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EXTRA-TIME INTERVIEW: WITH CAMBRIDGE UNITED MANGER SHAUN DERRY

CARLOS CARVALHAL
Linking defence to attack

DANNY WILSON
Negating and opening with passes

GRAHAM ALEXANDER
Quick finishing

PAUL BUCKLE
Block & break; block & build

CHRISS DAVIES
Attacking overloads

AEK ATHENS
GUS PPOYET
ASSISTED CROSSING IN THE FINAL THIRD

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MAY 2016

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Dear Coach,

Welcome to the May issue of Elite Soccer.

For many of us it’s the business end of the season, when dreams can be elegantly realised and hopes ruthlessly dashed. Wherever you are and whatever your aims, I hope it has been a fulfilling campaign for you, and what better way to move into those summer months than by bringing forward a number of new sessions that we hope will inform and inspire?

Of course, with the European Championships just around the corner, our attention is somewhat deflected to the football overseas, so with that in mind we’ve been to the Greek Superleague to pick up a fantastic session from AEK Athens manager Gus Poyet. The former Sunderland and Brighton & Hove Albion manager outlines for us an engaging practice that looks at assisted crossing in the final third – I hope you like it.

Moving on, from the Sky Bet Championship, Carlos Carvalhal explains the mechanics behind Sheffield Wednesday’s fantastic ability to link defence to attack this season. It’s been a principle that has worked to great effect with the club genuine promotion contenders. Meanwhile, from Sky Bet League One, Chesterfield boss Danny Wilson looks at negating and opening live passes, with a practice that has helped his side edge away from relegation danger this term.

Also from Sky Bet League One, Scunthorpe United manager Graham Alexander presents for us a session on quick finishing, while Reading coach Chris Davies shows us the benefits of well-constructed attacking overloads.

Finally, from the United Soccer League, Sacramento Republic boss Paul Buckle isolates how to build and break following successful blocks, in what is a detailed and engaging practice.

We hope you and your players enjoy what’s on offer, and we’ll see you again next month.

Enjoy your soccer,

Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman

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ISSUE 70/MAY 2016: FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Howard Wilkinson, LMA Chairman
Here are the six managers and coaches we’re delighted to welcome into this issue of *Elite Soccer*

**GUS POYET**  
*AEK ATHENS*

With Brighton, he immediately secured the club’s League One status, then in the 2010/11 season guided the Seagulls to the npower Championship, winning the League One title and, at one stage, clocking up eight consecutive victories. He was recognised by his peers in the division, as the managers of League One clubs voted him as their Manager of the Year.

In 2011/12, Poyet won the Football Manager Outstanding Managerial Achievement Award at the Football League Awards. Gus and Brighton also enjoyed an excellent first season in the npower Championship with a 10th-place finish. The following year the club finished fourth in the Championship, their highest league placing since 1983. Upon switching to Sunderland, Poyet enjoyed immediate success in the north-east as he secured Barclays Premier League status for the Black Cats. He also took the club to the League Cup final – their first since 1985.

As a player, Poyet represented Grenoble, River Plate Uruguay, Real Zaragoza, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur, plus earned 26 caps for Uruguay. During his playing career, he also earned some notable honours, including the FA Cup, UEFA Cup and European Super Cup with Chelsea; the Copa América with Uruguay; and the Spanish Copa del Rey and UEFA Cup Winners’ Cup with Real Zaragoza.

**CARLOS CARVALHAL**  
*SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY*

Carlos Carvalhal brings a wealth of experience to Sheffield Wednesday having led 14 teams in three countries, primarily in his homeland of Portugal. Having played as a central defender for Braga, Carvalhal moved into management in 1998 with Espinho before switching to Fremunde, Aves and Leixoes, where he became the first coach in Portugal to steer a third-tier team into the UEFA Cup. Leixoes then comfortably lifted the title the following campaign to earn promotion to Segunda Liga.

A second successive elevation followed with Vitoria Setubal, whom he guided into the Primeira Liga, then he switched to Belenenses, Braga, then fellow top-flight side Beira-Mar, before heading back to Vitoria, taking the club into the UEFA Cup, as well as to the Portuguese League Cup final where they defeated Sporting Lisbon. Carvalhal then headed to Greek side Asteras Tripolis for a spell that preceded a move back to the Portuguese top flight with Maritimo.

