



Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Presented by Wayne Harrison Former Academy Coach

Produced for the world's most innovative soccer coaches



Introduction

Most of the coaches I know look at the trends at the highest level of the game for ideas of what might be effective for their teams. In the last 10 years the most popular system has been the 4-3-3. The Dutch have been using it for much longer it became used more widely by clubs like, Jose Mourinho's FC Porto and later Chelsea FC as well as Barcelona FC, AS Roma, the US Women's National Team and many others. As this shift occurred at the top level we began to see more youth, high school and college teams move to this highly flexible system.

The 4-3-3's flexibility is one of its most attractive qualities. The formation can be adjusted to fit the qualities of the players on the team. A team with a lot of attacking personalities can keep their three forwards very high, have one defensive midfielder and two attacking midfielders while also encouraging their wing backs to push up when their team is in possession. This means that they are attacking more like a 3-4-3. But that same team can easily switch to two defensive center mid's and pull their wingers back to defend a lead and it looks like they are playing a 4-5-1.

The ability to mold the formation to suit your team has created a number of very popular variations. The most common recently being the 4-2-3-1. Clubs like Bayern Munich, Liverpool FC, Manchester City, Inter Milan, Arsenal FC, Sevilla FC and Valencia CF as well as the Spanish and German National teams have all adopted the 4-2-3-1.

As an example of the flexibility, this eBook begins with a description of how Spain utilized the 4-2-3-1 during Euro 2012. It explains the base formation that Spain employed as well as the adjustments and focus that they had in their game against Italy.

Next, is a look at the diagrams and descriptions of Wayne Harrison's presentations on the 4-2-3-1 system during the Nebraska WORLD CLASS COACHING International Coaching Seminar. The training sessions that follow present a comprehensive look at the roles and responsibilities of every player whether the team is defending, attacking or in transition. It also shows you how to explain and teach the system to your team so that they can take their tactical understanding to the next level.

We also recorded these sessions so that you could not only read about the 4-2-3-1 but also see how Harrison lead a team through the training sessions. You can read more about these videos and access them immediately from our [Coaching Soccer Tactics](#) web site.

Wayne Harrison's most recent coaching stint was five years as the Academy Director at Al Ain Football Club; the most prestigious and famous professional club in Asia and the Middle East and previous winners of the Asian Champions League. At Al Ain, Harrison had the Academy teams play using the 4-3-2-1 system of play which helped them win an incredible SEVEN National Championships in two years making them by far, the most successful Academy in the UAE.

Harrison played professionally in England and Europe before embarking on a coaching career at the Academy of Blackpool F.C., England before moving to the U.S. as the Director of Coaching for Eden Prairie Soccer Club for nine years. Harrison is the holder of the UEFA "A" License and is a best-selling author with 12 coaching books in print.



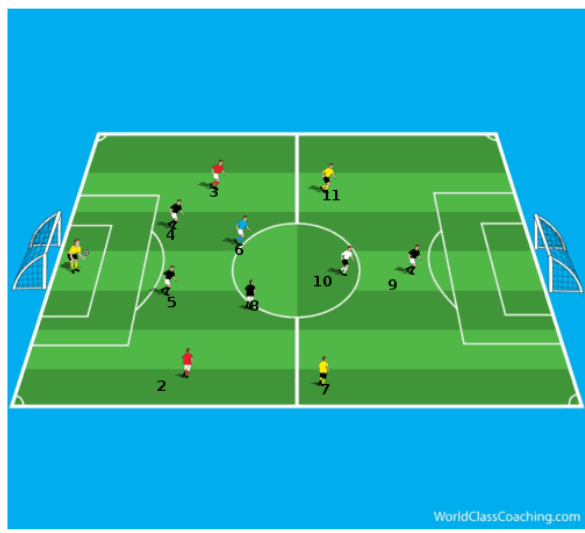
SPAIN PLAYING THE 4-2-3-1 AT THE EURO'S

Wayne Harrison

Coach Wayne Harrison was the Academy Director at Al Ain Football Club, the previous winners of the Asian Champions League. He won seven National Championships using the 4-2-3-1 system in his time at Al Ain FC.

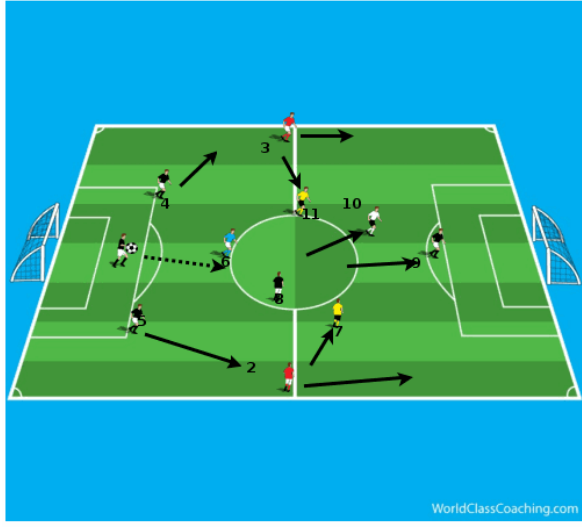
This article describes how Spain used the 4-2-3-1 formation in it's successful Euro 2012 campaign. Each game presented different challenges and opportunities. Here is an explanation of the base system and also how they approached their game against Italy.

To see how you can train your team to play the same system as some of the best teams in the world You can get access videos that will show you the attacking, defending and transitional properties of the 4-2-3-1 by visiting our [Coaching Soccer Tactics](#) web site.



The starting position phase formation is approximately a **4-2-3-1**; the attacking phase is **4-2-1-3** or **3-3-1-3**; and the defending phase is a **4-4-1-1**, so we have four formations coming from one; depending on where the ball is and who has it.

Fabregas played as the (9) in this diagram but rotated with Iniesta; Xavi and Silva; (11), (10) and (7) respectfully here.



Here we show how Alba (3) and Arbeloa (2) attack high up the field. Iniesta (11) and Silva (7) tuck in to take the Italian defenders inside to create space outside for the fullbacks. If they are not followed by defenders then this created a BIG overload of players centrally for Spain to Exploit.

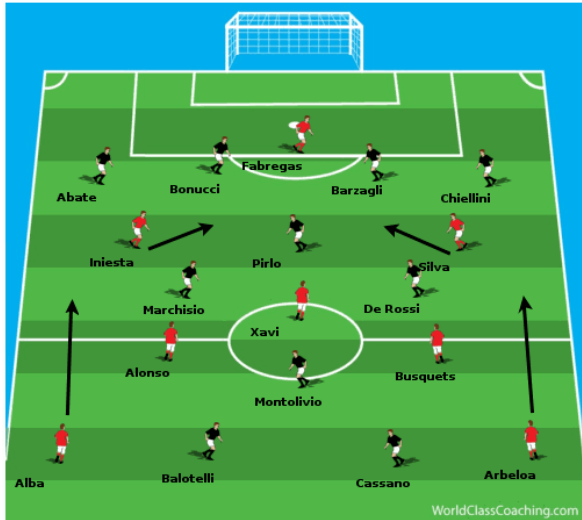
1. Where (6) passes to will depend on how the opponent defenders react to these combination movements but with the left footer on the right and right footer on the left plus the fullbacks the team has two great options, one coming inside to attack the space inside and possibly shoot with his strongest foot; and one overlapping with width to get a good cross in, again with his strongest foot..

Coaching Points:

Observe:

- a) Initial team shape (4-2-3-1)
- b) Timing of the runs (late and fast is best)
- c) Timing of the pass (if the choice is to pass)
- d) Where the pass goes (based on the opponents set up and individual and team reactions)
- e) The next phase of play as each event (a pass, run; dribble etc) starts a new phase of play
- f) Buildup Phase of play team shape (4-2-1-3) or (3-3-1-3)
- g) End Product Phase of play team shape

SPAIN v ITALY



Here you see how Spain exploited the width of the field against Italy's narrow midfield with both fullbacks attacking throughout the game, Alba in particular showed the value of this with a great forward run that resulted in him scoring the second goal.

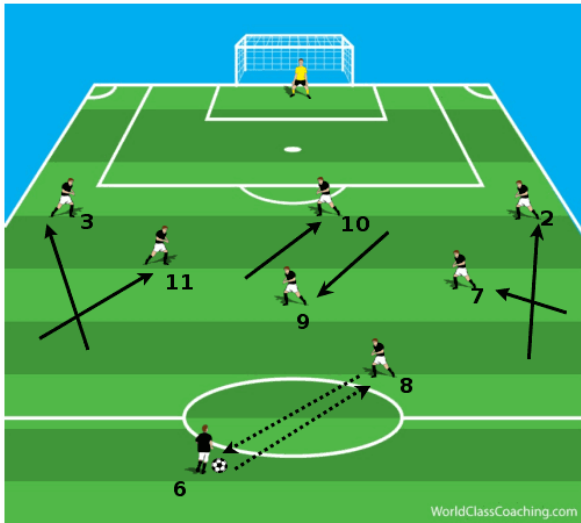
TEAM GAME PLAN AND INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES NEEDED BY PLAYERS PLAYING THIS SYSTEM OF PLAY

As shown above; the 4-2-3-1 is a flexible way to play employing four units rather than the usual three. It can transform quickly into a more offensive pattern of play of 4-2-1-3 by moving forward the wide outside midfielders **and with this push on the two fullbacks to fill the spaces they have left.**

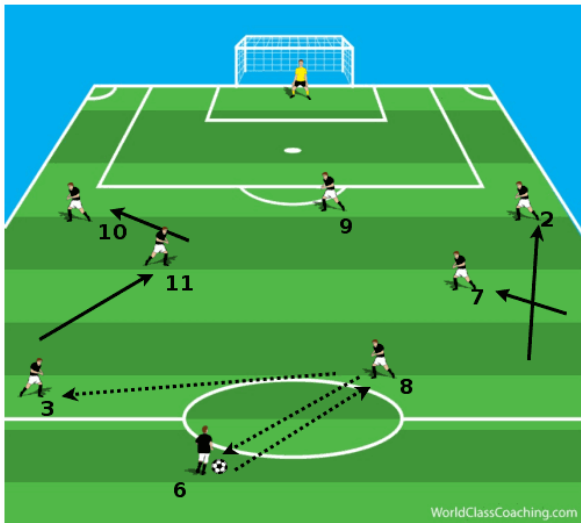
THE BEAUTY AND FLEXIBILITY OF THIS SYSTEM OF 4-2-3-1

