

Midfield

10 ready made coaching sessions



Short passing

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Selecting the right passing technique.
- 2 Executing a pass effectively.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Set the ball up for pass with your first receiving touch.
- 2 Select the target you are going to pass to.
- 3 Choose the right surface to pass with early.
- 4 Make the pass at the right time (timing).
- 5 Concentrate on a firm contact (weight).
- 6 Aim for the target with your standing foot (accuracy).
- 7 Don't let the defender read where you intend to pass (disguise).



what to shout

- “Get a good first touch”
- “Hit it harder / softer”
- “Use the inside of the foot”
- “Use the laces” / “outside”
- “Pass earlier” / “hold it longer”
- “See if you can look away from your target”



what to look for

- Players selecting the wrong surface of the foot.
- Hitting the ball too softly so that it doesn't reach.
- Hitting the ball too hard so that partner has a control problem.
- Waiting too long and being closed down by a defender.
- Releasing too earlier before partner is ready to receive.
- Defenders guessing and intercepting because pass is too obvious.



what to think about

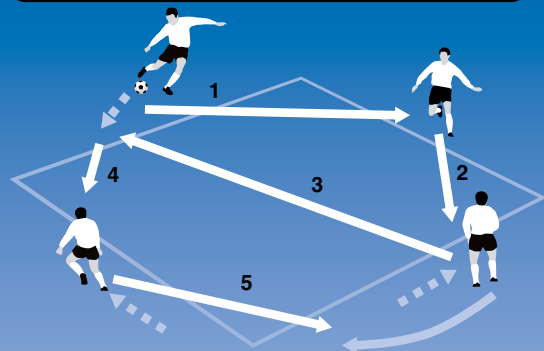
The positions players take up before receiving the ball. The body shape on striking the ball, are they relaxed and comfortable? The position of their standing (non kicking foot).

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: Outside a 10m x 10m grid stand 4 players, the practice begins with the players passing the ball across the grid on the ground or across the angles of the corners.

Stage 2: The receiving player may use two or more touches to get the ball under control and pass to a team mate. The team mate has two or more touches to receive the ball and pass back across the grid. This is repeated with the players changing the target player and the angle of the pass each time. The players must stand outside the grid. The ball is always played on the ground at this stage. Players are also encouraged to change the angle at which they support.

Short passing



Development

- 1 Restrict the players to “two touch”.
- 2 Try “one touch”.
- 3 Experiment with disguise, look one way pass the other.
- 4 Introduce, “back heels”, “tricks” and “flicks”.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Use a larger grid (20m x 20m) and place two opponents and two more team mates in the middle. Do this by joining three groups of four together. The players on the outside score by combining twice with the two on the inside to transfer the ball from one side of the grid to the opposite side. Now the team must combine passing and supporting with movement to achieve the objective.

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Receiving and turning

What you tell your players the session is about:

This session will help your players to quickly control the ball and turn away from opponents to keep the ball moving.

What you tell your players to do:

One player makes a pass into the middle player. The middle player must make a turn and pass out. The passing player now takes the middle player's position.



what to shout

- “Show disguise in your turn”
- “Eye contact before passing”
- “Communicate”



what to look for

- Look at the body shape of the receiving players. Are they ready to receive? Are they “on their toes” and ready to turn and move away at speed?
- When making the turn and pass, are they showing a disguise? Encourage them to try going one way then changing direction to make the pass.
- Do they perform this exercise at match-intensity?



what to think about

Controlling the ball, turning at speed and passing on to a team mate is a core skill that will enable your team to retain possession and build moves all over the pitch. This practice will help develop this skill in all your players. Start with simple technique but as it develops get your players to use a skill or disguise that will lose a tight defender.

What you get your players to do:

Set up: Pitch size: 20 x 10 yards (minimum) up to 30 x 15 yards (maximum).

Two cones arranged as a gate as in the diagram.

Arrange your players into two teams.

- A player from one team starts in the middle.
- He receives a pass from the other team.
- When receiving the pass he must control the ball with his back foot.
- He must then turn through the gate so that he faces the other turn.
- He can use either the inside or outside of the back foot to move the ball for the turn.
- He then passes out to his team mate.
- The team mate returns the ball to the player in the middle who makes another turn to face the player who made the original pass.
- The player in the middle now sprints out to rejoin his team and the opposite team send a player into the middle.