He coached European giants Sporting Lisbon and Turkish big hitters Besiktas, before taking up a technical director position at Al Ahli in the UAE. He joined Sheffield Wednesday in June 2015 and has guided the club to the npower Championship play-offs.

**DANNY WILSON**  
*CHESTERFIELD*

Danny Wilson is currently manager of Chesterfield. Wilson began his managerial career with Barnsley in 1994, soon negotiating the club’s path into the Premier League for the first time.

He has since managed Sheffield Wednesday, Bristol City, MK Dons, Hartlepool United, Swindon Town and Sheffield United before switching to Chesterfield on Christmas Eve 2015. This season he has successfully guided the Derbyshire club to safety having inherited a side in danger of slipping into League Two.

**CHRIS DAVIES**  
*READING*

Chris Davies is first-team coach at Reading, the same club he left as a player in 2004 after injury curtailed a promising playing career.

In the 12 years in between the former Welsh youth international spent six in youth coaching before moving up to oversee senior players at Liverpool, Swansea City and Leicester City. The 30-year-old has a UEFA Pro Licence and Sports Science Degree from Loughborough University, and was an integral part of the Liverpool coaching set-up that almost saved the Reds clinch the league title in 2014.

**PAUL BUCKLE**  
*SACRAMENTO REPUBLIC*

Paul Buckle is manager of United Soccer League side Sacramento Republic.

His first venture into management began at Torquay United in June 2007, with the club finishing third in the Conference standings. The following season they achieved promotion back to the Football League by beating Cambridge United 2–0 at Wembley.

Two seasons later Torquay were again in a play-off final, this time losing out on a place in League One to Stevenage.

Paul went on to manage Bristol Rovers, Luton Town and Cheltenham Town before accepting the opportunity to join USL side Sacramento Republic in July 2015.

**GRAHAM ALEXANDER**  
*SCUNTHORPE UNITED*

Graham Alexander is currently manager of Scunthorpe United having previously taken charge at Fleetwood Town in December 2012.

He joined from Preston North End where he headed up the club’s youth team, enjoying immediate success in his first full season in charge with a play-off final victory over Burton Albion.

Graham retired from playing at the end of the 2011/12 season after 1,024 professional appearances, in a playing career spanning 22 years. The former Scotland international, who won 40 caps for his country, played for Scunthorpe, Preston, Luton Town and Burnley.
MANAGEMENT MATTERS

MANAGER OF THE MONTH AWARDS

Leicester City boss Claudio Ranieri was named Manager of the Month after the prospect of the Foxes becoming the most unexpected top flight champions ever moved another step closer in March. City were 5,000/1 rank outsiders at the start of the season, but in a month where they were installed as title favourites for the first time, they swept aside Watford, Newcastle United and Crystal Palace, all by slender 1-0 margins. There was also a battling 2-2 home draw with West Bromwich Albion, but the club’s ability to shut out opposition attacks during the month seems to have had a defining influence on the title race.

In English football’s second tier, Rotherham United manager Neil Warnock took the award after the Millers won three of their four league matches in March. The Yorkshire club were odds on to return to League One after a sluggish start to the campaign, but incoming Warnock has revitalised the side’s fortunes and in March they saw off three promotion challengers in the form of Sheffield Wednesday, Middlesbrough and Ipswich Town, each by a single goal. They also scored three times in the last seven minutes at home to Derby County to rescue a point in a pulsating clash that ended 3-3.

In Sky Bet League One, Paul Heckingbottom picked up the divisional award after his Barnsley side won four of their six matches to move to the cusp of the play-off picture. The Tykes began the season slowly but have been revitalised under caretaker/manager Heckingbottom, and they defeated Coventry City, Fleetwood Town, Walsall and Port Vale during a packed month. There was also a goalless draw with Scunthorpe United and a home defeat by Southend, but the Yorkshire club maintained their uplift in fortunes at the start of April by defeating Oxford United in the Johnstone’s Paints Trophy final at Wembley.

And finally into Sky Bet League Two, where Bristol Rovers manager Darrell Clarke saw his team win six consecutive matches in the month. The Pirates were in outstanding form and put themselves firmly in the picture for an automatic promotion place, with victories over Hartlepool United, Notts County, AFC Wimbledon, Mansfield Town, Newport County and Cambridge United. Even defeat at Carlisle United at the end of the month couldn’t really detract from an incredible spell for the club in which they took 18 from a possible 21 points.

