

# 30



# ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP A

# POSSESSION BASED GAME

by DANNY CARVALHO



# **30 Activities to Develop a Possession Based Game Model**

*By*

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## About the author

I've been playing soccer since I was 5 years old and am absolutely passionate about it. I've played at my high school and college in Brasil both soccer and futsal.

I have been coaching youth soccer players since 2010 with experience in many youth clubs in Brasil and USA such as Corinthians and Everton affiliates among others. Currently I am the D.O.C at Elleven Soccer Performance since September/2020 in Campinas-SP – Brasil.

Between 2017 and 2019 I worked for Challenger Sports in the USA with many different age groups throughout 10+ states in clubs and summer camps.

I hold a bachelor's degree in Sports and Physical Education, a CBF/CONMEBOL B coaching license, and many other complimentary courses.



## Introduction

If you are like me, you were always thrilled to watch a Barcelona match during the Guardiola period throughout 2008 to 2012 with Xavi, Iniesta and their folks parading good positive aggressive attacking-minded possession soccer!

Always enchanted me the way that team could pass the ball around from their goalkeeper to the center backs, up to the center defensive midfielder whom would distribute the ball to the wing backs and the center midfielders through the center third of the field, finally getting up in the final third so the wingers and center forward could make magic and score!

That courage to play beautifully with short passes, ball safely on the ground no matter how intense the pressure and how small the space was until the ball got to the magical feet of Lionel Messi... AMAZING!

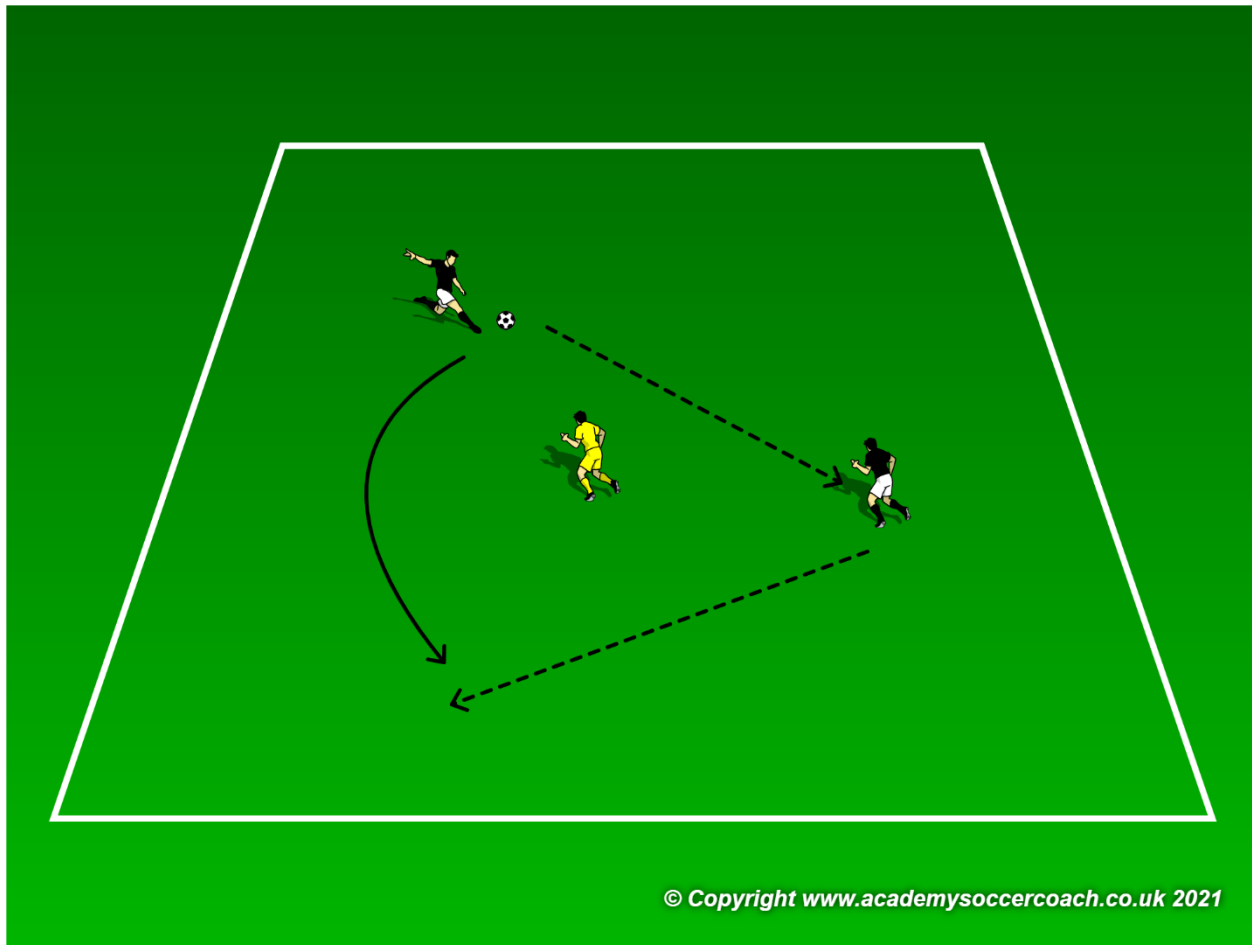
This e-book is intended to get coaches to work on their teams to develop a possession-minded style of play inspired in these Barcelona's golden times and improve the capacity of your players to retain the ball and build attacks patiently and with high quality of passing and receiving, switching points of attack, moving the opposition and creating gaps to get in and score!

## Rondos of 2 and 3 players in possession

### Activity 1

In a 1+1v1 structure, two players aim to keep the ball away from the defender. If the ball goes out of bounds, the last player to touch it is the defender and the other two keep possession away from them. If the defender wins the ball, they quickly transition to attack and the last player to touch it becomes the defender.

Play rounds of 1 to 2 minutes max depending on the level of group you coach as it can be a very intense and exhausting game.

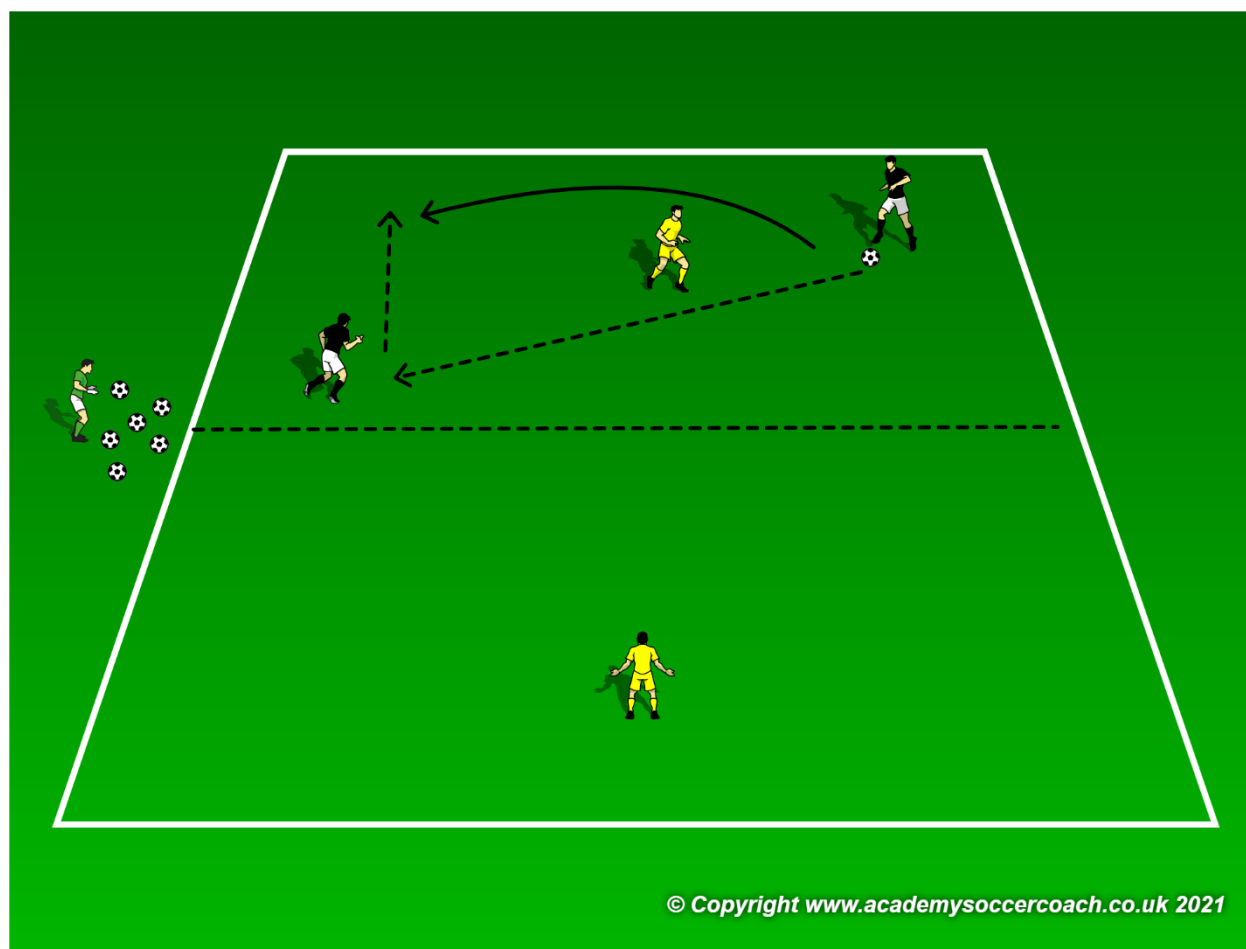


This game will encourage players to pass and move to get open a lot. Perfect to get them a first understanding of the importance to create passing lines and movement off the ball.

## Activity 2

Playing in two doubles, when double (A) has the ball, one player only from double (B) comes in to force a mistake (kick ball out of bounds) or win the ball. When one of these happens, the one (B) player drops back to their grid to keep possession with their teammate as one (A) player comes in to force a mistake or win the ball back.

The winning double will be the one to accumulate more passes at the end of the time.



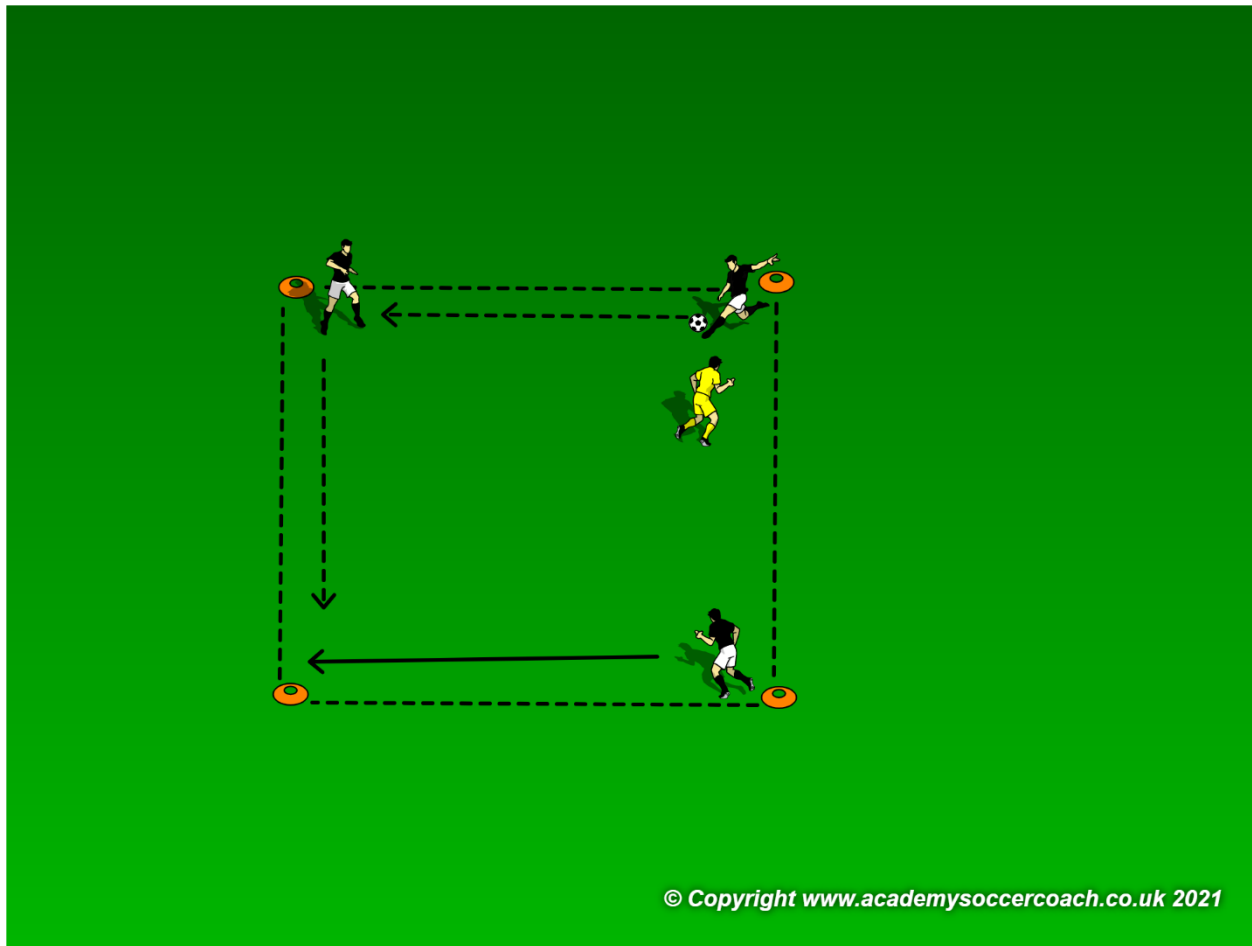
This game includes the getting the ball out of pressure zone concept in transitions to attack as when the one defender wins the ball back, they must pass to their open teammate on the other side of the grid to keep possession. It also includes the pressure after losing the ball concept in transition to defense to try to stop the opponent from getting the ball to the open teammate and win the ball back quickly.



### Activity 3

I call this one the “L rondo” because of the L shape that players are always going to position themselves in. Played in a 3v1 structure, the goal is to teach players to always give the player on the ball a passing option on each side.

