

6 Small Sided Games for Accelerated Development

RESOURCES FOR COACHES OF U8 - U12 PLAYERS



FOUNDATION AGE COACHING



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Introduction

Small Sided Games have been a staple of soccer for as long as I can remember. I am sure we all played variations of 4 v 4, 5 v 5, 6 v 6 or even 3 v 2 / 4 v 3 when we were growing up. Back then it would have been jumpers for goalposts stuff. We made up our own rules, boundaries and teams and played until we were told to go to bed.

Nowadays, this is less common, yet the benefit of Small Sided Games cannot be dismissed. AFC Ajax run the occasional session on the streets so that players can experience the ball bouncing differently. Futsal has gained in popularity as a development tool and it is widely known that Zinedine Zidane, arguably the greatest player in the world between 1996 & 2006, attributed a lot his success to playing Small Sided Games with his friends when he was growing up.

Each of the Small Sided Games in this booklet has 4 progressions, including the initial setup. This enables your players to repeat the skills they have learned on a weekly basis, while adding a new challenge that will force them to think differently. Think in terms of studying Shakespeare at school – each new act contains the same themes as the previous, while introducing something new to the learner.

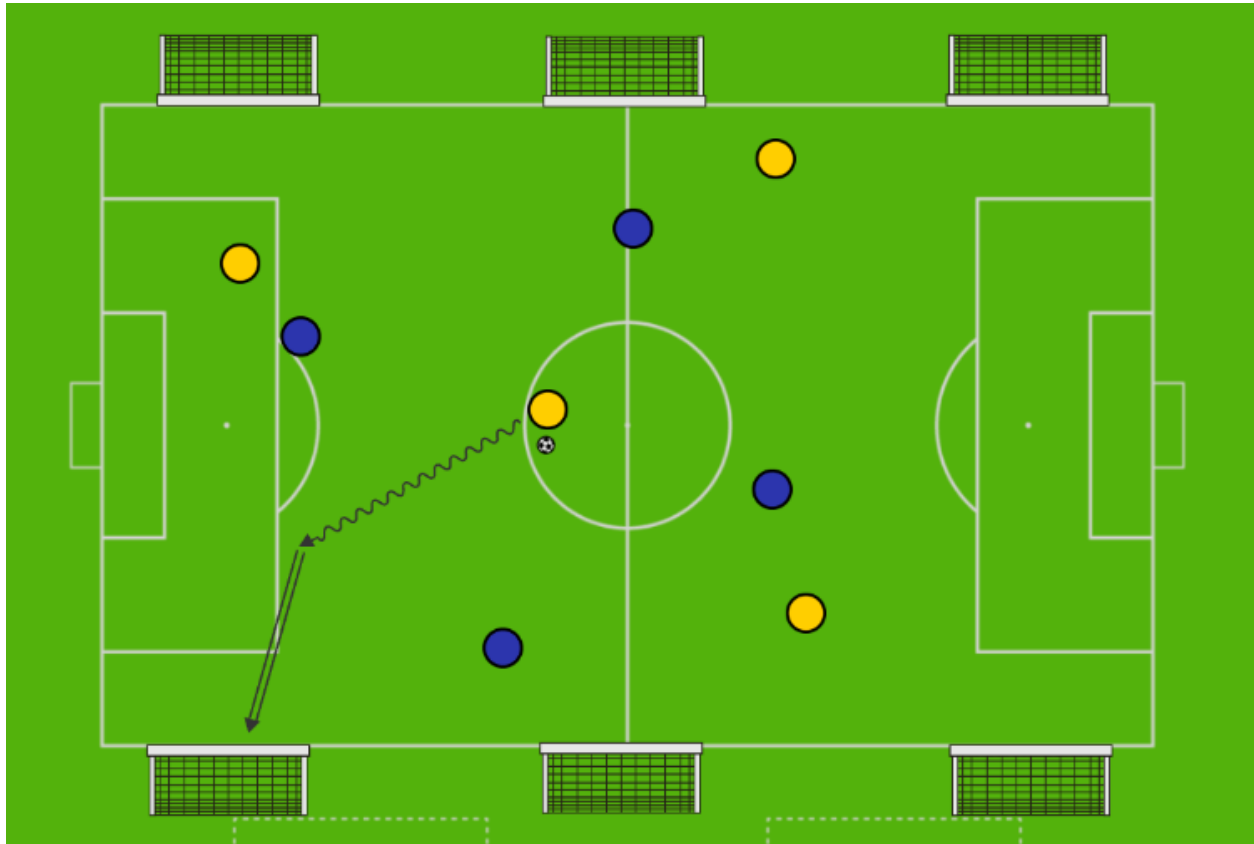
Every SSG recommends an age group to try it with. However, don't let this put you off attempting to run it with a younger or older age group. After all, you know what your players are capable of far better than I do.

Whether you are an experienced or a novice coach, the progressions and conditions in these games encourage the coaching points to be discovered naturally by the players, following the “let the game be the teacher” mantra that has become popular in recent years.

These games have been tweaked and changed throughout my career as a coach. Feel free to make any changes you think will make these games allow your players to have even more success on the soccer field.

Dave

6 Goal Game



Set Up

Set up a field measured wide as opposed to long. Place 3 goals on both goal lines. Both teams can score in any of the 3 goals that they are facing. No offside rules are in effect. If the ball goes out of play, the team starting with the ball may re-start the game however they want – dribble, pass, throw, roll – but have 5 seconds to do so.

Suggested Ages – U8-U10

Coaching Points

- Make the field wide
- Player on the ball to lift their head and see which the best goal is to attack
- Use 1 v 1 skills and combination play when relevant

Progression 1

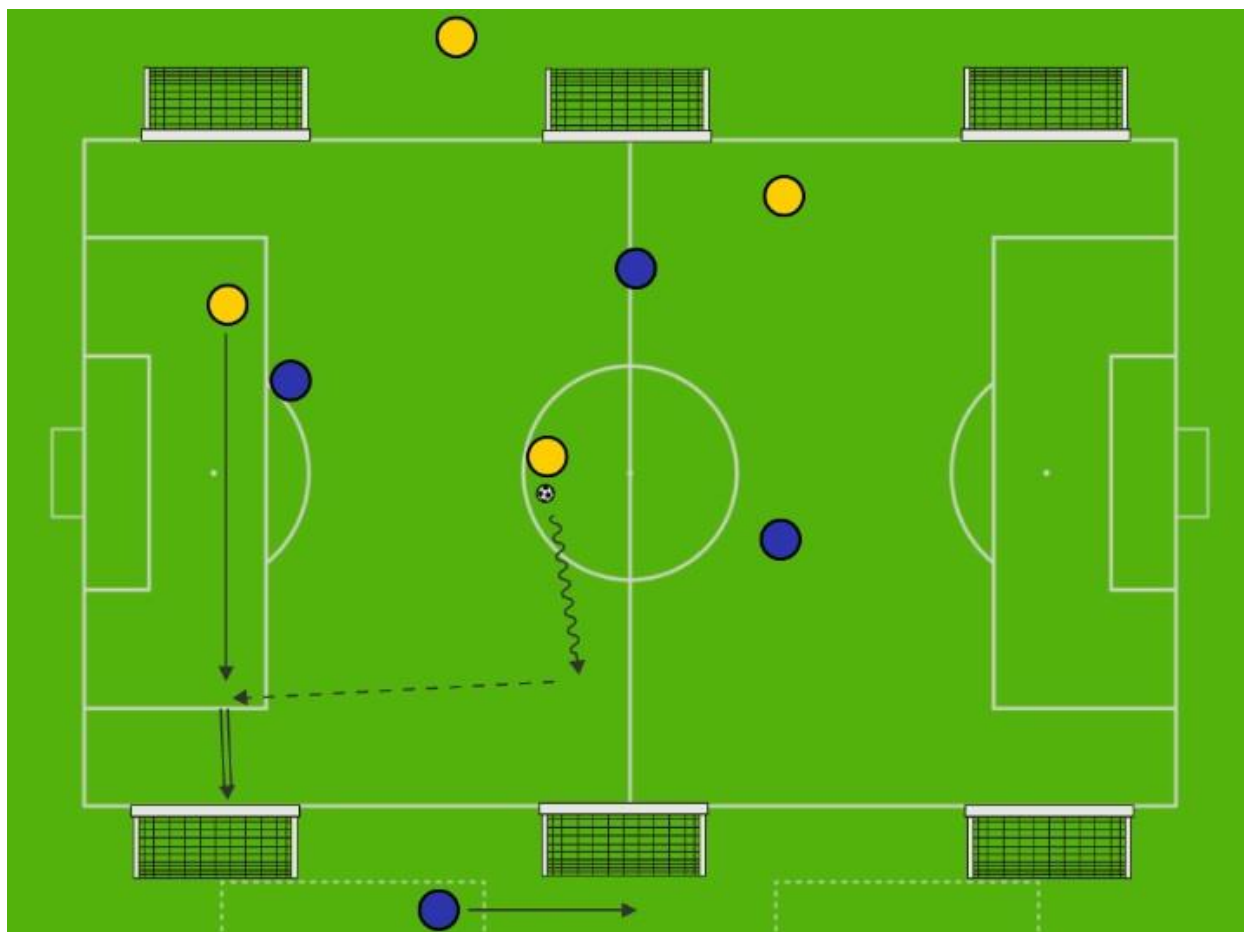


Set the rule that players can only score with certain feet depending on the goal. In the example above, players must score with their left foot in the goal to the left, their right foot in the goal to the right and either foot with the central goal. This can be switched to encourage players finishing with different parts of their feet.

