

CARDIFF CITY

Malky Mackay
Striker combinations and link play

Overview:

This session is about striker combinations and link-up play in the final third. It's important to practise these because we're frequently asked in matches to break down the backlines of teams who defend deep.

We saw this practice pay off to great effect in this year's Carling Cup final against Liverpool at Wembley, when excellent movement and quick, positive passing enabled Joe Mason to fire home the game's opening goal.

"Strikers must use different combinations, communicate well, and ensure good body shape."

STRIKER COMBINATIONS AND LINK PLAY

SET-UP

AREA

Up to full pitch (narrowed)

EQUIPMENT

Balls, cones, goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

Up to 16

SESSION TIME

Warm-up 10mins,
game practice 15mins,
small-sided game 20mins

What do I get the players to do?

Link play warm-up

We start in a 30x15-yard area, as shown. A plays to B, as C comes towards the ball. B passes to D, then A and B run down their respective wings (1a). As D receives the ball, C spins and receives a cushioned lay-off from him, feeding A down the wing (1b). We now repeat the drill from the opposite end.

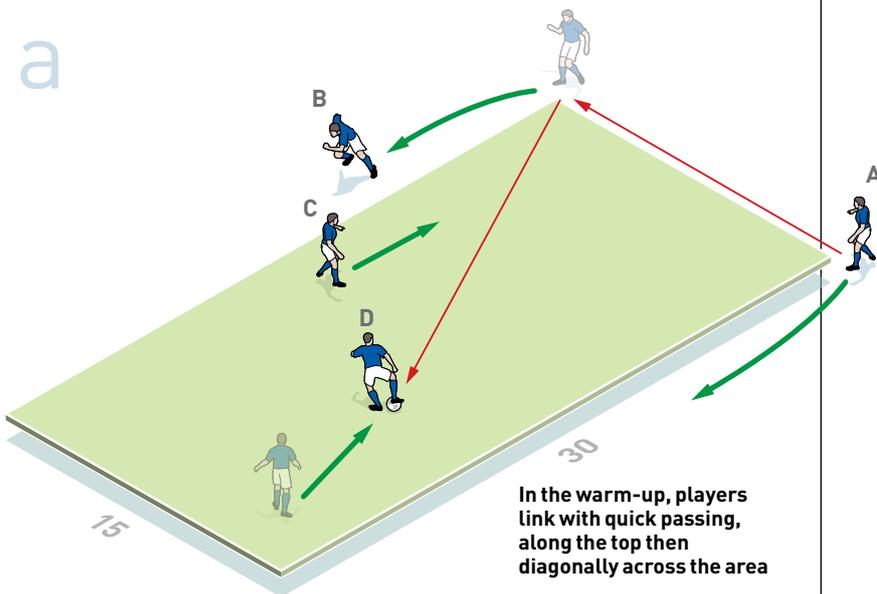
What are the key things to look out for?

Weight and accuracy of pass are the most important elements. In addition, C must approach the ball as if really wanting the pass, even though it's destined for D. And he must ensure he doesn't block the passing route to D. Finally, A and B must not run ahead of the ball. To progress, we make all players one-touch.

Link-play game practice

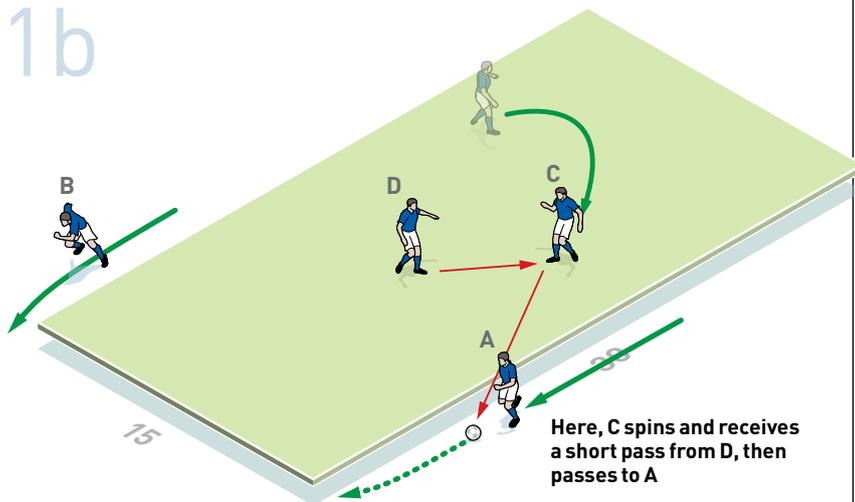
We set up as shown, with 3v3 in the central area, and two strikers in the next zone. Once

