50 COACHING DRILLS

50 FineSoccer Coaching Drills

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COMPLETE SOCCER COACHING GUIDE

50 Soccer Drills, Exercises and Tips for Better Coaching

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WELCOME

As coaches, we know that there are many things that contribute to a young soccer player's success. Our job becomes one of identifying where individual players (as well as our team) are at in terms of their developmental abilities and then choosing the right activities to help them improve their skills. When I say "good activities" I mean ones that are fundamentally sound, keep the kids moving, develop good habits, and make them think about the game as a whole. This book provides you with 180 activities designed to work on warming-up, dribbling, passing, receiving, communicating, spacing, supporting, possessing, passing, conditioning, heading, goal keeping, finishing, defending, offending, and many other techniques and tactics.

I feel these activities are suitable because they've been tried and tested by many soccer coaches and teams. You'll notice that this is a collection of material gathered from my experience as a coach, my summer soccer camp experiences, talking with other coaches, and from coaches who subscribe to my soccer newsletter available at finesoccer.com.

In addition to specific drills, there are many activities designed to be used as scrimmages at the end of practice. I highly recommend spending some time during or towards the end of your practice to play games that include the skills your players were working on. The kids will have more fun and you will be surprised at how the carry over from practicing these skills in a small or adapted version of the game improves the players overall real soccer game performance.

I hope you find these activities helpful, fun, and effective in achieving your desire to have the best team you can have. As you begin to try them, I would enjoy hearing your feedback regarding which ones you found most helpful as well as the ones the kids liked to do the most.

Have a great season,

Lawrence Fine

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GETTING PRACTICE STARTED QUICKLY WHILE BUILDING TEAM UNITY

To make the most of practice time, getting organized quickly for drills is essential. One thing I've noticed is that when players are asked to get into small groups for a particular activity friends will always look for friends to practice with, while some of the kids are left out or left to be assigned to groups by the coach. Because I strongly believe that all players should feel a part of the team, here is a trick I use to get going quickly and to build team unity at the same time.

I call this method the numbers game. I use it as a season long game. Whenever I call out a number, the players must get into groups of that number as soon as possible. Whoever isn't in a group "loses". For example, if there are 16 players at the training session and I call out "4" the players will quickly get into 4 groups of 4. However, if I call out 3, they will get into 3 groups of 5 and one person "loses." When I first introduce the game, I give the kids some examples of consequences for the loser. For example, she might have to do 5 push-ups or 5 donkey kicks. Players learn very quickly that whenever they hear me call out a number that they need to grab whomever is closest to them without regard for whether they are an old friend or a new friend.

This is also a great way to get players to work together with different teammates throughout a training session or season. It even works in large numbers (if you want to split 16 players into groups of 11 and 5, just yell 11 and those 11 become the first group right away. If a player wants to be in the group of 11 they will do so and if they don't that is her decision. This is a great way to find out who wants to do things because the players will frequently figure out what you are thinking with the numbers and will get into the bigger group to participate.

Sometimes I will assign players into groups, but most often I will yell out the number and let the players do it, which saves time and avoids potential conflicts. Next time you need to break your players into teams, play the numbers game and see how many potential problems are avoided.

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FineSoccer Drill 75

Here is one of the simplest and most commonly played games by coaches of youth teams, “World Cup”.

World Cup is a game where a group of players will break off into a bunch of teams of 2's players each. So, if you have a team of 15 players, you would have 7 teams of 2 players each plus one keeper. The server (usually the coach) plays a ball into the middle of the teams and each team tries to get the ball and score on the one goal (with a keeper in it).

There are a lot of variations to this game. Some people play it where each team picks a country that they represent and each time they score a goal, the team who scored must call out the name of the country they represent (so if the Brazilian team scores, they would yell "Brazil"). This could be a game where the first team to score steps off the field and each subsequent team to score steps off. The last team on the field loses. Or, you could do it where the first team to score 5 goals wins (remember, for each ball that is out there it's basically 2 v 12 plus a keeper because whichever team has the ball, all of the others are trying to stop them from scoring). Other variations would be to allow more than one ball on the field at a time. Or, you could have the balls served in from different angles (for example, have the ball served in like a corner kick).

Playing World Cup encourages players to look to take a chance and hit a shot because the likelihood of getting a perfect shot in that type of game is very slim so kids are willing to hit a shot the first opportunity they get. The willingness to hit a shot is one of the qualities that separate the true goal scorer from the rest so playing games that encourage this trait will help to develop goal scorers. However, most kids don't see this game as working on developing the habits of a true goal scorer. The best thing to do is let kids play World Cup (or other games like this) and afterwards ask them if they hit any shots in these games that they wouldn't hit in a real soccer game. Almost every one of them will say they did. Emphasize that there are very few "bad" shots in soccer and the only way to score goals is to take shots. Then, have them go out and play it again. Follow this up with a regular scrimmage and encourage them to take as many shots as they can.

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Use games like World Cup to develop the goal scorer's mentality. Then do everything you can to take this attitude that is developed in these training games and transfer it onto full-sided games.

FineSoccer Drill 76

Working on shape and balance is something that many coaches like to talk about but many don't actually seem to know how to actually train teams to work on this. Here is a way to work on both offensive and defensive shape at the same time.

First, you need to break the field into thirds as shown in the diagram below.

The rules are actually quite simple. You want to play a regular game of soccer (if possible, actually play 11 v 11 or if that doesn't work get as many players on the field as you can). A goal counts as 4 points. Anytime the team with the ball DOESN'T have a player in each of the three sections, they lose a point. (the key here is that it shouldn't always be the same players out wide). As an additional incentive a team can win points by quickly switching the ball. The way this works is that anytime the ball is in section 1, if the defense has any players in section 3, the attacking team gets a point. If the ball gets switched to section 3 and the defense has anyone in section 1, the attacking team gets a point. When the ball is in the middle (section 2), all defensive players must be in the middle section or the attacking team gets a point (you have to give a 1

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second period from the time the ball gets played from the outside to the middle to give the defense time to shift).

This activity encourages the attacking team to provide proper support with width and also it encourages them to switch the ball through the midfield as well as around the back. Defensively, this works on proper defensive rotation as well as proper support and balance.

The size of the sections can be changed depending upon the numbers you are working with as well as their understanding of the concepts.

Some of the variations to consider include rewarding a team for switching the ball from one outside section all the way across to the other (this will help a team switch the ball quickly but will also help them learn when NOT to do it). For the more experienced teams, one of my favorite things to add is that no player can be in either of the two wide sections for more than 5 seconds without the ball. This means that if a player is out wide and not being used, she must get out of that section and someone must take her place in that section (or the team loses a point). If you implement this, the players must understand the roles of different positions or else it turns into pure chaos.

Remember, this activity is best with 7 a side or more and should also be done after a team has gone through a fair bit of shadow training to understand the proper responsibilities of the different roles.

Give this activity a try the next time you want to work on shape and balance (and as a bonus it's great conditioning).

FineSoccer Drill 77

Here is a simple possession game that works on possession, defending in groups, and also taking responsibility.

Let's assume you have 15 players at your training session. Set them up in a circle (you could use the center circle for this).

Three players start in the middle and the players on the outside are playing one touch keep away. While the players on the outside can move around the outside of the circle, they may NOT move inside or outside the circle.

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The simple objective is for the players on the outside to keep the ball away from the players in the middle.

One problem with possession games such as 3 v 1 or 5 v 2 is that the person who loses possession of the ball is actually NOT the one who is at fault. Rather, the supporting players didn't do their job properly which results in the loss of possession. The way this game tries to work on this is that if a player loses possession of the ball, not only does she go into the middle, but so does the player on each side of her (the three players who were in the middle rotate OUT at this time). This encourages the players around the ball to provide proper support because if they don't, they will most likely become defenders as a result. The other thing this rule accomplishes is that it encourages the player on the ball to look further than the players next to her. Since we want to encourage our players to keep their head up and look further than the closest player, this is an excellent way to accomplish it (if the ball was coming to you and you knew that by playing the ball first time to the player right next to you might result in the loss of possession and you have to go play defense, wouldn't you start looking further first?).

As an added incentive to get the defense working hard (and working together) is that if the offensive players can string together 10 consecutive passes, it results in an extra turn on defense for the players in the middle. This means that if the players on the circle make 12 successful passes and then a player loses possession, the defense stays in for another turn. If the players on the outside can make 20 successful passes, then the defense gets two extra turns. It is for this reason that the circle must be very small (adjust it for the ability of the players as well as the numbers).

The great thing about this activity is that it gets quite exciting as the players try to keep other players in the middle as long as possible and also start providing proper support and better decision making.

FineSoccer Drill 78

This is a different type of version of the popular game “kick out”. The difference is that this is more game related and also does a better job of keeping all of the participants involved.

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Start with a restricted space (for 15 players maybe 25 x 25 would do). If there are 15 players have 10 start dribbling soccer balls. The other 5 are working independently trying to win a ball from one of the 10 who started with a ball. If a player wins a ball, she tried to keep it and the player who lost the ball can try to win that ball back or to go after someone else's ball. At the end of a pre-determined time period, the players who end up NOT having a ball lose.

This activity works on dribbling, moves, shielding, conditioning, field vision, and defense. Plus, kids will have a blast playing it.

Consider playing this game 5 times for 2 minute periods each and keep track of the number of times each player ends up with a ball. This could give you, and the team, an idea of who is best at both holding onto the ball as well as who works the hardest.

One thing to consider is to keep changing the time periods or else smart players might allow themselves to lose the ball early and only work the last 30 seconds or so. If they don't know when the game might end, they have to work the whole time (however, the time must be pre-determined or else it's easy to pick on one player and always end it when she doesn't have a ball).

While this might seem like a game more geared toward young players, try it with older players as well and I believe you will see that they get a great deal out of it as well.

FineSoccer Drill 79

Here is an activity that could be considered a continuation of the exercises described in Drill 76. It works on space and balance as well as finishing, defense, goalkeeping, and goalkeeping conditioning as well as many other things.

Split the field into vertical thirds with an 8 yard wide goal (made with cones) at the center of each zone . See the following diagram..

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Split the field into vertical thirds with an 8 yard wide goal (made with cones) at the center of each zone . See the following diagram..

This game is best with 7 on a side or greater (11 on a side works great if you have the numbers) and if you have 3 keepers it is wonderful but two works well also). The field should be full-sized for 11 on a side and only slightly smaller for less numbers.

You play a regular game of soccer. If a ball is dribbled through any of the three goals at midfield, it's worth 1 point each time. If a ball is PASSED through any of these goals and received by a teammate it's worth 2 points. A goal scored into the regular goal (at the end of the field, remember we are still playing a regular soccer game here) is worth 5 points. A team can score as many points at a center goal as they want and a point can be scored going in either direction (young players will get caught up going back and forth through the side goals for points so it becomes important to remind them that the ultimate goal is to score in the real goal). There should be a keeper in each of the regular goals.

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This game will encourage teams to stay spread out offensively and will also encourage them to try to compress the field defensively (it's hard to be chasing from side to side in defense when the attacking team simply has to play a long switching ball to get either 1 or 2 points).

If you are fortunate to have three keepers, two keepers play in the regular goals and the third keeper is responsible for the goals on the midfield line. Any time a regular goal is scored (the 5 point goals) the keeper who gets scored on switches with the keeper in the middle. This should encourage the keepers to do whatever they can to not let in goals because the keeper in the middle is responsible for three goals in both directions. This will require a great deal of conditioning on the keepers parts but again, they need to know how important it is to NOT give up goals in a game.

This game can be played for time (for example it could be a 20 minute game) or it could be played to a certain score (first one to 20 wins). It works on so many important facets of the game that I think if you give it a try, you will soon find yourself using this game (and variations of us) frequently throughout the season.

FineSoccer Drill 80

Here is a simple activity to set up to work on passing, receiving, and conditioning.

Two players start approximately 20 yards apart and player A passes the ball to player B. As soon as player A passes the ball to payer B, she sprints BACKWARDS away from the ball. Player B sprints forward to get to the ball and plays the ball first time back to player A. The key is that after each pass, there is a HARD 5 yard sprint BACKWARDS and when the ball is played to a player, she then sprints FORWARD to meet the ball. Do this for 2 minutes hard and you will really have to concentrate to keep the ball in play (the burning of the legs will be a nice reminder).

Next, do the same thing except now take two touches. The first touch should take the ball to the side and the next touch should be a hard driven ball. Again, once the ball is played, sprint back away from the pass. Also, once a ball

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is played the other player should sprint to the ball to receive it as soon as possible.

If the inside of the foot was used to receive the balls in the previous exercise, next use the outside of the foot. Everything else still applies.

There are numerous variations that can be added to this activity such as chips, turns and so on. The key is going to be to make sure the players are stretched properly (if not, there can be problems with pulls and cramping of the legs) and to have them work as hard as they can at all times. Give ample time to rest between sets.

Going to meet the ball is one of the biggest problems in youth soccer. This simple exercise works on doing this over and over again which will help to make it a good habit. Emphasize to your players that they must go and meet the ball but right before the ball gets to them, they must slow down in order to control the ball properly. Have them alternate feet for each of the passes and receptions.

Do this exercise 2-3 times a week over the course of an entire season and I believe you will see a noticeable improvement in your teams passing and receiving (it should only take 12 minutes per session or so).

FineSoccer Drill 81

This is a great exercise that works on both possession and penetration.

Start with a 10 x 20 grid with a midway line. Have two players from team A in one section along with one player from team B. In the other section, have one player from each team (see diagram below for setup).

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The two players from team A play keep away while the player from team B tries to win the ball. After X number of passes (X can be anything from 3-5 depending on level of play) the two players from team A try to find their teammate in the other section who is making runs to get open while the player from team B tries to prevent this pass from being played in successfully. When the ball is played into the player from team A, one of her teammates may join her in that section and they then begin playing 2 v 1 in that section until X number of passes are completed at which point they try to play the ball back into the original starting section.

Some of the things you want to emphasize to the two players trying to maintain possession of the ball are:

Get a look up to the person in the other section every time.

Try to receive the ball with the body opened up to the field whenever possible.

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Play the ball to the correct foot in order for the player to receive the ball opened up.

Communicate every time to make sure someone goes over into the other section upon successful penetration.

The player from team A in the section should be looking to time her runs to get open when her teammates can get her the ball. She also is working on being able to hold the ball under pressure to allow her teammate to join her in that section upon a successful penetrating pass.

Defensively, the player defending the lone attacker should start goal side to make it more game realistic. Also, make sure this defensive player (and the offensive player as well) realizes that this is a situation on the field (defending a target player) where there is a lot of physical contact and while it should be done within the rules, if it's not practiced in a situation like this, it will never be handled well in a real game.

Do this for 2 minutes and then rotate the players so everyone gets to play offense and defense.

To get more success, you can start with a 3 v 1 in one section and 1 v 1 in the other or even 3 v 1 and 2 v 1.

There are numerous options that can be added, so give this a try and adapt it to meet the needs of your players.

FineSoccer Drill 82

This drill is one that is used by many, many youth coaches out there and has so many things WRONG with it that I feel it should be addressed.

The activity I am referring to is "Knock Out". For those of you who are not familiar with this game, it's where everyone has a ball in a small area and each player tries to dribble the ball around while trying to knock everyone else's ball out of the area. When a player’s ball has been knocked out, she must leave the area. The last person with a ball in the grid is the winner. While there are many variations of this game, this is the way the game is normally played.

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Almost every time I have seen this game played, I see the same pattern happening over and over again. The same couple of kids are almost always the first ones to have their ball kicked out (simply because they might not be as athletic or because they don't have as good skills as the others). These players are the ones who need the MOST touches on the ball but instead, they get punished for not having the skills and is that they don't get to work on the skills that they need most (I am sure some would argue that by getting knocked out early it would give them an incentive to work on these skills so as to not get knocked out in the future. I don't believe this is being realistic at all). Rather than limiting the touches of the players who need it the most, shouldn't we be finding ways to maximize their touches?

Also, from a defensive standpoint, this game does NOT teach players how to tackle a ball and keep possession but rather it teaches them to get someone else's ball and knock it out of bounds. Is that what we want our players to be practicing?

Inevitably, the players who are left at the end of the game are the ones who found ways to hide in the corner so no one went after their ball. This means they let the other players knock each other out and then they come out as winners at the end. Is this helping to create the risk takers we want in soccer?

When teaching dribbling, we should be encouraging our players to dribble at a defender (more specifically dribble at their front foot) but instead this game encourages players to dribble AWAY from the defenders and not worry about direction at all. How is this helping our players?

I have seen one variation of Knock Out that was a LITTLE bit better. In this version the rule is put in that if your ball gets knocked out, you must sprint to your ball, juggle it 5 times, and then come back in the grid or something like that. This still doesn't deal with the other issues.

There are so many other games that can be played that accomplish the same thing, are fun for the players, and DON'T come with the negatives that I don't understand why so many coaches are so adamant about wasting their teams time on this game. If you want a simple alternative, take a look at Drill 78.

FineSoccer Drill 83

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Here is an excellent activity to work on passing and receiving as well as communicating.

Start with a square-shaped grid with a player on each of the corners. Each of the four players should have soccer balls. There should be another 4 players in the middle of the grid (see diagram below for set up).

The players in the middle of the grid go towards one of the players in the corners who have a ball and call for the ball. The ball is played into the feet of the players calling for the ball and then the ball is played right back to the corner and then the player EXPLODES to another corner to do the same thing. The balls should be played properly with good pace and the players should communicate ("Jeff, Ball" and "Back"). Do not have the players going in a certain pattern (for example, the players in the middle should NOT go in a clockwise rotation to make it easy). This will force the players to keep their heads up to see who has a ball and is available. Do this for 1 minute and then rotate the players (players in the corners go to the middle and players in the middle to the corners).

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Next, get rid of one ball and now the players receive the ball from a person in one corner and with their second touch play the ball to a person in another corner who does NOT have the ball. Now all of a sudden, it becomes important to receive the ball and keep the ball moving. It also requires the player to take a look around before receiving the ball in order to see which corner is open to pass to. Also, there is a lot more communication in this version as the person passing the ball from the corner should be instructing the person receiving the ball which person to pass to next. There also will be communication between the players in the middle as to where each is going to run next.

You also can do this with one touch but that gets quite complicated as all balls must be played perfectly for there to be success.

The next progression in this series would be for the ball to be served from the hands of the corner people so that the person in the middle must receive the ball with the thigh and bring it down to the ground before playing the ball to the next corner. From there, you can go with receiving the ball with the chest as well as receiving the ball with the head and then playing it to a corner.

Once a group gets proficient at this activity, you can add defenders so that now the players in the middle must do the exact same thing, but now under pressure. Please do NOT progress up to this level until the players are comfortable with receiving the ball without pressure because otherwise you are putting them in a position to fail. Let them get the basics down before putting too much pressure on them.

FineSoccer Drill 84

Here is a goalkeeping activity that works on deflections, conditioning, shot blocking, angles, and footwork. It does require a minimum of two keepers and two servers but optimally, you would have 3 keepers and 1 server.

Start with a full-sized goal and then two other goals made up of cones or flags. These two other goals (goals 1 and 2 in the following diagram) are on angles. A server is stationed 10 yards from goals 1 and 2 with six balls each (if there are three keepers, one of the servers should be the resting keeper).

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Keeper A is responsible for shots on goal 1 and keeper B is responsible for shots on goal 2. When the server is shooting on goal 1, keeper A tries to save those shots while keeper B is trying to keep any deflections out of goal 3 (the full goal). As soon as this shot is done, the other server gets ready to shoot and now keeper B is responsible for goal 2 while keeper A slides back into the big goal. This goes on until all 12 shots have been hit. If there are three keepers, keeper B would go shoot and the resting keeper (keeper C) would go where keeper A has been and keeper A would replace keeper B.

Not only is this an excellent activity for working on shot blocking and deflections, but it's a good conditioning exercise. It also works on developing good footwork even though the keepers don't necessarily realize this. When they are cutting off an angle (similar to what they are doing from the server in this activity) and then all of a sudden the ball gets played across, there is a tendency for keepers to sprint straight across. However the truth is that this is the wrong approach. Instead they need to bend their runs back to the goal (in a U shape

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almost) and this exercise gets the keeper in the habit of going back towards the goal before trying to cut off the angle on a ball that has been switched.

This is also a good way for field players to work on hitting free kicks because they can try to bend balls around the first goal and into the second goal. Or they can work on shooting low and trying to score in both goals on the same shot.

FineSoccer Drill 85

Here is an excellent exercise to work on possession, penetration, finding a target player and being organized defensively.

Many people play various types of 4 goals games but this one has a couple of different twists to it.

This is best as a 7 v 7 game. Set up the field to go across the entire width of a soccer field. The length of the field is from the 18 yard box to the midfield line. The goals are from the corner of the 18 to the side line (this is assuming it's a full-sized field of at least 68 yards wide) See diagram below for the set up.

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In this diagram, the O's are attacking the two lower goals and the X's are attacking the two upper goals. In order to score a goal, the teams must dribble through one of the goals they are attacking.

So far there is not much difference with the way that most teams play their four goal games. However, one of the differences is going to be that each player on each team is numbered from 1-7. The first time X's are on defense, the player assigned to number 1 must take a knee (meaning assuming a kneeling position) while her team defends. This forces the defense to be more organized since they are a player down. They will be forced to try to keep the play on one side of the field in order to avoid constantly chasing the ball and the open players, which is one of the purposes of the activity. Then, when the X's win the ball, they must get the ball to the player who had been kneeling before they can get to goal (this player might represent a target player up front or possibly a central midfielder who has most of the attack go through him). While they are doing this, O's number 1 must take a knee. All of a sudden, you can see where this will force a great deal of communication to make sure the right players are marking up, the

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right players are getting into the attack, and the right players are being found early in the attack. The next time the X's lose the ball, player number 2 takes a knee and so on.

Other options you can throw into this would include having a neutral player who is full-time offense. This means that whichever team has the ball the neutral player is on that team and they will then be up two players. Since the attacking team always is numbers up they should be able to maintain possession and also look to penetrate on almost every touch.

Other options include putting a rectangle in the middle of the playing area to limit the touches in the middle of the field to either one or two touches. By doing this, you encourage better spacing offensively.

There are many other options that could be put in depending upon what exactly you are wanting to work on.

FineSoccer Drill 86

One of the problems with a teams intent on maintaining possession of the ball is that they end up playing in very tight spaces and are always looking for the player closest to them instead of looking further away and getting the ball away from pressure.

This activity is designed to get players to look beyond the closest player on the field.

Take an area 40 x 40 (or a little more or less depending upon what you have available), and break it into smaller 10 x 10 grids. See diagram below.

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With a team of 16 players break them into 2 teams of 7 and then have two neutral players who are always on offense. The game is a simple game of keep away so that if the X's have the ball, they try to keep the ball away from the O's. The rules are as follow:

- A pass can't be made to a person in the same grid as the passer.
- A pass to a person in a bordering grid counts as 1 point.
- A pass to a person in a grid two away is worth 2 points.
- A pass to a person in a grid three away is worth 3 points.
- A one touch pass doubles the passes value (which means a one touch pass to a person two grids away is worth 4 points).
- A loss of possession results in a loss of 1 point.

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When a team loses possession, if they can win the ball back in the same grid, it's worth 1 point.

First team to 100 points (or whatever you choose) wins.

This game encourages players to maintain possession of the ball, look further than the closest player and spread the field. It also works on defensive transition (winning the ball back as soon as possible).

The hardest part of this game is keeping score. It's MUCH easier if you have two scorekeepers (one for each team). If you have a couple of injured players this is a great way to keep them involved.

There are a number of variations you can add in including points for combinations, having to play the ball in the direction the player is facing when they receive the ball, and much, much more.

FineSoccer Drill 87

This exercise works on conditioning, shooting and goalkeeping.

This works best with one gate, three soccer balls, and one goal for every 3 field players, and 1 goalkeeper. The gate is made up of two tall cones approximately 3 feet apart, with a pole keeping them together that is 2 feet high. The gates are 15 yards from the goal (Coerver goals work well with this) and the three balls are 1 yard from the gate closer to the goal (see diagram below).

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There are many options that can be done with this exercise and I am going to describe three of them.

First, the player starts between the gate and the balls and jumps over the gate and back (three times) and then hits a quick shot one goal. As soon as the shot is hit, she starts jumping again for the second shot. Three shots are hit (which means 9 jumps over and back real quickly) and then the second player goes. Do this set 2-3 times each.

Next, the player starts on the other side of the gate (away from the goal) and jumps over and back 3 times and then quickly crawls through the gate and shoots. Not only does this work on jumping but it also is a way to encourage the players to stay low on the shot. This is done for three balls and then rotate.

Next, the balls starts on the side of the gate and the shooter starts 5 yards behind the goal. A server plays the ball toward the goal and the shooter runs to the gate, hurdles over it, and quickly shoots the ball. She then turns, hurdles

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back over the gate turns, and goes again. If you have two or three groups going at the same time, this can be turned into a race (although the shots MUST be on goal).

Each of the activities can be done with or without a keeper in goal and you can add an extra ball or two to make it that much harder.

FineSoccer Drill 88

This activity is a great warm up that will get the players working hard and playing quickly while having a blast.

Use the center circle as boundaries and put two U10 goals on two sides of the circle facing each other. If you have 16 players, have a 4 v 4 game in the middle and the other 8 on the outside broken into two teams (see diagram below).

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The players on the inside are trying to score in the goal and can use the players on the outside who are on their team. The players on the outside are restricted to one touch only and the last defender back for each team is the keeper (this will be constantly changing depending on who is the last player back). While there is no restriction of touches in the middle, because of the limited space involved, they have to play quickly or get stripped of the ball.

When a team scores, the other team must switch (meaning if the B's score, the G's on the inside go to the outside and the G's on the outside go to the inside). As long as your team keeps scoring the players on your team stay on.

Not only does this game require quick play from all (whether inside or out) it also requires quick transitions and gets a lot of shooting in a short period of time. Play for awhile and you will see your team really get into it.

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FineSoccer Drill 89

Here is a great game that works on combination play as well as scoring (and every other aspect of the game as well).

Use a 60 x 44 area (basically half a field using the sides of the 18 as a sideline). There is a goal on each end line and the field has a line 12 yards from each goal and also a line at midfield. There are three players in the defensive half of the field for each team and two players in the offensive half. See diagram below for basic set up.

The basic rules in the beginning are that no one can cross over the midfield line and the 12 yard lines are the offside lines. To score, a team can either shoot from the midfield line or find one of the players in the offensive half of the field to go to team (for this reason, younger groups might want to use a smaller field). This is working on defensively pressuring in the offensive half of the field as well as offensively looking for shooting opportunities as well.

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Once the players understand the game, you can modify the rules to allow a player from the defensive half of the field to cross over the midfield line if it results in a scoring opportunity. The way this might work is the ball gets played forward to one of the players in the offensive half of the field and then a player from the back joins her to get a ball laid back for a first time shot (this is recreating playing the ball into a target player and then laying the ball to a midfielder for a first time shot). If the keeper makes a save from this situation, it would be in her best interest to try to counter quickly because now there is a 2 v 2 in the attacking half of the field.

Other options could include allowing a player to come back to defend when an attacking player has crossed over the midfield line or possibly allowing more than one player to cross over midfield to get into the attack (realizing that subjects their team to a quick counter attack).

There are many options that can be added to this game. Consider the various possibilities and you will find ways to help any team.

FineSoccer Drill 90

This activity is a four team and four goal game.

This can be used with a minimum of 16 players and while it's great if you have 4 U10 goals, cones can be used if needed. The dimensions of the field can vary but recently I did it on a 60 x 40 field with a goal centered on each line. A team is assigned to each goal . See the following diagram.

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A ball is played into the middle and the teams try to score on any goal EXCEPT the one they are assigned to. So the objective is to score on any of the three goals without giving up a goal. When a goal gets scored, all teams rotate to the right and now are responsible for defending a different goal. Also, each time a goal is scored an additional ball is added onto the field. After the second goal, there would then be 3 balls on the field. Never have more than 3 balls on the field at a time.

You can keep score a number of ways. You can just keep track of goals against or you can do it where a goal counts as 2 points, an assist counts as 1 point, and a goal against counts as -2 points.

Another option is to have it where when a goal is scored, the team that scores and the team that is scored upon switch goals and the other two teams stay where they are.

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The purpose of this game is to force players to think and always keep themselves balanced defensively.

This is a game that needs to be played a few times for a team to get used to, but they will have fun from the very beginning and will also learn a great deal about the game of soccer.

FineSoccer Drill 91

Here is a simple activity that works on the weighting of passes, the accuracy of passes, movement off the ball, and communications.

Start with two lines (4-5 people per line) approximately 20 yards apart (while everyone says you shouldn't use lines in training, if you keep people moving quickly enough they work). The first person in line A passes the ball to the front of line B and follows the pass and ends up in the back of line B. The first person in B (player 1B) starts toward the ball as if she is going to receive it but instead steps over the ball and quickly goes wide. The second person in line B (player 2B) plays the ball first time out wide to the 1B who then plays it back to 2B for a wall pass. 2 B then passes the ball towards the front of line A and follows the pass at which time it starts over in the opposite direction. 1B goes to the second spot in line B and becomes the next 2B. See diagram below for the movement.

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In this small sequence, we have players passing and moving, players dummying balls, showing proper support with angles, proper pacing of passes, and communication. With 4 people per line, the players will get plenty of touches and movement.

Other variations you can do with this activity would include overlapping runs (2B overlaps around 1B to get the ball back), double passes (1B could receive the ball from 2B, spin off and get the double pass) and almost any other combination you want.

This is just a simple example of how you can take a common exercise and accomplish so much more with it by using some creativity.

FineSoccer Drill 92

Many teams don't know how to prepare goal kicks and punts from the keepers (for either team). These are two situations that teams will see quite often over the course of a game, and they need to prepare for them.

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One way to practice for these situations is through shadow play. Here is a simple way to work on goal kicks (attacking and defending) as well as punts (attacking and defending).

Start 11 v 1 using 3/4 of a full field with the 1 player being a keeper for the opposing team. Any time there is a stoppage of play, the ball goes to the opposing keeper who alternates between taking punts and goal kicks. When she punts the ball, the other 11 must play as if there is opposition and NOT let the ball bounce but instead, must attack the ball. Also, while one goes for the ball, the others around her must provide proper support. As soon as the ball is brought down and controlled (frequently meaning brought down by one player and controlled by a different player), they then attack the goal at full speed to get used to proper supporting runs and passes. As soon as they get a shot hit (whether it results in a goal or a save or a goal kick) the 11 players must sprint back and prepare for the next ball. One of the things this activity does is get them in the mindset of getting back quickly and into proper spaces. It also is a way for keepers to work on their kicking game.

After a while of doing this, you can do the exact same thing but this time the punts and goal kicks are coming from the attacking teams keeper. This requires different positioning and different ways to receive the ball so, it must be practiced as well.

Once you are happy with a teams handling of these balls, the next thing to do is put some more opposition in. Don't go 11 v 11 at this point but rather, start with 4-5 players so there is still success but now it's done under some pressure. Gradually build up to 11 v 11 with the same thing taking place.

A game can be played where each team gets 10 goal kicks and 10 punts and they see who can score more goals. Anytime the ball goes out of play, the next punt or goal kick occurs. While this might not seem like it, if you play this game correctly, there is a LOT of conditioning built into it because you get your keepers playing balls quickly and you have players sprinting back into position before the balls get played.

