THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL CURRICULUM

"THE ROADMAP TO INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS"

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FOOTBALL
FEDERATION
AUSTRALIA

Contents

Foreword

How should Australians play football? What skills and style best suit our nation and our hundreds of thousands of players? These are fundamental questions that should engage the minds of everyone involved in the game from the professional tier to the grassroots.

The FFA National Football Curriculum not only provides answers, but explains the philosophy behind how we should play and illustrates practical steps that bring the thinking to life in training and matches.

The first version of the National Curriculum in 2009 was a breakthrough in setting out a broad agenda, but this second version is presented in a way that will resonate in schools, clubs, academies and elite development pathways, in fact anywhere football is played.

I'm delighted to formally publish the National Curriculum and I commend the FFA Technical Director Han Berger and his coach education team for the meticulous approach to this work.

Having this Football Curriculum available for all the coaches across the nation is a key part of FFA's Strategic Plan to make football the biggest and most popular game in Australia.

I look forward to seeing the football that will flow as this curriculum influences our next generation of players.

David Gallop
Chief Executive Officer, FFA

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Preface

I am proud to present the second edition of the FFA National Football Curriculum (NFC), with the sub-title "The Roadmap to International Success."

Although there have been many positive developments since the introduction of the first NFC in 2009, the understanding of it in the broader football community can still be much improved especially at grassroots level.

The first edition mainly explained the philosophical starting points but lacked detailed explanation and practical examples.

This new version explains the mental and physical characteristics of children and young adults during the various developmental stages and how these stages are linked. It also contains Model Sessions for every phase and explains how to organise sessions and plan 6-week training cycles for a season.

The Curriculum is a practical guide for coaches and players of every age, gender or level as well as their parents.

The National Football Curriculum intends to deliver an **Australian** playing and coaching philosophy based on analysis of top football and scientific research, taking the specific circumstances and characteristics of Australian football into consideration.

So, it is not someone's opinion or a copy of another country's curriculum.

It is aimed at a **fundamental transformation** of the way football is played and coached in Australia, especially at youth level, in order to develop future generations of players and teams that will enable Australia to maintain a leading position in world football, particularly within the Asian Football Confederation.

I hope this new version of the National Football Curriculum will create a better understanding of what high quality youth coaching is about and therefore help to dramatically raise the standard of our game at grassroots level.

After all, only a strong and broad foundation will create quality at the top.

Many challenges still lay ahead but if we all work together in the interest of our great game, we can overcome any roadblocks and hurdles and make Australia truly a World Leader of the World Game.

I'd like to especially thank my colleague Kelly Cross for his contribution to the realisation of this Curriculum. My thanks are also due to Ange Postecoglou, Ben Coburn and Dr. Donna O'Connor for their peer reviews of this book.

Han Berger

Fundamental Transformation

The preface mentioned the necessity of a Fundamental Transformation, but why is it necessary to change the way we play (and coach) football?

After all, in the not too distant past Australian football produced many great players who played in the top leagues of Europe, while the Socceroos qualified for the World Cups in 2006, 2010 and 2014 and the Matildas were crowned Asian Champions in 2010.

The players and coaches involved have brought football to where we are now in the FIFA Rankings: about 40th in men's football and 10th in women's.

This is a great achievement in a country where historically football has not been the number one sport.

But for some reason Australia has not produced the same number of top players in recent years and fewer Australians are starters at clubs in the European top leagues.

There are many theories and opinions about the cause of this, but what is not in doubt is that top football has developed physically - but especially **technically** - to a breathtaking level over the last 10-15 years.

The modern game at the highest level is a fast, high intensity, possession-based game where 'special' players with match-winning qualities make the difference.

Another reality is that the changing dynamics of the football landscape force us to adjust in order to stay competitive with the rest in the world.

What worked for us 20 years ago, doesn't necessarily work anymore. Today, for example, more players go overseas at ever younger ages. Also, the introduction of the A-League forced us to revise the AIS program where the career of many of the 'golden generation' started.

Since the AIS program is aimed at Australia's best young players, and in order to avoid competition with the A-League clubs for the same players, we had to significantly lower the age of the AIS program from Young Socceroos age (U/19-20) to Joeys age (U/16-17).

The responsibility for the development of the 17-21 year old players rests now with the A-League clubs through the National Youth League teams.

The connection between the programs of State and Territory Member Federations that underpin the National programs also required reviewing and adjustment.

The government-run State Institutes of Sport have in recent years moved away from the football programs to primarily focus on 'Olympic' sports.

In order to safeguard this important layer of the talented player pathway, FFA and the Member Federations have taken over the ownership of these National Training Centre programs.

Every Member Federation now has an identical Football Department structure with a Technical Director and coaches for the male and female National Training Centre (NTC) and Skill Acquisition (SAP) programs.

These programs as well as the National Youth Teams and AIS have already been applying this Curriculum over the last couple of years.

At these levels the positive effect is already becoming visible, especially in the brand of football these teams are playing and the type of players that are being developed.

There have also been encouraging signs in the A-League. Ange Postecoglou, one of Australia's top coaches, has seen evidence of 'footprints in our football landscape' and 'an impact at A-League level', especially reflected in the success of Brisbane Roar's high possession, technical brand of football.

Where the change hasn't yet fully happened and the National Football Curriculum still has to make a real impact is at the level underpinning these elite programs.

The National Football Curriculum is therefore primarily aimed at the thousands of children and youngsters who are playing football at grassroots level as well as their coaches and parents.

It is at this level that a fundamental change in mentality and approach must take place and the National Football Curriculum should have its biggest impact

From 'fightball' to football

What exactly do we mean by a fundamental change in mentality and approach?

Generally in Australian youth football far too much emphasis is placed on results and this hinders the development of skill, creativity and tactical cleverness - characteristics we currently lack compared to the best of the world.

Of course everyone wants to win when playing football, that's the purpose of the game.

But in youth football we should primarily teach young players the proper skills and allow them to play without negative pressure, to express themselves and be allowed to make and learn from mistakes.

In other words, there needs to be a better balance between results and development.

Is this some sort of woolly opinion?

Consider the field research study (2011) by Chris Sulley of Europe's most renowned youth academies (Bayern Munich, Ajax, Barcelona, the French National training centre at Clairefontaine, and others). Sulley states:

"All the organisations focused on development above and beyond winning on match day"

Apparently the best in the world share the same point of view.

Doubters should also read the book 'Coaching Outside the Box' by Mairs and Shaw.

'Winning at all costs', which is often the traditional Australian way, has a number of very negative side effects for youth development.

If winning is made too important in youth football, coaches automatically tend to select physically and mentally more developed children. These so-called early developers are usually children born early in the year, for being 10-11 months older usually makes a big difference at a young age.

Fundamental Transformation

This phenomenon is universally known as the Relative Age Effect (RAE) and results in overlooking large numbers of kids who may potentially be more talented than the early developers.

Another negative factor is that an unhealthy level of psychological pressure at a young age suffocates creativity and initiative. The result is that you develop **reactive** instead of **proactive** behaviour: out of fear of being criticized when making a mistake, children start looking at the coach for solutions instead of trying to solve football problems themselves.

Finally, fitness is made far too important in youth football because many coaches think that is what is going to make their team win. Interestingly, analysis shows that fitness was not a decisive factor at the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The fittest teams were not the most successful, but rather the technically best teams containing the 'special' players had the greatest success!

More importantly, by having young players running laps around the park and doing push-ups and sit-ups, we waste a lot of very valuable **football** training time.

By the age of 12-13 the basic skills and right techniques need to already be imprinted. After that age you can only catch up and patch up to mask or modify bad habits and technical deficiencies. So skill and technical development should be our focus, especially given the fact that in Australia we only play football 6 months of the year while in most of the world football is played year round!

This (and much more) is what is meant by a **fundamental transformation** and that's what the National Football Curriculum is essentially about. We have no more time to lose because football does not stop developing to wait for Australia. Not only is the development of the world's best nations accelerating to a breathtaking level, also some Asian countries are catching up with us rapidly.

However, we have to realise that only a consistent and structured **long term** approach will deliver the necessary changes and improvements.

A good example of that approach is Japan which started their football development plan 20 years ago with the results only now starting to become visible.

Sir Trevor Brooking puts it this way in his foreword of the English FA's new Technical Guide for Young Player Development.

"Developing young players who are capable of excelling on the international stage is not an issue which will change in the short-term and it is crucial that a long-term development mindset is adopted"

Vision & Philosophy

FFA's Football Vision and Philosophy is not just one individual's preference or opinion. It is based upon extensive analysis of (top) football and scientific research, taking the Australian circumstances and characteristics into account.

In this chapter we explain the rationale of:

• FFA's playing philosophy

• FFA's coaching philosophy

• FFA's vision on how to bring the theory to life.

FFA's playing philosophy

Although football is a very difficult game for players to master, the essence of the game can be very simply expressed:

'Two teams of 11 players try, within the rules of the game, to win by scoring at least one goal more than the opponent'.

In other words, the purpose of the game is trying to score goals when we have the ball and prevent the opponent from scoring when they have the ball.
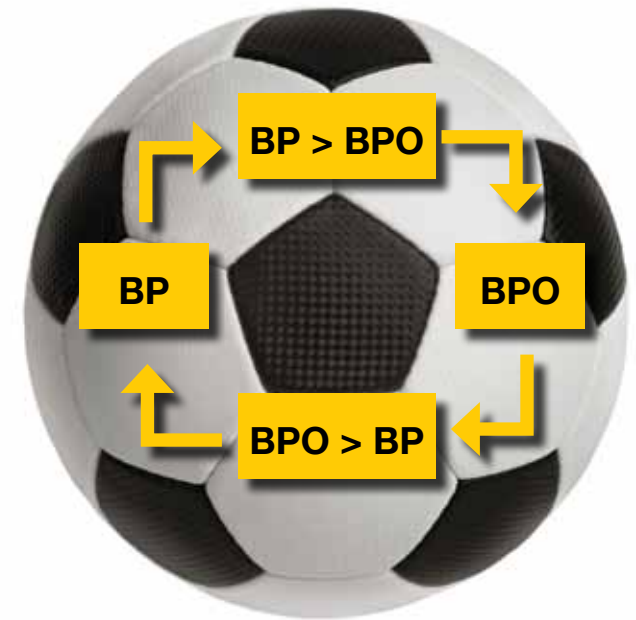
Any game of football, regardless of formation or playing style, can be divided into 4 phases:

1. Ball Possession (BP) : this is the phase when our team has the ball and we are attacking;

2. Ball Possession Opponent (BPO) : this is the phase when the opponent has the ball and we are defending;

3. Transition to defence (BP>BPO) : this is the phase when we lose the ball and must switch from attacking to defending;

4. Transition to attack (BPO>BP) this is the phase when we win the ball back and switch from defending to attacking.

We call these phases the 'four main moments'
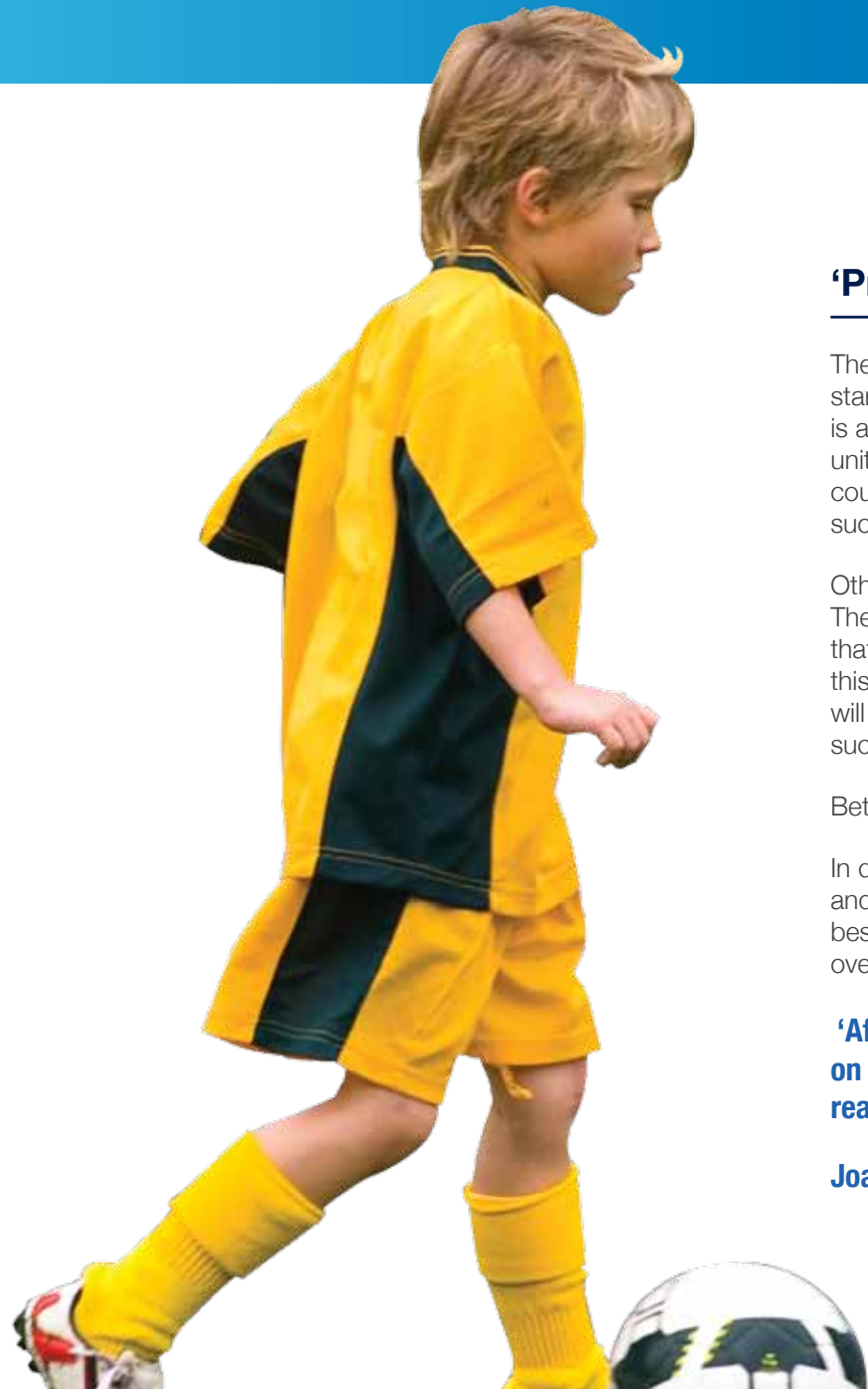
'Proactive' or 'reactive'?

There are many successful playing styles in world football. Some teams take defending as their starting point. Their first priority is not to concede goals and their playing style and team organisation is attuned to that. They allow the opponent to have a lot of possession and defend as a compact unit in their own half. When the opponent loses the ball in these tight areas, they try to strike on the counter attack. We call this a reactive playing style and some teams have been and still are very successful playing the game this way.

Other teams take attacking as the starting point and their first priority is to score goals. Their playing style and team organisation is attuned to putting the opponent under so much pressure that they will make defensive mistakes and concede goals. These teams take the defensive risks of this playing style for granted, counting on the fact that they will always score more goals than they will concede. This proactive playing style is generally more attractive but also more difficult to apply successfully.

Between these two extremes there exist of course also many successful 'hybrids'.

In defining FFA's Football Philosophy and Playing Style we looked closely at the Australian mentality and psyche, both in general life and in sport. It's obvious that a **proactive** playing style corresponds best with the Australian mentality: the fighting spirit of Australian teams and athletes is renowned all over the world and Australians always want to 'go for it'.

'After the World Cup in 2006, we decided to concentrate more on ball possession and on initiating play. We set out to change our footballing culture and to move away from reactive play'

Joachim Löw, National Team Head Coach, Germany

Vision & Philosophy

'Possession-based' or 'Direct Play'?

A proactive playing style can be applied in various ways.

- One extreme is the possession-based style of football made famous by FC Barcelona.

- The other extreme is 'direct play', which involves playing long passes from the back to the front, thereby taking the shortest route to the opponent's goal. This version of 'proactive football' is the traditional approach to the game in Australia, perhaps because of the influence of the other Australian football codes.

THE TWO EXTREMES OF PROACTIVE FOOTBALL PLAYING STYLES

POSSESSION-BASED

DIRECT PLAY

Possession-based	Direct Play
Dominating the game by controlling possession	Putting the opponent under pressure by aiming long passes towards the strikers as quickly and as often as possible
Patient build-up	Aerial and physical power to create scoring opportunities
Break down compact defences with individual skill and creative combination play	'Long ball – second ball' approach

Having expressed Australia's natural preference for 'proactive' rather than 'reactive' football, we then had to decide which end of the above 'proactive spectrum' would be the wisest choice for our national technical direction: 'possession-based' or 'direct play'?

In itself, there is nothing wrong with the more physical 'direct play' style of football, as historically some teams and countries have had a certain amount of success with it, but is it the right playing style for us to adopt if our aim is to challenge the best in the world?'

The English FA adopted a 'Direct Play' approach in the 80s and 90s, based on some statistics that showed most goals were scored following moves of 3 passes or less. If that was true, it was argued, then why bother with patient build-up and controlled possession? Why not simply launch continuous long passes towards the strikers, hope for the 'second ball', and then score in 3 passes or less?

This approach led to some short-term success for teams who adopted it (Wimbledon, Norway, Republic of Ireland) but did not lead to any real success for England at international level; in fact, one might suggest that the opposite has occurred.

Many have questioned the validity of the '3-pass rule', as the data didn't distinguish between three-pass moves resulting from long passes and those from winning the ball in the opposition half, set plays, etc. Obviously, many set plays or quick regains that led to 3-pass goals may have been gained after a multi-pass phase of possession.

It was also apparent from the data that at the higher levels of football, moves involving a higher number of passes are more successful.

The English have long since abandoned their 'Direct Play' policy, and those responsible for it have been accused of 'poisoning the well' of English football.

To gain further information on 'possession-based' versus 'direct play', we took a close look at the best in the world, using FIFA's analysis of the 2010 World Cup, and the UEFA Technical Report on the Euro 2012 tournament.

FIFA's expert analysis of the top three teams in South Africa in 2010 (Spain, Holland and Germany) was as follows:

Spain (1st)	Holland (2nd)	Germany (3rd)
Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield	Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield	Patient build-up play from the back through the midfield
Excellent passing game	Excellent passing game	Excellent passing game - Good options for the player in possession
Influential individual players (INIESTA, XAVI, VILLA)	Influential individual players (SNEIJDER, ROBBEN)	Influential individual players (SCHWEINSTEIGER, OEZIL, MUELLER)
Comfortable in possession when under pressure	Disciplined, well-organised defence	Disciplined, well-organised defence
Disciplined, well-organised defence	Dangerous at set pieces	Dangerous at set pieces
Immediate pressure after losing possession	Winning mentality	Winning mentality
Winning mentality	Good links between the team lines	Excellent team spirit
Good links between the team lines	Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good 1 v 1 situations	Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good 1 v 1 situations
Width of the pitch used well - wingers attack the goal, are able to cut in, good 1 v 1 situations	Midfield pressing	Rapid transition from defence to attack
	Immediate pressure after losing possession	Effective use of full-backs

There are several striking similarities between these three successful teams at the 2010 World Cup, but in terms of answering our questions about 'possession-based' football or 'direct play', the answer is clear. All three employed a 'patient build-up from the back through the midfield' and an 'excellent passing game', and no mention of long forward passing can be found. So direct play does not appear to be the way to gain success.

The UEFA report on Euro 2012 also states that the 'trend towards possession-based football is undeniable', especially in comparison with Euro 2008.

Euro 2008		Euro 2012	
Highest no. of passes in one game		**Highest no. of passes in one game**	
Spain	510	Spain	929 (almost double the record in 2008)
Highest Team average, passes per game, was Spain with 450		Every team except Ireland averaged more than 450 passes per game (which was the tournament high in 2008)	

Detailed data shows also that 'the trend is away from a long-passing game' (a 'long pass' is defined as one of 30 metres or more; a 'medium pass' is between 10 and 30 metres and 'short passes' are those which cover less than 10 metres)

• Long passes by the finalists throughout the tournament: Spain 8%; Italy 11%

• Most long passes: Ukraine (equal bottom of their group) 18%; Republic of Ireland (bottom of group, 0 points) 19%

The only teams that were described in 'direct play' terms were:

• Republic of Ireland (bottom of their group): 'Frequent use of long passes'

• Ukraine (equal bottom of their group): 'Attacks sometimes based on direct passes to Shevchenko'

• Sweden (equal bottom of their group): 'Blend of direct passing and combination play'

(The Czech Republic who lost their quarter-final to Portugal, are described as employing 'regular use of direct, back-to-front passes to lone striker Baroš', however, they were also analysed as having 'a possession game', 'clever combinations' and 'fluent, incisive middle-to-front passing')

The evidence from Euro 2012 seems to add more weight to choosing the 'possession' end rather than the 'direct' one. 'Direct play', based on frequent long forward passes, does not appear to be a policy of the top-performing nations.

The analysis of these major tournaments in 2010 and 2012 clearly shows that with a direct playing style it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be successful in modern top football, and that the most successful nations can be categorised as preferring the 'possession' end of the spectrum.

Barcelona, one of the world's leading club teams, appear to be the extreme in 'possession-based football', consistently averaging around 68% possession in the Champions League.

Spain, however, averaged 54% when they won Euro 2008, with only 48% in the Final; they averaged 59% at Euro 2012, and in the Final had 47% in the first half but thanks to Italy being a man down finished with a marginal 52%-48% advantage.

What is important to stress here is that we should not start an 'obsession with possession': the crucial point is this:

Possession alone is not the key

It is foolish to believe that all you need to do in order to win football matches is end up with a higher percentage of possession than your opponent. We are all aware of matches in which the winning team's possession statistics are inferior to those of their beaten opponents.

At Euro 2012, Russia and Holland averaged 56% of the possession in their three games, but went home after the Group Stage. England, despite only 36% (25% during extra-time) against Italy, could have won the quarter-final shootout.

Possession is not an end in itself: it is a means to an end. What is the point in keeping possession in your own half for minutes on end, if there is no end product? The only statistic that matters is the scoreline!

What appears to be the difference with the really successful teams is how possession leads to scoring chances.

The Euro 2012 report puts it this way:

'As in the UEFA Champions League, the challenge was to translate possession and inter-passing into a positive attacking game'

When one looks closely at the statistics from Euro 2012, one finds an interesting point: a key difference between the top teams and those eliminated in the Group Stage is the number of passes made in the attacking third of the pitch (and successful completion of those passes).

Spain, Italy and Germany had 50% more passes in the attacking third on average than those eliminated.

Spain averaged 217 passes in the attacking third (80% successful), Germany 200 (80% successful) and Italy 135 (70% successful).

In comparison, Ireland averaged 90 passes in the attacking third, with around 54% success.

These 'successful passes in the attacking third' figures also translate to the real measure of effective football: shots on goal and shots on target:

Spain, Italy and Germany = >25% more shots on goal on average than those eliminated.

Spain, Italy and Germany = almost 60% more shots on target on average than those eliminated.

Recent data from the English Premier League supports this evidence.

'SUCCESSFUL PENALTY AREA ENTRIES'

• The Top 4 EPL teams were approximately 40% better than the teams placed 9th-20th

'TOTAL TEAM SHOTS'

• The Top 8 EPL teams were approximately 25% better than the teams placed 9th-20th (a reflection of significantly higher 'successful penalty area entries')

'TOTAL TEAM SHOTS ON TARGET'

• The Top 8 EPL teams were approximately 40% better on average than the teams placed 9th-20th (a reflection of the two points above)

The evidence therefore leads us to believe that the 'possession-based' end of the spectrum is the wisest choice.

However, the emphasis must be on <u>EFFECTIVE</u> possession.

Individual Skill and Combination Play

In modern football, more and more teams are able to defend effectively, and most have the ability to form a 'defensive block' of eight or more players in a compact unit. Therefore, successful teams have had to develop exceptional ability in breaking down these defences.

A key factor in defeating the 'block' is creativity. Teams need to have skilful individuals who can 'pick the lock' and find a way through the tight defences. The top four teams at the 2010 World Cup all had more than one of these special 'match winning' players:

Match-winning Players – FIFA World Cup 2010	
Spain	Xavi, Iniesta, Villa
Holland	Sneijder, Robben, Van Persie
Germany	Oezil, Mueller, Schweinsteiger
Uruguay	Forlan, Suarez, Cavani

As well as creative individuals, teams also need quick and clever combination play. This involves two or more players working together to produce unpredictable inter-passing and mobility in order to penetrate the 'block'

These individual and combination qualities are also key points in UEFA's analysis of the top four teams at Euro 2012. They are also mentioned in the reports on Croatia, Czech Republic, England, France, Holland, Russia and Sweden.

Australia must work to develop more players like these in order to improve performance.

Counterattacking

What can also be deduced from World Cup 2010 and Euro 2012, is that top teams need to have the ability to launch quick counterattacks. One can also observe the potent use of counterattacking in successful club teams such as Real Madrid. However, UEFA point out the 'declining effectiveness of the counter': in Euro 2008, 46% of the open play goals were from counters, but in Euro 2012 only 25% of goals from open play were derived from counters. This decline is also observed in the UEFA Champions League, where the percentage steadily fell to 27% in the 2011/12 season.

The evidence suggests that the ability to counterattack quickly and successfully is a 'weapon' that successful teams have at their disposal. Even 'possession-based' teams will look for the opportunity to do so when their opponent is disorganised or slow in transition.

We must ensure that this 'weapon' is also developed. The danger of over-stressing 'possession and more possession' is that players may not look for counterattacking opportunities, and if they do, may not be equipped to exploit them.

Mental Strength

In the UEFA report on Euro 2012, reference is made to a theory that 'teams can be measured by their reactions to adversity.' Asked to name the factors that can make a difference in a contest between evenly-matched teams, Gérard Houllier responded: 'Heart, commitment and mental resilience.'

Croatia's coach, Slaven Bilić, echoed this opinion. 'We are not as strong mentally as teams like Germany or Italy. We need to improve this and we are working hard to do that.'

It is well-documented that Australia has always possessed this 'never-say-die' quality. Indeed, our National Team players themselves, in 'The Way of the Socceroos', singled it out as a major strength of Australian football. Whereas countries like Croatia apparently need to develop this attribute, it seems to be an in-built component in Australia. Therefore, we must ensure that we maintain this valuable asset of our players.

However, it should be stressed that 'mental strength' alone will not make us a world leader. It is a quality that supports good football, but it doesn't replace it. Houllier's words above define this 'X Factor' as something that will give an extra edge to one team, not as the only ingredient required for success.

UEFA's analysis of the teams at Euro 2012 gives special mention of mental strengths when describing Poland and The Republic of Ireland.

POLAND: 'Strong team ethic, fighting spirit and character'

IRELAND: 'Energetic and highly competitive; mentally strong; never-say-die attitude'

Both these teams, however, finished at the bottom of their respective groups, highlighting the fact that these qualities alone are not sufficient to bring success.

Here, it is interesting to look at some of the main points of the analysis of Ireland at Euro 2012.

FIFA's analysis of Australia at the 2010 World Cup consisted solely of the following points:

Ireland Euro 2012 (last place)

• Defence well equipped to deal with long balls and high crosses

• Frequent use of long passes

• Good 'second ball' mentality

• Emphasis on quick deliveries to classic twin strikers

• Heroic defending: blocks, interceptions, tackles

• Energetic and highly competitive; mentally strong; never-say-die attitude

Australia FIFA World Cup, 2010 (21st place)

• Deep defensive block

• Attacks using the width

• Immediate pressure after losing possession

• Strong, hard-working players

• Determination

Now consider the fact that Ireland played three matches, lost all three, scored one and conceded nine! What use is all that heroism and competitiveness when you finish bottom of your group? What use are all those long passes and a 'well-equipped' defence, if you rank 15th or 16th in all the key attacking statistics?

Clearly, we too are noted for our physical and mental qualities and must never lose this strength. It is also clear, however, that we must work to ensure that future analysis of Australia at major tournaments also includes more prominent mention of technical strengths and that our key statistics reveal a more successful attacking threat.

Vision & Philosophy

Approach to Defending

FFA's philosophy is that it is preferable to be in possession of the ball as that will allow us to dictate what happens in the game. Obviously, if we have the ball then the opponent cannot score.

Logically, therefore, when we lose possession our objective is to get it back as soon as possible. This does not necessarily mean that we must continuously press the opponent high up the field and close to their goal. However, it does mean that we should defend in an intelligent manner, finding the best way to win the ball back according to the situation.

At Euro 2012, UEFA's Technical Report states that the priority for most of the teams was to transition quickly into defensive positions. At the same time, though, their intention was to put pressure on the ball carrier.

It was noted, however, that whenever it was possible many teams would engage in collective high pressing, based not only on pressurising the ball carrier, but by using additional players to cut off the short-passing options. In this way, they were able to restrict the game within small areas, with the players on the far side pushing across towards the ball to complete a back-to-front and side-to-side squeezing operation.

This ability to high press was closely linked to an attacking philosophy: those teams who were prepared to push a larger number of players forward to join in the attack were the ones who had players in place to immediately exert high pressure and win the ball back quickly. By contrast, teams with a more 'direct play' approach, using long passes from back third to front third, were less able to utilize a high-pressing game.

Spain, the Champions, often used the high-pressing practices of FC Barcelona, but like many of the teams at UEFA EURO 2012 did not attempt to sustain this high-intensity pressure for long periods.

The FIFA Technical Report from the 2010 World Cup also identified a trend towards 'early pressing'. A link was suggested between this quick pressure and limiting opponents' ability to counterattack.

There is no evidence from the last World Cup and most recent European Championship that 'retreat defence' is a tool used by leading football nations. In other words, top teams do not seem to react to loss of possession by ignoring the ball carrier and immediately retreating to defensive positions deep in their own half to wait for the opponent.

FFA's philosophical preference, then, for a 'proactive' style of defending seems to be matched by trends at the top level of the game, while also fitting perfectly with Australia's traditional competitiveness and winning mentality.

Summary of key points:

- 'Proactive' rather than 'reactive'

- 'Possession-based' rather than 'direct play'

- 'Effective possession' is the key

- Creative combination play is required to break down defences

- Unpredictable individuals are the match winners

- Ability to counterattack quickly

- Commitment and mental resilience

- Proactive defending

The challenge now is to define a successful 'modern' Australian playing style, which incorporates the analysis of the world's top teams and top-level football, while maintaining Australia's unique strengths. We clearly have to make **realistic** changes and adjustments to our traditional playing style while preserving our own identity. It's not realistic to try and make Australia play like Spain, Brazil or anyone else.

Vision & Philosophy

National Playing Style Statement

FFA's Football Philosophy can therefore be summarised in the following statement of a national playing style:

A proactive brand of football, based on effective possession with the cutting edge provided by creative individuals.

Defensively the key components are quick transition and intelligent collective pressing.

The Playing Style is underpinned by a strong 'team mentality', capitalising on Australia's traditional strengths.

This means we must focus on developing teams and players that are able to execute this playing style and we therefore looked at the main prerequisites.

Key Elements	Prerequisites
Dominate and control the game through effective possession **Get the ball and our players into goalscoring positions in a structured manner** **Break down compact defences through individual skill and creative combination play** **Strive to possess the ball (the more we have the ball, the less we have to defend)** **Win the ball back through quick transition and intelligent collective pressing**	Quality positioning play High technical level (all players must be comfortable on the ball) Special players A suitable playing formation Willingness and ability of all players to immediately transition from BP>BPO and BPO>BP for 90 minutes (high-intensity football) High level of football-specific fitness (the essence of the Football Conditioning methodology)

To explain further, a characteristic of possession-based football is to dominate and therefore control a game by retaining the ball. **Effective** possession means that keeping possession should not become an aim in itself but that it should be a means to getting the ball and our players into goalscoring positions in a controlled manner (as opposed to 'trust to luck'). Effective possession should also lead to a higher number of successful entries into the attacking third, more shots on goal and more shots on target.

To be able to do that **all players**, including the goalkeeper, must be technically proficient and **all players** must understand and be able to execute quality positioning play.

What is also important in breaking down compact defences, as well as combination play and individual skill, is stretching the opponent's defence and using the width of the pitch. The FIFA analysis mentions this as a characteristic of all of the top 3 teams of the 2010 World Cup. All three had creative and fast wingers, which is one reason why we have a preference for a 1-4-3-3 formation. Another reason is that pressing an opponent's defence is easier with three attackers who are spread across the width of the pitch rather than with two.

A high-intensity playing style like this is only possible if all players are able and willing to consistently execute the team and individual tasks during the whole game. Whether players are able to do that depends on their **football-specific** fitness while their willingness to do that depends on discipline and perseverance: traditional Australian characteristics.

In Chapter 3 we will explain when and how to develop the main elements of our preferred playing style through the Building Blocks methodology.

Vision & Philosophy

Further lessons from the 2010 World Cup

Clear Attacking Strategy

FIFA reports that 'the most successful teams had a clear attacking strategy'. We believe that the processes that have been put in place in Australia as a result of the National Football Curriculum will provide our National Teams with this attribute. A 'clear attacking strategy' is much easier to achieve when you have a clear philosophy on football and the vision to make it happen. We look forward to the day when football experts look at our teams and easily recognise the 'Australian style' and our specific brand of attacking football.

Solid Youth Development Work

A link was observed between those countries who have been very proactive and successful in Youth Development, and the countries who performed well in South Africa.

Australia aims to enhance and extend its Youth Development programs and educate more Youth coaches in order to achieve similar success at senior national team level. One can already see how Japan have demonstrated the value of such a policy.

What does the future look like?

'The football of the past we must respect; the football of today we must study; the football of the future we must anticipate'

In projects such as this National Football Curriculum, the first two of the above should not pose too many problems. However, the third one is not so easy.

We have used an evidence-based approach to identify trends and patterns in current top-class football. But where is the evidence of the future? Of course, it doesn't exist.

Therefore, FFA plans to constantly monitor world football, regularly review the journey we have set out upon, and where necessary re-adjust the compass.

We feel, though, that football in the future will always require technical players who make clever and creative decisions quickly, which is our stated focus in Youth Development.

We also feel that the Australian culture will not shift away from the proactive, never-say-die, winners mentality, and therefore the fundamental philosophy is well-positioned.

Perhaps one could say that a true 'proactive' nation will be one of those that actually shapes the future rather than react to what others are doing: because if you are always trying to copy others, you will always be at least one step behind.

FFA's Coaching Philosophy

So, we've outlined FFA's specific philosophy on how football should be **played**, but FFA also has a specific philosophy on how football should be **coached**.
In Chapter 4 (Coach Education) FFA's coaching philosophy is explained in detail, but the essence of **FFA's coaching philosophy** is this:

Traditionally, it has been accepted that football has four main components (Technical, Tactical, Physical and Mental). Based on this, coaches and coach educators have tended to distinguish these four elements and develop them separately. We call this the '**isolated approach**'.

However in doing this, the holistic process of **perceiving** (a football situation), **deciding** (how to act) and **executing** (the acting itself) is being separated. Football is a game of constantly quick-changing situations. Not one situation is the same as the one before or after. The complexity of football situations is determined by what we call the 'football-specific resistances'.

This means that I have to do 'something' with the ball (which requires 'technique') but that 'something' depends on football-specific resistances such as: how much time do I have; how much space do I have; in what direction must I go; where are my team-mates; where are the opponents and what do they do; etc. The football-specific resistances activate the holistic PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION chain. In the traditional isolated approach, the focus is often only on the EXECUTION link of the chain.

ISOLATED APPROACH

Here is a visual to explain this point:

In this example dribbling/running with the ball is being practised but there is no real football context since most of the game specific resistances (space; time; direction; team-mates; opponents) are missing. From the chain PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION only the execution part is being practised.

This player will probably get very skilful at 'dribbling through cones' but the question we have to ask ourselves is:

"How much does this drill help the player to get better at running with the ball in a real game, or are there better ways to achieve that goal?"

Scientific research shows that the most **educationally effective** way to develop football players is to leave the PERCEPTION-DECISION-EXECUTION chain as much as possible intact. This is FFA's philosophy on coaching football and we call this the **holistic approach**. The rationale and detail of FFA's coaching philosophy is further explained in chapter 4.

Another important aspect of the holistic approach is that we believe it's not only the most educationally effective way, but also the most **time effective** way. This fact is very important since we play football only 6 months of the year in Australia! In most of the world football is played year round. In many cases also the quality and frequency of practice is higher. This means that we have to be very conscious in deciding what we do with our precious practice time. We cannot afford to waste one minute of valuable training time on non-football-specific practice.

How else will we ever be able to become good enough to challenge the best in the world?

Holistic vs Isolated approach

Rest of the world:

year round quality football

Australia:

6 months other sports

Wasted time?

6 months football

'Wasted Time' is time spent on non-football-specific activities, such as isolated technique training or isolated fitness training. Because of this, the season of 6 months may only be 4 months of actual football!

In Australia there is an especially strong tendency to regard fitness training as something exclusive and therefore separate ('isolate') it from football training. But by doing that we again lose valuable time of which we are short as it is!

Of course you need to be fit to be able to perform optimally but it is perfectly possible to get fit for football by **playing football**. Football-specific fitness and conditioning are therefore also a part of FFA's holistic coaching philosophy.

All the generally accepted physiological training principles are being applied through the Football Conditioning Methodology that is part of this Curriculum: the players acquire high **football-specific** fitness levels without wasting valuable football training time!

Bringing the curriculum to life

So, we have now outlined and explained FFA's football and coaching philosophies. The next question is: "how can we bring the theory to life?" In the vision of FFA, **Coach Education** and **Youth Development** are the primary strategic spearheads to realise the Curriculum's objectives.

Why Youth Development?

Well, youth development in Australia is presently inconsistent in both quality and approach due to factors such as the diversity and self interest of clubs; coaches; agents; private academies; schools; etc. The quality of youth coaching is generally still very poor and the competition structures are of insufficient duration and quality. If we are serious about one day challenging the best of the world, we have to make considerable changes and improvements in our approach to youth development. What specifically needs to be done, and how, is explained in Chapter 3: The Building Blocks.

Why Coach Education?

The reason why Coach Education is the other strategic spearhead in bringing the Curriculum to life is obvious. The only way to really bring about change and improvement is to better educate coaches, especially the ones that work with youth players. Better coaching will inevitably lead to better football.

That's why we have developed the FFA Coaching Expertise Model and re-structured all of the FFA coaching courses. However, it is important to understand that this is a long term process and will take a couple of generations of coaches going through the new coach education pathways before the effect will become visible. The FFA coaching philosophy and the Coaching Expertise Model are explained in detail in Chapter 4.

4 Training Building Blocks

2 Playing Building Blocks

17
13
9
5

Performance Phase

Game Training Phase

Skill Acquisition Phase

Discovery Phase

11 v 11

Small-sided Football

17
13
9
5

The National Football Curriculum distinguishes 6 Building Blocks: 4 training Building Blocks and 2 playing Building Blocks.

The FFA Building Blocks Methodology is the framework that provides practical guidelines for coaches working at all levels of youth development in order to help them in answering questions such as:

• What are the mental and physical characteristics of players in the various development stages?

• What type of practices are best suited for specific age groups and why?

• How long should a session go for and how often should I train?

• How do I plan and design my sessions?

• What are points of interest when I coach my team during games?

With the aim to:

• Develop technically proficient players

• Develop tactically aware, proactive players

• Transform the physical and direct style of youth football in Australia to a successful style based upon technique and creativity

• To instil a lifelong passion and love for football in young players

• To create a real 'football culture' in Australia

The result of this approach must be future generations of players with the skills and habits to make Australia a successful contender on the World stage, both in men's and women's football. Does the Building Blocks methodology guarantee we will develop the next Lionel Messi in Australia? Unfortunately the answer is no, but this structured approach will certainly increase the chance.

There is no magic formula for developing special players but recent scientific research (Coyle; Ericsson, Gladwell; Syed et al) does provide some very interesting insights:

1. **Talent is not 'innate'**. Messi (or any other outstanding performer in sports, science or art) didn't receive or inherit special 'genes' from birth

2. Every world class performer has a history of **many years of deep practice** that started at a young age

3. A condition for many years of deep practice is **intrinsic and sustained motivation**, a characteristic all top performers share.

No top performer has ever circumvented these rules! This doesn't mean however that geniuses do not exist. The top teachers and coaches Daniel Coyle interviewed for his book "The Talent Code" pegged the genius rate (Messi!) at about one per decade. Let us take a closer look at these insights.

If talent is not innate and excellence is the result of many years of sustained deep practice does that mean that anyone can become a top level player? Theoretically yes, although it's not that simple.

Many people may have heard of the so-called "Rule of 10,000 hours". This rule, introduced by the Swedish scientist Anders Ericsson, basically states that it takes 10,000 hours (or 10 years) of practice to reach a level of excellence in sports, science, art or any other field.

It is apparent that the **quality** of that practice is vital although, interestingly, research conducted by UK professor Mark Williams shows that time invested in **non-organised** practice, such as playing with mates in the park or juggling a ball in the back yard, is at least as important.

The Building Blocks

Coaching

Quality of practice is clearly contingent on the importance of **good coaching**. Good coaching means **purposeful** practice and quality **feedback**.

Purposeful practice is always aimed at progress: after all, only by working at what you can't do will you turn into the expert you want to become. And quality feedback is the rocket fuel that propels learning. Without it, no amount of practice is going to get you there because "if you don't know what you are doing wrong you can never know what you are doing right". Good coaches are therefore able to design practice so that feedback is embedded in the exercise, leading to automatic adjustment.

A good way of visualising what 'purposeful practice' means is to picture something 'just beyond the player's reach' or 'just outside someone's comfort zone', so there is a challenge but not one that is too difficult.

Motivation

Intrinsic motivation means that the player has developed a true passion for football and the motivation to become the best they can be comes from deep inside. The chance of developing a passion for football is of course greater when you grow up in an environment with a real football culture, where you have role models and more and better opportunities. That is why developing a real football culture is so crucial for Australia.

It's also important to realise that it is impossible to 'impose' motivation. Pushy parents or coaches will achieve nothing (or the opposite of what they are looking for) if it isn't the player's own choice.

However if the motivation is intrinsic, the effect is very powerful. One of the differences between good performers and the very best is that top performers are able to "push themselves harder for longer" because their motivation level is higher.

Intrinsic motivation by itself however is still not enough, for only **sustained** motivation leads to excellence.

A prerequisite for sustained motivation is what Professor Carol Dweck calls a 'growth mindset', which basically means that mistakes are embraced and deficiencies confronted ("I can master this, I just have to practice harder") This mindset sees a setback as a motivational factor.

The opposite is called a 'fixed mindset'; for those people, failure is a de-motivator ("I will never be able to do this, I just don't have the talent")

Here, it is also worthwhile highlighting the fact that coaches also have fixed or growth mindsets, which can affect their own development as well as that of their players.

A growth mindset is a characteristic shared by most top performers

How can a coach or parent stimulate the development of a growth mindset in players?

• Praise effort, not 'talent'

• Emphasise that abilities can be transformed through application

• Emphasise that challenges are learning opportunities instead of threats

"Failure is a great opportunity for improvement"

To bring all of the above to life, FFA has developed the Building Blocks Methodology, outlining the logical and progressive steps necessary to achieve our long term goals.

Key points:

• Football is a very complex game and takes at least ten years to master

• A step-by-step, phased approach is required, taking into account the age of the player

• The logical approach we have adopted in the Building Blocks can be summarised like this:
  - simplified situations before complex ones
  - individual skills before team tactics
  - football development before physical preparation

• The age groups stated are guidelines not absolute rules; girls and boys develop at different rates, and players of the same age may be at different developmental stages

• Each Building Block has a clear, distinguishable focus, but the player's development should be viewed as a gradual, ongoing process towards game mastery

• It is an holistic approach, rather than a series of four isolated stages/concepts.

For example, although the focus in the Skill Acquisition Phase is on individual skill development, the player's tactical insight is being developed at the same time, but using the 'hidden learning' approach. The coach uses training exercises which involve as many of the game-specific resistances (team-mates, opponents, direction, goals, etc) as possible, so that game awareness is automatically developed, rather than trying to 'coach tactics'. Equally, technical development doesn't stop at the end of the Skill Acquisition Phase; it continues throughout the Game Training and Performance Phases, although it is now not the main focus.

Development of tactical insight doesn't suddenly begin in the Game Training phase; it is developed during the Skill Acquisition phase in smaller, simpler situations. Here, the players are introduced to the fundamental individual and team tasks that form the foundation of decision-making in the 11 v 11 game.

Let's now have a closer look at each individual Building Block.

The Discovery Phase

4 Training Building Blocks

2 Playing Building Blocks

Performance Phase	11 v 11
Game Training Phase	
Skill Acquisition Phase	Small-sided Football
Discovery Phase	

17

13

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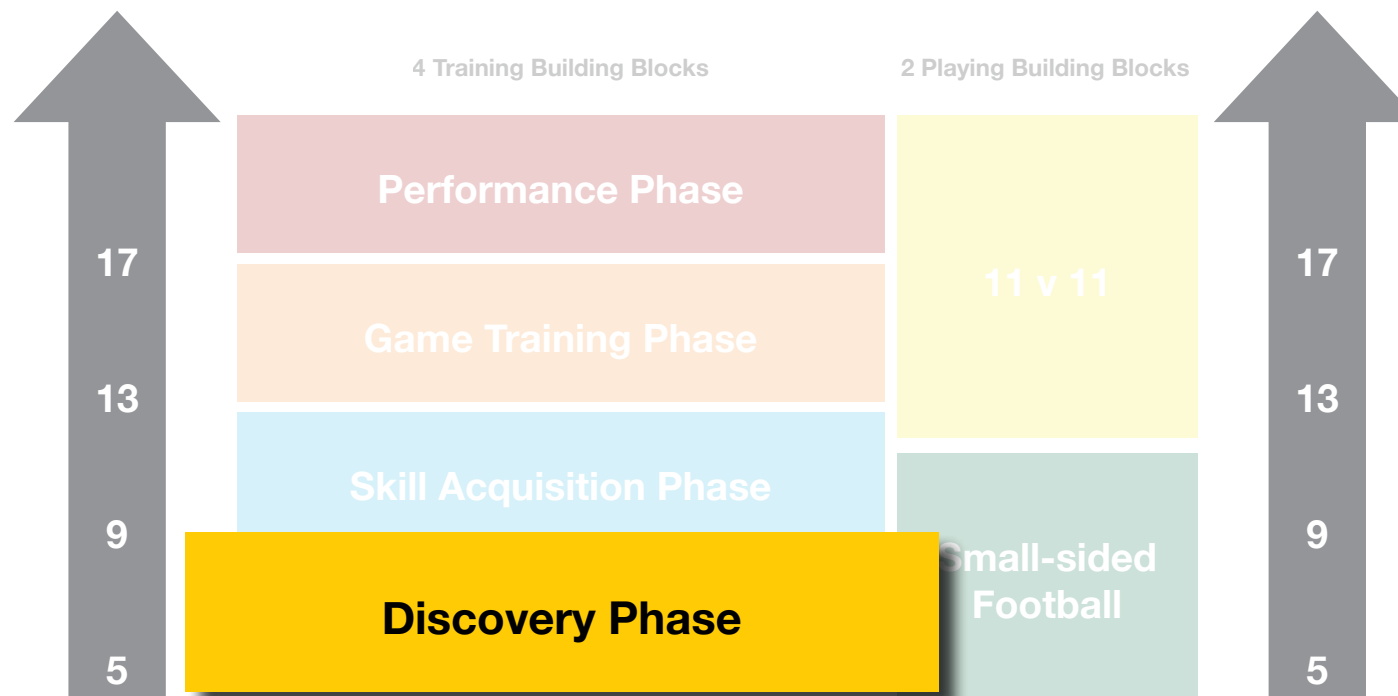
- Discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial & error
- Natural development: 'learn FOOTBALL by playing football'
- No 'coaching' but organising fun football exercises
- Replicating the 'street/park football' environment of the past
- Emphasis on building a love of the game

The Discovery Phase (U/6-U/9)

Regarding the first Building Block, the points made earlier concerning the development of excellence don't really apply yet and fortunately things are still quite simple.

What are the characteristics of children in this age bracket?

• They are still 'clumsy' (lack fine motor skills), because they are still developing their coordination

• They have a short span of attention and are quickly and easily distracted

• They are 'self-centred' and not yet able to really work together (so do not ask them to perform team play, it is impossible for them!)

• They play or participate for fun with short bursts of energy and enthusiasm

• They are unable to handle a lot of information (instructions; feedback)

What does this mean for training sessions with children this age?

Just let them play a lot of varied fun football related games!

In the 'good old days' as a kid you learned to play football in the street or the park. There were no coaches involved who made you run laps or do stretches and push-ups. When you were with just one mate you played a 1 v 1 game, when there were 8 of you, you played 4 v 4. There were no referees either, you made your own rules and every problem got solved. You just played, every free minute of the day. Funny as it may seem, this was (and still is) the best possible way to develop a basic skill level, understanding and passion for football.

In third World countries the old saying "the game is the teacher" still applies and is one of the reasons why we find so many creative and technically good players from Africa and South America in the European top leagues. But in our developed society children do not play sports in the streets

and parks that much anymore. They watch television, surf the internet, play computer games, chat on Twitter and Facebook as well as having to study.

As parents we now send our children to a club or academy to learn to play football and, despite all good intentions, here we make the mistake of 'coaching' children this age.

The first and most important step when 'coaching' the youngest kids is to take the word 'coach' out of your mind. Your most important job is to recreate that street football environment, be an organiser of fun football-related practices and....... let them play! This approach, where they can 'discover' how the game works in a natural way, is the right one for the Discovery Phase.

You'll find the Discovery Phase Model Sessions on page 85.

Skill Acquisition Phase

4 Training Building Blocks   2 Playing Building Blocks

17			17
13	Performance Phase	11 v 11	13
9	Game Training Phase		9
5	**Skill Acquisition Phase**	Small-sided Football	5
	Discovery Phase		

- In the Skill Acquisition Phase the coach must focus exclusively on providing a solid foundation of **technical skill**

- If the player does not gain this **skill foundation** during this phase it will be very difficult to make it up later

- No amount of fitness or competitive spirit will ever compensate for deficiencies in **functional game skills**

The Skill Acquisition Phase (U/10-U/13)

The characteristics of children this age are:

• They are highly motivated and enthusiastic

• They are competitive, like challenges and want to show they're the best

• They are well balanced and coordinated

• They are very adaptive to learning motor skills

• Although still self-centred, they start to learn how to work together

• They are sensitive to criticism and failure (praise is important)

• They are physically and mentally ready for a more structured approach
  to training

  As mentioned above, in the period before entering the growth spurt that goes
  hand in hand with puberty, children are well balanced and coordinated.
  This makes them very adaptive to developing motor skills (techniques)
  especially since this is one of the brain's key development periods.

The Japanese call this phase of 'turbo charged' technical development the 'Golden
Age of motor learning'. In no other development phase in life will motor learning
happen faster than here. As a logical consequence of the above,
it makes sense that we make optimal use of this period to lay a sustainable
technical foundation.

TECHNICAL SKILLS MUST BE DEVELOPED NOW
(if we miss out here it will hamper us for the rest of our playing career).

Hopefully it now makes perfect sense why we call this phase the 'Skill Acquisition
Phase'. The focus during this period is on the development of the 'functional
game skills'.

These are the technical skills you need to perform effectively during a game.

The word 'functional' emphasises the difference to 'un-functional' tricks,
which may be fun to see and do but useless during the game.

The 4 Core Skills:

The FFA Skill Acquisition training program focuses upon developing four core skills
when in possession of the ball.

1. Striking the ball
   This includes all forms of striking the ball such as short/long passing;
   shooting and crossing

2. First touch
   Controlling the ball with all allowed body parts

3. 1 v 1
   All moves, feints and accelerations to get past and away from an opponent

4. Running with the ball
   At speed (with a lot of space) or 'dribbling' (in tight areas), this includes
   techniques for protecting the ball and changing direction.

These four core skills cover 95% of the actions of any outfield player when in
possession of the ball during a game of football. The other 5% consists of actions
such as heading and throw-ins.

3. Skill Acquisition Phase

Of course we can also distinguish defensive skills such as various tackling techniques and it goes without saying that the defensive 1 v 1 skills are equally important and must be properly developed too.

We made the practical choice to develop the defensive skills as part of the 1 v 1 practices. Although the emphasis is on the attacking skills, we are not ignoring the defensive ones. So, in the 1 v 1 Model Sessions, coaches will find the box below with coaching tips for the defender as well the attacker.

1 v 1 Coaching Tips	
ATTACKER	**DEFENDER**
"Go at the defender with speed"	"Show the attacker one way/force them away from goal"
"Use a feint to put the defender off balance"	"Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you're able to change direction quickly"
"Threaten to go to one side then suddenly attack the other"	"The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down"

As far as heading is concerned, the advice is to start developing this specific skill at the start of the Game Training Phase. At younger ages heading is a 'scary' activity and not much heading takes place anyway since most players lack the power to play aerial balls.

If heading is practised during the Skill Acquisition Phase we advise the use of so-called super light balls (specially devised for youth football).

As we've explained earlier it takes many hours of practicing and lots of repetition to properly develop the four core skills with both feet and 'automate' the techniques. Automate means that we've practised the techniques so often that we can execute them without having to consciously concentrate on the execution.

We can compare this process with learning to drive a car: in the beginning we have to consciously think of every act in the process, we even tend to look where the pedals are. But after some time we drive from A to B while having a conversation, thinking deeply about something or making a (hands free) phone call. We arrive at our destination totally unaware of the driving acts we have executed on the way: driving a car has become an automatism.

The same principle applies for mastering the core skills: many hours of purposeful practice will eventually lead to automatism and we execute the skill 'unconsciously'. When this happens we will, as a consequence, have more time for scanning our options and making decisions. With top level players the ball is 'glued' to their feet while they look around and check the options.

The principle of thousands of hours of practice leading to automatism applies to everything, from playing a violin to playing golf or football. Football however differs from golf because the technical skills must be executed under constant pressure of football-specific resistances (opponents; space; time; direction), in ever-changing situations.

Scientific research (Daniel Coyle, 'The Talent Code'; et al.) shows that in football the most educationally effective way is to develop technical skills (execution) and perception skills (decision-making) **simultaneously**.

This 'holistic approach' is one of the essences of the FFA Coaching Philosophy which is explained in depth in chapter 4.

So, herein lies the huge challenge for anyone working with players in this important age bracket: your primary role is that of a 'skills teacher' focused on individual technical development as opposed to being a 'team coach'.

Your mission is to 'automate' the core skills through lots of repetition, but at the same time avoid 'drill' practices, where there may be repetition but no decision-making.

It's not easy to get this right!

Game Training Phase

4 Training Building Blocks

2 Playing Building Blocks

17

13

9

5

Performance Phase

Game Training Phase

11 v 11

Skill Acquisition Phase

Small-sided Football

Discovery Phase

17

13

9

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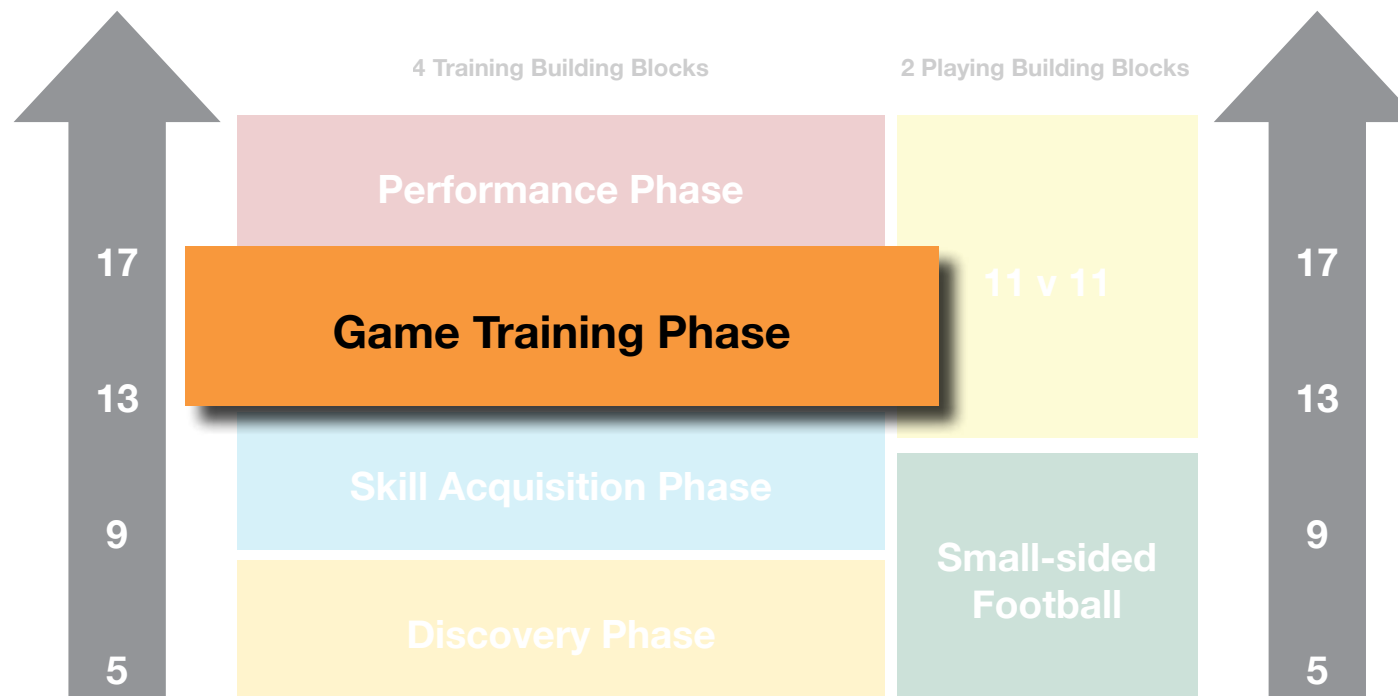
- Preparing players for senior football by teaching them to apply the functional game skills in a team setting using 1-4-3-3 as the preferred formation

- Developing tactical awareness, perception and decision-making through a game-related approach to training

The Game Training Phase (U/14-U/17)

The most important aspect of this age bracket is the fact that these players are in (or entering into) the **puberty** phase which is a phase of radical mental and physical changes.

Huge changes in the hormonal system cause confusion while the physical changes can also unsettle the youngsters. Physically they may sometimes suddenly look like adults but mentally they often are still children, something that may also confuse coaches. Another aspect for coaches to consider is that in general, girls enter the puberty phase slightly earlier than boys.

The main **mental** characteristics of the puberty phase are:

• Sudden mood changes

• Resistance against authority

• Impulsiveness (first acting then thinking)

• Accelerated intellectual development

• Identity search which leads to a desire to be part of a group

The main physical characteristic of the puberty phase is a sudden acceleration in growth. One of the consequences of this **growth spurt** may be a temporary decrease of coordination and strength.

Because suddenly the bones start growing fast and the muscles and ligaments as well as the nervous system need time to adjust to the new proportions, players may look 'clumsy'. Players are also prone to overuse **injuries** like Osgood-Schlatter disease during this phase.

It goes without saying that it's of the ultimate importance that coaches working with players this age have knowledge and understanding of all these aspects to be able to guide youngsters through this critical development phase in a well-considered way.

While during the puberty phase players' physical and technical development temporarily stagnates or loses ground, their intellectual development accelerates as does their understanding of and appreciation for teamwork. This makes the Game Training Phase exceptionally suited for developing tactical awareness and insight.

Whereas the purpose of the Skill Acquisition Phase is to **acquire** the core skills, the Game Training Phase is about learning how to **apply** them in a functional way. In the Game Training Phase the focus shifts towards learning to play as a team and developing an understanding of the team tasks during the main moments (attacking; defending; transitioning), as well as the specific tasks that go with the individual team positions.

To be able to properly develop the team tasks and the individual player tasks we need the context of a playing formation. After all, team tasks and player tasks may differ depending on the playing formation.

The 1-4-3-3 formation

It is important to realise that we did not just take 1-4-3-3 as a starting point! Unfortunately this has been and continues to be widely misunderstood and far too much attention has been devoted to discussions about playing formations.

Of course there are many successful styles and formations in football but FFA considers 1-4-3-3 the most appropriate formation to develop an understanding of **team play** in young players.

Our opinion is supported by another very interesting quote from the Chris Sulley research on Europe's most successful academies:

"There was a clear emphasis on a possession based philosophy and most employed a 4-3-3 model with an explicit attempt to pass the ball through the units. There was a tangible difference in the type of work delivered to the players from what is typically delivered at EPL academies. Early age players typically participated in random and variable practices that involved decision-making tactically. The consistent Talent ID criteria was centred around the player's ability to handle the ball, make good decisions and speed, as opposed to the notions of power, size and strength that still dominate the English youth system".

Game Training Phase

Why?

• In the 1-4-3-3 formation there are 3 lines with a balanced spread of players over the pitch ('triangles' of players). As explained earlier, this is one of the basic conditions for successful positioning play or to put it more simply: this creates a range of other, more 'logical', options for youth players. Instead of just kicking the ball forward, players almost 'automatically' start making combinations;

• The 1-4-3-3 formation stimulates the development of creative attacking players; more specifically the 3 attackers and the attacking midfielder(s)

• Defensively 1-4-3-3 also has an advantage since pressurizing an opponent's defence line (proactive defending!) is easier to do with 3 attackers as it requires less running and is tactically less complicated

• For youth players, the positions and the attached player tasks are logical, recognizable and easy to comprehend. Moreover, every position has a specific number which makes learning to play as a team easier.
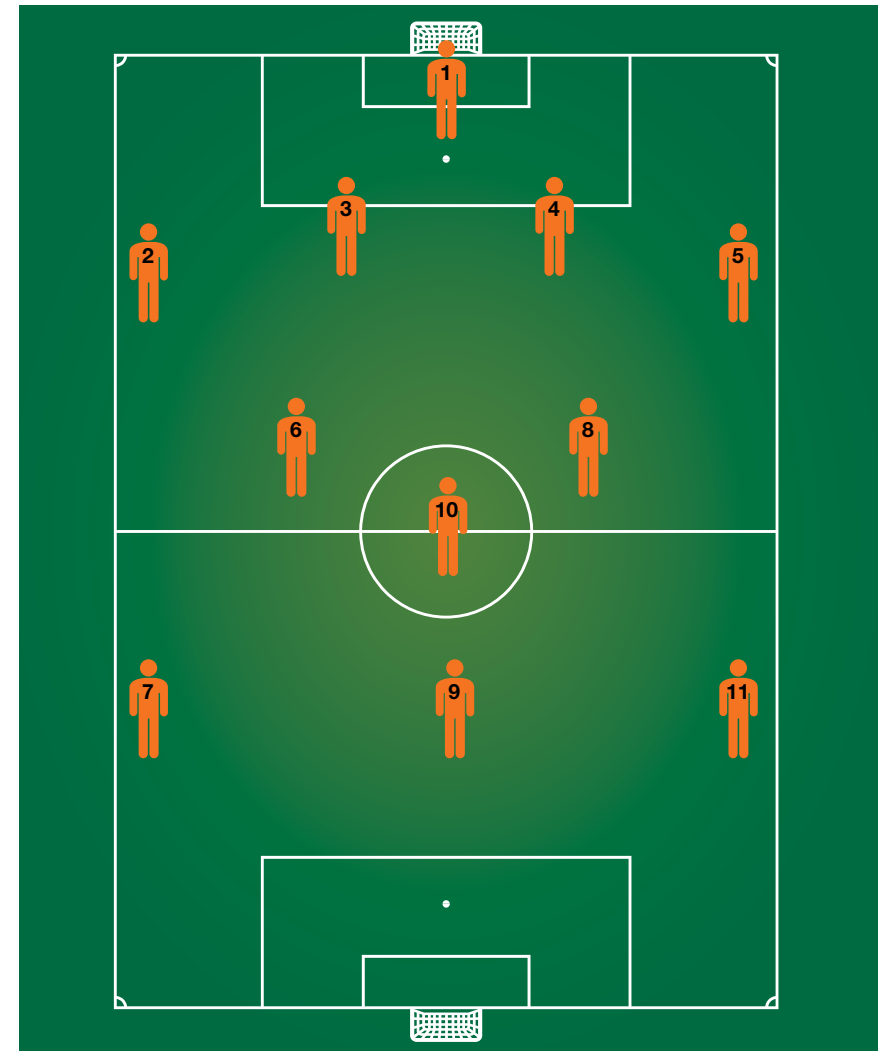
Competence profile - Goalkeeper #1

The goalkeeper is of course a special position in any playing system or formation. First and foremost it's the goalkeeper's task to keep the opponent from scoring in any possible way within the rules of the game. Some goalkeepers do that by making spectacular saves, others are great at organizing their defence and anticipating situations. Top keepers possess all these qualities as well as the physical and mental characteristics required.

A condition for our preferred playing style is that goalkeepers must be able to play with their feet as a prerequisite for possession-based football and the goalkeeper is an indispensable link for that.

As a consequence of defending high up the park, there will regularly be a big space behind our defence. This requires a goalkeeper to be able to play as a 'sweeper' which is another characteristic specific to the playing style.
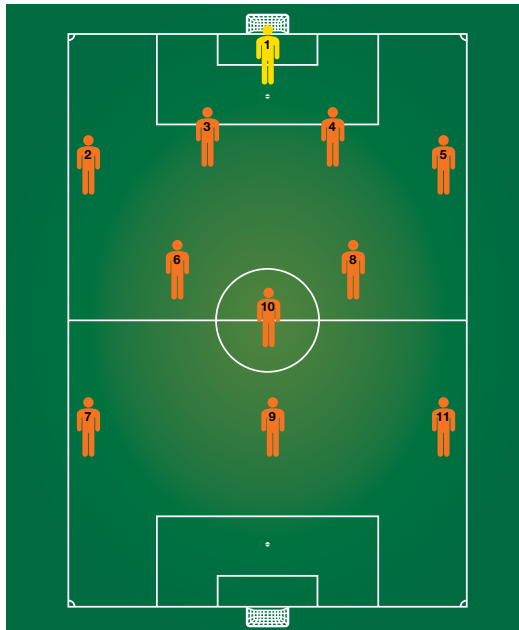
Competence profile - Full-backs #2 & #5

Full-backs in modern high-level football must be very versatile.

Defensively sometimes they have a direct opponent (winger) which requires strong defensive 1 v 1 skills. Sometimes they have no direct opponent so they have to defend 'positionally' which requires awareness and tactical insight. The role of modern full-backs in playing out and especially in attacking wing play has become vitally important.

When playing out, it's often the full-backs that can receive the ball from the goalkeeper because they do not have a direct opponent and are therefore unmarked.

In attack, more often than not it's the overlapping full-backs that provide the decisive crosses and assists. Especially in possession of the ball it's favourable if #2 is right footed and #5 is left footed.
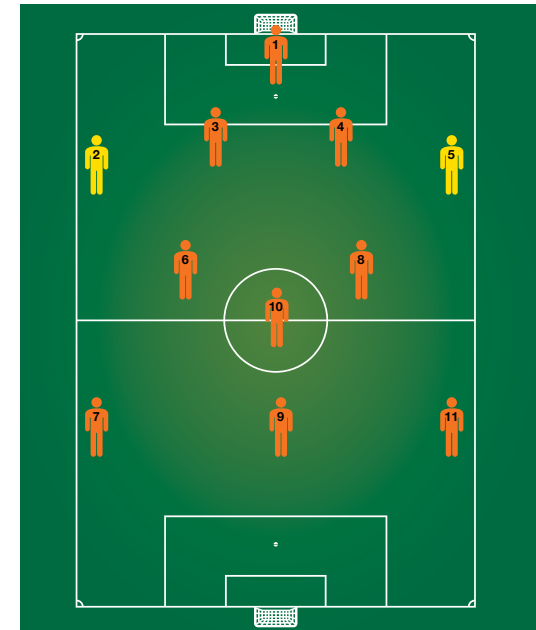
Competence profile - Centre-backs #3 & #4

Just like the full-backs, modern centre-backs also need to be more versatile than before.

Of course a centre-back still needs to be defensively strong and good in the air. But today's centre-backs also need to be tactically aware and know what to do when the opponent plays with one striker or with two, when to close down and mark an opponent and when to drop off and give cover.

In ball possession, a good cross-field pass to the wingers is still an important asset for any centre-back. But modern centre-backs should also be able to move into the midfield with the ball at their feet and create a numerical advantage. It's also important for a centre-back to have leadership skills and to coach and organise the team. Centre-backs usually have all the other outfield players in front of them which gives them an ideal view of the game.

Playing out is much easier if #3 is right-footed and #4 left-footed.
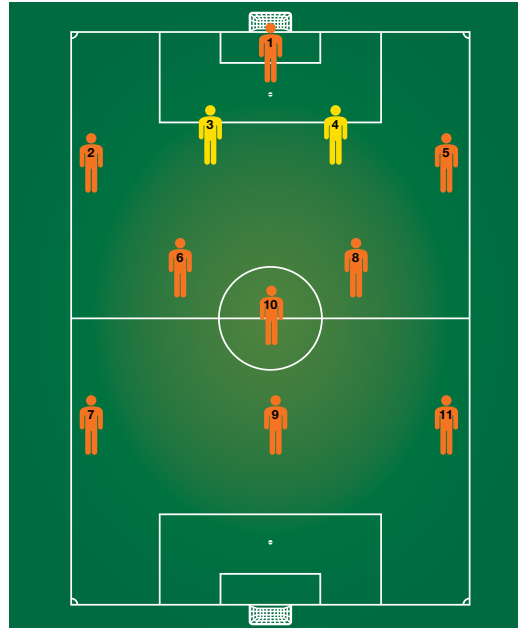
Competence profile - Midfielders #6 & #8

The right (#6) and left (#8) midfielders are the 'engine room' of the team.

Their task is to stay centrally and support the back four during BPO as well as feed and support the attack in BP.

It's important they can 'read' the game (meaning they are tactically aware) and have a good passing range.

Defensively they must assist the defence by creating a block with the centre-backs and screen the passing lines to the opponent's central striker(s).

In BP they must be the link players that receive the ball from the defenders and deliver it to the attackers without turning it over unnecessarily.

One of the two should always join in to support the attack while the other one stays behind the ball to keep the defensive balance. If #6 is right footed and #8 left footed it's easier to quickly change the point of attack which increases the chance of successful attacking play.
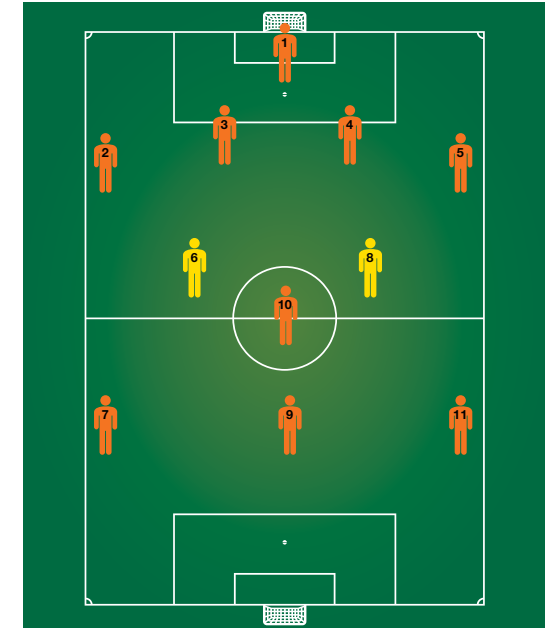
Competence profile - Attacking Midfielder #10

In the 1-4-3-3 formation the role of the #10 is of vital importance for successful attacking play.

The #10 must be a versatile, creative player that can combine, dribble and take on opponents.

A good #10 recognises the right moments to play a killer pass and has the ability to score goals.

The #10 tries to get on the ball in the space between the opponent's back four and midfield ('playing between the lines').

Although the attacking contribution of #10 is vitally important, it's a **midfield** position (not a 2nd striker).

Defensively the attacking midfielder should therefore connect with #6 and #8 to form a compact unit that presses the opponent in the central midfield area.
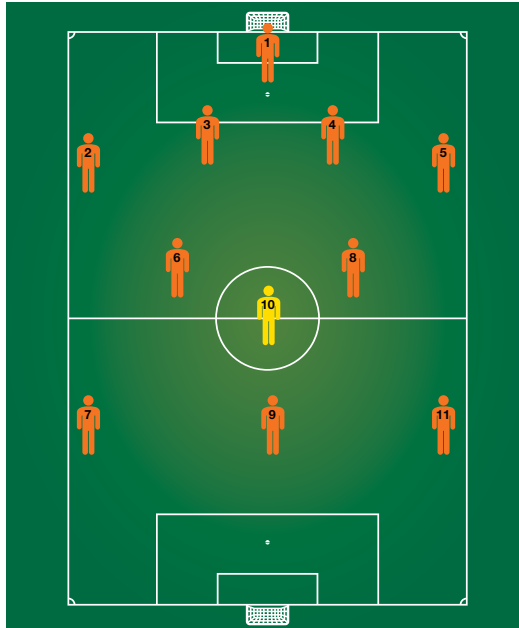
Competence profile - Wingers #7 & #11

The task of the right winger (#7) and left winger (#11) is to stretch the opponent's defence and, together with the full-backs, create openings in the wide areas. Although wingers can (should) also cut inside, it's important to do this at the right moment which means not too early and not all the time.

Their starting position should always be **high** and **wide**.

A moment when they should **always** come inside is when a cross is delivered into the penalty area from the opposite wing. Wingers must have good attacking 1 v 1 skills, be able to run with the ball at speed and to deliver good crosses. Creative combination skills as well as goalscoring abilities are also important attributes.

Defensively the wingers play an important role in pressuring the opponent's back four and, together with the full-back, protect and defend their designated wing.
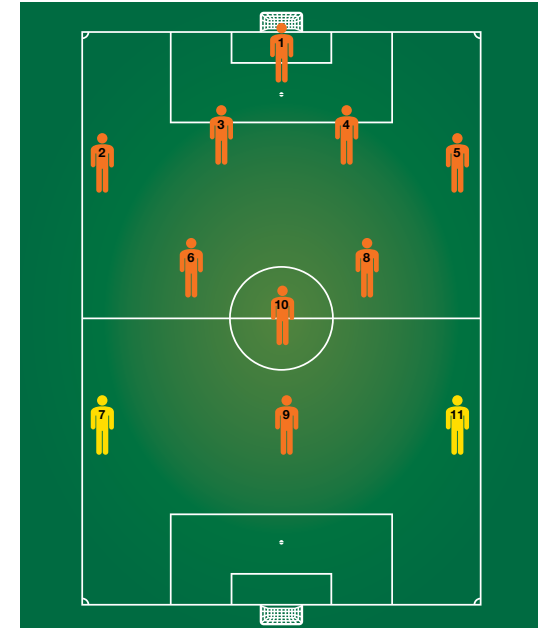
Competence profile - Central Striker #9

Traditionally the central striker or centre forward is the 'target man' that plays as high as possible. This is still the most common interpretation although there are also variations.

Of course the primary task of the central striker is to score goals. That means #9 must have a good shot with both feet and be a good header of the ball.

The #9 must also have a keen spatial awareness and excellent timing. Other important skills are creative combination play, the ability to keep the ball under pressure from an opponent and the ability to take on defenders.

Defending in modern football starts with the attackers. The central striker in particular has an important role in determining when and where to start pressuring the opponent's back four.
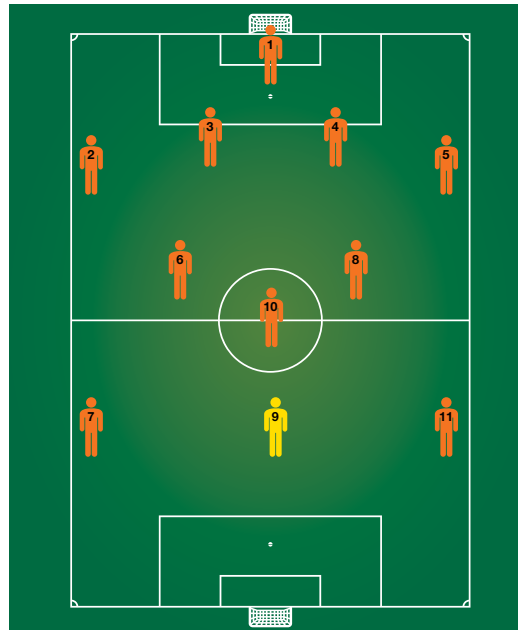
4 Training Building Blocks

2 Playing Building Blocks

Performance Phase

11 v 11

17

13

9

5

Game Training Phase

Skill Acquisition Phase

Discovery Phase

Small-sided Football

17

13

9

5

- Preparing teams for a competition environment where winning becomes the main aim

- Training to focus on solving football problems, based on match analysis

- FOOTBALL CONDITIONING becomes a key part of the program

The Performance Phase (17 years and older)

The Performance Phase starts when the puberty phase has ended and the growth spurt has come to a standstill. Generally this happens around the age of 16, but differs from individual to individual and, as stated before, girls generally reach this point earlier than boys.

Girls and boys diverge in their physical abilities as they enter puberty and move through adolescence. Higher levels of the hormone **Testosterone** allow boys to add muscle and even without much effort on their part, get stronger. In turn, they become less flexible.

Girls, as their levels of the hormone **Estrogen** increase, tend to add fat rather than muscle. They must train rigorously to get significantly stronger. Estrogen also makes girls' ligaments lax which makes them more flexible than boys but also more prone to certain injuries such as ACL (Anterior Cruciate Ligament) rupture.

Core Stability strength training is therefore an important training element in the Performance phase, especially for girls. However, it's unnecessary to do that in a gym since Core Stability programs can perfectly be done on the pitch as part of the warm-up. This way we avoid losing valuable **football** training time.

At this stage of development, the young adults are ready for high performance training. Coordination is back, the mental balance has been restored and the energy systems of the body are now effectively 'trainable'.

This is the moment that **football-specific conditioning** can start. At an earlier age so-called 'conditioning' is mostly pointless and generally a waste of time (or even dangerous if conducted inexpertly).

This is also the moment that winning really starts to matter. That's why the purpose of the Performance Phase is:

Learning how to perform/win as a team

So in the Performance Phase, the coach is very much focused on getting results. Training, therefore, is centred on fixing specific problems with the team's tactical performance.

Small Sided Football

The last two Building Blocks are the Playing Building Blocks, **Small Sided Football** and **11 v 11**.

4 Training Building Blocks

2 Playing Building Blocks

17

13

9

5

Performance Phase

Game Training Phase

Skill Acquisition Phase

Discovery Phase

11 v 11

Small-sided Football

17

13

9

5

- U/6-U/7 : 4 v 4 (no goalkeepers)

- U/8-U/9 : 7 v 7 (6 outfield players and a goalkeeper)

- U/10-U/11 : 9 v 9 (8 outfield players and a goalkeeper)

- From U/12 : 11 v 11

- Emphasis on fun, freedom of expression and 'learning by playing' instead of 'winning at all costs'

- The game is for the players, the role of coaches and parents is to help, teach, stimulate and praise them so they enjoy playing.

Small Sided Football

A former colleague of mine once came up with this perfect analogy while discussing the rationale of Small Sided Football with someone who disagreed with the concept:

"So then, would you also throw your 3 year old daughter into the deep end of an Olympic Pool to teach her how to swim?"

The motives behind the concept of Small Sided Football (SSF) are numerous and make perfect sense for any right-thinking person:

• For kids aged 5-12 the distances they have to cover on a full pitch are way too big. They are unable to run or pass over big distances and they will be exhausted in no time

• An 11 v 11 game is far too complex for young kids: there are too many rules, options and choices to be made and as a result the success rate will be very low

• The number of ball contacts in a game involving 22 kids and one ball on a big pitch will be very limited so they do not develop and it's not much fun

As a result of the above mentioned points the motivation to play our beautiful game will soon be gone and the kids will turn their interests to other activities! The biggest mistake you can make as a coach is to consider children to be little adults. We have hopefully made this clear by describing the mental and physical development stages throughout the various Building Blocks.

By gradually increasing the number of players as well as the pitch sizes the children learn to play the game in a progressive, logical and stimulating way.

In his book "The Talent Code", researcher Daniel Coyle describes why **futsal** (which is **Small Sided Football!**) is the secret behind the success of Brazilian football. In futsal players touch the ball on average 6 times per minute more often than in 11 v 11. In addition to this, because of the limited space, quickness of decision-making as well as accuracy improves dramatically.
Coyle calls futsal 'turbo charged football learning'.

This is once again an example of what we call the holistic approach. Brazilian kids do not separately learn how to pass the ball first; then to dribble and then to receive the ball, etc. They develop those technical skills as well as the decision-making skills while playing futsal.

Currently the rationale of Small Sided Football is understood and adopted all over the football world as the best way to make the youngest players familiar with our game.

On the next pages you will find the Small Sided Football formats used by FFA with an explanation of how 7 v 7 and 9 v 9 lead up to the 1-4-3-3 formation in a logical and methodical manner as well as a number of coaching tips.

3. Small Sided Football

Small Sided Football Formats

Playing Format	Under 6 & 7	Under 8 & 9	Under 10 & 11
NUMBERS	4 v 4	7 v 7	9 v 9
FIELD SIZE	Length: 30m Width: 20m	¼ Full Size Pitch Length: 40m - 50m Width: 30m - 40m	½ Full Size Pitch Length: 60m - 70m Width: 40m - 50m
FIELD MARKINGS	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings	Markers or line markings
PENALTY AREA	Nil	5m depth x 12m width	5m depth x 12m width
GOAL SIZE	Width: 1.5m - 2.0m Height: 0.9m - 1.0m	Width: 2.5m - 3.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m	Width: 4.5m - 5.0m Height: 1.8m - 2.0m
GOAL TYPE	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals	Markers, Poles, Goals
BALL SIZE	Size 3	Size 3	Size 4
GOALKEEPER	No	Yes	Yes
PLAYING TIME	2 x 15 minutes	2 x 20 minutes	2 x 25 minutes
HALF TIME BREAK	5 minutes	5 minutes	7.5 minutes
REFEREE	Game Leader	Instructing Referee	Instructing Referee

U/6-7

Teams of 4 players (no goalkeepers).

Coaching tips:

No 'coaching' only stimulating and praising

'Natural' development through just playing and discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial & error.

Emphasis on fun and building a love of the game.

The best coach is not the one who shouts instructions the whole game, however unfortunately many parents seem to feel that's what good coaches are supposed to do.

- In 4 v 4 football, the 'coach' should not worry about 'tactics' other than encouraging the kids to try and score when they have the ball and win it back when the other team has the ball in order to prevent them from scoring

- Aim for equal playing time.
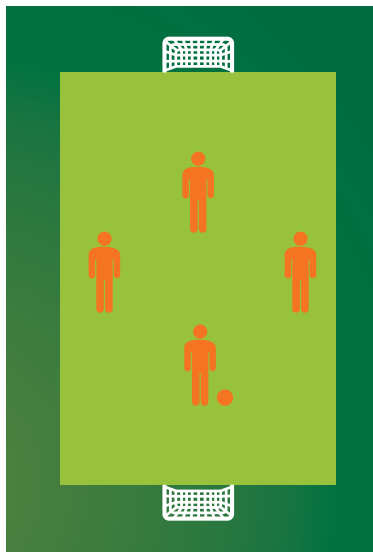
How NOT to coach Small Sided Football

Small Sided Football

U/8-9

Teams of 7 players (one goalkeeper and 6 outfield players)

Coaching tips:

• The players now begin to understand what the game's purpose is (winning by scoring more goals than the opponent)

• There will still be a lot of individual play but the players start to understand that they have to work together in order to be successful

• A basic 'feeling' for team play, direction and dealing with an opponent starts to develop

• Preference and talent for a specific position starts to show: you can start working on a basic organisation (1 in goal; 3 at the back; 3 up front) and a basic understanding of some team tasks (how to defend and attack as a team)

• The coach should still let every player play in every position regularly. One week they want to be goalie, next time the centre forward. Let them!

• Bigger goals with goalkeepers automatically appeal to aiming and shooting: give them all plenty of opportunities to shoot (or be the goalkeeper).

• In 7 v 7 football, the coach should still not be too concerned with 'tactics'. The focus in training is on the individual player, so in the weekend game the players should have the opportunity to apply their skills in a game setting. The coach organises the players into two lines of three with a Goalkeeper behind. The players just need simple tasks so they do not become confused or overwhelmed with information (Examples: 'You three try to defend more than you attack' 'you three try to attack more than you defend' 'let's see if we can always have one of our players pushed right up in the middle of the pitch' 'when the opponent has the ball, can we get one of our team near every one of their players on the goal side', etc)
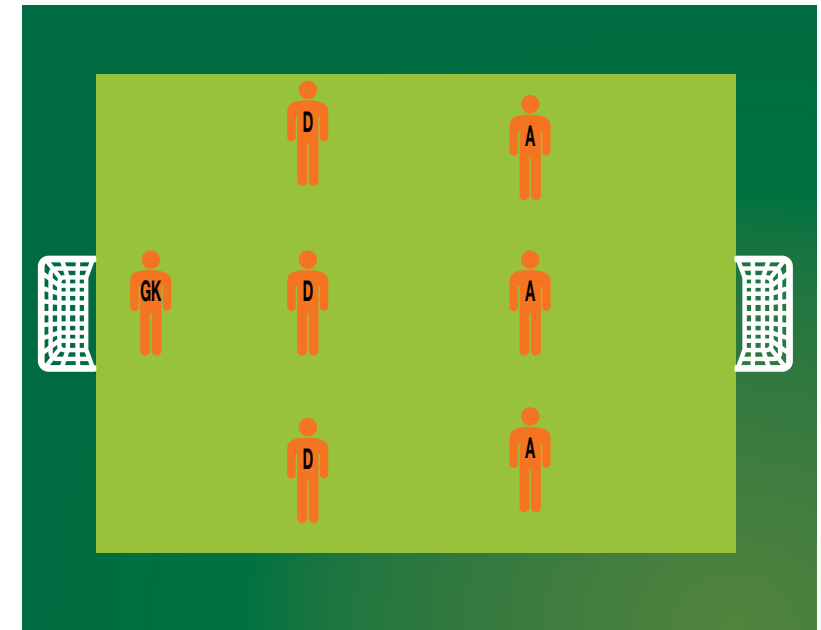
• At half-time, the coach should rotate players around to experience different aspects of the game (e.g. the three defenders become the three attackers)

• Aim for equal playing time

U/10-11

Coaching tips:

- The understanding of working together as a team develops more and more

- The awareness of the individual roles in relation to teamwork is also developing as well as the understanding for acting without the ball both in defence and attack

- With 8 outfield players a tighter and more strict task allocation and use of space is required

- Preference/ability for specific positions becomes more and more clear

- At this age the kids are very competitive and clever and very quickly develop their motor skills

- All the above means that the coach can raise the bar on all these aspects but:

  - Avoid an information 'overkill'
  - Keep it simple (speak their language)
  - It's their game, it's not about the coach

- In 9 v 9, the coach organises the players into three lines with a goalkeeper behind, preferably in a 1-3-2-3 formation as a guide for team shape

- The coach is still not too concerned with tactics or obsessed with results

- The players still just need simple tasks on match day

- The players should still be regularly rotated, either at half-time or from game to game

- Avoid playing the best players in central positions, and 'hiding' the weaker players out wide

- Aim for equal playing time
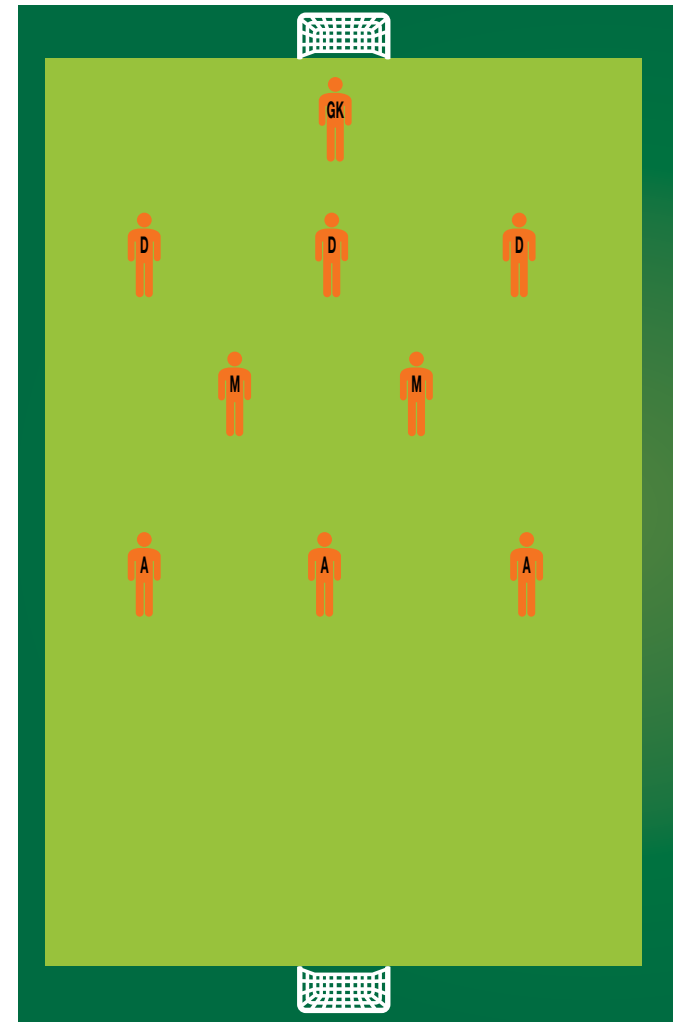
Small Sided Football

U/11

- With the U/11's it is FFA's preference to play box to box and narrow the field approximately 5m each side. Playing in the length of the pitch is a totally new experience with a different perception and more complexity. As a last step towards the real, full pitch game this format offers the ideal link.

