

TACTICAL



SERIES

# JURGEN KLOPP

by Alex Trukan



WORLD CLASS COACHING

**Tactical Series**

Jurgen Klopp

*by*  
Alexander Trukan

*Published by*  
WORLD CLASS COACHING

# Tactical Series

# Jurgen Klopp

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# FOREWORD

This short series tactical eBook is focused on giving a little insight into strategies used by one of the coaching masters – Jurgen Klopp. Due to the nature of the eBook format, it is a snapshot of the playing style rather than an extensive analysis of it. The main aim is to present general ideas related to the model of play as well as link this into the training content, which I feel, might help to bring out some of the pictures seen in Klopp’s teams among players you are working with. This is why, I have concentrated on showing principles of play, and less of a patterns of play. Principles of the playing model would be similar for a team throughout seasons. Patterns as well as players used within systems might change from game to game. The analysis in this eBook has been divided into four phases of the game – attack, transition to defence, defence and transition to attack. Both attacking and defensive phases were further divided into two micro phases. This framework is intuitive and seems natural as this is how football is being played. Although phases are interconnected and some of the aspects of one phase may be dependent on the other, this model provides structure and simplifies the playing model. Every chapter has two training practices included into it. One of the practices is more of a ‘lead-in’ type, aimed at getting players to understand basic concepts and principles. Second one in turn, is much more context specific, with more players and spaces used. It allows the coach to show pictures which will be similar to those encountered by the players during the match. In the preparation for the analysis, four Liverpool FC matches played between April and August, 2016 have been used. The presented content, therefore, relates specifically to this period of the season. In light of this, any generalisations, should be made rather cautiously. This, however, does not prevent us from drawing some conclusions about Klopp’s style of play which is fascinating! Enjoy this eBook and play ‘heavy metal’ football!

Alexander Trukan

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# INTRODUCTION

Jurgen Klopp is known as a 'konzepttrainer' in Germany. This means being a coach who sets new directions and introduces novel ideas into methodology. This can be especially seen when watching Klopp's teams in action – very specific and innovative in the way they play. One of the keys to being a 'konzept' coach is evolving. Klopp is no different in this aspect. Since finishing his rather average playing career, he has started to coach for Mainz 05, the club he has made more than 330 appearances for. At that time, under influence of Wolfgang Frank, he has widely used zonal marking and 4-4-2 defending. Then, after joining Borussia, he started to become well known for his 'gegenpressing' game, high energy and playing forwards. This style of play has gained him a lot of success, winning two league titles, one cup and two super cups during his 7 seasons at the club. In October 2015, Klopp has joined Liverpool FC, trying to bring his ideas together and evolve again in a different environment. In addition to high pressing game and intensity, Klopp has heavily insisted on rotation between players when attacking, making his side fluid and difficult to mark and defend against. He has been also stating that it is the type of players he has got are the starting point to any system he uses. It is therefore his role to bring the best out of every individual and play to his strengths. That fluidity is linked to him not using a word 'formations' very often when attacking. It is rather principles than positions that make attacking more effective and unpredictable. 'Formations' would be more often used when defending, providing structure as well as helping to overload certain areas and regain the ball back. All in all, it is fair to say that Klopp's teams are exciting to watch. And that's not only in the attacking phase. His 'gegenpressing' approach and transitions make his teams energetic and interesting to watch when they don't have the ball as well. As Klopp has recently said: 'gegenpressing is the best playmaker!' This eBook will explain this as well as other aspects of his style in four moments of the game.



## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- HIGH ENERGY AND TEMPO
- DESIRE TO PLAY FORWARDS
- FORWARD RUNS OFF THE BALL
- SUPPORT IN FRONT OF THE BALL
- SPEED AND QUALITY OF PASS
- PLAYERS POSITIONING BETWEEN THE LINES
- FLUIDITY AND ROTATION OF THE FRONT PLAYERS
- FULL BACKS REGULARLY INVOLVED IN ATTACKS ON THE OPPOSITION'S HALF
- ASSYMETRICAL ATTACKING SHAPES
- THROUGH BALLS IN BETWEEN CB'S AND INTO CHANNELS BETWEEN CB AND FB
- GEGENPRESSING (COUNTER PRESSING)
- DOUBLING UP WHEN DEFENDING
- AGGRESSIVE LEEWAY AND BALL ORIENTED PRESSING
- COMPACTNESS WHEN DEFENDING
- FORCING THE OPPONENT INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE PITCH
- PREVENTING SWITCH PLAY WHEN PRESSING
- COMBINATION PLAY IN THE FINAL THIRD
- CREATING OVERLOADS IN CENTRAL AREAS AND AROUND THE PENALTY BOX

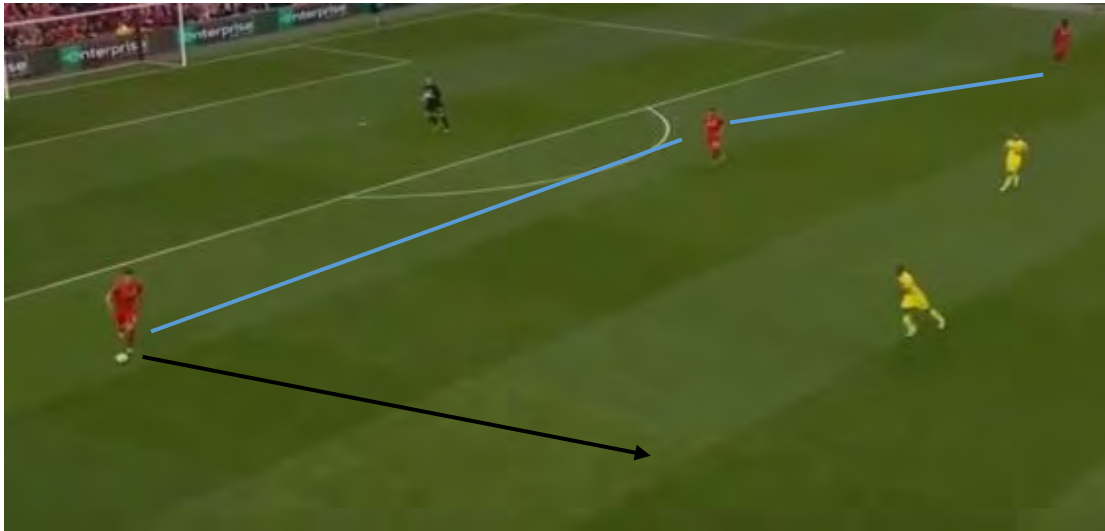
# ATTACKING

When in controlled possession of the ball, Klopp's teams are looking to play forwards at every opportunity. This means choosing vertical passes over horizontal ones, offering support in front of the ball as well as making forward runs off the ball. Having positive attitude and displaying high energy and intensity are key components that enable this style of play to be successful. Klopp has used a variety of different formations in the attacking phase: 4-1-4-1, 4-2-3-1, 4-3-3 or 4-2-2-2. These has changed and adapted not only from game to game but also during games. Rotation and fluidity was the key! Regardless of the formation though, his teams show certain traits which distinguish them from all the other ones.

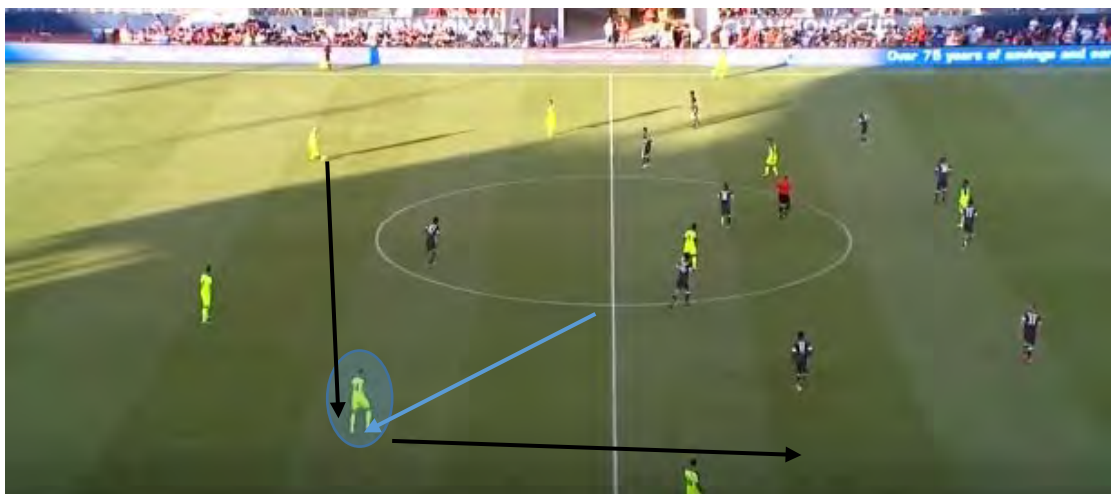
## Building up from the back

When building up from the back, Klopp's teams show a combination of direct as well as progressive styles. The emphasis, however is placed on getting the ball quickly into the opposition's final third. If the goalkeeper chooses to play out through the back line, a classical split into the edges of the penalty box is used. This is usually followed by one of the defensive midfielders (in most of the cases – Emre Can or Henderson) dropping between centre backs to form a back three. If this option is used, both of the full backs push up higher into the opposition's half and are not involved in the build-up in this initial phase. This strategy also tends to be more popular when playing against the opposition with two strikers pressurising the back line.





Another option involves one of the defensive midfielders (in this case usually Henderson or Milner) dropping into space between full back and centre back. This is a trigger for the full back on this side to push up higher up the pitch. Getting that full back on the ball usually happens through recycling it into defensive midfielder who then plays wide into full back. More direct option involves a diagonal pass from the opposite side centre back. This option is more often used on the right wing, with Clyne playing in more advanced attacking positions. The opposite side full back will drop deeper and remain in a more defensive position to ensure balance of the back line.



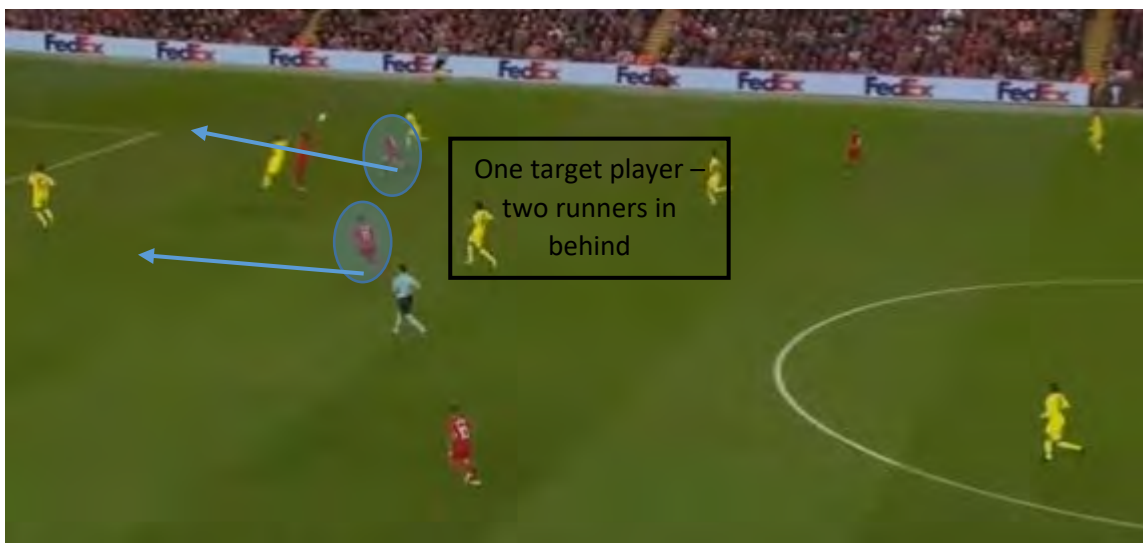
When the ball is in possession on the own half, the most preferred option would be to play to the most advanced striker into space. This role is usually played by Origi, Sturridge or Mane and preferred when playing against the teams using high line with spaces available beyond them.



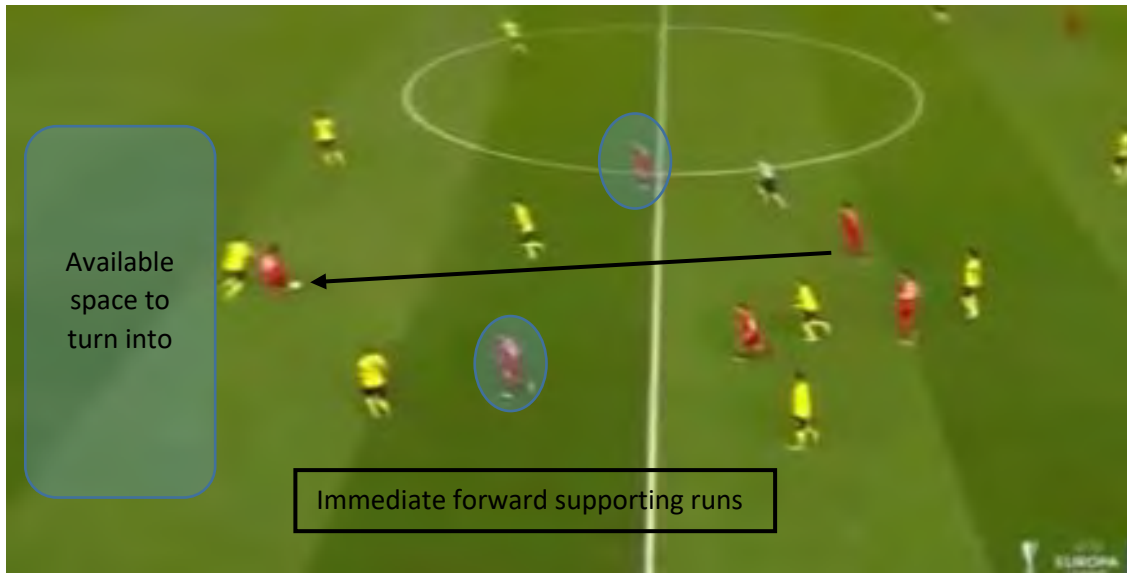
The trigger to start making a run is therefore space in behind and player in possession of the ball able to make a long pass (no pressure around). In order to time the run well as well as cause a zonal marking problem for the defender, a player might choose to curve his run. Body position is crucial in this case which should allow to see the ball as well as make a quick acceleration forwards into space.



Another direct combination used very often is playing into target player who then extends the pass into two players making forward runs in behind him. These are usually attacking midfielders or false strikers (Lallana, Firmino, Mane, Coutinho). Players used as a target man in this role need to offer immediate support straight after playing the ball in behind. Key areas for this kind of combination are usually spaces on the outside of the opposition centre backs, allowing to penetrate the space between centre back and full back.



Instead of playing the ball into the forward runners, target play can also choose to hold up the ball and combine with supporting players. Origi is particularly effective in this using his strength and balance to stay on the ball. This option allows quick combination play with attacking midfielders and playing through into the target man who should immediately make a run in behind the back line. Forward runs of the players involved should be in different lines and spaces.



As forward runs are being made from midfield positions (secondary runs), a direct pass can be played in behind to exploit that. These kind of movements are more difficult to defend against as centre backs are occupied by strikers and have to make a decision whether to stay or follow as midfielders will be often late to track the runner. Firmino, Coutinho as well as Mane coming deeper into midfield areas to then make a run are particularly effective in these kind of movements.



In most of the situations, however, a direct pass into strikers or into space in behind the back line will not be available. Another option preferred by Klopp's teams in the build up phase is a diagonal ball from centre backs into full backs in advanced positions on the opposition half. This is often used when switching to back three (Emre Can/Henderson dropping in) allowing full backs to push up. Lovren as well as Emre Can are players which are very effective in diagonal passes and switches of play. Clyne and Moreno (less so) are regularly used to receive beyond opposition's midfield line and create chances in the final third.



