

29 WORLD CLASS COACHING Training Sessions



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29

WORLD CLASS COACHING

Training Sessions

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Edited by Tom Mura



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Encouraging a Competitive Attitude

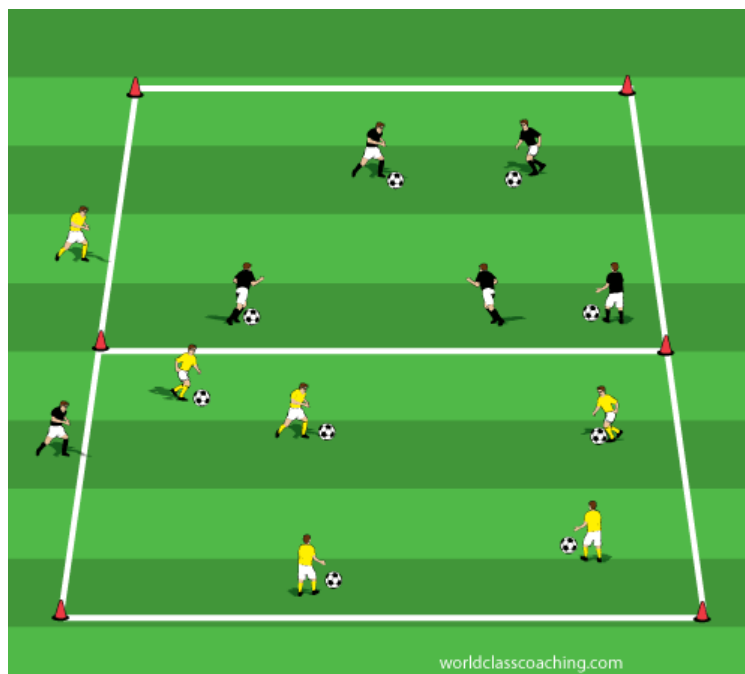
Coming out of a long winter of indoor practices and Futsal games, I'm always anxious to play our first outdoor league game of the spring. I was looking forward to it even more than usual this year because it had been more than a month since my U12 girls team had played their last Futsal game. Practices had gone well but it's often hard to judge how the players are developing without the test of an opponent.

The girls played well from the beginning of the game. We possessed the ball well and created scoring chances but didn't take any of them. Gradually the other team began to win more tackles and put some pressure on our defense. We hadn't slowed down or stopped making good decisions but as the half wore on we had less and less of the ball.

The difference was that we were PLAYING soccer and the other team was COMPETING. They were defending aggressively, fighting harder for the 50/50 balls, playing stronger to keep possession and really going for it in the final third. We discussed this at half-time and I challenged the players to match the intensity of their opponent so that we could play our game rather than constantly chasing them.

The girls worked hard in the second half but each time we would find some success the other team 'up the ante' and increase their speed and intensity of play. Some of the girls were able to match their 'Want To' but we couldn't do it consistently as a team. Playing against this relentless attitude was something that the girls were not prepared to do on this day.

At our next practice we played a series of games that focused on creating a competitive attitude. We began with a game of Wembley where the first two teams to score three goals would then play in the final. The game is a common one but there are many different ways to play it. We play it in pairs with two balls constantly in play. All of the teams are attacking the same goal which is defended by our goalkeeper. The girls enjoy this game and the competition set the tone for the practice to come.



The next game was one I call 'American Gladiators'. Two teams of six players are in their own 15 x 15-yard grid. One player from each team acts as a defender and enters the other team's grid where the remaining five players are dribbling a ball. When a player's ball is kicked out of the grid they are out of the game. The first defender to kick all of the balls out of the other team's grid wins for point for their team. This is played six times so that everyone has a chance to act as the defender. This game promotes hard work from the defender and being strong on the ball for the girls who are trying to keep the ball.

After that, we played a number of 1 v 1 games where all of the players are competing at the same time on a field that is 25 yards long. The girls are encouraged to be creative and score goals but the emphasis is on tenacious defending and hard work. The last 1 v 1 game that we played was one in which the girls are divided into two teams. Each team is lined up on one of the posts of the goal. They are organized biggest to smallest. The first two players in line come to the middle of the goal and lock arms at the elbow. I stand behind them as they look out away from the goal. I throw a ball over their heads and they run onto the field and chase the ball. They keep their arms linked and push shoulder-to-shoulder as they approach the ball. When one player gains possession of the ball she tries to turn, beat the other player and score. The player that scores earns one point for their team.

For the last game we played 10 v 2. Pairs of players take turns trying to win the ball from the 10 attackers as many times as possible in 2 minutes. The defensive pairs that touches the ball the most times wins. This game shows the girls how hard they are capable of working if they really focus on it. It also encourages them to work as a team to win the ball.

The practice ended with a scrimmage where the winning team would only have to do two sprints and the losing team would have to complete five. Having a consequence to the game gives the girls something to play for and emphasizes the idea of not just PLAYING but COMPETING.

We compete in a tournament this weekend so I'm looking forward to seeing how this practice carries over into our games.

Have you had a similar issue with your team in the past? How have you dealt with it?

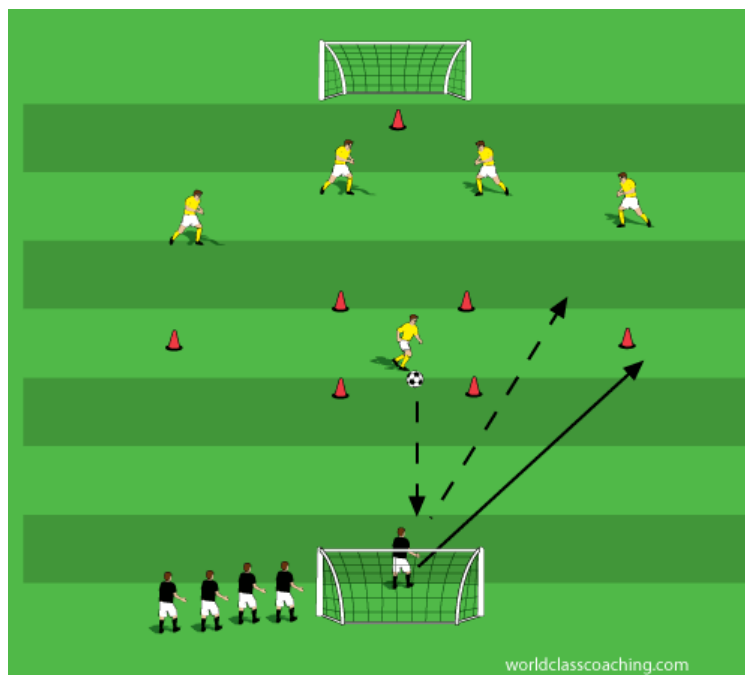
'Fun Day' after Tournament Weekends

I always have a 'Fun Practice' with my teams after a tournament weekend. This break from the normal routine gives the players a chance to play some fun games and just enjoy being with their teammates.

'Fun' is defined differently depending on the age and competitive level of the team. My younger teams (U9 & U10) usually want to play skill games that they have enjoyed like Foxes and Rabbits, Stuck in the Mud and [American Gladiators](#) that I described in my last post. Players in the middle age groups (U11 - U13) have usually chosen to play competitive team games that have elements of soccer but are not just a scrimmage. These games include Wembley, Half-Line (a shooting game) or Soccer Baseball. My older teams generally want to play small-sided games, often in a tournament format.

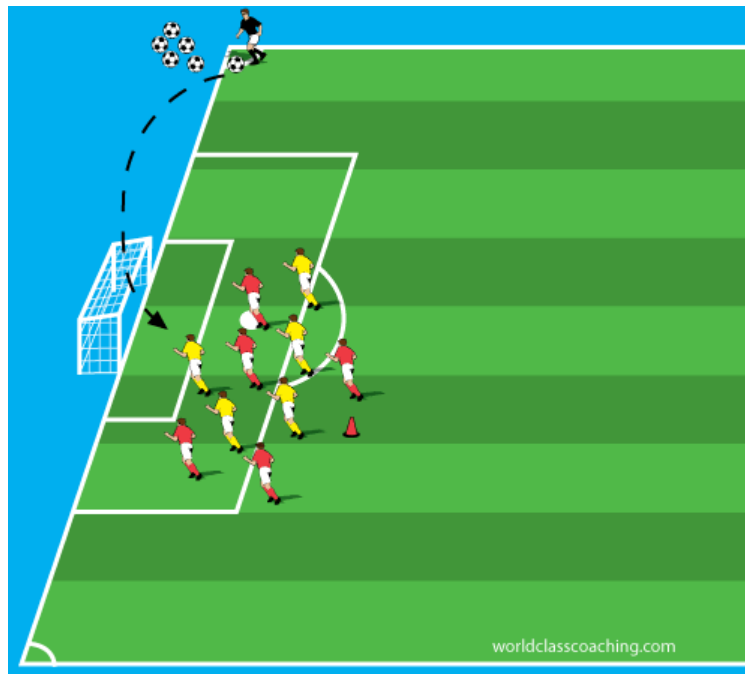
My recent 'Fun Day' practice was with my U11 and U12 girls teams. True to form, they wanted to start with Wembley so we played two games that lasted a total of about 15 minutes. I think most coaches play some form of Wembley so I won't describe it here.

Next, the girls picked Soccer Baseball. We play this game as a modified game of Kickball that is played in most elementary schools. The pitcher stays in a 6x6-yard box or pitcher's mound. The rest of the defending team spreads out around the diamond. The team who is 'Up', lines up next to one goal. Another goal is located in the outfield.



The pitcher passes the ball to the first player in line who shoots toward the opposite goal or puts it into play anywhere on the field. If it goes in the goal, it's a homerun. If a fielder heads the ball, the 'batter' is out. Once the ball touches the ground, the fielders must make three passes and pass it to the pitcher who then tries to score in the goal behind home plate. The next player in line for the team that is 'Up' can act as a goalkeeper and try to save the shot. All of this has to happen before the 'batter' manages to run around all of the bases and run into the goal he started from. Each team is 'Up' until the fielding team gets three outs or everyone has had a chance to 'Hit'.

After playing soccer baseball for about 30 minutes, the girls were ready for a change. They voted to play soccer tennis. Again, this is a popular game that most coaches are familiar with. We play it as a 'doubles' game. We usually have three games going on so that at the end of 5 minutes, the winning team moves up one court until they reach, 'Center Court'. The pair that loses that game moves down to lowest court. To create more rallies, the ball is allowed to bounce twice for each team every time the ball comes over to their side of the court.



Following about 15 minutes of soccer tennis, I offered the girls a chance to play a game they hadn't played before. I called it, 'Crossing Wembley'. We created two teams, Yellow and Red. I take a supply of balls to the corner and serve a ball into the box as it would be for a corner kick. Both teams are attacking the ball trying to score. If a goal is not scored directly from the cross, play continues until someone scores or the ball goes out of play. Three points are awarded for goals that are scored from a header or volley and one point is scored for another other goal. Each time a goal is scored or the ball goes out of play all of the players must run around a cone outside of the box before they are allowed to attack the next cross. The girls really enjoyed the challenge of this game.

As an aside, I've recently started to give the girls an incentive to head the ball around the goal. If they score a goal with their head, I bring ice cream to the next practice. I'm not usually a fan of extrinsic motivation; I would rather have the player do things for their own sake. Having said that, I've had great success with this little extra incentive starting at U11, especially with girls. Once someone scores a goal with their head, the other players start to give it a try and suddenly they're heading the ball in all areas of the field.

What do you do to change things up with your teams? Have you come up with any creative and effective ways to encourage your players to head the ball more confidently?

A Set Play That Works

I love set plays. Well, let me clarify that. I love well thought out set plays. They don't necessarily have to work because let's face it they don't always work. But the well thought out set plays show some creativity. Anything is better than the mind numbing default crosses from wide positions or shots from just outside the box.

A great example of a creative set play that worked to perfection was when Argentina scored at the end of the first half in the 1998 World Cup. It was a free kick from about 25 yards out. It looked like they were setting up for a shot but a quick pass down the side of the wall to Zanetti caught England napping and Zanetti fired a shot to pull Argentina level at 2-2. Argentina went on to win the game on penalty kicks...I won't mention the Sol Campbell header in extra time that was mysteriously disallowed and would have no doubt won the game for England. Still rankles me that. But let's focus on the great set play. Maybe I will post this one another time.

Anyway, last week, I saw another neat set play from Liverpool when they played West Ham in an EPL game. It was from a throw-in near the corner flag and was designed to get a player free to shoot, run into the box, etc. The set play worked great until the final pass to a player on the edge of the box who wasn't able to get his shot off. But it's one that can be easily copied and I'm sure will pay dividends.

Here it is broken down.



Glen Johnson takes the throw-in. Maxi Rogriguez shows for the ball and plays it back with one touch to Johnson.



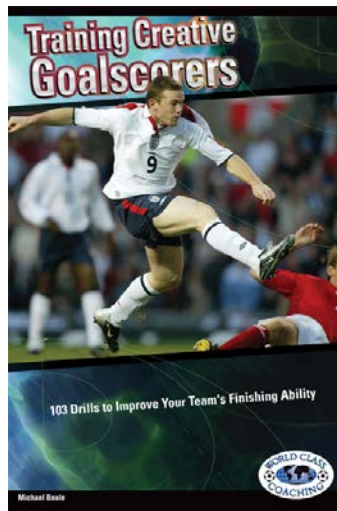
Gerrard now shows toward Johnson who plays a pass directly to Gerrard that splits the two defenders. Gerrard plays a one-touch pass toward the corner of the penalty area where Rodriguez has made his run.



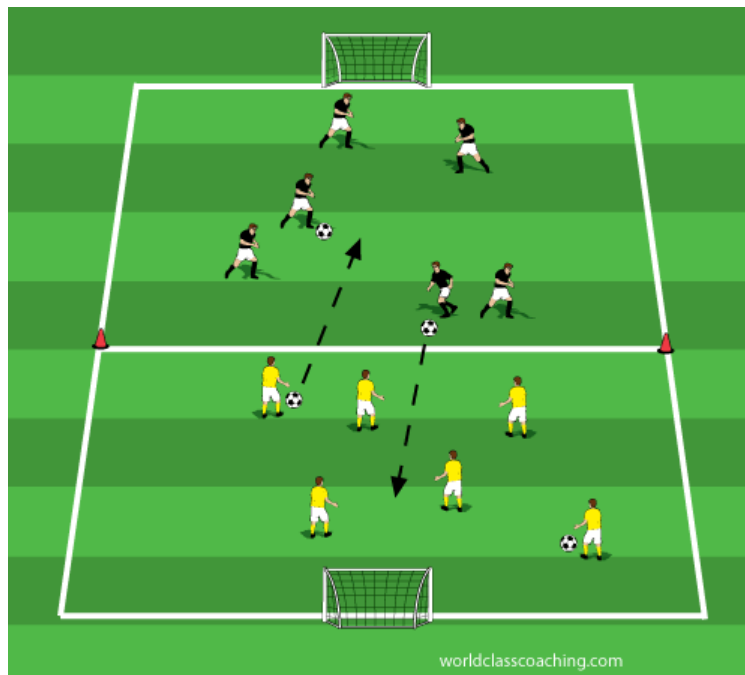
Rodriguez, then plays the ball across the box for an incoming player. At this point, I guess Rodriguez would have options to do what is available to him.

From Shooting to Finishing

When I work on shooting with my teams I like to create realistic situations that transfer easily into the real game. My favorite resource for these kinds of exercises is a book by Chelsea Academy Coach, Michael Beale, called *Training Creative Goalscorers*.



This is the best book or DVD I've seen for exercises that engage the imagination of the players and motivate them to play at game speed and focus.

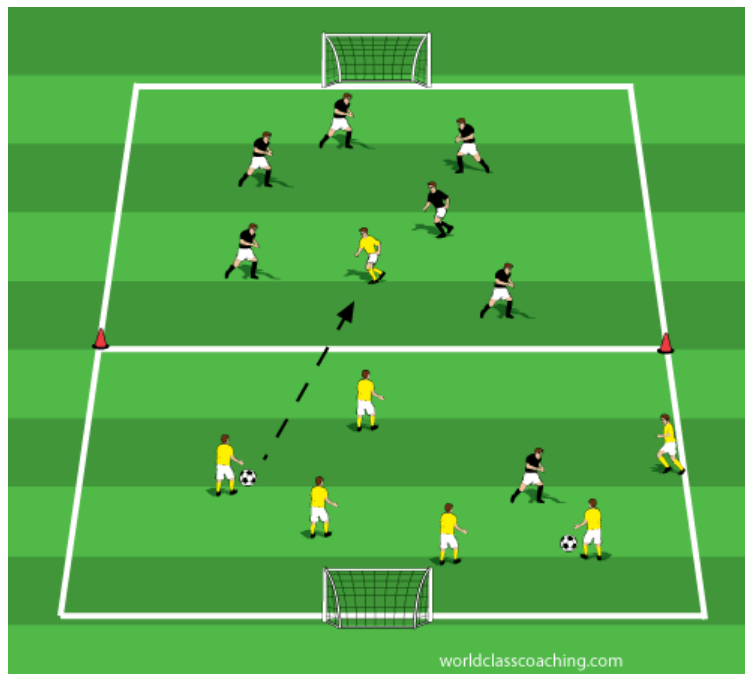


Having said that, my players will tell you that their favorite shooting game is one we call 'Half-Line'. After we warm-up with some exercises that focus on the technique of shooting, we divide the team in two and put one goal at each end of an area that is the same size as two penalty areas. Since the size varies depending on the age of the players, this is a good reference point to use. A line of cones halfway between the two goals separates the teams. With younger teams, each team starts with two balls. With older teams we only use two balls to lessen the chance of someone being hit by a ball they didn't see coming.

To begin with, the rules are fairly simple: shoot from your side of the field and score in the other team's goal. Depending on the age and ability of the players, you can allow them to use their hands to save shots that are taken on their goal or you can say that they must defend the goal by clearing the ball as a field player would. The first team to score 10 goals wins.

There is a whole list of alternative rules that you can use to focus on whatever skills you'd like. Here's a list of just a few:

- If a ball is caught, the shooter must sit out until his team scores or catches a ball shot by the other team.
- If a ball is received cleanly (no bounce) by the defender, the shooter must sit out until his team scores or a teammate receives a ball cleanly.
- The ball must be rolling when you hit it.
- You can only shoot a ball that has been passed to you by another player.

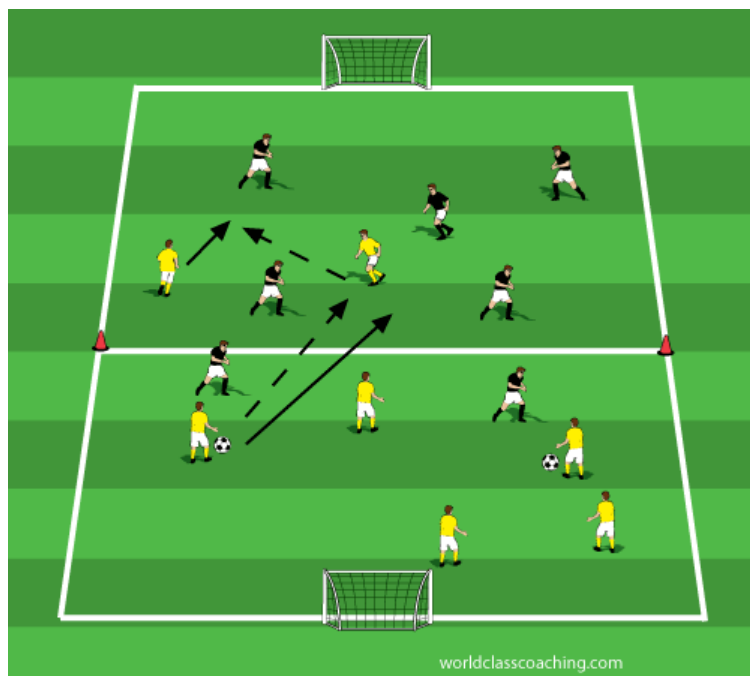


As the first progression, we take one player from each team and put them on the other side of the field as a forward who is also responsible for pressuring the other team's shooters. If the forward

wins the ball from the other team he can finish it. His teammates can pass to the forward for him to finish. If the forward is under pressure and unable to shoot, he can pass it back to his teammates on the other side.



Next, we allow the player who passed the ball to the forward to support his pass and move into the attacking third of the field. This run makes the game more realistic and allows for the forward to combine with another player in order to score. The second attacker is allowed to stay in the attacking half until the ball he passed in is played back to side of the field so now there is more pressure on the team to move the ball to open space to create the chance to shoot or pass to their forward.

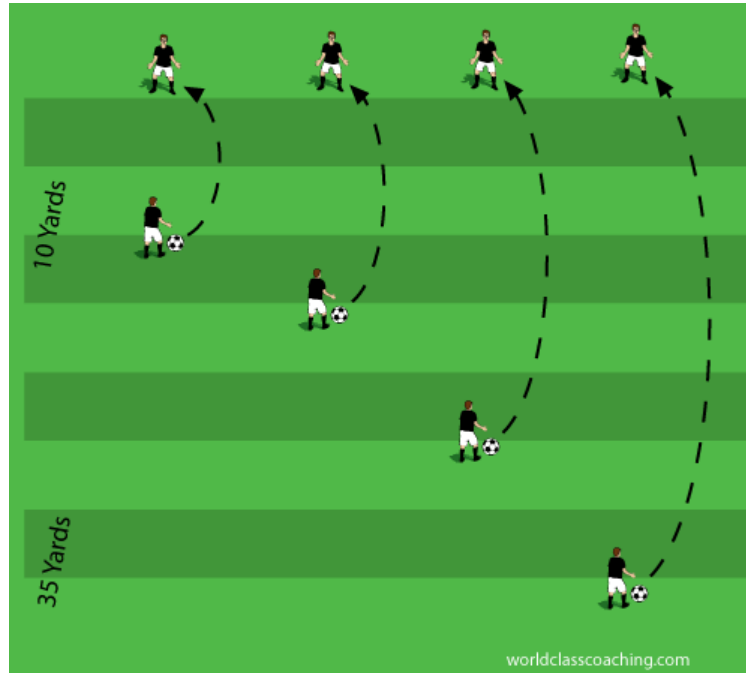


This final progression adds an additional forward but still allows a player to support his pass to the forwards, putting three players in the attacking half.