4 Training Building Blocks

2 Playing Building Blocks

Performance Phase

11 v 11

Game Training Phase

Skill Acquisition Phase

Small-sided Football

Discovery Phase

17

13

9

5

17

13

9

5
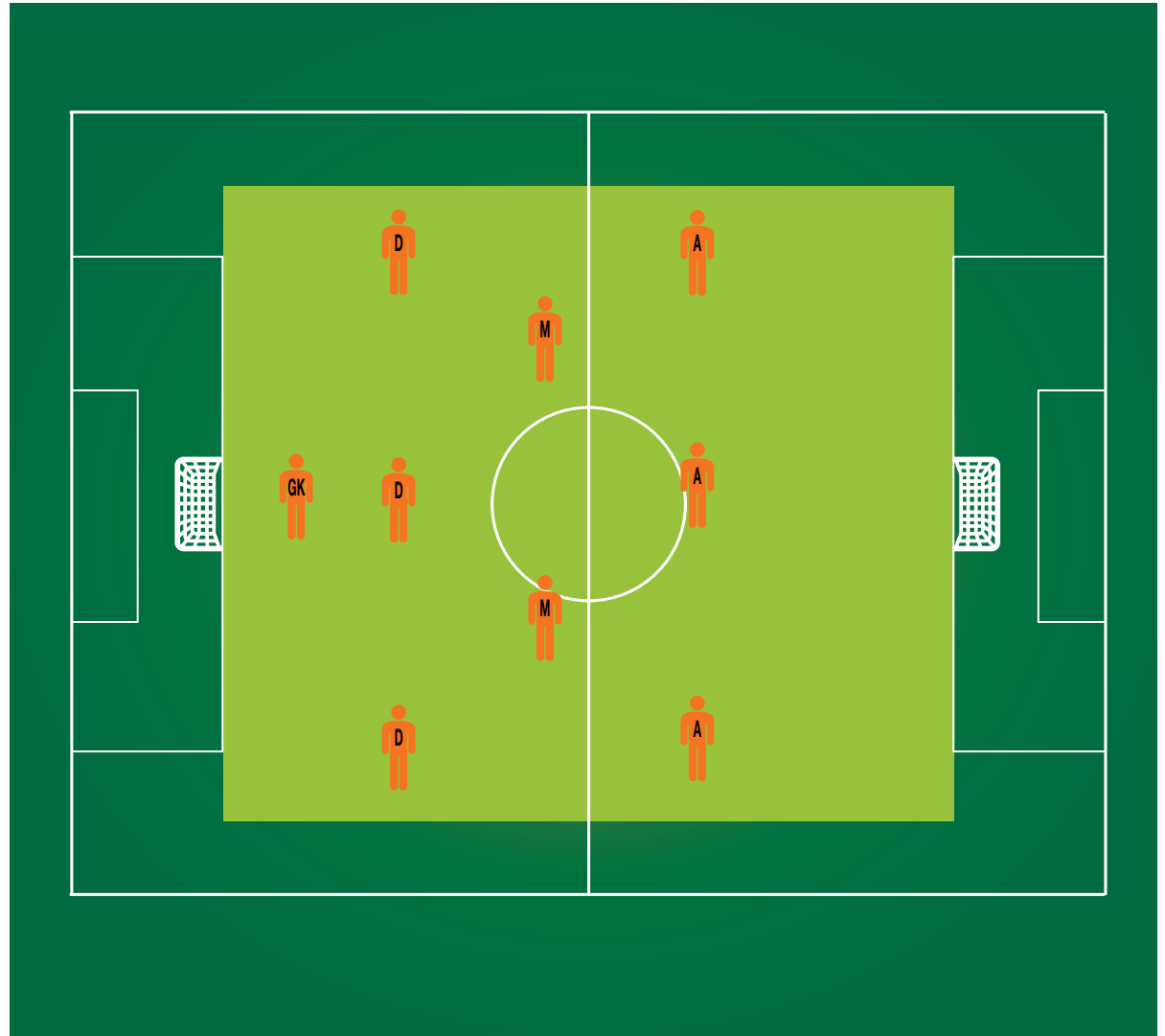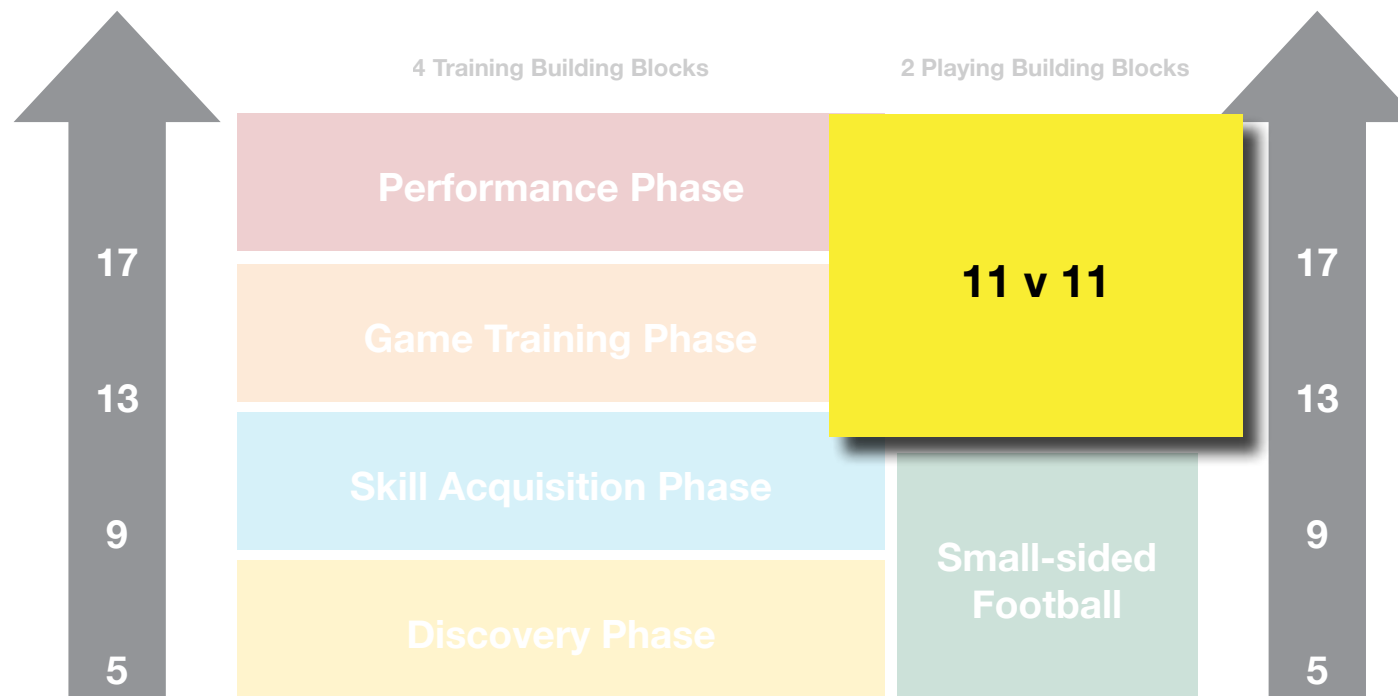
- From U/12 at the earliest

- The weekly game is a vital developmental element for young players

- The game is the frame of reference that tells us if we are improving

- Only in a regular, year-round competition environment can game cleverness, game hardness and game experience be developed

- The game is for players (not for the coach)

11 v 11

In the opinion of FFA, the full 11 v 11 game should be played from U/12 at the earliest. Worldwide, many experts are of the opinion that even this is too early and it's better to wait till after the growth spurt.

There is general consensus though on the fact that a weekly game is a vital element for the development of young players because the game is the frame of reference that tells us if we are improving. Only in a regular, year-round competition environment can players develop game cleverness, game hardness and game experience.

In youth football the development of the INDIVIDUAL should come first NOT the team result, something many coaches (and parents) often seem to forget.

In order to develop players to the maximum of their potential, they need to continuously be challenged to raise their individual bar.

Therefore each player should train and play at a level that is most appropriate for his/her actual development stage. If the level of resistance is too low and it's too easy, players do not develop. If the level of resistance is too high and it's too difficult, they do not develop either.

This is why the best must train with the best and play against the best.

This also explains why quality competitions are such a vital element of the development pathway.

In order to improve the competition structures as well as the structure and quality of club youth academies in Australia, FFA has introduced the Talented Player Pathway **Three Pillar Structure**.

The Three Pillar Structure is aimed at drastically raising the quality, accessibility and clarity of the Talented Player Pathway in Australia. The Three Pillar Structure is a work in progress though and still contains gaps.

Therefore FFA together with the Member Federations have taken ownership of parts of the National Talented Player Pathway whereas in most countries in the world youth development is undertaken by the (professional) clubs.

On the next pages you will find an explanation of the Three Pillar Structure of the male Elite Player Pathway.

The Female Elite Player Pathway Re-Structure together with the National Competitions Review for Women's Football is still in progress and accordingly is not available for inclusion in this publication. Although the starting points are identical, there will be certain differences in the pathway structure for girls and women.

3.

The Three Pillar Structure

	PILLAR 1		PILLAR 2		PILLAR 3
	"The Elite"		"Best of the Best"		"The Best"
	FFA	Scouting / Talent ID	A-League / FFA / Member Federations	Scouting / Talent ID	National Premier League
U22	Socceroos Olyroos	←	A-League	↔	First Team
U20		←		↔	U20 Team
U19	Young Socceroos	←	NYL	↔	U19 Team (optional)
U18				↔	U18 Team
U17	Joeys			↔	U17 Team (optional)
U16				↔	U16 Team
U15	AIS	NTC Challenge (U/15-16)	NTC	↔	U15 Team (optional)
U14				↔	U14 Team
U13		U/13-14 National Youth Championships	Skilleroos	↔	U13 Team (optional)
U12			Skill Acquisition Programs	↔	U12 Team

Pillar 1: The Elite

The first pillar consists of the men's National Team programs which are the specific responsibility of FFA (AIS/Joeys, Young Socceroos, Olyroos and Socceroos).

The male national team pathway starts with the AIS program.

This is a 2 year full time program at the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra for the best Australian U/16-17 boys.

The players for this top level program of international standards are primarily recruited from the underpinning State and Territory National Training Centre (NTC) programs.

The AIS team participates in the National Youth League (NYL) and ideally the AIS squad is the same group of players that form the Australian U/17 team (the 'Joeys').

This program prepares the players for the AFC U/16 Championships and the U/17 World Cup (subject to qualification) that are held every 2 years.

Graduates from the AIS program generally continue their playing career with National Youth League (NYL) or A-League clubs or are being contracted by overseas clubs.

"The Elite"

FFA	
Socceroos	U22
Olyroos	
	U20
Young Socceroos	U19
	U18
Joeys	U17
	U16
AIS	U15
	U14
	U13
	U12
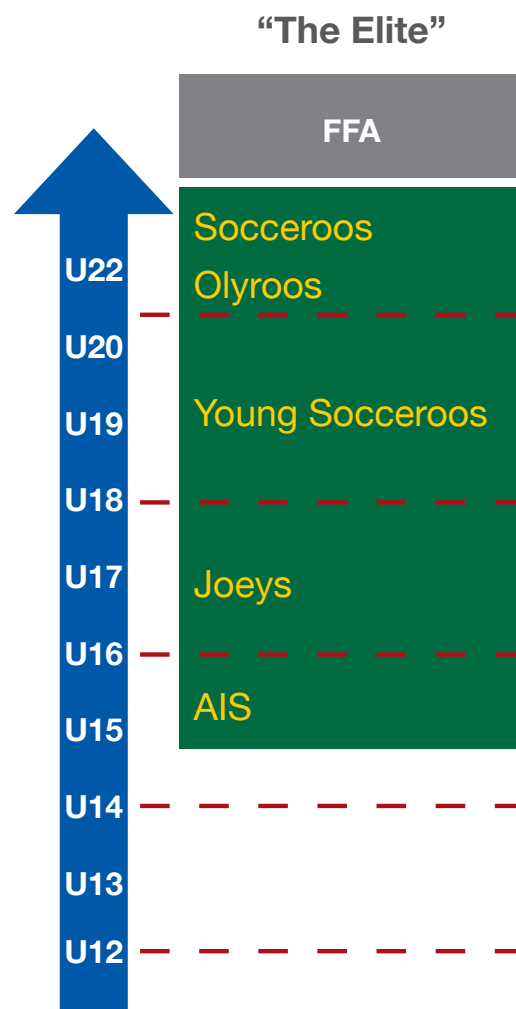
The next national representative team are the Young Socceroos for U/19-20 year old players. The Young Socceroos program is a 'camp based' program, since the majority of players are contracted NYL or A-League players or playing for overseas clubs. It is a 2 year program comprising of the U/19 AFC Qualifiers and Championships, the latter being the qualification tournament for the U/20 World Cup held every 2 years.

The Olyroos program is for U/22-23 year old players. Every two years they participate in the U/22 AFC Qualifiers and Championships, and every 4 years these Championships are the qualification tournament for the Olympic Games.

The last and most important step in the pathway is of course the Socceroos. The majority of Australia's top senior players are playing for overseas clubs, several of them in European top leagues. But recently more players from the A-League are being selected for the Socceroos which underlines the increasing quality of our domestic competition.

Every 4 years the Socceroos must qualify for the FIFA World Cup. Every 4 years the AFC also organises the Asian Championships (usually the year after the World Cup).

For both events there is a staged qualification process for countries that are members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

The Three Pillar Structure

Pillar 2: The Best of the Best

The second pillar consists of the combined FFA/ Member Federations programs, the National Youth League (NYL) teams and the A-League clubs.

The Skill Acquisition Programs (SAP) are programs aiming for talented boys aged U/14 and under, with the emphasis on developing the functional game skills as explained earlier in this chapter (the Skill Acquisition Phase).

There is at least one SAP program in every State and Territory and the so-called 'Skilleroos' squads (U/13-14) form the pinnacle of these programs.

There are yearly U/13 and 14 National Youth Championships to identify the most talented players in these age brackets.

The SAP is the first level of the National Talented Player Pathway for every boy that dreams of one day wearing the 'Green and Gold'.

Graduates from the SAP programs enter the National Training Centre (NTC) programs aimed at talented U/15-16 boys in every State and Territory.

The focus of these programs is on developing an understanding of the team tasks and individual player tasks as explained earlier in this chapter (the Game Training Phase).

"Best of the Best"

A-League / FFA / Member Federations

U22	A-League
U20	
U19	NYL
U18	
U17	
U16	
U15	NTC
U14	
U13	Skilleroos
U12	
	Skill Acquisition Programs
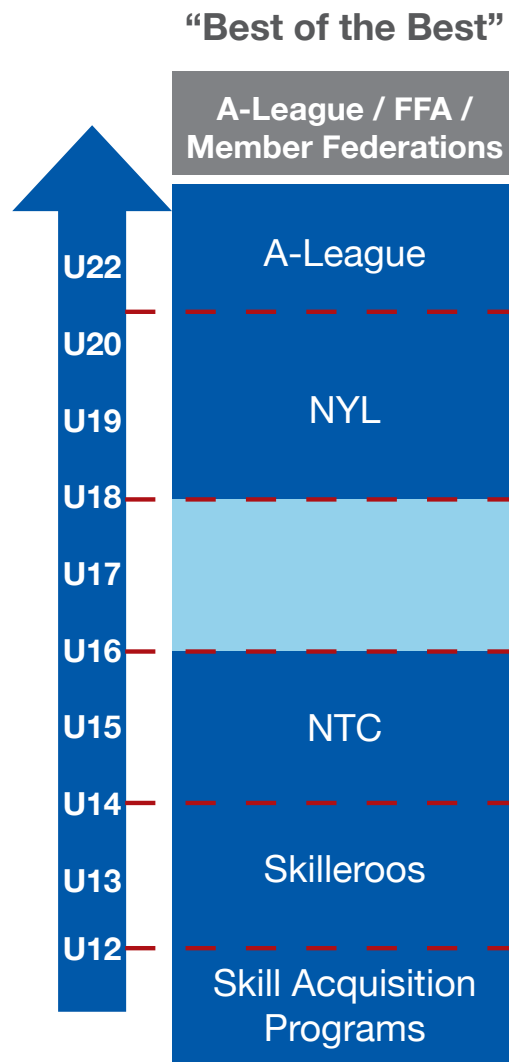
There is a yearly 'NTC challenge' to identify the most talented U/15-16 year old players for the AIS program that leads into the National U/17 team, the 'Joeys'.

The National Youth League (NYL) teams of the A-League clubs should form the next step for NTC graduates to continue their playing career at elite level.

Reality, however, shows that this step is often too big since many NYL teams are made up of 18-21 year olds and senior first team players.

Ideally we should bridge the current U16-U18 gap in Pillar 2 (light blue box in the diagram). FFA, together with the Member Federations and the A-League clubs are currently discussing possible solutions.

FFA's preferred solution is the so-called 'integrated pathway'. This means fusing together the FFA/ Member Federation programs with the local A-League clubs. Pillar 2 will then consist of the A-League and NYL teams underpinned by U/12-18 'academies' thus creating another important building block in Australia's Talented Player Pathway.

The current SAP and NTC program structure would then need revising and restructuring and appropriate solutions need to be in place for States and Territories that do not have an A-League club. It's worth mentioning that some A-League clubs, such as Newcastle Jets, in conjunction with FFA and their Member Federation, have already established academies in line with this philosophy.

Pillar 3: The Best

The third pillar is being created as a result of the National Competitions Review (NCR) and will create a competition for Elite Clubs at the highest level below the A-League in every State and Territory across Australia.

The name of these competitions is 'The National Premier League' (NPL). These 'Elite' clubs are selected and identified through an Elite Club Licensing Program that is being phased in from 2013 onwards. The purpose is to drastically raise the quality and quantity of youth development by improving and standardising the structure of these clubs. To obtain a license for the National Premier League, clubs must (amongst many others) meet criteria regarding:

- **Teams:** NPL clubs must have teams in all age groups from first grade to U/12's;

- **Youth development:** NPL clubs must have a long-term youth development mindset. Through

the introduction of a points system an NPL club can only raise a competitive first team by filling it predominantly with young, self developed players;

- **Coaching:** To guarantee the quality of coaching all NPL clubs must appoint a Technical Director and appropriately accredited coaches for all age group teams. The Technical Director must ensure that the National Football Curriculum is implemented;

- **Finance:** It will be mandatory for NPL clubs to publicise their registration fee structure in order to put a halt to the culture of using youth players and their parents as the source of income to fund the first grade.

Other criteria will focus on governance, facilities, organisational structure, membership protection, medical provisions, reporting structure and so on.

A final important objective of the National Competitions Review will be a gradual extension of the youth season to 10 months (including

competitions and training), which will bring Australia more into line with world's best practice. Whilst access to facilities outside of the winter period will be an obstacle, FFA will work with Member Federations to establish strategies which will provide greater access to football facilities.

The three pillar structure will not only drastically increase the quality of youth development but at the same time create far more opportunities for talented players. The expectation is justifiable that the majority of Australia's talented players will be gathered in these three pillars with the opportunity to switch from one pillar to another at any stage of their development. A late developer can be identified in the third pillar at any stage of his development and be transferred to Pillar Two (or even One).

If on the other hand the pathway for a player in Pillar Two stops, the player has the opportunity to continue his playing career on a quality level in Pillar Three. Through this three pillar structure the pathways will be much clearer for both players and their parents.

"The Best"

National Premier League
First Team
U20 Team
U19 Team (optional)
U18 Team
U17 Team (optional)
U16 Team
U15 Team (optional)
U14 Team
U13 Team (optional)
U12 Team

U22
U20
U19
U18
U17
U16
U15
U14
U13
U12
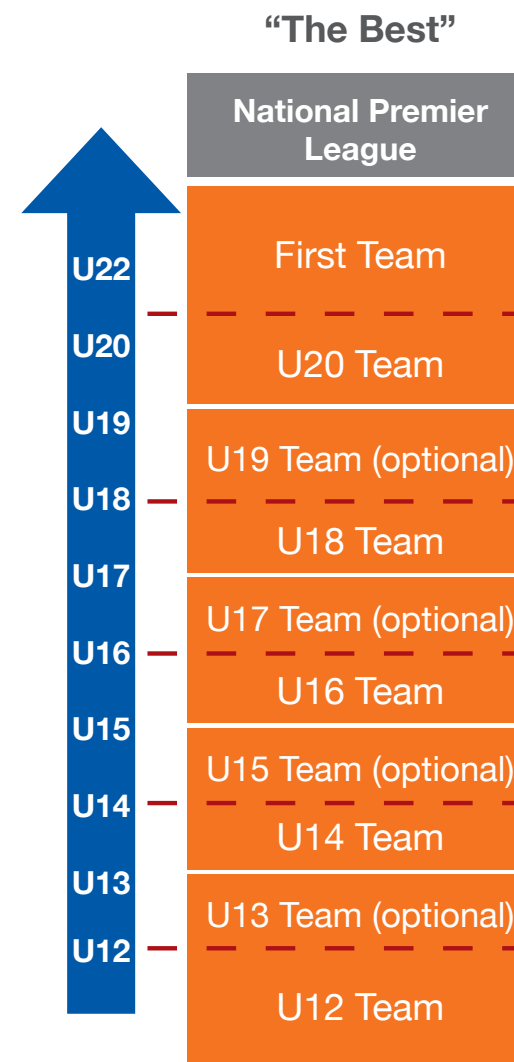
The Three Pillar Structure

FFA recognises that State and Territory based clubs have long played an important role in developing talented young players, and that they will play an increasingly important role in youth development in the future.

Assessing current Socceroos and A-League club squads, the vast majority of players are known to have risen through these clubs. With the implementation of the Elite Club Licensing program it is expected that many more young players of an even higher technical quality will be produced by the NPL club system. For this reason, FFA will officially recognise these accredited elite clubs as part of the Elite Player Pathway.

In the new three pillars pathway structure, the "best of the best" will continue to be selected for State/Territory or National programs (e.g. Skilleroos; NTC; AIS), where players will be exposed to year-round football in an elite or professional environment, ideally at no cost.

For too long, there was no clear direction for football in Australia and the result was an obvious lack of progress towards a defined objective. This applied equally to both **Youth Development and Coach Education**, which have now been identified as the two strategic spearheads to drive this country to its long-term goal.

The National Football Curriculum has set the road map and one of the major benefits of the Curriculum and its philosophy is that we now have clarity on the way forward. We have realised that football isn't 'just football'; there are many styles and brands of football but we now know how **we** want to play. We can now talk about 'our football', which can be defined and visualized, and not settle for 'any football'. We are now able to say 'any old football isn't good enough'.

That provides a solid platform for **Youth Development**, because we can logically define the types of players required to play the way we want to play. It has also provided the platform for **Coach Education** because, since we now know the football we want to play and we know the players required, we can logically define the kind of coaches we need to produce these players and playing style. As a consequence, we can now define 'The Australian way of Coaching'. We are able to say 'any old coaching isn't good enough'; there are many methods of coaching football, but we now know how we need to coach.

The Football We Want to Play (in Order for Australia to Be a World Leader)	A Philosophy on playing Football (National Football Curriculum)
The Players We Need (in Order to Play That Way)	A Philosophy on playing Football (National Football Curriculum)
The Coaches We Need (in Order to Produce Those Players and Develop the Teams They Play In)	A Philosophy on coaching Football (Coaching Expertise Model)

The FFA Coaching Expertise Model

This has been developed, as is outlined in the diagram, to fill the final step in the logical process of developing football teams and football players. The National Football Curriculum answers the questions 'What is Football?' and 'What should Football in Australia look like? The Coaching Expertise Model answers the questions 'What is Football Coaching?' and 'What should Football Coaching in Australia look like?'

Vision and Philosophy

Training

The Match

Management

Football Knowledge
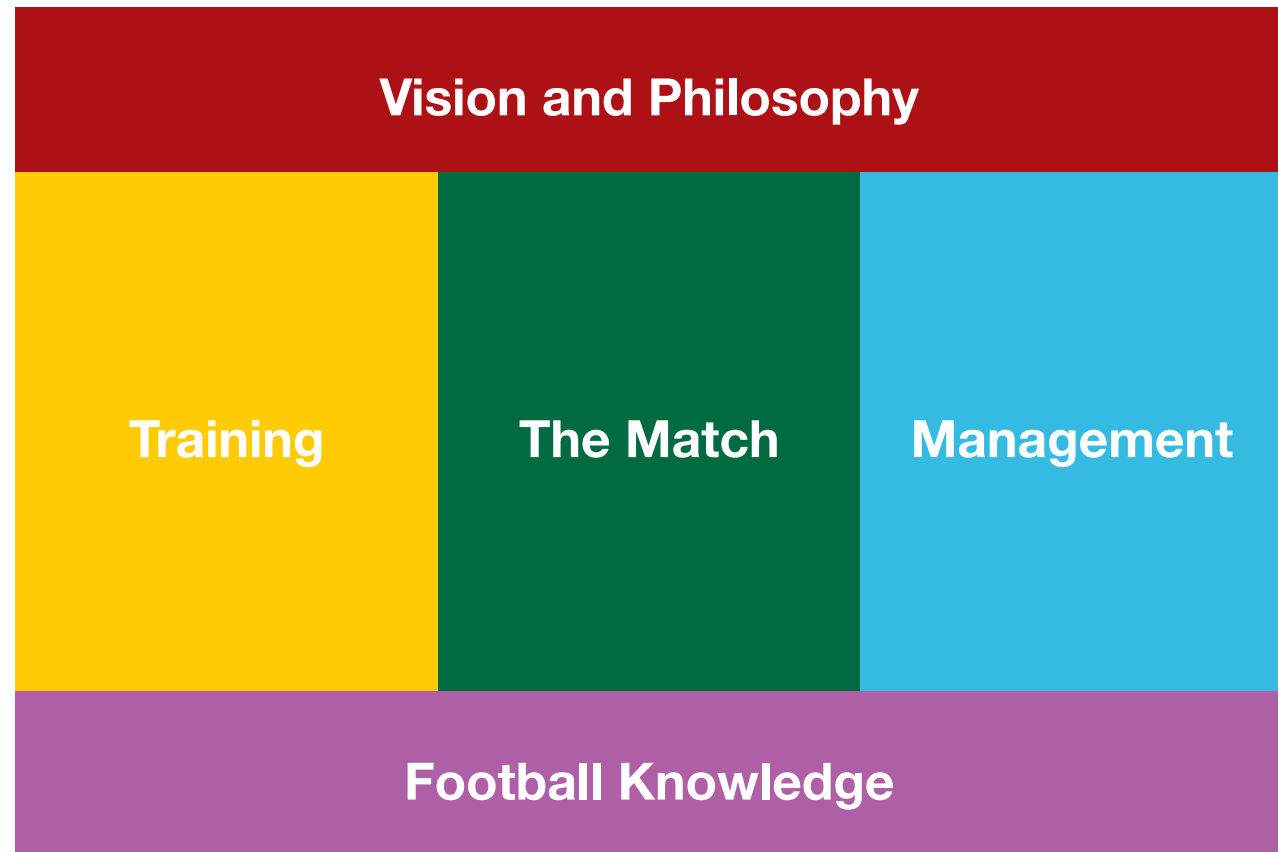
The Construction of the FFA Coaching Expertise Model:

Training	**The Match**	**Management**
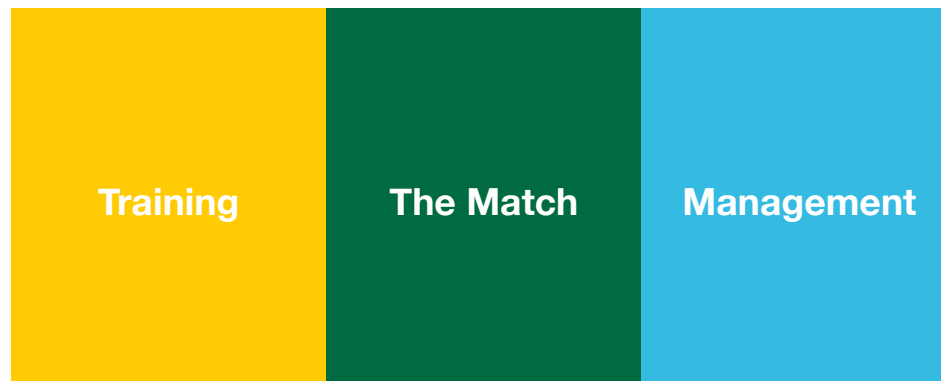
In the middle are the three main areas of competency (the 'pillars') the coach must develop. 'The Match' is at the centre of the whole model in line with FFA's philosophical direction, as it is the focus of everything a coach does: it all begins and ends with the game of football. That also explains why the central pillar is green and looks like a football field. Match-day competencies are a vital part of the coach's 'toolbox'.

To the left is 'Training'. There are specific competencies required to be an effective coach on the training field, and they all relate to the whole context of the model. Put simply, the coach's work on the training field is only effective if it leads to improved performance on the field when The Match is played.

At the right-hand side of the model is 'Management'. Since the coach, regardless of the level at which he/she works, is constantly interacting with others (communicating, leading, etc), he/she needs to develop competencies which will improve the success of these processes.

Football Knowledge

The bottom of the model contains the foundation supporting the three pillars:

A broad knowledge of the game of football is absolutely essential for the professional coach and, of course, desirable for those working at community level. Football Knowledge can be developed in many ways, including playing, coaching, analysing and discussing football. The process of gaining Football Knowledge is never-ending.

Vision and Philosophy

At the top is the overarching 'compass' that guides the coach. The almost infinite breadth of football knowledge available can lead to a lack of clear direction; there are so many different ways of playing football, such a huge variety of training exercises and so many examples of coaching methods. That is why 'Vision and Philosophy' overarches the whole model; the coach is aware of all the football that is 'out there', but based on their own experience and preference, must develop a strong personal Philosophy on Football and a clear Vision on how they want their team to play.

As a solid Vision and Philosophy is best developed after many years of experience, FFA's C and B Licence courses are conducted with FFA's Vision and Philosophy as the cornerstone.

We believe that the model is a strong one as it has sturdy pillars supported by a firm base, and is securely held together at the top.

These qualities are also intended to give the model a timeless structure that, we believe, might only ever need adjustments in the details that define the elements: we firmly believe that the elements themselves are constants.

'It is a good model if it is elegant and there are few arbitrary or adjustable elements.'

Stephen Hawking

Coach Education

Overview of the five elements

FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE		
COURSE-DRIVEN	1. WHAT IS FOOTBALL?	
SELF-DRIVEN	1. FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE	
	2. FOOTBALL STUDY	

VISION AND PHILOSOPHY		
PHILISOPHY	1. OPINIONS ON FOOTBALL	
	2. BELIEFS ON FOOTBALL	
VISION	1. TEAM MODEL (VERBAL)	
	2. TEAM MODEL (VISUAL)	
	3. TEAMBUILDING	

THE MATCH		
FOCUS	1. POST-TRAINING	
	2. PRE-MATCH	
PERFORMANCE	1. FIRST HALF	
	2. HALF-TIME	
	3. SECOND HALF	
REFOCUS	1. POST-MATCH	
	2. PRE-TRAINING	

TRAINING	PLAN	1. DEFINE
		2. DESIGN
	PREPARE	1. PEOPLE
		2. EQUIPMENT
		3. ENVIRONMENT
	CONDUCT	1. FOUNDATION
		2. ANIMATION
		3. CONCLUSION
	EVALUATE	1. OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED?
		2. PROBLEM SOLVED?
		3. NEXT STEPS

MANAGEMENT	MANAGE SELF	1. KNOW YOURSELF
		2. DEVELOP YOURSELF
	MANAGE OTHERS	1. KNOW OTHERS
		2. DEVELOP OTHERS

As outlined on the previous pages, the Coaching Expertise Model provides a framework for visualising the role of the coach and therefore provides an answer to our first question:

'What is Football Coaching?'

We now need to answer the second question:

'What should Football Coaching in Australia look like?

In other words, how is the National Football Curriculum implemented via the Coaching Expertise Model? How will we address the identified weaknesses of coaching in Australia (planning sessions properly, conducting sessions effectively)?

The Curriculum clearly states our philosophy: that we believe a 'Holistic' approach to coaching football is the best choice. Our belief is supported by analysis and scientific research.

Analysis of Football leads to the following conclusions:

- Football is a team game in which two teams try to win the game by scoring one more goal than the other

- Therefore, scoring and preventing goals are the main objectives for the team

- The team has a number of main Team Tasks in attacking, defending and transitioning to achieve these objectives

- The player has a range of general and position-specific tasks to perform in order to assist the team in the accomplishment of the team tasks

- The player executes a range of individual 'Player Actions' to successfully perform his/her tasks

Therefore, at its most basic level, football is all about 'Player Actions' – the things a player does. A player's actions are easy to see (and hear, in the case of communication) and analyse, but we must also look at what makes a player do what he/she does. The answer lies in the brain.

Perception – Decision - Execution

Based on the Objectives and Tasks of football outlined above, the player **Perceives** what is happening in the game, processes the information, **Decides** what should be done, and then **Executes** the action.

The three stages of Perception, Decision and Execution can be quite clearly distinguished, but are so closely inter-dependent that they cannot be separated.
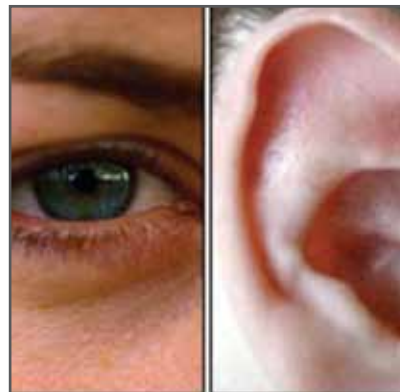
Perception   **Decision**   **Execution**

The 'Holistic' v 'Isolated' debate

Just like there are many different philosophies on how to play football, there are also different philosophies on what is the most effective way to coach football. Many coaches, and indeed countries, still hold the belief that football must be broken down into its many small components and that these components should then be practised in isolation until the techniques are deeply ingrained: we call this the '**Isolated**' approach.

Supporters of the isolated approach believe that the best way of improving a player's ability in, for example, 'passing with the inside of the foot' is to take 'passing with the inside of the foot' out of its natural game context and practice it in pairs or in lines; their reasoning is that this isolated training provides the opportunity for 'repetition'. However, this type of practice removes the realism required for proper learning, as there are no longer 'game-specific resistances' such as opponents: it may look a bit like football, but it isn't really football. In terms of Perception-Decision-Execution, isolated training only touches on the Execution; by removing the Perception and Decision, it is Execution without relevance.

Research has shown that this type of 'drills-based' practice (i.e. repetition without decision-making) is not the most educationally effective way to teach football. Players may learn to 'perform' the techniques, but do not learn how to 'apply' them in the game.

This makes sense if you think about this a little longer:

A player who looks great performing a prescribed technique on the training pitch but does not recognise when to use it during the game has the same problem as the player who sees the right moment to use it but lacks the technique to execute it.

In order to reach a level of excellence in football, one needs thousands of hours of purposeful practice.

Purposeful practice for football is practice that develops the players' technical and perception/decision-making skills, as well as the required football fitness, in conjunction with each other instead of developing the individual components in isolation.

We call this the **Holistic approach** to coaching.

The isolated approach is successful, and perhaps necessary, for specific sports, such as golf and gymnastics. However football demands the holistic approach as by its very nature, it is an incredibly complex game, with unpredictable situations where the player is regularly required to rapidly select from a wide range of possible options and execute them under pressure.

Daniel Coyle, in his much-acclaimed book 'The Talent Code', explains the difference in the brain processes involved in, on the one hand, activities like golf and violin-playing, compared to activities like football.

'Skills like football are flexible-circuit skills, meaning they require us to grow vast ivy-vine circuits that we can flick through to navigate an ever-changing set of obstacles. Playing violin, golf, gymnastics and figure-skating, on the other hand, are consistent-circuit skills, depending utterly on a solid foundation of technique that enables us to reliably re-create the fundamentals of an ideal performance.'

Example - Two ways of teaching a child to solve a 60-piece jigsaw puzzle

Method One (Isolated Approach):

Lesson 1: Take one piece out of the box, close the lid, and then take that piece to the child. Ask her to keep looking at the piece until she is totally familiar with it. Then take that piece away and put it back in the box.

Lesson 2: Take another jigsaw piece out, close the lid, and take the second piece to the child. Again, ask her to keep looking at the piece until she is totally familiar with it.

Lessons 3-60: Repeat the process until she is familiar with all the separate jigsaw pieces.

Lesson 61: Finally, empty the whole box of pieces on the child's desk, and take the box away. Ask the child to arrange all the pieces into a rectangular picture.

Method Two (Holistic Approach):

Lesson 1: Put the jigsaw pieces together according to the picture on the front of the box. Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture.

Lesson 2: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on one quarter of it.

Lesson 3: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on a second quarter of it.

Lesson 4: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on a third quarter of it.

Lesson 5: Take the complete jigsaw to the child's desk and ask her to familiarize herself with the whole picture, focusing mainly on the final quarter of it.

Lesson 6: Take the jigsaw apart, put the pieces on the child's desk and ask her to put it back together.

Which child do you think would finish the jigsaw quickest? It is feasible that the 6 lessons of the 'holistic' approach would be more successful than 60 lessons of 'isolated' because the child has always been presented with the 'big picture'. Therefore the child can see the links and make the connections between the pieces much more quickly and efficiently.

Here lies another problem with the 'isolated' approach: there are so many elements to the game of football, that the coach can end up with a list of, say, 60 separate elements to work on. If the coach then proceeds to address them all individually in an isolated way, the whole training program becomes totally removed from the real context of football. To compound the problem, by the time you work on the 60th 'jigsaw piece', the players have forgotten what the first piece looks like!

Repetition is of course important in developing players, but we must strive for:

repetition of football-specific situations with a focus on a particular aspect

The players must always be playing football by '**perceiving-deciding-executing**', and the relevance to the 'big picture' must always be apparent. The coach makes this happen by designing training exercises with game-specific resistances, by manipulating things like:

• The number of opponents

• The number of team-mates

• The size and position of the goals/targets

• The size of the space to work in

• The objective of the exercise

These are all usually absent in isolated training.

However, this is not to say that there is absolutely no place for isolated training. In specific circumstances, for a specific player, when the coach has exhausted all holistic means to improve the player, the only remaining solution is to work individually on 'technique'. Isolated exercises should be the last resort for certain players, when necessary, not the fundamental basis of training for all players.

It is FFA's belief that this kind of isolated, remedial work is best utilised as 'homework': in fact, all players should clock up a large number of hours mastering the ball at home, for example, using a wall to help develop passing and receiving technique, or trying out 1 v 1 moves in the back yard.

So, how is the National Football Curriculum's 'holistic' approach implemented via the Coaching Expertise Model? In short, we holistically teach coaches to holistically teach players.

In the same way that some countries prefer to break football up into little pieces and teach the isolated way, many countries choose to do the same with coach education. The Coach's role is broken up into a large number of distinct elements and these are covered in isolation. The same problem occurs: the true context is lost and the relevance is not always apparent. Teaching separate, isolated parts of the coach's role may look a bit like Coach Education, but it isn't really Coach Education.

Every element and module of FFA's Advanced Pathway courses is put into context, in relation to the Coaching Expertise Model. The Model itself is a holistic representation of the competencies and knowledge required to become an expert coach. We adopt the same approach to teaching coaches as we do to teaching players – they both need to see the whole picture, giving everything a clear context and relevance.

In terms of teaching players, there are two main ways in which the holistic approach is implemented:

1. Training Session Content: Clear guidelines are provided to assist coaches to design game-related and football-specific exercises which maximize learning and lead to the development of the kind of players we need

2. Coach Intervention: FFA has developed a clear process by which the coach can plan and conduct training sessions that use a task-based approach to give players real learning opportunities; fundamentally, we believe that if the players are challenged to solve problems at training, there is a greater likelihood that they will be able to solve problems in the game.

Our approach also aims to drastically reduce the amount of time players have traditionally spent standing still in training, while coaches give one long-winded speech after another. When conducting training sessions, it is important for the coach to remember 'it's all about the players'. The focus should be on helping the players to improve. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, the most common method employed by coaches in Australia is to constantly stop the training session to give long-winded speeches to the players. We have even observed this happening in the warm-up stage and in the 'training game' at the end of a training session.

All coaches are well-meaning, keen to help their players, but the fact is that this approach is misguided and simply doesn't work. Players learn by 'doing' and the coach must guide and facilitate this learning process. Coaches have to learn when to stop the players, how long for and how often. They must also learn what to say and how to say it in order to achieve the best possible outcome. Stopping the players too often, and talking for too long are not only non-educational, but they also frustrate the players and take away their enjoyment of training. Perhaps more worryingly, they take away valuable training time, compounding the problems caused by too much isolated training.

In terms of educating coaches, the Coaching Expertise Model provides the framework, which is clearly visualised and easily articulated

'The Coach uses the competencies of TRAINING, MATCH and MANAGEMENT to develop players and teams according to a clear VISION AND PHILOSOPHY, and the whole process is supported by a broad FOOTBALL KNOWLEDGE'

So, we have defined what coaches need to learn and how best to educate them.

Coaching Courses

One of the identified weaknesses of Coach Education in the past was that there was only one stream of courses available, whether you were coaching a social team of amateurs once a week or Head Coach of a State Premier League team. The courses were also far too short to deliver enough long-term learning or produce enough elite Australian coaches.

It was clear that two pathways were required, especially when one accepts that players can generally be divided into two streams: those that play for **Participation**, and those considered **Performance** players.

Therefore, the Two Pathway system was introduced in 2007:

1. The Community Pathway

2. The Advanced Pathway

Community Pathway courses are specifically designed for the coaches who look after **Participation** players: the courses are short, easily-accessible and low-cost. Because of the nature of the coach and the player in the Community context, these courses focus almost exclusively on the 'Training' pillar of the Coaching Expertise Model.

Advanced Pathway courses are specifically designed for the coaches who work with **Performance** players: the courses are longer and much more intensive. The course fees reflect the length and quality of the training program delivered. Because of the nature of the coach and the player in the Advanced context, these courses progressively develop all the elements of the Coaching Expertise Model. Graduates from the Advanced Pathway are the pool of coaches that are to be considered for full and part-time employment as football coaches.

A key culture shift has had to occur as the Advanced Pathway has been introduced: we have had to accept that, in the same way that it takes a long time and a lot of effort to become a professional football player, it also takes a long time and a lot of effort to become a professional football coach.

The Two Pathways and their relationship to the Building Blocks:

Community Courses	Building Block	Advanced Courses
SENIOR CERTIFICATE	**PERFORMANCE PHASE**	SENIOR C, B, A AND PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA
GAME TRAINING CERTIFICATE	**GAME TRAINING PHASE**	YOUTH C LICENCE
SKILL TRAINING CERTIFICATE	**SKILL ACQUISITION PHASE**	YOUTH C LICENCE
GRASSROOTS CERTIFICATE	**DISCOVERY PHASE**	N/A

Note:

• The Youth C Licence was introduced in 2013

• The Community Pathway is being revised as above and will also be rolled out in early 2014.

Coach Education

Community Pathway Diagram

GOALKEEPING DIPLOMA

14hr practical course includes assessment

GOALKEEPING LICENCE

7hr practical course includes assessment

FUTSAL LICENCE

8.5hr practical course includes assessment

GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL CERTIFICATE

3hr practical course no assessment

SKILL TRAINING CERTIFICATE

14hr practical course no assessment

GAME TRAINING CERTIFICATE

14hr practical course no assessment

SENIOR COACHING CERTIFICATE

14hr practical course no assessment

GOALKEEPING CERTIFICATE

7hr practical course no assessment

FUTSAL CERTIFICATE

3.5hr practical course no assessment

STARTING POINT

For coaches of 5-9 year olds

STARTING POINT

For coaches of 9-13 year olds

STARTING POINT

For coaches of 13-17 year olds

STARTING POINT

For coaches of 17+ year olds

VERTICAL ENTRY POINTS

HORIZONTAL ENTRY POINTS

Advanced Pathway Diagram

AFC and FFA

FFA's Advanced Pathway courses are approved by AFC. Since Australia has its own National Football Curriculum, we naturally need to deliver our own specific courses rather than the generic AFC courses, and AFC has recognised this (Australia and Japan are the only two of AFC's 46 member associations to have this right).

PRO - DIPLOMA

'A' LICENCE

FOOTBALL CONDITIONING LICENCE

'B' LICENCE

SENIOR 'C' LICENCE

Players 17 years + and above

YOUTH 'C' LICENCE

Players 9-17

'C' LICENCE PART 1

Introduction to advanced coaching

LEVEL 2 FUTSAL LICENCE

LEVEL 1 FUTSAL LICENCE

FUTSAL

LEVEL 3 GOALKEEPING LICENCE

LEVEL 2 GOALKEEPING LICENCE

LEVEL 1 GOALKEEPING LICENCE

GOALKEEPING
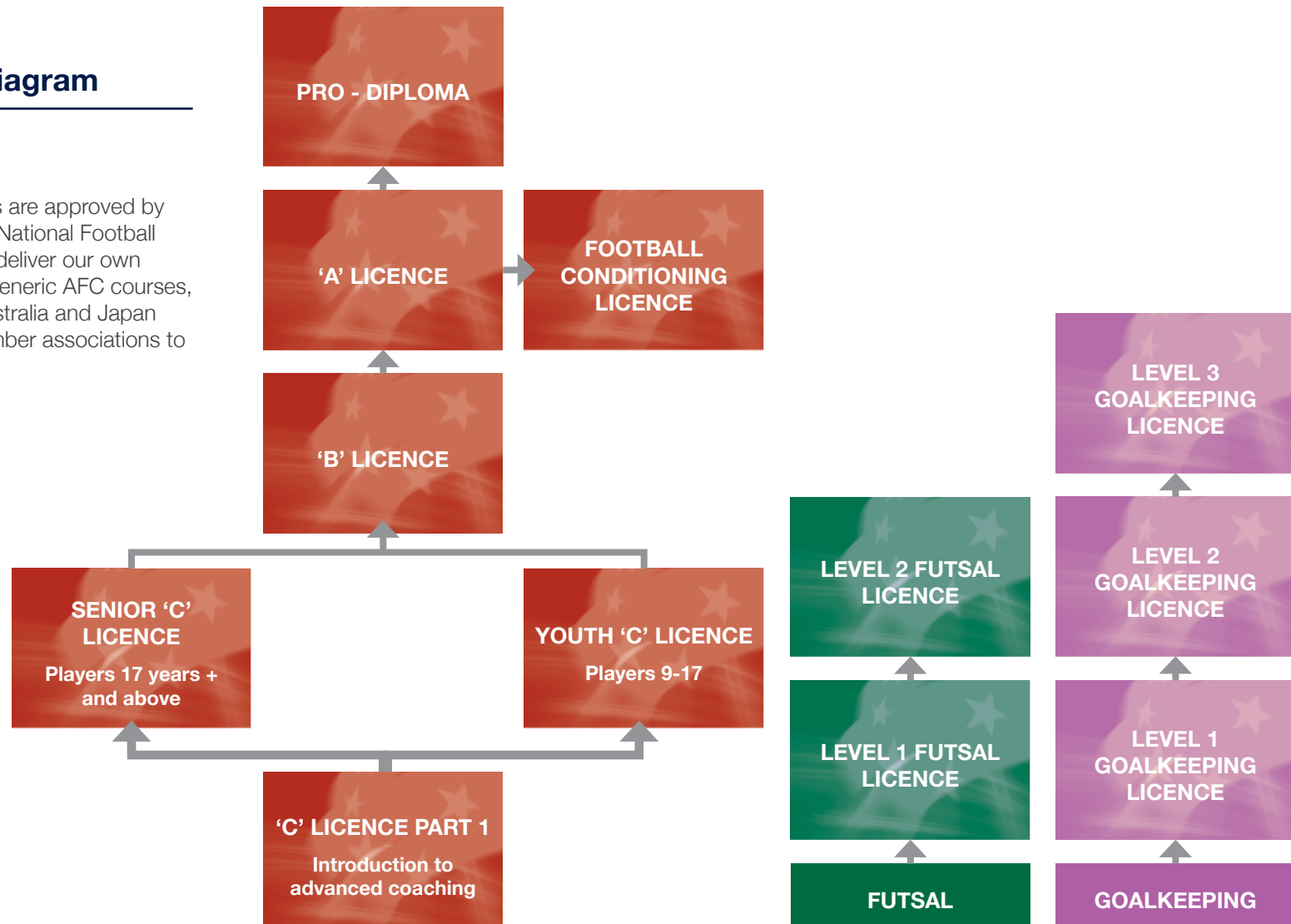
Coach Education

Minimum Coach Accreditation Requirements

FFA has established a set of guidelines outlining the preferred level of accreditation required to hold certain coaching positions.
This is necessary to ensure quality control and to reinforce the key messages that must continue to be delivered if we are to achieve our long-term goals.

The A-League, W-League, National Teams and key coaching positions in the state federations have been our major concern to date.

Team / Program	Position	Minimum Accreditation
SOCCEROOS	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	Professional Diploma
	GK Coach	Level 2 GK Licence (Level 3 by January 1, 2015)
OLYROOS U23	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
YOUNG SOCCEROOS U20	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
JOEYS U17	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
MATILDAS	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)

Team / Program	Position	Minimum Accreditation
YOUNG MATILDAS	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: A Licence. Female coaches: B Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
WOMEN'S U17	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: B Licence. Female coaches: C Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015)
A-LEAGUE	Head Coach	A Licence (Professional Diploma by start of 2015/16 season)
	Assistant Coach	A Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by start of 2014/15 season; Level 3 by start of 2015/16 season)
	Conditioning Coach	FFA Football Conditioning Licence by start of 2015/16 season
W-LEAGUE	Head Coach	Male coaches: A Licence. Female coaches: B Licence (A Licence by start of 2015/16 season)
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: B Licence. Female coaches: C Licence (B Licence by start of 2015/16 season)
	GK Coach	Must hold at least a Community GK accreditation (Level 1 GK Licence by 2014/15 season)
NATIONAL YOUTH LEAGUE	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	B Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by start of 2014/15 season)
AIS PROGRAM	Head Coach	Professional Diploma
	Assistant Coach	B Licence (A Licence by January 1, 2014)
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence (Level 2 by January 1, 2015; Level 3 by January 1, 2017)

4. Coach Education

Team / Program	Position	Minimum Accreditation
NTC PROGRAM (MALE)	Head Coach	A Licence
	Assistant Coach	B Licence
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence by January 1, 2015 (Level 2 by January 1, 2017)
NTC PROGRAM (FEMALE)	Head Coach	Male coaches: A Licence. Female coaches: B Licence (A Licence by January 1, 2016)
	Assistant Coach	Male coaches: B Licence. Female coaches: C Licence (B Licence by January 1, 2016)
	GK Coach	Level 1 GK Licence by January 1, 2015 (Level 2 by January 1, 2017)
STATE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR		A Licence
STATE TEAMS (U13/14 NATIONALS)		B Licence or Youth C Licence (Youth C Licence only from January 1, 2015)
AFC FUTSAL COMPETITIONS	Head Coach	Level 1 Futsal Licence
	Assistant Coach	Level 1 Futsal Licence

(NB: FFA Accreditation is preferred to equivalent accreditation from other National associations for all the above positions)

Overseas Coaches (those who do not hold Australian citizenship or residency)	
ALL NATIONAL TEAM HEAD COACH POSITIONS (MALE AND FEMALE TEAMS)	Professional Diploma
ALL NATIONAL TEAM ASSISTANT COACH POSITIONS (MALE TEAMS)	Professional Diploma
A-LEAGUE HEAD COACH AND ASSISTANT COACHES	Professional Diploma
W-LEAGUE HEAD COACH	Professional Diploma (male), A Licence (female)
ALL AIS POSITIONS	Professional Diploma
NYL HEAD COACH	Professional Diploma
NTC HEAD COACH (MALE AND FEMALE PROGRAMS)	Professional Diploma (male), A Licence (female)
GOALKEEPER COACH POSITIONS	Equivalent accreditation to that outlined above for Australian coaches
CONDITIONING COACH POSITIONS	CV and proof of accreditation must be submitted to FFA for prior approval
ALL OTHER POSITIONS	A Licence

Coach Education

NPL Coach Accreditation

All NPL clubs are expected to work towards the following guidelines to further spread the effect of the National Football Curriculum message and bring quality control several steps further.

All references are to Advanced Pathway Accreditation unless prefixed with 'Community'. 'New' Licences are those commenced in 2010 or later.

Requirement	Mandatory / Flexible	2013	2014	2015	2016
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	Mandatory	B Licence AND must have attended a State Coaching Conference during the previous 12 months.		'New' A Licence (or an 'old' A Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate) AND must have attended a Youth C Licence	
FIRST TEAM HEAD COACH	Mandatory	B Licence AND must have attended a State Coaching Conference during the previous 12 months.		'New' A Licence (or an 'old' A-Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)	
FIRST TEAM ASSISTANT COACH	Mandatory	C Licence AND must have attended a State Coaching Conference during the previous 12 months.		'New' B Licence (or an 'old' B Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)	
U20, U19 COACH	Mandatory	C Licence		'New' B Licence (or an 'old' B Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)	
U20, U19 ASSISTANT COACH	Mandatory	Community Senior Certificate		Senior C Licence (or an 'old' C Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)	
U18, U17 COACH	Mandatory	Community Senior Certificate		Senior C Licence (or an 'old' C Licence and an FFA Curriculum Refresher Certificate)	
U18, U17 ASSISTANT COACH	Flexible	Community Youth Certificate or Community Senior Certificate		Community Senior Certificate	
U16, U15, U14 COACH	Mandatory	Community Youth Certificate		Youth C Licence	

NPL Coach Accreditation

Requirement	Mandatory / Flexible	2013	2014	2015	2016
U16, U15, U14 ASSISTANT COACH	Flexible	Community Youth Certificate		Community Game Training Certificate	
U13, U12 COACH	Mandatory	Community Youth Certificate		Youth C Licence	
U13, U12 ASSISTANT COACH	Flexible	Community Youth Certificate		Community Skill Training Certificate	
FIRST TEAM GK COACH	Mandatory	Community Goalkeeper Certificate	Community Goalkeeper License	Community Goalkeeper Diploma	Level 1 Goalkeeping Licence
ALL OTHER GK COACHES	Flexible	Community Goalkeeper Certificate		Community Goalkeeper License	Community Goalkeeper Diploma

5. Model Sessions

Introduction to the Model Sessions

Training pitches in Australia are unfortunately often full of hurdles and ladders instead of balls and goals during youth training sessions. This isn't really helpful if we want to develop better FOOTBALL players. The Model Sessions contained in this Curriculum elaborate our national philosophy and are designed to help you train your players the right way. Please note that a 'one session fits all' approach obviously doesn't work; the exercises in these sessions should be modified/extended/simplified according to the needs of your players.

We have also developed a useful checklist for evaluating your training sessions:

'The youth training checklist'

1. Is **football** being played?

2. Is **football** being learned (and therefore taught)?

3. Is **football** being experienced (and enjoyed)?

4. Do the players understand the **football** purpose of the exercise?

5. Do the players recognise the relation to the real game of **football**?

6. Are the players challenged to improve as a **football** player?

Coaches should avoid:

• Too long waiting in lines

• Non-stimulating or over-complicated exercises

• Intensity too high or too low

• Coach intervening too much and talking for too long

Number of players in the Model Sessions

Since coaches are faced with a range of squad sizes, and different numbers of players at training, it was decided that it would not be suitable for us to decide on a fixed number of players for the Model Sessions. Instead, a variety of exercises with differing numbers of players have been presented, allowing coaches to modify and adjust them as they see fit, depending on how many players they are working with. The main purpose of the sessions presented is to convey FFA's basic coaching philosophy.

Numbering System used

In Game Training Phase and Performance Phase Model Sessions, players are given shirt numbers to reflect the 1-4-3-3 positions and their corresponding numbers.

Sometimes 'shadow' numbers are used, to indicate 2 players of the same position within an exercise (e.g. #10 and #20 who both play the number 10 position).

The following table explains the shadow numbers:

Team numbers	Shadow numbers
1	22
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	20
11	21

Key for diagrams:

Players

Coach

Running with the ball

Running without the ball

Passing the ball

Lofted pass

Model Sessions

Here are some useful tips to help you perform the important role of 'kids coach':

• Two weekly training sessions of 45 minutes and one game during the weekend is a maximum safe workload for U/6's and U/7's

• For U/8's and U/9's the length of the sessions can be increased to 60 minutes

• Plan your sessions in advance

• Arrive early and set up the area

• Give clear, short instructions

• Demonstrate quickly and efficiently

• Keep the session flowing

• Vary the activities but keep it simple

• Be enthusiastic and give lots of praise

• Encourage after mistakes

• Be patient

• Have fun (both the kids and you!)

• Keep everyone active, avoid having kids standing around

Session planning

A training session for kids this age consists of 3 components: The Beginning, The Middle and The End.

The purpose of The Beginning (better known as the warm-up) is to get the kids in the right frame of mind and activate their bodies. It's unnecessary to run laps around the field and do stretches to achieve that: all sorts of relays and tagging games with and without the ball are much better (more specific, more fun) and also help develop the children's basic coordination.

The Middle is the section of the training session where we conduct fun football exercises such as dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.

The last part (The End) is allocated for playing all sorts of Small-Sided Games

This leads to the following session timeline:

1 Welcome (5 minutes)

2 The Beginning (10 minutes)

3 The Middle (15 minutes)

4 The End (20 minutes)

5 Wrap up (5 minutes)

Cycle Planning

In this section you will find an example of a 6 week cycle and 12 Model Sessions for the Discovery Phase. This 6 week cycle is based on the assumption that the weekly training sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays with the weekly game on Saturday.

Discovery Phase CYCLE 1	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1	MODEL SESSION 1	MODEL SESSION 2	GAME
WEEK 2	MODEL SESSION 3	MODEL SESSION 4	GAME
WEEK 3	MODEL SESSION 5	MODEL SESSION 6	GAME
WEEK 4	MODEL SESSION 7	MODEL SESSION 8	GAME
WEEK 5	MODEL SESSION 9	MODEL SESSION 10	GAME
WEEK 6	MODEL SESSION 11	MODEL SESSION 12	GAME

If your team trains only once a week, or on different days, you can of course adjust this schedule accordingly.

For the next 6 week cycle(s) the coach can:

• Repeat the sessions in the same order 1-12

• Repeat them in a random order

• Combine the various session components of the 12 Model Sessions differently (i.e. The Beginning of session 1; The Middle of session 2 and The End of session 3; etc.)

• Attend the **FFA Grassroots Football Certificate course**, and use the accompanying resource 'Football for Kids' to gain more ideas for session content

Model Session 1

Beginning: Relays

Explanation for relays

• Each player starts with a ball, dribbles around the marker (as shown in diagrams 1 and 2) and returns to the start

• Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball

Guidelines for relays

• Avoid long queues

• Keep players as active as possible (don't keep them waiting in line for too long)

• Give the group a quick break for a drink when necessary

• All relays in this section can be performed with and without the ball (the preference is to always use the ball, but it is fine to take the ball out of the relays early in the session)

• The more skill your players acquire, the more the ball should be used and the greater the challenges can be

• If there are more than six players, make another lane of cones and keep it to two players in a line (this avoids long queues)
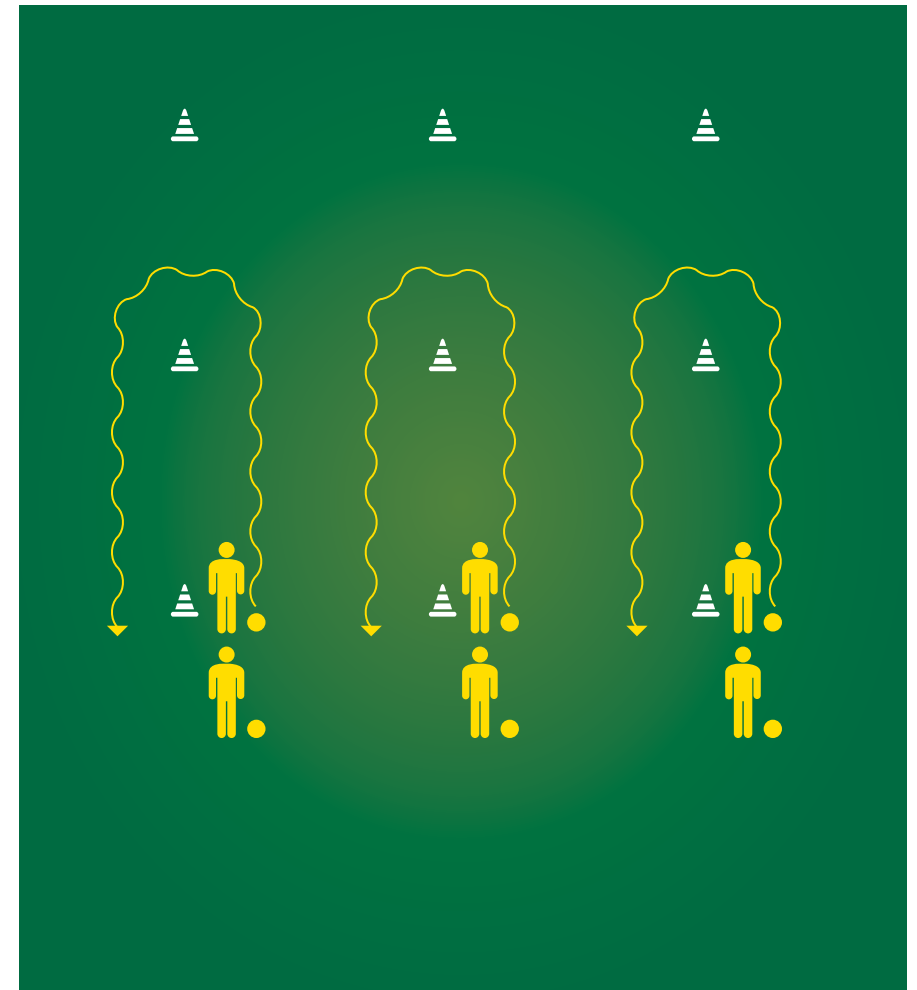
Diagram 1
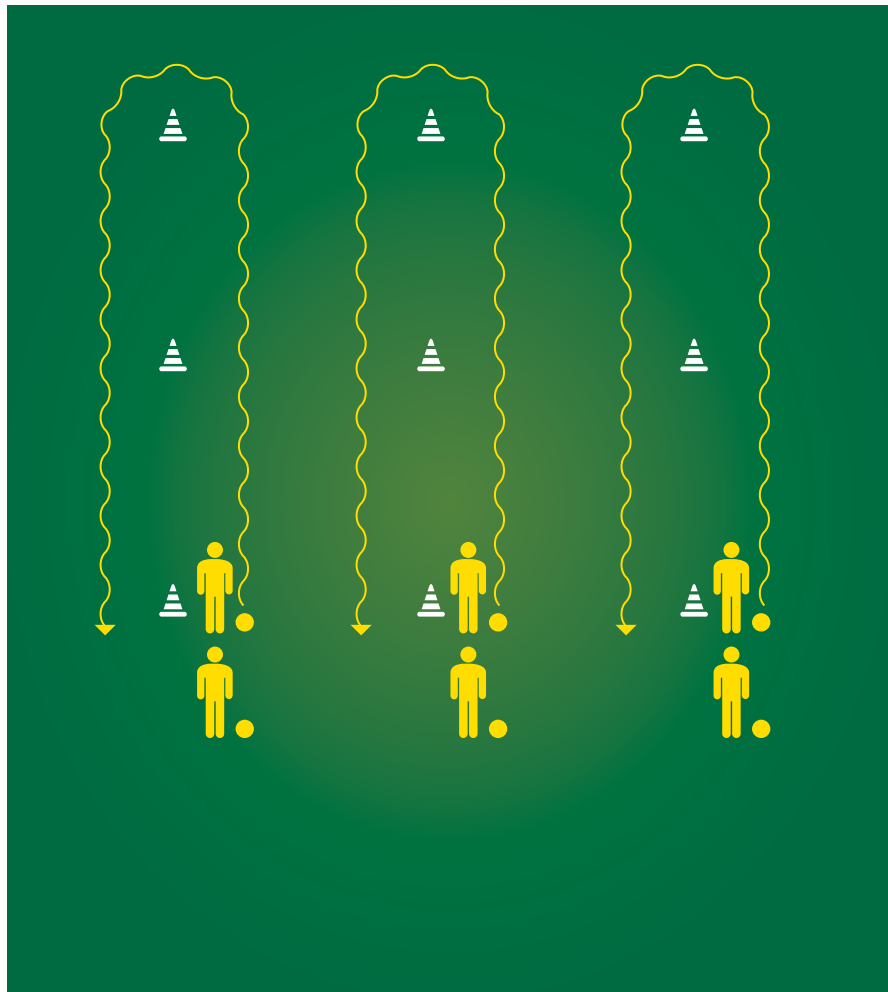
Diagram 2

Middle: Feather the Nest

Mark out a triangle with sides 10m–12m long. Three teams of two players are positioned at each corner with a cluster of balls in the middle of the triangle. The object of the game is to gather as many balls as possible for the corner or 'nest' within a set time period.

One player from each team runs to the middle of the triangle to get a ball and dribbles it to their corner, or nest, and leaves it there. Their team-mate then does the same. When all the balls in the middle of the triangle are gone, players can take them from someone else's nest.

Players are NOT allowed to stop others from taking balls from their nest – no blocking, defending, tackling, etc. No hands! Feet only.
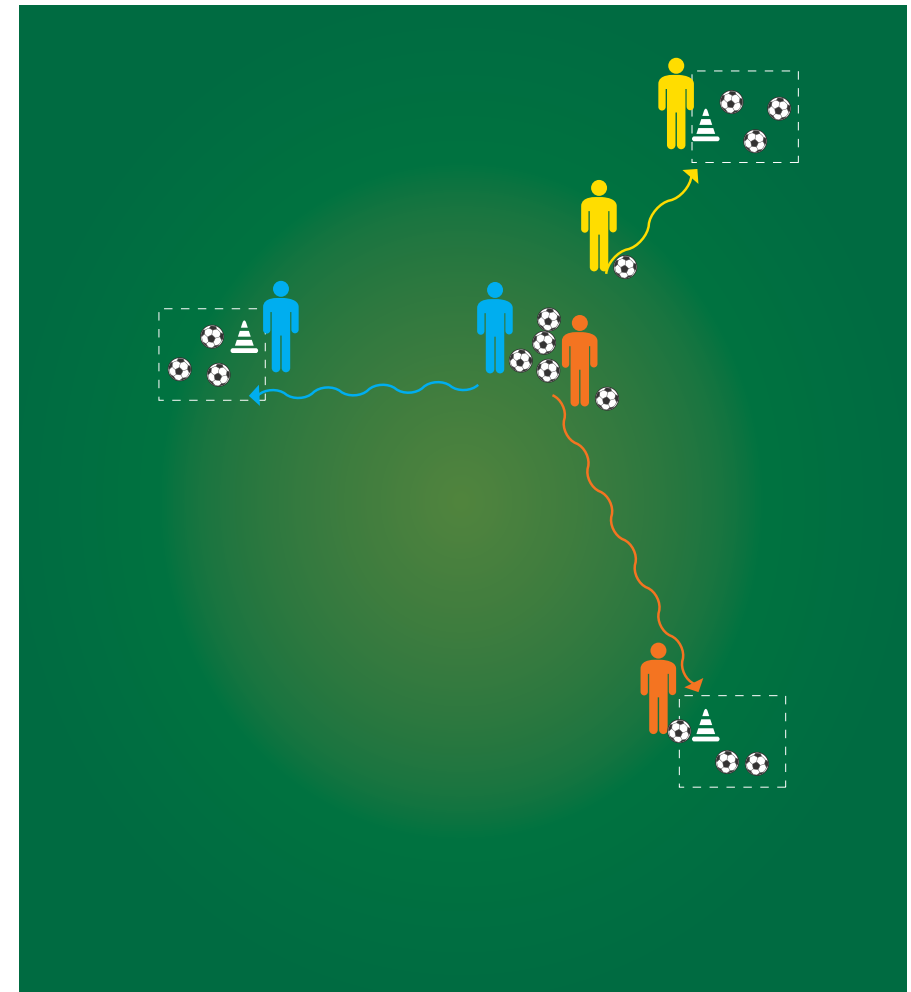
End: 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5) Training Game

Length: 20m–25m
Width: 14m–18m
Goal: 2m–3m

• "Just let them play"

• You can play with or without goalkeepers
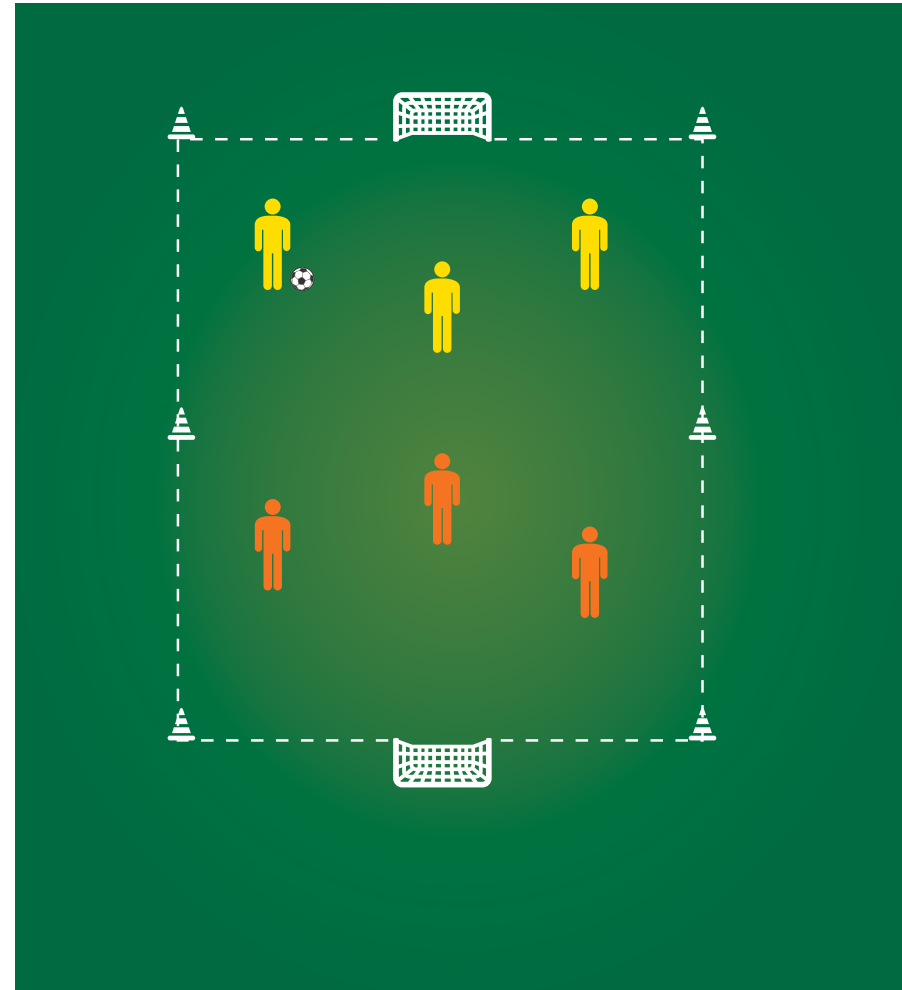
• Short games - 3 to 5 mins in length (with regular drink breaks)

Model Session 2

Beginning: Stuck-in-the-mud

Mark out a 10m × 14m area. Five players try to avoid one player who carries a ball in their hands.

The ball-carrier attempts to tag the runners by touching them with the ball (make sure the ball is not thrown and that players aim for the trunk). If a player is tagged, they are 'stuck in the mud', and stand with their legs wide apart until a team-mate frees them by crawling through their legs.

Each ball-carrier has 30 seconds to tag as many players as possible. After 30 seconds, change the ball-carrier.

Progression:

• Ball-carrier dribbles the ball around the field and tags the players with their hand, while keeping the ball close to them (if this progression proves difficult for them, make the field smaller)

Tagged Player   Ball-carrier
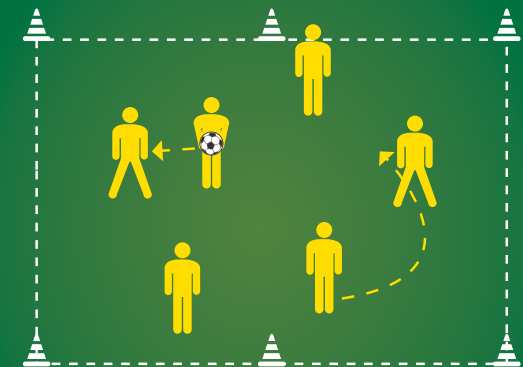
Middle: Robin Hood

Two teams of three split up as shown in the diagram opposite. Each team starts with an equal number of balls in their 'safe'. When the game begins, each team can start stealing balls from their opponent's 'safe' – there is one 'thief' who takes a ball and passes it across the first 'moat' to their team-mate; they then pass it across the second 'moat', to their team's 'collector', who puts it in the team's 'safe'.

Meanwhile, their opponents are doing the same with their balls! After a set time period (e.g. two minutes), see which team has the most balls in their 'safe'. The team that passes and controls the balls best will have the most balls in their 'safe' and will therefore be the winners.

You can't use your hands – feet only!

Thief   Collector
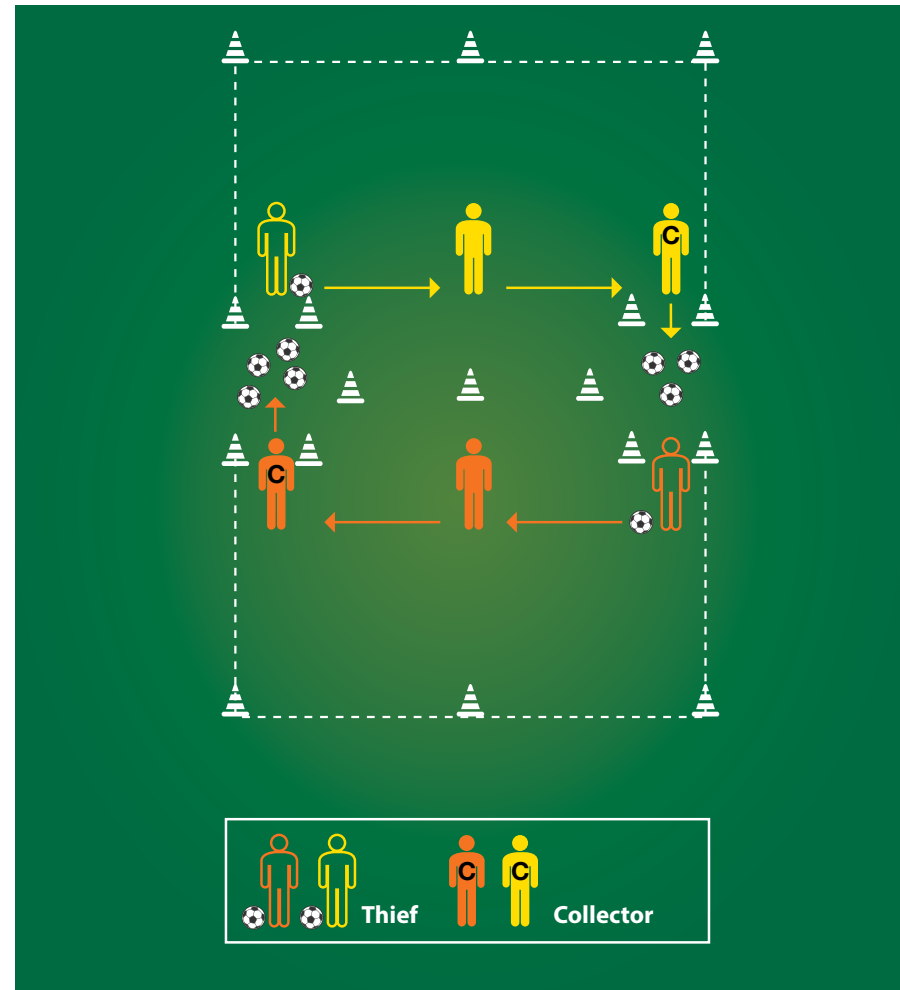
End: Pass to score

Length: 15m–20m
Width: 15m
Goal: none (make 4 or 5 gates of 1m–2m width inside the area)

• To score a goal, pass the ball through any of the gates to a team-mate

• This game encourages passing
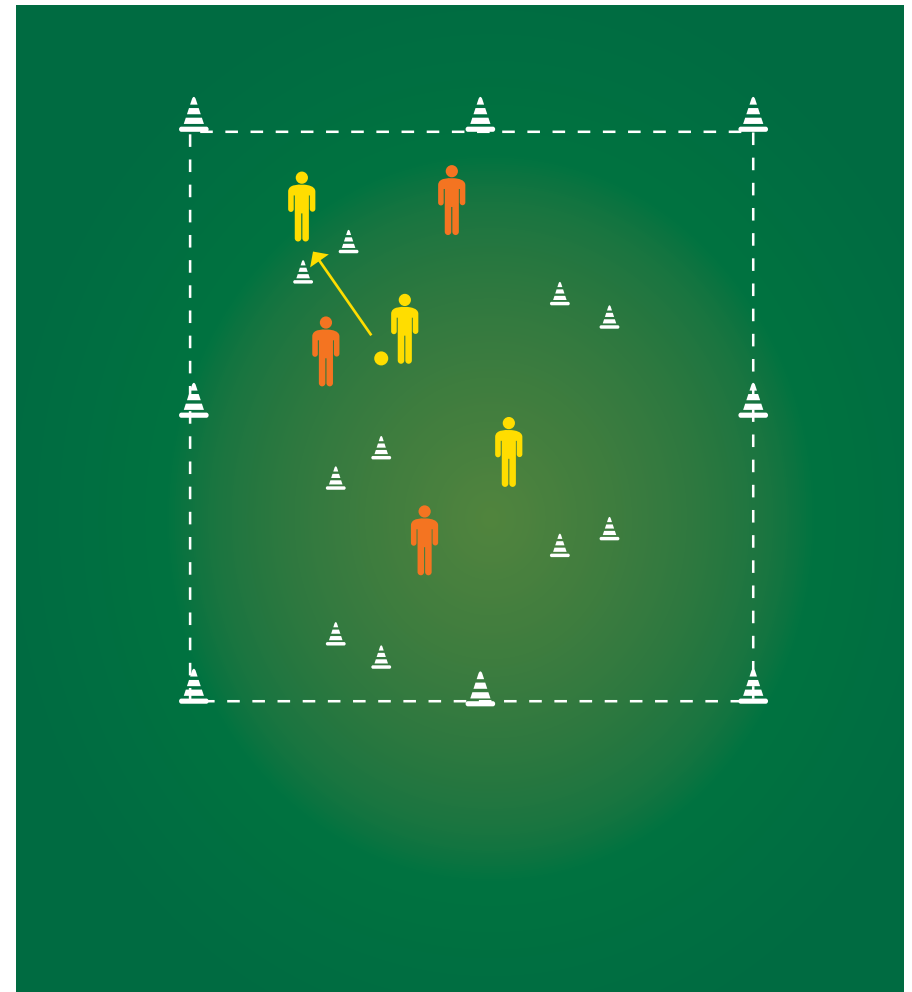
Model Session 3

Beginning: Relay

Explanation for relay

- Each player starts with a ball, and dribbles around the first marker in a full circle (as shown in diagram) then dribbles around the second marker, and then returns to the start

- Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball
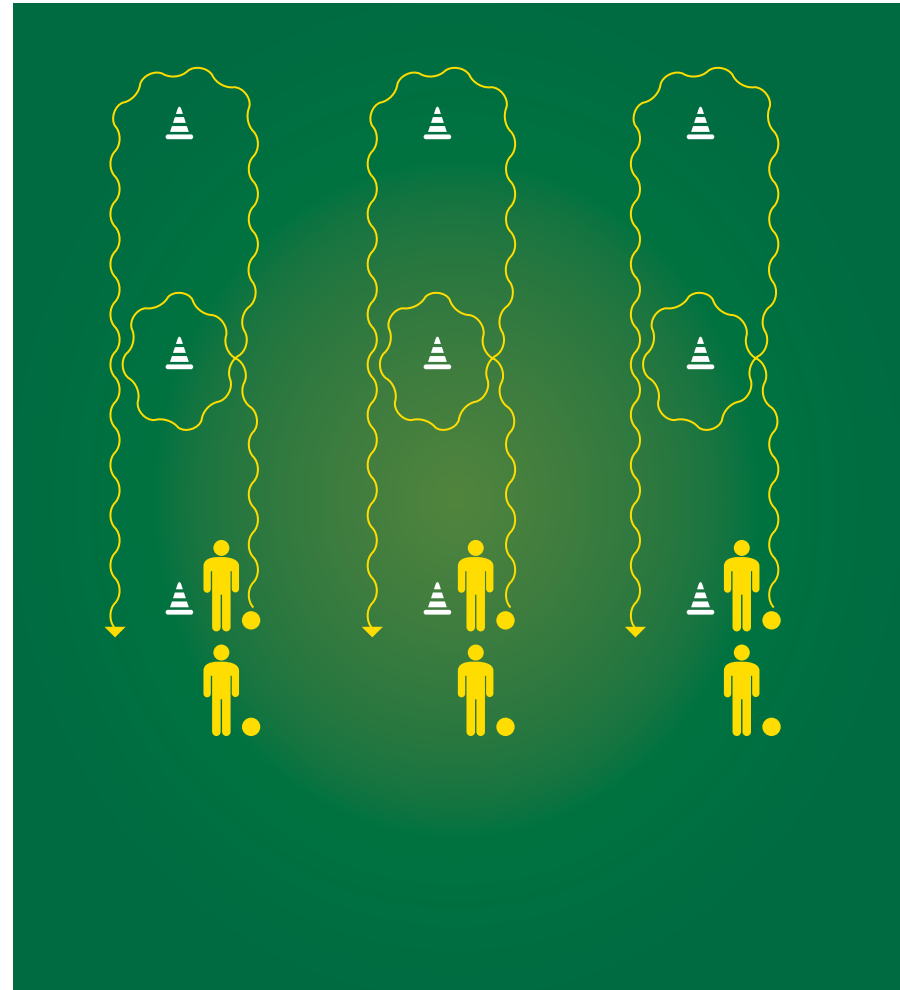
Middle: Empty it! Fill it!

Mark out a 14m × 14m square.

Players in two teams dribble balls inside the square. Outside the square, each team has two lines marked: one for their balls and one for themselves. On the call 'empty it!' the teams compete to be the first to empty the square.

On the call 'fill it!' the teams compete to be the first to get all their balls and themselves back in the square.

Players go here

Balls go here

Players go here

Balls go here
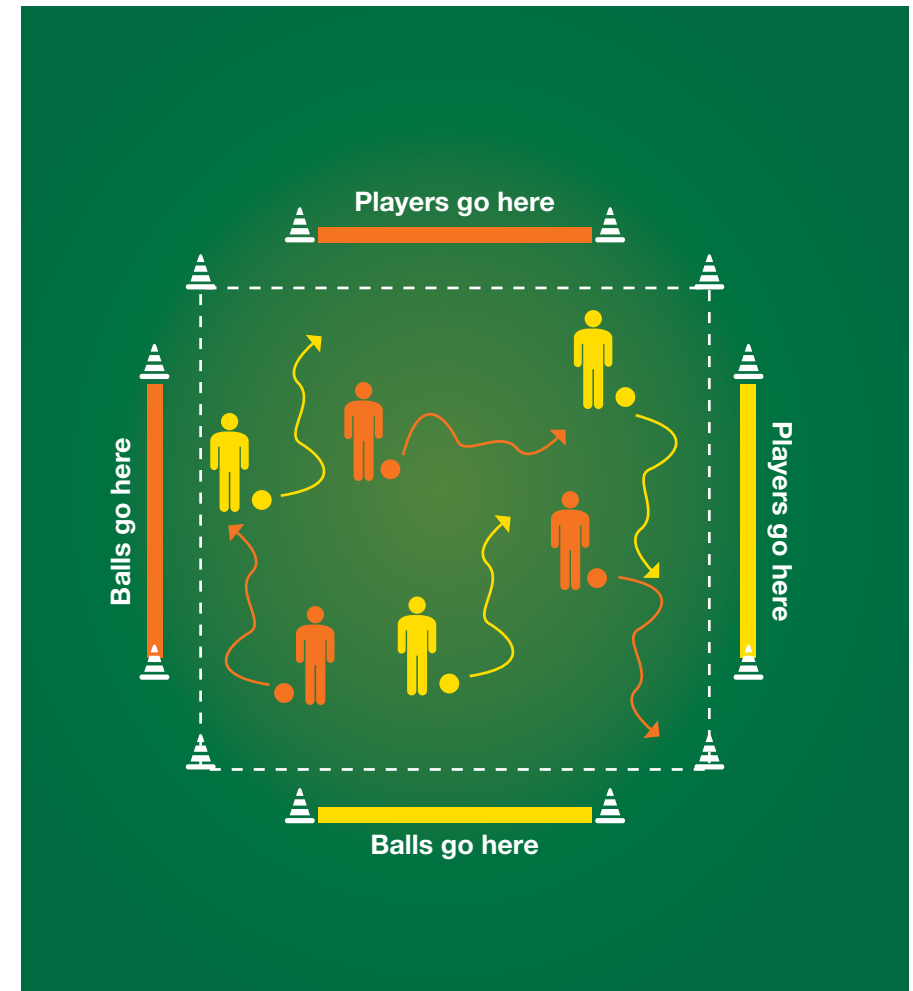
End: 4-Goal football

Length: 20m
Width: 15m
Goal: 2 goals (2m wide) on each end-line

• There are no goalkeepers

• Goals can be scored in either of your opponents goals

• This game encourages shooting and scoring
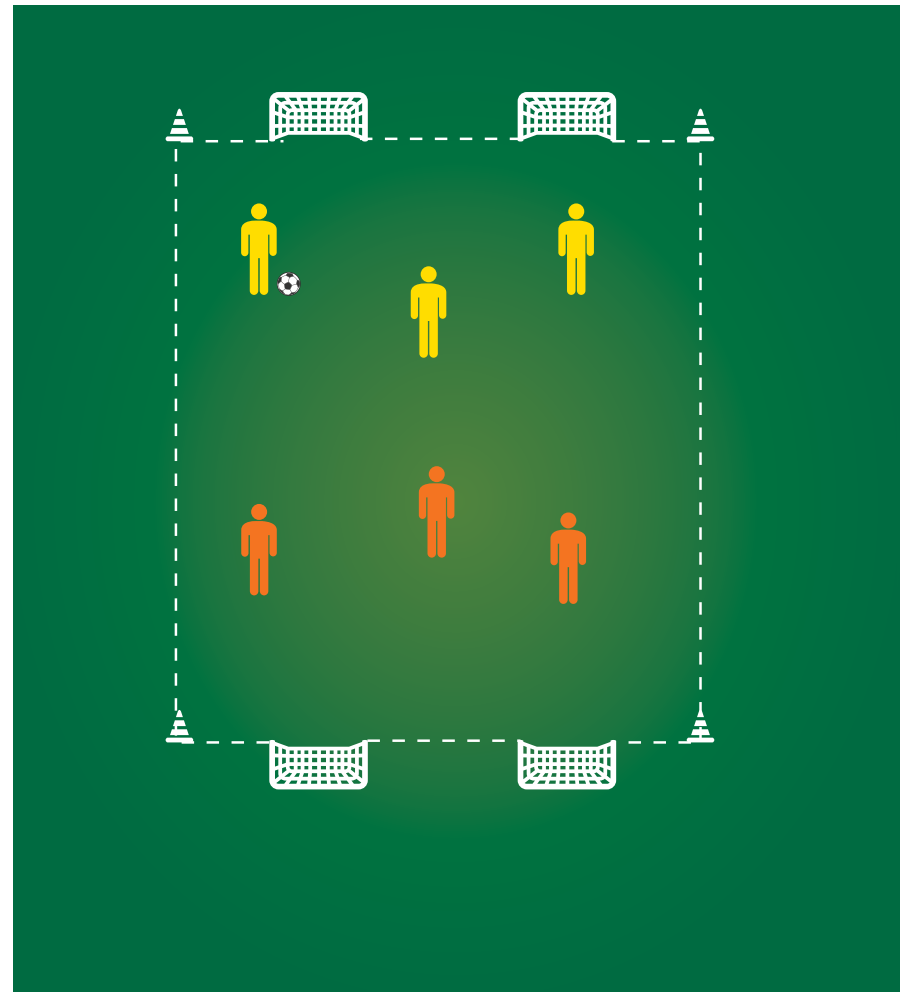
Model Session 4

Beginning: Me and my shadow

Players get into pairs; one is designated as 'leader' and the other as 'follower'.