Another way of building up from the back is quick, progressive passing through the central areas. The priority here are through balls that break one or two units of the opposition. In order to allow this, strikers as well as wide and central midfielders are narrowly positioned in central areas (central areas prioritised over wide areas). The key is trying to receive between the lines of the opposition, with the emphasis on turning and penetrating forwards. Players having pace to go in behind as well as finishing ability (Mane, Sturridge, Firmino) look to make a third man run

in behind the back line as soon as the 'playmaking' player (Coutinho, Lallana) receives the ball and faces forwards.



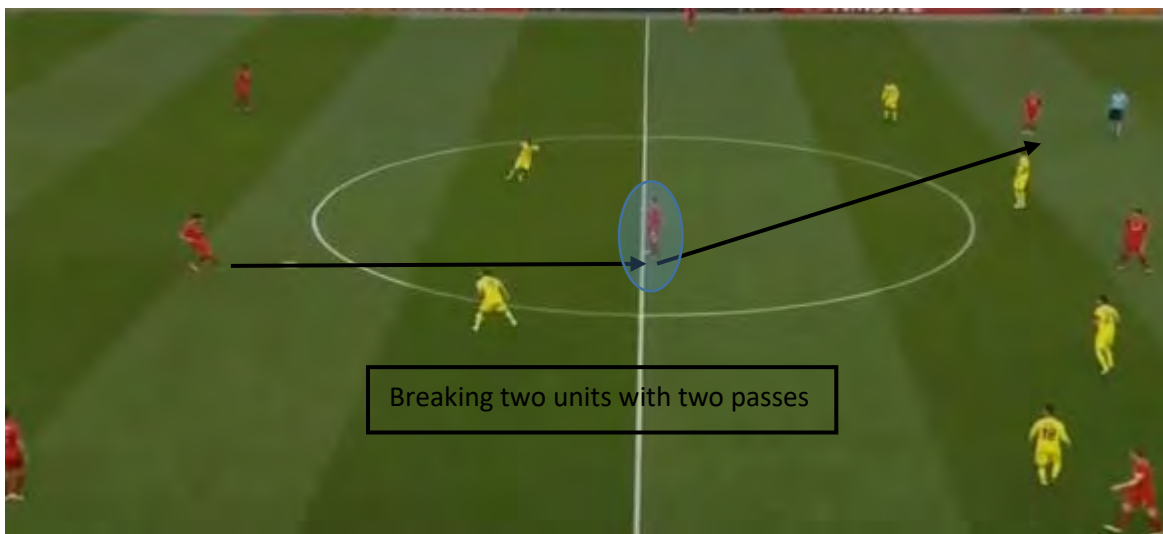
If a direct penetrating pass beyond the opposition's midfield is not available (i.e. due to opposition being compact and narrow), two midfielders are looking to make a movement towards the ball and try to receive in the space between opposition's strikers and midfielders.



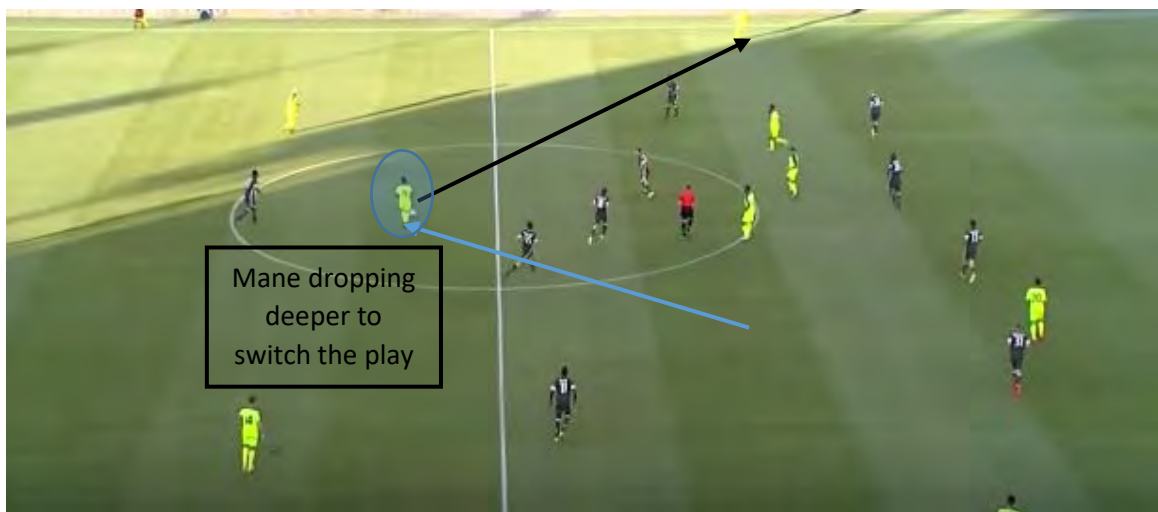
These kind of movements usually involve Lallana dropping on the ball side to play centrally or Milner more on the angle to link play with wide



areas. As soon as Lallana gets on the ball, strikers are looking to penetrate in behind the back line.



Finally, instead of midfielders, one of the strikers might choose to drop in in front of the back line. This was more evident towards the latter stages of the Klopp's period at Liverpool, when part of Mane's role was to pick the ball up from the back line and distribute into one of the full backs positioned wide. This allowed midfielder to offer support in wide areas (as they didn't have to drop and were positioned higher up the pitch) as well as gave enough time for Mane to make a run back into striker's role and look to finalise play.





Having different ways of building up from the back as well as being fluid in terms of positions and rotation of players, allowed Klopp's teams to be successful against different types of defending shapes - pressing high as well as dropping deep into their own half.

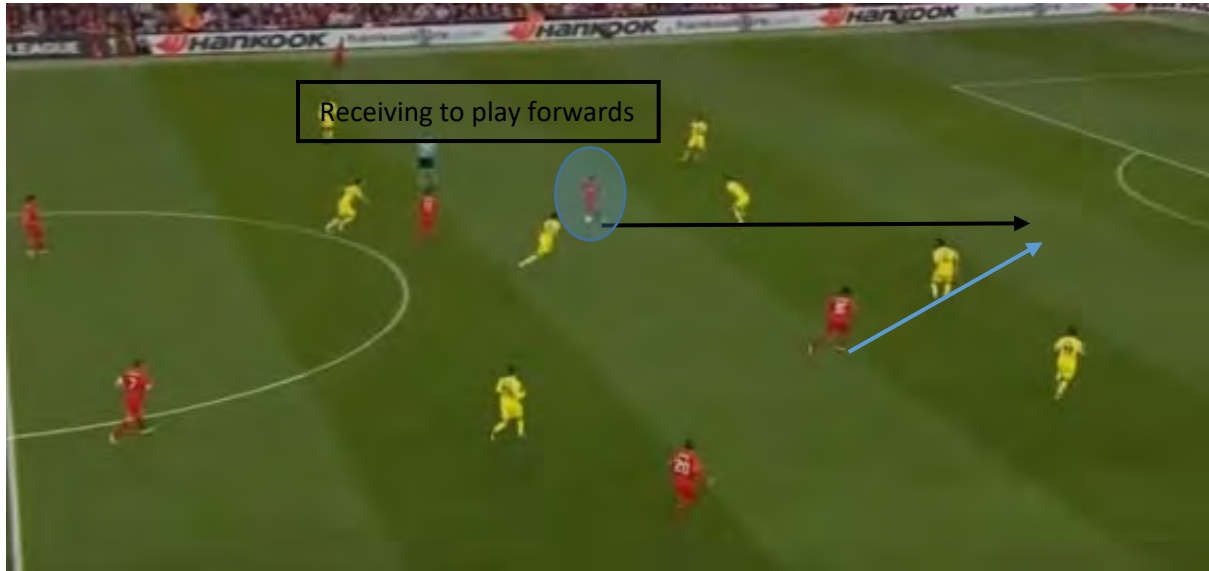
### Creating chances and scoring

When attacking on the opposition's half, what we can often observe is relative compactness in the shape. Small distances between the units and players, force the opposition to get more compact. This creates more space in behind to penetrate by a direct pass. Comparing to the build-up play, the distances between the ball and target zone are smaller, what gives less time for the runner to gain advantage over the defender. This is why, quick decision making and acceleration are crucial. Great fit for this role are players like Mane, Ojo or Firmino.



When the direct pass skipping the units is not available, second option used numerous times is getting midfielders on the ball facing forwards just beyond opposition's midfield line. This allows striker to make a forward run. The key is the timing of the striker's run. The moment when he begins the run will be dependant on his starting positions. If the striker is positioned deeper into the half, he should start the run as soon as the pass is made into midfielder. In case he is positioned higher

up the pitch in line with the opposition back line, the trigger would be midfielder facing forwards and being under no immediate pressure around.



Below, there is an example of a delay forward run from second line. In this case, the run had to be started as soon as the pass is made into midfielder. This type of movement is often used by Mane (described in the building up form the back chapter) who drops deeper first, gets on the ball, distributes it wide and then makes a run forwards as the ball is played from wide areas back to the middle.



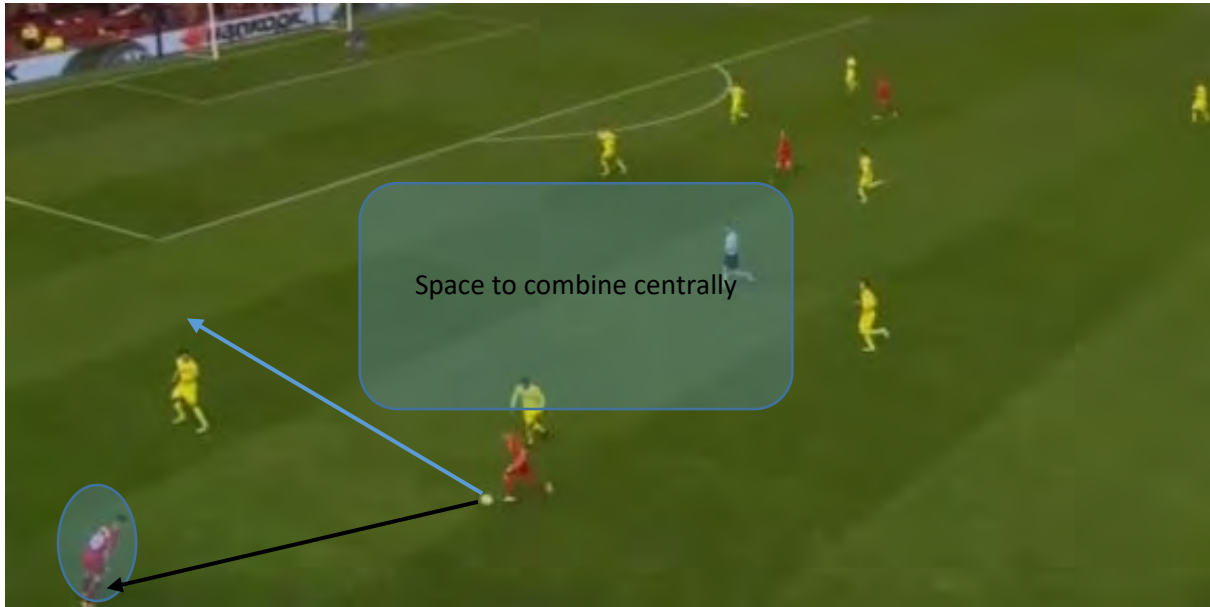
This type of movement might also involve more than one player making a forward run. Two players will cause a further problem for the defending unit. Strikers should aim to start and finish their runs in a different diagonal channel. In other words, the run has to be made on the angle. For example, it might be started between CB and FB and finished between two CB's.



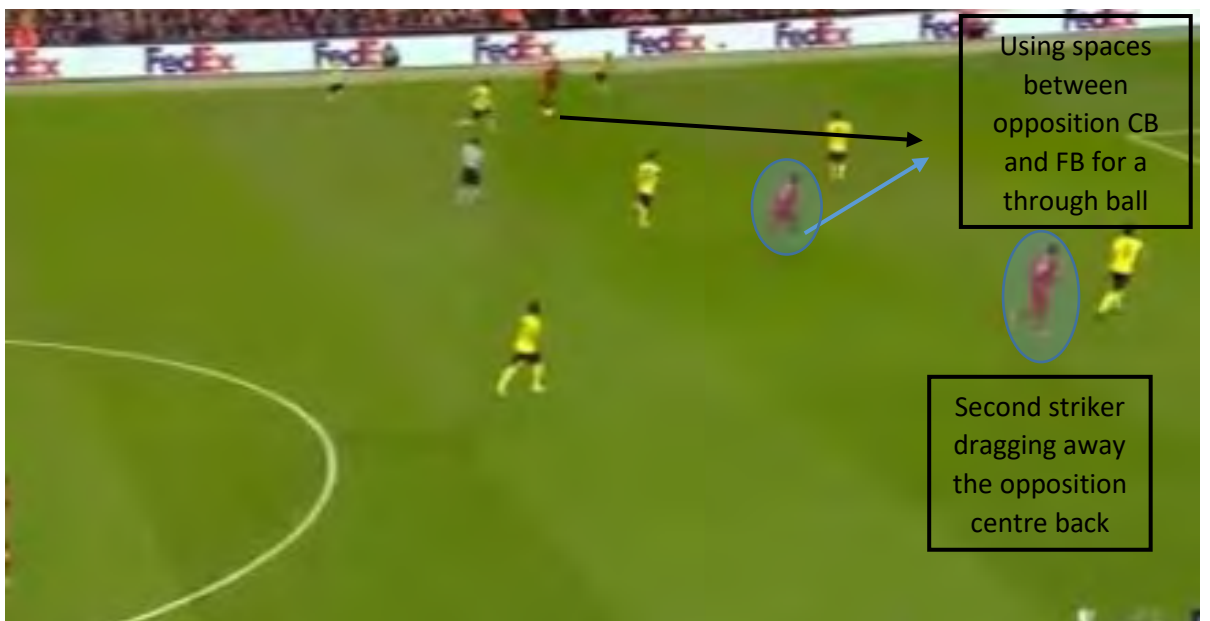
Second option is getting the ball into wide areas, mainly in two types of patterns. First one sees attacking midfielders drifting into wide areas (Coutinho, Lallana, Firmino) to then receive it and combine centrally. Second one involves full back making a forward run and getting it wide with a diagonal pass. In both cases, there is usually left a player in behind the ball who is responsible for distributing the ball into wide areas and switching play (Emre Can, Henderson, Milner).