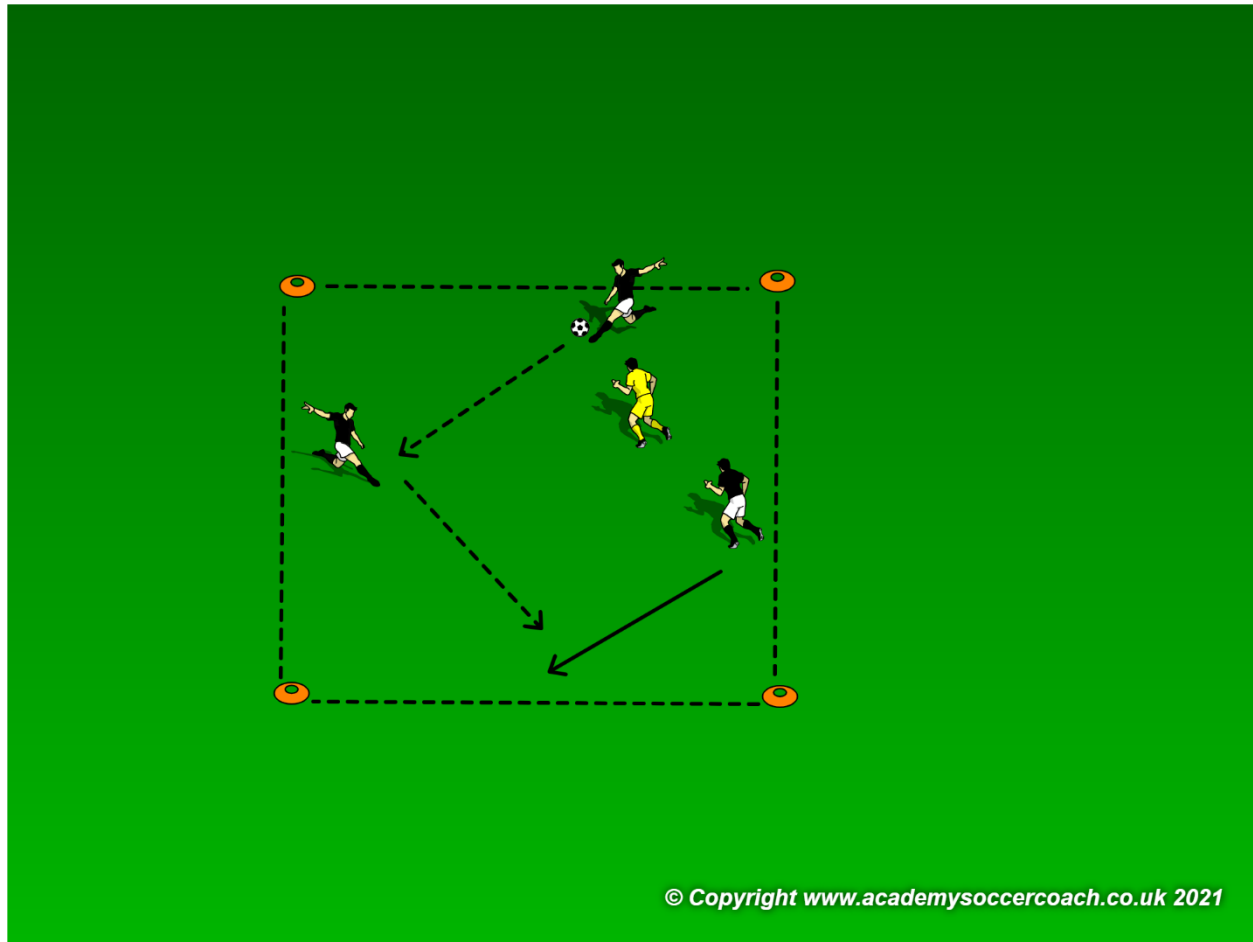
Players must be positioned at the corners of the square, always aware that depending on the ball's position, they must shift from one corner to another in order to give their teammates a great and clear passing option.



This game introduces the [third man run](#) concept.

## Activity 4

With similar goals and concepts as the activity before, I call this one the “V rondo” because of the V shape that players are always going to position themselves in. The only difference is that instead of players always positioning at the corners of the square, they now must position in the lines between the cones.

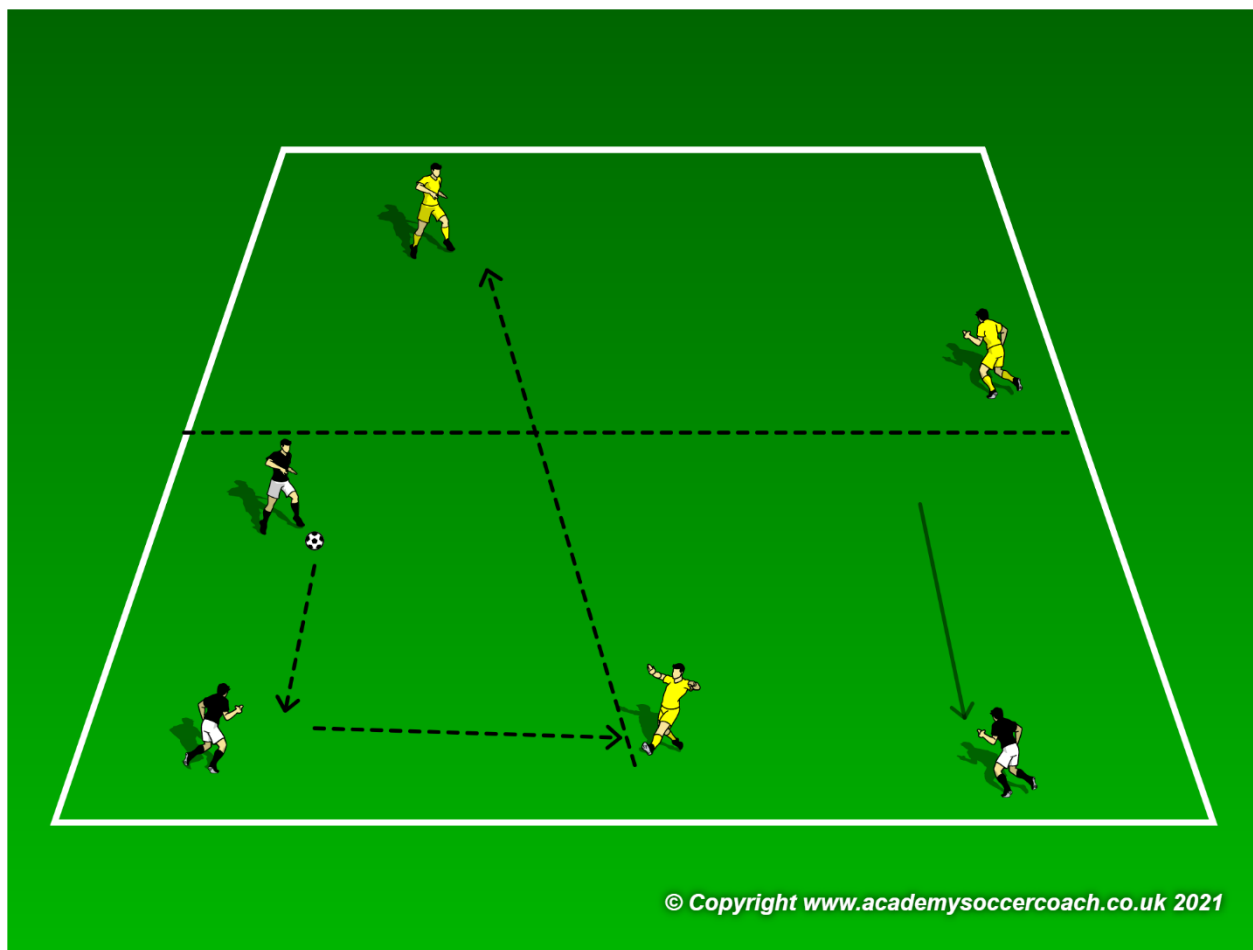


## Activity 5

Continuing to work on the 3v1 and all the concepts included, now we make it a game of two teams of three. When team (A) has the ball, one defender from team (B) comes in and the same in the other way around.

We are going to combine all the concepts from the previous activities on this one.

3v1 keep away where when the defender wins the ball or the team in possession kicks it out of bounds, a transition happens.

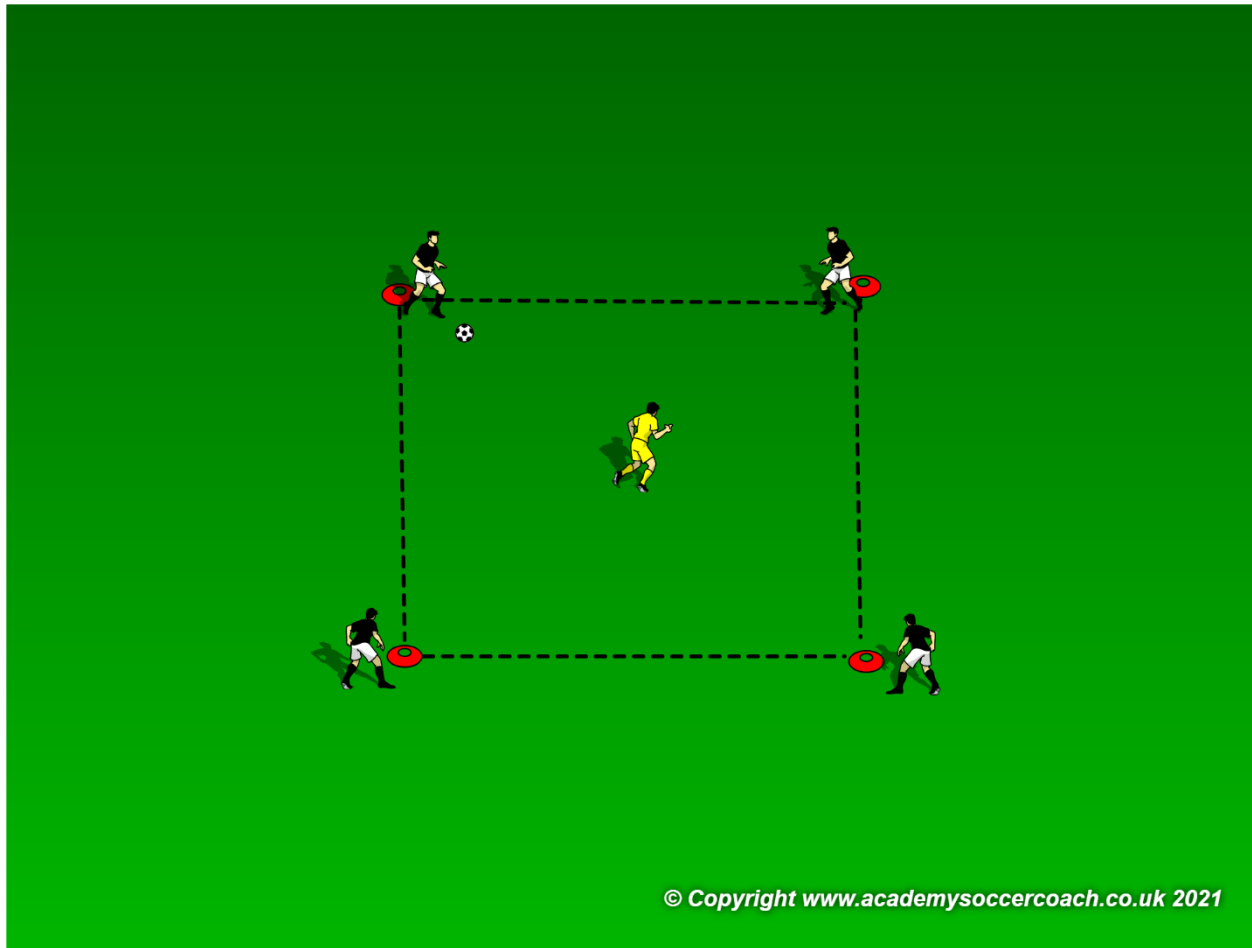


This time, we are going to establish that the player who made the mistake is the one who must become the defender.

## Rondos of 4 players in possession

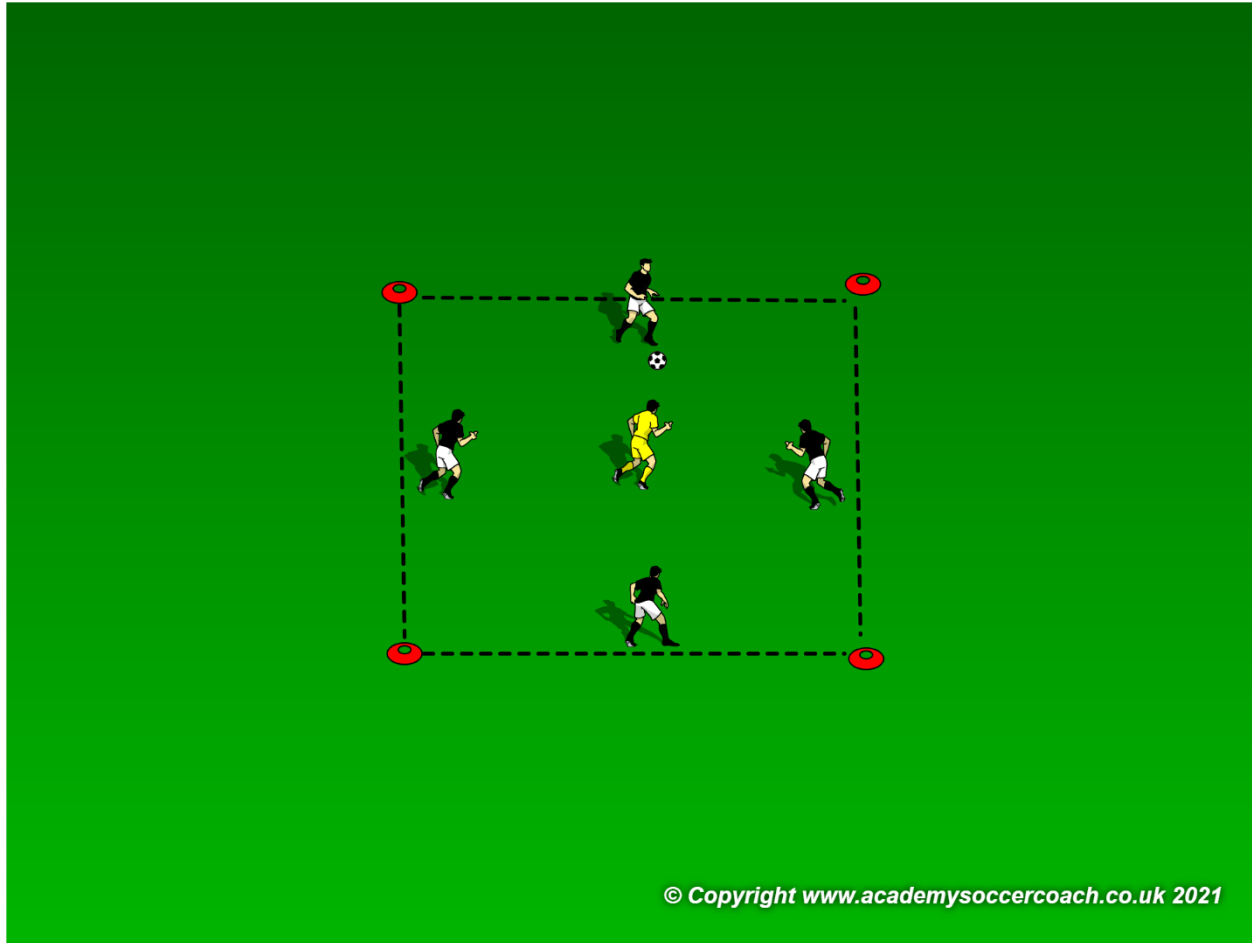
### Activity 6

Now we move on into the rondos of 4 players in possession. At these, we get the chance to work on the square and diamond shape as well as the three passing options concept. In this one, we are going to play a simple 4v1 rondo to keep the ball away where players must stay in the square shape.