CAREER PATH

...with John Coleman, manager of Sky Bet League Two side Accrington Stanley.

Of all your achievements in the game, taking the club with the lowest wage bill in the division to the upper reaches of League Two must be the best?

Well, this club has achieved a lot of things. I remember the multiple promotions through non-league and it seemed then that just getting to League Two was a huge thing. Now we have a really talented young group of players who have confounded expectations, so there is the chance here to go one better.

How have you managed to galvanise a group written off at the start of the campaign?

Well, they may have been written off by the bookies but we’ve always had absolute faith that working hard, listening and supporting your team mates can produce fantastic rewards, and that’s what this group of players has proven. Of course we’re not there yet, nor will we be once the season is over – this is a long-term project to ensure every player maximises his potential, as do we as a club.

Has your management style evolved over the years?

I think you’re allowed to alter your style depending on the players you are coaching, the size of the club and the situations you find yourselves in. I’ve never been a manager to stick rigidly to one way of thinking because I just don’t think it’s realistic to do that. I’d much rather have a fluid style of management that gets the best out of all players at all times.
**Overview:**
The session is about improving the technique and quality of crosses into the 18-yard box - whipped in with pace, stood up to the back post, cut back or floated - with the emphasis on perfecting a supply line that gives team mates the best opportunity to score.

It’s about trying to create understanding and awareness of team mates’ runs, with players choosing the correct delivery to give that attacking player the best opportunity to score.

The session needs time and, preferably, calm, mild weather in order for players to be able to maximise both its potential and that of their own. We like to run it in pre-season, a time when players begin to understand what we’re looking for as a team, but also get to learn about each other’s individual strengths.

We will also run the session if we’ve created numerous crossing opportunities in recent matches without realising a definitive end product.

**What do I get the players to do?**

**2v0 attacks**

We set up as shown in a 44x36-yard area (or two penalty boxes put together)\(^1\). There are four wide players and two lots of pairs on either side of the two goals. The first pair interchange passes then play a diagonal ball to either the right or left wide man. Wide men have two or three touches before delivering a cross into the box.

The first pair must focus on timing and making runs into the penalty area, with the wide man deciding on a type of cross that is then delivered to either unmarked player for an attempt at goal.

**2v1 attacks**

They run into the box but one attacker is picked up by the waiting defender, who stays on him.

It is the wide man’s task to hit the free man with his cross.

Again the two attackers move forward.
How do I progress the practice?
We progress by introducing a defender, as shown (2). This player is asked to mark one of the attackers (leaving the other one free) enabling the crosser of the ball to find the free player in the box.
We then move to a 3v2, as shown (3). This complicates further the decision-making of the player crossing the ball but slowly we are moving this player into a mindset whereby he knows he must be precise and accurate to succeed.
We want to see lots of movement in the area, a good selection of the right pass or cross to the unmarked player and an awareness of the timing of his run. These elements develop with repetition, practice and familiarity of the way team mates play.

What are the key things to look out for?
Tactically, players must pick out the unmarked player. Concentration is key because the task at hand is not just about passing the ball to a team mate in order to create a goalscoring opportunity, and that can only be achieved if players are composed.
Technically, we are looking at the selection of crosses and their quality, with delivery and pace crucial. We want to see crosses stood up, floated and cut back, with the weight of that cross varied so that a receiving player needs to think about whether he should take a touch or finish first-time.
It’s common for players to believe what they are doing is too easy. However, when defenders are introduced into the session they often realise it’s very difficult to find the free player with the right ball, and what is being demanded of them is considerable quality and technique.

How would you put this into a game situation?
We move this into a 8v8 game situation in a 50x44-yard area, as shown (4). It’s normal rules with players positioned in specific areas on the outside of the pitch. Here, they can receive the ball free, and are able to control and cross with time and space in order to improve their assist/crossing ability.

In the game situation, a goal that originates from a wide channel counts double.
Carlos Carvalhal
Linking through your centre-midfielder

Overview:
The role of the centre-midfielder is a vital one in modern soccer and his effectiveness and resourcefulness is best practised with regular repetition of technique and job role. This is a session I first outlined when with Besiktas back in 2011, but so solid and reliable is the role of the midfielder that it is as relevant now today as it was five years ago.

