

40

FUN GAMES

FOR YOUNG PLAYERS

by Luca Bertolini



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Introduction: why substitute exercises with games?

Children and young aged boys consider specific technical exercises boring. They see soccer as a pure game and a way to have fun.

Games are the opposite of work and "production"; it's pure enjoyment, it's intrinsic motivation (it doesn't matter the age), the rules are not a limit as they are accepted to take part of any kind of game. It's again the opposite of the ordinary reality, as fantasy, imagination and creation are the main factors to create and take part to a game. The factors are the objectives of the children while they are playing, which they usually take very seriously. It's a pleasure for them to engage, concentrate themselves and to strive too.

Playing is a way of driving the fears away and to overcome them and it's a fundamental key to develop the cognitive and personality dimensions; it helps the development of the behaviours dimension, which is, in turn, preparatory for the adult life. Children learn to follow rules and to share things, goals and feelings with the teammates.

The rules must create educational, but always fun, games. They create the behaviours of the player who must respect them; but, on the other side, these rules must be child-oriented. To force rules that the coach already knows a child cannot respect is useless; the behaviour rules must be fixed and undisputable, but the game rules must be proper and useful for the young players, allowing them to have always fun, while learning.

The coaches must be very good at not forcing them to perform "working practices," but a finding a solution: to set-up fun practices with a technical or individual tactical objective behind them. This way, a double result is reached: the players are coached and they have fun at the same time. Rules and play must run parallel as well as the coach-teacher role of the adult who manage them while playing soccer.

A well-known Italian coach, Maurizio Sarri (Chelsea Head Coach 2018/2019), said: "Don't kill the children in the deep of a player; a player who is having fun, gives his best twice." So we should never forget that soccer is always a game, at any level. The coach must be the first one being happy and having fun on the field, especially with young players.

A youth coach should be a soccer teacher, rather than a trainer, helping them to take part in the practices to support a general (motor, psychological and emotional) growth. Games, especially competitive team games, are very suitable for these objectives; the more they feel motivated, the more they learn, as they have fun while performing their tasks. He must be very careful about the most fun practices, while children are performing, to understand how to develop them and to find new variations; the more children are having fun, the more they are learning. This way the young players can test themselves.

Basically, to play is a personal experience for a child, especially during the first ages of life; but team games and teammates will help him to understand that playing with others can be useful for him and for his objectives to increase his pleasure and to keep this feeling longer. The desire of repetitive pleasure of playing is satisfied, as other of his own kinds have the same needs.

How to categorize playing soccer as a game and how can soccer be useful for children?

Playing can be categorized as follow:

- Free - the players can't be forced to take part
- Separate - space and time limit
- Random - developments and results can't be decided beforehand
- Un-productive - it doesn't create goods or news
- Ruled - with ordinary and usual laws
- Fictitious - aware of artificial nature of game

Games can be categorized into four types:

- Competition: sports or mind games
- Gambling games: luck is the main factor
- Mimicry games: role games where the players become someone else
- Vertigo games: thrill seeking, risk-taking, adrenaline inducing

Soccer is for sure a competitive game, where luck (randomness is always present in a soccer match) is a factor but not the main one usually, where the players have roles but they don't become someone else and where all the players try to provoke themselves in terms of improving inside the team, to make the team better.

Soccer can't be considered as free, because all the players must be part of a team and take part to the matches (or training); on the other side, they can't be forced in taking part, but in this case they are out.

It's a separate game as it's played inside a marked field and the duration is fixed; we may say that it's a separate twice, as each player has limited space and time to play, moreover when in possession of the ball.

It's for sure a random game, even when there are big differences of quality and ranking between the teams. Eventually it's a ruled game, as the laws of a match are always the same; the referees must interpret them being sure they are followed by all the players.

In my opinion, it can't be considered as un-productive, as every match ends with a final result (a news) and every player performance is a news as well. It's not fictitious too, because matches are real and the players don't lose themselves inside their roles in the team.

All these categories and characteristics sum up all the reasons why games are so important to allow children learning soccer as sport as well as way of growing up support. All these factors constitute all the team sports anyway, not only soccer.

Children learn to be competitive while being helped by the teammates, to have a role being themselves, to overcome their own limits and to improve themselves, to act inside limit of space, times and rules (respecting teammates, opponents, adults and the referees), to find a way to make every situation the most predictable possible, while playing, to be strong and look for luck rather than waiting for it.

I think that the most important education the children can learn from team sports is to reach their own goals together with other people, considering the players of the opposing team as opponents but not as enemies.

How to coach (teach) soccer through children games?

Children and younger boys must experience game situations with the ball, talking about soccer, creating relationships with the ball and among themselves, freely and randomly. All the games and practices must include random situations that allow the children to understand and to find individual solutions as the relation player-ball is prevalent during the early ages. Teammates, opponents, and the space are important elements but they are secondary for now; the children or young boys must be helped in feeling them, but not forced to consider them as an older or adult player would do.

There are 5 key factors that must be considered fundamental, when coaching children:

- Skills and Planning
- Rules
- Coach as teacher
- Progression
- Testing

These key factors must not be thought of as we would do thinking about exercises, but they must be "game and children oriented".

Coaches must be prepared and skilled to work with children, their educational manners must be proper and suitable for the young players. But, in my opinion, a precise season plan is not necessary; only general guidelines (what we are talking about right now) are so important. Players, spaces, time, weather are always variable elements; a basic session plan is anyway important, but coach skills and his ideas to adapt the practices are even more important.

We already talked briefly about the coach as a teacher, who must help the children having fun, being the first one having fun on the pitch. We should never forget that the coach represents a child - adult relation moment for the players; another adult, apart from the parents. He must be sure that all the children have the same chances to take part to all the practices of the session to improve their decision making skills and to express themselves as people, not only as players. The coach should be a referee too, during practices; a referee who helps the players while playing, but who doesn't judge or punish them.

All the games and the sessions should be a progression of experiences for children, but not a planned progression; it must respect their timing and not a timetable. It's possible to consider 3 kinds of progressions:

- physical (the lesser about children)
- technical (the coach issue is always how to progress this factor through fun games)
- individual progression (the most important)

The physical factor must be considered concurrently with the enthusiasm of the children; as it goes down, then it's time for a rest and a change of practice.

Technical issues should be increased during the season. The level of the players at the moment should be the main factor to consider when deciding whether to progress or maintain same level of requirements. Moreover, a coach should use games to promote a technical progression for the children.

Individual progression means helping them growing up as person with their own character; and the children must grow up in a positive environment full of inspirations.

Testing must be part of the games and of the sessions, but not a judgement; it must help the coach to understand his young players, and how they are growing up, rather than the children. Mistakes must not be underlined, but they have to be warnings for the coaches and for the future enquiries.

If we decided to substitute exercises with games, how to run the sessions?

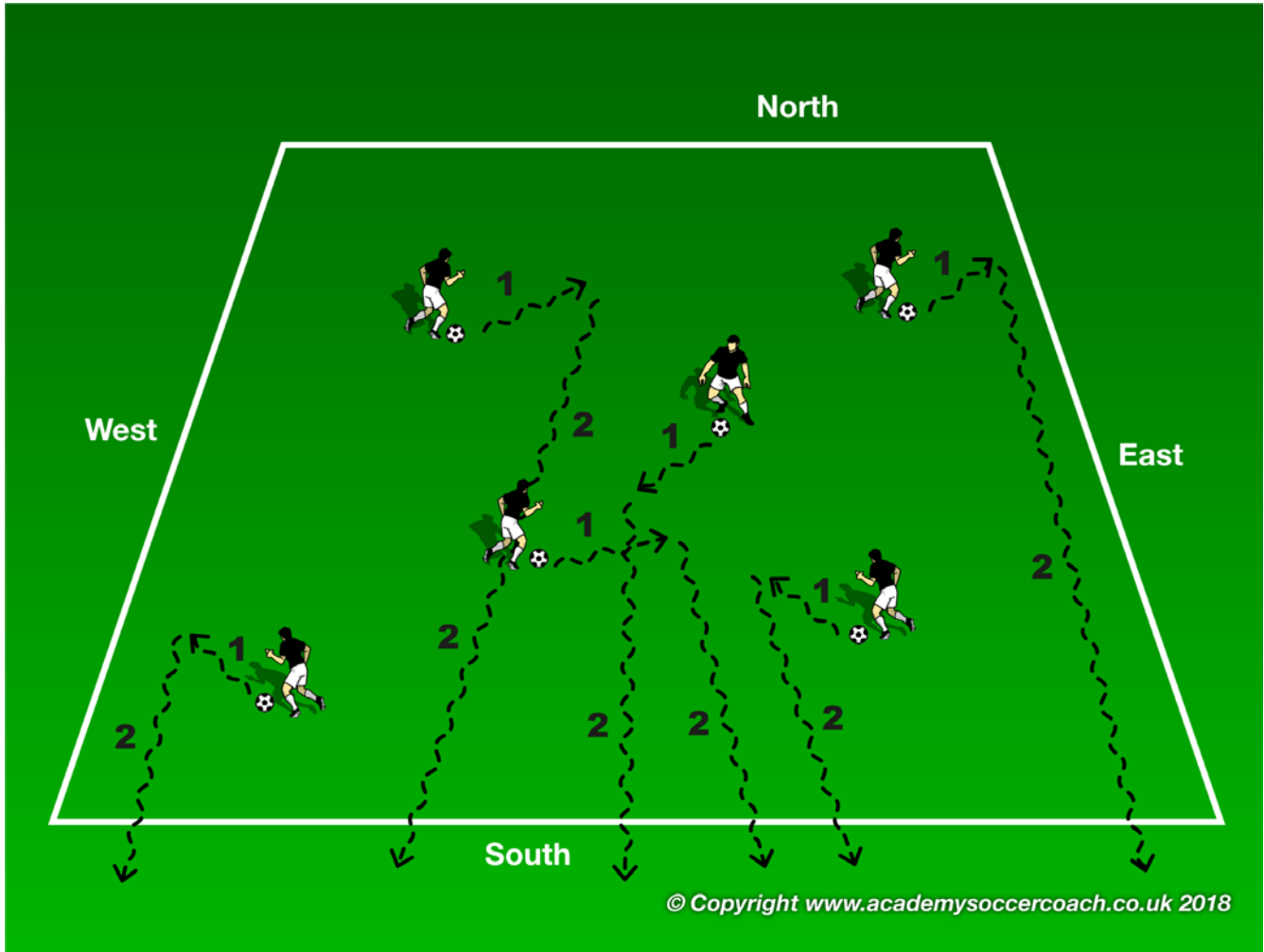
- The set-up of each session should be ready since the beginning of the session if possible
- All the players must be involved (divide them into groups on different set-ups if needed), even during problem solving moments
- Pay attention to the sizes of the pitches and of the balls (in my opinion, the best solution is to alternate num.3 and num.4 balls)
- Be positive, avoid negative words, encourage risk taking
- Pay attention to the body language of children; it must be suitable for soccer
- If needed, use handball sequences before playing with feet to understand each game better
- Don't stop the sequences; let them play. Focus briefly on coaching points among the practices
- Be sure all the players follow the rules (both as behaviour and during the games)

About the games in this book

These games are ideas on how children could practice soccer on the pitch. They are designed for players from 5 to 10 years old, but they may be adapted for older ones too. They don't shape a complete training session, but I try to be as global as possible; each game can be considered as warm-up, as main part (following the variations or thinking about new ones) or as a final game. The main goal I try to reach with these 40 games is to create a proper cognitive environment that can help your children learn. I hope these practices will be fun and useful for your little players and easy to use for you.

Note that sizes of the pitches and the number of players must be adapted to the ages and to the level of each team's players.

Exercise 1: follow the compass (1)



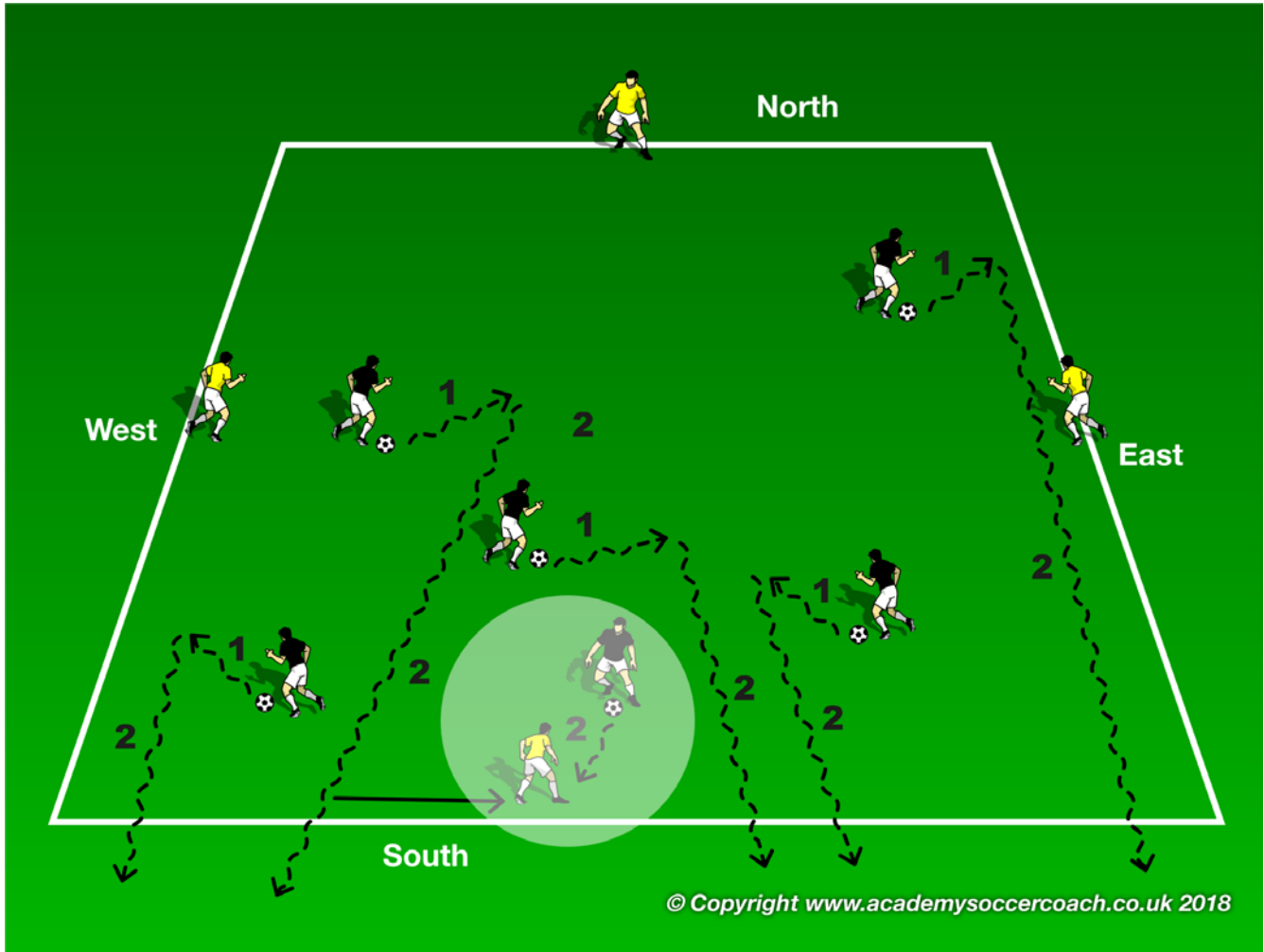
Set-up and sequence: all the available players are placed inside a rectangular area of different dimensions, depending on age and level of the children. The sides of the rectangle are named with cardinal points. The players dribble the ball freely at the beginning (1); when the coach calls out a cardinal point (south, in the picture), the players must turn and dribble the ball out toward the corresponding side (2). The children should pay attention not to collide while dribbling or changing direction.

Variations:

- The players can be asked dribbling with a specific part of the foot (flat, instep, sole), alternating the feet, changing direction with another foot or part of a foot.
- Fix a limit of time to dribble the ball out.
- Ask the players to dribble out toward the opposite cardinal point from the one that is called out.
- Ask a player to call out a cardinal point while dribbling during the first phase.

Coaching points: quality of dribbling, feet rhythm while dribbling, quick reactions to change direction.

Exercise 2: follow the compass (2)



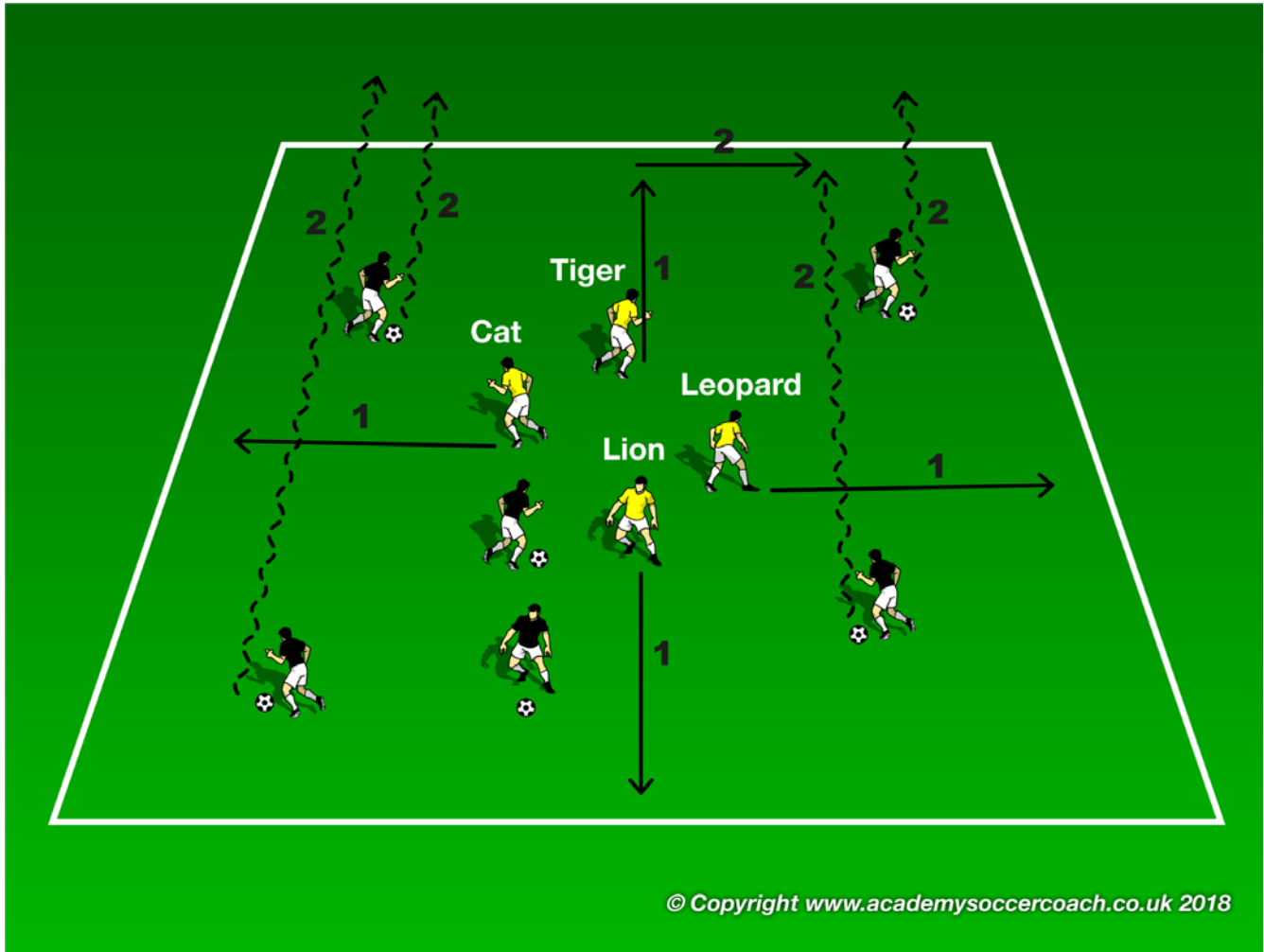
Set-up and sequence: this practice is a progression of the previous one. 4 more players (or 4 of the previous game) are defenders (yellow ones), who can run freely along the side where they are placed. The black players with the ball dribble freely at the beginning (1); when the coach calls out a cardinal point (south in the picture), the players must turn and dribble the ball out toward the corresponding side (2), preventing the defender from recovering the possession against one of them. The children should pay attention not to collide while dribbling or changing direction and to keep the possession. If the defender wins the ball, he becomes attacker and the opponent becomes defender.

Variations:

- Fix a limit of time to dribble the ball out
- Ask the players to dribble out toward the opposite cardinal point from the one that is called out
- Ask a player to call out a cardinal point while dribbling during the first phase
- Ask a defender to invite the attackers toward him

Coaching points: look for the best timing to dribble out preventing any opposition, quality of dribbling, feet rhythm while dribbling, quick reactions to change direction, avoid defender's tackle.

Exercise 3: defend the territory (1)



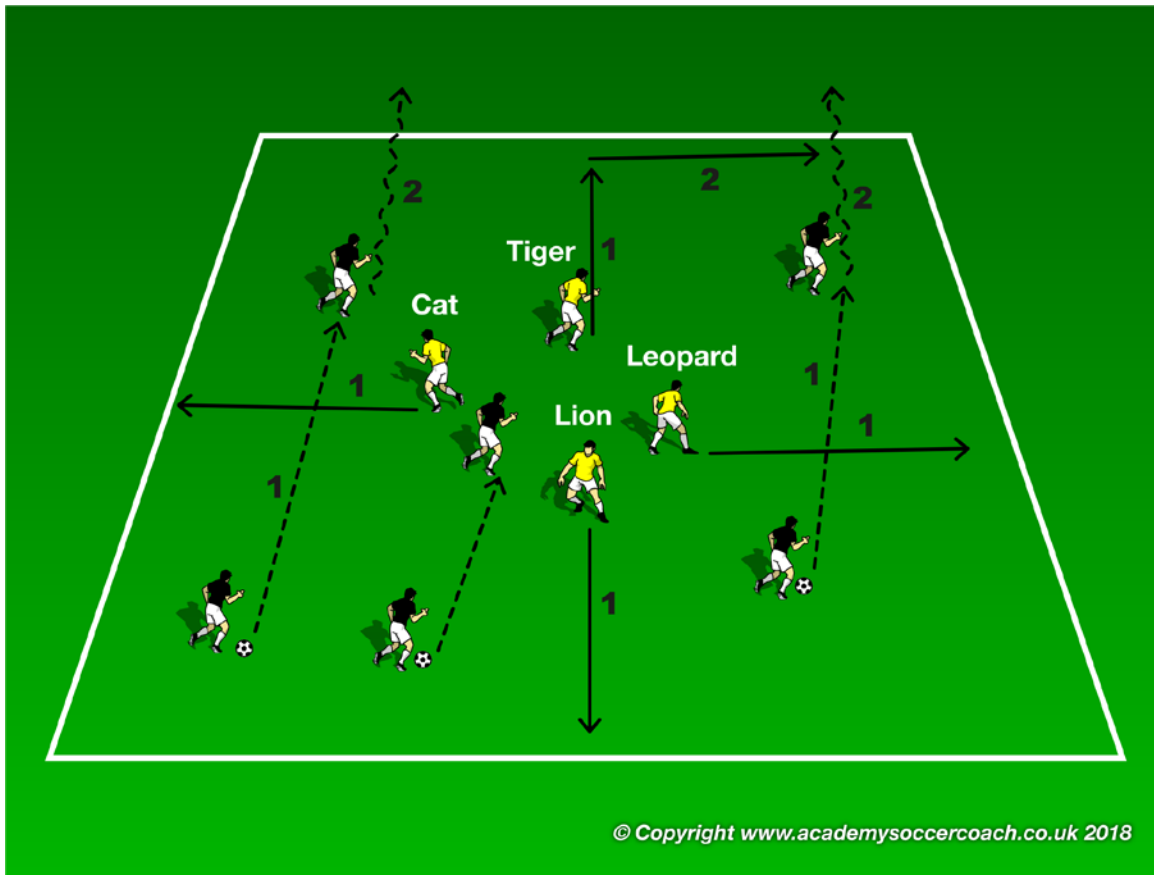
Set-up and sequence: all the available players are placed inside a rectangular area of different dimensions, depending on age and level of the children. 4 of them are defenders (yellow ones) and they are identified with names of animals; they can run freely along the side where they are placed, after the coach's sign. The black players with the ball dribble freely at the beginning; when the coach calls out an animal, the players must turn and dribble the ball out of the rectangle, overcoming the side where the called animal is placed, avoiding any tackle attempt (2). While the attackers change direction, the defender must try to protect the territory, recovering one ball from the attackers (2). If the defender wins the ball, he becomes attacker and the opponent becomes defender.

