

Switching play

Session overview

Throughout this session, the exercises alternate from a large pitch to a small pitch, with the same principles applying in both instances.

The session starts with a 9v8 game (plus goalkeepers) on the large pitch and with a focus on switching play in different systems, before two 5v5 games on small pitches. As the players progress through the drills, it is important that new tactical concepts be introduced in each exercise. The first step involves equipping the players with the knowledge to know how and why to switch play, before working on controlling possession and the game and then finally developing the skills to apply an effective counter-press.

Allow some time after each game to reflect on the aspects that were successful and areas for improvement.

The structure of the small-sided game features parts 1, 2 and 3, as outlined below, whilst the session is rounded off with Part 4, which is played on the large pitch.

Part 1: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: switching play in 3-5-2 and 4-3-3 set-ups
5v5 small-sided game: switching play in small spaces

Part 2: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: timing the switch
5v5 small-sided game: switching play in small spaces

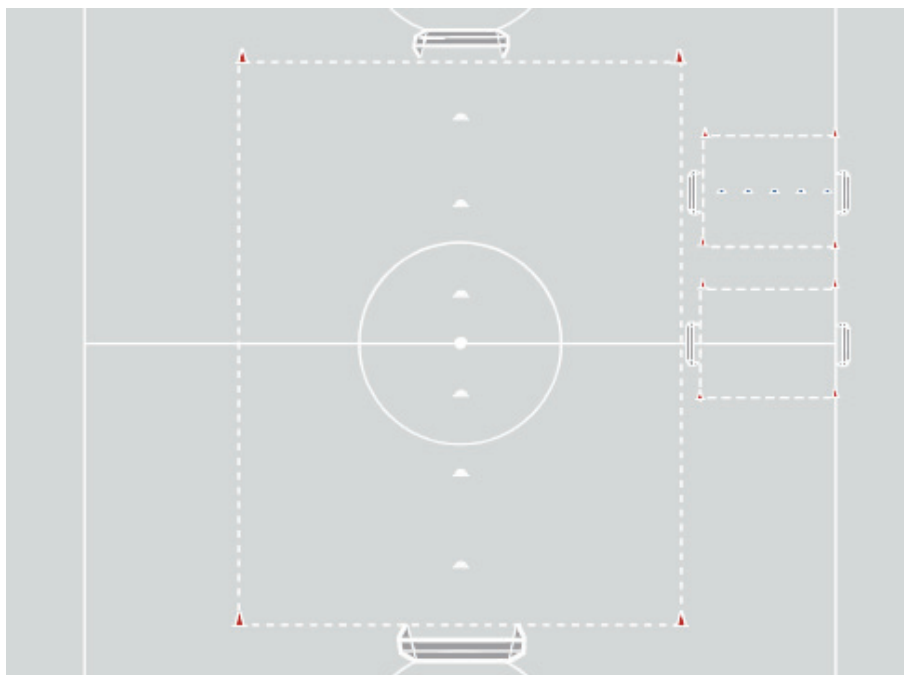
Part 3: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: switching play and possession
5v5 small-sided game: switching play in small spaces

Part 4: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: switching play and counter-pressing

