



Italian Serie 'A' Academy Training



An inside look at two Italian Professional Academies

Italian Serie 'A' Academy Training

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THANKS

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The author also wishes to thank Genoa FC and in particular, head coach Gian Piero Gasperini, assistant coach Bruno Caneo, fitness coaches Luca Trucchi and Alessandro Pilati, goalkeeping coach Gianluca Spinelli, Primavera coach Ivan Jurić and staff coaches Tullio Gritti and Maurizio Venturi for their cooperation and assistance in preparing this journal. Special thanks to coach Dan Abshier for editorial support.

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All photos by Dave Brown unless otherwise noted.

AC Siena Calcio

Background: Founded in 1904, AC Siena currently compete in Italy's top league, Serie A, having gained promotion at the end of the 2010-2011 season. As one of the league's smaller teams, the *Bianconeri* ("Black and Whites") have often found themselves bouncing between Serie A and B. Well-known past players have included former Middleborough forward Massimo Maccarone and Chelsea striker Tore André Flo. The current star of the team is Napoli and Italian U-23 player Emanuele Calaiò who scored 18 goals in last season's promotion campaign.

The club plays its home games in the famous Tuscan city better known for its culture, wine and the *Palio* horse race around the town's giant *piazza* that pits colorfully named neighborhoods against themselves every summer. Their small (15,725 capacity) but atmospheric stadium is located in the city center and is often compared to English stadiums due to the lack of a running track and the subsequent proximity of the fans. Training takes place at a multi-field training complex shared with the local Serie D team in the nearby town of Colle di Val d'Elsa.

Head coach **Giuseppe Sannino**, age 54, is himself a newcomer to Italy's top flight having coached a number of modest clubs, gaining particular notoriety by taking Serie C club Varese to the brink of promotion to Serie A. He took over this past June from former national team star Antonio Conte who left for Juventus. Sannino is often cited for his determined and gritty ("*grinta*") coaching style and his team reflects this. A sturdy 4-4-2 with a well drilled back line, two holding midfielders, all-purpose outside midfield players and a center forward not shy about tracking back into midfield to form a 4-5-1 in away games. This is a team built, not for artistry but for survival, in Serie A.



These training sessions were held mid-week in late September with temperatures still in the mid-80's.

WEDNESDAY 9:45 AM TRAINING SESSION

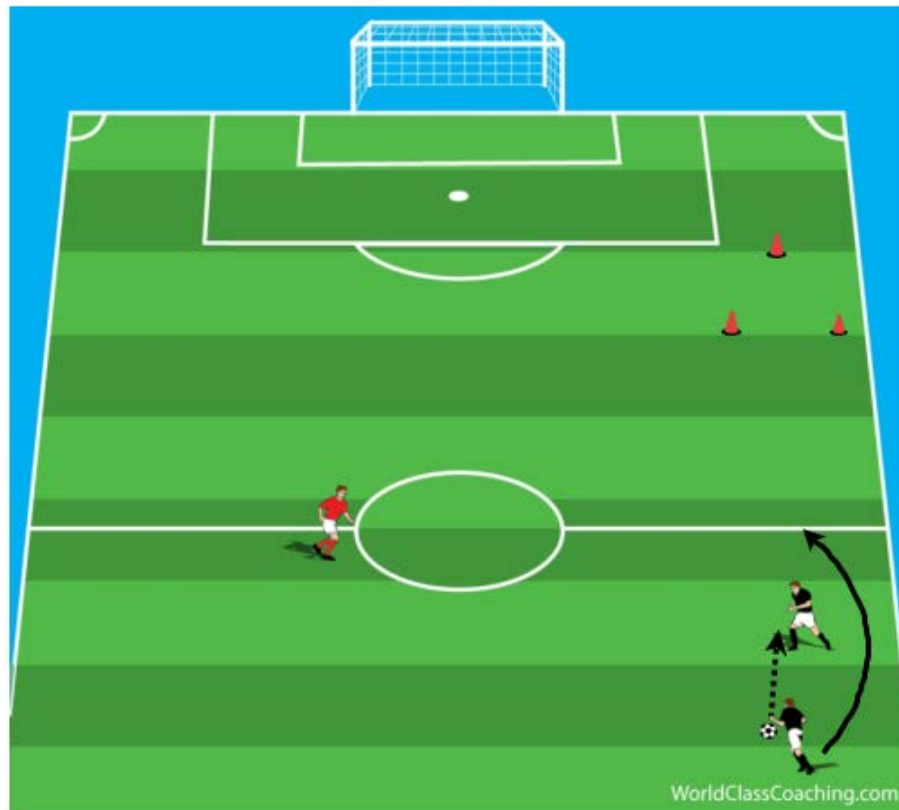
Warm Up and Speed & Agility Training: Using hurdles and cones the team performed a number of agility and plyometric drills with an emphasis on vertical and longer jumps and one- and two-footed take-offs. A significant amount of time was spent on changes of speed - a quick shuttle followed by a momentary complete stop, followed by a 4 foot burst of flat-out sprint - for example.

11 AM Field Session (20 field players plus 4 goalkeepers)

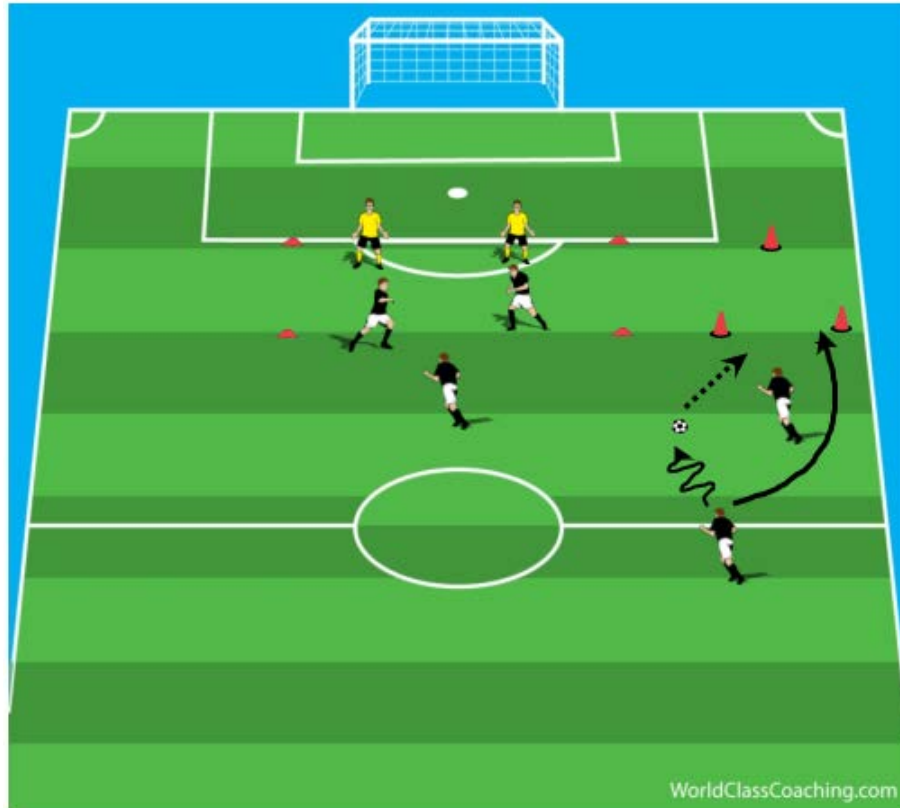
Overlapping & Crossing: Outside backs and outside midfield players work in pairs to attack goal and cross to two center forwards and one trailing attacking midfield player. The field drill is set up as In below. The following nomenclature is used for player positions: Goalkeeper (GK), Right Back (RB), Centerback (CB), Left Back (LB), Center Midfield (CMF), Right Midfield (RMF), Left Midfield (LMF) and Center Forward (CF)



One of the coaches positioned at the center circle starts play with flighted crossfield pass to outside back who controls and passes to the outside midfielder he is working in tandem with.



At pace the pair continue a series of overlaps downfield until about 10 yards before the penalty area. When the pair approaches the 6 yd. triangle of cones at the edge of the penalty area, the player in possession plays a final pass.

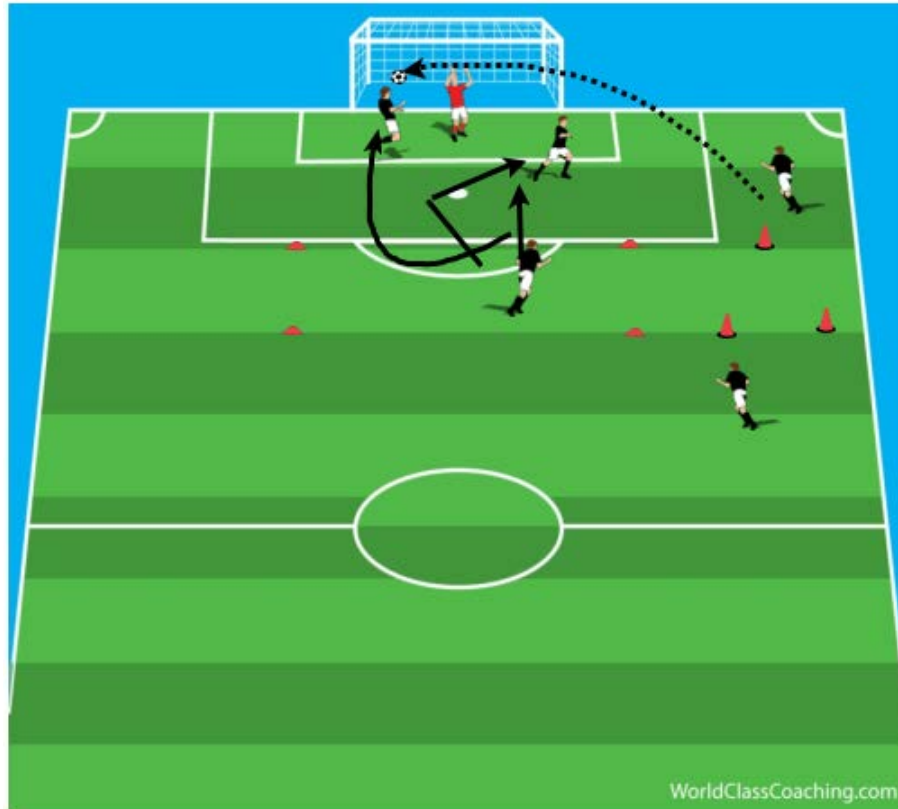


The receiving player runs on to the ball played *into* the triangle, either while facing or just to the outside of the “opponent” (cone) for him to dribble past to the outside or the inside before crossing to the waiting players.



The second option is the ball passed **through** the triangle of cones for the receiving player to run on to and cross with his first or second touch.





Meanwhile, at the top of the penalty area, two center forwards and a center midfield must work together to interchange positions, and make runs to the near and far post to attack crosses with the midfield player trailing on the edge of the box. They are defended by pairs of centerbacks that alternate every 4 rotations. (Defenders not shown in this diagram for sake of clarity.)

Once the series is done, the other coach plays a pass to a waiting pair of flank players on opposite side of the field and the play is repeated.

Coaching Points:

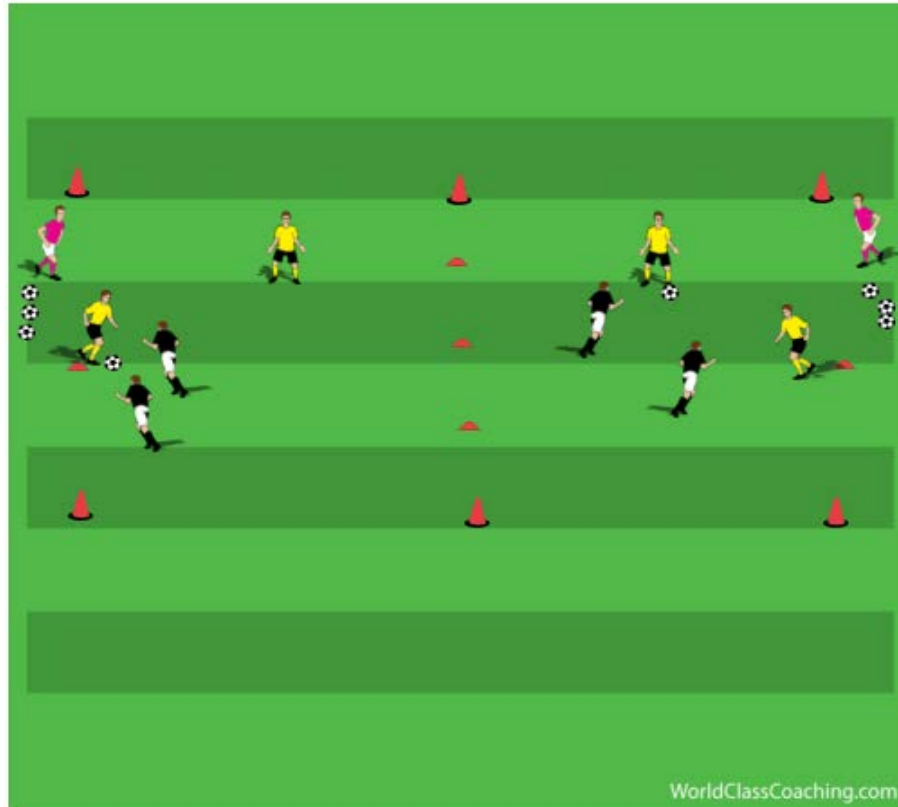
- All passes are one- and two-touch and the drill is done at match speed. These are long and strenuous sprints.
- Wide players receiving the ball should attack to the middle of the field from a wide position with pace and purpose to create space for overlapping player to run into.
- Players attacking crosses are coached to be clever and decisive in getting into position to attack the ball, including making final movement to the ball at the moment the defenders cannot see the both ball and opponent.

Break for Water

Team now breaks into one group of First Team players and into a combination of Reserve and *Primavera* players to perform the following exercises in separate groups.



Back Four Defending: Training began with coaching the shape and movement of the back four versus an opposing four players in area 30 wide and 15 yards deep. Coach worked to adjust the positions of challenging and supporting defenders. Attacking team progressed from passing on the command of the coach (slow circulation) to mandatory two-touch (faster) to normal passing (fastest circulation).



Defending in Pairs: The training area was then split in half to work 2 v 2 with the emphasis on quick defensive support and direction. When balls were played to the outside attacking player the 2 defenders worked to force play outside and to the line as shown on the left side of the work area. When the ball was played to the inside attacker (as illustrated in the right half of the diagram) play was forced out with the second defender positioned to both support the first defender and to cut out through balls.

Players worked in 30 second intervals before resting, no tackling allowed - only good positioning and intercepting passes. An additional coach joined to work with second team with plenty of extra balls to keep play moving. At this point the training was very quick, with one- and two-touch passing. Emphasis was on very quick play, adjustment by the back four players with intercepting and re-gaining possession preferred to tackling.

Shadow Play for Attacking Patterns: The first team players worked in 4-4-2 formation focusing on the following attacking movements:



First emphasis on direct build-up starting with goalkeeper distribution to centerback, who drove a long flighted ball up to center forward who laid ball back to one of the center midfielder players who then played to outside midfielder moving into space. Midfielder had the option to cross early or play the ball into space for overlapping outside back to receive in space and cross (not shown).



Pattern Two: Similar to first pattern, but now resulting in a first-time pass from the CMF over the top of the defense for CF to run on to.

Gentle cool down to end session.

WEDNESDAY PM TRAINING SESSION

3 pm. 20 field players plus 4 goalkeepers working with goalkeeper trainer

Warm Up

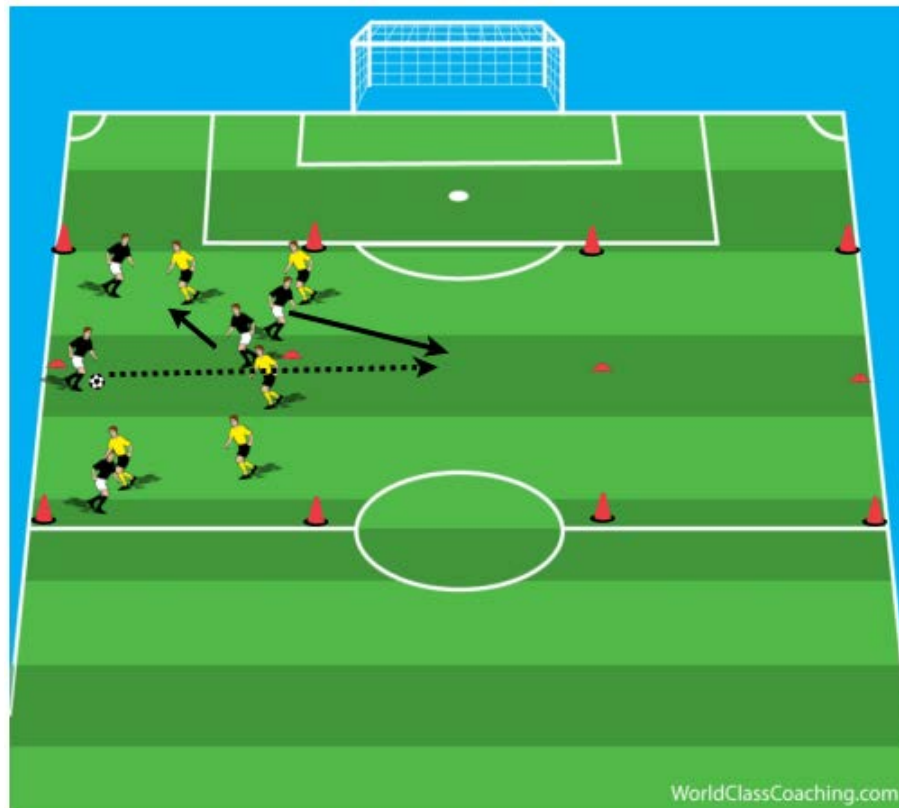
- Casual keep-away in circle, 3 vs remainder of team.
- Easy jogging followed by high kicks, loosening back and hip muscles, Carioca's and backward running.