1a



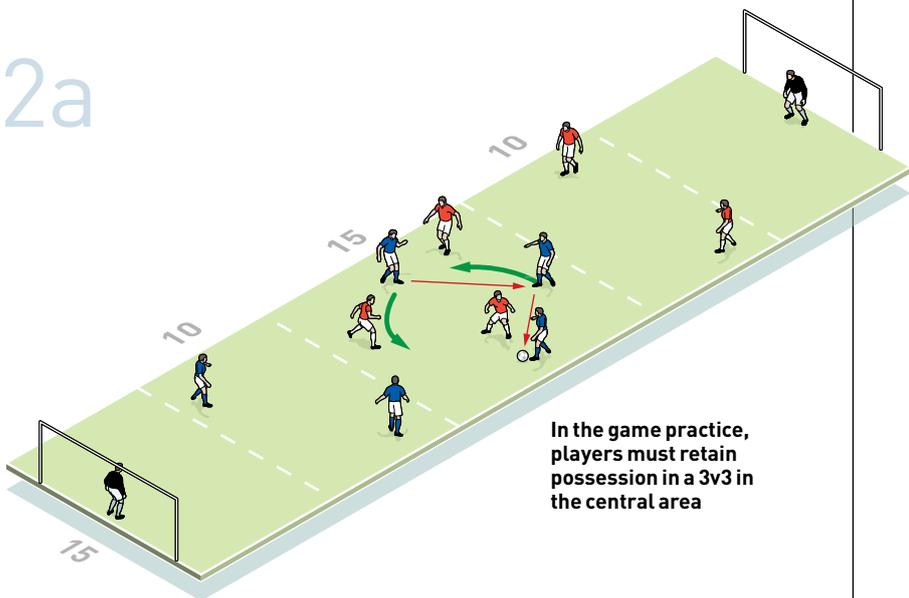
In the warm-up, players link with quick passing, along the top then diagonally across the area

1b



Here, C spins and receives a short pass from D, then passes to A

2a



In the game practice, players must retain possession in a 3v3 in the central area

KEY
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble →



**Malky Mackay
CARDIFF CITY**

Malky Mackay was announced as manager of Cardiff City in June 2011. In his first season in charge, he earned the south Wales club a play-off spot in the npower Championship despite having to rebuild the squad from scratch. The Bluebirds lost out to West Ham United over two legs, but the 40-year-old's first year in charge has been regarded as a great success with the club playing a brand of elegant, attacking football.

He had previously taken charge at Watford, securing the club's Championship status on limited resources.

As a player, Mackay, a centre-back, made his Scotland debut at the age of 32, and went on to earn five caps. In the club football, he turned out for Norwich City over 200 times, and also played for Queen's Park, Celtic, West Ham United and Watford.

STRIKER COMBINATIONS AND LINK PLAY

five passes have been made in the central area, the ball is played to the strikers who, two-touch, link and strike at goal (2a/2b).

What are the key things to look out for?

Strikers must use different combinations, communicate well and ensure good body shape when receiving the ball – e.g. on the half turn. To progress, we position a defender against the two strikers.

Small-sided game

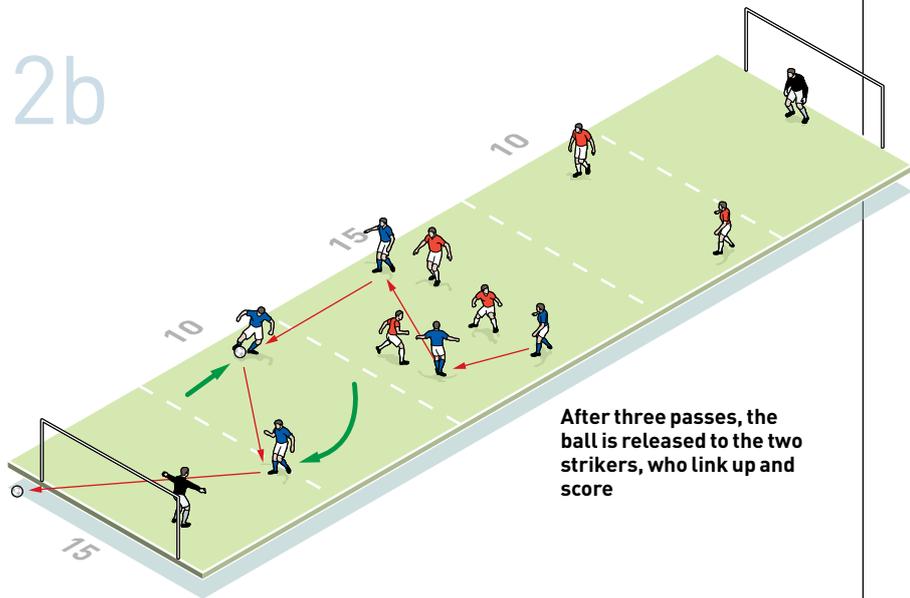
We set up as shown, an 8v8 zonal game – 4v4 free play in the central zone, 2v2 in the end zones. Strikers now have two defenders to contend with.