## Activity 7

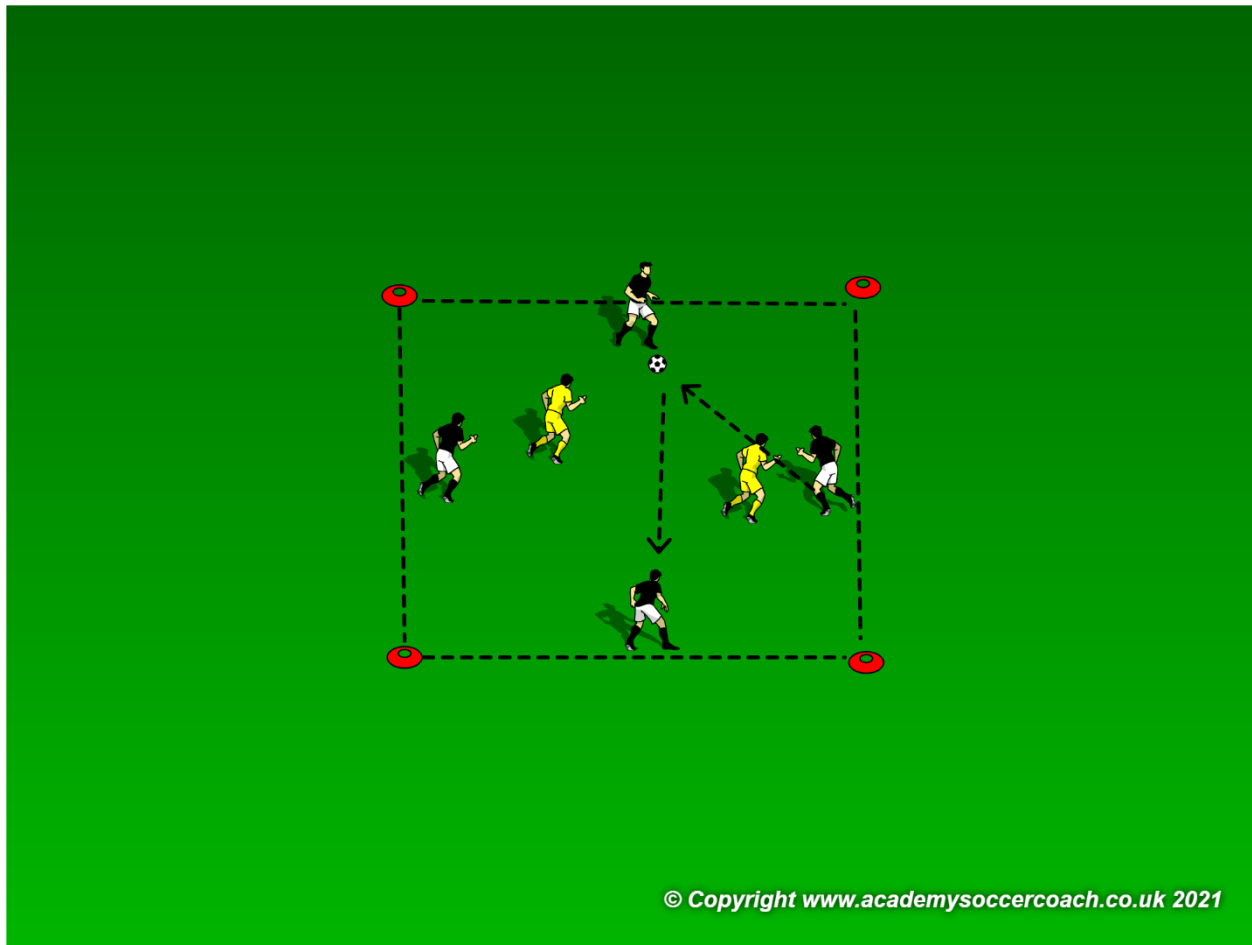
Progressing from activity 6, play a 4v1 rondo in a diamond shape.





## Activity 8

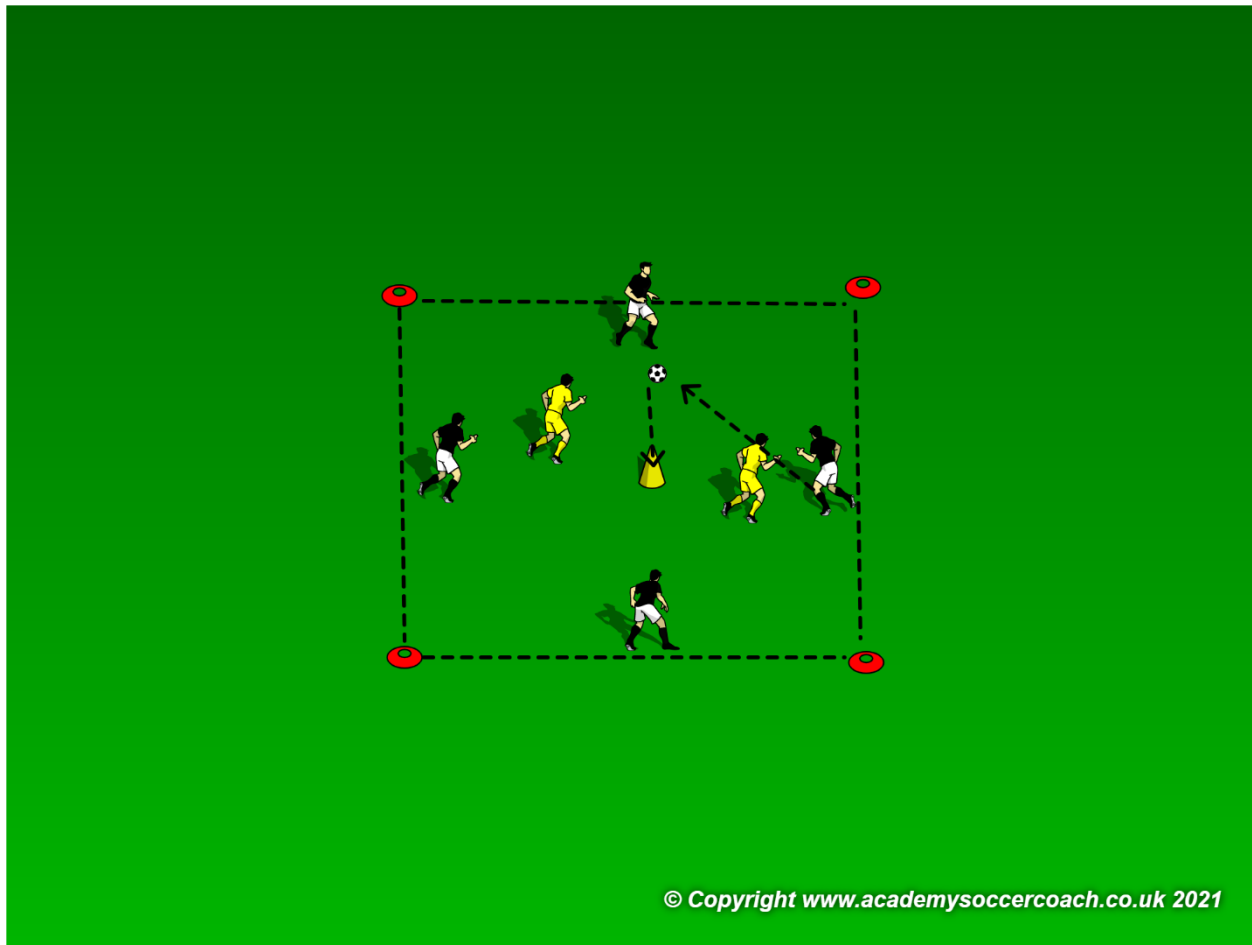
Increase the difficulty of the rondo by adding another defender. Make it a 4v2 and encourage players to move the ball quickly to create a gap in between the defenders and pass the ball through them.



To increase the competitiveness and engage players on the goals, set the rule that if a pass through happens the defenders must stay another round.

## Activity 9

I'm a big fan of the following rondo. Again in a 4v2, add a tall cone to the center of the square. The goal now is to complete 15 passes or knock down the cone to have defenders stay for another round.

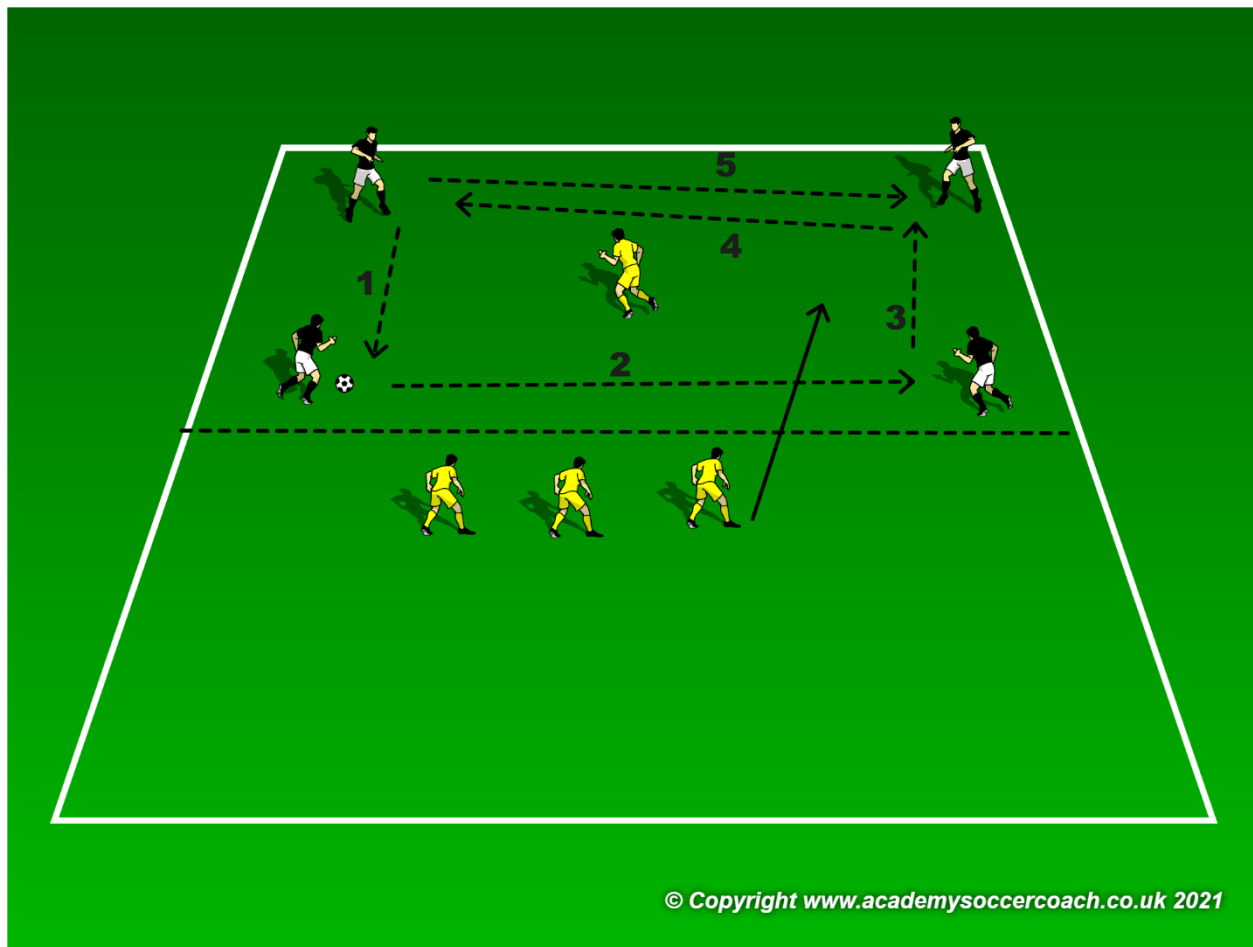


This one is all about game principles. The 4 attacking players must keep possession, circulate it quickly to spread the defenders and “score” by knocking down the cone or achieving 15 passes. The 2 defenders must protect the goal (tall cone), stop opponents from scoring as in the game as well as win the ball back. I love it!

## Activity 10

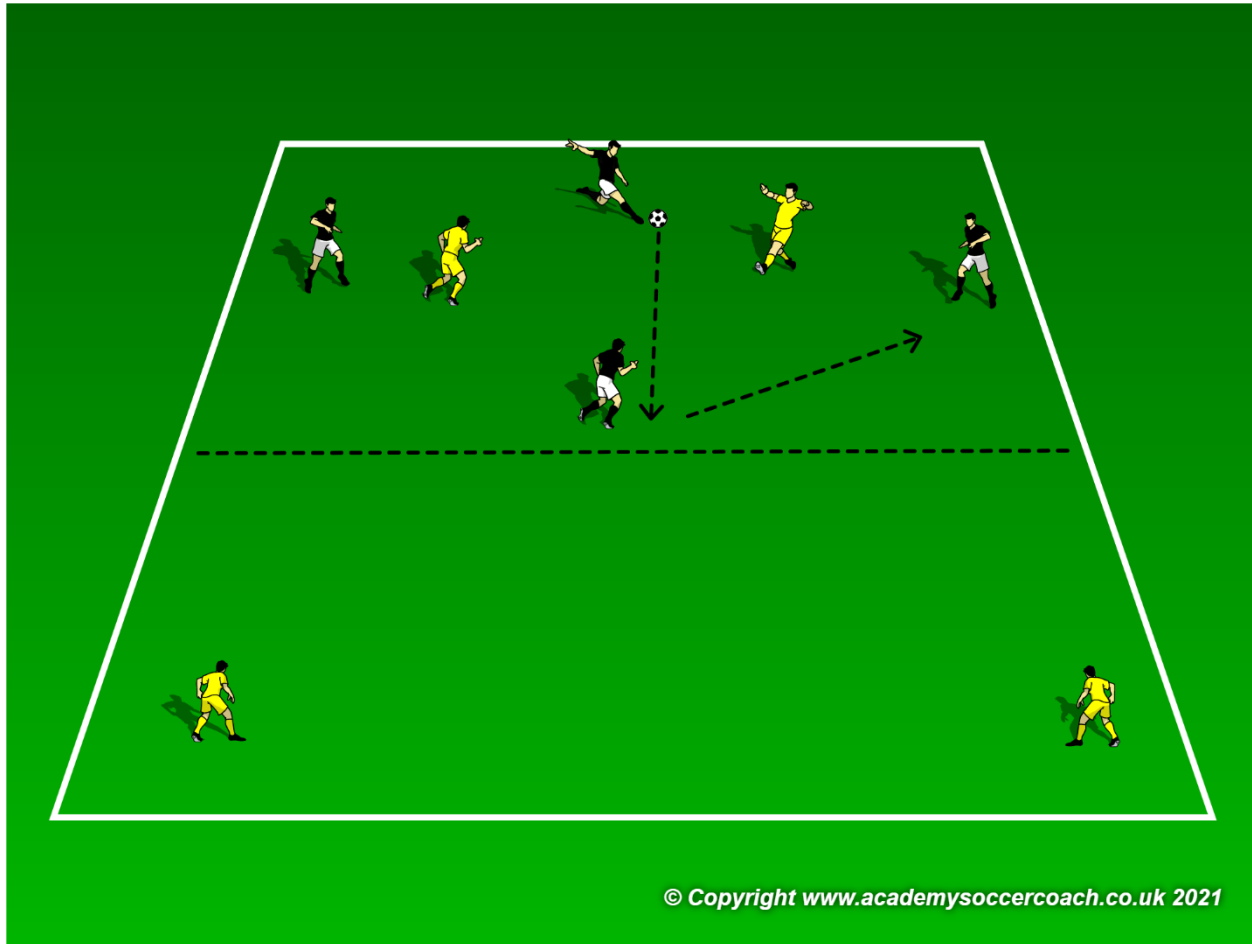
In this game we split the group into two teams of four players. When one team is in possession, only one opponent comes in. At every five passes another defender comes in as shown in the diagram below. When the defending team wins the ball or the possession team kicks it out of bounds, swap the team in possession at another half of the grid.