Technical Work: Players work in 30 x 12 yard rectangle with half the players on the outside of the box acting as servers with the other half inside training technique, rotating every 90 seconds. Technical exercises were:

- Easy one-touch pass back to server on outside and move away to another server to continue.
- Same as above at a faster pace with pass followed by spin away and sprint to another player. Emphasis on sharp and late change of direction if encounter another player in the middle of the area.
- Receive ball in air from hands of server; control ball to ground and quick foot adjustment before passing back on ground.
- Return with instep volley.
- Return with half-volley, side of foot.
- Jumping headers.



Possession Leading to Penetration. 5 v 5 with work area divided into 3 zones as shown. A short warm-up consisted of a simple game of keep away in one of the zones.



Exercise: Starting at one of the outside zones, all players play keep away until one team achieves a minimum of five passes. At that point, the team plays a pass into opposite area for teammate to run on to. Offside is observed as team passes from one zone to another. If team is then able to maintain possession in that area they try and progress to the final area. If able to progress through all 3 zones in succession, opposing team does 10 pushups. If at any time the ball is intercepted by the opposing team, they become the attacking team.

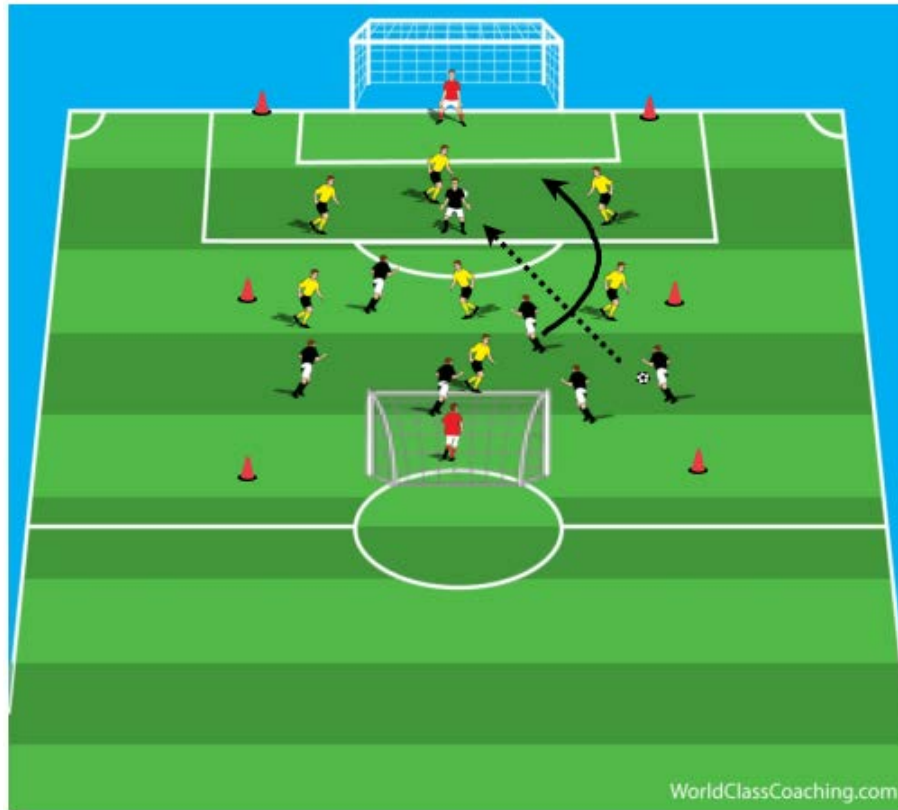
Coaching Points:

- Play must be quick and precise in the small and congested area.
- Once a team progresses into a forward zone, his teammates must join him quickly to offer their support.
- To encourage counterattacks, the defending team is encouraged to play an intercepted or tackles ball as quickly as possible; no minimum number of passes required.

End Zone Game: (Same work area now divided differently.) Using the full work area, one team tries to pass the ball into end zone for a teammate to run onto with an emphasis on wall-passes, 3rd man runs and runs from deep positions into the end zone (Receiving player cannot be in the end zone before the ball is passed.)



Squad remains in two groups but a number of *Primavera* players join the second group to increase the squad size. First group does core/abdominal exercises for 10 minutes while other group plays small-sided game as follows:



Small Sided Game: 7 v 7 plus goalkeepers on field 40 yds long by 36 yds wide. One team plays in 4-2-1 formation while other plays in 3-3-1 formation with players in positions that approximate their usual team positions. Game tempo is kept high with kick-ins instead of throw-ins, distribution from keepers' (spare balls in goal) instead of goal kicks, extra balls with coaches, etc.

Gentle cool down to end session.

THURSDAY PM TRAINING SESSION (following morning off)



Training Field with Pavilion Gym in Background

Conditioned Full Field 11 v 11 Scrimmage: (Warm-up and strength fitness work is done prior in gym adjacent to field.) A full field is used with disc cones used to create a restraining line or end zone 40 yards from goal.



Play normally until the attacking team is able to pass or dribble past their restraining line. At that point, 4 (later 5) attackers (typically 2 center forwards and two outside midfield players) are allowed to attack the goal unopposed by means of a cross, through-ball or combination play. (Opponents are fully active up until the time the attacking team gets past the restraining line.)

Dribbling is only allowed in wide positions; two touch restriction in central areas. Later, five attackers (typically as above plus one center midfield player) can enter the attacking zone.

11 v 11 Game with No Restrictions: The session ended with a 15 minute 11 v 11 scrimmage (*"partitella"*) played in half the field. Throw-ins now as normal but with assistant coaches acting as ballboys to keep play moving. Focus on quick, penetrative play. First team to three was the winner.

Gentle cool down to end session.

Genoa FC

Background on Genoa FC: The city of **Genoa** is located in Liguria along the northwestern Italian coastline bordering France, a region often referred to as the Italian Riviera. Boasting one of Europe's most historic ports, the city is the birthplace of pesto, Christopher Columbus and **Genoa FC**, which was founded in 1893, making it the oldest professional club in Italy. In addition to **Genoa FC** (properly named Genoa Cricket and Football Club due to its English roots), the city also is home to cross-town rivals **UC Sampdoria**, a club that enjoyed its greatest periods in the '80s and '90s when they last won the Italian Scudetto with a lineup of former high-profile players that included Ruud Gullitt, Roberto Mancini, Graeme Souness and Brazilian Toninho Cerezo.

Despite its long history, Genoa FC enjoyed its most successful postwar period from 2005 to 2010. The arrival of former Juventus youth team coach Gian Piero Gasperini saw the club promoted in his first season before enjoying four top-ten finishes as well as the arrival (and subsequent highly profitable departures) of Diego Milito, Marco Boriello and Thiago Motta. At the time of writing, the team's highest profile player was the former Florence, Bayern Munich and *Azzurri* striker Luca Toni. (Note: In November 2010 Gasperini ended his tenure as Serie A's longest-serving coach after disagreements with the team owner. He subsequently went on to a short and high-profile spell with Inter Milan.)

Club Facilities: The Genoa FC Technical Center is located in the seaside suburb of Pegli, a few miles from the center of Genoa. Facilities at the center include a full (105 yd x 64 yd) field and stadium seating 5,000, a running track, a 60 yd x 40 yd seven-a-side ("*calcetto*") artificial grass training field, and a fully equipped gym pavilion. A locker room, team meeting/video review rooms, administrative and coaching offices, a training room, and press room have been built somewhat incongruously inside the historical Villa Rostan, a former 17th Century retreat and hunting lodge for one of Genoa's most powerful families. Genoa FC and Sampdoria play their home matches at Stadio Luigi Ferraris, more commonly referred to as the Marassi.

Postscript: On June 24, 2011, Inter Milan confirmed Gasperini as their head coach. However, after a dismal run of five winless matches, including losses to Trabzonspor in the Champions League and Serie A newcomers Novara, Gasperini was sacked, with the 3-4-3 system so closely associated with him becoming a national talking point. Gasperini revealed in a recent interview that he had conflicts with Inter President Massimo Moratti over transfer policy, including the surprising loss of Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o and the revelation that relatively modestly priced players he had hoped to acquire - including Palacio and Criscito from Genoa -- were turned down. Gasperini also said that Uruguayan forward Diego Forlan was acquired without his approval.



A typical line-up under Gasperini in season 2010-2011.

Genoa's 3-4-3 Tactical System: During his time at Genoa, Gasperini won admirers for his shrewd player acquisitions as well as a bold tactical approach that defied both the traditional Italian defensive mindset but also the more recent trend (4-2-3-1, 4-3-3) to concentrate the middle of midfield with two defensive midfield players creating a formidable block in front of two centerbacks. His use of the attacking 3-4-3 formation saw Genoa FC among the list of Serie A teams conceding the most goals but has also seen them become a power at home, beating traditional powers such as Juventus, Roma and Milan as well as several key local derbies against Sampdoria.



Head Coach Gian Piero Gasperini: As a player, Gasperini entered the Juventus youth system at the age of 9. After a short stay in the Juventus first team, he played for Palermo and several smaller clubs before retiring in 1993 at the age of 35. After several years coaching the Juventus *Primavera* (U20's), he coached Crotona successfully before joining Genoa, then in Serie B. In the 2008–2009 season, Gasperini led Genoa to fifth place in Serie A, the highest placement for the team in 19 years, securing a UEFA Europa League spot while re-launching the careers of players like Diego Milito and Thiago Motta in an entertaining and high-scoring 3-4-3 system. Gasperini's tactical flexibility prompted Jose Mourinho to name him as "the most difficult coach he faced in Italy. Gasperini had a response to every move I made."

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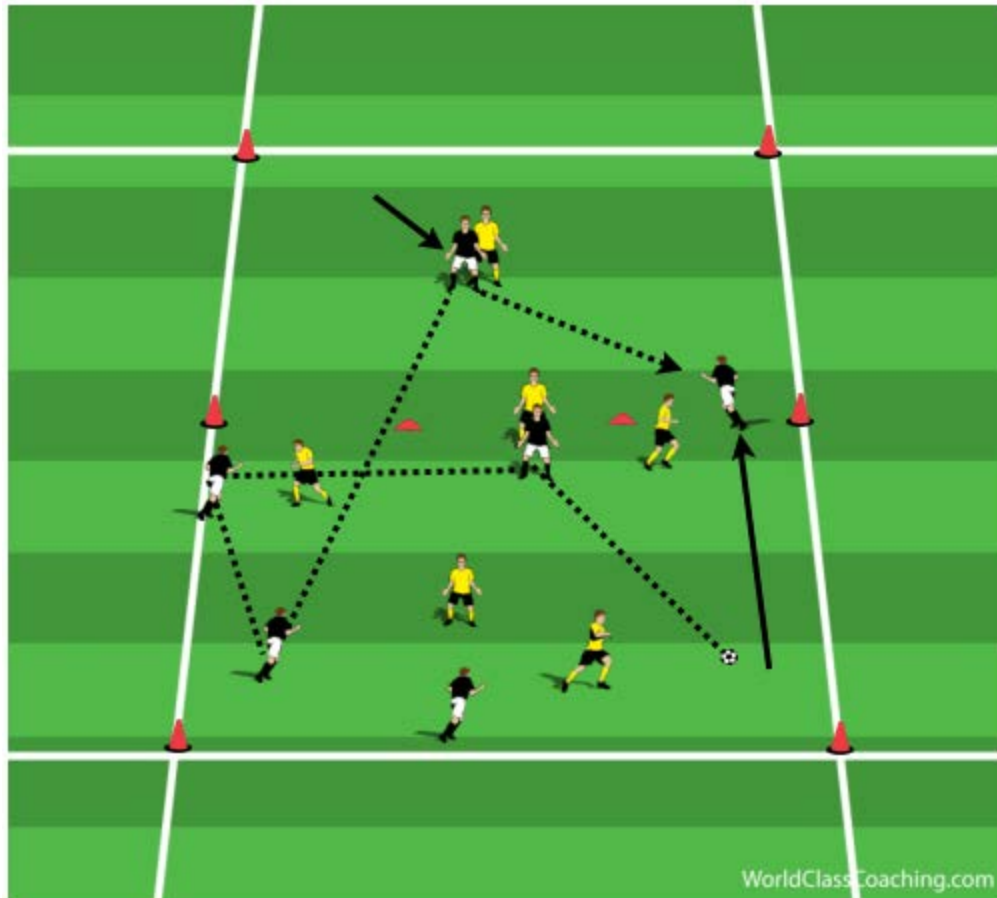
Technical Staff: Genoa's coaching support team, including assistant coaches, fitness trainers and physiotherapists won the 2008-09 *Association of Italian Trainer's "Golden Stopwatch"* award for best overall excellence with goalkeeping coach Gianluca Spinelli, winning the individual honor as the nation's best in his position.

Genoa Tuesday Dribbling Warm-up 1: Players warmed-up dribbling through cones. In each case, one player works while two are resting. The exercises, from left to right, are as follows:

1. (3 yards to first cone; 6 yards to second; then 3 yards to third cone.) Drive to the first cone at pace with longer strides; slow up to navigate around cone using any combination of surfaces before accelerating away to next cone to repeat. Leave the ball at the foot of the waiting player who repeats the sequence.
2. Dribble through the first set of cones with one sharp movement before immediately driving with long strides to the next cones, making sharp cuts around each. Use short steps and quick movement through the last set of cones.
3. Drive forward and “cut” the ball to the left through the first set of cones with the inside of the left foot. With the next touch with right foot, drive with pace to the next set of cones to repeat the cut sequence using the opposite combination of feet.
4. On the first time dribbling through the cones, use the inside and outside of right for making cuts around a cone. Use the left foot the next time through.

Coaching Points:

- ✓ Emphasis is on close control, change of pace and using the correct surfaces of the foot to make turns and cuts.
- ✓ Players worked at each station for 2 minutes before resting 30 seconds as they rotated to the next line.
- ✓ Light dynamic stretching was led by the fitness coaches between each exercise.



Warm-Up Game, Possession to Penetration: (6 v 6 in a 40 yd x 40 yd area.) Play a 6 v 6 possession game in one of the squares with one attacker and his defender beginning and remaining in the other area. After achieving 6 successive passes, the team in possession plays the ball forward to attacker in opposite area. Attacker who receives the ball must retain possession as his teammates - minus one defender - rush forward to support him in keeping possession. The team in possession earns a point when they can advance the ball. When they retain the ball for an additional six passes, they earn a point.

Upon earning a second point for successfully retaining possession both teams immediately reorganize as the ball is passed from the coach to the opposite team and the drill is repeated. When a pass is intercepted or successfully tackled they are allowed to play forward into the other area immediately.

Coaching Points:

- ✓ The players play for four minutes with a one-minute rest. Games were sharp, short and very quick.
- ✓ The two forwards who remained in their respective forward areas were very different players; the 6-foot-5 target player Luca Toni, and the much shorter and more mobile Rodrigo Palacio. Their teammates were encouraged to play them passes that would maximize their strengths; balls chest or thigh high for Toni to hold and balls into feet for Palacio to run on to.



7 v 7 plus goalkeepers: On *calcetto* field. One team in 4-2-1 formation with the other in 3-1-3 formation.

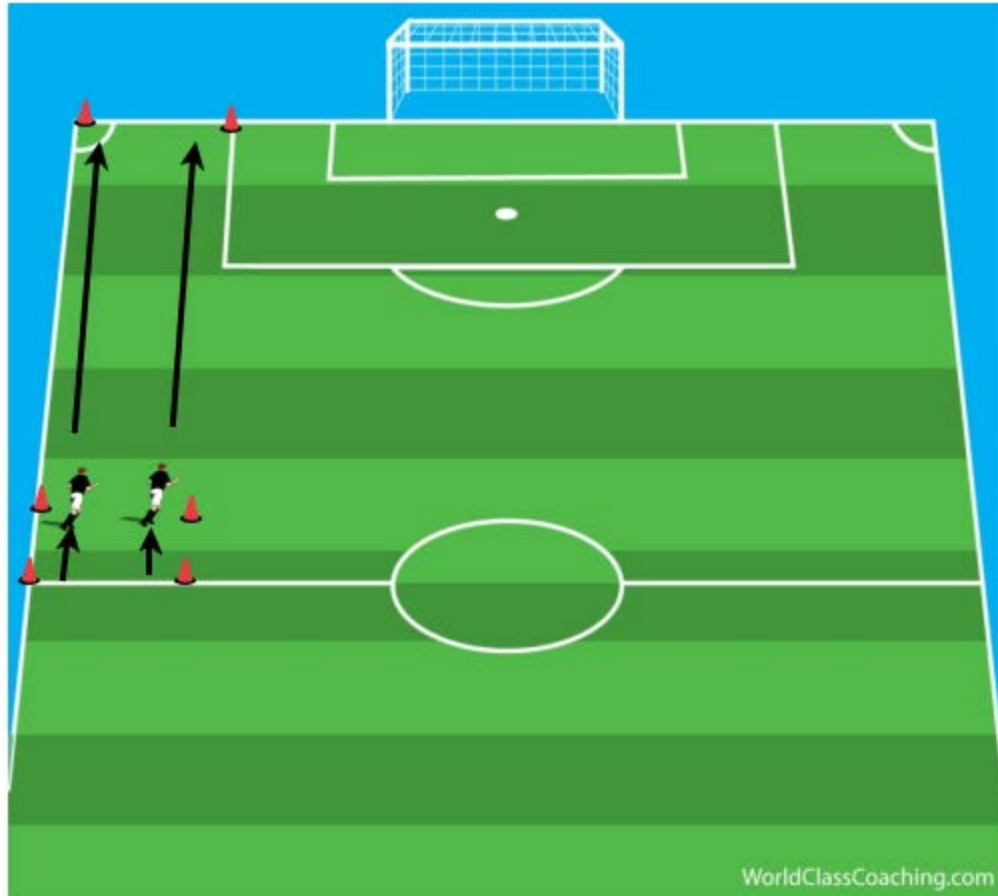
Coaching Points:

- ✓ Game was very quick and intense and was played for four minutes with one-minute rest at a time.
- ✓ All players were asked to drop back and compact the field with an emphasis on intercepted balls played forward quickly to train counter attacking.