What do I get the players to do?
The defensive pivot
The objective of this first exercise is very broad, however it aims at the link between the defenders of the team (who recover possession) and the defensive pivot of one of the midfielders (who comes in support as a result of the opponent’s high pressure). All midfielders are encouraged to discover the best positioning in this situation.

While this trains our offensive organisation and defensive transition, we also train the defensive organisation and the offensive transition, linking with the midfield players of the defending team in a dynamic way, with a constant sequence of movements.

So to start, the reds [along with the yellow, who plays for the team in possession] play with a 6v4 overload, as shown (1a). They knock the ball around with the objective of scoring.

Greens, who are at a numerical disadvantage, defend and try to recover possession. If they succeed, they can pass either directly or through the yellow centre-midfielder to one of their team mates in the attacking half. After losing possession, all reds transition to defence in trying to prevent the opposing team linking between the groups.

Once the ball crosses into the opposing midfield there is a new action of a 6v4.
plus a keeper, with the inclusion of the yellow centre-midfielder now in the other half (1b).

In all exchanges, in the case of a goal or shot on goal the ball is restarted through the keeper.

**How do I progress the practice?**

Now we’re looking at linking defence and attack through the inside/pivot midfielders on the same playing area, as shown (2a). Again this is based on the use of neutral midfielders.

Reds, in numerical advantage - along with two blues and the yellow - circulate the ball with a scoring objective against a defensive line, plus a keeper.

Greens play against the overload. Upon gaining ball possession, they must try to cross to the attacking half making at least one pass to the blue midfielders, who always play for the team in possession.

After losing possession, the yellow centre-midfielder, along with three forwards, transitions to defensive mode in trying to prevent the link between halves.

After the ball crosses to the other half, a new action of 6v4 plus a keeper starts, with green forwards, the yellow centre-midfielder and two white midfielders who, similar to the blue ones, always play in possession.

Again, if a goal is scored or there is a shot on goal, the game is restarted by the keeper.

This exercise is similar to the previous one with respect to its dynamic, but with different objectives in terms of the movement and pressure made by the defensive pivot, as shown (2b), and this is the key point. In short, we want our defensive pivot, along with the three forwards, to react appropriately to the point of possession loss. He does this by quickly shortening the distance between the two midfielders who play for the team in possession (either blues or whites), pressuring them quickly.

For the team which has assumed possession, at the time of transition we also want to see a sudden switch of team mentality, from defending to linking with centre-midfielders, as well as players discovering the best positioning to link the game with the attacking half.
Danny Wilson
Negating and opening through live passes

Overview:
This session is about trying to penetrate a four-man unit as an attacking drill. It also looks at stopping that ‘probe’ by forming a tight compact shield that is able to intercept balls and exchange strategy when in possession.

The session gives players the option to intercept and counter-attack by offering an understanding and organisation by which they can move in sync as a defensive unit. It also provides positive encouragement in trying to make forward passes through the lines of defenders when spotting openings, thereby developing the type of player who should be able to quickly and technically pass through the gaps.

The session will run once or twice weekly in cementing moves or situations that arise during matches. Opponents can be of midfield or defensive units and this should be practised in all weather conditions to ensure it is game-realistic.

What do I get the players to do?
We set up as shown on a 25x30-yard area, with the objective being to try to play through the lines to your striker’s feet. This player has to move with play to find the gaps and receive a pass, with nothing over head height. Insisting on one- or two-touch passing encourages players to pass the ball with a tempo to try to open the opposition when gaps appear.

If the pass is successful the receiving striker gives the ball to the defending team to restart the
process. If the pass is intercepted, we continue, while if it goes out of play the action will quickly be resumed by a coach on the centre line—he has a supply of balls in order to ensure the momentum is maintained. Players should not go into the ‘no zone’ area, and are also not allowed to stand on the front line of the zone when defending.

How do I progress the session?
The session is progressed easily by increasing team numbers and yardage as desired.

What are the key things to look out for?
Defensively, we want to see good communication between team mates, players filling gaps quickly and every man showing an ability to react immediately to changing conditions in front of him. Offensively, we want to see players assessing opportunities quickly for penetration, whilst having the right technical skill set in order to complete the pass. Moving the ball quickly is also an essential part of being able to fulfil the tasks in hand. The key mistake comes about as players switch off when a pass doesn’t come off, thus lessening the opportunity to close gaps quickly. Scoring goals (effectively making a completed pass through the lines) can also bring about this ‘switching off’ moment and is something we must protect against.