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FineSoccer Drill 93

Here is an excellent game that works on possession, penetration, runs off the ball, and defense.

It's a 2 v 2 game with 4 players in the corners of a field that is 30 x 20 with full-sized goals and keepers. (see diagram below)

The rules are that a player can go to goal playing 2 v 2 or they can play a ball into the corner. The players in the corner are restricted to one touch AND once the ball is played into a corner in the offensive half of the field and played back, there must be a first time shot. This forces the two players in the middle to make hard runs to get in a position to finish (they could be near/far runs or one of those runs and then the second player could run into a position of support for a shot from a distance). A player can play a ball back to a player in the corner in the defensive half of the field and is NOT required to shoot first time.

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The reason I like this activity is that once a ball is played into the offensive corner, both the attacking and defending players must really work hard with the attacking players making hard runs and the defending players trying to beat them to space. It's just like is SUPPOSED to happen in a real game but doesn't seem to very often. By playing this game with these restrictions, you can condition your players to stay "on" in these situations.

FineSoccer Drill 94

Here is a great way to work on passing to the correct foot and with the correct pace.

This is best using a 15 x 8 area. There are two players and one ball. The key is the players must stay outside of this 15 x 8 area. One player makes diagonal passes and the other player makes straight passes. For example, in the diagram below, player A makes diagonal passes to player B who then makes a straight pass down the line back to player A who has made the proper run to get to the spot early. The keys here are that the passes must be made to the outside foot on each pass and also it must be hit with the proper pace to challenge the other person to get to the space in time.

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Not only does this activity work on passing, but it also gets the players in the habit of making runs following the pass. As you can see in the diagram above, the runs are not straight but instead are bent runs to increase the angle to receive the ball as much as possible.

Do this for two minutes and then have the players switch roles so player A makes straight passes and player B makes diagonal passes.

There are many variations you can add such as one side chipping the ball and the other bringing it down and playing it on the ground back.

FineSoccer Drill 95

Here is an interesting alternative to traditional shadow training.

Instead of having 11 players on the field for shadow training, put your whole team (could be as many as 22 players) on the field at one time. Put your starters in one color (blue) and the second team in a different color (red). They are all on

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the same team going the same direction so there will be two right backs, two left backs and so on. The ball starts with a keeper and everyone moves into what they THINK is the proper position. Now there is some pressure on each player to get to the proper position as quickly as possible in order to beat the other player in the position to the spot. The ball can be played to any of the players. You will see players moving quickly to spots because otherwise they will very rarely get the ball.

This activity gets interesting when you see two players playing the same position making completely different runs in the same situation. This is when you, as a coach, should consider stopping play and finding out what each of the players is thinking (the key here is to not assume that one is right and one is wrong but rather for them to use these opportunities for each to learn different options that are available and the thoughts behind each of the options).

From a coaching standpoint, it's extremely important to be open minded in your thinking because you will see things that you had NOT anticipated and you can't jump to the assumption that it's wrong since it's not what you had thought of. It's also important for a coach to know when to stop things and when to let things go because if you stop them too often, you will lose the focus of your players.

If you have enough players, you can also add defenders to this activity to force the attacking players to make decisions based on defenders positioning. The only problem with this is that not many teams have enough players to do this. If you can combine two teams to work on this, it's definitely worthwhile. You do NOT have to have 22 players on the field either. You might just decide to have your midfielders and forwards doubled up or really, it could be any position that you want to emphasize.

FineSoccer Drill 96

This game is a great way to work on getting your outside backs into the attack as well as emphasizing the importance of the center-midfielders making themselves available at all times.

Start with a field that is 60 x 44 (which is half the length of a full-sized field and the width of the 18 yard box) with full-sized goals on each end. Put a 20 x

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20 box in the middle of this field. I am going to set this up with the assumption that you play a 4-4-2 but it could be adapted for your teams formation.

Have four players in each back 3rd of the field, two players from each team in the middle 20x20 box, and 2 players upfront for each team. Plus put a keeper in each goal. (see diagram for set up)

The rules are that the 2 center players for each team must stay in the middle area. The two forwards for each team must stay up front. The outside backs are allowed to go forward which encourages them to get into the attack and make early serves. The forwards on the defending team are allowed to go back and defend IF an outside back goes forward. Another rule is that a team can't go to goal until a center midfielder has touched the ball (it can either come from the back or be played back from a forward).

This game works on runs from the forwards, backs defending, forwards defending, midfielders showing for the ball, backs going forward, shots,

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goalkeeping, combination play, and much, much more. Deviations are easy to make by changing formations, or the size of the box in the middle.

FineSoccer Drill 97

Here is a good activity for working on simple combinations as well as finishing and goalkeeping.

Start with two goals on a 60 x 44 area (this can be adjusted depending on team size and also field space). Three players are working in each half of the field at a time and players rotate quickly. (see diagram below for set up)

First, 1 passes to 2 who lays the ball back for 3 to shoot. Two follows the shot and then 1 goes to 2 and 3 goes to the line behind where 1 started.

Another variation involves 2 checking to the ball, and 1 plays a soft pass in. Two plays it back to 1 and spins off to receive the double pass back, then 1 pushes the ball down the line and 2 runs it down and chops it back to 3 for a

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shot. The key here is for the initial pass into 2 to be soft to "sucker" the defender into trying to win it for the double pass to work. Also, 3 must hold back as this is NOT a cross but rather a ball that is chopped back for the shot.

There are many other variations you can use with this set up and with two groups going at one time, you can have a team of 18 players staying very active working on passing, movement off the ball, finishing, goalkeeping, crossing and so on.

FineSoccer Drill 98

Here are some excellent ways to work on combinations and finishing as well as chopping balls, and goalkeeping

The first activity involves a three person combination with a pass, takeover, hard push and a chop back to a shot. Player A passes the ball to player B who then executes a takeover with player C. Player C then takes a hard touch down the line and chops the ball back for player B to finish. They rotate with A going to B and B going to C and a new player coming on for A. (see diagram below)

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Next is a similar combination with a double pass. Player B checks back to the ball and receives a soft pass from player A. Player A then gets closer to B and B passes the ball back to A and then spins off for a double pass. Player B then chops the ball back to C for the shot . See the following diagram.

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Next Player B checks back for the ball just like he did in the previous exercise and then plays the ball back to player A. Player C makes a diagonal run to the corner receives the ball and chops the ball back to player A for the first time shot. (see diagram below)

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There are many other options that are available using this type of configuration. Be creative and have fun.

FineSoccer Drill 99

This is not a drill, per se, but a suggestion to make all of your drills relate to a soccer game.

Instead of having players stand in line and wait to stay within the rules of the drill, I prefer to keep my players involved in different types of games and exercises that keep the players more involved and even more importantly, keep the players thinking in terms of playing the game as opposed to doing the drill. An excellent example can be seen in the game described in Drill 89. Here you will see that according to the rules of the game, the players can't cross over the midfield line. When most people would do this activity, if a player crossed over the line even slightly, the coach would stop the game and award the ball to the opposing team. That would be an example of playing the rules of the drill.

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However, if you are trying to work on a given situation in a game, it doesn't always come out exactly as you planned. In the game mentioned above, if a ball gets played back to a player who slightly crosses the line to get a first time shot hit, we let that go because while it violated the rules of the drill, we want them to get into the habit of playing the game and too many "drills" are done at the expense of the game of soccer.

In creating your training sessions, look to find games that are soccer related in order to create teaching opportunities. If you can do this on a regular basis, you will be more successful as a coach.

FineSoccer Drill 100

Here are a couple of simple things to do in bad weather in a small space to work on individual skills. These can be done in a basement or garage with just one player and one ball.

Start by putting a line on the floor approximately 10 yards long (use tape or chalk so it won't permanently mark up the floor). Start on the right side of the line with the ball by the outside of the foot. Take a soft touch with the outside of the right foot so that the ball goes slightly forward and across the line. Very quickly, touch the ball the second time with the inside of the right foot and go down the line with as many quick touches as you can using just the inside and then the outside of the right foot. When you get to the end of the line, turn and return. Do this for a 1 minute realizing that the speed of moving down the line doesn't matter but the number of touches does.

Next do the exact same thing using the inside and outside of the left foot. Do this 5 times with each foot.

Next, go with the outside of the right foot, inside of the right foot, outside of the left foot, and then inside of the left foot.

These activities work on quick cuts and fast footwork.

Next do the exact same thing but instead of cutting the ball with the inside and outside of the foot, you would role your foot over the ball dragging it with the sole of your foot (just like as is done with a role-catch move). Start with the ball on the outside of the right foot and roll your foot over the ball so that it crosses

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the line and is not at the inside of your right foot. Then roll it back with the right foot again. Do this for a 1 minute and then switch and do the same with your left foot.

You can do most of the moves described indoors using this line and the quicker you can do them, and the more you do them, the more comfortable you will be doing them in a game under pressure.

Like most activities, the only limitations on variations is your imagination.

FineSoccer Drill 101

Here is a simple warm up activity to work on pairs of players (primarily midfielders and forwards) working together.

Start with 4 players on the outside and 2 groups of 2's in the middle (the diagram is only going to show 1 group of 2 in the middle to make it easier to understand).

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The X with the ball plays the ball to an outside O and then moves to make herself available for the return pass. The second X must move with the first X to receive this second pass. Everything is done one touch. (see diagram below)

This forces each of the players to play the ball with the correct pace as well as the correct direction because each of the balls must be played to the proper foot in order for it to be successful with one touch passes.

Next we start with the same set up but with a different pattern. Now the first X plays the ball to an O and the ball gets played to the second X who then finds the first X. The keys here are for the two X's too support each other in a way that they are close enough together for support but not to close to make it easy to mark both with one player. Also they must support each other on the correct side and the balls must be played with the correct pace and accuracy for this to work. With two groups in the middle, the players must keep their heads up at all time and communicate effectively to avoid running into each other. (see diagram below)

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There are numerous options that can be run off of this simple warm up limited only by your imagination.

FineSoccer Drill 102

This is a continuation of the training session started in Drill 101.

Now we go with 5 players going toward goal (with a keeper in goal). Two are forwards and three are midfielders. (see the diagram below for set up)

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The S (server) plays the ball into the center midfielder who has checked back to the ball. She then finds one of the outside midfielders who finds the near forward. At this point, there are numerous possibilities such as playing it down to the corner for a wall pass with the midfielder, or playing the ball back to the center mid who then finds the other outside mid on the other side. See the diagram for one possibility.

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This exercise shows how an activity that started with using combination play of midfielders can quickly be turned into an attacking activity with many different variations.

Another variation is having the ball played from the center mid to an outside mid. At that point, one forward checks to the ball and the ball is played into the second forward. The ball gets played back to the other forward who then has unlimited options. (see diagram below)

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Next is the same pattern but now they use the opposite midfielder as well.

Each of these patterns would end with a cross and a finish. Next, we would add defenders (one marking the two forwards and one marking the 3

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midfielders). Gradually add more defenders to where you are even numbers or even attacking one short.

There are many other options you can try and it's this type of pattern work that can make a team more effective in their attack.

FineSoccer Drill 103

This drill works on passing, defending, finishing, goalkeeping, and most importantly, vision.

There are two teams (X's and C's) and a field approximately 60 x 40 (the size can vary greatly depending on what is available and also the number of players). In the middle of the field is a Coerver Goal (or two goals back to back if that is all that is available).

In the example below, it's 6 v 6 with one keeper. The rules are simple. Either team can score on either goal. If there is only one keeper she has to protect both sides or, if you have two keepers, one can be assigned to each goal. See the following diagram for the setup.

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The way this usually starts is that all players end up on one side of the field so both teams underutilize spacing. Real quickly, one player will catch on and offensively stay spaced correctly. This allows this one player to take advantage of a long pass or an errant pass. There are no restrictions in terms of number of players on a side although at any point you can add restrictions to improve the game.

I have used this game a number of times and can't even begin to tell you how much the players enjoyed themselves while at the same time working on different aspects of the game.

FineSoccer Drill 104

Here is a fun way to work on chipping, receiving, and volleying. Two players are a little over 35 yards apart standing in a 5 yard buffer zone (see the following diagram for layout).

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Player 1 starts with the ball and chips the ball to player 2's chest. If the ball goes into the buffer zone that player 2 is in on the fly, it counts 1 a point. If player 2 is able to make contact with the ball with his chest, it counts as 2 points. If player 2 is able to receive the ball on his chest and then make contact with the ball and the foot before the ball hits the ground, it's 3 points. If player 2 cannot only make contact with his foot after receiving it with the ball but can also volley the ball back over player 1's line, it's a 4th point. If player 1 is able to receive the volleyed ball with his chest, it's a 5th point. So, on any chipped ball, there can be anywhere from 0-5 points awarded to the team of 2. Each player should take 10 chips and then switch.

This is a great way to turn chipping and receiving into a contest within a team. You can do it where teams of two compete against each other to see who can get the most points on 20 chips total (10 each) or if you want them to work really hard, play the game for a time period to force them to go quickly as well.

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The distances and points can be altered for different age groups and abilities but for an older age group, really challenge them to become proficient in their ability to play a ball (and receive a ball) over a long distance.

FineSoccer Drill 105

Here is a an easy way to work on maintaining possession and also look for penetration. As a bonus, it works on a central midfielder or forward creating space and getting open.

Start with 5 offensive players on a circle and 2 defenders in the circle. Then add a 6th offensive player in the middle of the circle acting as a target player (see diagram below but realize the circle is just so you see the layout, it's not really necessary).

Like a normal 5 v 2 situation the players on the outside try to maintain possession of the ball while also looking to split the two defenders with a pass. The X in the middle is trying to put herself in a position to receive the ball (this

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player represents either a central midfielder or a forward). To turn this into a competition, have the players pair up so that each pair plays defense for 2 minutes straight. Every time there is 5 consecutive passes on the outside it's a point. Every time the two defenders get split it's a point. Every time the middle X gets the ball it's 2 points and every time the middle X gets the ball via a split it's 3 points. After the 2 minutes, the next two defenders go in the middle.

The next step in this progression could be a simple as going 3 v 2 in the middle instead of 2 v 1 with all of the other rules staying the same.

FineSoccer Drill 106

Here is a great game to emphasize width in attack as well as taking the ball to the end line and serving the ball.

Start with a full field (or smaller if you don't have enough players) with two full size goals in the normal area. Next, with coaching poles (or corner flags or even cones) make 6 more goals on the field as shown in the diagram below.

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There are numerous rules you can use in this game.

Let's start with the rule that each time the ball goes through the two goals on the midfield line it counts as a point (it doesn't matter which way the ball goes through as they will be rewarded for playing a negative pass through the goals to relieve pressure.

Next is the rule that if a ball is taken down to the end line (of the goal the team is attacking) and serves the ball to a teammate through the goal, it's another point.

Next a goal scored in the real goal counts as 3 points (the important thing to remember is that while possession and serving balls is nice the ultimate goal is to still score a goal).

Other variations include changing the rules so that instead of rewarding a team for playing a ball through the side goals, you require them to do so before

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attacking goal. Or require that the ball go through two of the field goals (any two) before a team can attack the real goal.

There are numerous options depending upon what you want to emphasize but this game allows you to make minor rule changes and work on many different aspects of the game

FineSoccer Drill 107

Here is an excellent way to work on possession, penetration, and runs inside the box. Start with a 4 v 4 (plus keepers) in a 60 x 40 area with two full sized goals (you can use more players on the inside by adding space). There will be 4 players on the end lines (2 on each end line). See diagram below for the set up.

The basic rules of this game are that it's a normal game of soccer with the exception being that a team can use the players on their offensive end line. The players on the end line are limited to one touch. The idea of this game is for the

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field players to look to maintain possession until they have set up a situation where they can either go to goal or find a player on the end line to initiate the runs in the box. To see an example of the type of scoring opportunities that can be created, see the following diagram.

There are many other options that can be added into this activity (including putting players on the side lines as well who can provide support for either team).

This is a great way to work on many different parts of the game.

FineSoccer Drill 108

Here is a great way to work on team defense and forcing players out of the middle of the field.

This is actually a simple game. The rule is that anytime the attacking team makes a touch of the ball in the box in the offensive half of the field, they get a

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point. Looking at the following diagram, if O can touch the ball in the box on the left hand side of the field, they get a point. This encourages the X's to force the O's play the ball wide and to defensively compress the field. When the X's win the ball, the O's attempt to defend the right hand box area in this diagram.

In order to prevent a team from cheating defensively, a goal counts as 6 points. From an offensive view, it's still in a teams best interests to attack the goal.

Not only does this game work on defense, it also helps prepare a team offensively for when an opponent packs it in defensively.

This is a great way from a coaching standpoint to emphasize one thing (staying compressed defensively) while also working on all of the other aspects of the game.

FineSoccer Drill 109

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Here is an interesting way to work on runs in the box and finishing under pressure.

This works best with 12 field players and 1 keeper although it certainly can be adapted for other numbers. Break the field players into 3 teams (X's, O's, and Y's). The X's and O's start inside the 18 with a keeper in goal. The Y's are on the outside of the 18 as shown in the following diagram

The X's start on offense and attack the goal with the O's defending. The X's can either go straight to goal or play a ball to any of the Y's who are restricted to one touch. The Y's can either play back to the X's or to another Y who then can find the X's making a run. If the O's win the ball they must take the ball over the top of the 18 at which point they turn and become the attacking team. If the keeper wins the ball (either by making a save or intercepting a pass) she plays the ball to the team that was on defense.

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Play a 5 minute game and then rotate so either the X's or O's go on the outside and the Y's play in the middle.

There are numerous variations in this type of game such as requiring some type of combination play in order to score a goal or an extra point is awarded for goals off of headers and so on.

This exercise is a great way to work on runs in the box and not only is it a fun game to play but there are a lot of coachable moments being created regarding runs in the box in a short period of time.

FineSoccer Drill 110

This is a bit of a continuation of the exercises in Drill 109.

Start with a 6 v 6 or 8 v 8 game on half a field with two full goals and keepers. The areas from the end line to the 18 extended outside of the penalty area are designated as safe areas (the safe areas are represented by the shaded black areas in the following diagram). This means that the team defending in their defensive half, cannot go into safe area. The purpose of the game is to encourage the attacking team to get the ball wide into the safe area and then make the appropriate runs in the box to create scoring opportunities.

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One thing to consider in this type of set up would be to not allow the attacking player in the safe area to play too slowly which would create too much of an artificial situation. This can be done either by limiting the touches in the safe area or limiting the time allowed in the area.

Some rules that can be added are that a goal that is scored from a cross from the safe area counts as 2 points and a goal from any other area counts as 1 point. Or, you can put in the rule that a certain type of goal can count as more than others (for example, if there has been an emphasis on near post runs, a goal coming from a near post run gets a bonus point).

For younger ages who don't always see the importance of attacking from the flanks, a team can be awarded a point simply for getting the ball into the safe area and getting a cross him.

There are many variations that can be added to this activity only limited only by your imagination.

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FineSoccer Drill 111

Here is an interesting exercise that works on possession, communication, and helping midfielders determine when to support and when it's not needed both offensively and defensively.

Start with 4, 10 x 10 grids with some space between each grid. There should be two X's versus two O's possession games going on in each grid. There are also two extra X's and O's in the middle. See diagram below for the set up.

The objective in this game is for a team to have possession in all four grids at the same time. To help accomplish this, the four players in the middle (two X's and two O's) can go into any grid that they want to help their teammates. If one of the X floaters sees that her teammates are losing their battle in one of the grids, she can go in and turn it into a 3 v 2 instead of 2 v 2. Or, she can join a grid to help her teammates maintain possession if they are down a player in a 2 v 3 type situation.

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Not only does this work on possession in the 2 v 2 games, but the 2 teammates who are floating will be working on communicating to decide who goes where (or maybe they would decide to both go to the same place). Players in the grid would also be working on communicating (if they need help, they should communicate with the floaters to get help).

One of the hardest things in this game is for the coach to determine when a team has possession of all four balls at any one time. Injured players can help with this aspect of the game.

This type of an exercise takes some time for it to work because in the beginning it will be mass confusion. However, once they understand how to play this game, it can really help in many different aspects of the game.

FineSoccer Drill 112

Here is an activity that works on passing, receiving, movement after passing, and communication. Before even describing it, I should warn you that when you first try it, you might see mass confusion. Let the players work it out and it will force them to think.

Start with four lines of 3-4 set up as shown below.

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There are three balls (one in the front of line Z, one in the front of line X, and one in the back of line Y. The first player in line X passes the ball to the first person in line Y and then sprints to the back of line Y. At the same time, the first person in line Z passes to the first person in line O and sprints to the back of line O. The important thing for them to work on is getting a good sprint in after the pass. Everyone will have to keep their head up to make sure they don't run into each other or get hit by a ball. At the same time this is taking place, the last player in line Y passes the ball to the last player in line 0 and then sprints to the back of line Z. In other words, the pass is made counter clockwise and the run is made clockwise. See the diagram below to get a better understanding of all of the movement.

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The balls played from the front players keep going back and forth between the two lines and the ball being played in back goes around in a circle.

There will be three balls moving at all times (the two that are going back and forth should be one touch and the one that is going in a circle can be two touch) as well as at least three players running at all times. Players will have to constantly be communicating to know who to pass to and where to go next.

This is a fun warm up activity that includes the whole team (anywhere from 12-20 players can keep active in this activity) and can be used for various age groups.

FineSoccer Drill 113

Here is an activity that works on different aspects of heading.

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12 players are broken into two teams (X's and O's) and are in a 40 x 40 grid (the numbers and size of the grid can vary) See the diagram below for setup.

X1 starts with the ball in her hands (the players aren't actually numbered but this is just for demonstration purposes). She throws the ball (proper soccer throw in) to any of her teammates who will then head the ball to a third teammate who receives the ball with using the normal laws of soccer (no hands). Any time there is a successful throw, head and reception under control, it's 1 point for the team. The definition of a successful reception should be defined ahead of time but might be a ball that is controlled at the feet and then dribbled two times. To see an example, in the following diagram X1 throws the ball to X6 who heads the ball down to X2 who receives the ball. This would result in a point for the X's.

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If the ball hits the ground after the ball is thrown and before it's headed, the ball automatically goes to the opposing team. If the third player gets possession of the ball and takes two touches under control, she is allowed to pick the ball up uncontested (otherwise you are risking injury of players trying to pick the ball up while defenders are trying to kick it away).

While this might seem like a game geared primarily toward younger players, you would be surprised at how effective it is for more experienced players as well. With the younger players it works on proper throw-ins and not being too afraid to head the ball and so on. For the more experienced players, it works on the above as well as proper spacing and support (it doesn't do you any good to be open by yourself so the players are working together and communicating) as well as learning how to not just head the ball but also head the ball down to feet for a teammate to handle when it's appropriate. For older players, you can also allow double headers which, if then controlled, would count as 2 points.

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There are many variations of this activity. Give it a try and see how many different things you are working on while the team has fun!

FineSoccer Drill 114

Today's activity works on making the transition from offense to defense and then back to offense in the defensive half of the field.

Start with all 10 field players on the starting team within 10 yards of midfield and the keeper in goal. A server (the coach) should be in the center circle with a number of soccer balls (see diagram below for set up).

The server plays a long ball and the X's have to quickly organize themselves to win the ball and then work the ball back down the field (this is a form of shadow play but done from an unusual starting point). This is good preparation for when a team is dispossessed in midfield and the opponent plays a long ball over the top. Rather than having all players go to the ball, they would work on getting into good supporting position as well.

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Once they are able to make this quick transition effectively, the coach could then add a couple of opponents who start just on the other side of the center circle. As soon as the ball is played by the server, these opponents try to pressure and win the ball. Start with three opposing players and gradually build up to 11 v 11 if the numbers are available.

This is a great way to work on transition, support, communication (especially from the keeper), conditioning, and much, much more.

FineSoccer Drill 115

Here is an activity for younger players to work on maintaining some shape and balance. Try to discourage them from just "chasing the ball".

Start with a field that is 36 yards long and 44 yards wide with two full-sized goals (this would be two 18 yard boxes). Then break the field into 6 even grids inside of the field. The game will be a 3 v 3 game plus keepers. Each field player is assigned a grid. See the following diagram for the set up.

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The game is very simple. Players 1,2, and 3 are playing against 4,5, and 6. The main rule is a player can only go into another grid that touches their original grid. For example, player 6 can stay within her own grid and can go into the grids where 2,3, and 5 start but can't go into the grids of 1 or 4. See diagram below for allowed movement.

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This activity allows movement and support while also emphasizing some discipline and balance.

FineSoccer Drill 116

This exercise is a great way to work on soccer fitness, taking players on, and shielding as well as tackling and much, much more.

The game is basically 1 v 1 v 1 going from one sideline to the other with small goals. There are three players on the field and whichever player has the ball attacks and the other two players defend. If a player wins the ball, then she must attack the furthest goal. If there are 12 players involved in training, you would have two groups playing and two resting for 90 second periods and then they would switch. The resting players would be in charge of making sure there is always a ball in play. See diagram below for an example of the set up.

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By going sideline to sideline for 90 seconds, the players get a tremendous amount of conditioning in while also working on many other aspects of the game.

Other variations can include allowing the player with the ball to attack either goal or allowing them to use the players on the outside who would be restricted to one touch. Also, instead of three players playing at a time, there can be 4 so it's always 1 v 4.

This is a great way to work on fitness while maintaining the soccer feel. If each group gets 5 turns and the transitions between games can be held to 30 seconds, in a 20 minute period, you can accomplish many things.

FineSoccer Drill 117

This activity is done in groups of 5 so if you have 15 players do this in three groups.

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The area is 10 x 20 and the set up is as shown in the diagram below.

X1 begins the activity by passing the ball to S1

X1 them moves forward

S1 passes the ball to S2

S2 passes the ball to X1

X1 passes the ball to X3

X3 passes the ball to S2 and the whole pattern reverses directions

See the following diagram to see the pattern.

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Another variation is:

X1 begins the activity by passing to S2

S2 passes to S1

S1 passes the ball into the path of X1 who passes to X3 and so on

The thing I like about this activity is that it encourages a run after the initial pass and also works on three player combinations which is something that is lacking in a lot of players games.

FineSoccer Drill 118

This is a great activity to work on first touch, short passes, and movement to open your body up to receive a ball properly.

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Start with three players in a triangle close enough together to make the players work hard. See the following diagram for an example of the starting positions.

Players A and B are 10 yards apart on a line and player C is 5 yards off the line. Player A starts with the ball. A passes to C (and in this case, passes specifically to C's right foot) and C must move her feet so that she lets the ball roll past her left foot and plays the ball to player B's right foot with a first time pass. Player B then one touches the ball back to players C's left foot and C plays the ball to A's left foot. See diagram below for an example.

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Since every pass is hit one touch, player C will have to be constantly moving her feet in order to get opened up and play the ball with the correct foot and to the correct foot.

Player C does this for 1 minute and then they rotate and each player gets a turn to go. Once each player has gone twice, they move on up to the next step in the progression. Player A will next play the ball toward C's left foot. C will reach across her body with her right foot, and with the outside of the right foot play the ball back across her body so that she can next play the ball to player B's right foot using the inside of the right foot. B then plays the ball back toward C's right foot and C reaches across with the outside of the left foot to receive the ball and player it across her body so she can pass the ball with the inside of her left foot to A's left foot. Again, this requires accurate passing by all players and constant movement by the player in the middle.

Next, the player in the middle can do inside of the foot volleys then side volleys, then thigh traps to a volley then chest trap to a volley then headers.

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There are many different options in doing an activity like this to keep them working on their touches while also doing some fast footwork and some conditioning.

Even when the players are resting, they are still working on their passing (playing first touch) and still having to concentrate at all times.

The thing I like best about this progression is you can do it with an entire team (with 18 players you would have 6 groups of 3 players working at the same time) or you can do it with just two players and a coach. It works on some of the most important parts of the game yet is so simple to do. The one thing I would like to emphasize is that if the passes aren't being hit with proper accuracy and pacing, they HAVE to be corrected in order to help the players get better.

FineSoccer Drill 119

These activities are actually a simple progression that works on taking players on, defending, conditioning, and much, much more.

Start with a small grid (20 x 10 is a good size for most) and 4 players per grid with one ball per grid. The players split into two groups. One player from each group stands on the center of the end line and is the goal and the other player starts in the middle. To score, the center player must pass the ball through the legs of the other players "goal". The players who represent the goal do NOT try to defend and do NOT try to move to prevent a goal from being scored. The "goals" must stand with their feet far apart to make it easy for the players to score. The game lasts for 1 minute and then the players switch. See the following diagram for the set up.

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As soon as 1 minute is up, the players switch roles and the two players who were goals now are in the middle and the two who were working are now goals. They should play 4 times each (the players can rotate opponents). If there are 16 players to a team, there would be 4 fields going at one time.

The next step in the progression is to combine now into two groups of 8 using just two fields. Now you have the same set up as before but now there are also players in the four corners who can be used as teammates for the attacking player. See the following diagram for set up.

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The players in the middle can pass the ball to any of the four players in the corners and the four players are restricted to one touch passes. The middle players do NOT have to use a player on the outside before going to goal. Play for 1 minute and then rotate. This should be done for a total of 8 times.

Next there are two players in the middle, a player on each end for goals and a player on each sideline providing support for the attacking team. Again, the outside players are restricted to one touch and now it's much more of a combination type game. See the following diagram for set up.

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Each player would get 4 turns in the middle for a total of 8 minutes of total play.

The key to this type of progression is that absolutely no time needs to be built in for rotation of players within the games. When the coach says switch, the players on the outside should already know who goes where and when. So, in a matter of 24 minutes, each player would have played for 10 minutes at a very high rate of intensity and also acted in a supporting role for a few more minutes. It's extremely important that the coach explain the proper rotation and everyone knows what to do next.

This is an example of how a few different games can be tied together into an extremely effective progression.

FineSoccer Drill 120

Too often, coaches think that effective training sessions must resolve around good “drills”. Today’s activities are designed to show you how to work on

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specific phases of the game by incorporating certain restrictions into your scrimmages.

If the emphasis of a training session is going to be getting back on defensively and providing proper support, you can do this by playing a small sided game on a big field (for example, 4 v 4 with or without keepers on a 60 x 40 field). The two restrictions are that when a team loses possession of the ball (unless it's due to an attempted shot) all 4 players must sprint back and touch their own goal posts before the can defend. Before the team that won the ball can attack, they must make 4 consecutive passes of over 10 yards to each other. By forcing the players to sprint back and touch their goal post before defending, it gets them in the mindset that they must get back behind the ball upon losing possession of the ball. This rule also encourages the team with the ball to cherish possession and not accept just giving the ball away. The reason for the exception to the rule on attempted shots is you never want to do anything to discourage a player from looking for their shots.

An alternative to the above activity might occur if you want to encourage getting back and behind the ball defensively while also pressuring the ball. This can be achieved by having the person who lost possession of the ball to go high pressure and chase the ball wherever it goes while the rest of her team must go back and touch the goal posts before helping. Again, this accomplishes the objectives defensively while also putting in a strong incentive to maintain possession of the ball offensively.

Both of the two activities also work on strong communication in back (and this is why it's preferred that there be regular keepers in goal).

Another option is to have the player who lost possession of the ball to step off the field (or take a knee) until his teammates regain possession. This gets the players accustomed to shifting and covering for each other while a player is down. It also gives the player who lost possession time to think about their mistake and also to try to figure out how they can fix it in the future.