1. Wide players (Iniesta and Silva) attack the space between the fullback and the center back on both sides. Left on right, right on left; coming onto their stronger foot is an advantage because they come in against the full back's weaker foot
2. Fullbacks (Arbeloa and Alba) attack wide to get crosses in and can cut inside also to do the job of the wide player
3. Center back's (Pique and Ramos) spread wide to open up the attack from the back
4. Defensive midfielder (6) (Busquets) drops back in to cover and to start the movement also; he can fill in centrally or to the side
5. Attacking midfielder (10) (Xavi) plays between the opponent's defense and midfield. He can interchange with the wide players or the striker (9).
6. 2nd defensive midfielder (8) (Alonso) is more offensive and creates support between the back and the front
7. The two defensive midfielders can interchange.
8. (8) positions off center to (10) and off centre to (6) to maintain angles of support between them when attacking

INTERCHANGES UP FRONT OF FABRAGAS, XAVI, INIESTA AND SILVA

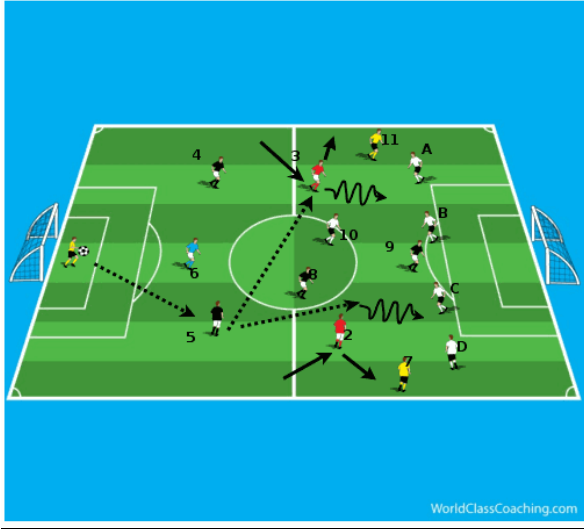


1. Here are some potential movements in front of the passer (8). All very simple but may cause **CHAOS** in the opponents defense. Spain know what they are doing in **advance of the ball**, the opponents do not; and this is to **the teams advantage**.



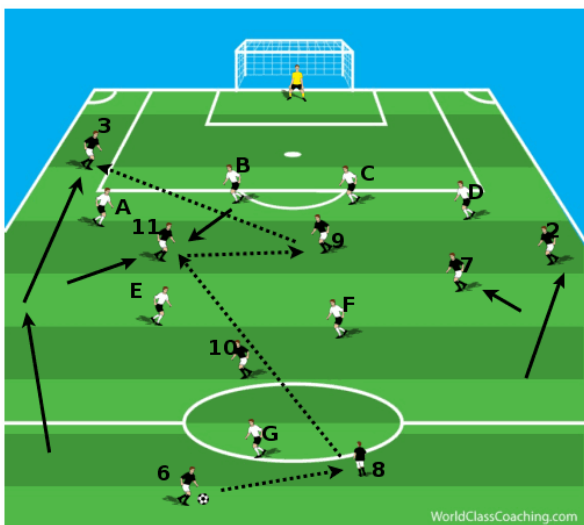
1. Four potential options for (3) in front of the ball. Cannot at this moment in the development of the session play a straight pass to (10) but there are four other options of a forward pass..

A SIX PLAYER ATTACK



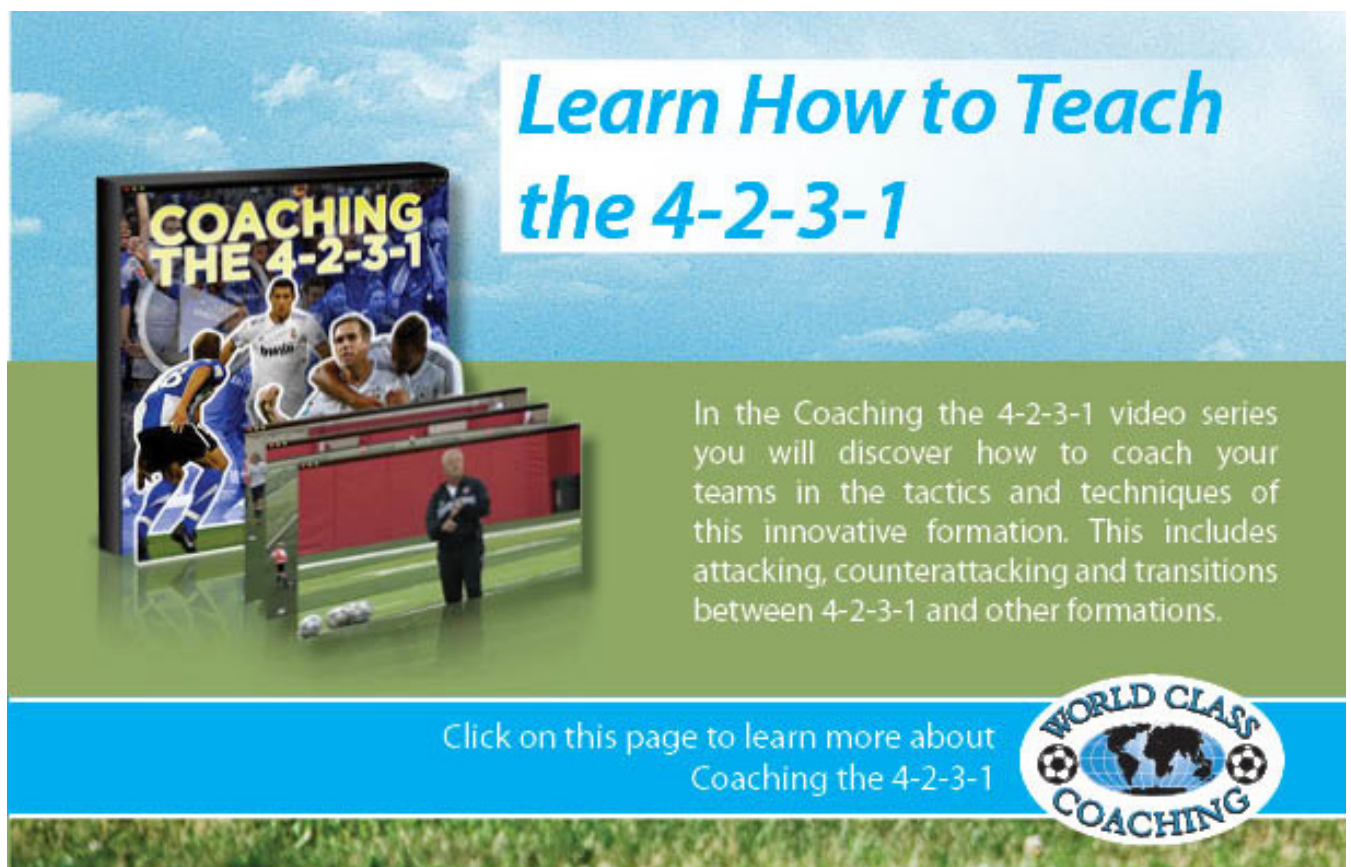
This becomes a 6 man attack including the fullbacks (2) and (3); who may underlap and switch with (7) and (11) also shown above.

THIRD MAN RUNS FROM BEHIND THE BALL



Another aspect of their play was THIRD MAN RUNS. Alba for the second goal showed this with his late and fast run. Many runs were made like this diagram above to get in behind the Italian defense.


In Conclusion: Spains movemen OFF THE BALL is a joy to watch. The only players who you could stay in their positions are the keeper and the center backs (4) and (5) the rest of the team seems to have great freedom to express themselves all over the field but at the same time so well coordinated that they cover for each other as this happens.



Learn How to Teach the 4-2-3-1

In the Coaching the 4-2-3-1 video series you will discover how to coach your teams in the tactics and techniques of this innovative formation. This includes attacking, counterattacking and transitions between 4-2-3-1 and other formations.

Click on this page to learn more about
Coaching the 4-2-3-1



Coaching the 4-2-3-1 In Three Phases

Wayne Harrison

This is the first of two sessions that Coach Harrison presented during the Nebraska WORLD CLASS COACHING International Seminar. Harrison discusses the basics of the formation with an emphasis on building the ball out of the back and the movements and combination plays available to the attackers.

The session begins by showing you how you can build your attack from the back in the 4-2-3-1 system. It starts with the shape and patterns required to defend and then build effectively and only then add the pressure of opponents.

In the next part, Coach Harrison trains the team to build the attack with the attacking midfielders and forwards. It begins with the forwards staying wide but then coming inside to support the ball and make room for the fullbacks to join the attack on the outside.

Finally, the entire team is included and progressed from 11 v 0 to 11 v 11. The movements of players is emphasized to show how the system morphs and changes as the ball moves around the field.

The session was very well received by the coaches in attendance and many of them have viewed the videos since the seminar to remind them of key points. You can get access to the same videos by visiting our [Coaching Soccer Tactics](#) web site.

SESSION IN THREE PARTS:

- 1. DEVELOPING PLAY FROM THE BACK**
- 2. ATTACKING MOVEMENT WITH INTERCHANGE OF PLAYERS**
- 3. 11 v 11 BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER**

POINTS OF INTEREST:

COACHING STYLE: GUIDED DISCOVERY/ QUESTION AND ANSWER: AS LITTLE OUTDATED TRADITIONAL COMMAND STYLE AS POSSIBLE

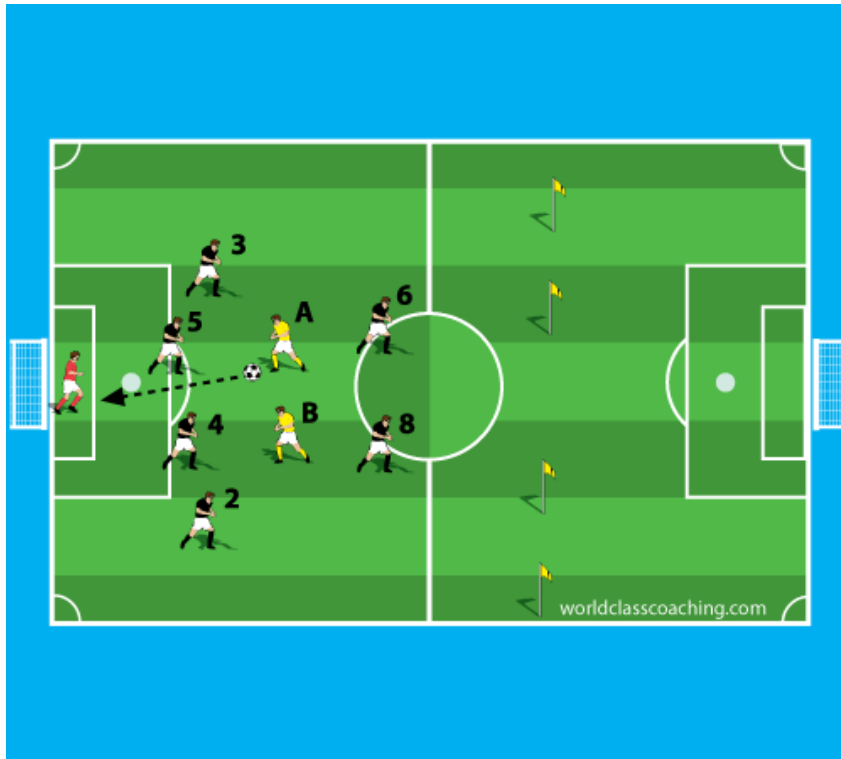
TRAINING IS PLAYER FOCUSED NOT COACH FOCUSED

