

Roger Schmidt: Tactical activation through possession and transition IV

Setup

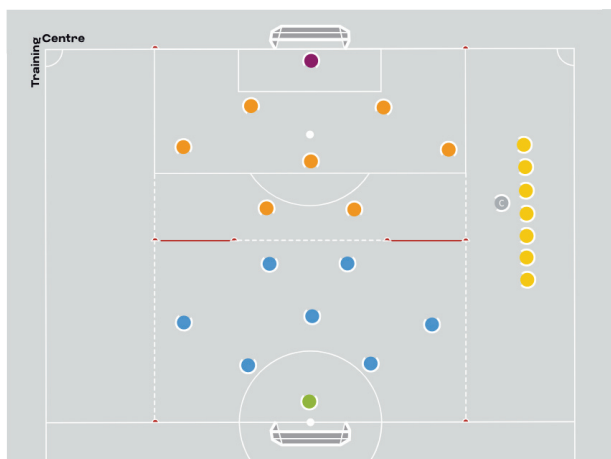
Three teams of seven players compete in a round-robin format. Matches are played on half a pitch with reduced width, creating a compact and high-pressure environment.

Rules

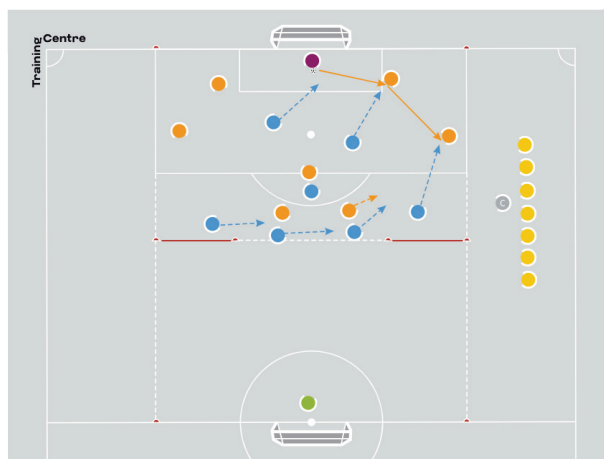
- Free play with the offside rule applying from the halfway line.
- Two gates are placed on the halfway line. Teams earn extra points by dribbling through them.
- Throw-ins are played, but corner kicks are replaced by restarts from the goalkeeper.
- Goals are rewarded — if a team scores, they keep possession.

Rotation

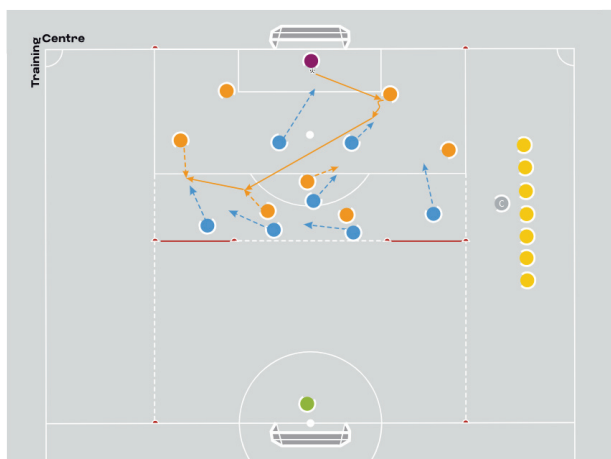
- Each game lasts 2 minutes, followed by a short active recovery break.
- Teams rotate after each round.
- Points are tracked, and the team with the most points wins the tournament.



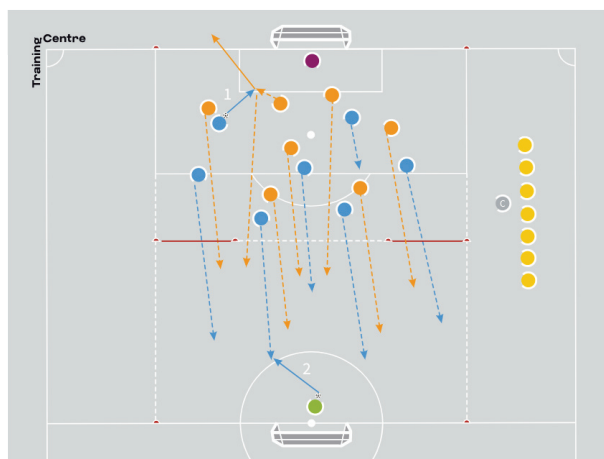
(1/4) Teams line up in a 1-4-1-2 formation, establishing their defensive structure before the start of the pressing tournament.