Coaching Points

- Same as set-up
- Shield ball from opponent to allow for more space to finish
- Select the part of the foot that allows for the quickest shot

Progression 2

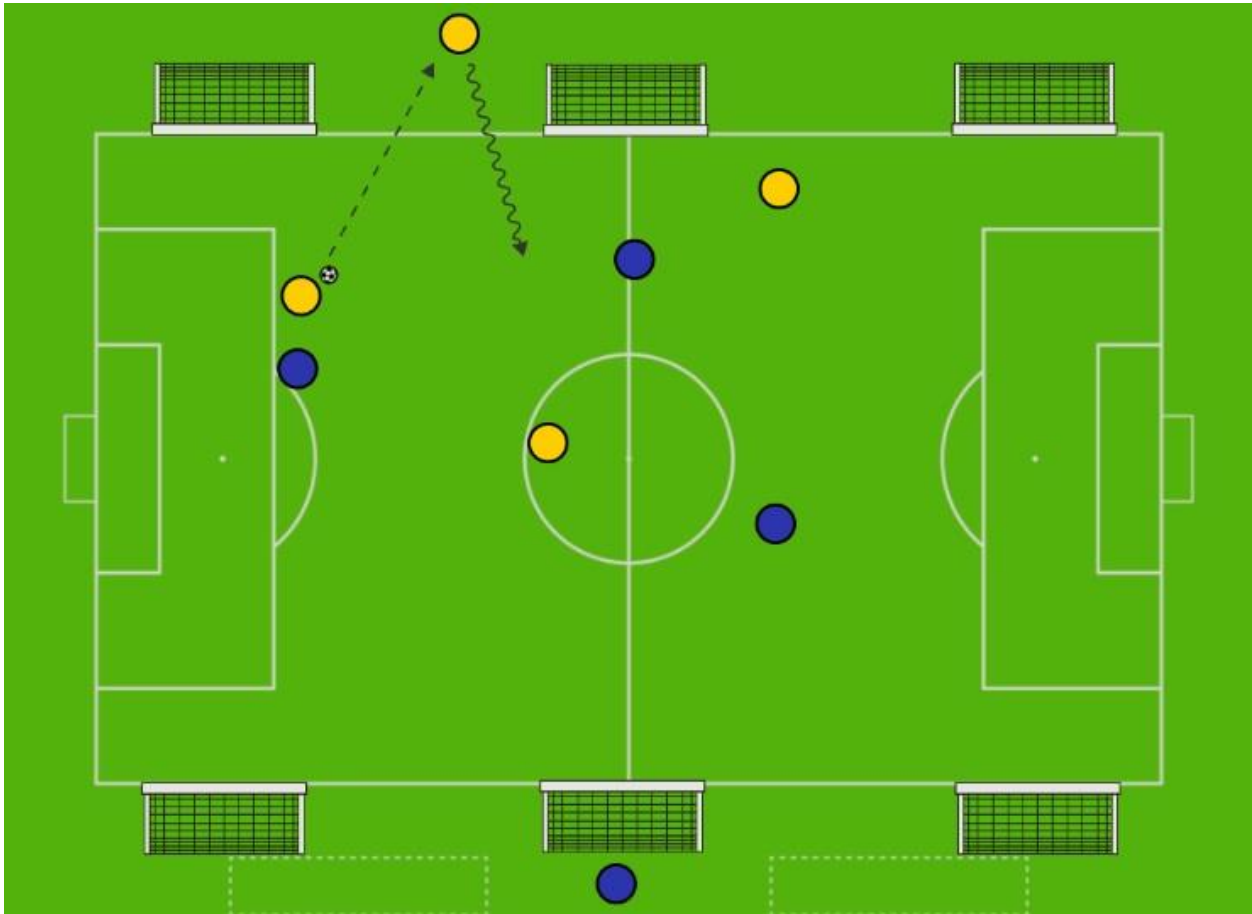


Both teams have a “sweeper” behind the goals. Whichever goal the sweeper is standing behind cannot be scored in. Rotate the sweeper every 2-3 minutes.

Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- The pass moves faster than the dribble – provide adequate support to allow that
- Lift your head and observe the position of the sweeper

Progression 3



Teams are now allowed to pass back to the sweeper to bring them into play. The player who passes back to the sweeper then becomes the new sweeper.

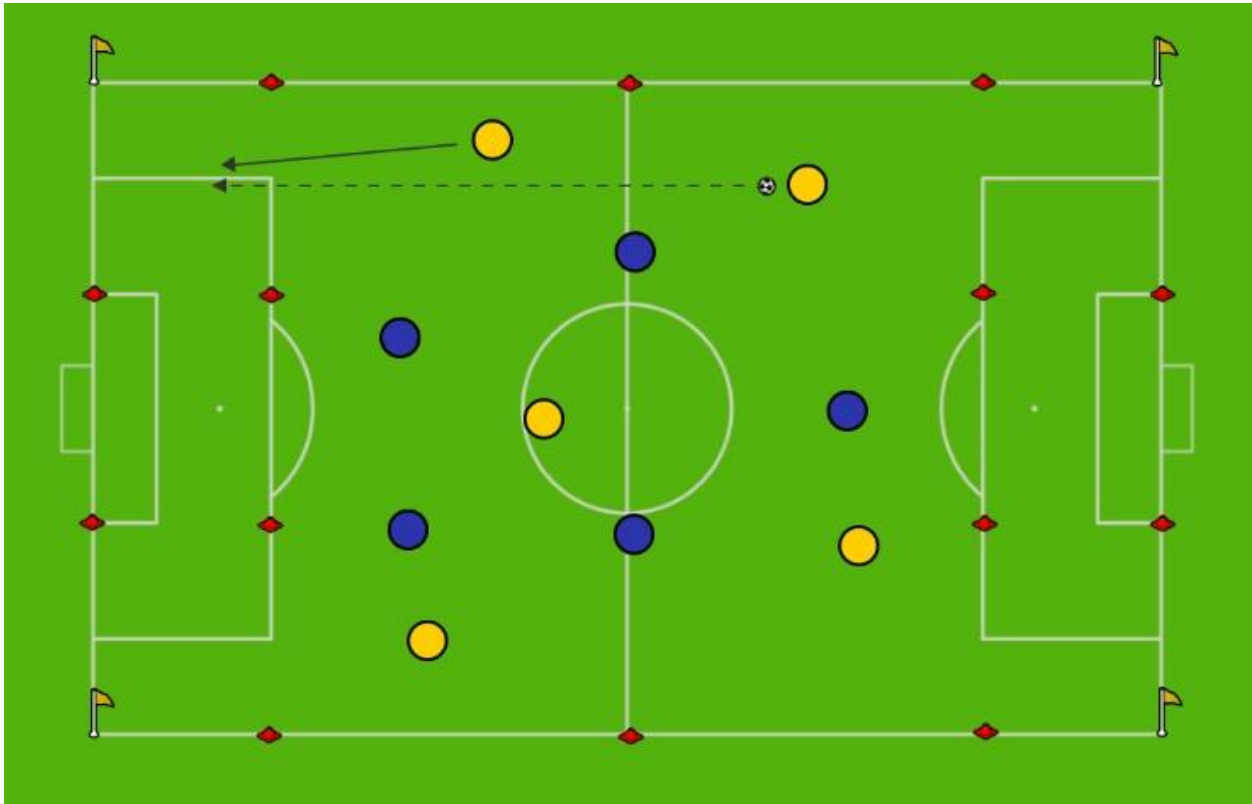
Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Pass back if the option to go forward is not available

Why it works

The wide field and numerous goals allows players to build their understanding of width and providing the relevant support to the player on the ball. All players get to work 1 v 1 skills, shielding, passing, receiving, finishing, dribbling and turning. 6 goals allows for plenty of opportunities to score. The sweeper must use a lot of lateral movement.

Diagonal Through Balls Game



Set Up

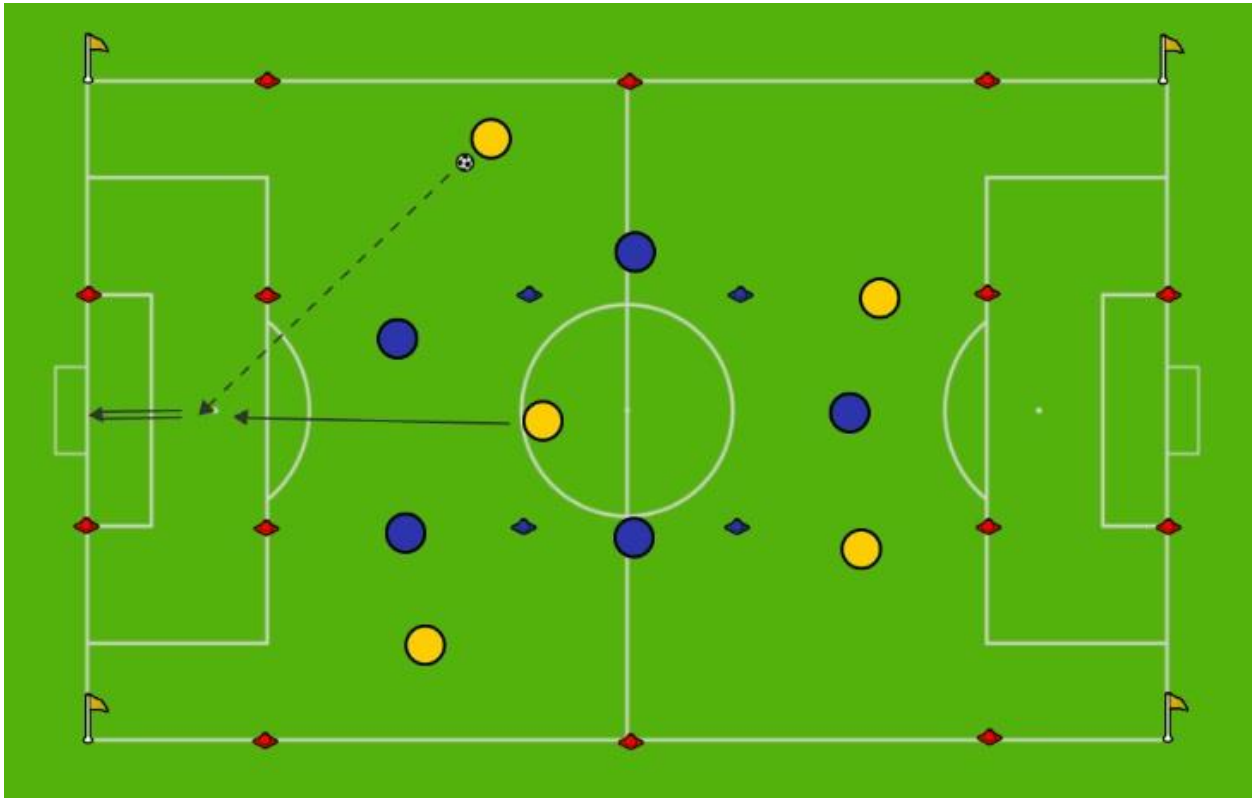
Set up a field with 2 end zones. Have a flag placed in each corner and a goal at the back of the end zone. Players score by passing the ball into the end zone for a team mate to run onto and control. No defenders can follow the attackers run.