Receiving and turning



direction of run  pass 

Development

Add a defender in the middle. Can the player successfully turn and pass to the opposite side?

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a normal or small-sided game and encourage your players to use this technique to keep the ball moving and to switch play.

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Where does it fit? Individual skills: Control, disguise, passing
Team skills: Team work, communication, combination play

Crossing

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 How and where to deliver balls into the penalty box from wide positions.
- 2 Improving passing techniques such as swerving the ball using the inside of the foot.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Play with match-intensity.
- 2 Look up to see what's going on around you.
- 3 Think about your kicking technique.



what to shout

- “Keep it away from the keeper”
- “Head up to see where your team mates are before crossing”
- “Use weaker foot to bend the ball the other way”



what to look for

- Type of cross – near or far post, or central? Low with pace, or lofted for taller forwards? Behind the defence? Bending away from the keeper? Delivered from just inside the attacking third, or from near the goal-line?
- Are they using the appropriate technique?
- Do they aim between the six-yard box and penalty spot?



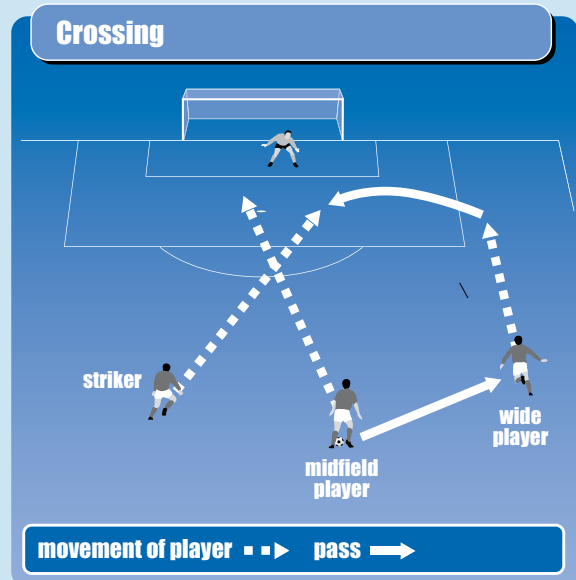
what to think about

The ability to deliver quality crosses from wide areas is a vital component in any side's attacking armoury, and the better your players become at it, the more effective your team will be at creating goal-scoring opportunities. Running this practice will show you which players are good in wide positions and will help you with your team selection and formation.

What you get your players to do:

Set-up: Use 1/3 of the pitch. Split your players into groups of three so that there is one crosser, one striker and one midfielder in each group. One goalkeeper.

- 1 The midfielder passes the ball to the wide player.
- 2 The midfielder begins a run into the penalty box.
- 3 The wide player runs with the ball inside the touchline but outside the line of the 18-yard box.
- 4 The striker begins a run into the penalty box.
- 5 The wide player crosses the ball into the penalty box for his team mates to attack.
- 6 Send in the next group.



Development

- 1 Alternate so that everybody has a go at crossing.
- 2 Switch to the left-hand side of the pitch.
- 3 Introduce a defender.
- 4 Give the attacking team a time limit, say 10 seconds, in which to score a goal.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Split your players into two teams, A and B. Half of team “A” and half of team “B” are in one half of the playing area, while the rest are in the other half, so that in each area there is a team defending and a team trying to score. Both teams have one “crossing” player in a channel to their right. Play begins when a channel player receives the ball from their goalkeeper and crosses it into their team's attacking zone. Goals can only be scored direct from, or immediately after a cross. If a goalkeeper gets possession of the ball, they throw it to their team's channel player.

