

ELITE SOCCER

COACHING PRACTICES FROM ENGLISH
FOOTBALL LEAGUE MANAGERS AND COACHES

SUNDERLAND

STEVE BRUCE

DECISIVE DEFENDING

- As individuals • As pairs
- Against overloads

Exclusive
Training practices
from top professional
managers



CARDIFF CITY

DAVE JONES

Penalty Box
Battles



ROCHDALE

KEITH HILL

Cutting Out
Counter-Attacks



STOCKPORT COUNTY

PAUL SIMPSON

The Back
Four



ENGLAND UNDER-19s

BOBBY DAVISON

High Tempo
Attack & Defend



LMA AMBASSADOR

STEVE FOLEY

Quick Play In
The Penalty Box

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Training ground drills from the English game's best coaches



Dear Coach,
Sunderland's Steve Bruce has dipped into his wealth of experience - as both a manager and player - to bring us a tremendous session on defending in this month's Elite Soccer.

The Black Cats are now a real force in the Barclays Premier League, and the former Manchester United defender gives us an idea why, describing the best way to defend as individuals and a pair.

And straight from the training ground we have five more insightful sessions. Cardiff City boss Dave Jones, who took the Bluebirds into the Championship automatic promotion places at the end of October, offers a routine on penalty box battles, while Rochdale manager Keith Hill describes how protecting against counter-attacks has been so valuable for his side in recent seasons.

Stockport County boss Paul Simpson looks at the structure of the back four, while England Under-19 coach Bobby Davison offers a view on high tempo attacking and defending. And to conclude, we have a session involving quick movement in the box from LMA Ambassador Steve Foley.

We're sure these insightful tactical contributions from some of the best coaches in the game will help you get the most out of your players.

Enjoy the issue and we'll see you again next month,

James Evans

James Evans, Editor

Elite Soccer is a monthly publication for professional, semi-professional and aspiring soccer coaches and is available by subscription only. £97 for 12 issues.

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Quick play in the penalty box

SUNDERLAND

Steve Bruce Defending as individuals and pairs

Overview:

We often think of the defence as a unit comprising four or more players, but it's common for one or two defenders to find themselves in situations where they are exposed to an overload of attackers. At Sunderland, our ability to practise and prepare for different scenarios has meant we've already kept clean sheets this season against Manchester United and Manchester City. This session is performed on a regular basis at Sunderland, and is one where concentration and communication are absolutely essential.

“Our ability to practise and organise has meant we've already this season kept clean sheets against Manchester United and Manchester City.”

DEFENDING AS INDIVIDUALS AND PAIRS: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

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

EQUIPMENT

Goals, balls, cones

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

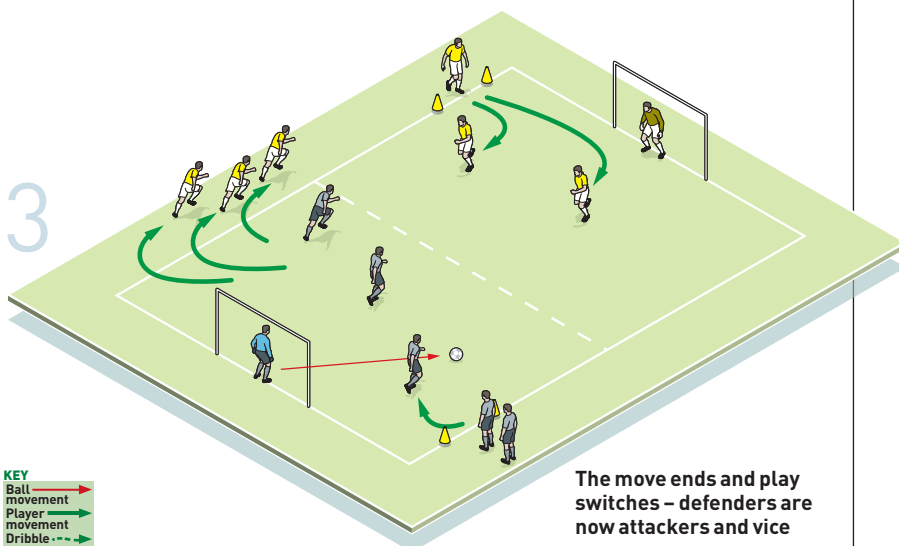
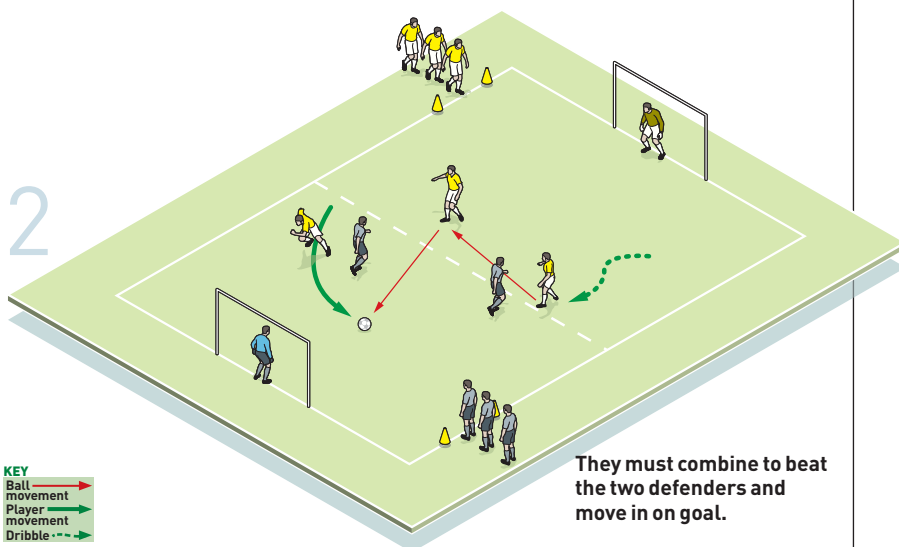
12 to 20

What do I get the players to do?

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

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

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





Steve Bruce

SUNDERLAND

Steve Bruce is one of a rare breed to have advanced a tremendous playing career by moving successfully into football management. Joining Sunderland in June 2009 – his sixth time in a hotseat – arguably offered the Northumberland-born 49-year-old his biggest challenge yet, having already overseen promotions at Birmingham City and Wigan Athletic.

And the Barclays Premier League side are tipped to do well this term, having already taken points off four of last year's top six.

Bruce's first managerial post was at Sheffield United in 1998, before he progressed his knowledge at Wigan, Huddersfield Town and Crystal Palace.

It is for his time at Birmingham that he is probably most respected, with two promotions and three mid-table Premier League finishes.

As a player, Bruce was a pivotal force at the heart of the Manchester United defence during the club's rise back to fame in the early 1990s. He won seven major trophies at Old Trafford, including the Double.

DEFENDING AS INDIVIDUALS AND PAIRS: PROGRESSION

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

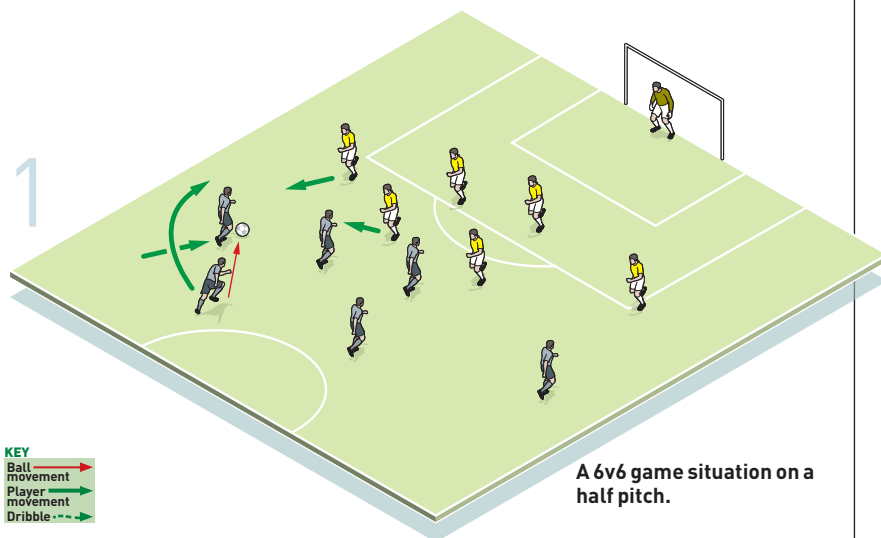
Although a simple attacking drill, this is very intense for defenders. Jockeying and back-tracking techniques work muscle groups, particularly as defenders have to adopt a low body stance whilst moving backwards. Quick feet are essential, as is good shot-blocking. We also look at position, distance from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

How do I progress the session?

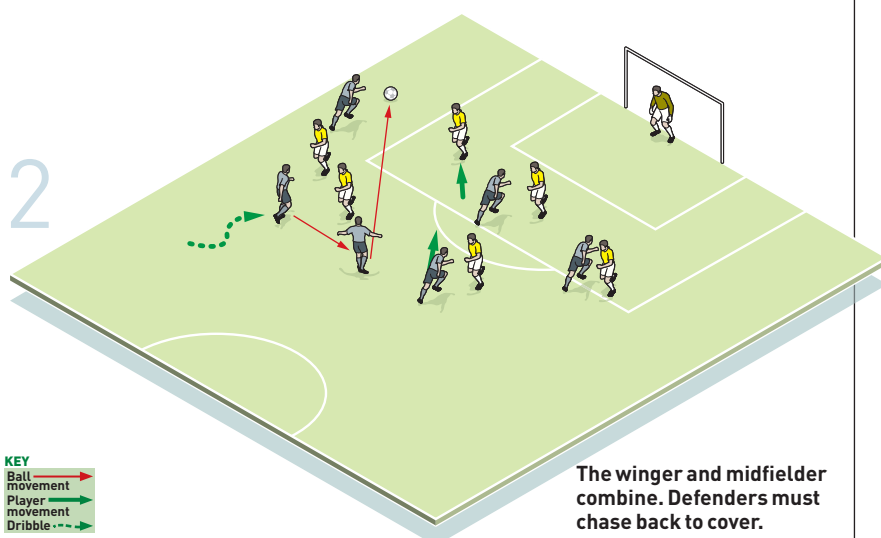
Change the width of the pitch as this dictates the level of difficulty for defenders – the wider, the more challenging. Also look at the number of touches allowed – a two-touch game for attackers works defenders as a pair, while all-in for attackers provokes 1v1 dribbling for defenders to adjust to.

