



EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

CREATIVITY

SHARINGOALS

THE SYSTEMIC COACHING MANUAL
FOR FOOTBALL COACHES
AROUND THE WORLD

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1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Scientific research

Creativity in football is the ability of players to find novel, effective, and unexpected solutions to game situations. It combines perception, imagination, decision-making, and technical execution to produce actions that surprise opponents and create advantages for the team.

Creativity is not random — it emerges from knowledge, experience, confidence, and freedom within structure.

1.1.1. Definition

Scientific literature describes creativity as a multidimensional construct involving originality, usefulness, and adaptive problem solving. Across psychology, education and sport science, several widely accepted definitions emphasise that creative behaviour must be both novel and functional within a specific context.

A widely cited definition comes from Robert J. Sternberg and Todd I. Lubart (1991), who describe creativity as the ability to produce work that is both original and appropriate. According to their Investment Theory of Creativity, creative performance results from the interaction of intellectual abilities, knowledge, thinking styles, personality, motivation and environment. This definition highlights that creativity is not an isolated talent but a combination of cognitive and contextual factors that can be developed through learning processes.

In sport science, Daniel Memmert (2015) defines creativity as the ability to generate multiple, flexible and original solutions to game-specific problems. Memmert emphasises that creativity in team sports emerges through the interaction of perception, decision-making and motor execution. Creative players are able to adapt their actions to dynamic and unpredictable situations, producing solutions that are both effective and unexpected.

From a cognitive perspective, Mark A. Runco (2012) describes creativity as the capacity to produce ideas or behaviours that are both novel and useful, emphasising that usefulness is a necessary condition for creativity. In football, creative actions are therefore not only surprising but also contribute to solving tactical problems successfully.

Across these definitions, three core characteristics of creativity can be identified:

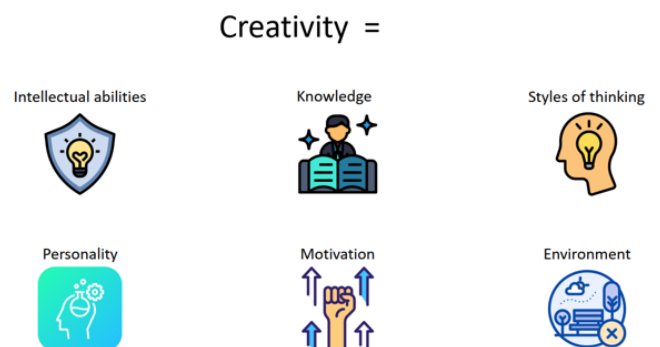
- Originality – producing new or uncommon solutions
- Functionality – solutions must be effective in achieving a goal
- Adaptability – solutions must respond to specific situational demands

In football, creativity can therefore be understood as the ability to produce adaptive and effective solutions in dynamic game situations that create advantages for the player and the team (Memmert, 2015; Roca et al., 2018).

1.1.2. Scientific Research and Models

Creativity in football can be understood as the ability to generate original, functional and context-appropriate solutions to dynamic game situations. Scientific research shows that creativity is not a single ability but emerges through the interaction of cognitive processes, motivation, personal characteristics and environmental influences (Sternberg & Lubart, 1991; Memmert, 2015).

In football, creativity is expressed through flexible decision-making, adaptive tactical behaviour and the capacity to produce effective yet unpredictable actions under time pressure (Roca et al., 2021; Rominger et al., 2021).



Creativity Model by Sternberg and Lubart (1991, modified from Amelang and Bartussek, 2006)

These components do not operate independently but influence each other dynamically, suggesting that creativity can be systematically supported through educational and coaching processes.

Intellectual abilities refer to the capacity to analyse situations, recognise patterns and evaluate possible solutions. In football, players constantly interpret complex visual and spatial information, such as the positioning of teammates and opponents, available space and time constraints. Research shows that creative players demonstrate more effective perceptual-cognitive processes, allowing them to identify multiple possible solutions and adapt decisions more flexibly to the evolving game situation (Roca et al., 2018; Roca et al., 2021).

Knowledge plays an important role because creative solutions build upon a rich base of experiences. Players who have been exposed to a wide variety of tactical situations develop broader game understanding and can draw from a larger repertoire of possible actions. Studies on perceptual-cognitive expertise indicate that experience in diverse and representative learning environments enhances players' ability to generate flexible solutions in complex game situations (Memmert, 2015; Santos et al., 2022).

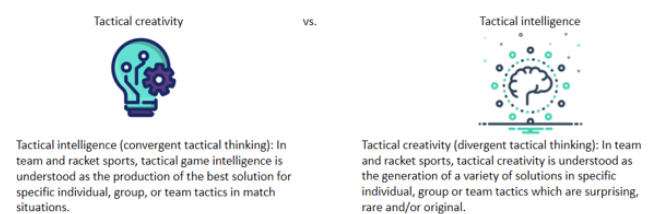
Thinking styles describe how individuals prefer to approach problems and process information. Some players prefer structured and predictable solutions, while others are more inclined to explore alternative approaches. Exposure to different tactical systems, playing philosophies and game formats increases cognitive flexibility and supports the development of creative decision-making (Memmert, 2015). Research in skill acquisition suggests that variability in practice conditions promotes adaptive behaviour and enhances the ability to transfer learned solutions to new situations (Davids et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2022).

Personality characteristics influence the willingness to take risks and attempt new solutions. Creative players often demonstrate openness to new experiences and the courage to try actions that may initially lead to mistakes. In football, creative actions such as unexpected passes or dribbling movements often involve uncertainty and require players to tolerate the possibility of losing possession. Research indicates that supportive learning environments increase players' willingness to take initiative and explore innovative solutions (Memmert & Roth, 2007).

Motivation is another key component influencing creativity. Intrinsic motivation encourages players to experiment with new techniques, movements and tactical solutions. Enjoyment, curiosity and interest in discovering new possibilities increase the likelihood of creative behaviour during training and competition (Sternberg & Lubart, 1991; Memmert, 2015). Studies suggest that players who experience autonomy in

learning environments show higher engagement in exploratory behaviour, supporting the development of creative performance (Santos et al., 2022).

The environment plays a central role in creativity development. Learning environments characterised by variability, diversification and nonlinear practice conditions provide more opportunities for players to explore different solutions (Davids et al., 2013). Small-sided games, modified rules and game-realistic constraints increase the number of decision-making situations and encourage players to continuously adapt their behaviour (Memmert, 2015). Research comparing different developmental contexts has shown that players exposed to less prescriptive and more exploratory training conditions demonstrate higher levels of tactical creativity (Raab et al., 2001).



(Daniel Memmert, Teaching Tactical Creativity in Sport, 2015)

Both processes are closely interconnected in football performance. Players must quickly interpret game situations and adapt their behaviour in response to the continuously changing interaction between teammates, opponents and environmental constraints (Roca et al., 2021).

Neuroscientific research provides additional support for the interaction between perception, cognition and action in creative football performance. Brain activation patterns observed during the perception of real match situations have been shown to predict creative task performance, indicating that creative decision-making is closely linked to the integration of perceptual and cognitive processes (Rominger et al., 2021). These findings highlight that creativity in football is grounded in the ability to interpret complex environmental information and transform it into effective motor actions.

Overall, scientific models of creativity indicate that creative football performance emerges from the dynamic interaction between individual capabilities, motivation and environmental conditions. Coaching processes that provide diverse experiences, encourage exploration and support adaptive problem solving can significantly contribute to the development of tactical creativity. Training environments that include variability, representative game situations and

opportunities for decision-making support players in developing flexible and innovative solutions that are essential for successful performance in modern football (Memmert, 2015; Santos et al., 2022; Davids et al., 2013).