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Where does it fit? **Individual skills:** Passing, running with the ball
Team skills: Movement, shooting, heading

Pressing the ball

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 When to put the opponent in possession under pressure.
- 2 How to do this as an individual and as a team.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Move quickly into position when the ball changes hands.
- 2 Demonstrate a positive aggressive attitude.
- 3 Position to stop the opponent playing or running forwards.
- 4 Adopt a stance that will force the opponent to turn or move in a predictable direction (backwards or square).
- 5 Be ready to challenge for the ball, threaten your opponent.
- 6 Keep a low centre of gravity and adopt a sideways on body position.
- 7 “Steal” the ball on a poor touch *or* tackle when you have support and cover.



what to shout

- “Move quickly” “get tight” / “not too tight”
- “Watch the ball” / “don’t dive in”
- “Sideways on” “can you steal it?”
- “Keep low” / “threaten” “stay on your feet”
- “Challenge!” / “don’t foul”



what to look for

- Players moving too late allowing players to run at them.
- Players allowing opponents to pass forwards past/over them.
- Moving too quickly without slowing down allowing opponent to beat them easily (diving in).
- Mental attitude, no aggression / too much aggression.
- Not seizing an opportunity to steal the ball or tackle.
- Diving into a rash tackle or fouling / tackling with no support.



what to think about

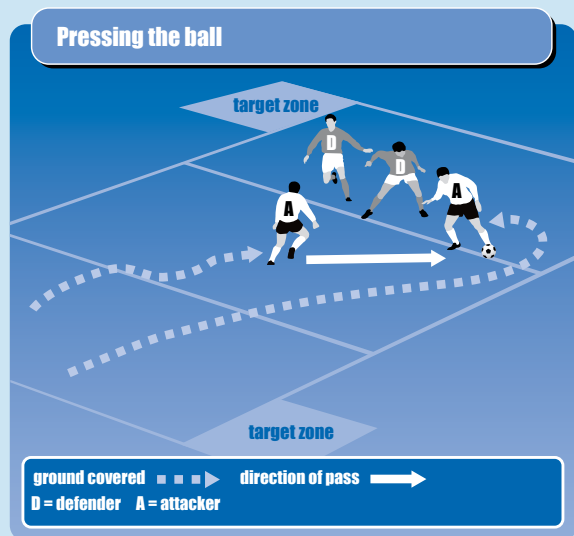
Are the players concentrating when the ball switches sides?
Are they working as a unit / team? Do they communicate?

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: In a 30m x 20m grid there is a 5m x 5m target zone. Playing 2v2 the team in possession attempts to beat their opponents and enter the target zone.

The defensive pair have to prevent this by pressing the attackers and winning the ball or putting it out of play.

The defenders should attempt to force them to play in a narrow area of the pitch; down the touchline on the target side. The first defender can only press when the ball enters the opponents defending third, then play is live.



Development

Move the target areas to the ends and make them wider as “End Zones” the defending and pressing must be better and covering becomes more crucial.

How would I put this into a game situation?

6v6 game with a half way line on a 60x40 pitch. The object is to play a long pass from your own half into the keepers hands to score. Keeper stays in “D”. a goal can also be scored by a clean header from a long pass.

The object is to press the player with the ball effectively to prevent long forward passes.

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Runs past the forwards

What you tell your players the session is about:

Midfielders making runs into the final third and beyond the centre forward in order to create confusion in the defence and to create a goal scoring opportunity.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 The forward must drop deep to receive.
- 2 The midfielders must go high and into the space behind the defenders.
- 3 The passing player must now read the defence – if they come with the forward then pass to the running midfielder, if they stay back then pass to the forward who can now turn and dribble.



what to shout

- “Movements to receive”
- “Be clever, be creative”
- “How quickly can we score”
- “Find your spare player”
- “Be direct”



what to look for

- Are the defenders confused by your attacker’s movements?
- Do the players attack with enough pace to take advantage?



what to think about

Tell your players that whatever movement the defenders make is a bad choice. If they stay back then our forward can turn and attack. If they come forward to defend, then our midfielder will get into the space behind and score. Good movement leads to a win/win situation.

What you get your players to do:

Arrange your players into 3 groups of 3.