SEEKING PLAYER DECISION MAKING: WITH LITTLE IF ANY COACH DRIVEN DECISION MAKING; UNLESS A SOLUTION CANNOT BE FOUND BY THE PLAYERS AND THEY NEED HELP

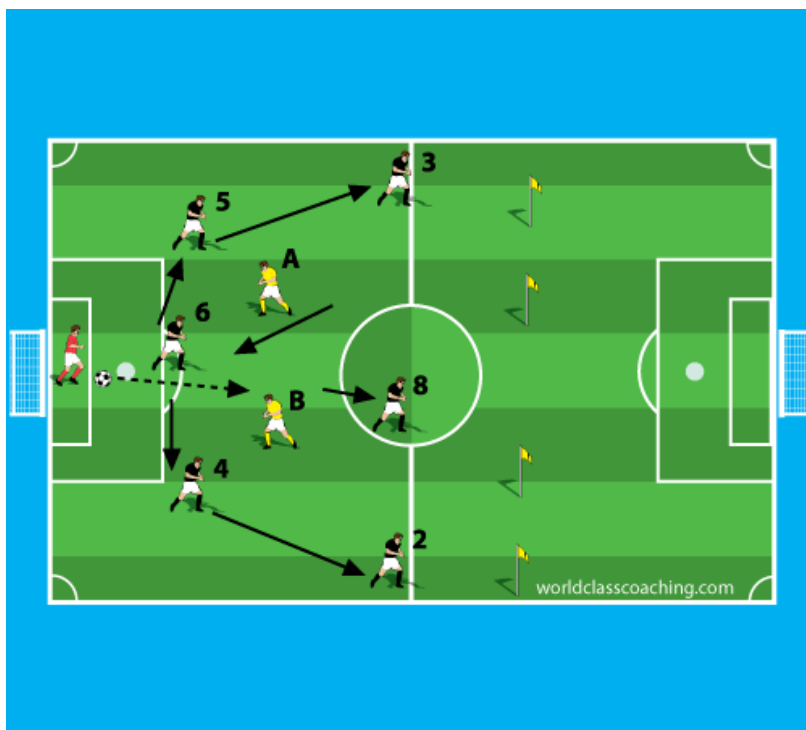
- 1. WITH BOTH FULLBACKS ATTACKING AT THE SAME TIME:**
TWO WAYS TO BUILD FROM THE BACK

With both fullbacks attacking from the back from both sides and a defensive midfielder staying back to drop in as a sweeper if need be. This is the usual method Barcelona and Real Madrid use as does the Spanish National team in this 4-2-3-1 system of play.

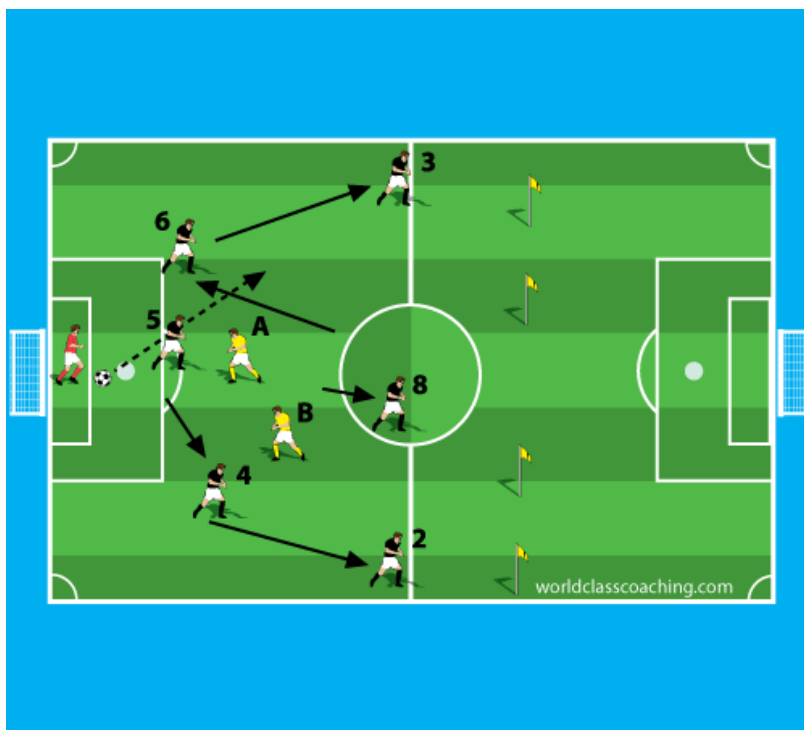
With both fullbacks attacking from the back from both sides and a defensive midfielder staying back to drop in as a sweeper if need be



1. The back four spread out as much as they can and use the full width of the field.



1. Change in shape as the players move forward, defensive midfielder (6) drops in between the center backs as security for them, particularly if the opposition leaves 2 forwards up. Most often teams play directly through the number (6) in this situation.
2. Here 2 fullbacks break forward, the center midfielder (6) stays in front as we have possession, and as soon as possession changes and opponents win it and look forward, the center midfielder (6) drops back into the sweeper role. It is likely our opponents will have two players up so it now becomes a 2 v 2 at the back, which is risky therefore we make sure a defensive midfielder; in this case (6), stays back to help them **CREATE A 3 v 2** going forward but also should the opponents win the ball and counter attack quickly a 3 v 2 as security.



iv) (6) CAN DROP INTO DIFFERENT POSITIONS DEPENDING ON WHERE THE BALL IS AND WHICH IS THE **SHORTEST ROUTE BACK**

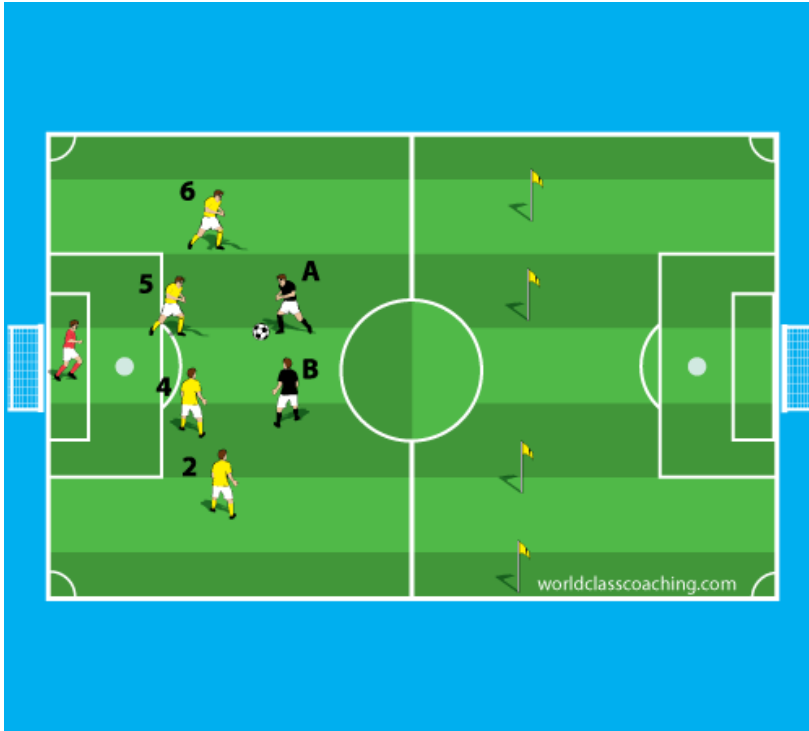
v) Likewise on the other side, and if closest to the middle then drop straight back into the sweeper position

Build this up to an 11 v 11 session as is shown in other parts of the book, but this is a simple way to start the process of developing player from the back through the number (6).

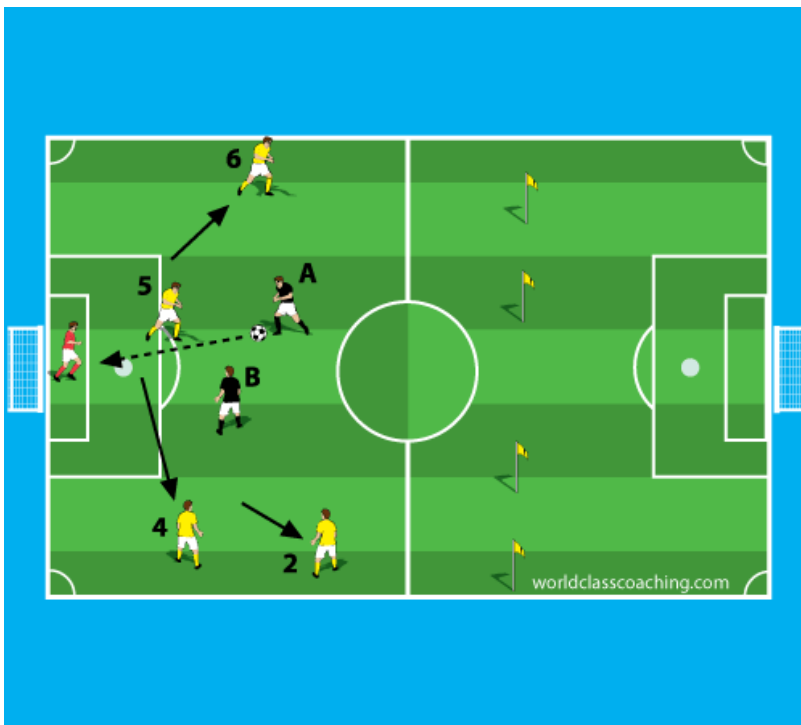
BUILD IT UP AND ADD PLAYERS AS OPPONENTS, MAYBE 6 v 4.

