

CAMBRIDGE UNITED

**Colin Calderwood
Developing
combination play**

SET-UP

AREA

Up to 60x40 yards

EQUIPMENT

Balls, bibs, cones, poles,
2 full size goals

NUMBER OF PLAYERS

18 players + 2 goalkeepers

SESSION TIME

Technical practice: 10mins
Possession practice: 20mins
9v9 + keepers: 20mins

Overview

This session is all about improving combination play in tight areas. It develops decision making when in possession of the ball and

helps players to reach a clear understanding of when to play through the opposition and when to play around them. It's a competitive and game-related session that the players enjoy. As the physical output from the players is limited by the size of the area and the low speeds being used, it is ideal for the first training session following a match.

What do I get the players to do?

Technical practice

We set up in a 24x24-yard square, coned off at the corners to leave an octagon-shaped training area. We're using 18 players, split into two teams of eight, plus two floaters. Each team has four players on the outside of the

octagon and four players on the inside, as shown [1]. The outside players have a ball each and they look to combine with their team mates on the inside. The two floaters are in the central area and they can support any inside player to make a combination.

What are the key things to look out for?

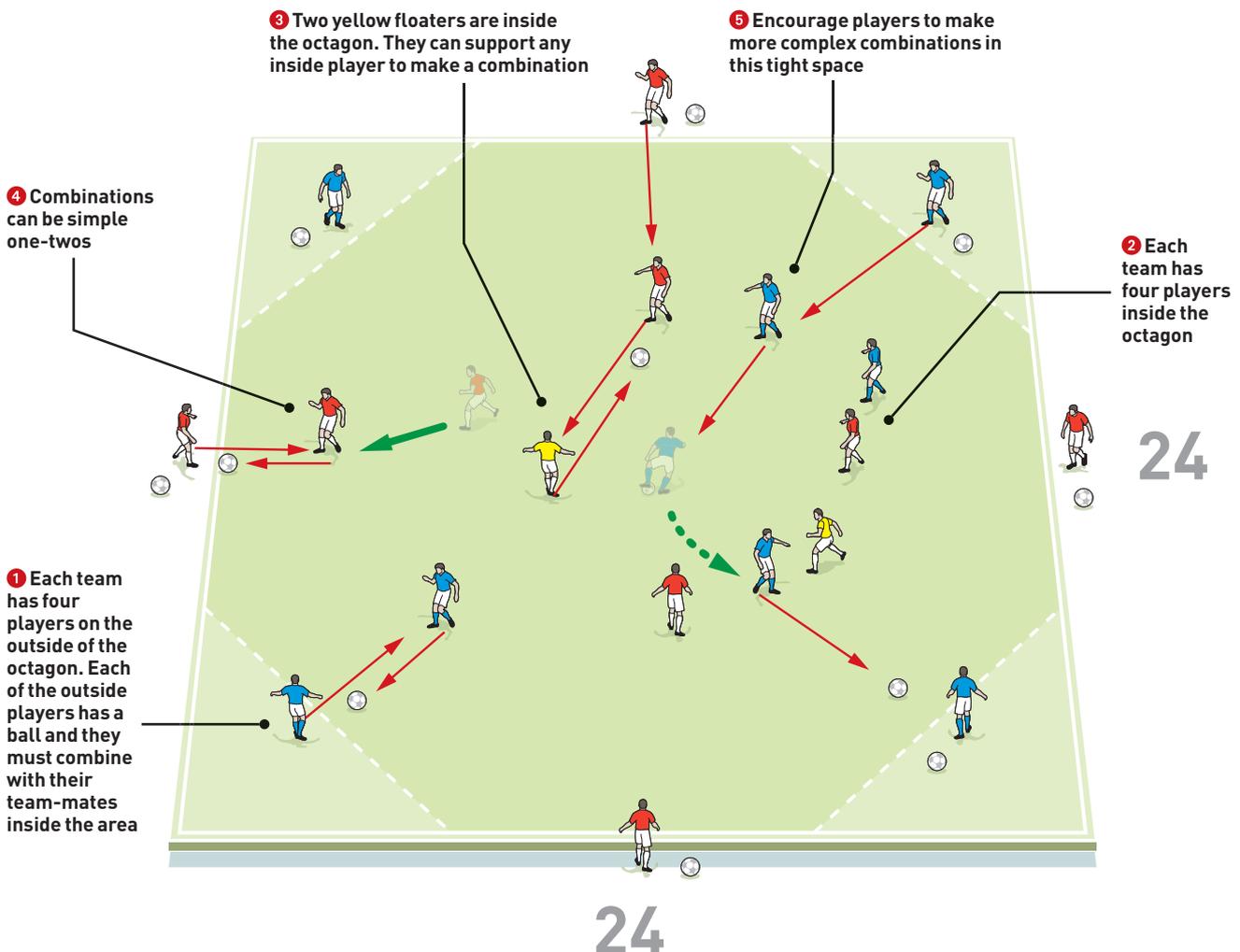
We want to see players making any of the following combinations:

