

Soccer Practice Sessions



Tactical Awareness

# Creating the Decision Maker

Player and Coach



By  
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# Acknowledgements

Thank you to every player I have coached.



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**Compact defending as a team.....**An exercise that teaches your players the importance of defending as a unit.



**Understanding pressure and cover.....**This session is about working together and stopping the opposition getting beyond your defense.



**Defending the penalty box.....**Teach your defenders to deal with quick play inside your penalty area.



**Pressing – Triggers and signs.....**This practice will give your players the desire to press and win back the ball from the opposition.



**Defending against the counter-attack.....**This practice will help your players understand their roles in and out of possession.

## Tactical midfield play



**Switching play.....**Your players will understand the importance of switching the point of attack with this practice session.



**Playing through the lines.....**A great session that encourages playing the ball through the thirds. When you do this you really cause your opponents problems.



**The importance of working together.....**The players will understand the importance of support play and working as a team in this highly intense practice session.



**Counter attack or build up play.....**This practice session will teach the players the art of attacking through midfield. Whether it's on the counter attack or through build up play.



**Movement and forward runs.....**The opposition will not be able to cope with the movement of your players after you coach this practice session.

## Tactical wing play



**Attack from wide areas.....**Exploit the space behind your opponent and get your players mentally ready to attack from the wings.



**Crossing and Finishing.....**This session is about getting quality crosses into the box. All your players will understand their movement and positioning when the ball is being crossed.



**Movement in the final third from crosses.....**When your wide players are delivering quality crosses, you want your attacking players to understand the movement required. This practice will help you do that.



**Creativity from your wide players.....**Your wide players need to offer more than just crossing the ball. This practice will encourage creativity.



**Getting behind the back line.....**This practice exploits wide attacking areas and will give your players a mental image of how they can be successful.

## Tactical attacking play



**Quick play and finishing.....**This quick fire practice session will improve your players decision making when inside the 18 yard box.



**Playing off the forward.....**This practice will instill a positive mindset into your players and encourage them to support the strikers.



**Reacting in the box.....**The instincts of your players will improve if you keep on running this practice session. It's all about seconds. Do not waste them thinking about your decision.



**Attacking overload.....**This quick counter attacking exercise will give your players confidence when they encounter game day situations. Your players will love this practice!



**Movement in the final third.....**This practice will enhance your players creativity, timing of pass and quality of movement in the final third.



## Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical defending

### *Compact Defending as a team*

**Area:** Set up on a full size field and mark out the zones to suit your tactical plan. This field is set up for a practice teaching compact defending. There are two lines 40 yards from either goal and two lines running from 18 yard box to 18 yard box. Having segments on the field will help your players visualize your tactical plan.. While this field is a valuable coaching tool it is only a template. The session still requires coaches to apply knowledge and imagination (decision making). You must allow the players to play without the zones to see whether or not they understand the concept of the practice.

The purpose of the zones are: If the ball is in a wide zone, the defending team occupy the zone that the ball is in and the central zone. If the ball is moved into the central zone the defending team occupy the central zone only. As you can see from the image (2) the ball is out wide with the opposition left back. This is the trigger for your team to move into the two shaded zones.



## ...compact Defending as a team

The opposition right back has the ball. The reds have shifted into the two zones and the area is now compact. The session has to be designed around a theme. Whether its offensive or defensive. This type of practice can be used in all aspects of playing styles. I like this exercise because I like seeing my players work as a unit. If the ball is in the defending third of the opposition, I like my defenders to push beyond our defensive line (as shown) and the goal-keeper will then move to the edge of their 18 yard area acting as a 'sweeper'.



I now remove all the cones and zones and watch the team play a 'normal' game of soccer.

I am looking to see if the players have understood the topic of the practice session. Allow the players to play in realistic situations and also have them play in different systems, attacking and defending. Using this set-up allows coaches to organize and teach players to have a clear method of defending in a compact shape.

The zones can also be used when attacking. You may be focusing on one team so when the defenders win the ball look for attacking options and have your players spread out in the zones maintaining good distances between each other and looking at movement and player rotations. I always encourage my players to rotate and keep moving into space, I do not want them to be static.





# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical defending

## *Understanding pressure & cover*

**Area:** Set up a 40 x 25 area as shown. At one end you have a server while at the other end you have two strikers. There are four 10 x 25 zones marked on the field.

The server starts by passing to any yellow player. (see figure 1) The receiving players has three options:

- Play it back to the server.
- Play to another team mate in any of the three zones.
- Play to a striker at the opposite end.

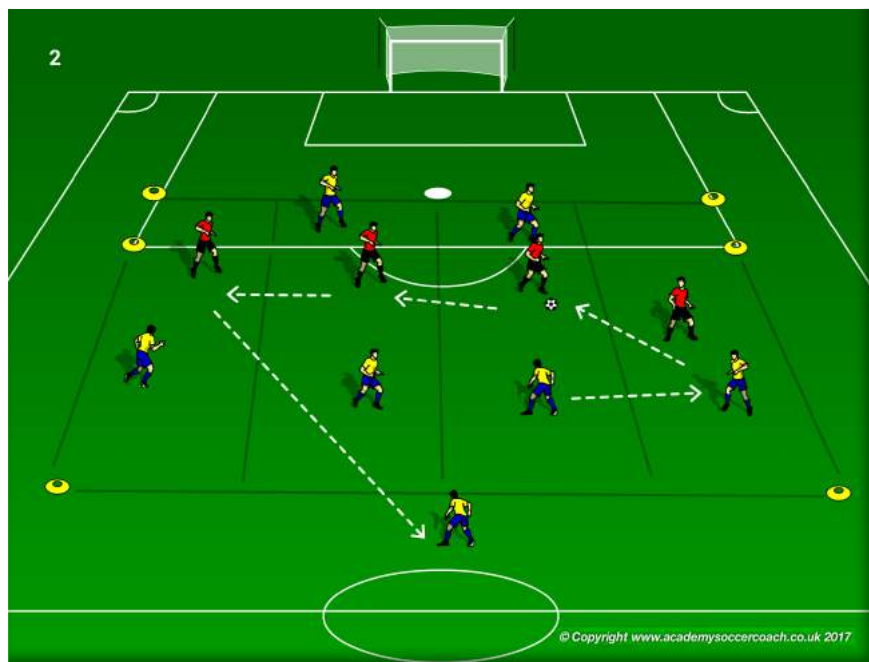
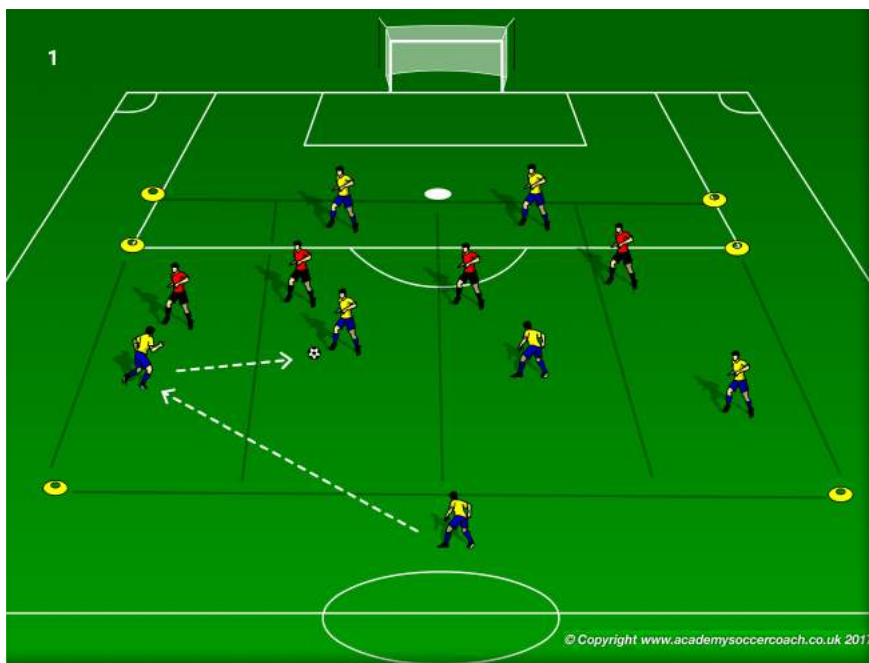
The strikers can only receive a pass from a player that is in a different zone.

Defenders have to stay in their zone. Pressure by the defender and cover by team mates to stop the pass to the strikers is essential.

Attackers score by passing the ball to the two strikers and defenders score by winning the ball and passing to the server either by combination play with another defender or a pass from the defender winning the ball. (see figure 2)

### **Coaching points:**

The defender occupying the zone where the ball is puts pressure on the attacking player. They force the play in a certain direction depending on the coaches philosophy. Team mates offer cover to stop the passes reaching the two strikers. Communication is key.



Above shows the defenders winning the ball and combining to score by passing to the server.

## ...understanding pressure & cover

I now add a goal-keeper. If you want to move the playing area and the strikers to the edge of the 18 you can.

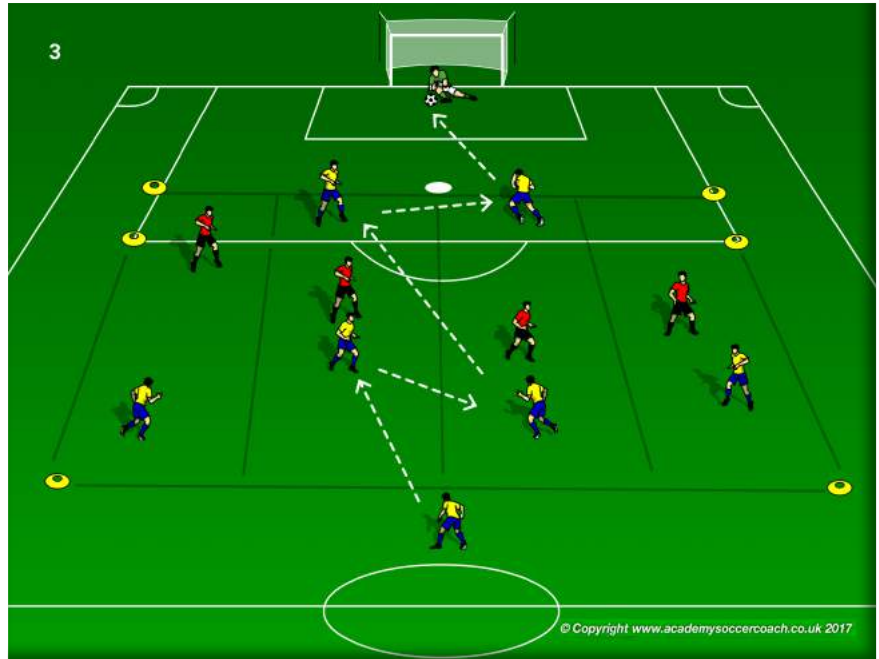
We now have 1v1 scenarios in each zone. If the attacker beats the defender in a 1v1 and dribbles into the end zone they get the opportunity to score. This will get the attackers 2 points.

Another option for the attacking team is to pass the ball to a striker who must play the ball to the other striker who can then shoot at goal (see figure 3) Defenders still get one point if they win the ball and get it to the server.

### Coaching points:

Defenders press at high intensity. They need to understand which way to force the play and what is behind them. Communication between team-mates is a major factor when defending. The defensive shape of the team should never be square with one another.

I always allow the players to play at the end. (see figure 4) I am looking to see if the players understood the topic that was covered. There will be opportunities for you to step in and coach your philosophy on defending. I generally stick to the topic coached, even in the game at the end.



A through ball is played and the striker combines with the other striker who gets a shot on target.



Allow your group to play and the coach will observe their learning skills.





# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical defending

## Defending the penalty box

**Area:** Set up as shown in figure 1. Six 6x3 boxes are marked down the side of the six yard area extending to the edge of the penalty box.

A 6x4 box is marked 22 yards from the goal. Inside here is the server. One yellow player occupies each box and a 2v2 is played inside the penalty area with a goal-keeper in the goal.