1.1.3. Impact on performance

Creativity is a key performance factor in football because the game constantly presents complex, dynamic, and time-pressured situations that require players to generate effective and often unpredictable solutions. Creative players demonstrate a higher ability to adapt their decisions to changing tactical contexts, allowing teams to exploit spaces, destabilize defensive structures, and create goal-scoring opportunities (Memmert, 2015). Creativity therefore contributes directly to offensive effectiveness and tactical flexibility, both of which are essential for success in modern football.

Empirical research shows that creative players display superior perceptual-cognitive skills that allow them to recognise patterns earlier and identify a broader range of potential actions during gameplay (Roca et al., 2021). In particular, studies investigating visual search behaviour in skilled football players demonstrate that highly creative players scan the environment more effectively and detect teammates in advantageous positions earlier than less creative players (Roca et al., 2018). This expanded attentional focus enables players to generate original and functional solutions under pressure, improving decision quality and increasing the likelihood of successful actions.

Further research confirms that creative decision-making in football is associated with fluency (number of solutions), flexibility (variety of solutions), and originality (novelty of solutions), all of which are key indicators of high-level performance (Memmert, 2015). Players who are able to generate multiple tactical options are less predictable for opponents and better able to adapt to defensive pressure. This unpredictability increases the probability of breaking defensive lines and creating scoring opportunities (Robberechts et al., 2023).

Neuroscientific studies provide additional evidence for the performance relevance of creativity in football. Brain activation patterns during the observation of real game situations have been shown to predict creative performance in goal-scoring tasks (Rominger et al., 2021). These findings suggest that creative players process game situations differently, integrating perceptual and cognitive information more efficiently in order to produce effective solutions. The ability to rapidly combine perception, decision-making, and motor execution is particularly important in high-speed

game situations where time constraints limit analytical reasoning (Raab et al., 2001).

Studies comparing different training environments demonstrate that players exposed to variable and game-realistic situations show higher levels of creative performance than players trained predominantly through repetitive and prescriptive drills (Santos et al., 2022). Training approaches that include diversified movement tasks, small-sided games, and nonlinear practice conditions increase players' adaptability and support the development of creative motor solutions. These findings support ecological dynamics approaches, which emphasise that creativity emerges through interaction between the player, the task, and the environment (Davids et al., 2013).

Research also indicates that creative players contribute to overall team effectiveness by improving collective tactical adaptability. Teams that encourage players to explore multiple solutions show greater flexibility in responding to different match scenarios, such as compact defensive opponents or high pressing situations (Memmert & Roth, 2007). Tactical creativity therefore enhances a team's capacity to solve unpredictable problems during competition and increases resilience under pressure.

From a talent development perspective, creativity has been identified as an important differentiating factor between elite and sub-elite players. Players with higher creative abilities demonstrate more effective decision-making behaviour and a greater capacity to produce innovative solutions in offensive situations (Roca et al., 2018). The ability to generate original actions not only improves individual performance but also increases the overall attacking potential of the team by creating new possibilities for collective play.

Overall, scientific evidence indicates that creativity enhances football performance through improved decision-making, increased tactical flexibility, more effective perception of game situations, and greater unpredictability of actions. Creative players expand the range of available solutions in dynamic situations and enable teams to adapt more successfully to the complex demands of modern football.

1.1.4. Impact on social cohesion

Creativity in football contributes significantly to the development of social cohesion because creative performance in team sports emerges through interaction, shared decision-making, and coordinated adaptation between players. Creativity is not solely an individual trait but a collective process shaped by communication patterns, mutual responsiveness, and collaborative problem solving (Gloor et al., 2014; Memmert, 2015). When players co-create tactical solutions during training and competition, they develop shared understanding and interpersonal trust, which are central components of social cohesion (Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002).

Research in sport psychology demonstrates that team cohesion is strongly influenced by the quality of intra-team communication and shared norms that regulate interaction behaviour (Onağ & Tepeci, 2014; Eys et al., 2015). Creative game situations require players to continuously interpret teammates' actions and intentions, adjust their positioning, and coordinate timing under changing constraints. This ongoing interaction increases communication density and promotes mutual awareness, strengthening interpersonal bonds and collective identity within the team.

Studies on team creativity show that collaborative environments characterised by distributed leadership, flexible role adaptation, and frequent interaction are associated with higher levels of collective innovation and stronger relational ties among group members (Gloor et al., 2014). In football, creative actions such as spontaneous combination play or adaptive tactical adjustments depend on players' willingness to contribute ideas and respond constructively to others' initiatives. These behaviours foster psychological safety, which has been identified as a key factor for both creative collaboration and group cohesion (Edmondson, 1999).

Empirical research further indicates that cohesion in team sports enhances perceived social support and strengthens athletes' sense of belonging and shared identity (Xu et al., 2025). Creative cooperation contributes to these outcomes because players experience collective success when novel solutions emerge through joint effort. Shared creative experiences, such as successfully executing an innovative attacking pattern, reinforce emotional connections between teammates and increase commitment to common goals (Kao, 2019).



Research specifically addressing creativity in football environments highlights the importance of learning climates that encourage autonomy, exploration, and interaction, demonstrating that creative performance is socially embedded and dependent on collaborative learning processes (Memmert, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2025). When players are encouraged to experiment with new solutions, they must communicate more frequently, negotiate shared understanding, and support each other's initiative. These interaction processes strengthen trust, mutual respect, and collective responsibility, all of which are core components of social cohesion in team sports.

Overall, the literature suggests that creativity contributes to social cohesion by increasing communication, promoting shared problem solving, strengthening psychological safety, and reinforcing collective identity. Teams that engage in creative processes together develop stronger relational bonds, improved coordination, and greater commitment to shared objectives.

1.1.5. Correlations with private and family life, academic and work career

Scientific research suggests that creativity is supported by both domain-specific expertise and domain-general cognitive processes, allowing creative abilities to transfer between different life contexts such as sport, education, arts and professional environments (Runco & Acar, 2012; Kaufman & Baer, 2005). Creativity relies on cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking, pattern recognition and adaptive problem solving, which are general cognitive mechanisms that can be developed in multiple environments and applied across domains.

Engagement in creative activities such as music, drawing, free play or strategic games has been associated with increased divergent thinking ability and cognitive flexibility (Guilford, 1967; Torrance, 1974). Divergent thinking describes the ability to generate multiple possible solutions to a problem and is considered a key cognitive process underlying creativity. These abilities are also highly relevant in football, where players must continuously adapt their behaviour to dynamic and unpredictable situations (Mehmert, 2015).

Activities such as music training have been shown to improve executive functions, working memory and attentional control, which are important for flexible decision-making in complex environments (Schellenberg, 2004; Moreno et al., 2011; Herholz & Zatorre, 2012). Similarly, engagement in visual arts supports imagination, observation skills and the ability to mentally simulate alternative solutions (Winner et al., 2013). These perceptual and cognitive abilities may contribute to creative performance in football by improving spatial awareness and anticipation of movement possibilities.

Research in sport science indicates that diverse play experiences, including informal games and varied movement activities, support the development of tactical creativity (Raab et al., 2001; Santos et al., 2022). Informal play environments often involve rule adaptation, experimentation and negotiation between participants, encouraging flexible thinking and creative problem solving. Exposure to different types of games and movement challenges expands the range of available behavioural solutions and increases the ability to adapt to new situations (Davids et al., 2013). These findings suggest that creativity developed through artistic, musical or playful activities can positively influence creative decision-making in football.