Using the same numbers, you can play with big goals and no keepers with the rule being that the player furthest back can use their hands inside the penalty box. By putting in this rule, it encourages players to think about providing

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defensive support from behind (since in this game that player can act as the keeper).

There are so many ways to work on the various aspects of the game while playing small or full sized games. Not only are they usually more game realistic, but they are also much more fun for the players. Next time you are looking for a "drill" to work on something, think about whether there is a way to incorporate the activity into a small-sided game to get more out of it.

FineSoccer Drills 121

This activity is a different variation on the dribbling activity discussed in Drill 78.

While this works on all of the things that drill 78 does it also is an excellent test to determine who are the "personality players" on a team.

If there are 15 players, start with 10 players with soccer balls in a 30 x 30 grid (or whatever size you choose). The difference between this activity and drill 78 is that now it's not good enough to just end up with a ball. A team can play five 2 minutes matches and a player gets one point for having a ball at the end of the 2 minute. If they can get two balls at the end of the 2 minute period they get 3 points and if they have none, they get no points.

By adding this wrinkle into the activity you can learn a great deal about the players. The ones who try to get two balls on a regular basis are the risk takers and in most cases this will carry over into a regular game. These are the types who will be the attacking center midfielders or strikers. The player who is more interested in ending up with 1 point after each 2 minute period is more likely to be the safe solid player (possibly the defensive midfielders).

Sometimes playing a simple game like this can not only work on individual skills and conditioning but also give a coach a much greater idea on who the personality players are on their team.

FineSoccer Drills 122

This activity works on passing, receiving, footwork, and conditioning.

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Start with a 4-yard equilateral triangle in the middle of the center circle (use either coaching poles or cones for the triangle). Anywhere from 3-5 players are on the outside of the circle surrounding the triangle. One player is inside the circle protecting the triangle. See the following diagram for set up.

The players on the outside pass the ball around the circle (or through it) and get a point each time they can pass the ball through any of the sides of the triangle. The defender must keep her feet moving to be in position to prevent this from happening. Each time the ball goes through the triangle, a point is awarded. If the defender wins the ball, she must give the ball back immediately and they start up again. The defender stays in the middle for 1 minute and they rotate after the minute. The defender who gives up the fewest number of points wins. Each player can be a defender for two periods.

The players on the outside can play one or more touches but may not go into the circle. To score, the ball must be below the knees. A ball can be

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chipped over the triangle to another player on the outside but that would not count as a point unless it's below the knees when going through the triangle.

The defensive player may NOT run through the triangle so she must keep moving around the triangle in order to defend each side.

The players on the outside have to play quality quick passes in order to score points and will have to be able to handle these passes as well. The defensive player will have to be in good shape and really work hard in order to be an effective defender in this game.

FineSoccer Drill 123

Here is a fun game that works on goal scoring, communication, aggressiveness, and teamwork.

Start with three teams and two goals with keepers. All three teams are on the field at the same time and the field will depend upon the number of players on the field as well as how much running the coach wants the players to do. Using a team of 17 as an example, it would be 5 v 5 v 5 with two keepers on a field 60 v 40 or so. The coach has a bunch of soccer balls on the sideline. See diagram below for set up.

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The coach serves a ball in and whichever team gets the ball is on offense and can attack EITHER goal. If that team loses the ball, whichever team wins it can also go to either goal. The players learn quickly that they need to get to goal as fast as possible because they will not be able to maintain possession for long periods of time since there are twice as many opponents on the defending teams.

There is no offside rule in this game and anytime the ball goes out of play (or a keeper wins the ball) the coach then serves in a new ball.

Teams will learn real quickly that if they want to win in this game, they will have to be the aggressor and not sit back and wait for the ball to come to them. They will also learn to spread out offensively and compress defensively.

Other variations are that when a team wins the ball from another team, they must attack the goal furthest from where they are. Also, points can be awarded

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for head balls won (and the coach can chip balls into play) as well as any number of other options.

FineSoccer Drill 124

Here is a simple progression to work on attacking at speed and also building in working with a second defender.

Start with half a field and two lines of players and a keeper. The players in the line nearest the goal have soccer balls. See diagram below for set up.

The first O plays a long ball out to the first X who attacks in a 1 v1 situation. As soon as O plays the ball out, she then goes out and defends . See the following diagram.

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Next add in a second defending line who sprints to become the second defender behind the first defender. As soon as the second defender gets behind the first defender, this will allow the first defender to take more chances defensively. The rule in this activity is that the second defender may NOT try to win the ball until she assumes the role of the second defender. See the following diagram In this diagram, O plays the ball out to X and then O sprints out to become the first defender and Y sprints BACK to become the second defender to provide proper support for the first defender.

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While it might look like there will be a lot of standing around during this activity, it's actually an extremely quick moving and as soon as the defense slows down the attack, the attack is over (since the role of the defense on a partial breakaway like this is to delay until support arrives). Since each attack should last for less than 5 seconds or so, you can see why there is very little standing around in this activity. The key is the coach MUST get the next group going as soon as the previous one ended.

Next you can add a second attacker which can be seen in the following diagram In this diagram, B and X are attacking and O and Y are defending. The key for the second defender here is to still provide the proper support first and then to worry about marking the second attacker. When you add the second attacker, it forces there to be much more communication between the two defenders and the keeper.

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From here you can keep adding more players in the attack and defense and start to introduce the idea of the 3rd defender at that point.

FineSoccer Drill 125

Here is a fun activity that works on offensive and defensive headers.

Start with groups of three with one ball per group in a 20 x 5 area. One player is in the middle with the ball and the other two are on the ends of the grid. See diagram below for an example.

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WELCOME

As coaches, we know that there are many things that contribute to a young soccer player's success. Our job becomes one of identifying where individual players (as well as our team) are at in terms of their developmental abilities and then choosing the right activities to help them improve their skills. When I say "good activities" I mean ones that are fundamentally sound, keep the kids moving, develop good habits, and make them think about the game as a whole. This book provides you with 180 activities designed to work on warming-up, dribbling, passing, receiving, communicating, spacing, supporting, possessing, passing, conditioning, heading, goal keeping, finishing, defending, offending, and many other techniques and tactics.

I feel these activities are suitable because they've been tried and tested by many soccer coaches and teams. You'll notice that this is a collection of material gathered from my experience as a coach, my summer soccer camp experiences, talking with other coaches, and from coaches who subscribe to my soccer newsletter available at finesoccer.com.

In addition to specific drills, there are many activities designed to be used as scrimmages at the end of practice. I highly recommend spending some time during or towards the end of your practice to play games that include the skills your players were working on. The kids will have more fun and you will be surprised at how the carry over from practicing these skills in a small or adapted version of the game improves the players overall real soccer game performance.

I hope you find these activities helpful, fun, and effective in achieving your desire to have the best team you can have. As you begin to try them, I would enjoy hearing your feedback regarding which ones you found most helpful as well as the ones the kids liked to do the most.

Have a great season,

Lawrence Fine

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GETTING PRACTICE STARTED QUICKLY WHILE BUILDING TEAM UNITY

To make the most of practice time, getting organized quickly for drills is essential. One thing I've noticed is that when players are asked to get into small groups for a particular activity friends will always look for friends to practice with, while some of the kids are left out or left to be assigned to groups by the coach. Because I strongly believe that all players should feel a part of the team, here is a trick I use to get going quickly and to build team unity at the same time.

I call this method the numbers game. I use it as a season long game. Whenever I call out a number, the players must get into groups of that number as soon as possible. Whoever isn't in a group "loses". For example, if there are 16 players at the training session and I call out "4" the players will quickly get into 4 groups of 4. However, if I call out 3, they will get into 3 groups of 5 and one person "loses." When I first introduce the game, I give the kids some examples of consequences for the loser. For example, she might have to do 5 push-ups or 5 donkey kicks. Players learn very quickly that whenever they hear me call out a number that they need to grab whomever is closest to them without regard for whether they are an old friend or a new friend.

This is also a great way to get players to work together with different teammates throughout a training session or season. It even works in large numbers (if you want to split 16 players into groups of 11 and 5, just yell 11 and those 11 become the first group right away. If a player wants to be in the group of 11 they will do so and if they don't that is her decision. This is a great way to find out who wants to do things because the players will frequently figure out what you are thinking with the numbers and will get into the bigger group to participate.

Sometimes I will assign players into groups, but most often I will yell out the number and let the players do it, which saves time and avoids potential conflicts. Next time you need to break your players into teams, play the numbers game and see how many potential problems are avoided.

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FineSoccer Drill 1

Start with a warm up before this drill. Set a number of gates up throughout half of the field like below. Each gate should be 2 yards wide.

Have half the players wear white and the other half blue. Have a white and a blue player match up with each other with one ball per pair. This is simply a 1v1 game where the players try to score points by dribbling through as many gates as they can. The white player starts with the ball and tries to score as often as possible in the first 1 minute half. If the blue player wins the ball, then she tries to score goals. The only restriction is that the players can NOT dribble through the same goal two times in a row. After 1 minute half, they rest (and stretch) for a minute, then play the second half with the blue player starting with the ball. With

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a team of 16 players, there will be 8 games of 1v1 going on at the same time. This will encourage the players to dribble with their heads up (or run into each other). At the end of the second half, you might let the winner rest for a minute while the loser suffers some type of consequence such as burpees. The key is to turn this into a very competitive match. The next game should feature a white winner matching up with a blue winner and also have the losers match up with each other. You can do this three times and get a very strenuous work out going which will continue into the next drill.

The next progression of this series (which will begin to work with spacing and switching fields) is set up exactly the same way with the gates remaining the same. It's essentially the same game with the major change being that there is only one ball for the whole team. Now it's all of the whites against all of the blues. In order to score a goal, the ball must be passed through a gate and received by a teammate. Those are the only rules that need to be explained. Start them off playing a 6 minute game with a 1 minute break at "halftime". This break is very important because typically, the first 3 minutes of this drill are dreadful. It has been my experience that players will try to dribble to a gate and then pass the ball through to a teammate who inevitably is marked up. During this one minute break, explain to the players that it actually takes 3 players to score a goal and not just the two they are trying to use (the player with the ball and the target through the gate). The three players are the player with the ball, and then two other players who are working together to find an open gate. Once they find an open gate, the player with the ball can drive (or chip) the ball to one of these open players who then play it through the gate to the other one). Once they start to think in terms of needing three players to score a goal and that two of them must find an open (or unmarked) gate, then they will start to experience success in this game.

As the players get accustomed to this game, they will get more comfortable with playing with their heads up and looking to players who have proper support and spacing. This drill is a great way to prepare for the next drill that will continue to work on getting better spacing and the switching of fields in the attack.

FineSoccer Drill 2

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The second part of this progression is to set a field up as shown in the following diagram.

The dimensions will depend upon the numbers playing but with 16 or so players, you would use half of a full-sized field. The corners have a small area designated by cones (the two sides of the triangle that make up the right angle should be 3 yards long).

The 16 players are broken up to two teams (team A and team B). Team A would place one player in the upper right corner and also one in the lower left corner. Team B would place one player in the upper left corner and the lower right corner.

Team A scores a goal by passing the ball into either of the players in their corners and then that player must one touch the ball to a third player for the goal

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to count. If the goal is scored, the player who originally passed the ball into the triangle then goes in the corner and the player who originally was in the corner joins the others on the field.

Just like in the previous drill, players will originally try to dribble toward the goal and then pass it to their teammate. Also, just like the previous drill, this will NOT be effective. Building on the last drill, explain how to score a goal, there must be three players involved (however, now it's almost four players). Instead of trying to dribble the length of the field, the player with the ball should look for two players working together and play the early first pass to them. Then those two players will play the ball into the corner and make the proper runs in order to get open. (pretty cool progression!)

As the players get more accustomed to this game, they will automatically start to get better spacing as they realize that instead of forcing the ball into one corner, they can change directions and go the other way if they have proper balance.

Any balls that go out of play are kick ins and even a kick in can be played into the corner to initiate a goal.

Of all of the drills that I have ever used, this might be the most enjoyable for me because of how quickly I tend to see improvement. When combined with the next drill, I can watch how well they are able to take this improvement and actually apply it in a game situation.

The next step in this progression is to change the field slightly to look like the one in diagram below.

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This field has the same dimensions but now, instead of triangles in the corners, there are small 2 yard wide goals (just place a goal in each corner and then another one 2 yards in on the end line). Also, there is a square in the middle.

Again, there are 2 teams but now to score, the ball must be played through the goals. Team A would be scoring into either the top left goal or the bottom left goal and Team B would be scoring into either the top right goal or the bottom right goal (this part is set up like a standard 4 goal game). The rectangle in the middle represents a one touch zone (for younger players this can be a two touch zone). By having the goals in the corners, it encourages the players get wide early and by putting in the one touch zone, it discourages the players from trying to dribble from one side of the field to the other. You will start to see players doing a much better job of spacing with players running through the center to receive the ball and play one touch soccer.

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The other thing this central zone does is encourage both width and depth. Instead of playing all balls either square or forward, they will realize the advantages of playing balls back and around the zone (just like you want them to switch balls around the back of the field in a real game).

One of the reasons I like this game so much is that the spacing comes almost naturally. I believe the more a player can realize on their own, without it having to be explained in great detail, the more she will really progress.

To make this game even more difficult, you can also put in a one touch finish restriction. This simply means that to score a goal, it must be played one touch into the goal. This will help them to get back to thinking about working in 2's and 3's instead of just playing by themselves.

FineSoccer Drill 3

This is last in the progression on switching fields and providing proper balance.

The next step is to take the field as laid out in the following diagram.

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The dimensions will depend upon the numbers involved in the drill, but can be the same in the previous drill. The center rectangle from the previous drill still is there and has the same restrictions of one touch (or two touches for younger players). Instead of the 4 small goals, we now add two full-sized goals centered on the end lines. Now the rules are quite simple. One touch in the middle and before you can go to goal, the ball must go into the offensive third of the field (in most cases, the field will be set up so that it is reasonable to be able to shoot from the middle third of the field). Those are the only restrictions (the dotted lines in the diagram above are ways to represent the middle third and the other thirds).

By using these two restrictions, it will force players to use width (since it's one touch in the middle third) because the box will encourage the use of width. The restriction of having to get into the offensive third will force the use of depth in the attack.

To start with, you can allow players to be offside in the attack since you the depth, but gradually, force the players to stay onsides.

The last step in this progression is to pick up the center cones and let them play unrestricted but encourage them to maintain width and depth, proper balance and shape.

This series of drills has been very successful when I used them together.

FineSoccer Drill 4

As a warm up to this team defense series, you can have the team start in groups of two with one ball per group. Have the player with the ball start on one sideline and dribble all of the way to the other sideline working on various moves as they go along. The second player would be working on a proper defensive stance with their feet constantly moving and feinting as if they are going to go in for a tackle. At no point should the defender actually try to win the ball. When the player with the ball gets to the far sideline, they switch and now she works on her defensive footwork and the other player works on moves.

Next the player with the ball dribbles at the defender just like before, but now when the coach yells "switch" the player with the ball steps back into a defensive position and the other player becomes the attacker. This does a good job of

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working on quick transition from offense to defense and is a great way to warm up for the team defense series.

The first progression in this series requires 6 players split in teams of two. The field is 15 yards wide and 25 yards long and 3 players are on offense as set up like the X's in the diagram below and three like the O's on defense.

In the beginning, the X's are stationary and pass the ball back and forth taking three touches. When the ball is in the center, the defense needs to adjust as shown in the diagram below:

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This allows the first defender to pressure the ball and the two outside defenders to take on the role of the second defender and offer support. The X's are NOT permitted to go forward but they want to take their touches as quickly as possible to make the defense move quickly.

When the ball goes to the outside players, the defenders adjust accordingly as shown in the diagrams below:

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After the defenders work hard for 2 minutes, they should places switch with the offensive players.

Once the players are confident in their movements, the next step is say that after 5 passes, the offensive players may leave their positions and try to get the ball from one side of the field to the other. The defense is still not allowed to try to win the ball and the only thing they can do is maintain proper positioning to prevent the attackers from getting to their intended point.

Next the players can go live with the offense doing anything they want to get across the end line and the defenders allowed to win the ball.

There are a lot of other variations that can be built into this drill such as putting a keeper on the far end line and having them work on communication by telling the defenders what to do. Also, while working on communication, you can have the keepers be the intended target of the offensive players. In order to get a point, they must chip the ball into the keepers hands (besides working on communication and chipping, this also forces the defense to get the players heads down so they can't find the keeper).

Be creative and this drill can be an entire training session or you can use the rest of the drills in this progression.

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FineSoccer Drill 5

The next step in this progression requires a field 25 yards wide and 35 yards wide. There needs to be a small semi-circle on each end line as shown in the following diagram:

The ideal number for this drill is 12 players who would be broken into 3 teams of 4. Whichever team is resting puts 2 players in each semi-circle.

The two other teams play 4v4 with a goal scored by passing the ball into the semi-circle and having the ball received by the resting players. If team A is trying to score in the goal to the left, and is successful then they get to retain the ball and go in the other direction.

By setting up the field this way, it will force the defending team to maintain proper defensive support positions or else it's easy to score. Also, if the team does get scored upon, they are forced to respond quickly and get back in the other way to defend or else they will keep letting up goals.

Some variations on this include mandating that in order to score a goal, the ball must be chipped (and received) into the semi-circle.

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Play 3 minute games and rotate the teams into resting area.

This game can be played with as few as two players per team or as many as you want. The number of variations are only limited by your creativity.

Constantly reinforce the need for the defense to get behind the ball and maintain proper support at all times.

While this is a simple drill to set up, it works on defensive support, defensive recovery, offensive runs and support, chipping, receiving balls in the air, and many more things. It can also be turned into a very competitive game with the team that lets up a goal having to step off and be in the goals. Use this to encourage players to always want to win.

With all of the possible variations on this drill, this can be a complete training session, or you can use it with the drills from the previous progression or you can wait for the next drills which are the end of the progression.

FineSoccer Drill 6

The last step in this defensive progression requires a field set up like the diagram below.

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The end lines are 30 yards long and the side lines are 40 yards long. On each end line are three goals (each are 3 yards wide).

Two teams of three participate in this drill with each team attacking an end line. Since they are allowed to score in any of the three goals, it requires quick shifting and support. All three players have to defend all three goals so the shifting must be done in unison and quite quickly.

The neat thing about all of these drills is that while they are working on defensive positioning, they also work on so many other things such as conditioning and offensive spacing.

The next step in this progression is to remove the 3 goals on each end line. Now the rule is that a goal can be scored anywhere on the end line with the one requirement being that the ball must be stopped on the end line by the offensive team in order for the goal to be counted. By expanding the area that the defense has to protect, it forces them to concentrate on getting behind the ball (or get scored upon). You can revert to the rule from an earlier drill and if a team scores a goal, they retain possession of the ball and now attack the other end line.

The last step in this progression is to add two, full-sized goals and keepers and simply play soccer with the emphasis on getting behind the ball.

By reminding the players how each of these drills tie together, they should be able to concentrate on getting behind the ball and maintaining proper defensive shape.

FineSoccer Drill 7

The first drill in the finishing progression is one of my favorites because it combines finishing, defending, and an incredible amount of conditioning. I simply call it the breakaway drill.

The set up of the field is quite simple. If available, use a full field with two full-sized goals. The minimum number of players needed for this drill is 10 with two keepers, although 12-14 is ideal.

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Split the team into two groups. One group should be 10 yards outside of one goal with balls and the other group should be 10 yards outside of the other goal (opposite post). See the diagram below.

Each player has a ball. The first player in the X line takes off on a full field breakaway at full speed (consider having a coach or player chase her from behind to put pressure on this one player). As soon as she finishes the breakaway, the first player in line O takes off on her breakaway. The X player who just finished her breakaway then becomes the defender and must chase the O player down to pressure her on her breakaway. As soon as the O player finishes her breakaway, then SHE becomes the defender and the next person in the X line takes off. This drill can be done for 8-10 minutes and while it might seem like there is a lot of standing around while waiting for a players turn, the truth is that the players are making TWO full field sprints in a row and need the time to recover.

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Players will try to cheat in this drill to make it easier for themselves. One way will be to take off on offense before the opponent finishes her breakaway. If necessary, the coach can be the one who says "so" before is allowed to take off. Another way to cheat is for the player who is on offense to shoot from a far distance so she can get back quicker on defense. If this starts to happen, make the players touch the goalpost that they are finishing on before they are allowed to get back and defend.

The great thing about this drill is that it works on finishing breakaways in a game like situation (under pressure of lack of time as well as while suffering from exhaustion) and it is a great way to end a training session instead of doing something that involves plain conditioning. It has been my experience that after doing this drill a few times, teams become much more comfortable with finishing in actual games.

You can turn this drill into a competition between the two teams. If you do that, however, you really must guard against players starting early to cheat.

Give this drill a try but be aware that this is not an easy drill and the players must really be pushed as they get tired.

FineSoccer Drill 8

These crossing drills are an easy way to combine passing, finishing, defending, and conditioning.

Set up cones in a semi-circle as shown in the following diagram:

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The cones start on the end line and stay outside the 18 yard box. All of the players, except the first two players have soccer balls.

The first player starts sprinting around the cones and as she gets to the second to last cone, the third person in line passes the ball (on the ground) toward the last cone. When the first player gets around the last cone, she attacked the ball and finished it into the back of the net. When the first player is half way around the semi-circle, the second player starts her run.

From this point on, as soon as a player passes the ball, she starts making this run around the semi-circle. While it might seem like there would be a lot of standing in line, if you can get the players running at a full sprint, by the time they get back in line, it's time for them to go again.

The next step is for the ball to be crossed in the air so that the finishes are done either with a volley or header.

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This drill should be done from both sides and a keeper should be in the goal at all times. Ideally, you would have two keepers who are rotating on every 5 shots.

Each shooter is responsible for retrieving his/her own ball and this should give players an incentive to get all shots on goal (it's more tiring to sprint after a ball that went over the goal then it is to get one out of the back of the net).

The next step is to set up the field the same way as in the previous drill except now the players start on the sideline (as can be seen in the diagram below).

The first difference is that the players must take the ball down the sideline and then take a touch toward the near post in order to cross the ball away from the keeper. After serving the ball, she continues on the same semi-circle run as the previous drill to become the finisher.

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The other difference is that after finishing the run, she then becomes the near post runner for the next serve. If the server sees the keeper cheating toward the far post, she may serve it to the near post.

In other words, a player takes the ball down the line, serves the ball, becomes the far post runner, then becomes the near post runner before going to the back of the line to start again.

One of the things you will notice is that I do use lines. However, I have the drills going non-stop so that at no point does a player spend any time standing in a line.

The next variation is to add a second line 2 yards behind the first line. This line becomes the defensive player and starts defending the server as soon as she touches the ball down this line. This will force the players to go at speed at all times.

Another player can be a designated defensive player who either goes with the near post or far post runner which will force the server to pick out a target based on what the defender is taking away.

This should be done from both sides and can have many other variations added to it.

FineSoccer Drill 9

This is a simple shooting drill that includes shooting, passing, receiving, timing runs, goalkeeping, and conditioning.

Put three cones down as shown in the diagram below.

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One player is at cone 2 and one is at cone 3. Everyone else is at cone 3 with balls. The first person in line passes across to the player at cone 2 and then sprints directly behind her. The player at cone 2 one touches the ball toward the 18 and then goes to cone 3. The person at cone 3 receives the ball and finishes it first time. Everything is done at full speed and one touch.

You can see the movement in the diagram below.

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Dotted lines are the path of the ball and solid lines are the path of the players.

One of the keys to this drill is to require a full speed sprint after each pass and shot. Also emphasize that the first pass has to be hit with pace. Do NOT let the first pass run around cone 3 to get to cone 2. This slows the drill down.

As soon as player 2 touches the ball, the next person in line 1 should be ready to go. This is a very fast paced drill and after the player shoots, she must follow the shot and then quickly get to the back of the line.

If you have enough players (16 or so), you can turn this into a competition where there are two teams. The first team does this drill for 3 minutes while the other team retrieves balls. After 3 minutes, they switch roles. Whichever team scores the most goals in this time period wins. If, at any time, the shooting team doesn't have a ball, they get credit for a goal since the other team didn't get the balls back in time.

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This is a fast paced drill with many positives and no negatives.

FineSoccer Drill 10

This is the first step in the progression on developing patterns in the attack. In order for a pattern to work properly (and for it to be incorporated into an actual game situation), passes must be hit with the proper pace and to the proper foot.

Work in groups of threes as a warm up. In the second set of drills of this progression we will add more players to some of these patterns and take it to goal.

Start out with the three players in the positions shown in the diagram below.

Player 1 plays a square ball to player 2's right foot and then steps up toward player 3 who is checking back to the ball. Player 2 one touches the ball to Player 3 and then overlaps around player 3. Player 3 one touches the ball to Player 1

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who then finds Player 2 on the overlap. This is a very simple three person overlapping pattern. See the pattern in the diagram below.

The next step in this progression starts with the players in the same positions as before. Player 1 plays the ball to player 3 who is checking back to the ball. Player 1 then overlaps around player 3. Player 3 one touches the ball back to player 2 who has gone to meet the ball. Player 2 then one touches the ball to the overlapping player 1. See the diagram below for the pattern.

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With both of these simple patterns, you will want to have the players rotate positions so each player gets experience doing each of these roles.

There are many alternatives and options you can add to these patterns. As you will see in the next set of progressions, this can easily go from a simple warm up to an entire team session.

FineSoccer Drill 11

The next step in the progression is to take these same patterns and have them going to goal. The ideal number for this drill is 12 field players and 2 keepers, but it can be adjusted to most any number. Set the 12 players up as shown in the following diagram.

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Players 1, 2, and 3 do the exact same pattern as was shown in the previous pattern. Player 1 passes to 2 then 2 passes to 3 who has checked back to the ball. Player 2 then overlaps around 3 and 3 plays the ball back to 1 who now finds 2 on the overlap. When player 2 receives the ball on the overlap, she takes it down to the end line and crosses the ball back out to players 9 and 10 who are making near post runs. Once this pattern is over, player 4 steps on the field to give 2 a break, 3 goes to where 1 was and 1 goes to where 2 was.

As soon as 2 receives the ball on the overlap, the exact same pattern starts on the left side with 5 passing to 6, 6 passing to 7 who has checked back to the ball and 6 overlapping around 7. Player 7 passes the ball back to 5 who now finds 6 on the overlap. Player 6 takes the ball to the end line and crosses back to 11 and 12. Then 8 steps on the field to give 6 a rest and the players rotate and continue.

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After a certain period of time (I frequently do this for 4 minutes at full speed), the middle group (9,10,11,12) goes to the right side, the right group (1,2,3,4) goes to the left and the left group (5,6,7,8) goes to the middle.

This can be turned into a competition where a group gets a point for every goal scored on their serve or that they finish themselves. This gives everyone the incentive to try to be successful on every scoring attempt.

While there isn't an age limit for this drill, it does require players being able to pass accurately, move quickly, and cross and finish crosses. There is a need for a lot of balls since there is not time to constantly be getting them back to the middle of the field.

With a talented group, this is an extremely fast moving and fun drill that challenges them to do many things well and at speed.

FineSoccer Drill 12

It's more accurate to call this a game with points awarded for different skills than to call it a drill. The idea is to simply play a regular small-sided game of soccer with keepers and everything else being normal. The additional rules are that anytime a regular goal is scored, it counts as 2 points and anytime any pattern (or really any combination play involving three players) occurs, it counts as 1 point.

If a goal is scored off of a pattern or combination play, then it counts as 5 points.

One way to encourage these combination plays is to have a white team and a red team and then have two neutral blue players who are always on offense. In other words, when white has the ball, blue is on the white team and when red has the ball, blue is on the red team. This will allow the attacking team to always outnumber the defensive team which should make it easier to do things.

As it gets easier, assign one neutral player to each team.

At the very end of practice, if there is time, lift all rules other than normal soccer ones and let them play. Make this a reward for working hard during the

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training session and you will find them staying more focused knowing there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

FineSoccer Drill 13

Here is a simple game that emphasizes defensive intensity at the same time working on attacking soccer. Set up the field as shown in the following diagram with one big goal and two small goals.

Break the team into two even teams with one team going to the big goal and the other team going to the two small goals (the small goals are only 2 yards wide). Inevitably, the players will want to be attacking the big goal so the rules are quite simple. If team A starts off attacking the small goals and they score a goal, then they keep the ball and change direction so that they get to attack the big goal. This gives the team attacking the big goal an incentive to make sure they never get scored upon since they will not want to be "punished by making them have to defend the big goal.

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You can add the rule that if you score on the big goal, that gives you a free pass so that if you score two goals on the big goal and then get scored upon, they can still keep attacking the big goal since they can use this free pass to offset the goal.

Another option is to put a time limit on the game. Whichever team is attacking the big goal at the end of the time period, wins. If it's a 10 minute game, then whichever team has earned the right to attack the big goal is the winner. To be fair, you should play two games like this since this will allow both teams the right to start attacking the goal in the beginning of the game. This restriction will force the team attacking the big goal to really play hard to keep this right to attack the big goal and will also work on possession as it will be in this team's best interest to keep possession of the ball unless a great scoring opportunity arises.

There are numerous other variations of this drill but as you can see, it allows you to work on defensive intensity as well as building on the competitiveness of all of the players.

FineSoccer Drill 14

Here are two more drills that can be used to work on both offense and defense but really put a tremendous emphasis on defensive intensity.

First start with a standard small-sided game but on a very large field. For example, this could be a 6v6 game on a full-sized field with two keepers in the goals. Each player on Team A is assigned a player on Team B. The rules are quite simple for this game. A player can only mark the player they are assigned on the opposing team. This means that there is no defensive support at all. If the player you are assigned beats you, then she can go to goal unhindered. This forces a player to really work hard to get back on defense because there are no ifs, ands or buts about whose fault it is when a goal is scored. If the player you are assigned to scores a goal, everyone will know it was your player and you were at fault. This is a great conditioning drill plus it will quickly show who wants to win more (some players will turn this into a game of full field sprints where they get back on defense and go forward on offense at full speed). Other players will stand around talking to the player they are marking thinking that if neither runs very hard, they will both look good.

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I like to use this game for a couple of reasons. First, it shows me who will make a commitment to defend. It also works on defensive footwork and attacking 1 v 1.

Another thing it works on is conditioning which will quickly become apparent. However, emphasize that the players should play normal soccer and not turn this into a complete game of 1v1.

As this game continues, switch the defensive responsibilities around so that players are constantly being challenged. This could mean having a fast player match up with another fast player or a forward match up with a marking back (or have a forward match up with a forward and see who wins the battle). Players are allowed to intercept passes, just not interfere with a player with the ball.

The next step in this progression is to do the exact opposite. Instead of having players pre-assigned to marks, do not allow them to mark anyone until a pre-determined captain or the keeper assigns them to the mark. This means that after each loss of possession, the keeper and captain must quickly assign marks so that the players can slow the ball down and start to defend properly. This is a GREAT way to get keepers and sweepers to work on communication. When possession is lost, the defensive team can sprint back toward their own goal but may not do anything more until they have been assigned their marks. This encourages both better talking as well as better listening then most players are accustomed to.

It is not good enough for the keeper to say "you get Lisa on every loss of possession" rather this responsibility must be reassigned after each change of possession. Offensively, teams should play normal soccer (although the quicker they can pass the ball around, the harder it is for the team to defend).

