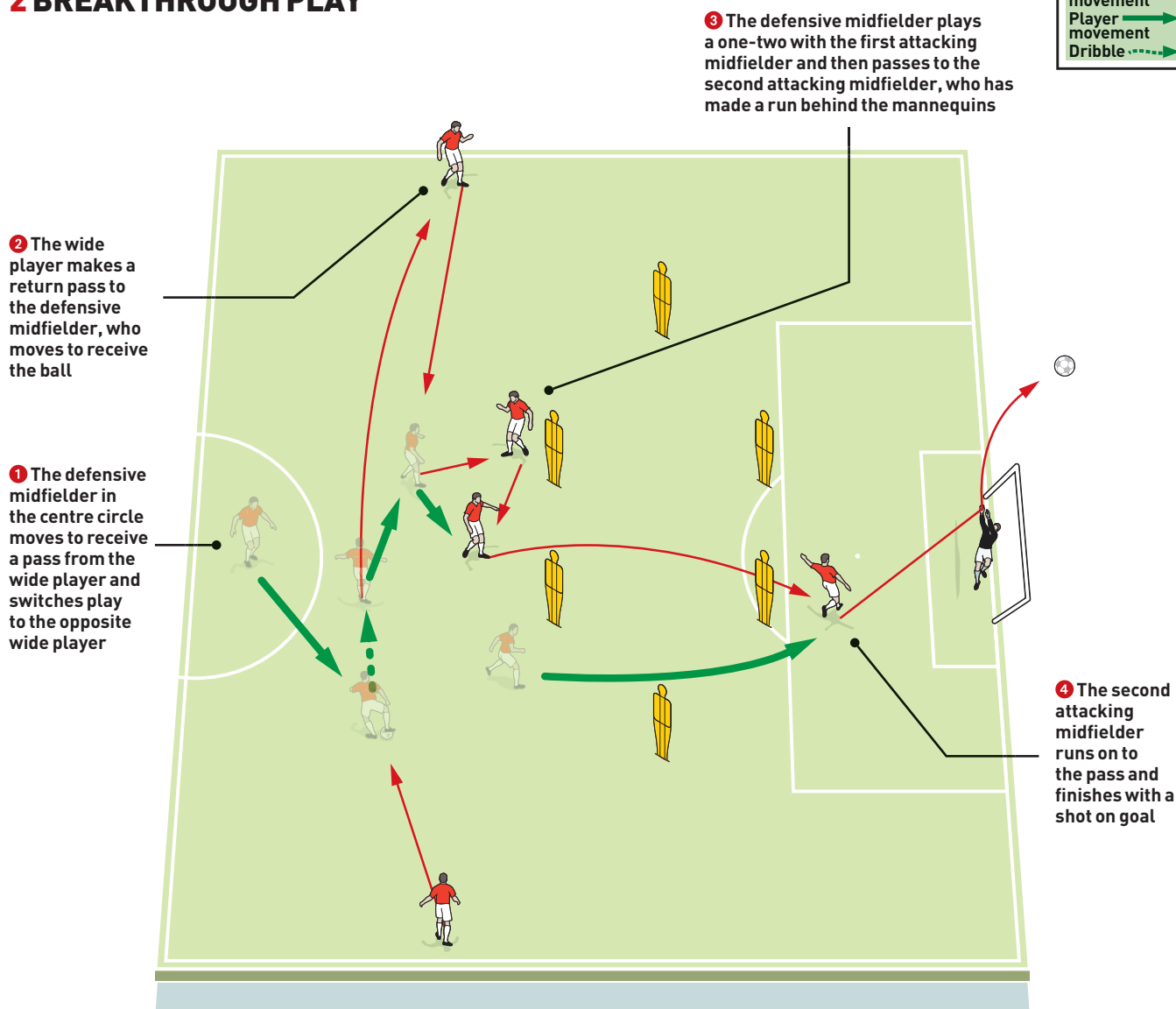
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble→

1 INTENSIVE MIDFIELD CIRCUIT



DEAN SMITH: DEEP RUNS FROM MIDFIELD

2 BREAKTHROUGH PLAY



“The session is designed to encourage attacking midfielders and wide players to make deep runs in behind the opposition defenders”

second mannequin where he heads a ball thrown by the top coach. He must then accelerate across the area to intercept a pass played by the bottom coach towards the top mini goal, finishing with a shot into this goal. The run is completed with a short movement around the third mannequin, where he receives a pass from the bottom coach and finishes with one touch into the other goal at the bottom of the area.

Then the next player starts the circuit. Each player completes five repetitions of the sequence.

What do I get the players to do next? Breakthrough play

We set up on half a pitch with a full size goal and goalkeeper at one end and six mannequins positioned outside the penalty area, as shown [2]. We're using five players: a

defensive midfielder who starts in the centre circle, two attacking midfielders who start tight to the two central mannequins, and two wide midfielders – one on each wing. Play starts with the defensive midfielder moving to receive from the wide player and switching play to the opposite wide player. He then goes to collect a return pass before playing into one of the attacking midfielders, who can either set back▼

DEAN SMITH: DEEP RUNS FROM MIDFIELD

to the defensive midfielder for a pass to an attacking midfielder who has made a deep run, or he combines with the other midfielder to attack behind the mannequins. The move should end with a shot on goal.

How do I progress the practice?

Breakthrough play progression

To advance the practice, we would add a centre forward to the attacking team and replace the mannequins with a live back

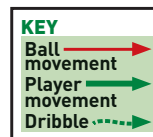
four, making it a 6v4 in favour of the attackers, as shown [3]. We could use a linesman for offsides to make the practice more realistic. It is free play but the attackers are encouraged to make runs from deep and employ what they have learnt from the previous practice.

What do I get the players to do next?

Attack v defence

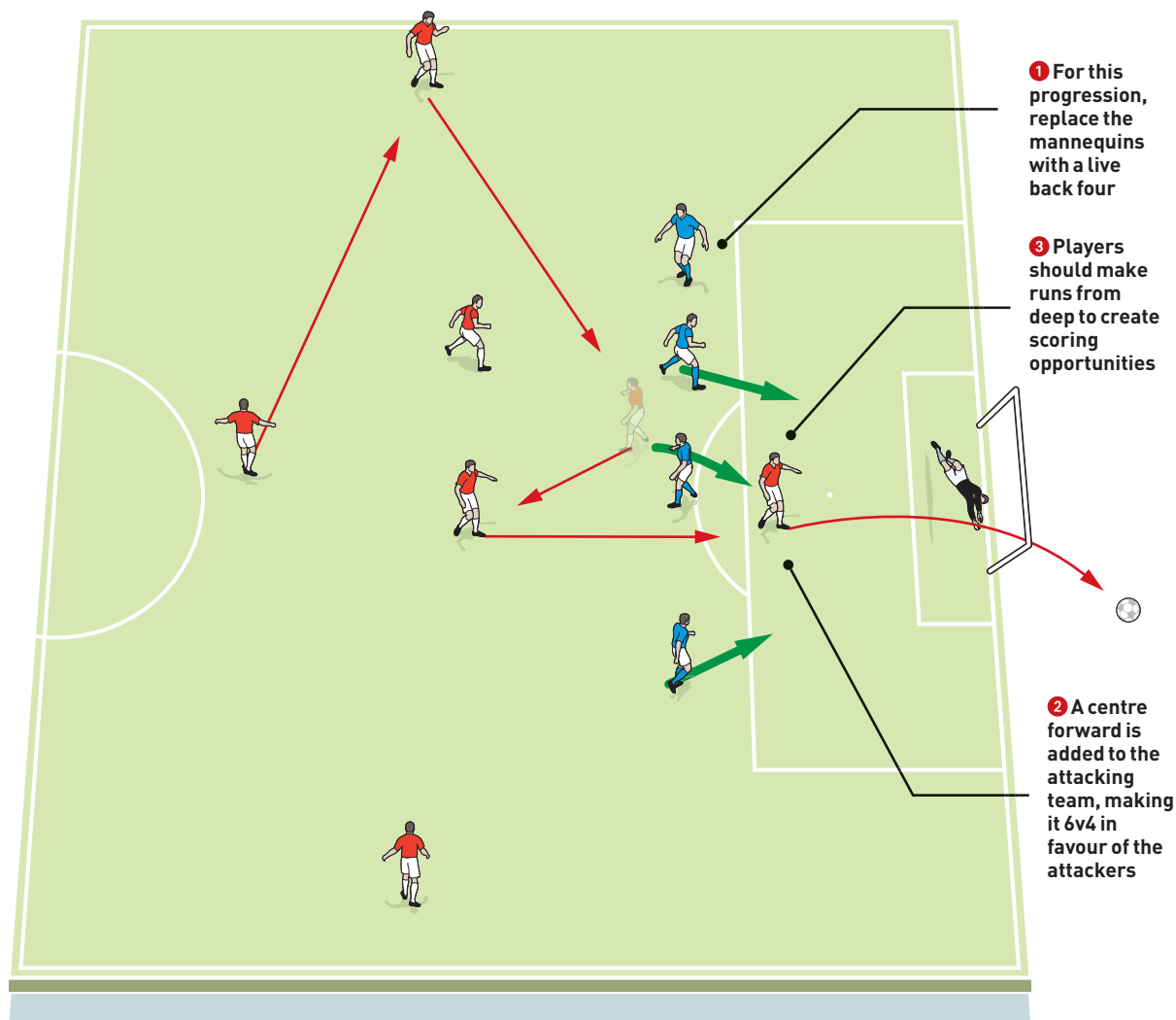
We set up on two thirds of a pitch with a goal and a

goalkeeper at each end. We're using 15 outfield players split into an attacking team of eight (the reds) and a defending team of seven (the blues). We're also using a linesman to call offsides. Play starts with a pass out from the red goalkeeper and goal scoring opportunities should be created using the attacking movements learnt in the session so far, as shown **[4a]**. The red front five should be encouraged to make forward



“The key thing we look for is the desire of players to make forward runs in front of the ball”

