

FROM RONDOS TO REAL GAMES



10 TRAINING SESSIONS

by Luca Bertolini



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Introduction: Small Sided Possession Games, Rondos, Position Games definitions.

A small-sided game is a technical exercise performed in the form of a game. The coach, thinking about the goals of the exercise of the training session, shapes and conducts the game based on the number of the available players and of spaces. Small-sided games come from all those games where the number of players, the rules, and the playing spaces must be adapted to perform a match between two teams.

These kinds of exercises are useful to improve players’ technical skills and physical conditioning, as the level of effort for the players is very close to 11 v 11 games. Lastly, small-sided games help to motivate those players who isolate themselves and their game vision.

Generally, 4 v 4 and 7 v 7 require the same efforts of 11 v 11 games; 2 v 2 and 5 v 5 are even harder for the players. But, as we found out, there are some important key factors that are responsible for the high intensity performance of a player who is involved in a small-sided game:

Higher Intensity	Lower Intensity
Small pitch	Medium and Large pitch
Number of players	Number of players
Limited ball touches	Unlimited ball touches
Coach support	No coach support
Many balls to be played	Few balls to be played

Surely, the sizes of the pitches and the number of players are the key factors producing a high intensity small-sided game. This following table is the most common connection between these key factors:

Pitches (y)	2 v 2	3 v 3	4 v 4	5 v 5	6 v 6	7 v 7	8 v 8
Small	10 x 15	15 x 20	20 x 25	25 x 30	30 x 35	35 x 40	40 x 45
Medium	15 x 20	20 x 25	25 x 30	30 x 35	35 x 40	40 x 45	45 x 50
Big	20 x 25	25 x 30	30 x 35	35 x 40	40 x 45	45 x 50	50 x 55

Small-sided games are reduced versions of soccer games, if we consider it as a sequence of duels with a small number of players. They are limited—the players just work on possession or non-possession phases of play without specific tactical requirements and the transition phases are not coached properly, as they are only a succession of the moves with the ball and without the ball. Just the space concept seems to be a real key point in these exercises.

The tasks of the players need to be specified inside the game and patterns of play need to be created during the game to shape exchanges of positions and rotations of players that they should repeat on the field during the matches. This way, small sided games introduce the timing of play, the numerical advantage, and the outnumbered situations concepts.

There are two fundamental parameters in a soccer game: space and time. The space that the players are given in each situation of the game and the time that they have to fix the issue of the same situation, both from individual and team tactics point of view. The space and the time, while being in possession, and the recovery of the ball, while defending, need to be understood and exploited before the opponents.

During a soccer match there are a lot of "questions" a player must answer quickly (time) and they are related to the measures of the space of play; the ball, the teammates and the opponents give these answers. This relationship of space and time must be coached; they aren't just using simple small-sided games.

Rondos are training games with the numerical advantage for the possession players or team and they are played inside small-sided spaces, usually squares, rectangular or circle shaped spaces.

The main objectives are to keep the ball first of all and then to keep it away from the defenders, playing possession combinations at a high rhythm and speed. The defenders work on pressure timing, closure of the passing lanes, individual duels in the middle of the space and on the recovery of the ball.

Rondos are not simple possession exercises, as the players are placed inside a pre-set space or along a line of the set-up and they don't play all over. It's all about how to keep the possession under pressure, to develop technique and how to put pressure to recover the ball, being outnumbered.

They are useful training methods to develop an advanced possession style of play, much more than simple small-sided games. To keep the possession safe means to play safe passes (forward, backward or sideward); the safest kinds are short passes. But even a short pass must have a purpose.

Here are the biggest differences between the possession small-sided games and the rondos: pass and keep the possession, press and recover the ball with a tactical purpose.

Which are the main types of passes?

- First Line Break/Pass: pass to the teammate next to you. The easiest pass to perform in a rondo as it doesn't require a wide range of vision.
- Second Line Break/Pass: the pass will bypass the teammate next to you but it doesn't split defenders. The second line pass requires a little larger passing vision; it's more difficult than the first line pass.
- Third Line Split Pass: this is the pass that splits the defenders through the middle. It requires skill, creativity, vision and timing of play. In soccer the ultimate goal is to get the ball forward and score. Third line split passes help to develop this skill.

Which are the main types of recovery of the ball when the defenders are outnumbered?

Direct recovery:

- Ball recovery by interception of a pass (a)
- Ball recovery by tackle after a 1 v 1 duel (b)

Indirect recovery:

- Wrong pass due to the closure of the passing lanes (c)
- Wrong pass due to closure of goal or end line spaces (d)

Here's a scheme of the different kinds of pass quality that can be found playing simple possession small-sided games and rondos:

	First Line Break/Pass	Second Line Break/Pass	Third Line Split Pass
Small-sided game	x	/	/
Rondo	just for possession	x	x

Here's a scheme of the different kind of ball recovery that can be found playing simple possession small-sided games and rondos:

	a	b	c	d
Small-sided game	x	x	/	/
Rondo	x	x	x	x

From these schemes, it's clear how rondos introduce the concept of space to be exploited and to be defended.

Anyway, as the numerical advantage is ensured for the players in possession, rondos can be developed in shooting exercises or sequences, as last level of a training progression and moreover in positional games, where the players have their usual role during the matches.

Here are the main differences between possession games and rondos:

Possession Small-Sided Games	Rondos
General ball possession	Pattern of play and specific requirements
Players only move all around inside the set-up	Outside neutral support players along the end lines
Be unmarked freely	Freeing from the marker depends on ball, player in possession and opponents
Numerical advantage is not ensured	Numerical advantage is ensured for the possession players
The players are always attackers or defenders	The players alternate the role during the game, exchanging their positions
General improvement of the players	Improvement of the player coaching the principles of play
Direct play	Direct and indirect play are alternated
There's no direction of attack and defense	There is a direction of possession and of defense
Finishing phase is not included	Finishing phase can be included
Transition phases are not the results of a tactical ideas	Transition phases can be organized through exchange of positions and player rotations, when the possession is won or lost
Small-sided spaces	

Positional games exercises can be considered possession games, but carried out inside real situations of play, as every player has the same role on the pitch, all the passing lanes are the same of the matches, to free from the marker must be efficient and functional to the system of play.

We can consider the positional games as a direct consequence of rondos and of a modern soccer philosophy with these basic principles of play:

- The goalkeeper builds up from the back
- The outer players run toward the center spaces
- Overload a side and exploit the weak side of the opposition
- Attacking phase is functional to the transition to defend and the defense phases can be efficient
- Defending phase is functional to the transition to attack and the possession phases can be efficient
- Defend forward
- The striker is the space

Positional games include all the components of a training session:

- Technical: all the technical skills of the players are useful to the specific requirements of the coach, of the model and system of play
- Tactical: the player tactical skills are coached inside the "team system," creating the team tactics during the possession or non-possession phases
- Physical: the required efforts of these exercises are specific and based on the roles that the player will have during the matches
- Psychological/Motivation: invite the player to train at their best to play like they would do during the matches

Here are the main differences between possession games and positional games and the only common point:

Possession Small-Sided Games	Positional Games
Players only move all around and inside the set-up	
Pay attention to the number of players	18 players can be included
They are always played inside small-sided spaces	Spaces must be useful to reproduce matches situations

Be unmarked freely	Runs to be free from the markers and inside runs must be related to the role on the pitch and to the system of play
Numerical advantage is not ensured	Numerical advantage is ensured by the "comodine players" with specific roles
The players are always attackers or defenders	The players alternate the roles during the game, exchanging their positions; attack wide and defend inside
General improvement of the players	Improvement of the players, coaching the principles of play of their role and of the team system of play
Direct play	Direct and indirect play are alternated
Free from the marker freely	Free from the marker to receive or to create a space for a teammate with a specific tactical idea
There's no direction of attack and defense	There is a direction of possession and of defense
Possession is the only goal	Position is the main goal
Passing and receiving	Create passing lanes between and among the possession players and passing triangles
Play all around the set-up	Play wide to create center spaces; play through the center to free a wide space
Finishing phase is not included	Finishing must a development of the exercises
Transition phases are not the results of tactical ideas	Transition phases can be organized through exchanges of position and player rotations, when the possession is won or lost, with a tactical idea.

How should coaches organize positional games? How many players and how many "comodines?" It's very important to be sure that players and comodines together create a team of 10 field players or 11 if goalkeeper is included.

1. The idea must always come from the system of play the team is used to shape on the field
2. The comodines (neutral players) must be positioned first to create the numerical advantage
3. The rest of the players must be divided into two teams
4. The attacking players must complete the team with neutral players; the others are placed inside as defenders

Here is an idea of basic duels with different numbers of comodines:

Number of players	Duels	Comodines
6	2 v 2	2
7 / 10	3 v 3	1 - 4
9 / 12	4 v 4	1 - 4
11 / 15	5 v 5	1 - 5
13 / 16	6 v 6	1 - 4
15 / 17	7 v 7	1 - 3
17 / 18	8 v 8	1 - 2

Where to play the positional games? Rectangular spaces and square spaces are the best solutions. Squares are always easier spaces to be understood by the players; but, if a real game situation is needed, then rectangular shapes would be better to create real passing lanes and angles, to make the defending team small and short, overloading the area near the ball and to make it big and wide when in possession, to find the upper vertexes (comodines).

Here is a basic scheme of measures of the pitches related to the number of players. All the coaches should know that the right measures are related to the number, the level of the players and the objectives he is looking for.

Number of players	Rectangular pitches (y)	Square pitches (y)
6	14 - 20 x 17 - 24	15 - 22 x 15 - 22
8	17 - 21 x 20 - 30	18 - 25 x 18 - 25
9	18 - 24 x 22 - 30	20 - 26 x 20 - 26
10	21 - 22 x 25 - 35	23 - 28 x 23 - 28
11	25 - 26 x 30 - 35	27 - 29 x 27 - 29
12	27 x 31 - 37	29 - 31 x 29 - 31
13	26 - 27 x 33 - 40	30 - 32 x 30 - 32
14	28 x 35 - 40	31 - 33 x 31 - 33
15	30 x 35 - 40	32 - 34 x 32 - 34
16	32 x 40	35 x 35
17	34 x 40	36 x 36
18	32 - 35 x 45	38 x 38

Transition phases are now coached in a real situation the players will face during the matches; both if a team must put pressure, as the possession is lost and if a team must save the possession, playing together with a neutral one, as the possession is recovered. The reactions of the players are now organized and pre-ordered.

Why? Because the possession players are placed in the same positions that are required by the system of play and by the relations among the teammates. The defenders are asked to put pressure, creating a strong area near the ball and overloading it to close the passing lanes and to recover the possession; then, if the possession is recovered, the team must be shaped quickly to save it. Transitions are now coached to be as fast as possible. The positional games can be considered as developments of rondos, but which are the differences and the common points?

Rondos	Positional Games
Pattern of play to keep the possession is the main goal	Position is the main goal
Players are placed inside and along the border lines of the set-up	Players only move all around and inside the set-up
Small group of players	18 players can be included
They are always played inside small-sided spaces	Spaces must be useful to reproduce matches situations
Freeing from the marker depends on ball, player in possession and opponents	Runs to be free from markers and inside runs must be related to the role on the pitch and to the system of play
Numerical advantage is ensured for the possession team by the neutral players in the center of the set-up	Numerical advantage is ensured by the "comodine players" with specific roles
Improvement of the player coaching the basic principles of play	Improvement of the player coaching the principles of play of their role and of the team system of play
There's no a unique direction of attack and defense if the rondo exercise doesn't include the finishing phase	There is always a direction of possession and of defense
Transition phases can be organized through	Transition phases can be organized through

exchange of position and player rotations when the possession is won or lost	exchange of position and player rotations when the possession is won or lost with a tactical idea
Direct and indirect play are alternated	
The players alternate their roles during the game, exchanging their positions; attack wide and defend inside to put pressure and create a strong area near the ball	
Finishing phase should be included as developments of the exercises	

Neutral players v Comodines

The only common point we can find between neutral players and comodines is the creation of numerical advantage for the team in possession. This is an answer to only one question: "what they do?"

How, when, where, why? Let's try answer these further questions.

How?

Neutral Players	Comodines
They haven't a specific role or position; they just have the task to be support players. They can be press or not, they can be active or not and they can be involved in the transition phases, depending on the coach's requirements.	They have specific roles inside the team in possession. They are always under pressure and active. They are very important for positive transition phases. Comodines can be support, center, wide and vertex players, related to the possession player.

When?

Neutral Players	Comodines
They can receive whenever is needed, as the first and only goal of the possession team is to keep the possession and the only goal of the defending team is to recover the ball as soon as possible to keep it.	They must receive the ball with the right timing, which is required by the idea of possession phase of the team. During transition phases, they must play quickly to make them as fast as possible; each single comodine must receive at the right moment of the moves.

Where?

Neutral Players	Comodines
They play inside or outside the set-up to provide numerical advantage for the team in possession. Their position is not linked to any position on the field during the matches or to the possession players.	They play inside the set-up; their position is strictly linked to the roles on the pitch during the matches. Comodines can be support, center, wide and vertex players, related to the possession player.

Why?

