

# THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL CURRICULUM

“THE ROADMAP TO INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS”

HAN BERGER, NATIONAL TECHNICAL DIRECTOR



Discovery Phase Model Sessions

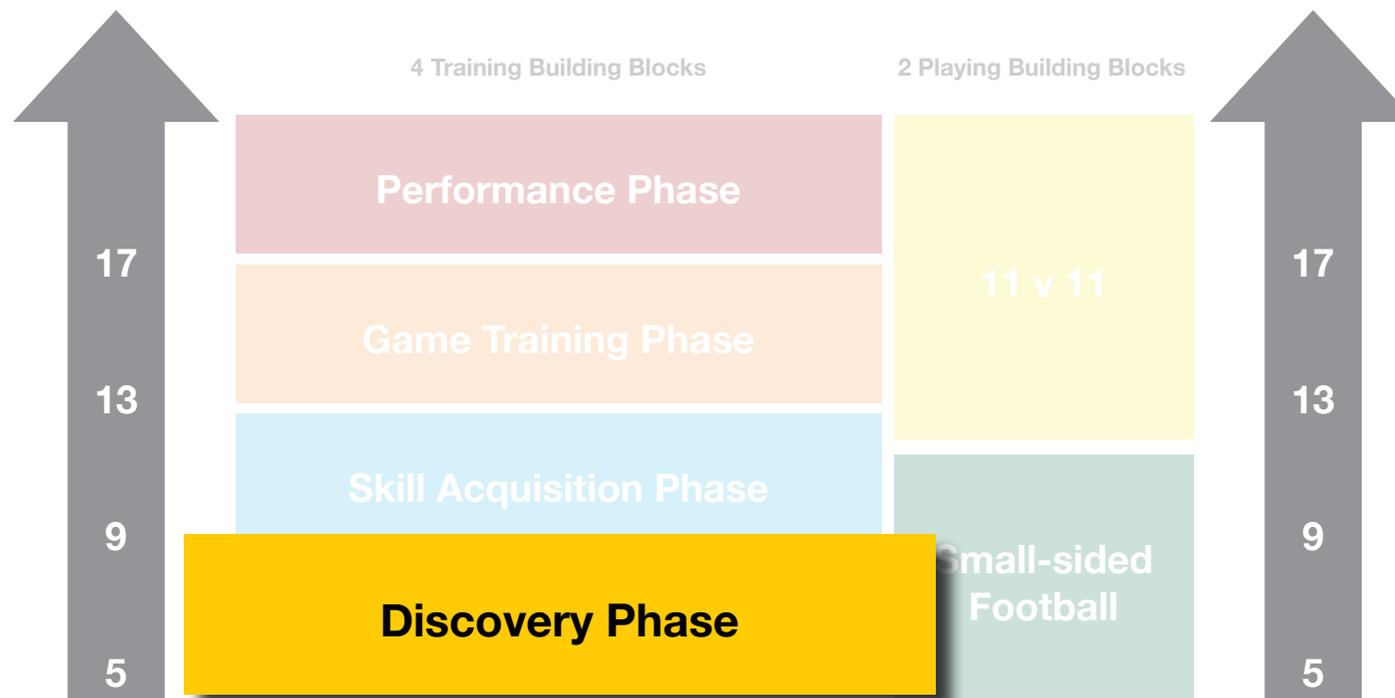
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FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION  
AUSTRALIA

# 3.

## The Discovery Phase



- Discovering one's (im)possibilities through trial & error
- Natural development: 'learn FOOTBALL by playing football'
- No 'coaching' but organising fun football exercises
- Replicating the 'street/park football' environment of the past
- Emphasis on building a love of the game

## The Discovery Phase (U/6-U/9)

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Regarding the first Building Block, the points made earlier concerning the development of excellence don't really apply yet and fortunately things are still quite simple.

What are the characteristics of children in this age bracket?

- They are still 'clumsy' (lack fine motor skills), because they are still developing their coordination
- They have a short span of attention and are quickly and easily distracted
- They are 'self-centred' and not yet able to really work together (so do not ask them to perform team play, it is impossible for them!)
- They play or participate for fun with short bursts of energy and enthusiasm
- They are unable to handle a lot of information (instructions; feedback)

What does this mean for training sessions with children this age?

### Just let them play a lot of varied fun football related games!

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In the 'good old days' as a kid you learned to play football in the street or the park. There were no coaches involved who made you run laps or do stretches and push-ups. When you were with just one mate you played a 1 v 1 game, when there were 8 of you, you played 4 v 4. There were no referees either, you made your own rules and every problem got solved. You just played, every free minute of the day. Funny as it may seem, this was (and still is) the best possible way to develop a basic skill level, understanding and passion for football.

In third World countries the old saying "the game is the teacher" still applies and is one of the reasons why we find so many creative and technically good players from Africa and South America in the European top leagues. But in our developed society children do not play sports in the streets

and parks that much anymore. They watch television, surf the internet, play computer games, chat on Twitter and Facebook as well as having to study.

As parents we now send our children to a club or academy to learn to play football and, despite all good intentions, here we make the mistake of 'coaching' children this age.

The first and most important step when 'coaching' the youngest kids is to take the word 'coach' out of your mind. Your most important job is to recreate that street football environment, be an organiser of fun football-related practices and..... let them play! This approach, where they can 'discover' how the game works in a natural way, is the right one for the Discovery Phase.

**You'll find the  
Discovery Phase  
Model Sessions on  
page 85.**



## Introduction to the Model Sessions

Training pitches in Australia are unfortunately often full of hurdles and ladders instead of balls and goals during youth training sessions. This isn't really helpful if we want to develop better FOOTBALL players. The Model Sessions contained in this Curriculum elaborate our national philosophy and are designed to help you train your players the right way. Please note that a 'one session fits all' approach obviously doesn't work; the exercises in these sessions should be modified/extended/simplified according to the needs of your players.

We have also developed a useful checklist for evaluating your training sessions:

### 'The youth training checklist'

1. Is **football** being played?
2. Is **football** being learned (and therefore taught)?
3. Is **football** being experienced (and enjoyed)?
4. Do the players understand the **football** purpose of the exercise?
5. Do the players recognise the relation to the real game of **football**?
6. Are the players challenged to improve as a **football** player?

### Coaches should avoid:

- Too long waiting in lines
- Non-stimulating or over-complicated exercises
- Intensity too high or too low
- Coach intervening too much and talking for too long

### Number of players in the Model Sessions

Since coaches are faced with a range of squad sizes, and different numbers of players at training, it was decided that it would not be suitable for us to decide on a fixed number of players for the Model Sessions. Instead, a variety of exercises with differing numbers of players have been presented, allowing coaches to modify and adjust them as they see fit, depending on how many players they are working with. The main purpose of the sessions presented is to convey FFA's basic coaching philosophy.

### Numbering System used

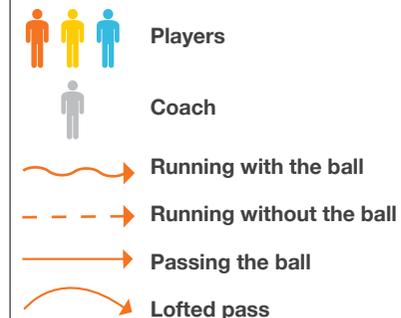
In Game Training Phase and Performance Phase Model Sessions, players are given shirt numbers to reflect the 1-4-3-3 positions and their corresponding numbers.

Sometimes 'shadow' numbers are used, to indicate 2 players of the same position within an exercise (e.g. #10 and #20 who both play the number 10 position).

The following table explains the shadow numbers:

Team numbers	Shadow numbers
1	22
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	20
11	21

### Key for diagrams:



5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions



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# 3.

## The Discovery Phase

### Model Sessions

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Here are some useful tips to help you perform the important role of 'kids coach':

- Two weekly training sessions of 45 minutes and one game during the weekend is a maximum safe workload for U/6's and U/7's
- For U/8's and U/9's the length of the sessions can be increased to 60 minutes
- Plan your sessions in advance
- Arrive early and set up the area
- Give clear, short instructions
- Demonstrate quickly and efficiently
- Keep the session flowing
- Vary the activities but keep it simple
- Be enthusiastic and give lots of praise
- Encourage after mistakes
- Be patient
- Have fun (both the kids and you!)
- Keep everyone active, avoid having kids standing around

### Session planning

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A training session for kids this age consists of 3 components: The Beginning, The Middle and The End.

The purpose of The Beginning (better known as the warm-up) is to get the kids in the right frame of mind and activate their bodies. It's unnecessary to run laps around the field and do stretches to achieve that: all sorts of relays and tagging games with and without the ball are much better (more specific, more fun) and also help develop the children's basic coordination.

The Middle is the section of the training session where we conduct fun football exercises such as dribbling, passing, shooting, etc.

The last part (The End) is allocated for playing all sorts of Small-Sided Games

### This leads to the following session timeline:

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- 1 Welcome (5 minutes)
- 2 The Beginning (10 minutes)
- 3 The Middle (15 minutes)
- 4 The End (20 minutes)
- 5 Wrap up (5 minutes)

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## Cycle Planning

In this section you will find an example of a 6 week cycle and 12 Model Sessions for the Discovery Phase. This 6 week cycle is based on the assumption that the weekly training sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays with the weekly game on Saturday.

Discovery Phase CYCLE 1	Tuesday	Thursday	Saturday
WEEK 1	MODEL SESSION 1	MODEL SESSION 2	GAME
WEEK 2	MODEL SESSION 3	MODEL SESSION 4	GAME
WEEK 3	MODEL SESSION 5	MODEL SESSION 6	GAME
WEEK 4	MODEL SESSION 7	MODEL SESSION 8	GAME
WEEK 5	MODEL SESSION 9	MODEL SESSION 10	GAME
WEEK 6	MODEL SESSION 11	MODEL SESSION 12	GAME

If your team trains only once a week, or on different days, you can of course adjust this schedule accordingly.

For the next 6 week cycle(s) the coach can:

- Repeat the sessions in the same order 1-12
- Repeat them in a random order
- Combine the various session components of the 12 Model Sessions differently (i.e. The Beginning of session 1; The Middle of session 2 and The End of session 3; etc.)
- Attend the **FFA Grassroots Football Certificate course**, and use the accompanying resource 'Football for Kids' to gain more ideas for session content

# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Model Session 1

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#### Beginning: Relays

##### Explanation for relays

- Each player starts with a ball, dribbles around the marker (as shown in diagrams 1 and 2) and returns to the start
- Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball

##### Guidelines for relays

- Avoid long queues
- Keep players as active as possible (don't keep them waiting in line for too long)
- Give the group a quick break for a drink when necessary
- All relays in this section can be performed with and without the ball (the preference is to always use the ball, but it is fine to take the ball out of the relays early in the session)
- The more skill your players acquire, the more the ball should be used and the greater the challenges can be
- If there are more than six players, make another lane of cones and keep it to two players in a line (this avoids long queues)

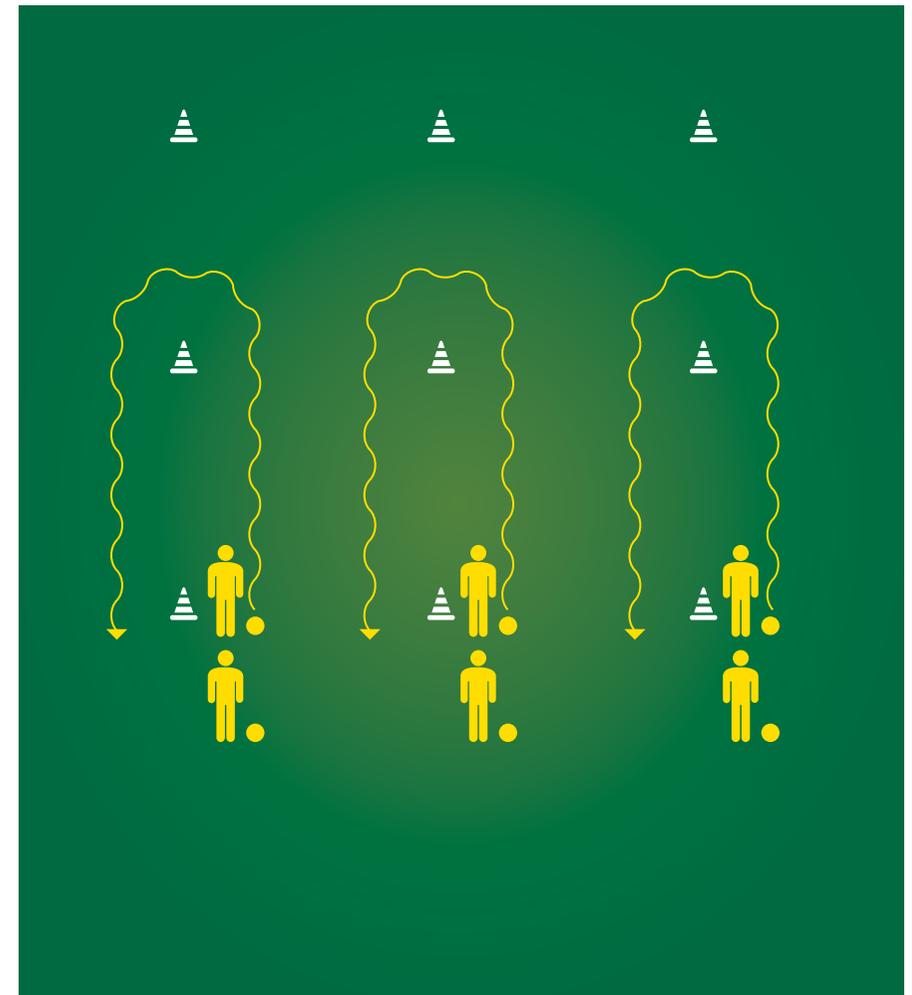


Diagram 1

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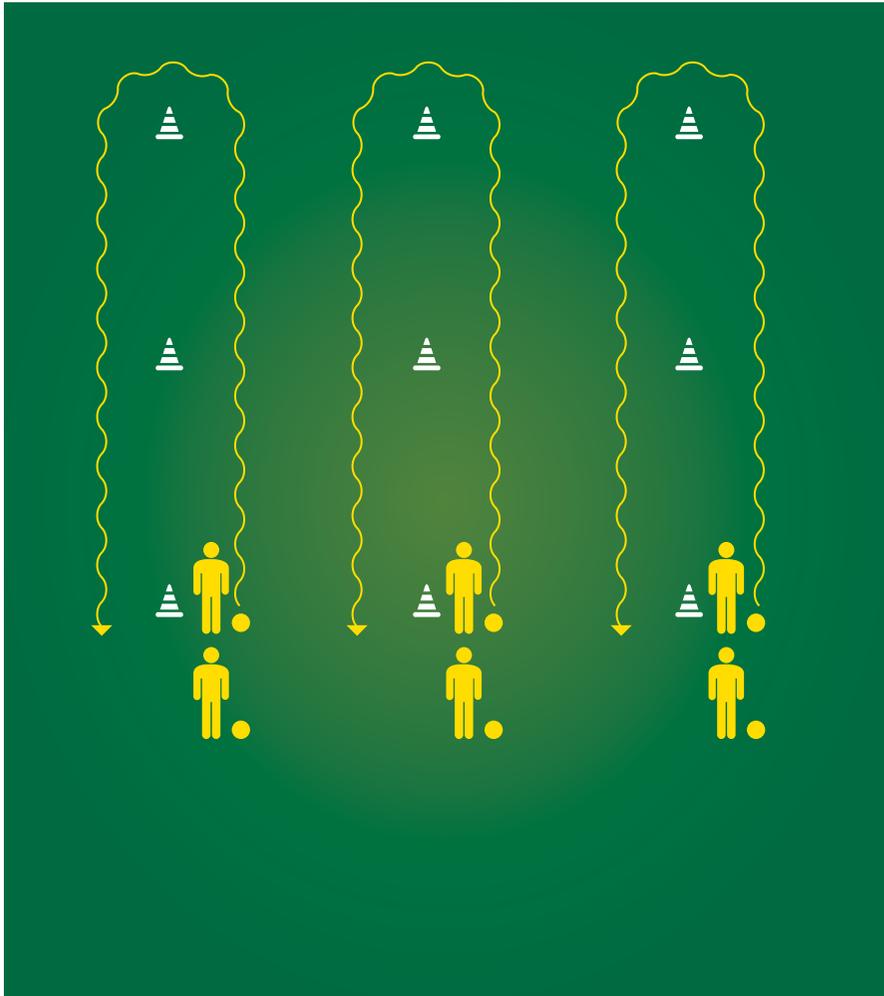