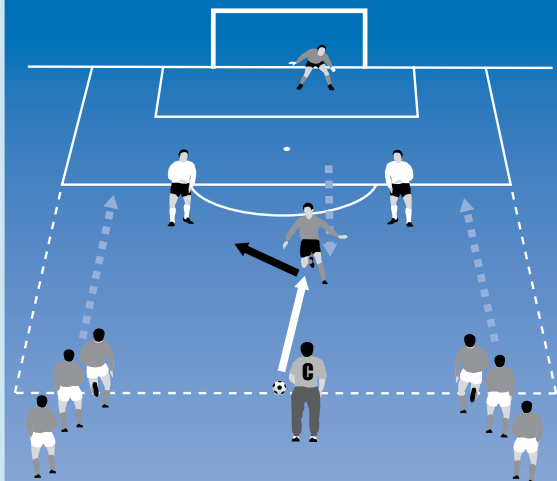
One group acts as the defenders/forward. Rotate the nominated forward.

The other two groups work in pairs to be the midfielders.

The forward must make a movement deep to receive the ball while the midfielders must sprint into an attacking wide area. The forward must try to find the midfielders with a pass.

Can they create confusion for the defenders? Can they score?

Runs past the forwards



direction of run  direction of pass  dribble  C = coach

Development

Add a retreating defender to the game, now the defenders will have some security and the attackers must be even sharper in their movements.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a normal game but instruct your wide midfielders to constantly make forward runs into the space behind the defenders. If this doesn't create space for the forwards to receive the ball to feet then it will certainly create space for their full backs to get forward and receive the ball.

Switching play

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Changing the point of attack.
- 2 Exploiting space created away from the ball.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Create space by spreading wide and stretching end to end.
- 2 Ensure good close control and quality passing.
- 3 Keep good possession before attempting to penetrate.
- 4 Look for spaces behind opponents to attack with and without the ball.



what to shout

- “Keep the ball.”
- “Open your body up” / “Keep your head up”.
- “Pass and move” / “Blind side”.
- “Where’s the space?” / “Pass it!” / “Give and go!”.
- “Keep it” / “Play safe”.



what to look for

- Players standing not moving.
- Players not taking the advantage to pass early.
- Players running too early (offside runs).
- Dribbling when an early effective pass is on.
- Crowding around the ball, not getting width and depth to create space to play.
- Players not using vision, playing with heads down.



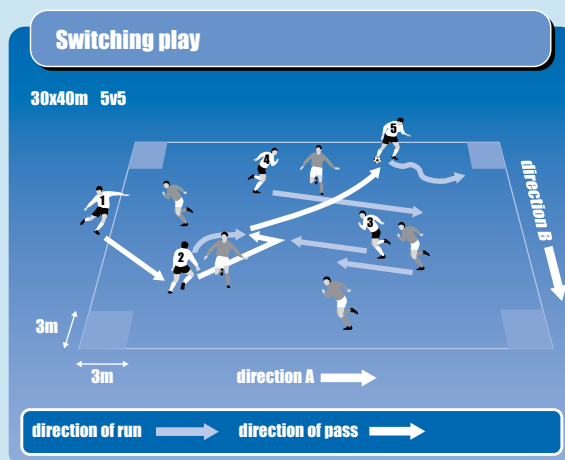
what to think about

Switching the point of attack is used to expose space created away from the ball. Defenders must be drawn out of position and towards the ball by good movement and quality passing.

Timing to pass and run into the spaces created away from the ball and the vision to see the opportunity are crucial.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: The team in possession can score in any of the corners by running or receiving the ball in the corner zones. Here player 1 passes to 2 and supports behind the ball. While the ball travels player 3 is moving towards the ball to receive a 1 touch pass from 2 who creates a new angle and plays a first time diagonal pass to 5 who has made a blind side run. 4 has created space for 5 wide by an inside run moving a defender infield.



Development:

Blues are attacking in direction A. Reds will attack the other way. To improve vision and awareness both teams can score in any direction but having attacked in direction A they keep the ball and attack in Direction B and vice-versa.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Extend the boxes along the pitch into channels and add goals and goalkeepers play a normal match but insist that a goal can only be scored from a pass supplied by a player in one of the channels.

