

Don't look back— think forward!

Force your opponents to give up the ball and then make your move!
by Ralf Peter, DFB coach

When you win the ball, you should start moving decisively forward right away while the opposition's defense is still disorganized—that's one of the fundamental principles of the modern game. However, it doesn't just apply to the classical counterattack from your own half; it's

equally important for fast attacks after you win the ball in the midfield. But how do you win the ball in situations where, for example, an inside defender is initiating the attack? In this article, DFB coach Ralf Peter turns three hypothetical game situations into exercises that teach

players how to make their opponents lose the ball. Special passing rules are used to steer the opposition's attack into the desired areas.

After the turnover, players should always play the first pass forward and then switch immediately to offense.

The basic concept

In soccer, we make a fundamental distinction between two modes of attacking:

1. attacking against a well-organized defensive formation, and
2. attacking when the opposition is not well-organized.

The following pages address only the second of these two points.

During the attack-building phase

We'll use three game situations to show you what you need to do during opponents' attack-building phase in order to make them lose the ball. By making coordinated runs, you can cut off the ball carrier from certain receivers. Little by little you close down the space until eventually you have the ball carrier outnumbered. If you attack decisively, win the ball and then move quickly and purposefully forward, you'll have a good chance of scoring, as this is a moment when the opposition's defense is temporarily in a disorganized state.

Game formation

In this article we'll show you a method of provoking a turnover based on the 4-2-3-1 formation (see Figure 1 at right). It doesn't work in other formations, but of course they have possibilities of their own.

Where you win the ball

The exercises that follow are based on specific game situations. The point of having your players steer opponents' passes inside is to increase the likelihood of winning the ball in the middle. The reason is obvious: The path to the goal is shorter from the middle than from the wings.

What about flighted balls?

Naturally, you can only steer your opponents inside and attack them in the middle if they behave the way you want them to. To a certain extent they will, but long and/or wild flighted balls can never be ruled out. The proper way of dealing with this situation is shown on page 23.

FIG. 1 4-2-3-1 FORMATION



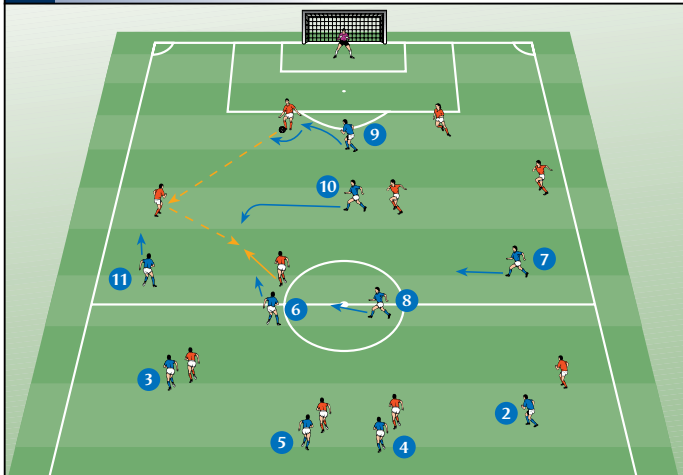
Player roles in basic configuration

- The two inside midfielders (aka the “double 6”) try to close down space. Thanks to their parallel positioning, either one of them can team up with 10, depending on the situation.
- To win the ball successfully it's essential that these three central players work together.
- Thanks to their positioning, the two outside midfielders don't have to run far to confront and stop the opposition's outside defenders.
- The target player steers the attack by moving sideways to block passing lanes.
- If the ball is turned over later on, the central attacker must stay open at all times and show for the ball in open spaces, ideally in front of the goal in the middle.