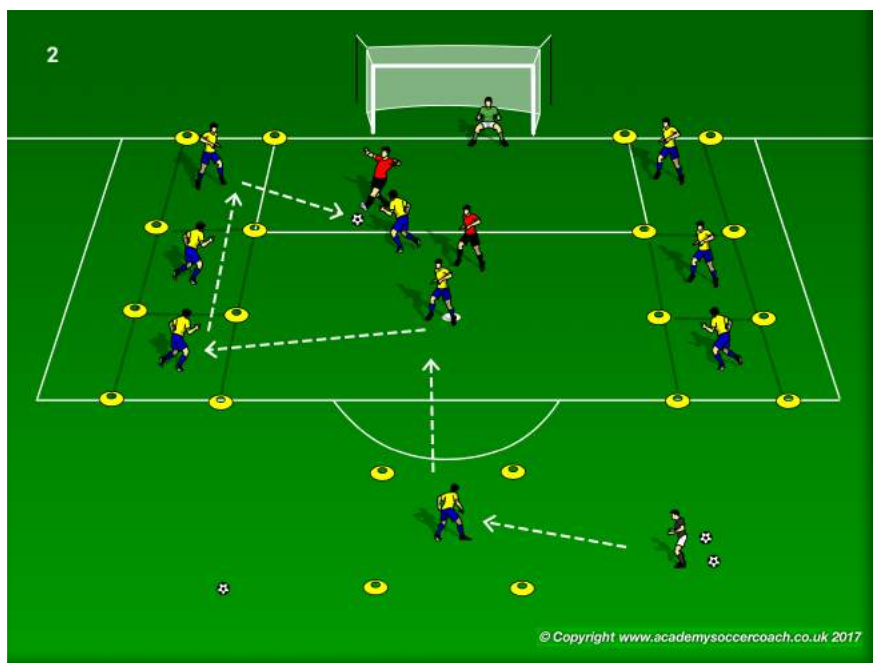
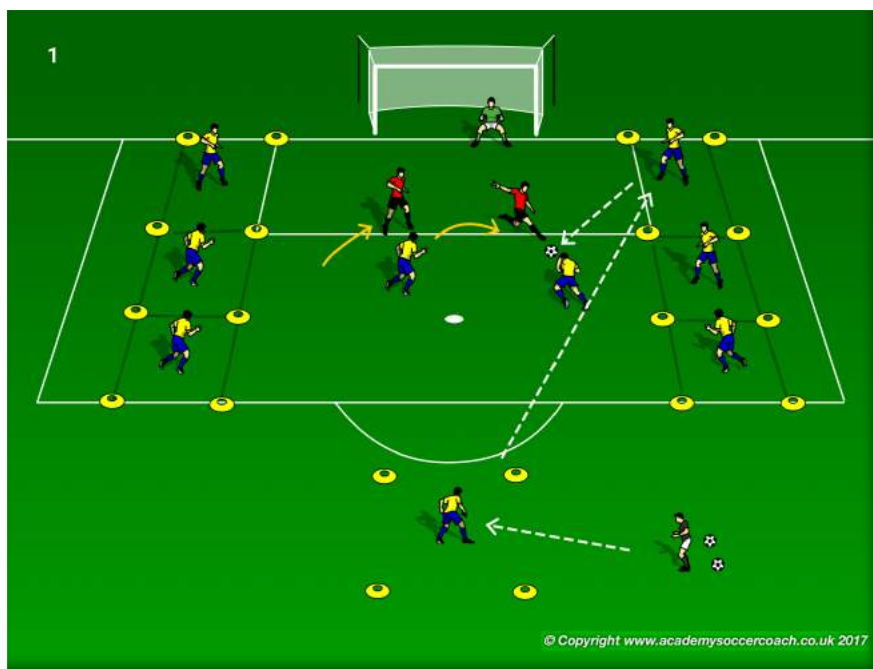
The two red players are defending the goal. Yellow players on the outside are one touch only and the offside rule is in play.

The objective of the exercise is for the yellow players to keep the ball and create shooting opportunities. The red defenders track the play and defend quickly to block passes or shots. Red defenders score by blocking a shot and score two points if they win possession and pass it to the server.

The server passes the ball to alternate sides. The yellow outer players can pass to each other (see figure 2)

### Coaching points:

The defender looks at angles and distance. They communicate with each other. They must try and see the player and ball at all times, so keep an open body stance.



The outer players combine passes. This challenges the two defenders.

## ...defending the penalty box

I now increase the size of the playing area. And play 5v5 in the central playing area (see figure 3)

This challenges the defenders more because the yellow attackers have more space to run in behind. The defenders and the goal keeper need to be aware of the space behind the defense.

Encourage the outer players to cross the ball. This will create realistic scenarios that happen in games.



The ball is played wide and then crossed into the danger area.

It is important to play a game at the end of the practice. Figure 4 shows the group playing 7v7 and the reds are defending the large goal. When the reds win the ball they attempt to score in either of the small goals.

Reverse the role of the teams. Yellow team now gets an opportunity to defend the large goal.

The practice creates realistic challenges that can happen in and around the penalty area. The session is intense so hopefully when it comes to the pressures of the real game, your players will be ready and confident to compete and make smart decisions.



Allow your group to play at the end of the practice. Look for signs of the players understanding of the topic.



# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical defending

## Pressing - Triggers and signs

**Area:** Set up as shown in figure 1. Use a 7x7 playing area with three reds inside each area. Run as many areas as needed (six players per area) There are three yellow defenders standing at the tall cone each has a ball. The first yellow defender plays the ball to any red player and then presses the ball in a 3v1 scenario. Reds must make 8 passes or the yellow defender must win the ball for this part of the exercise to end. The second yellow defender now passes their ball in and plays 3v1. After each round the red team add up their number of passes. Play until all three defenders have had a turn (maximum of 24 passes) After all three yellows have defended, they then switch roles. The red players now become the defenders. Can the red team stop the yellow team making more passes? I now progress the practice by playing 8v8 with each goal-keeper standing in the 'D' on the edge of the penalty area. The game starts with the goal-keeper playing to a red. The aim of the exercise is for the attacking team to pass the ball around and whenever they get the opportunity, they can chip the ball into the hands of the opposite goal-keeper to score a point.



The yellow team move as a unit to press the play. Coach your style of pressing.

## ...pressing - Triggers and signs

The goal-keeper always distributes the ball to the team that is defending their area. The yellow team combine passes (see figure 3) and find a player in open space who is able to chip the ball into the goalkeepers hands to score.

I now set up on three quarters of a field with 11 v 10. (See figure 4)

The red team is in a 4-4-2 and the yellow team is set up in a 4-3-3. The red team attacks the big goal. The Red team will only ever have 8 players active on the field when they have possession. Two reds must stay behind the area marked by the red cones. The yellow team must defend by keeping their shape,

communicating, knowing when to press or sit back and looking for triggers to press as a team. When yellows win possession, they can score in the small mini goals. If yellows win the ball the 4 red defenders must retreat into the defensive zone.

As soon as the yellow team score or a shot is missed the red center back quickly starts the game to see how yellows react to being out of balance.

### Coaching points:

Approach quickly then jockey as you engage the player with the ball.

Which way are you going to force the play? Wide or towards a team mate?



The defender does not close down the player quick enough. The leads to the yellow team scoring a point.



Yellows press successfully and win the ball back.





# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical defending

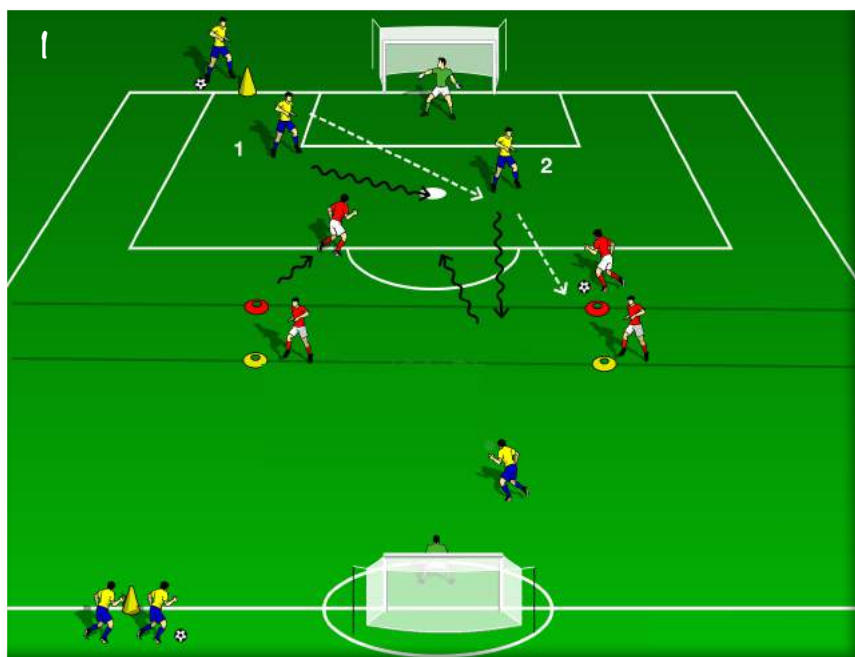
## *Defending against the counter attack*

**Area:** I run a quick 10 minute warm up and get the players switched on for the rest of the practice. It's critical to let the players know exactly what you are working on. Set-up two stations if needed (as shown in figure 1) in a 40 x 30. There is a five yard zone in the middle of the playing area. Player 1 starts with the ball.

Player 1 passes the ball to player 2 then enters the field. Player 2 passes to one of the reds. Player 2 then has to sprint into the 5 yard zone and then recover to help player 1. Both reds enter the field and play a 2v1 while yellow player 2 is recovering to make it a 2v2. Player 1 has to delay the play so that player 2 can recover to help.

I progress the exercise to just past the halfway line with two 5x5 boxes (shown in 2) The game is 8v8. Reds have a goalkeeper and are defending the large goal. Reds also have one target player in each 5x5 box. Yellows play with 8 on the field. GK starts the exercise. The red team attempt to possess the ball and find one of the target players who cannot move out of the box. The yellow team form a screen just in front of the halfway line.

If the Red team find a target player they score a goal. If the Yellow team wins possession, all players are free to counter attack. The Red target players are also free to come out of their area and recover on defense. Reds recover quickly because they are out numbered 8 to 5. If a goal is scored, ball goes out of play, the game restarts with the goal-keeper and two reds move back into the 5x5 boxes.



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## ...defending against the counter attack

I now get the players to play full field (11v11 if possible) In figure 3 we show 7v7 on a 60x40 playing area. Normal rules apply. The coach is wandering around the field holding a soccer ball. The yellow team are on the attack and have played the ball out to the right midfielder. When the coach feels the time is right, they serve in a new ball randomly to the red team, exposing opportunities to counter attack. The coach can now highlight to the yellow team vulnerable areas of the field. The aim is to keep running the exercise and avoid these counter attacks on game day.

Focus on one team for the defending part. Emphasize the importance of the holding midfielder. They are there to keep possession flowing but also to break up the counter attack. (see figure 4) The ball is about to be delivered into the box. The holding midfielder is positioned for the ball to be dropped back or the possibility that the red team will win possession. They are also blocking any clearances or passes to the forward player.

### Coaching points:

Players must be aware of protecting the center of the field. Even when a team is attacking there must be a collective responsibility in maintaining a defensive structure.



The coach walks around the field of play and randomly serves in a ball for the red team to counter attack. Yellow team responds to that counter attack.



The holding midfielder takes up a great position to avoid the counter attack..



# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical midfield play

## Switching play

**Area:** I start with an easy warm up so that we can implement the point of the practice session. In a 40 x 40, twelve players are shown in figure 1, two teams of six, (you can run 3 teams of six) 2 balls per team. There are four 10x10 squares in each corner. Teams line up two players in opposite squares with one ball. One player then occupies the other squares.

Yellows play clockwise, oranges play counter-clockwise.

The ball is passed long to the single player. The passer now follows their pass.

The receiving player moves out of the square and receives the pass and switches the ball to the next square.