The 'leader' moves around the field, changing speed and direction frequently, and perhaps adding a variation here and there, such as a jump or a ground touch.

The 'follower' then copies everything the 'leader' does.

Change roles regularly and also change partners regularly.

Progression:

• The leader (only) has a ball

• The leader and the follower both have balls

• The follower has a ball (this is a difficult progression so instruct 'leader' to jog at medium speed around the area, with occasional random changes of direction)

Follower   Leader
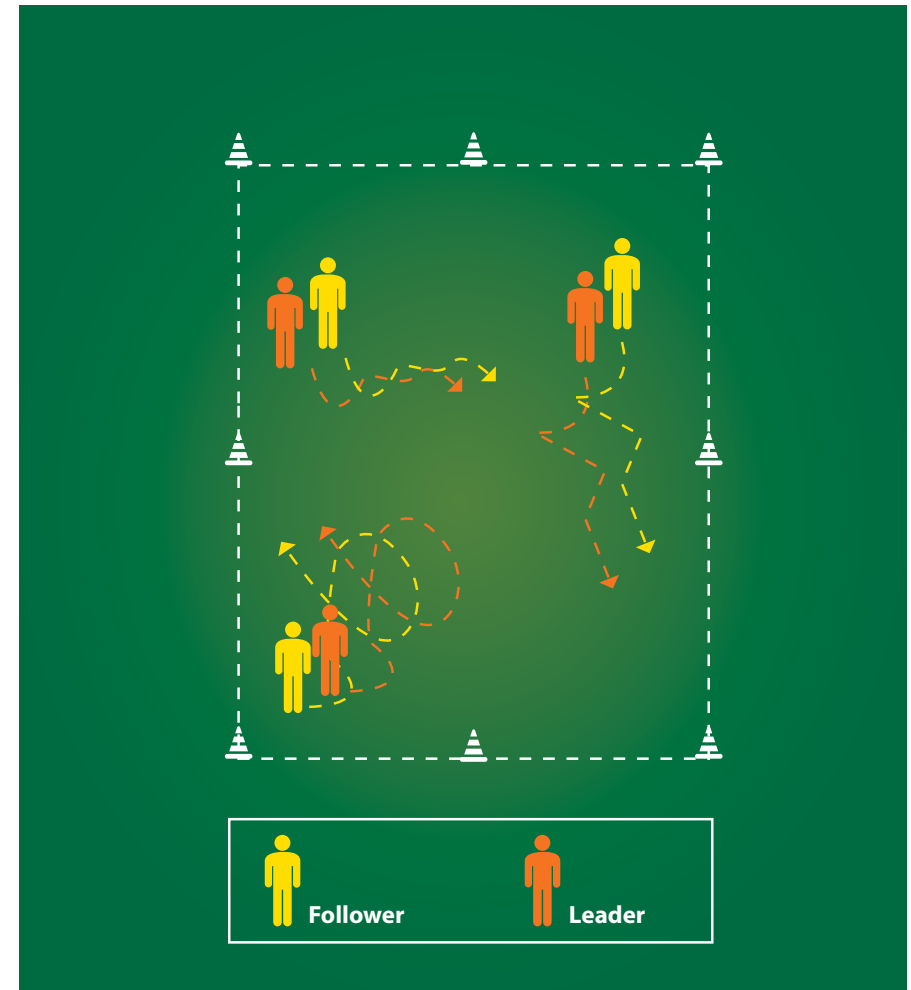
Middle: 1 v 1 Mini Games

Make three small areas about 10m × 7m.

Players play 1 v 1 on each mini-field and score by dribbling the ball over the opponents' line.

Think of safety when setting up; avoid scenarios where players could dribble into each other by allowing buffer zones.

Keep rotating so opponents are changed regularly. Rotation also allows a period of rest, so control how long rotation takes depending on how fatigued the players seem. You could also give some brief hints to the whole group in order to give them a rest.

Games should be no longer than 1 minute maximum.

If enough cones are available, progress to a small goal on each end-line for players to score in.

You will also need a good supply of spare balls, as they tend to go everywhere when shooting is introduced.
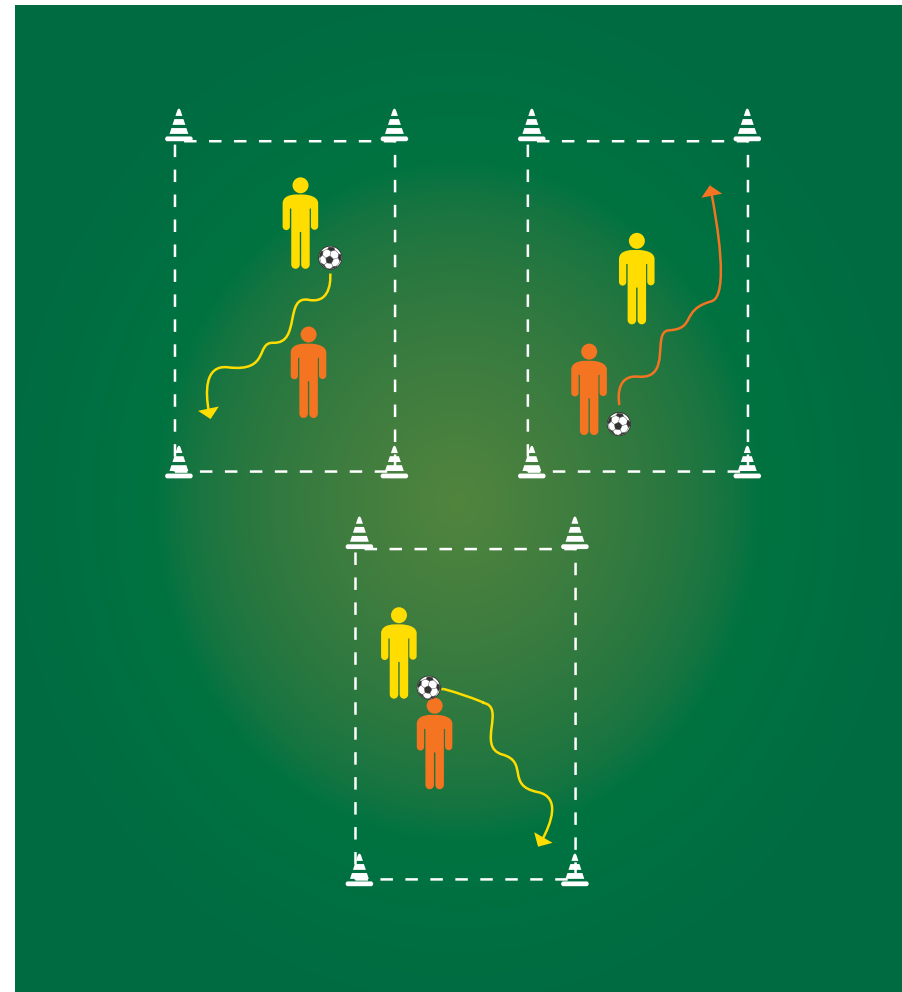
Discovery Phase Model Sessions

End: Line football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 20m
Width: 15m
Goal: none

• Usual rules, but method of scoring is to dribble the ball across the opponents' end line

• This game encourages dribbling and 1 v 1 skills
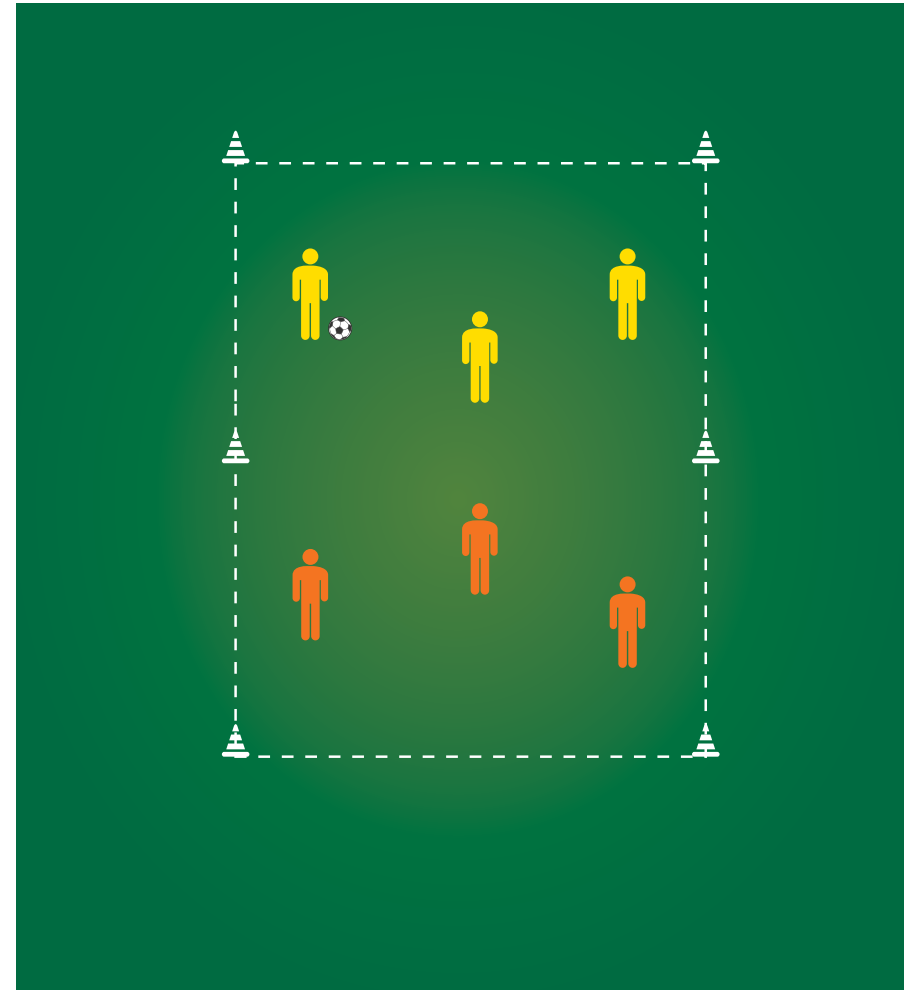
Model Session 5

Beginning: Relay

Explanation for relay

- Each player starts with a ball, and dribbles around the first marker and then cuts the ball, changing direction to the left (as shown in diagram 1). Then dribbles around the second marker, and repeats the same pattern (but cuts right this time) on the way back

- Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball

- Variation - instead of all players beginning at the one point, they could be split up at either end

- Player 1 now dribbles around the first marker and then passes the ball to player 2 (as shown in diagram 2), who repeats the same movement and passes to player 3
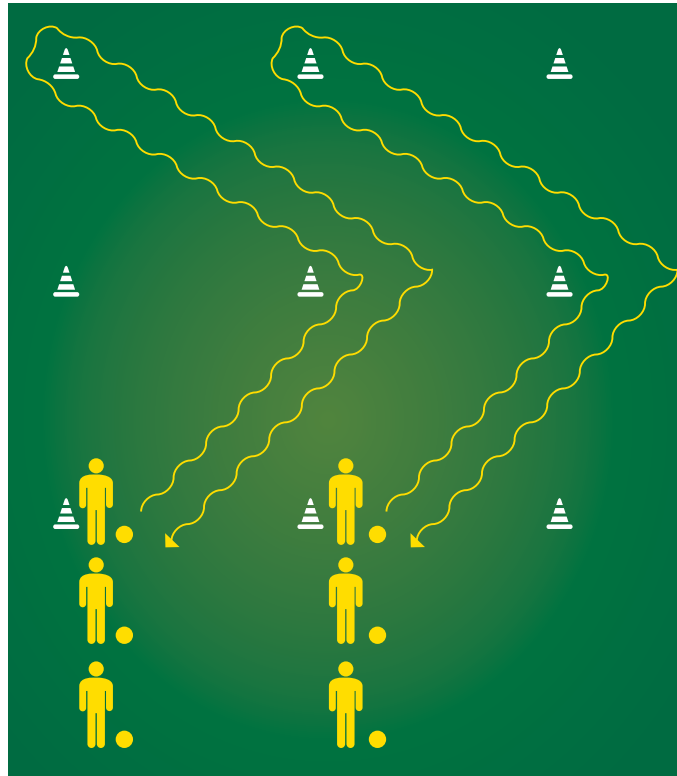
Diagram 1
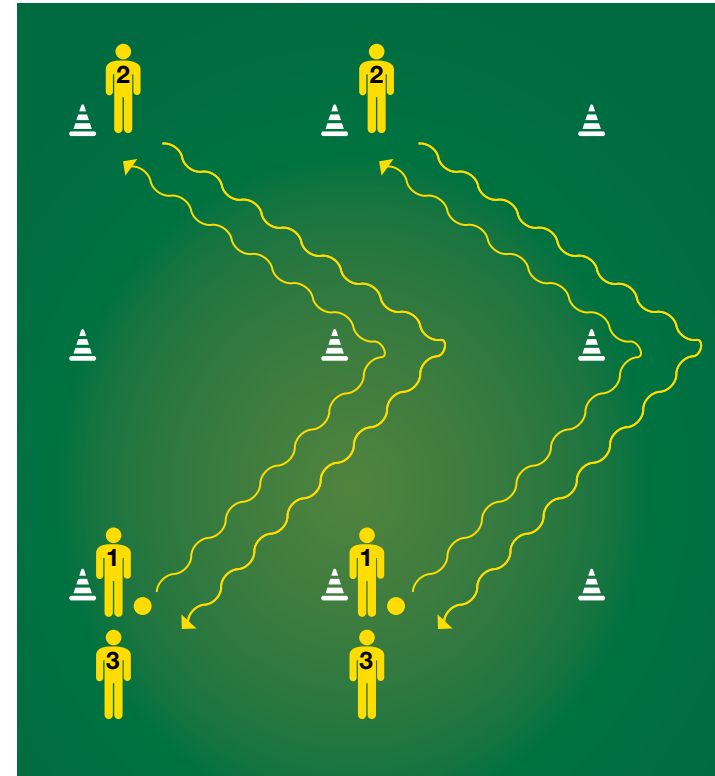
Diagram 2

Middle: Round em' up

Five players dribble their balls inside a 10m × 14m area. On your call 'round 'em up!' the sixth player tries to 'round up' all five balls, by kicking them out of the square.

Allow 30 seconds for players to 'round up' as many balls as possible.

Take turns so each player has a go at rounding up the balls.
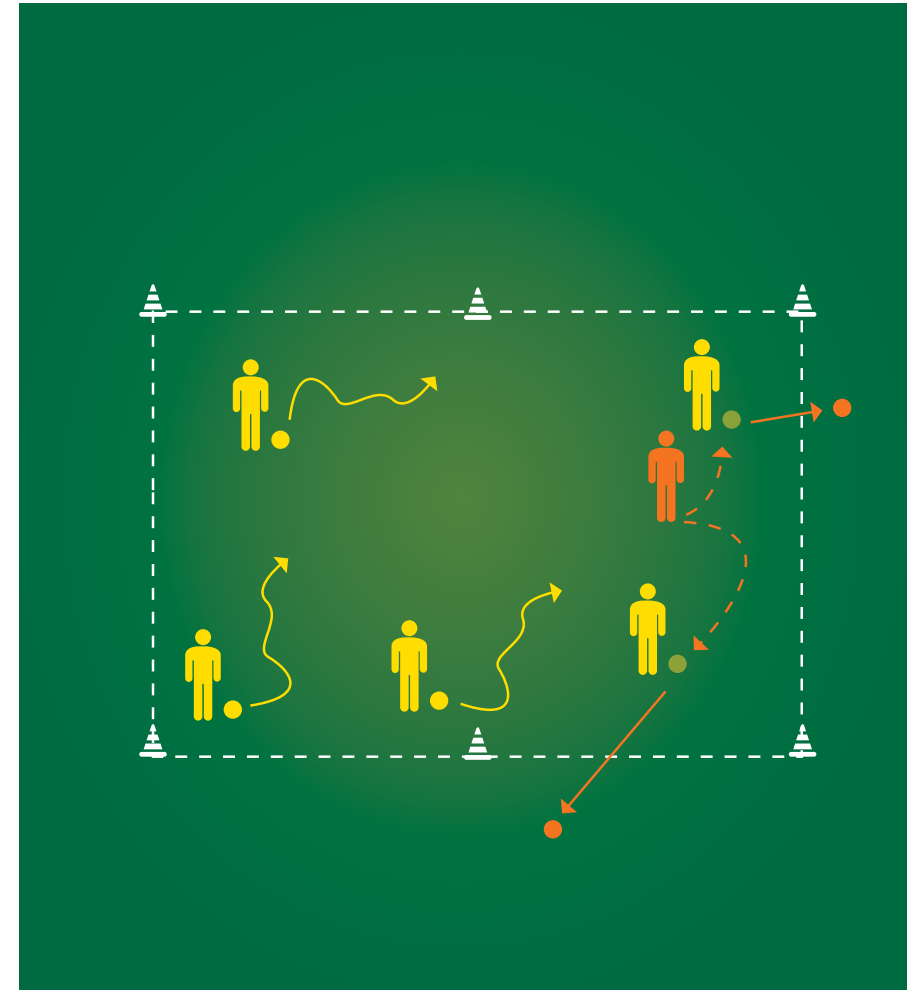
End: 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5) Training Game

Length: 20m
Width: 15m
Gate: 2m–3m

• In this game players can score by passing/shooting the ball through either side of the gate, from in front or behind

• "Just let them play"

• You can play with or without goalkeepers
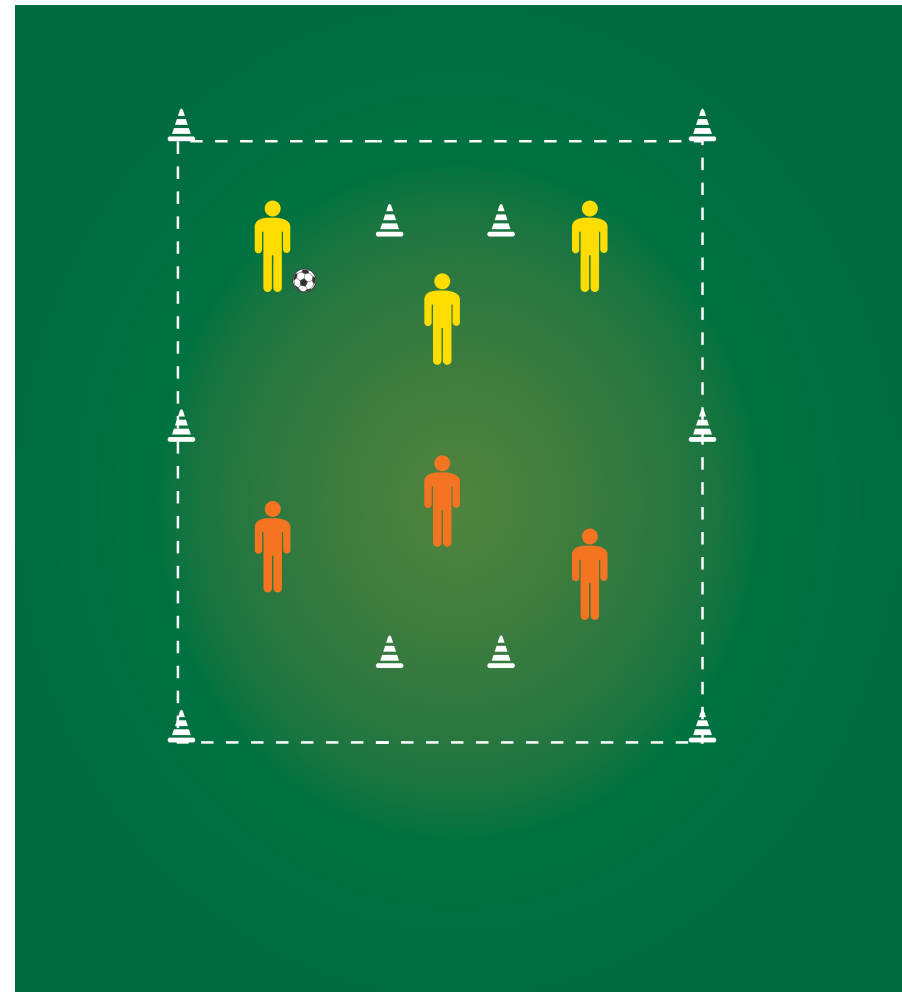
• Short games - 3 to 5 mins in length (with regular drink breaks)

Model Session 6

Beginning: Double Trouble

Two players without a ball link hands and move around the area trying to kick other players' balls out.

The other players dribble their balls around the area, trying to avoid having their ball kicked out.

There are two options for this game:

• Change the chasing pair when everyone is out (when a player's ball is kicked out, they fetch it then remain outside until that game is over)

• Change the chasing pair after a set time period by setting the challenge: 'How many balls can you kick out in 30 seconds?' (When a player's ball is kicked out, they fetch it and come back into the area as soon as possible, continuing to dribble and to avoid losing their ball)
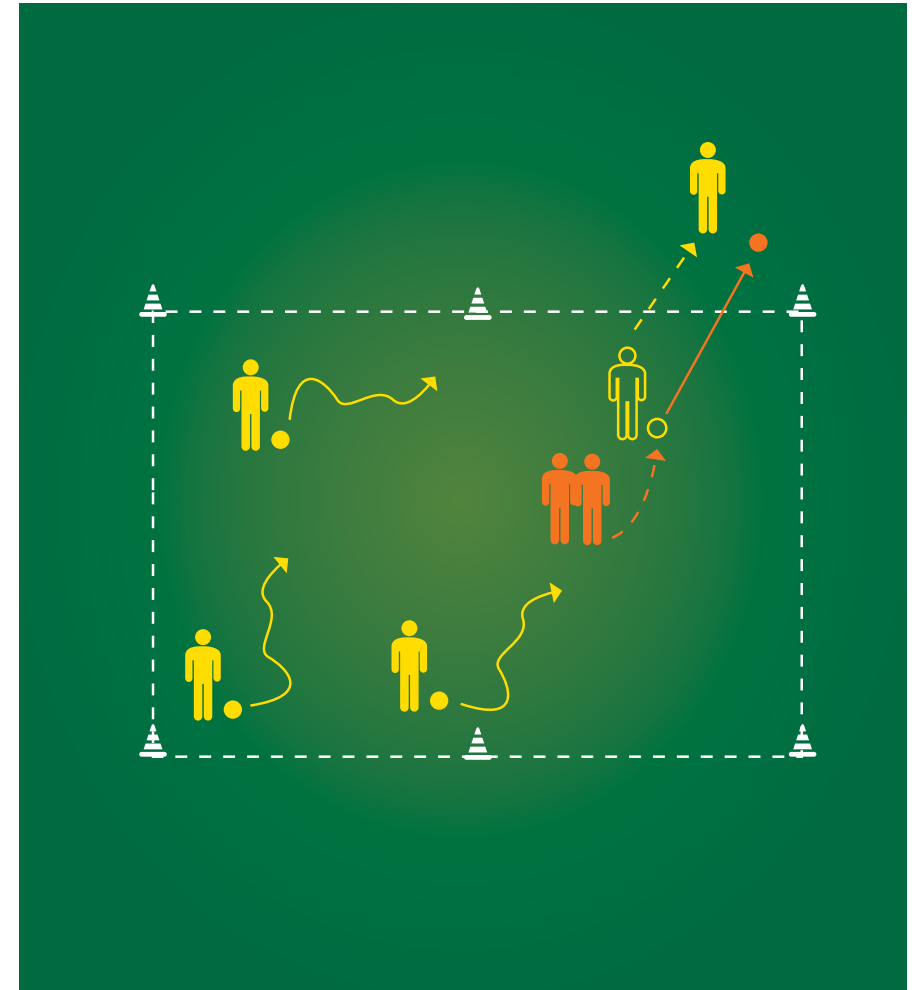
Middle: Pairs through the gates

Mark out an area about 7m × 10m and set up four small gates – two cones about two metres apart.

The players run around the area in pairs with a ball between them and pass it through the gates to each other until they have performed a successful pass through each gate.

The winning pair is the first to pass through every gate and wait outside the area.

Before moving to the next activity, have a competition to see which pair (one at a time) can pass through the most gates in 20 seconds.

End: Short and wide

Length: 15m
Width: 25m
Goal: 2 goals (2m wide) on each end-line

• This game develops awareness of space
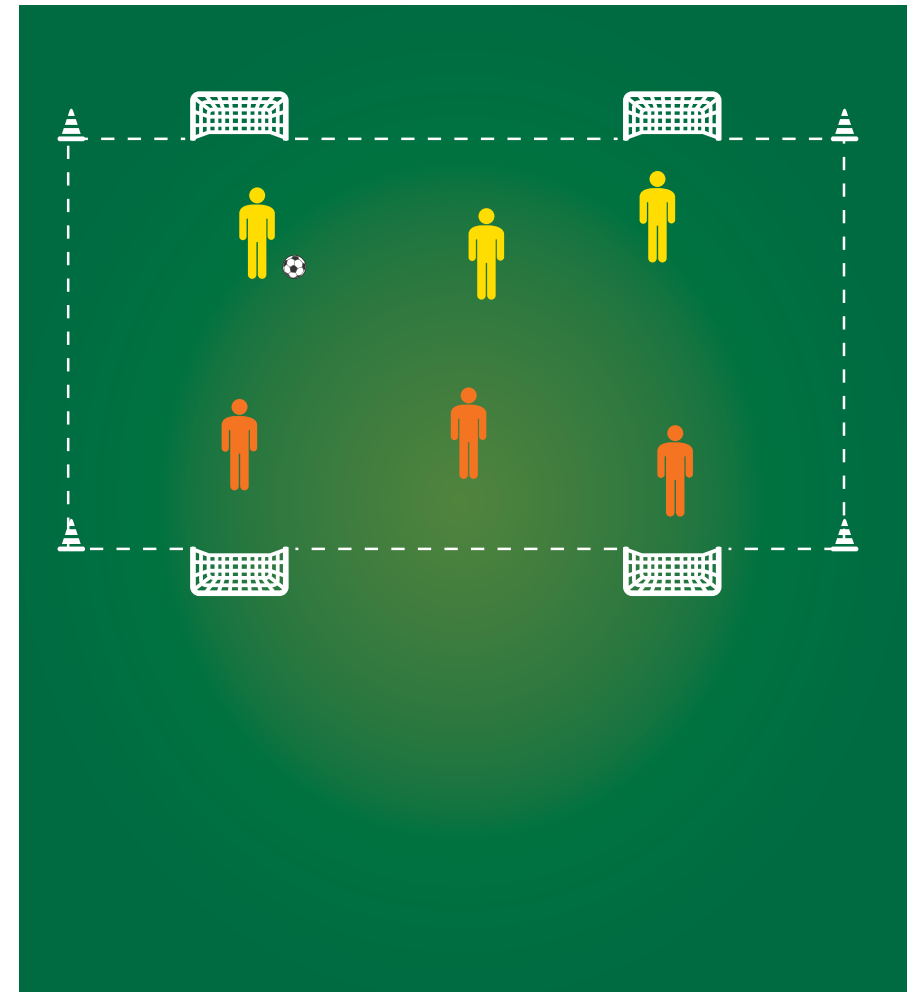
Model Session 7

Beginning: Figure 8 Relay

Explanation for relay

• Each player starts with a ball, and dribbles around the first marker and then the second marker in a figure 8 type direction (as shown in the diagram)

• Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball

• **Progressions**

- Players to use their right foot only

- Players to use their left foot only

- Players to use the inside of their foot only

- Players to use the outside of their foot only

- Each group to use one ball only, where the ball is exchanged at each end upon completing the figure 8
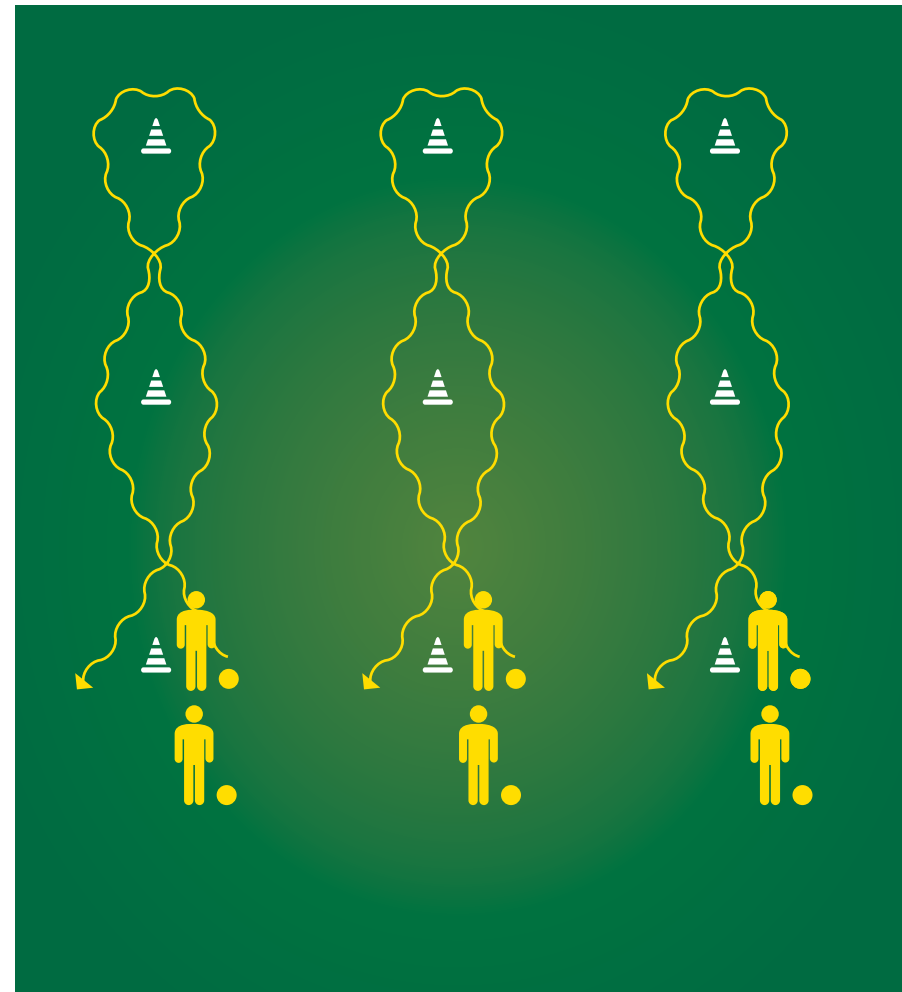
Middle: Colour code

This activity should be arranged in a square 15m x 15m and requires at least three cones of two or more colours placed randomly inside the square.

Players dribble their balls round the outside perimeter of the area.

Call out a colour and the kids must dribble into the square, around the cone of that colour, and back outside the square. The winner is the first one back outside with their foot on their ball.

Remind players to keep their heads up and watch out for possible collisions.

Variations:

• Round all cones of that colour

• Players to use their right foot only

• Players to use their left foot only

• Players to use the inside of their foot only

• Players to use the outside of their foot only

There are more possible variations, limited only by the number and colour of your cones, and your imagination!
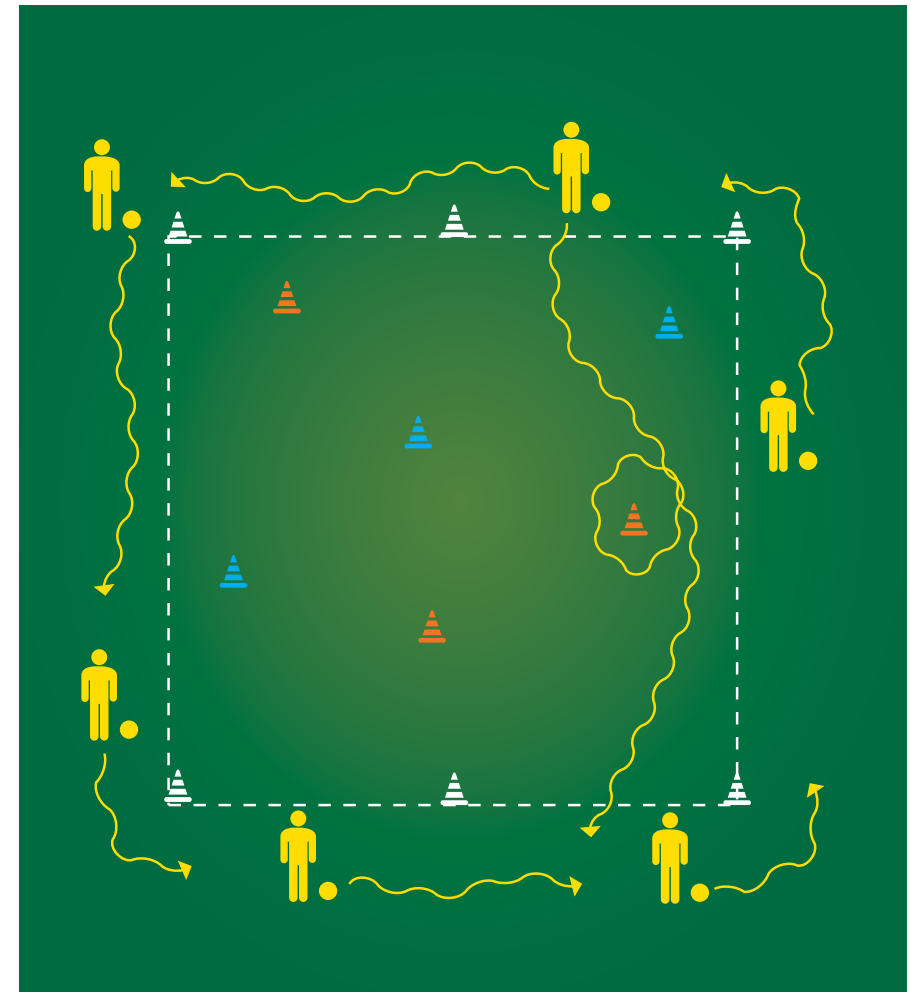
End: Dribble to score 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 15m–20m
Width: 15m
Goal: none (make 4 or 5 gates of 1m–2m width inside the area)

• To score a goal, dribble the ball through any one of the gates

• This game encourages dribbling

• Players cannot score in the same gate consecutively
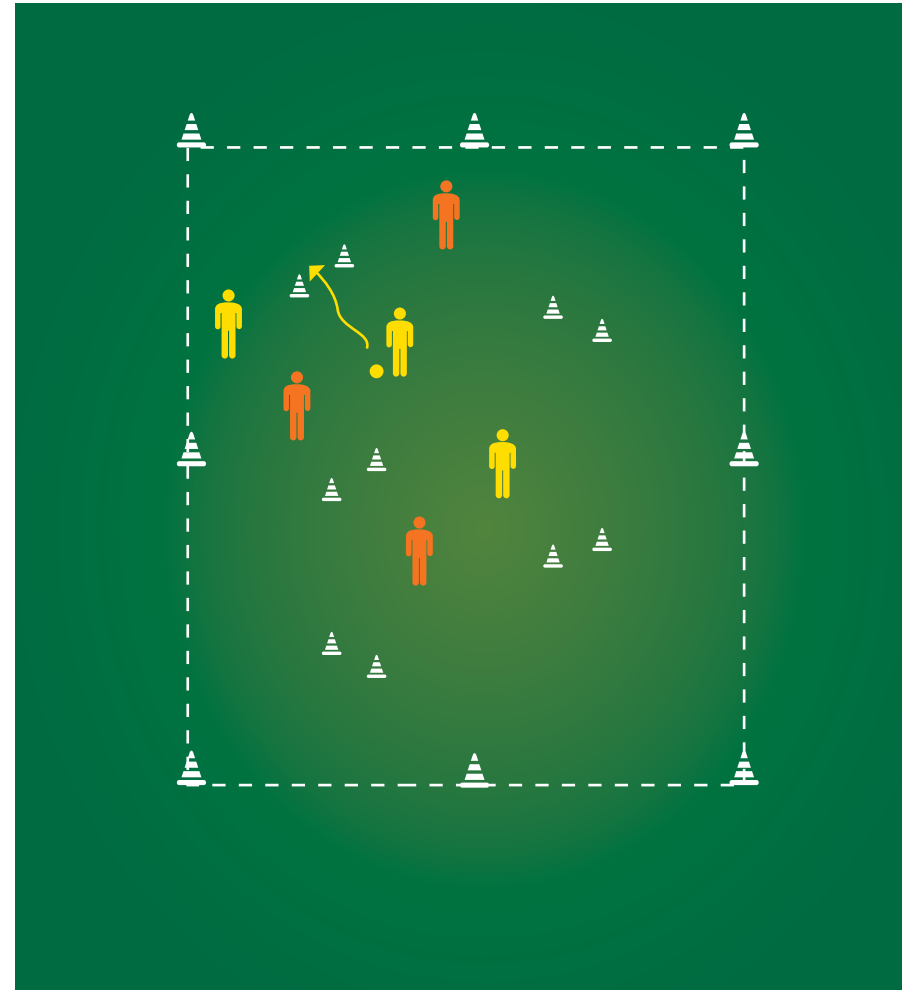
Model Session 8

Beginning: Dribblers and Collectors

Two players without a ball link hands and move around the area trying to kick other players' balls out. They are the 'collectors'.

When a player's ball is kicked out, they immediately join the 'collectors', so that there are now three players with hands linked chasing the others (then four and five) until everyone is out. Then two new 'collectors' start chasing.
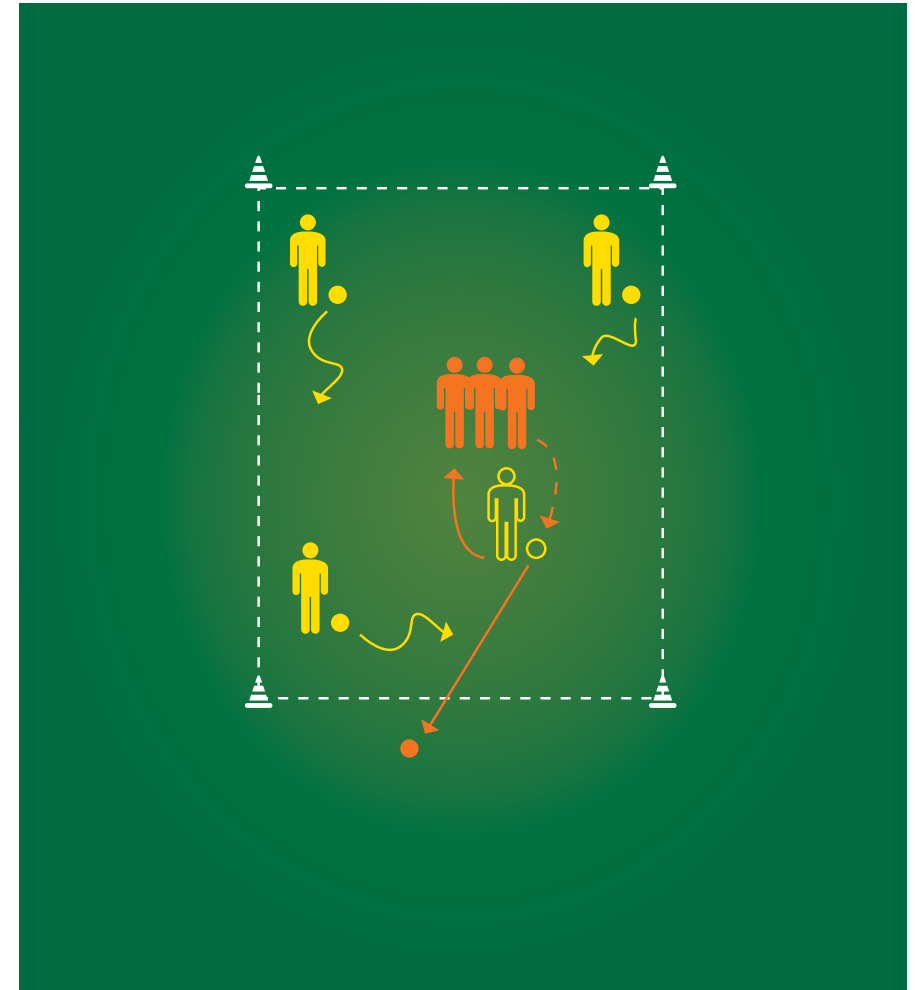
Middle: 1 v 1 Mini Games

Make three small areas about 10m wide × 7m-8m long (field is short and wide).

Two gates 2m wide placed on each byline, approximately 1m away from each corner marker.

Players play 1 v 1 on each mini-field and score by dribbling the ball through one of the gates.

Think of safety when setting up; avoid scenarios where players could dribble into each other by allowing buffer zones.

Keep rotating so opponents are changed regularly. Rotation also allows a period of rest, so control how long rotation takes depending on how fatigued the players seem. You could also give some brief hints to the whole group in order to give them a rest.
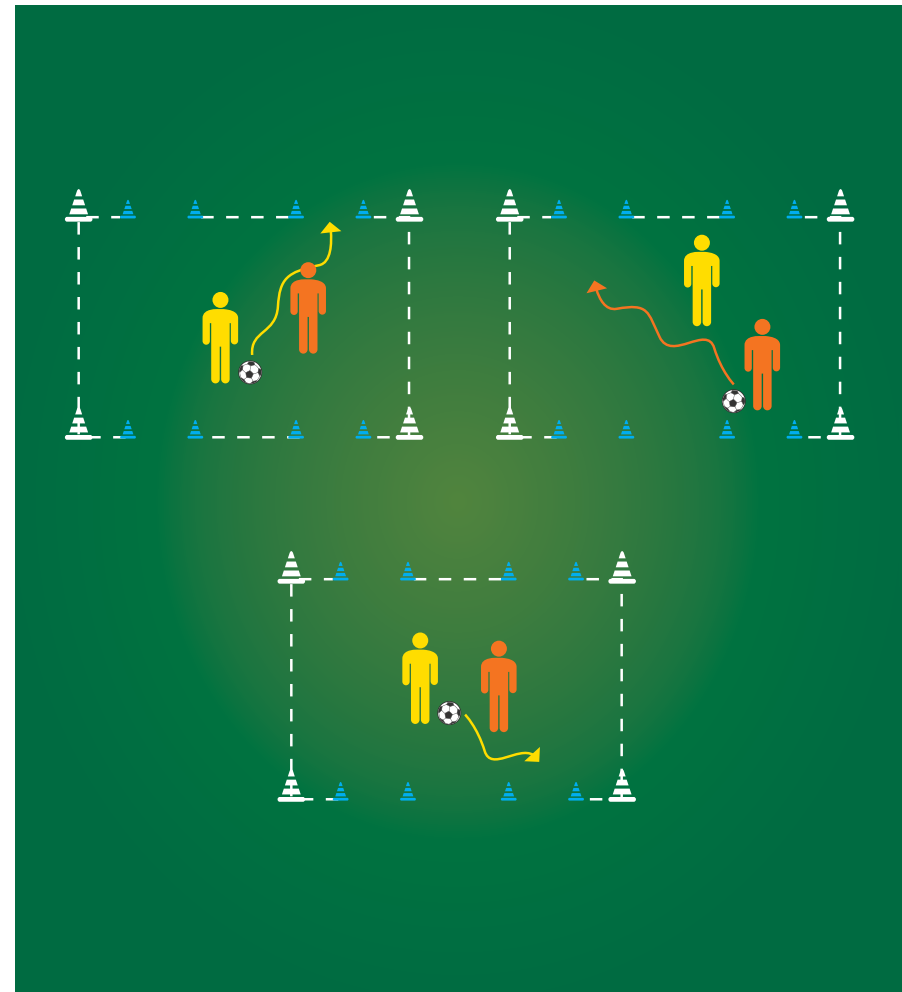
End: Line football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

- Field dimension is short and wide

Length:15m -20m
Width: 20m - 25m
Goal: none

- Usual rules, but method of scoring is to dribble the ball across the opponents' end line

- This game encourages dribbling and 1 v 1 skills

- **Progression:**

- Add 2 scoring zones behind each byline (as shown in the diagram)

- To score, players must dribble the ball over the byline, but also stop the ball in the scoring zone
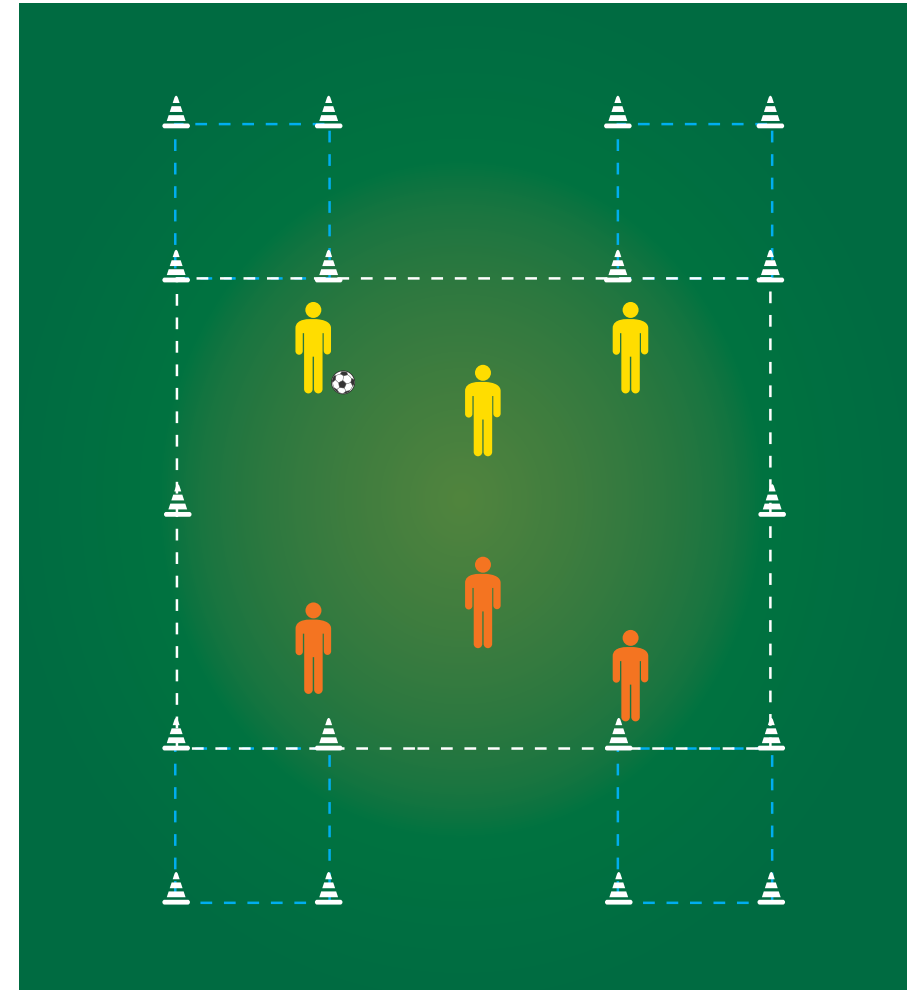
Model Session 9

Beginning: Relay

Explanation for relay

• Each group starts with 1 ball

• Player 1 dribbles the ball to marker 1, and leaves it there.
Then runs around the marker and tags player 2 at the starting point

• Player 2 runs to the ball, collects it from marker 1, dribbles it to marker 2 and
leaves it there, then runs around the marker and tags player 3 at the starting
point

• Player 3 runs to the ball, collects it from marker 2, dribbles with it around marker
3 and brings it back to the starting point

• Change the player numbers regularly

• **Progressions**

- Players to use their right foot only

- Players to use their left foot only
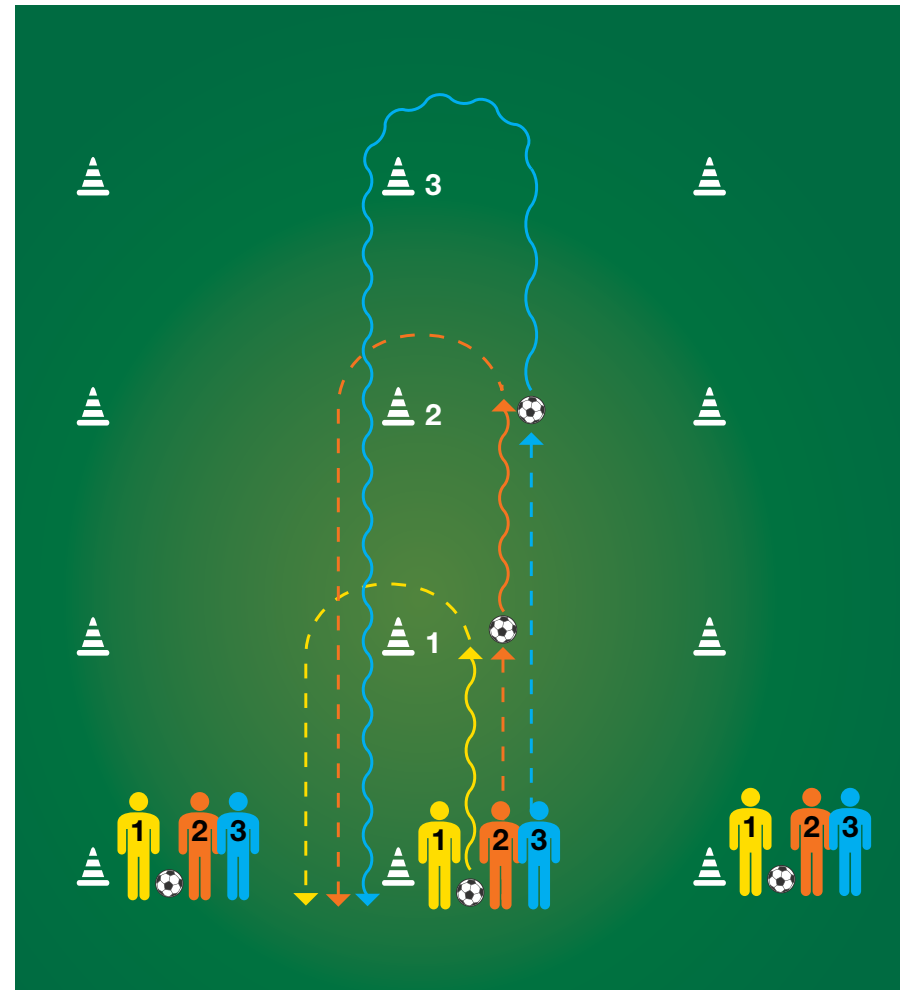
Middle: Beehive

Six players with a ball each dribble around an area about 7m × 10m.

They attempt to kick the other players' balls out of the area while keeping their own ball under control. The players must be careful – while they are kicking someone's ball out, someone else might kick theirs out!

If their ball is kicked out, the player must leave the area immediately without kicking any other balls out. The player can fetch their own ball and wait until there is a winner and the game starts again.
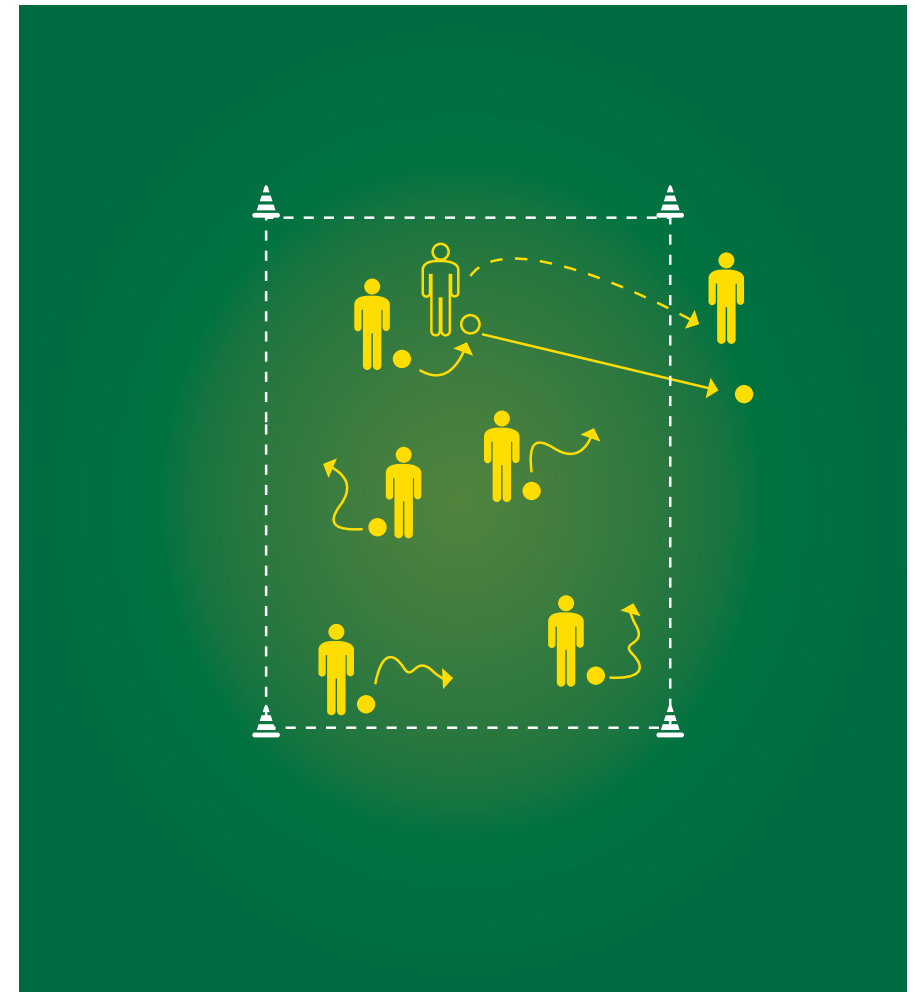
End: 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5) Training Game - focus on shooting

• Field dimension is short and wide

Length: 15m
Width: 15m - 20m
Goal: 3 goals on each byline (as shown in diagram)

• This game encourages shooting as often as possible
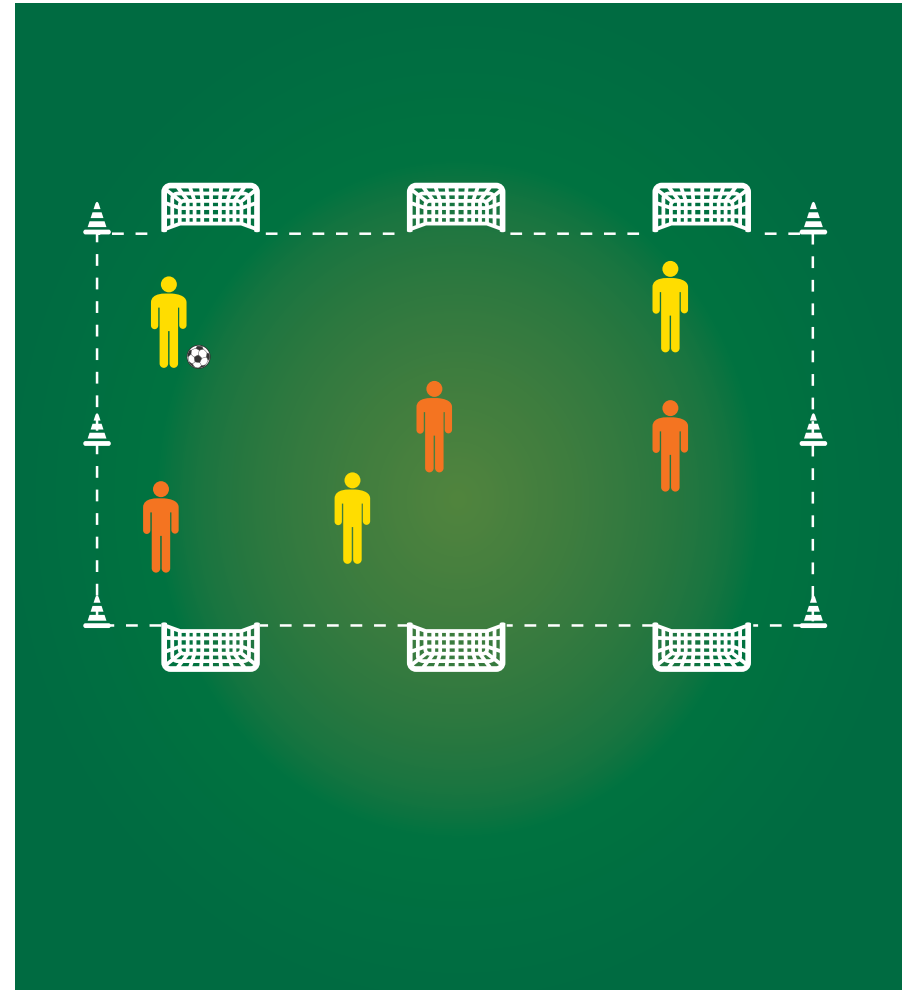
Model Session 10

Beginning: Catch the Tails

One or more players are 'hunters'. They chase the other players and try to remove their 'tails'. If a player's 'tail' is taken, they become a 'hunter'.
(Bibs tucked into shorts can function as 'tails').

Progression:

• The 'hunter' dribbles their ball while trying to remove the 'tails'

• Players with 'tails' dribble their balls while trying to avoid the 'hunter'
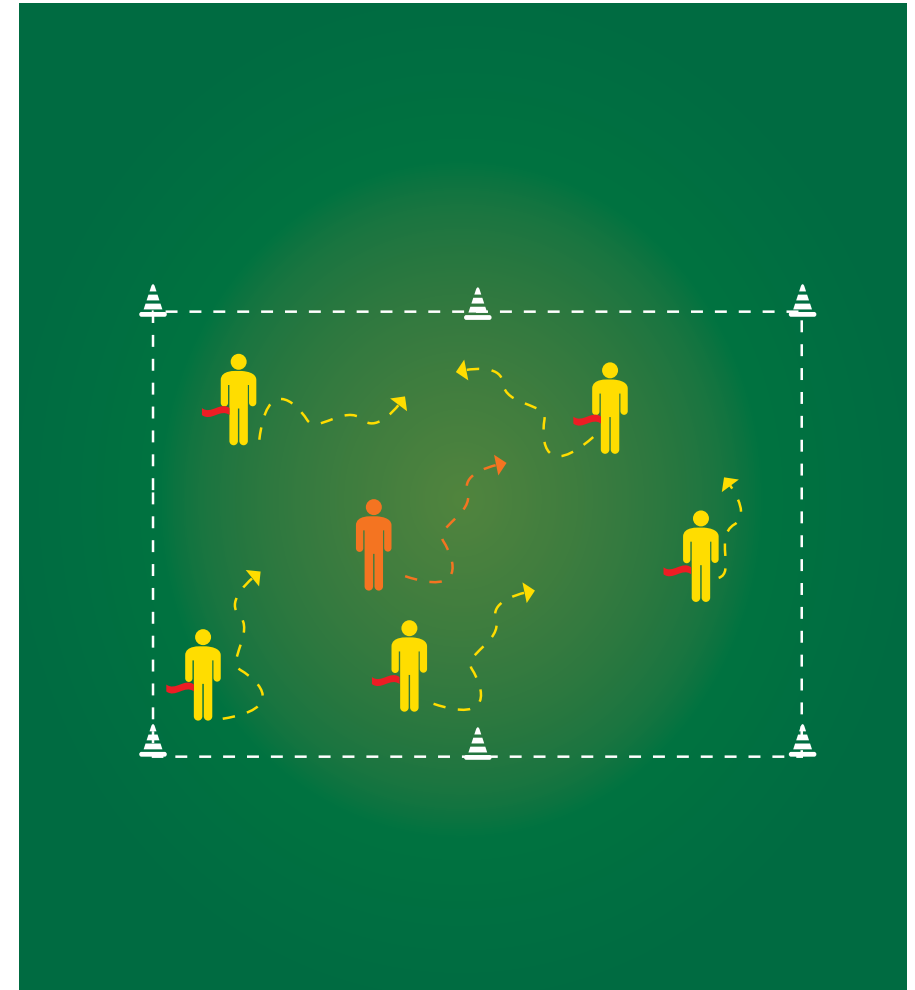
Middle: Simon Says

Players dribble freely around the area with a ball each. Give the kids various tasks and challenges, which they must do ONLY if you say 'Simon says' at the start of the sentence. Therefore, sometimes you use 'Simon says' and sometimes you don't – see who's listening!

The players must avoid touching anyone else's ball, and must not let anyone else touch their own ball.

Possible tasks:

• STOP! (Means stop dead with your foot on your ball)

• TURN! (Quickly go the other way with your ball)

• OUT! (Run outside the square and put your foot on your ball)

• CHANGE! (Leave your ball and find another one to dribble; who is the last one dribbling a new ball?)

• LEFT! (Dribble around the area touching the ball only with your left foot)

• RIGHT! (Dribble around the area touching the ball only with your right foot)

• Use your imagination!

Use instructions like 'Simon says sit next to your ball' or 'Simon says get a drink from your bag', to give the players a rest when needed.
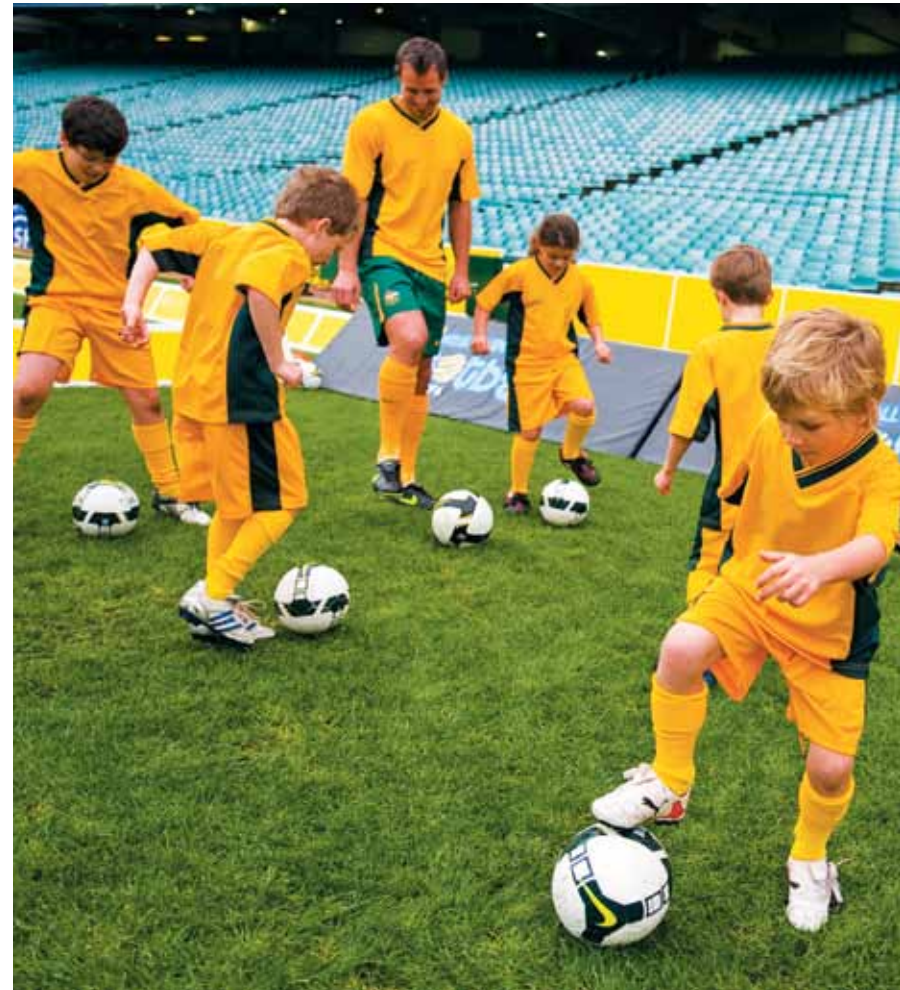
End: 2 v 2 (or 3 v 3, 4 v 4) end zone football

Length: 20m
Width: 15m
Goal: create an end zone (a square 2m x 2m) behind the centre of each byline

• To score the players must pass the ball to their own player in the end zone who must stop/control the ball in the area

• There are no goalkeepers

• Rotate players in the end zone every 1-2 minutes
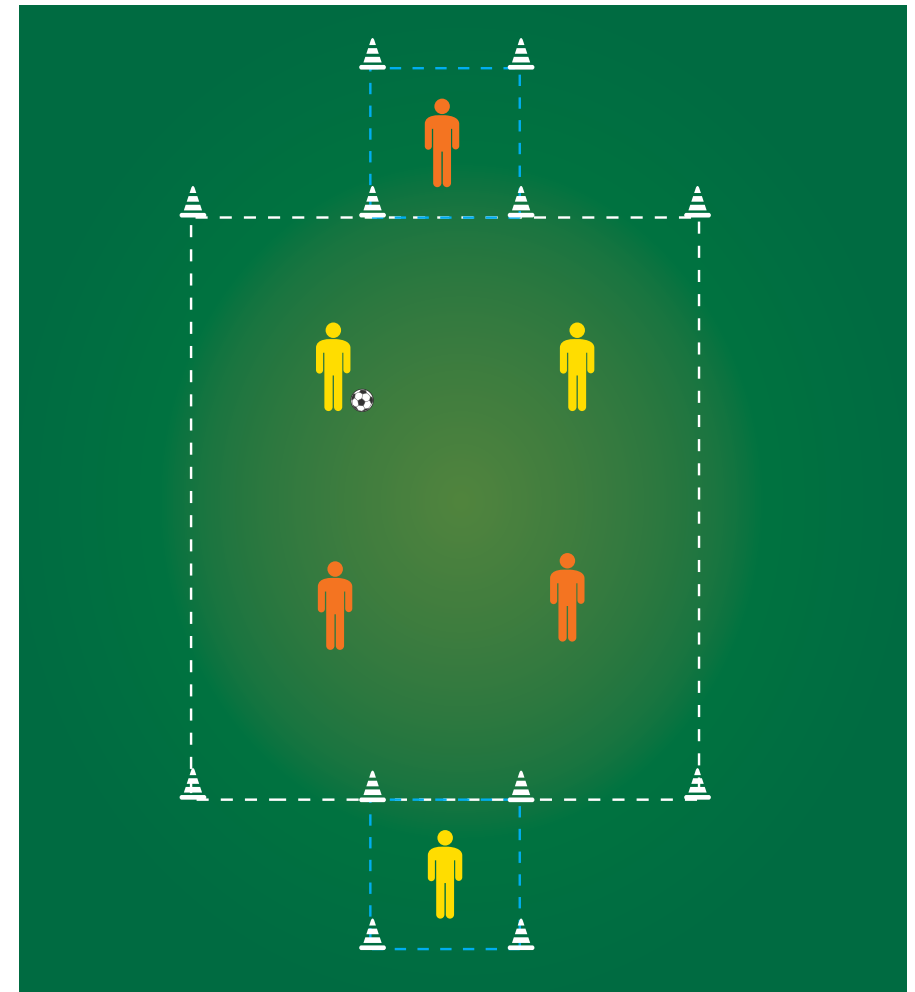
Model Session 11

Beginning: Relay

Explanation for relay

• Each player starts with a ball. Player 1 dribbles their ball through the middle gate and then around the far cone and back through the middle gate again on the way back

• Upon returning to the starting point, player 2 commences the same pattern

• Twelve cones are required

• Vary the width of the gates to increase/decrease difficulty
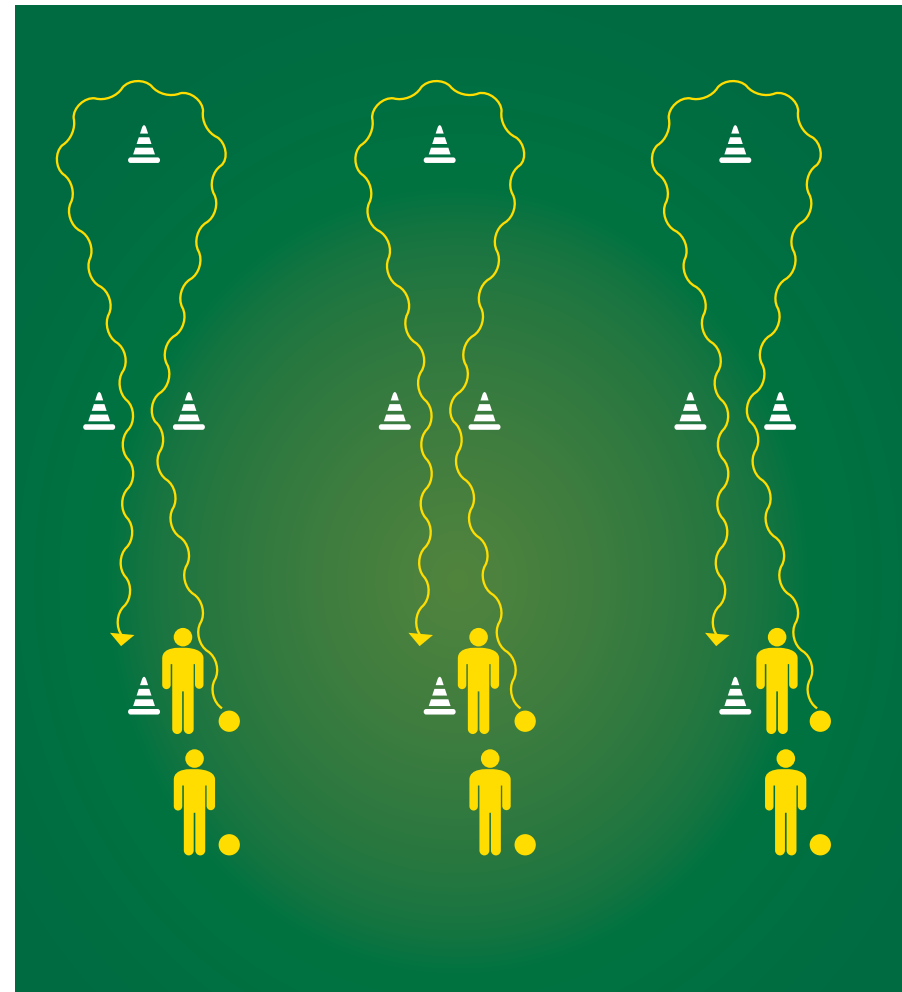
Middle: Pass and Move

This activity requires two players with a ball and four players without.

The players with the balls start by dribbling, while the other players move freely around the area. When the ball carriers see another player ready to receive the ball, they pass to them, then move to another part of the area. When a player receives the ball, they dribble until they can see another player who is ready to receive the ball. They then pass the ball to that player and move. Players are constantly moving, either looking to receive one of the two balls, or looking to pass to one of the players without a ball.

Progression:

• Three players with a ball and three without

This activity helps develop vision and communication and introduces the concept of passing the ball to a team-mate, which is often difficult to grasp for a naturally self-centred under-seven!

Passing will begin to be more evident from under-eights upwards.
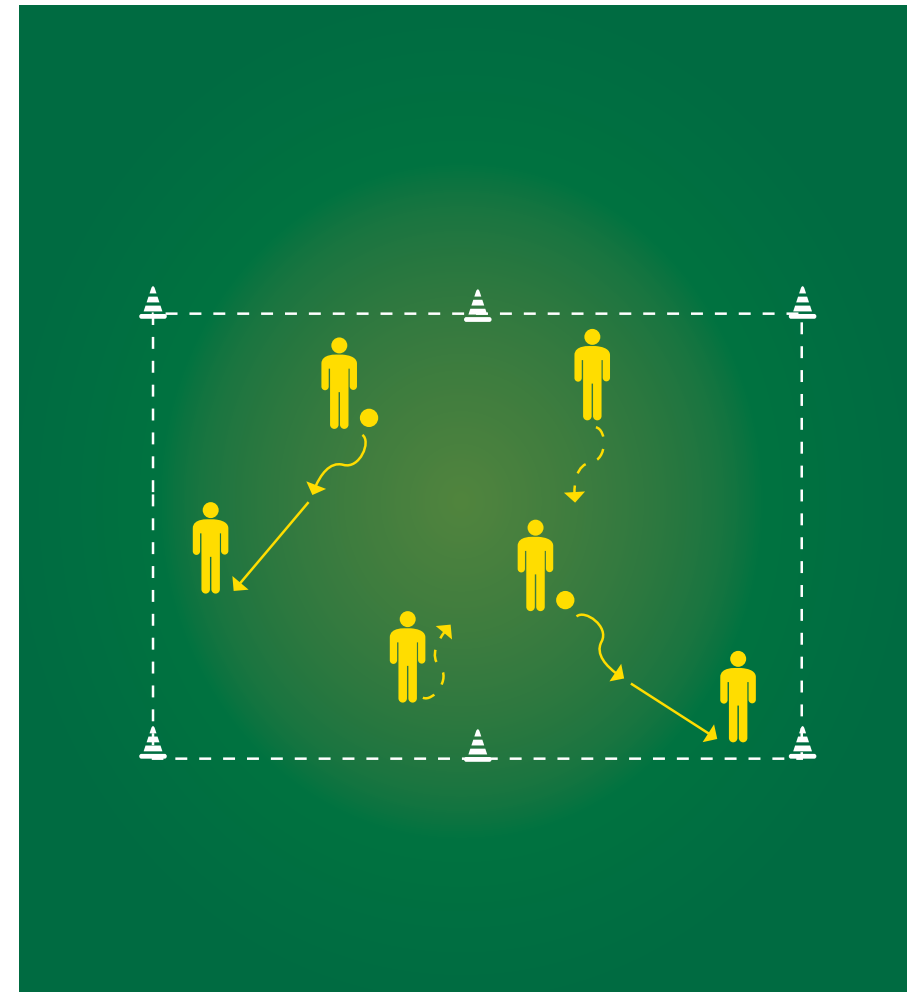
End: 4 sided football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 20m
Width: 20m
Gates: 4 gates of 1m–2m wide inside the area (as shown in the diagram)

• Players can score by passing the ball through any one of the 4 gates (and from either side) to one of their team-mates

• This game encourages passing and supporting
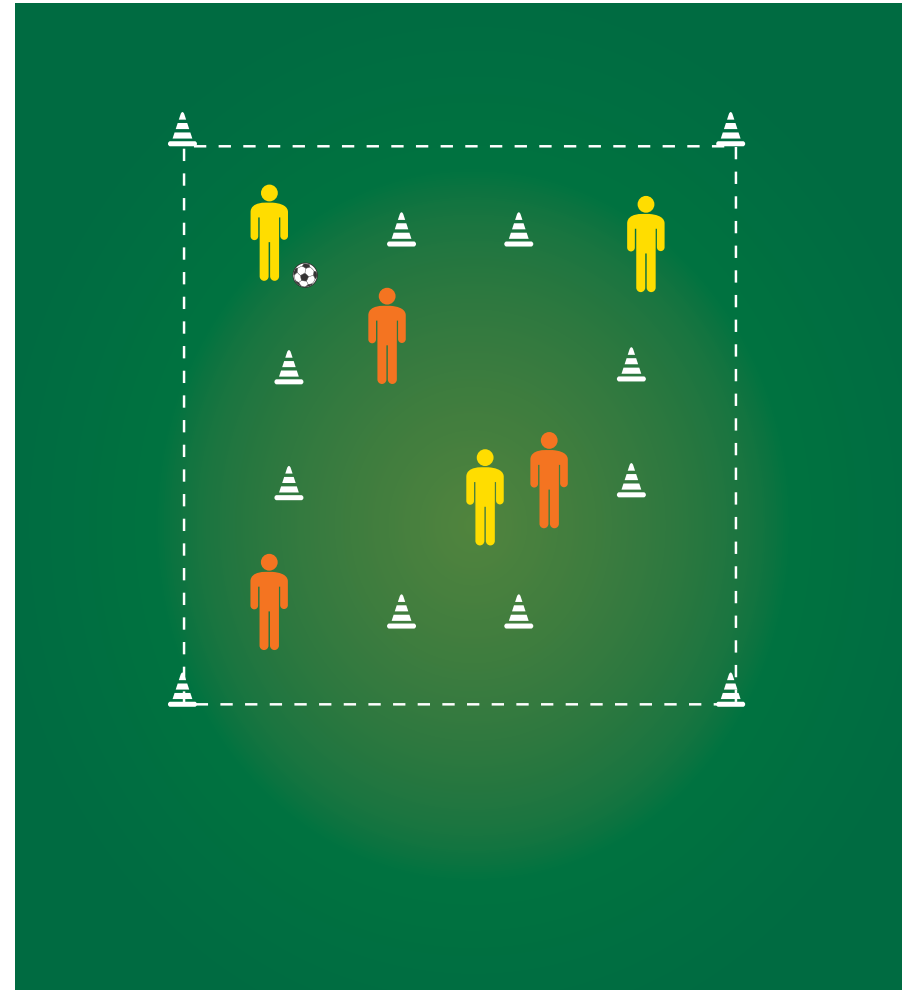
Discovery Phase Model Sessions

Model Session 12

Beginning: Dribble Tag

In an area about 10m × 14m, players dribble their balls around.

A 'chaser' is nominated and they try to tag the other players while keeping control of their own ball. The other players avoid him or her while keeping control of their balls.

If you are the tagger you must carry a bib so everyone knows who the chaser is.

Chaser
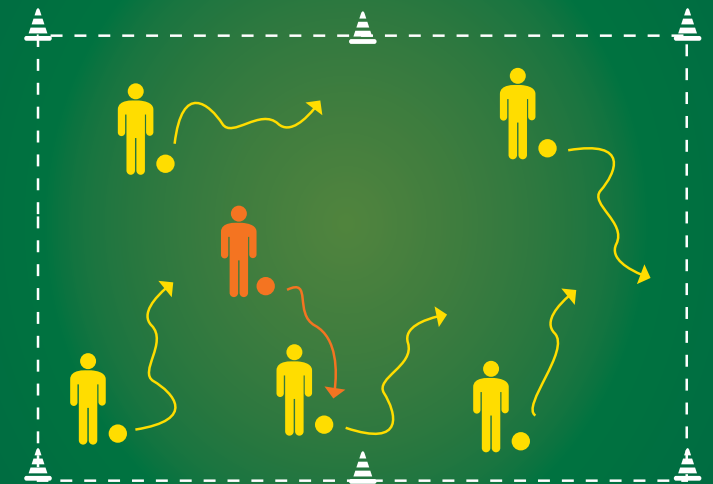
Middle: Hit the target

Make three small areas about 10m × 7m.

To score, players must hit the target to get points.

Targets may include 3 tall cones, water bottles, balls, empty plastic bottles etc.

Players will receive 1 point for every target which is knocked over or hit (like ten pin bowling).
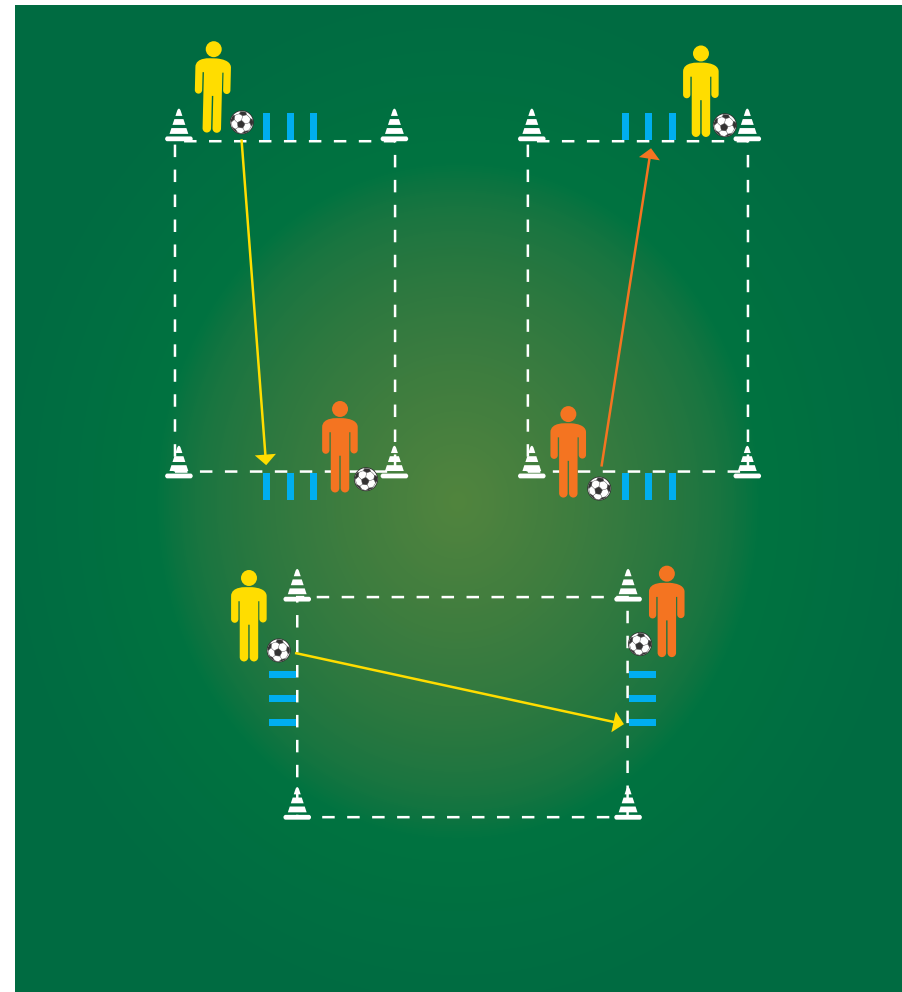
End: Triangular goal football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 20m
Width: 15m
Goal: triangular goal, 2m-3m per side, 2m-3m inside the field

• To score players must shoot or pass through any one of the 3 sides of the triangle of their designated goal

• This game encourages passing and shooting from different angles
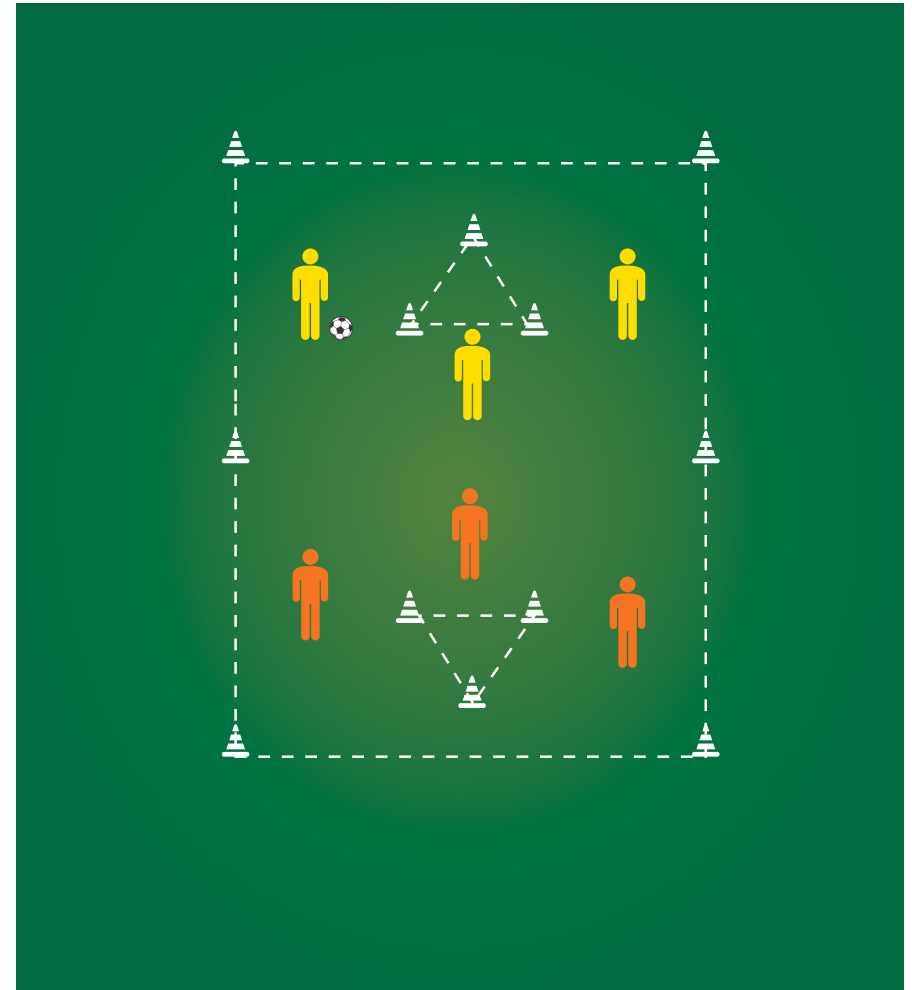
Skill Acquisition Phase

Model Sessions

At this age the children are ready for a more structured approach to training. In every session the focus is on one of the core skills, from the beginning until the end of the session ("theme based sessions").

The Skill Acquisition Phase sessions consist of 3 components:

1. Skill introduction, this is the warm-up as well as an introduction to the designated core skill for this session. This is the only part of the session where drill-type exercises should be used, but the creative coach can include elements of decision-making.

- Flow, no 'stop-start coaching'.

2. Skill training, this is the part of the session where conscious teaching and learning of the designated core skill takes place.

- Lots of repetition in game realistic scenarios!
- Task-based coaching
- Effective feedback
- Use of questioning (ask players 'why did you choose that option?', 'where do you think there might be more space?', etc)

3. Skill game, a game where as much as possible all the elements of the real game are present but organised in a way that the designated core skill has to be used regularly.

- Skill games are preferably **small sided games** to stimulate the number of repetitions/touches!
- The players play, the coach observes if learning has taken place.

It is also advisable to 'wrap-up' the session at the end, summarising the main points of the session to enhance learning.

Since the Skill Games are games in which all the **Game Specific Resistances** are present (team-mates; opponents; goals; direction; etc) they also provide an ideal opportunity to gradually establish the basic principles of the team tasks during the main moments of the game (e.g. 'make the field small' when defending; 'try to face forward' when attacking).

In other words: the emphasis in the Skill Acquisition Phase is on **Skill Development** but this can/should not be separated from developing insight/game understanding at the same time.

If this approach is applied properly, it will provide a seamless transition into the **Game Training Phase**.

This principle also relates to the concept of Small Sided Football and appropriate coach behaviour (refer to chapter 3):

During the Skill Acquisition Phase, 2-3 sessions of 60-75 minutes plus a game is a safe weekly workload, with the following session planning guidelines:

• Welcome: 5 minutes

• Skill Introduction: 15-20 minutes

• Skill Training: 25-30 minutes

• Skill Game: 20-25 minutes

• Wrap up: 5 minutes

On the next pages you will find three consecutive 6 week cycles (18 weeks program) and 12 Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions, 3 for each core skill with increasing difficulty. The 6 week cycles are based on the assumption that the weekly training sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays with a game on Saturday.

During the first cycle, Model Session 1 of each core skill is repeated every two weeks. Each time we repeat the Model Session we try to make a step-up (make the session more challenging) but only if the players are ready for it. During the second cycle, Model Session 2 of each core skill is repeated every two weeks and during the third cycle Model Session 3 of each core skill:

Skill Acquisition Phase CYCLE 1	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1	First touch **MODEL SESSION 1**	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 1**	**GAME**
WEEK 2	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 1**	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 1**	**GAME**
WEEK 3	First touch **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 4	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 5	First touch **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 6	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 1** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**

3. Skill Acquisition Phase

Skill Acquisition Phase CYCLE 2	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1	First touch **MODEL SESSION 2**	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 2**	**GAME**
WEEK 2	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 2**	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 2**	**GAME**
WEEK 3	First touch **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 4	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 5	First touch **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 6	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 2** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**

Skill Acquisition Phase CYCLE 3	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1	First touch **MODEL SESSION 3**	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 3**	**GAME**
WEEK 2	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 3**	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 3**	**GAME**
WEEK 3	First touch **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 4	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 5	First touch **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	Striking the ball **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**
WEEK 6	Running with the ball **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	1 v 1 **MODEL SESSION 3** Step up (if possible)	**GAME**

With 3 sessions per week our advice is to limit the duration of the sessions to 60 minutes and rest the players the day before as well as the day after the game. So, with a game on Saturday, we recommend a training session on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Factors to consider:

• Performance of the players in previous training sessions

• Performance of the players in matches (NB: matches should only be assessed in terms of core skill performance, not 'team tactics'. That way, training and matches are closely and logically linked)

Observation may lead you to conclude that one core skill appears to be especially deficient in most of the players, while another is generally strong.