Neutral Players	Comodines
They support the players in possession to help the	They help the team to be organized and to solve a

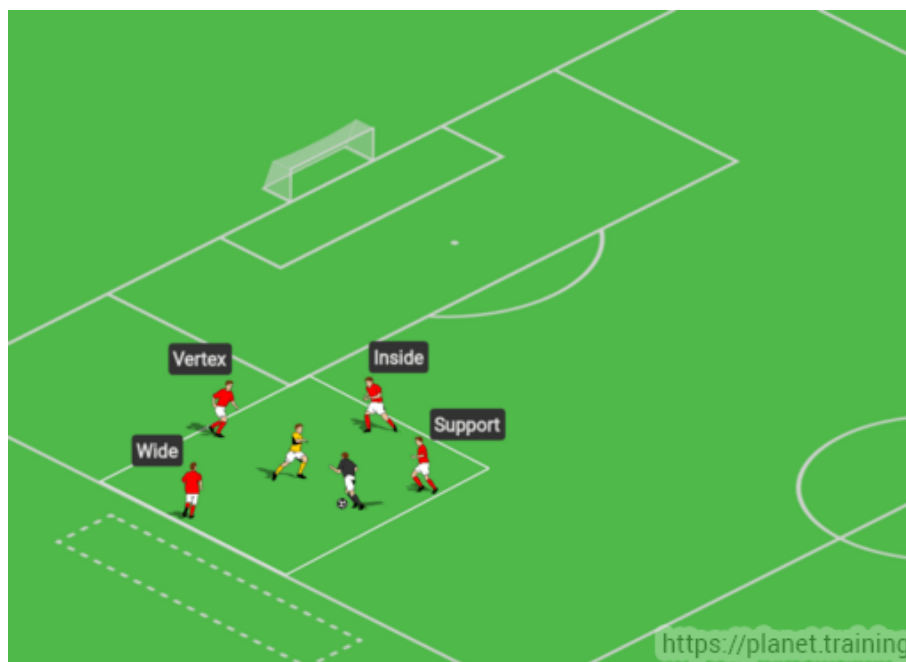
team keeping the ball.

tactical situation they will face during matches.

Neutral players

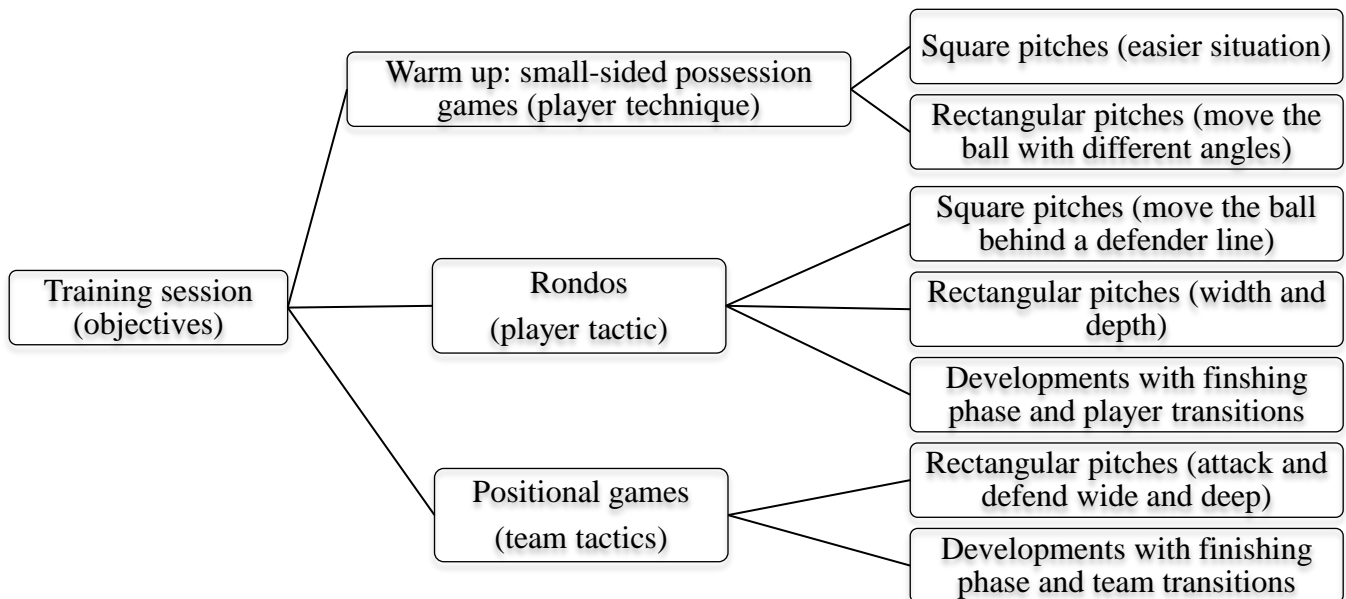


Comodines



How to create a training session?

If we consider possession small-sided games, rondos, and positional games as different but complementary practices, then training sessions may be organized with these sequences and set-ups:



In this e-book, only rectangular pitches are used as set-ups.

Let's now check the coaching points that make all these exercises effective practices, considering four theme areas of a training session:



All the training sessions of this e-book are thought as follows: 20 players (18 field players, 2 goalkeepers), one half of a regular field available, one coach, one assistant and a goalkeeper coach. A final free match is always included in all the sessions.

The exercises are planned for 9 or 10 players and the team is always divided into two groups, or three if the goalkeepers work separately.

Every final position game includes a transition to attack/defend phase, if the defenders win the ball; for all the others exercises, transitions phases are change of possession team (small-sided games) and exchange or rotations among the players (rondos).

Systems of play: 1-4-3-3



1-4-3-1-2



1-4-3-2-1



Training session 1: Build up from the back (1)

Small-sided possession game: 4 v 4 + 2



Sequence

Two teams of four players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up. The goal for the team in possession is to play quick passing combinations up and down the field with the goalkeeper and the neutral player, who are placed along the shorter sides. The team in possession wins 1 point at every completed sequence.

Variations

- The sequence can be completed if all the possession players have touched the ball
- The passer and the receiver of the return pass, from the goalkeeper, or the neutral player, cannot be the same
- Pass the ball from the goalkeeper to the upper neutral player (1 point); pass the ball back from the neutral player to the goalkeeper (1 point)

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, give and go combinations, run toward a different space after a pass.

Rondo: 4 v 4 + 2



Sequence

Two teams of four players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up. The possession team is placed on the field with two players along the longer sides of the set-up; the defenders are placed in the middle. The goal for the team in possession is to play quick passing combinations up and down the field, with both the neutral players, from the lower (the goalkeeper) to the upper one, who are placed along the shorter sides. The nearest players to the upper vertex must run inside the field to play the up and down passing combination, before reaching the upper vertex. The team in possession wins 1 point at every completed sequence. If the defenders recover the ball, they switch their positions with the opponents.

Variations

- The sequence can be completed if all the players have touched the ball in a prior possession sequence.
- The inside runs can be required before passing the ball toward both the neutral players.

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, timing of runs without the ball.

Positional game: 3 v 3 + 4



Sequence

Two teams of three players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up, as in the picture. The possession team has a center midfielder and the left and the right midfielders. The four neutral players are the goalkeeper, two center defenders and the center forward. The goal of the building up from the back phase of play is to free to opposite midfielder (the left one in the picture), from the side where the move started (with the right center defender in the picture). The other center defender must run toward the ball area to create numerical advantage. If the defenders win the ball, they switch their positions and the roles with the opponents.

Variations

- Free the midfielder of the same side where the move started.

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, timing of runs without the ball, be unmarked to receive.

Transition: 3 v 3 + 4 to keep the possession after the recovery



If the defenders win the ball, they must pass to the goalkeeper, to run toward their new positions, center defender and left and right forwards, as in the picture.

Training session 2: Build up from the back (2)

Small-sided possession game: 4 v 4 + 1 and goalkeeper



Sequence

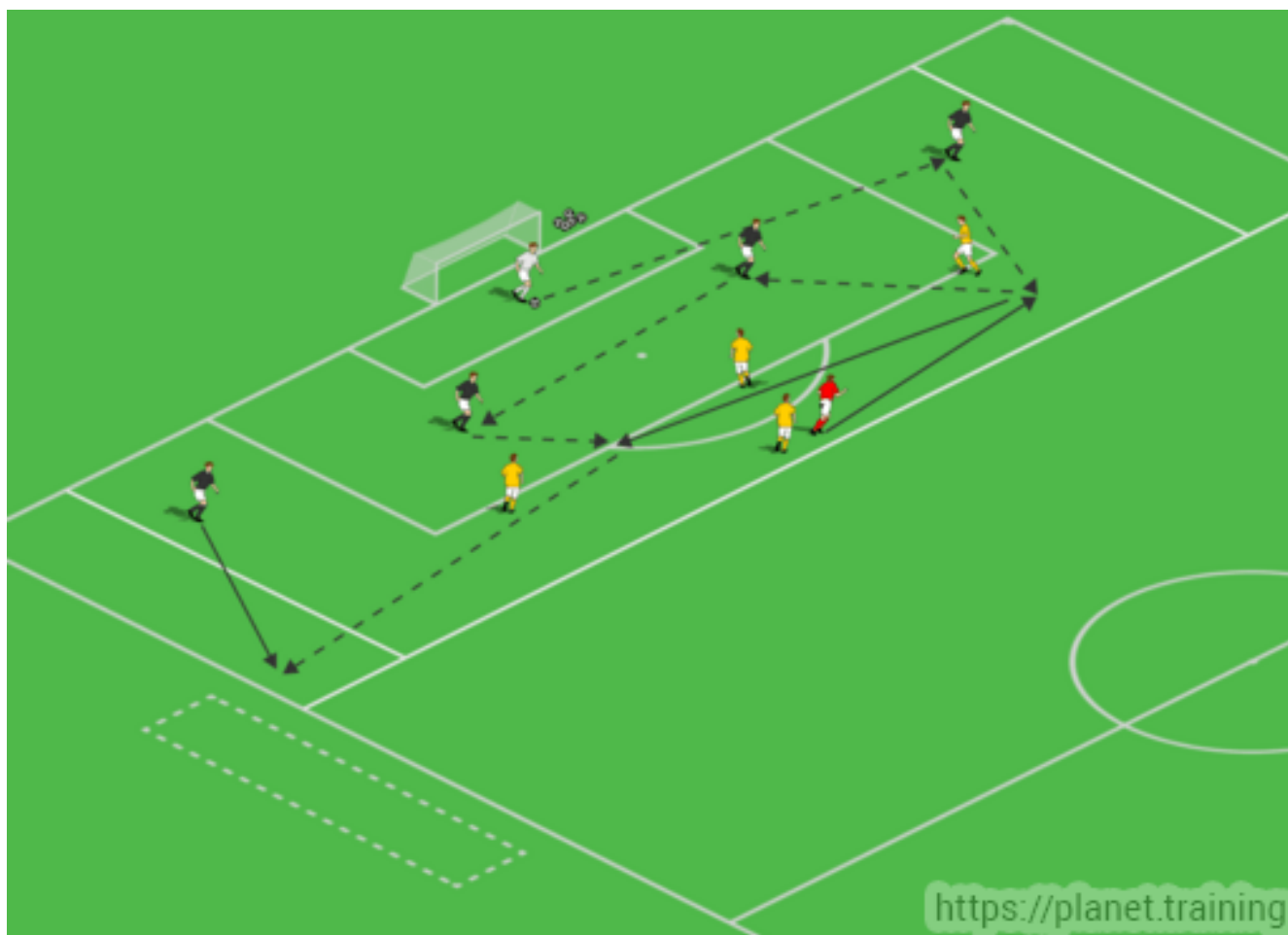
Two teams of four players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up as in the picture. One goalkeeper saves the regular goal and a neutral player has the role of support for the team in possession. The goal for the black team is to build up from the goalkeeper and to keep the possession together with the neutral player. The team in possession wins 1 point at every switch side of play. If the defenders win the possession, they must keep it safe together with the neutral player, and the black ones must put pressure to recover it back.

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball, they must try to shoot on goal.

Eye on: body placement to receive, quality of the passes, pressure to win the ball back.