Variations:

- Fix a limit of time to dribble the ball out
- The coach can call the animals one after the other, to encourage changes of directions with the ball

Coaching points: quality of dribbling, quick reactions to change direction, avoid defender's tackle, memorize the opponents, look at the position of the opponent, choose the easiest situation to recover the possession, reaction speed.

Exercise 4: defend the territory (2)



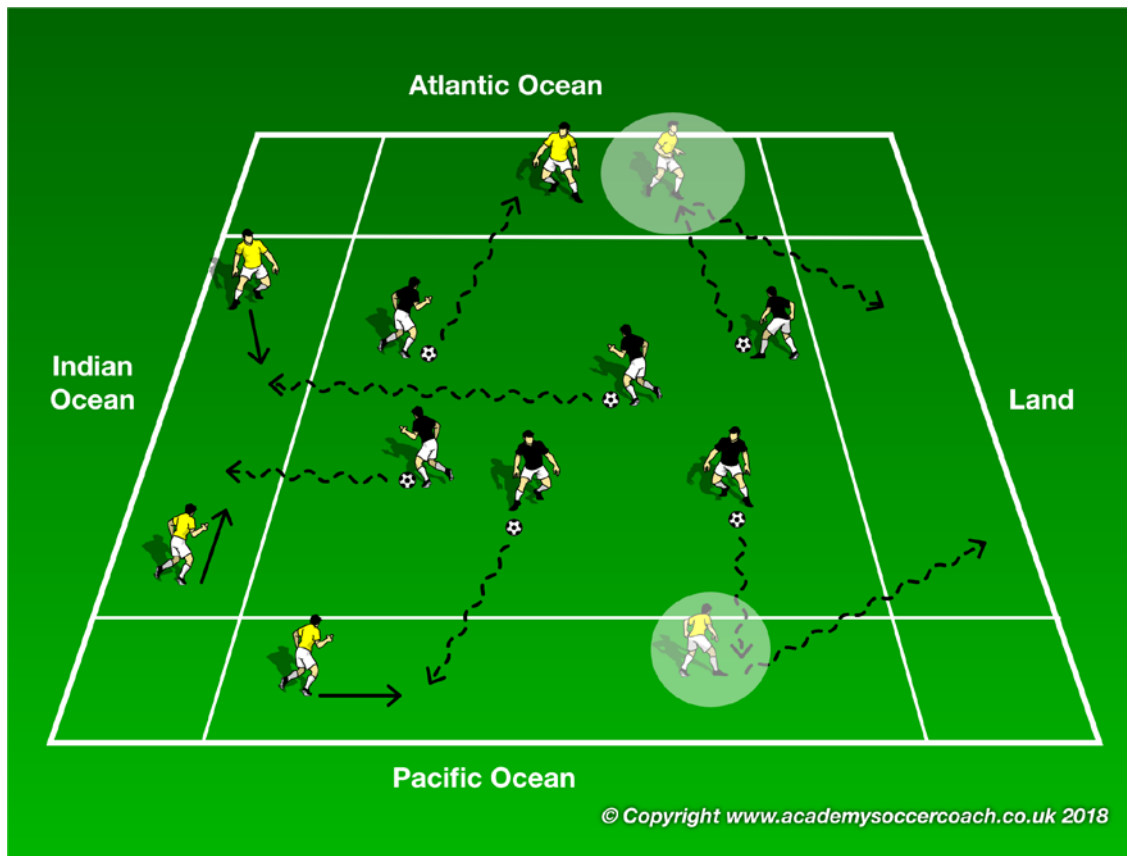
Set-up and sequence: this is a variation of the previous exercise. All the available players are placed inside a rectangular area of different dimensions, depending on age and level of the children. 4 of them are defenders (yellow ones) and they are identified with names of animals; they can run freely along the side where they are placed, after the coach's sign. Half of the black players have the possession and they dribble freely at the beginning; the other half must move properly to be ready to receive. When the coach calls out an animal, the black players must pass the ball to the teammates, who must be well positioned to receive and to dribble the ball out of the rectangle, overcoming the side where the called animal is placed, avoiding any tackle attempt (2). While the attackers change direction, the defender (the called animal) must try to save the territory, recovering one ball from the attackers (2). If the defender wins the ball, he becomes attacker and the opponent becomes defender.

Variations:

- Fix a limit of time to dribble the ball out
- The coach can call the animals one after the other, to encourage changes of directions with the ball
- The called animal is allowed running back inside the rectangle to counter a forward and to save his territory

Coaching points: correct body position to receive, quality of dribbling, quick reactions to change direction, avoid defender's tackle, memorize the opponents, look at the position of the opponent, choose the easiest situation to recover the possession.

Exercise 5: conquer the oceans or bring the ball safe on the land (1)



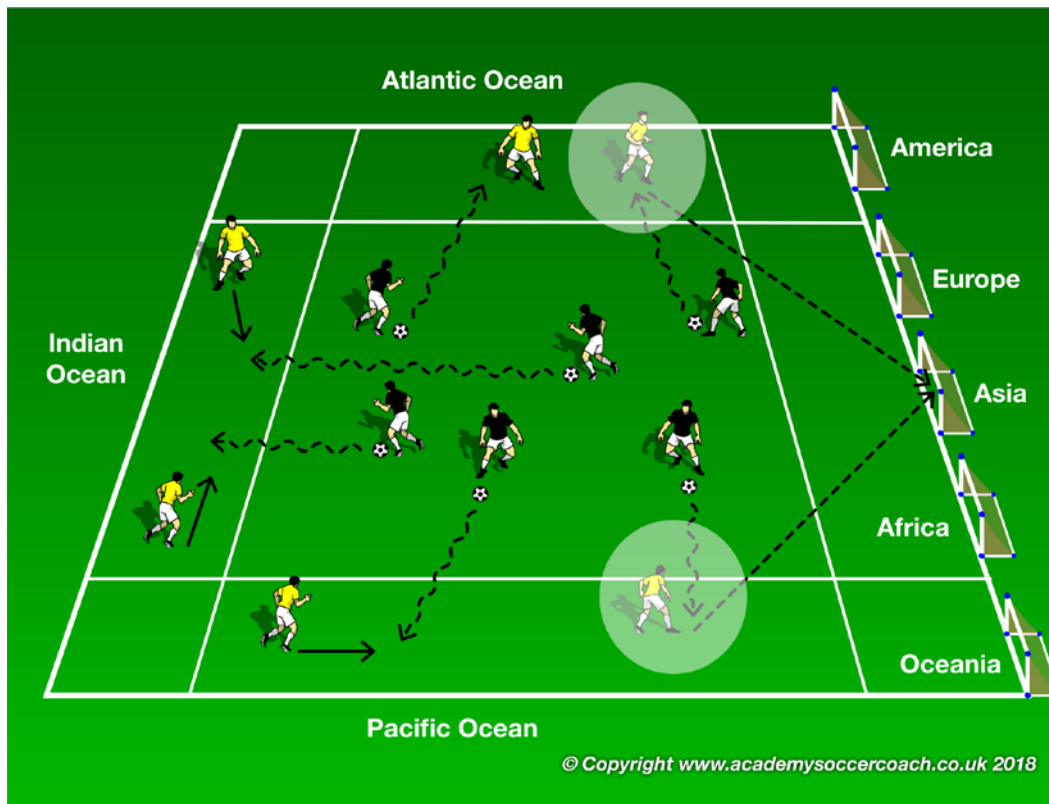
Set-up and sequence: a rectangular area is marked as in the picture, with 4 outer areas and a center one. The defenders are placed inside 3 of these areas and they must save the oceans at their back (2 defenders inside each area); 6 black forwards are in possession of a ball each in the middle space of the set-up and they must attack the defense lines to conquer the oceans, dribbling the ball over the end line (2 forwards attack each ocean). They dribble freely at the beginning, but they must be organized and pay attention to the ocean to attack, as they must be paired and play 1 v 1 duels near each "ocean line". If the defenders win the ball, they must dribble freely toward the land (the fourth outer area) to win the point and to switch the roles of the teams, when the sequence starts again. The black player who lost the possession can track him to win the ball back again.

Variations:

- The forwards must be able to keep the possession for 6"-8" inside the outer area. This is the time limit to recover the possession and dribble the ball to the land.
- The defenders can run inside the center area to win the ball for 6".

Coaching points: quality of dribbling, quick reactions to change direction, avoid defender's tackle, look at the position of the opponent, counter-pressing to win the ball back, pay attention to find the "right ocean" to attack.

Exercise 6: conquer the oceans or bring the ball safe on the land (2)



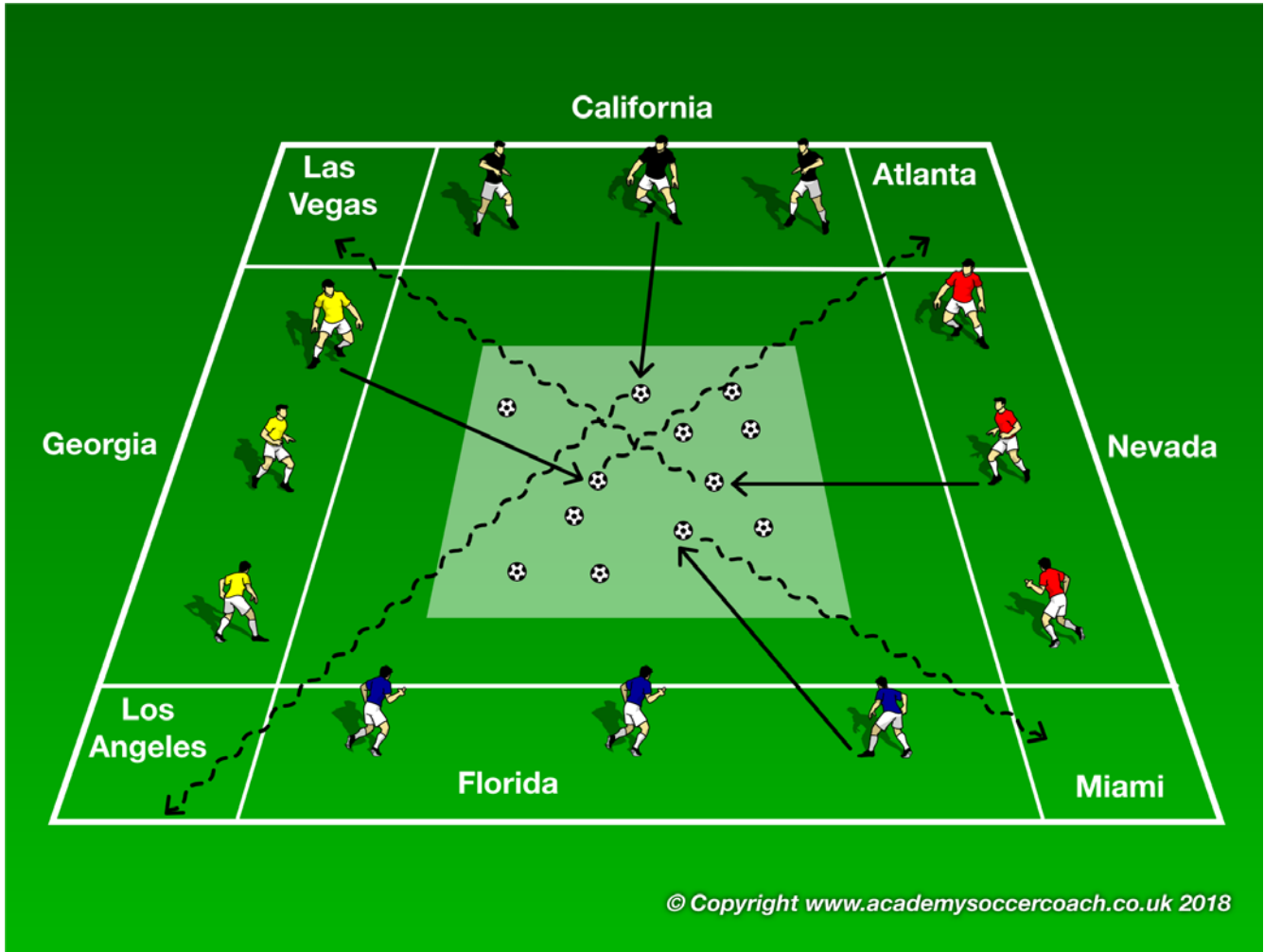
Set-up and sequence: this exercise is a progression of the previous one. A rectangular area is marked as in the picture, with 4 outer areas and a center one. 5 goals are named as continents and they are placed along the fourth side, as in the picture. The defenders are placed inside 3 of these outer areas and they must save the oceans at their back (2 defenders inside each area); 6 black forwards are in possession of a ball in the middle space of the set-up and they must attack the defense lines to conquer the oceans, dribbling the ball over the end line (2 forwards attack each ocean). They dribble freely at the beginning, but they must be organized and pay attention to the ocean to attack, as they must be paired and play 1 v 1 duels near each "ocean line". If the defenders win the ball, they must shoot toward the land, scoring in one of the mini-goals that are named as continents, to switch the roles of the teams, when the sequence starts again. The black player who lost the possession must be very fast to prevent a shooting attempt.

Variations:

- The forwards must be able to keep the possession for 6"-8" inside the outer area. This is the time limit to recover the possession and dribble the ball to the land.
- The defenders can run inside the center area, to shoot or to win the ball for 6".

Coaching points: quality of dribbling, quick reactions to change direction, avoid defender's tackle, look at the position of the opponent, pay attention to find the right ocean to attack, quick individual transition.

Exercise 7: states and cities (1)



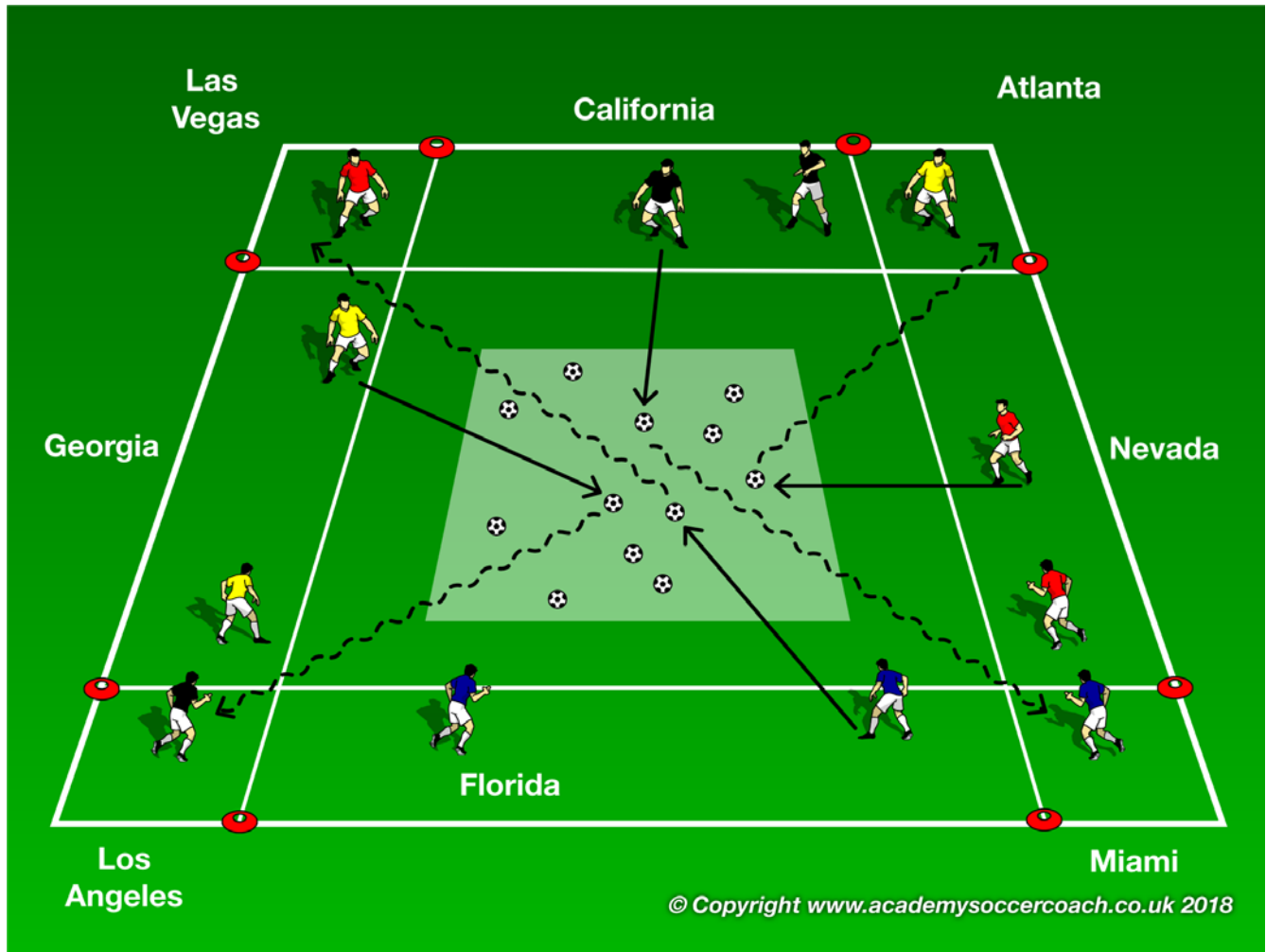
Set-up and sequence: the set-up of this exercise is the same of the previous two. A rectangular area is marked as in the picture, with 4 outer areas and a center one. Each outer area is named as a US State, as in the picture; the corners are named as the main cities of each state; a center area in the middle includes the balls that must be brought to the corresponding city. 4 teams of 3 players each are placed inside the outer "state" areas. When the coach asks to start, one player for each team must run toward the balls area and dribble to the right city on the corners; the game goes on this way one player after the other. When the balls in the middle are finished, they can be stolen from the other team cities, until a team wins, when a city is empty.

Variations:

- Vary the names of the states and of the cities
- Change the corners of the cities at every sequence to encourage different changes of direction

Coaching points: quick reactions to arrive on the ball and to change direction, pay attention to find the right city if it changes after each sequence, sprint skills to steal the ball to the other teams.

Exercise 8: states and cities (2)



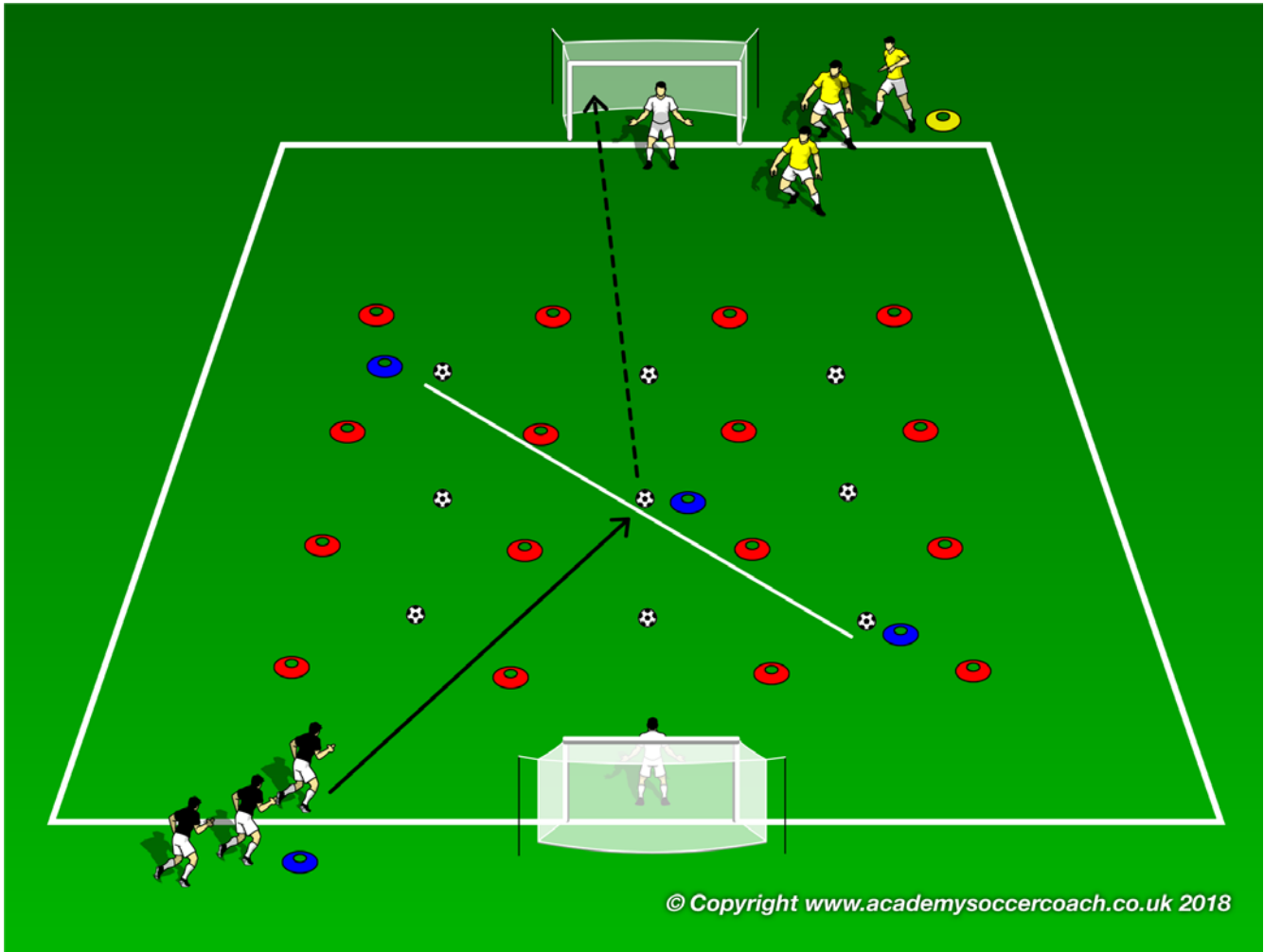
Set-up and sequence: the set-up of this exercise is the same of the previous two. A rectangular area is marked as in the picture, with 4 outer areas and a center one. 4 teams of 3 players are placed inside the outer areas. Each outer area is named with as a US State, as in the picture; the corners are the areas that are named with the main cities of each state and they are protected by a defender. A center zone in the middle includes the balls that must be brought to the correspondent city. When the coach asks to start, one player for each team must run toward the balls area and dribble to the right city on the corners, playing a 1 v 1 duel against the "city defender" and dribbling the ball over the red cone diagonal lines. The game goes on this way one player after the other, until the ball in the center are finished.