Suggested Ages – U10-U12

Coaching Points

- Make the field wide
- Make the run before the pass
- Keep the ball if unable to penetrate the end zone

Progression 1

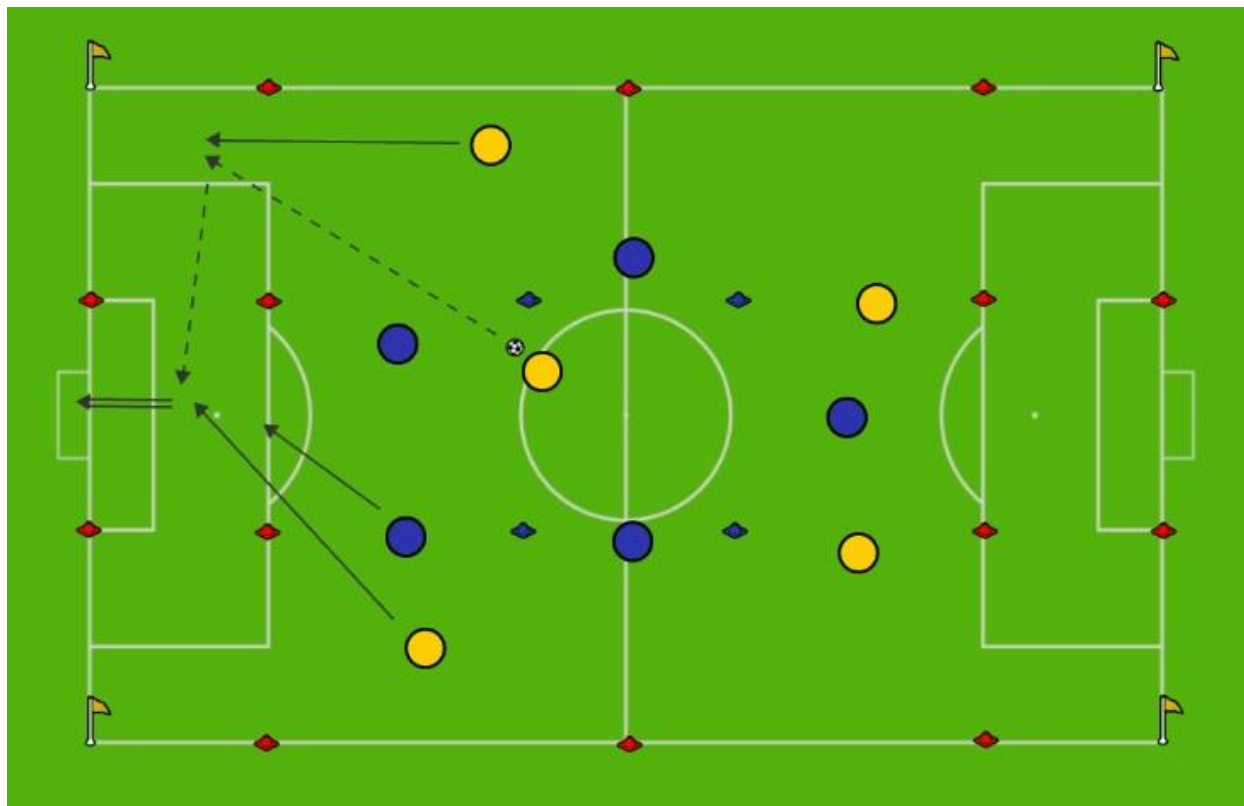


Split the field into 3 channels. This also breaks the end zone into 3 sections. Players must play the through pass diagonally from the channel they are standing in. For example, the player above is in the wide right channel. Therefore, the ball must be played into the central end zone square for their team mate to run onto. Players in the end zone must now make a 1 touch finish in the goal to score.

Coaching Points

- Same as set-up
- Aim wide through passes at the corner flag
- Aim central through passes to the far corner of the 6-yard box
- Runner to make a double movement – away from the ball, then towards the goal

Progression 2

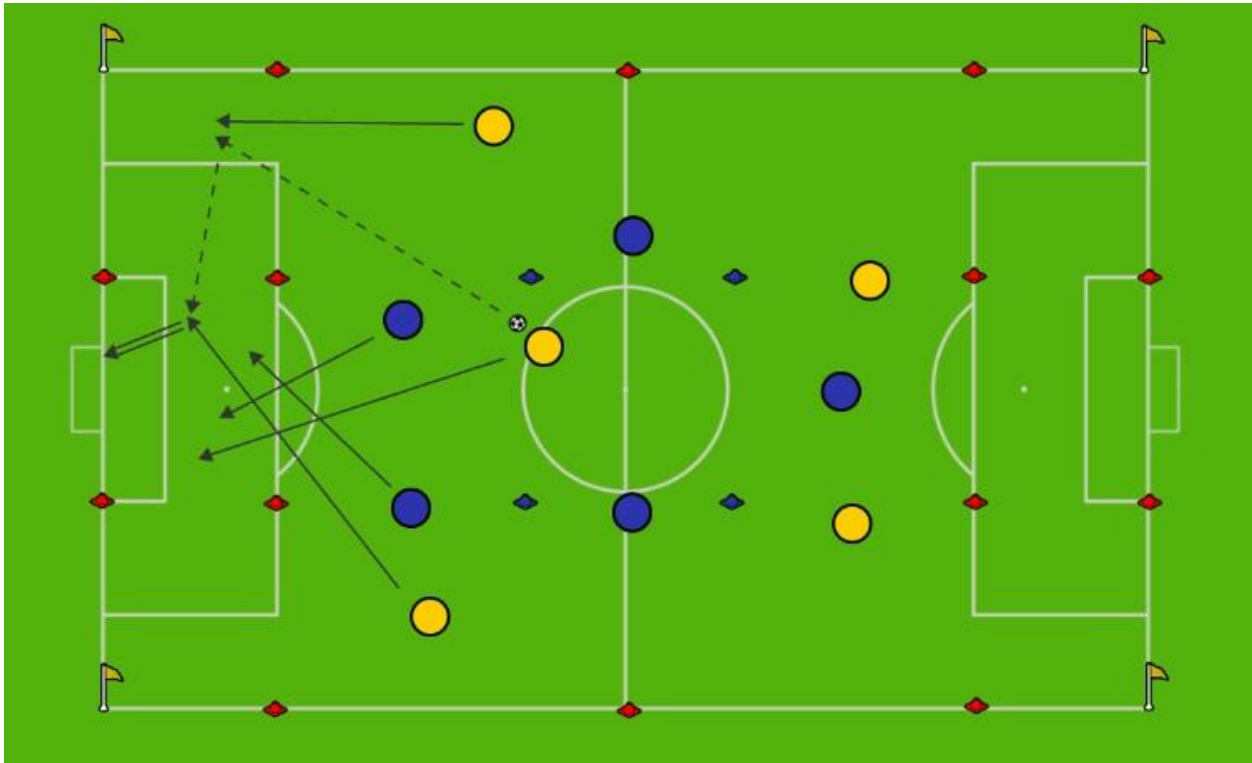


2 players can now run into the end zone, with 1 defender recovering. If the ball is played into the wide squares, the player running in must make a first time cross. If it is played into the central square, a first-time finish must happen, with the second player following in for a rebound.

Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Runner for the cross to attack front post, back post or edge of end zone
- Crosser must look up to view the runners position

Progression 3



The attacking team can now have 3 players running into the end zone after the ball is played. The defending team can have 2 players recovering. A straight through ball can now be played into the end zone if the run made is diagonal.

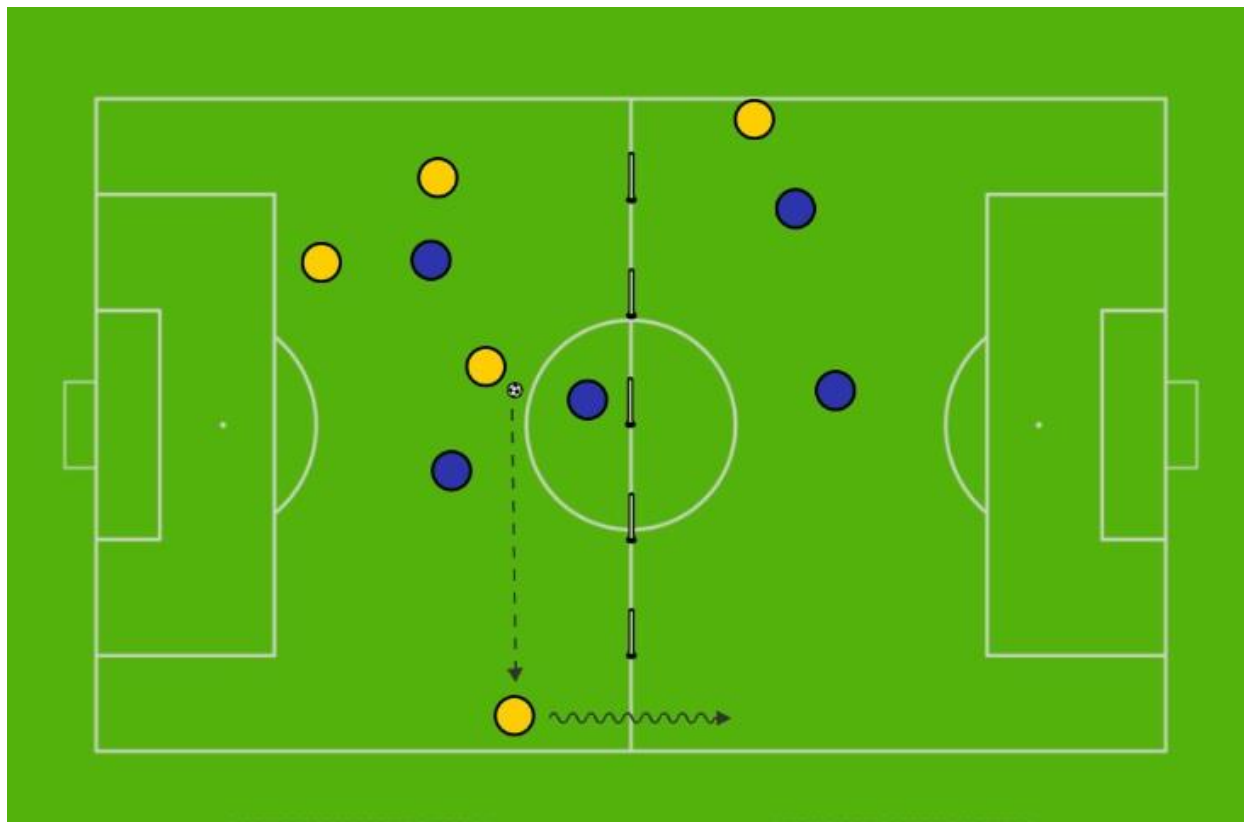
Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- One player to attack the front post
- One player to attack the back post or the edge of the end zone
- Crosser to select type of cross based on the runners position – driven, pull back or lofted

Why it works

The progressions allow you to look at a different technical aspect of attacking play each week – through passes, first-time finishing, finishing off a cross, crossing technique. The end zones encourage players to work on their awareness for timing their run. There is a constant repetition of timing runs for the players from the first progression to the last.

