

PLAYING THROUGH THE LINES

AGE PHASE: U12-U16

LEVEL

- U12-U16

SESSION OBJECTIVES

A possession-based approach to playing within the opposition shape, including:

- Recognising when to play forward and when to retain the ball
- Becoming comfortable with and dealing with pressure when in possession
- Technical ball mastery to improve speed of circulation
- Utilising the link player

PART 1: COMBINATION PLAY

- The practice takes place in a 12m x 12m area and requires seven to 12 players.
- Two or three players act as defenders, with one or two players acting as link players depending on numbers.

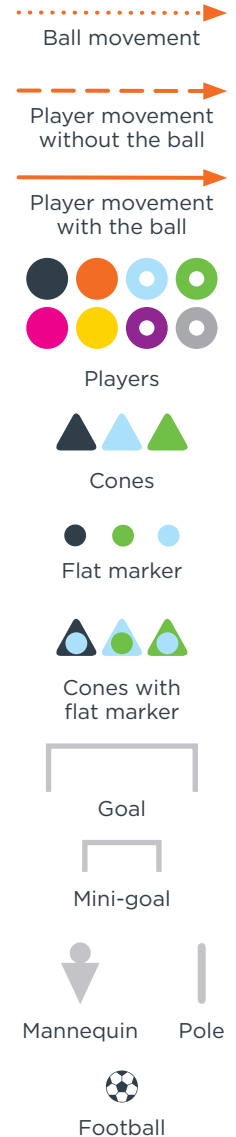
PART 2: POSSESSION SMALL-SIDED GAME

- This exercise is best utilised using either a 6v3, 7v4 or 8v5, depending on the number of players available.
- The practice must always include two goalkeepers, both of whom play with the team in possession.

PART 3: ZONAL GAME

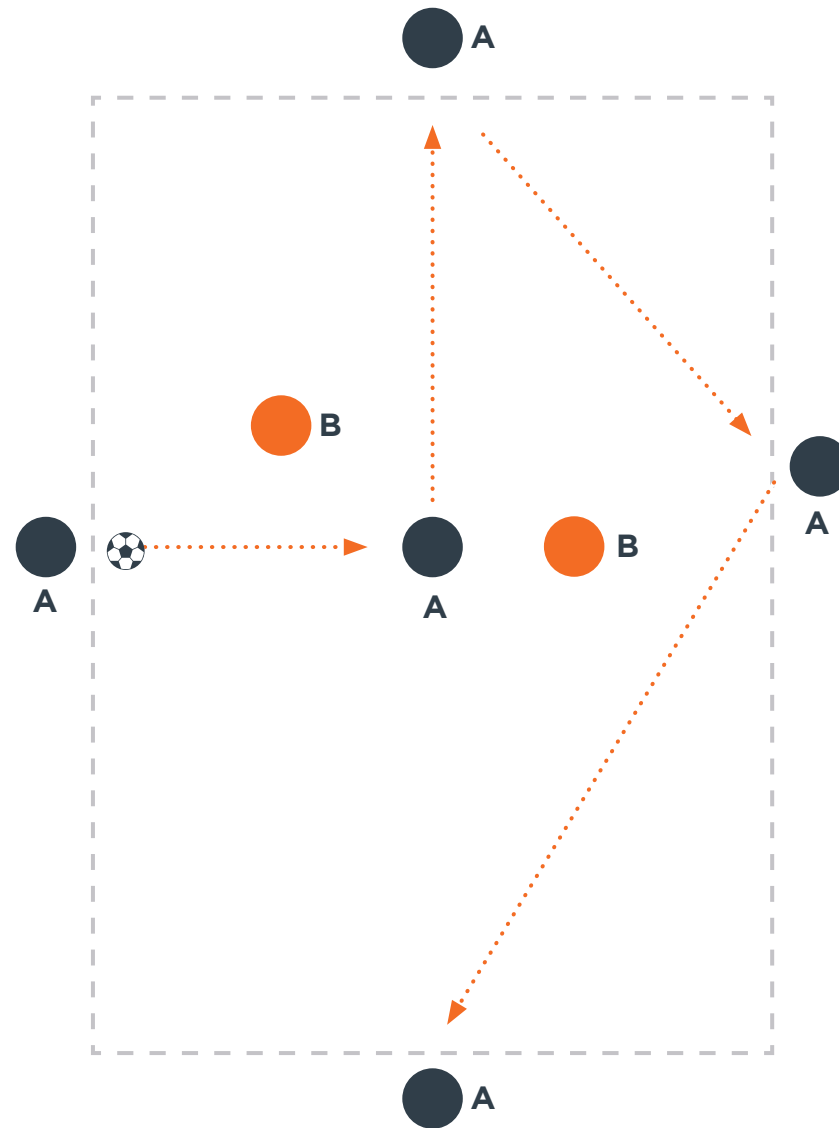
- This practice is a zonal game set up as a 9v9 plus two goalkeepers, with all players primarily operating in their designated zones.
- The practice works well when set up in an area of 56m x 40m.