Key coaching points

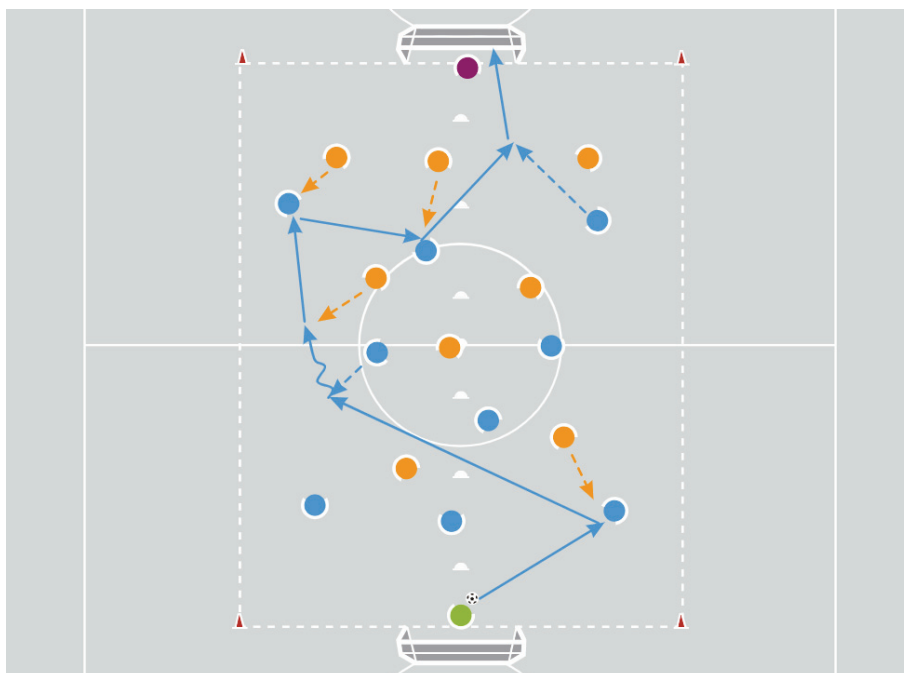
- The large pitch allows players to apply certain principles when switching play, such as using anchor points and a range of passes, whereas the smaller pitch enables players to showcase their individual technical skills as they seek to switch play.
- Use two different systems that feature various player roles so as to offer players an understanding about how and when to switch play, based on the system in which they are operating.
- Quick switches of play can allow a team to exploit a defence's weak area, or in other words, the part of the defence with the fewest defenders.
- Encourage players to switch play quickly using a range of passes, such as long diagonal passes or short incisive passes into central players, who act as an anchor point.
- Before switching play to the other side, think about how the team can stretch the pitch and create the space to make the switch.
- Vary the approach taken to switching play and, based on the situation, make a decision about whether it is better to initially build up possession or look to switch the ball quickly.

Organisation



Throughout this session, the exercises alternate from a large pitch to two smaller pitches.

Large pitch: 9v8 plus goalkeepers



The teams contest a 9v8 game (plus goalkeepers) on the large pitch.

Organisation

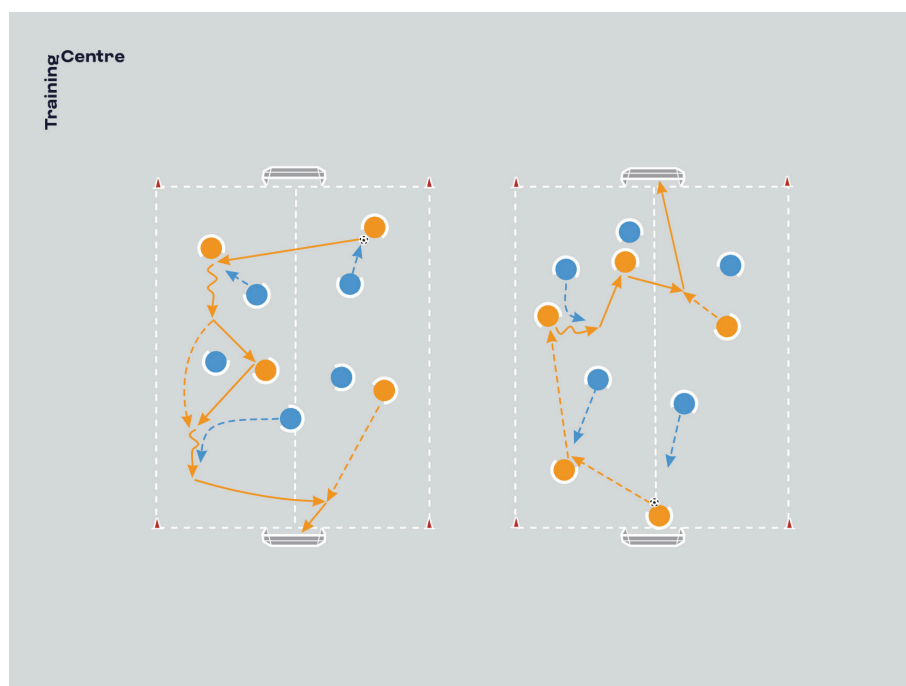
- Mark out a 50x40m pitch.
- Divide the pitch into 2 lanes by placing cones down the middle.
- Place a full-size goal at one end of the pitch and a medium-size goal at the other.
- Divide the players into 2 teams (9v8).
- The team with 9 players (blue) play with a goalkeeper (10 players in total).
- The team with 8 players (orange) do not have a dedicated goalkeeper and rotate an additional outfield player to keep goal (9 players in total).