The winning team is the one to accumulate more passes in the same play.



## Activity 11

On a progression from the previous activity, on this activity teams always play 4v2 on one side while another two players from the defending team stay in their zone. While the black team is keeping possession, the yellow team is trying to force them to get the ball out of bounds or to win the ball and quickly pass it to one of the players waiting on the yellow's zone. When this happens the yellows play 4v2 on the blacks.



You've probably realized that so far, we've mainly introduced rondos with players in possession being positioned near the outside of the grids in order to open up and space.

In the following activities we are going to introduce rondos with possession players in the middle of the grid, as center midfielders do in the actual game.

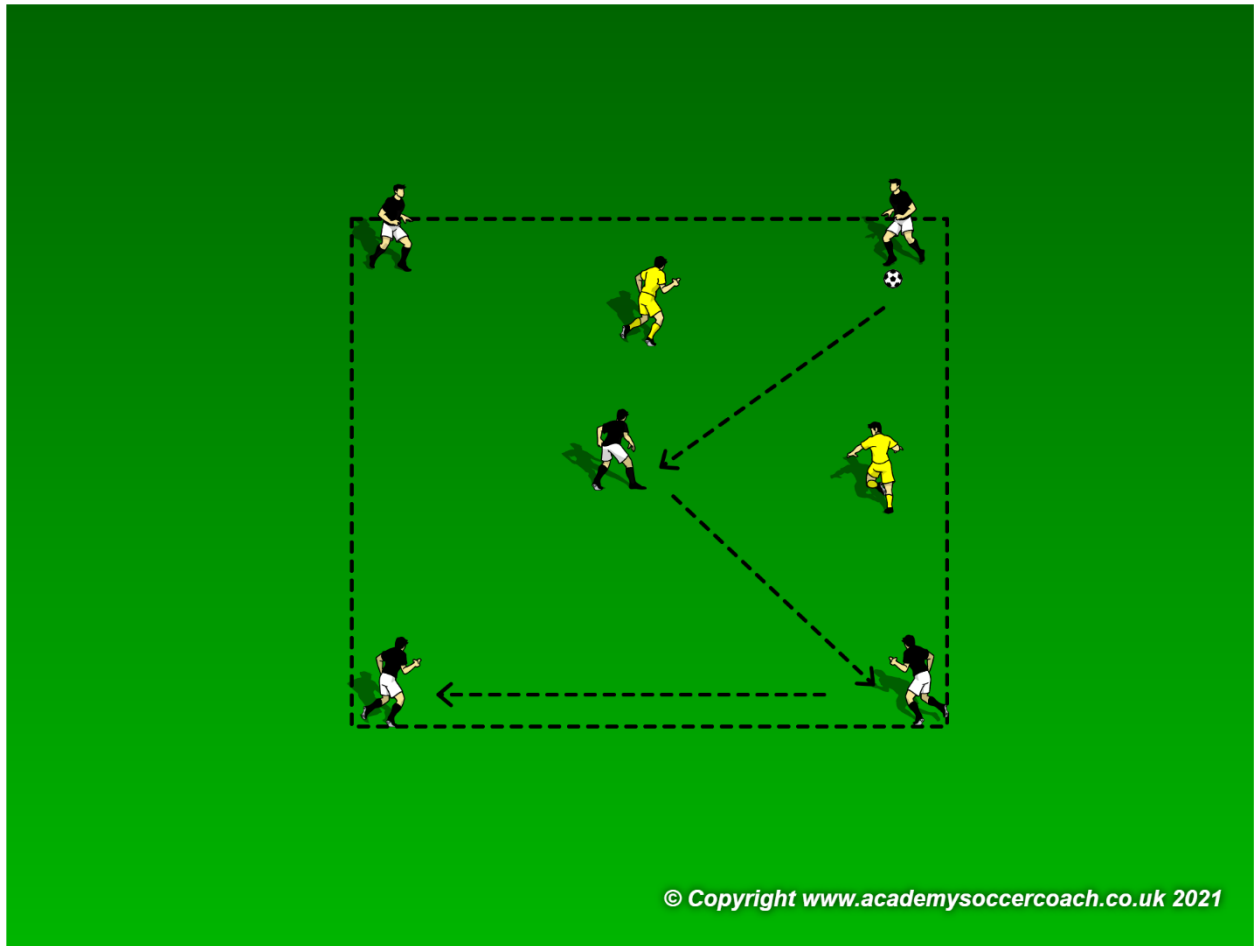
In addition to all concepts and skills worked before, now players in the middle are going to need a lot of awareness and thinking ahead to make the best decisions. First touch, one touch pass, body position, scanning, use of different foot parts etc....



## Rondos with a midfielder

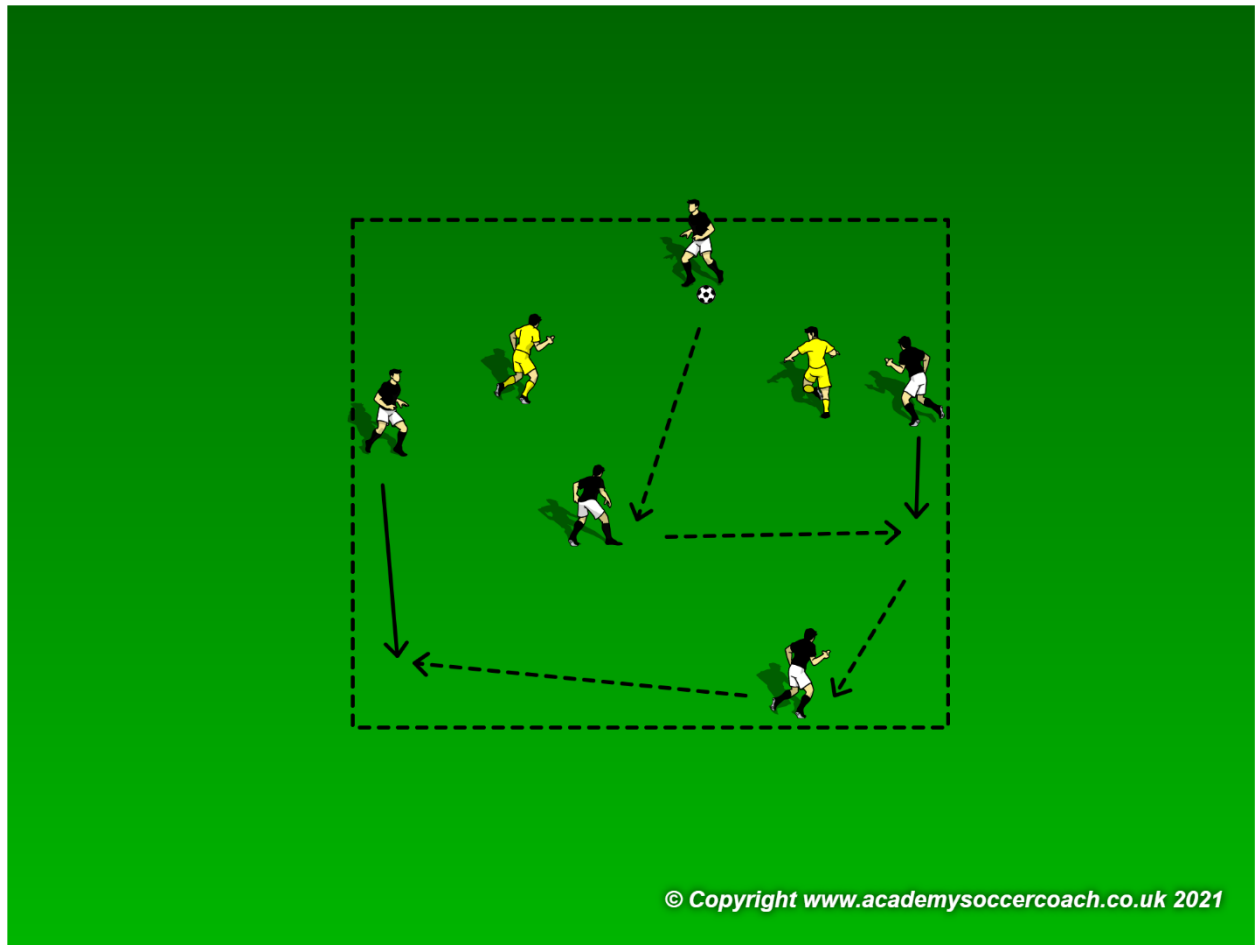
### Activity 12

In this activity we play a 5v2 where four players are each responsible for one corner of the square, being allowed to move about three steps sideways but aiming to keep the square shape and then the fifth player is the midfielder, the one player with freedom to move anywhere in the square.



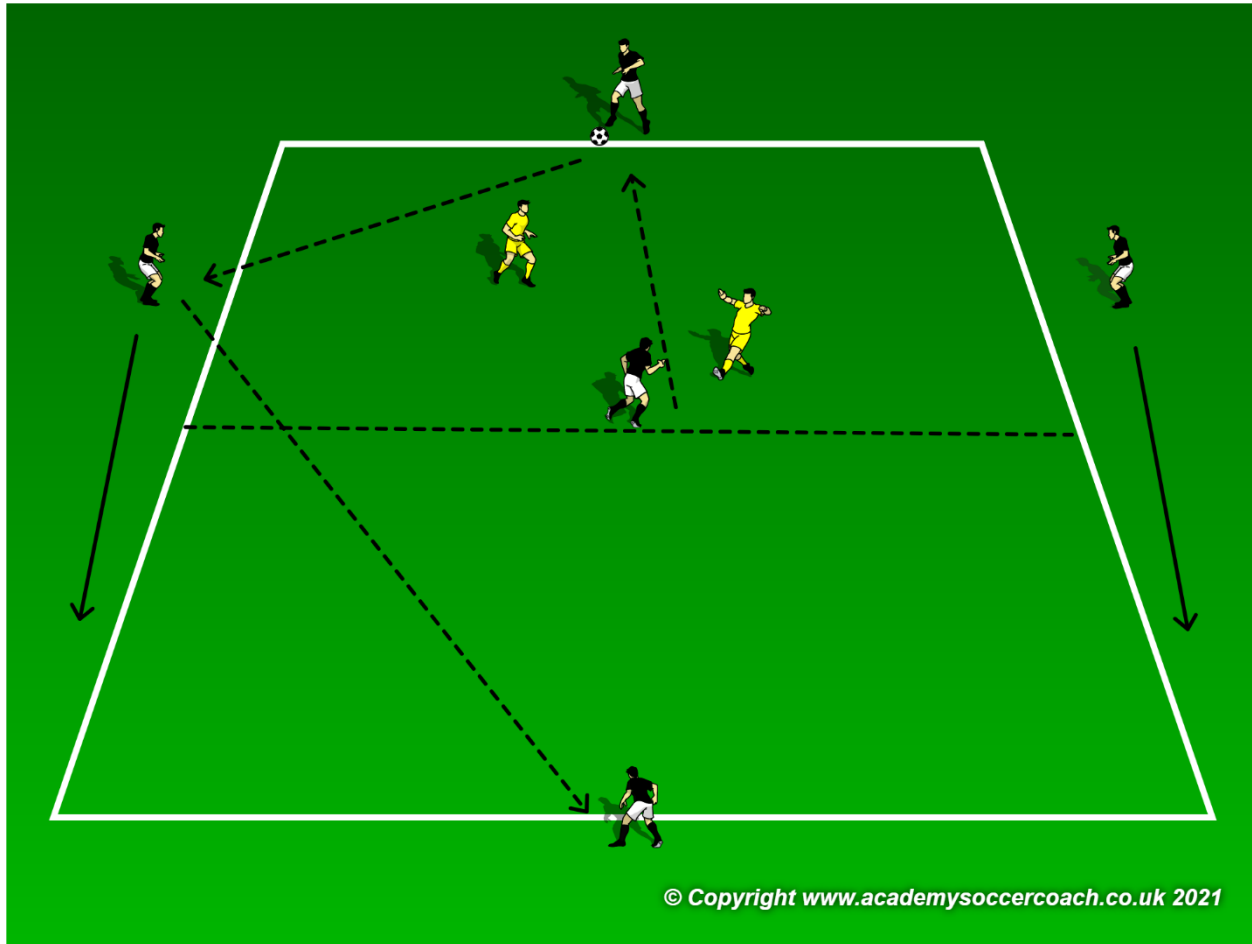
### Activity 13

In a variation from the previous activity, four players now sliding up and down each line of the square and one player in the middle, aiming to keep a diamond shape most of the time.



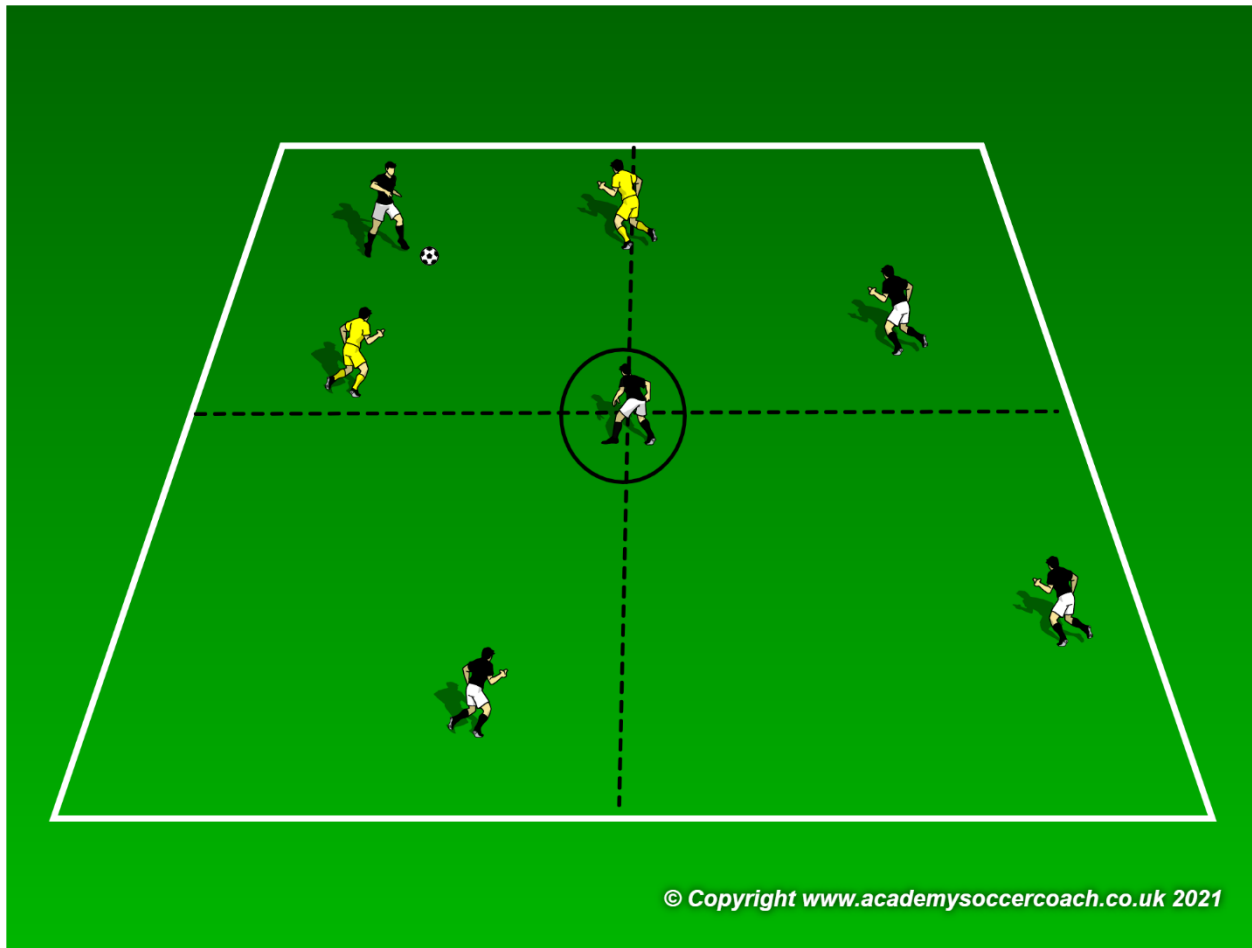
## Activity 14

On this 5v2, we split the grid into two halves. We have one player positioned on each side of the grid and a player positioned in the line that splits the grid. This rondo's goal is to have the middle and wide players shift from one half to another in order to keep possession with the two players positioned on depth, combining possession with progression up the field as well as switches of play.