Diagram 2

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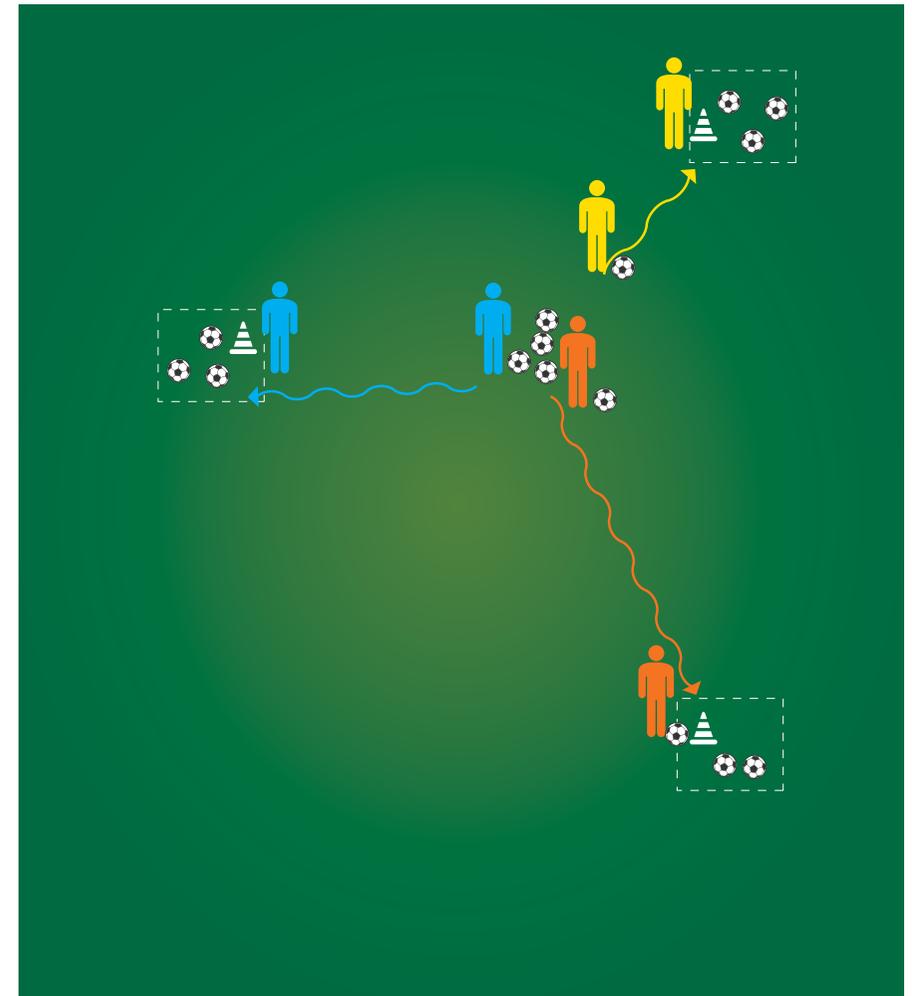
## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Middle: Feather the Nest

Mark out a triangle with sides 10m–12m long. Three teams of two players are positioned at each corner with a cluster of balls in the middle of the triangle. The object of the game is to gather as many balls as possible for the corner or 'nest' within a set time period.

One player from each team runs to the middle of the triangle to get a ball and dribbles it to their corner, or nest, and leaves it there. Their team-mate then does the same. When all the balls in the middle of the triangle are gone, players can take them from someone else's nest.

**Players are NOT allowed to stop others from taking balls from their nest – no blocking, defending, tackling, etc. No hands! Feet only.**



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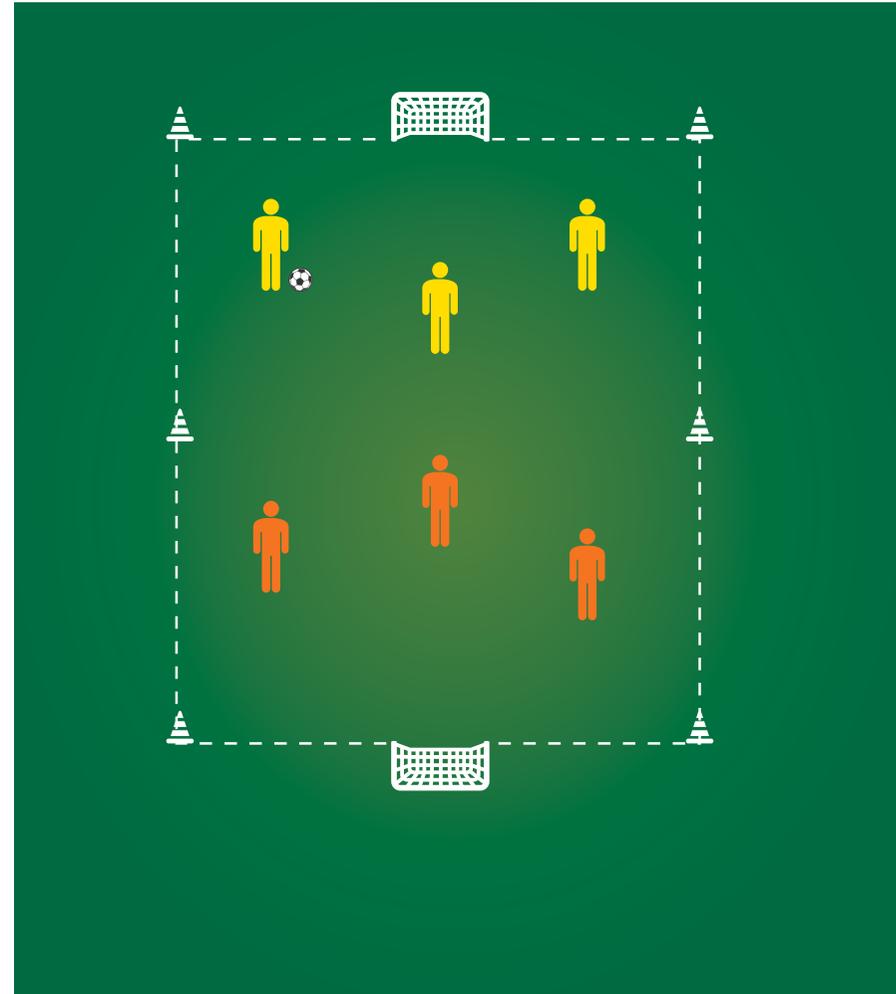
### End: 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5) Training Game

Length: 20m–25m

Width: 14m–18m

Goal: 2m–3m

- “Just let them play”
- You can play with or without goalkeepers
- Short games - 3 to 5 mins in length (with regular drink breaks)



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Model Session 2

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#### Beginning: Stuck-in-the-mud

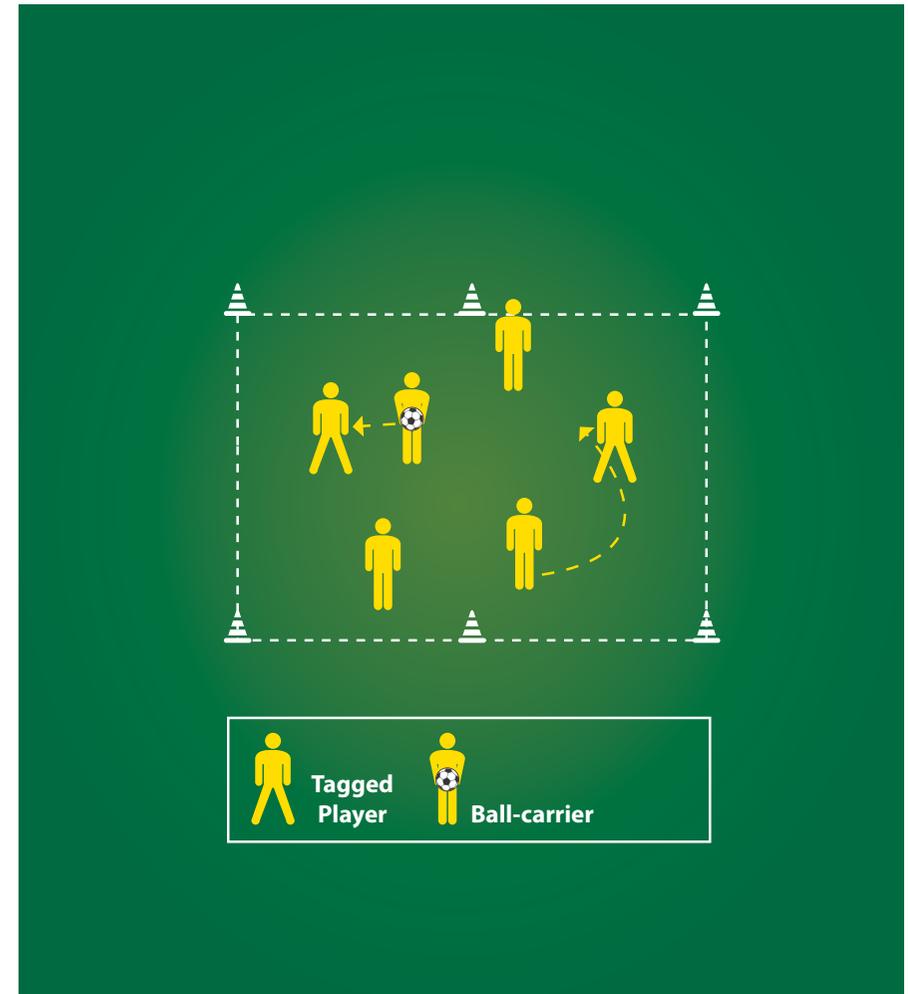
Mark out a 10m × 14m area. Five players try to avoid one player who carries a ball in their hands.

The ball-carrier attempts to tag the runners by touching them with the ball (make sure the ball is not thrown and that players aim for the trunk). If a player is tagged, they are 'stuck in the mud', and stand with their legs wide apart until a team-mate frees them by crawling through their legs.

Each ball-carrier has 30 seconds to tag as many players as possible. After 30 seconds, change the ball-carrier.

#### Progression:

- Ball-carrier dribbles the ball around the field and tags the players with their hand, while keeping the ball close to them (if this progression proves difficult for them, make the field smaller)



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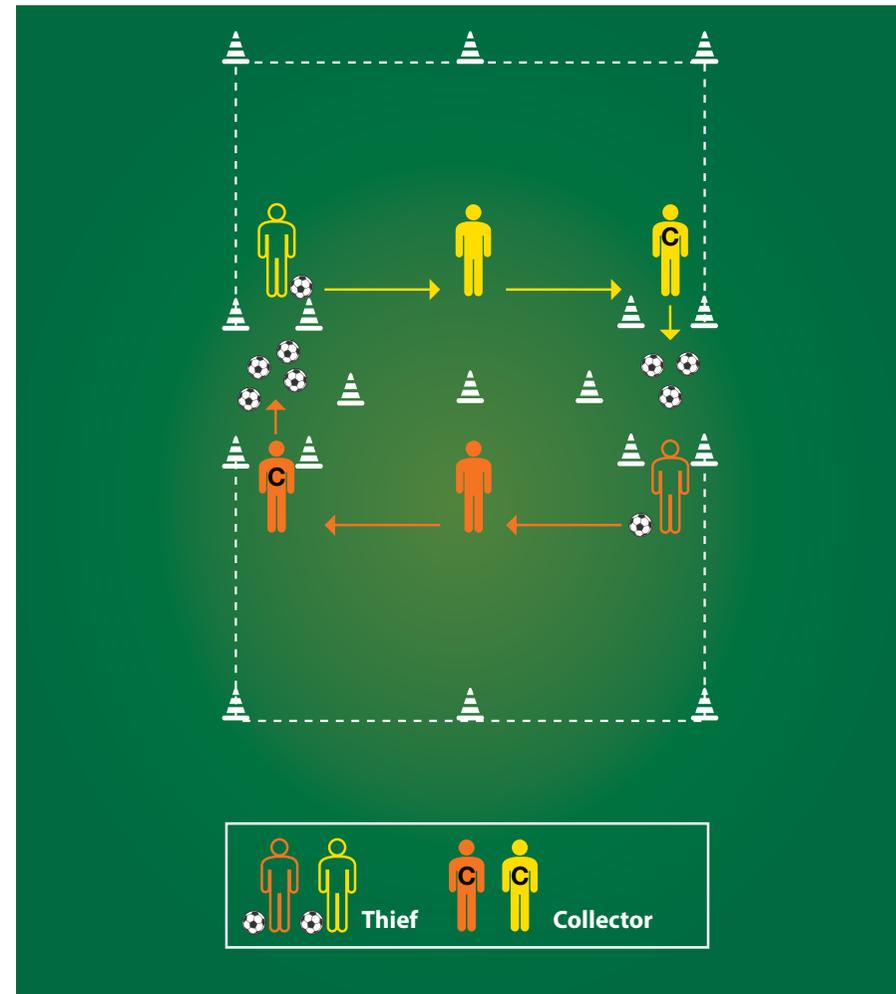
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### Middle: Robin Hood

Two teams of three split up as shown in the diagram opposite. Each team starts with an equal number of balls in their 'safe'. When the game begins, each team can start stealing balls from their opponent's 'safe' – there is one 'thief' who takes a ball and passes it across the first 'moat' to their team-mate; they then pass it across the second 'moat', to their team's 'collector', who puts it in the team's 'safe'.

Meanwhile, their opponents are doing the same with their balls! After a set time period (e.g. two minutes), see which team has the most balls in their 'safe'. The team that passes and controls the balls best will have the most balls in their 'safe' and will therefore be the winners.