Possible Cycle Planning changes:

• Replace the stronger skill with the weaker one every second rotation

• Move to a 5-session rotation in which each skill is focused on once, except for the weaker one which appears twice

The best advice for a coach working with players in this age group would be to attend the **FFA Youth C Licence course**.

This will give coaches a much better understanding of the why's and how's of session planning and season planning, while developing their ability to design their own practices.

Important:

• When the kids start playing 11 v 11 while they are still in the Skill Acquisition Phase, (U12/13) there is a common tendency for coaches to become totally obsessed with results, and forget that the players are still in the skill acquisition phase. This has a very negative effect on training session content as well as Match Day behaviour.

Training must remain focused on skill development; it is poor practice and detrimental to the players to sacrifice critical skill training time in order to conduct unnecessary 'tactical' coaching.

Match Day is when the coach can start developing the players insight and understanding of the basic team and player tasks. This involves reinforcement and elaboration of the basic tasks introduced at training during Skill Games ('Get between the lines', 'Can you face forward?' 'Look for the killer pass', 'Make the field big', etc)

It is also disadvantageous for young players' development to specialize for a specific team position too early; let them experience the various positions and aim for specialisation during the Game Training phase (the rationale for this is excellently explained in the book 'Coaching Outside the Box' by Mairs and Shaw).

First touch Model Session 1

1. Skill introduction

Players in fours (fives is also fine, and is a way of reducing intensity, if required) with one ball between them. 2 pairs facing each other 5m-7m apart. The yellow player starts by passing the ball to the orange player and following their pass at speed.

The orange player uses their first touch to move the ball away from the yellow player, and with the second touch passes to the blue player. The orange player follows their pass and jogs to the back of the opposite line.

In example A, the orange player has moved the ball to the right because the yellow player approached him/her slightly to his/her left side.

In example B, the yellow player has moved the ball to the left because the blue player approached him/her to his/her right.

The coach can also direct the passer to follow the pass by running **directly** at the receiver. Therefore the receiver has the option of going left or right, ideally the receiver will fake to move the ball in one direction, and then with his/her first touch move the ball the other way.

Concluding Competition:

Which group can complete 10 passes first?
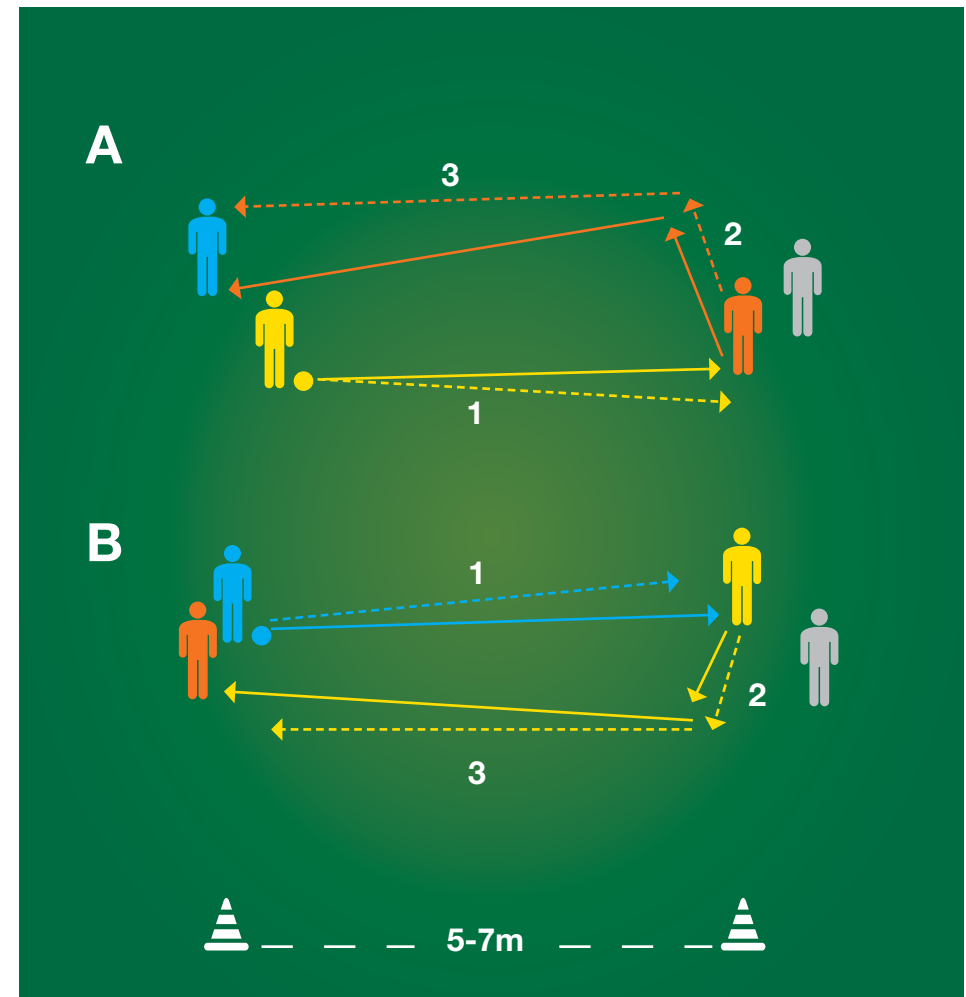
First touch Model Session 1

2. Skill training component:

Positioning Games with **two touches** as a **mandatory** requirement (i.e. first touch = control the ball, second touch = pass the ball).

Disallowing a direct pass forces the players to have a good first touch in order to move the ball away from the defender(s) and keep possession!

Which positioning game to use depends on the level of the players and ranges from 4 v 1 (easiest), 3 v 1, 5 v 2 and 4 v 2 (most difficult).

The grid size also depends on the level and capabilities of the players with 15m x 15m as a starting point (15m x 20m for the 5 v 2).

The coach can make the exercise more challenging for the players by simply decreasing the space or easier by making the grids bigger.

4 v 1

3 v 1
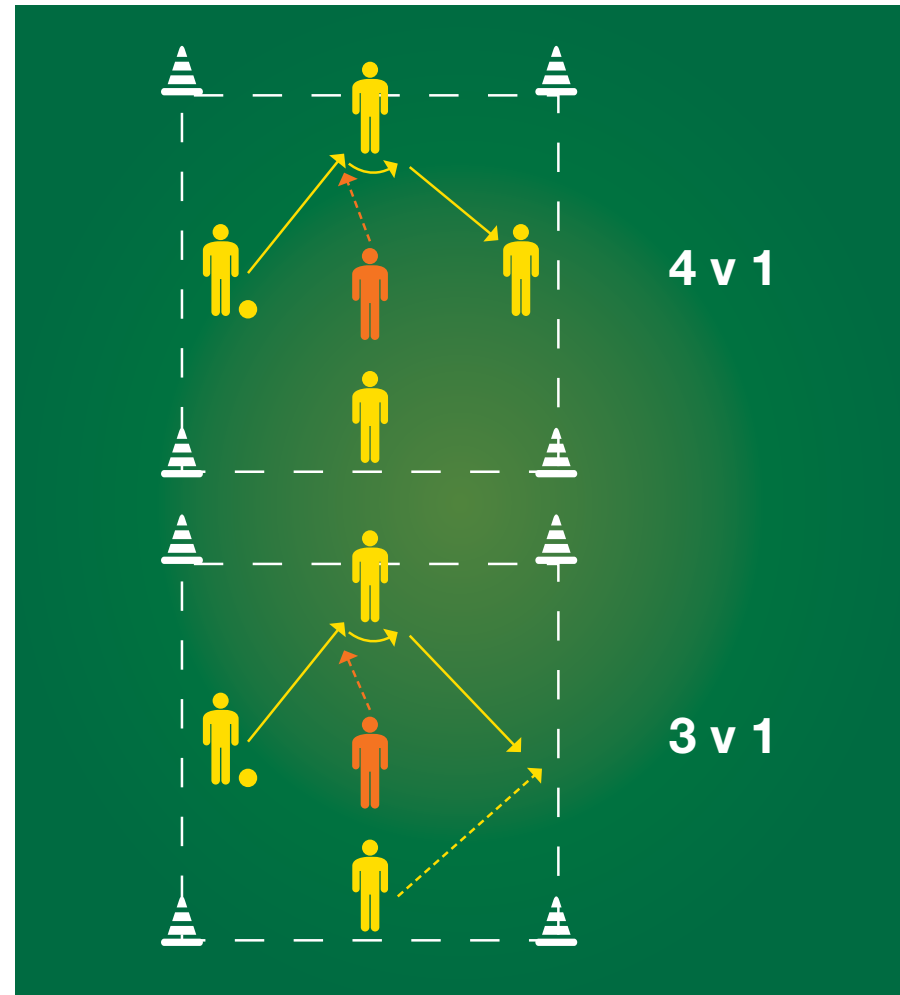
Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 1

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Move to support as the ball moves"

- "Make angles (do not stand in the corners)"

- "Keep your body open to the field"

- "Move the ball with your first touch away from the defender(s) "

- "Use body feints to disguise your intention"

- Competition: which defender(s) forces most mistakes in 1 minute

5 v 2

4 v 2
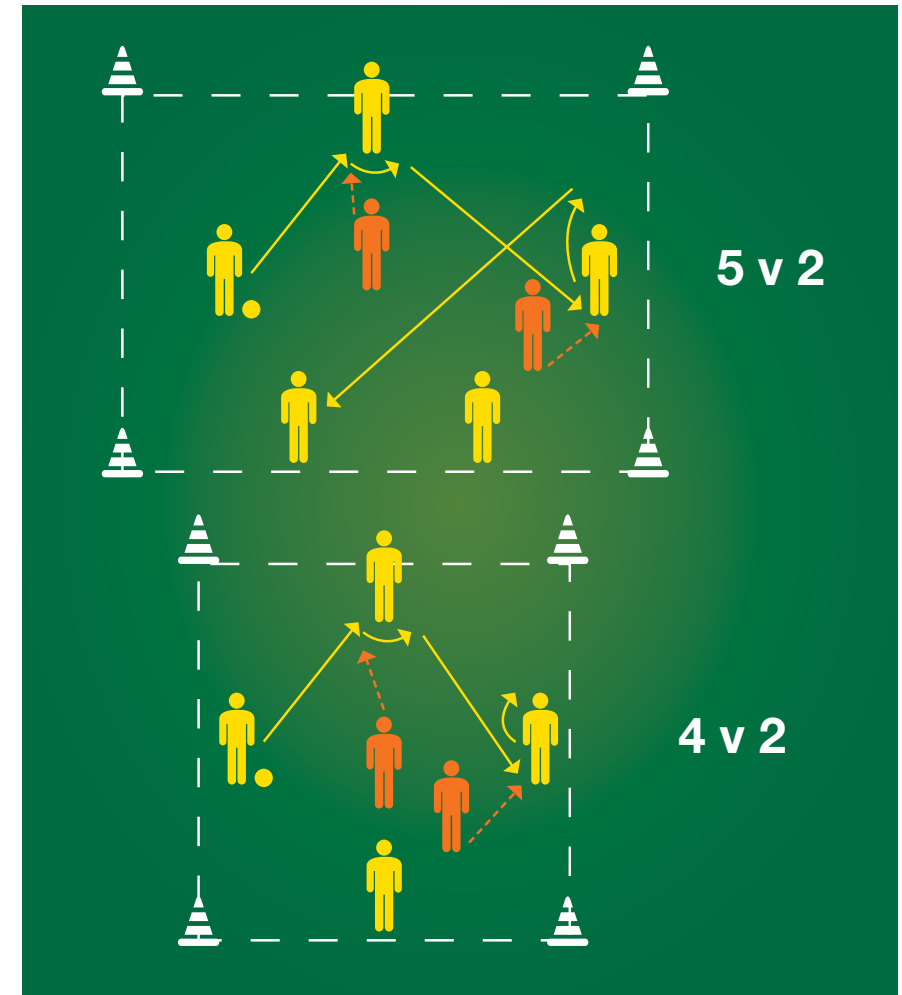
First touch Model Session 1

3. Skill Game:

5 v 5 with the restriction that with every ball contact each player **must take two touches**.

Disallowing direct play forces the players to have a good first touch in order to move the ball away from the defender(s) and keep possession!

The coach can make the game more challenging by simply decreasing the space or more easy by making the field bigger or creating a numerical advantage for the team in possession of the ball by adding a 'joker'.

First touch Model Session 2

1. Skill introduction

• In and around the centre circle 3 groups of 4 (or more) players with different
colour bibs are positioned as follows:

    a. The orange players outside the centre circle with a ball each
    b. The blue players outside the centre circle without a ball
    c. The yellow players inside the centre circle without a ball

• The yellow group moves around the circle calling for the ball and moving it with
their first touch to pass it with their second touch to a player outside the circle
who does not have a ball (anticipation, communication and awareness)

• Change roles after 1-2 min

• Only use left/right foot

• Only use inside/outside foot

• Serve out of hands to thigh/chest

• After passing the ball servers follow their pass to (passively) pressure the receiver
on their 1st touch
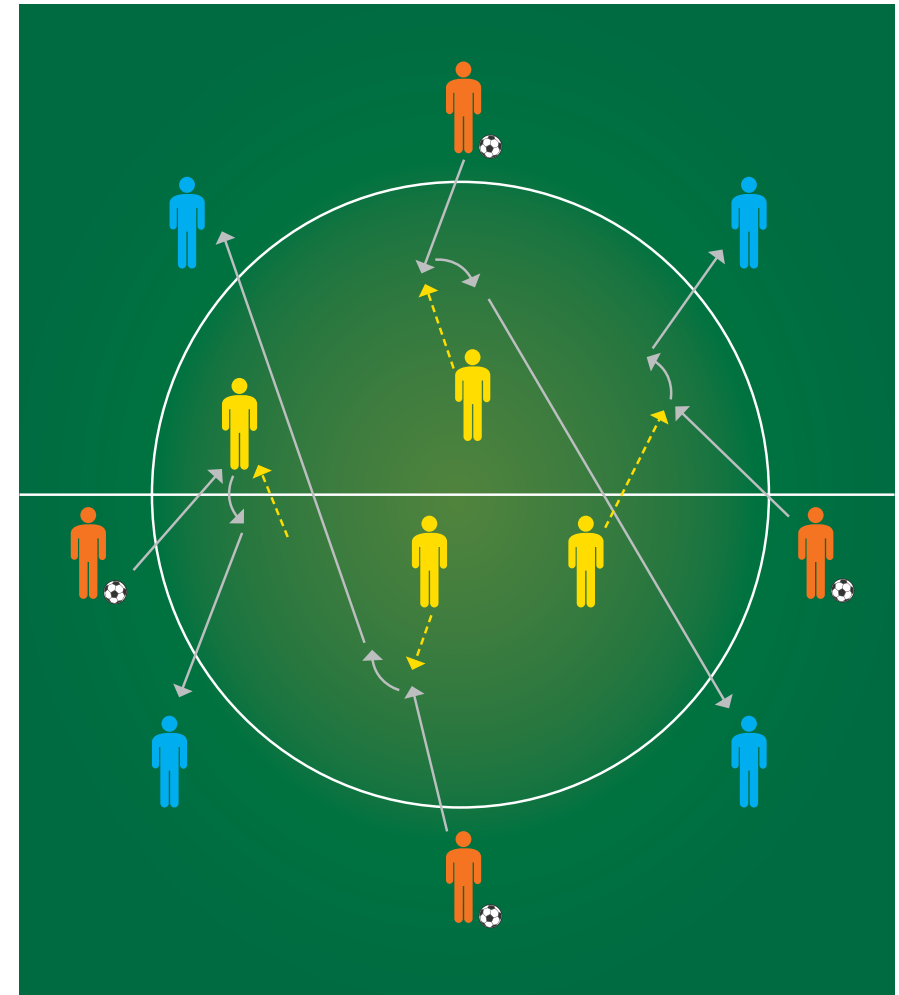
First touch Model Session 2

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Know beforehand to whom you are going to play the ball"

- "Try to use 2 touches only, the 1st touch to receive the ball and the 2nd touch to pass it"

- "Do not just move the ball side-ways, try to make a full turn sometimes"

Concluding game:

- 8 v 4 in centre circle, **mandatory** 2 touches to emphasise a quality 1st touch.

- Blue and orange try to keep possession with yellow defending

- Always position 1 or 2 'link' players centrally

- How long does it take for yellow to make 5 or 10 interceptions? Now blue defends and then orange

- Who is the winner?
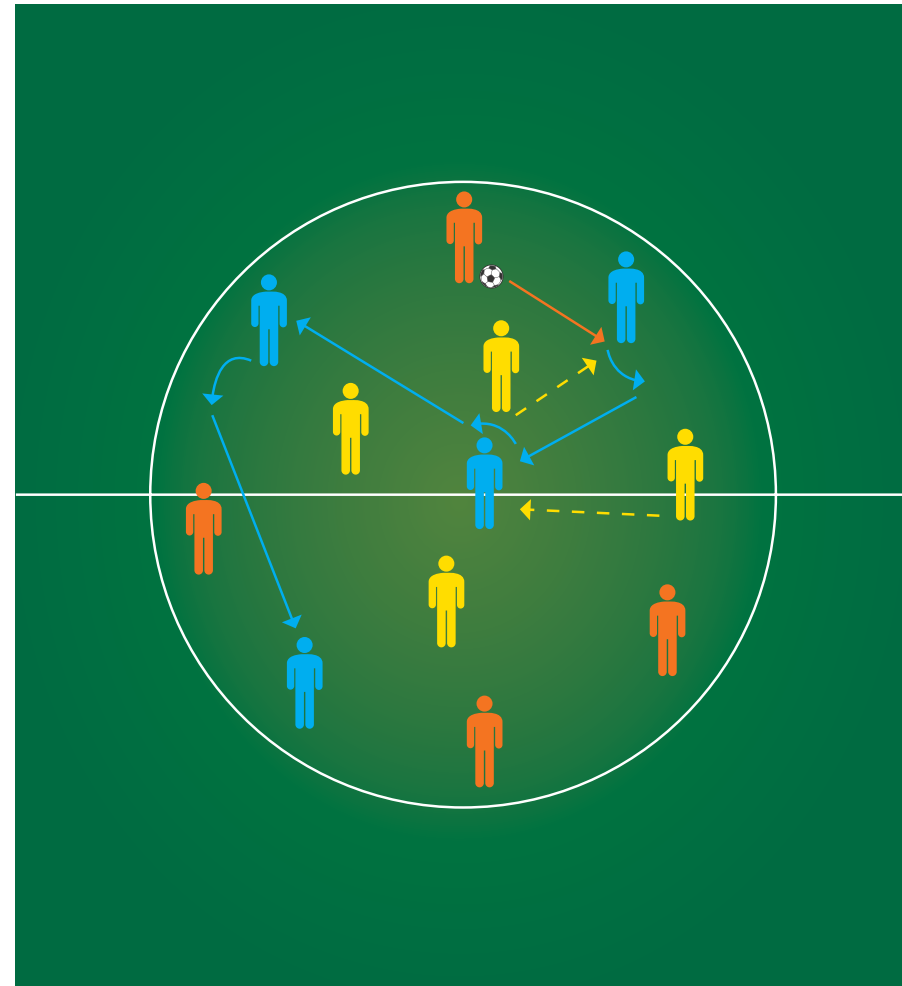
First touch Model Session 2

2. Skill training component

Positioning game 4 v 4 with 4 'wall' players (8 v 4) in a 20m x 30m grid (depending on player's ability).

Mandatory 2 touches for all players including the 'walls' who must keep the ball moving (i.e. not allowed to stop the ball with their 1st touch). This simple restraint sees to it that each 1st touch must be perfect every time the player receives the ball.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

• "Move the ball with your 1st touch away from the defender(s)"

• "Use body feints to disguise your intention"

• "Make an angle when asking for the ball"

• "Try to position yourself in such a way that you can see as much of the grid as possible"

• "Scan your options before receiving the ball"

• "Walls: help the players in the grid by coaching them"

Step up

• Reduce grid size

Step down:

• Increase grid size or go back to an easier positioning game (4 v 1; 3 v 1 or 4 v 2)
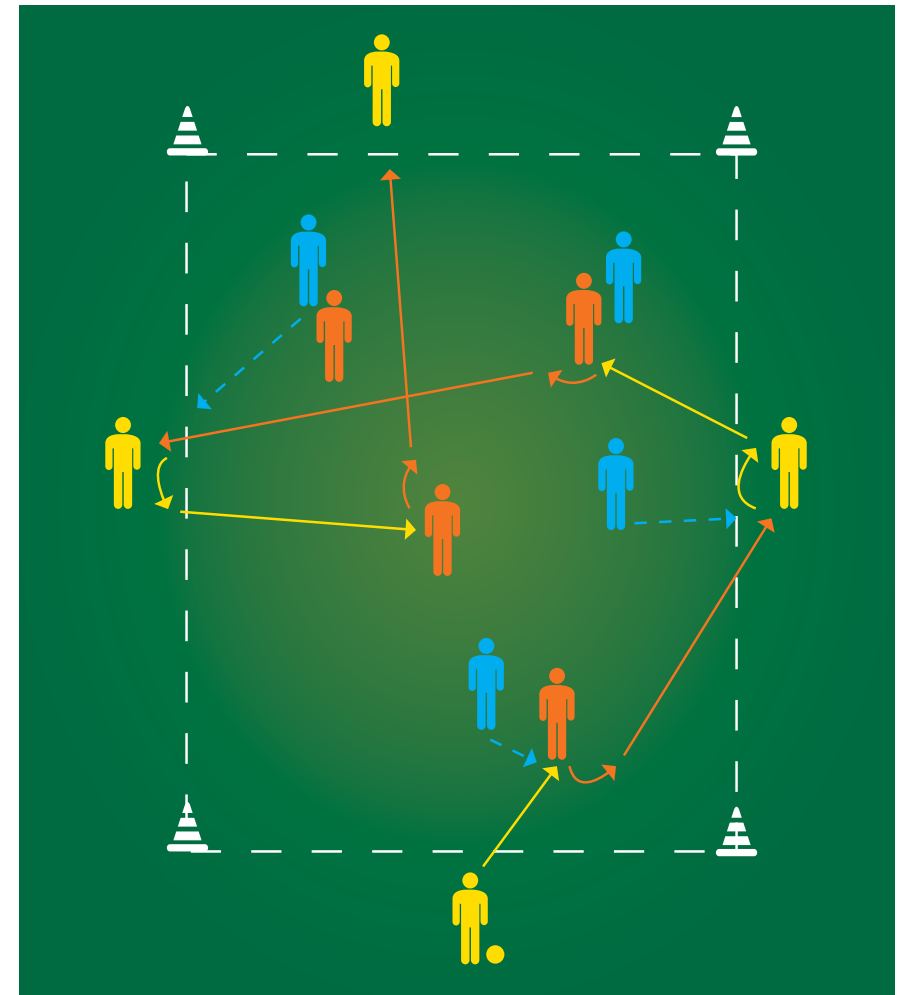
3. Skill game

• 4 v 4 with 4 walls (8 v 4) in a 20m x 30m grid with two 2m goals and a 5m-7m scoring zone at each end (see diagram)

Game rules:

• Mandatory 2 touches for every player (MUST touch the ball twice)

• Walls not allowed to stop the ball or play to each other

• Inside the scoring zone one touch finishes are allowed if the ball comes from the wall player between the goals

• Change teams every 2-3 minutes or after a goal is scored
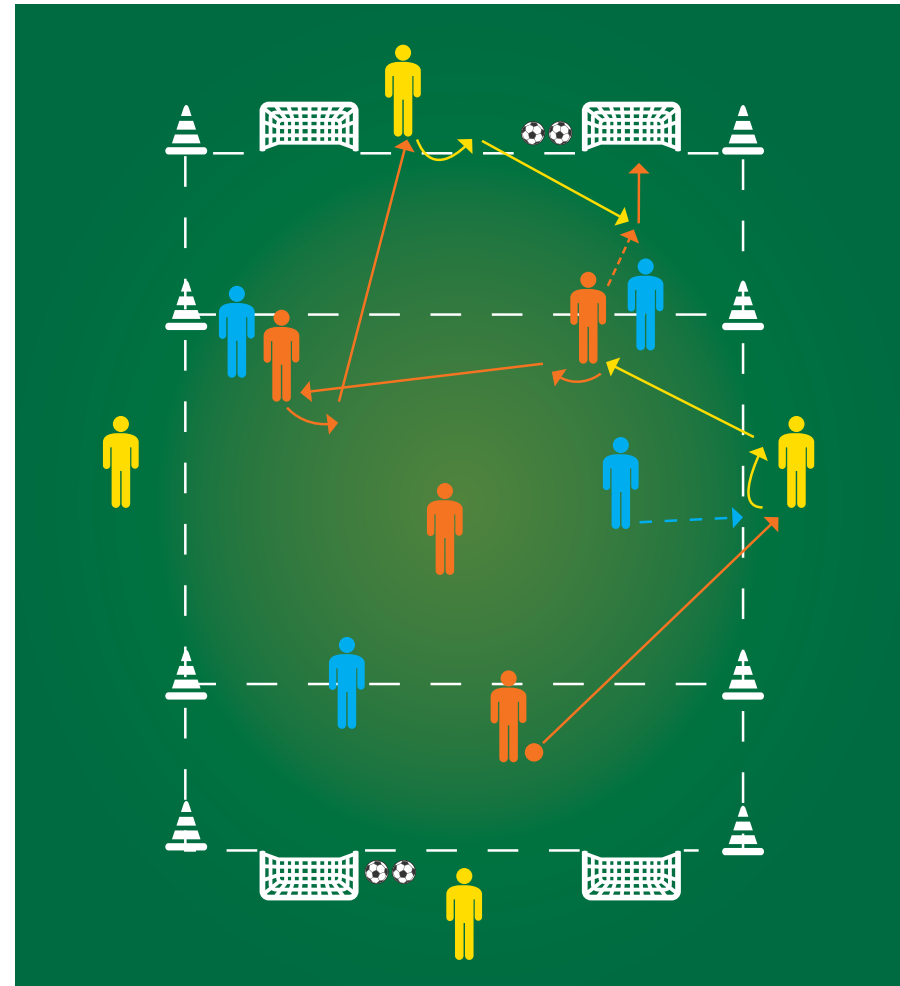
First touch Model Session 3

1. Skill introduction

Players in threes, positioned as shown. Both players at the sides with a ball; the player in the middle stands in a 2m x 2m grid without ball.

The exercise starts with a player on one side passing the ball to the player in the grid. They must move the ball with their first touch side-ways out of the grid and pass it back with their second touch.

Then they receive the next ball from the player at the opposite side, etc. (see variation 1) Rotate positions after 10 repetitions. Use various techniques i.e. right/left foot only; inside/outside foot only.

In variation 2, the central player receives the ball, turns in the grid (one touch) and passes to the player at the opposite side with their 2nd touch. This player receives the ball and passes it back again to the player in the grid, etc. (so here we temporarily use one ball only!). Again: left and right; inside and outside foot.

In variation 3, the outside players follow their pass, sprinting to the left or right cone of the grid. The player in the middle must now move the ball out of the grid in the opposite direction with their 1st touch and dribble the ball to the empty cone. The new middle player now receives the ball from the other end and the pattern is repeated.

Concluding competition:

Use one of the 1st touch techniques for a relay:
"which group has concluded 10 perfect repetitions by all 3 players first"
"OK, one more time and now .....(other technique).
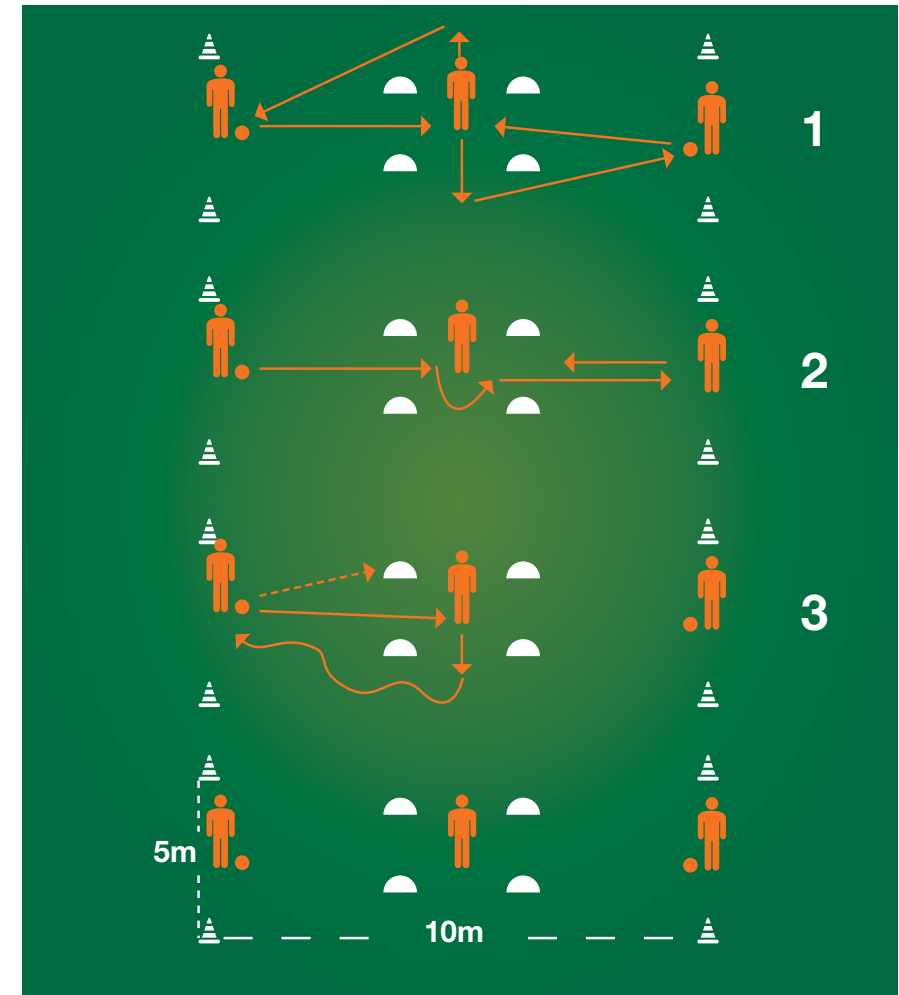
First touch Model Session 3

2. Skill training component

• Positioning game 4 v 4 + 2 'rescue' players (6 v 4) in a 30m x 30m grid

• The 'rescue' players of both teams are positioned opposite each other (as shown in diagram)

• **Mandatory 2 touches** for all players, including the 'rescue' players (this simple restraint sees to it that each 1st touch must be good!)

• If someone passes to a rescue player, both players (passer and 'rescue' player) must immediately swap positions

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"Move the ball with your 1st touch away from the defender(s)"
"use body feints to disguise your intention"
"make an angle when asking for the ball"
" try to position yourself in a way that you can see as much of the grid as possible"
"scan your options before receiving the ball"
"rescue players: help the players in the grid by coaching them"

Step up:

• Reduce grid size

• Game: one point for every successful interchange passer-rescue player (NB the rescue player must continue possession)

Step down:

• Increase grid size

• Use a 'joker' or an easier positioning game
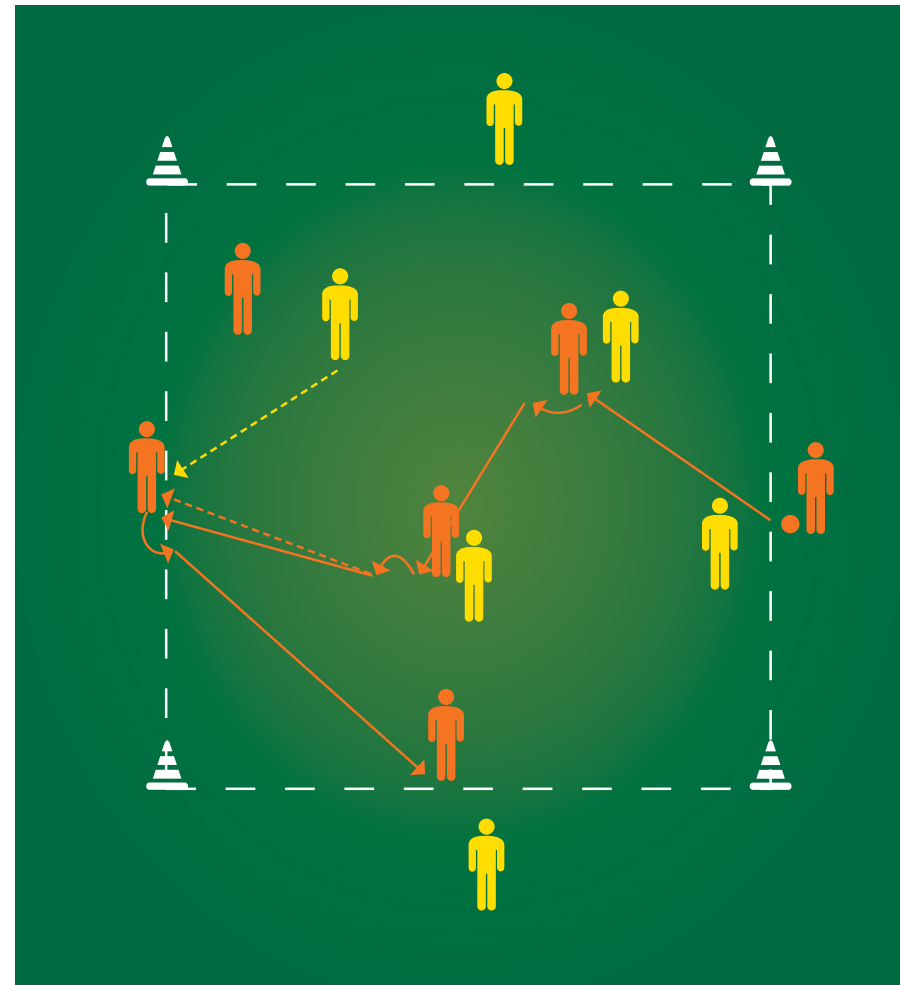
First touch Model Session 3

3. Skill game

4 v 4 in a grid of approximately 35m x 35m with five 3m gates positioned as shown.

The team in possession scores a goal when one of their players passes the ball to a team-mate through one of the gates.

Mandatory 2 touches for all players

If the defending team wins the ball, the roles change without stopping the game.

"Which teams scores most?"

Step up:

• The attacking team must make an effort to score within 30 seconds, otherwise the possession goes to the opponent

• Decrease the goal size

Step down:

• Increase the goal size

• Add another goal

• Introduce a 'joker'
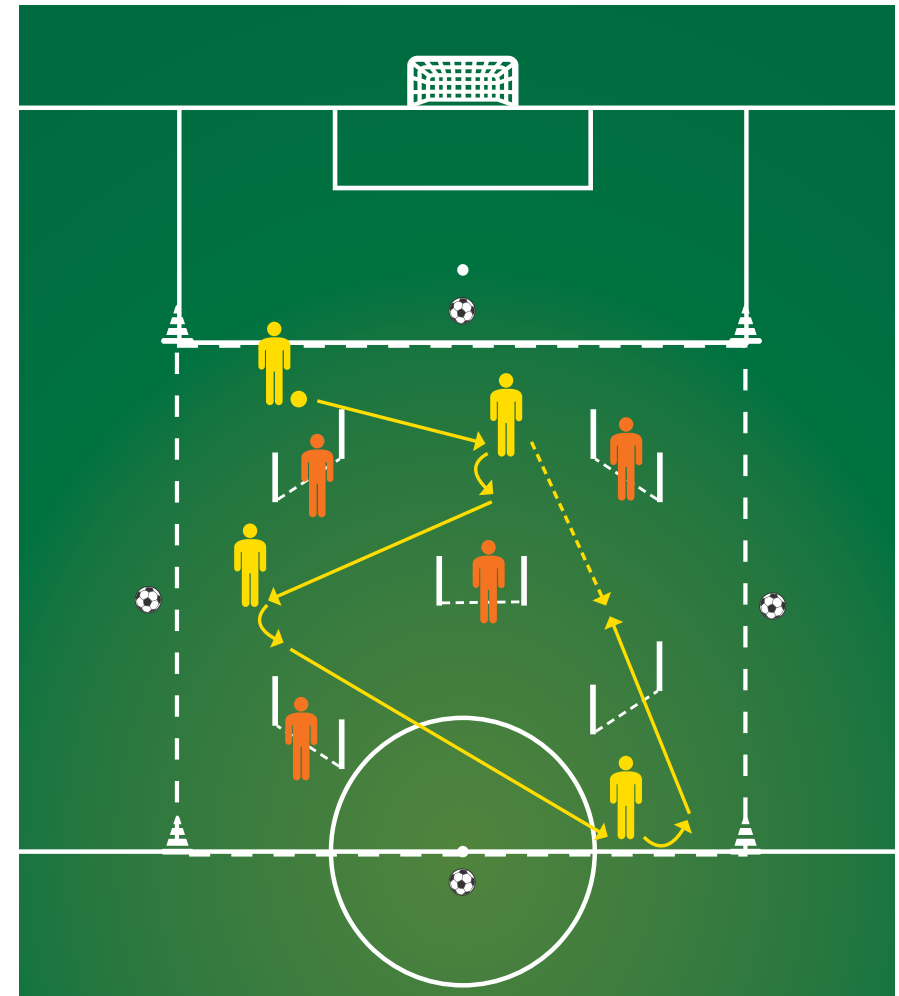
Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

1 . Skill introduction

In a grid of approximately 20m x 20m (dependent on group size) half of the players position themselves outside the grid without a ball and the other half with a ball inside.

The players inside the grid dribble freely until they can pass to a 'free' player on the outside who then passes the ball back to the same player (see diagram A)

Change roles every two minutes, players must use left / right foot on coaches call i.e. 2 min left foot only; then 2 min right foot only.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

• "Only pass the ball when the passing line is 'open' and make sure someone else is not passing to that player at the same time"

• "Pass the ball precise and with the right speed"

• "Look where you run when asking for the ball back and make an angle for the return pass"
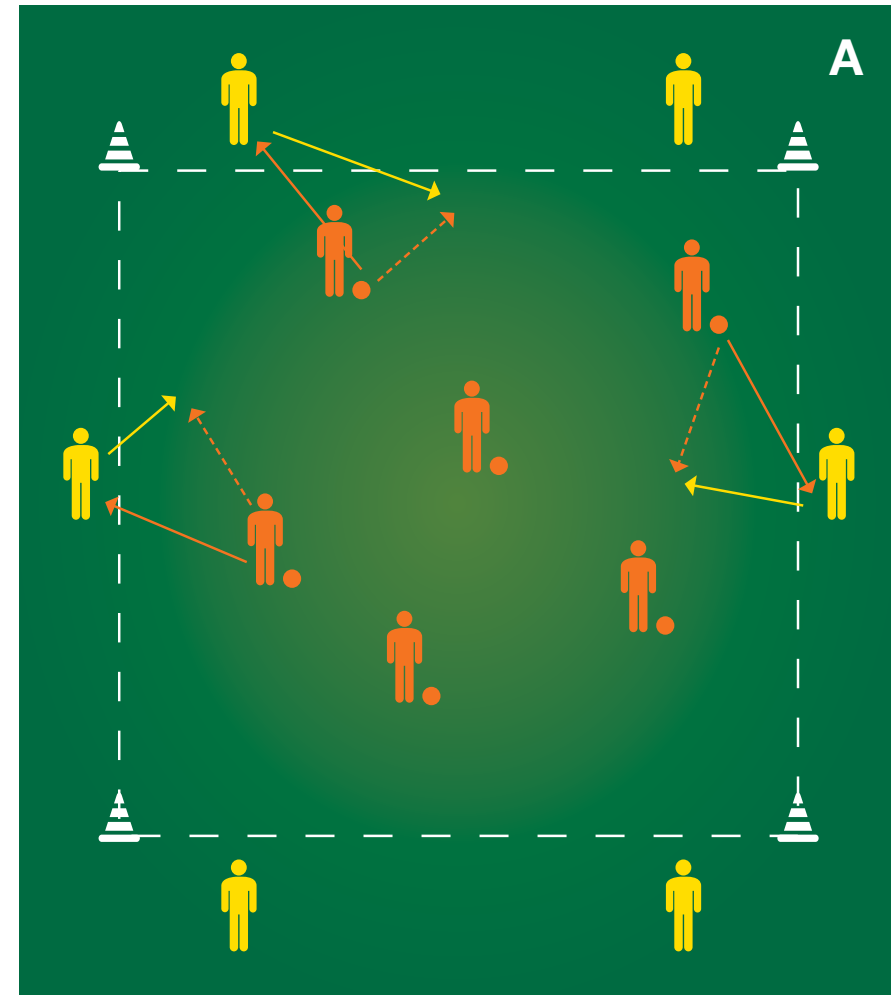
Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

- Next the players form pairs with one ball and position themselves at the edge of the grid, 3m on either side of the line (see diagram B)

- The players move towards each other while playing one touch passes until they have reduced the distance to 1m-2m. Then they move backwards again continuing to pass until they have reached their starting position

- Right foot only

- Left foot only

- Right-left alternately

This exercise challenges the players to work on the 'weight' and accuracy of their pass using both feet over varying distances

B
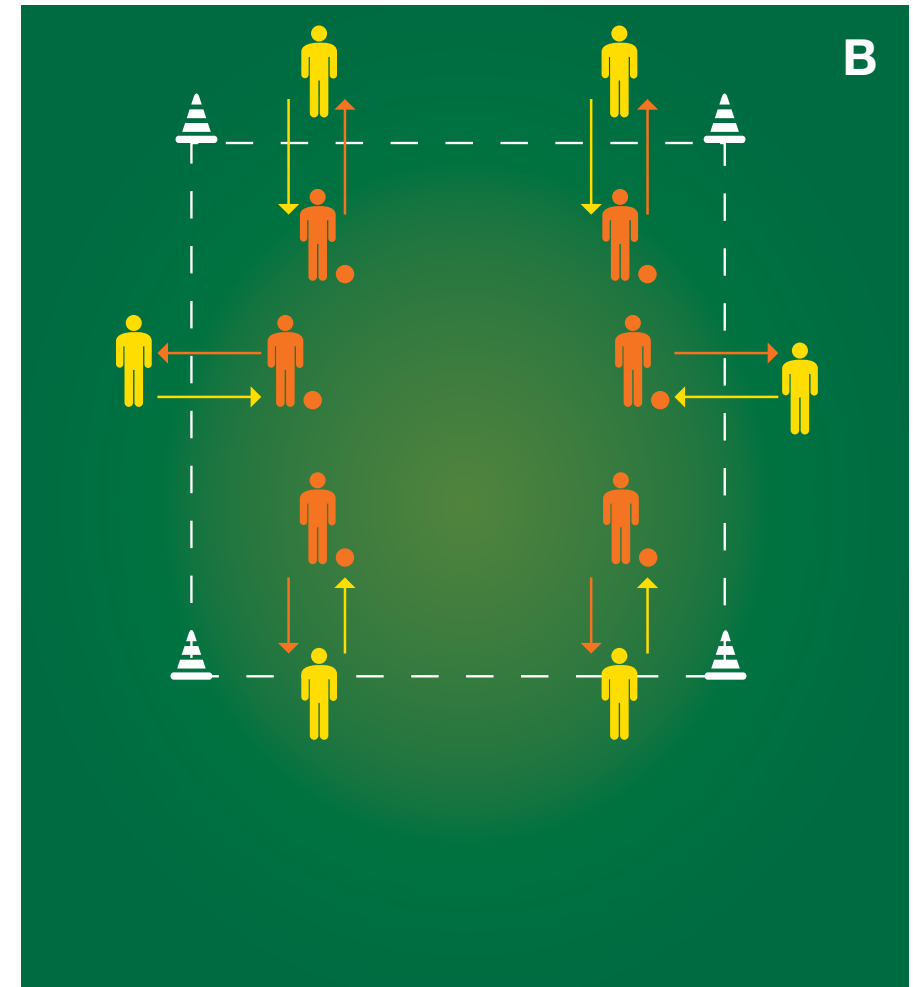
Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

Concluding tagging game

- All players go into the same grid we used for the previous exercises. Half of them have a ball at their feet, the others are without ball

- One player is appointed 'tagger' and carries a bib in their hand

- The tagger can only tag a player without ball. If the tagger succeeds in tagging a player without ball, both swap roles

- The players with ball can help their team-mates without ball by passing a ball to them when they are being chased by the tagger

- Any balls that roll out of the grid may not be fetched back, so the passes need to be accurate.

Variations to make easier or more difficult:

- 2 or more taggers

- More (or less) players with a ball

Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

2. Skill training component - Positioning games

Depending on the ability of your players, choose any of the 3 'basic' positioning games i.e. 4 v 1; 3 v 1 and 4 v 2. All have similar objectives but with varying degrees of resistance and complexity.

See diagrams on the right:

A. 4 v 1 (grid size 10m x 10m – 15m x 15m)

B. 3 v 1 (depending on the level of the players)

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"The player on the ball must always have a player to their left and right that they can play to"

"But do not stand in the corners, your angle is much smaller if you do that""
With 3 v 1 this means that "you have to move each time the ball moves"
(see diagram B)

"Position yourself in a way that you can see the whole grid"
("with your back to the line")

"Play the ball to the proper foot of your team-mate (i.e. away from the defender) and with the proper speed and precision"

Please note that 3 v 1 asks for a lot of running and is therefore quite exhausting for players this age. Use regular drink breaks to allow for recovery
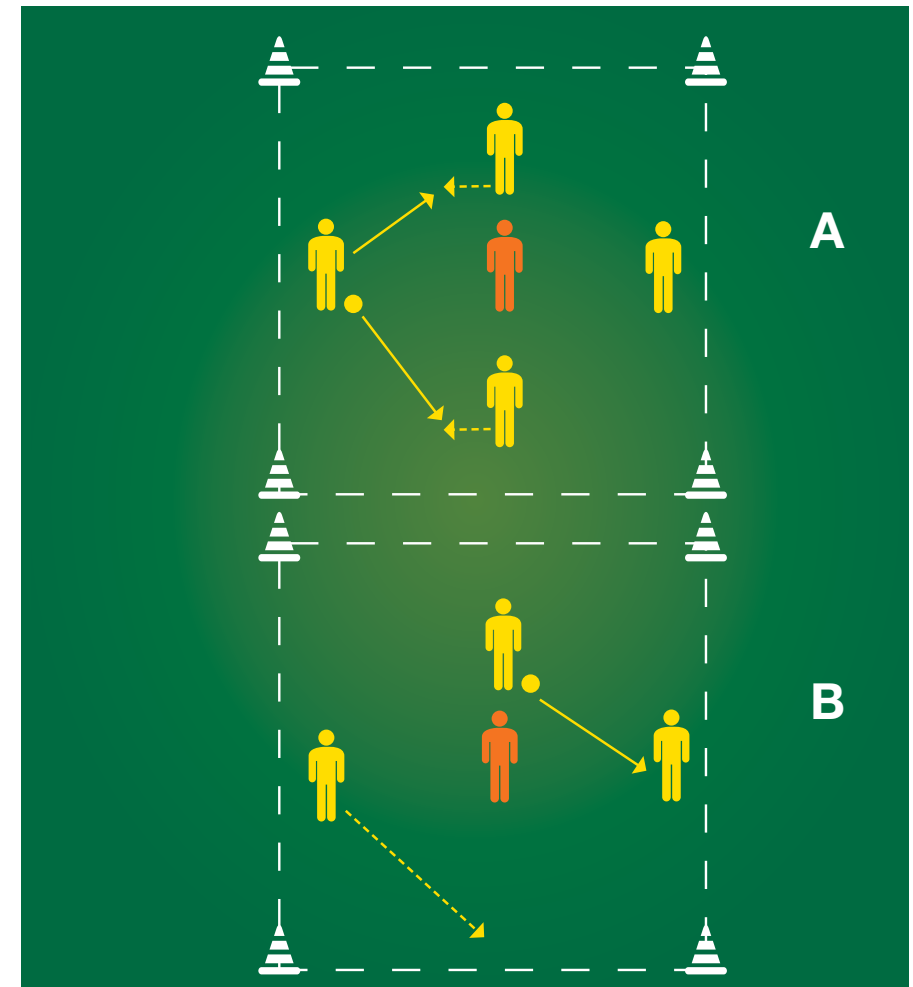
Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

4 v 2 (diagram C) grid size 12m x 12m – 15m x 15m depending on level of players

Possible Coaches Remarks specifically for 4 v 2:

"Now the player on the ball must always have a player to their left, right and in between that they can pass to"

"Especially look to pass through the 2 defenders, that's the most important pass! We call that the killer pass"

Step up:

Make the grid smaller

Step down:

Make the grid bigger
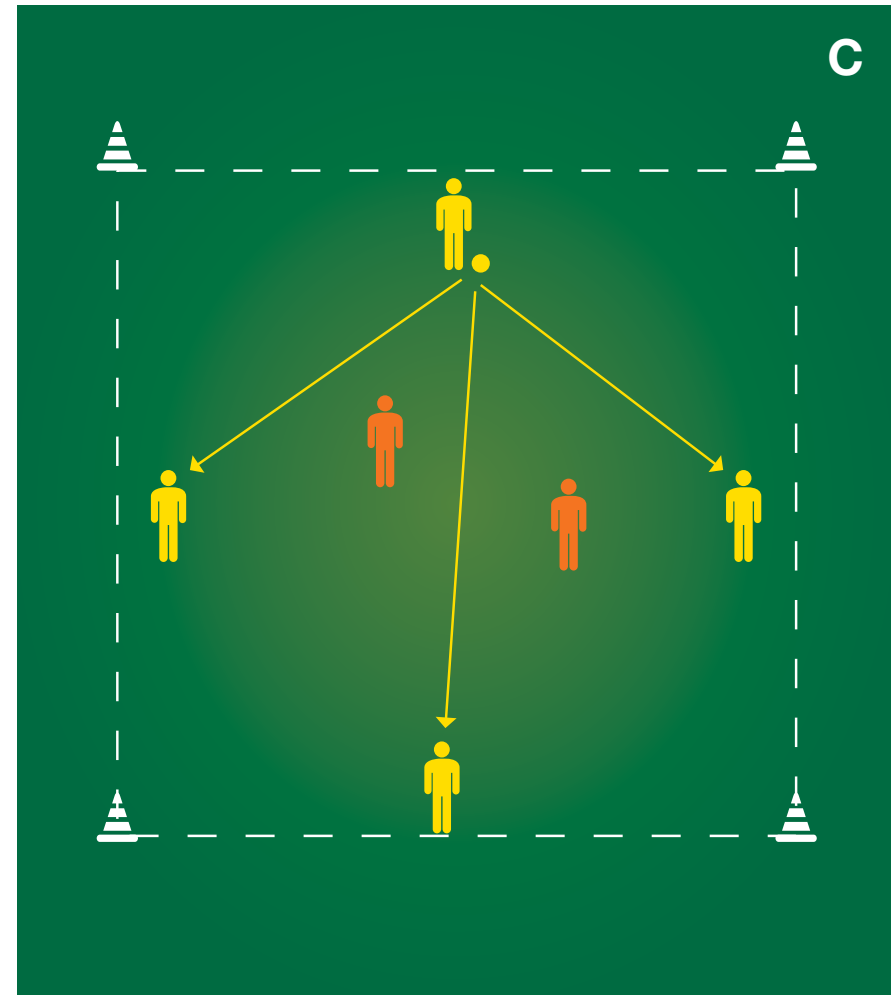
Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

3. Skill game

• 4 v 4 with 4 neutral players (walls) on a pitch of approximately 20m x 30m

• 4 small goals placed as shown (2m wide)

• The team in possession of the ball can use the wall players (8 v 4)

• Rotate teams after 3 min or after each score: scorers stay on

• Depending on level of the players: 2-3 touches max in order to get an emphasis on passing

Possible progressions:

• Wall players must play the ball direct

• Goals count as double if scored by a so-called **3rd man combination** (see diagram)
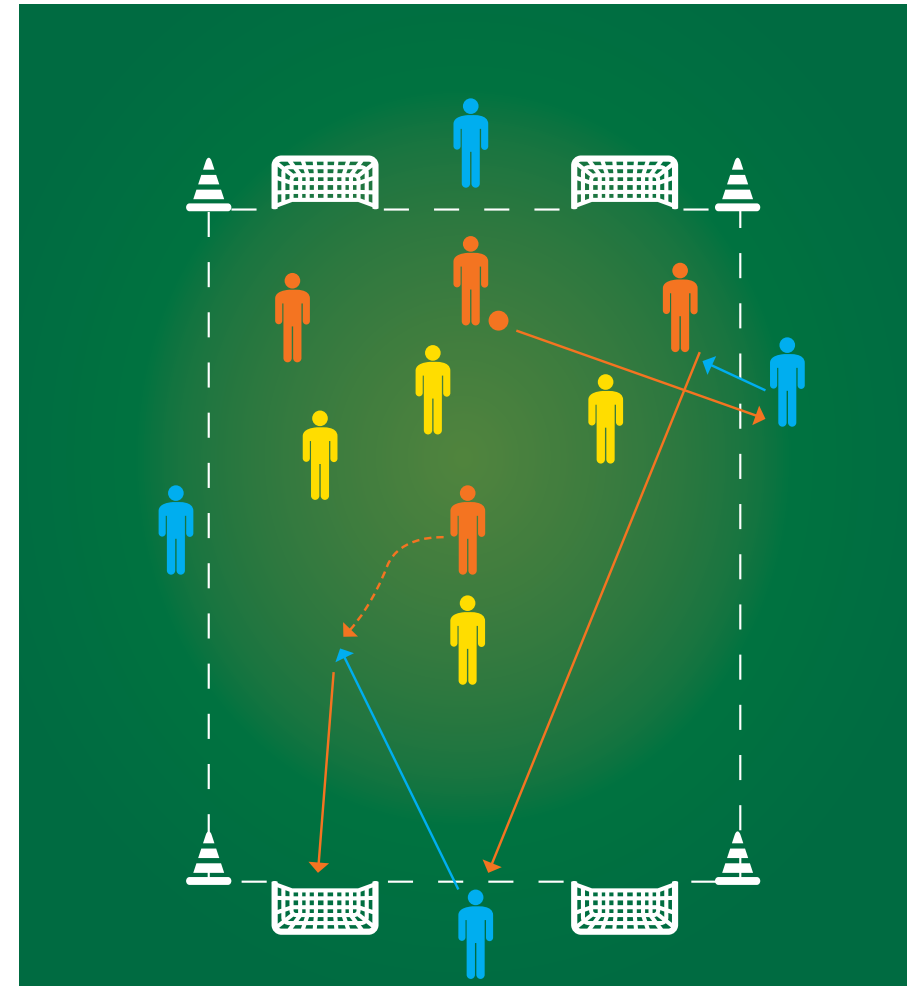
Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

1. Skill introduction

6 players are positioned as shown, distance between the cones 7m-8m.

The passing exercise starts with player #1 at cone A passing the ball to the feet of the player at cone B (who moves away with a dummy run as if getting away from an imaginary defender, then checks back to the ball to receive it).

B bounces back to A1 who plays the killer pass to the first player at cone C.

C1 moves the ball (1st touch) and passes to the player at cone D (2nd touch) and the same pattern is repeated.

All players involved move to the next cone after completing their action/pass (from cone A to B; B to C; C to D and D to A). Every 2-3 minutes: change the direction (use other foot).

Variation for advanced players

• 2 balls, starting with A1 and C1 at the same time

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"More accuracy, play the ball to your mate's right/left foot"

"Play the ball with more speed"

"Communicate, time your action"
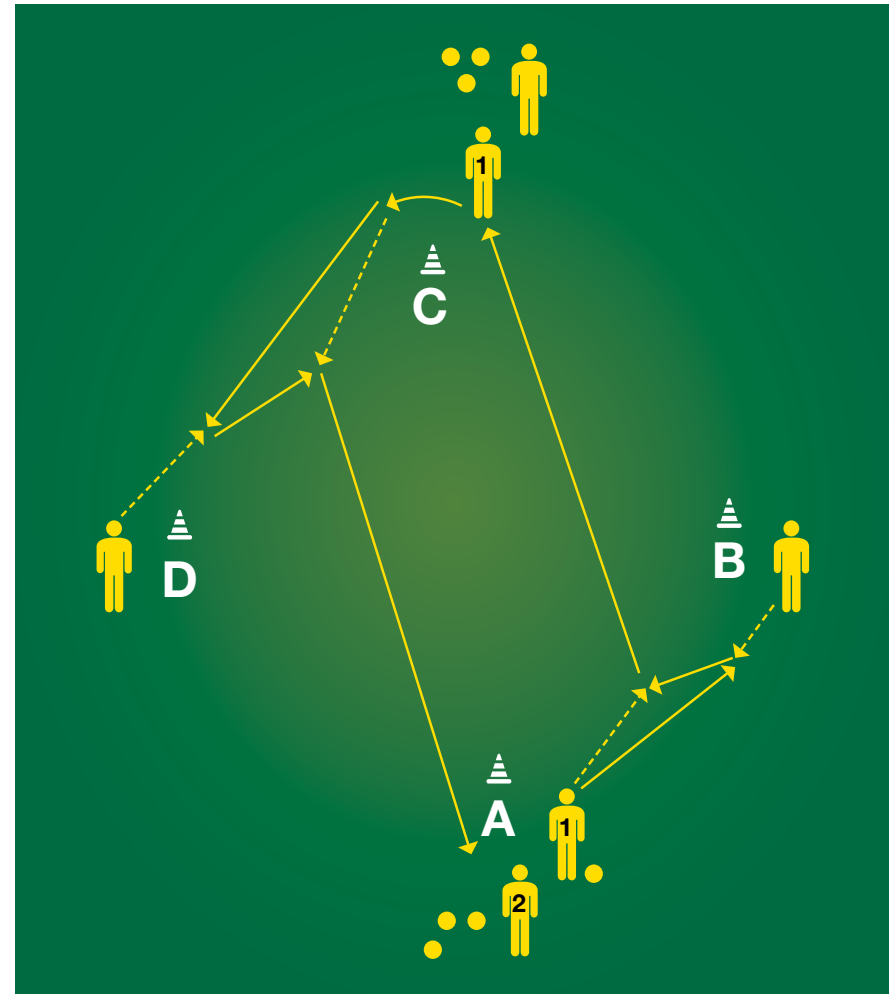
Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

Concluding Competition: positioning game 4 v 2

"Count how often you can play a successful killer pass (between the defenders)"

Every 2 minutes change of defenders and start again.
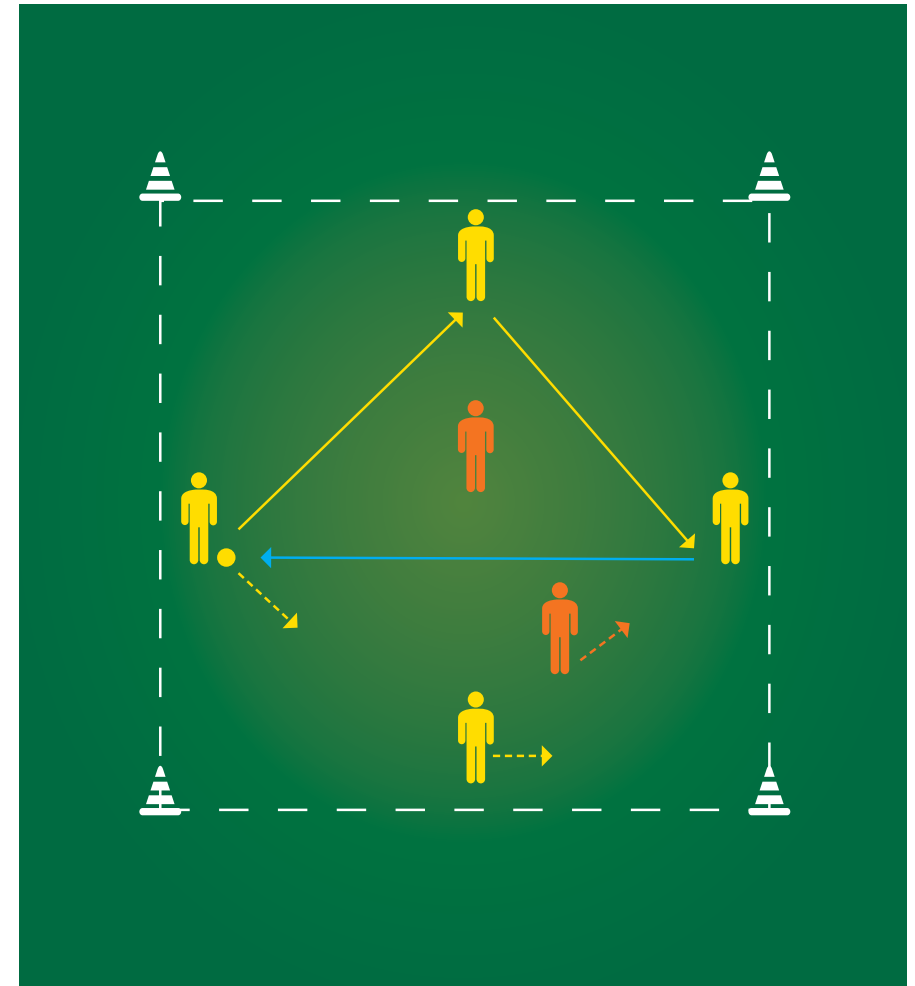
Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

2. Skill training component

3 v 1 killer pass positioning game with 9 players.

Organisation

Two grids of about 12m x 12m (A & C) separated by a grid of 12m x 5m (B).
Three teams of 3 players with different colour bibs, one team in each grid as shown.

The coach is positioned with the balls centrally, next to grid B.
The coach starts the game with a pass to a yellow player in grid A. At that moment one orange player from grid B sprints into grid A to defend/win the ball:
3 v 1 in grid A.

Yellow must now look for the right moment to play a killer pass through grid B (with the two remaining orange defenders) to a blue player in grid C. Then immediately another orange player sprints into grid C to defend while the defender from grid A returns to grid B.

If a defender wins the ball in grid A/C or the defenders intercept the killer pass in grid B, they change grids with the team that lost the ball.

Step up or down:

- Make the grids bigger/smaller

- Free or limited touches (2-3) in 3 v 1

- Killer pass: only on the ground or lofted pass allowed as well

- Make easier: 6 players (2 per grid: 2 v 1) or harder: 12 players (4 per grid: 4 v 2).
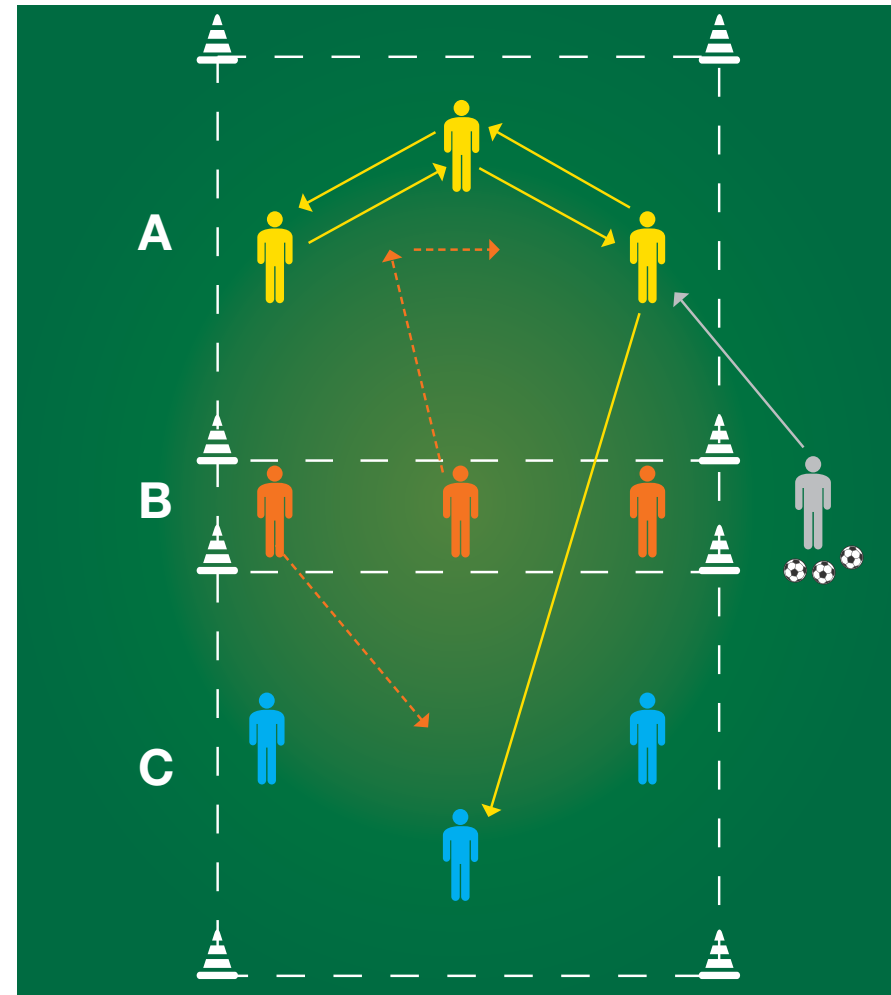
Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

3. Skill game

5 v 5 (include goalkeepers) + 2 'neutral' players on a 40m x 50m pitch with big goals, divided in two grids (A & B) by a 5m 'killer pass zone' (see diagram). 2 defenders + goalkeeper and 2 attackers in each half as well as a 'neutral' player ('joker'). All players must stay in their designated grids.

The game starts in grid B with yellow + the joker playing 4 v 2 against the 2 oranges. They must try to play a 'killer pass' through/across the middle zone to a yellow player or the joker in grid A. If the orange players intercept the ball they can score immediately.

The yellow players + joker in grid A try to score against the 2 orange defenders + goalkeeper (3 v 3). If they score the game starts again in grid B. If they lose the ball to orange, the game continues/re-starts in grid A with orange + joker playing 4 v 2 against the 2 yellow players. Players to change roles/grids every 3-5 minutes.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"Focus on properly playing 4 v 2 first"
"look for the right moment to play the killer pass"
"the right moment is when you are facing forward and make eye contact with the player(s) you want to pass to"

Step up:

• 2 touches only in 4 v 2

• No jokers: 2 v 2 (or 3 v 3) + goalkeepers

Step down:

• 2 jokers per grid

• Make grids A & B bigger

KILLER PASS ZONE

A

B
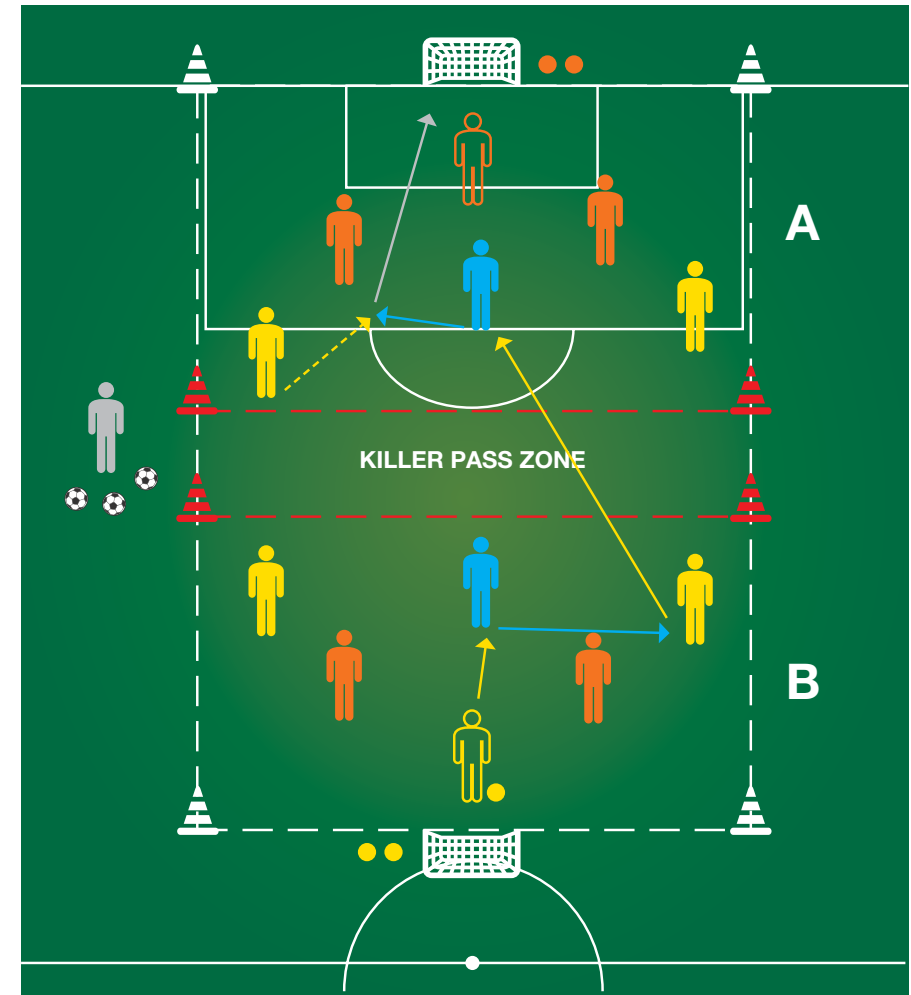
Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

1. Skill introduction

- 6 orange players are positioned approximately 5m outside of the centre circle with a ball each and act as 'goalkeepers'

- 6 yellow players are inside without a ball, in a smaller (7m-8m diameter) circle shaped by 6 cones

- They receive a rolled ball off a 'goalkeeper' and with a **controlled instep drive**, shoot it back into the goalkeeper's hands

- After going back around the next cone they receive a ball from the next 'goalkeeper'

- Change roles and direction every 2 minutes

- "When we move in the direction of the clock, only use your right foot"

- "When we move the other way around, only use left"

- "Now goalkeepers: throw the ball and players: volley it back in the goalkeeper's hands before it hits the ground"

- "It's about accuracy, not power"

- "Now a half-volley"
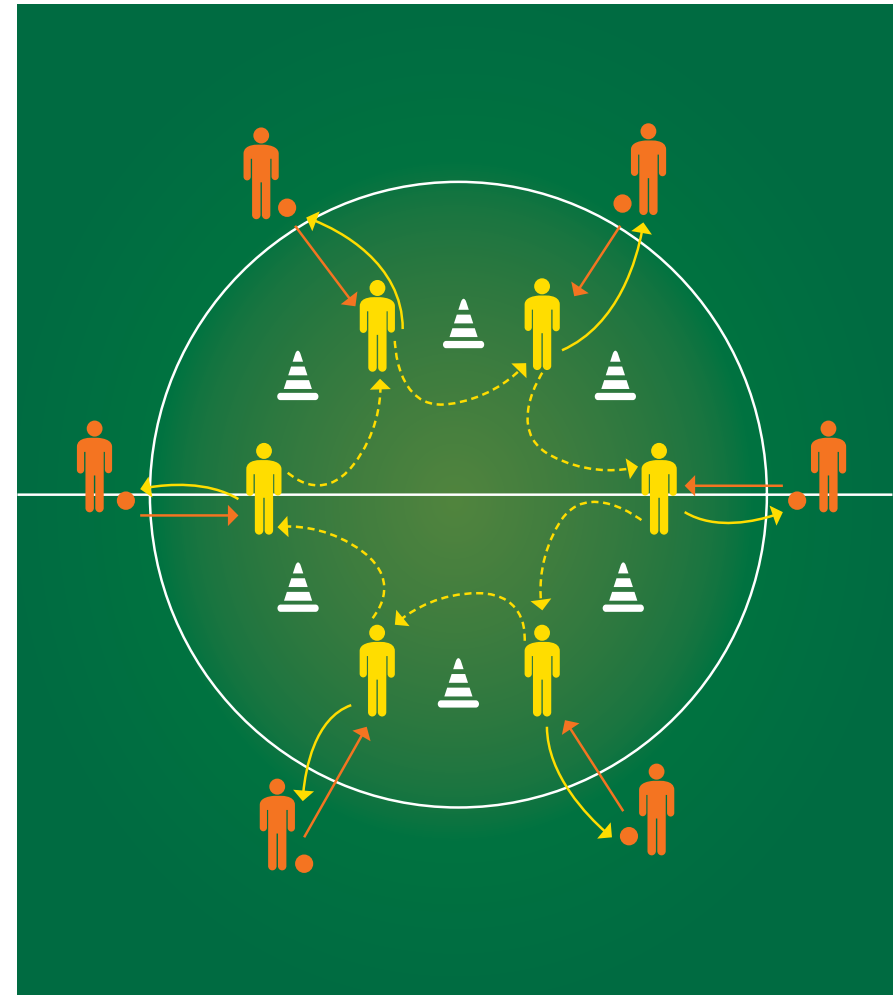
Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

1. Skill introduction - Concluding Competition

- "For every proper shot which the goalkeeper catches during one full round you earn a point"

- "Now change roles"

- "Count your points, who wins individually?"

- "And which group wins when you add up all individual points"

- "Now we do it again but in the opposite direction with our other foot"

- "Now only proper volleys count"

- Etc
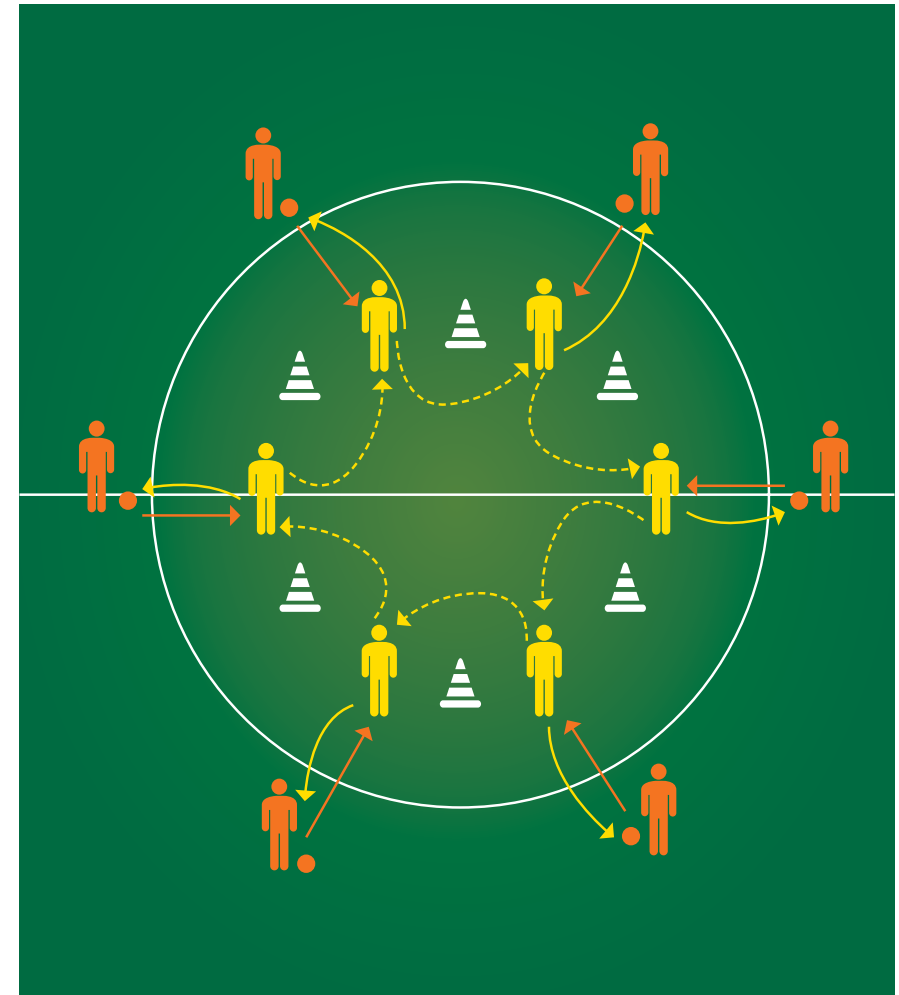
Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

2. Skill training component

Organisation

One group focuses on right foot shooting, the other on left foot. Change groups regularly.

#1 passes to #2 and runs to apply pressure; #2 moves the ball with the first touch to prepare for a shot from the edge of the penalty area.

#1 then joins the shooting line (behind #6); #2 fetches the ball and joins the serving line (behind #5). The same pattern takes place in the left foot group simultaneously.

The angle/distance from #1 to #2 is manipulated by the coach to ensure #2 can shoot with the second touch without being tackled and without having to beat #1.

Step up/step down

- Increase the angle and/or distance from #1 to #2 to give #2 more or less time (less or more chance of #1 applying real pressure)

- With younger players, the coach may move the cones closer towards the goals so the shots are from shorter distance (ensure safety of players by not moving too close to the GK)
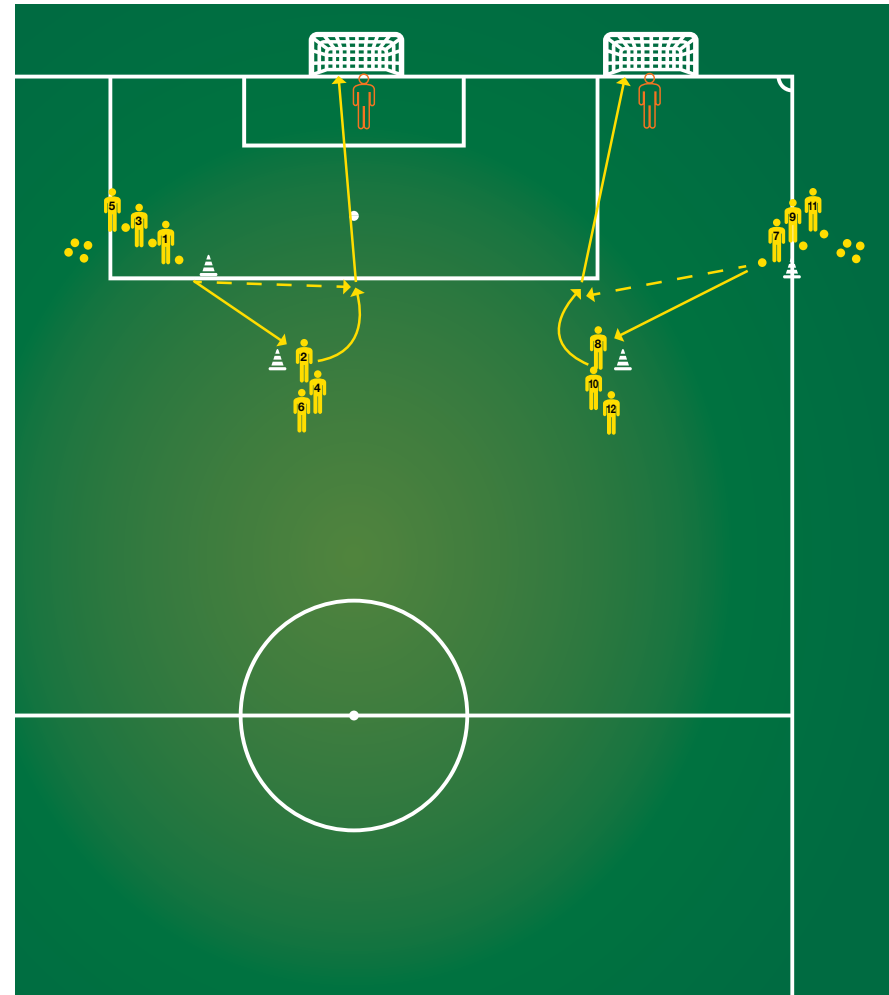
Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

Variations:

- #1 passes the ball square (along the edge of the penalty area) so #2 can run and shoot with the first touch

- #1 starts on a cone to the side of #2 and plays the ball in front of him; the coach selects the distances to encourage first-time shooting under pressure from a chasing defender
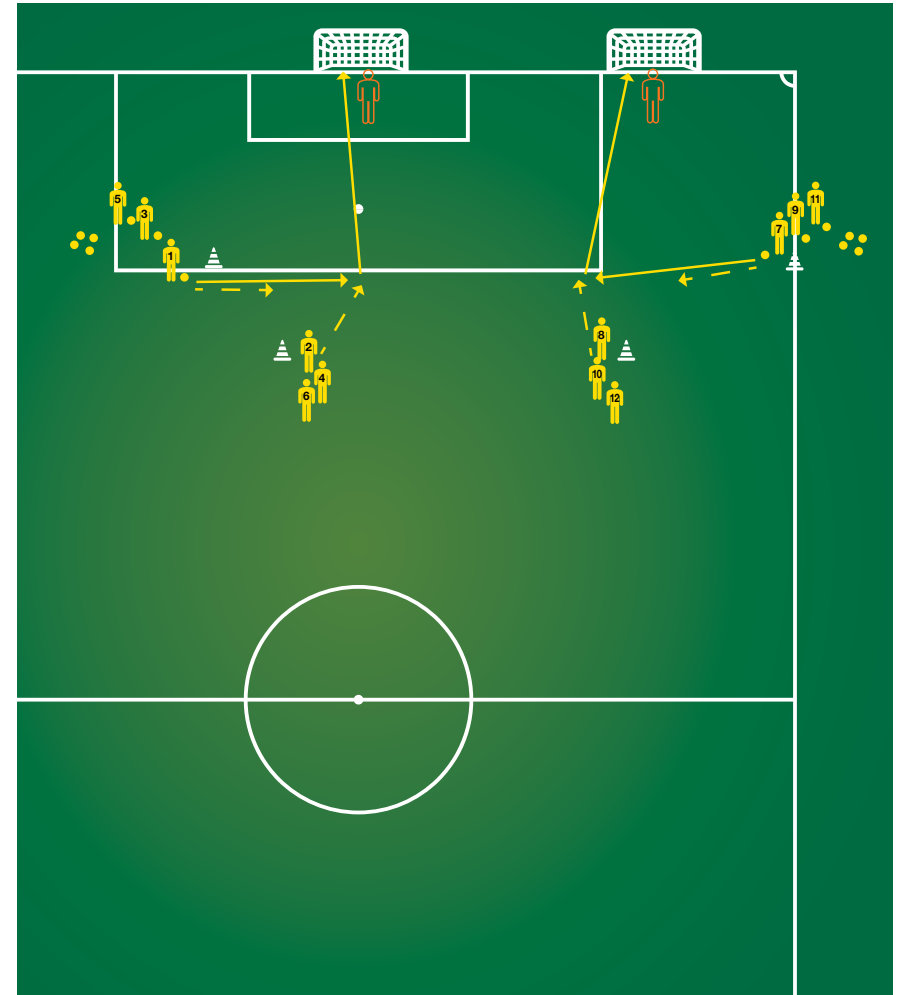
Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

3. Skill game

3 v 3 'shooting game' in a grid of approximately 20m x 20m divided by a halfway line.

In each half there is a goalkeeper + 2 outfield players from one team and 1 outfield player from the other team (see diagram), all players must stay in their own grid. Plenty of balls in/next to the goals.

The game starts with a 3 v 1 game in one grid. A team can only score by:

1. Shooting from their own half

2. A finish by the lone striker from a ball rebounding back from the goalkeeper; a defender or the post/bar

Rotate the players regularly.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"As soon as the line to the goal is open: SHOOT"
"move the ball quickly to open the line to the goal"
"don't just boot it, precision is more important"

Step up:

• Limit the time or number of passes to take a shot

• Make the grids smaller

Step down:

• Make the grids bigger
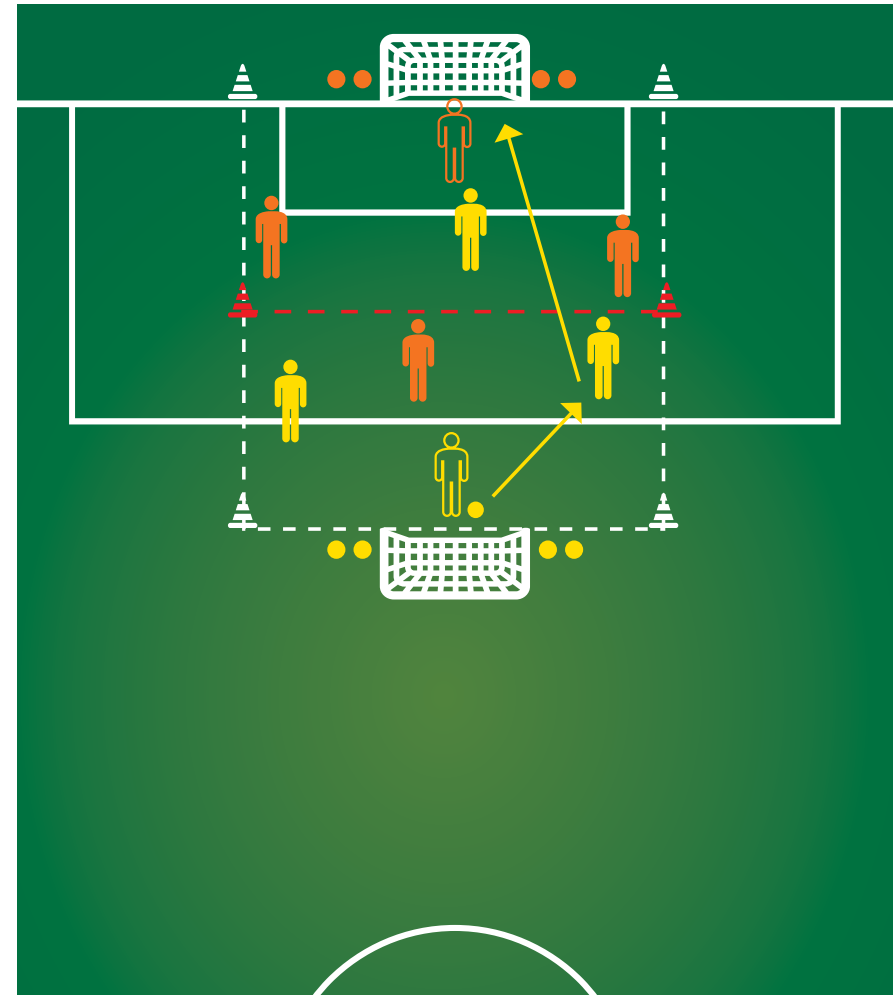
Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

Here is another option (with the emphasis on awareness and shooting precision):

Field markings:
End zones 7m long, penalty box width.
Middle zone 20m long, penalty box width.

4 v 4 in the middle grid between the red cones. Players score by shooting in one of the three goals (3m-5m wide).The goalkeepers try to defend all 3 goals.
The outfield players are not allowed to enter the 'goalkeeper zones'.
If not enough shooting takes place: add 1 or 2 'jokers'.
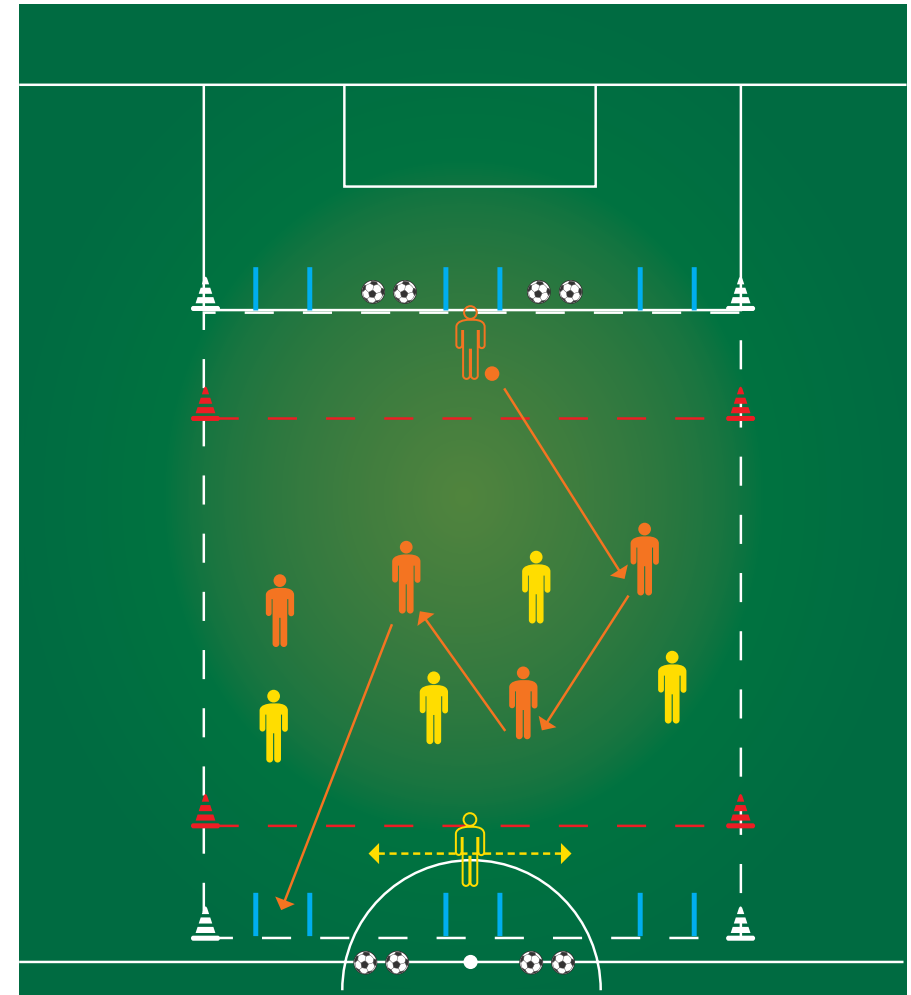
Running with the ball Model Session 1

1. Skill introduction

All players running with a ball freely in a grid of approximately 30m x 30m to warm up.

