



Small-Sided Games to Train the 4-2-3-1



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by
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Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING

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Introduction

Coaching the 4-2-3-1 is not just a formation or system of play. It can also be described as a philosophy on how the game is played. This philosophy is based around flexibility. One of the strengths of the 4-2-3-1 is the flexibility it provides with the interchanging of positions of the midfielders and forwards. This is one of the reasons opponents find it really hard to play against.

This philosophy can and should be adapted at a younger age too. So for those age groups that don't play 11v11, this free eBook shows you how to adapt the 4-2-3-1 to the small-sided soccer that younger teams play. Not only that, if you have a team that is just a year or two away from moving to 11v11, this eBook is perfect for helping them make the transition from the smaller numbers they are playing to the full blown version of the 11v11 4-2-3-1.

GREAT FOR TRAINING SESSIONS – The material in, 'Small-Sided Games to Train the 4-2-3-1' is also perfect for using the smaller numbers to create your own 4-2-3-1 training sessions. If you have 18 players or less on your team, you can use the ideas in this eBook to set up small-sided games specifically designed to teach the 4-2-3-1.

Making the transition from small-sided football to 11-a-side football

In youth football, most players and coaches have a problem with moving to what is a more complex game; there is more space on a field that is much longer to reach the opposition goal than what the players moving from 7 or 8-a-side football, meaning passing and running distances should be much longer, but also with more players, positioning, problem solving and decision making are much more difficult.

In many countries to help building from the back, some non-competitive youth football is played with a 'retreating line' meaning that the GK can roll the ball out to a defender who can take a touch before any opposition player can move ahead of the retreating line and press the ball. In small-sided football, this gives players time to receive and analyse the options they have – passing options or to dribble out of the 1st zone of play.

As the move to 11-a-side football is made, the retreating line is taken away, giving the GK the dilemma to pass out to a defender who will likely be pressed, and if he loses the ball, the move to 11-a-side also has a problem for GK's – large goals which are often far too large for young GK's to be able to save any shots that are near the crossbar. Most strikers will try to shoot high so that the small GK cannot make a save in the overly large goals.

Also, as the field is much wider, teams who in SSG's liked to pass wide and have the winger dribble 1v1 then make crosses have more difficulty in playing this style if the player is unable to cover long distances quickly, or cross the ball over longer distances; before in SSG's the crossing distance may have been 18 yards from touchline to back post, now crosses can be up to 30 yards, a significant change in how hard and ultimately how accurate and effective wingers can be in the early stages of 11-a-side football. Corner kicks may only be effective with teams who have players who can kick a ball very long to reach the centre of the box to have a chance to score.

Main changes for players and coaches moving to 11-a-side

- More players – more complex game
- More spaces – a more athletic game than SSG's
- Larger goals – easier to score for players who can kick the ball high over long distances
- Wider field – attacking angles have changed and set pieces are more difficult to use

Planning ahead for 11-a-side

When planning ahead for 11-a-side, the coach should not lose focus of what the coach's role is – to develop children to be good people socially, good footballers and to have a sense of morality when playing the game. Some coaches are 'Win at all costs' coaches and will ignore the development of players to replace them with bigger and stronger, more effective players for short term gain. This should be avoided – stick with the players you have and educate them to play the game better; winning is NOT important, it is a by-product of producing the best players in the correct learning environment. By producing technical and tactical footballers, players will learn how to use their skills in the correct areas for maximum efficiency, which in turn leads to dominating possession and from this, making more scoring chances, winning matches and success should be gained in this way.

The main things the coach should look to retain are; the teams current playing style, maintain technique, speed and tactical awareness over strength. **Don't recruit bigger kids for short term gain.**

When planning ahead of the 11-a-side season, using SSG's are vitally important. Players still need to have touches on the ball and play in tight spaces – playing 11-a-side matches in training sessions just to give players a feel for the size of the field may help but how many touches on the ball will they have?

I used a lot of shadow play with 11 players on a daniel.sundstrom@ymail.com field to give players an idea of how we would play in 11-a-side friendlies leading up to the new 11-a-side season. In this, I placed players in the positions I thought they would play within the formation I expected to play and placed defenders into the play to ask them to press the ball, meaning the 11 players would need to move the ball away from pressure and ask players not directly or indirectly involved in play to maintain a shape to retain possession when attacking.

As the team played 2-3-1 in 7-a-side, or 2-1-3-1 in 8 a side, the simple theory I had was to play with a 4-2-3-1 formation, meaning the 6 players outfield would only have a small change to the way they played – a back 4 playing 10 yards behind the line of the 2 deepest players. This seemed a simple way to integrate the players into playing with an 11-a-side formation. Some teams we played against in friendlies played 3-2-1 in 7-a-side or 3-3-1 in 8 a side then 4-4-2 in 11-a-side – 3-3-1 being an easy to understand version of the future move to 4-4-2.

Most coaches will have an idea of the formation they will use when leading up to the 11-a-side season and who will play in which position. Shadow play on a small-sided field is a good way to get players used to having extra players in possession, while adding in a defender or 2 over 3 lines of play on a tight field can help the players to understand to pass to feet and move quickly, to move to the ball as passing distances are longer, and that when pressed, switching play to the far side can get the ball away from pressure.

Creating a training programme to be ready for the 11-a-side season when it arrives

To plan ahead for the 11-a-side season which in most countries brings 1st time competitive league based play for points, coaches should begin a slow building process around 6 months before the start of the season, using simple ideas in conditioned games such as a longer, narrow field, and increase the number of players in shadow play for both attack and defence gradually.

Coaches must still develop the players for the long-term goal of becoming a good footballer, but as players like to win and test themselves against other players, preparing them properly can help them achieve this in the correct manner – some coaches will bring in lots of new players and tell the players that if they don't play well, they don't get on for very long, if at all; as I have seen many times – this should be avoided, and coaches like this should re-evaluate what is important to kids football.

The correct manner is to properly prepare them for the step over to the larger field and ultimately more complex game. This should be done so that players can still play the usual small-sided games but for the players to know that what they do in the small-sided game is very important for the success of the 11-a-side game. Some players will completely change the way they play from SSG's when moving to 11-a-side, and we don't want this to happen, especially to thoughtful, intelligent players.

Preparing a training plan for 11-a-side – 6 month development plan

When planning ahead, you need to maximise the time spent with the players, and to do this we need to work out how much time we have, how we will divide it up, and prioritise certain aspects of training. I work on a ratio that most teams will have around 3-4 hours practice per week and should have 1.5/2.5 hours technical, 1 hour tactical and 0.5 hours physical.

All technical and tactical activities are physical in the form of running, turning and reacting, but physical to me is working on things like the techniques of efficient jumping, landing, agility, footwork, balance, reactive speed and determination. 15 minutes per 2 hour session after the warm up should get the foundations built into the start of the session, especially if you coach ways to improve the aforementioned abilities during the 15 minutes.

I believe that technique is the most important aspect, with tactical awareness and decision making just as important but with less time spent dedicated to it (in a lot of cases, playing the game and thinking about your positioning and decisions can teach players more than a coach stopping and starting play lots of times).

Physical is least important because the brain and feet with the ball do most of the work, and Physical attributes can be worked on later in the players life, around 16 years old this will become more important, so from the ages of 7-9 game intelligence and technique are equally important, with the ages of 9-13 technique taking slight precedence, with 13-16 tactical play, specifically position specific abilities both technically and tactically for each players position. Technique should be developed already and players now need to be using the technique that they have developed to become effective and eventually, automatic.

From the age of 16-18 years, technique how, when, where and why should be ingrained in the players mind-set, decision making and positioning should be understood of when, where and why, now becoming a better athlete to use the technical and tactical abilities properly and at a faster speed under pressure is developed further. Doing this at age 7-13 will only result in having players who don't have enough technique or tactical understanding of the game to succeed, as doing this at age 16 is too late. The golden age of learning is age 7-13, and more specifically age 9-12.

Small-sided Scenario's develop the move to 11v11

I believe that in 11-a-side football, playing SSG's at training is a vital way to help develop the players tactically, technically and physically, and in 7-a-side this is no different. Playing in small groups aids the development of players, and gives them scenarios which are common in matches and problems which need solved. Various scenarios' 1v1, 2v1, 2v2 all the way up to 7v9 should be practiced.

Research shows that the 2v1 is the most common scenario in football and this is also one of the hardest puzzles to solve for young players, as some young players don't want to take the easy route by passing, preferring to play 1v1 but sometimes losing the ball. Losing the ball isn't a problem if young players learn from it and realise that next time, instead of dribbling, they draw the defender to the ball before taking the easy and simple option of passing at the correct time and retaining possession.

Games like Futsal – 5v5 with a weighted ball and tall hockey type goals, and street football, where players organise their own teams with no referee, only democratic decisions made among the players are good ways to develop the 3 aspects mentioned. With street football, players make conscious moral decisions about free kicks without the aid of adults, so develop a better sense of rules and fair play amongst team mates and oppositions, leading to better enjoyment of the game.

Session Planning

I would normally spend around 2.5 of the 4 hours per week divided into 2 technical sessions of 1.5 hours during the session after a match, and 1 hour during the session before a match, on pressurised technical practices combined with a tactical element to the technique.

For example, a technical session with tactical elements;

Technical attacking and defending; Start off the session with players learning several 1v1 moves and the defenders learning body shape to press in a non-competitive environment. In attack, practice and learn how to do 2 or 3 moves to beat the opponent on both sides, with the defender learning when to stall, tackle or fake a tackle to unnerve the attacker.

The technical-tactical element;

A winger playing 1v1 against a full back to cross – initially focussing on 1v1 attacking moves and defensive positioning and mentality, moving onto positioning and marking inside the box, and movement and losing markers inside the box.

I would then add in midfielders to defend certain areas and tracking runners, looking at timing the run from midfield and losing the marker. From this, we can look to allow the defence to learn how to counter attack. This would be done over several training sessions until all players understand and recognise this scenario and understand how to deal with it in attack and defence.

Devise an amount of time that you would like to spend on Tactics, taking into account the differences, transferable skills and new rules between SSG's and 11-a-side play, for example,

- Small-sided Games tactics – 7 or 8 a side – incorporating offsides and no retreating line
- Playing in small groups in areas of congestion on an 11-a-side field and exit routes
- Creating space to receive or to drag away opponents
- New 11-a-side tactics – Offsides, defending as a back 4, Goal Kicks without a retreating line
- Attacking and corner kick routines – longer distances, how to improvise against this

Devise an amount of time you would like to spend on Technique, taking into account 11-a-side play, most skills are directly transferrable, for example,

- Short (7m), Medium (14m) and Long (21m) Passing
- Types of strikes for passing and shooting
- Shooting from varying angles and distances relevant to 7 and 11-a-side play
- Dribbling to eliminate players in different areas of the field i.e. within the 4-2-3-1 v 4-4-2

Devise an amount of time you would like to spend on Physical abilities, for example,

- Shuttle races to press the ball varying distances away
- Agility tests to allow the same player to press a 2nd or 3rd pass in tight spaces
- Brain reaction speed tests for transition play, off the ball movement and losing markers
- Balance and flexibility tests to develop ball protection and volleying
- Stamina, as the 11-a-side game will require lots of jogging for prolonged periods, technical play under fatigue is important as is tactical awareness under fatigue (concentration)

In most cases, you can combine different aspects of different abilities from one section, or 1 from each of Technical, Tactical or Physical. This can help maximise the minutes of each session.

For example, working on counter attacking in a 7-a-side game

The central midfielder has won possession on the edge of the box, and has the left winger available for a wide pass, or the striker for a pass forward. The attacking 3 play against a defending 3.

This can work on decision making for passing, and the next step – dribble or pass, where to pass, support runs, where to dribble, where run ahead of or from behind the ball. Players would think about positioning and moving ahead of the ball or staying behind the ball at the correct times.

You could add in that the attack must be completed in x amount of seconds – this adds in a physical element as the players must move quickly, but it's a technical challenge to play at speed under pressure while making good decisions – where to run, pass or dribble, and when to make these decisions.

Given that the 3v3 over 50 yards could also happen in 11v11, this part of training is directly transferable to the larger sided game. The aspects of the small-sided games transfer to the 11-a-side process but the distance of this play is vital to having players able to recognise when to take the initiative and attack the goal.

11-a-side match planning

While playing SSG's in the normal 7 or 8 a side format is vital and more important than planning ahead, players don't want to be lost during the next season, so matches of 11-a-side should be planned before the start of the new season to allow for the adjustment to it, but it also adds excitement for the players ahead of the new, competitive "Real Football" season. Some players view it as "Real Football" as it is what the adults play, but young players aren't adults and shouldn't be treated or given complex tasks that adults can perform.

To build up to 11-a-side, players should be subjected to gradual increases of player numbers, but within a tactical system and formation that they can adapt to. If the team normally plays a short passing game on a small field, this is good, but bear in mind that a field that they may be moving to could be as much as 30 yards longer than the current field they play on, so attacks could take longer to build into a scoring position.

The size of the field

When possible, move to 9 a side on a slightly longer field, box-box on an 11-a-side field is a good size and offers players a chance to see how much more width there is on the field (Approx. 74x60 yards).

For a team who plays 2-3-1, playing 3-1-3-1 will offer them an insight to playing with a wider defence – 2 side defenders and a central defender, with a holding midfielder in front, but with 3 attacking midfielders – 2 covering the sides and a central player who can drop back and help out the holding midfielder when out of possession.

The 3-1 attack will be familiar to the players and this should aid the speed of the transition to 11-a-side. A team playing 3-2-1 may find it easier to play with a 2-3-2-1 and have the side players of the 3 push on and act as the wide players, more like in a 3-5-2 or 4-3-2-1.

9 a side transitional formations - 3-1-3-1 v 2-3-2-1 (2-3-1 v 3-2-1)



The 2 teams have set up with a part of their usual formations. The Black, playing 3-1-3-1 have the attacking shape that they are familiar with being used, but instead of having 2 players behind the line of 3, they have a single holding midfielder, but a back 3 to allow 2 players to cover the sides in both defence and attack, like in the 4-2-3-1 they wish to use in the 11-a-side season.

The Yellows usually play with a 3-2-1 formation, and in this formation, they have simply place 2 defenders behind the line of 3, giving the 3 extra securities in transition when an attack ends, making a 2-3-2-1.

Both systems have allowed players some form of familiarity despite having 2 extra players in the new transitional formation. Both systems also have a single central holding midfielder which is vital -in developing both the 4-2-3-1 and 4-3-3 systems. Both systems have triangles in the system, although the 2-3-1 has not become a 2-2-3-1 because playing from defence to midfield would've meant that the 2 holding midfielders would've needed to understand to know when to pull wide to offer a wide pass into a full back position – playing the 3-1 allows this to be an easier understanding. Again, both systems are similar because of the use of a lone striker – common in modern football.

Once players have gained an understanding of the extra 2 players and the new roles, you can move to 10 a side and find that playing 3-2-3-1 can help start the process of a see-saw pressing system in midfield, midfield triangulation when passing forward and often defenders will become more attacking in the form of full backs in the back 3.

In 7-a-side, the 3-2-1 formation allows for both full backs able to attack the space on the sides and have a midfield triangle and diamond between the 3-2-1 set up, but many coaches would rather keep the defence tight and prohibit the side defenders from moving forward to support the attack.

I must point out that in my experience, a coach playing with a rigid 3-2-1 formation at 7 aside will likely move to a 3-3-1 or 3-3-2 and ultimately a 4-4-2 when 11v11 arises, which may help you plan ahead and teach your young players how to use the 2v1 and 3v2 scenarios that will occur in central midfield to control the game, although the same could be said for a coach playing 2-3-1, I have found that these coaches normally play a little more creatively and give young players more freedom when playing.

Structuring friendlies and giving challenges to bridge the gap from SSG's to 11-a-side football

When structuring friendlies, bear in mind that it may take several matches for the players to get used to the new width of the field, so be patient! The game is more complex, much larger and takes time to adapt to.

Try to play at least 3 games of 9v9 on a box-box field, preferably with transition goals (in between the sizes of 7v7 and 11v11 goals) as this effects the attacking angles and distance the ball will travel with young players – I coached a team on this size of field with 7v7 goals and it finished 0-0 because both teams played a wide game and crosses were barely reaching the front post as there were small, tricky dribblers on both sides who would normally only have to pass across the goal no more than 15 yards to a team mate to shoot. Changing to cross/pass over double that distance is a massive effort. After 3 games, players should start to feel more comfortable in their new game, so giving specific tactical and technical challenges in both attack and defence can help focus players to a task to perform during the match.

Challenges that could be given have a challenge sheet with which player is on which challenge marked.