WINNING THE BALL IN THE MIDDLE

THROUGH PASS INTO MIDFIELD FROM OUTSIDE DEFENDER

Dropping back to attack the ball 1



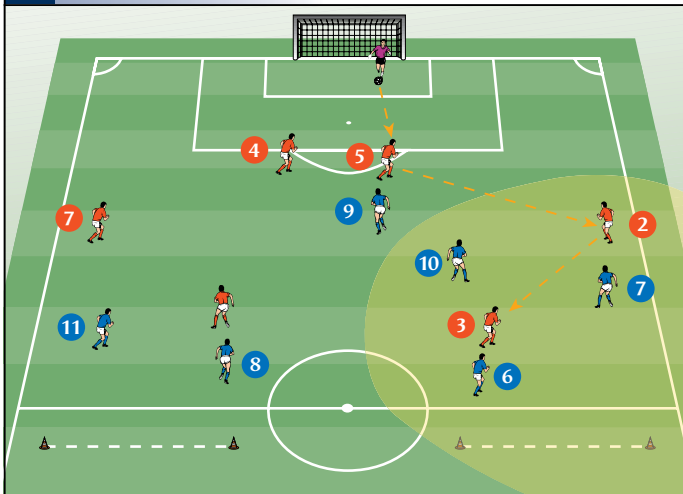
Intended progression

- An inside defender passes onto the wing.
- The outside defender who receives the ball can only pass forward into the midfield.

Method/suggestions

- Target player 9 triggers the pass by running between the two inside defenders and then blocks the lane for back passes to the keeper. If his teammates go on to win the ball, he must stay open for a pass at any time by showing for the ball in open spaces in front of the goal.
- 11 cautiously approaches the outside defender, leaving enough room for him to receive the ball. The object is to keep him from passing up the line.
- Depending on the situation, 10 either moves over to attack 2 v. 1 with 11 or drops back to do so with 6.

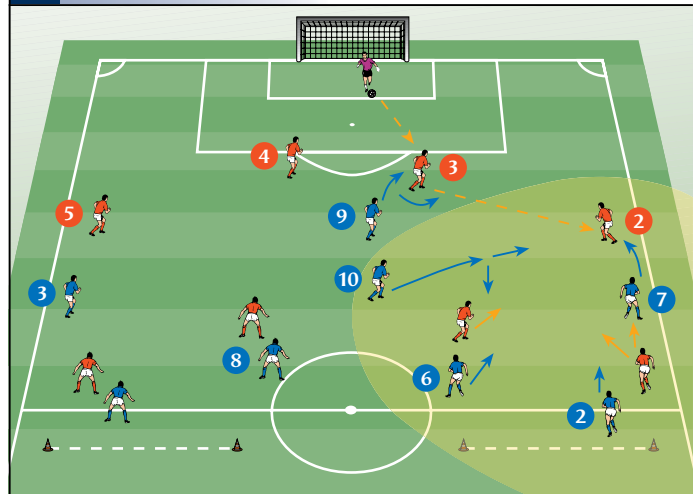
Introductory exercise 1



Setup and sequence

- Divide players into two teams of six, assigning each to a position.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on the endline and mark out two 20-yard counterlines behind the centerline.
- The goalkeeper passes to 5, who relays to 2.
- The pass to 2 initiates a 3 v. 2 situation (yellow shaded area).
- The blue team tries to outnumber opponents, win the ball as fast as possible and immediately switch to an attack on the goal (4 v. 4 situation).
- The red team tries to dribble across the counterlines.
- Next the keeper passes to 4 and the sequence repeats on the other side.

Introductory exercise 2



Setup and sequence

- Setup is the same as in Exercise 1, except with teams of eight.
- The goalkeeper passes to 3 or 4.
- Target player 9 approaches the ball carrier in such a way that he can only pass onto the wing.
- The pass to the wing initiates a 4 v. 3 situation (yellow shaded area).
- The blue team tries to outnumber opponents, win the ball as fast as possible and immediately switch to an attack on the goal (5 v. 5 situation).
- The red team tries to dribble across the counterlines.