First 2-3 minutes: "low speed/intensity", "use both feet".
Next 2-3 minutes: "accelerate when you see a free space in front of you; now only use your right/left foot".

Now split the players into 4 groups and number them 1 to 4 placing them on all 4 sides. When the coach calls a number, these players run with the ball as quickly as they can across the area and back (opposite group will need to move back to give the others room to turn!).

Now 2 groups at the same time: "take care; vision; if necessary slow down and then accelerate again".

Look out for collisions!
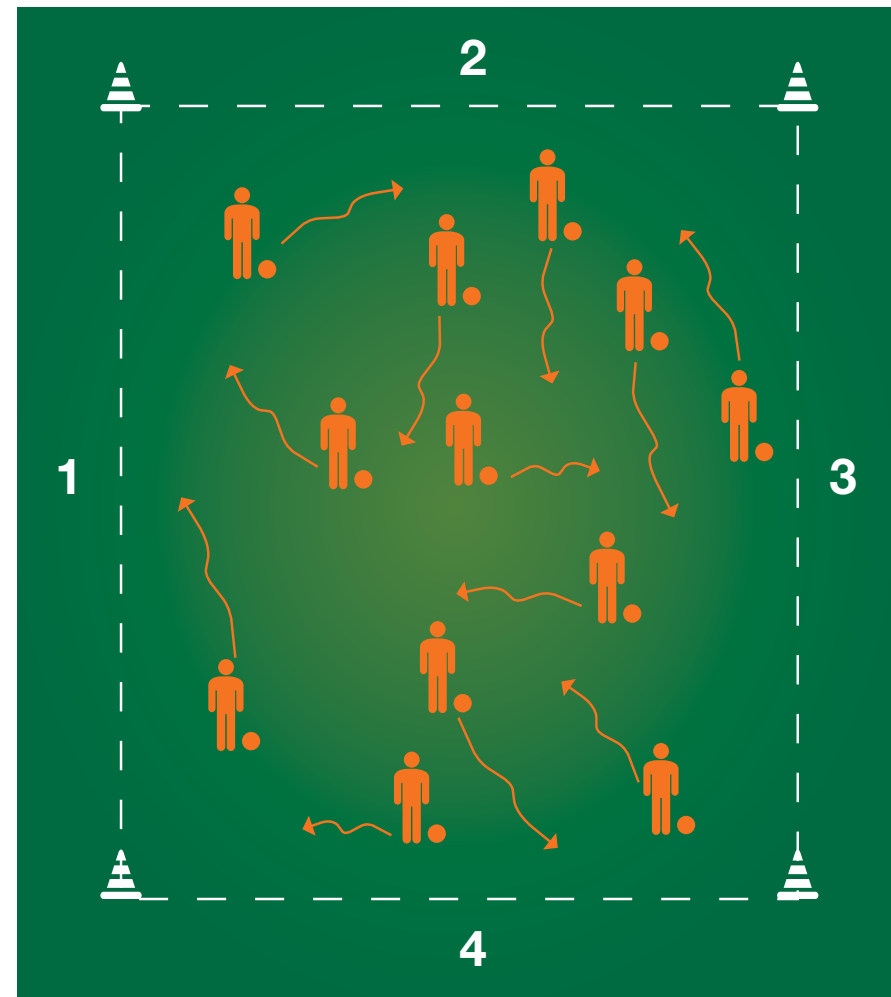
Running with the ball Model Session 1

Concluding Competition

Relay. Grid: 30m x 20m; 4 small goals and a 5m-7m shooting line at each end. Two equal teams (orange and yellow) positioned as shown in a 30m x 20m grid; each player with a ball;

On the coach's signal the first player from each team start running with the ball to the opposite goal. When they enter the shooting zone they pass/shoot the ball into the empty goal. As soon as the ball passes the goal line the next player can start running with the ball in the opposite direction.

If the ball DOES NOT go into the goal the player who took the shot MUST go and touch the player waiting to run with the ball before they can start.

Which team can complete one full sequence first?

• Use right foot only

• Use left foot only

• Each player runs twice (first time right foot, second time with left)

SHOOTING ZONE

SHOOTING ZONE
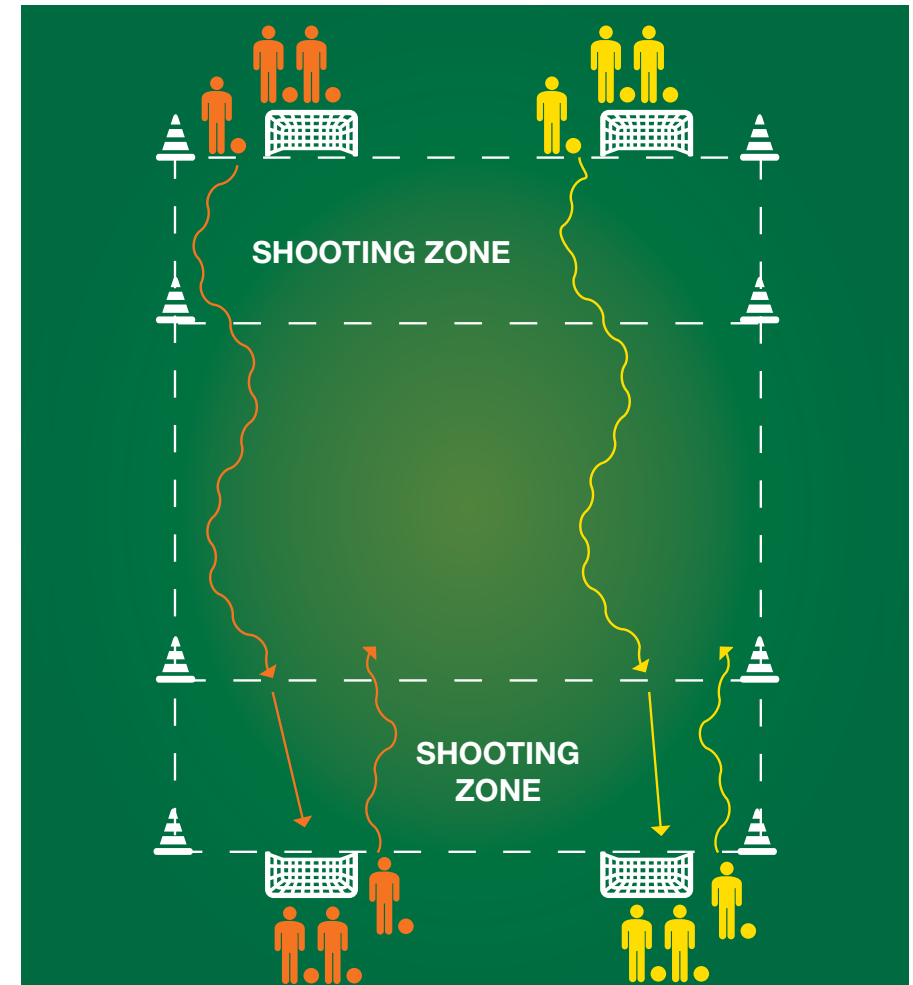
Running with the ball Model Session 1

2. Skill training component

• A grid of 30m x 20m; 4 small goals and a 5m-7m shooting line at each end

• Evenly split teams positioned as shown

• Minimum 4, maximum 8 players per grid; if the group is bigger then make two grids

• The exercise starts with the first player of the yellow team running with the ball to the opposite side and shooting the ball into the goal. They can only shoot once they have crossed the line into the shooting zone

• As soon as the yellow player shoots at goal, the first orange player starts running with the ball to the opposite side

• As soon as the yellow player has had their shot at goal, they turn and chase the orange player to try and catch up with them and prevent them from scoring

• Count the goals! Which team scores the most goals?.
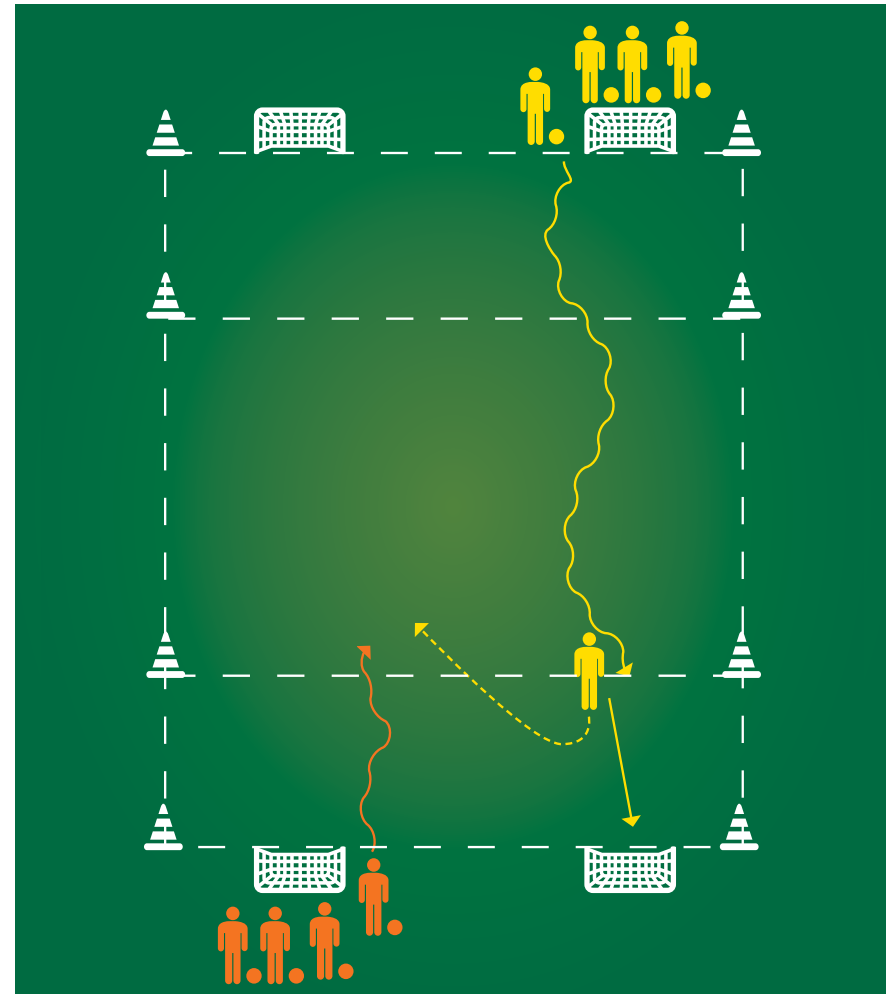
Running with the ball Model Session 1

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"Push the ball forward every 3-4 steps"
"run as fast as you can but keep the ball under control"
"If the defender catches up with you, this is what you can do" (**demonstrate!**)

• Feint to turn and accelerate again

• Feint to stop and accelerate again

• Cut off the defenders line by crossing in front of them

• Take on the defender 1 v 1 if they manage to get in front of you (scoring in both goals is allowed!)

Step up:

• Narrow the distance between the two goals on the byline

Step down:

• The chaser just races against the runner to beat him to the shooting line. If the chaser reaches the shooting line first, the runner cannot shoot and score anymore
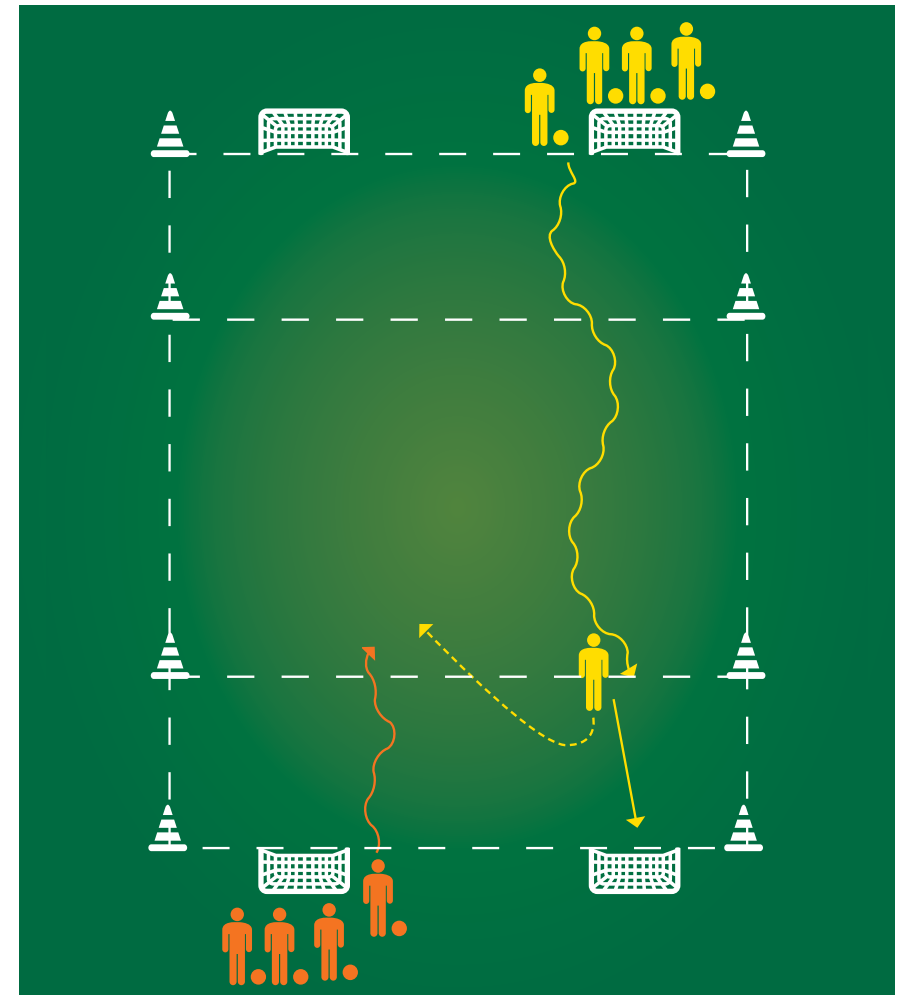
Running with the ball Model Session 1

3. Skill game

4 v 4 line football

Grid size approximately 30m wide by 20m long (pitch shape is short but wide)

Explanation of the game:

4 v 4 small sided game; to score a goal a player must run with the ball across the opponent's by-line (see diagram A).

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"Spread out; use the width of the grid"
"We must have a centre forward and 2 wingers"
"run with the ball whenever you see space in front of you"
"don't be afraid to take on opponents"
"when a defender is chasing you use the feints you learned earlier"

A
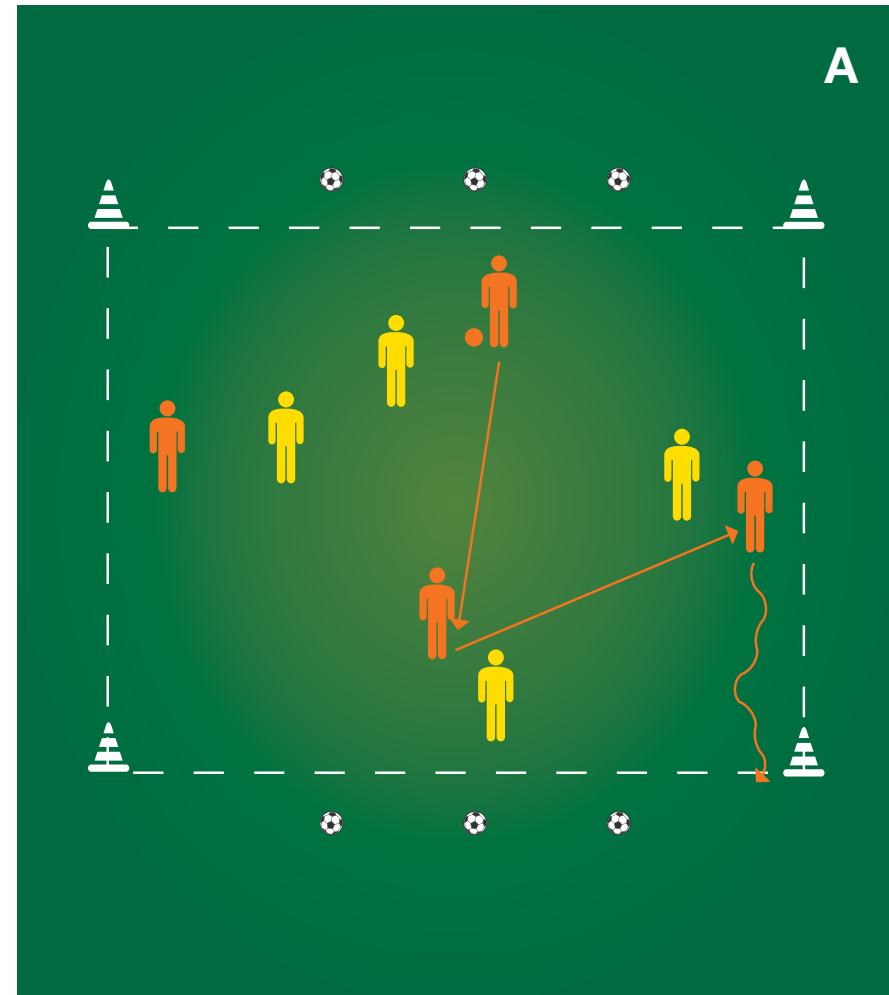
Running with the ball Model Session 1

Assess how the game goes: do all players run with the ball regularly and are goals being scored? If the answer is no, make it easier:

• Make the pitch wider

• Add a neutral player ("joker") who always plays with the team that has the ball (numerical advantage of 1 player; see diagram B)

• If still too difficult: bigger numerical advantage (2 jokers)

If too easy:

• Make the field more narrow

• Scoring zones rather than the whole line
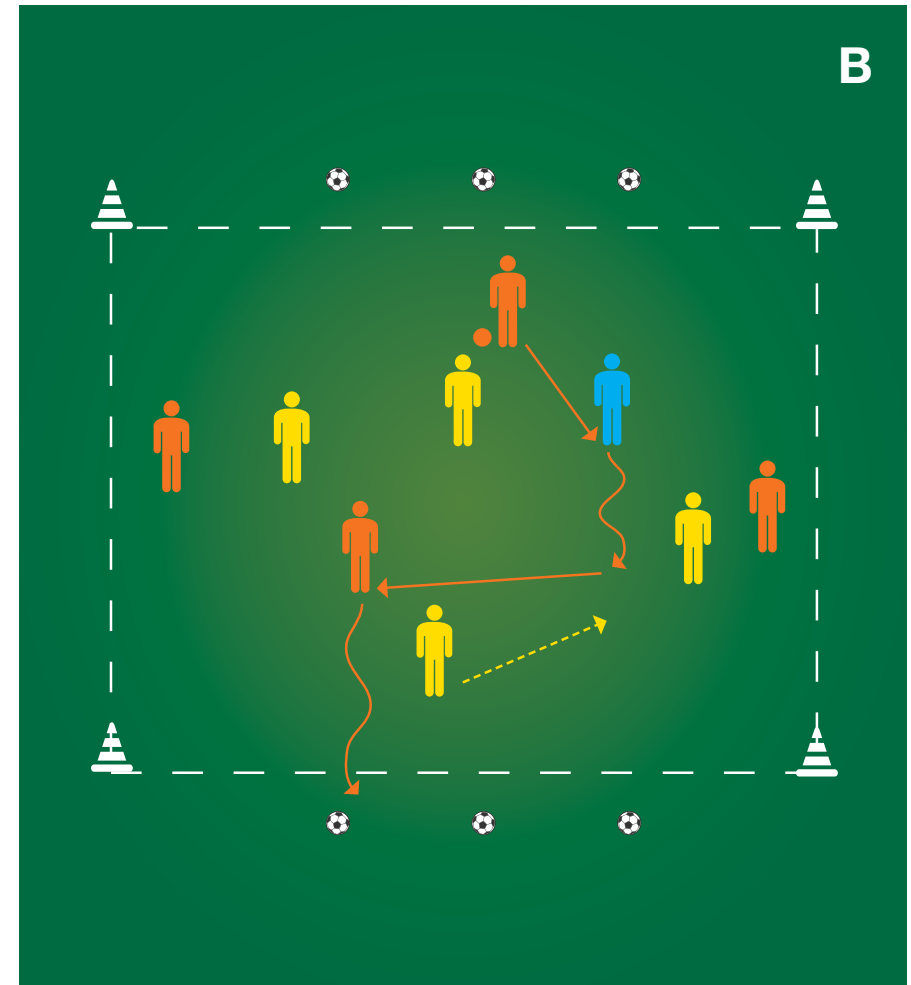
Running with the ball Model Session 2

1. Skill introduction

In a 30m x 30m grid the players are divided into pairs with a ball each (for safety reasons the grid should be rather too big than too small!).

One player dribbles in front, the other follows at short distance (change task of leader-follower regularly). In the beginning the speed is low and steady.

The coach asks the players to "scan" the field and be careful to not run into each other.

Next the coach instructs the players to gradually add the following variations:

• Accelerations ("when a space opens up in front of you")

• Changes of direction and turns

• Stop-starts

• Feint stops followed by an acceleration

• Feint turns followed by an acceleration

• Etc
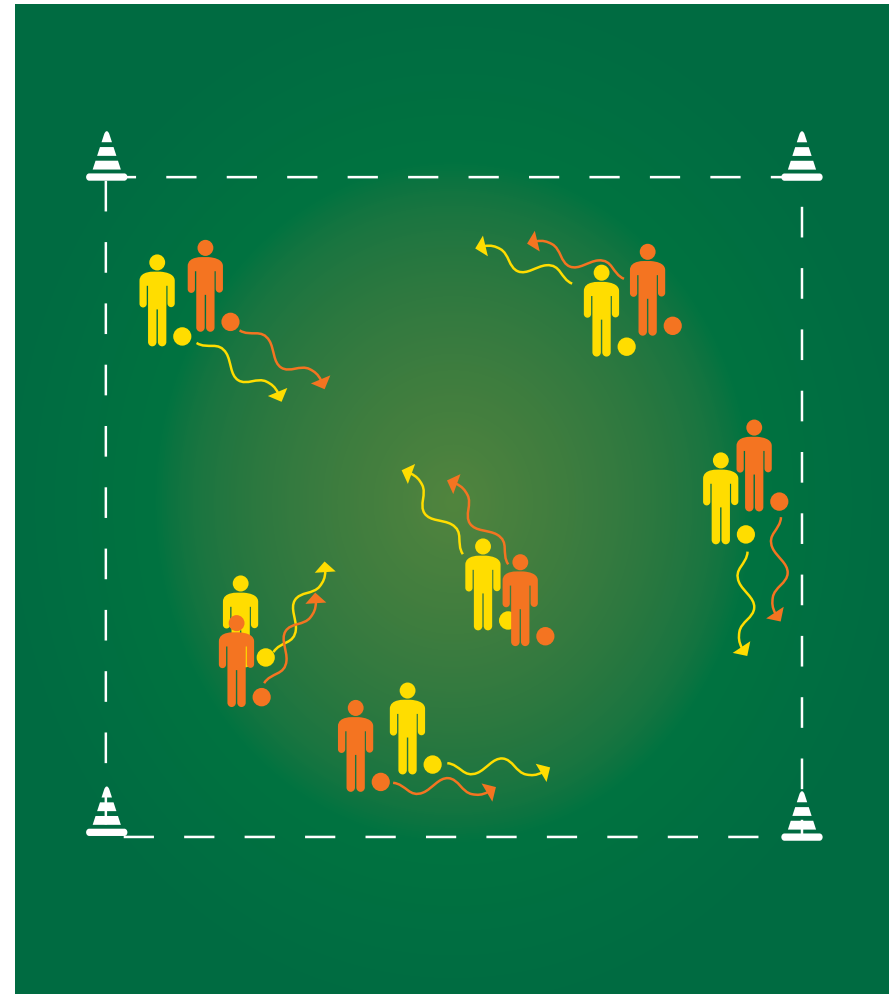
Running with the ball Model Session 2

Concluding tagging game (using the same 30m x 30m grid)

The players line up with a ball each and facing the sideline (backs to each other). Distance between the players is 3m-4m and is marked out with cones.

When the coach calls "ORANGE" the orange players run with ball to the sideline chased (without ball) by the yellow players who try to tag them before they've reached the line. Depending on outcome the runner or chaser earns a point and we line up again.

When the coach calls "YELLOW" the reverse happens.

Since safety is extremely important, the players must only run in a **straight line** (stay in their own 'lane').
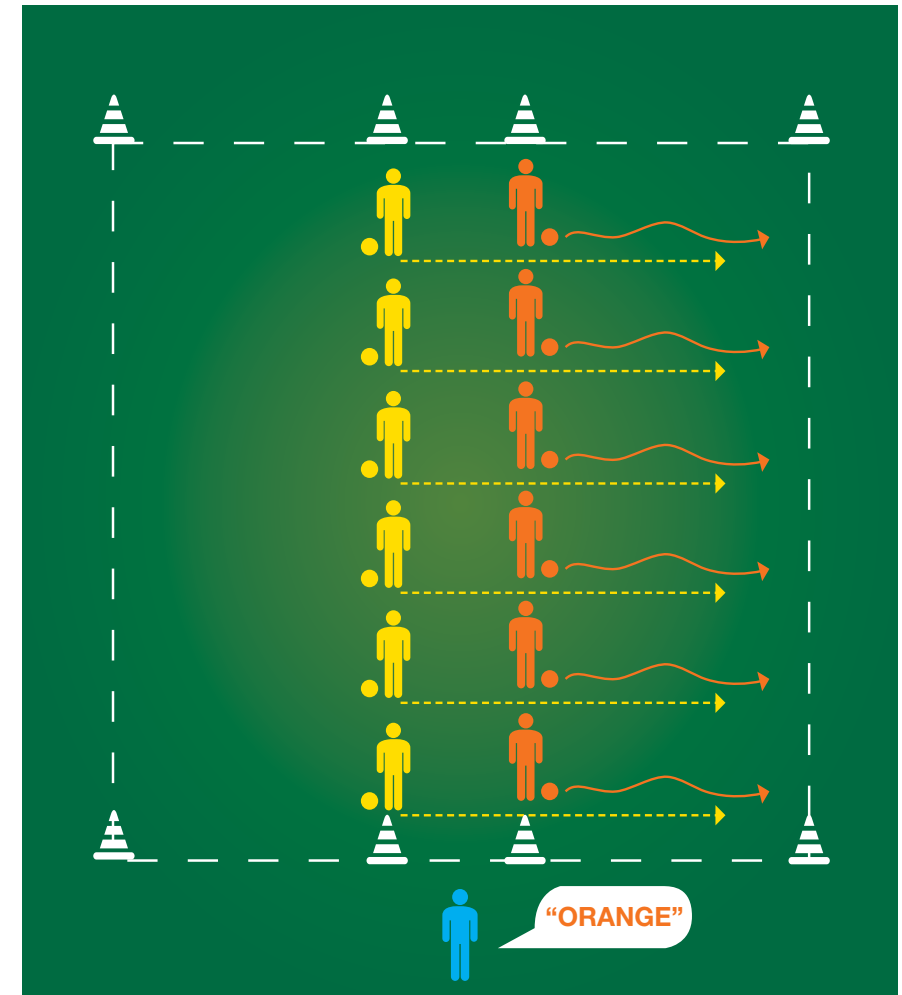
"ORANGE"

Running with the ball Model Session 2

2. Skill training component

Organisation: Outside the penalty box another grid of the same size has been marked out.

Two teams (orange and yellow) are divided in 4 groups of equal numbers (A;B;C and D) and positioned as shown in the diagram.

Groups orange A and D have a ball each, groups yellow C and B line up between the cones on the byline of the grid.

The exercise starts with the first player of group A passing the ball to the first player of group B (pass between the cones and with speed). Player B controls the ball and runs with it at speed toward the goal.

Player A follows their pass, overlaps and then chases player B who tries to finish (the shot can only be taken from inside the penalty box).

After the action has ended, the yellow player goes with the ball to position A; the orange player goes to position B.

Now it's group D and C's turn. Groups change sides regularly (use of other foot!). "Who scores most ?"
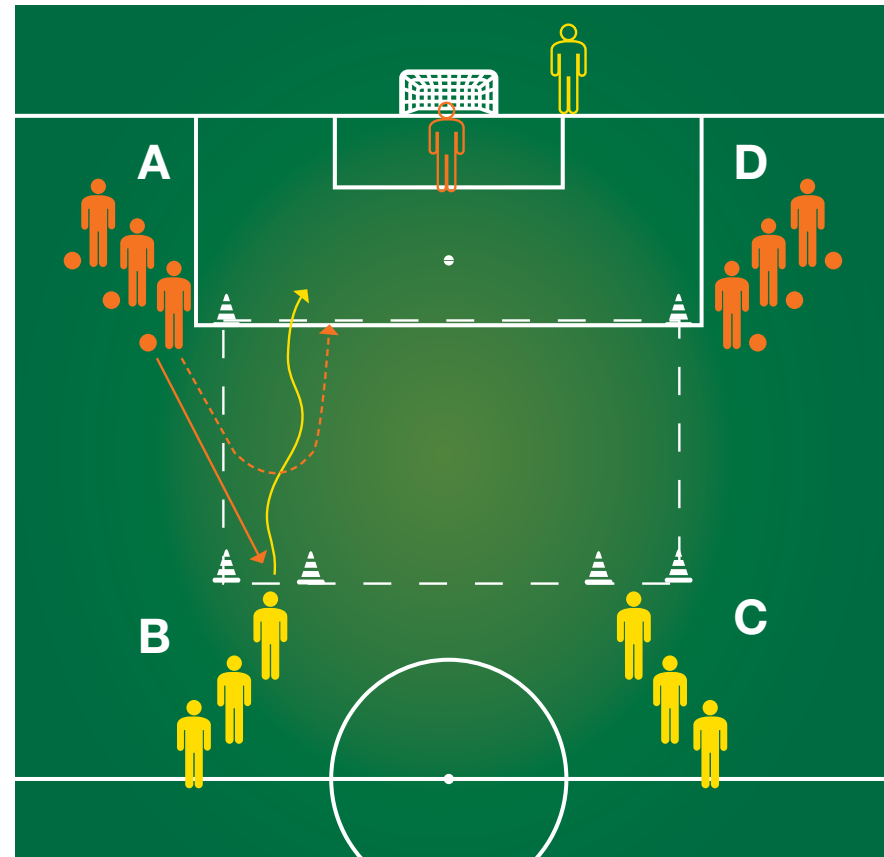
Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Push the ball forward every 3-4 steps"

- "Run as fast as you can but keep the ball under control"

- "If the defender catches up with you, this is what you can do:" (demonstrate!)

  - Feint to turn and accelerate again
  - Feint to stop and accelerate again
  - Cut off the defenders line by crossing in front
  - Take on the defender 1 v 1 if they get in front

Running with the ball Model Session 2

3. Skill game

4 v 4 in a grid of approximately 35m x 35m.

There are five gates of 3m positioned as shown.

The team in possession scores a goal when one of their players runs with the ball through one of the gates.

If the defending team wins the ball, the roles change without stopping the game. "Which teams scores most?"

Step up:

• The attacking team must make an effort within 30 seconds, otherwise the possession goes to the opponent

• Decrease the gate size

Step down:

• Increase the gate size

• Add another gate

• Introduce a 'joker'
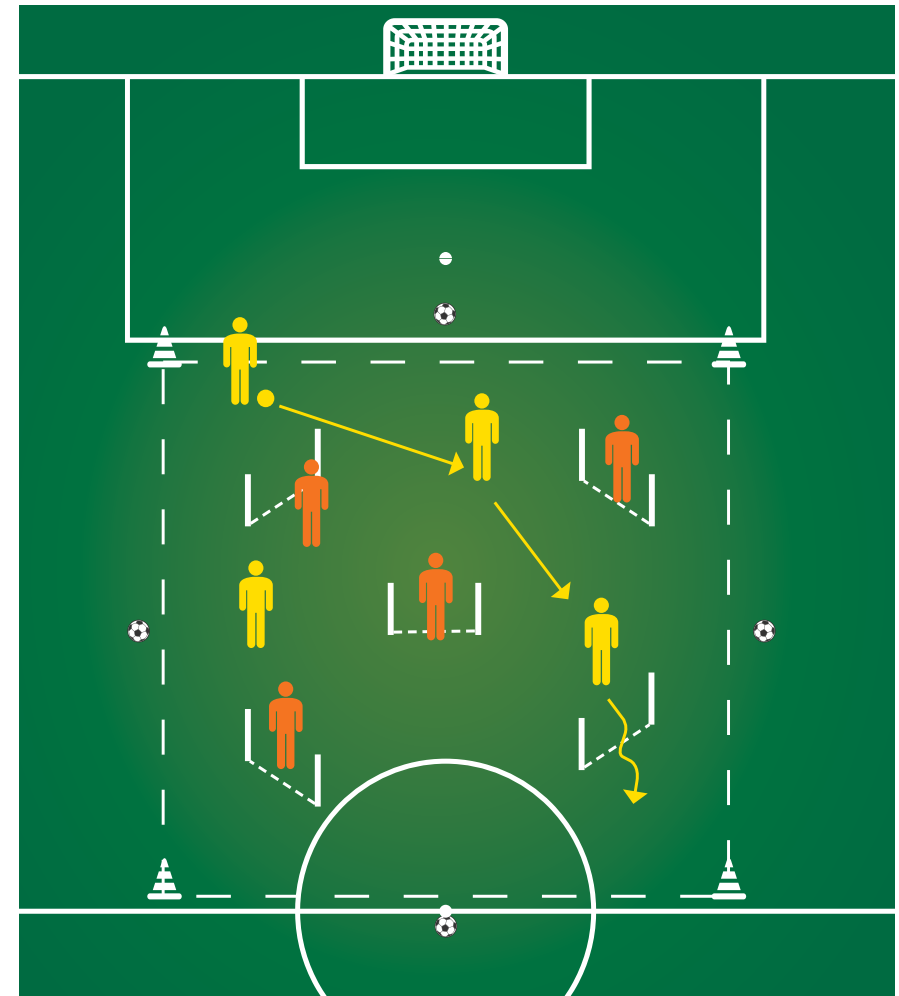
Running with the ball Model Session 3

1. Skill introduction

A grid of approximately 30m x 30m has 4 small 5m x 5m grids in all 4 corners.

The players are divided into 4 groups of 3 players and positioned in the corner grids with a ball each as shown.

The 3 players in the corners wear different colour bibs or are numbered 1-3. On the coaches signal all players of the same group (all orange or #1's) run with the ball to the next corner followed by the next group, again after the coaches signal.

When everyone is back in the grid where they started; we start again but now in the other direction using the other foot only. In the beginning the speed is low and should be raised gradually.

Next we add the following variations (both with right as well as with left foot):

• Accelerations

• Stop-starts

• Feint stops followed by an acceleration

• Feint turns followed by an acceleration
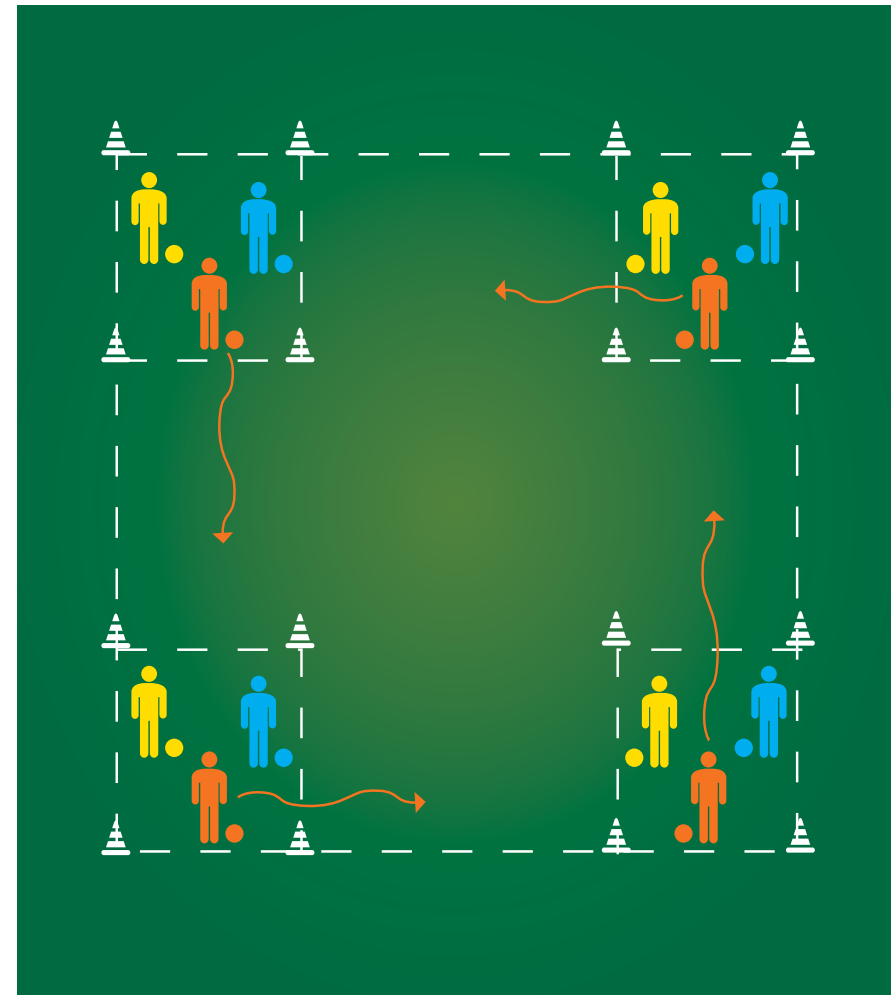
Running with the ball Model Session 3

Concluding tagging game

Use the set-up from the previous exercise.

One player with a ball in every corner grid; the rest of the players with a ball in the centre grid. There are one or two 'taggers' without a ball who try to tag the players with the ball. The players that get tagged, leave the grid and wait outside. A player can 'escape' the tagger by running with the ball into a corner grid but then the player that stands there must immediately leave the grid.

"How long does it take the taggers to tag all the players?"

After everyone has had a turn as taggers:

"Who are the winners?" (i.e. fastest time)
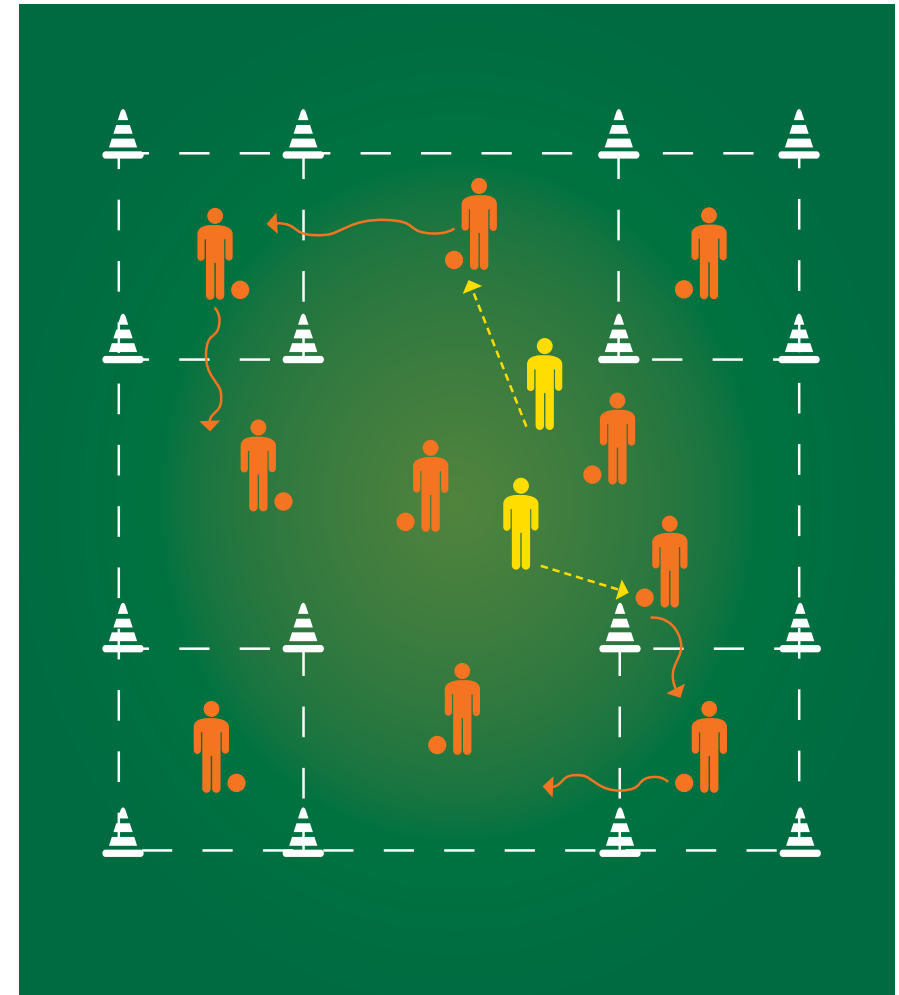
Running with the ball Model Session 3

2. Skill training component

Organisation: 15m outside the penalty box, two lines of cones are placed as shown in the diagram.

The players in pairs with one ball and positioned in grids A;B;C and D as shown.

The pairs pass the ball back and forward to each other while waiting for their turn.

The exercise starts with the pair in grid A when, at the coach's whistle, player #2 passes the ball past #1 in the direction of the goal. Player #1 turns and runs with the ball towards the goal and tries to score (inside the box). Player #2 gives chase and tries to stop #1 from finishing.

As soon as the action ends, pair A return to their grid and pair B starts; etc. after every turn #1 and #2 change positions.

Regularly change the composition of the pairs as well.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

• "Push the ball forward every 3-4 steps"

• "Run as fast as you can but keep the ball under control"

• "If the defender catches up with you, this is what you can do:" (demonstrate!)

    - Feint to turn and accelerate again
    - Feint to stop and accelerate again
    - Cut off the defenders line by crossing in front of him
    - Take on the defender 1 v 1 if they get in front
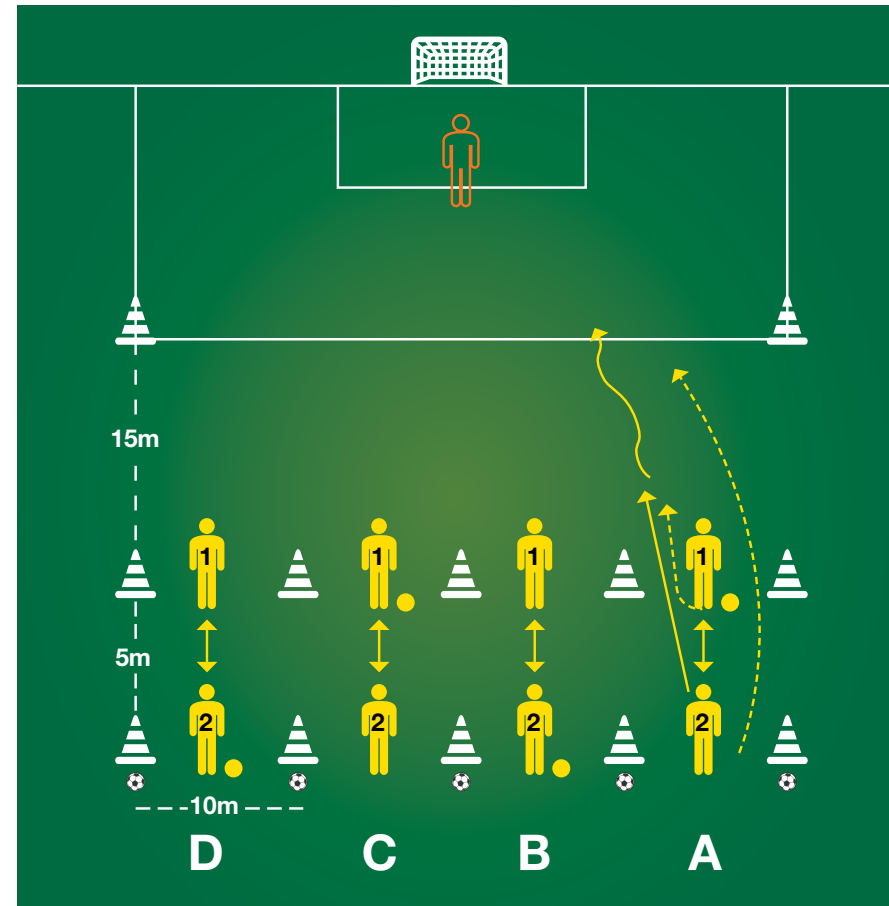
Step up:

• Reduce the distance between the two lines of cones (4m-3m-2m)

Step down:

• Increase the distance between the two lines of cones (6m-7m-8m)

Running with the ball Model Session 3

3. Skill game

4 v 4 + 4 'walls' (8 v 4) on a long and narrow pitch with big goals and goalkeepers (as shown).

All players choose (or get assigned) a **direct opponent** and can only take the ball from that opponent.

The team in possession can use the wall players to combine with (walls: 1 or 2 touches only).

The offside rule applies

Change of teams when a goal is scored or after 2-3 minutes.

Variations:

• 1 or 2 small goals without goalkeepers

• No goals but 'line-football'

Step up:

• Teams can only use the walls in their own half

• Narrow the pitch

Step down:

• Widen the pitch
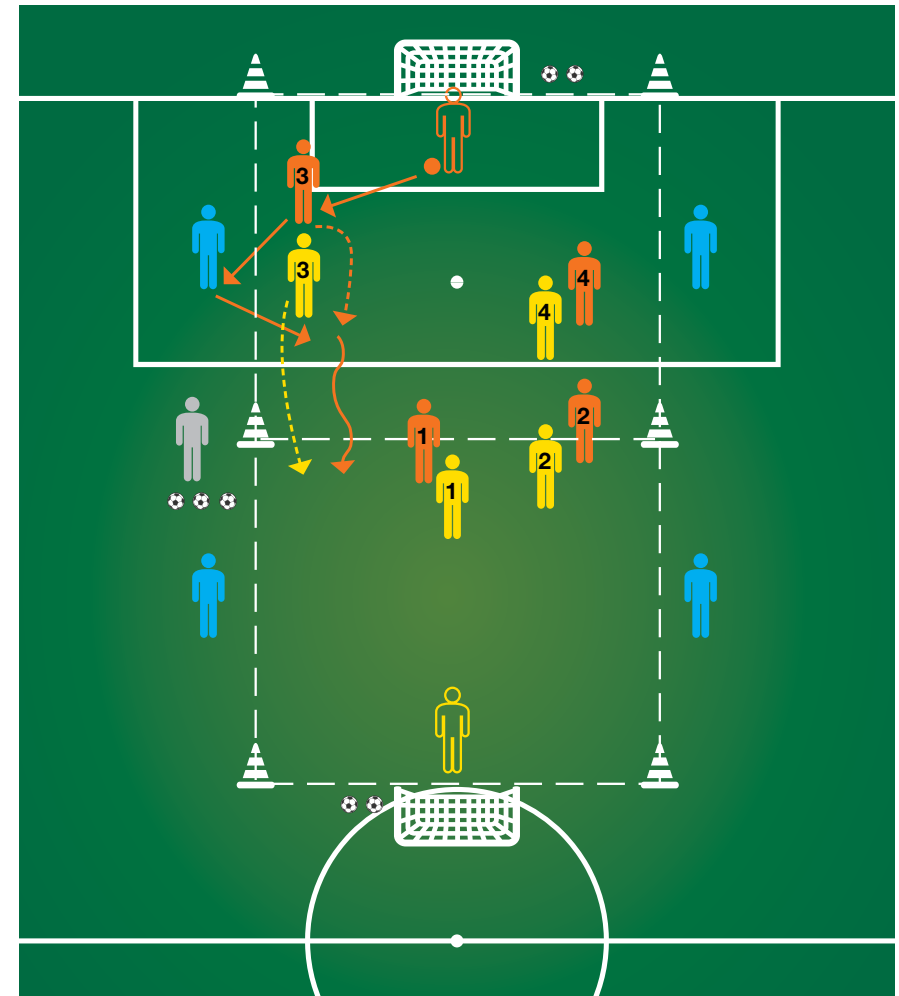
1 v 1 Model Session 1

1. Skill introduction

4 markers placed 12-15m opposite of each other with 4 markers centrally in a diamond 1m-1.5m apart (see diagram).

Max. 2 players with ball line up at the markers. On the coaches call two players opposite each other start dribbling to the other side. In the middle they perform a prescribed or free feint to go around the **right side** of the markers and accelerate to the opposite marker. After 2 minutes: now go around the **left side** of the markers.

Progression:

• Speed up tempo (maintain proper execution)

• Take out the markers (perception and communication)
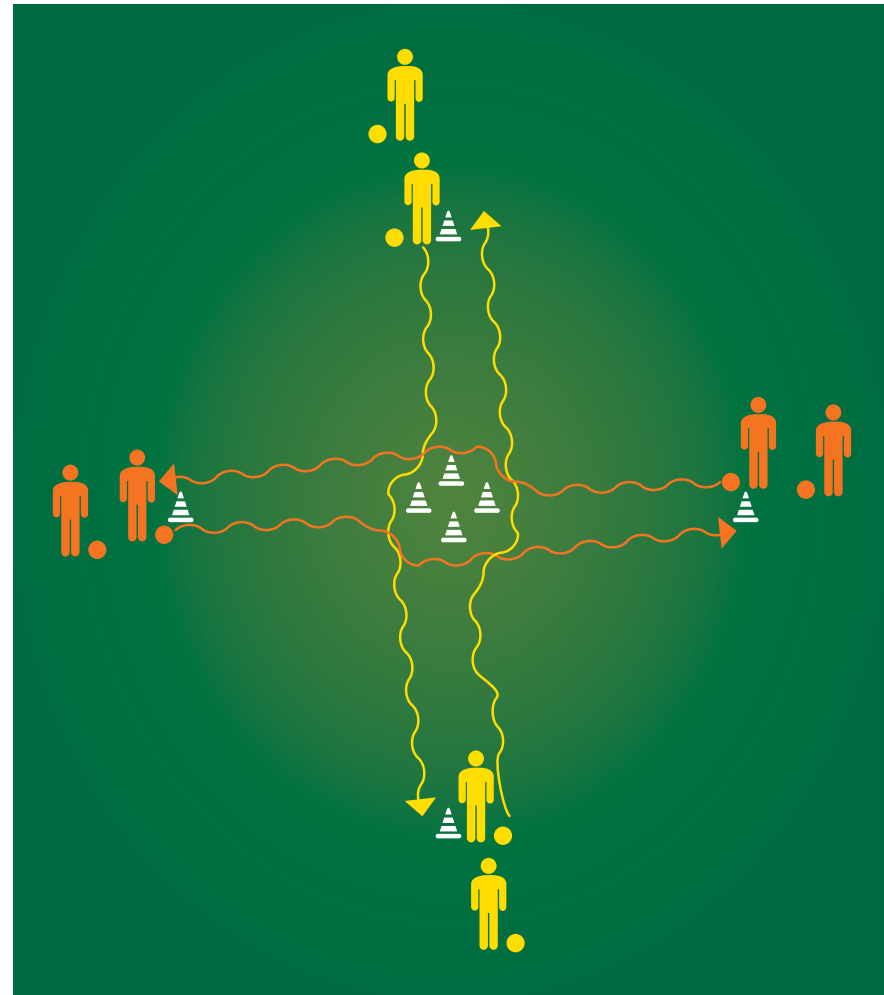
1 v 1 Model Session 1

Concluding tagging game:

All players move with a ball inside a 15m x 15m grid while 1 or 2 "taggers" (holding a bib in their hands) chase the other players and try to "tag" them.

All players (taggers and runners) MUST keep their ball under control at all times.

A player who is tagged or loses control over the ball or runs out of the grid must change roles with the tagger.

The same rules apply for the tagger(s): they cannot tag someone unless they have the ball under control.

To make it easier/more difficult (for taggers):

• More/less taggers

• Smaller/bigger grid
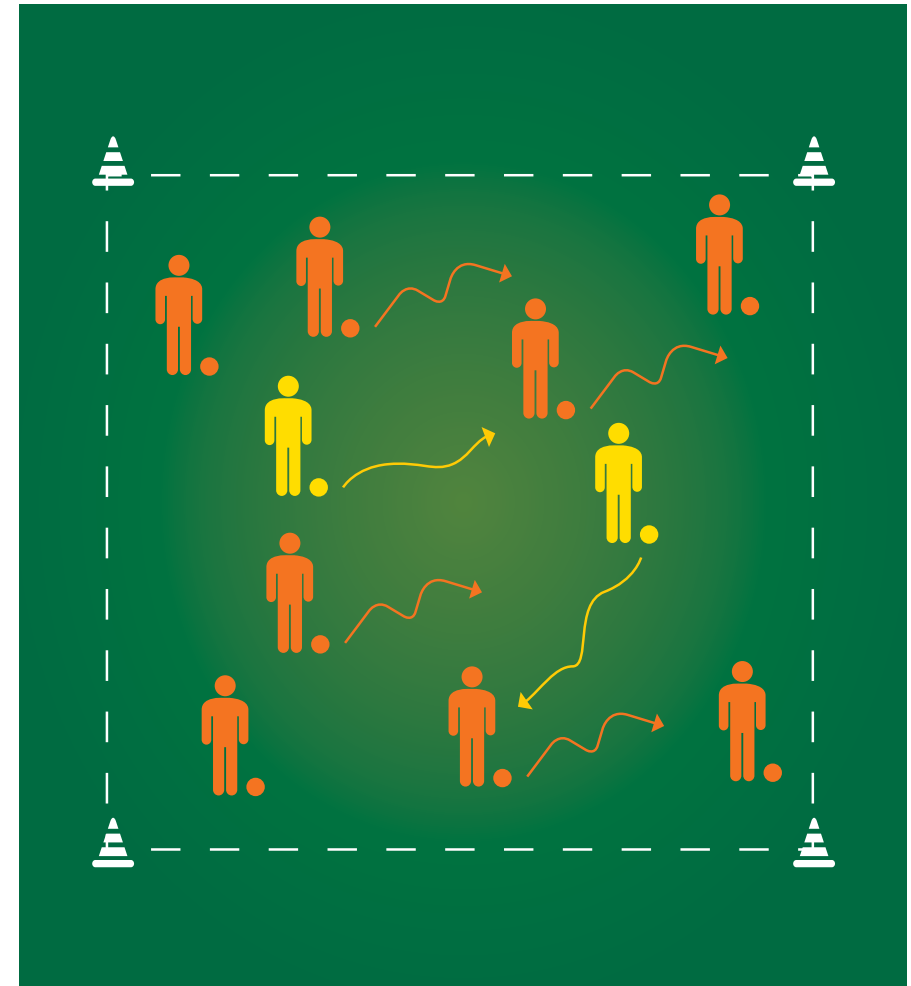
1 v 1 Model Session 1

2. Skill training component:

In a grid of approximately 20m x 30m two small goals are placed on each byline with markers on the corners and on the sideline at 5m from the corners to mark the 'scoring zone'.

Two teams of 6 players maximum line up behind the markers on the sideline as shown. The coach is positioned with the balls between the two goals on one side of the pitch.

On a signal from the coach orange #1 and yellow #1 sprint around the corner marker and the nearest goal. The coach serves in favor of the orange player who take on the yellow player at maximum speed. The attacker can finish in either of the 2 goals but must finish from INSIDE the 5m 'scoring zone'. If the defender wins the ball they can score in one of the opposite goals (one attempt max. each). When the action has ended the players line up on the opposite side.

The coach can manipulate the 1 v 1 through the **angle** with which they serve the ball.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

ATTACKER	DEFENDER
"Go at the defender with speed"	"Show the attacker one way"
"Use a feint to put the defender off balance"	"Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you're able to change direction quickly"
"Threaten to go to one side then suddenly attack the other"	"The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down"

1 v 1 Model Session 1

3. Skill game

3 v 3 on a pitch (20m wide x 40m long) with big goals and goalkeepers. Placed on the halfway line are 3 equal sized 'gates' as shown in the diagram. Each player (orange or yellow) must defend their 'own' designated gate when the opponent has the ball (i.e. player #1 defends gate 1, player #2 defends gate 2 etc).

The orange goalkeeper starts the game with all outfield players of both teams in grid A. The orange team combines till one orange player beats their opponent 1 v 1 and moves through one of the gates into grid B and tries to score.

If orange scores the game starts again in grid A.

If yellow wins the ball in grid A they can immediately score. If yellow scores, the game restarts in grid B with possession for yellow.

If the yellow goalkeeper wins the ball in grid B, the game restarts in grid B with possession for the yellow team.

Step up:

- The attacking team must make a 1 v 1 effort within 30 seconds otherwise the possession goes to the opponent
- Narrow the pitch (smaller gates)

Step down:

- Introduce a 'joker'
- Widen the pitch (bigger gates)
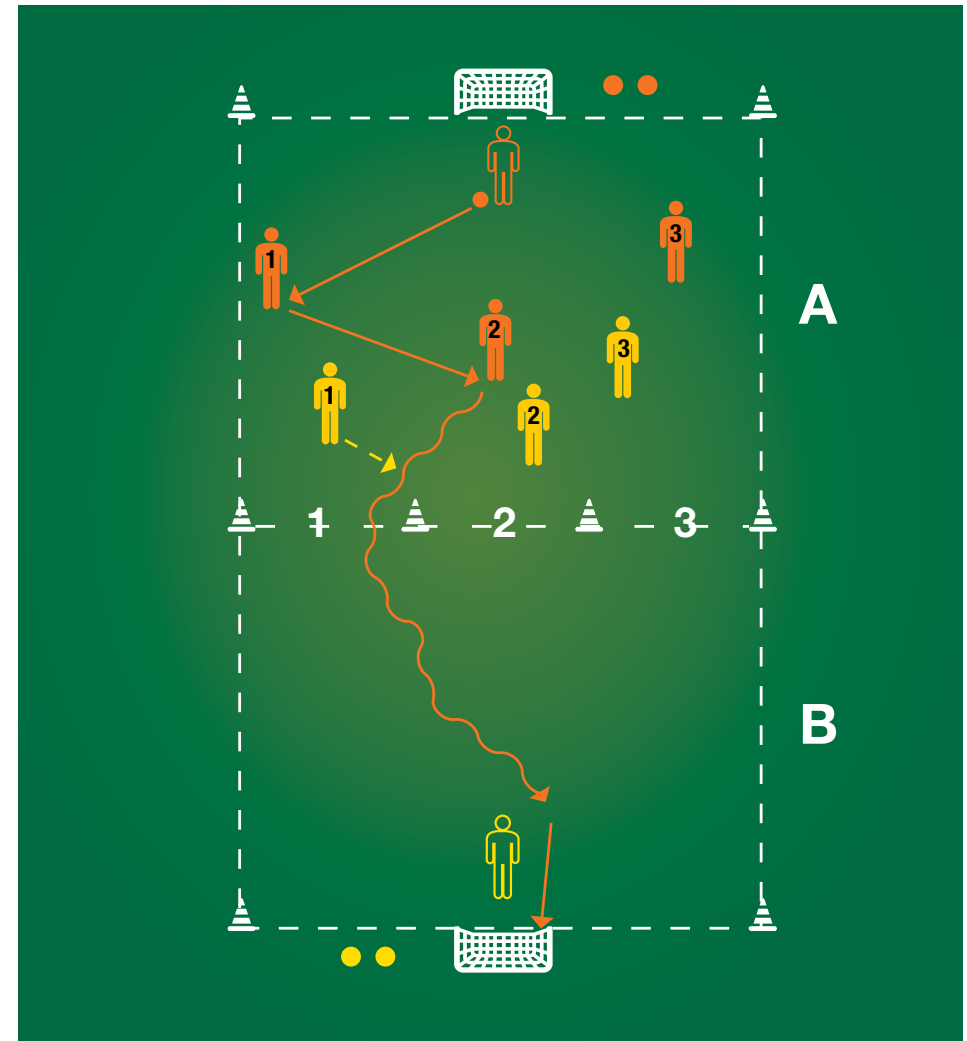
1 v 1 Model Session 2

1. Skill introduction

- Set up the organisation as shown in the diagram. Grids A and C 20m x 10m, grid B 20m x 15m, with two 2m goals on each byline

- All players dribble with a ball in grid B

- **Avoid collisions** (balls and players)

- Make feints (free choice)

- Accelerate after a feint into grid A or C

Progression:

- Number all players 1-4. On the call of a specific number these players (i.e. all #1's) feint and accelerate out of grid B and finish in **separate** goals (awareness; communication and decision-making!), then get their ball and return to grid.
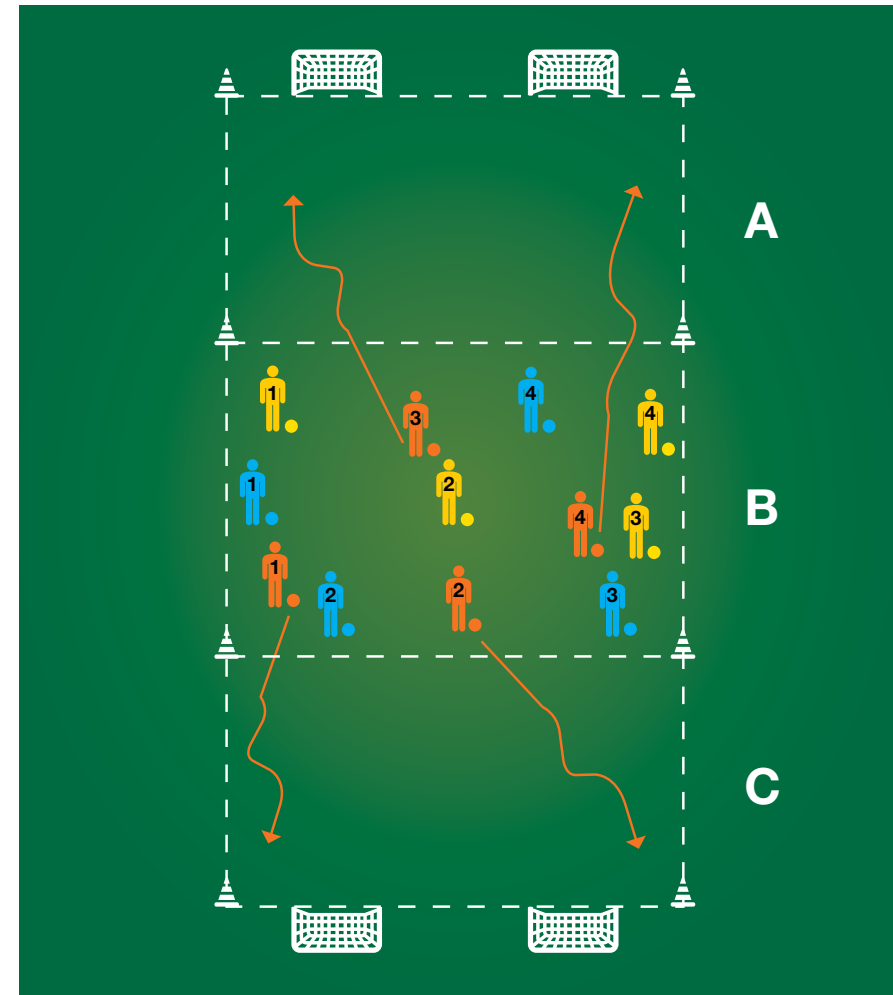
1 v 1 Model Session 2

Concluding Game:

'Cross the canal' to free zone on other side.

One group (yellow) position themselves in grid B and are the 'defenders'. All other players with a ball each in grid A. On the coaches signal they must all dribble to grid C.

The defenders must eliminate runners by kicking the runners balls out of grid B. When a defender kicks your ball out of the grid, you have to get it and start to juggle on the side until a new game starts.

"Who wins?" (fastest time by defenders or last runner standing).

1 v 1 Model Session 2

2. Skill training component

Organisation:

Outside the penalty box is a 15m x 15m grid with 6 cones placed as shown in the diagram.

Two teams (orange and yellow) are divided into 2 groups of equal numbers and positioned as shown.

Groups orange A and yellow C have a ball each. The exercise starts with A1 passing the ball to B1. A1 then runs around the central cone to receive the ball back from B1. At the moment A1 starts their run around the cone, D1 also starts to run around the opposite central cone.

A1 must now try to beat D1 in a 1 v 1 to enter the penalty box and finish on goal. D1 can only defend in the grid and is not allowed to enter the penalty box.

The action stops when A1 has finished on goal; D1 captures the ball from A1 or the ball goes out of the grid.

After the action has finished the players involved move as follows:

- A1 to group B (bring back the ball)

- B1 to group A (bring ball from A1)

- D1 goes back to group D (line up at the back)

- Next sequence is C1 passing to D2 with B2 defending

"Which team can score the most?"

1 v 1 Model Session 2

Step down:

'Passive' defending by the defenders

Step up:

2 v 1 ('overlapping' player)

After passing to A1, B1 now 'overlaps' A1 to make it 2 v 1 (see diagram).

Possible Coaches Remarks:

ATTACKER	DEFENDER
"Go at the defender with speed"	"Show the attacker one way"
"Use a feint to put the defender off balance"	"Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you're able to change direction quickly"
"Threaten to pass to the overlapping player but accelerate past the defender instead"	"The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down"

'Don't forget to coach the defenders'

1 v 1 Model Session 2

3. Skill game

Organisation:

A grid of 40m x 30m (depending on ability) divided in 2 grids of 20m x 30m by a halfway line of 4 cones (see diagram). Two small (2m) goals on each byline and a 5m-7m shooting line at each end.

Two teams of 4 players each. The game starts in grid A with the orange team in possession and one yellow defender (4 v 1). The 3 other yellow players position themselves as shown (one between the goals and the other 2 at the shooting line cones).

The orange team must get a player running with the ball across the halfway line into grid B and score in one of the goals (inside the scoring zone).

At the moment the orange player crosses the halfway line one of the yellow players enters the grid to attack the orange player (1 v 1).

Which defender commits depends on the 'gate' through which the attacker enters grid B (see diagram).

• If orange scores: restart in grid A

• If the yellow defender captures the ball in grid B: restart in grid B with yellow in possession

• If the defender wins the ball in the 4 v 1, they can score immediately in 1 of the 2 goals (from any distance)
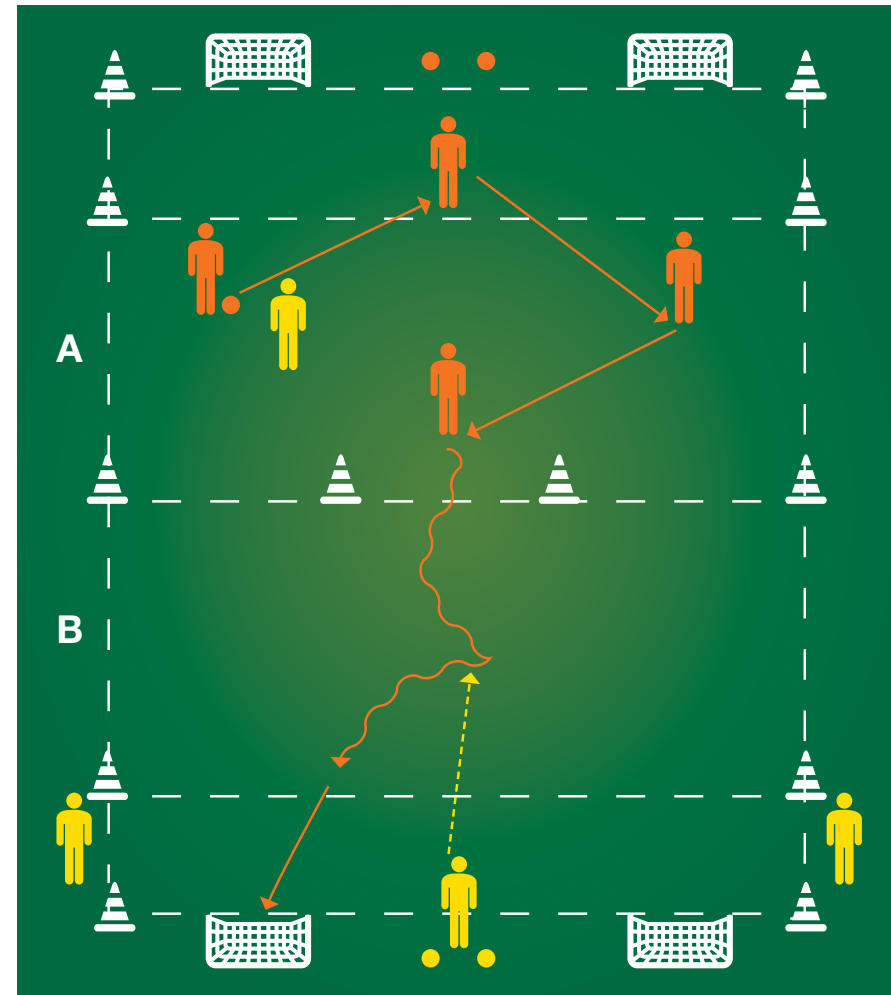
1 v 1 Model Session 2

Variations:

No goals but the attacker must run with the ball across the byline

Step up:

• The attacking team must cross over the halfway line within 15 seconds otherwise the possession goes to the opponent

• Decrease the grid size

Step down:

• Increase the grid size
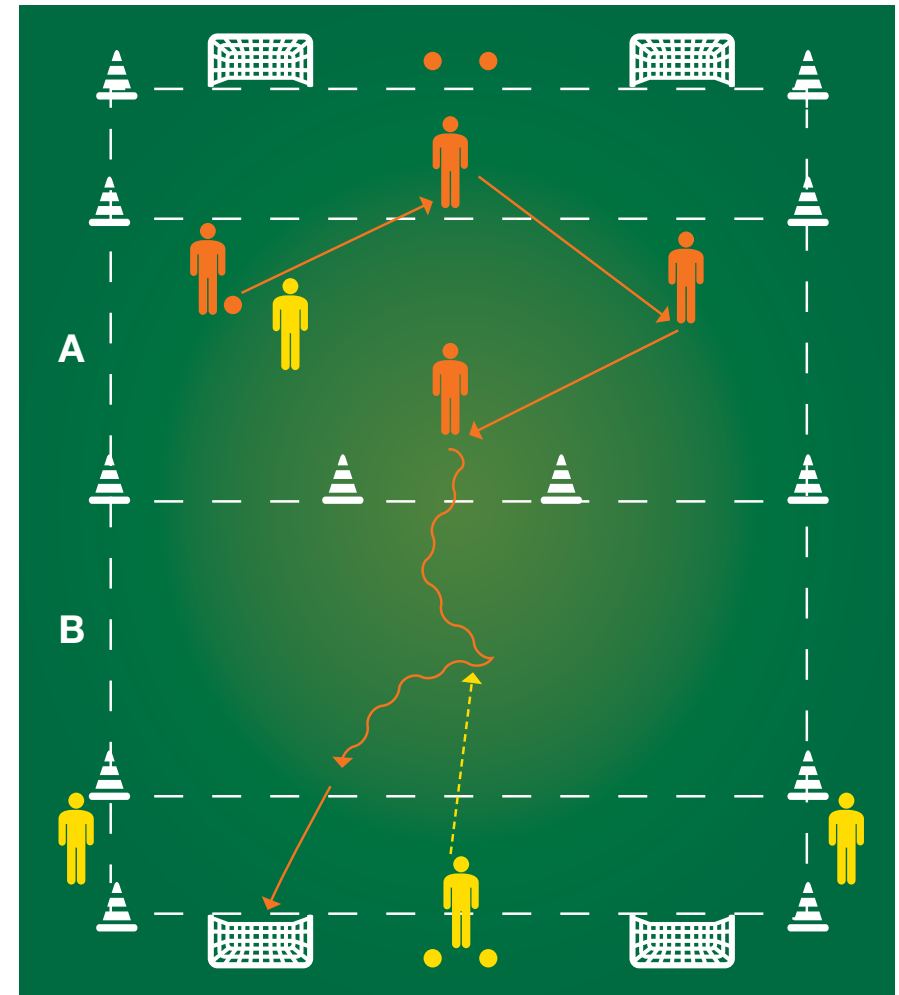
1 v 1 Model Session 3

1. Skill introduction

Positioned inside a large grid of approximately 40m x 40m are a number of 5m x 5m x 5m triangular grids. The players are split into 2 groups (orange and yellow) of equal numbers, orange with ball and yellow without.

The number of triangular grids equals the number of players per group.

Of the group without the ball, each player must stand inside a triangular grid (see diagram).

The orange players dribble around the area and 'attack' the triangles from any possible side. Only one player can attack a triangle at the same time (awareness; communication).

The yellow players have to 'defend' the borders of their triangles (**passively** at the beginning).

Change roles of groups regularly.
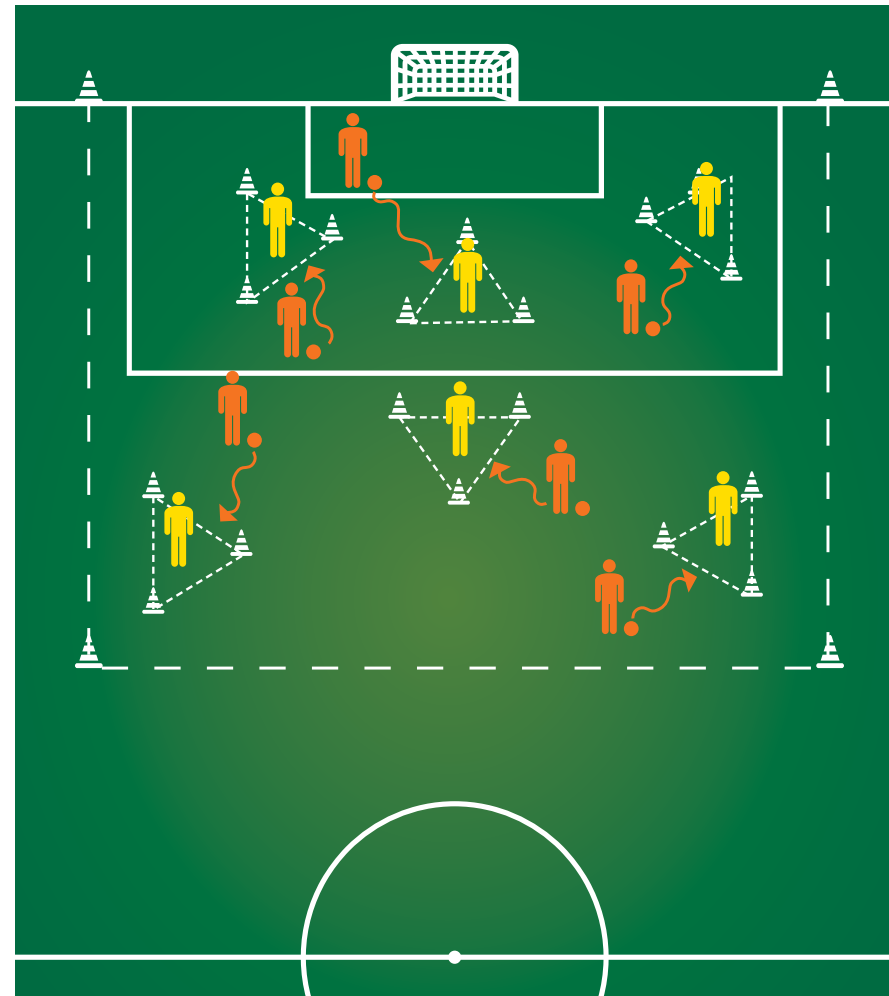
1 v 1 Model Session 3

Player Actions/Tasks to encourage:

"Make feints" (free choice or prescribed)
"Now only use your weaker foot"
"Now increase the tempo but avoid collisions" ("heads up")
"Defenders, gradually raise the resistance"
"Defenders now full resistance, try to stop the attackers entering your grid"

Concluding Game:

Each player individually counts the number of times they are able to beat
a defender and dribble through their triangle.
"You have 2 minutes"
"What is the group's total?"
"OK, now change roles and see if your group can beat that number"
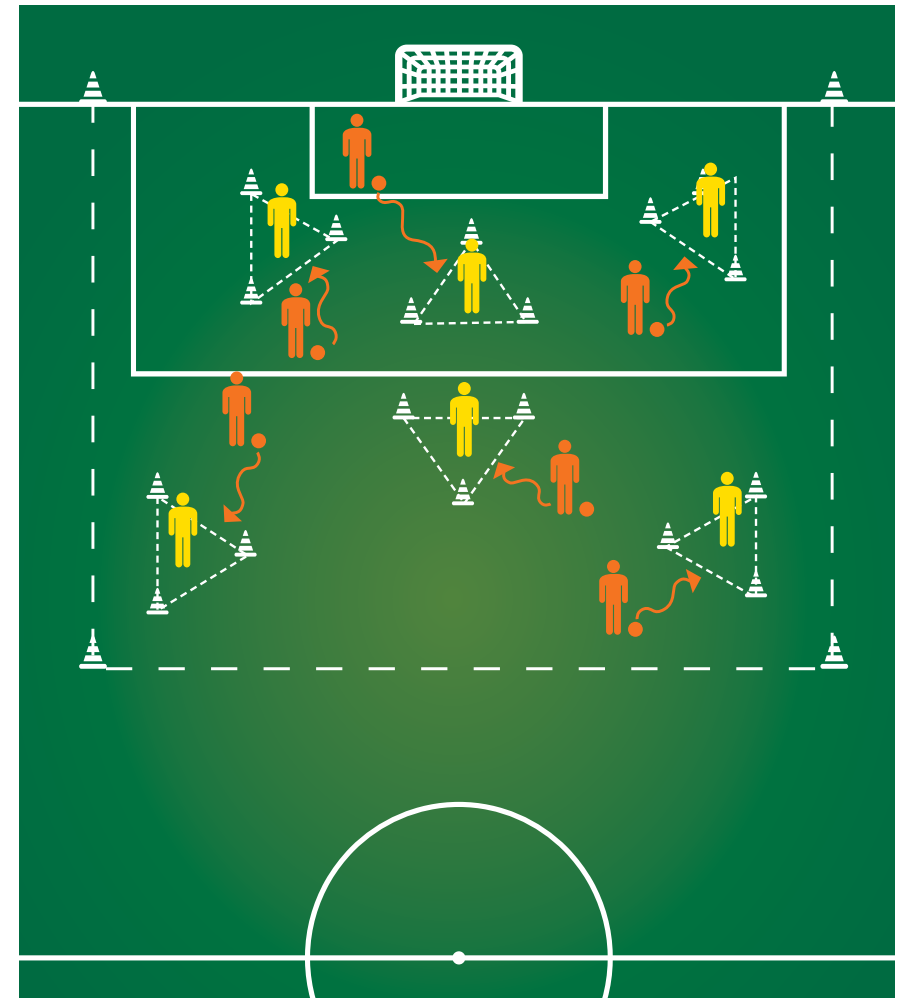
1 v 1 Model Session 3

2. Skill training component

- A grid of approximately 15m x 15m with a halfway line and three gates of 5m at each byline

- Two groups (yellow and orange) of 4 players positioned opposite one another in the middle gate (see diagram A)

- Yellow group with a ball each; orange without a ball

- #1 yellow passes to #1 orange and immediately sprints to the halfway line (yellow must start defending on or over the halfway line, waiting in own half is not allowed)

- Orange #1 receives the ball and takes on yellow #1 at speed, trying to get past them and score by dribbling through the left or right gate

- The action stops when orange scores or yellow wins the ball

- Orange #1 now takes the ball and joins the yellow line while yellow #1 joins the orange line

- After everyone's had a turn, the oranges now become the defenders and yellow the attackers

- "Count the number of goals: who scored most?"

A

1 v 1 Model Session 3

Possible Coaches Remarks:

ATTACKER	DEFENDER
"Go at the defender with speed"	"Show the attacker one way"
"Use a feint to put the defender off balance"	"Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you're able to change direction quickly"
"Threaten to pass to the overlapping player but accelerate past the defender instead"	"The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down"

'Don't forget to coach the defenders'

Progression:

• Defenders can score too when they win the ball

• 2 v 1

• 2 v 2

2 v 1 organisation (see diagram B):

• Pairs of yellow and orange players

• #1 yellow passes to #1 orange and engage in 1 v 1

• #2 orange first runs around one of the corner cones before entering the grid to make it 2 v 1

• #2 yellow skips a turn and jogs around the grid to join the orange line

1 v 1 Model Session 3

3. Skill game

4 v 4 in a grid of approximately 35m x 35m.

There are four gates of 5m-7m positioned as shown, each protected by
a defender (gates should be too wide rather than too narrow).

The team in possession of the ball scores a goal when one of their players can
beat a defender and run with the ball through one of the gates (from either side).

If the defending team wins the ball, the roles change without stopping the game.

"Which team scores most?"

Step up:

- The attacking team must make a 1 v 1 effort within 15-30 seconds, otherwise
  the possession goes to the opponent

- Decrease the gate size

Step down:

- Increase the gate size

- Introduce a 'joker'
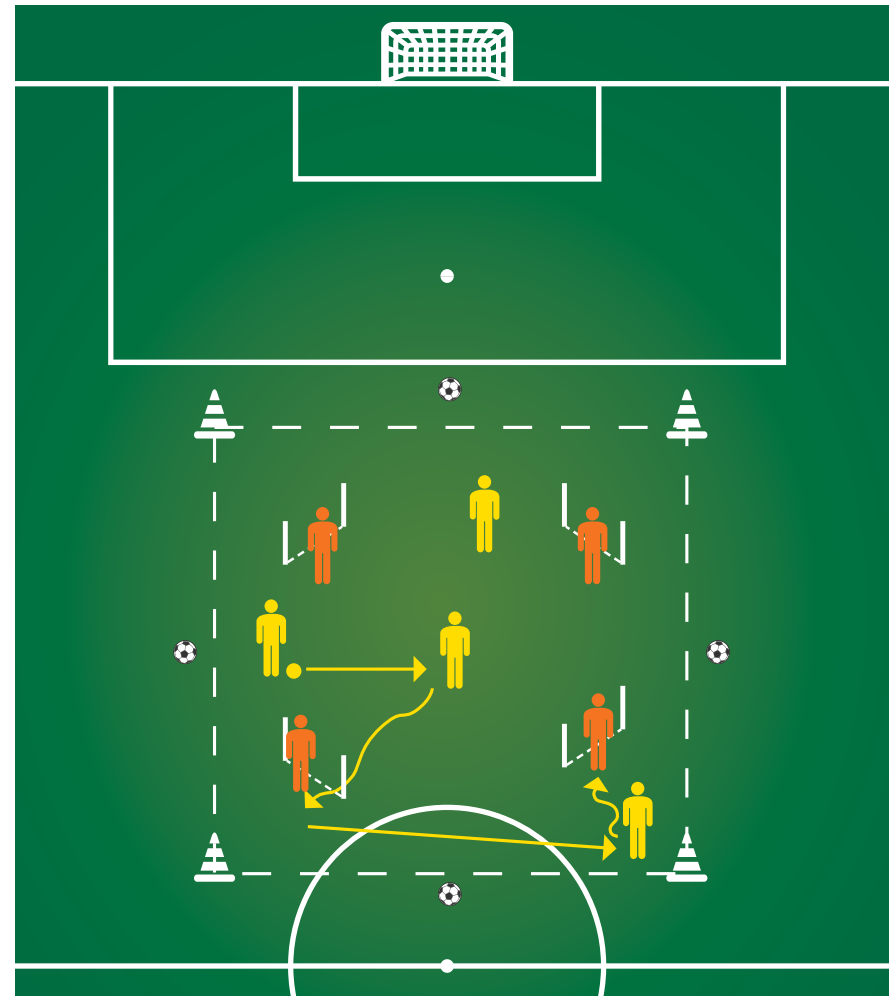
Game Training Phase

Model Sessions

Similar to the sessions of the Skill Acquisition Phase, the sessions of the Game Training Phase are also 'themes based'. During the Skill Acquisition Phase the 'theme' of a session focuses on one of the four 'Core Skills' (first touch; running with the ball; 1 v 1; striking the ball)

In the Game Training Phase the 'theme' of a session focuses on one of the 'Main Moments' and the Team Tasks (as well as the individual player tasks) within that 'Main Moment'.

To arrange the Game Training Phase Model Sessions more practically, we have subdivided the Main Moments into 'trainable' themes.

These themes are:

1. In possession of the ball (BP):

- Playing out from the back
- Midfield play
- Attacking

2. When the opponent is in possession of the ball (BPO):

- Disturbing/pressuring
- Defending/recapturing the ball

3. Transitioning (BP>BPO and BPO>BP)

- Team and player actions when we lose the ball
- Team and player actions when we win the ball

Since Game Training Phase sessions should strive for game realistic scenarios, the practices must include game specific resistances such as opponents, team-mates, direction, rules and appropriate dimensions. As a consequence, in Game Training Phase sessions often all three Main Moments take place continuously, but the focus is on one of them.

Game Training Phase sessions consist of 4 components:

1. Warm Up:
Starting points for the Warm Up are:

- Preferably with ball (e.g. passing practices);
- If possible 'theme related' including a level of decision-making; Avoid warm-ups that are more like conditioning sessions!

2. Positioning games:
The main conditions for quality positioning play are:

- Maximal use of space in order to create more time on the ball (stretching the opponent)
- Triangles (no players in straight lines)
- Support play to create options for the player on the ball
- Anticipation and communication (verbal and non-verbal).

These basic principles form the foundation for proactive possession based football and this explains the importance of the positioning games in training practices.

Through positioning games young players:

• Learn to always create at least 3 options for the player on the ball (through proper positioning)

• Improve their decision-making (by learning to choose the right option)

• Increase their handling speed (less space and time forces quicker thinking and acting)

• Improve their technique (passing and first touch are essential technical skills)

• Learn to communicate both verbally (e.g. calling for the ball) and non-verbally (e.g. through ball speed and ball direction).

This is the reason why positioning games are on the menu of every Game Training Phase and Performance Phase session.

3. The Game Training Component:
This is the part of the session where conscious teaching and learning of the designated Team Task takes place. For a proper Game Training practice the coach must therefore:

• Create the proper scenario (organize the practice in such a way that the focus is on the designated Team Task);

• Organize the practice in the right area of the field (where this particular situation takes place during the real game) and with the appropriate dimensions

• Create the proper level of resistance (too easy = no development; too difficult = no success)

• Make effective interventions and provide quality (specific) feedback

• Ask smart questions to develop player understanding and enhance learning

4. Training Game:
This is the traditional game at the end of a session. In our approach however it should not just be a 'free' game. The definition of a Training Game in the context of a Game Training Phase session is:

A game at the end of the session that contains all the elements of the real game but with rules and restraints that see to it that the designated Team Task is emphasised.

During a Training Game the players are playing and the coach is observing if learning has taken place (little or no stop-start coaching but preferably coaching 'on the run').

Clearly, quality coaching is not as easy as it may look!

Game Training Phase

As explained earlier, the coach must be mindful of the Growth Spurt. Players going through this stage of maturation will have varying energy levels and are injury-prone. Proper managing of training loads to avoid over-training is essential.

Therefore we consider 3 sessions of 75-90 minutes and one game a maximum safe weekly work load, with the following session planning guidelines:

• Welcome/explanation: 5 minutes

• Warm Up: 15-20 minutes

• Positioning Games: 20 minutes

• Game Training component: 25-30 minutes

• Training Game: 20-25 minutes

• Warm Down/wrap up 5-10 minutes

On the next pages you will find 12 Game Training Phase Model Sessions and two examples of how you can implement the sessions in 6-week cycles.

The 6-week cycles are based on the assumption that the weekly training sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays with the weekly game on Saturday.

Game Training Phase CYCLE 1	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1	Playing out from the back MODEL SESSION 1	Midfield play MODEL SESSION 1	GAME
WEEK 2	Attacking MODEL SESSION 1	Disturbing/pressuring MODEL SESSION 1	GAME
WEEK 3	Defending/ recapturing MODEL SESSION 1	Transitioning MODEL SESSION 1	GAME
WEEK 4	Playing out from the back MODEL SESSION 2	Midfield play MODEL SESSION 2	GAME
WEEK 5	Attacking MODEL SESSION 2	Disturbing/pressuring MODEL SESSION 2	GAME
WEEK 6	Defending/ recapturing MODEL SESSION 2	Transitioning MODEL SESSION 2	GAME

In this cycle the 'trainable themes' appear in a sequential order.

As a consequence, more time is allocated to the main moment Ball Possession (3 consecutive sessions) compared to Ball Possession Opponent (2 consecutive sessions) and Transitioning (1 session).

The same sequence is continued in the next cycle with Model Sessions 3. When the coach has exhausted the 12 Model Sessions then repeat them using the 'step up' options outlined in the Model Sessions (but only if the players are ready!)