Please realize that players will get discouraged playing both of these games. They will try to find ways to get around them, but they really do work well once you sell the players on their value.

FineSoccer Drill 15

The last set of games in this progression is also a great way to work on both high pressure and low pressure defense.

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This game works best with two keepers and two full-sized goals on a field that is appropriate for the number of players (for example, a 6 v 6 game would work well on half of a full-sized field).

The game is simple. Team A starts with the ball and is up 1-0 with 5 minutes to play. All soccer rules apply (throw ins, offsides, etc). Team A should play a patient type of possession soccer and if/when they lose the ball they should work on playing a very safe, low pressure type of defense, never allowing the opposing team to penetrate their defense.

Team B is to play a high pressure attacking type of defense with an emphasis on winning the ball at all costs.

Increase your players desire to win by having the losing team be in charge of getting water for the winning team. Team B will have to work hard throughout this 5 minute game in order to win since they have started a goal down. Not only will this work on high/low pressure it also works on proper time management and maintaining possession vs. taking chances.

After the 5 minute game (and break afterwards), have them switch and play another game with Team A starting behind a goal and Team B up a goal.

This drill is easy to set up and start but really takes a great deal of coaching in order to get it to work well. Too many players don't understand how to use a clock effectively (either when up or down a goal) and this is a great way to teach a team how to win (this might sound like an easy thing but many teams have no idea how to win a game in the last few minutes of a match).

Playing this game (you might have noticed that I use the terms game and drill interchangeably sometimes) on a regular basis (couple of times per month) will really help your team understand how to play high/low pressure defense as well as how to play against it.

Use this drill regularly and you will quickly see your players gain a more clear understanding of the game.

FineSoccer Drill 16

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This is a short drill to explain, but takes up a decent amount of time in a training session. It also accomplishes a great deal in terms of intensity and conditioning.

Assuming you have 16 players, you will need 8 cones and 8 soccer balls. Spread out the cones so there is plenty of room to go around each one. Two players are assigned to each cone and they play a 2 minute 1 v 1 match. A goal is scored by having the ball touch any part of the cone. Both players are attacking the same goal. At all times there would be 8 games going on at the same time.

The only condition for this game is that the defenders MUST play high pressure at all times. At no time can they sit back by the cone and defend that way. If the attacking player takes a chance and hits a shot from 10 yards away and misses (which results in the ball going 20 yards from the goal on the far side), then BOTH players must sprint after the ball. This is a very intense game that should be done at full speed.

After the 2minute period, everyone meets in the middle of the field and says whether they win or lose. The players switch opponents and they start back into game two.

If there are16 players, it is best to play 15 matches (each player plays against each player once) and keep track of the won/loss record. This would take 45 minutes and be a great workout with 2 minutes of hard work followed by a 1 minute rest and reorganization period. At the end of the 15 matches, you will have a true champion.

At first, the best 1 v 1 players will win but as the games go on, the fittest and most competitive players will prevail. Coaches must really emphasize the importance of trying to win every match and work hard for the whole period.

Having done this series a number of times, I would strongly recommend that a fun and slower paced drill be done next. Remember, this is a very intense and very tiring series and the players will need some time to recover.

An alternative drill to this one is to do the exact same thing except the players are going 1 v 1 full field to the big goals. There can be as many as 8 games going on at the same time (no keepers). Have some servers stay on the

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side of the goals so that when a goal is scored, they can play another ball back in play for the two to fight over.

This is even more tiring since the players are racing full field in order to win the game. You can add the rule here that if a player never crosses into her offensive half of the field during the entire 2 minute game, she must do a full field sprinting during the 1 minute rest period (another form of positive motivation).

In sessions when you play games like these, there is no need to do “conditioning" in addition to the training.

FineSoccer Drill 17

Another high intensity drill (most of my drills involve high intensity and conditioning) is also a great way to work on getting the defense back and behind the ball at all times.

The rules are simply, anytime a team loses possession of the ball, everyone (EXCEPT THE PERSON WHO LOST THE BALL) must sprint back and touch the goal post before they can defend. The person who lost the ball must chase after the ball going on a one person, high pressure campaign until possession is regained. By doing this, the person who lost the ball will get into the habit of trying to win it back (and taking responsibility for their actions) right away. At the same time, the rest of the team will be getting back and behind the ball quickly and are also learning how important it is to give proper support to their teammates (because if they don't, they will have to do the running).

If this is done with a 8 v 8 game on a full field, there will be an incredible amount of conditioning going on. Other things worked on include possession (who wants to lose the ball knowing the consequences?) and communication (the first defender back will probably have to go to the ball to slow down the first attacker and the keeper will be responsible for assigning all of the other marks).

If you want to place an emphasis on possession, you can also put in a requirement that the team that wins the ball must make 5 passes before they can go to goal (remember this is a 8 v 1 until the rest of the team gets back and then finds their marks). By doing this, you work on spacing, possession, communication (it's important to know when the defenders are getting near so hopefully, your teammates will communicate this) and many, many more things.

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Play this game for 10 minutes and you will have some really tired players on the field. Follow this up with some free play (or possibly let them go to free play with the understanding that if you don't see good defense you will put these restrictions back on). Normally, you will see an improvement in play pretty quickly.

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FineSoccer Drill 18

The last drill in this progression is actually quite simple. Set up a field like an American football field with 10 yard end zones. See diagram below.

To score a goal, a team has to receive a ball in the end zone they are attacking. A player can NOT dribble into the end zone. The thing that makes this game extremely interesting is that off sides does apply.

Both teams will be encouraged to try an offside trap. This will allow players to see the advantages (and disadvantages) of this.

After a goal is scored, there is a kick off just like in American football.

One variation on this drill include not allowing any players to dribble forward at all. Another is you can put a limitation of 2 touch to eliminate this problem completely.

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Have someone calling offside from the sidelines as this becomes an extremely important part of the game. You can play to a certain score (first team to 5 wins) or for a specified time period.

Some of the things this drill works on are through passes, offside traps, beating offside traps, communication, conditioning, short passes, support, and much, much more. An added bonus is that it's a fun game and the players will have no idea just how hard they will be working.

FineSoccer Drill 19

This drill initially works on combination play, finishing, and goalkeeping and ends in an interesting game.

Set up a field that goes from one sideline to the other and from the end line to the mid line. Make a goal using either cones or corner flags in the middle of the field. Have three X's on one side of the field and three O's on the other. See the diagram below to get a better understanding.

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A keeper should be in the goal. He plays the ball out to the middle O1 who then plays a one touch pass to O2 and overlaps around O2. O2 plays a one touch ball to 03 and then O3 finds the overlapping O1 who can either shoot on goal or cross the ball to O2 and O3 who are making near post far post runs. If the keeper saves the ball, he turns and throws the ball to X1 who then starts the same routine on the opposite side of the field. If the shot is missed high or wide, then the X's have to work the ball to X1 to start this rotation.

After the O's have done this once, O1 rotates to O2, O2, rotates to O3, and O3 goes to O1.

In case of poorly executed shots or passes, there should be some spare balls on the sides to keep everyone moving.

Done properly, this can be quite a fast moving drill that works on passing, overlaps, crossing, finishing, and goalkeeping with some conditioning thrown in for fun. The two sides can also compete to see who can score more goals in a certain time period.

FineSoccer Drill 20

This is a continuation from Drill 19. Start the exact same way (see diagram below).

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This time, O1 has the ball and dribbles at O2. O2 does a takeover then passes to O3 and overlaps around O3. O3 has the option of either finding the overlapping O2 or O1 on the other side. Either way, the player takes the ball to the corner and then crosses to near post / far post runners.

As soon as there is a loss of possession, the same thing starts up on the X's side. If there is a bad shot, this will force the X's to work on receiving balls as well as doing all of the other work.

There are so many advantages to this series of drills. If you think about it, there is an unlimited number of variations you can do from this set up. I simply wanted to introduce these two drills and let you create the rest on your own.

FineSoccer Drill 21

Have a field set up just like in the previous drills but now have all 3 X's spread out on their end line and all three O's spread out on their end line.

The first game has the keeper kicking the ball anywhere on the O's side of the field. Whoever gets to the ball first for the O's is trying to score against the other two O's. The neat part of this game is that it encourages risk taking because a player is not supposed to be successful taking on 2 defenders so if they try something and it doesn't work, it's no big deal, but if it does work then it's great. This is one of the best ways to encourage players to become take on artists. If the ball goes on the other side of the field then the X's are playing 1 v 2. Players will have to work very hard to be successful.

The next variation is that whichever of the X's gets the ball, she can call out one of the other two X's names. That person is now on her team and they play 2 v 1 going to goal. If the 1 gets the ball then it's 1 v 2 to goal. This now adds communication and spacing a defense. Again if the ball goes to the other side of the field then the O's are in play.

The last variation I want to introduce is the X's versus the O's. The X's can only score on their side of the goal and the O's can only score on their side of the goal. This is a very high speed intense, game and also provides a tremendous workout to the keeper (there is only one keeper in at a time for each of these

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drills). To some extent there is no boundary and the first team to the ball gets to keep it.

In each of these games, the keeper must play fairly and not pass the ball to her friends. Instead she must play the ball out to open space to give each person an opportunity to win the ball.

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FineSoccer Drill 22

There are a number of fun games you can play to give your team a break during practice while still accomplishing some things. A favorite of many players is Soccer Golf.

Pick 9 targets around the field or complex at which you are practicing. The players have to hit each of these 9 targets (in the proper order) in the fewest number of shots.

To make this a more interesting game, play with teams of two where the two players alternate shots.

A basic rule I tend to add is that the entire course must be played while the players are jogging (even in fun games, I need to get in some conditioning). Also, I will allow keepers to punt their "tee shot" for each hole.

Pick holes that are going to be a challenge (for example, if there is a sign on a fence, they must hit the sign in order to build chipping into the game).

The players have a great time and usually don't realize that they are working on driven balls, chips, conditioning, and various other types of passes.

There are many variations you can do with soccer golf. When done correctly, the players can have a blast and the coach can accomplish his goals as well.

FineSoccer Drill 23

Soccer kickball is another one of my favorite games to play with teams (older teams will complain at first but end up having fun anyway).

Start with home plate in the corner of a field (using the corner arc is effective) so that the goal is where first base normally would be and the only other base is where 3rd base normally would be See the following diagram.

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The pitcher (usually the coach) rolls a ball to the batter at home plate and the batter kicks away. If it's a foul ball then it's an automatic out. There are no balls and strikes so the batter has to take whatever pitch they are given. If the team in the field heads the ball out the air, it's an automatic out. If the ball bounces without a header, then the batter must run to the one base and back home before the team in the field can score a goal in the big goal where first base normally would be.

The team at bat can put a player in goal and that person will be whoever made the last out for their team. You can put in the rule of no bunting or not, it's your choice.

This can be a slow moving game but since the pitcher controls the pace, the coach can keep it going pretty quickly.

Typically, I play with only two outs per inning and will play for a pre-determined time period rather than a number of innings.

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While the players think this is loads of fun, they are working on driving balls, chipping balls, heading, shooting and goalkeeping. This is a game I use at camps when the players need a break but I want them to keep moving.

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FineSoccer Drill 24

Another fun warm up drill I like to use is called rock, paper, scissors.

Maybe you're familiar with the kid's game rock, paper, scissors. If not, it begins with two people standing 2 yards apart with a ball between them. They each say "rock, paper, scissors, shoot" and then each player puts out either out two fingers (for a scissors) or makes a fist (for the rock) or leaves their hand flat (for the paper). Since a rock can break scissors, a rock will win that contest. Scissors will cut paper so scissors wins that contest and paper covers a rock so it wins that contest. Whoever wins tries to kick the ball into the loser's legs. If she is successful in doing this, then she gets a point. If she is unsuccessful in hitting the other player's legs with the ball, the other player gets the point. The first one to five points wins. The objective for the other player is to avoid getting hit with the ball by moving her feet as quickly as possible.

This might seem like a pretty simple game that doesn't accomplish much but if you think about it, it works on decision making (the players have to try to react to the outcome of the individual contest to either avoid getting hit or to hit the opponent). I have spoken with a couple of sports psychologists who say they use this game to work with kids on quick reactions. Other things this game works on is quick footwork and conditioning (if the winner of the individual contest kicks the ball at the other player and misses, both players must spring after the ball and start playing again right away from wherever the ball ends up).

The first time I saw this game being played was during a coaching course I was working at and I initially it was incredibly foolish. However, the next week I was running a camp for keepers and was looking for a fun game to use as a warm-up. I tried rock, papers, scissors and the players LOVED it.

FineSoccer Drill 25

This first drill in this progression simply works on maintaining possession while under pressure.

Start with two teams of approximately 6 players each set up as shown in the following diagram.

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Team X starts with the ball and Team O can send 2 players over into the other zone to try to get the ball. If Team X can complete 6 passes in a row and then pass the ball over to Team O's side, then Team X gets a point. The first team to 5 points wins. If Team O intercepts the pass or Team X loses possession by playing the ball out of play, then Team O gets the ball in their half of the field. If Team O can get 6 passes in a row before Team X can get organized and get their two defenders over, then they get a point.

Besides working on possession and support, this also works on defense as well as team organization and communication in deciding who will be the next two players to go over and defend (it cannot always be the same two players).

Variables that can be changed are the number of players needed to go over, as well as limiting the number of touches an individual may have on the ball. For example, to add pressure, you can put in the restriction of one touch soccer or to really make things difficult, make a player touch the ball 3-5 times before they

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can pass the ball (this will force them to work on receiving the ball into space and shielding as well as constantly changing the support positions).

This is a great way to prepare the team for the next drill, which works on both possession as well as penetrating passes.

FineSoccer Drill 26

This drill adds penetration into the possession. By penetration, I mean a pass that allows the attacking team to get behind the defense (penetrate the defense).

Start with three teams of 5-6 in different color pinnies. Place them in a grid as shown below.

The ball starts with Team X and Team Y can send 2 players over to defend. Team X tries to possess the ball for a predetermined number of passes (lets say 4 passes) then will get a point if they can successfully pass the ball to Team O

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without Team Y being able to win the ball. If Team Y wins the ball from Team X, then the ball goes to Team O and Team X becomes the middle team and defends . By adding this middle zone with a third team, it adds the part of penetrating into an already successful drill. By lowering the number of passes needed to get a pass (assuming a successful penetrating pass) it forces the team to constantly get their heads up because the defending team in the middle can move around their area trying to prevent a successful through pass.

There are many other things you can add into this game. Try putting in the restriction that if the receiving player doesn't take a look at making a penetrating pass before she makes a pass, it's a loss of possession. Or, you can put in the rule that the defending team can send as many or as few players into the defensive third as they want but this would make it even easier to make a penetrating pass.

Another rule is to require or prohibit chips in order to play the ball across the middle third (this just depends on what you are looking to accomplish).

I have done this one drill for an entire training session by changing the restrictions and rules to keep the game fresh and to keep working on different things. I do not recommend doing this, but there are so many changes that can be made to this one drill, that it is something to consider.

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FineSoccer Drill 27

This is the last drill in this particular progression on possession and penetration. The variable added in this drill is finishing.

Set up with two teams and two full-sized goals with keepers on a small field (approximately 30 yards long and 40 yards wide). Set the two teams up as shown in the diagram below.

Team X starts with the ball and is shooting on the goal being guarded by Team O. Team X needs to get three (or whatever pre-determined number you choose) passes before they are allowed to shoot. They are not permitted to cross the middle line so there is only 1 defender allowed to prevent this from happening. The lone O stays up there for a 2 minute period trying to win the ball or at the very least to prevent a good shot from being hit on her goal.

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The rest of Team O can step up to the middle line to take away shooting lanes for Team X, but they have to be careful of the lone X player who can receive the ball and finish herself.

This drill works on goalkeeping, defending, possession, penetrating passes, finishing, and conditioning (the lone player in the opposing zone will have to work extremely hard for 2 minutes before rotating back and letting someone else run hard. It also works on communication (the keeper must organize things from the back and all of the players must make sure they rotate the player upfront properly). This also works on proper balance and spacing as well as movement off the ball. There are actually very few parts of the game of soccer that are not worked on in this drill.

FineSoccer Drill 28

This is the first in a series of three drills that works on individual skills. Too many coaches overlook the technical side of the game and don't seem to understand that without being able to use proper technique under pressure, they won't be able to do much in terms of tactics.

Every training session should start with some type of skill work even if it's only done as a warm up drill. This is one of my favorite drills to do whether working with an individual or with an entire team.

Have a server be at a specific spot. There should be two cones the first one 5 yards away and then next one 3 yards away. See diagram below.

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Start with the server playing the ball to the player as she gets besides the middle cone (the cone closest to the server). The player will one touch the ball back to the server and then spring BACKWARDS around the back cone and then forward to the other side of the front cone for another serve. This should be done at full speed for 1 minute. If there is only one player, they can do 1 minute of work and then 30 seconds of a break. Start with balls on the ground and then serve for volleys, thigh traps volley backs, then chest traps volley backs, then chest head backs, and then headers. There are a number of other variations such as two touch passing and so on.

While this promotes excellent conditioning, if you are doing this with an entire team, you can have them go in groups of threes. One player serves the ball, the second player does the work, and the third player is behind the server doing conditioning (1 minute of ab work, lunges etc). This is a great way to start a teams training session off to get a lot of touches on the ball, work on some conditioning, and get an intense training session going right away.

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Over the years, I would guess that I have done this series of drills more then any other soccer drills between individual training sessions and team practices.

FineSoccer Drill 29

The second drill for individual training is simple to set up but quite difficult to do successfully.

Many players like to juggle the ball but very rarely do I see this done with a purpose. Simply challenge the players to juggle the ball 1000 times in a 10 minute period. If they are on 26 and they lose possession of the ball, they start back counting at 27 (don't count by consecutive juggles but total juggles in a 10 minute period).

I have never been a big fan of juggling but this is a good way to get many touches on the ball and also get some conditioning in at the same time. If you don't think this involves any conditioning, take 10 minutes and give it a try. I think you will change your mind real quickly.

Explain to your team that if they lose possession of the ball, they must sprint to get it back in order to be successful.

If because of age or skill limitations, the players aren't able to come close to 1000 touches in a 10 minute page, then lower the number of touches (not the time) and challenge them to work their way up to 1000

FineSoccer Drill 30

The last drill in this series is one that can be done by a single player or with a whole team.

Have three cones set up in an L shape as shown in the following diagram.

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Start at one of the outside cones and dribble to the central cone and cut the ball sharply with the inside of the foot to go hard at the other outside cone. When you get to the next outside cone, turn and go back to the central cone and cut with the other foot. Do this for 1 minute and then rest for 1 minute. The keys here are to accelerate on each turn and really push yourself at all times.

After each break, make a small change such as cutting with the outside of the foot or changing the turns on the outside. You can add things like circling each of the cones before moving on, using the right foot and then left foot only, adding moves to get around the central cone (for example, a pull cruyf must be done between each).

The closer the cones are to each other, the more moves and turns. I recommend starting with them being 10 yards apart and then gradually moving in towards 5 yards.

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Done properly, this can be a very intense drill and proper rest periods must be taken in order to ensure quality work.

FineSoccer Drill 31

This is a very common drill but with an interesting twist that adds a great deal of conditioning to an otherwise slow moving drill. The most commonly used name for this drill is the tunnel drill.

Normally, you would have a group of players (anywhere from 4-8) in two lines facing each other (see diagram below).

The first player in line A passes the ball to the first player in line B and then sprints to the back of line B. The first player in line B then passes to the first person in line A and then sprints to the back of line A. A very simple drill and somewhat boring.

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To increase the number of touches per player and to increase both the intensity and conditioning part of the drill, do the exact same thing in groups of 3. Have two players together and then the third player is 15 yards away. The first person in the group of 2 passes the ball to the third player and then sprints behind her. It ends up being just like a bigger tunnel (and in fact can be done utilizing the same space) but now each player gets every third touch. By keeping the players 15 yards apart, the players will have to really sprint to get to the spot to receive the ball next. Do this drill at full speed for 1 minute periods and you will find that this conditioning is very relevant to soccer fitness.

Other variations on this drill include, playing two touches with the first touch away from pressure (the sprinter runs right at the receiver). This touch can be done first with the inside of the foot and then with the outside of the foot. Also, you can move the players back to 30 yards apart and have them play 2 touch chips to each other. This requires both a great deal of conditioning as well as working on chipping and receiving high balls. Do 5 different variations of this and it takes a mere 10 minutes of the training session (1 minute of intense work and 1

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minute of rest per variation) and you will find this is a great example of economical training.

FineSoccer Drill 32

Here is another simple drill made quite intense (I prefer that drills be done for short periods of time at intensity rather then for longer periods without the concentration and intensity).

Have two players stand 15 yards apart passing a ball back and forth one touch. Now the twist is to really emphasize that when the ball is played to a player, they must sprint to meet the ball at the earliest point possible. As soon as the ball is played away, the player must sprint backwards as fast as possible.

This might not seem like a strenuous thing to do but if done at full speed, it will really get their heart rates up and produce a burning feeling in their calves.

Give it a try for 3, 1 minute periods with 30 seconds rest between sets. I think you will like the results.

FineSoccer Drills 33

When people ask me what type of conditioning program I recommend for soccer players, inevitably I start telling them about plyometrics. I am NOT an expert on plyometrics but what I do know about them is that the players who do them seriously and correctly, tend to have a better first step, jump higher, and also are less prone to knee injuries. I recommend that people do this particular set of plyometrics three times a week with 48 hours between each time. One of the neat things about this program is that unlike many other programs, no equipment is needed except for a line between 18-20 yards long. It is more important to do each of these things correctly than to do a lot of them. In other words, start slow and do them correctly rather then rushing through them.

PLYOMETRIC PROGRAM

- Slalom jumps back and forth down the line. Small quick jumps.
- Knees to chest maximum height jumping down the line.

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- Facing the line, jumping back and forth doing as many as possible moving quickly down the line.
- Same as #3 but facing other direction.
- Hop on right foot going down the line. Go for maximum height.
- Same as #5 but hop on other foot.
- Long jump down the line. Go for maximum distance. Feet must stay together the whole time.
- Lunge walk down the line.
- Slalom run. Long stride, arc, and jump. Must be fluid.
- Sprint to end of line and back.
- Use a line 18 yards long.
- Do 5 sets of the 10 exercises.

After each exercise, except the sprint, jog back to the beginning.

Feel free to take a 1 minute break between each set of 10 exercises (each set, NOT each exercise)

Give plyometrics a try and I am confident you will be pleased with the results long-term

FineSoccer Drill 34

While most coaches say that all conditioning should take place with a ball, in my opinion, some conditioning has to be done without it. The reason for this is that it's extremely difficult to generate the exact same amount of intensity in training as you can in a game (it's just hard for the players to get as excited in training which helps to get the adrenaline going). Since it's so hard to get the same amount of intensity in training, the only way to get the heart rate up as high is to force it in conditioning without the ball. Here are a couple of quick ways to accomplish this.

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You will notice that there are no long runs in this drill. The reason for this is that if you want to get in shape to run long distances, then run long distances. If you want to get in shape to do the short sprints needed in soccer, then do shorter sprints.

Break your team into three groups (A, B, and C) and have them set up as shown in the following diagram.

The groups should be 44 yards apart (this is the width of the 18 yard box). Assign each group a leader. Group A sprints past the line where Group B is waiting. As soon as the last person in Group A passes the line, the leader of Group B says "go" and they sprint toward the other line. When the last player in Group B passes the line, the leader of Group C says "go" and they start their sprint. The thing that is great about this conditioning drill is that it allows for a 1:2 work to rest ratio which allows the players to work on developing the "second wind" that is so important in the game of soccer. Do this until group gets in 20 sprints and you will find that they have had a tough little workout.

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FineSoccer Drill 35

Here is another easy drill that actually can be done with or without a ball. The reason I recommend that it be done without a ball is that the players can be "pushed" to go faster and their skills won't allow them to slow down.

This can be done with three players (or multiples of threes). Two players stand 10 yards apart and rest. The third player is the worker and runs figure 8's around the two resters (see diagram below).

One of the keys to this conditioning drill is to get the worker to touch the ground directly behind the rester's feet and then explode as she turn the corner. Really emphasize that it's important to stay low as you turn (since the lower a player gets while changing directions in soccer, the quicker she will be able to accelerate). It's not until the runner is in the middle of the run should she be upright if even then. Also, make sure the run is done as a figure 8 and not as a circle or else they will only be turning in one direction.

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Each runner should do this for a 1 minute period and then one of the resters starts her run. If each person does this 5 times they will get a good work out while only taking 15 minutes with each person getting a 1:2 work to rest ratio. When one person ends her run, the next person starts hers which allows for no time in transition.

If you alternate between this drill, Drill 33 and Drill 34, you will get a team working hard without wasting time.

Do these drills and have the players work hard in their other drills and they should be in good shape when it comes to conditioning.

FineSoccer Drill 36

This is the first in a series of three drills which will work on everything from possession to attacking an offside trap, to finishing, to defending a target player, to breakaways to finding one hole vs. two hole passes.

Start with a field split into thirds. Your number of players can vary in these drills but I will start with 5 v 5 in the middle third with a keeper in each goal (see diagram below).

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The rules of this first drill are simple. Whichever team has the ball needs to make 5 passes in a row within the middle third of the field before they may attack the goal. Once a team has their 5 passes in a row, they may go to goal, HOWEVER, the ball must enter the attacking third of the field via a pass before anyone on either team may go into that zone. This means a player cannot dribble into the offensive third as a pass is required to gain entry. Also, another player cannot run into the offensive zone before the ball has been played into the area. Likewise, no defender is allowed into their defensive zone until the ball is played into the zone.

Initially, this will result in a bunch of players standing on the line between the middle third of the field and their offensive waiting for the ball to be played. Luckily, players will quickly learn that this is quite ineffective as the defender will be waiting beside them. As the attacking players come to this realization, they will start to make runs off of their passes and try to slip passes through to players who are making one and two hole passes. This is a wonderful way to work on possession and movement off of the ball.

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If the players are having problems getting to 5 passes before they can penetrate, there are a couple of things you can do. First you can reduce that number from 5 to 3 or even get rid of the requirement all together (I recommend keeping a requirement even if you have to reduce the number somewhat.). Another option which is quite effective is to add an additional neutral player or two. These neutral players are on whosever team has the ball so there is always a numbers up situation for the attacking team.

It is also important to limit where the keepers can stand when the ball is in the middle third of the field. Because this is a small field, if they stand far off of their line, the keeper will be able to win most of the through balls that are played into the box. Make the keepers start on their line and then if they want to come out hard and take away some of the through balls they are more then welcome to do so.

Try this drill out and once the players can do it well, then they are ready to progress to the next step.

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FineSoccer Drill 37

This is the next step in the progression. If you haven't done Drill 36, do it first.

Take the same field layout as in Drill 36 but now add a target player for each team. (see diagram below)

The target player starts in her teams offensive third and once the players in the middle get their required passes for possession in the middle third, the target player starts looking to check into space to receive through ball. The main rule on this target player is that she is REQUIRED to play one touch only. This will force her to become more comfortable with playing with her back to the goal and laying balls off and spinning off to goal.

By restricting the target player to one touch soccer, this also forces the attacking team to work on attacking with numbers because if the ball is played into the target player and there is no support, she will have nothing to do with the

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ball other then lose it.. This is a wonderful way to get the midfielders to work on supporting their through passes. This also helps with various types of near post/far post runs as what will frequently happen is that when the ball is played into the target player, she will one touch it back to a midfielder who due to pressure from the defenders (remember the defenders can come into the third of the field as soon as the ball is played in), will then play a wide ball to a runner who will be able to serve in a cross from the side. Now we have the target player receiving a ball, one touching it back, and then spinning off and timing her run for a near post run.

Once this drill starts to go by successfully, add a defender on the target player in each zone (see diagram below).

Everything stays the same except for the added pressure of a defender who MUST stay goal side until the ball is played into her zone.

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If necessary, to get more success, add both a defender and a second target player at the same time who could then be working on the two runs of the targets players in a 4-4-2 type formation.

After this drill works successfully, move on to the last drill in this progression.

FineSoccer Drill 38

The last part of this progression is set up the same way as the end of Drill 37 (see diagram below)

The difference now is that after the required number of passes in the middle third of the field, a player can dribble into the offensive third (still, no one else is allowed into the offensive third except for the designated players until the ball has been played in). This forces the defender and the attackers to figure out the appropriate runs to clear or cover space. You might want to consider adding a second defender when you change to this part of the progression.

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Lastly, remove the thirds and the restrictions and let the players play a free game. It has been my experience that you will start to see a lot more thought going into their play at this point.

FineSoccer Drill 39

This first drill is a slight variation of a standard 4 v 2 keep a way game. Start with a 12 x 12 grid and 6 players. Have two wear red, two wear blue, and two wear white. Start with red on defense. It's now white and blue vs. red. If red wins the ball, whoever's team lost the ball then goes on defense. If white loses the ball, then all of a sudden, it's blue and red vs. white. The thing that makes this different than most 4 v 2 games is that there is nothing like "first pass is free" or anything like that. In order for the defense to switch to offense, there must be complete possession of the ball. If the ball is knocked out of play, then the team it went off of is on defense. Also, if you lose the ball, you are to immediately work to get it back (if I am on white and I lose the ball to red, I am allowed and encouraged to take it right back on the very next touch). This encourages the player who won the ball to immediately get the ball away from pressure and the player who lost the ball (and her teammate) to give immediate chase upon loss of possession. Either the coach or someone else should be on the side to serve balls in as soon as they go out of play. Done properly, this can be a very intense and very demanding game.

Next, this same game can be played with larger numbers which will emphasize this quick transition from offense to defense even more. Keep the space small (if you have 12 players a 20 x 20 grid is great). Really emphasize this quick transition and have people on the side to serve in new balls as well as to encourage the players to work harder and harder.

These drills work on a number of things including transition, offensive support, passing, receiving, movement off of the ball, conditioning, defensive support and much more.

FineSoccer Drill 40

This is one of the more complicated drills I do, but it is an extremely effective drill that with patience can be quite effective.

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A minimum of 12 players is needed for this although it is best with 16 including 2 keepers. The field should be 70-80 yards with two goals. Start with two red defenders defending one goal and two white defenders defending the other goal. Then add three attackers from the white team in the middle of the field with a ball. All of the other players should be on their respective sides of the field near the middle (see diagram below).

The three white attackers go to goal and try to get a shot hit. If the red defenders win the ball, then they quickly attack the other goal and get another player to add on to their attack from the side. As they attack the white defenders, two new red defenders go on the field for the next attack. Anytime the ball is lost or a shot is hit, the ball goes in the other direction (keep a supply of balls in each goal).

The players will be working on attacking at speed, diagonal runs, defending with the purpose of taking away penetration and delaying, distribution, and much more. In the beginning, the players will try to dribble the ball up the field when

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they win possession but will quickly learn to pass the ball up to the add on player in order to advance the ball quickly.

An option you can add is that when the three attackers lose possession of the ball, they can high pressure in the offensive third of the field and if they win it there, they go to goal. This way, players are working on both the transition from defense to offense but also from offense to defense. Also, you can go 4 v 3 instead of 3 v 2 although I would strongly suggest starting small and then building up.

Typically, for this drill to work, you will have to explain it, then walk them through it a couple of times before they will understand it completely. Give it a try and let them really work on transition the right way.