(2/4) The defending team pushes up aggressively to defend high, aiming to control space and apply pressure in the opponent's half.



(3/4) Teams can earn extra points by dribbling through the gates on the halfway line, encouraging high pressing.



(4/4) Instead of a corner kick, play restarts from the goalkeeper. The defending team must quickly push up to organise the press and prevent the attacking team from progressing forward.

Deliberate practice and design

This exercise is designed carefully to challenge players physically, tactically and mentally. Everything, from the setup and rules to coaching interventions, is intended to foster maximum intensity, tactical clarity and a bold pressing mentality.

- **Tournament format:** The competitive format increases pressure, driving intensity and focus while replicating real match situations.
- **Work-rest ratio:** Short two-minute games with active recovery periods sustain high intensity and keep players sharp and engaged.
- **Rule constraints:** Gates on the halfway line force defenders to press high and defend forward, rather than dropping deep to protect the goal.
- **Quick restarts:** Rapid transitions after goals or out-of-play situations maintain tempo and reward urgency.
- **Coaching interventions:** Schmidt uses player circles and live on-field demonstrations to clarify and instil tactical behaviours.
- **Mentality and exaggeration:** Players are encouraged to push limits, exaggerate pressing behaviours and embrace the intensity needed to develop an extreme style.

Five Key Principles of Schmidt's Pressing Philosophy

Roger Schmidt's pressing philosophy is grounded in a clear tactical vocabulary. Below, we break down five central German terms that structure his team's behaviour and explain how they come to life on the training pitch.

1. Ball orientation

Defenders use the ball as their primary reference point, not the opponent. The team shifts collectively towards the ball to:

- Compress space around it
- Create numerical superiority
- Maintain compactness and mutual support

This principle underpins Schmidt's approach to pressing: the ball dictates the team's shape and movement.

2. Swarm behaviour

The team moves as a synchronised unit, maintaining vertical and horizontal compactness. When one player presses, others follow, creating a net of pressure and enabling pressing in waves. If the first line is broken, the next player is already in position to continue the press. Key objectives include:

- Stay compact
- Maintain pressure after the first line is broken
- Create a web of pressure that suffocates the opponent's build-up

This principle enables Schmidt's teams to press in waves without losing structure.

3. Floating between opponents

A player positions themselves between multiple opponents, covering several options without committing to one. This allows them to:

- Block multiple passing lanes
- React flexibly in different directions
- Stay mobile and unpredictable

This behaviour is especially effective in fluid, high-intensity pressing systems.

4. Sprint pressing

Players press in straight lines at full speed, aiming to challenge and win the ball, not just delay. This pressing action is defined by:

- Full-speed commitment
- No hesitation
- Intent to tackle or force an error
- Trust in team-mates to cover behind

This principle reflects Schmidt's extreme pressing mentality. The pressing player's objective is to reach the ball early, ideally intercepting it. He is not responsible for controlling the surrounding space; that responsibility lies with his team-mates, who must stay connected and cover behind to maintain compactness.

5. Covering from behind

When a full-back steps out to press, the rest of the backline shifts horizontally or steps up diagonally to:

- Cover the space behind
- Prevent vertical passes
- Maintain balance and compactness

In Schmidt's aggressive pressing systems, durchsichern ensures the team remains stable even when individuals commit forward. This principle is especially relevant in an 11v11 match scenario — for example, when a full-back presses the opposing full-back, leaving the opponent's winger temporarily unmarked.

Conclusion

This session demonstrates how Schmidt's pressing philosophy is brought to life on the training ground. Through competitive structure, tactical rules and intense coaching, players are immersed in the behaviours that define his teams. The result is a training environment that builds not only tactical understanding, but the mentality and intensity required to play Schmidt's high-octane style.