Explanation

- The blue team set up in a 3-3-3 formation that represents a standard 4-3-3 set-up.
- The orange team set up in a 3-3-2 formation that represents a standard 3-5-2 set-up.
- The objective is to score a goal that involves a switch of play during the build-up.
- The objective should be harder for the blue team to achieve as they are trying to score into a smaller goal.
- The exercise lasts 10 minutes.

Small pitch: 5v5: switching play in small spaces

The purpose of this drill is to give players the opportunity to use the same principles of switching play but in tighter spaces, where their individual technical ability plays a more prominent role. There are times when there is no space in the wider areas and so players will need to call on their technical skills and precise passing to shift the ball from side to side in tighter areas. This exercise allows players to work on these aspects with a view to creating the space to finish.



The smaller pitch gives players the chance to showcase their technical ability and precise passing as they shift the ball across the midline.

Organisation

- Mark out two 10x8m pitches.
- Place 2 mini-goals on each pitch.
- Divide the pitch into 2 lanes by placing cones down the middle.
- Divide the teams as follows: the blue team in 2 teams of 5 and the orange team into 1 team of 5 and another team of 4.
- The goalkeeper joins the team with 4 players.
- Each pitch should host a 5v5 or 5v4 game between a blue team and an orange team.

Explanation

- The objective is to score a goal that involves a switch of play across the midline in the build-up.
- Players can only score with a first-time finish.
- A team is awarded 1 point if the goal involves a first-time finish.
- A team is awarded 2 points if the play is switched across the midline in the build-up to a goal involving a first-time finish.
- The first-time finish rule does not apply to the orange team with only 4 players. They are allowed to take multiple touches before attempting to score.
- The exercise lasts 5 minutes.

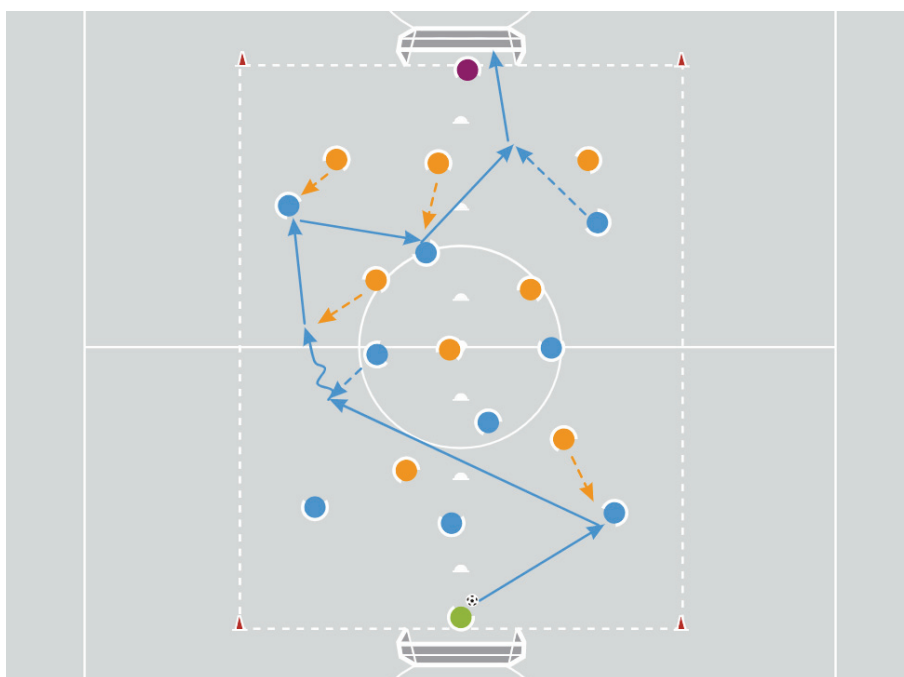
Coaching points

- The same principles from the previous exercise on the larger pitch apply, but players need to place greater emphasis on operating in tighter spaces.
- Players should call on their individual technical ability to create opportunities to switch play across the sideline.
- Close control, precise passing and high intensity levels are key elements in creating opportunities to switch play.

