MC5 COACH · SESSION

# 4 games for a preseason session

Ages 13–15 · about 60 minutes · built on constraints, not drills

A session built from games, not drills. Each game changes one constraint (space, a rule, the scoring) so the players have to find the solution themselves. Run it after a short movement warm-up; keep the ball rolling and coach between rounds, not during them.

| GAME | TIME | WHAT IT TRAINS |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Rondo 4v2 + finishing** | 15' | Finishing, then keeping the ball under pressure, and the first seconds after winning it. |
| **2. 3v3 chase: attack the depth** | 15' | Attacking the depth at speed in open field. |
| **3. Width game** | 15' | Using the width in possession; staying compact out of possession. |
| **4. Three-zone game: stay short** | 15' | A short team, counter-pressing, a high press and a fast transition after winning the ball. |

## Why games?

EVIDENCE: MODERATE

In team-invasion sports, game-based (nonlinear) approaches did better for tactical decisions in most outcomes measured; for technique the results were similar.

Bromilow et al. (2025), Sports Medicine – Open. DOI: 10.1186/s40798-025-00893-y

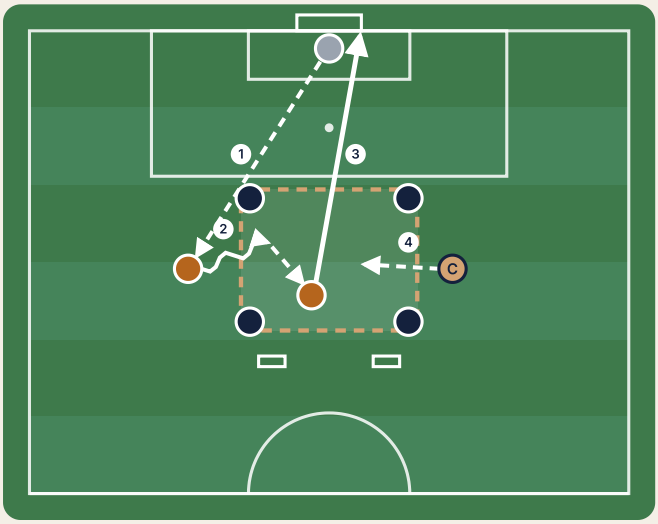
EVIDENCE: EMERGING

After 14 sessions of small-sided and conditioned games, U12 players improved decision-making and passing, and kept the gains. One small study without a control group.

Práxedes et al. (2019), Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy. DOI: 10.1080/17408989.2019.1580689

These four games apply the principles of the research. They are examples from practice, not protocols tested in the studies.

attacking team · other team · goalkeeper · — — pass · —— run · ∿ dribble




GAME 1 · 15'

## Rondo 4v2 + finishing

**Aim:** Finishing, then keeping the ball under pressure, and the first seconds after winning it.

### SET-UP

A 20 × 16 m square in front of the goal with 4 attackers (navy) on its edges. 2 copper players start the finishing action, then defend. Two mini-goals outside the square, towards the halfway line. Coach on the side with balls.

### RULES

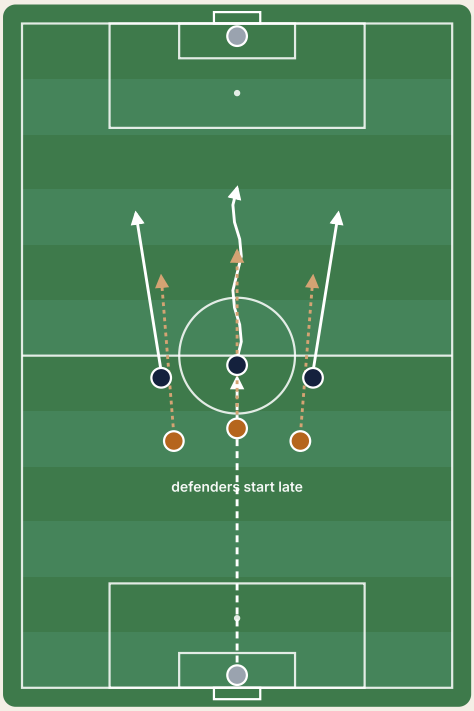
- Finishing: the keeper passes to a copper player, who controls it and passes to his teammate for the shot.
- Second ball: the coach plays it into the square and it becomes a 4v2 rondo. Navy score in the big goal after a set number of passes (for example 5).
- If the 2 copper players win the ball, they score in one of the mini-goals.

### COACHING POINTS

- Receive with the body open to the pitch.
- Finish the action, then switch on: the 2 must defend at once.