**You can't use your hands – feet only!**



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## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

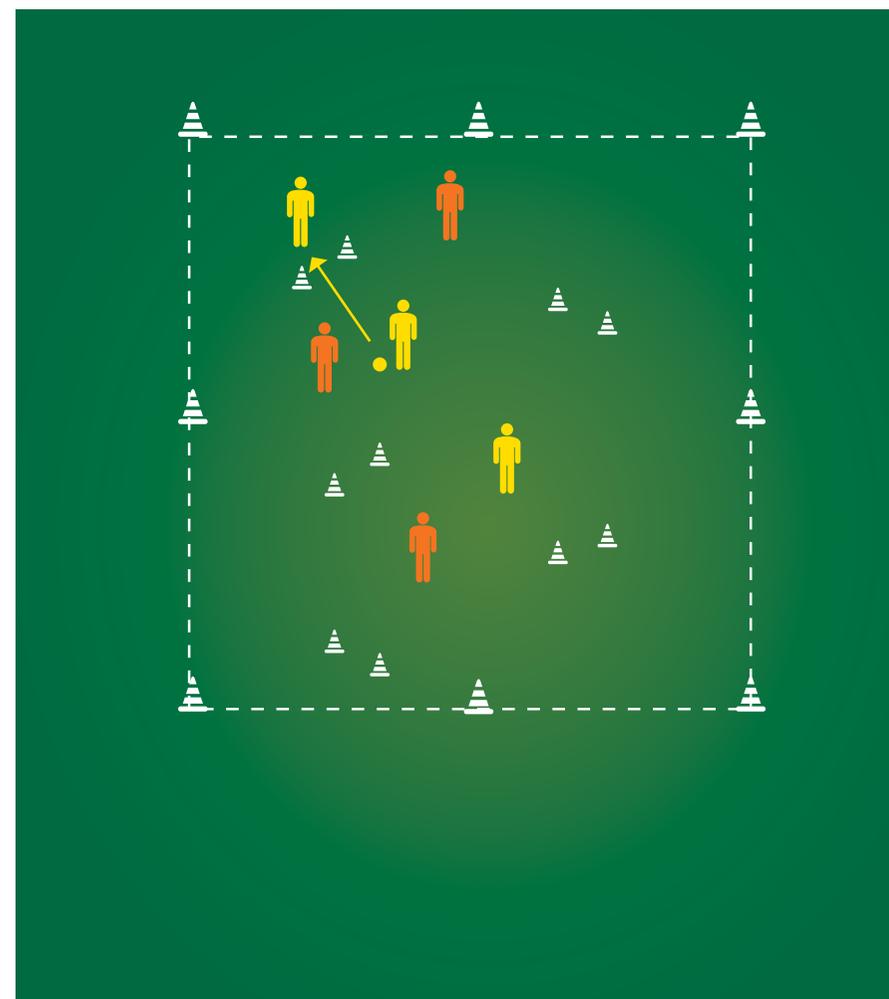
### End: Pass to score

Length: 15m–20m

Width: 15m

Goal: none (make 4 or 5 gates of 1m–2m width inside the area)

- To score a goal, pass the ball through any of the gates to a team-mate
- This game encourages passing



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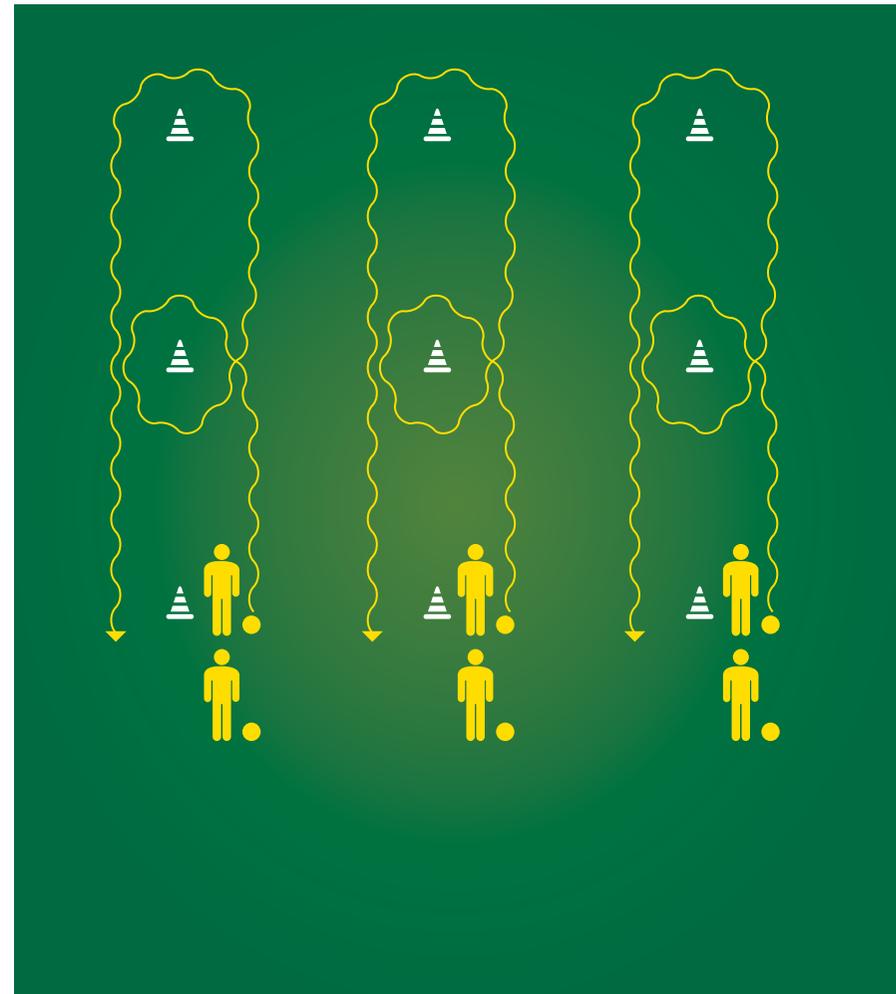
## Model Session 3

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### Beginning: Relay

#### Explanation for relay

- Each player starts with a ball, and dribbles around the first marker in a full circle (as shown in diagram) then dribbles around the second marker, and then returns to the start
- Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball



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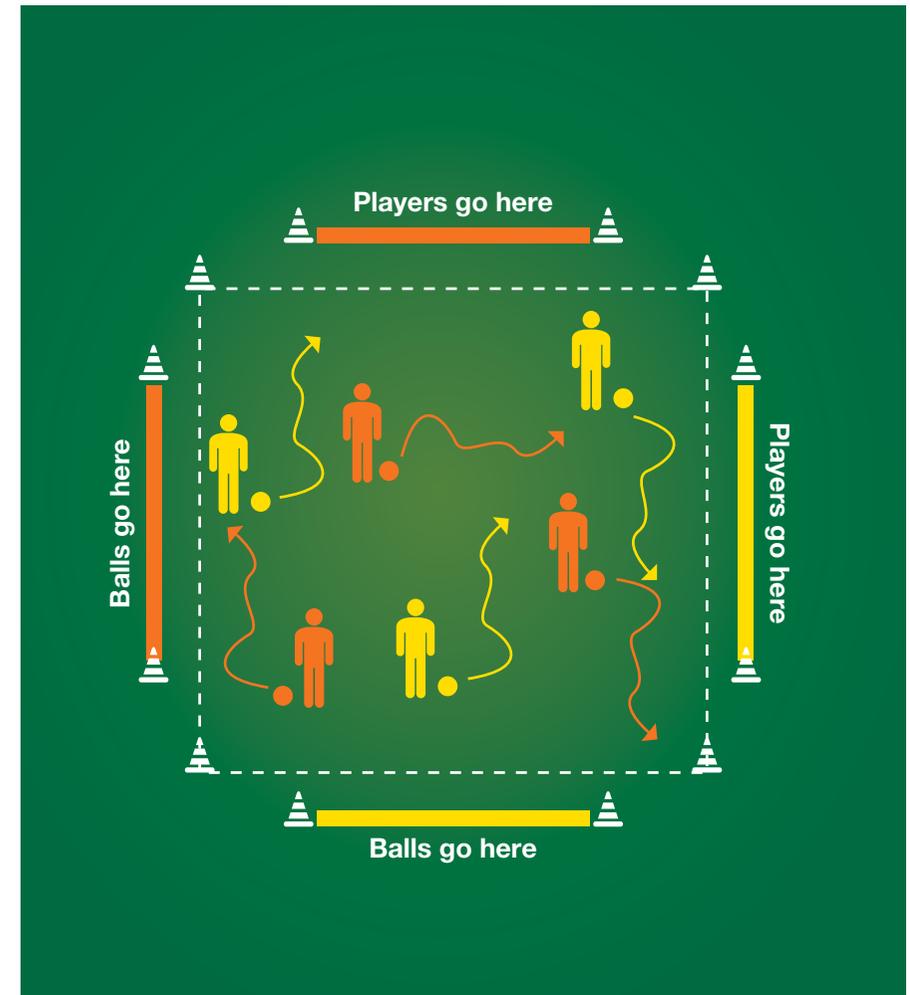
## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Middle: Empty it! Fill it!

Mark out a 14m × 14m square.

Players in two teams dribble balls inside the square. Outside the square, each team has two lines marked: one for their balls and one for themselves. On the call 'empty it!' the teams compete to be the first to empty the square.

On the call 'fill it!' the teams compete to be the first to get all their balls and themselves back in the square.



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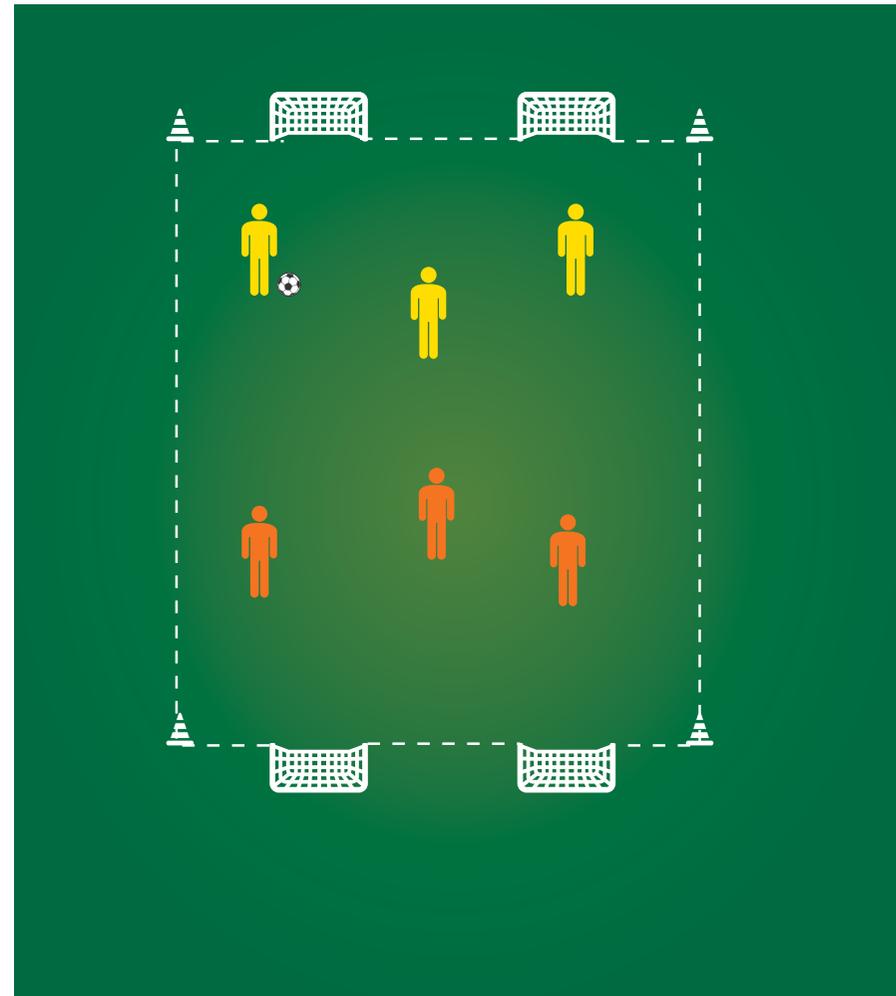
### End: 4-Goal football

Length: 20m

Width: 15m

Goal: 2 goals (2m wide) on each end-line

- There are no goalkeepers
- Goals can be scored in either of your opponents goals
- This game encourages shooting and scoring



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Model Session 4

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#### Beginning: Me and my shadow

Players get into pairs; one is designated as 'leader' and the other as 'follower'.

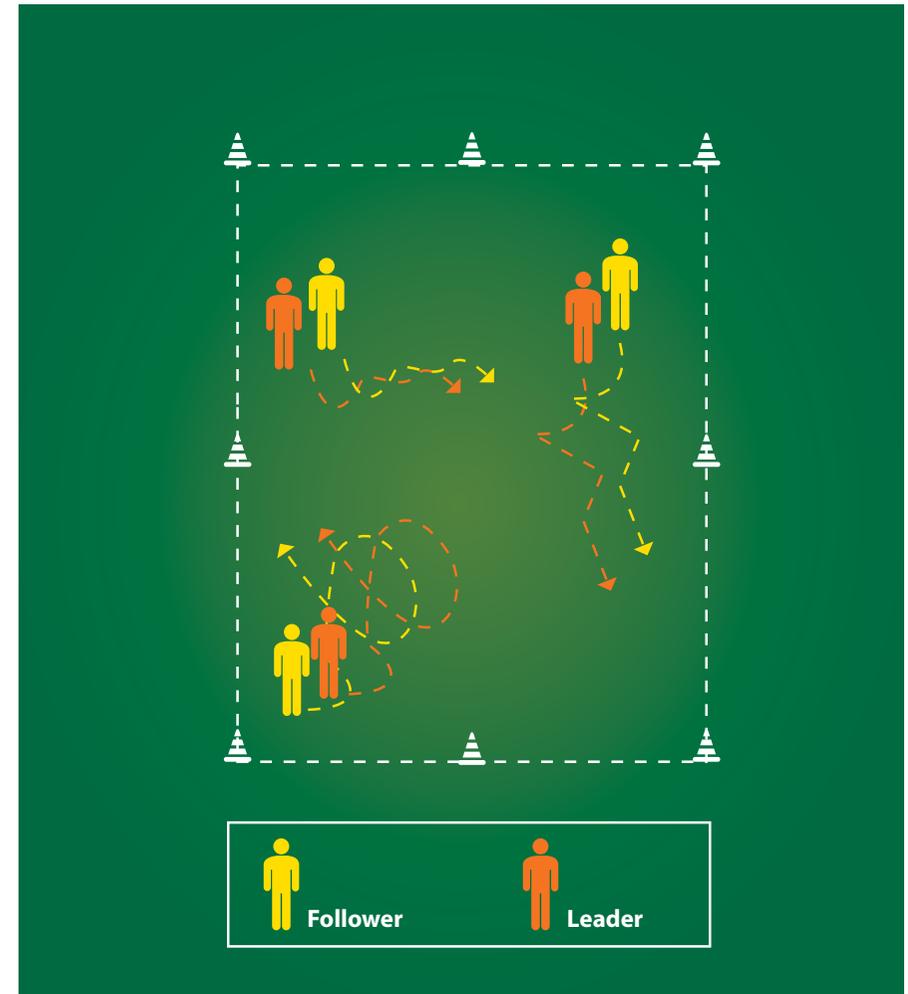
The 'leader' moves around the field, changing speed and direction frequently, and perhaps adding a variation here and there, such as a jump or a ground touch.

The 'follower' then copies everything the 'leader' does.

Change roles regularly and also change partners regularly.

#### Progression:

- The leader (only) has a ball
- The leader and the follower both have balls
- The follower has a ball (this is a difficult progression so instruct 'leader' to jog at medium speed around the area, with occasional random changes of direction)



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### Middle: 1 v 1 Mini Games

Make three small areas about 10m × 7m.

Players play 1 v 1 on each mini-field and score by dribbling the ball over the opponents' line.

