



Create & Attack

If you want your midfielders to create scoring chances and spark swift counterattacks, coach them how to play like Manchester United's latest signing Juan Mata

Jose Mourinho's decision to sell one of Chelsea's most creative players to rivals Manchester United came as a shock to many and the stats explain why. Juan Mata scored 33 goals and made 51 assists for the Blues in all competitions during his time at Stamford Bridge and he was twice voted the club's Player Of The Season. But Chelsea's loss will ultimately be United's gain, as Mata is precisely the sort of creative midfielder that David Moyes has missed this season.

Mourinho let Mata go because he had concerns over the player's willingness to carry out his defensive duties, but that won't trouble his new manager for now. The Spaniard has been brought to Old Trafford to provide goals – and he duly delivered with an assist for Ashley Young in his United debut against Cardiff.

Mata is a left-footed playmaker. He built his career back in Spain on the left but he is no longer seen as a left winger. He can play centrally but Moyes has been experimenting with him on the right as an inverted winger. In contrast

to his new United team-mate Antonio Valencia, who is expected to go past his man, Mata comes inside and looks to play penetrating passes.

He is not alone, as there is something of a trend in the Premier League for bright, compact left-footed wizards such as Cazorla, Ozil and Silva. All four are technically superb with excellent close control and vision but Mata is arguably the best of them all. Last season his passing accuracy hit 85 per cent, he created 95 chances and some 28 assists. In short, he is the sort of player that can easily help a side rediscover its cutting edge.

If your midfielders use the following activities they can learn to think and play like Mata. He has a quick brain and when the opposition play breaks down, he is already on the move, looking to turn the situation into a swift counterattack. Our first drill coaches this style and encourages players to capitalise on the breakaway with quick decision-making and sharp passing.

The second drill is designed to show

your players how to emulate Mata's imagination around the penalty box with expertly weighted passes and well-timed runs. To click properly, these two skills need to be perfectly aligned, with the man with the ball exploiting the gaps by playing a slick pass right to a player who is hitting space at just the right moment. Put the two together and your team will become a major threat.

Words by:
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Activities by:
David Clarke

"Game intelligence, that's the key. Juan's very clever, finds space and technically he's very good. He has good vision and scores goals. These players are difficult to find. He likes to play between the lines, behind the midfielders and in front of the centre backs"

– Rafa Benitez sums up the versatility of Juan Mata



End-To-End Attack

Use this fast and exciting training session to teach your players to recognise when a counterattack is on. It encourages quick breakaway attacks and quick decision-making

WHY USE IT

Players get chances to score on the counterattack and they must be quick to take advantage. Often young players will not see the overload when they receive the ball in situations that they need to exploit fast.

SET UP

Set up an area of 50x40 yards with a goal at each end. We've used 14 players in this session. You need bibs, balls, cones and goals.

HOW TO PLAY

Split your players into a 6v6 plus two goalkeepers. One team can score in both goals while the other team must defend both goals and make six passes to score. The keepers play for the team defending the two goals.

Play for six minutes and then rest for two minutes before swapping the roles of the teams – play four games so both teams attack twice.

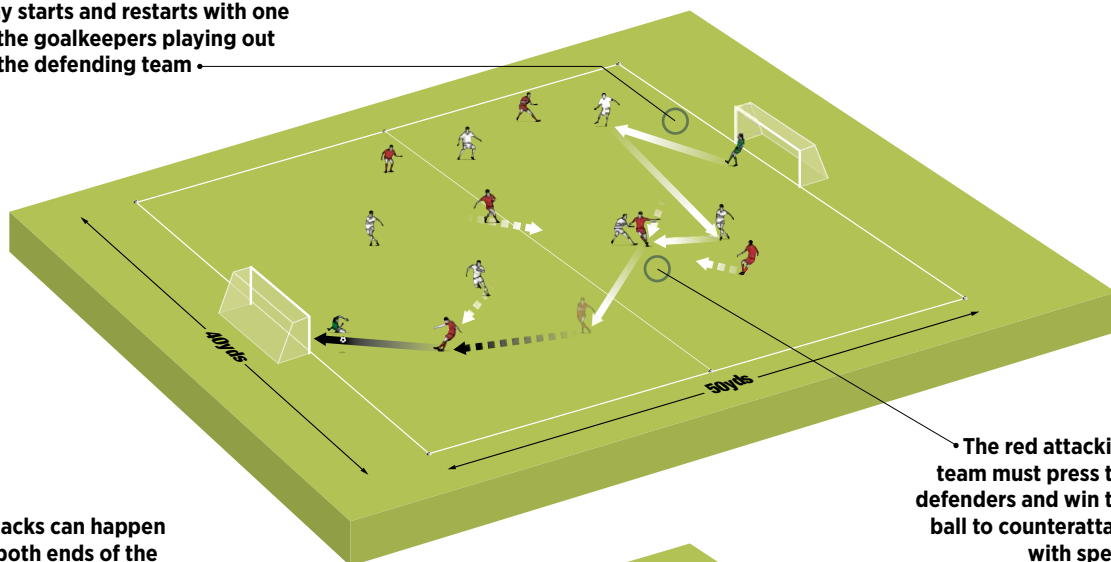
Allow the players a couple of minutes at the start of each game to discuss their tactics. Discuss the choice of tactics at the end of the session.

TECHNIQUE

Players must understand the game and that they are not attacking just one goal without seeing the overload at the other end. Tactics and shape are important, both with and without the ball. Speed of play is vital when teams win the ball.