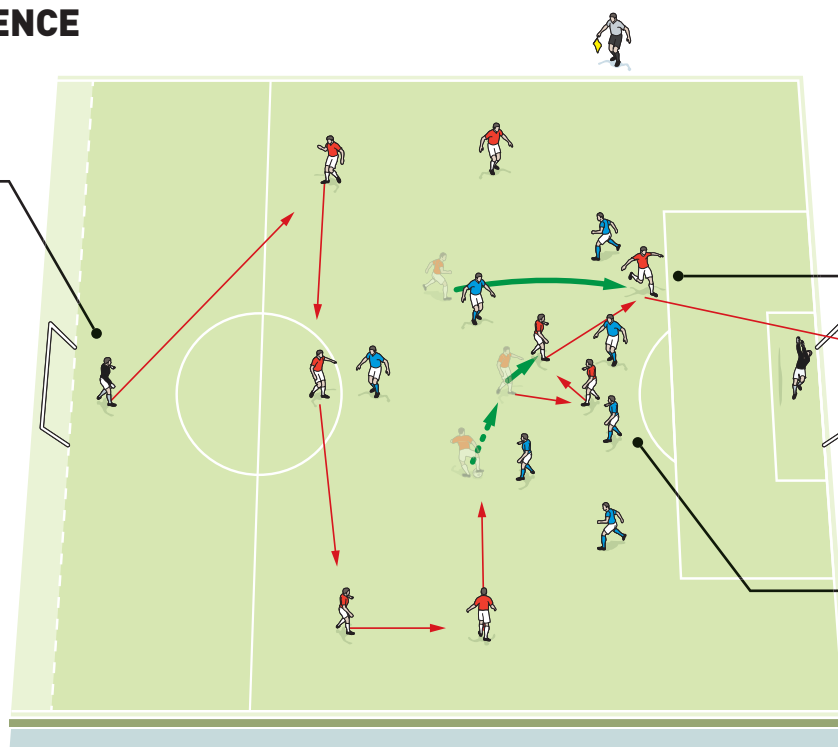
3 BREAKTHROUGH PLAY PROGRESSION



DEAN SMITH: DEEP RUNS FROM MIDFIELD

4a ATTACK v DEFENCE

1 Play starts with a pass out from the goalkeeper of the red attacking team of eight

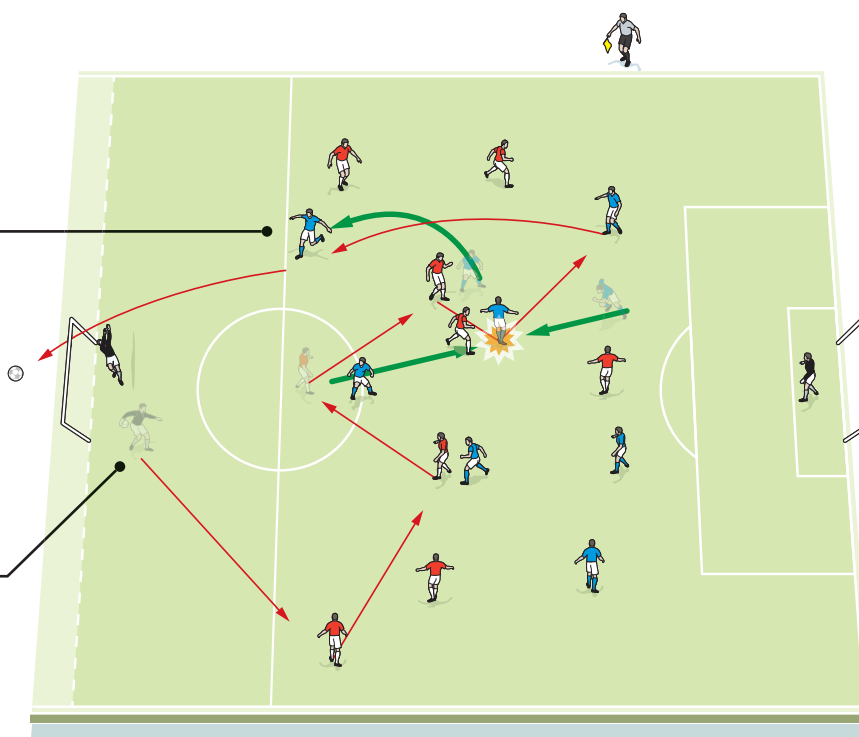


3 The red front five should make forward runs in front of the ball to disrupt the defensive line

2 The blue defending team of seven attempt to stop the reds scoring

4b

2 If the blues gain possession, they are allowed to attack and score



1 Play always restarts from the goalkeeper of the red team

runs in front of the ball to disrupt the defensive line – any of them can make a deep run in behind the back line to make space, not just the player that receives the ball. To encourage transitions, if the blue team manages to intercept the ball or gain possession, they are allowed to attack and score, as shown [4b].

What are the key things to look out for?

The key thing we look for is the desire of players to make forward runs in front of the ball but on the opposite side of the ball. The players do not have to receive the ball, they are simply creating space either in front or behind the opposition's back line.

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

Players have a tendency to play in front of the opposition too much and allow the back line to stay in shape with good organisation. We try to encourage attackers to make runs in behind.

WEST HAM WOMEN

Matt Beard Reinforcing team fundamentals

SET-UP

AREA

Two third of pitch

EQUIPMENT

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

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

16 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Each activity: 8mins

Overview

The main objective of this session is to make sure players are comfortable on the ball and confident in possession. It focuses on the fundamentals of team play and covers all

types of decision making, both defensively and offensively. As it progresses, it adds other elements of the game, such as counter-pressing, counter-attacking, making penetrating forward runs and shooting. Here we are running it as a 9v9 session but it is easily adaptable to 10v10 or 11v11. It is also possible to add an overload player into the game to increase the challenge. Players really enjoy this session as it is set in quite a realistic environment, with numerous ways to score points.

What do I get the players to do?

Non-directional possession

We set up between the penalty areas of our pitch with a full

size goal at each end. We're using 16 outfield players and two goalkeepers divided into two teams of nine. We play a 9v9 game where the objective is to pass the ball and keep possession.

It's a non-directional game so neither team should attempt to score in the opposition goal – they must simply aim to string 10 passes together without losing possession to score a point, as shown [1].

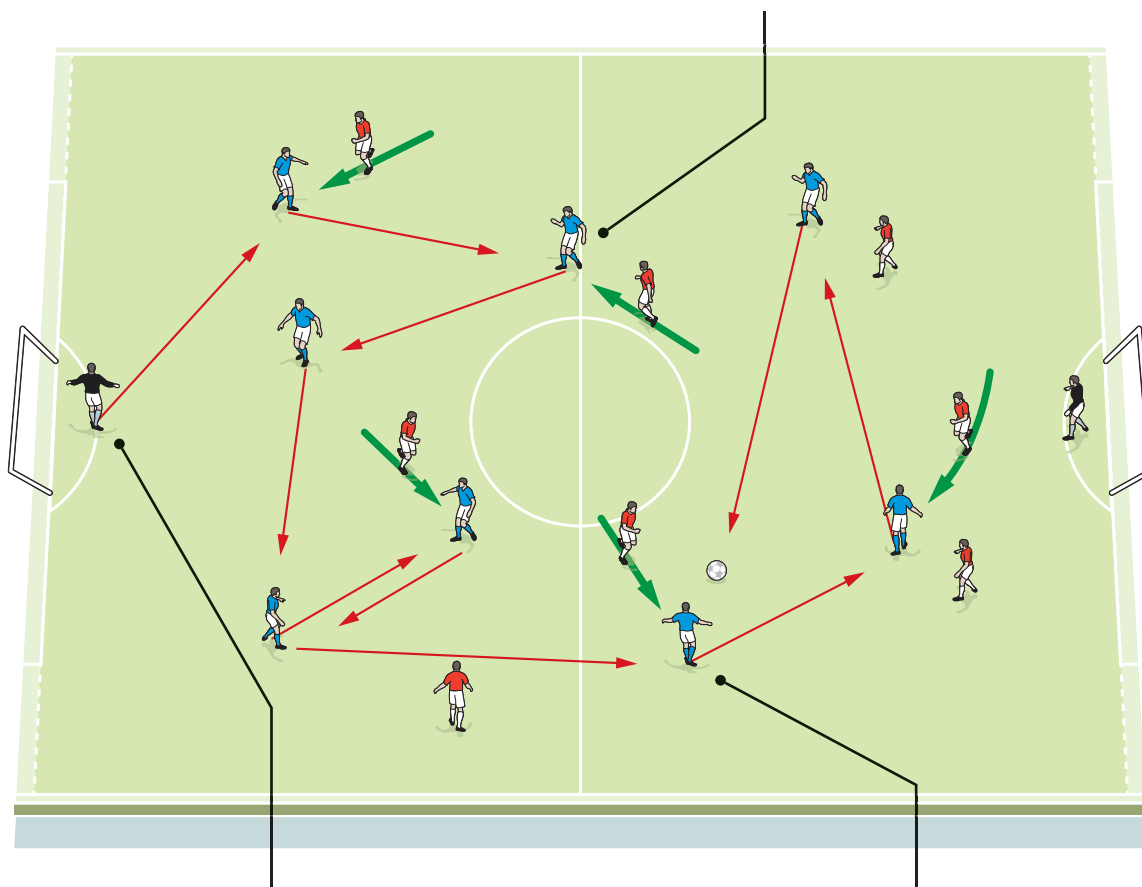
The coaching focus should be on quick decision making and encouraging players to be smart in keeping the ball. At this stage of the session the goalkeepers are unopposed, so they must not be pressed. We play this game for eight minutes.

KEY

Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble→

1 NON-DIRECTIONAL POSSESSION

1 Play 9v9 including goalkeepers. The objective is to keep possession in a non-directional game



2 Goalkeepers are unopposed and are only used to start play and recycle possession for their team

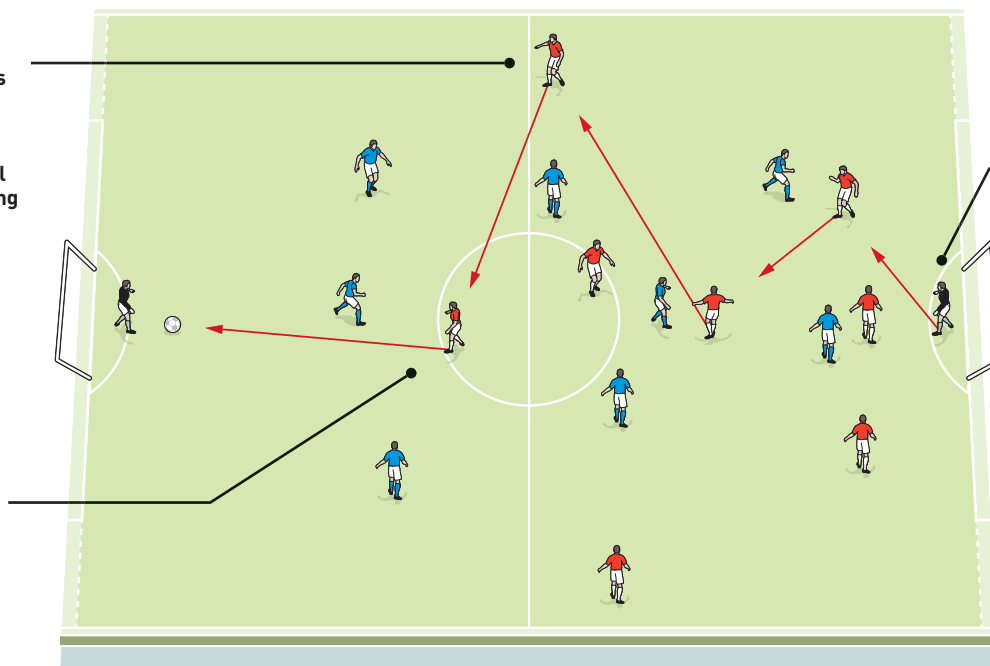
3 Teams must make 10 passes without the opposition winning the ball to score a point