2. with a three, with one fullback pushing on and one center back on the same side going touchline wide, so it becomes a 3 v 2 against 2 strikers

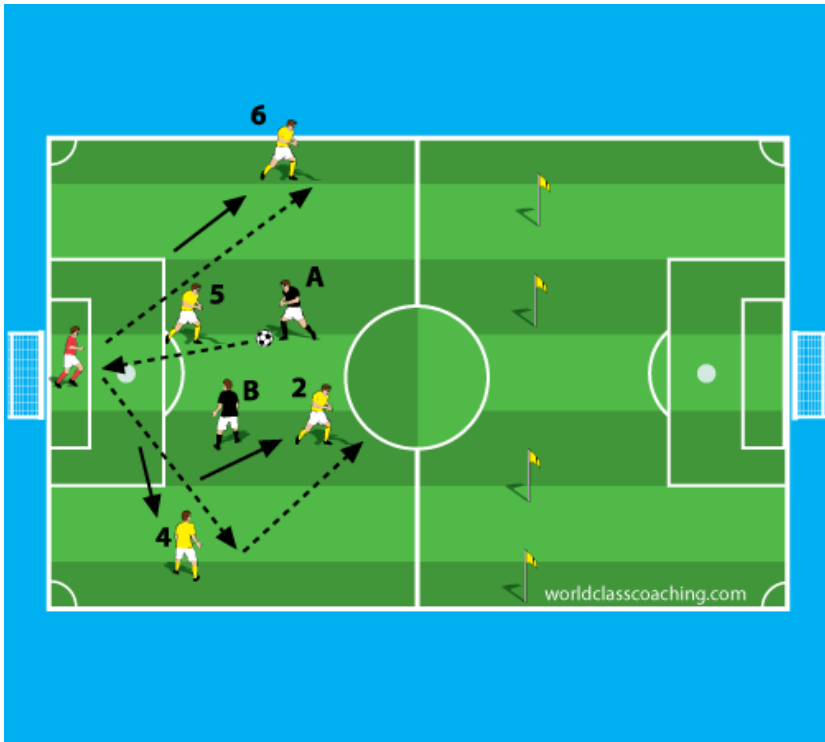
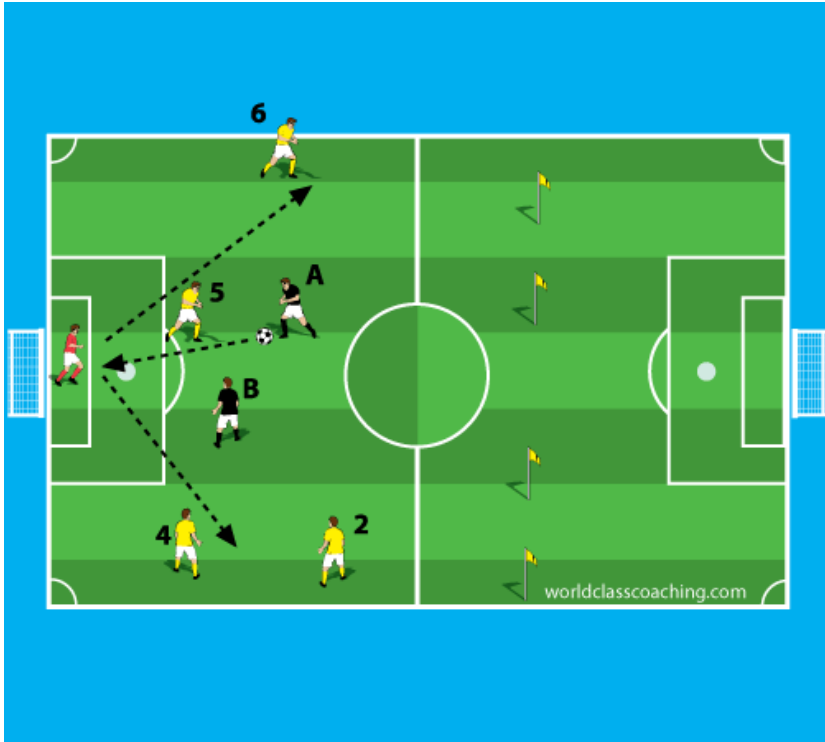
ADD PLAYERS AS YOU BUILD IT UP. PERHAPS END WITH A 6 v 4



A Simple beginning, (A) shoots at the keeper and the play starts from there.



Fullback (2) pushes forward leaving the space for center back (4) to run into, (CB (5) stays in the center and FB (6) pushes wide the other side. Both (2) and (6) are **TOUCHLINE WIDE**.



FB (2) can go inside to receive and play forward.

THE BASIC SET UP USING THE 2-3-1 THEN THE 4-3-1 (of the 4-2-3-1)



1. A shadow play with the **2-3-1** of the team (not including the back four and keeper yet)
2. Initially keep it short and tight for quick movement. So we have four zones just as wide as the penalty area only to play in.
3. Have two groups of 6 players going one group at a time to keep the session flowing, by the time the first group is back to the start again the 2nd group has gone and so on.
4. Eventually go to the full width of the field with 4 zones.

FUNCTION FOR WIDE PLAYER MOVEMENT



1. You can use the cones as an indicator as in the previous diagrams if you like. Only seven players needed. This is a Drill / Function keeping the movements simple.

2. Two 1 v 1 situations teaching both sides how to cut inside and receive a pass inside the defender.

3. **Coaching Points:** a) Start position passing back and forth

b) Communication: Eye Contact / speech / pointing

c) Movement off the ball: timing and angle of the two part run (faking the defender)

d) Quality of the Pass: Timing, angle and accuracy of the pass

e) Coordinated movements of the passer and receiver

f) Combination Play

g) Finish on goal

4. **Four Ideas of Movement to get Free:**

a) Run him off and cut inside

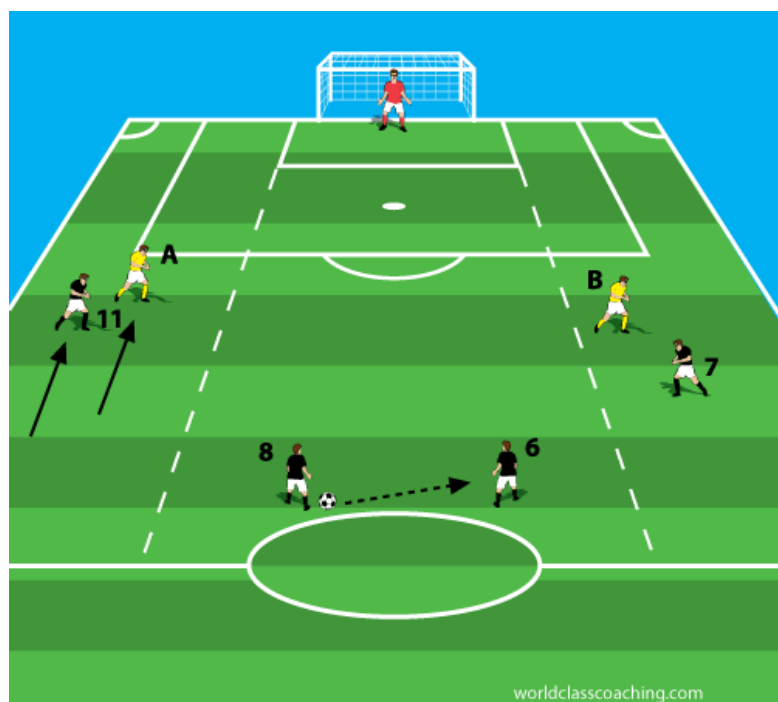
b) Run towards the ball drawing the defender close then cutting across and inside of him

c) Run him inside to create space outside then check back outside

d) Run him away and outside away from the ball and then check back inside.

5. Players making all these different runs need to learn to check off of both feet. (11) Running the defender off then checking inside checks inside off his left foot.

(11) Running towards the ball drawing the defender with him then checking across him and inside he is checking inside off his right foot.



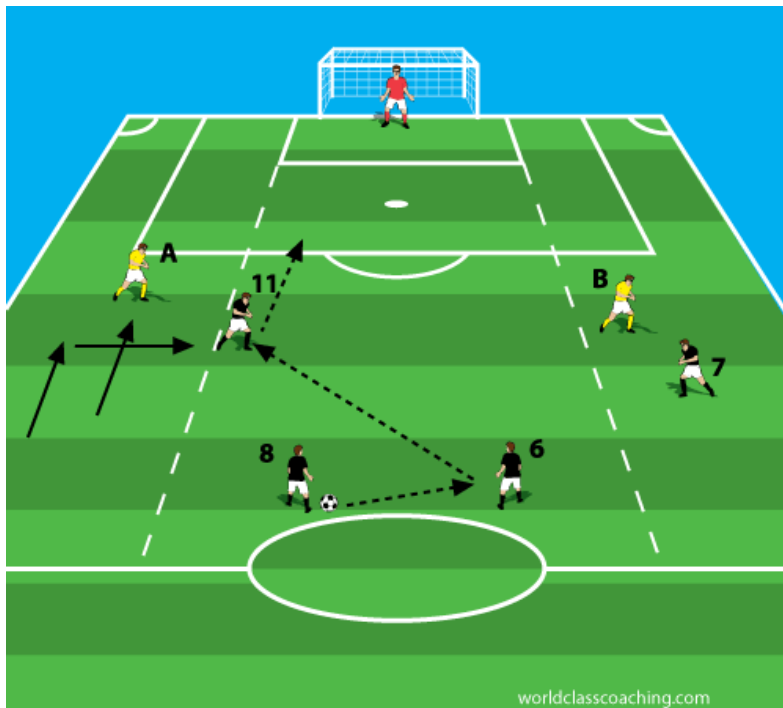
1. As the ball is passed between (6) and (8) the wide player (11) runs off defender (A).

2. So we are looking at the timing of the run and the timing of the pass. The run is in **two parts**;

the first one to occupy the defender and the second one to get free of the defender.

3. (11) needs to be observing the body language also of the player on the ball so he knows when the pass will be delivered and he can then time his second movement off that.
4. You can have the players practicing these movements in your **warm up**, checking runs, breaking inside off the outside foot. Keep practicing until it becomes embedded in their minds and it becomes a natural movement for them.

CUTTING INSIDE



1. Here (11) makes his second run and cuts inside having run the defender off in the first run.
2. Again the key is the timing of each, **the run and the pass**.
3. If you have a right footer on the left and a left footer on the right then the player cutting inside will come onto his strong foot and be more able to shoot on goal.
4. Here the player breaks inside off his outside foot, the left foot in this case.

COMING SHORT TO GO LONG



1. Here we see a different way to get free of the defender, this time coming **towards the ball** and bringing the defender with him.
2. Once the defender is tight (11) cuts across his path and into the path of the pass in space in front of him. It is a very **sharp cut** not a looping cut that is easier to defend against.