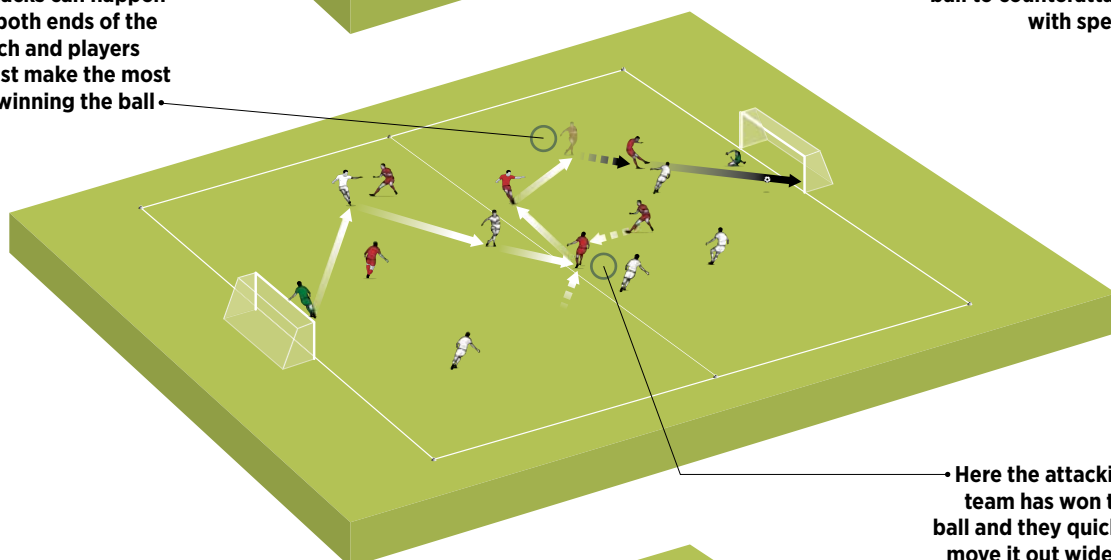
Activity by: David Clarke

Play starts and restarts with one of the goalkeepers playing out to the defending team

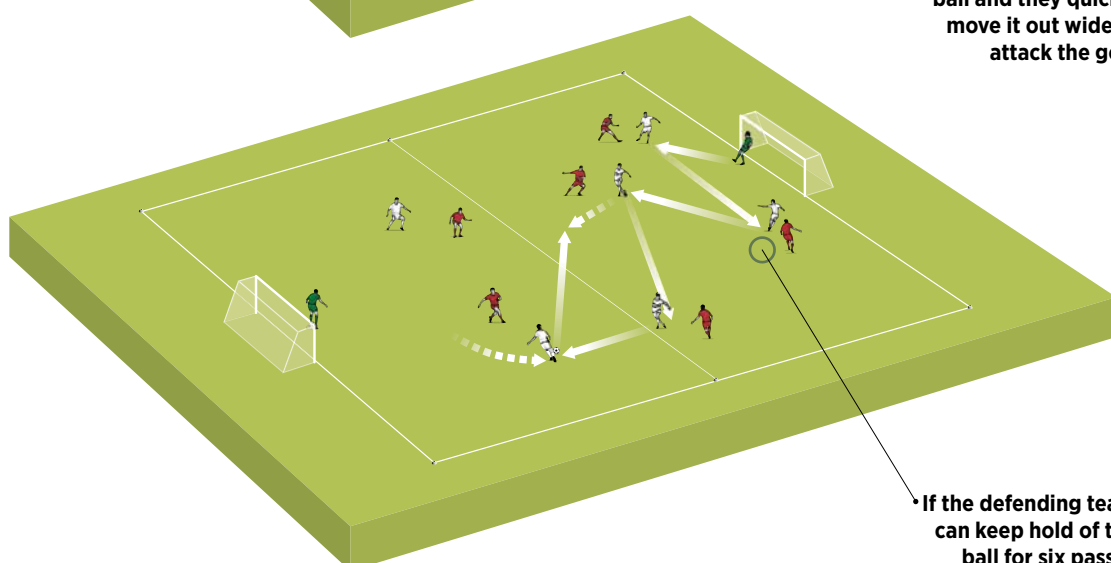


The red attacking team must press the defenders and win the ball to counterattack with speed

Attacks can happen at both ends of the pitch and players must make the most of winning the ball



Here the attacking team has won the ball and they quickly move it out wide to attack the goal



If the defending team can keep hold of the ball for six passes they get a point

Player movement

Ball movement

Run with ball

Shot

Pull Defences Apart

Encourage your players to be as creative as Juan Mata around the penalty area and teach them the importance of a well-weighted pass and a well-timed run

WHY USE IT

Creativity around the box is vital to ensuring the creation of scoring chances. The type and accuracy of pass are key, as is a good first touch from players receiving the ball. This session will help players perfect the timing and angles of their runs to support the playmakers.

SET UP

Use an area half the size of your usual pitch. Put a normal goal at the penalty area end and place three target goals at the opposite end. We've used 14 players in the session.

HOW TO PLAY

The team attacking the main goal has eight players in a 3-2-3 formation and the defending team has five players in a 1-2-2 formation.

Attacks start from one of the small goals, taking turns to start from each one, so attacks will go down the two wings and down the middle. The first pass must be into those areas each time.

If the defenders win the ball they can try to score in one of the three target goals. Rotate positions regularly.

TECHNIQUE

This is about exploiting areas around the penalty box with clever passes, good skills and movement from an attacking overload situation. It involves three different attacking situations to give match-style variety.

Activity by: David Clarke

Play starts with a pass out from one of the small goals and should start down that side of the pitch.

Here the attacking players can use their skills to create a goalscoring chance.

Using different tactics, the attacker drops short and plays a quick combination to create space behind the defence.

A well-timed and weighted chip drops for the attacker to shoot into the goal.

If the defending team wins the ball they can try to score in one of the three target goals.

Player movement 

Ball movement 

Run with ball 

Shot 