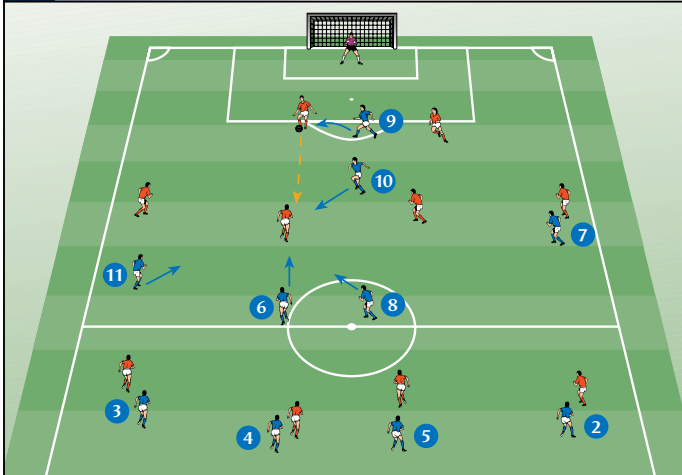
Variation

- Target player 9 forces the ball carrier to pass to the opposite wing.



THROUGH PASS INTO MIDFIELD FROM INSIDE DEFENDER

Dropping back to attack the ball 2



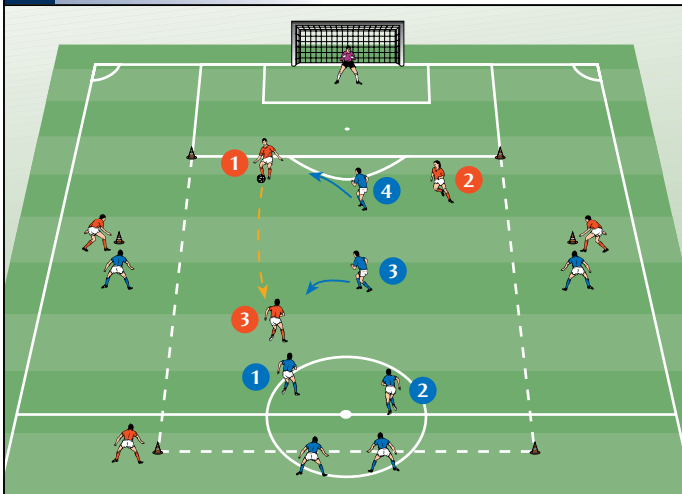
Intended progression

- The inside defender who receives the ball from the keeper can pass either onto the wing or up the middle. He chooses the middle.

Method/suggestions

- Target player 9 blocks passing lanes to the other inside defender and back to the keeper.
- If his teammates go on to win the ball, he must stay open for a pass at any time by showing for the ball in open spaces in front of the goal.
- When the ball is passed into the midfield, either 6 or 8 moves up, depending on the situation, and 10 drops back for a 2 v. 1 attack.
- 11 moves toward the ball carrier and closes down space.

Exercise 1 (very easy)



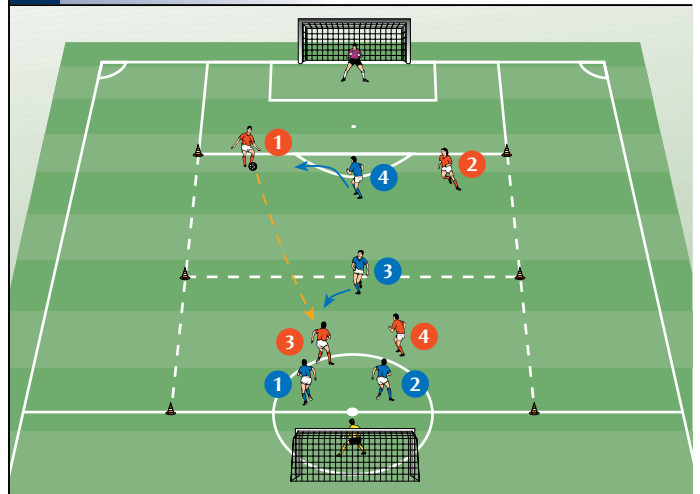
Setup

- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on a field the width of the penalty box, extending just past the centerline.
- A team of four (blue) and a team of three (red) take the field.