4 v 4 plus keepers: Group then split into three teams of four for competitive minitournament.

Coaching Points:

- ✓ Formation for each team was 3-1 in defense and a diamond (“rombo”) in attack.
- ✓ Game was very quick and intense and was played for four minutes with a one-minute break with one team resting while other two teams played.
- ✓ Offsides rule was in effect at the offside line and no shooting was allowed from outside the 18.



Genoa Tuesday Sprint Training: The players moved on to the full-size field for sprint training. Sprints were 60 yards, starting with a five-yard running start. Depending on whether they had played in the match on the previous Sunday, the players ran either four or eight sprints with a 12-second rest between.

WEDNESDAY

Warm-Up:

- Easy jogging as a group followed by dynamic stretching led by fitness coaches.
- Relaxed ball work in twos and threes, including wall passes, overlaps and third man running patterns.

7 v 7 plus goalkeepers: On *calcetto* field. (Same as Tuesday afternoon session.) The fifteen-minute game was spirited and fast. Pace of game was kept high by using kick-ins instead of throw-ins, by having coaches act as ball boys to retrieve balls and play them back into touch as quickly possible, and by having extra balls in goals for goalkeepers to distribute quickly following goals or missed shots.



Gym Session: The Genoa strength and fitness program incorporates a number of free-weight lifts including squats, the power clean and the power jerk. Players typically work in groups of three and rotate to stations. The following listed exercises are combined from the fitness sessions held on Wednesday and on Friday.

Strength Training Exercises:

- Use of low-hanging gymnastic rings for modified pullups (torso straight, looking at ceiling with heels on ground) and modified deep pushups (torso straight and toes on ground).
- Step-ups onto 12-inch box carrying dumbbells.
- Split squat jumps with dumbbells. Start in squat position with one leg in front, jump and switch lead leg while landing.
- Shallow leg presses and heel raises on sled machine.
- Leg extensions mimicking a ball kicking motion with resistance provided by rubber bands.
- For hamstrings: Single-leg squats (starting on edge of chair) with dumbbell held across chest
- Core work including planks, side situps and side bridges.
- Squats combined with lateral shoulder raises with dumbbells for resistance.
- Hamstring flexion on machine.
- Dips.
- Pullups.

NOTE: Players performing free-weight exercises -- squats, power clean and power jerk -- wore weight belts, were spotted and closely supervised by the fitness coaches.

Plyometric Exercises:

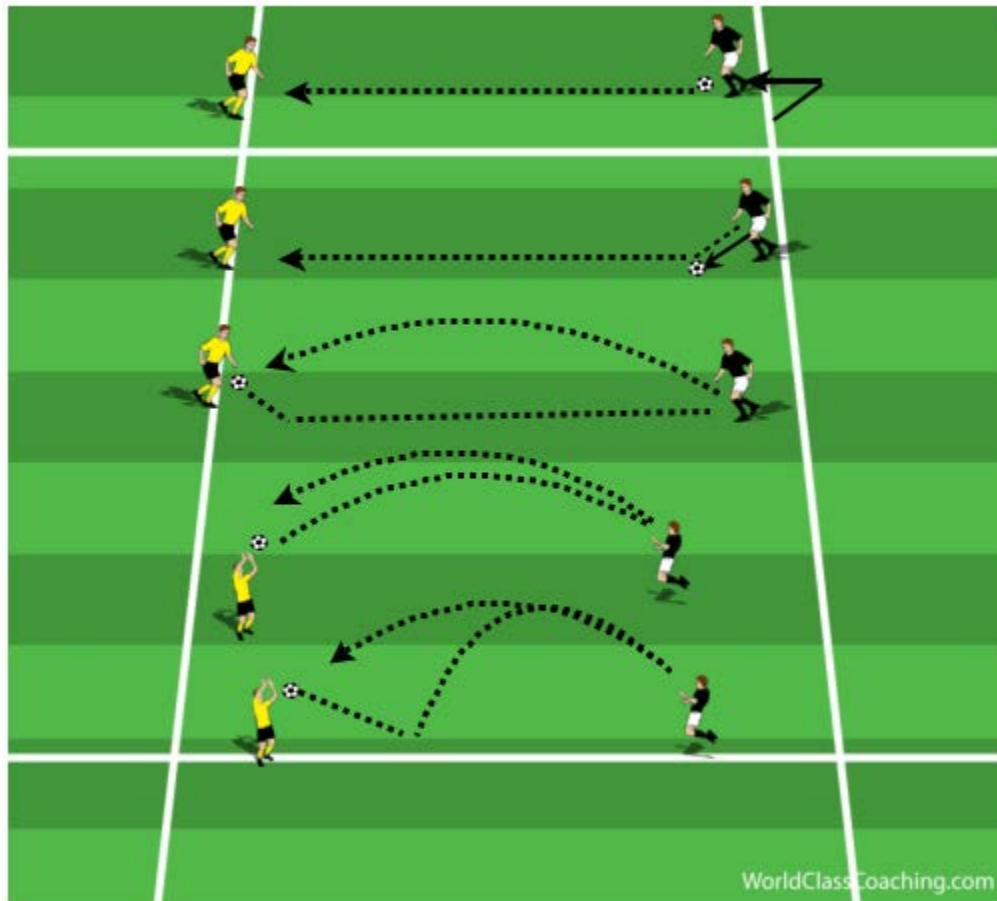
- Vertical jumps over a series of three 28-inch hurdles following a depth jump off of an 18-inch plyometric box.
- Vertical jumps onto 42-inch platform from standing start.
- Explosive one-legged jumps onto two 16-inch boxes arranged one in front of each other; alternating legs.
- Three standing jumps (knees to chest) followed by 20-yard sprint.

Heading Ball:

- One of the most popular exercises was an adjustable-height suspended heading ball. The players practiced heading both stationary and moving balls. Much banter revolved around the fact that 5-foot-9 Rodrigo Palacio consistently outjumped 6-foot-5 Luca Toni.



WEDNESDAY PM:



Technical Work in Pairs: The players, standing 6 to 10 yds apart, begin by playing easy one-touch passes back and forth. One player is the “working player” and the other a server while the players perform the following exercises:

1. Working player touches ball back to server and “checks away” at an angle before returning ball 1-touch to server. Repeat by checking away at opposite angle.
2. Working player now practices receiving the ball with the inside of the foot and controlling it forward at a 45-degree angle before striking a low return pass with laces simulating a strike on goal or driven pass
3. Server controls a flighted ball into space in front of and to the side of himself before playing a soft and accurate a pass on the ground to his partner. Working partner plays a first-time flighted return pass between knee and chest high to server.
4. Jumping headers from the hand of server
5. Jumping headers from a high bounce. (Server throws ball into ground ahead of working player.)

Serving and working players alternated roles every 90 seconds.

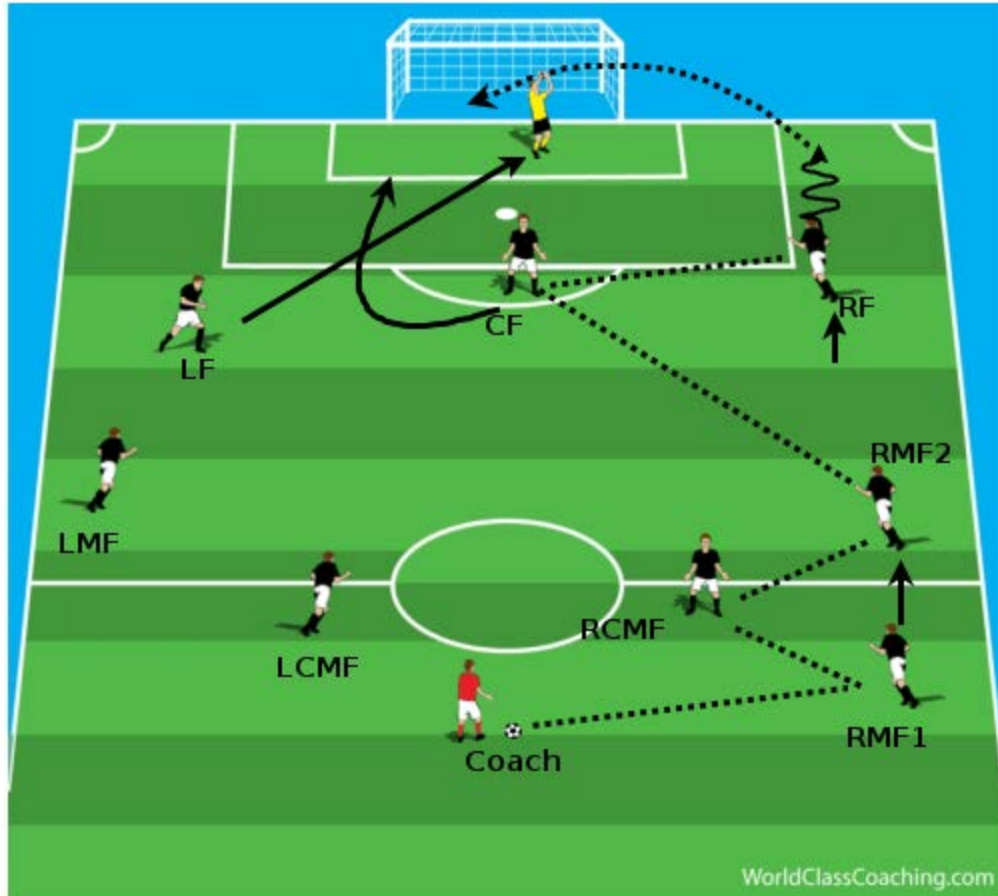
Team then split into **forwards and midfield players** working on attacking patterns with **defenders and goalkeepers** working separately.

Attacking Patterns: A group of attackers worked on patterns in a shadow play format of three strikers supported by four midfield players with the coach Gasperini behind them starting the play. Patterns practiced looked to take advantage of the height and strength of Toni in a traditional “target” role combined with the mobility and speed of the outside attacking players (Palacio and Sculli) and the overlapping and interchange of the outside forwards and outside midfield players.

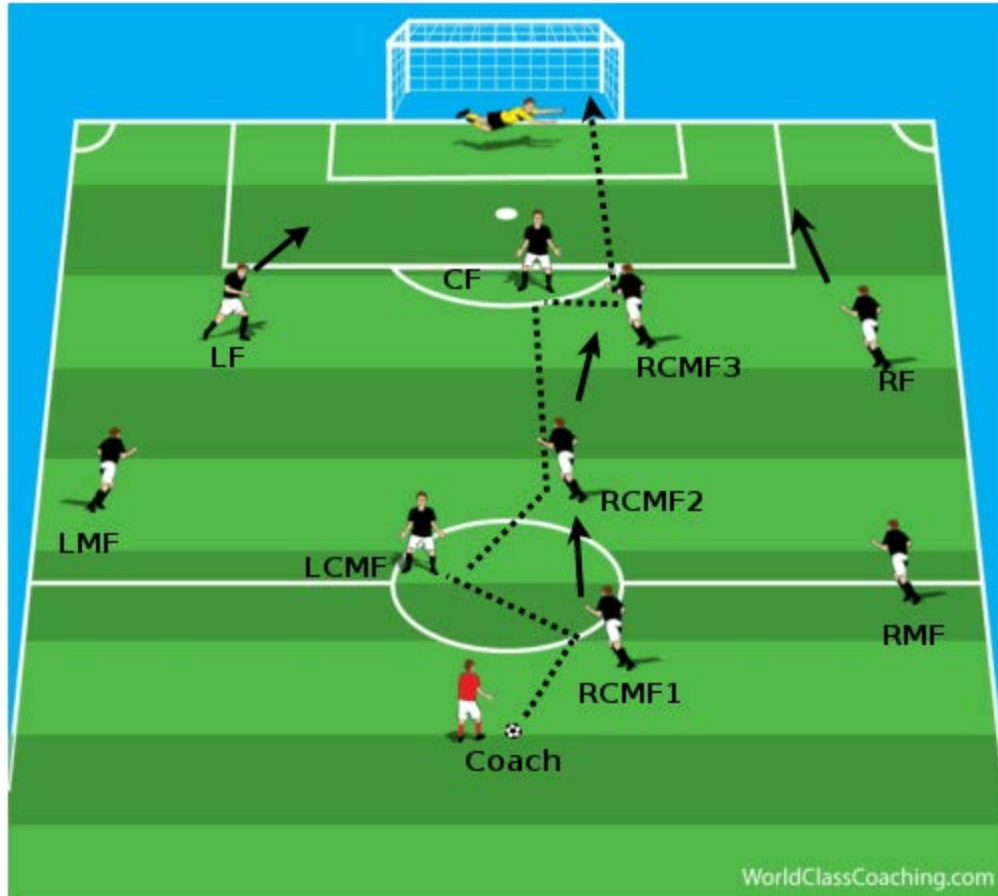
The following nomenclature is used for player positions: Goalkeeper (GK), right back (RB), centerback (CB), left back (LB), center midfield (CMF), right midfield (RMF), left midfield (LMF), right forward (RF), left forward (LF) and center forward (CF). The play was quick with a focus on first-time play by the forwards, fluid interchange between positions and an emphasis on diagonal runs by forwards to clear space for other forwards to run into. In general, these attacking patterns were played with one-and two-touch passes on the ground. Exceptions were short dribbles in flank areas followed by flighted crosses into the box. Most of these patterns are shown as developing on the right side of the field though both sides were trained during the session.



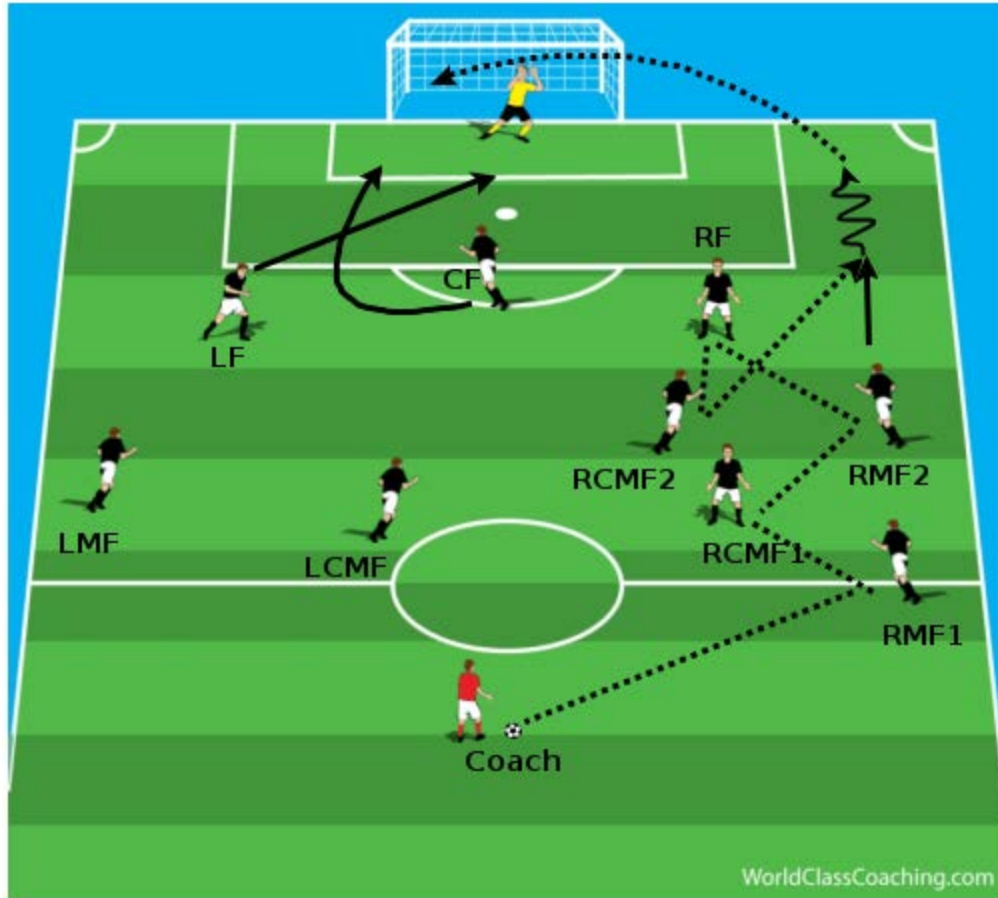
The starting position of the players for training in attacking patterns.