Here is another option:

Game Training Phase CYCLE 1	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1 (BP)	Playing out from the back **MODEL SESSION 1**	Midfield play **MODEL SESSION 1**	**GAME**
WEEK 2 (BPO)	Disturbing/pressuring **MODEL SESSION 1**	Defending/ recapturing **MODEL SESSION 1**	**GAME**
WEEK 3 (TR)	Transitioning (BP > BPO) **MODEL SESSION 1**	Transitioning (BPO > BP) **MODEL SESSION 2**	**GAME**
WEEK 4 (BP)	Attacking **MODEL SESSION 1**	Playing out from the back **MODEL SESSION 2**	**GAME**
WEEK 5 (BPO)	Disturbing/pressuring **MODEL SESSION 2**	Defending/ recapturing **MODEL SESSION 2**	**GAME**
WEEK 6 (TR)	Transitioning (BP > BPO) **MODEL SESSION 1**	Transitioning (BPO > BP) **MODEL SESSION 2**	**GAME**

In this example, every week the focus is on one **Main Moment**. In week one the focus is on Ball Possession, in week two on Ball Possession Opponent and week three on Transitioning.

Creative coaches who understand the methodology will be able to design 6-week cycles and a season plan that suits their team best. Maybe your team has to improve in possession of the ball and are already sufficiently proficient defensively and in transition. You could then choose to spend a whole 6-week cycle focused on Ball Possession.

When you have 3 sessions per week, our advice is to limit the duration of the sessions to 75 minutes and rest the players the day before as well as the day after the game. If the game is on Saturday this would mean training on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

4 sessions per week would only be acceptable in a first class environment, such as a National Training Centre program, where there is a full-time, professional coach and qualified support staff. Player welfare is paramount.

In the wrong setting, 4 sessions per week could be harmful.

The best advice for a coach in this age-group would be to attend the **FFA Youth C Licence course.** This will provide you with more ideas and insight on session, cycle and season planning and developing your team.

Playing out from the back Model Session 1

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Players in game positions #2; 3/4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9/10; 11 as shown in diagram A

• If the number of players allows/requires: a similar organisation on the other half of the pitch

• Players #3 & #4 as well as the goalkeeper(s) at the starting position

• The players pass the ball around in a 'logical' sequence (1-8)

Possible Coaches Remarks:

• "Follow your pass to the next position"

• "Pass precision and ball speed"

• "Now we go in the opposite direction" (to the right)

• "Gradually increase your running speed"
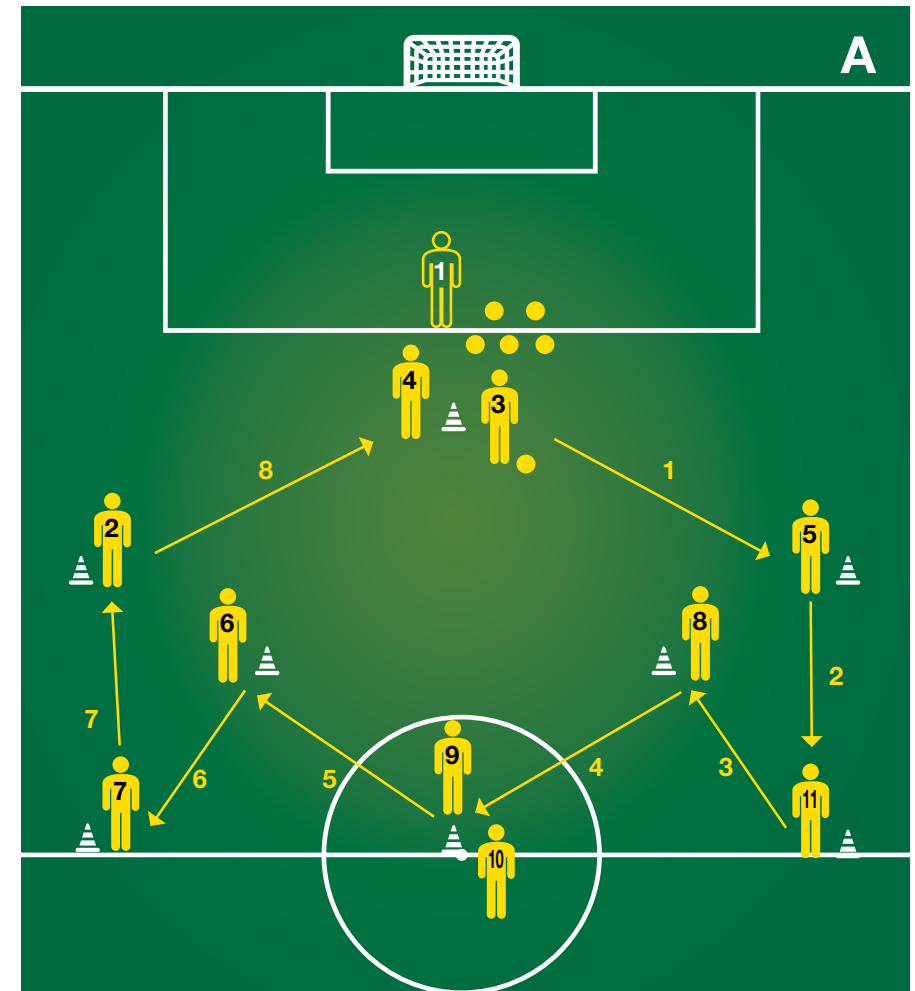
Playing out from the back Model Session 1

- "Here is another variation" (see diagram B)

- "Now just improvise but use a logical order and every player must touch the ball"

Progression:

- A 2nd ball can be introduced when the first ball reaches the #9 position.
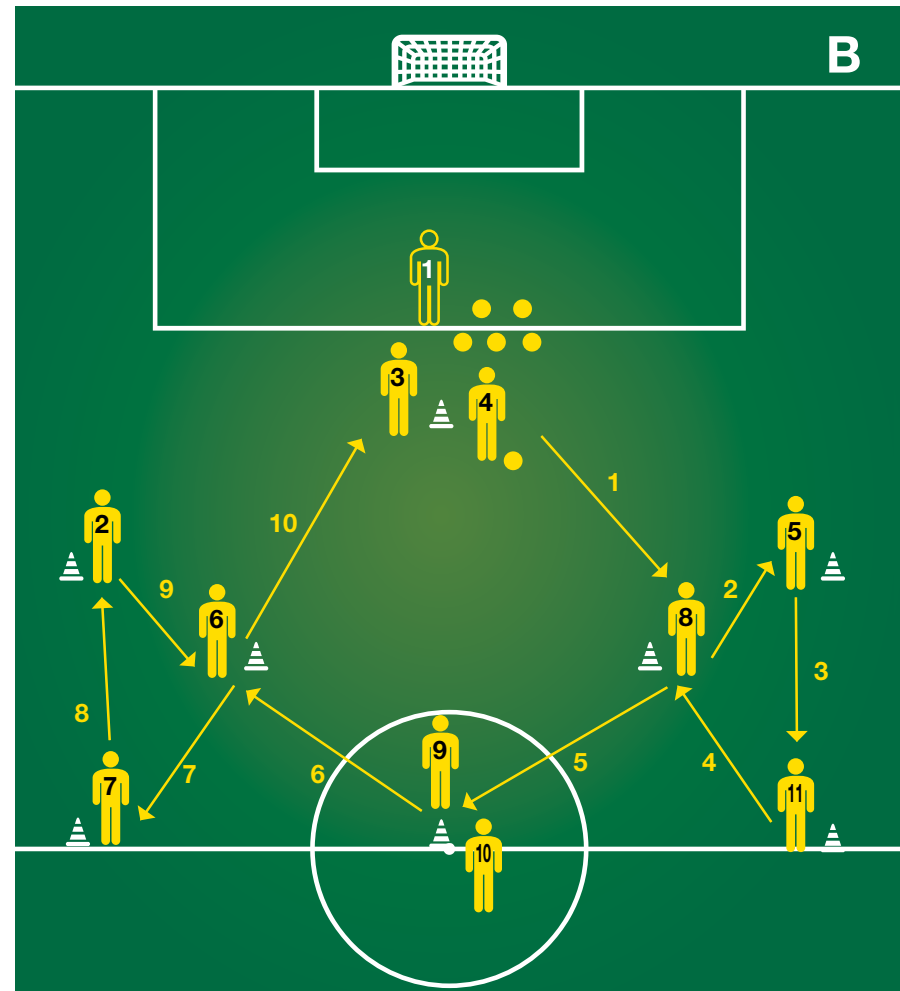
Playing out from the back Model Session 1

2. Positioning game: 7 v 4

- 2 grids of approximately 30m x 30m (A & C) separated by a grid of 10m x 30m (B)

- 2 groups of 4 outfield players

- Yellow consisting of the players #2-3-4-5

- Orange consisting of the players #7-8-10-11

- #9 and #6 are neutral players who always play with the team in possession; #9 in grid B; #6 in the grid where the positioning game takes place (see diagram)

- 2 goalkeepers positioned on each back line

- Players #3-4-6 as much as possible in their game positions with #2 and #5 positioned on the edge of the grid

- #1 yellow starts the game and yellow must try to get the ball to #9 but only #3; 4 or 6 can pass to #9

- If yellow succeeds: start again with #1 yellow

- If orange wins the ball in grid A, they must try to pass to #9 in grid B or their goalkeeper at the far end. All players then cross over to grid B where the game restarts with orange in possession and yellow defending
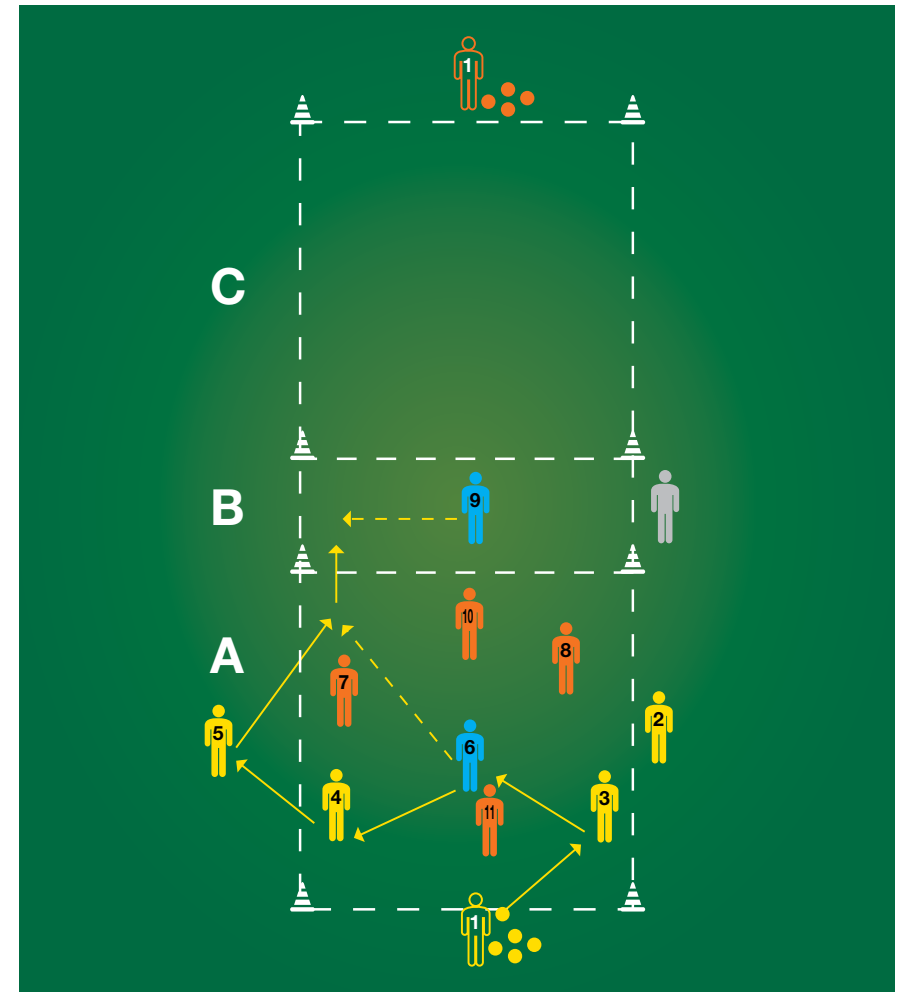
Playing out from the back Model Session 1

• Now the orange team in prescribed positions (see diagram)

Steps up or down:

• Make grids bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Stop-start change of grids/'flying' change of grids

• #9 must pass the ball back in to the hands of #1

Remark:

• Position the grids in 'game realistic' areas of the field (see diagram)

Playing out from the back Model Session 1

3. Game training component:

Yellow defence (#1-2-3-4-5) playing out from the back against orange attack (#7-9-11)

• Goalkeeper (yellow #1) starts by serving the ball to one of the defenders

• The objective for the yellow defenders (#2, #3, #4, #5) is to dribble the ball through one of the three gates (see yellow lines in diagram A)

• Yellow team can also use #6, 8 and 10 as bouncers (see blue lines in diagram A)

• If orange wins the ball, attack the goal and try to score (one attempt only) if orange loses the ball, the action has ended

• Every restart is from yellow goalkeeper

Progression (see diagram B):

• Yellow #6 comes in as a player to help the yellow achieve their objective

• Yellow #10 joins the **orange** team as a direct opponent of yellow #6 in the field

• This leaves yellow #8 as the only 'bouncer'

A

B
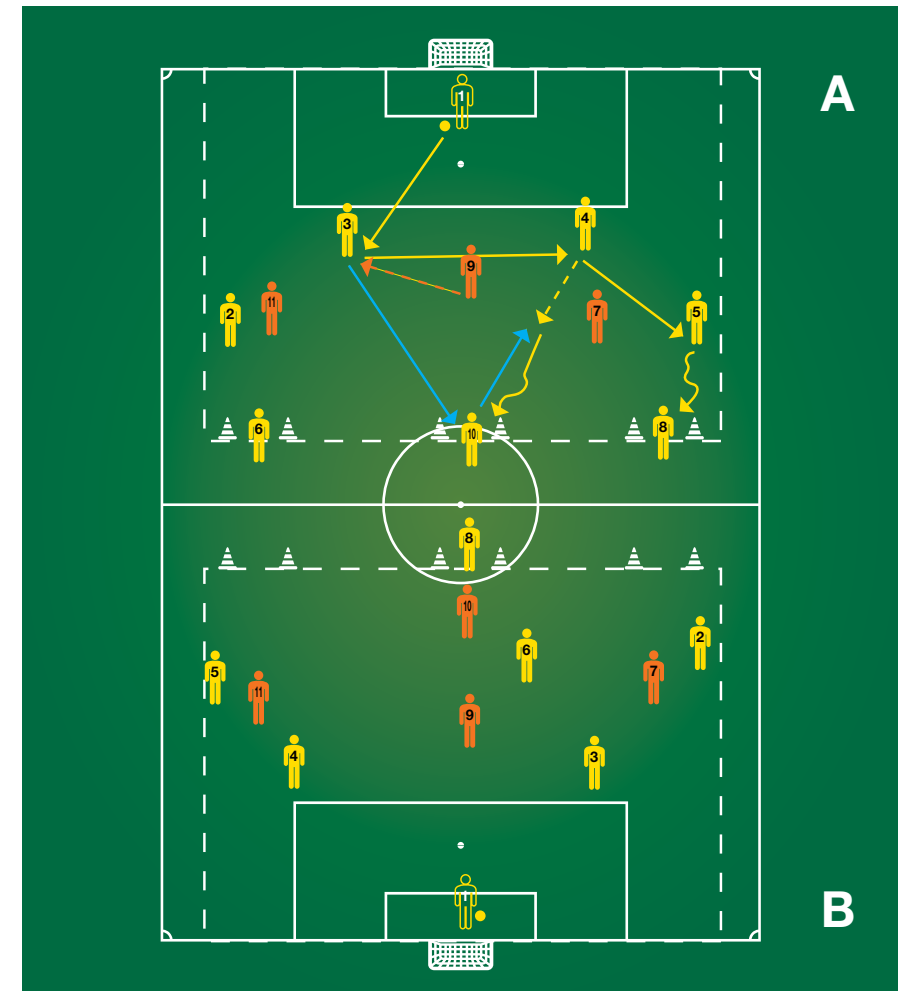
Playing out from the back Model Session 1

4. Training Game: 5 v 5 + goalkeeper

• Yellow defends the big goal; orange defends the three gates on the halfway line

• Orange: try to score in big goal

• Yellow: try to score in one of the gates

• Offside rule applies

• Maintain the organisation/formations

C

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Players in game positions as shown in diagram A

• The passing sequence starts with the two goalkeepers (can be simultaneous): one to the right side; the other to the left side

• The players pass the ball in a 'logical' order (1-7) while staying in their positions

• "Pass precision and ball speed"

• "Now follow your pass to the next position" (NB: #10 goes to position #3/4)

• "Gradually increase your running speed"

A

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

- "Here is another variation" (see diagram B)

- "Now just improvise but use a logical order and every player must touch the ball"

B

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

2. Positioning game: 5 v 4 + 2 (7 v 4)

- A grid of approximately 40m wide x 30m long

- 2 groups of 4 outfield players (orange + yellow)

- Yellow consisting of the players #2-3-4-5

- Orange consisting of the players #7-9-10-11

- #6 is a neutral player who always plays with the team in possession

- The 2 goalkeepers are neutral players who always play with the team in possession and are positioned just behind each back line

- The players as far as the game allows in 'logical' positions

- Yellow #1 starts the game for the yellow team, who must try to pass the ball to orange #1 on the opposite side (see diagram)

- If they succeed, orange #1 must now pass the ball across the grid back to yellow #1 on the opposite side, who must catch the ball and start again

- If orange wins the ball, they must try to pass the ball to orange #1 who restarts the game with orange in possession and yellow defending

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

Steps up or down:

• Make grid bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Free/minimum number of passes before you can pass to #1

• 1 point for every successful pass from goalkeeper to goalkeeper

Remark:

• Position the grids in 'game realistic' areas of the field (see diagram on the right)

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

3. Game training component:

- Two teams of 8 players each consisting of a full defence line (#1-2-3-4-5) and attack line (#7-9-11)

- 2 grids approximately the width of a full pitch and 45m long as shown in diagram A

- In both grids the defenders of one team play against the attackers of the other team

- The goalkeepers start by serving the ball to one of the defenders (enough balls next to both goals)

- "Get the ball to the 'free' player who must run with the ball across the end line"

- If the attackers win the ball, attack the goal and try to score (one attempt only). If the defenders win the ball back, the action has ended

- Every restart from the goalkeeper

A

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

Progression:

- Now we 'connect' both grids (see diagram B)

- Yellow starts playing out from the back and tries to get one defender across to the other grid

- They can now also use the yellow attackers in the other grid as bouncers (offside applies)

- One orange defender waits next to the goal

- So yellow has a numerical advantage (4 v 3) and tries to score

- If the yellow team loses the ball in their defensive grid, orange can try to score (1 attempt only)

- If yellow loses the ball in the attacking grid, orange play back to their goalkeeper and the action has ended

B
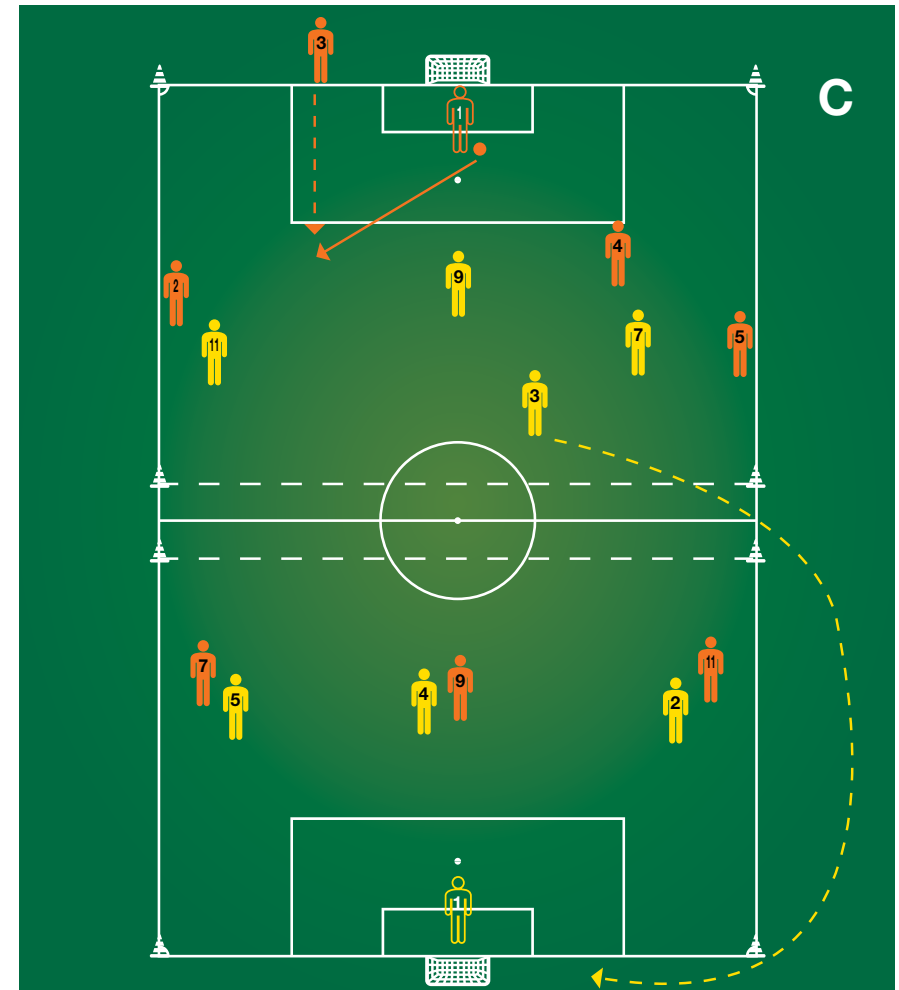
Playing out from the back Model Session 2

- Now the orange defender (#3), who was waiting next to the goal, comes on to the pitch and the yellow defender (#3) that had joined the attack steps out and jogs back to wait next to the goal

- The same action starts again but now with orange playing out and attacking while the yellow team defends (see diagram C)

- The next step up would be to decrease the size of the grids, with portable goals on the edge of each box and narrowing the pitch 5m each side. The halfway line now divides the attacking and defensive halves

C

Playing out from the back Model Session 2

4. Training Game: 8 v 8

- Formation of both teams 1-4-3

- All players can move across the whole field

- Normal rules, offside applies

- Pitch size depends on player's ability (see diagram D)
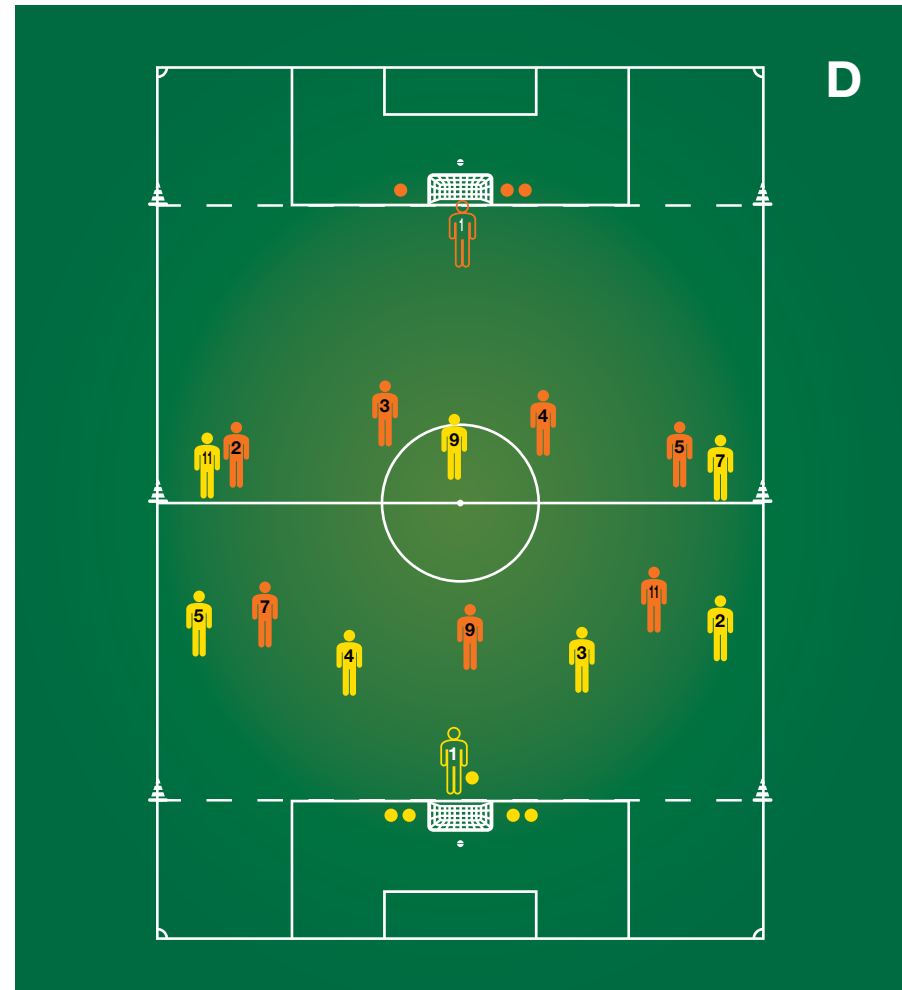
Midfield play Model Session 1

1. Warm-up: passing exercise (see diagram A)

• Players in game positions as shown

• At least 2 players in positions #3/#4, #10 and #9

• #6 checks off and asks for the ball; #3 passes to #6 and coaches "turn" (1)

• #6 receives & turns (2) and passes to #9 (3)

• #9 bounces the ball to supporting #10 (4)

• #10 turns away (5) and dribbles to the starting position of #3 (6)

• All players move to the next position ("follow your ball")

• Now the same via the left side starting with #4 passing to #8

A
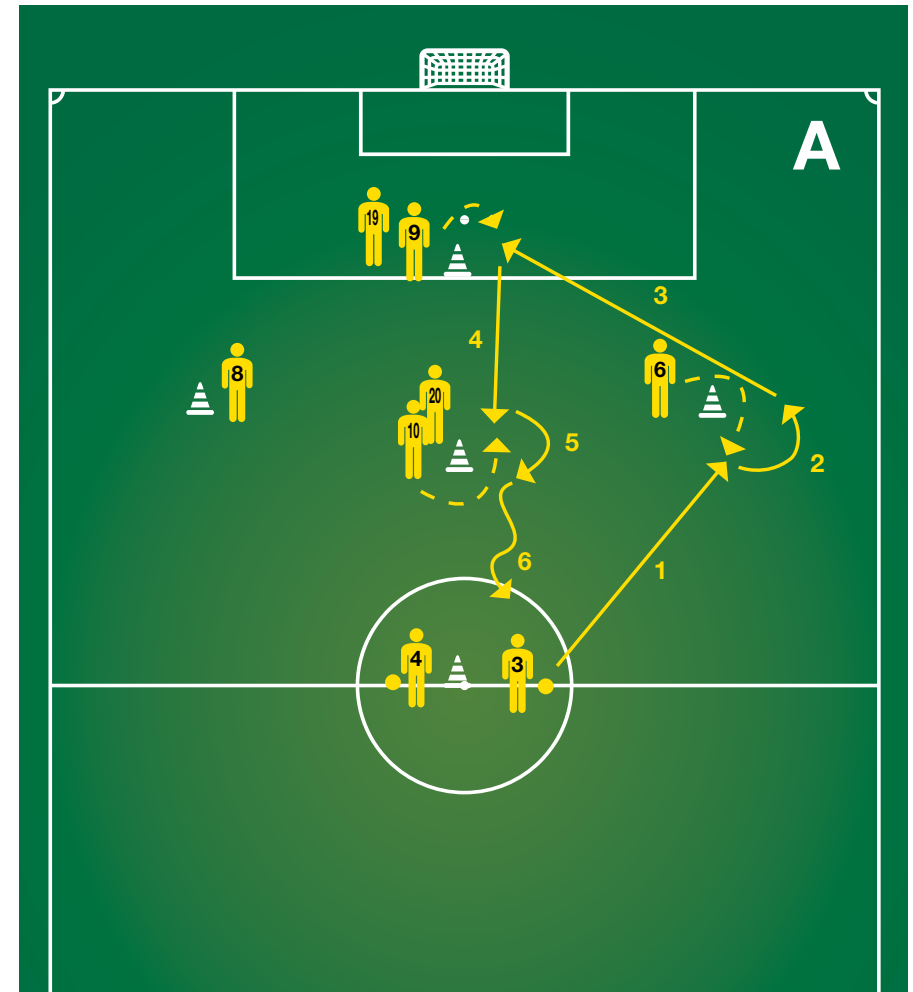
Midfield play Model Session 1

Variation 1 (see diagram B)

- #8 checks off and asks for the ball; #4 passes to #8 and coaches "**man on**" (1)

- #8 bounces the ball back to #4 (2)

- #4 passes to #9 (3) who bounces to the supporting #10 (4)

- #10 receives and turns (5) and dribbles to the starting position of #3 (6)

- Player rotations are as follows: #4 then goes to where #8 was, #8 goes to #9, #9 to #10, and #10 ends up at the beginning where the sequence was started

Variation 2

- Choice of two options for #6 and #8 **depending on whether number 3 and 4 say "turn" or "man on"**

- Early cue from #3 and #4 is now essential

Coaching points of attention:

- Pass precision and pass direction (to proper foot; proper ball speed)

- Tuning of actions

- Anticipation & movement without ball

- Verbal and non-verbal communication
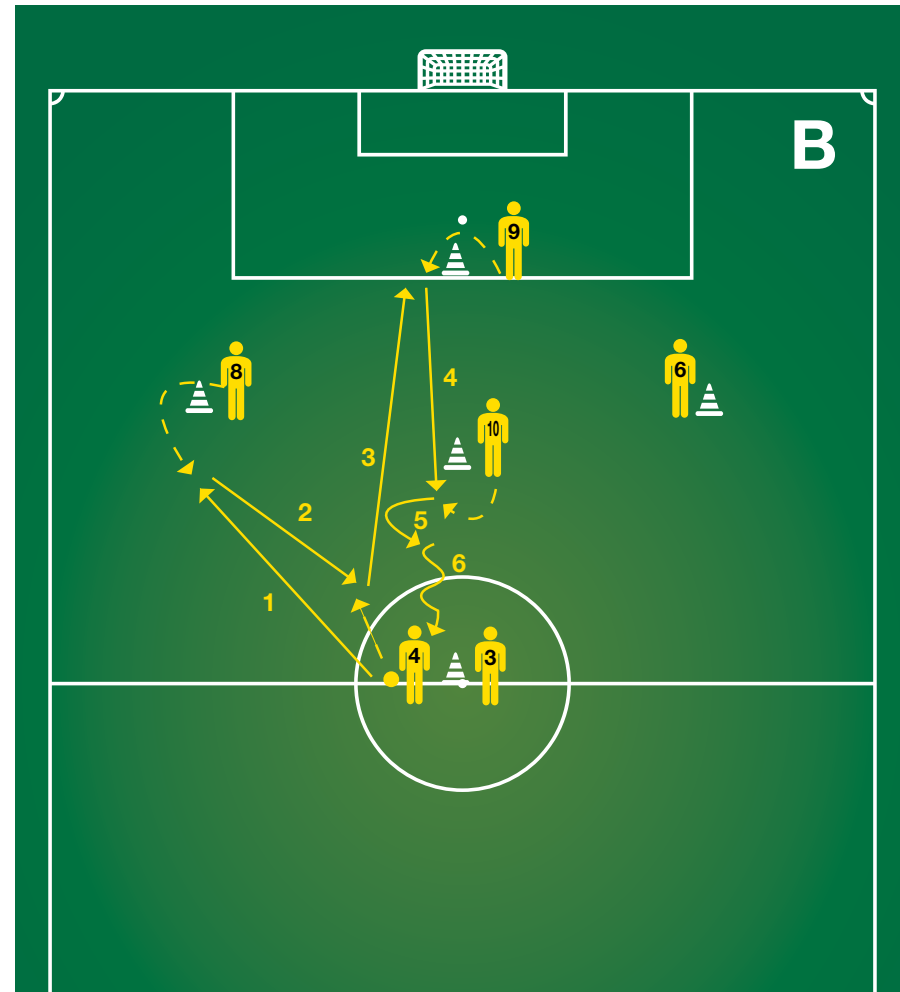
Midfield play Model Session 1

2. Positioning game: 6 v 3

- Grid of approximately 30m x 30m (dependent on level of players)

- 3 groups of 3; one group consisting of the midfield players #6-8-10

- 6 players (orange and blue) keep possession against 3 defenders (yellow)

- Always one 'link' player in the centre (preferably a midfielder)

- Provide 4 options (left; right; central and far) for the player on the ball through proper positioning

- When the group of 6 loses possession, the whole team of the player that turned over the ball must now defend

Steps up or down:

- Make grid bigger/smaller

- Free/limited touches

- Stop-start change of defenders

- 'Flying' change of defenders
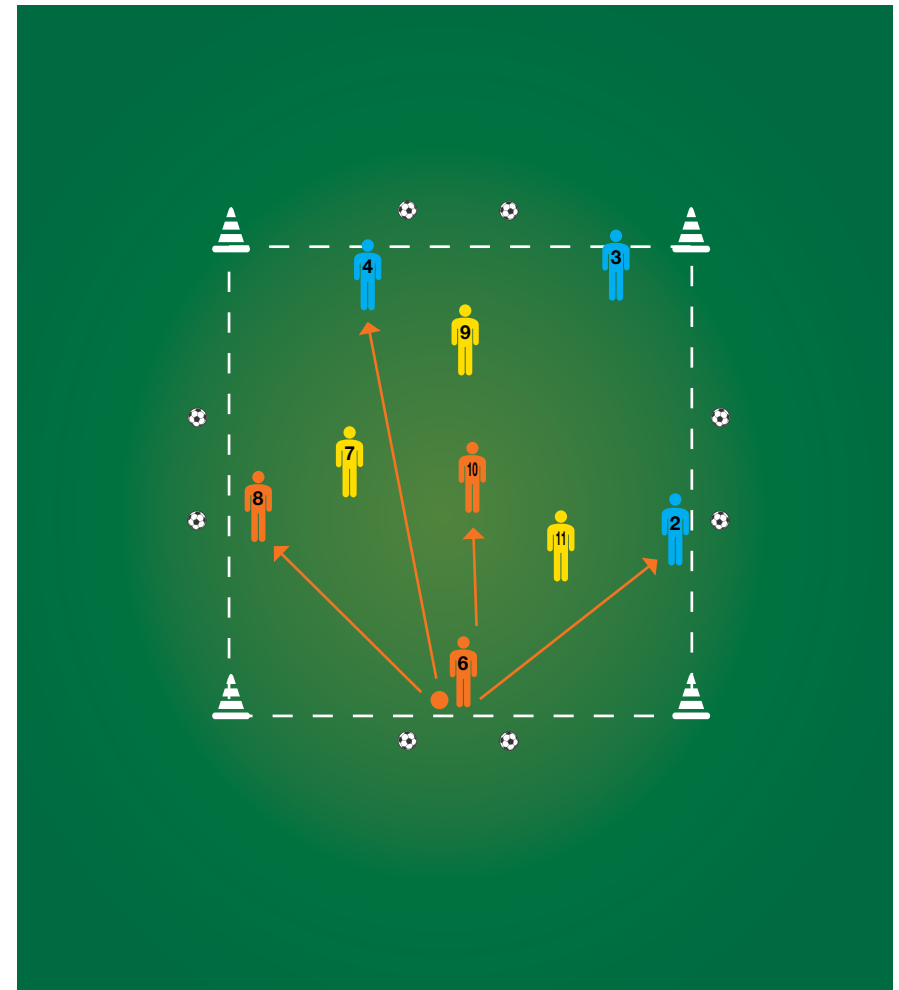
Midfield play Model Session 1

3. Game training component:

- Starting situation: 3 grids (A;B;C) players must stay in their designated area

- Every attack starts with a pass from orange #3 in grid A to one of the midfielders

- Orange midfielders #6-8-10 play in grid B against 2 opponents (3 v 2) and can use orange #9 in grid C as a 'bouncer'

- When one of the midfield players is free on the ball facing forward, they try to pass through one of the gates in grid C

- When the yellow midfielders #16 or #18 win the ball, they try to pass through one of the gates in grid A

Progression 1:

- Add another yellow player in grid B (3 v 3)

- 3 v 3 in grid B. #3 orange is now allowed to dribble into grid B and create a numerical advantage (4 v 3)
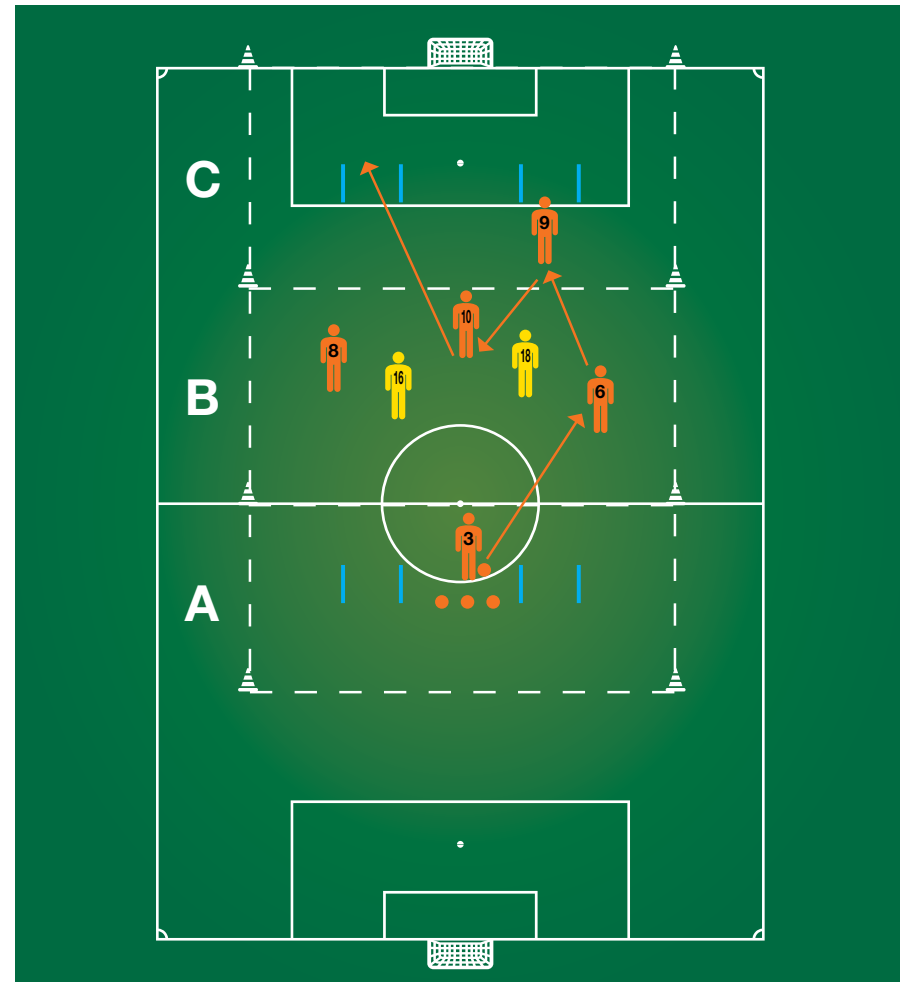
Midfield play Model Session 1

Progression 2:

• Remove the gates from grid C

• Add a yellow defender (#13 yellow) in grid C against #9 orange.

• One player from grid B can now enter into grid C to create a 2 v 1 situation

• Finish on goal against a goalkeeper

Progression 3:

• Place the gates in grid A on back line

• Add #4 orange and #19 yellow in grid A (2 v 1)

• Every new action starts with the coach now serving the ball to orange #3 or #4 (see diagram)

• If yellow recaptures the ball in grid A or B, #19 can score through the gates

Progression 4:

• Narrow the grids (width of the box)
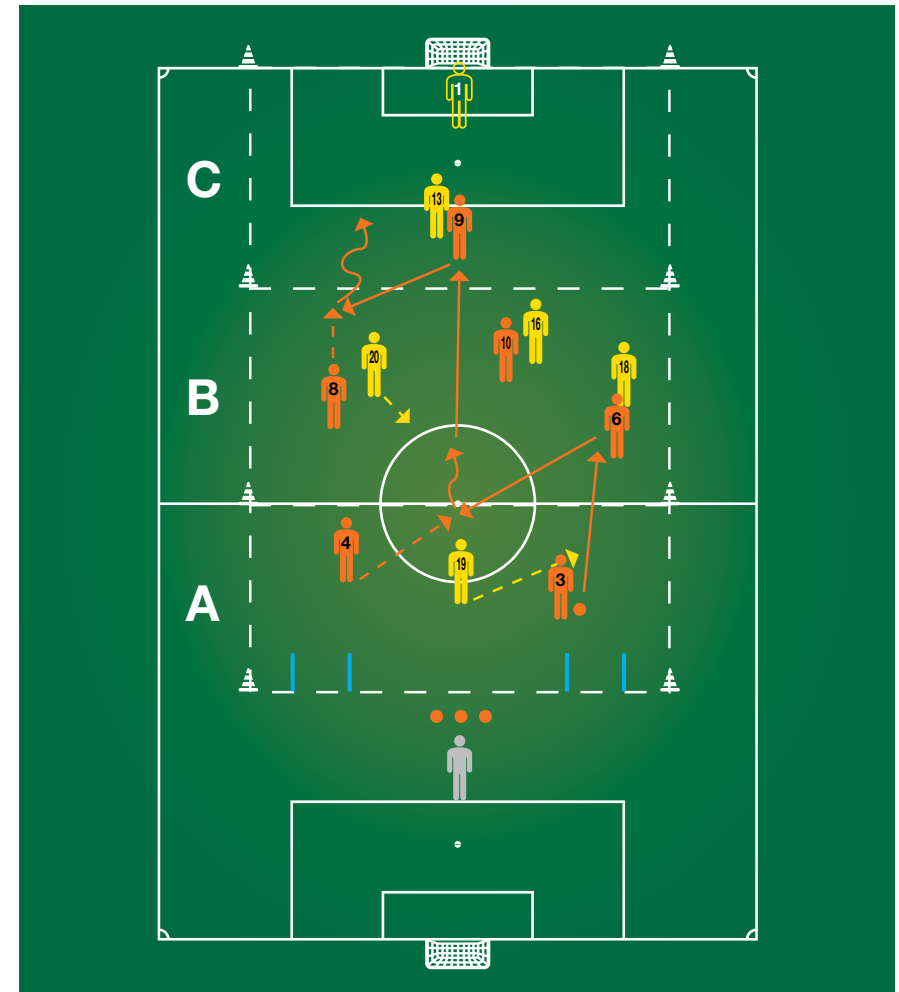
Midfield play Model Session 1

4. Training game - 7 v 7 (6 v 6 with goalkeepers):

• Field long and narrow to emphasise midfield play through central axis

• Both teams in a 1 (GK)-2-3-1 formation

• Offside rule applies

• Coaching 'on the run'
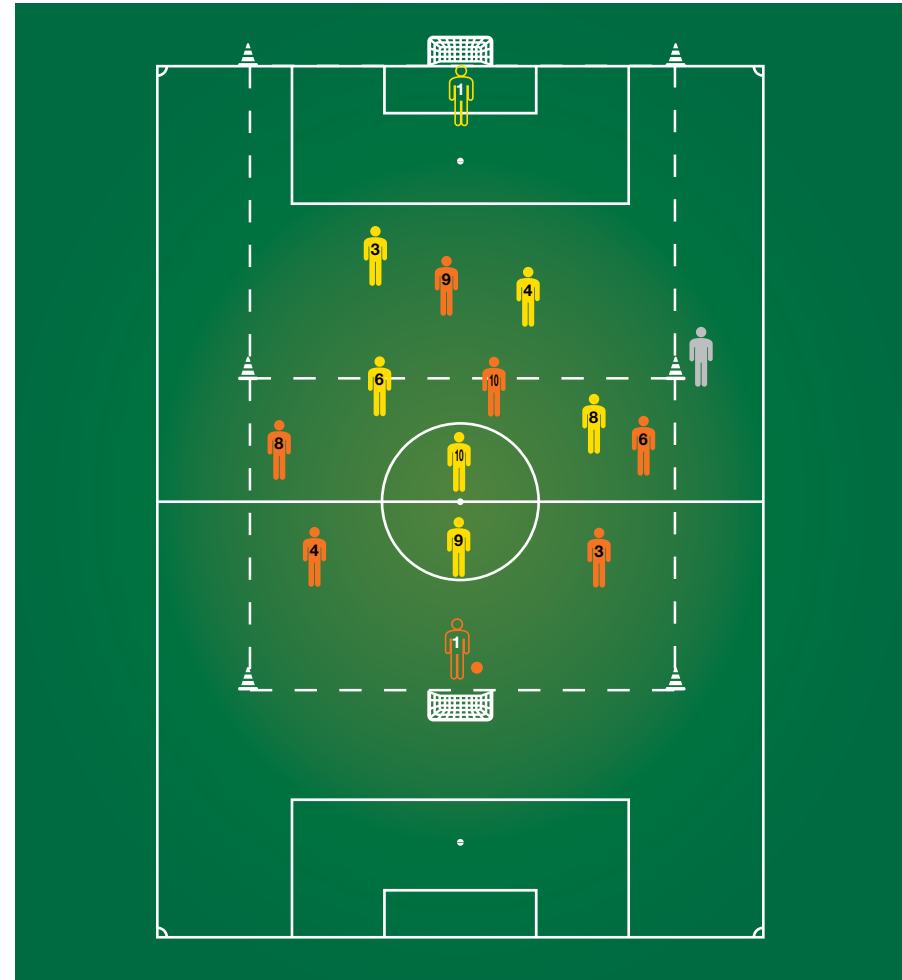
Midfield play Model Session 2

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Cones and players positioned as shown in diagram A.

• If the number of players allows/requires: 2 players per position or a similar organisation on the other half of the pitch

• At least 2 players at the starting position and 2 at the central cone

• The players pass the ball around in a 'logical' sequence (1-6)

• Players follow their pass to the next position

• Now go the other way around and players #6 and #8 adjust accordingly

Possible Coaches Remarks:

• "Pass precision and ball speed"

• "Check off before asking/receiving the ball"

• "Now we go in the opposite direction"

• "Gradually increase your running speed"
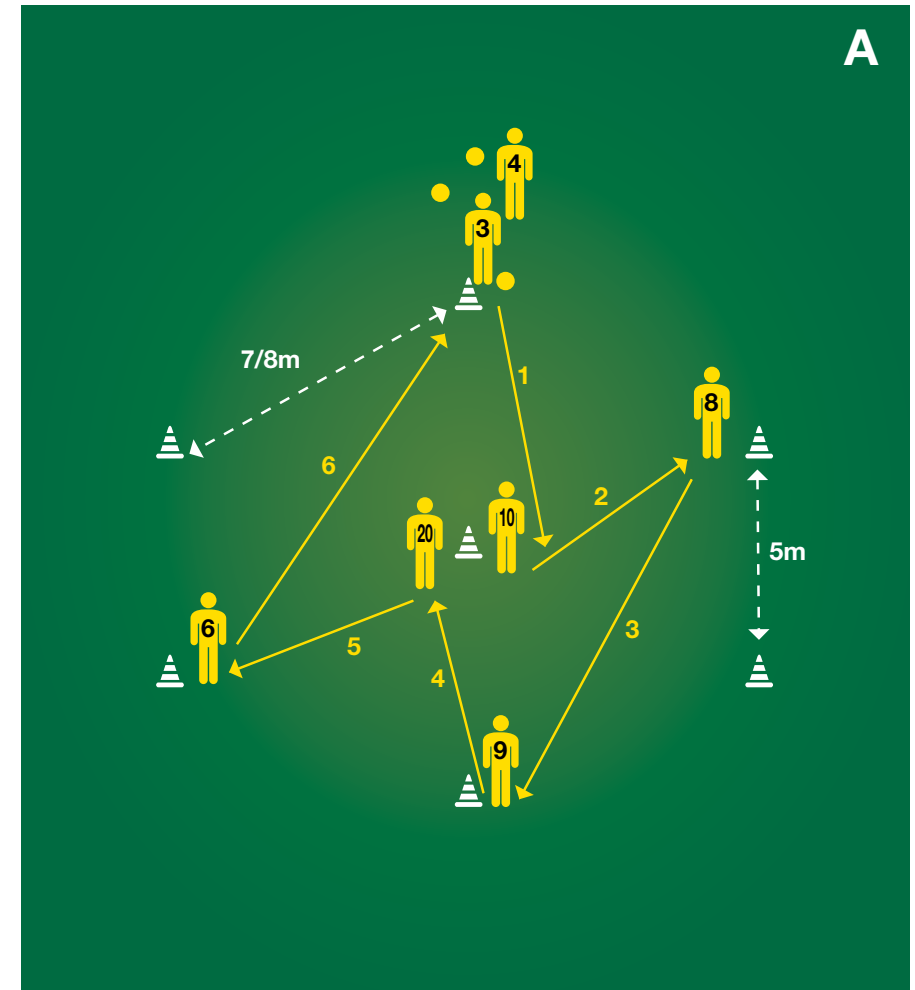
Midfield play Model Session 2

- "Here is another variation" (see diagram B)

- Player rotations are now as follows: #3 goes to #8, #8 to #9, #9 to #6 and #6 back to #1 (then recommence)

- #10 and #20 stay in the middle

- "Now just improvise but use a logical order and every player must touch the ball"

Remark:

- Position the exercise in a 'realistic' area of the field
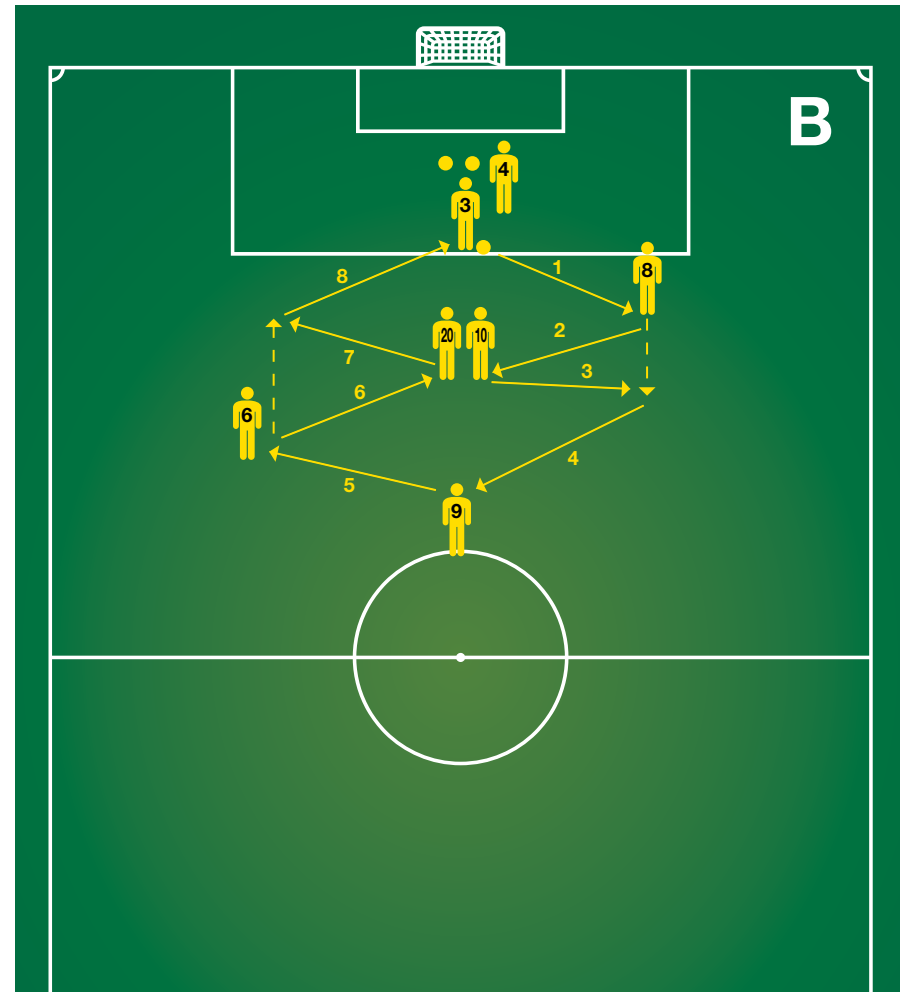
Midfield play Model Session 2

2. Positioning game: 3 v 3 + 2 (5 v 3)

• A grid of approximately 30m x 25m, positioned in 'game realistic' area of the field (see diagram C)

• Two groups of 3 outfield players

• One team consisting of the midfield players #6-8 and #10 (yellow in diagram)

• #3 and #9 are neutral players, positioned on each back line

• The players, as far as the game allows, in 'logical' positions

• #3 starts the game for yellow who must try to pass the ball on the ground to #9 on the opposite side

• #9 must now pass the ball back across the grid to #3, who starts again

• If orange wins the ball, they must try to pass to #9 who restarts the game with orange in possession and yellow defending

• If the pass across the grid is intercepted (or #3 is not able to properly control it), the game restarts with #9 and possession for orange

Steps up or down:

• Make grids bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Free/minimum number of passes before you can play to #3 or #9

• 1 point for every completed sequence
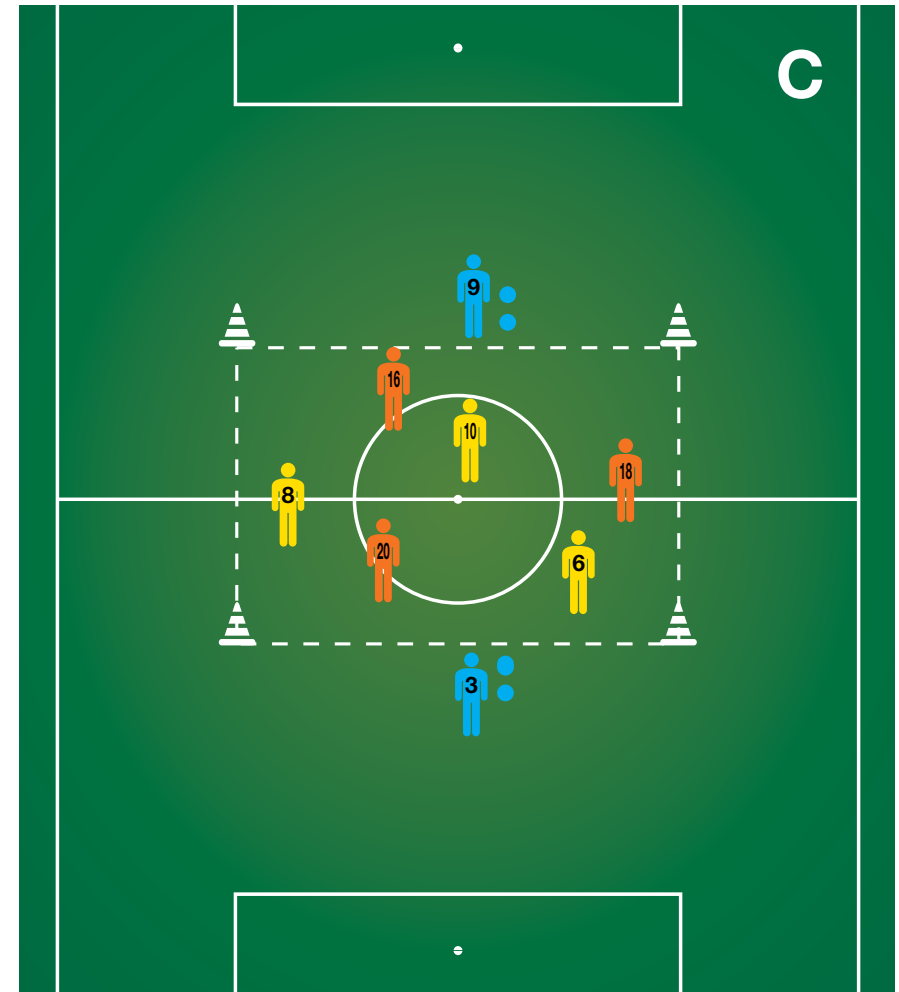
Midfield play Model Session 2

3. Game training component:

- Position a second 25m-50m grid adjacent to the one of the positioning game, as shown in diagram D

- Inside this grid are the defenders #2; 3; 4 and 5 of the yellow team

- Goalkeeper #1 serves them a ball and they combine amongst each other till there is a good situation to pass to one of the midfielders in the adjacent grid

- The midfielders try to pass into one of the two small goals, using #9 as a bouncer

- If the orange team intercepts the ball, they try to pass the ball into the hands of #1

- After every successful/unsuccessful attempt: #1 restarts again

- Next step is to introduce 1 or more opponent(s) in the grid of the defenders

This organisation is aimed at practicing midfield play in relation to building-up
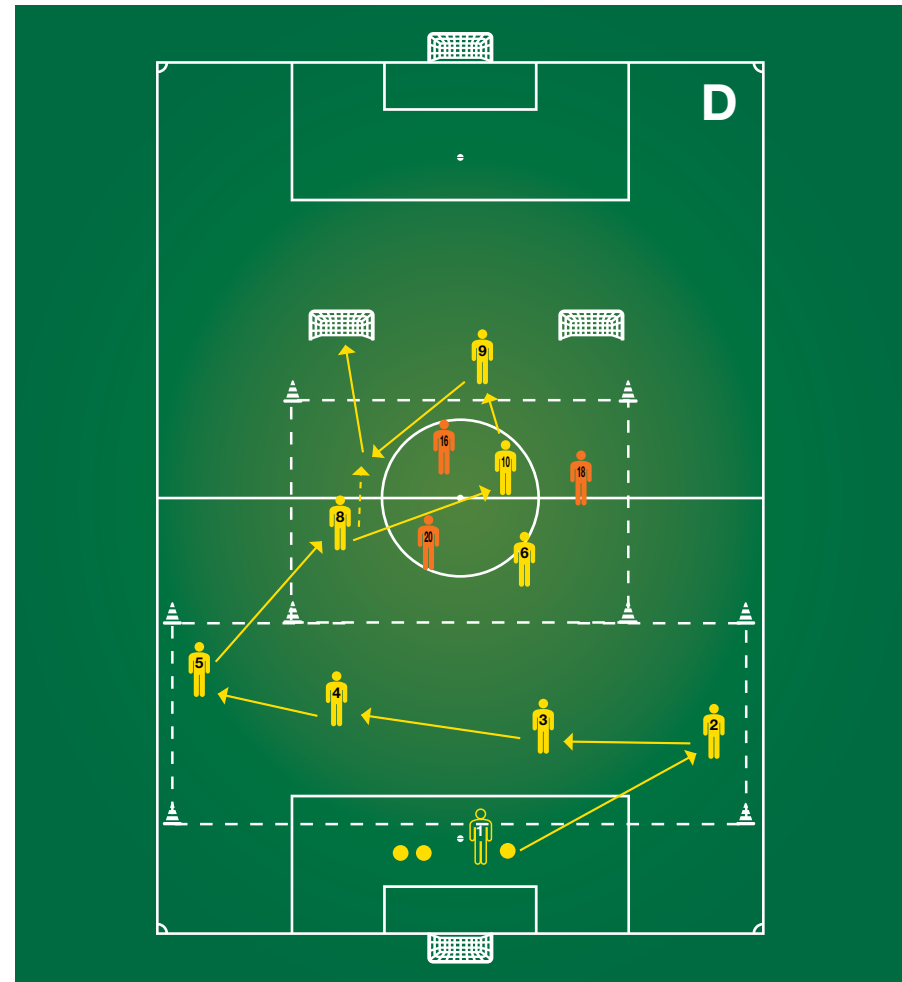
Midfield play Model Session 2

• We can also apply the same principle to practice midfield play in relation to attacking by placing the adjacent grid at the opposite end of the midfield grid (see diagram E)

• The midfielders must create/use the right opportunity to pass to one of the 3 attackers in the adjacent grid, who must try to score against 1, 2 or 3 defenders

Progression:

• One midfielder can join the attack (with or without the ball)
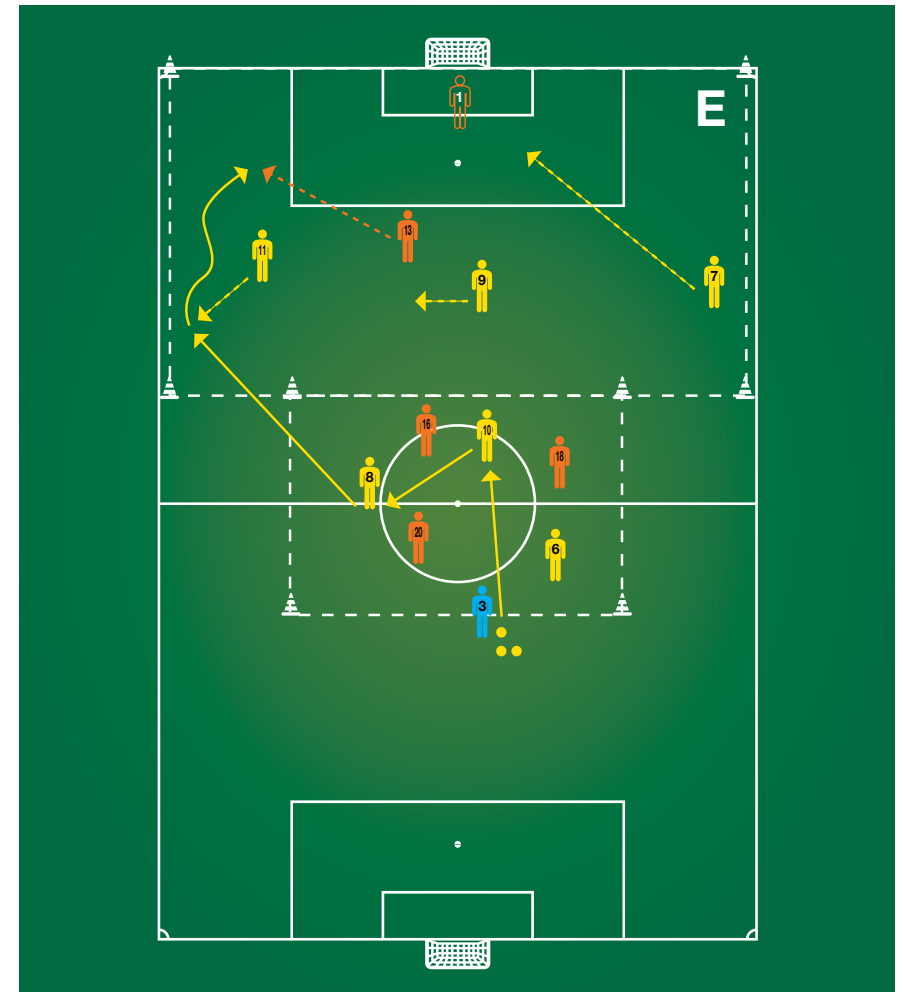
Midfield play Model Session 2

4. Training game

- 8 v 8, normal rules apply (diagram F)

- Formation yellow: 1-4-3-1

- Formation orange: 1-2-3-3

- If our training aim is to improve <u>midfield play in relation to building-up</u> we focus on the execution of the **yellow team**

- If our training aim is to improve <u>midfield play in relation to attacking</u> we focus on the execution of the **orange team**

Attacking Model Session 1 (central areas)

1. Warm-up: passing exercise (diagram A)

• Players in game positions as shown in diagram A

• At least 2 players on positions #3, #4 and #10 (also possible on the other positions)

• #6 checks off and asks for the ball; #3 passes to #6 and coaches "turn" (1)

• #6 receives and turns (2) followed by a pass to #9 (3)

• #9 bounces with '3rd man' #10 (4) who shoots at goal (5)

• Players move to the next positions: #3 to #6; #6 to #10; #10 to #9; #9 jogs back to position #3

• At the beginning the shot must be aimed towards the hands of the goalkeeper who rolls the ball back to #9, who dribbles it back to the starting position (6).

• Now repeat the same with #4 passing to #8, etc

• **Gradually** increase the shooting power (it's still warming-up!)

Attacking Model Session 1 (central areas)

- Introduce a variation (see diagram B)

- Give #9 the option to bounce with #10 (4a/5a) or turn away and finish themselves (4b/5b)

Coaches focus points

- Pass precision and pass direction (to proper foot; proper ball speed)

- Tuning of actions

- Anticipation & movement without ball

- Verbal and non-verbal communication
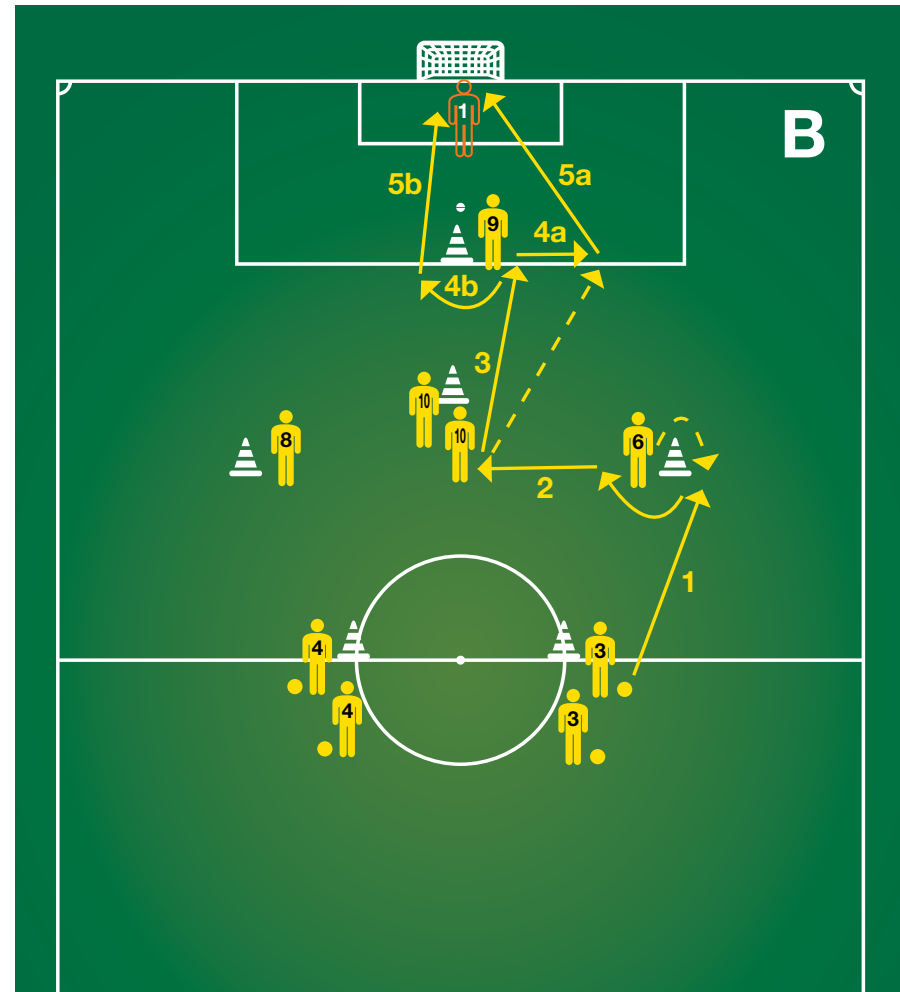
Attacking Model Session 1 (central areas)

2. Positioning game: 5 v 4

- A grid of approximately 30m x 30m (dependent on level of players)

- 2 groups of 4 outfield players; one group consisting of the players #6-8-9-10

- 2 goalkeepers positioned behind each back line

- 5 (yellow) keep possession against 4 (orange)

- Players as much as possible in their game positions, with #10 in the middle (see diagram)

- Provide 4 options (left; right; central and far) for the player on the ball through proper positioning

- When orange wins the ball, they must try to pass to their goalkeeper, the game continues with orange in possession and yellow defending

- If a yellow player passes the ball out of the grid, the coach immediately serves a new ball to the orange goalkeeper
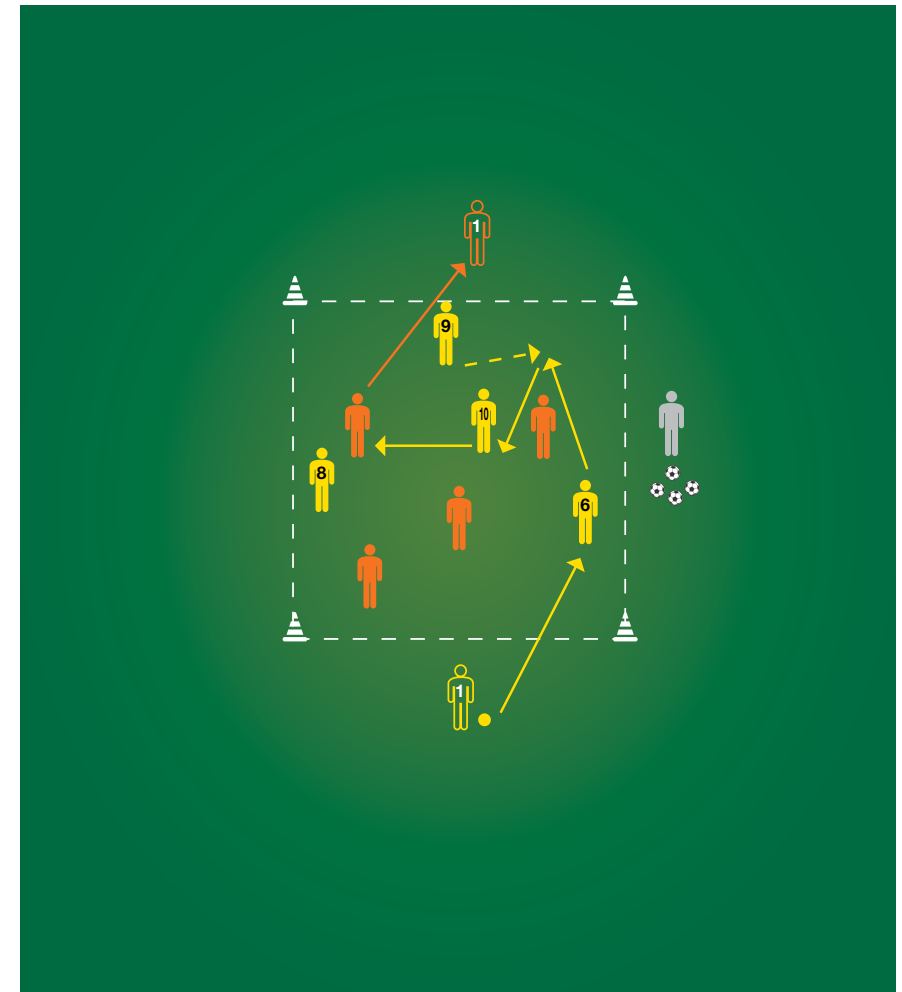
Attacking Model Session 1 (central areas)

Steps up or down:

• Make grid bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

Remark:

• Position the grid in a 'game realistic' area of the field (see diagram on the right)
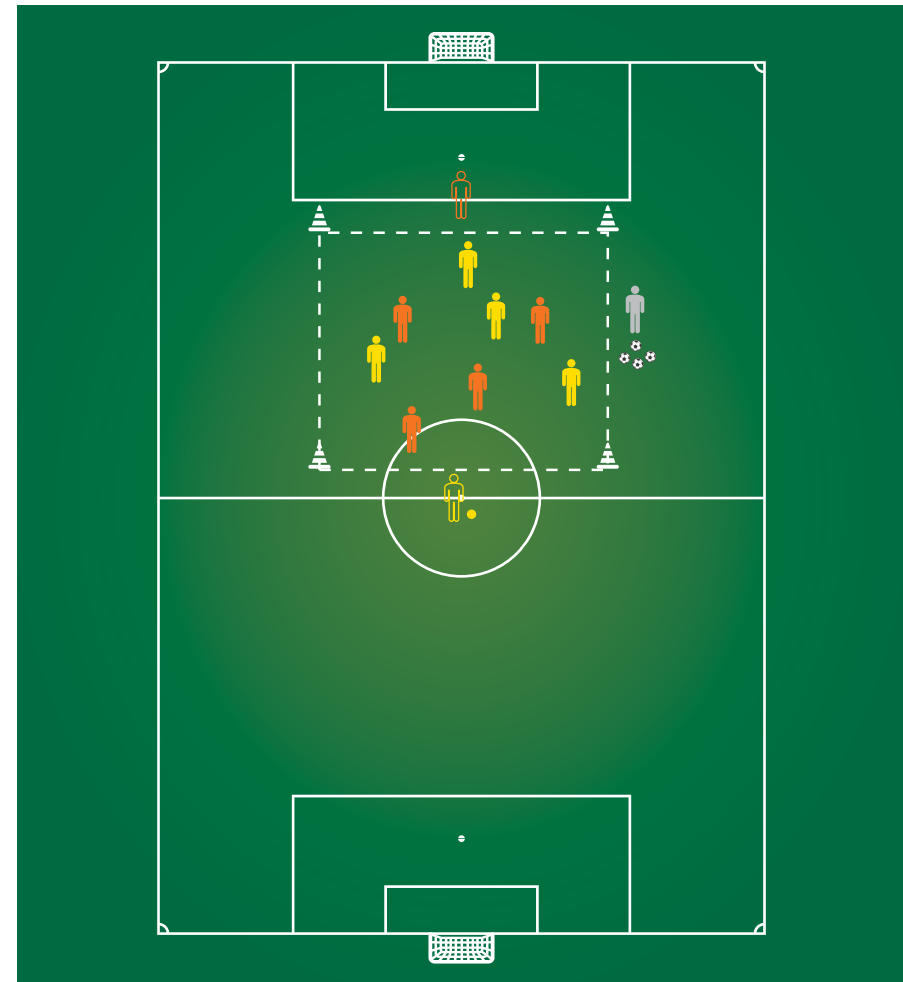
Attacking Model Session 1 (central areas)

3. Game training component:

• Starting situation: two grids A & B with the players positioned as shown in diagram on the right

• The players must stay in their designated areas

• An attack starts with a pass from #3 to one of the yellow midfield players #6-8-10

• They play in grid A against 2 orange opponents (3 v 2) and must try to get one player into grid B

• In grid B stands yellow striker #9 and one orange defender

• The yellow midfielders can dribble into grid B (when free) or use #9 as a bouncer

• In grid B yellow must utilise the 2 v 1 numerical advantage and score

• Offside applies in grid B

• When the defenders win the ball in grid A, they can score in two small goals (one counter attack only, then restart)

Progression:

• Add 3rd orange player in grid A, #3 yellow now either passes or dribbles with ball into grid A to create a 4 v 3 situation
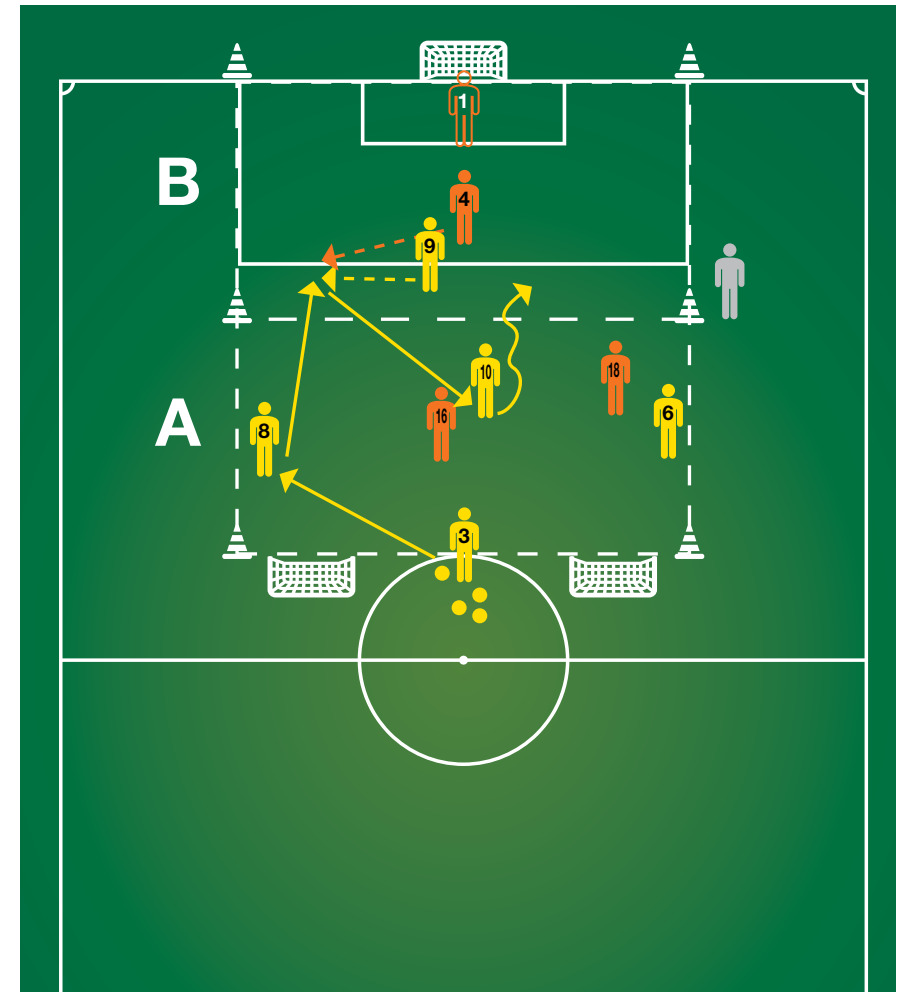
Attacking Model Session 1 (central areas)

4. Training game: 5 v 5 + goalkeeper

- Yellow team attacks the big goal, orange can score in the small goals

- Normal rules, including offside

- Yellow team in 1(DF)-3(MF)-1(FW) formation

- Orange team in GK-2(DF)-3(MF) formation

- Coaching 'on the run'
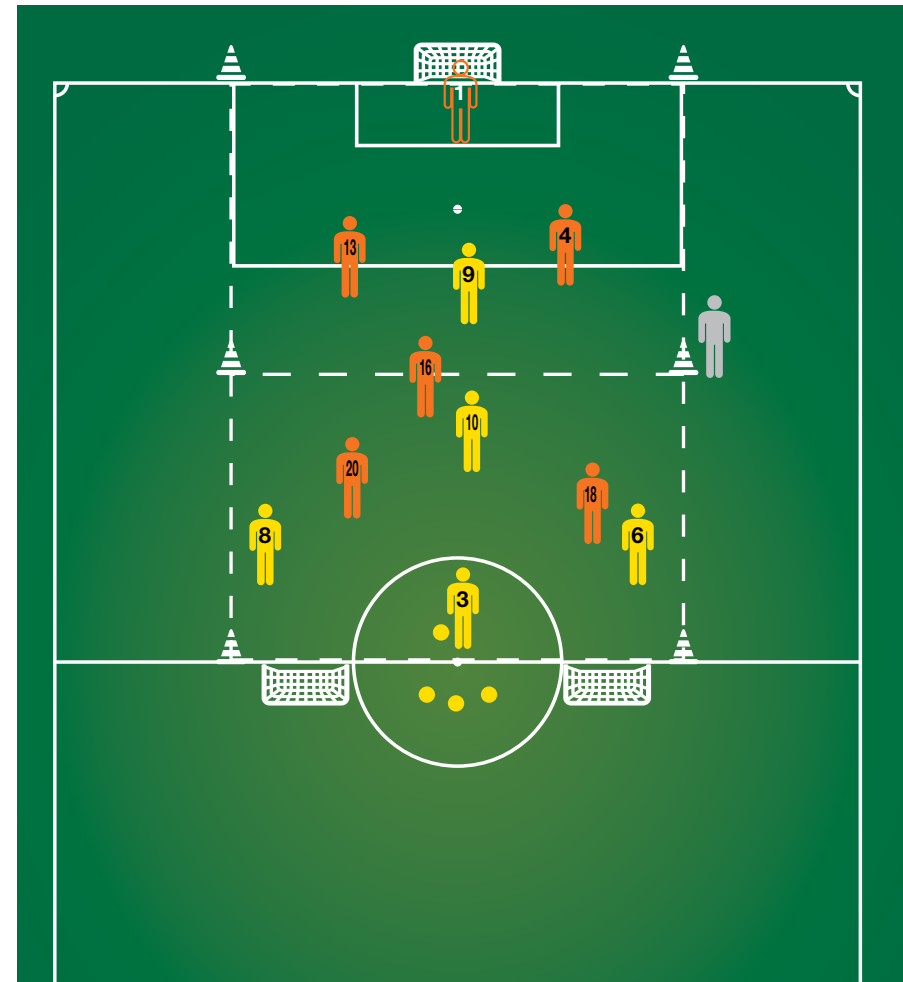
Attacking Model Session 2 (wide areas)

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Players in their game positions (see diagram)

• Right side players (yellow) and left side players (orange) opposite of one another but not interfering with each other

• Minimum 2 players in the positions #3 & #4

• In case of bigger numbers: set up a similar organisation on the other wing

• Yellow works from top down; orange from bottom up (#7 yellow passes to #4 orange who starts the same combination in the opposite direction till #11 orange passes the ball again to yellow #3)

• All players follow their pass to the next position but only on their own team

• i.e. After pass 5 to orange #4, yellow #7 goes to the position of yellow #3 (same for orange #11: to position #4).

• Start with prescribed pattern (as shown)

• Introduce a 2nd (3rd?) pattern

Progression:

• Now yellow passes with passive resistance of orange: choose the right option depending on the defensive positioning of the opposing players (this option is for advanced players only)
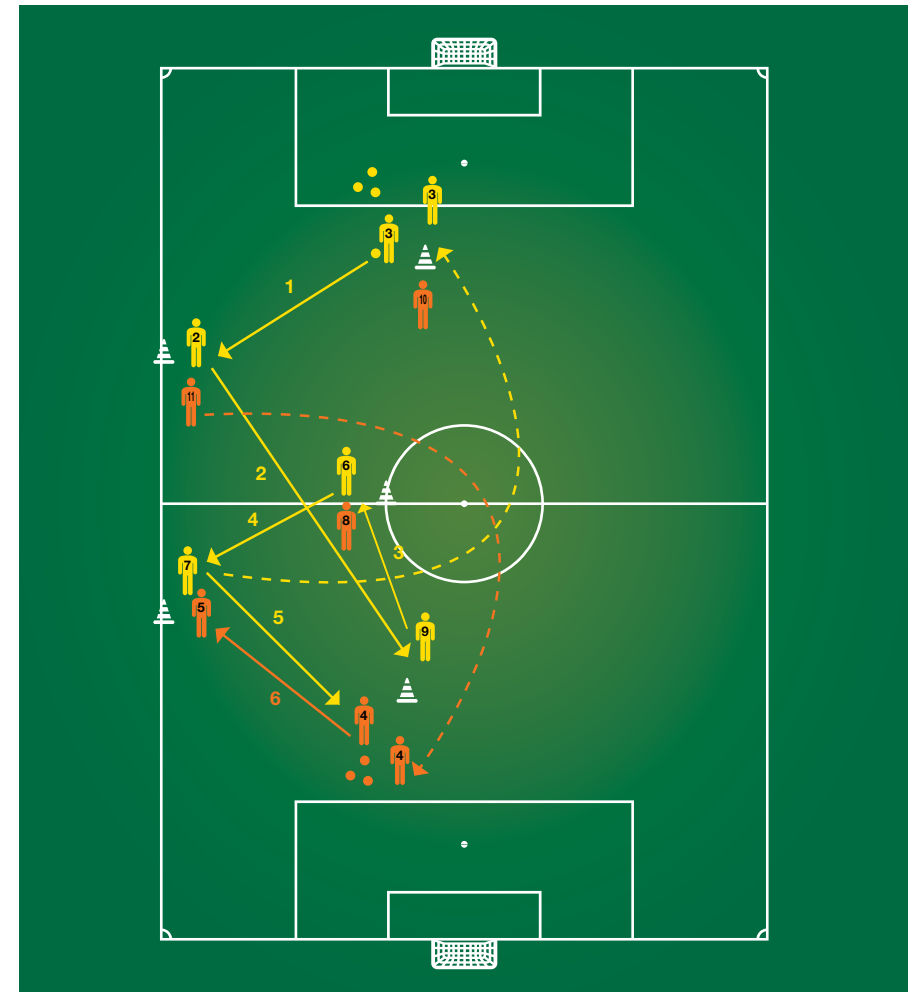
Attacking Model Session 2 (wide areas)

2. Positioning game: 7 v 4

- 2 grids of approximately 30m x 30m (A & C) separated by a grid of 5m x 30m (B)

- 2 groups of 4 outfield players

- Yellow consisting of the players #2-3-6-7

- Orange consisting of the players #4-5-8-11

- #9 and #10 are neutral players who always play with the team in possession; one in grid B the other in the grid where the positioning game takes place (see diagram)

- 2 goalkeepers positioned on each back line

- #7 (yellow) keep possession against #4 (orange)

- Players as much as possible in their game positions (especially the team in BP)

- Provide 4 options (left; right; central and far) for the player on the ball through proper positioning

- When orange wins the ball in grid A, they must try to pass to #9 in grid B or their goalkeeper at the far end

- If they succeed, all players cross over to grid C where the game continues with orange in possession and yellow defending

- If a yellow player passes the ball out of the grid, the coach immediately serves a new ball to the orange goalkeeper and the game restarts in grid C with possession for orange

Attacking Model Session 2 (wide areas)

Steps up or down:

• Make grids bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Stop-start change of grids

• 'Flying' change of grids

Remark:

• Position the grids in 'game realistic' areas of the field (see diagram on the right)
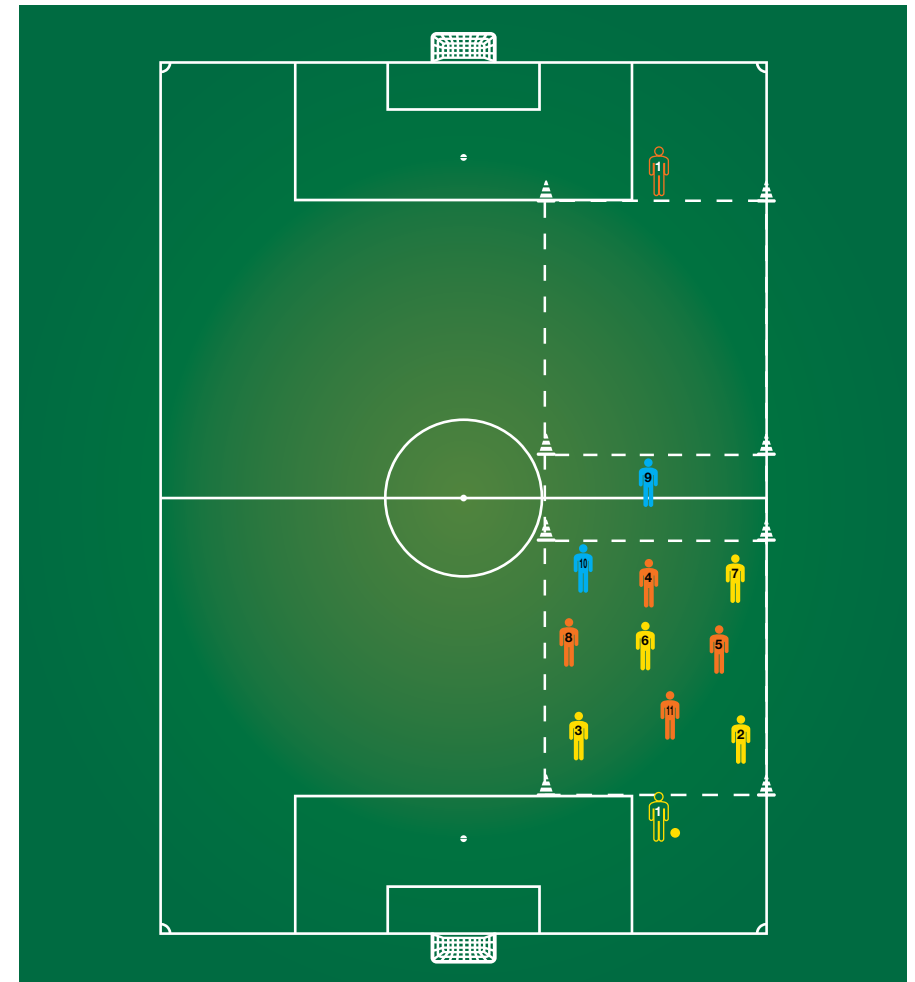
Attacking Model Session 2 (wide areas)

3. Game training component:

• Three grids A, B and C as shown in diagram on the right

• In grid A, #11 yellow and an orange defender (#12); #5 yellow is positioned outside the grid with plenty of balls

• In grid B, #9 & #10 yellow and an orange defender (#3) plus a goalkeeper

• In grid C, #7 yellow and an orange defender (#15) with yellow #2 outside the grid

• #2 & #5 yellow alternately serve a ball to respectively #7 & #11

• #2-7 and #5-11 must beat the orange defenders in their respective grids through effective wing play and deliver a cross to #9 & #10 in grid B who try to finish 2 v 1

• The defenders in grids A & C cannot defend beyond the red dotted line

Wing play options:

• The winger beats the defender 1 v 1 (situation 1)

• The winger plays a wall pass with #9 or #10 (situation 2)

Attacking Model Session 2 (wide areas)

More wing play options:

• The full-back overlaps the winger to create a 2 v 1 (situation 3)

• The winger bounces with the full-back and becomes the 3rd man via
  a combination with #9 or #10 (situation 4)

The option selected by the attacking player often depends on the action of the
defender. The coach may need to help the players develop their awareness and
insight to select the most effective option.

