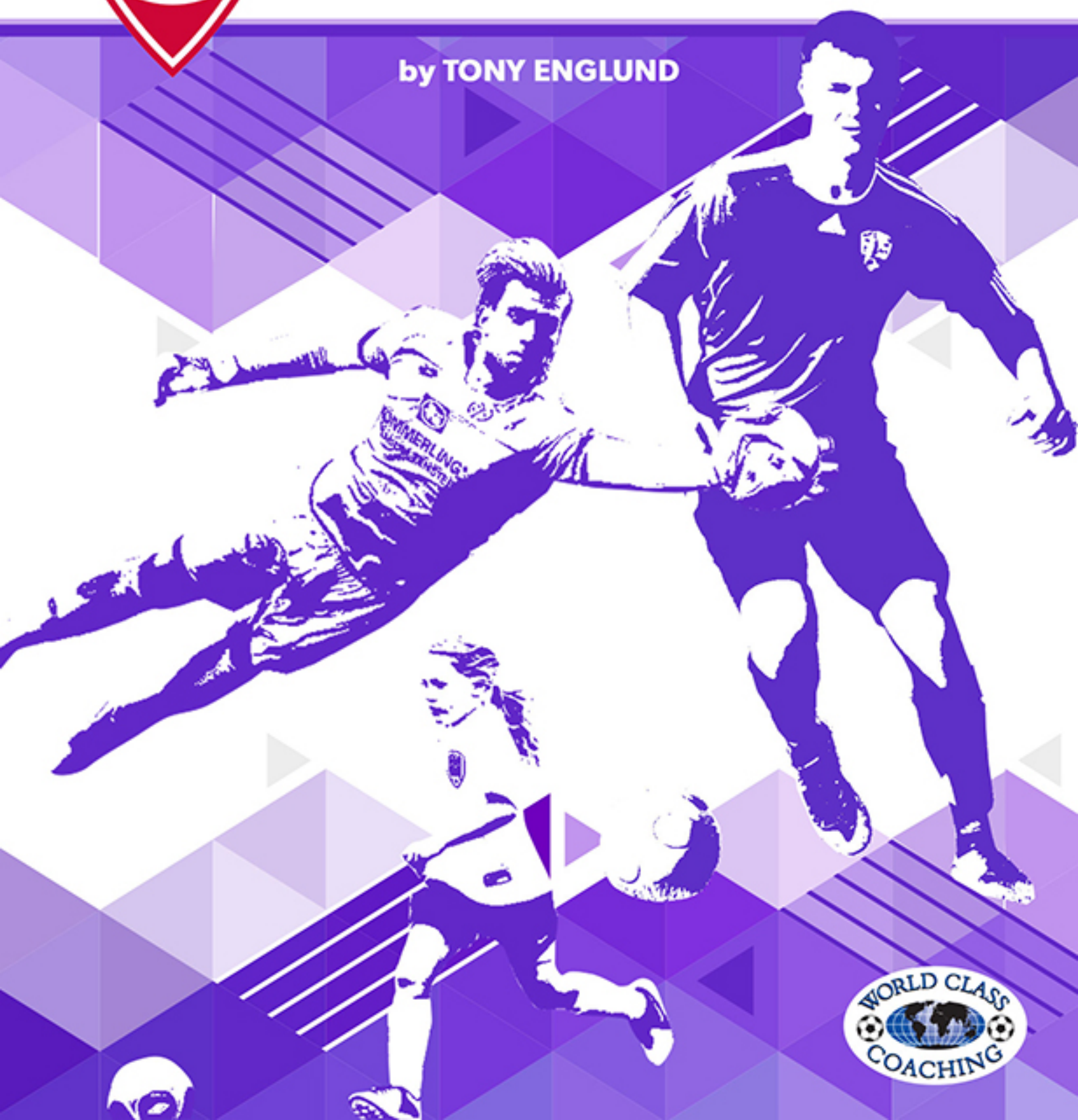


CLUB CURRICULUM



# FUN TRAINING GAMES

by TONY ENGLUND



# **Teaching Soccer Through Fun Games**

*by*  
Tony Englund

*Published by*  
WORLD CLASS COACHING

# Teaching Soccer Through Fun Games

First published April, 2017 by  
WORLD CLASS COACHING 12851 Flint St Overland Park, KS 66213

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By Tony Englund

Edited by Tom Mura



*Published by*  
WORLD CLASS COACHING



# Teaching Soccer Through Fun Games

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75 games that teach young players a full range of skills in fun, easy-to-coach environments. Includes full-color diagrams, detailed instructions and coaching tips, practice planning assistance and numerous progressions and variations.

**Tony England**

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## **Introduction: Coaching young children**

The starting point for any adult planning to mentor young children is to be certain to adopt the proper perspective in developing a philosophy of coaching that reflects a thorough understanding of the differences between adults and children. Simply put, coaching 6-8 year olds has very little to do with competition and much more to do with introducing young people to physical activity, social interaction in the team setting and having fun playing the game of soccer.

Adults must take into account the physical and psychological abilities and needs of young children in planning and also coaching activities for 6-8 year olds. Children at these ages have immature and growing skeletal and cardiovascular systems that influence their motor abilities. They have limited agility and often go very hard, become exhausted and stop, and then quickly recover. Psychologically, young children have a fragile and evolving self concept that needs consistent nurturing through social acceptance and adult approval of their *efforts* (as opposed to results), and though they are intrinsically motivated, they do not have the sense of competition that is present in older children and adults.

In addition to accounting for the physical and psychological needs of young children, coaches must also attempt to understand why children play soccer (or any sport), and try to design the team experience to nurture those motivations. Fun, exercise, being with their friends and skill development are all important considerations for young children in this sense. There are numerous studies in print outlining the reasons why children quit playing sports (as many as 75% by age 13). Not surprisingly, those reasons mirror the motivational elements that draw children to participate, as not having fun or improving and not being with their friends are among the chief reasons kids stop playing.

The message, then, is a simple, but very important one: Young children have different physical and psychological needs and abilities than adults and the latter must coach to the needs of the former, not to the needs of a fully mature adult. Children generally play sports for exercise, fun and skill acquisition, not to win, and, as a mentor once explained to the author, "Coaches at this age should judge their success this year not based on wins and losses, but rather on the number of kids who sign up to play again next year."

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## **Organizing a practice session**

One of the most important aspects of coaching is preparation. Even at the youngest ages, players and parents will recognize whether a coach has taken the time to organize his or her thoughts and create an effective, coherent practice plan.

### **Preparation elements:**

- Practice plan: Which exercises will be used and for how much time? What are the key teaching points? The coach should have a written plan for every session.
- Equipment: What types and how many balls, vests, cones, goals, etc. will be needed? Don't forget a ball pump!
- Safety: The coach should walk the practice area before each session, checking for items that could pose a danger to children. In addition, the coach should carry a phone with emergency numbers for all players. The coach or manager should always have a first-aid kit on site. Lastly, the coach should be the first to arrive and the last to leave training, assuring that there is adult supervision of children at play and that no child is left alone at the field. It is recommended that two adults be present at all times.

### **U6/U8 Practice**

Children at these ages are in the midst of acquiring motor and mental skills, and their U6/U8 experience is often their introduction to the game of soccer. Training for coaches in these age groups consistently emphasizes that the primary goal is for children to have fun and to *play games* that familiarize them with the basic skills and rules of the game.

### **Training time**

Roughly equal to the length of a game, and generally not more than an hour.

**Composition:** About ½ (usually the final portion of practice) of every training session should be spent just letting children play soccer. The remainder of the time should be built around a variety of dribbling and ball-striking games. It is recommended that the coach select a couple activities from both part 1 and part 2 of this book. It is important to remember that at this age, children are ready to change activities fairly quickly and it is important to give them new tasks and challenges every few minutes to keep practice fun and exciting.



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## **Sample Training Session**

Team: U6 Pumas  
Date: 10/10/2010  
Time: 6-7pm  
Location: LWB  
Number of players: 8

Theme: Individual attacking  
Equipment: Balls; vests (2 colors); disc cones; tall cones.

### Activity #1

#### **Cone chaos** - 20x20 yard grid

Scatter tall cones around the grid area, leaving some upright and some tipped over. Each player has a ball. The players dribble around the area and stop their ball to stand up tipped over cones. If a cone is standing, they can use the inside of their foot to tip it over (no kicking – safety first!). This activity is a good warm-up for very young players to mix dribbling with a bit of agility and fun.