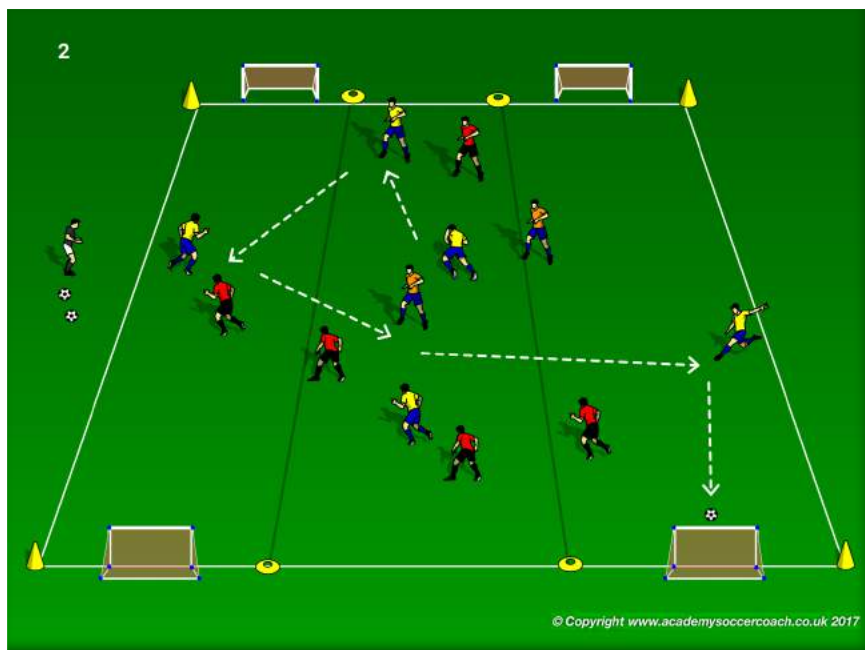
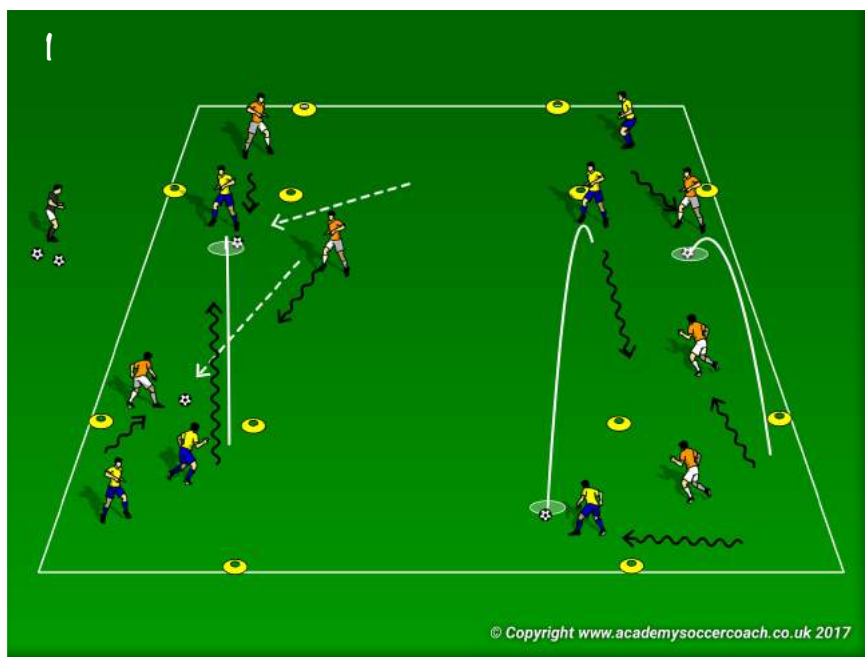
**Variation:**

Go the opposite direction.

I then progress to a 60x40 playing area with 5v5 and two floating players. Two small goals are placed at each end-line (see figure 2) The field is marked into three zones. The task is to play through all three zones before scoring a goal.

The two floating players play for the team in possession creating a 7v5. After playing with floaters for 10 minutes, move to 6v6 (no floaters).

Possession and team shape now becomes important as the task to switch the play becomes harder.



## ...switching play

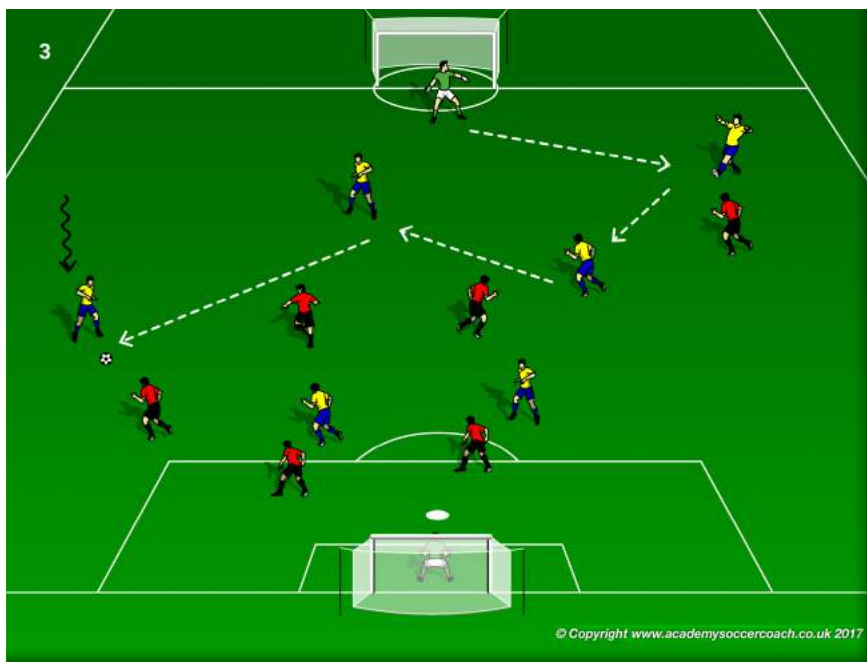
I now move to half a field and play 6v6 with goal-keepers. (see figure 3) I am looking for the players to use the full width of the field and switch play. I am looking to see if the players have learned anything from the previous conditioned game.

I sometimes introduce a three touch rule to make the players move the ball quickly.

I want them to try and create overloads out wide. As you can see in figure 4, once the ball is switched there is no overload and the reds have good cover. The yellow team recognize this and quickly switches the ball to the opposite side and create a 2v1.

### Coaching points:

Players should show excellent awareness, move the ball quickly out of tight areas and make forward runs at pace. Receiving the ball on the 'back foot' is key to keeping quality possession and control. There may be an opportunity to switch the play more than once.



The goal-keeper distributes the ball and the left back combines passes with the midfielder and center back to switch the play.



The ball is switched again to create a 2v1.



# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical midfield play

## *Playing through the lines*

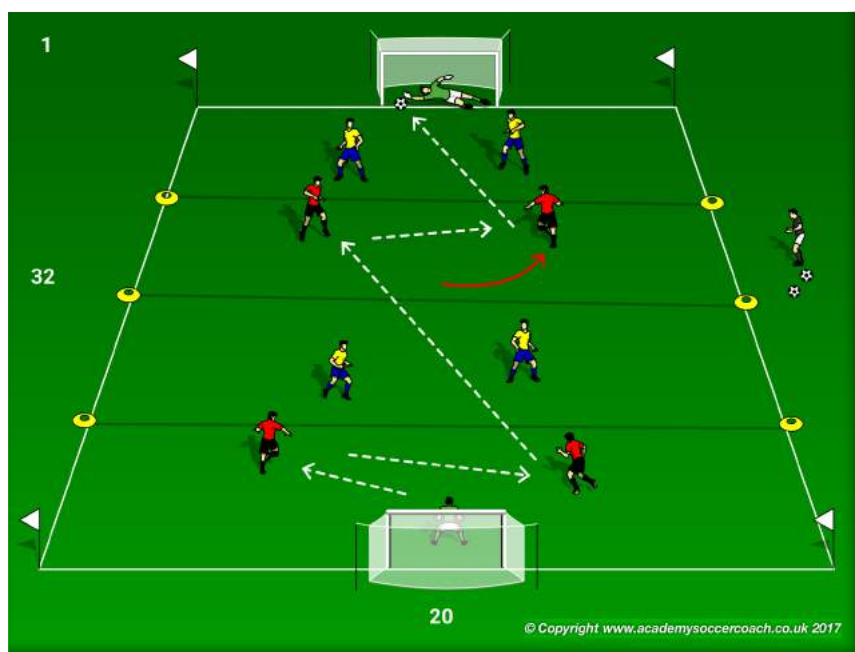
**Area:** I start with fun competitive warm up. The area is 32x20 yards, split into four 8 yard zones with a goal at each end with goal-keepers. Two teams of four are on the field with two players defending and two players attacking (see figure 1) The session starts with the goal-keeper distributing the ball to a defender. The defenders must attempt to play the ball to the two attackers without yellows blocking the passes. Players can move anywhere in their zone only. All players are restricted to two or one touch but they can keep the ball and wait for an opening. For the team out of possession they must try and block the ball.

If the ball is intercepted that team can start the attack or shoot if they are in the attacking zone (see figure 2)

When the ball goes out of play the coach decides which goal-keeper has the ball and passes them a ball.

All passes must stay below head height. Have the players rotate the zones.

Ideally you want the attacking team to break the line as soon as possible. Soccer intelligence is key to getting success in this exercise.



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## ...playing through the lines.

I now use a field 30 x 55 in three zones. 25x30, 20x30 and a 10x30 middle zone. 6v6 with two neutral players. Set up a 3v3 in the 25 yard area and a 2v2 in the 20 yard area. All the players except the neutral players stay in their zones. Play starts with a pass from the goalkeeper to a defending player who passes to the central player. The neutral player now starts an attack for the blues. A 3v2 is played in the 20 x 30 zone. If the yellow team win the ball they can pass to the other neutral player to start the attack on the opposite goal where a 4v3 will be played. If a goal is scored the goalkeeper starts the attack by throwing the ball to a defending player.

**Variation:** You can add a defender in the middle zone

I then allow the players to play 'normal' soccer. I still keep the neutral players and see if the teams have the confidence to break the lines. I then play with no neutral players.

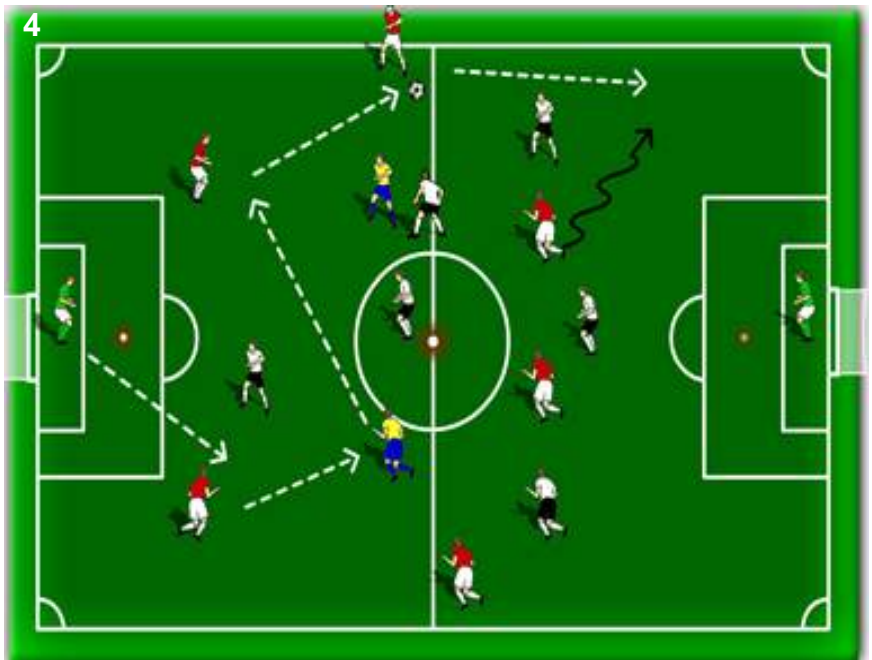
### **Coaching points:**

Look for movement and rotation from your players. If a player moves into space and is being defended well by the opposition, they must move out of that position and a team-mate must rotate with them.