At the same time, creative competencies developed in football can transfer to other life areas. Football represents a complex learning environment requiring continuous interaction between perception, cognition and action. Players constantly analyse situations, generate possible solutions and evaluate the effectiveness of their decisions under time pressure (Roca et al., 2021; Memmert, 2015). These processes strengthen cognitive flexibility and adaptive problem solving, which are relevant for academic learning and professional performance (Diamond, 2013).

Neuroscientific research indicates that creative thinking across domains involves common neural networks related to idea generation, cognitive flexibility and executive control (Beaty et al., 2016). Participation in open-skill sports such as football requires continuous adaptation to changing environmental constraints, supporting the development of flexible thinking strategies that can be applied beyond sport contexts (Voss et al., 2010). The ability to interpret complex information, anticipate possible developments and adjust behaviour accordingly is beneficial for problem solving in education, work and everyday life.

Creative processes in football also involve collaboration, communication and shared decision-making. Research on group creativity demonstrates that innovation often emerges through interaction between individuals who contribute different perspectives and ideas (Sawyer, 2012). Players learn to negotiate solutions, respond constructively to feedback and integrate the ideas of others into collective actions. These collaborative competencies are highly relevant for creative processes in academic and professional environments.

Experiential learning theories further suggest that learning in complex environments enhances the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to new contexts (Kolb, 1984). Football provides repeated opportunities for experimentation, reflection and adaptation, strengthening confidence in one's own ability to generate solutions. Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation have been identified as important predictors of creative behaviour across domains (Bandura, 1997; Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2007). Players who experience autonomy and success when exploring new solutions in football may be more willing to apply creative thinking in artistic, academic or professional situations.

Overall, scientific literature indicates a bidirectional relationship between creativity in football and creativity in other life domains. Engagement in diverse creative activities such as music, art and games can support the development of cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking relevant for football performance. Conversely, creative experiences in football strengthen adaptive problem solving, collaborative creativity and confidence in exploring new ideas, which can positively transfer to school, work and everyday life

1.1.6. Development of Creativity

Scientific research demonstrates that creativity in football can be systematically developed through learning environments that stimulate adaptive decision-making, perceptual flexibility and a broad repertoire of motor and tactical solutions. Creativity in football is not only an innate characteristic but a trainable competence that emerges through the interaction of cognitive processes, movement experiences and contextual constraints (Memmert, 2015; Sternberg & Lubart, 1991).

Neuroscientific research shows that creative decision-making in football is strongly linked to fast and automatic cognitive processes that operate under time pressure (Rominger et al., 2021). In dynamic game situations, players must quickly interpret spatial information, anticipate the behaviour of teammates and

opponents, and generate effective solutions without extensive conscious deliberation. These findings suggest that creative performance is supported by training environments that expose players to realistic, time-constrained decision-making situations.

Research indicates that creativity can be learned and improved through training approaches that stimulate divergent thinking and flexible problem solving (Kempe & Memmert, 2018). Divergent tactical thinking refers to the ability to generate multiple potential solutions to a game situation rather than relying on a single learned response. Training activities that encourage players to explore different options, such as modifying rules or introducing alternative tactical objectives, increase the likelihood that players will develop original and adaptive solutions during competition.

One effective approach for developing creativity is the systematic analysis and discussion of creative goal-scoring actions. Exposure to highly creative examples allows players to better understand how novel solutions emerge in real game situations and supports the development of tactical imagination (Kempe & Memmert, 2018). Reflecting on different solution possibilities increases players' awareness of alternative decision-making options and encourages the application of creative behaviours in their own play.

Small-sided games represent another important methodological approach for fostering creativity in football. Modifying the number of players, available space or tactical constraints creates diverse learning environments that encourage exploration of different movement and decision-making solutions (Canton et al., 2022; de Joode et al., 2023). Studies show that smaller game formats, such as 4v4 situations, lead to a higher frequency of diverse and creative actions compared to traditional 11v11 formats (de Joode et al., 2023). Numerical advantages or disadvantages further stimulate adaptive behaviour because players must continuously adjust positioning and tactical decisions.

Differential Learning approaches provide additional evidence for the importance of variability in practice design. Differential Learning emphasises enriched learning environments that expose players to constantly changing conditions, encouraging the exploration of diverse movement solutions (Coutinho et al., 2018; Canton et al., 2022). This approach is consistent with principles of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) and Nonlinear Pedagogy, which highlight the importance of representative learning situations and adaptive problem solving (Davids et al., 2013).

Combining fundamental movement skills such as coordination, balance and agility with fundamental game skills such as passing, dribbling and shooting also contributes to the development of creativity (Coutinho et al., 2018). Players who develop a broad movement repertoire are better able to adapt their actions to changing game situations and produce versatile and unpredictable solutions. Research indicates that improvements in motor skill competence increase the likelihood of creative actions during gameplay (Zahno & Hossner, 2022).

Manipulating task constraints, such as ball type, pitch size or rules, further influences creative performance by encouraging players to adjust their technical and tactical behaviour (Santos et al., 2020). Changes in equipment or game structure can stimulate new perception-action couplings and increase the diversity of behavioural solutions available to players. Creating variability in training conditions therefore supports the emergence of creative motor actions (de Joode et al., 2023).

Recent methodological frameworks also provide tools for identifying and developing creative behaviour in football players (Obœuf & Frachey, 2025). Indicators such as fluency (number of solutions), flexibility (variety of solutions) and originality (novelty of solutions) allow coaches to systematically design learning environments that encourage creative exploration. Training environments that intentionally stimulate these indicators can contribute to improved individual and team performance.

Overall, scientific literature consistently indicates that creativity in football develops through exposure to varied, game-realistic and cognitively stimulating learning environments. Training approaches that promote exploration, variability, adaptive decision-making and reflection enable players to expand their repertoire of tactical and technical solutions. By providing opportunities to experiment with different actions and encouraging players to search for multiple solutions, coaches can actively support the development of creative competence in football (Memmert, 2015; Davids et al., 2013).



1.2. Window of opportunities

Creativity develops particularly strongly during childhood and early adolescence, when brain plasticity, exploratory behaviour and openness to new experiences are highest (Diamond, 2013; Beaty et al., 2016). During these years, children show high levels of curiosity and experimentation, which support the development of divergent thinking and flexible problem solving (Runco & Acar, 2012).

Longitudinal research on creativity demonstrates that creative thinking abilities developed in childhood can predict creative achievement later in life (Torrance, 1988; Torrance, 2002). These findings indicate that early learning environments that support curiosity, experimentation and idea generation contribute significantly to long-term creative potential. Neuroscientific research points the same way: creative cognition is supported by neural networks associated with cognitive flexibility, working memory and associative thinking, which develop strongly during childhood and adolescence (Beaty et al., 2016). Experiences that encourage children to explore multiple solutions rather than focusing on one correct answer strengthen flexible thinking patterns that remain relevant throughout life.

Research in sport science indicates that early engagement in varied movement experiences and diversified play environments supports the development of creative motor behaviour (Memmert, 2015; Santos et al., 2022). Exposure to different games, movement tasks and tactical situations increases the number of behavioural solutions available to players and strengthens their ability to adapt to dynamic game situations (Davids et al., 2013).

Studies on perceptual-cognitive skill development show that children between 7 and 12 years demonstrate particularly high sensitivity to learning perceptual and decision-making skills, which are essential for creative performance in football (Roca et al., 2021). During this period, players benefit from environments that encourage experimentation and allow multiple solutions rather than focusing on one correct answer.

Informal play and small-sided games have been identified as important contributors to creative development because they provide opportunities for rule adaptation, improvisation and interaction with peers (Raab et al., 2001; Rasmussen & Østergaard, 2016). Such environments allow players to experience autonomy and develop confidence in their own ideas, which strengthens intrinsic motivation and creative behaviour.