MATT BEARD: REINFORCING TEAM FUNDAMENTALS

2 DIRECTIONAL POSSESSION

1 In this progression the same rules apply but the game is now directional. Teams can still score by making 10 passes

2 Teams can also score a point by successfully passing the ball to the opposition goalkeeper

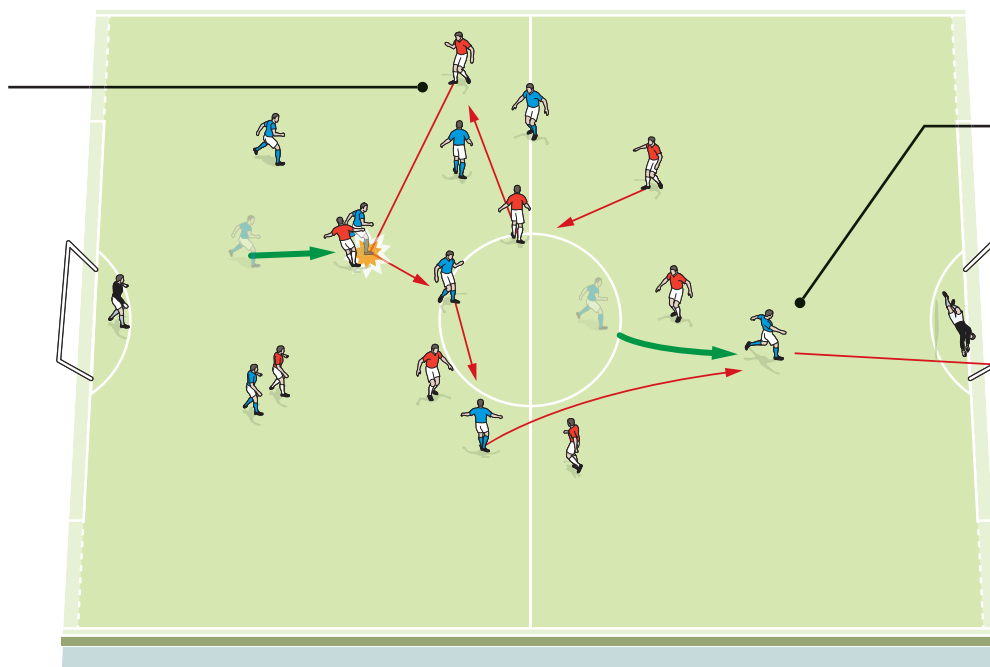


KEY
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble - - - - -

3 The keepers can now be pressed by the opposition attackers

3 DIRECTIONAL POSSESSION WITH COUNTER

1 The same rules apply. Teams can score a point by making 10 passes, or by passing to the opposition keeper



2 In this progression if teams win possession, they can now counter-attack and score in the opposition goal

How do I progress the session?

Directional possession

After a two-minute break, we play a second 9v9 game with the same set-up as before but this time it's directional. To score a point, teams must either make 10 passes or successfully pass the ball to the opposition goalkeeper, as shown [2]. In this progression

the keepers can now be pressed. We play for eight minutes.

What are the key things to look out for?

In this first progression we want to see if players can focus on keeping the ball and make positive forward passes. From a defending stand point, we want to see that players can

switch on defensively and that they can quickly get into shape once the opposition keeper has received the ball.

How do I progress the session further?

Directional possession with counter

After another two-minute break, we play a third 9v9 game with the

MATT BEARD: REINFORCING TEAM FUNDAMENTALS

same set-up as before. Again, to score a point teams must make 10 passes or successfully pass the ball to the opposition goalkeeper, but this time, if teams win possession, they can now counter-attack and must try to score in the opposing team's goal, as shown [3]. If the ball goes out, play restarts from the keeper. In this progression the added focus defensively is the counter-press, while

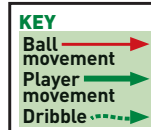
the offensive focus in on the counter-attack.

Directional possession with dribble

We use the same set-up as before but for this progression we position three mannequin gates on the halfway line. We play another 9v9 game and teams can still score points by making 10 passes, or by passing to the opposition goalkeeper, or by counter-attacking and

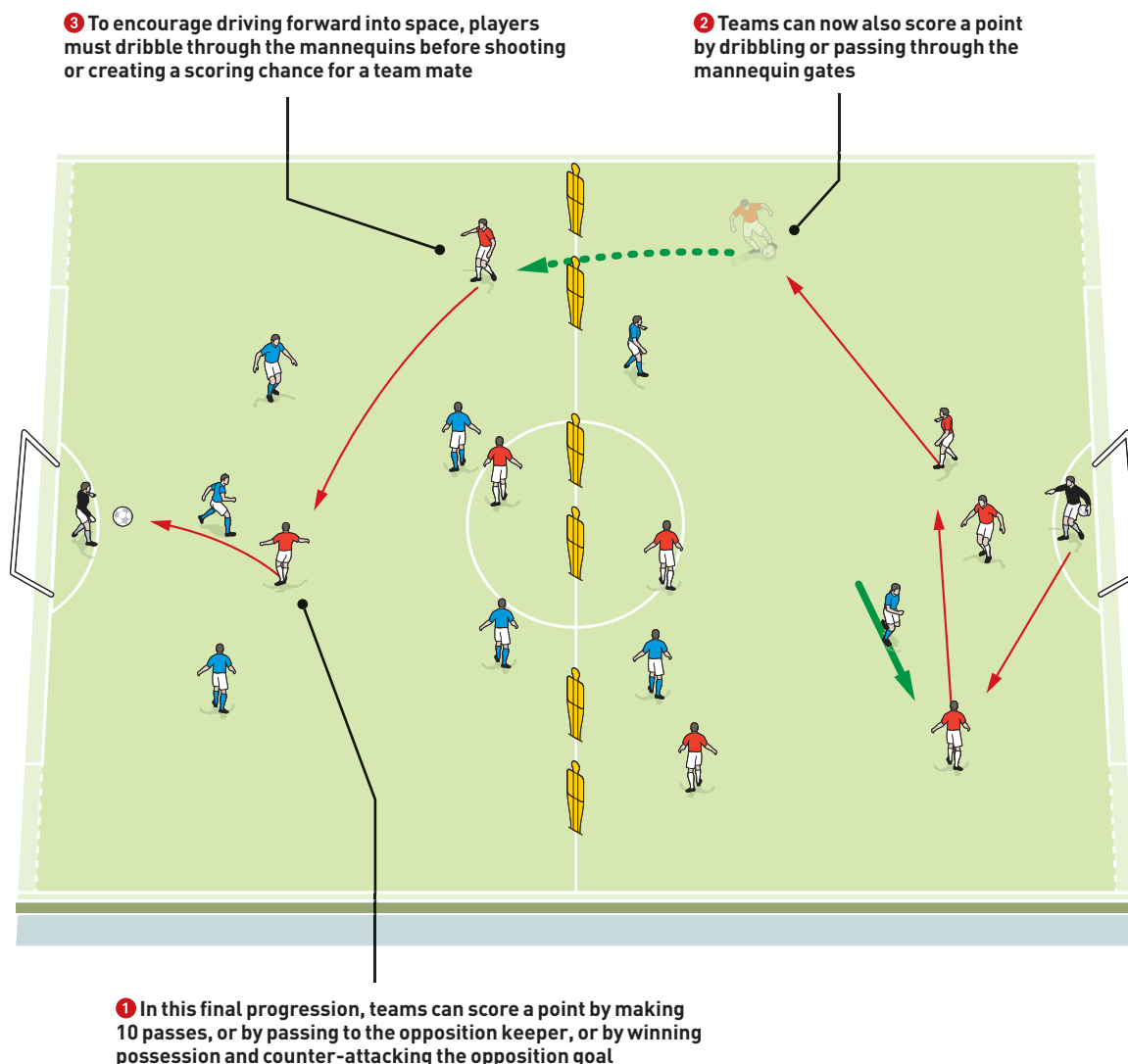
scoring in the opposition goal, but now players can also score points by dribbling through the mannequin gates and driving into space, as shown [4], or by passing through the mannequin gates.

If needed, we encourage players to drive through the mannequin gates by adding a condition that players must dribble through them before shooting or creating a chance for a team mate. We play for eight minutes.



“The focus defensively is the counter-press, while the offensive focus in on the counter-attack”

4 DIRECTIONAL POSSESSION WITH DRIBBLE



CAMBRIDGE UNITED

Colin Calderwood Developing combination play

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 60x40 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, poles,
2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

18 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Technical practice: 10mins
Possession practice: 20mins
9v9 + keepers: 20mins

Overview

This session is all about improving combination play in tight areas. It develops decision making when in possession of the ball and

helps players to reach a clear understanding of when to play through the opposition and when to play around them. It's a competitive and game-related session that the players enjoy. As the physical output from the players is limited by the size of the area and the low speeds being used, it is ideal for the first training session following a match.

What do I get the players to do?

Technical practice

We set up in a 24x24-yard square, coned off at the corners to leave an octagon-shaped training area. We're using 18 players, split into two teams of eight, plus two floaters. Each team has four players on the outside of the octagon and

four players on the inside, as shown [1]. The outside players have a ball each and they look to combine with their team mates on the inside. The two floaters are in the central area and they can support any inside player to make a combination.

What are the key things to look out for?

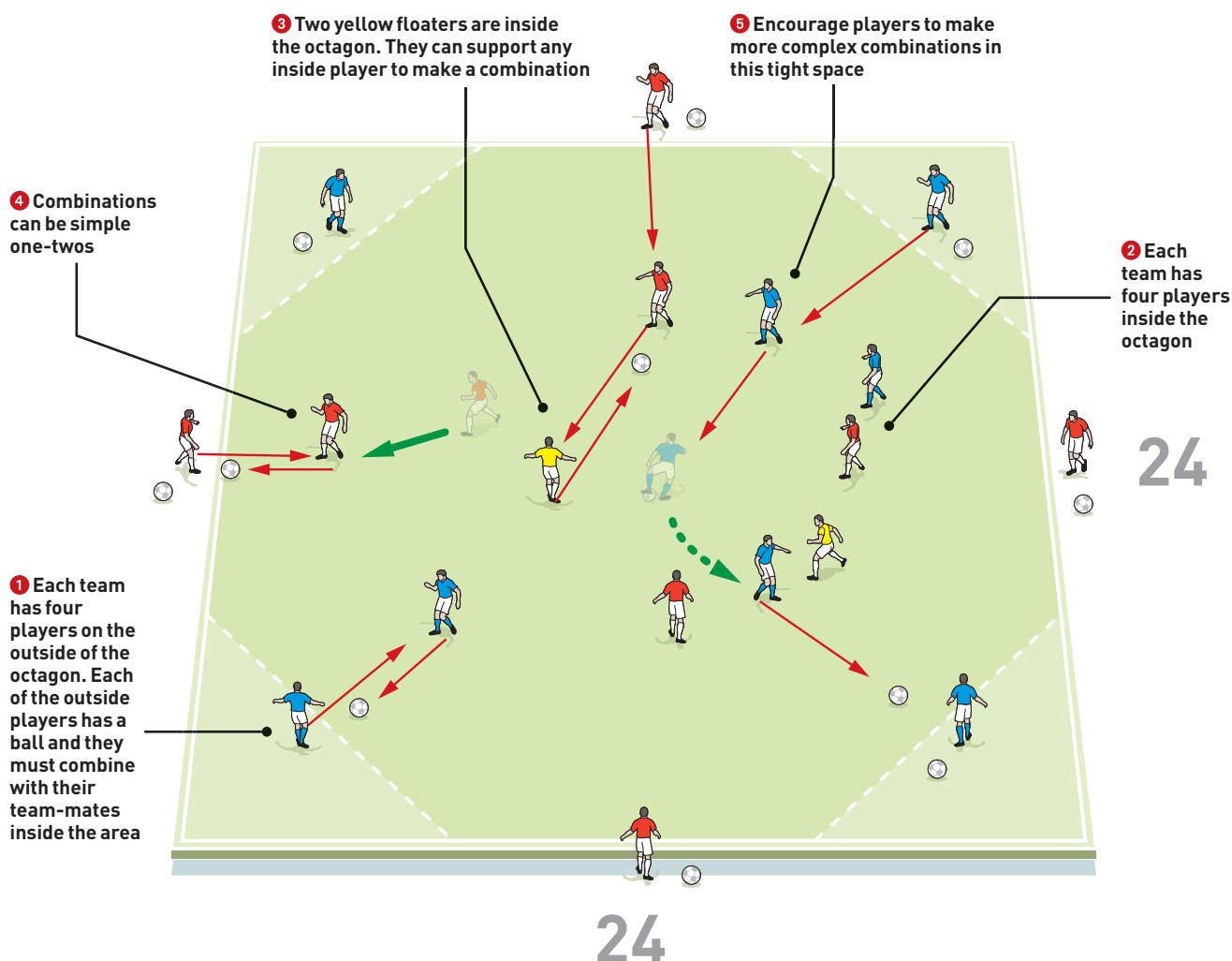
We want to see players making any of the following combinations:

- Play a one-two and then find another ball.
- Receive from the outside, turn and use various receiving skills, such as front foot, back foot, no touch turn, then play to a free player and find another ball.

