

AJAX AMSTERDAM.

AJAX YOUTH SYSTEM.

AJAX PLAYING SYSTEM AND COACHING SESSION.

AJAX – FIRST TEAM TRAINING SESSIONS.

AJAX – YOUTH PRACTICES AND DRILLS.

GED SEARSON.

17th of December 1995.

AJAX AMSTERDAM.

Co. Adriaanse - Ajax Director of Youth Development.

Ajax's rise in the early 1990's becoming the major force in European and World club football has derived from the ability to produce their own home grown talent efficiently.

Ajax Amsterdam is run by a board of five elected unpaid Directors. Under this board there is four paid Directors who look after the footballing side of the club.

Technical Director - (Incharge of the 1 st and 2nd team).

Director of Youth Development.

Commercial Director.

Financial Director.

The Technical Director - Louis van Gaal, is on a short term contract which expires in the summer of 1997.

The Director of Youth Development - Co. Adriaanse, is on a long term contract. Co. has been given a contract for life by the club, (until his 65th birthday).

PLAYERS.

Ajax demand four fundamental requirements from all the young players at the club, which is known as T.I.P.S.

T.I.P.S -

T- Technique

I- Intelligence / Insight

P- Personality

S- Speed

TECHNIQUE – Technique is the number one requirement for an Ajax player. All Ajax players must be technically good with the ball.

The Ajax way is to play in the oppositions half of the pitch, this means players playing in tight space, which means that the player must be able to play using good technique.

INTELLIGENCE / (Football INSIGHT) - Football intelligence is vital for the Ajax style of play. Ajax players must be able to understand instructions and follow out these instructions.

Ajax players must know what to do with the ball in given situations, such as when to hold on to the ball, and when to release the ball. They must know how to create space and when to move into space.

PERSONALITY – Personality is necessary for a team player. Players need strength of character and leadership qualities. The club look for personality in players, to see if they are confident, if they can influence other players and most importantly if they can work within a group. Ajax players must be able to gel with the other players in the team and not be an individual. The Ajax team must be as one.

Note - Ajax players must not wear jewellery. Earrings, chains or bracelets are not to be worn on or off the pitch while at the club, players who do so are seen as individuals. Players personal stereos are also banned by the club, they are banned at the training ground, on the team bus and at the Hotels used at away matches. Players who use personal stereos are cut off from the rest of the team, making themselves individuals.

Co Adriaanse also said Ajax had many chances to buy the Brazilian forward Romario. But reports Ajax had back from his club's said he was an individual and would upset the team spirit. He would only train when he wanted and he was even known to go on holiday during the season. He was also known to criticize his teammates and upset them with his comments.

SPEED - Speed of thought and speed of action is a characteristic of Ajax players. Ajax players must be able to sum up situations quickly to problem solve on the pitch.

The only running Ajax do in training is 20 - 30 yard sprints, there are no long distance runs. A lot of work is done on the players running technique working on short and long running strides. A lot of training is performed on improving the players acceleration and to make the players more explosive.

TRAINING.

The club employ a specialist goalkeeper coach, a soccer specific coach - for Athletic power, and Dietician personnel who report only to Co. Adriaanse, he himself reports direct to one of the board and not to Louis van Gaal who is in charge of the senior players.

Training at Ajax is based on the controlling, receiving and transporting of the ball. The young Ajax players at the optimum learning age of between 8 and 12 must perform a lot of 'Coerver' training (working on individual ball skills).

Ajax players train with many different types of ball, they will train with tennis balls, small footballs, balls in a hand held net, and specially designed foam balls. These are continually used by younger players to improve their touch and technique. Ajax train their young players to make their feet be like their hands, and to make them 'be the boss of the ball'.

Physical training is also important with the young players, but ball work is most important aspect of training. All training is done within small-sided games, based around the 'Dutch Vision' 4 v 4 (small-sided games with different sized and shaped pitches). This is used to teach the 'Diamond' and 'Triangle' positional shapes which are recognised as part of the Ajax play. These games help the players appreciation of

angles and distances, and to aid them on passing and receive the ball, so they can decide on the weight of pass and touch.

4 v 4 and 7 V 7 games are encouraged at all levels throughout the club.

Training is interval based and covers the following areas:

Ball Control - Passing (always work on short and long passes), dribbling, moving with the ball etc.

Duelling - 1 V 1, attacking and defending, defensive heading etc.

Power of Combination - Sense for position and working with team-mates etc.

Athletic Capabilities - Start speed, sprint speed over 10 metres, 30 metres, agility, staying running and jumping power.

Commanding Charisma.

Creativity, Team Spirit etc.

Before a training session players will do 30 minutes 'Soccer Aerobics' as their warm-up with coach Wormhoidt. 'Soccer Aerobics' is designed to improve hip rotation, stomach muscles, thigh muscles and coordination. The Aerobics helps the players become more explosive, improves their body rotation and gives them better balance.

Communication is the most important factor for team building and there is great emphasis placed on this area at the club. From a very early age emphasis is placed on learning -:

- The rules of the game.
- Shoe maintenance.
- Acquiring an understanding of the Ajax system of play.
- Body care.
- What to eat and drink, and when in relation to matches and training.

The 8 -12 year olds are taught by coach 'Janibor' how to run elegantly and economically.

The players are taught to adopt sportsman like attitude in respect of opponents, to accept direction and guidance to submit to a referees decision. To evaluate ones achievements with a critical eye. To see soccer as a team sport. Learn to listen to their bodies and how to inform coaches and parents if the have an injury.

Each youth team which is made up 16 players. The squad has been selected after a lengthy process. During the season each player will take three tests, these consist of 15 physical and skill tests which mainly measure the players physical progress (speed and power). Players are assessed game by game by the coaches, all the information is stored on the clubs database.

Players are also assessed throughout the season with regular meetings with the players parents. If at the end of the season Ajax see better players around than the

players at the club, the players who are not progressing will be replaced by these new players.

Youth players between the age of 8 and 14 will train three to four times a week, play a match on Saturday morning and are expected to watch the first team play if playing at home, e.g. five trips to the ground each week minimum and this increases as they get older. This means a player aged 8 will have almost five hours training and one 60 minute match a week.

At the age of 15, training becomes more concentrated and instead of finishing school at the same time as other children, they are collected by one of the fleet of 20 buses that Ajax run, i.e. at 1:30 - 2:00pm and spend the afternoon at the club studying, training and eating. The youth teams are rotated on a daily basis so that at various times they are either training, showering, eating or studying with the nine part-time teachers Ajax employ to help the players with their homework. All study lessons are around one and a quarter hours long. The players are made to understand that school is more important than football, and that Ajax cannot guarantee that all the youth players will make it, to become professionals, and Ajax also see that players don't just play football with their feet but also with their brains. If players do badly at school, they have to miss training.

Players must also take a course in Media Studies, to improve personal confidence and how to portray yourself to the public. Players also have to fill-in personality questionnaires.

The club invite top sports people from other sports to talk and lecture the players.

SCOUTING.

The club are allowed to sign boys within a 90 kilometre radius of Amsterdam. Ajax start their scouting of players at the age of seven. Most of Ajax's scouting is of players between the age of 8 and 12, as they are at their optimum age for learning technical skills. Ajax scouts are told not to look for 'T.I.P.S' but instead are looking for 'S.P.I.T'. The scouts are firstly looking for Speed and Personality over intelligence and technique in the players. The club believe they have the ability to improve the Intelligence and Technique of the players once at the club.

YOUTH MATCHES.

When Ajax youth teams play against other clubs, the players of the opposition will be two years older than the Ajax players. This will give Ajax teams more of a fair match as playing teams of their own age will not be a challenge to the Ajax players. They will every now and then play opposition with players of the same age of the Ajax players and end up beating them at least 4 or 5 – nil. This is good for player confidence.

During training sessions and matches parents are allowed to support but not interfere and most certainly are not allowed to shout advice to the players, hence the sign at each session which requests, 'Silence'.

The club also plan ahead which tournaments will be suitable to attend, learning being the most important consideration to the players.

From the beginning of the season to Christmas each coach is encouraged to give games to all the boys in the squad on a regular basis, but after the new-year the coach is allowed to pick the strongest team. The Ajax coaches portray "Winning is not everything but at some stage it is important".

PITCHES AND TRAINING GROUND.

Most of Ajax's training and youth matches are played on Astro Turf pitches. As Holland is a very wet country, good playing surfaces are hard to find and even harder to keep in good condition. As Ajax play a passing game, they need to have a good flat surface for their teams to play on, and astro turf is seen to be the best suited surface for this.

Ajax are moving to their new £80 million stadium The Amsterdam 'ArenA', in the summer of 1996. The stadium includes a training centre with indoor and outdoor training facilities for the professional staff. Close by to the stadium will be seven grass and astro turf pitches for the clubs juniors. The new grass pitches have been guaranteed to last all year round.

COACHES.

Each youth team has it's own coach, if a new coach is employed by Ajax to ~ with a team, Co. Adriaanse the Head of youth Development will work with him for a year. Ajax coaches must teach the Ajax way, coaches must organize the training carefully and be creative.

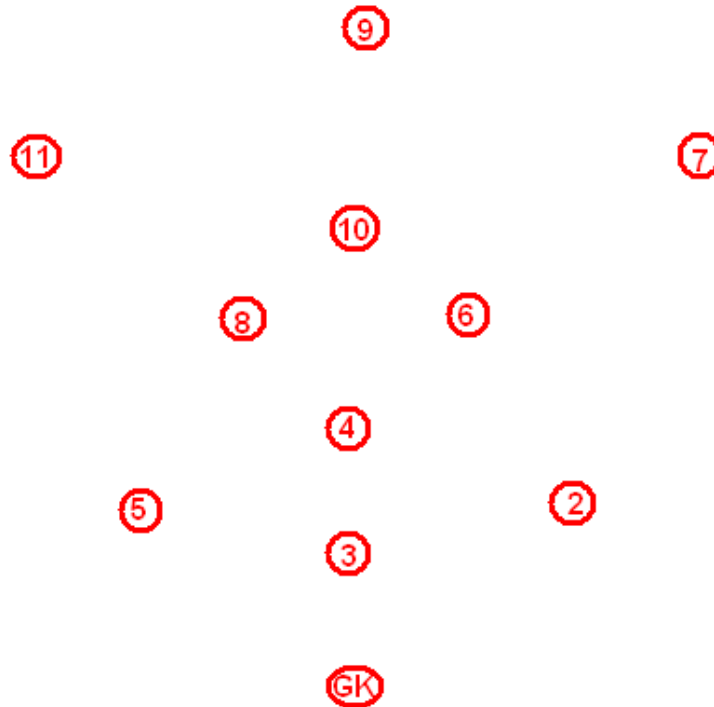
The coach must be able to understand children, big problems have to be made small problems for the players. The coach has to teach the players the secret of football.

All Ajax coaches must watch the other Ajax youth teams play.

Note - Coaches in Holland must train for seven years to be fully qualified.

SYSTEM.

The Ajax Formation throughout the club.



The numbers the Ajax players wear on the back of their shirts is very important, as each number represents a different position with different duties. The youth teams play the same system as the senior teams, and the numbers of each position will be the same in the first team as every youth team.

A young player at the club will know which player in the first team plays in his position, and this senior player will be his role-model.

Every Ajax youth team is made up of a squad of 16 players, There is no additions to the squad during the season. The squad is :

- 2 - Goalkeepers.
- 4 - Right footed players for positions 2,6 and 7.
- 4 - Left footed players for positions 5,8 and 11.
- 3 - Players for positions 3 and 4.
- 3 - Players for positions 9 and 10.

All Ajax youth players will train in every position until they reach the age 15 16, by then they will have a set position.

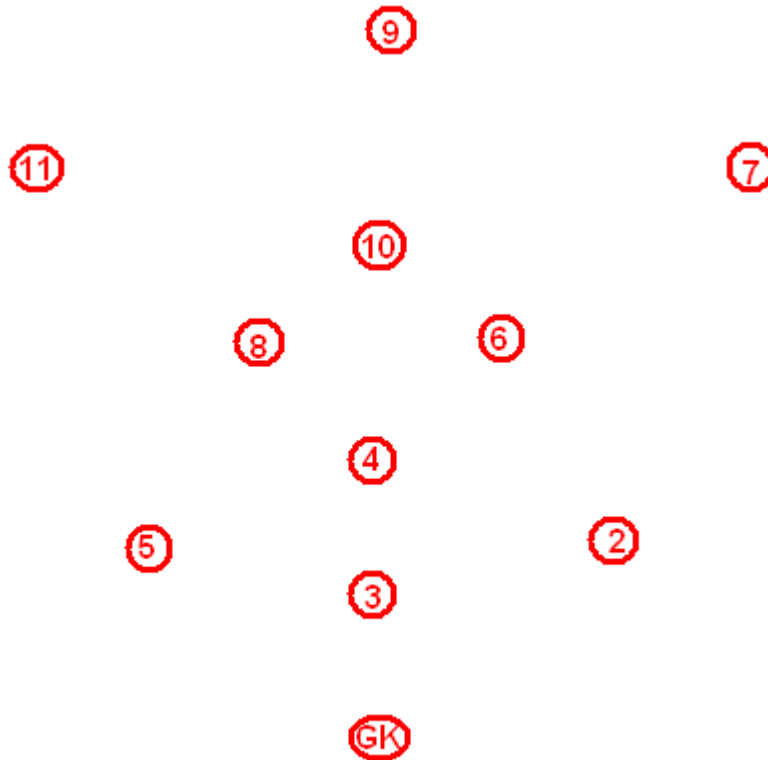
Scientific analysis has helped Ajax fashion their training to the game and individual positions. The positions Ajax players play is dependant on the formation of the opposition, the Ajax players need to be multifunctional and understand the many different positions which allow play to be transferred quickly, to go backwards or forward to find a 1 v 1 situation. Ajax players are taught that if they cannot play the ball forward, then play it sideways, if they cannot play the ball sideways then play the ball backwards.

The Ajax playing system was created by Louis van Gaal and Co. Adriaarise. The system was not a success with the first team in the beginning, because the first team players could not play within the system. As the system is very hard to learn, it was better for players to learn how to play the system while they are developing in the youth system. Only after a few seasons, when some of the youth players had broken through to the first team, did the system start to work. These youth players had learned to play in the system at young age. As the system is very hard to learn, it is better for players to learn how to play the system while they are developing.

The Ajax system was proved to be difficult to learn when in the summer of 1995 Ajax bought Marcio Santos the Brazilian World Cup sweeper from Fiorentina. Marcio Santos had to play in the Ajax reserves for two months, he was said to be the worst player at the club at the time. He was not able to play the Ajax way.

THE AJAX PLAYING SYSTEM.

The Ajax system is based on the Rinus Michels 70's system of 'Pressing Football', where the team must press forward when in possession of the ball and press the opposition when the opposition is in possession of the ball. Louis van Gaal added his own philosophy to this style of play.



The Ajax system is an attacking football system, the team must play the ball forward, if the ball cannot be played forward, the ball must be played sideways, if the ball cannot be played sideways the ball must be played backwards. "If the front door is closed, try the side door, if that is closed, try the back door".

The system encourages all of the players to get into 1 v 1 situations all over the pitch, this means all players must have good technique when under pressure from the close marking opponents, this means the Ajax players need to have better individual technique than the opposition players who are playing directly against.

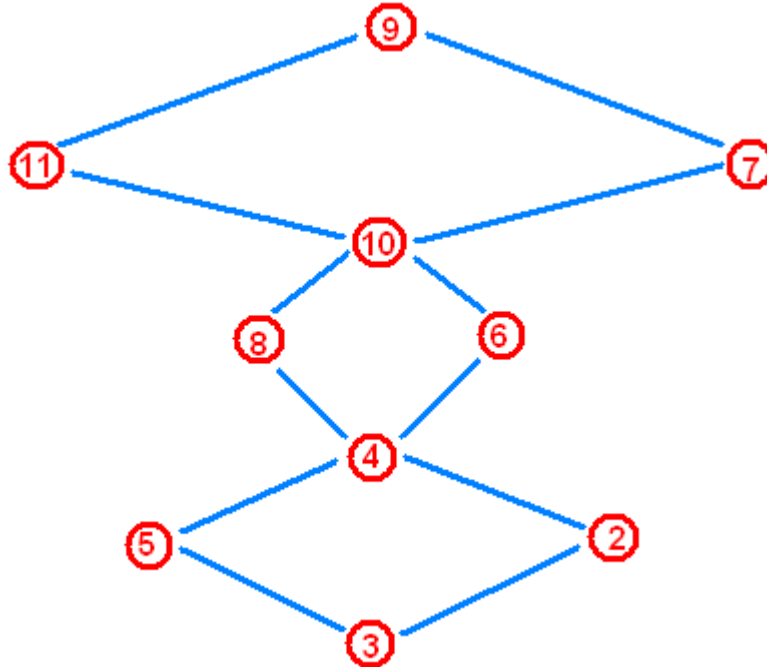
The players must have good individual technique and must have the ability to create space for themselves and their team-mates.

The moment Ajax gain possession of the ball, all the players must move away from their markers creating space for themselves, becoming passing options.

When the opposition have possession of the ball, every player must react positively the moment possession is lost and press the opposition to win the ball back. The nearest player to the ball must press the opponent who has possession of the ball. His team-mates must take up covering and marking positions, to be able to intercept passes.

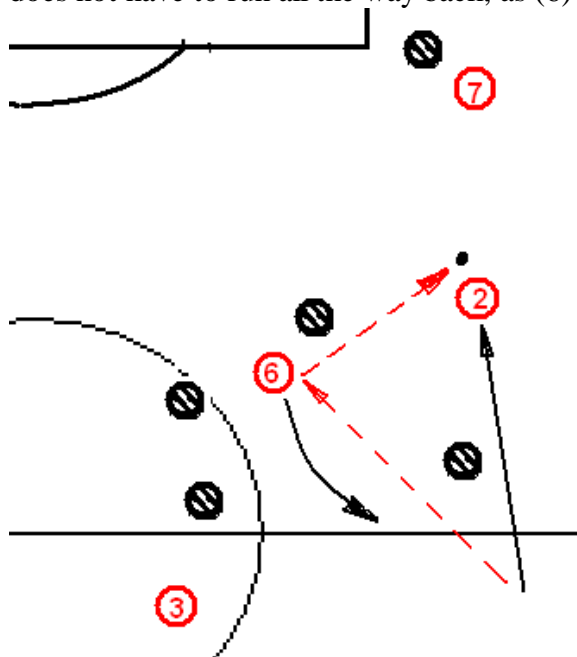
TEAM SHAPE – DIAMONDS.

Team shape is very important to the system. The players are taught not to make overlaps, but instead the players must keep shape by making diamonds and triangles using the 'Dutch vision' techniques / games (4 v 4). When playing in diamonds, you have both depth and width.



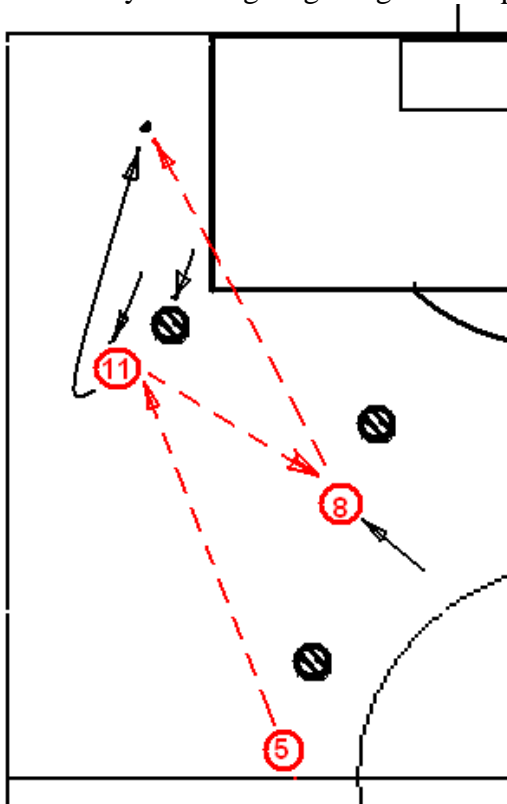
PLAYER ROTATION.

The Ajax system is fluid, with players rotating positions. An example is, if the right-sided defender (2) pushes forward, the right-sided midfielder (6) drops-in and covers him, becoming the right-sided defender. This ensures that shape has been kept, and also that (2)'s recovery run back to position if possession is lost is shorter as he does not have to run all the way back, as (6) has become the right-sided defender.

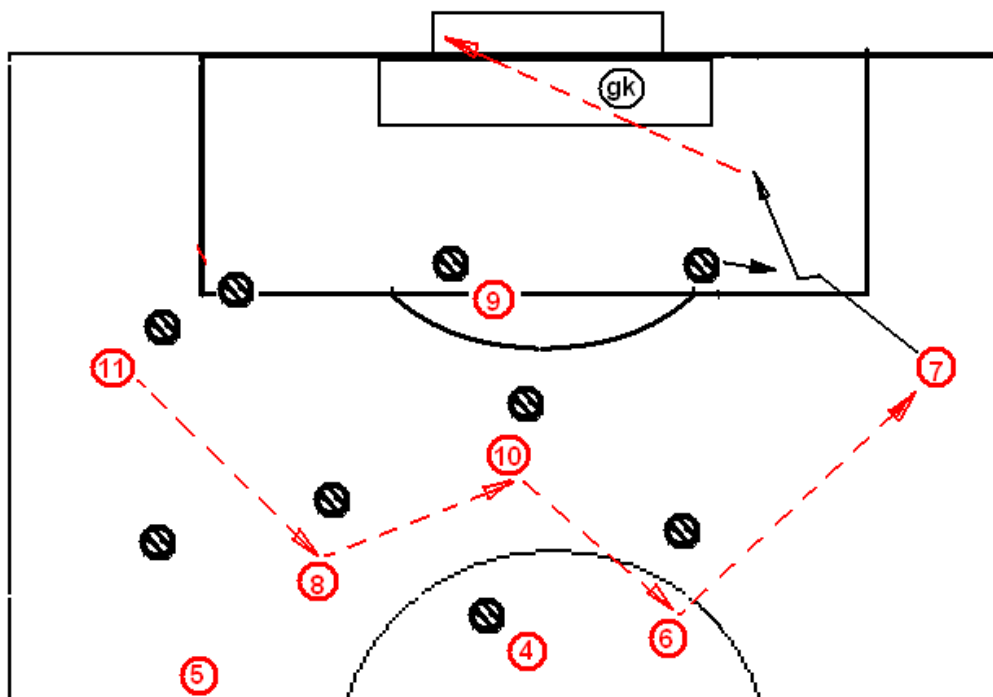


THE WIDE ATTACKERS.