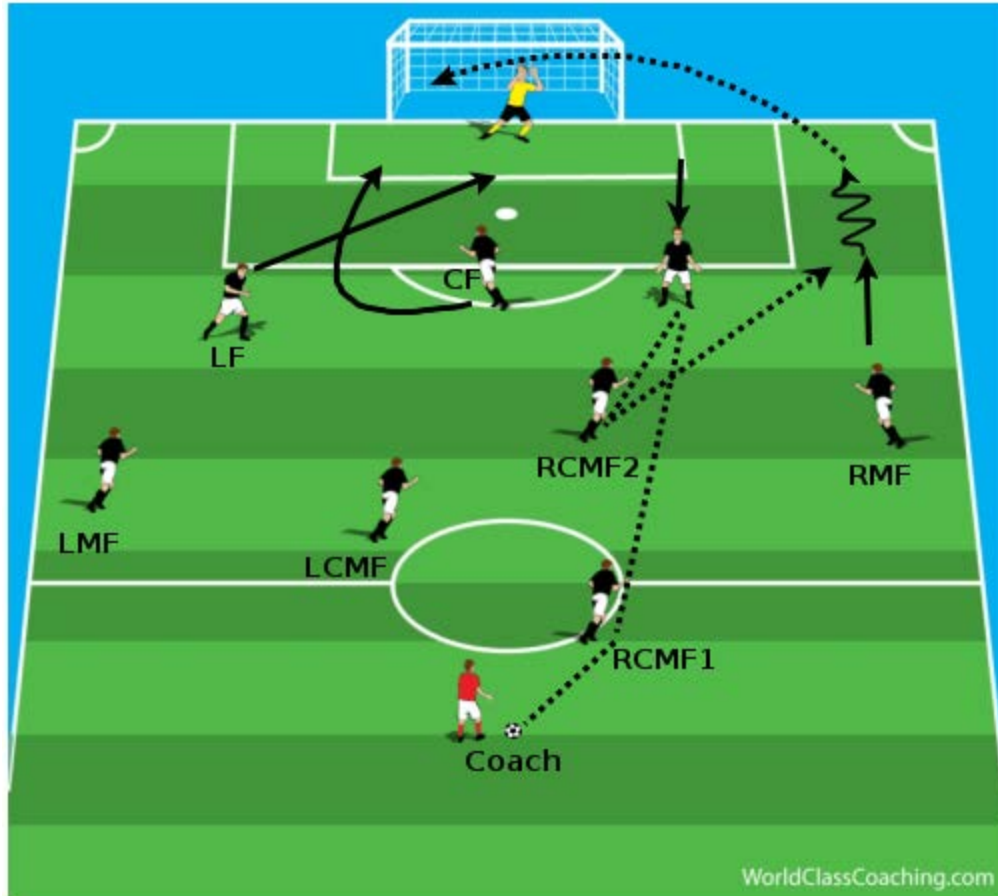
Attacking Pattern 1: Following a pass from the coach, the RMF, plays a wall pass with RCMF who is in a slightly more advanced position, before then playing the return pass forward first-time to CF. CF lays off a diagonal pass to the RF to push into space for a short dribble before crossing for CF and LF to attack.



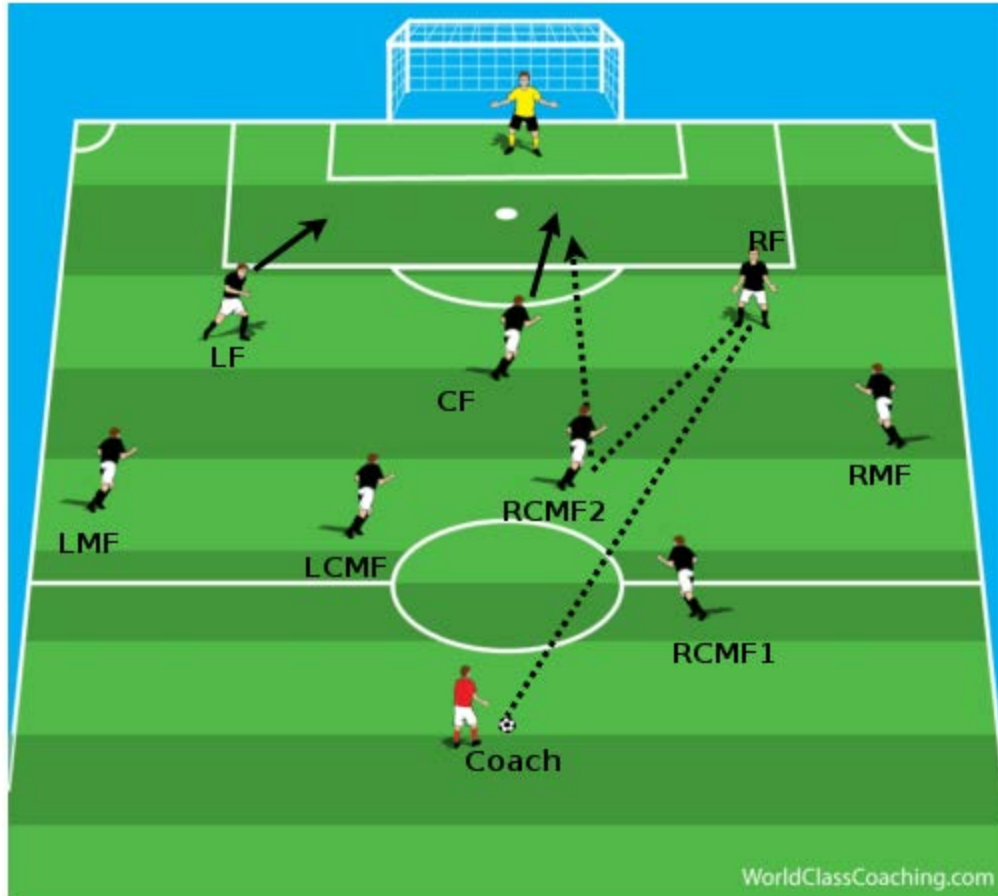
Attacking Pattern 2: Following a pass from the coach, the RCMF player plays a wall pass with LCMF. He plays the return pass to CF who is checking back to the ball. CF touches off a short square pass to RCMF who has continued his run for a first-time shot on goal.



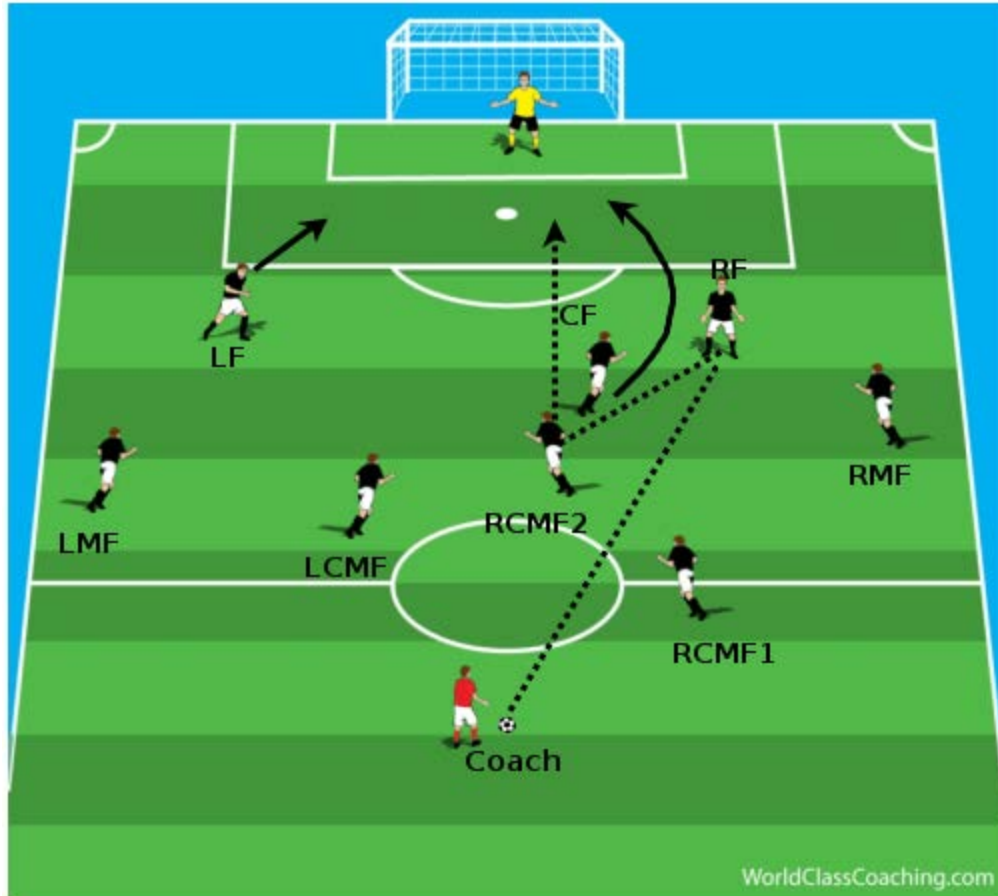
Attacking Pattern 3: Following a pass from the coach, the RMF player plays a wall pass with the RCMF, who then turns to support the RF who is himself checking toward the ball. RMF, meanwhile, plays ball to RF who plays pass back to RCMF who has moved forward into a supporting position to play the ball into space for the RMF who has continued his run. After a short dribble, the RMF crosses to forwards attacking the cross.



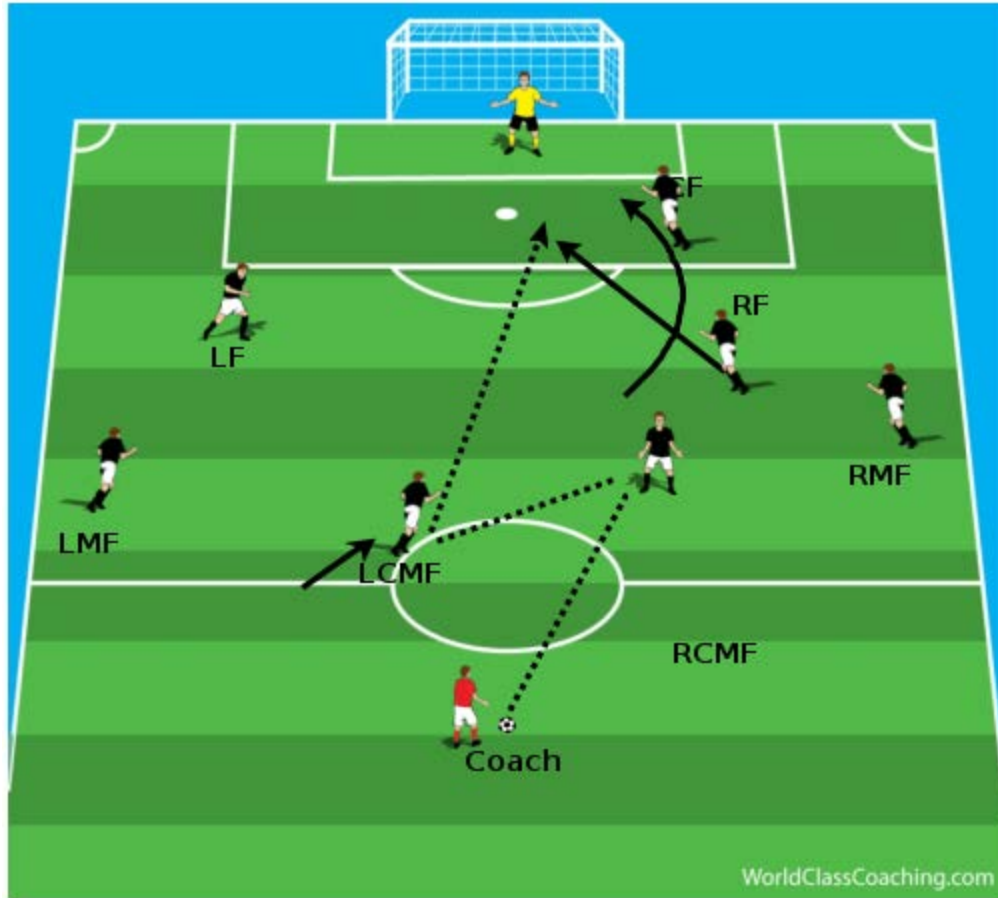
Attacking Pattern 4: Following a pass from the coach, the RCMF player plays to the RF who is checking back to the ball. RF passes the ball back to the RCMF who has moved forward to support play. The ball is played first time the RMF player sprinting into space. After a short dribble, the RMF crosses to forwards attacking the cross.



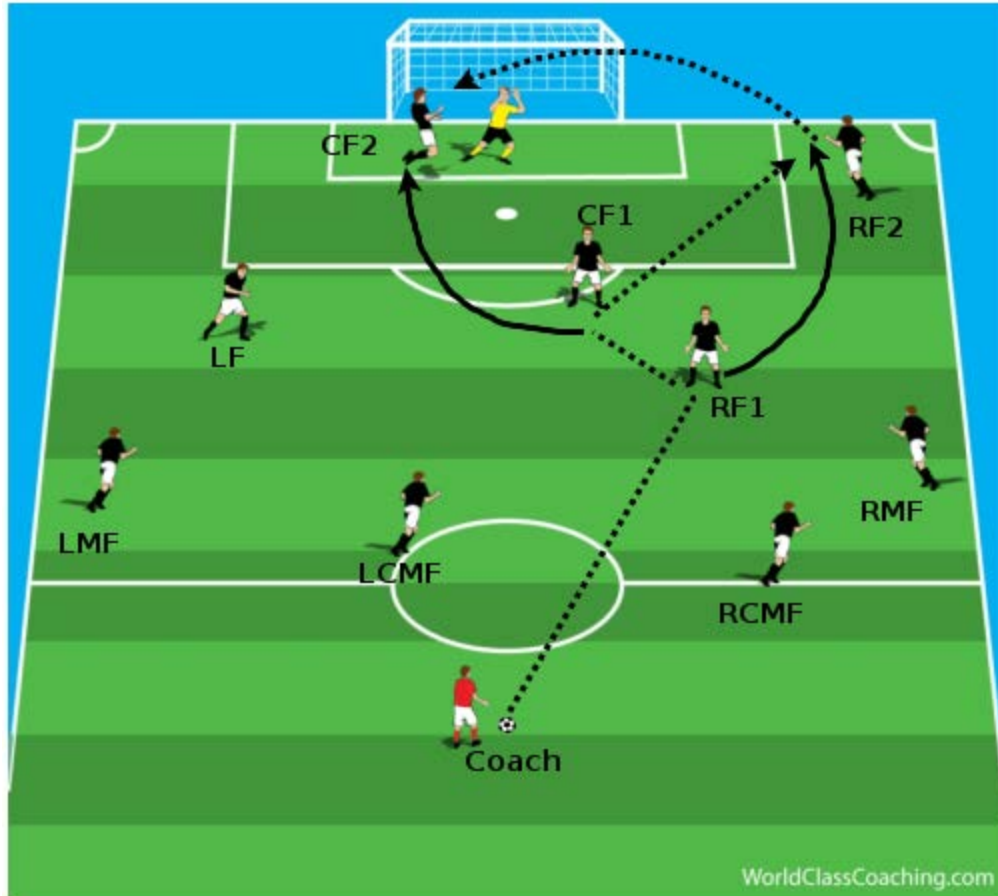
Attacking Pattern 5: Following a longer forward pass from the coach, the RF plays the ball back to the RCMF who played a first-time through ball into the penalty area for the CF to run on to.