### Activity#2

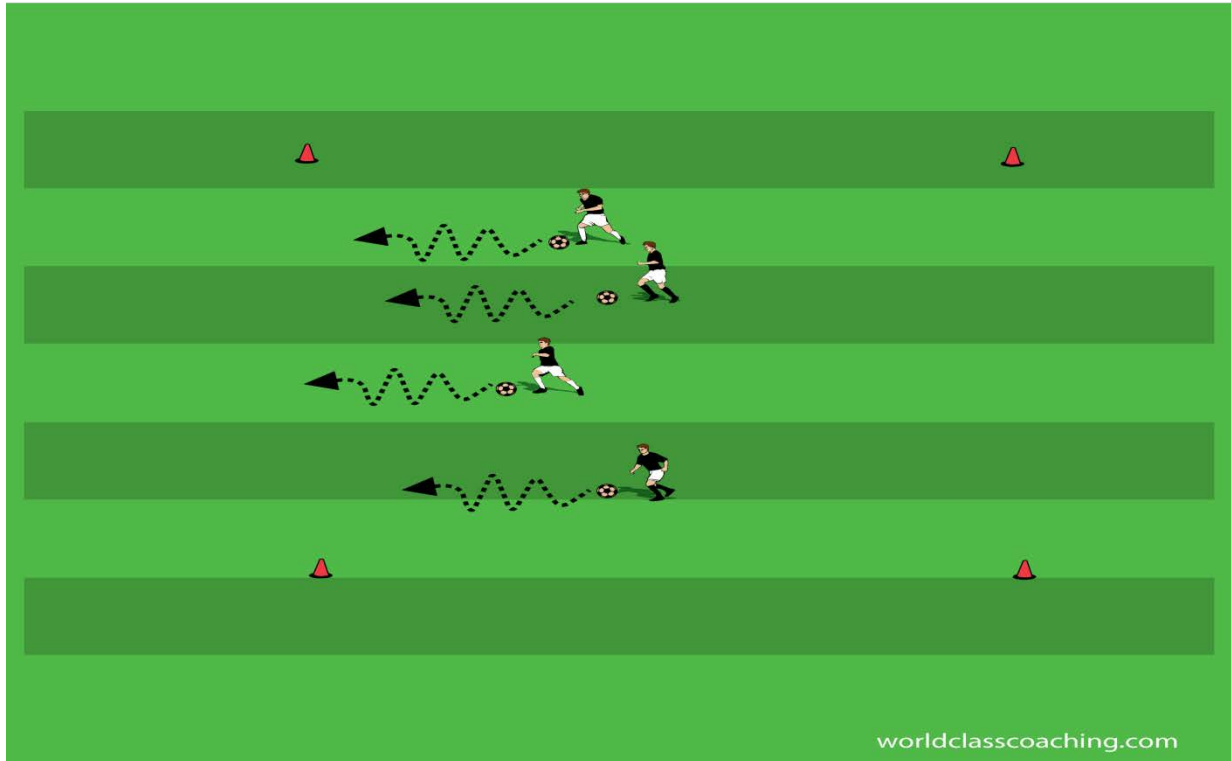
#### **FTL (Follow the leader) dribbling** - 20x20 yard grid

Players are organized in pairs with one ball for each player. Designate one player as the leader for each pair. The leaders dribble around the area and their partners must follow them and mimic their touches and speed as closely as possible. This is a simple exercise, but one that players tend to enjoy immensely once they are comfortable. It is very important for the coach to give some ideas for the leaders as to what they can do before starting the first period of play.

Some ideas:

- Change speed
- Change direction.
- Change the foot they use to dribble.
- Change the surface (inside or outside) they use to touch the ball.

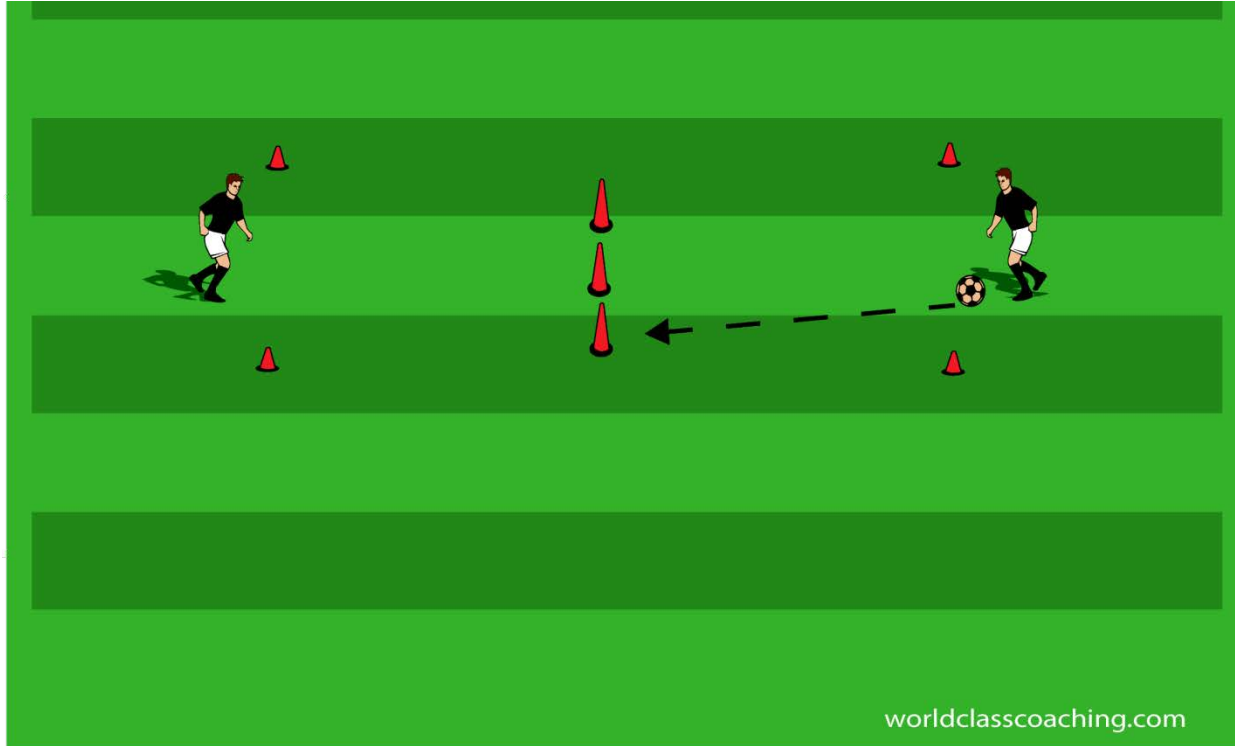
### Activity #3



#### **Ice Cream?! - 20x20 yard grid**

Each player has a ball. The coach assigns a flavor of ice cream to each of the four lines on the perimeter of the grid. Players dribble around the grid changing speeds and surfaces. The coach calls out a flavor of ice cream and the players must quickly dribble over the appropriate line before returning to the grid.

#### Activity#4



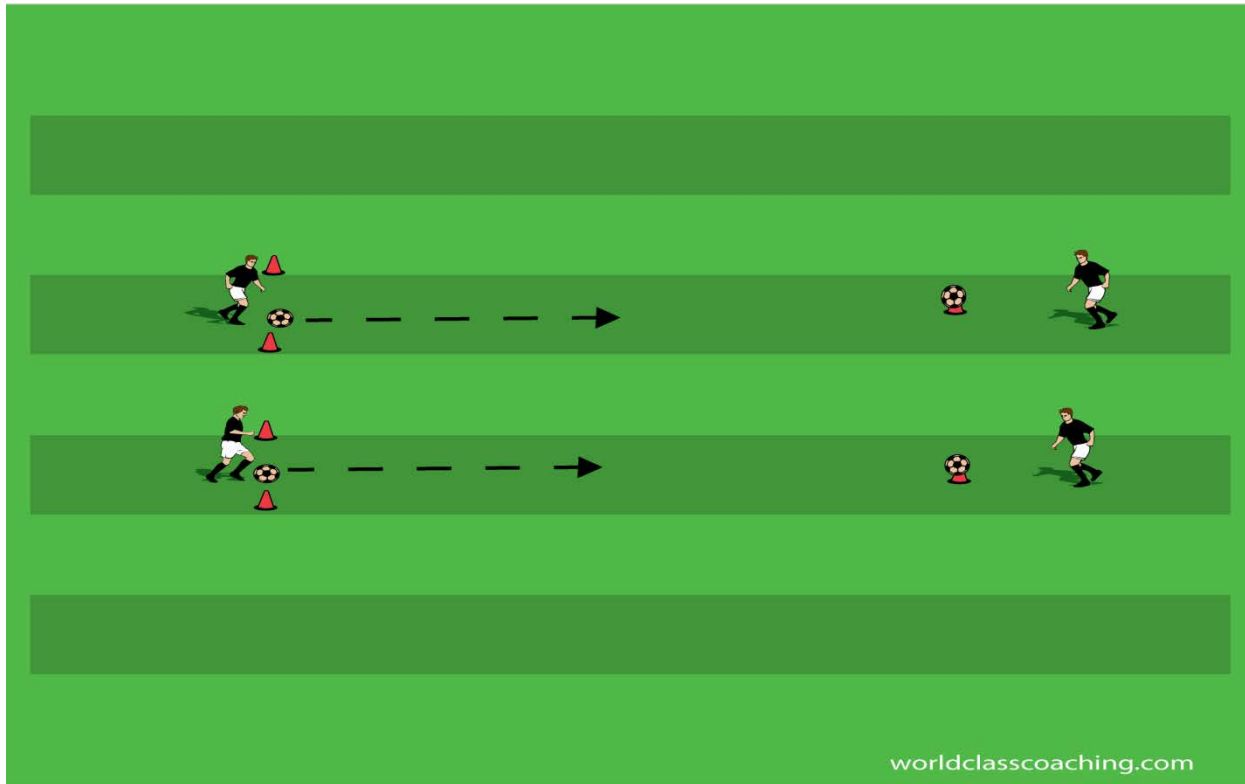
#### **Bowling!** - 4x12 yard lanes

Players work in pairs with one ball. Put one player at each end of the lane and give one player the ball to start. Place three tall cones in the middle of the lane. Players take turns passing the ball in an attempt to knock over the cones. When one player has knocked down two cones, she wins that “frame” and the cones are reset to play again. The key points of emphasis are the use of the inside surface (accuracy), locking the ankle of the passing foot, and pointing the toes of the standing foot toward the target cone.