Communication between the players is essential.

Also pay attention to the positioning and finishing of #9 & #10
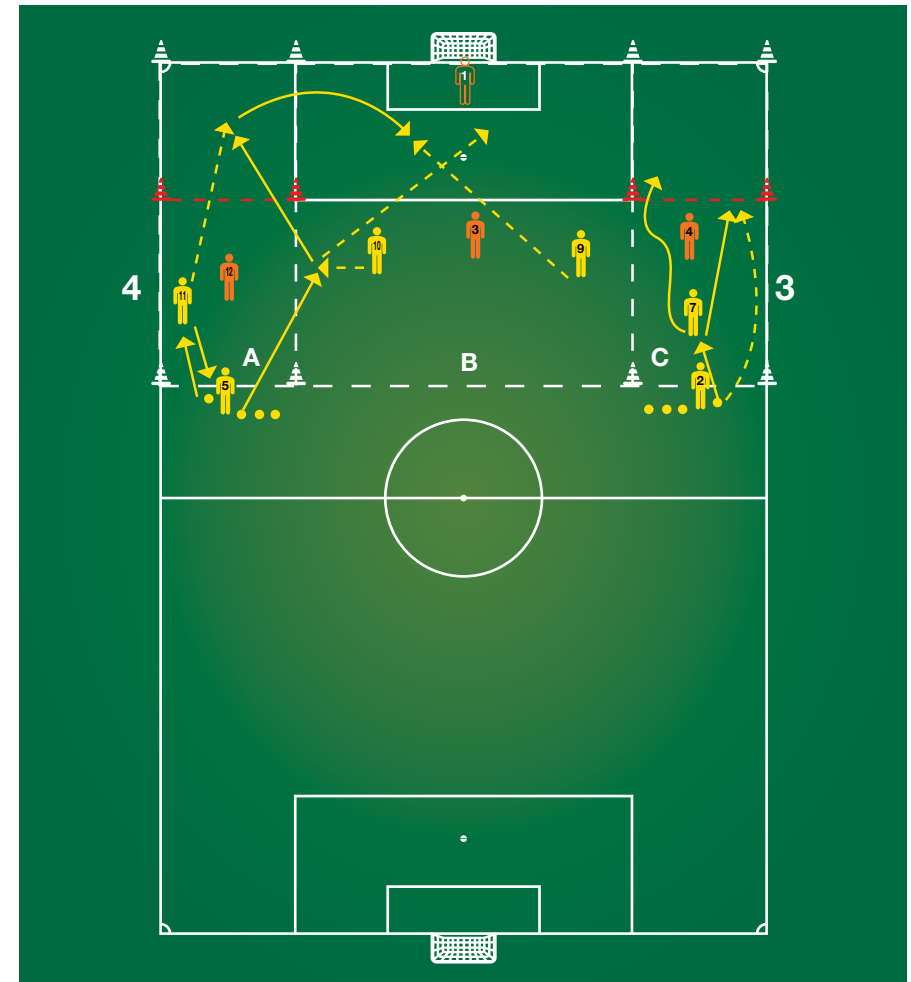
Attacking Model Session 2 (wide areas)

4. Training game: 5 v 5 + goalkeepers

• The field is positioned in a wide area of the full pitch (see diagram)

• Pitch length: box to box (70m)

• Pitch width: central axis to sideline (35m), divided by the halfway line

• Two portable goals (or poles) placed as shown (balls next to the goals)

• The coach with balls on the halfway line

• Offside rule applies!

• Players in their usual 'game positions'

• In this particular game, it means that the right side of the team (#2-3-6-7)
  + striker #9 plays against the left side of the team (#4-5-8-11)
  + central midfielder #10. It is essential that the coach maintains realistic positions relative to a full field game (this explains the positions of the goals)

• #9 and #10 to change teams halfway through the game

• **By setting the game up this way, wing play will automatically be emphasised**

Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 1

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

- Players #2; 3; 4; 5; 6 & 8 yellow and #7; 9; 10 & 11 orange position themselves as shown in diagram A

- At least two players at the starting position (yellow #3)

- At the coach's signal, #3 starts the passing drill as shown (1-6) with the yellow players following their pass to the next position/cone

- As the ball moves the orange attackers must move as a unit too, keeping their relative distances the same

- After pass 1 they must be in the positions indicated by the dotted arrows in diagram A

- Orange #7 must be in a position where they can pressure both #4 and #8 yellow when the ball is on the opposite side (e.g. with yellow #2)

- Every new pass all four orange players shift and adjust their positions
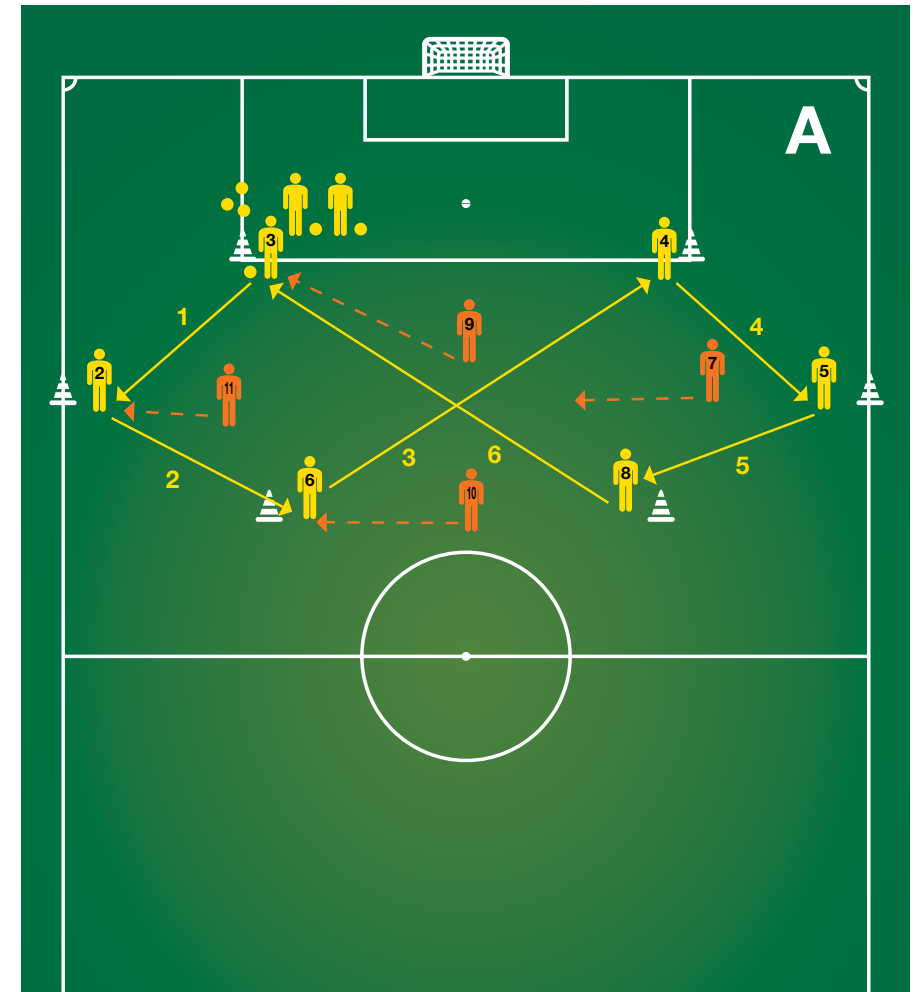
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 1

• At pass 4 the positions of the orange players are as shown in diagram B

Progression:

• Increase passing and running speed

• Sudden change of pass direction on coach's call (#3 yellow to #4; #4 to #5 etc)

• Introduce a second passing sequence

• Free instead of prescribed passing sequence

Remark:

• Rotate the four attackers regularly with another group of attackers
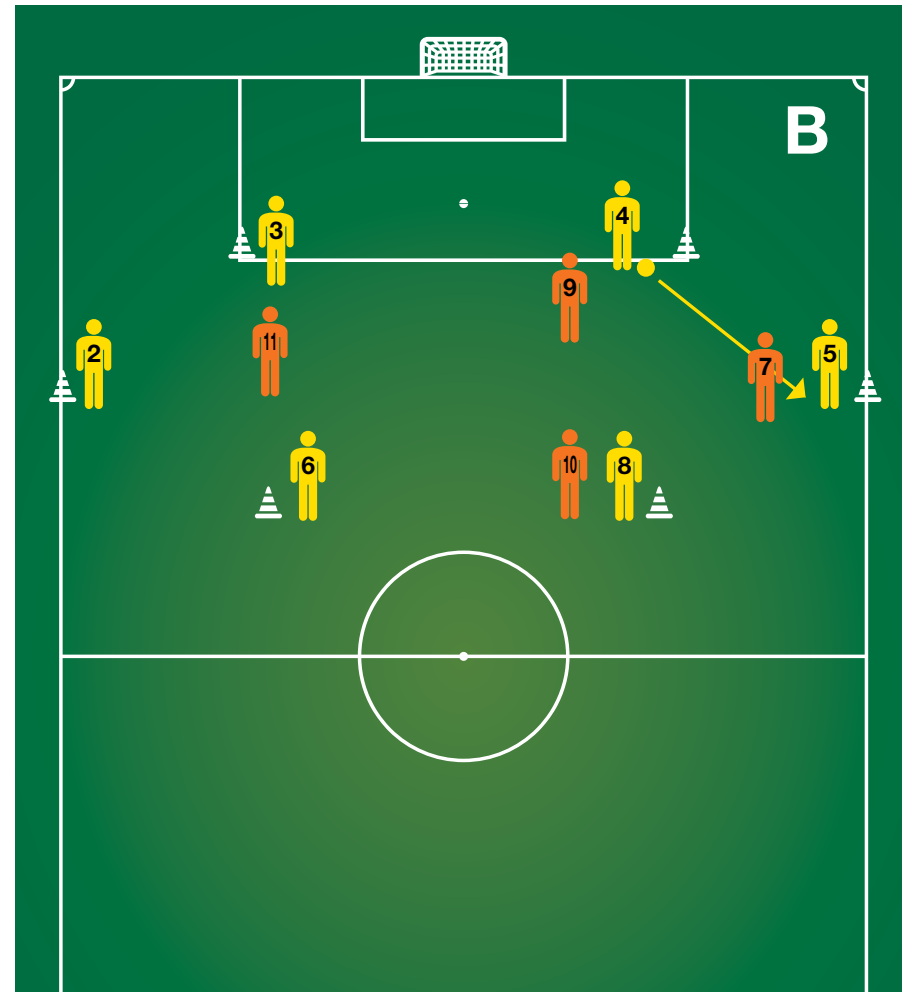
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 1

2. Positioning game: 7 v 4

• A grid of approximately 40m x 40m

• 2 teams, orange and yellow

• Yellow consisting of the outfield players #2-3-4-5-6 and the goalkeepers #1 and #22. Orange consisting of the players #7-9-10-11

• Goalkeeper #1 in the goal; #22 positioned on the opposite back line (see diagram on the right)

• Players as much as possible in their game positions

• #1 yellow starts the game and yellow must try to pass the ball on the ground to #22

• #22 must pass the ball back to #1 who must catch the ball inside the 6 yard box

• If they succeed, #1 starts again (1 point for yellow)

• If orange wins the ball they try to score (2 or 3 points for a goal)

• If #1 yellow doesn't catch the ball inside the 6 yard box, the coach immediately serves a ball to orange

Steps up or down:

• Make the grid bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches for the yellow outfield players

• Free/limited touches (1/2) for yellow #22
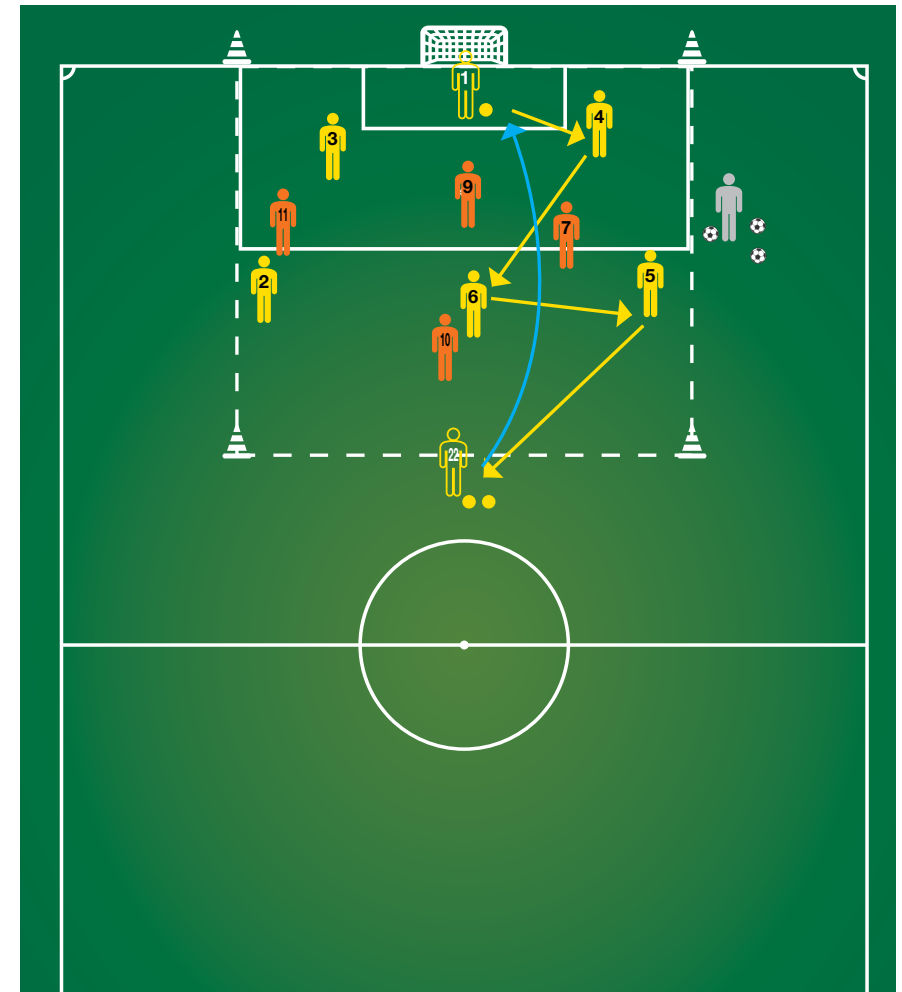
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 1

3. Game training component: 5 v 3

- A grid of approximately 50m x 50m divided by a halfway line (see diagram A)

- Yellow defence (#1-2-3-4-5) playing out from the back, orange attack (#7-9-11) must disrupt and pressure yellow's possession

- Goalkeeper (yellow #1) starts every action by serving the ball to #2-3-4 or #5

- The defenders combine till one player can run with the ball across the back line

- The orange team must prevent this and try to win the ball

- If orange wins the ball "attack the goal and try to score" (one attempt only). If orange loses the ball the action has ended

- The offside rule applies

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Work as a unit, keeping your relative distances short"

- "Press the player with the ball"

- "Mark/pressure the players closest to the ball and leave the ones which are the furthest away free"

- "You must stay in your positions and keep your formation"

Step up/down (for orange!)

- Make the pitch wider/narrower

- Free/limited touches (2/3) for yellow

- Free/limited time for yellow to get the ball across the back line
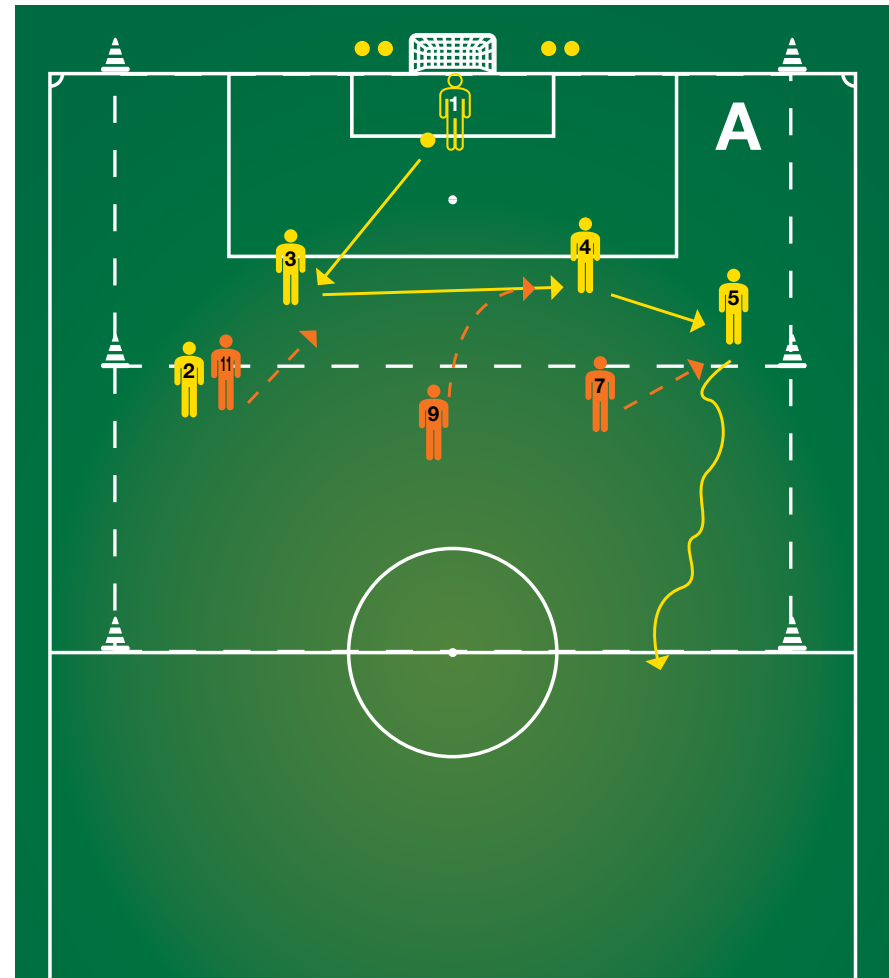
Remark:

- Yellow is not allowed to go back once the ball has crossed the halfway line of the grid

Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 1

Progression:

• When the ball has crossed the halfway line of the grid, yellow can now score by passing through one of the two gate(s) positioned on the back line

Option 1 (diagram B):

• Two 5m gates on the wings: this invites yellow to play out using their full-backs. The coach focuses on coaching orange how to prevent/disrupt this

Option 2 (diagram C):

• One central 5m-7m gate (diagram C): this invites yellow to play out using their central defenders. The coach focuses on coaching orange how to prevent/disrupt this
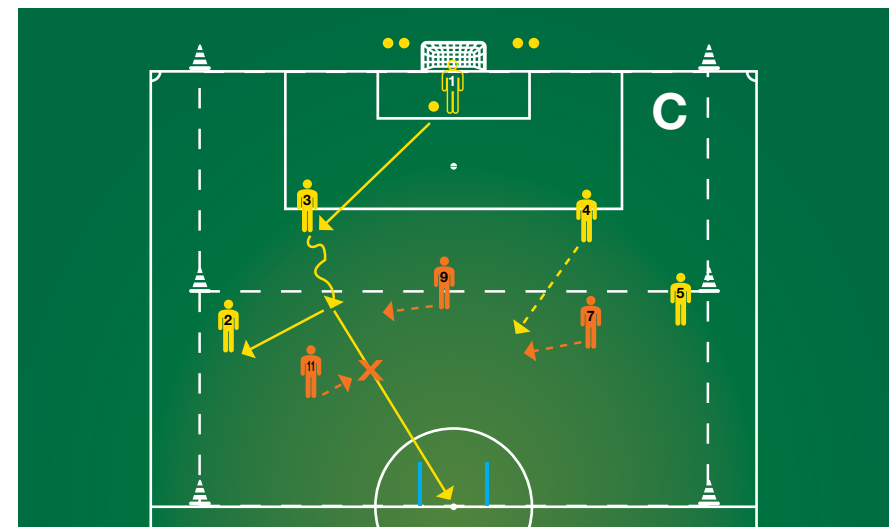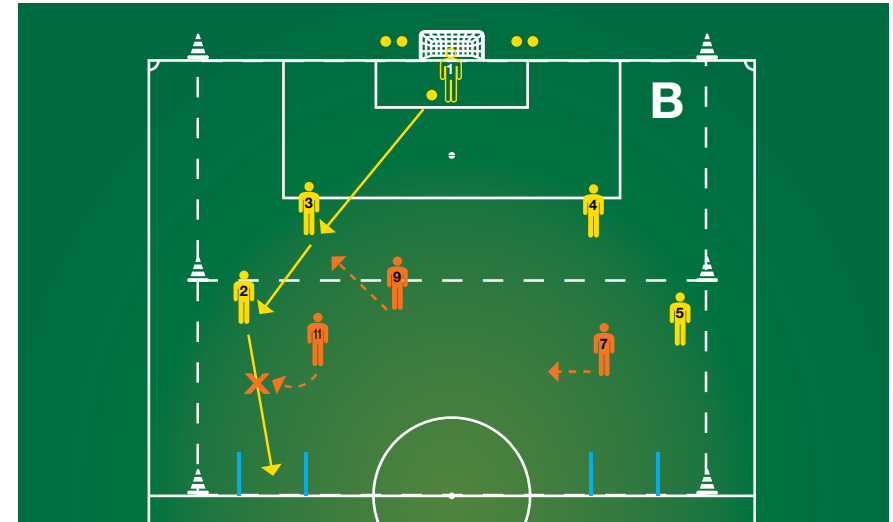
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 1

4. Training Game: 6 v 6 + goalkeepers (see diagram)

• Orange is the team the coach focuses on with regards to disrupting/pressuring. It consists of a GK and the MF's #6, 8 and 10 and the FW's #7, #9, and #11 (formation 1-3-3)

• Yellow consists of a GK and the DF's #2, 3, 4 and 5 plus a holding MF #16 and the FW #19 (formation 1-4-1-1)

• It is important that the coach sees to it that the formations stay intact

• Offside rule applies

Variation:

• Orange defends two small goals in wide areas instead of the big goal
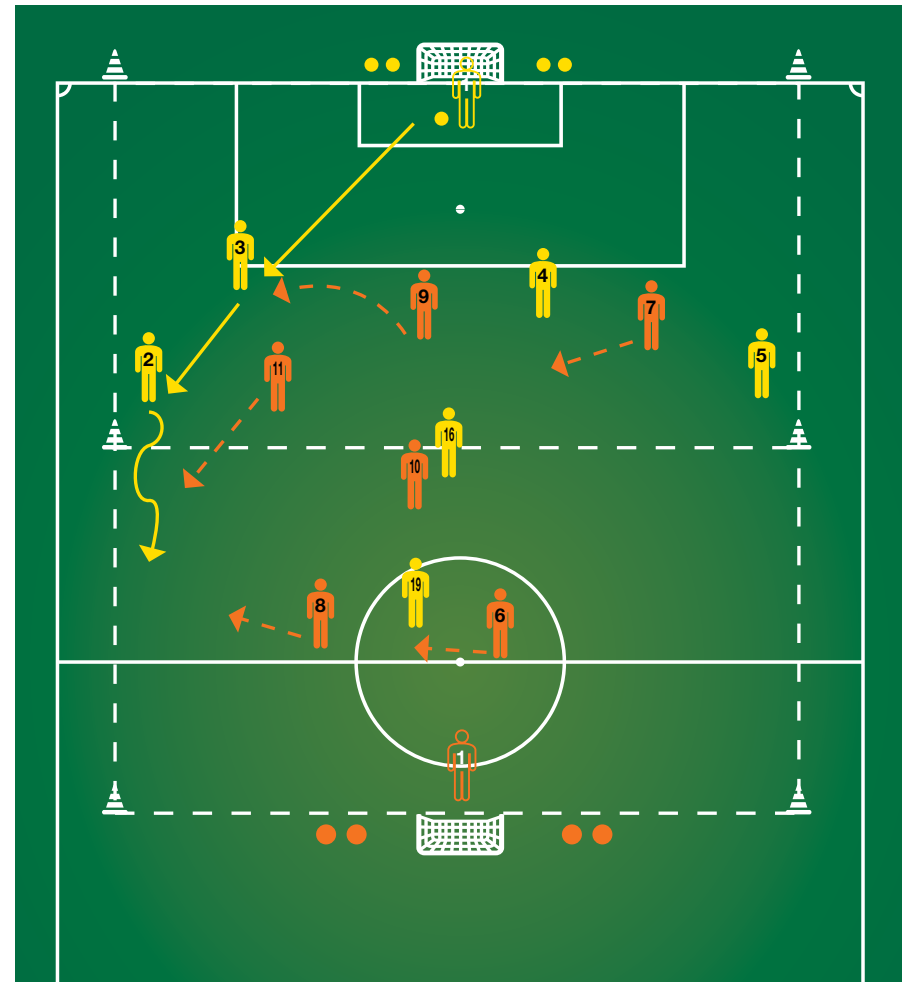
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 2

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Two groups of 8 players position themselves in a grid of approximately 35m x 50m as shown in diagram on the right

• Yellow #3 starts the passing exercise

• Yellow players pass the ball in a prescribed order as shown (1-8)

• Although the players stay in their positions, they must not be 'static' but check off and anticipate; etc

• The orange players 'pressure' the ball as a unit without intercepting the ball or disrupting the passing sequence

Progression:

• To the left and to the right

• Change the role of the yellow and orange team

• Include intervals with dynamic stretches

• Increase the passing and ball speed

• Introduce a second passing sequence

• Free instead of prescribed passing sequence
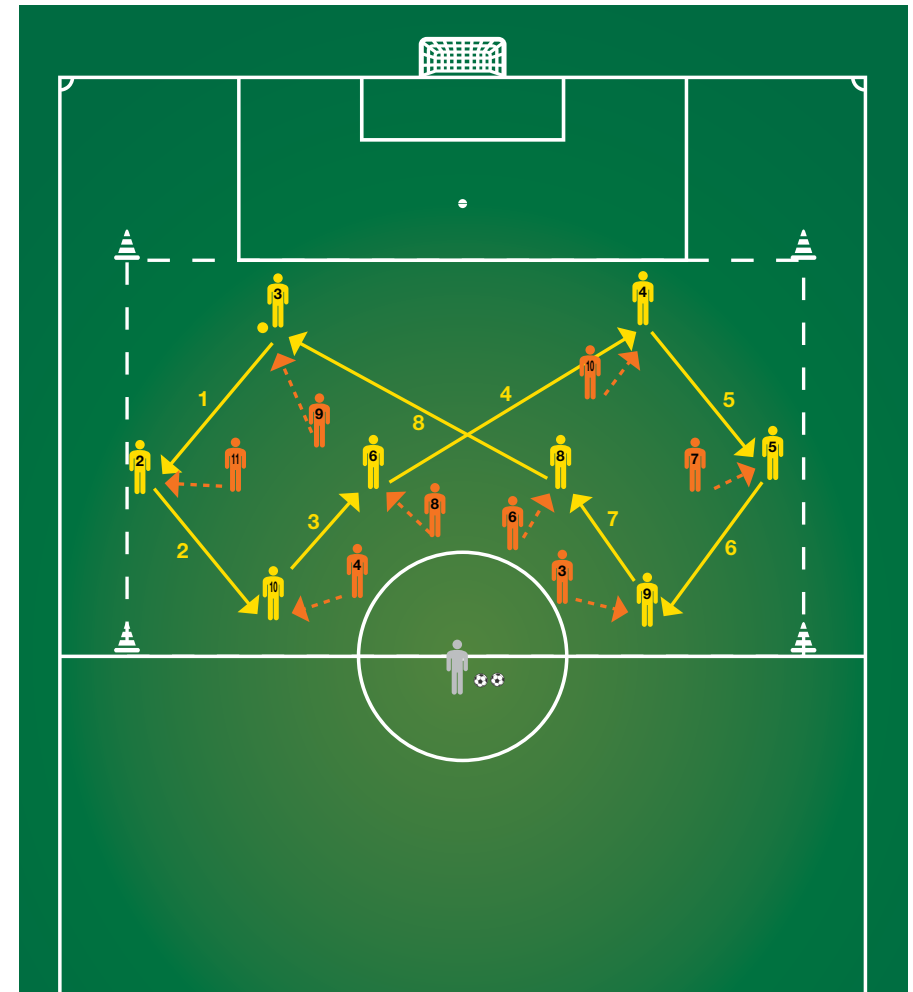
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 2

2. Positioning game: 8 v 8 + goalkeepers

- Use the grid from the passing exercise

- 2 goalkeepers on each back line in a 10m x 10m grid

- The GK starts the game for yellow team who must try to pass the ball into the hands of the GK on the opposite side

- Orange must prevent this by pressuring the ball

- Change of roles if orange wins the ball

Steps up or down:

- Make the grid(s) bigger/smaller

- Free/limited touches

- 1 point for every successful pass into the hands of the goalkeeper
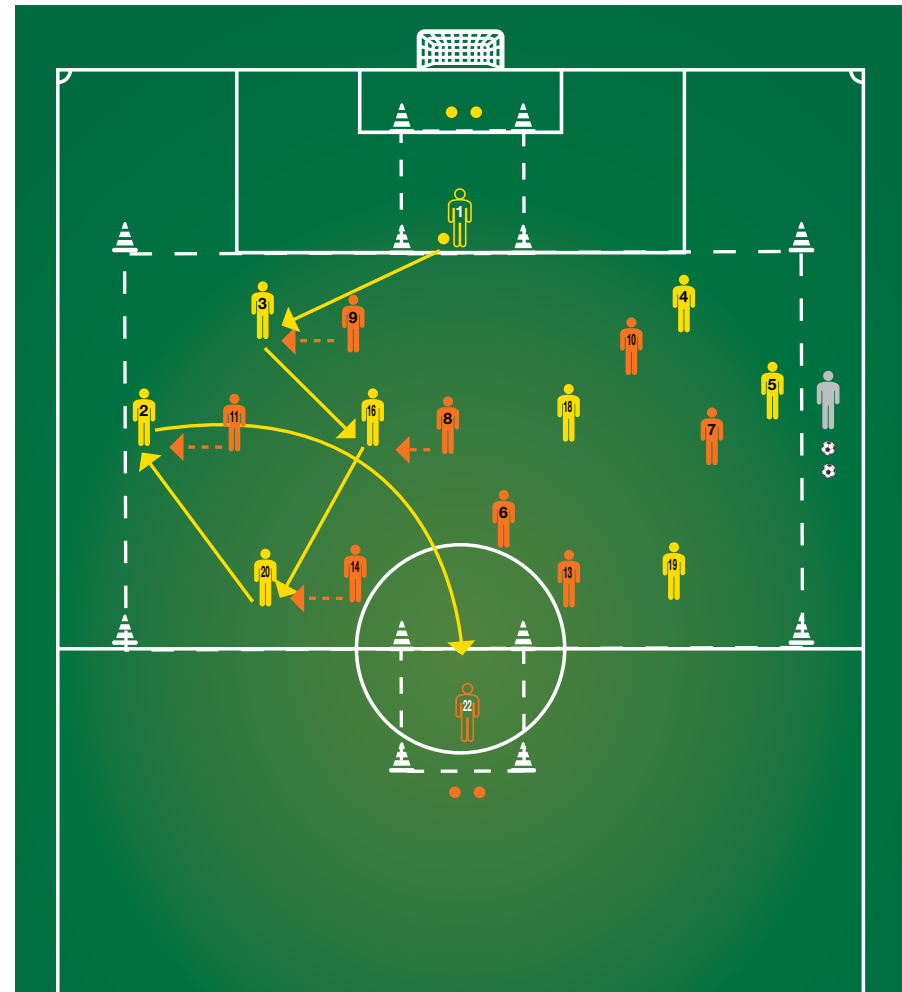
Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 2

3. Game training component:

- A grid of 50m (length) x 60m (width), with two 5m gates on one byline and 10m x 10m box on the other byline (as shown in the diagram)

- Yellow team consists of the DF's #2, 3, 4 and 5, MF's #16, 18 and 20, and FW #19 (formation 4-3-1)

- Orange team consists of FW's #11, 9 and 7, MF's #10, 8 and 6 and DF's #13 & 14 (formation 2-3-3)

- The coach starts by serving the ball to one of the yellow defenders

- The yellow team must try to pass the ball into the hands of the goalkeeper who is standing on the opposite side in the 10m x 10m box

- The orange team must prevent this by collective, coordinated pressure

- Offside rule applies

- If orange wins the ball they try to score in one of the two goals (one attempt only). If the defenders win the ball back the action has ended

- Every restart from the coach

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Immediately press the player with the ball"

- "Do not allow time and space to pass to the goalkeeper"

- "Mark/pressure the opponents close to the ball"

- "Work as a unit and keep your relative distances short"
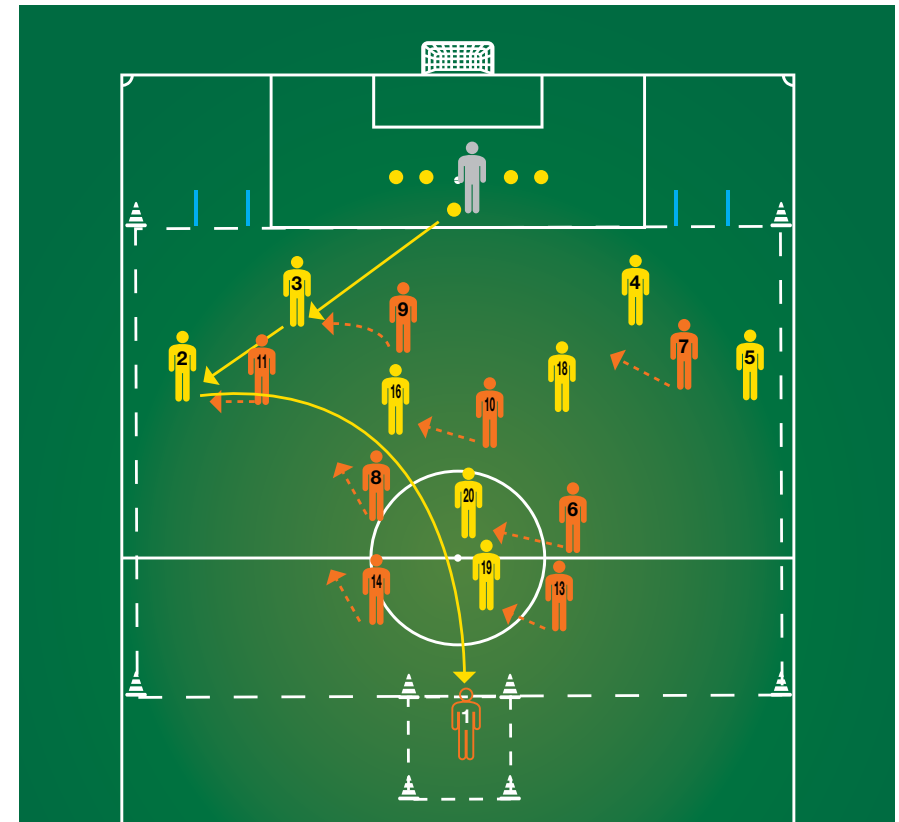
Step up/Step down:

- Free/limited touches for yellow

- Free/minimum number of passes before yellow can play to #1

Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 2

4. Training Game (Option 1):

• Continuing from the game training exercise on the previous page:

• Yellow team gets 1 point for every successful pass into the hands of the goalkeeper

• Orange gets 2 points for every pass through one of the two gates

Disturbing and Pressuring Model Session 2

4. Training Game (Option 2):

• 8 v 8 + goalkeepers on ¾ of a full pitch (box to box) divided by the halfway line

• The coach's focus is on the **orange** team with regards to **disrupting/ pressuring** the yellow team's ability to play out from the back

• The orange team must pressure yellow as early as possible and try to win the ball back in the yellow team's half. Every time they succeed in winning possession in the opposition half they will receive one bonus point

• The offside rule applies

Defending/recapturing Model Session 1 (zone defending)

1. Warm-up:

- Two grids (A and B) are positioned as shown in the diagram

- Grid A is 10m -15m long and pitch wide. Grid B is approximately 20m long and also pitch wide

- Grids A and B are divided by a line of 3 x 2 cones of different colours positioned across the width of the pitch

- The position of the cones must be exactly as shown in the diagram

1. Blue cones; width of the penalty box

2. Red and yellow cones; sideline-central axis

- Four yellow defenders #2, 3, 4 and 5 position themselves in grid A, spread between the blue cones at an equal distance

- Five (or more) orange players are positioned in grid B, spread across the width of the pitch

- At the coaches signal, the orange players start passing the ball in a random order/direction

- As the ball moves, the yellow defenders must move as a unit too, keeping their relative distances the same

- When the ball goes to #7 orange, they must all be between the yellow cones

- When the ball goes to #9 orange, they must all be between the blue cones
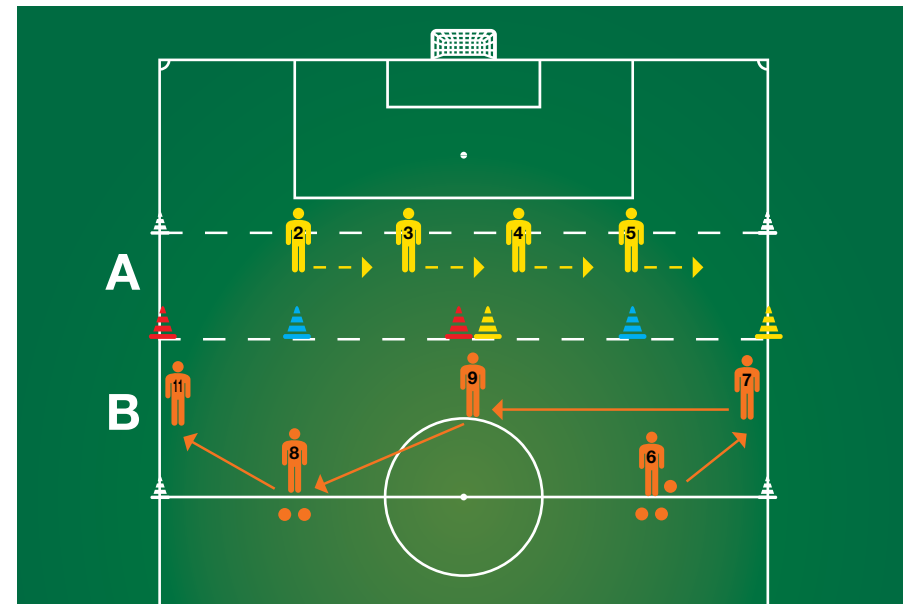
- When the ball goes to #11 orange, they must all be between the red cones

- When the ball is played backwards (to #6 or #8), they must also move slightly forward

Points of attention for Orange:

- High ball speed

- Accurate passing

- Quick change of direction

Change defenders regularly.

Defending/recapturing Model Session 1 (zone defending)

2. Positioning game:

• 2 grids of approximately 15m wide and 10m long (A & C) separated by a grid of 15m x 5m (B)

• 3 groups of 4 outfield players in each grid

• Yellow, consisting of the defenders #2-3-4-5, in grid B

• The coach starts the game by passing the ball to an orange player in grid A

• One yellow defender (who is closest) sprints into grid A and chases the ball (4 v 1)

• Orange combines and must try to pass through grid B to a blue player in grid C (ground pass only!)

• The 3 yellow defenders in grid B must work as a unit and adjust their positions depending on the position of the ball

Steps up or down:

• Make grids wider/narrower (if too easy/difficult for the defenders)

• Make grids A & C shorter/longer (if too easy/difficult for the attackers)

• Free/limited touches for the attackers

Remark:

• Encourage attackers to play the killer pass into the opposite zone as often as possible
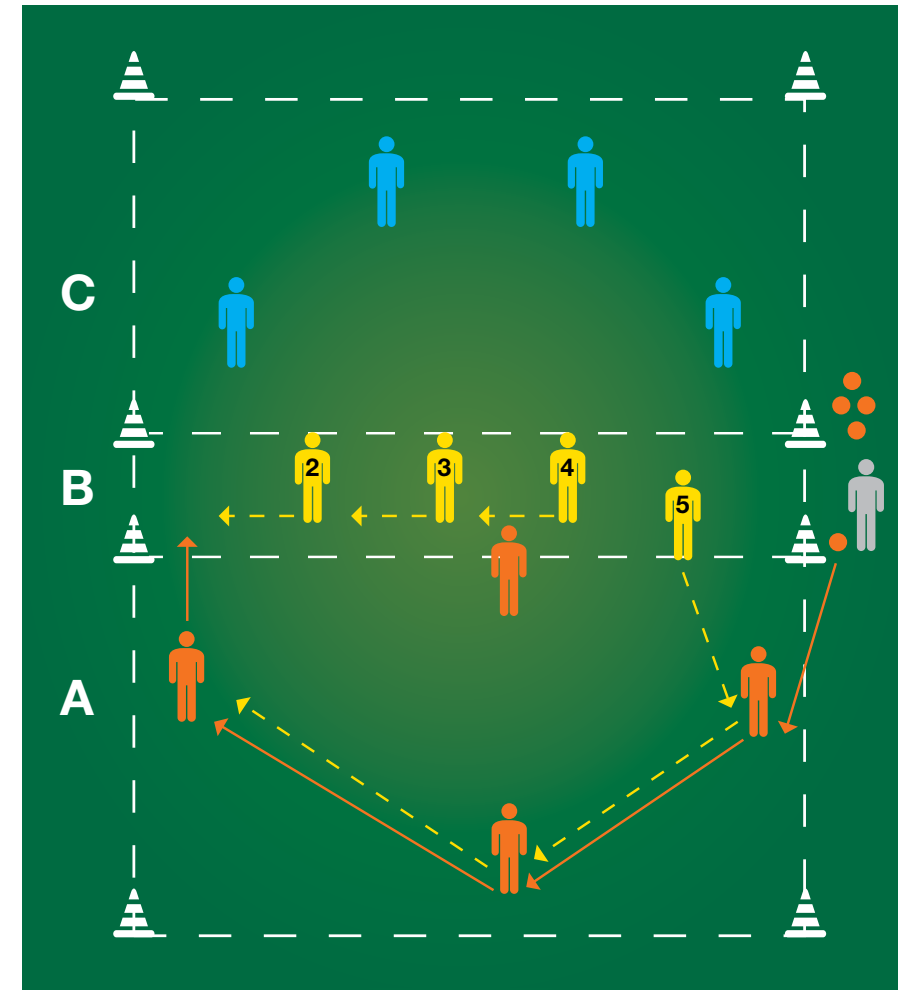
Defending/recapturing Model Session 1 (zone defending)

3. Game training component: 7 v 5

Organisation: 1/2 of a full pitch

- Yellow team consists of (#1-2-3-4-5) defends zonally against orange team (#1-6-7-8-9-10 & 11)

- The orange must try to score by beating yellow's zonal defensive line through combination play; individual actions and/or runs off the ball

- They can use #1 to change the point of attack

- Yellow must stop them by moving as a unit in the direction of the ball ('ball-oriented defending') and pressuring the ball carrier

- The offside rule applies

Possible Coaches Remarks (with focus on yellow):

- "Keep your relative distances"

- "Cover each other"

- "Press the ball if you can get close to it"

- "Drop as a unit if you see orange is going to play a ball behind the defensive line"

- "Move up if the attackers play the ball backwards"

- "Communicate and coach each other"
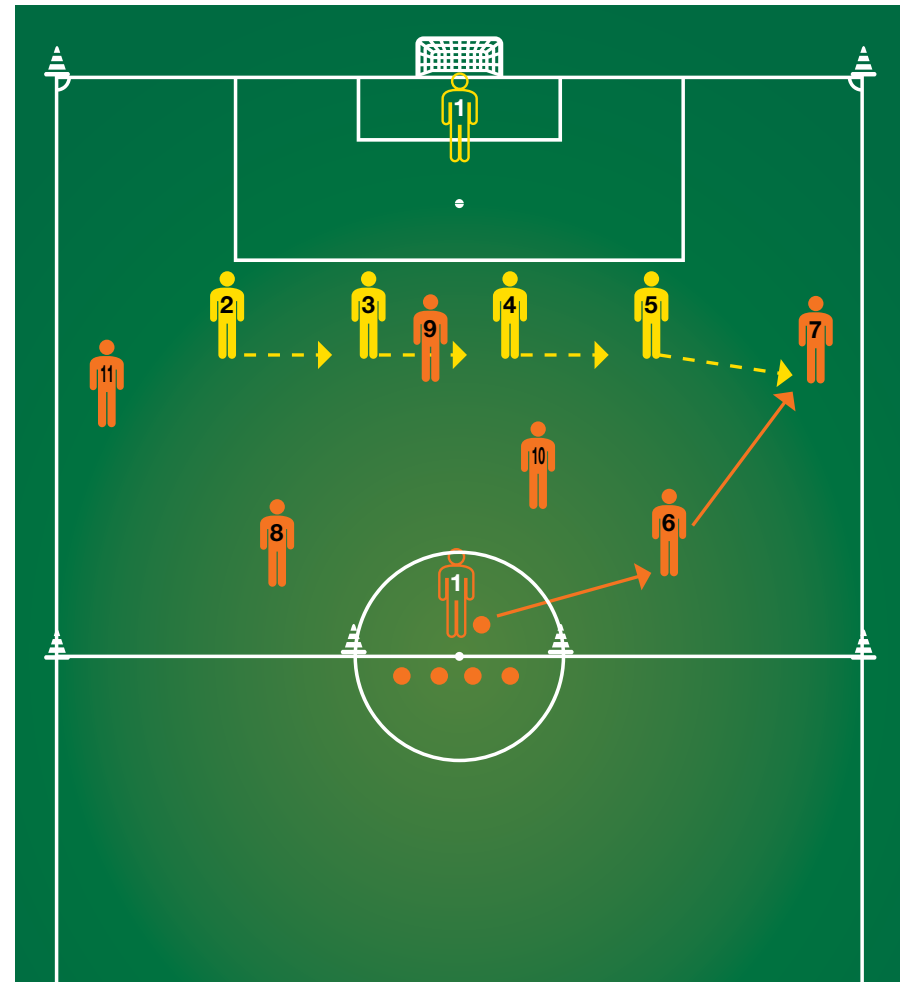
Defending/recapturing Model Session 1 (zone defending)

- If yellow wins the ball: try to pass it into the hands of the orange goalkeeper who must stand in the front half of the centre circle (one attempt only: if yellow loses the ball the action has ended)

- Every restart from the orange goalkeeper

Step down: (too difficult for the defenders)

- Narrow the pitch

- Limited touches for the attackers

Progression:

- 8 v 6/9 v 7
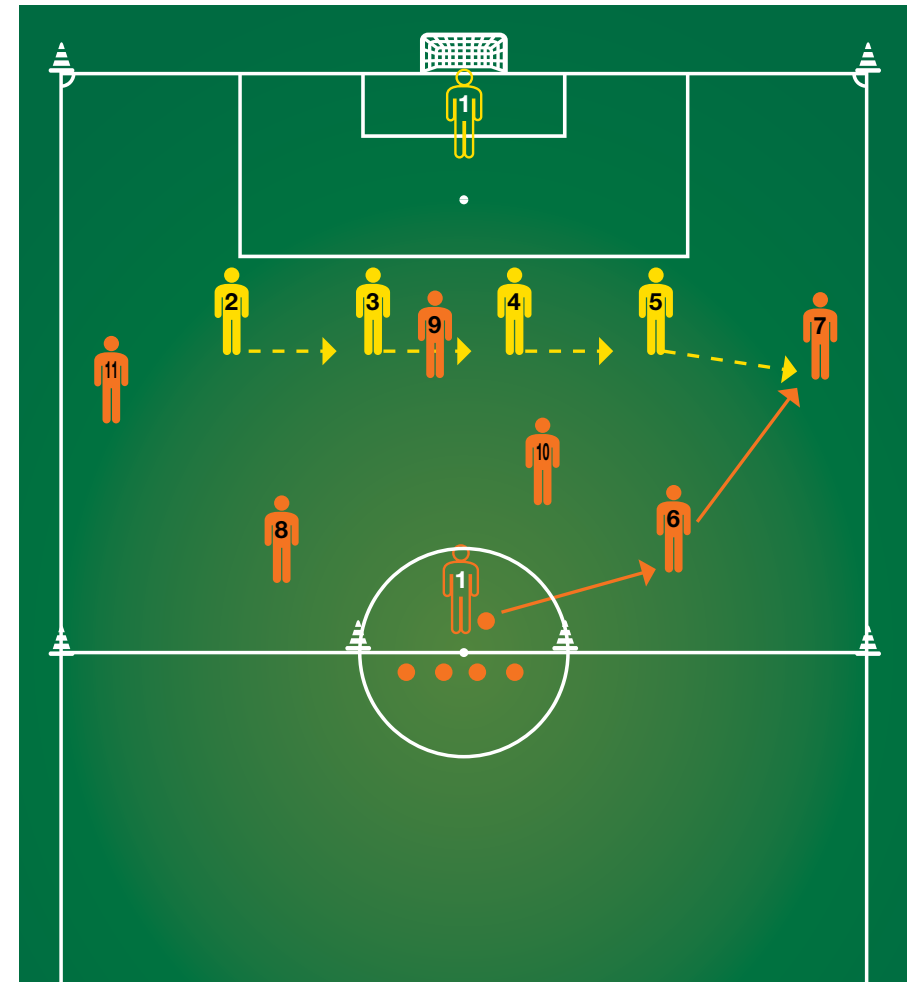
Defending/recapturing Model Session 1 (zone defending)

4. Training game: 6 v 6

Organisation: 1/2 of a full pitch

- Formation yellow:1-4-1

- Formation orange: 1-2-3

- The orange goalkeeper has a dual role ('joker')

- Offside rule applies

- The orange team must score in the goal defended by yellow #1

- The yellow team scores by passing into the hands of the orange goalkeeper who must catch the ball inside the front half of the centre circle

- **The coach must focus on the zonal defending of the yellow team**

If it turns out to be easier for yellow to score than it is for the orange team:

- Limit the number of touches for yellow
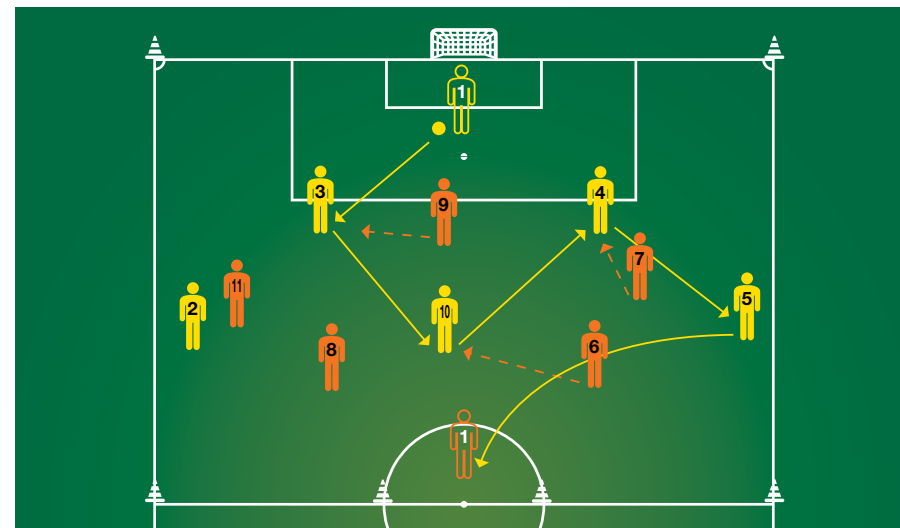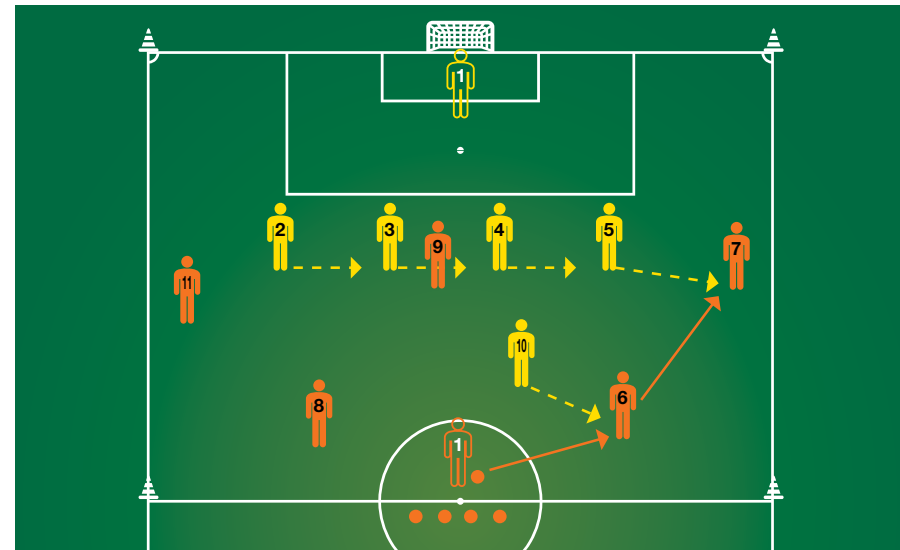
Defending/recapturing Model Session 2 (long ball - 2nd ball)

1. Warm-up: passing exercise A

• Players in the positions as shown in diagram A

• Three or more players at the starting position (a) and two players at the next position (b). At least one player at the other positions (c & d)

• The players pass the ball in the order 1-4 and move to the next position (a-b-c-d)

• The player who receives pass 4 dribbles back to the starting position (5)

• Alternate from left to right

Possible Coaches Remarks:

• "Pass precision and ball speed"

• "Gradually increase your running speed"

Progression:

• The next step is moving back the players/cones of positions (c) (see diagram B)

• Pass 3 now becomes a lofted pass that player (c) must head or volley to player (d)
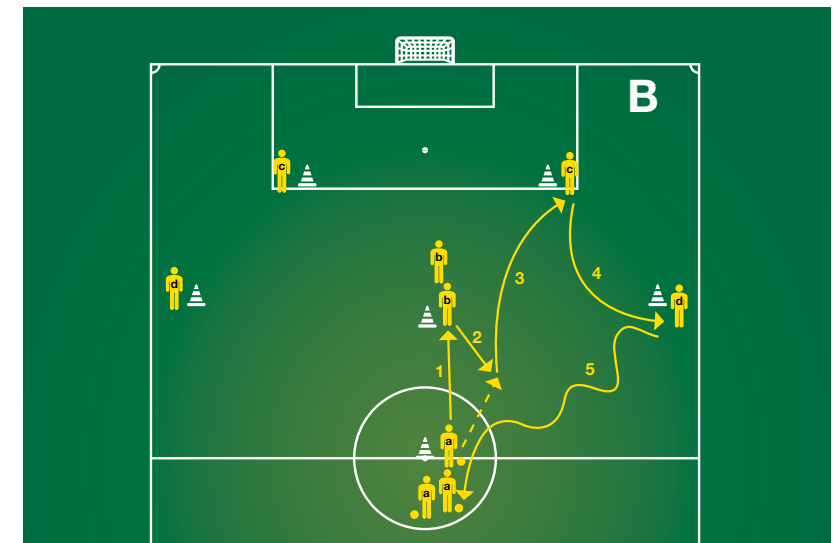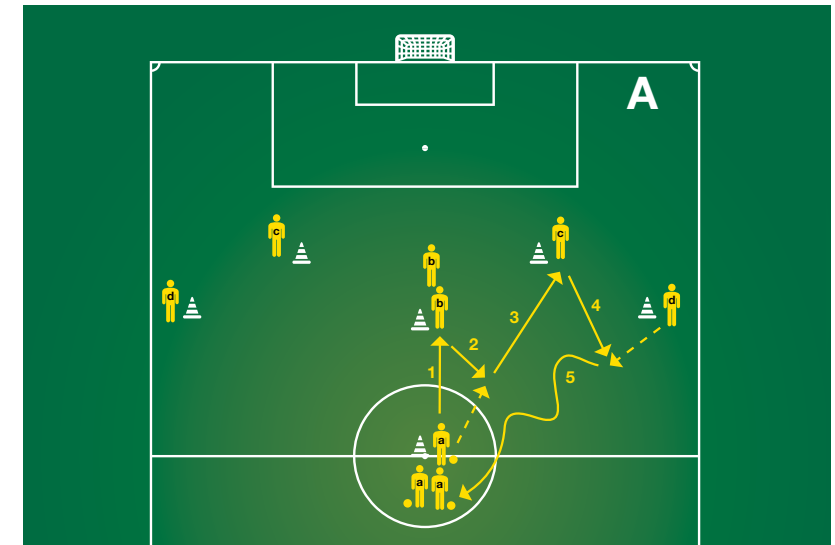
Defending/recapturing Model Session 2
(long ball - 2nd ball)

2. Positioning game: 4 v 2 with 12 players

Organisation (see diagram):

- 3 adjacent squares (A-B-C) of 15m x 15m/20m x 20m
  (depending on player's ability)

- 3 groups of 4 players with different colour bibs position themselves in one
  of the grids

- The coach with sufficient balls next to grid B

- The coach starts the game with a pass to the orange team in grid C
  (or blue in A)

- At that moment players #1 and 2 from the yellow team in grid B immediately
  start defending in grid C: 4 v 2

- Orange must try to play a pass across grid B to the blue team in grid A.
  Then yellow players #3 and 4 start defending in grid A and yellow #1 and 2 go
  back to grid B

- If the orange or blue team makes a mistake (lose possession or a pass out of
  the grid) they must change with yellow and defend

If too easy or difficult:

- Bigger/smaller grids

- Free/limited touches

- 3 v 1 (9 players); 2 v 1 (6 players)
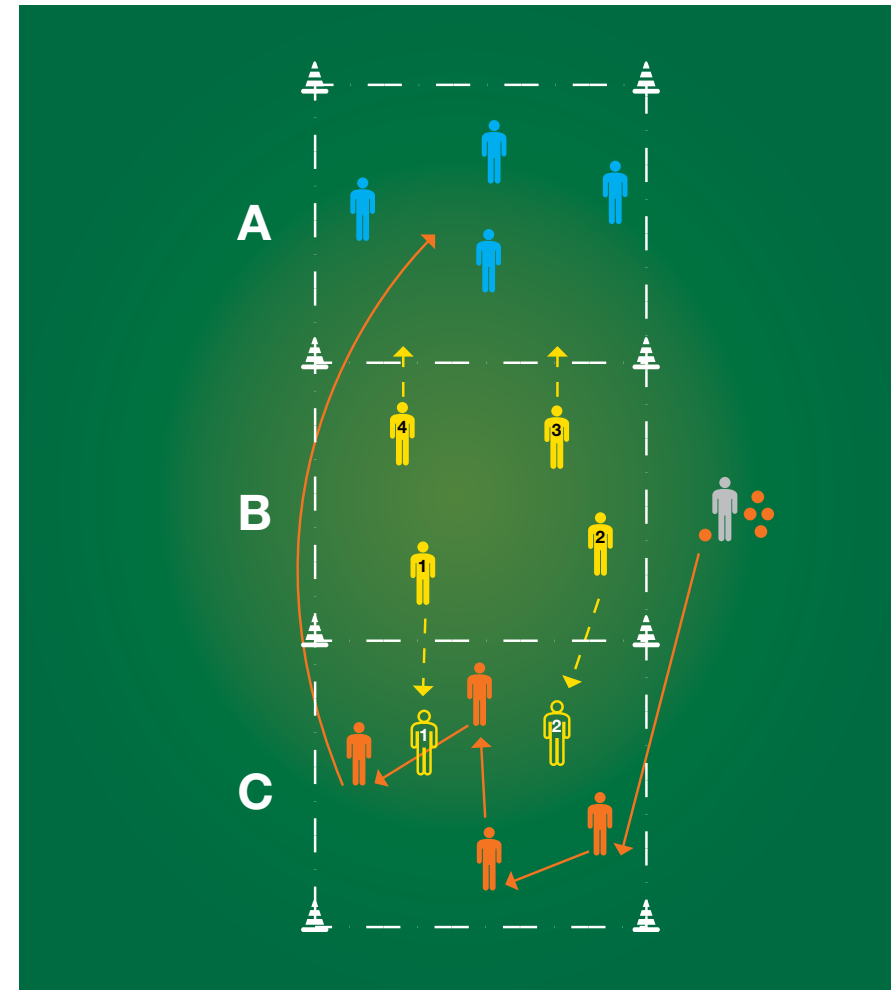
Defending/recapturing Model Session 2 (long ball - 2nd ball)

3. Game training component:

Organisation:

- A 50m x 50m pitch divided by a 'halfway line'

- Two teams of 6 outfield players plus a goalkeeper each

- Plenty of balls on the edge of the far end of the centre circle

- The yellow team consists of the defenders (#1-2-3-4-5) plus the midfielders (#6-8)

- The orange team is made up of the attackers (#7-9 & 11) and midfielders (#10-16-18)

- The orange goalkeeper has a 'dual' role

- Orange #1 starts the exercise with a long aerial pass to the attackers (the pass must go across the 'halfway line')

- Orange tries to win possession (1st and 2nd ball) and score.

- Yellow must defend their goal and, when they win the ball, pass it into the hands of the orange goalkeeper who must stand in the back half of the centre circle (one attempt only: if yellow loses the ball the action has ended, and orange #1 restarts)

- Offside rule applies
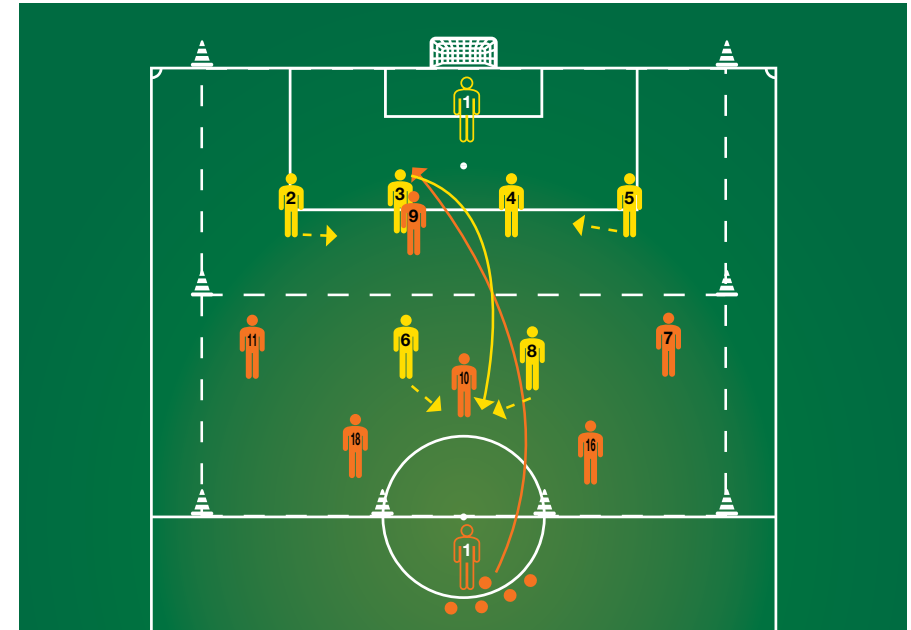
The coaching focuses on the yellow team:

- Marking/duelling (1st ball)

- Positioning/timing (2nd ball)

- Communication (covering/offside)

- Transitioning (BPO>BP)

Defending/recapturing Model Session 2 (long ball - 2nd ball)

4. Training game: 8 v 8

Organisation:

- A pitch of approximately 70m x 50m with two big goals and divided by a halfway line (see diagram)

- Two teams of 7 outfield players plus a goalkeeper

- Orange consists of GK #22, DF #14, MF's #16-18-20 and FW's #7-9-11 (formation 1-1-3-3)

- Yellow consists of GK #1, DF's #2-3-4-5, MF's #6-8-10 (formation 1-4-3)

- Offside rule applies

Special rule:

- **Every time the orange GK #22 gets the ball (also in open play), they must start with a long ball to the strikers (across the halfway line)**

- For the rest it's a normal 8 v 8 game, but the coaching focuses on **defending the long ball and 2nd ball by the yellow team**
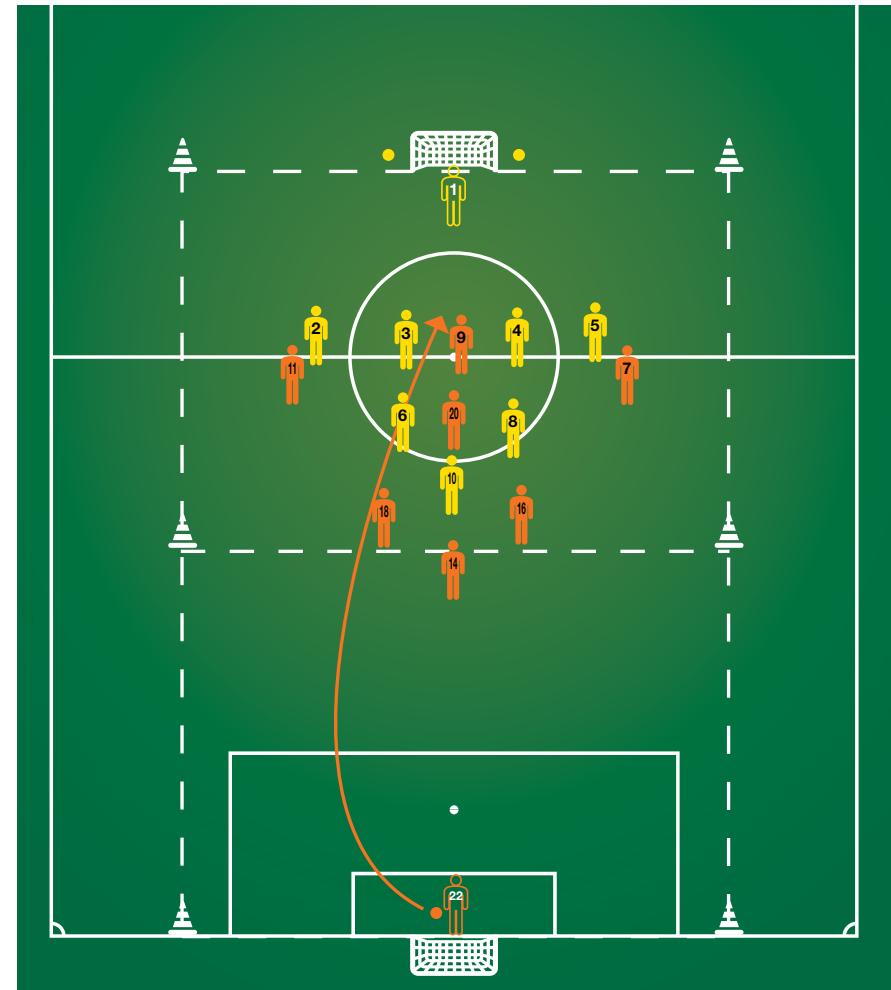
Transitioning Model Session 1 (BP>BPO)

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• 4 cones placed in a 15m x 15m square

• 6 players divided in 3 pairs (different colours) and positioned as shown in the diagram

• Players pass the ball in sequence (1-4). Players only run to their **opposite side** (as indicated by the dotted lines) after passing

• Change direction regularly (pass in opposite directions)

• "Precision and ball speed"
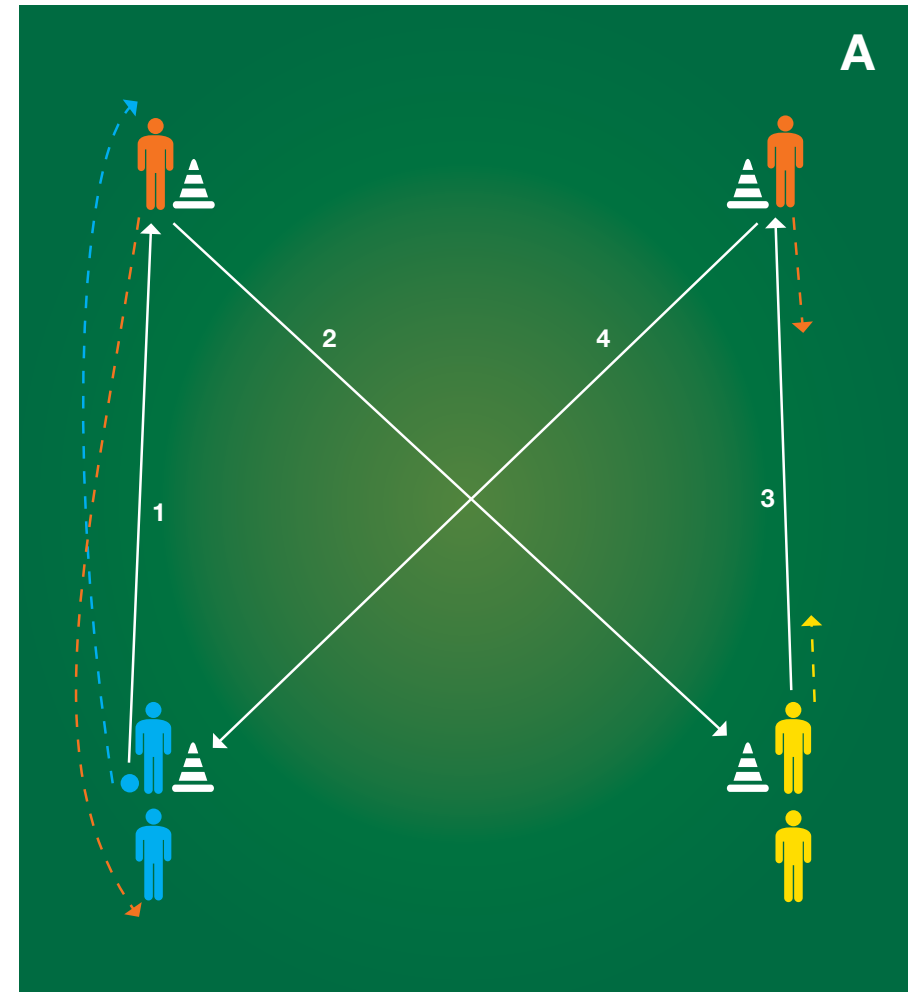
Transitioning Model Session 1 (BP>BPO)

- Next step 4 players perform the passing drill while 2 players (one pair) defend passively (see diagram B)

- The players now **stay** in the same position

- On the coach's call (colour) the pair that are 'defenders' change with the pair that's been called by the coach:

- 'Flying' change over; no/minimal stop

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Immediately focus on your new task"

- "Know where you have to pass"

- "Which pair makes the least mistakes"

Progression (advanced only):

- Regularly change the direction on the run (orientation)

- Players run to opposite cone after passing

- Faster change of defenders

Are the players able to transition and adjust immediately?
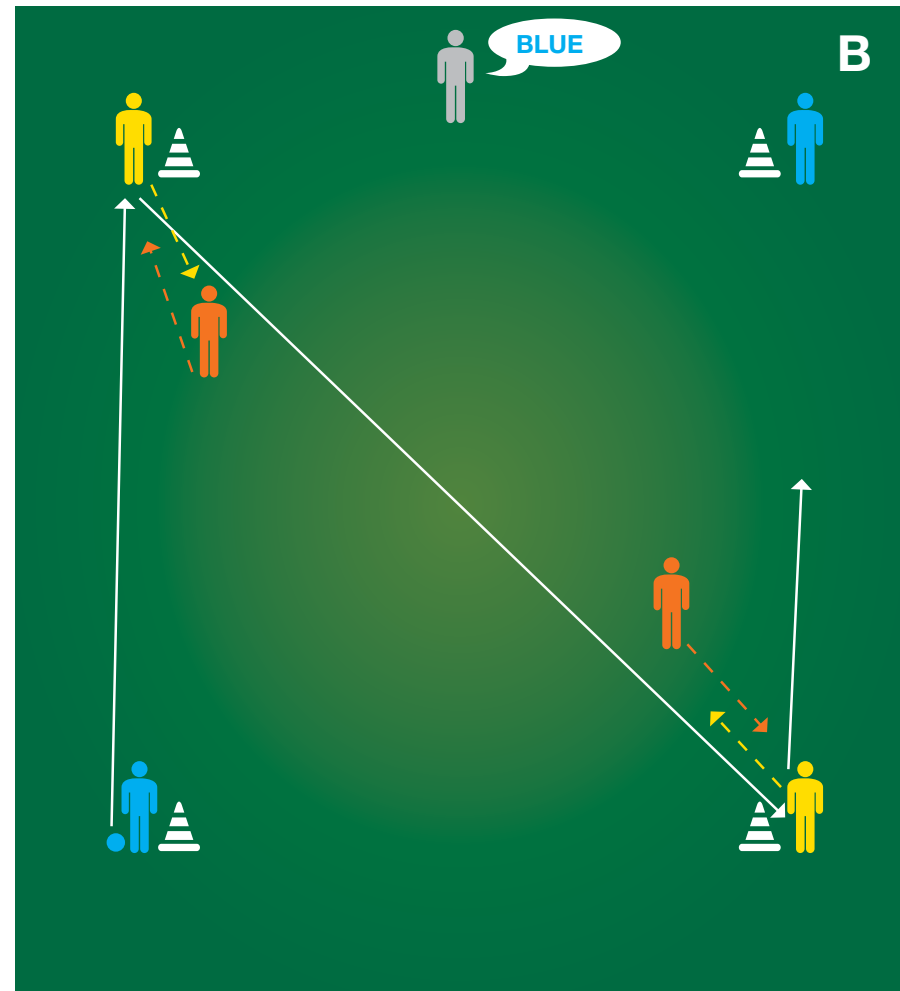
Transitioning Model Session 1 (BP>BPO)

2. Positioning game 4 v 2 with 8 players

- 8 players divided in two groups of four (yellow and orange)

- Two adjacent squares of 10m x 10m/15m x 15m
  (dependent on ability of players)

- 4 (orange) v 2 (yellow) in one grid; 2 yellow waiting with a ball at the end of the
  adjacent grid (situation A)

- As soon as orange makes a mistake (interception yellow or ball out of grid) the
  game moves to the adjacent grid (situation B) using the ball that the two spare
  players have

- Orange #3 & #4 can immediately pressure yellow #1 & #2; this forces yellow
  #3 & #4 to also make a quick transition to BP

- If orange makes a mistake everyone goes back to their initial starting positions in
  situation A

- #3 & #4 (of both teams) are the 'shifting' defenders; swap with
  #1 & #2 (of both teams) every two minutes
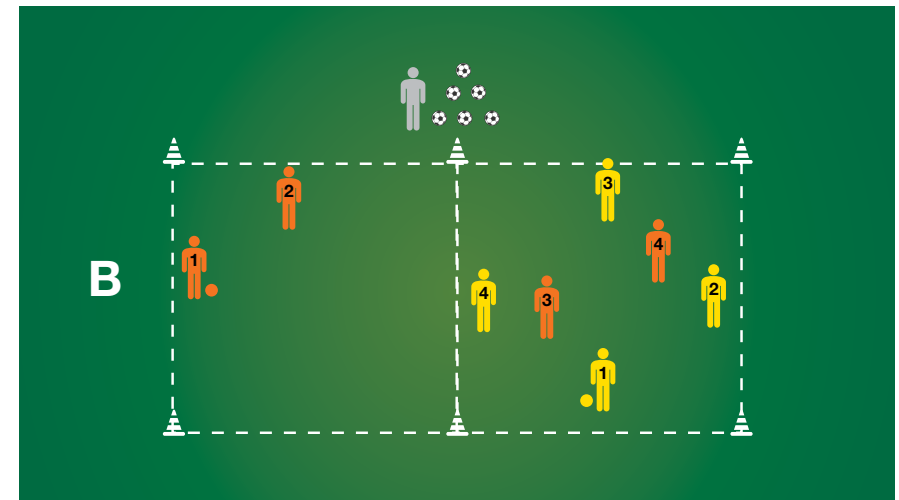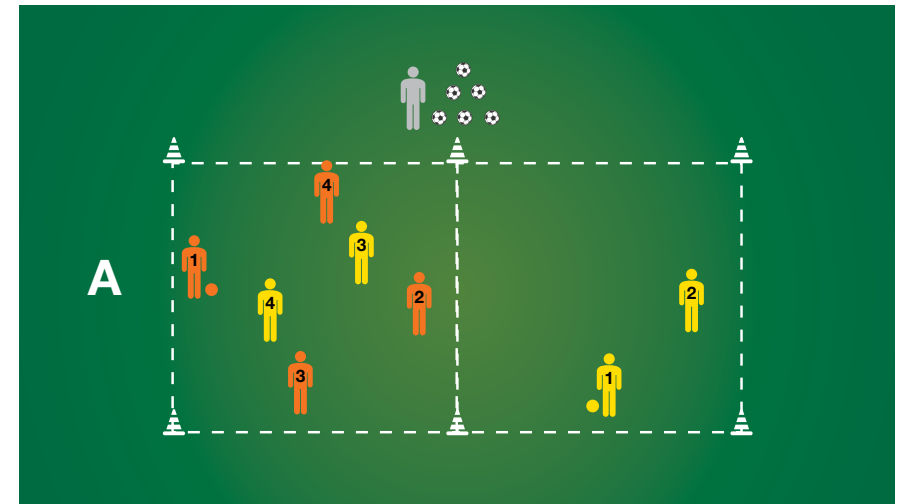
Transitioning Model Session 1 (BP>BPO)

3. Game training component:

Transitioning BP > BPO for attackers (yellow) and BPO > BP for defenders (orange)

- 6 attackers/midfielders (yellow) against 6 defenders/midfielders + goalkeeper (orange) on one half of a full pitch, everyone in their usual 'game positions'

- The blue goalkeeper on the halfway line has a dual role of playing for both teams in BP

- The 'neutral' goalkeeper starts an attack for yellow by playing to one of the yellow players. As long as the yellow team is in possession, the goalkeeper can stay involved as an **outfield** player but positioned in/around the centre circle (see diagram)

- Yellow tries to build a successful attack and score in the goal defended by the orange goalkeeper
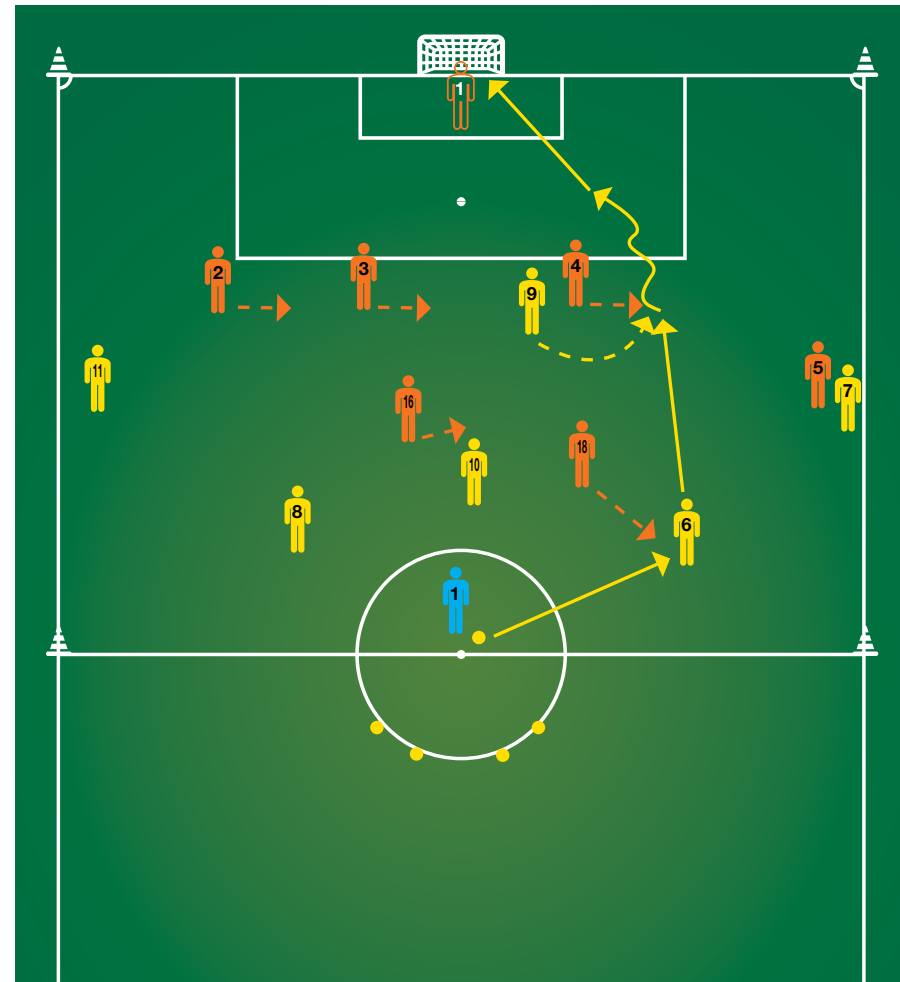
Transitioning Model Session 1 (BP>BPO)

- When orange wins the ball, they must immediately open up, move into proper BP positions and try to pass into the hands of the neutral goalkeeper who must **catch the ball** inside the centre circle

- The yellow team must try to avoid this by quick transitioning and pressing the ball (see diagram)

- After every sequence (attack yellow; counter attack orange) there is a new restart from the neutral goalkeeper

- The coaching focuses on the speed of transitioning from both teams but **yellow** in particular **(BP>BPO)**

4. Training game

- The same organisation but now as a non-stop game with 'coaching on the run'

- 3 points for every goal scored by yellow; 1 point for every time orange succeeds in passing the ball into the hands of the neutral goalkeeper

- Offside rule applies

If too easy for orange:

- Limited touches (2-3) only for orange

- Decrease the area where the neutral goalkeeper can catch the ball (i.e. only the back half of the centre circle)
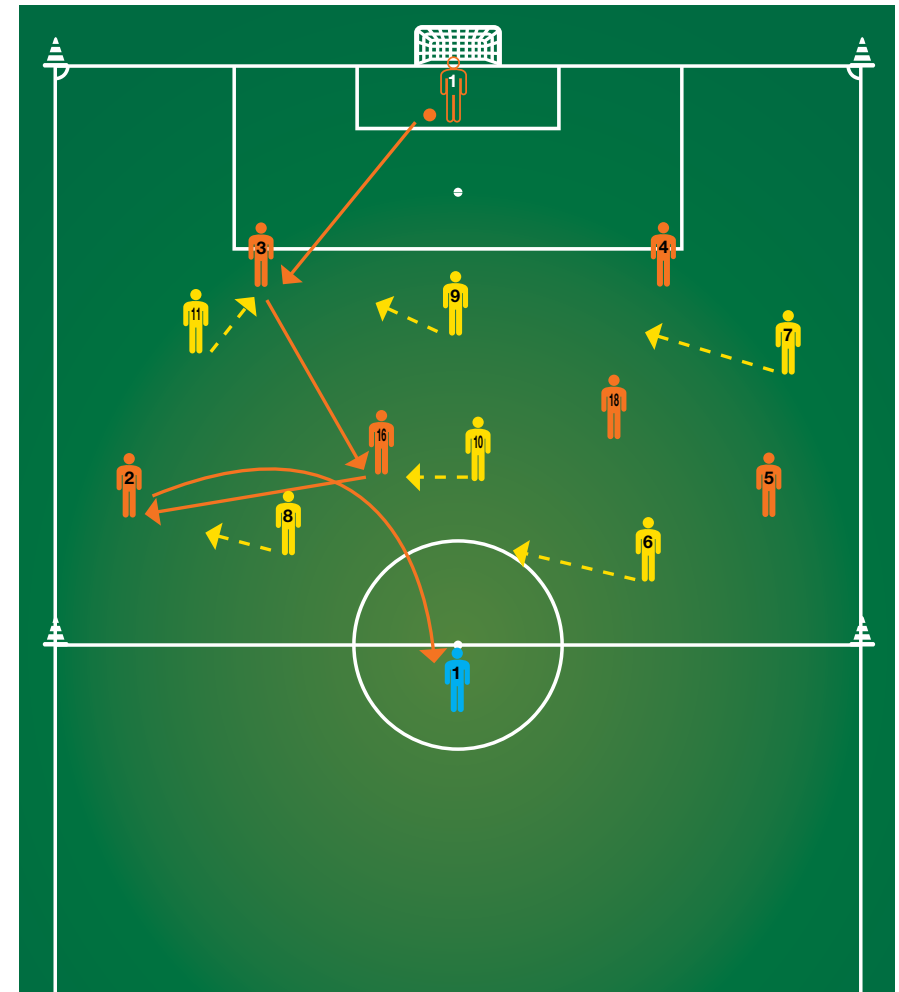
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

- Cones positioned as shown in diagram. Distance between the cones 5m-10m depending on ability

- 9 players divided in 3 groups of three (different colours)

- Each group with a ball, 3-5 min random passing and moving in the area between the cones

- Next they perform the passing drill shown in the diagram

- Players move to the **next** cone after each pass

- Change direction regularly (to left/right)

A
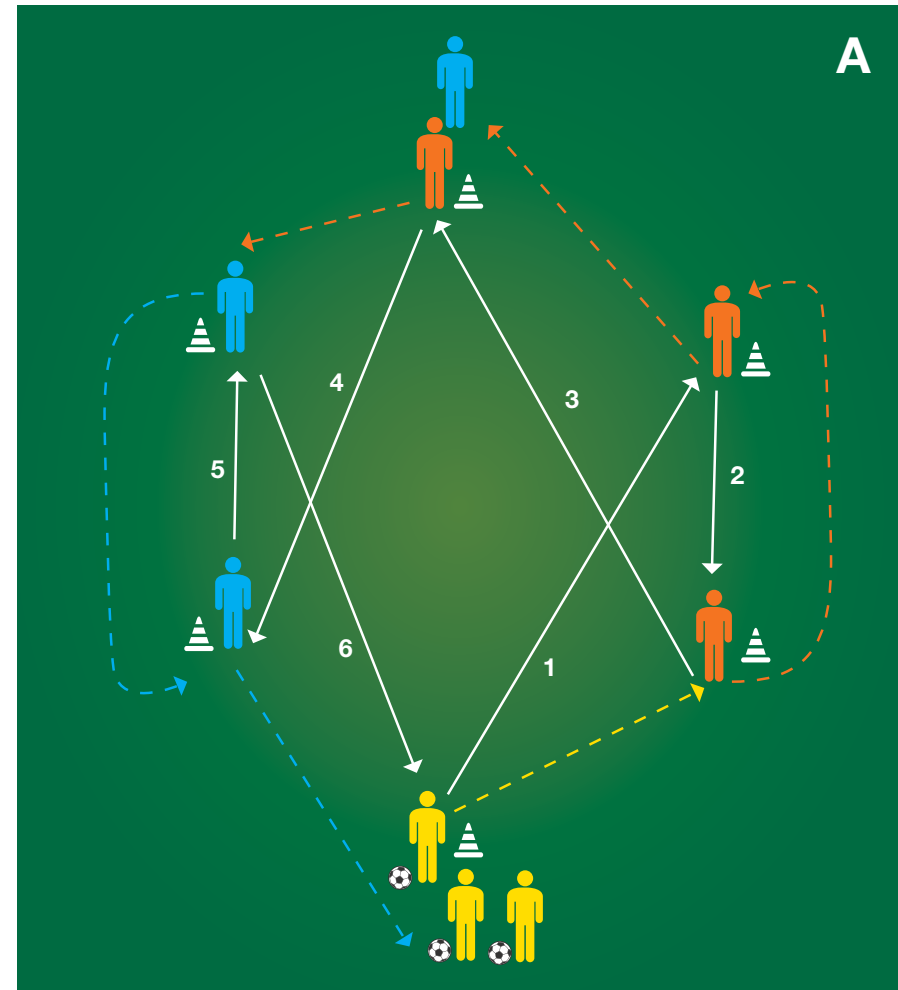
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

Progression:

- 6 players perform the passing drill **without** following their ball, while 3 players (one group) defend passively (yellow in diagram B)

- On the coach's call (colour) the group that are defenders change with the group that's been called by the coach:

- 'Flying' change over; no/minimal stop

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Immediately focus on your new task"

- "Know where you have to pass"

- "Which group makes the least mistakes"

Progression (advanced only):

- Regularly change the pass direction on the run (orientation)