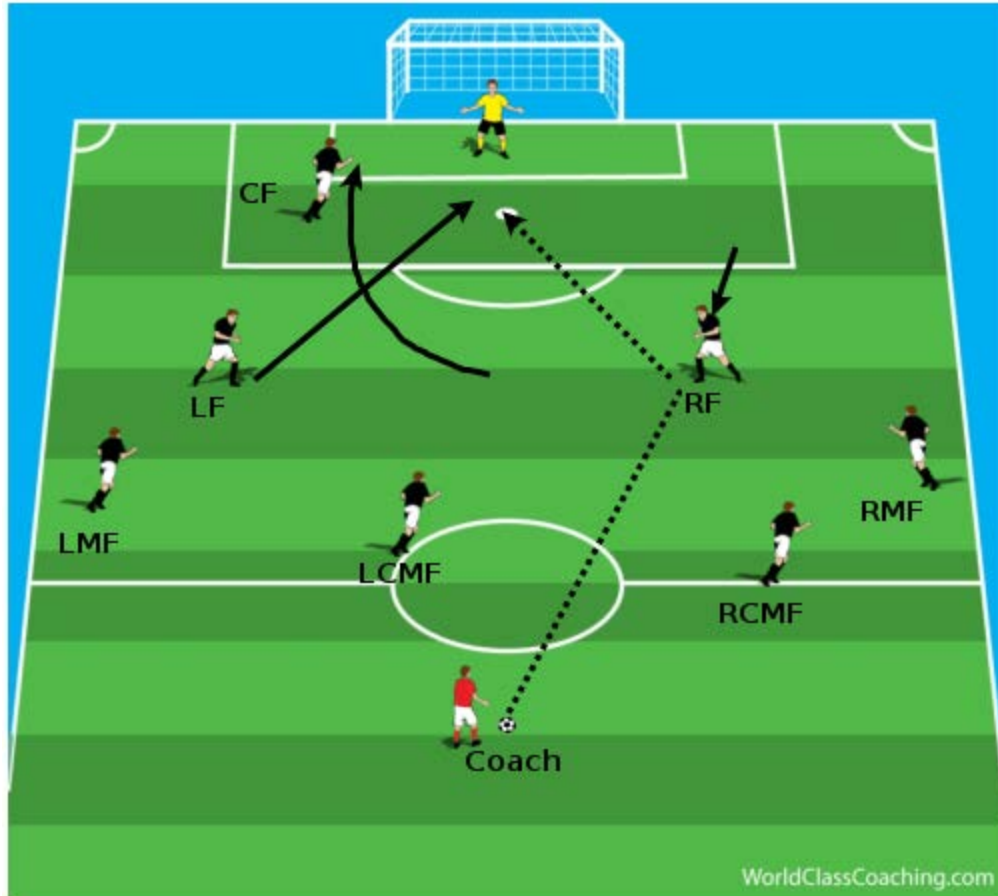
Attacking Pattern 6: (Variation on Pattern 5) Following a longer forward pass from the coach, the RF plays the ball back to the RCMF who has taken up a slightly more central position in support of the attack. This time with his left foot, he plays a first-time through ball into the penalty area for the CF who is making a curved to the right into the penalty area.



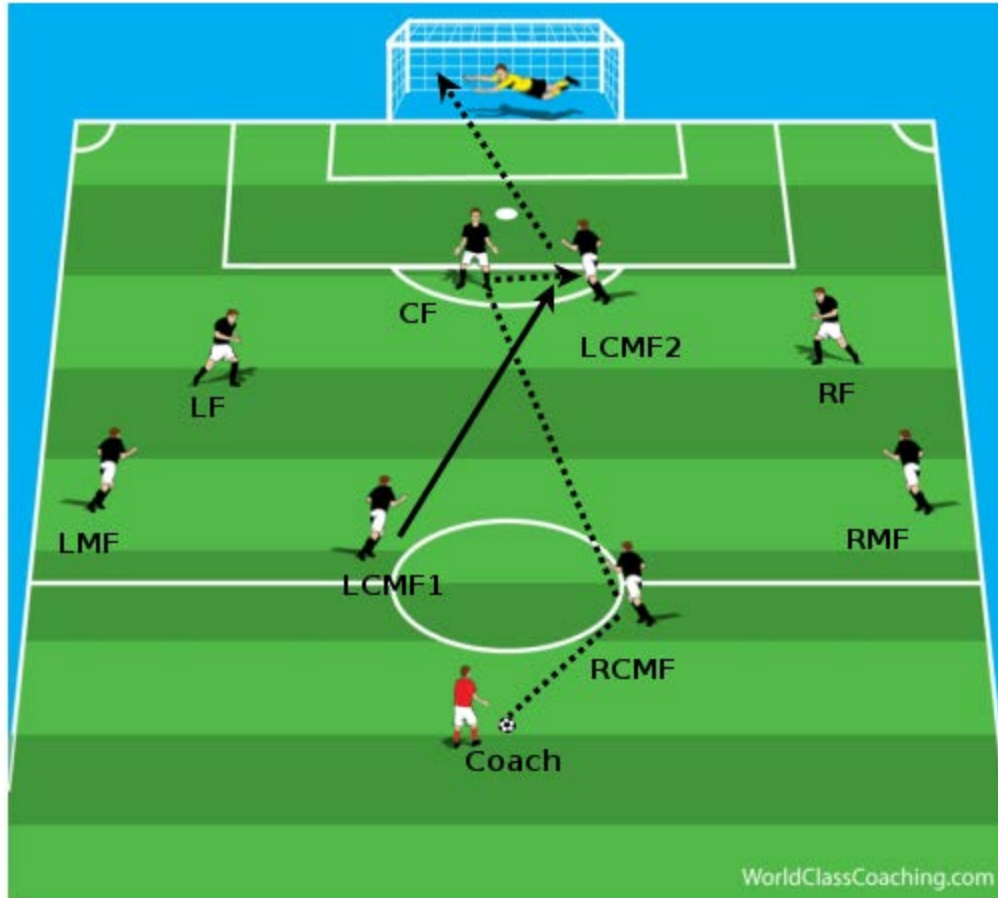
Attacking Pattern 7: Following a pass from the coach, the RCMF player plays the ball to the LCMF who plays a long pass into the penalty area. The CF makes a curved run to the right to clear space for the RF who is making a diagonal run into the penalty area.



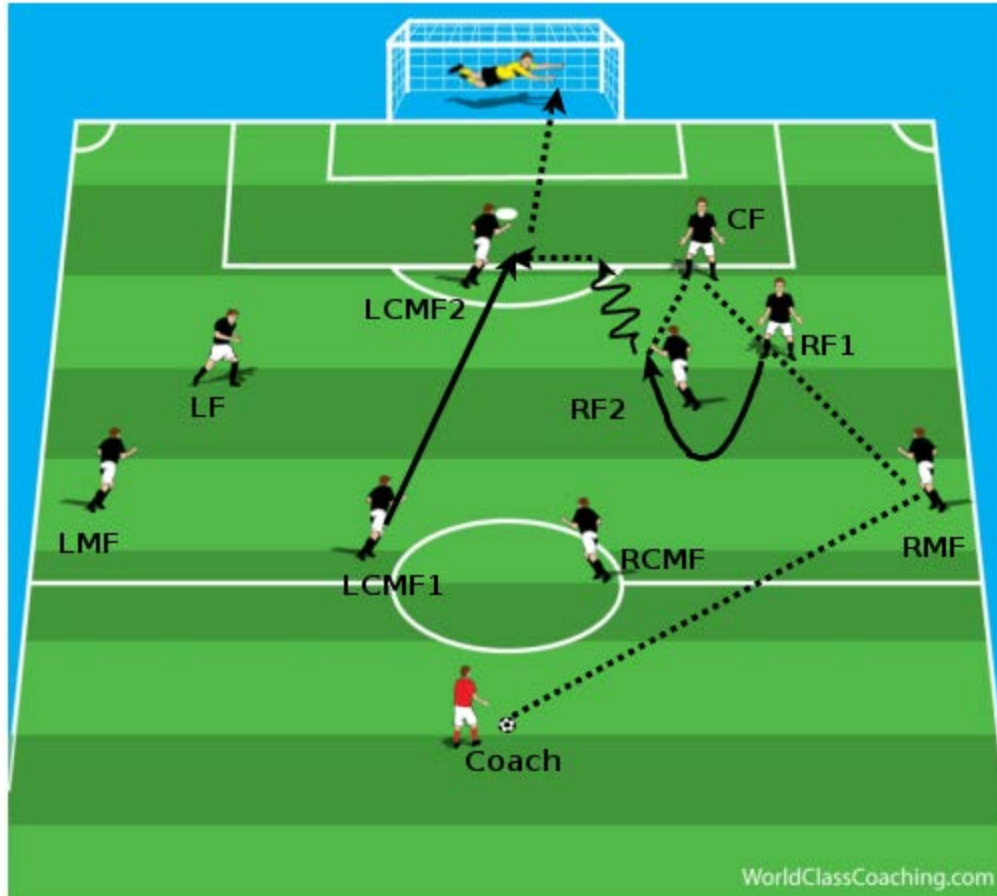
Attacking Pattern 8: Following a longer forward pass from the coach, the RF plays a quick pass with his left foot before spinning to the outside to receive the return pass from the CF. CF has now himself spun to the left and sprints into the penalty area to attack a first-time cross from the RF.



Attacking Pattern 9: Following a longer forward pass from the coach, the RF receives the ball on his left foot and turns with the same motion to play a pass into the penalty area for the on-rushing LF. CF has made a curved run to the left to clear space for the LF.

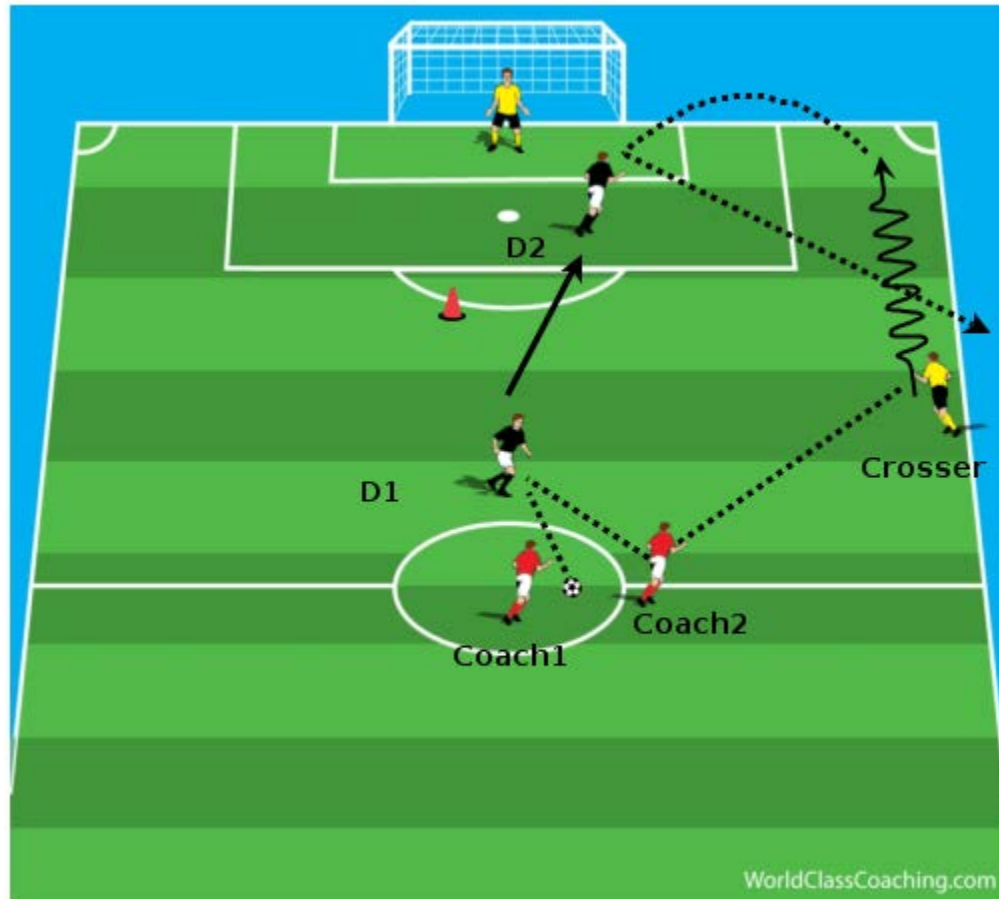


Attacking Pattern 10: Following a pass from the coach, the RCMF plays a longer ball to the CF who holds the ball momentarily for the LCMF who is making a supporting run “underneath” him. CF lays off ball to LCMF for a first-time shot on goal.

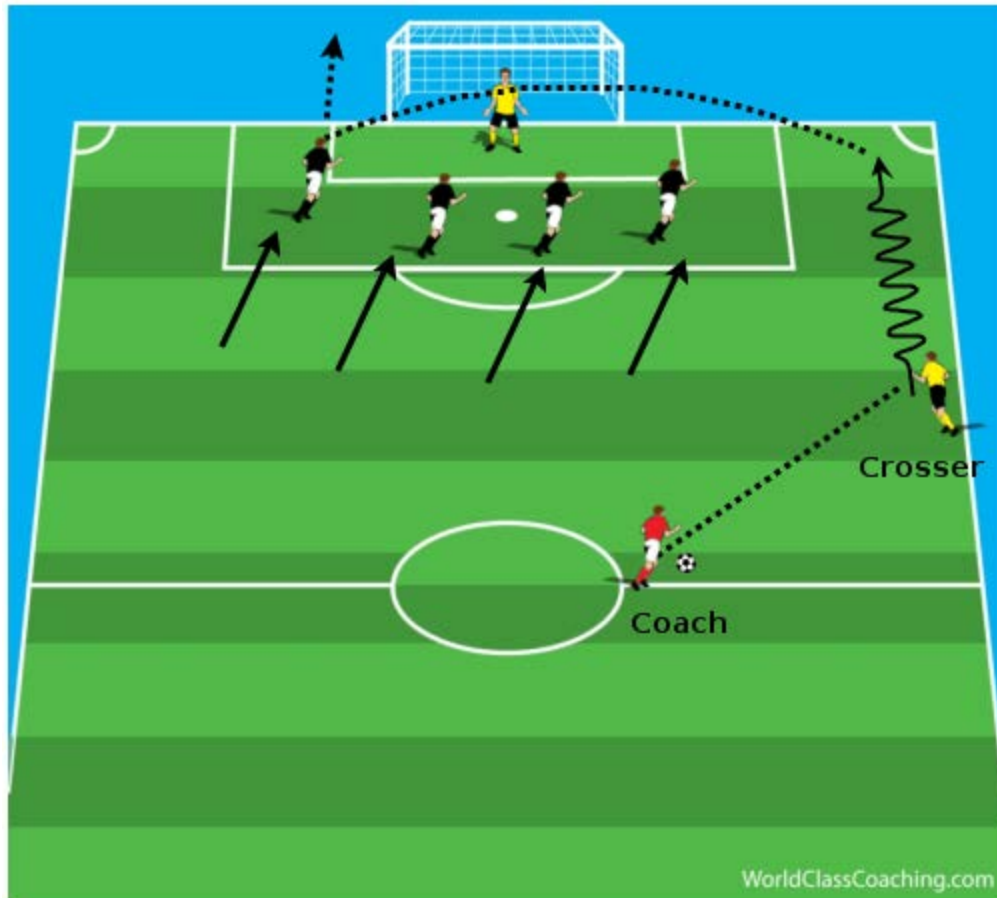


Attacking Pattern 11: Following a pass from the coach, the RF, who has taken up a more inside position, dummies the ball and spins toward the middle of the field to receive a pass from the CF. RF carries the ball forward toward the penalty area before playing a square pass for LCMF to shoot.

Functional Training for Defenders: The defenders and goalkeepers worked separately with the assistant coaches on clearing high balls played into the box. Emphasis was on balls cleared while defenders were running toward their own goal and on balls played into the near post.



Genoa Defending Drill One: Defender starts by moving forward towards a pass from coach. His return pass to the coach is played first-time into the path of the crosser who dribbles toward the end line before crossing. Defender sprints immediately back toward his own goal and practices clearing crosses to the touchline.



GENOA DEFENDING DRILL TWO: Similar to the prior exercise, but now with the entire back four. One of the centerbacks exchanges passes with coach before sprinting back toward his own goal alongside his teammates to clear the subsequent cross. Balls that cannot be cleared out safely or over the touchline are played out for corners.

Coaching Points:

- ✓ Defenders should sprint back toward their own goal as fast as possible and “set their feet” so as to be in a good position to clear.
- ✓ Service from the crosser was varied as to the height, speed and timing of the cross (early crosses as well as balls dribbled to the endline before being crossed) so that defenders would have to deal with a variety of service.
- ✓ Defenders should put ball out for a corner if there are no other safe options. Crosses played to the near post and crosses played to the far post that cannot be cleared to the opposite touchline are considered particularly dangerous.

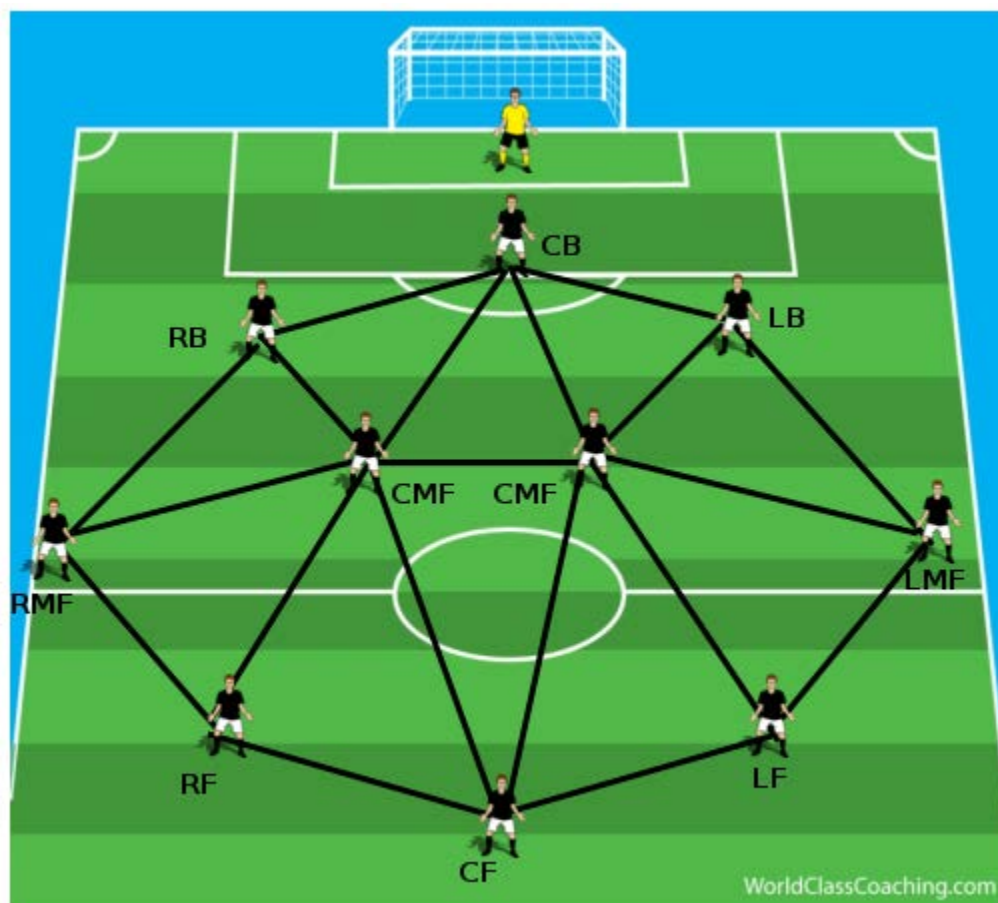
8 v 8 Partitella (scrimmage): Italian teams traditionally play a midweek small-sided scrimmage that is free to the public.