Coaches should be creative but realistic given the players abilities. Players can choose their next challenge if they complete the challenge given to them before half time. Here are some examples;

Individual Attacking Challenges – Increase with success and relevant ability levels

- Complete 5 x 1 touch passes
- Complete 3 x 1v1 dribbles
- Complete 3 x 1-2's
- Have a shot on target from outside the box
- Have 3 shots on target from inside the box
- Complete 3 switches of play from the central zone to a wide player
- Receive the ball on one foot and pass with the other 10 times
- Each player has 2 designated moves to try each time they have possession in a 1v1 scenario

Collective Attacking Challenges – Increase with success and relevant ability levels

- Keep possession for 15 passes – 1 'coach's goal' given to the team. How many per match?
- All players must touch the ball before trying to score
- Play with 3 touches maximum for 10 minutes of a match
- Play possession up to the half way line for 10 minutes without trying to score
- Retain possession inside the opposition half for 1 minute before trying to score
- Only attempt through balls with 1 touch and score with a 1 touch finish

Individual Defensive Challenges – Increase with success and relevant ability levels

- Make 3 clean tackles
- Win a header – a header that is passed to a team mate is worth 3 points
- 'Double-up' on an opponent to win possession
- Intercept 3 passes and retain possession with the next pass
- Block a cross

Collective Defensive Challenges - Increase with success and relevant ability levels

- Concede no shots on target
- Defend from the front and win possession to have a shot on goal
- Allow no crosses

Giving players' challenges to try during non-competitive matches can help build confidence in their ability, but also can be a way to avoid running up scores that don't help anyone, games over 5-0 don't help the confidence of the opposing team, and don't provide a challenge to the dominating team. Winning the game and completing a challenge or two can give a mismatched game a bit of validity.

Offside – a new concept for young players moving to 11v11

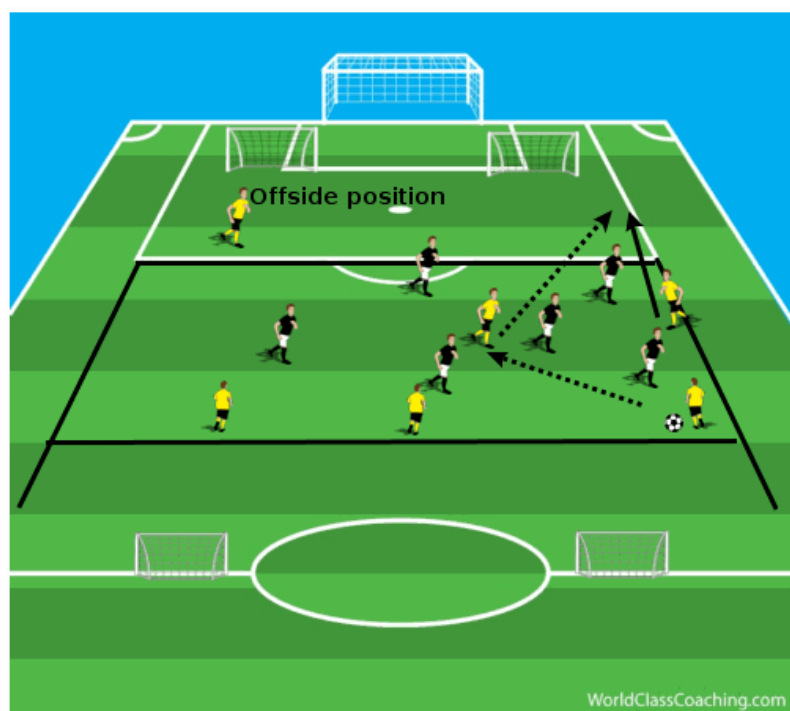
From organising friendlies 6 months before the start of the new season, try to make practices and play matches where players learn to play with offsides – many young players don't understand and will run forward when they see a chance to receive the ball behind the defence, and often they run too early or were never onside before the ball is passed. Planning and educating for this can help players feel more comfortable with the move to 11v11 and in some cases, allow the players to feel more confident as they may believe that they "know more than the opposition" according to one of my old players.

Offside when defending is also an entirely new concept for young players, as in 7v7, the defenders would chase back and try to make sure the attacker cannot shoot – in the 11v11 game, they need to recognise times when they don't need to run back with an opponent and this can take some players years to learn. Also, with offside being introduced, defending as a team becomes important, as many teams in 7v7 football will simply put one player who is really fast in defence with a more solid defender, who as a pair don't really operate as a unit; one will run after the ball and an opponent while one marks another player, sometimes with neither of the players being close to the goal.

Defensive players should be encouraged to look along the line during the 7-a-side matches and try to make sure there is never more than 8 yards between the defenders, as this will help with the central defensive cohesion moving up to 11v11 with offsides.

To allow players a chance to work out *how* to play offside in both attack and defence, the coach must provide simple, easy to understand practices for young players that fit with their emotional age, physical age and with enough room in the practice to stimulate creativity and problem solving.

An easy to understand practice to introduce timing runs and passes to break an offside line



Mark out a box which is 44 yards wide and 25 yards long with 2 goals to score into 12 yards behind the 'Offside line' at the edges of the box. Players can pass behind the offside line into a player who has run from deep (behind the line) to receive the ball. In the image above, the player in the centre receives the ball and having scanned over his shoulder before receiving, he knows he cannot pass to the far side as his team mate is in an offside position, but he has a player running into the scoring zone while staying onside.

Coaching Points:

- Defensive players dropping back into the offside zone become the 'offside line' – push up!
- Attackers must time runs by evaluating when a passing lane into the end zone becomes open
- Passing into the end zone requires knowing where and when to pass the ball, and a visual agreement between the runner who receives and the passer
- Think ahead of the game and play with unpredictability, change passing angles, change positions

Progressions/Variations:

- Play with a single large goal and allow the GK to sweep up through balls that are over-hit
- Goals can be scored from anywhere to prevent defenders from only protecting through balls
- Make a game of 1 point for each successful through pass and 1 point for each onside run, while defenders get 1 point per interception of a through ball. Who can make the most accumulative points?

In this simple to organise game, players have a simple objective to think about – stay onside when receiving, and look for the correct pass to a player who will be onside.

As the players get more accustomed to the offside rule, you can make the defenders the offside line, but only when inside their own half, like in a match, making the practice more relevant, and you can ask questions of the players of when to step up and play offside, or which scenario's require you to drop back and cover to prevent a player running through on goal.

Structuring friendlies to practice 11v11 with 11v11 rules

In the 6 months prior to the new 11v11 season, structure the friendlies so that as mentioned previously there is a gradual increase in the amount of players and the size of the field over several game, and play 11v11 when there is a break – summer or winter breaks generally have around 8 weeks between the end and start of a new season, so given that most teams have a 4 week preparation period over the break, you should fit in around 4 friendlies of 11 v 11 and give each player specific challenges for both attack and defence in their designated positions, giving players the opportunities to try out different areas of the field as you would in 7v7 or 8v8 football.

Why should players play in new positions when moving to 11v11? Some players may have played as a right centre back in 7v7, but in 11v11, his attributes or playing style may mean it is more beneficial for them to play at right back or central midfield, so playing in new positions can give the coach new ideas for the team and can often provide players the chance to play in their preferred area of the field, sometimes in positions the coach never knew the player wanted to play in or could play in.

Making a 6 month training schedule to prepare for 11-a-side football – Ages 11 and 12

In the development process leading to 11v11, Futsal, 3v3s with 4 goals and 5v5s should not be stopped just because the players will be playing a larger game. As I mentioned before, the game is much more complex and giving players easier problems to solve will aid the development of the players much faster than if they are continually subjected to larger sided games.

Whenever possible, use small-sided games as the main way to develop the players physically, technically and tactically, but find a balance between 11v11 tactical practices and 7v7/8v8, for example using a half field for defence v attack - 4-2 formation, against attack maybe a 3-3-1, using 14 players as an example.

Building blocks of physical development – the 1st 15 minutes of the session after the warm up should be dedicated to one of, or multiple components of the following aspects of football fitness;

- **Agility**
- **Speed**
- **Endurance**
- **Sprint Stamina**
- **Balance**
- **Reaction Speed**
- **Flexibility**

All aspects are equally important and although Speed and Endurance are the most easily recognisable ones, reaction speed, balance and agility are all important factors to recovering loose balls or retaining possession under pressure. Flexibility aids injury prevention but is also vital in aspects such as volleying or reaching to block shots.

Technical Development –

Different techniques can be used in multiple scenarios, so instead of ‘Passing’ you could work on different types of pass; for example, curled and backspin passes could be used for long range passing distances of over 25m. An Instep strike could be used for a firm pass over medium distance (up to 25m) but also to shoot with over medium distances

- **Ball mastery**
- **Inside of the foot strike**
- **Instep strike**
- **Backspin strikes**
- **Curled strikes**
- **Free kick and corner taking**
- **Volleying**
- **Toe pokes**
- **Back heel**
- **Instep, outstep and sole control**
- **Aerial control – chest, thigh, foot**

- 1st touch direction
- 1v1 moves – opponent in front
- 1v1 moves – opponent on the side
- 1v1 moves – opponent behind
- Ball protection
- Protect turns
- Turning when recovering possession
- Scanning and awareness

Tactical Development

- Positioning between the lines
- Width in possession
- Depth in possession
- Penetration play
- Counter attacking
- Offering passing lanes
- Playing with a deep defence
- Playing with a balanced defence
- Playing with high pressure defending
- Pressing and pressing triggers
- Covering spaces between the lines and behind the line of pressure

New 11v11 Possibilities

- Playing with a zonal back 4
- Playing with a midfield over 2 lines (4-2-3-1)
- Defending as a block in defence and midfield
- Defending as a block between midfield and attack
- Offsides in defence and attack

Session Plan Structure – Based on coaching for 3 hours per week, over 6 months (48 sessions of 90mins)

0-10 Mins – Light Warm Up

10-25 Mins – Physical Development

25-40 Mins – Basic Technique

40-60 Mins – Technique in a Tactical Phase

60-75 Mins – Tactical Development

75-90 Mins – Conditioned Match based on Technical/Tactical elements of the session

During conditioned games, effective questioning should be used instead of stop-start methods.

Month 1 – 8 sessions (12 hours)

Aim – Players should have an understanding of how to play in small groups, from 2v1 up to 7v7 in both attack and defence

Month 2 – 8 sessions (12 hours)

Aim - Players should be able to understand how to open up and offer new passing lanes to combine with team mates

Month 3 – 8 sessions (12 hours)

Aim – Players should be able to understand how to protect the ball and retain possession under pressure

Month 4 Aim – 8 sessions (12 hours)

Aim - Players should be able to understand how and when to change positions and when to play between the lines to receive possession

Month 5 – 8 sessions (12 hours)

Aim – Players should be able to understand how to make runs beyond the back 4 and stay onside, but also how to activate an offside trap with a high line, and the principle of only play offside when there is pressure on the ball

Month 6 – 8 sessions and 4 x 11v11 matches (12 hours)

Aim – Players should be able to understand how to press from the front, how to defend deep and as a unit of 4 over both defence and midfield line, and work on various set pieces before the start of the new season.

During matches, especially as the games are uncompetitive in the sense of that winning isn't really important, the coach should be asking the players what specific objectives or challenges they will give themselves to try during the match, and give the team a collective objective or challenge to gauge development levels.

Remember; some of the information practiced during the weeks sessions can take several weeks or even months before it is fully understood, so patience is critically important over the whole development process. Things that were practiced in the 1st week may start to show through in week 6 for some young players, so continue to monitor what they have practiced previously and ask questions of what they done well to what they didn't do so well. Do this on a 5:1 ratio - 5 positive : 1 negative.

Positive reinforcement should be used whenever possible and keep negative comments to a minimum, especially in front of the other players. The best method is to have a chat with a player in private and have a more informal chat about football and find out how they perceive training and matches to be going, and what they can do to improve themselves as players.

Below, I will give example sessions for the 1st 3 sessions of month 1, and a starter session for each other month, which will be 8 sessions, which can lead to lots of different variables such as how the sessions develop leading to the style of play, players roles and mentalities, and which formations to use.

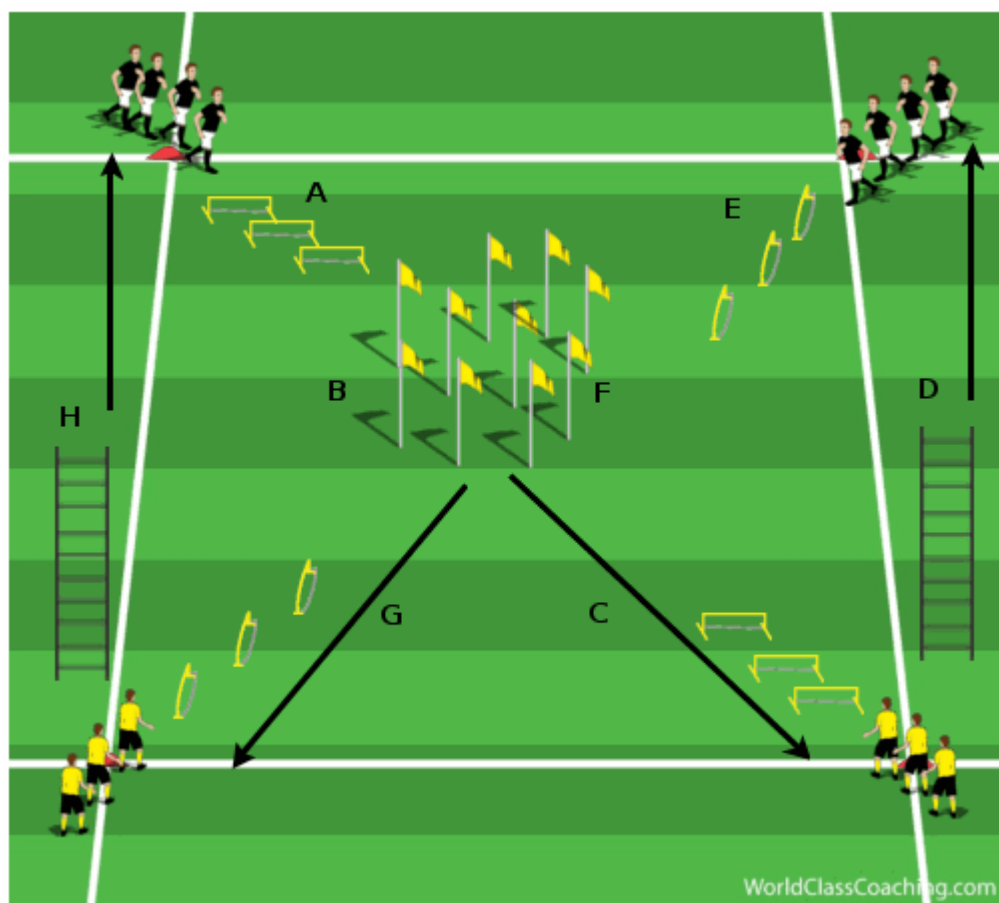
Month 1 – 8 sessions (12 hours)

Aim – Players should have a well-rounded education in different techniques, and an understanding of how to play in small groups, from 2v1 up to 7v7 in both attack and defence – Focus on Small Group Play and SSG's.

Month 1 Week 1, Session 1 – All sessions are 90 minutes

Warm Up – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development – 15 minutes. Agility, Speed, Plyometric.



Players stand on the corners of a 30x30 yard box.

Players at position A and E must follow in one rotational direction, players in Yellow at C and G move the opposite way, moving from C-B-A-H-G-F-E-D-C.

Start with Black at (A) - jump over the hurdles (A), sprint to quickly move through the poles (B), then sprint across to The other side – the sprint is 12 metres (C).

From the sprint, players continue round the corner to the agility ladder (D), performing 2 steps in each space (one on each foot) then sprint 12 metres to section E.

From E, the players perform two-footed sideways jumps over and back of each hurdle, then move to the next ones. After performing 6 sideways jumps, moves quickly through the poles before sprinting around the corner to the agility ladder, where players do this sideways with 1 step in each space, finishing with a 12 metre sprint back to A.

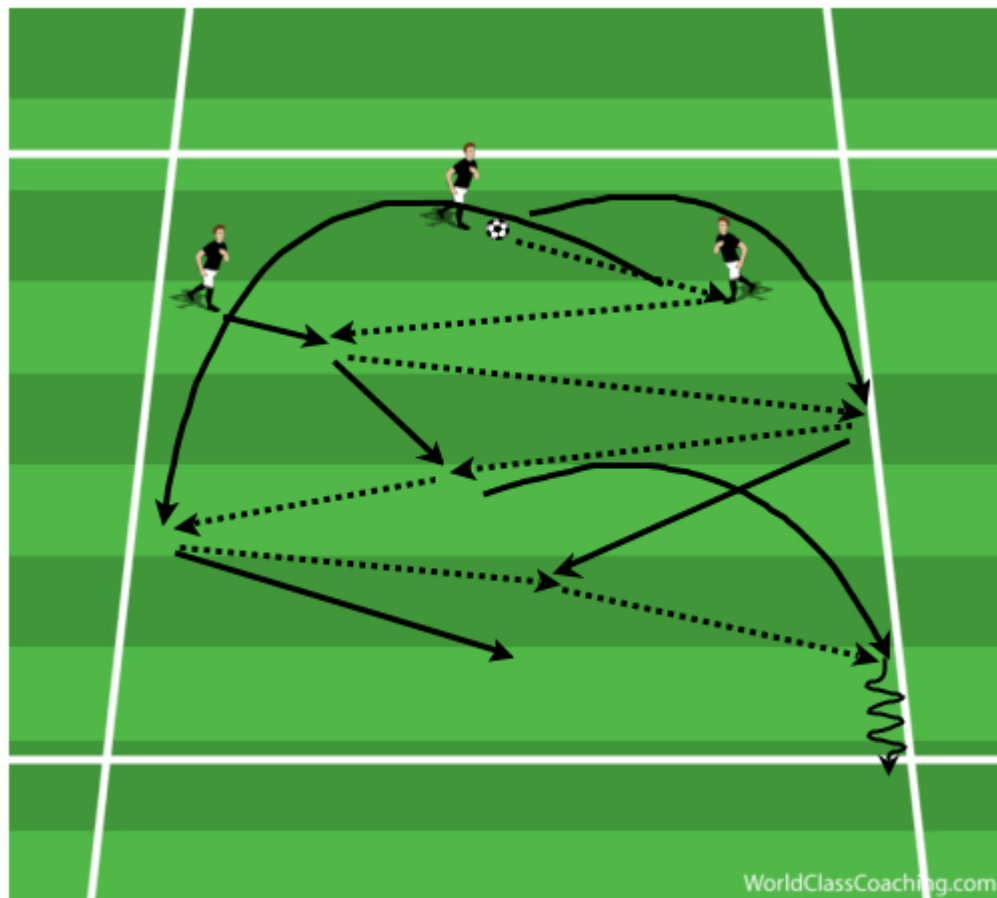
Coaching Points:

- Keep heels off the ground
- When turning sharply to the left, brake with the left foot, bring the right hip round as you accelerate to straighten the hips and accelerate with the right foot
- Minimal contact time with the floor with the toes on each step in running and agility ladder work
- Move the hips, shoulders and head as you move through the poles, keeping the hips facing the final acceleration point
- Eyes up to avoid traffic

Activity 2 – Basic Technical Development

Passing and overlapping in 3's – 15x15 yard box.