Variations:

- Vary the names of the states, of the cities
- Change the corners of the cities at every sequence to encourage different changes of direction

Coaching points: quick reactions to arrive on the ball and to change direction, pay attention to find the right city if it changes after each sequence, 1 v 1 skills to defend and to attack a small space without losing the possession.

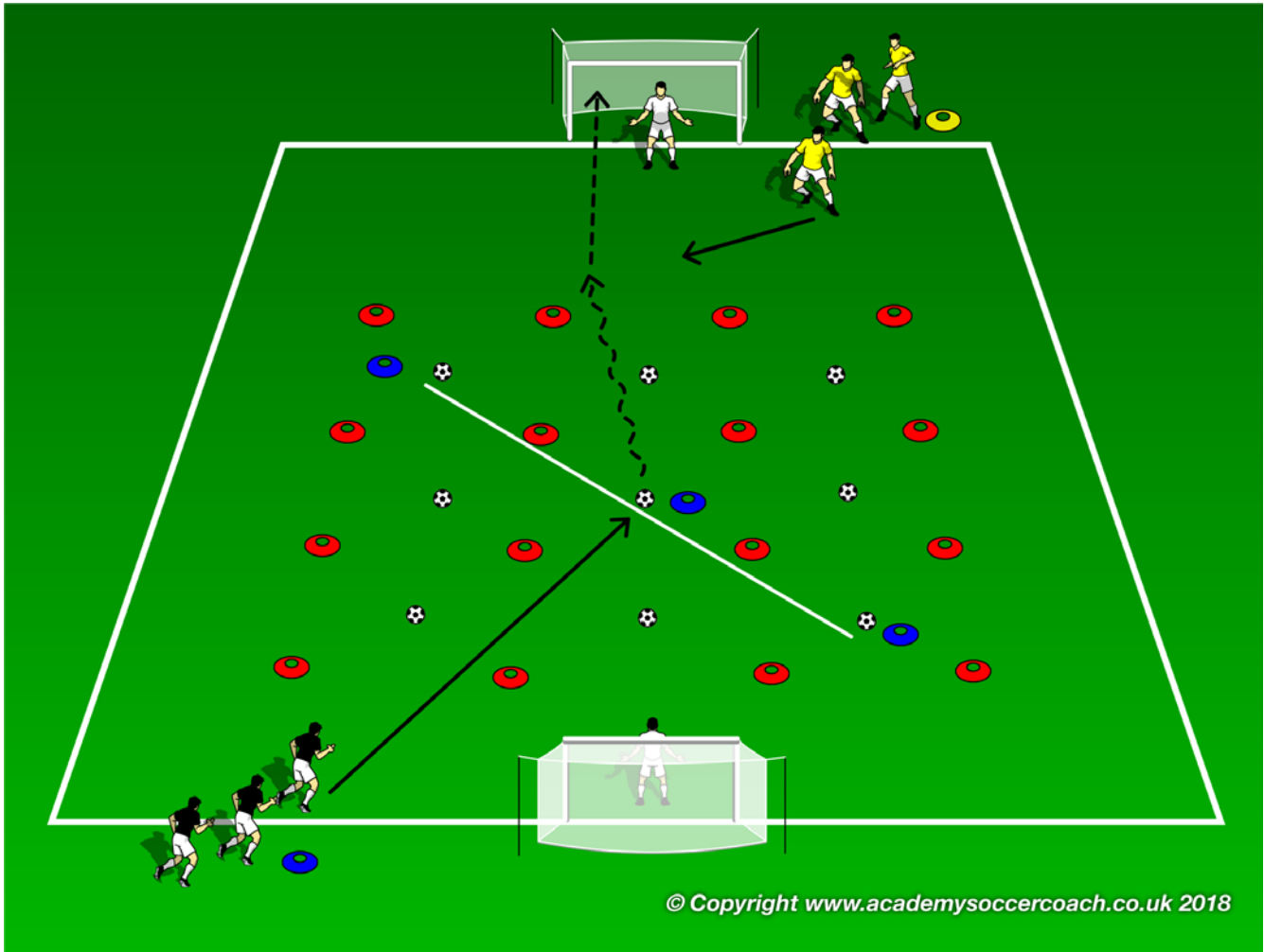
Exercise 9: shooting tic-tac-toe (1)



Set-up and sequence: a rectangular area is set-up with 2 goals and goalkeepers in the center of the shorter sides and a tic-tac-toe set-up is placed in the middle, as in the picture. Balls are placed inside each square. The players of each team (3 blacks and 3 yellows) start from the left side (or right) of the goal and behind the end line and all them carry a cone in their hand. Each player of both teams must run one after the other toward a ball, deciding which is the best square, and shoot toward the opposition goal trying to score; shots must be kicked with 1 touch. If the player scores, he can put the cone on the ground; but if he can't score, he must bring the ball back into the starting place. The team who is able to complete the tic-tac-toe sequence (as the black team does in the picture) wins the round.

Coaching points: find the best solution to complete the tic-tac-toe sequence, shot with the natural foot on the ball (don't force shoots with the strong foot), run properly to be ready to shoot.

Exercise 10: shooting tic-tac-toe (2)



Set-up and sequence: a rectangular area is set-up with 2 goals and goalkeepers in the center of the shorter sides and a smaller tic-tac-toe structure is placed in the middle, as in the picture. Balls are placed inside each square. The players of each team (3 blacks and 3 yellows) start from the left side (or right) of the goal and behind the end line and all carry a cone in their hand. Each player of both teams must run one after the other toward a ball, deciding which is the best square, dribble it out of set-up and shoot toward the opposition goal trying to score, after a 1 v 1 duel against a defender of the opposition team. If the player scores, he can put the cone on the ground; but if he can't score, he must bring the ball back into the starting place. If the defender wins the possession, he can't put his cone, instead of the prior attacking player. The team who is able to complete the tic-tac-toe sequence (as the black team does in the picture) wins the round.

Coaching points: find the best solution to complete the tic-tac-toe sequence, win the 1 v 1 duel as quickly as possible, finish the move shooting on goal as soon as possible, decide if to counter the opponent directly or to close the goal space.

Exercise 11: hit the cone and shot on goal

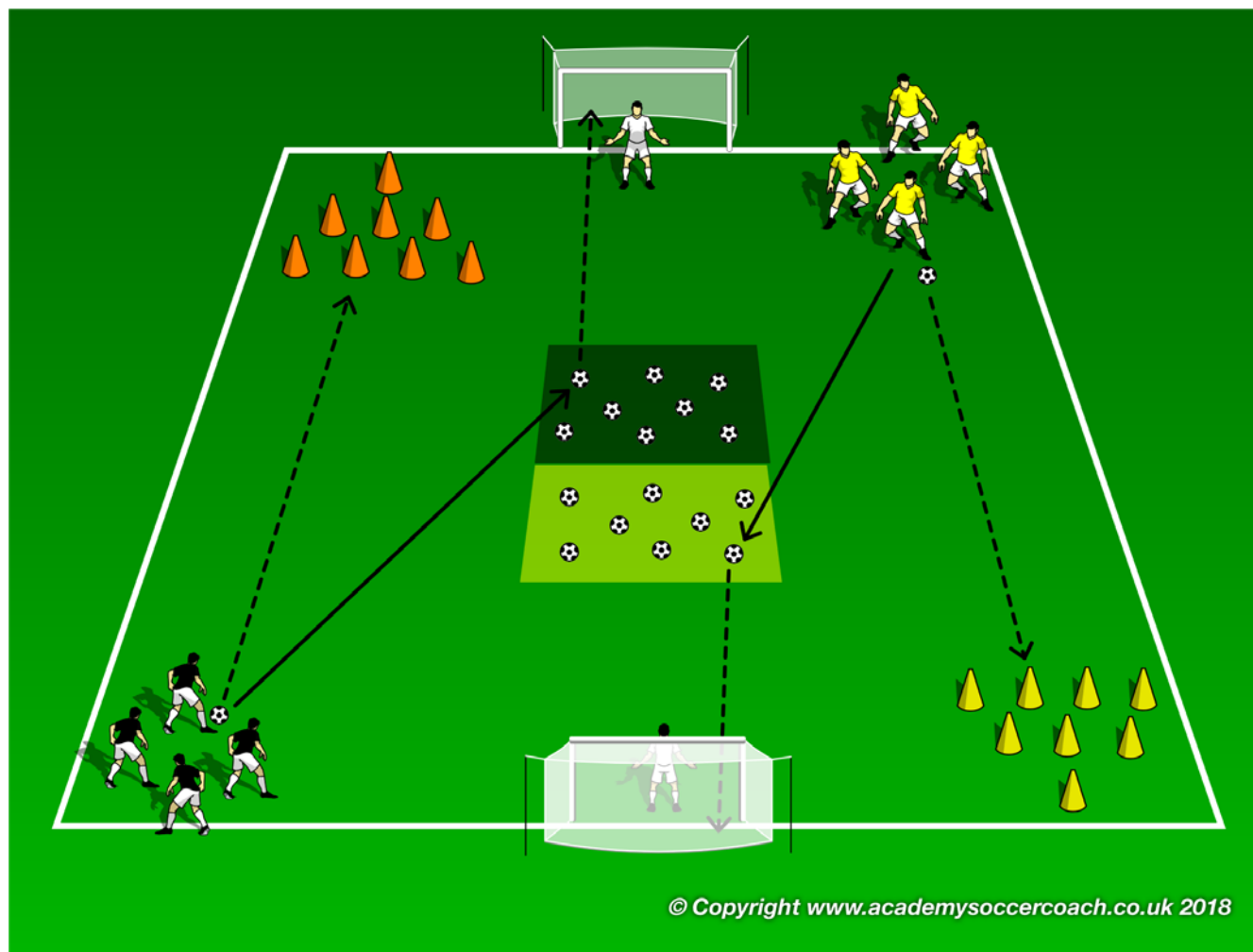


Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 3 players (or whatever the number of available players is, but an even number) are placed inside a rectangular area with 2 goals and goalkeepers in the center of the shorter sides of the set-up. Triangle shapes are placed all over the playing area, as in the picture; yellow triangles are used by the yellow team and the orange ones are used by the black team. All the players dribble the ball freely until a sign of the coach; after it, they must stop the ball along the lines on the lower sides of the triangles and then hit the top bigger cone. If they hit it, they can shoot toward the further goal, after a change of direction; if they can't, they must dribble the ball away, waiting for a second attempt. 2 touches are required after hitting the top cone. The team who scores more goals after a fix period of time wins the round.

Variation: the coach may requires a specific foot or part of the foot to dribble first and then to shot.

Coaching points: weight of ball touch to hit the cone without sending it too far away, touches quality to shot and score quickly, dribble at high tempo.

Exercise 12: bowling and shots on goal (1)



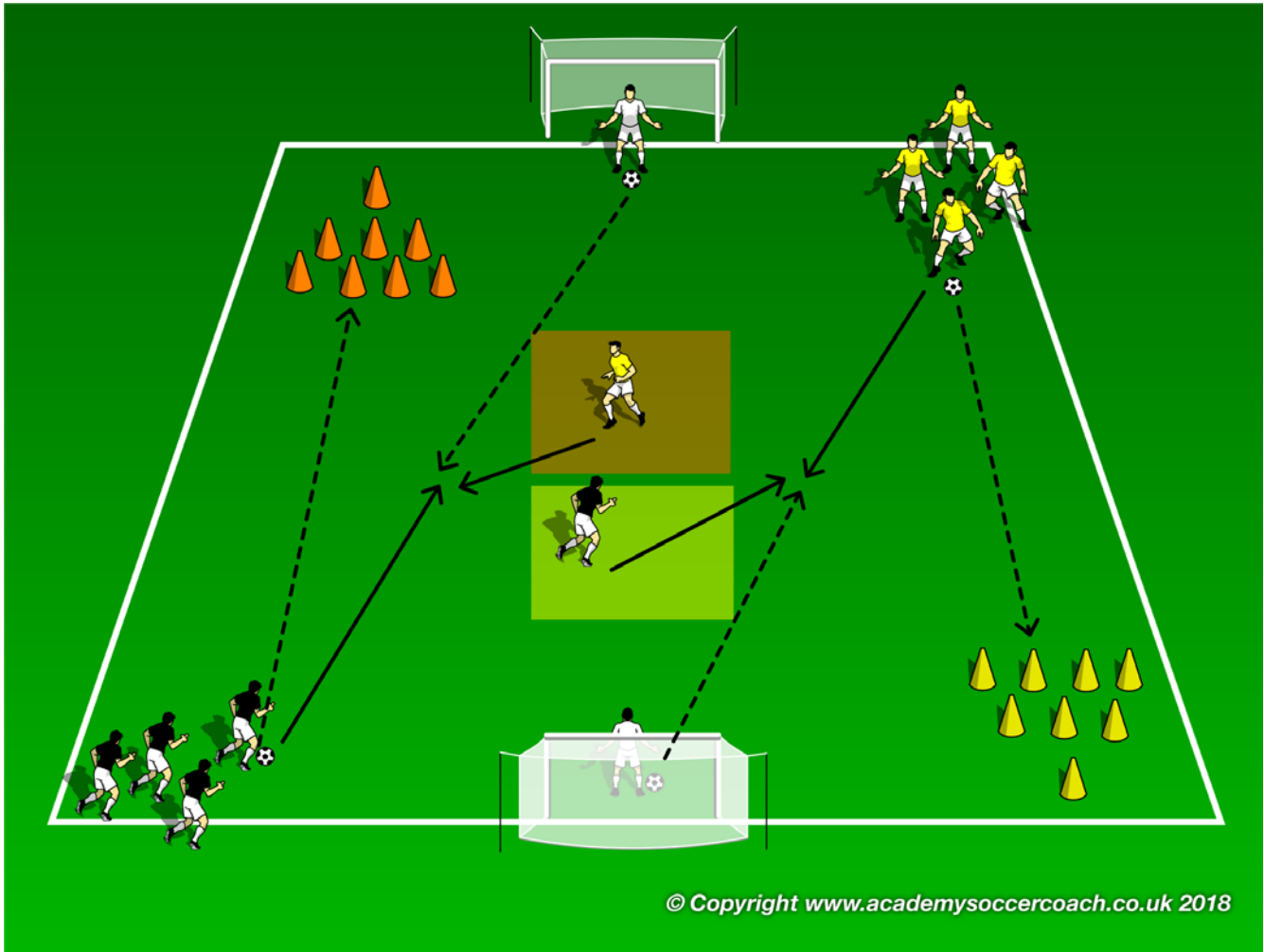
Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 4 players (or whatever the number of available players is) are placed at the opposite corners of a rectangular area. 2 goals with goalkeepers are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle, 2 "trees" of cones are placed on the free corners, as in the pictures, and 2 box areas with 8 balls each are placed in the middle of the set-up. The goals for each team are to hit the cones in front of them (yellow for yellow players and orange for black team) and then to shoot on goal one of the ball inside the further center area (1 touch shot with the right foot in the picture); the goal worth the same quantity of prior hit cones. Points are gained only after scoring.

Variation:

- Reverse the corners to shot with the other foot
- Add a defender in front of each goal

Coaching points: be aware while kicking the ball toward the cones, weight of touches to try to hit more than one cone, run properly to be able to shot with a single touch.

Exercise 13: bowling and shots on goal (2)



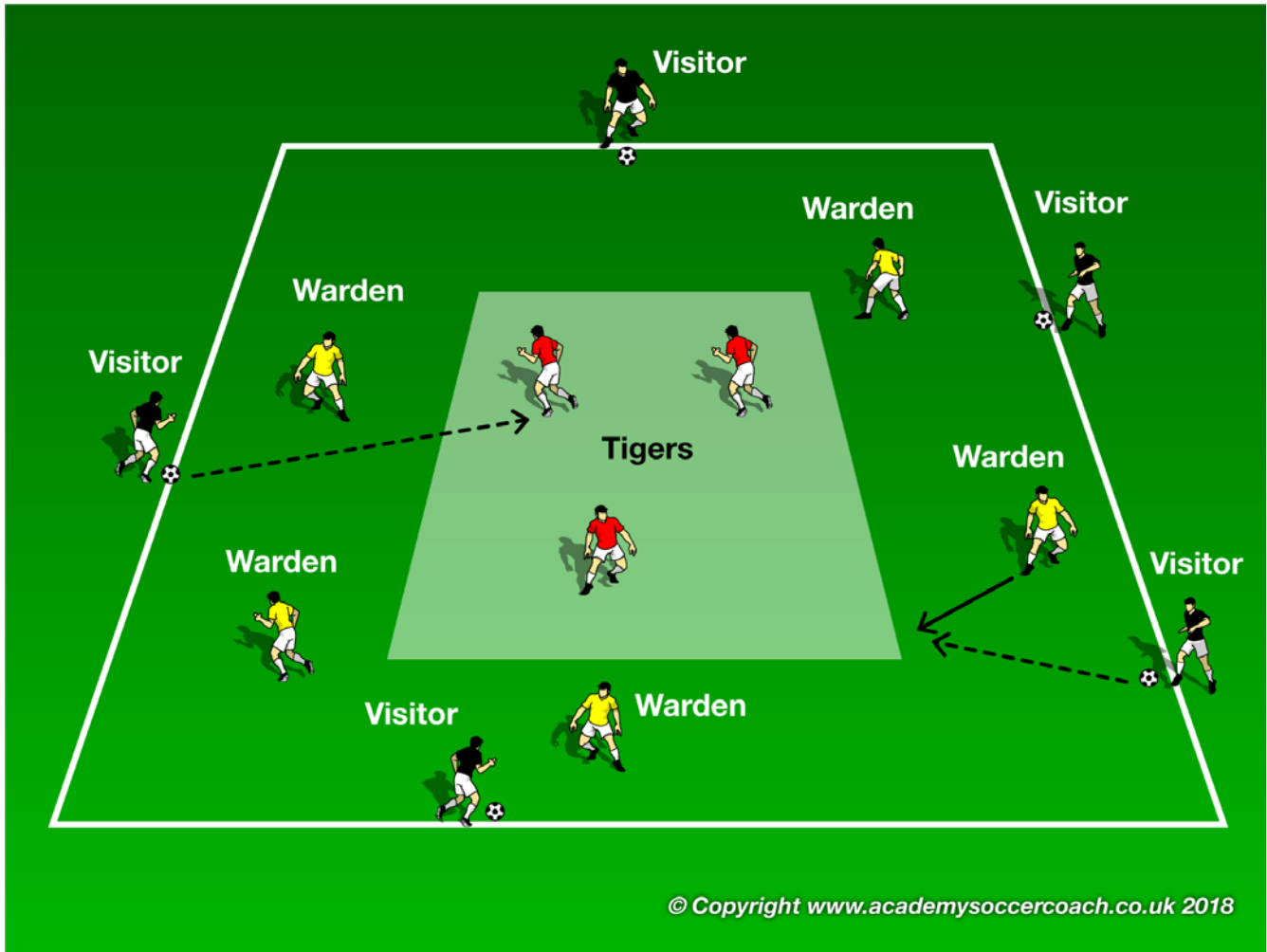
Set-up and sequence: this exercise is a progression of the previous one. 2 teams of 4 players (or whatever the number of available players is) are placed at the opposite corners of a rectangular area. 2 goals with goalkeepers in possession of a ball are placed along the shorter sides of the rectangle, 2 "trees" of cones are placed on the free corners, as in the pictures, and 2 box areas with a defender of each team are placed in the middle of the set-up. The goals for each team are to hit the cones in front of them (yellow for yellow players and orange for black team) and then to shoot on goal after receiving a pass from the opposition goalkeepers and winning 1 v 1 duels against the defenders; the goal worth the same quantity of prior hit cones. Points are gained only after scoring. If the defenders win the ball, they can shoot toward the opposition goal, doubling the value of the potential scoring of the attacking teammates.

Variation:

- Reverse the corners to shot with the other foot

Coaching points: be precise while kicking the ball toward the cones, weight of touches to try to hit more than one cone, run properly to be able to receive without losing the ball control, win the 1 v 1 duel as quickly as possible, try to overcome the opponents without losing the goal space.

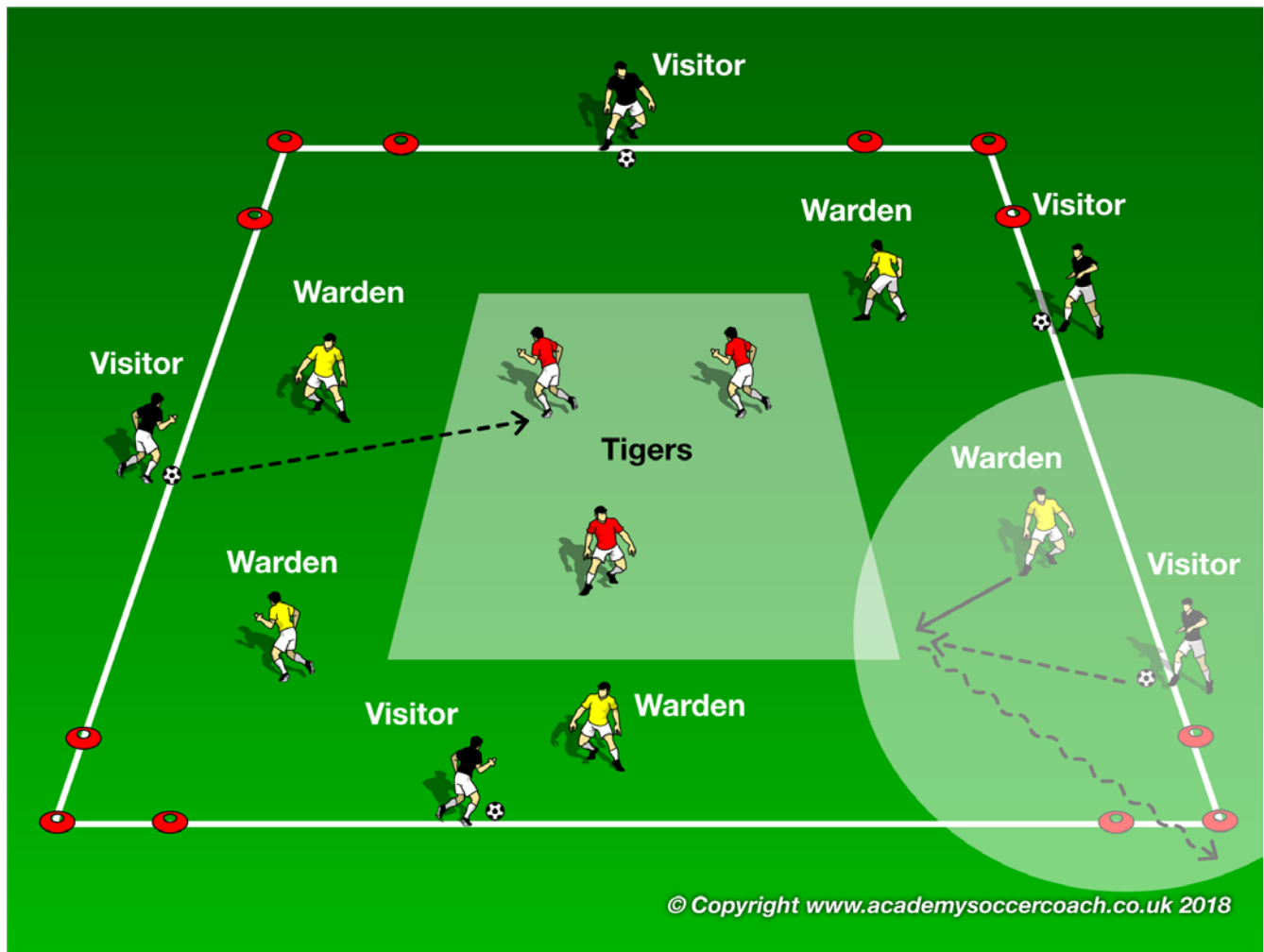
Exercise 14: tigers zoo (1)



Set-up and sequence: the rectangular set-up is considered as a tigers' zoo. The 5 visitors (players in possession of a ball each) are free to dribble along the border lines of the playing area, 3 red tigers are placed inside another zone in the middle and 5 wardens (defenders) can move freely along the area between the center zone and the border lines, trying to prevent the visitors (attackers) from passing toward the tigers. Each completed pass is a point for the attacking team. If a defender wins the ball, he gains a point for his team. The tigers must always move around the middle area to be sure to be unmarked at the back of the wardens.

