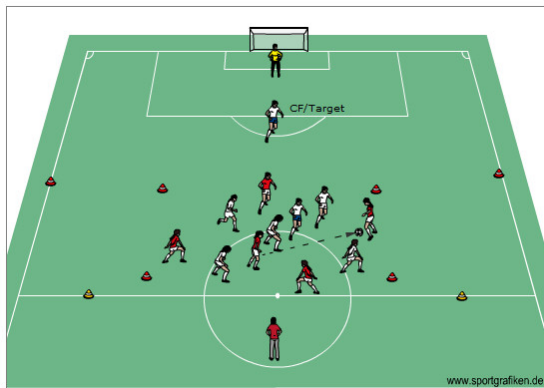


Functional Training in the 4-3-3

At the 2012 NSCAA Convention in Kansas City, I had the pleasure of watching Peter Vermes, Head Coach of Sporting Kansas City, run a session titled Approach Play with Finishing in a 4-3-3. Prior to his coaching career, Vermes was a member of 1990 United States World Cup team and had a distinguished professional career both in the MLS and overseas.

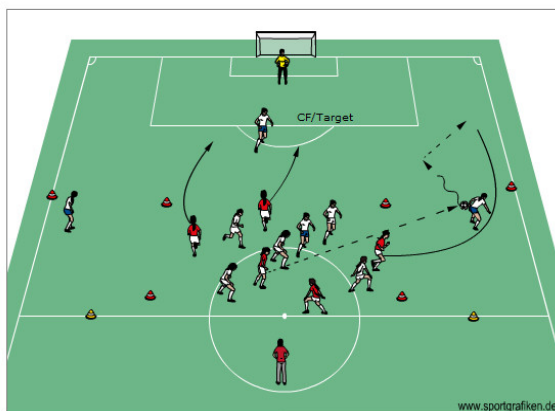
What follows isn't a detailed summary of the session Coach Vermes ran. Instead, I chose to use the framework & concepts of Coach Vermes session and attempted to create a full team functional training session for the 4-3-3 system. You know you've attended a really good session when it sparks discussion with colleagues on how you would tweak it or can we take it a step further? I truly enjoyed Coach Vermes session and plan to incorporate many of the same concepts into my coaching, but instead of replicating the session verbatim, I plan to make it my own. The following are just a few ideas that Chris Parsons, Men's Soccer Coach at the United States Coast Guard Academy, and I came up with in the aftermath of Coach Vermes session.

Coach Vermes Exercise



The Set-up: created a 20x25 grid fifteen to 20 yards from the top of the penalty box.

The Exercise: A game of 5v5 plus 1 took place inside the gridded area. If a team connected 5 consecutive passes they played forward into the target/CF and three players were allowed to support the attack. Coach Vermes demanded that all attacks be carried out at speed & finish with a shot on goal. Once the attack was completed, the 3 supporting attackers had four seconds to return to the grid.



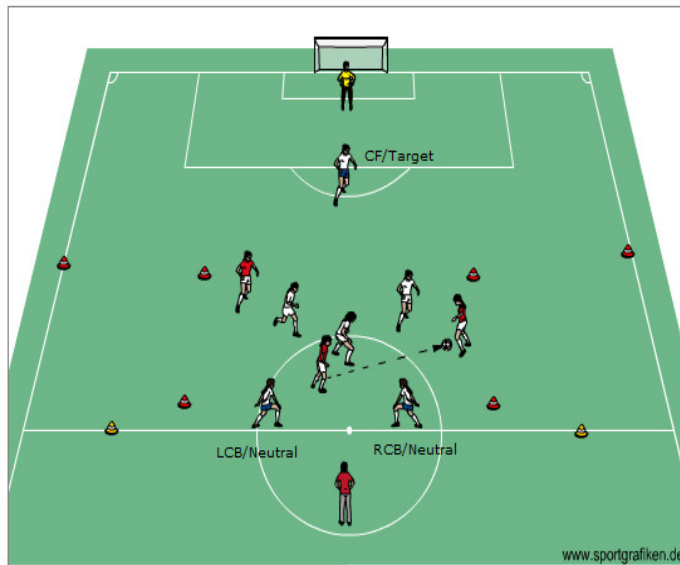
Progression: Two flank players (RW&LW) are now introduced into the activity. A game of 5v5 plus 1 took place inside the gridded area. If a team connected 5 consecutive passes they either played forward into the target/CF (as done initially) or out wide to a RW or LW. If the ball is played wide one of the attacking players must make a hard overlapping run while two of his/her teammates time their runs into the box.

The wing player should attack with the dribble and play out wide to the overlapping runner who serves the ball into the box.

Focus of the Vermes Exercise:

- Possession
- Penetration (can we play forward)
- Transition
- Recovery (4 seconds to return to the box)

Coach Donahue's Variation:



The Exercise: A game of 3v3 plus 2 takes place in the gridded area (the coach can reduced the size of the grid depending on the level of player). The two neutral players should be your central defenders. These players should remain along the back of the grid so that they are faced up to the field.

The 3v3 should be played by your midfield players. This will help the players develop an understanding of one another and learn proper spacing and balance when on the attack.

If a team connects 5 consecutive passes they play forward into the target/CF and two attacking players are allowed to support the attack, the third teammate should remain in the grid to keep the team balanced mirroring a holding midfielders role during the attacking phase. One midfielder from the defensive team is allowed to recover.



The central defenders/ “neutral players” are allowed to play into the target after the 5 passes have been completed. This will mirror the deep pass the center back should be looking to play at the appropriate times during match play.

