



Rondos

How to use Spain's secret weapon

Possession Style

The possession style of play is synonymous with teams like Barcelona, Villarreal and the Spanish national team, and it's no coincidence that Rondo's are an integral part of their training methodology. First we need to understand what the possession style of play is and that it isn't "pass, pass, pass" like many think.

The possession style is when a team tries to take control of the match by having more possession than the opposition, both in offensive & defensive phases of play. When you set out to play this style and you want to have more possession than the opposition, but it's not possession for the sake of it. The intention is to keep the ball while you set up your tactical plans or positional attacks, rather than surrender the ball to the opposition. When we see team like Barcelona playing short passes back & forth in the midfield it's not just to attain great pass completion stats; but to move the opposition, either to create space for a pass or to expose a tactical weakness to exploit.

When using this style of play it doesn't mean we pass over all options. The first thought is to run forward or dribble with the ball if we can and not to tell our player to pass every time they have the ball.

Defensive or Offensive?

Some people question whether using the possession style is defensive or offensive and the answer is it's BOTH!

The idea is to do everything with the ball. If your team is comfortable in possession you can defend by keeping possession and circulating the ball around, but you can also keep possession in order to wait until players are in the correct position to attack. We can also circulate the ball to move the opposition and create space. Whether possession is defensive or offensive is dependent on many things and not decided by just having possession.

Here is a quote from Pep Guardiola about possession at Barcelona:



“What I learned here is everything starts with the ball and ends with the ball. Sometimes we forget that it’s a game of 11v11 with ONE ball. We try to keep this ball, we try to play with the ball; we try to make everything with the ball. This is what we learn when we start as boy here.”

Train Like You Play

One of the important aspects of your training is making sure that it is done with your playing style and tactical plans in mind. Using rondo's is a fantastic way to integrate the possession style of play with your team and, as we will see, help with technical, tactical and positional aspects of your teams overall play.

Using rondo's is not the only way to train and if you use a more direct or counter attacking style of play then there are better training forms that you can use in order to teach your players the style of play you hope to play in matches.

When you're planning your sessions, try to create the the pictures that you want to see in the game so that your players can recognise and react to things they have practices time & time again. This is one of the most important aspects of using rondos both for a technical and tactical point of view. This is also why there are popular ways to set up and structure rondos within your training sessions. You will see in the diagrams that the players used with be specific to the aspect of play we want to work on

What are Rondos?

Rondos are usually set up in a grid of varying size, which can be anything from 8x8 to a half pitch depending on the skill level of the players or the aspect of play you want to work on. There are always players “in the middle” with the team in possession usually having numerical superiority either through given number of players or with the use of neutral players/jokers.

They are often thought of as only a technical practice because the main aim is to keep possession away from the defenders and the technical aspects of rondos are there for all to see, but we can also set up rondos to work on many tactical and positional aspects of play; albeit in a condensed setting.

There are popular set ups for rondos because of the relevance to in game situations. The most popular are: 3v1, 4v2, 5v2 & 6v3. There are many other set ups but these are the most used.

“Rondo, Rondo, Rondo. Every. Single. Day. It’s the best exercise there is” – Xavi Hernandez

Technical Advantages

This presentation is aimed at showing the tactical and positional work you can work on with rondos but the technical improvements player can achieve when using them cannot be ignored:

One and two touch passing

It's easy as a coach to stipulate how many touches players can take but rondos help create the environment where 1 or 2 touches is all you can have.

Rhythm of play and tempo

Rondos can help players understand when to play quickly and when to put their foot on the ball and slow things down depending on how close the opposition player is.

Improved control

Playing in such tight spaces forces your players to have a good first touch and also realise if they need to take a first touch away from a player.

“If god wanted us to play football in the sky, he'd have put grass up there” – Brian Clough

Technical Advantages

Short Passing

When using a possession style of play, the majority of your passes will usually be 12 yards and under. Using rondos gives your players lot of practice playing passes at this distance under pressure.

Constant Movement and Passing Lines

Many coaches want more movement from their teams and through the use of rondos players will be used to constant movement, whether it's 2 yards or 10 yards. This also helps players with the understanding of passing lanes and how to move in to give a team mate a free passing lane.

Improvisation

Not all passes are perfect and rondos can help players learn to improvise if a pass is short or played harder than expected. Most Spanish players can play passes with any surface of their bodies.

“In a small space a player has to be able to act quickly. A good player who needs too much time can suddenly become a bad player” — Johan Cruyff

Technical Advantages

Recognise when and where to overload

We are going to read about the importance of overloads later, but using rondos in training can help players understand when, where and how to overload an area to retain possession or expose a weakness in the opposition to attack.

Habits and Repetition

When using rondos players are under pressure at all times and need to play with one & two touches and that becomes habit that they always use. The same goes for the movement to open up passing line for their teammate. Through the contact repetition these things become habit.

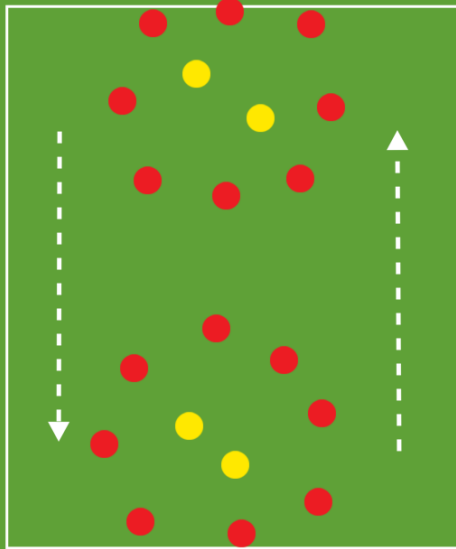
Grid Size

When we first start using rondos the grid size is adapted to suit the level of our players, but as they become more advanced the grid sizes become more significant. Teams like Barcelona & Villarreal want to be playing passes 10 yards and less, and when all the players are this distance apart, they can press the ball intensely should they lose possession.

“If you want to play quicker you can run faster, but the ball decides the speed of the game” – Cruyff

Warm Up Rondos

Warm Up's

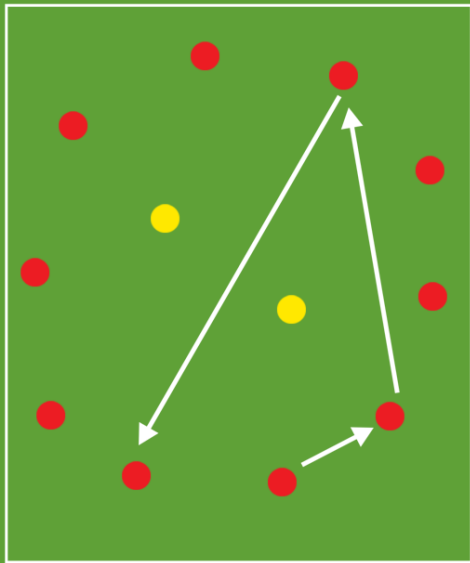


This is a commonly used rondo warm up & probably the most familiar to what most people think rondos are.

The most common way to use this is have 2 players in the middle and if either set of outside players make 10 passes the middle two need to sprint to the other circle and start again there.

If either middle player wins the ball the outside player who lost it and the player who passed to him go into the middle.

Full Team Warm up Rondo



Players make a circle with 2 or 3 players “in the middle”. Goalkeepers are usually involved in this exercise too.

Using one or two touches the outside players keep possession.

There are many variations using different combinations of passes to test the players.

The pass through the middle of the defenders is the desired option when available

1st/2nd/3rd Line Passing

In the previous slide we seen a team rondo with 3 different passes shown. These type of passes are important to the context of not only rondos but to the possession style of play. They are referred to as 1st, 2nd & 3rd line passes

First Line Pass

This refers to a pass that is usually to the teammate on either side of you and doesn't bypass a defender

Second Line Pass

This is a pass which goes past the defenders but not through the space in the between them.