## Activity 15

On this 5v2 rondo, we split the grid into four zones, having one player in each zone that cannot leave their zone + one player merging from one zone to another to support the player there. This rondo is more about spacing and keeping your shape while the midfielder moves to “orchestrate” the team.



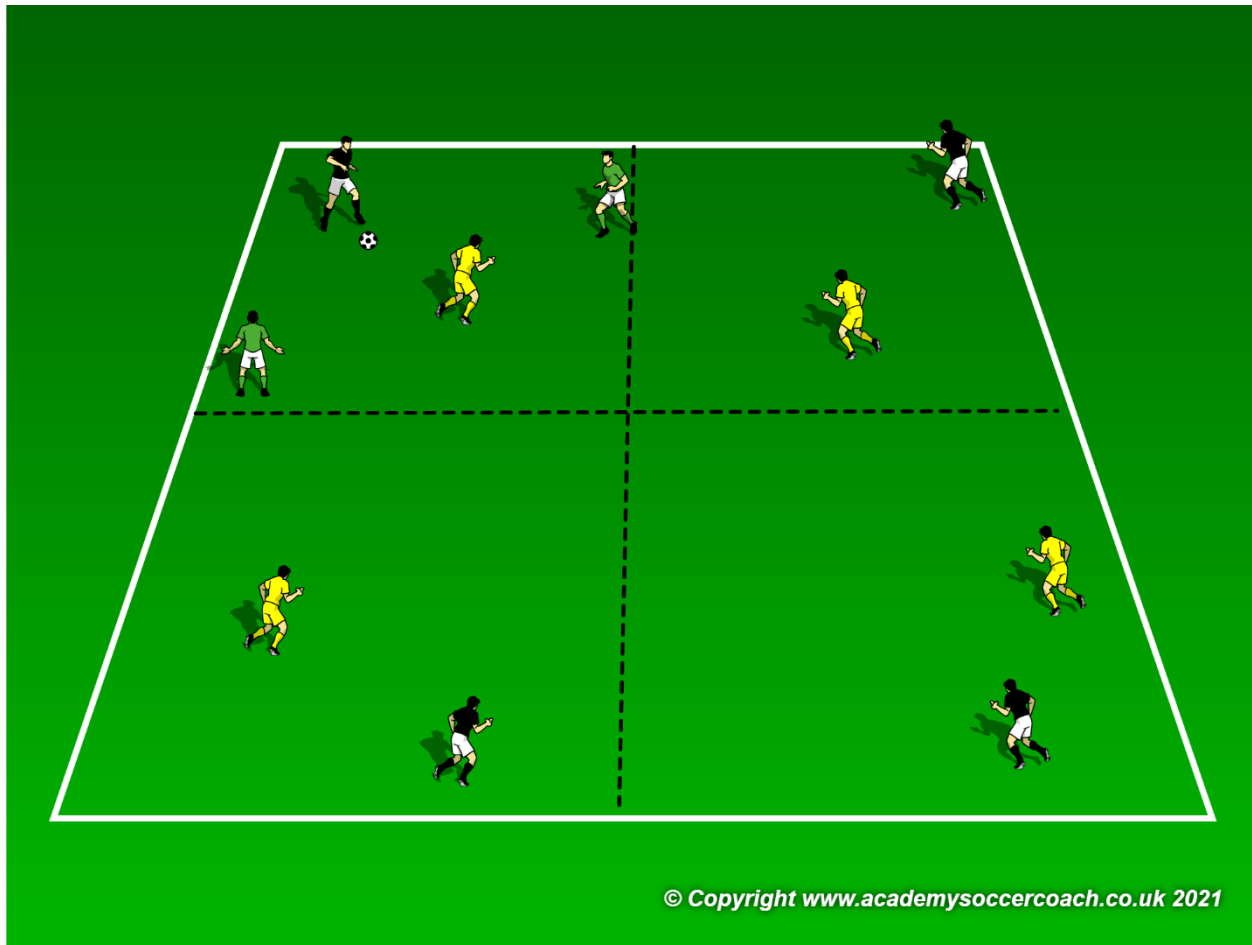
Moving on, next we are going to start looking at rondos with neutrals. Those are great to keep on working with overloads but with teams of the same number of players such as 2v2+3, 4v4+2 etc. This makes teams work more on transitions and increases the complexity of the activities which is great for better improvement on decision making and all game relates topics.



## Rondos with neutrals

### Activity 16

This activity is a progression from activity 15. On this one, we have two teams of four players split into a 1v1 on each zone, with two neutrals joining in to make it a 3v1 on each square as well as helping to distribute the ball from one zone to another, also making it a 6v4 on the whole grid.



## Activity 17

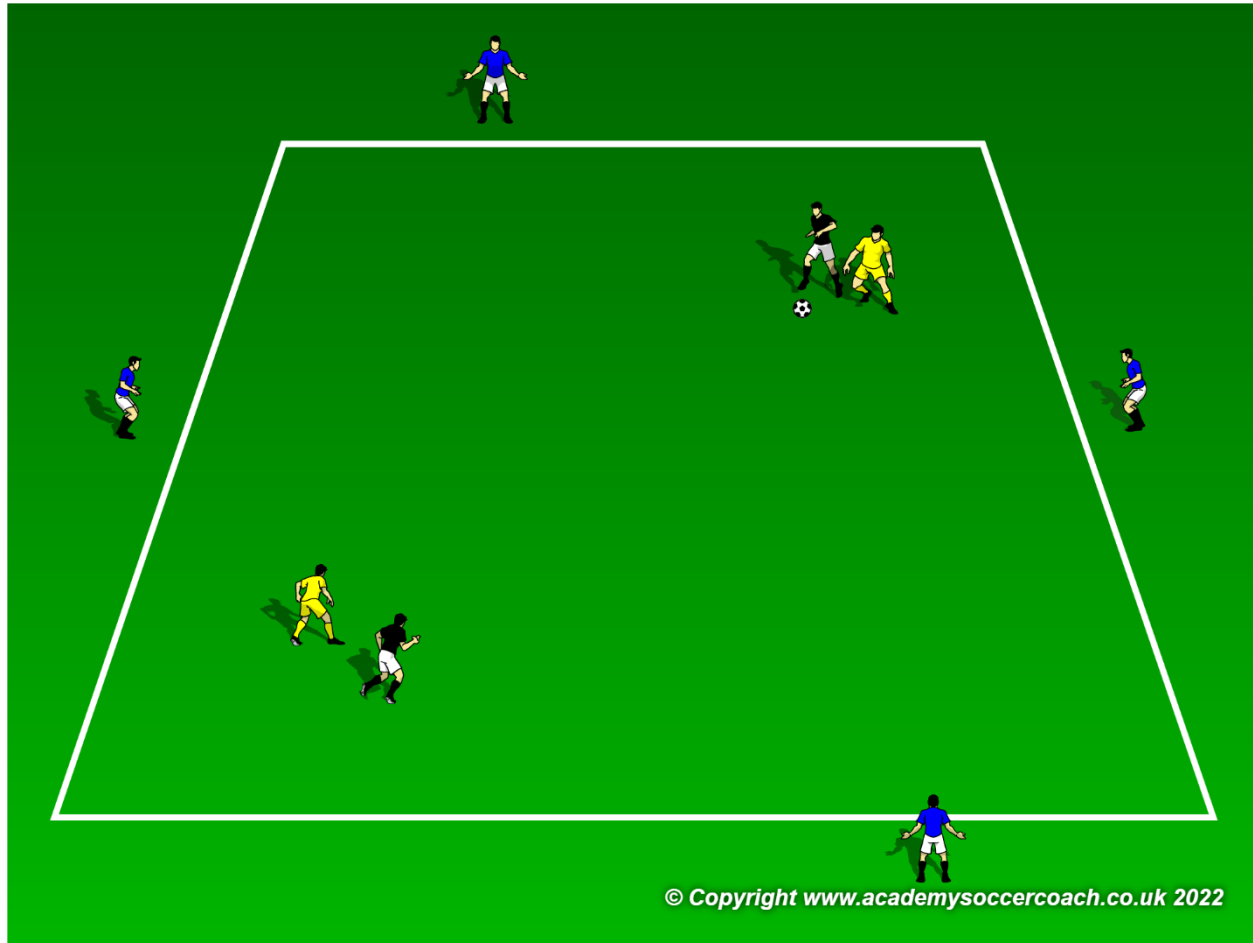
Regressing a little bit to the 5v2 structure, on this one we split the group into one neutral player and three pairs. While two pairs + neutral keep possession, the third pair play as defenders trying to force mistakes or win the ball. The pair to kick it out or lose possession transitions to defense.

Players are free to move anywhere in the grid but encourage them to get a smart shape such as one player near each outside line and the neutral free to move in the middle for example.



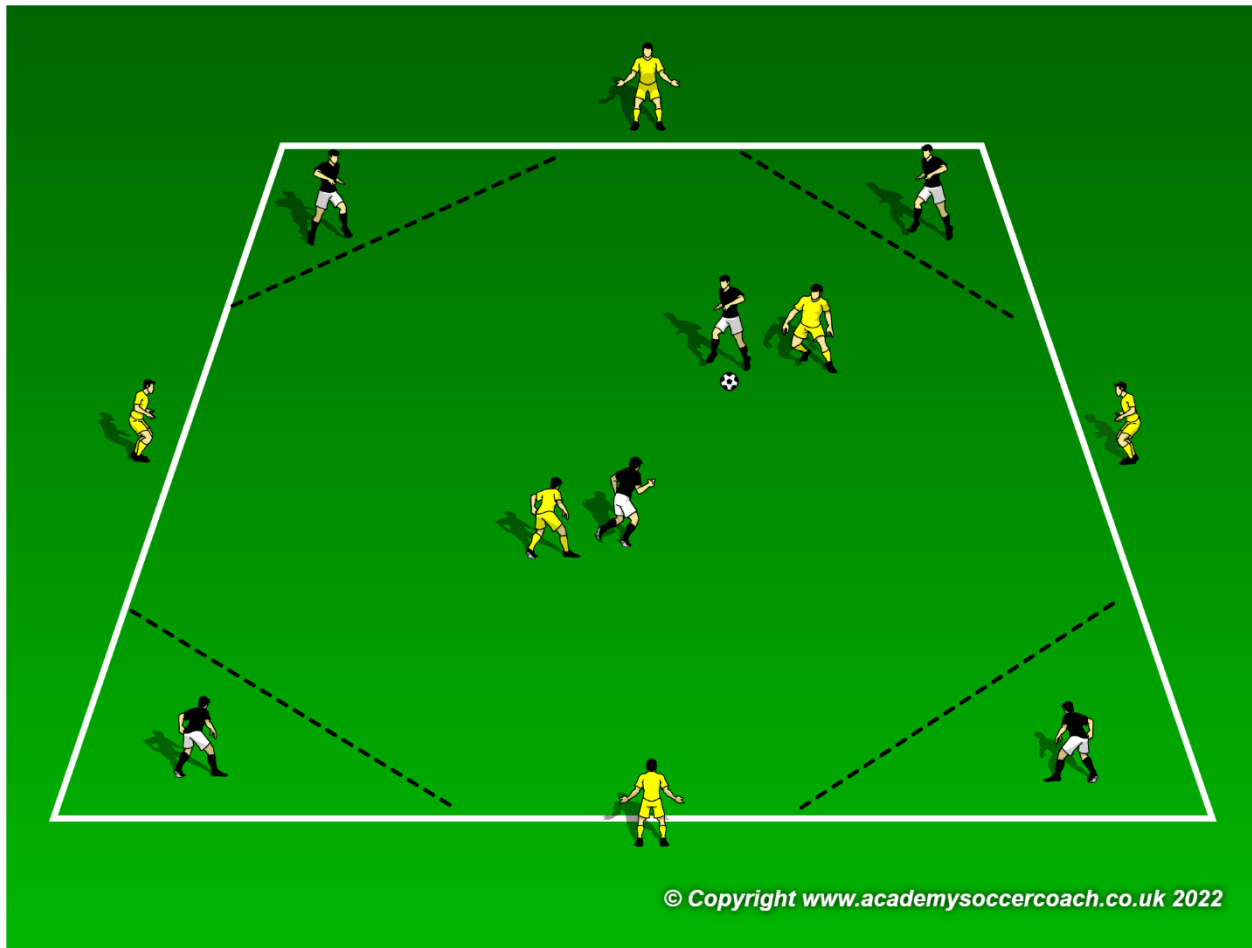
## Activity 18

In a group of 8 players, have four of them playing as neutrals at the outside of the grid, one covering each line. Have the other four players split into teams of two. The rondo is played on a 2v2+4 structure.