FineSoccer Drill 41

This drill works on so many things it's unbelievable. It will work on possession, defending possession, conditioning, transition, communication, bending runs, serving long balls, receiving long balls, goalkeeping, and much more.

Start with two 15 x 15 grids set up on a full-sized field as shown in the diagram below. The size of the grids can be changed depending upon the numbers in the drill. Have a keeper in each goal.

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This drill works best with a big group of 22 but can be done with as few as 14. Start with a 3 v 2 keep away game going in each grid with the rest 5 other players by each grid waiting. When the coach blows his whistle, the three players on offense attack the far goal and the two players on defense defend the near goal (in other words, the three attackers will be defended by the two defenders from the opposite grid). The key is for the attackers to organize their runs to unbalance the defense and the defenders are trying to prevent penetration and simply delay the attack. If they successfully delay the attack, then it's over. See diagram below:

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As soon as those 5 players leave the grid, the next 5 enter and start their keep away game. When the attacks are done, those players all go to the opposite grid from which they came and wait their turn.

The next step is when the coach blows the whistle, the player with the ball in each grid plays a long diagonal ball across to the other three attacking players and then continue their attack. This will give the defense a little more time to get organized, adds in working on long serves and receiving long balls and forces more organization on the attackers' part.

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Another variation is adding a target player and defender near the goal. The way this works is that when the coach blows his whistle, the ball gets played across to the other attackers and then they can try to find the target player up front (who is being marked by the defender). This variation will vastly alter the runs being made since everything will be predicated by the target players runs.

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As you can imagine, there are many more options that coaches can create. This is a very intense drill (done properly) and can take up most of a training session if you keep changing things up.

FineSoccer Drill 42

This series of drills works on first defender, second defender, first attacker, second attacker, communication, conditioning, and much more. I would recommend that it be coached from a defensive perspective but the rest should be kept in consideration as well.

Start with a grid 10 yards wide by 20 yards long with two groups of players and a server (see diagram below).

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The first part of the drill has the server playing the ball to player A who then tries to beat player B off of the dribble. The defenders primary responsibilities are to stop the attacker from crossing over the end line she is defending by simply slowing down the attacker. If the defender can simply slow down the attacker, THE DEFENDER WINS! I am capitalizing this because coaches don't emphasize this enough. THE DEFENDER WINS BY SLOWING DOWN THE ATTACK. There is no need to win the ball or stab or anything like that, simply slow the attack down. One of the things you will notice about this drill is that unlike many coaches, I don't have the defender initiate the drill by passing the ball to the attacker but rather have the server start it with a pass. The reason for this is it's not realistic for a play to start with a pass from a player to an opponent. Players can rotate from A to B to server.

Next, we will add a second defender. Here the key is that the second defender starts 5 yards behind the first attacker. When the ball is played from the server to the attacker (player A), the first defender will come out and slow the attack down to give time for the second defender (player C) to have time to get

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behind the first defender and provide support or coverage. The keys here defensively are to get the first defender out quickly because we would rather defend in the offensive half of the field rather than the defensive part. Communication also becomes huge here. The first defender should start right off by saying she has ball, then the second defender encourages her to delay and then lets the first defender know when she is in proper position to provide support. Next the second defender tells the first defender which direction to push the attacker and supports to that side. If the attacker beats the first defender, the second defender steps up and becomes the first defender and the beaten player steps back to become the second defender (this is where communication becomes vital). One of the things I emphasize when the second defender is communicating to the first defender is that directions must be specific. Too often you hear a second defender yell "push her right" and there is confusion regarding whose right. Should it be the attacker's right or the defender's right? I would like the defenders to talk in terms of "your right or your left" or "push them wide or to the middle". The more specific, the less confusing. See the following diagram for the setup of this phase of the drill.

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The next step in this progression is to add a second attacker (player D). By doing this, we have now built up to 2 v 2. The other thing we will add is a keeper. The keeper in this part of the drill is somewhat artificial as she is sort of playing on both teams. She is on the attacking team (players A and D) in that they score by chipping or passing the ball into her hands. She is to remain somewhat stationary at first. She is also on the defensive players team (players B and C) in that the keeper is working on communication by telling them who should step to ball and who should fall back in support. If the defensive team wins the ball, they can score by dribbling over the opposite end line. See the following diagram for a better understanding of how this looks.

The next step in this progression can be a couple of things. We could add a third defender to provide balance or we could add a third attacker to attempt to unbalance the defense. As you can see there are many options, however the next step I would recommend is to take this to goal. Everything stays the same

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except that now instead of the keeper standing on an end line, we can expand the field and add a full-sized goal. Everything else stays the same except that the attacking team is trying to score rather then simply to chip to the keeper.

Lastly, I would add a second goal and keeper and let them scrimmage with an emphasis on getting behind the ball at all times and providing proper defensive support at all times.

FineSoccer Drill 43

This progression will work on finishing and crossing and finishing crosses. It starts kind of slow but the last couple of progressions are quite fast paced and hectic.

First start with a line as shown in the following diagram. Player A takes a hard touch down the line, then with her second touch takes a touch in towards the near post and crosses the ball out to the 12 yard spot where a coach is standing. If it's a good hard cross on the ground, then the coach knocks it back to the end of the line. If it's a bad serve, then the player has to sprint to get the ball and take it to the back of the line. This simply reinforces the proper approach for the cross and striking the ball properly. Do this 4 times from each side and then move on.

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Next we add a second line who is timing their runs from 30 yards out and on the sidelines. This runner wants to get to the 12 at the same time as the ball and this person simply puts the ball in the back of the net. The two players then switch lines. This is working on the 12 yard run, the finish, and the serve. See the following diagram.

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Next we add a near post runner and far post runner into the equation The server now can elect to serve to any of the three runners who are making properly timed and bent runs. See diagram below.

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From here you can add defenders on the server and in the middle to speed up the serve and make the server pick a target rather then just serving the ball into the box aimlessly. The key to adding the defenders, is to have the defender pressuring the ball start behind the server to simply make them speed up. Have the defender in the box overplay one of the runners to make it obvious where the serve should go. See the diagram below to see the setup.

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Each of these drills should be done from both sides to work on finishing crosses from both sides as well as serving balls with either foot.

The next step is quite different. Start with three runners in the box making near/far/12 yard runs. Have a line with balls out wide on each side and a line in the middle. First the person in the right line takes a hard touch down the line and then another touch in and serves the ball to the runners who try to finish first time. As soon as this is done, the middle line takes a hard touch and hits a shot (the runners get out of the way of the shot, frame the goal, and finish any rebounds). Then the left side takes their hard touch and a serve followed by another shot from the middle. The runners can stay in for a hard 2 minutes then rotate them. The rest of the players rotate through the three lines. This drill has a lot of movement, communication, serving, finishing of crosses, long distance shots, conditioning and goalkeeping. You can also add some defenders if you want. This is best done if you have two keepers, as it's quite hectic and tiring for them to stay in there for any length of time.

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FineSoccer Drill 44

This is a 4 v 4 v 4 game that works on attacking at speed, defensive organization, and both offense to defense and defense to offense transition.

Start with a full-sized field (if possible) broken into thirds with the middle third 10 yards long and the others of equal size to each other (see diagram below)

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The red team starts in the middle third and attacks the blue team (there is a neutral keeper in each goal). If the blue team wins the ball, the red team starts defending to keep them in that third of the field. This is working on the quick transition from offense to defense. If the red team wins the ball back in the offensive third of the field, they continue to attack the ball. The blue team tries to win the ball and get out of their defensive third of the field. If they succeed in getting into the middle third of the field, they then attack the white team in the other third. With constantly changing opponents, a team must reorganize quickly which works on communication (especially from the keepers).

If the blue team scores on the red team, then the ball starts in that keeper's hands and they change directions and the blue team tries to work the ball out of the back with the white team defending (in other words, if a team scores, they are rewarded by getting to keep the ball and attack the other goal).

With older, more skillful teams, you can make the middle third as small as you want while with younger players you can make this middle third bigger (the

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bigger the middle third the easier it is to pass to a teammate in that middle to get out of the back). To really put pressure on the team trying to get out of the back, completely take away the middle third. This means that the team coming out of the back must cross over into the other half of the field to be clear of the first defensive team and as soon as they do that, the second defensive team is there to go against them. Without skillful, controlled players, this can turn into total chaos. Start with the middle third and then if that is successful, progress to a smaller middle and then no middle.

FineSoccer Drill 45

The drills shown here are designed to work on both playing and receiving long chips and driven balls which are integral parts of the game at the higher level.

First start with 3 players in two lines 30-40 yards apart (distance will depend on the abilities of the players). Player A chips the ball to player B and then runs right at player B. Player B receives the ball and one touches the ball back to player A who one touches the ball softly to the side for player B to then chip the ball to player C and then player B sprints toward player C and player C one touches the ball to player B who lays it off for player C's chip back to player A See the following diagram. This is working on chipping, receiving, laying balls off and following your pass (how many times do you see a player clear a ball from the back and then stand or slowly jog up the field when they should be sprinting up to support their pass This simple short-short-long passing drill can help to develop a lot of really good habits.

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The next drill requires 4 players in two lines 40 yards apart or so. Player A drives the ball to player B. Player B one touches the ball to player C who is slightly in front of her. Player C one touches the ball to the side for player B to drive the ball to player D who is slightly behind player A. Player D one touches the ball to player A who one touches the ball to the side for player D to run onto and drive the ball to player C. This rotation continues. See the following diagram.. One of the keys here is that while at first this might seem like a very static drill, in order for it to work properly, the players will be constantly moving and communicating as the player who wants to receive the ball must get somewhat behind the other player. There also must be communication between the two players regarding which side to lay the ball off to and where the players should be positioned. Done properly, this is a very quick moving and difficult drill.

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Some variations you can add to the above drill is to put a goalkeeper in the middle. Each of the chips or driven balls must be done over or around the keeper. Also, you can add some conditioning by saying that once the ball is played away from your side, both players have to do 5 push ups or any type of conditioning exercise which will force them to move quickly and think a bit more.

FineSoccer Drill 46

Keeping possession of the ball while moving up the field is a simple concept, but from watching many games it's obviously much more difficult to actually apply. This drill will show you how you can take what the defense gives you and use it against them.

Start with the 7 player set up as shown in the following diagram with 4 players around midfield and 3 back by the 18.

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One of the three players starts with the ball, then 2 of the 4 players check to the ball from midfield while the other 2 players go away. The ball is played to one of the checking runners and the player who passes it forwards follows her pass with a hard sprint to get up by the two players who checked away. The player who checked to the ball but didn't receive it, spins off and goes away as well. The player who receives the ball will one touch it BACK to one of the remaining two players who are slowly jogging forward. The player who played the ball back follows her pass and gets in a line with the two who are jogging forward. Next, the two players who originally were running away from the ball now check to the ball and we start up again. The general rule is two players check back to the ball, everything is one touch, always play the ball in the direction you are facing, and follow your pass.

This becomes a very simple pattern of players checking back to the ball, receiving the ball with their first touch, and playing the ball in the direction they are facing at all times. Also, this drill develops the habit of sprinting in after each pass, and supporting at angles. It takes a while for a group to do this properly.

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FineSoccer Drill 47

This is a great drill for working on goalkeeping footwork, shot blocking, handling crosses, shooting, serving balls, dribbling, and conditioning.

All that is needed is two field players, a goalkeeper, the offensive third of the field (with goal) and several balls. Player A starts with a ball and if the keeper isn't in a good position can shoot. If the keeper is in a good position, she dribbles down to the end line and crosses the ball back out to player B who can either shoot or do the same thing, dribbling down and crossing the ball back out to player A. The other option either player A or player B has is to attack the goal on a breakaway at any time. (see diagram below for the setup)

This drill works on a field player making the correct decision regarding whether she has a good angle to shoot from, it also works on getting her hips turned if she decides to take the ball down to the end line and serve the ball back

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to player B. Player B is working on positioning her body to be able to receive the ball and finish it first time or take a good touch down the line for her serve.

From the keeper's perspective, this is an excellent drill to work on proper footwork. When I first saw this drill done, it was actually done solely for the benefit of the keeper which should give you an idea of how much work it is for a keeper.

The next step in this drill would be to add a third field player at the top of the D. This player can either receive the ball back out from a serve back or can also add in a near post run at any point to add another variable for the keeper to consider.

FineSoccer Drill 48

The first part of the aggressiveness drills is to have an 8 x 8 grid for each two players in your group. The two players are working on shielding. One player starts with the ball and when the coach says "go" the other player tries to win the ball from the first player who is trying to keep the ball by shielding. If the second player wins the ball, then she tries to shield the ball for the remainder of the 10 seconds. The key is to emphasize that the player without the ball is trying to legally win the ball and that soccer is a CONTACT sport. This can be done as a competition where each player starts with the ball 10 times and then sees who has the ball the most times at the end of the 10 second periods. See the following diagram for the setup.

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Next, switch from 2 players to 3 players in a grid. Start with a player in each corner with the ball in the middle. When the coach says "go" each player tries to win the ball and keep it by shielding it from the other 2. This could also be done as a contest. If the ball goes outside of the grid, they all lose that battle. See the diagram below for this setup.

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Now that the players are used to winning the ball and keeping it, we now add winning the ball, keeping it, and then going to goal. Start with two lines approximately 25 yards from the goal. When the coach says "go" the first player in line A sprints around the goal going toward the post nearest her first. At the same time, the first player in line B goes around the goal toward the post closest to her. The ball is on the top of the 18 and the first player to the ball, wins it, shields it until she can find the opportunity to turn and then goes to goal. If the second player then wins the ball, she goes to goal. This drill works on conditioning, aggressiveness, shielding, finishing, goalkeeping, and defense. The coach should have the next two players in line start as soon as the two in front of them get near the ball. This drill can have as many as 12 field players going to one goal without there being too much standing around. See the diagram below for the setup.

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The last step in this progression is to have a 6 v 6 game with two goals on a small (40 x 30) field. The ball gets served into the middle and either team can win the ball and score on either goal. This will encourage the players to fight to win the ball since defending in this game is very difficult. Carefully watch for fouling as this game can get out of hand if not monitored properly.

FineSoccer Drill 49

This is a defensive organization and discipline drill that also works on communication.

There will be three defenders going against seven attackers. The three defenders start at the top of the D and the seven attackers are on the other side of midfield. The keeper punts the ball out toward midfield and as soon as the ball is punted, one defender has to run out and touch a cone out on the left side of the field, one has to touch on a cone on the right side of the field and the third defender has to sprint and touch the goalpost. No attacker can cross midfield

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until the ball does (for younger groups this can be moved in somewhat). See the following diagram for the setup and runs.

Once the defenders make their sprints they must organize themselves so that one goes toward the ball to slow them down and the other two provide proper support and balance. If the defense either wins the ball or simply slows down the attack, they win.

This drill works on goalkeeper communication as well as organization. Also it works on a teams shape and balance. I would recommend doing this as the last step in a progression from Drill 4, Drill 5, and then Drill 6.

As a warning, remember that this is a defensive drill. It would seem that the attacking team would be successful almost every time because of the number superiority. Please realize however, that this is an unnatural attacking formation and if the defense does their job, the defense will win all (or at least most) of the attacks.

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FineSoccer Drill 50

This series of drills works on using a target player and playing off of this target player.

Start with a layout of cones as shown below. The cones should be staggered approximately 8 yards apart.

Player A checks into the space right in front of the first cone. Player B plays her the ball and then supports to her left. Player B plays the ball back to player A and then spins off in the opposite direction. The two players then proceed through the cones playing one touch wall passes. If they make it through all of the cones without making a mistake they are rewarded with the opportunity to hit a shot. Any mistake (missing a cone, two touches, popping the ball up, spinning the wrong direction etc) means they must start over (or go to the back of the line). The keys here are for player B to spin AWAY from the direction she passes (among other things this makes it more difficult for the defender to watch both the

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ball and the player in a real game). Also, the players want to make bent runs to meet the ball and then go away to increase the angle for the next pass. See the diagram below for an example of this drill.

The next step is to add in some other players. We will start with a three person combination. Player A plays the ball to player B who has checked to her. Player B plays the ball back to player C who has made a supporting run. Player B spins off and receives the ball back from player C for a one touch shot. See the diagram below:

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Next, we can do the same thing but instead of player B getting the shot, she bends her run out wider and receives the ball and takes it to the end line for a cross while players A and C make near/far post runs. See diagram below.

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Lastly, add a second target player. Player A plays the ball to player B who has checked back for the ball. She plays the ball to player C who now finds player D who is checking to the ball. Player D can now find player B or even player A. See diagram below.

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As you can see, there are almost an unlimited number of variations for these patterns using a target player. You can add more players coming from the midfield and also add a couple of opponents to make it more realistic. If you add the opponents, simply give the players the options that are available to them and let them decide which is the best depending upon the situation.

Try this whole progression and I think you will find that your team will have a better understanding of their options when using a target player.

FineSoccer Drill 51

Today's drills are really just a progression of one big drill called THE MAZE. Very simply, it's a drill that will allow the players to get a large number of touches on the ball and also get a good deal of conditioning as a bonus.

The keys to this drill are that space can range from a full-sized soccer field to a small gym (I have done this progression in some of the smallest spaces that you can imagine and it still works if you can keep the work rate up). It does

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require one ball per player and a minimum of 6 players, but the more the merrier (I have seen it done with up to 30 players at one time). This drill can be done by players of all ages (while it's wonderful for young players to get this amount of ball work, I have seen this done by a college team for a 45 minute period and the players looked like they were about to pass out from working that hard).

Start with all of the players in a line 5 yards apart near the outside of the area you have to work with. Each player should have a ball and be spread out evenly. Each player starts to get quick touches on the ball that is between their feet (just real simple touch-touch on the side of the ball). The player in the back of the line starts by slalom dribbling through the line as fast as she can while maintaining control of the ball. As soon as this dribbler gets three people in front, then the new player in back of the line begins. When a dribbler gets to the front of the line, she goes 5 yards in front of the previous front person and starts with her touches on the side of the ball. Obviously, the fewer people in line, the more times they will go through the line, but when you consider that each player is getting touches on the ball throughout the entire progression you can see that the work has already begun. Once you feel like they have done this enough (with 30 players you might want to do this one time through and with 6 you might want to do it 5 times through). The next step would be to do various moves while going through the line. The last person would go straight at the player and then do a cut-catch to the right. As soon as she goes past this player she goes directly at the NEXT player and does a cut-catch to the right.

Another thing that can be done in the maze is to have the players dribble around the players using the inside of the foot only, or even the left foot only (when I say dribble around the players, I mean a complete 360 degree circle around each player). Have the players alternate the direction of the circle with each player in front of them. Other options are to do it one touch through each player (meaning slalom dribbling where you really have to push the ball through since it's only one touch to go past each player). This really forces the players to go fast through the lines.

At any point you can make the change from touches on the side of the ball to touches on top of the ball or any other variation that you want. Done properly, this can be a wonderful progression working on individual ball skills and conditioning. I don't think there is a player in the world that couldn't benefit from some of this type of training.

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FineSoccer Drill 52

This progression works on possession and changing the point of attack.

Start with an area of 50 x 50 area. Break this area into 10 x 10 zones (see diagram below).

Two teams (8 v 8 would be ideal) and it's a simple keep away game. The difference between this game and any other keep away game is that the players are encouraged to both keep possession of the ball as well as look far first. The way this is done is to reward every pass that goes into different zones. For example, if a ball is passed from one zone into the zone right next to it, that pass is worth one point. If it travels to a player two zones away, then it's worth two points. However many zones a ball goes through on a pass (this is assuming the pass is successfully completed) the team gets that number of points. The one other rule that must be used is that a player must sprint OUT of her zone after she makes the pass. In order to make this more successful, you can have one or

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two neutral players that are always on the team that is on offense in order to give them a numbers superiority. First team to 50 points wins. It is much, much easier if you have someone other then yourself keep score.

Next start with a full field (or smaller if you have limited numbers) and break it into the thirds as shown in the diagram below).

This is a simple game of soccer with one rule added: the ball must go through all three zones before the team can attack the goal. This will force a team to maintain proper balance and shape and works on changing the point of attack. Any time a team loses possession of the ball and then regains it, they must go through all three zones again before attacking the goal. If you want, you can put in a rule that if a team wins the ball in their offensive third of the field, they don't have to switch the ball through the vertical thirds. A ball that is played from the right side over to the left side is considered to have gone through all three thirds even though it didn't touch down in the middle third.

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The next step is to take up the middle lines and simply play soccer. It has been my experience that the ball will be switched much more often than before simply by playing this game first.

FineSoccer Drill 53

Start with two "grids" set up on angles going toward the 18. See the following diagram.. At the top of each grid, are a line of players who will attack the goal (line A). The defenders will be at the bottom of the grids (line B). Player A tries to beat player B off of the dribble and if she can cross over the end line into the 18, she tries to get a shot hit. If the defender can stop the attacker, then the play is over.

Some of the points of emphasis here are that the attacker should go at speed, she should work on her 1 v 1 moves, and look to finish as quickly as possible. Defensively, the players work on their first defender role and force the player wide or to her weaker foot. The keeper works on communication, angles,

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and shot blocking as well as holding balls (if there is a rebound, the ball is live). As soon as the play is over, the attacker in the other grid begins to attack. This should be a fast moving drill and the players should rotate to all four lines.

The next drill has two lines. The first player in line A sprints out to the server with the ball (C). The server plays the ball to her feet. As soon as player A gets a two step start in her sprint to the ball, the person in line B sprints out and defends. The player with the ball must receive the ball, hold it, and turn as soon as possible. The defender simply tries to prevent the turn and slow the attack down. As soon as the play is over, the defender becomes the next target player, the next person in line becomes the defender and the previous target player becomes the server in line C. See the following diagram..

The last step in this progression is to allow the player in line C to play the ball in and then support the pass. The target player has the option of either finding the supporting player or turning and shooting. All of a sudden, this becomes a great drill for both offensive and defensive communication. The key

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here is to make the offense go at speed and NOT let them slow the ball down and turn it into a slow paced 2 v 1 competition. (see diagram below)

FineSoccer Drill 54

These series of drills work on passing, dribbling, communication, and teamwork. These are NOT necessarily a progression but rather some options to use as a warm up.

First start with four groups in four lines with a ball with the first person in lines 1 and 3. (see diagram below)

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The first player in line 1 passes to the first player in line 2 and then sprints to the back of line 4. At the same time, the first player in line 3 passes to the first player in line 4 and sprints to the back of line 2. In other words, pass counter clockwise and sprint clockwise. (see diagram below)

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The emphasis in this drill is in passing not only in the right direction but actually passing to the correct foot (in this case the pass would always be played to the right foot). After doing this for a short time, change the direction of the pass and sprint. If you want to add some additional conditioning, have them pass to the right and then sprint to the left but ending up where they passed (in other words line 1 passes to line 2 but then sprints behind line 4 and line 3 to get to the back of line 2). If you do this, the sprints will have to be run hard in order to get ready for your next turn.

There can be a lot of variations to the drill. You can have the lines go far apart and have chipping to the lines followed by a sprint. Or, have a player receive the ball, do a move, and then play the next ball. The only thing limiting you in this drill is your imagination.

The next drill works on dribbling, vision, and communication. Start with four lines as set up below with a cone in the middle.

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The first player in each line starts with a ball. The first set is for all 4 players to dribble to the middle cone and then turn and go back. As soon as they get back, they do a takeover with the next person in line and this keeps on going until each person has gone a few times. You can work on different turns this way but have each player doing the same thing.

Next, the first player in each line dribbles to the center cone and then dribbles around the cone clockwise. If they time this correctly, they will be going around the cone at the same time as the other 3 dribblers. This will force them to work on ball control as well as vision and communication (sometimes it is necessary for a player to ask the others to speed up or slow down) See the diagram below to show you how this is done.

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From here, you can do counter clockwise dribbling, takeovers, moves, changing lines, and so on.

If you want to combine this series of drills with the first ones, you take this series and then add another ball at the back of line 1. While the first person in each line is doing the dribbling, the last person in line 1 passes the ball to the last person in line 2 and then sprints behind the last person in line 4. By doing this, it keeps everyone busy and concentrating because either they are passing, dribbling, or getting ready for one or the other.

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FineSoccer Drill 55

One of the best ways to train small groups is to let them play small-sided games in a controlled environment.

For instance, if you have three players and one of them is a keeper, play a 1 v 1 game going to a big goal. They start outside the 18 and whoever has the ball first goes to goal with the other player defending. If the player with the ball wins the ball, she must take the ball outside of the 18 before she can go to goal (for those of you not raised playing soccer, it's just like one on one in basketball where you must take everything back past the foul line before trying to score). The keeper is trying to prevent both players from scoring. This works on 1 v 1 attacking and defending and from a goalkeeper's standpoint, works on shot blocking as well as positioning and breakaways. You can play games to 5 and with two good field players and a good keeper, they will get an excellent

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workout. Some of the rules you can put in are if you score, you get the ball back which really gives the players the incentive to score since most players would rather be attacking then defending. Plus you can say no free backs which means that if player A has the ball and player B wins it, player A can automatically go into a high pressure defense to try to win the ball back and go to goal. If player A has the ball and hits a shot that the keeper saves, player B must get open and receive the ball from the keeper before player A recovers. Now all of a sudden you are working on transition and distribution as well.

If you have 4 players and two of them are keepers (or even if you have two who enjoy playing goal and know the basics of the position), you can play 2 v 2 to two full-sized goals. The designated keeper for each team can use her hands to make saves but once she has possession, she becomes a regular field player. This really turns into a 2 v 1 game with a keeper which works on attacking, defending, balance, communication, finishing, goalkeeping and much more. Plus, the keepers are working on their field skills as well as their keeper skills which they certainly will enjoy.

With any greater number than 4, just keep adding in field players to the small-sided games. This is where the saying that the game is the best teacher comes into play. By playing small-sided games where teaching takes place on breaks and also where restrictions can be used to simulate different situations, you can accomplish more then any "drill" that is out there.

FineSoccer Drill 56

This short series of drills works on two frontrunners learning to make and use space for each other in the 18 yard box.

Start with 8 players and the 18 (or set up a grid to represent the 18). Play 2 v 2 inside the box with the other 4 players spread out around the box (see diagram below).

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The two A's in the grid are trying to keep possession. They do this by either dribbling, passing to themselves, or they may use any of the 4 players on the outside who are restricted to one touch soccer. The players on the outside must play the ball back to the team that played it to them. If the B team wins the ball, then they are on offense and try to keep possession of the ball. Done properly, this will get the players in the grid looking to make runs off of each other especially when they play the ball to a person on the outside. You can play 2 minute games and then have them switch so the 4 players who were on the outside then become the center players and the players that started in the center become the outside players.

If you want to turn this into a competition, have a contest to see which team (A or B) has the most passes after the 2 minute period.

Next we take this same game to goal. It's a similar setup except we do it inside the 18 and the two teams are trying to score and we add a keeper. The

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outside players are not only trying to get the ball to the proper team but also in a way that the player can get a shot hit. See the diagram below for the set up.

Points of emphasis are that the two players must work together and they must be willing to make runs to create space for each other. Also, remind the other players that they must make good passes as those same players will be passing to them next.

The next step is to play 4 v 4 in a small area where the only restriction is that all finishes MUST be first time. By doing this, you encourage the runners to work together and continue to make the same type of runs that were made earlier. An ideal size for this grid would be 44 yards wide (the width of the 18) by 50 yards long. If you have two keepers for this game, this would make it ideal.

Finish up this session with a 4 v 4 game with no restrictions but encourage the players to continue their runs.

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This progression is a great way to get players moving off the ball in the offensive third of the field.

FineSoccer Drill 54

Stock exchange is an excellent drill to use for ball skills as well as a good way to set the tone for a training session with regards to movement and communications.

Assuming we have 16 players (it can be more or less) start with 8 players around a circle with balls and each of the other players behind a player with a ball . See the following diagram..

The players with the ball start dribbling toward the center of the circle and then toward a different player on the outside. She then passes the ball to the player on the outside and calls for it back. The player on the outside one touches the ball right back to the player and she the player in the middle then goes toward another player on the outside. Do this for 1 minute and then switch roles.

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The keys to this first step are for the person in the middle to dribble with her head up so that she doesn't dribble to the same player on the outside that another player is dribbling to. Also, she must play a hard, accurate pass so that it doesn't hit anyone else. The players on the outside should be keeping their feet moving as well as communicating to let the players know if they are available.

Next, everything is the same but now instead the player on the outside should play the ball in front of the player in the middle instead of right back to her. This is the difference between a 1-2 pass vs. a wall pass. The player on the outside should be the wall and play the ball off in the same angle that it came in. Everything else is the same.

Next, the player in the middle plays the ball and yells for the player on the outside to hold the ball. While the player holds the ball, the player in the middle runs around the player on the outside and then receives the ball back. This adds even more communication and conditioning.

Next we add them all together. The player in the middle should tell the player on the outside what she wants. If she says "1-2" then the ball gets played directly back to the player. If she says "wall" then it is to be returned in a wall pass. If she says "hold" then it's a hold and overlap. This is where you start to see the difference between talking and communicating because now, not only does the player in the middle have to say something but the player on the outside has to listen, understand, and execute.

There are many other variations that can be added by using your creativity but this should give you a good start.

FineSoccer Drill 58

This is a shooting drill that has 4 lines, 2 goals, and 2 keepers. The goals are approximately 50 yards apart. The set up is shown below.

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As soon as the player in line A touches the ball going to goal 1, the first player in line D takes off to defend against her. The whole purpose of this drill is to work on taking an early shot and really get to goal quickly and hard rather then slowing down and trying to turn the game into a 1 v 1 contest with the defender.

While lines A and B are going to goal 1, lines C and D are doing the same thing to goal 2. Players should rotate lines.

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The lines can be moved around a bit to create different angles to work from.

By using this exercise, you can work on dribbling at speed, hitting a shot when the opportunity arises, finishing and following, closing the space when defending, angles, communication between a defender and keeper, as well as goalkeeping. Plus, if done at speed, it can have a great deal of conditioning built into the exercise as well.

FineSoccer Drill 59

This is a drill that works on chipping, receiving, and finishing as well as goalkeeping.

The setup requires two goals and approximately 50 yards of field as well as 16 players and two keepers. This drill is for older age youth players because younger ones will have some difficulty doing this drill successfully.

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The two goals are back to back with a keeper in each goal. There are four lines of four players with lines 1 and 2 with balls. The first player in line 1 chips the ball over the goals to the first player in line 3. The player in line 3 receives the ball and either hits a first or second touch shot on goal. At the same time that this is happening, the first player in line 2 serves the ball to the first player in line 4. Players rotate from line 1 to line 2 to line 3 to line 4. See the following diagram.

If you start this drill allowing the players to take one touch to finish, you can then have it as a one touch finish which works on finishing with the head or volley.

There are many other options that can be chosen in using this drill. For example, you can add defenders who starts by the keepers on each side and they can challenge for the served ball or put pressure on the shooter after her first touch.

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This is an excellent way to work on chipping, receiving balls in the air, and finishing. Do realize that the player receiving the ball is receiving a ball from an "unnatural position" so it will take some time to get accustomed to doing this well.

FineSoccer Drill 60

This exercise works on free kicks (both offensive and defensive). It's real brief but for those of you coaching at the older ages, if you are not doing something like this, you are not maximizing your team's opportunities to win (at the younger ages, there are many more important things to be working on then winning but even with them, it's a good idea to do this occasionally).