Sequence

- 1 or 2 passes to 3, and together they try to dribble across the opposite endline.
- Together with 3, 1 and 2 try to win the ball, quickly switch to offense and score a goal with the help of forward 4.
- Rotate new players in after each round.

Exercise 2 (easy)



Setup

- Mark out a field the width of the penalty box, extending from the box to the centerline, and divide it in half.
- Two red passers and one blue player are in the upper half (in front of the box).
- Three blue players and two red players are in the lower half.

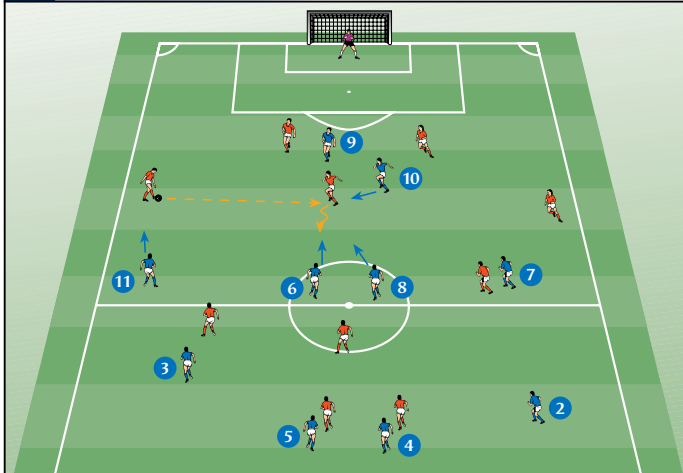
Sequence

- 1 or 2 passes to 3 or 4 but does not cross the centerline.
- Together with 3, 1 and 2 try to win the ball, quickly switch to offense and score a goal in 4 v. 4 play with the help of forward 4.
- The red team attacks on the other goal.

WINNING THE BALL IN THE MIDDLE

SQUARE PASS INTO MIDFIELD FROM OUTSIDE DEFENDER

Double-teaming the ball carrier



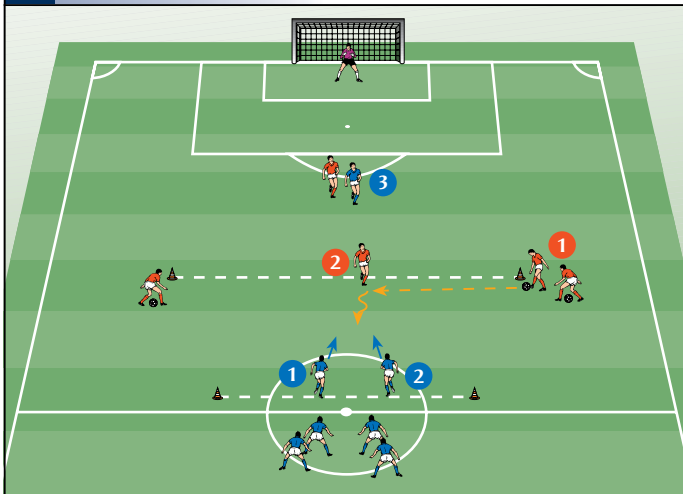
Intended progression

- The outside defender can only play a square pass into the middle.
- The red team is using a midfield diamond.

Method/suggestions

- 11 approaches in such a way to keep the ball carrier from passing up the line.
- 6 and 8 move forward as soon as the square pass is played. It's important for them to have a plan and cooperate (see photo sequence at the bottom of page 24).
- After winning the ball, they immediately switch to offense. Forwards 9 and 10 must stay alert and be open for passes at any time!