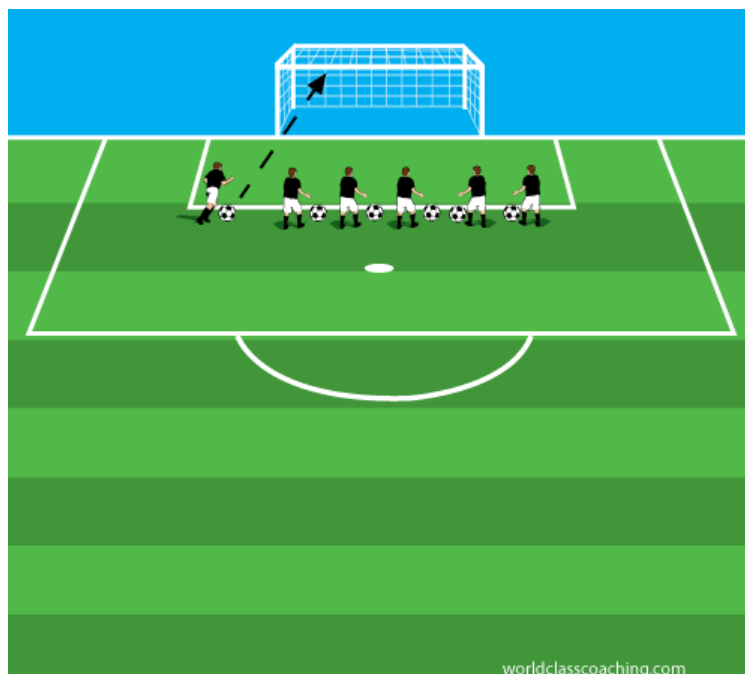
Do you have any other progressions that could be used with this game? What shooting games or exercises do you use to transfer shooting technique into finishing skill?

Long Passing

If you asked a group of 100 players to list their 5 favorite practices I don't think that 'Long Passing' would show up on the list. The activity itself is not intrinsically fun or exciting. But you can make it challenging and competitive if you turn it into a game.

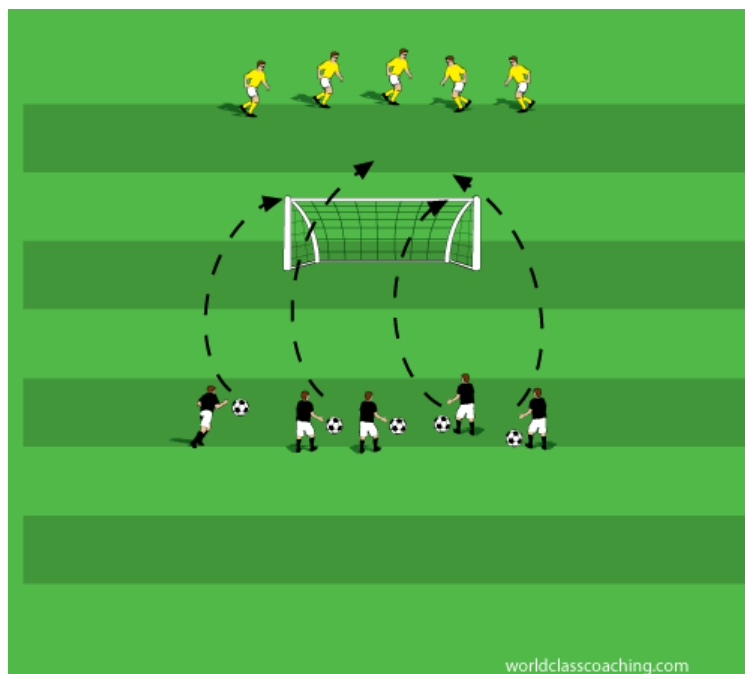


It's important to first make sure that the players understand the basic technique necessary to pass a ball in the air. Start with the players in pairs, 10 yards apart. One player tries to chip the ball into the hands of another. Once they have some success with this then they move back to 15 yards, then 20, 25 and so on. Starting so close together will encourage them to slide their foot under the ball to lift it.



Next, have the players line up in front of the goal, six yards away. One at a time, the players strike the ball and attempt to hit the back of the net in the air. Those that are successful move back another six yards. This continues until only one player is able to hit the back of the net without the ball bouncing.

The last game is a favorite of my teams. We play a game of 'Crossbar' which I imagine most people have played at one time or another. We play it as a team game where one team has the balls out in front of the goal and the other team is behind the goal. The team with the balls has two minutes to hit the crossbar as many times as they can. The team behind the goal must keep them supplied with balls or the other team receives a point. After two minutes the teams change roles and the team with the most points wins. A progression of this game is to have the players touch the ball forward so that it is moving when they strike it.



An alternate method of scoring is to give one point for every cross that goes over the bar and three points for every one that strikes it. This encourages the players to get the ball into the air.

Games like these can make the most mundane skills fun to work on.

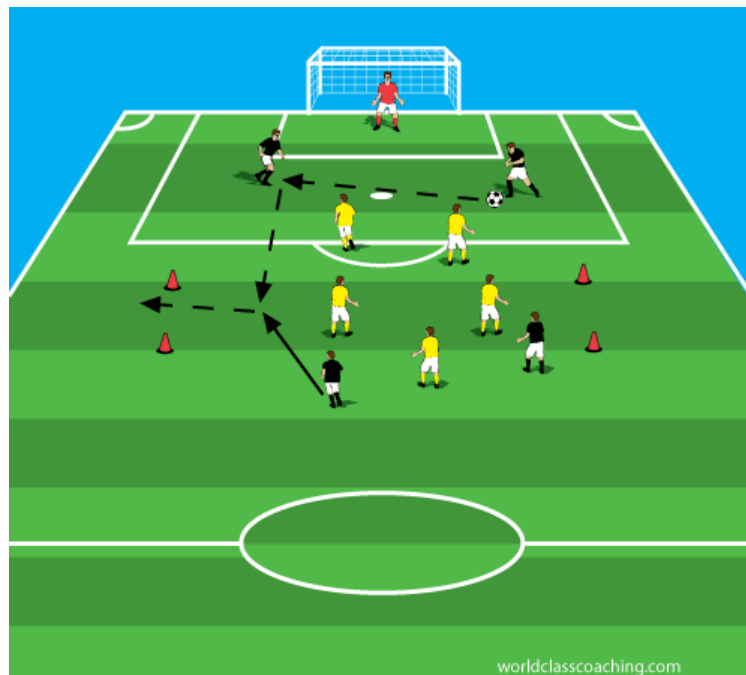
What other activities or games have you used to make long passing engaging and fun? What other ways have you been able to capture the imagination of player successfully with a difficult topic?

One Goal Games

While I was planning my sessions for this week I thought about how lucky I am to have access to a wide variety of goals. My club trains at the Overland Park Soccer Complex which will host the 2010 US Youth Soccer National Championship. There are 12 lighted Tiger Turf fields that each has as many as eight different goals. Some are full sized; others are 6x3 and three other sizes in between.

I haven't always been this fortunate. Like most other coaches, I've had to get by with one goal more often than not. This isn't always a huge problem because most of the teams I have coached only had one goalkeeper on the roster. Playing a game to two large goals would mean that I would stick a field player in goal and he/she would miss out on an opportunity to play on the field.

Over my years of coaching I've been on the look out for small-sided games that only require one goal. Here are a couple of the games that I've used the most.



One Large Goal and Two Cone Goals

All of these games can be played with different numbers of players. I've used 5 v 5 plus the goalkeeper in my examples. You can alter this depending on which area of the game you want to focus on.

A goalkeeper and one team defend the large goal while the other team of five defends two small goals created with cones. What makes these goals different is that they set up perpendicular to the large goal. This prevents a player from taking a long shot at these goals and forces them to build up the attack through combination play or beating a defender 1 v 1. If they area around one

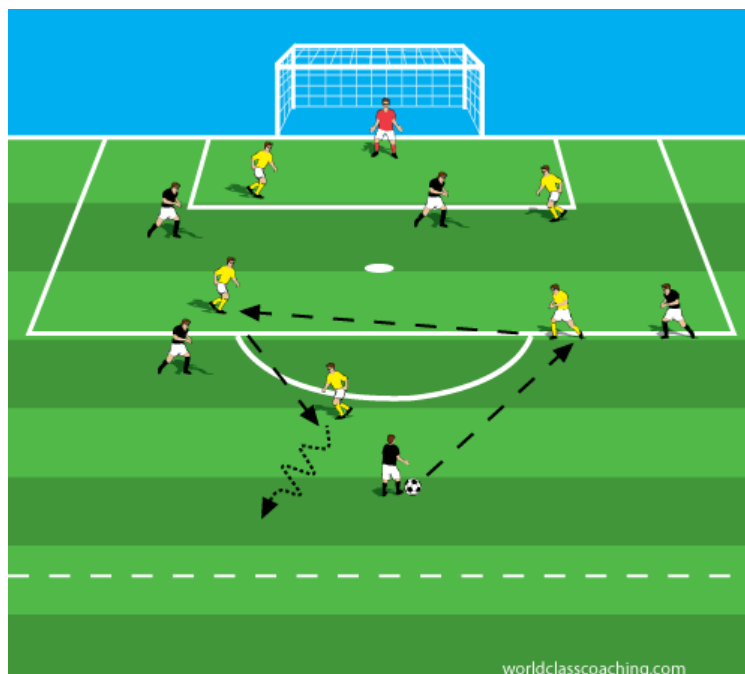
of the goals becomes crowded, the attackers need to change the point of attack and try to score in the other small goal.

When either team scores, they change sides so that they have a chance to solve both of the scoring challenges.



4 v 4 + 4 Possession and Attack

This game focuses on fast attacking and finishing. The team that wins possession must pass to the neutral players at least twice and can only attack the goal after a pass to one of the neutral players who is closest to the goal. This game rewards a team who maintains possession until it is the right time to attack. It also requires the attacking players to make forward runs when one of the neutral players closest to the goal receives the ball. This is a great game to play following a possession oriented practice.



Half 'Court' Game

This game is based on a half-court basketball game that many of us played as kids. The team with the ball attacks the goal and tries to score. If they are successful, they get the ball back at the half line and try to attack again. If the defending team wins the ball they have to possess it back to the half line before they can attack the goal. This simulates building out of the back and then attacking the goal. With younger or less accomplished teams I allow them to pass to me rather than take it all the way back to the half line. Then I pass to one of their players and they are allowed to attack.

What progressions can you add to these games? What games have you found success with when you only had access to one goal?

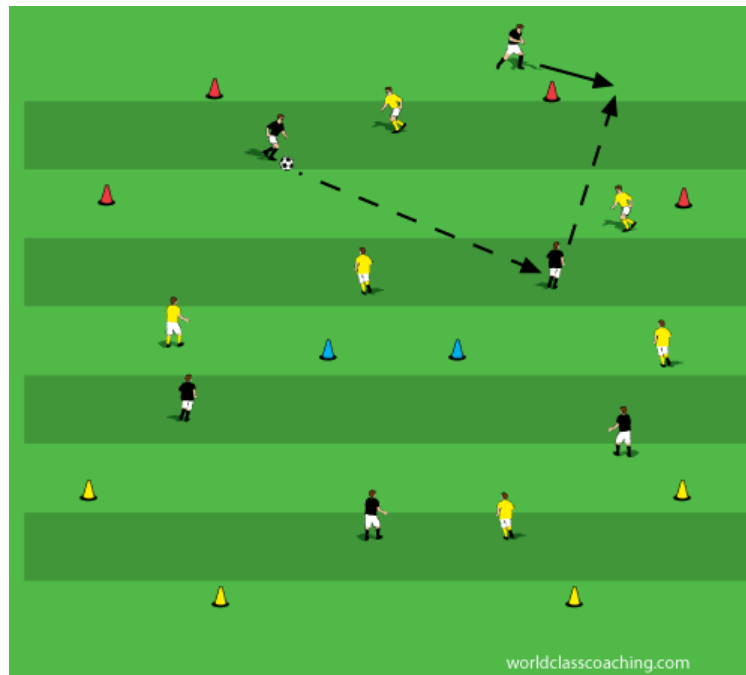
End of the Season

In the last week of May many teams enter their final week of practice before the end of the league season and end of the year tournaments. At least this is the case for our teams in the Midwest. If a team is not participating in State Cup and are one week away from the summer break, how do you approach the final practices?

The weather is turning hotter, the season is coming to an end, school will be out soon and the attention span of your players is at an all time low. The players are not going to be interested in reviewing passing and receiving or doing a walk-through of defensive shape. For those coaches who try to review the mundane they will find it a difficult and frustrating situation.

At this time of year I turn to small-sided games to generate excitement and motivation in the players while still running a productive session. If the rules of the game reward what you are trying to reinforce, then the game becomes the teacher. When I make a coaching point the players don't look at it as correction, they look at it as it helping them find a way to win the game. There are many, many different small-sided games and you can find one to suit any topic you want to focus on.

Here is a progression of small-sided games that I use at different points during the year but especially near the end.



Five Goal Game

The size of the field will vary depending on the age and ability of the players. There needs to be enough room behind each of the cone goals that players can move in and out of it easily.

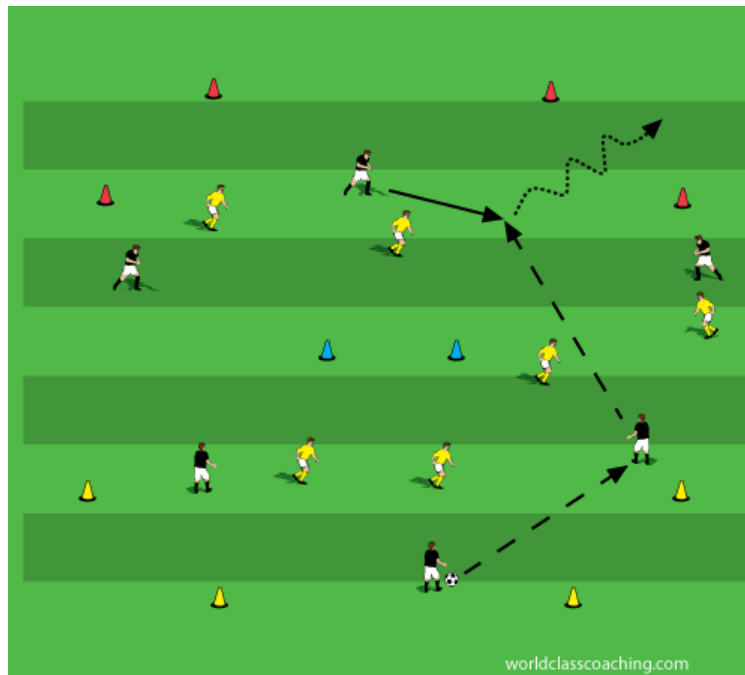
The number of players on each team can be anywhere between four and 10. You can also play this game with three teams where two teams play against one.

The teams are able to score in any of the five goals.

There are a number of different ways that you can award goals depending on what you want to emphasis.

- 1) Dribble through the cones in possession of the ball
- 2) Pass the ball through the cones to a teammate on the other side
- 3) Either dribble or pass through the cones
- 4) Five passes equals a goal

The emphasis for the first three is pretty obvious but the fourth one may not be. Adding this method of scoring will encourage good passing and support play but more importantly it will reward high pressure defending and discourage a team from 'goal hanging'.



Progression

The black team can only score in the red cone goals on one end. The yellow team can only score through the yellow cone goals on the other end. Either team can score through the blue cone goal in the middle. This gives the game direction and makes it more game related.

Any or all of the previous scoring methods can be used or you can allow the players to simply shot the ball through the cone goals.

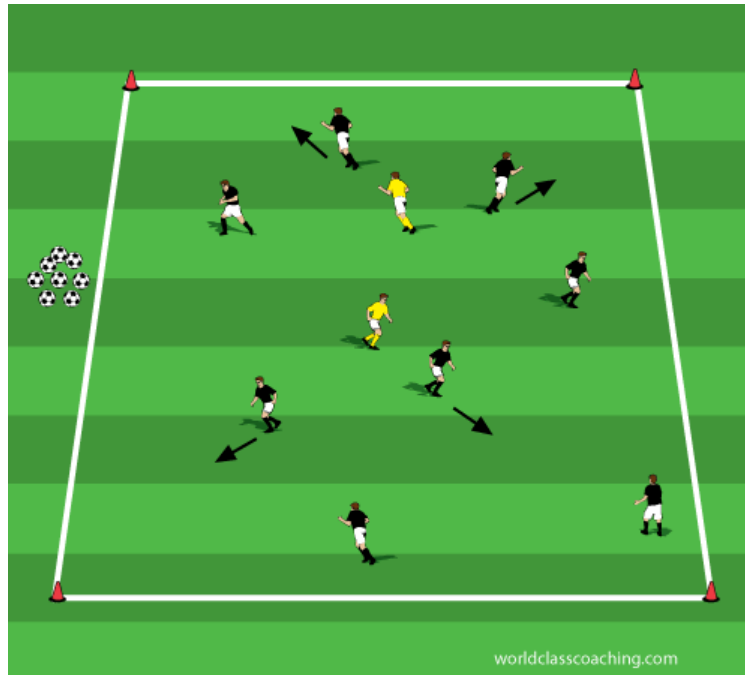
Full Team Scrimmage

Toward the end of the year I usually spend more time allowing the players to scrimmage freely without restrictions so that they can apply everything we've worked on during the year. The players enjoy this and I'm able to evaluate how the players, and the team as a whole, have understood what I've attempted to coach.

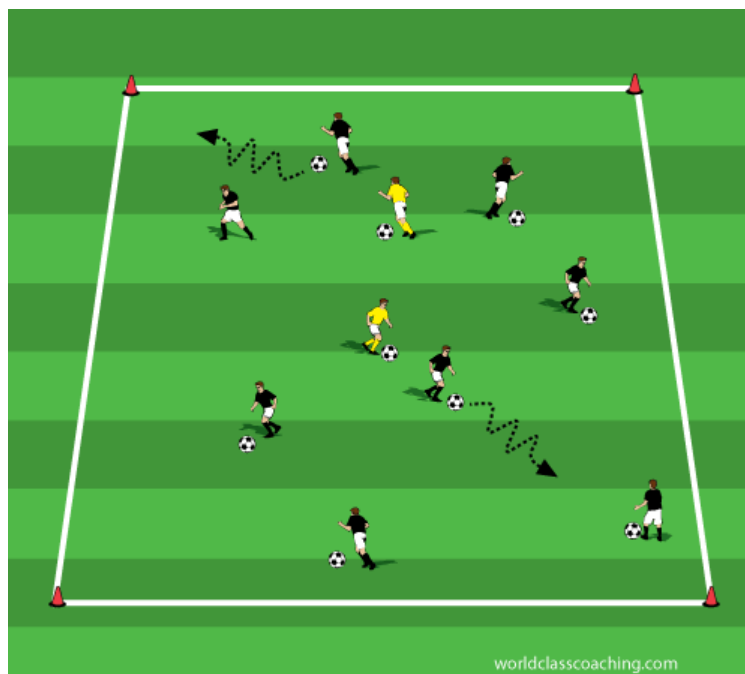
What do think? Are your sessions at the end of the season different from any other time? What have you found that works for you?

Warm-Up Game

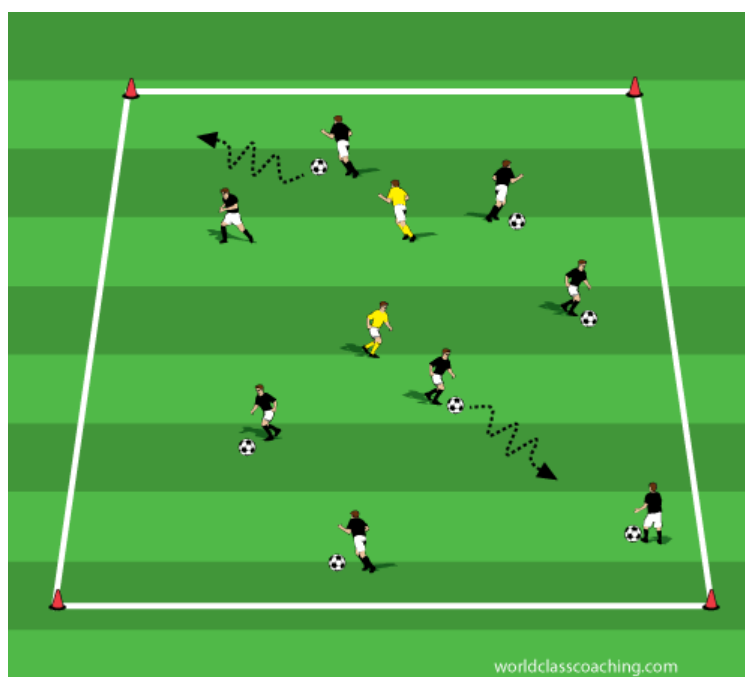
The start of a session sets the tone for the day, focuses the players on soccer and gets their body ready for physical activity. With younger teams (U12 and below) I like to start with a game that relates to the topic I'll be teaching. One of my favorites for days that we are working on dribbling is a progression of Tag.



To begin with, the players leave their ball outside the grid. The two players who are 'It' (you can use only one for the youngest players) hold a colored bib. The other players move freely throughout the grid. The players who are 'It' try to tag another player. If they do, that player gets the shirt and tries to tag someone else. The other players are encouraged to move constantly and be aware of where the 'It' players are.



After two minutes everyone, including the players who are 'It', get a ball. The rules are the same but now everyone has to control a ball while they are trying to tag players and avoid being tagged. If a player dribbles out of the area they take the bib from the closest defender.



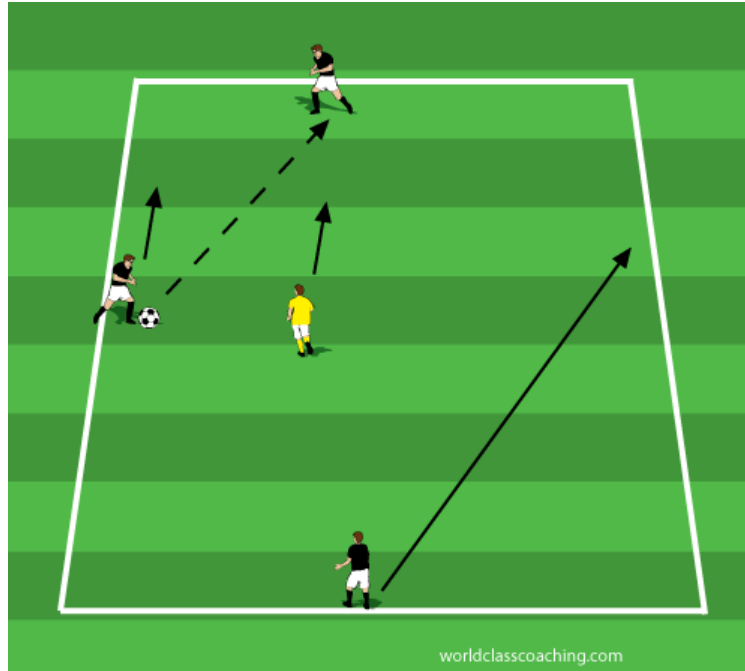
Next, the players who are 'It' leave their ball outside the area and instead of trying to tag people with their hand, they try to tag the ball with their foot. The dribblers are asked to move the ball away from the pressuring player and protect it.