Progression: Add in a single defender (3v1) then a 2nd Defender (3v2)



Players pass then immediately overlap the player they passed to, so that the player in possession always has an option to the left and right. If a switch pass is over 12 yards, the receiver should move inside to meet the ball and possibly dribble inside before switching and overlapping.

When the game becomes 3v1, the same principles still apply; the player in possession wants an option both left and right. When the game becomes 3v2, the principles still apply but try to isolate a defender in a 2v1 on one side to find a way across the end line.

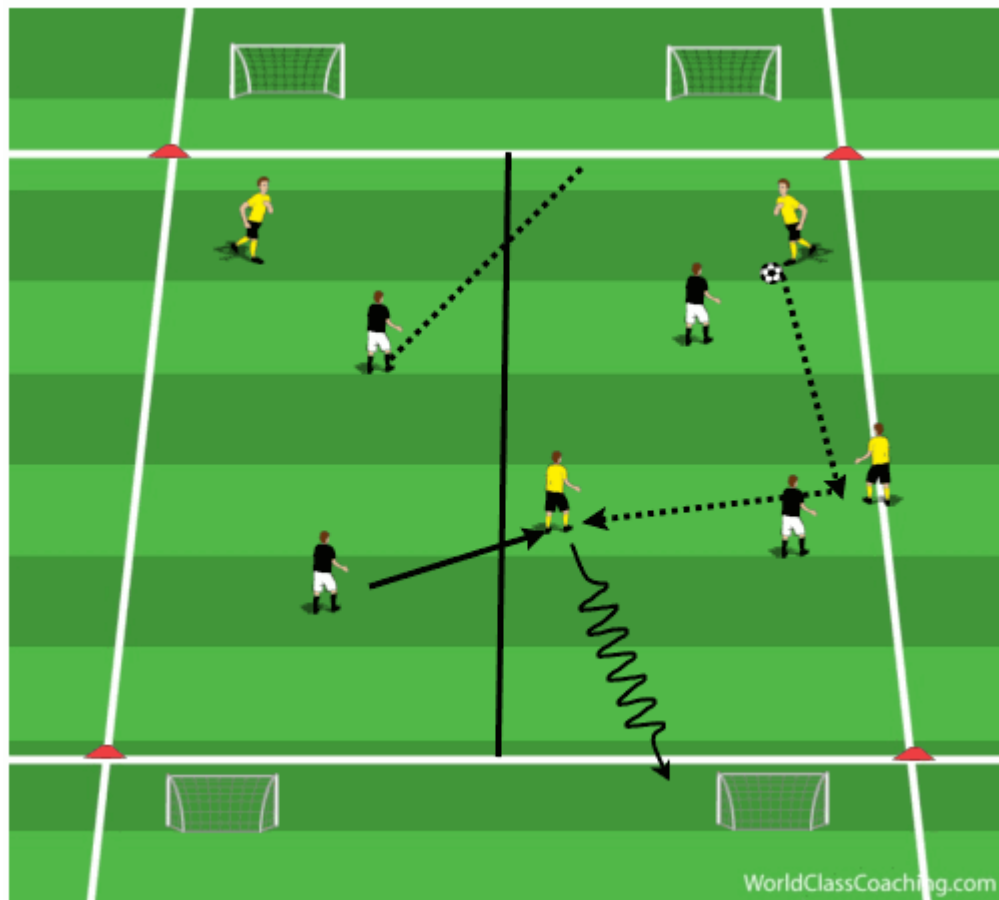
Coaching Points:

- Accurate passes into the stride of team mates
- Receive on the far side foot
- 1st touch direction towards the next action (pass or dribble)
- Quick overlap
- Communication on far side 'Switch play' and from overlapping player to 'Hold'

- Think ahead of the game and make early decisions
- Protect the ball
- Isolate opponent 2v1 in 3v2 game

Technique in a Tactical Phase

4v4 Attacking Overload Game



Set up a 16x24 yard box, with a goal 4 yards behind the edge of the box and a central partition down the centre (24x24). Both teams must defend a goal on each side of the central partition. Attackers can move into the opposite half to make a 3v2, but defenders cannot change zone, allowing for 3v2 overloading.

Coaching Points:

- Pass and change positions when close to the goal. In the example above, the 1st passer could make a run across the front of the 3rd player for a lay off or to attack the opposite side 3v2 into 2 goals
- Alternatively, the far side player could make a run forward into the space to make a different 3v2
- Look to support and offer passing lanes to exploit 2v1s when possible, like above
- Time the run across to the other zone

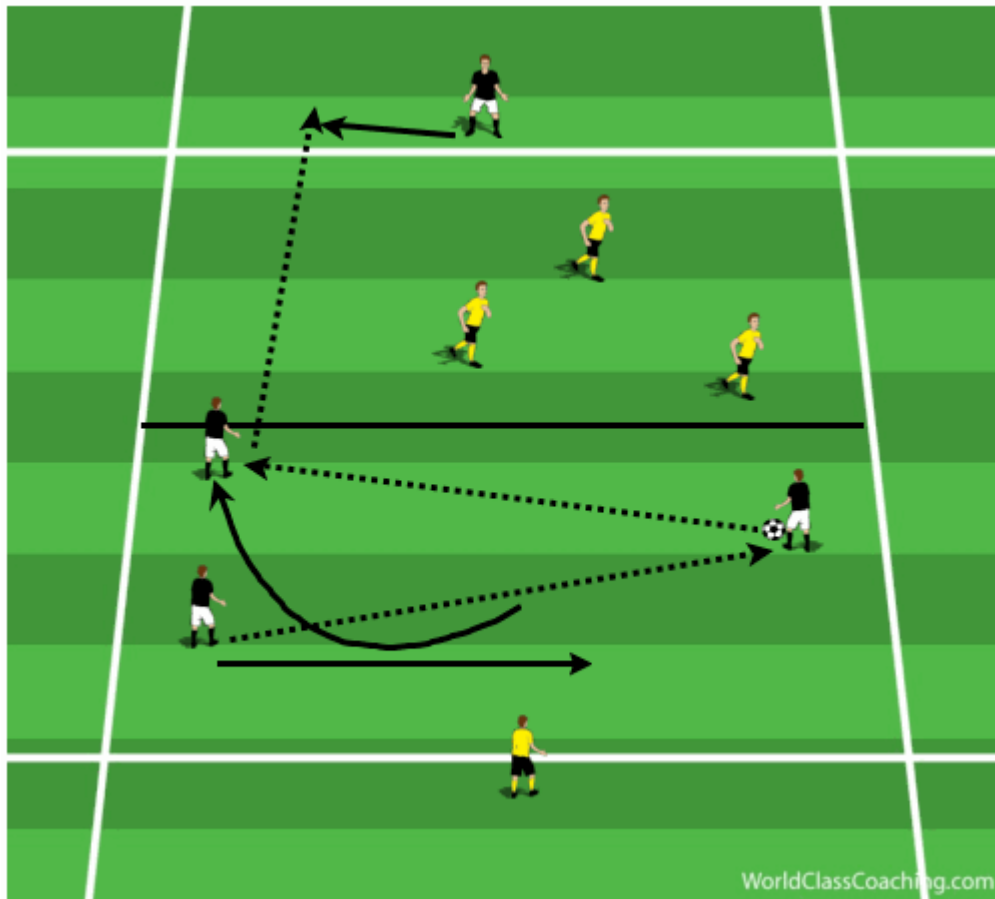
- When possession is won, look to counter out the other side and make a 2v1 of your own

Progressions/Variations:

- Play the game with a GK in a larger goal 12 yards behind the line– once you cross the line you can shoot, same overall game principles apply.

Tactical Development

Pressing and covering spaces in small groups – 3v3 + Target player



Mark out a 24x12 yard box, split into 2x12 yard boxes. Players pass and move inside the box and try to find a space to pass through to the target man on the far side. The defence must move as a unit, blocking passing lanes and moving to cover each other each time the ball changes position.

If the ball is touched out during an interception, the opposite team start with a pass from the end line (service line). If the ball is passed out, the opposite team start on the service line. If a player takes more than 2 touches, the opposite team re-start on the service line.

To win, the target man must receive 3 passes into his feet that he can control with 1 touch on the floor. Play for 3 minutes each match and change the target man every 3 minutes. Keep scores and be competitive!

Coaching Points:

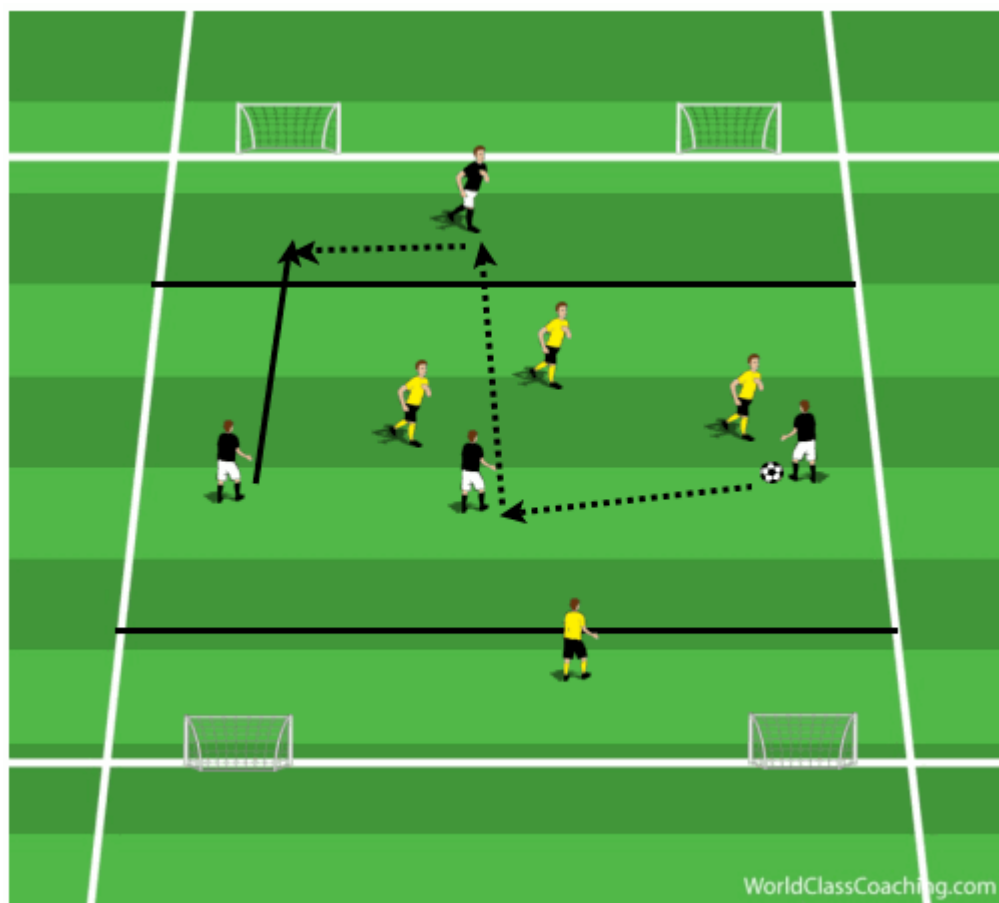
- Defensive players should try to anticipate the forward pass and intercept it
- Get close to the ball and reduce the forward passing angles
- Play narrow when the ball is central and move wide with the pass to the side
- Attacking players should try and pass forward 1st time to improve the speed of the attack

Progressions/Variations:

- Target Man receives, turns and shoots at a small target 12 yards behind him. If he scores, he gets 3 points and a win. If he misses, the team still score one point, the game continues.

Conditioned Game

3 Zone Game – 4v4



In the 4v4, the only way to score is from a 1 touch lay off from the target man into a supporting run.

Rotate target men around every 3 minutes.

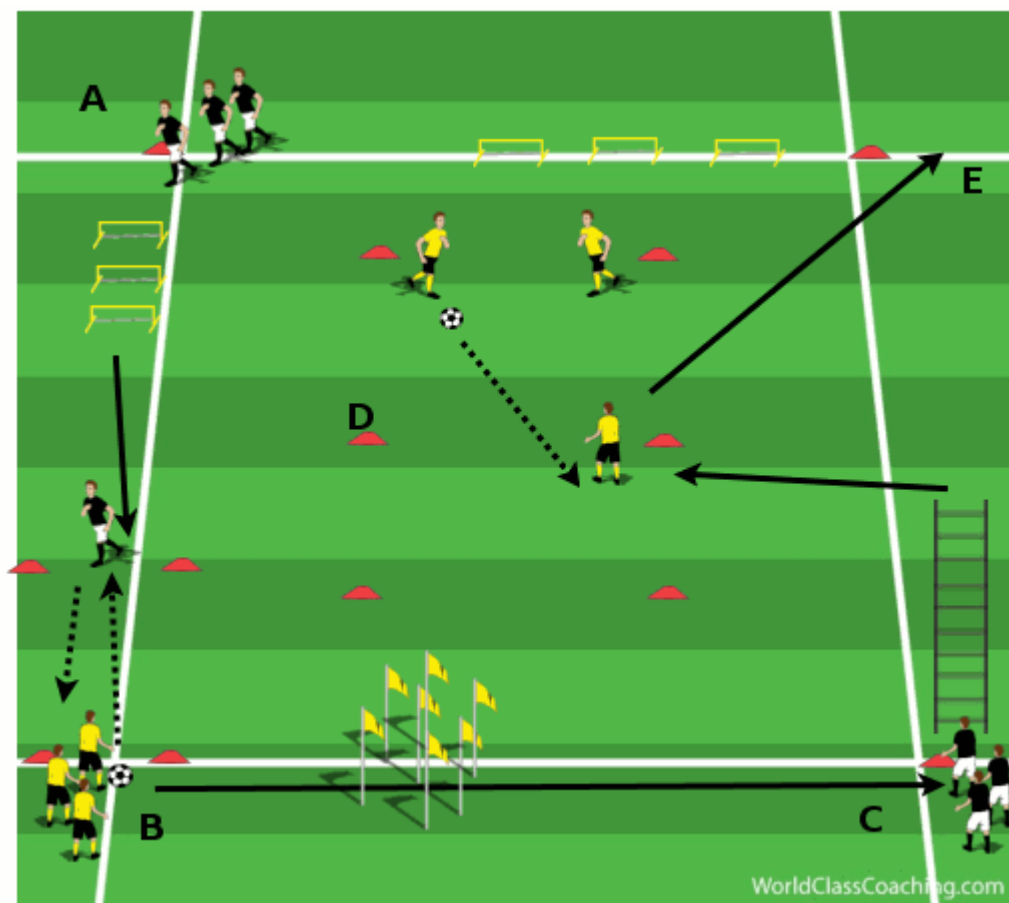
Allow players to play the game without coaching interruptions, only asking questions of the players about decision making, positioning and movement off the ball.

Remember; the player in possession wants options to the left and right, maintain triangulation.

