

ELITE SOCCER

COACHING PRACTICES FROM THE WORLD'S
LEADING MANAGERS AND COACHES

Exclusive
Training practices from top
professional managers

CRYSTAL PALACE

IAN HOLLOWAY

THE DEFENSIVE LINE: PROTECT AND PENETRATE



PRESTON NORTH END

**SIMON
GRAYSON**
Defending
crosses



NORTHAMPTON TOWN

**AIDY
BOOTHROYD**
Developing
decision-making



LMA AMBASSADOR

**PETER
TAYLOR**
Crossing and
scoring areas



LMA AMBASSADOR

**DAVID
KEMP**
Defensive
headers



MIDDLESBROUGH

CRAIG LIDDLE
Pressing
and regaining
the ball

**EXTRA-TIME
INTERVIEW:**

**WITH CRAWLEY TOWN MANAGER
RICHIE BARKER**



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ISSUE 38 / SEPTEMBER 2013: FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Brilliant training blueprints from the game's best informed coaches

Dear Coach,

Welcome to the September issue of Elite Soccer.

For many of us, the season is now back into full swing, and here at Elite Soccer, we have on display another really interesting cross-section of soccer coaching sessions that will benefit players of any standard.

To begin, from the Barclays Premier League, we welcome Crystal Palace manager Ian Holloway, who has crafted a fascinating session that looks at both penetrating and protecting the defensive line. It's a plan that enables players to consider how they play irrespective of whether they are attackers or defenders, and one that the charismatic Eagles boss will use frequently throughout the course of the coming season.

From the Sky Bet Football League, Huddersfield Town manager Simon Grayson steps up to present a bespoke training practice that teaches players how best to defend crosses. In addition, Northampton Town manager Aidy Boothroyd explains how coaches can improve and enhance their players' decision-making.

Former England Under-21s manager Peter Taylor returns to Elite Soccer with a session which focuses on the key scoring area in front of goal, while vastly experienced coach David Kemp explains how to perfect the art of good defensive headers.

And in a new feature, we ask one of the game's leading coaches to answer a reader query. In this issue, Middlesbrough Professional Development Lead Coach Craig Liddle tackles the question of how players can work quickly and effectively when looking to press and regain possession.

As always, we hope you find these quality sessions interesting and stimulating, and welcome your feedback on any aspect of the magazine.

See you next month,

Howard Wilkinson

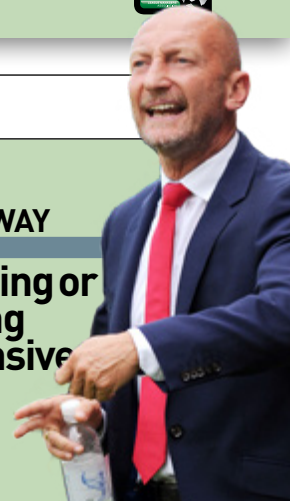
Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman

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CRYSTAL PALACE

Ian Holloway Penetrating or protecting the defensive line

Overview:

This session is about penetrating or protecting the defensive line, and is a blueprint that works attackers and defenders in equal measure.

We're looking for attackers to fashion goalscoring opportunities both when in and out of possession, while defenders must concentrate on defensive compactness, discipline and communication. This resilience is a feature of every successful team, and being able to penetrate this line effectively on a consistent basis is central to winning football matches.

We use this session in the lead-up to every match, with players transitioning in their roles throughout the practice.

PENETRATING OR PROTECTING THE DEFENSIVE LINE

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 86x50 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, flat cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 9v9 plus keepers

SESSION TIME

6v4 plus keeper
4x2mins, 1min rest;
Game 4x3mins,
30secs rest

What do I get the players to do?

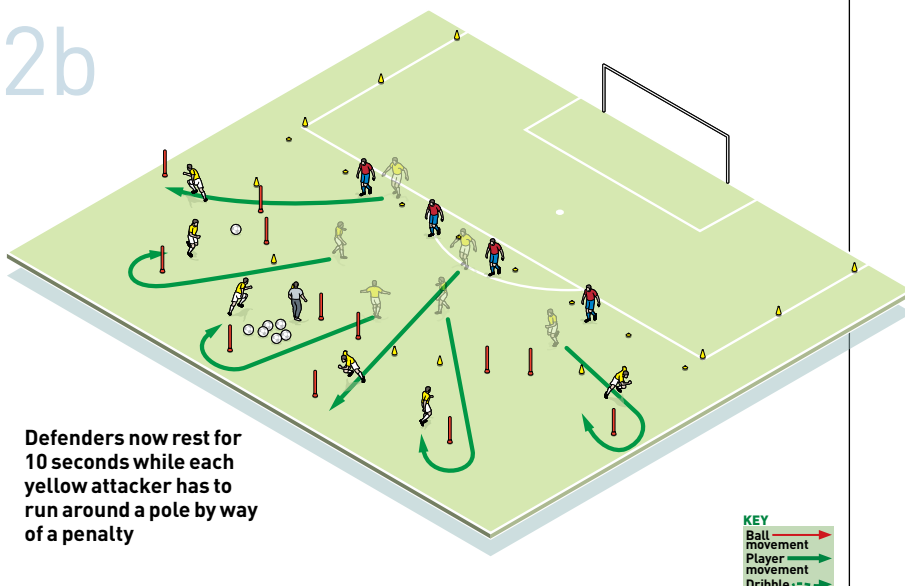
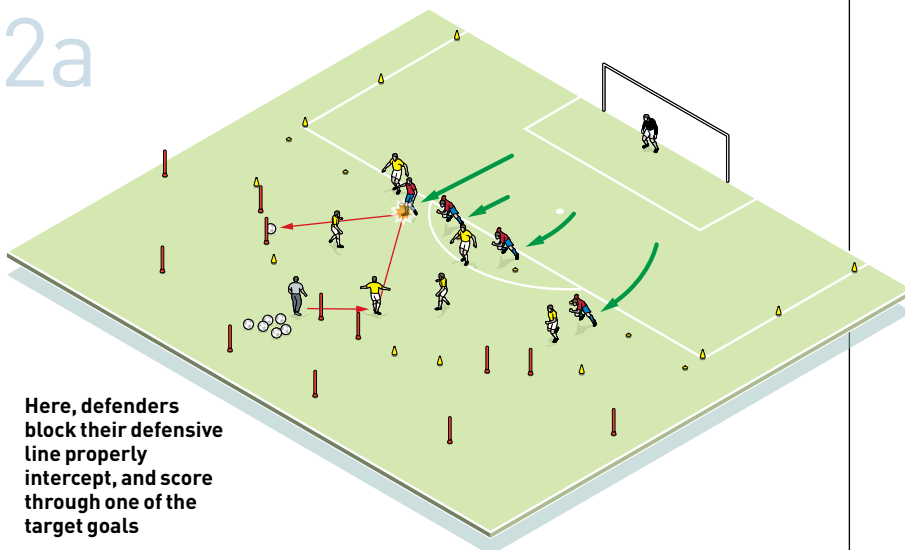
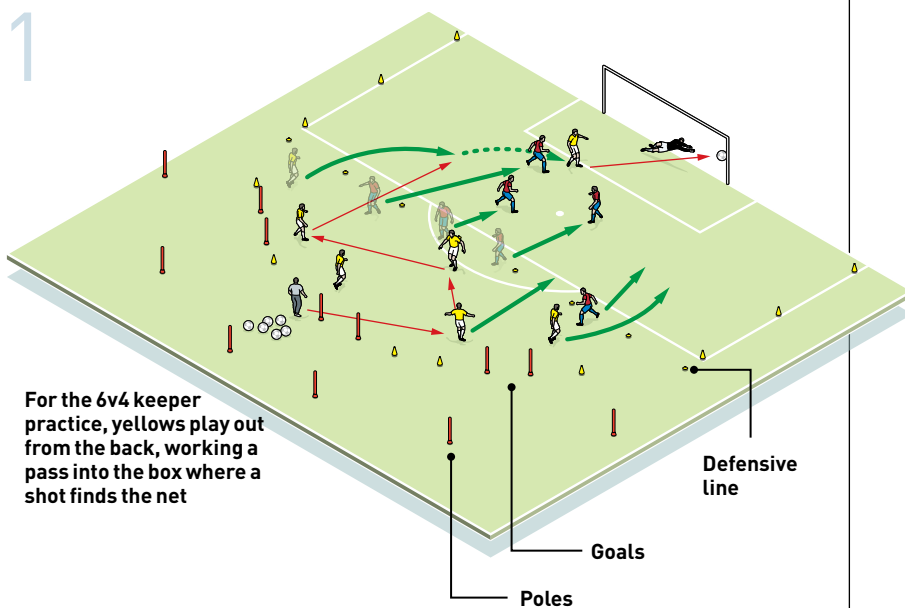
6v4 plus keeper practice

We set up as shown (1), with three target goals across the width, each 1.5 yards wide, and 'deep' poles placed at the bottom of the area, which is 35 yards long. Two yards outside the box, a defensive line is marked with flat rubber cones. The practice requires

a keeper and four defenders, who go up against six attackers.

We serve the ball in to the attacking team, who attempt to penetrate the defensive line and score. When the ball goes out of play, defenders must push out past the defensive line as quickly as possible. A new ball is then served in to the attackers.

If defenders win possession, they attempt to pass the ball into a target goal (2a). Scoring offers them a 10-second rest, with each attacker having to run around a deep pole before coming back into the area (2b). These



Ian Holloway

CRYSTAL PALACE

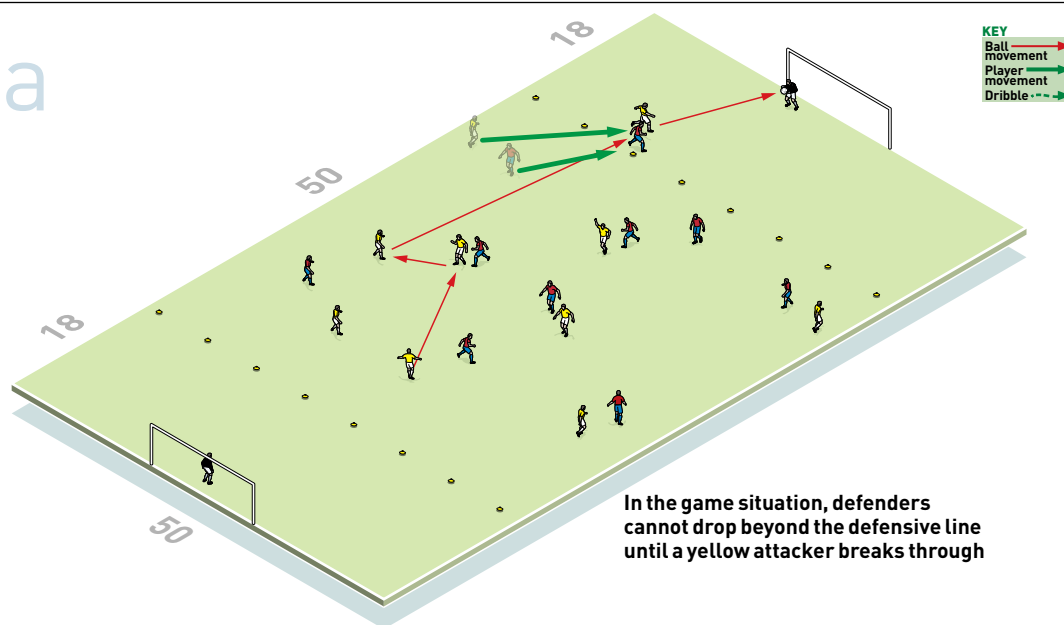
Crystal Palace manager Ian Holloway is one of the most charismatic figures in the game, and joining the south London club in November 2012 saw the 50-year-old take charge of his sixth professional side.