The Ajax system play with two out and out wingers. The main object of these two wide players is to get behind the oppositions defence. This is either done by beating their markers by dribbling or getting the ball played in behind their markers.



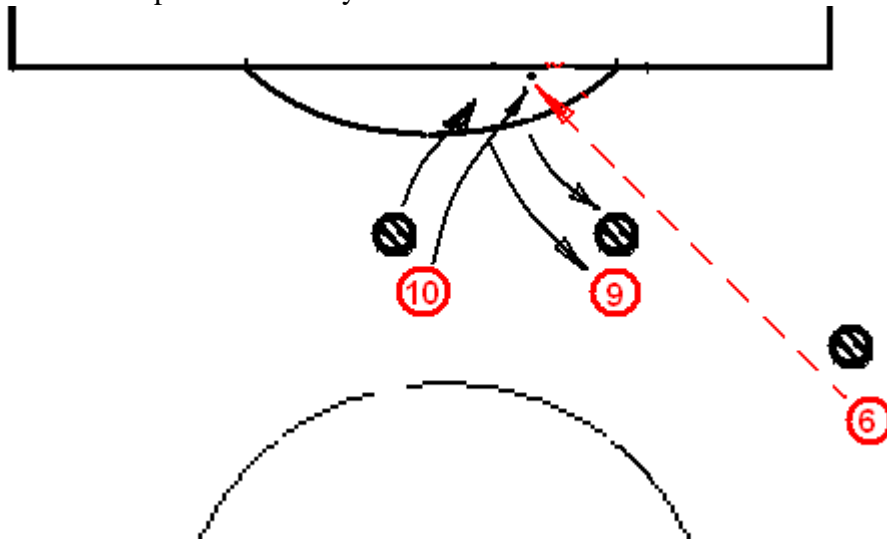
In the Ajax system, the ball is circulated to get the wide players into a one-v-one situation. The wide player is only allowed to take on and try to beat his opponent when he is in a one-v-one situation. If the wide player is outnumbered, the ball is circulated again.



PLAYER RELATIONSHIPS.

At Ajax they believe in player relationships on the pitch. This means the movement of one player determines the movement of another player.

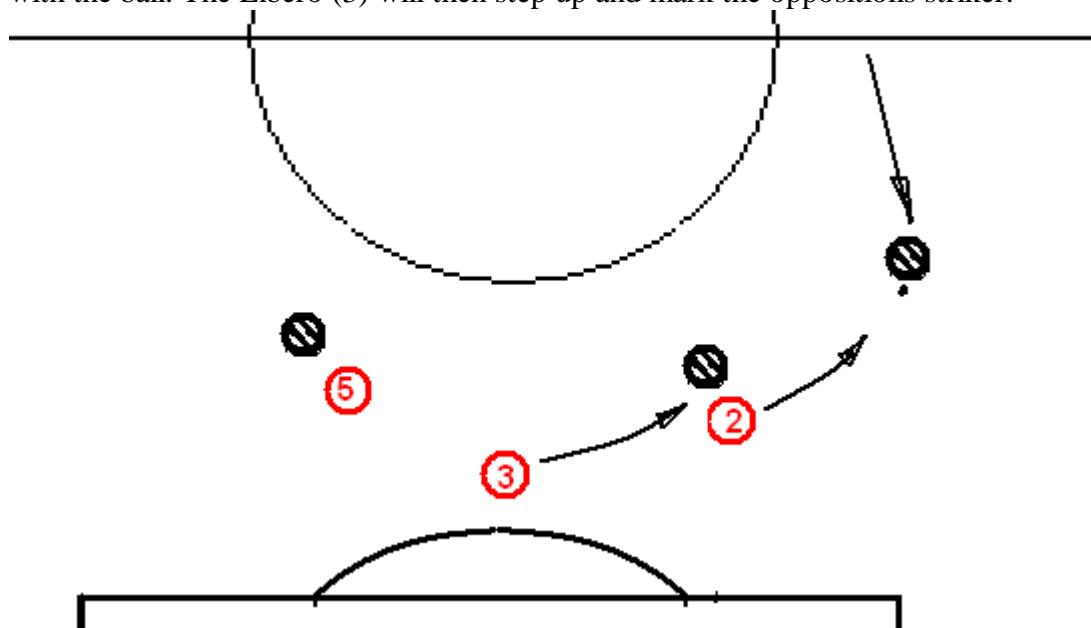
For instance - Number 9 the centre forward is told to move towards the player with the ball. This means that number 10 the withdrawn striker must move away from the ball into the space vacated by the striker.



THE LIBERO.

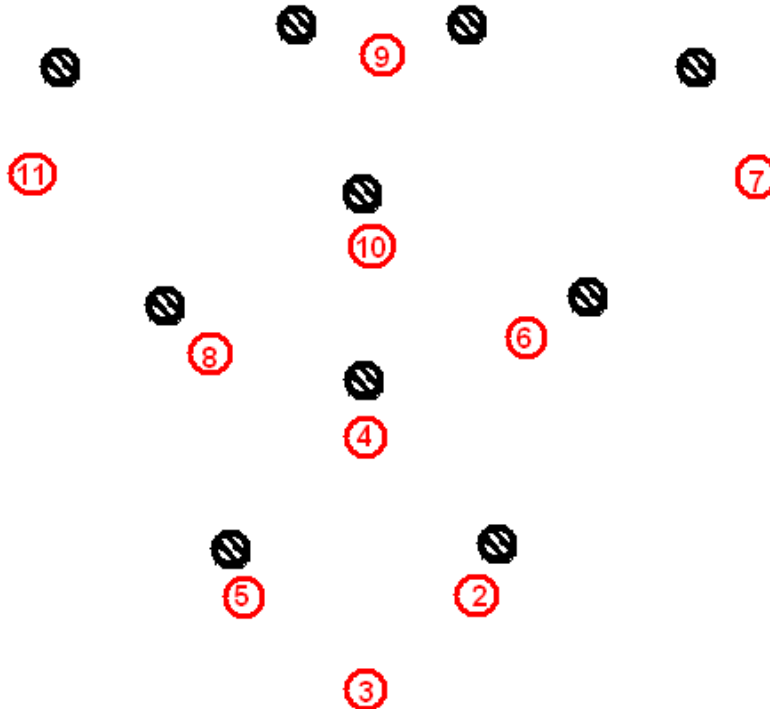
THE LIBEROS DEFENSIVE ROLE – Ajax play a man-marking system with a Libero (3) positioned behind. The Libero (3) must have a full range of defensive techniques. His defensive duties are to read the game, covering team-mates and also stepping up to mark free-players.

If an oppositions player breaks forward from midfield with the ball towards the Ajax defence, one of the man-marker can leave his man and step out to deal with the player with the ball. The Libero (3) will then step up and mark the oppositions striker.



THE FLUID SYSTEM AND ADJUSTMENT OF THE FORMATION.

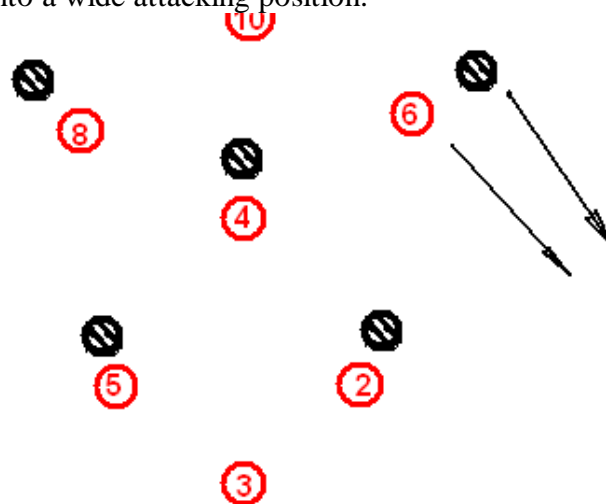
The Ajax system is multi-functional to adapt to the oppositions formation.
If the opposition play with a 4-4-2 system, the Ajax formation will look like the following: -



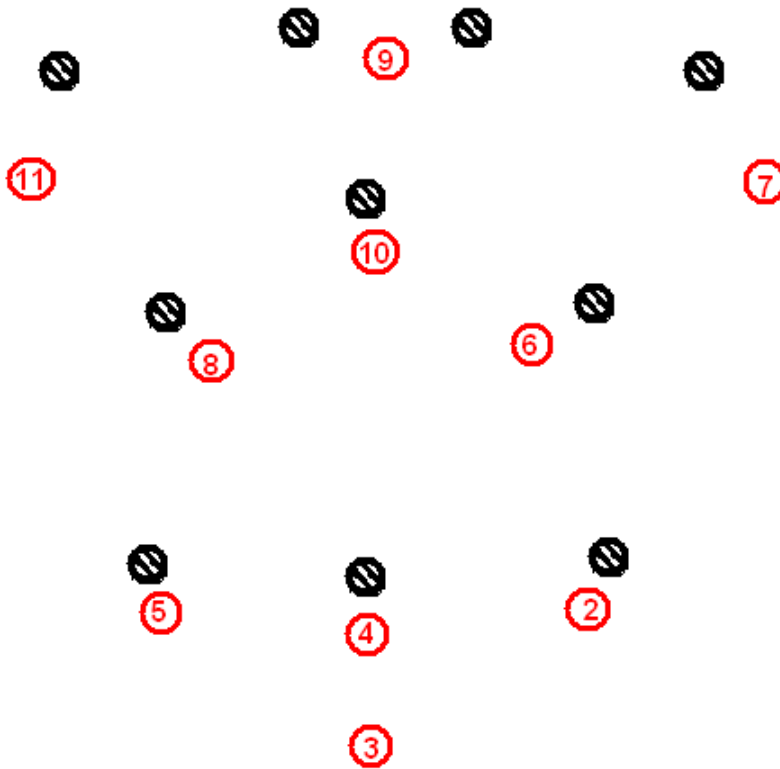
The wide players 7 and 11 push up onto the oppositions full-backs. 10 the withdrawn striker still plays in his withdrawn role. 6 and 8 play left and right centre midfield with 4 playing in front of the defence as the stopper. The left and right defenders come inside and mark the oppositions two forwards, but drop out wide when the team has possession of the ball. 3 is the Libero covering and picking up free players.

Players 7 and 11 will track the oppositions full-backs if they overlap the midfielders in the wide areas.

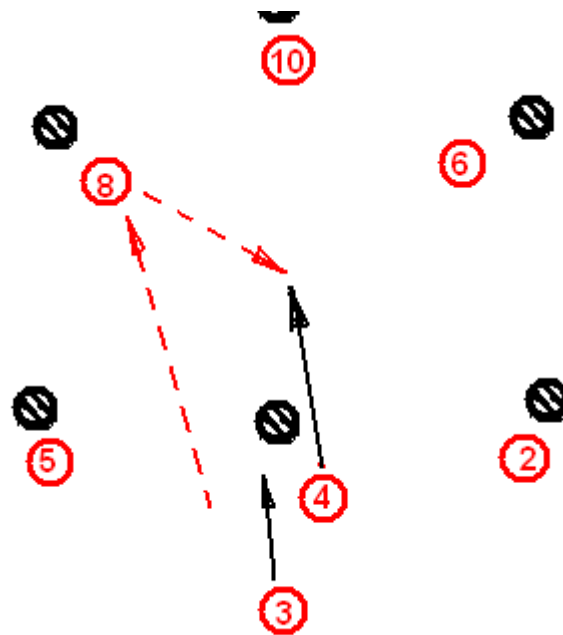
Players 6 and 8 must track the oppositions left and right midfielders if they push forward into a wide attacking position.



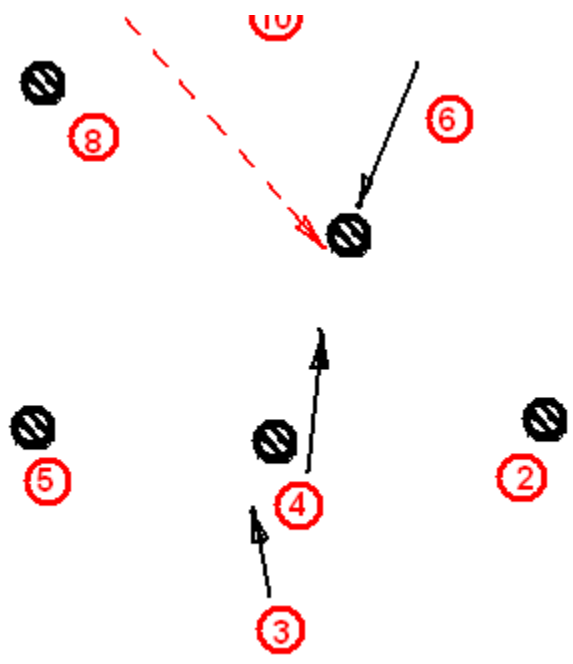
If the opposition play with three forwards in a 4-3-3 formation: -



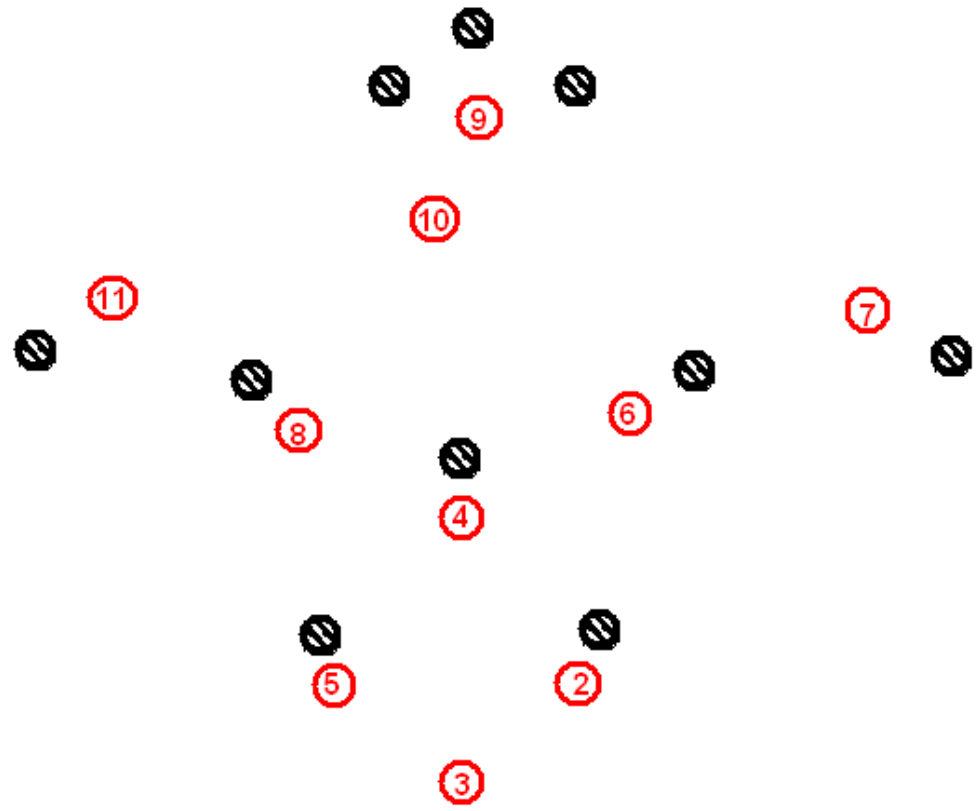
Player 4 will have to drop back into the defensive line and become the third marking back, with 3 dropping back as the Libero. 10 also plays a little deeper picking up their deep midfield stopper / play maker. When Ajax are in possession of the ball 4 can push back up into midfield.



Midfield players 6 and 8 must stay central, marking to the two opposition central midfielders. If a player breaks free in midfield, player 4 can step up into midfield to deal with him with the Libero 3 stepping up into the back line.

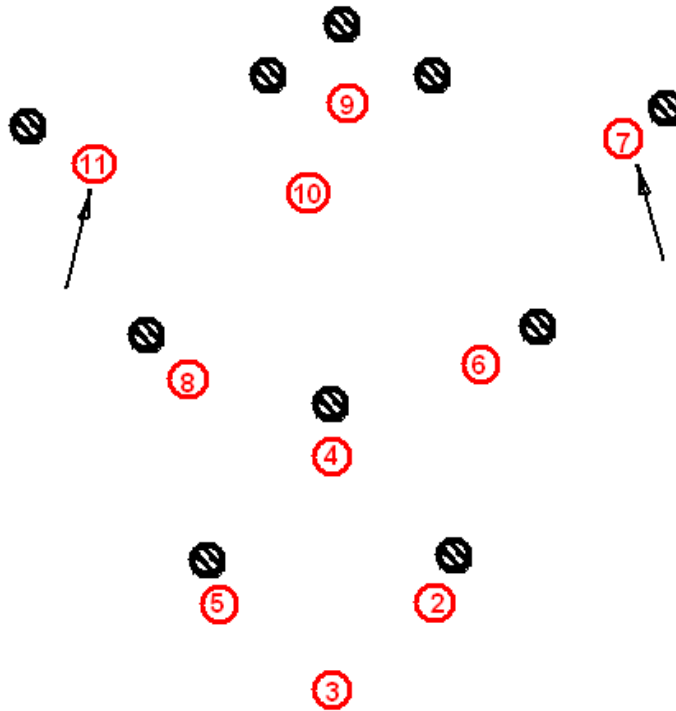


If the opposition play using a 3-5-2 formation, the Ajax formation will be:-



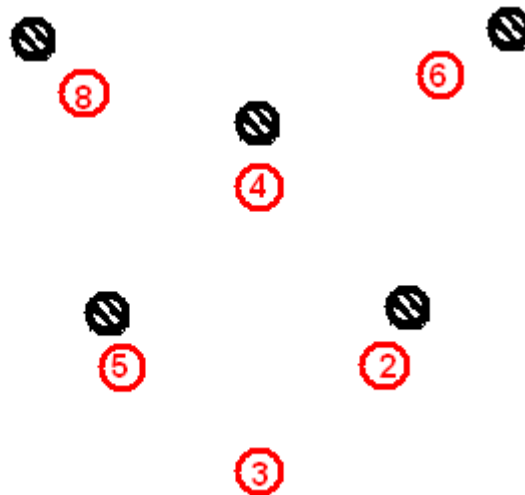
If the one of the oppositions midfielders plays as withdrawn striker behind the two strikers, player 4 must pick him up. Player 10 still plays as a withdrawn striker, but he must push on with 9 and press the opposition.

Wide players 7 and 11 must push as far up as possible forcing the oppositions 'wing-backs' to play as deep as possible, turning a back three into a back five.



When the opposition have possession of the ball, players 11 and 7 must track the winger-backs when they press forward.

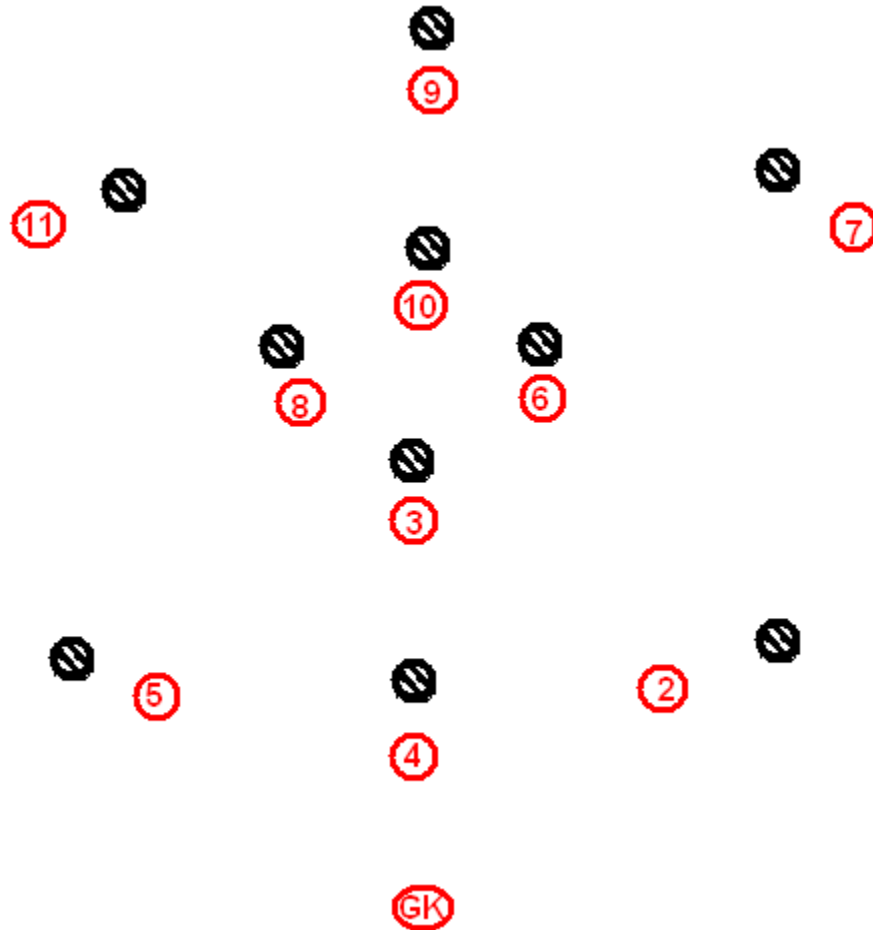
Players 5 and 2 are the marking backs with the Libero 3 playing just behind.



