

LMA AMBASSADOR

**Stuart Pearce
Defending deep to
counter-attack**

Overview:

This session looks at defending in your own half in order to counter-attack the opposition in an 11v11 practice.

The importance of counter-attacking football in the modern game is very prevalent, with aggressive turnover of possession and quick, incisive responses all essential in order to attack out-of-balance opposition sides.

The practice should be performed once a week, whereby we might also bring in smaller non-11v11 practices, especially leading into away fixtures when this footballing style will be most needed.

SET-UP
AREA Full pitch
EQUIPMENT Balls, cones, goals
NUMBER OF PLAYERS Up to 11v11
SESSION TIME 20-40mins

What do I get the players to do?

We set up on a full-size pitch, as shown (1), and play a normal game, but with the premise being on the Aggressive Engagement Area (AEA) – see below.

We want defenders to be set up no deeper than the edge of the box. This is how deep we would be willing to go in order to create space in the opponents' half. At the other end, the striker would be just inside the opposition half and ready to break.

There are a few different ways we can start the practice – by feeding the ball into the attacking centre-half 10 yards inside

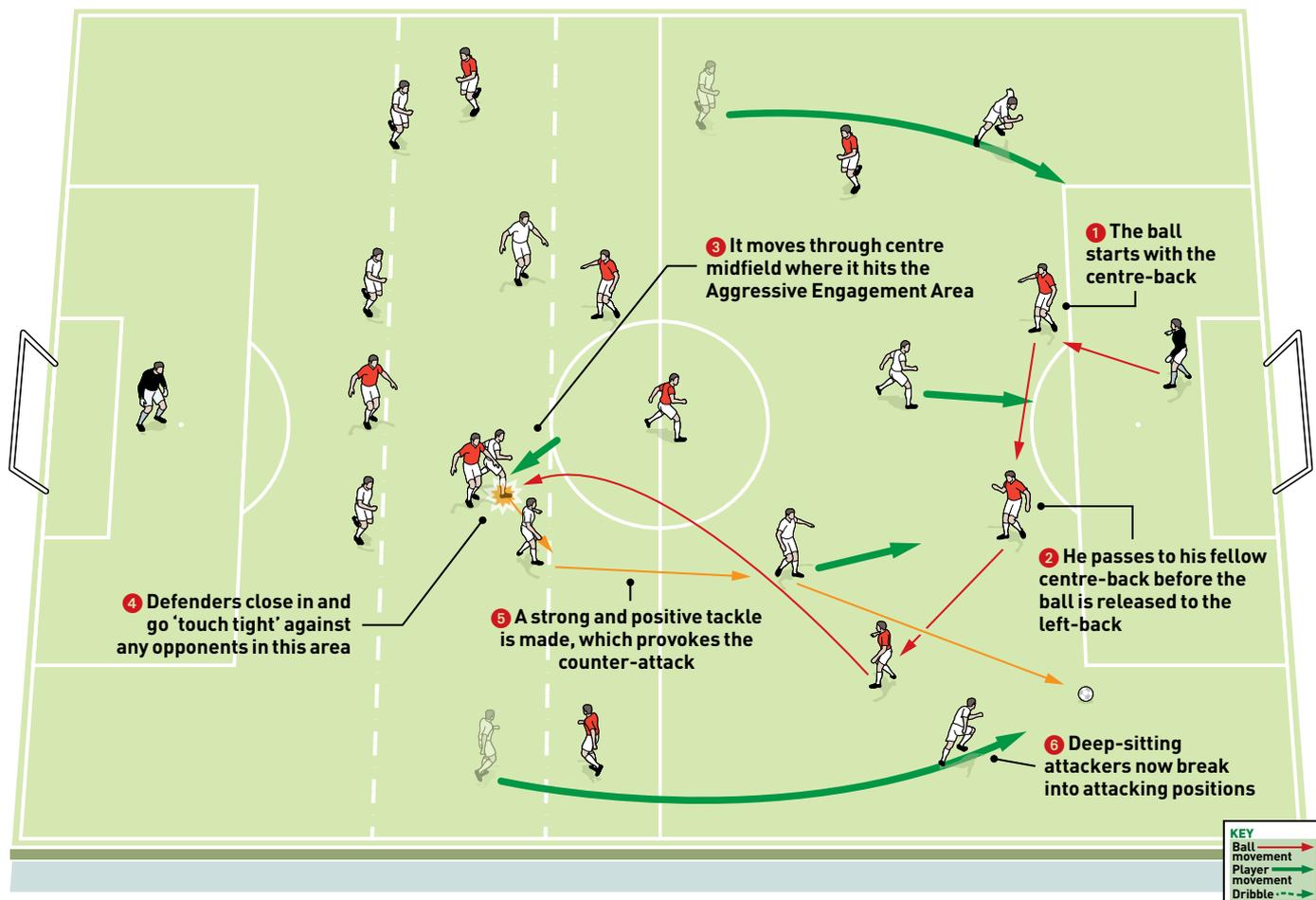
his own half and, as he transfers the ball across the pitch, taking that time to coach the defensive team on their shape as they shuffle across the pitch. Alternatively we can start from a goal kick, or I might feed the ball into a midfield player with the attacking players in the defensive team ahead of the ball, therefore requiring recovery runs so that players get back into position.