Third Line Pass

This is the pass that goes between the two defenders and is often referred to as the "Split Pass" This is the option you want your players to look for and create.

Team Shape and Positions

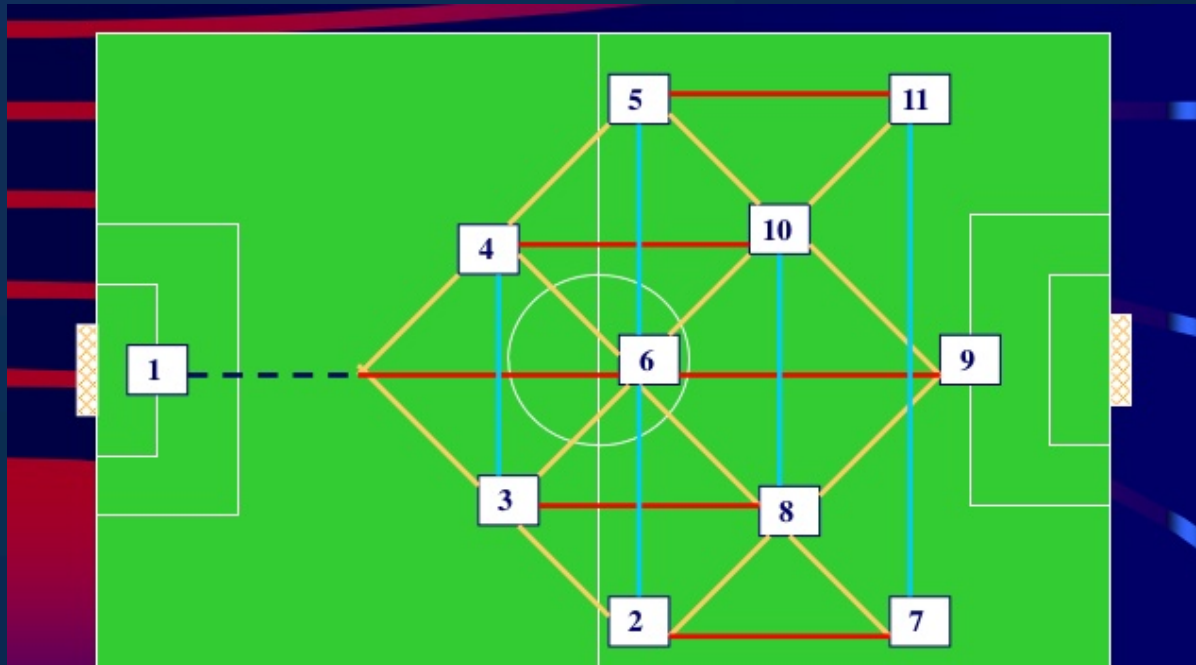


There is no right or wrong formation but for the positional rondos in the next section the numbers used are referring to a certain position in the 1-4-3-3 formation:

1. Goalkeeper
2. Right Fullback
3. Left Fullback
4. Defensive Midfielder
5. Centre Back
6. Centre Back
7. Right Winger
8. Central Midfielder
9. Centre Forward
10. Central Midfielder
11. Left Winger

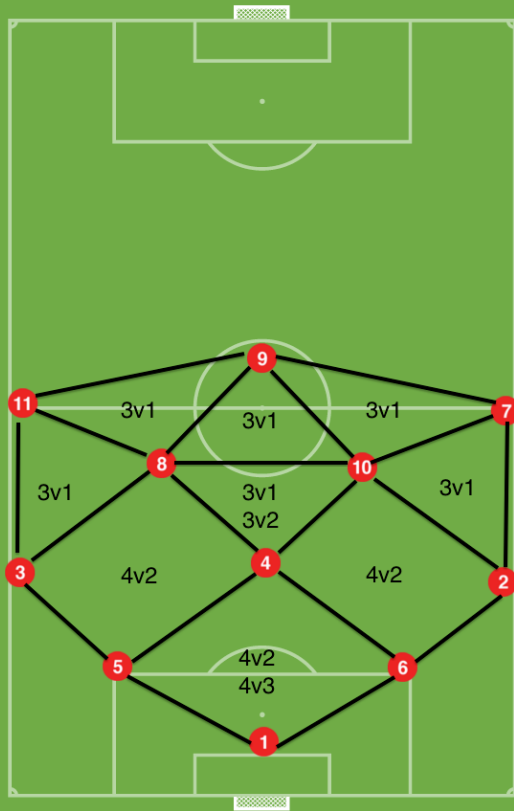
Passing Lines

The picture below shows the passing line available in the 1-4-3-3 formation in game form. Yellow lines are diagonal passes, blue are horizontal and red are vertical.



Slide from Barcelona Philosophy & Vision presentation by Luiz Lainz

Rondo Shape in Match Formation



This picture shows the potential rondos that could appear when playing out from the back in a 1-4-3-3 formation.

You can see that we have potential overloads in every area of the field and that if another opposition player enters that are we have a teammate close enough to drop in to create another overload in our favour

For example in the centre our midfield we have two 3v1's but if our No 9 drops it becomes a 4v2

The Importance of Overloads

Many people believe that players only have to be good technically and have some kind of support in order to retain possession or to play a possession style of play. The most commonly misunderstood aspect of the possession style of play is the need to create overloads all over the pitch.

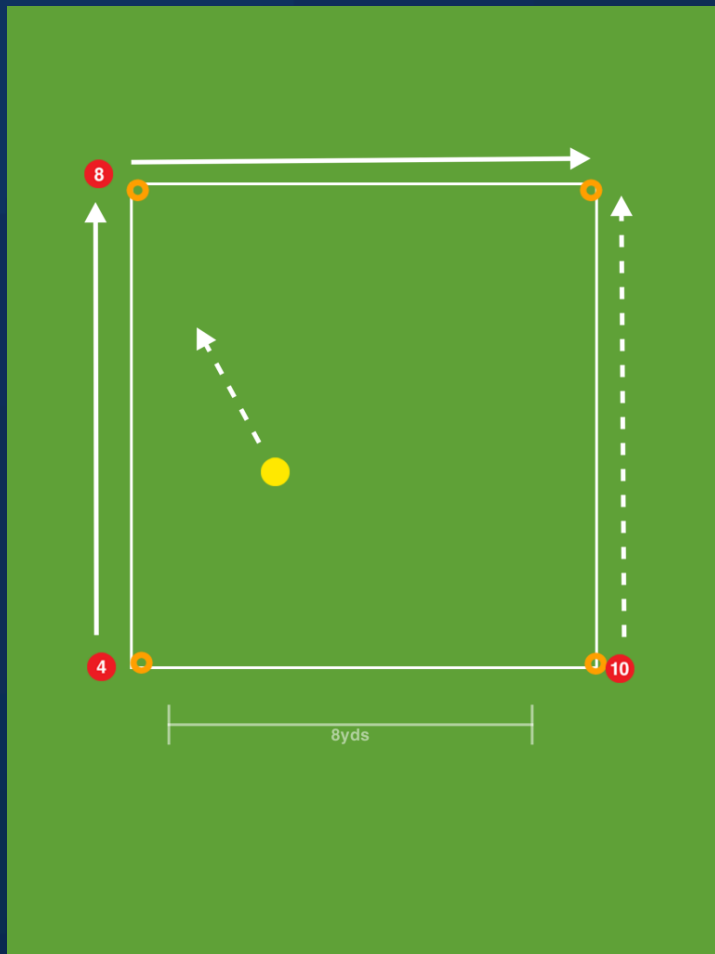
An overload is when you have more players than the opposition in the particular area of the field you are playing in. This is one of the main reasons playing with only one striker has become popular, because teams want to overload the midfield.