If the opposition player 3-4-3.

Co Adriaanse believes the best way to beat Ajax is to play a mirror formation of the Ajax system and play man-to-man on the Ajax players. If the opposition have better player in these 1 v 1 situations, the opposition can possibly beat Ajax.

Player 4 must now play as a marking back on the oppositions centre-forward. 3 who usually plays as the Libero must mark the withdrawn striker.



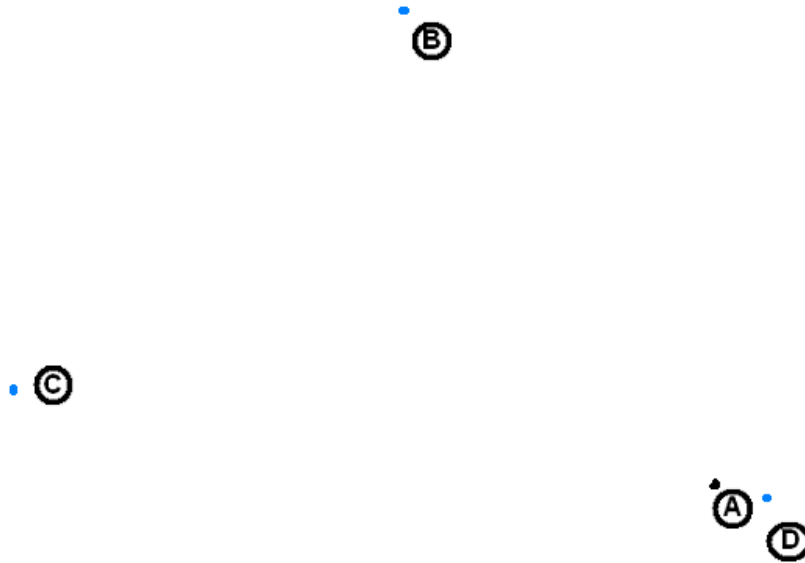
AJAX AMSTERDAM. YOUTH TEAM DRILLS AND TACTICS.

Director of youth development – Co Adriaanse.

ONE TOUCH PASSING – THE AJAX TRIANGLE.

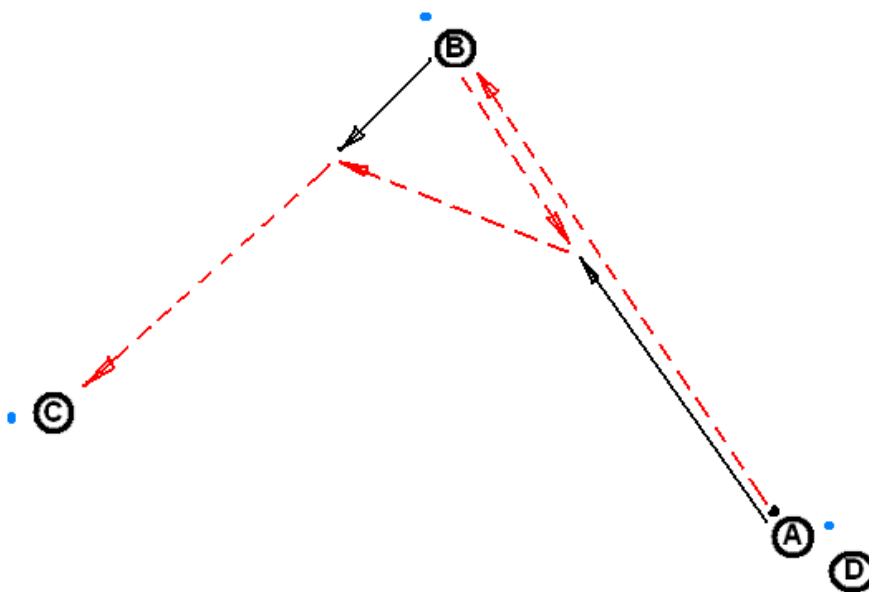
4 PLAYERS AND 1 BALL.

AREA –

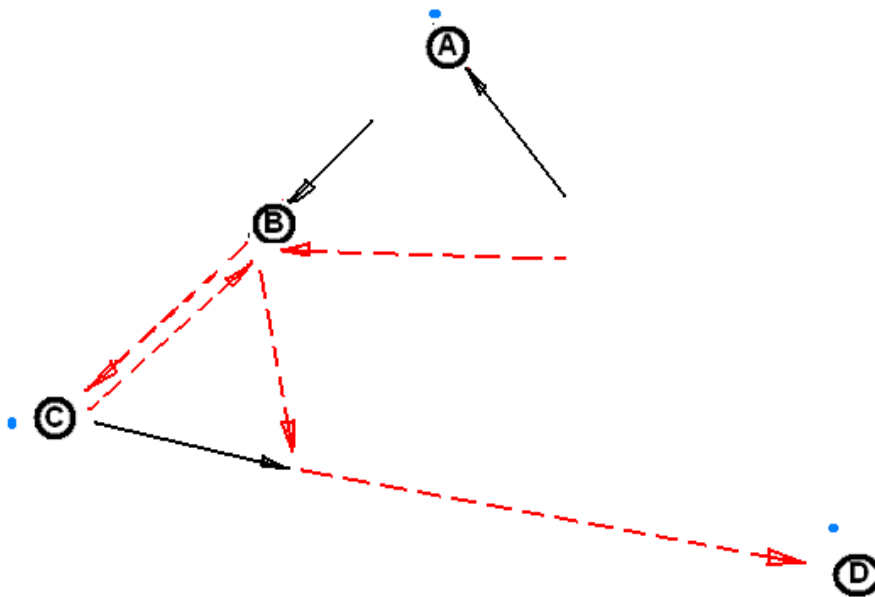


Players form a large triangle, but with players player at the corner where the ball is.

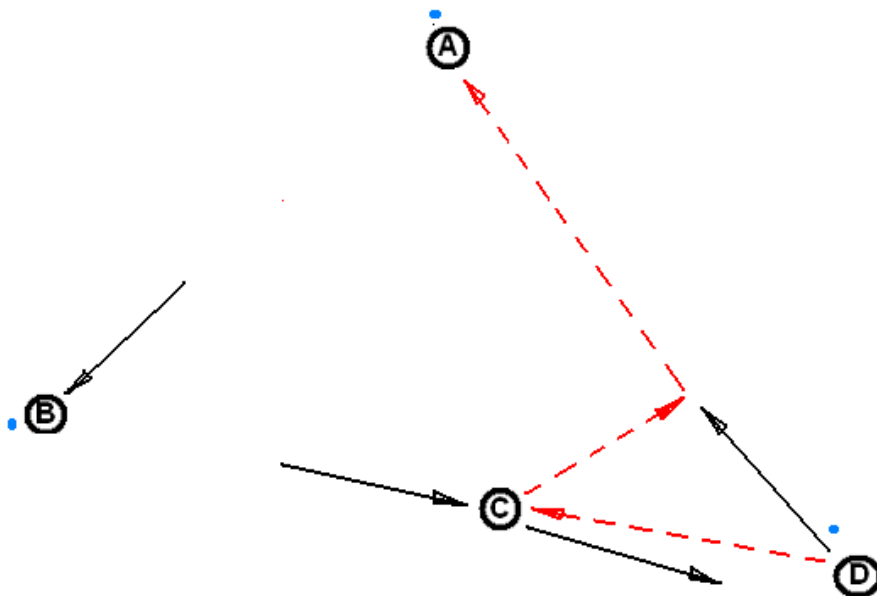
Player (A) passes to player (B) and follows his pass, (B) sets the ball back first time to the incoming (A). (A) plays a one touch pass in front of (B) for (B) to run onto and play a one-touch pass to (C)'s feet. Player (A) moves to the next corner of the triangle.



(C) plays a one-two with (B) with (B)'s return pass played in front of (C) for (C) to pass into player (D). (B) moves to the next corner of the triangle.

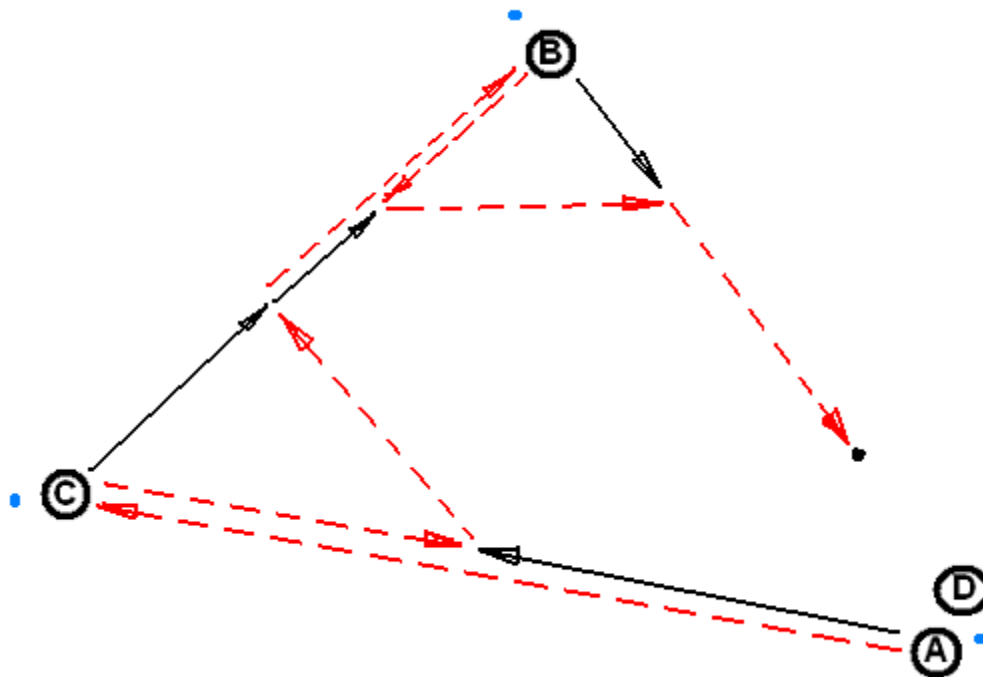


(D) sets the ball back to (C), (C) plays the ball in front of (D) to run onto and play the ball into (A). (D) moves to the next corner of the triangle.



This same movement continues with the ball working around the triangle and with the players moving around the area moving from corner to corner.

A after a short time the practice is stopped and restarted again but the ball travelling around the triangle in the other direction. With the ball coming towards the players from a different angle from the last practice, the players will at times have to use their other foot more often to make passes.



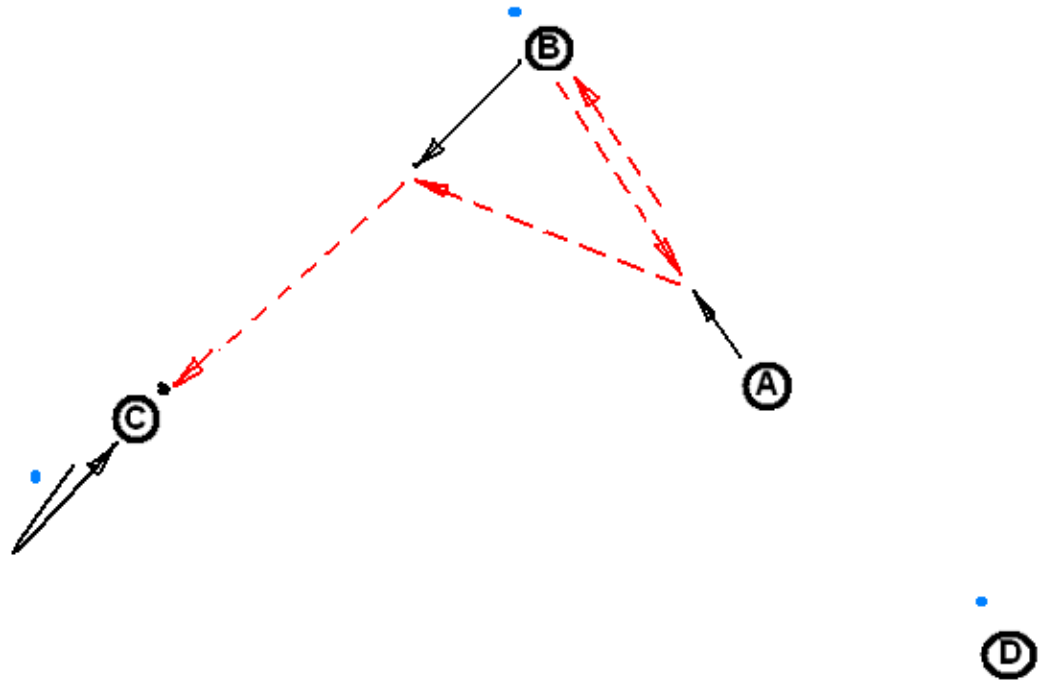
MAJOR COACHING POINTS – All passes are to be one-touch passes, but if a second touch is needed to stop the practice from braking down, the player should do so but only in this instance as the players must get use to making first time passes, including difficult balls.

MAJOR COACHING POINT – PASS TO FEET AND PASS TO SPACE. The pass to the players at the corners and also the lay-off pass must be made to feet, the angled pass for the players to run onto must be played into the space in front of the player, for him to run onto.

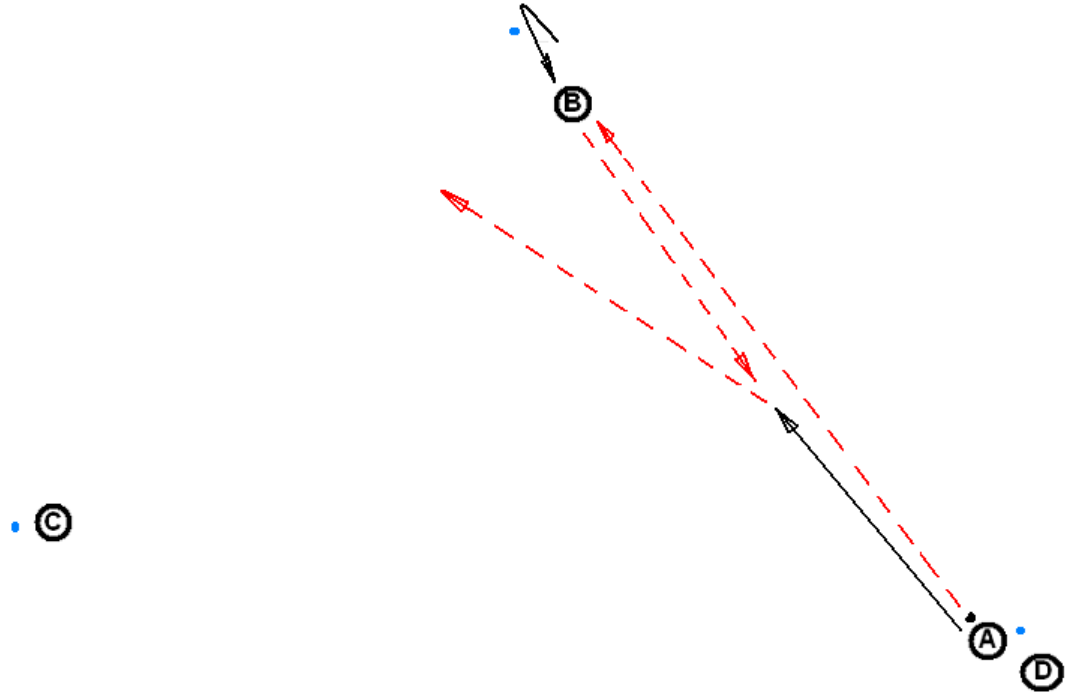
COACHING POINT -

- Players to be in the ready position, standing on the balls of their feet.
- Players to play with head up.
- All players to use both feet to pass with.
- Good communication, players to call for the ball early.
- Players to get over the ball keeping the ball low to the ground.

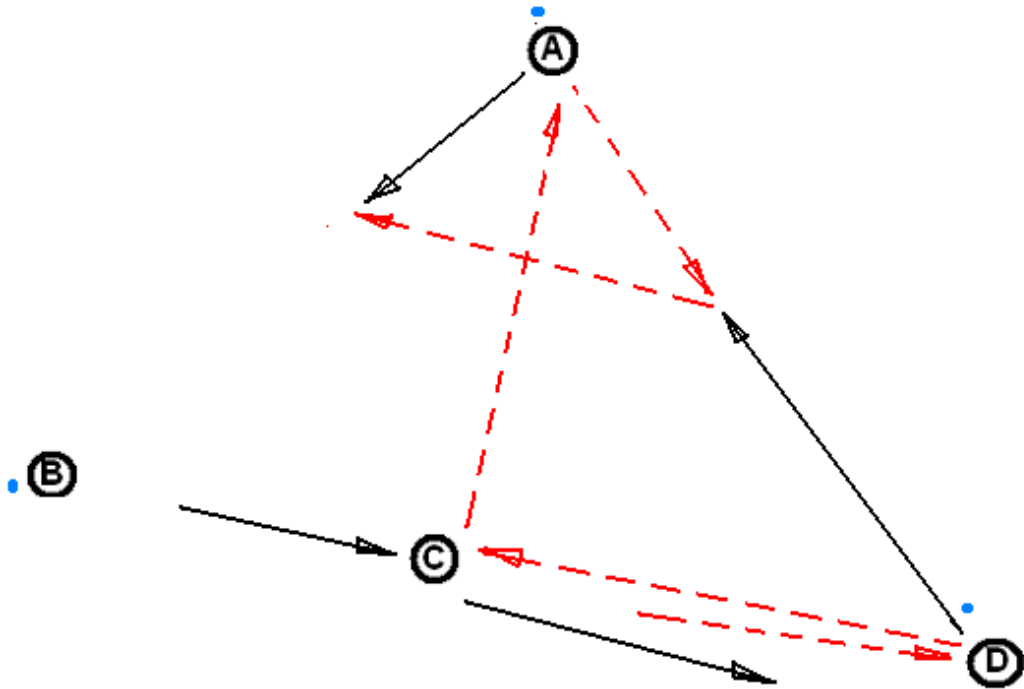
DEVELOPMENT – The players at the corners must ‘check’ away from the ball before they receive the pass, as if to create space for themselves by taking an opponent away. Player must check away at the correct time, as the ball is being played back into (B), (C) must have checked away and is now coming back towards the player with the ball so (B) can play the ball into him.



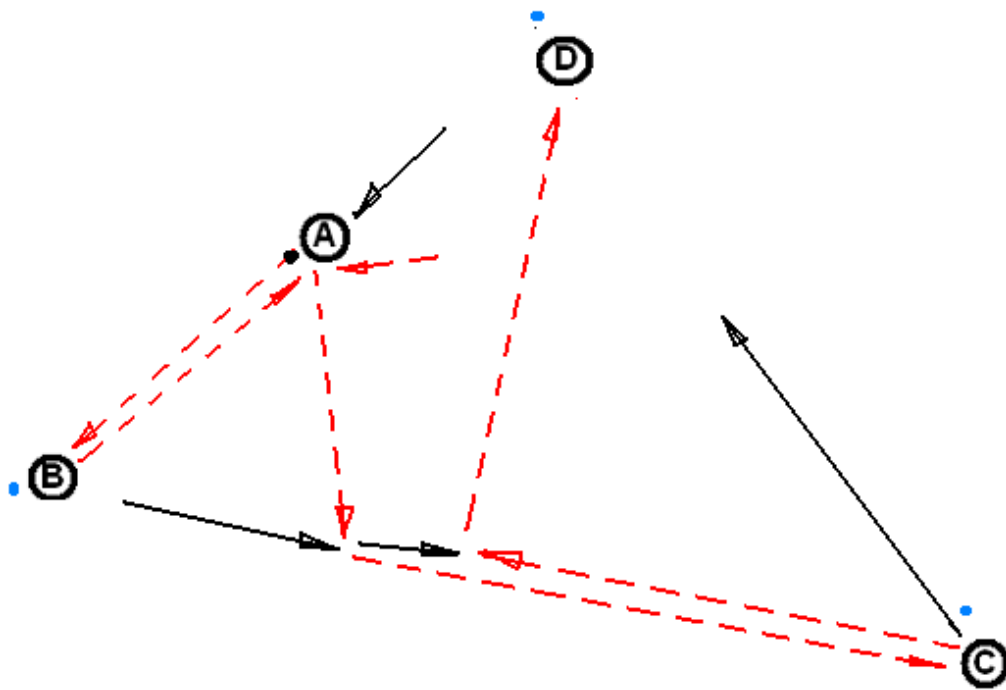
DEVELOPMENT – Make the triangle larger so that the players are passing over a longer distance.



DEVELOPMENT – The passing pattern is now changed in the bottom corner, when the ball has worked its way around the triangle and back to the corner where it started. When player (D) sets the ball back to (C), (C) must pass the ball across the triangle to player (A). Player (D) must move to support player (A). Player (A) plays a one-two off (D).