The former Bristol Rovers, QPR and Brentford footballer has inspired countless players with his brand of honesty and humour. Successful stints at Rovers, and QPR (for whom he gained promotion to the Championship) were followed by spells at Plymouth Argyle and Leicester City. And after a year out of the game he joined Blackpool in 2009, guiding the Seasiders into the Premier League for the first time in their history.

Blackpool's brand of expansive, attacking football won Holloway many admirers, and joining Palace in 2012, he continued those ideals, with the Eagles making it into the play-off final where they dispatched Watford 1-0 thanks to a Kevin Phillips penalty, to seal a return to the top flight. Palace have now kicked off their first season back in the Barclays Premier League following an eight-year absence.

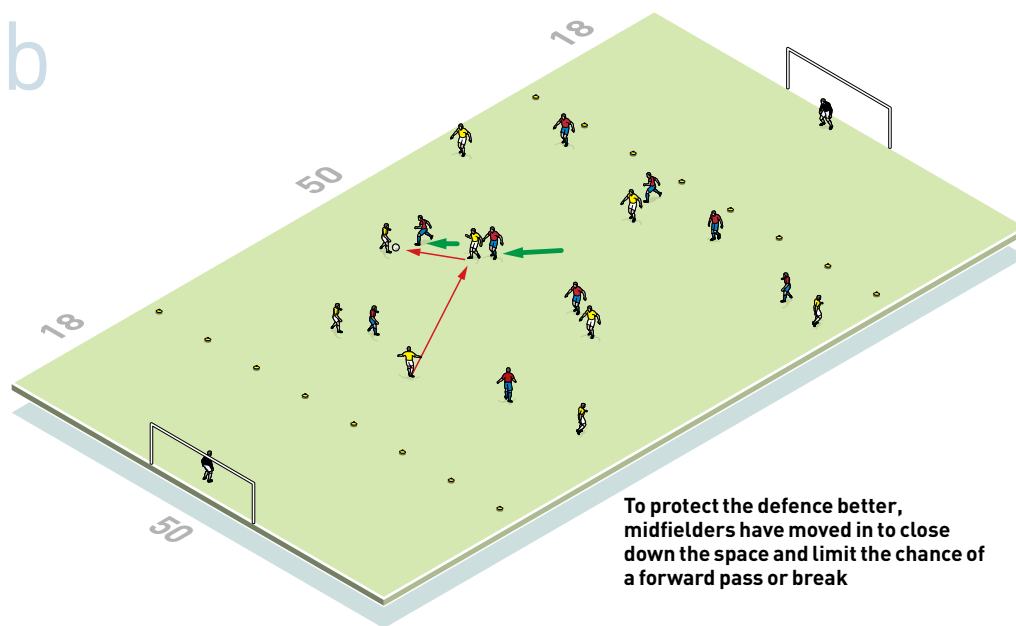
PENETRATING OR PROTECTING THE DEFENSIVE LINE

3a



In the game situation, defenders cannot drop beyond the defensive line until a yellow attacker breaks through

3b



To protect the defence better, midfielders have moved in to close down the space and limit the chance of a forward pass or break

actions replicate instances in a game – the 10-second rest represents defenders making a successful pass out of defence, while attacker movement around the poles mimics recovery runs.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want attackers to disrupt the back four, penetrating the defensive line and executing a positive finish on goal. Within that, connectivity and good decision-making are vital.

Defensively, players must work together, recognising that

winning possession is not the end task, but the start of the transition which needs to finish with them scoring in one of the target goals.

We also find it useful to introduce a holding midfield player who plays for the defending team.

How do I put this into a game situation?

Setting up as shown (3a/3b), we create a small-sided game – 9v9 plus keepers in an 86x50-yard area, with two 18-yard end zones. Again, attackers attempt to penetrate the

defensive line but can only play one-touch in the end zones. Defenders are not allowed deeper than the defensive line until the ball enters that area.

Teams must play at high tempo. Any team that scores regains possession, but missing the target means relinquishing possession.

How do I progress this game?

We can reduce space in order to increase the need for accuracy and speed of thought. ■

PRESTON NORTHEND

Simon Grayson Defending crosses

Overview:

This session looks at how to properly defend crosses into the 18-yard box, and examines the requirements of technique, communication, awareness and a true desire not to concede goals.

At most levels, defenders have a tendency to ball watch, so because of that they must be aware of attackers as much as possible. Choosing the right type of clearance is important – players shouldn't panic or slash at the ball. Because of these points, it's important we practise this session at least once a week so that players get into (and stay in) good habits. I always say good defending is as important as scoring a goal. If players can combine knowledge and skill with a healthy dose of bravery, they will do well.

“Good defending is as important as scoring a goal.”

DEFENDING CROSSES

SET-UP

AREA

Up to a half-pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 11v11

SESSION TIME

Box delivery and progression 20mins,
4v4 plus midfielder 10mins

What do I get the players to do?

Box delivery

We set up as shown (1a), with seven servers around the box ready to send in crosses for the four defenders and keeper. Each server is numbered, and on the coach's call, that player delivers, although different servers have to send in different types of crosses:

Servers 1 and 7: a chipped or driven cross

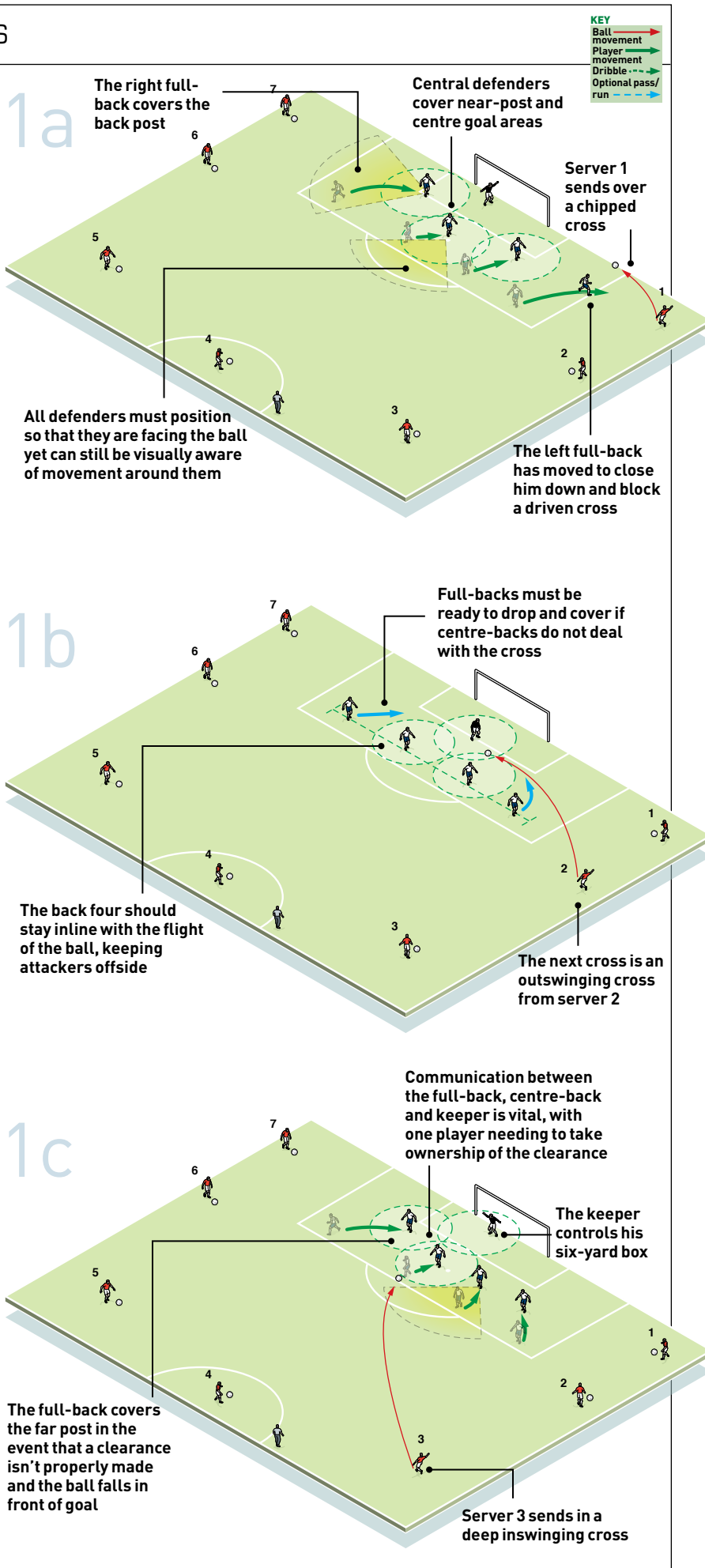
Servers 2 and 6: an outswinging cross (1b)

Servers 3 and 5: an inswinging cross (1c)

Server 4: a straight ball
For each ball delivered, defensive team mates must organise around the player whose task it is to clear the ball.

What are the key things to look out for?

When the ball is being delivered, defenders must be ready to react, so the body position needs to be correct. This means being able to see not only the ball, but space around them where opponents might be.





Simon Grayson PRESTON NORTH END

Simon Grayson is manager of Sky Bet League One side Preston North End, having joined the Lancashire club in February 2013.

Prior to arriving at Deepdale, the 43-year-old enjoyed successful spells at Blackpool, Leeds United and Huddersfield Town. Remarkably, for each of those clubs he achieved promotion from League One to the Championship, and now takes eight years of managerial experience into his first full season at Preston.

The likeable Yorkshire-born manager can also draw on an 18-year professional career that began at Leeds in 1988. He went on to star in the Premier League for Leicester City, Aston Villa and Blackburn Rovers and also had spells at Sheffield Wednesday, Stockport County, Notts County, Bradford City and Blackpool.

“Each defensive clearance must have height and distance, with players communicating clearly and concisely with teammates.”

DEFENDING CROSSES

Each clearance must have height and distance, with defenders communicating clearly and concisely with team mates. This could be to advise of a ‘man on’ situation, or to ensure that once the ball is cleared, defenders don’t ‘sit in’, instead squeezing up a yard or two in following the ball out.