## Activity 19

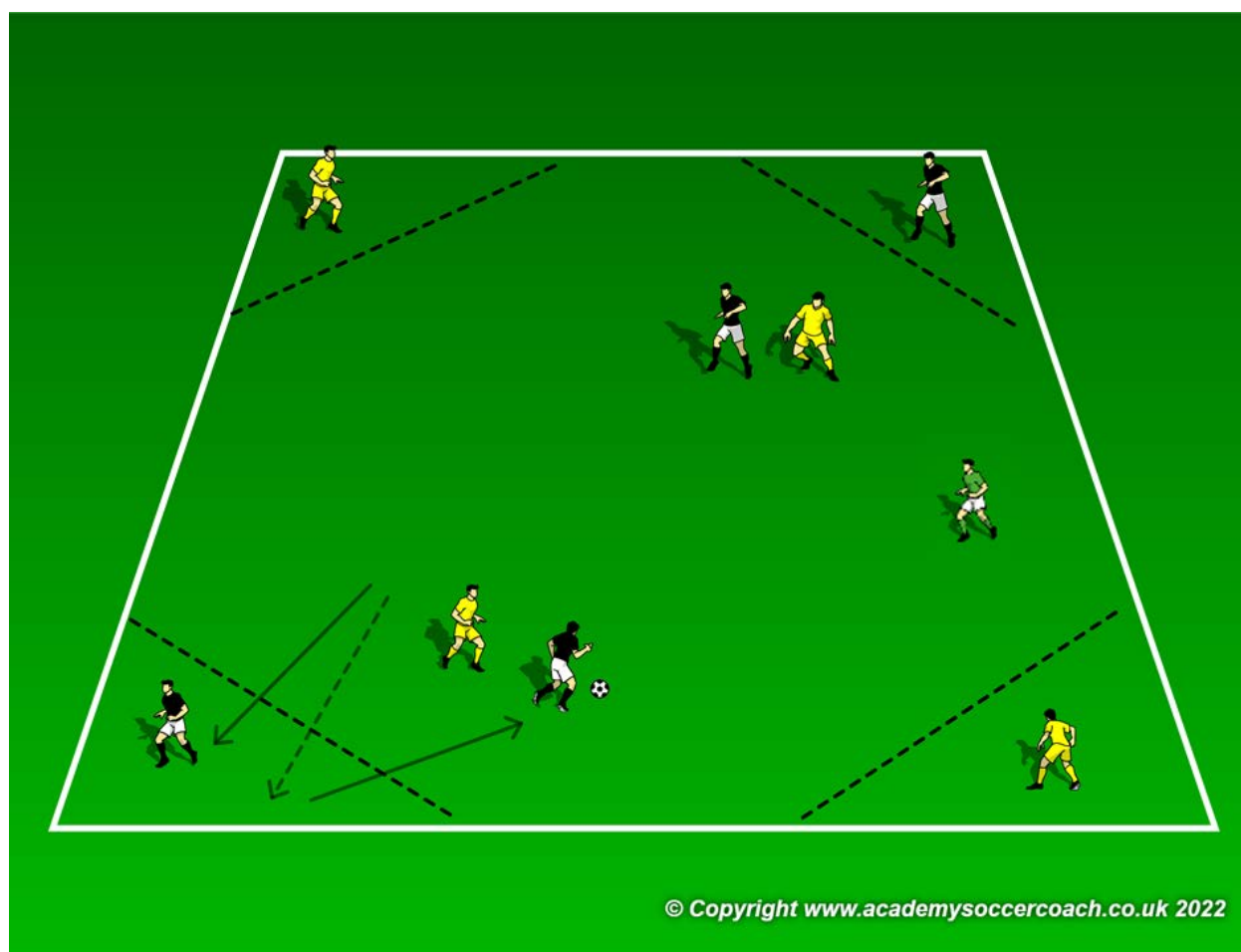
In two teams of six players each, this game is played in a 6v2(+4) structure where both teams have two players each in the middle of the grid and four players on the outside as support players. One of the teams have them on a diamond shape and the other team have them on a square shape as shown in the diagram.



## Activity 20

On this 4v4+1 possession game the goal is to pass the ball to the teammate in the set areas and swap positions with them to score points as shown in the diagram below. Two players are free in the middle of the grid and the other two teammates are positioned in the set areas, not allowed to leave the area unless when they receive a pass. You can stimulate the guided receiving skill by setting a rule that player in the set area must take a first touch directing the ball off the area.

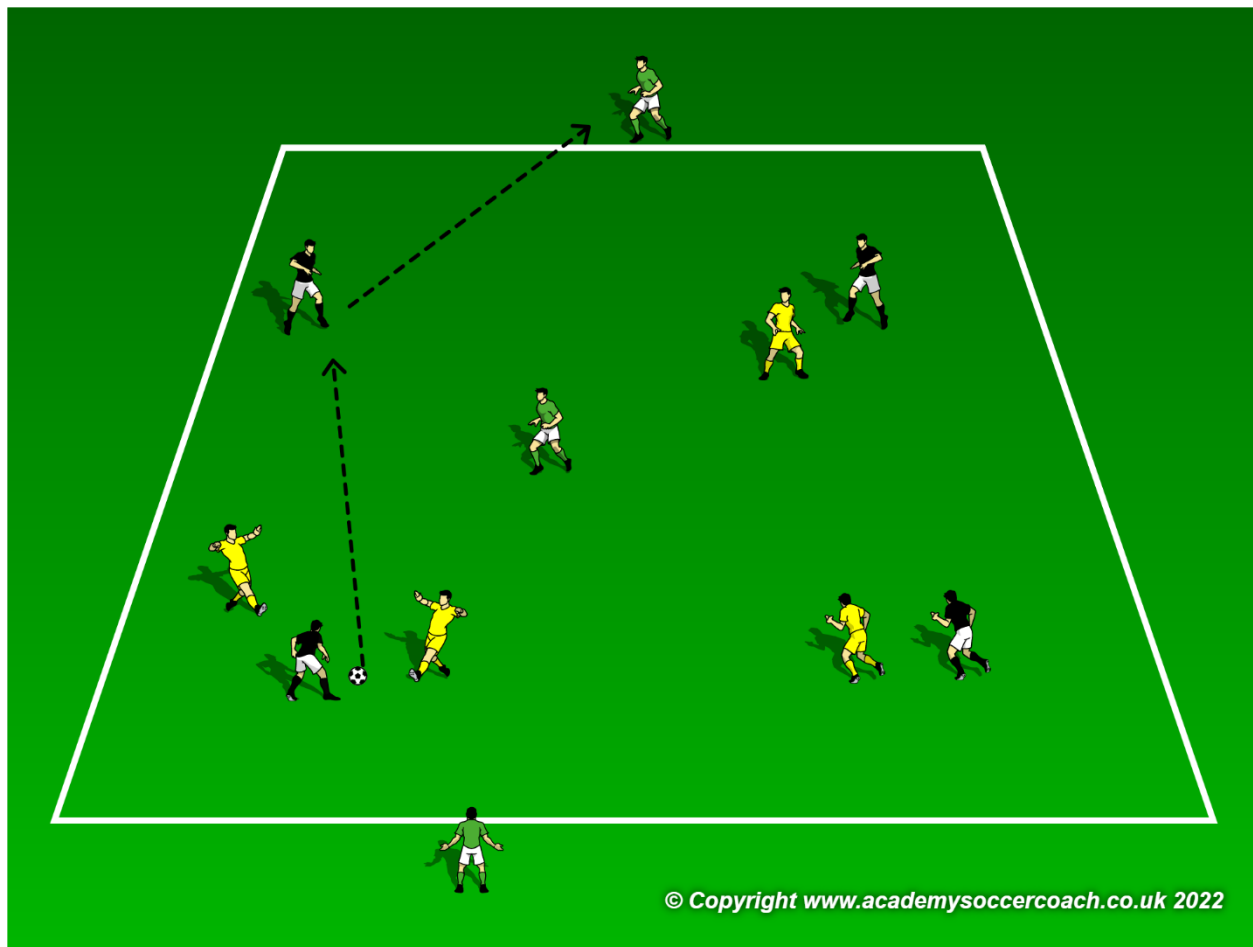
Obviously when the neutral player is the one to pass the ball to one of the support players, the receiving player won't swap positions with the neutral. They must connect a pass to retain possession and stay in their area.



## Activity 21

This is a very well-known rondo for the Guardiola's fans. In this 4v4+3, we have two teams of four on the inside of the grid with three neutrals positioned in a straight line with one playing in the middle and the other two playing each in a different edge of the grid.

In the diagram you can see the black team keeping the ball away from the yellow team by passing it to one of the neutrals.



On this last part of the book, we are going to introduce rondos to work on possession in specific formations (4-3-3, 4-2-3-1, 4-1-4-1 etc.) as rondos can sometimes look like random games that might seem hard to transfer its concepts to a real game situation.

These rondos demand higher ability and tactical knowledge as well as soccer awareness and game understanding. Not saying that you can't use them with groups of less ability, tactical knowledge, awareness and game understanding but if you do use them, expect a lot of mistakes and confusion from the start. It all comes with time, experience, feedback and repetitions. Be patient, be present, intervene whenever called for!

A few explanations in advance for all the following rondos:

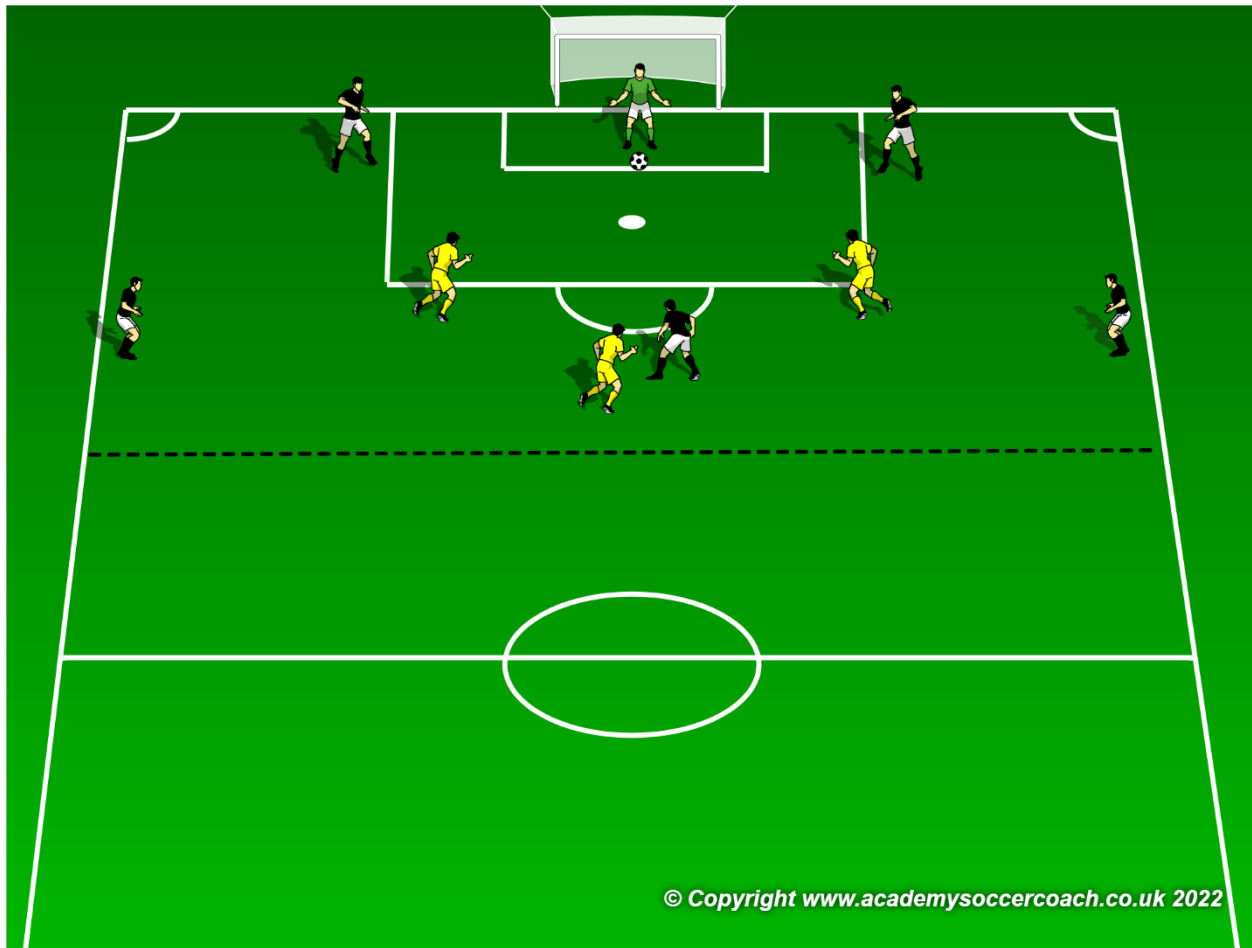
- The 1<sup>st</sup> goal is to get players used to keep possession. The 2<sup>nd</sup> goal is to move the ball forward. The 3<sup>rd</sup> goal is to create goal attempts. Start easy and simple according to your group. As the goal is easily achieved, increase the complexity, making it harder and more complex.
- The rondos will be introduced as a keep away game most of the times. They can all be adapted to points to be scored, mini-goals and/or targets can be added etc.

## Rondos to work on specific formations

### Activity 22

This one is played in a GK+5v3 to work on building from the back in a structure that is common to the 4-3-3 and 4-1-4-1. As you can see in the diagram below, the formation is:

GK, Right and Left Center backs on the side of the box, Left and Right Full backs open wide by the sideline and the Center Defensive Mid in front of the box.



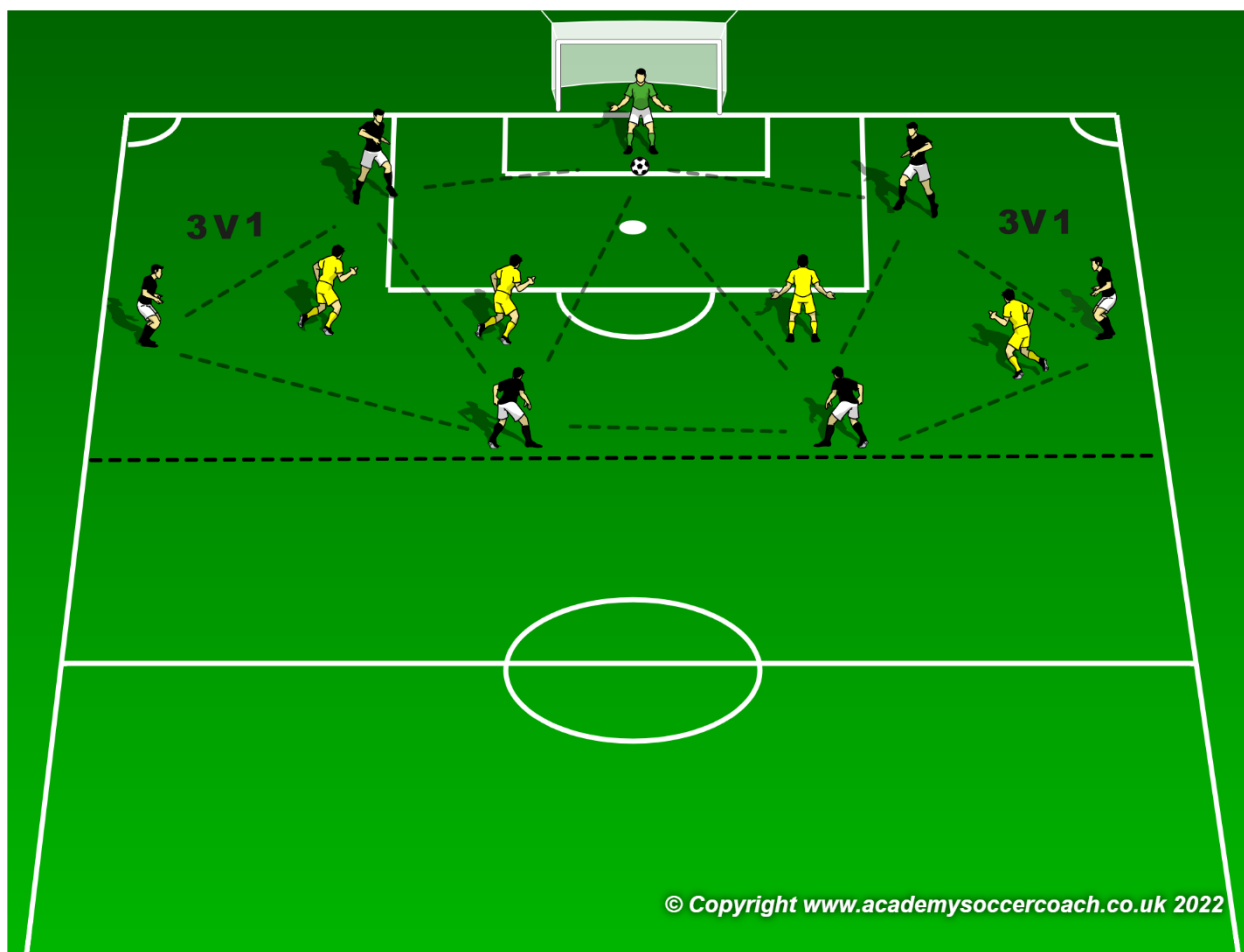


## Activity 23

Just a slight change from the previous activity. This one is played on a GK+6v4 in a formation very much used in a 4-2-3-1 mainly to build from the back against teams who press high up the field.