Constant movement is key.



The goal-keeper distributes the ball to the defender who quickly passes the ball to a central player.



Play a game at the end and see if the players understand your philosophy..



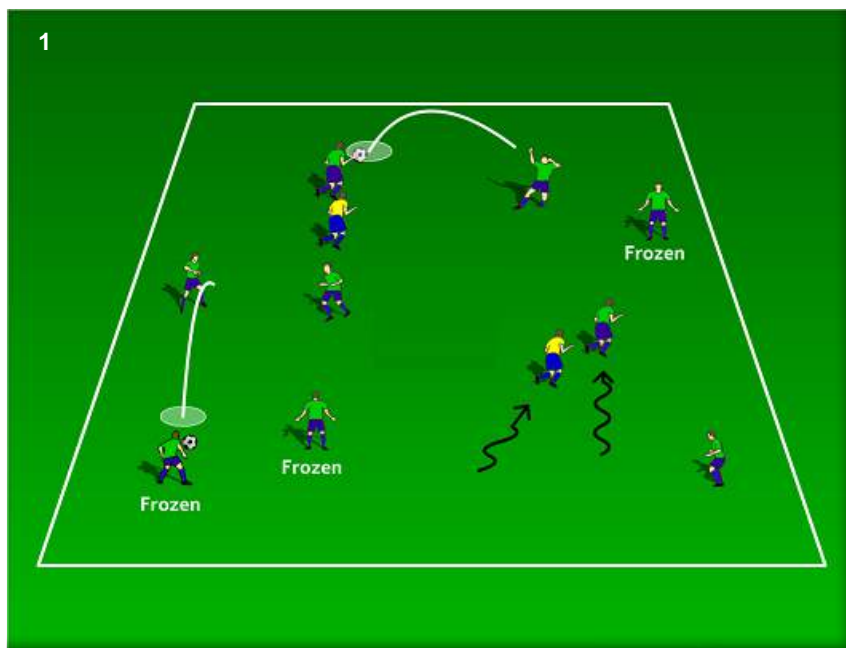


# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical midfield play

## *The importance of working together*

**Area:** I start with a fun warm up.

When you need to teach players team work it helps if you make the practice session fun. I mark a 20 x 20 (Depending on the amount of players at practice) I nominate two (or more) players to be the taggers. The rest of the players spread out inside the playing area. Two players hold a ball each. The two taggers move around the playing area attempting to tag the other players who are running away. The taggers cannot tag a player who is holding a ball. Once a player is tagged, they are frozen. To be unfrozen one of the players with a ball will throw the ball to them. They are now free and back in the game and looking to free others.



### Coaching points:

Players with a ball are moving and watching for players that are frozen and where the taggers are moving.

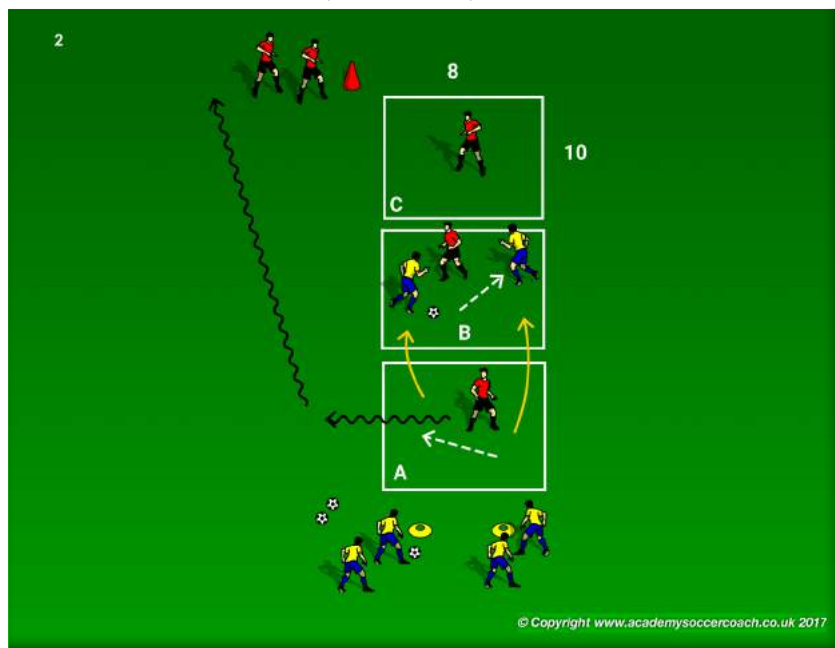
Players that are frozen communicate.

When the ball is thrown players make eye contact with each other and communicate.

I now move on to an exercise that teaches team work. It is a 2v1 exercise. (see figure 2)

I set up three 8x10 boxes linked in a straight line with a one yard neutral area separating each box. I have reds v's yellows. Reds position one defender in each box while the rest of the red team form a line at the end. The yellows are at the opposite end and start in pairs. The yellow pair have to get through all three boxes using the 2v1 situation, starting in box A and then moving through to box B and then C.

To score the pair must get over the final line. If the defender wins the ball the pair return to the back of the start line. Once the yellows move out of Box 'A' the red defender joins the back of the defensive line.



When yellows move from box B to C the red defender moves down a box to Box A. If yellows get past the end line then the red defender in Box C moves down to box B and then a new defender joins box C. Allow the yellows to have 15 attempts and count how many times they cross the end line. Play a second game with the roles reversed.

## ... the importance of working together.

I set up a 40 x 60 split in half with two 20 x 60 playing zones. Two teams of 7 v 7 with a 4v3 in favor of attackers in each zone. The coach has all the balls. Each player remains in their designated half of the field with three defenders in each half protecting their goal. A 4v3 attack is played.

Possession is kept until a shooting opportunity arrives. If the defenders win the ball they attempt to pass it into the opposite zone to one of their team-mates and a 4v3 is played. If the GK gets the ball they restart by throwing the ball to an open team-mate. Switch players if need be so others get opportunities to attack or defend.

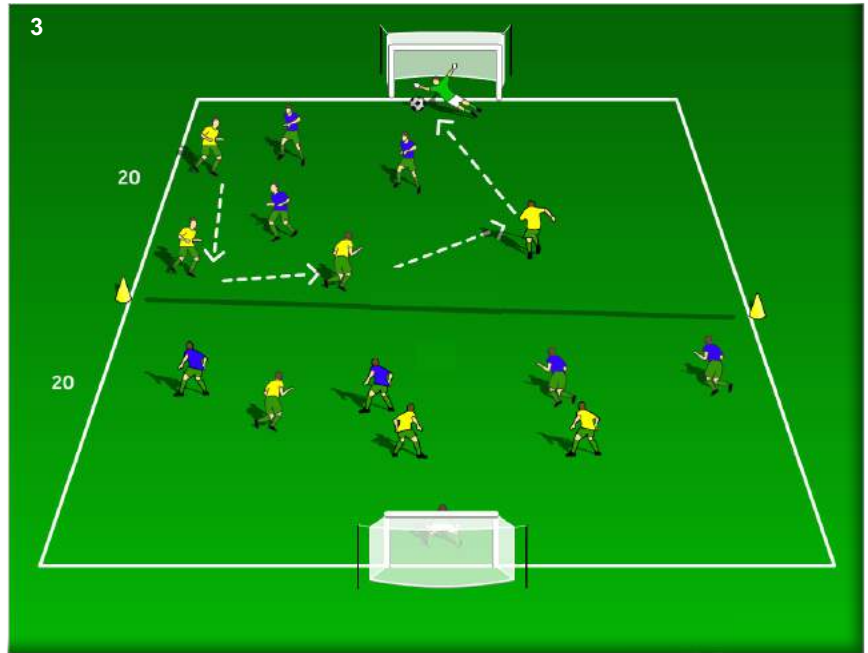
This exercise gets the players engaged and really promotes team work.

I now allow the group to play. I add a condition:

The player that scores a goal joins the other team.

I am looking for signs of team work. Do the players understand the concept of the practice session?

I may step in to add some coaching points if things are not going as planned but I usually allow them to play. I will step in and applaud play that has come from the previous practices.



### Coaching points:

Quality passing. Ball control. Body shape  
Movement off the ball and communication  
Field awareness



Play a game at the end and see if the players understand your philosophy.



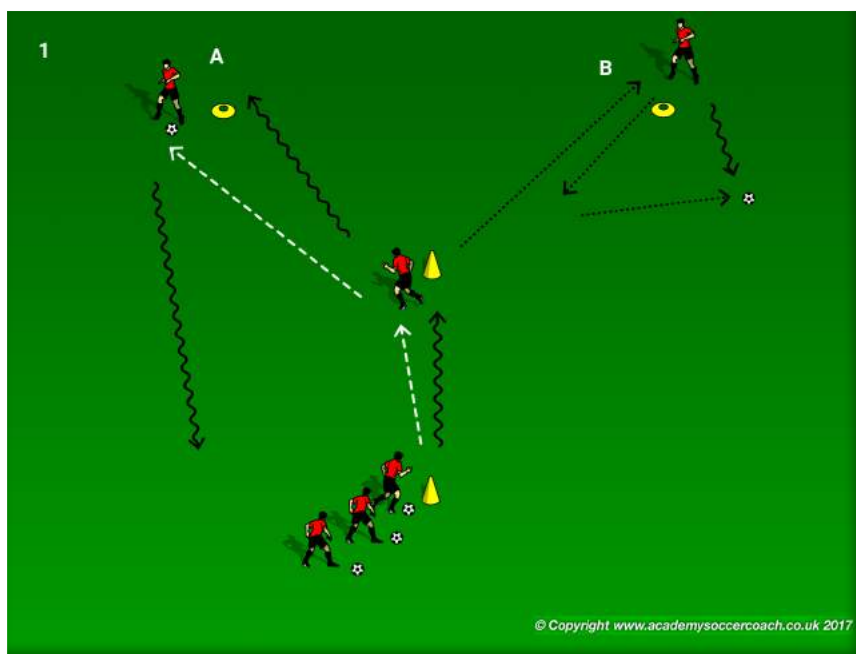
# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical midfield play

## Counter attack or build up play?

**Y-drill:** I start with a technical warm up, The Y-Drill. Set up a Y shape with the cones being 15 yards apart. Place players as shown. All players at the start have a ball. I get the players to perform three passing sequences. The first one (shown in figure 1-A). The player passes the ball to the middle player. They open their body up and control the ball on the back foot and then pass to the wide player. All players follow their pass. The next player receiving the ball in the central area will open up their body and pass to the other side and so on. The next passing sequence (figure 1-B) After receiving the ball on the back foot, the central player will play a give and go with the wide player using the cone as a defender.

The third passing sequence (figure 2) Player A passes the ball to player B who plays it back to player A. Player A now passes long to player C who plays a give and go with player B. Player C now dribbles the ball to the end of the line. Player A moves to B position and player B to C position. The player taking the next turn will receive the ball and pass to the left.

It's important to train the players on technique. Your players need to understand the accuracy, weight and timing of a pass.



### Coaching points:

The accuracy of the pass to the central player. Players must understand which direction the central player is going next so that it helps them receive the ball with the correct foot.