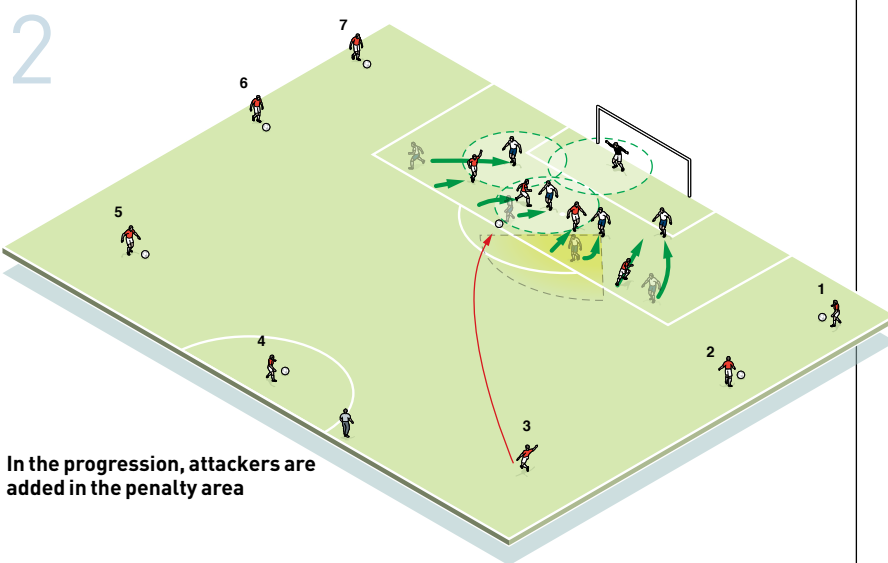
How do I progress the session?

To progress, we add four attackers who go up against the defenders for each cross [2].

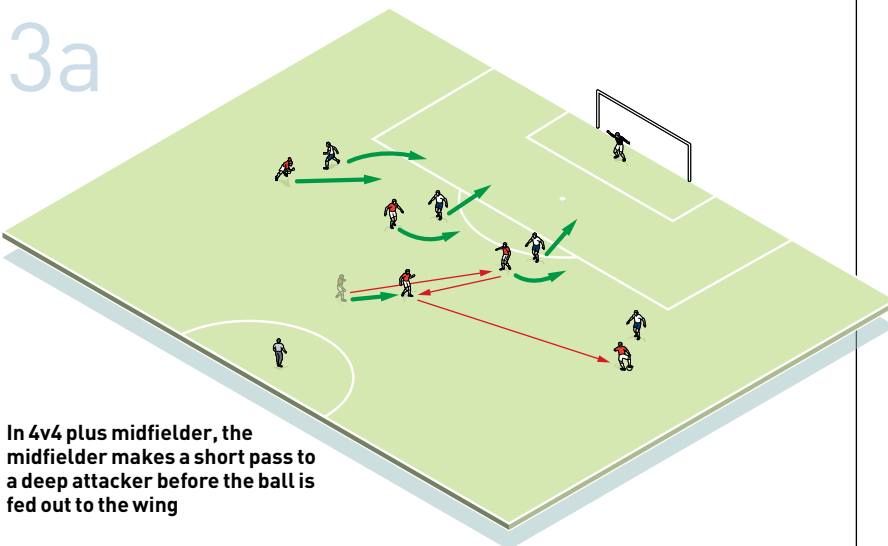
4v4 plus midfielder

For the next practice, we use a half-pitch. It’s 4v4 again, plus a lone midfielder. The midfielder starts, feeding into a central striker, who plays to a winger (3a). The full-back goes to close him down but must eventually allow the cross to be put in. Now, a 3v3 situation occurs in the box, with two defenders covering the posts and the third protecting the middle of the goal (3b). We then rerun on the other side.

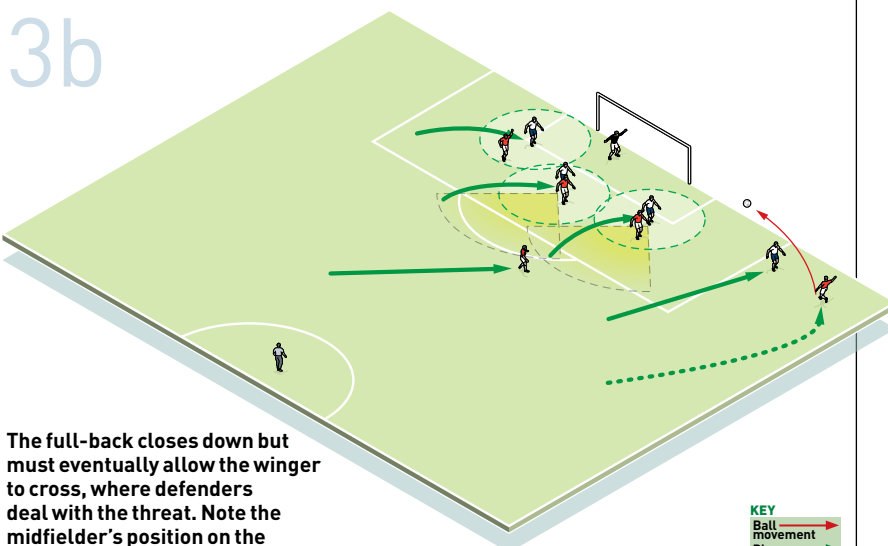
We can move this into an 11v11 game with crosses encouraged from the wings with the use of tram lines on the side of the pitch. ■



In the progression, attackers are added in the penalty area



In 4v4 plus midfielder, the midfielder makes a short pass to a deep attacker before the ball is fed out to the wing



The full-back closes down but must eventually allow the winger to cross, where defenders deal with the threat. Note the midfielder’s position on the edge of the box for a pull-back or miscued clearance

KEY
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble - - -
Optional pass/run - - -

NORTHAMPTON TOWN

Aidy Boothroyd Developing decision-making in players

Overview:

The best teams are those that recognise the space pressed and left by opponents, and the best players are those who know whether to play in front of, to the side of, in between or behind an opponent.

This session is therefore set up to develop good decision-making, and also helps players gain a better understanding and appreciation of spacial awareness when in possession of the ball.

We run this on a weekly basis because it showcases skills that can be improved upon by any player. These are also elements of game play that occur every time a team has the ball, both collectively and individually, which makes the practice equally relevant for all players in all positions.

“The best teams are those that recognise the space pressed and left by opponents.”

DEVELOPING DECISION MAKING IN PLAYERS

SET-UP

AREA

Up to the area in between penalty boxes

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 26

SESSION TIME

3v1 practice 25mins,
6v3 end zones 25mins,
Progression 25mins

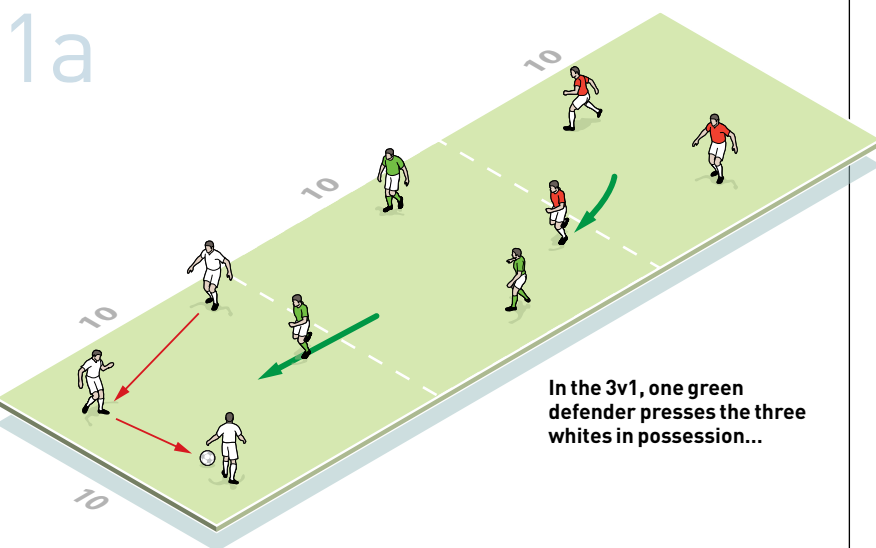
What do I get the players to do?

3v1 practice

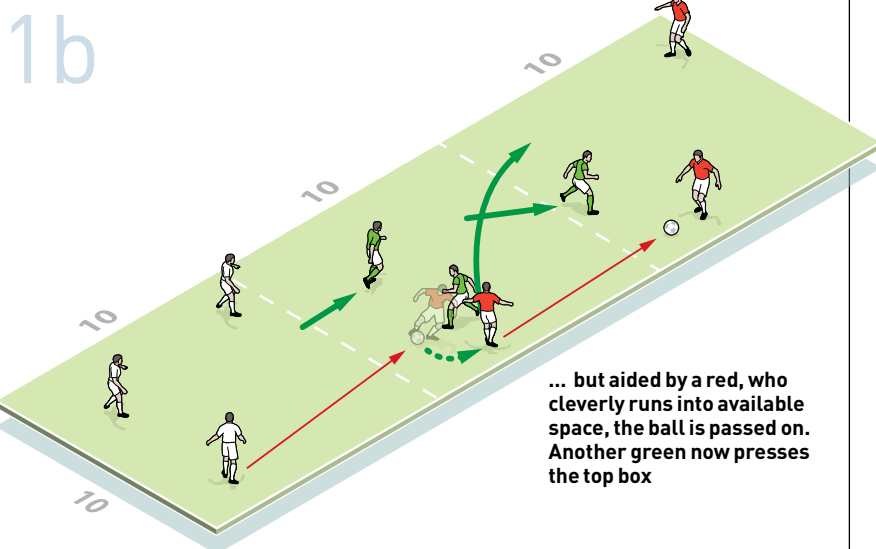
We set up as shown (1a), and in a 30x10-yard area, with three teams of three. Players in possession aim to work the ball past the central defensive team and into the far area, either by playing through or beyond their opponents (1b). Each team can move into a neighbouring box to pass, receive or close down; and there must be a minimum of four passes before the ball can be transferred either through or over the defenders. Rotate teams regularly.

6v3 end zones

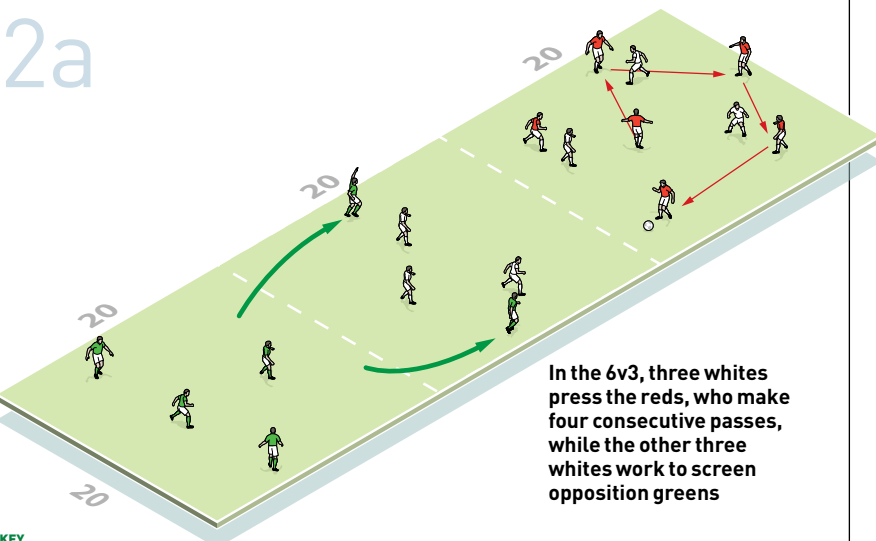
We now extend the practice to a 60x20-yard area (2a/2b). The principle remains the same, but the larger area means the central defensive team will need to split into two groups of three – one to press opponents in the top end zone, for example, and the other to screen opponents in the bottom end zone. ▼



In the 3v1, one green defender presses the three whites in possession...