THURSDAY

Tactical Analysis: The Principals of Genoa's 3-4-3 Formation. An interview with assistant Coach Bruno Caneo (translation assistance provided by Katia Paroczi).

Gasperini's 3-4-3 philosophy is based on the following basic principles:

The Genoa formation is built on a series of diamonds ("rhombi") and triangles with the center forward being the front point of the central diamond. (Luca Toni, with his tall, powerful frame and his ability to hold the ball with his back to the goal, is considered an important part of this system as the central and most advanced "point" of the formation.) Overly direct play is discouraged in favor of a quick but measured passing build up.



Attacking Principles:

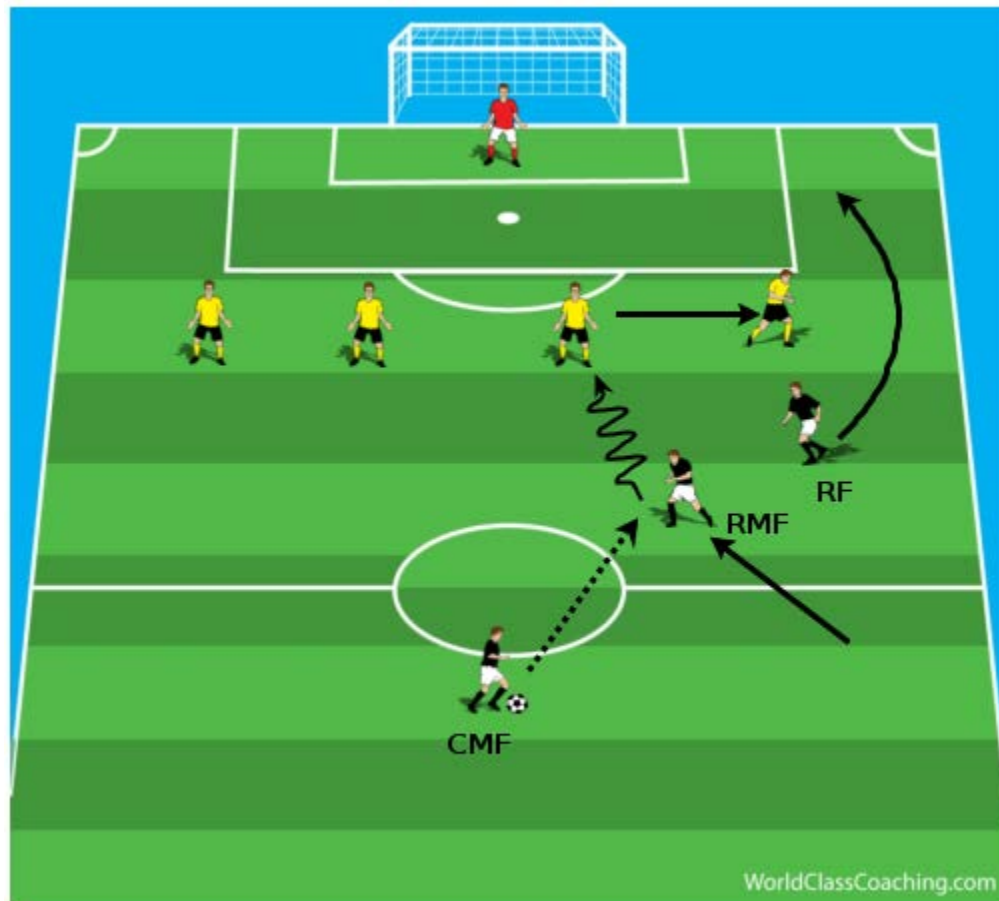
Due to having width in all parts of the field combined with close proximity between the forwards to each other **and** to the outside midfield players, a number of combinations unique to the formation are possible. "When outside midfield players are in possession in the attacking half of the field, they always should have the option to play to an overlapping wide defender and when outside forwards have the ball they should always have the option of an overlapping midfield player."

The system is based on a fluid interchange between outside backs, outside midfield players and outside forwards. Gasperini's philosophy is based on attack, risk in committing players forward and interchange between the outside defenders, midfield players and forwards. "The role and the positions of the players in the formation are not as important as what part of the field they find themselves at key moments in the game. They have to be capable and willing to fill whatever role is required depending on the situation and the zone they occupy." Defenders and midfield players are encouraged to join in the attack at all times but must of course be in a position to instantly recover. The system is very physically demanding of players. Players are exhorted to "play with courage" and not to be afraid of 1 v 1 confrontations in any part of the field.

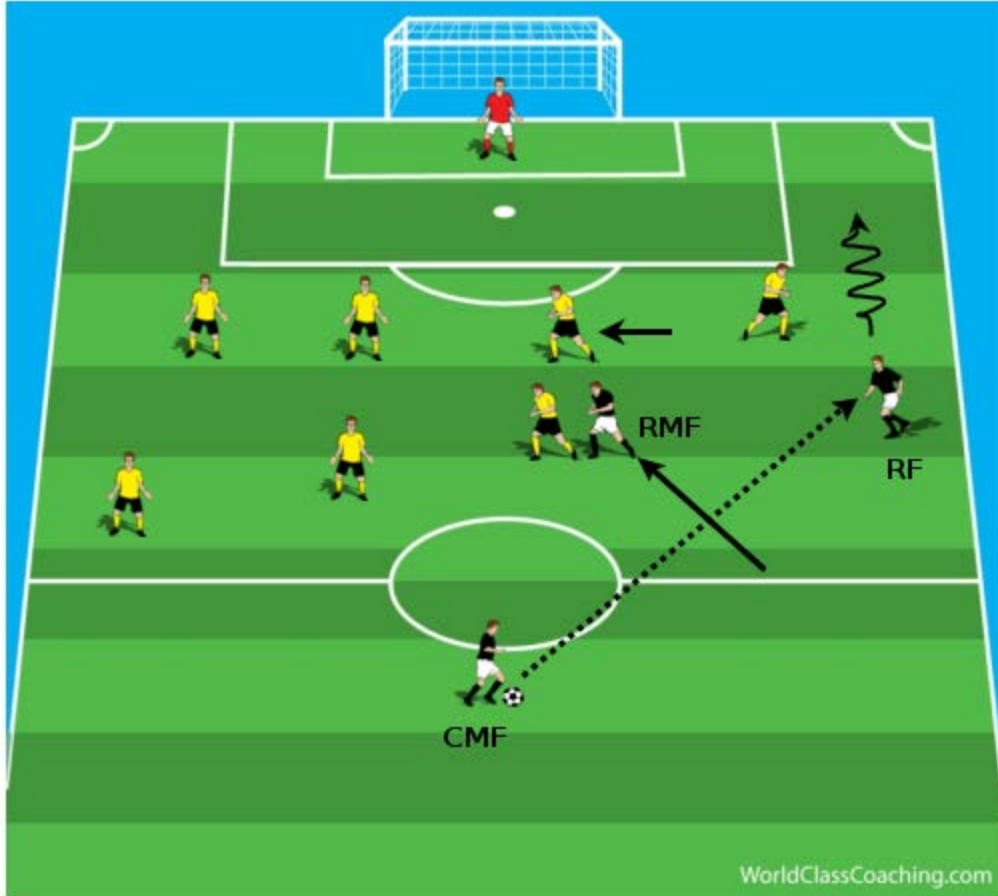
The two central-midfield players stay central and do not venture wide. Center forward Luca Toni stays available as a central target until the final third of the field, where he is encouraged to make diagonal runs on to through balls or runs into wide areas to create spaces for the other forwards. Attacking patterns specific to the formation and the players are practiced regularly and examples can be seen in the Wednesday afternoon session.

An aggressive, up-tempo, passing game is encouraged and players are encouraged to play forward whenever possible and to play forward quickly as soon as possible after winning the ball in a transition. "When other teams win the ball back in transition, their first thought is to play backwards to retain possession. Not Genoa! We always try to play forward as soon as possible when we win the ball."

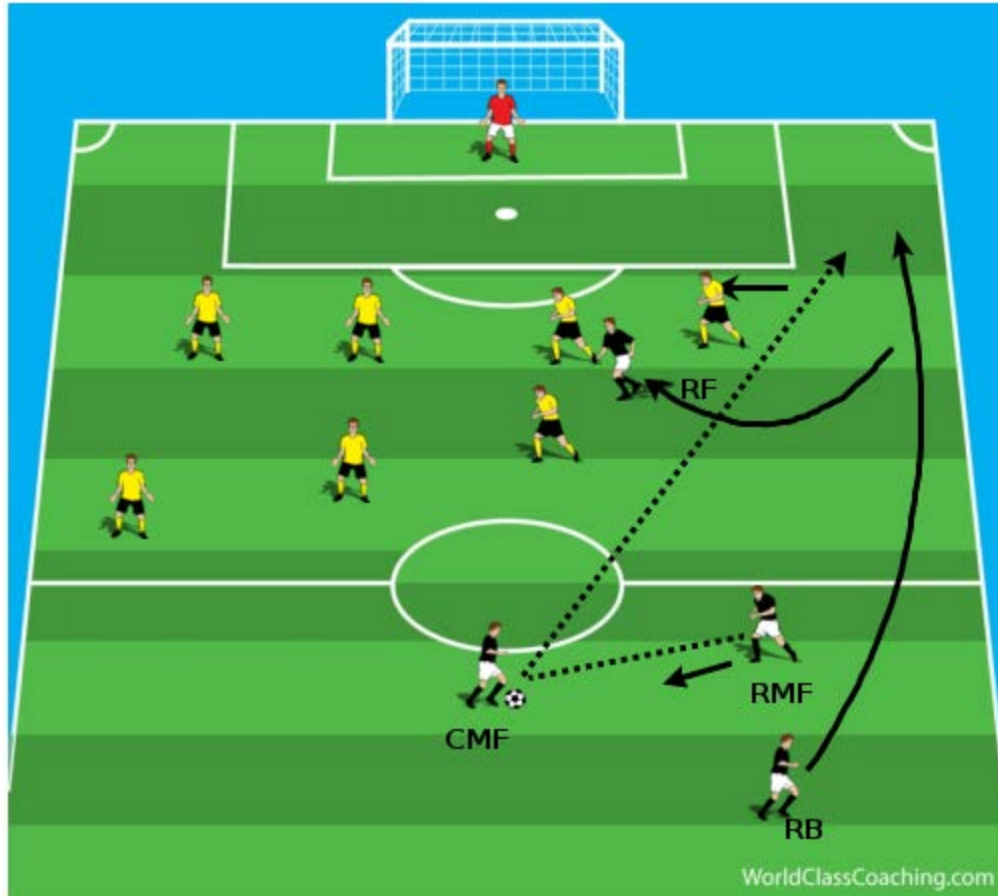
Some examples of Genoa's attacking principles were illustrated by coach Caneo:



In this example, the RMF player sprints infield to receive a pass and attack the central defense while the RF player overlaps to pull the covering defender away and create a 1 v 1 situation in the middle of the defense.



In this example, the OMF player sprints inside to create space for OF to achieve a 1 v 1 on the flank.



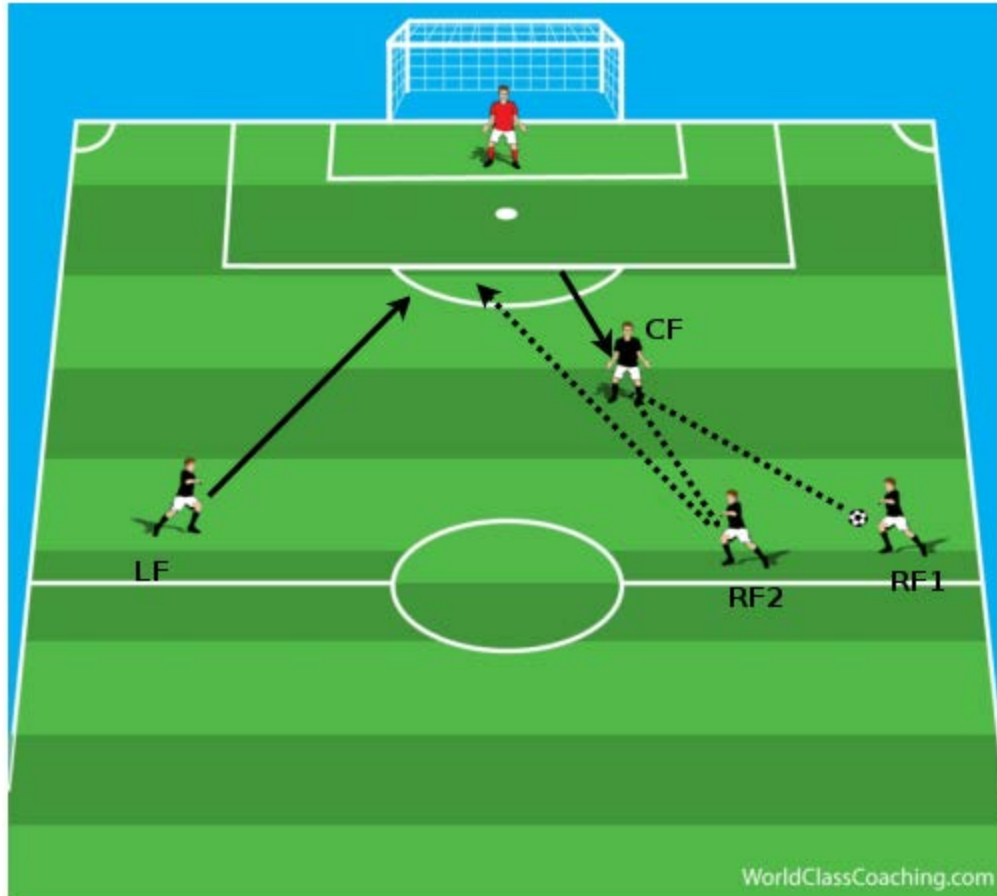
In this example, RMF player passes the CMF and steps toward him to offer support. This is the immediate signal for the RB to overlap and be in a position to receive pass and carry ball forward. The RF makes a run to the middle to open space for overlapping player.



Defensive Principles:

A primary defensive principle is that the 3-4-3 gives the ability to pressure opponents in all parts of the field. Players are encouraged to “push on” and press the ball as far up the field as possible even if it means creating 1 v 1 marking situations at the back. In most situations Genoa uses a “high line” in defense that relies on quick and mobile defenders and by limiting opportunities for long, accurate passes behind its defense. In this example, the RF is caught out of position and is not in a position to defend against the opposition’s left back as he dribbles out of defense. The RMF player “pushes on” to challenge the ball while the ORB goes to challenge the opposing midfield player. The remaining two defenders slide over to mark one on one with the weak-sided OMF adjusting his position accordingly.

Balls won through interceptions or tackles in flank areas are switched to the opposite side forward whenever possible while balls won in the middle of the field are played forward via an “up, back and through” pattern with the first ball played to the feet of Luca Toni and through balls to onrushing outside forwards running in to the middle.



These tactics are trained in small-sided games where midfield and back players call a “press” to win balls when opponents miscontrol passes, can be double-teamed or be trapped in flank areas. In training, the coaches sometimes freeze play momentarily when that attacking team has the ball and re-creates an interception, miscontrolled pass or successful tackle by playing the ball to the defending team. That team must play the ball forward first-time with the most aggressive pass or two possible.

The players that fit the system best are:

- Adaptable and comfortable in several positions. Only the centerback and two center midfield players do not look to constantly interchange and overlap as well as the center forward who is encouraged to stay in the middle of the field as an outlet target at all times until the ball is in the final third. There he is encouraged to make runs into more wide positions to clear space for faster and more mobile players to sprint into the middle.
- The most successful players in the system tend to be “hybrid” players. For example Palacio is equally comfortable in a wide forward or wide midfield role; captain Marco Rossi can play in central and wide midfield, outside back and even forward; Italian international Crisicito can play left back or left midfield; and Rafinha, who played center midfield for Genoa, now plays right back at Bayern Munich.

Afternoon Friendly with Derthona Calcio. Derthona Calcio compete in Serie D, Italy's top semiprofessional league.