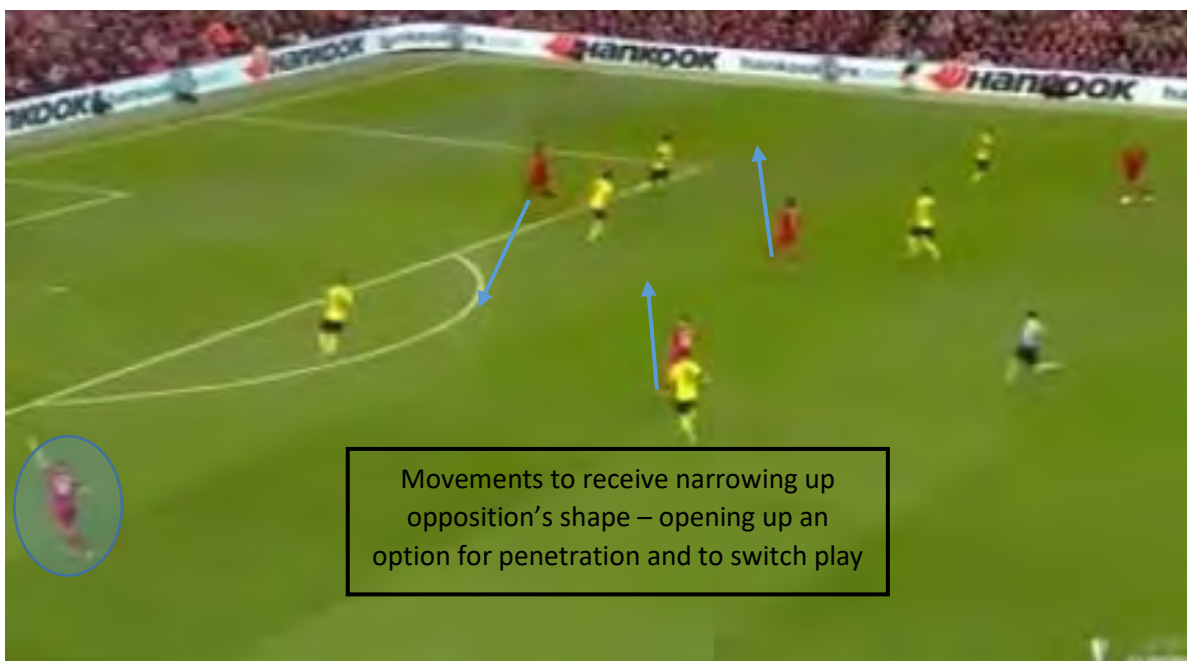
Getting Coutinho and Lallana on the ball in wide areas creates an opportunity for them to drift inside and combine with strikers. It also enables full backs to make overlapping as well as underlapping types of runs and create local overload on the wing. This type of movement tend to be more evident on the left wing, with Moreno combining with attacking midfielders. On the right wing, a more direct approach is preferred, as Clyne receives the ball in advanced positions and tries to create a cross or final pass by himself.



As soon as wide midfielder starts to make an infield movement (emphasis on facing centrally and getting away from the pressure rather than getting past the defender), forward players positioned centrally would be looking to make a run forwards. The area used for these type of runs most often would be between opposition full back and centre back on the ball side. In case two players making runs at the same time, second one would be looking to occupy 'weak side' centre back and drag him away from the ball.

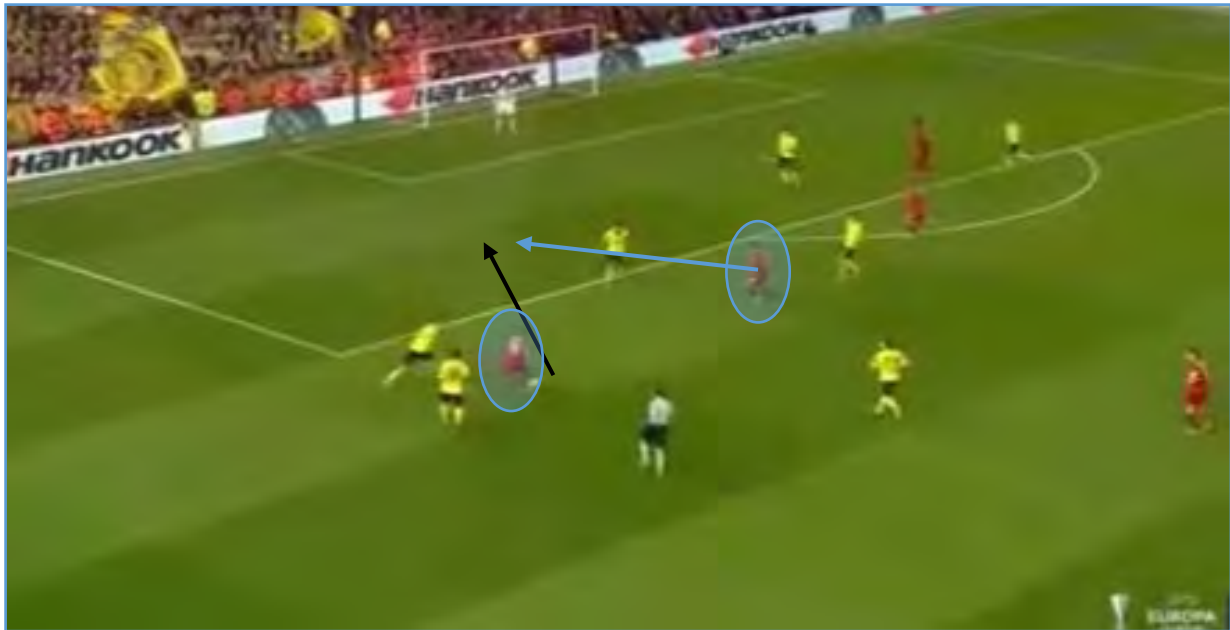


In the situation when the opposition is positioned closer to the own penalty box, and less space is available in behind to penetrate, more rotation between players leading to combination play will be used. Strikers and attacking midfielder would be looking for quick support and playing quickly off one touch to progress forwards. This will usually narrow up the opposition shape and create additional chance to switch play directly on to the opposite side where full back makes a forward run.



If a player driving inside manages to get closer to the penalty box, through balls to the strikers making a movement against the ball might be used. Firmino is particularly effective in these type of situations, using sharp movement to get away from the defender and finish.





Another pattern that was obvious at times when the ball was wide is overloading central areas of the pitch and isolating wide players. This encourages direct play into the box as well as creates more chances to pass into channel and progress forwards. It also occupies the opposition back line, often creating 3v4 and 4v4 situations which are difficult to deal with from a defending point of view.



This further links to the situation if the ball gets into the final third and an opportunity for the cross arises. Having more than two players in the



box creates more options for a delivery and increases the chances of effective covering of spaces – front post, central areas and far post.



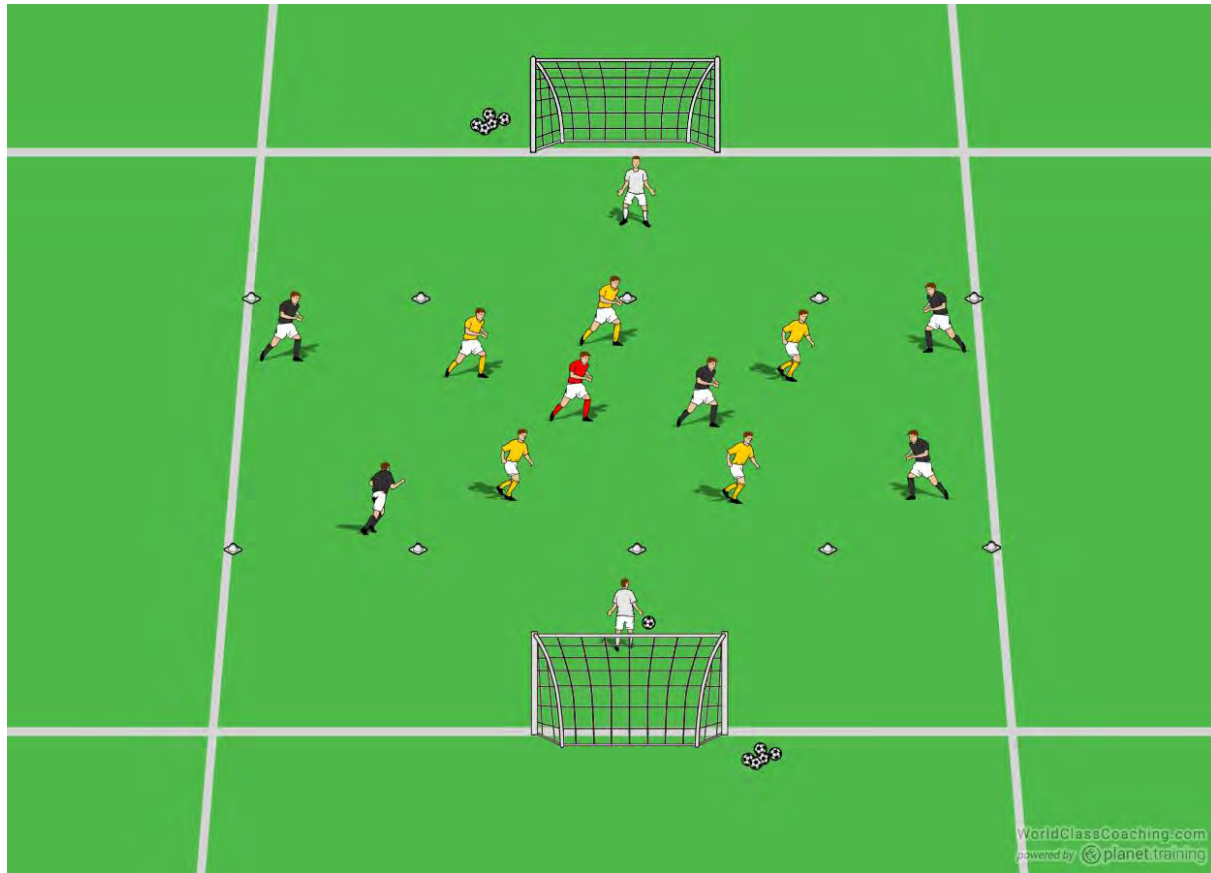
The presented type of attacking strategy requires excellent physical preparation. In particular, speed endurance as well as power are the key components responsible for high quality intensive actions as well as quick recovery between them.

## Training practices

### Leading in – Small Sided Game 6v6+1

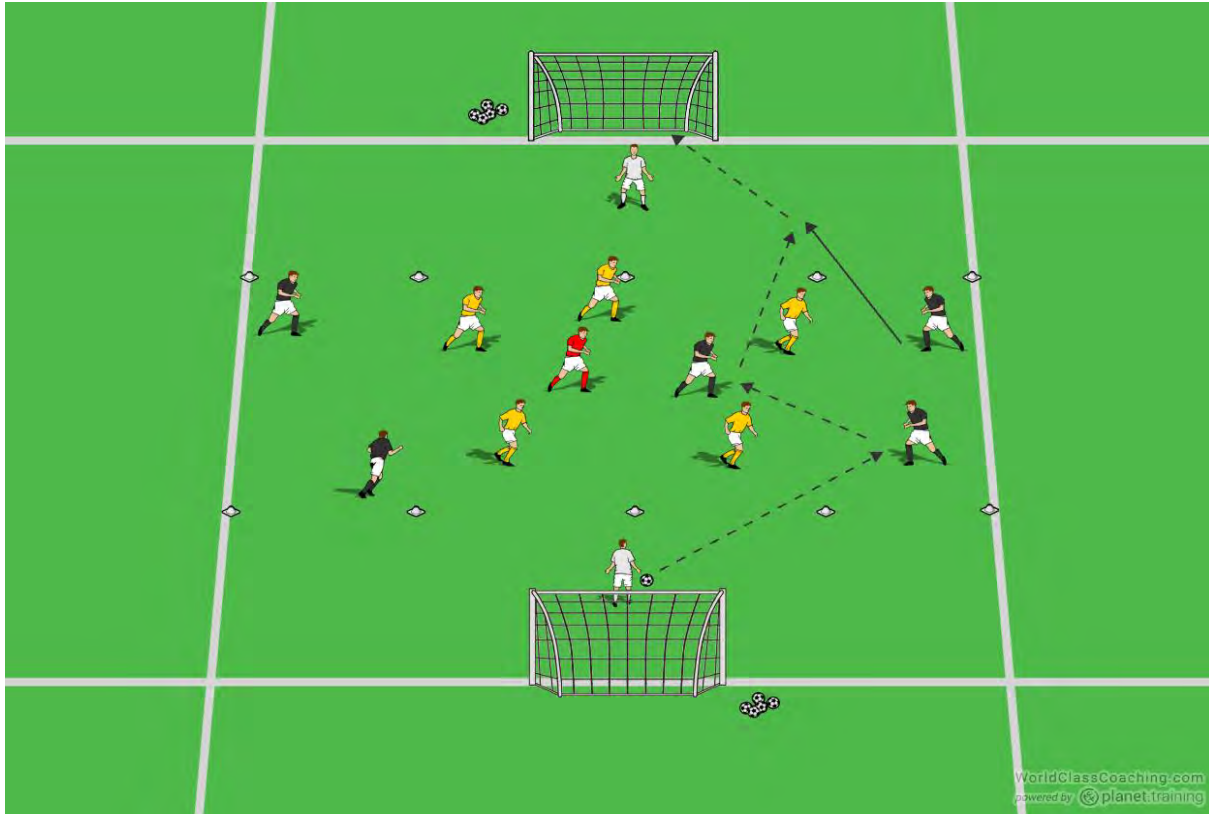
#### Set up and organization

Organise a pitch of approximately 30 x 40 yards. Further mark out a middle zone of 15 yards in length. Divide the group into two teams of six (5 outfield + 1 goalkeeper). Designate one floater (attacking with a team in possession). Prepare a sufficient amount of balls to ensure tempo and intensity.



The practice starts from the goalkeeper who plays out the ball to one of his teammates. The game is initially played in the first two thirds of the pitch. Any player can enter the final third only after the ball gets there first. Lines marking out the thirds are also offside lines. The team in

possession is working on combinations to play through balls into space in behind. Technical detail to focus on is timing of the run, support, movements off the ball as well as quality of pass.



Both teams attempt to score in the opposite goals. There are no corners in this game, the practice is restarted from the goalkeeper. Throw-ins apply. Neutral player support the team in possession to create overload and enable more attacking success. In order to make the practice harder, neutral player might be removed (6v6) or join the team with a defending focus (5v6). This will challenge the attackers to create chances in an underload scenario.

## Main part – Phase of Play 9v9+GK

### Set up and organization

Mark out a half of a full size pitch. Divide the group into two teams. Attacking team should have 9 players (8 + server positioned behind the half way line), playing with three central midfielders, three forwards (positioned narrowly) and two full backs. Defending team should be playing in a 4-4-1 formation. Regular rules of football, including the offside rule apply. Formation of the opposition can be adjusted to mirror the upcoming opponent (i.e. 4-3-2 or 4-2-3). Prepare a sufficient amount of balls next to the server.



The practice starts with a server playing the ball into of the midfielders from the attacking team. The team should then to find a way to score in the opposite goal as soon as possible. This might be a direct pass behind

the back line as well as patient combination play, depending on the situation. Defending team should adjust in relation to the offside line and look to win the ball back as soon as possible.

As the defending team gets in possession, it score in two ways – by dribbling the ball through the half way line or by passing the ball into the server. The game is then restarted again from the server playing the ball into the attacking team.



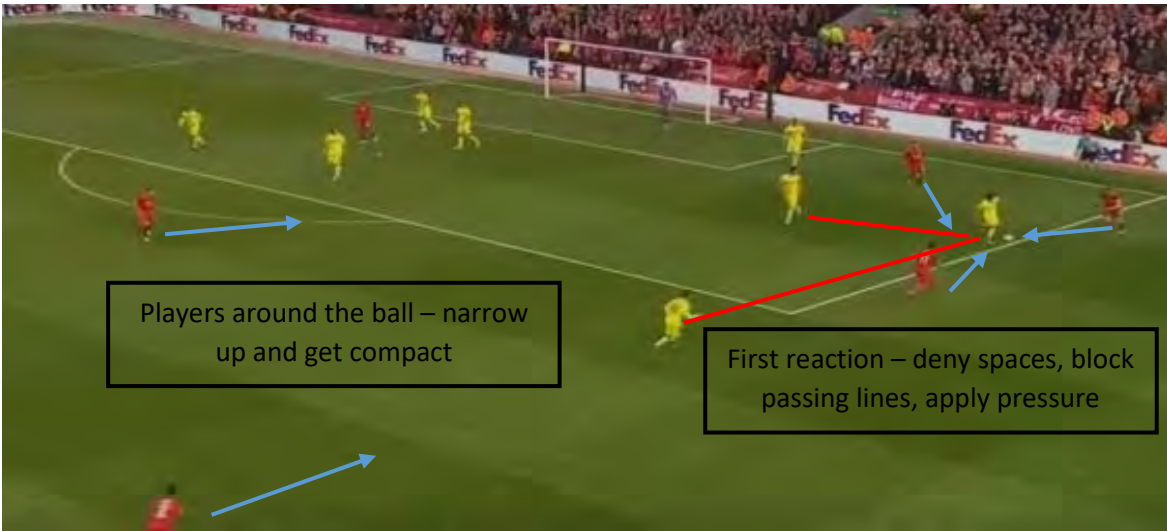
The practice might be progressed into 10v10 phase of play as well as further into 11v11 on a full size pitch. Attacking team might be restricted to certain time for finishing an attack. This will encourage them to play forwards at every opportunity. Also a rule might be added where any passes backwards are disallowed (or two back passes in a row are disallowed to make it easier for the attackers). This will bring out more supporting movements in front of the ball.