How would you put this into a game situation?

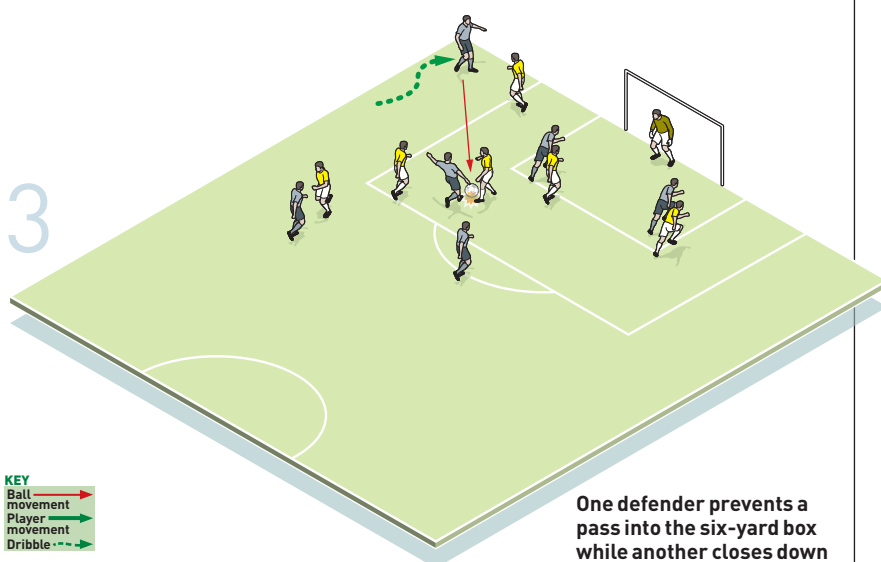
Play 6v6 attacking one goal on a half pitch, with the emphasis on full-backs and centre-backs finding and holding position. Attackers must produce overload scenarios, but the defensive line needs to counter the threat by pressing as individuals, or closing a man down in tandem.



A 6v6 game situation on a half pitch.



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



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

CARDIFF CITY

Dave Jones Penalty box battles

Overview:

Defending is a skill that needs practise, as much as dribbling or passing. Within that, it's vital that players win their 1v1 duels, particularly in and around the penalty box.

When we look back over matches where the team has emerged victorious, we'll often find that our defenders have performed the defending principles well. We believe that, despite all the other scenarios played out on the pitch, the core defensive elements are key.

This session provides a straightforward yet vital method of ensuring that those key parts are performed well.

"We believe that, despite all the other scenarios played out on the pitch, the core defensive elements are key."

PENALTY BOX BATTLES: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

Penalty box, plus a marked area three yards in from each side of the box extended to 10 yards outside (i.e. 32x28 yards)

EQUIPMENT

Balls

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

11 (5 defenders, 5 attackers, 1 goalkeeper)

What do I get the players to do?

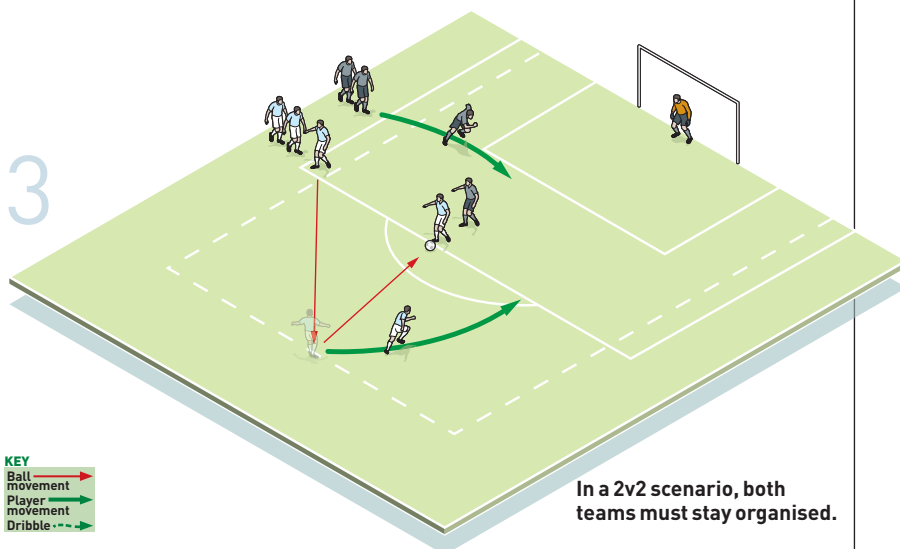
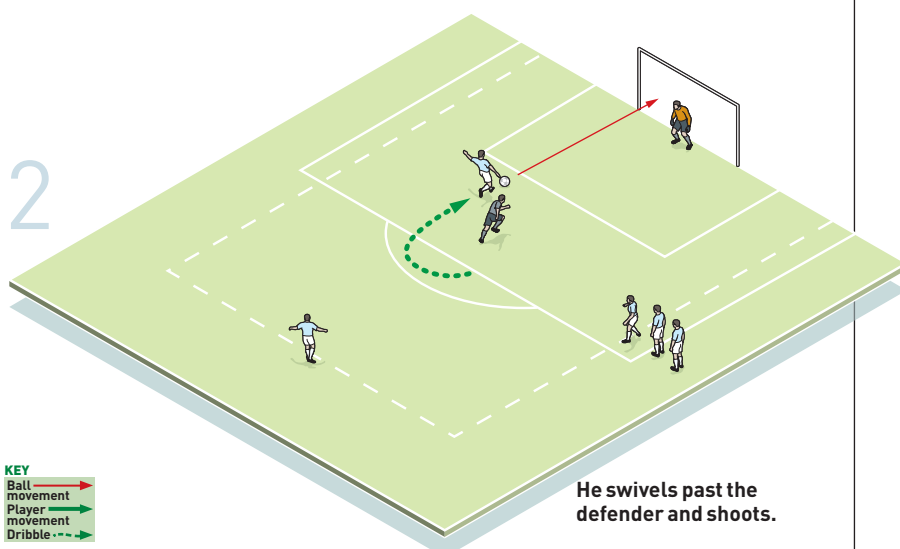
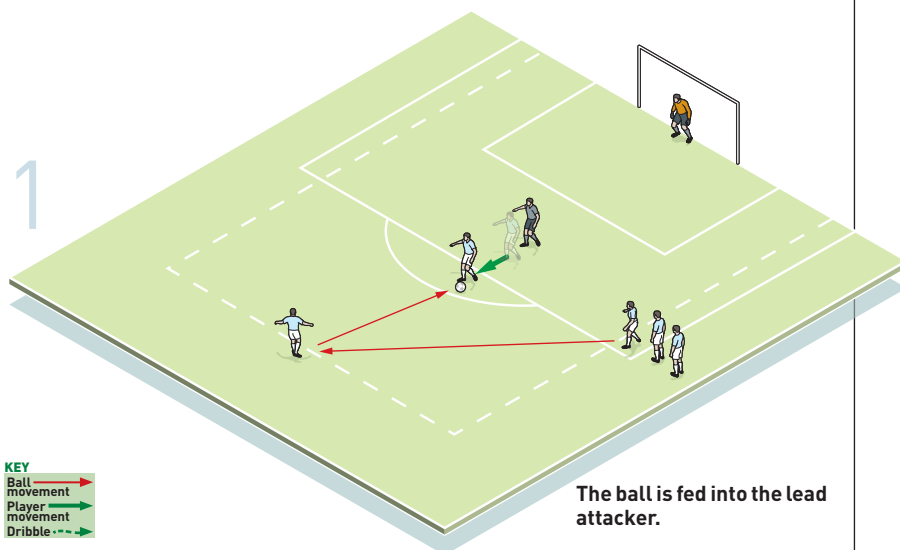
Line up a row each of attackers and defenders on the right-hand side of the penalty box. Invite one defender and one attacker to take up a position in the middle. Another attacker moves to the edge of the larger marked out area where he will receive the ball from a team-mate in the row. He passes in to his fellow forward, who must control the pass and get a shot away. The defender must be in a position where he can see the ball, and quick decision making is paramount – can he intercept it? If not, can he stop the attacker turning?

If the attacker does turn, the defender needs to adjust quickly in order to block the shot. Offsides apply, and always rotate players after a shot or clearance.

If the attacker does turn, the defender needs to adjust quickly in order to block the shot. Offsides apply, and always rotate players after a shot or clearance.

How do I progress the session?

We will switch play to the left-hand side of the penalty box. We'll



Dave Jones

CARDIFF CITY

Liverpudlian Dave Jones stepped into management in 1995 after his playing career was cut short by injury. Success in his first job as youth-team coach at Stockport County saw him elevated up to the position of first-team manager, and he guided the club to what is now the npower Championship, as well as the 1997 League Cup semi-finals.

After a spell at Southampton, Jones joined Wolverhampton Wanderers in January 2001, and he oversaw the club's return to the top division for the first time in almost two decades. Jones and Wolves parted company in 2004 but he made a quick return to the game with Cardiff City. He took the south Wales club to the 2008 FA Cup Final, and a year later they missed out on the Championship play-offs only on goal difference.