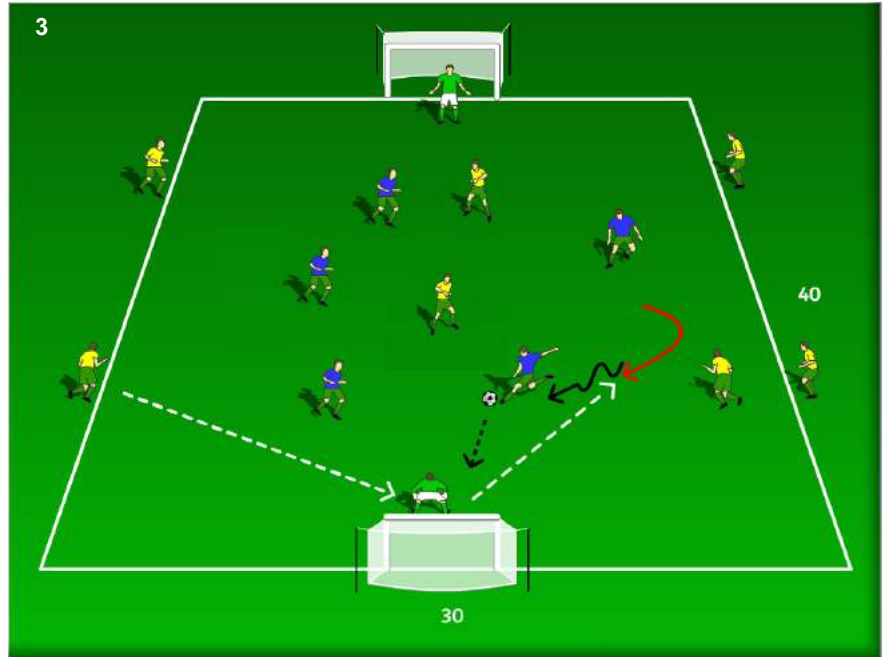
***...counter attack or build up play?***

1 now move to a 30 x 40.  
14 players including GK's  
arranged in a 7 v 5 plus GK's.  
Inside the paying area play a  
5v3 with the three being helped  
by the goalkeepers and the  
players on the outside. Yellows  
have to keep possession only.  
Blues have to win the ball and  
score.

Outside players are limited to two touches and stay on the outside. They cannot pass to the outside player that is on the same side but they can pass to either one on the opposite side. They can also pass to the GK's and the three central players. If the 5 blues win the ball, they keep possession, play a 5v3 and can score on either goal (as shown in figure 3) Switch roles to give everyone an opportunity to see different scenarios. This exercise gets the players engaged and really promotes team work.

I now allow the group to play. I may add some neutral players for 10 minutes and then make the teams equal. Look for signs when a team can counter or be patient.

I may step in to add some coaching points if things are not going as planned but I usually allow them to play.



### Coaching points:

Quality passing. Ball control. Body shape  
Movement off the ball and communication  
Field awareness



Play a game at the end and see if the players understand your philosophy.





# Soccer Practice Sessions - Tactical midfield play

## *Movement and forward runs*

**Area:** I start with 5v5 in a 40 x 40 area. I have the forwards on the team position themselves as target players on the outside (as shown in figure 1) These target plays have a one or two touch passing restriction.

The team in possession (Red) must complete four passes within their team before they can pass to any target player. If they manage to do this they score a point. If the yellow team win the ball, they attempt to do the same.

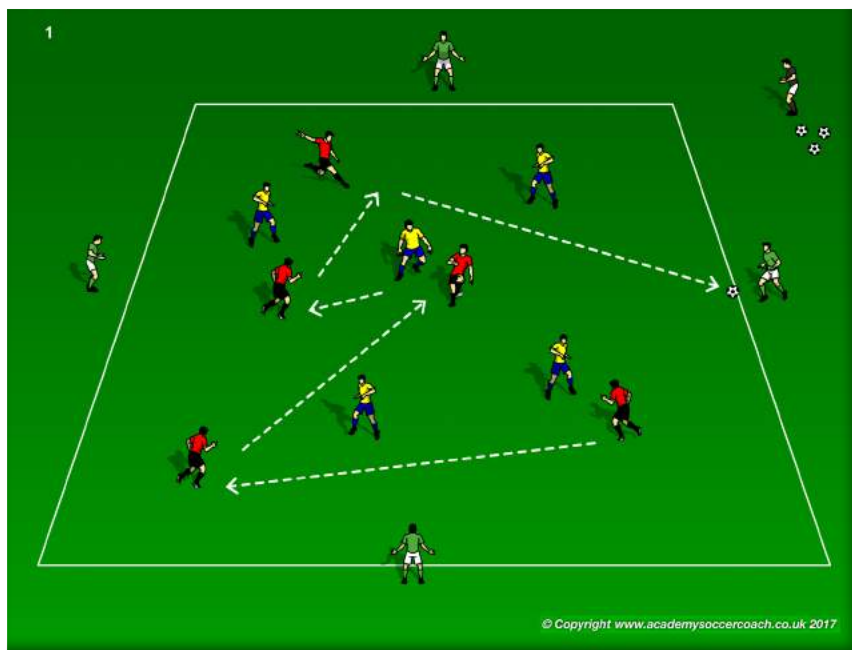
### **Coaching points:**

Create quick angles of play around the ball. If your position is cut off by the opposition, quickly move and support in another area. This will involve players rotating their positions with team mates.

Once the ball has been played to a target player, the possession team quickly move to support the target player (see figure 2) The target player has a two touch restriction so support has to be quick and players have to show a good angle of support.

If the target player passes the ball back to the red team, they attempt to make another 4 passes (or more) before they pass to a target player again.

If you want to rotate the target players you can.



After four passes or more, the red team passes to a target player.





## ...movement and forward runs.

I now move to full field but it is sectioned off. I mark it level with the outside 18 yard box and I have a 10 yard zone occupied by one of the target players (shown in figure 3)

5v5 is played in the central zone and goal-keepers are placed in goal. Each team is assigned a goal to attack.

The conditions remain the same with four passes or more before passing to the target player.

Once the ball is passed to a target player one of the attacking players breaks out of the central zone and supports the target player. The target player can either turn and shoot or pass the ball to the running midfield player. Can the running midfield player do a one touch finish? If the yellow team scores, they receive the ball from the coach. If they miss, the coach passes the ball to the red team.

I now remove the target players and add one each to the teams. I remove the 10 yard target zone and allow the players to play. (see figure 4) If you have more players you can play full field and your system of play (4-4-2, 4-3-3 etc.)

I am looking to see if the players recognize when and where and who. When does the team pass to the target man? Where do they support from? Who has moved into the best position to receive the ball?





# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical wing play

## Attack from wide areas

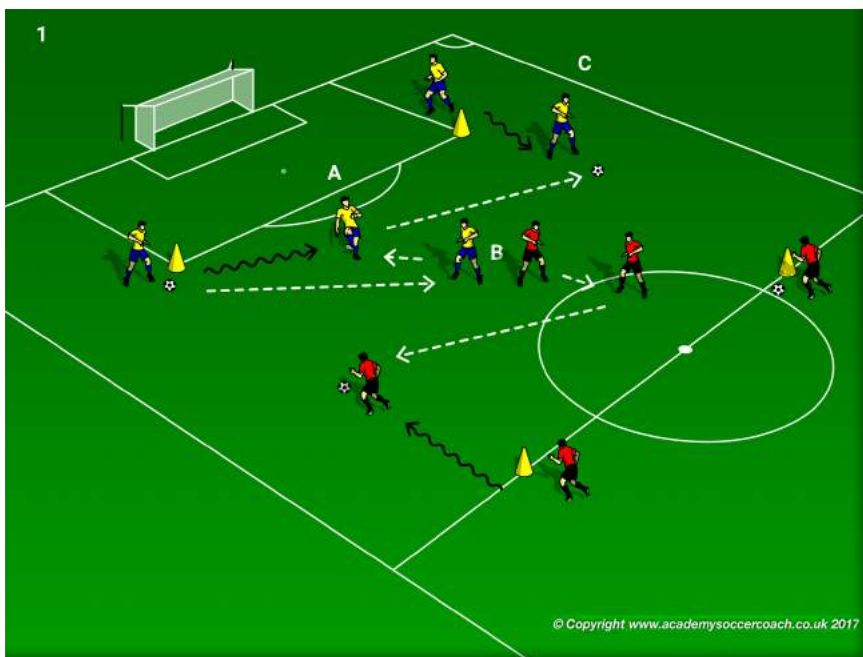
**Area:** I set up in a 40x40 playing area using 10 players in two groups of five. If you have more players you can run two stations. Both groups perform the exercise at the same time. All players at the start of the exercise have a soccer ball.

Each team has a player positioned in the central area (Player B) Here is the passing sequence:

Player A passes the ball to Player B. Player B then lays the ball back to player A who has moved to support player B. When the ball is played back to Player A, this is the trigger for Player C to run and Player A passes into their path. Player C now dribbles the ball to the next group and waits to start the exercise again going in the opposite direction.

The rotation is: Player A now stays in the central area, Player B moves to Player C position. I now move to a 4v3+2 neutral wide players. In a 30x40 (split in half) I have two teams of four in each half with two neutral wingers on the outside (see figure 2) The team in possession play a 4v3+2. They attempt to keep the ball for seven consecutive passes with the help of the wide players (who could be limited to one touch) They score a point if they do this. If the three defending players win the ball they must try and pass it to their team mate in the opposite area.

If they do this the defenders move across and the wingers slide down the sides to play a 4v3+2 in favor of the Red team. Switch the wide players if required.



### Variation:

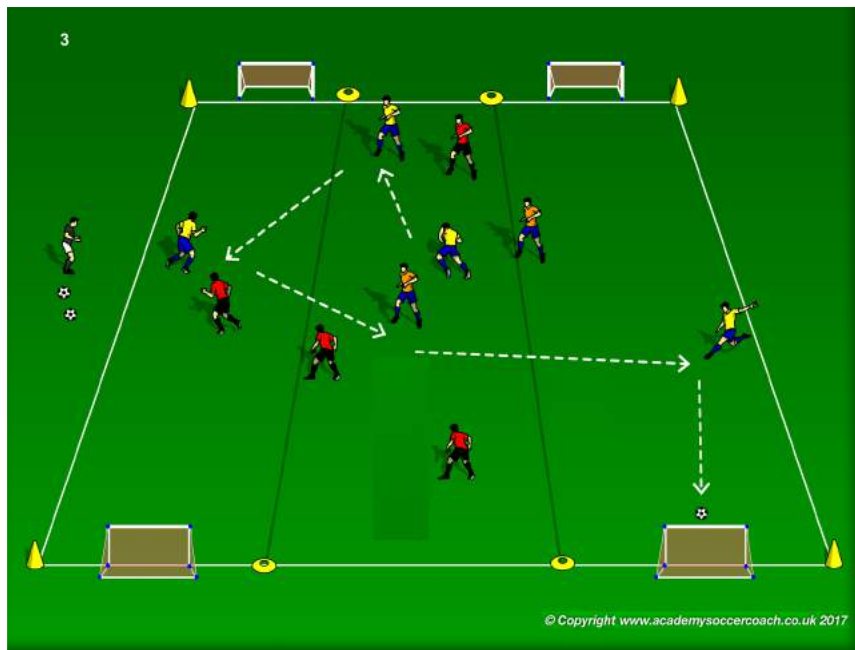
- You can play with two soccer balls only and player C passes it to the next player.
- Start the exercise from Player C (without a demonstration) See if the players can adjust.



## ...attack from wide areas.

I now progress the practice to a game situation. Taking care of the ball while in possession can open up the wide players and help create scoring opportunities.

In a 60x40 (or a field size to suit the number of players you have) play 4v4 with two floating players (orange) play for the team in possession. There are two small goals in the end zones at each end line (see figure 3) The team in possession needs to utilize the extra players and move the ball into wide areas to create scoring opportunities. I then remove the neutral players and play 5v5.



I now let the group play but I focus my coaching on one team. (see figure 4) I would set up on half a field and coach the team attacking the large goal. I am looking for the yellow team to attack from wide areas. I want to see if the players have understood the concept of the practice session. If the defending blue team wins the ball, they attempt to pass the ball to the target player. I want to make this as realistic as possible. If the team attack down the middle, that is fine. (You can add a channel down either side of the field if that will help)

Switch roles and allow the Blue team to attack the large goal.



Make sure the game is realistic and the wide play is not exaggerated.





# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical wing play

## Crossing and Finishing

**Area:** I set up on half a field (see figure 1) I set the group up in a system I am playing for the next game. I start from the back line and have progressive movement up the field which leads to a cross from the wings. It's important to run both left and right wings. I want players to play realistically by passing and moving into areas as though it was a game.

### Coaching points:

The quality of the pass (weight, accuracy and timing) and movement is crucial.

Center-back – Plays the ball wide and drops back for support.

Full-back – Plays the ball to the striker and moves wide to support.