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

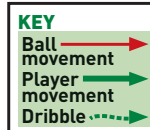
1 TECHINICAL PRACTICE



COLIN CALDERWOOD: DEVELOPING COMBINATION PLAY

2 POSSESSION PRACTICE

24

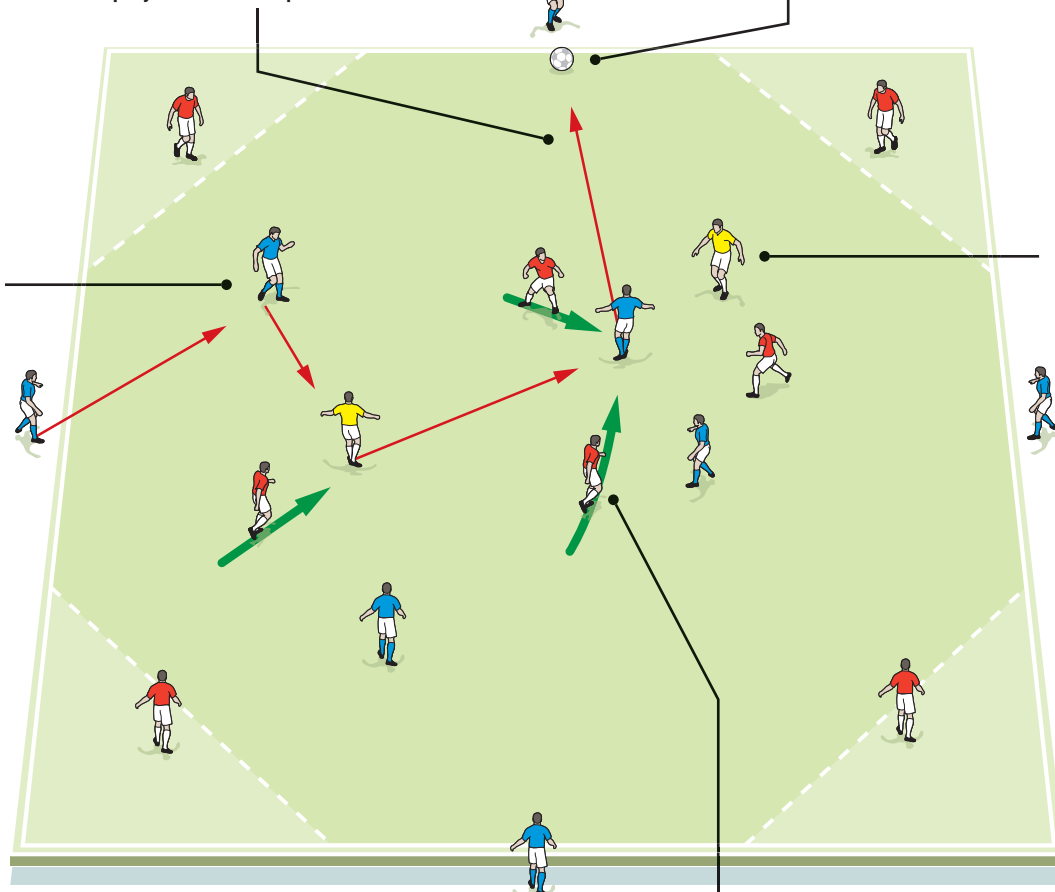


③ The possession team can use team-mates on the outside to support, but a pass to an outside player is worth no points

① Use the same set-up as before, but there is now just one ball in play

② The possession team passes the ball under pressure. One point is scored for each completed pass in the central area

④ The yellow floaters play for the team in possession and are one-touch. They can link play centrally when required



24

24

⑤ If the pressers win the ball, they must transition quickly into the new passing team. The first team to 21 points wins

“This session is all about improving combination play in tight areas. It develops decision making when in possession”

- Receive from the outside, turn, play out and play the outside player in with a one-two. The player inside then goes to the outside.
- Receive from the outside, turn, play out and play the outside player in with a dribble to the outside. The player inside then goes to the outside.
- Receive from outside, turn, play out and overlap the outside player. Receive another pass from him before taking the ball and playing again with someone else.

What do I get the players to do next?

Possession practice

We use the same set up as in the previous practice but this time only one ball is in play and the team in possession must try to keep hold of the ball under pressure from the other team. They combine with each other inside and use their outside team-mates to help them keep the ball if necessary, as shown [2]. The two floaters can also support the team in possession but are limited

to one-touch link play centrally. If the pressing team wins the ball, they become the new passing team. Keep score using the pontoon system: each completed pass in the centre scores one point; each pass to the outside scores no points but possession is maintained – this will encourage players to make central combinations in the tighter spaces where possible, using the outside players only for safe controlled passes. The first team to 21 points wins.

COLIN CALDERWOOD: DEVELOPING COMBINATION PLAY

We play for 20 minutes, swapping outside players with the inside players every three minutes. We can progress the activity by conditioning the number of touches of the ball if needed.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see players using good receiving and protection skills in tight areas. They should play with their heads up, showing an awareness of

where the pressure is coming from and where the space is, making quick decisions about where to play the ball using one-tvos and give and go's. Off the ball, players should make runs to create space.

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

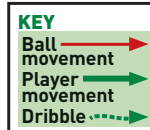
In the possession practice, players will sometimes find themselves inadvertently blocking passes to the outside,

limiting passing options for their own team. The passing team has a 10v4 overload including the floaters when in possession, therefore players should show for the ball in a position that doesn't block a pass to their team-mates on the outside.

How would you put this into a game situation?