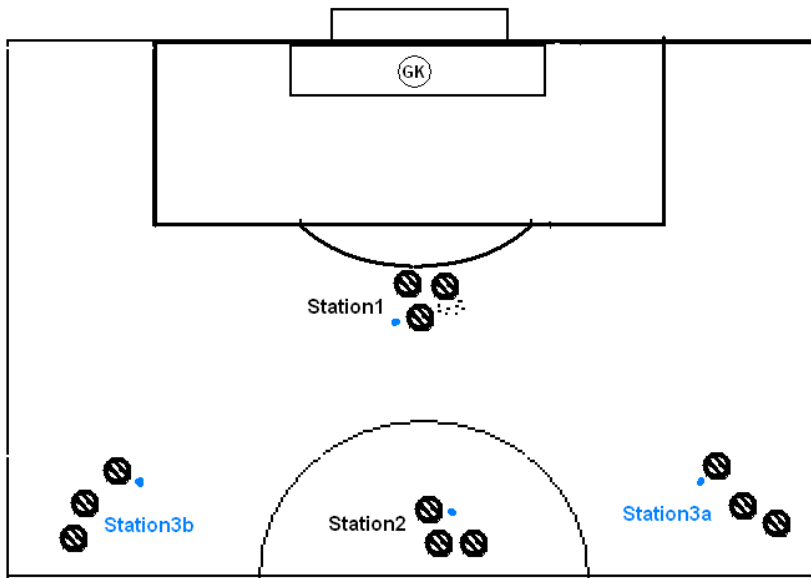
Player (A) must play a one-two with (B) as before with (B) passing to (C), but once again the passing movement changes in the bottom corner with the ball switched across the area.



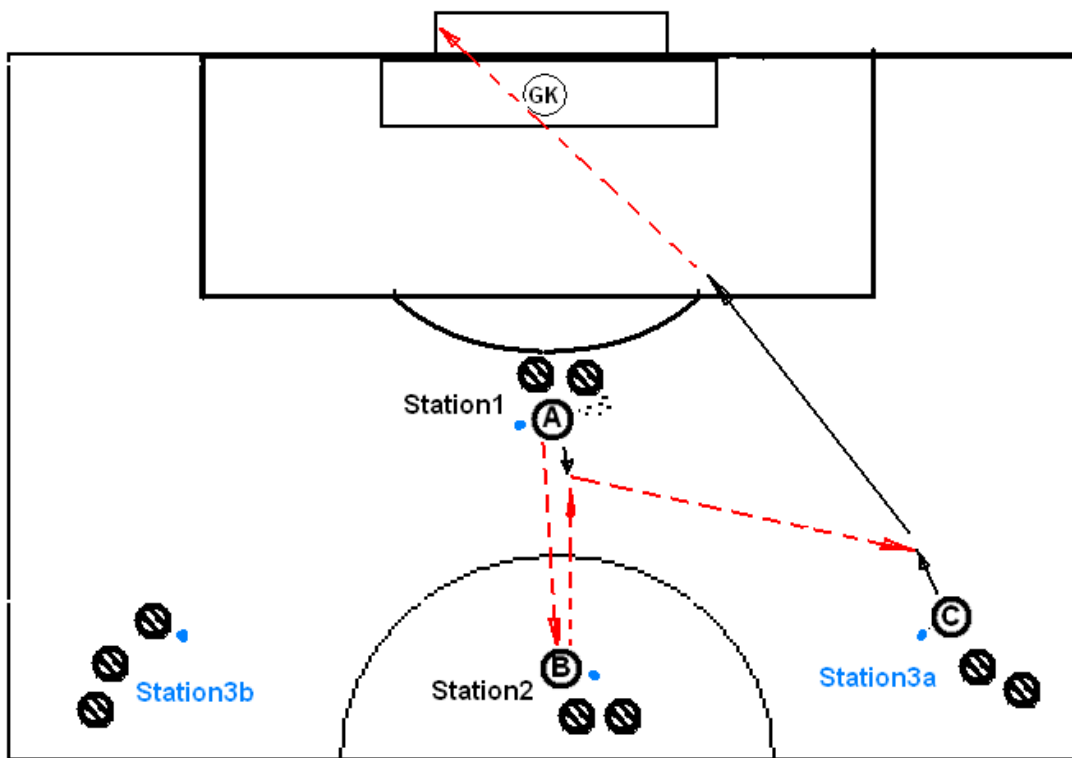
ONE TOUCH PASSING AND FINISHING. PASS AND ROTATE DRILLS.

12 players, 1 goalkeeper and a supply of balls.

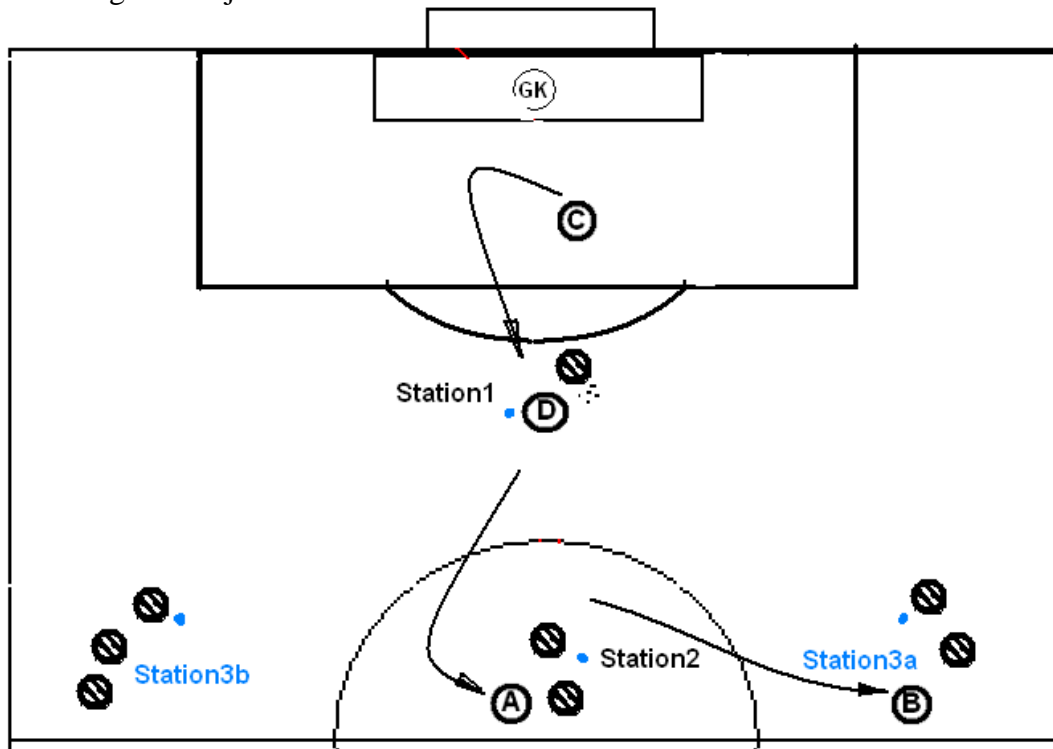
AREA – Half of a full-sized pitch. Four stations, 3 players at each station



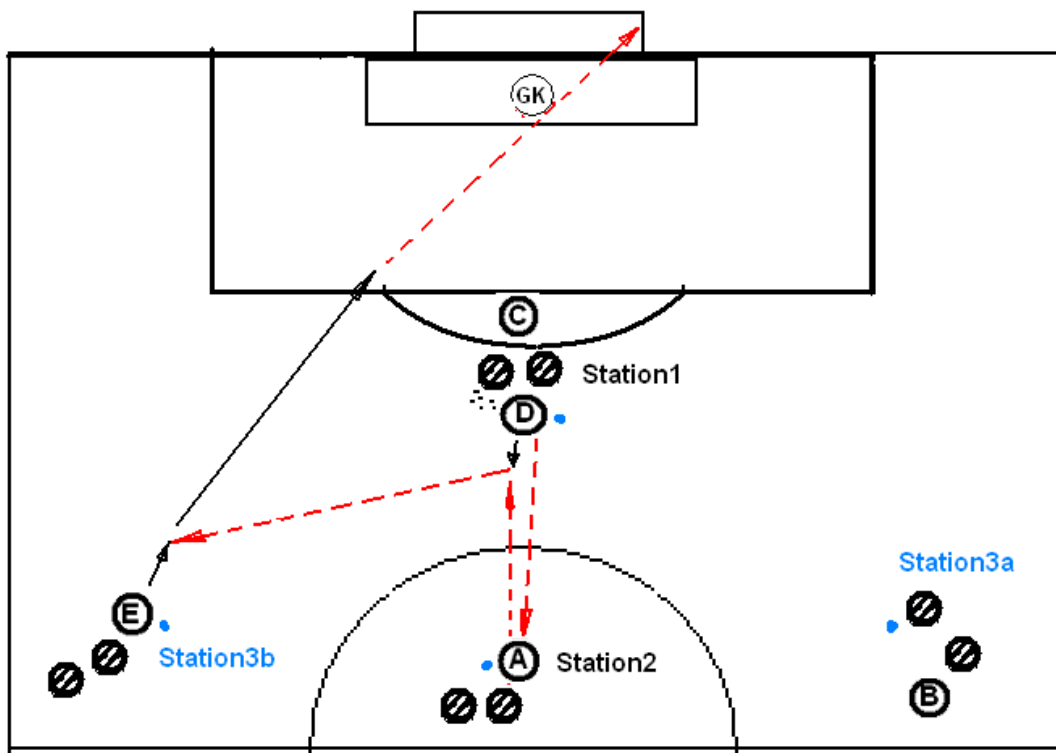
Player (A) plays the ball into player (B) and follows his pass. Player (B) sets the ball back to player (A). Player (A) opens his body up and plays an angled pass in front of player (C). Player (C) must knock the ball out of his feet and run with the ball towards the penalty area and shoot at goal.



Player (A) joins station 2. Player (B) joins station 3A. Player (C) retrieves the ball he shot at the goal and joins station 1.



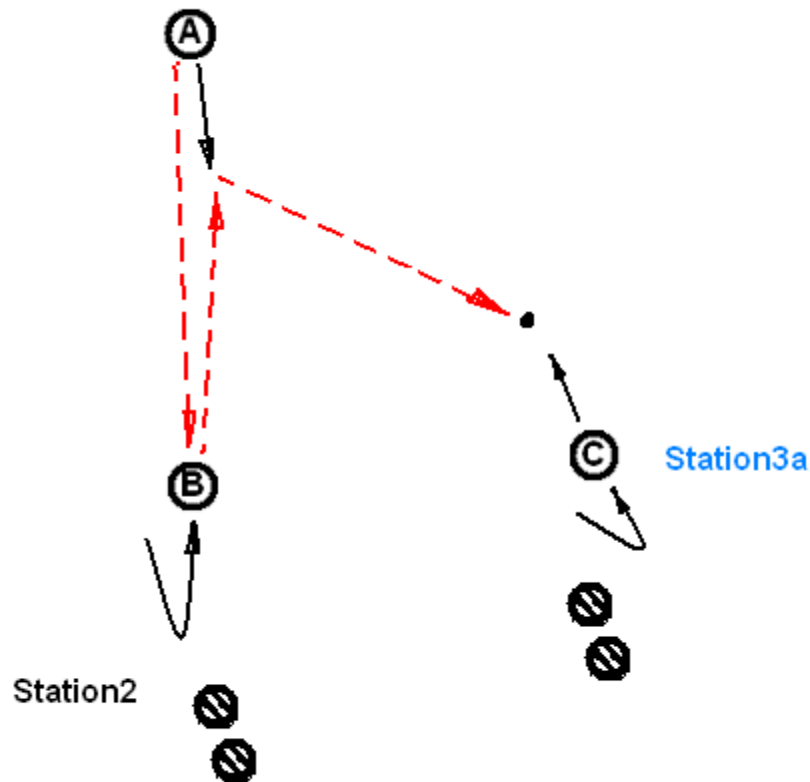
The practice is repeated with the ball passed out to station 3B.



COACHING POINTS –

- One touch passing with the players getting over the ball, keeping the ball low.
- Players being in the ready position of the balls of their feet.
- Players playing with their heads up.
- Ensure that players play using both feet.
- Accuracy of pass. Passes to feet and passes in front of players.
- Good communication between players with early calls.
- The player who is attempting to shoot, must have a good first touch, getting the ball out of the feet allowing him to run with the ball comfortably.
- Good finishing with the ball struck early and hit low.

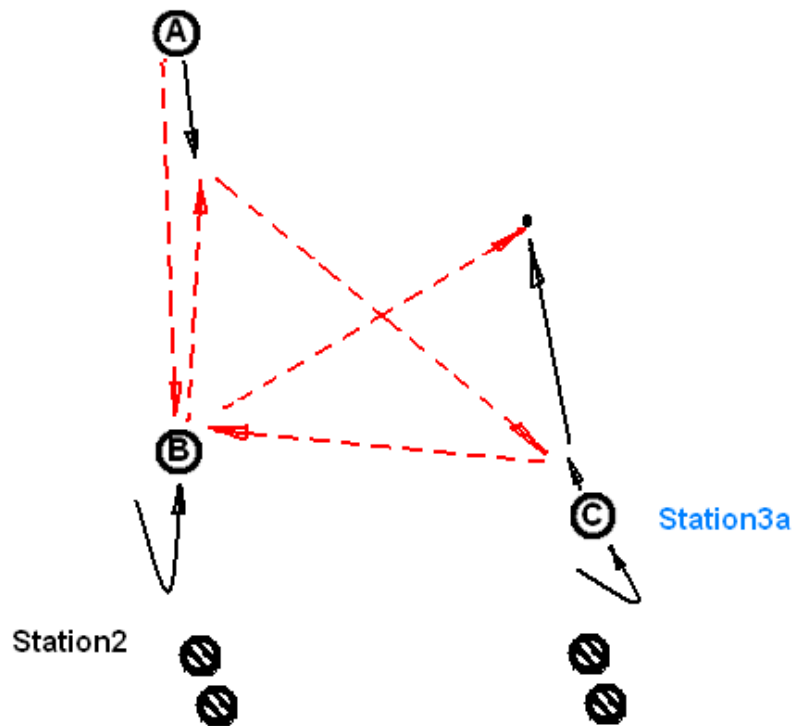
DEVELOPMENT – The players must ‘check’ away from the ball before they receive the ball.



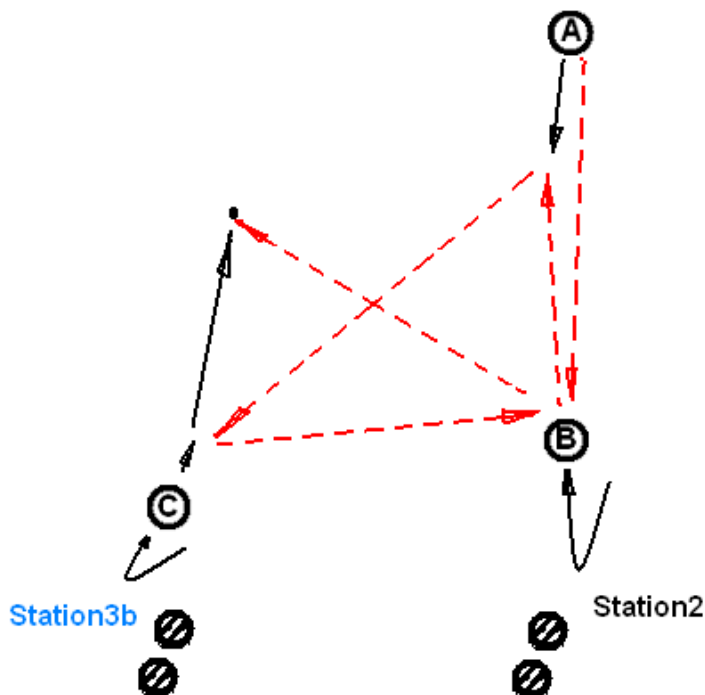
ORGANISATION POINT – Make sure that the players are not standing in lines at the stations. If so, the players will not be able to check away with players standing behind them. The players waiting at each station must stand well back away from the player who is going to receive the ball, so that player has plenty of space to work in.

DEVELOPMENT – Player (A) plays a one-two with (B) before passing to (C) as before.

Player (C) must now bounce the ball off player (B). When (C) passes to (B), he must start his run towards the goal. (B) must play the return pass in front of (C) for him to drive the ball on towards the penalty area to enable him to shoot once again.



The practice is also repeated on the left with the ball going out to station 3B.

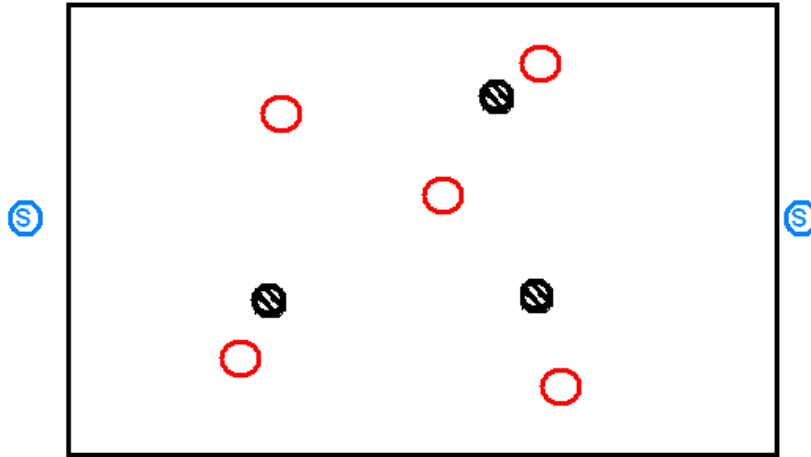


DEVELOPMENT – Change the goalkeepers position to encourage different type of shots.

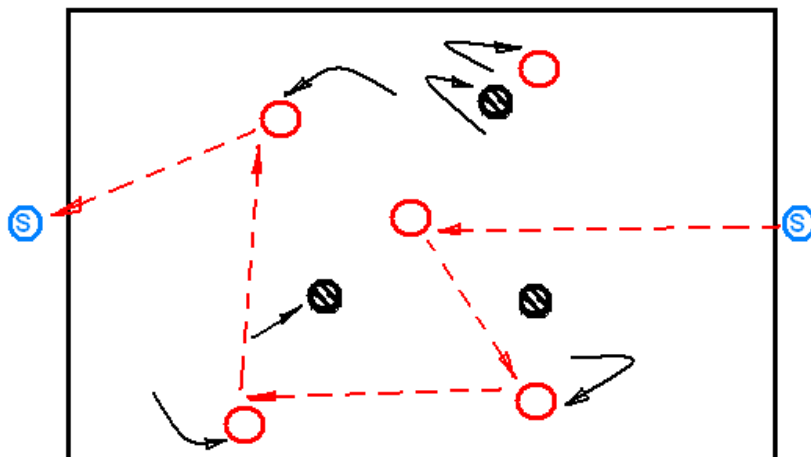
ONE-TOUCH KEEP AWAY POSSESSION GAME.

5 v 3 WITH TWO SERVERS / TARGET MEN.

AREA –



The players must get the ball from one server to the other server using one-touch play without the three opponents intercepting the ball.



Once the player have past the ball to one server, the players must then work the ball back to the other server still only using one-touch passing. Balls can be passed back to the same server who just passed the ball out.

If the opponents intercept the ball, they must pass the ball to either server.

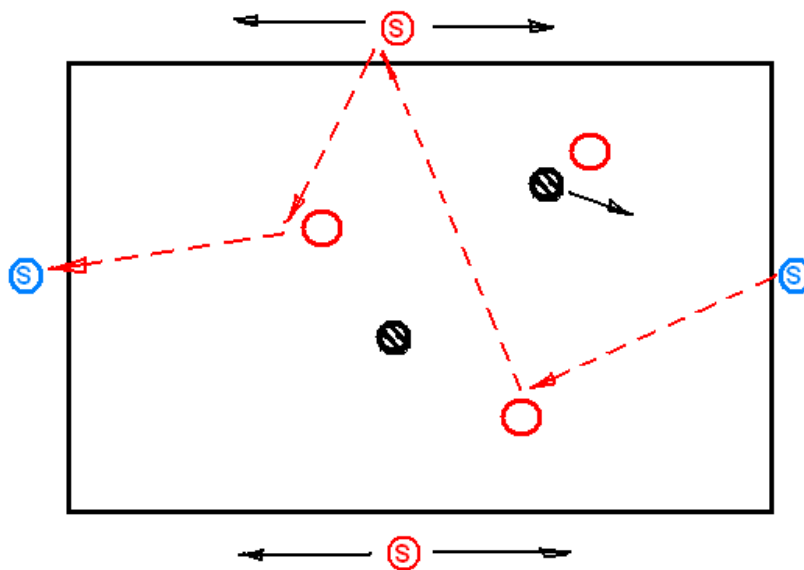
COACHING POINTS –

- **AWARENESS.** Players must look before they receive the ball. The players must know where they are going to play the ball before they receive the ball.
- The players must look backwards and not just only forwards to retain possession.
- Players should take up a side-on stance to get a better view of the area.
- **COMMUNICATION.** Good early calling to guide the receiving player on what his passing options are.

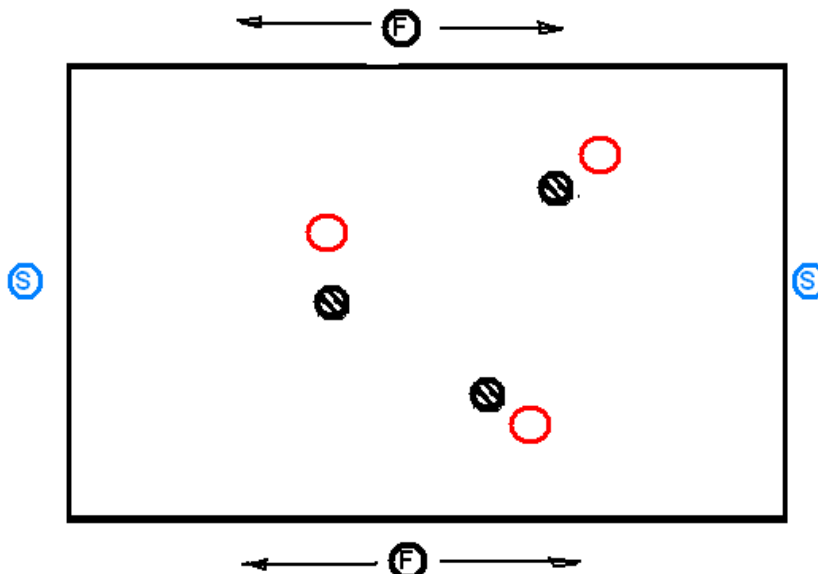
- **QUALITY OF PASSING.** Good quality of passes, keeping the ball low to the ground. Passes to feet and passes to space.
- Players to keep a good shape and spread out giving width and depth.
- Players are encouraged to give good passing angles.
- **CREATE SPACE.** Players must create space for themselves by checking away from the ball to lose a marker, and also setting the ball and spinning off to receive the ball back.