Coaching points: close the passing lanes, be unmarked at the back and find the right space dribbling the ball.

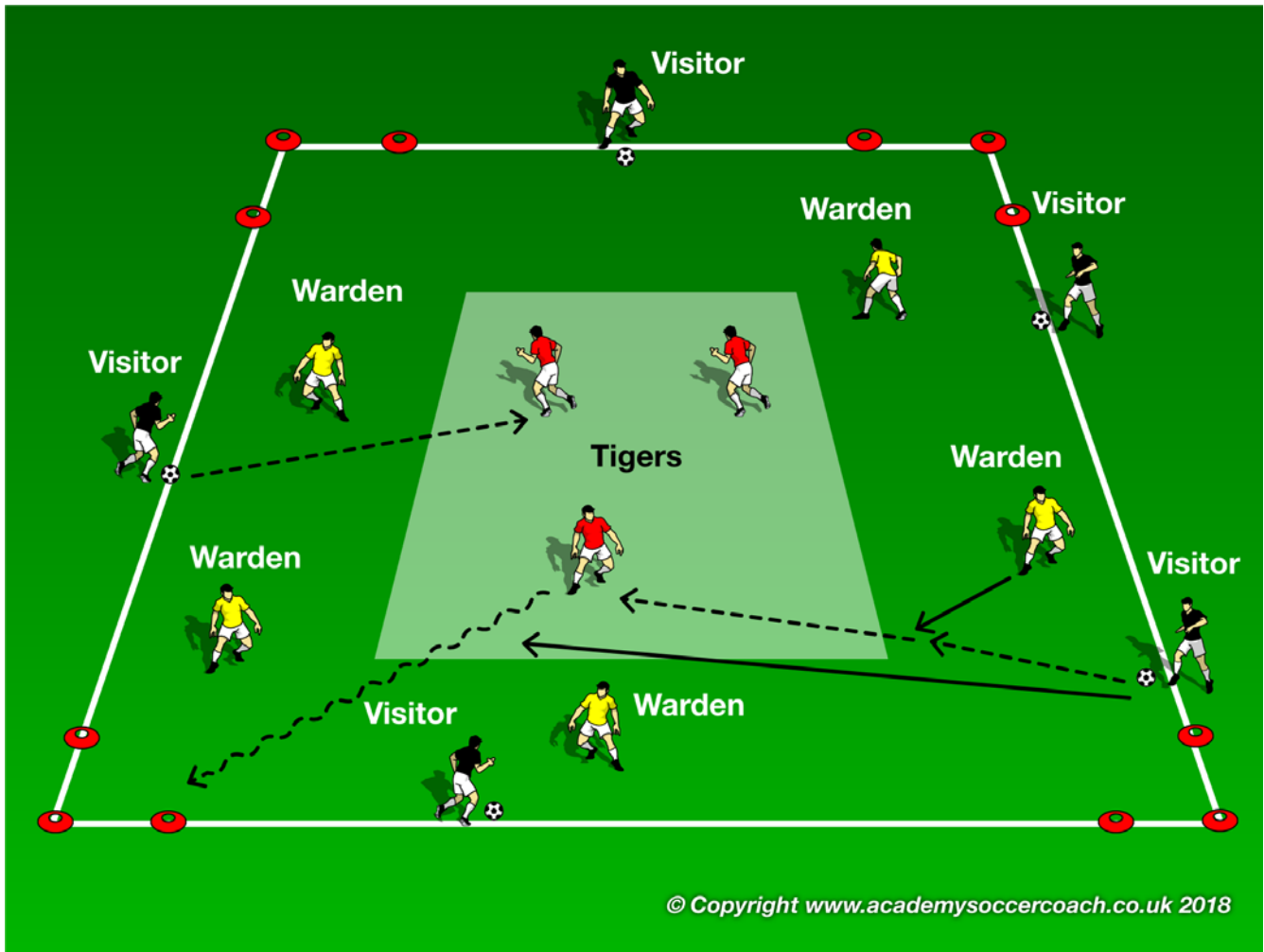
Exercise 15: tigers zoo (2)



Set-up and sequence: this exercise is a progression of the previous one. The rectangular set-up is considered as a tigers' zoo. Corner goals are now added using red cones, as in the picture. The 5 visitors (the players in possession of a ball each) are free to dribble along the border lines of the playing area, 3 red tigers are placed inside another zone in the middle and 5 wardens (defenders) can move freely along the area between the center zone and the border lines, trying to prevent the visitors (attackers) from passing toward the tigers. Each completed pass is a point for the attacking team. If a defender wins the ball, he must dribble to ball out of the nearest and easiest corners gate to gain a point for his team. The tigers must always move around the middle area to be sure to be unmarked at the back of the wardens.

Coaching points: close the passing lanes, be unmarked at the back, find the right space dribbling the ball, counter-pressing and individual transitions.

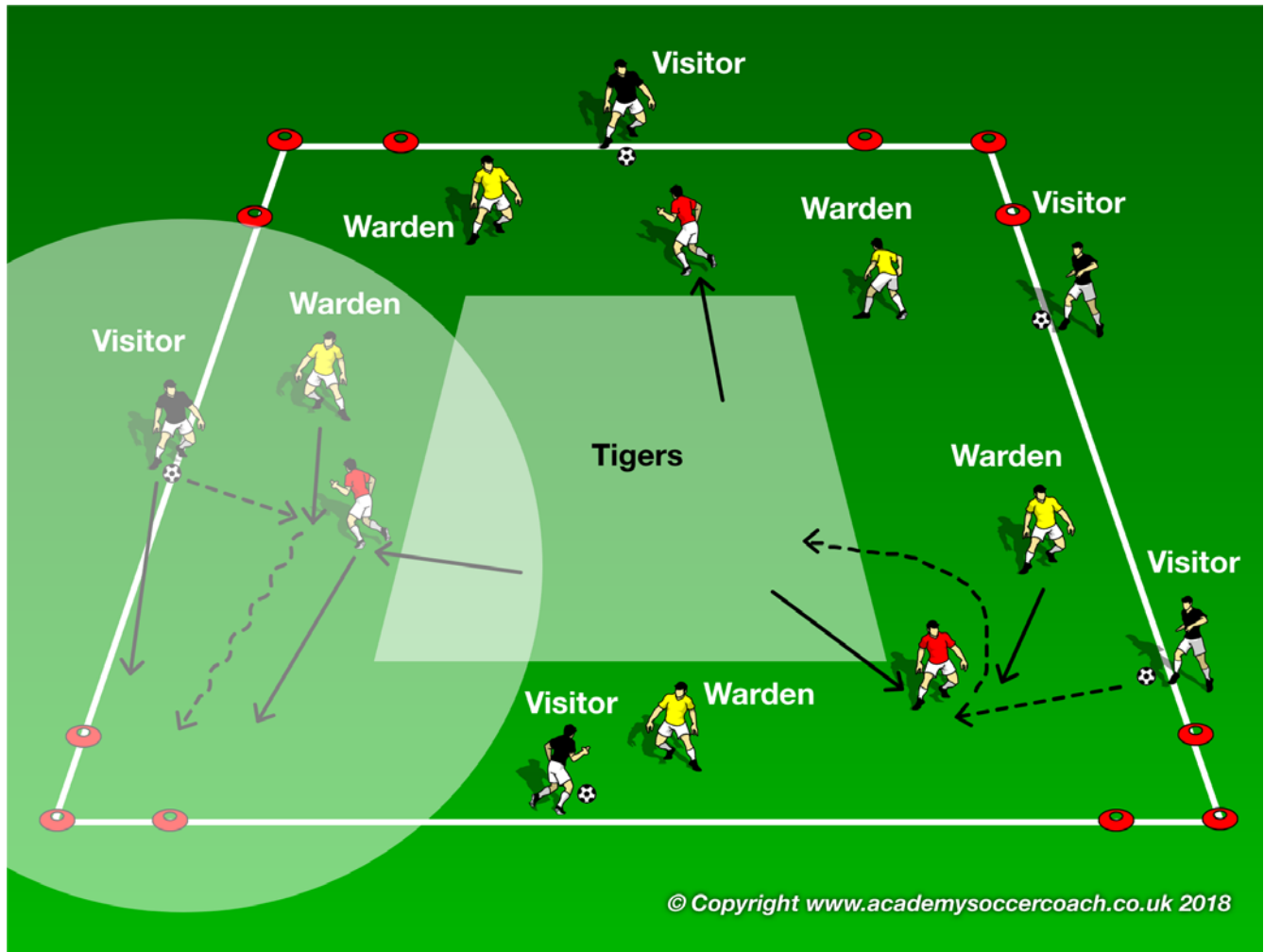
Exercise 16: tigers zoo (3)



Set-up and sequence: this exercise is the third progression of the number 14. The rectangular set-up is considered as a tigers' zoo. Corner goals are added using red cones as in the picture. The 5 visitors (the players in possession of a ball each) are free to dribble along the border lines of the playing area, 3 red tigers are placed inside another zone in the middle and 5 wardens (defenders) can move freely along the area between the center zone and the border lines, trying to prevent the visitors (attackers) from passing toward the tigers. Each completed pass is a point for the attacking team. If a defender wins the ball, 1 tiger becomes his teammates, as he must pass the ball to the tiger inside the center zone; as the tiger receives, he must dribble the ball out of the nearest and easiest corners gate to gain a point for the defending team. The visitor becomes defender who must recover the space, preventing the tiger from scoring. The tigers must always move to be sure to be unmarked at the back of the wardens or pay attention if they must play together with the wardens.

Coaching points: close the passing lanes, be unmarked at the back, find the right space dribbling the ball, counter-pressing and individual transitions, and defend in an outnumbered situation.

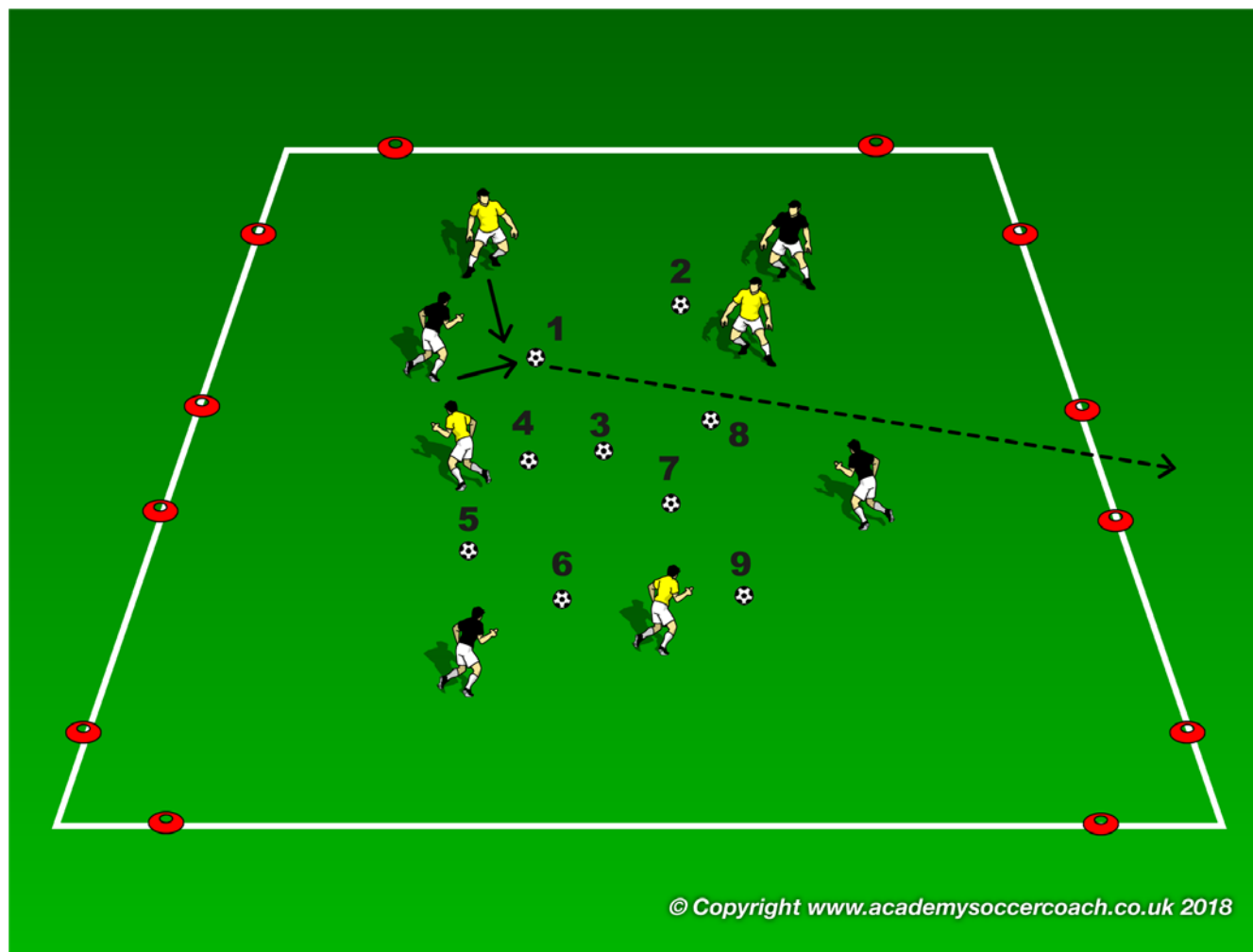
Exercise 17: Tigers Zoo (4)



Set-up and sequence: this exercise is the fourth and last progression of the number 14. The rectangular set-up is considered as a tigers' zoo. Corner goals are added using red cones as in the picture. The 5 visitors are free to dribble along the border lines of the playing area, 3 red tigers are placed inside another zone in the middle and 5 wardens (defenders) can move freely along the area between the center zone and the border lines, trying to prevent the visitors (attackers) from passing toward the tigers. Each completed pass is a point for the attacking team; note that in this progression the tigers come run out of the center area to receive and dribble the ball inside, before passing it back. If a defender wins the ball, the tiger becomes visitors' teammate, helping him to recover the possession and avoiding the new ball carrier from dribbling out of the nearest and easiest corners gate to gain a point for the defending team. The visitor becomes defender who must recover the space, preventing the tiger from scoring. The tigers must always move to be sure to be unmarked at the back of the wardens or pay attention if they must play together with the wardens.

Coaching points: close the passing lanes, be unmarked at the back, find the right space dribbling the ball, counter-pressing and individual transitions, double the mark for transition to defend.

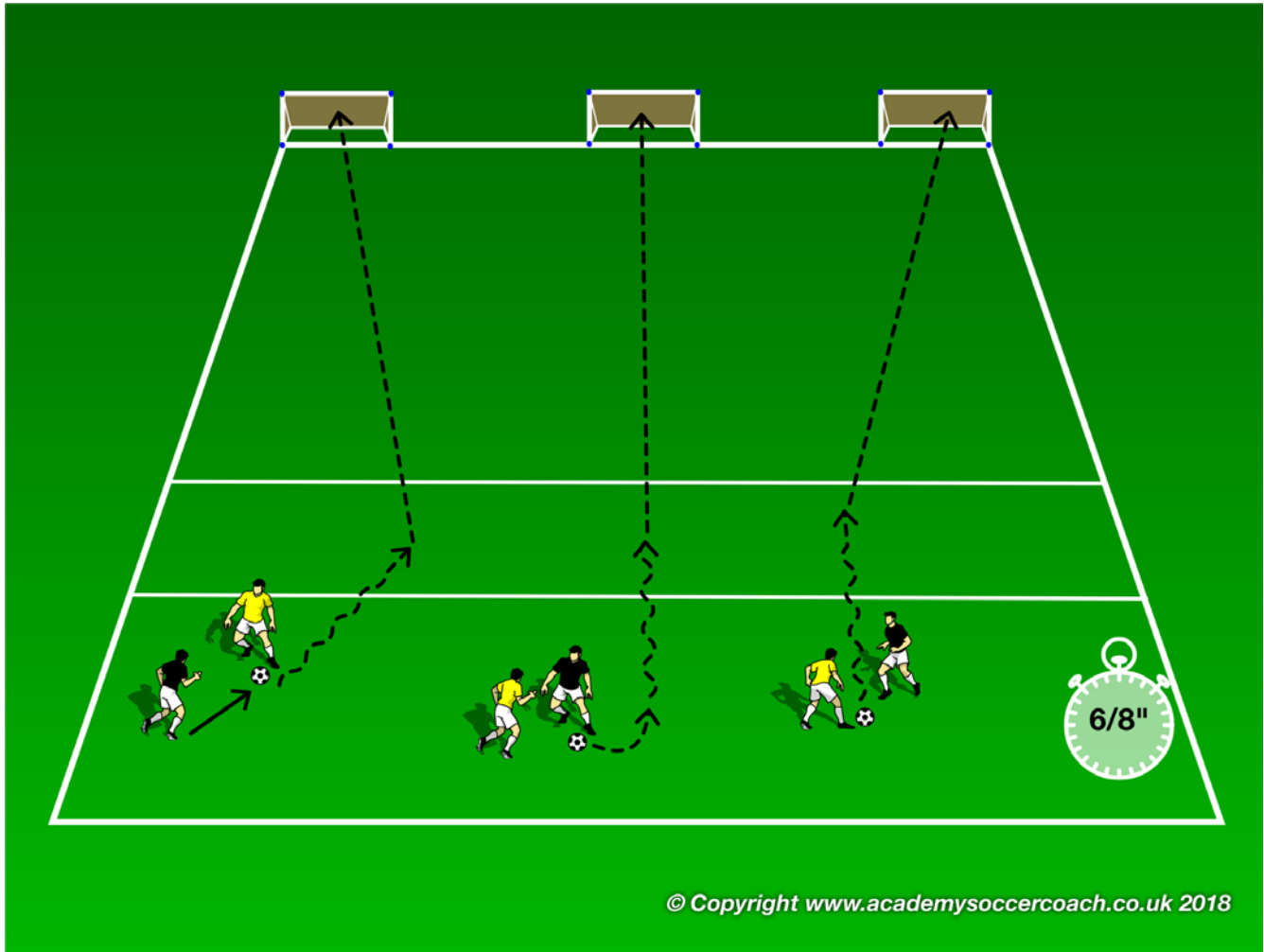
Exercise 18: pool soccer



Set-up and sequence: a rectangular area is shaped as a pool table, as the cones' gates are placed as pool holes are (4 on corners and 2 in the middle of the longer sides). 9 numbered balls are placed all over the center part of the set-up. 2 teams of 4 players are free to move without the ball along the space. The coach calls the number of the ball to be kicked over the easiest cones' line to win 1 point for the momentary possession team, after a 1 v 1 duel; the balls maybe called from 1 to 9 as sequence or randomly. The players involved are the nearest to the ball or decided by the coach, numbering the couples.

Coaching points: quick reaction to win the ball, close the goal space, body placement adaptation to ball and gates to attack and defend.

Exercise 19: shooting range (1)

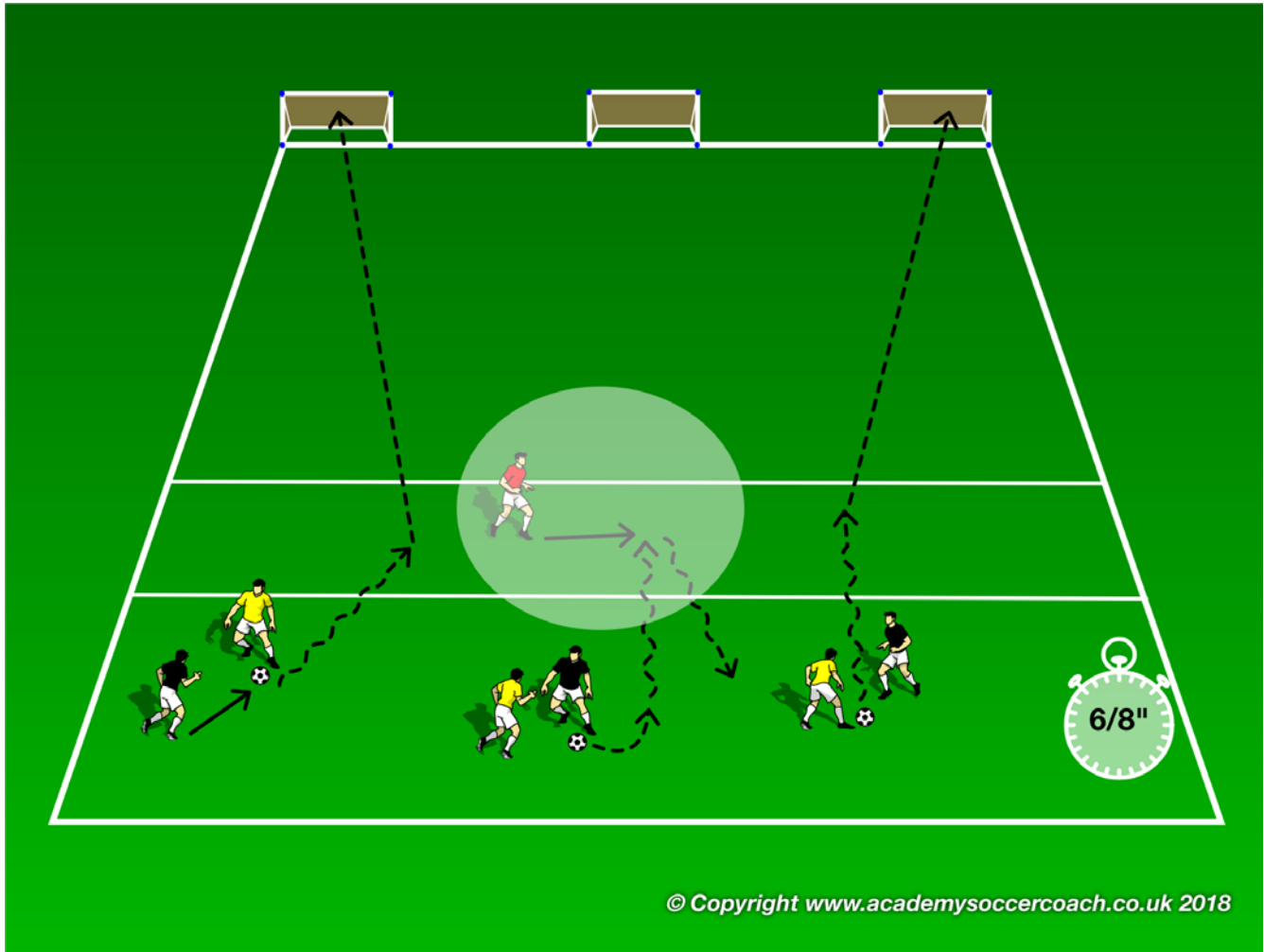


Set-up and sequence: a rectangular area is divided into 3 parts. Multiple 1 v 1 duels are played inside the lower zone (3 in the picture), the middle and shorter zone is where the possession players must shoot on goal from, and the third one that is used to create the distance from the shooting area and the goals placed along the opposite shorter sides. The goals must be the same number of the 1 v 1 duels; the players of the black attacking team have the possession and they must keep it for 6" or 8" after the coach's signal before dribbling inside the short shooting area. The attackers can't score in the same goal and the defenders can't counter the attackers inside the middle area. If the defenders win the ball, before the time limit, the possession must be maintained until the fixed time before dribbling and shooting.