What are the key things to look out for?

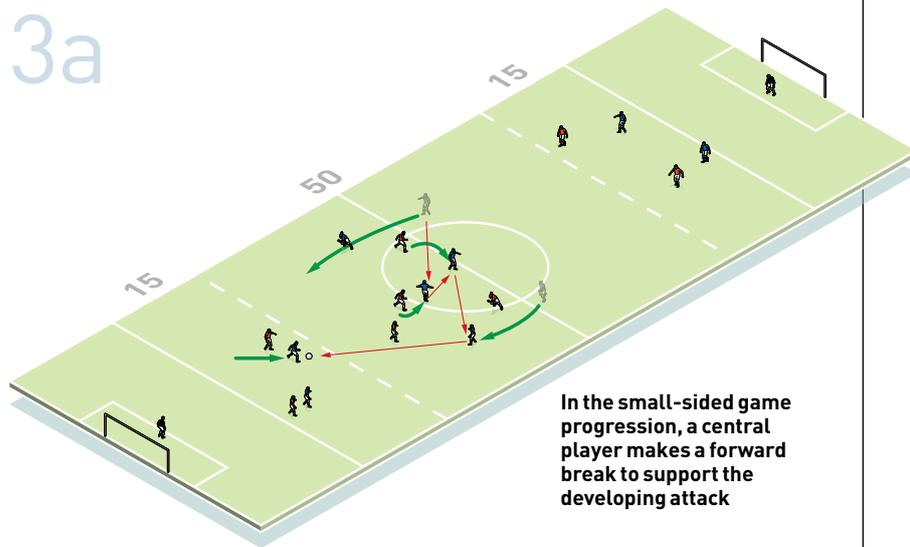
Strikers must work off defenders – coming short to go long, and long to come short – stretching their opponents without killing space. To progress, a player from the central zone can break forward to support (but not the player who released the ball) (3a/3b). We can also introduce a one-touch rule.

With each progressing game, players must use the skills learnt earlier in the session. ■

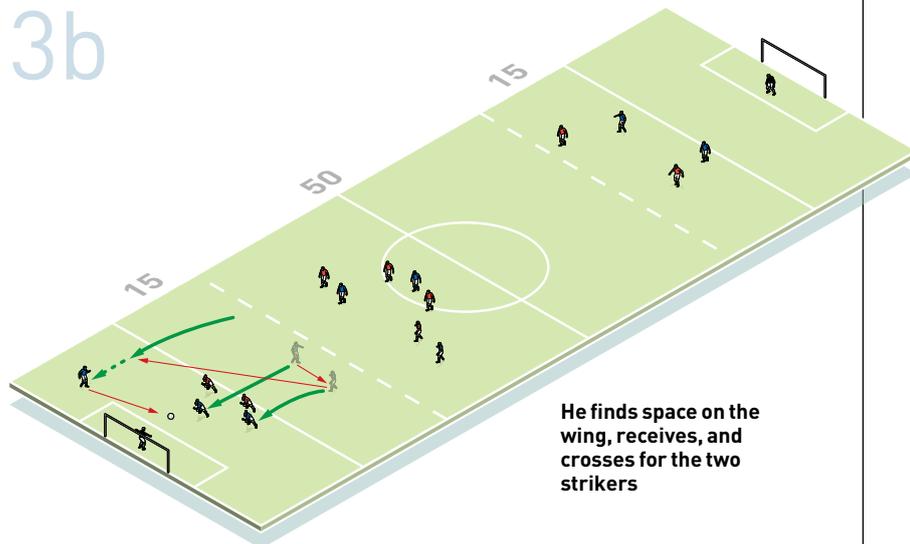
2b



3a



3b



KEY
Ball movement →
Player movement →
Dribble →