

Playing Through The Thirds Rondo: Part 1

Written by The Coaching Manual

Playing Through The Thirds

It is imperative that any session or practice that a coach delivers can be related to the game, and players can recognise where the key coaching points and detail occur.

The emphasis in this practice is focused on playing through the thirds, with players coached on where, how and why they can influence the play to build and maintain possession through the thirds.

9v5 Playing Through The Thirds Rondo

Set Up

Area 24x15 divided in thirds (8x15) to provide the Blue team with reference points for when, where and how they can take up positions to maintain possession and advance forwards through the thirds.

3 x Central Midfielders (Blue 6, 8 and 10) occupy the middle third, however the Pivot (Blue 6) can move to drop in the defensive third, and Blue 8 and 10 may advance into the final third.

The Blue players on the outside of the Rondo can move along their line but must stay in their designated third (Blue 4 and 5 defensive third; Blue 7 and 11 final third). Goalkeeper (Yellow 1) and Centre Forward (Blue 9) can play along the length of their 15 yard designated line.

The Red players are set up with 1 x player in the defensive third (Red 9), 2 x players in the middle third (Red 6 and 8) and 2 x players in the final third (Red 4 and 5). Red players are not permitted to move out of their designated third to begin with.

Task

Blue Team (Attackers): Maintain positions and possession of the ball with the emphasis on playing forwards through the thirds and penetrate effectively to the Centre Forward Blue 9.

Red Team (Defenders): If the ball is won, maintain possession 5v3 and attempt to dribble or pass the ball to Yellow 1 to simulate a counter attack.

Key Coaching Points

Movement and timing to create numerical and positional superiority in each third of the pitch

Angles, distances and areas of structure to penetrate effectively and patiently through the thirds

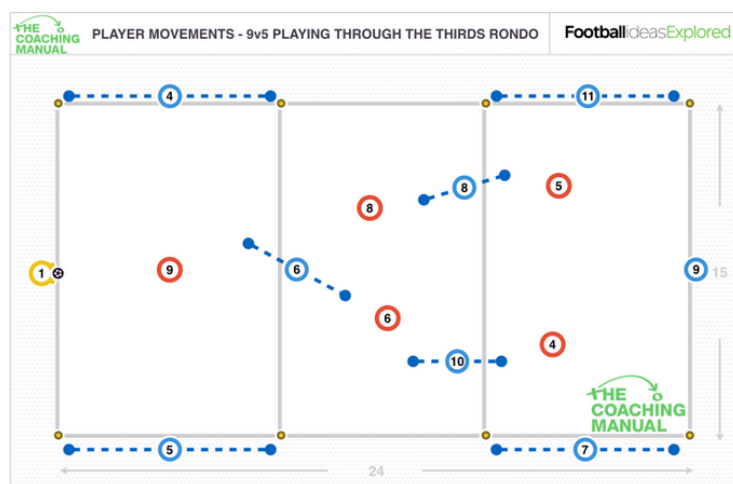
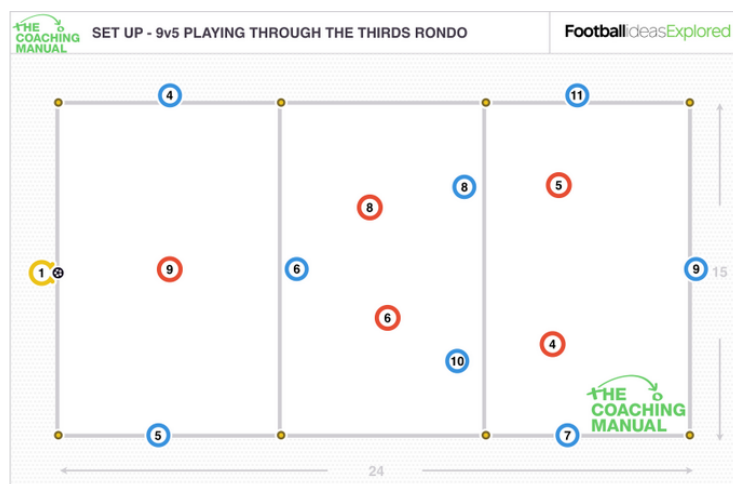
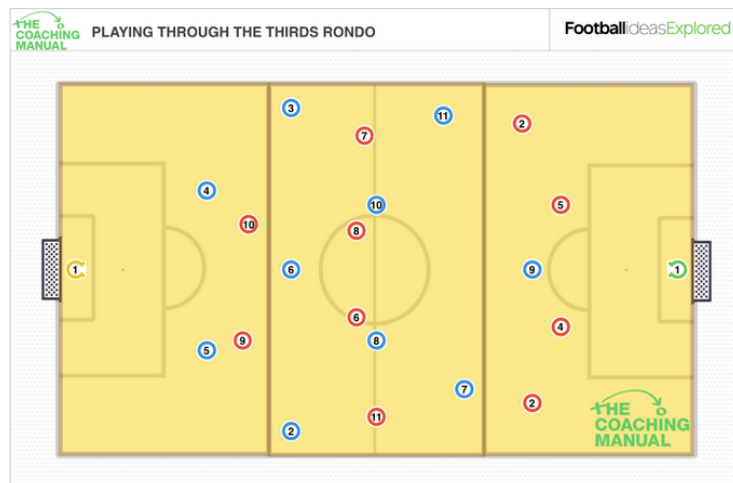
Support play of Central Midfielders to provide opportunities to switch play, create overloads and stretch opposition