#### Variations

- The coach should adjust the length of the lane so that players are challenged but also enjoy some success.
- Play for five minutes and then change partners and play again.
- It is also useful to require players to play a frame or more with their “off” foot.

## Activity#5



### **Pineapple Drop** - 10x15 yard areas

Divide the group into teams of 3-4. One player puts her ball atop the group's cone and then steps behind to monitor and retrieve errant shots. The other players form a line and proceed to pass/strike their balls (one at a time) in an effort to knock the 'pineapple' off of the cone. When a successful shot is made, the shooter puts her ball atop the cone and becomes the monitor. Play for two minutes and check scores.

### Variations

- Players must use their off foot to strike the ball.
- Vary the length of the shot area.

---

**Practice planning form**

Team:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Number of players:

Theme:

Equipment:

Activity #1:

Activity#2:

Activity #3:

Activity#4:

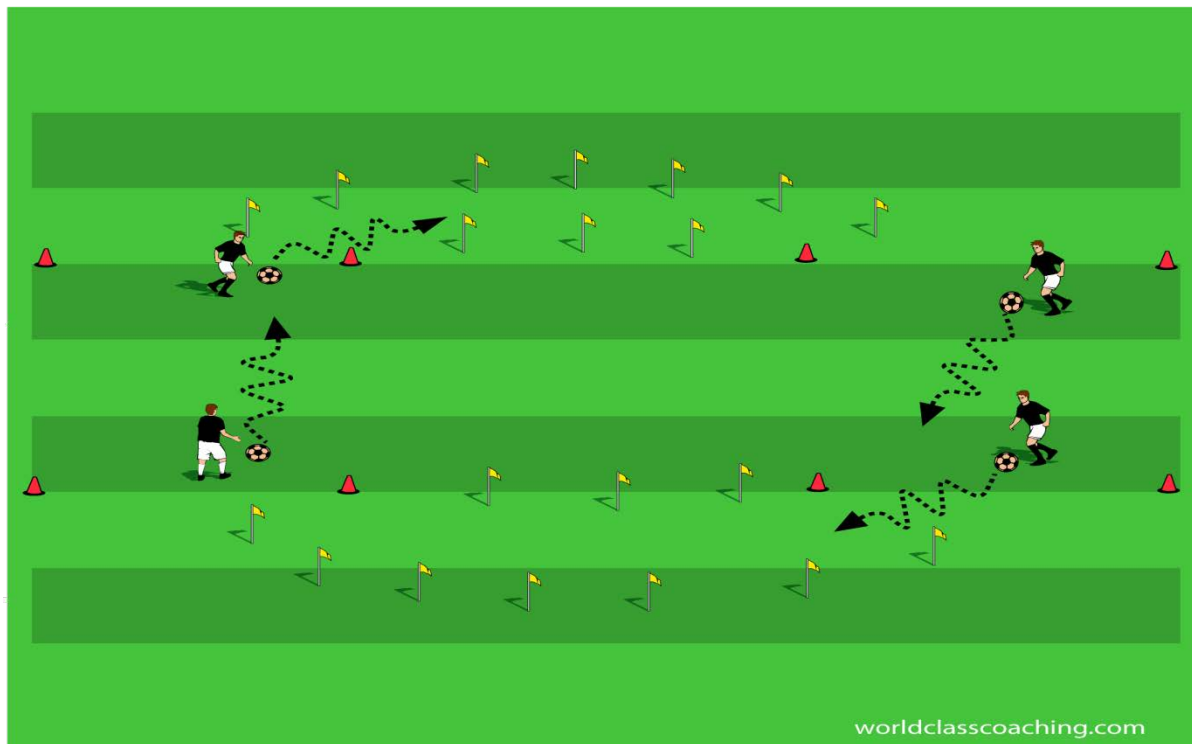
Activity#5:

Activity#6:

## **Part 1: Dribbling games!**

### Coach

- Comfort on the ball. Each of the games in this section will allow players to get many touches on the ball, increasing their comfort level in possession.
- Changes of surface. Players should begin to acquire the ability to use the inside, top, bottom and outside of both of their feet in possession.
- Changes of speed. Players should understand that through changes of speed they can create or exploit space in possession.
- Changes of direction. By suddenly and frequently changing direction, players create more space and new possibilities for attacking.



### **Subway dribbling** - 2 12x12 yard grids

Each player has a ball. Players are placed in equal numbers in the two grids. Players dribble around varying speed and surfaces used to dribble. At a signal from the coach, the players dribble out of their grids and through either 'subway' to the other grid, where play continues.

### Variations

- Use only one foot in the subway.
- Coach uses a visual signal to initiate move to subway.
- Race: Which team can get through the subway and into the other grid first?
- Add a ball thief in the middle of the subway. Anyone who loses their ball gets it back right away and continues.

---

### **Red light/green light** - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players dribble around the area. The coach gives the following cues: Green: Dribble; Yellow: Speed up! (point out that this does not apply with real traffic lights!); Red: Stop! Play for a minute, compliment-ing good stops and changes of speed.

#### Coach

- Players should focus on keeping the ball close to them and avoiding contact with other players and their soccer balls. Young players will learn to anticipate the need to stop and the use of the sole of their foot for stopping the ball. Also emphasize the importance of dribbling to open space within the grid

### **Body part dribbling** - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players dribble around the area. The coach gives cues as to which body part must be used to stop the ball. This is a fun game designed to build coordination for young players. Suggested cues: Knees; shin; sit on the ball; elbow; ear; nose; back. Emphasize safety first and this is one exercise where the coach might participate to add to everyone's fun. Play for two minutes.

### **Body fun dribbling** - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball and they dribble around the area, changing speeds and surfaces used to dribble as frequently as possible. When the coach calls out a number, the players must dribble as fast as possible to the perimeter of the grid and then stop their balls. The players then have to touch the ball with as many different body parts as the number called out by the coach.

### **Zen dribbling** - 20x20 yard grid

Players are organized in pairs with one ball for each group. Partners lock arms and one player has the ball and must keep her eyes closed. The other partner provides verbal and physical guidance for the partner in possession. This is a cooperative exercise designed to get players to help each other problem-solve. Play for thirty seconds and then change roles. Play several rounds, being sure to have players change partners frequently so that communication is built across the group. Encourage the instructing player to use specific cues and to give compliments where appropriate. The leading player should work to keep the ball with the dribbling player, in the grid and also away from other pairs and their soccer balls.

### **Mushroom farm** - 20x20 yard grid

Place numerous items ('mushrooms' -cones, vests) on the ground inside the grid. Appoint one mushroom farmer (wears a distinctive vest). The mushroom farmer starts in the grid. All other players have a ball and start on the perimeter of the grid. At a signal from the coach, players dribble into the grid and 'pick' mushrooms by grabbing items (1 mushroom per trip into the grid) and carrying them out of the grid to their start spot. If the farmer kicks away a player's ball or tags them, the player must drop any mushroom they are carrying and exit the grid (and recover their ball) before continuing. Play until the grid is empty and then see who picked the most mushrooms. Play again with a different farmer.

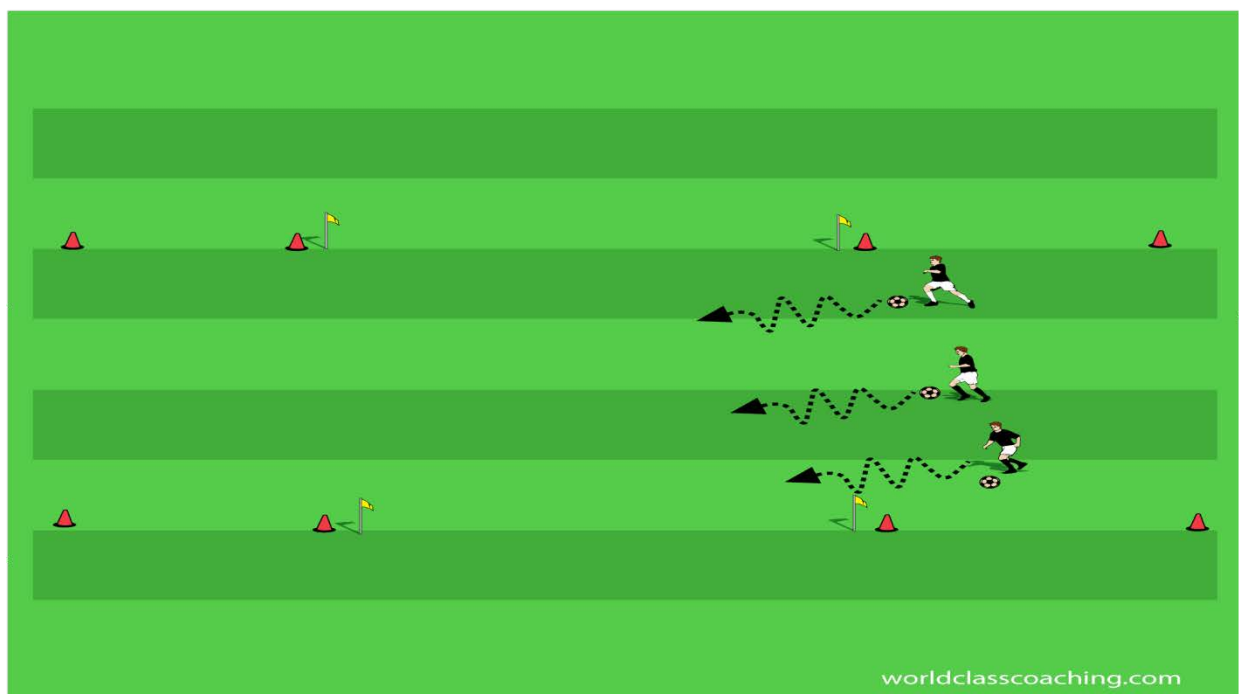
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### Follow the line dribbling - full field

Players dribble along the lines of the field, following the coach. Can they dribble the ball on the line and keep up with the coach?