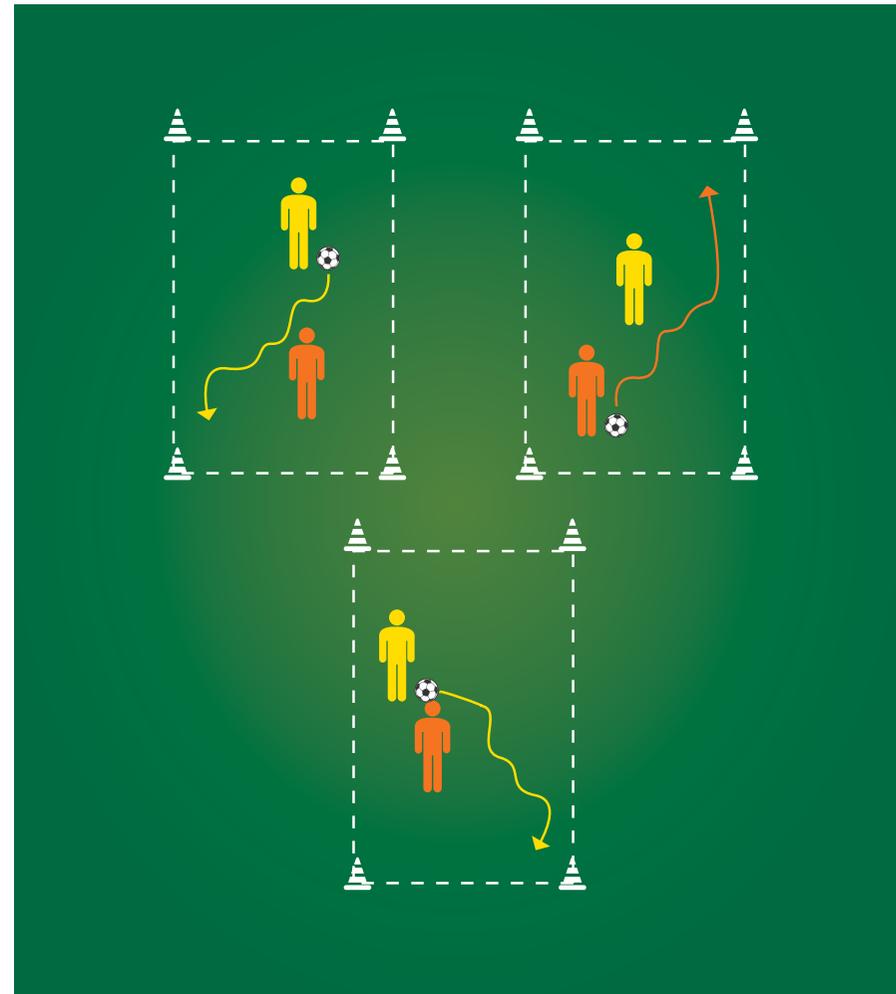
Think of safety when setting up; avoid scenarios where players could dribble into each other by allowing buffer zones.

Keep rotating so opponents are changed regularly. Rotation also allows a period of rest, so control how long rotation takes depending on how fatigued the players seem. You could also give some brief hints to the whole group in order to give them a rest.

Games should be no longer than 1 minute maximum.

If enough cones are available, progress to a small goal on each end-line for players to score in.

**You will also need a good supply of spare balls, as they tend to go everywhere when shooting is introduced.**



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

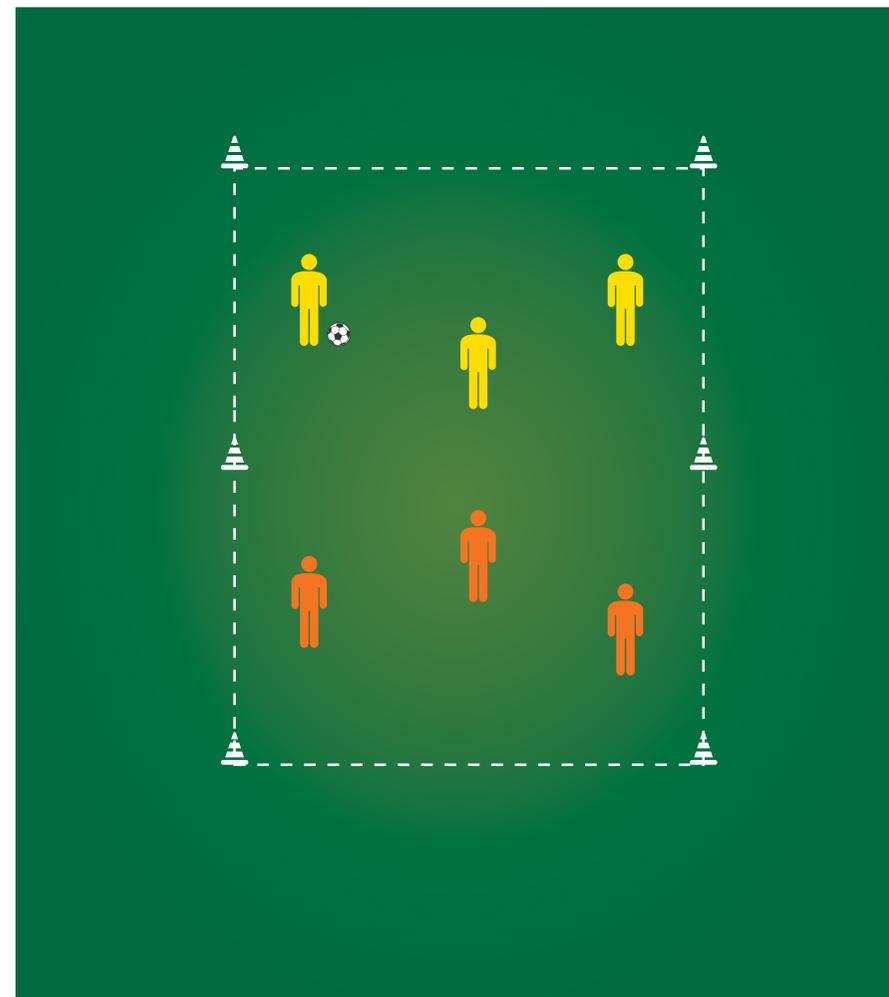
### End: Line football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 20m

Width: 15m

Goal: none

- Usual rules, but method of scoring is to dribble the ball across the opponents' end line
- This game encourages dribbling and 1 v 1 skills



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## Model Session 5

### Beginning: Relay

#### Explanation for relay

- Each player starts with a ball, and dribbles around the first marker and then cuts the ball, changing direction to the left (as shown in diagram 1). Then dribbles around the second marker, and repeats the same pattern (but cuts right this time) on the way back
- Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball
- Variation - instead of all players beginning at the one point, they could be split up at either end
- Player 1 now dribbles around the first marker and then passes the ball to player 2 (as shown in diagram 2), who repeats the same movement and passes to player 3

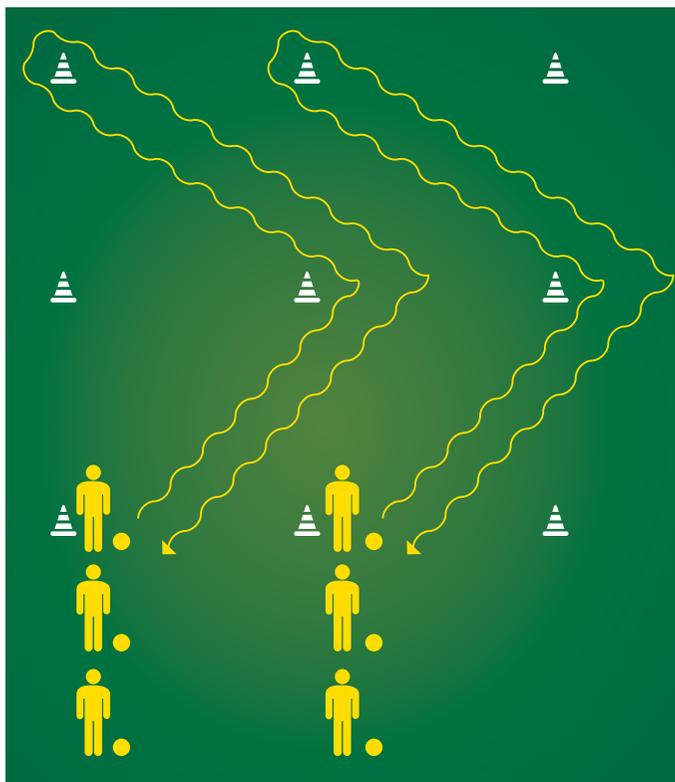


Diagram 1

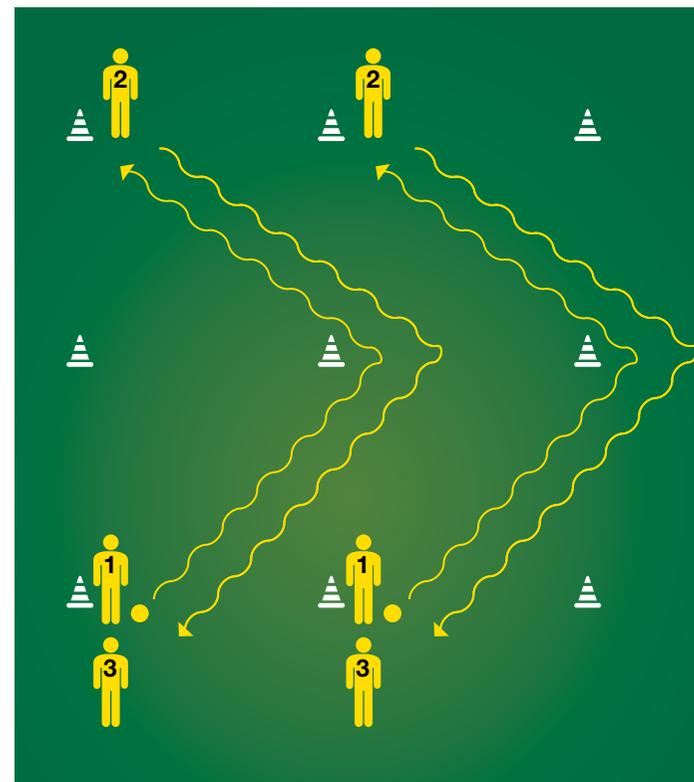


Diagram 2

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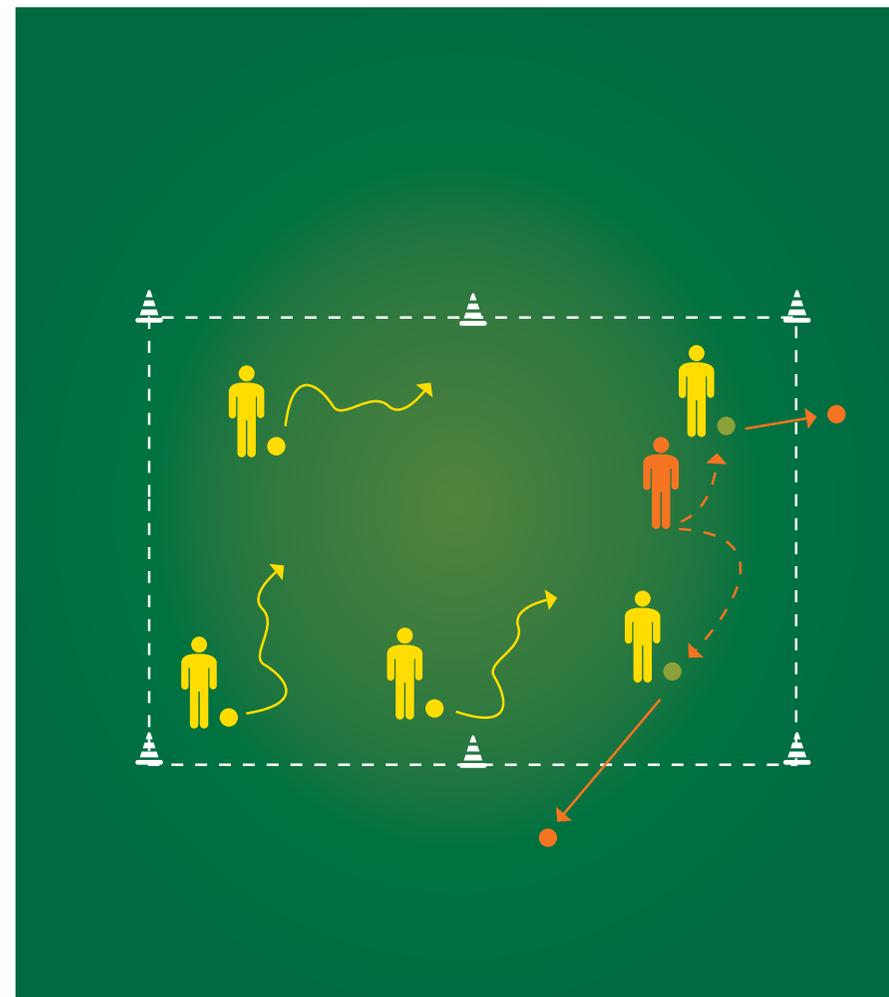
## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Middle: Round em' up

Five players dribble their balls inside a 10m x 14m area. On your call 'round 'em up!' the sixth player tries to 'round up' all five balls, by kicking them out of the square.

Allow 30 seconds for players to 'round up' as many balls as possible.

Take turns so each player has a go at rounding up the balls.



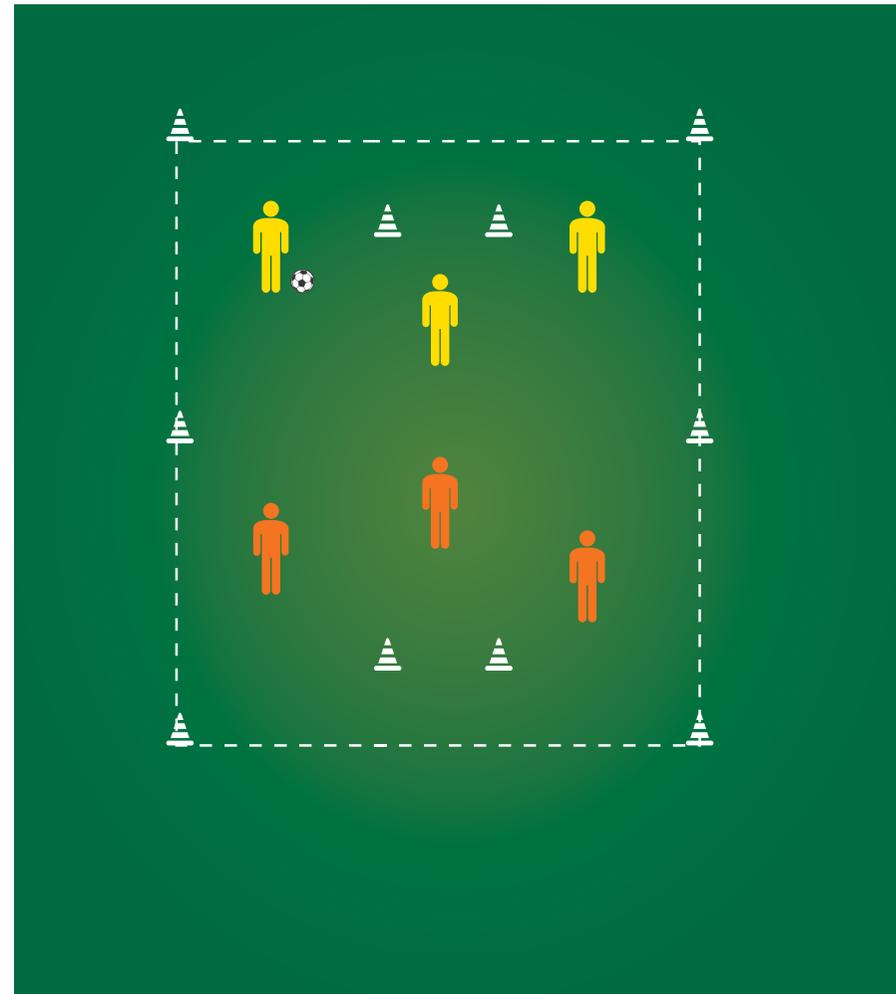
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### End: 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5) Training Game