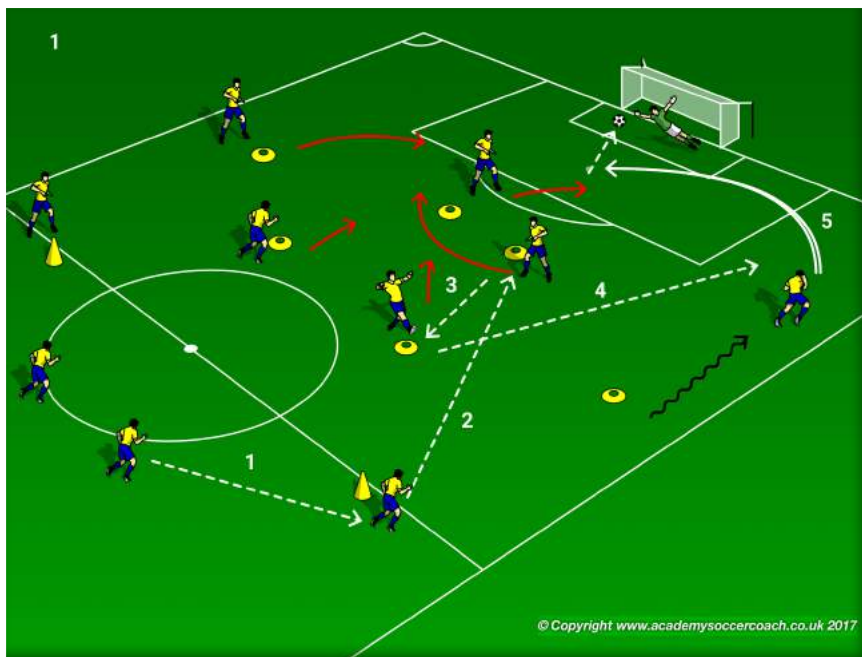
Striker – Checks to the ball and plays a one touch pass to the central midfielder. The two strikers now move into the area with one attacking the front post and one the back post.

Center-midfielder – Plays a one touch pass into space for the wide player. The other central midfielder attacks the penalty area while one holds their position outside the 18.

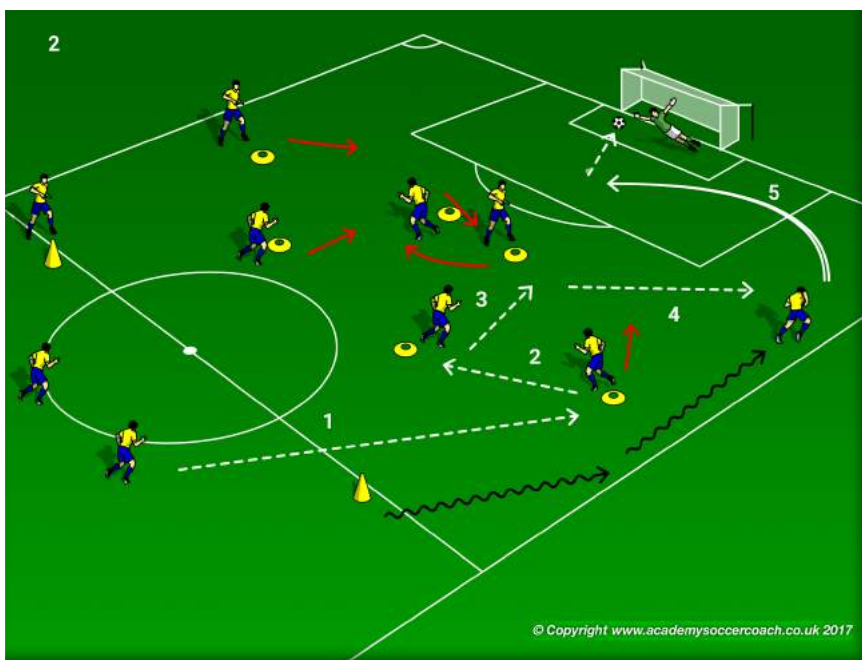
Wide player – Plays a quality cross away from the goal-keeper.

Opposite wide player – attacks the box.

I now run many variations to this system. (See figure 2)



Timing of the pass and run are crucial.



The right back is now the third man running who will cross the ball. Use your own ideas to run variations of this exercise. I also like to run one that switches the field then a cross.

## ...crossing and finishing.

I now progress the practice to a conditioned game. I set up on half a field. I coach the team attacking the goal. I have two channels marked and this is where the wide players are located. In the central zone I play 5v5 (or more) Yellows combine passes and attempt to get the ball out wide. The wide play has a two touch maximum. The wide player can either cross the ball or reset the attack. (see figure 3) If the ball is being crossed you are looking for a quality cross and quality movement. If the Red team win possession they attempt to pass it to the server.

### Variation:

Once the ball goes out wide, one defender can move into the wide zone and defend. The wide player has unlimited touches. Can the wide player beat the defender before crossing the ball?

Switch roles. Allow the Red team to attack the large goal. Run the practice to two goals.

I think it is important to let your players play at the end. It will allow you to see whether the group understood the theme of the practice session and it will also allow you to implement your style of play to the team. Do not over coach or step in at every mistake. Sometimes a quiet word with a player is sufficient.



The wide player resets the attack and the switch is made.







# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical wing play

## *Movement in the final third from crosses*

**Area:** I set up 2 penalty boxes and two goals with goal-keepers. There are four wide players that cross the ball and the players attack in pairs. (See figure 1) The first pair interchange passes and then play a diagonal pass to a wide player. Wide player has one or two touches to deliver the cross. The attacking pair must focus on the timing run into the penalty area.

The wide player decides on the type of delivery depending on the attackers run.

As you can see in figure 1, the attacker who has not passed the ball out wide has made an arc run and is ready to attack the front post area. The player who has passed the ball wide moves in behind to attack the back post. I then progress the exercise to a 2v1.

I add a defender (who defends each attack) The defender is asked to defend one attacker. This encourages the wide player to look up and deliver the cross to the open attacker.

### **Variation:**

You can progress the exercise to 2v2, 3v2 in the attackers favor.

Tactically, the movement and cross into the box are key. The forwards understand that movement will cause confusion and create opportunities. This will all make sense once you add the defenders.



Timing of the pass and run are crucial.



## ...movement in the final third from crosses.

I now extend the playing area to half a field. I add a 5 yard central zone and play a 3v3 in each half. When a striker feels like they can move into the central zone to receive a pass, they do this quickly. Once they receive a pass from a yellow defender (see figure 3) they play the ball out wide and then attack. The wide player takes one or two touches before crossing the ball. Watch for the quality of the cross and the movement of the attackers. If the red defender wins the ball they can start an attack by going in the opposite direction with a red attacker moving into the central zone to start the attack. You can also allow the exercise to be passive for the first few times and allow the forward to receive the pass in the central zone. Once the forward plays out wide, the attack is 'Live'.

### Variation:

Allow the opposite wide player to join in with the attack creating a 4v3.

Allow the players to play on a suitable size area (see figure 4) to show you they have learned from the practice session. You can step in and coach your style of movement and crossing. This will give you an opportunity to experience coaching. Do not over coach. Let them play and figure things out themselves too.



The yellow forward drops into the central zone and passes the ball out wide.





# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical wing play

## *Creativity from your wide players*

**Area:** I set up on half a field. As shown in figure 1. I set up 8 mannequins that represent a back four (you can use cones) With this practice I use the full backs, wide players, strikers and goal-keepers but you can run it as a team practice if you want. This is a technical exercise that shows the wide players various combinations of play.

**Combination A** – The ball is played out wide and the receiving wide player cuts inside to beat the full back and plays a disguised pass to the striker. The striker times their run to stay onside and shoot at goal.

**Combination B** – The ball is played to the wide player who cuts inside and plays a give and go with the forward and then shoots at goal. Have the players move to the next cone after the activity is over.

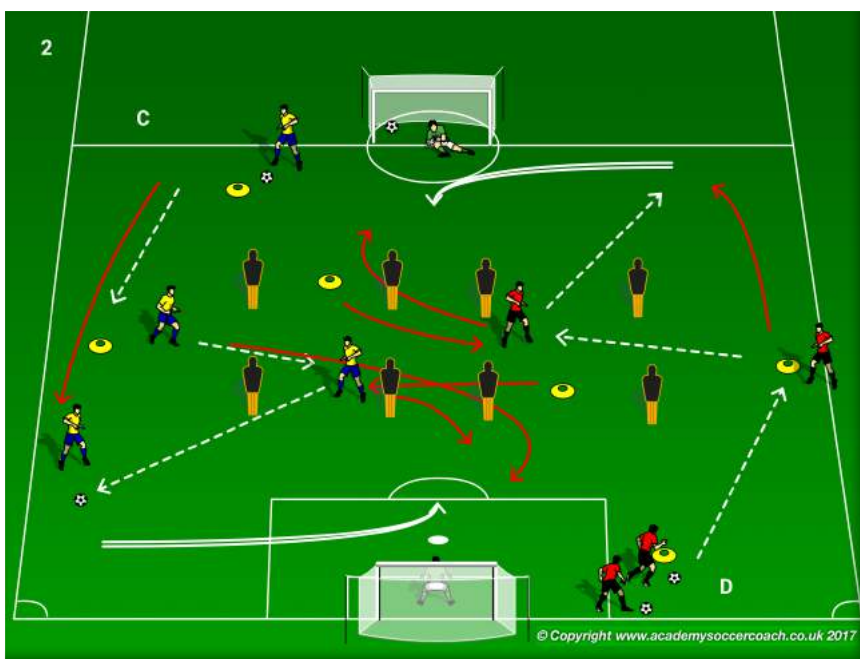
(see figure 2) **Combination C** – The ball is played to the wide player. The wide player cuts inside and plays the ball to the moving striker. The player who passed to the wide player continues their run. The forward plays the ball wide to the 'third man running'. The wide player is now attacking the front post and supported by the striker. The full back crosses the ball.

**Combination D** – The ball is played wide and the winger plays a wide give and go and crosses the ball for the forward.

Feel free to use other combinations that suit your style of play.



Inverted wingers create confusion for the opposition.





## ...creativity from your wide players.

I now move to a game related exercise. Play half a field that is coned off just wider than the penalty area. The field is marked into two halves. There are two mannequins (cones) placed on either side of the half way line (see figure 3) 8v8 is played with 3v2 in favor of defenders in each half plus two wide players from each team on the outside. The 3v2 players stay in their own half. The yellow defenders have the ball. They are supported on the outside by the wide players. Once the ball is played wide both wide players become active and move through the mannequins and create a 4v3 in the attacking half. If the reds win the ball they can start the counter attack. The wide players only become active when they or their opposite wide player receives the ball. I then finish off playing on half a field with three target gates on the half way line and a goal with a goal-keeper at the opposite end. One team attack the big goals and one attacks the three small goals. The team attacking the gates must score by dribbling the ball through any of the three gates. The coach now has an opportunity to coach their style of play. Look for signs of learning from your players. Watch how creative your wide players will be. Do they understand their movement?



The opposite wide player joins in with the attack.







# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical wing play

## Getting behind the back line

**Area:** A Rondo with purpose. I set up a 20 x 24 split in half. Four blue players occupy the outer part of each playing area while two blue players occupy the middle. Four yellow defenders are in the playing area, two in each half. Four yellow defenders are on the outside. The coach serves in the ball to the blue team. 6v2 is played. The blue team possess the ball for 3 or more passes. Once they see an opportunity to pass to a blue player in the opposite half, they do so. When they do this, the two middle blue players move into that playing area. The two yellow defenders attempt to win the ball and pass it out of the playing area. When the coach calls “CHANGE”, the four yellow defenders on the outside quickly swap places with the four yellow defenders inside the playing area.

### Variation:

Switch the defenders.

I now move to a tactical exercise. This exercise shows the players how to utilize the space between the oppositions defensive square. The numbers shown are the yellows positions on the field. Players 5, 6 and 2 pass the ball between each other. #9 moves inside the defensive square. This is the trigger for the attack. The ball is played to the #9 who passes the ball to the wide player #11. Once the ball is touched by the player entering the defensive square, the defenders can now defend the goal.