Switching the Point of Attack Game



Set Up

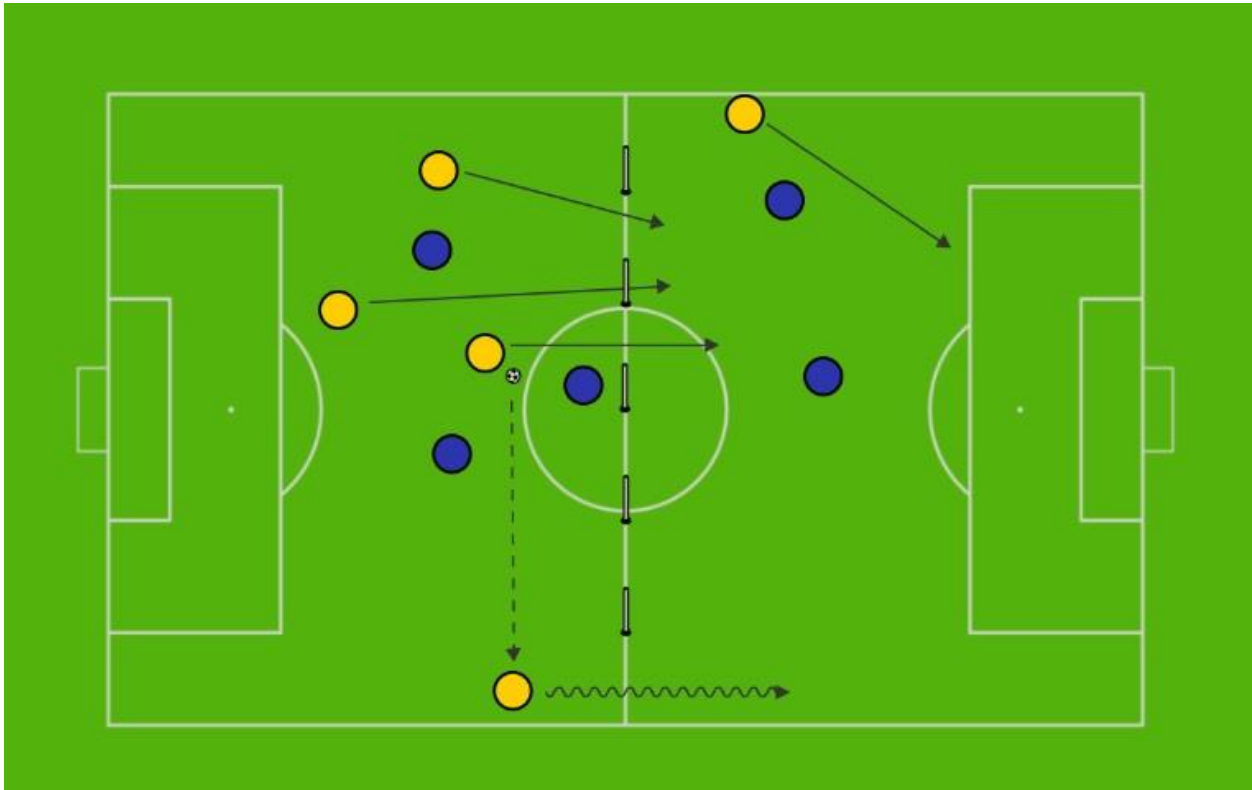
Set up a field with goals at either end. At the half way line is 5 poles (cones can be used, poles work better for progressions). Allow 8-10 yards of space between the end poles and the sideline. The ball cannot travel forward through the poles, only through the outside channels between the pole and sideline. Players can run through the poles. If the ball goes through the poles, the opposition are awarded an indirect free kick.

Suggested Ages – U11-U12

Coaching Points

- Make the field wide
- Short passes to draw opponents in and open up space on the far side
- Play a driven pass when switching

Progression 1

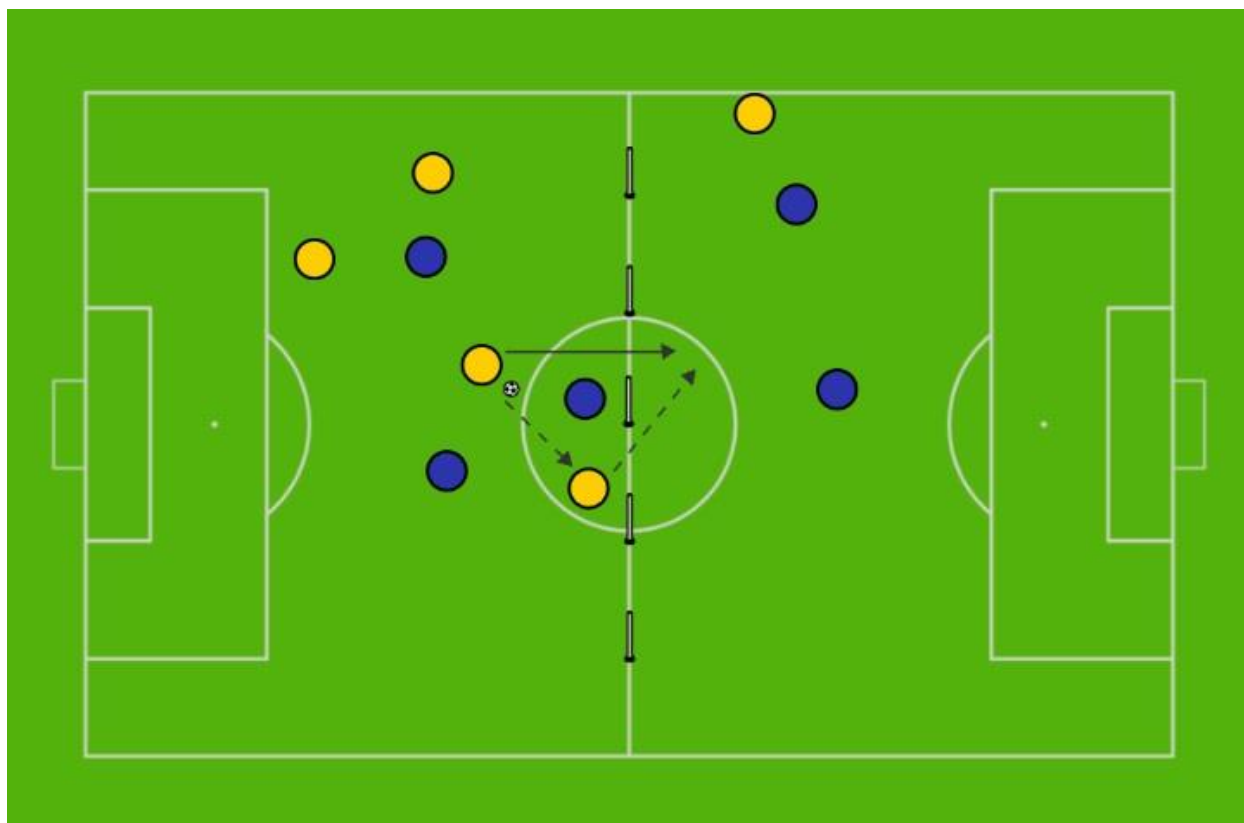


Before scoring, the entire team must be in the oppositions half.

Coaching Points

- Same as set-up
- Communication between team members to push forward
- Fast reactions from all players when the ball is in the opponents' half

Progression 2

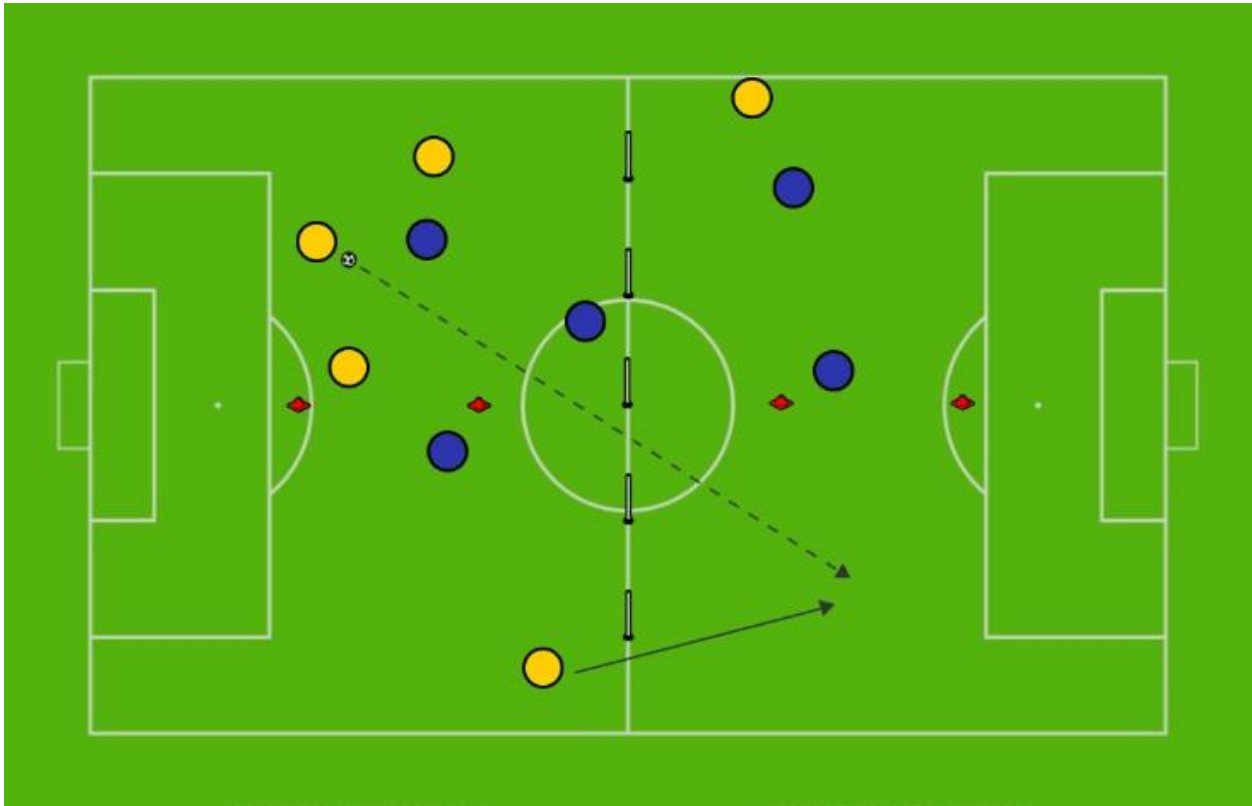


Players can now move the ball into the opposite half by playing a 1-2 through the poles. Players can still run with the ball through the wide channels.

Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Look to attack centrally when the space opens up
- Quick support to overload the opponents

Progression 3



Split the field into quarters with cones. Players can now play a lofted diagonal pass from one quarter to the other. The pass must clear the height of the poles.