Detail

Decision making of player in possession - penetrate, play around or retain possession

Incorporate principles of playing out from the back, midfield 3 connections and attacking overloads to successfully play through the thirds

Body angle to receive the pass and play forwards



Receiving areas of foot or body

Understanding slow and quick play through the thirds to exploit space

Timing of passes - "La Pausa"

Use the 3 passing lines (in front of Defenders, around the Defenders and through the Defenders) to create opportunities to penetrate the opposition and advance through the thirds

Passing options around, behind and ahead of the ball

Communication

Focus - Playing Through the Defensive Third

With the Goalkeeper (Yellow 1) in possession, the Centre Backs (Blue 4 and 5) offer an option to receive and play forwards, whilst the Pivot (Blue 6) also moves into the defensive third to provide a penetrating option and create a 4v1 overload.

As the ball begins to progress towards the middle third, Blue 8 and 10 should start to think about their movements and positioning to create space and forward passing options.

Focus - Playing Through the Middle Third

With the Pivot (Blue 6) in possession in the middle third, the remaining Centre Midfielders (Blue 8 and 10) take up positions on different horizontal lines whilst offering forward passing options.

The Pivot combines with Blue 10 in order to off-balance the Defenders (Red 6 and 8), as this "Up-Back-Through" ball movement allows for a penetrating pass between Red 6 and Red 8 to the advancing run of the Central Midfielder (Blue 8), who becomes the spare man.

Alternatively, Blue 10 can perform a forwards inside movement that opens a passing line directly to the Wide Forward (Blue 7) in the final third. If Red 6 attempts to move and screen the pass to the Wide Forward, then the Pivot can play a penetrating pass onto the run of Blue 10 or may even play around the Defenders through Blue 8.