How would you put this into a game situation?
As a further progression that works as a game situation, we can change the parameters entirely by setting up 8v8 on a half-pitch, with strikers in between the lines looking to score when fed the ball.

In the progression, the playing area is enlarged to make the challenge more difficult for defenders; but attackers must now finish into a goal target too.

As a game situation we can move this into an 8v8 on a half-pitch with attackers positioned between the lines – this set-up is another step towards the practice being fully match-realistic.
SCUNTHORPE UNITED

Graham Alexander
Quick finishing

Overview:
This session is mainly for attacking players but remains important for defenders who can take something from it as well. It’s ideally an afternoon session - 45 minutes maximum - focusing on producing an ‘end product’ to an attack.
Individuals need to be good at what they are judged on and scoring goals is vital for attacking players. Strikers especially love to have bespoke sessions geared for them to score goals, and in their mindset need to get a shot off with minimum fuss accompanied by the confidence that they will hit the target.
The ratio of shots in this session is high compared to a game so players must be focused with every attempt they have. A key point is its simplicity, so players work on the final outcome without too much tactical play beforehand.
This session can be broken down and each section used on its own if time is scarce between games. It can be progressed this way so each part is a step up on intensity and competitiveness.

What do I get the players to do?
Two-touch finishing – unopposed (1)
In the first practice the receiving attacker takes the ball from the coach, takes a first touch to turn or take on the mannequin, then shoots, making sure to follow in on any rebounds.
This will be a competition format between two teams, one from each side.

Two-touch finishing – opposed

The coach feeds the ball in

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Two-touch finishing - unopposed

1. The coach feeds the ball in
2. The player takes a touch to move the ball away from the mannequin (acting as a passive defender)
3. The player takes a touch to move the ball away from the mannequin (acting as a passive defender)
4. He shoots and scores past the keeper

Two-touch finishing - opposed

1. The defender sets the ball to the striker
2. He then presses looking to close down the space
3. He creates an angle to shoot at goal and sends the ball past the keeper
4. He creates an angle to shoot at goal and sends the ball past the keeper
5. The striker moves the ball away from the defender
6. The striker moves the ball away from the defender
Two-touch finishing - opposed (2)

It’s important to bring in opposition players in order to recreate the pressure strikers will be put under in match day scenarios.

So with that in mind the first touch now from the defender is to set up the attack and show that player away from his opponent. We want to see a speedy second touch as well as the defender closing in to press. He must be careful not to sell himself but be ready to put his body on the line. The practice is very intensive so needs to take the form of short bursts of action (45-60secs maximum), and we want to ensure we give attackers a set number of shots using both left and right feet.

To make it competitive, a forfeit for the losing team is a good incentive. If attackers score a set number of goals (say, five) they win; if defenders concede fewer than that number, they are the victors.

How do I progress the session?
To progress, players will have to react to the delivery of the ball from the coach, adapting their positions accordingly. We want to see good awareness of what is ‘on’ and an instinct to either set up a team mate or get a shot off.

“Strikers love to have bespoke sessions geared for them to score goals, and in their mindset need to get a shot off with minimum fuss accompanied by the confidence that they will hit the target.”

GRAHAM ALEXANDER: QUICK FINISHING

5v2 – one-touch
What are the key things to look out for?
Attackers need to stay composed and use the techniques practised. Remaining calm in front of goal is a major quality required in being a regular goalscorer.

We also constantly remind players how important it is to hit the target, especially with team mates close by to take on any rebounds. For defenders, it’s vital to be quick across the ground and ready to commit to a block without selling themselves or giving away a penalty.

In terms of mistakes, as soon as it becomes competitive, players will often lose their composure. This is one of the main coaching points during this session, with technique and decision-making vital in scoring goals.

5v2 – one-touch (3a/3b)
In the 5v2 strikers get a shot off or set up a chance for a team mate. Defenders close down without selling themselves and this is again 45-60 seconds per round in a competition format.

How would you put this into a game situation?
Finishing 5v5 (4)
Finally we move into a 5v5 two-way game with all players involved. Using a double box with a 3v2 in each, attacks are at high tempo. Attackers have 10 seconds to score once they have received the ball. If defenders win the ball back they can feed their strikers quickly, or when the attack is dead the keeper starts the next play.