Month 1 Week 1, Session 2

Warm Up – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development – Speed, Agility, Plyometric



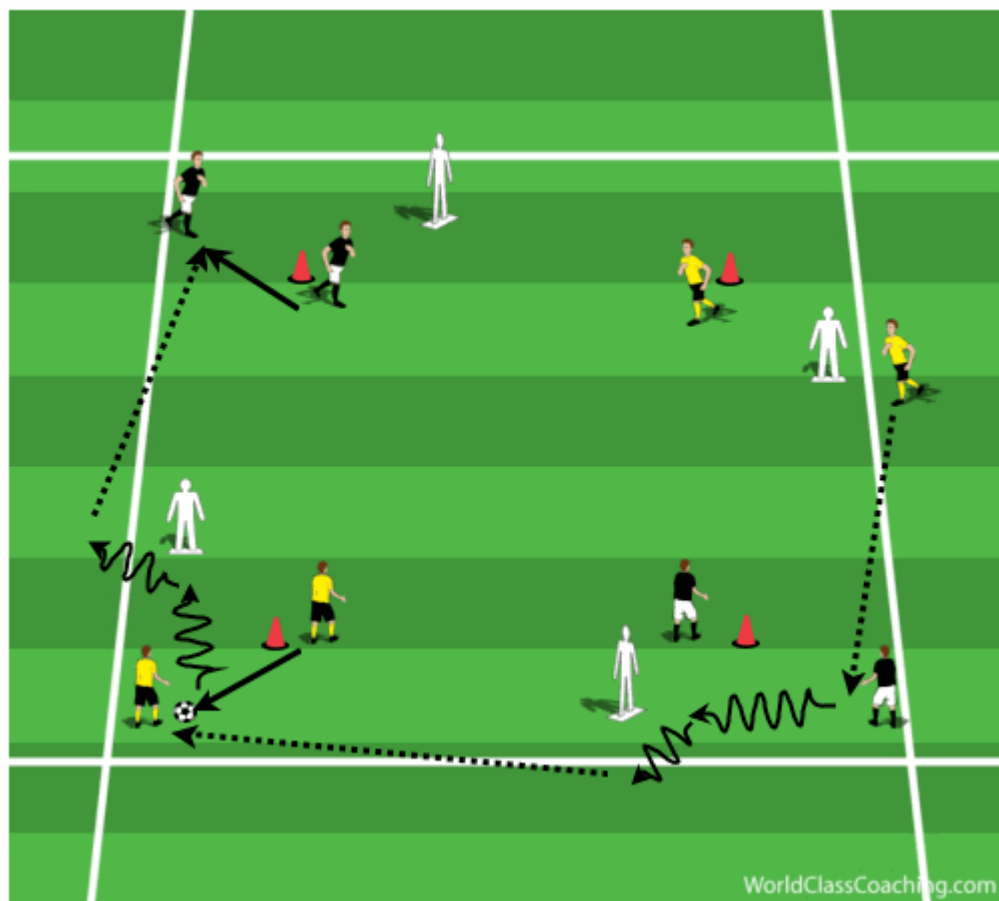
Section A – Jump over the 3 hurdles, and then sprint to receive the pass from the 1st player at section B. The 2nd player at section B will receive the return pass.

From section B, run through the poles then to section C. Section C, agility ladder – criss-crosses diagonally across the ladder, touching 1 foot inside the space and one outside the ladder.

Section D, pass and move – recovery period. When the next group enter the box, high 5 then leave D to move to E and do two-footed jumps over and back over the hurdles then move to A.

Activity 2 – Basic Technical Development

Receiving to dribble, body shape to receive, 1st touch orientation, moves to beat an opponent



Mark out a 16x16 yard box, place a mannequin 6 yards from each corner.

The 1st player dribbles at the mannequin, perform a move to beat an opponent then make the next pass to the next player who has checked away from the cone to receive and dribble.

Coaching Points:

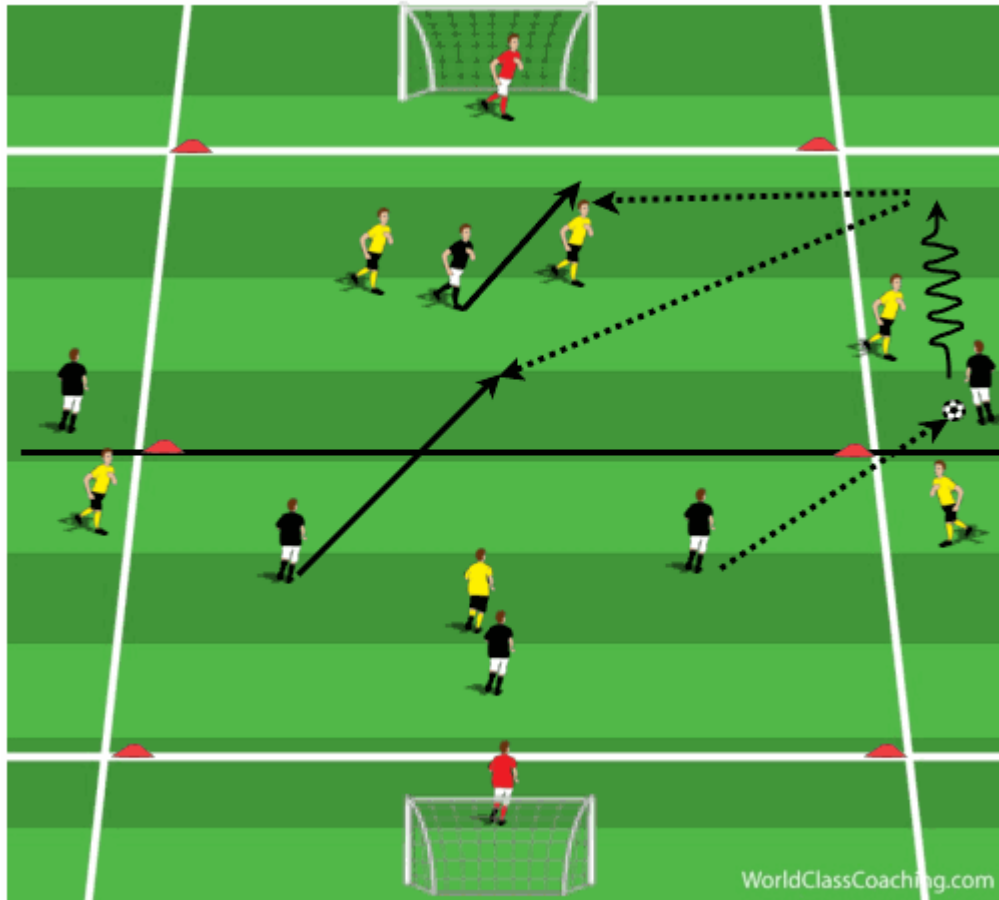
- Timing of the movement to receive
- Body shape on the receive
- 1st touch direction to go 1v1 directly
- Move selection and technique
- Stride adjustment to make the last pass

Progression/Variations:

- Players have 4 different moves to use – 1 on each mannequin

- Receive a pass in front of a mannequin (move the mannequin 6 yards back) to receive, use a crossover or another fake then spin away

Technique in a tactical phase – 1v1 to cross



Mark out a box 40 yards long by 20 yards wide, with a 6 yard wide zone outside the field on both sides (40x32). Split the box into 2 halves of 20 yards.

Inside the deepest half, the game is 3v1, the 3 must pass the ball out to the winger on the side who plays 1v1 against a player of the 3 defenders on the other side who exits the main box to become the full back.

One of the 3 players inside the initial box can move forward and support the attack, effectively making a 3v3 in the final 3rd. The winger must dribble past to cross or cutback or inside the full back then switch play either directly to the opposite winger or indirectly via the supporting player and exit the field again to maintain a 3v3.

Coaching Points:

- Pass wide and attack 1v1 quickly

- Unbalance the defender and try to go past him
- Eyes up to find the next pass
- Good movement to loose opponents and be able to receive to score
- Minimal touches, shoot 1st time if possible
- Speed in transition to counter attack if possession is won by the defence

Progressions/Variations:

- The winger can cut inside to play a narrow 3v3
- The pass wide can be followed with an overlap to make a 2v1 on the side and a 4v3 attack overload
- The far side winger can drop deep and tuck inside to help the defence and make a 4v4

Tactical Development

Keeping possession in small, narrow groups v wide play in transition



Within the same space as above, the 32 yard box is split up into a 20 yard box with 2 x 6 yard zones down the sides. The 6 must keep possession and score once all players have touched the ball, the 4 must win possession and transfer the ball wide to the wingers who will counter attack on the sides.

Allow players to play without interruption, only ask questions about positioning on the sides, decision making in possession, movement off the ball and runs off the ball in transition.

Change the teams over to 6v4 for the opposite team after 7 minutes.

Conditioned Game

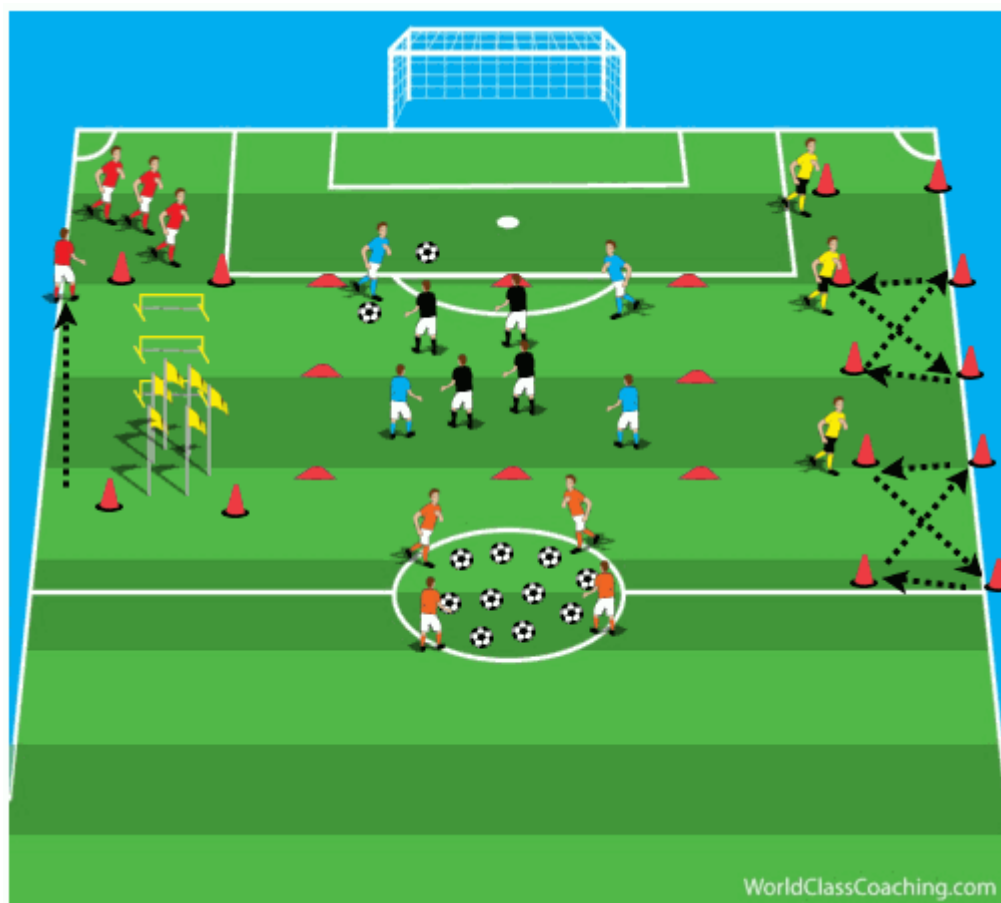
Using the same set up as above, a goal can only be scored from a pass from the wide zone; there can be no more than 1 defensive player in that zone, but up to 3 attacking players inside the zone.

Alternatively, remove the goal keepers and play a 6 goal game on the same field with small goals.

Month 1 Week 2, Session 1

Warm Up – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development – Speed, agility, reactions



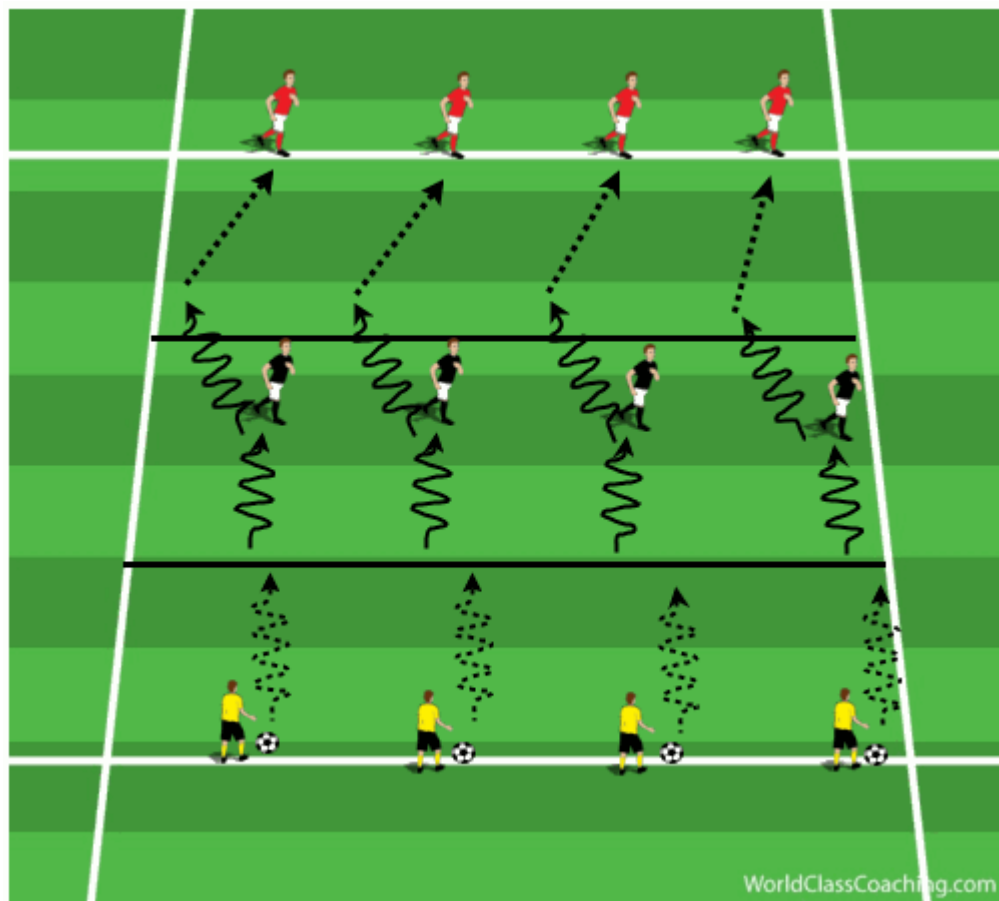
Red section – Hop legged over 3 hurdles, before moving quickly between the poles at the end, before returning to repeat.

Blue v Black; Possession 4v4. If possession is lost, 5 press ups or other conditioning movement.

Yellow Section – Agility test – Saltire runs; Race between players

Orange Section – The 4 players dribble the ball between the other balls. On the coaches' clap/whistle, players stop the ball and take a new one to continue dribbling with in a new direction.

Technical Development

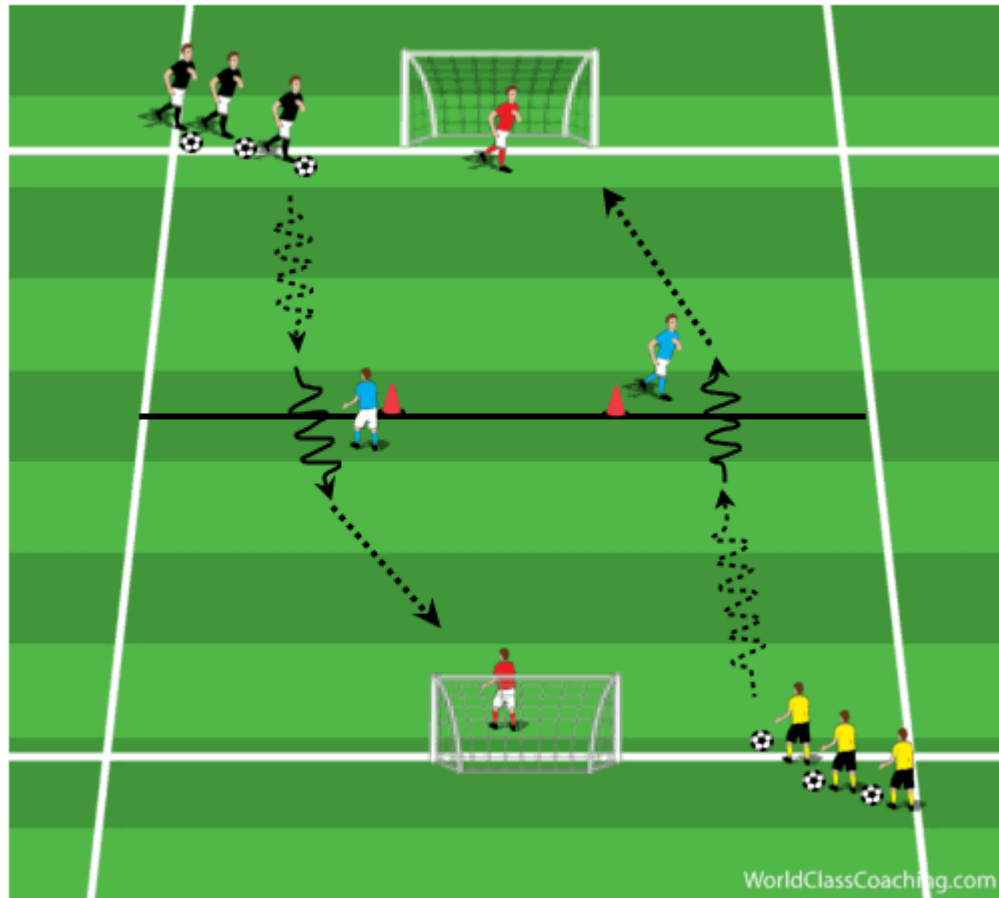


The Yellow player will perform juggles while walking into the 2nd zone where he will play (passive) 1v1 against the black player, then after crossing the last line, pass on the run into the Red player, who will repeat what Yellow just did. Change the passive defender over after 2 minutes.