Coaches and managers can set up their teams to have an overload in a particular area, like midfield, but you need to coach your players to have the tactical intelligence to know when to move “out of position” to create an overload.

We seen in the last slide how rondos can appear in match form and how we can create overloads in each area. These are not exhaustive solutions and players need to be able to understand when/how to create an overload anywhere

Positional/Tactical Rondos

3v1 Inside Square

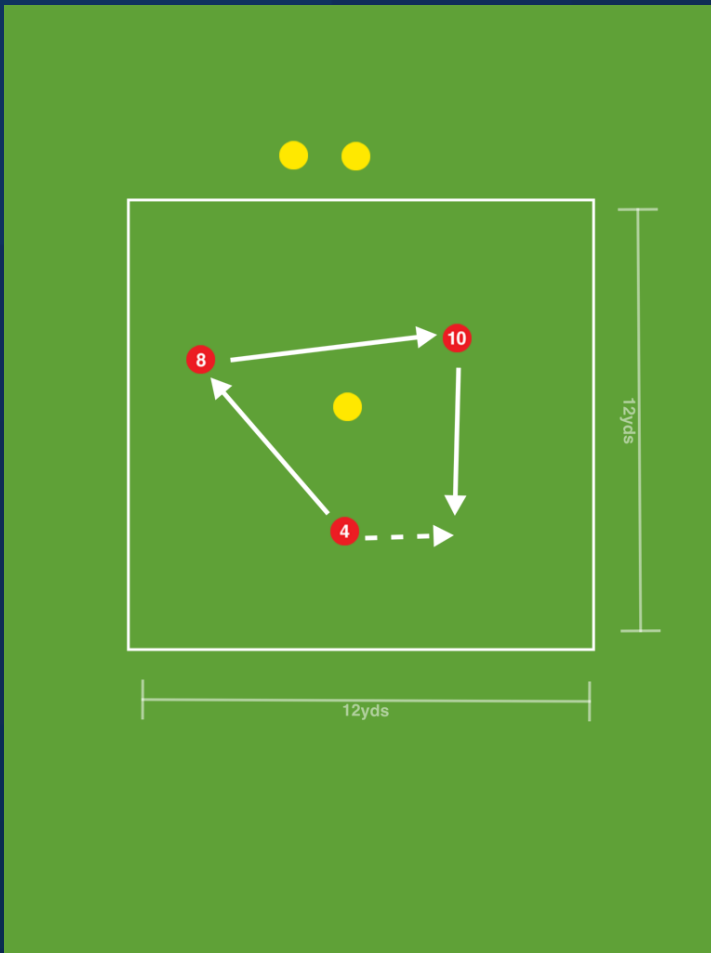


This 3v1 rondo can be done with any 3 combining players but the midfield 3 are shown.

The objective is to keep the triangle shape through out by passing and reacting to passes.

Here the number 4 starts with the ball and passes to the number 8. as the ball is travelling the number 10 runs to the free cone to maintain the triangle overload shape.

3v1 Rondo Inside Square



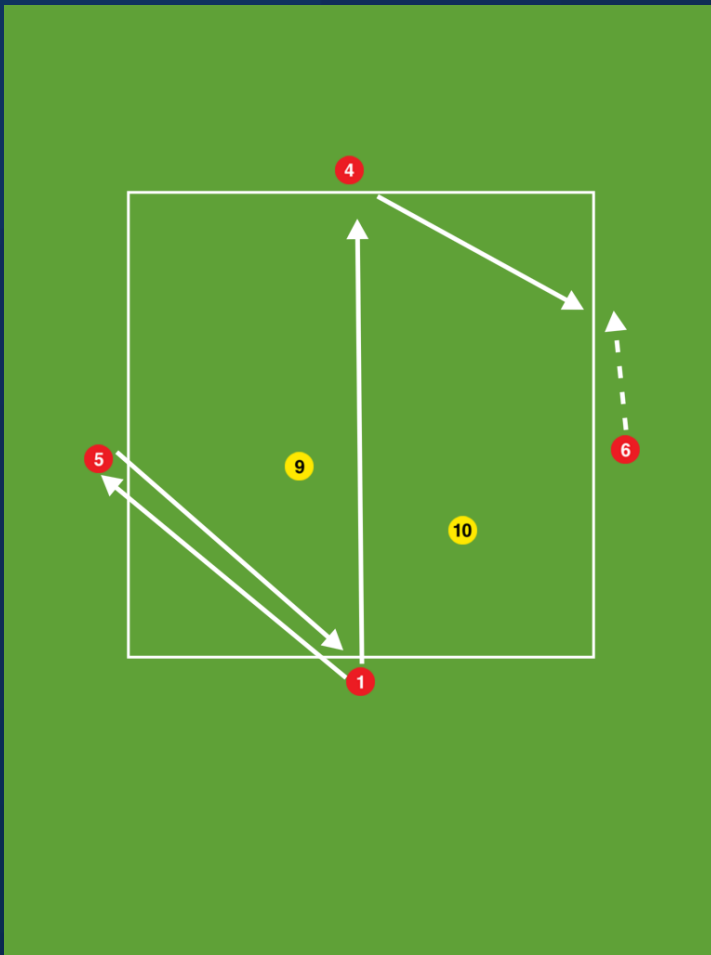
This 3v1 is done inside the square and is usually harder for the players because they don't have the cones to guide them how to keep the triangle shape.

The aim is to keep the triangle overload shape at all time despite being free to move around the area.

4 starts with the ball and passes to 8, as 8 passes to 10 our number 4 needs to move $\frac{2}{3}$ yards to maintain the shape & open the passing line

The middle player works for 30secs before changing with teammate

4v2 Playing out from the back

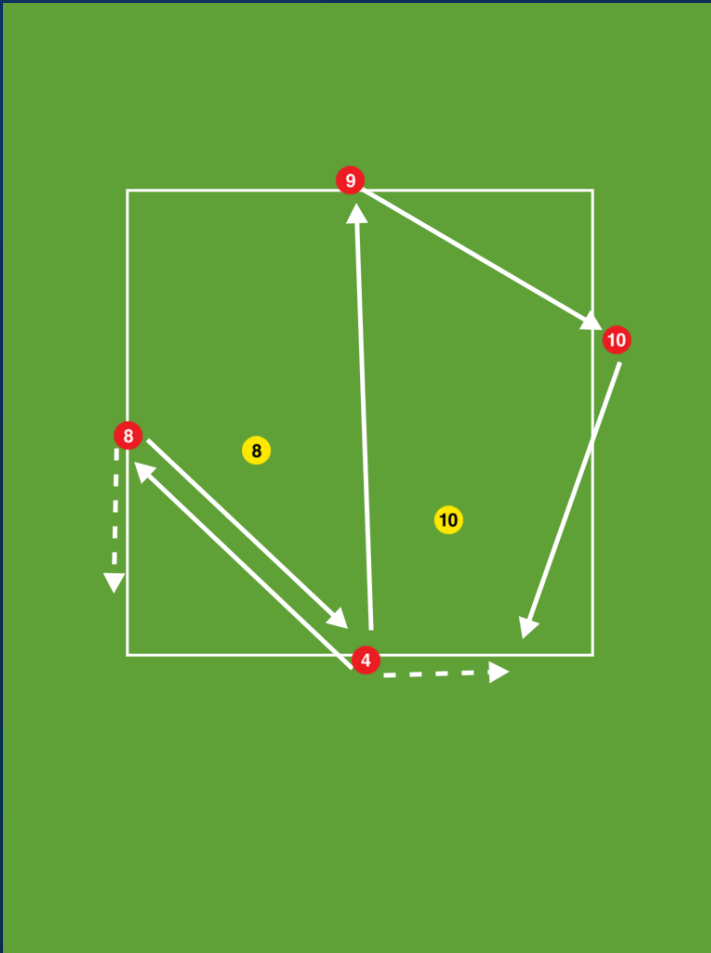


The players used in this 4v2 can work on playing out from the back and understanding how to work with each other. Players used GK, 2CB & DM

You can set the defenders up to press as they would in a game and try to prevent the forward pass to the No 4.