#### Progression

- The coach stops the group and explains the meaning of each line to the group. This is a great way to introduce the rules of the game to young players.
- Restrict dribbling to one foot only (alternating inside and outside touches), change speeds and change directions on occasion to keep the exercise fresh for the players.
- Give each of the players a chance to lead the group.



### River dribbling - 20x25 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players begin on one 'bank.' At a signal from the coach, players dribble with their 'fish' (ball) across the bank, through the river and across the bank on the other side. The coach should indicate any dribbling restrictions (i.e. one foot only; stop and go on command; one touch for each step, etc.).

#### Variations

- Vary the technique to be performed in the river.
- Pass the ball from the edge of the bank to the river and run onto it before dribbling across the other bank.
- Place 'rocks' (cones) in the river. Players must dodge rocks while dribbling.
- Place crabs (seated or standing) in the river who try to win a ball from the dribblers. If they succeed, the two change roles.



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### **Junkyard** - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball and they dribble around inside the grid. The coach spreads various items around the area outside of the grid (shoes, clip board, vests, etc.). On the call from the coach, players dribble their ball around a called item and back into the grid. The first player to return to the grid earns a point.

### **FTL (Follow the leader) dribbling** - 20x20 yard grid

Players are organized in pairs with one ball for each player. Designate one player as the leader for each pair. The leaders dribble around the area and their partners must follow them and mimic their touches and speed as closely as possible. This is a simple exercise, but one that players tend to enjoy immensely once they are comfortable. It is very important for the coach to give some ideas for the leaders as to what they can do before starting the first period of play.

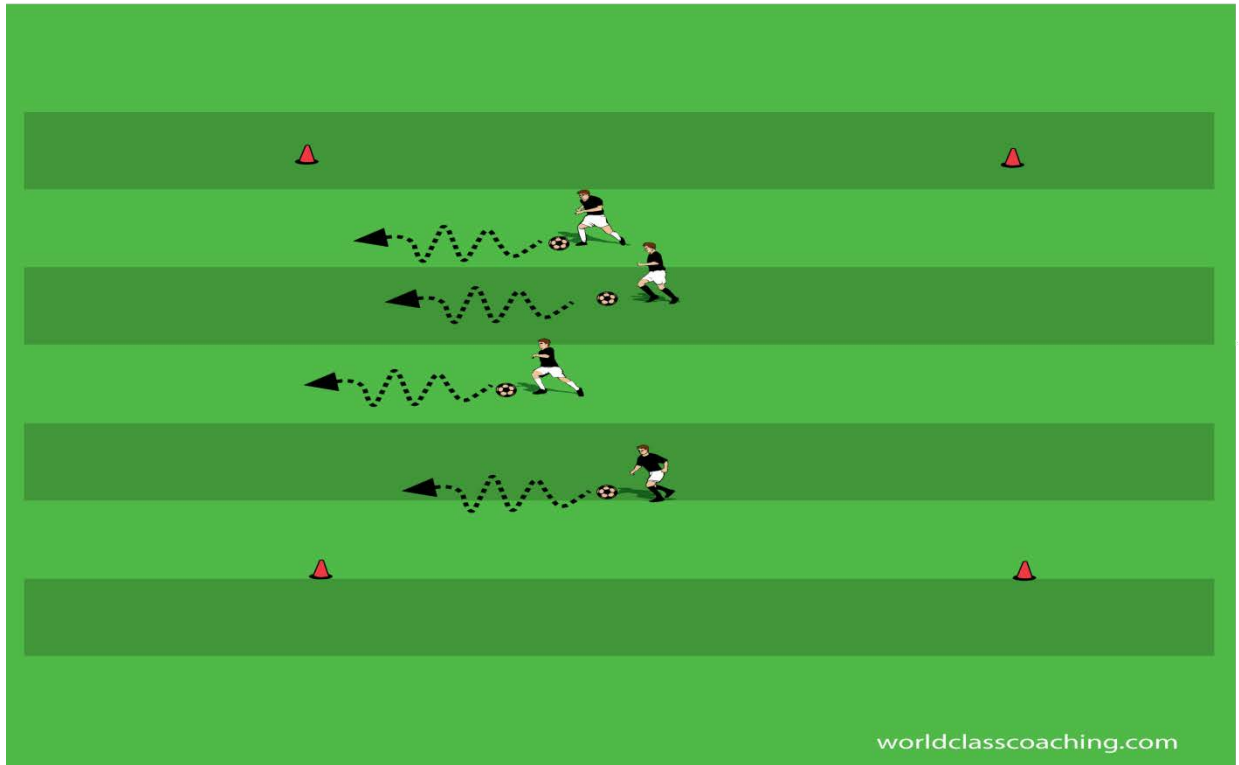
Some ideas:

- Change speed
- Change direction.
- Change the foot they use to dribble.
- Change the surface (inside or outside) they use to touch the ball.

There are also fun diversions that can be incorporated, including: Stop the ball with a body part (i.e. left ear); run around the ball and then continue to dribble; fall down and get up and dribble; sing while one dribbles, and the list goes on...The best part of this exercise for the players is that they have control and they tend to be very creative given the chance. Change roles after 30 seconds and play again. Then change partners and play again.

### **Cone chaos** - 20x20 yard grid

Scatter tall cones around the grid area, leaving some upright and some tipped over. Each player has a ball. The players dribble around the area and stop their ball to stand up tipped over cones. If a cone is standing, they can use the inside of their foot to tip it over (no kicking – safety first!). This activity is a good warm-up for very young players to mix dribbling with a bit of agility and fun.



### **Ice Cream?! - 20x20 yard grid**

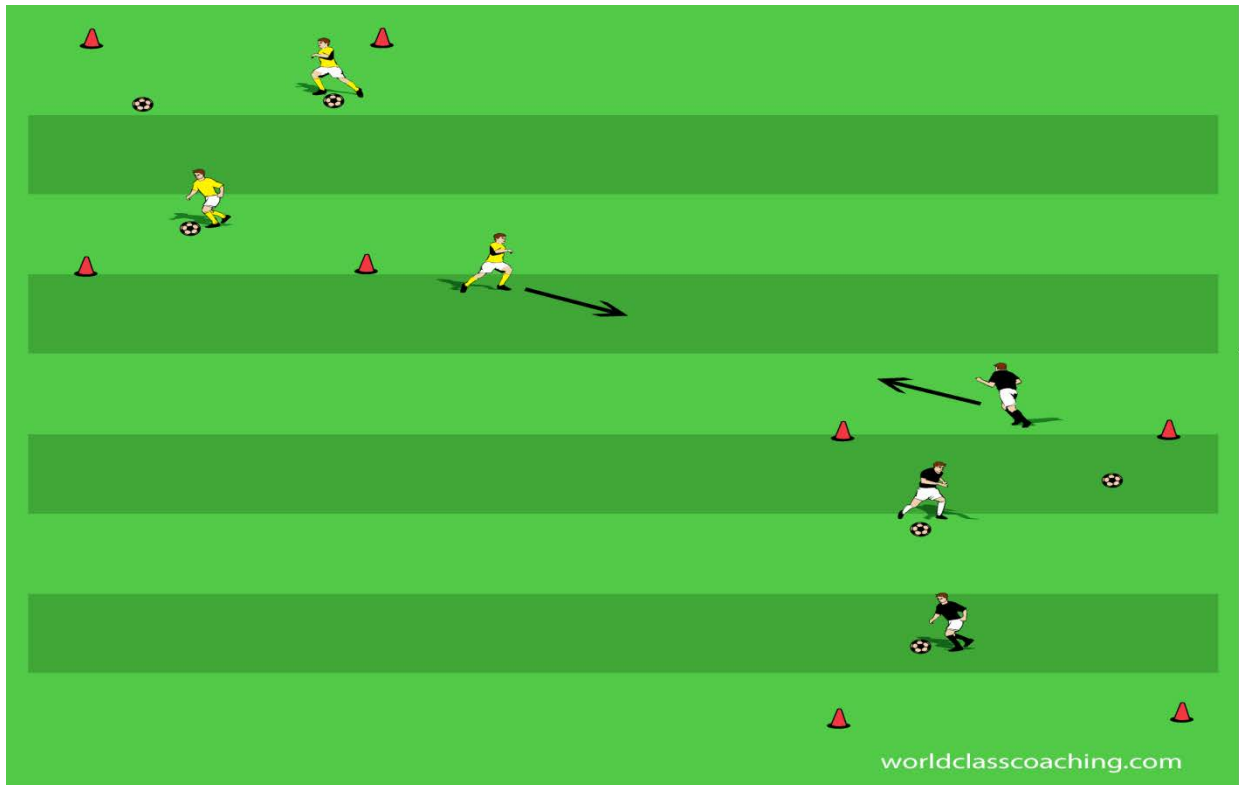
Each player has a ball. The coach assigns a flavor of ice cream to each of the four lines on the perimeter of the grid. Players dribble around the grid changing speeds and surfaces. The coach calls out a flavor of ice cream and the players must quickly dribble over the appropriate line before returning to the grid.