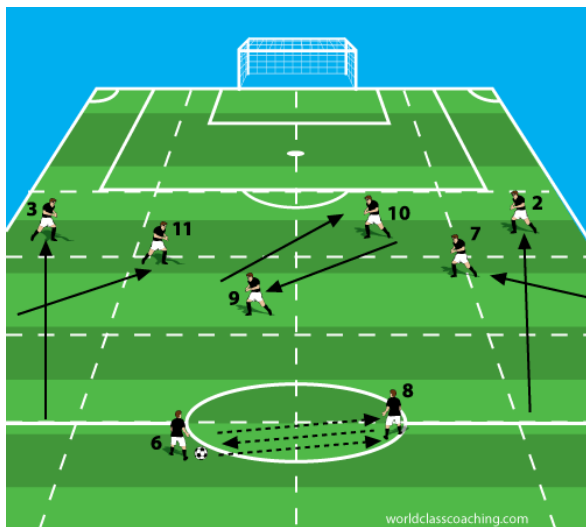
3. Here the player breaks inside off his outside foot again, but in this case it is the right foot. So they need to learn how to do this checking movement off **BOTH FEET**



1. Showing a few options for (6). (10) May interchange with (11) and go wide also.

INTRODUCING BOTH FULLBACKS TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF OPTIONS AVAILABLE NOW WE HAVE A 4-3-1 (of the 4-2-3-1)

1. Introduce the fullbacks (2) And (3) now. Shadow plays to develop the idea.



1. Here are some potential movements in front of the passer (8). All very simple but may cause **CHAOS** in the opponents defense. We know what we are doing in **advance of the ball**, the opponents do not; and this is to **our advantage**. Continue with the movements with the relevant passes and have a finish on goal.

INTRODUCE DEFENDERS



1. Bring in the attacking fullbacks. Now it is an 8 v 6, or 8 v 5 in the outfield. Now we can explore all the options this formation offers for the attacking team. Once the phase play works well with this set up of an 8 v 5 add more defenders to increase the pressure.

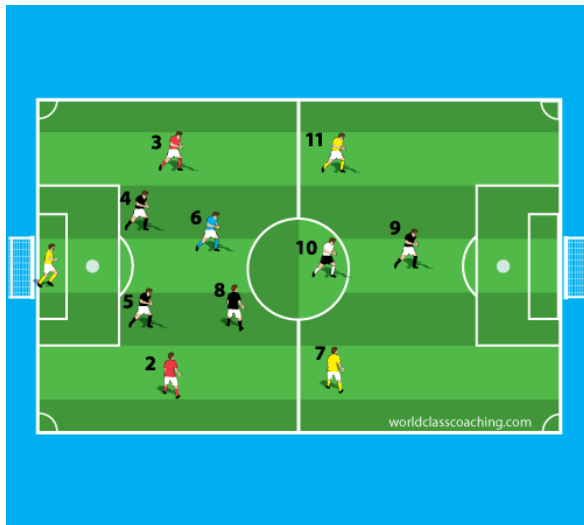
ALLOWING STRAIGHT PASSES BY PLAYERS SWITCHING ZONES IN FRONT OF THE BALL



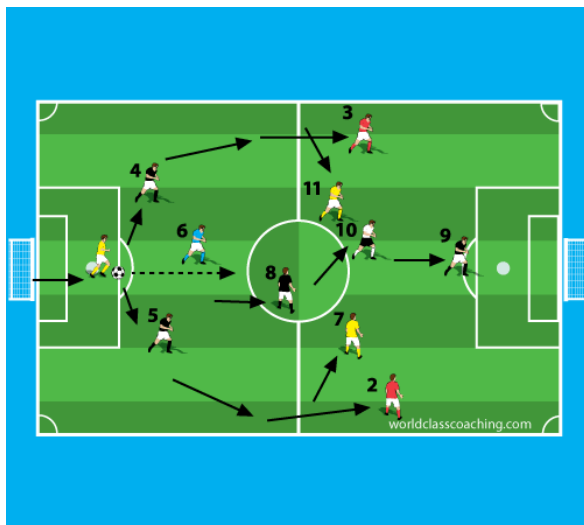
1. **New rule:** Players can receive a straight pass if they **change the zone** in front of the passer. Here we have an interchange between (9) and (10). (9) must run in such a way that he times the run so the ball can run alongside him and he does not have to receive and turn or receive with his back to play.
2. The correct timing of the run and timing of the pass is vital here. Also the end product to determine his decision will be influenced by what the defenders do.

FINISHING WITH AN 11 v 11

DIFFERENT COLORS EMPHASIZING THE CHANGES BETWEEN UNITS OF PLAY



So if the starting position phase formation is **4-2-3-1** the attacking phase is **4-2-1-3** or **3-3-1-3**; and the defending phase is a **4-4-1-1**, we have four formations coming from one; depending on where the ball is and who has it.

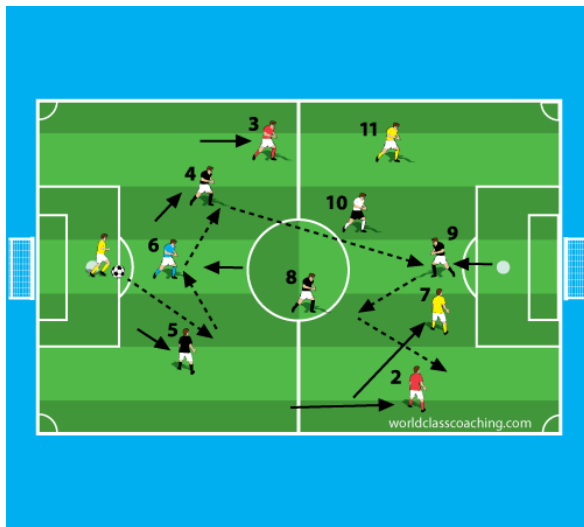


Coaching Points:

Observe:

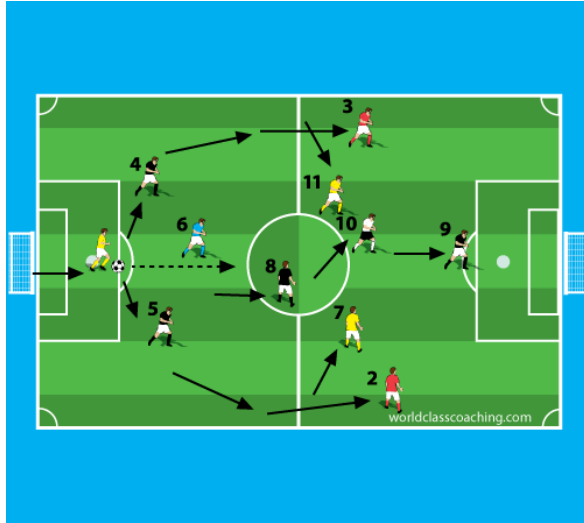
- a) Initial team shape (4-2-3-1)
- b) Timing of the runs (late and fast is best)
- c) Timing of the pass (if the choice is to pass)
- d) Where the pass goes (based on the opponents set up and individual and team reactions)
- e) The next phase of play as each event (a pass, run; dribble etc) starts a new phase of play
- f) Buildup Phase of play team shape (4-2-1-3) or (3-3-1-3)
- g) End Product Phase of play team shape

PLAYING INTO THE STRIKER



1. An example could be this phase of play above. The coach dictates the movements beforehand. The Keeper passes / throws to (5) who lays it back to (6), who passes to (4) who plays it into the feet of striker (9) who in this phase of play cannot turn so he has to lay the ball off to (8) who already has an angled approach off his position. (7) cuts inside creating space wide for (2) to overlap and run into the space and (8) plays a ball in front of (2) to run onto and cross. The coach determines all these passes in advance.

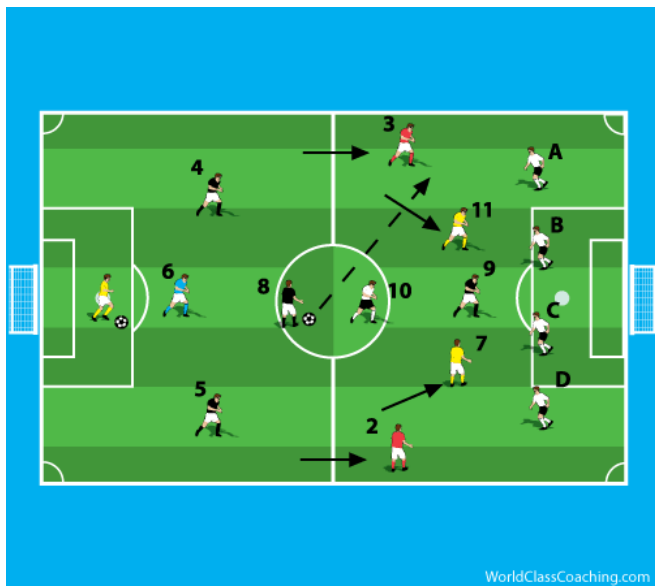
OUTSIDE MOVEMENTS AND 2ND BALL



Coaching Points:

- a) Movements off the ball to create the INITIAL attacking shape
- b) Changing personnel between units with new combinations created by the forward motion of the team
- c) Balanced shape throughout the team with midfield players playing in angles off each other
- d) Good communication between (2) and (7) and (3) and (11) to determine who goes inside and who stays outside in the ADVANCED attacking shape
- e) Decision making by the passer; which player does he pass to of the several options he should have?
- f) Timing and angle of the pass and the runs to receive
- g) Interchanges of the number (9) and (10) to create space for each other and for other teammates
- h) Team shape defensively; should the move breakdown we maintain cover behind the attack
- i) End Product of a goal scored