1 passes to 5 but 5 is closed down so plays back to 1, who then plays the 3rd line/Split pass to the No 4 who recycles possession to the No 6 who moved accordingly.

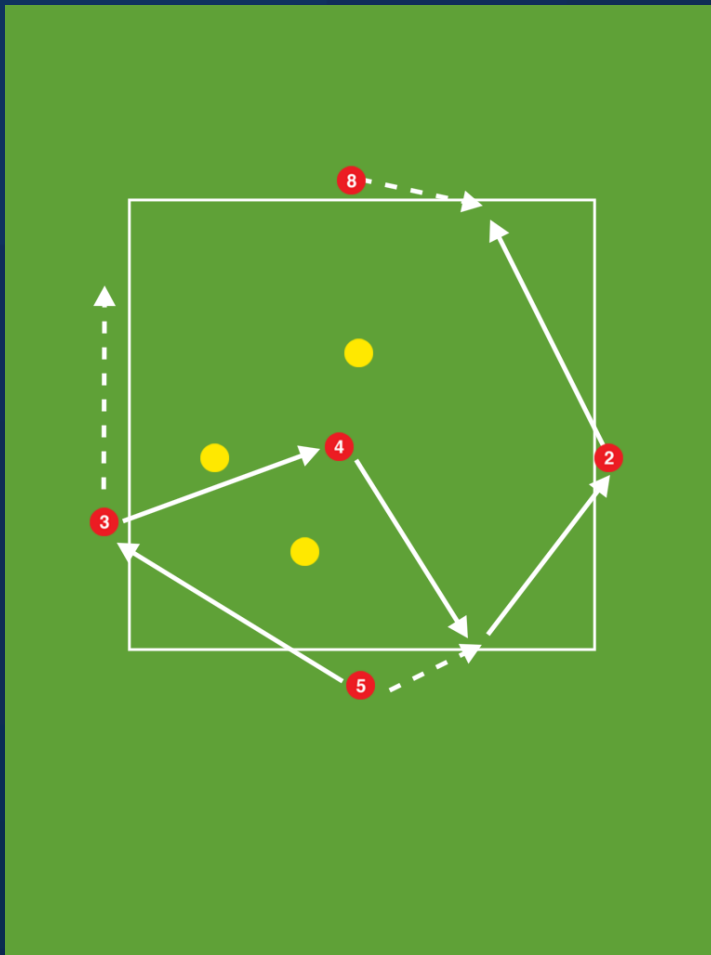
4v2 Midfield Combinations



If you think back to the Rondos in match form slide, this rondo could be our midfield 3 with our CF in the centre of the pitch

4 starts with the ball and plays a 2nd line pass to 8, who plays it back and opens up the space between the defenders allowing 4 to play a 3rd line pass to 9. our No 9 plays to 10 and the rest of the players move accordingly.

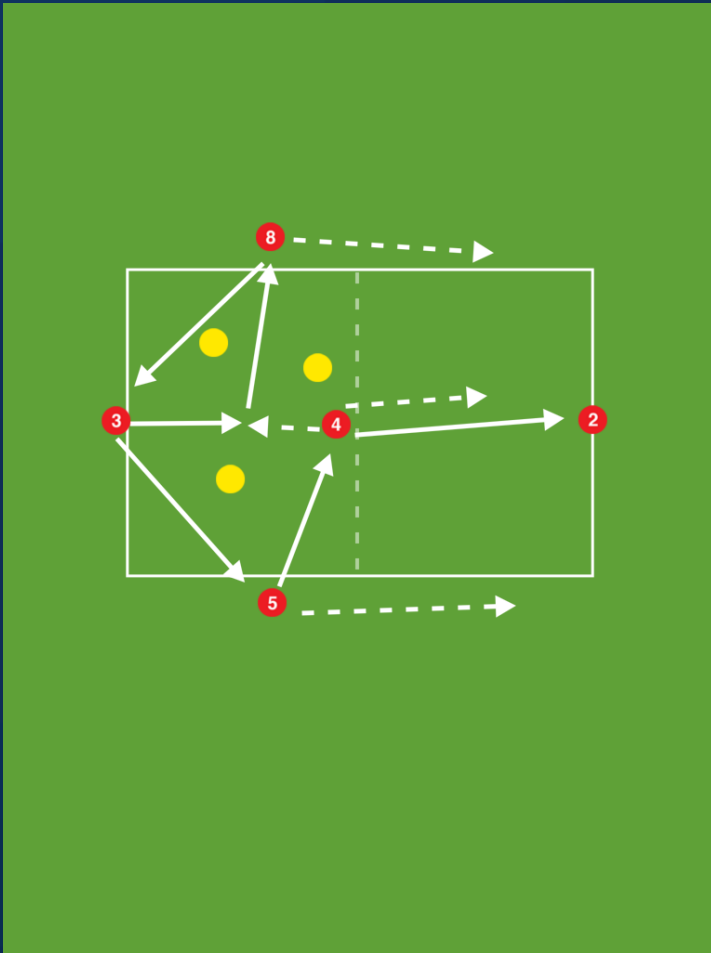
5v3 Playing out from the back



Another example of how to use rondos to help players understand how to play out from the back and switch play to the other side. This time there are 3 defenders and we have a player in the area too. Players used are CB, 2 FB's, DM & CM.

5 starts with the ball and plays a 2nd line pass to 3 who plays a 3rd line pass to 4 who plays first time to 5 who has moved in reaction to the pass. 5 plays to 2 and we play to the furthest play and recycle possession.

5v3 Switching Play

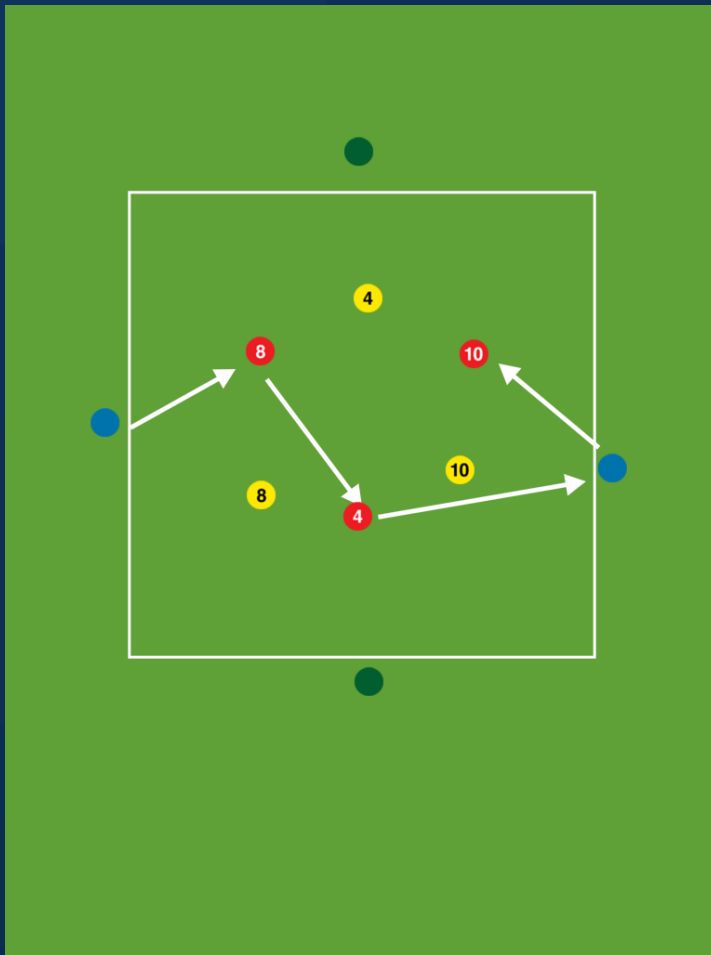


Example of how to use a rondo to work on switch of play. This example is showing defenders but we could set this up with wingers & CF on the outside.