KEY



FUNCTION

- The practice can be set up using anywhere between seven and 12 players. In the example pictured here, it features seven players in a 5v2.
- The in-possession **Team A** sets up with four players on the outside of the area. The fifth member acts as the link player in the central area, against two defending players from **Team B**.
- The team in possession attempts to keep the ball for a minimum of **8 passes** in order to score a goal.
- Alternatively, if your preference is not to count passes, then an **in-out combination** through the middle player(s) can be worth a goal. Should you wish to combine the two systems, then **8 passes** can be worth one goal and an **in-out combination** worth two goals.
- The defenders can either do a block or blocks of work (2 x 90 seconds, for example), or they can become part of the attacking team every time they win possession, swapping with the player from whom they won the ball.



COACHING DETAIL: IN POSSESSION

BALL SPEED MANIPULATION

- Depending on the size of the grid, the players can be limited to play on one touch.
- This condition means players need to plan quickly and appropriately, always be on the move up and down their line to provide varying angles of support, and change the weight of their pass into their teammates.
- Another condition may allow only the link player(s) to play off more than one touch, in order to make changing the point of attack through them more achievable. Again, coaching the players' roles within these conditions is important.

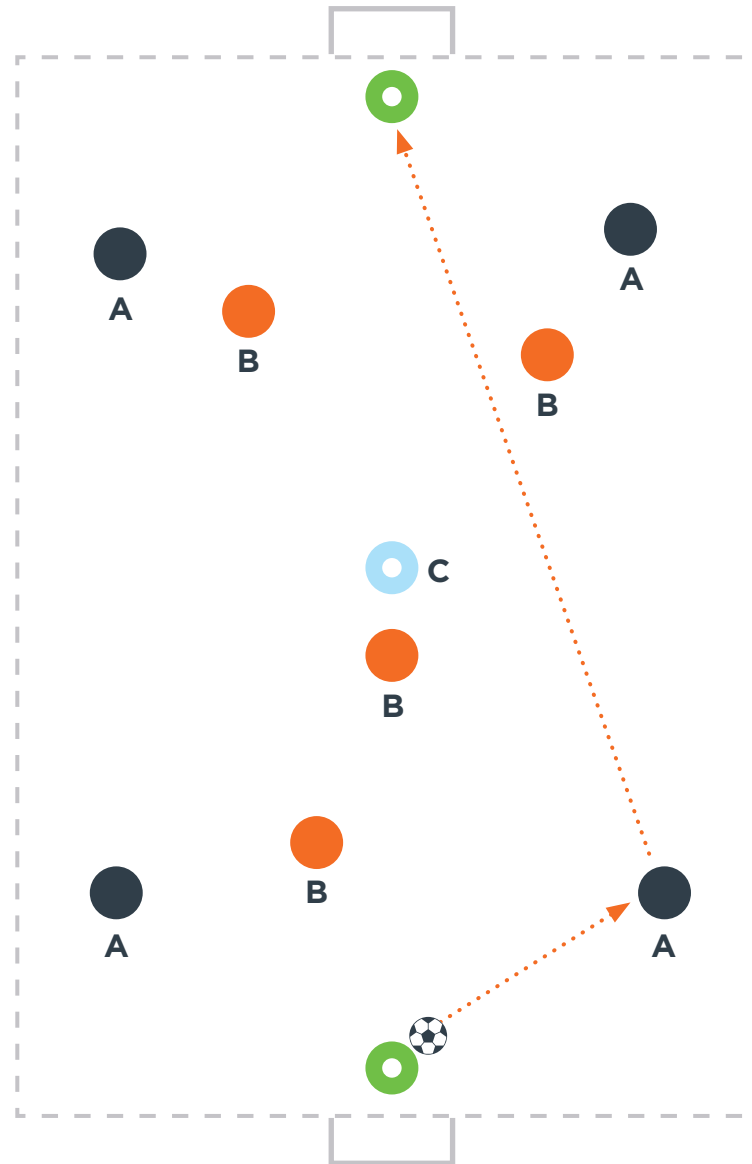
COACHING DETAIL: OPPOSITION MANAGEMENT

MAINTAIN REALISM

- The team in possession can be challenged in numerous ways by effective management of the defending players.
- Asking them to perform different defensive roles will cause the opposition to change their decision-making.
- If the scoring system only allows for goals scored from in-out combinations, then the defending team should be encouraged to press the ball as well as protecting the central area.

FUNCTION