Variation: the defenders can try to defend inside the middle shooting area, but if they win the ball, they must dribble back, maintain the possession as long as the original sequence against the direct opponent, before shooting.

Coaching points: ball protection, tackling to prevent shooting attempts, contrast against an opponent, space closure, counter-pressing to win the ball back.

Exercise 20: shooting range (2)

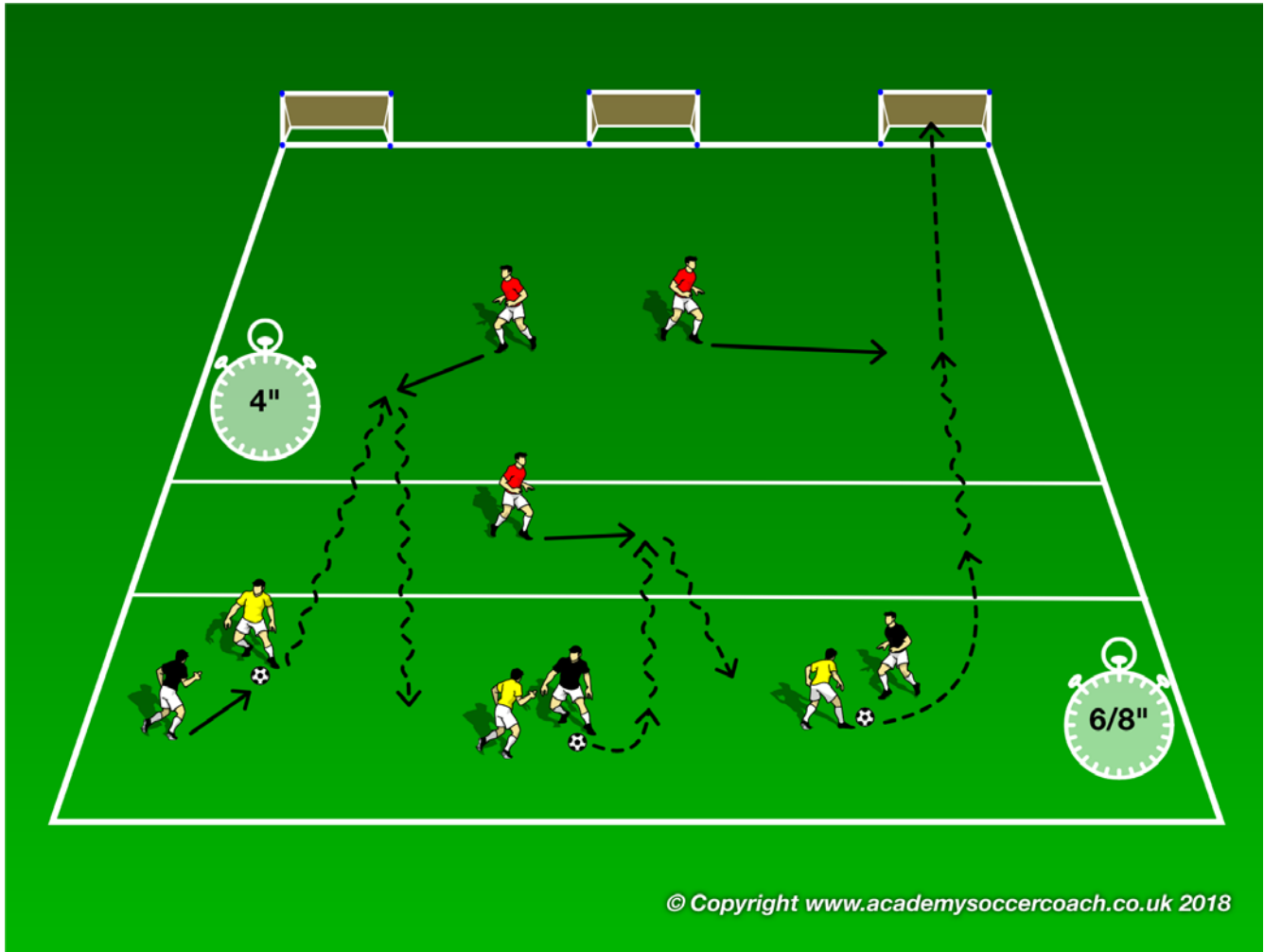


Set-up and sequence: this exercise is a variation of the previous one. A rectangular area is again divided into 3 parts. Multiple 1 v 1 duels are played inside the lower zone (3 in the picture), the middle and shorter zone is where the possession players must shoot on goal from (in this variation against a red player who can counter them) and the third one that is used to create the distance from the shooting area and the goals placed along the opposite shorter sides. The goals must be the same number of the 1 v 1 duels; the players of the black attacking team have the possession and they must keep it for 6" or 8" after the coach's signal before dribbling inside the short shooting area, where red player can counter them. If he wins the ball, the player who loses the possession must replace him. The attackers can't score in the same goal and the defenders can't counter them inside the middle area. If the defenders win the ball, before the time limit, the possession must be maintained until the fixed time before dribbling and shooting, always countered by the red player.

Variation: the defenders can try to defend inside the middle shooting area; this way the red players can choose where to double the mark, if there's more than one 1 v 1 duel in the middle space.

Coaching points: ball protection, tackling to avoid shooting attempts, contrast against an opponent, space closure, counter-pressing to win the ball back, double the mark.

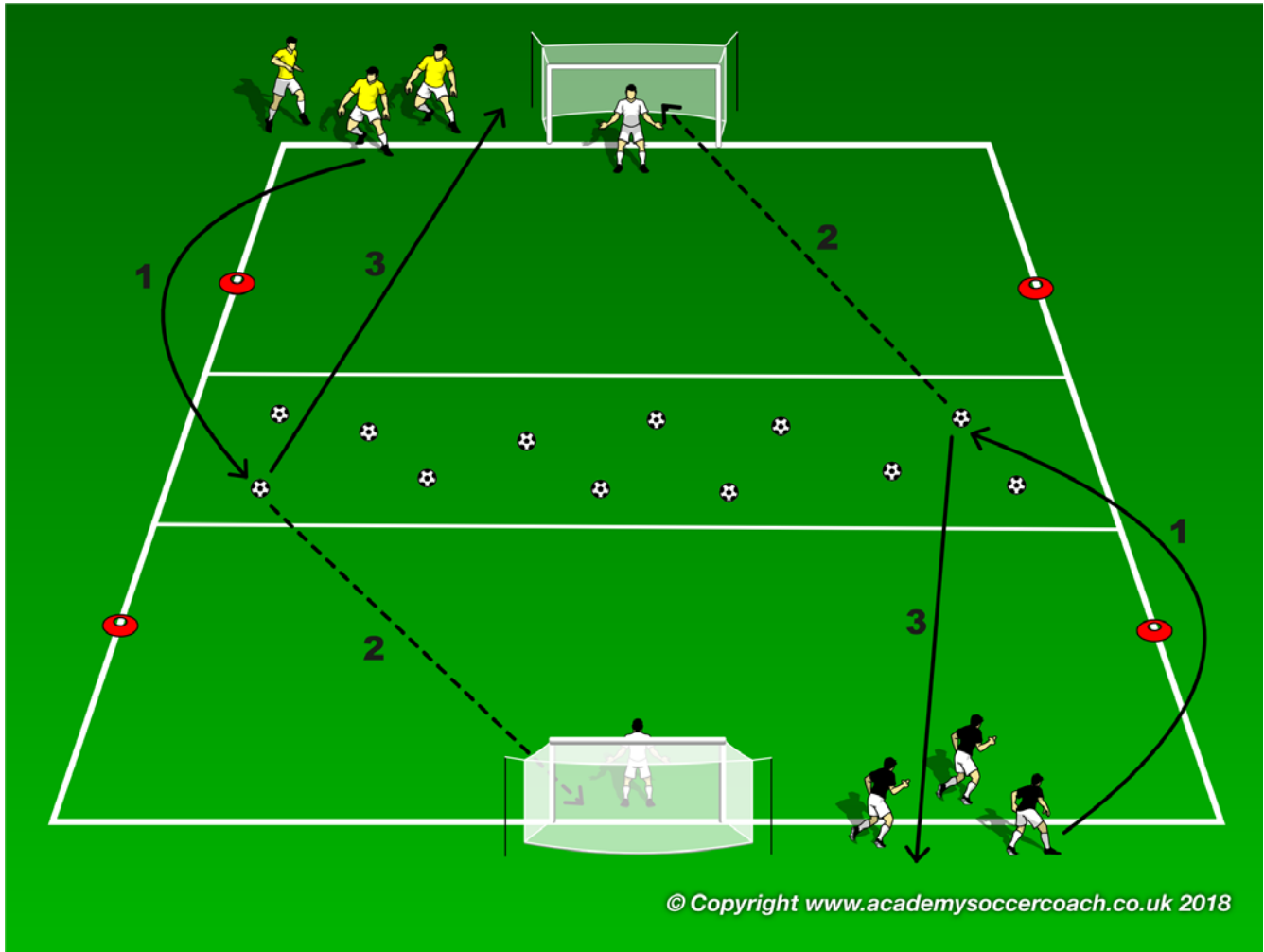
Exercise 21: shooting range (3)



Set-up and sequence: this exercise is another variation of the num.19. A rectangular area is again divided into 3 parts. Multiple 1 v 1 duels are played inside the lower zone (3 in the picture), the middle and shorter zone is where the possession players must dribble through against a red player, who can counter them, and the third one where they must shot on goal being under the pressure of 2 more red players, who try to recover the possession. The goals must be the same number of the 1 v 1 duels; the players of the black attacking team have the possession and they must keep it for 6" or 8" after the coach's signal before dribbling through the middle area, where the first red player can counter them. Then the possession players must run inside the third area, keep the possession for at least 4" before shooting on goal. The attackers can't score in the same goal and the defenders can't counter the attackers inside the middle or third area. If the defenders win the ball, before the time limit, the possession must be maintained until the fixed time, before dribbling and shooting, always under the pressure of the red players, after the black opponents. If the red players win the ball, they switch the roles with the direct opponents.

Coaching points: ball protection, tackling to avoid shooting attempts, contrast against an opponent, space closure, counter-pressing to win the ball back.

Exercise 22: shooting battle (1)



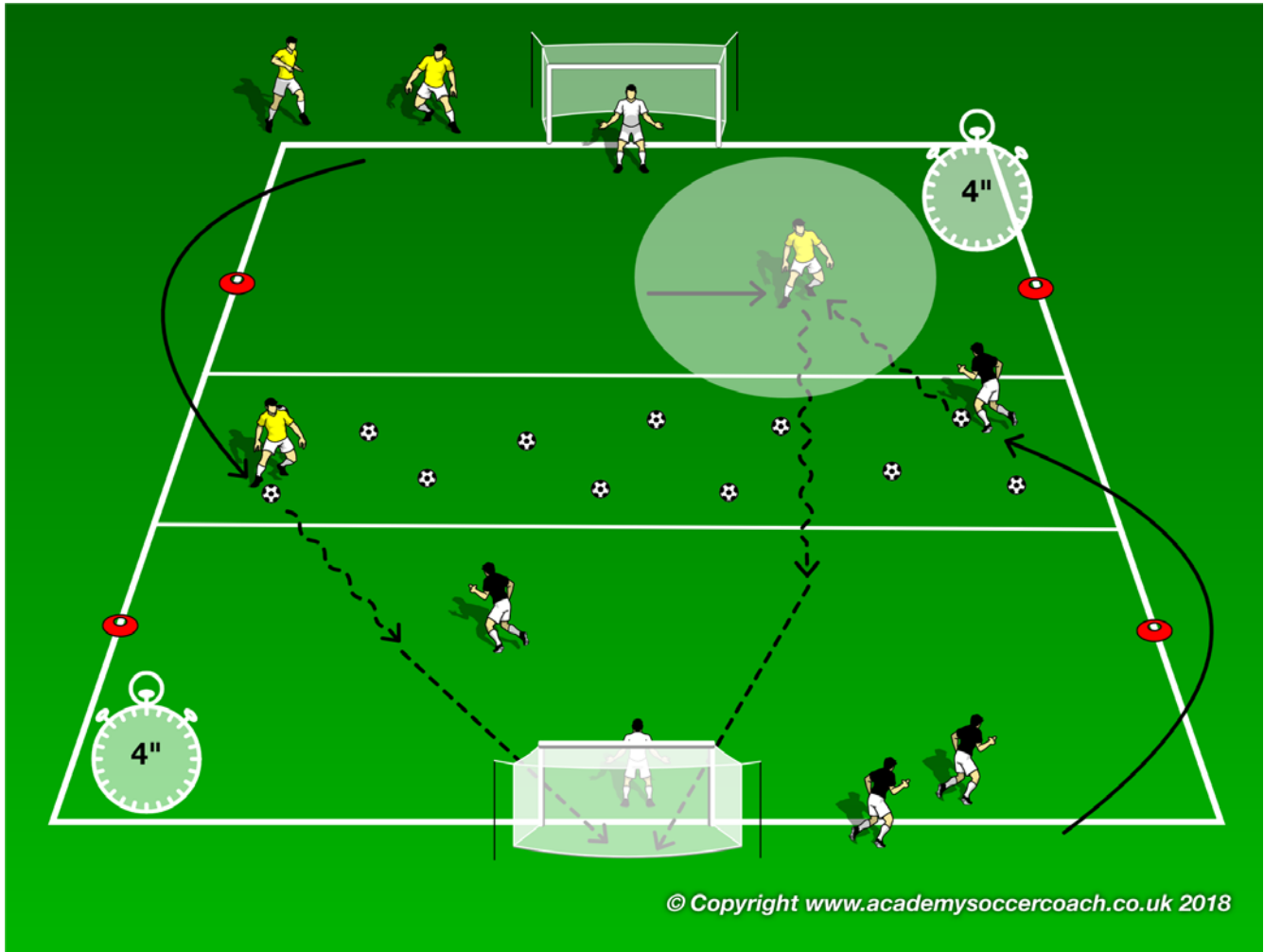
Set-up and sequence: the rectangular playing area is divided into 3 parts and 2 goals with goalkeepers placed in the middle of the shorter sides. An even number of balls (12 in the picture - 2 shots for each player) is placed inside the center area. 4 cones are placed on the left and on the right sides of the outer areas; they must be overcome outwardly, before shooting from the middle area.

The teams (black and yellow) start from the right side of the own goal (or from the left) and they have 6 chances to score (2 for each player); all the players must be quick to gain the best chance to score, kicking the easiest ball, when they run inside the middle area (they can only shot with 1 touch). The next teammate can't start until the prior one is back in line.

Variation: fix a limit of time to shot on goal

Coaching points: sprint ability, changes of direction, coordination to shot on goal with 1 touch.

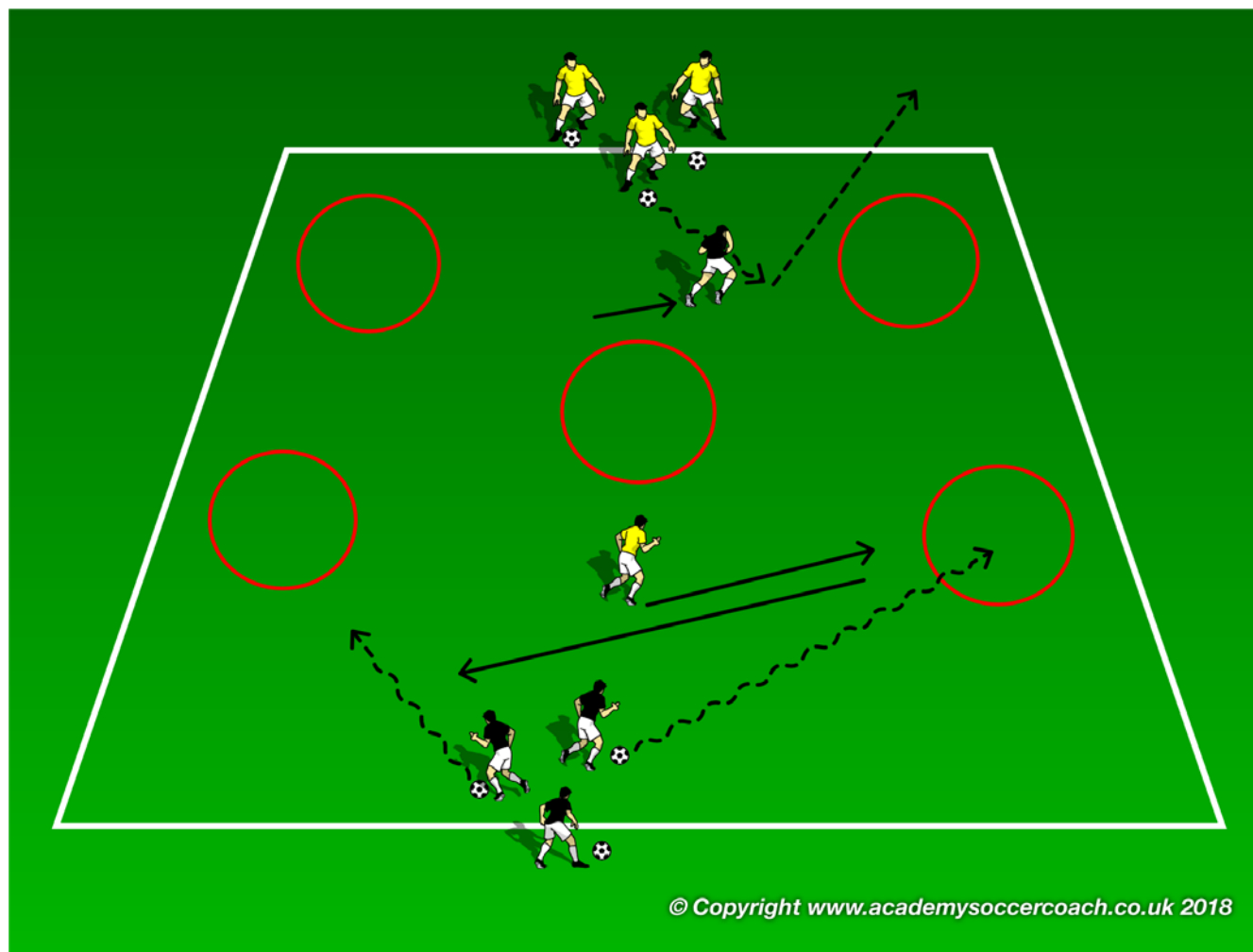
Exercise 23: shooting battle (2)



Set-up and sequence: the rectangular playing area is divided into 3 parts and 2 goals with goalkeepers are placed in the middle of the shorter sides. An even number of balls (12 in the picture - 2 shots for each player) is placed inside the center area. 4 cones are placed on the left and on the right sides of the outer areas; they must be overcome outwardly before dribbling the ball out of the center area and shooting inside the final thirds against an opponent. The teams (black and yellow) starts from the right side of the own goal (or from the left) and they have 6 chances to score (2 for each player); all the players must be quick to gain the best chance to score, looking for the easiest ball when they run inside the middle area and dribbling out, as soon as possible to finish. The opponents inside the final thirds have 4" to counter the attackers and win the ball; if they are able to recover the possession, they can shoot freely toward the opposition goal. If they can't recover the ball within that time, then the attackers can't be countered at all. The next teammate can't start until the prior one is back in line.

Coaching points: sprint ability, changes of direction, coordination to shot on goal with 1 touch.

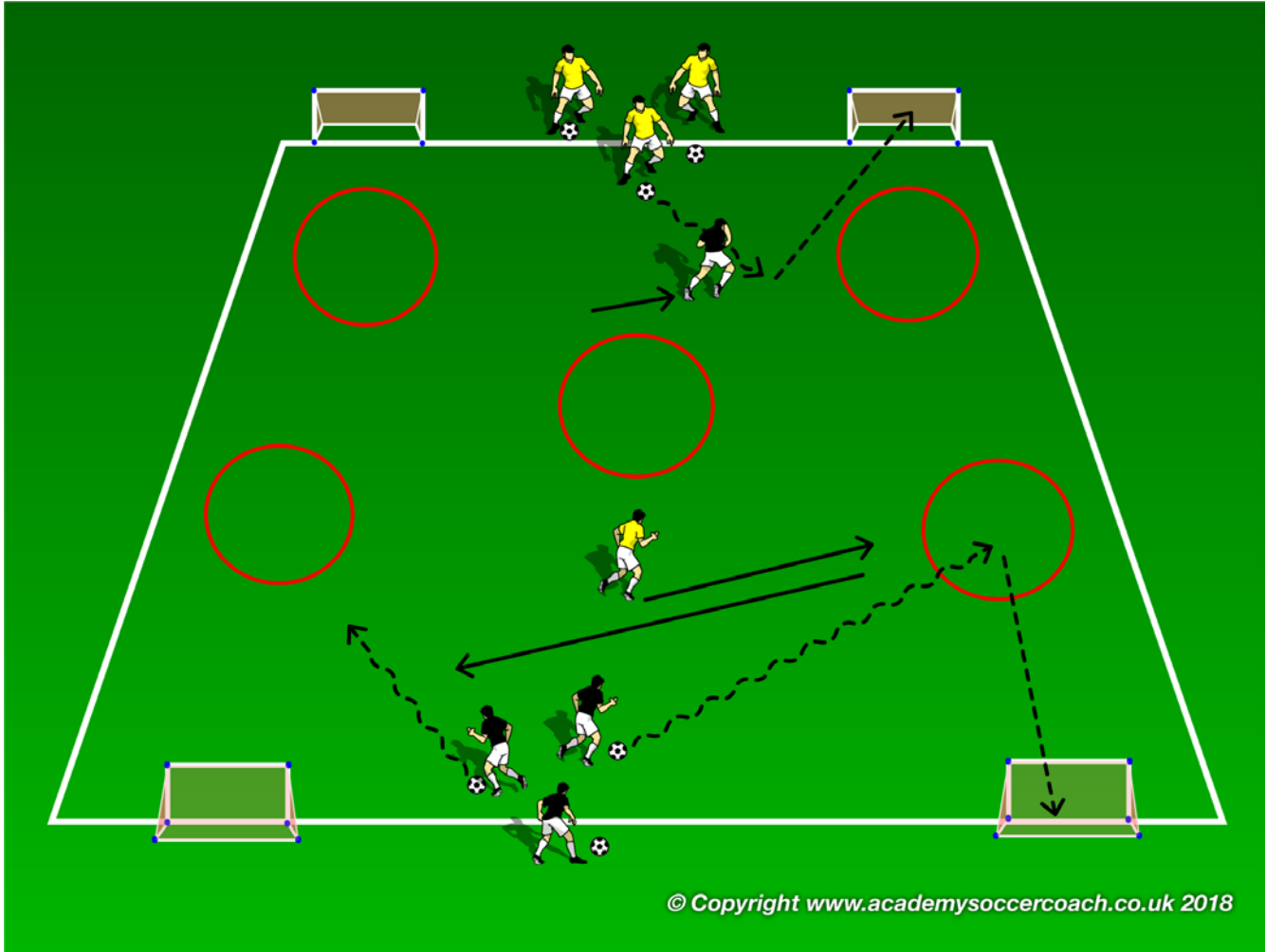
Exercise 24: conquer the cycles



Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 4 players (3 attackers and 1 defenders) are placed in the middle of the end lines (attackers in possession of a ball each) and in front of the middle 5 cycle set-up (only the defenders). The attackers of each team start dribbling the ball one after the other to "conquer" 1 of the 5 cycles in the middle of the playing area, by placing the ball inside. The defenders must try to prevent the opponents from dribbling inside the cycles, countering and tackling them. The next teammate can't start until the move of the prior one is finished. The team who can conquer 3 cycles wins the round.