They went even better last season, finishing fourth, but lost 3-2 to Blackpool in the play-off final. The club are well tipped to finally make it to the Barclays Premier League this season though.

PENALTY BOX BATTLES: PROGRESSION

also invite an additional attacker and defender to create a 2v2.

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

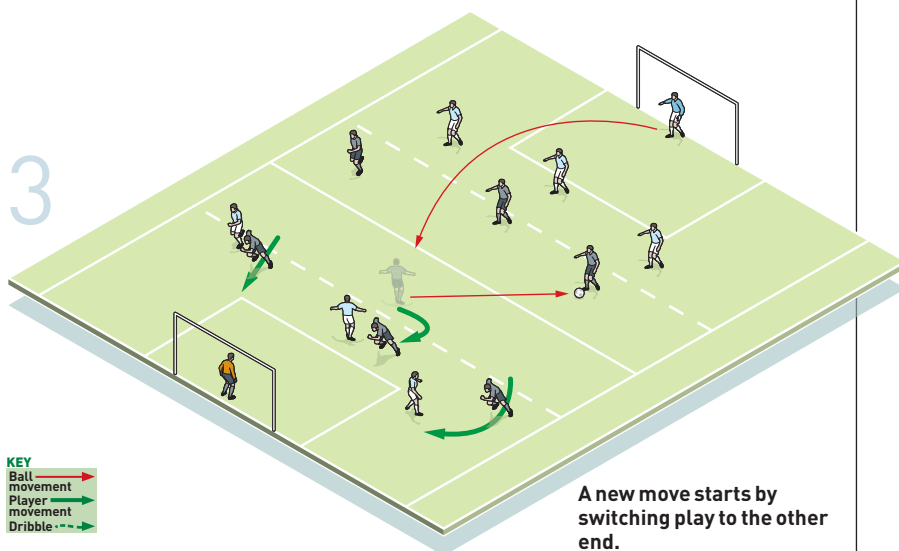
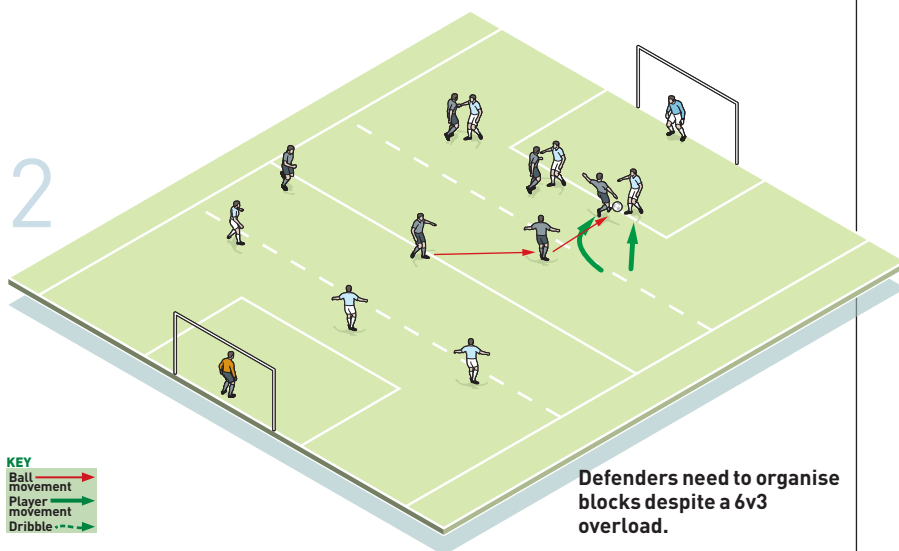
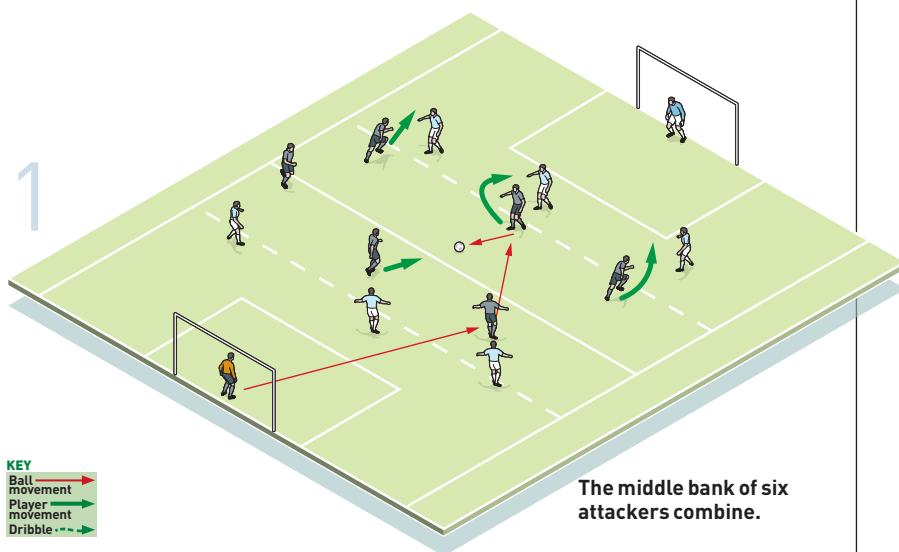
Repeating this move provokes good decision making by defenders. We look for balance, quick feet, and the ability to stay upright. Good defenders restrict either time or space, will direct attackers away from goal, and are aware of the danger of follow-ups resulting from goalkeeper saves.

How would you put this into a game situation?

Mark out a pitch 40x50 yards, the length divided into two 25-yard halves. Add in 18-yard lines - offside's apply at this point. Play 6v6, using a keeper at each end, with six attackers starting in the middle sandwiched by two banks of three defenders.

Attackers link up to create space, and overload situations. They should try to remain in their respective left/centre/right channels - if they stray outside, they only have one touch. Defenders need to make quick decisions - when to mark the player and when to mark space.

When a move comes to an end, play switches direction and the six attackers now look to score in the other goal.



ROCHDALE

Keith Hill Cutting out counter-attacks

Overview:

Analysis at the end of our 2008/09 League Two campaign showed we needed to develop a new collective responsibility to defend against the counter-attack. We knew this would increase our potential to keep clean sheets whilst also ensuring that we had players in good areas of the pitch in order to regain and maintain possession. Our aim was therefore to produce a session that helped the players understand better their roles and responsibilities both in and out of possession, focusing on three key areas of the pitch.

Comparing 2008/09 season with 2009/10:

	2008/09	2009/10
Points	70	82
Won	19	25
Lost	14	14
Drew	13	7
Scored	70	82
Conceded	59	48
Clean Sheets	9	14

CUTTING OUT COUNTER-ATTACKS: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

60x40 yards

EQUIPMENT

Goals, cones, balls

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

18 (9v9 in 3-2-3 formations)

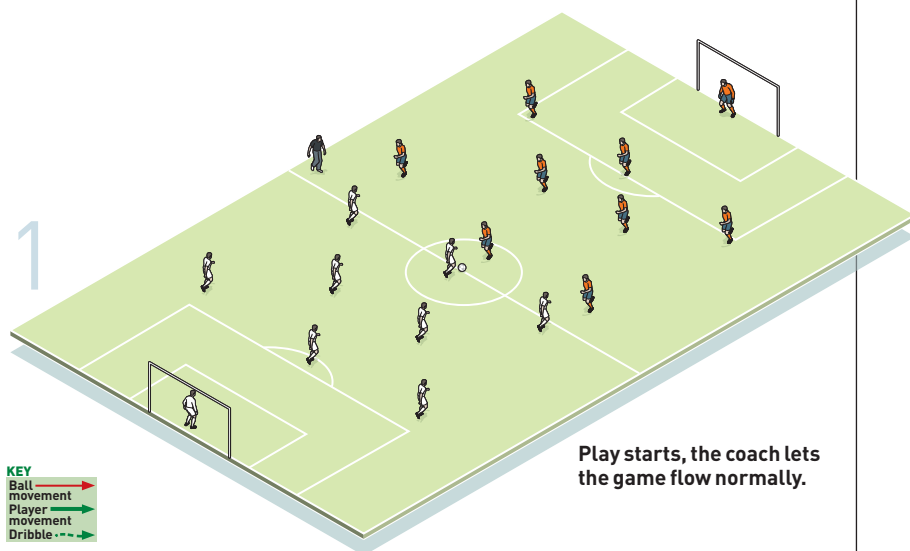
What do I get the players to do?

Play kicks off as it would in a standard game - the coach is involved on the pitch. One of the attacking team's full-backs comes forward (in the example given it's the left-back). When this player advances into the opposition half, the coach serves a new ball randomly to the other team, exposing opportunities to counter-attack. After the counter-attack has occurred, play is brought back to highlight vulnerable areas of the pitch.