### VARIATIONS

- Change the number of passes before the goal.
- Limit touches for the attackers.
- Goal counts double if all 4 attackers touched the ball.




GAME 2 · 15'

## 3v3 chase: attack the depth

**Aim:** Attacking the depth at speed in open field.

### SET-UP

Full pitch. 3 attackers start from their own keeper's pass; 3 defenders start a few metres behind them, late.

### RULES

- The keeper plays to the 3 attackers: they attack the depth at full speed.
- The 3 defenders start late and try to win the ball back.
- If the defenders win it, they score in the other goal.

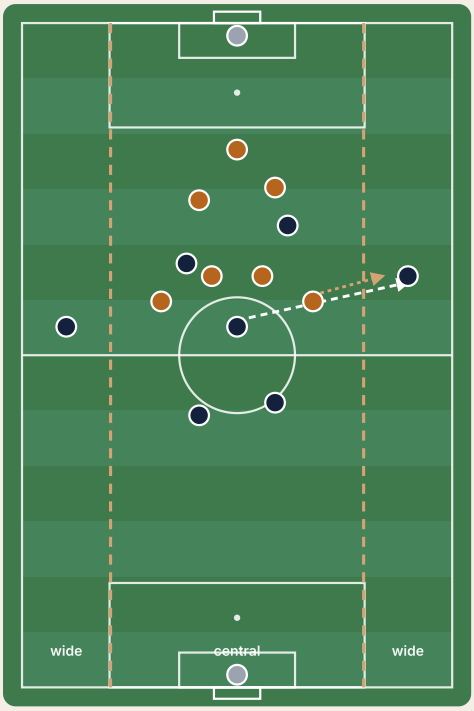
### COACHING POINTS

- Attack the space before the chasers recover.
- Chasers: recover inside first, then press the ball.

### VARIATIONS

- Change the head start to make the chase easier or harder.
- Attack must finish within 10 seconds.

attacking team · other team · goalkeeper · — — pass · —— run · ∿ dribble




GAME 3 · 15'

## Width game

**Aim:** Using the width in possession; staying compact out of possession.

### SET-UP

Pitch split into three lanes: two narrow wide lanes and a wider central lane. Both teams start in the central lane; every restart is from the keeper.

### RULES

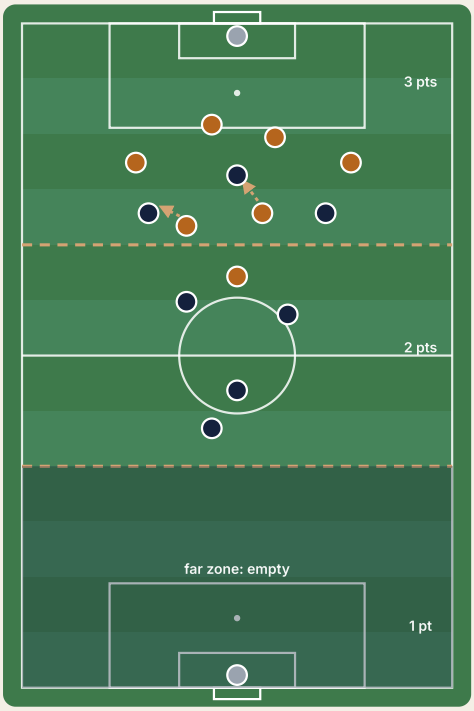
- When a team has the ball, it sends two players to occupy the wide lanes.
- The defending team stays in the central lane. It may press a wide player only when he receives the ball; otherwise it defends centrally.
- If a wide player comes into the central lane, a teammate swaps with him so the width is always occupied.

### COACHING POINTS

- Wide players: stay wide early, receive facing forward.
- Defenders: shift together, press on the receiver's first touch.

### VARIATIONS

- Narrow the central lane to make the block harder to break.
- Limit the wide players to two touches.




GAME 4 · 15'

## Three-zone game: stay short

**Aim:** A short team, counter-pressing, a high press and a fast transition after winning the ball.

### SET-UP

Normal game, pitch split into three zones across its length.

### RULES

- Both teams must always stay in the two zones nearest the ball: a short team.
- Win the ball in the zone nearest the opponent's goal and score: 3 points.
- Win it in the middle zone and score: 2 points. In your own zone: 1 point.

### COACHING POINTS

- Move up and down together with the ball.
- The nearest player presses, the others close the space behind him.

### VARIATIONS

- Bonus point if the team wins the ball within 5 seconds of losing it.
- Shorten the zones for older groups.

MC5 FOOTBALL

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