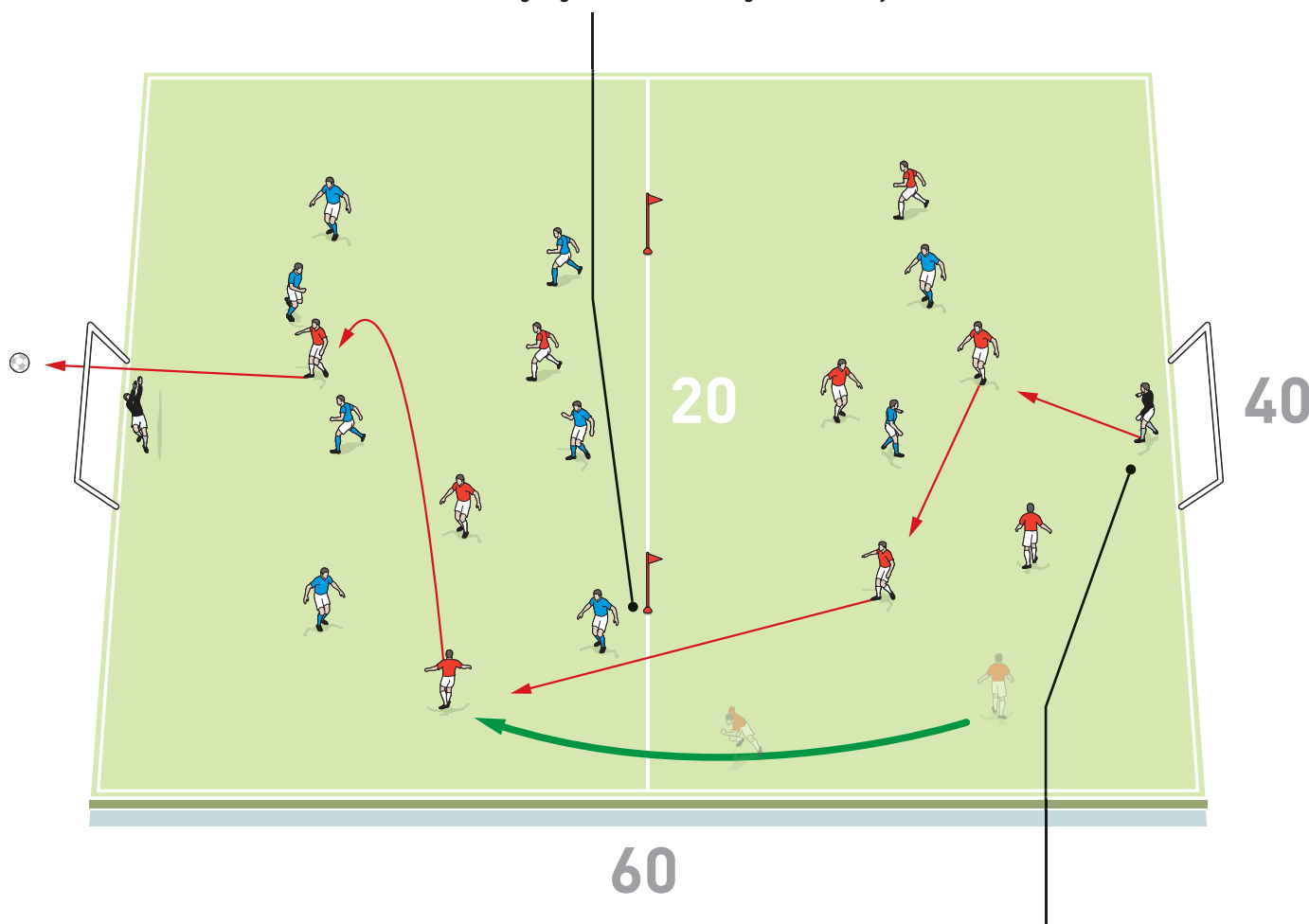
9v9 + keepers

We set up an area of 60x40 yards with a goal at each end



3a 9v9 + KEEPERS

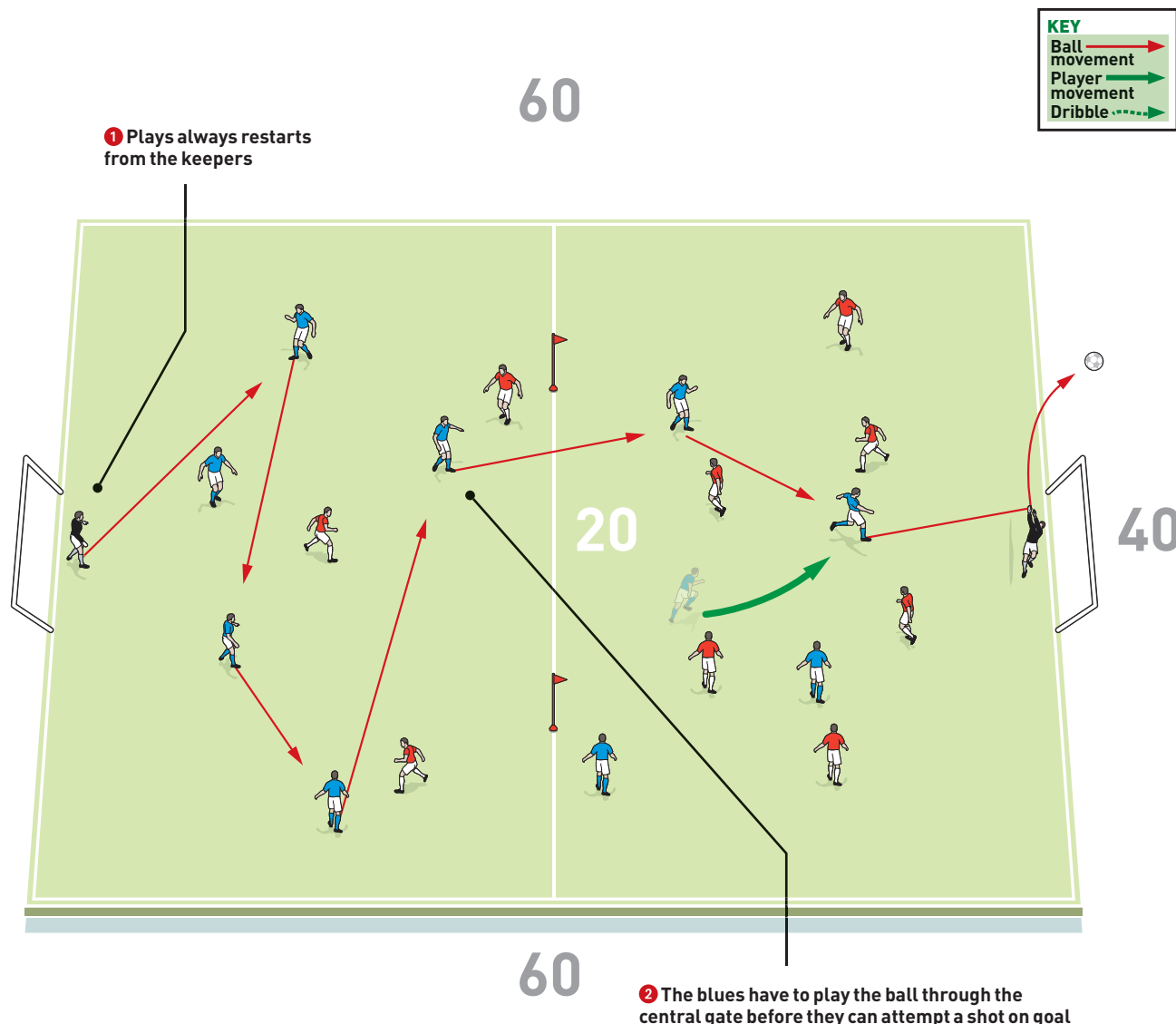
2 The reds must play the ball into the attacking half by going around the central gate before they can shoot



1 Play starts with a pass from the keeper. The reds build an attack on the opposition goal but teams cannot shoot from their own half

COLIN CALDERWOOD: DEVELOPING COMBINATION PLAY

3b



“One team is conditioned to play around the central gate when attacking and the other team must play through the central gate”

and a 20-yard gate marked across the centre of the halfway line with poles. We're using 18 outfield players and two goalkeepers, split evenly into two teams.

Each team must try to score in the goal at the end they are attacking but one team is conditioned to play around the central gate when attacking, as shown [3a], and the other team must play through the central gate when attacking, as shown [3b].

If either team takes the wrong route into the opposition half, they still

keep possession of the ball but they must play back into their own half and then take the correct route before being allowed to score in the goal.

Goals can only be scored in the attacking half of the pitch – long shots from a team's own half are not allowed. Play for 20 minutes, with the teams swapping conditions at half-time.

As a progression, we can run this game as free play to see if the players show an understanding of when to play through and when to play around the opposition.

What are the key things to look out for?

From the team who have to play through the gate, we want to see good combination play and effective receiving and protection skills in tight areas. We also want to see creative passing and good movement off the ball. From the team who have to play around the gate, we want to see a range of passes, including penetrative passes, and different kinds of supporting runs, such as underlaps, overlaps and third man runs.

LMA AMBASSADOR

Luke Swindlehurst Attacking 4-3-3 against 4-4-2

SET-UP

AREA

Up to full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 mini goals, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 20 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

9v9 practice: 25mins

11v11 game: 35mins

Overview

This session is designed for teams that operate with a 4-3-3 system of play, utilising two wide players and one attacking midfielder who supports

a lone central striker. It's aimed at preparing players to attack an opponent that operates with a 4-4-2 system. It's a session that will help encourage teams to play out from the back and either play through or around the opposition. It will show players how to attack the opposition and utilise the extra player in the centre of midfield, switching the play quickly with positive penetrating passes. It will show teams how to play through the thirds in a number of different ways depending on the opposition's defensive structure, and it will allow all players to demonstrate effective attacking play with a number of different skills, techniques and tactics.

What do I get the players to do?

9v9 practice

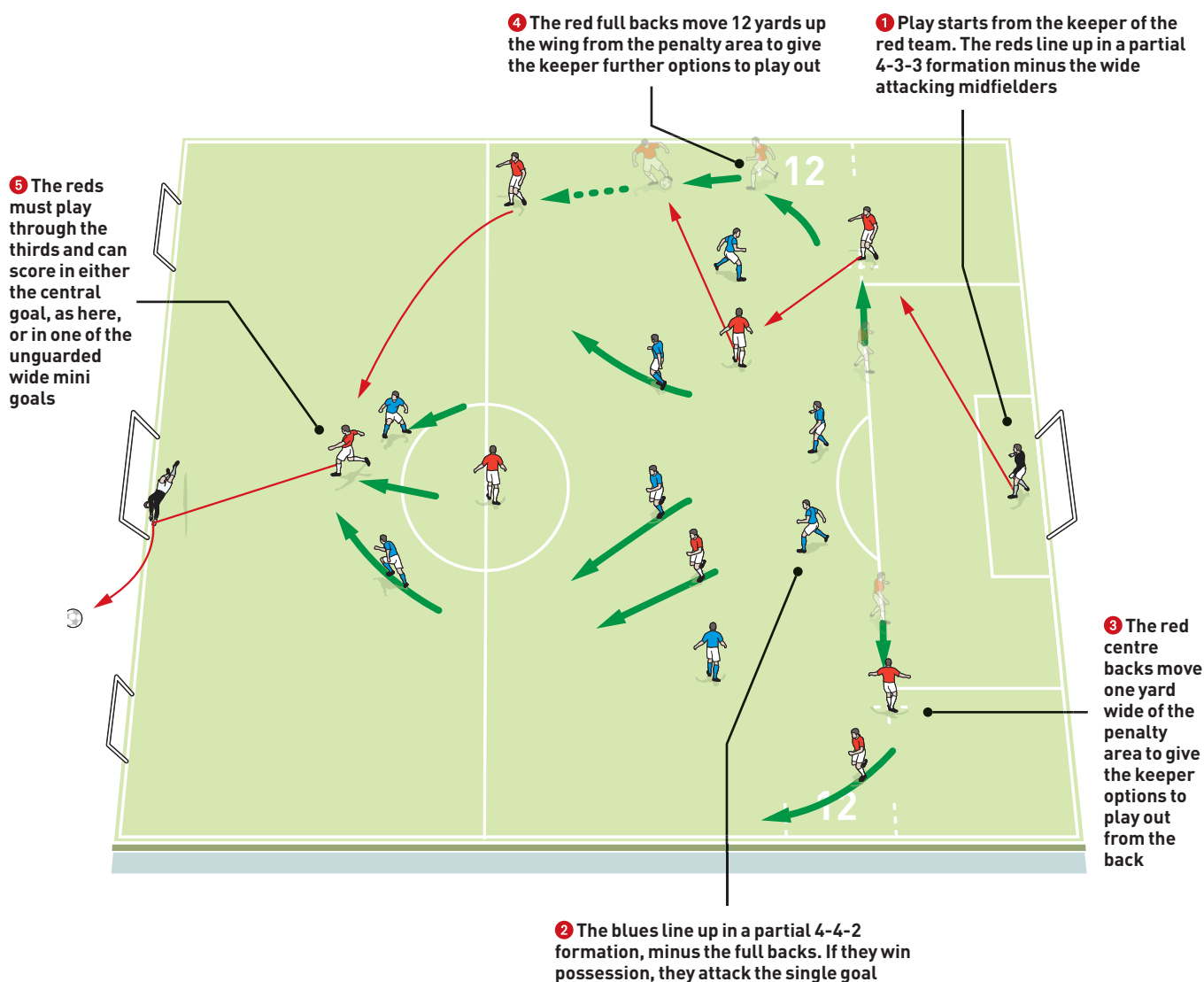
We set up on three quarters of a pitch, with a full size goal at each end. The short end of the pitch also has a mini goal on each flank.

We're using 16 outfield players and two goalkeepers, split into two teams of nine, with the attacking team (here, the reds) lining up as if they were the 4-3-1 part of a 4-3-3 formation. They have two central midfielders and a central attacking midfielder, and are missing the right and left attacking midfielders. The defending team (here, the blues) line up as if they were the 2-4-2 part of a 4-4-2 formation, minus the full backs.

KEY

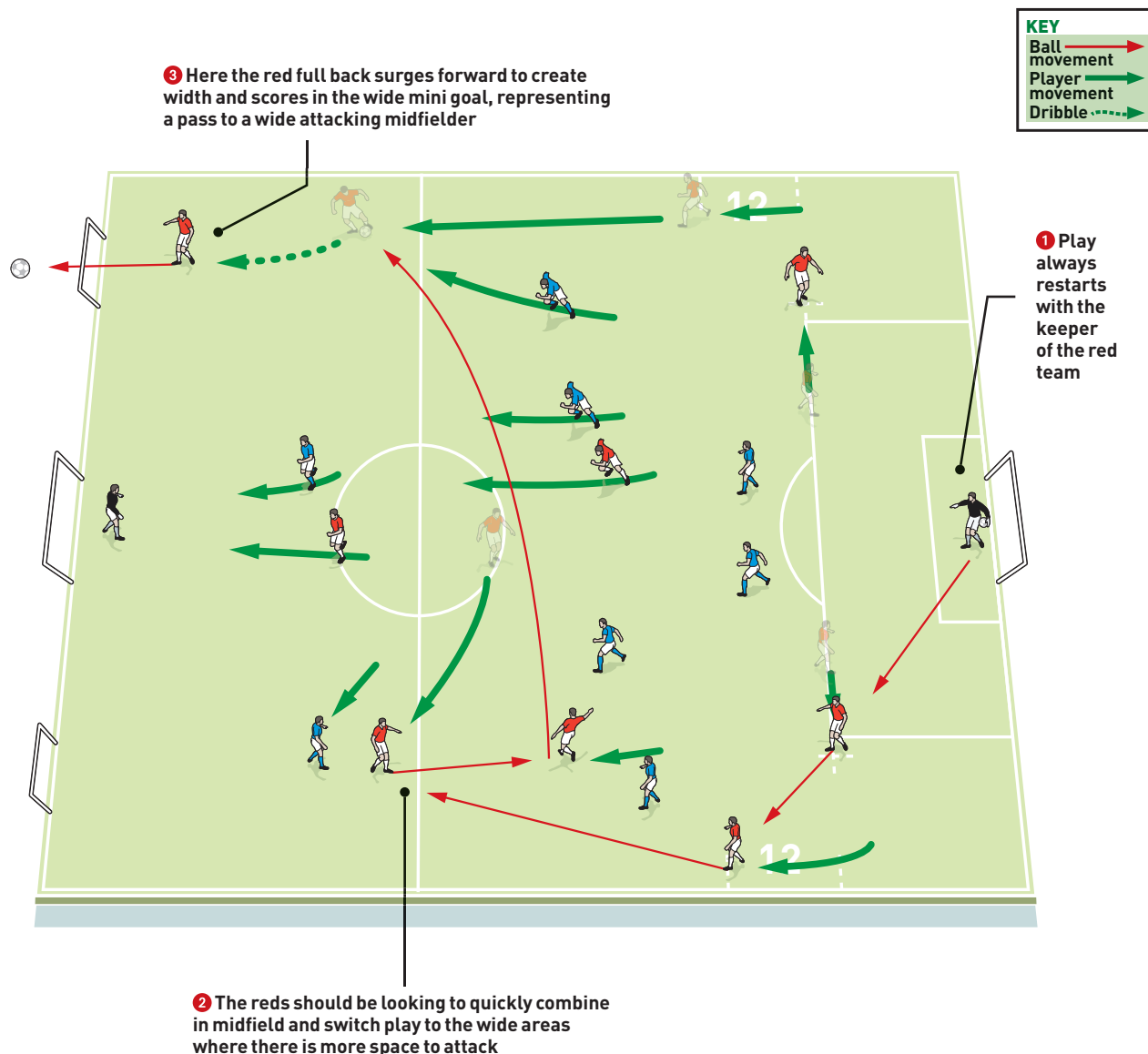
- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