Coaching points: dribble the ball at speed, changes of direction while dribbling, counter the opponent directly, quick feints to overcome the direct opponent.

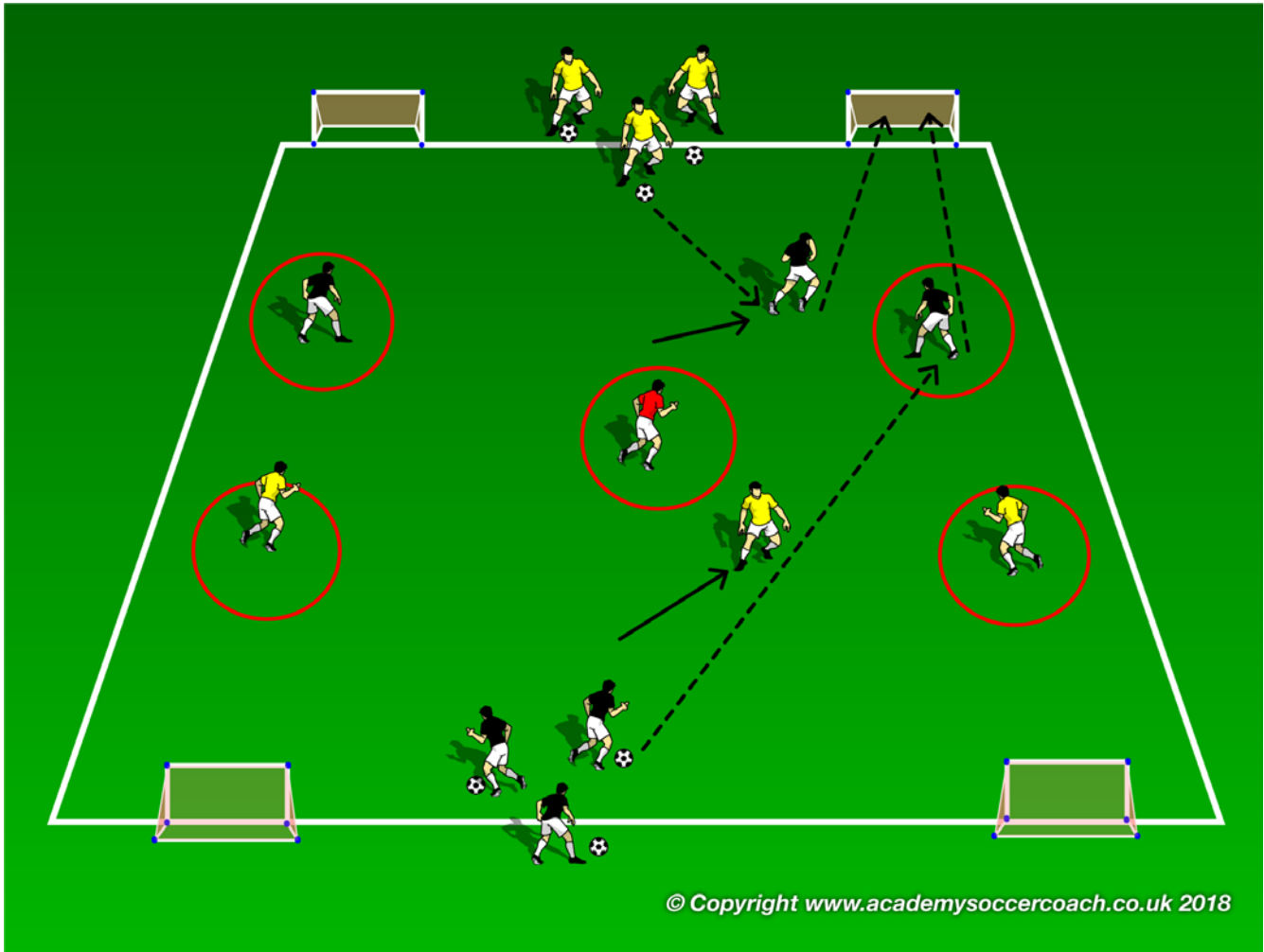
Exercise 25: conquer the cycles and shot on goal (1)



Set-up and sequence: this is a progression of the previous exercise. 2 teams of 4 players (3 attackers and 1 defender) are placed in the middle of the end lines (attackers in possession of a ball each) and in front of the middle 5 cycle set-up (only the defenders). 4 goals are added near the corners along the end lines. The attackers of each team start dribbling the ball one after the other to "conquer" 1 of the 5 cycles in the middle of the playing area, by placing the ball inside, before turning, changing direction and shooting toward the nearest goal. The defenders must try to prevent the opponents from dribbling inside the cycles, countering and tackling them or try to close the space of the potential goal. The team who can conquer 3 cycles and scores wins the round. If the defenders win the ball, they can shot directly toward the nearest goal; if they score, it worth like a conquered cycle.

Coaching points: dribble the ball at speed, changes of direction while dribbling, counter the opponent directly, quick feints to overcome the direct opponent, close the shooting space.

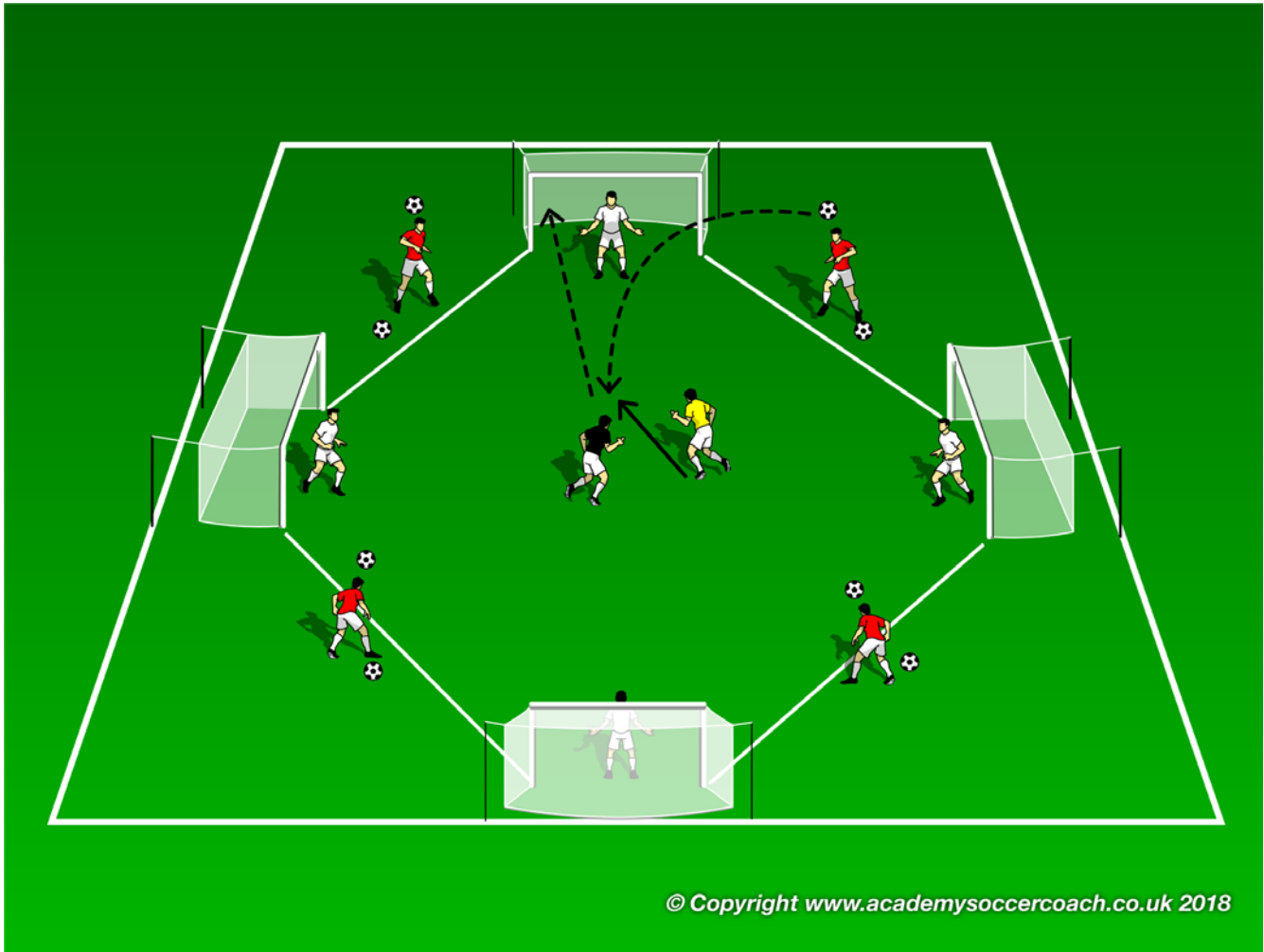
Exercise 26: conquer the cycles and shot on goal (2)



Set-up and sequence: this is a variation of the previous exercise. 2 teams of 6 players (3 dribbling attackers, 2 already placed inside the cycles and 1 defender) are placed inside the rectangular playing area; 4 goals are added near the corners along the end lines. The attackers in possession of each team must be able to pass it to the teammates inside the forward cycles, who must receive and shoot with 2 touches; if he scores, the cycle can be considered as conquered. The defenders must try to close the passing lanes. If the possession player is not able to pass directly toward a teammate, the center red free player can help to progress the move; but the following goal worth half point if it is scored. If the defenders win the ball, they can shoot directly toward the nearest goal; if they score, it counts like a conquered cycle.

Coaching points: dribble the ball at speed, changes of direction while dribbling, counter the opponent directly, quick feints to overcome the direct opponent, close the shooting space.

Exercise 27: 1 v 1 aerial duels (1)

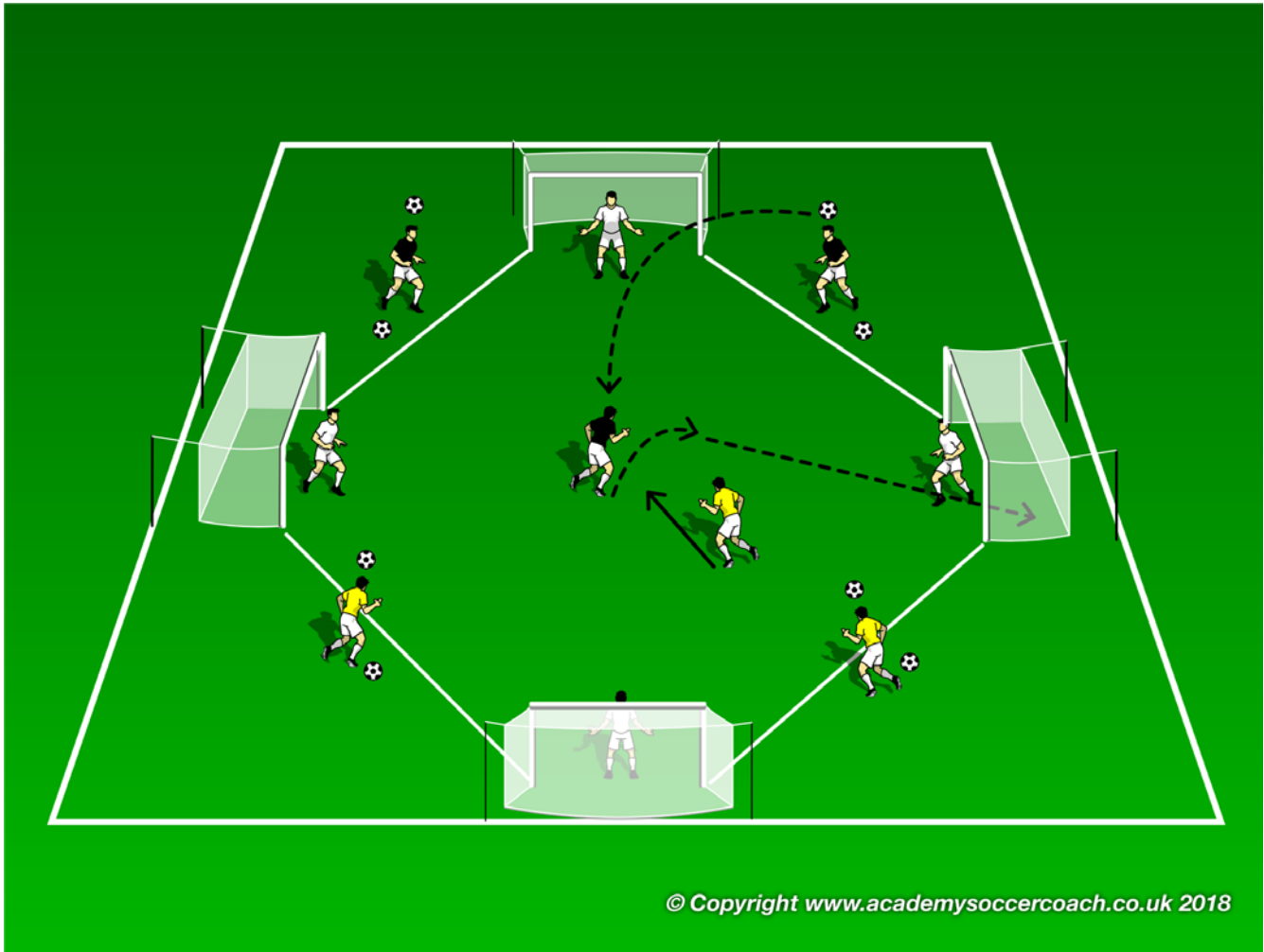


Set-up and sequence: 4 goals with goalkeepers and 4 free players with 2 balls each are placed on the corners and along the sides of a diamond set-up as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played in the middle between the black attacker and the yellow defender; both them can finish 4 times (shooting toward all the goals) and must defend 4 times. The attacker, who must be properly positioned to finish with a header or an aerial shot after a volley pass, decides the free player he wants to receive the pass from. The defender must clear the chances for the opponent by deciding whether to mark him on or save the goal space as best solution.

Variation: the attacking round can be played with 8 balls; 4 aerial passes and 4 ground passes.

Coaching points: body positioning to finish with 1 touch, escape the marker, aerial finishing skills, mark the man on, save the goal space.

Exercise 28: 1 v 1 aerial duels (2)

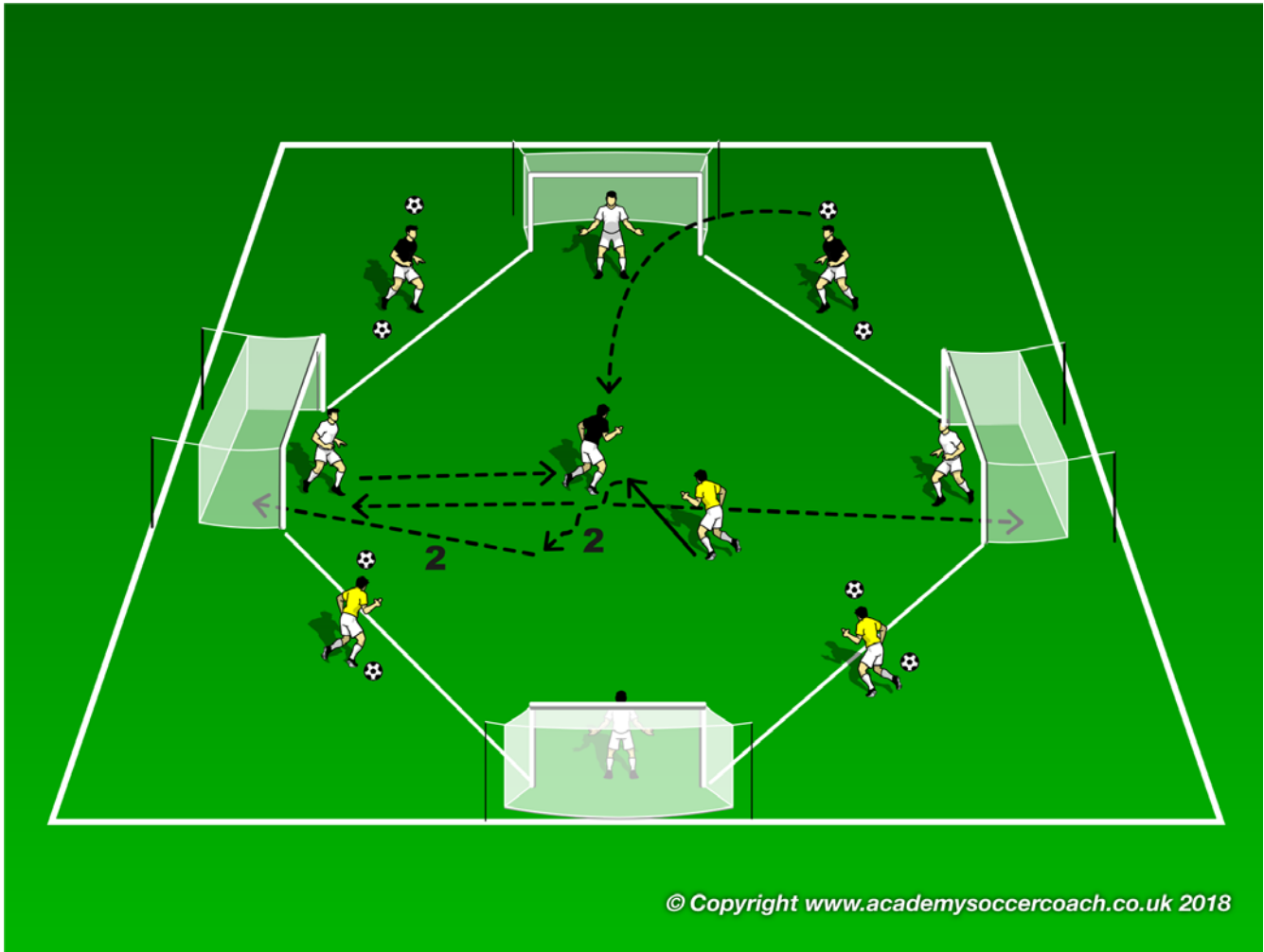


Set-up and sequence: this exercise is a progression of the previous one. 4 goals with goalkeepers and 2 black and 2 yellow players with 2 balls each are placed on the corners, along the sides of a diamond set-up, as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played in the middle between the black attacker and the yellow defender; both them can finish 4 times (shooting toward all the goals) and must defend 4 times, after receiving a pass from the outer teammates. The attacker must be properly positioned to finish with a header or an aerial shot after a volley pass. The defender must clear the chances for the opponent by deciding if to mark him on or saving the goal space as best solution. If the defender wins the ball, he can shoot toward the nearest and easiest goal. The round ends when all the 3 players of each team have played 1 turn as attacker and 1 turn as defender.

Variation: the attacking round can be played with 4 balls; 2 aerial passes and 2 ground passes.

Coaching points: body positioning to finish with 1 touch, escape the marker, aerial finishing skills, mark the man on, save the goal space.

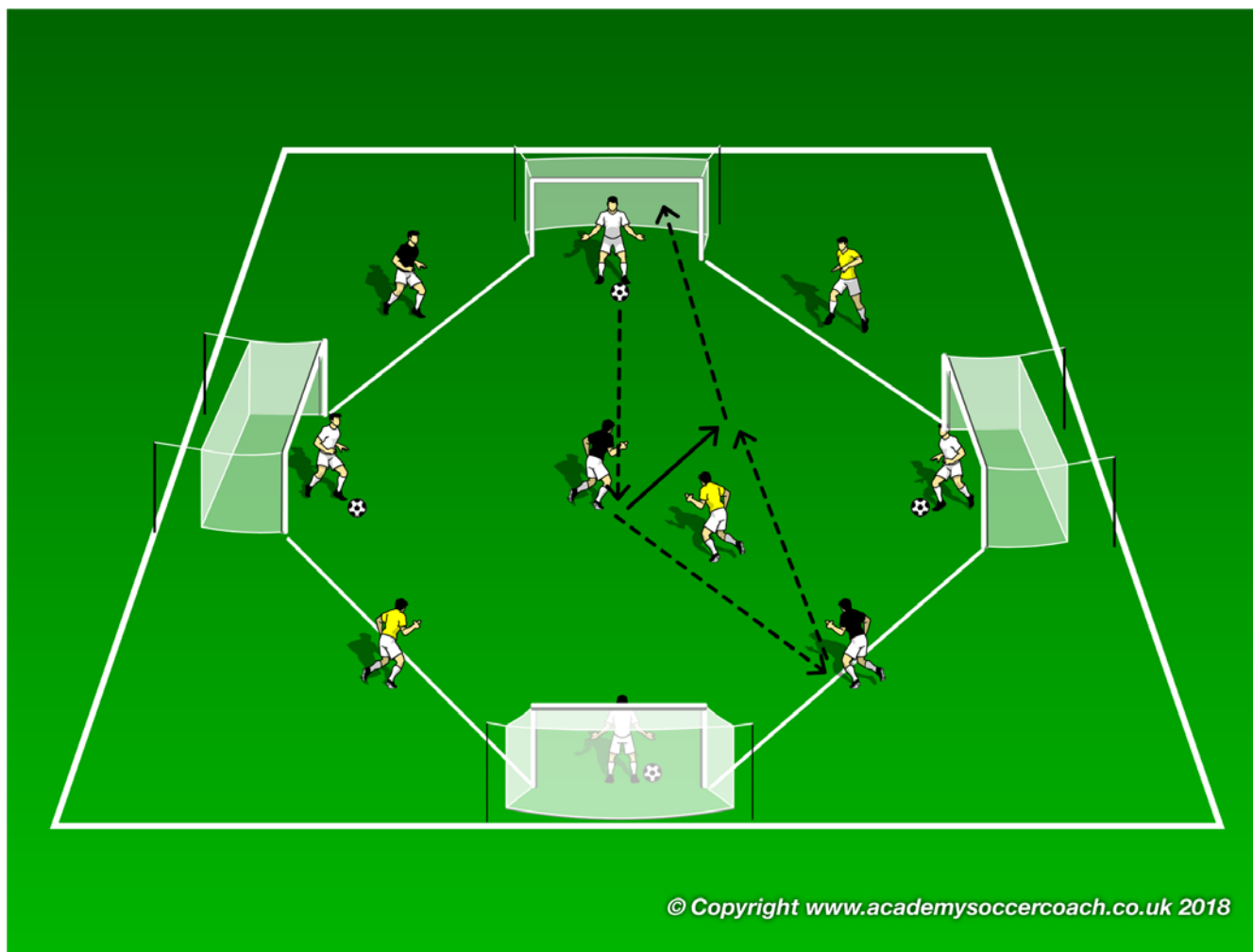
Exercise 29: 1 v 1 multiple duels (1)



Set-up and sequence: this exercise is a progression of the exercise num.28. 4 goals with goalkeepers and 2 black and 2 yellow players with 2 balls each are placed on the corners and along the sides of a diamond set-up, as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played in the middle between the black attacker and the yellow defender; both them can finish 4 times (shooting toward all the goals) and must defend 4 times, after receiving a volley pass from the outer teammates, playing a wall pass combination with a goalkeeper and finishing toward the opposite goal (2). The attacker must be properly positioned to receive and for a header control first and then to finish after receiving the return pass. The defender must clear the chances for the opponent by deciding if to counter the first pass or the return pass from a goalkeeper. If the defender wins the ball, he can shot toward the nearest and easiest goal. The round ends when all the 3 players of each team have played 1 turn as attacker and 1 turn as defender.