Variations:

- Instead of juggling, perform various Ball Mastery excersizes
- Instead of a simple pass at the end, play a double 1-2

Technique in a Tactical Situation – Attacking the last defender to score



Begin the activity with a simple technical exercise, for example; juggling or ball mastery in the 1st half of the field.

Progress the activity further by adding an overlapping team mate to make a 2v1 scenario. This is both a technical development exercise but moving to 2v1 and 2v2 adds in the tactical development – positioning, decision making and timing of decisions.

Coaching Points:

- Be conscious of the need to score – don't dribble into a shooting position from an acute angle
- Use the overlap as a decoy or a way to pull the defender out of where you want a return pass to
- If possible, use the defender as a guide to curl the ball into the far corner
- In the 2v2, try to isolate 1 player in a 2v1 and exploit it

Tactical Development

3 zone game with wingers channels and a 4v4 elimination game in the centre. 5mins then change wingers.

This game is designed to encourage dribbling in varying game situations in both central and wide areas.

Players in the centre should dribble past an opponent to shoot, or away from an opponent to create space for the next action, wide players should dribble 1v1 to cross or if possible, cut inside and shoot or pass to the far post.

The game works also on defensive abilities in both 1v1 and small group scenario's and anticipation of the next action from the dribble.

Again, no coaching during the game, only questions to the players about decisions, positioning and possibilities from where the ball is, and how to react to the situation.



If in the central zone, you are dribbled past, or feinted when pressing from behind, you are eliminated from the game. If the game becomes 4v1, the wide players should tuck in to replay the game 4v3 in the centre.

The only exception is the wingers channels, who gain 1 point for each time they beat their opponent and either; retain possession, cross to a team mate who receives the ball, or shoot on target.

Players shouldn't be eliminated for more than 2 minutes, enough time to give the opposition the advantage. In this time, they should practise their own 1v1 moves and defensive positioning if a 2nd player is out.

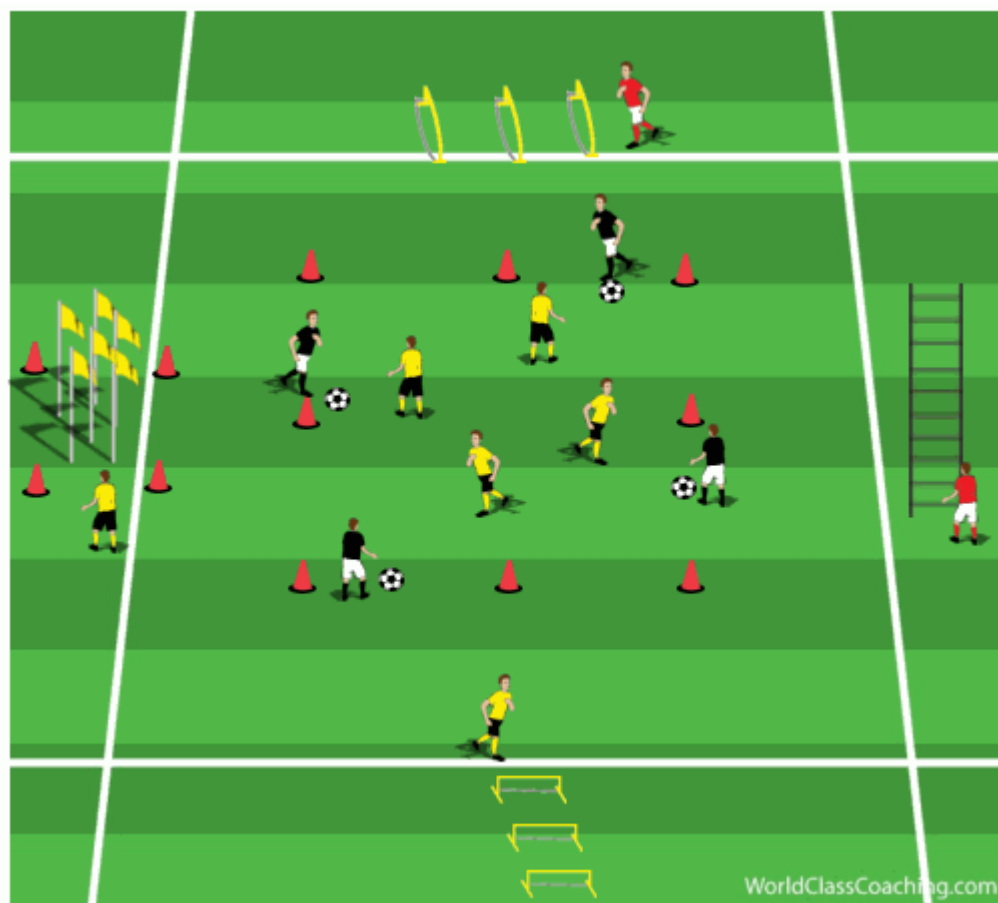
The winger with the most points in each 5 minute game is declared the winner in that group of 4 wingers, while the team who scores the most goals are the winners.

Month 2, Week 1, Session 1

Aim – Opening and offering new passing lanes to combine with team mates

Warm Up – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development

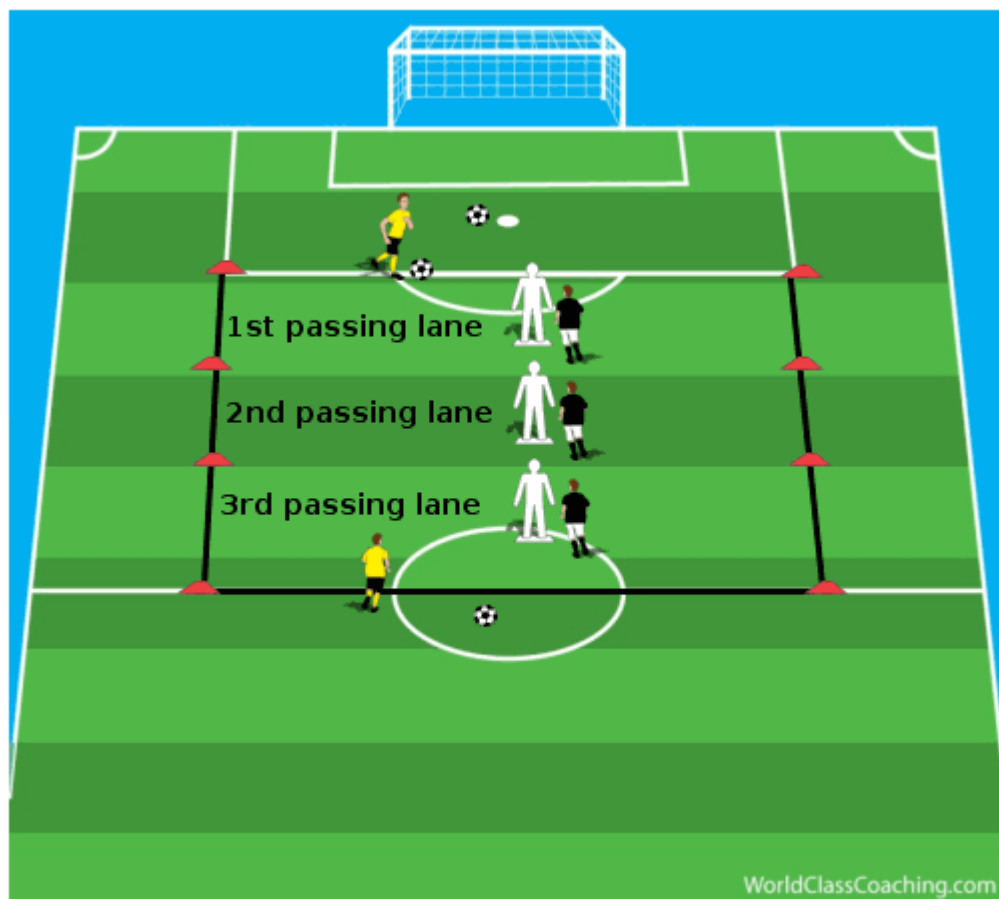


Make a 15x15 yard box inside and a 24 x 24 yard box on the outside.

The 4 black players inside the box are feeders, Yellows receive and pass back. The players outside; Red and Yellow move around the circuit on the outside. The Reds on the outside switch with the Yellows, Yellows switch with Blacks, so that all players rotate – Physical, Passer, Feeder.

Technical Development

Opening passing lanes and watching the movements of team mates to open the next passing lane.



The Feeders in yellow are the end target players. The player in the 1st passing lane checks away from the ball and opens up his body to pass into the player in the 2nd passing lane, who will open up his body to receive and pass to the player in the 3rd passing lane who checks away from the ball and offers another diagonal pass into feet. Player 3 will turn and pass into the feeder on the other side.

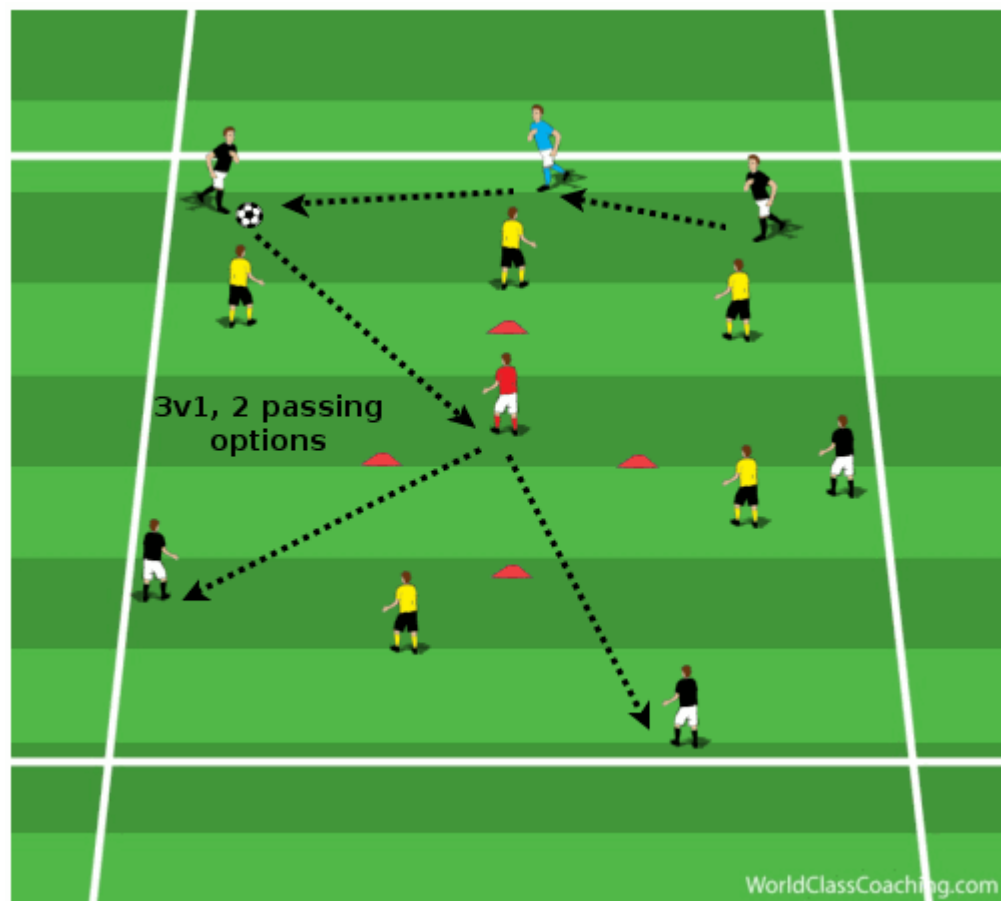
Coaching Points:

- Scan over the shoulders to see the movements of other players
- 1st touch towards the next pass – any surface, inside, outside or sole
- Pass into the far side foot
- Receive with one foot, pass with the other

Progressions/Variations:

- Pass into the 2nd passing lane, to pass back to 1, pass forward into 3, back into 2 then feeder
- Pass into the 1st passing lane, into 3, back to 2 then into feeder
- Pass into 3rd, back to 1, into 2, then 3 to feeder

Technical within a Tactical Phase



Mark out a 30x30 yard box. Place an 8x8 yard diamond inside it at the centre.

The Red player must continually move within the central diamond to offer passing lanes in and out of the diamond. The blue player is a playmaker for both teams, giving an extra passing option when in possession. Teams get 1 point for each time the ball is passed into the red and back out to retain possession.

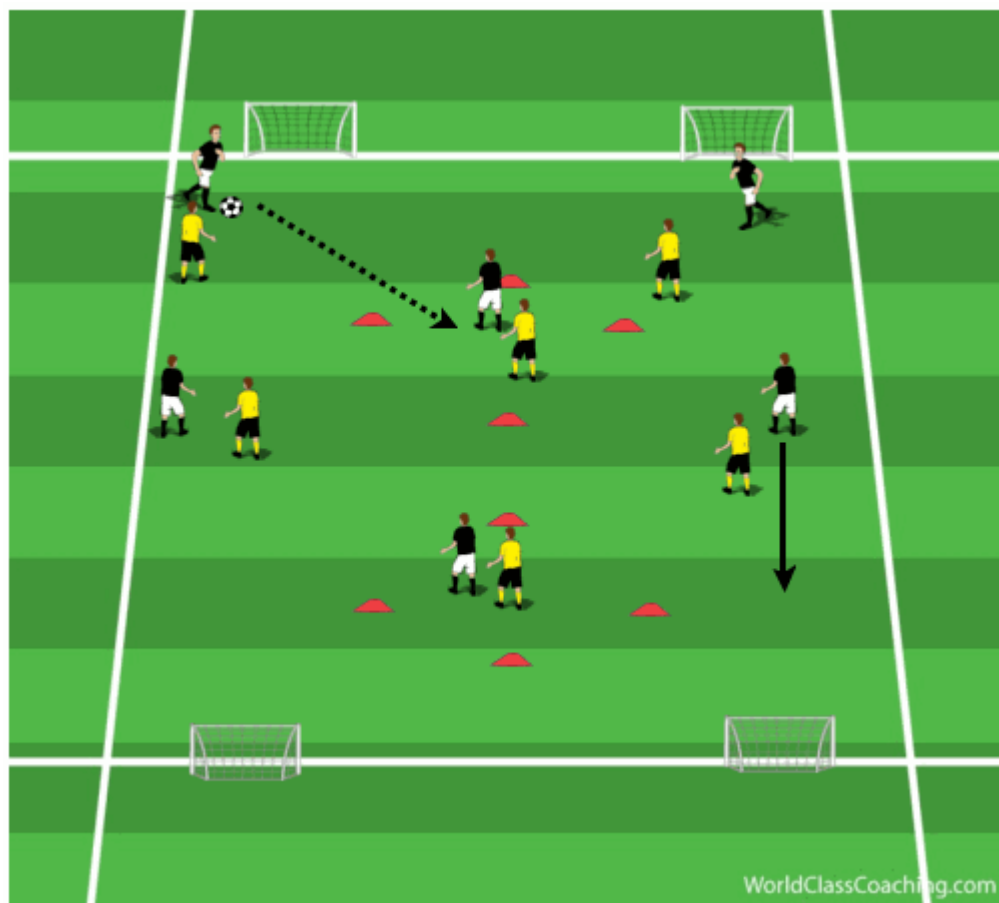
Coaching Points:

- Players should look for the space between 2 opponents to receive then pass through at all times
- Pass 1st time into Red when possible – 1st time passes are quicker and reduce effective pressing
- When the ball is going to be passed into the red, players on the blind side of the defence should watch each other's movements to offer new and multiple passing lanes.

Progressions/Variations:

- The blue can become a full time defender
- Place the blue as a defender against the red inside the diamond

Tactical Development



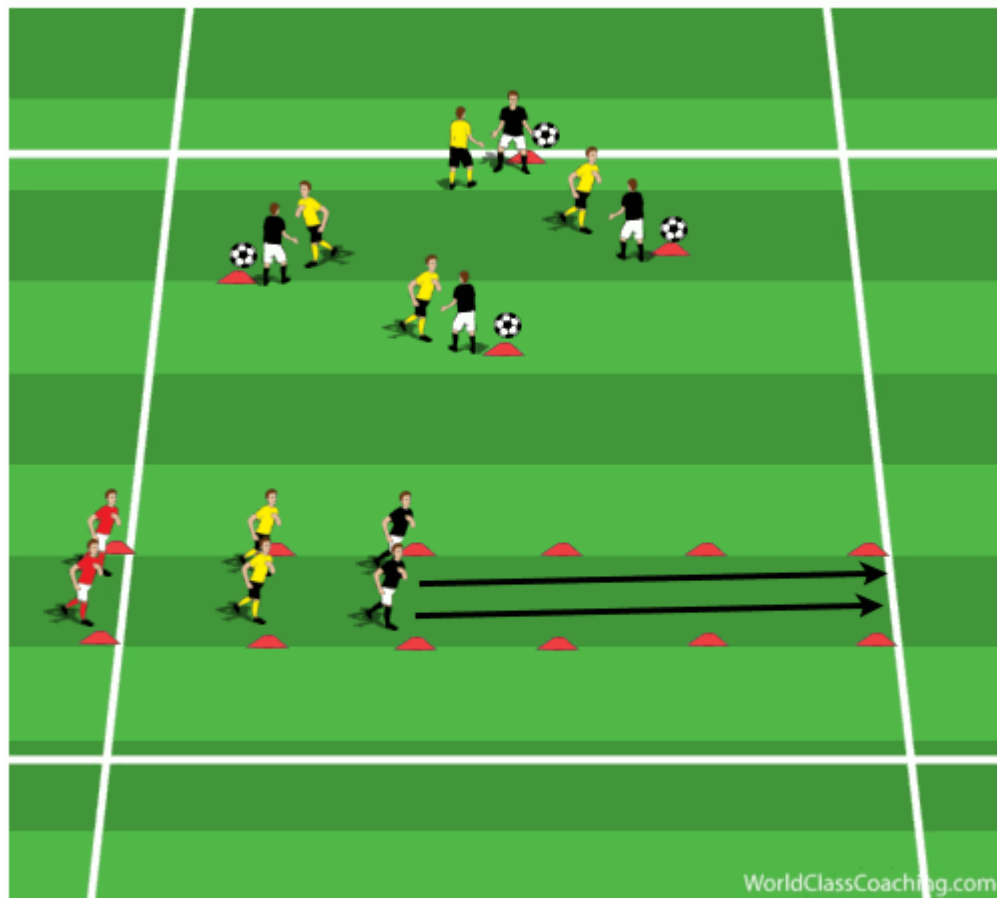
Inside the 30x30 yard box, play 4v4 with 1v1's inside the diamonds, with 4 goals to score into, 2 on each end line. To score, the ball must be passed in and out of a diamond then into one of the small goals on the end.

