

WATFORD
Malky Mackay
Midfield magic

Overview:

This session links midfield interplay with supporting strikers and other forward-minded players. This progressive attacking style is based around core principles of retaining possession and getting the midfield to move freely. It gets midfielders to link up play and support forwards.

We're always telling players that possession is so vital, but so too is the transition that allows the team to execute counter-attacking moves.

We practice this at least once or twice a week and are frequently seeing the results come off in matches. It paid dividends in our first game of the new power Championship season away at Norwich City, when Danny Graham received a pass from Marvin Sordell and burst through the centre of the park to score. It was a great example of measured midfield support play. And even on weeks where we don't see it played out in a matchday scenario, it's a great move for general fitness, sharpening of technique and tactical awareness.

MIDFIELD MAGIC: MAIN SESSION

SETUP

AREA

Over half pitch size

EQUIPMENT

Goal, balls

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 13

6 defenders
6 attackers
1 goalkeeper

What do I get the players to do?

Create a 25x25 yard square around the centre spot and play 5v5 in this area. We look for three (or more) completed passes before the ball is moved out of the zone. Once that pass is made, the team have eight seconds to score a goal. To support, use one forward and one defender starting in the D on the 18 yard box.

Either one or two players can break to support the forward, but if two go (thus creating a 3v1 situation), I encourage one of the forwards to go wide, while the other stays central. Players must remain onside at all times.

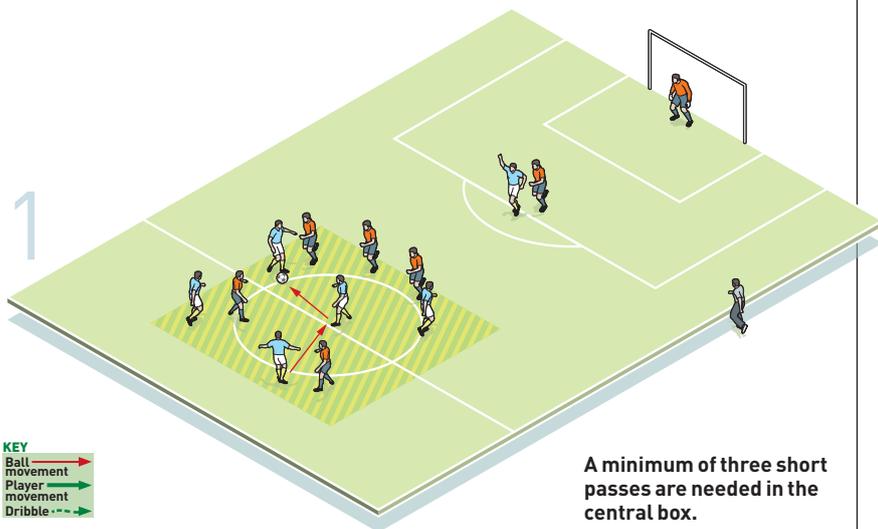
If the team scores, they jog back to the centre. If they miss, they must sprint back.

Such is the flexibility of this session, it can be tweaked to involve any number of players.

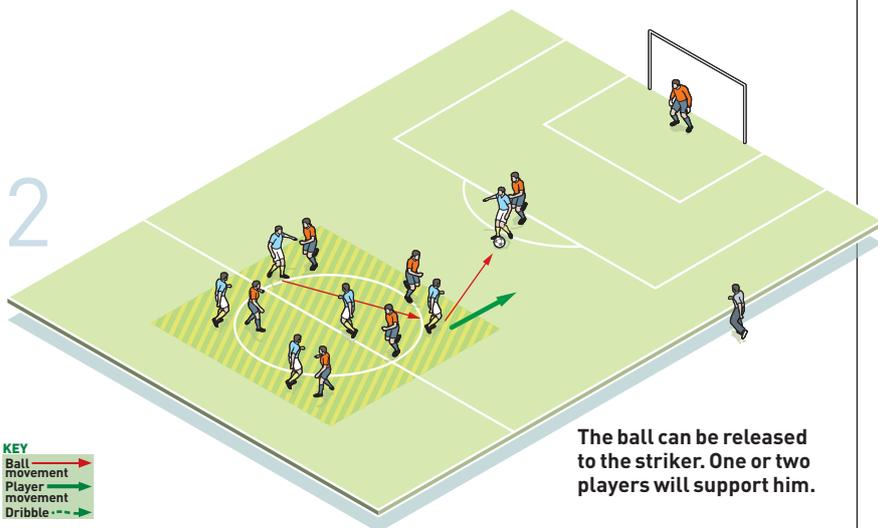
Do this for 4x4 minutes, with one minute recovery in between.