What is key though is to let the attacking side play as they would in a game, whilst coaching the defensive unit on their shape, from back to front and side to side.

Aggressive engagement area

This area is pivotal to counter-attacking, the session itself and so many of our playing principles. It is coned off 10 yards from the edge of the box, across the full width of the pitch, until approximately 15 yards from the centre circle. Whenever the ball is played into this part of the pitch there should be a defensive overload, with the defending team aggressive in their pursuit of winning possession. Players are constantly reminded – it's no good dropping off if you're not prepared to press the ball and defend in this area. So every

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time the ball is received here, a defending player should be 'touch tight' (similar to what you'd see in basketball) and ready to make a tackle as the ball arrives.

If the ball is on one side of the pitch, I want to see the opposite winger retreat to a defensive position but also one that will enable him to receive the ball and counter-attack if necessary (2).

What are the key things to look out for?

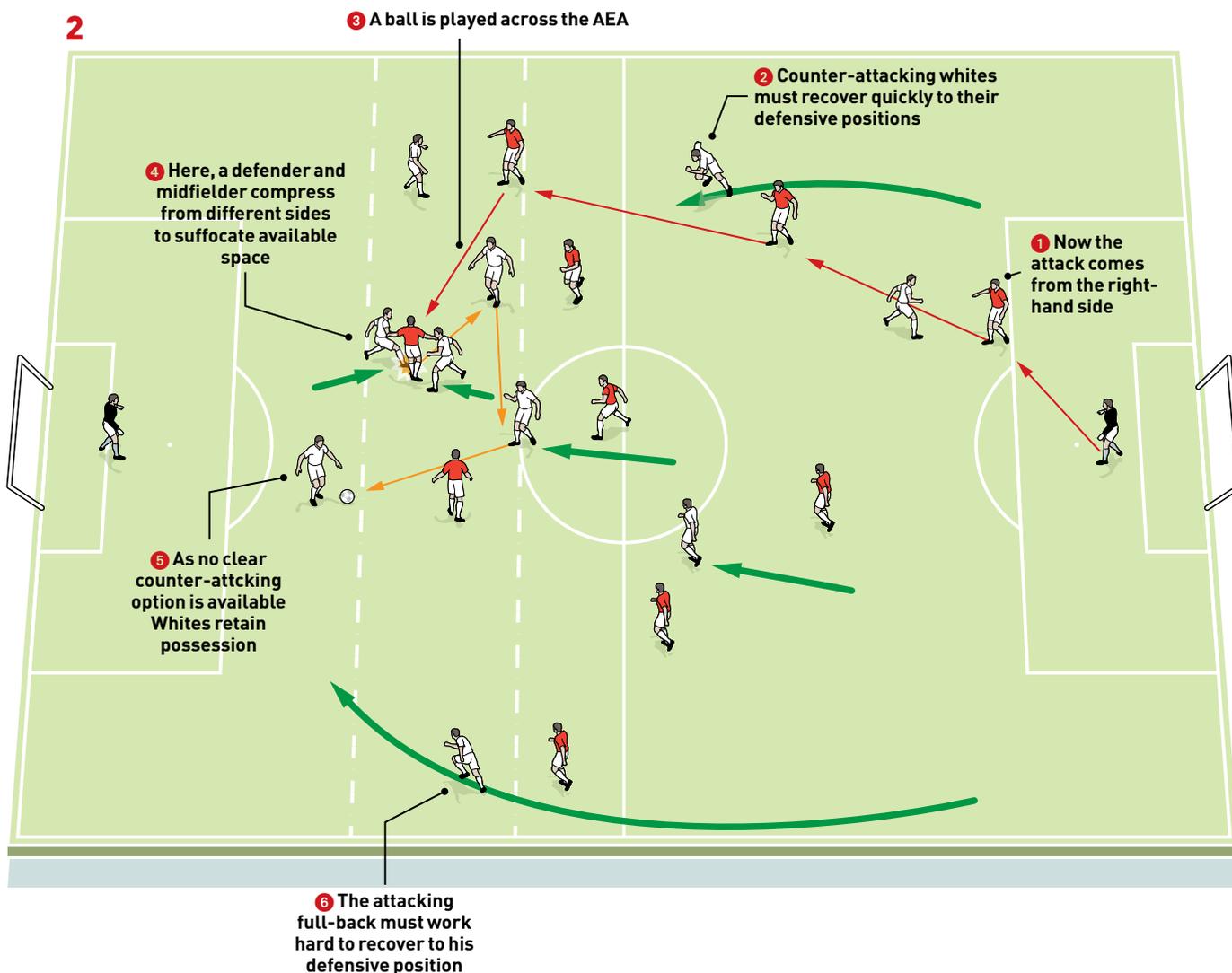
While players will develop specific instructions and aims within the context of protecting this key area, there are a number of technical and tactical ambitions to be accomplished in order to fully maximise each counter-attacking phase of play. These

include the depth of the team to start the practice, who engages, when and where, plus the compactness of the team and use of the AEA, of course. We also want to see every player aware of his role in creating good movement angles and runs so that the counter-attack has available outlets from the point of the turnover. Players must quickly identify when and where to deliver a pass on the counter-attack.

Typical mistakes

The most common mistake is getting into a compact shape but fail to press aggressively. We may also see players defending too high or too deep, and there can be a temptation to rush a pass on turnover of possession.

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players must 'read the game', anticipating a situation before it has come about. In reality, this is something that can only be learned over time but players who cannot foresee situations will typically produce actions that lead to counter-attacks being slowed or failing completely.