During adolescence, creativity can be further developed through increasingly complex tactical situations that require players to adapt solutions to changing game contexts (Memmert, 2015). Training environments that include variability, decision-making pressure and opportunities for reflection support the refinement of creative decision-making processes (Rominger et al., 2021).

Overall, research suggests that creativity develops most effectively when players experience diverse movement challenges, opportunities for exploration and supportive environments that encourage experimentation. Early exposure to varied play activities and continued opportunities for adaptive decision-making throughout adolescence contribute significantly to the development of creative competence in football (Davids et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2022).



1.3. Correlation with other skills and competencies



Correlation with Emotional Competencies

Creativity is closely linked to emotional development. Self-confidence encourages players to try unfamiliar ideas and take risks, even when success is uncertain. Grit helps them persist when original solutions do not work immediately, while motivation fuels curiosity and the desire to explore alternative approaches instead of relying on the obvious option.

Correlation with Physical Skills

Creativity can support physical performance through precision. Creative actions often require unusual movements or unexpected solutions, which can only be effective when executed with accurate control of timing, force, and body position.

Correlation with Technical Abilities

Creativity is strongly connected to technical development. Dribbling provides players with different ways to overcome opponents, while first touch creates opportunities by directing play into unexpected areas. Passing expands creative possibilities by enabling players to use options that others may not anticipate, making attacks less predictable and more effective.

Correlation with Social Competencies

Creativity is closely related to social competencies. Compassion helps players understand their teammates' strengths, intentions, and movements, making creative combinations more likely to succeed. Trust creates a supportive environment in which players feel confident to attempt innovative and risky solutions without fear of criticism if they fail.

Correlation with Cognitive Skills

Creativity supports problem solving and decision making. It helps players generate multiple solutions, while cognitive skills allow them to select and apply the most effective option under pressure.

Correlation with Tactical Principles

Creativity supports the application of tactical principles by helping players find solutions that opponents do not expect. In penetration, creativity enables players to break through organised defensive structures using unexpected actions or combinations. In mobility, creative movement into different spaces creates new opportunities for teammates and opens possibilities that would otherwise remain unavailable.

1.4. Key learnings

- Creativity means producing solutions that are original, functional and adapted to the game situation.
- Creativity is not random; it develops through the interaction of perception, decision-making, imagination, knowledge, motivation and environment.
- Creativity can be learned and trained through activities that stimulate divergent thinking and flexible problem solving.
- Players develop creativity when they are exposed to many different game situations that require adaptation and exploration of multiple solutions.
- Small-sided games increase the number of decisions and interactions, which promotes flexible thinking and creative behaviour.
- Modifying constraints such as space, number of players, rules or equipment encourages players to discover new tactical and technical solutions.
- Variability, diversification and nonlinear learning environments support the emergence of creative actions.
- Differential Learning and Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) approaches support creativity by encouraging exploration and adaptive decision-making.
- Creativity is supported by a broad repertoire of movement skills, technical abilities and tactical understanding.
- Improving motor skills increases the number of possible solutions available to players and supports creative behaviour in game situations.
- Creative players demonstrate broader visual search behaviour and recognise more possible solutions in dynamic situations.
- Creativity is influenced by intellectual abilities, knowledge, thinking styles, personality, motivation and environment.
- Intrinsic motivation, curiosity and enjoyment increase the willingness of players to try new solutions.
- Psychological safety supports creativity because players are more willing to experiment when mistakes are accepted as part of learning.
- Creativity contributes to performance by increasing unpredictability and improving the ability to adapt to changing tactical situations.



- Creativity strengthens team cohesion because creative solutions often emerge through communication, cooperation and shared problem solving.
- Shared creative experiences increase trust, communication and collective understanding within the team.
- Creative experiences in football strengthen adaptive problem solving, cognitive flexibility and collaborative creativity.
- Creativity developed in football can transfer to school, work and everyday life.
- Engagement in other creative activities such as music, art, free play and games can support creative development in football.
- Early childhood and early adolescence represent important phases for developing creativity due to high neural plasticity and exploratory behaviour.
- Coaches can support creativity by encouraging players to explore different solutions and by asking open questions such as “What other solution is possible?”.
- Learning environments that provide freedom within structure support players in developing confidence in their own ideas.
- Creativity develops through interaction between player, task and environment.
- Providing many opportunities for decision-making supports the development of creative competence.

1.5. From science to practice

Stage 1 7-8 years



Creativity develops through diverse movement experiences and opportunities for exploration.

Learning environments that allow players to experiment with different ways of moving, controlling the ball and solving simple game situations support the development of flexible thinking. Small-sided games with many ball contacts and varied tasks increase opportunities to discover different solutions.

Stage 2 9-10 years



Creativity is supported when players experience that game situations can be solved in different ways.

Modified games that allow multiple solutions encourage players to explore different technical actions and recognise alternative options. Variability in tasks and game formats supports adaptive behaviour and strengthens confidence in trying new ideas.

Stage 3 11-12 years



Creativity develops when players are exposed to varied decision-making situations that require flexible adaptation of technical and tactical actions.

Learning environments that include changing constraints such as space, time or rules increase the need to generate different solutions. Reflection on different possibilities supports awareness of alternative options.

Stage 4 13-14 years



Creative behaviour is supported through representative game situations that require continuous adaptation to teammates, opponents and tactical demands. Variability in positional tasks and game structures encourages players to adjust movement, timing and decision-making.

Learning environments that allow players to explore different tactical solutions strengthen flexible thinking.

Stage 5 15-16 years



Creativity develops when players apply tactical principles in dynamic and complex situations.

Training environments that include realistic decision-making scenarios encourage players to adapt technical and tactical actions under time pressure. Variability in game constraints supports the development of diverse and effective solutions.

Stage 6 17-18 years



Creativity is expressed through flexible adaptation of tactical behaviour in complex match environments.

Learning situations that allow autonomy in decision-making support the confident application of diverse technical and tactical solutions. Opportunities for shared problem solving encourage creative collaboration and adaptive team behaviour.

2. COACHES' BEHAVIOUR

2.1. Coaching style

2.1.1. Scientific grounding

Research consistently suggests that creativity in football is not best developed through rigid repetition of one ideal solution, but through learning environments that expose players to variability, representative game situations and opportunities to explore multiple functional solutions. Scientific models of creativity describe creative performance as the result of interactions between knowledge, motivation, thinking style, personality and environment, while sport-specific research emphasises that tactical creativity emerges when players are required to adapt perception, decision-making and action to dynamic and unpredictable situations (Sternberg & Lubart, 1991; Memmert, 2015).



One important implication for coaching is that creativity depends strongly on the design of the learning environment. Research in ecological dynamics and nonlinear pedagogy shows that behaviour changes when task constraints change. Variations in space, player numbers, rules, targets or equipment create new affordances for action and increase the likelihood that players search for different solutions instead of repeating the same pattern (Davids et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2022). In football, this means that coaching style should not over-direct players toward one predetermined answer, but should support exploration within meaningful game contexts.

Research further suggests that small-sided and conditioned games are especially relevant for creativity development because they increase the frequency of decision-making situations and expose players to a greater number of perceptual and tactical problems. These environments create repeated opportunities to generate, test and adapt solutions in relation to teammates, opponents and space (Memmert, 2015; de Joode et al., 2023). Studies on youth football indicate that modified games and varied constraints can increase the number of creative actions and promote more diverse tactical responses (Canton et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2020).

