As a player, Veljko Paunovic performed as an attacking midfielder or a striker. He spent most of his professional career in Spain where he represented eight clubs, including enjoying several spells with Atletico Madrid. He also played in Germany, Russia and the United States, and he played internationally for Serbia and Montenegro.

Finally hanging up his playing boots in 2011, Paunovic earned a UEFA Pro coaching licence and a sporting director degree from the Spanish football federation.

After successive seasons working as manager of the Serbian national U18s, U19s and U20s, he enjoyed success when he led the latter to victory in the 2015 FIFA U20s World Cup. After this triumph, he was appointed head coach of MLS side Chicago Fire and took the team to the play-offs in 2017.

He was appointed manager of Reading in the EFL Championship in August 2020.

SESSION
FINISHING PATTERNS IN THE FINAL THIRD

This session is designed to rehearse players in the kind of attacking patterns we want them to use when playing in a 4-2-3-1 shape. The focus of the session is to teach the players to understand the different ways we, as a team, can break down opponents who are playing in a defensive block, particularly when we are playing at home.

It’s all about the implementation of attacking patterns. Players tend to enjoy this session as it creates goal scoring opportunities and gives them ideas and solutions to problems they face when they are in front of the opposition’s goal.

This session would be used at least once a week if fixtures allow a full week’s training. It will also be run on the day before a game in order to reinforce the patterns of play.

“This session gives players ideas and solutions to problems they face when they are in front of the opposition’s goal”
VELJKO PAUNOVIC
FINISHING PATTERNS IN THE FINAL THIRD

PATTERN 1

We set up on half a pitch as shown, with a goal and a goalkeeper at one end. Mannequins are used to represent the defending team, plus extra mannequins are added in the penalty area to give the forwards guidance for the areas to attack. We’re using 11 outfield players.

Play starts with centre backs combining and playing the ball into a central midfielder, who sets the ball back. The centre back then plays it through to the left winger who comes inside to receive and sets it for the other central midfielder, who plays a through ball into the wide channel for the overlapping left back.

The left back runs onto the pass and fires a low cross into the box, where the centre forward and the number 10 are making runs to attack the ball, as shown [1a]. Both wingers should also attack the

Set-up
Area: Half a pitch
Equipment: Balls, bibs, cones, 10 mannequins, 1 full size goal
Number of Players: 10 players + 1 goalkeeper
Session time: Each pattern: 5mins

1. Play starts with centre backs combining and playing into a midfielder, who sets the ball back for the centre back to pass into the final third
2. The winger comes inside to receive a pass and sets it for the other central midfielder
3. The overlapping full back receives a through ball and fires a low cross into the path of the centre forward and the number 10 who are making attacking runs
4. Both wingers should also make runs into the penalty area
5. A central midfielder supports from the edge of the penalty area ready to receive a cut-back if needed

KEY
Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble
Optional movement
We reset and run the same attacking pattern on the opposite wing, while a central midfielder supports from the edge of the penalty area ready to receive a cut-back or if needed sustain the attack.

Next we reset and run the same attacking pattern on the opposite wing, replicating the movement. After receiving the set-back from the winger, the central midfielder plays a through ball for the overlapping full back to receive on the edge of the penalty area and make a low cross. The wingers should also attack the penalty area in support if possible.

“Good off-the-ball movement is vital, as is the timing of the runs and crosses”
PATTERN 2

We set up as before. The first movement is for a deep midfielder to drop between the centre backs to create a back three, who then plays into the number 10, who comes deep to receive. The number 10 lays the ball off to one of the central midfielders, who plays a forward pass to the centre forward. The centre forward then lays the ball off to the number 10 and then turns and makes a run into the penalty area. The number 10 has made a forward run to receive the pass and shoots at goal from outside of the penalty area, as shown [2a].

As soon as the first shot is dead, a second ball is played in to the centre forward by the coach. The centre forward receives the ball with his back to goal and turns and finishes, as shown [2b].
We set up as before. The first movement is for a deep midfielder to drop between the centre backs to create a back three. He receives from the centre back and then plays the ball into one of the central midfielders, who sets it back. The deep midfielder then switches the point of attack with a long pass to the full back, who has made an overlapping run into a wide forward position. The full back delivers a whipped cross for the forward players to attack – the centre forward, the number 10 and the opposite wide player should all be making runs into the penalty area, as shown [3], while one of the central midfielders should make a run to the edge of the penalty area, just in case the ball is cut back.

“We want to see quick and precise passing, with players always moving the ball forwards”
PATTERN 4

We set up as before. Again, the first movement is for a deep midfielder to drop between the centre backs to create a back three. The ball is passed across this back three before it is played out wide to a full back in a deep position. The full back receives and drives forward with the ball before crossing into the back post area. The centre forward meets the cross in the air and heads it down into the path of his oncoming team mates, who are making attacking runs into the penalty area, as shown [4].

COACHING POINTS

How do I progress the session?
We can remove the mannequins and add live opposition defenders into each pattern of play to increase the difficulty for the attacking players.

What are the key things to look for?
Technically, we want to see quick and precise passing, with players always moving the ball forwards when possible. Off-the-ball movement is also vital, as is the timing of the runs and crosses, and we want to see players making quality finishes with both feet and head.

Tactically, we want to see players creating plenty of scoring chances and demonstrating that they can drive with the ball into the opposition box.

We want to see players passing crisply and cleanly with the ball on the ground and varying the delivery of attacking crosses by using pull-backs, driven low crosses and deeper crosses in the air.

What are the typical mistakes players might make and how do I avoid them?
We sometimes see players waiting on the ball and being too static when we want to see them making effective off-the-ball movements.

Another typical mistake players make is that they can occupy space too soon, when they need to demonstrate well-timed runs.

Players also sometimes lose focus when it comes to the second ball and we need to make them understand that they should react quickly to these second ball chances when the opportunities arise.