

# The One-Nil Game

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theory

**This is probably my favourite small sided game. This is more of a possession game, played like a standard 4v4 game but with a twist. Because of the nature of the game I limit each match to 5 minutes, but may play 2 or 3 games one after the other.**

*"We didn't need a referee; we accepted the rules of the game and stuck by them. For us not to have done so would have spoilt the game for everyone. It taught us that you can't go about doing what you want because there are others to think of and if you don't stick to the rules, you spoil it for everyone else. Of course, that was not a conscious thought at the time, but ~~looking back~~ those kick about games on the waste ground did prepare us for life."*

**Stanley Matthews**



*"For me, the ball is a diamond. If you have something that precious you don't get rid of it, you offer it."*

**Glenn Hoddle**

*"Keeping possession is a way for a team to get a breather."*

**Gordon Taylor PFA**



### Organization

- Age Group – U11s to adults
- Pitch Size 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

### Progression

The basic rule of the game is that you can only win by one goal. The game begins as a normal 4 v 4 game with the usual rules. When a goal is scored, the team that scored must just try and keep possession and can't score into the goal. If they do, the goal is disallowed and a goal kick ensues. If the other team then equalise and make it 1-1, either team can then score to make it 2-1. The team leading then just has to keep possession. This is an excellent possession game and also allows a team to play out time by keeping possession, which is why I limit the game to just 5 minutes. As well as possession, teams also have to attack with speed when needing to score and the game also focuses on transition.

# The Pressing Game

theory

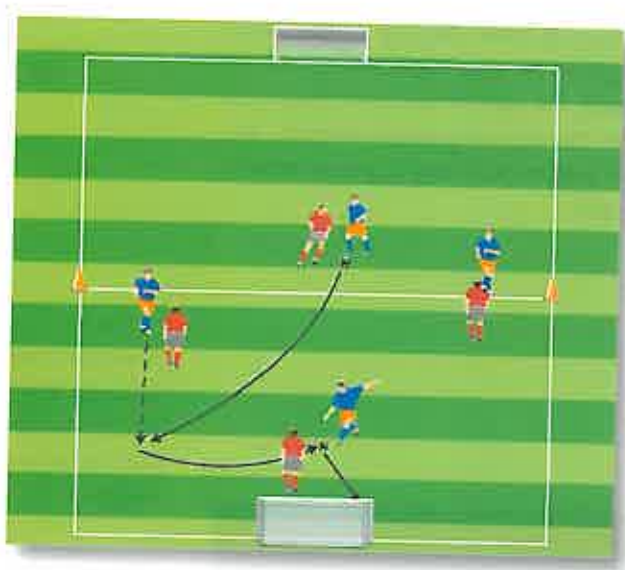
A study in 1988 of 16 international matches showed that possession was won 13% of the time in the attacking third. A staggering 66% of goals scored were from this 13%. This game can have a big effect on how your team performs and is about encouraging the players to defend from the front. It is quite a high tempo game. It is also good for conditioning and developing a physical and mental toughness.



*"I would describe what the journalists call 'total football', as 'pressing football'. To me, this expression seems to put the emphasis on the type of football I was trying to create with Ajax and with the Dutch national team in the 1974 World Cup. What I wanted to create was a game in which all ten outfield players pressed forward all the time – even when we didn't have the ball!"*

**Rinus Michels**





### Organization

- Age Group – U8s to adults
- Pitch Size 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch, with a half way line marking. (you can use two traffic cones at each side of the pitch)
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

### Progression

The game is played as a standard small sided game with one condition. If a team wins the ball in the oppositions half and then goes on to score before the ball has left that half, they are awarded two goals. A goal scored any other way counts as just one goal. Very popular with the players and evokes good team spirit. The attacking team need to work as a unit and both press and close down defenders.