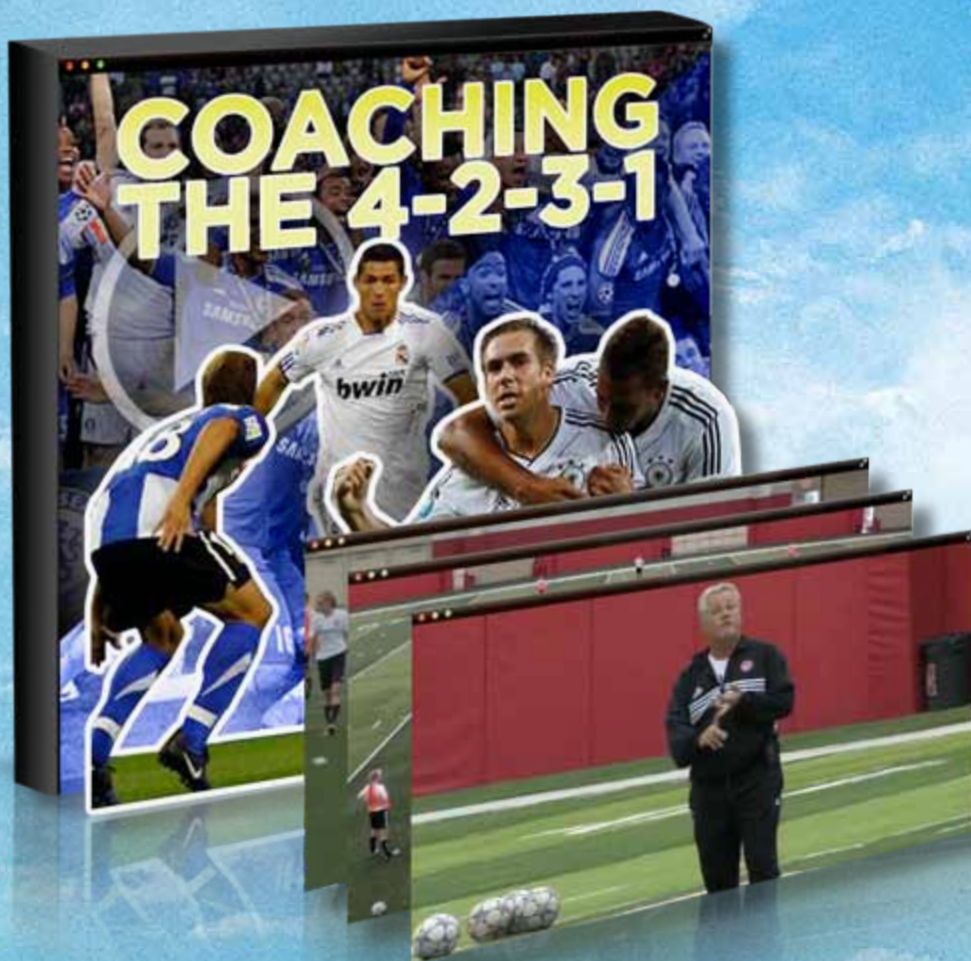
BACK FOUR IN



1. If the opponents full backs are positioned too wide in dealing with the overlapping wing backs the opponents may even have a 3 v 2 against their two center backs which is an ideal situation for our team. Whilst this is unlikely to be allowed to happen, at any one moment if the attacking play by our team is fast enough the opponents may not have the foresight to adjust quickly enough to deal with it and for a moment or two we may create an overload centrally which is to our advantage. Remember, we have the advantage of knowing what we will do in advance; the opponents do not know what we intend to do and this may create the moment we are looking for.
2. Here (7), (9) and (11) outnumber (B) and (C), likely (D) will tuck in to even it up and the opponents midfielder may track back to deal with this attack but if it is done quickly on the counter attack this situation may develop for us.

DEVELOP INTO AN 11 v 11 GAME SITUATION AND COACH WITHIN THE GAME WHERE REQUIRED.

Learn to Coach the 4-2-3-1 from 12 Great Videos



If you've been looking for a way to coach your team how to play the 4-2-3-1, you've just found it. Coaching the 4-2-3-1 is a special 12-part video series which provides a comprehensive tactical and training guide to this exciting formation. Utilized by Real Madrid, Chelsea and the most successful sides in the Euro 2012 tournament, the 4-2-3-1's flexibility and attacking power is fast becoming the formation of choice for leading coaches all over the world.

Click on this page to learn more about
Coaching the 4-2-3-1



Coaching the 4-2-3-1 Counter Attacking and Transition

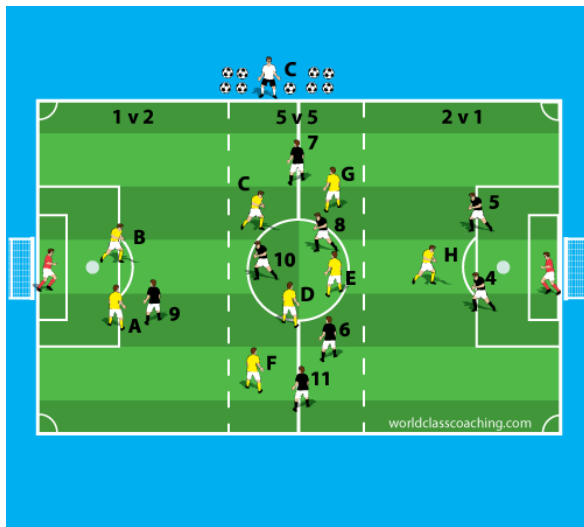
Wayne Harrison

This was the second of two sessions that Coach Harrison presented during the Nebraska WORLD CLASS COACHING International Seminar. It added an attacking and transitional focus to the defensive principles that were explained in the previous session.

This session begins as a attack versus defense exercise where the players are taught various ways of combining to break down a defense and attack the goal. It progresses into a transitional game that allows the players to use what they have learned previously. They have to decide when to be patient and when to attack with pace.

The coaches in that observed were impressed by the progression of the training session from a phase of play exercise to a small sided game. Many of them commented on how this session would help the players transfer what they have learned to the next match.

Seeing the diagrams and reading the descriptions gives you an idea of how the session progressed but seeing the videos makes it even more clear. You can get access to the same videos by visiting our [Coaching Soccer Tactics](http://www.worldclasscoaching.com) web site.



A Directional session: Divide the field up into three zones. Start with a **1 v 2** in each attacking zone.

The team in possession has to make three passes then they can pass into the lone striker.

The Session is designed for working on attacking principles primarily, to create overload situations for the attacking teams going both ways so the focus is on **QUICK COUNTER ATTACKING AND THE TRANSITION OF POSSESSION** and how to respond to it..

TRANSITION: So, we have transition from attacking to defending and defending to attacking happening many times in this session.

This is good for the mentality of the players to change their mindset immediately as possession changes and they learn to maintain their focus better.

We will develop the main phases of play that result from the attacking shape of a 4-2-3-1.

The numbers at the top of the diagram show the balance of players in each third of the field at any one time.

We are not including fullbacks yet in the session as we want to focus on breaking from midfield first of all. Breaking from the back and joining the attack in the attacking third will be covered later.

DEFENSIVE TRAINING: the **RECOVERY RUNS** of midfield players is an important part of the learning process also. This system of play can fall down if the two wide players (7) and (11) do not recover back and form a second bank of a defensive four. So, to encourage this to work we ask the midfield players in the middle third when they receive the ball to make 3 passes before they can go into the attacking third. This way the recovering players; usually (7), (10) and (11) have a chance to get back and pressure the opposition.

Later and once this is working well, we can change the condition so the counter attack is the main priority and that way the transition from attacking to defending becomes much quicker as possession changes. So once a team wins possession there is no condition on the number of passes required and they can play the ball in first time if it is on to do so, to either a midfield player or straight into the striker even from a back four defender for speed of attack..

- RULES:**
- a) Three passes before the ball can go into the Attacker
 - b) The first ball in has to go to the lone strikers feet. Then we can vary it as the session develops.
 - c) A 4 v 2 in favor of the attacking team is created (the defending midfield players cannot recover back to help out the back players to ensure the overload)
 - d) The attacking team has 10 seconds to score as we want to encourage quick counter play
 - e) Whilst initially the focus is on the service of the ball into midfield to begin the attack the coach can vary where he plays the ball to offer different challenges to the players. Perhaps directly into the striker, or into a defending player to begin the attack.

PRINCIPLES IDEAS GAINED FROM THE SESSION

- a) Counter attacking and quick play
- b) Different types of counter attack practiced (can be from the back to the front also directly). Choices can be:
 - i) Into the feet of **striker** (9)
 - ii) Played into the **wide areas** for the onrunning (7) or (11)
 - iii) **Dribbled or run** into the attacking third by a player
 - iv) Attacking from the **attacking third**, not recovering but staying in and winning the ball back in the

danger area and getting a very quick shot on goal from this

c) Attacking **Team shape** from an initial start position of 4-2-3-1 to a likely 3-1-3-3

d) **Recovery runs** of midfield players when we lose possession (**VERY IMPORTANT**)

e) It is a very good **conditioning game** especially for the attacking and then recovering midfield players.

Coaching Points

a) Quick Breaks in attack with very quick decision making.

b) Quick Passing and Support play.

c) Early shots / headers on goal.

d) Regains of the ball and quick counter attacks

e) Recovery runs of attacking midfield players from the previous attack

f) Creating a **mental transition** from attacking to defending and defending to attacking

Developments:

a) A 4 v 2 overload in attack Define where the attack should begin:

i) Into the striker feet from Midfield

ii) Into the strikers feet or in the air by a direct play from the back

iii) Into the wide players to get shots cutting inside or crosses in

iv) Four attacking players stay in the attacking third and press from the front to regain the ball

b) Add a recovering defender to create a 4 v 3

c) Add two recovering defenders to create a 4 v 4 and a bigger challenge to attack quickly and score

d) Regaining possession in the attacking third

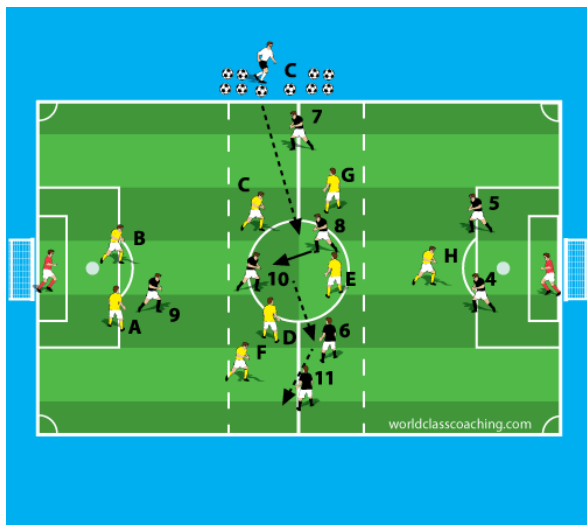
e) Add fullbacks on both teams. Now counter attack quickly from the back

f) Working from the 4-2-3-1 shape **fullbacks overlap** and the transitions of positions by players occurs.

AFTER THE CONDITIONED SESSION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AND ALL THE OPTIONS OF ATTACK HAVE BEEN SHOWN AND PRACTICED:

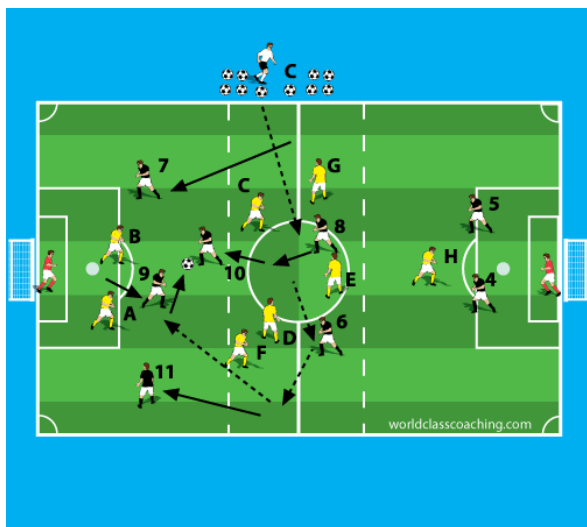
Now, the **PLAYERS** decide, do they stay in the attacking third and press from there; or do they recover? They decide; do they play through the middle, through wide areas, run it in; pass it in; dribble it in, do they play direct from the back to the front and miss out midfield.