1a 9v9 PRACTICE



LUKE SWINDLEHURST: ATTACKING 4-3-3 AGAINST 4-4-2

1b



“This session will help teams to play out from the back and penetrate through and around the opposition”

The reds are set up to play out from the back. The centre backs should move to a point one yard wide of the penalty area and the full backs move 12 yards up the wing from the penalty area, giving passing options for the goalkeeper. The team should then build up an attack through the thirds. The red team can score in either the main goal, as shown [1a], or in one of the wide mini goals, which represent passing to a wide midfielder player, as shown [1b]. The attacking team should be looking to take advantage of the 3v2 overload created in central midfield and combine quickly to play

through the opposition, or switch play to the wide areas so they can play around the opposition where there is more space to attack.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see teams playing through the thirds. In the defensive third we want to see teams playing out from the goalkeeper, with players creating space and passing options. The keeper should pass onto the front foot of the receiving defender's stronger side and then the defence should push out into

middle third as the ball moves forward into attacking areas.

In the middle third we want to see movement and creativity from the central players and passing options in front and in the wide areas. Players should move the ball quickly and switch the ball to play through and around opponents. The full backs must move forward to create width.

How would you put this into a game situation?

11v11 game

We now set up on a full pitch for an 11v11 with a goal at each end, ▼

LUKE SWINDLEHURST: ATTACKING 4-3-3 AGAINST 4-4-2

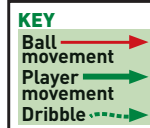
adding in the two players missing from each team in the previous practice. The reds are still in a 4-3-3 formation and the blues line up in a 4-4-2. We play a normal 11v11 game with offsides. Where the 9v9 practice could end with a pass to the wide attacking midfielders (the mini goals), now the game moves on to creating scoring opportunities in the final third, using balls played in from wide areas, as shown [2]. We play for 30 minutes

with a half-time break for coaching interventions.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want players to use the principles of playing out from the back that were coached in the 9v9 practice and bring them into the 11v11 game. As play builds up through the thirds, we now get the players work on how the wide attacking midfielders fit into the overall picture. They should make good movements to receive

the ball and one of them should always attack the back post when the ball is on opposite side of the pitch in the attacking third. The wide attacker should also threaten the outside of the full back and dart in between the full back and centre back. In the attacking third we want to see high tempo passing with combinations to unlock the defence. Players should be willing to get into the box and score goals, and we want to see the striker using good hold-up play and an ability to anticipate through balls.

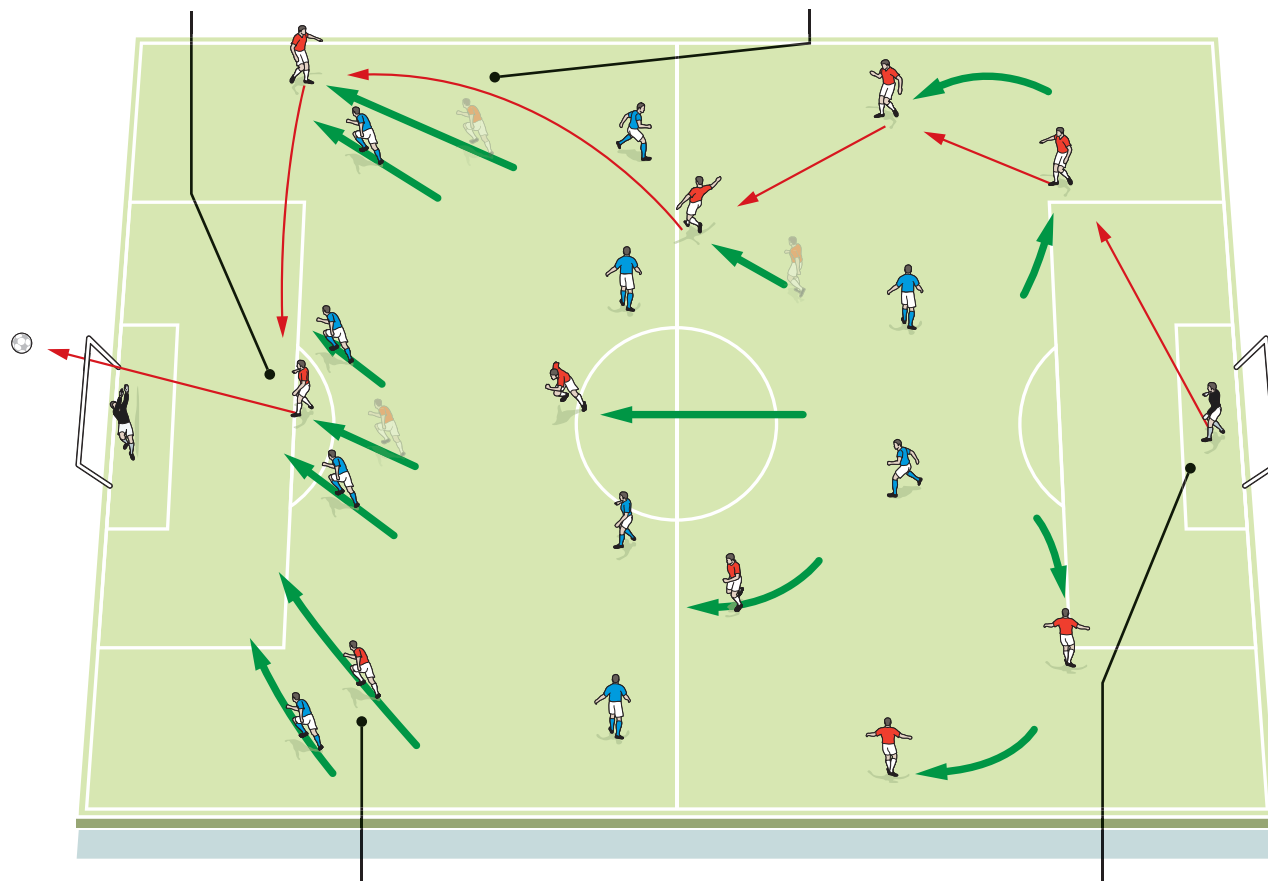


“The wide midfielder should always attack the back post when the ball is on opposite side of the pitch in the attacking third”

2 11v11 GAME

3 Where the 9v9 practice ended with a pass into the 'wide midfielders', the 11v11 game moves on to attack the final third. Here the reds score from a cross

2 For the red 4-3-3 team, the focus should be on how the wide attacking midfielders now fit into the game



4 The wide midfielder should make a run attacking the back post when the ball is on the other side in the attacking third

1 In the 11v11 game, the players should use the principles of playing out from the back that were coached in the 9v9 practice

LMA AMBASSADOR

Christopher Evans Compact defending

SET-UP

AREA

Up to full pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, 2 mini goals, 2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

16 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Pressing 4v4: 10mins

Pressing 8v8: 10mins

Compact defending: 15mins

9v9 game: 20mins

Overview

This session is all about learning how to defend in our own half, while tactically forcing the opposition into wide areas and encouraging

crosses, which is an opposition weakness. It also encourages compactness and teaches players how and when to press. This was a session that I used regularly when I coached in the Bangladesh Premier League because my players lacked coordinated technical detail, especially on their individual roles and how their own roles would fit into the larger tactical picture.

What do I get the players to do?

Pressing 4v4

We set up in an area of 10x10 yards. We're using eight outfield players split into two teams of four. We play a 4v4 game with the team in possession trying to keep the ball while passing and receiving. Passes around the inside edge of the

area help to keep possession, while an attacking pass across the middle of the area may be more dangerous but would score a point for the possession team if received successfully. The other team presses hard and tries to win the ball, as shown [1]. We encourage teams to press in intense 10 second bursts, to work on their fitness and synchronisation. If they win the ball they transition quickly into the new passing team. We would usually have two group playing simultaneously.

Pressing 8v8

We set up in an area of 30x20 yards with five-yard cone gates at either end. We're using 16 outfield players split into two teams of eight. We play a directional 8v8 game, using

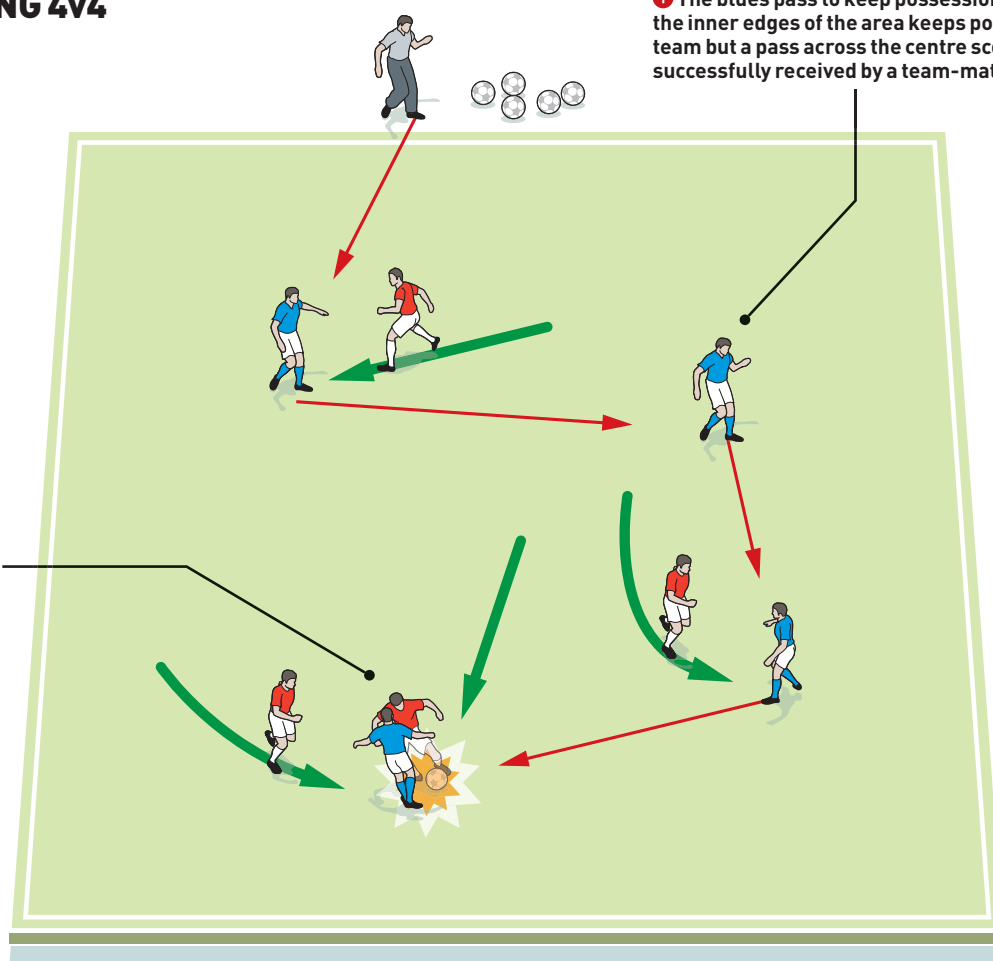
KEY

Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble

1 PRESSING 4v4

2 The reds press to win the ball in intense 10 second bursts. If they win possession, they quickly transition into the passing team