Getting behind the ball

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Getting goalside of the ball when defending.
- 2 Helping out team mates outnumbered by attackers.
- 3 Making decisions on where to mark.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Run back as fast as possible.
- 2 Take a direct line towards your own goal.
- 3 Be aware of the position of your team mates.



what to shout

- “Get back quickly”
- “Concentrate”
- “Heads up”



what to look for

- Recovery lines should be like a funnel – wide players take a line back towards the near post, central positions head towards the penalty spot.
- Doing something useful once goalside – can your players first challenge the attacker with the ball, or if not, cover a team mate challenging for the ball? If the answer is no, they should mark an attacker, or failing that, mark space.



what to think about

It's easy for players to think that just by getting back they've done their job. They haven't – stress to them that the job of defending properly begins at that point and it's important they don't switch off mentally.

What you get your players to do:

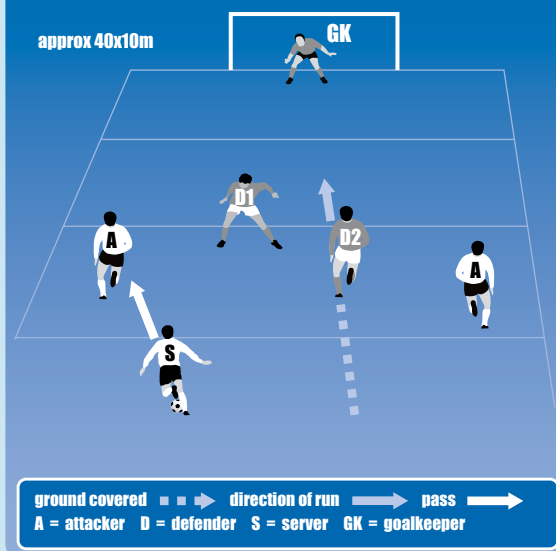
Stage 1: In an area approx 40 x 10 metres and using a full-size goal play one attacker versus two defenders.

A server begins the practice by passing to the attacker who has to try and beat the first defender and head for goal.

The second defender starts from a position approx 10m further back and can only start their recovery run once the server has passed the ball.

Stage 2: Switch players so everyone has a turn at getting goalside.

Recovery runs



Development

Add a second attacker.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Encourage players in any small-sided games – for example 3v3, 4v4 – to get goalside of the ball when their team has lost possession.

The short throw-in

What you tell your players the session is about:

- 1 Restarting the game after the ball has gone out of play.
- 2 Retaining possession.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Face the pitch.
- 2 Use both hands.
- 3 Find a team mate.



what to shout

- “Keep both feet on the ground”
- “Throw it to feet”
- “Make it easy for your team mate”



what to look for

- Gripping the ball firmly but comfortably.
- Loose arms, elbows bent and flared out.
- Feet about shoulder-width apart, with part of each foot either on the touch line or on the ground outside the pitch.
- The ball going back past the ears.
- The ball released immediately after passing the front of the head.
- The team mate being able to control the ball easily with either foot because the throw is accurate and has the right pace.
- Use of a run-up, bent knees and an arched back if going for distance.



what to think about

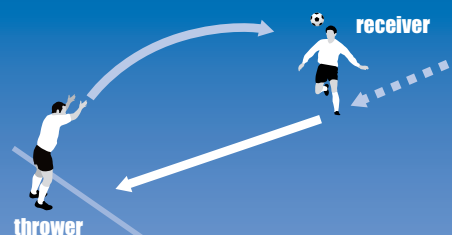
The most common cause of a foul throw is when a player lifts a foot when throwing the ball. This can be a result of the player trying to throw the ball too hard. If the player keeps repeating this mistake tell them to relax and concentrate on getting the ball back into play, or try standing with their feet together.

What you get your players to do:

Stage 1: Using a touchline put the players in pairs. One player throws the ball to their partner who passes it back on the volley.

Stage 2: Get the receiver to change the angle of where they stand and use their other foot. Switch roles so all players have a go at being the thrower.

The short throw-in



direction of throw → ground covered - - - →
direction of return pass →

Development

The receiver now drops back about 10 metres before running in towards the thrower. While they are moving, the thrower throws the ball so the receiver can return the ball before it hits the ground.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a small-sided match, for example a game of possession with no goals. When the ball goes out of play on any of the four sides of the pitch, the game is restarted with a throw in.