A player receiving the ball from the keeper must shoot or combine with team mates and score within 10 seconds. When receiving he must be aware of the position of defenders, and is looking to take advantage of the overload quickly.

“Attackers need to stay composed and use the techniques practised. Remaining calm in front of goal is a major quality required in being a regular goalscorer.”
Overview:
This session is about defending as a unit from around the halfway line with two banks of four, with a no. 10 and no. 9 ready to support the counter-attack or build the attack. The decision on offer is whether to break fast on the regain through the middle, wide right or wide left; or to build, making six passes to move forwards up the pitch. Players have to communicate, with quick passing and finishing, and having three goals to attack makes it enjoyable, giving them a real point of focus on regains.

This session is realistic and match-related, using two-thirds of the pitch. I will run this session at least once a week and will always set the team attacking us in the same shape as those we are playing the next week. This can also be used in a smaller area if you are looking to leave it in the players’ legs for the next game. The same principles will always apply – when regaining, counter or build.

9 & 10 shadow play
Setting up as shown (1), this shows the movement of the no. 9 and no. 10 who become active on the counter-attack. They cannot tackle when defending – instead the no. 9 cuts off one of the centre-halves showing one way. The no. 10 operates around the opposition’s deepest midfield player.

The blue 9 can not tackle when defending, but moves to block any back pass

The blue 10 operates around the deepest lying midfield player

The blue midfield players move across to attacking areas

The blue defence moves across to block space and mark attackers

The blue 9 and no. 10 are ready to support the counter-attack or build the attack.
Building attacks through counter-attacking

After possession is turned over (2a), this becomes a rapid break that also includes the no. 7, and is made possible because opposition players are out of balance and have left space to progress into, as shown (2b).

"The decision on offer is whether to break fast on the regain through the middle, wide right or wide left; or to build, making six passes to move forwards up the pitch."

KEY

1 The press begins three yards into the opposition half
2 The no. 6 cuts the pass
3 The team defends in a 4-4-1 on regain
4 The no. 9 will sit high
5 The no. 10 is short or high
6 The no. 7 breaks
7 The no. 2 breaks on the overlap
8 The no. 10 is short or high
9 The no. 9 will sit high
10 The press begins three yards into the opposition half

Ball movement
Player movement
Dribble
Optional pass/run
Building attacks through passing

In the next example, as shown (2), and having turned the ball over, we now look to attack in a 4-2-3-1 system, with the aim of building attacks centrally, wide right or wide left and scoring in goals 1, 2 or 3. There is no space to counter-attack because opposition players are in good defensive balance. We therefore encourage them to achieve six passes whilst allowing our full-back to get upfield. On any regain the decision of the team to counter fast or build is crucial, and it’s always important to do this in balance and shape.

How do I progress the practice?

To progress we recommend moving to a full pitch and alternating the starting point – left, middle or right. You can test the players to get forward to the goal area with a reduced number of players (therefore a more difficult counter-attack), or in a quicker timeframe, perhaps 10–15 seconds. In any game situation the coach needs to choose his line of confrontation and work with his team’s strengths and weaknesses, adapting and offering advice at each step of the way.

What are the key things to look out for?

“We want to see an understanding of a solid unit and balance. Players should know when to press, when to counter and when to build.”

We want to see an understanding of a solid unit and balance. Players should know when to press, when to counter and when to build.

Players should know when to press, when to counter and when to build.
Chris Davies
Attacking overloads and positional play

Overview:
This session takes the form of a number of progressive exercises, each designed to develop players’ ability to progress the ball through the pitch. The idea is to create overloads because without them the game can become dependent on 1v1s, and that can mean it’s difficult to progress the ball unless you are far superior to your opponent. These exercises reinforce to players the fact that by creating numerical superiority (overloads) you can securely progress the ball to the final third, enjoying the rewards that follow in that key area of the pitch.

What do I get the players to do?
Warm Up (10mins)
The warm-up is done with the fitness coach, who will get the players engaged with dynamic flexibility and activation.

Technical: Rondos (5mins)
For the first practice we set up 5v2 in two centre circles (so 14 players in total), as shown (1). This is a simple one-touch exercise designed to activate players’ decision-making as well as improving ball retention. Here there are effectively three free players but the area is small and achieving more than 20 passes – which is the challenge – is rare.