- Change defenders roles at random intervals

Are the players able to transition and adjust immediately?
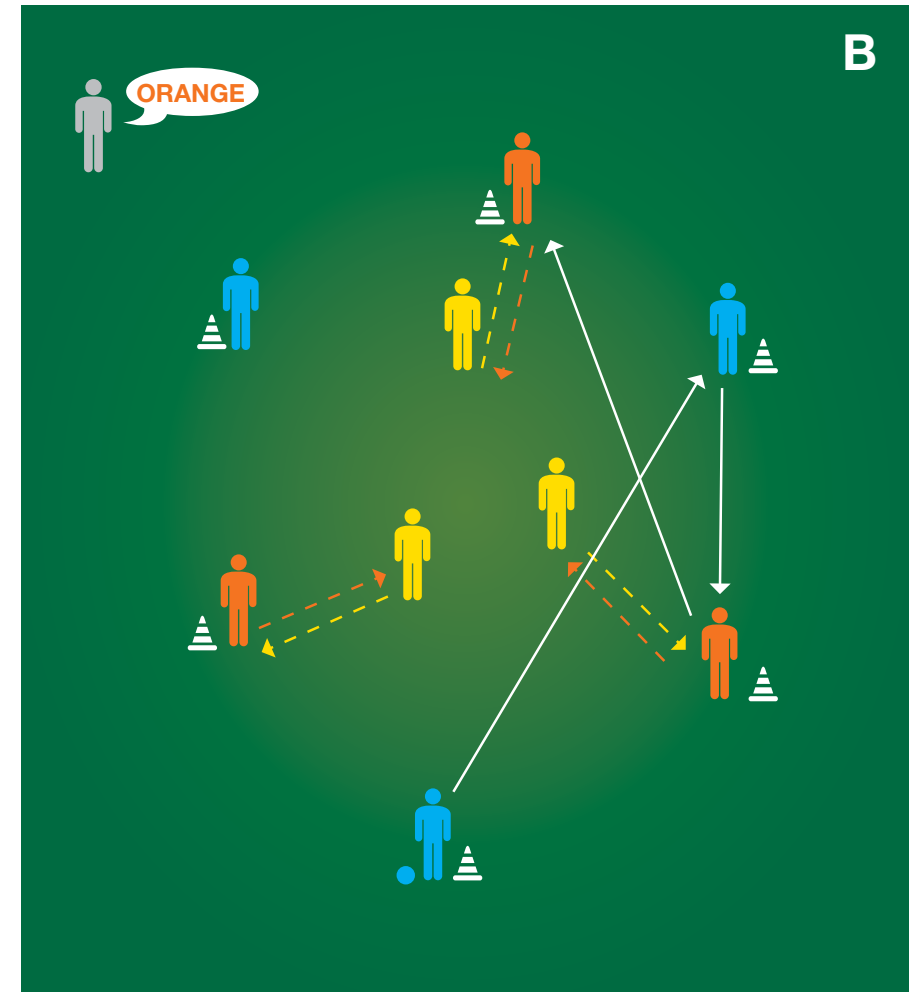
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

2. Positioning game: 6 v 3

- 9 players divided in three groups of 3

- A grid of 30m x 30m (dependent on ability of players)

- Orange and blue (6) keep possession while yellow (3) tries to win the ball (diagram A)

- 6 v 3 always requires a 'link' player in the centre (orange #10 in diagram as an example)

- As soon as an orange or blue player makes a mistake (interception by yellow defender or ball out of grid) the defenders swap roles with the team of the player that made the mistake (blue in diagram A)
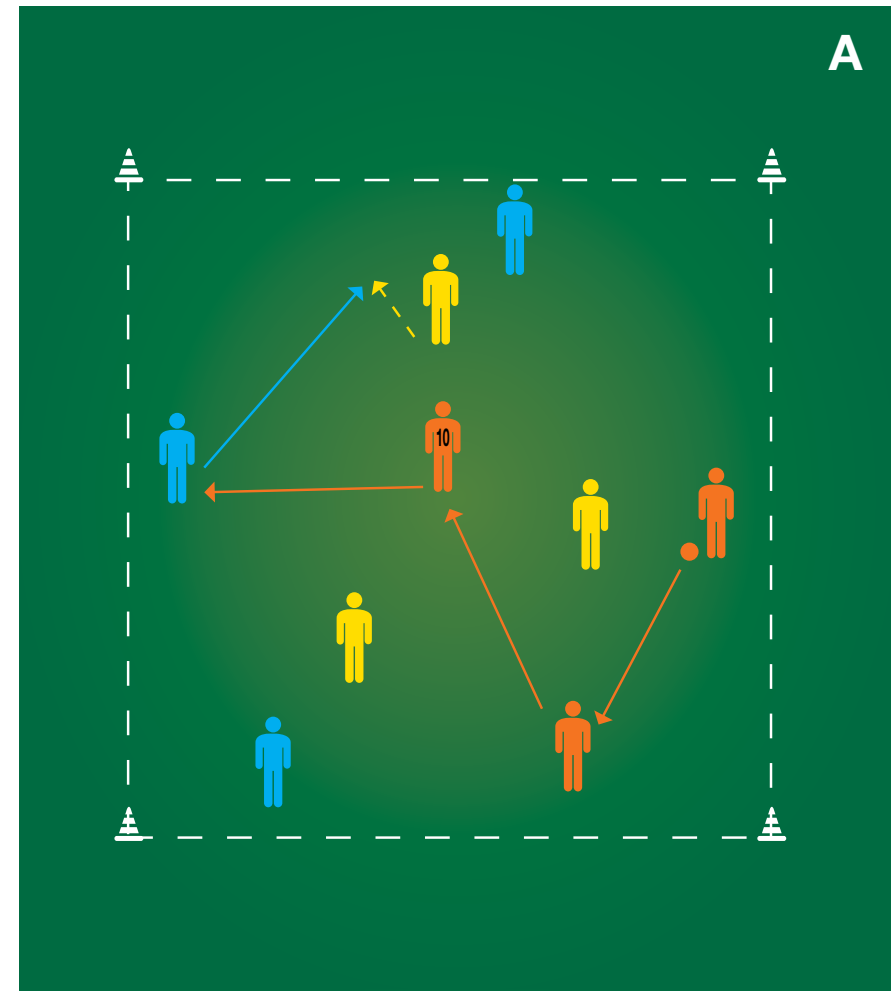
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

• Blue must immediately start defending which forces yellow to also make a quick transition to BP (see diagram B)

• Play in series of 3-4 minutes

Step down (too difficult)

• Allow a stop to change roles when the 6 players in BP make a mistake and gradually reduce the duration of the stop

• Make the grid bigger

Step up (too easy)

• Reduce the size of the grid

• Limit the number of touches (2-3)

B

Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

3. Game training component:

3 v 1 with 9 players

• Emphasis on quick transitioning

Organisation:

• Two grids of about 12m x 12m (A & C) separated by a grid of 12m x 5m (B)

• Three teams of 3 players with different colour bibs, one team in each grid as shown

• The coach is positioned with the balls centrally, next to grid B
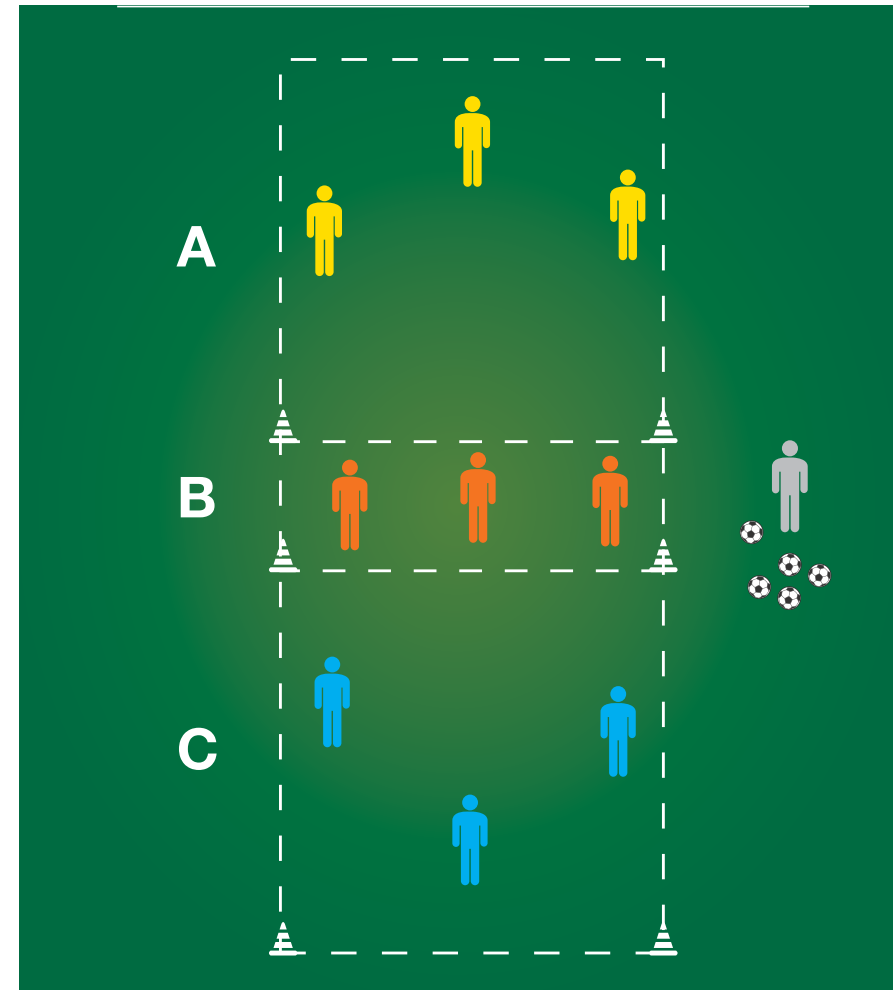
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

Exercise development:

• The coach starts the game with a pass to a yellow player in grid A

• At that moment one orange player from grid B sprints into grid A to defend:
3 v 1 in grid A

• Yellow must now look for the right moment to play a killer pass through grid B
(with the two remaining orange defenders) to a blue player in grid C

• Then immediately another orange player sprints into grid C to defend while the
defender from grid A returns to grid B

• If:
- either team in BP passes the ball out of the grid, or
- the defender wins the ball, or
- the defenders in grid B intercept the killer pass
then the team that lost possession immediately changes grids/roles with the
defending team (**emphasis on transitioning**)

Step up or down:

• Make easier: 6 players (2 per grid: 2 v 1), or more difficult: 12 players
(4 per grid: 4 v 2)

• Make the grids bigger/smaller

• Limited (2/3) or free touches

• Killer pass: only on the ground or lofted pass allowed as well.
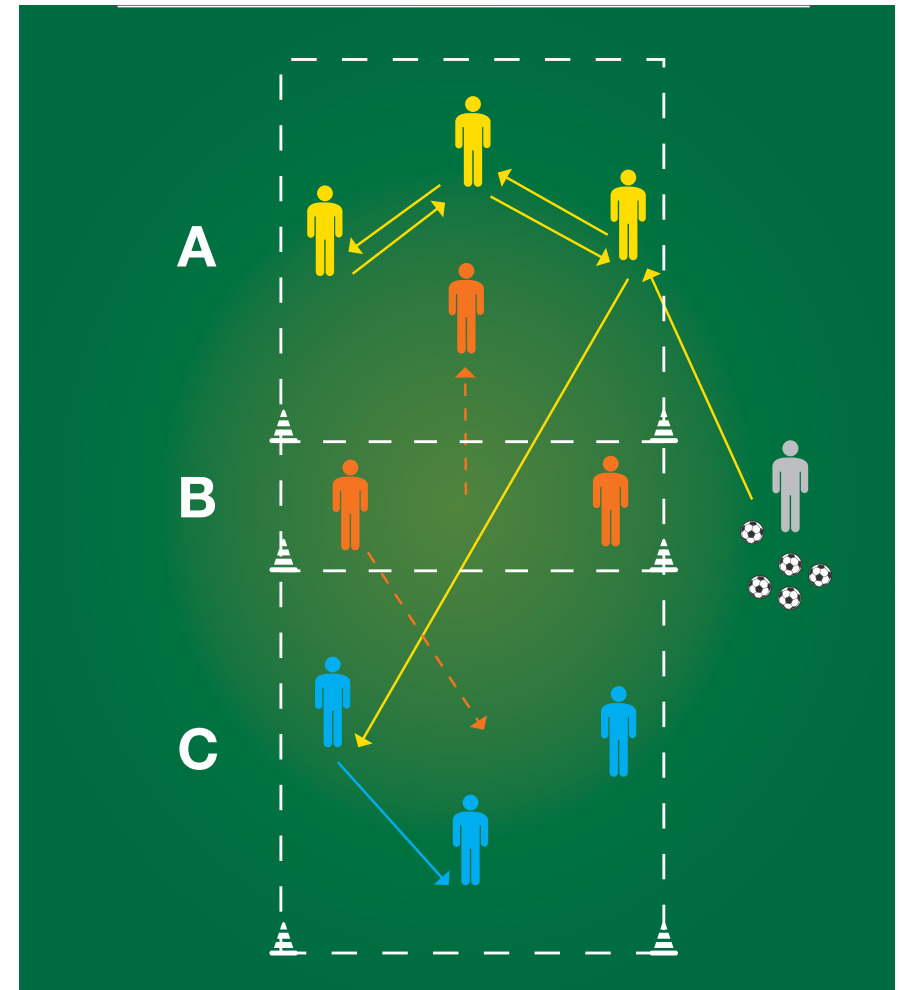
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

4. Training game

'Transitioning game' 6 v 6 + 1 goalkeeper (smaller/bigger teams: adjust pitch size)

• Pitch 40m x 40m divided in two equal halves (see diagram on the right)

• A 'neutral' goalkeeper in the goal with plenty of balls next to the goal

• Two 5m -7m 'gates' on the back line

• The coach with plenty of balls on the halfway line between the gates

• The coach serves a ball to the yellow team who try to score in the goal with the goalkeeper
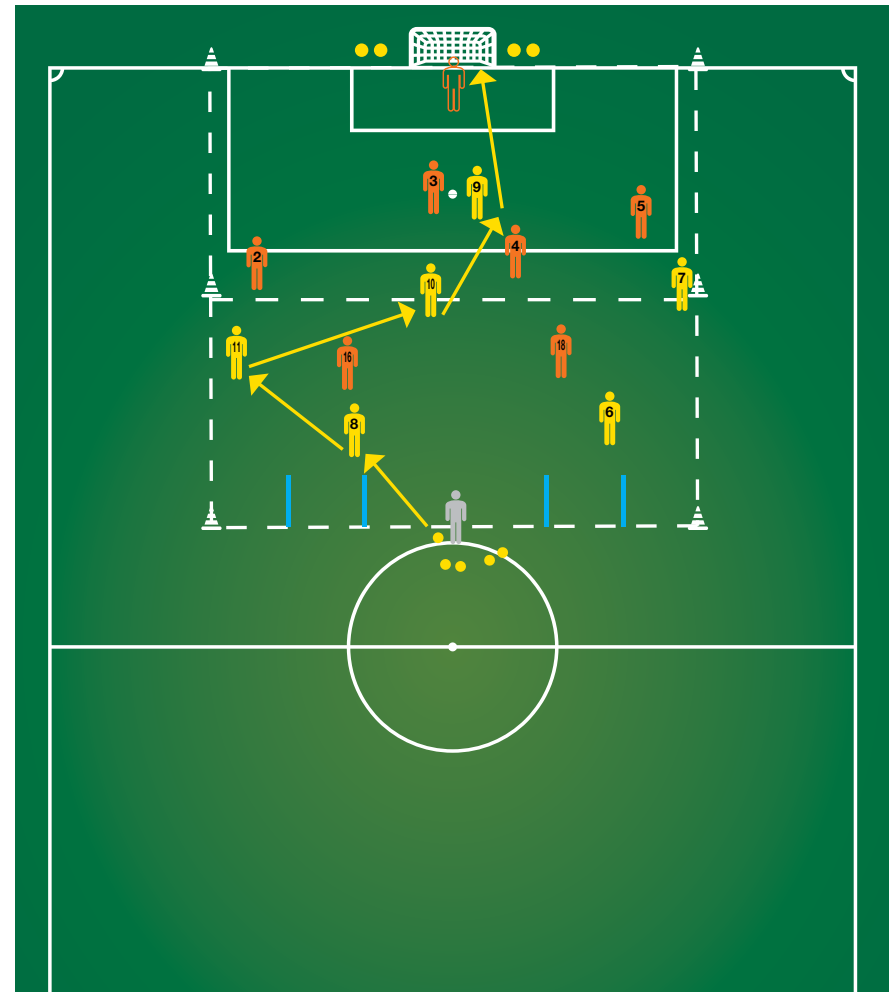
Transitioning Model Session 2 (BPO>BP)

• If orange wins the ball they must pass the ball through one of the gates

• If yellow scores, the score is 1-0 and the coach restarts the game by serving the next ball to yellow

• **If orange passes the ball through one of the gates, the score remains 0-0 but the teams change sides on the run with the coach immediately serving a ball to orange (transitioning)**

• Now orange attacks the goal and defends the 2 gates (players must get back in their proper positions ASAP)

If too difficult (not enough transitioning happening):

• Make the gates wider

If too easy:

• Make the gates narrower

• Limited touches (2/3) for one team or both
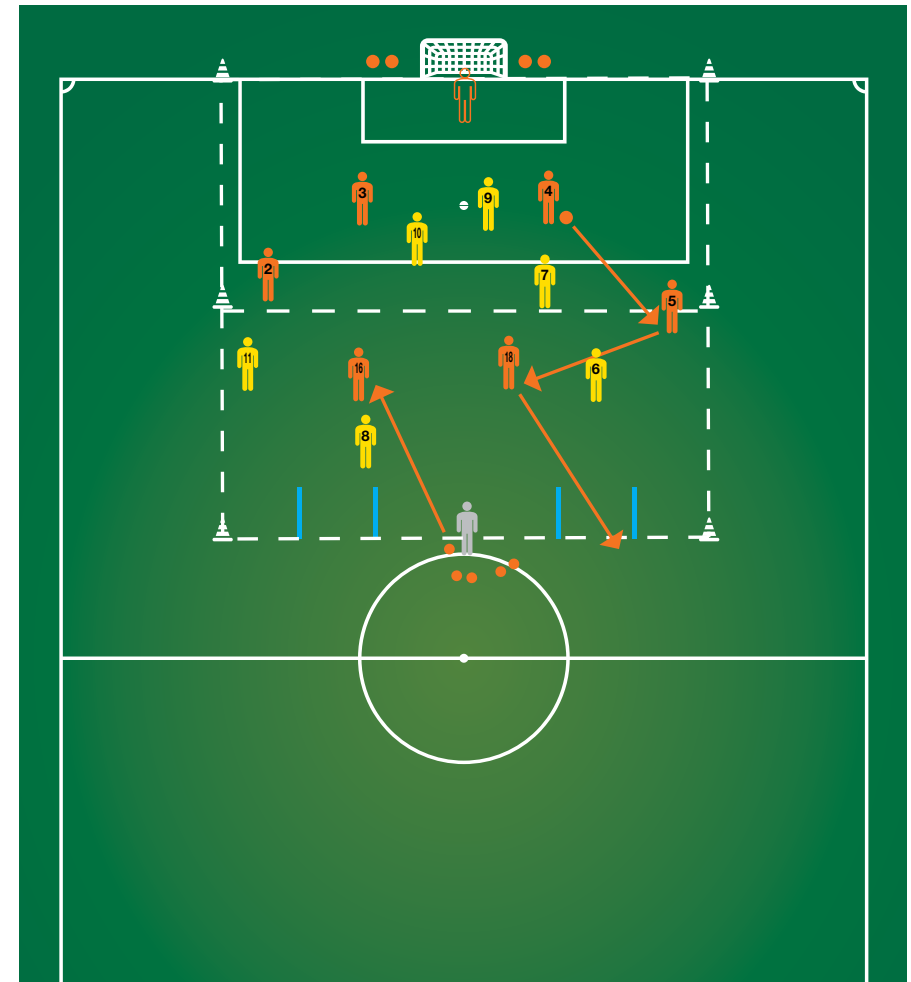
Model Sessions

The concept of rotating through pre-determined themes, which serves us well in the Skill Acquisition and Game Training phases, will not apply now. However, the basic structure of the ideal training session is almost identical to those in the Game Training phase:

• Welcome/explanation: 5 minutes

• Warm Up: 15-20 minutes

• Positioning Games: 20 minutes

• Game Training component: 25-30 minutes

• Training Game: 20-25 minutes

• Warm Down/wrap up 5-10 minutes

The differences are:

1. The session themes are based largely on recent match performance, with a view to improvement in the next match.

   • This requires from a coach the ability to properly **analyse** a game, **define** the 'football problems' and **design** sessions to improve the team's ability to solve these football problems.

2. The Training Game can now be used as a Football Conditioning game.

   • Football Conditioning Games are part of the Football Periodisation Model, developed by exercise physiologist Raymond Verheijen, which has been adopted by FFA.

The Football Periodisation Model is based on the principle that it's totally possible to get your players fit for playing football by playing football. This aligns perfectly with our vision that a holistic approach to coaching is not only the most educationally effective way but also the most time effective way. If done in the proper way, football training automatically becomes conditioning and therefore it's unnecessary and unwise to separate fitness training from football training.

In the Football Periodisation Model there are three types of conditioning games:

• The big games (8 v 8 or 9 v 9 or 10 v 10 or 11 v 11)

• The medium games (5 v 5 or 6 v 6 or 7 v 7)

• The small games (3 v 3 or 4 v 4)

Put simply, if these games are conducted in the right way, they develop the qualities of aerobic capacity and aerobic power specific to football players. However, a real understanding of this conditioning method, including football sprints, can only be gained by attending **FFA's Advanced Coaching Courses**.

Regarding the 6-week cycles in the Performance Phase the following points are essential:

• The session with the Football Conditioning Games must always be planned for the beginning of the week to avoid players still being fatigued on the day of the next game

• We consider 4 sessions of 75-90 minutes and one game a maximum safe weekly workload for the Performance Phase (Advanced level only)

• The planning and progression of the Football Conditioning Games requires expert knowledge of the Football Periodisation Model. **It is dangerous to experiment with Football Conditioning without having the necessary knowledge**

• To give coaches a basic grasp of the concepts, we provide three sample Performance Phase sessions, based on hypothetical 'football problems' that a team might have. Each sample session shows how the Training Game can be changed to a Conditioning Game (one 'big', one 'medium' and one 'small' game), gaining a football fitness benefit while still working on the team's 'football problem'.

Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

Football problem:

"Our team struggles with playing out from the back. Too often we play a senseless ball forward that is easily intercepted by the opponent.

The players do not recognise the right moments to play a forward pass or see the solutions too late.

They are also hesitant to break the line and create a numerical advantage by moving forward with the ball at their feet".

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Players in game positions as shown in diagram A

• The passing sequence starts with the two goalkeepers (can be simultaneous): one to the right side; the other to the left side

• The players pass the ball in a 'logical' order (1-7) while staying in their positions

• "Pass precision and ball speed"

• "Now follow your pass to the next position" (NB: #10 goes to position #3/4)

• "Gradually increase your running speed"
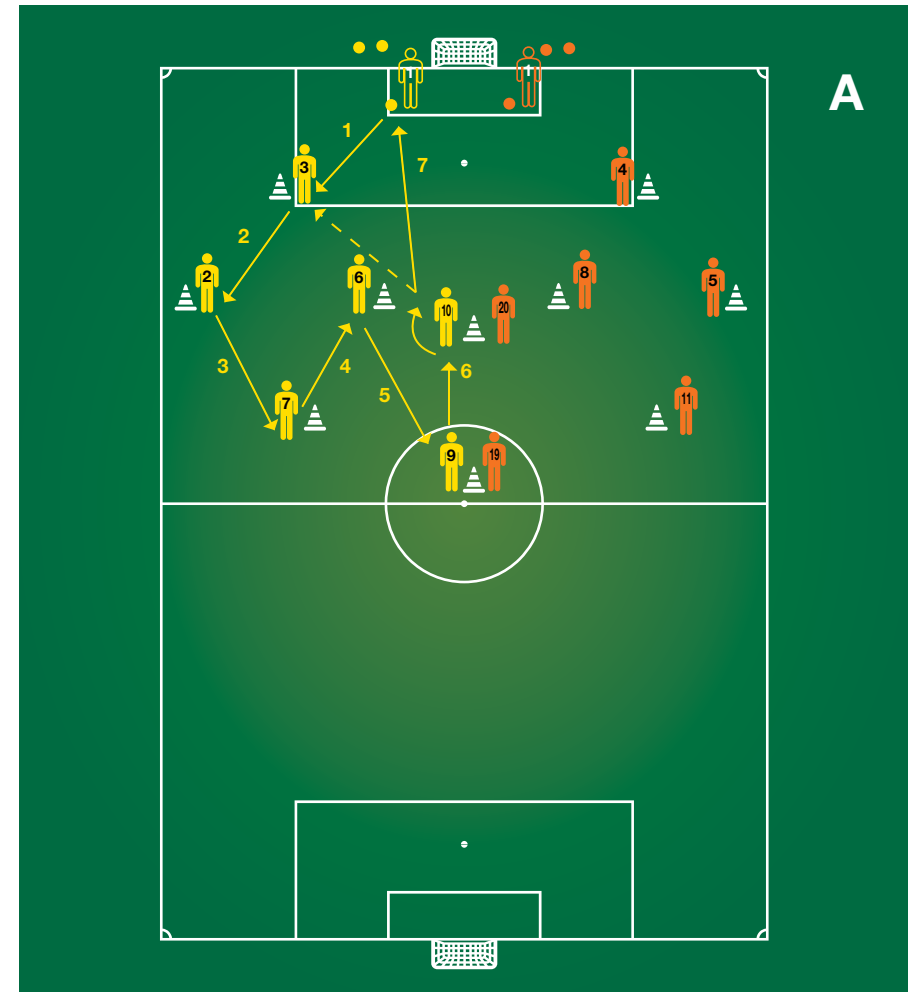
Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

• "Here is another variation" (see diagram B)

• "Now just improvise but use a logical order and every player must touch the ball"

B
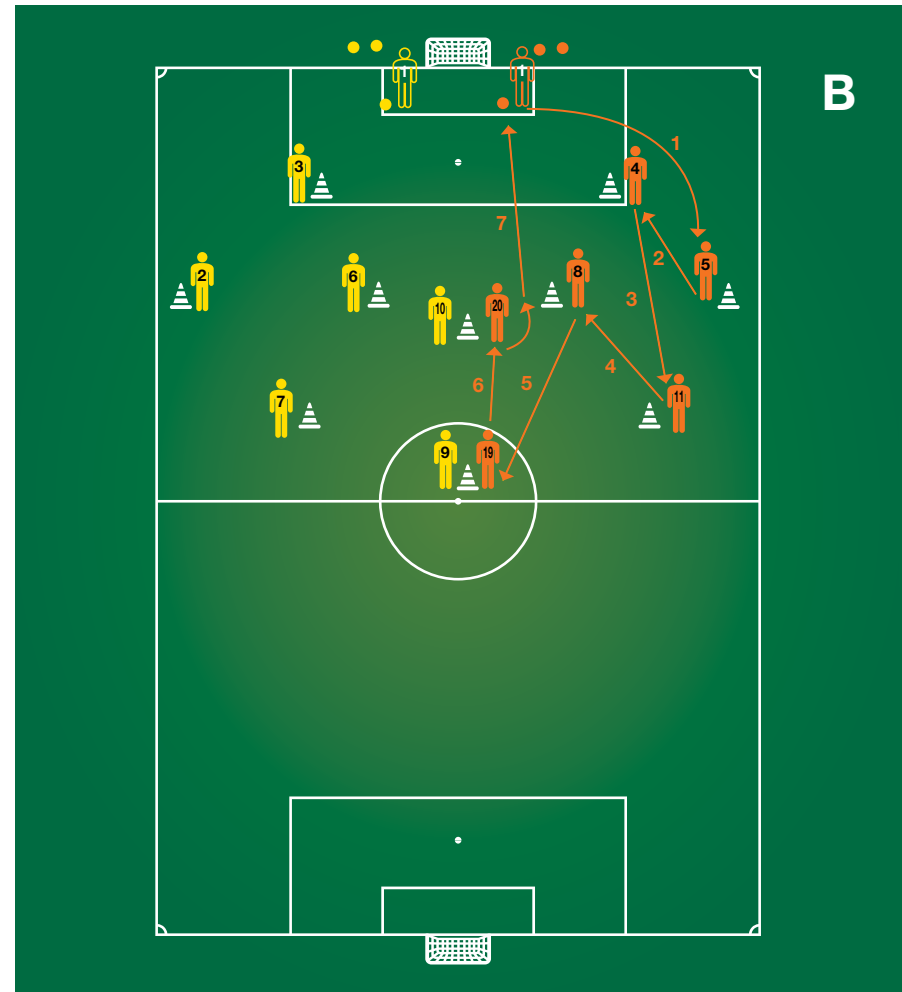
Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

2. Positioning game: 5 v 4 + 2 (7 v 4)

• A grid of approximately 40m wide x 30m long

• 2 groups of 4 outfield players (orange + yellow)

• Yellow consisting of the players #2-3-4-5

• Orange consisting of the players #7-9-10-11

• #6 is a neutral player who always plays with the team in possession

• The 2 goalkeepers are neutral players who always play with the team in possession and are positioned just behind each back line

• The players as far as the game allows in 'logical' positions

• Yellow #1 starts the game for the yellow team, who must try to pass the ball to orange #1 on the opposite side (see diagram)

• If they succeed, orange #1 must now pass the ball across the grid back to yellow #1 on the opposite side, who must catch the ball and start again

• If orange wins the ball, they must try to pass the ball to orange #1 who restarts the game with orange in possession and yellow defending

Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

Steps up or down:

• Make grid bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Free/minimum number of passes before you can pass to #1

• 1 point for every successful pass from goalkeeper to goalkeeper

Remark:

• Position the grids in 'game realistic' areas of the field (see diagram on the right)
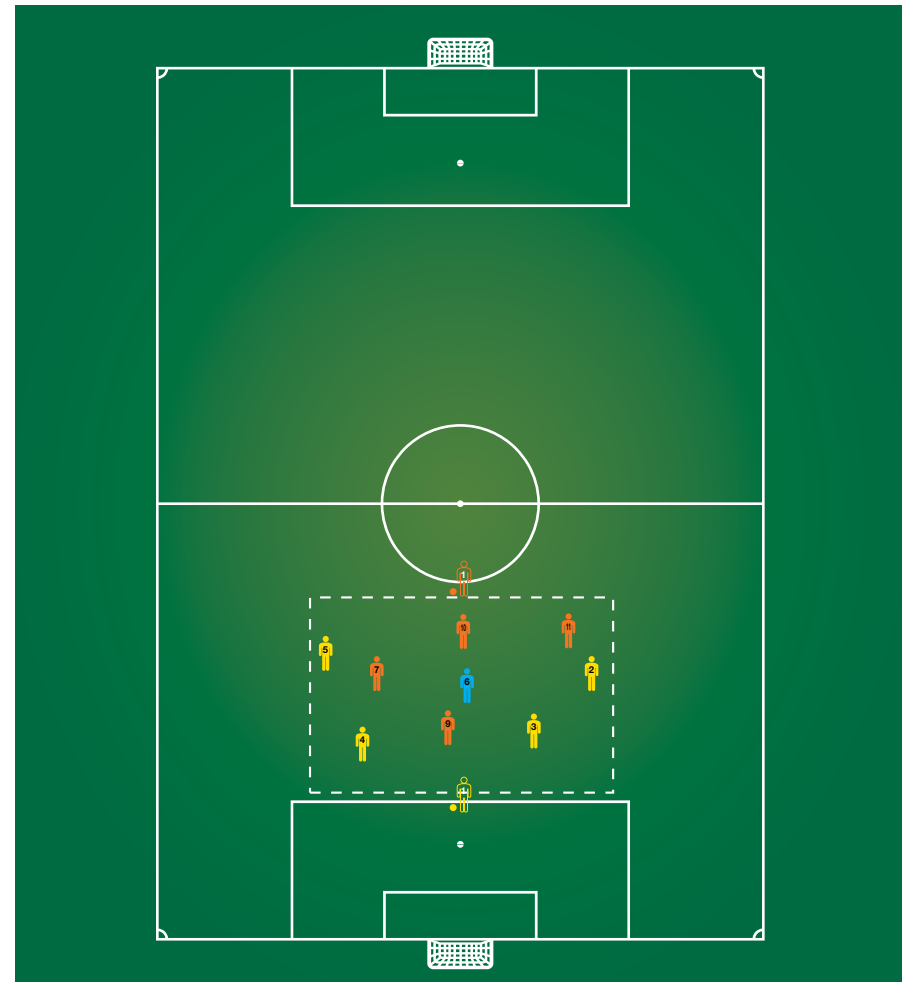
Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

3. Game training component:

• Two teams of 8 players each consisting of a full defence line (#1-2-3-4-5) and attack line (#7-9-11)

• 2 grids approximately the width of a full pitch and 45m long as shown in diagram A

• In both grids the defenders of one team play against the attackers of the other team

• The goalkeepers start by serving the ball to one of the defenders (enough balls next to both goals)

• "Get the ball to the 'free' player who must run with the ball across the end line"

• If the attackers win the ball, attack the goal and try to score (one attempt only). If the defenders win the ball back, the action has ended

• Every restart from the goalkeeper
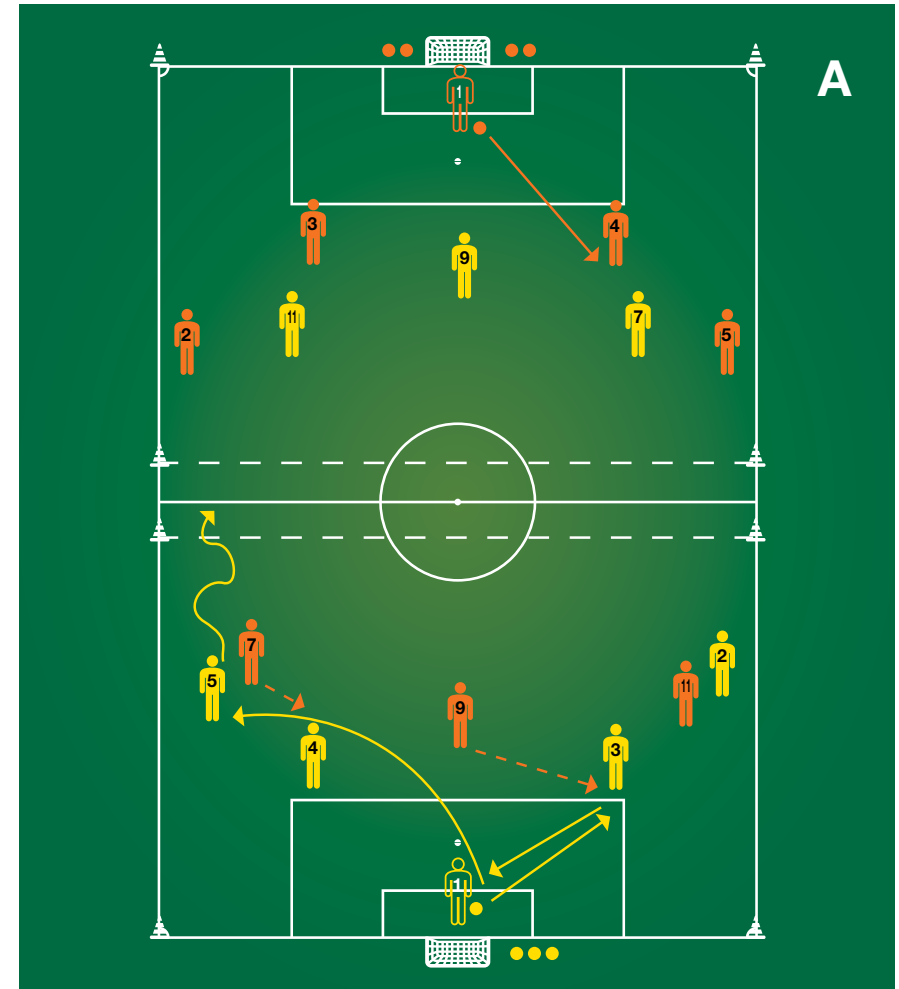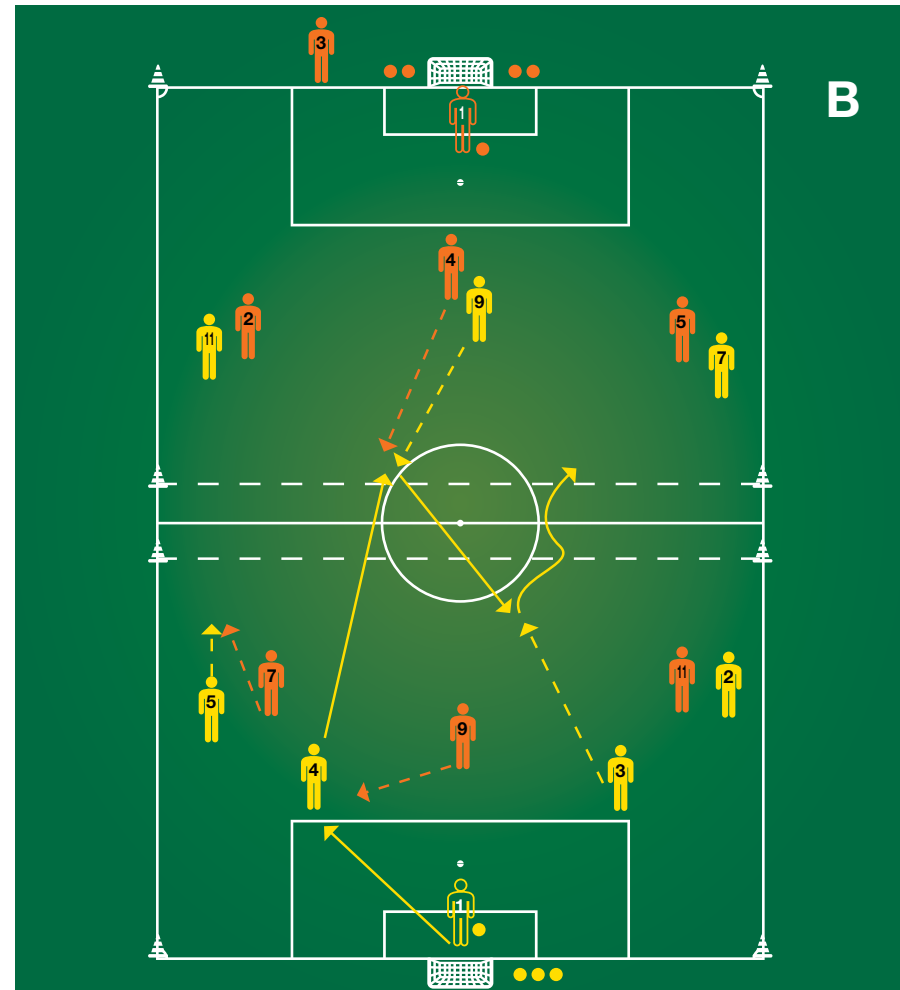
Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

Progression:

• Now we 'connect' both grids (see diagram B)

• Yellow starts playing out from the back and tries to get one defender across to the other grid

• They can now also use the yellow attackers in the other grid as bouncers (offside applies)

• One orange defender waits next to the goal

• So yellow has a numerical advantage (4 v 3) and tries to score

• If the yellow team loses the ball in their defensive grid, orange can try to score (1 attempt only)

• If yellow loses the ball in the attacking grid, orange play back to their goalkeeper and the action has ended

Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

- Now the orange defender (#3), who was waiting next to the goal, comes on to the pitch and the yellow defender (#3) that had joined the attack steps out and jogs back to wait next to the goal

- The same action starts again but now with orange playing out and attacking while the yellow team defends (see diagram C)

- The next step up would be to decrease the size of the grids, with portable goals on the edge of each box and narrowing the pitch 5m each side. The halfway line now divides the attacking and defensive halves

Performance Phase – Model Session 1
Football Conditioning (Big games)

4. Conditioning Game: 8 v 8 (7 v 7 + goalkeepers, see diagram D)

• Formation of both teams 1-4-3

• All players can move across the whole field

• Normal rules, offside applies

• Pitch size depends on player's ability (see diagram D)

• **Since it's a conditioning game the intensity must be high**. Therefore there are no stops for throw-ins; corners; free kicks or goal kicks. The goalkeeper of the team that should have had the throw-in, corner or free kick immediately serves a new ball (within 3 seconds otherwise the coach serves a ball to the other team)

• **Play 2 games of 10 minutes with two minutes rest between the games**
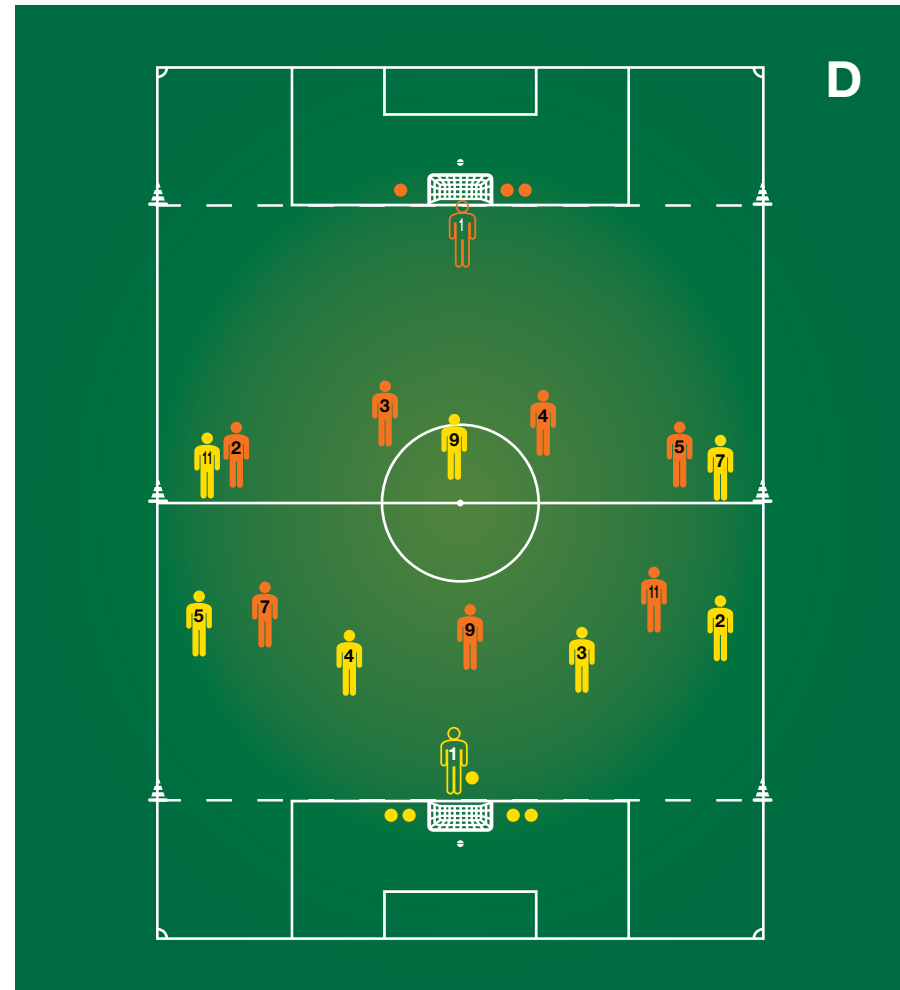
D

Performance Phase – Model Session 2
Football Conditioning (Middle games)

Football problem:

"Our team is not very effective when we attack in wide areas. The wingers, in combination with the full-backs, too often make wrong choices.

The awareness and decision-making of our wingers and the cooperation with the full-backs must improve to make our wing play more effective".

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

• Players in their game positions (see diagram)

• Right side players (yellow) and left side players (orange) opposite of one another but not interfering with each other

• Minimum 2 players in the positions #3 & #4

• In case of bigger numbers: set up a similar organisation on the other wing

• Yellow works from top down; orange from bottom up (#7 yellow passes to #4 orange who starts the same combination in the opposite direction till #11 orange passes the ball again to yellow #3)

• All players follow their pass to the next position but only on their own team
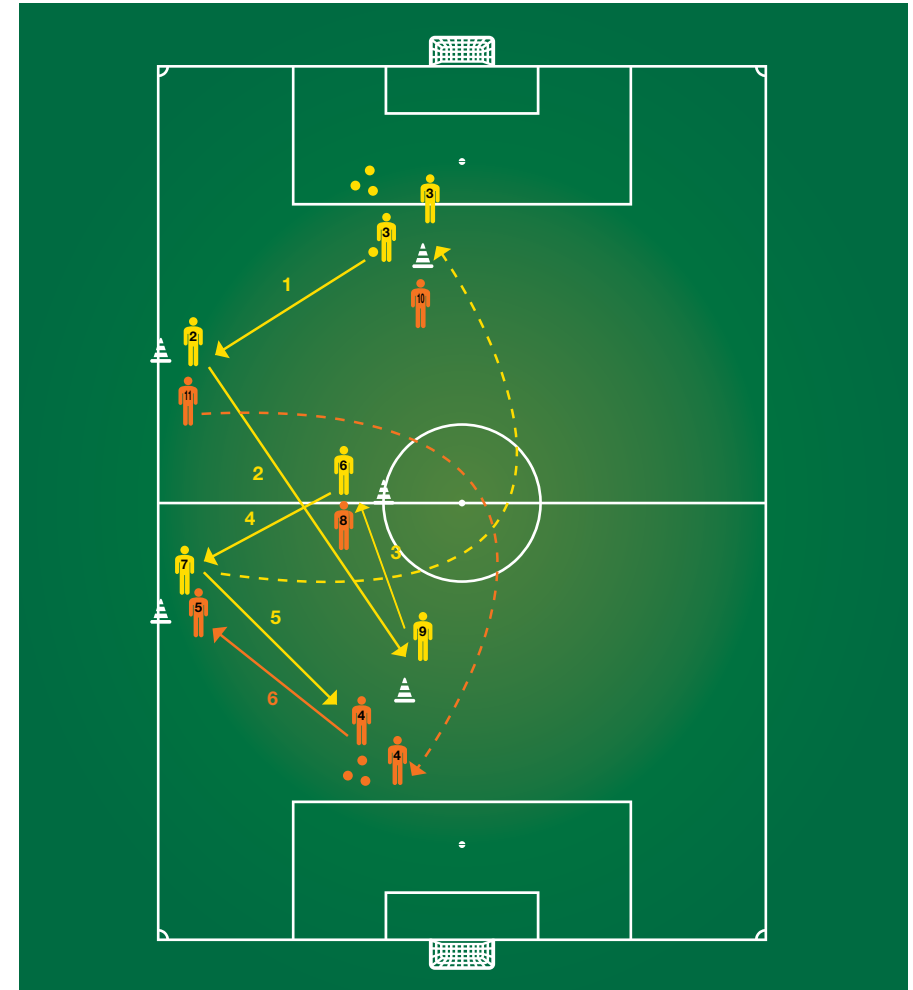
Performance Phase – Model Session 2
Football Conditioning (Middle games)

- i.e. After pass 5 to orange #4, yellow #7 goes to the position of yellow #3 (same for orange #11: to position #4).

- Start with prescribed pattern (as shown)

- Introduce a 2nd (3rd?) pattern

Progression:

- Now yellow passes with passive resistance of orange: choose the right option depending on the defensive positioning of the opposing players (this option is for advanced players only)
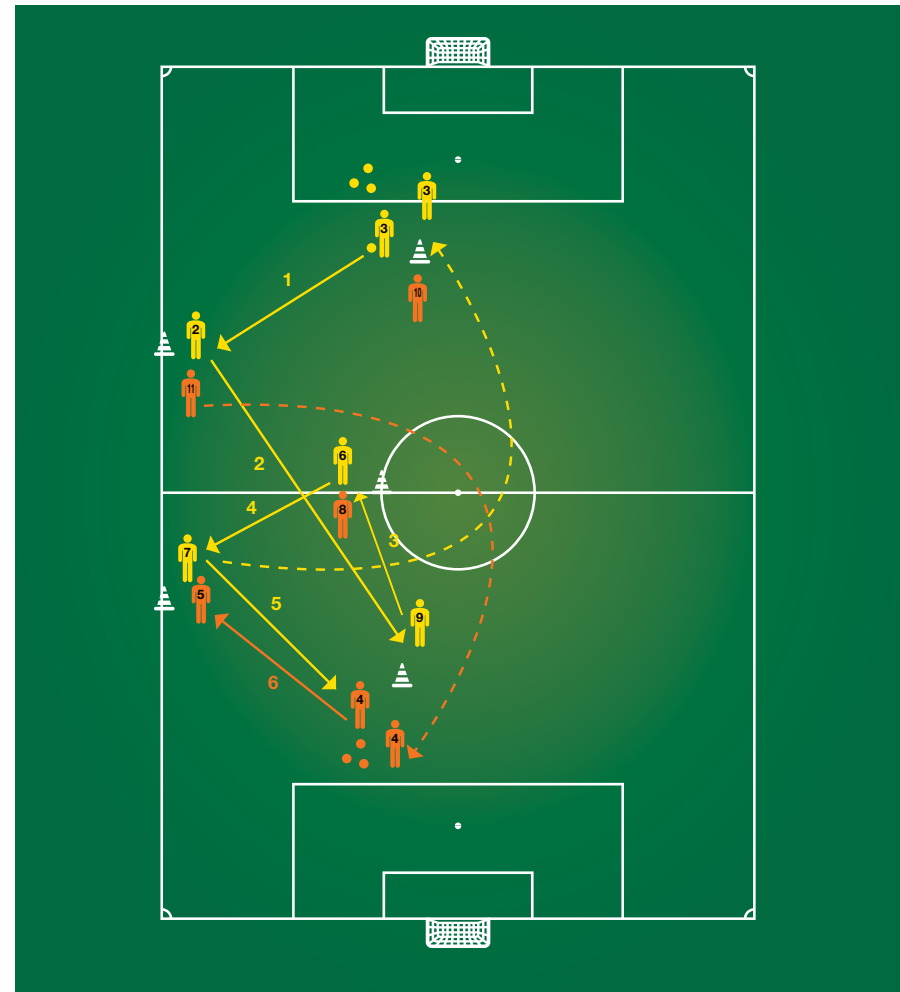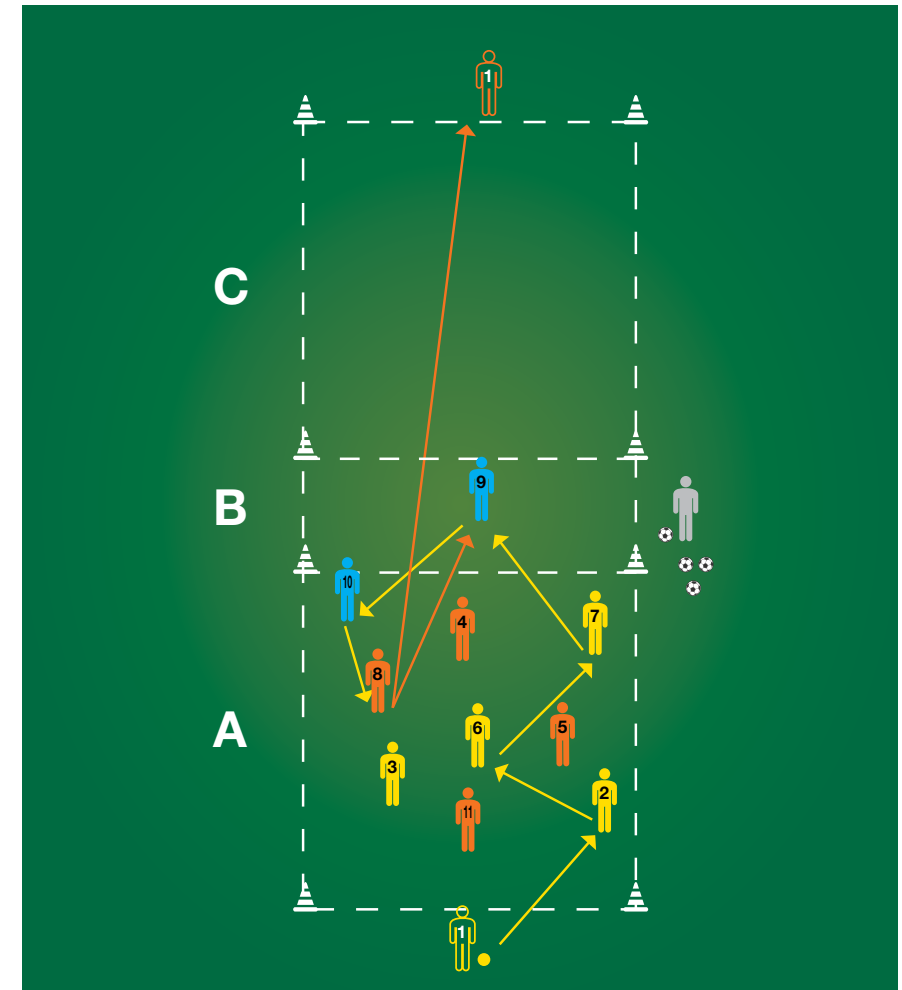
Performance Phase – Model Session 2
Football Conditioning (Middle games)

2. Positioning game: 7 v 4

- 2 grids of approximately 30m x 30m (A & C) separated by a grid of 5m x 30m (B)

- 2 groups of 4 outfield players

- Yellow consisting of the players #2-3-6-7

- Orange consisting of the players #4-5-8-11

- #9 and #10 are neutral players who always play with the team in possession; one in grid B the other in the grid where the positioning game takes place (see diagram)

- 2 goalkeepers positioned on each back line

- #7 (yellow) keep possession against #4 (orange)

- Players as much as possible in their game positions (especially the team in BP)

- Provide 4 options (left; right; central and far) for the player on the ball through proper positioning

- When orange wins the ball in grid A, they must try to pass to #9 in grid B or their goalkeeper at the far end

- If they succeed, all players cross over to grid C where the game continues with orange in possession and yellow defending

- If a yellow player passes the ball out of the grid, the coach immediately serves a new ball to the orange goalkeeper and the game restarts in grid C with possession for orange

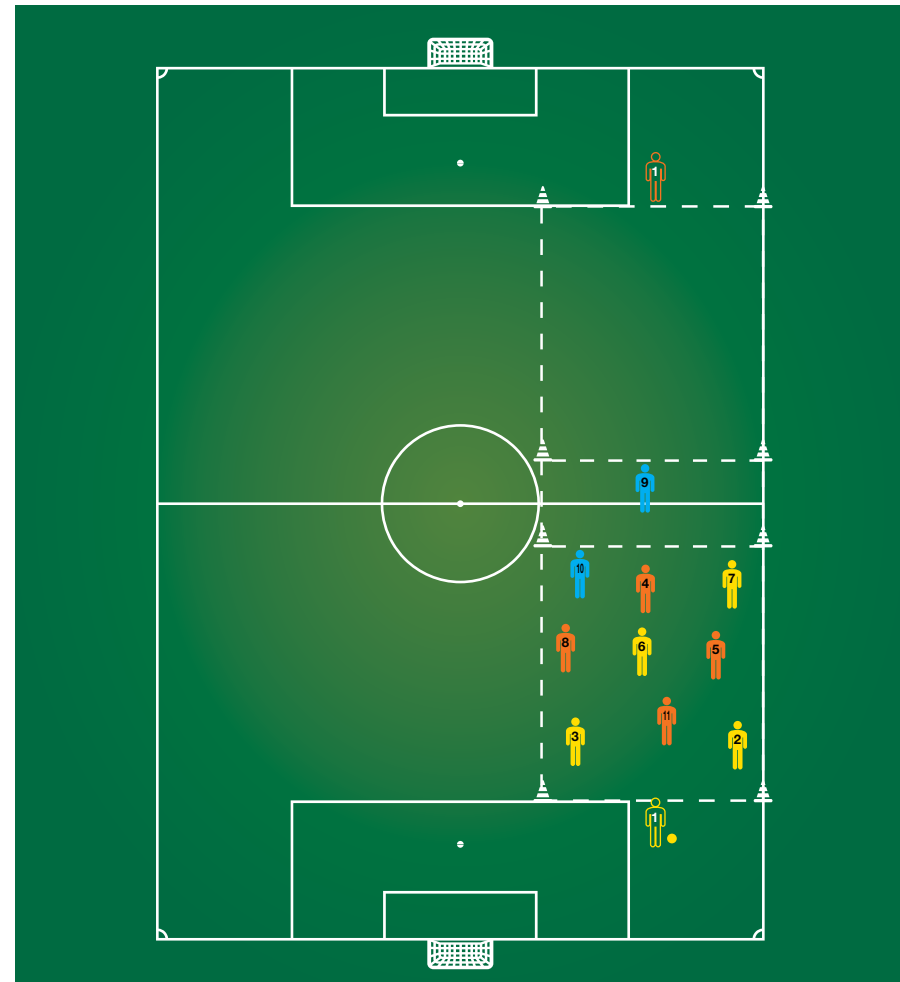## Performance Phase – Model Session 2
Football Conditioning (Middle games)

Steps up or down:

• Make grids bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Stop-start change of grids

• 'Flying' change of grids

Remark:

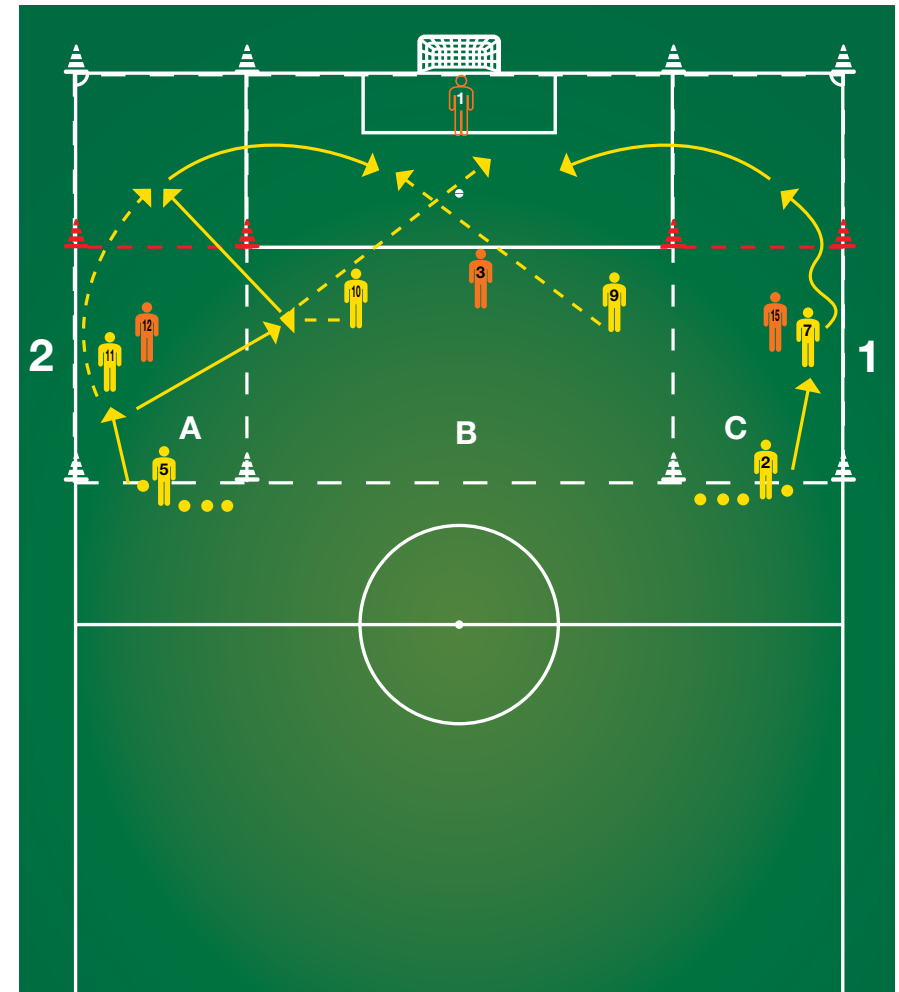• Position the grids in 'game realistic' areas of the field (see diagram on the right)

Performance Phase – Model Session 2
Football Conditioning (Middle games)

3. Game training component:

• Three grids A, B and C as shown in diagram on the right

• In grid A, #11 yellow and an orange defender (#12); #5 yellow is positioned outside the grid with plenty of balls

• In grid B, #9 & #10 yellow and an orange defender (#3) plus a goalkeeper

• In grid C, #7 yellow and an orange defender (#15) with yellow #2 outside the grid

• #2 & #5 yellow alternately serve a ball to respectively #7 & #11

• #2-7 and #5-11 must beat the orange defenders in their respective grids through effective wing play and deliver a cross to #9 & #10 in grid B who try to finish 2 v 1

• The defenders in grids A & C cannot defend beyond the red dotted line

Wing play options:

• The winger beats the defender 1 v 1 (situation 1)

• The winger plays a wall pass with #9 or #10 (situation 2)

Performance Phase – Model Session 2
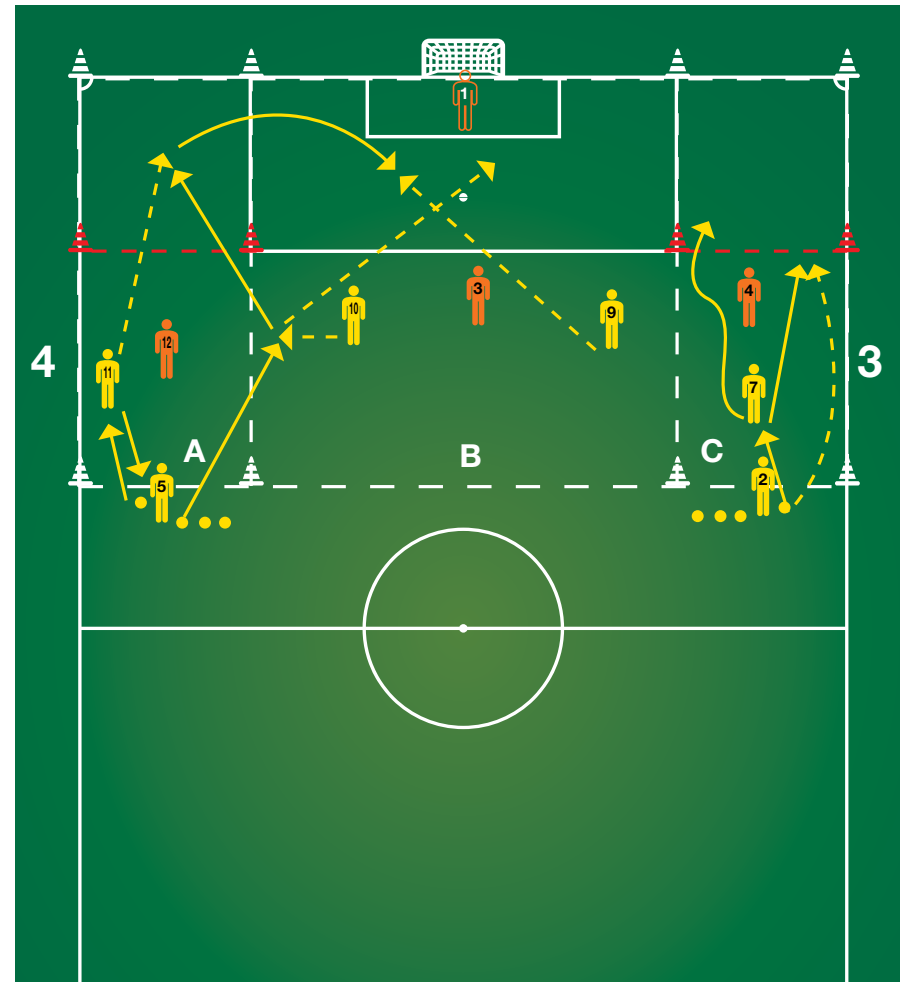## Football Conditioning (Middle games)

More wing play options:

• The full-back overlaps the winger to create a 2 v 1 (situation 3)

• The winger bounces with the full-back and becomes the 3rd man via
  a combination with #9 or #10 (situation 4)

The option selected by the attacking player often depends on the action of the defender. The coach may need to help the players develop their awareness and insight to select the most effective option.

Communication between the players is essential.

Also pay attention to the positioning and finishing of #9 & #10
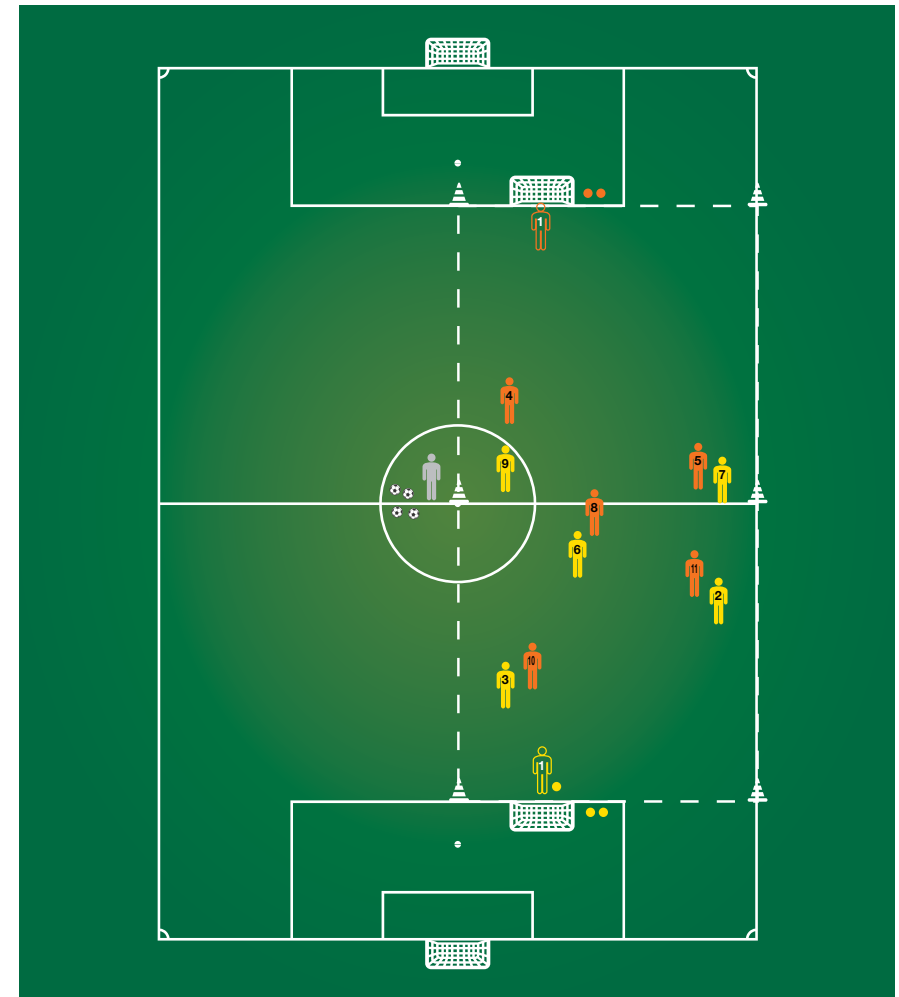
Performance Phase – Model Session 2
Football Conditioning (Middle games)

4. Conditioning game: 5 v 5 + goalkeepers

• The field is positioned in a wide area of the full pitch (see diagram)

• Pitch length: box to box (70m)

• Pitch width: central axis to sideline (35m), divided by the halfway line

• Two portable goals (or poles) placed as shown (balls next to the goals)

• The coach with balls on the halfway line

• Offside rule applies!

• Players in their usual 'game positions'

• In this particular game, it means that the right side of the team (#2-3-6-7)
  + striker #9 plays against the left side of the team (#4-5-8-11)
  + central midfielder #10. It is essential that the coach maintains realistic positions
  relative to a full field game (this explains the positions of the goals)

• #9 and #10 to change teams halfway through the game

• **By setting the game up this way, wing play will automatically be
  emphasised**

• **Since it's a conditioning game the intensity must be high**. Therefore
  there are no stops for throw-ins; corners; free kicks or goal kicks. The
  goalkeeper of the team that should have had the throw-in, corner or free kick
  immediately serves a new ball (within 3 seconds otherwise the coach serves
  a ball to the other team)

• **Play four games of 4 minutes with 2 minutes rest between the games**

Performance Phase – Model Session 3
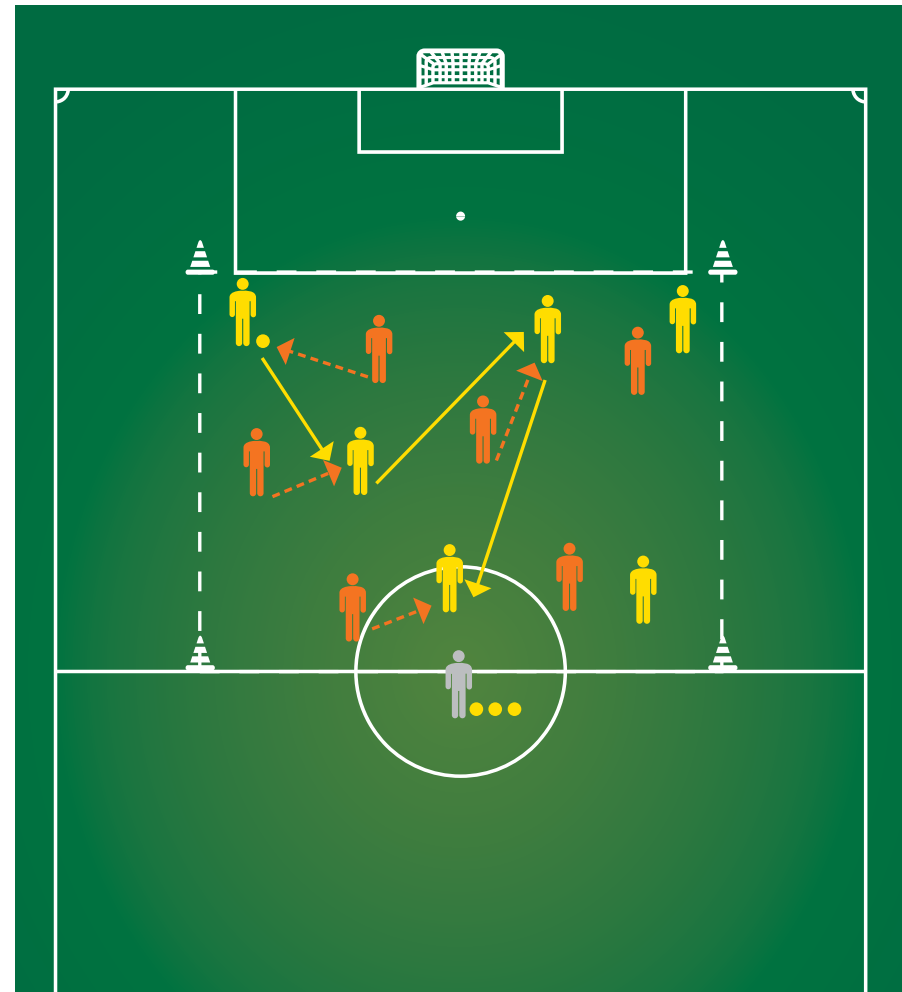## Football Conditioning (Small games)

Football problem:

"Our team is not good at regaining the ball from the opponent. Our players are generally too passive and give their opponents too much time and space to receive, pass, shoot or run with the ball. We must improve our ability to defend more aggressively as a team as well as individually".

1. Warm-up: passing exercise

- Two groups of 6 players position themselves in a grid of approximately 40m x 40m as shown in diagram

- The yellow players move freely in the grid while passing a ball in an un-prescribed order

- The yellow players must actively ask for the ball, check off, anticipate, etc

- The orange players 'pressure' the ball without intercepting it or disrupting the passing sequence

Progression:

- Change the role of the yellow and orange team regularly

- Dynamic stretches possible in the intervals

- Increase the passing and running speed

- Introduce a 2nd (3rd) ball

Performance Phase – Model Session 3
Football Conditioning (Small games)

2. Positioning game: 6 v 6

• Use the grid from the passing exercise

• One team keeps possession of the ball while the other team tries to win it back

• Series of 3-4 minutes max with 2 minutes rest in between

Steps up or down:

• Make the grid bigger/smaller

• Free/limited touches

• Zonal marking/man-marking
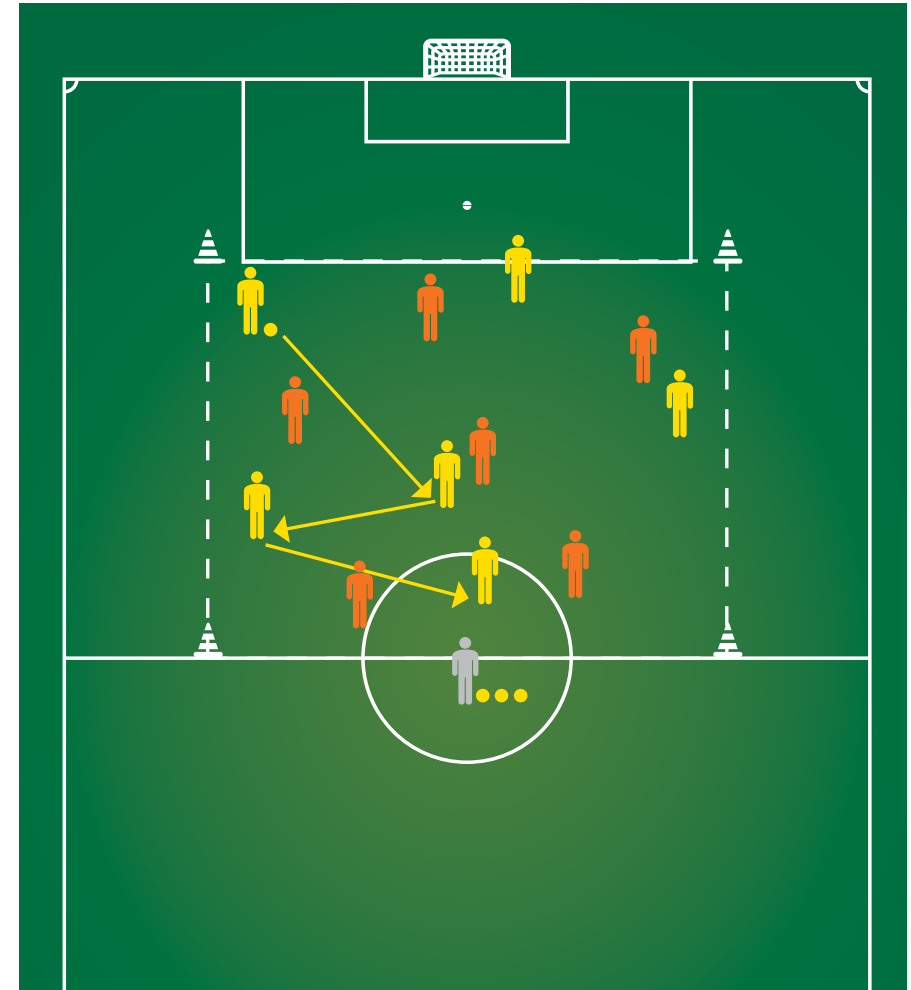
Performance Phase – Model Session 3
Football Conditioning (Small games)

3. Game training component: duel 1 v 1

Organisation:

Outside the penalty box is a 15m x 15m grid with 6 cones placed as shown in the diagram.

Two teams (orange and yellow) are divided into 2 groups of equal numbers and positioned as shown.

Groups orange A and yellow C have a ball each. The exercise starts with A1 passing the ball to B1. A1 then runs around the central cone to receive the ball back from B1. At the moment A1 starts their run around the cone, D1 also starts to run around the opposite central cone.
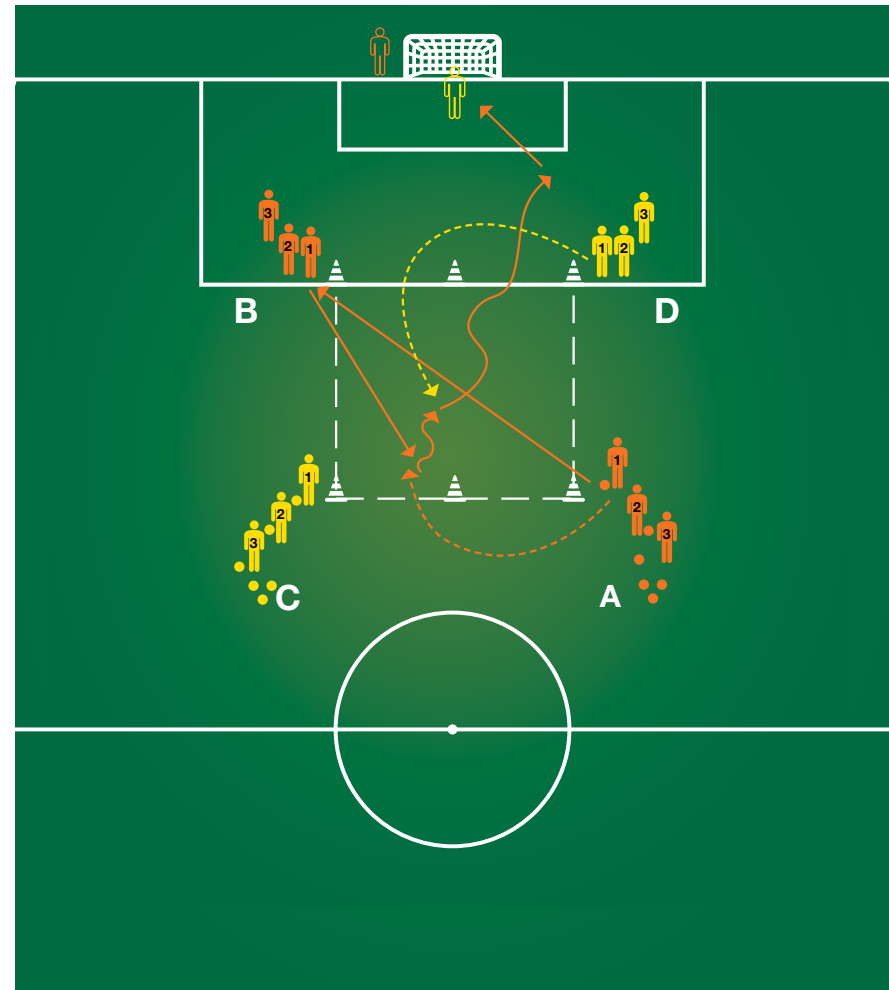
A1 must now try to beat D1 in a 1 v 1 to enter the penalty box and finish on goal. D1 can only defend in the grid and is not allowed to enter the penalty box.

The action stops when A1 has finished on goal; D1 captures the ball from A1 or the ball goes out of the grid.

After the action has finished the players involved move as follows:

• A1 to group B (bring back the ball)

• B1 to group A (bring ball from A1)

• D1 goes back to group D (line up at the back)

• Next sequence is C1 passing to D2 with B2 defending

"Which team can score the most?"
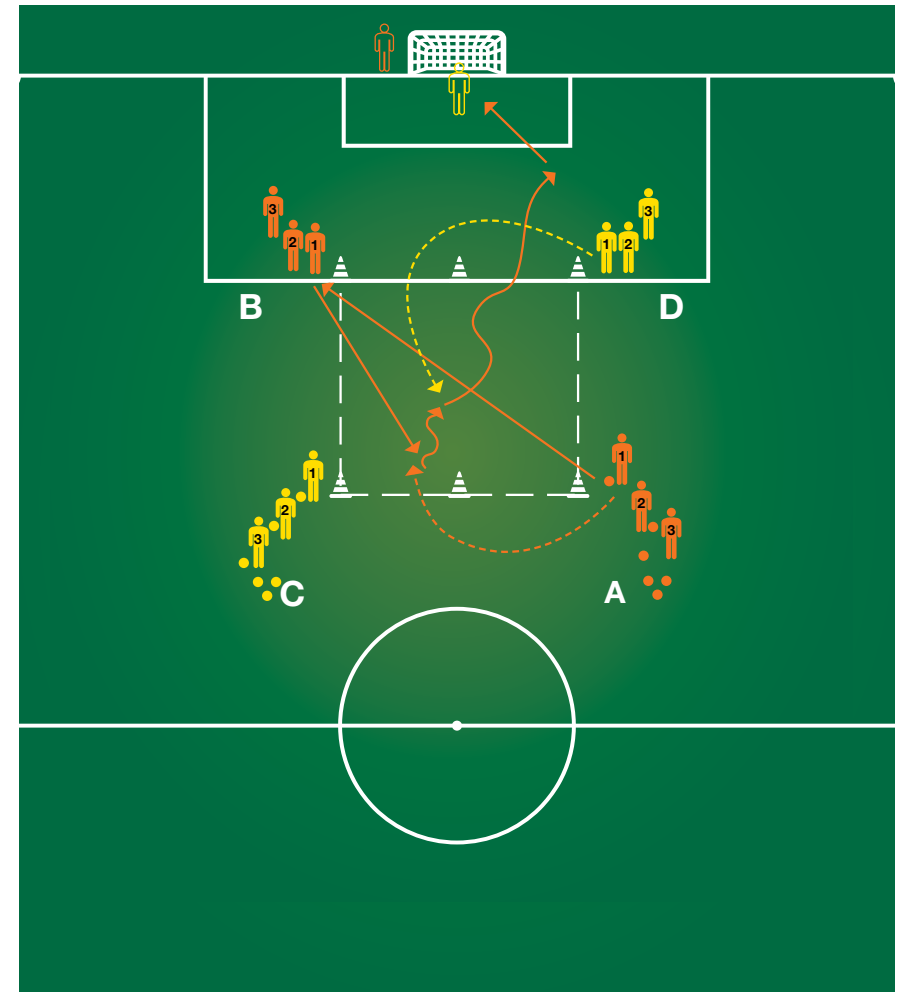
Performance Phase – Model Session 3
Football Conditioning (Small games)

Remember the coaching must focus on the defenders:

"Make contact and force the attacker to one side"

"Use feint attacks to slow the attacker down"

"Attack the ball aggressively when the opponent loses control of the ball or stops"

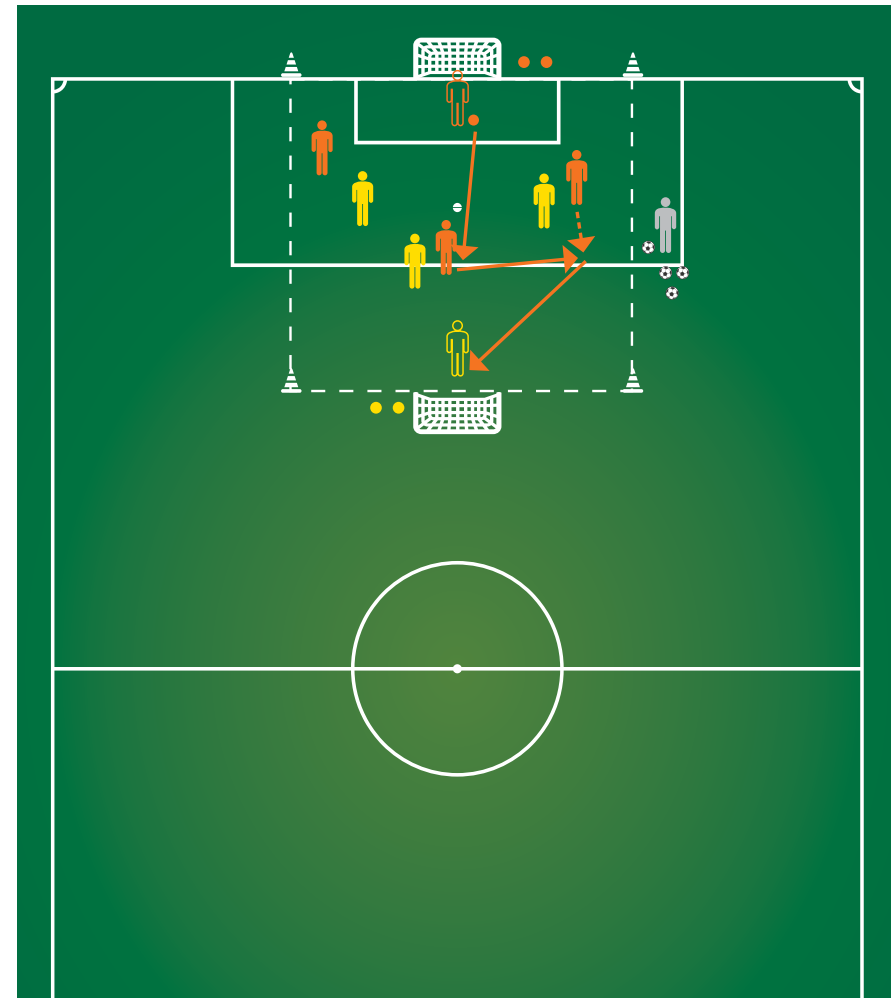## Performance Phase – Model Session 3
Football Conditioning (Small games)

4. Conditioning game: 3 v 3 games + goalkeepers

- A field of approximately 30m x 25m with two big goals and plenty of balls next to the goals

- The coach with balls on the sideline

- The team in possession must keep a diamond shape to make combination play possible

- The attackers can score from any position on the pitch, therefore the defenders must mark closely and defend aggressively everywhere

- **Since it's a conditioning game the intensity must be high**. Therefore there are no stops for throw-ins, corners, free kicks or goal kicks. The goalkeeper of the team that should have had the throw-in, corner or free kick immediately serves a new ball (within 3 seconds otherwise the coach serves a ball to the other team)
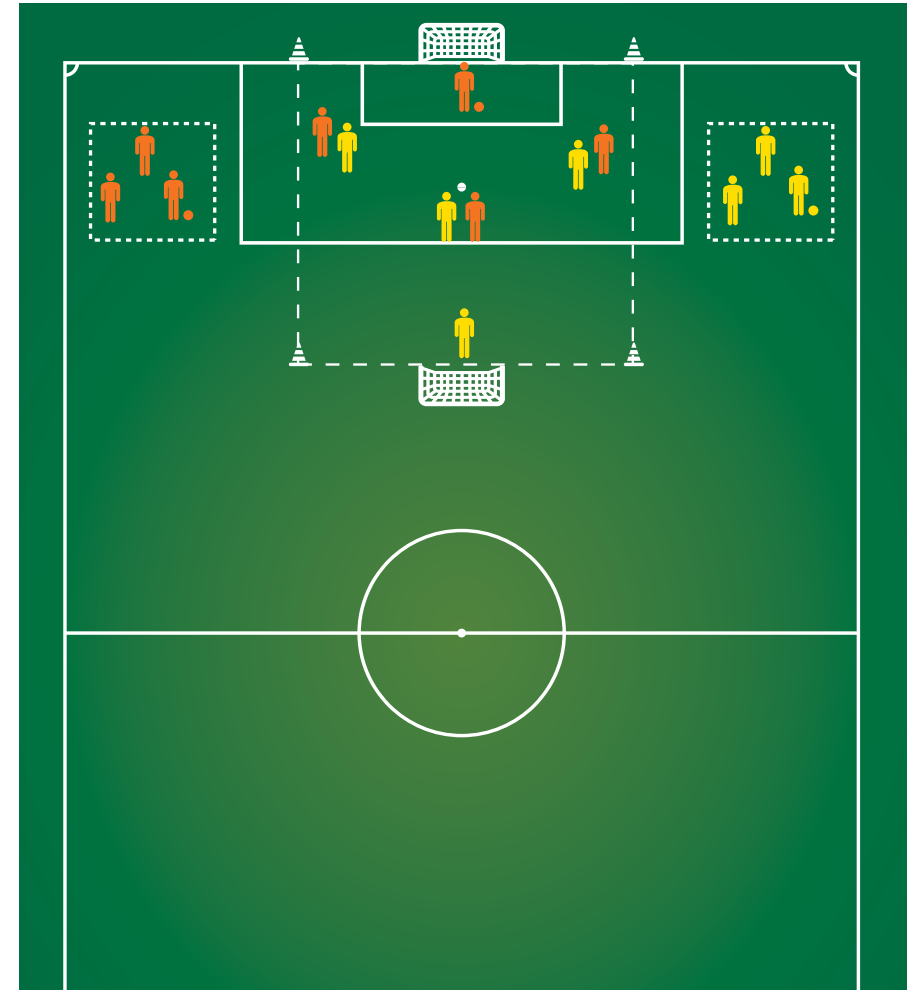
- **Play 12 games of 1 minute with 3 minutes rest between the games and a longer (6 minutes) break after the 6th repetition**

Performance Phase Model Sessions

- The rest periods must be a so-called 'active rest'. This is a low intensity activity like juggling individually or as a group

- This can be done while another group of players is working (see diagram)

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- UEFA Euro 2012 Poland-Ukraine – Technical report

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- EPL statistics – Data of 2012/13 season, as at February, 2013 (Prozone)

- Paul S.A. Mairs & Richard E. Shaw – 'Coaching Outside the Box: Changing the Mindset in Youth Soccer'

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