In the final progression the players who are 'It' must take the ball away before their change role with the dribbler. If the 'It' players kicks the ball out of the area, the dribbler gets it back. If the dribbler leaves the area, he changes roles with the closest defender.

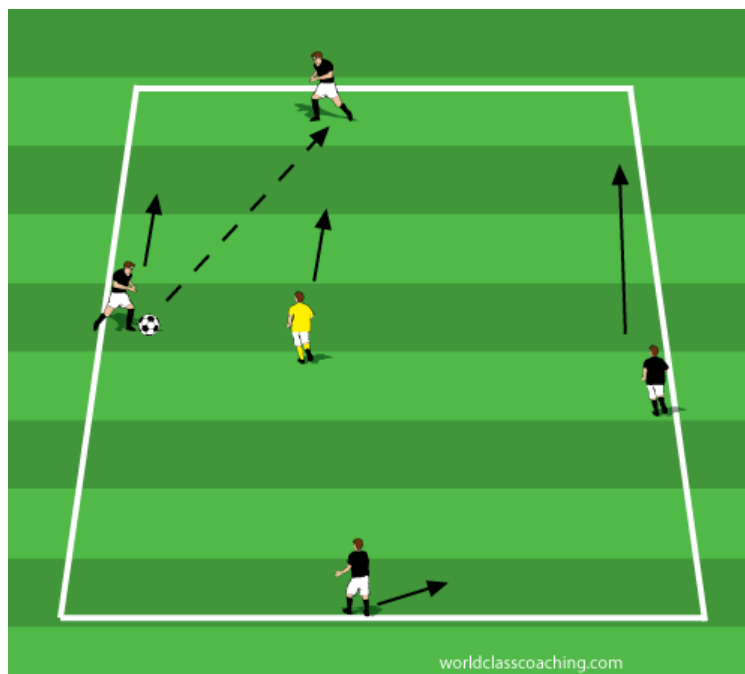
This is an easy to understand warm-up that provides everything necessary to prepare a player for practice. It is also progressive as it begins without a ball adds more defensive pressure gradually. You can add pressure by increasing the number of defenders depending on the age and ability of the players.

Possession Games

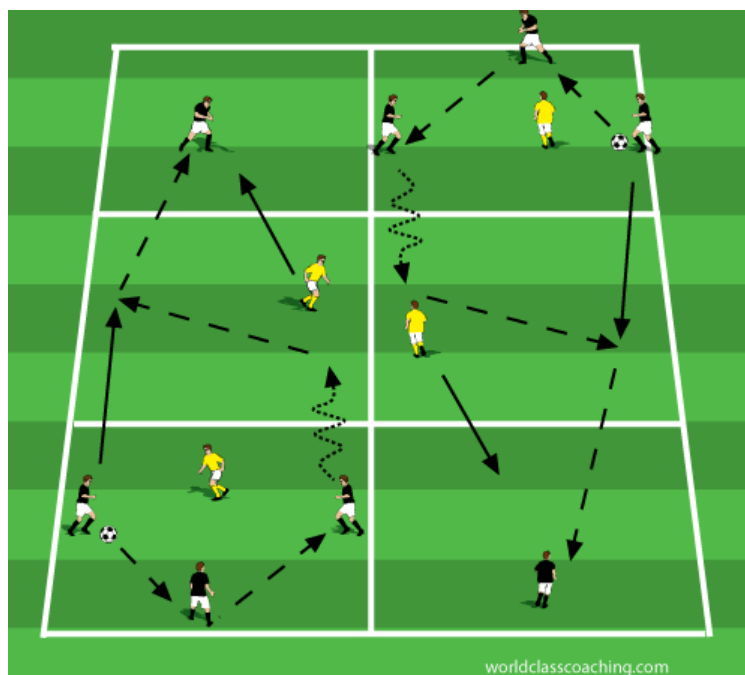
Most coaches I know use some variation of a 5 v 2 keep away game in a limited area. I've never liked 5 v 2 as a teaching tool because I have always felt that it was too static. Anson Dorrance did a great demonstration at our International Seminar a few years ago where he showed us the coaching points they use at UNC. One of the most important was to move closer to the player with the ball using an open body position. This makes the game more dynamic but still falls short of what I feel is a good teaching environment.



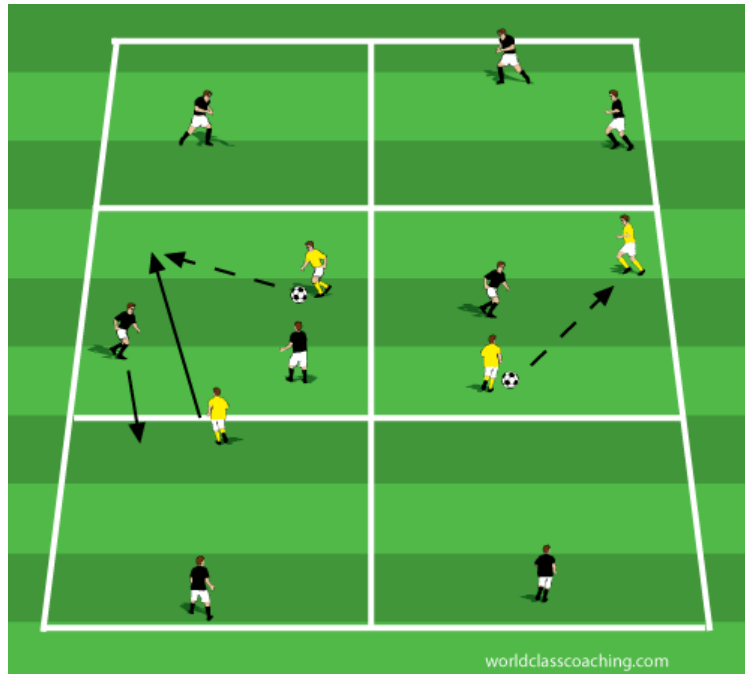
I prefer to use a 3 v 1 keep away game because it requires the players to move in order to provide a passing option on both sides of the ball. This requirement means that the players have to be more aware of space, pressure and support than in the more traditional 5 v 2. It also means that the player with the ball has to improvise if the support doesn't arrive before the pressure. These aspects make the 3 v 1 game more game related than 5 v 2.



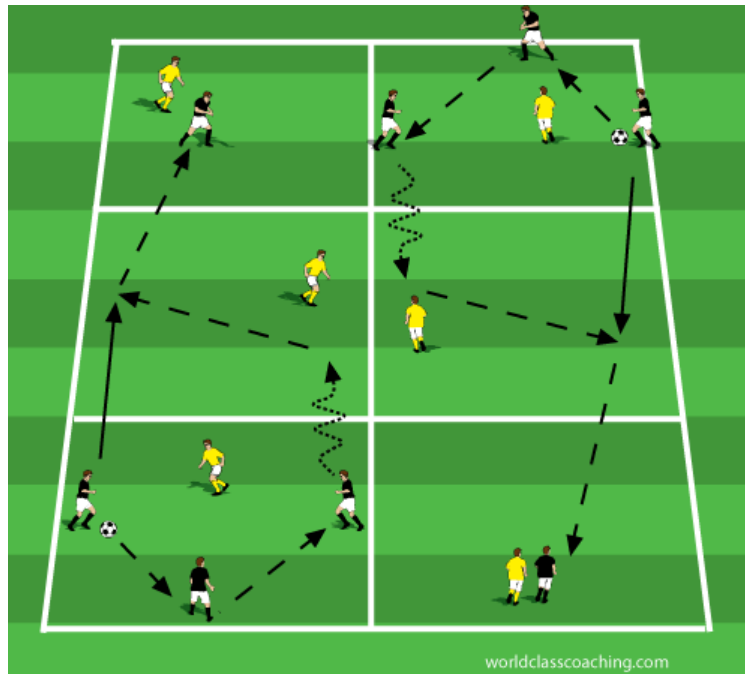
The 3 v 1 game can be too challenging for younger or less experienced players. When I run into this situation I will regress the practice to 4 v 1. When this is necessary I always make sure that the players understand that they are not to stand in the corners. They should be moving between the cones to provide support for the player with the ball. My other issue with keep away games is that they often don't translate to the real game. Non-directional possession games in isolation will not teach the players how to possess the ball and then attack with it.



This is a game that I have used with teams as young as U10 and as old as U19. As the players progress technically and tactically you can add complexity that will teach them new concepts and require greater precision and speed. The basic rules are simple: The three attacking players in the first grid must make three passes before they can move into the middle grid. The player that dribbles out of the first grid is supported by another player. Their goal is to get the ball to the attacking player in the last grid as soon as possible. If the defender in the middle grid tries to stop the direct ball to the attacker, the dribbler passes to the supporting player who can then play to the attacker. Once the ball reaches the attacker, the dribbler and supporting player move into the final grid followed by the defender and the pattern begins again.



If one of the defenders wins the ball and can keep it in the grid then they move it to the middle grid and play 2 v 1 against the player who lost the ball. If the ball goes out of any one of the grids then the ball is returned to the attacking team and they try to complete three passes.



Once this becomes easy for the attackers then you can add a defender to the last grid so that the attacker has to work harder to receive the ball from the players as they move through the middle grid.

Do you have ideas of how this could be progressed further? Do you have a way to progress the traditional 5 v 2 game to make it more functional?

Formations for Young Teams

There are many books and DVDs that discuss the different formations that can be played in the 11v11 game but I haven't seen that much discussion about how coaches organize their players when playing 6v6 or 8v8. While there are some areas that use 7v7 and 9v9, the former are the two most common formats for young players in United States.

Players that are U9 and U10 generally play 6v6 I'll focus on this post. I'll discuss the 8v8 format that U11 and U12 players progress in next week's blog.

It could be that this subject isn't discussed often because the focus at this age is on players developing their skills. This is true but they also need to learn how to play the game and understand the responsibilities of each position.



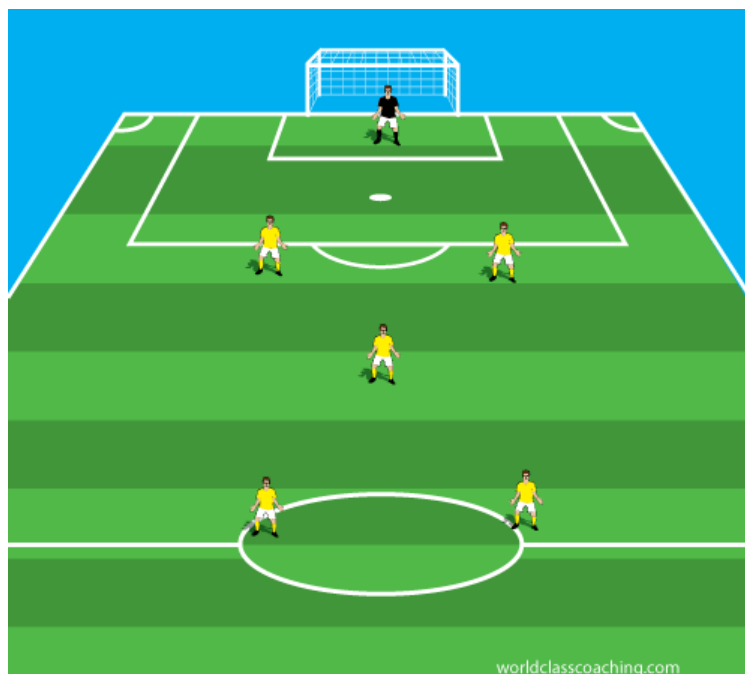
I keep it very simple most of the time with the 6v6 format. My teams play two defenders, two midfielders and a forward. This formation requires the players to learn to 'slide' from one side of the field to the other.



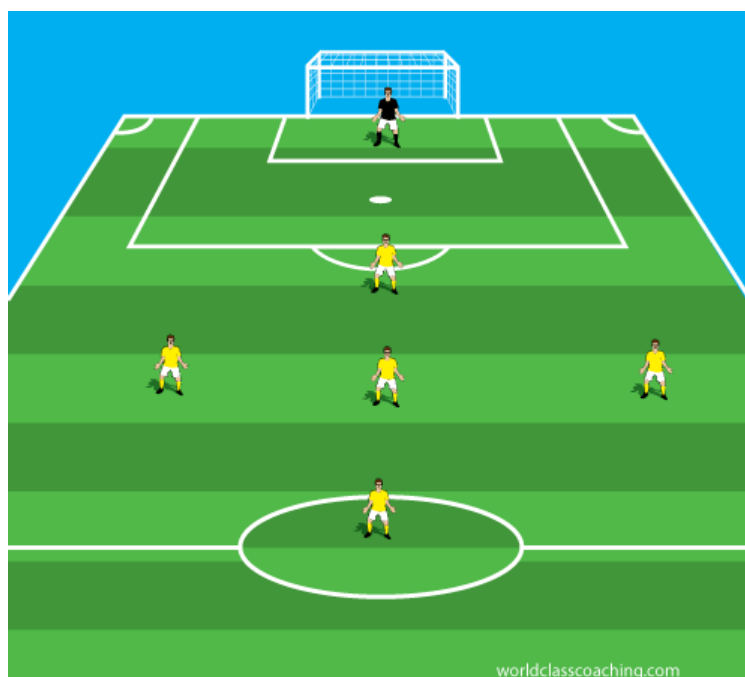
When defending, the defender on the ball side of the field moves to pressure while the weak side defender must slide toward the middle of the field and also drop back to cover the pressuring defender. The midfielders come back to help with the ball back. The ball side midfielder helps pressure the ball while the back side midfielder covers the back side becoming a third defender.

On the offensive side, the forward learns that they need to move to the ball side of the field and find a clear path to receive the ball. The midfielders learn to support the forward by making wide runs when attacking. This is especially true for the weak side midfielder. It's common to see this player get sucked into the middle in search of the ball. This makes it much easier for the defending team because there is less space to defend.

The defenders are encouraged to move forward and support the midfielders; this makes the field smaller for the other team and gives the defenders a chance to get involved in the attack. I want the defenders to dribble forward when they pick up the ball near the halfway line if they have space in front of them. We routinely have defenders score goals because of this attacking attitude.



This alignment gives the team a constant presence in the middle but it requires the two forwards to come back to cover the flanks or for the defenders to come forward to pick up wide midfielders leaving the other defender 1v1 with the forward.



When I guided a coach's tour to Holland a couple of years ago we watched a PSV training session where they were playing 6v6 and the players used a 1-3-1 formation. The center midfielder was responsible for getting back to cover the defender when his team lost the ball.

The other players had similar roles to the 2-2-1 but this was a unique approach that I had not seen before.

This formation would definitely add more width to the game but playing with one true defender against at least one forward would put a lot of pressure on this player. I suppose it would be good for teaching 1v1 defending and the importance of recovery runs but it would give me a stomach ache :-).

What are other formations that you've used with the 6v6 format and how have they worked to help the players learn the game?

Formations for Young Teams Part II

Last week I gave examples of formations that you can use in the 6v6 format that is used in many areas of the US for U9 and U10 teams. You don't have too much flexibility when there are only six players on your team.

With the 8v8 format you can do a number of things to play to the strengths of your team or the weaknesses of the opponent.



The most common line-up I've seen is a 3-3-1. This formation gives you a lot of cover in the back allowing the wide midfielders the opportunity to get forward to support the single striker. There is also a natural transition from 3-3-1 to 4-4-2 when the team begins to play full-sided games.



My person preference is to play 2-3-2 because it provides the opportunity to stress the importance of pressure and cover on defense. It also teaches the wingers to cover the back side when their team is defending. On attack, the two strikers can play off each other without having to wait for support from the midfielders. I also like this formation because I like to play 3-4-3 with my girl's teams when we transition to full-sided games.



I've also used a 2-4-1 formation with one attacking and one defending midfielder. This gives you extra cover in the center and allows the attacking midfielder to join the striker when they can.

As I said in last week's post, the formation is not the most important issue when coaching young players but it can give you the opportunity to emphasize the area of the game you want to coach.

Are there any other formations that you use with your teams that have worked well?

Preseason Conditioning

As August approaches many teams in the Midwest United States are starting their preseason program, including my U12 girls. At this age I think it's important for the kids to have a break during the summer months and have time to just be a kid. This makes preseason even more important because I need to get them in some kind of shape before we get on the field.

Conditioning for soccer has changed a lot since I was in college and 5 miles runs were an accepted preseason tradition. Now condition is much more soccer specific.

The program I use was introduced to me by Scott Moody of Athlete F.I.T. Scott has worked with hundreds of soccer players in the Kansas City area and his [web site](#) has educated coaches and athletes around the world. He also has a very useful [blog](#) that has been a great resource.

The conditioning program has five stages. The stages can be spread over five weeks or can be down in as little and two and a half weeks. I prefer to complete the stages by doing two sessions a week over two and a half weeks.

In each stage the goal is to cover as much distance as possible and more than you did the last stage. It is best to do these runs on a track where the distance is easily measured. The goal distance that I refer to is for my U12 girls. This would be longer for older players. Here is how the stages breakdown:

Stage 1 - 24 minute run - 2 3/4 miles

Stage 2 - 2 x 12 minute runs (5 minute rest) - 3 miles

Stage 3 - 3 x 8 minute runs (3 minute rest) - 3 1/8 miles

Stage 4 - 4 x 6 minute runs (2 minute rest) - 3 1/4 miles

Stage 5 - 6 x 4 minute runs (1 minute rest) - 3 1/2 miles

Obviously some players will not be able to meet these goal distances initially but the goal for everyone is to steadily cover more distance during the preseason. This will give all of the players a solid aerobic foundation that they can build on throughout the season.

What do you do with your teams during preseason? What have you found works best?

University of North Carolina Skills Testing

I've always liked the way that Anson Dorrance attempts to quantify everything that his teams do in practice. Keeping score creates motivation and encourages a competitive attitude better than anything else.

This also creates a benchmark that you can test against later in the season to gauge how effective your training sessions have been in each area. So not only are these test motivation for the players but also great tools for the coach to evaluate his or her methods.

The following exercises were presented by Anson Dorrance when he was a clinician at the WORLD CLASS COACHING International Coaching Seminar.

Anson Dorrance – North Carolina Women's Soccer Technique Olympics

Anson Dorrance – *UNC Preseason Camp*

Anson is feels that it's very important to objectively quantify as much in the game as possible. The reason is that they want to see if they're doing the right things in practice. So they are quantifying technique. This was the beginning of the 'Competitive Caldron' which had a huge impact on developing the mentality of the teams at UNC and the 1996 US National Team.

UNC PRESEASON CAMP

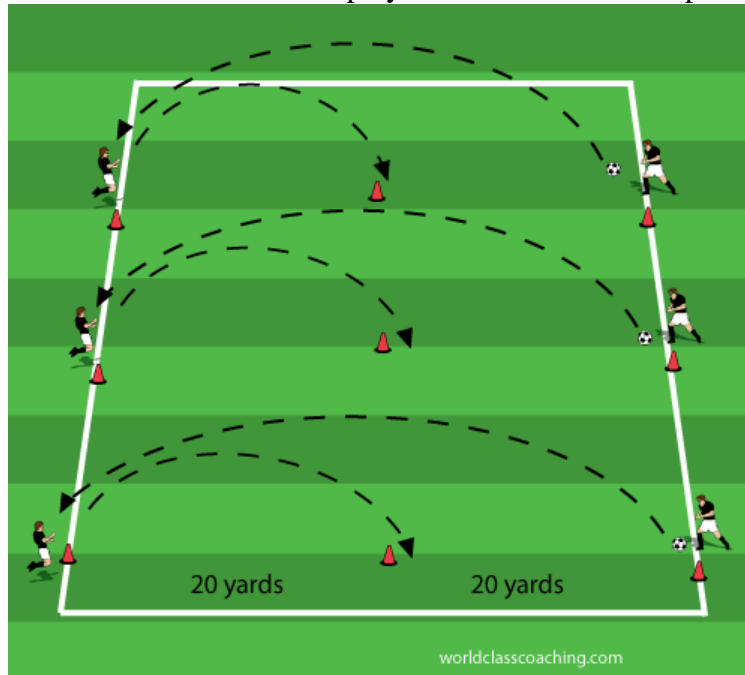
The objective is to make sure the players are working on technique during the summer in addition to fitness.

Serving and Heading

The object of this test is to challenge the girls to serve the ball accurately over 30 yards and head the ball effectively.

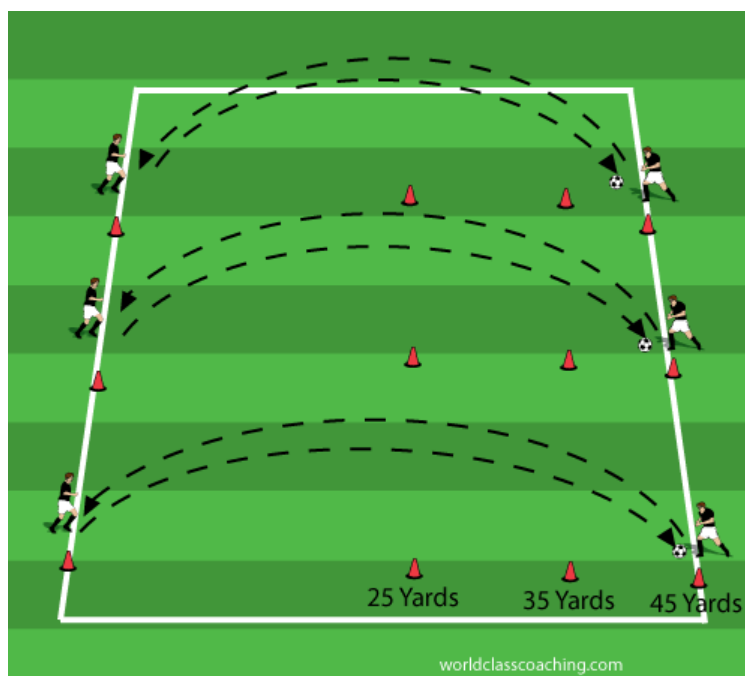
Each girl picks a player that they have to pass the test with. The server must pass the ball to receiving player. Receiving player must head the ball past the middle cone. Ten balls are served and the header must get six of them past the cone.

The roles then reverse and the other player serves balls for her partner to head.



