



**Player Practice  
Sessions No 3  
(Midfield)**

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## ***Player Practice Sessions - No 3***

### **Midfield:**

1. Drills to get your wingers dribbling.
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3. Make your own playmaker.
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## Drills to get your wingers dribbling

If you reckon your wide men's dribbling skills could do with some polishing up, there are several training drills you can use to improve effectiveness.

### **Time to dribble**

Many coaches believe there is a time and a place for dribbling: in the attacking third of the pitch. Lose the ball here and the risk of the opposition creating a goal scoring opportunity is reduced; dribble successfully (e.g. go past the defender) and the chances of being rewarded with a goal increase.

### **A is for Attitude**

Your winger must be positive, at each training drill and in matches, and believe he has the ability to beat the full-back. Even with the first controlling touch their body should be side on and they should be looking to commit a defender.

One way they can gain confidence is for you to encourage them and accept it's likely THEY WILL FAIL MORE THAN OFTEN THAN THEY SUCCEED.

Dribbling is a high risk/high reward skill – risks have to be taken to create goal scoring opportunities, and when you understand that, it will put the unsuccessful attempts in perspective. Remember, criticising them for being tackled and losing the ball will only make them less likely to try again.

The other way to build confidence is to get your winger to...

### **Practise, practise, practise**

Every winger should have skills he can use to beat a defender. Once techniques such as the step over are acquired set up 1v1 training drills. Remember, observe if your attacker is:

- Comfortable with the ball and able to keep it under close control
- Playing with their head up so they can see their options
- Slowing down as they approach the defender
- Using body feints to unbalance the defender
- Able to change direction once the defender is unbalanced
- Exploding past the defender with their head up

### **Other ways to beat a player**

A winger doesn't have to dribble past a defender to beat them. A one-two is always effective, or if, for example, your full back has the ball, the winger can drag their marker with them towards the ball, and spin off behind the marker into the space vacated when your full-back plays the ball over the top. Alternatively, if there's space to run into and they're quicker than their opponent, a winger can just knock the ball past and give chase. Finally, sometimes there's no need even to beat a man – David Beckham, has made a career out of taking one touch to control the ball and with his second touch bending dangerous crosses around the defender marking him.

### **Positional play training drill**

One of the key reasons teams employ wingers is to stretch defences width ways, thus creating gaps infield for forwards and attacking midfielders to exploit. The most obvious way to do this is to ask your wingers to stick close to their touchlines when your team has possession.

This way, they can either receive balls to feet, allowing them to run at the defender, or they can run into the space behind when a ball is played inside the defender.

Sticking wide also makes them free for the ball switched diagonally across, say from a central defender. Receiving this type of ball means a winger is more likely to find himself in a favourable 1v1 situation where the defender has no cover.

### **End product**

Once the player has beaten the defender on either the outside or inside, you want an end result. This means can they:

- Shoot
- Cross the ball/pull it back for an attacker
- Play a defence-splitting pass?

If these options aren't on they must retain possession – unless, of course, there's another defender to be beaten!

## How Quick Free-Kicks Open Opposition Defences

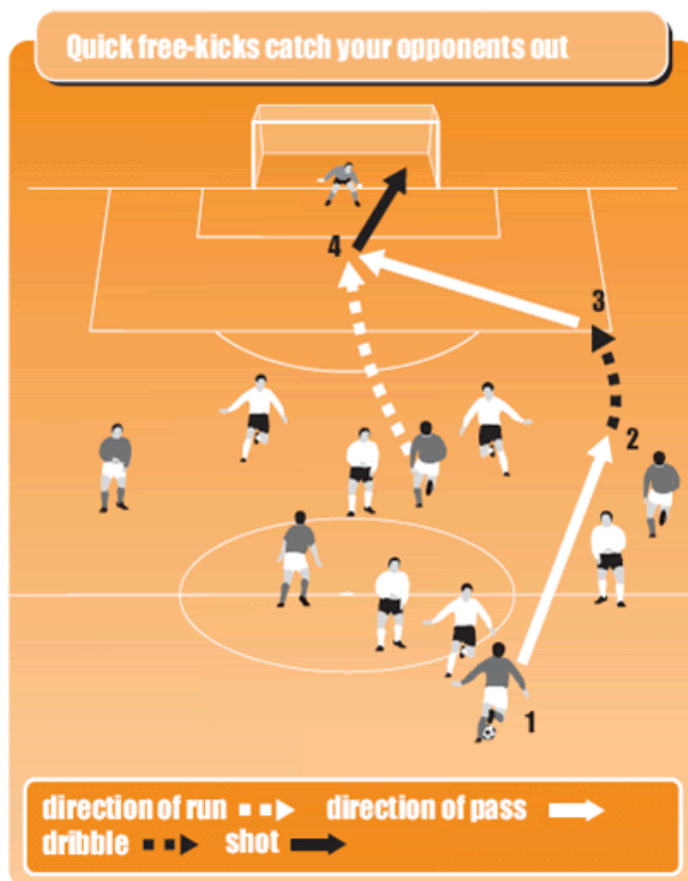
Free-kicks are given so you have an advantage over your opponents - make sure your players are prepared to make the most of them. One way to do this is by catching the opposition off their guard.