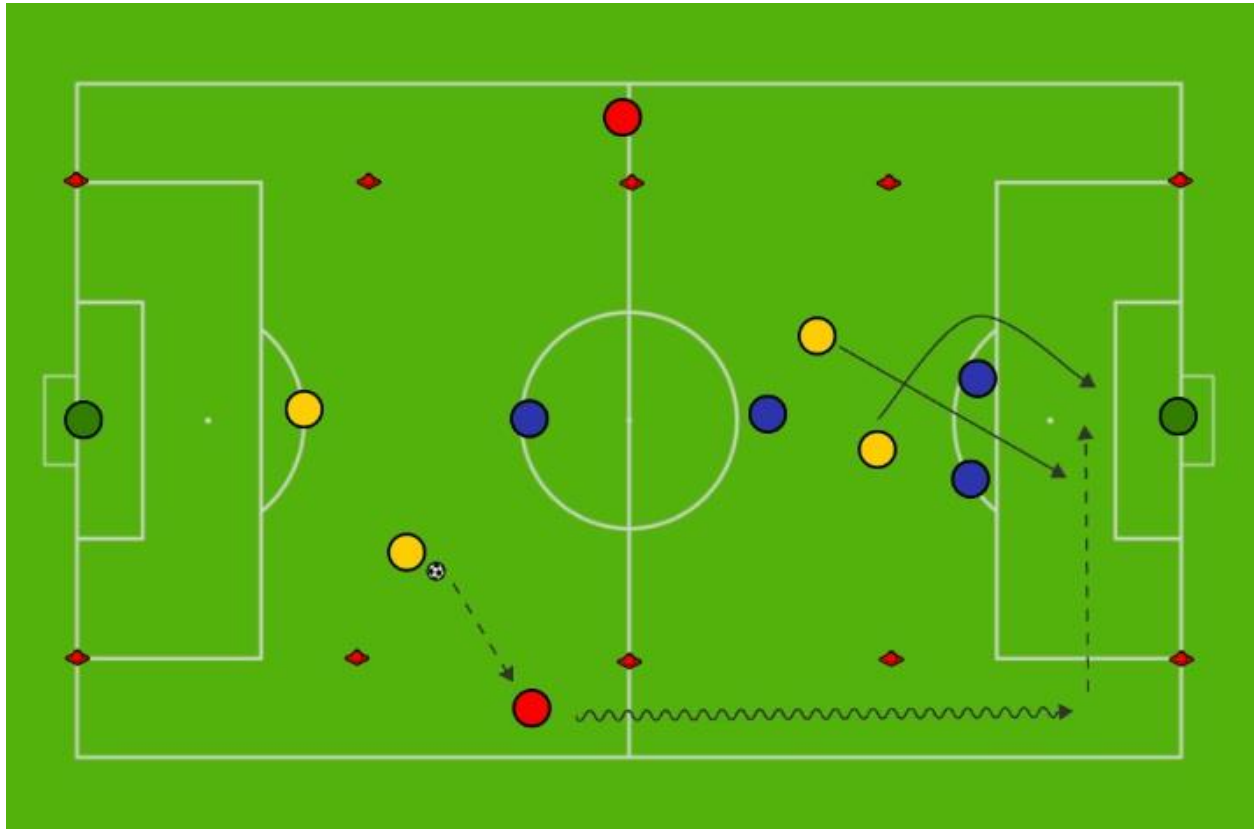
Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Run before the pass
- Good first touch to setup the lofted pass
- Aim for the corner flag

Why it works

Players get to understand several ways in which they can switch the point of attack. The option to play through the middle forces them to be aware of opportunities to attack through all areas of the field. Fast support is required to create an overload and a clear goal scoring opportunity. The poles allow players to picture the players heads that they have to clear.

Attacking in Wide Areas Game



Set Up

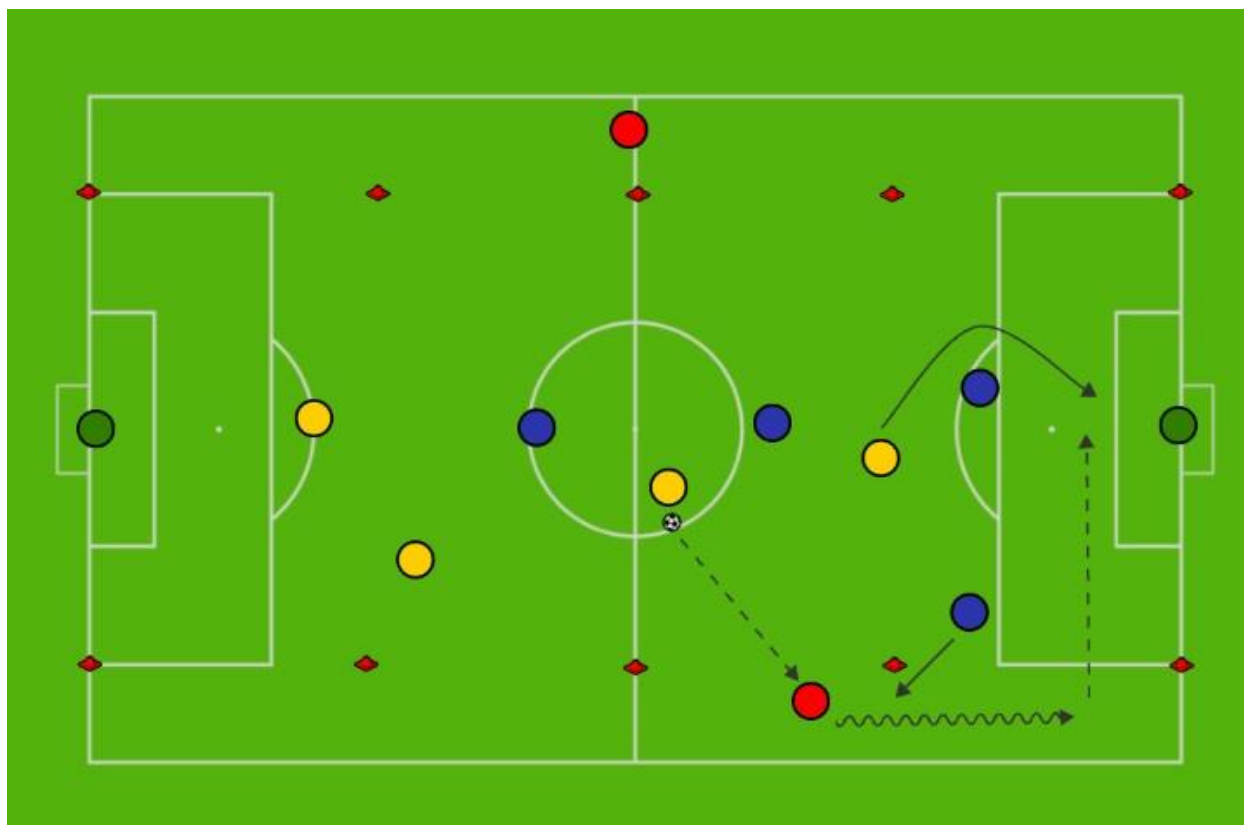
Set up a field with a neutral wide player standing in each one. Teams play 4 v 4 in the middle, plus a GK. The teams can pass to either neutral, who can travel freely up the channel to put a cross into the oppositions penalty area.

Suggested Ages – U10-U12

Coaching Points

- Use the wide player
- Cross early if the defenders are high, attack the end line if the defenders drop back
- Attack the front post, back post and edge of the penalty area
- Look up to decide type of cross – driven, lofted or pull back

Progression 1

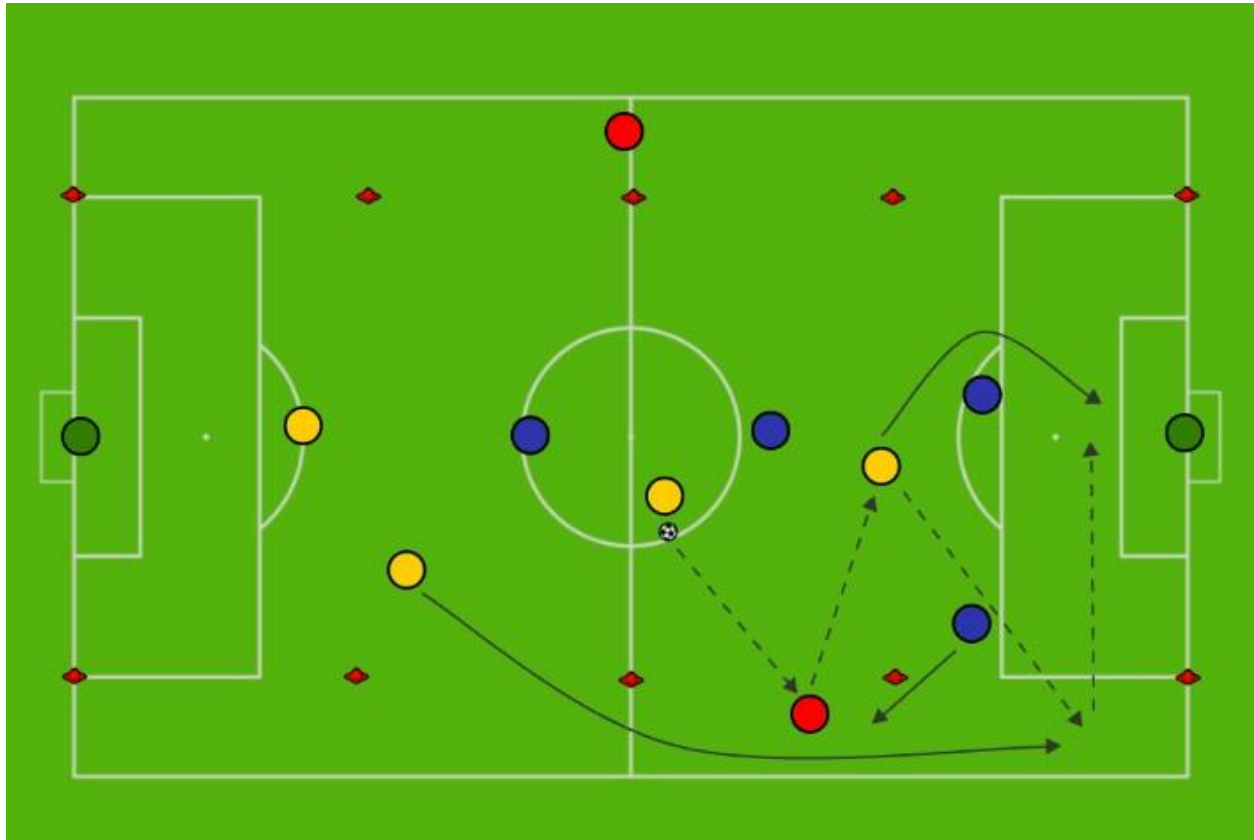


Allow a defender to enter the wide channel when the ball is played to the neutral.