The game is really simple. Separate into two teams and play a regular game of soccer going to full-size goals. The only difference in this game, than in any other game is that any time a team makes 5 consecutive passes (successfully) they are rewarded with a free kick. The key here is that the free kick is NOT taken from where the 5th pass was completed, but is done in a more random way. The first time 5 passes are completed successfully, the team gets an offensive corner kick. The second time, the team is awarded a direct kick from 20 yards out (the angle should vary). The third time is an indirect kick again from around 20 yards out (the distance and angles can vary, but it has to be consistent for both teams). The fourth time results in a penalty kick.

Each goal off of a free kick results in 1 point and a goal in the general flow of the game results in 3 points. Play this game for 10-15 minutes and you will find that both teams intensity will be extremely high both offensively and defensively (after a few times defending free kicks in a row, watch how the keeper becomes more of a leader because she will NOT want to face anymore of these while her counterpart is relaxing).

Too many teams seem to either ignore dead ball situations all together, or even if they do know what to do on dead ball situations, they practice them under pressure of a game like situation. I have heard different numbers regarding the percentage of goals scored off of dead ball situations over the course of a season and don't know the actual number, but I do know, teams that work on dead balls on a regular basis are usually more successful in the long run.

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Give this game a try and watch how this can have a positive impact on your team.

FineSoccer Drill 61

This drill works on transition and it involves having three teams (equal numbers) playing a possession game were two teams are trying to maintain possession of the ball and the other team is defending. Whichever team loses possession of the ball becomes the defending team against the other two teams. This is an excellent way to work on possession, defending, and communication.

This new exercise is the next step in this same series. Instead of simply playing for possession, now you play toward two goals. If it's red and blue vs. white, red and blue are attacking one goal while white defends that goal. If a red player scores, then they defend the other goal and it's white and blue attacking. If a blue player loses possession during this attack, then they defend against red and white going the other way. Now all of a sudden, you have possession, penetrating, finishing, defending, transition, communication, and even goalkeeping if you want.

It's extremely important for the players to look to attack the opposing goal at speed (for this reason it's also extremely important for the coach to enforce off-sides so that all of the teams play fairly).

In playing this game, smart teams will always be thinking about proper shape and balance (both offensively and defensively) and also communication is a huge part of this game.

Give this game a try and once the players (and coaches) get accustomed to this, I believe you will find this to be a great way to work on many aspects of the game.

If your team uses a zonal defense, this is an excellent way to work on it as well. Put your 3 or 4 defenders on the same team and since on the defensive side they can't match up man to man, they will be forced to work on zonal defending.

FineSoccer Drill 62

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This series of drills is an excellent way to begin a training session.

Start off by breaking the team into two groups wearing two different color pinnys. Have each member of the white team with a ball and everyone on both teams jog around in a specified area (possibly half the field or slightly smaller). You can start with a wall pass and the basic rule is that the white players are dribbling around looking to use the red players for wall passes. Do this for 1 minute or so and then have them switch so that the red players are starting with the ball. Encourage the players to look beyond the closest player of the other color to expand their vision. After each group has had an opportunity to try this, you can then change it from a wall pass to a double pass, then a takeover, then a double wall, and you can add as many variations as you want.

Next, have all but three players make up a circle. The three players are inside the circle with balls . See the following diagram..

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Start by having the three players doing wall passes with any of the players on the outside and you can go through the whole progression again. However, you will find this is a bit static so quickly add an interesting twist. When the player in the middle plays the ball to a person on the outside, the players on each side of the person on the outside overlap her. See diagram below. By adding this twist, you now have many more options. For example, the ball gets played from the center person (player A) to the person on the outside (player B). Players C and D overlap and player B now plays the ball to either C or D who then goes and finds another person on the outside to do this with. Or you could do it where A plays the ball to B who then finds C who then finds D. The options are somewhat limitless.

Some of the things you are working on with this series are passing, receiving (although most of the time the ball will be played one touch), communication, vision, and thought. Plus, there is a certain degree of conditioning built into this. It's important that all of the players understand this series before you attempt it, otherwise, it will be pure chaos.

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FineSoccer Drill 63

This drill works on defensive footwork, intensity, and anticipating as well as offensive turning with the ball, dribbling, and moves. Plus, it's excellent conditioning for all involved.

Start with a line 20 yards long (if you don't have a line for this, you can always use cones). At the end of each line there should be a 5 yard break and then one last cone (see the diagram below).

An offensive player with the ball is on one side of the line and a defender is on the other side (see diagram below).

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The offensive player is given 1 minute to score as many goals as she can by dribbling the ball into the two cones beyond the end of the lines. The defensive player can NOT cross over the line so she must stay even (or slightly ahead of where the dribbler is going). She can only really defend my winning the ball or blocking the dribble once the ball has gone beyond the line and toward the cone that represents the goal. Done properly, the person with the player will be dribbling at speed trying to beat the defender to the cone and the defender is trying to get there first. If the attacking player sees that she has lost her advantage of getting there first, she should quickly change directions and go toward the other goal. If a goal is scored, the attacking player must go back towards the middle of the line before attacking the same goal again. If the defender wins the ball, she should immediately give it back to the attacker.

Ideally, this drill is done in groups of 4. While two players are working, the other two are resting. If player A is on offense first and player B is on defense, players C and D are resting. After the first minute is up, player C is on offense

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and player D is on defense. After that minute, player B attacks and player A defends.

Done properly, this is a very intense game and as the players start to wear down, they must be encouraged to really push themselves (possibly by rewarding the winner which is another way of saying motivating the loser).

After each player has attacked and defended, they should switch partners and go again.

One of the benefits of this drill is that it reminds people just how much hard work is needed to be a good defender.

FineSoccer Drill 64

This drill can be used in training both indoors and outdoors. This drill, called Get out of here" will be explained here as an indoor activity, but it works exactly the same way outdoors.

This activity is best with 14-17 players including two keepers. Start with big goals (or even U10 goals will work) and use a basketball court as boundaries. Break the group into 3 teams (a red, white, and blue team for our example) and have a keeper in each goal. Assuming you are playing with 17 players, you have 5 v 5 plus keepers. Pick a duration for the game (20 minutes is good) and start with red v white with blue on the side. The rules are very simple. It's regular soccer but anytime a ball goes over a sideline the team that it went out off of, "s off the field and the team that is resting plays. So, using our red v white example, the two teams play and if the ball goes over the sideline off of white, it's red ball and they are now attacking BLUE. Red does NOT have to wait for blue to get on the field or set up. This is a game that encourages quick transition as well as possession and shooting (if the ball goes over the end line, it's a loss of possession but the team who knocked it over the end line does get to stay on the field).

The other way to get the opponent off the field is to score a goal. The team that gets scored upon has to leave the field and the team that scored the goal stays on, gets the ball. and attacks the opposing goal.

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When you start playing this game, it will seem to be quite chaotic but as the players get used to it, you will see them really adding a great deal of thought to their play. Instead of just getting the ball and kicking it (which will frequently result in them having to get off the field) they must try to maintain possession. Also, in the beginning, the team that is off the field will stand together at midfield waiting for their turn. Real quickly they will learn to spread out because they have to be prepared to defend either goal at any time. You will find that this drill will increase a teams communication dramatically.

Some of the skills that this game works on are possession (teams don't want to have to sit out so they will work on possessing the ball in order to get to play more), shooting (it's in a teams best interest to hit a lot of shots because if they score, they get a point and the opponent has to sit out, plus if it goes over the end line they still stay on, as a bonus, if the shot is blocked by an opponent and it goes over the sideline, the opponent has to sit out), communication, defense, organization, and most of the other things that are used in a regular soccer game.

Not only does this game works on many things, it's fun for the players. To watch a player get caught in a corner with the ball and one or two opponents and see her realize that she can kick the ball off of the opponent so that it goes over the sideline for which knocks the opponent off the field is both fun to watch as well as very gratifying from a coaches perspective in that it encourages a player to really think on the field instead of just kicking or simply doing what they are told.

An added bonus is hearing the players yell to the team that just lost the ball out of bounds "GET OUT OF HERE!"

FineSoccer Drill 65

Today's exercise is a fun way to work on crossing, runs in the box, finishing, conditioning, and goalkeeping.

Break your team into groups of three or four players. The game is pretty simple. One player from each group starts with a ball out wide and must take the ball down to the end line and cross the ball into the box. There are no defenders (except for the keeper). The other players in the group will make near/far runs (if

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there are four people in a group, they will make near/far/12 yard runs). The ball must be scored first time. If the ball is played on the ground and scores, it counts as 1 point. If it's scored off of a volley, it's worth 3 points and a header is worth 5 points. The game goes on for a pre-determined time (I usually do it for 8 minutes) and the group with the highest number of points wins. The key here is that while there are no defenders, there is also no set order. If the red team can get two balls served before the blue team gets one served, it increases their chances of scoring. This gives the players an incentive to get their ball and get back to serve.

The only rules are that you can't kick another groups ball, you have to try not to get in other groups ways, a player can only serve three times in a row before one of her teammates serves, and the player who is going to serve the ball must start be beyond the 18 (both in terms of being wide as well as being 18 yards from the end line) and take the ball down to the end line to cross. Also, the runners should start outside the 18 as well in order to recreate the correct runs from a game.

A team of good finishers will be able to score an average of 1.8 points per ball served.

FineSoccer Drill 66

This exercise is a form of shadow training which works on defensive rotation.

This exercise can use anywhere from 4 v 4 to 7 v 7 with one keeper and requires a third of the field. Let's assume that we are going to have the numbers for 5 v 5 with a keeper. Start with the red team spread out in a semi-circle around the offensive third of the field. See diagram below.

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The blue team will mark up man to man by initially getting very close to each of their marks. As will be readily seen, if the red team is going to goal, they have a lot of space in the middle to receive a ball with the blue team marking up this way.

Start with the ball R1 and make sure that each member of the blue team is marking up correctly but also is providing proper coverage and balance to her teammates. The further the offensive players (red) are from the ball, the further back and towards the middle the defensive player can be while maintaining proper ball-you-man-goal-side defense.

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Once all of the players are in the correct position, the ball can be passed from red 1 to red 2 and each defensive player would then make the proper adjustment to be either the 1st defender, 2nd defender, or 3rd defenders. As the blue players start to make these adjustments quicker and quicker, have the red team start knocking the ball around playing 3 touches minimum (by making the offense take at least 3 touches, it will allow the defense time to shift properly).

This whole time, the red players should be stationary so that the defenders only have to worry about where the ball is since their marks are staying in one place. As the defense gets better at this, allow the red team to start moving (slowly at first). Gradually, allow the red team to play at first speed and see whether the blue team can adapt accordingly.

Do this for 5 minutes or so and then have the two teams switch roles.

This exercise can be used as a great opportunity for teaching proper defense and, as a coach, you have to be extremely careful to balance out the

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coaching opportunities with spending too much time talking. With too much talking you are at risk of losing the attention of the entire team so you think you are making a great coaching point, you are in fact teaching nothing at all.

This exercise is a slower moving one than most that I use and really is something that coaches have to spend a great deal of time and energy planning for to get the maximum benefit. Like most shadow training, it has the potential of being a very effective way to work on team defense and the roles of the first defender, second defender, and third defender.

FineSoccer Drill 67

This exercise is a simple way for an individual or small group to work on dribbling, moves, and turns.

Start with three cones set up in an L shaped formation (see diagram below). The players work hard for a 1 minute period and then switch.

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Player A starts with the ball at cone A and then dribbles at cone B. Right before getting to cone B, she should cut the ball with the inside of her foot and accelerate to cone C. Right before getting to cone C, she should pull the ball back and head back towards cone B. Right before getting to cone B, she should cut the ball with the inside of the opposite foot and head back to cone A. In starting with this simple set, the player is working on dribbling, acceleration, cutting and turning.

When player A is done with her first minute, she rests a minute and player B does the same thing.

Next, player A dribbles at cone B, she cuts the ball with the OUTSIDE of her foot and heads to cone C. Again, she pulls the ball back before getting all the way to cone C and heads back to cone B. She cuts the ball again with the outside of her other foot and returns to cone A.

In the next step in this progression, player A will dribble at cone B and do a full 360 around cone B with the inside of the foot and proceeds to cone C. This time, she should do a step over in order to turn the ball at cones A and C.

Other steps in the progression could include doing a move between cones A and B and also between cones B and C. The players can do cut/catches, roll/catches etc. Also, the pull back moves (Pull Cruyffs and V Moves) can be done at cone C to replace the cuts).

This exercise is a great way to work out on your own or with a partner. It also can be done indoors as well as outdoors so it can be done in a gym, backyard, basement, garage or field.

FineSoccer Drill 68

This exercise drill requires accurate passing, good timing, teamwork, and good footwork to be successful. It will take some time to get used to but can be very beneficial to get players to realize the importance of doing the little things correctly.

This exercise requires a minimum of 12 players and 6 soccer balls. It does require a fair amount of skill so some teams will struggle but that is part of the purpose of this exercise as it will show both strengths and weaknesses.

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Start with 4 players in a square with two more players in the middle of the square and the rest on each end . See the following diagram..

The players on the end (players X) start by playing the ball to the player on the square to her right (in each case, this player to the right is player A). Player X then overlaps around player A who makes a one touch pass to the player in the middle (players C) and player C returns the ball to player X for a successful overlap. Player X then plays the ball to the OTHER player C for a wall pass around players D who are there merely as dummies (see the following diagram for an idea of what this looks like).

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Some of the keys to this exercise being successful are that all passes must be played to the correct foot at the correct time (in other words, it's not good enough to say pass the ball to feet but rather play the ball to the correct foot so that the receiver can play the ball to the next person one touch). The players receiving the ball will have to move in order to get their bodies turned properly to play the ball one touch to the correct foot of the next player as well. Another one of the keys for this to be successful is that the players on each end must start at the same time. This requires both communication as well as teamwork.

Of all of the players in this activity, the players in the middle of the square are doing the most work. They must be constantly moving in order to get themselves in proper position to both receive the ball and play in one touch. These players would represent center midfielders or forwards. If they try to play this role as a stationary player, they will be unsuccessful (just like they would be trying to play the center midfield position stationary).

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After doing this activity for a few minutes, have the players switch roles so that the dummy positions can get some work and the players who have been working the hardest can get some rest.

Give this a try but please be patient as it is NOT an easy activity to master.

FineSoccer Drill 69

Here is a simple finishing pattern that works on forwards getting used to working together along with getting a lot of good finishing done (plus it's certainly a good way for keepers to get used to reading the games flow and making saves).

Before doing this activity, you might want to start your team doing Drill 50, which involves some similar concepts but is more of a drill than a pattern like this one.

You should begin with a minimum of 6 field players plus a keeper, a goal, and 8 soccer balls.

Start with a line of 4 players plus two players out in front as is shown in the diagram below.

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The first player in line (player A) plays a soft pass to player B who then plays the ball back on an angle to player A. Player B spins off (in the opposite direction than she laid the ball off) and player A find player C with a hard pass. Player C then lays the ball off for player B to finish toward goal . See the following diagram.

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Some of the keys to this pattern are that the initial pass in from player A to player B should be a soft pass (and preferably toward the outside). The reason it's soft is to try to draw the player marking player B to the ball in order to create more space to run into. Then, the pass from player B back to player A should be on an angle in order to create even more space to work with as well as to make the next pass as easy as possible. As soon as making this pass, player A must spin off IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION AS THE PASS WAS PLAYED. For example, if player B passes the ball to her left, she should spin to her right to get around the player who is marking her (in this activity, there is no one marking her but we are trying to develop good habits here). Then, the ball played into player C should be a driven ball because time is of the essence. Player C will lay the ball off to player B in the direction that player B will have indicated by going in that direction initially. Once the ball is laid off by player C, she then should spin off in the opposite direction to either receive yet another pass in a game situation or to follow up any rebounds.

The players would then rotate and the activity continues.

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The spacing of this pattern can be anything from really tight (10 yards between players) to much more spaced out (20-25 yards between players) and rather than thinking that one is correct to do and the other incorrect, work on this with different spacing so the players are prepared for different things to happen.

FineSoccer Drill 70

A very common exercise to do with teams is to play 5 v 2 (5 players trying to maintain possession against 2 defenders in a limited space).

The way it is frequently set up is with 5 players in a circle (or actually a pentagon type shape) with the two in the middle.

However, you will actually find it much more effective to change this to 5 v 2 +1. The difference is now you have a central figure who is playing the role of the target player. While the 5 players are still trying to maintain possession of the ball and the 2 are still trying to win possession (and not get split) the 1 additional player is trying to put herself into position to win the ball. This changes the focus of this activity dramatically because it's no longer good enough to just maintain possession but now you are looking to also split the defense and find a target player. Now, the activity has changed from one of mere possession to one where you are looking to penetrate as well.

This could be made into a game where the 8 players will each spend 2 minutes on defense and the other 6 players will see how many times they can find the target player without losing possession. One way to keep score in this activity would be to give the defense 1 point for each time the target player receives the ball as well as each time the players make 5 consecutive passes and to take away 3 points for each time the offense loses possession (in this activity, points are BAD). After each player has an opportunity to play defense, you would see which two defenders ended up with the fewest points and they would be the winners.

By adding in this one target player, it helps the players get conditioned to finding a specific person in a specific role (whether it be an attacking center mid or possibly a frontrunner).

FineSoccer Drill 71

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This activity is called “All Forward and All Back” and works on proper support both offensively and defensively.

This game is better with at least 12 players including 2 keepers and can be played with up to 22 players total.

I am going to assume we have 12 players including the keepers. Play on a field approximately 60 x 40 with full-sized goals on the end lines and also with a midfield line.

The rules are quite simple. The teams play regular soccer with the condition that in order for a goal to be scored all 6 players from the team must be on the offensive half of the field (this includes the keeper). If all 6 players are over midfield when the goal is scored, the team gets a point. If there are any opposing players who have not crossed into their defensive half of the field, the team that scored a goal gets an additional point for each player who did not get back.

This works on transition (both offensively and defensively) as well as conditioning, finishing, goalkeeping, and overall team play.

Why does the keeper have to cross over midfield as well as everyone else? The answer is that it works on the keepers being able to properly support their team. If your team has the ball in the offensive half of the field (in a real game) you don't want your keepers back in the 6 yard box. You will probably want the keeper out 30 yards or so to support her teammates offensively as well as to provide the proper support defensively. This is the same distance that the keeper will be out on this smaller field so you are conditioning the keeper to be in the proper support position.

Why do the forwards have to come back into the defensive half of the field? Again, this will both keep them onsides as well as to encourage them to get back and defend (we are trying to create total soccer players here).

Other variables you can alter in order to speed up the game is to play 2 touch soccer all over the field (with the rest of the rules the same). Or you can play 2 touch just in the defensive half of the field and unlimited touches in the offensive half of the field.

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This activity will work on many things but also if done properly will allow the players to have a great deal of fun as everyone is involved at all times.

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FineSoccer Drill 72

These activities are to give an alternative to the basic finishing activity that too many teams use where the team lines up 25 yards from goal with the coach on the 18 and the first player in line passes the ball to the coach who plays a square ball and the player finishes first time. The problems with this drill is that too many players are standing around doing nothing, the person who gets the most touches on the ball is the coach, the pace of the pass is rarely taken into consideration, and a square ball in this position rarely works. In other words, not only is this drill very inefficient, it also develops some bad habits.

The first alternative requires a 60 x 40 area and two goals (and preferably two keepers but that isn't required). The basic set up has two lines in opposite corners of the field with the first player (player B) out by midfield (see diagram below).

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Player A plays the ball to player B who has checked away and then checked back to the ball. Player B plays a soft pass back to player A on an angle and then spins toward the middle and player A plays the ball into the middle for player B to finish first time. Player B gets the ball and goes to the back of the other line. Player A then takes the middle position and the rotation continues. See diagram below.

There are many other options like this such as player B playing the ball back in the opposite angle, spinning toward the sidelines and player A playing a ball down the line and player B chopping the ball back to player A for a first time finish . See the following diagram..

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There are many options for this type of finishing exercise. Not only are they more efficient in terms of working on more things in a shorter period of time, but they also will allow you to reinforce good work habits.

FineSoccer Drill 73

These activities are excellent ways to work on transition (both offensive and defensive) as well as attacking and defending.

The first way to do this is to start with two teams of three and a field broken into three parts with the middle part smaller than the other two thirds (the size of the field will depend on the numbers on each team which can range from 3 players per team all the way up to 8 players per team). Start with one team in each of the three sections . See the following diagram..

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Team A starts by attacking goal 1 which is defended by team B. If team B wins the ball, team A immediately tries to win the ball back while team B tries to get into the middle part of the field. If team B gets into the center of the field, they then reorganize and attack goal 2 which is defended by team C. If team B scores in goal 2, they get the ball back and try to work out of the back so they can next attack goal 1.

The reason this is one of my favorite activities is that it encourages both offensive and defensive transition which is such a huge part of the game. At the same time, every other facet of the game is worked on as well. Plus if done properly, it is an excellent way to work on conditioning.

To make this even more realistic, get rid of the middle portion of the field. Everything else stays the same with the exception that there is now no safe zone for a group to have time to reorganize. As soon as a team gets out of the their defensive half of the field, they are automatically being pressured by the third team so the need to have an organized attack becomes vital. I would strongly

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recommend doing this activity with three zones before trying it with two because otherwise, it is an EXTREMELY complicated activity to do.

FineSoccer Drill 74

Here is a fun activity that works on teamwork and heading for finishing.

Start with a field that is 20 yards long by 10 yards wide with a goal on each sideline (this could either be a full-sized goal or a slightly smaller Coerver goal or just use cones to make a full sized-goal). Put a line down the middle for a midfield line.

There are two players on each team and you can have as many games going on at one time as you want.

Team A starts with the ball and must stay on their own side of the field. The players can throw the ball back and forth to each other or even can run with the ball to the midfield line. In order to score a goal, the players must head the ball into the opposing teams goal. If team B saves the ball (both players on each team can use their hands to save the goal) they immediately go on the attack and try to score in team A's goal.

Since the only way to score is with a header, the quicker the counter attacks happen, the greater the probability of scoring. When the opportunity arises, a player might actually save the opponents shot with their head in order to quickly counter with a shot of their own. To watch good players play this game, you see headers, diving headers, two, three, and even four consecutive headers in a row trying to score over the opponents.

This activity works on heading, heading to goal, clearing headers, conditioning, goalkeeping, and is also a whole lot of fun. You can have your team play a 2 v 2 headers tournament by having each team play each other team for a 2-3 minute game and keep track of the records. Not only will they work hard and get a great deal out of this activity, but they will have a blast. If you do this on a rainy day, it makes the games that much more fun.

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FOREWORD

Les Kershaw has been involved with England soccer clubs since the 1970s, working as a scout for coaches and managers such as Malcolm Allison, Terry Venables, George Graham and Jim Smith. In 1988 he was invited by Alex Ferguson to become Chief Scout at Manchester United Football Club, and was involved in the signing of young players such as David Beckham, the Neville brothers, Paul Scholes, John Curtis and Terry Cooke. Most recently, he has been involved with the development of the Football Association Academies Reserve Leagues.

Malcolm Cook's third book for the soccer market is timely with the advent of the Football Association Academies for the coaching and development of young soccer players. Very little literature on soccer has been dedicated to primary school children, who have tremendous enthusiasm and a capacity to learn new skills.

Anyone involved in developing young soccer players, from primary schools, junior clubs, Centres of Excellence through to Academies, will find this book useful. It gives a logical series of practices in all the basic techniques, without the need for specialised or expensive equipment. The practices are simple, but effective, and cater for all abilities. David Beckham, for example, gained exceptional skills in soccer by practising these kinds of techniques when he was a young player. His free kicks, crosses, and long and short passes are now acclaimed worldwide.

In *Youth Soccer Drills* Malcolm has successfully brought together his vast experience as a soccer coach and teacher in an easy-to-follow and practical manual. I recommend this book to both experienced and prospective coaches, and anyone with an interest in developing young soccer players.

Les Kershaw
Youth Academy Director
Manchester United Football Club

Gareth Southgate, the England central defender, has developed into a player who has the composure to use the ball simply and with good effect. His pace and athleticism make him one of the best defenders in the world. ***Photo: Ben Radford***

INTRODUCTION

This book is designed to support the coach, teacher or parent, and aid them to obtain the best results from their practice sessions with young footballers. There are a number of books available on coaching methods and technical skill acquisition. However, the main aim of this book is to provide a comprehensive programme of varied, realistic and educationally sound drills for young players which will help them to improve progressively.

There is little attempt to tell the coach how to coach, for each one will employ his or her own unique style and characteristics that will, naturally, affect the learning of young players. I have noticed that some books containing drills are impractical and not designed for the particular age groups that are supposed to be using them. In this book I have attempted to provide the coach with a supply of practical and functional drills in a simple format which takes into account the growing needs of youngsters between the ages of 7 and 11 years. Young players at this stage are curious, enthusiastic and constantly on the go. They learn to become more co-ordinated over time, and the wise coach will allow them to experiment and play down the competitive element – they need plenty of variety as they learn new skills.

The players will learn to improve their skills, have fun and develop good social habits through the constant use of the drills. The role of the coach, teacher or parent is to provide the support, guidance and encouragement for young players to maximise their potential. I hope this book achieves what it sets out to do, and becomes a tried-and-tested toolkit of practical resource material for the coach in the years ahead.

It should be emphasised at the beginning that although we use the word 'he' throughout the book, this is only for convenience. It does, of course, also refer to female players, who also give so much to the sport and are developing all the time in their own right.

KEY TO DIAGRAMS

Measurement conversion
1 yd = 0.9144 m = 3 ft

Notes

- The cones, which are used for markers, are not always mentioned in the practice set-up for the drill, but they are listed in the equipment.
- Any other suitable piece of equipment can be used to substitute for the cones and flag poles.

Chapter 1

PRACTICE ORGANISATION

The good coach will endeavour to produce an effective learning environment for his players that promotes safety, fun and purpose and ensures progression. He should plan each session beforehand and decide on the skills or topics that he wishes to help his players learn. He should select the combinations of drills from the book and arrive early at practice in order to set up and prepare equipment for the players. Good organisation generally makes for good coaching and motivation. Here are some basic guidelines for the coach to consider when using drills from the book.

PRACTICE SERVICE

The coach will have to demonstrate, and allow his players to practise ways of serving the ball to their team-mates. Some of the techniques will be familiar to them while some will be relatively new - however, all of them will be valuable to their learning.The majority of service actions are by hand as this tends to guarantee accuracy. However, as soon as the player can consistently kick the ball well then he can serve in this manner too.

These are the service techniques:

Underarm The player places both hands under the ball, between his knees with legs bent. He tosses his arms and hands outwards towards the target, releasing the ball while straightening the legs to add momentum to his movements.

Throw-in The player places both hands around the back of the ball, which rests on the back of his neck. With one leg in front of the other to give himself a more balanced position, he bends his upper body backwards before swinging forwards in a smooth motion to thrust the arms forwards together and send the ball on its way.

Javelin The player balances the ball using one hand and wrist to secure it. The body is turned side-on with the other arm aiming towards the intended target. The player then whips his arm over and through to hurl the ball high and far.

Bowling (*see* top of page 13) The player holds the ball from below and crouches on one knee, swinging his arm backwards with the ball before swinging through to roll the ball along the ground.

Kicking Conventional techniques such as the push-pass (*see* figure middle left), using the inside part of the foot, is adequate for short-range services, while the instep-pass (*see* figure middle right) can be used to kick longer distances. If the service needs to be delivered higher, for example to give a player heading practice, then the player serving the ball can gently toss it up to himself before playing a volley-pass (*see* bottom figures).

Many of the drills require one of the players to serve the ball to a team-mate to allow him the opportunity to practise and develop his skills. As such, the delivery of the ball needs to be accurate, sensitive and realistic, whether the aim of the drill is to work on controlling, shooting or heading the ball. Remember the maxim: 'poor service starves the practice'.

FOOTBALLS

Many of the drills do not require a lot of balls. However, where possible, the quality should be the best available, with particular attention paid to their size and weight. For example, when introducing heading to young players, make sure it is a 'pleasure not a pain' for them to practise by using a light ball. I find volleyballs are perfect at this stage until the players build up the necessary confidence and technique and can move on to the conventional football. It is a good policy for the coach to have a variety of balls of different sizes, colours, markings, weights and textures. He can then change them depending on the ages of the players, the skills being practised or the difficulty of the drill. Players will progress more quickly, develop greater sensitivity and 'touch' for the ball and generally be more motivated to practise with a variety of balls.

EQUIPMENT

Self-discipline is part of being a good footballer. Build this quality in your players by getting them into the habit of assisting the coach to set up and take away equipment used in the practice session. Young players like to see an attractive learning environment where portable goals, coloured bibs and cones, varied balls and flag poles are safely set up – it's all part of the fun!

SPACE

The distances and areas mentioned in the book are only approximate. The coach needs to observe how much space and time players require to make the practice drill effective. He should then modify it by having the players stand nearer or farther from each other, or enlarging or reducing the area they are working in. The space will depend on the players' sizes, maturity, ages and skill levels – don't be afraid to change distances when necessary.

The diagram on page 15, which shows one half of a football field, could be utilised by using the flank areas A and B for crossing or long-kicking,

while C could be used for goalkeeping, shooting or heading. Areas D and E could be used for small-sided games. The centre circle area F could be used for various skills or tactics.

NUMBERS

Ensure that the number of players in each drill is relatively small so that every player has repeated opportunities to practise the skill and improve his ball control. There is nothing worse than having long files of bored youngsters awaiting their turn to perform skills – keep them active! However, the other extreme is for young players to work non-stop and become physically and mentally exhausted. The good coach will intersperse the more physically demanding drills with the lighter ones, in order to allow young players to work at their maximum without becoming overtired.

The drills can be used in a progressive way, working from the easiest to the more difficult. Alternatively, varied skills and drills can be used when the coach thinks fit. However, the same drill should not be used for too long as this can cause boredom. On the whole, youngsters have a shorter attention span than adults, so they do not like 'overcoaching' – it is best to repeat drills often but to keep them short.

Paul Scholes, the dynamic England midfielder, is always in the thick of things in every part of the field. His non-stop running demonstrates the importance of good physical preparation for today's players, whatever their position on the field. ***Photo: Shaun Botterill***

Chapter 2

WARMING UP

The coach needs to ensure that the players prepare themselves correctly - physically and mentally - before they commence practice. There are three main reasons why players should warm up.

1 To mobilise the joints of the body, increase blood flow, raise muscle temperature and stretch the muscles. This will allow the players to move through a greater range of movement and will help prevent injury.
2 To maximise performance. The body performs better when demand on the circulatory and respiratory systems increases gradually. Demanding physical activity will fatigue the body prematurely if the body is not warmed up.
3 To prepare mentally. The mind needs to 'tune-in' to the practice situation so, by rehearsing movement patterns from the game, the mind becomes activated and focused on the skills that are needed for practice.

The effective warm-up consists of three phases:

Phase 1 The first phase focuses on getting the whole body mobilised gradually. Light running activities are used to raise the body temperature and heart rate.
Phase 2 The second phase involves stretching the major muscles of the body and the joints. Particular attention should be paid to the specific muscles and joints that are used in playing the game, i.e. the spine, hips, and legs.
Phase 3 The third, and final, phase is the most intensive and involves activities performed at a faster tempo that allow players to practise and rehearse patterns of movements from the games. Note: players should do some light running after the stretches in phase 2 to raise the heart rate and temperature before starting this phase.