Coaching points: body positioning to finish with 1 touch, escape the marker, aerial receiving skills, mark the man on, save the goal space.

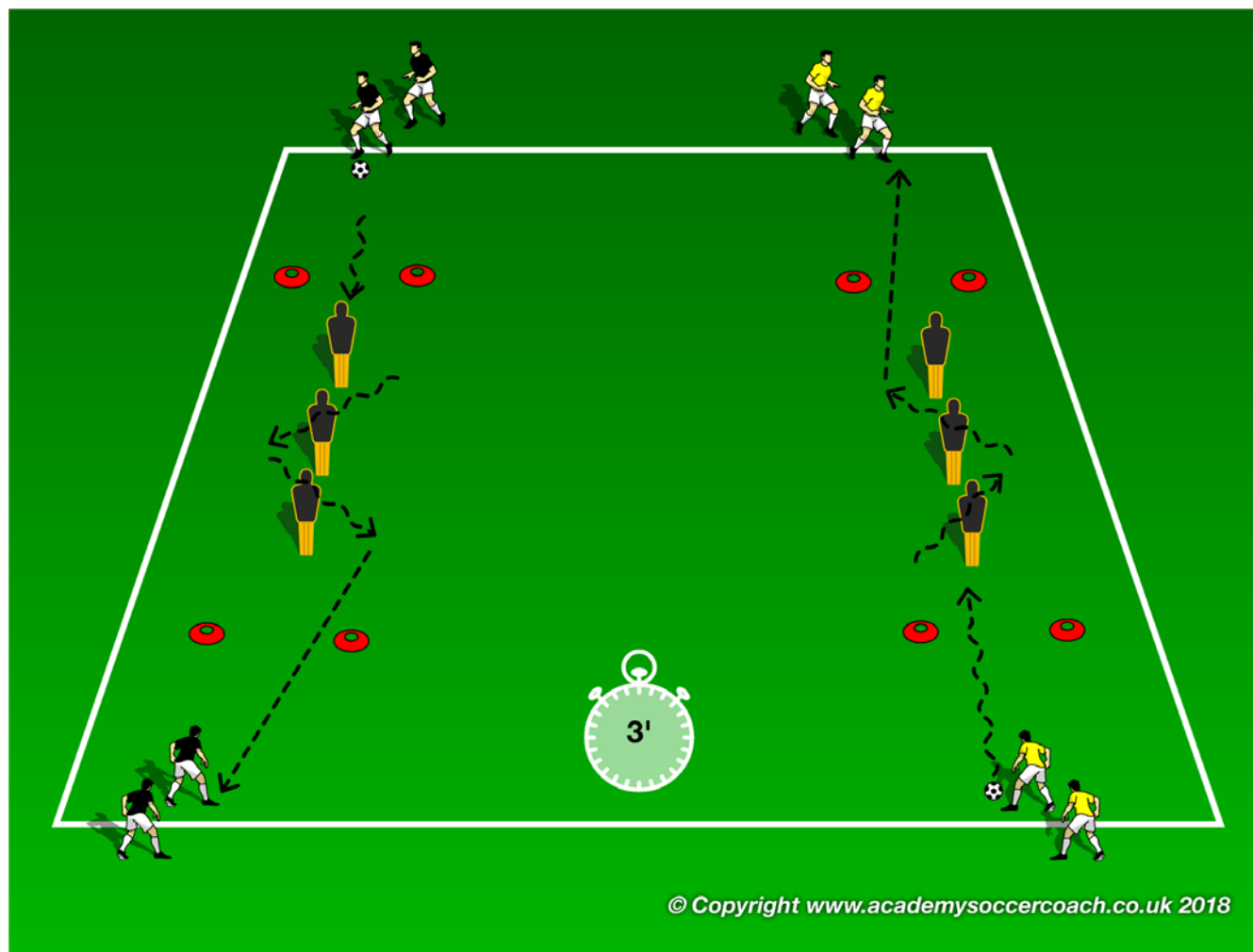
Exercise 30: 1 v 1 multiple duels (2)



Set-up and sequence: this exercise is another progression of the exercise num.28. 4 goals with goalkeepers in possession and 2 black and 2 yellow players (in front of each other) are placed on the corners and along the sides of a diamond set-up, as in the picture. A 1 v 1 duel is played in the middle between the black attacker and the yellow defender; both them can finish 4 times (shooting toward all the goals) and must defend 4 times, after receiving a pass from a goalkeeper, playing a wall pass combination with the opposite outer teammates and finishing toward the goal, where the ball was received from at the beginning. The attacker must be properly positioned to receive. The defender must clear the chances for the opponent by deciding if to counter the first pass or the second return pass. The round ends when all the 3 players of each team have played 1 turn as attacker and 1 turn as defender.

Coaching points: body positioning to finish with 1 touch, pass quickly to free from the opposition pressure, escape the marker, mark the man on, save the goal space.

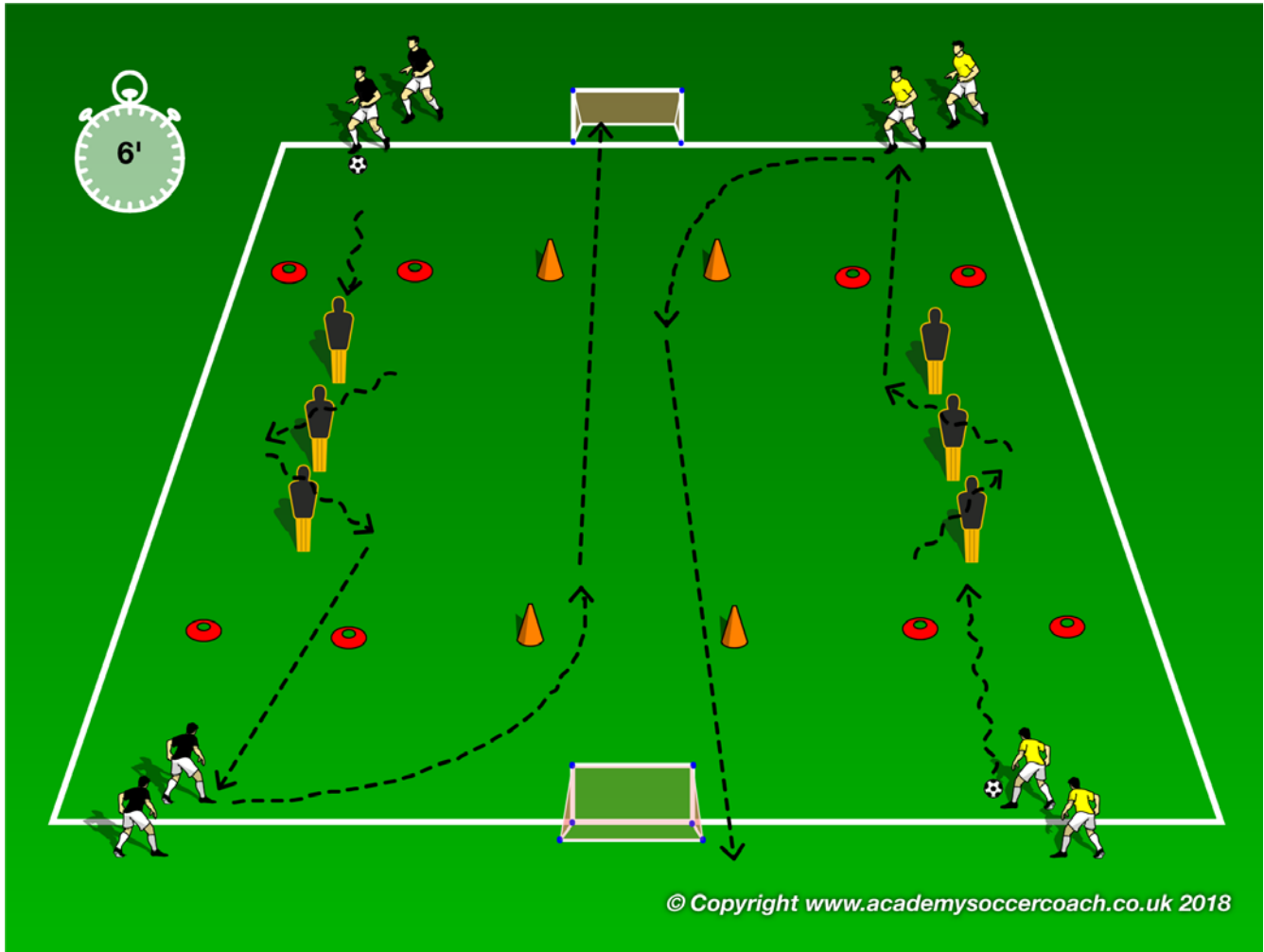
Exercise 31: dribbling and feints battle



Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 4 players (or whatever is the number of the available players, but even number if possible) are placed and lined as in the picture. 3 air-bodies stand in the middle between the team's queues. The teams must dribble the ball out and back, feinting among the air-bodies; the team that completes the highest number of turns within 3', wins the round. Dribbling and feinting must be performed as required by the coach. Every final pass must be played between the red cones; otherwise, the turn doesn't count.

Coaching points: dribbling quality and speed, feinting quickness, quality of ball touches.

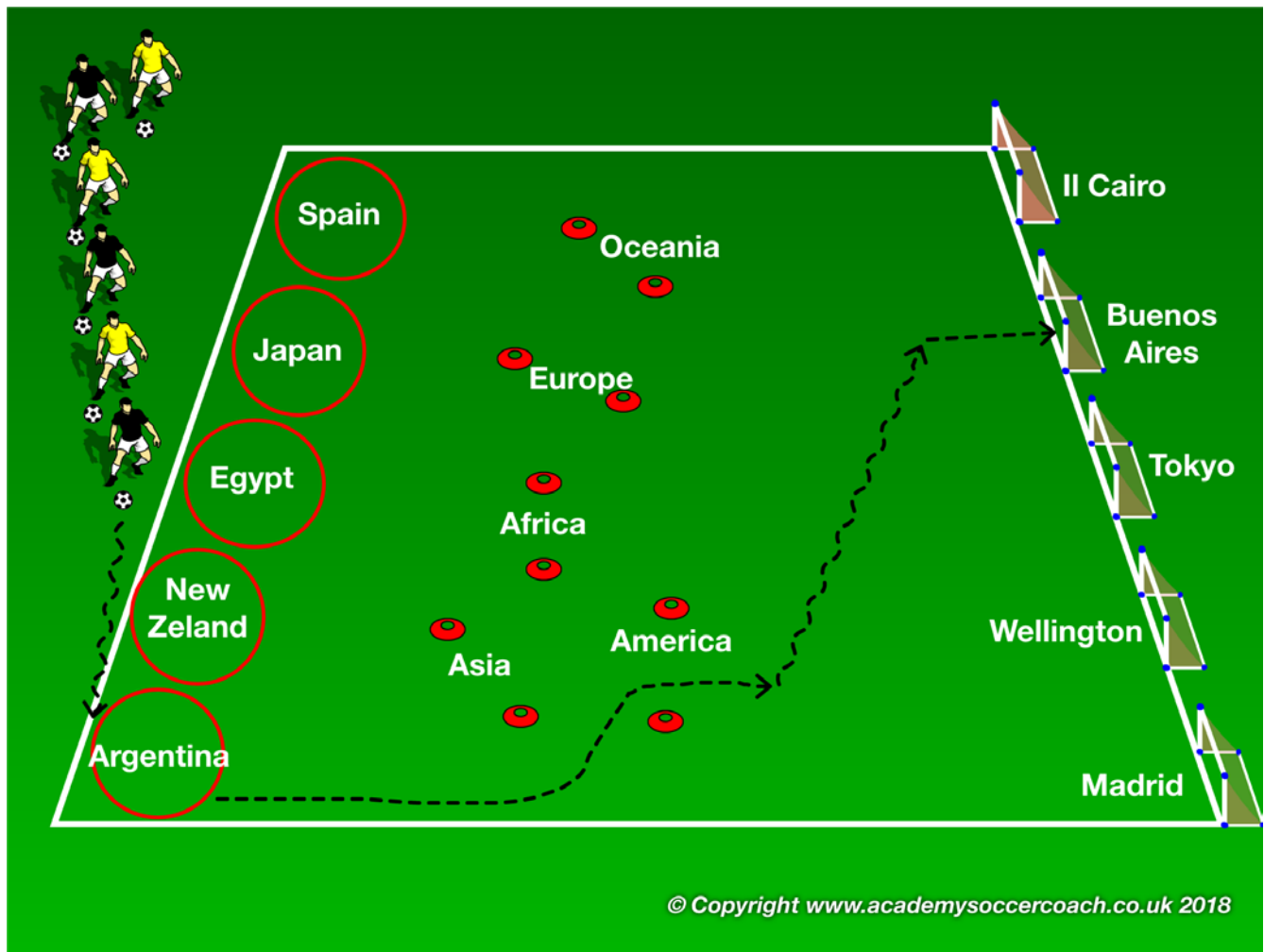
Exercise 32: dribbling, feinting and shooting battle



Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 4 players (or whatever is the number of the available players, but even number if possible) are placed and lined as in the picture. 3 air-bodies stand in the middle between the team's queues. 2 mini-goals are placed in the middle of the end lines, as in the picture. The teams must dribble the ball toward the opposite side, feinting among the air-bodies; the players in possession must pass the ball between the red cones and the receiver must control it toward the opposite mini-goal, in front of them and sideways from the center orange cones, before shooting on goal. The turn can be considered valid only if they score; otherwise, the turn doesn't count. The player who kicked the ball must recover the ball to start a new sequence. The team who completes the highest number of turns (scoring goals) within 6' wins the round.

Coaching points: dribbling quality and speed, feinting quickness, quality of ball touches, shooting accuracy.

Exercise 33: dribble from the nation to the continent and score in the capitol city



Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 3 players (or whatever is the number of the available players, but even number) are placed and lined alternately, as in the picture. The playing area is set-up as follow:

- The cycles at the beginning are named as Nations.
- The cones' gates in the middle are named as Continents.
- The mini-goals along the opposite side are named as Capitol cities of the Nations.

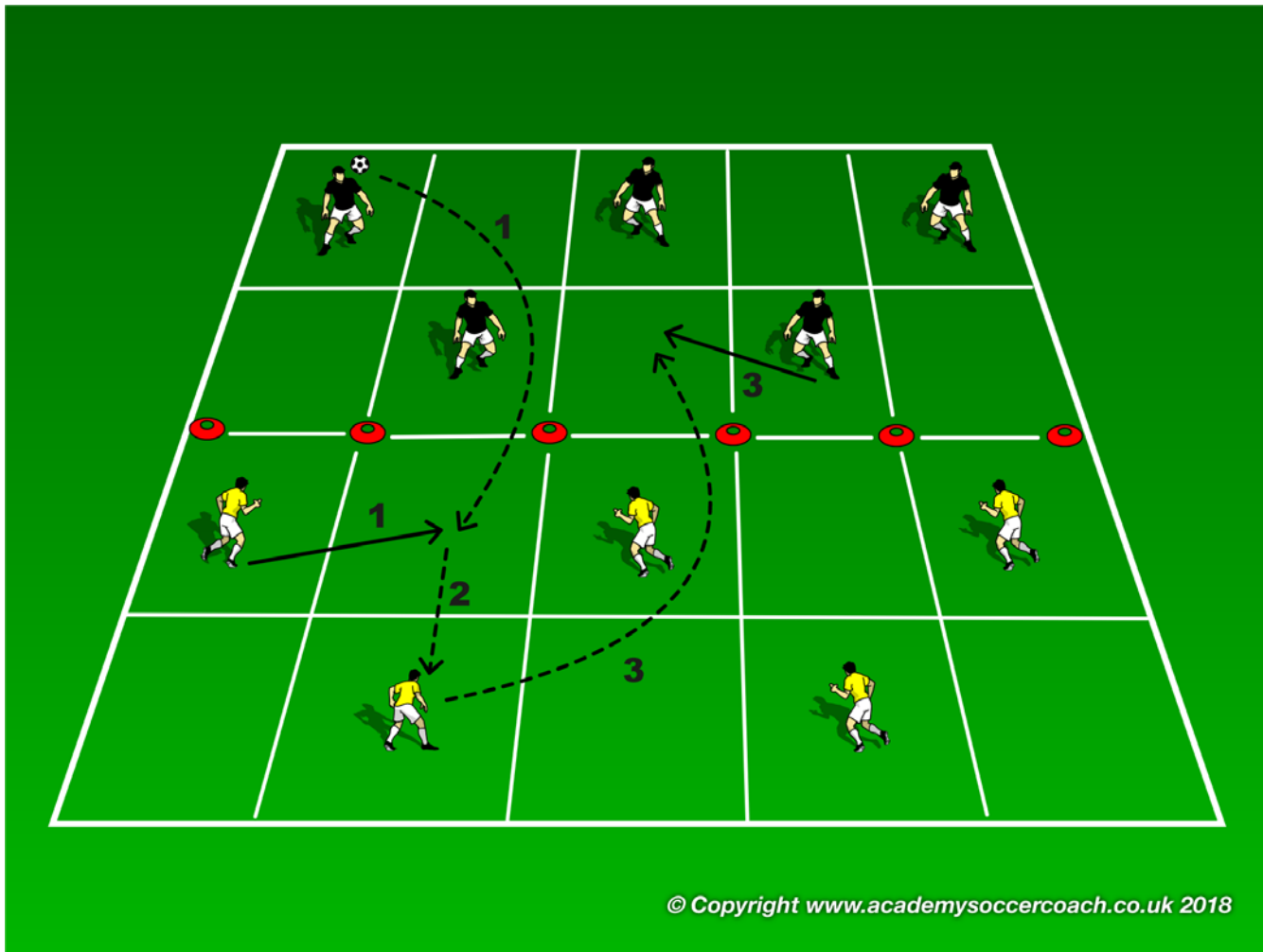
The coach calls out the cycle where to start from and the player must connect it with the correct continent first and then score in the right mini-goals.

After a fixed number of repetitions, the total time of both teams has to be signalled and the faster team in completing the connections wins the round. The players must dribble the ball with the foot and in the ways the coach requires.

Variation: the coach can call out the Continent first that must be connected with the right Nation and then with the right Capitol city, to encourage changes of direction while dribbling the ball.

Coaching points: dribbling quality and speed, proper changes of directions, quality of ball touches, shooting accuracy.

Exercise 34: throw-ins battle



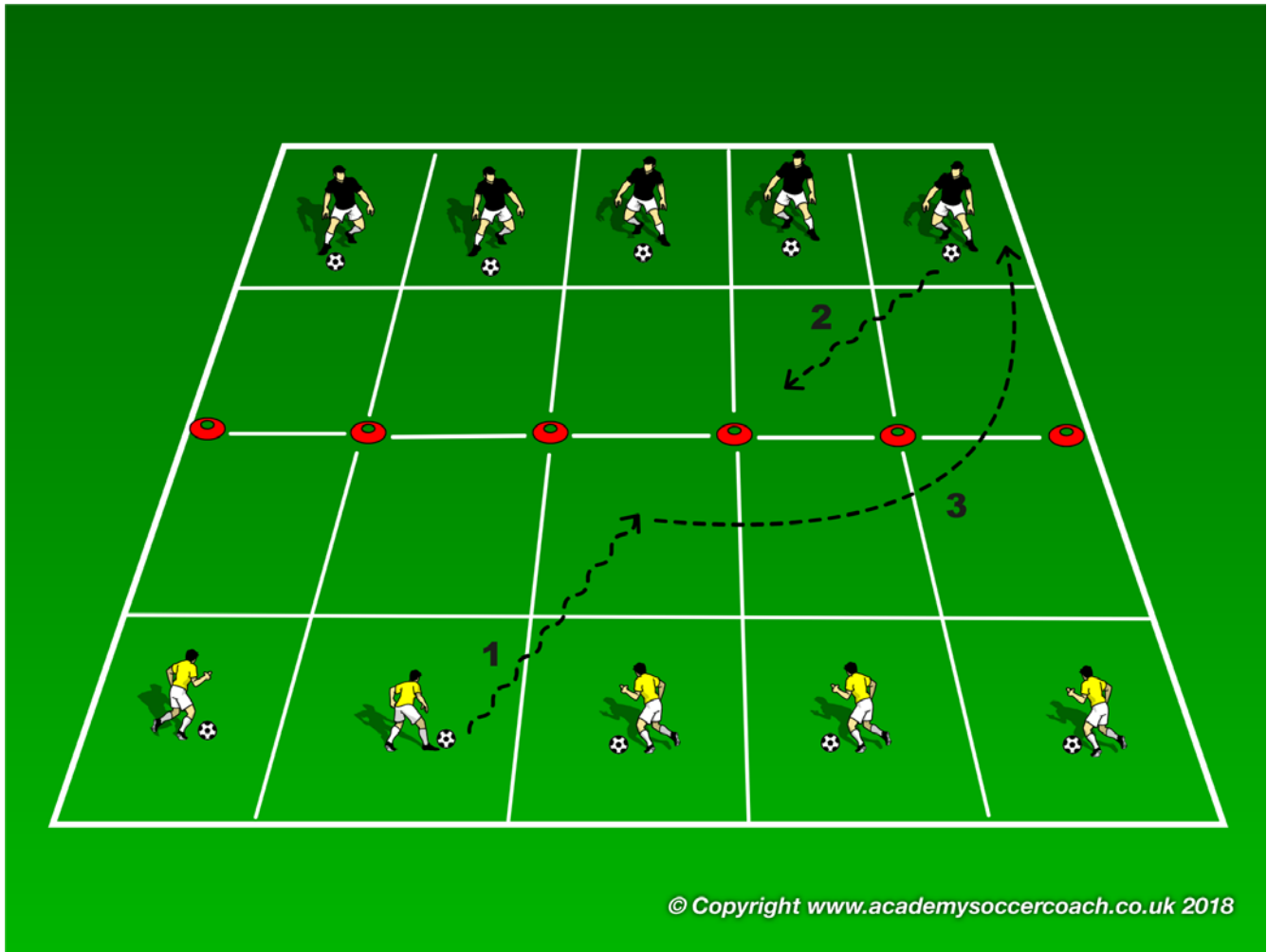
Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 5 players each are placed on a pitch that is divided into 2 halves. Each half is then again divided into 8 parts and the players must be placed alternately in a 3-2 or 2-3 formation, as in the picture; one team starts with the ball possession. The goal when the team is possession is to play throw-ins toward a free space of the opposition's half, trying to let the ball touch the ground; the defending team must prevent this, moving a player toward that part of the pitch and catching the ball in the air (1). When the ball is safe, a second player must receive the ball (2) to send another throw-in toward the opposite side (3), moving across the half to keep the required formation; all the other players must move the same way. If the ball touches the ground a point is gained. When the formation is not correctly shaped, that team loses a point. After a fixed limit of time, the leading team wins the round.

Note: the throw-ins must be always properly performed to win the potential point.

Variation: the ball can be saved by a correct foot aerial control inside the area where the ball is falling; but it can't go out of it.

Coaching points: alternate short and long throw-ins, throw-ins technical skills.