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Passing and communicating

What you tell your players the session is about:

Learning to communicate with team mates in order to improve the team and the individual.

What you tell your players to do:

This session consists of two phases:

- 1 Players must pass to each other in a numbered sequence.
- 2 Players must communicate what they want to happen after the pass.



what to shout

- “Eye contact before the pass”
- “Give the receiver some information”



what to look for

- Are your players looking up at the receiver first before making the pass?
- Do your players make eye contact with each other?
- Is the passer giving sensible, useful instructions to the receiver?
- Are your players using good passing technique and making it easy for each other to control the ball?



what to think about

A great many of the mistakes which occur in soccer can be avoided with effective communication. If we teach young players to communicate early in their soccer education they will help overall team-play immeasurably and are likely to see more of the ball themselves.

What you get your players to do:

Set-up: Mark out a grid approx 30 x 30 metres, use 6 players at a time, and number the players 1 to 6.

Practise 1: Tell your players to pass the ball in number sequence i.e. player 1 passes to player 2 who passes to player 3, etc.

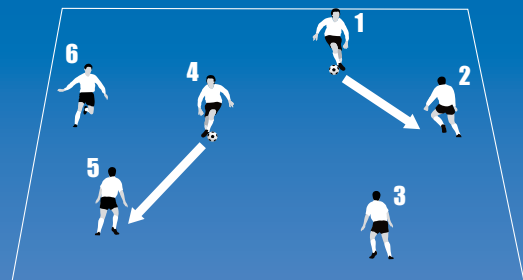
Practise 2: Now the players have 3 choices –

- 1 pass to the central player and call “turn”, then swap places with the central player;
- 2 pass to one of the wide coaches and call “overlap”; or
- 3 pass to one of the wide coaches and call “one-two”.

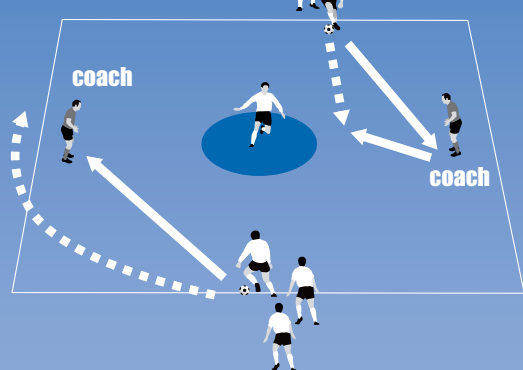
Upon completion of the move, the player dribbles out to the opposite side.

Passing and communicating

Practise 1



Practise 2



movement of player ■ ■ ► pass →

Development

For practice 1, add an extra ball to see if your players can keep their concentration.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a small-sided game. Each time a player doesn't call or communicate when making a pass the ball is given to the opposite team.

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Possession game

What you tell your players the session is about:

This session is about making your extra player count i.e. using your extra players to full advantage and keeping possession of the ball.

What you tell your players to do:

- 1 Keep your head up.
- 2 Look for the movement of your team mates.
- 3 Pass quickly and accurately.
- 4 Make your passes easy to receive.



what to shout

- “Keep the ball moving”
- “Be able to receive”
- “Pressure the ball”
- “Cut off the pass option”



what to look for

- Tempo of passing.
- Movements to receive.
- Do the players use the space?



what to think about

Do your players understand from the outset what they are trying to achieve with this session? Do they understand the value of keeping possession? Are they looking up and seeing the opportunities presented by the spaces? Are they able to create space with smart movement? If not, stop the game occasionally to point out the opportunities.

What you get your players to do:

The pitch is a 30 x 30 metre area with a smaller 15 x 15 metre area in the middle (see diagram).

One team has four players, the other team has 6 players. The team with four players plays 4 v 2 against 2 players in the 15 x 15 metre area.

