

Flying with wingers

By David Clarke

Getting players to take the ball wide and change attacking angles can help pull defences out of shape, which can create space for well-organised forwards to exploit.

But it can be difficult to get players to spread play wide in the first place - every match starts in the centre, and heading to the flanks goes against the natural idea of attacking a target that's straight in front of a player.

The idea of this session is not only to encourage players to the right or left side, but to reassure them that they have time and space when they're there.

For that reason, we start the session without the bias towards the wings, so when that element is brought in, players really recognise the value of going wide.

As the session progresses, you can apply new restrictions to gradually increase pressure on the wings.



How to set it up:

- For this session, you'll need balls, bibs, cones, goals and two keepers.
- Set up a 30x15 yards area with a goal at each ends.
- You'll need one team of four players and one team of three.
- You'll also require a floating player who only plays for the attacking team.
- For the second part of the exercise create a five-yard channel on either side of the area marked out with cones.

Getting started:

- Begin the game (without the channels) by serving to the team of four. They play 5v3 given that they're using the floating player.
- Despite playing against an overload, the defending team should be able to organise itself adequately against the focus of the attack because it will be in a fairly confined space.
- Then introduce the channels.
- One player from the attacking team is allowed into the channel and can take as many touches as needed in that area before passing back inside or crossing.
- No defenders are allowed in the channels, and with a wider area to defend, it should become more difficult for them.

Developing the session:

- After a few minutes add the restriction that wingers can only keep the ball in the channel for a count of five.
- Next, restrict wing play further by allowing wide players only two touches.
- And challenge their role further by allowing one defender to go into the channel to add pressure.

Why this works:

The drill rehearses wingers in quick, positive and purposeful play, enabling players to take control of situations. At first, it invites them to exploit time and space in the channels to positive effect.

The exercise allows 4v3, 4v4 and 5v3 situations, creating a number of additional one-on-one or overload combinations that players will encounter in matches. Wingers will quickly grow in confidence, while defenders must be well organised to counter a five-man attack.