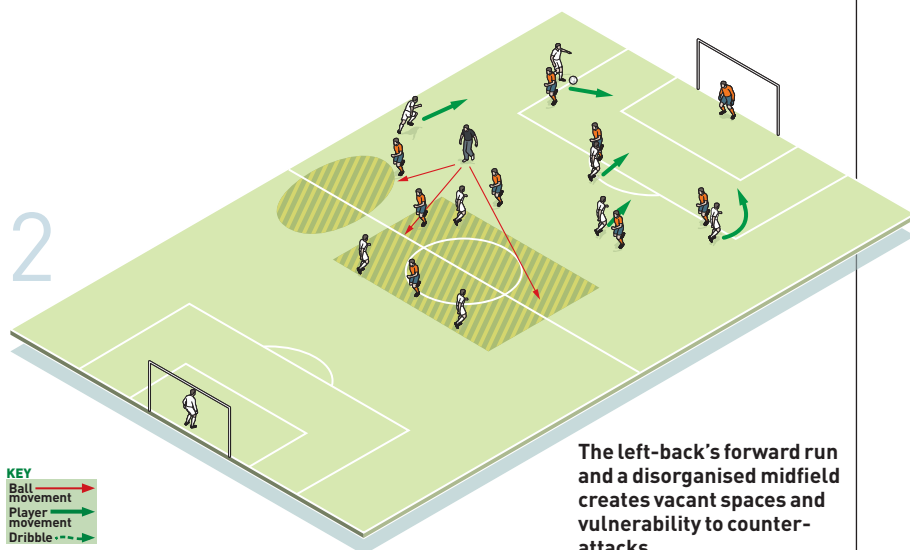
The move is then run again. This time, better defensive organisation and greater balance is offered by instructing the left-back to support from deeper, whilst showing the remaining defenders and midfielders the benefit of forming a four-man square around the vulnerable centre circle area. Effective recovery runs are now possible.

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

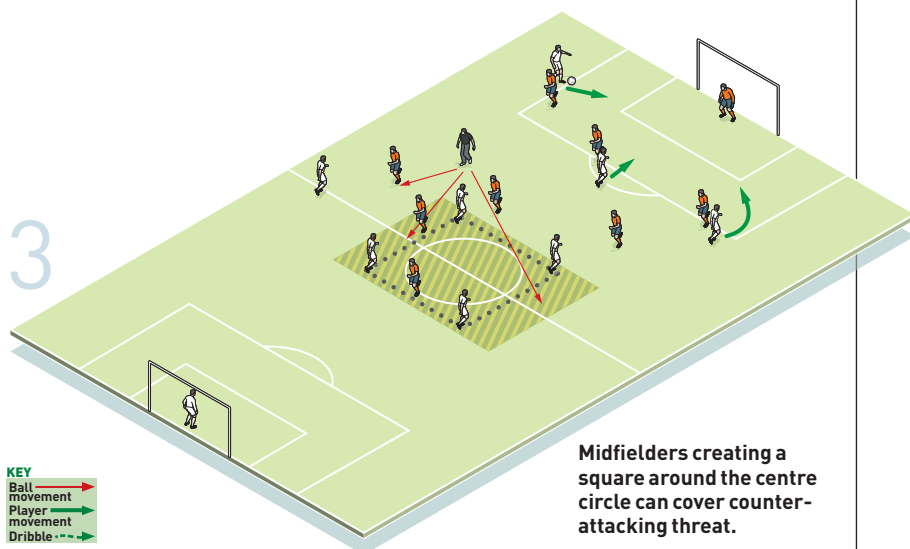
Players must be aware of the benefit of screening and protecting the centre of the pitch, as this is the key area that is



Play starts, the coach lets the game flow normally.



The left-back's forward run and a disorganised midfield creates vacant spaces and vulnerability to counter-attacks.



Midfielders creating a square around the centre circle can cover counter-attacking threat.



Keith Hill ROCHDALE

In 2009/10, Keith Hill oversaw the most remarkable season in Rochdale's somewhat flat recent history. The 41-year-old negotiated promotion from League Two after the Yorkshire outfit had spent 36 consecutive years in the bottom division. And this season they look in good shape to push on again, with the aim of making the npower League One play-offs.

Hill joined Rochdale in January 2007, recording two top six finishes before fine-tuning the formula last year, scooping double Manager of the Month awards plus third place in the table. He was voted League Two Manager of the Year.

As a player, Hill operated as a stylish yet physical centre-back, starting his career with hometown club Blackburn Rovers, before moving on to Plymouth Argyle, Rochdale, Cheltenham Town and Morecambe. Before taking on the role of first-team manager at Rochdale, he worked as coach and director of youth.

CUTTING OUT COUNTER-ATTACKS: PROGRESSION

exploited in counter-attacks. There must be a collective responsibility in maintaining the defensive structure even when developing attacks.

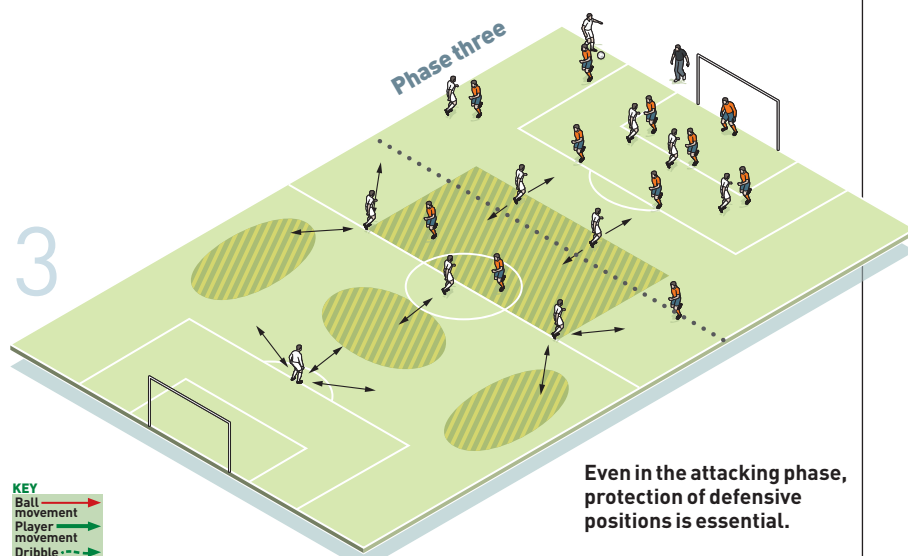
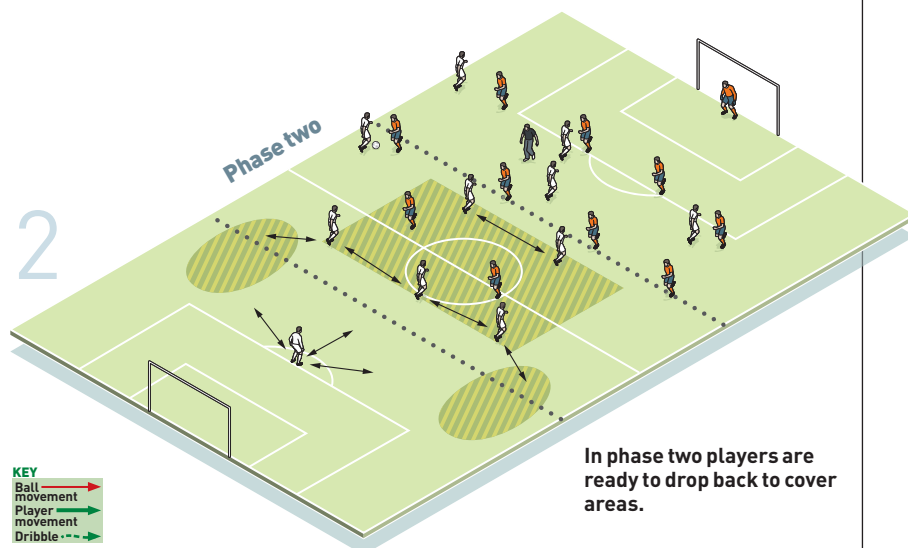
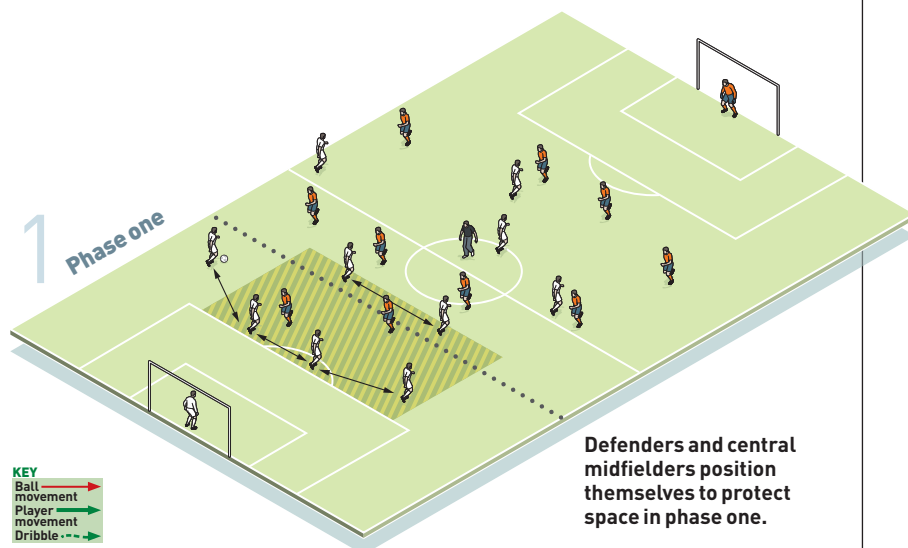
How do I progress the session?

Progress the session by expanding play onto a full-size pitch, with 11v11. Set up scenarios where, as play develops, each man is aware of how they need to move in terms of distance and direction.

In **phase one**, a proactive defensive strategy is deployed, using two central midfield players to prevent balls into strikers should possession be lost.

In **phase two**, which is the middle third, two central midfielders cover space in order to maintain possession. Furthermore, their positions offer opportunities to regain possession. The goalkeeper advances and full-backs show awareness of covering space behind them.

In **phase three**, a ball is about to be delivered into the box, therefore players must be prepared for the possibility that the other team might win possession. In this instance, the central midfield players protect the centre of the pitch to prevent a counter-attack. Defenders who have pushed forward are ready to drop back.



STOCKPORT COUNTY

Paul Simpson The back four

Overview:

This session is all about making sure the defensive unit is organised. A strong, intelligent defence is crucial for keeping clean sheets, and achieving that aim is halfway towards winning matches.