What are the key things to look out for technically/tactically?

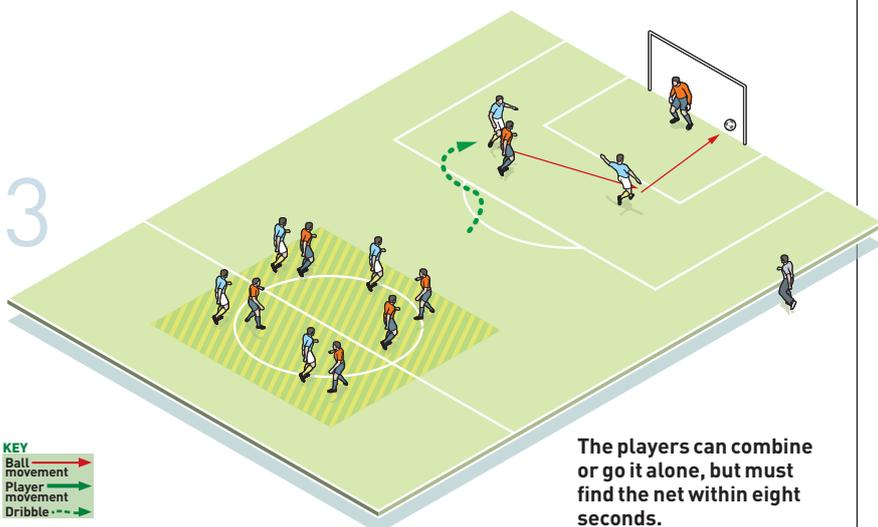
Initially, we're keeping an eye on possession in the central box, awareness of players,



A minimum of three short passes are needed in the central box.



The ball can be released to the striker. One or two players will support him.



The players can combine or go it alone, but must find the net within eight seconds.



Malky Mackay

WATFORD

Watford manager Malky Mackay personifies all of the battling spirit that will be expected of his Watford side this season as they aim for a competitive year in the npower Championship.

But in the form of the 38-year-old, they appear well equipped to do so. After all, Mackay knows the Championship well - three times he was promoted from the division as a player, on the third attempt achieving his ambition of playing in the Premier League.

Having starred for Queens Park and Celtic in his native Scotland - winning five international caps in the process - Mackay moved south of the border in 1998, enjoying six successful years at Norwich City, before moving on to West Ham United and Norwich City.

After hanging up his boots, he worked as a number two to Aidy Boothroyd and Brendan Rodgers at Watford, before being appointed as first-team manager - an appointment described by Sir Alex Ferguson as "a great choice"

MIDFIELD MAGIC: PROGRESSION

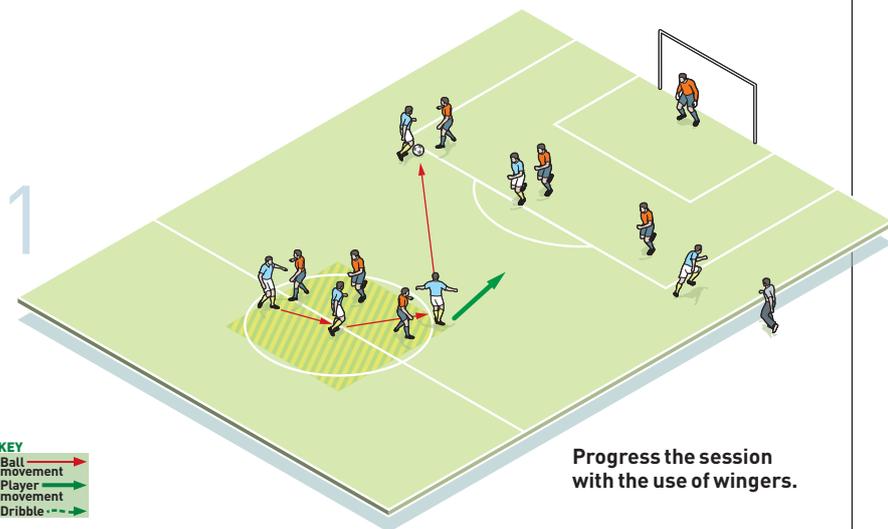
and quality of passing. In addition, check that players are going forward at the right moment. We'll also focus on the quality of forward runs, intelligence and patience in waiting for an opening, plus communication between players.