## TRANSITION FROM ATTACK TO DEFENCE

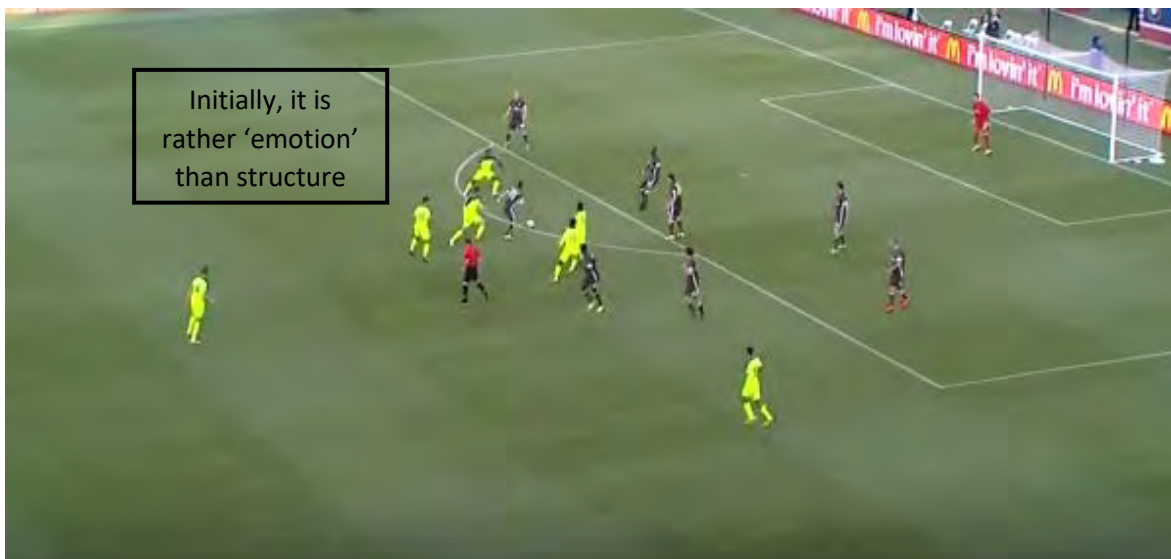
This phase has become one of the most recognizable parts of Klopp's brand of football. 'Gegenpressing' (Eng. counterpressing) has been employed by Klopp's teams both at Dortmund and Liverpool. It is based on acknowledging the fact that opposition upon winning the ball back loses its defensive structure, and is easier to attack. Therefore, if the ball is won back as soon as possible after it's lost, there will be advantageous opportunities available to penetrate quickly and score. There are several types of counterpressing - ball oriented, access oriented, leeway oriented and passing lane oriented. Klopp's teams have a preference for a leeway oriented press which is based on cutting the space out for the player on the ball by blocking passing as well as running lines. The aim of this type of pressing is to win the ball as soon as possible and start the counter – counterattack. The first phase of counterpressing however, happens when the team is still attacking. One of the key components of its effectiveness is remaining in a relatively narrow attacking shape and overloading central areas. This will ensure that players have immediate access to the ball upon losing possession.

As soon as the ball is lost, the role of the nearest player to the ball (not necessarily the one that has lost it) is to press and deny any opportunities to go forwards. At the same time, players around the ball pressurise as well cut off nearest passing lines and spaces to run with the ball. This should be done with high energy and speed. In the initial seconds it is more the role of the reaction and psychological affect rather than tactical structure. The role of the players away from the ball is to get compact and condense the spaces to prevent any long balls through and in behind.





This might often mean that three or four players will be positioned within couple of yards from the ball. The aim here is to either force a pass which can be intercepted or delay the decision (get even narrower) and win the ball back. If that's not possible, forcing any pass backwards or sideways gives time to reorganise and get compact as a team again. Winning the ball in the final third, provides great opportunities to create chances and overload areas close to the opposition goal.



The weakness of this type of strategy, however, are areas away from the ball. Especially at the beginning of Klopp's work at Liverpool, the



team has shown improvement in aggression and reaction to win the ball back but structure and detail were lacking. Despite an increase in ball regained as well as a decrease in 'no regain' press, the team was very prone to counter attacks in case the first line of press was broken.



Gaps between units when applying 'gegenpressing' might lead to opposition breaking through and opening up spaces for counter. This shows how crucial it is to focus on the compactness of the players away from the ball as well as forcing a player on the ball to look down and therefore stopping any long balls in behind.



Coaching 'gegenpressing' and achieving results with it takes time. Klopp's achieved initial reaction and aggression improvement after just a week of training, however it took months until the whole structure was improved and synchronised as a whole team. This was then reflected in more balls regained directly from the player on the ball as well as from intercepted passes.

## Training practices

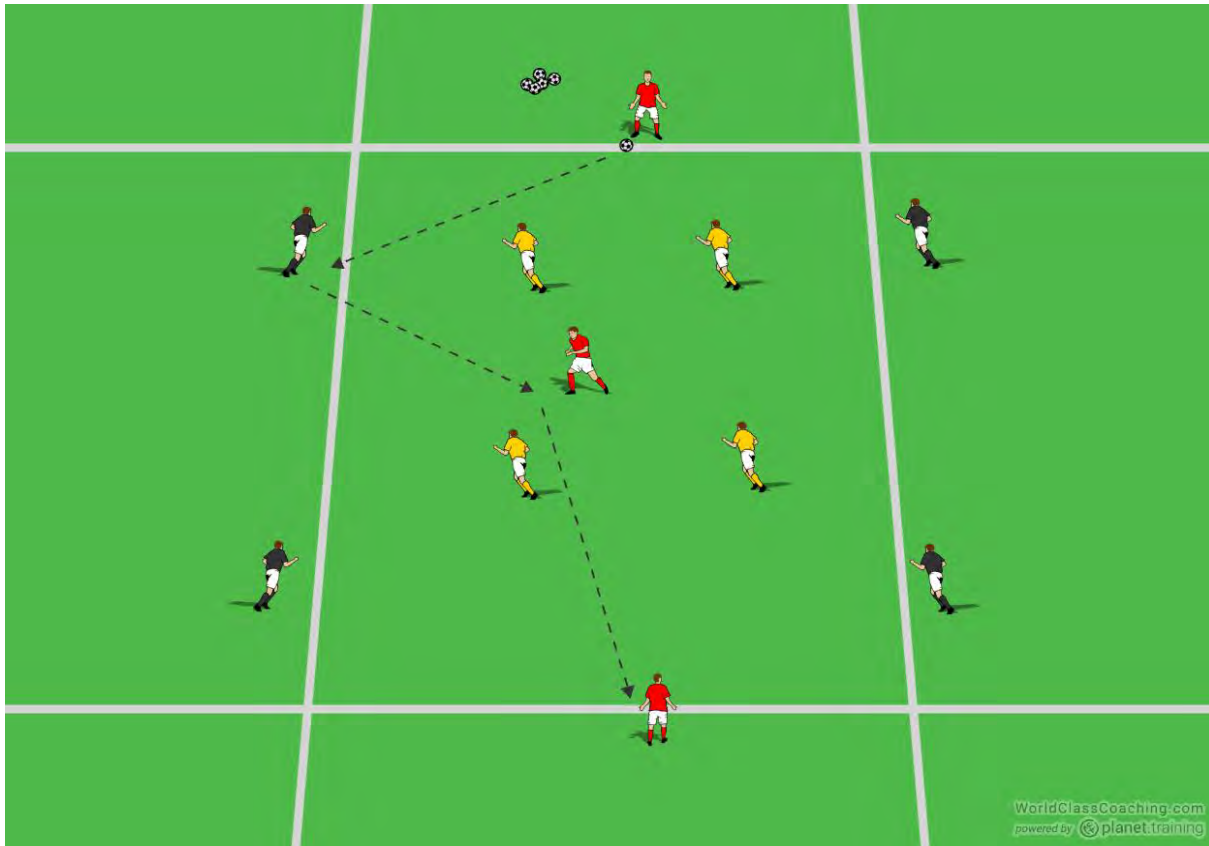
### Leading in – Possession game 4v4+3

#### Set up and organization

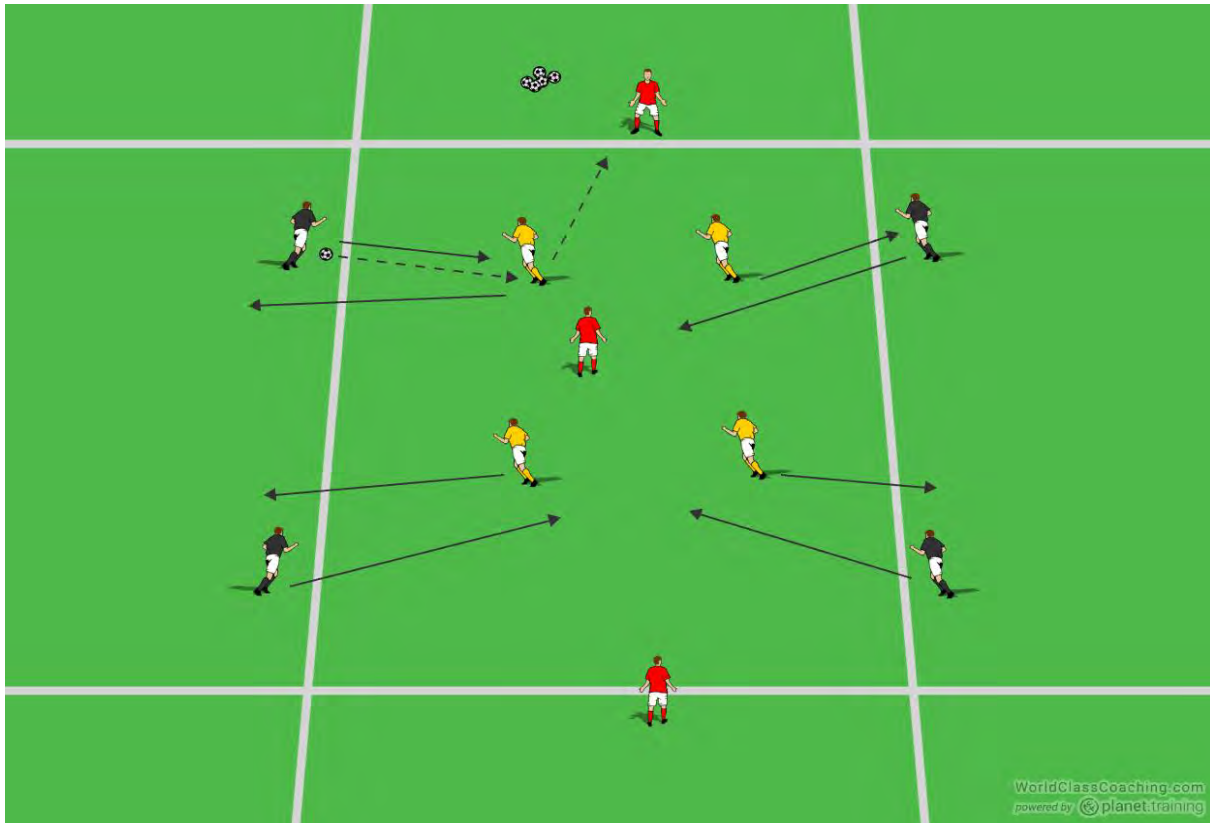
Organise a pitch of approximately 15 x 25 yards. Divide the group into two teams of four and three neutral players. Two neutral players are positioned on the shorter ends, opposite each other (goalkeepers or centre backs might be used for this role). Third neutral player is positioned in the middle of the area. One of the teams start outside the playing area (attacking) and the other one, inside the area (defending). Prepare a sufficient amount of balls around the pitch to ensure intensity and flow of the practice.



The practice starts from one of the neutral players. The attacking team supported by three neutrals, tries to keep possession of the ball away from the defending team. Certain amount of passes equals a goal (i.e. 10 passes = 1 goal). Defending players try to gain possession as soon as possible.



As the defending team gets in possession, they have to take up attacking positions (outside the square). The team that has just lost possession will need to pressurise and try to win possession back before the other team gets organised in attack. Neutral players remain on their positions playing for whichever team is in possession.

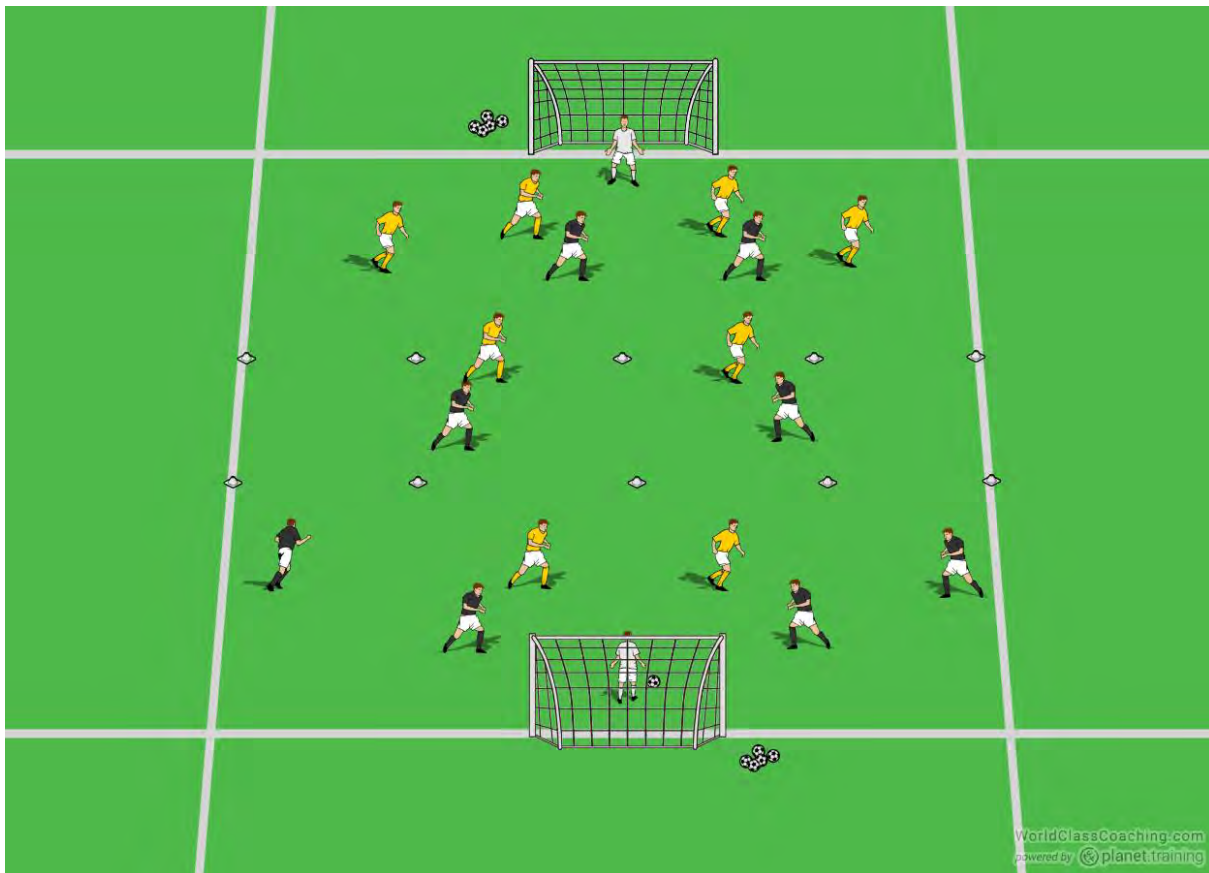


The numbers in this practice might be adapted –  $4v4+2$ ,  $5v5+3$ ,  $6v6+3$ . Apart from the neutral players on the ends, this practice has not got position specific focus. The main emphasis of this game is to coach initial speed of reaction to losing possession and basic defending principles of 'gegenpressing'.