DEVELOPMENT – Two target men / servers, 3 v 2 with two wide assisting servers down the sides of the area (turning the game into 5 v 2).

The two wide assisting servers must stay outside of the area, but can move up and down the sides giving supporting angles. The se two players can play using two touches.



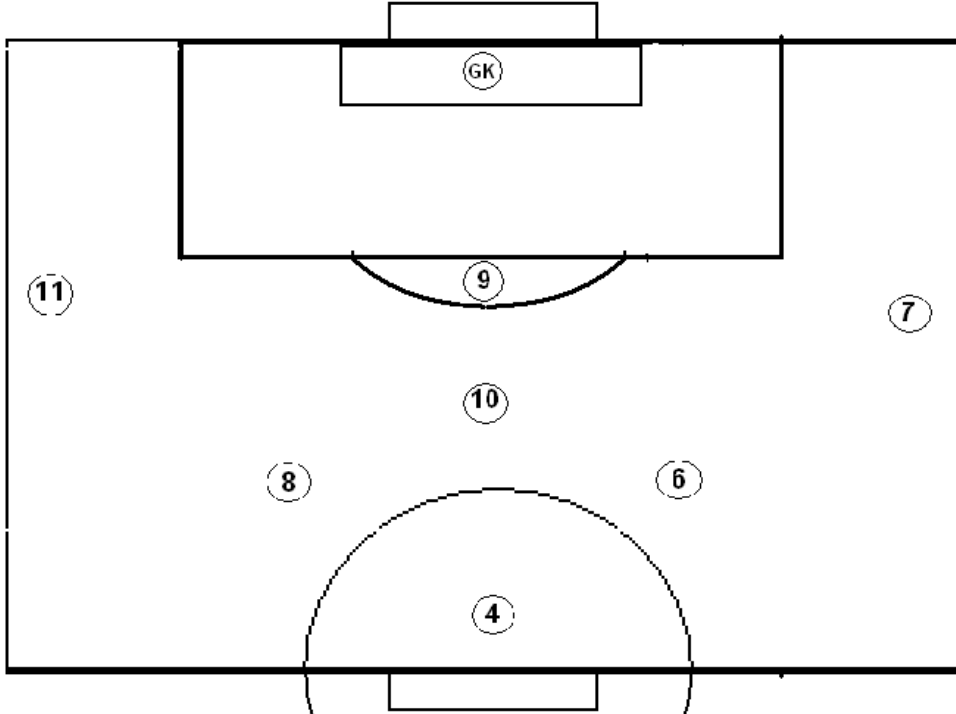
DEVELOPMENT – The game is now 3 v 3 in the middle. The two wide assisting servers are now floaters and support both sets of players, passing to whichever team has possession.



THE AJAX SYSTEM OF PLAY.

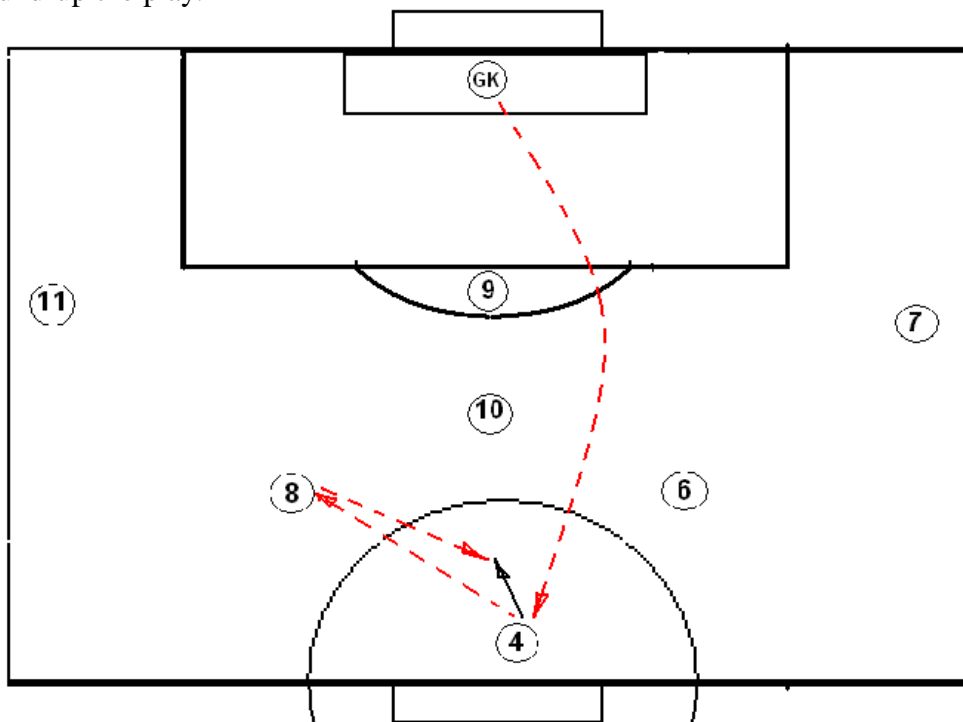
SHADOW PLAY TURNING INTO A ATTACKING PHASE OF PLAY.

AREA – Half of a full-sized pitch, with a portable goal on the half-way line.



Seven players lined-up in attacking formation with a goalkeeper in the oppositions goal.

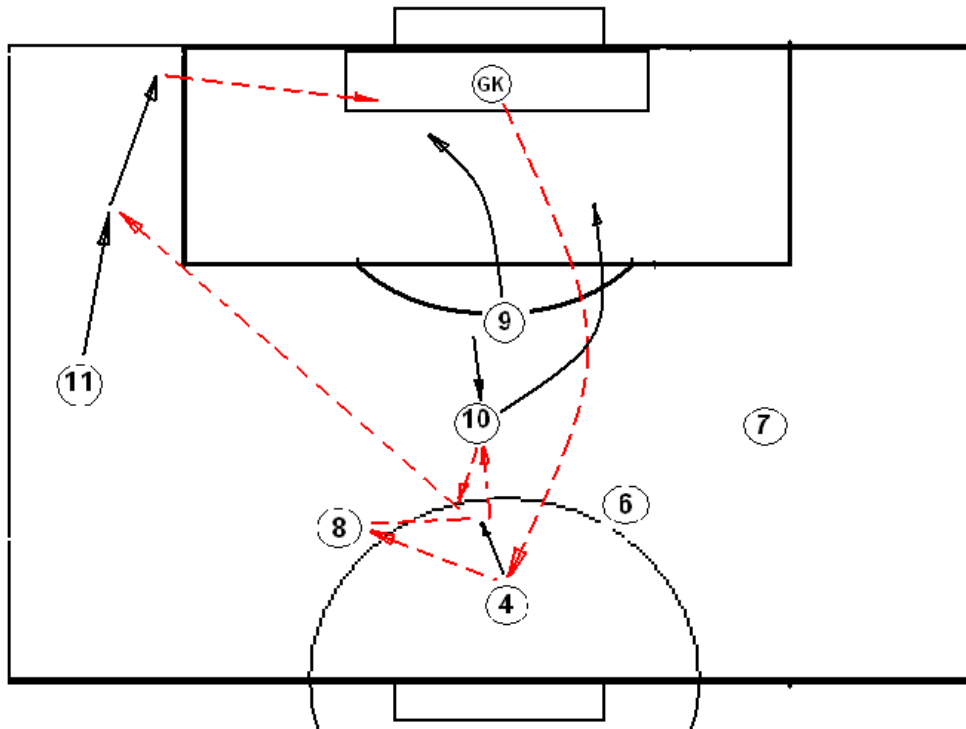
The practices always begins with the goalkeeper kicking the ball long towards the attacking teams goal on the half-way line, for the number 4 to control the ball and build-up the play.



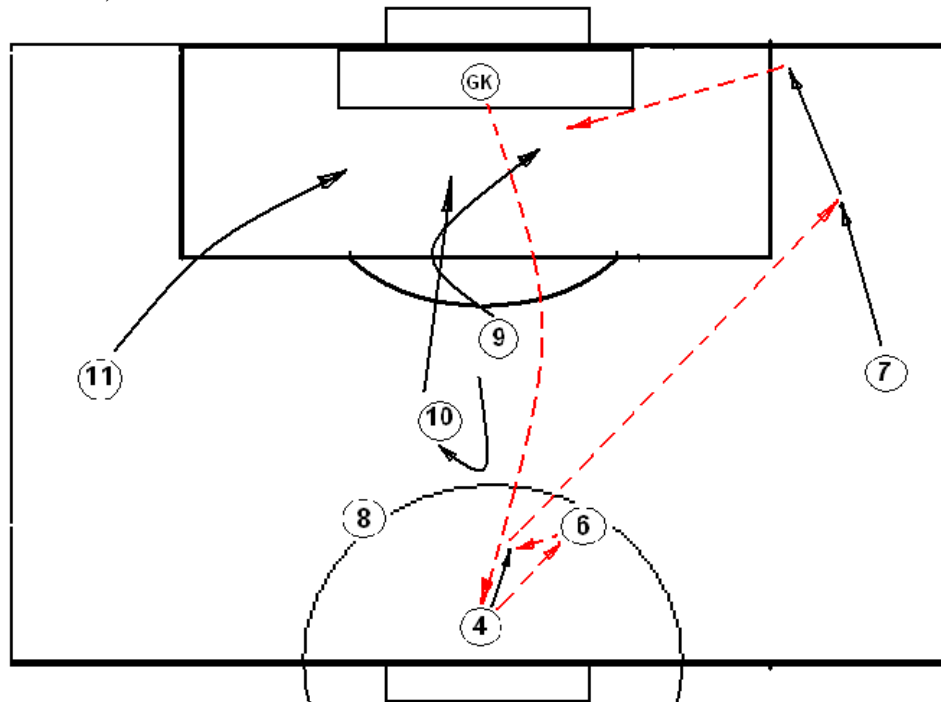
The attacking team have to build-up the play in the central area using one-touch play. They must link-up with each other to send the ball out wide to either 7 and 11.

The wide players 7 and 11 can use a couple of touches to either drive the ball across the goal or send in a cross.

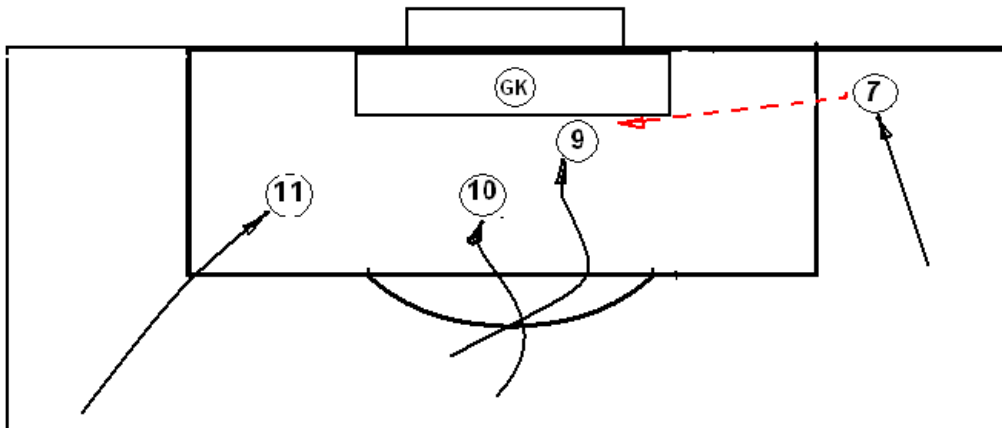
Player 4 always builds-up the play using the two midfield players 6 and 8 and the withdrawn striker number 10, with the ball being played out wide to 11, for him to drive the ball across the goal.



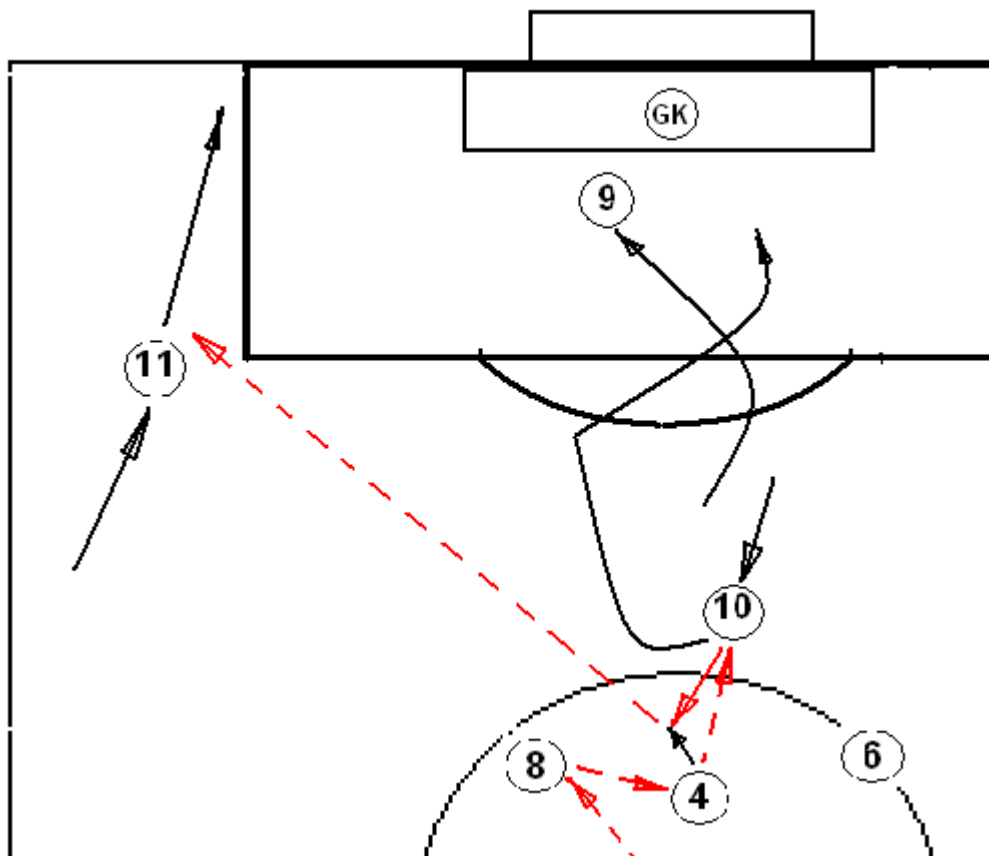
The number 4 links up with player 6 playing a one-two and drives the ball out to number 7, who knocks the ball out of his feet and crosses the ball into the box.



When a ball is played into the penalty box, 9 the centre-forward must attack the ball, number 10 the withdrawn striker must also get into the penalty box. The Wide-attacker number 11 must also get into the penalty box.



When 10 drops into midfield to support player 6 and 8 and join-in with the build up play, he must then spin-off to support number 9 to get into the penalty box to get onto the end of the ball played into the penalty area by the wide players.



GAME SITUATION – If the attacking team score, they gain one point. If the goalkeeper makes a save or the strikers miss the target, the goalkeeper gains one point.

COACHING POINTS – The build-up play must be one-touch using the coaching points made earlier.

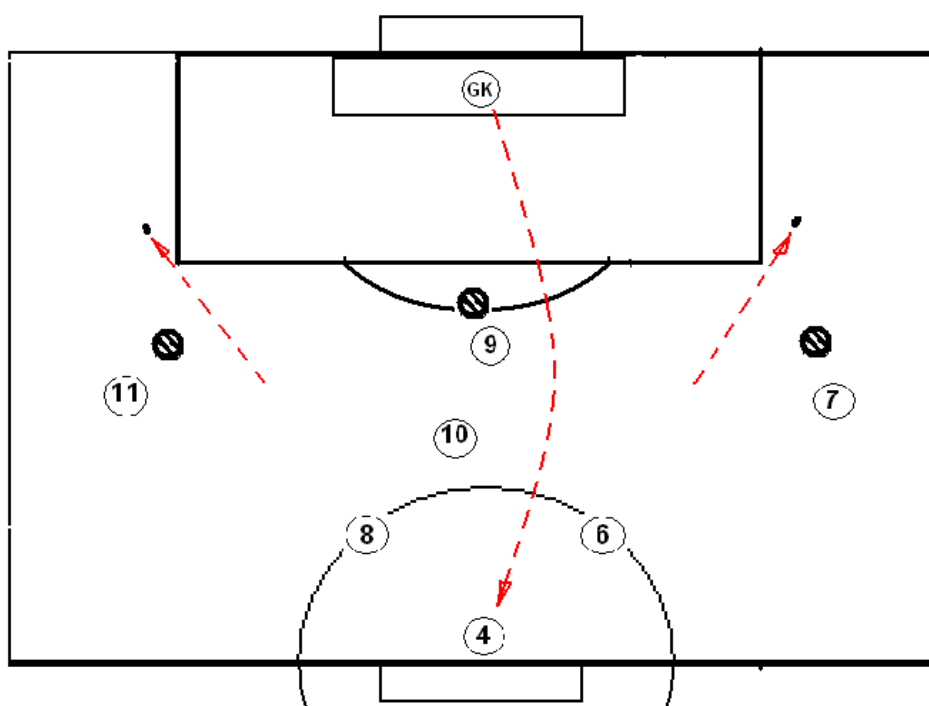
- Players must look around themselves before they receive the ball. The players must know where they are going to play the ball before they receive the ball.
- The players must look backwards and not just only forwards to retain possession.
- Players should take up a side-on stance to get a better view of the area to received the ball with an open body.
- Good early calling to guide the receiving player on what his passing options are.
- Good quality of passes, keeping the ball low to the ground. Passes to feet and passes to space.
- Players are encouraged to give good passing angles.

DEVELOPMENT – Three defenders are brought-in to mark the centre-forward 9 and the two wide players 7 and 11.

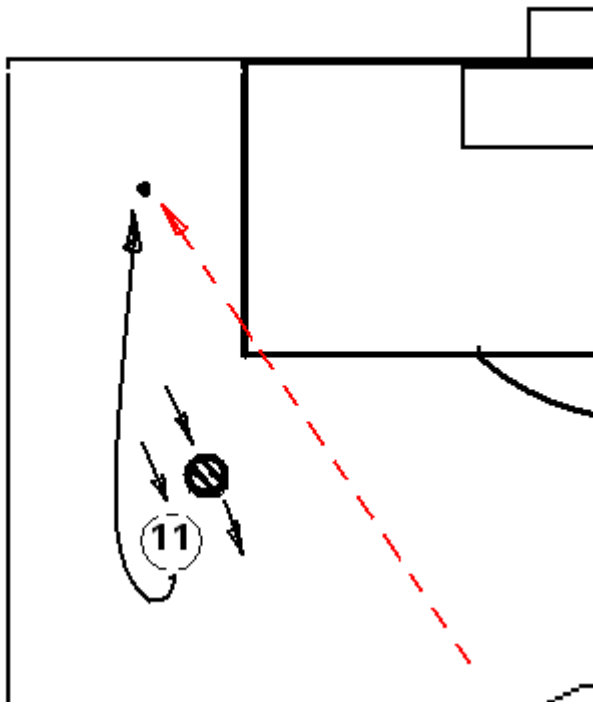
If the opposition win possession of the ball they must try to score into the goal on the half-way line.

The attacking play is as before but with players trying to get the winger in behind the oppositions defence.

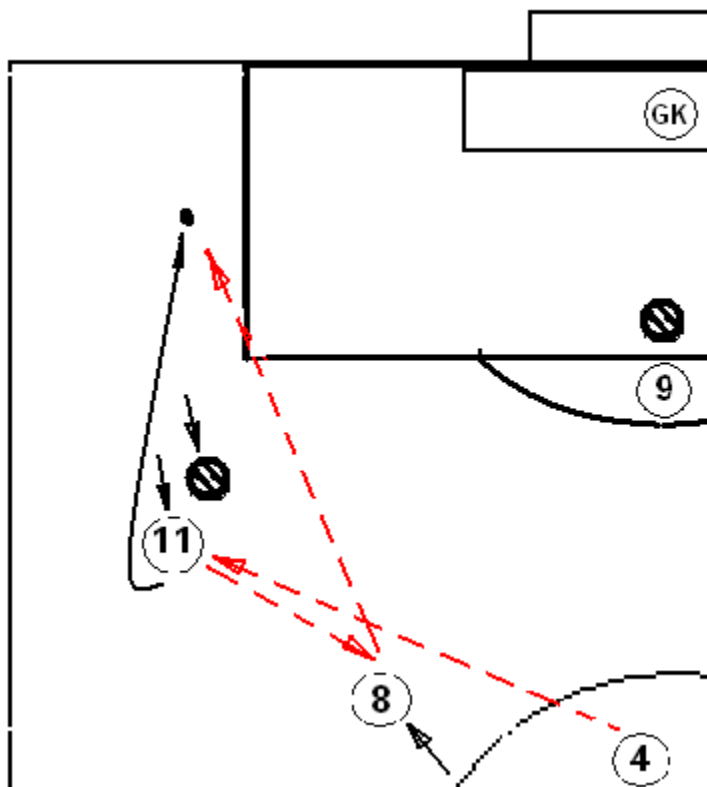
This can be achieved by the ball being hit-in diagonally behind the defenders for 7 and 11 to run onto.