You can add a #10 and #8 and have them move into the defensive square. This exercise will give you an opportunity to coach your style of play to the players.



A rondo warm up with purpose.



## ...getting behind the back line.

Here in figure 3 we see #11 move into the defensive square and play a give and go with the forward. The full back (#2) has now moved down the wing. This is a functional practice. A kind of pictorial lesson for your players. This kind of exercise is vital in teaching game intelligence. Feel free to add other variations but do not spend the whole practice running these exercises.

Once I feel the players have grasped the idea of getting inside the opposition defensive square I move to a game related exercise. I play IOvIO and have the white team attack the goal (see figure 4) I set up the defending team in two colors to help the attacking team see the defensive square. I set up the attacking team in a 4-2-3-1 system but feel free to play your chosen system. I set the opposition up in a 4-4-1. The 1 being the target player (here we show the coach)

The coach serves in the ball. The white team is looking to score on the goal by moving into the defensive square and exploiting the space behind the back line. If the defending team win the ball they attempt to pass it to the target player (coach). Make sure the attackers create space (width and depth) to open up the defensive square.



#11 moves into the defensive square and plays a give and go with #9.



In figure 4 we see #10 quickly move into the defensive square. There is then a rotation with #9 who then passes to running wide player #11 who gets in behind the back line.



# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical attacking play

## Quick play and finishing

**Area:** I like to start with a shooting technical warm up before I go into this session. It also gives your goal-keepers an opportunity to work on their skills. I place three cones 25 yards from the goal (see figure 1) and split the groups up evenly on each cone. All players have a ball. Each cone has a different shooting task.

Player A dribbles past the coach and shoots at goal.

Player A then turns and receives a pass from Player B (give & go) Player B shoots at the goal. As soon as Player B has taken a shot, Player C now calls out a name. Player C and the name called play a 2v1 against the other player. When the three players return they stand at a different cone.

I then progress to a game related exercise. This exercise can be done with more players but in figure 2 you see 10 players including two goal-keepers. I set up three 18 x 24 areas and place 4 red attackers in the middle zone and four defenders on the outside corners. The coach serves in the ball. Two defenders from opposite corners enter the playing area. The reds have to complete three or more passes before one of them can break out and shoot.

Ideally the red attacker would take one touch out of the playing area and shoot. If the defenders win the ball, they recover back to their corner and the coach serves in another ball. The next two defenders get ready to press. Switch roles and allow the yellows to shoot at the goals.



A technical shooting exercise before we start the session. This is good for the keepers too.





## ...quick play and finishing.

I advance the session by adding another condition to the game. For a red attacker to shoot the ball must be played into the shooting zone for the red attacker to run on to. In figure 3 you see a 3<sup>rd</sup> man run from the red attacker who shoots at the goal with a first time shot. Understanding the timing of movement and passing is key when this condition is added.

### Variation:

You can add a defender in the scoring zones.

Players can break out wide from the middle zone and cross the ball for attackers to finish.

In the final progression I move the exercise to a 36x24 playing area as shown in figure 4. Shown is 5v5 but you can certainly tweak the exercise to play with higher numbers. Each team is assigned a goal to attack.

I am looking for players to harness the techniques from the previous exercises. I am looking for quick movement, field awareness and hitting the target with the shots. I am also looking for the players reactions on rebounds. Lots of opportunities are missed because players do not react quickly enough when the goal-keeper blocks a shot.

Move to a 'normal' game at the end. Allow the players to play and making their own decisions.



Third man run and goal.



Quick passing and movement is critical when you are in the 18 yard box.

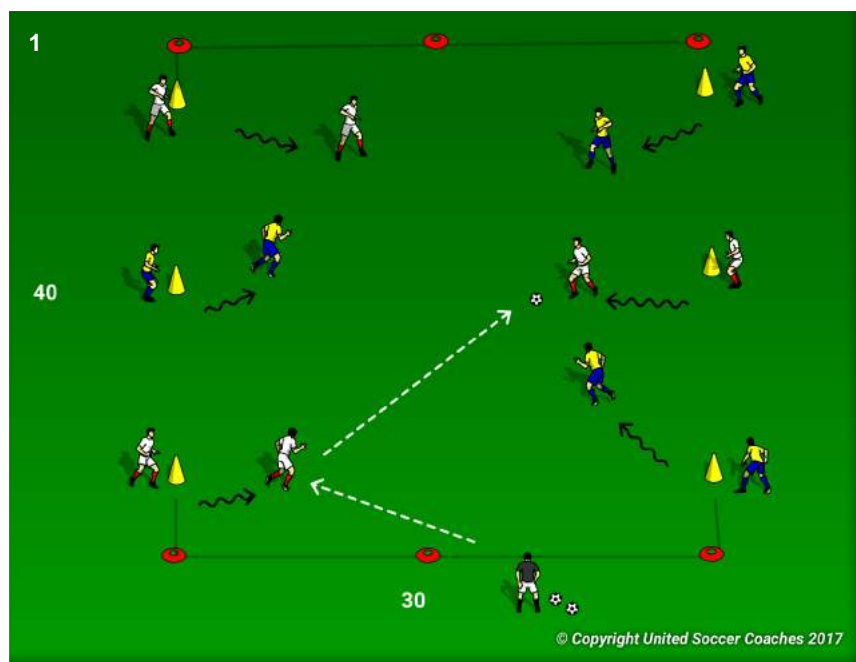




# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical attacking play

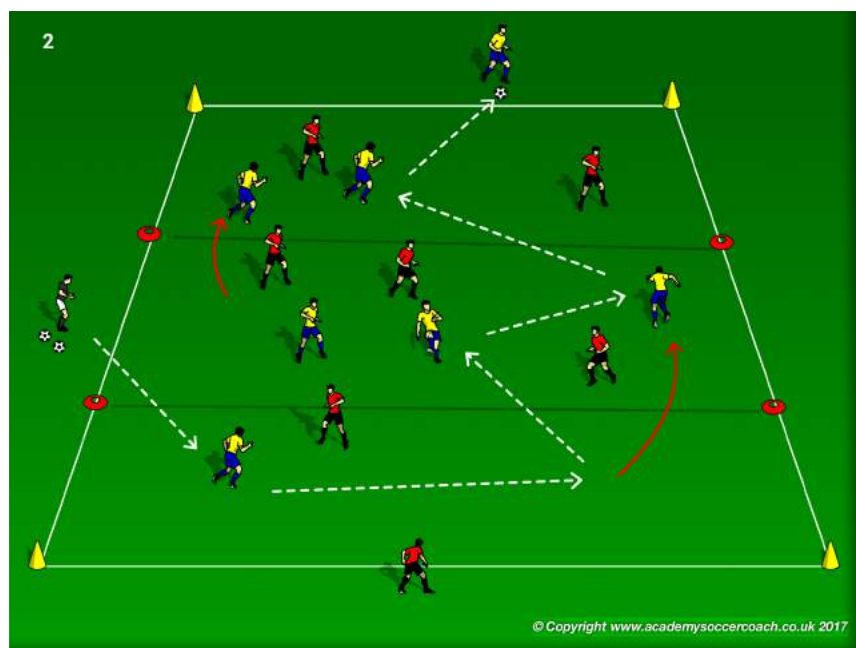
## Playing off the forwards

**Area:** In a 30 x 40 with two teams, 6v6. Three cones are placed at each end line. Teams are set up with two groups on two outer cones at one end and the forwards at the middle cone on the opposite end line. The coach has all the soccer balls. The coach serves in the ball (not to a forward) A 3 v 3 is played. To score, the teams have to dribble across the opposite end line – whites are attacking left to right. If you have more players you can have two forwards come onto the field and play 4v4.



I am looking for the ball to be played forward and then support from the two other players. If the defenders do a good job at stopping this I want to see quick movement from the attacking team..

I then move to a 60x40 split into three 20x40 playing zones. Shown in figure 2 is a 2-3-1 + target player. When the game starts players stay in their zones. Play starts with a ball served in by the coach. The object for both teams is to score by passing the ball to their target player. When the ball is played forward into a zone, a player can go into that zone to help their team mate. You are looking for positive movement and forward play from your players. I then move the session to free play where the only rule is, to score, you pass to the target player. Rotate the target players.



The defender plays the ball into the midfield zone and supports the play. The supporting player does not have to be the person who passed the ball.

## ...playing off the forwards.

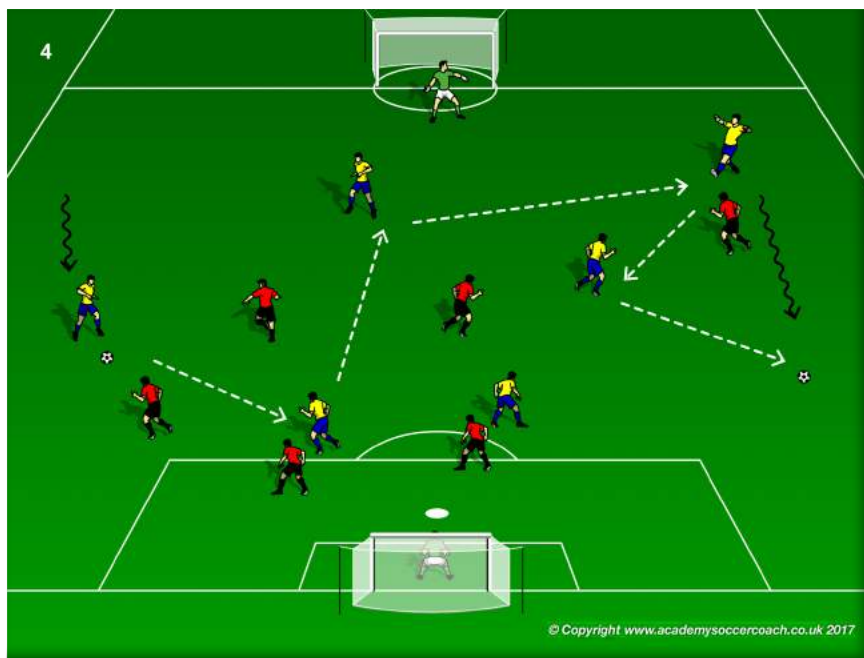
I advance the session playing 7v7 on half a field. Normal rules apply except for one condition:

The game is two touch maximum and if the players do take a second touch, then that pass must be played forward. The restriction of two touch encourages the players to be alert and ready to make some difficult decisions. If the player takes one touch, that pass can go backwards or forwards.



Striker moves to support full back and plays the ball backwards with their first touch.

In the final session I allow the players to play free soccer. I am looking for players to harness the techniques from the previous exercises. I am looking at the players ability to play forward. I am looking for decision making, body shape, communication, movement and awareness. The body positioning means the body shape of the player receiving the ball must be side on so when players receive the ball they can see the passer of the ball and the forward players ahead of them. Players are always looking forward to view their options before they receive the ball.



Have your players learned from the practice session?



# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical attacking play

## *Reacting in the box*

**Area:** I set up as shown in figure 1 with 12 players in four teams of three players. One ball is used. 6 players are on the outside and a 3v3 is played in the middle. The 3v3 players go man for man and can only compete against the player they are assigned to. The team in possession can pass the ball between themselves or they can use an outside player. If a player passes to an outside player, that player and their opponent have to sprint around the outside player that received the ball and then rejoin the game. Rotate the inside players with the players on the outside. I like this warm up because it gets the players prepared for the session ahead.

I then progress the session into the penalty area. Three goals. Each goal is assigned to a team. (You can use 3 large goals with GK's if available) Here we show one large goal with a GK and two smaller goals with out a GK. 4v4v4 is played. Teams are looking to score on the other two goals while defending their own. Run for three periods of 5 minutes and rotate each team after 5 minutes so they get to defend all three goals. Add the score at the end. I am looking for field awareness and reactions in the box.



This warm up is geared towards getting the players mentally ready for an intense practice session.



## ...reacting in the box.

I advance the session playing 6v6 in a 24x20 area. The playing area is split in half. Two large goals with keepers. In each half there are 4 players + GK and one opposition player (as shown in figure 3) The coach has all the soccer balls.