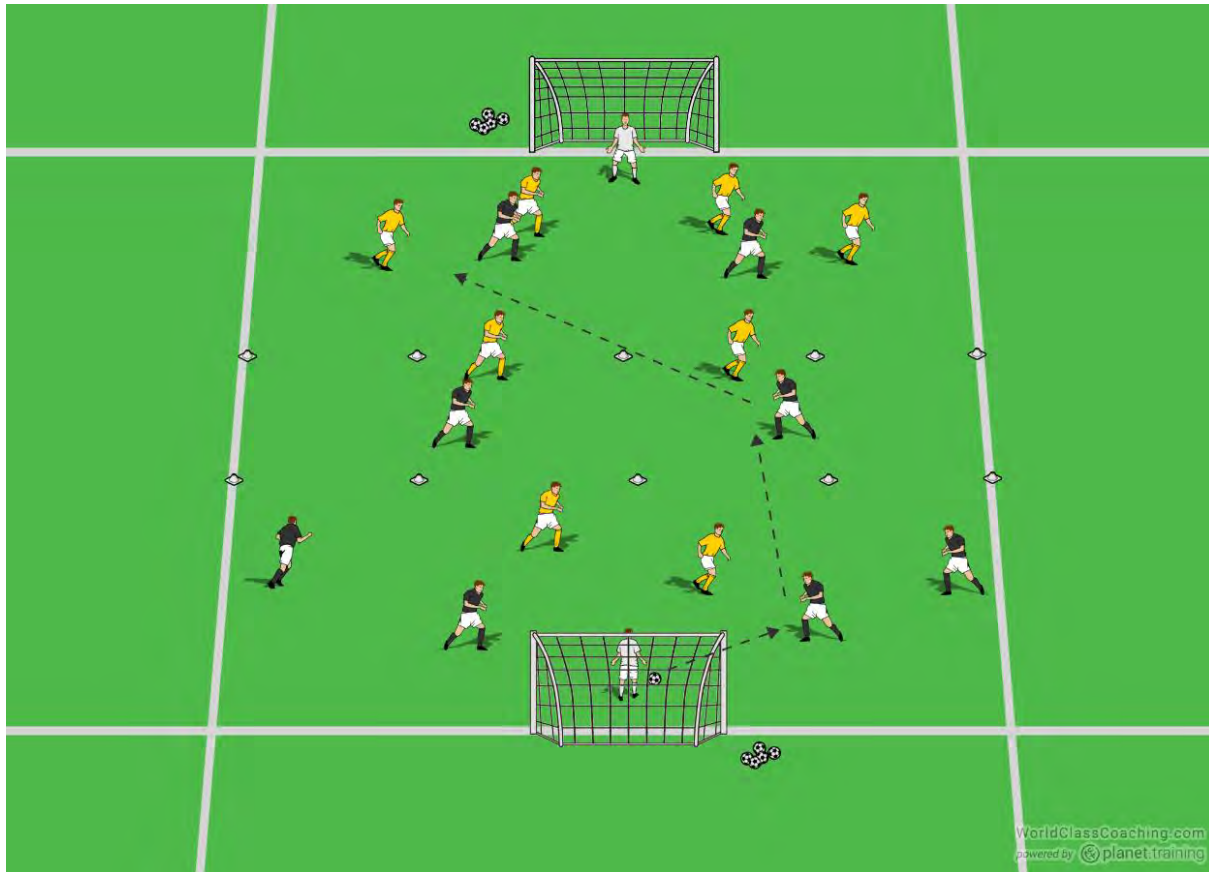
## Main Part - Small Sided Game 9v9

### Set up and organization

Organise a 60 x 40 yards pitch (size may be adapted to suit team needs). Mark out a middle zone, having 15 yards in length. This will divide the pitch into thirds. Split the group into two teams of nine (8+GK). When in positional attack (after 4 seconds from winning possession), first third should be occupied by four players, whereas middle and final thirds, by two. This only applies to a team in possession of the ball. A team that defends in a given moment has a freedom to position their players as they see fit. Prepare a sufficient amount of balls to ensure flow and intensity of the practice.



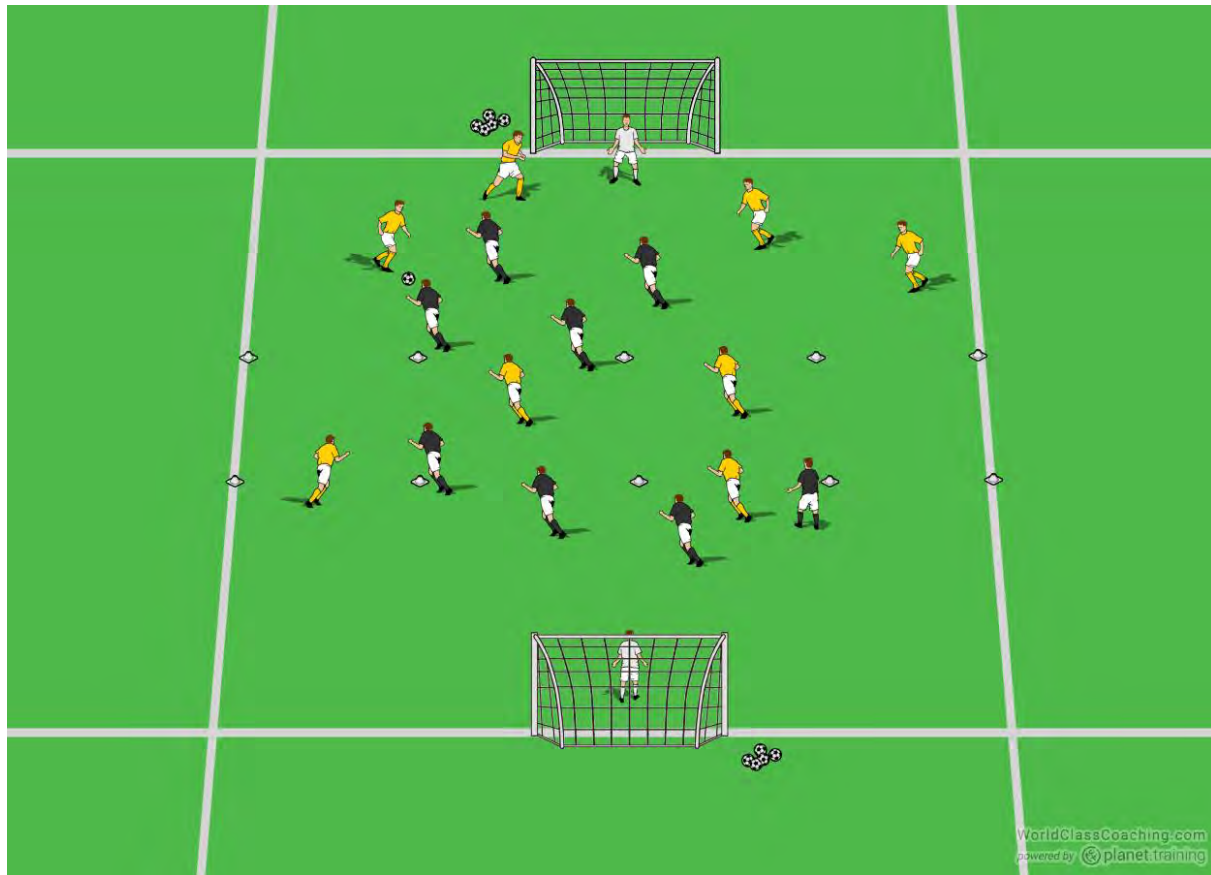
The game starts with a goalkeeper who passes the ball out into of the players from the first third. The attacking team attempts to build up play and score in the opposite goal.



As the team in possession will be underloaded in the final third, a lot of possession turn overs (loses of the ball) will occur in this area. This creates a great opportunity for the team that loses possession to win it back and score straight away (remembering that a team which is defending has a freedom of movement between the thirds). Upon winning possession back, a team has 4 seconds to finalise play until the rule of having only 2 players in the middle and final thirds starts to apply. This condition creates a situation when it can be more advantageous to score from transition to attack, rather than from



patient positional attack. It also urges players to be positive and score early after gaining possession.



This practice can be further progressed into phase of play with more position specific work in larger areas. Phase of play type of practice will provide more detail and context, however, less constant transitions will occur and the intensity will be lower comparing to small sided game.

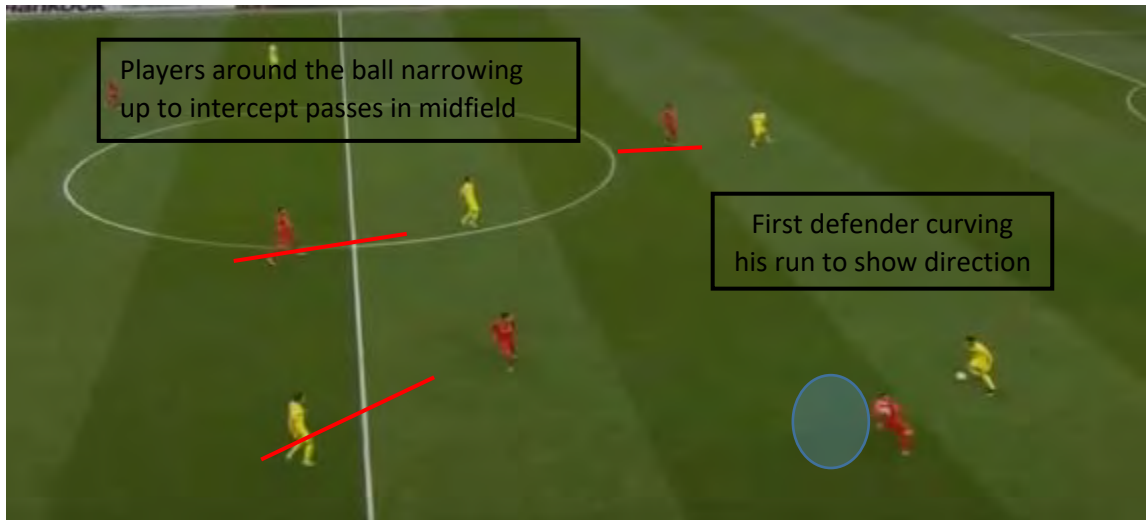


# DEFENDING

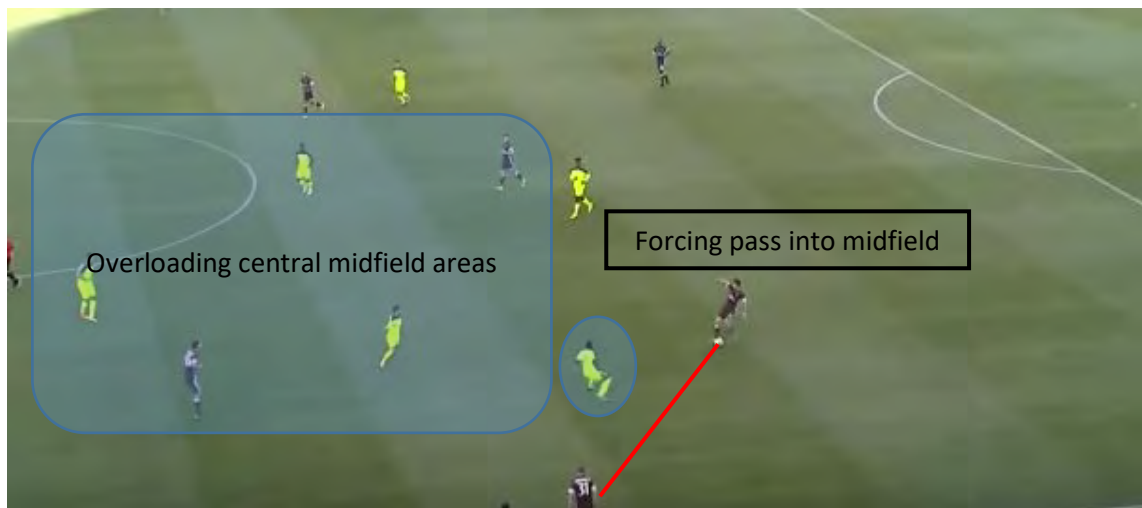
If the initial press was not effective and the possession wasn't regained until the ball is played away into different space, the team needs to reorganise and shape a defending structure to win the ball back from. Klopp's teams prefer a direct approach using high pressing and compactness to win the ball back as soon as possible even when organised. Central areas get overloaded and the opposition is forced into the middle into a pressing trap to regain possession. This phase requires a lot more defensive structure and detail than initial transition to defence.

## Preventing building up from the back

When the opposition team decides to build up from the back through the back line, Klopp's teams will allow this as it increases the chances of winning the ball closer to the opposition goal and suits high pressing teams well. As soon as the centre backs receive the ball, forwards unit would be looking to apply pressure and force play in certain direction. In most of the cases, this would be into central areas. The reason for this is narrowness of Klopp's teams both in attack and defence what means that central areas will be overloaded and easier to win the ball back in. This is achieved by first defender curving his run from outside in to cut off an option to full back and force central defender inside by pressurising him. Second striker would be looking to get closer to the other centre back, preventing the ball being played into him. This will force player in possession to either play into midfield or back into the goalkeeper.

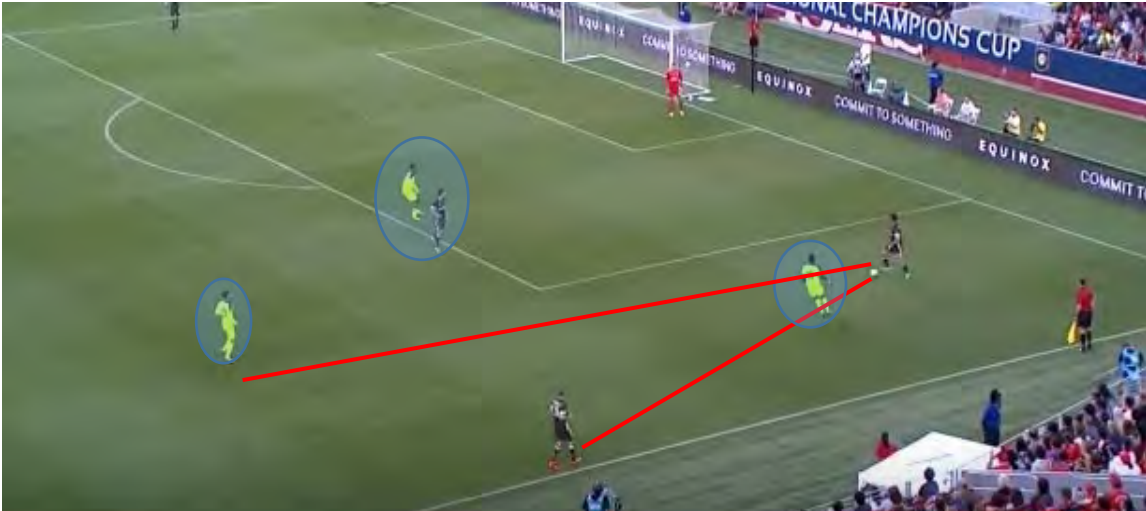


When playing with a front three, as the winger pressurises from the outside, central striker cuts the option to the other centre back and the opposite winger drops deeper into midfield to overload central areas. Three midfielders would be looking to block passing options, man mark players within their zones and try to intercept any passes coming through.