... but aided by a red, who cleverly runs into available space, the ball is passed on. Another green now presses the top box



In the 6v3, three whites press the reds, who make four consecutive passes, while the other three whites work to screen opposition greens





Aidy Boothroyd

NORTHAMPTON TOWN

Aidy Boothroyd is approaching his second anniversary in charge of Sky Bet League Two side Northampton Town, having previously managed Coventry City, Colchester United and Watford.

The 42-year-old sampled promotion in his first managerial job, when taking Watford into the Premier League in the 2005/06 season. And his aim this season is to guide the Cobblers back to the third tier – his side having been installed as one of the pre-season title favourites.

As a player, Boothroyd starred in the lower leagues for Huddersfield Town, Bristol Rovers, Mansfield Town and Peterborough United, plus had a short spell in Scotland playing for Hearts.

“We tell players to recognise quickly when to follow the ball out, and when to raise their heads and assess the space left by opponents and team mates.”

DEVELOPING DECISION MAKING IN PLAYERS

What are the key things to look out for?

We are looking for defenders to assess the space and drop into pockets in the middle box. From there, they press and screen.

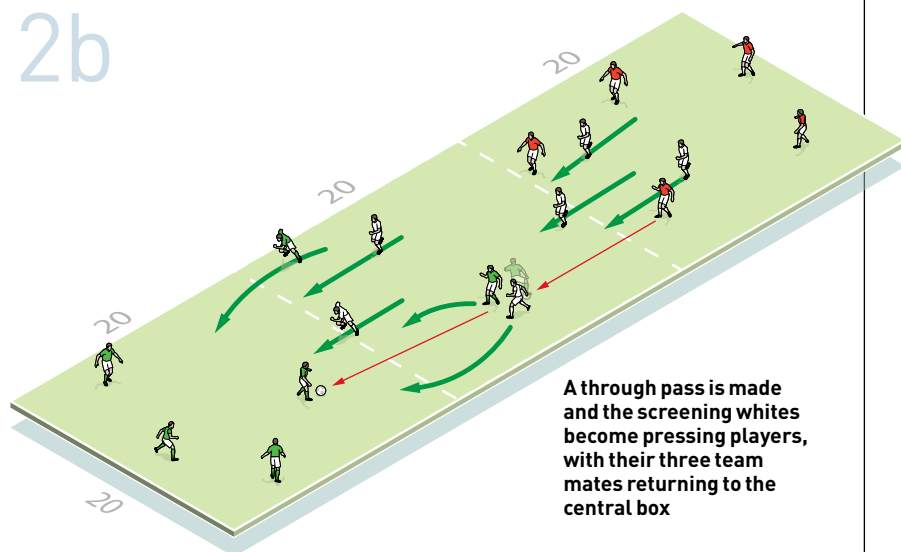
In possession, we find a common fault is when players look around for too long before executing a pass. To correct this, we tell players to recognise quickly when to follow the ball out, and when to raise their heads and assess the space left by opponents and team mates.

How do I progress the session?

We now extend again so that we're using the space in between the penalty boxes. There is a keeper and a full-sized goal at each end, plus three defenders who wait to the sides of each goal (3a).

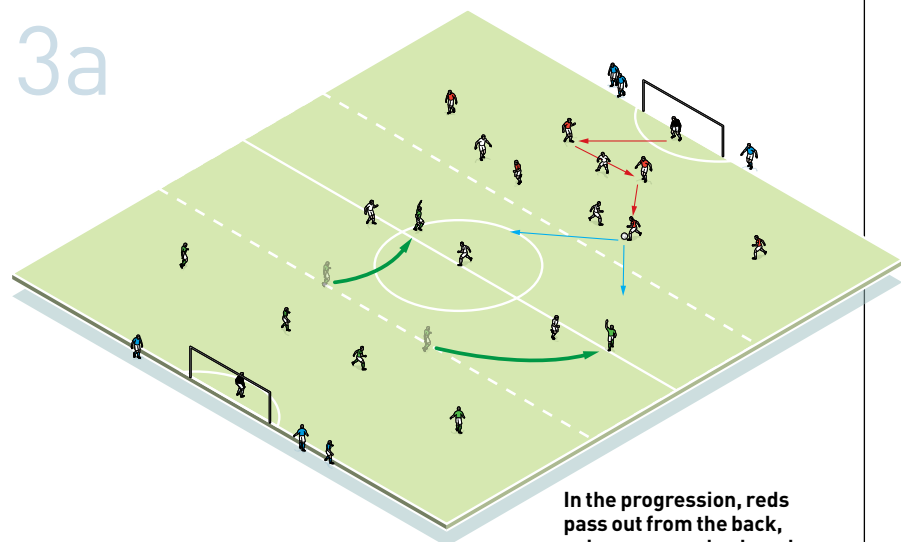
When an attacking team receives the ball in the end zone, it turns and attacks the goal, though at this point defenders enter the pitch, so a 6v3 attacking situation develops (3b). To make maximum use of the overload, attackers must push forward quickly and not get left behind in the middle zone. Defenders must work together efficiently against the overload. When a move comes to an end (through a goal or turnover of possession) restart with the other keeper. ■

2b



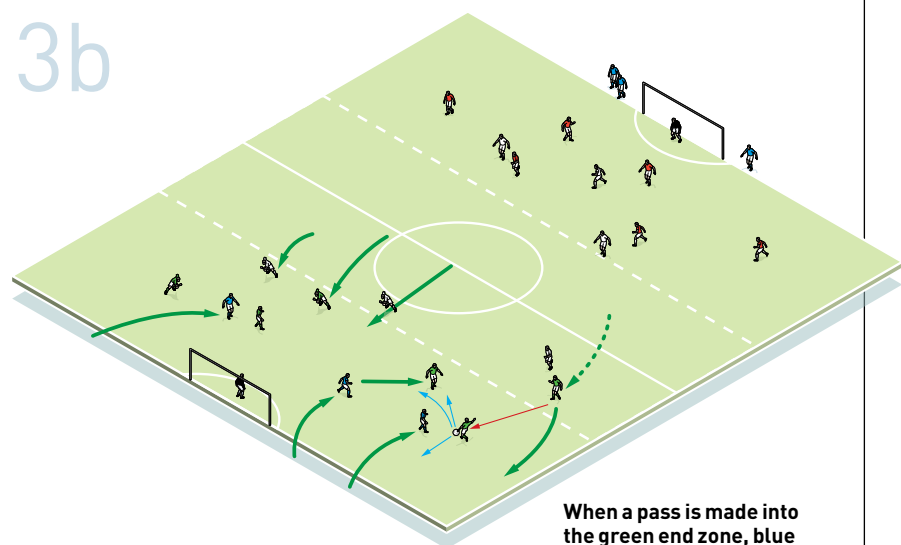
A through pass is made and the screening whites become pressing players, with their three team mates returning to the central box

3a



In the progression, reds pass out from the back, using greens who drop deep as passing outlets in the middle section

3b



When a pass is made into the green end zone, blue defenders enter to try to block the attack, while central greens rush into the zone to maximise their attacking overload



LMA AMBASSADOR

Peter Taylor Crossing and scoring areas

Overview:

This session covers crossing areas in the final third of the pitch, and isolates the key need for attackers – to instantly know which areas should be attacked and where the best goalscoring opportunities are. For attackers, the final third is the end product. If your team can increase its options when it comes to scoring goals, it has a much greater chance of winning matches. The true benefit of practising this session is in crossers not having to look up before they cross, because through practice, they know their attackers will automatically make a beeline for key areas. While this is an attack-minded practice, it also benefits defenders, who can learn where good attackers will run to, and how best to stop the subsequent cross.

CROSSING AND SCORING AREAS

SET-UP

AREA

Up to a half-pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals, mannequins

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 18

SESSION TIME

Each step 10mins

What do I get the players to do?

Final third practice

This practice uses up to 18 players, including two keepers. We agree three realistic areas from where goals are scored:

Step one: Early cross

Step two: Cross from outside the box

Step three: Cross from inside the box

Step one(1)

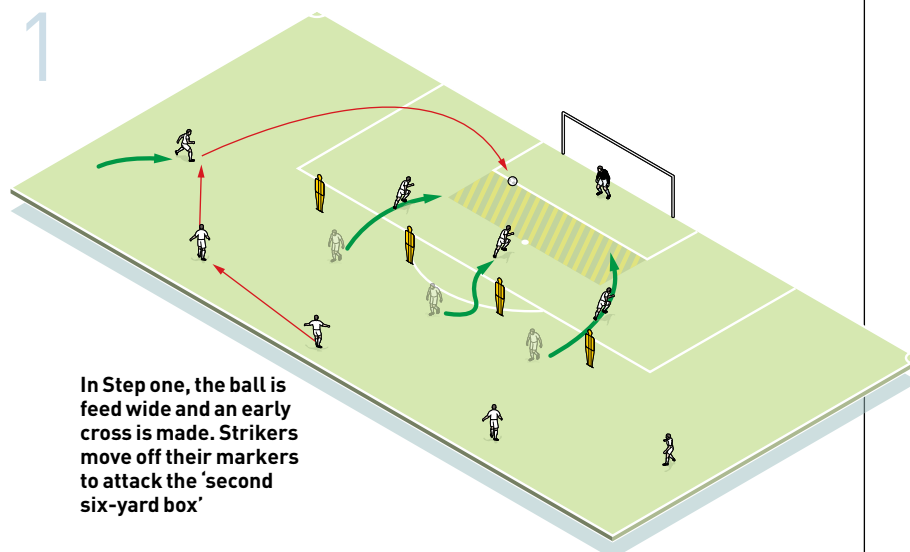
The move starts from 30 yards out, with the ball going left or right to a midfielder. He feeds the wide man, who can have two touches but must cross early. Forwards move off their mannequins, timing their runs so to stay onside and attack the 'second six-yard box', which is the intended delivery area for the ball.

We use multiple players on each station so momentum is maintained after each attack finishes.

