

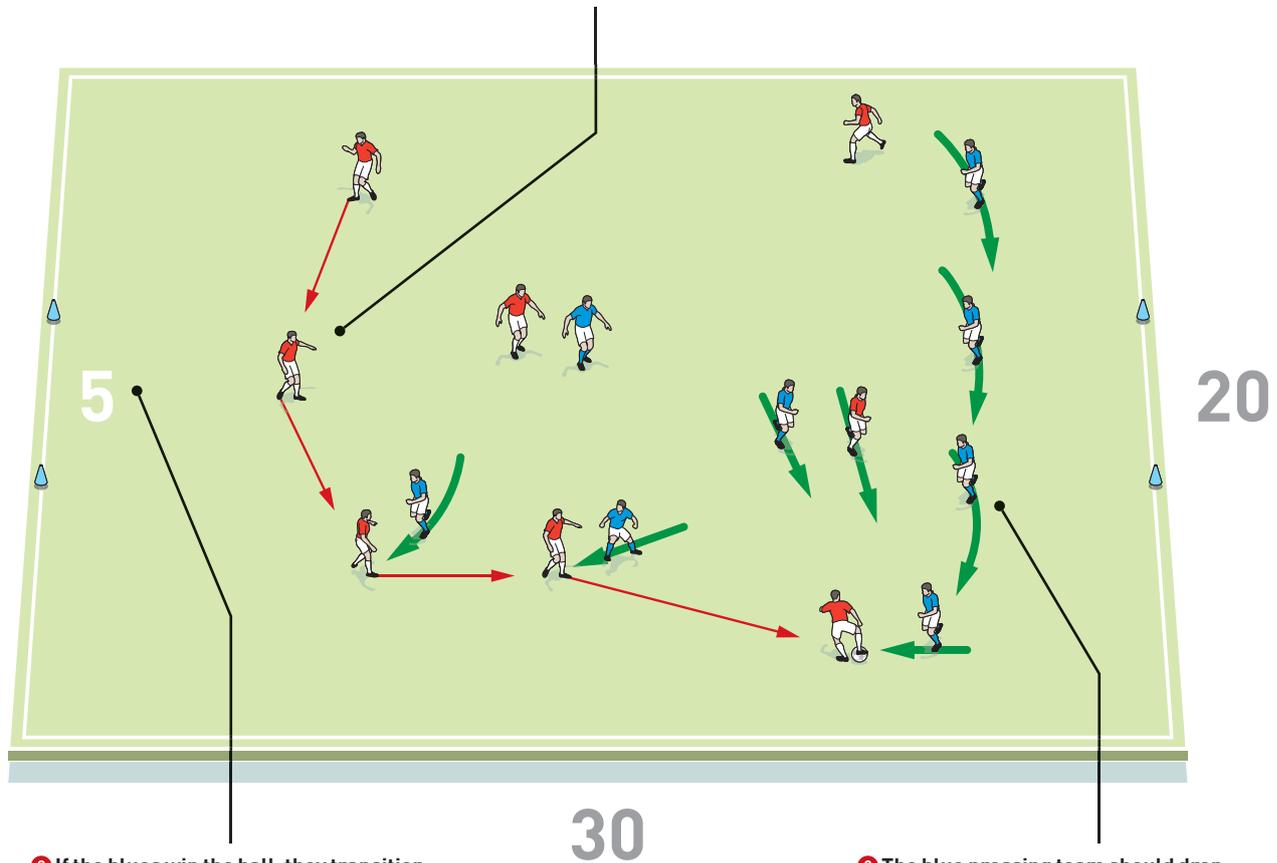
CHRISTOPHER EVANS: COMPACT DEFENDING

2 PRESSING 8v8

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

1 The reds pass the ball to build an attack. If they manage to pass through the cone gate at the end they are attacking, they score a point



3 If the blues win the ball, they transition into the attacking team and must create an opportunity to pass through the cone gate at the end they are attacking

2 The blue pressing team should drop, keep compact and press intensely, as individuals and as units, to force the possession team wide

“This session is all about learning how to defend in our own half, while tactically forcing the opposition into wide areas”

the same passing and receiving principles as in the previous practice, but this time the possession team scores by passing through the gate at the end they are attacking. The pressing team should be encouraged to drop, keep compact and press intensely, both as individuals and as units, to force the possession team wide, as shown [2].