NB: in the small-sided games, each team's score is calculated across all of the games, with the team with the most goals declared the winner.

Part 1: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: switching play in 3-5-2 and 4-3-3 set-ups

This first exercise focuses on switching play in two different systems, 3-5-2 and 4-3-3. As the two systems differ, the approach and method involved in shifting the ball from one side of the pitch to the other may vary. This drill helps players to understand when and how to switch play when operating in different systems in which they occupy different roles. The coach needs to introduce the concept of a vertical line in this exercise.



The image shows how differently players switch play when operating in a 4-3-3 and a 3-5-2.

Rules

- A team is awarded 1 point for scoring a goal that does not involve a switch of play in the build-up.
- A team is awarded 2 points for scoring a goal that involves a switch of play in the build-up.
- The exercise lasts 10 minutes.

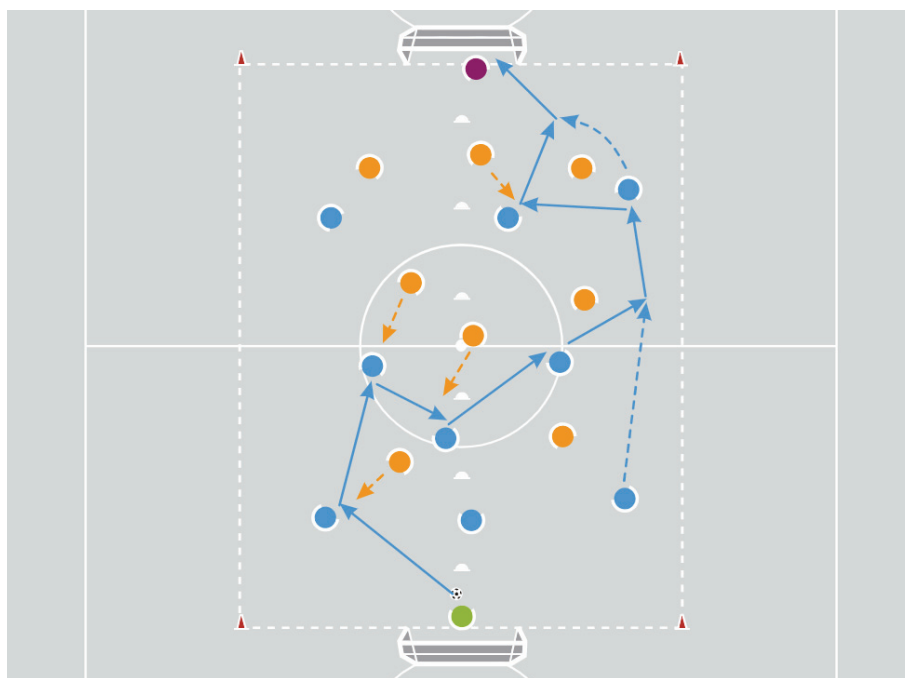
Coaching points

- The formations need to offer a realistic representation of the systems a team adopts in 11v11 matches (4-3-3 and 3-5-2).
- Within the 3-3-3 formation, the blue team's right- and left-sided defenders need to operate as full-backs in order to faithfully reflect the 4-3-3 system. As a result of this, the one remaining defender becomes the only centre-back, who lines up alongside 3 midfielders and attackers apiece.
- The orange team operates with 3 centre-backs, 3 central midfielders and 2 strikers in a 3-3-2 set-up.
- The players should use the pitch markings as a reference to help stretch the pitch.
- The players need to use a range of passes when switching play and not rely solely on playing long balls.
- Playing shorter passes through and across the midline can represent a more subtle approach and ultimately prove successful in opening up the opposition.
- The blue team that sets up in a 3-3-3 formation should consider playing longer diagonal passes that pick out the wingers and give them the chance to isolate the opposite full-backs.