Possession: 5v5+4 (10mins: 3x2.5mins including breaks)
With more players now involved – not least four neutrals around the edge of the square, who play for the team in possession – the players have even more decision-making concepts such as anticipating
the next pass, moving away from the free player and eliminating opponents with passes. This takes place in a 30x30-yard box, as shown (2).

**Conditioned small-sided game (8v8) (20mins: 3x6mins including breaks)**

Setting up on a 40x60-yard pitch, as shown (3a), the play always starts with the red keeper whenever the ball goes dead. Each team gets 10 consecutive attacks then swaps over. The ball must be played through zone 1 (the construction zone). One of the midfield players can drop into zone 1 to make a 3v2 overload (so including the red keeper this is a 4v2), giving the reds superiority and the conditions to securely progress the ball to zone 2. To make this game-related the midfielder is encouraged to drop in between the two central defenders or drop out to one side of the centre-halves – these are two common tactics used.

From here, one of the three red players steps in and dribbles the ball over the flat cones into zone 2 (the preparation zone) as shown (3b). His entry makes it 3v3 but at this point one of the strikers can drop in to the middle zone.

Again, they have numerical superiority with a 4v3 overload – this could be a winger jumping inside in a game or a striker dropping in. It’s worth noting that progressing the ball through the middle zone to the attacking zone can prove difficult despite having an overload. This is due to the fact the midfielders are not positioning themselves correctly and opening up passing lines by making their zone as big as possible. To that end the midfield triangle should be opened up so a passing line is created to a free player.

One of the reds then dribbles into zone 3 (creation and penetration zone) – he is now into a 2v2 situation. It is very rare to find overloads in this area of the pitch. The focus here is being positive and aggressive in the offensive actions to get a shot in. We are looking for quick dynamic actions from the other striker to...
create space, either for himself or his strike partner.

One condition is that for a goal to count the red team's defenders (two players) need to have run in zone 2 (the preparation zone) but can’t do so until the ball has progressed into zone 3. This encourages the defender to shorten the effective playing area and keep the team compact, which in the real game gives you a chance to press the ball immediately in transition and reduces the space between your organisation.

When the defending team regains the ball they counter-attack towards the goal and must shoot within 10 seconds, as shown (4). A by-product of dropping in to create overloads and positional play is that it gives the attacking team a chance to press immediately in transition because they have more players around the ball than the defending team, otherwise they can retreat and form a block ensuring the blues can’t shoot within 10 seconds. This transition defending underpins positional play so is an important concept to develop.

**How would you put this into a game situation?**

One progression from the game is to remove the condition that the ball has to travel through the zones, as shown (5). The teams are encouraged to make the same movements to create overloads (and what naturally happens is the opposition players start locking on to man-mark) so we would encourage players to recognise the moments to play into the second or third line and eliminate opponents.

So if a red midfielder drops in, he either creates numerical superiority for his team to progress the ball up the pitch securely, or provokes a blue midfielder out of his zone thus creating space for other players.

The keeper becomes vital within this as he is now the only free player the possession team have. Patience is then required to circulate the ball before the penetration moment arrives.
Experience is like gold dust for anyone in the early stages of their career and every success, failure and disappointment, however fresh and raw it feels, provides a valuable opportunity to learn. Crucially for managers starting out it is often the mental skills required for success in the profession that are least prepared and these need time and practice to build and grow. There’s nothing quite like the school of hard knocks to thicken the skin and help you develop the resilience and steely determination required to fulfil your ambitions.

As first jobs go Derry’s was a baptism of fire: faced with a fierce battle to avoid relegation, which he achieved, winning six of the season’s last nine games. Despite his efforts, however, Derry was replaced after only 18 months. It’s the kind of setback that is becoming par for the course in football management, especially for those taking their first steps in the profession, but that doesn’t make the cross any easier to bear. Yet, here, Derry seems wise beyond his years – pragmatic, devoid of bitterness and wholly forward in his thinking.

“You’re the psychologist, a father figure, and so on, so your talent and responsibilities have to be spread across the board.”

As someone who tries to take the positives from every situation, Derry viewed his departure not as a setback but as the next step on his management journey, and one that was inevitable at some point.

“Tt happens to the best of us, so I didn’t allow it to affect me too much,” he says. “I remember driving home from the club that day and thinking that it wasn’t a door shutting, but another one opening.”