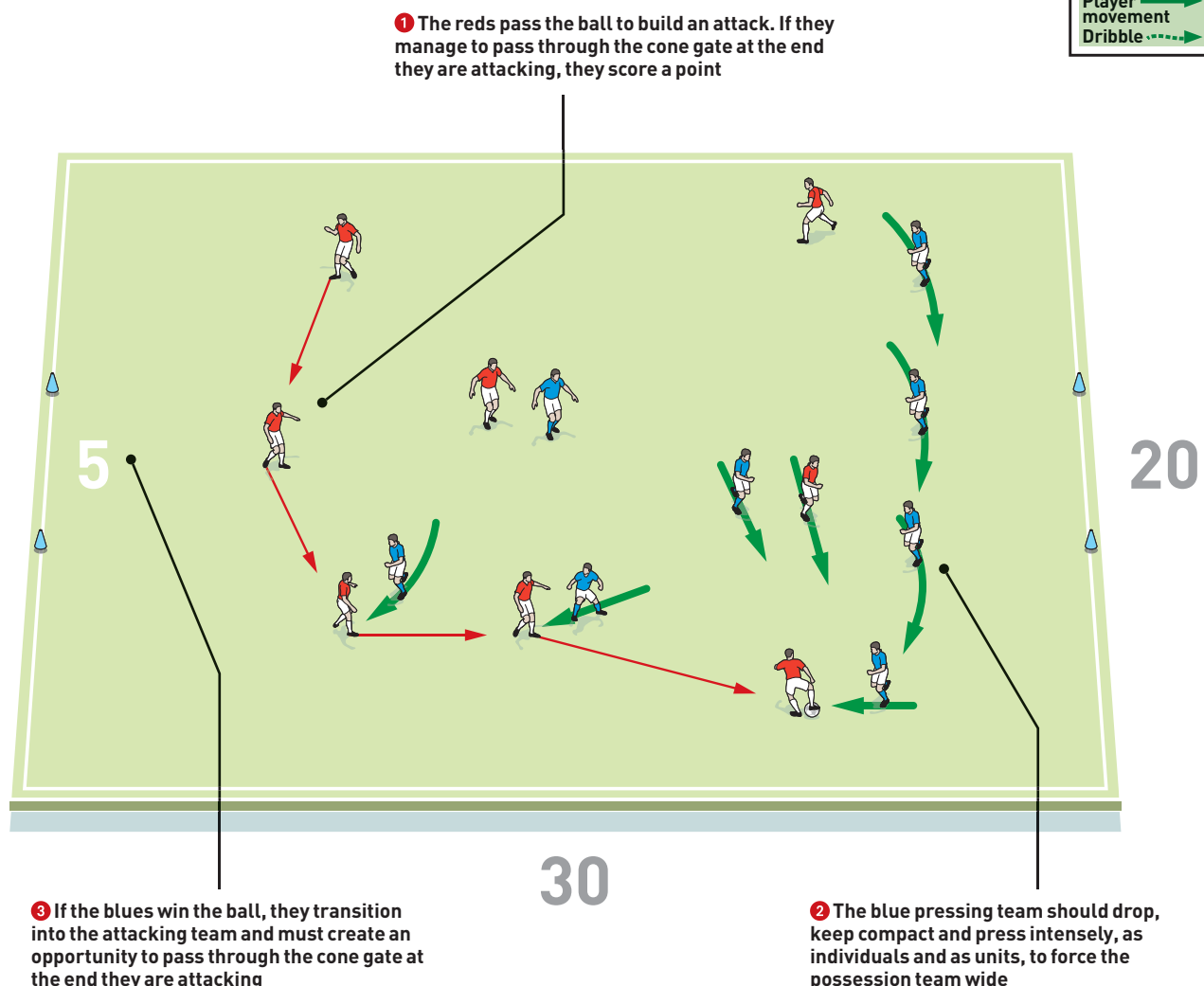
1 The blues pass to keep possession. A pass around the inner edges of the area keeps possession for the team but a pass across the centre scores a point if successfully received by a team-mate



10

CHRISTOPHER EVANS: COMPACT DEFENDING

2 PRESSING 8v8



“This session is all about learning how to defend in our own half, while tactically forcing the opposition into wide areas”

the same passing and receiving principles as in the previous practice, but this time the possession team scores by passing through the gate at the end they are attacking. The pressing team should be encouraged to drop, keep compact and press intensely, both as individuals and as units, to force the possession team wide, as shown [2].

Compact defending

We set up on just under half a pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper in their usual positions at one end.

A goal line is marked out at the other end, with two mini goals and two wide boxes of 10x5 yards positioned on it, as shown [3]. We're using 15 outfield players and one goalkeeper. One team is made up of eight outfield players (here, the reds) and they line up in a 2-3-3 formation attacking the main goal, with one full back in each of the wide boxes. The other team lines up with a goalkeeper, four defenders and three midfielders (here, the blues). A full back for the red attacking team starts play with a pass out of

the wide box. He must pass to one of the red forwards in the midfield area. The blue defending team should press as a unit and force play into the wide channels – the reds should be made to cross or are pushed back into the wide boxes. The blue midfielders should support their defenders by tracking runners and screening the ball in the dangerous central areas, while the blue centre backs should remain in the central areas if possible, picking up threats and defending crosses. If the blue defending team wins

CHRISTOPHER EVANS: COMPACT DEFENDING

possession of the ball, they can attack either of the mini goals at the other end.

9v9 game

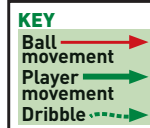
We set up on half a pitch with a goal at each end. We're using 16 outfield players and two goalkeepers, split into two teams of nine. We play a 9v9 game, with play always restarting quickly with a pass out from the goalkeeper of the blues, who are the attacking team, as shown [4]. We coach the reds, who are the defending team. They

should be expected to use all the defending principles that were practised in the previous activities.

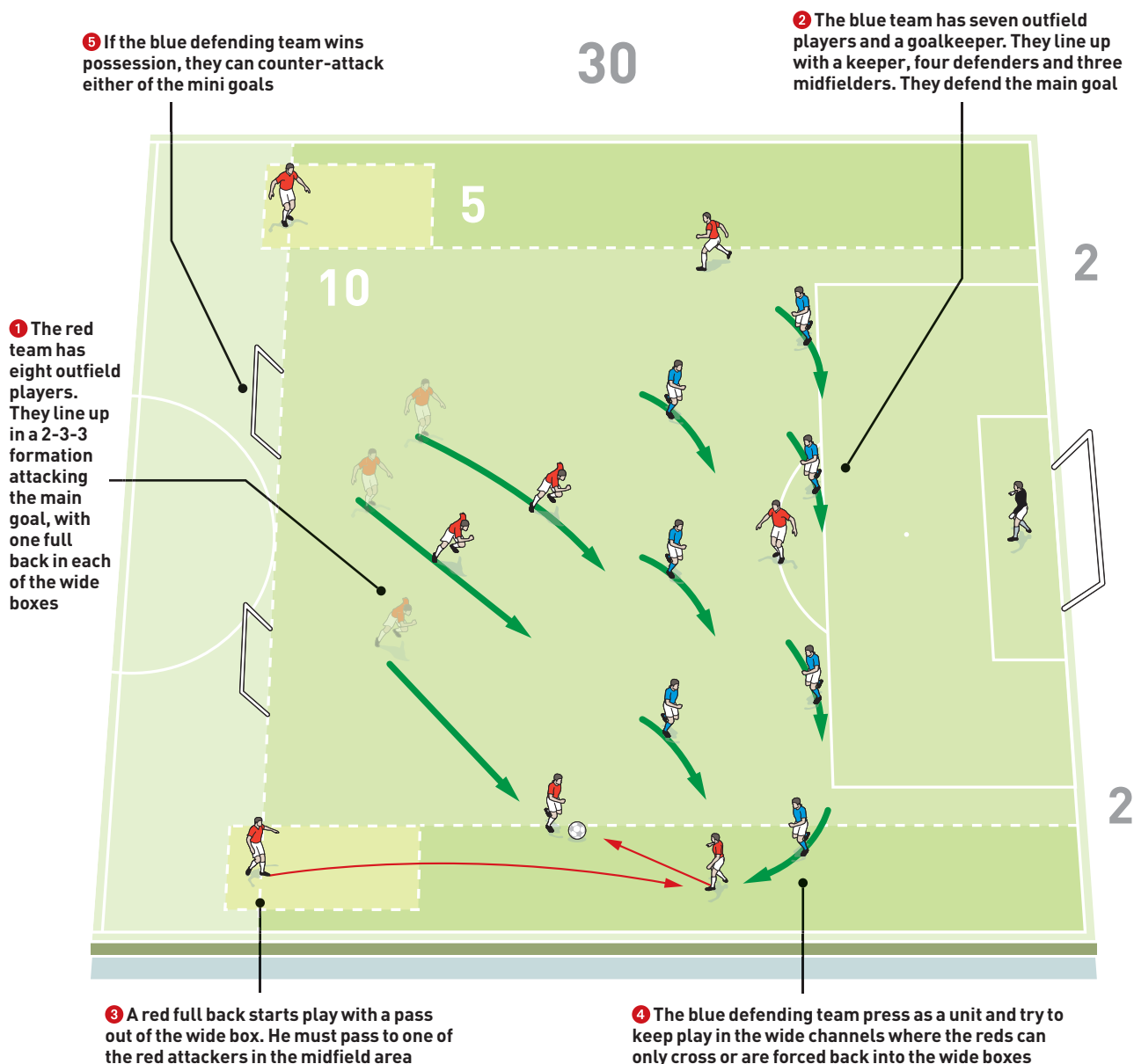
How would you put this into a game situation?