Creativity is also closely linked to perceptual-cognitive processes. Creative players have been shown to display broader visual search behaviour and a greater ability to identify several possible solutions in dynamic situations (Roca et al., 2018; Roca et al., 2021). Neuroscientific evidence further indicates that creative decision-making in football is associated with rapid and efficient integration of perceptual and cognitive information under time pressure (Rominger et al., 2021). For coaches, this means that creativity is not primarily strengthened by verbal explanation alone, but by repeated exposure to representative football situations in which players must scan, interpret and act.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between motor repertoire and creativity. Research suggests that creative actions in team sports are rooted not only in divergent thinking, but also in players' available movement and technical possibilities. Players with broader sensorimotor repertoires are better able to execute unusual or adaptive solutions in game situations (Zahno & Hossner, 2022). This implies that coaching style should encourage technical and coordinative variety rather than technical standardisation only. If players only practise one preferred movement solution, the range of possible creative actions in the game is reduced.

Research also shows that creative development benefits from autonomy-supportive and psychologically safe environments. Players are more likely to experiment, take initiative and tolerate mistakes when the learning climate encourages exploration rather than fear of failure. Studies on creativity in football and team sport repeatedly underline the importance of environments in which players are allowed to test ideas, modify actions and search for new solutions without immediate overcorrection (Memmert, 2015; Fink et al., 2019). This does not mean the coach becomes passive, but that the coach guides attention, manipulates constraints and asks questions that open possibilities instead of prematurely closing them.

Finally, observational and reflective processes also support creativity development. Exposure to creative football actions, discussion of how solutions emerged, and opportunities to adapt observed ideas can strengthen tactical imagination and support transfer into players' own behaviour (Kempe & Memmert, 2018; Obœuf & Frachey, 2025). Creativity therefore develops most effectively when coaching combines representative game situations, variability, autonomy, reflection and a positive approach to experimentation.

Overall, the literature suggests that a coaching style supporting creativity is characterised by variability, freedom within structure, representative game situations, encouragement of exploration, and tolerance for productive mistakes. Such a coaching style does not remove guidance, but uses guidance to expand players' search for solutions and increase their confidence in creating functional and original actions under pressure.

2.1.2. Practical implications

Practically, this means that the coach creates a learning environment in which players are encouraged to explore, adapt and generate more than one effective solution to a football problem. Creativity develops when players experience that a situation can be solved in different ways and when they are given opportunities to test, adapt and refine those solutions in realistic football contexts.

A coaching style that supports Creativity includes:

- Designing variable learning environments
 - creating small-sided and conditioned games with changing constraints
 - modifying space, rules, player numbers, targets or equipment
 - using different game formats that invite different tactical and technical solutions
 - creating many decision-making situations instead of isolated repetitions
 - encouraging players to experience a wide range of football problems
- Allowing freedom within structure
 - providing a clear task while leaving room for players' own solutions
 - avoiding over-prescription of one correct answer
 - allowing players to experiment with timing, positioning, technique and interaction
 - supporting exploration without removing the football-specific context
 - balancing guidance and autonomy



- Encouraging multiple solutions
 - asking open questions such as “What else is possible here?”
 - highlighting that different solutions can be effective
 - recognising originality when it remains functional in the game context
 - encouraging players to search for new options instead of repeating one pattern only
 - valuing flexible thinking and tactical imagination
- Supporting psychological safety
 - treating mistakes as part of exploration and learning
 - reacting calmly when players try something new that does not work immediately
 - reinforcing initiative and courage to experiment
 - avoiding communication that punishes unsuccessful creative attempts
 - helping players understand that creativity includes risk and adaptation
- Expanding technical and motor repertoire
 - encouraging variation in first touch, passing, dribbling, finishing and movement solutions
 - including coordinative and sensorimotor diversity in training
 - exposing players to many different movement experiences
 - supporting players in developing a broader range of executable actions
 - understanding that a wider repertoire increases creative possibilities in the game
- Using observation and reflection
 - showing or discussing creative football actions and combinations
 - encouraging players to explain what made an action effective or difficult to defend
 - inviting players to adapt observed ideas to their own style rather than simply copy them
 - using reflection to help players recognise alternative possibilities
 - linking creative moments to tactical understanding and decision-making
- Progressing with age and development
 - for younger players, emphasising playful exploration and discovering that there is more than one way
 - for middle stages, encouraging collaboration and experimentation with teammates
 - for older players, supporting tactical creativity, adaptability and creative team play under pressure
 - progressively shifting from simple technical variation to complex collaborative creativity
 - keeping activities scientifically grounded while remaining realistic and enjoyable

Especially in football, the coach should not try to “teach creativity” through explanation alone. Creativity is better supported when players are placed in situations that require them to perceive, decide and adapt. The coach therefore acts less as a provider of final answers and more as a designer of environments, a guide for attention and a supporter of experimentation.

When coaches consistently create representative, variable and psychologically safe learning environments, players are more likely to develop a broader action repertoire, stronger confidence in their own ideas and greater ability to produce original and functional solutions in competition. This strengthens both individual performance and collaborative team play.

2.2. Choice of words

The language used by coaches influences whether players feel encouraged to explore different solutions or whether they focus primarily on avoiding mistakes. Words can shape how players interpret game situations, how confident they feel when trying new ideas, and how willing they are to adapt their behaviour.

Coaches therefore play an important role in supporting creativity by using language that values experimentation, curiosity and collaboration. Communication that emphasises possibilities rather than limitations helps players recognise that there is often more than one effective solution in football.

Stage 1 7-8 years



Language should encourage curiosity and help players discover that trying different solutions can be enjoyable.

Example tone:

- “Try another way.”
- “That was a great idea.”
- “Show me something new.”
- “You can try something different.”
- “I like how you explore.”

Stage 2 9-10 years



Language should encourage players to experiment with different individual solutions and feel confident when trying new actions.

Example tone:

- “Try a different move.”
- “See if another solution works.”
- “That was creative thinking.”
- “Can you find another way past the defender?”
- “Good idea to try something new.”

Stage 3 11-12 years



Language should encourage players to develop creative solutions together and inspire each other.

Example tone:

- “How can you create something together?”
- “Try combining your ideas.”
- “Can you surprise the opponent?”
- “Find a new solution as a team.”
- “Show me a different combination.”

Stage 4 13-14 years



Language should encourage players to adapt their behaviour to changing situations and recognise new possibilities that emerge through interaction.

Example tone:

- “What new option do you see?”
- “How can you change the situation?”
- “Try a different combination.”
- “Find a solution that the opponent does not expect.”
- “How can you create an advantage?”

Stage 5 15-16 years



Language should encourage players to analyse, adapt and apply creative ideas in realistic football situations.

Example tone:

- “What makes this difficult to defend?”
- “How can you make this solution more effective?”
- “Try a new variation.”
- “How can you adapt this idea to the game?”
- “What different solution could work here?”

Stage 6 17-18 years



Language should support players in independently experimenting with creative solutions and expanding their tactical repertoire.

Example tone:

- “Experiment with different solutions.”
- “How can you create something unpredictable?”
- “Which option gives you the biggest advantage?”
- “How can you adapt this idea to the situation?”
- “Show your own creative style.”

2.3. Body Language

A coach's body language communicates whether players feel encouraged to explore new solutions or whether they feel pressured to avoid mistakes. Non-verbal behaviour strongly influences whether players feel confident to experiment, adapt their actions and express their own ideas. Especially when players attempt unexpected or unconventional solutions, they closely observe the coach's reaction. Calm, attentive and encouraging body language signals that creative attempts are valued, even when they are not immediately successful.

When coaches demonstrate openness and curiosity through their body language, players are more likely to perceive football as an environment in which new ideas are welcome. Visible signs of frustration or impatience after unsuccessful attempts may reduce players' willingness to experiment and can lead to more predictable and risk-avoiding behaviour. Supportive non-verbal communication therefore plays an important role in helping players develop confidence in their own ideas and expand their repertoire of solutions.