Length: 20m  
 Width: 15m  
 Gate: 2m–3m

- In this game players can score by passing/shooting the ball through either side of the gate, from in front or behind
- “Just let them play”
- You can play with or without goalkeepers
- Short games - 3 to 5 mins in length (with regular drink breaks)





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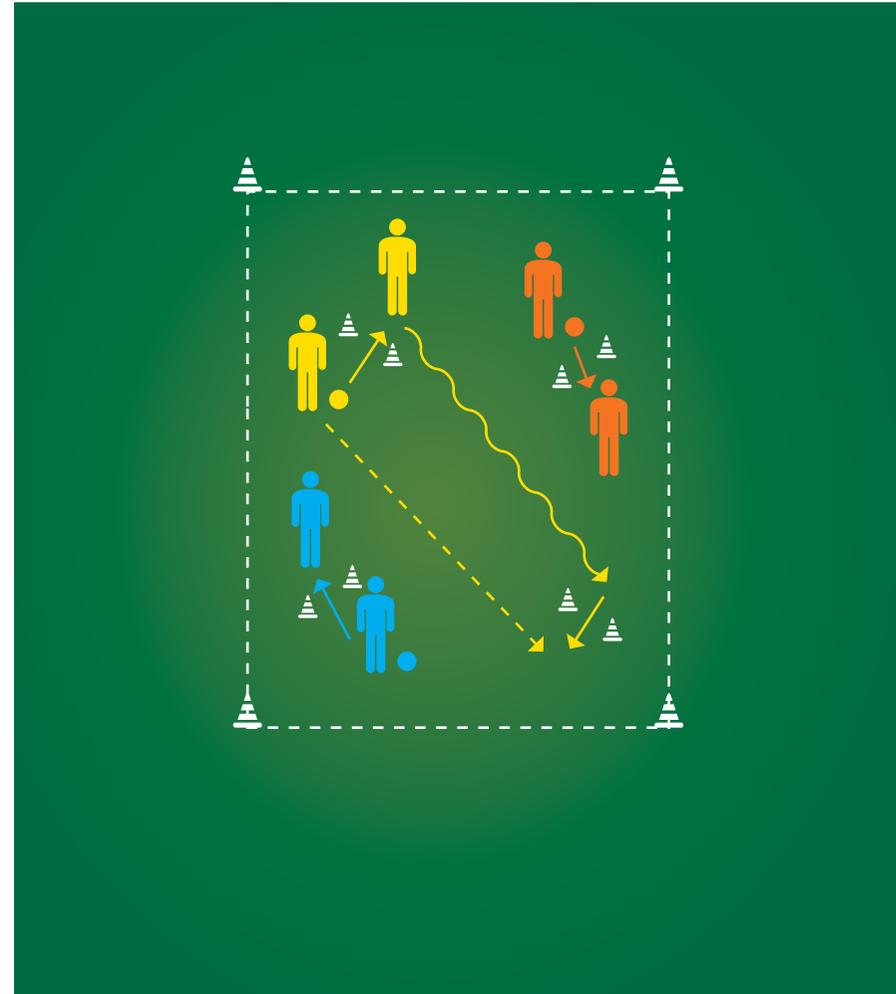
### Middle: Pairs through the gates

Mark out an area about 7m x 10m and set up four small gates – two cones about two metres apart.

The players run around the area in pairs with a ball between them and pass it through the gates to each other until they have performed a successful pass through each gate.

The winning pair is the first to pass through every gate and wait outside the area.

Before moving to the next activity, have a competition to see which pair (one at a time) can pass through the most gates in 20 seconds.



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## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

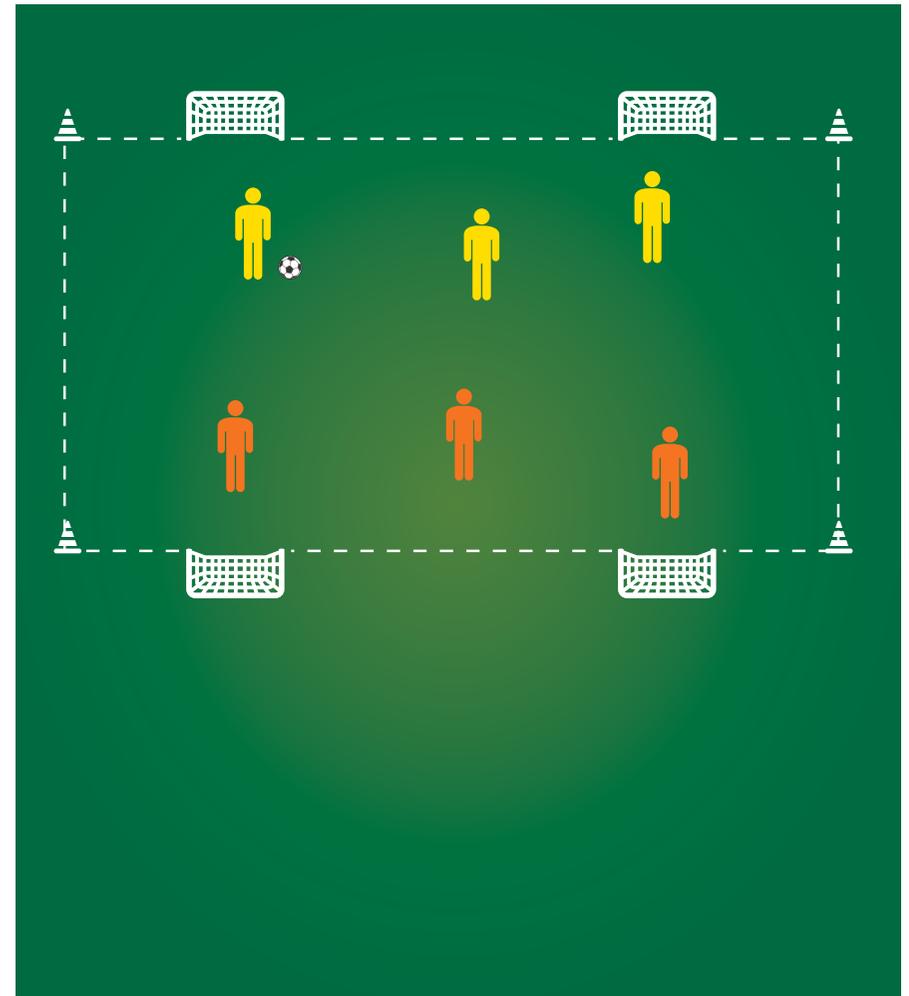
### End: Short and wide

Length: 15m

Width: 25m

Goal: 2 goals (2m wide) on each end-line

- This game develops awareness of space



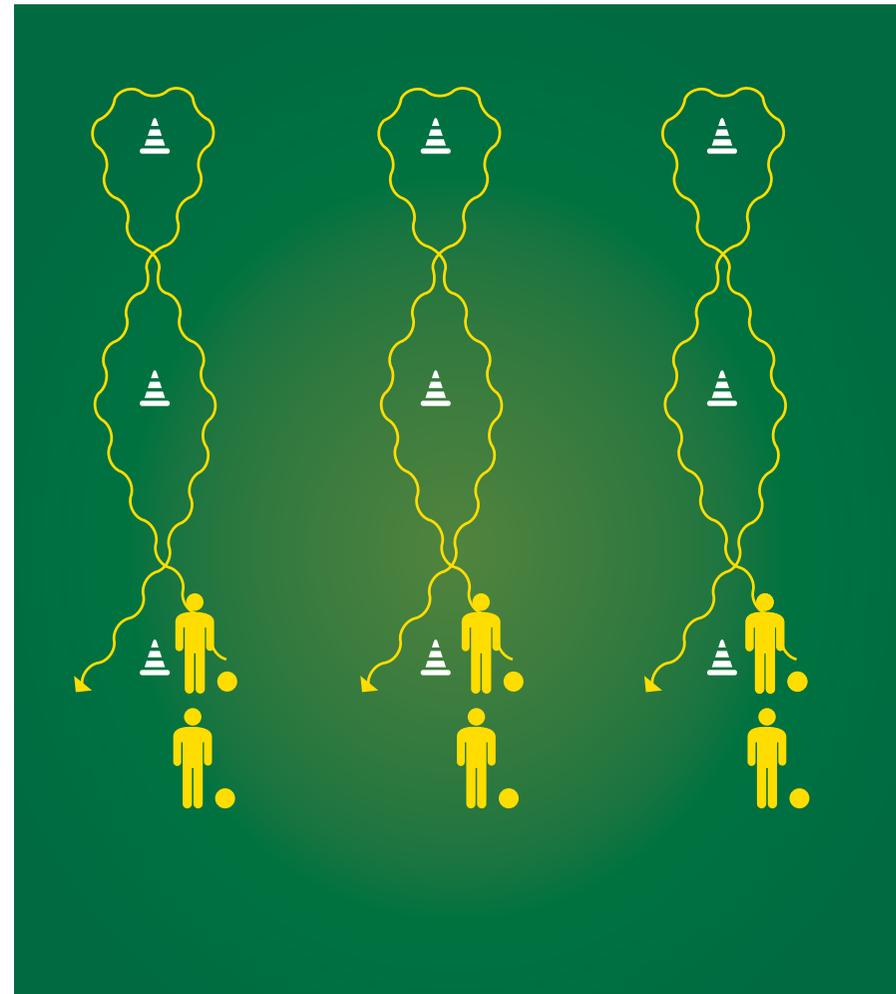
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## Model Session 7

### Beginning: Figure 8 Relay

#### Explanation for relay

- Each player starts with a ball, and dribbles around the first marker and then the second marker in a figure 8 type direction (as shown in the diagram)
- Upon returning to the starting point, the next player starts the same pattern with their own ball
- **Progressions**
  - Players to use their right foot only
  - Players to use their left foot only
  - Players to use the inside of their foot only
  - Players to use the outside of their foot only
  - Each group to use one ball only, where the ball is exchanged at each end upon completing the figure 8



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Middle: Colour code

This activity should be arranged in a square 15m x 15m and requires at least three cones of two or more colours placed randomly inside the square.

Players dribble their balls round the outside perimeter of the area.

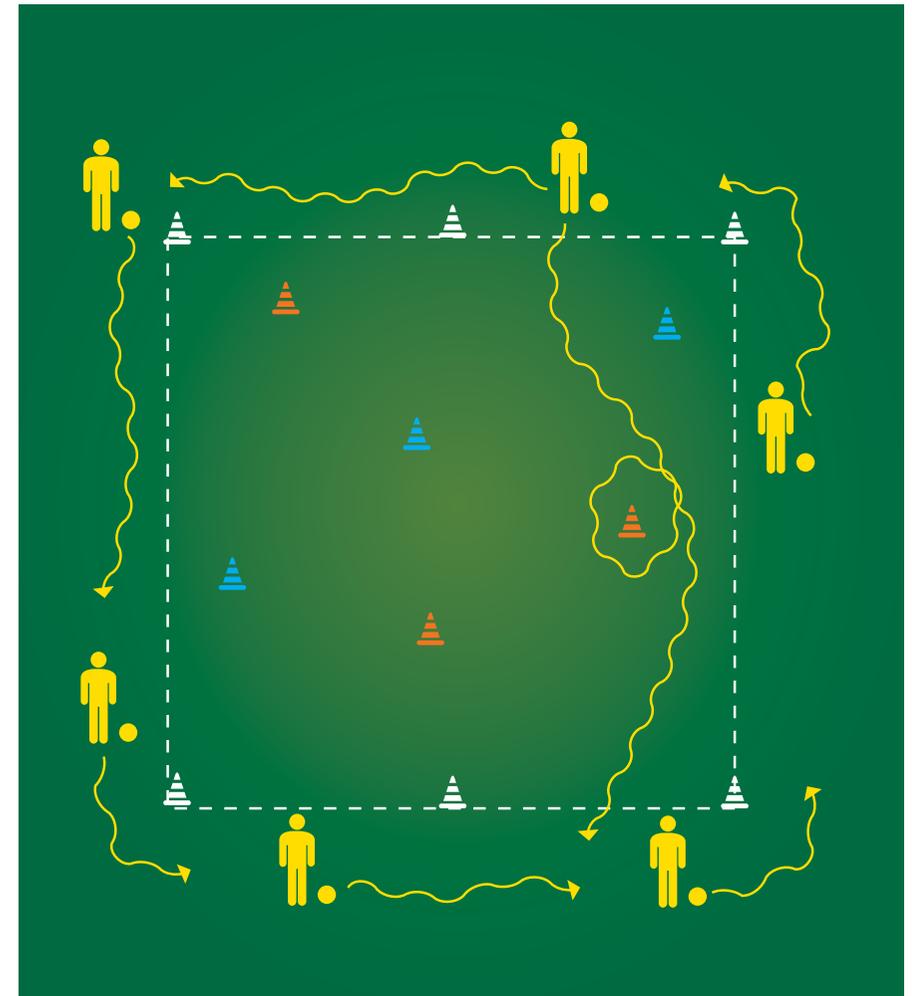
Call out a colour and the kids must dribble into the square, around the cone of that colour, and back outside the square. The winner is the first one back outside with their foot on their ball.

Remind players to keep their heads up and watch out for possible collisions.

Variations:

- Round all cones of that colour
- Players to use their right foot only
- Players to use their left foot only
- Players to use the inside of their foot only
- Players to use the outside of their foot only

**There are more possible variations, limited only by the number and colour of your cones, and your imagination!**



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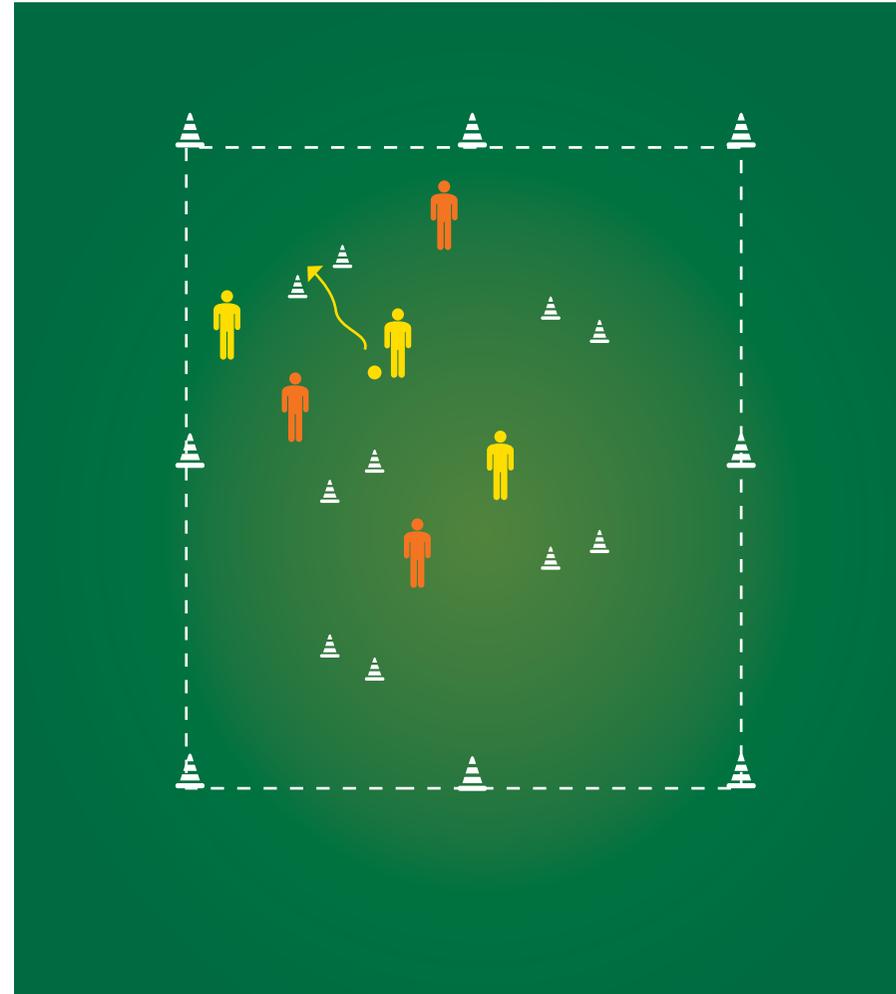
### End: Dribble to score 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 15m–20m