Step two(2)

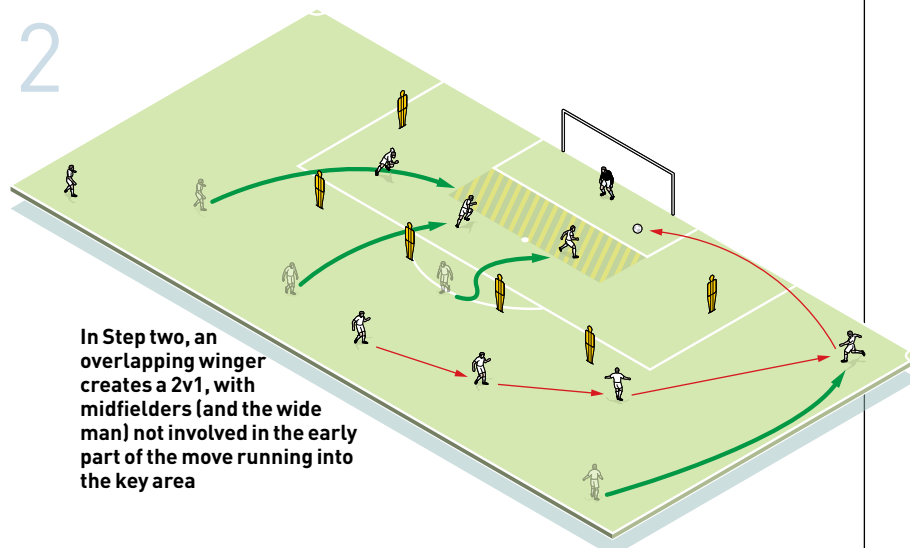
The next step uses only one main striker, as shown, and features midfielders running from deep. The wide man is overlapped to create

1



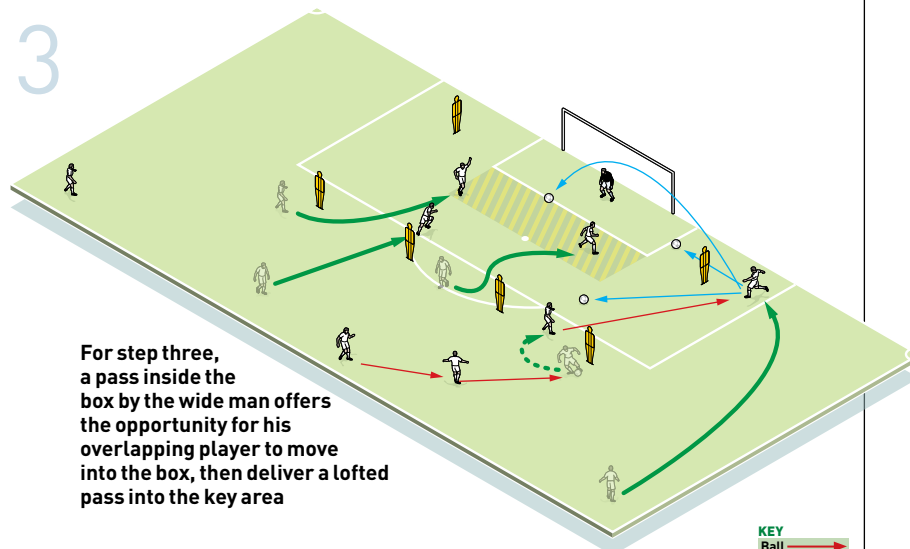
In Step one, the ball is feed wide and an early cross is made. Strikers move off their markers to attack the 'second six-yard box'

2



In Step two, an overlapping winger creates a 2v1, with midfielders (and the wide man) not involved in the early part of the move running into the key area

3



For step three, a pass inside the box by the wide man offers the opportunity for his overlapping player to move into the box, then deliver a lofted pass into the key area

KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble
Optional pass/run



Peter Taylor LMA AMBASSADOR

Peter Taylor is a hugely experienced football manager who has taken charge of the England Under-20 and Under-21 sides, as well as the Bahrain national team.

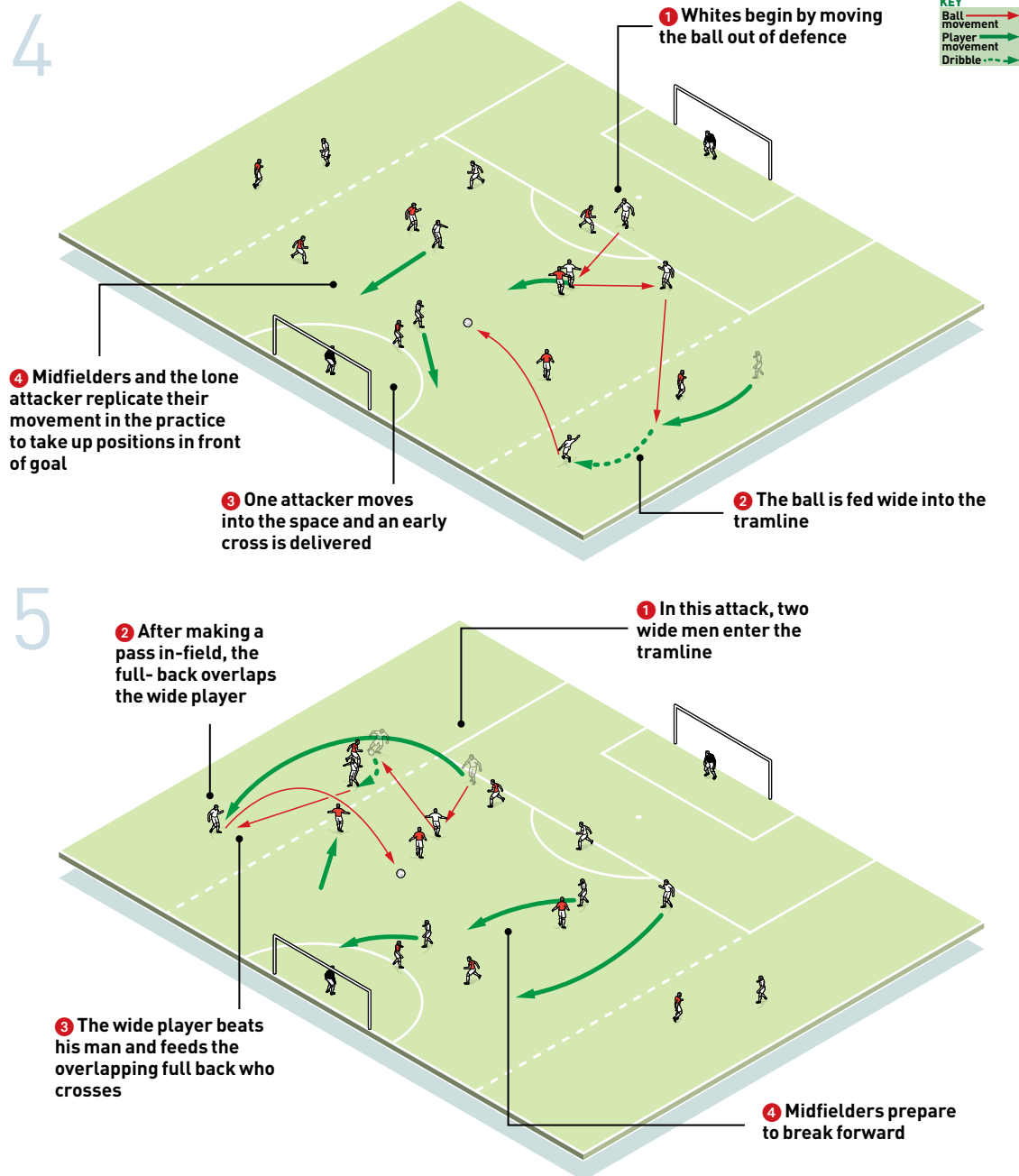
In club football, the sides he has overseen include Southend United, Leicester City, Brighton & Hove Albion and Gillingham.

He was also caretaker manager of the England national team on the night David Beckham was handed the captaincy for the first time.

As a player, Taylor made over 400 senior appearances, for Southend, Crystal Palace, Tottenham Hotspur, Leyton Orient, Oldham Athletic and Exeter City.

“Before the exercise begins, it’s important for the coach to agree with players where space will be, and where defenders will realistically head to.”

CROSSING AND SCORING AREAS



a 2v1 overload option, and the subsequent cross must not hit the first defender (mannequin), to the side of the six-yard box. Players not involved at the start are the deep runners, and attack the ball in the 'second six-yard box'.

Step three (3)

For step three, the wide man crosses or passes inside the box. The receiver takes the

ball and turns inside to pass into the box for his overlapping player. The subsequent cross or pass must not be low, because this slower set-up means more defenders will have regrouped and are likely to block a low grounded pass.

What are the key things to look out for?

Communication helps timing and realism, and it's important for the coach to agree with players where space will be, and where defenders will realistically head to. Players need to use imagination, make realistic runs, show good timing and must stay onside.

Tramline game (4/5)

On a half-pitch, this is a 9v9 including keepers. Play as you would do a normal game, though only one defender is allowed in the tramline area. There is no restriction on attackers inside the tramline, but we might limit touches. Goals can only be scored from crosses, or rebounds from crosses. ■

LA AMBASSADOR

David Kemp Defensive headers

Overview:

This session examines the skill and art of defensive headers. It's a simple exercise, but practice makes permanent. It's my belief that this sort of session should be used weekly so that players get a firm steer on technique and body shape, yet accomplished heading remains a skill that is rarely practised in the modern game. Every single game of football involves headers, and defensive headers at that, so this blueprint – which gets players working together, bonding and communicating – is of real value.

“Every single game of football involves headers, and defensive headers at that, so this blueprint is of real value.”

DEFENSIVE HEADERS

SET-UP

AREA

Up to a half pitch

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals, mannequins

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 10

SESSION TIME

Each practice 15mins

What do I get the players to do?

Heading arc

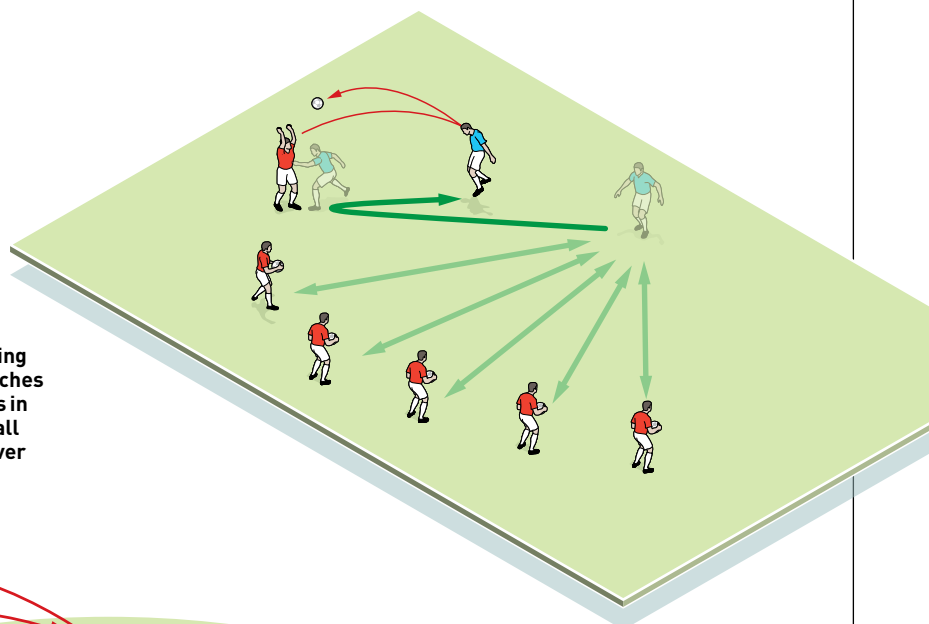
We begin in a small area, with seven defenders positioned in an arc (1). The practice requires players 2 to 7 to each have a ball in their hands. Player 1 moves forward five yards to player 2, touches the

ball, then backpedals (2). Player 2 throws the ball up and over the player's head, meaning he has to retreat quickly in order to head the ball back to player 2. The practice continues, with player 1 making his way round to player 7, then back along the line to 2.