- Play a one-two and then find another ball.
- Receive from the outside, turn and use various receiving skills, such as front foot, back foot, no touch turn, then play to a free player and find another ball.

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

1 TECHINCAL PRACTICE



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2 POSSESSION PRACTICE

24

KEY

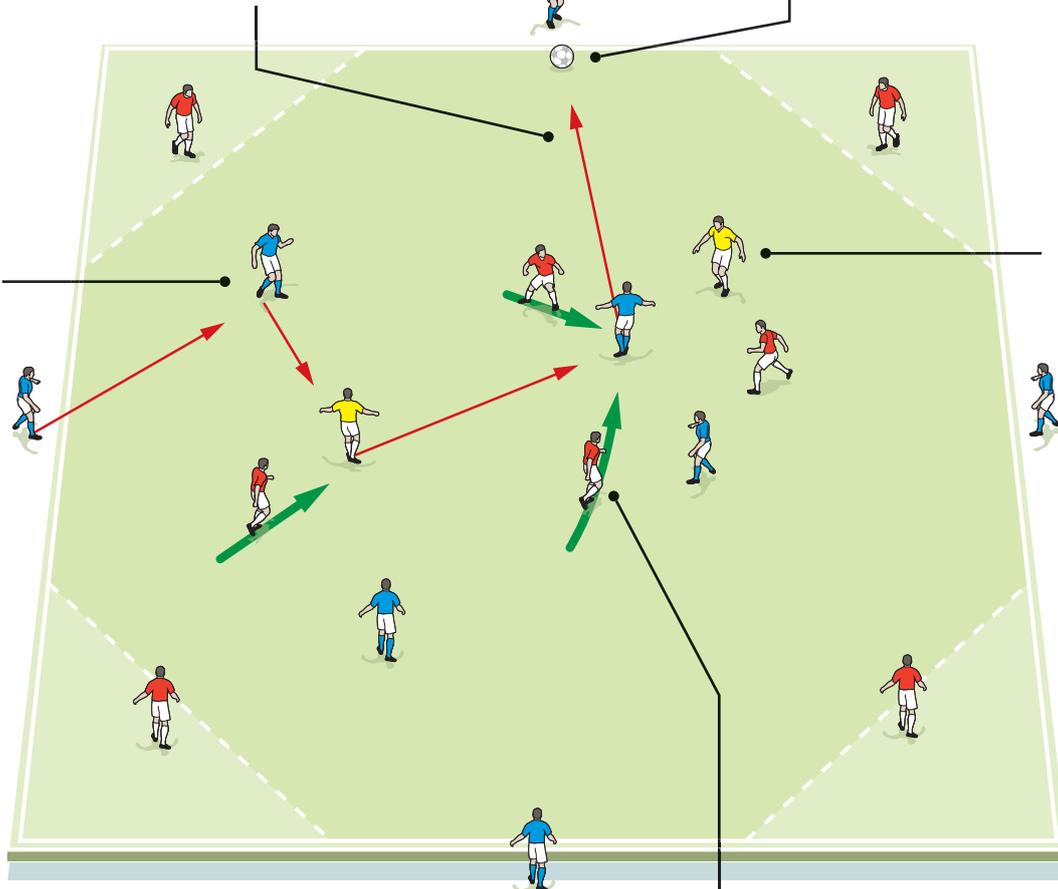
- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble →

3 The possession team can use team-mates on the outside to support, but a pass to an outside player is worth no points

1 Use the same set-up as before, but there is now just one ball in play

2 The possession team passes the ball under pressure. One point is scored for each completed pass in the central area

4 The yellow floaters play for the team in possession and are one-touch. They can link play centrally when required



5 If the pressers win the ball, they must transition quickly into the new passing team. The first team to 21 points wins

“This session is all about improving combination play in tight areas. It develops decision making when in possession”

- Receive from the outside, turn, play out and play the outside player in with a one-two. The player inside then goes to the outside.
- Receive from the outside, turn, play out and play the outside player in with a dribble to the outside. The player inside then goes to the outside.
- Receive from outside, turn, play out and overlap the outside player. Receive another pass from him before taking the ball and playing again with someone else.

What do I get the players to do next?

Possession practice

We use the same set up as in the previous practice but this time only one ball is in play and the team in possession must try to keep hold of the ball under pressure from the other team. They combine with each other inside and use their outside team-mates to help them keep the ball if necessary, as shown [2]. The two floaters can also support the team in possession but are limited

to one-touch link play centrally. If the pressing team wins the ball, they become the new passing team. Keep score using the pontoon system: each completed pass in the centre scores one point; each pass to the outside scores no points but possession is maintained – this will encourage players to make central combinations in the tighter spaces where possible, using the outside players only for safe controlled passes. The first team to 21 points wins.

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We play for 20 minutes, swapping outside players with the inside players every three minutes. We can progress the activity by conditioning the number of touches of the ball if needed.

What are the key things to look out for?

We want to see players using good receiving and protection skills in tight areas. They should play with their heads up, showing an awareness of

where the pressure is coming from and where the space is, making quick decisions about where to play the ball using one-twos and give and go's. Off the ball, players should make runs to create space.

What are the typical mistakes players might make and how do I avoid them?

In the possession practice, players will sometimes find themselves inadvertently blocking passes to the outside,

limiting passing options for their own team. The passing team has a 10v4 overload including the floaters when in possession, therefore players should show for the ball in a position that doesn't block a pass to their team-mates on the outside.

How would you put this into a game situation?