Serving and Receiving

The objective of this test is to test a player's ability to serve and receive over distance. The exercise is accomplished in pairs at three different distances; 25 yards, 35 yards, and 45 yards. Players serve and receive for one minute at each distance. The serving player serves a pass to the receiving player. Coach awards the players a point if the pass reaches the receiving player and the receiving player is able to control the ball out of the air. Receiving player must control the ball out of the air and serve the ball back at game speed in order to receive a point. If the receiving player has a poor first touch or the serve does not clear the line, the players are not awarded a point. Coach awards points at each level and totals points upon completion of the exercise.



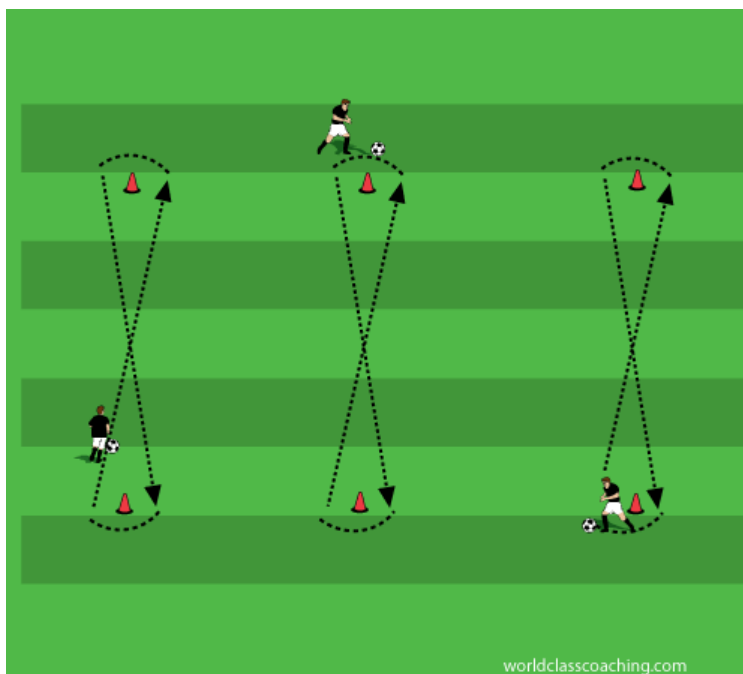
Progression –

- Alternate which foot is serving
- Start out at 25 yards
- Move to 35 yards
- Mover to 45 yards

Figure 8 Dribbling

The player starts behind one cone and proceeds to dribble the ball in a figure 8 around two cones. The distance between cones is ten yards. Each player completes three one-minute cycles. Each cycle is completed with a different restriction: inside of the foot only, outside of the foot only, and both with any part of the foot. A coach counts the number of times the player completes the circuit to the nearest quarter.

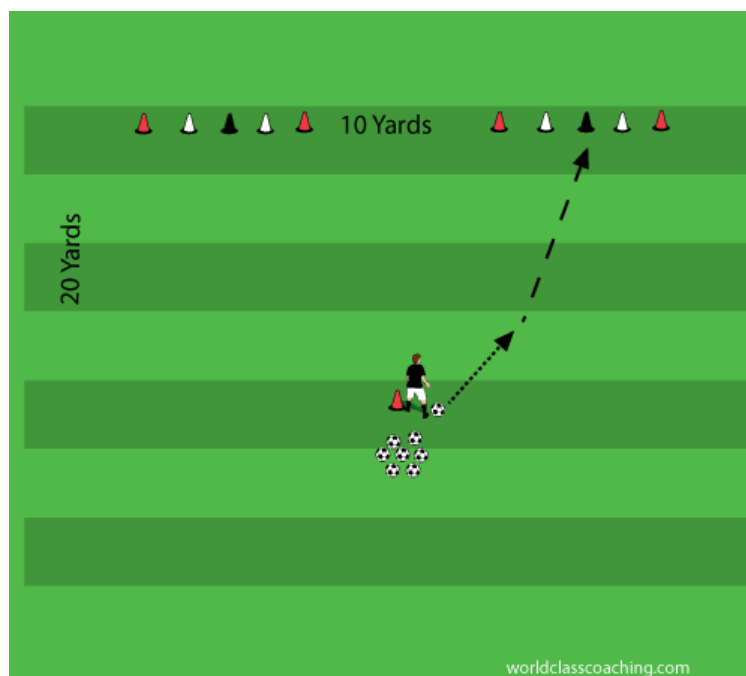
A quarter is deducted for each fault (touch with the wrong part of the foot). Example: 7 and 3/4 circuits completed with two faults, they players score for the exercise is 7 and 1/4.



Brazilian Technical Passing

The player begins by running forward and passes the ball toward the target. If the player hits the center cone they receive three points. If it goes between the cones on either side of the center cone they receive two points. If the ball goes through the widest cones without touching them the player receives one point. No points are scored if the player misses the target or hits the outside cones. The player gets one minute to score as many points as possible.

The ball should be passed with the right foot at the target on the right and left foot on the other side.



These are just a few of the skills that they measure during the preseason at UNC.

Losing the WILL to WIN

This is a post by Scott Moody of [Soccer F.I.T Academy](#). It is re-posted here with his permission because I thought he made some excellent points that you might enjoy reading and discussing.

I commented on a post in a soccer [forum](#) last night and I thought I would also share the post here. The question was centered on the topic of..."Is it okay to push kids to WANT to WIN?" This is a very sensitive subject in this country and the more people I talk to the more complex the answers get. Here is a summary of my reply....

Players should want to WIN, that is why they play. Let's not sugar coat it, winning is fun! Losing, although not fun, should be motivating, and we should try and find the motivating factors in a loss that drives our training forward, motivating them, striving to win.

Quote from an English Coach on the Soccer Forum:

"As a coach I view everything as a step towards a realistic goal and then provide the emotional scaffolding to support the player as they climb..."

In the US, we are slowly becoming a country that is telling kids that it is okay to lose... but what I see every day is that they are losing the WILL to WIN and becoming very, very soft. Sure, it is okay to lose and as one coach pointed out around 90% of teams in your league end the season as losers. But it is more fun to win! And why is it so bad to tell our kids this? I told my 9 year old daughter in her first swim meet to have a blast, enjoy every second (like it is the only meet you will every compete in)...and if you have a shot to win at the end of the race, give it everything you have, everything. Refuse to get beat! That way at the end of the day you will know that you competed to the best of your ability. She won all 4 races, and had the time of her life! And in the final race she tried harder than I have ever seen her try at anything.

In my opinion, the problem is that we don't push the development that coaches, like the one I quoted above, are talking about. If we developed the kids (give them the athletic and technical skills to PLAY the game at a higher level), they would enjoy playing more. If they enjoy the game more, they play more often and their understanding (tactical knowledge) improves. They get better...

The better they get the more they feel that have vested in the process and the more we need to push the FUN of winning, the FUN of competing and FUN of the preparation (training) to be the best we can be (the journey). Instead, we don't develop the players at young ages like we should. We just expect them to be good and to do much of it on their own. We become frustrated with their lack of enthusiasm, and they see themselves as not living up to the coach's standards (this is not FUN anymore). So parents console their kids (as parents should do) with an attitude of "its okay to lose...It's only a game."

After a few years of "It's okay to lose, it's only a game." the WILL to WIN is lost and the players feel that they have little to work towards. This can, and most often will, carry over into

other aspects of their life (school, work, family, etc.). Winning is tough, preparing to win is tougher and coming back from a loss is probably the most difficult thing they will face. But, if they do come back from a loss and compete and win...then they know that with toughness, hard work and a mentality that you can do anything makes it fun again!

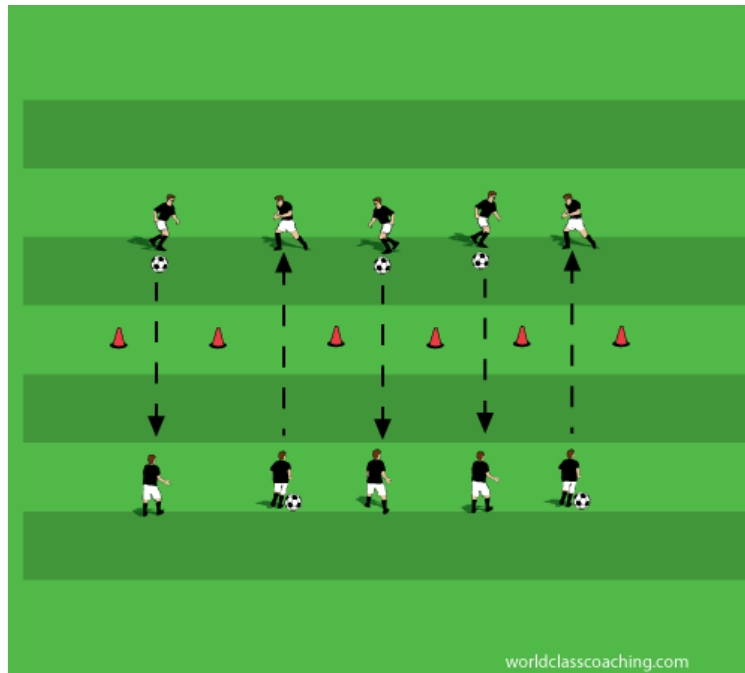
My point is shorter than my post...

Give them to tools...Give them the support...Encourage them to enjoy the process and never let them lose the will to win!

Passing Practice

This is a passing practice session that I have run with various age groups. I like it because you can coach just the basic technique or you can go into great detail depending on the age and ability of the players in the group you're working with. Each phase can also be made competitive which always drive performance higher.

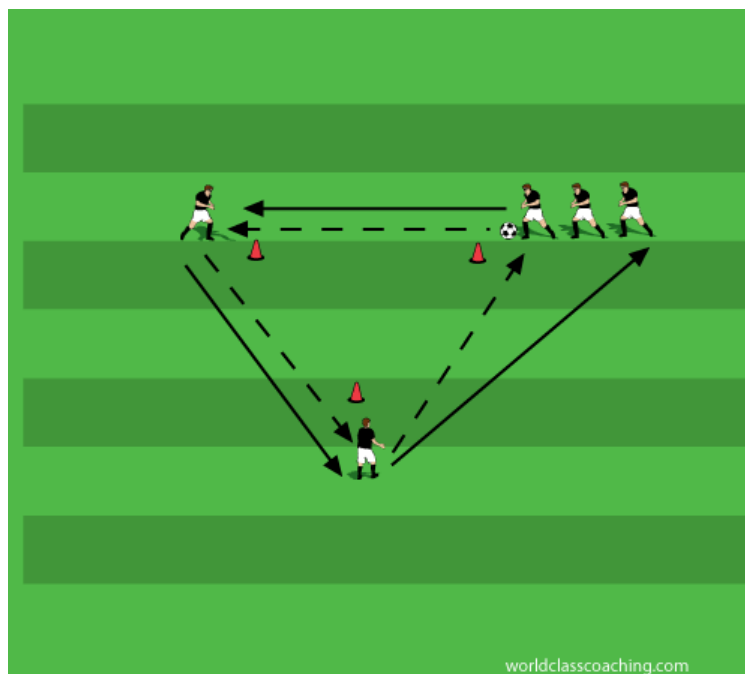
I always begin with a simple ball striking exercise where I don't give the players any coaching points in advance. I just let them get on with it and see how they do. Then I know where the players are starting from and what they need help with.



After a couple of minutes of I'll ask the players to focus on one or two aspects that will improving their passing and let them go again to see how quickly they are able to incorporate these ideas. Everything we do for the rest of the session is based on this evaluation. If they pick it up quickly, I'll get them another coaching point or two. If they struggle then I know we'll be keeping things rather simple with this group of player and only increase the challenge very slowly.

I still like to make it competitive, even with the less skillful groups so I'll ask them to see which group can make 10 perfect passes the quickest. A perfect pass is one that goes directly to the receiver, on the ground and is control with one touch. After each round the player on one side of the cone each move down one so that they have a new partner. The player on the end moves to the other end of the line.

The next phase incorporates movement, directing the first touch and some basic concepts of support.

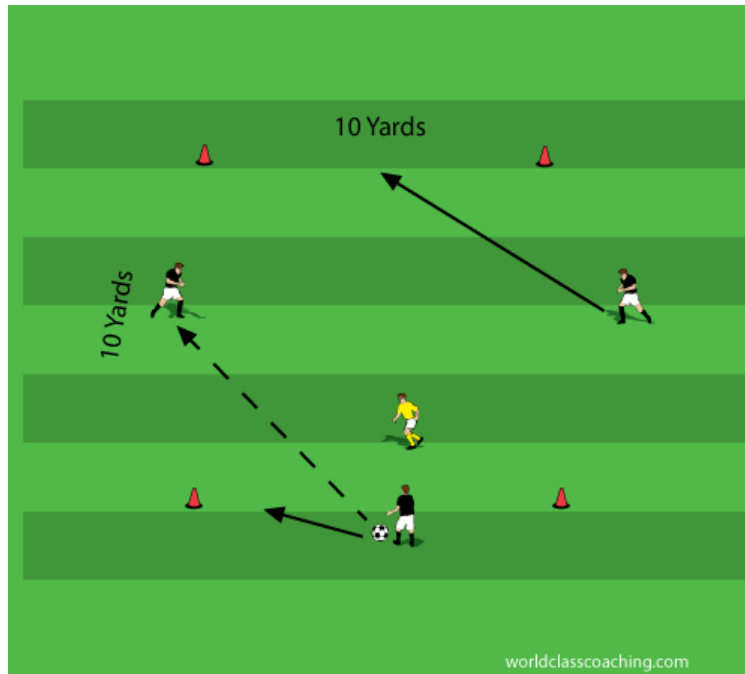


The goal is to treat the cone triangle as three defenders and move the ball around them so that it is always on the outside of the triangle. The receiving player is stand away from the cone defender so that the passer has a target away from the defender. The receiver then takes the ball with his back foot and opens up to pass the ball to the next receiver. Each player follows his pass.

I start with the cones just five yards apart and increase the distance as the players improve. A progression of this exercise would be to have the players start next to the cone/defender and then check away as the ball arrive to the passer so that they learn to time their movements with the ball. Another progression would be for the receiver to set the ball back to the passer, move around the outside of the cone and receive a return pass.

For younger players that have difficulty focusing on keeping the ball outside the cones, I add a defender to the middle of the triangle. This player is only allowed to touch the ball if it comes in the middle. I've found that adding this player forces the passer to make sure that the pass stays on the outside.

A further benefit of adding a defender is that they give the supporting players a better picture of the angles that are needed to make to ensure that the passer can get the ball to them. I use this when we move on to 3v1 or 4v1 to describe the supporting angles as 'getting outside the triangle'.



I prefer to use 3v1 rather than 4v1 because it forces the outside players to move much more.

I don't do anything very different with exercise. It's basically a game of keep away that tests the player's ability to make good choices and proper passes.

I end the session with a scrimmage where the players are only allowed to score after they have made a certain number of passes. The teams can have an equal number of players or you can have one or more players serve as neutral players who assist whichever team is in possession. The coach can also join in as a neutral player to help provide an example to the players and help the session flow.

Developing Vision and Awareness

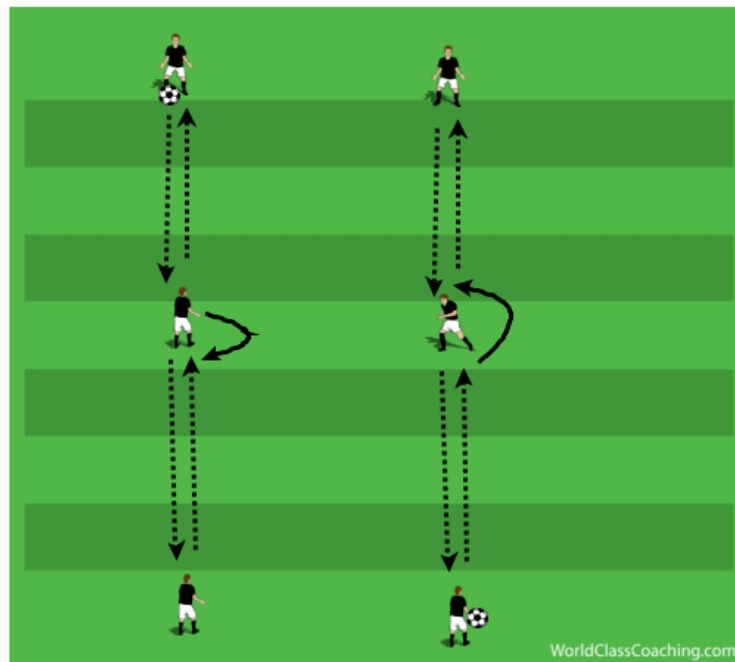
We received an excellent DVD recently and I've found the information very useful with my team so I thought others might as well.

In my opinion, one of the most under-coached aspects of youth soccer is awareness. We do a good job teaching the techniques of the game as well as the basic tactics of the game but we too often teach them in isolation. Small-sided games ask the players to look, think and react but the situations are ones that they are used to dealing with so they don't pull the players out of their comfort zone enough to really challenge them.

[Developing Vision & Awareness Volume 1](#) from [Soccer eyeQ](#) asks the players to see more, think quicker and play better (as the front of their DVD explains). Here is how they describe it further in the back text description:

“In soccer, almost everything players do and almost every decision they make is because of what they see - and the sooner a player sees something, the quicker they can act. Improving a player's “field vision”, the awareness of everything around them, will help them become a much more dynamic and effective player.”

Here is an example of one of the progressions they take the players through.



Players 1 and 3 have a ball each and they are 20 to 30 yards apart, depending on the age and ability of the players. Player 2 is positioned in the middle.

To begin with Player 1 passes to Player 2. As soon as the ball is struck Player 2 looks over his shoulder to look at Player 3. Player 2 then controls the pass and returns it to Player 1. Player 2 then turns and repeats this with Player 3.

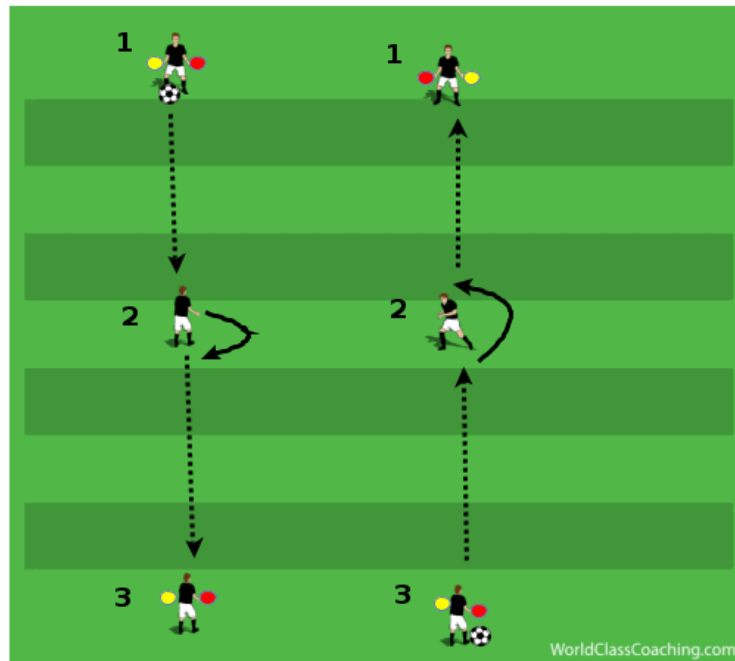
Coaching Points

Judge the pass from the first fraction of a second after it's struck

Turn your head quickly to see the player behind you

Adjust your feel to where the ball is going as you look behind you

Focus on a quality first touch and a good pass back to the servers feet

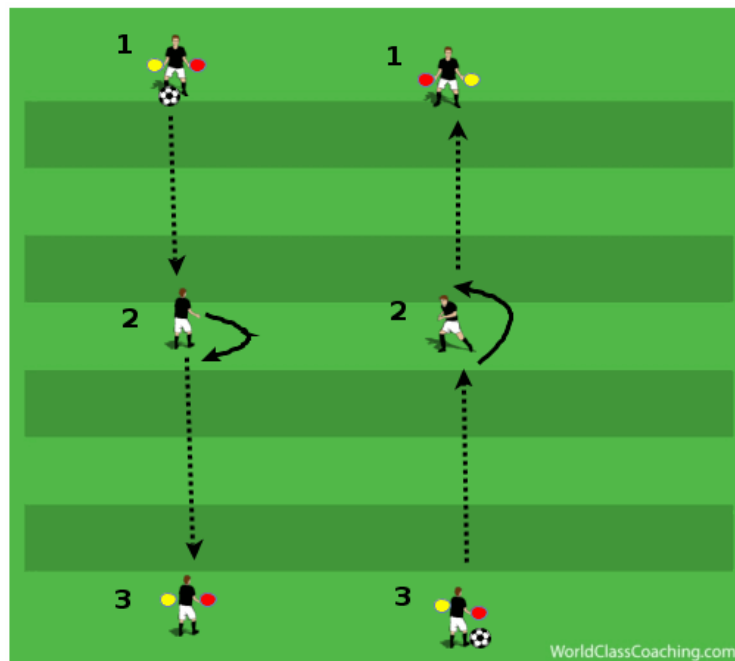


The same passing pattern is used but now the outside players are holding a colored disc cone in each hand. When Player 2 turns to look at the player behind him he must call out the color of the cone that has been raised over head

Coaching Points

Don't hold up the cone until the pass is made (so the middle player can't cheat and look early)

Maintain the quality of each touch and pass while focusing on the color of the cone

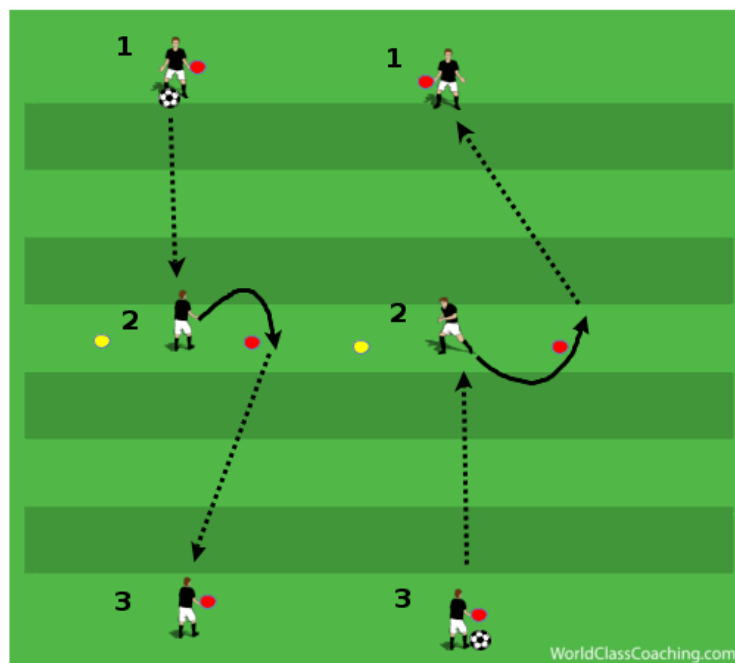


In the next phase only one ball is used. Player 1 passes, Player 2 looks and then turns to receive but now he performs a turn with the inside or outside of the foot and then passes to Player 3.