No coaching, only questions about movement to lose the marker inside the box, how to protect the ball and if possible, how and when to turn or protect turn.

Month 3, Week 1, Session 1

Warm – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development



Activity 1; Balance and ball protection

In the top exercise, the 4 yellows try to steal a ball from each of the blacks. The ball is positioned on top of the cone, and the yellow must duel 1v1 against the black and try to steal the ball with his feet. The game will last for 30 seconds then players change over. After playing against all opponents, count up the number of times each player has stolen the ball.

Coaching Points:

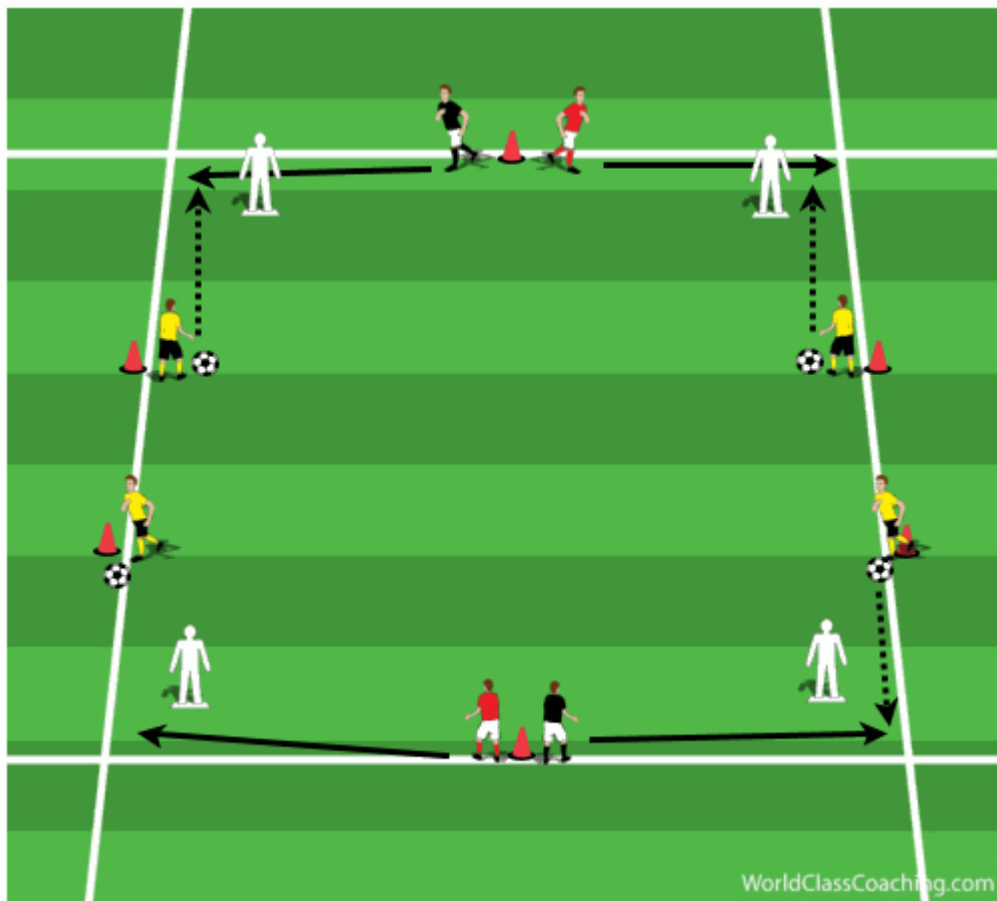
- Bend the knees
- Turn side on
- Keep the heels off the ground
- Move quickly to change direction
- Lean into the opponent and keep them away from the ball

Activity 2; Running

Mark out an area up to 40m long, with each section divided into 5m gaps.

The starting player begins at the 3rd section (30m run), the 2nd at the 2nd section (35m run) and the last player at the starting section (40m run). Players race against the opponent on the same line as them up to the end line, the winner gets a point, but the players who are behind must catch the player in front to gain 2 points. Change starting positions each time to vary the length of the distance ran in each race, which helps analyse each player's reaction speed, acceleration speed and which distances they reach top speed at.

Technical Development



Protect turns

The yellow will pass the ball into the corner for the red or black to meet. The reds will protect and turn with the sole of the left foot; the blacks will turn with the sole of the right foot. After 6 attempts, change-over.

Coaching Points:

- Receive on the half turn with the correct foot

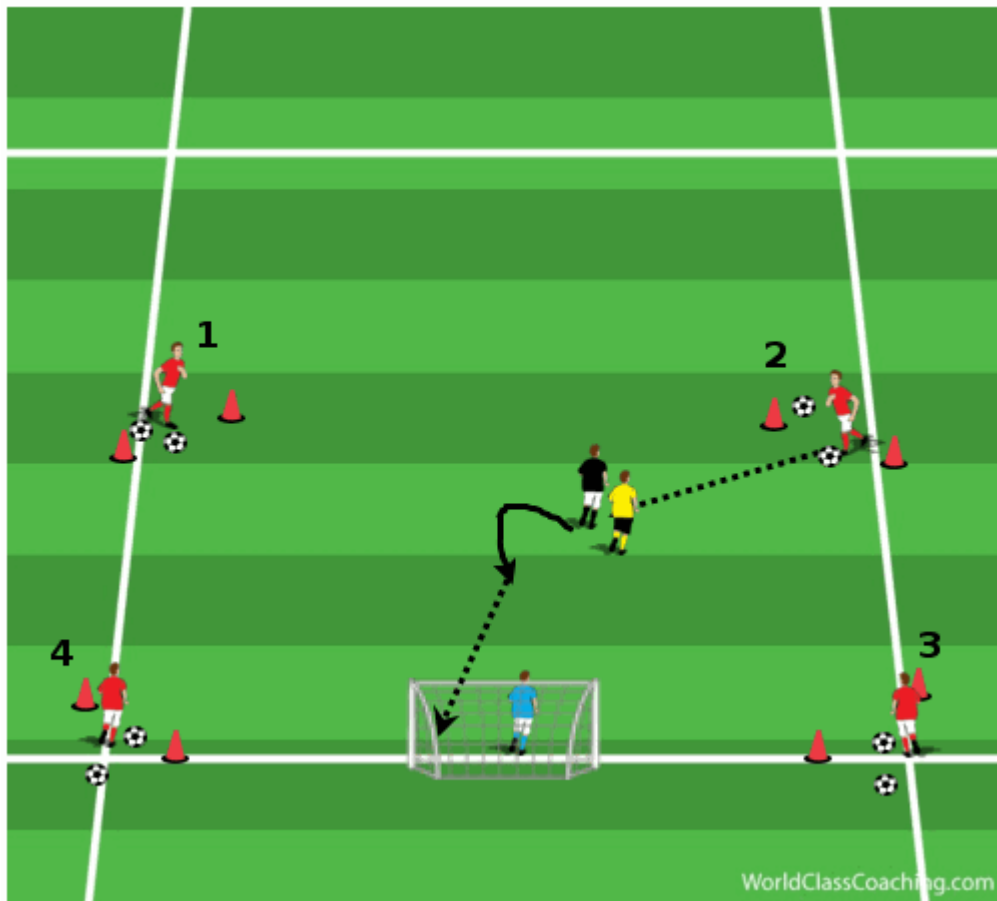
- Protect the ball with the opposite side of the body
- Cut off the mannequins (defender) angle of pressure and route to the ball
- Pull round and spin with the ball as you protect to make the next action

Progressions/Variations:

- In place of a mannequin, a passive defender will press the ball from a diagonal run
- When the turn is completed, shoot on goal

Technical within a Tactical Phase

Receiving with an opponent who is too close



Four players are positioned on the outside with a ball, all numbered. The defenders must hold onto the jersey of the attacker at all times and stay “too close” in a position for the striker to receive and spin away from the defender in one move, protecting the ball as he spins to shoot.

Coaching Points:

- Check the shoulders before you receive, find where the space is and which foot receives to spin

- Keep the defender on the side away from where you want to spin to
- Lean into the defender and receive with the sole of the other foot
- Pivot with the non-receiving foot to spin
- Protect the ball, and get the eyes up as you turn

Progressions/Variations:

- Coach calls out the number of the player who passes, the striker and defender must return to the centre
- Allow the defender to choose the defending pressure distance to make the striker learn when to use the move, as well as other types of receive to protect the ball 1v1 to goal
- If the defender wins possession, they have 6 seconds to score

Tactical Development



Mark out a box of 40 yards long by 30 yards wide, mark out 2 lines of 3 yards deep for a single receiving player in it.

Both teams play a match as normal, but the player in red is a joker for both teams, but they cannot leave their zone. To score, the ball must be passed into a red player who uses a protect turn to receive and pass forward.

Conditioned Game

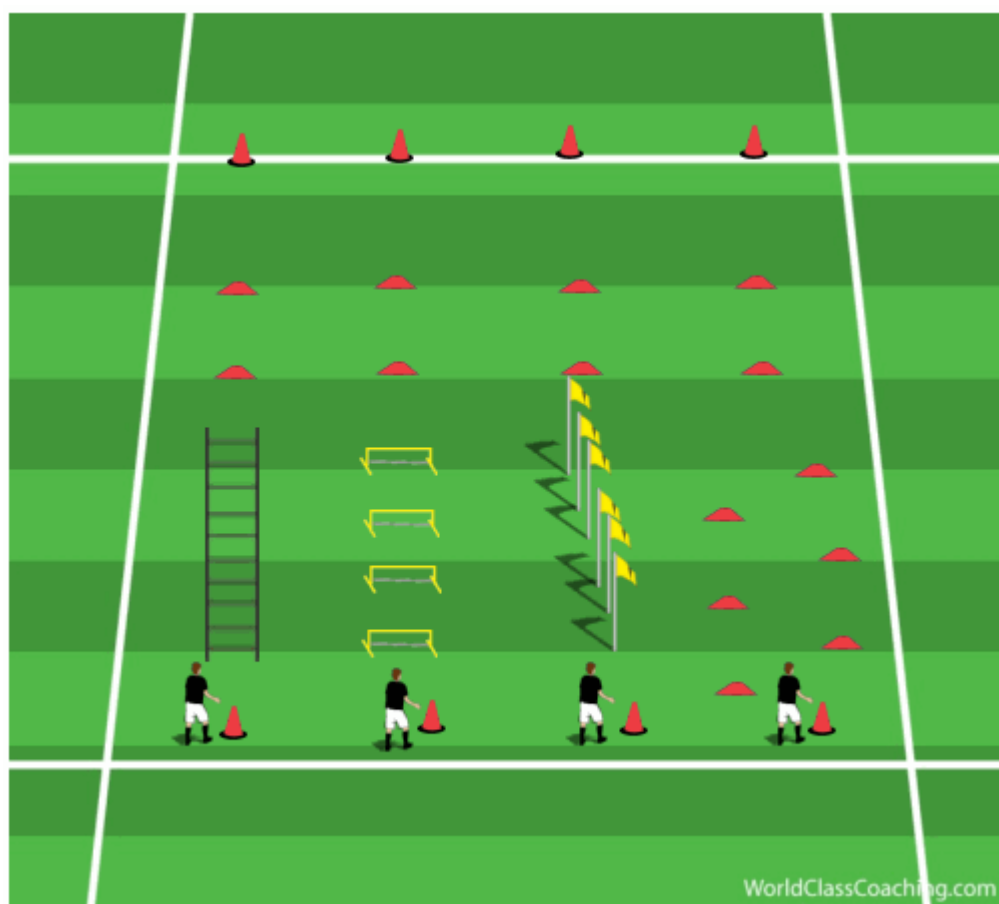
The final 15 minutes of the session should be played as a normal match, but every time a protect turn is used to retain possession, the team score a point. Most points (goals) wins.

This can also become an individual competition amongst the rest of the team.

Month 4, Week 1, Session 1

Warm up – movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development



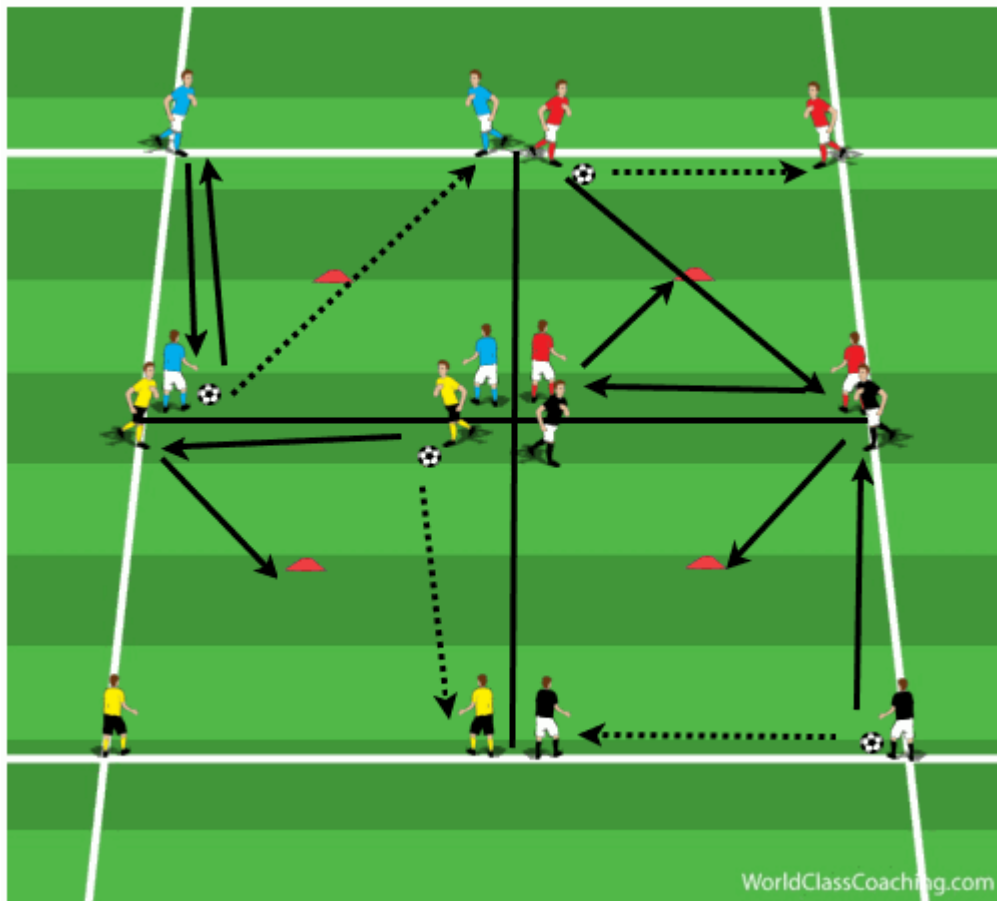
4 groups – All groups work for 1 minute per section then move on.

Move through the agility ladder/jump the hurdles/move through the poles/quick lateral movements through cones, sprint to the 2nd cone, run backwards to the 1st then sprint to the end.

Players can keep count of how long it takes each player to move through each section and make a competition by noting times during the rest period between runs.

Technical Development

Changing positions and watching team-mates movements. (Rotations and 3rd man runs)



4 Groups all have 5 positions within each section, 1 in each corner and one in the centre. The ball can be passed to the feet of any player, then move to the spare space.

A team mate must fill in the space left by the moving team mate to re-fill the space just vacated after the pass. In some scenarios' i.e. the red box, multiple players may need to move to fill in spaces due to the next pass distance. Passes should always be to feet.