Area is split into two halves with the aim being to make 5+ passes in one side before switching the ball

3 starts with the ball and passes to 4 who drops between the defenders to play a first time pass to 8 who plays back to 3. 3 passes to 5 who plays first time pass to 4 who switches play to other side.

Midfield 3 Switch/Forward Play

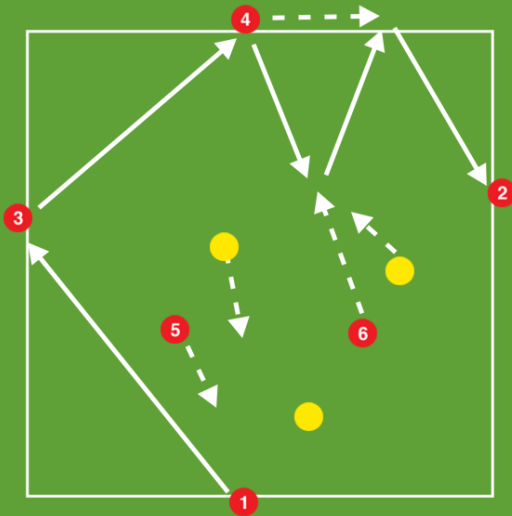


This rondo works with our midfielders on two different aspects. We have our midfield 3 in the middle with 2 sets of neutrals/jokers.

Coach asks red team to play for the switch of play to the blue jokers & the other team to try and play forward to the green Jokers.

We have 5v3 in possession & players inside can rotate/move freely but are encouraged to maintain shape/balance. When ball is lost team must stop the other team from playing forward.

6v3 Playing out from the back

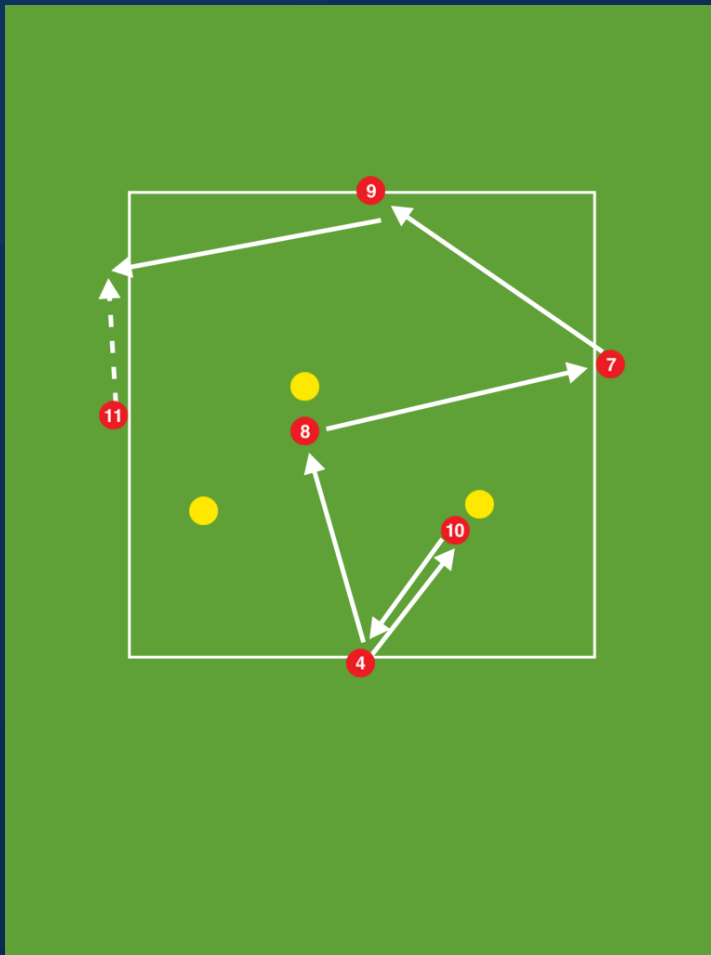


Playing out from the back under high pressure and using 3 defenders which could represent a front 3 if you play against teams using a 1-4-3-3 formation.

We are using our GK, back 4 and our DM.

1 starts with the ball and the movement of 5 creates space to play to 3 and then we can play out and retain possession

6v3 Playing through midfield

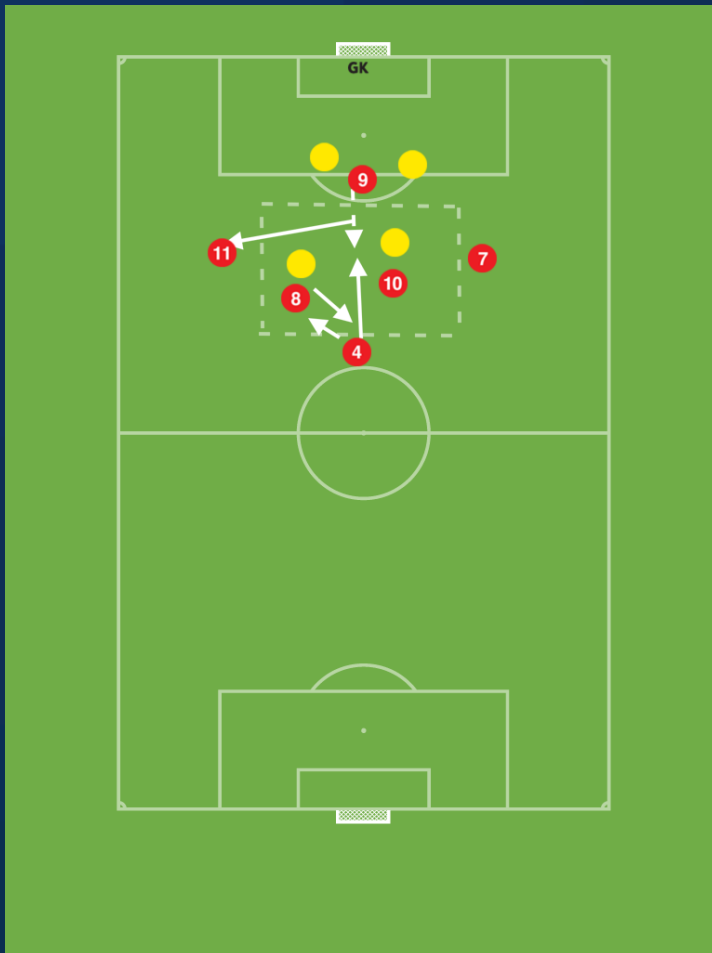


A more attacking set up which can easily be moved on to become a combination/finishing practice on the field.

We have our midfield 3, wingers & centre forward.