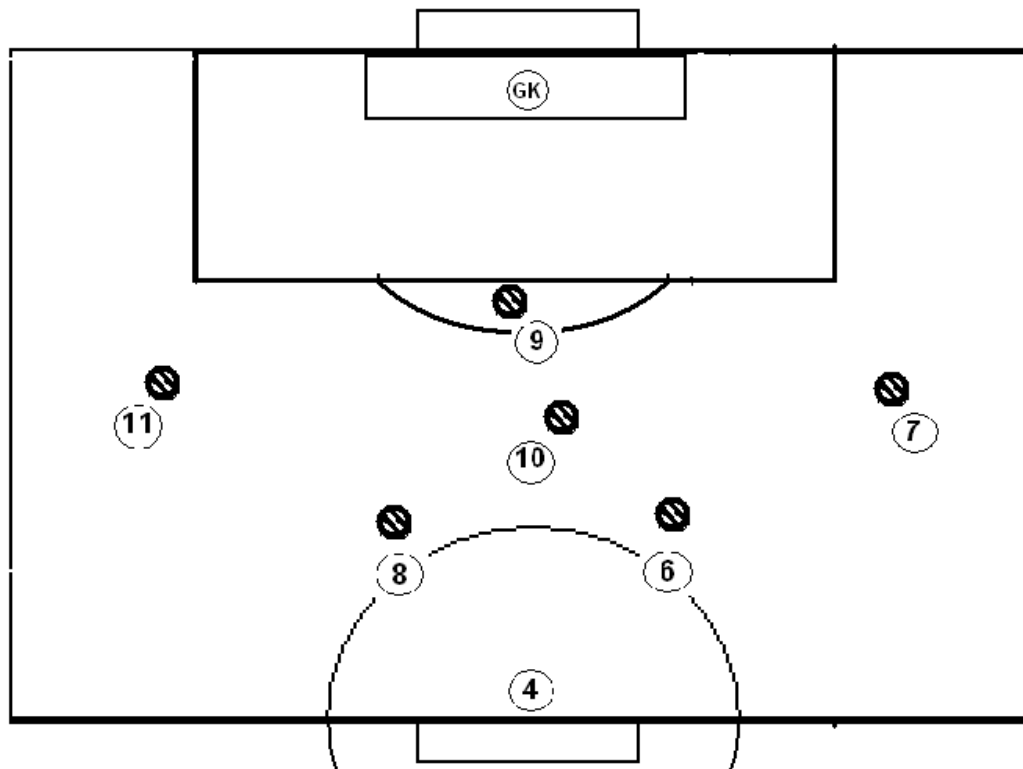
The wide players should check-in and then spin-off to receive the through ball.



The wide players can also play one-twos off the midfielders to run onto the through ball.



DEVELOPMENT – Introduce three more opposition players to mark the withdrawn striker, and also the two centre-midfield players.



If the defending team win possession of the ball, they are encouraged to play the ball out and try to score into the goal on the half-way line. The goal on the half-way line represents the oppositions withdrawn striker (10) and gives the defending team an outlet to pass the ball.

COACHING POINT – The attacking team is encouraged to create diamonds to make passing options and to keep shape.

AJAX AMSTERDAM - FIRST TEAM TRAINING SESSION.

De Meer Stadion / training ground – Saturday the 23rd of March 1996.

Training session taken by Louis van Gaal and his assistant Mr. Wolfs.

This training session was the teams last session before the following evenings game versus Feyenoord at home.

10:30am – Warm-up – Players in a line working across the pitch from side to side with the players performing different movements for five minutes. This was followed by ten minutes static stretches. The players then performed more running activities for another five minutes.

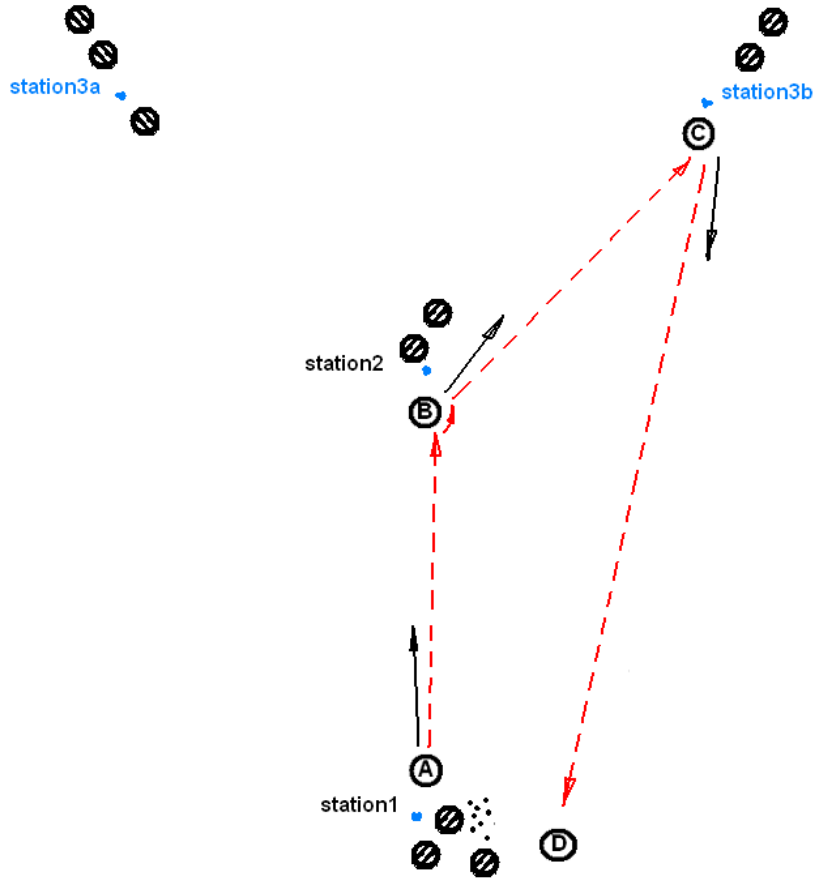
PASS AND ROTATE DRILL.

Group of 14 players including the goalkeeper Edwin van der Saar. Supply of balls.

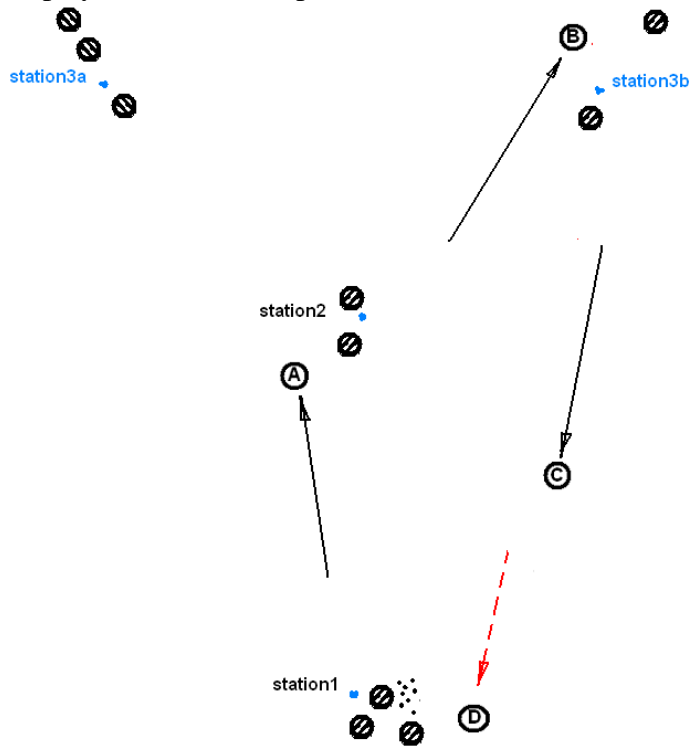
Four groups, Five players at station 1 and Three players at stations 2, 3a and 3b.



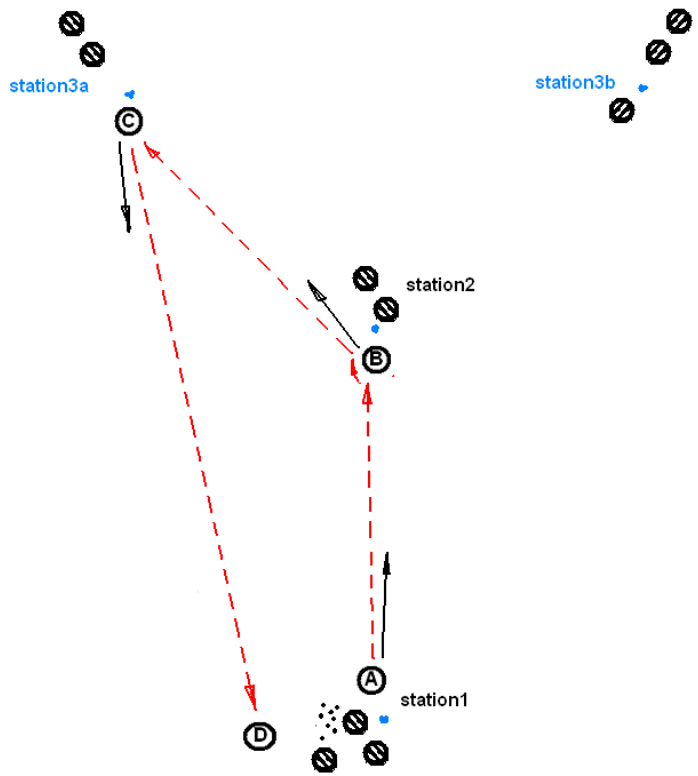
Player (A) passes to player (B)'s feet, player (B) receives the ball half-turned and passes the ball into player (C)'s feet. Player (C) knocks the ball out of his feet and then drives the ball into a waiting player at group 1.



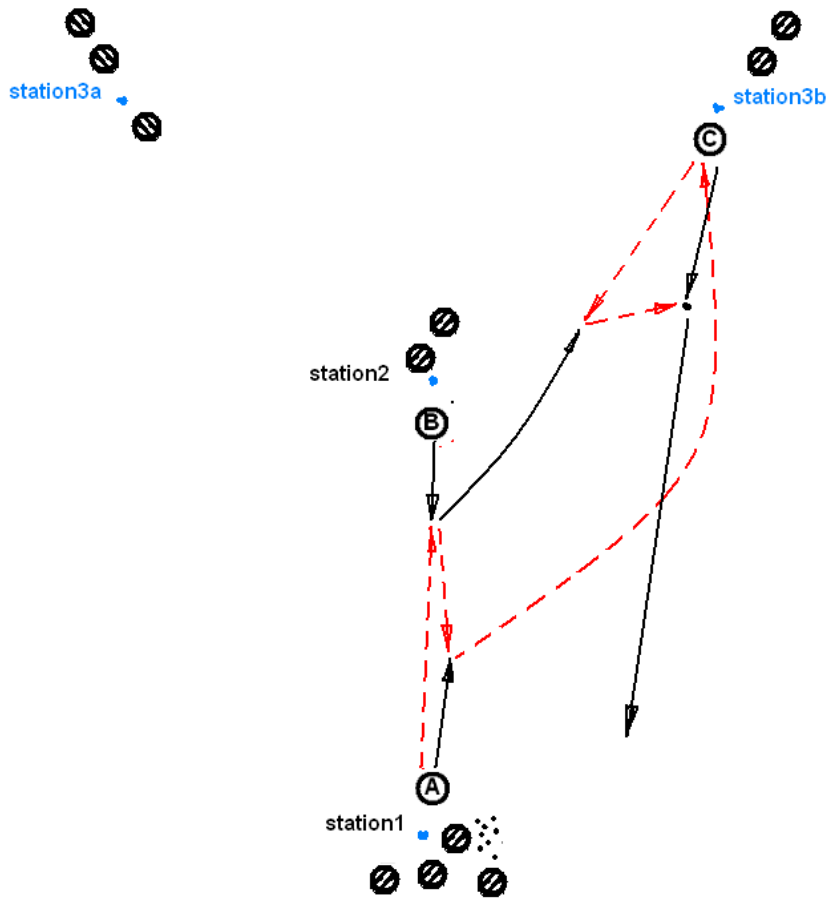
All players follow their passes and rotate to the station that they passed the ball to.



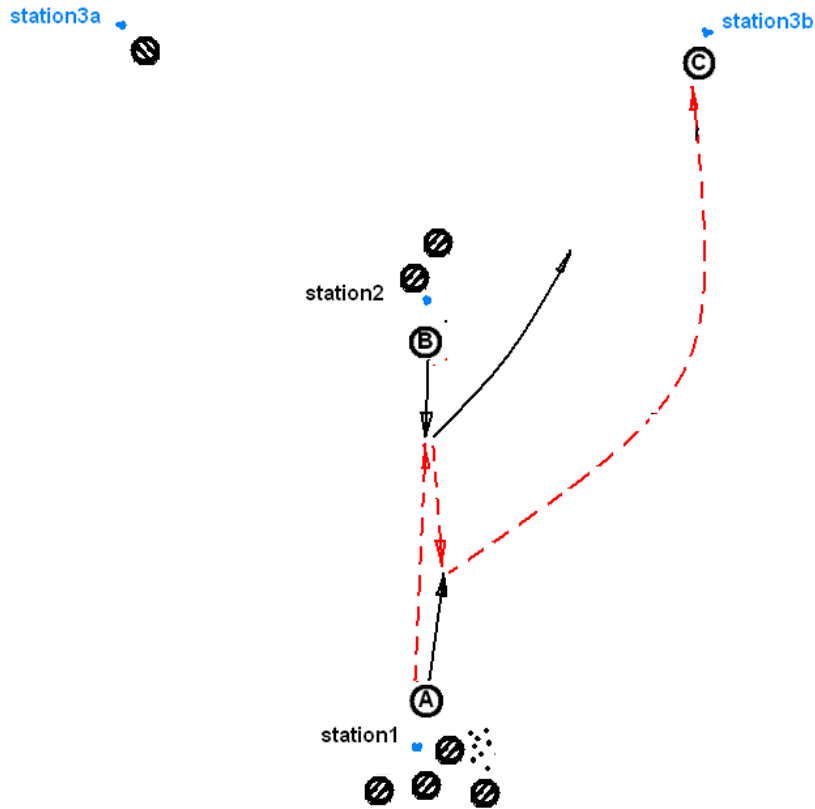
The practice is then repeated with the ball passed out to station 3a.



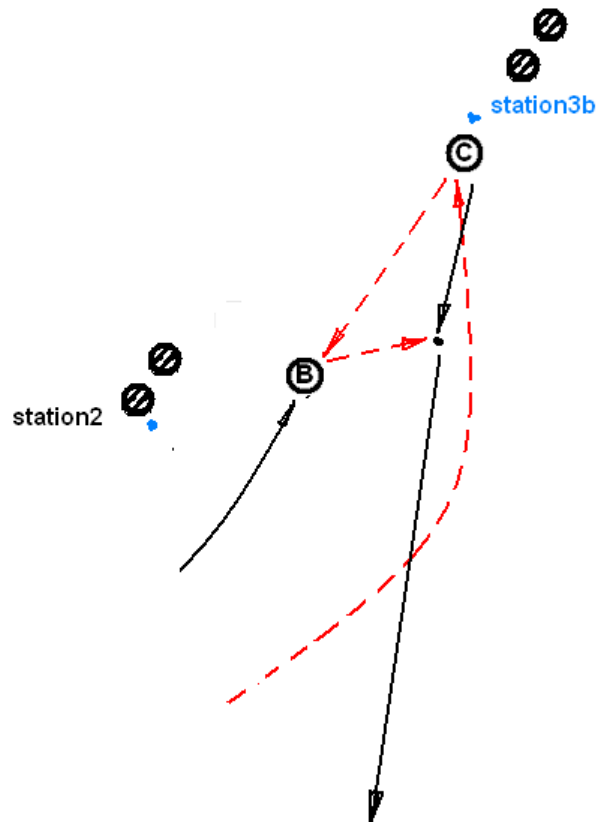
DEVELOPMENT – Two extra passes are added.



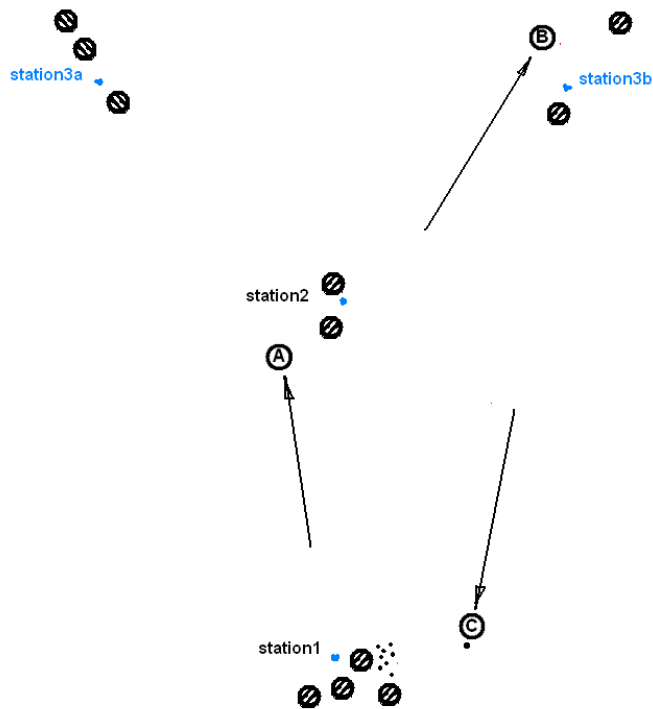
Player (B) must set the ball back to player (A), player (A) must hit a first time lofted pass to player (C).



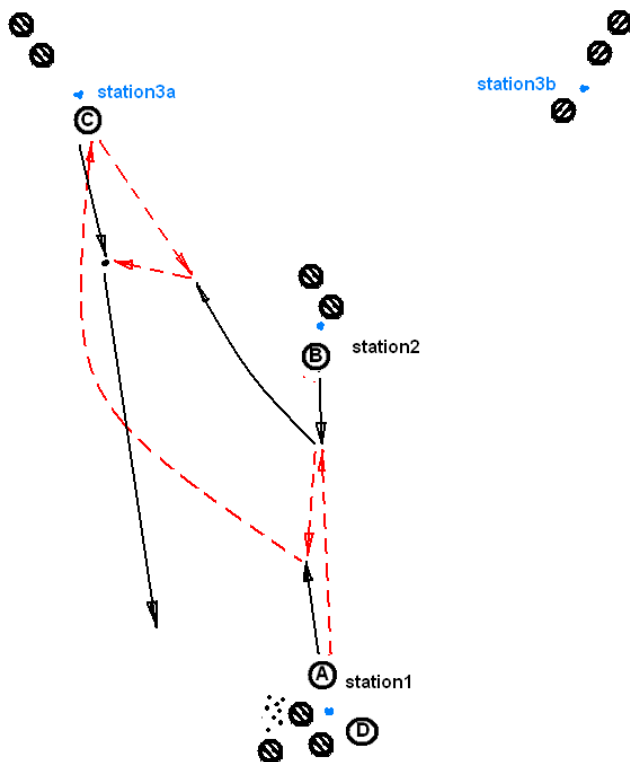
(B) must move quickly to support his player (C). Player (C) must knock the ball down into player (B) who bounces the ball back to (C). (C) runs with the ball back to station1.



Player (A) moves to station 2 and player (B) moves to station 3b as before.



The practice is repeated with the ball being passed out to station 3a.



COACHING POINTS –

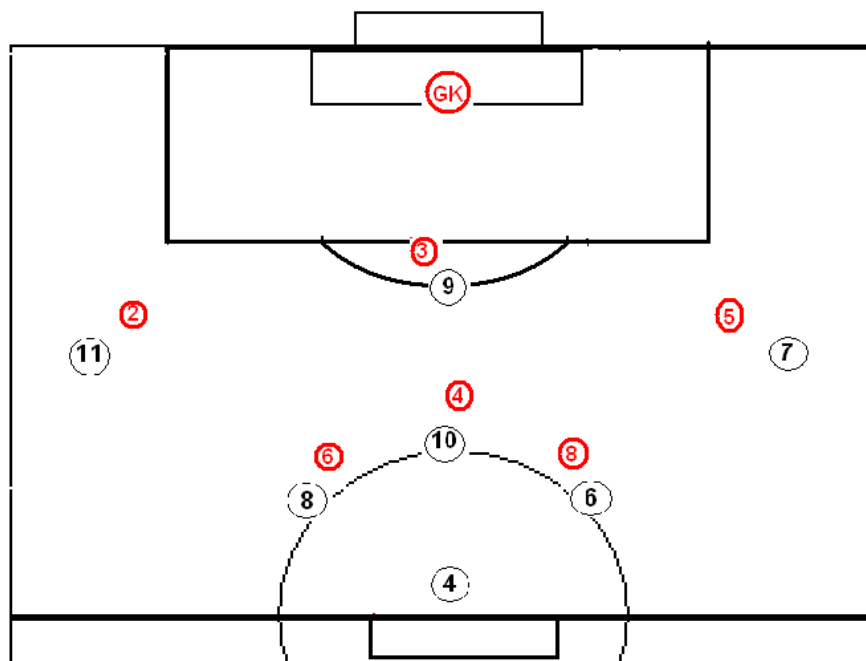
- Quality passing. Good crisp passes along the ground.
- High tempo. Everything was done at a high tempo with the ball zipped around.
- Players must be in ready positions to get into line with the ball to play the one-touch passes.
- Good clear early calling for the ball.

PHASE OF PLAY – ATTACK v DEFENCE.

This was a similar practice to what I saw at Ibrox, but this time with the actual Ajax players performing the tasks.

The attacking team shaped up in their 3-4-3 formation. The defensive team also adopted the same shape, as Feyernood also play the same formation.

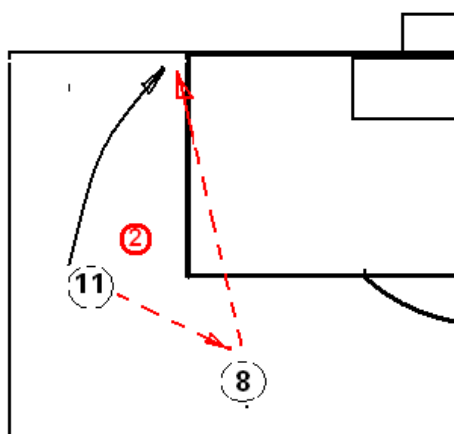
AREA – Half of a full-sized pitch.