- This practice is a 7v4 overload for the team in possession.
- The possession team is made up of four outfield players – here, **Team A** – one neutral player (**C**) and two goalkeepers.
- The team in possession can utilise either goalkeeper at any time during the practice. However, the goalkeepers can only use their feet.
- The team in possession must aim to keep possession for a block of 90 seconds without any opposition player getting a touch on the ball.
- The defending team – here, **Team B** – must try and press the ball. Should they win possession, they can score past a goalkeeper in either of the goals.
- Once the ball goes dead, play is restarted by the possession team. If the coach deems that the possession team have kicked the ball out of play due to pressure from the defending team, the ball is awarded to the defending team – who can then look to score.
- Whenever the possession team loses the ball and it remains in play, they must immediately work to win back possession. Should it then go dead, the possession team get the ball back and restart play.
- Keep score! Once the block is finished, the teams swap roles – at which point the now-defending team aim to score more goals in transition than their opponents.



COACHING DETAIL: IN POSSESSION

EMBRACING PRESSURE

- Ball movement is targeted at moving the opposition into areas that afford you more spaces to play. Players need to become comfortable operating in tight spaces; this should be challenged throughout by the opposition applying high pressure.

MAKING THE PITCH BIG

- Encourage any players on the possession team who are not directly affecting the ball to 'stay away' – thus creating more space for central players to work in and switch the point of attack.

MOMENTS OF TRANSITION

- In order to help improve players' understanding of the importance and value of all the technical aspects required to keep possession, place great importance on their ability to transition from attack to defence. The more they are forced to do this, the more care they may take when their team are in possession.