Rondo: 4 v 4 + 1 and goalkeeper



Sequence

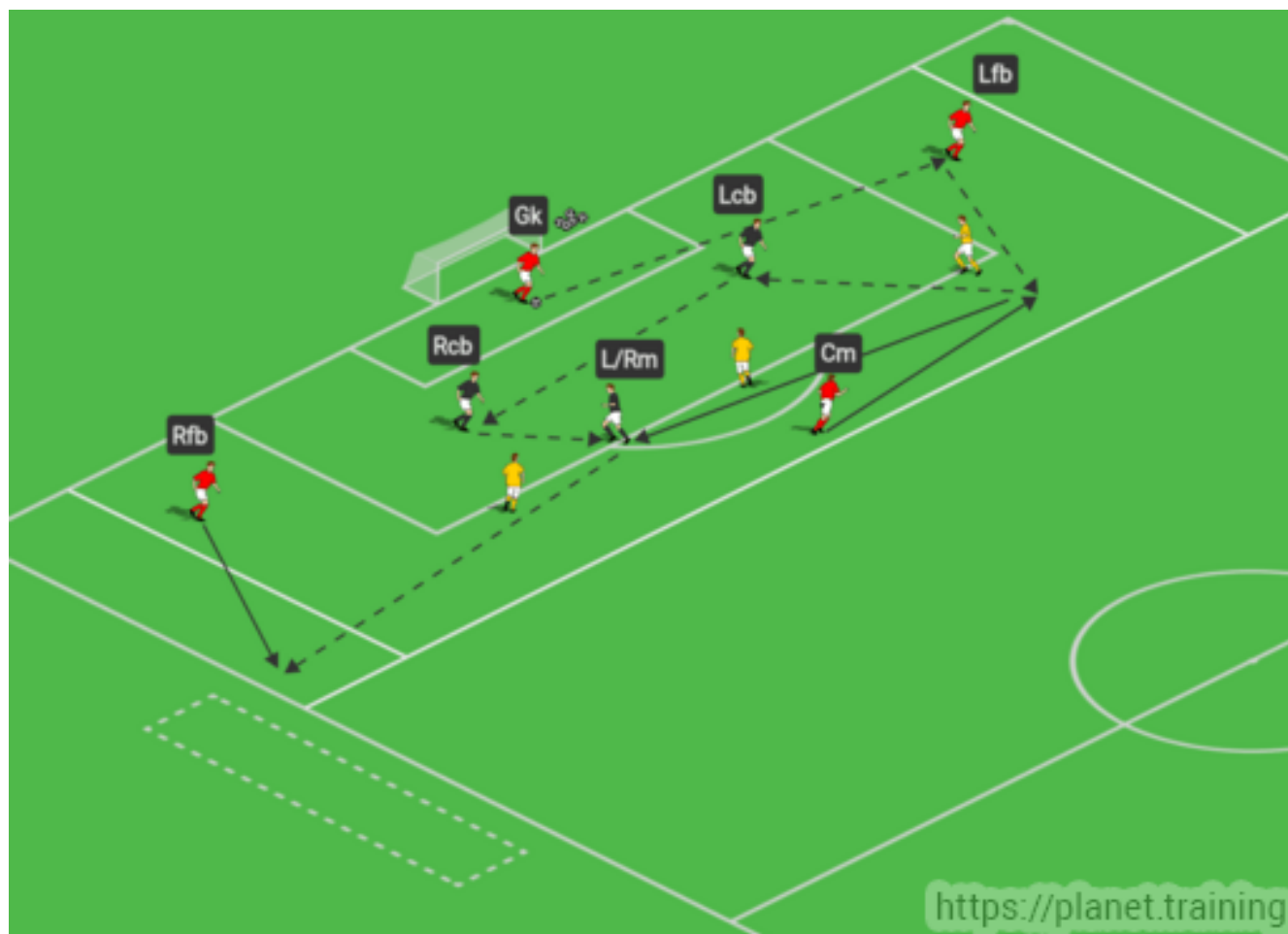
Two teams of four players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up as in the picture. The black team is shaped in a line of 4 formation and the yellow team with a 1 - 3 formation; a neutral player has the role of center midfielder. The goal for the black team is to build up from the goalkeeper, to free the opposite fullback from the side where the possession phase starts, through passing combination with the neutral player. Three advanced yellow players must put pressure; the fourth one must mark the neutral player on. If the defenders win the possession, they must keep it safe together with the neutral player, and the black ones must put pressure to recover it back out of the penalty area.

Variations

- If the yellow players win the ball, they must try to shoot on goal.

Eye on: body placement to receive, move to be an option, quality of the passes, pressure to win the ball back, finish quickly.

Positional game: 3 v 3 + 4



Sequence

Two teams of three players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up, as in the pictures. The possession team has two center defenders and one right or left midfielder. The four neutral players are the goalkeeper, the fullbacks and the center midfielder. The goal of the building up from the back phase of play is to free the opposite fullback (the right one in the picture) from the side where the move started (with the left fullback in the picture). The left/right midfielder and the center one must exchange their positions to create space in the middle and to split the pitch easier. If the defenders win the ball, they switch their positions and the roles with the opponents, playing with the neutral players.

Variations

- Free the midfielder of the same side where the move started.

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, timing of runs without the ball.

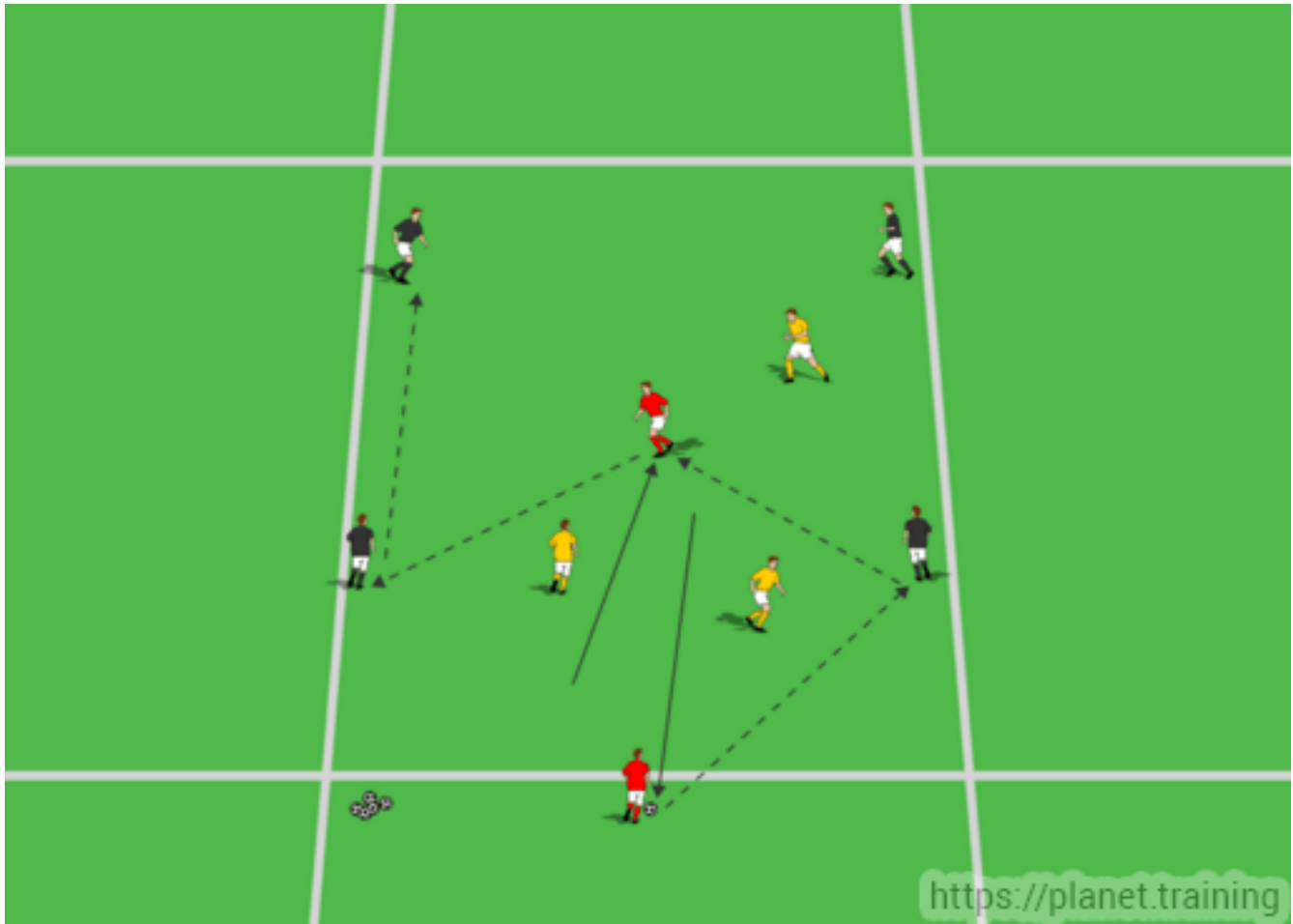
Transition: 3 + 1 v 4



If the defenders win the ball, all the black players and the other neutral ones but the center midfielder must defend the goal area against the counter attack of the yellow players. The yellow players must finish as soon as possible.

Training session 3: Build up from the back (3)

Small-sided possession game: 4 + 2 v 3



Sequence

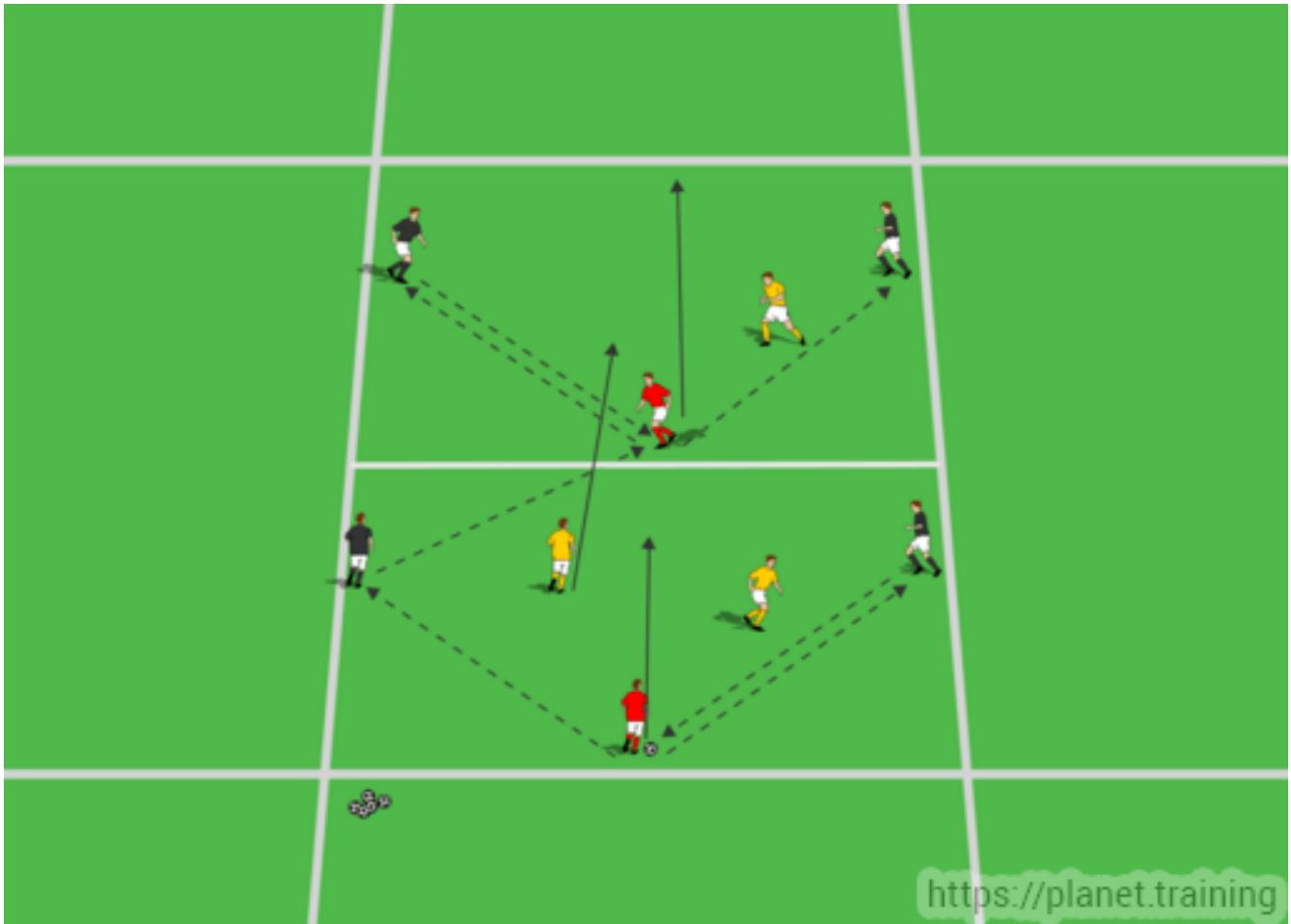
Two teams of four (the black one) and of three players (the yellow one) are placed inside a rectangular set-up; the possession team must play the ball trying to stay placed wide and leaving the defenders in the middle. Two neutral players are placed in the middle of the area and out of the lower line. The goal for the team in possession is to play quick passing combinations up and down the field, with the neutral players, who are asked to switch their positions at every completed sequence; this way the team in possession wins 1 point. If the defenders win the ball, a 3 + 2 v 4 duels starts inside the set-up.

Variations

- The sequence can be completed if all the possession players have touched the ball
- The passer and the receiver of the return pass from the neutral players cannot be the same player

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, exchange the positions with the right timing, run toward a different wide space after a pass.

Rondo: 4 + 2 v 3 (alternated 3 + 1 v 2 duels)



Sequence

The same set-up is now divided into two areas: a lower one and an upper one.