Introductory exercise 1



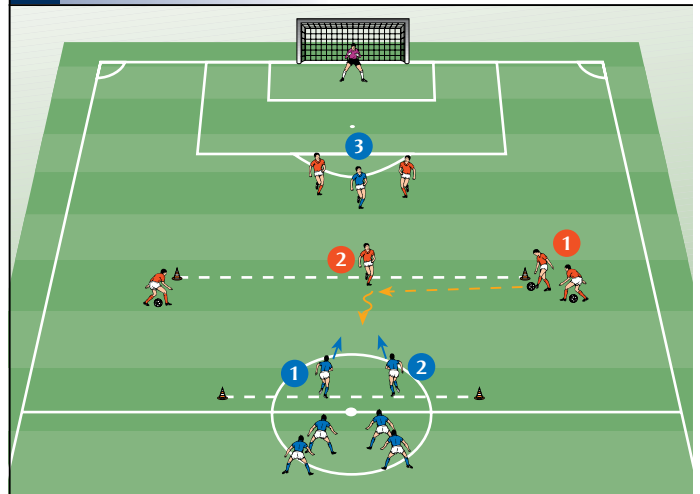
Setup

- Using cones, mark out two starting lines about 20 yards apart in front of a goal with goalkeeper.
- The red team starts at the line closer to the goal. Blue players line up in pairs at the other line.

Sequence

- Each round begins with a pass from 1 to 2, at which point 1 and 2 immediately move forward and double-team 2.
- 2 tries to dribble across the goal line. 1 and 2 try to win the ball, switch to offense and finish on the goal in a 3 v. 2 attack together with 3.

Introductory exercise 2



Setup

- Setup is the same as in Exercise 1.

Sequence

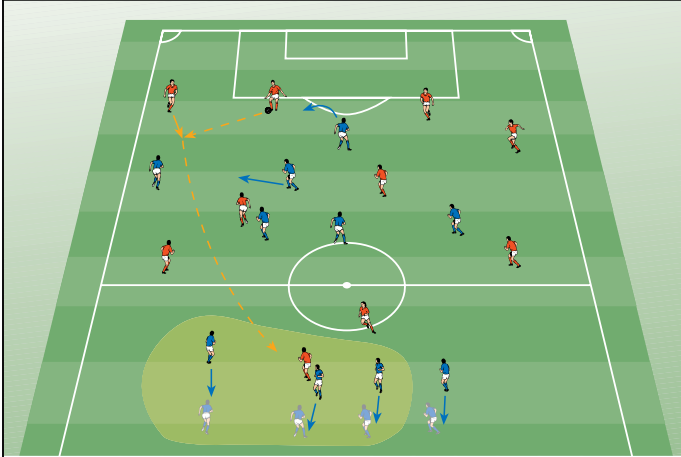
- Each round begins with a pass from 1 to 2, at which point 1 and 2 immediately move forward and double-team 2.
- 2 tries to dribble across the goal line. 1 and 2 try to win the ball, switch to offense and finish on the goal in a 3 v. 3 attack together with 3.



DEFENSIVE TACTICS

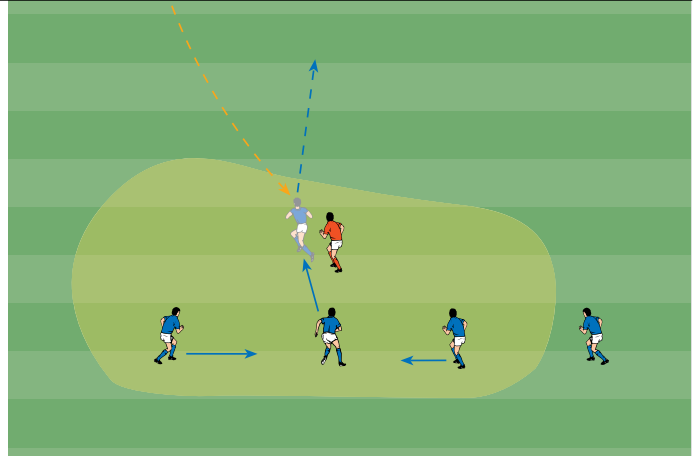
LONG FLIGHTED BALLS FROM THE OPPOSITION'S HALF

Dropping back



Back four's response to flighted ball

- The back four needs to start dropping back as soon as the outside defender winds up for the flighted ball.
- All defenders drop back three or four yards without looking away from the ball.



