Known simply as Nuno during his playing career as a goalkeeper, Espírito Santo first made a name for himself in Spain before returning to his home country of Portugal in 2002 to sign for Porto.

After calling time on his playing career, he rejoined his former Porto manager, Jesualdo Ferreira, as a goalkeeping coach, first at Malaga and then at Panathinaikos. Becoming a manager in his own right in May 2012, he took Rio Ave to the final of the Taça de Portugal and the Taça da Liga, finishing both cup competitions as runners up to Benfica and qualifying for the Europa League for the first time in the club’s history.

He subsequently led Spanish giants Valencia to a fourth place finish in his first season and was named La Liga Manager of the Month three times.

Moving to Porto in 2016, he finished second in the league before relocating to England, where he was named manager of Wolverhampton Wanderers. He led Wolves to the Premier League after a six-year absence, winning the EFL Championship with two games to spare. In recognition of this achievement, he was voted LMA Championship Manager of the Year. In his time at the Molineux Stadium he achieved consecutive seventh-place finishes in the Premier League and led Wolves to the quarter-finals of the Europa League. He was appointed head coach of Tottenham Hotspur in June 2021.

SESSION
GAME FUNDAMENTALS

This game-based session is designed to focus on, and drill down on, some of the simple game fundamentals inside of our process. In a simple way, we can touch on each moment of the game with simple messages.

When we pass messages to the players while playing and competing, the quicker these messages can turn into actions, and with time and repetition into an automatic habit, it becomes what we are as a team. This is a go-to exercise for us to introduce, revise and train our most basic fundamentals of the game.

We would run this during a certain stage of pre-season in order to instil our key messages in all of the players. As we progress with a new group of players, these games become more competitive. During the season, when the schedule permits, we also like to do this work in clear weeks, sometimes as a means of ‘revision’, or maybe we might add some more specific detail to the work that is either relevant to the next opponent we are facing or for how we are developing the team.

“This is a go-to exercise for us to introduce, revise and train our most basic fundamentals of the game”
We set up a playing area of 60x48 yards (or between the penalty boxes with the pitch coned off 10 yards in from each touchline). We position a goal and a goalkeeper at each end and position six mannequins as shown.

We’re using 18 outfield players split into three teams of six. Two teams start in the central area in a 6v6 and they have unlimited touches, while the third team support the possession team from outside the playing area, as shown [1a]. The outside team are limited to two touches and they have two players at each end on either side of the goals and two players working up and down the wing with one on each side of the pitch.

The aim for the team in possession is to build from the back and attack centrally to score. The attacking team can use any of the six yellow support players on the outside of the pitch to provide them with a numerical advantage. When the ball is played to a support player on either side from the defending half and it is played back inside, then both side support players (the full backs) should advance up the wing into the opposition’s half, as shown [1b].
Once both yellow side support players have moved forwards into the attacking half, the aim for the team in possession is to find ways to attack centrally to score. Once the ball is in the attacking half, the team in possession now have four high support players that they can use to help them create goal-scoring opportunities, as shown [1c].

If it is not possible to find passes to attack centrally, then a midfield player can ‘open to the side’ in order to take up the original position of the yellow side support player. When a player from the team in possession moves to the outside of the pitch to receive, they are now limited to two touches to play the ball forwards down the side to a support player to progress the play, as shown [1d].

On receiving the ball, the player who has opened to the side has the option to play vertically down the side to a support player or back inside into the pitch to a team-mate, as shown [1e]. They can then re-join the game on the inside.

[1c] Once both yellow side support players have moved into the attacking half, the red possession team must find ways to attack centrally.

[1d] When the ball is in the attacking half, the reds can use the support of the four yellow outside players in that half to help them to create goal-scoring opportunities.

[1e] The red midfielder who ‘opens to the side’ has the option to play vertically down the side to a yellow support player or back inside to a team-mate. After playing the pass, they can re-join the game on the inside.
“How one team can control the momentum of these short games depends on how well they make decisions in each moment of the play”

The team in possession should aim to produce combination play using players inside the pitch or the support players on the outside to create goal-scoring opportunities, as shown [1f].

When all the players are in the attacking half and there is a turnover of possession, the red team (who have lost possession of the ball) should press aggressively to try to win it back. The aim for the blue defending team who have now won possession of the ball is to find a pass to a side support player as quickly as possible. In reality, the blues have two options: to secure possession and build an attack centrally or for the side support player to play a vertical pass down the side for a forward player who has made a diagonal run to the outside to receive, as shown [1g].
When this vertical pass down the side is played, a counter-attack is initiated and must be completed. The forward who has moved to the outside has two touches maximum to play the ball back inside to a supporting team-mate – the attack then continues to a finish, as shown [1h].

The main thing about the session is that the structure and rules of the set-up allows the thinking of the players to become in tune and aligned with each other, so we will start to see ‘team decision-making’. And any work on the training ground that helps the team members think the same things, feel the same things and see the same things, is work that makes a team better.

We play three-minute games. Each of the teams plays each other once in each round of three games. Dependent on the physical load for the day, we play three rounds of games, meaning each team will play six games on the central pitch and three games on the outside as the support team.

**COACHING POINTS**

**How do I progress the session?**
The players’ understanding of the game, its rules, the structure of it and the options it therefore gives them, informs their decision-making and this brings the work to life. The quality of the players and their intelligence is what progresses this session.

**What are the key things to look for?**
This becomes entirely about decision-making – individually and collectively. How one team can control the momentum of these short games depends on how well they make decisions in each moment of the play: how they read the situation, how they collaborate, and how they learn to think the same things at the same time.

**How would I put this in a game situation?**
The set-up of this activity allows us to have the game situation already in place, although it is a touch manipulated. What we expect is to see the benefit of this work transferred when we progress to two-team game-work, whether it be at 8v8 or 10v10.