### A quick free-kick often results in a goal

This is how it works in the diagram:

1. The ball is played quickly out to the player unmarked on right-wing.
2. The winger dribbles towards goal.
3. He then crosses the ball into the penalty box.
4. The attacking team is first to the ball and scores

With a little vision and a quick pass, the defence is caught sleeping and is unbalanced with the left-back out of position. The quick pass from the free-kick allows the winger to capitalise on the poor marking. He plays in a hard, low cross which his attacker is quicker to than the defenders.



### The defending team has lost concentration

At a free-kick teams must keep their concentration to make sure that no opposition players are left free in space. In the diagram the lack of concentration is punished.

### The attackers have taken the initiative

The ability to make the most of opportunities shows how important it is for teams to sometimes play free-kicks quickly (be aware of attacking possibilities) and to capitalise on a defence that is caught unawares.

### Key coaching tip:

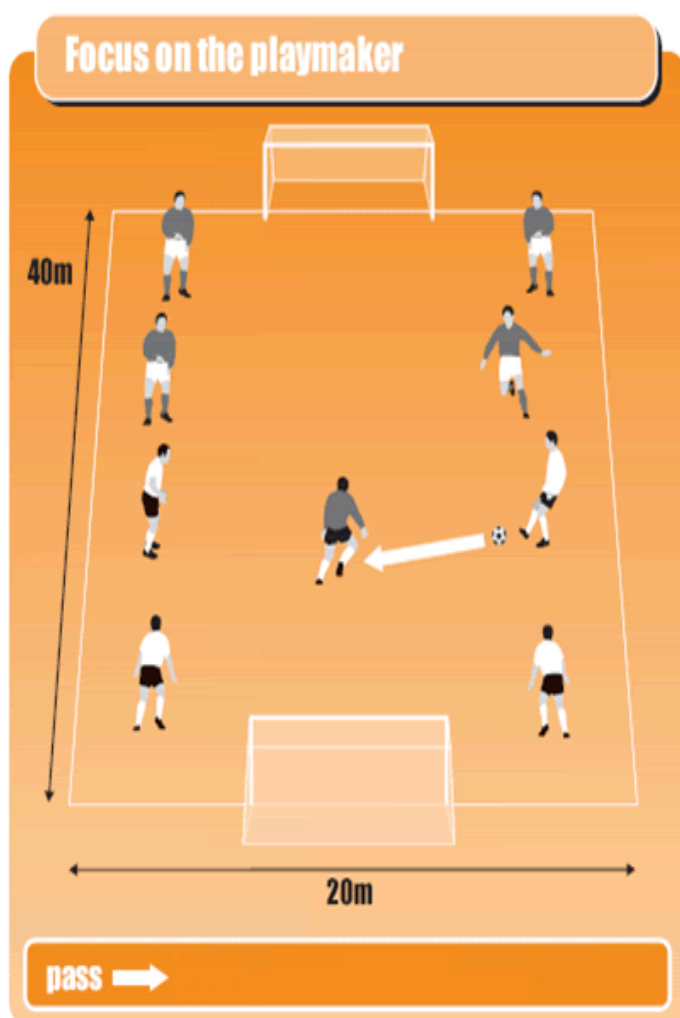
It's simple - tell your players to be first to the ball at free-kicks.

## Make Your Own Playmaker

Small-sided games can be used to develop skills that make players stand out in matches.