Compact defending

We set up on just under half a pitch with a goal and a goalkeeper in their usual positions at one end.

A goal line is marked out at the other end, with two mini goals and two wide boxes of 10x5 yards positioned on it, as shown [3]. We're using 15 outfield players and one goalkeeper. One team is made up of eight outfield players (here, the reds) and they line up in a 2-3-3 formation attacking the main goal, with one full back in each of the wide boxes. The other team lines up with a goalkeeper, four defenders and three midfielders (here, the blues). A full back for the red attacking team starts play with a pass out of

the wide box. He must pass to one of the red forwards in the midfield area. The blue defending team should press as a unit and force play into the wide channels – the reds should be made to cross or are pushed back into the wide boxes. The blue midfielders should support their defenders by tracking runners and screening the ball in the dangerous central areas, while the blue centre backs should remain in the central areas if possible, picking up threats and defending crosses. If the blue defending team wins

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possession of the ball, they can attack either of the mini goals at the other end.

9v9 game

We set up on half a pitch with a goal at each end. We're using 16 outfield players and two goalkeepers, split into two teams of nine. We play a 9v9 game, with play always restarting quickly with a pass out from the goalkeeper of the blues, who are the attacking team, as shown [4]. We coach the reds, who are the defending team. They

should be expected to use all the defending principles that were practised in the previous activities.

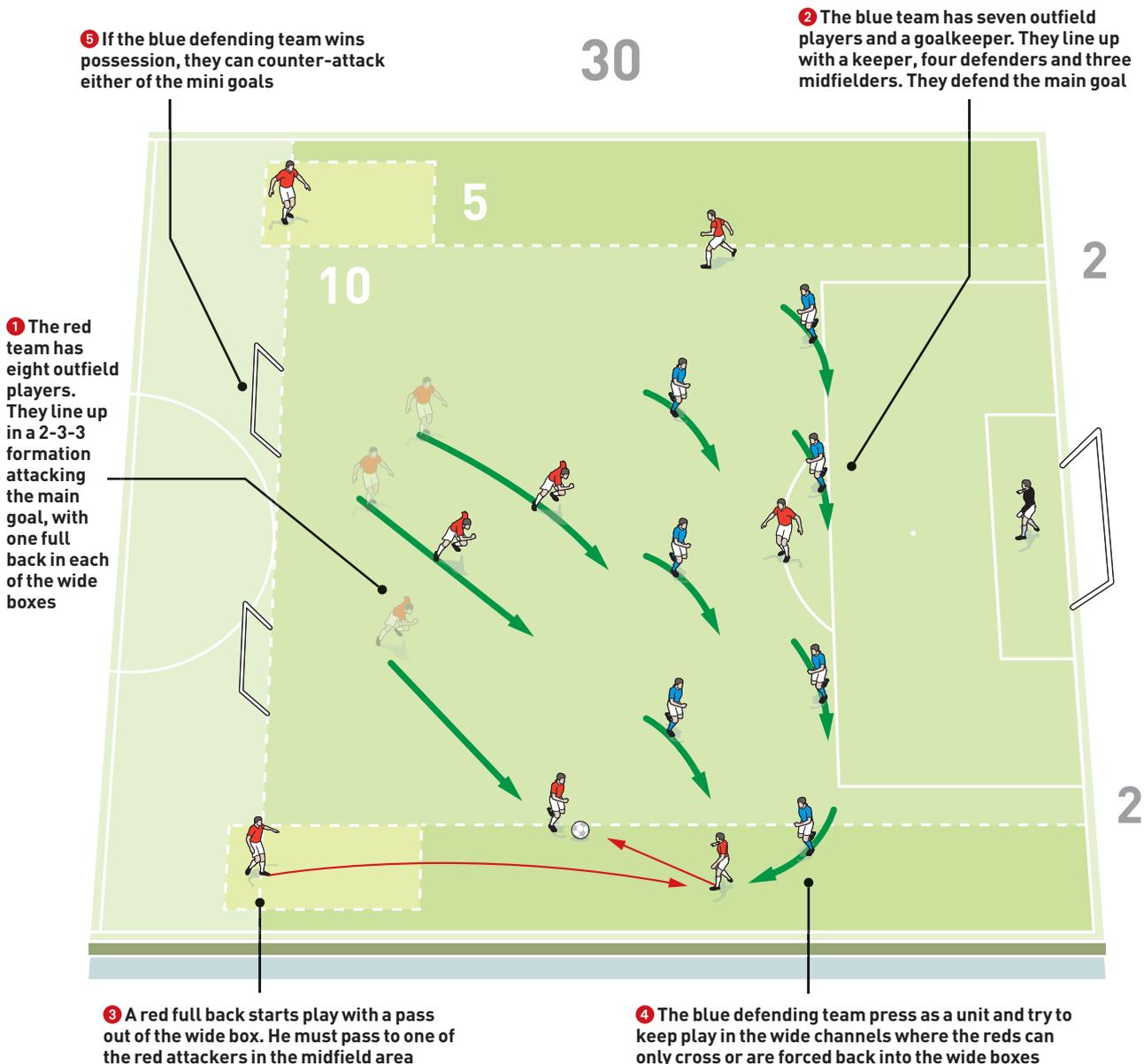
How would you put this into a game situation?