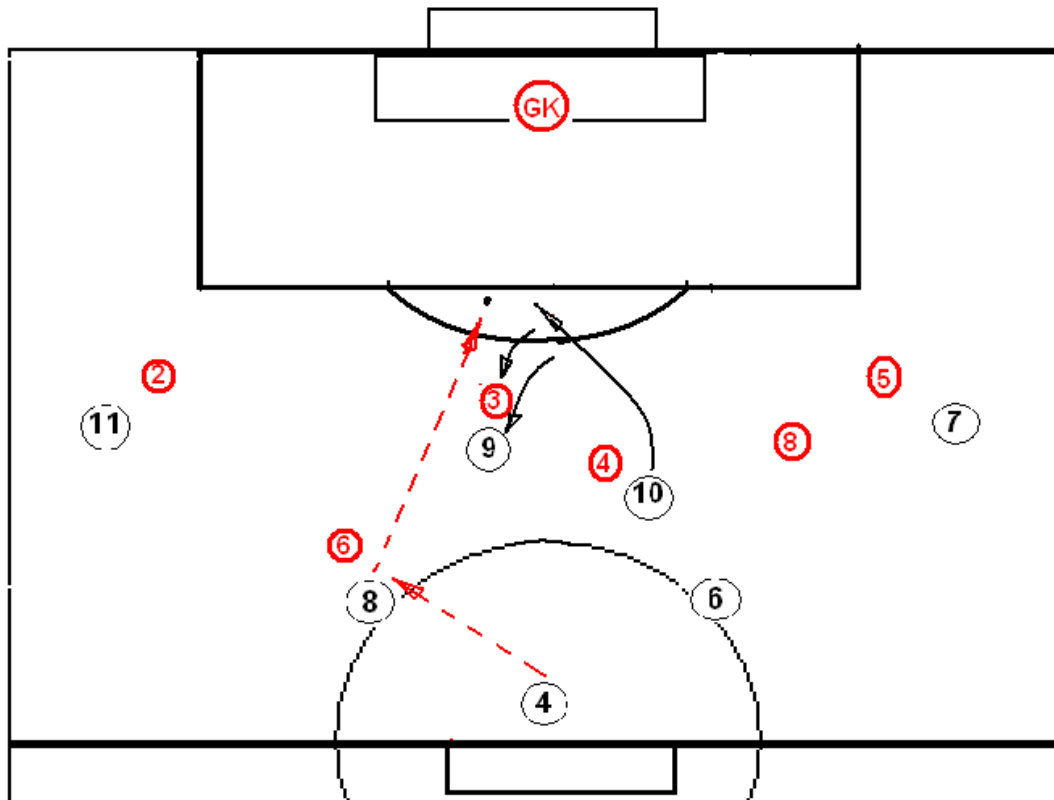
The goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar plays the ball long down the pitch to the attacking teams number 4 (Jari Limanen). Litmanen lined-up in this role which was unusual to him as he would normally play in the withdrawn strikers role of number (10).

4 would build up the play using players 6 and 8, the attacking team would always work the ball out into the wide area for players 7 and 11.

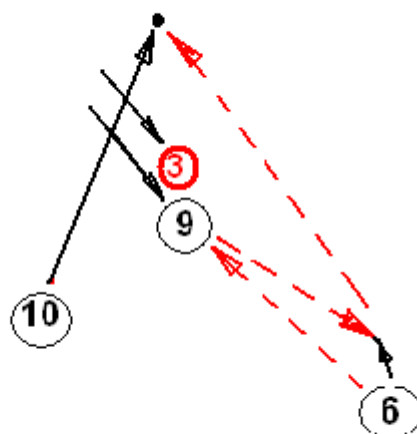
7 and 11 would always try to get the ball in behind the oppositions defence to get to the goal-line before crossing the ball.



If the attacking team played the ball down the middle instead of out wide, number 9 (Kanu) the centre-forward would drop deep to receive the ball pulling his marker out of position, with number 10 (Patrick Kluivert) pushing on into this space.



This was often achieved by making third man runs with 10 Kluivert running onto the ball.



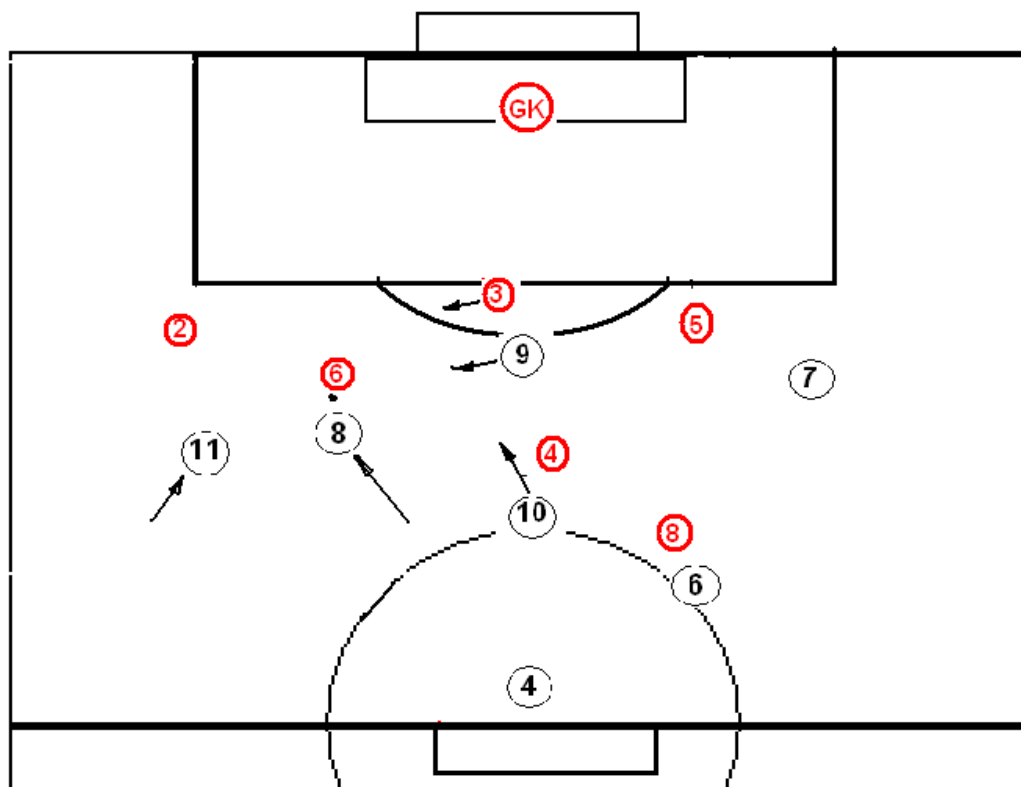
The 'Up back and through' third man run.

ATTACKING TEAM TO PRESS - If the defending team gained possession of the ball, they were instructed to hit early long balls into the attacking teams goal on the half-way line.

This was because Ronald Koeman would be playing for Feynoord the following evening. He had a fine range of passes and would be able to cut the Ajax team open with his long rang passes if allowed space.

So every time one of the defensive players had possession of the ball, Louis van Gaal would scream out “KOEMAN” at the attacking players. This was the message to the attacking team to press the opposition to give them no time and space on the ball.

The attacking team was instructed to force the defensive team backwards or to force them to knock the ball out of play.



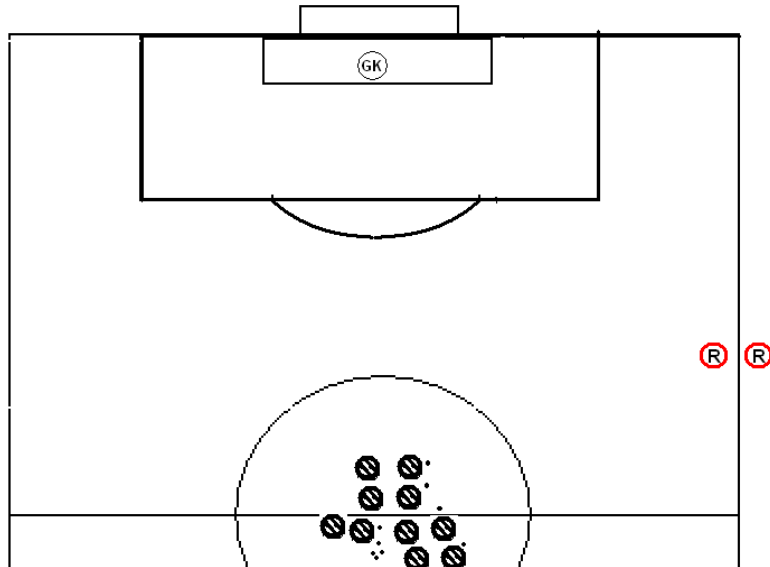
The attacking team were instructed to ‘press’ onto the opposition when the opposition had possession of the ball. The players would have to be switched-on and react quickly, changing from their attacking to defensive roles instantly to allow the defending team no space to make forward passes.

Half-way through the practice, Jari Litmanen who was playing as the attacking teams number 4, changed places the defensive teams number 4. This was so that he could work on his defensive duties in the team.

BASIC CROSSING AND FINISHING.

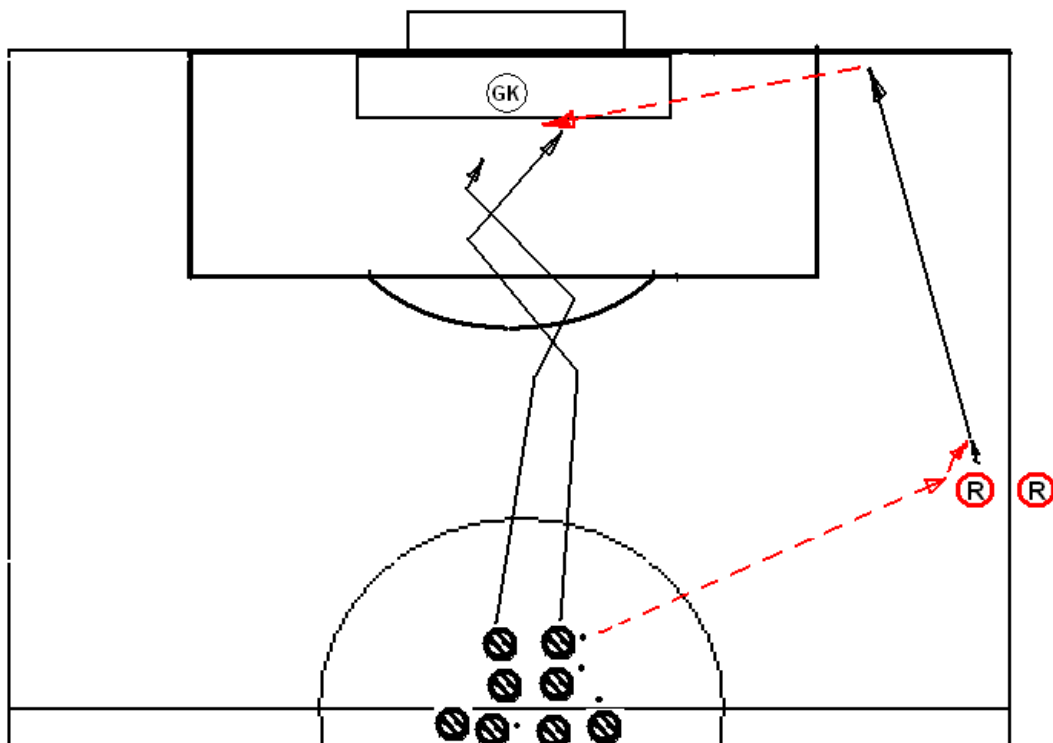
Players in pairs on the half-way line with a supply of balls. Two right-sided players out on the touch-line.

AREA –

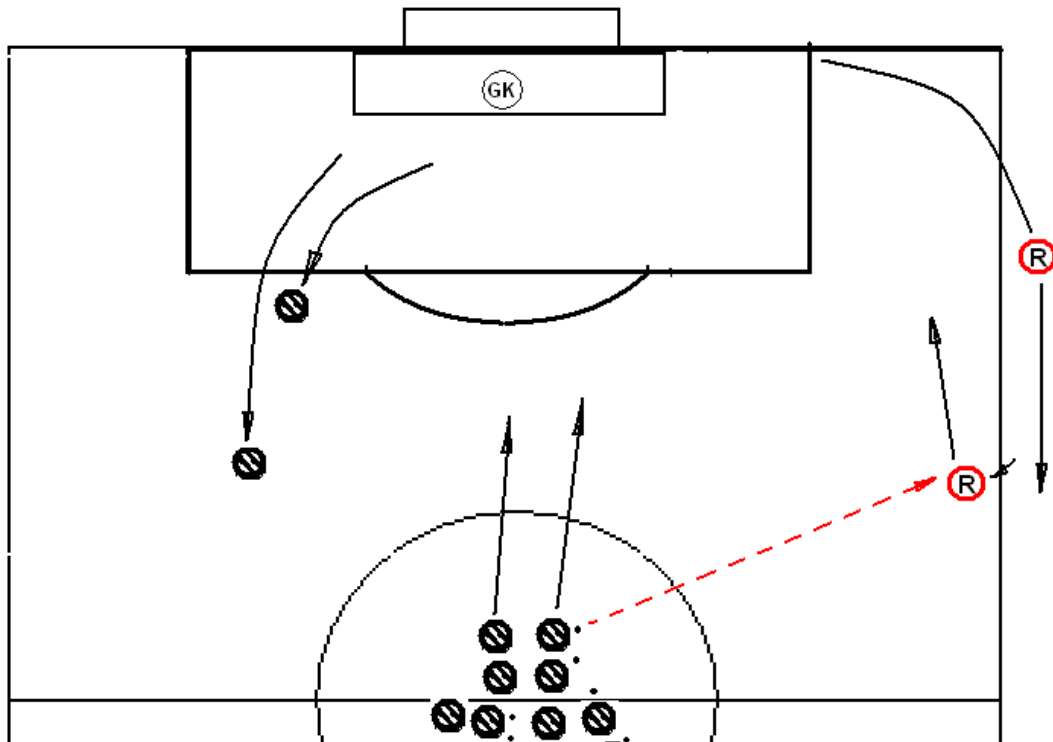


One of the players in the pair passes the ball out wide to one of the wide players. The wide player knocks the ball out of his feet drives down the line and crosses the ball by the dead ball line.

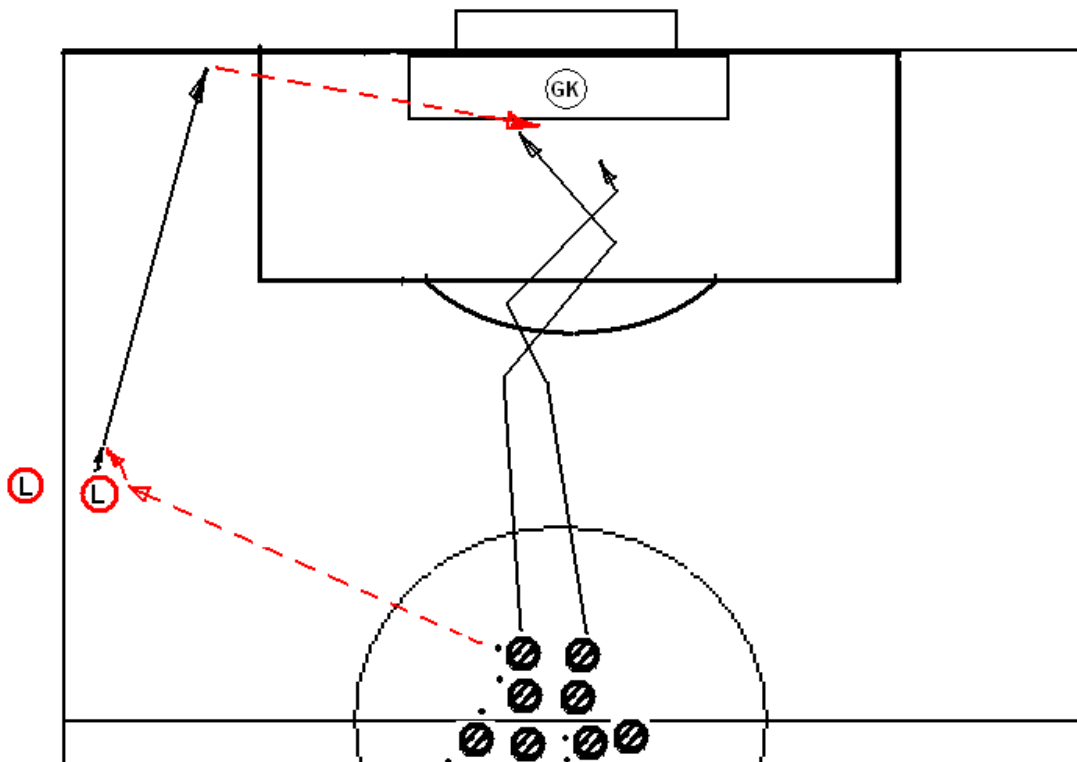
Once the ball is played out wide the two players must dart into the box and try to get onto the end of the crossed ball.



The two wide players take turns in crossing the ball. The next pair of players on the half-way line repeat the practice. The last pair of strikers move back to the half-way line down the left side of the pitch.



After a period of time the practice is repeated with two left footed player positioned out on the left touch-line putting in crosses.



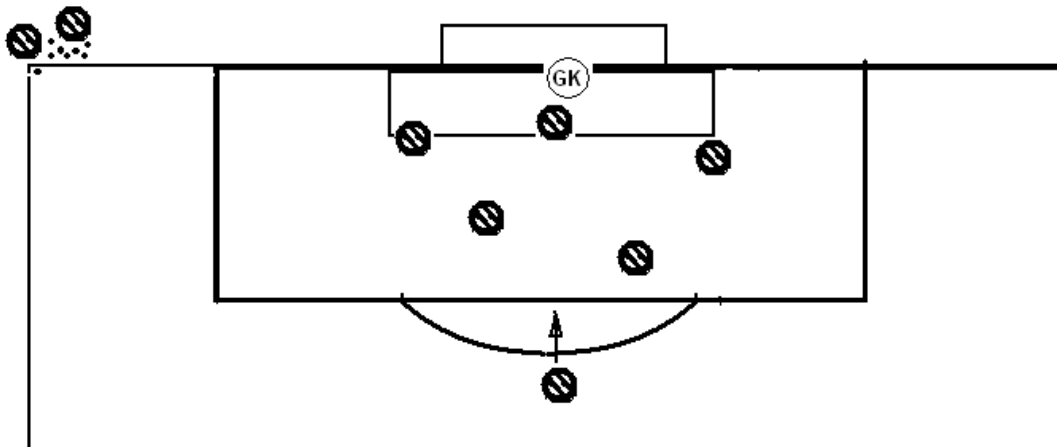
COACHING POINTS –

- The wide players first touch must be good, receive the ball with an open body and knocking the ball out of his feet.
- The wide player must sprint down the line to cross the ball from the dead ball line. The ball was either a high or low cross to near or far post.
- The two attacking players must sprint into the final third and attack the ball played into the box, with one attacking the near side of the goal and the other attacking mid / far side of the goal.
- The two players must make little checked cross over runs. If these moves were not made sharply the players would not be able to get onto the crosses and would still be trying to get into the penalty box when the ball crossed.

CORNERS.

The players then went through their attacking corner routines.

AREA –



Two right footed players take turns sending the ball into the penalty box. One player was positioned at the near post area. One player is put on the goalkeeper. Another player takes up the area towards the back of the penalty area.

Two players are position in the middle of the penalty area to attack the ball. Jari Litmanen is positioned on the edge of the penalty box to knock any cleared balls back into the box.

The same set-up was repeated with the corner being taken on the other side.

The players performed a warm-down at the end. Jari Litmanen and Edwin van der Sar remained behind with Louis van Gaal and did some extra work, with Litmanen practicing his shooting from outside of the box.

Simple practice with Litmanen passing the ball into Van Gaal with him laying the ball off for Litmanen to strike.

The match the following night saw Ajax beat Feynoord with Ajax 2-0. Ronald Koeman played in a very advanced position, in front of the two centre-midfield players, in a kind of number 10 role. Dropping back into the midfield and trying to hit

longer passes from there. Litmanen played in a deep role in his own half and built-up the play very well from there in role that I take he never played in before.

One of the most impressive sites was Edgar Davids playing in three different positions. He started off in his usual number 8 position which was centre-left midfield, when the number 5 got injured he stepped into that position, and when the number 11, the wide left player also got injured, he also played in that role. Showing that he was capable of playing in all left sided positions in the team. Co Adriaanse (the Ajax Director of Youth development) said that the Ajax youth players are taught to play in a number of different positions, and Edgar Davids demonstrated this.

THE COACHING PRINCIPLES OF AN AJAX YOUTH TRAINING SESSION.

Training session by Jan Olde Rickerink - May 1996.

Jan Olde Rickerink was the then Ajax Amsterdam Under 11's / 12's coach, he came to English football coaching conference and demonstrated what an typical Ajax Amsterdam youth training session would look like. (A year later he was first team coach of Ajax Amsterdam).

He said the main principle of a session was to "Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse" and that the sessions must remain "Fun" for the players.

He then performed a session as he would if he were taking an Ajax youth session.

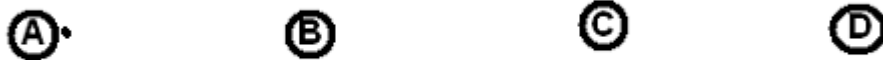
After the players had performed their own warm-up Rickerink started his session.