9v9 + keepers

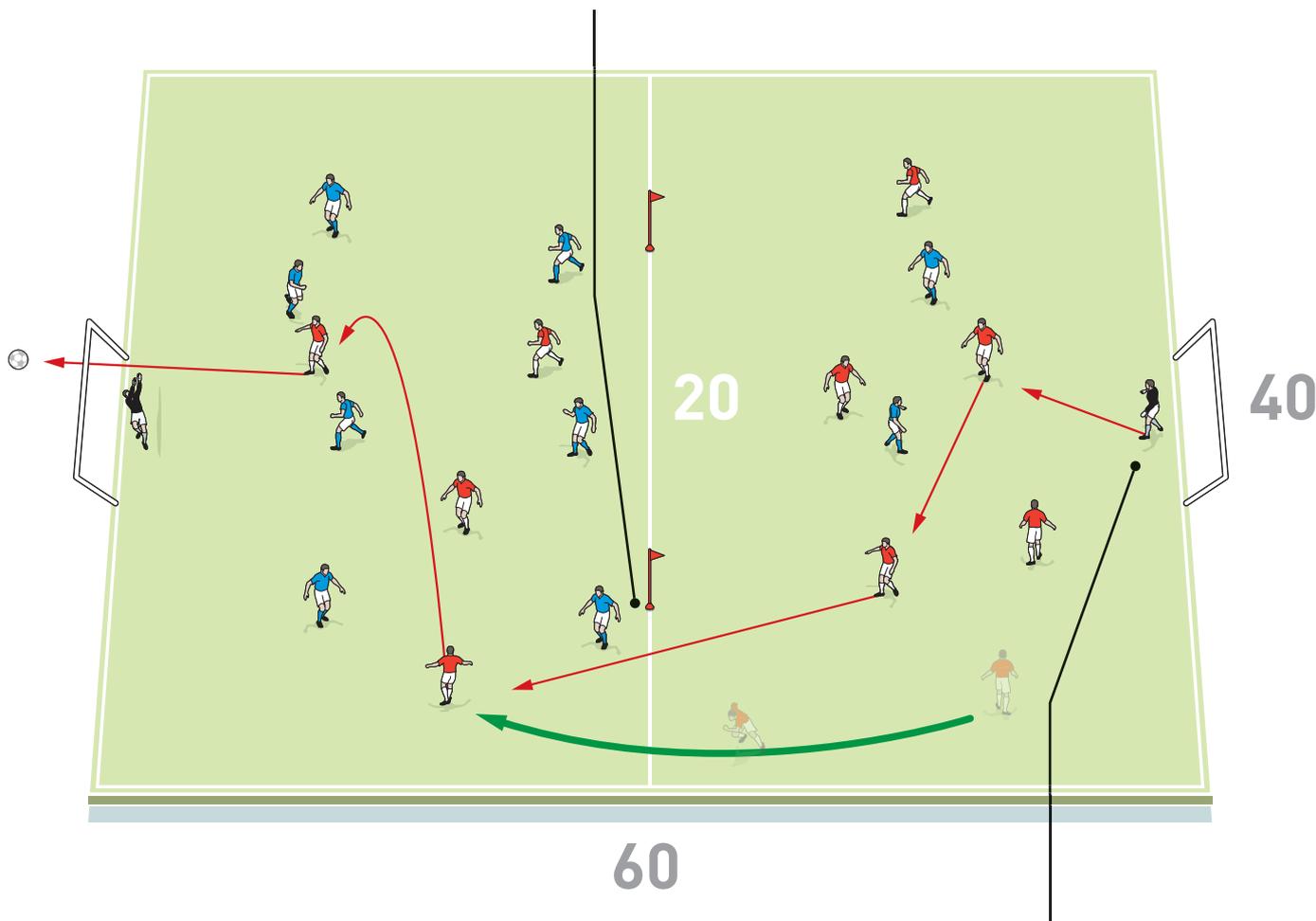
We set up an area of 60x40 yards with a goal at each end