How do I progress the session?

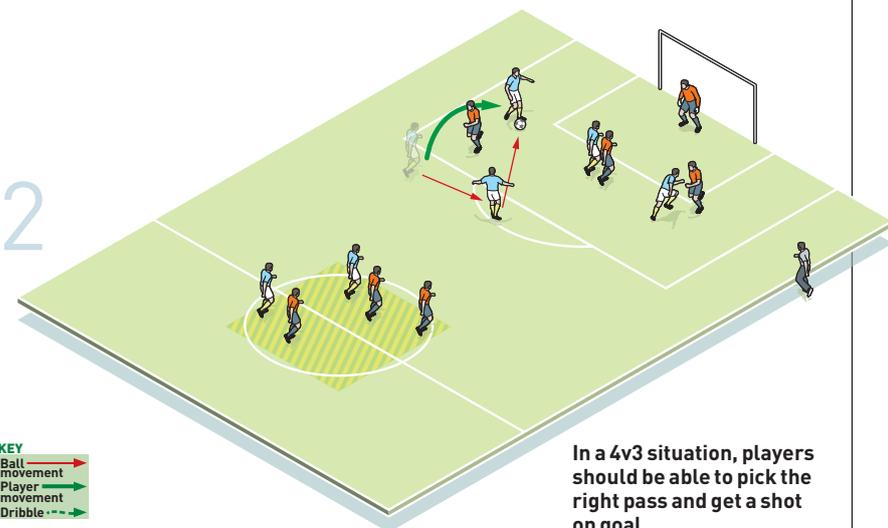
Tighten the central area (to 15x15 yards), or use two extra forwards outside the box as wingers and two extra defenders as full-backs. Only one of the three players can support the attack, so creating a 4v3 situation. Players in the central starting box now have the option of passing to either winger or the centre-forward.

How would you put this into a game situation?

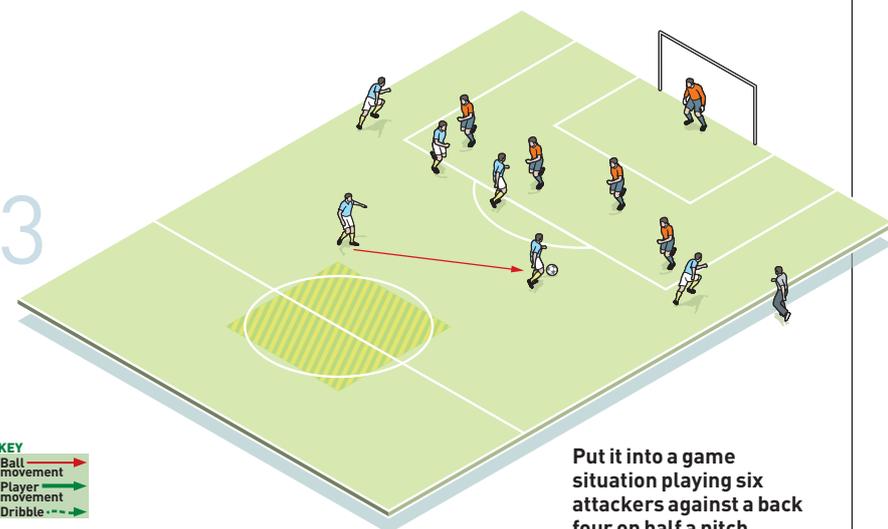
In a 10-minute small-sided game situation, we would remove the box, play half pitch and add in a back four, playing attack versus defence with an overload of forward players (6v4).



Progress the session with the use of wingers.



In a 4v3 situation, players should be able to pick the right pass and get a shot on goal.



Put it into a game situation playing six attackers against a back four on half a pitch.

“This session can be tweaked to involve any number of players.”