3. TRAINING

THE DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

of Creativity from foundation to maturity:



7-8 years

- 1 Try more than one way to solve the same simple task.
- 2 Attempt an unfamiliar action without waiting to be sure it will work.
- 3 Keep experimenting after an attempt fails.



9-10 years

- 1 Use a different solution the second time the same situation arises.
- 2 Change the action when the space or the opponent changes.
- 3 Name two different ways the situation could have been solved.



11-12 years

- 1 Find a solution that involves a teammate rather than only yourself.
- 2 Choose differently depending on where teammates and opponents are.
- 3 Say what other option was available after making a choice.



13-14 years

- 1 Create an advantage for someone else rather than for yourself.
- 2 Adjust your own action to fit what a teammate has started.
- 3 Attempt an unusual solution in front of the group.



15-16 years

- 1 Use a familiar principle at an unexpected moment.
- 2 Produce a solution that creates space rather than only beating an opponent.
- 3 Change the decision mid-action when the situation changes.



17-18 years

- 1 Choose between an original and a simple solution, and say why.
- 2 Produce an effective unexpected action under time pressure.
- 3 Set up a creative solution that another player finishes.

Training

7-8
years



Stage 1 (7-8 years)

3.3.1. Stage characteristics

Players at this stage show a natural curiosity and willingness to explore different ways of moving and playing. Creativity is expressed through spontaneous experimentation with the ball and playful problem solving in simple game situations. Players often try new actions without fear of mistakes and enjoy discovering different movement and technical solutions.

Creative behaviour is mainly individual and intuitive. Learning environments that allow freedom to explore support confidence and enjoyment when trying new ideas.

3.3.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, creativity develops through exploration and experimentation with different individual solutions in simple game situations.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

- 1 Try more than one way to solve the same simple task.
- 2 Attempt an unfamiliar action without waiting to be sure it will work.
- 3 Keep experimenting after an attempt fails.

3.3.3. Coach insight

Creativity at this age is not a choice but a habit children still have. They try unusual things because nobody has yet taught them that being wrong is costly, and that fearlessness disappears quickly once an unfamiliar attempt is corrected before it is finished. What keeps it alive is a rule players can feel: there is more than one way to solve this.

MANY WAYS TO SCORE



	Players	4+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	6 x 20 m per field
	Equipment	4 balls, 24 cones
	Duration	total: 12 min play: 10 x 1 min breaks: 30 s
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players work in groups of 4.
- Each group consists of 2 shooters and 2 goalkeepers.
- Shooters try to score goals using as many different solutions as possible. Each attempt must be different from the previous attempt. Players are encouraged to vary first touch, body movement, finishing technique, direction or tempo of the action.
- Goalkeepers try to prevent goals and immediately return the ball to the shooters to allow many repetitions in a short time.
- After 1 minute, players change tasks. Shooters become goalkeepers and goalkeepers become shooters. Repeat 5 times.
- Players observe different solutions and try to discover new ideas. A solution is considered different when at least one element of the action changes.
- Variations:
 - Limit touches before finishing
 - Increase or decrease the distance to goal

Coaching Tips

1. Reinforce that there is no single correct way to finish, and **highlight creative attempts** even when they do not score.
2. Encourage **variation** of first touch, finishing technique, tempo and direction.
3. Keep the **ball returning quickly for many repetitions**, and ask players to watch what others try.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

①

Players make each attempt on goal different from the one before it.

- Which different finishing techniques did you try?
- Which solution required a different type of first touch?
- What was hardest to make different from the last one?

②

Players attempt a finish they would not normally try, without knowing whether it will work.

- Which solution felt most unfamiliar?
- Did you try sth. that you normally wouldn't try in a game?
- What stopped you trying it earlier?

③

Players keep varying their attempts after one of them fails to score.

- What did you do after an attempt did not work?
- Which solutions did you observe from other players?
- Did a failed attempt make your next one safer or bolder?

Training

9-10
years



3.1. Stage 2 (9-10 years)

3.1.1. Stage characteristics

Players increasingly recognise that game situations can be solved in different ways. Creativity is expressed through variation of technical actions such as first touch, passing, dribbling or finishing.

Players begin to intentionally try different individual solutions depending on space, opponents and teammates. Creative behaviour becomes more purposeful, although still strongly focused on individual problem solving. Learning environments that include variability support flexible adaptation of known techniques.

3.1.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, creativity develops through variation of individual technical solutions in response to changing game situations.

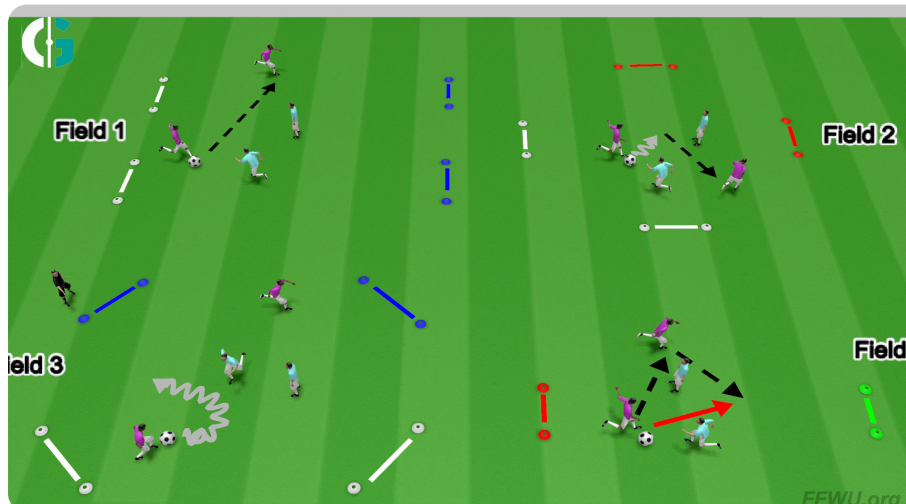
In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

- 1 Use a different solution the second time the same situation arises.
- 2 Change the action when the space or the opponent changes.
- 3 Name two different ways the situation could have been solved.

3.1.3. Coach insight

Variation becomes deliberate at this stage. Players stop stumbling into different solutions and start choosing them, but only where choosing has been worth something before. A player who repeats the same action is usually not uncreative; they have learnt that the familiar action is the safe one. Creativity grows where a new idea costs nothing when it fails.

DIFFERENT FIELDS - MANY SOLUTIONS



	Players	4+
	Age	07-08 09-10 11-12 13-14 15-16 17-18
	Pitch	30 x 20 m
	Equipment	4 balls, 28 cones
	Duration	total: 25 min play: 8 x 2 min breaks: 1 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players play 2v2 in 4 different small fields. Each field has two goals positioned differently.
- Players rotate between the four fields and experience different game situations.
- Each field encourages players to discover new solutions through dribbling, passing combinations, changes of direction, changes of tempo or positioning.
- Dribbling situations and simple combinations such as 1-2 (wall pass) are encouraged to promote different individual and collaborative solutions.
- Game time = 2 minutes. After each round, teams move to the next field.
- Scoring system (positive reinforcement): 1 point for each dribbling attempt, 2 points for a goal after a successful 1v1, 2 points for a goal after a successful 1-2 (wall pass), 3 points for a goal after a successful feint or change of direction

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage players to **try a new solution rather than repeat** the one that worked; the attempt matters more than the outcome.
2. Help players **recognise** when a 1v1 is available and when a combination creates the better advantage.
3. Keep play continuous so feints, changes of direction and 1-2 combinations **get many repetitions**.



Learning Objectives

①

Players **use a different solution** the second time they meet the same situation on a field.

②

Players **change their action when they rotate** to a field with different goals and space.