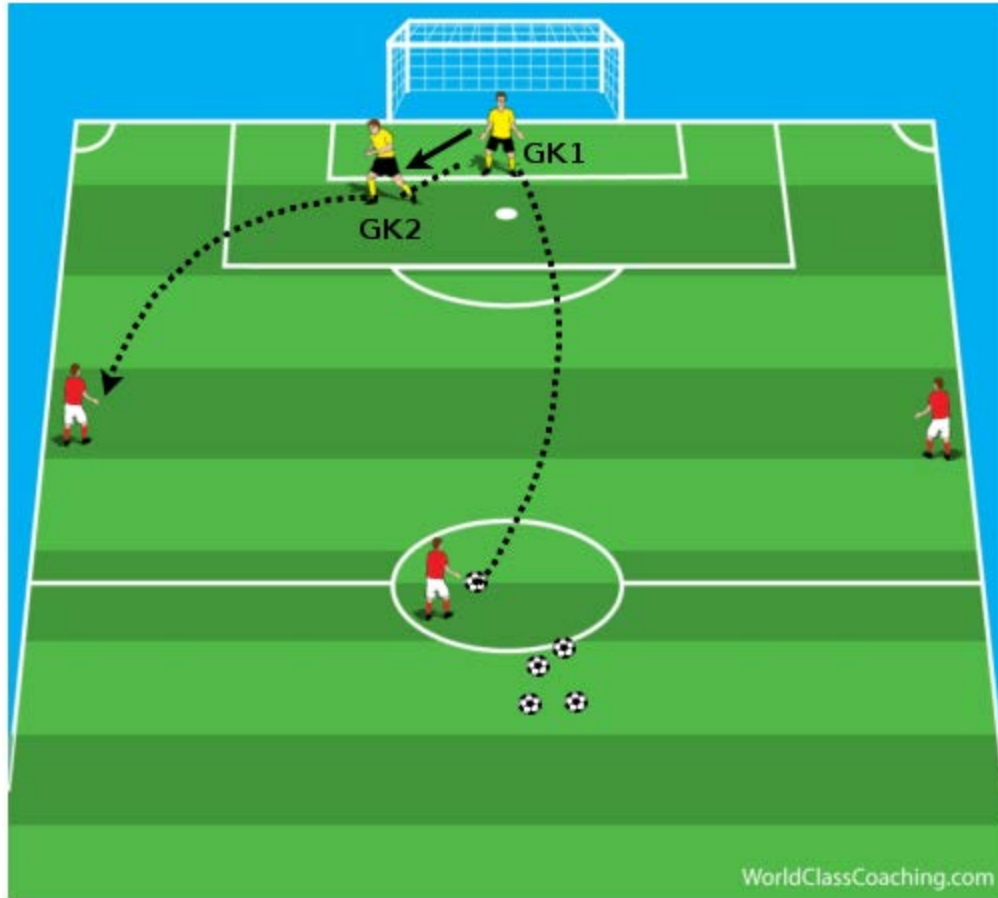
Field Players Prematch Warmup: A typical warmup of light jogging followed by 5 v 1 keepaway games, and standard possession games in a small area interspersed with breaks for dynamic stretching. Closer to kickoff players ran "zig-zag" sprints around cones placed eight yards from each other, and a small-sided line game where the objective was to either dribble into or run onto a pass played in a six-yard endzone attached to the back of a penalty area-sized field.

Goalkeepers Prematch Warmup: (Two keepers with goalkeeping coach.)

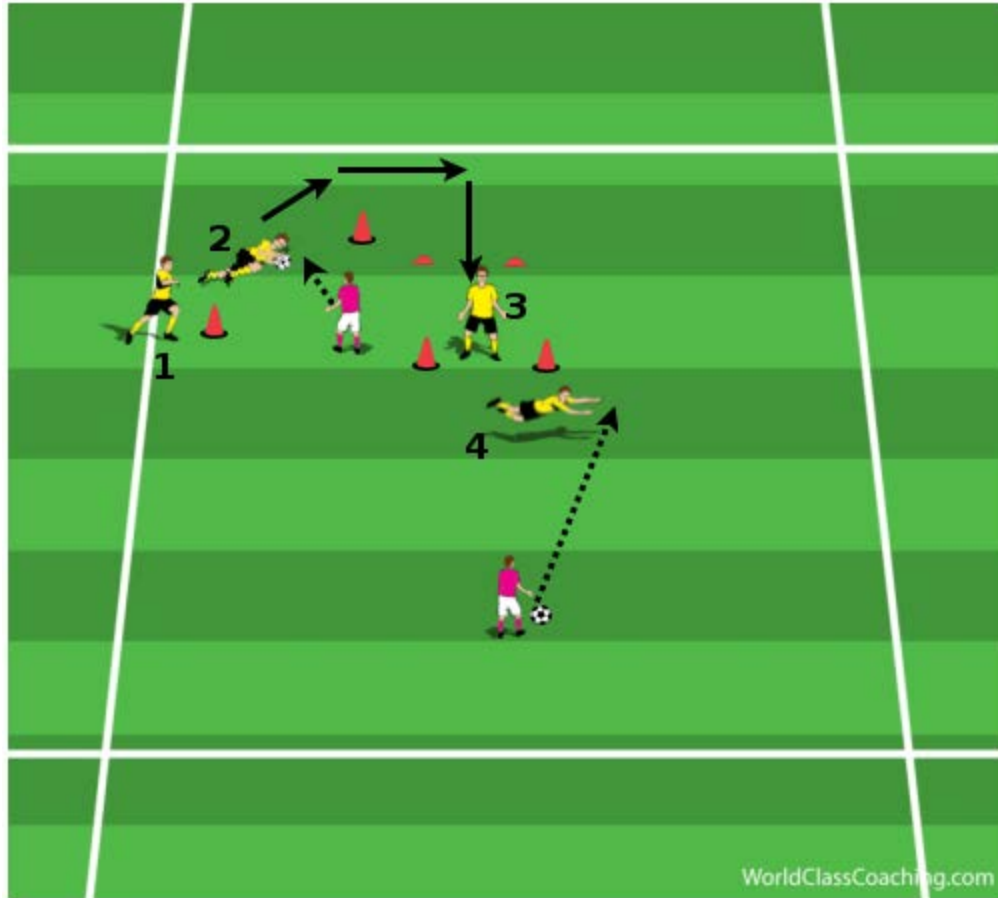
- Abdominal and hands warmup: Player seated with legs in front of him. Goalkeeper coach in front of him serves balls about 16 inches off the ground to alternate sides. Goalkeeper makes two-handed saves and returns ball immediately using ab muscles and moving forward with each save.
- Same but keeper "palms" ball with one hand and returns serves to coach.
- Goalkeeper, now standing, saves and returns a series of six balls driven on ground to alternating sides.
- Goalkeeper in goal now fielding series of six driven shots of varying heights from the top of the penalty area.
- Goalkeeper handles crosses from assistant coaches on either flank. Resting goalkeeper takes up varying near and far positions to provide passive opposition for working keeper to maneuver around.



Genoa FC Goalkeeping Trainer Gianluca Spinelli (Photo courtesy of G. Spinelli)



- Coaches now move to flank positions to receive clearances from back passes. Goalkeeping coach varies service (either foot, ground and air balls) to keeper who must take one touch away from pressure before playing balls to waiting coaches.



Double Save: From a starting position (1), goalkeeper makes diving save (2) of a ball played on ground by the first coach, returns ball and sprints around cone and through gate to set himself (3) before diving to save (4) from coach serving volleyed shots on goal made of cones.

FRIDAY

AM: Field Session: Handball games with variations, strength & agility session in gym, aerobic fitness



Handball Games with Variations (each variation played for about 5 minutes)

Basic Game: Players use their hands to progress the ball down the field in the following manner:

- Players cannot run with the ball in their hands so must pass and move without the ball.
- Passes from one team can be intercepted by the hands of the other team but balls played into the 6 yard box (an attempted assist) can only be headed clear by field players.
- If the ball touches the ground, whichever team touched it last loses possession.
- Goalkeepers play as normally.

Variation 1: As above, but passes can only be a volley kicked from hands.

Variation 2: Ball passed on ground now with feet but teammates can only score from a header or volley.

Variation 3: Regular game, but players can only score with one touch. (Focus on quality of final pass.)

Variation 4: Team starts play with a volley from hands but only headers are allowed after that.

Gym Session - (Session was similar to the Wednesday gym strength and agility session as described above).



Aerobic Fitness Session: Genoa FC utilizes the Polar Team² Pro heart-rate analysis system consisting of wristwatch monitors and transmitter chest bands worn by each player, a laptop docking system for uploading information, and software that records and analyzes individual and player training performance including time in target zones, energy expenditure, training load, recovery rate and heart rate. It is used to track, monitor and plan training sessions. On this day the players were training (lap running on track) to two different duration levels. Those who had played at least half of the friendly game the day before worked in three four-minute blocks and those that played less or not at all performed in six four-minute blocks. In both cases, the objective was the same:

- Start jogging with the goal of reaching 92 percent of maximum heart rate (MHR) and hold for the remaining time left in their four-minute block.
- Once the four minutes was finished they could jog slowly or walk until their heart rates returned to 70 percent of their MHR, at which point they were to return to their 92 percent level and repeat for the prescribed amount of time.
- Results logged by the individual player's heart monitor wristwatches are then downloaded and analyzed for performance on the fitness coach's laptop to provide a graphic summary of each player's performance.



Additional information:

Player Tracking and Evaluation System: Each player is evaluated at the start of each season by the club medical and fitness staff as to his fitness levels in the following areas:

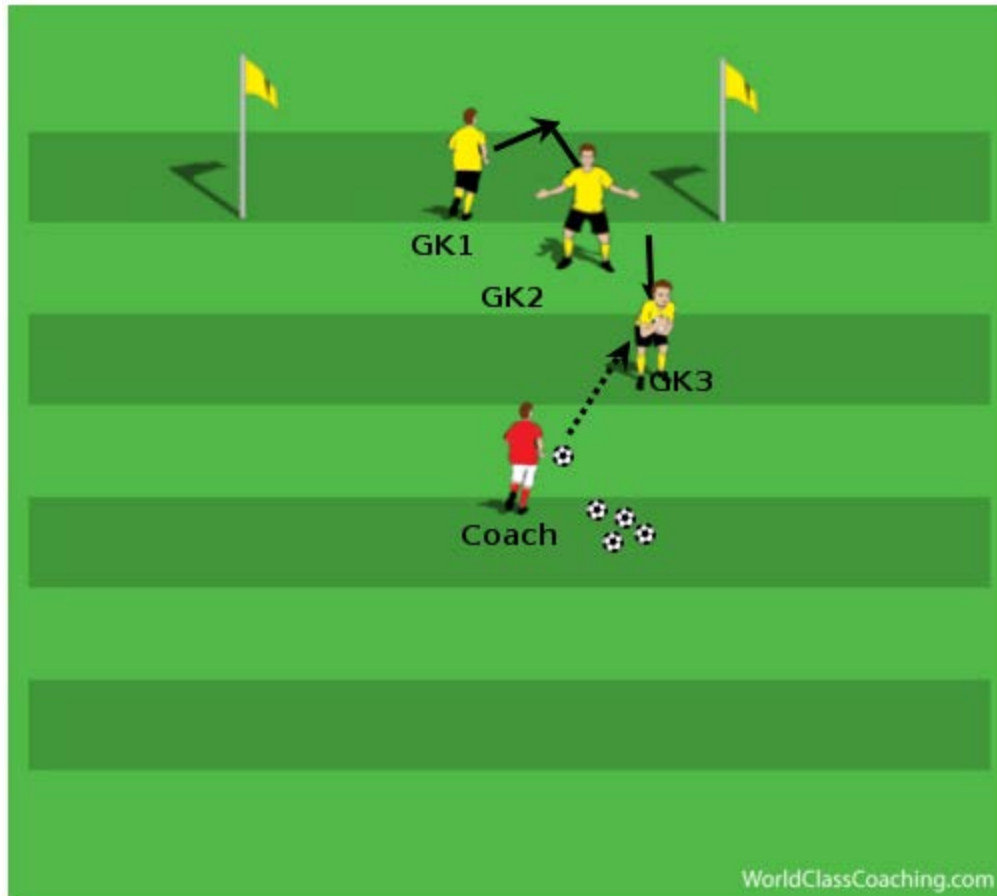
- Aerobic and nonaerobic capacity.
- Local muscle endurance (number of exercise repetitions before failure).
- Leg power (force times velocity) as measured on leg sled machine equipped with power meters.
- Vertical jump.

These areas are regularly measured over the course of the season. Each of the above areas is also assigned a weighted score which is then aggregated to create an overall fitness score shared with the players.

Film Analysis: All the games of the first team as well as games of upcoming opponents are first reviewed and edited by the coaching staff using the Dartfish video software system. A full game is reduced to approximately 30 minutes for the review of head coach Gasperini after which it is again reduced to eight to 10 minutes total which is then shown to the players. Scouting of opponents focuses on attacking tendencies, defensive deficiencies and set plays.

Goalkeeping Training Session with Gianluca Spinelli, *Preparatore Portieri* (goalkeeper trainer), an assistant coach and two goalkeepers.

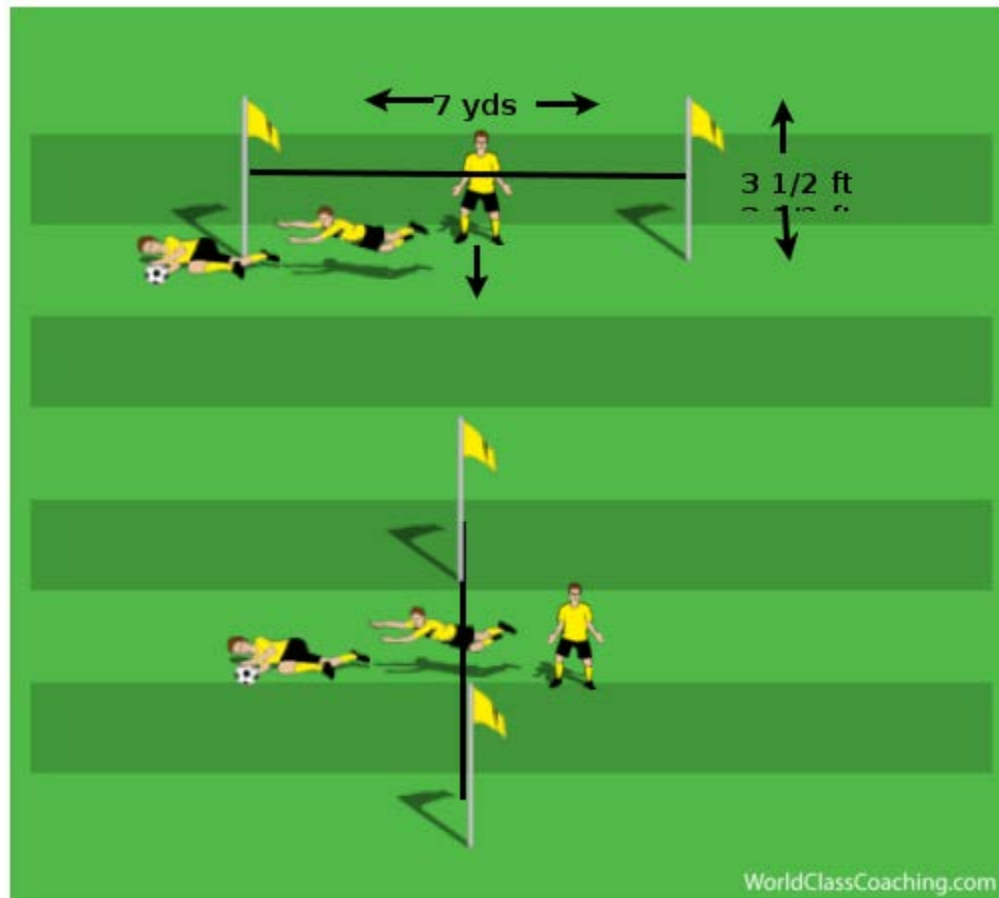




Warmup: Warmup consisted of a series of exercises:

- Footwork (agility work through cones).
- Core-strength exercises (one- and two-handed saves from seated position; performing a sit-up while returning ball).
- Reaction work (goalkeeper with back to coach turns to make a reaction save from thrown or kicked ball as illustrated).

Diving Technique: The goalkeepers worked with a large “hurdle” constructed of flags and a tape constructed as illustrated to focus on footwork, agility and dive extension.



In the first example as show above, keepers stood behind the tape while the goalkeeping coach prepared to hand serve the ball to one side or the other. The keeper moved toward the ball, ducking under the rope while the ball was served and then extended powerfully to make the save. Keepers were coached to push off powerfully with the leg closest to the ball and to dive forward as well as sideways to reduce the angle of the shooter.