#### Variations

- Dribble around corner cones rather than running out over lines.
- Players name each line for some other commodity (favorite dessert, tv show, candy bar, soccer player).

### **Awareness tag - 20x20 yard grid**

Each player has a ball. This tag game challenges players to keep their ball and attempt to tag other players. For the tag to count, it must be applied to the target's back and before the target calls out the name of the player applying the tag. If the players do not know each other's names yet, then they can call out the color of the player's t-shirt or other identifying information. The idea here is to improve dribbling skills while also teaching players to be aware of the space around them. Play for two minutes and then check scores.



### **Grid tag with ball - 2 15x15 yard grids**

Each player has a ball. Divide the team into two groups, putting one group into each grid. At a signal from the coach, one player on each team leaves her ball and runs into the opposing grid. She stays there until she can tag one of the other team's players and then sprints back to her own grid. The first player to return earns a point for her team. Give each player a chance to be the runner.

### **Tail tag with ball - 20x20 yard grid**

Each player has a ball at their feet and a scrimmage vest tucked into the back of their shorts ('tail'). Players dribble around the area trying to tug out other players' tails. If a player loses her tail, she dribbles to the edge of the grid and fixes her tail, then re-joins play. Play for three minutes.

### **Hospital tag - 20x20 yard grid**

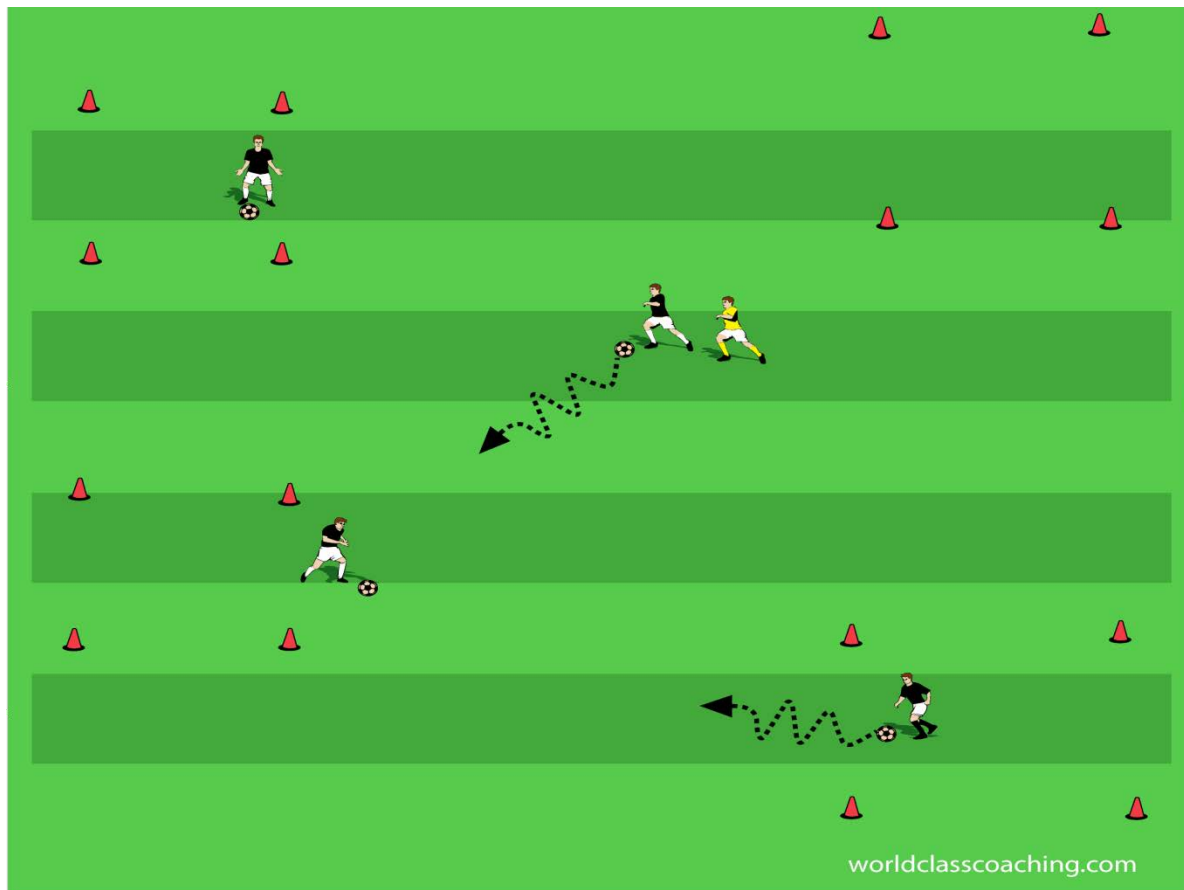
Each player has a ball. This is a tag and dribbling game that challenges players to get creative tags on other players while also keeping their ball and avoiding being tagged. When a player is tagged once, she must "cover" the "wound" with one hand. The second "wound" is covered with the other hand and it is worth noting that this player can no longer tag anyone else. With a third tag, the player must go to the "hospital," which is the perimeter of the grid. There, the player does six dribbling touches at which point she is "healed" and may reenter play. Encourage players to be creative with their tags (i.e. a lower leg tag creates a funny-looking dribble) and to be safe in applying tags (soft tags and avoid the face, etc.). Play for three minutes.

### Statue Tag - 20x20 yard grid

Two defenders stand outside the grid to start. All other players have a ball and spread out inside the grid. At a signal from the coach, the defenders enter the grid and attempt to tag the dribblers. If a dribbler gets tagged, she stops and holds her ball above her head. Statues can be revived by a dribbler with a dribble/pass between the statues' legs. The defenders win if all players become statues within one minute. The dribblers win if anyone is still active. Play several rounds to allow everyone to be a defender.

### Corner tag - 6x6 yard grids

Players start at each corner of the grid. At two opposite corners, the players have a ball. Those players pass the ball to their right and then follow their pass. The receiving players dribble counter-clockwise (continuing the movement to the right) to the next corner, where they pass to their right and the play continues. Encourage players, once they understand the pattern, to try to catch up to the other ball by playing a bit faster. Can they tag the person who is next in the sequence?



### Island tag - ½ field

Create multiple, small 'islands' using cones to outline the areas. One person acts as the 'shark,' running about trying to tag players who are not on islands. Those players each have a ball and they try to dribble from island to island, trying to avoid being 'bitten' by the shark. Anyone tagged by a shark must do four dribbling touches in place and then they are 'healed' and can continue to play. If players stay on the islands, the coach can call 'land shark!' at which time the shark can go onto the islands for five seconds.