### A skilful player causes excitement

We all have favourite players that cause a stir of excitement when they get the ball because we know that something will happen - a defence splitting pass, a clever one-two, a flick or a spin. It's the playmaker in action. For anyone old enough to remember the great teams of the 70s and 80s every team had a playmaker who got the crowds on their feet.



### Encourage the skilled players

So the idea behind this training session is to encourage the development of a playmaker. The player will be working on his technique - passing and receiving - and his communication and decision making, as well as adding his own flair.

### How it works

Set up a 4v4 match, then choose your playmaker who is the extra player. Put him in a different coloured bib. He plays for the team in possession. For either team to score a goal the play must go through the playmaker.

The playmaker will see a lot of the ball and make many decisions. It is this repetition that will improve passing, receiving and decision making.

### Key coaching tips

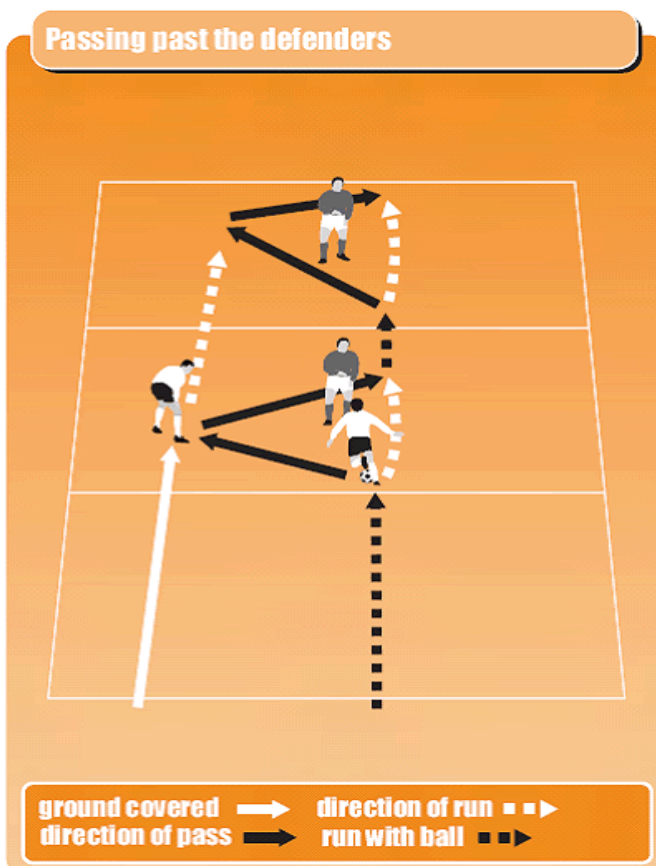
More involvement, less pressure, lots of fun allows the more skilled players to develop.

## Carve Your Way to Goal

Get your wingers to practice playing one-twos with their midfield team-mates so they can carve a way to goal and leave a few defenders behind on match days. Sometimes it's better than dribbling.

### How to get around a solid defence

When your wingers are hitting a brick wall every time they try to dribble their way to goal, tell them to try playing quick one-twos to get around a solid defence. There is nothing more frustrating for your team if they are constantly losing the ball when your players are trying to dribble around defenders. This way they can beat them without losing the ball.



### How to do it

- One of your attackers dribbles to the second zone where he must play a quick one-two with his supporting team-mate to beat the defender.
- The supporting player passes the ball back into his path.
- The first attacker then dribbles towards the next defender and repeats the same action.
- His team-mate successfully plays the ball back.

### How to change the elements

- Tell your players to vary their approach angles and starting positions and you can vary the size of each zone.
- Put in a chasing player to pressure the dribbling player.
- Add another defender that puts pressure on the supporting player so he has to pass quicker.

### What to watch out for

- Tell your dribbling player to wait for the defender to come to him.
- Tell him to keep the defender guessing by using faking movements such as step-over and dropping his shoulder.
- Tell both the dribbler and the supporting player they must use explosive bursts of pace to get into the positions to play and receive the ball.

### Key coaching tips

Accurate passing is crucial to beating players using this method; timing of passing is crucial; timing of run is crucial.

### Use a zonal system

Mark your training pitch into three zones, and have two attackers/passers in the first zone, and put a defender in zone 2 and a defender in zone 3.