To finish the session, we progress the previous 9v9 activity into an 11v11 game played on a full pitch [not shown]. This could be with or without restrictions depending on the progress that the players have made. For example, if it is felt there is a need to impose restrictions on

the players, an assistant coach can feed balls into the attacking team to quickly restart with a full back in the middle third and the full back can play fast into the striker's feet, meaning the defending team has to get its 'block' in place quickly. It's important that any session of this nature is played out in an 11v11 game, so we can assess what real learning has taken place. If it seems that the players have failed to take the coaching points onboard, then we can readjust the original



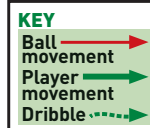
3 COMPACT DEFENDING



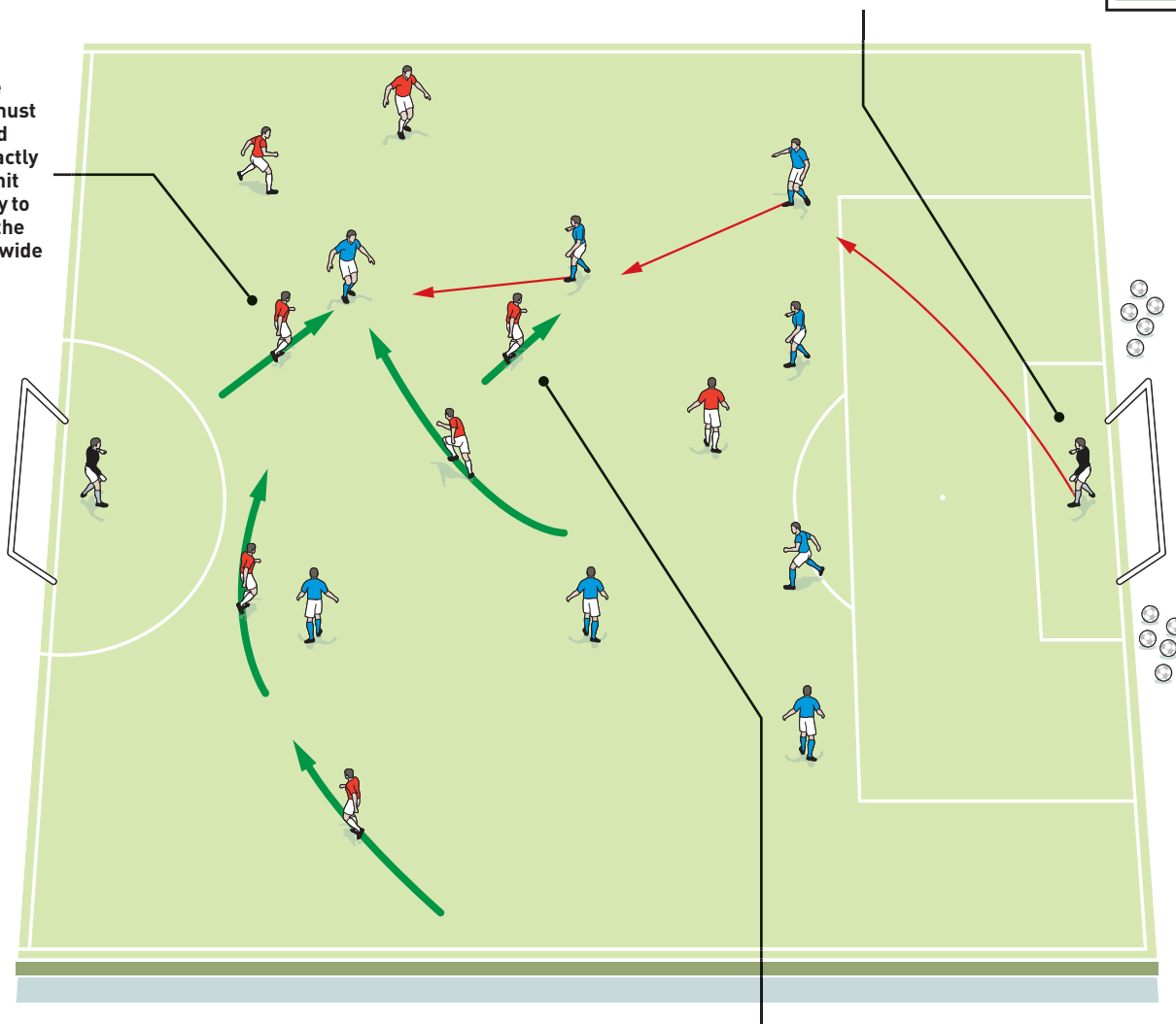
CHRISTOPHER EVANS: COMPACT DEFENDING

4 9v9 GAME

1 Play a 9v9 game. Play starts and restarts with a quick pass out from the keeper of the blue attacking team



2 The reds must defend compactly as a unit and try to force the blues wide



3 The defending midfielders should screen for attacking passes and track runners

“We look at the first press and whether the pressing player is timing the press correctly, as we want to see if he can affect the ball”

activities to take account of any holes in the players' learning.

What are the key things to look out for?

Technically, we're looking at the players' body posture without the ball, their distances from the ball, and whether they are observing the ball. Their eyes should be focused both on the ball and the opposition. Then we will look at the first press and whether the pressing player is timing the press correctly, as we want

to see if he can affect the ball. We also want to see if the players around him are aware of their compactness relative to the area of the pitch.

Tactically, we want to see that all players are dropping to defend and whether the shape is what we are looking for in any given situation, including outlets if the ball is won. We will look at forcing play wide to encourage the opposition to cross and making sure we are compact at the edge of the box to stop pull backs. We also want to make sure the

central midfielders track any runners in pockets, especially between the full backs and the centre backs when the full backs are pressing.

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

Pressing too early or too late will massively affect the ability of the team to defend successfully, so it is vital that players recognise the triggers that tell them when to press. Use coaching breaks to talk players through the relevant triggers.

EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: CHRIS WILDER

THE WILDER SIDE

Sheffield United manager Chris Wilder talks about his long and winding road to Premier League management



Since being appointed manager of Sheffield United in 2016, Chris Wilder has inspired his home-town and boyhood team to two promotions. He was even voted LMA Manager of the Year in 2019 after leading the club to the top flight of English football.

With the Blades now back in the Premier League for the first time in 12 years, he is adamant that he is not about to make radical changes to their game or to his authentic and inclusive style of leadership.

“Football has always been my obsession.”

I can clearly remember playing football in the back garden of my mum and dad’s house when I was five or six. My family’s connection with Sheffield United goes back quite a long way, as my grandad had a trial for Sheffield United Reserves. He played football part time and worked at the local steelworks.

I also have a connection with Liverpool, as my dad is from there. At one stage his work took us to live in London, so for three years my summers were spent travelling

to Liverpool or going to Sheffield to visit grandparents. At that time Liverpool were dominating football, so my loyalties were pulled in two directions until we moved back to live in Sheffield. Then United became my sole focus.

“My parents worked hard for everything we had.”

At one point, my dad even had three or four jobs at the same time. When things aren’t handed to you on a plate, you have to go out there and work really hard to achieve them. Certainly, it’s from my parents that I got my values and my hard-work ethic; I never take my foot off the gas.

I believe that, like any manager, I need to keep learning, improving and moving with the times, but the positive values I hold – honesty, commitment, working as a team, being competitive – still underlie everything I do. They also help to keep me grounded.

Those core values have shaped the culture I’ve built at Sheffield United, one of honesty, openness and inclusion. It’s essential that everyone in the staff and playing team is pulling in one direction, but at the same time I understand that they’re all individuals and I want them to feel able to express themselves. It’s

I think football management is so relentless and unforgiving that you can’t allow yourself to become complacent

important to me that they know they each have an important part to play in the success of the team and that they enjoy coming to work every day. Communication is, therefore, massively important, so I speak with the players a lot and encourage an open doors policy.

The same goes for my support staff. I have great people

around me, from our sports science and first-team coaching staff to my assistant manager, Alan Knill. I’m very inclusive, so while I’ll make the final decisions, I always welcome and value other people’s opinions. ▼

EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: CHRIS WILDER

“Some of my approaches stem from my time as a player.”

I think back to those times and ask, in what environment and under what leadership did I play my best football? Then, of course, you also have to adapt your approach to the players in your team and the club you're at. At Sheffield United we really engage with our fans and, as a Sheffield man myself who has supported the side since the age of 10, I feel a real connection with the supporters and the city.

“You have to stay grounded in this game.”

I think football management is so relentless and unforgiving that you can't allow yourself to become complacent. If ever you think you've cracked it, you'll probably come unstuck. But I've always taken the approach that you have to believe in what you're doing, in the system you want to play and in your players. We've developed our game over a number of years and, as much as possible, I want us to keep playing the same style of football we've employed successfully over the last three years.

I know, however, that you have to be adaptable to any situation that you encounter, whether that's in between games or during a match. Rather than just sticking rigidly to one system or style of play, you need to be decisive as a manager and be prepared to alter your approach. There are, after all,



different ways to win a game of football and to be successful.

“Winning LMA Manager of the Year was validating.”

It was an honour for me, the players and the football club, especially given it was voted for by my managerial peers. I'm also proud to follow in the footsteps of managers who faced similar situations to me, as well as those right at the very

We want to be hard-working and not get over confident or complacent if things are going well

top of the game. I have a massive amount of respect and admiration for managers at the elite level who have to deal with quite different

challenges, not least the incredibly high expectations and pressures at the top.

Having the opportunity to spend time with these managers really inspires me and I'm looking forward to welcoming them into my office after games this season. We may

be competitors, but we're all alike in working in a very tough, results-driven business, and there are a lot of good people in the game.

“I love listening to other managers' experiences.”

It was great to listen to Pep Guardiola speak at a recent LMA insight event and I value the opportunities I've had to spend time with the likes of Sir Alex Ferguson, Walter Smith, Howard Wilkinson and Sam Allardyce. Listening to other senior managers helps you to continue to learn new ways to improve yourself and the team, and it can give you more confidence in your own methods. However, you can't copy someone else's style of leadership or football directly, because every team is unique and is at a different level. Instead, learn as much as possible from others



EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: CHRIS WILDER

while remaining authentic and true to yourself.

"Different times lie ahead for us."

We have total respect for whatever league we're playing in and it's an attitude I've always instilled in the players. When we were promoted to the Championship, our aim was to get a foothold in the division and earn the right to stay there, and we're taking the same approach now with the Premier League.

We want to be hard-working and not get over confident or complacent if things are going well. We want to continue to express ourselves and stick together, and support one another when the going gets tough. I think these are qualities that all great teams share.

We know there will be challenges from a physical, technical, tactical and mental toughness point of view and as a team we've talked about these a great deal. It's important that the players and I know how we'll approach any new experiences and setbacks.

The mindset of the players going into the Premier League is particularly important to me, but I'm confident they'll remain grounded and will thrive on this fantastic opportunity. There needs to be a good balance between feeling excited and feeding off the new challenges this season, and continuing to play with the freedom that we're known for.



It's important that the players and I know how we will approach any new experiences and setbacks

"I'm not going to set any monthly targets."

We're simply going to try to get points from every game that we play in. I'm not going to sit here and think it's realistic that we can finish in the top

seven or eight, but equally I'm not aiming for us merely to survive in this division.

There's been a glint in the players' eyes and we're all enjoying getting out there in the Premier League and proving ourselves, going toe to toe with other clubs in the Premier League and competing with some of the best in the world.

I'm also looking forward to competing again against Daniel Farke, who did a fantastic job getting Norwich promoted to the Premier League as champions last season. Our performances earned us the right to be in the Premier League and now we need to show everybody that we deserve to stay here. ■