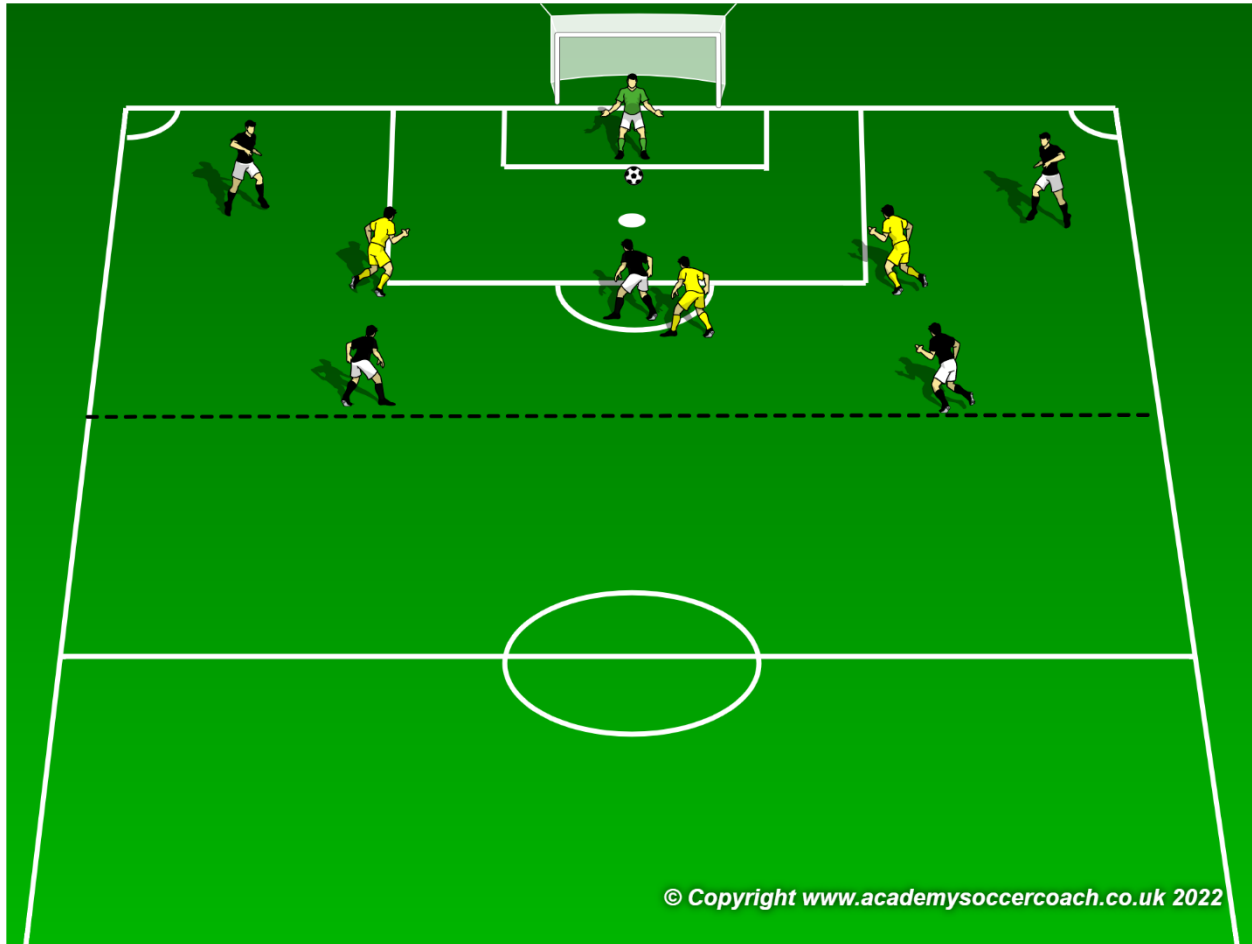
Another CDM is added and so another defender is added. See that now we've created a W shape with the GK+CBs+CDMs with the fullbacks on width. This gives us another connection in the middle.

Notice how the connections are created in triangles which most of the times gives the player in possession the option to progress or the option to circulate the ball.



## Activity 24

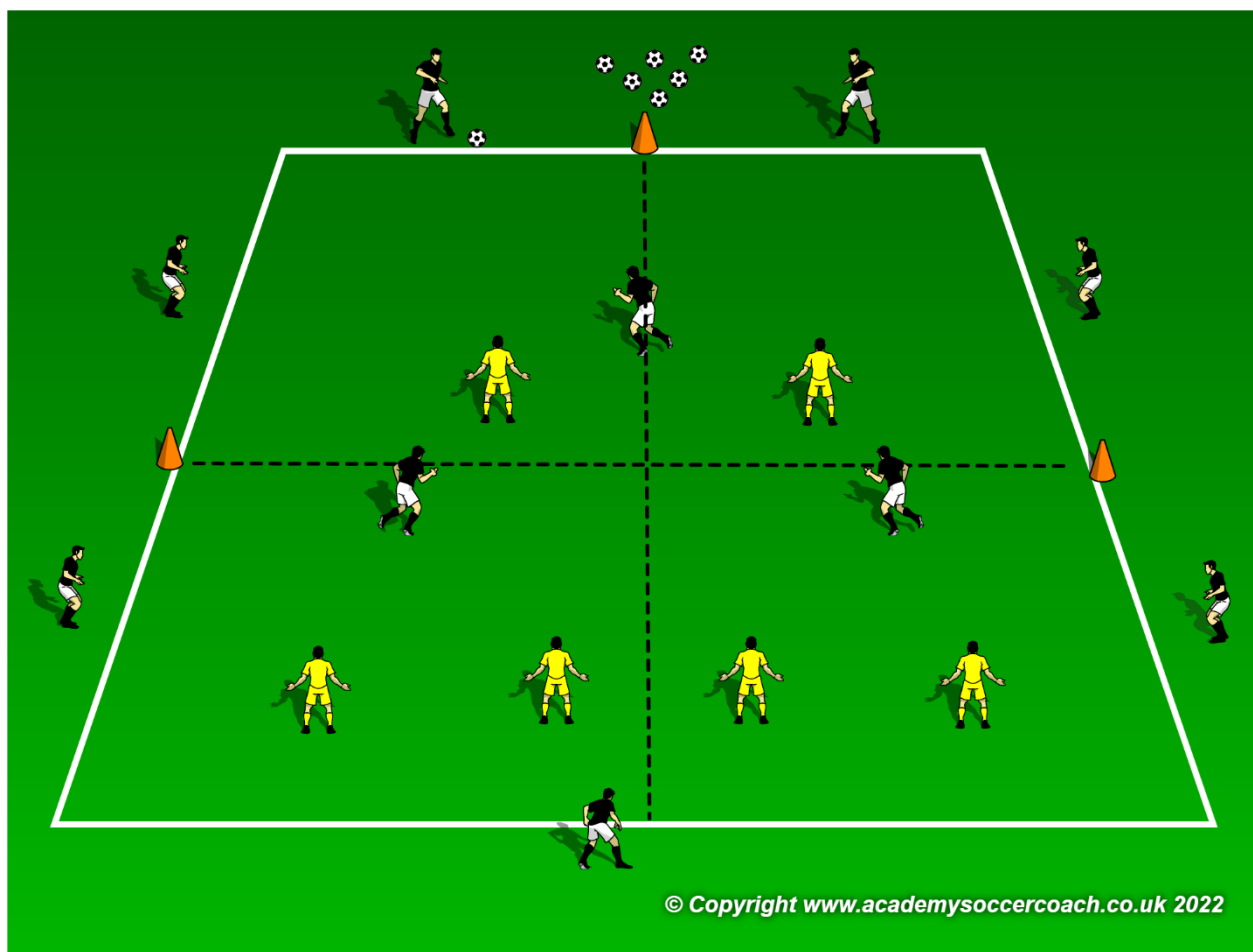
On this one, we are focusing on teams playing with a back three (3 center backs) or teams that have the CDM drop in between the CBs, making a momentaneous back three with two Center Mids getting open to receive the ball from the building third to the creation third (mid third). This one is for teams who look into pushing fullbacks/wing backs forward so they join the attack, overload on the final third.



## Activity 25

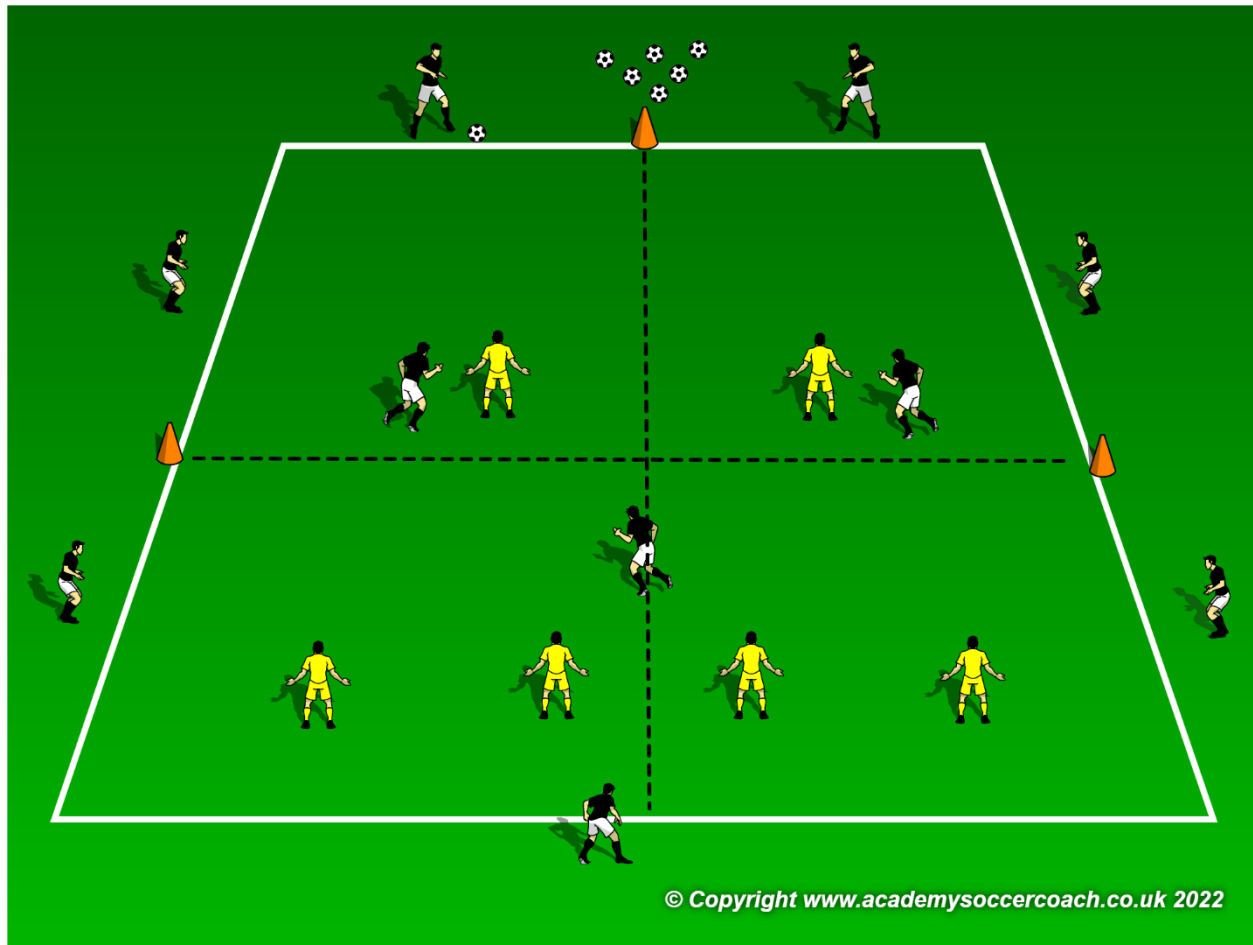
This is a 10v6 rondo to work on the general shape in a 4-1-4-1 or 4-3-3 with one CDM and two CMs. The ball always starts from one of the two CBs (on top) and the goal is to make the ball get all the way to the striker (on the bottom).

See that the area is split in order to set each player in their area. The CDM and CMs are free to move but instructed to stay most of the time near their appointed lines of action. The striker is free to move right and left in their bottom line. The CBs, FBs and wingers have a more limited area of action that goes from their respective corner to the orange cone on their lines.



## Activity 26

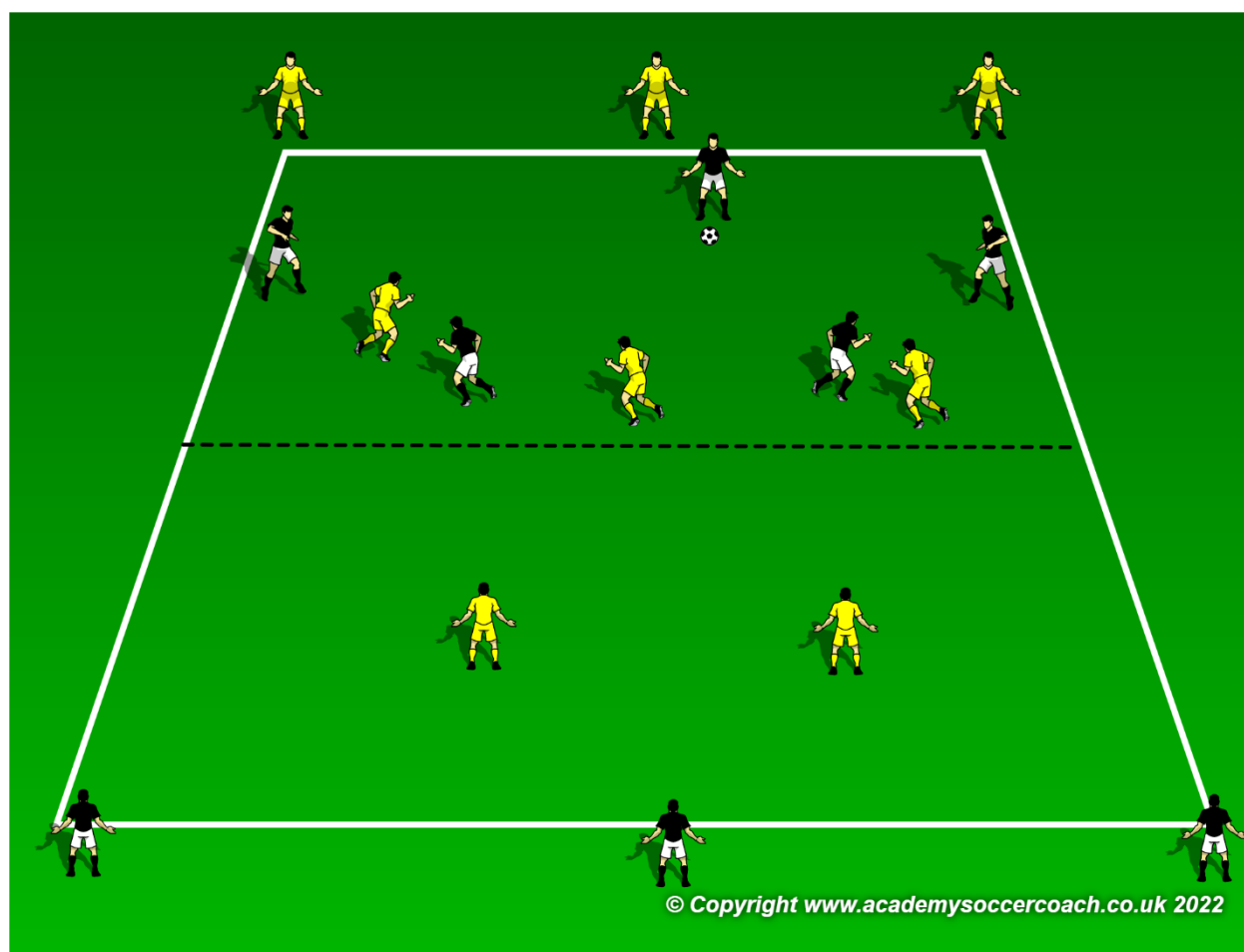
A slight change of the midfielders' position and now the rondo is proper for teams playing in a 4-2-3-1 or a 4-3-3 with two CDMs and one CM or CAM (center attacking mid).