By the end of these three phases the players will be ready mentally and physically to get the best from the practice drills. Most coaches have enough material to carry out phases 1 and 2 competently, so the drills provided in this chapter are specifically designed for phase 3 of the warm-up

Drill 1

Purpose: Sidestepping an opponent

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand facing each other 12 yds apart with a cone placed in the centre. The first player from each file runs towards the other until they are 2–3 yds away. At this point they both dummy to go one way before changing direction and passing each other on the other side of the cone. The coach informs them which direction they should all take as they pass their partners. They then join the back of the other file and await their next turn.

Equipment: Five cones

Progressions: Players should practise dummying to both side. As they progress, the tempo of the drill can be increased.

Drill 2

Purpose: Marking and dodging movements

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand facing each other 12–15 yds apart and the players from each file work in pairs. The first player runs forwards towards the other side with his partner 'shadowing' him 1–2 yds behind. The leading player changes direction often, with his partner attempting to follow his every movement as closely as possible. As soon as they arrive at the other side, the next two players repeat the drill in the opposite direction. Each pair should alternate each time between being a 'leader' and 'shadower'.

Equipment: Four cones

Progressions: Start slowly and increase the pace as players improve.

Drill 3

Purpose: Changing direction and pace

Practice set-up: Two files of players face each other 12–15 yds apart in a channel 10 yds wide. The first player from one file runs across the area and tries to get across the far line to join the opposite file without the opposing player tagging him. Both players run towards each other and alternately attempt to evade, if they are an attacker, or close down, if they are a defender, their opponent. When they finish they join the file opposite and the next two players emerge.

Equipment: Four cones, one set of coloured bibs

Progressions: Make the channel narrower for the attacker or wider for the defender so that they have to be more agile in their running movements.

Drill 4

Purpose: Changing direction at speed

Practice set-up: Two files of players face each other 16–20 yds apart with a slalom of flag poles placed 1–2 yds apart on the ground. The first player runs in and out of the poles, ensuring that he does not touch them until he reaches the other side, where the next player repeats the exercise in the opposite direction.

Equipment: Six to eight flag poles

Progressions: To progress, the tempo can be increased, the number of poles can be increased, or the space between them narrowed to make it more difficult for the players to run through them.

Drill 5

Purpose: To practise lateral movement

Practice set-up: Two files of players face each other 16–20 yds apart with a maze of flag poles placed on the ground 3–5 yds apart and adjacent to each other.The first player moves forwards and runs from one side to the other, moving through the maze until he reaches the other side, whereupon the next player sets off in the other direction.

Equipment: Six flag poles

Progressions: The tempo can be increased, or one player from each side can compete with an opponent to see which one can reach the other file first. If two players compete, they need to be careful that they avoid each other as they race.

Drill 6

Purpose: Practice in stopping, starting, dodging, marking and changing direction at speed

Practice set-up: Players split up into pairs and work in a 12 yd square. Players are numbered 1 and 2 and one of them tries to escape the other who gives chase within the area. The player 'shadowing' the leading player does not actually touch him as they run; instead, he tries to keep as close to him as he can. The coach whistles regularly and all players must halt immediately when he does. If the 'chaser' can reach and touch his opponent, he gains a point; if not, the 'leader' gets the point. The chasers and leaders change roles after a set period.

Equipment: Four cones, two sets of coloured bibs

Progressions: After a set number of 'chases', the players count their points; to progress, the coach can change the pairs so that they work with other players.

Drill 7

Purpose: General movement with changes of direction

Practice set-up: In an area 15 yds square, the players disperse and two players hold hands to form a 'chain' in the centre. The two players chase the others in the area and try to 'tag' them or force them outside the square. In either case, the tagged player joins the chain until one player is left. If the chain breaks at any time, then the other players are free to disperse and the original two players start again.

Equipment: Four cones

Progressions: Another two players have a turn and each two-person chain is timed to see how long they take to eliminate the others.

Drill 8

Purpose: To practise feinting with the body

Practice set-up: Four to six players link hands to form a circle with one designated player in the group. Another player is the 'chaser' and stands a few yards away; all are in a circle 6–10 yds in diameter. The coach gives the command for the outside player to try and tag the designated player in the circle.The other players in the circle must hold hands without breaking free and move around in a circular fashion to avoid the designated player being 'tagged' by the chaser. Players keep changing roles so that they practise chasing and evading capture.

Equipment: A circle marked on the ground, one coloured bib

Progressions: Use more players holding hands so that the chaser has to move more quickly to touch the designated player. Each player can be timed and results compared at the end of the practice.

Drill 9

Purpose: Change of pace and direction when running in all directions

Practice set-up: A group of players disperse in an area 15–20 yds square with two players that are identified by coloured bibs or shirts acting as the 'taggers'. The two of them chase the others, who try to evade them. Any player who is tagged must stand where he was touched with his arms outstretched to the sides and his legs wide apart like a scarecrow. The 'scarecrow' can come back into the activity if another teammate manages to 'free' him by crawling through his legs without either of them being touched by the tagger in the process.

Equipment: Four cones, two coloured bibs

Progressions: The two players are timed on how long it takes to get everyone out in the group. Another two players then get their chance to beat the record.

Drill 10

Purpose: To practise reactions and quick movement

Practice set-up: An area 12–15 yds square is marked on the ground with all the players standing on one line facing the coach and bibbed out in colours making 2–3 teams.The coach calls or points to a line and the last person to arrive at the line designated by the coach drops a point for his team. Scores are counted up at the end of the activity.

Equipment: Four cones, one to three sets of coloured bibs

Progressions: The coach can develop the drill by asking the players to run to the *opposite* line that he points to each time. He can change his call or point to another line at *any time* so that the players have to react quickly.

Chapter 3

DRIBBLING AND RUNNING WITH THE BALL

Youngsters of between 7 and 11 tend to be somewhat oblivious of others around them as far as parting with the ball is concerned.They like to play with the ball and this should be encouraged, as the development of technical expertise is more important at this stage than learning when to dribble and when to release the ball - this will come later in the players' development. Experimentation, discovery and the repetition of a wide variety of running and dribbling 'tricks' with the ball at their feet should be a key aim for the coach.

Rio Ferdinand, the young and emerging England centre-back, shows great control while under pressure whenever he brings the ball out from defensive positions. He carries the ball speedily, economically and effectively to begin a counter-attack when it's least expected. ***Photo: Dan Smith***

Drill 11

Purpose: Running straight with the ball

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand facing each other and slightly to the side, 12–15 yds apart. Each file has a ball. The first player in the file proceeds to run smoothly with the ball in a straight line, and when he crosses the opposite line, the first player in the other file sets off with the ball at his feet in the opposite direction. Practise using both feet, increasing the tempo or lengthening the area so the players need to cover more distance with the ball.

Equipment: Four cones, two balls

Progressions: This drill can start with one ball only: if each player stops the ball with the sole of his foot when he reaches the line, the next player then sets off with it again. To progress the drill, players can run with the ball simultaneously from both ends until they finish a set number of repetitions – who finished first?

Drill 12

Purpose: To run with the ball while changing direction quickly

Practice set-up: The group is broken into files of players who compete against each other via a slalom course marked with flag poles placed on the ground 1–3 yds apart. Each player in turn runs with the ball through the cones in a designated fashion decided by the coach (e.g. left foot only, alternate feet, a set technique or 'trick', etc.) before their team-mate takes over from the other side. Each player has to carry out a set number of runs and the first team to finish the course wins.

Equipment: Six to eight flag poles, two cones

Progressions: The tempo can be increased or the slalom can be made 'tighter' by placing the poles closer together to increase the difficulty of the drill.

Drill 13

Purpose: Passing on the run with the ball

Practice set-up: A long channel 15–25 yds long by 5–8 yds wide is marked on the ground and two small goals are made with cones placed 2 yds apart. Two files of players stand at the back of their respective goals. The first player runs with the ball and tries to pass it on the run through the small goal at the other end, continuing to run and join the end of this file. The next player receives this pass and runs with the ball to the other goal and so the drill continues. Keep a few spare balls around for continuity of the practice.

Equipment: Four cones, two balls

Progressions: Both teams racing against each other at the same time. Repeat the practice in the opposite direction so players have to use both feet.

Drill 14

Purpose: Dribbling and moving with the ball in all directions

Practice set-up: In the centre circle or a similar area, a group of 10–16 players dribble freely with a ball each and practise various tricks or movements. The players then try to 'tag' any other player while dribbling the ball, gaining a point for each player touched while still retaining control of their own ball. The players also avoid being tagged by dribbling with their ball quickly to get out of danger.

Equipment: One ball per player

Progressions: A competition to see which player finishes with the least number of touches in the time-limit given.

Drill 15

Purpose: To dummy or feint at speed

Practice set-up: Two files of players, each with a ball at their feet, stand facing each other 10–20 yds apart. One player from each side dribbles towards the other with their ball under control. As they get within a couple of yards of the other player they dummy to go left and then take the ball past their opponent on the right side. The players then join the rear of the opposite file as the next two players approach each other. The coach needs to make sure that the players start slowly before practising the designated skill. He also needs to ensure that the players are all using the same foot and moving to the same side so that they do not collide.

Equipment: One ball per player

Progressions: Increase the tempo as players' confidence grows, and practise more difficult skills while running with the ball.

Drill 16

Purpose: To dribble with the ball and evade challenges

Practice set-up: A group of 12–20 players with a ball each dribble inside the centre circle or a similar area. Each player moves with his ball under control. When one player in the circle temporarily loses control of their ball, another player tries to tackle and nudge the first player's ball out of the circle. The player who loses his ball then retrieves it and rejoins the game, while the player who knocked it out gains a point. Players count their points up at the end of the session. The player with the most points wins.

Equipment: One ball per player

Progressions: All players can also gain a point by forcing another player to run his ball out of the circle by dribbling a ball towards them.

Clarence Seedorf, the Dutch midfield dynamo, is a driving force who poses a massive threat to opposition defences with his excellent technique, ball control and mobility. This combination of skills allows him to make surging runs into the penalty area and often results in him scoring spectacular goals. *Photo: Alex Livesey*

Drill 17

Purpose: To practise using the inside and outside of the foot when running with the ball

Practice set-up: Eight cones are placed equal distances apart on the centre circle line. Eight players with a ball each at their feet stand at the cones, facing inwards towards the centre spot. On the coach's command, all the players run with their balls towards the centre before changing direction and doubling-back towards the next cone in a clockwise direction. The players run in sequence to the centre and then to the next cone, moving around the circuit. To increase difficulty, the coach can ensure that the players move in both directions, use both feet, speed up the tempo or practise set tricks or movements as they run with the ball.

Equipment: Nine cones, one ball per player

Progressions: As players dribble in one direction the coach can shout 'change' and the players must instantly move with the ball in the opposite direction.

Drill 18

Purpose: To practise beating an opponent with the ball

Practice set-up: Two files of players face a defender in a channel 10–14 yds long by 6–10 yds wide. All the attackers have a ball each and the first one dribbles the ball forwards to play 1 vs 1 with the defender, who must stay on the centre line. The attacker tries to beat the defender and arrive with the ball at the far line. When the defender is back in position, the next attacker from the other side tries to beat him as before, and so the drill continues.

Equipment: One ball per player except the defender, four cones, one coloured bib

Progressions: The coach should set a time-limit of about one minute before changing the defender, as he will become easily tired. Each of the dribbling players has to fetch his own ball if the defender knocks it away.

Drill 19

Purpose: To dribble past a fast-approaching defender

Practice set-up: Two files of players face each other in a channel measuring 12 yds long by 18 yds wide. One file of players, the attackers, have a ball each. They emerge one at a time to engage a defender from the other side and try to get past him and run the ball over the far line. The defender can only move in a forward direction. After the action, both players move back to their respective files.

Equipment: Four cones, one ball between two players

Progressions: The attackers count how many points they have totalled before they become defenders. The two files compare total scores after the second file has finished attacking.

Drill 20

Purpose: To dribble past defenders in changing circumstances

Practice set-up: In a circle measuring 20 yds in diameter, 5–6 small goals 1–2 yds wide are marked with cones. Ten to fourteen players with a ball each play against 3–4 players who act as defenders wearing coloured bibs. The attackers try to score a point by dribbling the ball through any of the small goals (from either side of the goal) while the defenders try to prevent them from doing so.

Equipment: Ten to fourteen balls, ten to twelve cones, three to four coloured bibs

Progressions: After a timed interval of one or two minutes, the scores are tallied to find the player who has dribbled through the most goals. The defenders then swap with some of the attackers so that all players practise dribbling the ball.

Chapter 4

PASSING THE BALL

The development of sound, natural and efficient passing techniques is an important element for youngsters at this age. If bad habits are allowed to become a part of their kicking techniques, it will be much more difficult to remove them further along the line. Young players will find some drills more difficult than others because of the technical demands involved. Players in this age range have physical limitations as well as the psychological limitations due to lack of knowledge and experience. The coach needs to be patient and find the best way of giving the younger players in this age range early passing success in the more basic skills. Brute force is not required to kick the ball effectively - the drills will enable the youngsters to practise, learn and develop a range of basic passing skills. The coach's job is to get them to concentrate on a more natural, flowing and stress-free action when passing the ball.

Opposite: **Rivaldo, the Brazilian international midfielder, is one of the world's top performers. He not only scores important goals for his team, but also sets up goal-scoring opportunities for his team-mates. His classic left foot and quick brain combine to create devastating passes from all over the field.** ***Photo: Mark Thompson***

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Drill 21

Purpose: To practise short passing using the inside and outside of the foot

Practice set-up: Two files of players face each other 8–12 yds apart. The first player in one file proceeds to pass the ball directly across to the first player in the other file and then follows it; so the drill progresses. Each player controls the ball and passes it across to the opposite side ensuring that, as they run, they go wide enough to avoid blocking the line of the next pass.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: Use both feet and various types of passes.

Drill 22

Purpose: To practise various short passes with movement

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand facing each other 8–12 yds apart. The first player on one side passes the ball to the first player on the opposite side and immediately 'peels-off' to join the back of his own file. Each player receives and passes the ball in turn before rejoining the end of their file.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: The coach can introduce two-touch, and eventually one-touch passing.

Drill 23

Purpose: To practise reverse passing with movement

Practice set-up: Three files are arranged in a triangular formation, each 8–12 yds apart. The first player in one file has a ball and proceeds to pass it to the next file, then follows on to join the back of that file. Each player controls and passes the ball in turn in a clockwise direction around the triangle, always following it to the next file.

Equipment: One to three balls

Progressions: The coach can introduce a second ball and third ball, both of which are passed around the triangle at the same time. He can also change the drill so the players pass in other directions and use varied passes.

Drill 24

Purpose: To practise short passing while moving backwards

Practice set-up: Players line up in pairs 2–4 yds apart, with two lines marked on the ground 15–25 yds away from each. One player in each pair has a ball and the player with the ball proceeds to pass it to the feet of his partner and they both move in the same direction, passing the ball between them. When they reach the line, they continue in the reverse direction so that both players practise passing in a forward and backward direction.

Equipment: One ball between two players, two cones

Progressions: Speed up the tempo of passing and use both feet.

Drill 25

Purpose: Short volley passing

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand facing each other 6–8 yds apart, with one player holding the ball in his hands. He gently serves the ball underarm to the player opposite while quickly moving out of the way and running to the end of the opposite file. The player receiving the ball passes it on the volley, cushioning it so the pass arrives for the next player to catch. He then moves to the back of the opposite file and so the drill continues, with one side tossing the ball while the other side passes on the volley.

Equipment: One ball, two cones

Progressions: Players practise using their weaker foot and serving the ball with spin, which is a more difficult skill.

Drill 26

Purpose: To practise short passing with the inside and outside of both feet

Practice set-up: Four players with a ball each at their feet stand in a cross formation facing a fifth player, who stands without a ball in the middle. The players are 7–12 yds apart and the first player passes the ball to the central player for him to control and pass straight back. The central player then turns to the next player in rotation to receive a pass, and so the drill progresses for a set time interval or number of passes before changing places with another player.

Equipment: Four cones, four balls

Progressions: Change direction, feet and tempo of the drill by asking players to play first-time passes when they are able to do so.

Drill 27

Purpose: Short passing and movement

Practice set-up: Five players stand at the corners of a 7–10 yd square. Two of them stand together at one corner while the other three players position themselves at the other corners. One of the two players standing together has a ball and passes it to the player on the next corner while following on in the same direction to change places with him as that player controls and passes it on in turn. Each player controls and passes the ball while moving in stages, around the square.

Equipment: Four cones, one ball

Progressions: Move in both directions, and groups can compete to see who can pass around the square quickest after a set number of circuits.

Drill 28

Purpose: Using alternate feet rhythmically to pass the ball

Practice set-up: Three players form a triangle 3–6 yds apart. One player without a ball faces two others who each have a ball at their feet. Both players pass alternately and continuously to the middle player who returns the passes first time in a rhythmical way, using his right and left feet.

Equipment: Two balls, one coloured bib

Progressions: Each player in turn has a set time or number of passes and the tempo of the passes should be gradually increased.

Drill 29

Purpose: To practise control and timing of short passes

Practice set-up: Four players form a cross in a 8–12 yd square. Two players have a ball and pass it directly to their partner opposite, who controls it before quickly passing it back. All the players need to keep their passing sequence going and avoid striking the other ball as they do so.

Equipment: Two balls, four cones

Progressions: Use both feet, varied techniques and increase the tempo to first-time passes when they are ready.

Drill 30

Purpose: Quick passing and control

Practice set-up: Four players stand around a 6–10 yd square, two of them with a ball at their feet. The two players with a ball proceed to pass the ball simultaneously in a clockwise direction around the square, so the balls rotate. At first, players should control the ball before passing it, but later they should try to pass the ball straightaway so that the balls are continually on the move.

Equipment: Four cones, two balls

Progressions: Use both feet in both directions.

Drill 31

Purpose: Short passing and ball possession

Practice set-up: Eight or more players link up by joining hands and outstretching their arms to form as wide a 'chain' as possible. One player stands in the centre. The outside players, without breaking their link, pass the ball between themselves so that the central player, who can only walk and not run, cannot get possession of the ball. The player who gives away possession of the ball by misplacing his pass changes places with the central player and becomes a defender who tries to intercept the ball as the others play 'keep-ball'.

Equipment: One ball, one coloured bib

Progressions: The players are only allowed one or two touches of the ball before passing.

Drill 32

Purpose: Short passing on the move

Practice set-up: Six to ten players stand around the centre circle, or similar area, with two players who have a ball each at their feet facing them from the centre. The outside players jog around the circle in the same direction while the two central players, who stand a little apart from each other, pass the ball to each player in turn. The players give them a quick return pass, so that they pass around the circle in sequence.

Equipment: Two balls

Progressions: Pass in each direction, increase the tempo and change players' roles so that they all get turns in the centre and on the outside of the circle.

Drill 33

Purpose: Controlling and timing passes

Practice set-up: A cone is placed on each corner of a 10 yd square. One player stands in the middle, and four others stand on the outside of the four sides with one ball between them. The four players proceed to interpass, ensuring that they do not go inside the square, but that the ball passes through the square and inside their own cones each time. The middle player cannot leave his area, but tries to intercept each pass.

Equipment: Four cones, one coloured bib, one ball

Progressions: To increase the difficulty of the drill, the players can be restricted to two or three touches only. Alternatively, if their pass is cut out, they change places with the defender.

Drill 34

Purpose: Timing and selection of passes

Practice set-up: In a square 12 x 12 yds in area, four or five players play against one defender and try to maintain possession of the ball. The four players can move around anywhere in the area while the defender tries to intercept the ball.

Equipment: Four cones, one coloured bib, one ball

Progressions: The coach can impose conditions such as two touches only, or reduce the number of attackers, or even add another defender to increase the difficulty of the drill.

Drill 35

Purpose: Wall-passing

Practice set-up: Two files of players with a ball each stand 16–20 yds apart, and two players stand at the halfway mark 8 yds apart. The first player from one side plays a pass directly to one of the two central players, who relays it straight back to the passer while he is running to the other side. This player then controls the ball and runs with it to the back of the opposite file. The next player then repeats the process to the other central player, thus playing a 'wall-pass' in the opposite direction.

Equipment: Four cones, one ball per player, except the two central players

Progressions: The players can pass simultaneously so two players are 'wall-passing' from both sides at the same time.

Chapter 5

SHOOTING AT GOAL

For youngsters this is a very exciting element of the game and one for which they need to be taught the correct mechanics. Young players naturally want to score goals, as indeed players of any age do. However, it is at this early age that the boy's peers, coaches or parents can unconsciously begin to put pressure on him to score and this will affect the development of his technique. This is often reflected by players 'tightening-up', which affects muscular co-ordination and can result in them trying to smash the ball out of the stadium, when in fact a calmer approach would have helped and allowed them to hit the target! The coach needs to help players to concentrate on smoothness and style when shooting at goal - the process is more im-portant than the end result at this stage.

Gianfranco Zola, the diminutive Italian striker, is a clever player who can create unexpected opportunities in and around the penalty area. Using his wide technical range and mastery of the ball, he has set up countless goals for his team, often with spectacular results. *Photo: Ben Radford*

Drill 36

Purpose: Shooting from a wall-pass

Practice set-up: A file of players with a ball each stands at the edge of the penalty area facing the coach who is 6–10 yds away. A goalkeeper defends the goal with two ball-retrievers stationed behind and to each side. Each player, in turn, passes the ball directly to the coach, who returns it directly to the right or left side so the player who has run on to the ball can shoot at goal. The player collects the ball from the retrievers and rejoins the end of the file as the drill continues.

Equipment: One ball per player

Progressions: Change the shooting angles and shoot from a greater distance.

Drill 37

Purpose: To practise short volley and half-volley shooting

Practice set-up: Two servers with a supply of footballs stand to the side of a goal with fixed nets. They are faced by a small file of players 4–8 yds away. The servers toss the ball underarm to each player in turn and the player hits a volley or half-volley into the net before returning to the back of the file. Servers should toss the ball at a fast pace to maintain the practice flow.

Equipment: A good supply of balls, a goal with a practice net

Progressions: Count the number of goals the players score in the empty goal in a timed interval or in a set number of services.

Drill 38

Purpose: Quick reactions when shooting

Practice set-up: Two files of players face a goal 8–16 yds away, and defended by a goalkeeper. The coach is in a central position with a supply of balls. The first two players sit down and the coach serves the ball in between them so that they can recover quickly from their position. The first one to the ball gets to shoot at goal. They retrieve their ball as the next two repeat the process.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach can make the service more difficult or speed up the process.

Drill 39

Purpose: Shooting with the instep of the foot

Practice set-up: In a channel measuring 22 yds long by 10 yds wide a makeshift goal using flag poles is erected with a goalkeeper guarding the 'sticks'. One player stands at each end of the channel, one with a ball at his feet. The goalkeeper faces the player in possession of the ball, who shoots at goal. If the keeper saves the shot, he feeds it to the other player; if the shot goes past him, he turns to face the next shot.

Equipment: Two flag poles, four cones, one ball

Progressions: The players have a competition to see who scores most goals within a time-limit.

Drill 40

Purpose: To get in a shot against a recovering defender

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand in pairs 12–15 yds away from and to each side of the goal. One player has a ball and the other player, the 'defender', stands with his back to the goal with his legs apart. The player with the ball faces the defender and proceeds to push the ball through his legs, then runs around him quickly to shoot at the goal as the defender recovers.

Equipment: One ball between two players

Progressions: The players shoot from alternate sides and change over roles and sides after a timed interval so that everyone gets a taste of the action.

Drill 41

Purpose: To strike a moving ball at goal

Practice set-up: Two goals, defended by goalkeepers, are erected on an area measuring 14–20 yds long by 12 yds wide. The goalkeepers have a good ball supply in their goals. Two files of players stand next to each goal, but on opposite sides. The goalkeepers throw the ball simultaneously to the first player in the file on the opposite side. Each player controls the ball before passing it to the first player from the opposite file so they can shoot at goal. The two players then retire to the end of the file at the other side and the goalkeepers throw the ball to the next two players, and so the drill continues.

Equipment: Two portable goals, four cones, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Players can only shoot with the weakest foot or try to hit a certain area of the goal (e.g. low at far post).

Drill 42

Purpose: To shoot alternately with both feet

Practice set-up: Six to eight balls are placed in a line 1–2 yds apart and 8–14 yds from a goal defended by a goalkeeper. A line of players face the balls and the first player starts by running and striking the outside ball on the right with his right foot before quickly moving to strike the ball on his extreme left side with his left foot. He moves like a pendulum from the outside in until he has hit all the balls at goal.

Equipment: Six to eight balls

Progressions: Count the player's scoring ratio and how fast he achieves this, and compare it with other players.

Drill 43

Purpose: Shooting from a narrow angle

Practice set-up: Six to eight balls are laid on the ground a yard apart and at an angle 8–14 yds from the goal. A file of players stands behind and to the side of the ball furthest from the goal. Each player runs to the line of balls and hits each ball in turn, moving down or up the line according to the coach's instructions, and looking to shoot all balls rhythmically and quickly. The coach can impose a time-limit, each player needing to take all shots within that interval. The player can use various techniques to score, such as out-swinging shots or swerved shots.

Equipment: Six to eight balls

Progressions: The drill is flexible, and the coach can ask the player to hit with one foot or both feet. The coach can number the balls so that the player needs to react at speed when the coach calls the numbers, in order to shoot at goal as quickly as possible.

Drill 44

Purpose: To get in a shot while under challenge

Practice set-up: Two files of players line up 6–8 yds apart and 10–16 yds from a goal defended by a goalkeeper. The coach stands in a central position with a supply of balls and proceeds to pass the ball each time to one file, whose players look to get their shots in while the players from the other side give chase and try to prevent the shot. After a set period the players change roles. The coach should ensure that all players receive practice in shooting with both feet.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The service can be made more difficult for the player shooting by playing the ball nearer to the defender.

Drill 45

Purpose: Shooting in a variety of circumstances

Practice set-up: Four players each with three balls at their feet stand on the corners of a 12–16 yd square, with a player in the centre facing a goal defended by a goalkeeper. The players pass the ball in rotation for the central player to control and shoot quickly at goal. The players then switch positions after all twelve balls have been served so that a new player is given practice in the central position.

Equipment: Four cones, twelve balls

Progressions: The coach can make it more competitive by adding scores, only allowing first-time shots or asking the servers to toss the ball in the air for the central player to hit volleys or half-volleys.

Drill 46

Purpose: To decide where to shoot at goal

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand opposite each other 10 yds to one side of the goal and 14–16 yds apart. The file nearest to the goal are the defenders; the file furthest from the goal are the attackers. The coach stands in front of the goal and in line with the file of attackers with a supply of footballs. He faces the file of attackers and passes to each one in turn. The attacker controls the ball and quickly runs with it to go around the coach and shoot as fast as he can. As soon as the coach passes the ball a defender moves to cover his goal line as the goalkeeper 'narrows the shooting angle' in front of him. Both players move back to their respective files and the drill continues.

Equipment: Two cones, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Change roles of attackers and defenders after a set period of time and encourage the attackers to assess the situation before deciding where to shoot. For example, the player may chip the ball over the goalkeeper's head, away from the covering defender.

Drill 47

Purpose: To shoot on the turn

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand to the side of each other 16–20 yds from a goal, with two flag poles placed in the ground a few yards in front. The players, who each have a ball at their feet, run forwards alternately at speed, going completely around the pole with the ball before shooting on the turn at goal. The players retrieve their balls as the next players come forwards to dribble the ball round the poles before shooting. Make sure players shoot as soon as they are coming out of the turn.

Equipment: Two flag poles, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Two teams can compete against each other within a time-limit to see who scores the most goals.

Drill 48

Purpose: To dribble and shoot

Practice set-up: Two players, an attacker and defender, stand in a channel in the penalty area 10–12 yds wide with six balls placed in the penalty arc. The attacker collects a ball and dribbles it past the defender to try and score. If he does they swap roles. The defender gets a ball and attacks while the attacker defends and they compete to see who can score most goals. If the defender wins the ball in the area he can go on to score; either way the players have alternate opportunities each time to defend or attack.

Equipment: Four cones, six balls

Progressions: The player with the ball must dribble past the defender before scoring; alternatively, two or more balls can be added to the practice.

Drill 49

Purpose: Dribbling and shooting at goal

Practice set-up: On an area 20 yds long by 15 yds wide, two goals are erected and manned by goalkeepers. A small 'keepers only' semi-circle area is marked in front of each goal. Two files of players are bibbed out in two different colours to identify them and are numbered. The two teams sit behind a goal each and the coach calls a number and feeds a ball into the area. The two players play 1 vs 1 and try to beat their opponent and score. As soon as the coach calls a new number, the two players must leave the ball and return to sit behind their goals while the next two players compete.

Equipment: One ball, two sets of coloured bibs, two portable goals

Progressions: The team with the most goals wins.

Drill 50

Purpose: To dribble past a player before shooting

Practice set-up: A 15 yd square area is marked out with four goals positioned centrally on each side, which are defended by goalkeepers. Two adjacent goals are defended by goalkeepers from one team and two from the other. Two groups of six players in coloured bibs are split into two smaller teams that are numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4, 5, 6 respectively. Each team of three players sits behind their respective goals and opposite the opposing team with the same numbers. The coach calls two numbers, always an odd and even, and feeds a ball into the area. The four numbered players play 2 vs 2. Each pair has to defend their two goals and can score in either of the opposing goals. Whatever two numbers the coach calls, four players come out to try and score each time.

Equipment: Four cones, two portable goals, two balls, two sets of coloured bibs numbered from one to six (or as required)

Progressions: Count the goals scored within in a time-limit.

Chapter 6

HEADING THE BALL

This is one of most neglected skills in the game and one that requires careful handling when presented to youngsters for the first time. Heading is hardly a natural technique – your first reaction is to shut your eyes and move your head out of the way of the ball as it approaches! It is vital in the early stages of their development for young players to feel confident that heading the ball will not be a painful experience.

For this reason, lightweight balls should be used, with the accent on fun and variety to alleviate any fears that youngsters have of heading the ball. The drills provided will enable the players to build up their technical expertise gradually before moving on to the more difficult skill of heading from crosses from the flanks.

Oliver Bierhoff, the powerful German centre forward, has demonstrated his goal-scoring prowess with club and country. He is exceptionally strong in the air, where he can demonstrate his ability to 'out-jump' opponents and score with spectacular, piercing headers. *Photo: Claudio Villa*

Drill 51

Purpose: Body power for heading

Practice set-up: A player sits on the ground facing his partner, who stands 3–6 yds away with a ball in his hands. The server tosses the ball gently underarm for the sitting player to return with a chest-high header, which the server catches. Players change positions after a set number of headers.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: As the player improves, the server can throw the ball from a longer distance, so that more power and accuracy is required. The server can also move around to provide a moving target for the player heading the ball.

Drill 52

Purpose: Using the body to head the ball more effectively

Practice set-up: Two players face each other 3–5 yds apart, one standing with a ball in his hands while the other kneels on the ground. The server tosses the ball underarm, using both hands, for the kneeling player to return with a chest-high header. By denying the player the use of his legs when kneeling, he has to use his upper body more effectively to generate power to the ball. Players change positions after a set number of headers.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: Move further away when serving so that the player has to utilise more power when heading the ball.