Coaching Points

- Same as set-up
- Midfielder to support neutral to allow for 1-2 around the defender
- Winger must observe the defenders position and decide to take them on, combine with midfielder or cross from deep
- Switch the point of attack if the defense slide across

Progression 2

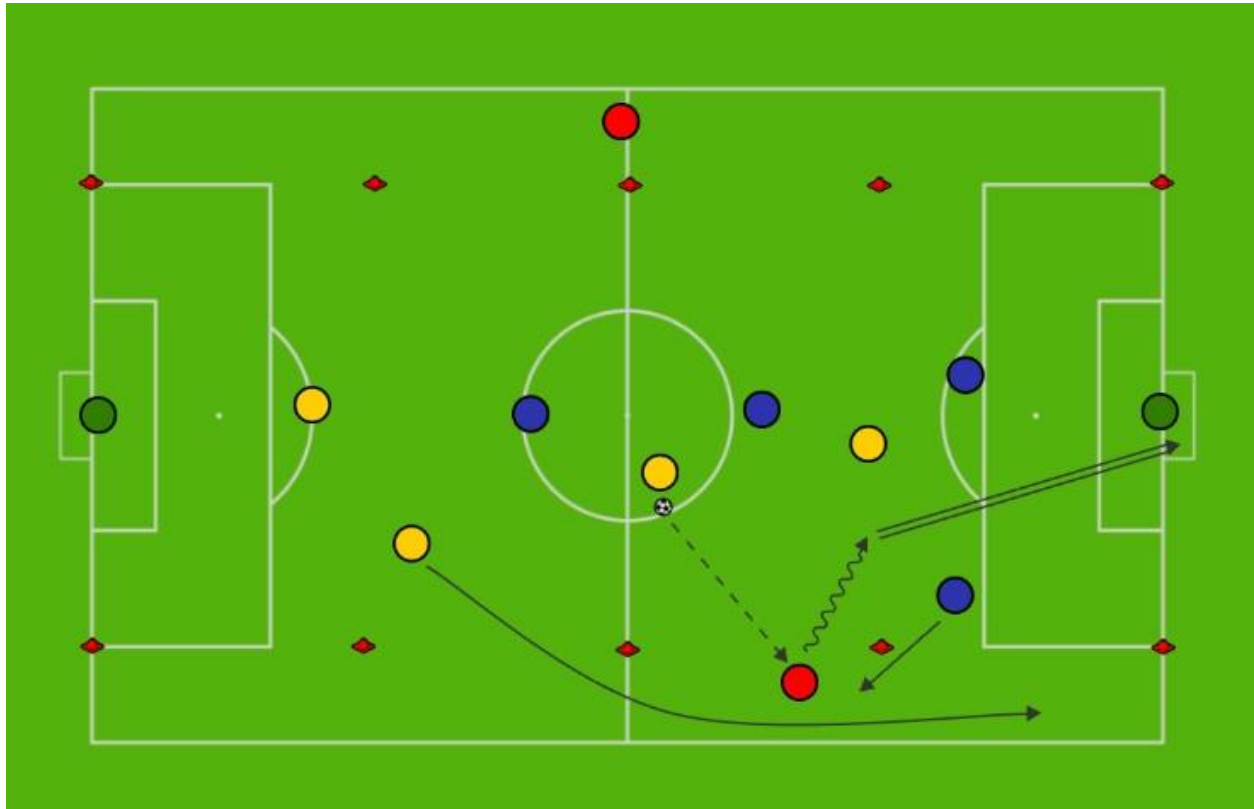


When the ball is played into the wide channel, a team mate runs in to create a 2 v 1 situation

Coaching Points

- Same as the previous progression
- Overlap the winger if they have moved in field
- Underlap winger if they are on the sideline
- Combine with midfielder to use the 3rd person run
- Full back to hold back if winger takes on defender and attacks goal line

Progression 3



The neutral player is now allowed to come in-field when they receive the ball. They can score for the team who passed to them.

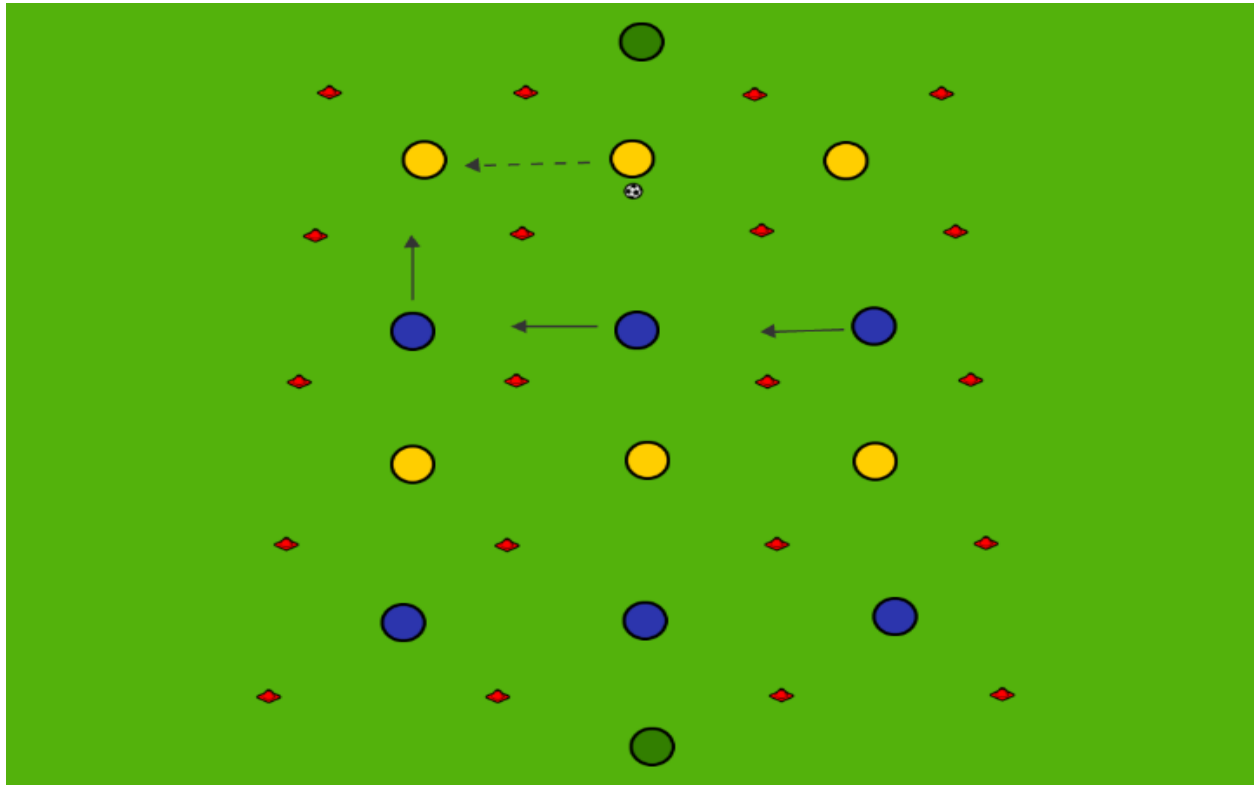
Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Winger to decide whether to shoot or play diagonal through ball if they cut inside
- Attack centrally if the space opens up

Why it works

The game covers a wide range of situations faced by the winger. Most young wingers try to go around the outside – the conditions highlight several different options available to them. Full backs are encouraged to support the attack. Players attacking the crosses get plenty of repetition.

Pressure, Cover, Balance Game



Set Up

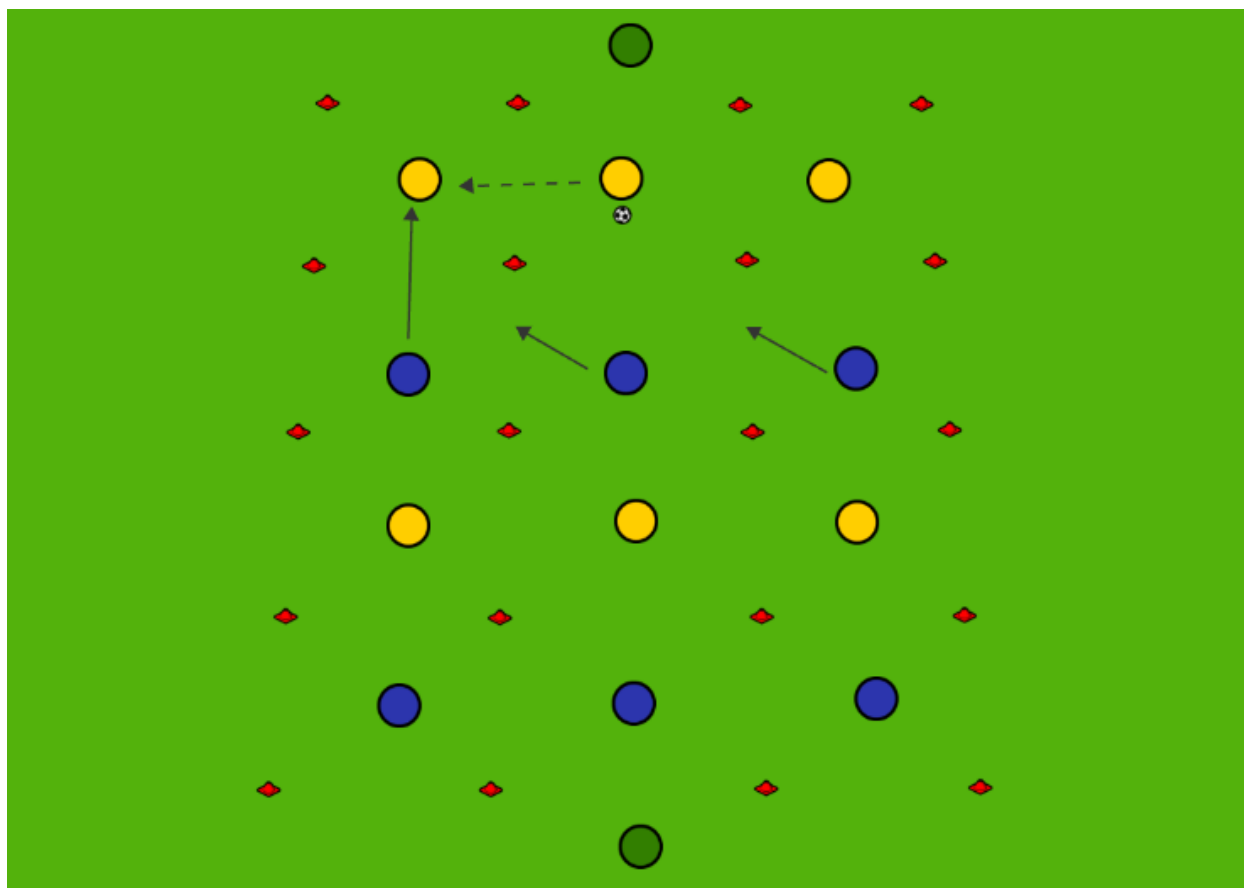
Set up a field with twelve 6 x 6 yards squares inside. Make sure the squares are in rows of 3. Have 2 teams of 6 players, split into groups of 3. 1 team has the ball and looks to pass through the opponents to their team mates. Players can move around the square they are in, but they cannot leave. If the defenders win the ball, they look to keep possession with their team mates.