The aim is to combine with teammates to play through the midfield and play to the centre forward. The example shown could also be a switch of play to attack

6v3 to finish

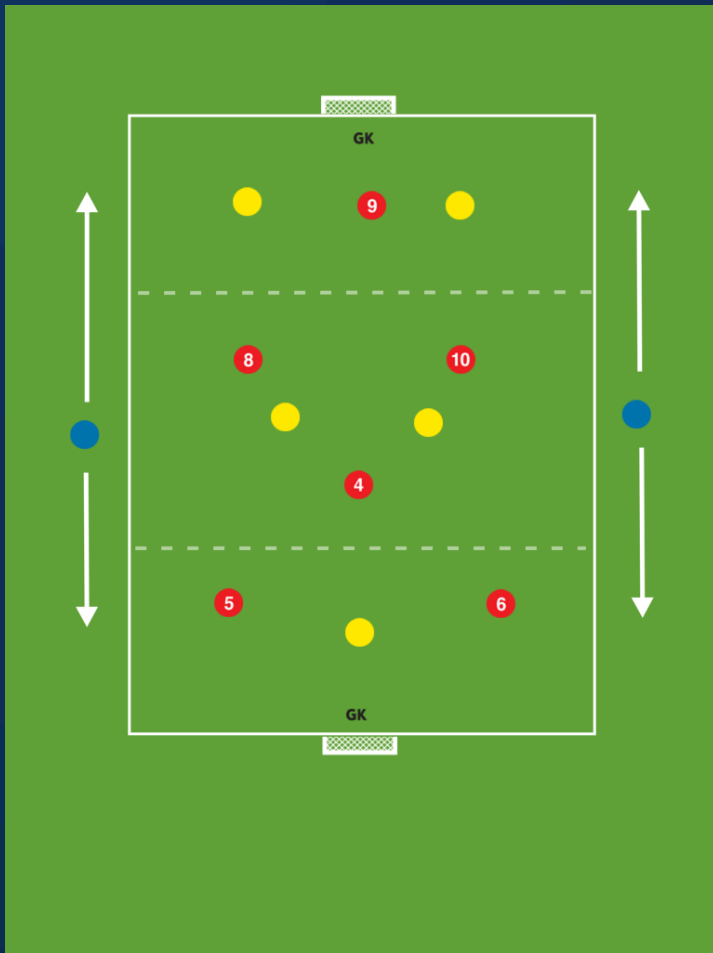


This is how we can take the previous rondo, put it into on field context and add a finishing element to bed in the players' knowledge.

The set up is the same except we have to opposition defenders who are only involved once the play has come out of the rondo.

We start with our 4 and aim to make 3-5 passes inside before we play wide & the exercise becomes a 3v2 to finish with our 9, 7 & 11 attacking the goal.

3 Zone Game



This rondo could also be a SSG but the aim of this is for the players to start to recognise the rondo/overload shapes in a more match orientated format.

If we think back to the rondos on the pitch slide we can begin to create these shapes in this kind of setting before moving onto the full size field.

The aim is to keep possession and play through the zone to get a shot on goal when the time is right. The outside players are wingers/fullbacks and can help in any zone without going outside.

How To Integrate Rondos

We have seen what rondos are, how they appear in matches, warm ups, tactical & positional examples and the technical advantages of using them. But how do we integrate them into our training?

We can introduce rondos as early as 8 years old and keep the set ups we use to the basic forms of 3v1 & 4v2 without restricting touches and playing inside the grids, with the players free to move around before we move on to more advanced rondos.

We can use rondos every day, especially the more basic forms, and by doing this you will see the technique of the players improving. The more tactical rondos will depend on the aspect of play you're currently working on with your team.

Rondos don't need to be the main part of your session and can be used after the warm up to begin to bed in certain aspects, under pressure in a condensed setting, before moving onto a bigger field or an attack v defence practice.

How To Integrate Rondos

Defensive aspects can also be worked on using rondos and usually in the same set ups as seen in the attacking aspects. The difference is the level of detail you give to the defending players. Most coaches who use rondos for an attacking topic want realistic defending anyway, so the attacking players are seeing realistic pictures. Many coaches who use rondos, do so when they first start working on pressing from the front, as putting 3 forwards in the middle, as defenders, allows a coach to work on their shape first before adding the midfield and defence in a bigger practice.

A number of people have asked how using rondos and seeing them in a match affects team shape. The answer is it doesn't affect it more than anything else. Players should be reacting to the position of the ball and keep the team shape while circulating the ball. If the ball is moving the team is moving.

“Technique is not being able juggle the ball 1000 times. Anyone can do that by practicing. Technique is passing the ball with one touch, with the right speed, at the right foot of your teammate” - Cryuff

Examples of Rondos in Matches

5v2 Playing out from the back

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Winger & CM's drop into this area to create an overload

RB

CB

CM

RW

CM

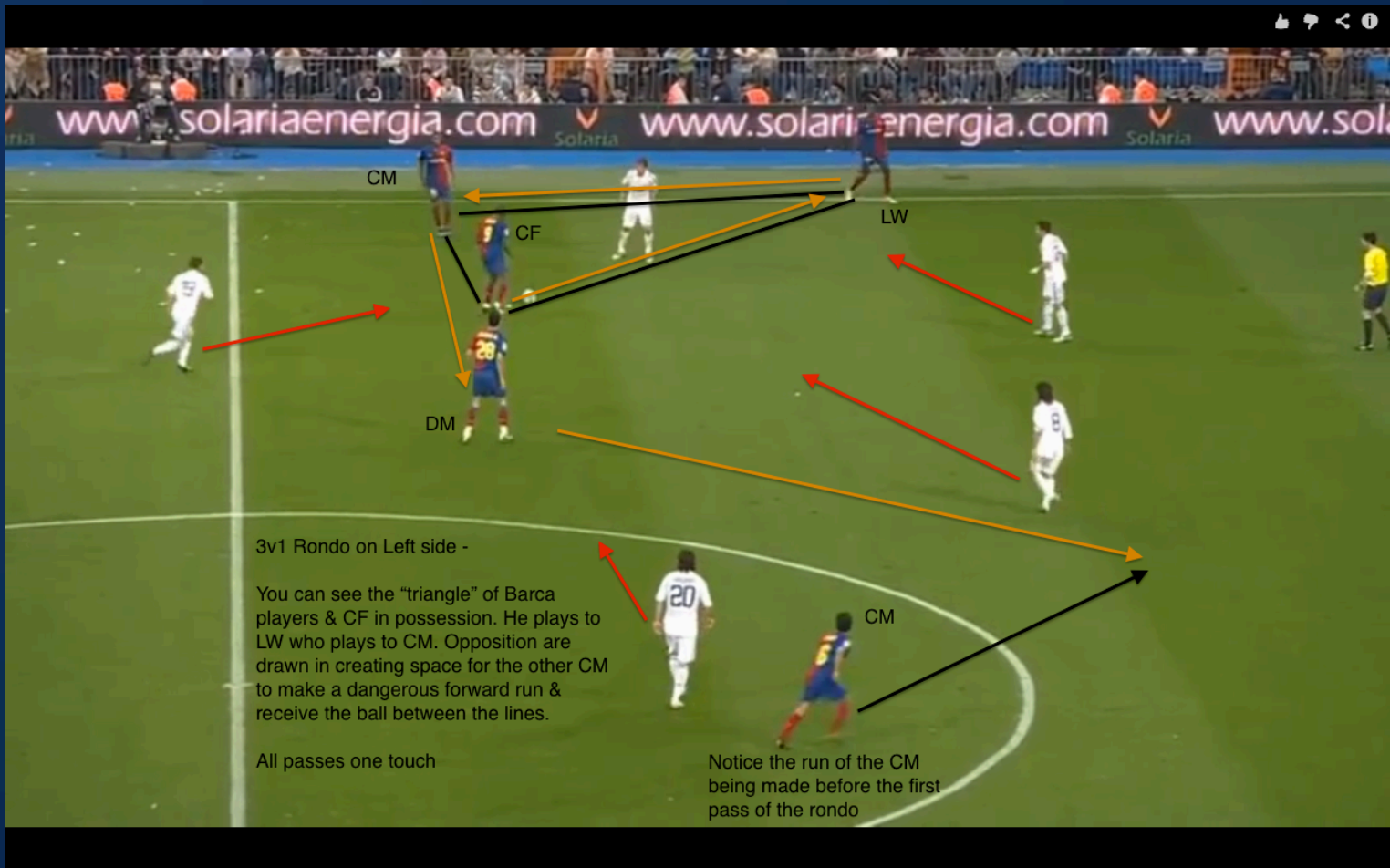
Rondo's appearing in the match -

5v2 for Villarreal and they use a rondo to play out from the back.