③

Players name **two different ways** the situation on that field could have been solved.



Reflection Questions

- Which different dribbling or passing solutions did you try?
- Which solution helped create a scoring opportunity?
- What did you do differently the second time?

- When did you decide to dribble, and when to combine with a teammate?
- How did the defender influence your decision?

- Which solutions helped create goals?
- When can different solutions be used in the same situation?
- What else could you have tried in that moment?

Training

11-12
years



3.2. Stage 3 (11-12 years)

3.2.1. Stage characteristics

Players show improved perception and decision-making abilities, allowing more purposeful creative behaviour. Creativity becomes visible through adapting technical actions to simple tactical situations. Players increasingly recognise multiple options and begin combining individual solutions with interaction with teammates.

Creative behaviour develops from individual variation towards simple creative collaboration in game situations. Learning environments that include decision-making opportunities support flexible problem solving.

3.2.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, creativity develops through combining individual technical solutions with simple tactical interaction with teammates.

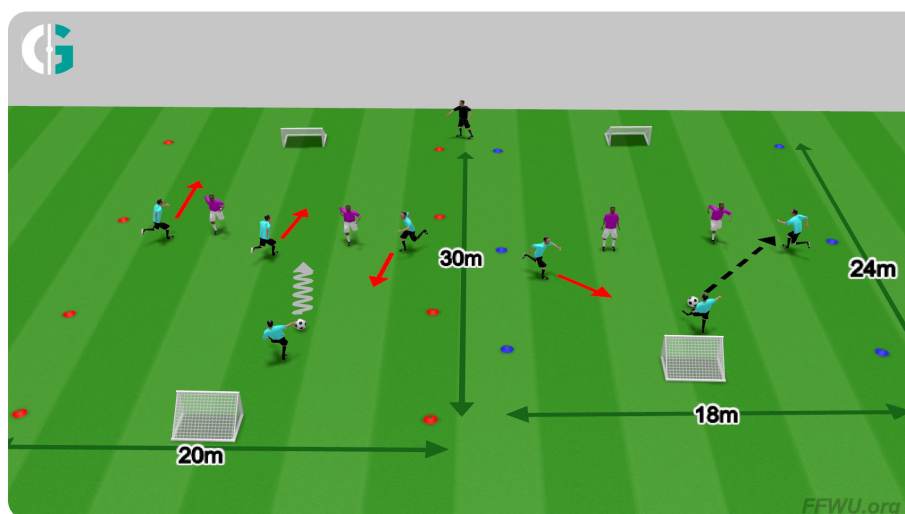
In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

- 1 Find a solution that involves a teammate rather than only yourself.
- 2 Choose differently depending on where teammates and opponents are.
- 3 Say what other option was available after making a choice.

3.2.3. Coach insight

Creativity stops being solitary here. Players begin to see a teammate as an option rather than an obstacle, and the number of solutions available to them multiplies as soon as they do. This is also where prescribed patterns do the most damage: a player given one correct answer stops looking for the second one.

CREATIVE TOGETHERNESS



	Players	11+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	40 x 30 m
	Equipment	2 balls, 4 small goals, 4 bibs
	Duration	total: 22 min play: 4 x 4 min breaks: 2 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players play in two small-sided game formats:
 - Field 1: 3 attackers vs 2 defenders
 - Field 2: 4 attackers vs 2 defenders
- Players are encouraged to explore different ways to create an advantage through positioning, passing combinations, timing of runs, dribbling or changes of direction.
- After each round, attacking and defending players rotate.
- The game is played in 4 rounds of 3 minutes.
- Scoring system (positive reinforcement):
 - 1 point for at least 3 successful passes
 - 2 points for scoring after a combination involving at least 3 players
 - 2 points for a goal after a forward run creating space
 - 3 points for a goal where all attacking players are involved
- Variations: limit touches, increase or decrease field size

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage **variation** in positioning, distance to teammates and passing combinations, without prescribing patterns.
2. Allow time for players to **discover shared solutions**, and let them talk to each other while they do.
3. Ask players to **notice which solutions worked** in each of the two game formats.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

①

Players create the advantage through a combination rather than on their own.

- Which different combinations did your team try?
- Which combination created a new opportunity?
- When did a teammate make your solution possible?

②

Players choose differently in the 3v2 than in the 4v2, depending on where the defenders are.

- How did positioning influence your decision?
- When did you change your position to support a teammate?
- What changed for you between the two field formats?

③

Players say what other option was available after the round ends.

- What else could you have done in that moment?
- Which team solution was most effective, and why?
- Which option did you see too late?

Training

13-14
years



3.3. Stage 4 (13-14 Years)

3.3.1. Stage characteristics

Players increasingly recognise that creative solutions can create advantages for the team. Creativity is expressed through flexible adaptation of technical actions within tactical situations. Players begin to intentionally use positioning, timing and interaction with teammates to develop new solutions.

Creative behaviour becomes more context-specific and influenced by tactical understanding. Players start to recognise that creative collaboration can open new possibilities in dynamic game situations.

3.3.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, creativity develops through intentional interaction with teammates to create new tactical solutions in dynamic situations.

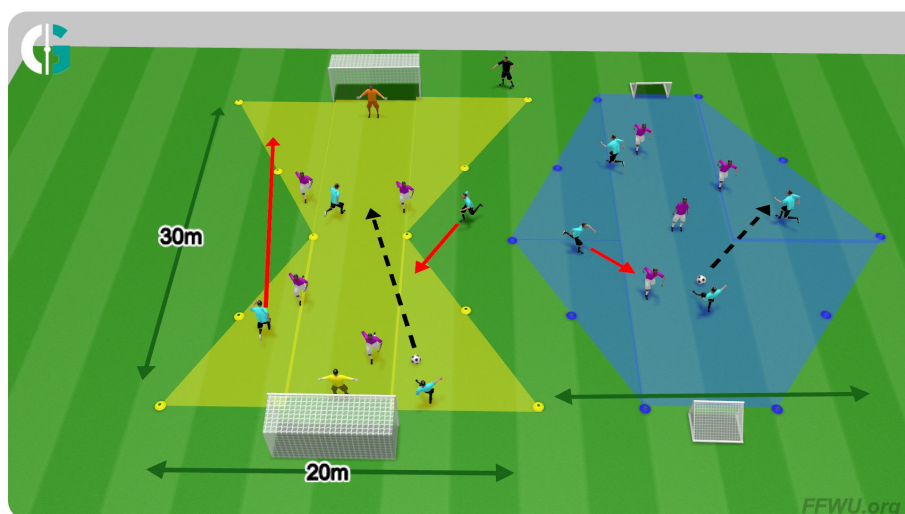
During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

- 1 Create an advantage for someone else rather than for yourself.
- 2 Adjust your own action to fit what a teammate has started.
- 3 Attempt an unusual solution in front of the group.

3.3.3. Coach insight

Adolescence works against creativity before it works for it. Players become acutely aware of how teammates judge them, and the unusual idea is the first thing they suppress. Creative collaboration needs a group in which an attempt that fails is not remembered against the player who made it. Positioning and timing can be taught; the willingness to try cannot.

DIAMOND & SAND



	Players	12+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	40 x 30 m
	Equipment	2 balls, 20 cones, 8 bibs
	Duration	total: 22 min play: 4 x 4 min breaks: 2 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players play 3v3 or 4v4 in small-sided games on two different field shapes.
 - Field 1 is organised in a diamond shape.
 - Field 2 is organised in a sand clock shape.
- Each game lasts 4 minutes playing 4 rounds. Players rotate between the two fields after each round.
- Scoring system (positive reinforcement):
 - 1 point: goal scored
 - 2 points: goal after takeover, goal after successful individual creative action (feint, change of direction, creative first touch) followed by pass or goal
 - 3 points: goal after 1–2 (wall pass), goal after third-player combination (triangle)
- Variations:
 - Adapt field sizes and shapes

Coaching Tips

- Draw attention to how the shape of the field changes **which solutions are available**.
- Encourage flexible positioning and creative use of width and depth, **without prescribing tactical patterns**.
- Give players **time and space to communicate** and find their own attacking ideas.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

①

Players use the field shape to create an advantage for a teammate rather than for themselves.