*** Players should move over to the smaller pitch for the small-sided game.**

Part 2: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: how and why to switch

This exercise aims to enhance players' intensity and sharpness so that they can switch play to great effect. Focusing on movement off the ball, quick decision-making, reading of the game and the timing of the switch pass, rather than frequency, allows players to identify the right cues that will ensure success when it comes to switching the ball from one side of the pitch to the other.



Play can be switched via a central player, who acts as an anchor point. Where this switch of play features in the build-up to a goal, the team is awarded 2 points.

Rule changes

- A team is awarded 1 point for scoring a goal that involves a first-time finish.
- A team is awarded 2 points for scoring a goal that involves a switch of play in the build-up.
- The exercise lasts 10 minutes.

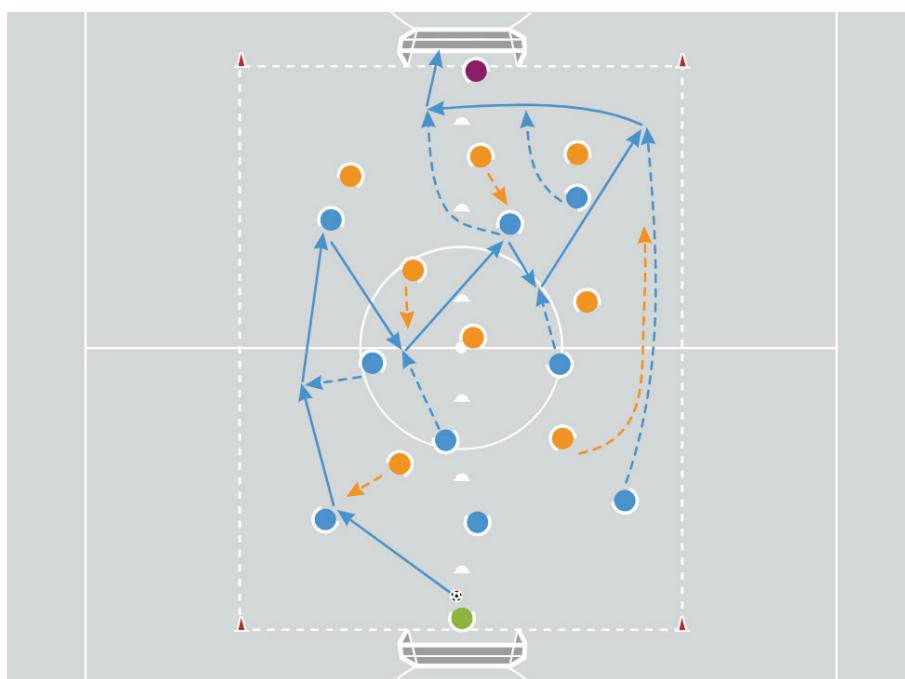
Coaching points

- Players should concentrate on their movement off the ball to allow them to find the space that enables their team to switch play.
- The central players should focus on acting as an anchor point and a conduit through which a switch of play is executed during the build-up phase.
- The central players can shift the ball by finding pockets of space to make simple passes that initiate the switch.
- A switch pass does not need to be played at every opportunity. Players should instead focus on timing and consider whether the opposition is stretched.
- If the opposition defends compactly, the team in possession should look to occupy spaces that offer more than one option to initiate a switch.

*** Players should move over to the smaller pitch for the small-sided game.**

Part 3: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: retaining possession by switching play

With the addition of a new rule, this exercise aims to give players a range of choices when building an attack. During the course of a game, a team is able to choose the best course of action in terms of their build-up and this is dependent on the situation they encounter. They can choose to try and score directly, switch play quickly or build the play up on the basis of control and possession, before moving the ball from one side of the pitch to the other.



The team in possession is awarded 3 points if they put 8 or more passes together before switching play and scoring.