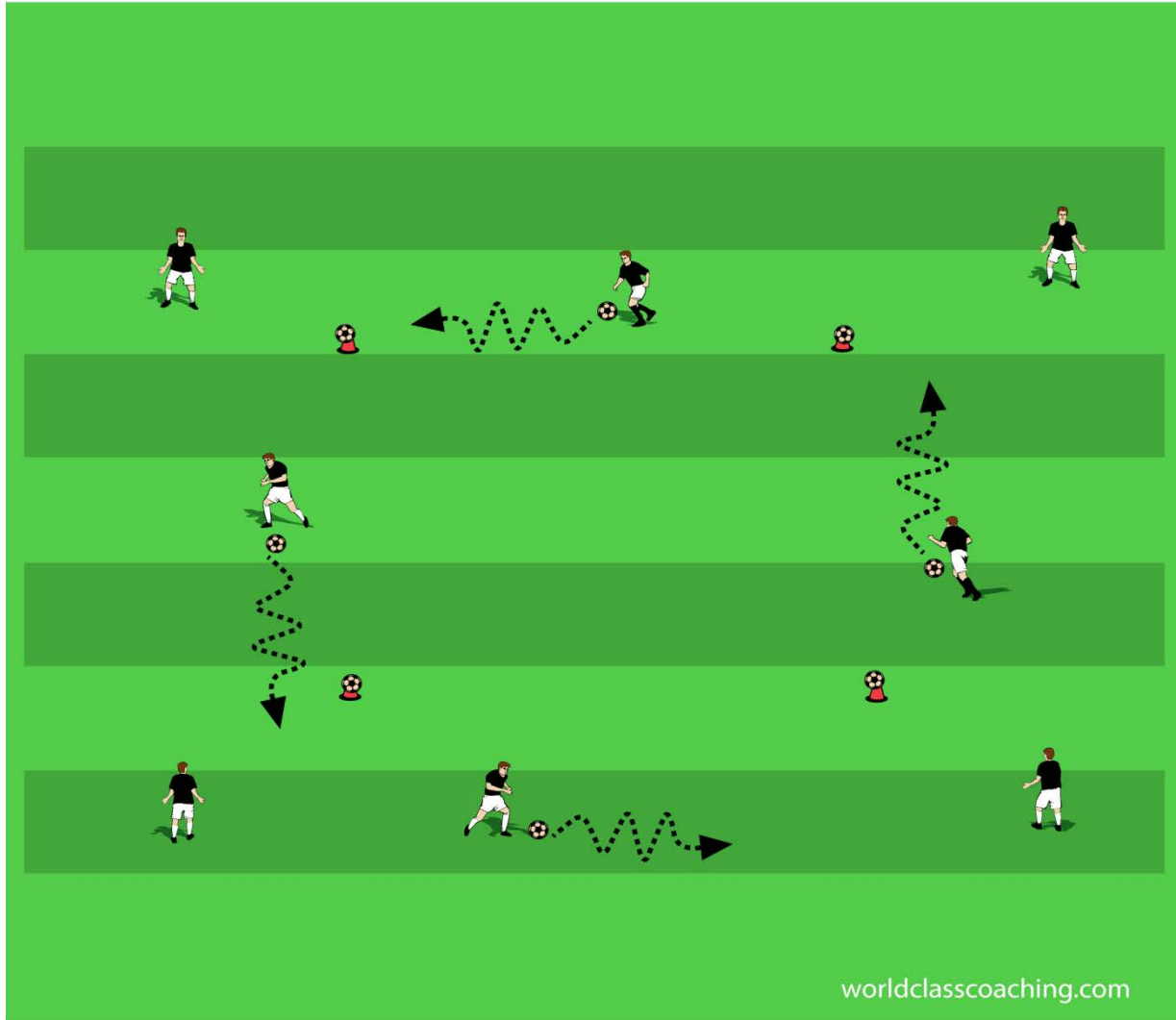
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**Freeze tag** - 20x20 yard grid

One player is 'it.' The remainder all have a ball and they dribble around the area. The 'it' player tags dribblers, who then have to freeze, spread their feet, and pick up their ball and hold it above their head. If an active player can pass the ball between the feet of a frozen player, that player is 'thawed' and can continue playing. If the 'it' player can freeze all of the dribblers she wins. Alternate 'it' players every two minutes.

**Knockout** - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players dribble around the grid and attempt to knock the balls dribbled by other players out of the grid while keeping their own ball. This is a game that is commonly used to teach shielding the ball (keeping the ball on the outside of the away foot when confronted by an opponent) and also poke tackling (using the front of the foot to tap the ball off of the dribbling player), and the key points of coaching for young players include spatial awareness, thoughtful dribbling, and dealing with an opponent in tight space. When a player's ball is knocked out of the grid, they are *not* eliminated. Rather, they must sprint after the ball and then return to the perimeter of the grid, where they perform six dribbling touches and then return to the game. Players should keep track of the number of balls they knock out of the grid and also the number of times their own ball is knocked out. Play for three minutes and then check scores.



### Dribbling races - 10x10 yard grids

Players are organized in pairs with two balls for each group. Put each pair at the corner of a grid. One ball is placed on top of the disc cone in the corner. The player whose ball is on the cone is resting and cheering for her partner, and she should take a knee three yards outside the grid near the corner. The other player is the racer. All racers start at the signal from the coach. Each player must dribble around the entire perimeter of the grid back to her starting point and then use her ball to tap her partner's ball off of the cone. Determine a winner in each race and then switch roles and race again.

#### Variations

- All dribble clockwise.
- All dribble counter-clockwise.
- At each corner, the racer must pass her ball *inside* the corner marker and then she runs around the *outside* of the marker and catches up with the ball and continues to dribble around the perimeter (run clockwise and counter-clockwise).

Check points at the end of the sequence to determine a winner.



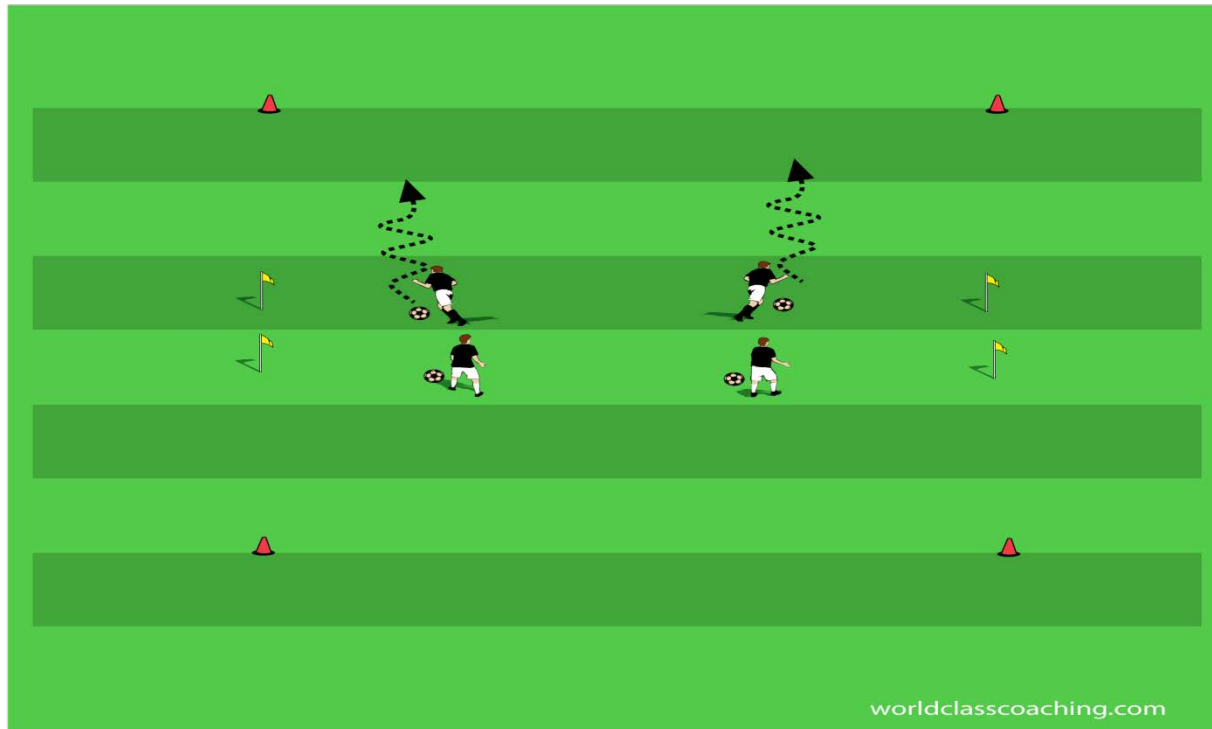
### Relay races - $\frac{1}{4}$ field

Players work in pairs or larger numbers, depending on the preference of the coach. Relays can take many forms, but in essence involve a sense of team purpose and time pressure.

#### Examples

- Players dribble around a cone or series of cones and back to the start point.
- Players dribble around a cone their first run, then a more distant cone on their second run, etc.
- Players dribble a complete circle around each cone.
- Players weave through a set of cones and run back to the start.
- Players perform a simple move at each cone (i.e. turn the ball with the inside of the foot or use a pull-back to change directions).

More variations can involve restrictions regarding the foot used to dribble or the surface (inside/outside) to be used.