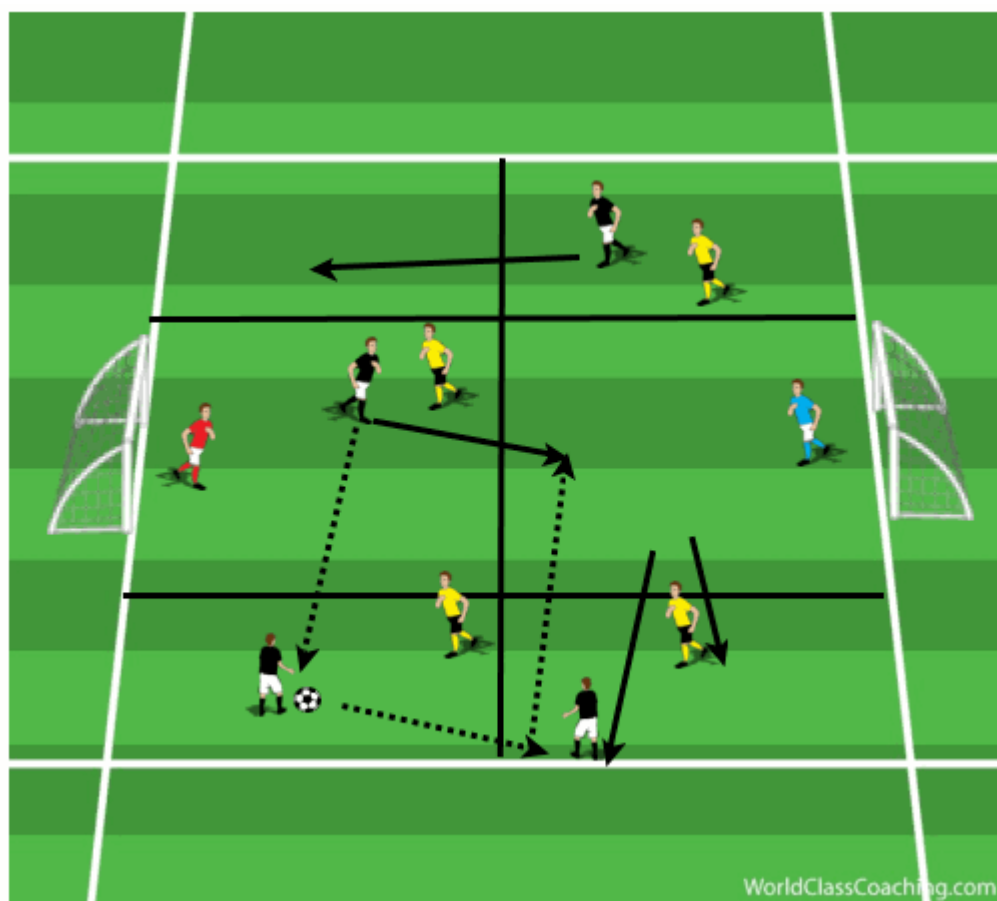
Coaching Points:

- Scan on the run – where am I going (forward) where have I been (over the shoulders)
- Anticipate where the next pass will go via the receivers 1st touch direction and body shape
- Open up the body on the move to open up the possibility of receiving in a game scenario
- Communication to rotate positions via hand signals and eye contact

Progressions/Variations:

- Players can offer a double 1-2 with the person they passed to (receive and pass on the run)
- Dribble to the space vacated by the last passer – all 3 players must change positions
- Play 3v1 keep away with mandatory rotation after each pass (pass or dribble decisions)

Technical within a Tactical Phase



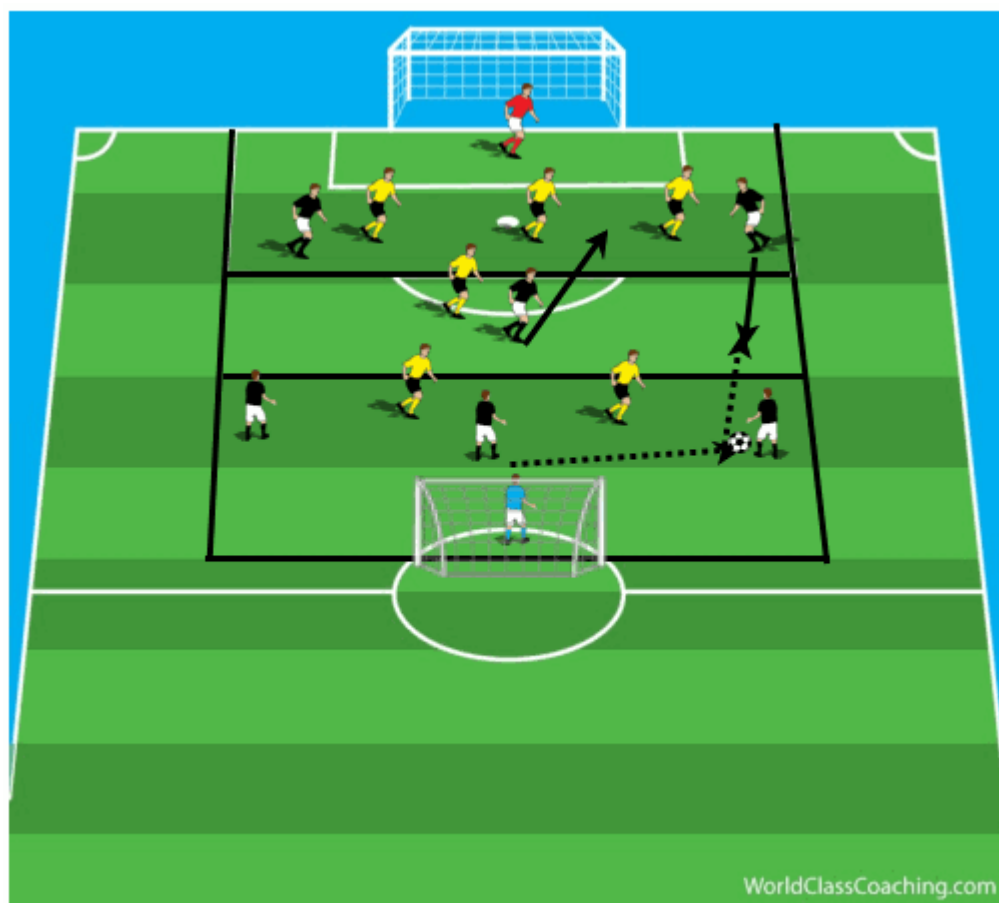
Split a game into 4v4 with 6 zones. As 2 zones will always be spare, players can always rotate positions, and in some cases, leave the central zones open and allow for wide passing and central movements (as above). In the example above, the widest player drops deep to offer a pass to the far side, unopposed if his marker stays back, but leaving space for his team mate with the central movement to pull wide and make more space.

Coaching Points:

- Always move after each pass
- The deepest player should create space with forward runs – staying deep creates no space for players dropping off and allows predictability
- In each box, look for the space between players, and in between the spaces of where the defensive lines are
- Use the Goalkeeper to retain possession under pressure to make a 5v4

Tactical Development

3 zone game



Split a 44x44 yard zone into 3 zones, 18,8,18 yards.

The 3-1-2 formation above can become any formation it wants depending on how players move off the ball.

Above, the central midfielder makes a forward run as he cannot receive the ball, allowing the wide attacker to drop off, potentially with an easy receive. A potential scenario is a diagonal run from the attacker on the other side of the same box to allow the far side full back to push forward and receive inside the 2nd zone.

This would mean that now we have 2 players inside each zone, with 2 players having changed positions and a player moved forward to support the attack.

Coaching Points:

- Encourage players to not stand in one area for more than 2-3 seconds, if they don't get the ball, move and allow the space to be re-filled by another player
- Make runs to allow other players to receive easy possession if you can't receive the ball, such as diagonal runs when an opponent is parallel to you on the same side
- Play with complete freedom and keep the ball moving – play in between players and between the lines as often as possible to draw out opponents for runs into the spaces left by the defenders

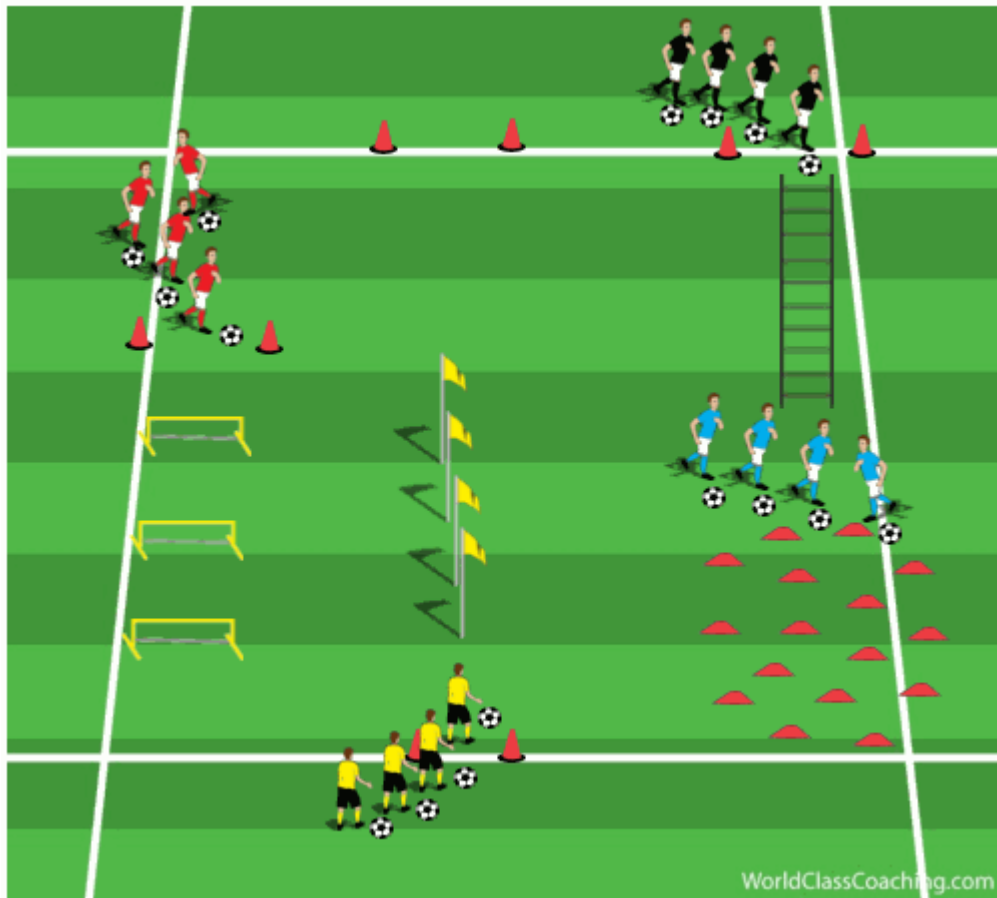
Conditioned Game

Play a match with the above set up but with the condition that you can spend no more than 6 seconds in the any zone, but as many as all 6 players can be inside the central zone, meaning that consistent changing of positions can be achieved in attack. In defence, players can stick to positions with no conditions of changing position; it is up to the attack to draw players out of position to create spaces in the defence.

Month 5, Week 1, Session 1

Warm up – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development



Players perform a circuit with and without the ball.

Red and Yellow;

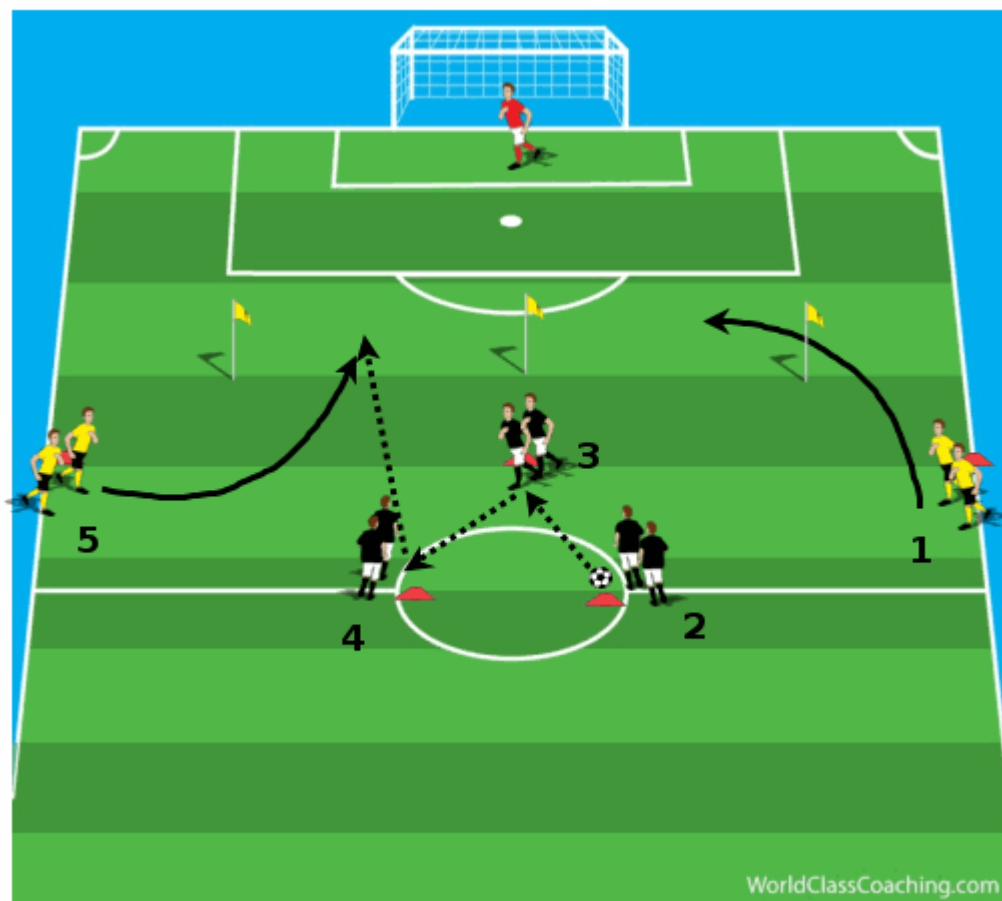
Pass under the hurdle and then jump over the hurdle. Move onto pass to one side and move around the other side of the pole, moving in a figure of 8 motion.

Black and Blue;

Pass down the side of the agility ladder and move quickly through the ladder, performing different types of movements through the ladder each time. Move onto a race dribbling through the cones between 2 players – touching a cone results in a loss.

Technical Development

Beating the offside trap



Mark out an offside line around 30 yards from goal. Players move through the positions from 1-5.

Player 2 will pass to 3 who lays off for player 4 to make a through pass to either 1 or 5 who are making arced runs to beat the offside line.

Coaching Points:

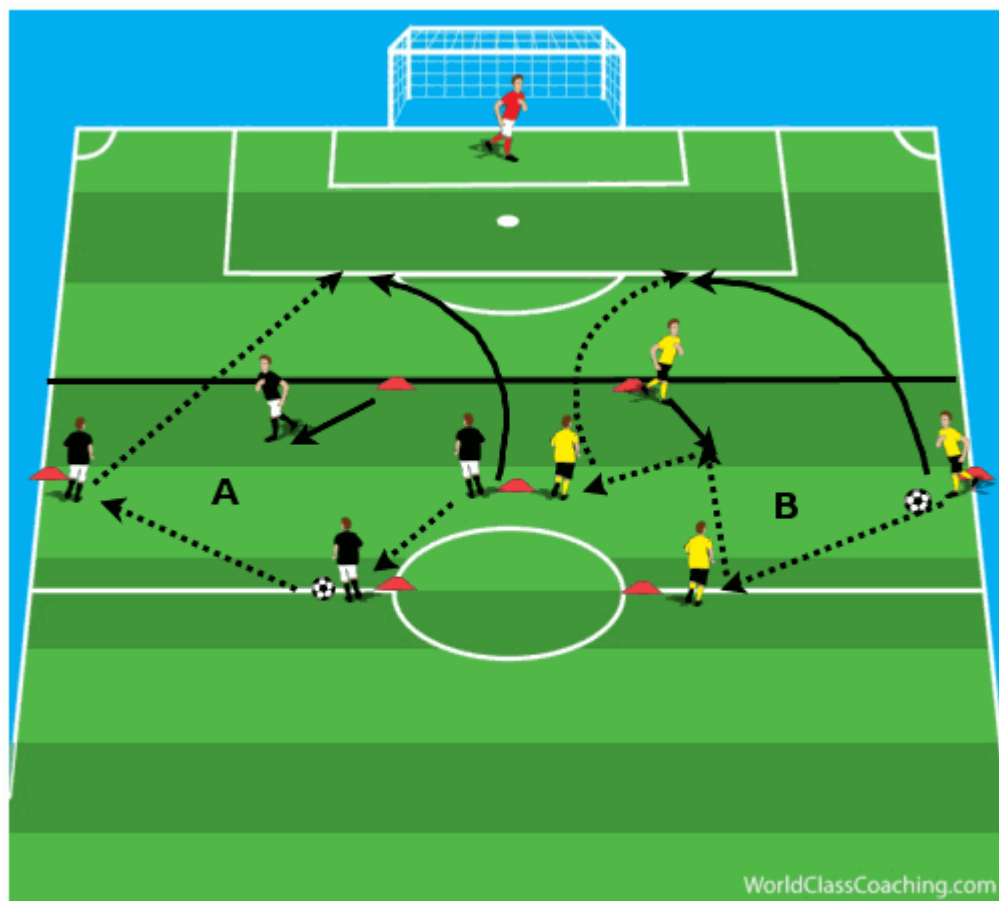
- Players on the side should make a sprint as they ask for the pass behind the defence to ensure they can get clear of the defender before the goalkeeper
- Arc the run along the line to stay onside
- The final pass should be into the stride of the runner

Progressions/Variations:

- Add in a defender on the middle pole to chase back and pressure the ball or intercept the pass
- Players 2,3 and 4 play 3v2 inside a 15x15 yard box to make space to pass forward

Technical within a Tactical Phase

Creating space for midfield runners



Section A – The Attacking midfielder passes back to the defensive midfielder, who passes wide to the winger. As the winger receives, the striker drops off to bring the central defender out and allow the attacking midfielder to run beyond the defence for the through ball from the winger to go 1v1 with the GK.