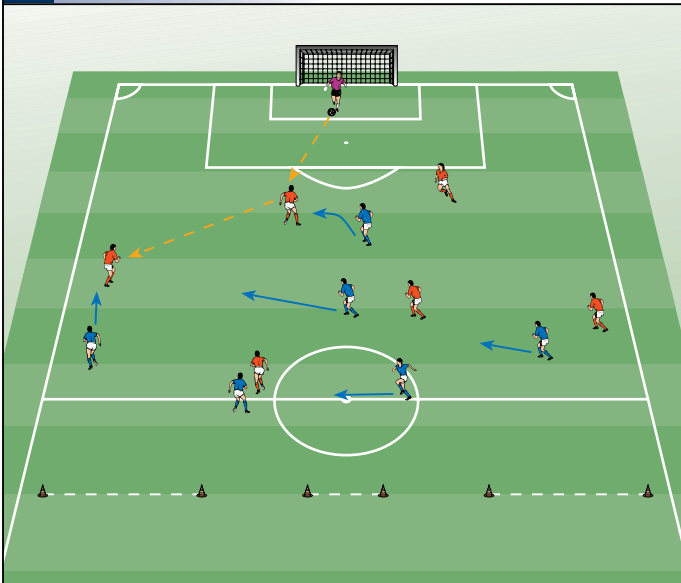
Detail of area where ball lands

- Taking advantage of his head start, the player closest to where the ball is going to land moves decisively toward it and tries to win it in the air.
- The two defenders on either side cover space.

TURNOVER TRAINING GAME

6 V. 6 PLAY

Midfield pressing



Setup

- Set up a goal with goalkeeper and mark out three counterlines behind the centerline (wing lines 15 yards wide, middle line five).

Sequence

- The goalkeeper starts each round by throwing the ball to one of the inside defenders. The red team tries to dribble across one of the wing lines or shoot across the middle line. The blue team attacks on the standard goal.
- Players use whatever tactics are appropriate to the situation.

Tip

- Don't let the keeper throw too far. The blue team should start out a bit farther back to allow a flow to develop.

MORE ON THE WEB

Sample exercises at www.successinsoccer.com

For additional training on this topic, visit our website at www.successinsoccer.com and click on **Sample Exercises** under **Subscriber Benefits**. There you'll find two exercises by DFB coach Bernd Stöber that focus on the main concepts covered in this article. **Fast transitions** simulates an attack against a disorganized opponent, with players trying

to win the ball with 2 v. 1 play and then score with a 4 v. 3 attack. In **Steering the attack**, players practice forcing opponents to pass outside and then inside so that they can win the ball and score.

SIS subscribers can download new sample exercises every month from www.successinsoccer.com!



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From 1 v. 2 to 4 v. 3



Setup

- Set up two goals about 20 yards behind the centerline and one on the endline.
- Divide players into two teams of seven.

Sequence

- The coach passes to a player near the centerline, who plays 1 v. 2 to score.
- If the two defenders win the ball, they immediately switch to offense and attack 4 v. 3 together with their two forward.
- After each round, switch to the other wing (blue goalkeeper switches goals).

Winning the ball in 2 v. 1 play: Here's how it works



▶ 1

- The defender in front steers the ball carrier sideways toward his teammate.



▶ 2

- The teammate moves in, and together they attack the attacker ...



▶ 3

- ... then switch to offense immediately after winning the ball.

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