Coaching Points

Turn with one touch and pass with the next

Vary the type of turn you use



The final stage of the progression adds a cone to each side of Player 2. Now when Player 2 turns and calls out the color cone held up by the player behind him, he turns back and takes his first touch around the same color cone before passing to Player 3.

This is only the first stage in a whole series of exercises that are presented on the DVD but it provides the foundation for everything that follows. It's a good DVD that is well worth looking at.

'Dots' Warm-Up

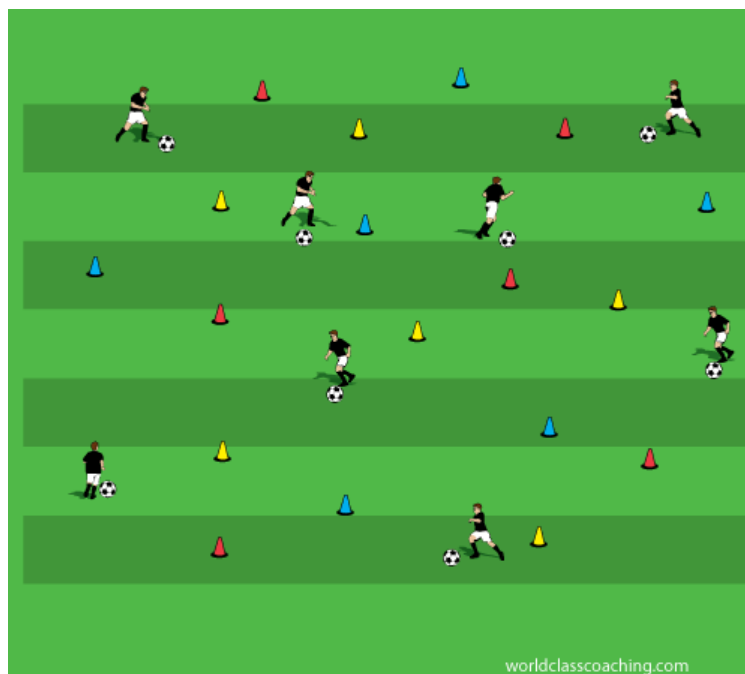
I think it's important to start practices with an activity that will engage the players and get their attention. When players arrive at the practice field they have usually come from a busy day of school. They may have spent some time playing with friends around the neighborhood. Depending on their practice time, they may have eaten dinner. Before they can be expected to learn anything we have to get them to focus on where they are and what they are doing.

Most of the time I begin with a fun game that they will enjoy but will also have a connection to the topic of the session I've planned. Another exercises that works well is the 'Dots' warm-up that I'll describe below. I've done this as with 'Gates' as well but one day I was short on cones and just put a single cone down rather than use two cones to create a gate.

This had some unintended consequences that offered some things that the gates did not. The cones can be approached from any angle which makes it easier for the players to dribble smoothly from one cone to the other without have make a radical change in direction. Secondly, two players can dribble at the same cone and as long as they changed direction before running over the cone, they could both perform the movement and dribble away to the next cone. This also adds some additional pressure to change direction in time because they risked running into another player and not just a cone. There are also advantages to using gates so you can experiment with both and see what works best for your players depending on what you're trying to teach.

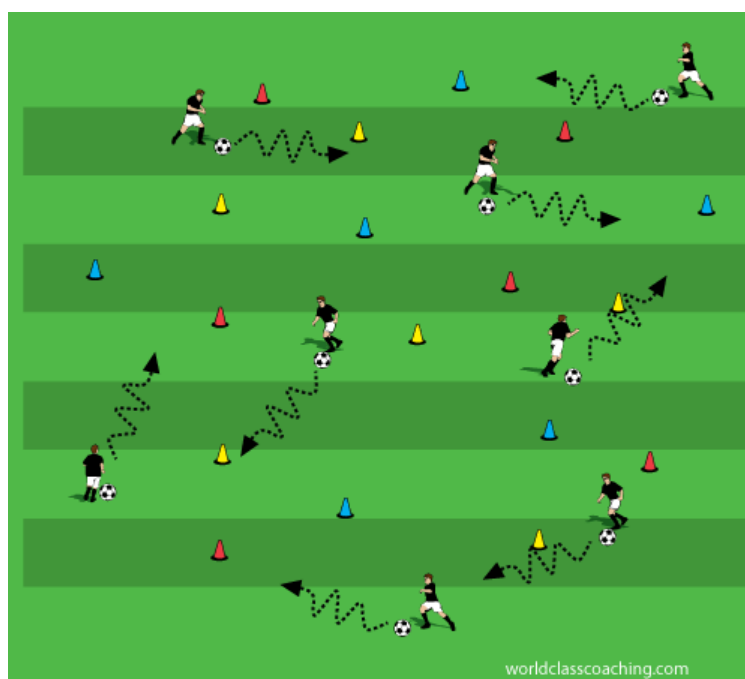


Three different colored cones are spread randomly around an area. The size of the area depends on the number of players you have as well as their age and ability level.



To begin with I have the players dribble from one ‘Dot’ to the next in a pattern of their choice. They are allowed to change the pattern whenever I stop the players for a change in rules or to give a coaching point.

There are many things that you can have the players focus on as they dribble: inside/outside of one foot only, dribble to the right of each cone using the farthest foot, change speed as they pass each cone, change direction away from each cone, etc.



Next, I'll have them perform a certain fake or move when they approach a specific color cone. For example: Have the players perform a scissors when they come to the yellow cone in their pattern. The players simply dribble to the orange and blue cones. Add different activities for the other cones one at a time until the players have something to do each time they reach a cone.

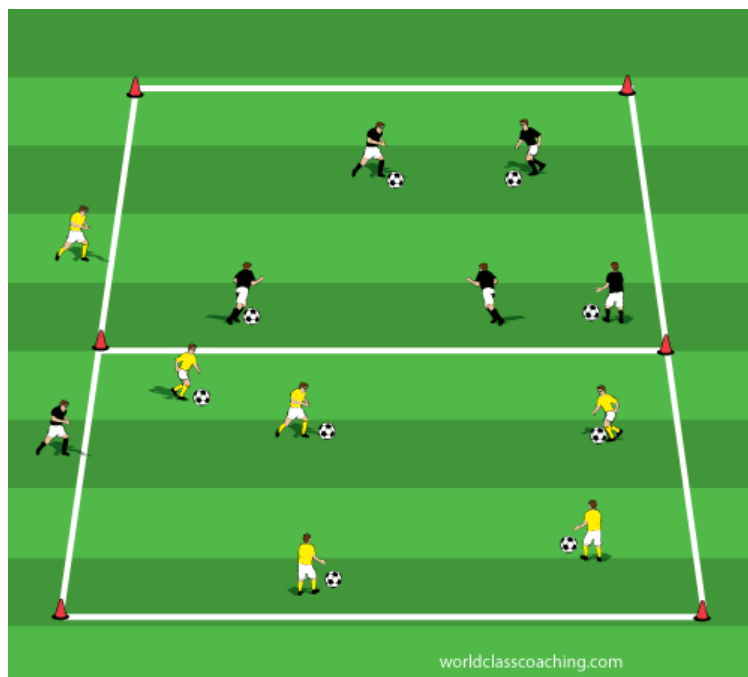
This warm-up is limited only by your imagination. Please share your ideas for variations in the comments section of this post.

Multi-Theme Practice

During this time of year I like to run a few sessions that incorporate competitive games that test the player's dribbling, passing and shooting. Making the exercises into competitive games increases the motivation of the players and challenges them to perform the skills under pressure.

You can use almost any drill or exercises in this way as long as you can have two groups of players doing it simultaneously and you keep score. The power of keeping score in practice environments cannot be underestimated. Players that will just go through the motions in an exercise will participate with much intensity as soon as score is being kept.

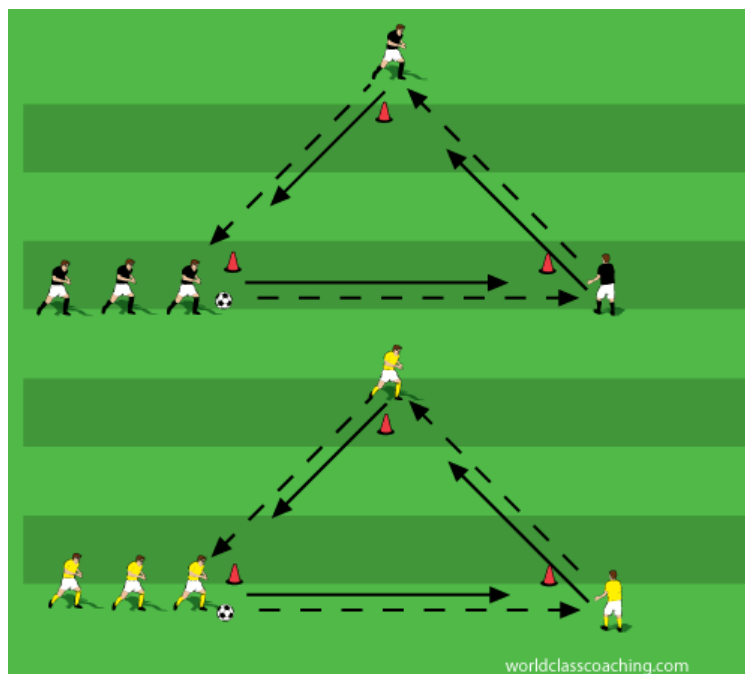
Here is an example of a multi-themed practice that I used with my younger teams last night.



American Gladiators - Dribbling and Possession

This is a game that I've used a lot because of how versatile it is. Two teams of six players are in their own 15 x 15-yard grid. One player from each team acts as a defender and enters the other team's grid where the remaining five players are dribbling a ball. When a player's ball is kicked out of the grid they are out of the game. The first defender to kick all of the balls out of the other team's grid wins a point for their team. This is played six times so that everyone has a chance to act as the defender.

A great progression of this game is to allow players who have lost their ball to stay in the grid and help their teammates by providing passing options. Eventually, the games become 5 v 1 keep away until one of the teams loses their last ball.

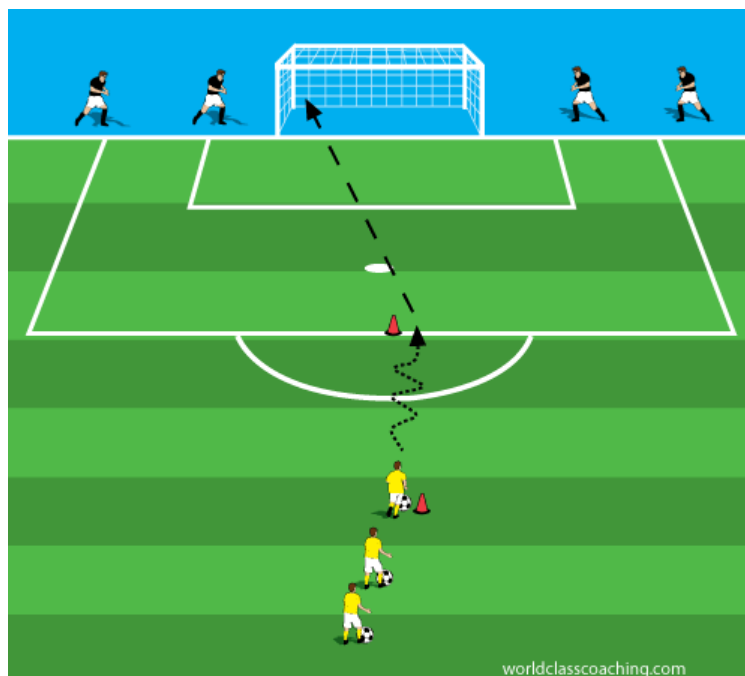


Triangle Passing

I've used this triangle passing drill a number of times during the season to teach not only passing but also the importance of first touch and body position.

Each player follows their pass to the next position after passing the ball. It's important to emphasize that the first touch and the pass should be made with the right foot when the exercise is moving in a counter-clockwise direction and with the left foot when it is moving clockwise. Using the 'Back Foot' in this way keeps the players body open to his teammates and allows him to take his first touch in the direction of the pass he wants to make.

We did this as a relay with two triangles passing at the same time so that the first team to have all of their players complete the circuit twice, wins.



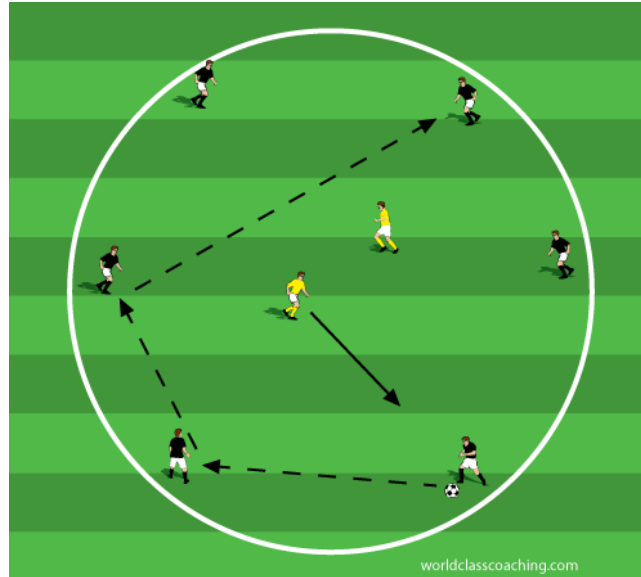
Shooting

One team is lined up with a ball at the starting cone while the other team is spread out on either side of the goal. One at a time the players with a ball dribble toward the cone, perform a fake or move to go past the 'defender' and shoot into a goal. The team has two minutes to score as many goals as they can before the other team takes their turn. With more advanced team you can have one player from the defending team serve as a goalkeeper. You could also have a 'live' defender if your players need even more of a challenge.

The practice ends with a scrimmage that is free of any special rules so that the players are free to play hard, compete and use all of their soccer skills.

The Day Before a Game

There are times that I'll have a practice on a Thursday when the team has a Friday game. This is a session that comes from our Brazilian Academy Journal that I have used. It provides a relaxed environment where the players can have some fun and express themselves. The small-sided games give the players a chance to rehearse how they want to play in the upcoming match.



Warm-Up

The team divides into two groups of eight. Six players form a large circle and keep a ball away from two defenders in the middle of the circle.



Dodge Ball

The team divided in two and plays a fun game of dodge ball for 30 minutes. They do this as a fun way to warm-up and prepare for the session.

The players do a series of abdominal exercises following the game.



Half-Field Game

10 of the first team players in dark attack a goal defended by six players in white shirts and a goalkeeper. The attacking team plays with a central diamond shape.

The attackers attempt to win the ball and attack the goal. The defending team works to win the ball back and score by dribbling or passing the ball through one of two goals at the halfway line.

Progression

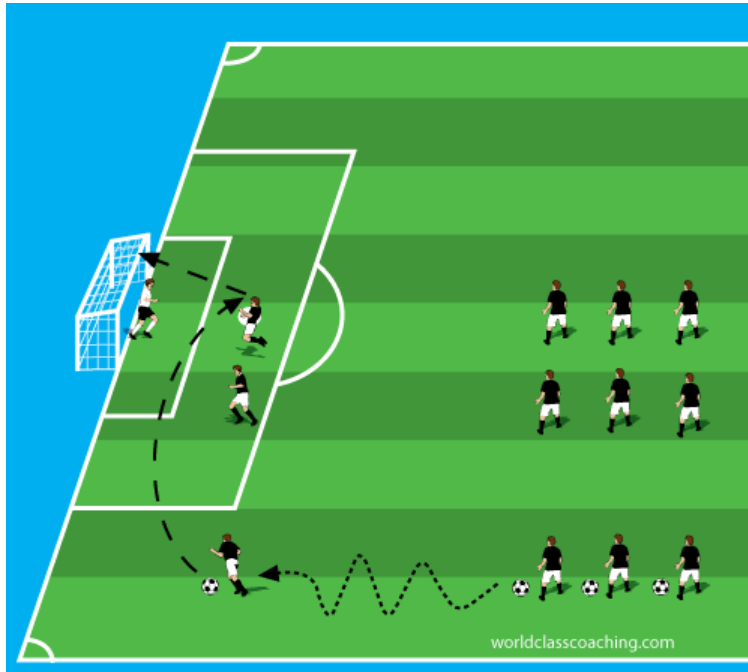
Two additional defenders are added to put more pressure on the attacking team and make it more difficult to score.

The game is interspersed with rest periods to deliver shots from fouls, from the flanks and from shots in front of goal.



7 v 7

The first team players divide into two teams of seven plus goalkeepers. The players are allowed to play freely without restriction.



Crossing and Finishing

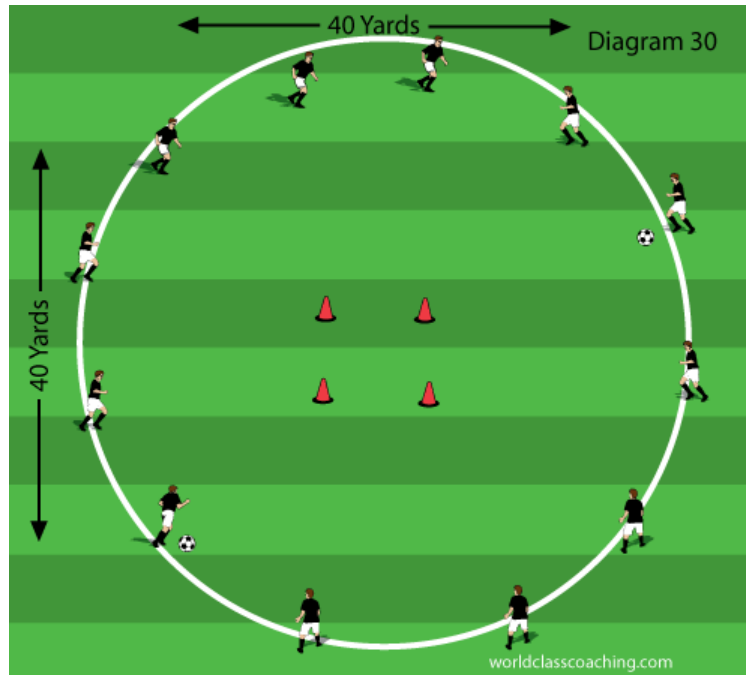
The players from the B team and the test players do a crossing and finishing exercise while the first team played the half-field games.

A player crosses to the far-post area from the left flank. Two attackers attempt to score from the cross while a goalkeeper tries to prevent them from scoring.

The exercise is repeated from the right flank.

Circle Drills

There are a number of high level coaches that use a lot of circle drills in their sessions including Barry Gorman (long time coach at Penn State) and David Williams (Manchester United Academy). I've had the opportunity to watch both of them run sessions at our International Coaching Seminar so I've used some of their ideas with my teams. Here's a session from David Williams that he presented at our first seminar in Connecticut.



Warm-Up

Organize the players in a 40-yard circle with four cones placed in the center as shown in diagram 30. Start with two balls. Dribble into the center square, dribble out and pass to another player, then take his place on the circle perimeter.

Add the following conditions:

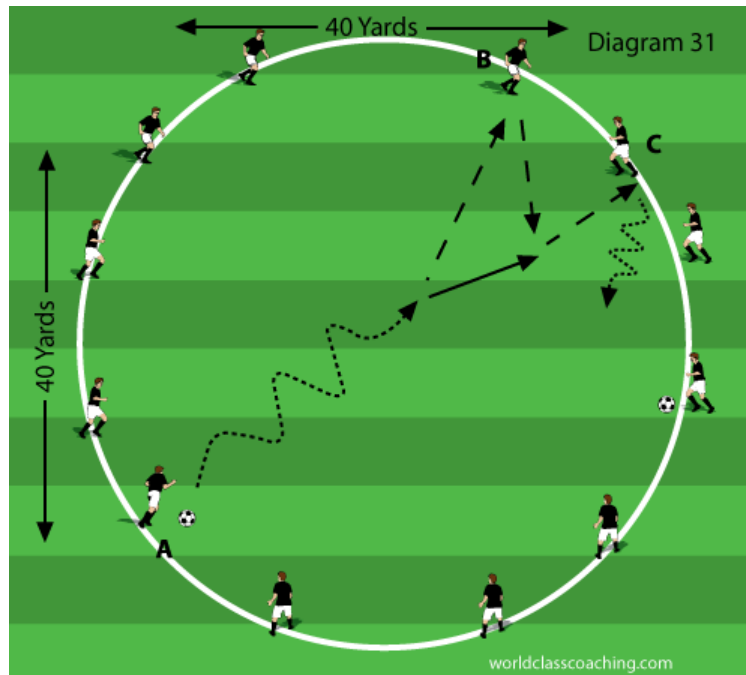
- Left/right foot only
- Perform a turn in the center
- Change of pace, go in slow, come out fast.
- Change direction

Coaching Points

- Don't let gaps appear on the circle perimeter
- Communicate, and move around the edge to fill any spaces
- Start with two balls - add or take away balls as necessary

Progression

Once the player has been through the center square, instead of passing the ball to another player, the receiving player 'takes' the ball in a take-over move.



Give-and-Go

In this example, player A dribbles the ball into the center of the circle and passes to player B. Player B passes back with one touch to player A who then passes one touch to player C. Player C continues the drill by dribbling into the center of the circle. Again, start with two balls and adjust accordingly. This exercise helps build quick play around the goal box.