To finish the session, we progress the previous 9v9 activity into an 11v11 game played on a full pitch [not shown]. This could be with or without restrictions depending on the progress that the players have made. For example, if it is felt there is a need to impose restrictions on

the players, an assistant coach can feed balls into the attacking team to quickly restart with a full back in the middle third and the full back can play fast into the striker's feet, meaning the defending team has to get its 'block' in place quickly. It's important that any session of this nature is played out in an 11v11 game, so we can assess what real learning has taken place. If it seems that the players have failed to take the coaching points onboard, then we can readjust the original

KEY
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3 COMPACT DEFENDING



CHRISTOPHER EVANS: COMPACT DEFENDING

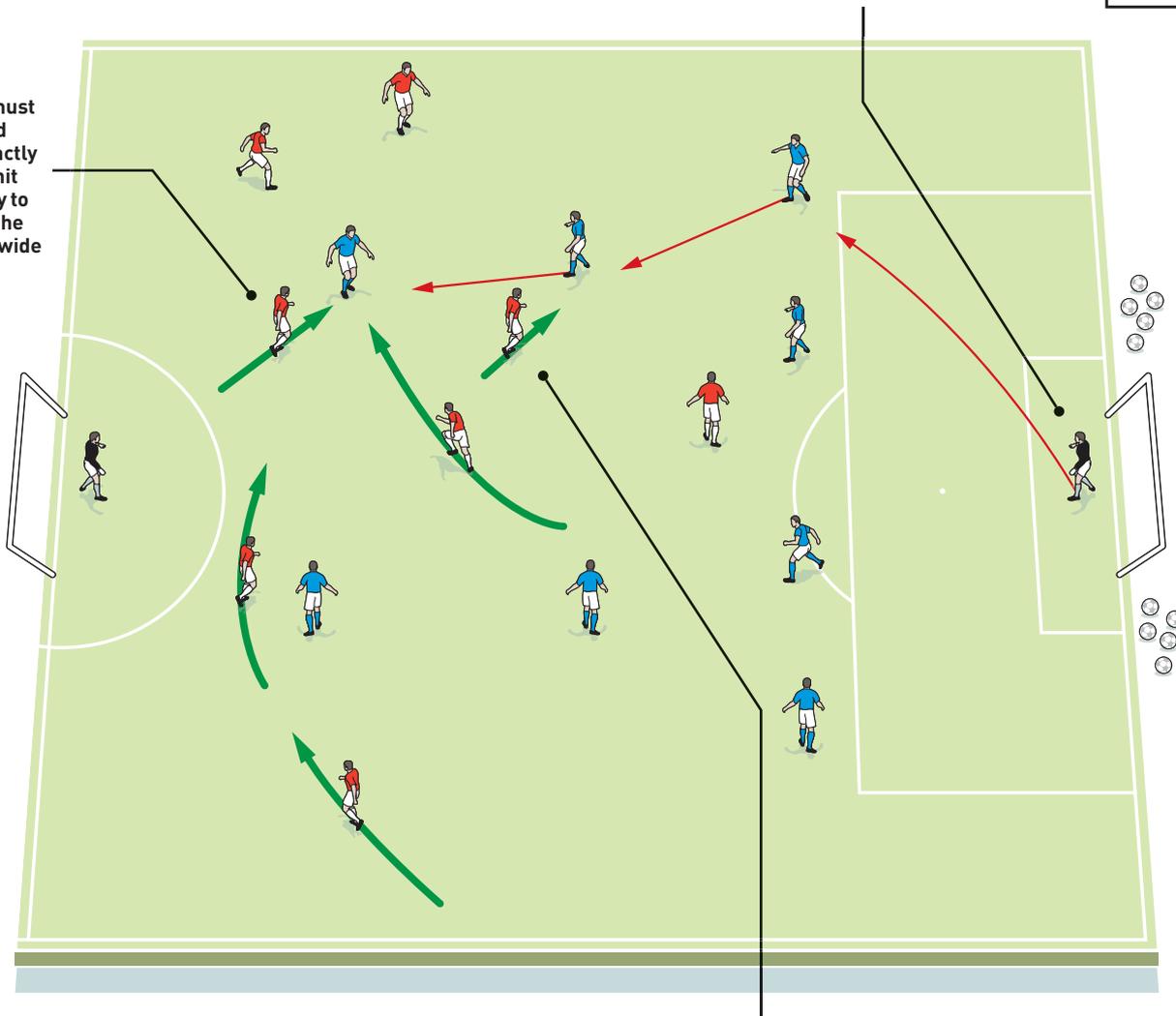
4 9v9 GAME

1 Play a 9v9 game. Play starts and restarts with a quick pass out from the keeper of the blue attacking team

KEY

- Ball movement →
- Player movement →
- Dribble→

2 The reds must defend compactly as a unit and try to force the blues wide



3 The defending midfielders should screen for attacking passes and track runners

“We look at the first press and whether the pressing player is timing the press correctly, as we want to see if he can affect the ball”

activities to take account of any holes in the players’ learning.

What are the key things to look out for?

Technically, we’re looking at the players’ body posture without the ball, their distances from the ball, and whether they are observing the ball. Their eyes should be focused both on the ball and the opposition. Then we will look at the first press and whether the pressing player is timing the press correctly, as we want

to see if he can affect the ball. We also want to see if the players around him are aware of their compactness relative to the area of the pitch. Tactically, we want to see that all players are dropping to defend and whether the shape is what we are looking for in any given situation, including outlets if the ball is won. We will look at forcing play wide to encourage the opposition to cross and making sure we are compact at the edge of the box to stop pull backs. We also want to make sure the

central midfielders track any runners in pockets, especially between the full backs and the centre backs when the full backs are pressing.

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

Pressing too early or too late will massively affect the ability of the team to defend successfully, so it is vital that players recognise the triggers that tell them when to press. Use coaching breaks to talk players through the relevant triggers.