All attacks should be carried out at speed & finish with a shot on goal.

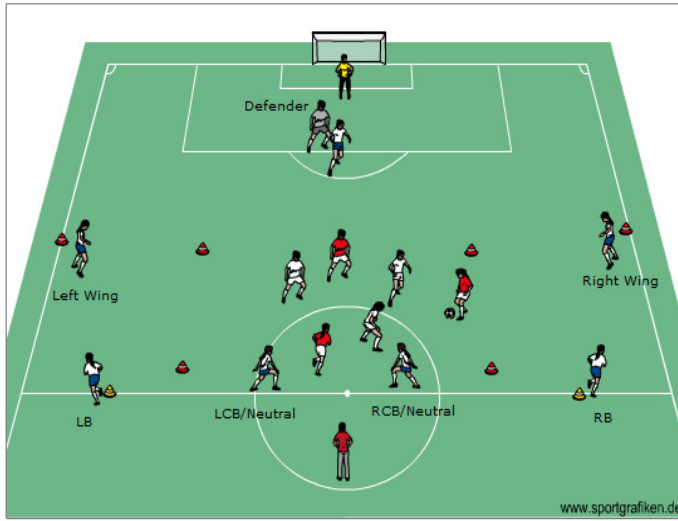
Once the attack is completed, the 2 supporting attackers have four seconds to return to the grid.

Coach should play a new ball into the grid.

Focus:

- Possession
- Penetration (can we play forward)
- Transition
- Shape through positional play
- Recovery (4 seconds to return to the box)

Addition of Flank Players



The Set-up: The same 3v3 plus 2 situation is occurring in the inner grid, but now there are two additional flank players (Right Wing & Right Back/ Left Wing & Left Back) in the wide channels.

You'll also notice the addition of a defender to "mark" the target player.

Note: You should still encourage players to look to play the center forward after the 5 passes if that option is "on".

If the Ball is Played into a Wing player (over lapping option)



(Pictured left)

As the ball is traveling to the left wing, the left back should be making an overlapping run at speed. The left wing should dribble inside to create a bit of space for the left back.

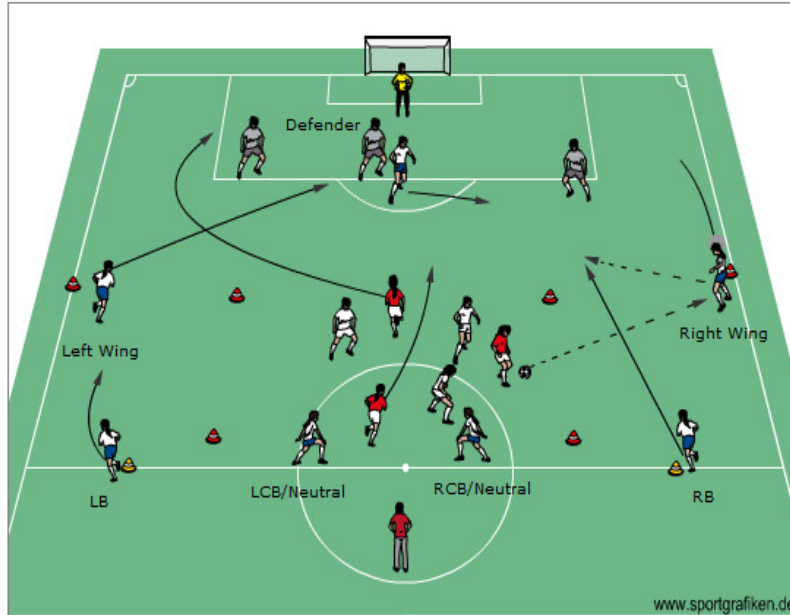
In this situation the center forward drifts away toward the back post while the winger on the opposite side attacks the space vacated by the CF.

The right back should "step up" so he/she doesn't leave a gap in the team when the RW attacks with the diagonal run. This may appear to be a small detail, but it's an important habit

for players to reinforce during training.

Not pictured just for clarity purposes of the new movements: Two of the three attacking midfielders should continue to make runs into the box. They should time these runs properly "arrive on time" and base their movements on the ball, their teammates, and the defenders positioning. Coach can allow one, two, or all three of the defensive midfielders to recover into the box.

If the Ball is played into a Wing player (inside run option)



Note: There is now a backline of three protecting the goal.

As the ball is traveling to the right wing, the right back should be making an interior penetrating run at speed. The right wing should play the ball to the RB. Once the RB touches the ball all defenders are “live”.

Coaching point- The interior run may be a good option if the forward wing player is the wider of the two flank players. Also if the RW has pressure on him/her (not pictured) that won't allow him/her to come inside, the RB should recognize this and quickly attack the inside space.

In the situation above the center forward shows toward the ball in an effort to open drag the Central Defender with him to open up space for the LW to attack. One of the two midfield runners should recognize this situation and assume responsibility for getting to the back post. The left back should “step up” so he/she doesn't leave a gap in the team when the LW attacks with the diagonal run.

There are numerous attacking options that could unfold out of this pattern. Here is just one example: The RB could play the CF who in turn slips a pass behind the defender to the RW who serves into the box.

There are many other options to consider, but I prefer to allow the players the freedom to find the patterns and movements that work for them. Having said that, it's important for the coach to always have a few ideas to share with their players if they aren't exploring some of the patterns that you believe will be successful on game day.

Comments and feedback are always welcome at bdonahue@lexingtonunited.org