The coach serves the ball into the yellow team. The yellow team stay in the 12x20 area and keep possession. When they get an opportunity to shoot they take a shot from inside their half. The yellow player inside the opposite half looks for rebounds. The single player attempts to win the ball back and if they do win the ball they can either shoot or play the ball back to their team. Rotate the single player. The single player can also be used as a wall pass player.

I then move to a small sided game inside two 18 yard areas and I have one team attacking a large goal and the other team attacking three small goals. When scoring on the three small goals the rule is that it must be a one touch finish. Allow the team to play and watch to see if you are seeing signs of learning.

Switch roles and allow the blue team to attack the large goal. If you have time you can move the practice to a 'normal' game of soccer. Players enjoy the time to play at the end of practice.



The yellow player shoots while the yellow player in the opposite box looks for rebounds.



Have the players learned from your practice session?





# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical attacking play

## Attacking overload

**Area:** I set up as shown in figure 1 in a 40x20 playing area with two large goals with goal-keepers. The coach has all the soccer balls. The game starts in a 3v2 in favor of the red team. Once a red player takes a shot, whether they miss or score, that player leaves the field.

The two red players that are still on the field now become defenders. The two yellow players also leave the field and are replaced by three team mates. The yellow team now attacks the two red defenders (see figure 2) in the opposite direction. If the goal-keeper saves the ball the coach does not pass in a ball. The goal-keeper starts the attack.

If the two defenders win the ball they attack the opposite goal and the same 5 players stay on the field until one of the three attackers takes a shot.

I am looking for the player with the ball to run at one of the defenders to entice that defender to come to the ball so that the other two players can overload against the other defender. I am also looking for overlaps and quality movement and support play. The attacking players should not allow defenders to block the line of the pass. You can build this practice up to a 4v3.



The red player takes a shot and quickly moves off the field.



## ...attacking overload.

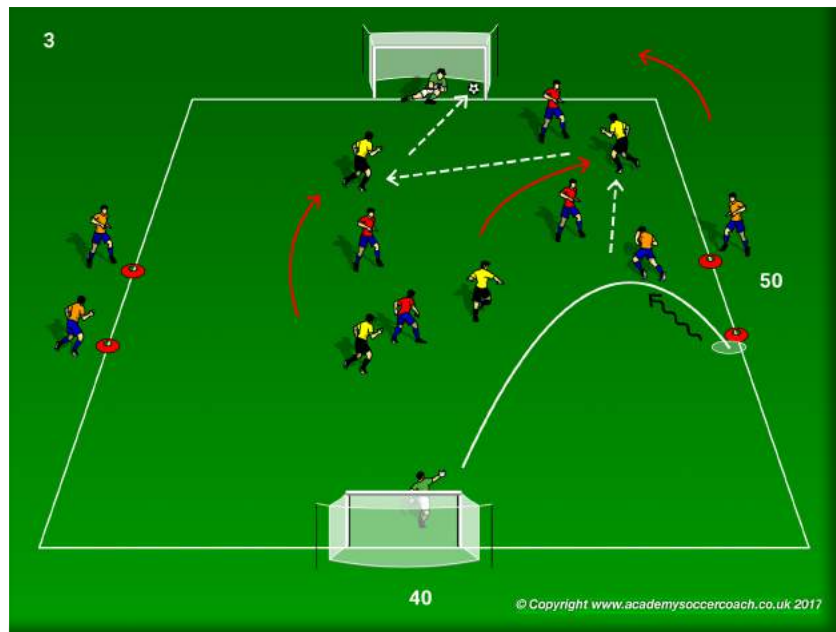
I advance the session playing 4v4 plus goal-keepers in a 40x50 area. There are 4 neutral players placed on the outside (see figure 3) The goal-keeper distributes the ball to any of the neutral players. That play enters the playing area and plays with the yellow attacking team in a 5v4. If the red team win the ball they attempt to pass to any of the other three neutral players and attack in an overload in their favor while the neutral player that is on the field retreats back to their starting position. Every time there is a turn over the team that have won the ball can pass it to a neutral player. If they win the ball in front of the opposition goal the attacker can shoot.

I then allow the players to play 'normal' soccer (see figure 4) I still keep two neutral players and see if the teams have the knowledge to learn from the previous exercises that we have just conducted.

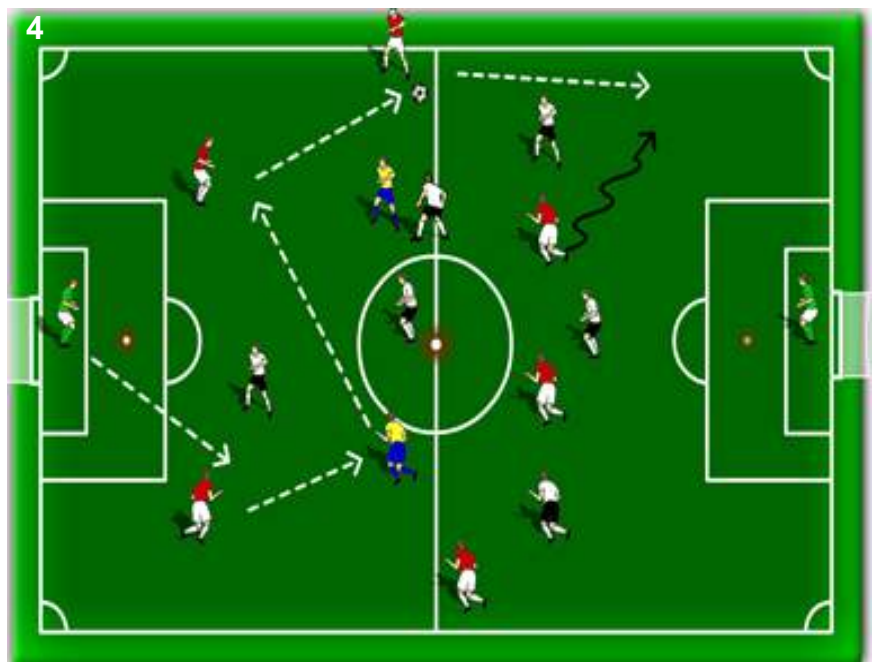
### Coaching points:

I want players to adapt a positive attacking mindset. Passing must be accurate. Movement must have purpose. Players must always be looking to overlap and making diagonal runs.

I now remove the neutral players.



A 5v4 overload with movement wide and then a cross for a goal.



Have the players learned from the practice session?



# Soccer Practice Sessions – Tactical attacking play

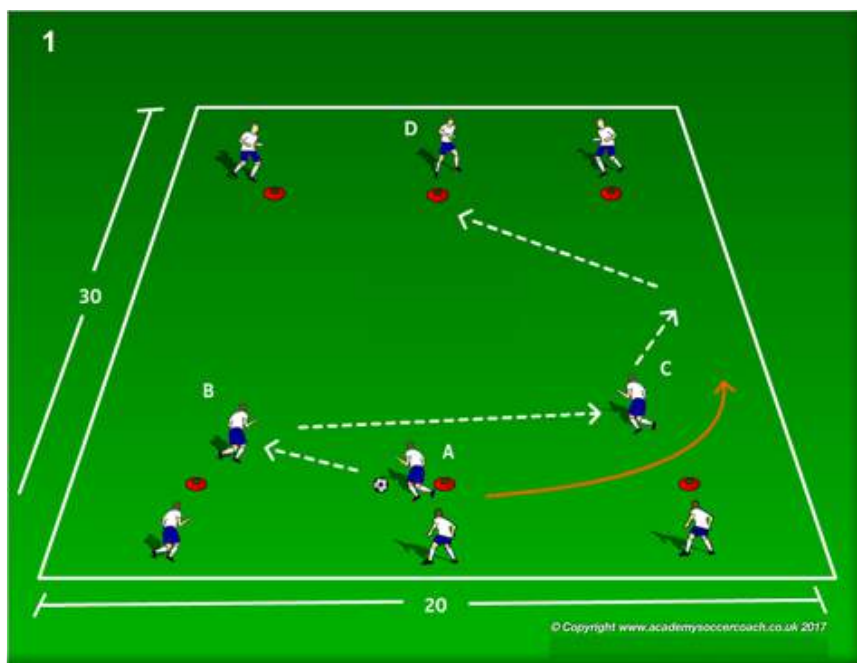
## *Movement in the final third*

**Area:** 30 x 20. Player A starts the exercise. Player A passes to player B. Player B passes the ball wide to Player C. Player A overlaps Player C who passes Player A the ball. Player A passes to middle Player D. Players A, B & C now join a group at the opposite end. Player D starts the exercise coming the opposite way and so on.

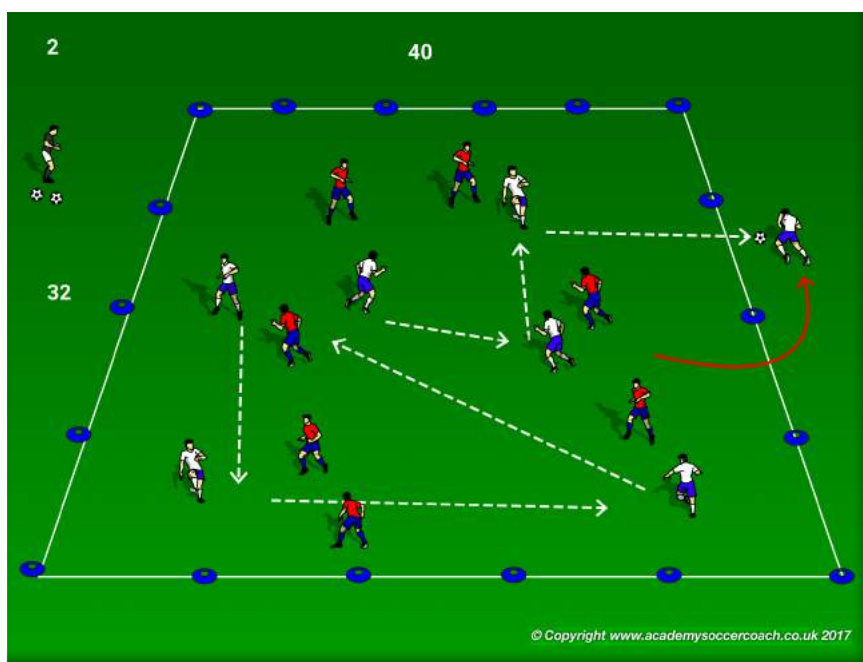
### **Variations:**

- After passing to player B, Player A overlaps player B. Player B passes to Player C and Player C passes the ball to Player A. (3<sup>rd</sup> man run) Player A passes to D.
- Player A passes wide to either B or C. They then pass the ball back to player A who starts moving forward with the ball. Player B & C overlap central player A. Player A decides who to pass the ball to.

I now progress the exercise to a 7v7 in a 40 x 32 area. Cones are placed every 8 yards as shown in figure 2. The team in possession must make 5 (or more) consecutive passes before a player moves outside the area to receive a pass. The pass to the outside player has to be played through a different gate. If the player can bring the ball back into the playing area and continue possession the team scores a point. You may have two players moving outside the area. Choose the right player.



A technical warm up focusing on movement..



The white player moves outside the area to receive a pass. The pass cannot be received through the gate that the player ran through.



## ...movement in the final third.

I advance the session playing a 7v7 on half a field but play to the width of the 18 yard box (see figure 3) There is a large goal with a goal-keeper and two small goals on the half way line. I focus my attention on the team attacking the large goal. The red team possess the ball until they can penetrate the final third with a pass through one of the gates to a running team mate who plays a 1v1 with the goal-keeper. The offside rule is in play. The white team attempt to score on the two smaller goals. Switch roles and have the white team attack the larger goal. I am looking for intelligent movement and third man runs.

The final stage of the practice is to allow the players to play freely. I set up on half a field as shown in figure 4. I am looking to see if the players have learned from the previous exercises and coaching points. This final session will also give the coach an opportunity to step in and add some coaching points related to his / her coaching philosophy.

The offside rule is in play. Allow the players to be creative and figure things out for themselves.



Reds have broke the offside and passed the ball to a moving team mate who plays a 1v1 with the goal-keeper.



Have the players learned from the practice session?