Derry also managed to maintain some perspective on the situation, another core personal trait that even the most experienced managers may struggle with amidst the pressure, ambition and passion of the job.

Silver linings
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“As I had given the job at Notts County my absolute all, my family had been put to one side to a certain degree,” he says. “As
EXTRA-TIME PROFILE: SHAUN DERRY

“As a player, my managers afforded me and my team trust to run the dressing room as we saw fit and this was something I was keen to do here at Cambridge United.”

soon as I left the club, therefore, I vowed to spend some quality time with them away from the football environment, so we spent a fantastic month fulfilling a long-held ambition to travel around California. It gave me time to think about my career and my ambitions and get some real perspective on things.”

The next step
When he became manager of Cambridge United in November 2015, Derry joined a cohort of young managers making their mark on League Two, in which the average age of managers is only 43, the lowest of the four English leagues. “I hope that as a growing number of British managers are given a chance in the profession, especially in the Sky Bet Championship and the Barclays Premier League, those average ages will come down further,” he says. “When I look around me I see many like-minded, driven young people who really want to be given the opportunity to grow and learn and we all aspire to reach as high in the profession as we possibly can.”

As someone who is highly self-driven, Derry says to be able to manage against people with a similar drive and ambition is very powerful, not least because managing in League Two is tough. “It’s perhaps harder to manage at this level than in the higher leagues, because as you’re working with fewer staff you have to spend even more time on a host of things other than leadership. You’re the psychologist, a father figure, and so on, so your talent and responsibilities have to be spread across the board.”

How someone copes with the early weeks in a job can be critical to their ongoing success and there may be a minefield of relationship issues, strategic cross-purposes and expectations to navigate. But Derry has acquitted himself well since joining the League Two side. Was the experience he gained at Notts County since joining the League Two side. Was the experience he gained at Notts County, enabling him to further learn and add to his own. “The group of staff here have the kinds of characteristics that I like to work with,” he adds, “so the transition has been pretty seamless and I feel confident and comfortable in my new surroundings.”

But of all the lessons he’s taken to Cambridge United from his time at Notts County one stands out more than most – the importance of dealing with disappointment. How well you do that, he says, has a huge impact on your ability to lead. “On a Monday morning people are looking to you for leadership, so you can’t dwell on a poor result or leave issues to fester until later in the week,” he says. “You can’t allow your disappointment in a result or performance to define the week, as that can be very detrimental to the players and the wider team.”

Success depends on how you react and respond in the face of adversity, he adds. “So, on Monday morning you need to speak with clarity of purpose and set the vision for the week ahead, because there’s another opportunity just around the corner. Everyone around you needs guidance and direction and they need stability to be able to perform to the best of their abilities.”

Respect and autonomy
Mutual trust is also a key feature of Derry’s style and ethos as a manager – trust in his support staff and in his playing team. As a player Derry was comfortable in the role of team captain and he thrived on the leadership and sense of responsibility. He was also a natural communicator, comfortable in speaking on behalf of the team, helping them to understand what was expected of them and how they could achieve that.

“I always placed strong value on the relationship between the captain and the manager and I had strong relationships with the managers I played under. I was their voice in the dressing room and as such I needed to respect what their wishes were,” he says. Unsurprisingly, he now places special importance on the captaincy role and on trusting the players under their wing.

“Generally, I don’t go into the dressing room as a manager, because I believe it’s the players’ domain,” he says. “As a player, my managers afforded me and my team trust to run the dressing room as we saw fit and this was something I was keen to do here at Cambridge United. I want to have four or five like-minded people in the dressing room – people whose ambitions match mine and who I’m happy to represent me – and then give them ownership of what they want to achieve, within the guidelines I have set.”

The mutual trust and respect that Derry has with his support staff is equally vital, not least with his assistant managers, Greg Abbott at Notts County and Joe Dunne at Cambridge United, with whom he is also studying the LMA Diploma in Football Management.

“Having been able to draw on the experience of two men who have managed themselves has been invaluable,” says Derry. “Since I embarked on this journey I have experienced many things, but every day I’m still learning. I want to immerse myself in knowledge, have experienced professionals around me and be able to speak to and learn from people with backgrounds and skills that contrast with my own.”

For Derry, each position is more than a job; each club is a learning environment. “Importantly, I want it to be the sort of learning culture that takes everybody forward, because together we’re constantly changing our behaviours, beliefs and abilities.”
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