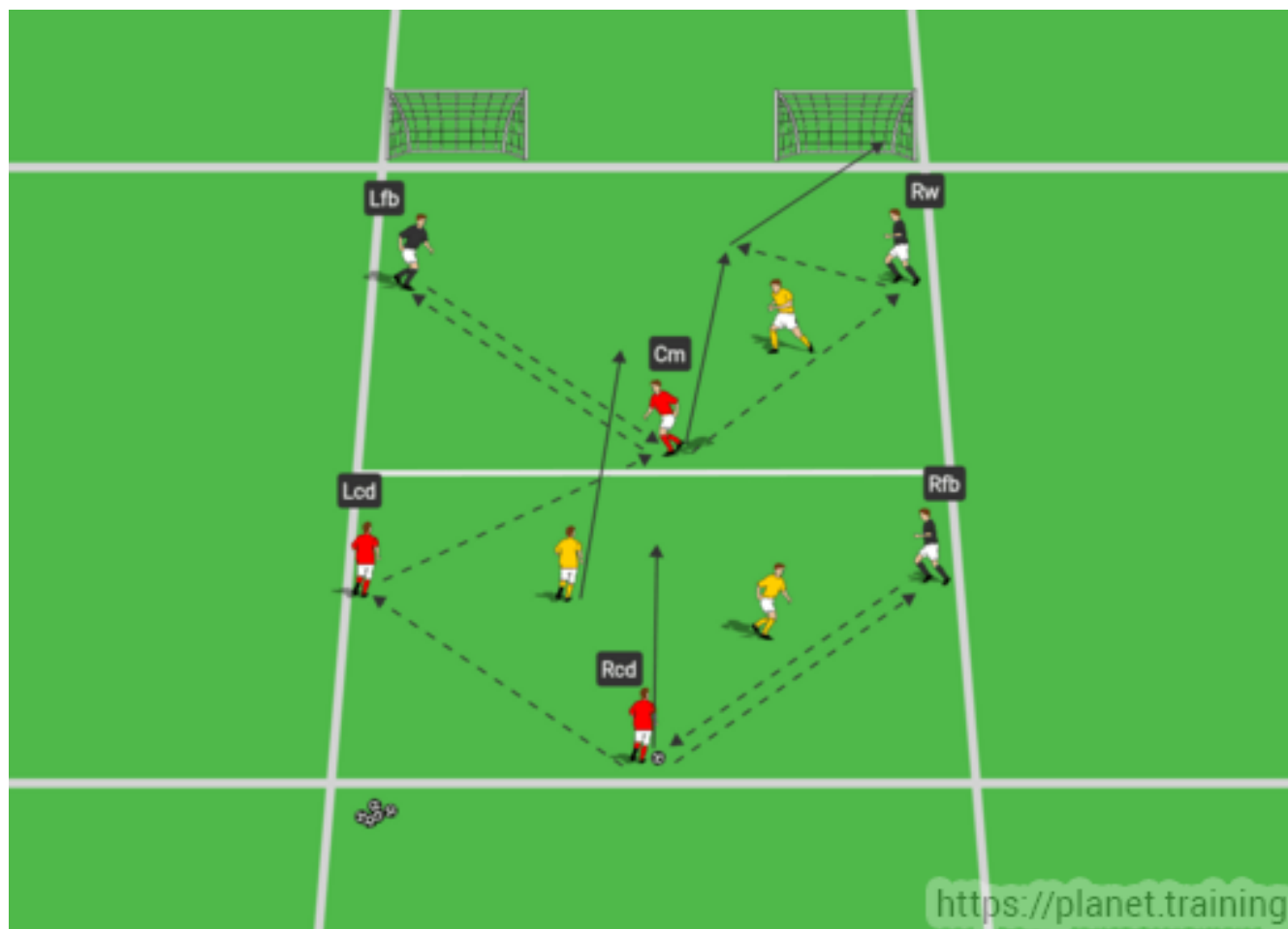
A 3 + 1 v 2 duel is played inside the lower zone with 2 possession players and a center neutral one against two defenders in the middle. The goal for the possession team is to play a wall passing combination first and to switch the side then, before passing the ball toward the upper area to the second neutral free player. One defender must run up to help the third teammate and the neutral players must move to the next pitch line forward to create a second 3 + 1 v 2 duel inside the upper zone. The sequence must be continued up and down the set-up. If the defenders win the ball, a 2 + 1 v 2 possession game is played inside the area where the wall is recovered.

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball a 3 + 2 v 4 duel is played all over the set-up

Eye on: creation of three players combination with a fourth upper vertex, passing and receiving rhythm, close the passing lanes, pressure on the ball.

Positional game: 3 + 3 v 3



Sequence

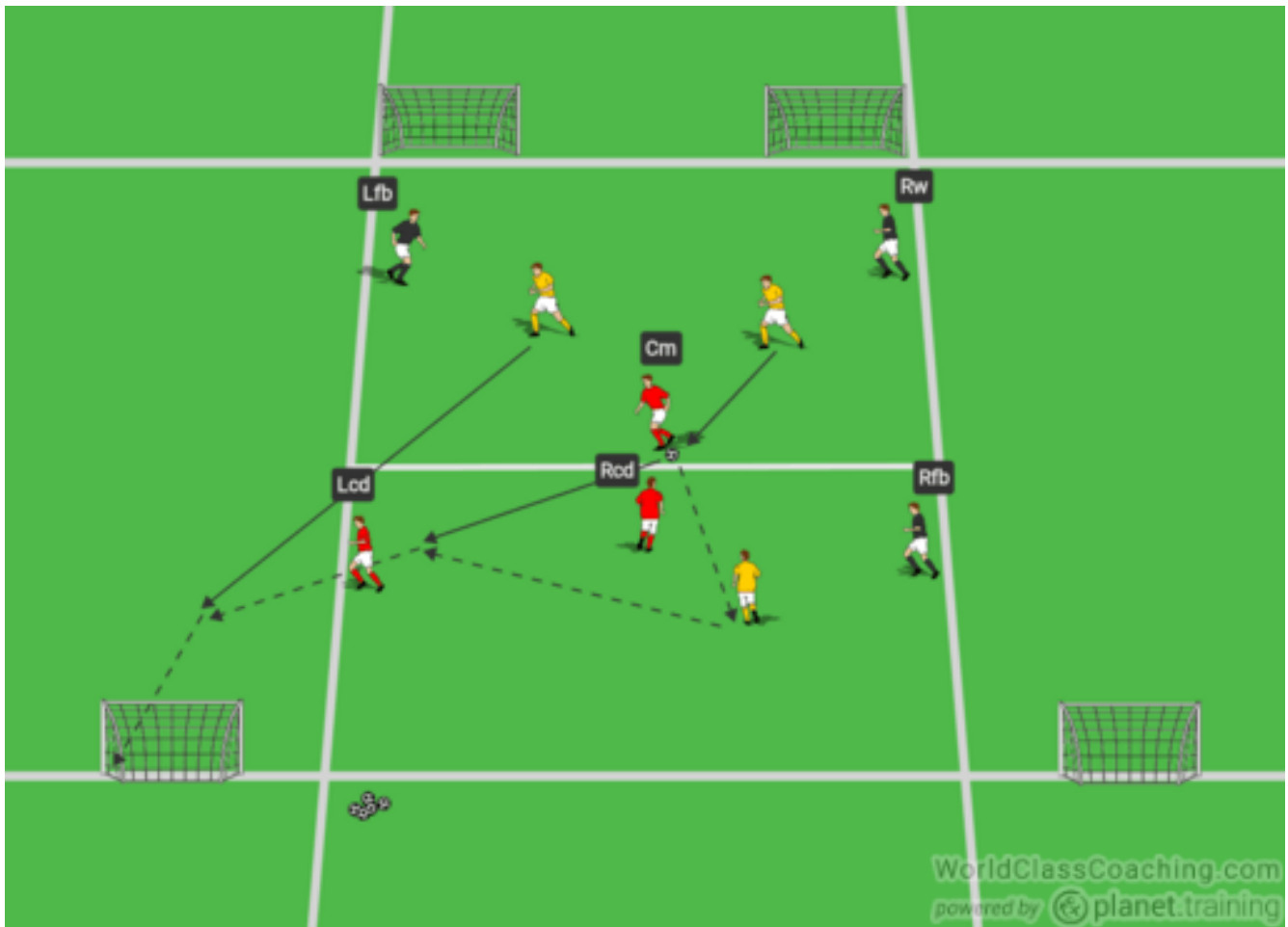
Two teams of three players each are placed inside the same rectangular set-up of the rondo practice, as in the pictures. The possession team has a right fullback, a left fullback and the right winger. Three neutral players are the right and left center defenders and the center midfielder. The goal of the building up from the back phase of play is to free a winger (the right one in the picture) with a fullback, who helps the possession phase (the left one in the picture) and through the center midfielder and one center defender as support. The winger can finish in one of the mini goals that are placed along the upper end line. The wall passing combination and the switch of the side are always required. If the defenders, who are always placed in pairs in the middle, win the ball, they switch their positions and the roles with the opponents, playing with the neutral players.

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball, they switch their positions with the black players, but they act with opposite roles; right fullback, left winger and left fullback. They even switch their positions with two neutral players.

Eye on: creation of three players combinations with a fourth upper vertex, support the build up phase, alternate the flanks after the recovery of the ball.

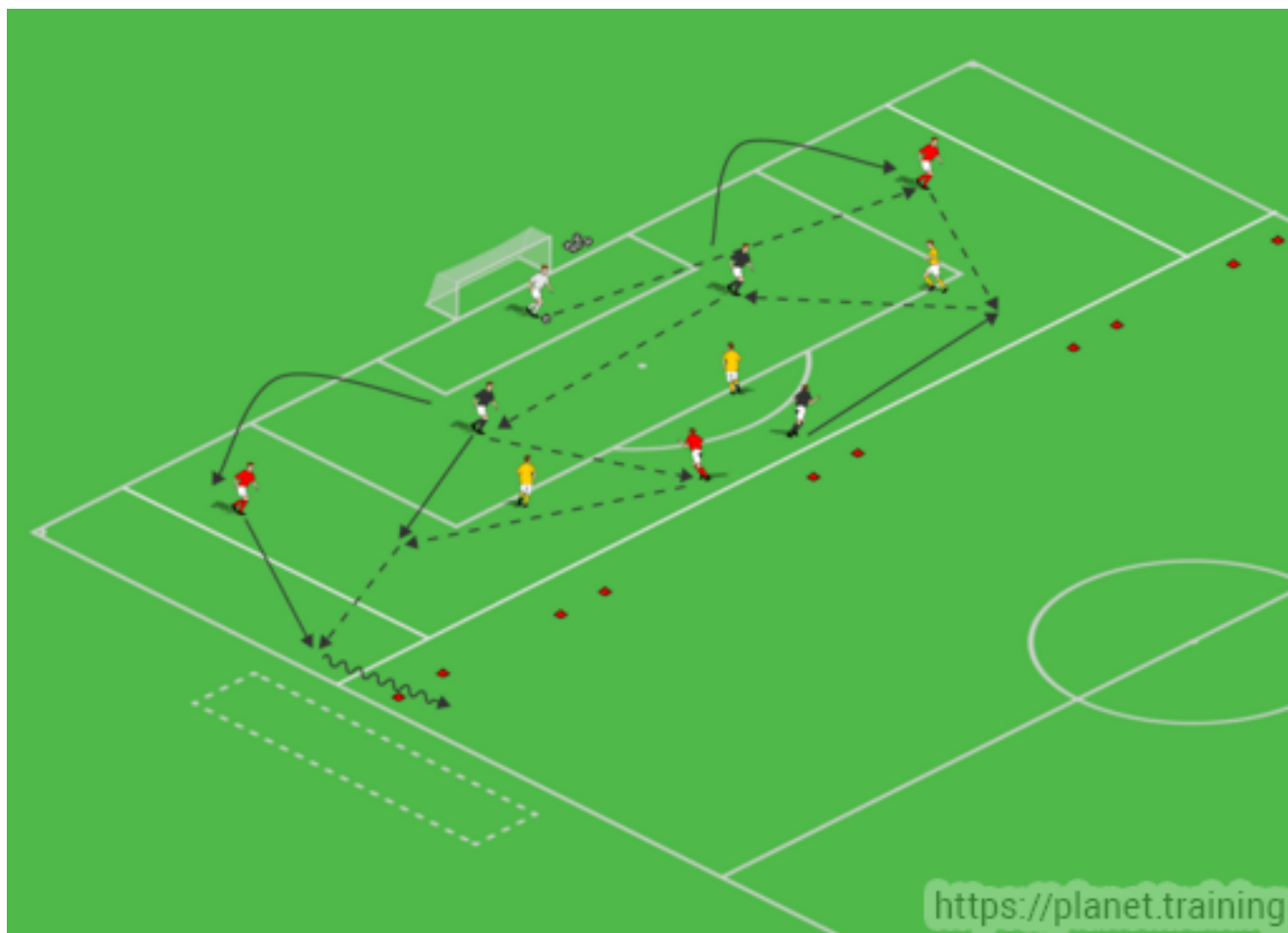
Transition: 3 + 1 v 3



If the defenders win the ball, they play a 3 v 3 duel against the neutral players to counter attack wide and to finish in one the outer mini goals.

Training session 4: Build up from the back and play out with numerical advantage

Small-sided possession game: 3 + 3 v 3 and goalkeeper



Sequence

Two teams of three players each are placed inside and near the penalty area; a third team of neutral players is also placed inside the main rectangular set-up. Two flanks are marked and closed to the sideline. The goal for the team in possession is to build up from the goalkeeper, to find the overlapping runs of the wide neutral players and free the opposite neutral one on the opposite side where the move started. If the neutral player is able to dribble through the cone gates, the possession team wins 1 point. If the defenders win the possession, they must keep it safe together with the center neutral player and the goalkeeper, and the black players must put pressure to recover it back.

Variations

- Free the center midfielder, who must dribble through one of the center gates to score a point.

Eye on: body placement to receive, quality of the passes, runs to be free and to overlap, pressure to win the ball back.