No matter who the opposition are, there will come a time in every game when the back four will be asked the toughest of questions, and their ability to provide the right answers will have a huge impact on the final outcome.

We practise the following move for 15 minutes, add an additional player and repeat, switching between the left and right sides of the pitch. We then put it into a 20-minute game situation.

“No matter who the opposition are, there will come a time in every game when the back four will be asked the toughest of questions.”

THE BACK FOUR: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

Half pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, goal

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

9 (goalkeeper,
4 defenders,
4 attackers)

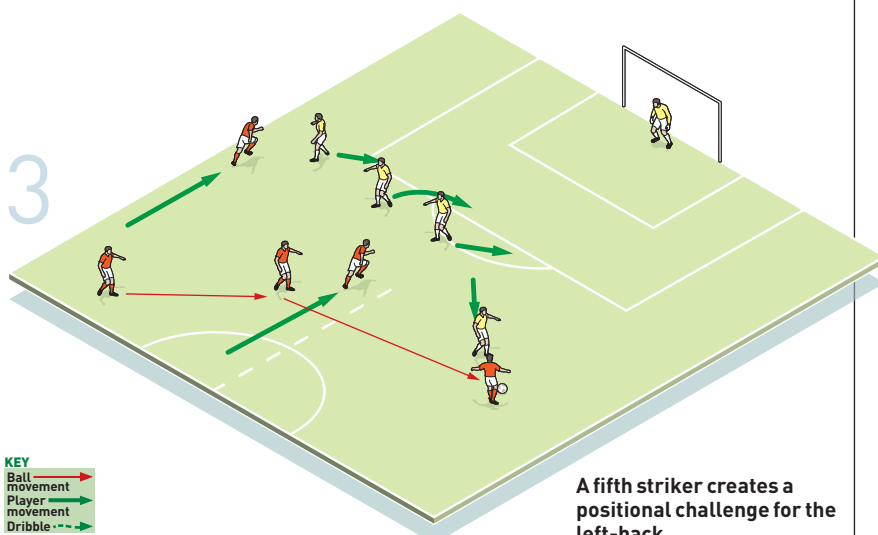
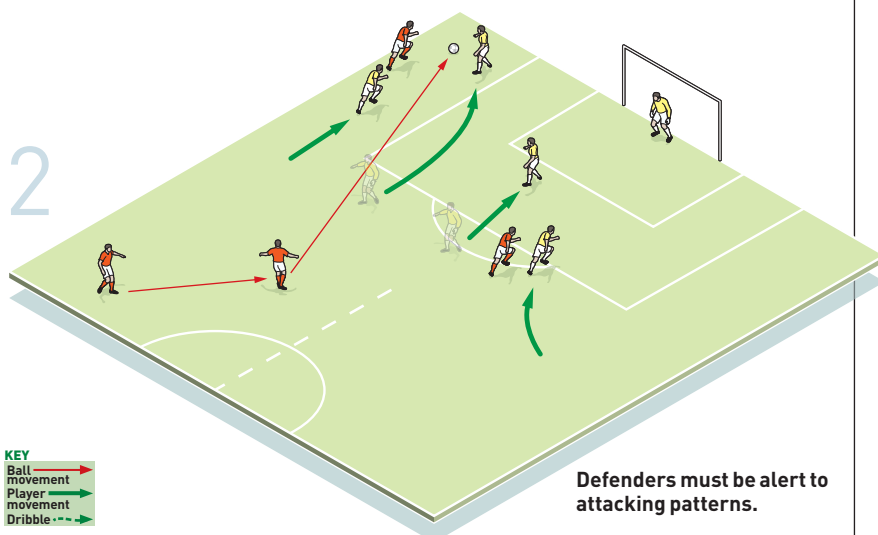
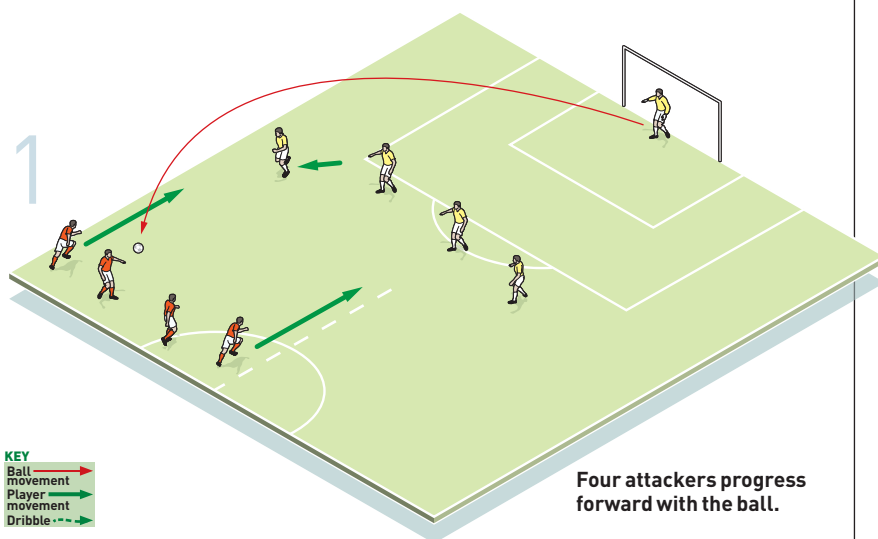
What do I get the players to do?

The goalkeeper releases the ball to a line of four attackers who, having started at the halfway line, approach on the left-hand side of the pitch. Three defenders approach, with the left-back only able to support his team-mates when the attack is less than 30 yards from goal.

Organise defenders so that the nearest to the ball moves forward to close down the man, and ensure that each player knows his position across the back four. In a confined area of the pitch, the defenders should work together to suffocate space and clear the danger. When this happens, or should they win possession, they pass it back to the keeper. If the attackers find a way through look for defensive recovery runs to be made.

How do I progress the session?

Progress this by adding a fifth attacker on the other side of the pitch. If play is switched the left-back needs to delay the forward progress of this extra player, allowing enough time for his fellow defenders to come across.





Paul Simpson

STOCKPORT COUNTY

Paul Simpson was confirmed as the new manager of Stockport County on July 12, 2010.

He was previously in charge of Shrewsbury Town, where he enjoyed considerable success, guiding the club to the play-off final in his first full season in charge.

A skilful winger in his day, Simpson enjoyed a tremendous playing career, turning out for Manchester City, Oxford United, Derby County, Sheffield United, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Walsall and Blackpool.

Simpson took up player/manager roles at first Rochdale, then Carlisle United, guiding the Cumbrians back into the Football League after a solitary season in the Conference. Moving to Preston North End, he gave the Lancashire outfit their highest league finish for 55 years.

Simpson now has Stockport moving in the right direction – the club having scored in eight consecutive league games from the end of August in npower League Two.

THE BACK FOUR: PROGRESSION

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

Ensure good lines of communication throughout, with defenders less than 15 yards apart and always looking to hold position, as well as being ready to make good recovery runs should play be switched quickly. In addition, the back four should always be looking to maintain a high line.

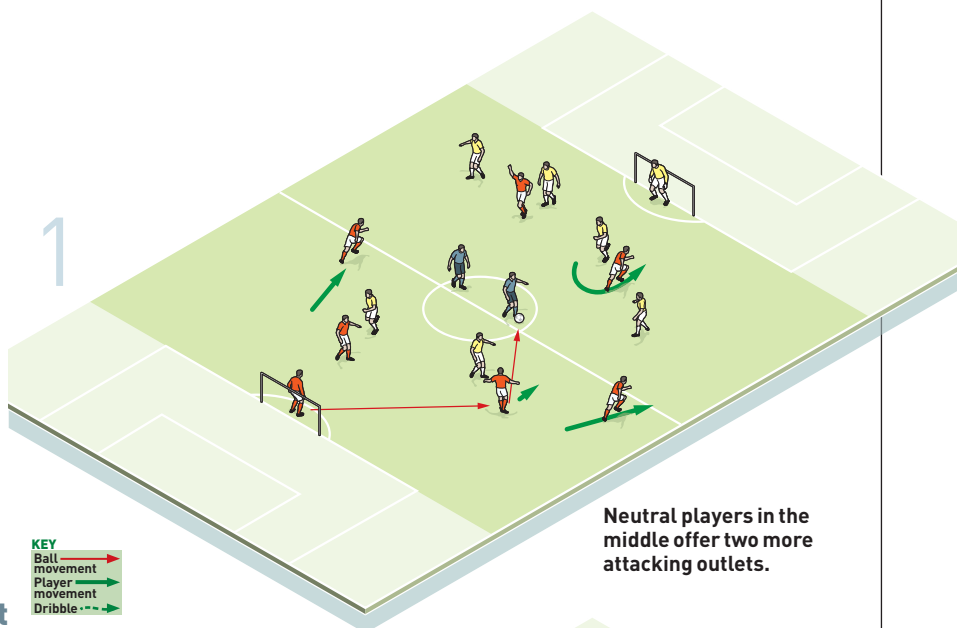
How would you put this into a game situation?

Play in the space between the two 18-yard boxes and across the full width of the pitch, with a goal on each 18-yard line. This game is 7v7 but uses two additional neutral players.