Section B – The winger passes back to the defensive midfielder, who passes into the striker who drops off to make space for a run behind the defence. The striker lays off to the attacking midfielder who passes into the run of the winger who receives beyond the defence for the through ball from the winger to go 1v1 with the GK.

Coaching Points:

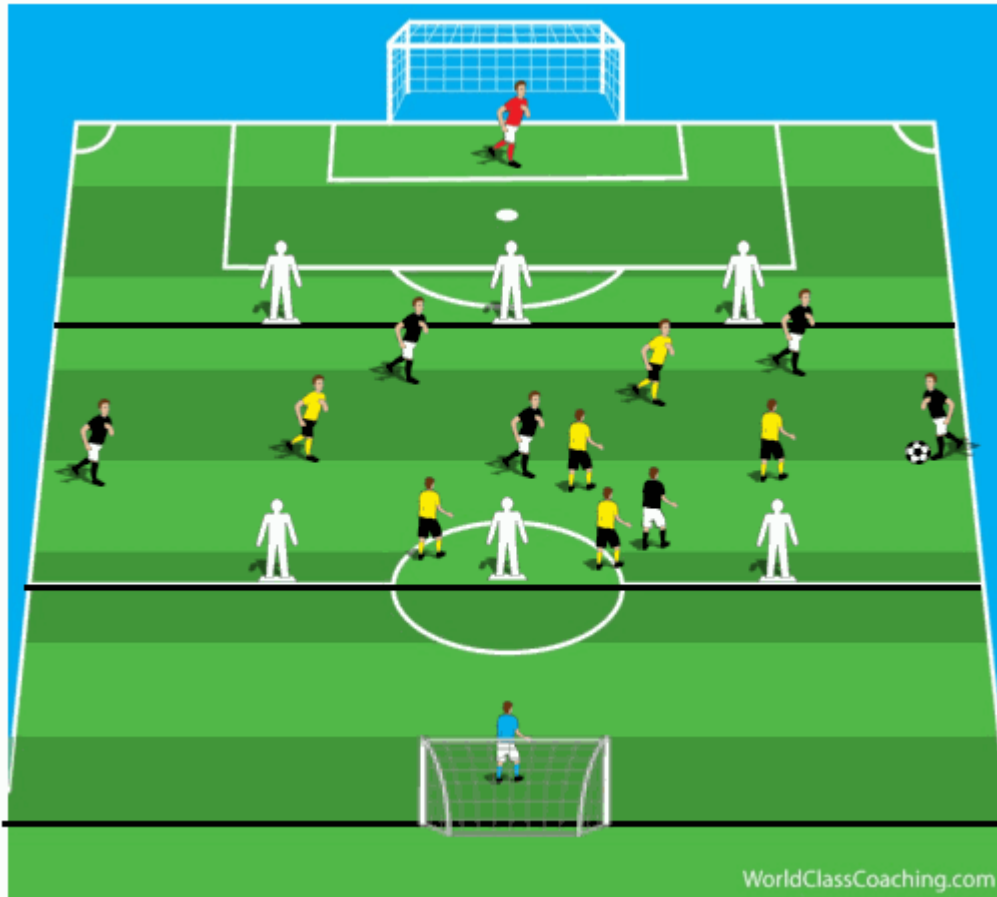
- Timing of the movements and passes in cohesion
- Communication to tell when and where the final pass should be delivered to
- Body shape and 1st touch to directly attack the goal

Progressions/Variations:

- Add a CB to mark the striker, and a covering CB to cover the through ball

Tactical Development

7v7 game with offside lines



Mark out a field 80 yards long and full field width; two zones of 25 yards and one zone of 30 yards. On the end lines, place 3 or 4 mannequins along the line to act as a guide for runs and passes beyond the defence.

Inside the 30 yard long zone, the game is 7v7; both teams keep the ball until a run can be made beyond the defence to meet a through ball to go 1v1 with the GK from 25 yards out.

Coaching Points:

- Use the full width of the field
- Players should change positions and look for runs beyond the defence to receive through passes
- Retain possession until a good opportunity arises for an attack

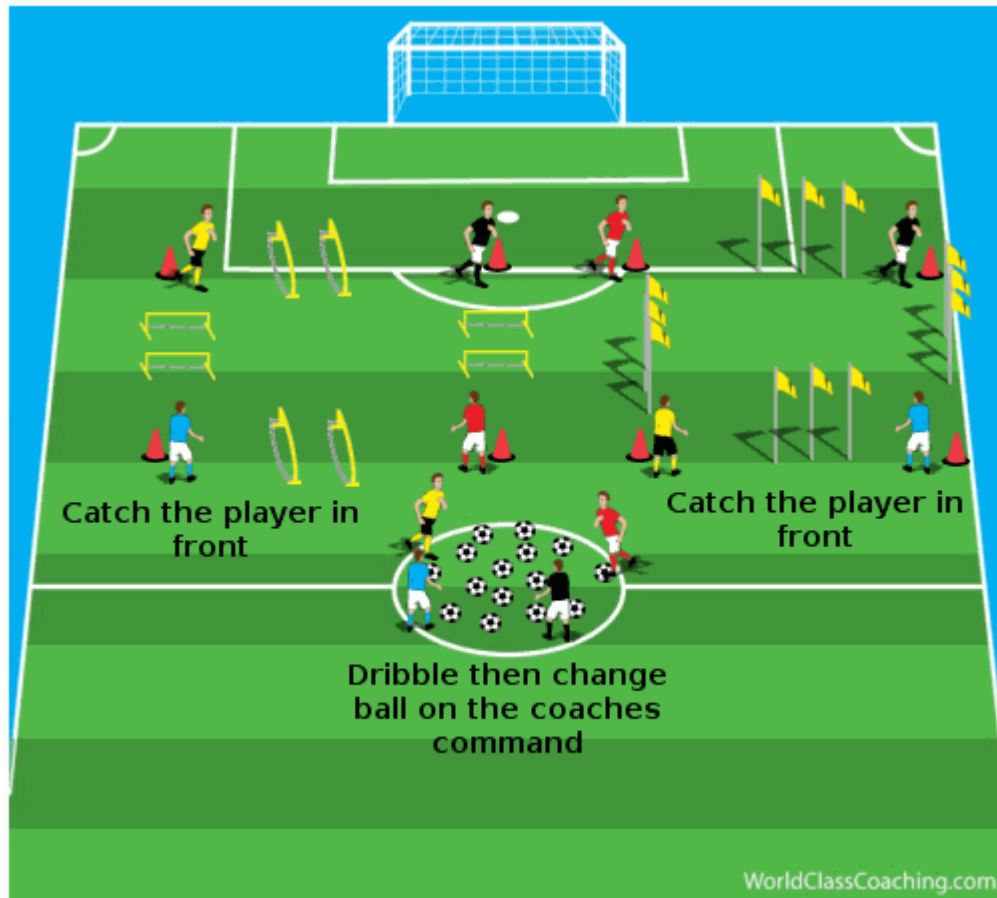
Conditioned Game

In the conditioned game, a goal from a through ball into an offside breaking run is worth 2 points.

Month 6, Week 1, Session 1

Warm up – Movement with the ball and dynamic stretches

Physical Development



Make 3 groups of 3/ 4 with 1 spare 'resting' group. 30 seconds then 10 seconds to move to the next group

Group 1 – Jump the hurdles and try to catch the player in front of you – 30 seconds per race

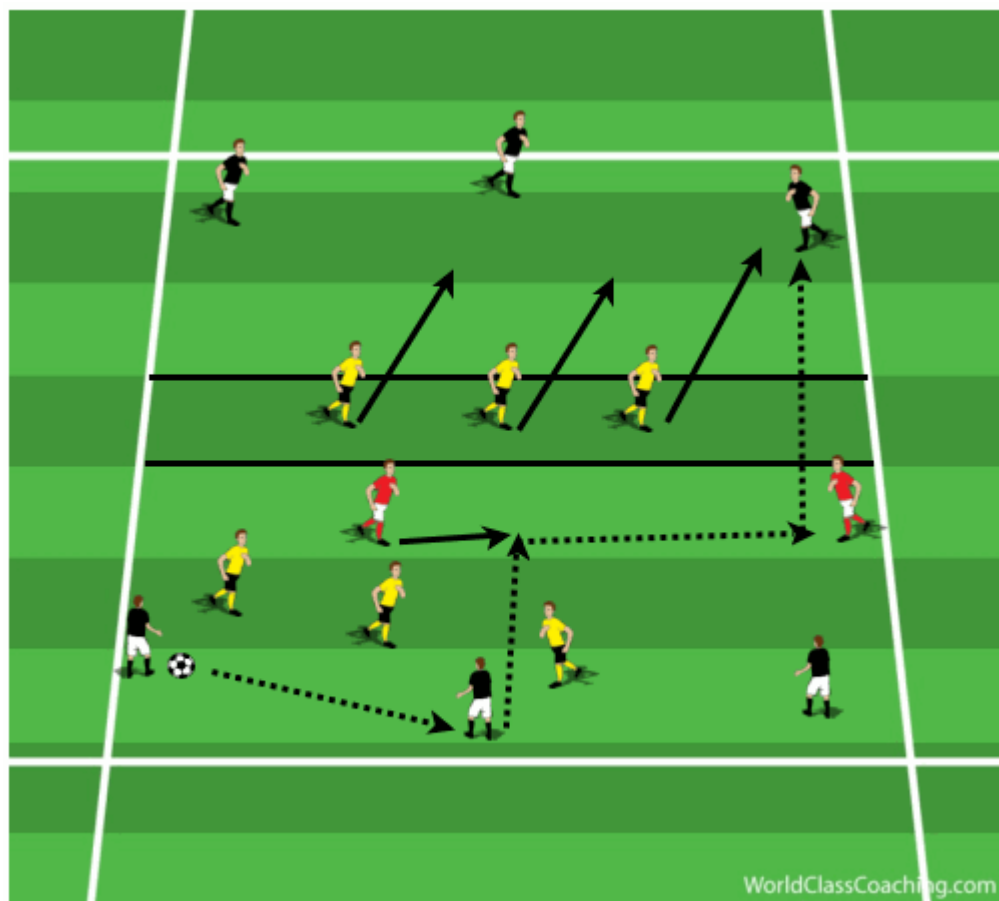
Group 2 – Weave between the poles and try to catch the player in front of you – 30 seconds per race

Group 3 – Reaction speed – players dribble the ball and avoid the other balls and traffic, on the coaches command, stop the ball and take a new one; rapid changes of ball in the course of the 30 seconds.

Group 4 – Resting group

Technical Development

5v3 Pressing and covering with ball transition



The red are playmakers, and are always in the possession team.

The 3 yellows pressing the ball must try to win possession; the 3 yellows covering must try to intercept passes to the far side. If the ball reaches the far side, the yellow groups change roles, the reds move over to continue the 5v3. If possession is won, the blacks will move into defensive positions and the game restarts.

Coaching Points:

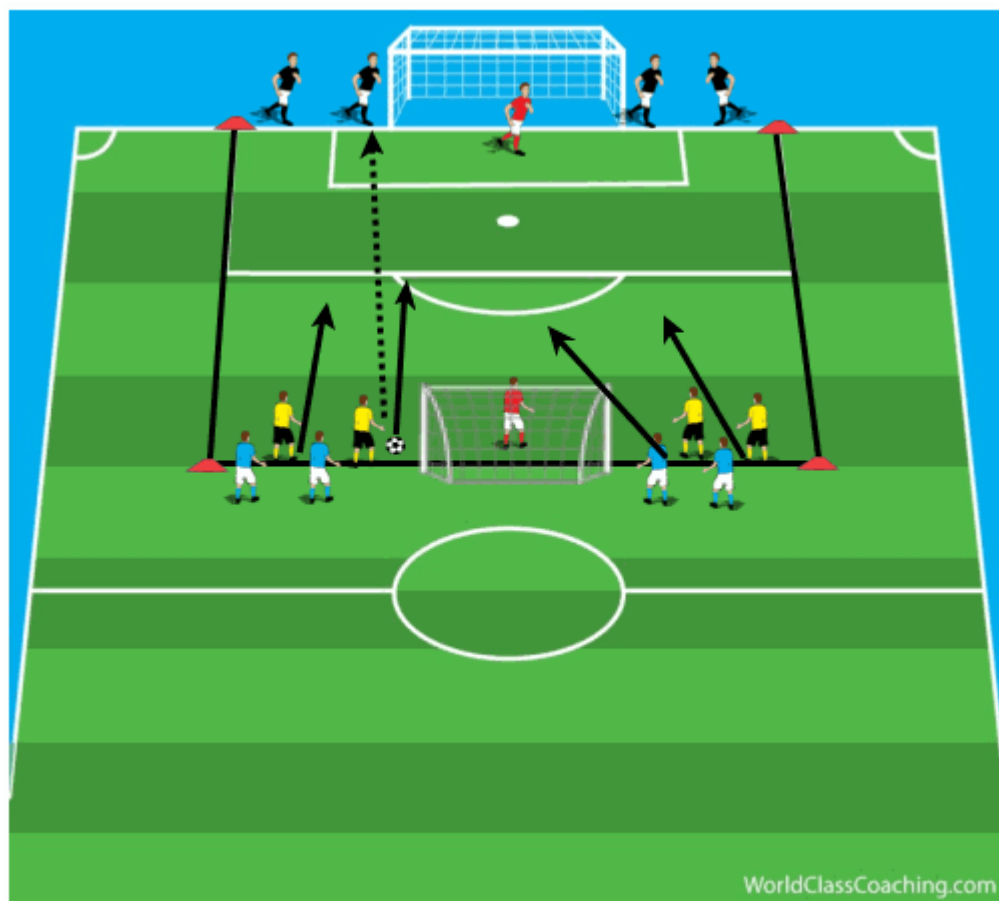
- Look for the spaces between the lines of pressure and covering
- Try to maintain triangulation and positional changes to make spaces and keep the ball
- Look forward for the switch pass and quick support
- Speed of pressure when the ball is switched

Progressions/Variations:

- 6 passes must be made before the ball can be switched
- Chipped passes can be made over the line of covering

Technical within a Tactical Phase

Defending in a line of 4 against an attacking, including offside lines in a 36x44 yard area.



The ball is passed out by the back 4 who defend 4v4 with offside lines. If the defence win possession, they should try to score. After defending, the back 4 become the attacking 4, the spare 4 are the new defence.

Coaching Points:

- The back 4 should make 'defensive triangles' when pressuring centrally
- The back 4 should make an arc with the 3rd defender the defensive line controller
- The far side full back should be in line with the 2nd defender (1st covering player)
- The attack should look to change positions and play in a diamond shape, with the bottom of the diamond breaking forward to keep spaces opening up
- Shoot when not pressured

Progressions/Variations:

- Each attack has 12 seconds to shoot
- If the Attack score, they stay as the attack
- Experiment with a back 3 and 1 defensive midfielder

Tactical Development

Defending in a 4-2 shape against an attacking shape (2-3-1, 4-2, 2-2-2, 3-2-1, 1-4-1)



Mark out a full width field to give players an idea on the distances needed to cover within the 4-2-defensive shape, but mark out clear zones – a central defensive zone, full back zones and a midfield zone, this should give the players an idea of the distances that should be kept between the defensive lines in order to press the ball effectively.

Conditioned Game

In the conditioned game, the field is 44 yards wide by 44 yards long, as above.

The condition is that both teams will play a 4-2 formation in defence, and a 2-3-1 in attack, replicating the 4-2-3-1 future formation. Using offside rules and principles in defence of pressure, cover balance, both teams will try to defend the goal in the 4-2 shape, and using the attacking shape of 2-3-1, players should look to play in the space between the lines.

Other conditions can be made such as;

- A goal can only be scored from a cross – 1v1 and 2v1 defending on the sides
- A goal can only be scored from a 1-2 with the striker – defensive triangles against a central attack

- A goal can only be scored from either a shot from outside the box, or a rebound – midfield pressure and defensive follow ups

I hope this guide to the transition from 7-a-side to 11-a-side football can be helpful to you, and please only use this as a guide, as each player is an individual and each team although some will have similarities, all are different. The sessions I have made for the started session of each month are sessions I have used in the past, and manipulated slightly to make it more general for all teams. As coaches, we should build the sessions up over time (almost like a year-long session plan) and add layers onto each activity or change the difficulty with the ability of the players.

Layers such as checking runs to create space, eye contact, visual and audio agreements between players, and adding in various types of pressure are critical to the development of the players both short and long term.

Thanks for reading and for any more information, please contact me at steviegrieve@hotmail.com

Stevie