Rondo: 3 + 3 v 3 with goalkeeper



Sequence

Two teams of three players each are placed inside and near the penalty area; a third team of neutral players is placed out of it and inside the main rectangular set-up. Two flanks are marked and closed to the sideline. The goal for the team in possession is to build up from the goalkeeper, to find the overlapping runs of a wide possession player through a neutral one on the opposite side from where the move started. If the possession player is able to dribble through the cone gates, the possession team wins 1 point. If the defenders win the possession, they must keep it safe together with the center neutral player and the goalkeeper inside the main set-up and the black players must put pressure to recover it back (3 + 2 v 3 duel).

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball they switch the position with the black ones.

Eye on: body placement to receive, quality of the passes, overlap with the right timing, pressure to win the ball back.

Positional game: 3 + 3 v 3



Sequence

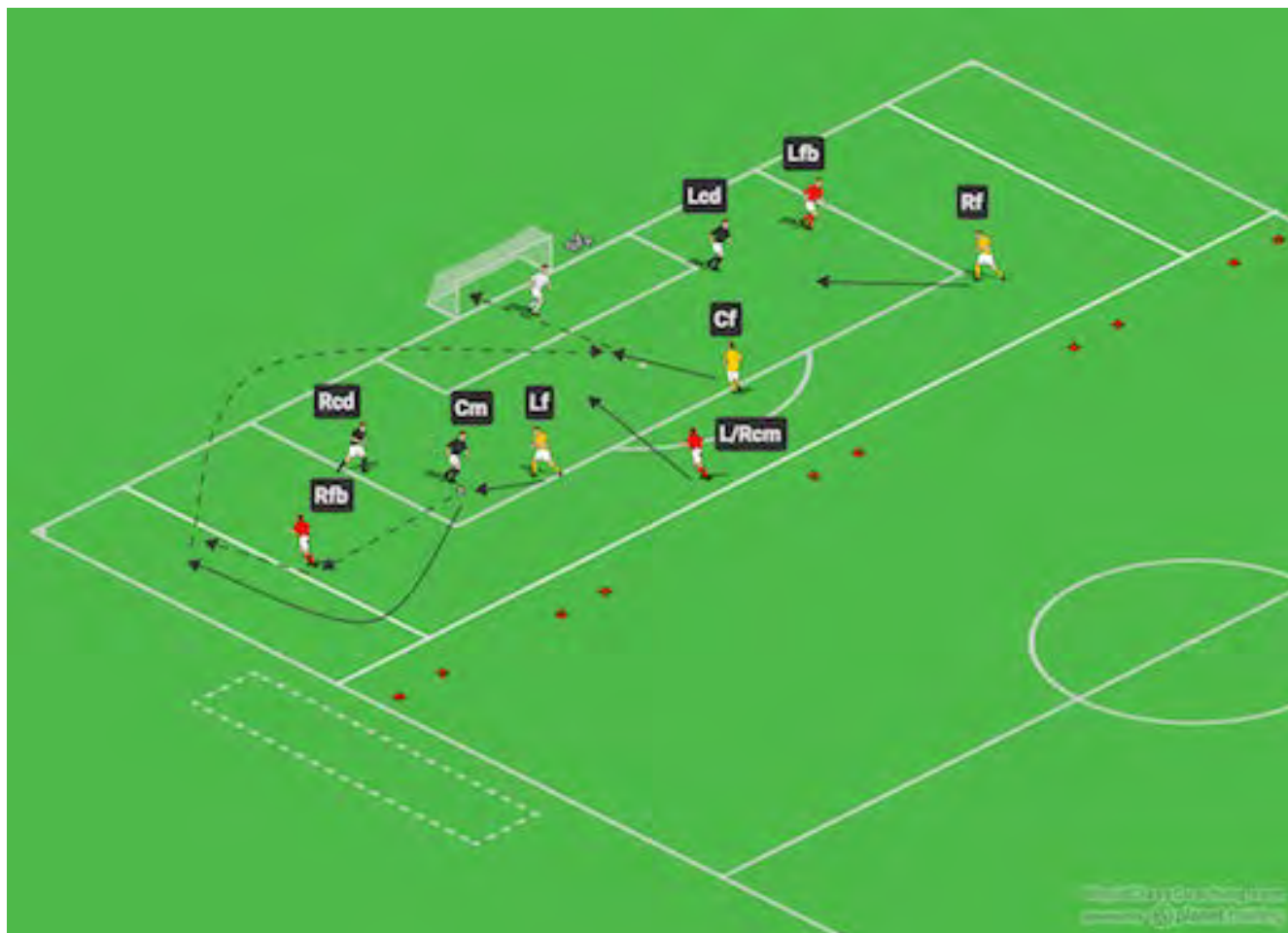
Two teams of three players each are placed inside and near the penalty area; the possession team has a center midfielder and two center defenders against three defenders. The team of neutral players has two fullbacks (left and right) and a center midfielder (left or right). The goal for the team in possession is to build up from the goalkeeper, to find the overlapping runs of a center defender, who must receive from the fullback of the same side, dribble through the cones gate and pass to the center midfielder, who is running forward through another cone gate to receive. The overlap sequence should be on the opposite side from where the move started. If the defenders win the ball, they switch their positions with the black players; they play with same roles, but they must try to free the opposite fullback.

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball they switch their positions with the neutral players, passing the ball to the goalkeepers and black players become defenders.

Eye on: body placement to receive, quality of the passes, overlap with the right timing, runs to receive of the center midfielder.

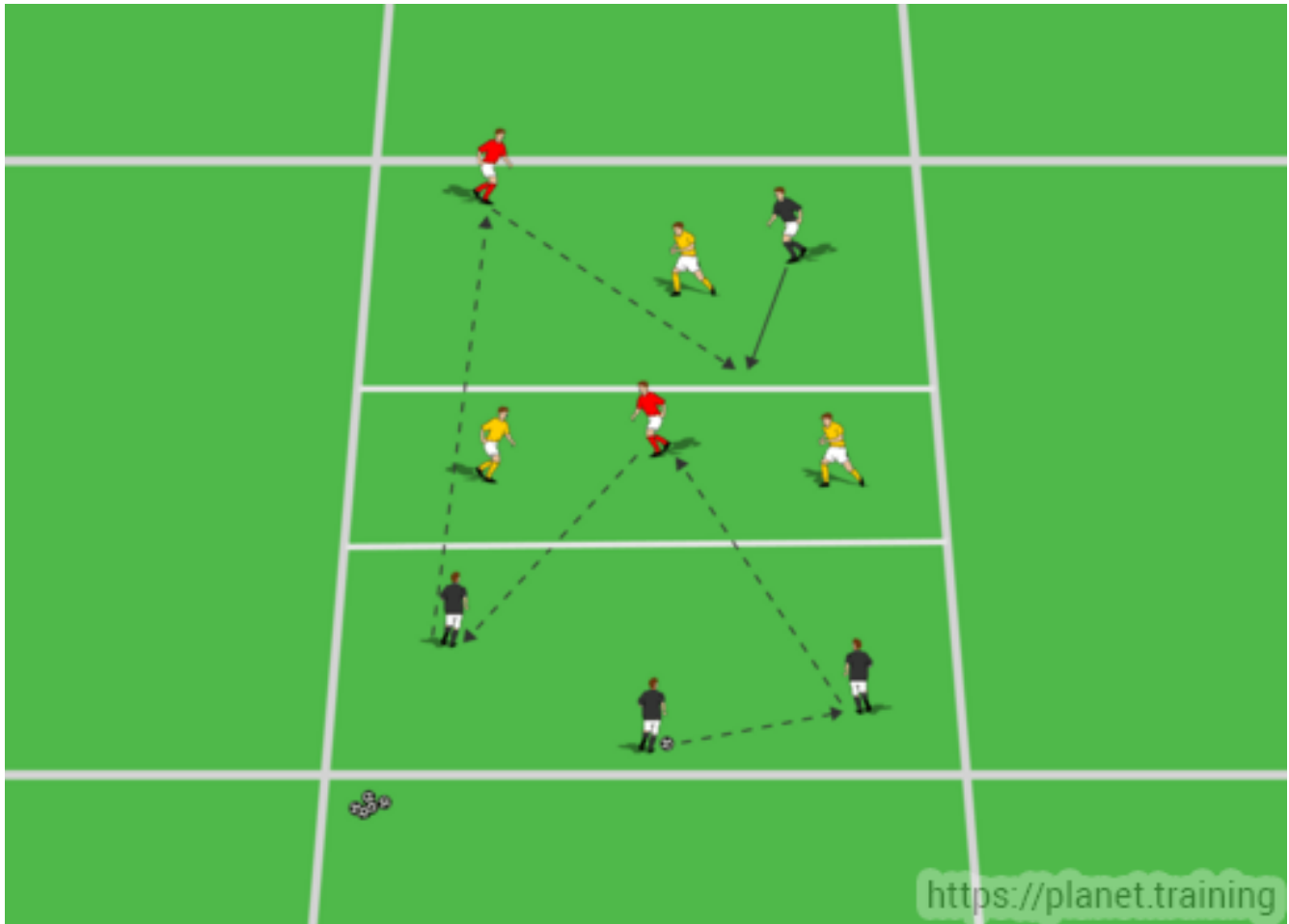
Transition: counter attack through overlapping runs



If the defenders win the ball, they counter attack as left and right forwards and as center forwards, together with the neutral players, to finish after an overlap run and a cross pass. The center midfielder attacks the second time of the ball or the rebounds of the goalkeeper.

Training session 5: Play behind an opponent line in the middle third (1)

Small-sided possession game: 4 + 2 v 3



Sequence

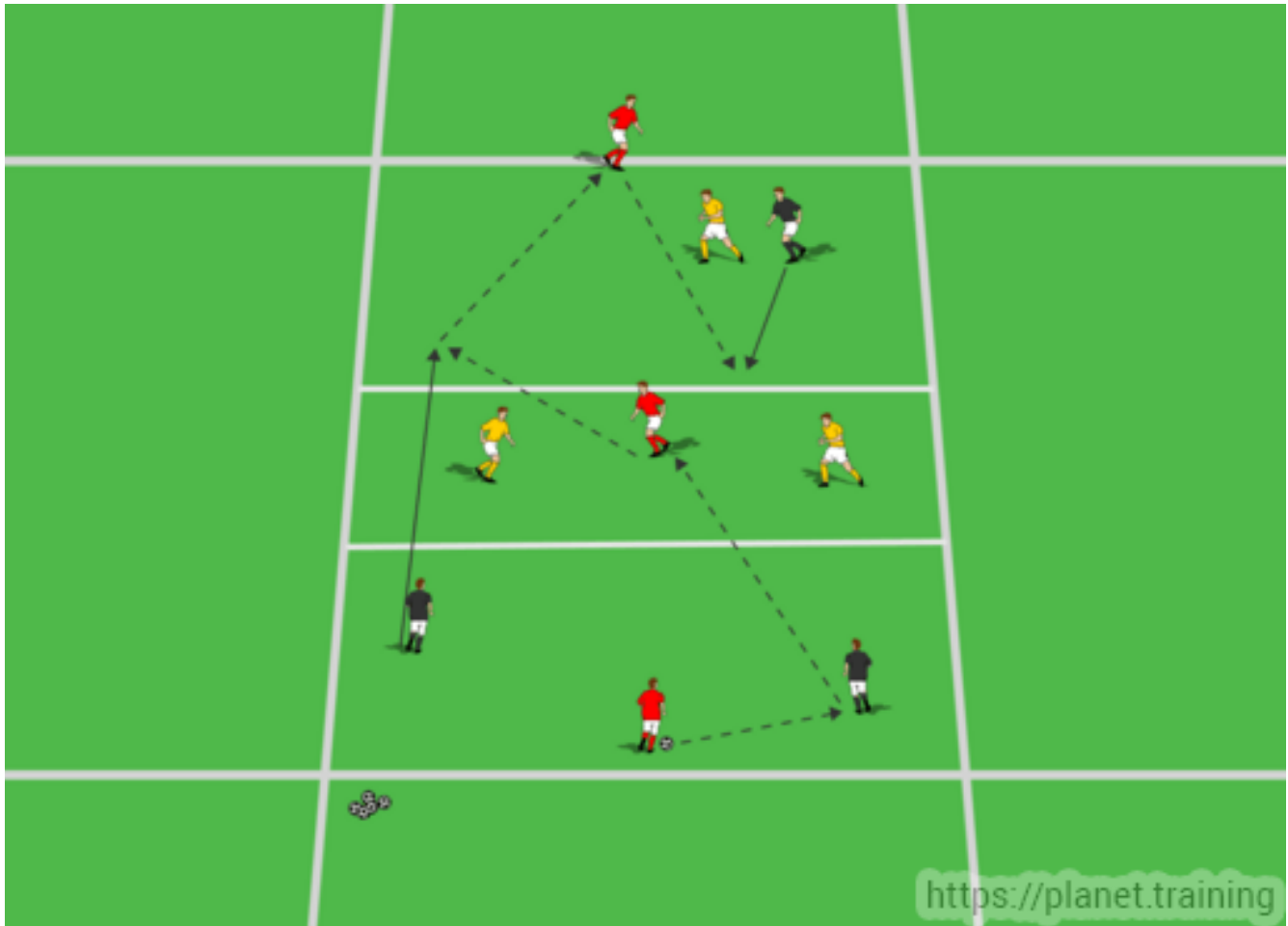
Two teams of four (the black one) and of three players (the yellow one) are placed inside a three zones rectangular set-up, as well as two neutral players. Three possession players are placed inside the lower area, a 2 v 1 duel is played in the middle among the defenders and the first neutral player and another 2 v 1 duel is played inside the upper zone among one possession player and a neutral one against a defender. The goal for the team in possession is to pass through the areas, behind the first defenders line and to keep the possession for a fix limit of time inside the upper area, before passing the ball back to start the sequence again. If a defender wins the ball, he switches the position with the opponent who played the wrong pass.