We rotate players so each takes a turn at being the header of the ball, then rerun, this time asking each player to see if they can head the ball over their server's head. We can also adjust the distances between players, as required.

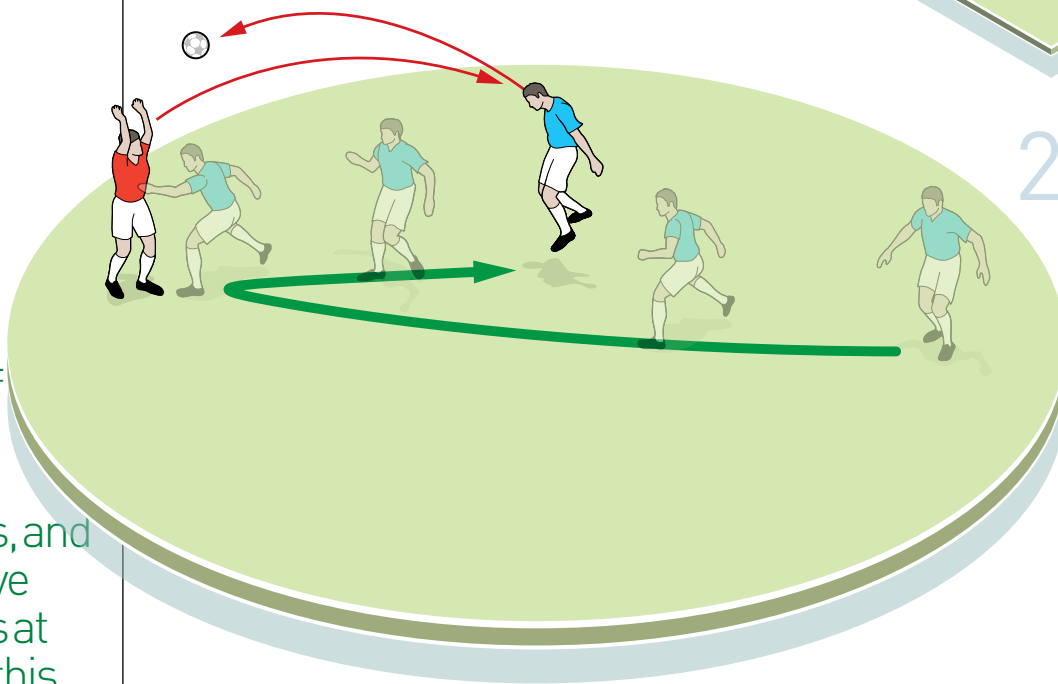
1

In Heading arc, the working player runs forward, touches the ball, then backpedals in order to head back the ball which is being flighted over his head



2

Heading arc technique and process in more detail



KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble
Optional pass/run



David Kemp LAAMBASSADOR

London-born coach and former manager David Kemp spent last season at Stoke City, having been Assistant Manager at the Barclays Premier League side.

An extensive career in coaching began when he took charge of Swedish side Norrköping in 1985, and he would go on to manage Plymouth Argyle, Slough Town and Oxford United. He has also been Assistant Manager at Crystal Palace, Wimbledon, Millwall and Portsmouth, and has worked in player development at Leicester City.

As a player, he scored 126 career goals for the likes of Crystal Palace, Portsmouth, Carlisle United and Plymouth, and spent two years playing in the United States.

“Players must have a spring in their jump, with eyes open and good timing to meet the ball.”

DEFENSIVE HEADERS

Double headers

For the next practice, we're looking for two headers from each server throw – the distance is now 10 yards between players. This set-up requires mannequins, although if you don't have any, you can use cones or even static players. The heading player starts on the inside shoulder of the mannequin for the first header, then moves round to the outside shoulder for the second header (3a). He continues along the line until reaching the end (3b); we then rotate players.

What are the key things to look out for?

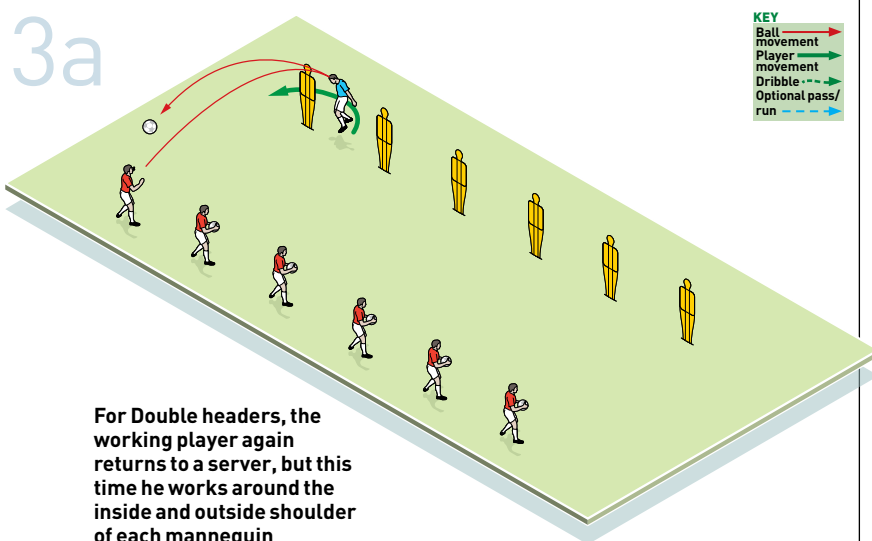
Body shape is vital in this practice, with shoulders across the pitch – if they're not, the headers will go off at different angles.

The working player must have a spring in his jump, with eyes open and good timing to meet the ball.

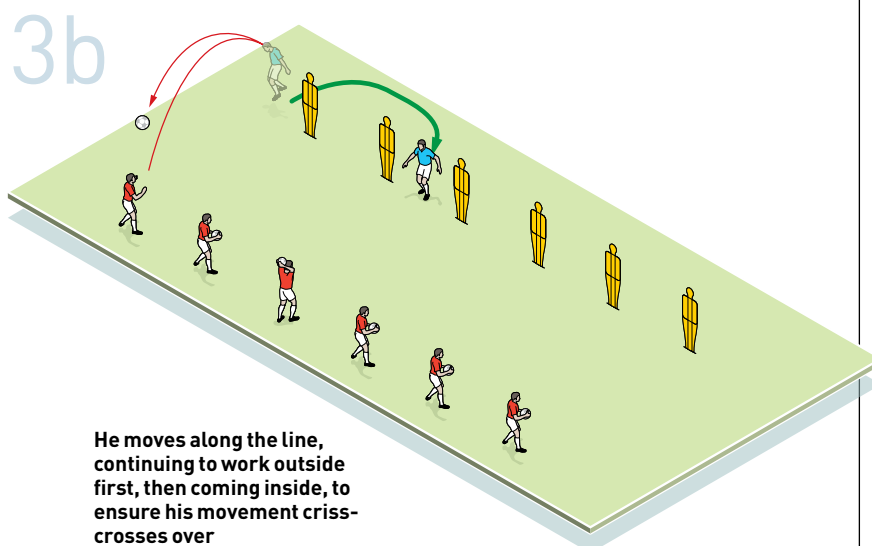
And the use of neck muscles in heading the ball back with power and control, is crucial.

How do I progress the session?

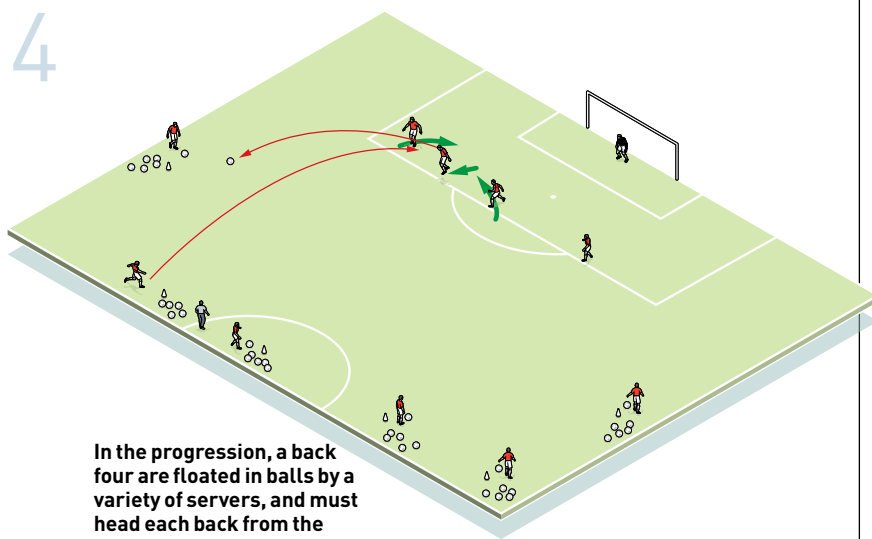
We can set up a back four with servers playing balls in from all areas of the pitch. Balls should be headed back to where they came from, with height, distance and power (4). ■



For Double headers, the working player again returns to a server, but this time he works around the inside and outside shoulder of each mannequin



He moves along the line, continuing to work outside first, then coming inside, to ensure his movement criss-crosses over



In the progression, a back four are floated in balls by a variety of servers, and must head each back from the direction it came, with height and power

COACHING CONSULTATION

Each month, we ask one of the game's leading coaches to answer a question posed by an **Elite Soccer** reader.

THIS MONTH:

Press and regaining possession

When we lose possession in midfield, we sometimes struggle to get immediate pressure on the ball to blunt counter-attacks. How can I improve this?

Question asked by
Mike Jacobs,
Head Soccer Coach,
University of Evansville, USA.

ANSWERED BY

Craig Liddle

MIDDLESBROUGH

To combat this problem, I'd want to coach my players in three different situations - these situations break down and mimic the immediate events after a turnover of possession in the middle. The first looks at players' ability to block and slow an attack, the second aims at being reactive and repositioning in transitions, while the third looks at regaining possession against the overload.