## Strong midfielders defend then attack

Teams play better when a strong midfielder is winning the ball off the attackers and creating opportunities for a counter attack. It's a great way to turn the tables on opponents.

I did a terrible thing this season. I dismantled my all-conquering under 11s team and scattered them to the four corners of the football globe. I put my son into a team that was struggling and told him to use all that he had learned in the seven years I had coached him, all the goals he had scored and give them to a new team.

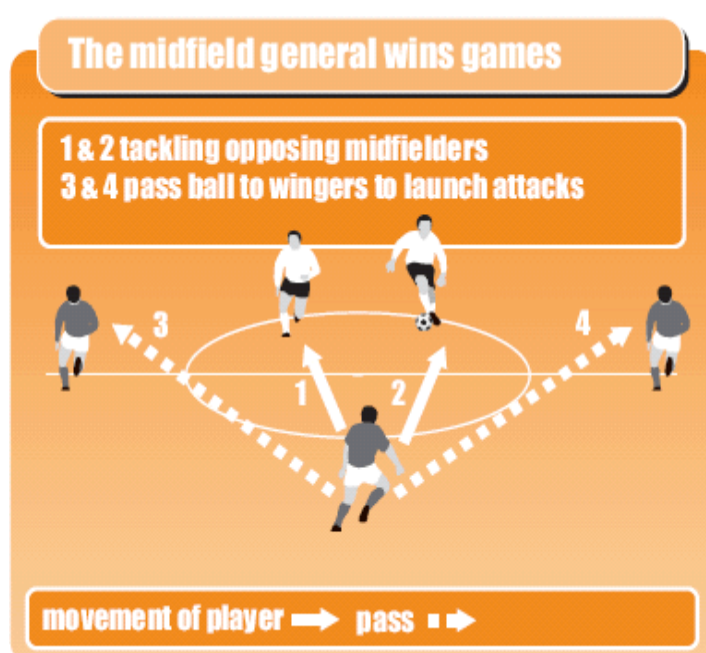
He had to become the player the whole team revolved around. There was a lot for him to learn through having to fight for every ball and every tackle. But he has taken a lot of satisfaction out of it.

It's a position I think every team needs. The central midfielder that wins the ball and distributes it left, right and plays through balls to the attackers. It's a very hard roll to play, but if you can get one of your players to do it your team will benefit.

Think Roy Keane, Claude Makelele, Steven Gerrard, Michael Bradley, Gennaro Gattuso. These guys can do that.

It's a difficult position to coach. Give it to the wrong player and he's giving away free kicks all over the pitch. Give it to the right player and coach him into holding his position and you're on to a winner.

Tell your player to play in the hole in front of the central defenders. Get him to close down any player running at the defence and stop them in their tracks.



You've seen games where the opposition kicks off and runs right through your team to score. This player stops that.

He targets the man with the ball and makes sure he gets it. And when he does get the ball, he's off running, passing, opening up the opposition defence. The rest of the team have to be ready to support his role and be open for the pass.

**Key coaching tip:** The midfield general must be equipped with sliding and block tackles, be able to make a through pass to the attackers, and be the fittest player in the team.



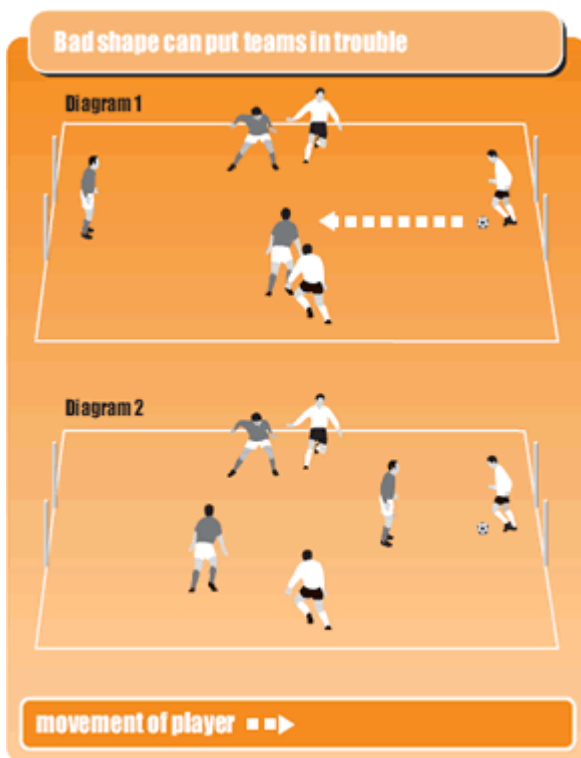
## Use shapes to make your team stronger

Shapes are important in soccer. They happen all over the pitch and you have to make sure your players know how to use them.