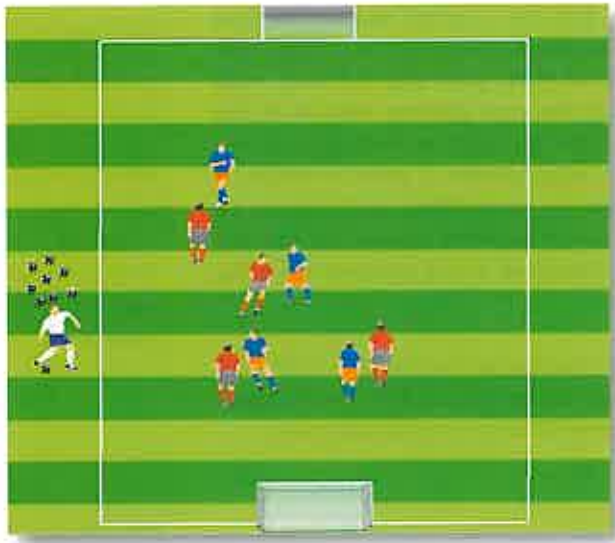
# The 2nd Ball Game

theory

Football is not only about attractive skills like dribbling and shooting, it is also about the physical side, winning headers and reacting to the 2nd ball. This game is also good for team bonding and is an excellent physical work out.

*"We used to play with a tennis ball on concrete and we used to tackle. I remember my mom bought me an England tracksuit, and I ripped it up doing a slide tackle in the playground. I was gutted. Nightmare if you're a defender you have to tackle – its part of the game. I love to defend. If the ball is there to be won, I'll go and win it."*  
**Johnathan Woodgate**





### Organization

- Age Group U15s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

### Progression

The coach has a number of balls and stands on the side of the pitch. He starts the game by throwing or drop kicking the ball onto the pitch so that players have to challenge in the air to win the ball. The two main issues are winning the aerial challenge and reacting to the knock down or 2nd ball. Every time the ball goes out of play whether for a throw in, goal kick or corner, the coach starts proceedings again. Play for a set time or until the balls have all been used and then free play for 5 minutes. It is a good game to help players become more confident at challenging for high balls.

# The 6 Second Transition Game

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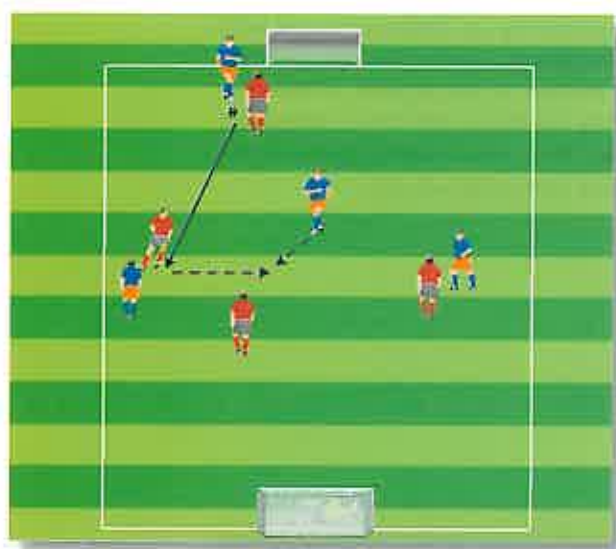
theory

Teams are at their most vulnerable in terms of losing the ball, in the first few seconds after gaining possession. It is this transition period that we are looking at, both in terms of winning the ball back quickly and then keeping it. The key is the first six seconds after losing the ball. This period is when the opposition have not yet switched from defensive to possession mode. The other key period is those six seconds after you have won the ball back and the need to maintain possession during that critical period when your team is changing shape and finding space (going wide and deep).

*"Everybody says that set plays win most games, but I think it is more about transitions."*

**Jose Mourinho**





### Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 30/40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

### Progression

In this game when a team lose possession they have 6 seconds to win the ball back (the coach counts this out). If they win it back in that time they are awarded a point (a goal). The idea is to double team and work frantically to get the ball back in the allotted time frame. If they fail to achieve this they must then go to the centre and make sure they close all the gaps and limit the space for the opposition. If they do win the ball back within 6 seconds, if they are high up the pitch they must look for an immediate goal scoring opportunity. If they are in a more crowded midfield area they must look for an 'out-man' who can get hold of the ball and maintain possession through the crucial 6 second period. This may well be a sideways pass or a backwards pass to a player in plenty of space.