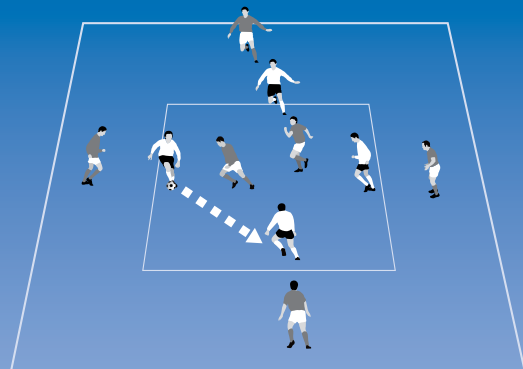
If the ball is won by the two defenders then they quickly pass out to their outside team mates.

Now the game commences 6 v 4 in the 30 x 30 metre area.

The four players must now try to win possession.

If successful then the game reverts to the 15 x 15 metre area. Each team scores a goal for every set of 5 passes completed.

Possession game



direction of pass →

Development

If your players are slow to release the ball introduce a time limit of 5 seconds, otherwise they concede possession.

How would I put this into a game situation?

Play a normal game but have two neutral players. Whichever team is in possession of the ball must try to use the two neutrals to their advantage.

[Click here to download the index](#)

Where does it fit? Individual skills: Movement, control, passing, awareness, communication

Team skills: Combination play, awareness of space, supporting each other, communication, team work

How to use these sessions

Print off the session and take it to training. It should take you less than five minutes to read the instructions, set up the session, and then you are ready to communicate what happens to your players.

Number of players

You only need six players to complete a session, though it can easily be expanded to meet your needs. With lots more players you could have a number of grids working at the same time.

Timings

The timings are for a twenty minute session, but it can be expanded or reduced to meet your needs. It's your call.

As a rule of thumb 10 minutes would be enough time for a well executed first drill, development and feedback. Any shorter and you have not explored the full skill range or asked enough questions of the players. Longer is fine as long as you feel the session is developing. The game related element adds another 10 minutes.

Equipment

The equipment used is simple. A set of cones (or trainers or tops) as markers and a couple of balls.

You can add in other equipment where you feel you need them – we just assume that you don't have them because sometimes the shed is locked or another coach is using them.

Training area

The size of the training area is left for you to decide. Smaller players need a smaller area, but the session will never need more than a 20m x 20m grid for initial drills. The smaller the area the more intense the training.

The standard and age groups

These sessions are based on the core skills of soccer. They will challenge any standard because a player can always perform the core better.

The "development" ideas can be used to differentiate between the different standards of your players; the "think about" section can challenge the more advanced; the "game related situations" can change the contact situations the teams face.

Players should wear shin pads in all coaching sessions. They should be suitable to the player's physique and worn correctly with socks pulled up.

Elements of the session

What to tell your players the session is about:

This is your introduction and outlines the objectives of the session. Just read this out. The players then have an objective. Return to this at the end of the session to see if you have achieved your objectives.

What you tell your players to do:

This is how you want your players to achieve the objectives. You can tell the players straight away how to achieve the objectives, or you can tease it out of them as the session goes on.

What you get your players to do:

This shows you how the session is going to work. Depending on what is going to be achieved, it sets out what actions the players are going to take. There are no exact measurements, or complicated patterns – the approach is "simple, stupid, successful". Slow motion the first few patterns – get the drill right and the skill right first before speeding up. Use the "What to shout" prompts to keep the players focused. Use the "What to look for" to keep your eye on why the players might be failing.

Development

No session is worth doing unless there is some form of progression. Normally there will be an increase in pressure, say by adding more defenders, or by restricting the time available. Other areas for you to think about are: Where do I stand as coach? Do I throw the ball into the grid?

How would I put this into a game situation?

All the elements of the session are geared to the game, but this section puts the session one step away from a full game, with attack, defence and a goal line.

What to shout

Have the words handy, because apart from the usual words of encouragement, it is good to shout the key factors to players. Of course you can hold some of these "shouts" back and ask the players to identify how they can improve.

What to look for

You need to keep your eyes open for "best practice". This section helps you identify quickly where players might go wrong so you can quickly put them right.

Think about

Here you have the chance to challenge the players and situation, either by using feedback or just asking yourself the questions. It is a little more advanced and might not be appropriate for your players.

Where does it fit:

To help you file and order our coaching we have given you the core areas of individual and team skills that the session covers.