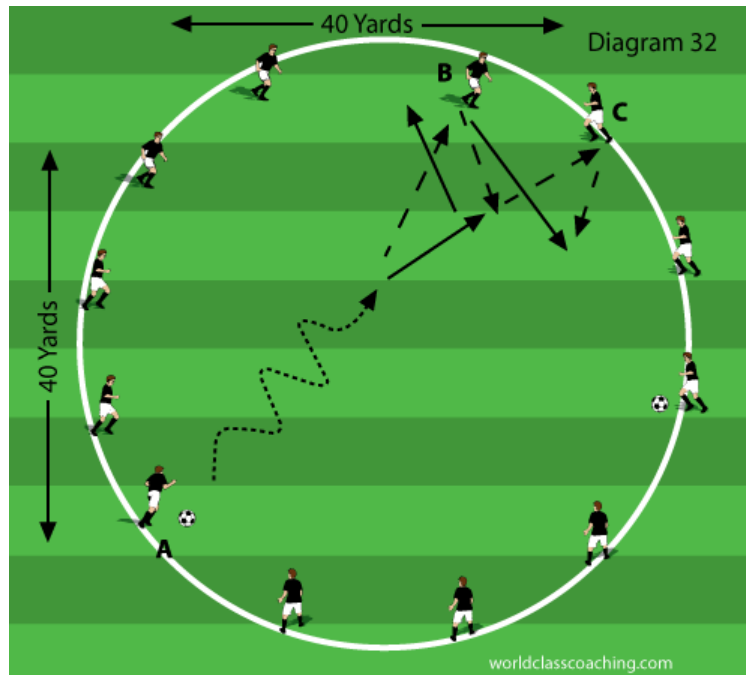
Coaching Points

- One-touch passes if possible
- Always be ready 'off' the ball
- Fill the gaps around the circle as the players move
- Be aware of where the other balls are and don't dribble to that area
- Try to increase the speed of drill
- The 'set up' pass must be of good quality to allow the next player to pass with one touch

This exercise helps the following:

- **Technical** - pace and angle of pass

- **Fitness** - sprinting, running
- **Mental** - always thinking

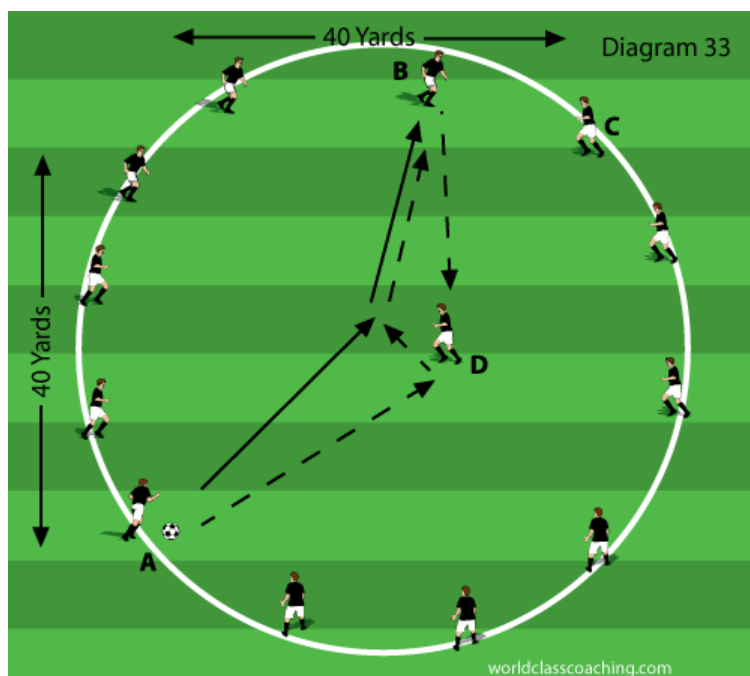


Third Player Running

The same as the previous exercise, except this time after player B has made the return pass to player A, he moves into the center to receive the pass from player C. Player A moves into the spot vacated by player B.

Coaching Points

- Timing is vital - don't make your runs too early
- The ball must keep moving
- The third player must be aware of where he will receive the pass



Center Player

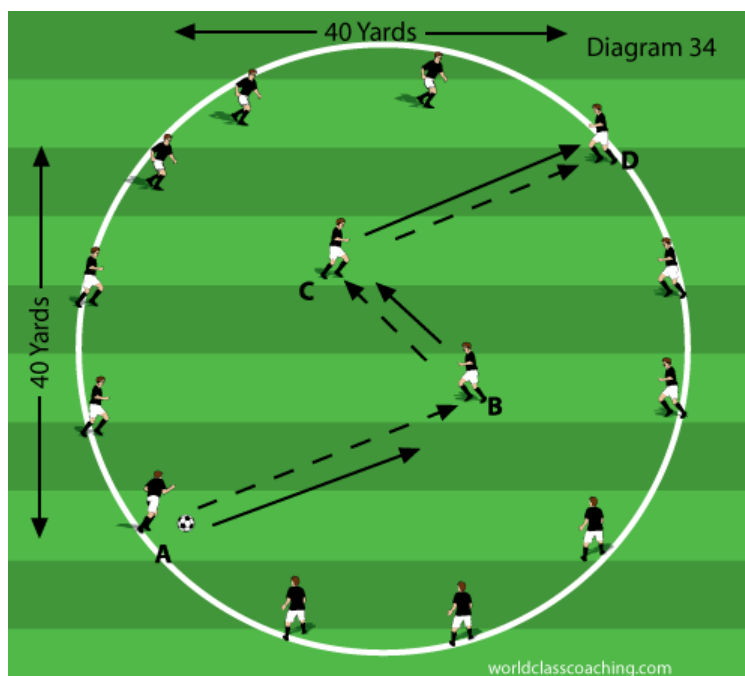
Start with a player who stays permanently in the center of the circle. Player A starts by passing to the center player, D. Player D plays a give-and-go with player A who then passes across the circle to player B. Player B continues the drill by passing to player D.

Coaching Point

The player in the center 'runs' the drill, communication, speed, etc.

Progression

Add a second player in the center.

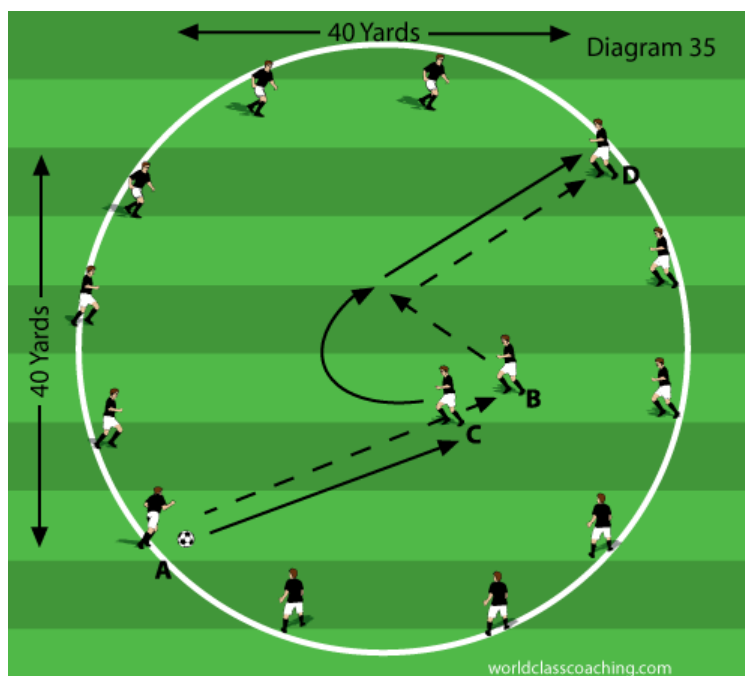


Two Center Players

Start with two players in the center. Player A passes a firm pass to player B. Player B lays a pass into the path of player C. Player C passes across the circle to player D. Each player follows his pass.

Coaching Points

- Players on the outside must always be ready
- The central player 'without' the ball makes the decision for his team mate as to where to pass the ball

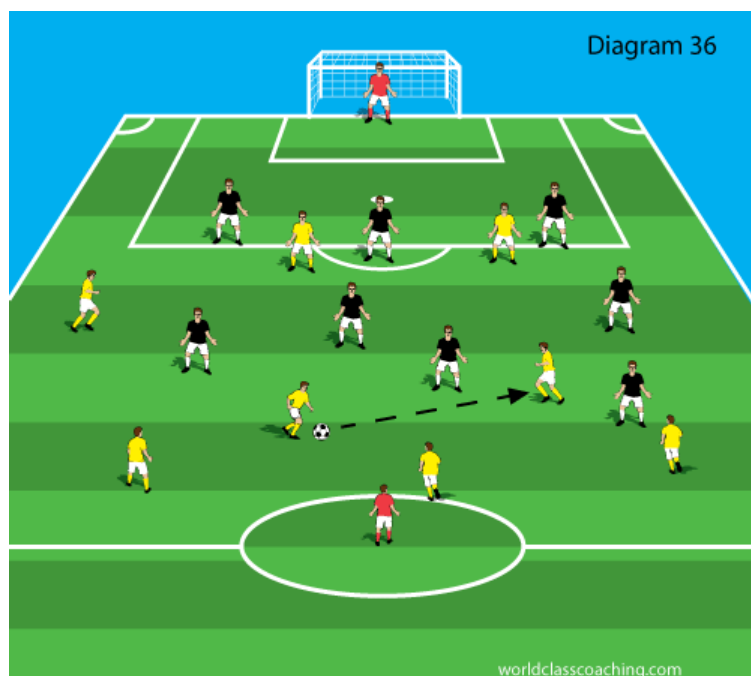


Two Center Players

In this example, the players perform an “over”. Player A passes to player C who allows it to run through his legs or by the side of him to player B. Player B lays the ball off into space for player C who has spun round into the space. Player C passes across the circle to player D.

Coaching Points

- Player B must be the one to shout “over” - this communicates to player C to let the ball run by him
- Player C must spin quickly to receive the ball

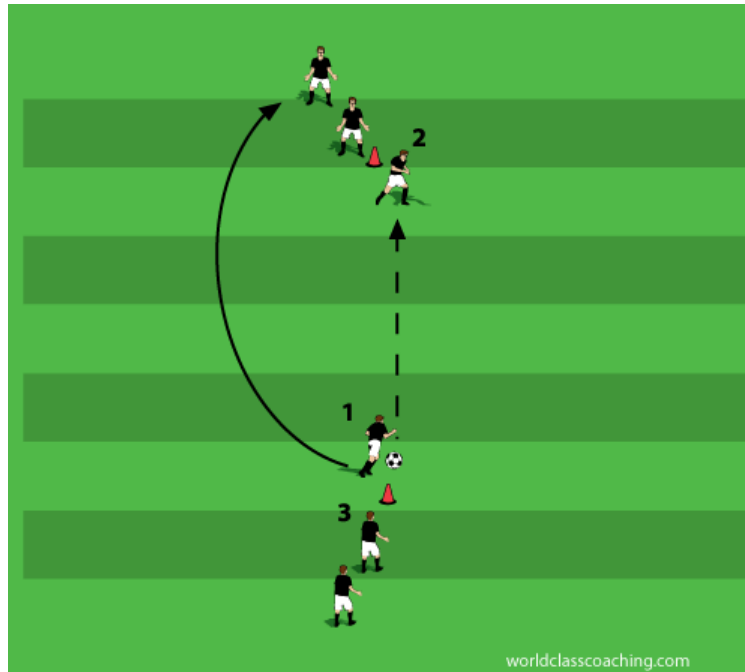


Small-Sided Game

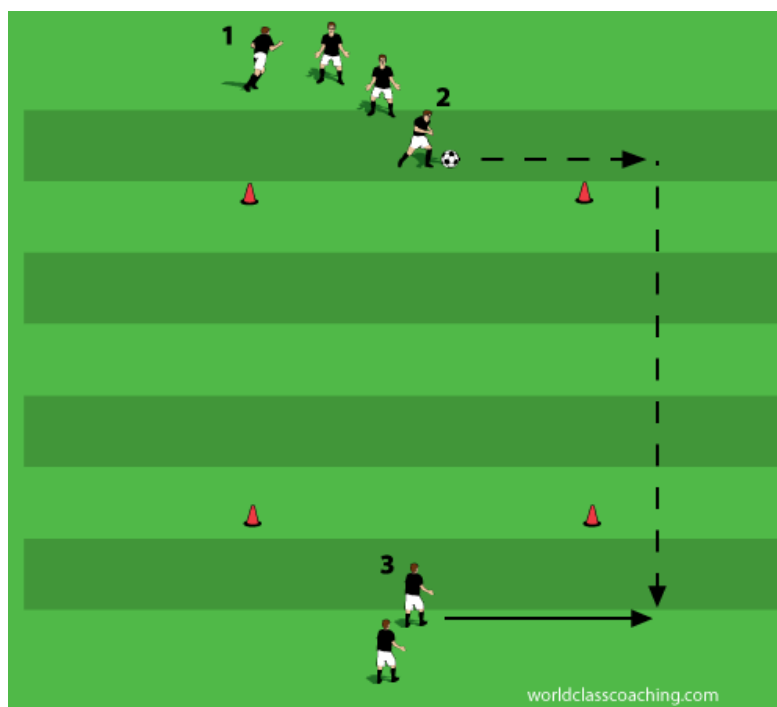
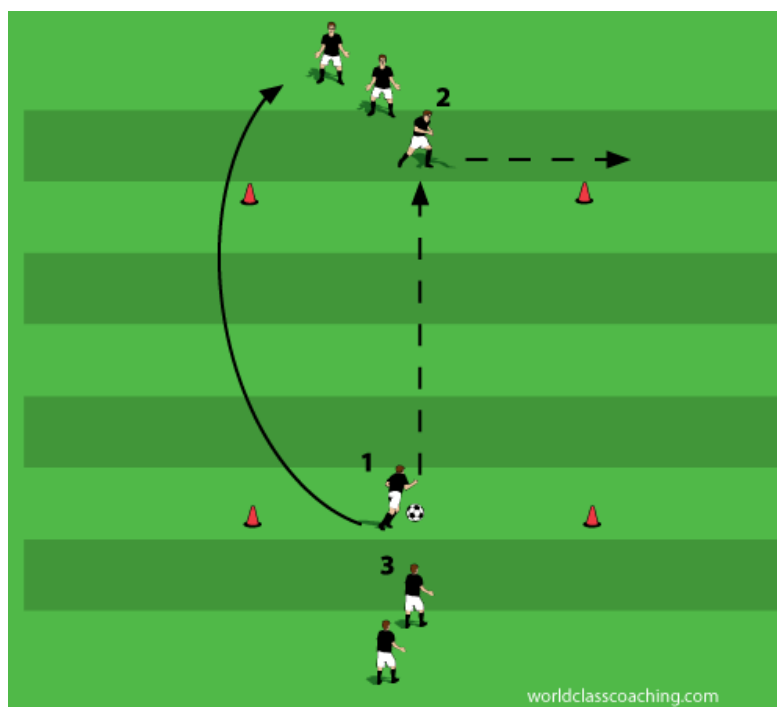
End practice with an 8 v 8 game and look to incorporate all the moves learned during the circle practices.

Adding Movement and Awareness to Basic Passing

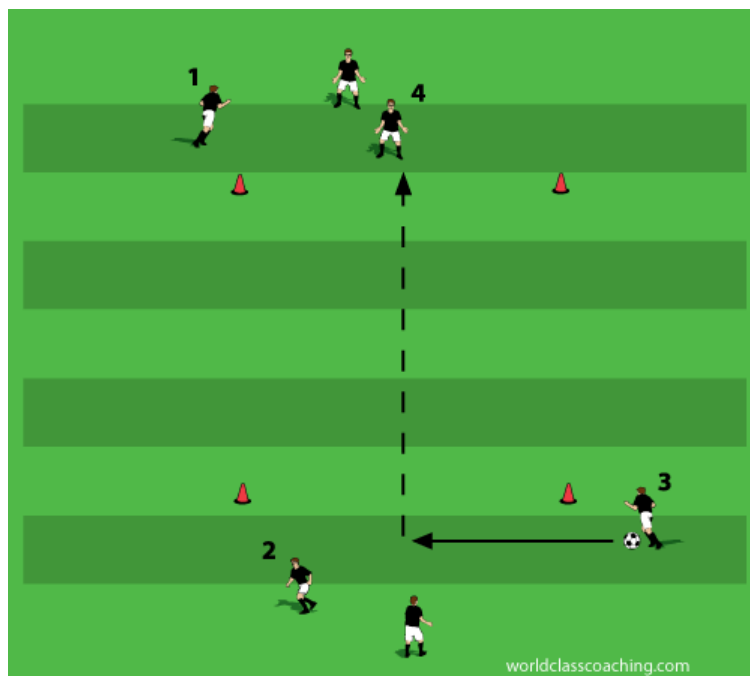
Basic passing exercises like the one below are great for focusing on the technical aspects of passing the ball but it's easy to get stuck in a rut of doing the same progressions over and over.



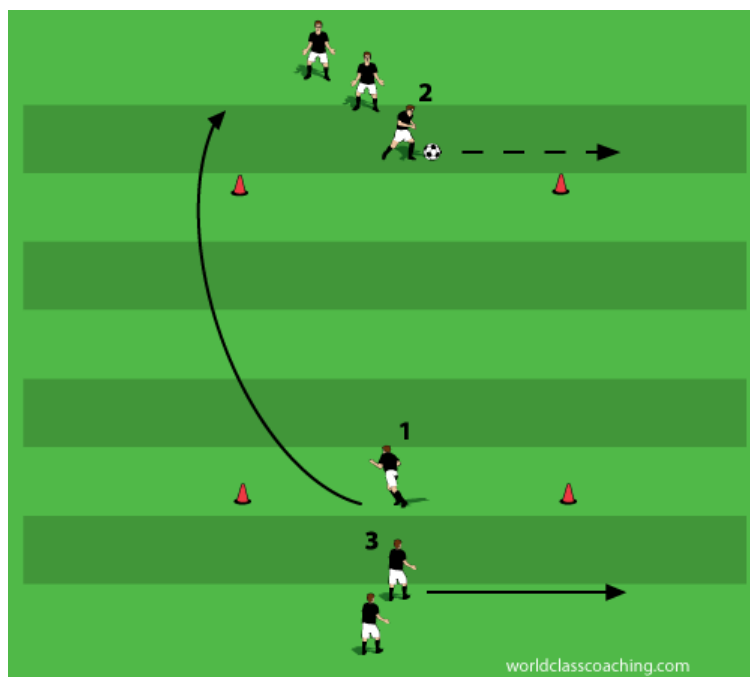
I was playing with different ways to add movement as well as force the players to think about where they were running and why. The first thing I did was to ask the receiving player to control the ball with the inside of the foot it came to and take it across their body past the cone. The passing player followed their pass but ran down the opposite side from where they controlled the ball.



Player 3 moved into a position to receive the ball from Player 2. Player 3's first touch should be with the outside foot, across their body and back to the middle of the cones. Player 2 follows their pass to join the end of the line.



As this continues you'll see the passing player run to the open side and the next player in line moving to provide a passing option.



Finding new ways to get your players thinking about their movement in relation to their team mates, while still focusing on the quality of their pass, is the best way to transfer skills from the training ground into effective play in the next game.

Five Goal Game

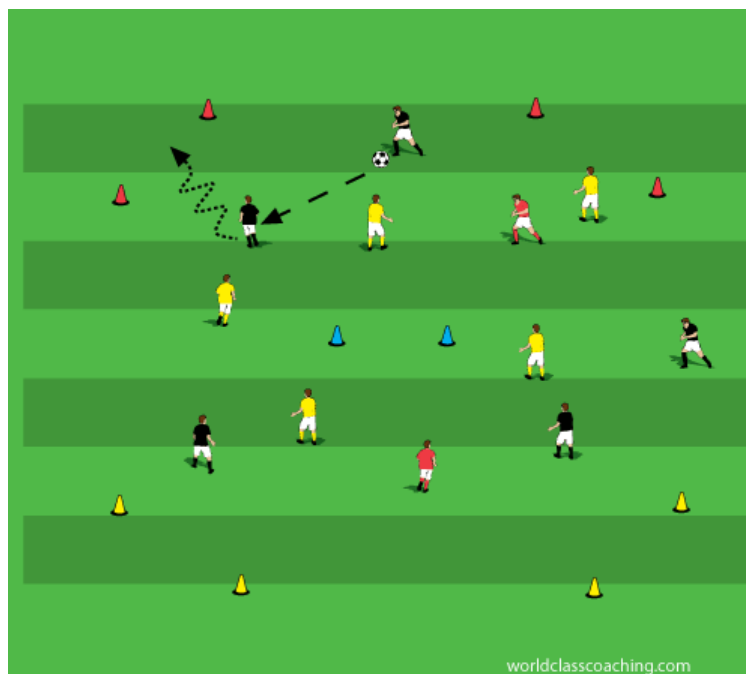
This is a game that I've used as a warm-up and in the main part of the session. I like it because of how many different things you can coach depending on your focus. As with most small-sided games, the kids really enjoy playing it so they get a lot out of it.

Here is how the field is set up:

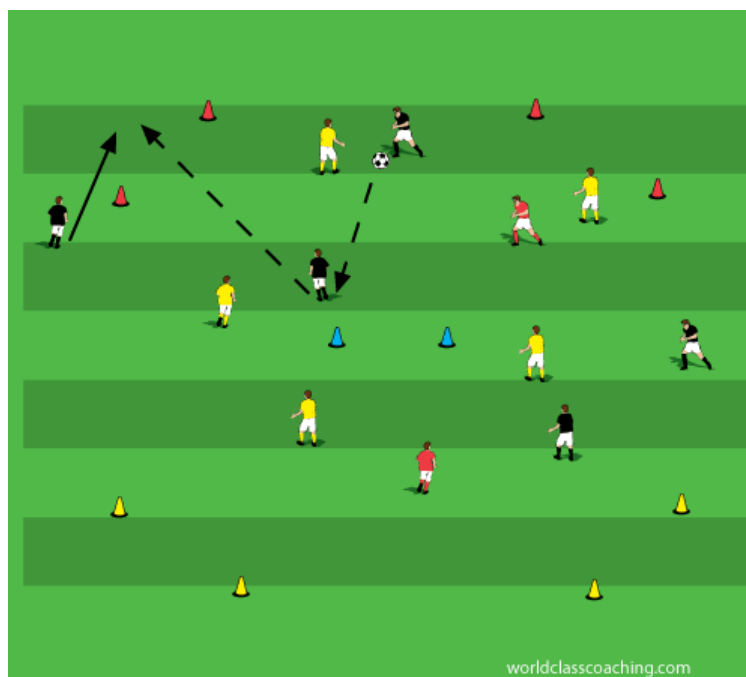


The size of the field and goals can vary based on the age and ability of the players. Adding neutral player will help the game flow and give the players a lot of opportunity for success. Playing with two equal teams will make the game much more challenging and is usually more appropriate for advanced players.

I usually begin by awarding a goal if a player dribbles through any of the goals. You can award two points for dribbling through the central goal.



A progression would be to have a point awarded each time a player passes through a goal to a team mate on the other side.



I'll usually then allow the teams to score either by dribbling or passing.