All these developments we have practiced serve as a **guide** to the players to then have a game where they make all the decisions themselves and the **coach says VERY LITTLE unless needed.**



Use a full size 11 v 11 field for this clinic. Players make three passes amongst themselves in midfield then pass it into the striker and all three supports quickly to exploit the attacking overload situation.

Playing with **patience** then when the time is right attacking with **Pace**.



Three passes then the ball goes into the feet of (9) and the three players break from midfield to support him from a typical 4-2-3-1 shape..The ball is laid off to supporting player (10).

Start with a big overload when we attack into the attacking third and introduce a recovering midfielder later when the session is working well to offer a bigger challenge. This leaves a 5 v 2 situation in the middle zone in favor of the other team who are currently defending, if no recovering midfielder is used to begin. This is a good start to the session as it makes it easier to gain success for the attacking team which is ultimately what we are looking to achieve.

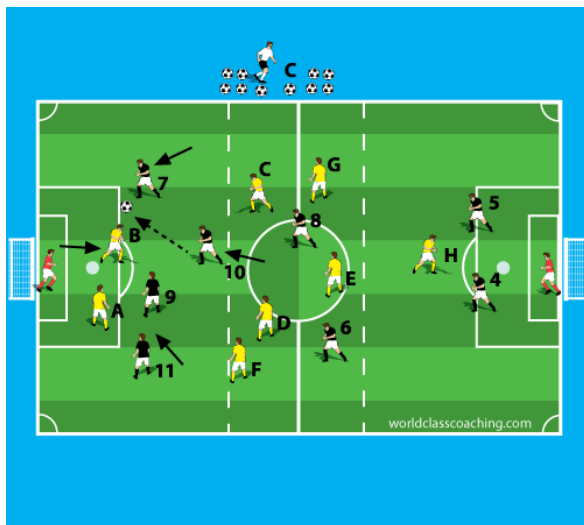
If the defenders win the ball or the keeper receives it, the ball is played quickly into the middle zone (to a 5 v 2 overload again going the other way) where they make three passes then get the ball into the striker to attack in the other direction.

Or; if the play ends the coach plays another ball in quickly to the other team in the middle who has the overload going the other way.

Three midfield players break quickly to support from the 2-3-1 shape of the 4-2-3-1 (making a 4 v 2 overload in favor of the attacking team) and / or one defensive midfielder can recover which would be a 4 v 3 in favor of the attacking team). You can play around and change the numbers to suit what you need, even allowing 2 recovering defending midfield players to get back to create a 4 v 4 situation to really test the speed of attack of the attacking team.

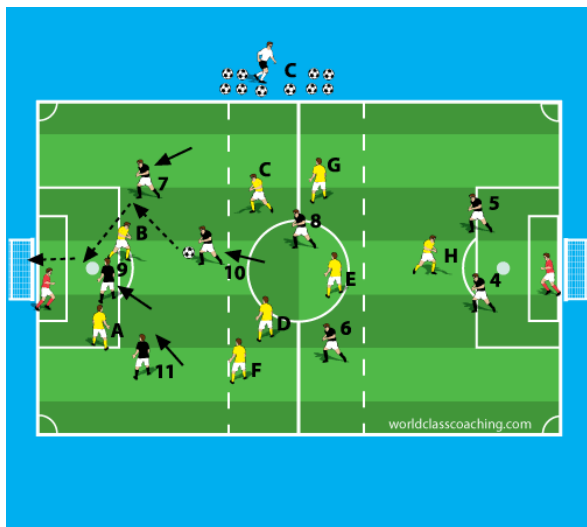
Time the break to get a shot in. Ten seconds maximum to score.

We are working both ways. This is a good **conditioning session** also particularly for attacking and recovering midfield players.

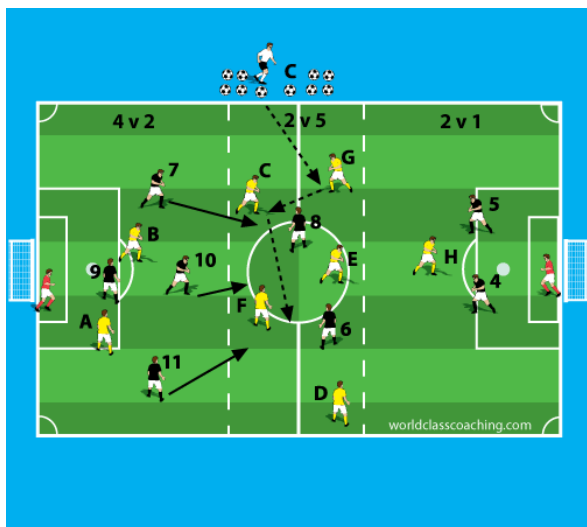


The ball is played down the side to (7) to shoot or cross. This is all happening at **PACE AND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE..**

The condition is the defending team midfield cannot recover back to help as we want to create an overload; as if in an actual game we have caught the opposition on the break.

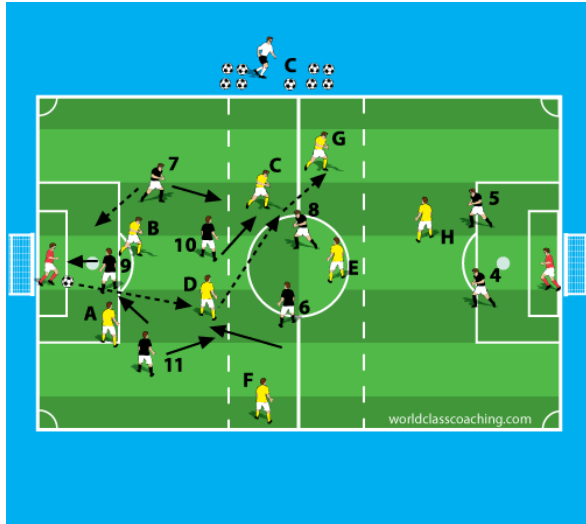


Player (7) crosses for (9) to score.



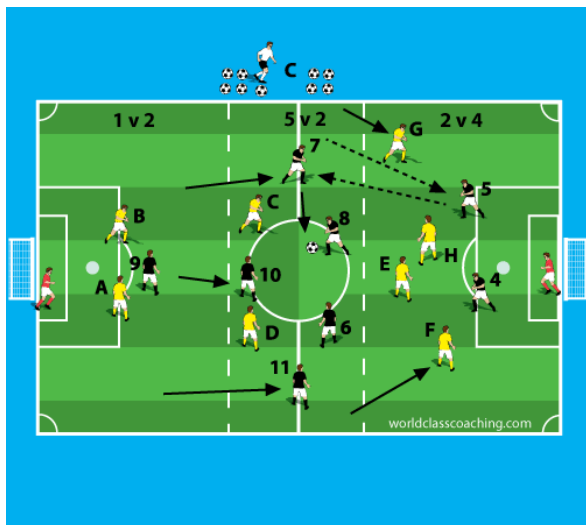
Players in the previous attack from the other team must recover as quickly as possible to try to win the ball back before they get it into the striker (H).

As soon as the previous attack is over, in this case the numbers team scored a goal; the coach passes a new ball into the previously defending team, now the attacking team going the other way. Three pass rules ensures that the recovering players (7), (10) and (11) have a chance to get back and win the ball to attack again. If the players (8) and (6) can delay the opponents to allow this to happen then that is even better.



The keeper has the ball and starts the counter attack. Midfield player (D) has dropped into the defending third to accept a pass and develop the counter. . He plays it quickly to (C) who in turn plays it to (G) and the attack is on. (7), (10) and (11) will recover as quickly as possible.

So now when the ball goes into (H) we will have (E), (F) and (G) supporting the counter attack.

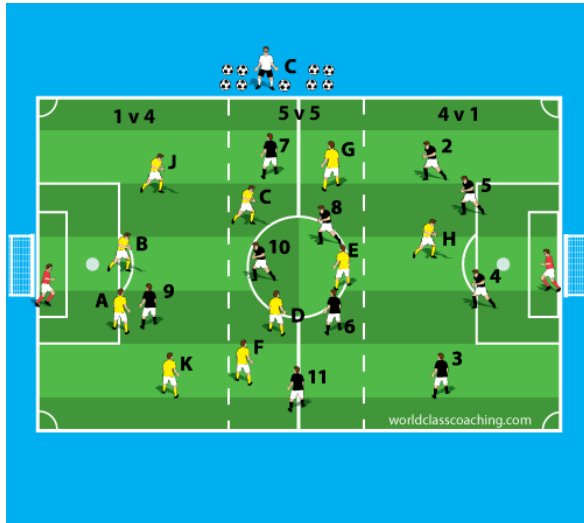


1. The numbered team have been caught on the break but win the ball back, but (G) gives the ball away with a bad pass and the ball is intercepted by (5).. Choices can be now include quick counter attacking playing through the **midfield** or a **direct ball** into the striker (9) and the midfield can then link up with him.

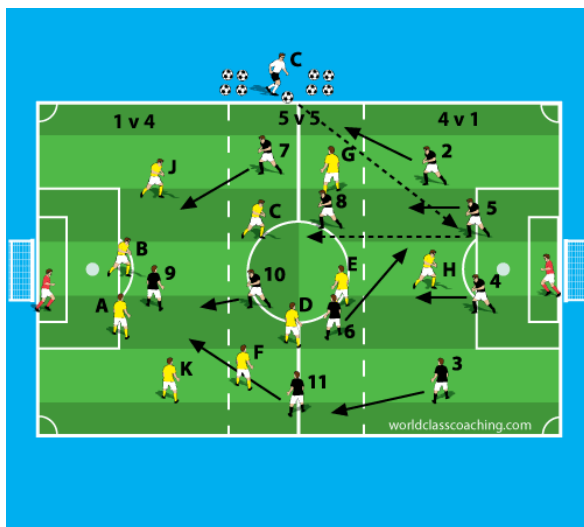
2. Here we show the ball played into midfield. (7), (10) and (11) run back to the middle zone ready for the next counter attack going the other way.

3. **DEFENDING FOCUSED SESSION:** You can work on **defending** against a counter attacking fast break overload too. To do this insist on more passes begin needed in the middle third before they can go into the attacking third thus allowing the recovering players more time to get back.