Suggested Ages – U11-U12

Coaching Points

- Defender with the ball in front of them is to close down the space
- 2nd and 3rd Defenders to slide in towards the 1st defender
- 1st defender to show the player on the ball towards defensive team mates

Progression 1

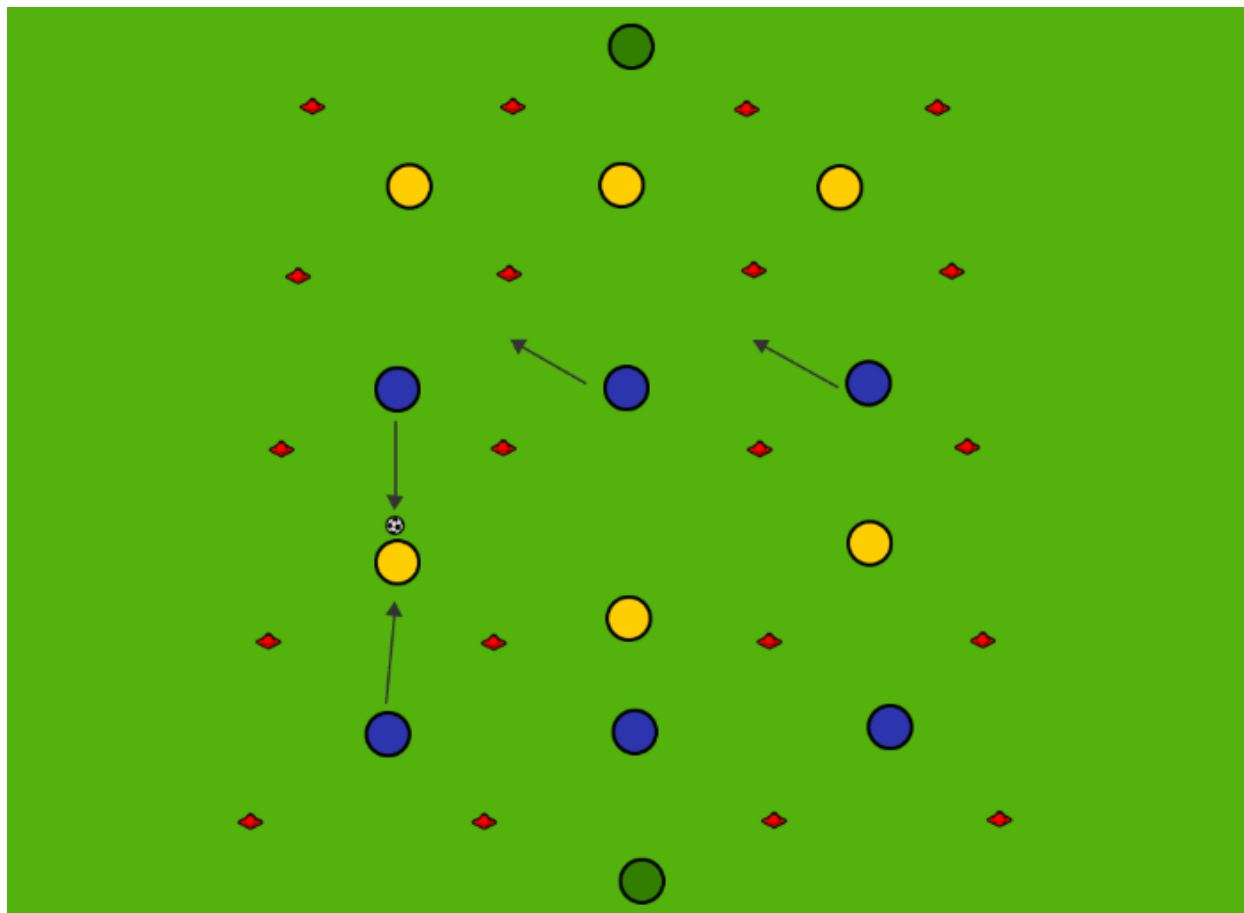


Allow the defenders to leave their square when pressuring the ball. They can steal it if the opportunity allows.

Coaching Points

- Same as set-up
- Supporting defenders to step up if the 1st defender is touch tight to the player on the ball
- Supporting defenders to drop back if the 1st defender gives space to the player on the ball
- Communication between the defenders and from the GK

Progression 2

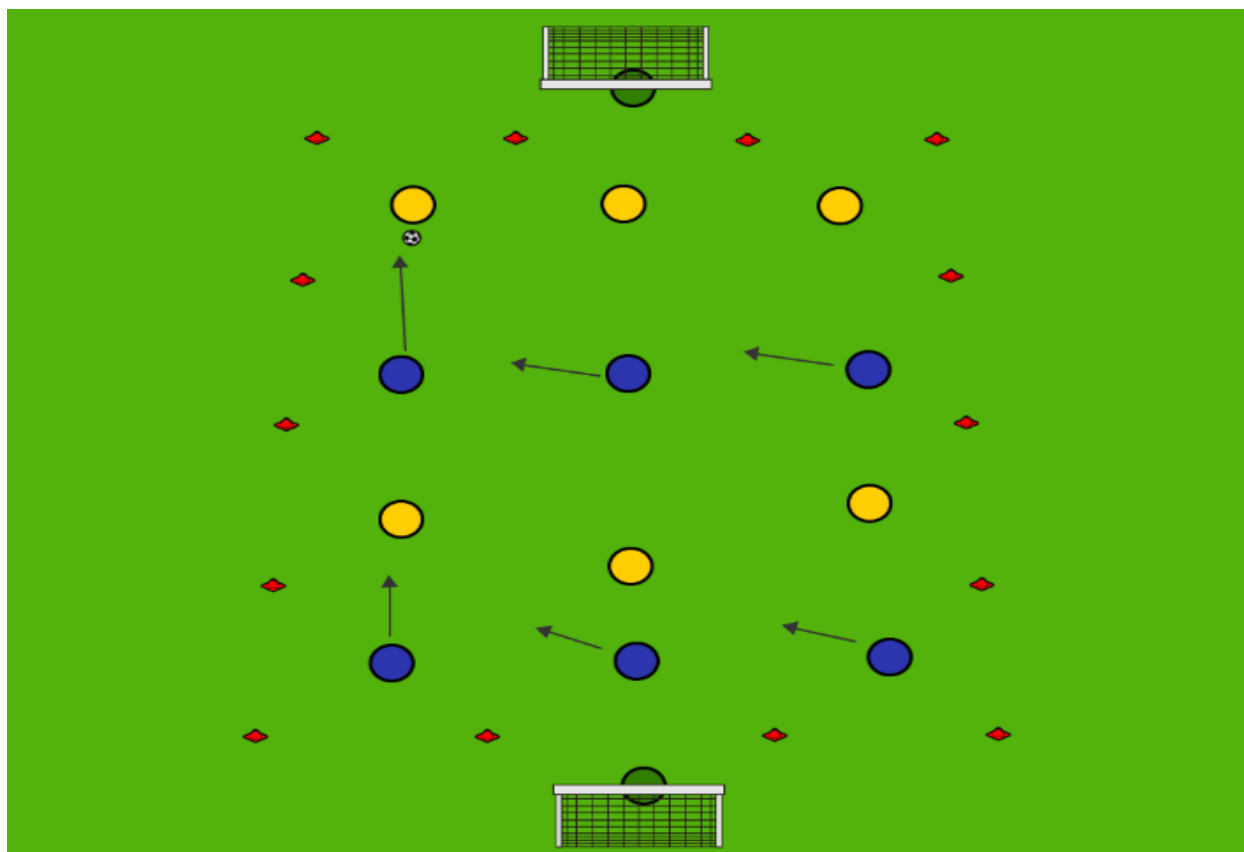


When the players positioned centrally have the ball, allow the defenders behind them to pressure them.

Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Pressure the opponent from the direction which the 1st defender is showing them
- 1st defender to delay the opponent to allow time for recovery run

Progression 3



Take out the central cones and add goals at either end. Play 6 v 6 (plus GK) with both teams playing 2 lines of 3.

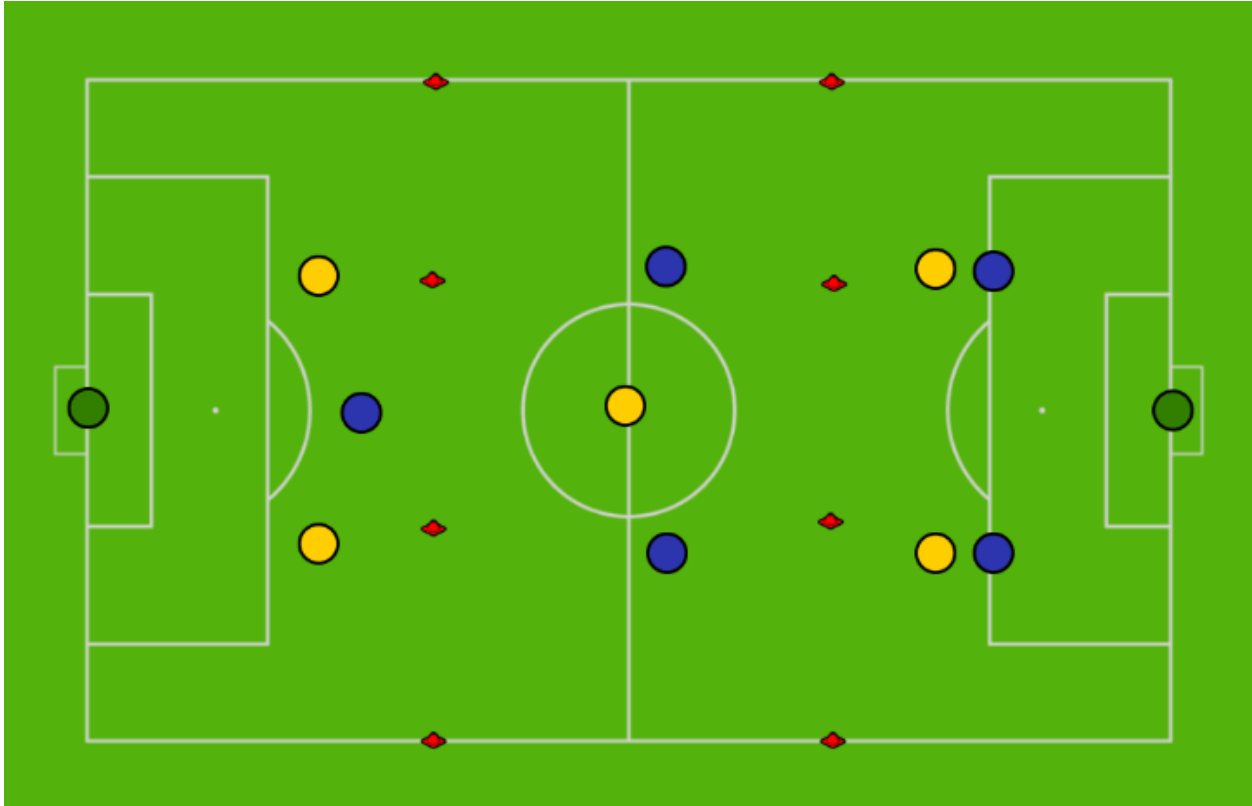
Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Maintain correct distances
- Pressure & slide when the ball is traveling
- Covering defender to screen forward pass

Why it works

The squares provide visual cues for the distances the defenders need. Goalkeeper get to visualize what to expect from their defensive team shape on game days. The initial set up teaches the players to be patient in forcing a mistake.