Width: 15m

Goal: none (make 4 or 5 gates of 1m–2m width inside the area)

- To score a goal, dribble the ball through any one of the gates
- This game encourages dribbling
- Players cannot score in the same gate consecutively



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

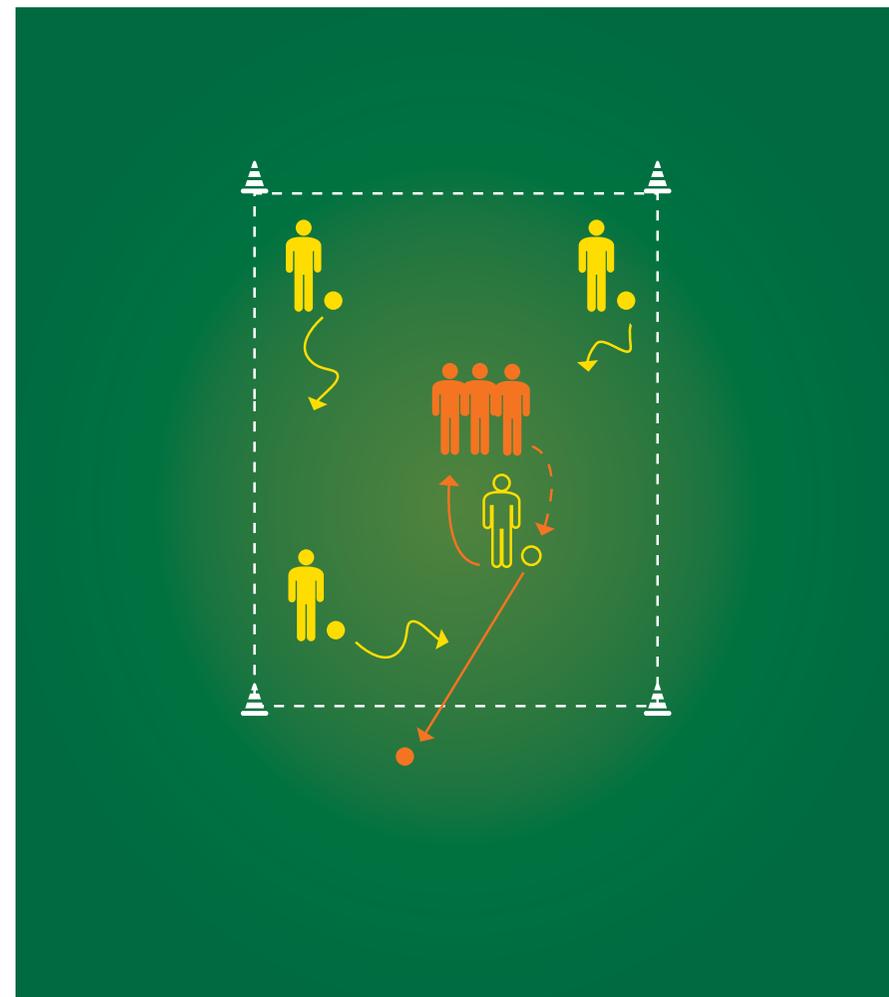
### Model Session 8

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#### Beginning: Dribblers and Collectors

Two players without a ball link hands and move around the area trying to kick other players' balls out. They are the 'collectors'.

When a player's ball is kicked out, they immediately join the 'collectors', so that there are now three players with hands linked chasing the others (then four and five) until everyone is out. Then two new 'collectors' start chasing.



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### Middle: 1 v 1 Mini Games

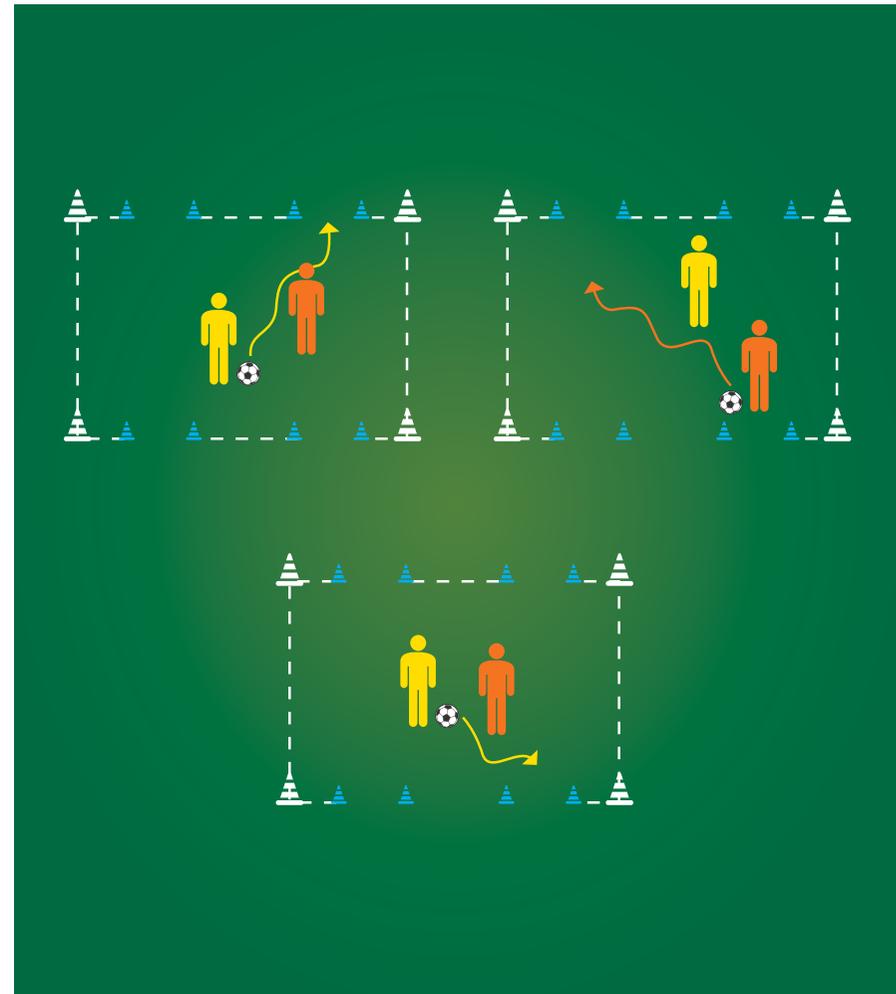
Make three small areas about 10m wide × 7m-8m long (field is short and wide).

Two gates 2m wide placed on each byline, approximately 1m away from each corner marker.

Players play 1 v 1 on each mini-field and score by dribbling the ball through one of the gates.

Think of safety when setting up; avoid scenarios where players could dribble into each other by allowing buffer zones.

Keep rotating so opponents are changed regularly. Rotation also allows a period of rest, so control how long rotation takes depending on how fatigued the players seem. You could also give some brief hints to the whole group in order to give them a rest.



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### End: Line football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

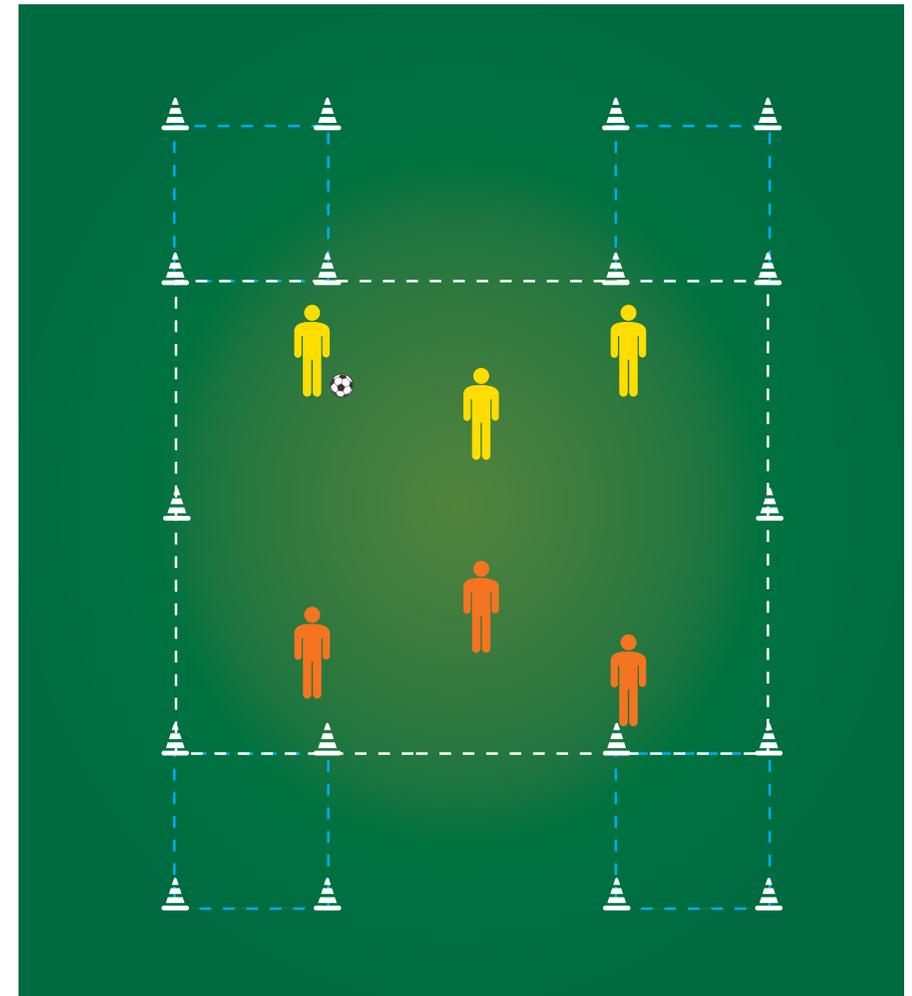
- Field dimension is short and wide

Length: 15m - 20m

Width: 20m - 25m

Goal: none

- Usual rules, but method of scoring is to dribble the ball across the opponents' end line
- This game encourages dribbling and 1 v 1 skills
- **Progression:**
  - Add 2 scoring zones behind each byline (as shown in the diagram)
  - To score, players must dribble the ball over the byline, but also stop the ball in the scoring zone



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## Model Session 9

### Beginning: Relay

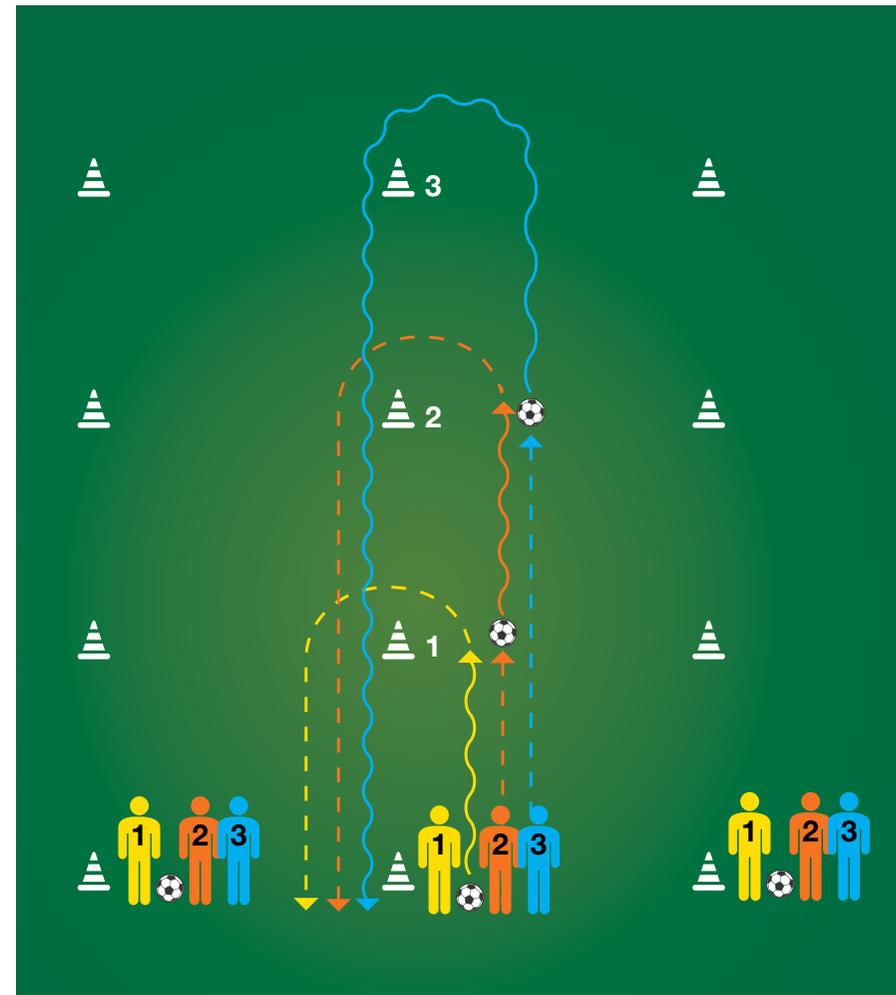
#### Explanation for relay

- Each group starts with 1 ball
- Player 1 dribbles the ball to marker 1, and leaves it there. Then runs around the marker and tags player 2 at the starting point
- Player 2 runs to the ball, collects it from marker 1, dribbles it to marker 2 and leaves it there, then runs around the marker and tags player 3 at the starting point
- Player 3 runs to the ball, collects it from marker 2, dribbles with it around marker 3 and brings it back to the starting point

- Change the player numbers regularly

#### • Progressions

- Players to use their right foot only
- Players to use their left foot only



# 5.

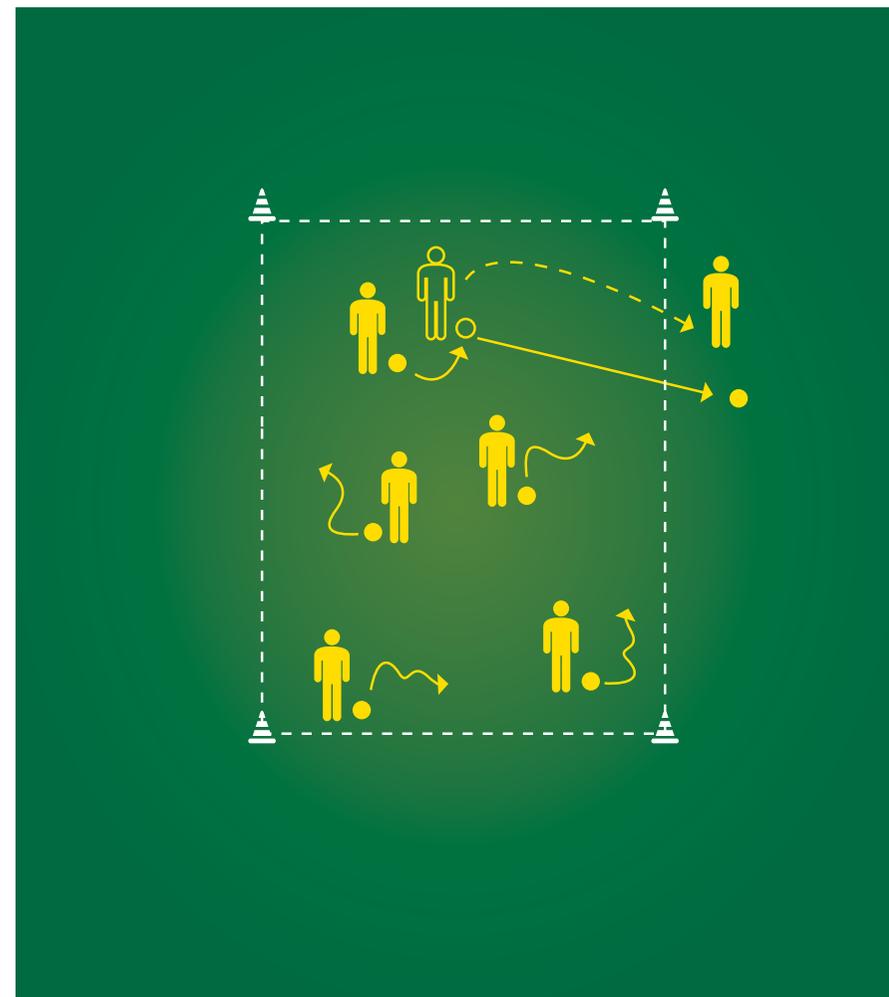
## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Middle: Beehive

Six players with a ball each dribble around an area about 7m × 10m.