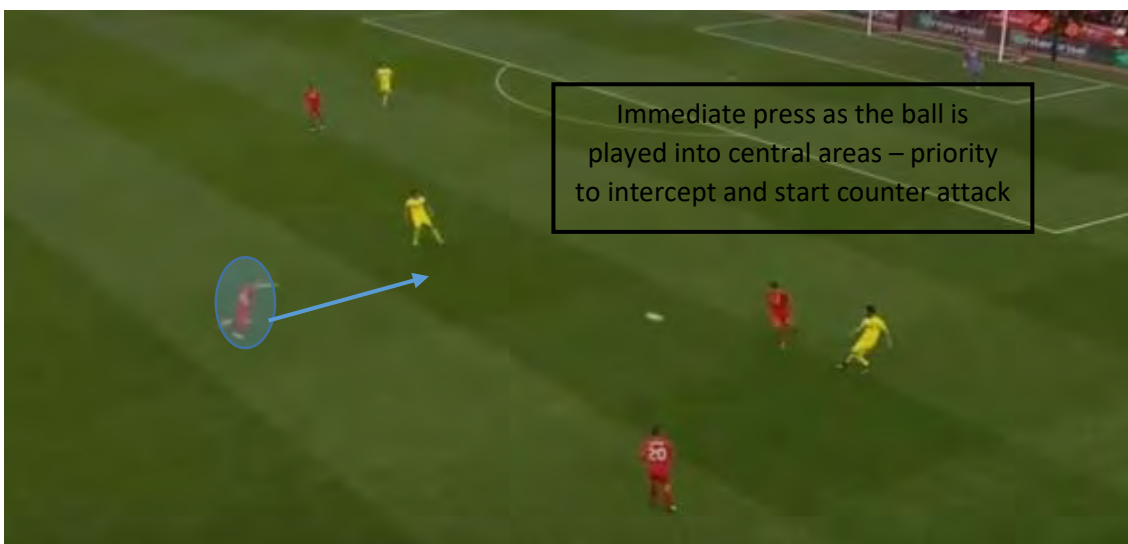


Similar picture happens when the opposition insists on playing through the thirds and their centre backs drop into the sides of the penalty box to receive. This provides even better opportunity to win the ball back as it's easier to isolate player on the ball and force into desired areas. In

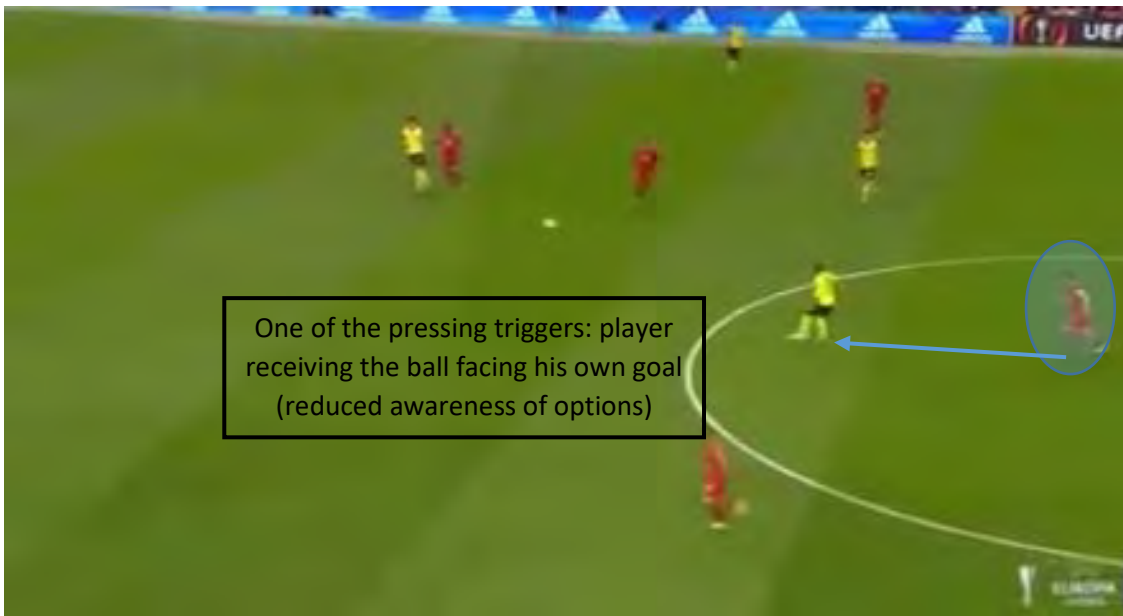
this situation, other striker will be looking to come across narrower and cut the option to switch between centre backs as well as affect their midfielder dropping deeper to receive.



As soon as the pass is made into central areas, the player receiving the ball should be immediately closed down and forced to lose the ball or pass backwards. The starting position of the pressuring midfielder should allow him to intercept the pass as well as prevent the receiver from turning away. Two strikers in front of the ball would be looking to penetrate forwards in case possession is won.



As it can be seen below, due to narrow shape, central areas are overloaded and easier to win the ball back in. As the ball is moving and pressure applied, it is crucial role for players around the ball to adjust their positions and cut off nearest passing options, at the same time, reducing the space for the player on the ball.



In case forcing centrally is not available, or the opposition managed to switch play and create an opportunity to play wide, Klopp's team would try to set a pressing trap in those areas. As the centre back turns his body to play into full back, pressurising striker will pressurise from inside and cut the option to play sideways. Central midfielders would come across as the ball moves and mark within their zone. Wide midfielder/winger would in turn delay his press on the full back and remain more centrally to allow the space for the pass to be played.

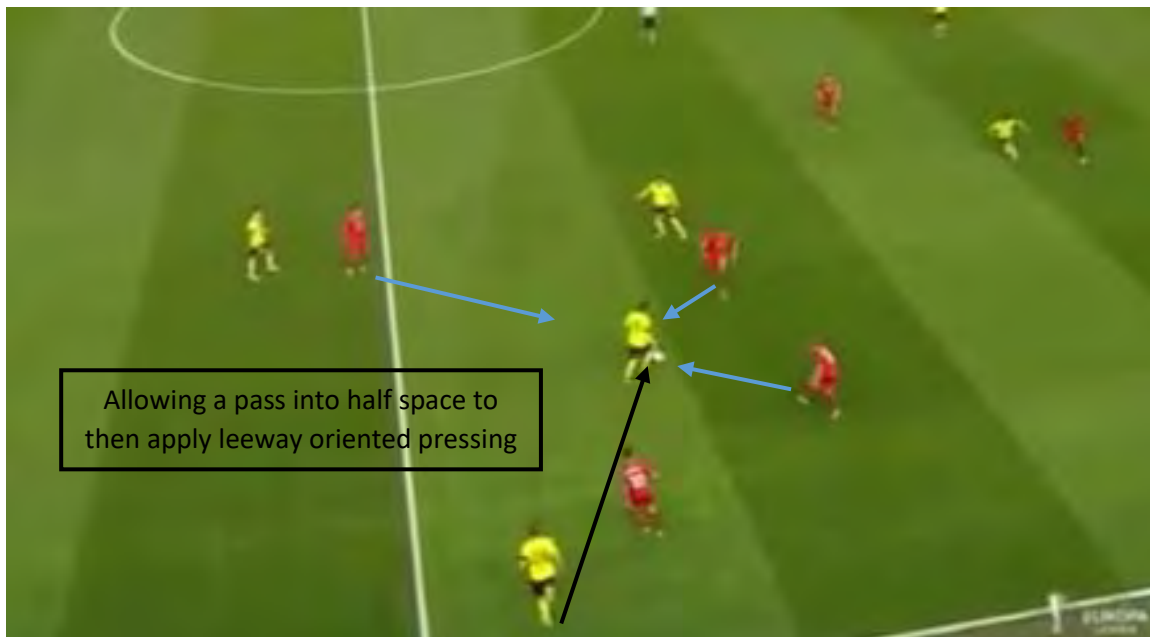


As soon as the full back receives the ball, a leeway pressing is applied as described in a previous chapter. First defender (wide midfielder) curves his run to force back or sideways. Players around the ball narrow up and get closer to the ball remaining on the passing lines. The key is to cut off all the nearest options and overload areas closest to the ball.



What distinguishes Klopp's Liverpool from many other teams is one of the variations of pressing in wide areas – allowing the pass into half space and then pressurising player on the ball. These half spaces near to wide areas will be usually occupied by defensive/central midfielders

dropping to receive, and often having limited vision to play forwards due to body position (in the example below, midfielder managed to turn and face forwards as the press was delayed). This creates advantageous opportunity to apply pressure and double up to get in possession. Winning the ball back in those half spaces provides more opportunities to counter attack comparing to when the ball is won in wide areas. This is due to more options open (left, right and centrally).

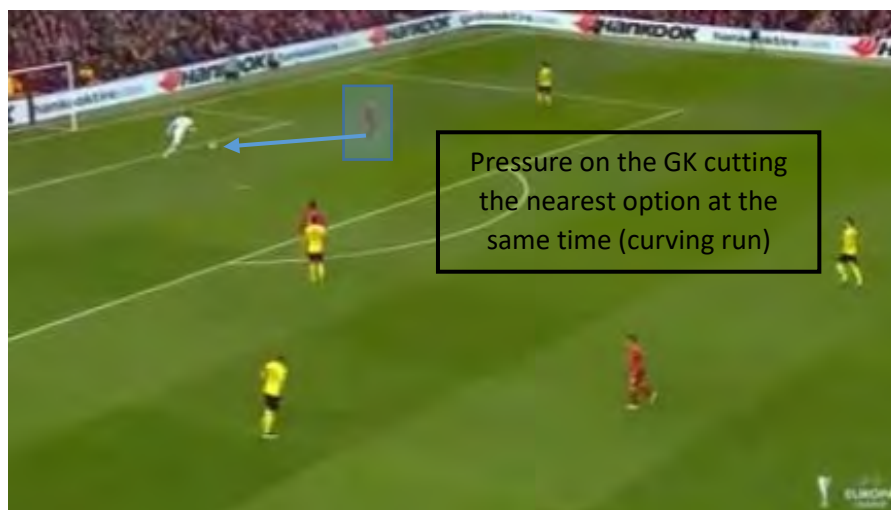


Another defending aspect specific to Klopp's teams is applying pressure from behind. In case opposition player manages to get past the strikers unit, he would still be under pressure from forward chasing from behind. If combined with a pressure from the front, it can create a great opportunity to win the ball back as a safe option to play backwards would be denied. Player driving forwards has limited vision what's happening in behind and is focusing on players pressing from the front. This further increases the chances of winning possession.



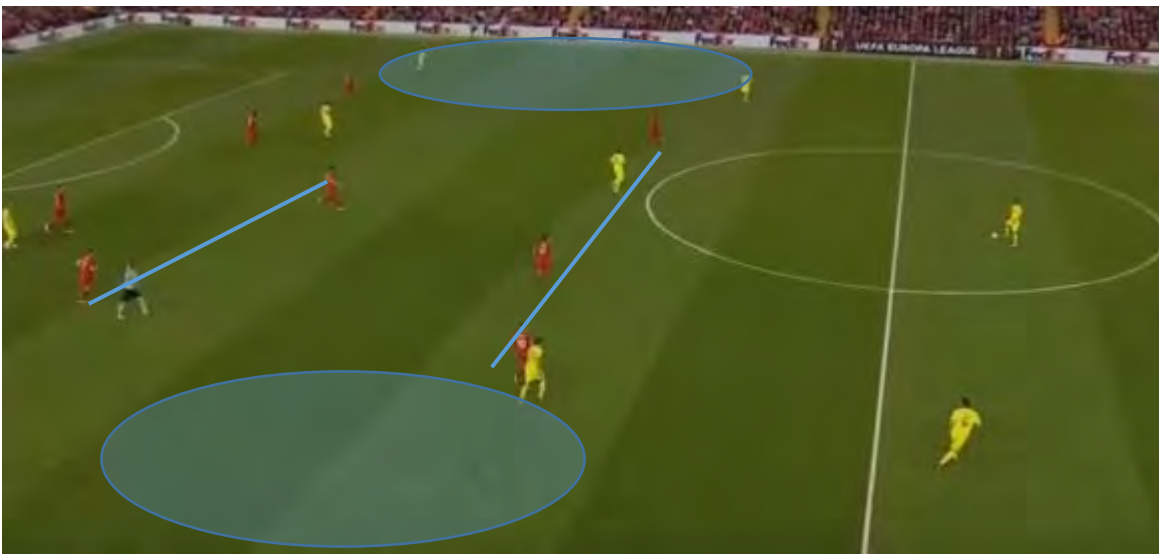


There will be times, however, when the ball is played backwards, potentially into the goalkeeper. Klopp's teams in most of the cases would be still looking to press the goalkeeper and force a long pass. This prevents the opposition from playing back to the centre backs and reorganising attacking shape. As the ball is played back to the goalkeeper, the opposition will be still positioned away from each other, using the space on the pitch effectively. This means that the distances between players will be bigger and it will be harder to be effective in receiving a long ball/winning second balls. Applying pressure on the goalkeeper also creates a psychological pressure on the opposition.



## Preventing creating chances and scoring

When the opposition beats the pressing block and the ball gets to the defending half, a team would be looking to reorganise and defend deeper with emphasis on protecting central areas and trying to counter attack as soon as possible. In the analysed Liverpool games, the team preferred mainly two shapes when defending on their own half: 4-2-3-1 and 4-1-4-1. In both of the variations, one striker was left in front of the ball to initiate the counter attack. Depending on the opposition, this might have been more holding (Origi) or penetrating forward (Sturridge, Mane). Midfield unit would be looking to narrow up the distances between each other and move in relation to the ball to prevent any passes through midfield. Zonal orientation would apply with man to man marking within each player's zone. When playing with two holding midfielders, it is more difficult for the opposition to play a through ball into the striker. This option is usually preferred with more direct opposition. The weakness is more space for the opposition to get the ball wide and attack through the wings.