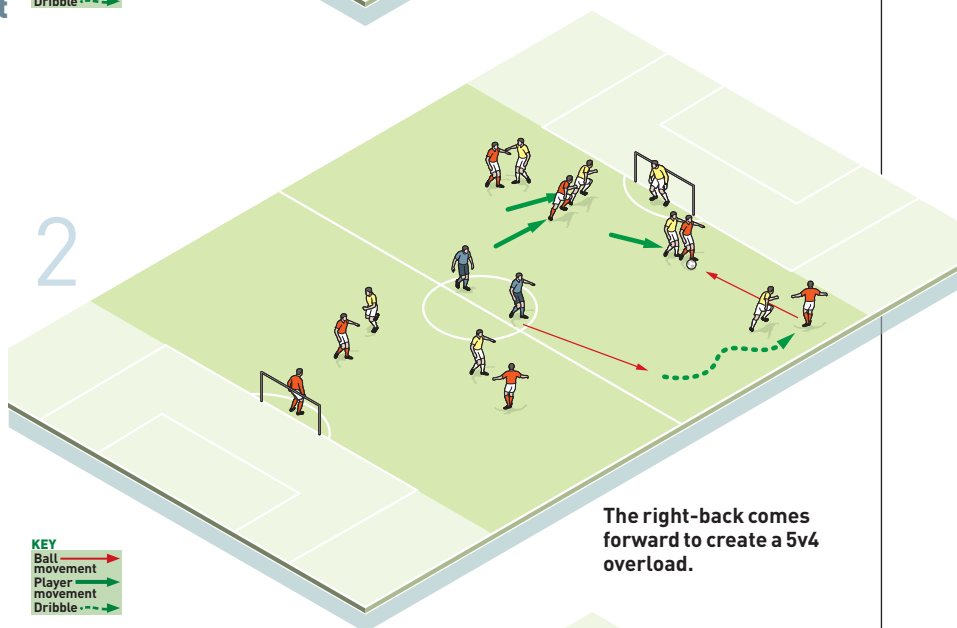
Each side lines up with four defenders and two attackers. The two neutral players in the middle will join the side in possession, in effect offering a four-man forward line which approaches four defenders.

Allow free movement of full-backs as well to create possible attacking overload situations and encourage the game to flow naturally.

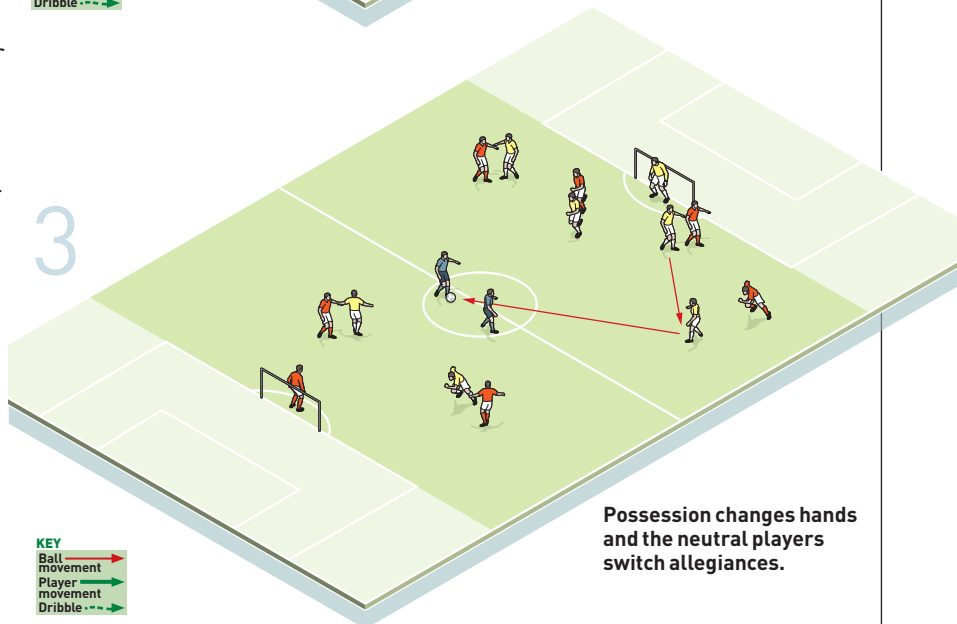
When possession changes hands, the two neutral players switch sides. Always look for players to display the technical and tactical principles rehearsed in the moves at the start of the session.



Neutral players in the middle offer two more attacking outlets.



The right-back comes forward to create a 5v4 overload.



Possession changes hands and the neutral players switch allegiances.

ENGLAND UNDER-19S

Bobby Davison High tempo attacking and defending

Overview:

This session incorporates the key elements of both attacking and defending at pace. From the time spent coaching Ferencvaros in Hungary through to my current involvement in the England Under-19 set-up, developing an individual's skills through passing, creating space, supporting, closing down, tracking and counter-attacking has always gone on to be of huge benefit to the team as a whole. This drill has worked particularly well in Europe where teams tend not to press as much. And in England Under-19s' recent 2-0 win over Slovakia, this set-up within a 4-3-3 formation enabled us to constantly retrieve balls in dangerous situations.

"In England Under-19s' recent 2-0 win over Slovakia, this set-up enabled us to constantly retrieve balls in dangerous situations."

HIGH TEMPO ATTACKING AND DEFENDING: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

44x18 yards, no goals

EQUIPMENT

Balls

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

6 up to full squad

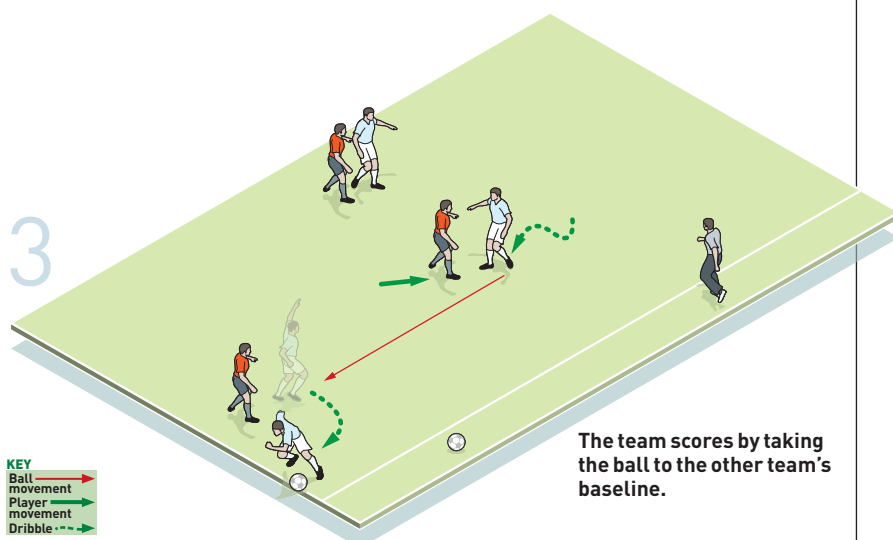
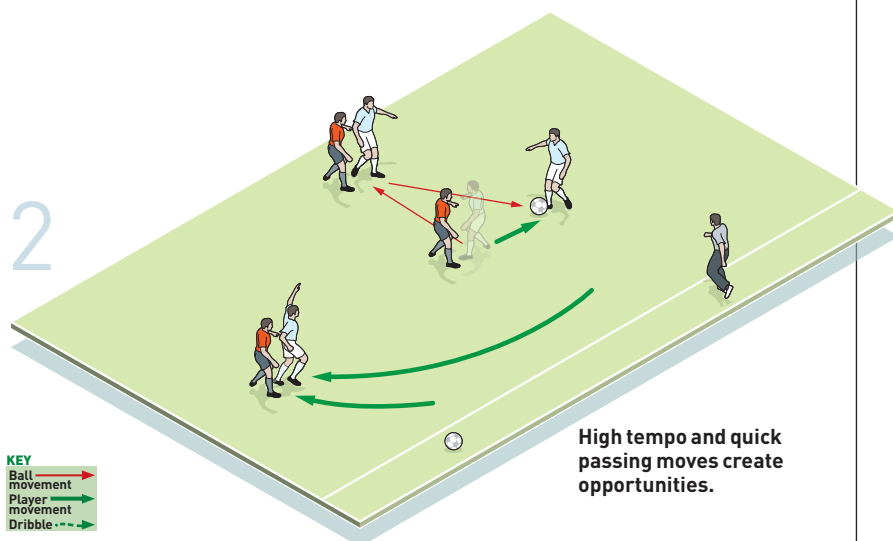
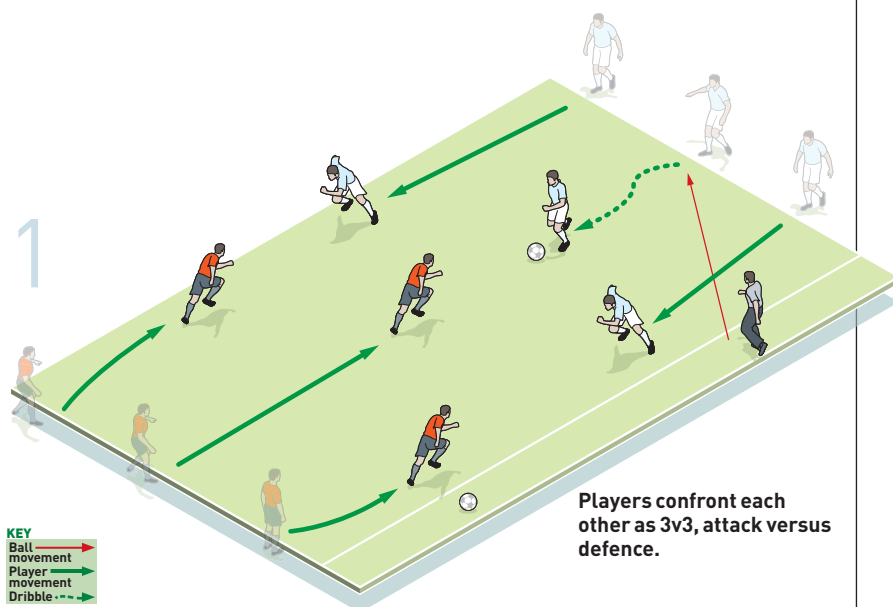
What do I get the players to do?