Playing through the Thirds Game



Set Up

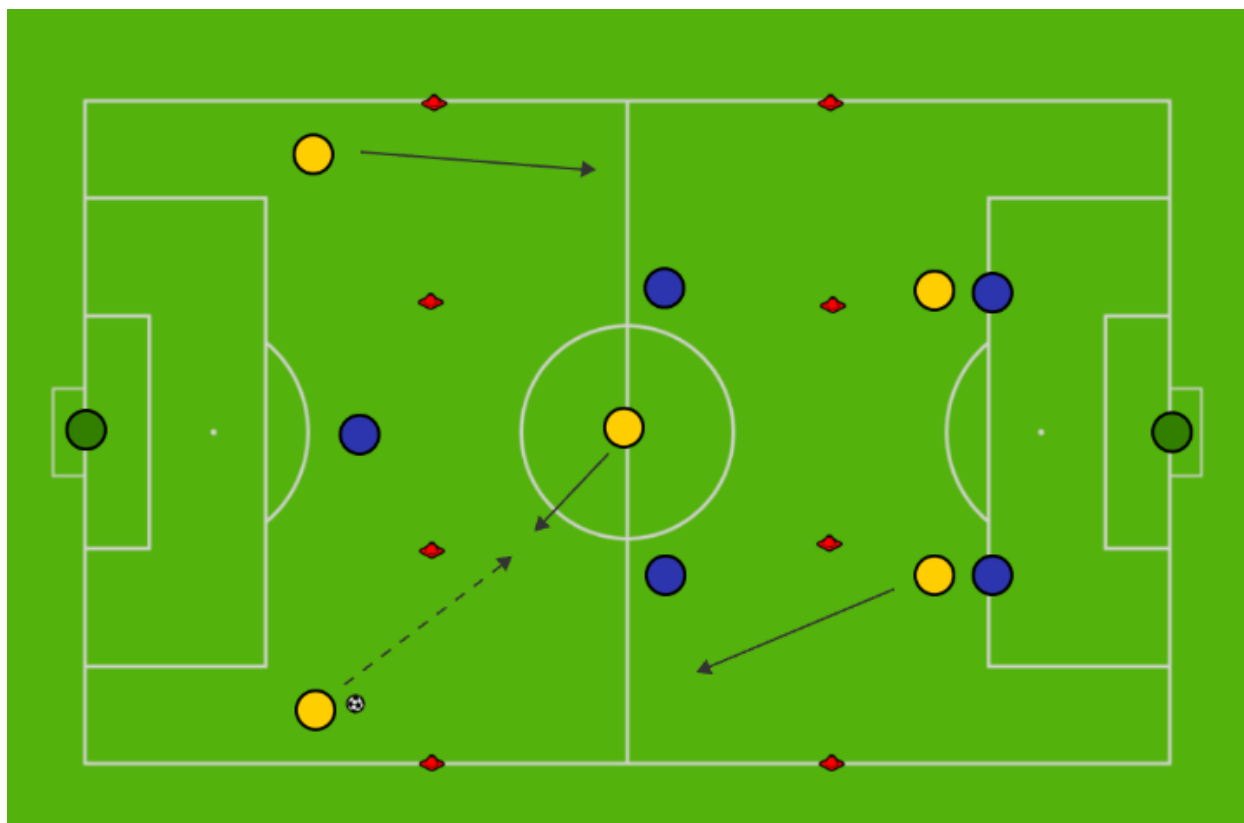
Set up a field broken into thirds. Have 1 team play a 2-1-2 formation, with the opponents playing a 2-2-1 formation. All players must stay in the thirds that they are positioned in and the ball can only travel by passing. The ball must be touched in all 3 thirds before scoring.

Suggested Ages – U10-U12

Coaching Points

- Create good angles to receive
- Play forward if possible
- Clever movement to lose markers

Progression 1

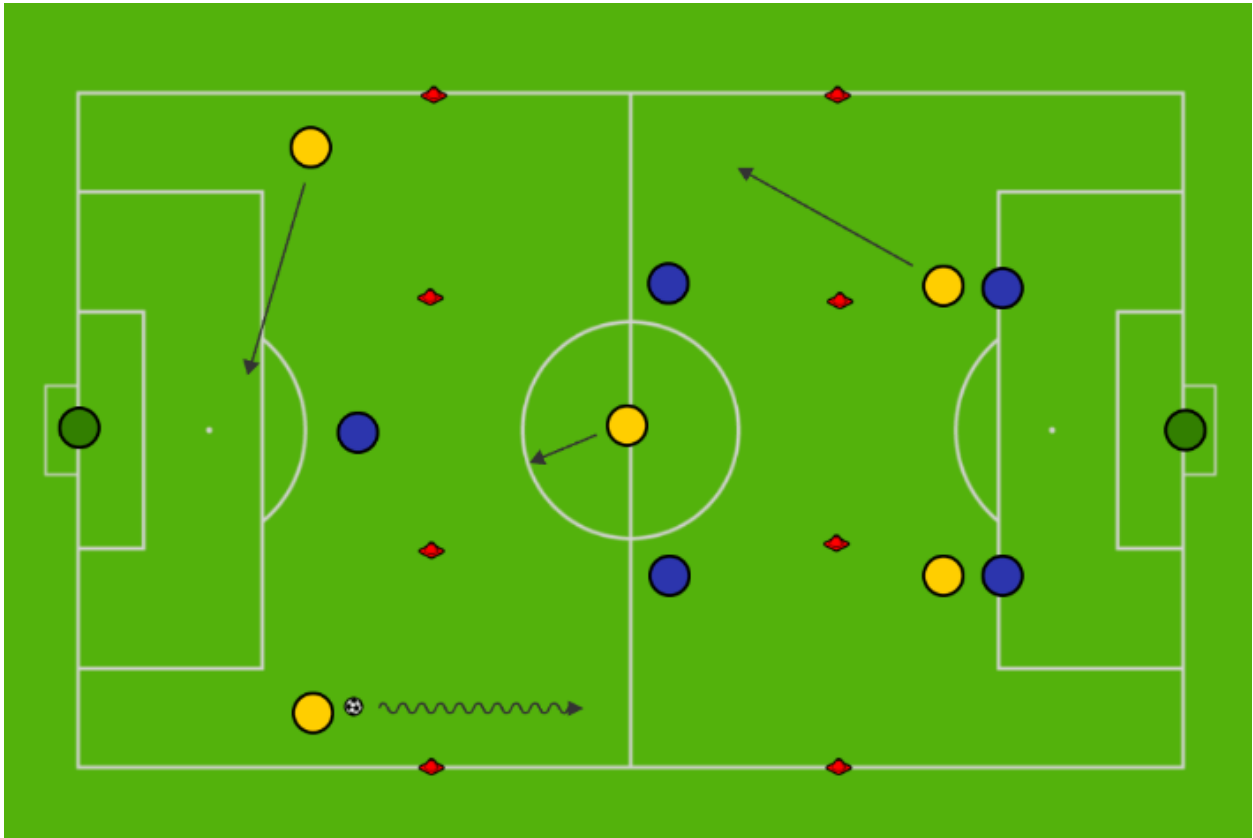


When the ball travels into the middle third, a defender and a striker can support the midfielder(s), creating a 3 v 2 or 4 v 1 overload for the team in possession. When the ball moves into the final third, 2 players can support the striker(s).

Coaching Points

- Same as set up
- Supporting players to occupy opposing space
- Exploit the overload in the middle and final third

Progression 2

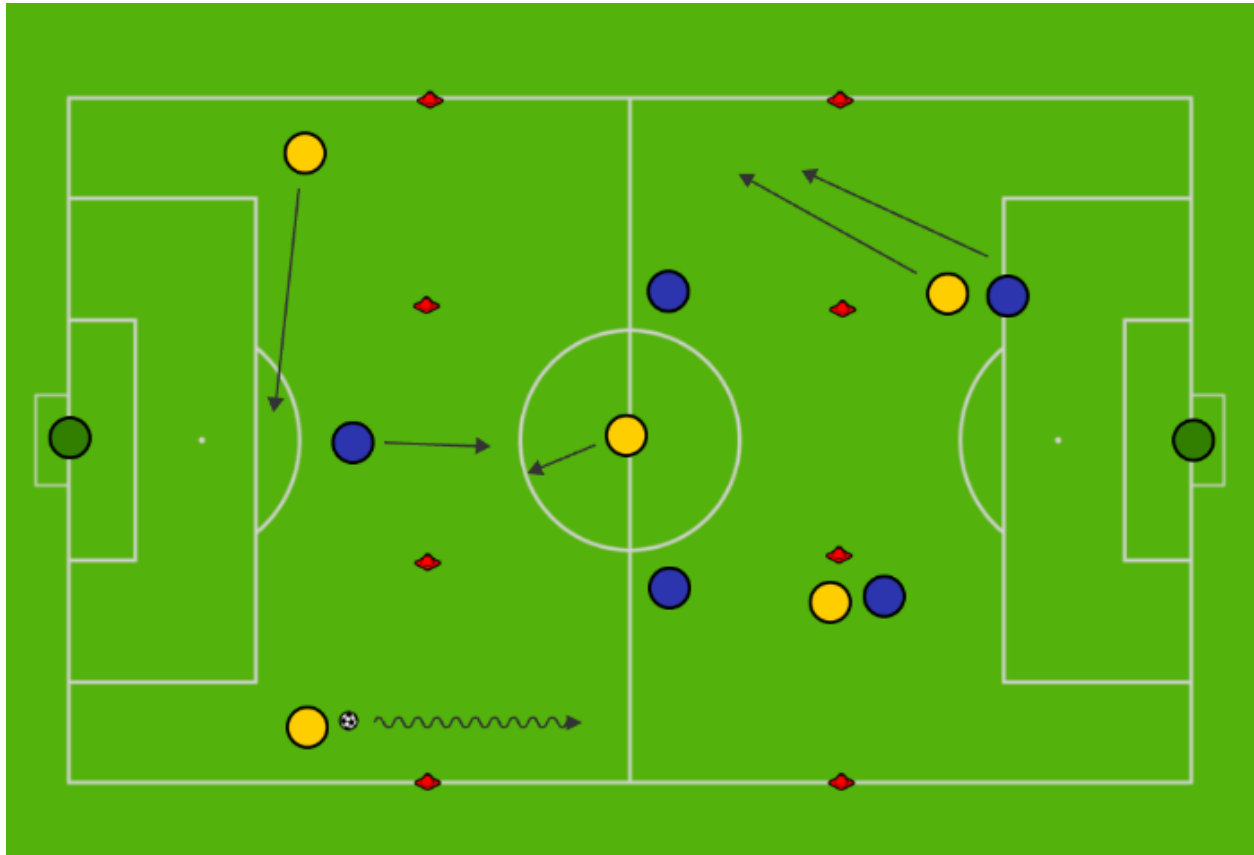


Players can move the ball into the next third by passing or dribbling

Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Observe the space to travel with the ball
- Draw defenders in to the ball to open up the opportunity to switch

Progression 3



All players can move into the middle third. The cones represent an offside line.

Coaching Points

- Same as previous progression
- Play back if needed to open up space further forward
- Time runs into the final third
- Support in the thirds quickly to create overloads

Why it works

The steady progressions allow for plenty of repetitive success before the challenge becomes harder. Players become comfortable moving out of their set 'position' to allow for a more fluid style of play. Painting the picture to create attacking overloads transfers into game day.