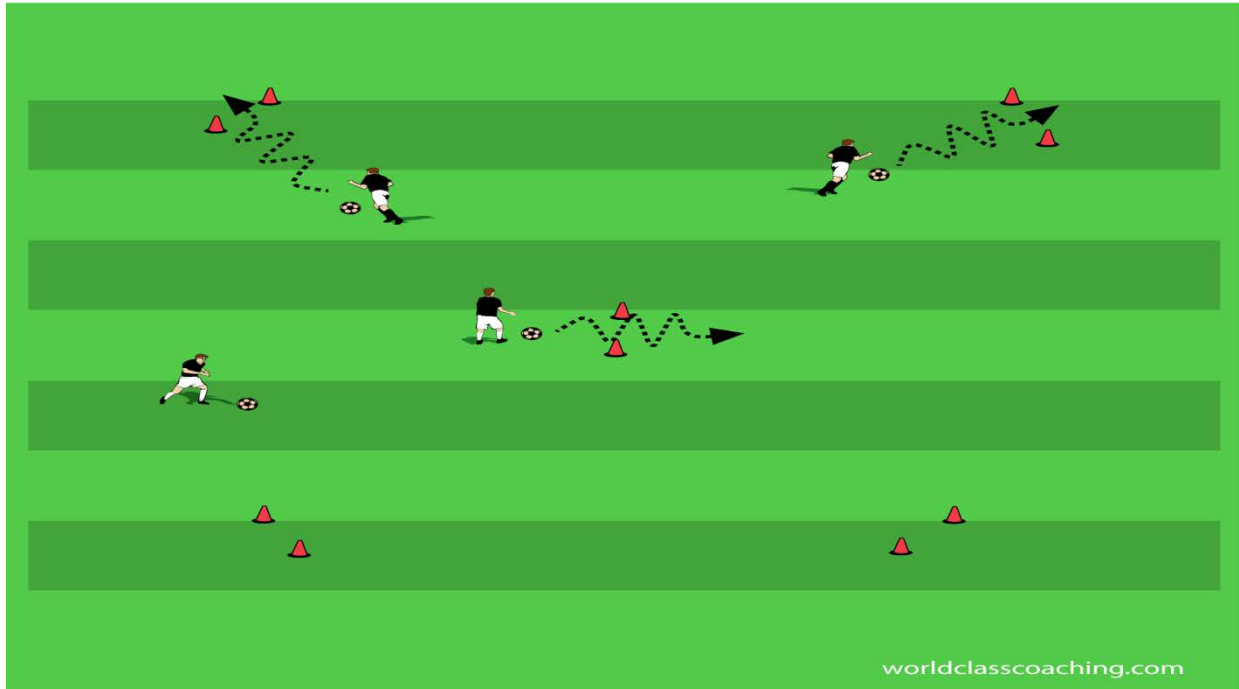
### **Crows and cranes** - ½ field

Players work in pairs, and each player has a ball. Place the players along two cone lines running across the center of the field area and five yards apart. One member of each pair is on each line and they are facing the coach, who stands at the side of the grid. One player is a “crow” and the other is a “crane.” The coach calls out either name and the group that is chosen dribbles their ball at top speed to the nearest end line. The other group, meanwhile, chases them, dribbling their soccer balls and trying to get close enough to tag their partner. After each race, players jog back to their starting point. This game teaches speed dribbling and also dribbling with some pressure. The ideal surface here is the laces (allows players to keep their running form and speed), but that is of minimal concern with young players. The coach can instruct players to use a longer first touch to get themselves going and then shorter touches as they near the finish line.

#### Variations

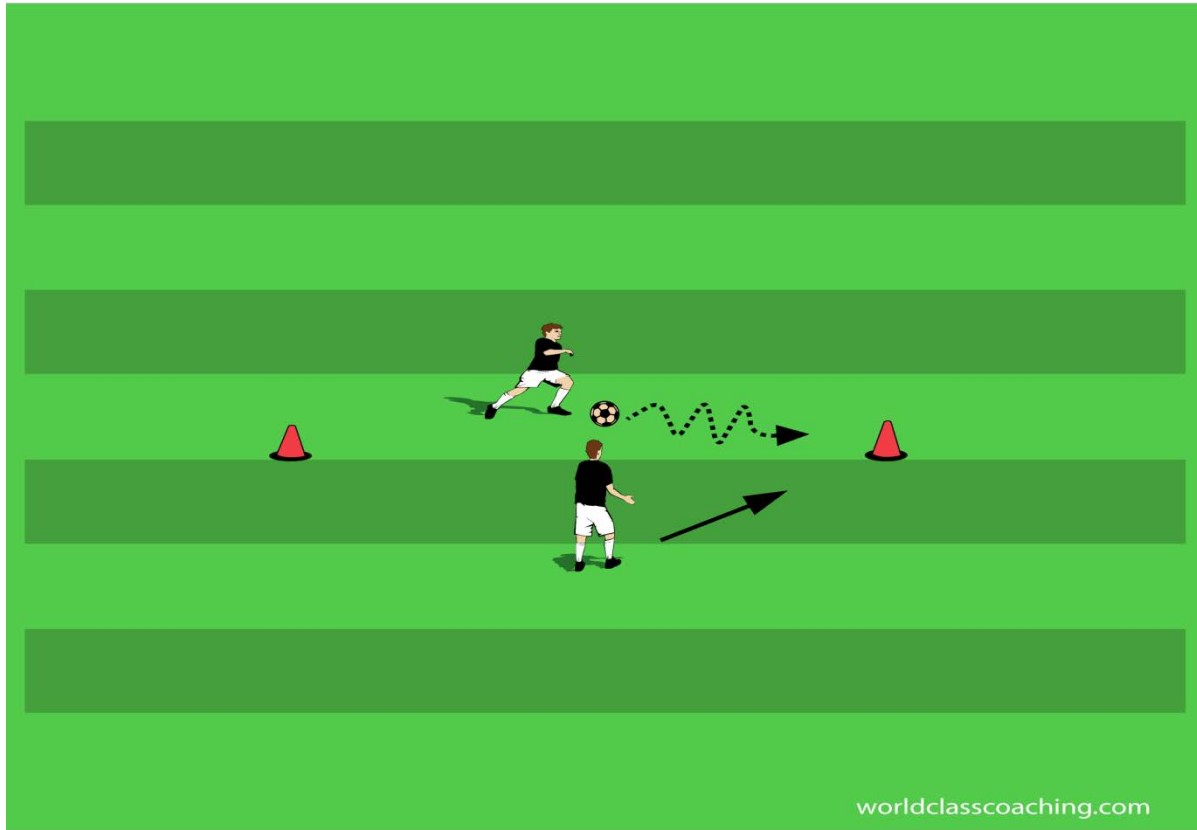
- To win the race, the player must stop the ball on the endline (emphasizes control at the end of the dribbling run).
- The chasing group does not have to tag their partners, but rather tries to beat them to the endline.
- The chasing group does not need to dribble their ball.





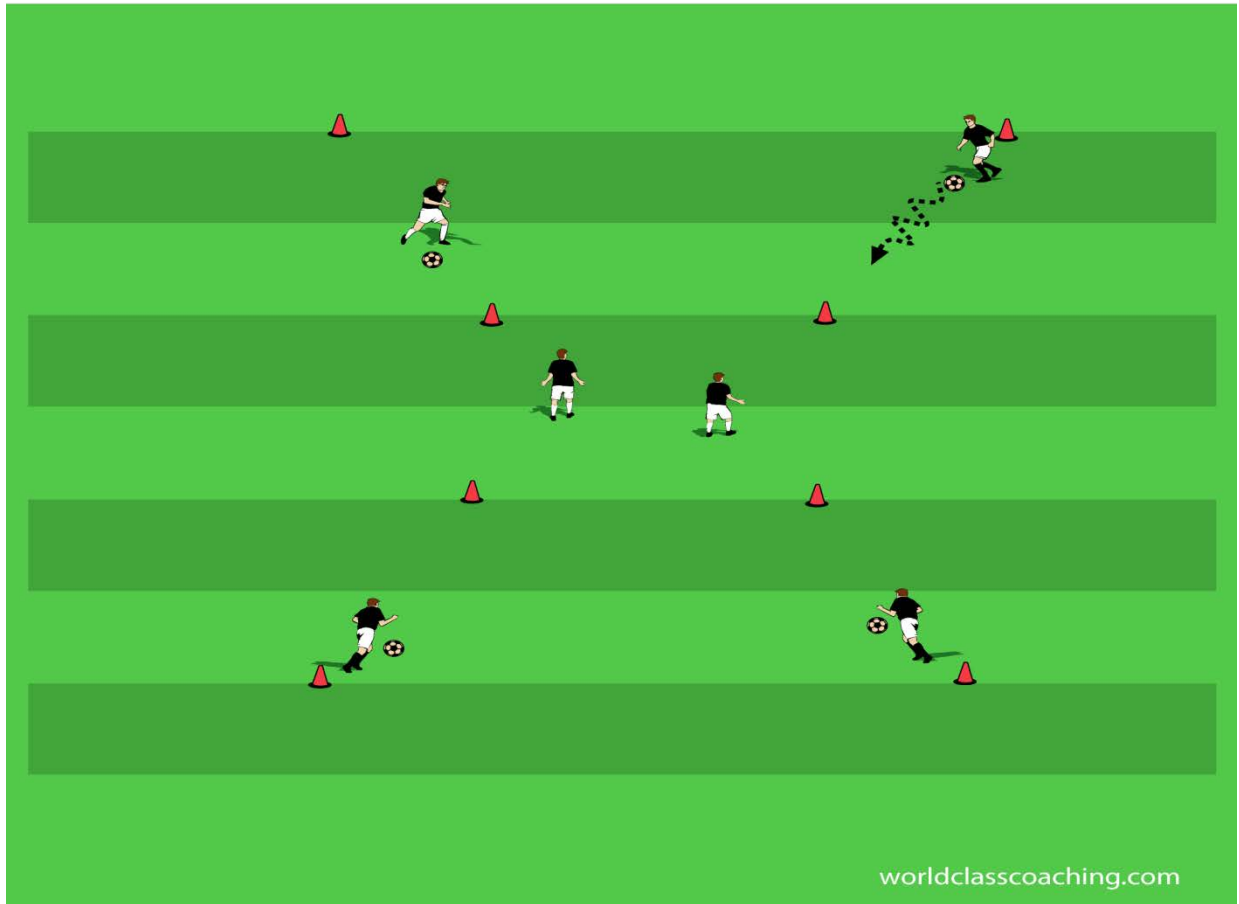
### **Many Goals Dribbling - 20x30 yard grid**

Create a grid with 6 small cone goals spread randomly across the area. Players work in pairs with one player in possession to start. Explain that the purpose of the game is to win or keep possession of the ball from one's partner and then dribble through as many cone goals as possible. Each run with the ball through a cone goal earns a point for the dribbler. Point out that it is important not to run through a cone goal while another player is in that goal, as there could be a collision. Also, encourage players to make a run toward one goal and sharply change direction to lose their defenders and create scoring opportunities. Play for two minutes and check scores. Change partners and play again.