Variations

- Keep the ball in the middle for a fix limit of time before passing back and forward behind the first defenders line.

Eye on: play decisive passes, be unmarked behind the defense line, keep the possession under pressure.

Rondo: 3 + 3 v 3



Sequence

Two teams of three players are placed inside a three zones rectangular set-up as well as a third one of neutral players. Two possession players and a neutral one are placed inside the lower area, a 2 v 1 duel is played in the middle among the defenders and the second neutral player and another 2 v 1 duel is played inside the upper zone among one possession player and a neutral one against a defender. The goal for the team in possession is to pass through the areas, behind the first defenders line, while two of the three black players exchange their positions in the outer areas. If the defenders win the ball, they switch their positions with the opponents, passing the ball to the lower neutral player.

Variations

- Keep the ball in the upper area, playing 2 + 1 v 1 (or 2) for a fix limit of time before passing back to start the sequence again.

Eye on: play decisive passes, be unmarked behind the defense line, run without the ball to receive in behind.

Positional game: 3 + 3 v 3



Sequence

Two teams of three players are placed inside a rectangular set-up, as well as a third one of neutral players. The possession team has the right and the left midfielders and the right or left forward; the neutral team has a center defender, the center midfielder and the center forward. The goal for the team in possession is to play forward, behind the defenders' lines, through the lower center neutral player, while the wide forward drops back to receive first and the left midfielder runs deep to receive then, and to pass to the center forward to finish. If the defenders, who are always placed in the middle, win the ball, they switch their positions and the roles with the opponents, playing with the neutral players.

Variations

- One defender must switch the role as opposite wide forward
- If the defenders win the possession, they switch their positions with the neutral players.

Eye on: alternate runs to drop back and to run deep, close the passing lanes, quick transitions.

Transition: 3 + 1 v 3



If the defenders win the ball, they act as center defender, right and left fullbacks. They must counter attack, switching the side and scoring in one of the outer mini goals, in a 3 + 1 (center neutral midfielder) v 3 duel. One yellow player must run wide to receive from the center defender and the move must be finish on the other flank by the opposite fullback. The black players become defenders.

Training session 6: Play behind an opponent line in the middle third (2)

Small-sided possession game: 7 v 7 + 4



All the field players are placed inside a rectangular set-up; the playing area is wide as a regular pitch and long as from the penalty area borderline to the half line. Two teams of seven players are placed on the pitch in a 4 - 3 formation; four neutral players are placed on the right and on the left and up and down the set-up; they are free to move along the end lines and the sidelines. The goal for the possession team is to play from a neutral player on the end line to the other, though a wide one, and in behind the defenders. One player must always run from the back to receive and to play forward. When a sequence is completed, the team wins 1 point. If the defenders win the ball, they must play the same way, but passing the ball to the opposite wide neutral player.

Variations

- If the possession team is able to dribble the ball over an end line, 1 more point is won
- Keep the possession (with or without the neutral players) for a fix limit of time, before trying to complete the required sequence

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, runs without the ball, close the passing lanes

Double rondo: 4 + 2 v 3



The same set-up of the first practice is now divided into two areas where a double 4 + 2 v 3 duel is played. The neutral players are placed along one end line and on the left (or right) when move wide; the second player can decide where to move. The goal for the possession team is to alternate the passes among the possession players and the neutral ones, trying to find a free teammate in behind the three defenders' line. One player must always run from the back to receive and to play forward. If the defenders win the ball, they must keep the possession in a 3 + 2 v 4 duel.

Variations

- The possession team must keep the possession for a fix limit of time, before trying to complete the sequence
- If the defenders win the ball, they play with neutral player along the sideline to find the upper one in the opposite direction

Eye on: play up and down passing sequences, move wide to be an option with the right time, save the depth spaces.

Positional game: 6 + 4 and goalkeeper v 8 + goalkeepers



All the field players are again placed inside the same rectangular set-up of the first practice and the goalkeepers are now added. The possession team is placed on the field in a 1-4-3-3 formation and the defending team is placed in a 1-4-3-1 formation; the neutral players are two center defenders, the center midfielder and the center forward. The goal for the team in possession is to free a wide forward in behind the defense line, alternating the passing sequence among the black players and the neutral ones. If the defenders win the ball, they counter attack in an 8 v 6 possession duel, as the neutral player can't be active in this situation. The new sequences always start from the goalkeeper of the black team.

Variations

- The scorer must be the opposite one from the side where the move started

Eye on: passing and receiving rhythm and awareness, pressure on the ball, create a strong side, close the passing lanes.

Transition: 8 v 8 possession game to counter attack



If the defenders win the ball, they counter attack in an 8 v 8 possession duel, as the center neutral players become active defenders for the black team.

Training session 7: Play wide in the middle third

Small-sided possession game: Double 4 v 4 + 1



Two playing areas are marked with a center space and a flank, the left one in the picture, and all the field players are divided into two groups, working separately. A 4 + 1 v 4 duel is played inside both the spaces. The goal for the team in possession is to keep the possession in a 3 v 3 duel in the center and to develop passing combinations on the flank in a 1 + 1 v 1 duel; the neutral player is a support for the wide possession black or yellow ones. Every time the sequence is completed, the team wins 1 point. A wall passing combination in the center is required, before trying to play wide. If the defenders win the ball, another free 4 + 1 v 4 duel starts to keep the possession for a fix limit of time to gain 1 point. The flanks can be changed on the field.

Variations

- If the possession player is able to dribble over the end line on the flank, the team wins another point
- One defender can equalize the number of players on the flank and if the ball is recovered, a 3 + 1 v 3 duel is played in the center to keep the possession for a fix limit of time

Eye on: play wide to free a teammate, create a strong area to play wide, cover the weak side

Double rondo: 3 + 2 v 4 - Play wide behind the first opposition line



A double 3 + 2 v 4 duel is now played inside the same set-ups of the first practice. The possession players must alternate the passes with the neutral ones and a wide player must receive unmarked on the flanks, after an overlap run and behind the defender. A 2 + 1 v 3 is played in the center and a 1 + 1 v 1 on the flank. If the defenders win the ball, another free 3 v 2 + 1 duel starts to keep the possession for a fix limit of time in the center, to gain 1 point.

Variations

- If the possession player is able to dribble over the end line on the flank, the team wins another point
- One defender can equalize the number of players on the flank and if the ball is recovered a 3 v 2 duel is played in the center to keep the possession for a fix limit of time, as the neutral players can't be active in this situation

Eye on: passing / receiving rhythm, play wide to free a teammate, overlap timing, cover the weak side

Positional game: 3 + 3 v 3



A double 3 + 3 v 3 duel is now played inside the same set-ups. The possession team has the right and the left midfielders, who can't be placed on the same line and the center forward; the neutral team has the center midfielder, an advanced left fullback and the left forward (or the right ones, if the game is organized to work on the right flank). Three defenders must try to recover the possession. The goal for the team in possession is free the left forward behind the defenders, thanks to the center forward, who must drop back to open the space; the passes must be alternated among the possession and the neutral players. If the defenders win the ball, they switch their positions and roles with the players who lost the possession.

Variations

- If the left forward is able to dribble over the end line on the flank, the possession team wins another point

Eye on: alternate moves of the left and right midfielders, drop back and overlap runs timing, pressure in the center space

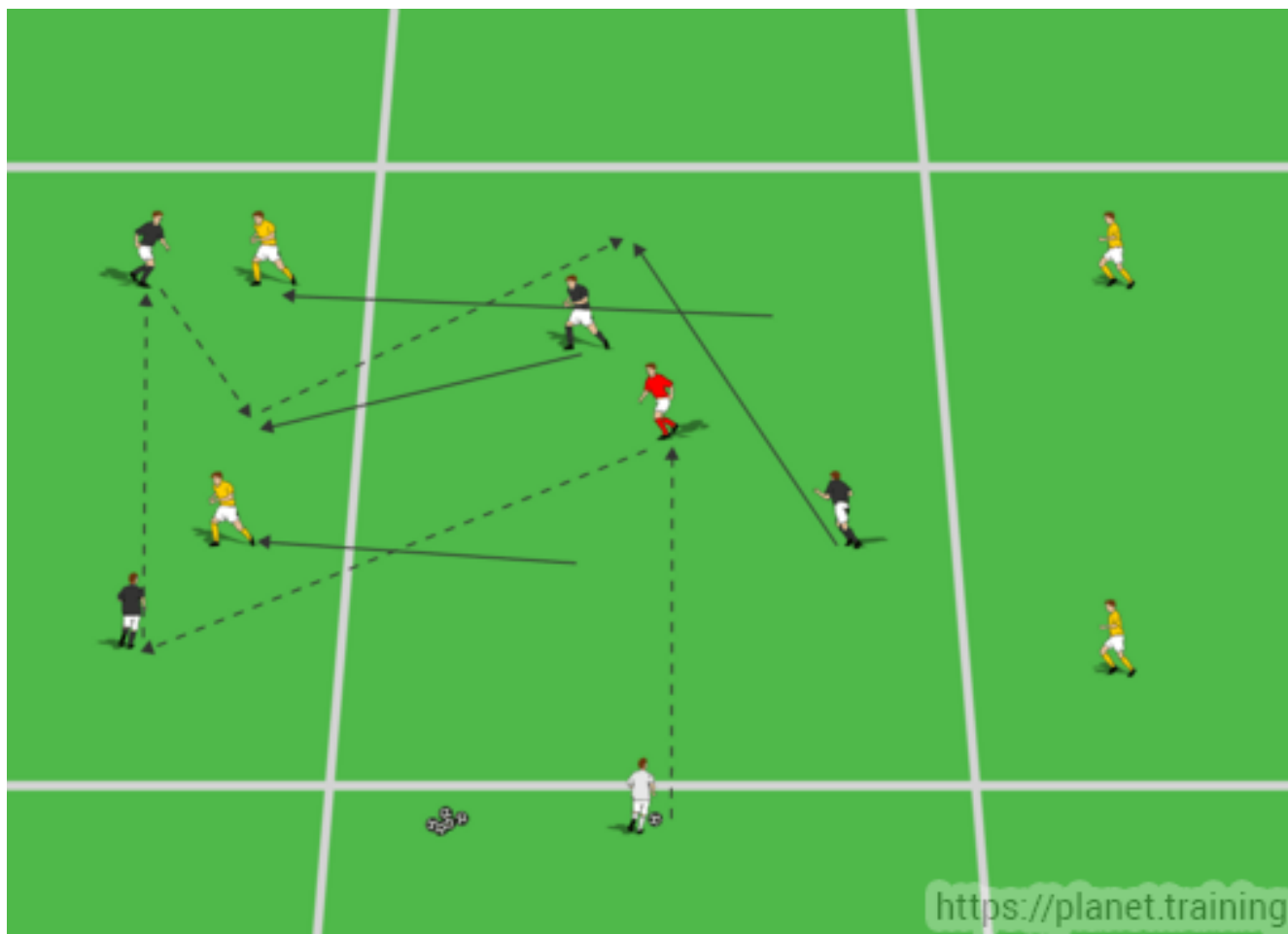
Transition: 3 v 3 duel to counter attack from the flanks through the center space



If the defenders win the ball, they must counter attack through the center space, to finish in the mini goals that are now added. The roles of the new possession team are now the right fullback and forward and the center forward. The defending team can be the neutral one or the one that lost the possession.