When playing with one holding midfielder and four players in midfield line, it is easier to prevent passes into wide midfielders and full backs, at

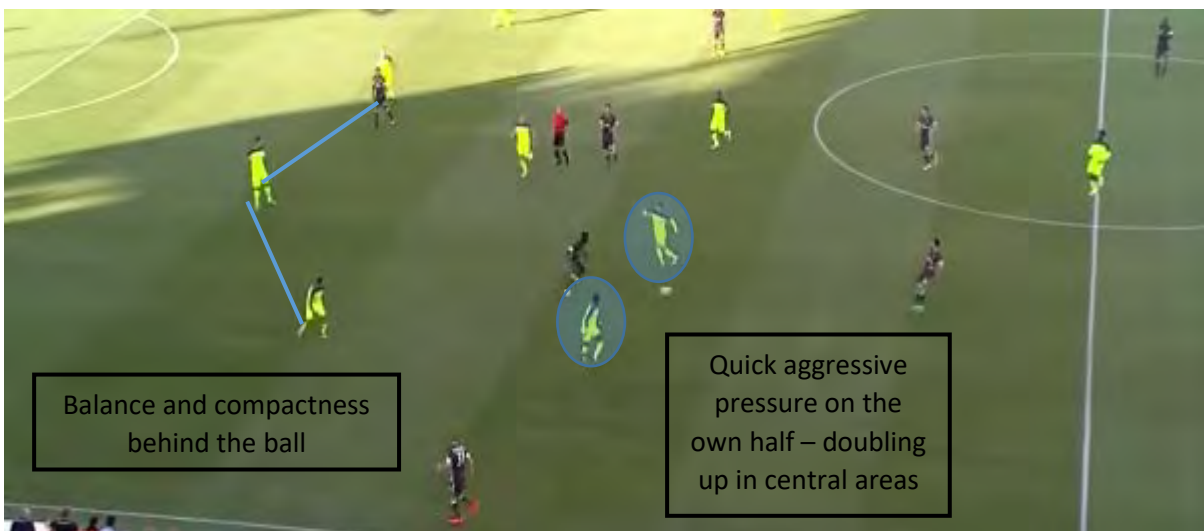
the same time, forcing the opposition to play centrally. Regardless of the shape, striker's pressing from behind applies on the own half as well. Lone striker up front might seem detached from defending but it's only a false impression. His role is to get between the ball and centre backs to prevent back passes as well as to press from behind if the opportunity arises.



Similarly to pressing from the front, defending on the own half is initiated off certain triggers. One of the main trigger used by Klopp's teams is opposition player facing his own goal. This is a trigger for the nearest player to pressurise and try to win the ball back or force backwards. Other triggers might include: poor quality of pass, receiving mistake, limited support available or pass played into certain zone.



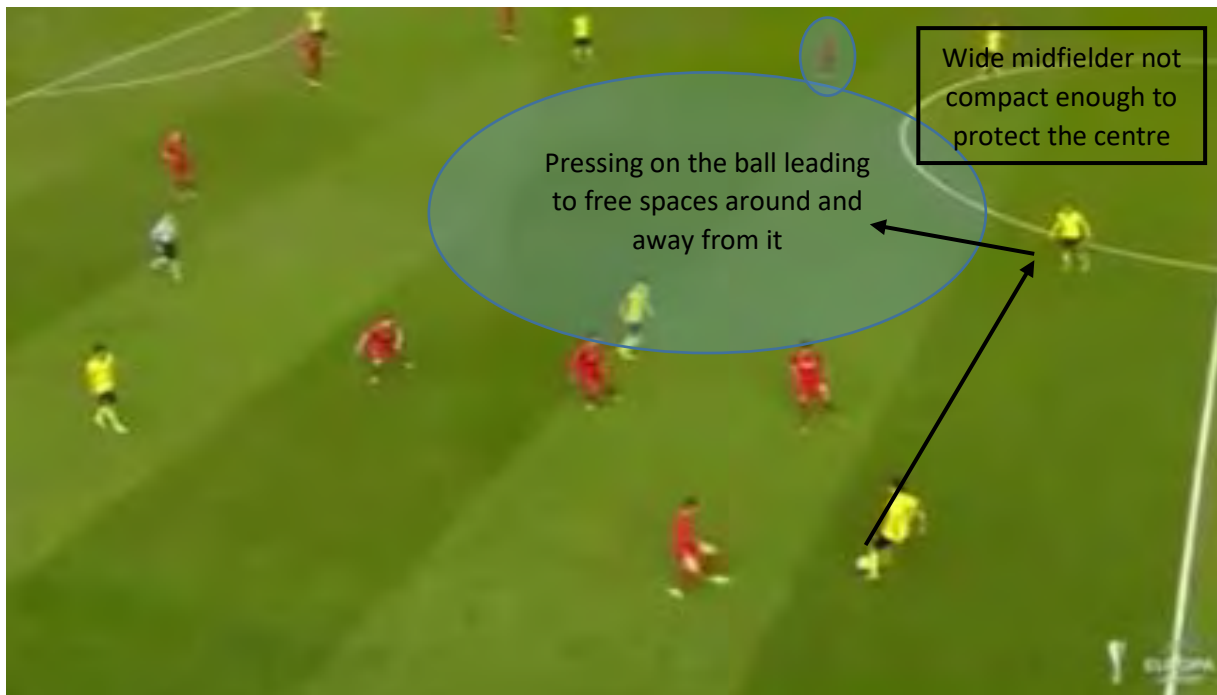
Defending deeper requires similar level of intensity and aggressiveness when pressing as defending from the front. As the ball is played into opposition midfielder positioned deeper on the defending half (starting point for pressing should be agreed), he should be immediately closed down. Klopp's teams prefer to double up in central areas as well. This should prevent the midfielder from turning and playing forwards. Players around the ball need to get narrower and support from the back.



Compactness in central areas will force the opposition to play wide most of the time. When the ball is wide, playing with at least one holding midfielder provides an opportunity for him to drop between

centre backs and switch to false back five when the ball is wide. This will allow to have more players on the ball side of the pitch and at the same time be wide enough to react and slide across in case the ball is switched.

One of the main characteristics of Klopp's teams discussed before – ball orientation and high intensity pressing, provides serious threat in case the opposition plays through or around. For example, if the defending team decides to double on the own half, there will be spaces left away from the ball which might be not sufficiently covered. This is why, players around the ball narrowing up spaces are crucial. As it can be seen below, two central midfielders decided to double up and press, however, left midfielder is late to get compact what leaves big gap of space for opposition midfielder to drive in.



Technical details when defending on the own half play a big role. Body position of the supporting defender might allow or prevent him from intercepting a pass. Similarly, angle of approach will force where the ball will go next. Details matter when defending and often determine whether possession is won back or opposition manages to play through.

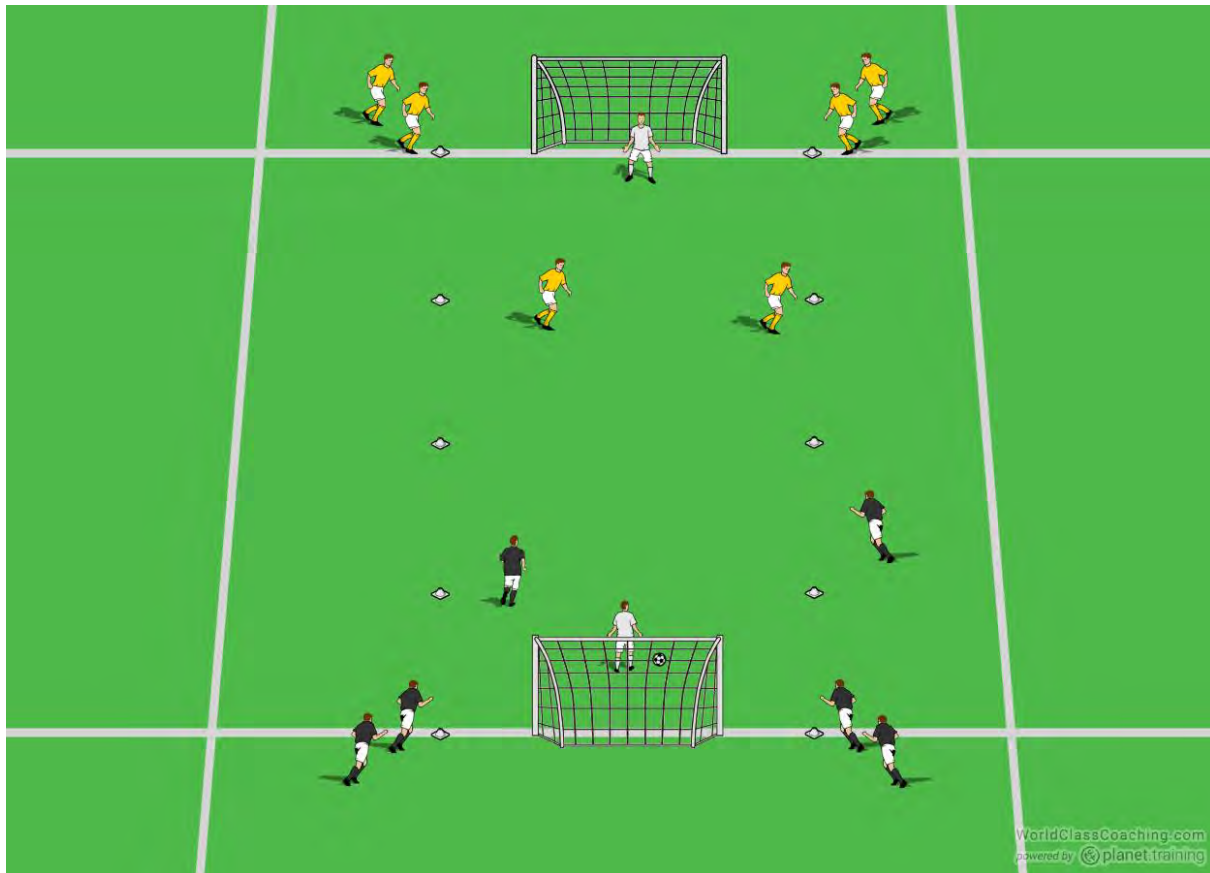


## Training practices

### Leading in – Wave Practice 2v2

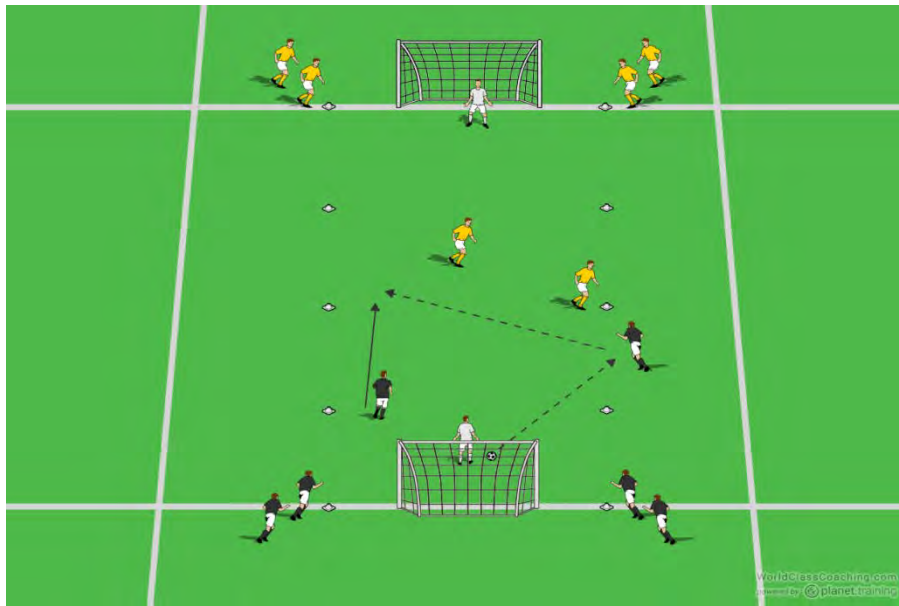
#### Set up and organization

Organise a pitch of 30 x 35 yards. Mark out two wide channels, 5 yards in from the touchline. Divide the group into two teams and then further into pairs within team. One team has a starting position behind one goal, the other one, behind the opposite goal. Organise goalkeepers in goals. Prepare a sufficient amount of balls to ensure flow and intensity of the practice.

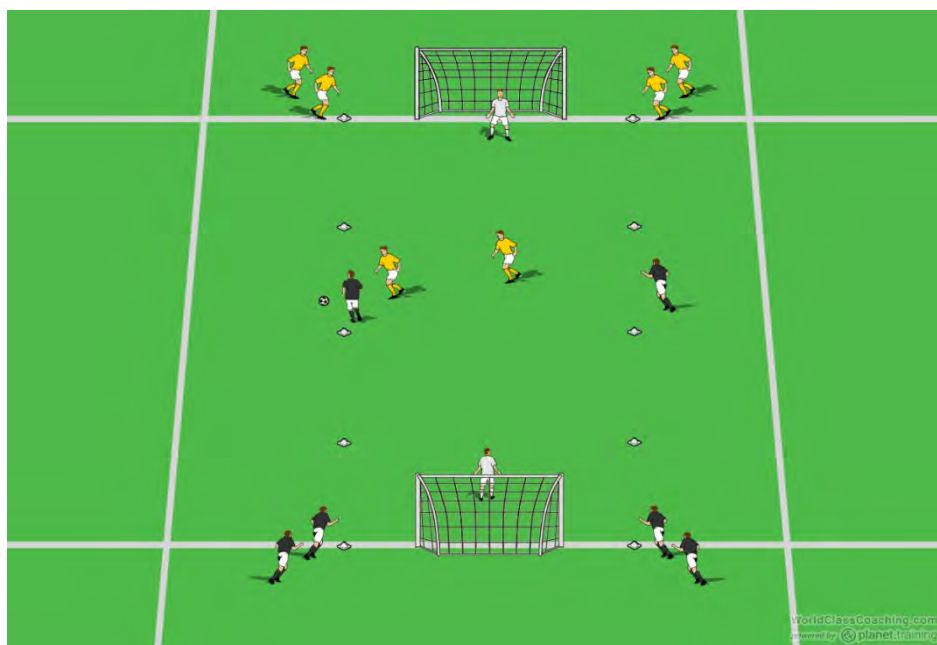


The practice starts with a goalkeeper passing the ball out into one of the attacking pairs stepping forwards. Another pair from the opposite side starts defending. The aim is to score into the opposite goal. If the

attacking pair scores from the middle channel, they get 3 points. Scoring from wide channel is worth 1 point.



This condition for the attacking team will encourage defenders to force the attackers into wide areas rather than into the middle. The same rule might be flipped the opposite way, what will help the defending team to force centrally rather wide (position of the goal might be also adjusted).



## Main part – Phase of Play 9v9

### Set up and organization

Prepare 2/3 of the full size pitch. Mark out wide channels between the side of the penalty box and the touchline. Organise two full size goals places opposite each other. Cut off the angles of the pitch on the side nearer to the half way line as shown on the diagram below. Divide the group into two teams of 9 (8+GK). Attacking team (blacks) plays with four defenders, three midfielders and one striker up front. Defending team (yellows), plays with two central defenders, four midfielders and two strikers (2-4-2). Goalkeepers should be set and ready in goals. Prepare a sufficient amount of balls to ensure intensity and flow.



The practice starts with a goalkeeper of the black team playing out from the back into one of the back line players. Both teams attempt to score

into opposite goals. If the defending team wins the ball in the central area and scores, it would be worth 3 points. If the ball is won in the wide areas and a goal is scored, it counts as 1 point. Again, this might be flipped opposite way to encourage the defending team to force wide rather than centrally. There are no corners, the play restarts from a goalkeeper of the attacking team.



This practice provides a lot of opportunities to defend from the front and make transitions to attack. It paints similar pictures to those happening during the game, making it easier for players to understand the concepts. It also allows the coach to work position specifically and in formations related to the nearest game and a model of play.



This practice can be progressed with adding additional player into attacking team and making it a 10v9 phase of play. This will challenge the defenders to overload areas around the ball more effectively and get compact and narrow.

## TRANSITION FROM DEFENCE TO ATTACK

The moment when the team wins the ball back is another opportunity to use high energy and intensity. With many teams being very organised defensively and getting compact, it is increasingly difficult to break through using patient positional play. Counter attack though provides a great opportunity to penetrate and create chances as the opposition is disorganised and still in the attacking structure. Especially, when the available players are full of pace, positive attitude and technical excellence it might be tricky to defend against. Klopp's teams possess players with those characteristics – Mane, Sturridge, Firmino, Lallana as well as Coutinho provide a great base to build your counter attacks from.