Players line up at each side of the marked area. The coach will serve the ball to alternate ends, a player receives, then moves forward supported by two team-mates. Three players from the opposition team approach from the other side. The aim of the team in possession is to interchange passes, evade tackles and eventually get the ball across the opposition line. A high tempo is central to this move.

If the ball goes out of play a new ball is served – vary its delivery in terms of pace and height. If an interception is made, the opposing team goes straight on the attack. After a minute of game time has elapsed, rotate players.

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

For the defending team, one man must go forward to close down. We look for individual and defensive awareness, the tracking of runners, plus the forcing of play down one channel. The key for the defence is to



Bobby Davison

ENGLAND
UNDER-19S

Former Leeds United and Derby County legend Bobby Davison moved into coaching having hung up his playing boots in 1995 at the age of 35.

He has earned a reputation as an excellent tactician with a talent for building a strong rapport with his players, having earned the UEFA A License whilst coaching at all levels of the game from the Premier League to non-league.

His time abroad saw him take the role of Director of Football at Hungary's most successful club, Ferencváros, in February 2008, quickly moving up to the role of manager. In his first full season in charge, the club won promotion back to the Hungarian top flight. Within that run was a club record 16-match winning streak.

Recently, Bobby has been coaching the England Under-19s side.

HIGH TEMPO ATTACKING AND DEFENDING: PROGRESSION

always be pressing to limit attackers' passing options.

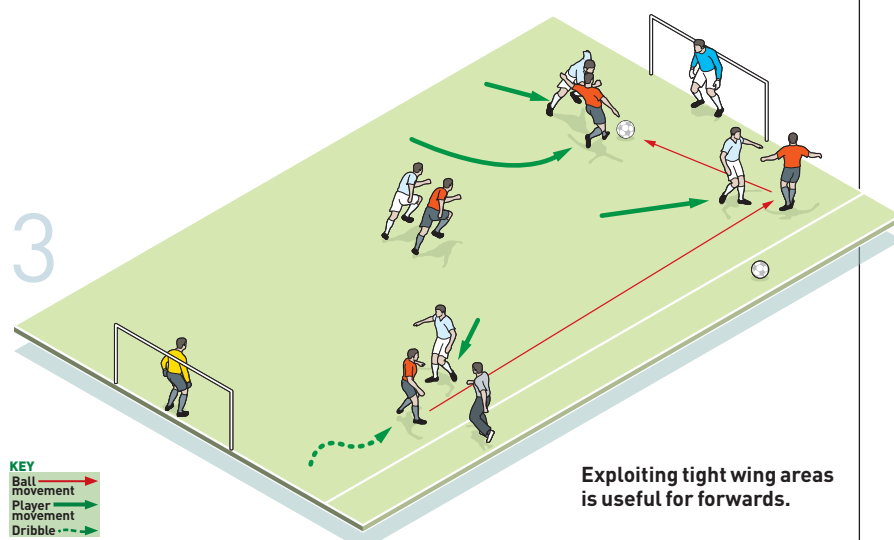
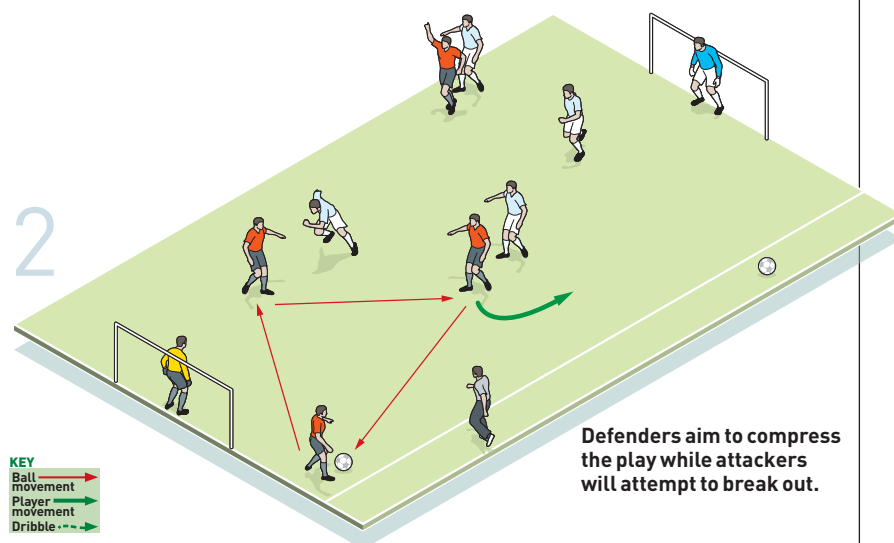
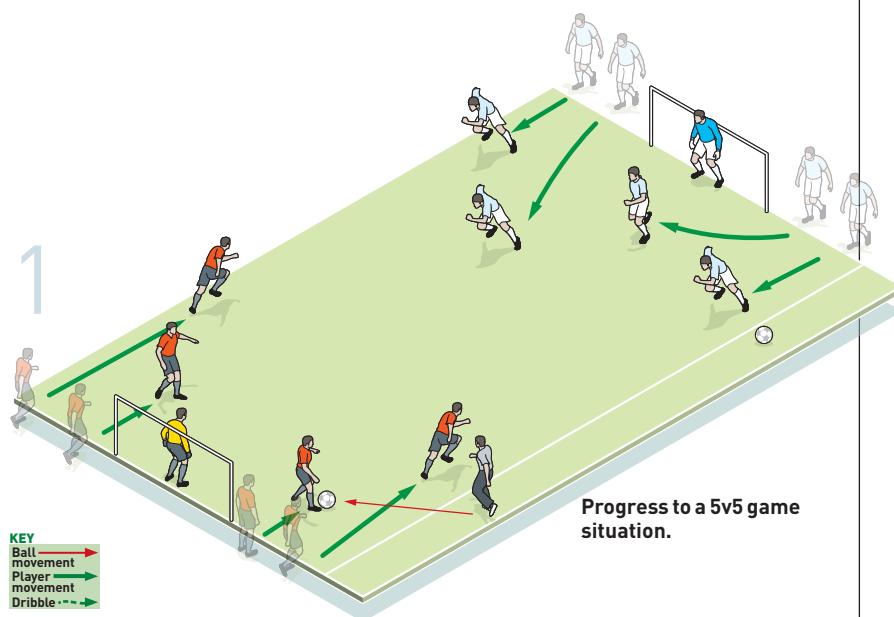
Attackers must always progress forward – no backward passes. They need to provide supporting options always, whilst also displaying individual skills in order to beat the man.

How do I progress the session?

Progress onto a 5v5 game, adding a goal and goalkeeper at each end. With more players, the emphasis should be for attackers to break in pairs and release runners. Defenders should aim to squeeze and compress play by getting as tight in as possible. Increase team numbers as suits, giving consideration to also increasing the size of the playing area, should the need arise.

How would you put this into a game situation?

Adapt to 11v11 but retain a pitch size that is less than standard dimensions so that defenders appreciate the benefits of squeezing attacking play, while attackers use the exercise to perform a tight, accurate forward passing game in a restricted space.



LMA AMBASSADOR

Steve Foley Quick play in the penalty box

Overview:

In the modern game, penalty boxes are tight, congested areas to work in and around. This session helps players practise elements of quick approach play, strong and dedicated support, along with the ability to dispatch immediate shots on goal.

Individual skills are important, so we'll encourage player traits such as subtle flicks or quick directional changes. Combined with strong positional sense and dedicated practise, it means that opportunities can be produced in any area against any backline.

This is a straight-forward and relatively quick session lasting 10 minutes, with a further eight minutes for a small-sided game.

"Opportunities can be produced in any area against any backline."

QUICK PLAY IN THE PENALTY BOX: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

Penalty box

EQUIPMENT

Goal, balls, bibs

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

14 (3 teams of 4 plus 2 goalkeepers)

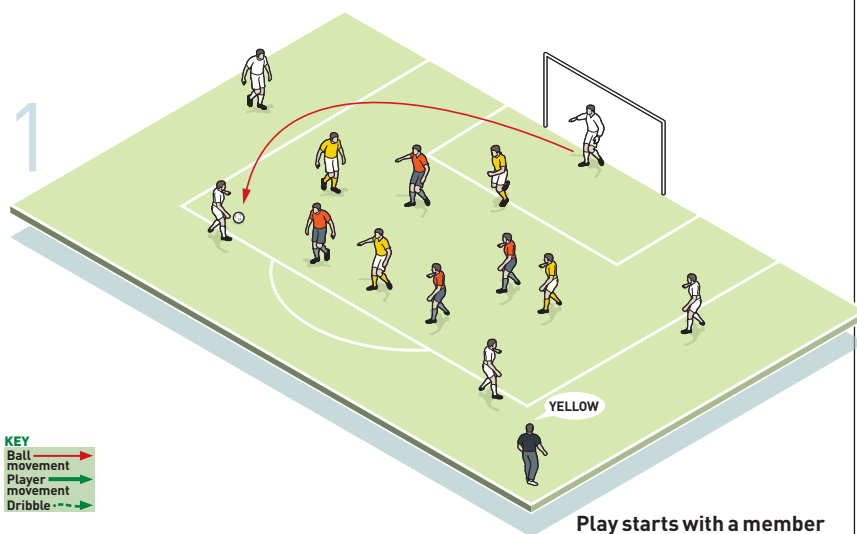
What do I get the players to do?

Divide 12 players into three teams. The whites have a player on the right and left of the box, plus another two along the 18-yard line, one either side of the arc. They remain outside the box at all times. Inside it, the blues set up to form a square, with reds in the shape of a cross. The goalkeeper throws the ball out to any white player. While it is in the air, the coach calls out "yellow" or "red". That team becomes attackers, the other team defenders. The attacking side must combine with the whites to get a shot in on goal - effectively, as an 8v4 overload. The white team plays one-touch and must only support, not shoot. The session is played at a high tempo.