WARM UP – The players had a ball each and performed 'toe tapping' exercises and then ball juggling kick-ups.

PASSING AND RECEIVING PRACTICES.

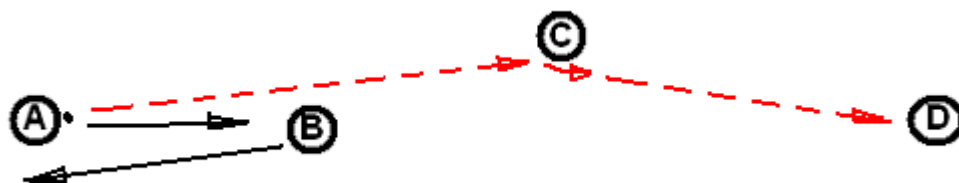
Players in groups of 4 with 1 ball per group.

AREA –

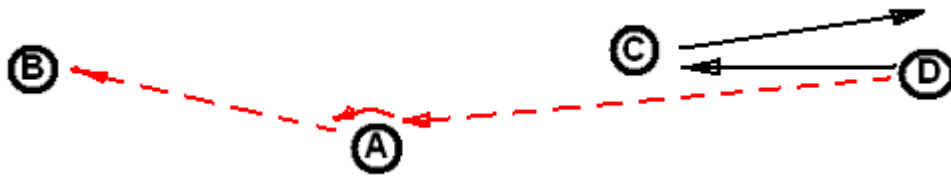


PASSING TURNING WITH THE BALL.

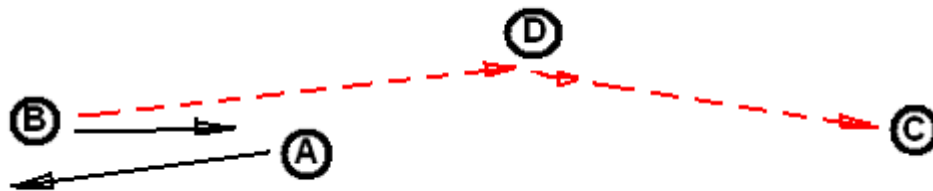
Player (A) passes to player (C) who moved to receive the ball, (A) and rotates places with player (B). Player (C) receives the ball half-turned and passes to player (D).



Player (D) passes to player (A). Players (C) and (D) rotate positions. Player (A) receives the ball half turned and passes to player (B).



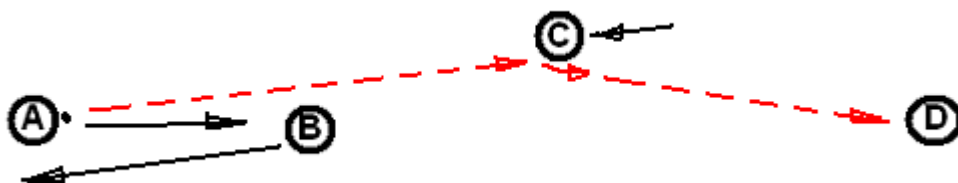
Player (B) passes to player (D), (B) rotates places with player (A). Player (D) receives the ball half-turned and passes to player (C).



The practice continues with the players with the players rotating positions.

NOTE – Player (A) and (B) continually rotate, players (C) and (D) always rotate with each other.

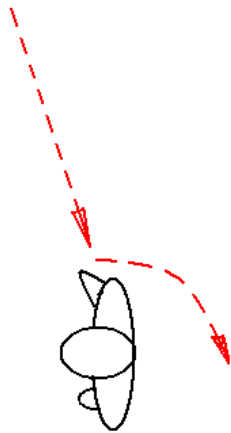
DEVELOPMENT – The player turning with the ball must now come towards the ball to receive the ball and not stand and wait for the ball.



COACHING POINTS –

- All players must be in the ready position on the balls of their feet.
- All passes must be long the ground and played to feet.
- The player who is going to turn with the ball must make angle to receive the ball.
- When receiving the ball half-turned the players must take up an open body position and let the ball run across their body on to their back foot.
- Player must never receive the ball standing still, must always come towards the ball.

DEVELOPMENT – Instead of receiving the ball half-turned, the players must still receive the ball side on (as if shielding the ball from an opponent) and turn with the ball using the outside of their front foot, turning outwards and passing with the other foot.

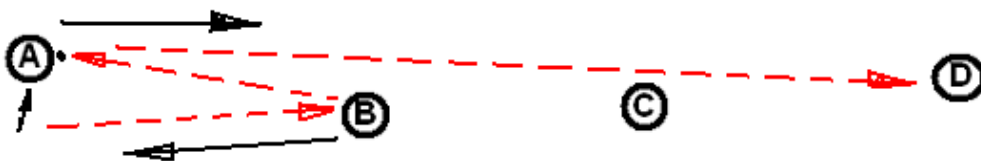


DEVELOPMENT – The players must still receive the ball side-on as before and turn using their front foot, but this time turn inside using the inside of the foot.

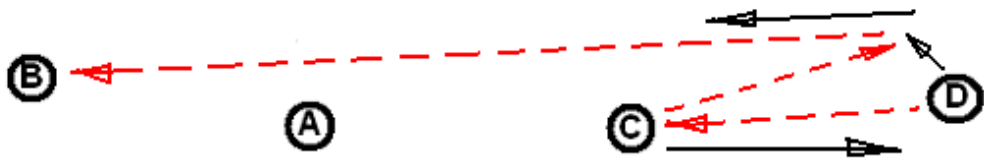


ONE TOUCH PASSING - SHORT PASS + LONG PASS.

Player (A) makes a short pass to player (B) and makes a slight angle, (B) returns the ball to player (A). Player (A) passes the ball long to player (D). Player (A) and (B) rotate positions.

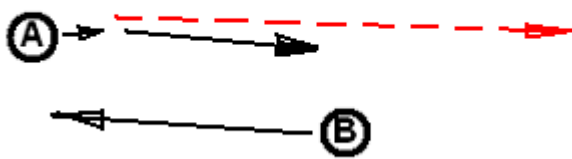


Player (D) plays a one-two off (C) making a slight angle to receive the ball back. (C) plays the ball long to player (B). Players (C) and (D) rotate positions.



The practice continues with the players rotating positions.

COACHING POINT – Before the player plays the long pass, the player must step into the ball, and as the player plays the long pass he must continue with his forward movement and run forward rotating positions with the other player.

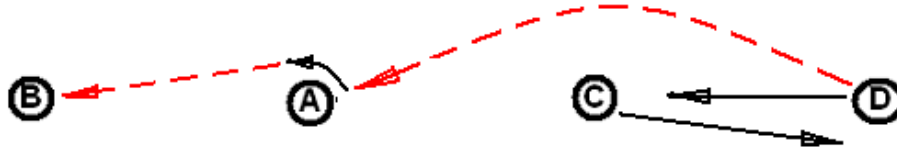


CHIPPING AND RECEIVING THE BALL.

Player (A) throws the ball up to player (C), (A) rotates positions with player (B). Player (C) must control the ball using either his foot, thigh or chest and then turn with the ball and chip the ball into player (D) hands.



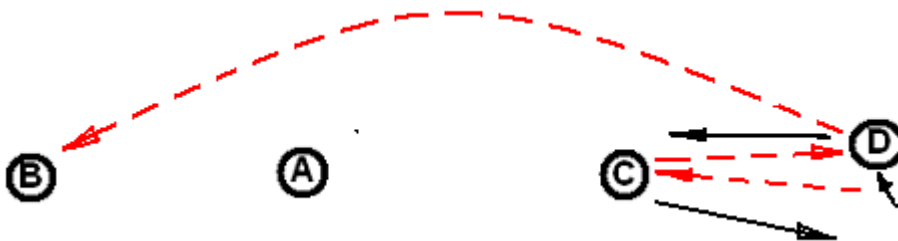
Player (D) throws the ball up to player (A), players (C) and (D) rotate positions. Player (A) controls the ball using either the feet, thigh or chest, turns with the ball and chips the ball up to player (B) hands.



DEVELOPMENT – Player (A) passes to player (B) and makes a slight angle, player (B) lays off the ball, player (A) plays a long chip pass to player (D). Players (A) and (B) rotate positions.



Player (D) controls the ball and plays a one-two off player (C) making a slight angle to receive the ball. (D) plays a chip pass to player (B). (C) and (D) rotate positions.



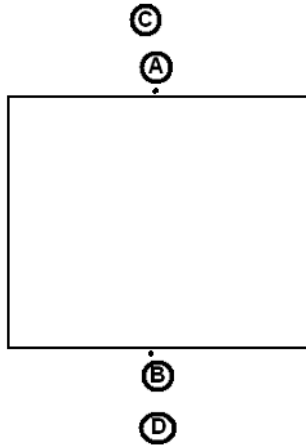
COACHING POINTS – All players must make correct receiving angles to receive the ball.

DEVELOPMENT – The chip pass is now replaced by a long driven pass instead.

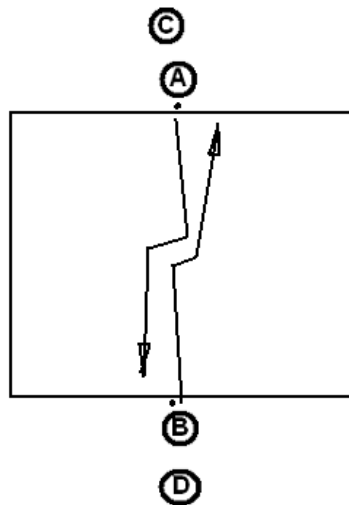
DRIBBLING.

Players in groups of four with two balls.

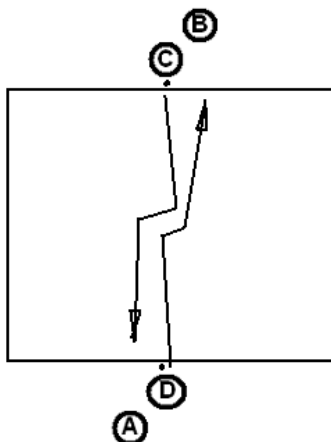
AREA –



Player (A) and (B) with a ball each travel towards to each other. Both players must take the ball past each other using the outside of the right foot, taking the ball away to the side so that the players do not collide. The balls are then given to players (C) and (D).



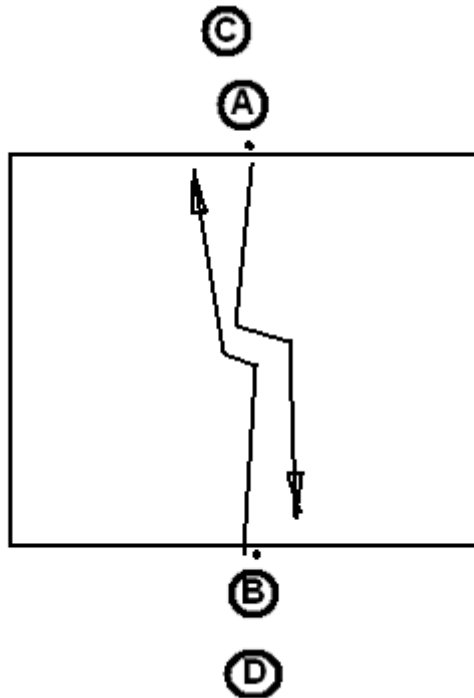
The practice is then repeated with player (C) and (D) moving towards each other both taking the ball past each other with the outside of the right foot.



COACHING POINTS –

- The players must keep their heads up while travelling with the ball to keep the other player in view.
- The ball must be kept under close control.
- The players must move towards each other slowly and then change pace to go past each other.
- If the players change directions too late the players will collide with each other. The players must change direction at a distance of about 2 / 3 yards.

The players must now take the ball past each other using the outside of the left foot.



DEVELOPMENT – The players must now use the ‘Scissors’ step over move to go past each other. The players must both step-over the ball using the left foot and take the ball to the side using the outside of the right foot before accelerating past the other player.

DEVELOPMENT – The players must use the ‘Scissors’ step over move again, but this time step over the ball using the right foot and taking the ball away using the left foot.

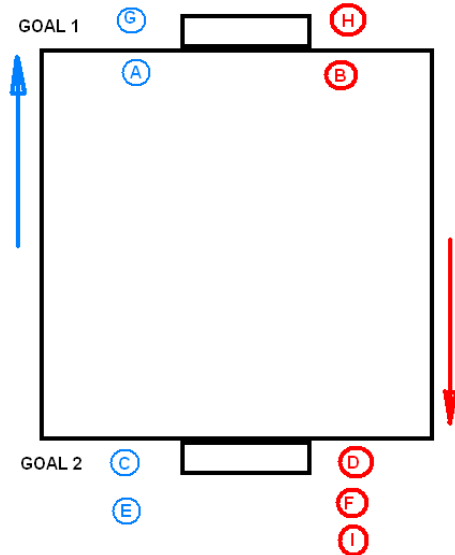
COACHING POINTS –

- The players must once again travel with their heads up, not down looking at the ball.
- The ball must be kept under close control using the foot which the step over is going to be made with.
- When the player steps over the ball, the player must sweep his foot around the ball and drop his shoulder before taking the ball away with the other foot.
- The ‘Scissors’ move must be made at the correct distance from each other, not too far away or too close where the player would crash into each other.

TURNING AND DRIBBLING - 1 V 1 GAME.

9 Players and a supply of balls.

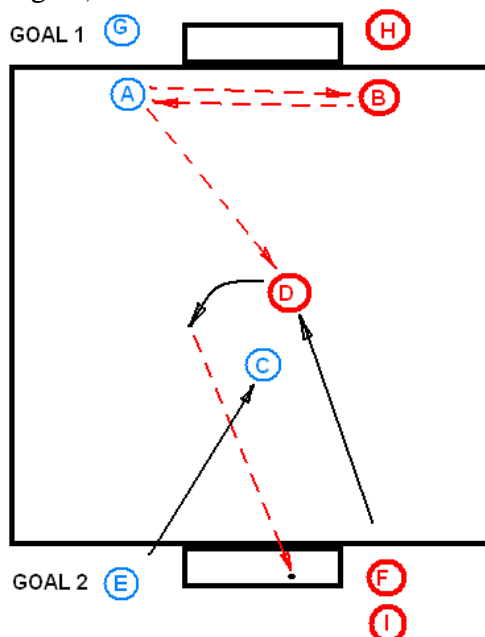
AREA – Small pitch with two mini-goals.



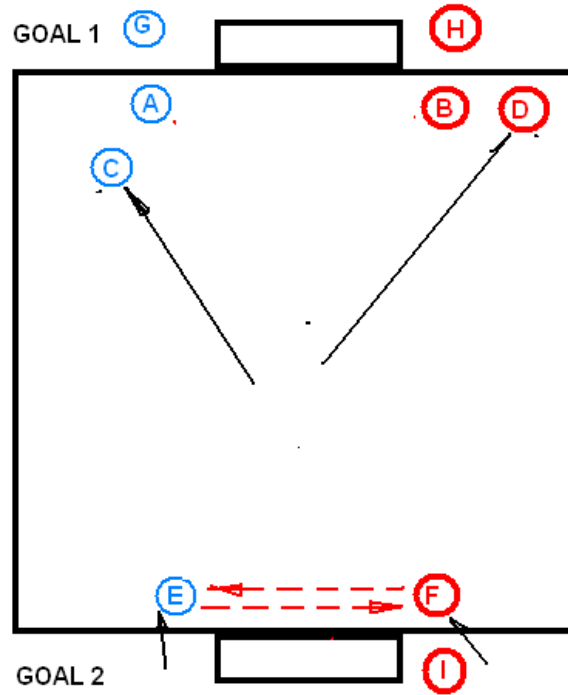
Players are split into two teams. Two blue players are behind both goals. Two red players are behind one goal and three red players are behind the other goal.

The red team can only score in goal 2, the blue team can only score in goal 1.

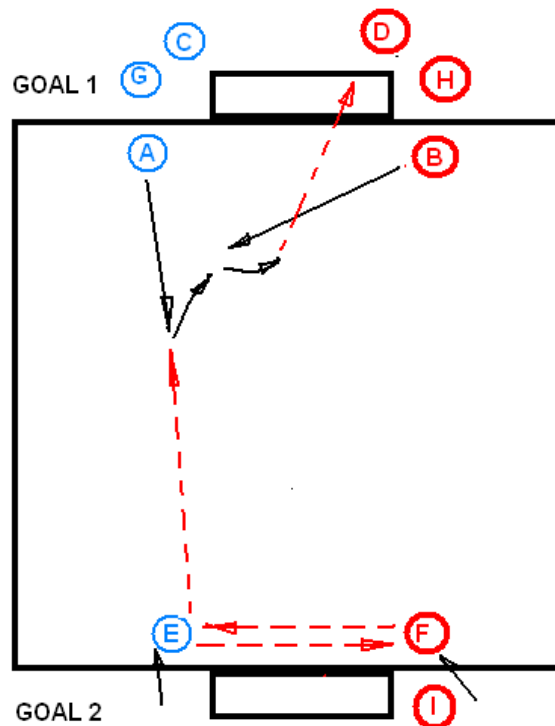
Players (A) and (B) pass the ball back and fourth between each other. The red team are trying to score into goal 2. Player (D) must call for the ball and enter the pitch, player (C) must also enter the pitch and try to follow (D). Player (A) or (B) must pass the ball to player (D). Player (D) must receive the ball and try to score into goal 2, player (C) must try to stop him from scoring, if (C) wins possession of the ball, the game stops (later on the game developed where the defender can then try to score in the other goal)



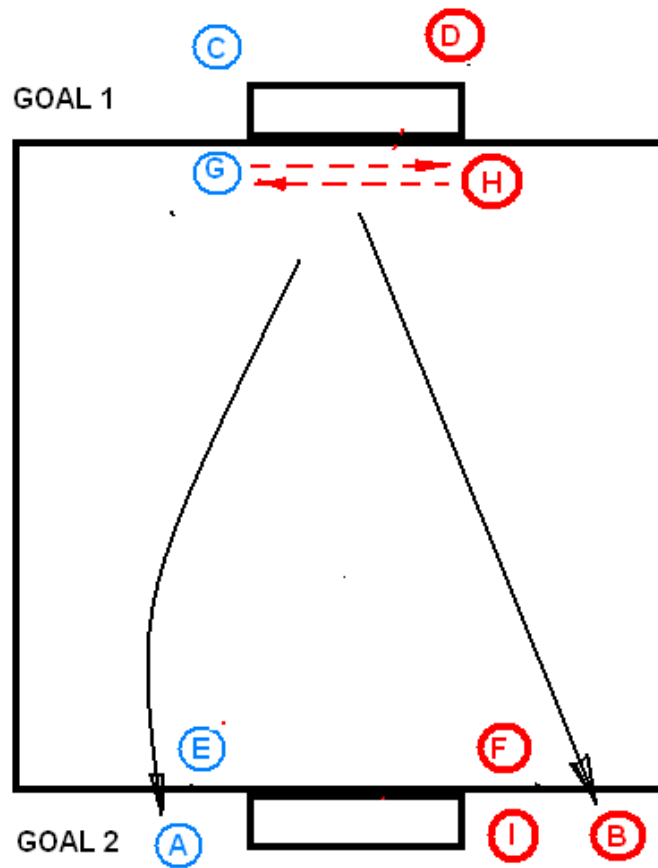
Players (C) and (D) must join their players behind goal 1.



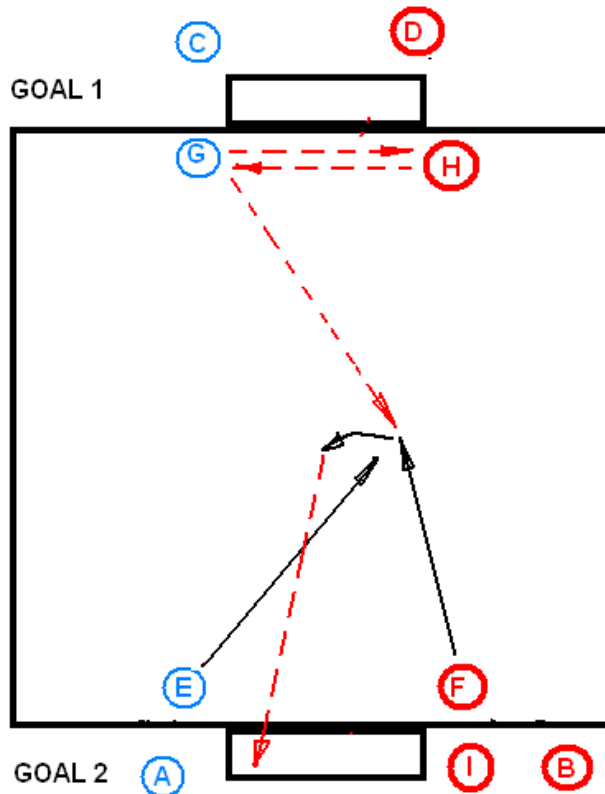
Players (E) and (F) must pass the ball between each other. The blue team are now going to try to score into goal 1. Player (A) must call for the ball and move into the pitch followed by player (B). Players (E) or (F) must pass the ball to player (A), player (A) must receive the ball and try to score in goal 1, player (B) must try to stop (A) from scoring.



Player (A) and (B) join their teams behind goal 2.



Players (G) and (H) pass the ball between each other with player (F) looking to score into goal 2 with player (E) trying to stop him from scoring.



COACHING POINTS –

- The receiving player must come towards the ball.
- The receiving player must be 'aware' to the positioning of the defending player.
- If the player receiving the ball has space the player should receive the ball with an open body so to face the goal.
- If the defender is close to the player receiving the ball, the player should screen the ball side on and control the ball on the front foot trying to turn the player using the outside or inside of the foot, as was practiced earlier in the session.
- If the player has the ball under control and is facing the opponent, the player must try to create space to shoot or dribble past the opponent by using a dribble move.

DEVELOPMENT – The defending player can now win the ball and try to score into the other goal.