Blocking

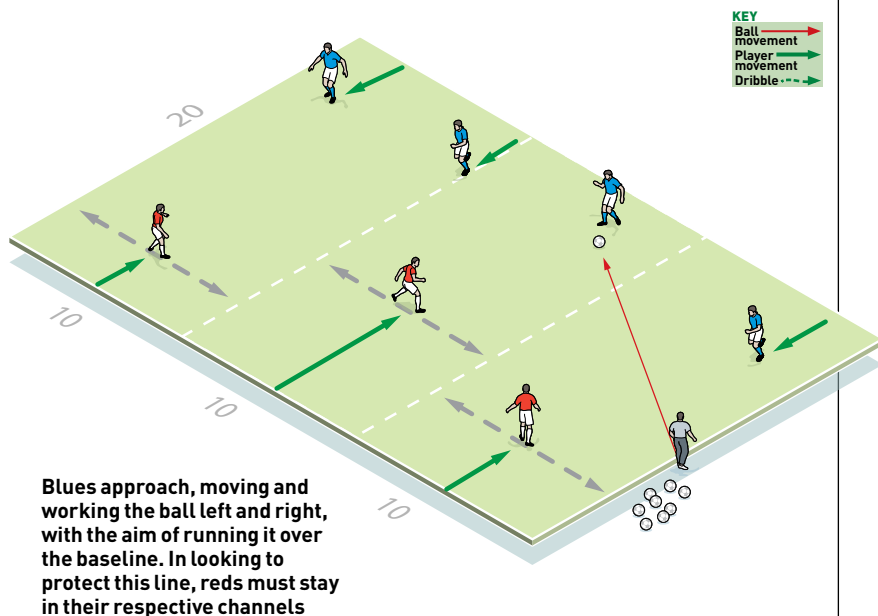
(20x30 yards, 4v3)

The coach serves the ball to one of the four blues positioned at the top of the area.

They can pass and move left and right across the tramlines, although the advancing reds must stay within their lines.

Blues aim to run the ball over the bottom line protected by the reds.

Then restart.



Being reactive to transitions

(40x30 yards, 7v7)

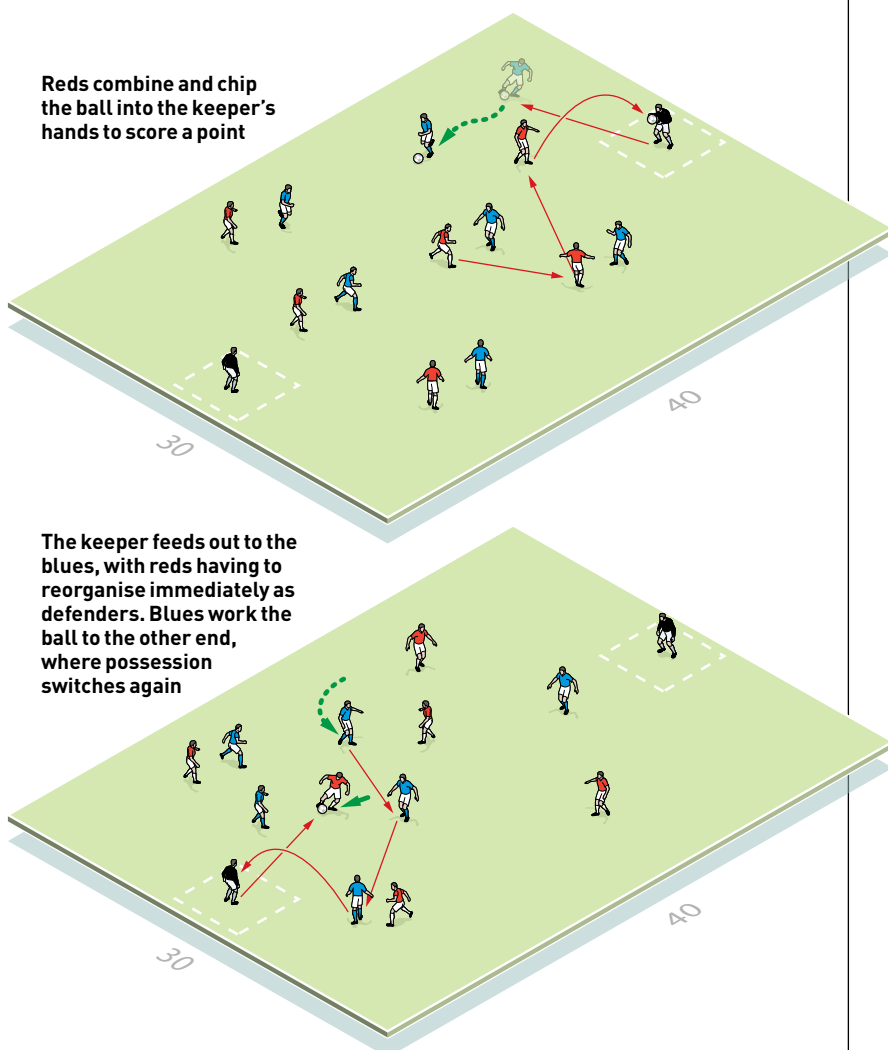
The coach serves the ball in to either team.

Team mates must combine but can attack either end.

The aim is to chip the ball into the keeper's hands.

When the keeper catches he immediately serves it out to the opposing team.

The attacking team now becomes the defending team, and vice versa.



SET-UP

AREA

Up to 60x40 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 7v7

SESSION TIME

Each situation 20mins

COACHING CONSULTATION

Coaching considerations

Are the players pressing quickly, together and as a unit, or can they delay an attack?

Is there sufficient balance, cover, support and communication, for both sides?

Are players defending correctly and not diving in, and are they preventing opponents from getting in behind them?

Why this works

It's important teams learn how to put pressure on the ball immediately after a turnover of possession, because modern soccer is awash with sides breaking quicker than ever before and catching opponents unprepared. The last thing a team wants is to lose the ball when in possession and committing players forward, unable to take back control of the situation in a quick and disciplined way. ■

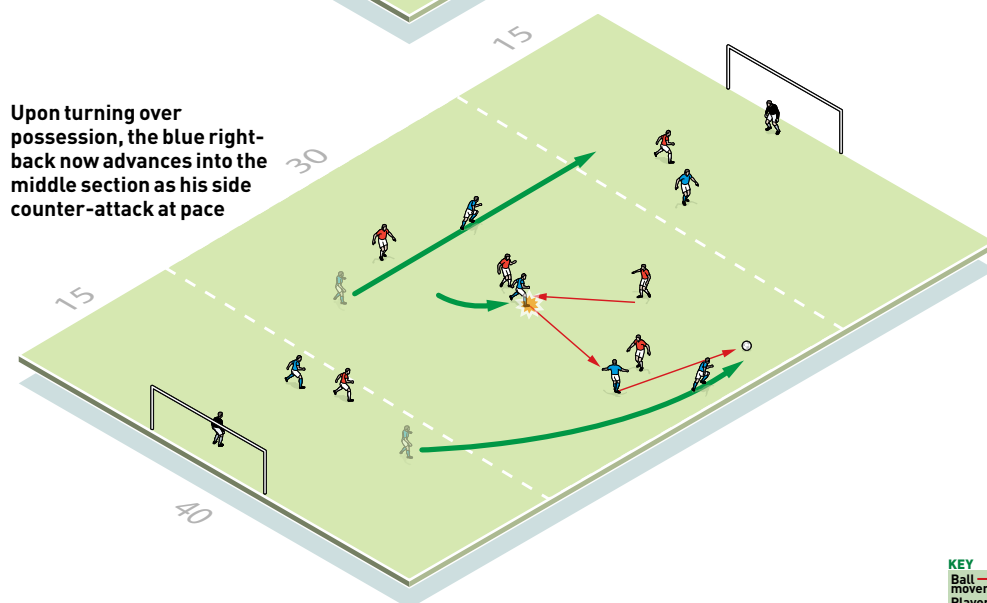
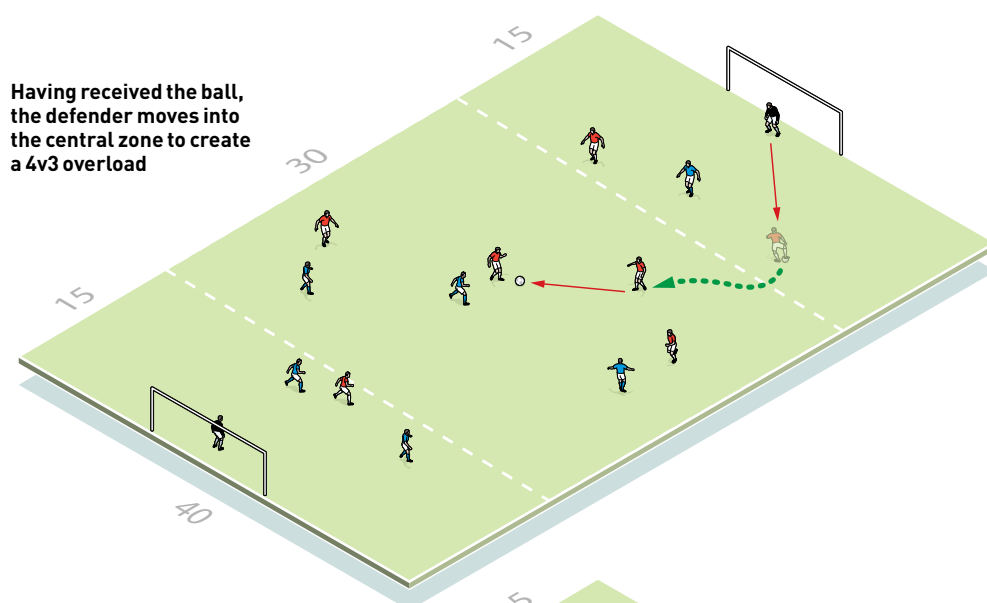
Regaining/exploiting possession in overloads

(60x40 yards, 7v7)

The keeper plays to a defender, who moves quickly into the midfield area to create an overload.

Blues defend against the 4v3 overload, attempting to regain possession and create attacks for themselves.

Only defenders can move out of their zones in overloading into the middle area.



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



Craig Liddle

MIDDLESBROUGH

Craig Liddle is the Professional Development Lead Coach at Sky Bet Championship side Middlesbrough.

The 41-year-old had previously taken up numerous caretaker-manager roles at Darlington, having also made 271 appearances for the north-east club as a tough-tackling defender, between 1998 and 2005. Prior to that, he appeared 25 times for Middlesbrough in the top flight, having begun as a trainee with Aston Villa.

EXTRA-TIME

RICHIE BARKER CRAWLEY TOWN

Despite being appointed as manager of Crawley Town just six days before the start of last season, Richie Barker managed to lead the club to the highest finish in their 125 year history. Now with a full pre season to prepare for the 2013/2014 Richie Barker is intent on carrying on Crawley's impressive Football League progress.

Q You finished 10th in League One last season ahead of four former Premier League sides in your division; how do you now consolidate and continue that momentum?

A "For five years as a club, Crawley Town have finished higher than their previous position the season before which really shows how far the club has come. We were 10th last year and obviously if we could finish within that top 10 again that would mean we would better ourselves yet again.

Some of our fans probably had to pinch themselves at times last season to see us finishing ahead of the likes of Preston, Coventry and Notts County. We had a spell where in 3 weeks we

played 3 former Premier League teams and we won two and drew one which does show how far the club has progressed.

I believe that the division is going to be a lot harder this year with the likes of Bristol City, Peterborough, Wolves and the promoted teams from league two joining the division and making it a lot stronger. However, we are consolidating on the ▼

"We make sure we have great understanding of what is happening to our people away from their time spent at the club. Life is not perfect and at some stage players may be involved in the responsibilities of things like moving their home, children's schools etc."

EXTRA-TIME

pitch and also off the pitch where we hope we have made the finances more manageable and we are on our way to making the club more self sustainable.