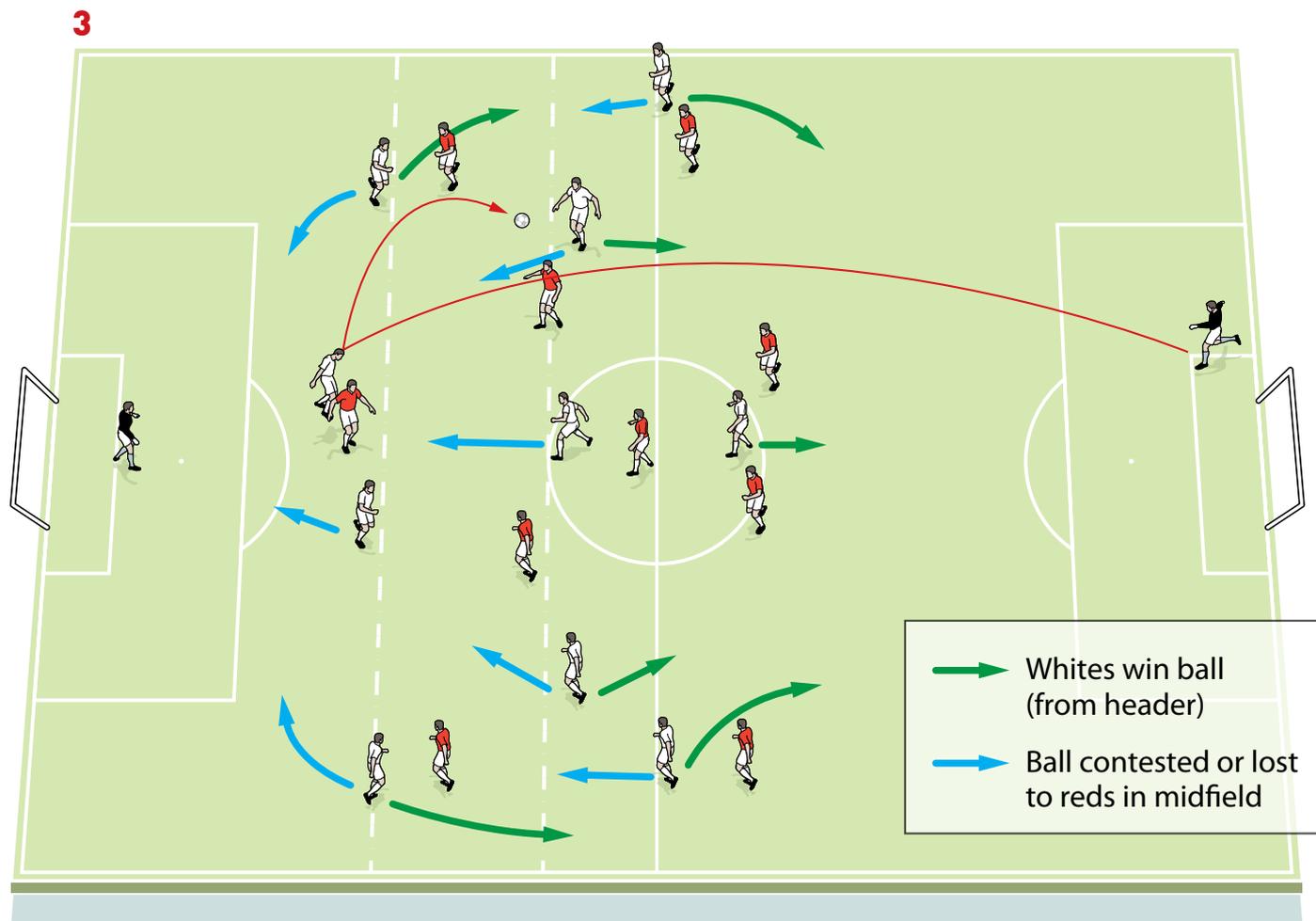
How do I progress the session?

A key progression is individual instruction and encouragement for each player and the team duties as a whole, but we can look to put in place a more advanced press higher up the pitch. This would see us on the front foot

and enforcing an earlier counter rather than letting play come onto us. We can also bring about different types of attacks - such as a long ball forward - to ensure we still get the right reaction (3).

We might also break down the team units to add focus and detail, taking each group in isolation in order to work on the finer technical and tactical elements. From this we can bring in established position-specific techniques for certain players (for instance, a winger's use of stepovers or a no.10's skill at playing with his back to goal).

"We must get supporting counter-attacking players into the opposition area quickly and there should be nothing held back by key men making it into these goalscoring positions."



Possible player-specific actions from a long ball forward (i.e. a goal kick)

KEY
 Ball movement → (Red arrow)
 Player movement → (Green arrow)
 Dribble → (Dotted Green arrow)