## Activity 27

Split the group into two teams of eight players each. Each team is going to have five players on one half and the other three players at the opposite end line. Those are going to be the target players. When in possession play a 5v3 to keep possession for six passes on their own half. After completing six passes they must connect a pass with one of their three target players to score.

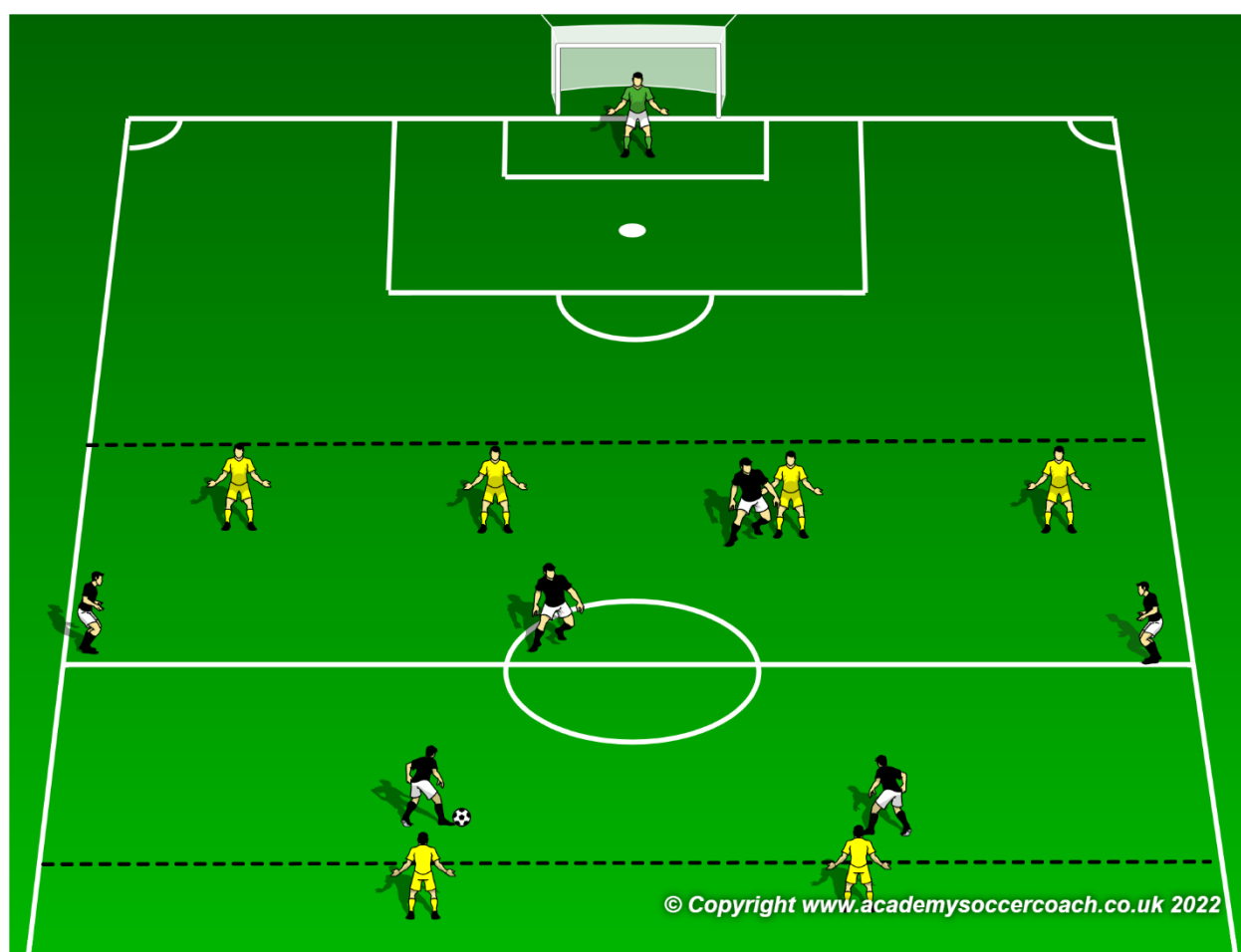
The formation in possession is something like a back three, two center mids and the target players represent the front three. So I guess we can say that we are only missing the fullbacks/wing backs of a 3-4-3 formation in possession.



## Activity 28

On this 6v4(+2) played in the middle third, the attacking team aims to achieve six passes before trying to break through the line and score in the goal. The defending team tries to keep them from completing the passes and breaking through the line to score as well as winning the ball and connecting a pass with the target players so they can attack.

As you can see in the diagram, the attacking formation looks like a 2-3-1 (CDMs- Wingers and CAM-FW) but it can also be a 4-2 with two CMs + two side mids or wing backs + 2 forwards.

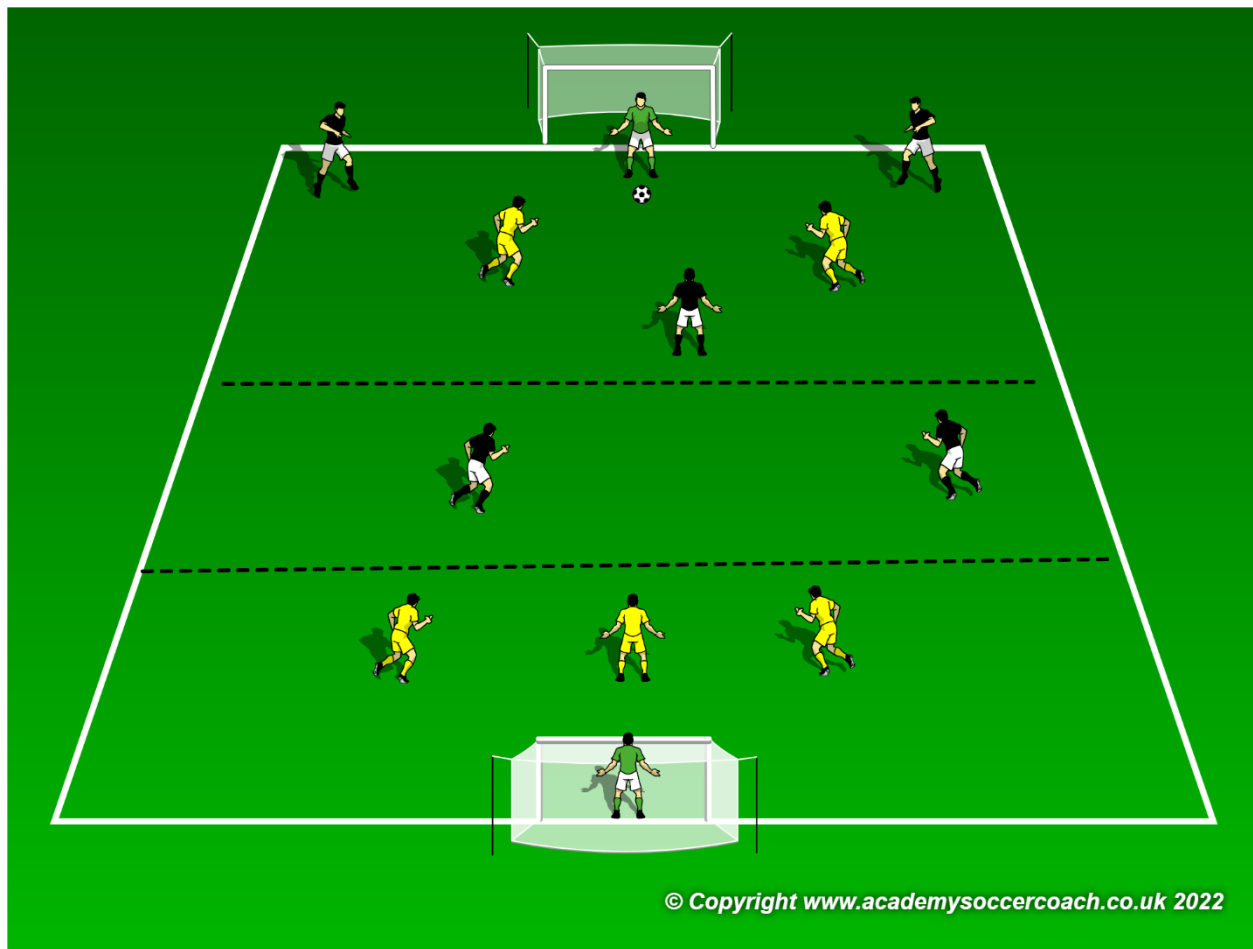


## Activity 29

Once again, we come to a building from the back game but this time stimulating progression and shot from distance. Play in two teams of GK+5

When in possession, teams play a GK+3v2 in their defending zone to make six passes in a row. As they achieve it, break into the middle zone, where opponents are not allowed in, and take a shot on goal as soon as possible.

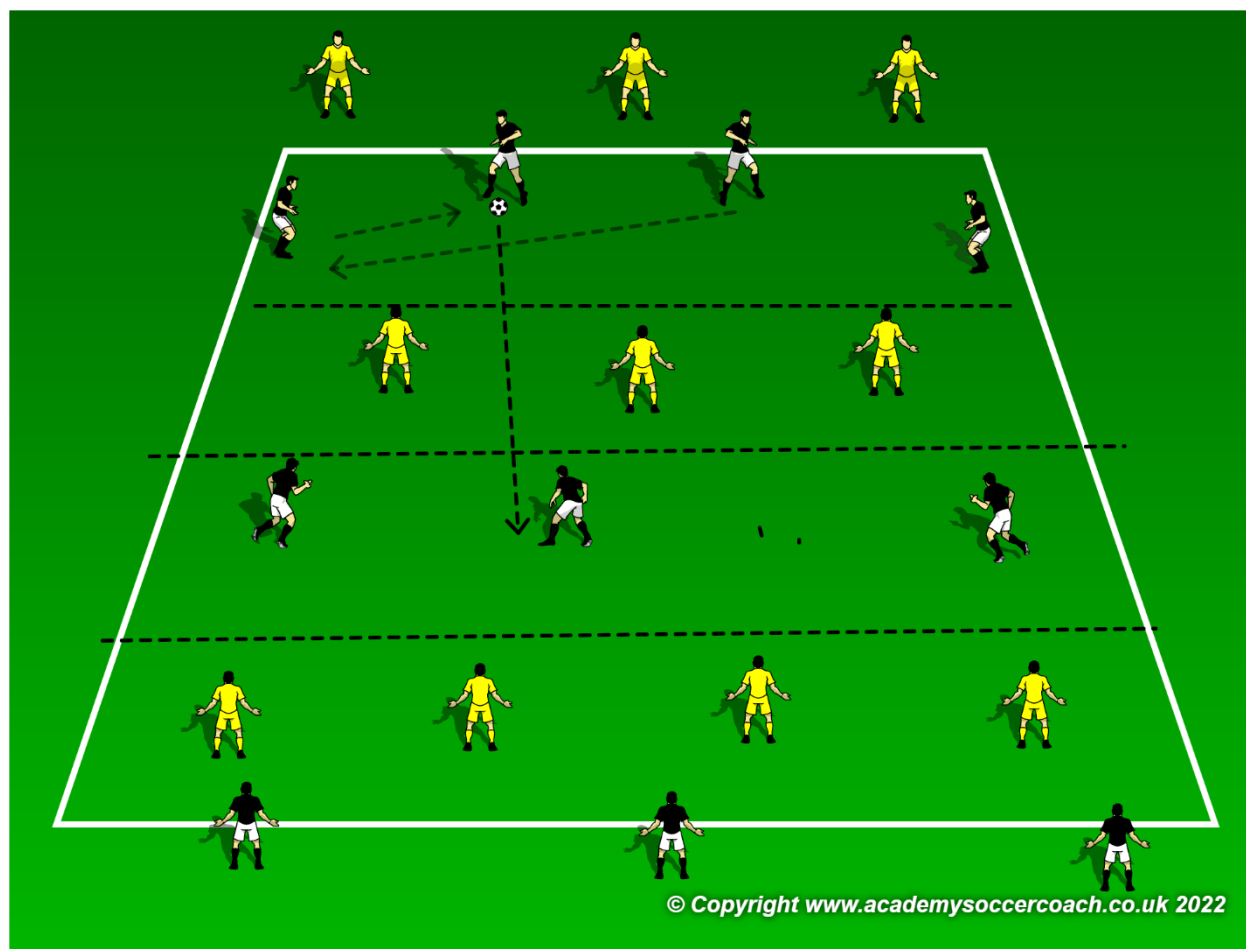
This game is great to get your teams to improve their building from the back with a diamond GK-CBs-CDM plus get your midfielders to take shots and check the rebound. Also good to get your players to understand when to dribble into space or when to pass in between the defensive lines. This definitely works for any formation you can think of.



### Activity 30

In this sectorial rondo, both teams are split in a 4-3-3 formation. Game is played with a one touch limit and the goal is to get the ball from the back four up to the middle three and then finally to the front three to score.

At first play with players stuck in their zones to get the idea of pass through defensive lines. As players develop a better understanding, increase the complexity and difficulty with one defender being allowed to come in the ball zone, or player on the ball being allowed to dribble to next zone if space was created etc.





## SUMMARY

I sincerely hope you not only liked the content but also apply it into your team sessions. Adapt it as needed, increase, or decrease the complexity, intensity... make it your own!

Possession is a theme that allows coaches to create countless activities + variations + progressions so I tried to bring stuff that will add value to your daily coaching as well as open your mind to create your own activities to meet the needs of your players and teams.

These activities have been applied to many different teams in a bunch of varied contexts and realities. From U-9 to U-17 and adults, male and female teams, advanced and intermediate players.

This is not intended to be the only true and a certain recipe, but it was thought and designed to help coaches and teams to improve not only for games but, also for fun and/or for better soccer awareness. No matter the outcome on score boards, I'm sure all the parts are going to take advantage of all benefits that this rich material will bring to their lives.

The author truly hopes that you find relevant content, effective, useful and realistic activities, dynamic and challenging stuff for players that will make them want to repeat it over and over again!