In the excellent book by Patrick Barclay, 'Mourinho, Anatomy of a Winner', Jose talks about doing a lot of work on 'keep ball'. This was based on Mourinho's theory of possession for possession's sake. All teams need rest periods, and it is much better to do this when your team has possession. Other than the 6 second condition the rest of the game is a standard small sided game. Goals can also be scored in the normal way.



# The Playground Game

theory

I was told about this game by John Allpress who heads up player development at the FA. He is a very progressive coach with excellent ideas and this game replicates the 'chaos' that we all took for granted in the school playground at lunch time, which was actually a great way to learn. I am taken back to an age of tom trousers, scuffed shoes, dodgy haircuts, detention, the cane, gobstoppers, catapults and Jumpers for goal posts.

The great thing about that era, when street football was king, was that it was the children's game. The children made up the rules, designated the pitch size, picked the teams and refereed the game. The kids had to use their imagination and make all the decisions. It was the informality of the game and the various obstacles children had to overcome while playing, such as a number of games being played at once in the playground that bred generations of footballers who really felt the rhythm and heart beat of the game. The game is in fact two games. One game is 4 v 4, playing from North to South, the other game plays across that pitch playing East to West and is also 4 v 4.



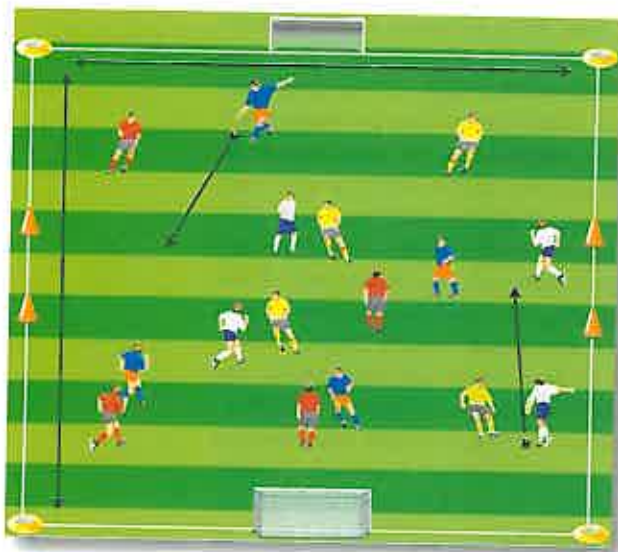
*"At the hub of this ordinary life was football, a love affair that began, as so many others have, with street games that started after school and finished after dark. My first organized games were played at St Philomena's Primary School and St Joseph's Secondary School, where we honed our skills and scuffed our shoes, playing with a tennis ball at lunchtime in the yard"*

**Tony Cascarino**

*"I knew I was better at football than the others in the playground, although the teachers just looked at my size and that was against me from the start."*

**Aian Ball**

*(Ball was never selected for his school side, despite winning a world cup winners medal some 6 years later at the age of 21.)*



### Organization

- Age Group U8s to adult
- Pitch sizes – 40 x 40 Or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams - 4
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals (But you can use a variety and have say big goals, north to south and small goals, east to west)

### Progression

The main aim of this game is to see how players adapt to a chaotic situation and how they problem solve. This can be made even harder by wearing no bibs. The players have to get their heads up to identify who is on their team, who the opposition is, which ball is theirs and who is playing in the other game. When we have played this game with children, the first few minutes are a little confused, but very quickly the kids sort themselves out and play. I don't do any coaching I just observe and see how the kids solve the problems we have given them. At the end of the game I just ask them questions. Kids are very resilient and will just about cope with anything you throw at them. Their problem solving skills are probably better than you think, so this is a perfect set up to judge how they are coping with these issues. As coaches we need to let go and allow the kids to find their own solutions before we interfere and do their thinking for them.