Rule changes

- A team is awarded 1 point for scoring a goal that does not involve a switch of play in the build-up.
- A team is awarded 2 points for scoring a goal that involves a switch of play in the build-up.
- A team is awarded 3 points for scoring a goal that involves a sequence of 8 or more passes in the build-up. Whilst a switch of play is not a requirement, it is likely to feature within the build-up.
- This exercise lasts 10 minutes.

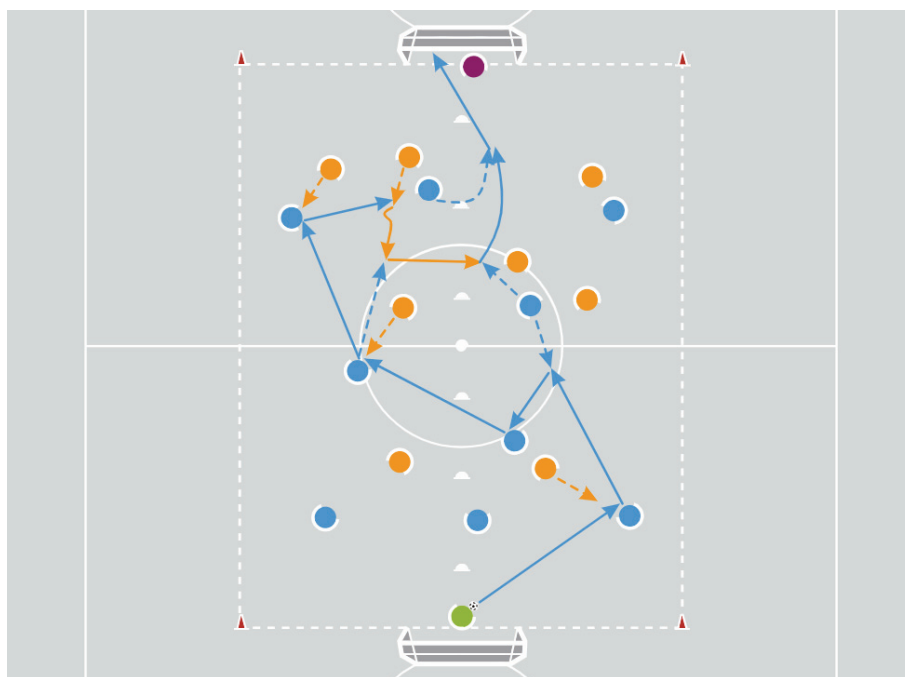
Coaching points

- Central players should seek to receive passes in pockets of space that have been created by intelligent movement to enable them to act as a successful anchor point in the team's build-up.
- Wide players should seek spaces on the flanks in which to operate, whilst stretching the opposition to provide the platform for the switch.
- If the opportunity to switch play is not on, players should be encouraged to retain possession whilst creating more favourable circumstances in which to execute the switch.

*** Players should move over to the smaller pitch for the small-sided game.**

Part 4: 9v8 plus goalkeepers: switching play and counter-pressing

This final game adds another rule and encourages players to retain possession and continue to attack when in the opposition's half. Implementing a swift counter-press allows a team to maintain favourable attacking situations in which players already occupy good attacking positions.



The team regains possession and is allowed to resume their passing sequence.

Rule changes

- A team is awarded 1 point for scoring a goal that does not involve a switch of play in the build-up.
- A team is awarded 2 points for scoring a goal that involves a switch of play in the build-up.
- A team is awarded 3 points for scoring a goal that involves a sequence of 8 or more passes in the build-up. Whilst a switch of play is not a requirement, it is likely to feature within the build-up.
- If a team loses the ball during a passing sequence, but regains possession before the opposition manages to progress beyond the halfway line, they may resume the passing sequence. For example, if a team has put 5 passes together and then loses the ball, they can resume their pass count from 5 passes as long as they regain possession before the opposition take the ball into their half.
- However, if the team that lost possession fails to win the ball back before the opposition advances beyond the halfway line, their pass count returns to zero.
- The exercise lasts 10 minutes.

Coaching points

- Encouraging quick counter-pressing enables the team to retain control of the ball, whilst also remaining on the attack.
- The players should seek to work the ball from one side of the pitch to the other and look after the ball as they do so.
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