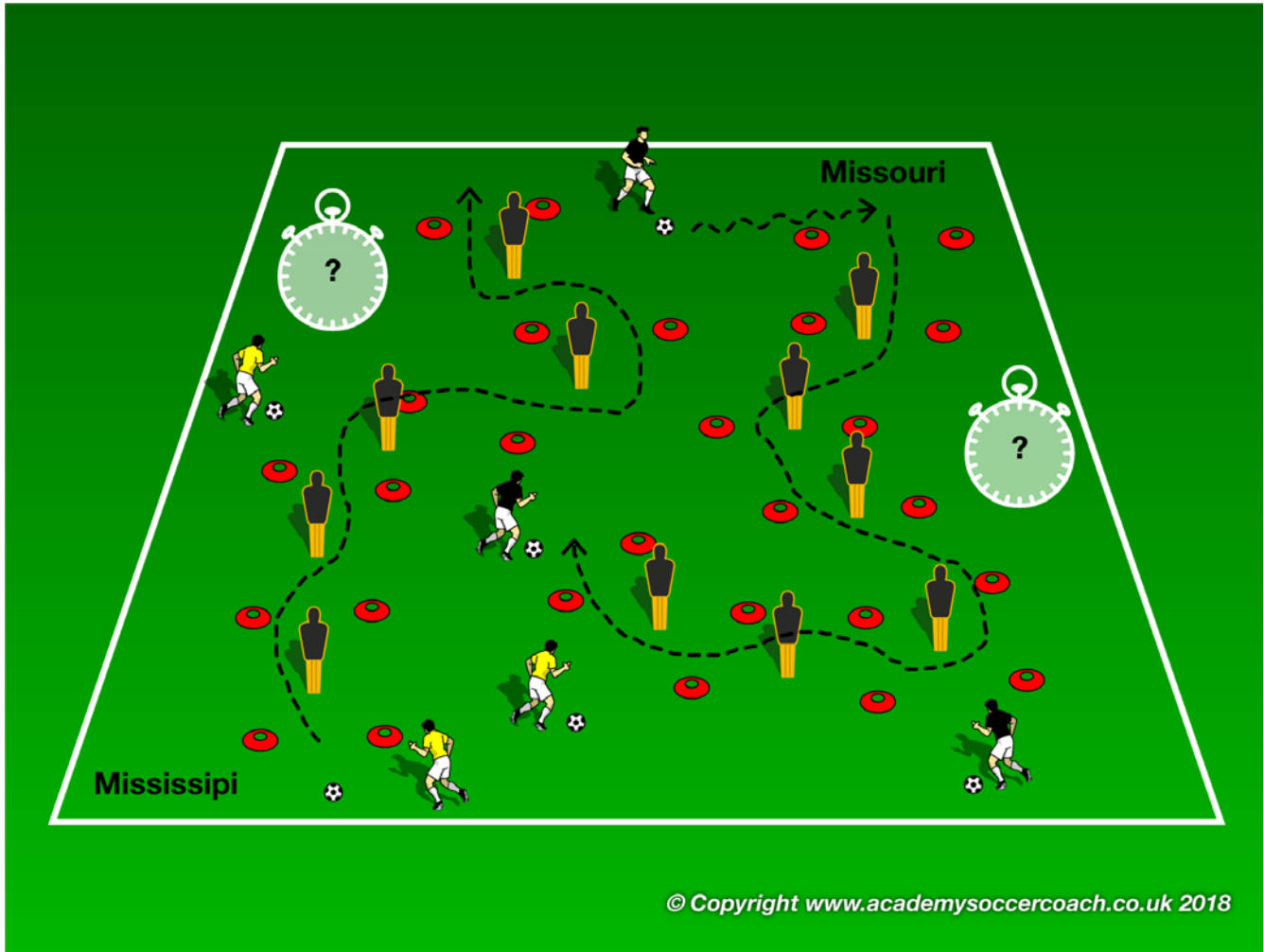
Exercise 35: dribbling checkers game



Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 5 players (all them have a ball) each are placed on pitch that is divided into 2 halves. Each half is then again divided into 10 parts and all the players must be placed along the lower parts of each half, as in the picture. The goal of the game is the same of the checkers one, but dribbling the ball. A first player starts, dribbling the ball diagonally on the left or on the right (1) and the same does another one on the other side (2); the goal is to overcome the opponent behind him to gain a point as to crown a draught. The first team that crowns 3 draughts wins the round. Dribble must be performed as required by the coach.

Coaching points: dribbling quality and speed, proper dribbling directions, quality of ball touches.

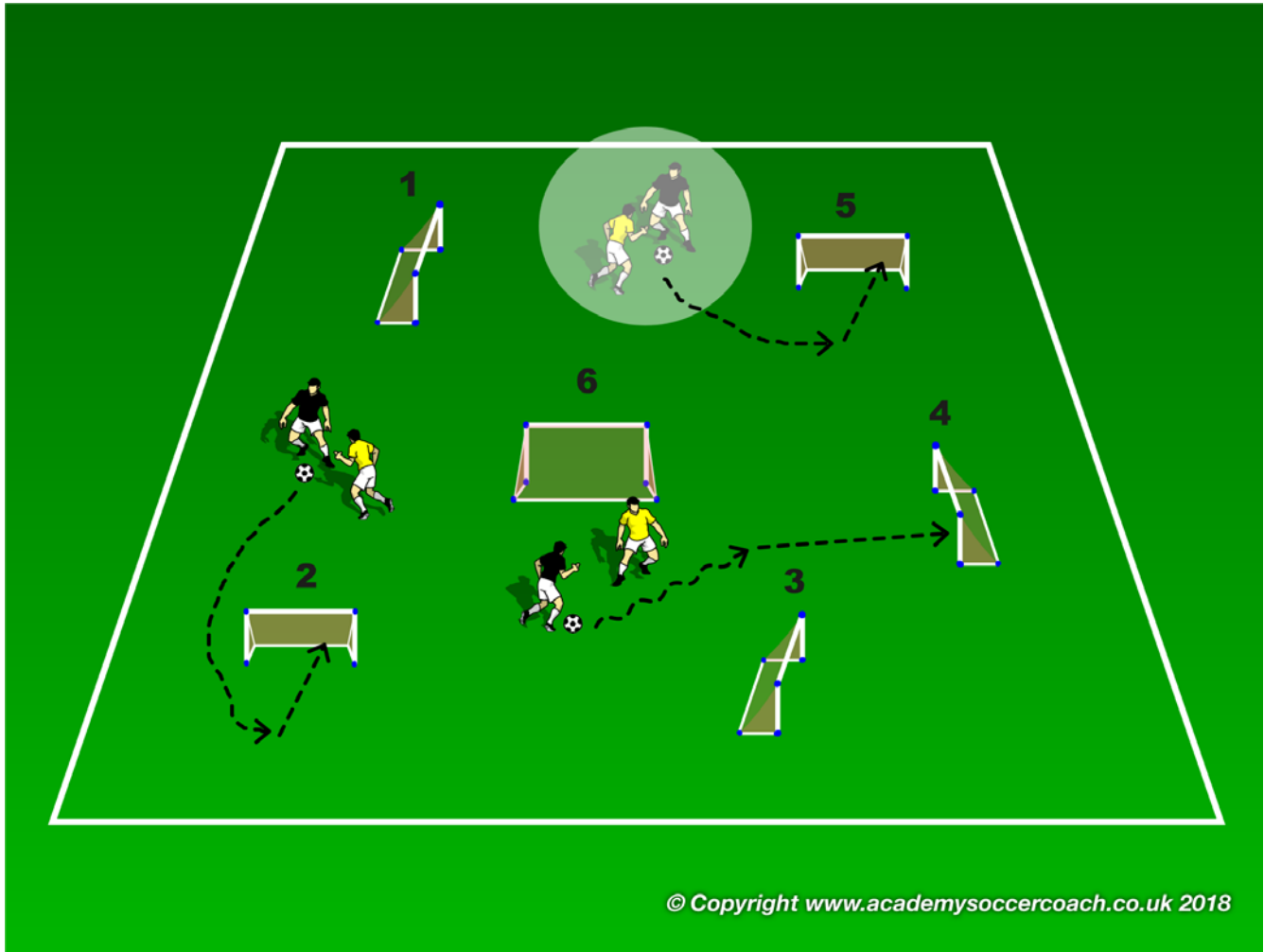
Exercise 36: dribbling along the rivers



Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 3 players (or whatever is the number of the available players, but even number if possible) are placed inside a rectangular playing area, as in the picture. 2 cones' rivers are marked inside the area with air-bodies in the middle and between the cone's set-ups. Each team is linked to a specific "river" at every repetition. When the coach sends a sign (a whistle as instance), the nearest player of each team to the river's spring must start sailing it along the air-bodies. The team who is able to sail both the river within the fewest limit of time wins the round. The dribble must be performed as the coach requires.

Coaching points: dribbling quality and speed, feinting quickness, quality of ball touches.

Exercise 37: face the goals



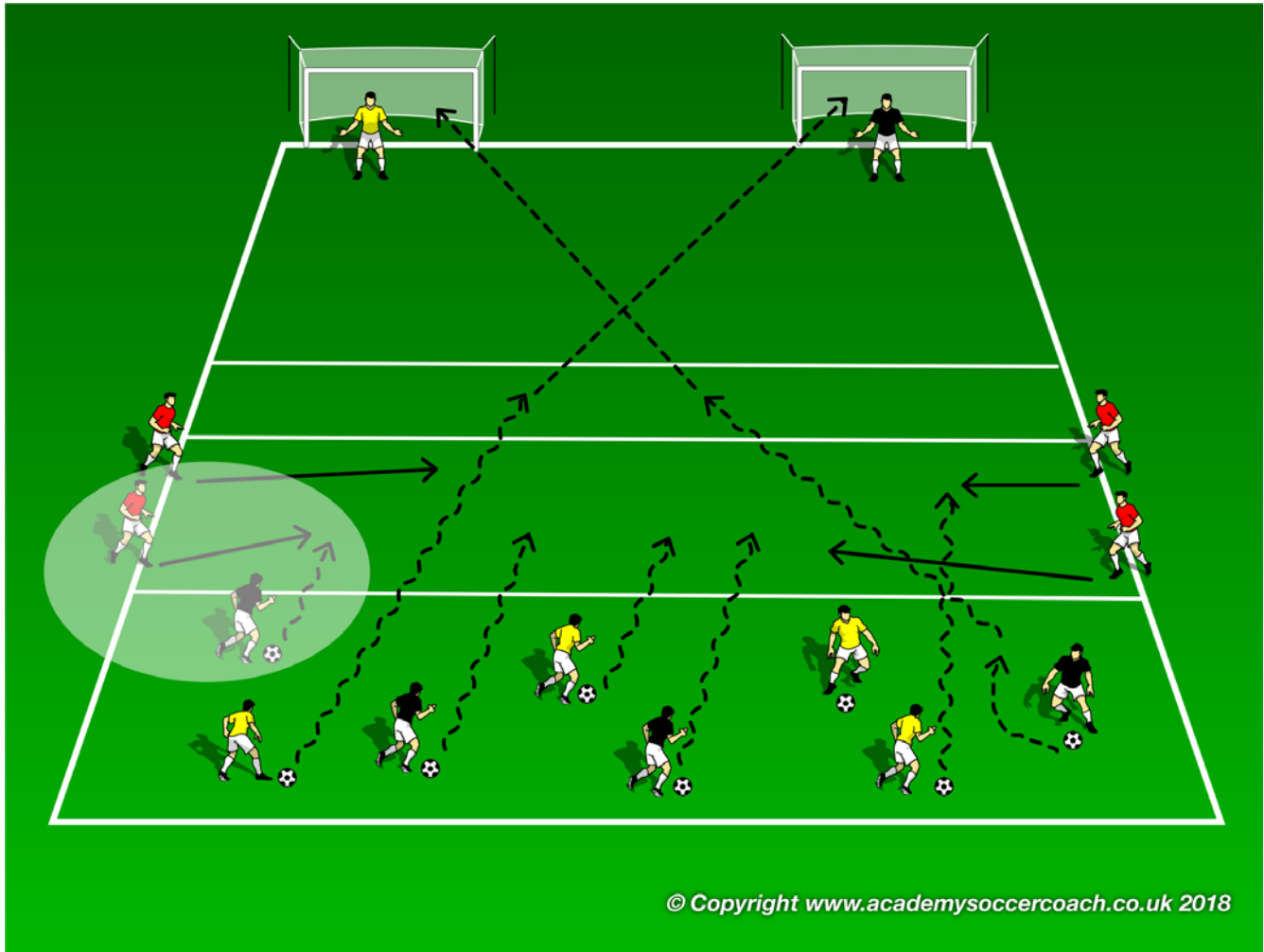
Set-up and sequence: 2 teams of 3 players each are placed and paired in multiple 1 v 1 duels inside a rectangular pitch. 6 goals are placed and numbered all around the pitch in random directions (1 - 6). The players exchange the possession of the ball under semi-active pressure until the sign of the coach, who calls "even!" or "odd!". The players in possession must try to dribble the ball toward the goals that are even or odd numbered, to score a goal for their team; the defenders must try to counter them and to score in the same kind of mini-goal (if a defender saved an odd numbered mini-goal, he must score in a another odd mini-goal).

Variations:

- The defenders must score in an opposite kind of mini-goal; if he saved an odd numbered mini-goal, he must score in an even numbered mini-goal.
- The defenders must score in the exact opposite mini-goal; if he saved the mini-goal num.3, he must score in the num.1.

Coaching points: dribbling quality, proper dribbling directions, quality of ball touches, reaction to play in a fully active way, mark the opponent on, force the opponent away from the goal.

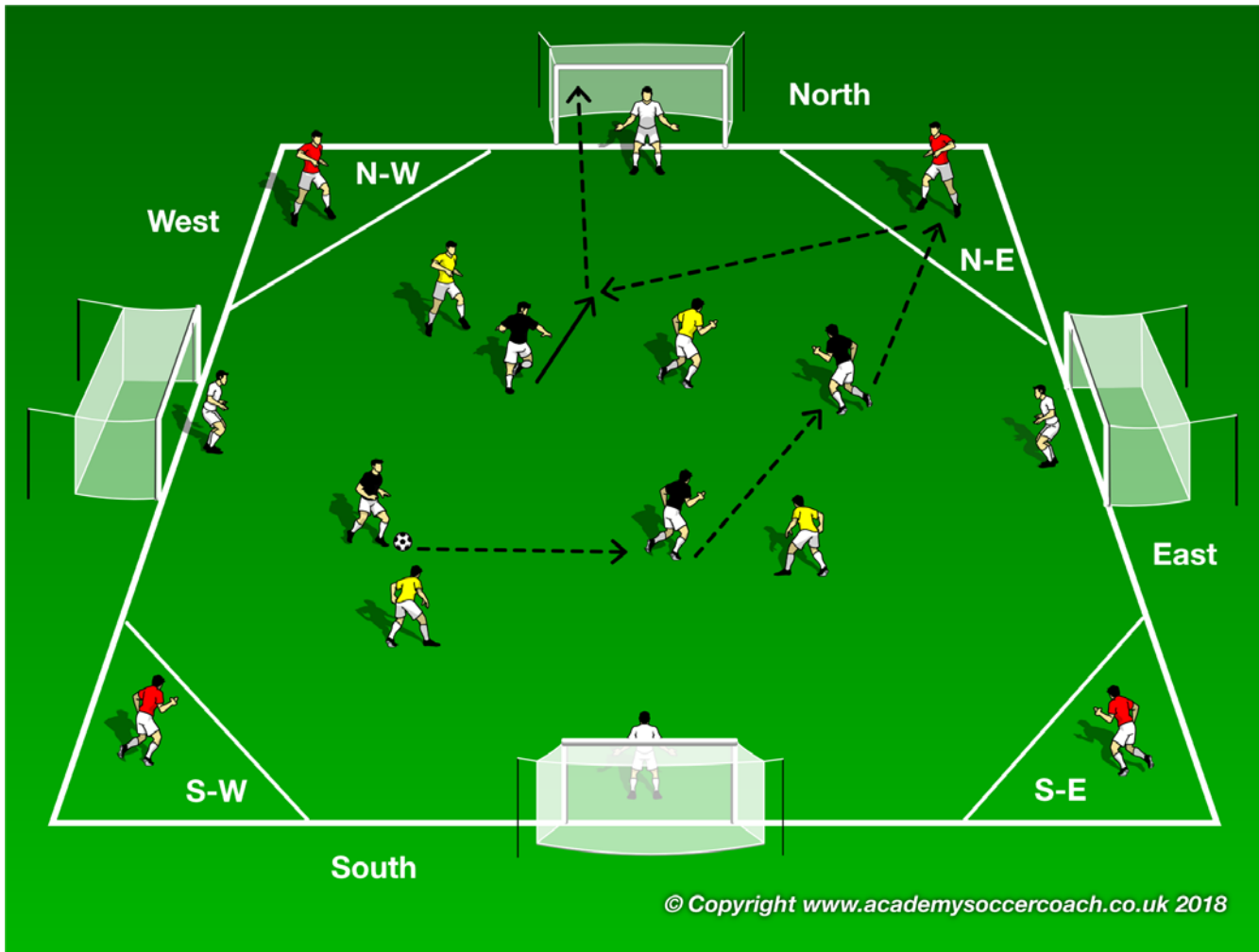
Exercise 38: dribbling through the storm



Set-up and sequence: a rectangular area is divided into 4 parts. 2 teams of 4 players with the ball each are placed in the lower area, 4 more players without possession are placed along the sidelines of the next area, a smaller shooting zone is the third one and the last one is used to create a distance between the shooting area and the goals that are placed along the upper end line. The players dribble freely at the beginning until the sign of the coach (a whistle, as instance), when they must carry the balls toward the shooting area, dribbling through the second area, where the 4 red players try to counter them to win the possession. The players who can dribble through must try to finish toward the opposition goal (goalkeepers switch teams at every new sequence) inside the shooting area. If a red player is able to recover the ball, the roles of the teams must be switched (the team of the player who lost the possession becomes defending team, the red team becomes one of the attacking team). The team with the highest number of goals after a fixed number of repetitions wins the round.

Coaching points: dribbling quality at speed, proper dribbling directions, quality of ball touches, counter the opponent by tackling, force the opponent away from the goal direction.

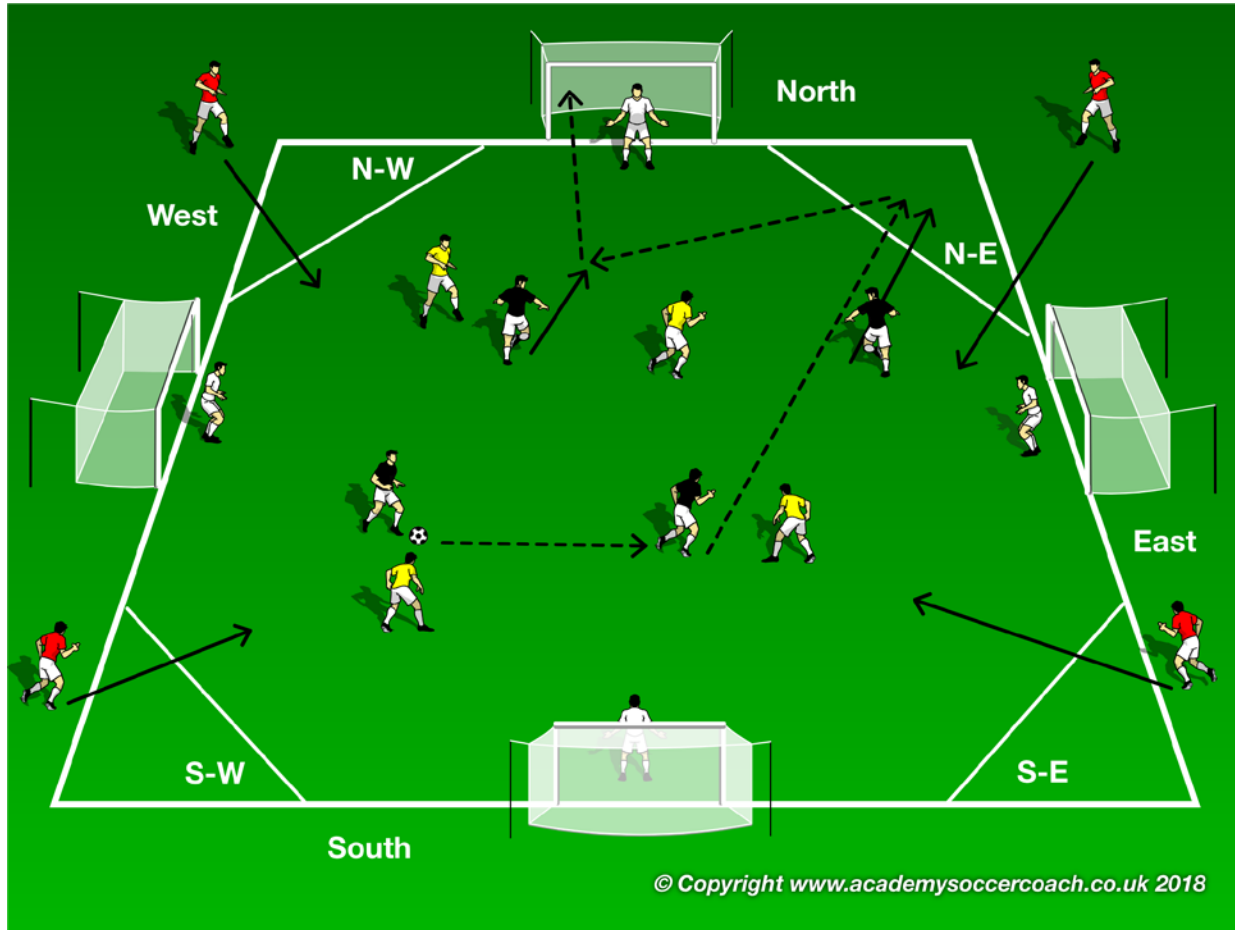
Exercise 39: score following the compass (1)



Set-up and sequence: a hexagon set-up is marked inside the rectangular main playing space, as in the picture. The 4 sides of the rectangle are considered as cardinal points (the goals with goalkeepers are placed in the center of these cardinal points) and the triangles that are shaped on the corners by the main rectangle and the internal hexagon are the intermediate cardinal points, where 4 free players are placed. A 4 v 4 duel is played in the middle of the smaller set up; at the beginning is a possession game, but when the coach indicates the "cardinal points goals" where the possession team must score, the move must be finished after a wall passing combination with the one of the neutral players, who are placed on the intermediate cardinal points. All the 4 possession players must have touched the ball once before finishing. If the defending team recovers the possession, the move must be finished toward the opposite "cardinal point goal". After a fixed limit of time, the role of neutral player must be exchanged, and the team with the highest number of scored goals wins the round.

Coaching points: speed of play, reaction speed to direct the attacking phase, forces the possession phase of the opposition sideways.

Exercise 40: score following the compass (2)



Set-up and sequence: a hexagon set-up is marked inside the rectangular main playing space, as in the picture. The 4 sides of the rectangle are considered as cardinal points (the goals with goalkeepers are placed in the center of these cardinal points) and the triangles that are shaped on the corners by the main rectangle and the internal hexagon are the intermediate cardinal points. A 4 v 4 duel is played in the middle of the smaller set up; at the beginning is a possession game; when the coach indicates the "cardinal points goals" where the possession team must score, the move must be finished after a wall passing combination with the one player of the possession team who escape the marker in the middle to be ready to receive inside the intermediate cardinal point space. All the 4 possession players must have touched the ball once before finishing. If the defending team recovers the possession, the move must be finished toward the opposite "cardinal point goal" by the same way. The attacking team becomes defending team as 1 goal is scored; a third team (the red one) becomes attacking team and the last one runs out to wait for the next turn.

Variation: after a fixed limit of time, the red players become defenders, creating numerical advantage to recover the possession; the team who wins the ball become the attacking team during the next sequence.

Coaching points: speed of play, reaction speed to direct the attacking phase, forces the possession phase of the opposition sideways.