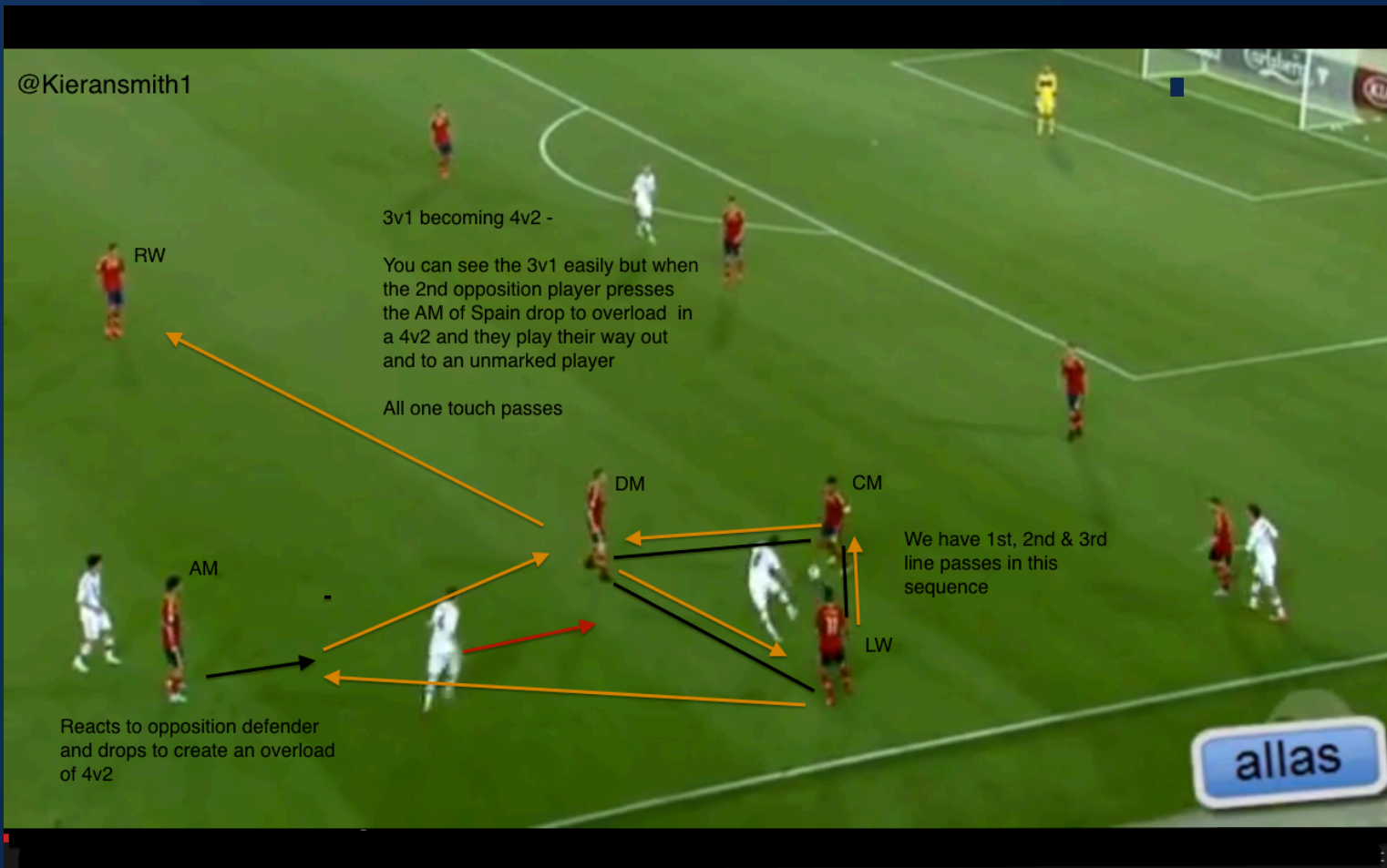
Orange arrows are passes

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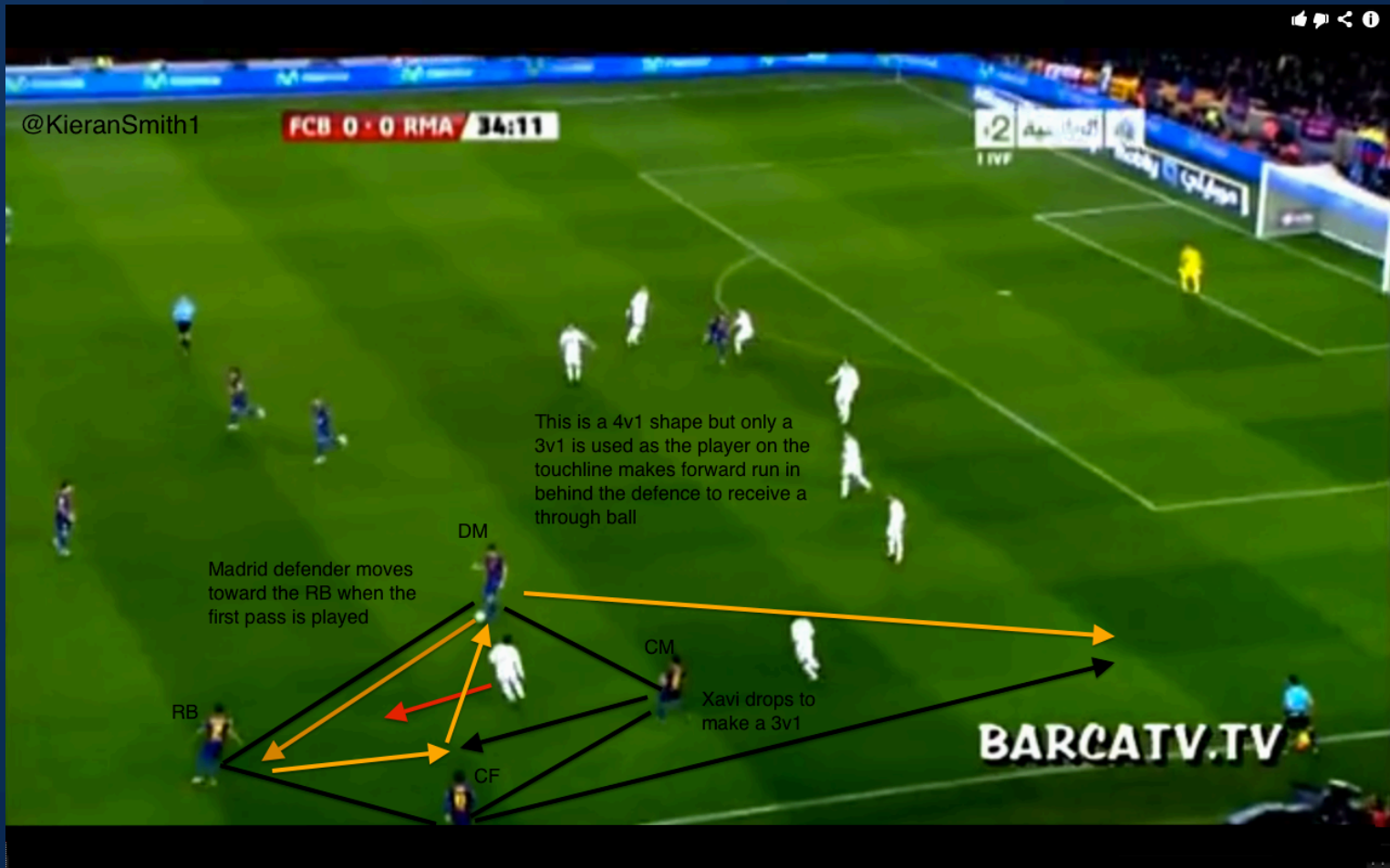
3v1 – Switching Play