We are now starting to recruit players to the club that we believe would add value to the football club. So we are recruiting younger, enthusiastic, energetic, athletic players who want to learn, progress their own careers and subsequently help Crawley Town's development as well."

Q What type of working culture do you as a manager try and engender at your football club?

A "We have two main keywords that are really important and indicative of what we are trying to do. The first is the humanistic approach to the way we run the place, where everybody is treated as an equal and a human being. We make sure we have great understanding of what is happening to our people away from their time spent at the club. We understand that life is not perfect and at some stage players may be involved in the responsibilities of things like moving their home, children's schools etc.

So we take a very human approach to make sure that everybody is happy. We never ask anybody to do something they really don't want to do and instead ask people to volunteer to do certain things and remember that everyone is a human being.

In terms of the football side of things we try and make sure that every day is a learning environment for players. The training sessions are designed of course for everyone to continue learning but also specifically with the intention that at least a small group of players will go away at the end of the day believing they are a better player than when they walked through the door that morning. We keep training unpredictable so that when players are driving in they haven't already got a fixed idea of what they will be working on that day which keeps things fresh for everybody."

"We are recruiting younger, enthusiastic, energetic, athletic players who want to learn, progress their own careers and subsequently help Crawley Town's development as well."

Q During the close season you continued your own learning process by attending the specialised Warwick Business School Certificate of Applied Management course as well as a week long course to start your UEFA Pro Licence course....

A "The close season has been a busy educational time for me and one which I have thoroughly enjoyed. As a manager you are continually looking at ways to develop yourself as well as others. On the Pro Licence we will be talking about coaching and football whereas on the Warwick course the focus is on learning more business skills that will help you in your role as a football manager – interaction with staff of all levels, communications skills, creating environments, financial reports, IT.

At Crawley Town we have to bridge a financial gap and we haven't got the finances that some of the clubs that we have to compete against have. So it's beneficial for me to have all the tools to help bridge that financial gap by understanding what goes on above me at the club, in the boardroom, what the Chief Executive is going through and hopefully help understand how we continue to take the football club forward both on and off the pitch."

Q Steve Coppell is your Director of Football – how important is the role and the wealth of experience that Steve brings to the club?

A "The word that sums up the relationship that I have with Steve Coppell is mentor. He's a fantastic learning mentor for someone like me who only has two years experience as a manager. He is extremely personable, and he has time for everybody at the football club. He doesn't force his opinions on anybody and I would strongly recommend to any young managers that if they can find a mentor in a similar mould to Steve then they should do it.

Steve and I had a trust right from the start because I knew that Steve wasn't looking to do my job and that if things weren't going well he would try to step in. He's a fantastic mentor for me and I have learnt as much from him since I joined the club as I have on any educational course.

Steve has won two LMA Manager of the Year awards and he has also managed over 1,000 matches as a manager. Reaching that 1,000 match landmark is a target that I really aspire to being able to match one day."

Q How do you reflect on your first season in charge of Crawley Town?

A "I'd have to look back and describe it as successful for everyone at the club who worked so hard to reach that 10th place finish. It was only the club's second ever season in the Football League and first year in League One. Some of the opposing teams had greater resources and we still managed to ensure our year on year progression as a club.

One of the ways that I try to assess my development as a manager is by analysing if the football club is in a better place now than when I first started at the club and I certainly hope that Crawley is. We have young players now who are starting to progress, we've hopefully established ourselves in League One, we've increased our fan base and have players who have hopefully progressed as well due to the environment that we have created."

BOOKED: **THIS MONTH'S CHOICE**

By James Evans

The building blocks of sport

BUILDING WINNING TEAMS:
Leadership Tips from the
Changing Room to the Board
Room
Brian Noble

Imagine you have moved house as part of your commitment to revitalise a team which had 3:28 record last season. Soccer is by far and away the most popular local sport and you are running the country's only professional soccer league outfit. You have also persuaded your young coaching team to rent or buy locally. Before and as you arrive, there are problems over recruitment and mounting financial troubles. The backer pulls out and then, it is decided to move the club four hours up the road.

All your best-laid plans are in tatters and you have no kit, no proper training facility and seemingly no hope. Yet Brian Noble managed to turn round just this situation. The sport was rugby, and his side, the Crusaders, who play in Wales, would go on to win 48% of their games and reach the Super League play-offs in 2010. It was not the first time he had faced adversity and the lessons he had brought with him served him well.

This is one of the many first hand experiences that Noble draws to illustrate how coaches face challenges in their careers, and what they can do to overcome them. Because of his success at both winning or saving teams, any sports coach who wishes to advance their own career should be studying this book.

Some of you might be familiar with his TV punditry on the BBC at

top rugby league games. As a former GB coach, he brings a wealth of tactical experience to the audience. Well versed in dealing with the media, he knows not to speak down to his audience or baffle them with jargon. He does not hide his strong views. This makes him a good analyst to watch and listen to.

However, this is not a book about rugby league tactics. Noble, though proud and loyal to league, is not afraid to draw from all sports and walks of life. He has an excellent group of contributors to finish each chapter. Cross-code players like Jason Robinson and Jonathan Davies, former Ashes winning England cricket captain, Michael Vaughan, business leaders like Dave Whelan and Sir Ken Morrison and even Hollywood star (and former boxer) Mickey Rourke.

Refreshingly, these contributors add their experiences to the bolster the arguments and conclusions, not to glad hand Noble. Each has been successful and yet each has faced problems and hardship that they have overcome. Rugby dual code legend, Jonathan Davies, lost his father at 14, was out of the game with injury for 18 months at 19, and lost his wife when she was 34. He talks about the lows of internal and external situations. His conclusion is that those who work the hardest come out on the other side of adversity.

And Noble is not going to surprise us too often with what works:



"This is not a book about rugby league tactics. Noble, though proud and loyal to league, is not afraid to draw from all sports and walks of life."

Hard work, belief, energy and building the right team around you. The subtly lies in what work you do, when and how. To action this, the book neatly split into eight headings: Leadership, Motivation, Preparation, Values, Adversity, Conflict & Criticism, Structure, Success & Winning.

Within in each chapter, he sets out concisely how

to improve or deal with coaching challenges. He then illustrates them with examples from his own experiences. In addition, he draws on his own reading. It is not surprising to see that he comes back to Jim Collins' Good to Great text. Collins' extensive research of the best businesses showed that among other things, the leaders were not flashy and they worked hard at their core business. Noble goes on to use Collins' metaphor of a bus. A good business is like a bus. It is simple: somebody has to be the driver, some has to plan its direction and route, and some have to be the passengers and so on. When the direction of the bus is known and everyone is in his or her place, then the bus can drive on at full speed. To be a successful team everyone has got to want to be on that bus.

Noble knew certain players could disrupt the team. He would either work with them, redefining their roles or he would weed out what he says (former England rugby

BOOKED: THIS MONTH'S CHOICE

union coach) Clive Woodward called "energysappers". He has tells us of a number of examples where he used influential players to lead the team in the direction he wanted. Often, in difficult times, they were ones who gave the team the impetus they needed. Noble understands the value of trust, which we can also call empowerment.

When talking about motivation, he says that pre-match, half-time or full time speeches are overrated. He personally cannot remember any as a player, and only a few as a coach. A couple stick in his mind. One was just before a crucial Tri Nations match against Australia. In the high tension of the changing room before the game, as he looked at the strain on the players' faces, he tried to outline three crucial points. In the silence that surrounded him he said: "One, we must control the rucks" to nods of approval. "Two, our little things have to be better than theirs". As he felt the heat rising, he then said: "Three", a slight pause, "Three", he said again. Then nothing, because he completely forgotten what he was going to say. After a few moments of desperation he said "and I've forgotten what the third point is!" The changing room collapsed into hoots of laughter for five minutes. And, of course, with the tension gone, the players went out to win a famous victory.

Stories like this go alongside his tales of the battles up and down the management chain. You don't just have to make sure the players are happy, you have to look after your employers. Everyone is answerable to someone. Rugby league is a tough environment on and off the field. The fact that Noble was able to see through longer term contracts shows he invested time in persuading his superiors that they would see a payoff. He came into relegation threatened Wigan Warriors and made them competitive again. Previously he had made Bradford Bulls one of the most successful teams of the early 2000s.



Brian Noble

Born in 1961, Noble played hooker for mainly for Bradford Northern, combining his professional with being a policeman. He played 11 times for Great Britain, including seven as captain.

He joined the coaching staff at Bradford on retiring, becoming head coach in 2000. Whilst head coach of Bradford Bulls, he guided the Bulls to two Minor Premiership titles, victory in three Grand Finals in 2001, 2003 and 2005, the Rugby League Challenge Cup in 2003 and to three World Club Championships in 2002, 2004 and 2006. He was named Super League coach of the year in 2003 and succeeded David Waite as Great Britain coach following the 2003 Ashes series.

In 2006, he took over at Wigan Warriors, saving them from relegation and restoring their position in the Super League, reaching the semi-final play-off game in 2009. He then moved to the troubled Welsh side the Crusaders. In the face of some enormous financial and locational challenges, he helped them to the play-offs for that season.

He still remains the only coach to take a team to three World Club Championships.

He wasn't always blessed with the biggest budgets or the best players. So we can easily align our own situations to him. As coaches, of rugby, of soccer, or any other sport, we can learn how he set out his seasons with clear messages on what was going to happen and, crucially, why? He knows that the players need to know why they are working towards the goals he is giving them. That means they are more likely to listen, keep going when it is tough, enjoy the rewards for what they are when they do come.

Underlying much of what he says is that he knows that success comes from lots of small improvements. When you are losing, you have to know where you are going in the long run. But

"When talking about motivation, he says that pre-match, half-time or full time speeches are overrated. He personally cannot remember any as a player, and only a few as a coach."

in the short run, you need to keep coming back to the micro aspects of the game. He knew what it would take to get back winning again if the results were not coming his way.

He changed his success measurements, "downsizing" as he called it, so progress was being made. He could assure players because they could see their successes growing week by week, even if their tangibles of wins and league points were not yet. Noble rates his best season as a coach and a leader when he didn't win any silverware (and this was a coach who won nine cups at Bradford, including three World Club Championships).

There are two reasons why this book should be within an arm's reach of the your desk. First, it is a book you can easily dip in and dip out of. The summaries at the end of each chapter are timely reminders of how you should conduct yourself. It is well worth reading one of these before you go out onto the training park later today or before a sticky meeting with a player. The final couple of chapters also give you a road map for success. Some great tick lists on player boundaries, planning and management techniques.

The second reason must be to inspire you to fulfill your ambitions as a coach. We all dream of doing a great job and winning every game. The reality can be nothing like that, and every coach faces lows. Because Noble has such humility, he can allow his enthusiasm and sometimes sheer bloody-mindedness to create successful teams, whether as cup winners, or survivors. That to me is the key. We may not always have a positive win:loss ratio, but as he quotes Jason Robinson: "The best person to judge your success is you, only you know if you could have given more". Noble has built and maintained teams which have had integrity. His own summary would be what he says several times in the book, "A bad person cannot make a good rugby league player".



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