The strongest shape in soccer is the triangle, with a player at each corner. You can beat anyone if you know how to make triangles work for you, get it wrong though and the triangles will fall apart.

Playing 3v3 brings up situations that often occur in small-sided and 11-a-side games. It illustrates how poor shape has an effect on the other players, making their own job much harder.

The triangular shape in midfield is very much something coaches can use to great effect all over the pitch. But you must use it properly.



Have a look at these situations in the diagram and I will show you what I mean:

In the top situation in the diagram the white team have the ball and have to bring it out from their own goal. The grey team has adopted the shape of a triangle; however, the middle player has dropped back deep to protect his goal, in effect becoming a sweeper behind the other two grey team players.

This means that the white player bringing the ball out is unmarked and can either directly attack straight down the middle or create 2v1 situations with his team mates.

The two grey wingers have a problem. Do they mark their player or go towards the man with the ball?

By moving away from the player they are marking they leave themselves open to a simple wall pass and leave the goal at their mercy. If they stay, this creates a 1v1 directly in front of their own goal. Or the white player can elect to move towards one of his teammates creating a 2v1.

In the bottom diagram the grey team is still in a triangle but the middle player has moved up to the man on the ball. This gives the man on the ball an immediate problem as he tries to bring the ball out. He is under pressure to pass the ball because he dare not dribble past him.

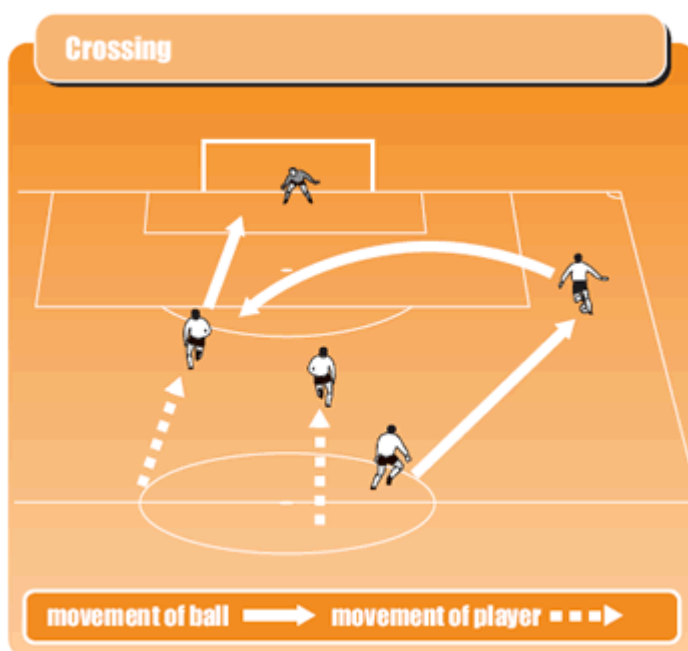
Passing is difficult so the grey team are more likely to win the ball. The grey player can also force the player to pass one way or another by moving slightly to one side, forcing a pass and allowing a grey team mate to intercept.

## Crossing and finishing

Make sure your wingers are crossing to your team's strengths

Playing to your strengths is a vital part of being a soccer coach. You know your players and what they can do.

If you watch soccer from all over the world you will see tall players, short players, fat and thin players, all of whom have a particular skill that has influenced the coach to pick them for his team.



At Manchester United Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez are both very short attackers, so it's no good crossing high balls into them, the defenders will head them away all day long. But, put a low hard cross in and watch what happens.

At the other end of the spectrum is the England striker Peter Crouch, the tallest man on the pitch. He doesn't even need to jump to score goals, so if you have him on your team, get a high cross in.

I also have a very tall attacker in my team; I also play him in goal because of his size and agility. When he's up front I tell my wingers to cross high balls into him. Defenders hate it. Once the cross is away, if it's a good one, you can bet he'll get his head on it and have a chance to score a goal.