Drill 53

Purpose: Diving header

Practice set-up: Two players face each other, one standing holding the ball and the other kneeling on the ground 4–7 yds away on soft ground or on a cushioned mat. The server tosses the ball underarm dropping it short of the kneeling player so that he needs to dive to head the ball. Ensure the player heading the ball uses both hands in front of himself to cushion his contact with the ground. The header should be played so that the server can catch it each time. Players change positions after a set number of headers.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: The server can drop the ball even shorter or stand further away as he serves. Either way it will increase the difficulty for the other player.

Drill 54

Purpose: Controlled heading

Practice set-up: A file of players face a team-mate who stands 3–5 yds away with a ball in his hands. The server tosses the ball underarm to the first player in the file, who returns it with an accurate header for the server to catch. The first player then crouches down while the server tosses the ball over his head for the next player in the file to head back and crouch down in turn. When he has moved along the file, the server joins the front of the file and the back player becomes the server. Proceed until everyone has had a turn.

Equipment: One cone, one ball

Progressions: Set up teams to compete against each other. Only headers that are caught by the server count.

Drill 55

Purpose: Heading for accuracy and power

Practice set-up: Using flag poles and cones, set up two makeshift goals 4-6 yds wide and 5-7 yds apart. A player stands in the middle of each goal. One of the player's tosses the ball up for himself and tries to score in the other goal with a header while the other player acts as a goalkeeper and tries to save the ball. He then serves himself and tries to score with a header. Players can score with a direct header from wherever they catch the ball. The drill should flow with headers and saves - count the goals to find the winner.

Equipment: Four cones, four flag poles, one ball

Progressions: Move the goals further away from each other so that the headers require more power. Allow players to head directly from an opponent's header either by diving or jumping to surprise the player.

Drill 56

Purpose: Jumping to head the ball

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand facing each other, 3–5 yds apart and slightly to the side of each other. The first player tosses the ball underarm to the first player on the other side, then quickly turns and joins the back of his own file. The player receiving the ball jumps and heads it directly into the hands of the second player on the opposite file, then turns to run to the back of his own file. The sequence continues so that one file serves while the other heads the ball. Make sure that the balls are served high. Once the first player is back at the start, the files change over.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: The files move further apart so that the players heading the ball have greater difficulty in judging the ball's flight and in maintaining accuracy.

Drill 57

Purpose: Controlled heading

Practice set-up: The player gently tosses the ball to himself and heads it so that it rebounds from a wall for him to catch. He continues to feed the ball to himself, attempting to head it twice in succession before catching it and so on, increasing the number of headers by one each time. (Beware of standing too near the wall.) Ensure the player heads through the lower half of the ball.

Equipment: One ball, a high wall or a vertical rebound surface

Progressions: Each time the player practises he tries to beat his record score.

Drill 58

Purpose: Controlled and 'touch' heading

Practice set-up: A player faces a wall and gently tosses the ball high against it so that the ball rebounds. The player attempts to keep the ball in the air by repeatedly heading it against the wall. To improve control, the player should move closer to the wall until he can place both hands against it while still heading the ball rhythmically against the wall. (Beware of standing too near the wall.)

Equipment: One ball, a high wall or vertical rebound surface

Progressions: Start to move further from and then nearer to the wall while heading the ball, keeping control of it in the process.

Drill 59

Purpose: Heading for defending

Practice set-up: The player marks a line on a wall above his head. He faces the wall and either tosses the ball up to head it or tosses it underarm directly against the wall to head it. The player should start a heading sequence, counting only the headers which go above the line and try to beat his record.

Equipment: One ball and a high wall

Progressions: Players need to learn to head the ball high and away from the goal. Make the line on the wall higher - but not so high that players find it difficult to reach it with a header.

Drill 60

Purpose: 'Touch' heading

Practice set-up: Two players stand 1–2 yds apart, one with a ball in his hands. He carefully tosses the ball upwards towards himself and heads it high and accurately for the other player to return with a header which the first player catches. This counts as two consecutive headers. The first player then repeats as before, however, the players now attempt three consecutive headers and the second player catches the ball. The players try to move up to 10 or more headers.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: The two players move further apart so that greater accuracy is required when heading the ball.

Drill 61

Purpose: 'Touch' heading

Practice set-up: One player stands on his own, holding the ball. He gently and accurately tosses the ball upwards for himself and, keeping his head back, heads the ball skywards before catching it. He then tries to head it twice successively, then three times and so on.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: Players continually try to beat their personal best score.

Drill 62

Purpose: Controlled heading

Practice set-up: Put up a 3–5 ft high long net or rope. A line of players pairs up on each side of it, with one ball between each pair. Each player with a ball starts by gently heading the ball over the net or rope for his partner to head back, so they can keep up a sequence. Later partners can pair up against other pairs (2 vs 2) on the same net. Place a mark on the ground to divide the area in half.

Equipment: One ball, two flag poles, a rope or net

Progressions: Each pair competes against another pair to see who can attain the highest heading sequence.

Drill 63

Purpose: Controlled heading on the move

Practice set-up: Put up a net or rope 3-5 ft high and 1-2 yds wide. Two files of players stand on either side of it, facing each other, one file with a ball. The first player starts by tossing the ball across the net for the player opposite to head straight back over again for the next player opposite to catch. Both players - the thrower and the player heading the ball - run around the net to join the back of the opposite file as the drill continues.

Equipment: One ball, two flag poles, a rope or net

Progressions: Teams compete against each other and count their highest consecutive score.

Drill 64

Purpose: Leaping to head the ball from a standing jump

Practice set-up: The coach, or a player, holds the ball in both hands high above the head of a player who is standing. The player underneath the ball springs up repeatedly, using both legs, to head the ball that is held by the coach. As they head the ball the players should tighten their neck muscles. After six jumps the player moves to the end of the file and the next player starts. A player holding the ball in the air can use a box to stand on if more height is needed.

Equipment: One ball, one box (if necessary)

Progressions: The coach holds the ball a little higher each time so that the player needs more spring to reach the ball.

Drill 65

Purpose: Jumping to head the ball on the run

Practice set-up: Players stand in a file facing the coach, who holds the ball in both hands in the air. They run in sequence and jump using one leg to take off and head the ball, which is cushioned in the coach's grip. The player returns to the back of the file as the next player takes his turn.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: The coach should hold the ball higher as the players' jumping ability increases.

Drill 66

Purpose: To withstand body contact when jumping

Practice set-up: Two files of players stand side-on and a short distance apart. With the coach in front they keep in order and jog slowly forwards towards a cone 20 yds away. On the coach's command of 'Up!', they jump and make contact with the sides of their shoulders. When they reach the cone they jog backwards and then repeat the exercise.

Equipment: Two cones

Progressions: The coach must ensure the practice is safe and the contact between players is sensible.

Drill 67

Purpose: Jumping to head the ball

Practice set-up: The coach faces a file of players standing 6–8 yds away.The coach feeds the first player with a high, soft and looping service and the player comes forwards, jumps and heads the ball back accurately before returning to the back of the file. The coach then serves continuously to each player in turn. He should keep some spare balls at his feet for misdirected headers.

Equipment: One ball (a few spare balls should be available)

Progressions: Throw the ball a little higher each time, so that the players need to improve their timing and increase their power when heading the ball.

Drill 68

Purpose: Defensive power heading

Practice set-up: A file of players faces the coach from a distance of 3–5 yds, with two ball-retrievers facing the back of the coach behind a cone the same distance away. The coach tosses the ball to the first player who heads it high and long over the coach's head for one of the retrievers to catch. The player then turns and runs to the back of the file while the next player receives a service from the coach. Change the ball-retrievers often.

Equipment: Two cones, one ball (a few spare balls should be available)

Progressions: Increase the distances of the players and ball-retrievers from the coach to improve the power and distance when heading.

Drill 69

Purpose: Power heading in defence

Practice set-up: A coach stands facing a player who is 2–3 yds away. Behind the coach are a series of lines or cones set at yard intervals to represent distances. The first one is placed 1–2 yds behind the coach. A ball-retriever stands within the lines or cones to measure the distance of the headed ball. The coach serves the ball underarm and the player heads it as far over the coach's head as he can, getting points for the distance achieved. The ball-retriever returns the ball to the coach. The player gets six headers, totalling his score before changing places with the ball-retriever.

Equipment: Six cones, one ball

Progressions: Each player continually looks to improve his score.

Drill 70

Purpose: Glancing headers

Practice set-up: Two servers stand at the sides of the goal with six balls each. The goalkeeper stands on the goal line while two players stand 6–8 yds in front and behind two cones in line with the goalposts. The servers alternately toss the balls gently underarm in a diagonal direction for each player to come and head at goal. After heading the ball the player runs towards the other cone as the next player receives service. The goalkeeper must stay on the goal line when defending the goal.

Equipment: Two cones, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Encourage the servers to make the practice more difficult by tossing the ball so the players need to jump high, or dive, to head the ball at goal.

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Chapter 7

CROSSING AND FINISHING

Although an integral part of the game, the techniques of crossing the ball and finishing off the resultant cross with a shot or header are difficult for young players to learn. With this in mind, the coach needs to be patient and aware of the potential difficulties so that he can guide the youngsters more sensitively through the drills.

Young players who can kick the ball reasonably well when striking it in a straightforward direction find it much more difficult to kick a ball on the move when they have to lift it up to a team-mate's head while running in another direction. The necessary balance, timing and co-ordination of several limbs needs much practice before the technique becomes refined. Equally difficult is the skill of moving on to a fast-approaching ball and timing it so that the player hits it on the ground, or in the air with a volley, or heads it at goal.

By using the drills and modifying them where necessary, such as allowing the players to cross a stationary ball, or by using a bigger or lighter ball, or controlling the cross before shooting, the players' confidence will grow and the coach can gradually increase the tempo as they progress.

Opposite: **David Beckham is an excellent striker of the ball who can cross with devastating effect or score from opportunities set up by his team-mates. He is particularly dangerous in free-kick situations where he can flight the ball accurately to team-mates or bend it around the defensive wall at goal.** ***Photo: Shaun Botterill***

Drill 71

Purpose: Shooting from a cross

Practice set-up: A group of players are numbered from 1 to 5 or 6 with 1 acting as goalkeeper, 2 acting as the crosser and 3 shooting at goal from 10–16 yds, while the others form a file behind. Number 2 has a good supply of balls and proceeds either to play a ball along the ground or cross it in the air for number 3 to control and shoot at goal. All three players rotate so that 3 becomes the goalkeeper, 1 is the crosser and 2 joins the end of the file while 4 comes forwards to shoot.

Equipment: A good supply of balls, a cone

Progressions: Cross from both sides before shooting, or have the crosser position himself closer to the touchline, to increase the difficulty for the player shooting.

Drill 72

Purpose: Crossing and heading practice

Practice set-up: On an area 20 yds long by 30 yds wide, two goals are defended by goalkeepers. Two groups of three players stand at the halfway mark and two groups of three players stand in opposite corners. A server stands in the other two corners with a good supply of balls. The servers cross the ball to the corner groups in turn as they try to score. The four groups jog around the back of the goals and rotate around the area to continually meet the cross from the server for a set time-limit. All the groups add up their goal count.

Equipment: Four cones, two portable goals, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Keep changing around so that all players have equal opportunities to cross and head the ball.

Drill 73

Purpose: Crossing to a specific area

Practice set-up: On an area measuring 20–24 yds long by 30 yds wide, two portable goals are positioned with a goalkeeper in each one. Two players acting as wingers stand in opposite corners with a good supply of balls. Two players acting as strikers face one goal each. A ball-retriever stands behind each goal. One winger crosses a low ball while the other crosses a high service each time so that each striker shoots or heads at goal before they turn and bypass each other to attack the other goal. They receive heading and shooting practice in this drill for a set interval before changing with other players.

Equipment: Four cones, two portable goals, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Players continually change their roles, acting as wingers, strikers, or ball-retrievers.

Drill 74

Purpose: Cutting the ball back on the move for a player to shoot

Practice set-up: A striker faces a goal 12–15 yds away which is defended by a goalkeeper. Two wingers stand 15–20 yds away from the goal with a good supply of balls. Two ball-retrievers are positioned behind the goal. The wingers run with the ball before cutting it back for the striker to finish with headers or shots. Depending on the type of service, the player can control the ball before shooting, volley the ball in the air, or head the ball at goal. The striker should change with another player after a set interval. The service should be regular.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The player cutting the ball back should be encouraged to run more quickly with the ball and to cross on the move, while the striker is allowed one touch to strike at goal.

Drill 75

Purpose: Learning to time runs at goal and finish effectively

Practice set-up: Two portable goals, with goalkeepers, are positioned 10–15 yds apart, and two servers stand in opposite corners with a good supply of balls. Four pairs of players line up in files at the sides of each goal. Pairs of players come forwards alternately from each side to receive a thrown service from each server which they try to convert to goals. The pair perform a crossover run before receiving the service, and the server can vary the service by rolling it along the ground or tossing it higher for a header. The pair of players retires to the far file as the drill continues in the opposite direction. The goalkeepers must stay in their goal areas and must move forwards to stop the crosses.

Equipment: Four cones, a good supply of balls

Progressions: Ensure players continually change to get crossing and heading practice and eventually ask the servers to serve the ball by volleying it from their hands.

Drill 76

Purpose: Crossing and finishing in rotation

Practice set-up: Two portable goals are erected on an area measuring 20 yds square, both guarded by a goalkeeper. A supply of balls is left on the centre line on both sides. Two players run forwards with a ball from the centre line and cross the ball for two central players to shoot or head at goal. All players rotate one place so that they now cross, finish or await their turn to do so. A few ball-retrievers, or spare players awaiting their turn, can be used to ensure that the ball supply is maintained.

Equipment: Six cones, two portable goals, a good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach can ask the crossers to practise a particular type of cross (e.g. out-swinging cross, near-post cross, hard-driven cross etc.).

Drill 77

Purpose: Crossing a moving ball to the far post area and finishing the cross from that position

Practice set-up: A group of players organise themselves around a goal guarded by a goalkeeper. A server stands on the touchline with a supply of balls, faced by another player, the crosser, 10–15 yds away. A file of players stands at the other side of the goal. The drill proceeds with the server rolling a gentle pass for the facing player to cross. The first player in the file, the striker, breaks off and tries to finish with a shot or header. The players all rotate quickly.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The crosser moves to a wider position so that the cross becomes more difficult to perform.

Drill 78

Purpose: Crossing on the run, and timing runs to head at goal

Practice set-up: Two portable goals are placed 15–20 yds apart, each with a goalkeeper. There are three files of players at both ends: two files of players act in pairs and stand to one side of a goal; the other file stands 15–20 yds away from the other side of the goal in a marked channel. The wider files of players have a good ball supply at both ends. The drill starts with one player running with the ball along the channel while a pair of players runs parallel and centrally, competing to receive his cross and to try and score. All players join their respective files at the other end and the drill continues in the opposite direction. The files should change over so that they both get crossing and finishing practice.

Equipment: Four cones, two portable goals, a good supply of balls.

Progressions: The coach can ask the players to run with the ball a little faster to add an edge to their crossing techniques.

Drill 79

Purpose: Crossing with both feet, and timing runs to head at goal

Practice set-up: Two portable goals are placed 15–25 yds apart on a goal line, each defended by a goalkeeper. Two servers are positioned on the goal line and 10–15 yds away from their respective goals. The player who is crossing the ball stands between the servers 6–10 yds away. Two strikers are positioned in each of the far post areas of the goals. The drill starts with server 1, who is on the right side of one goal, rolling a gentle pass for the player in front to cross with his right foot to the left. Striker 1 attempts to score from this cross. The player crossing the ball immediately turns to face a service from server 2 and hits a cross with his left foot to the opposite side. In this way he receives practice on both feet. The tempo should be increased, and the players should switch roles regularly to practise crossing and finishing.

Equipment: Two portable goals, one cone, a good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach can ask the player crossing the ball to aim for specific areas, e.g. near a goal post.

Drill 80

Purpose: Selecting where to cross the ball and finishing while under challenge from opponents

Practice set-up: On an area measuring 20 yds long by 30 yds wide, two teams play 4 vs 5 or 5 vs 5 with two portable goals, each defended by a goalkeeper. Two wingers, one on each side of the field, stand outside the area. Two teams of players play normal football and when the attacking team gets near a goal, they pass the ball to either of the wingers. The winger receiving the ball must try to cross the ball for another player on the same team, who attempts to score from the cross. Play restarts with the other team having possession and playing the other way.

Equipment: Four cones, two portable goals, one or two balls, coloured bibs

Progressions: The coach can count the number of crosses in the game, or the number of goals scored and award points to the team that has amassed the highest total.

Chapter 8

GOALKEEPING

All youngsters should experience this specialist position, which is so unlike any other in the team. As the only player who can use his hands to stop the ball, many of the skills and techniques the goalkeeper needs to learn differ greatly from those needed by outfield players. The goalkeeper has a special responsibility in the team as the 'last line of defence' and can help his team win by making match-winning saves. The goalkeeper not only needs to become a good 'shot-stopper' and deal with crosses, he also is the 'first line of attack' in his team and needs to know how to throw and kick the ball accurately to start off attacking moves for his team. The drills provided are geared to the specifics of goalkeeping and they will give 'would be' goalkeepers practice in the relevant skills of the position.

Jose Luis Chilavert, the extrovert Paraguayan goalkeeper, showed the importance of being the 'first line of attack' and the 'last line of defence' in the World Cup Finals in France in 1998. Not only did he make many heroic saves for his team, but he also set up several counter-attacks with his intelligent throwing and kicking. He was also the team's main penalty and free-kick specialist. ***Photo: Shaun Botterill***

Drill 81

Purpose: Correct diving techniques

Practice set-up: The goalkeeper lies on his side along the ground, with his chest facing the coach. The coach rolls the ball along the ground to one side of the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper pushes along the ground to catch or direct the ball away. He then returns to his position and repeats the action. The coach should repeat the exercise a set number of times, but should take care not to exhaust the goalkeeper.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: Gradually extend the goalkeeper's skills by rolling the ball a little further from him, or by rolling it a little faster, so that his technique is put under continual but controlled pressure.

Drill 82

Purpose: Recovery and diving technique

Practice set-up: The goalkeeper sits on the ground faced by the coach who has a ball in his hands. The coach serves the ball to the side of the goalkeeper, who dives sideways to catch it and return it to the coach for the next service. The coach serves the ball six times to the right side and then six times to the left side.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach should gradually extend the goalkeeper by throwing the ball a little higher or further from him and alternately left and right as the session progresses.

Drill 83

Purpose: Correct diving technique

Practice set-up: The goalkeeper kneels on one knee and faces the coach, who holds a ball. The coach proceeds to toss the ball to one side of the goalkeeper, who dives to catch it and return it to the coach. (Note: the toss should be to the side where the knee is off the ground.) The coach should ensure that the goalkeeper is diving along the side of his body, so that he can see the ball clearly and use the softer part of his body to land.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: Gradually extend the goalkeeper by serving the ball faster or further from his body so that he needs to react more quickly or improve his diving techniques.

Drill 84

Purpose: Catching the ball from a cross

Practice set-up: A file of goalkeepers faces the coach, who stands to the side 13 yds away. The coach serves a high, looping throw for each goalkeeper in turn. Each goalkeeper must move and jump to catch the ball as high in its flight as possible before returning it to the coach and going to the back of the file. The goalkeeper needs to be aware of his timing and should try and come a little late so that he gathers momentum and arrives to take the ball in a forward direction.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach can stand further away and either use a javelin service or kick the ball from his hands. This increases the difficulty for the goalkeeper, who has to assess the flight of the ball and catch it at the top of his jump.

Drill 85

Purpose: Punching the ball from a cross

Practice set-up: A file of goalkeepers stands in front of and to one side of the goal. The coach, who has a good supply of balls, stands on the other side of the goal and further back. The coach serves a ball to each goalkeeper and they take turns to punch the ball high and far away from the goal, using either one hand or both. (Note: ensure children use a safe technique and wear goalkeeper gloves.) The coach should make sure that young goalkeepers watch the ball's flight carefully and punch right through the bottom part of it so that the ball travels far and high out of the danger area.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach stands at various positions on the flank and delivers a more realistic and difficult service for the goalkeeper to deal with.

Drill 86

Purpose: Positioning and shot-stopping

Practice set-up: Two players pass the ball between them in a channel 12–18 yds wide in front of the goalkeeper. They pass quickly and shoot within 1–3 passes. The goalkeeper gets practice in changing his angle and position to face each shot. A supply of balls keeps the practice flowing and the coach should ensure that the pair of players continually attack the goal, thus keeping the goalkeeper under pressure. The goalkeepers should change every three or four minutes so they can recover.

Equipment: A good supply of balls, six cones

Progressions: The coach can encourage the players shooting at goal to try and use as many varied techniques as possible to give the goalkeeper more realistic practice in positioning and stopping their shots.

Drill 87

Purpose: Practising quick reactions, positioning and shot-stopping

Practice set-up: One or two players stand behind 6–8 footballs, positioned 13 yds from the goal. The goalkeeper stands off his goal line. The player starts at the end ball and shoots in sequence as the goalkeeper reacts quickly to save each shot. The next player lines up the balls and shoots starting from the other side, moving to hit each ball in sequence until he has fired all eight shots at goal.

Equipment: Six to eight balls

Progressions: The player shooting at goal can strike *any* ball at random so that the goalkeeper has little time to react and has to move his feet and take the correct angle for the different shots. Thus he will need to make the best out of every situation in order to protect his goal.

Drill 88

Purpose: Correct diving technique

Practice set-up: A file of goalkeepers stands in the centre of the goal with a ball each in their arms. One at a time, they jog with the ball towards the coach, who stands in front in the penalty area. The coach points to the left or right and the goalkeeper dives with the ball while on the move, rolling over and recovering with the ball still in his hands. He then returns to the back of the file, awaiting his turn to repeat the action.

Equipment: A good supply of balls

Progressions: The coach can encourage the goalkeepers to dive a little higher and help them to land more effectively by getting their body into a comfortable shape and relaxing the muscles not actually used in the action.

Drill 89

Purpose: To gather a ball rolling along the ground

Practice set-up: The goalkeepers stand in a file facing the coach, who is 6–10 yds away. The coach serves the ball, with his feet or hands, along the ground for the first player to come forwards and gather the ball. The goalkeeper then uses a bowling action to roll the ball back to the coach before quickly returning to the end of the file. In this way, each goalkeeper receives fielding practice.

Equipment: One ball

Progressions: The coach can ask players to speed up play, or can roll the ball to the sides of the goalkeepers so that they have to employ better footwork.

Drill 90

Purpose: To catch a hard-driven ball at chest level

Practice set-up: Four files of players stand 8–10 yds apart in a cross formation. Two leading players on adjacent files hold a ball in their hands. The players throw the balls forcefully towards the chests of the players opposite, who catch them and throw them back to the next players in the files. After throwing the ball players join the end of the file to await their turn.

Equipment: Two balls (a few spare balls should also be available)

Progressions: Speed up play or serve the ball to the sides of the player (though not too far away) to incorporate better footwork and catching practice.

Drill 91

Purpose: Fielding a ball rolling along the ground

Practice set-up: The players stand in pairs, 3–8 yds apart. One holds the ball and faces his partner. Two lines are marked on the ground behind them to show the practice area. (Alternatively, cones can be used.) The player with the ball dribbles it along the ground, slowly driving the other player, the goalkeeper, backwards. The goalkeeper either controls the ball with his feet or gathers it with his hands and returns it quickly to the oncoming player until they reach the line. They then reverse roles and direction until they reach the opposite line and then repeat the drill.

Equipment: Two cones, one ball

Progressions: Speed up play or use various fielding techniques, such as going down on one knee, or keeping the feet together and a straight back to cup and scoop the ball up into the goalkeeper's arms from the ground.

Drill 92

Purpose: Positioning and shot-stopping

Practice set-up: A portable goal, defended by a goalkeeper, is erected using two flag poles, and a pair of players stands 10–12 yds away on both sides of the goal. One ball is shared between all the players. The players are allowed a maximum of three passes before shooting from behind the line. If the goalkeeper saves, he rolls the ball to the other pair; if the shot goes past him, he turns quickly to face a shot from the other side. In this way, the practice alternates from end to end.

Equipment: Two flag poles, four cones, one ball (keep a spare ball handy)

Progressions: The coach can ask the players to hit a specific type of shot (e.g. high in the corner or low and hard at the goalkeeper's body), thus giving the goalkeeper more realistic practice.

Drill 93

Purpose: Quick reactions, agility and shot-stopping technique

Practice set-up: The goalkeeper stands on a soft surface facing a wall or shooting board 3–6 yds away. The coach, or a player, stands behind and slightly to the side of the goalkeeper and serves the ball by hand or foot so that it rebounds from the wall. The goalkeeper sees the ball coming late and has to react or dive quickly to catch it. He rolls it back to the coach and gets ready for the next service.

Equipment: One or two balls, a rebound surface

Progressions: The coach can feed the ball a little harder or wider, or the goalkeeper can move a little closer to the wall so that there is less time for him to react to the oncoming ball.

Drill 94

Purpose: Various shot-stopping situations and throwing the ball

Practice set-up: Two portable goals (preferably with nets) are erected 10–16 yds apart, and are defended by two goalkeepers who have a good supply of balls. Each goalkeeper tosses the ball, in turn, from just in front of their own goal line, trying to score in the other goal. The other goalkeeper tries to save the ball and, in turn, throws the ball towards the far goal, and so the drill continues.

Equipment: Two portable goals, a good supply of balls

Progressions: The goalkeepers can throw the ball harder to give each other better quality practice, or the coach can ask them to serve the ball in a particular way (e.g. low or lobbing the ball under the crossbar) to give them practice at handling specific shots.

Drill 95

Purpose: Angling, positioning, shot-stopping and distribution

Practice set-up: Two portable goals (preferably with nets) are erected 10–16 yds apart, and each is defended by a pair of goalkeepers, who have a good supply of balls. One goalkeeper throws or kicks the ball towards the opposite goal to try and score. The goalkeepers take up appropriate positions to save the ball each time, and take turns to shoot at goal.

Equipment: Two portable goals, a good supply of balls

Progressions: The goalkeepers can strike the ball at goal much more aggressively. This not only gives their opponents valuable practice, but also improves their own kicking techniques, which all good goalkeepers require in the modern game.

Chapter 9

WARMING DOWN

The drills that are always done at the conclusion of the coaching session are used to help the players, who have been working hard physically and mentally, to return the body and mind to its normal state. This period should always be entertaining for young players so that they will want to come back for more; which is when small-groups, light-hearted activities and competition are used. The main function is not the development of skills, although obvious errors can be quickly pointed out, but to finish the session in a gradual fashion and to have some fun and social interaction in the process.

Lee Bowyer, the young English midfielder, could soon be pulling on a full international shirt if he continues to develop his all-round play. Although small in stature, he is energetic and mobile and can both defend and attack well. Today's players require a high level of running fitness and knowledge of how to prepare for practice as well as for matches. *Photo: Clive Brunskill*

Drill 96

Purpose: For fun, competition and to return the body to its normal state

Practice set-up: Four files of players stand behind four hoops 10–12 yds apart. Twelve balls are placed in the centre. One player from each team runs to collect a ball in his arms and carries it back to place it in his hoop. The next player from each team does likewise and so the drill continues until one team has four balls in their loop. During the drill, each player is allowed to go and steal a ball for his hoop from another team's hoop instead of from the centre, if it is advantageous for his team.

Equipment: Four hoops, twelve balls

Progressions: Add more balls.

Drill 97

Purpose: For fun, competition and to return the body to its normal state

Practice set-up: Four files of players stand behind four hoops as in drill 96, and aim to get four balls inside their hoop to win. However, instead of using their hands to carry the balls, they must dribble the ball. The same rules as in drill 96 apply. Players are not allowed to kick other balls as they practise. However, as before, they can steal another ball by dribbling it from another hoop back into their own.

Equipment: Four hoops, twelve balls

Progressions: Add more balls.

Drill 98

Purpose: Light running, competition and some flexibility work

Practice set-up: Teams compete against each other in files of players who face a cone 10–12 yds away. The front player has a ball under his arm and he proceeds to run around the cone and back to his file. He turns his back and passes the ball over his head for the rest of the file to do likewise until the ball reaches the back player, who receives the ball and repeats the drill. Each player in turn runs with the ball and passes it overhead along the team for a set number of repetitions, which is decided by the coach.

Equipment: One cone and one ball per team

Progressions: The players can perform different movements as they run to and from the file of players (e.g. side skips, running backwards, forward rolls).

Drill 99

Purpose: Fun, competition and helping the body to recover

Practice set-up: Teams line up in files facing a marker 10–15 yds away. The front player has a ball at his feet and proceeds to run with it at speed around the marker. He then returns to his file, where the remaining players stand with their legs wide apart to make a tunnel. The player passes the ball through the tunnel so that the back player stops it and proceeds to run with it around the marker. The coach sets a number of repetitions for each team.

Equipment: One cone and one ball per team

Progressions: The coach can ask each player to use different skills when running with the ball (e.g. left foot only, alternate feet, or having a player complete a full circle with the ball around the cone before returning with it to his team).

Drill 100

Purpose: Fun and warming down activity

Practice set-up: Files of players form a chain by each one holding the bottom of another's training bib or shirt at the back. The first player in the chain has a ball at his feet and, on a diamond shape 10 yds wide at each marker, he proceeds to run with the ball, keeping it under control just in front of himself as the chain moves in unison with him around the diamond. When they reach the starting point again, the first player goes to the back and the exercise is repeated. The chain must not break, otherwise the players must start again.

Equipment: Four cones, one set of coloured bibs, one ball

Progressions: A heavier medicine ball can be used, or the players can be told to move in both directions around the square.

Drill 101

Purpose: Heading and general warming down

Practice set-up: Four players, each holding a ball in their hands, stand beside a cone in a 10–15 yd square. One player stands beside a cone placed in the centre. The central player runs to each of the other players to receive a gentle underarm throw in the centre which he must head back for each player to catch. After each header, the player has to touch the centre cone before moving clockwise around the square. He performs a second circuit, but during the second circuit he runs *around the back of each player* that he heads the ball to each time, so that he finally completes eight headers in all.

Equipment: Five cones, four balls

Progressions: The central player, if the coach wishes, can be asked to perform various skills, such as passing from the ground, volleying the ball or controlling the ball before he passes.

The practice bible for youth soccer coaches

Designed specifically for players aged 7 to 11, this manual contains a wide range of progressive practice drills to help young players develop. Fun, educational and challenging, all drills are illustrated and cover the essential technical skills including:

- warming up
- dribbling and running with the ball
- passing
- shooting
- heading
- crossing
- goalkeeping
- warming down.

As well as easy-to-use instructions, each drill contains information on the equipment needed, the space required and how to organise the players.

Suitable for both new and experienced coaches, this handy resource will help young players have fun, play well – and win.

Malcolm Cook was for three years the Technical Director (Youth) at Liverpool FC and was responsible for revolutionising the club's youth scheme and assisting the early careers of established international stars such as Robbie Fowler, Steve McManaman and Dominic Matteo.

"For 30 years Malcolm Cook has shone his light down the path of soccer development and progress." Andy Roxburgh, UEFA Technical Director

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