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- movement →
- Dribble→

3a 9v9 + KEEPERS

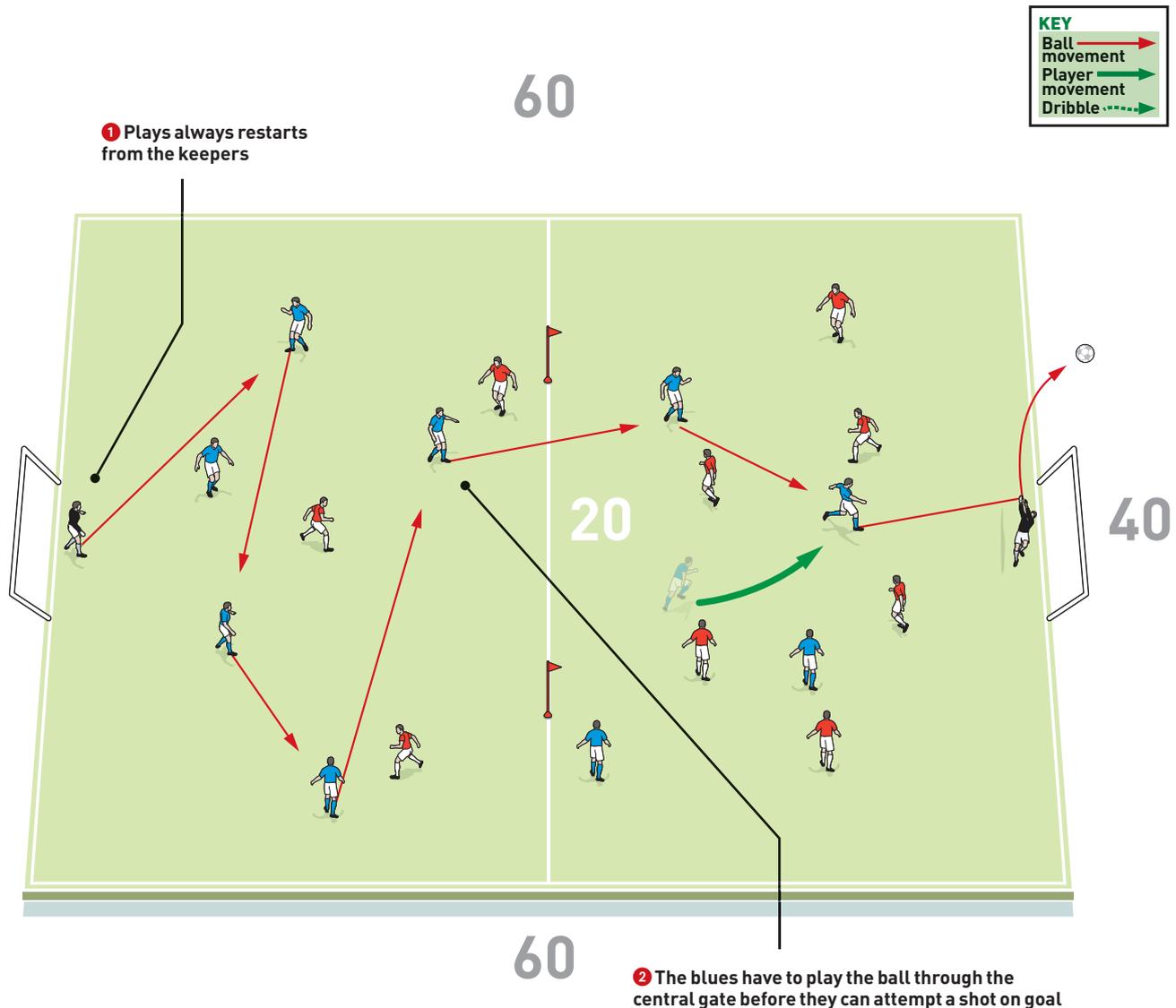
2 The reds must play the ball into the attacking half by going around the central gate before they can shoot



1 Play starts with a pass from the keeper. The reds build an attack on the opposition goal but teams cannot shoot from their own half

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3b



“One team is conditioned to play around the central gate when attacking and the other team must play through the central gate”

and a 20-yard gate marked across the centre of the halfway line with poles. We’re using 18 outfield players and two goalkeepers, split evenly into two teams.

Each team must try to score in the goal at the end they are attacking but one team is conditioned to play around the central gate when attacking, as shown [3a], and the other team must play through the central gate when attacking, as shown [3b].

If either team takes the wrong route into the opposition half, they still

keep possession of the ball but they must play back into their own half and then take the correct route before being allowed to score in the goal.

Goals can only be scored in the attacking half of the pitch – long shots from a team’s own half are not allowed. Play for 20 minutes, with the teams swapping conditions at half-time.

As a progression, we can run this game as free play to see if the players show an understanding of when to play through and when to play around the opposition.

What are the key things to look out for?

From the team who have to play through the gate, we want to see good combination play and effective receiving and protection skills in tight areas. We also want to see creative passing and good movement off the ball. From the team who have to play around the gate, we want to see a range of passes, including penetrative passes, and different kinds of supporting runs, such as underlaps, overlaps and third man runs.