ADD FULLBACKS FOR BOTH TEAMS TO MAKE AN 11 v 11



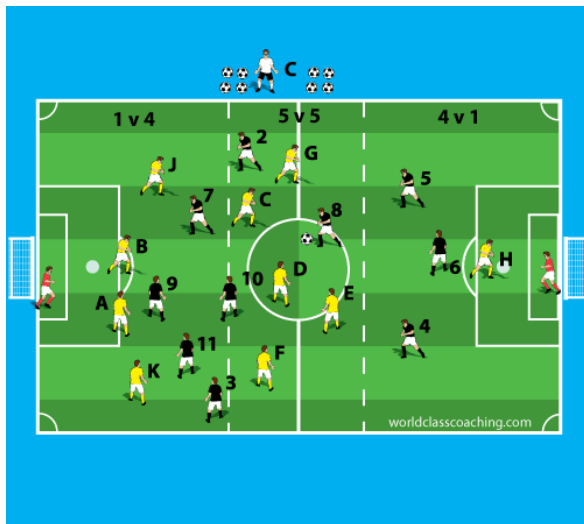
1. A 1 v 4 up front with the defending team at an advantage, and a 5 v 5 in the middle.
2. Once the keeper (or a defender) wins it then a midfielder can drop in and support.
3. **Development:** Now we develop play from the back. Back four spread out to receive and play from the back.
4. Work on players filling in for each other if the move breaks down.
5. Fullbacks can now **transition through the thirds.**



(5) Gets the ball from the coach as the start position and passes to (8),

Fullbacks are now **transitioning through the thirds**. (8) Has the ball and players attack with fullbacks making the forward runs from deep. (6) Can cover for them and fill the sweeper position (or fill in one side for a fullback) should the move break down.

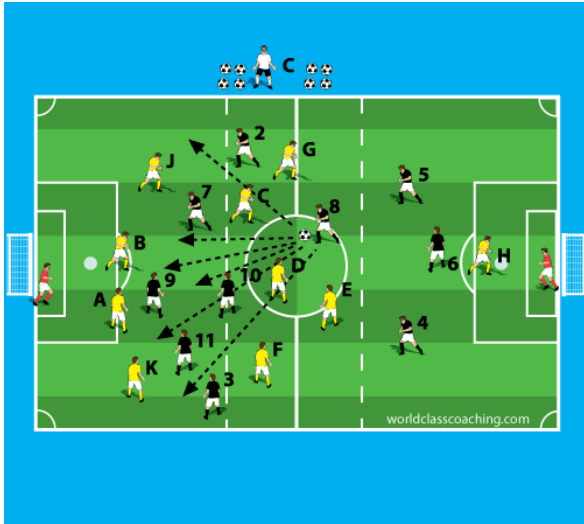
Striker (9) will be moving the defenders around trying to get free for a pass as well as the other attacking players trying to find space to receive a pass from (8). (8) Should have the possibility of lots of options of a pass now.



After the attacking movements of the team this is the shape of attack we should get.

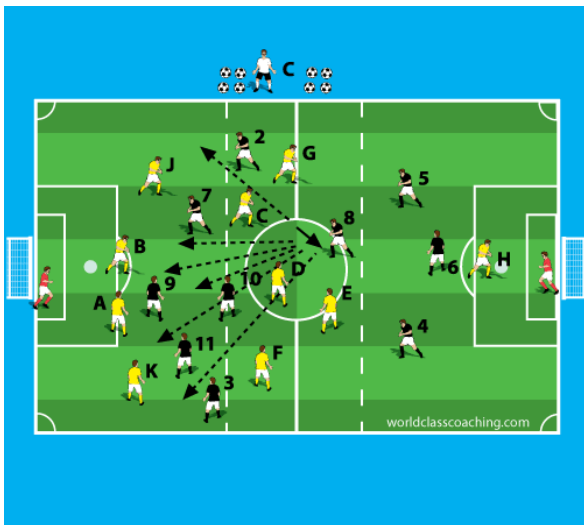
Back three have pushed up leaving (H) offside, fullbacks (2) and (3) have overlapped to provide **WIDTH** in attack both sides.

(7), (9) and (11) form an attacking front three and (10) supports behind forming a diamond shape in attack. (8) floats between attacking and defending being the pivot player should the attack break down but also available to be in the passing movement going forward.



Here we display the attacking passing options of (8) should our attack work as it should with players in their correct attacking positions based on a 4-2-3-1.

Now the attacking shape is more like a 3-1-3-3, 4-2-3-1 being only the start position of the formation..



Here (8) chooses a pass to (7) attacking from outside to inside.

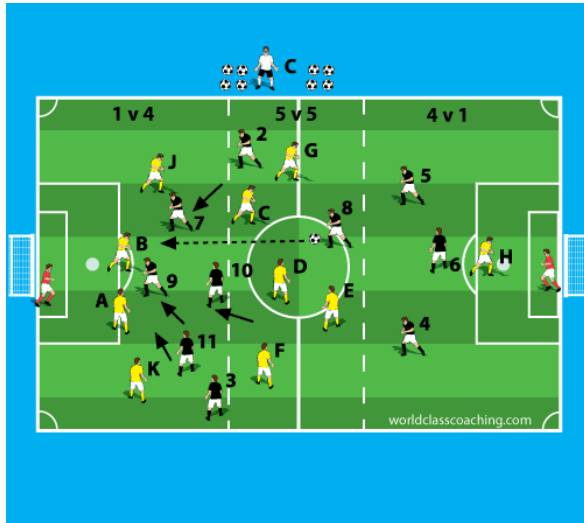
It would be interesting to play a left footer as (7) and right footer as (11) so when cutting in they come onto their best foot to add the advantage of having the potential for a shot on goal.

A CHANGE OF APPROACH TO COUNTER ATTACKING

Now when we get the ball into the attacking third, if we lose possession there, rather than (7), (10) and (11) recovering back they stay in the attacking third to try to win the ball in there and counter from the attacking third. This way if they win possession they are very close to goal to score.

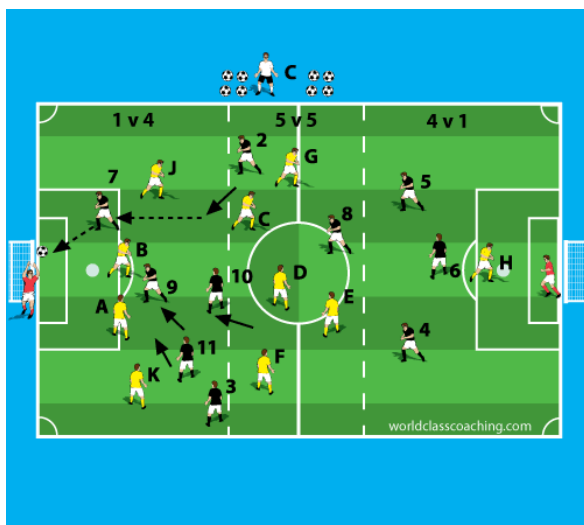
The quick break counter attack is based now on **regaining possession of the ball in the attacking third** of the field.

If this does not work then these three players have to recover back; as likely the opponents have played the ball into midfield or directly to their striker to start their own counter.



Player (8) plays a pass intended for (9) but it is misplaced and goes to defender (B). The attacking team immediately press from the front and try to win the ball there and then and if doing so will be in a great position to immediately score a goal. (7) and (9) press double teaming. (10) presses in behind them as extra security and (11) slides across to close down his nearest player (A) should he receive the ball.

(7)'s body position should be such that it cuts off a pass to (J).



Here (7) wins the ball back, dribbles past (B) and scores a goal. Now the coach immediately passes another ball into the middle third into the other team and the process continues.

TO RECAP THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENTS:

ATTACKING TEAM

1. Midfielders must get the passes in and then break quickly and support the striker as the ball is played into him. Initially the ball must go to the striker's feet but then midfielders can run the ball in or pass it in and another player can go in. Vary the support players from here based on where the immediate space is.
2. The striker must get free from his markers to receive the ball and link up with the attacking quick break midfielders or turn and attack themselves depending on the positions of the defenders.
3. They need to score in a certain short time scale, decrease the time allowed as they improve at this.
4. You can vary the number of players in striking positions as you develop the session if you want to practice another system of play in counter attacking (perhaps your second preferred system of play after the 4-2-3-1), start with one then two and have these two linking up together to develop an understanding, movement off the ball for each other to create space for themselves and for each other.
5. As soon as the move breaks down the attacking midfield players who joined in with the striker need to get back to the midfield area they came out of. You can also coach them to rotate where it may be a striker who is nearer who makes a recovery run back to fill in for the midfielder who may have ended up beyond that striker in the attacking third of the field. Nearest player, shortest recovery route back. Alternatively we are teaching how to counter attack by **immediate pressing** in the attacking third also.
6. The idea is to overload the attack so we gain success from the session in an attacking sense.

DEFENDINGTEAM

1. Recovering midfield players (7), (10) and (11) get back quickly to counter the quick attack.
2. Vary the number of defenders already in position and those recovering as you build up the session to change the challenges of the teams.
3. Midfielders and strikers of the team without the ball are ready to break quickly should they win it back in the defending third. They need to be constantly on the move getting free from opponents to receive the ball once the keeper or a defender gains possession of it.
4. When the defending team wins the ball and it is played into midfield it may be a defender who joins in and goes all the way into the attacking third. They can pass it in or run it in. Make sure a midfielder drops back into a defensive position into the defensive third (usually 6) to cover for this. This encourages the players to rotate positions and develop more freedom in their positioning on the field.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Maintain the overload situations in midfield, once the session gets going after the initial start with equal numbers, as the transitions take place from defense to attack to ensure you get the session working effectively so there is constant transition from attack to defense and defense to attack, both happening at pace.
2. Eventually open the game up into an actual scrimmage and see if both teams have adopted the quick break mentality you have been trying to teach. Now it is equal numbers in all areas so it will be a good test for the players to see if they can make it work.

DEVELOPMENTS FOR THE TRANSITION GAME

1. 1 v 2 in each attacking and defending zone and a 5 v 5 in the middle zone (the numbers can vary here).
2. Big overload to gain success in the attacking play, three attacking midfielders making a 4 v 2 overload.
3. 1 v 2 the attacking and defending zones with fewer players in the middle zone but still equal numbers there. Midfield can run it in now. Work on the movement of the striker to create space and move the defenders around.
4. **Development:** Allow a midfield player from the middle zone to **drop back into the defending zone** where his or her team has regained possession to provide help in the link up play (distances may prevent a good long pass from the back directly to midfield depending on the age group being coached, so this helps). Opponent can't follow them in so this gives a better chance for the attack to build quickly.
5. Once we are at an 11 v 11 situation: Allow the fullbacks (or centre back) from each team (in possession) to break forward into the middle and attacking thirds and now focus on the way they cover for each other, players dropping in to replace each other allowing **more freedom** in the team in terms of

movement around the field. This is important to follow to keep the shape of the team when opponents counter attack.

6. Finally 1 v 4 in the attacking third, meaning when the defending team win it they may have numbers up to break from the back and attack probably along the flanks.

7. Eventually let it go as a **free game**; **no** restrictions or conditions, but asking them to remember all the progressions and keep the team balance using them.

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