You can incorporate into your training sessions a ten-minute quick break practice of passing, crossing and finishing. High looping crosses to tall good headers of the ball and low hard ones to the good volleys, with good turning skills and footwork.

Use this set up:

Tell your wingers to use both high and low crosses so you can see how your attackers cope. A server passes out wide to your winger who crosses first time aiming for the edge of the 18 yard box. Two attackers run to receive the cross and either shoot or head first time.

You can then make it harder by adding a defender or two.

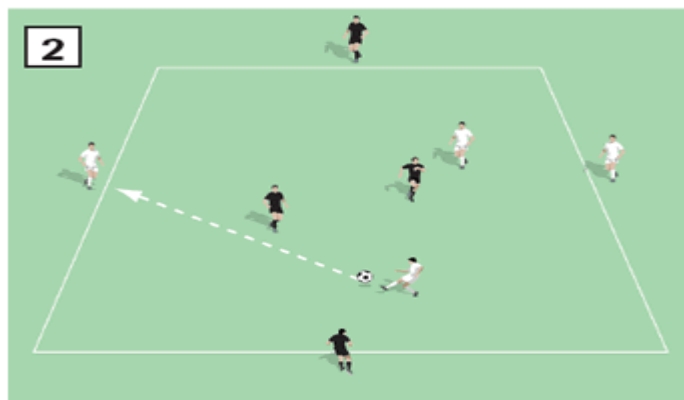
One game I like to play is to give your server three or four balls and tell your players they are 1-0 down with a minute left so the server must play to the winger and get as many goal scoring chances in before the minute is up and try to turn around the 1-0 score line.

## 2v2 Small-sided game to maintain possession

In this game, players have to keep possession for their team and pass the ball to a team mate standing outside the pitch.



1. The white team are in possession in a simple 2 v 2 game.



2. A white player creates an opportunity to pass to his team-mate off the pitch.



3. A successful pass means the two players swap roles.

It is a good 2v2 with supporting play on the outside. Players are using individual and team skills to rack up more goals than the opposition.

Set up a pitch 30 x 20 yards and use two teams of four players.

Each team has two players on the pitch and two players off it.

If the ball leaves play the coach passes a new ball on to the team who weren't in possession at the time.

The aim of the game is to pass out to a team mate. The passing player swaps with the outside player, who dribbles the ball onto the pitch. Award a goal for each successful pass to an outside player.

Play the game for a set time.

## Advance your players' use of space

Controlling the ball quickly, away from defenders and into space, will give players more time to assess their options and execute their next move, whether that is a shot, pass or dribble.

- It improves the ability to keep possession.
- Creates more possession time.
- Increases the team's speed of play.

### In this session players need to think about:

- Where their opponents and team mates are.
- Body position - half-turned in the direction they want to control the ball.
- Ball travels across body to the back foot.
- Contact the ball's horizontal mid-line or above.
- Cushion the ball to play it again without having to chase or reach for it.

### How to play it



- You need a ball and four players in a 10 x 10 yard area.
- 2 players stand one behind the other on one side of the square, with the other 2 players lined-up opposite.
- The first player passes the ball across the square, where the player receiving controls it – using the inside, or arch, of the foot – and passes it back, ideally with their second touch.
- Once a player from either side has played a pass, they turn behind the second player in line, who repeats the drill.
- Keep the ball moving.
- Use the right foot to control to the right, and the left to control to the left.
- Stress the importance of good passing.

## Playing in windy weather

Advice to keep your players' shots, passes and goal kicks accurate when they're playing in windy weather.

### **Playing into the wind checklist**

- Tell your players to keep it tight — short passing into the wind. Any long balls will be held up by the wind and you will soon find you're up against a fast breakaway attack.
- In training practise holding the ball up — get your players to play balls into the attacker with his back to goal, creating opportunities for your midfielders to run with the ball.
- At goal kicks, tell your goalkeeper to play out to the sides — a long kick down the middle would be suicide.

### **Playing with the wind checklist**

- Tell your players to resist the temptation to blast long balls into the opposition half — your forwards will soon get tired of the ball going straight out of play.
- But do let your goalkeeper unleash some long balls – get your forwards to cause chaos with the bouncing goal kicks by heading them towards goal.
- Tell your forwards to test your opponents' goalkeeper with high accurate shots.