The type of counter attack Klopp's teams use will be heavily dependent on the area where the ball is regained. When defending on the own half, usually one striker is left in front of the ball (Sturridge, Origi). Upon winning possession in the own half, the first priority is to play to the lone striker into space in behind him. In most of the cases, however, the opposition will deny the opportunities to penetrate through in behind their back line. This is why, Liverpool has often played the first counter attacking pass into feet or head of the lone striker whose role was to then combine play with supporting midfielders making forward runs (Firmino, Coutinho, Lallana). This strategy is effective in getting the ball quickly into opposition half and provides time for more players to get forwards and join the attack.



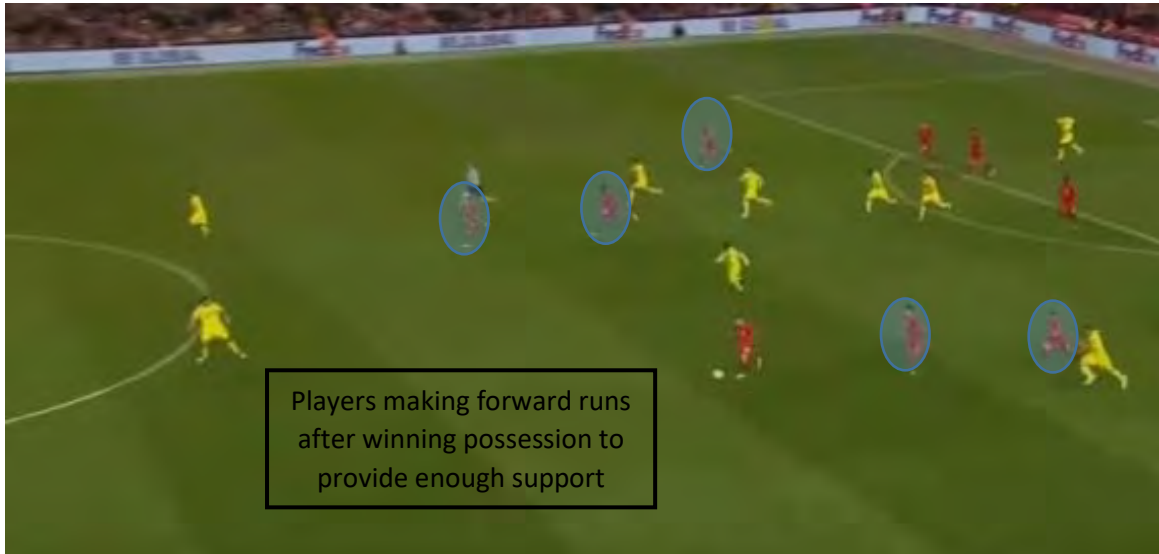


After the arrival of Mane, his pace was more often used in the counter attacks with ball being played into spaces where he has made a run (primary target). He was also used as a supporting player after the lone striker has combined with him (secondary target). Players making forward runs during the counter attack should be looking to use different channels to run into. This will ensure the opposition back line is split, potentially leaving gaps in between them.

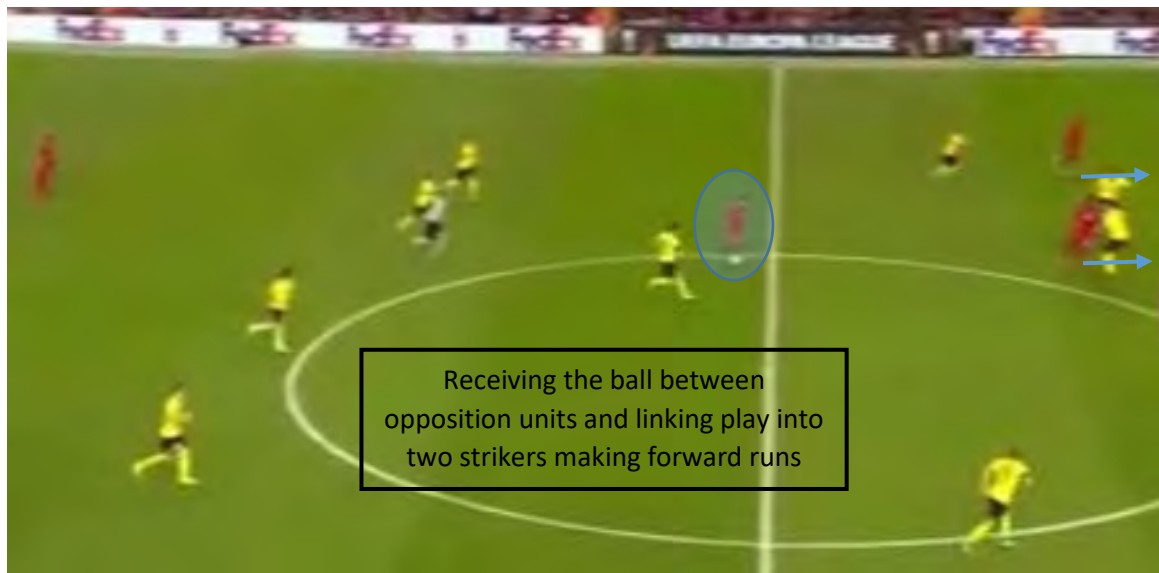


The biggest advantage, however, can be gained by quick reaction time after winning possession. Most importantly, not only reaction of the

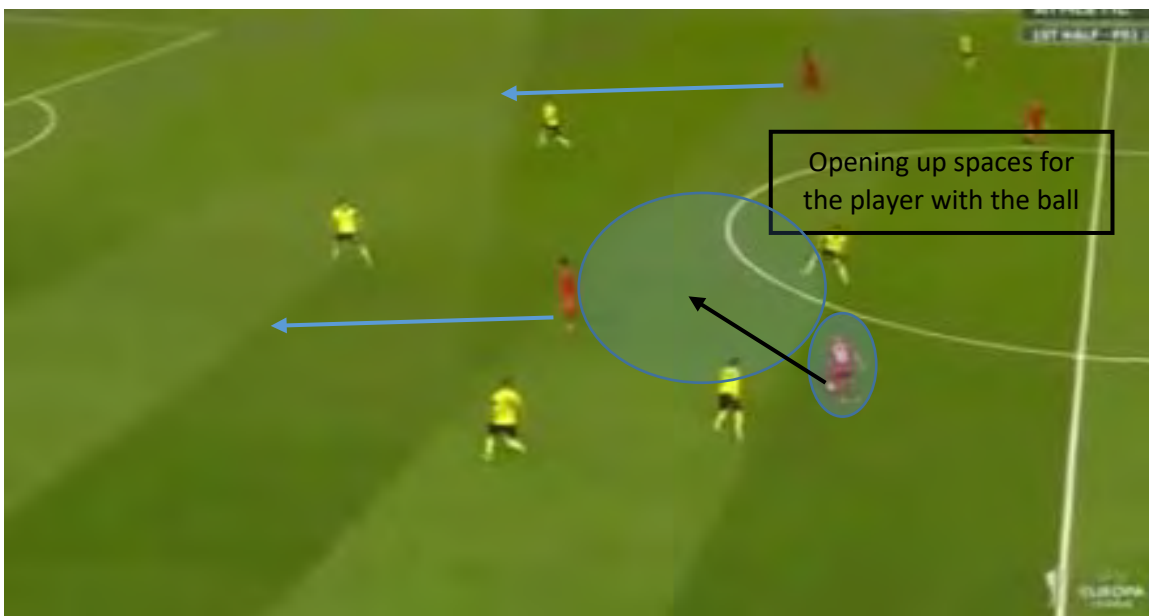
players on and around the ball, but also players away from it. Those players will be responsible for providing sufficient support as well as finalising play as the ball gets into the opposition half.



Players receiving the ball from the first player in possession after winning it, should consider finding gaps in between opposition units and operating in available spaces to be able to play forwards. This will help with getting the ball into the final third quicker.



As the ball is in the opposition half, whether after target man laying it off or other player running with it/combining through the thirds, it is crucial to provide support in front of the ball. Strikers making forward runs will not only create opportunities to play in behind but also open up spaces for the player on the ball to run with it. Forward runners (Sturridge, Origi, Mane, Firmino) will often look to start the runs in between opposition centre back and full back and curve it to arrive in different channels and fill the spaces in.



If the space is available for the player on the ball to drive with it, a forward pass might be delayed in order to commit more defenders to pressurise it. This will open even more spaces for the strikers in the final stages of the counter attack. Player responsible for the final pass should have a 'playmaking' profile - seeing the options, being great decision maker and technically proficient enough to be able to execute them. At Liverpool, it would be usually Coutinho, Lallana, Wijnaldum and Firmino.



In the first seconds after winning the ball back and starting the counter attack, the team should remain narrow and relative compact. Especially the players in behind the ball should stay close to each other and be organised defensively (even it is an attack). This is crucial to prevent the opposition from using 'gegenpressing' strategy and exploiting too early attacking shape after winning the ball. Only after the team gets into controlled possession (usually after 5-6 seconds), it will be looking to provide more width and depth by getting players into attacking positions. This 'delay' in adapting an attacking shape, however, should not stop the team from making an effective counter attack. Sufficient amount of players should make forward runs to penetrate and create a scoring chance.

## Training practices

### Leading in – Possession Game 3v3+2

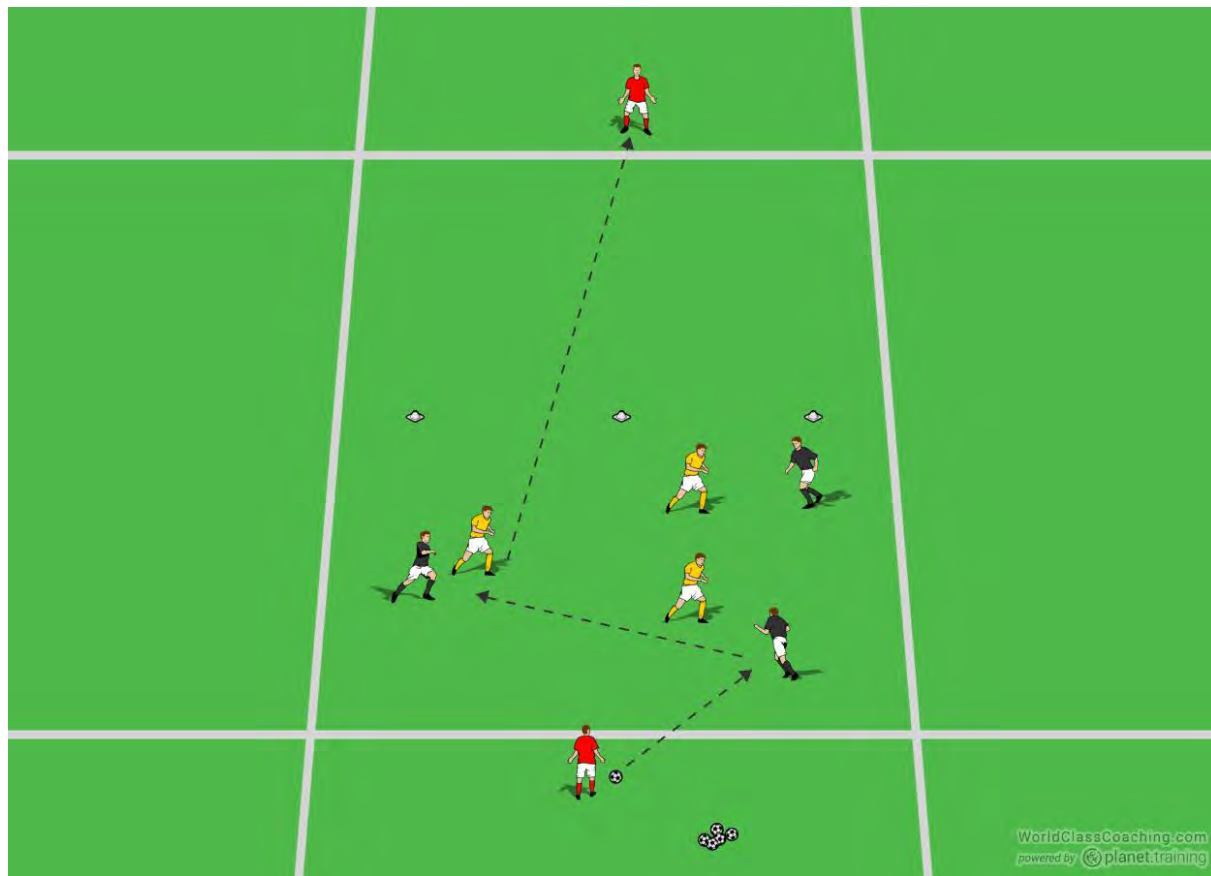
#### Set up and organisation

Organise an area of 15 x 25 yards. Divide it further into two halves. Split up a group into two teams of three and add two neutral players which will be positioned on the opposite ends. Prepare a sufficient amount of spare balls next to the target players.



The practice starts with a target player passing the ball into one of the attackers. Both teams have to be positioned in the half closest to the target player starting with a ball. As soon as the ball is played out, the aim for the attacking team is to stay on the ball and try to make 6 passes. Attacking team can use target player on their side to keep possession. As soon as the other team wins the ball, their aim is to

transfer the ball to the opposite target player as soon as possible. If this is not successful within 6 seconds, they try to keep possession.



As the ball is transferred to the opposite side, all the players from both teams should move into the other half and remain there. The team that transferred the ball, stay in possession of it and keeps possession.





This practice can be adapted to suit different numbers – 4v4+2, 5v5+2 or even 6v6+2. It can be also conditioned to include different ways of transferring the ball into opposition half – run through the line, direct pass or combining through the thirds. All of these link to different ways of counter attacking used in a bigger picture.

## Main part – Small Sided Game 8v8

### Set up and organisation

Organise a pitch of approximately 60 x 35 yards. Divide it further into two halves. Place two full size goals on the opposite ends. Split the group into two teams of 8 (7+GK). Defending team (yellow) defends the goal closer to the half way line and has a freedom of players' movement between the halves. Counter attacking team (black) defends the opposite goal and has to have 6 players on the own half and 1 player on the opposition half when out of possession. When in possession, the black team has a freedom of movement between the halves.



The game starts with a yellow team goalkeeper who plays the ball out into one of his teammates. The team then tries to build up into attacking half and score. Because the black team has 6 players on the

own half and most likely will be overloaded, a lot of possession turn overs will happen in those areas.



As soon as the black team wins the ball, they will be looking to counter attack as soon as possible. There will be a player available on the opposition half to use to get the ball forwards quickly. As soon as the ball is won, players should be looking to make forward runs and support the striker. There are no corners in this game, after a goal is scored or the ball goes out behind the goal, it is restarted from the goalkeeper of the yellow team. Throw ins apply.



This practice can be further progressed into 9v9 Small Sided Game and then Phase of Play using more players and larger spaces. Counter attacking practices require large physical load and therefore work to rest ratio should be considered carefully.

## TOP 10 FOR HIGH INTENSITY SESSIONS

1. Make sure the session is well planned and organised
2. Prepare used areas and put down all the cones before the start of the session – minimise waiting time
3. Ensure there is a sufficient amount of spare balls ready to use in case the other one goes out
4. Use practices which involve transitions
5. Develop players' motivation – there are many ways of doing it but allowing players to know the reasons for certain practice is a good start!
6. Make sure all the players are involved and not standing around
7. Be enthusiastic and switched on – energise players!
8. Ensure competition between players – i.e. keep the scores, use scenarios, set time limits
9. Allow time for breaks and active recovery to then come back for another chunk of sharp work
10. Make quick (30 sec. max) interventions in natural breaks (i.e. during recovery) – maximise ball rolling time!

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