Focus - Playing in the Final Third

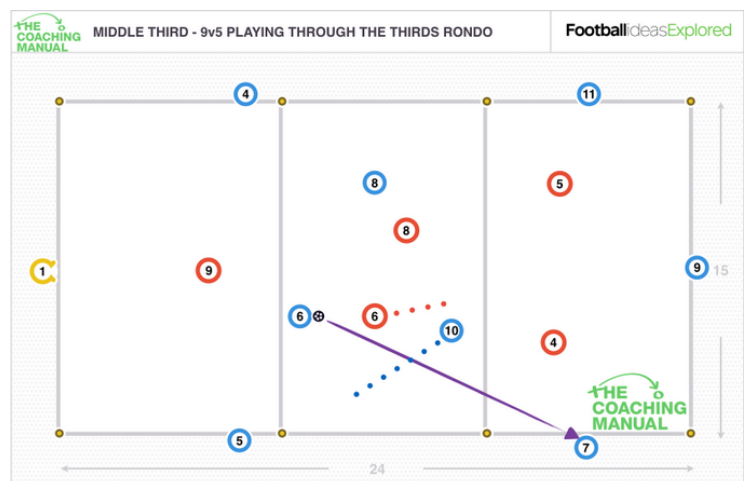
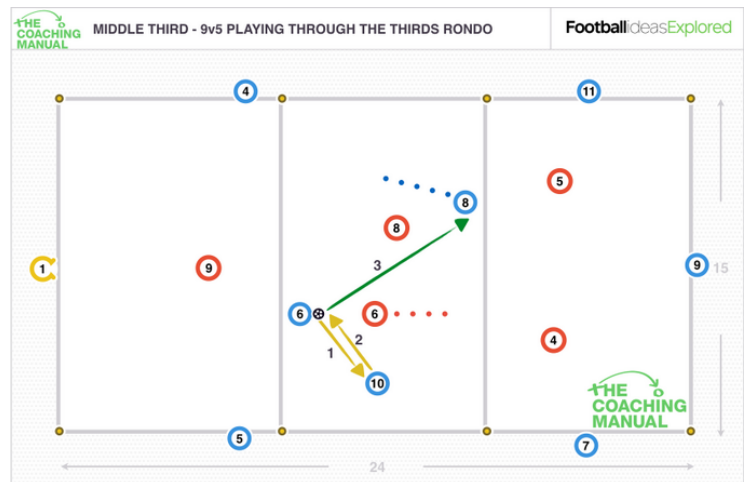
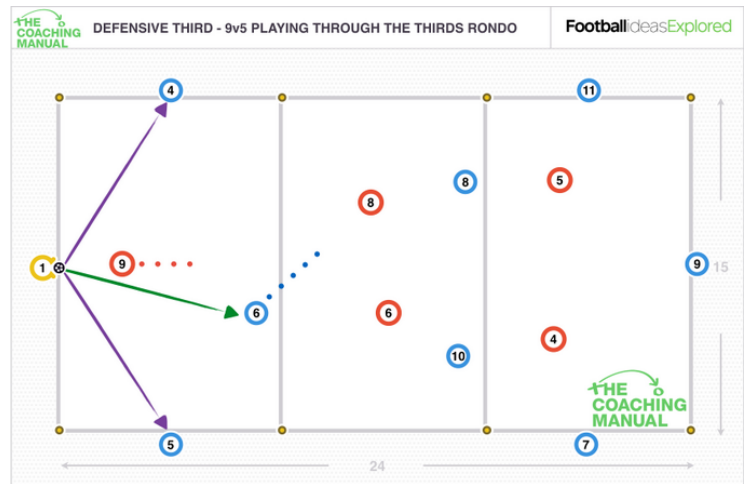
Once the Blue team enter the final third with possession secured, the Attacking Midfielders (Blue 8 and 10) should recognise opportunities to support the play as the Pivot (Blue 6) holds and maintains shape. It may not always be appropriate for both Central Midfielders to advance forwards.

In the above scenario, the Wide Forward (Blue 7) has possession, as the passing option to the Centre Forward (Blue 9) is screened off by Red 4 and 5. Blue 10 moves into a position to support behind the ball and then switch play, either through the advancing Blue 8 or directly to the opposite Wide Forward (Blue 11) to find the Centre Forward (Blue 9).

Progression - Recognise Opportunities to Play in 1 or 2 Touch

Once the players are comfortable with the concepts and principles of playing through the thirds, further challenges can be added to progress the activity.

For example, a key concept in playing through the thirds is quick play so that opposition Defenders cannot get shape. The concept of quick play can be facilitated by challenging players to recognise when to play in 1 or 2 touches.



Consider that it is not always appropriate to play in 1 or 2 touches and, at times, it can directly influence a player's decision rather than hone decision-making skills (for example, if a player is aware they only have 1 touch on the ball they may attempt a pass that is not available and give away possession, which is a poor decision that has been negatively influenced by the condition).

Additionally, the detail surrounding coaching players "La Pausa" and the timing of passes sometimes means securing possession with a number of touches to draw in Defenders before a team mate arrives in the space to receive.

Therefore, the challenge given to players may be;

“Recognise opportunities when it is on to play in 2 touches in the defensive and final thirds, and 1 touch in the middle third.”

This allows players to practice and understand when to play quickly, in 1 or 2 touches, and when to keep possession or even dribble if that is the best decision in that situation.

Next Up...

This practice focused on developing players' movement, positioning and timing of passes/moves to create numerical and positional superiority in each third of the pitch, allowing the team to play through the thirds with secured possession.

Next up we will progress the 9v5 Playing Through The Thirds Rondo into a Game Rondo, adding goals and further players.