- Which actions created an opportunity for a teammate?
- When did movement create space for someone else?
- Which shape made it easier to set someone else up?

②

Players adjust their own action to finish what a teammate has started.

- How did your positioning change on the two fields?
- Which movement helped someone finish what they started?
- When did you abandon your idea to follow a teammate's?

③

Players attempt the individual creative action that scores two points, in front of the group.

- What did you try that felt risky with everyone watching?
- How did the field shape influence what you're willing to try?
- Did the scoring system make you braver or more careful?

Training

15-16
years



3.4. Stage 5 (15-16 years)

3.4.1. Stage characteristics

Players show increasing ability to apply creativity within structured tactical contexts. Creativity is expressed through flexible application of tactical principles such as Penetration, Width & Length and Mobility. Players recognise that creative solutions can help break defensive structures and create new attacking opportunities. Creative behaviour becomes more efficient and purposeful, combining technical variation with tactical understanding. Players increasingly use interaction with teammates to develop unpredictable solutions.

3.4.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, creativity develops through flexible application of tactical principles to generate effective and unpredictable attacking solutions.

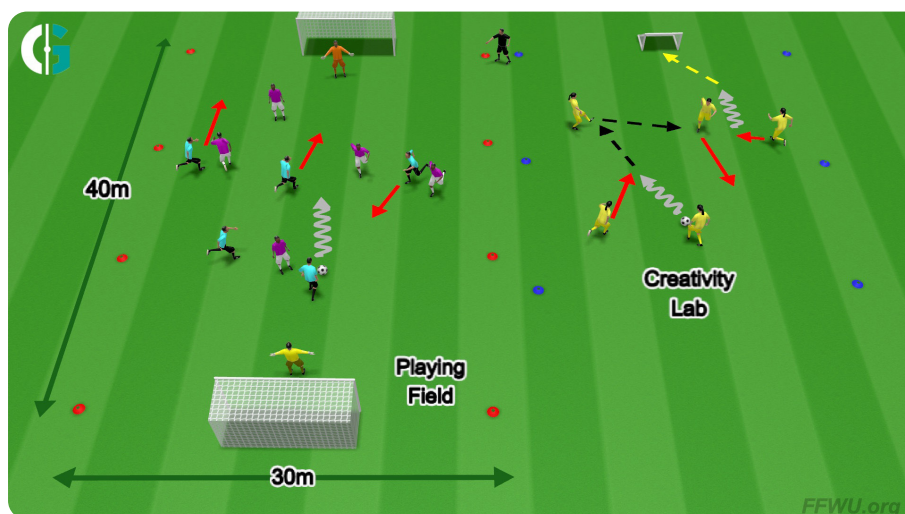
During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

- 1 Use a familiar principle at an unexpected moment.
- 2 Produce a solution that creates space rather than only beating an opponent.
- 3 Change the decision mid-action when the situation changes.

3.4.3. Coach insight

Creativity and tactical discipline are not opposites. At this stage players apply principles such as penetration, width and mobility flexibly rather than mechanically, and the creative solution is usually a familiar principle used at an unexpected moment. Players who understand why a principle exists can break it intelligently; players who only know the rule cannot.

CREATIVITY LAB



	Players	15+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	40 x 30 m
	Equipment	2 balls, 2 goals, 2 small goals, 16 cones
	Duration	total: 40 min play: 6 x 5 min breaks: 2 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players are divided into 3 teams, playing 6 rounds of 5 minutes.
- Two teams play 5v5 or 6v6. The third team collaborates without opponents.
- Players in the third team invent and practice their most cherished creative plays
- Creative plays are rewarded by a scoring system:
 - 1 point: goal scored,
 - 2 points (goal scored after): overlap or underlap, positional rotation, successful individual creative action,
 - 3 points (goal scored after): any combination involving 3 players, switch of play followed by finishing,
 - 4 points (goal scored after): any combination involving 4 players
- Variations:
 - Adjust field size or shape
 - Use different balls

Coaching Tips

1. Explain the **scoring system clearly before the activity** and keep the points visible.
2. Ask players to explain why they consider a play creative, then let them **explore variations** of it.
3. Allow **experimentation** with positioning and timing, and highlight collaborative solutions.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

①

Players use a familiar principle at a moment the opponents have not prepared for.

- Which creative play did your team try?
- When did a familiar idea work because it came at an unexpected moment?

②

Players produce the play that opens space rather than the one that beats a defender.

- How did movement influence the success of the play?
- When did timing help create an advantage?
- Which action created space without anyone being beaten?

③

Players change the play mid-action when the defenders react differently than expected.

- When did you change your mind while the action was already under way?
- Which variation improved the solution?

Training

17-18
years



3.5. Stage 6 (17-18 years)

3.5.1. Stage characteristics

Players demonstrate the ability to apply creativity intentionally and efficiently in complex match situations. Creativity is expressed through flexible adaptation of tactical behaviour under time pressure.

Players recognise when creative solutions provide advantages and when simple solutions are more effective. Creative behaviour becomes increasingly connected with tactical intelligence and decision quality. Players show the ability to combine individual creativity with collective tactical effectiveness.

3.5.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, creativity develops through adaptive decision-making that balances originality and effectiveness in complex tactical situations.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

- ① Choose between an original and a simple solution, and say why.
- ② Produce an effective unexpected action under time pressure.
- ③ Set up a creative solution that another player finishes.

3.5.3. Coach insight

The mature creative player is the one who knows when not to be. Originality has a cost, and at this stage players can weigh it: the simple pass is sometimes the better solution, and recognising that is itself a creative judgement. What separates them now is not how many ideas they have but which one they choose.

CREATIVE FLOW



	Players	16+
	Age	07-08 09-10 11-12 13-14 15-16 17-18
	Pitch	50 x 35 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 2 goals, 10 bibs
	Duration	total: 30 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Two teams play a continuous game for 30-45 minutes.
- The coach regularly calls two numbers, one for each team and the respective number of players enter the field
- Maximum two players difference to ensure game-realistic situations (e.g. 4v2, 5v4, 6v5, 7v7).
- When the coach calls new numbers, players quickly adjust and enter or leave the field.
 - 1 point = goal scored
 - 2 points = goal after successful individual creative action
 - 3 points = goal after any combination involving 3 players and a creative moment
 - 4 points = goal after any combination involving 4 players and a creative moment
 - 5 points = goal after any combination involving 5+ players and a creative moment

Coaching Tips

1. Explain the **scoring system clearly before the activity** and keep track of points.
2. Highlight creative solutions involving more than one player, and **emphasise creative collaboration** over individual brilliance.
3. Leave players **free to organise positioning and roles**, and encourage communication as they enter the field.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players **choose** between the two-point creative solution and the simple goal, **and say why**.

- When did you choose the simple option, and why?
- How did the different player numbers influence your decisions?

2

Players produce an **effective unexpected action** in the seconds after the numbers change.

- Which creative play worked without time to prepare it?
- What did you do in the first moments after entering the field?

3

Players set up the three-point goal **for a teammate to finish**.

- Which collaboration created the best opportunity?
- When did your action allow someone else to finish it?
- Whose goal did you make possible today?

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