Training session 8: Play wide to open center spaces

Small-sided possession game: 4 v 4 + 1 and goalkeeper



Sequence

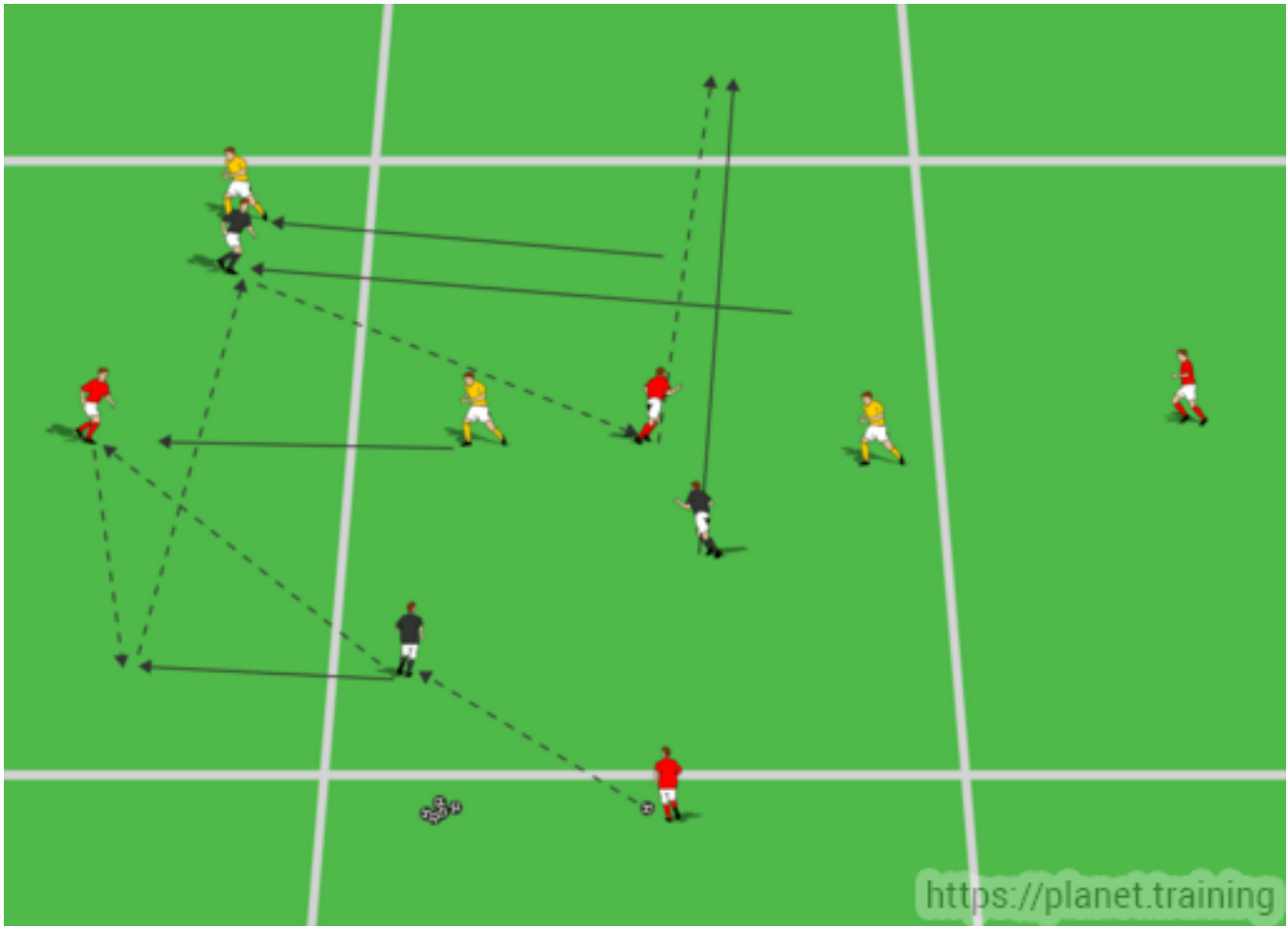
Two teams of four players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up, with a center area and two outer ones. Two black players and two yellows are placed in the middle area; two players of each team are placed inside the right or the left sides of the set-up. The goalkeeper, who is placed on the lower end line, starts the sequence passing the ball to the center neutral player. As he receives, he decides who is the team in possession (the black one in the picture). The goal for the team in possession is to play wide to create a 3 v 2 duel on the flank where two possession players are placed (two yellow defenders can run out there); this way the center spaces should be opened for the fourth possession player, who can receive and pass back to the goalkeeper, to win 1 point and to start the sequence again. If the defenders win the ball, they must switch the side and keep the ball in a 4 + 1 v 4 duel.

Variations

- The sequence can be completed if all the possession players have touched the ball
- The outside players must keep the ball for a fix limit of time before passing it toward the center

Eye on: create a strong side, cover the weak side even if outnumbered, free the third man in the center.

Rondo: 3 v 3 + 4



Sequence

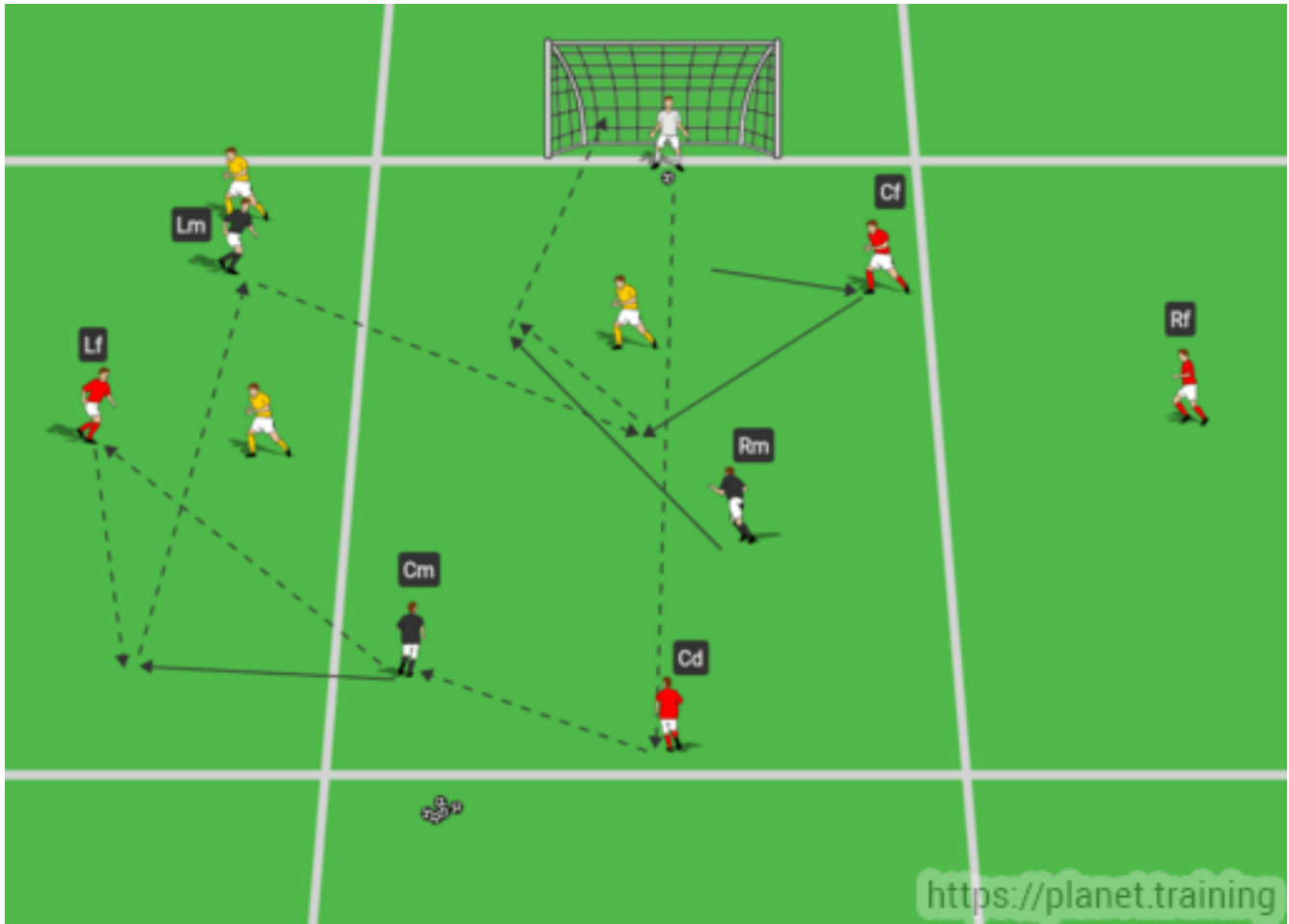
Two teams of three players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up, with a center area and two outer ones. All the black and yellow players are placed in the middle area, together with the first neutral one. Two neutral players are placed inside the right or the left sides of the set-up and the fourth one, the goalkeeper, is placed out of the lower end line. The goalkeeper decides who is the team in possession (the black one in the picture), and the goal is to play wide to create a 3 (2 + 1) v 2 duel on a flank, where two black players must run to (two yellow defender can run out there also). This way the center spaces should be opened for a third man, who can receive from the center neutral player and dribble out to win 1 point for his team. If the defenders win the ball, they must switch the side and try to play the same way, to dribble the ball out with a third center man.

Variations

- The sequence can be completed if all the center possession players have touched the ball, before passing wide
- The ball must be kept on the flank for a fix limit of time, before passing it toward the center

Eye on: create a strong side, cover the weak side even if outnumbered, free the third man in the center, switch the side to save the recovered ball.

Positional game: 3 v 3 + 4 and goalkeeper



Sequence

Three teams of three players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up, with a center area and two outer ones; a goal with a goalkeeper is placed on the upper end line of the set-up. A black center midfielder and the right and left midfielders of the black team, a center defender and the center forward of the neutral team are placed inside the center area, against three defenders; the left and the right forwards, as part of the neutral team, are placed wide on the flanks. The goalkeeper passes the ball to the center defender who decides the team in possession (the black one in the picture). A 3 v 2 duel is then created inside one flank (the left one in the picture); the center midfielder must support the left midfielder and forward against two defenders; the goal is to free the opposite midfielder, thanks to the moves of the neutral center forward, who must open the spaces in the center. If the defenders win the ball, a 3 + 2 v 3 duel is played in the center part of the set-up to finish, after a passing sequence with the neutral player.

Eye on: create a strong side, cover the weak side even if outnumbered, free the third man in the center, drop back to create space, switch the side to save the recovered ball.

Transition: 3 v 3 + 4 and goalkeeper



If the defenders win the ball, they must create the same situation on the opposite side, building up again from the center defender of the neutral team.

Training session 9: Play wide to open center spaces and to finish

Small-sided possession game: 5 + 1 v 3



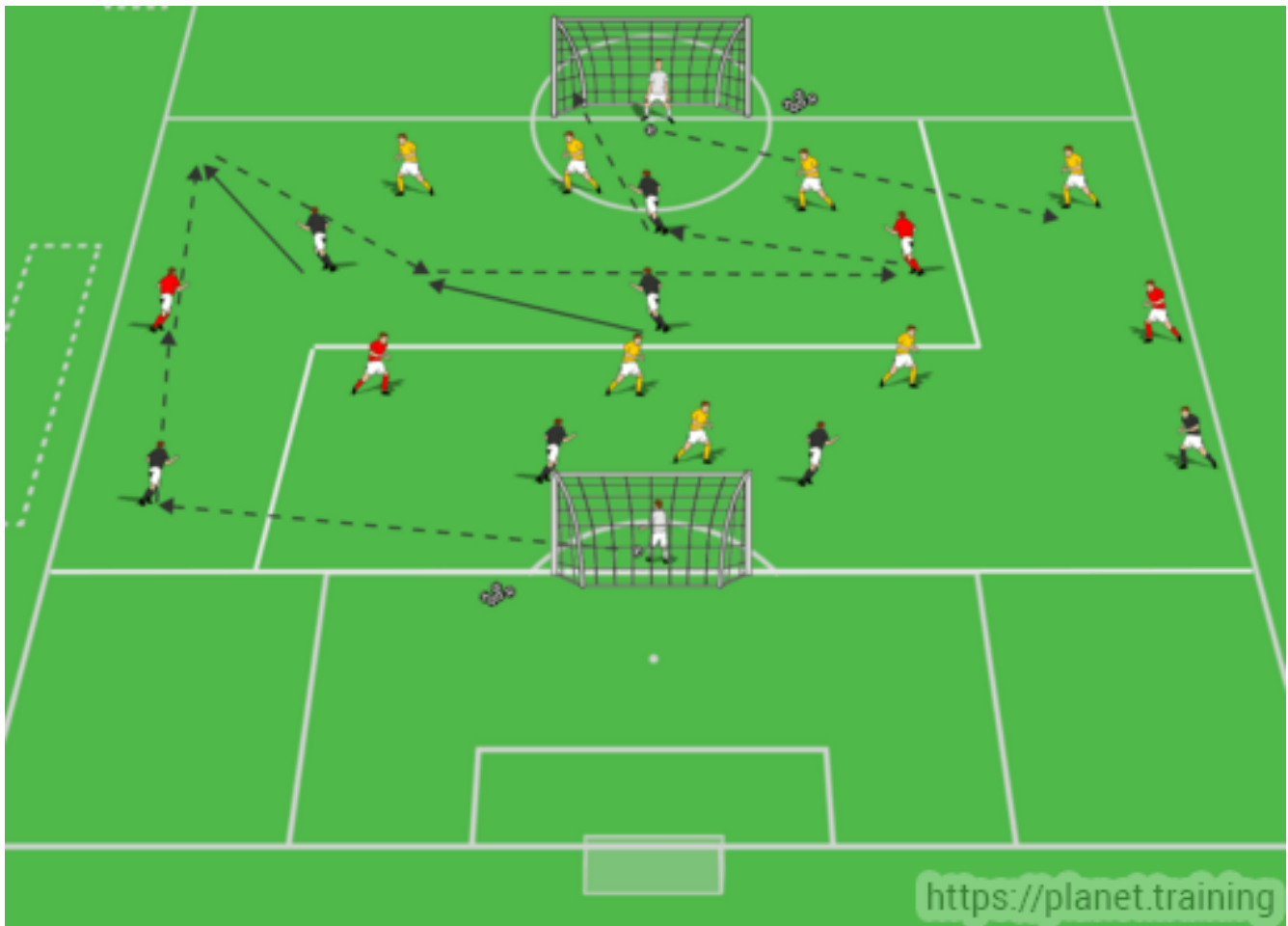
Two playing areas are marked with a center space and a flank, the left one in the picture, and all the field players are divided into two groups, working separately. A 5 + 1 v 3 duel is played inside both the spaces; the move starts from the center defender of the other half of the pitch, who passes the ball wide to create a strong side on the flank. The goal for the team in possession is to play wide first, thanks to the neutral player; as a strong side is created, center spaces shall be opened where a 4 + 1 v 3 duel must be carried out to keep the possession for a fix limit of time; after this period, the team wins 1 point. If the defenders win the ball, a free 3 + 1 v 4 duel starts to keep the possession for a fix limit of time to gain 1 point in the center part of the set-up.