They attempt to kick the other players' balls out of the area while keeping their own ball under control. The players must be careful – while they are kicking someone's ball out, someone else might kick theirs out!

If their ball is kicked out, the player must leave the area immediately without kicking any other balls out. The player can fetch their own ball and wait until there is a winner and the game starts again.



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### End: 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5) Training Game - focus on shooting

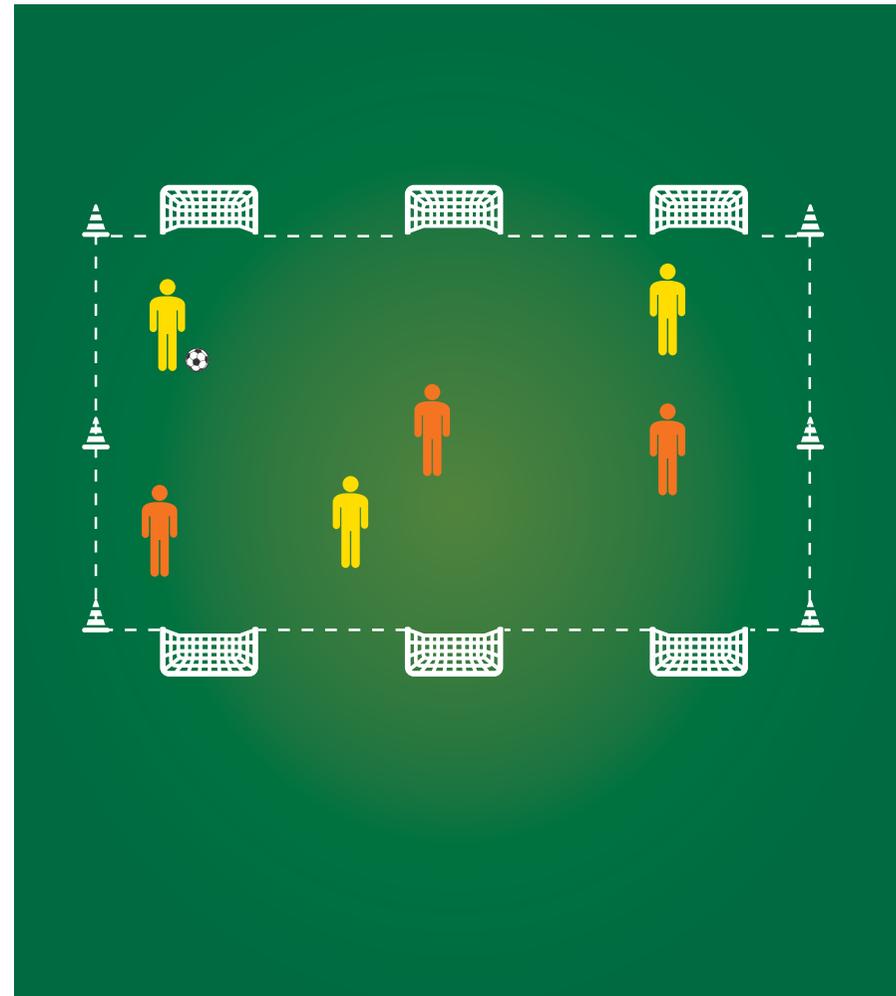
- Field dimension is short and wide

Length: 15m

Width: 15m - 20m

Goal: 3 goals on each byline (as shown in diagram)

- This game encourages shooting as often as possible



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Model Session 10

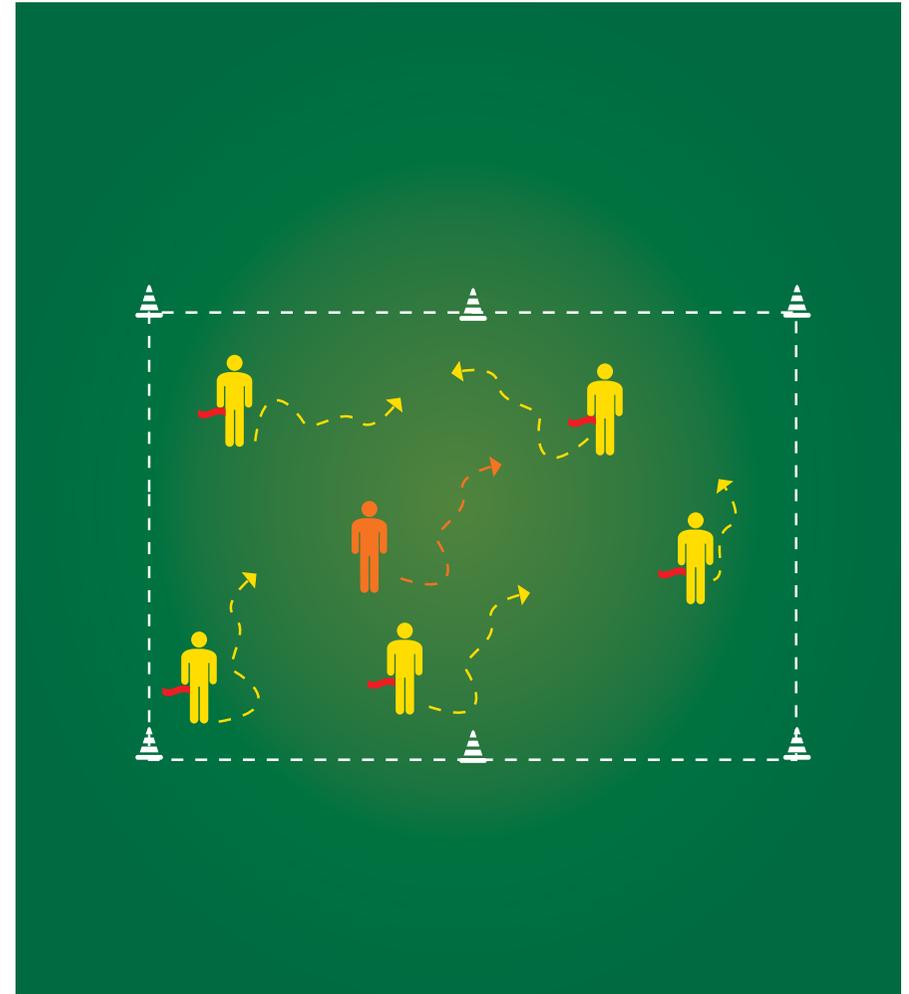
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#### Beginning: Catch the Tails

One or more players are 'hunters'. They chase the other players and try to remove their 'tails'. If a player's 'tail' is taken, they become a 'hunter'.  
(Bibs tucked into shorts can function as 'tails').

#### Progression:

- The 'hunter' dribbles their ball while trying to remove the 'tails'
- Players with 'tails' dribble their balls while trying to avoid the 'hunter'



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### Middle: Simon Says

Players dribble freely around the area with a ball each. Give the kids various tasks and challenges, which they must do **ONLY** if you say 'Simon says' at the start of the sentence. Therefore, sometimes you use 'Simon says' and sometimes you don't – see who's listening!

The players must avoid touching anyone else's ball, and must not let anyone else touch their own ball.

Possible tasks:

- STOP! (Means stop dead with your foot on your ball)
- TURN! (Quickly go the other way with your ball)
- OUT! (Run outside the square and put your foot on your ball)
- CHANGE! (Leave your ball and find another one to dribble; who is the last one dribbling a new ball?)
- LEFT! (Dribble around the area touching the ball only with your left foot)
- RIGHT! (Dribble around the area touching the ball only with your right foot)
- Use your imagination!

**Use instructions like 'Simon says sit next to your ball' or 'Simon says get a drink from your bag', to give the players a rest when needed.**



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

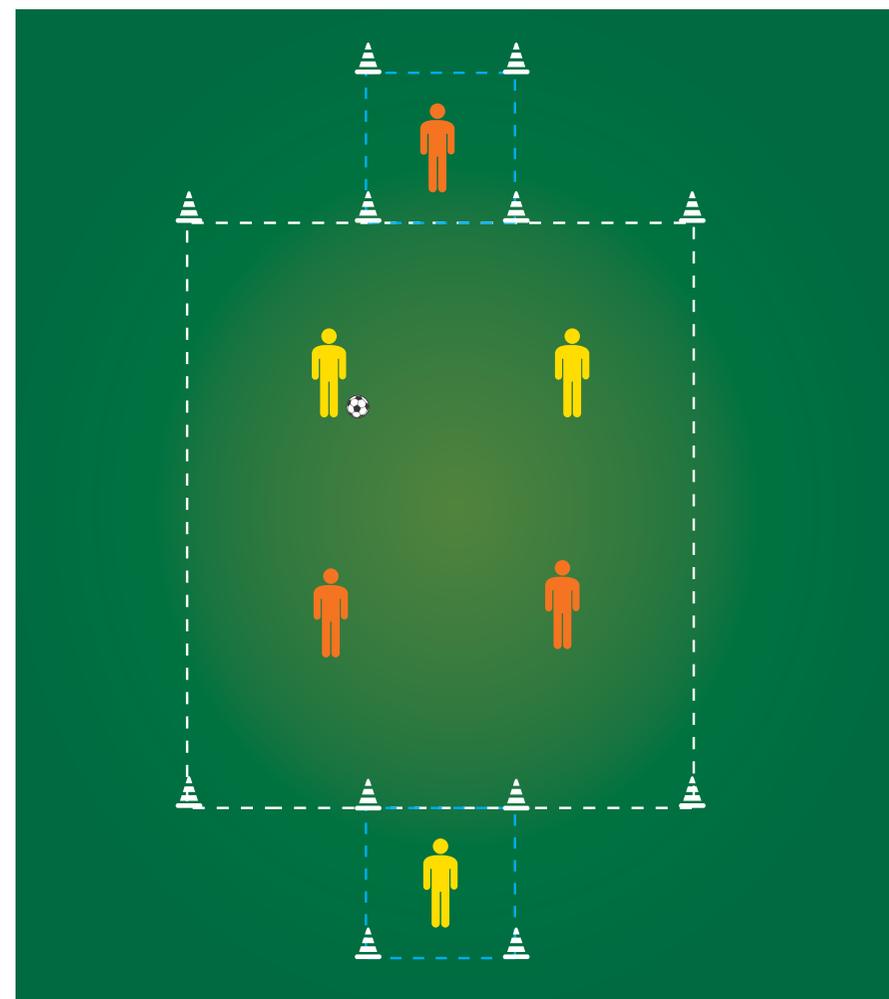
### End: 2 v 2 (or 3 v 3, 4 v 4) end zone football

Length: 20m

Width: 15m

Goal: create an end zone (a square 2m x 2m) behind the centre of each byline

- To score the players must pass the ball to their own player in the end zone who must stop/control the ball in the area
- There are no goalkeepers
- Rotate players in the end zone every 1-2 minutes



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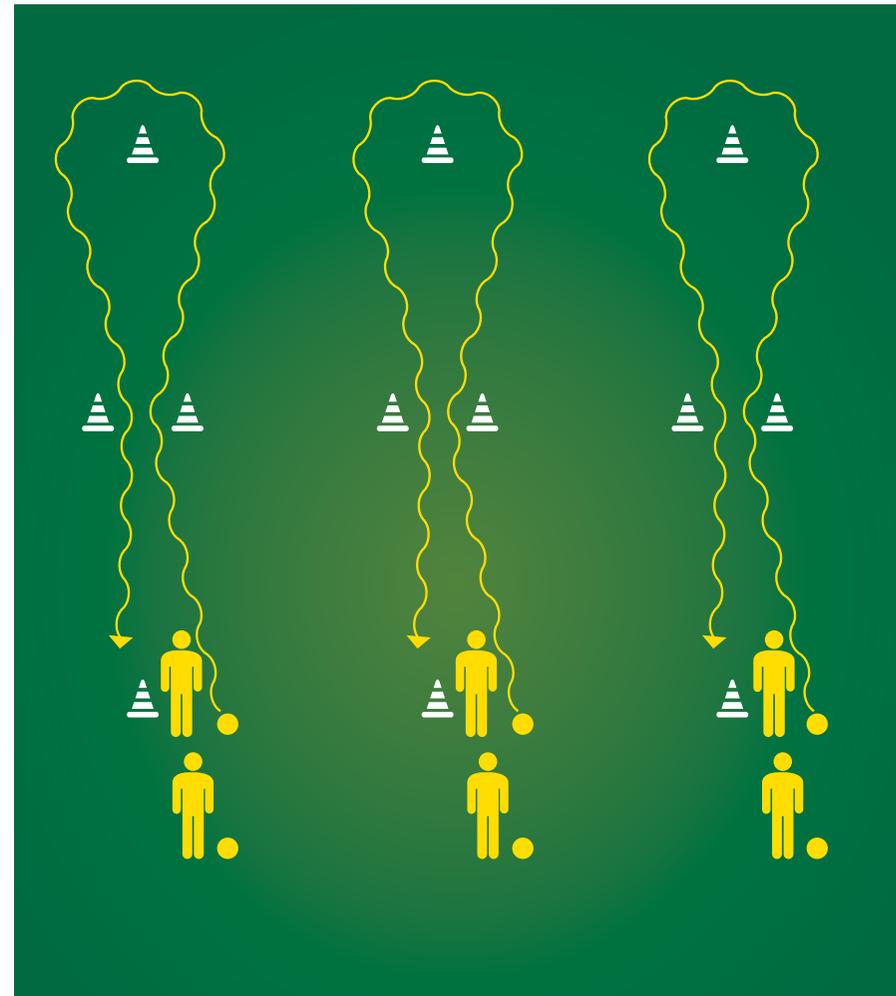
## Model Session 11

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### Beginning: Relay

#### Explanation for relay

- Each player starts with a ball. Player 1 dribbles their ball through the middle gate and then around the far cone and back through the middle gate again on the way back
- Upon returning to the starting point, player 2 commences the same pattern
- Twelve cones are required
- Vary the width of the gates to increase/decrease difficulty



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Middle: Pass and Move

This activity requires two players with a ball and four players without.