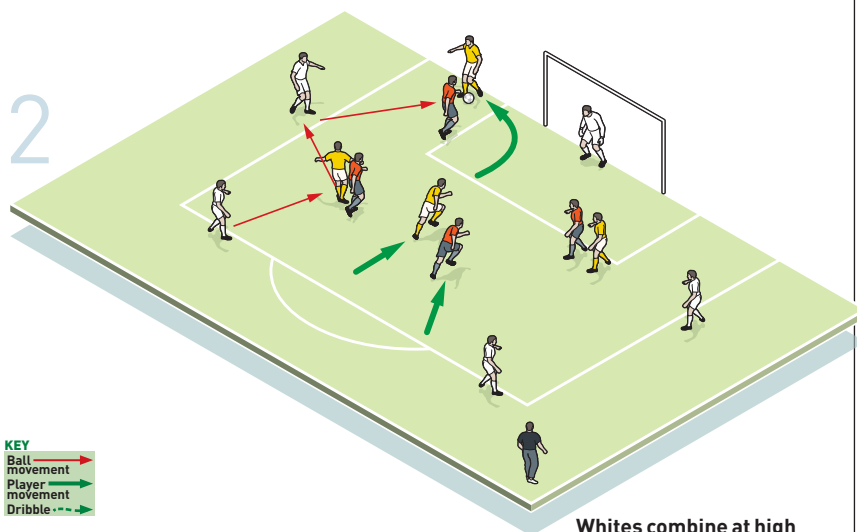
When a move comes to an end, restart with the a new keeper. Keep players alert by only confirming who the designated attackers will be when the ball is in flight.

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

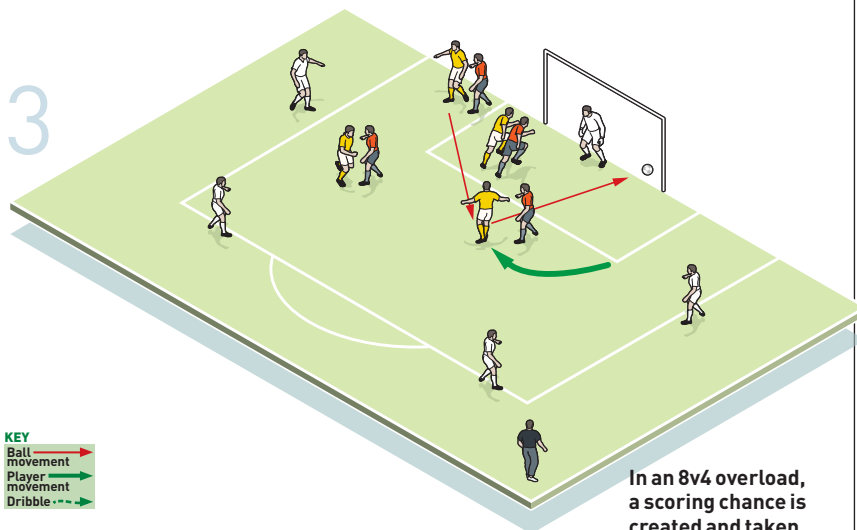
From the whites, we're looking for control, accuracy of pass and a



Play starts with a member of the white team.



Whites combine at high tempo with the designated attacking side.



In an 8v4 overload, a scoring chance is created and taken.



Steve Foley

LMA AMBASSADOR

As a player, Steve Foley made more than 300 league appearances in the centre of the park for Colchester United. Having worked his way into coaching, he spent a decade at Norwich City before joining rivals Ipswich Town.

He departed Portman Road in April of this year, and Foley now is involved in a number of nationwide coaching projects, having also passed on the benefit of his skills during spells at Colchester United and Watford. He has also operated as caretaker manager at Colchester on more than one occasion in the 1990s.

QUICK PLAY IN THE PENALTY BOX: PROGRESSION

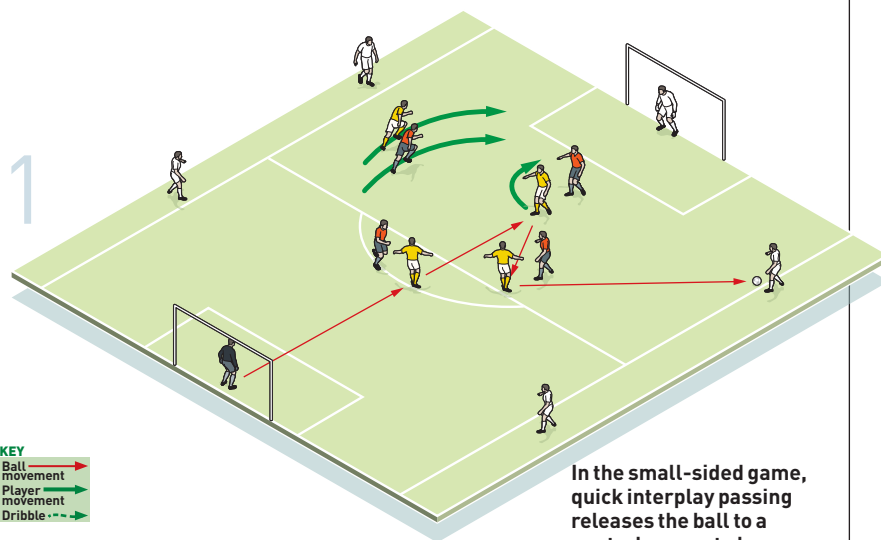
variety of crosses. The attacking team inside the box must use all options around them and must shoot quickly. Defenders must judge carefully when to press white players and when to close in on their opponents inside the penalty area.

How do I progress the session?

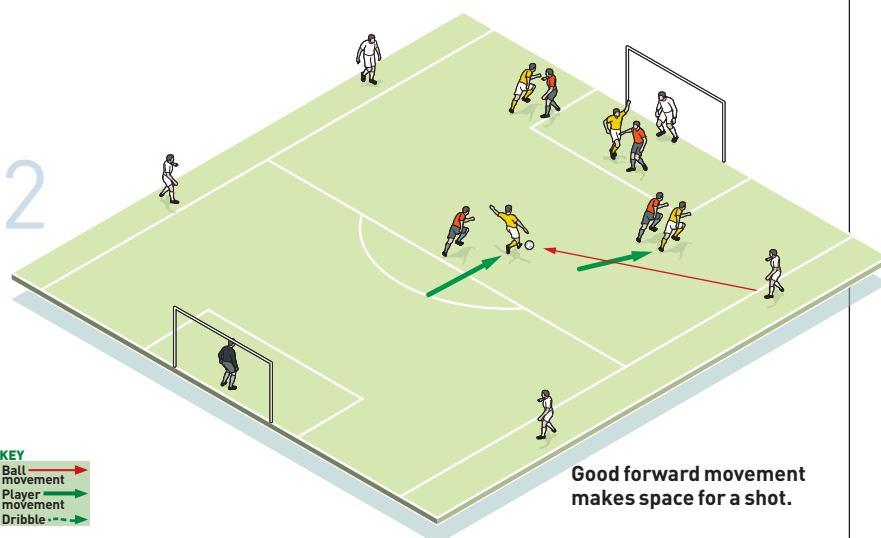
Encourage attackers to turn and take on defenders rather than laying a simple ball back to a white man. Also experiment by adding an attacking player in the 'D' outside the 18-yard box. This player must stay in this area and can shoot using one touch, or act as an additional white supply man.

How would you put this into a game situation?

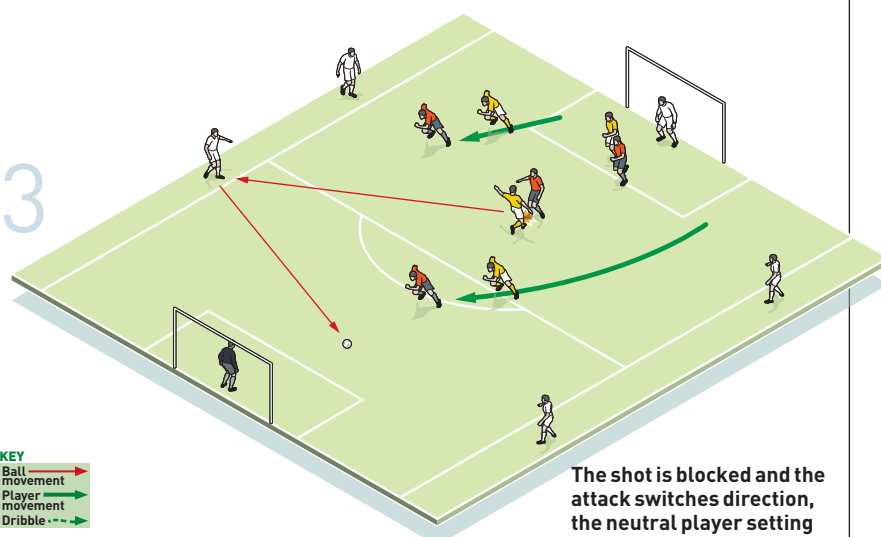
Use two penalty areas placed together with a goal at either end to play a quick shooting game, 4v4 plus two keepers. White players continue to play as neutral – this time each patrolling a flank along half a pitch. When possession is turned over, the defending team can use their white flank player as a forward outlet as they break into the opposition's half. Varying one and two-touch commands will also have an interesting effect on the pace of the match.



In the small-sided game, quick interplay passing releases the ball to a neutral support player.



Good forward movement makes space for a shot.



The shot is blocked and the attack switches direction, the neutral player setting up a breakaway move.