A further progression toward a more game-realistic situation is to have one team attack the orange goals and the other team attacks the yellow goals. Either team can score through the

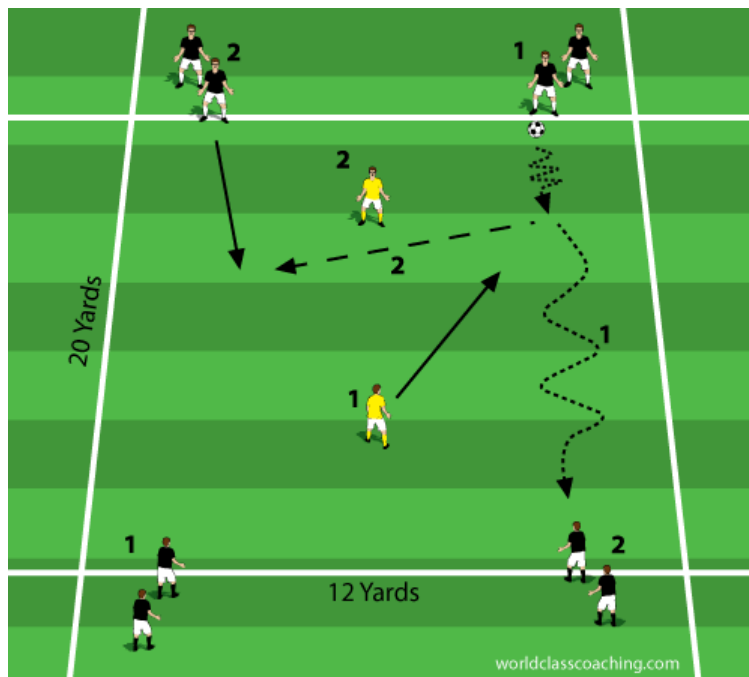
central, blue goals. This leads easily into a regular scrimmage with goals and goalkeepers where you can evaluate how the players have understood the topic you've focused on during the session.

2 v 1 Exercises

We all want our players to be able to recognize certain situations and then choose the correct option to take advantage of it. One very effective way of showing players these situations is to set the attacking team up with an advantage and condition the defenders to play in a certain way. This allows the attackers to experiment with different methods of beating the defenders and discover which ones work best for them. The result of this is that the players are better able to recognize when these patterns appear in the game.

The exercises below are from [Modern Attacking and Goalscoring](#) by Mike Vincent and Phil Roscoe. *Modern Attacking and Goalscoring* includes more than 100 drills, exercises and small-sided games to train your players to create and finish more scoring opportunities.

If you revisit these types of exercises on a regular basis you players will be able to read the cues presented by the positions of defenders and team mates during and game and react quickly and decisively.



Task 1

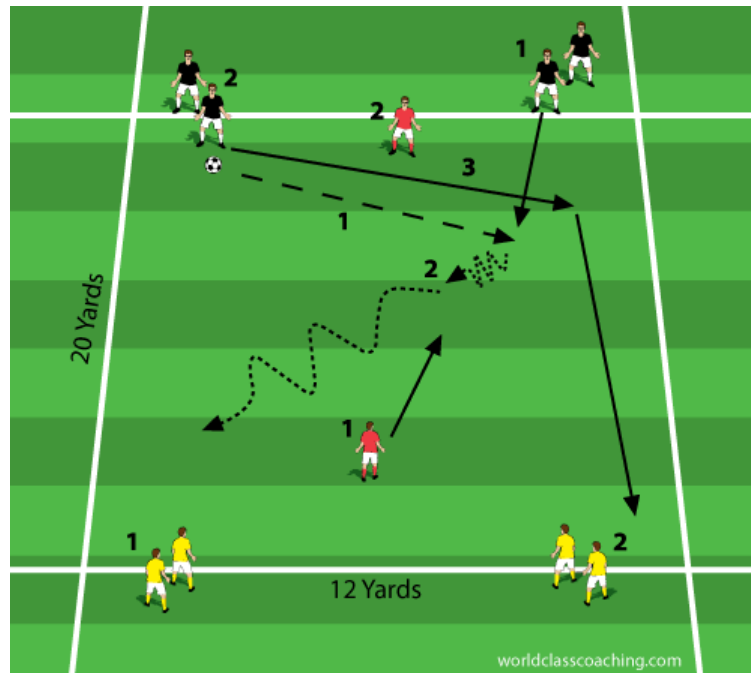
- X1 or X2 starts with ball.
- As player moves forwards D1 can react and defend
- X1 has two options
- Take on and beat defender himself
- Use X2 to beat him

Once X1 + X2 have beaten D1 or been tackled then O1 and O2 can start to attack D2

In all the practices associated with 2v1 and 3v2 have the defenders working for 2 minutes before switching them

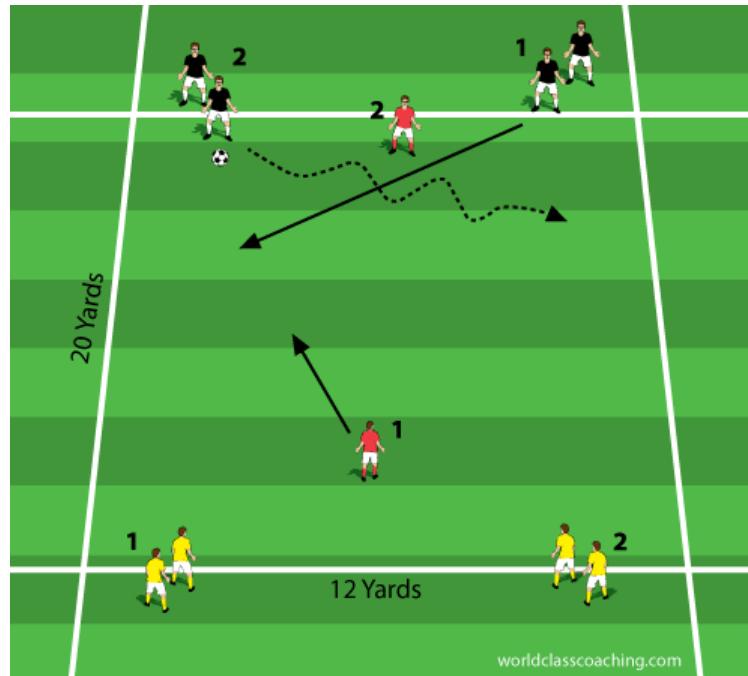
Key Points

- Attitude (want to beat the defender)
- Keep your distance from each other
- Player without ball – stay onside
- Match pace
- Decision (pass or dribble – The position of the defender)
- Disguise in pass



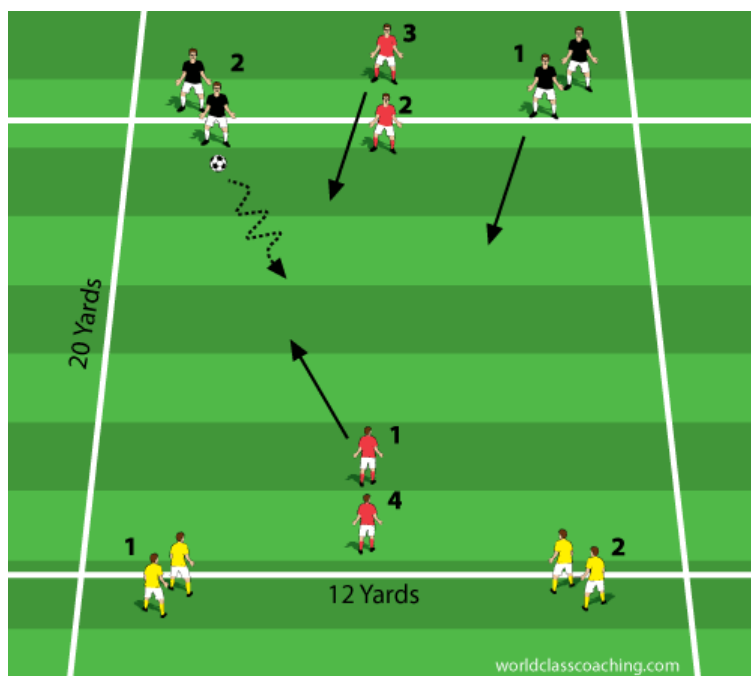
Progression 1

- X2 starts with the ball and plays the pass over to X1
- X1's first touch is inside to give X2 space
- X2 overlaps and they look to beat D1



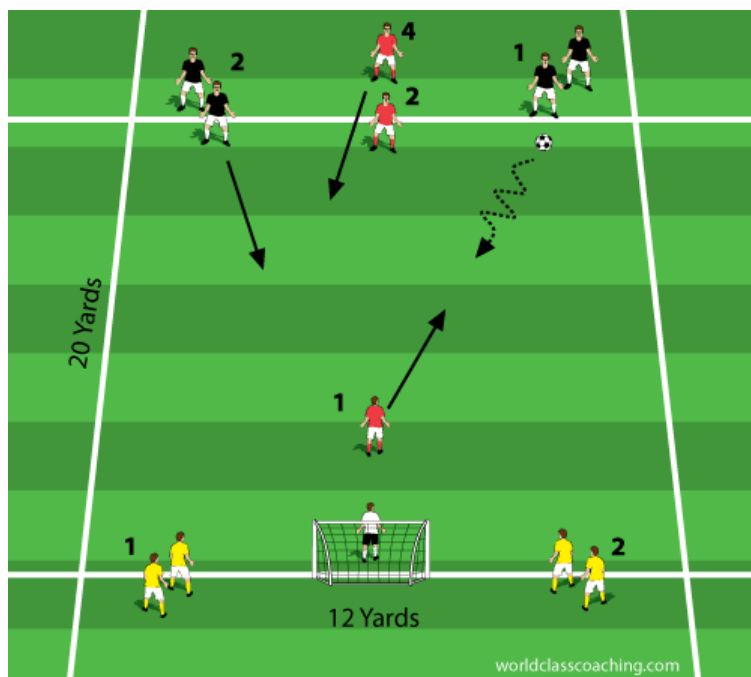
Progression 2

- X2 starts with ball and immediately runs towards X1
- X1 under laps X2 and takes the space vacated



Progression 3

- X2 or X1 start with the ball and use the moves worked on previously to beat D1
- However, once the first touch forwards is taken D3 who is stood 10 yards behind practice looks to defend from behind
- This encourages the players to work even faster to beat D1



Progression 4

- Exactly the same 2 v 1 space but a further space with a goal and keeper is added.
- Please note, you could actually start the whole practice with this set-up if you wish
- Exactly the same as progression 3 now but players can finish on goal
- Work specifically on type of finish and run of 2nd striker

Sweeper/Keeper

Incorporating the keeper into team training is vital to do but so often neglected. Those teams “fortunate” enough to have a designated keeper coach tend to have the keepers go with this coach for part, if not all, of the team training. The reason for doing this is because the skills, techniques and tactics in goalkeeping are so different than the rest of the team.

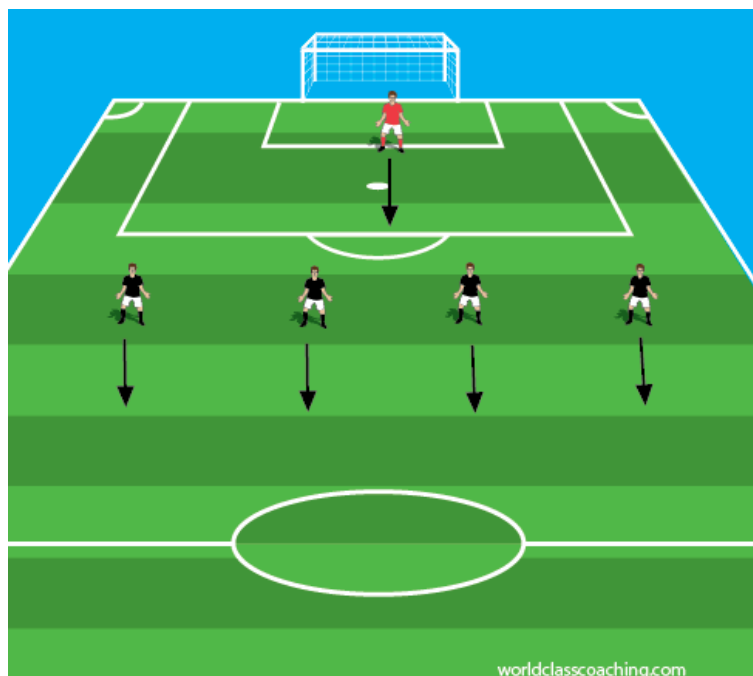
The problem with sending the keepers “off to train” is if they aren’t incorporated into the team’s tactics, major problems will occur in games.

As an example, if a team is going to occasionally push up into an offside trap, if the keeper isn’t aware of his positioning, great goal scoring opportunities might be created AGAINST you.

In the diagram below the black team is establishing a line around 25 yards out from goal.



If the backs all decide to step up, in order to condense the field or to push the opponents into an offside position, the keeper must step with them.



As the backs are stepping up, the keeper takes on more of the role of the “sweeper/keeper”. One way to beat a team stepping up into an offside trap is for the player with the ball to “pass” the ball to himself by pushing it forward and running onto it himself. If the keeper doesn’t step with the back, this will be difficult for the defending team to deal with. Another way to beat this type of an offside trap is to make a through pass to a teammate making a run from the back. If the keeper has stepped up with the backs, it’s easy to defend. If the keeper has stayed back, it’s much more difficult.

If the team has worked on stepping up defensively while the keepers were off doing their own training, the entire team training gets defeated because of this lack of understanding.

There are many other examples where the keepers **MUST** be incorporated into as much of the team training as possible. This is the reason many teams will do their keeper training prior to the team training so the keeper can then participate in the entire team session. Another way to do this is to have the keepers their individual training while the team is doing their skill work in the beginning of training sessions.

To learn more about how the keeper should react to this type of offside trap, check out the book [Offside!](#)

Brazilian Transition Games

Brazilians learn the game by playing the game. In many countries training sessions are focused around drills and exercises that isolate techniques and tactics. Brazilian coaches spend most of their time creating playing environments with small-sided games that put an emphasis on the specific areas of the game but also train the player 'globally'.

One of the most important tactics of the game is how your team will handle transitional situations. Small-sided games provide a great way to train your team to take advantage of them.

These games are from [Brazilian Training Games](#). Incorporating these games into your training sessions will help you breakdown the game into realistic situations while focusing your players on competing and adding an element of fun to the practice that will increase their motivation to train and learn.



GAME 1 – Attack v Defense with 4 Goals

Organization: 2 teams – 6v6 to 10v10

Description: Classical Brazilian attack v defense game with 4 goals in the midfield. In all the attack v defense games, if the defenders score in the small goals or target they become strikers.

Coaching Points:

- Link midfield – forwards and defenders - midfielders
- Speed of the game with and without the ball
- Change of direction

Variation: 2 touches for the offensive players and 3 for the defensive players

Equipment: 4 small goals, discs.



GAME 2 – Attack v Defense – Minimum Touches on the Ball

Organization: 2 teams – 6v6 to 10v10

Description: Similar to Game 1, in this case the offensive team plays 1 or 2 touch on the ball, if they take 2 touches, the second must be forward. Defenders get 2 or 3 touches; the 3rd touch must be forward.

Coaching Points:

- Fast link between the midfielders – forwards
- Speed of the game with and without the ball
- Build up from the back

Rule: The player can stay for 5 seconds in the channel.

Equipment: 3 small goals, discs



GAME 3 – Attack v Defense – Outside Channels

Organization: 2 teams – 6v6 to 10v10

Description: Similar to the game 1, with 2 free outside channels

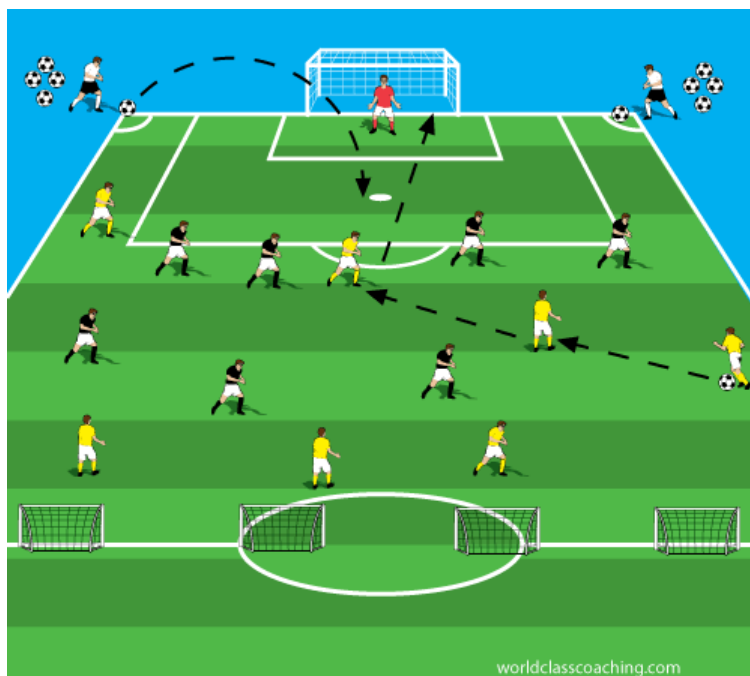
Coaching Points:

- Link midfield – forwards and defenders - midfielders
- Speed of the game with and without the ball
- Outside plays

Variation: 2 touch restriction (both defensive and offensive)

Rule: The players can only stay in the channel for 5 seconds

Equipment: 3 small goals, discs



GAME 4 – Attack v Defense – Shooting Bonus

Organization: 2 teams – 6v6 to 10v10

Description: Similar to the game 1, in this game every time that the offensive team finishes a ball on the goal or out, the coach crosses an extra ball into the box.

Coaching Points:

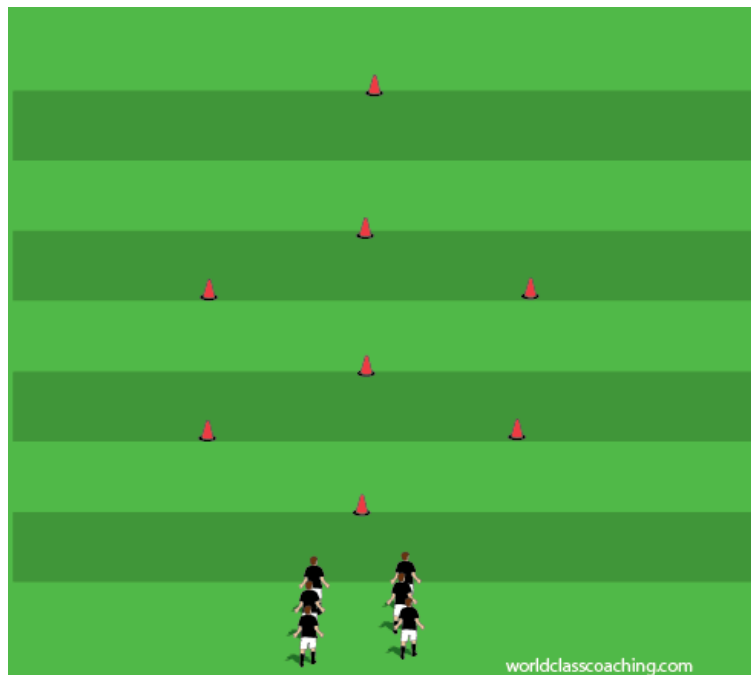
- Faster link from midfield to the offensive sector
- Shooting/finishing
- Defensive adjustment

Equipment: 3 small goals, discs.

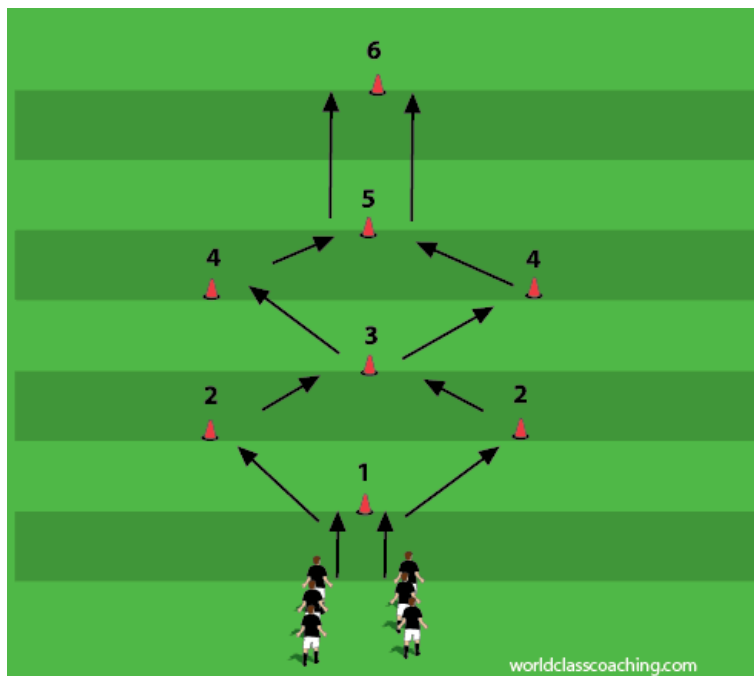
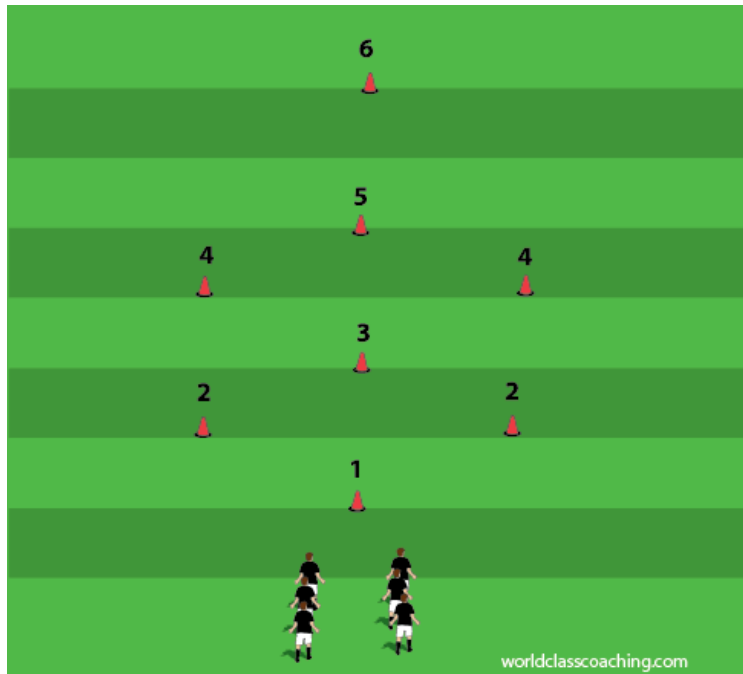
Why a Dynamic Warm-Up Is Vital

A dynamic warm up is vital to a successful training session. There are many different versions and mixed feelings regarding whether there needs to be a ball involved or not. Many feel any time in training that doesn't utilize a ball is wasted time. I, and others, feel it's more important to get a good warm up and to have the players truly ready (both physically and mentally) for when the ball is then added to the warm up.