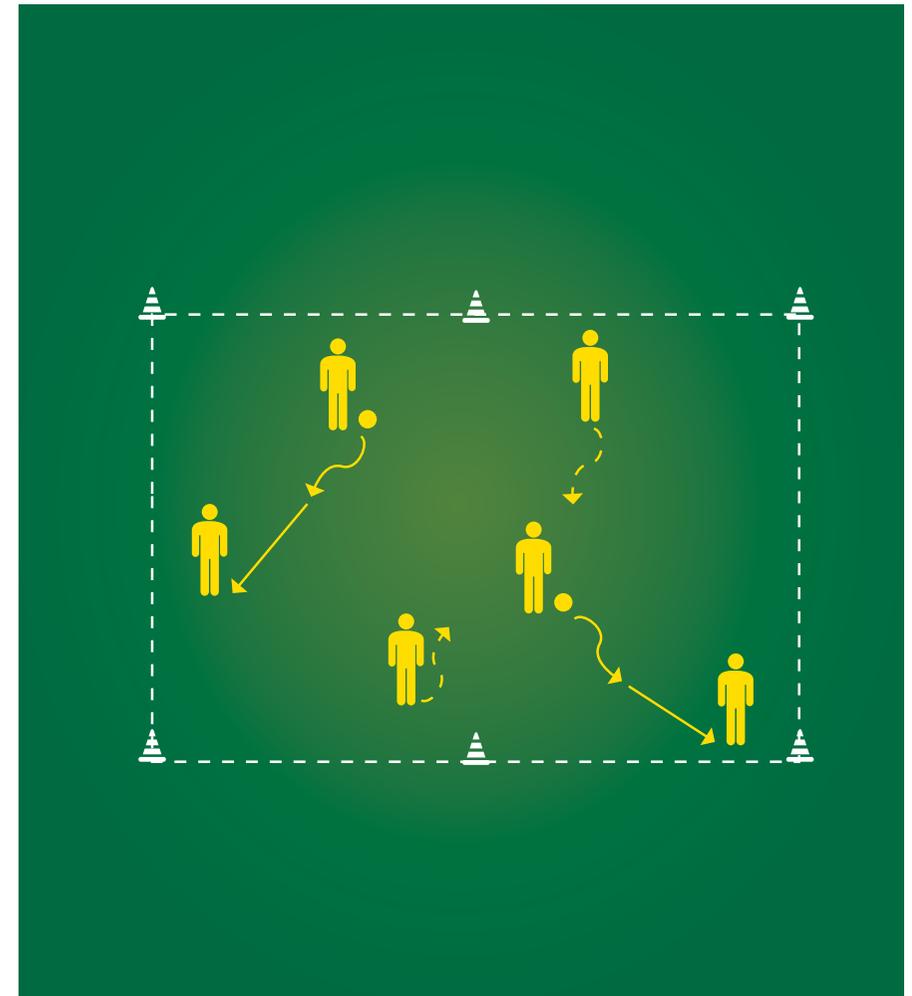
The players with the balls start by dribbling, while the other players move freely around the area. When the ball carriers see another player ready to receive the ball, they pass to them, then move to another part of the area. When a player receives the ball, they dribble until they can see another player who is ready to receive the ball. They then pass the ball to that player and move. Players are constantly moving, either looking to receive one of the two balls, or looking to pass to one of the players without a ball.

#### Progression:

- Three players with a ball and three without

This activity helps develop vision and communication and introduces the concept of passing the ball to a team-mate, which is often difficult to grasp for a naturally self-centred under-seven!

**Passing will begin to be more evident from under-eights upwards.**



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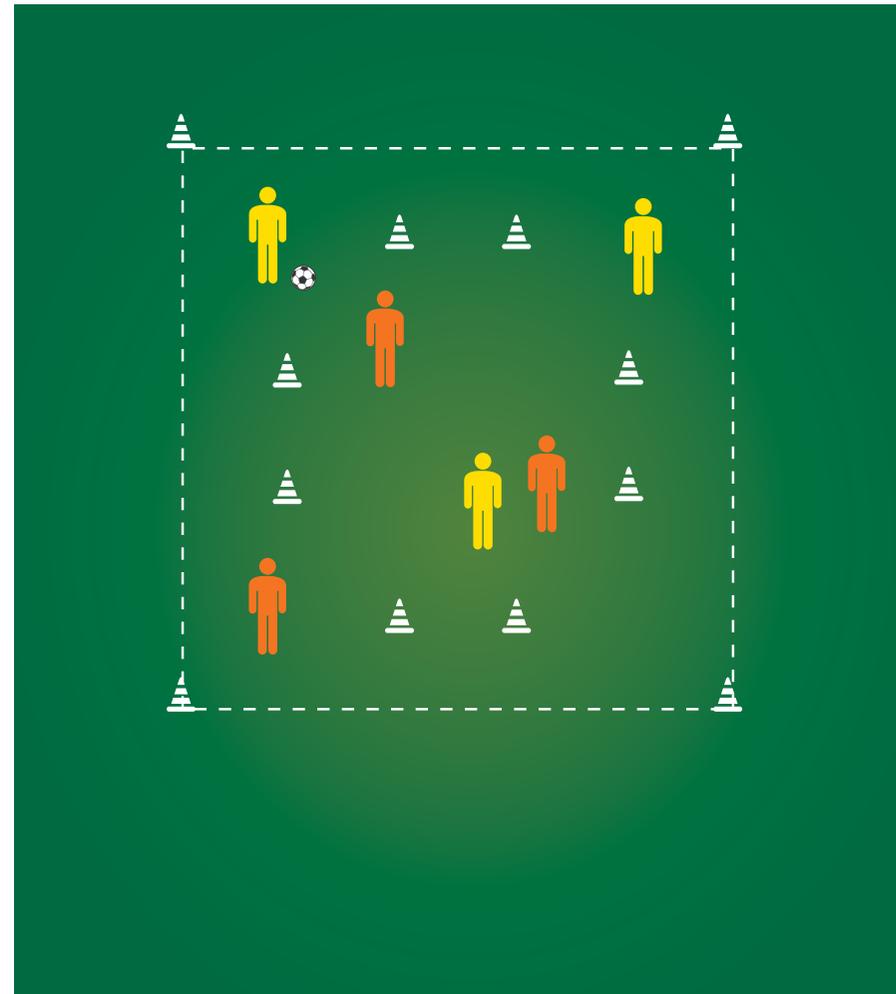
### End: 4 sided football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 20m

Width: 20m

Gates: 4 gates of 1m–2m wide inside the area (as shown in the diagram)

- Players can score by passing the ball through any one of the 4 gates (and from either side) to one of their team-mates
- This game encourages passing and supporting



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

### Model Session 12

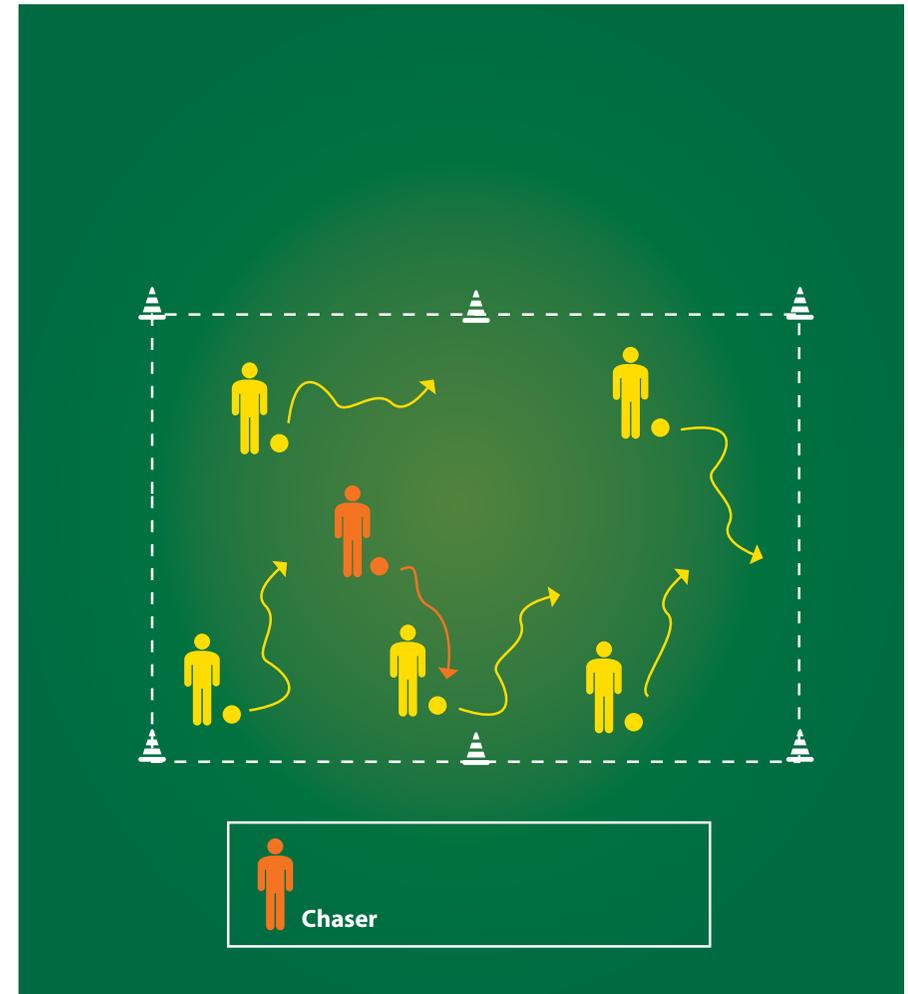
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#### Beginning: Dribble Tag

In an area about 10m x 14m, players dribble their balls around.

A 'chaser' is nominated and they try to tag the other players while keeping control of their own ball. The other players avoid him or her while keeping control of their balls.

If you are the tagger you must carry a bib so everyone knows who the chaser is.



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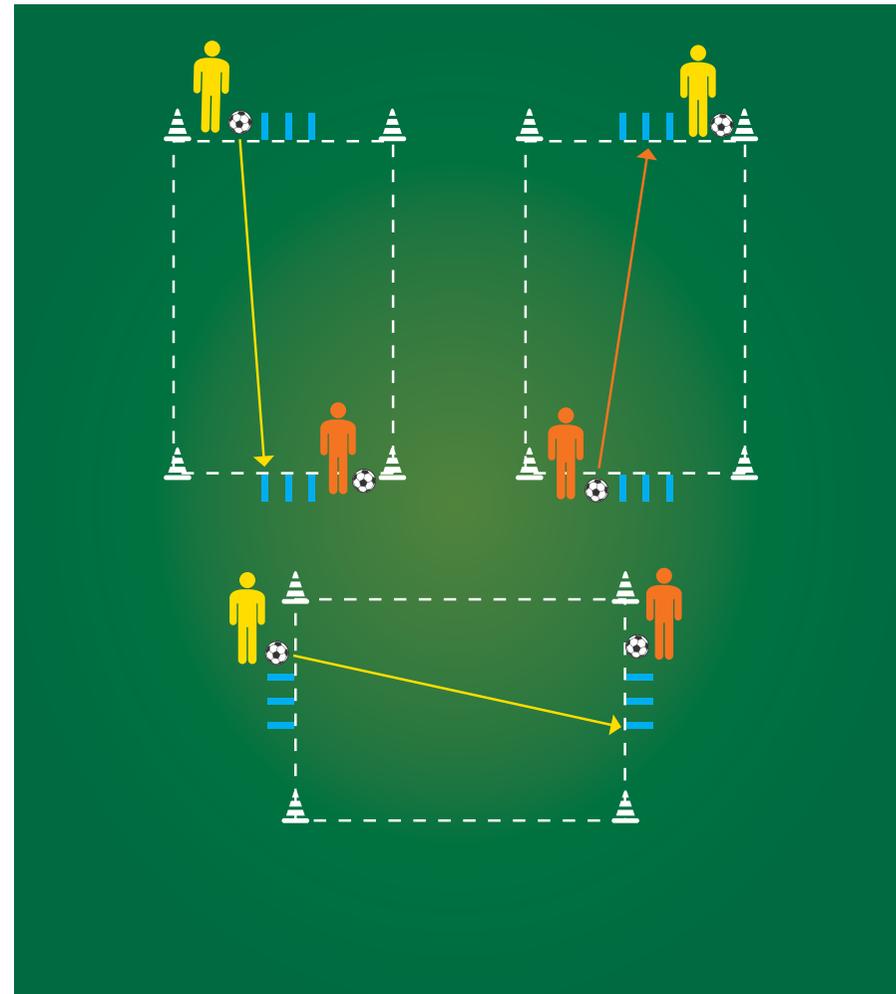
### Middle: Hit the target

Make three small areas about 10m x 7m.

To score, players must hit the target to get points.

Targets may include 3 tall cones, water bottles, balls, empty plastic bottles etc.

Players will receive 1 point for every target which is knocked over or hit (like ten pin bowling).



# 5.

## Discovery Phase Model Sessions

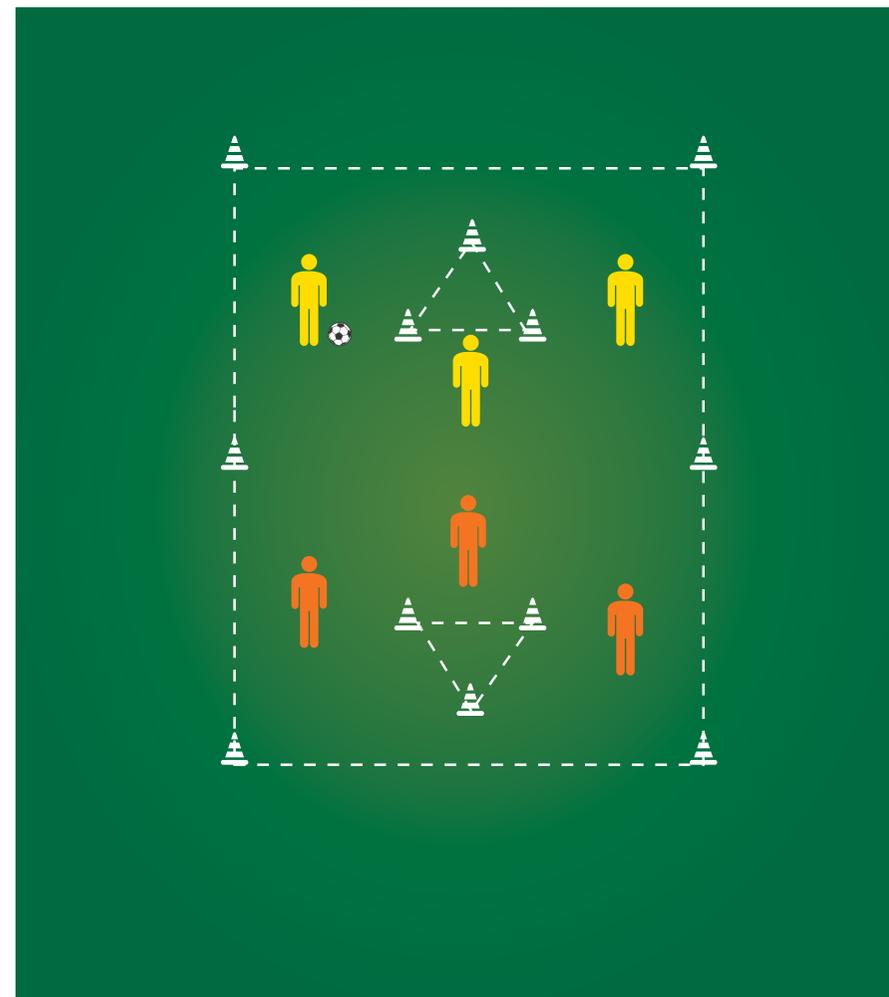
### End: Triangular goal football 3 v 3 (or 4 v 4, 5 v 5)

Length: 20m

Width: 15m

Goal: triangular goal, 2m-3m per side, 2m-3m inside the field

- To score players must shoot or pass through any one of the 3 sides of the triangle of their designated goal
- This game encourages passing and shooting from different angles



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