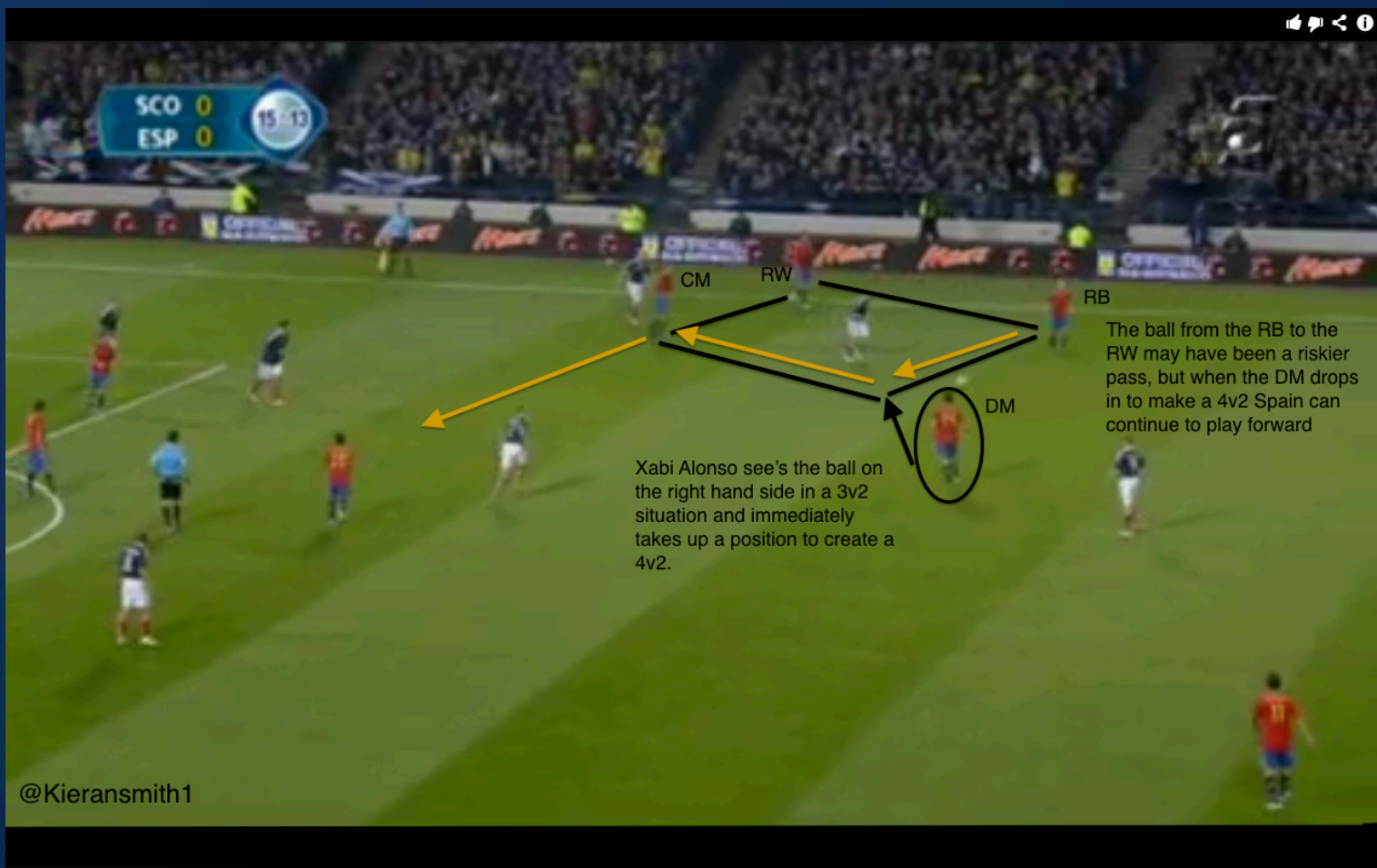
3v1 to 4v2 Playing Out



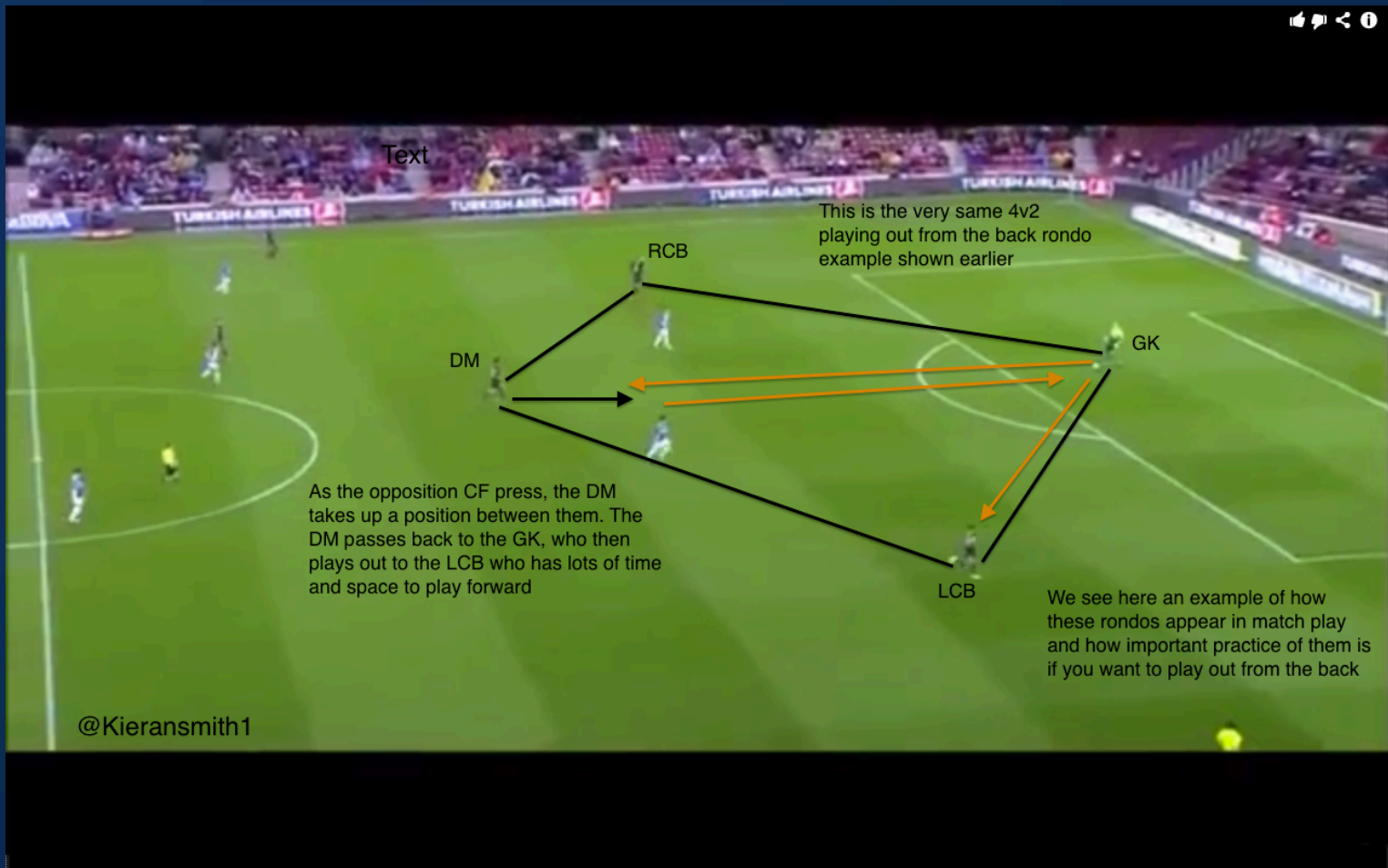
3v1 Through Ball



DM Moves to Create Overload



4v2 Playing Out



CF Drops to Create Overload