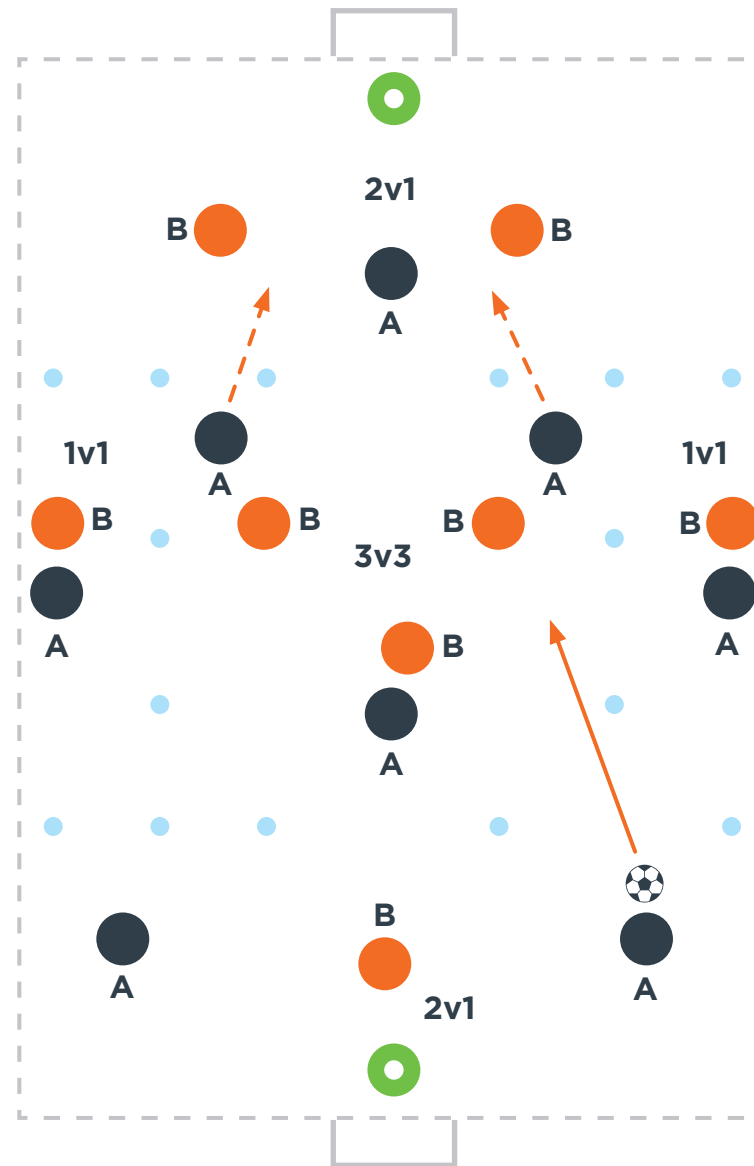
COACHING DETAIL: DEFENDING TEAM

OPPOSITION PRESSURE

- Encourage the defending team to hunt the ball with great intensity, with constant reminders about the reward of being able to get a shot off at goal should they win possession.

FUNCTION

- This practice is a zonal game set up as a 9v9 plus two goalkeepers.
- The practice is designed to encourage the creation of overloads in order to play through the centre or around the sides of the opposition.
- All players primarily operate in their designated zones as pictured here. Both teams are set up with a 2v1 overload in their defensive third. The middle third is split into a central zone, featuring a 3v3, and two wide zones incorporating a 1v1.
- When a team has possession of the ball, **an extra player** is allowed to join the middle area to create a 4v3 overload.
- Players occupying central areas can also rotate into other areas to create overloads – this includes creating 2v1 situations in the wide zones.
- The team in possession looks to work the ball forward, where **two supporting players** can join the lone attacker in the attacking third to create a 3v2 situation.
- If this results in them scoring a goal, they retain possession and play restarts with their goalkeeper. Should they miss, the opposition are awarded the ball.



COACHING DETAIL: IN POSSESSION

HAVING THE BALL

- The practices prior to this exposed players in possession of the ball to sustained moments of high pressure, where their ability to master the ball and make informed decisions was challenged.
- This practice transfers these experiences into a more gamelike situation. Ensure the same coaching points and messages are enforced in this new environment.

COACHING DETAIL: DEFENSIVE TRANSITION

IMMEDIATE PRESS

- As soon as the in-possession team loses the ball, they should be encouraged to try and regain it as soon as possible.
- Having to work hard when out of possession should hopefully reinforce to players the value of getting the mechanics and processes of ball possession correct.