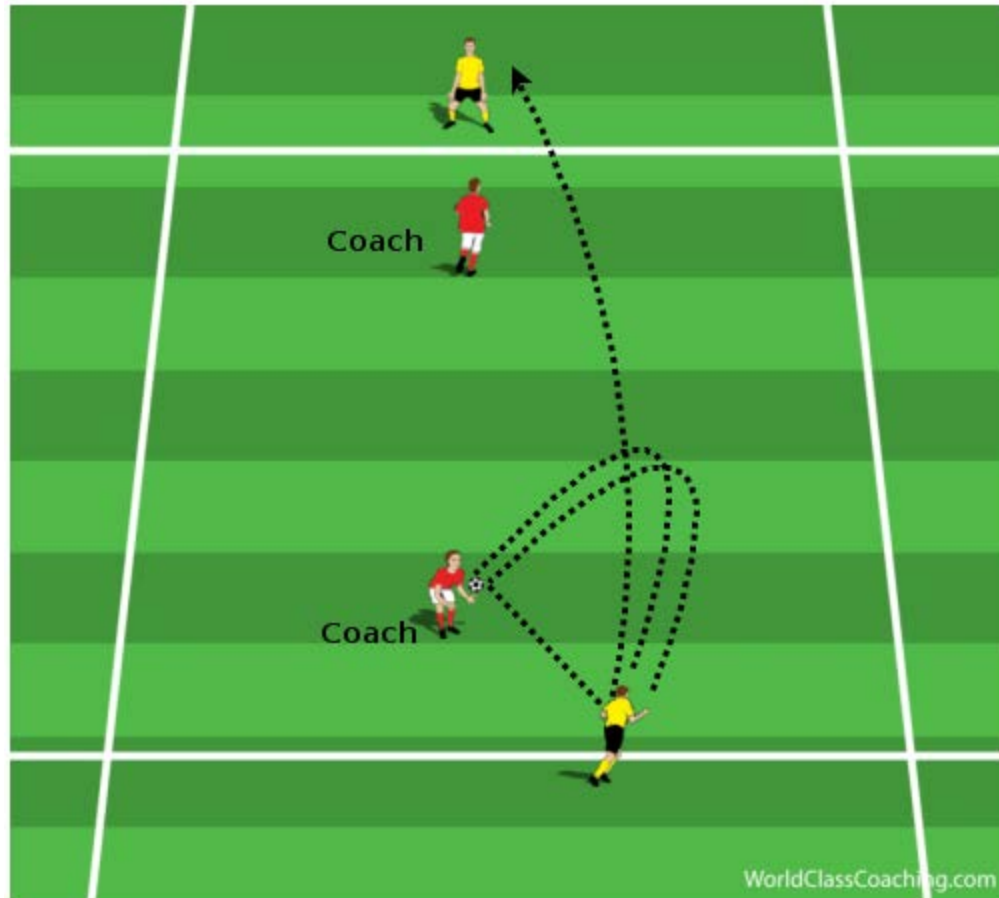
In the second example, the goalkeepers stood to the side of the hurdle and focused on longer dives to save balls driven on the ground from the coach positioned six yards away. Each keeper made four saves, alternating sides, before resting.

Saves Followed by Quick Clearances: Goalkeepers moved into a bigger work area to combine making saves with accurate kicked (punt or drop-kicked) clearances to the resting goalkeeper 40 yards away.

These exercises were as follows:



- Starting with back to coach, keeper turns to save a low drive from the first coach. He gets up and navigates past second coach acting as an opposition player and then makes a quick and accurate clearance up field as to simulate the start of a quick counterattack.
- Variation: Same as prior exercise but now, after making a diving save from a ball thrown by nearest coach, goalkeeper regains his feet to receive a back pass from farthest coach. Goalkeeper must control the ball to one side of “opponent” providing limited pressure and then clear to resting goalkeeper who is upfield.



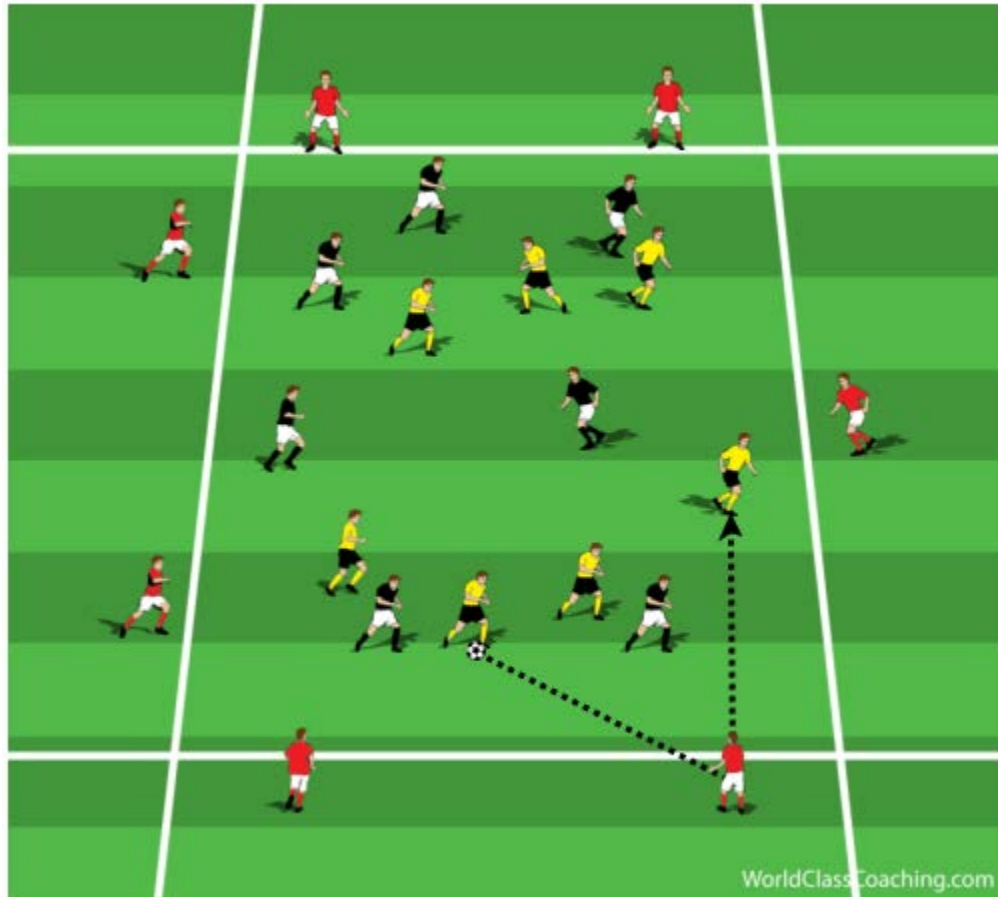
Dealing with Back Passes: To improve the goalkeeper’s control of back passes played back at various heights. The goalkeepers and coaches arranged themselves as above.

Exercise begins with the coach, about 10 yards from the player, serving a ball from his hands to the first keeper’s feet, thigh, chest or head. At that point the first goalkeeper would play the ball back for him and coach to juggle three or four times using different parts of the body. On the coach’s command the goalkeeper would volley the ball over to the opposite goalkeeper for him to trap the ball and repeat the process with the other coach. After a period of time, the distance between the goalkeepers was increased to 40 yards.

The last variation of this exercise ended with the coach playing his last touch to the feet of the keeper before following his pass to pressure the keeper, forcing him on to his weaker foot to first practice controlling ground balls away from pressure and then long clearances.

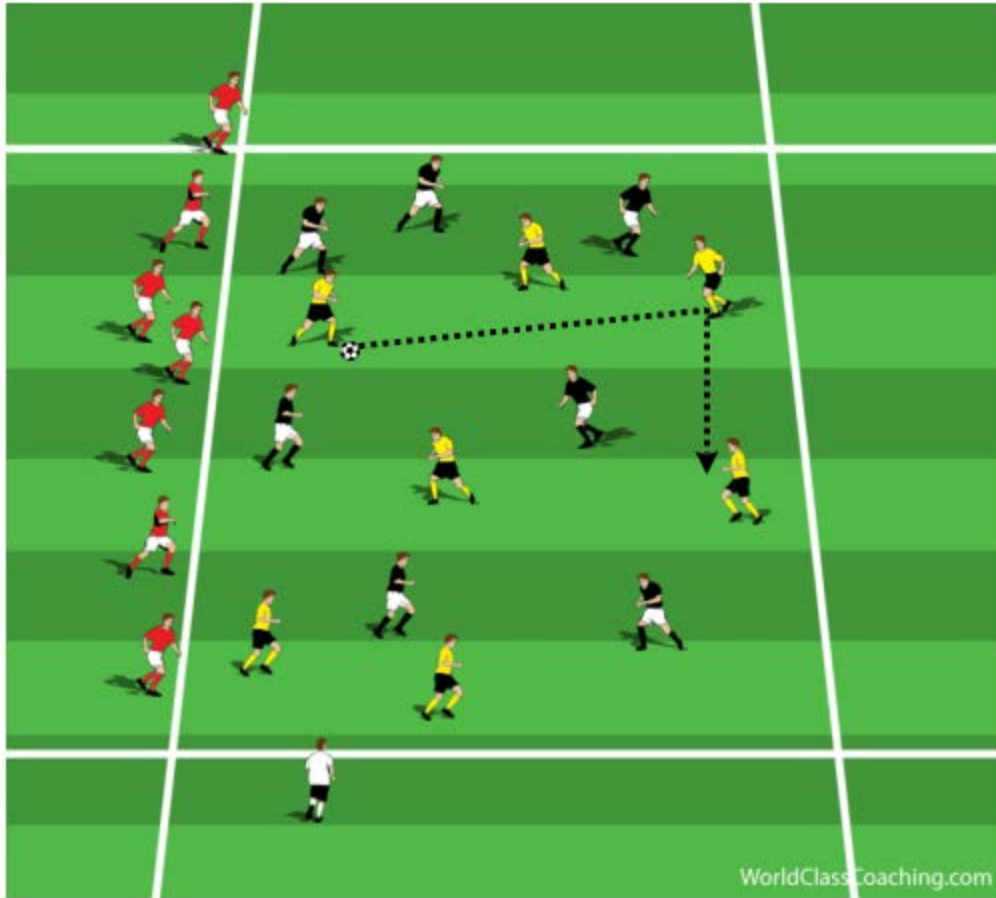
FRIDAY PM

Genoa FC Primavera Training Session: While the first team had the afternoon off, the *Primavera* (U20s) trained at the nearby training complex of top youth club ASD Multedo. Training was conducted by Primavera head coach Ivan Jurić.



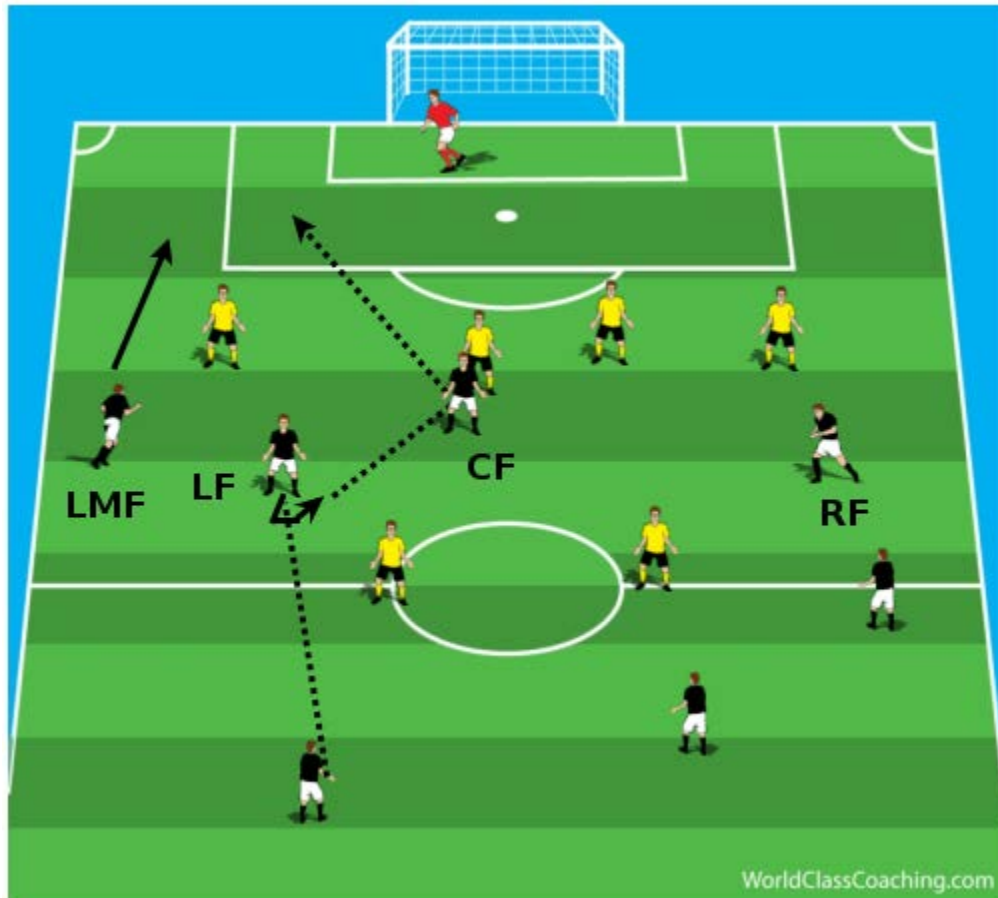
Primavera Warm-Up; Technical & Tactical Games

7 v 7 (+7): The team with the ball (yellow) seeks to retain possession by passing to their teammates inside the grid or to the seven (red) resting players positioned outside the grid. To ensure that resting players stayed mobile and mentally active, they not allowed to pass to another player on the outside of the grid or the player they just received the ball from, but are required play to another of the yellow field players. Upon turnover of possession the resting players join the new team in possession.



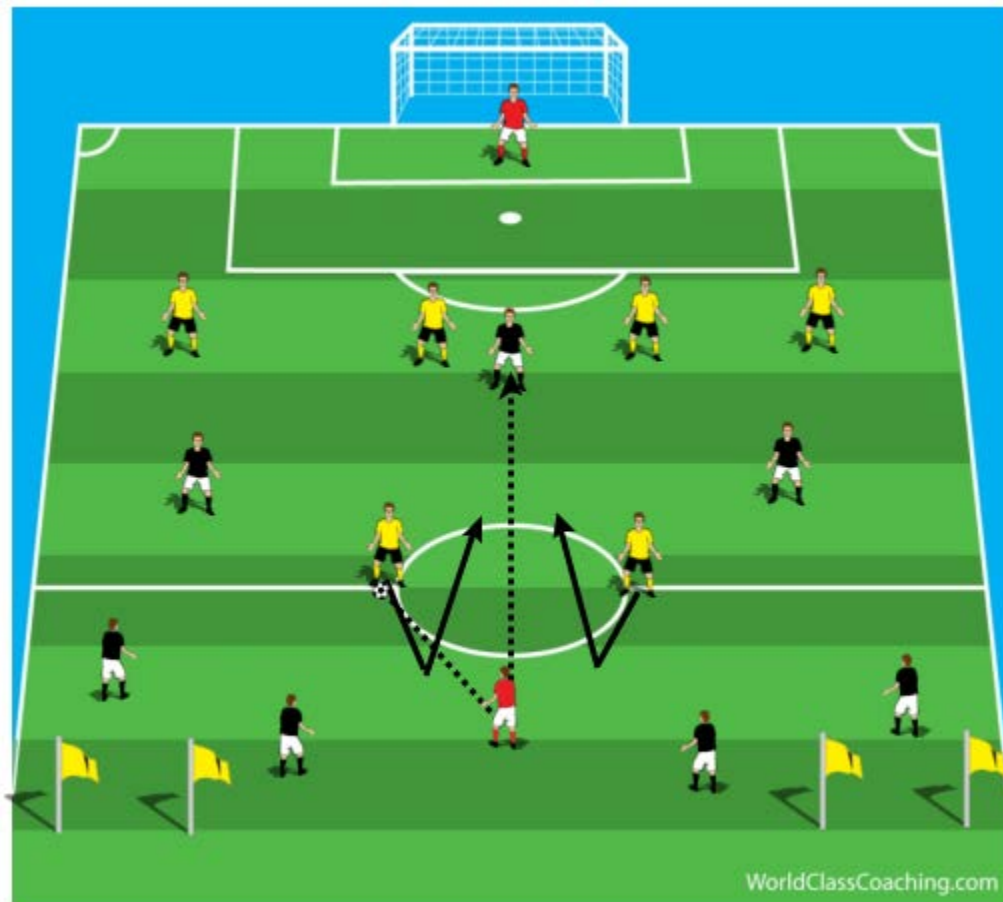
Three teams of 7 v 7: The defensive team (black jerseys) works hard to regain possession of the ball. When they do so, they play to the resting team and sprint off the field to themselves have a rest. The resting team (in red) now sprints on the field and attempts to retain possession of the ball while the team that originally lost the ball (yellow jerseys) becomes the defending team.

Attacking Patterns: The Primavera attacking patterns practices were similar to those practiced by the first team with a couple of variations as illustrated:



Primavera Attacking Pattern 1: A midfield player passes to the LF who controls the ball and turns to the inside with one movement before passing to the CF. The CF plays the ball first time into space down the left flank for the LMF to run on to.

Offense v Defense: Seven black attackers play against six yellow defenders plus a goalkeeper. Play starts when one of the yellow midfield players plays a ball to the coach and immediately moves to close down the coach. The coach plays a one- or two-touch pass into one of the black forwards. Yellow midfield players must now sprint back to compact the play and help support the central defenders by applying pressure for the back. The game continues with the offense training different patterns and movements and the defensive team working as a unit to pressure the ball, compact play and use the offside law to their benefit. When yellow defenders won they ball they could attack two smaller flank goals by dribbling into them or passing through them once within 15 yards.



The session ended with a gentle cool down and players stretching individually on mats.



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