In this activity, start with 4 cones in a line, 10 yards apart. Another 2 cones are in a different line 10 yards apart and 10 yards to the side of this first line. 2 more cones are in a similar line 10 yards to the other side.



Two lines of players start by going to cone 1, then to cone 2, then to cone 3, then to cone 4, then to cone 5 and then to cone 6. When they get to cone 6 they jog back to the starting line.



- * To start, the players jog through the set up. When the first player gets to the third cone, the next players starts
- * Next the players skips through while opening the gate. This means the player brings their leg to their chest, then swings the knee to the side and then does the same with the other leg
- * Next the players skips through will closing the gate (exact opposite of the previous one)
- * Next the players jog through with high knees
- * Next the players jog through hitting their heels to their butt.

- * Next the players carioca.
- * Next the players jog backwards
- * Next the players jog forward at 50% speed
- * Next the players go through at 75% speed
- * Next the players go through at 100% sprint

This is a nice dynamic warm up that helps players get ready for their training session. Similar warm-ups can be found from our [book, Dutch Drills For Total Team Training](#).

Goalkeeper and Team Warm-Up

Integrating goalkeepers into team sessions is often a challenge for coaches who have experience playing or coaching the position. John Murphy deals with this subject in his excellent book, ["Team Training for the Goalkeeper"](#).

Below is an excerpt from this book. It is from the Goalkeeper and Team Warm-Up Chapter.

If the goal is to integrate the goalkeeper more effectively into your training sessions, a good place to start is in the warm-up. The lack of connection between the goalkeeper and the team in training often begins in the warm-up. It can stem from a lack of understanding of the position by the coach, compounding an existing cohesion issue. This gap in training will eventually trickle into a weakened link within the team shape in match situations.

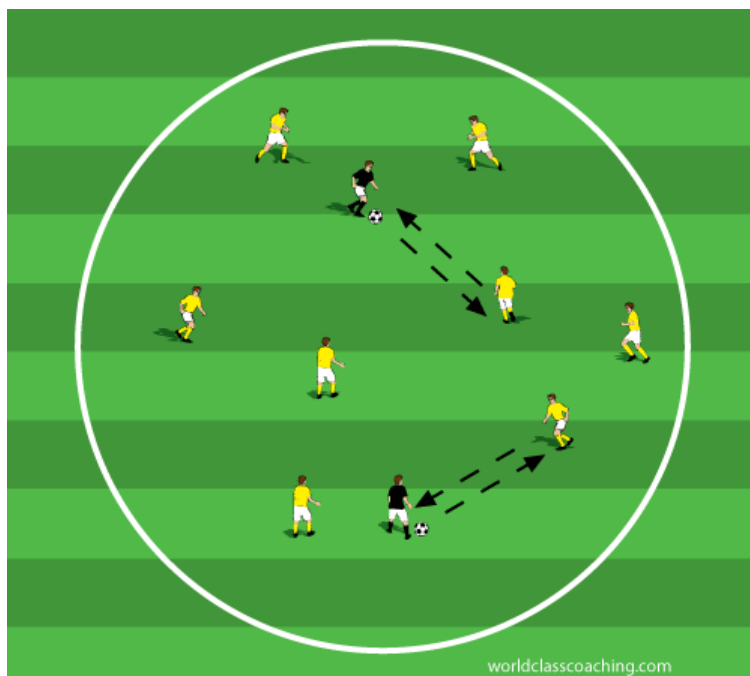
It is an issue that has began less than a generation ago with the advent of goalkeeper coaches. Before that time, the goalkeepers would just train with the team or worse, on their own. But despite all the positives a specialist coach can bring, the situation does have its downsides. At its worst, specialized goalkeeper work taken to an extreme can present goalkeeping almost as its own SPORT rather than a position within the game of soccer. But even in good training situations, the goalkeepers are often to one end of the pitch working for 30 minutes and then join the team. While this time alone with the goalkeeper coach has its value, doesn't it make sense to further develop the connection between the goalkeepers and the rest of the team by training together?

Regardless of your resources, there is a value of including the goalkeeper in the team warm-up on a regular basis:

- integration into the team dynamic
- to develop him further as a leader within the group
- for the individual technical development
- place the goalkeeper in technically/tactically challenging situations

Exercises such as fast footwork using hurdles and ladders as well as other technical work such as passing exercises are beneficial. In addition, if you are creative, you can get repetitive shot handling established in the warm-up for both the goalkeepers and the team. By doing so, you are moving the training session along more economically where you can get into a small-sided game or a functional attacking exercise quicker. When you have two training sessions a week, this can be time well spent.

Finally, I have a personal preference of using lines and dimensions on the pitch whenever possible, particularly in the warm-up. So with that in mind, I have provided three exercises using the center circle, two with the 18-yard box and one across the width of the pitch within warm-up routines.



Center Circle Exercise 1:

Organization: 2 goalkeepers in the center circle w/ a ball in their hands

Players move freely in the center circle

Goalkeeper passes to player and gets a return pass to his hands

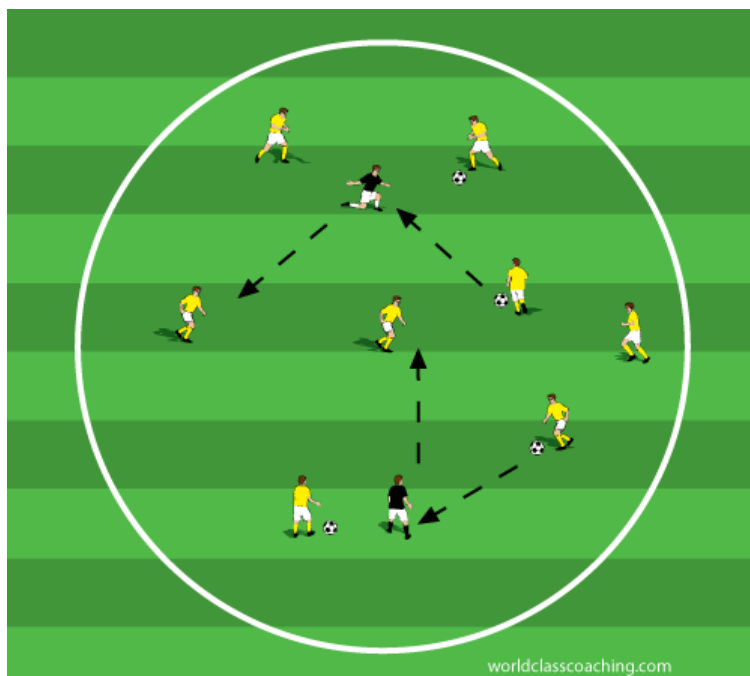
GK's and field players move while looking off their shoulders

GK Coaching Points:

- Alertness / looking to link in w/ teammates
- Quality of serves to teammates
- Handling/body shape
- Composure/speed of play
- Emphasizes movement and understanding of space with all players

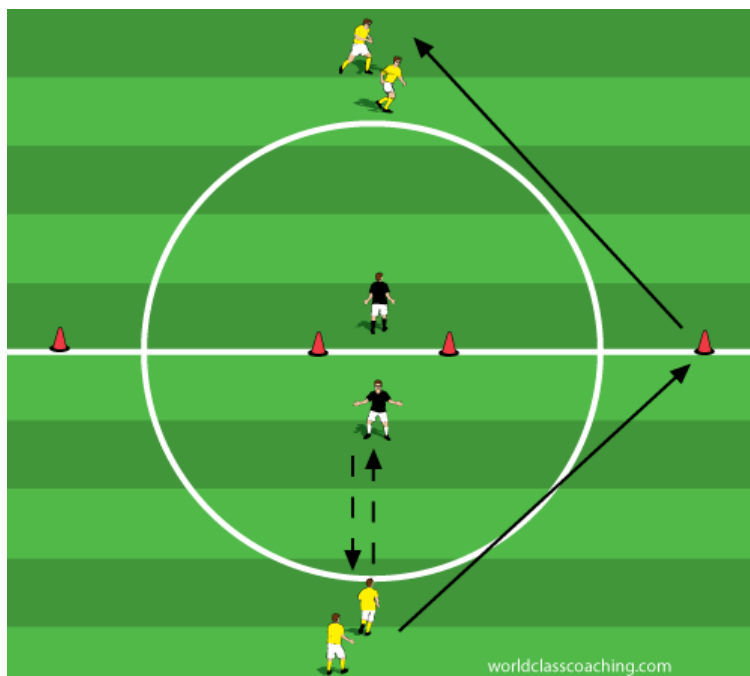
Progressions:

- Crescent kicks w/ the inside of the foot
- Instep volley
- Chest and pass
- Head
- All exercises performed twice in succession



Variations:

- Field players share 4 balls to pass among themselves and clip into GK's hands
- All players have a ball and look to dribble and clip ball into GK's hands coach can place movement requirements on the players (shuffles/skipping/high knees, etc...)



Center Circle 2:

Organization:

Use corner flags or cones a 6 yard gate on halfway line

w/ a goalkeeper on each side

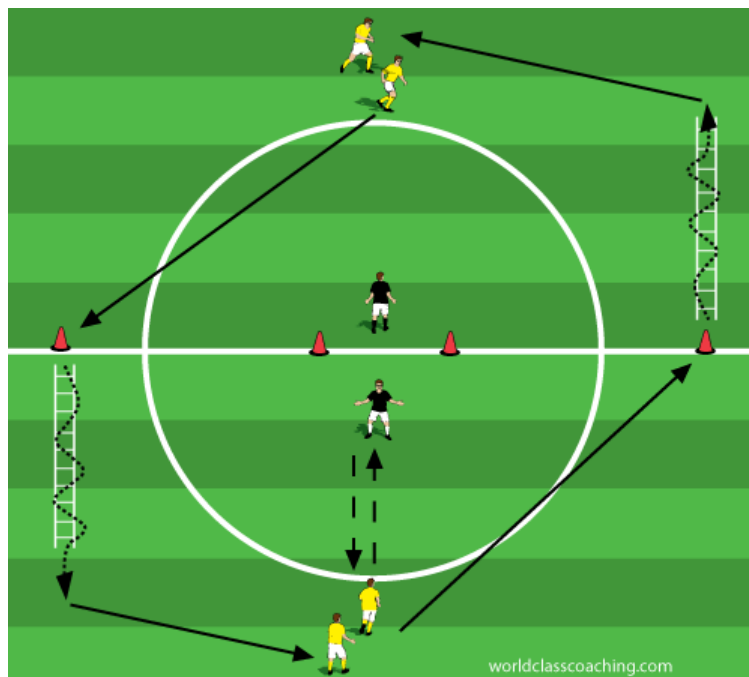
Players lined up opposite of each gk 15 yards away

Ball played into the goalkeeper / player moves to the cone to his right, then joins in opposite line

Goalkeeper plays the ball back into next player

GK Coaching Points:

- Starting position in the gate
- Body shape
- Correct handling surface and technique
- Quality of pass to teammates



Variations:

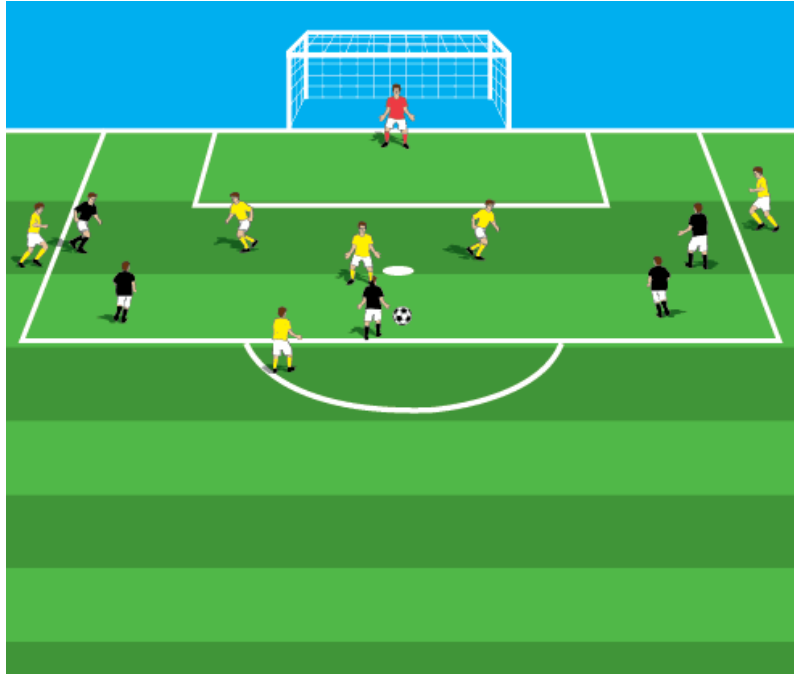
- Place cone further or closer to circle to change movement requirement of players
- Add hurdles or ladders on the side of the circle for players to move through
- Three extra balls at the outside of the circle for players to run to, dribble a ball out and back before joining next line
- Work both right and left

This is just a small sample of the warm-up exercises that are included in this chapter. Other chapters include **Functional Training**, **Possession**, **Small-Sided Games**, **Phase of Play** and **11 v 11 Setting**.

Coaching Everything At Once

Many activities work on attacking and defending. Many activities work on possession. Not many work on both. This activity, and many like it can be seen in the [book Full Season Training Program - Elite Team by Terry Michler](#)

This activity is a 6 v 5 plus a keeper in the penalty area. 5 attacking players are inside the 18 with a ball. 3 defending players are inside the 18 as well. The other 3 players on the defending team are around the 18. There is a keeper in goal.



The attacking team starts off by playing 5 v 3 to goal. If they score a goal, they get the ball again. This is a relatively small space and the idea is for the attacking team to get to goal quickly (it doesn't make sense to make 8 passes inside the 18 before trying to score as this would be unrealistic in a real game). To make this a bit more difficult for the attacking team, the offside rule is in place (the 3 players on the outside of the 18 don't affect offside).

If the defending team wins the ball they try to maintain possession using the 3 players inside the 18, the keeper and the 3 players on the outside of the 18. The players on the outside of the 18 are restricted to 1 touch and while they can move along the 18 they must stay within 5 yards of the 18 at all times (they can't enter the 18 but to improve their angles, they can move back up to 5 yards)

A goal by the attacking team (the team with 5) counts as one point.

5 passes by the defending team (the team with 6) counts as one point.

If the team with 6 has possession and then loses the ball, the team with 5 can score right away so not only does the team with 6 have to try to keep possession but they also need to be aware of where they are on the field and play accordingly.

The first team to 5 points wins. The team with 6 would rotate their players so each player gets an equal amount of time inside the 18 as they do outside.

This is an excellent activity to work on attacking and defending the goal as well as maintaining possession of the ball.

This activity, and many like it can be seen in the [book Full Season Training Program - Elite Team by Terry Michler](#)

Teaching Turning

Teaching players to turn with the ball is an area that I don't see covered very often by coaches working with players from eight to 12. I'm not sure if it is because the coaches think the topic is difficult to teach young players or because they don't want to take time away from areas they consider more important.

I teach it because I think there are a lot of different skills that can be worked on in one set of exercises. Passing, first touch, awareness of space and pressure, balance and coordination. With the youngest players I keep it very simple and focus on three types of turns: inside of the foot, outside of the foot and Cruyff turns. The pressure is limited to cones. With older or more advanced players the pressure is increased and I become pickier about every aspect from the pass to the side the players turn to.

This is the progression that I like to use:

Dribble Inside a 15x15-yard Grid

Each player has a ball and dribbles freely at first. Then with their favorite foot only using the inside and outside of the foot. Next, using only the other foot. After that I demonstrate and inside of the foot turn (or chop), then an outside of the foot turn (or hook) and finally a Cruyff turn where the ball goes between their legs.

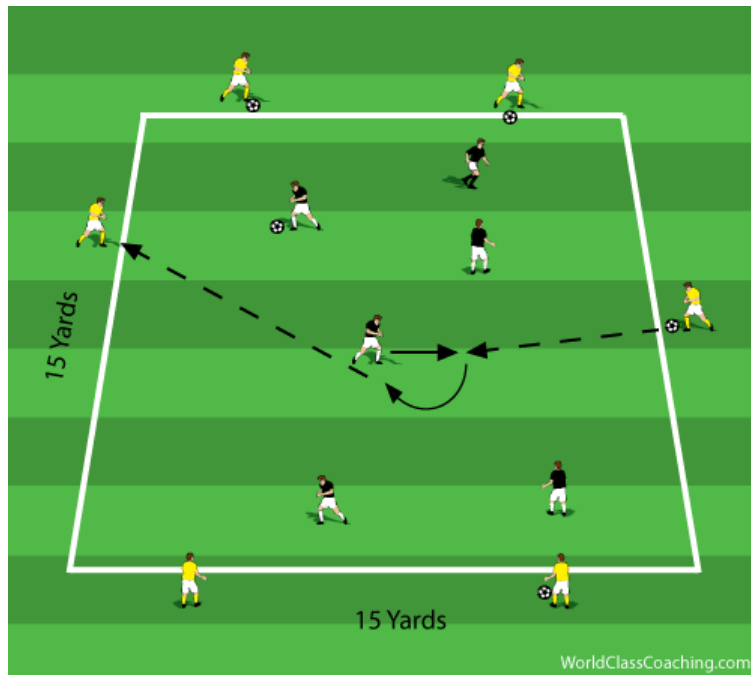
This is all done to prepare for the turns that will be used when they receive the ball from a pass.



Players Inside and Out

Half of the players are on the inside of the 15x15-yard grid without a ball and the other half are on the outside with a ball at their feet.

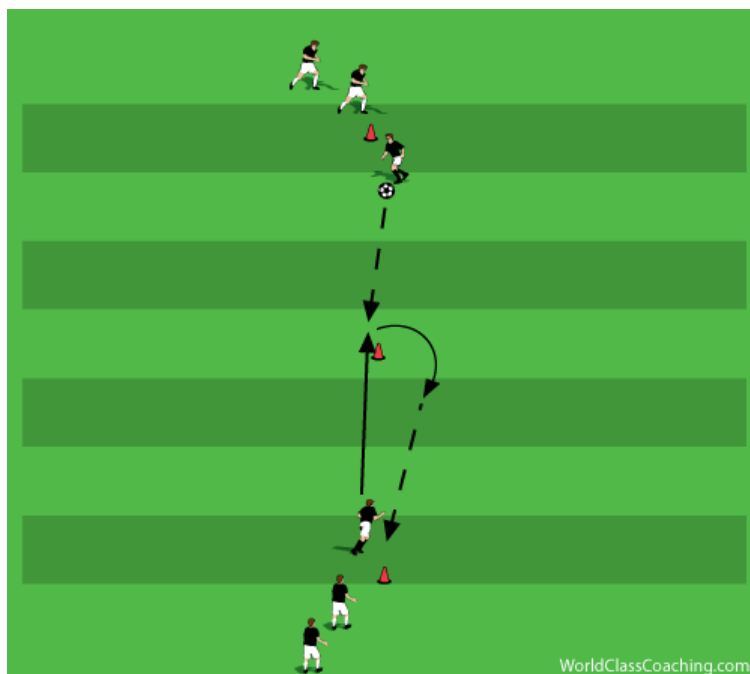
The players on the inside check toward a player with the ball, ask for it, take a touch to control the ball and then turn with one of the three techniques worked on in the warm-up. Next, they dribble away and pass to one of the outside players who don't have a ball. Once each group has a couple of chances to try this, the players use only one touch to turn.



Turn Around a Cone

Four to six players are the perfect number for each group in this exercise. The player in the front of one line has a ball. The front player in the other line checks in front of a cone in the center that represents a defender. The pass is made when the checking player asks for the ball. He then turns around the cone to one side or the other, passes the ball to the next person in the line he came from and runs to the end of the line. The first passer then runs in front of the defender and the pattern continues.

There is so much to coach here and it is only limited by the experience level of the players. You can keep it as simple or complex as you like.

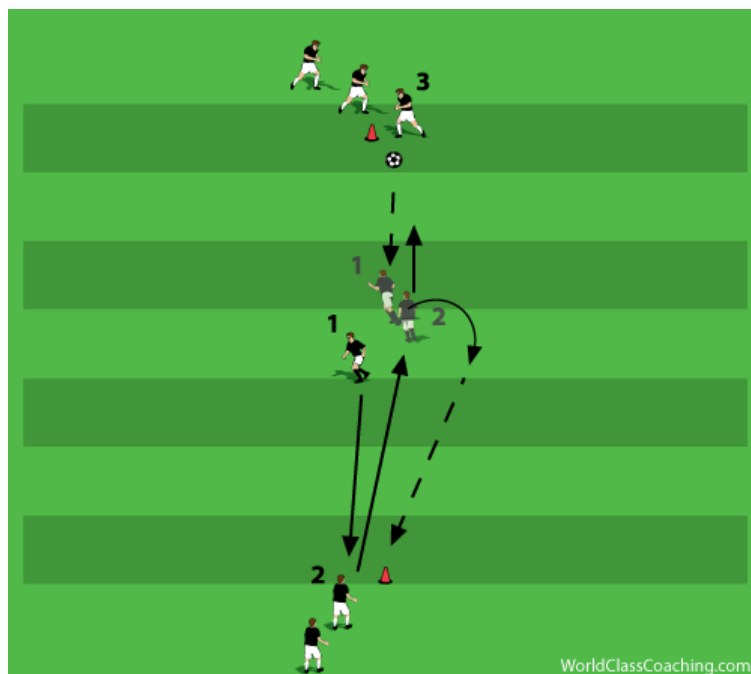


Progression

Now the cone is removed and one player starts in the middle. The middle player checks away from the ball and tag the first player in the other line and comes back to show for the ball. The player who was tagged follows the other player toward the ball and acts as a passive defender. The receiving player turns around the defender and passes to the next player in line. The defender continues their run and tags the passer before showing to the middle and asking for the ball. The passer now acts as a defender and the pattern continues.

I start by having the players walk through this until they start to understand the pattern. Then I can start to coach their technique and decision making. I've done this with players as young as eight and they start to have fun with the constant movement and activity the more they do it.

Once I give the defender a chance to touch the ball the players start to see how the exercise relates directly to situations they face in the game.



We end with small-sided games where I point out opportunities to turn or praise players who use the techniques we worked on.



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