Variations

- If the defenders win the possession, all the other team must create a strong area on the ball to put pressure and to recover it back; a 3 + 1 v 5 duel is now played
- Create a required pattern of play along the flank before passing the ball toward the center

Eye on: play wide to free a teammate, create a strong area to play wide, open the center spaces, cover the weak side, keep the balance is outnumbered.

Rondo: 4 + 2 v 3 with goalkeepers



Two goals with the goalkeepers are now added on the end lines of the marked playing areas. A 4 + 2 v 3 duel is played inside both the spaces; the move starts from the goalkeeper of the other half of the pitch, who passes the ball wide to create a strong side on the flank. The goal for the team in possession is to play wide first, thanks to the first neutral player; as a strong side is created, center spaces shall be opened where a 3 + 1 v 3 duel must be carried out to finish through the second free player, who is placed on the sideline of the set-up; if the possession team scores, 1 point is won. Both the neutral players must be part of the move, to play out in one side and then to finish in middle. If the defenders win the ball, a free 3 + 2 v 4 duels starts to keep the possession for a fix limit of time to gain 1 point in the center part of the set-up and to put pressure to recover the ball by the new defending team.

Variations

- If the defenders win the possession, both the other teams must create a strong area on the ball to put pressure and to recover it back; a 4 + 2 v 3 duel is now played
- Create a required pattern of play along the flank before passing the ball toward the center

Eye on: play wide to free a teammate, create a strong area to play wide, open the center spaces, cover the weak side, keep the balance if outnumbered.

Positional game: 3 v 3 + 4 and goalkeeper



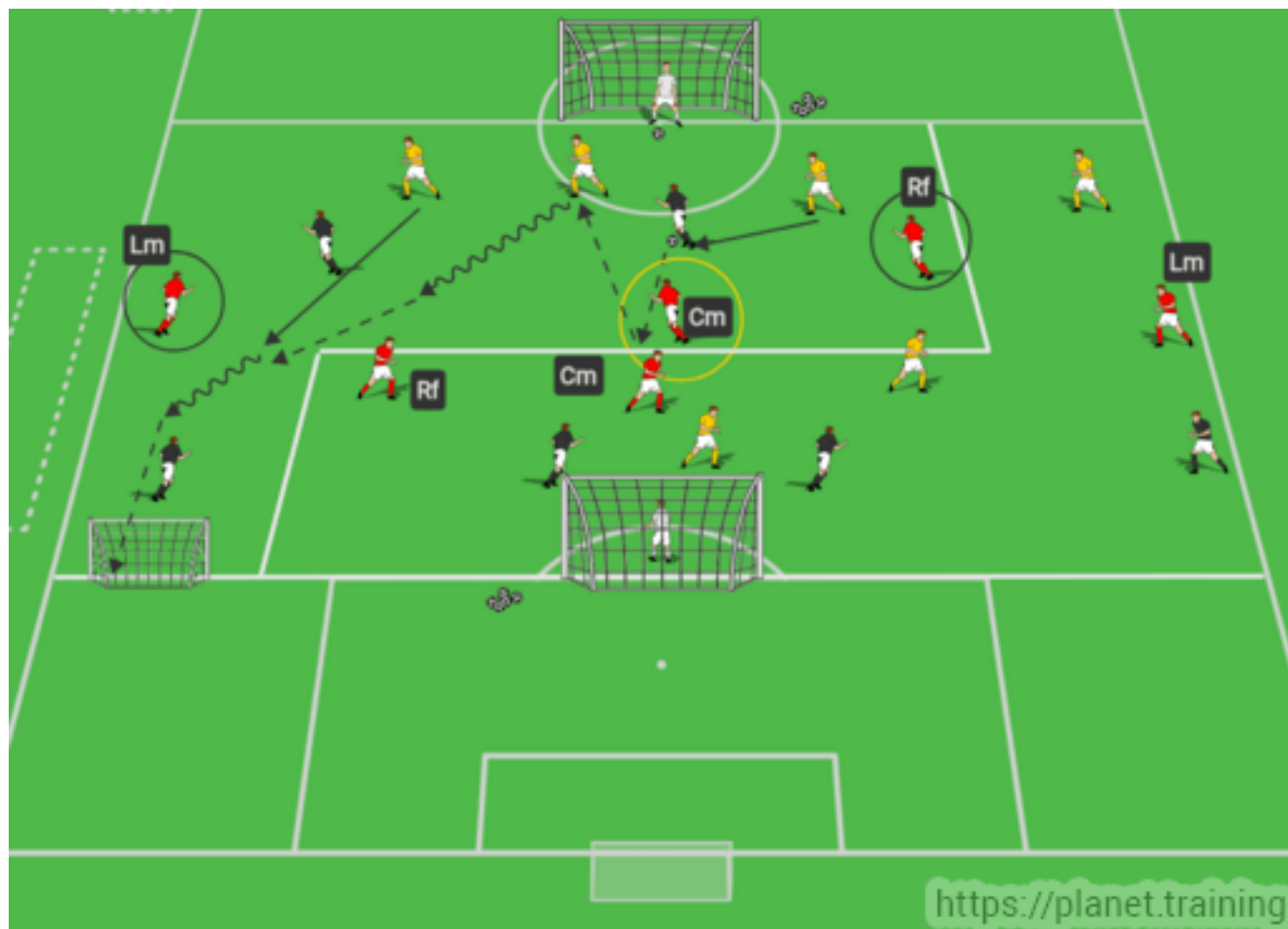
In this positional game on the same set-up, a 3 + 3 v 3 with goalkeeper duel is played. The exercise is played alternately on the set-ups. The neutral players are the center midfielder, the left midfielder (or the right one if the direction of play would be on the other flank) and the right forward. The goals of the exercise are the same of the prior ones, but the goals worth only if the center midfielder, who is a support player, is able to open the center space and to pass the ball to the wide forward on the sideline of the set-up. A possession player must be the scorer. If the defenders win the ball, they switch side and set-up, passing the ball to their teammates, to start the same sequence on the other side. If a goal is scored or the move ends, the other goalkeeper starts a new sequence.

Variations

- If the defenders win the possession, both the other teams must create a strong area on the ball to put pressure and to recover it back; a 2 + 3 v 3 duel is now played
- Create a required pattern of play along the flank before passing the ball toward the center

Eye on: play wide to free a teammate, create a strong area to play wide, open the center spaces, cover the weak side, keep the balance if outnumbered.

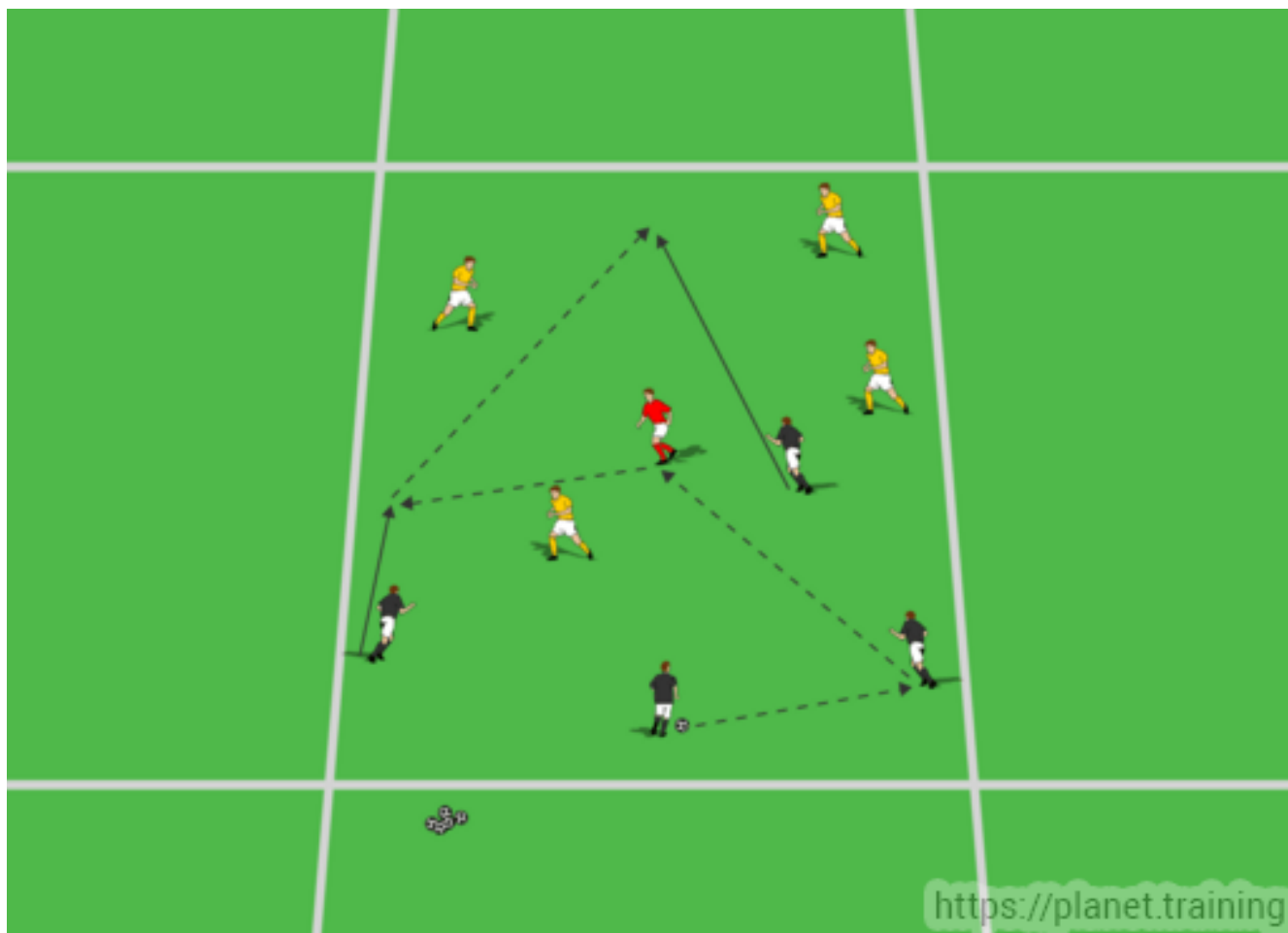
Transition: 3 + 1 v 5



If the defenders win the ball, the center midfielder becomes their teammate to counter attack along the flank and to score in the wide mini goal. The left midfielder and the right forward become teammates of the new defending team for a counter pressing phase, to recover the ball.

Training session 10: Play behind the last opposition defense line

Small-sided possession game: 4 + 1 v 4



Sequence

Two teams of four players each are placed inside a rectangular set-up; a neutral player is a support for the team in possession. The goal is to shape lines of 3 on the pitch and toward any direction, behind the center neutral player, and to play forward on the run of the fourth teammate through him. If the defenders win the ball they must play the same way.

Variations

- The sequence can be completed if all the possession players have touched the ball
- If the defenders win the ball, they must keep the possession outnumbered 4 v 4 + 1

Eye on: overcome a defense line, free from the marker behind him, keep the possession.

Rondo: 3 + 2 v 4 with goalkeeper



Sequence

Two teams of three and four players each are placed inside the same rectangular set-up; two neutral players are supports for the team in possession. The goal is to shape a line of 3 on the lower part of the pitch, to play forward on the run of the third man through the first neutral player and to free the second neutral player among the defenders to score. If the defenders win the ball they must keep the possession against the three black players, as a 4 v 3 duel is created; the two neutral players aren't active in this phase.

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball, they must keep the possession with numerical advantage 3 + 2 v 4
- If the defenders win the ball, the neutral players support the black ones to organize a counter pressing phase

Eye on: overcome a defense line, free for the marker behind him, timing of runs without the ball.

Gdp: 3 + 2 v 4 with goalkeeper



Sequence

Two teams of three and four players each are placed inside the same rectangular set-up; two neutral players are supports for the team in possession and they play as center midfielder and center forward. Both the neutral players must be unmarked in the center, running from the opposite sidelines, as in the picture. The goal is to shape a line of 3 on the lower part of the pitch, in a momentary 3 v 1 duel, to play forward on the run of the third man through the first neutral player and to free the second neutral player, among the defenders, to score. If the defenders win the ball, they must keep the possession against the three black players, as a 4 v 3 duel is created; the two neutral players aren't active in this phase.

Variations

- If the defenders win the ball, they must keep the possession with numerical advantage 3 + 2 v 4

Eye on: overcome a defense line, free for the marker behind him, timing of runs without the ball from opposite directions.

Transition: 4 v 3 + 2 and counter pressing to recover the possession



If the defenders win the ball, they must score playing outnumbered in the mini goal on the opposite end line, and the neutral players support the black ones to organize a counter pressing phase.