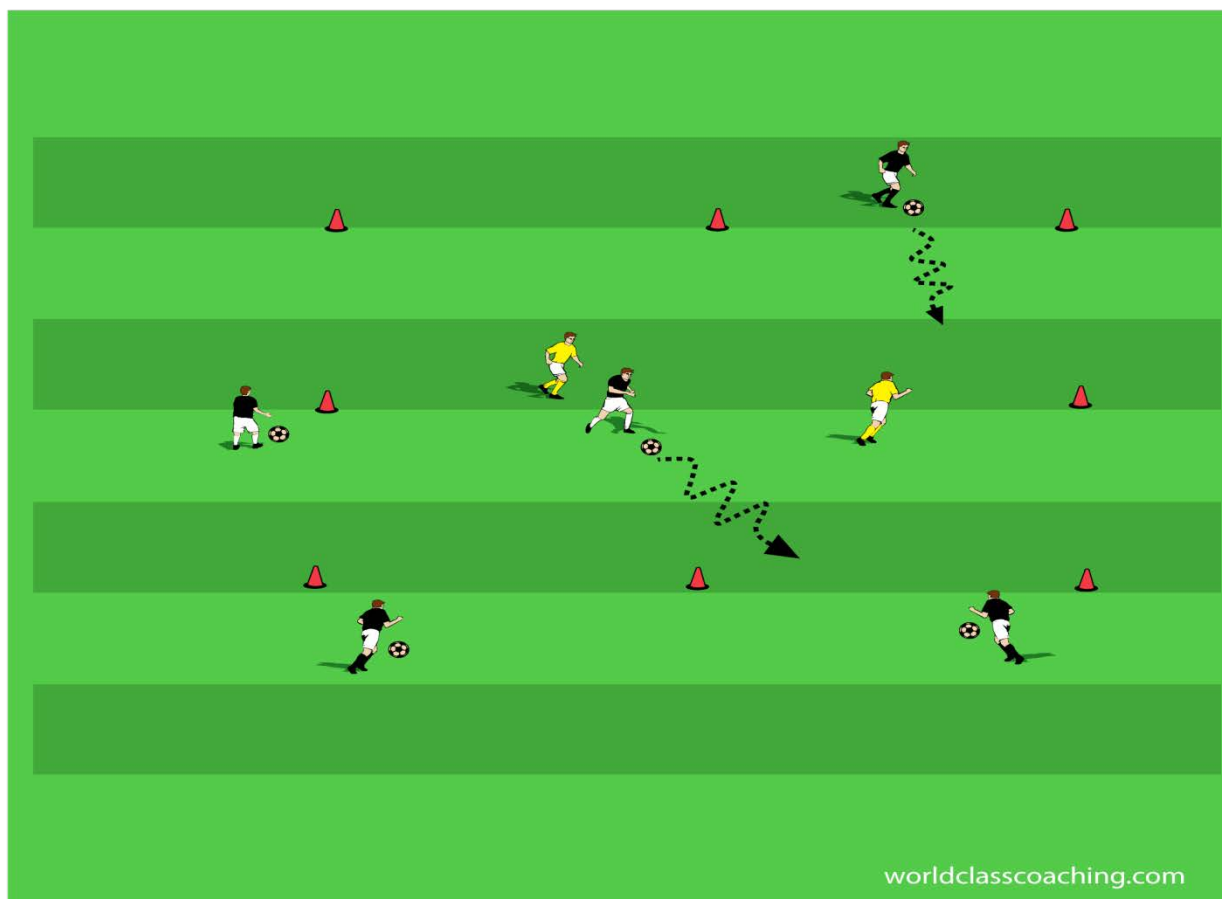
### **Two-Cone Dribbling** - 6x15 yard grid

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball. The attacker starts midway between the two cones with the ball and facing the defender. Explain that the defender in this game must remain on her side of an imaginary line between the two cones (unless blocking a cone), and the attacker must also stay on her side of this line. To score, the attacker must dribble the ball to either cone and stop the ball in contact with the cone. To prevent the attacker from scoring, the defender must move back and forth and place herself between the attacker and the cone before the ball is put there. This game is a low-pressure (no tackling) environment where the attacking player should be encouraged to learn to change pace, direction, and dribbling surface frequently to try to wrong-foot the defender. Play for one minute and then change roles.



**Hotbox** - 15x15 yard grid with inner grid (5x5)

Two defenders begin in the hotbox. The other players are evenly distributed at 4 lines located six yards beyond the perimeter of the grid. The defenders must remain in the hotbox and they earn a point for each ball they kick out of the box while they are there. The dribblers must try to dribble toward the grid and then dribble around the cone nearest to their line (momentarily entering the grid) and exit the hotbox and dribble back to their starting point. If they are able to do this without losing their ball, they earn a point. If they lose their ball, then they retrieve it and get back in line. The next player in line then tries to score. The purpose of this game is to teach players how to deal with dribbling into tight space and when and how to time runs. They will learn to try to catch the defenders unaware and quickly get in and out. Play for two minutes and then change the defenders in the hotbox.

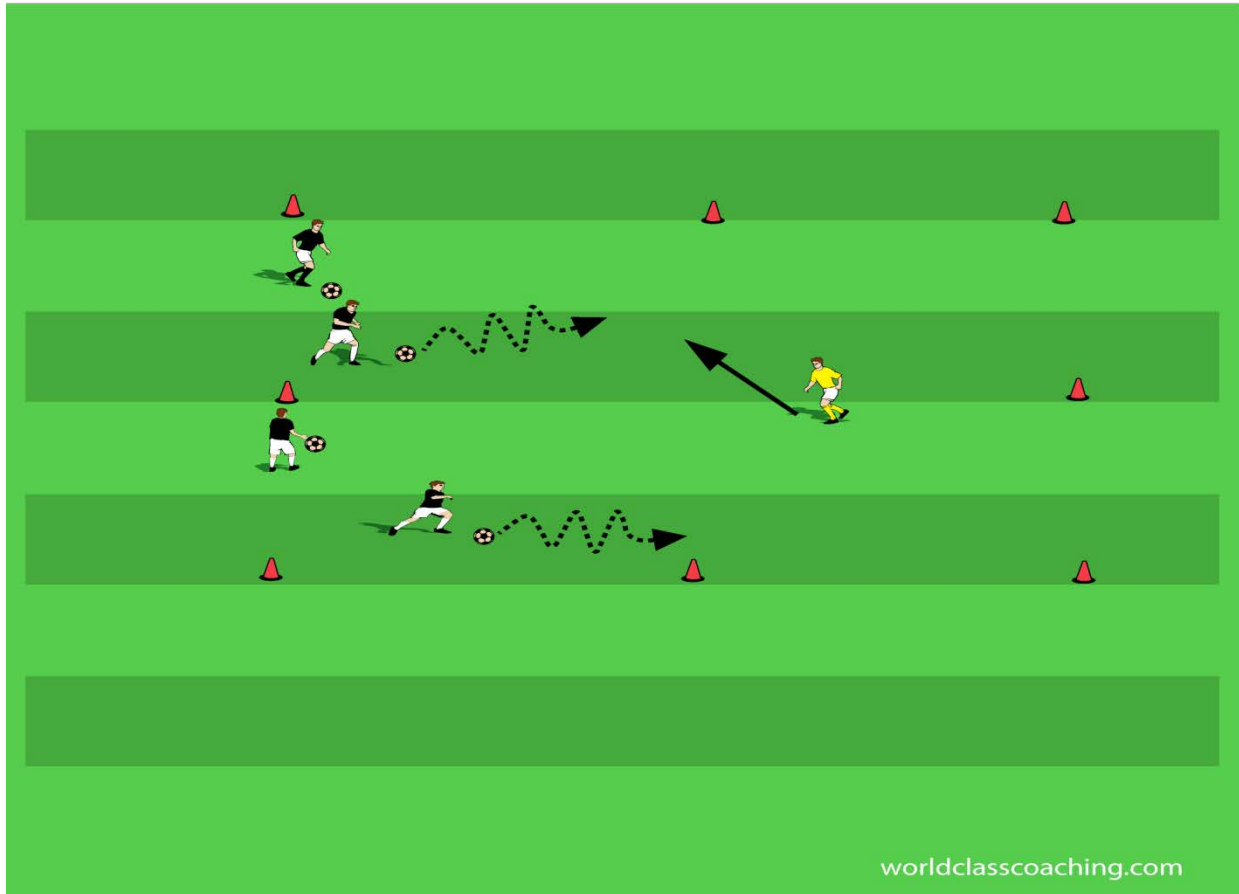


### **Alligator Alley** - 12x20 yard grid

Select 2-3 “alligators.” These players do not have a ball and they stand inside the grid area. The rest of the team each need a ball and they spread around the perimeter of the grid. Explain that the goal of the game is to dribble across the “alley.” The alligators attempt to dispossess the dribblers as they cross the grid. The alligators earn one point for each ball they knock out of the grid. The dribblers earn one point for dribbling across the narrow width of the grid and three points for dribbling the long length of the grid. Players keep track of their points throughout the exercise. Rotate the alligators every two minutes and give every player the opportunity to be an alligator. This exercise is useful for encouraging players to engage in 1v1 duels, dribble to open space, execute sharp changes in speed on the ball, and learn to tackle.

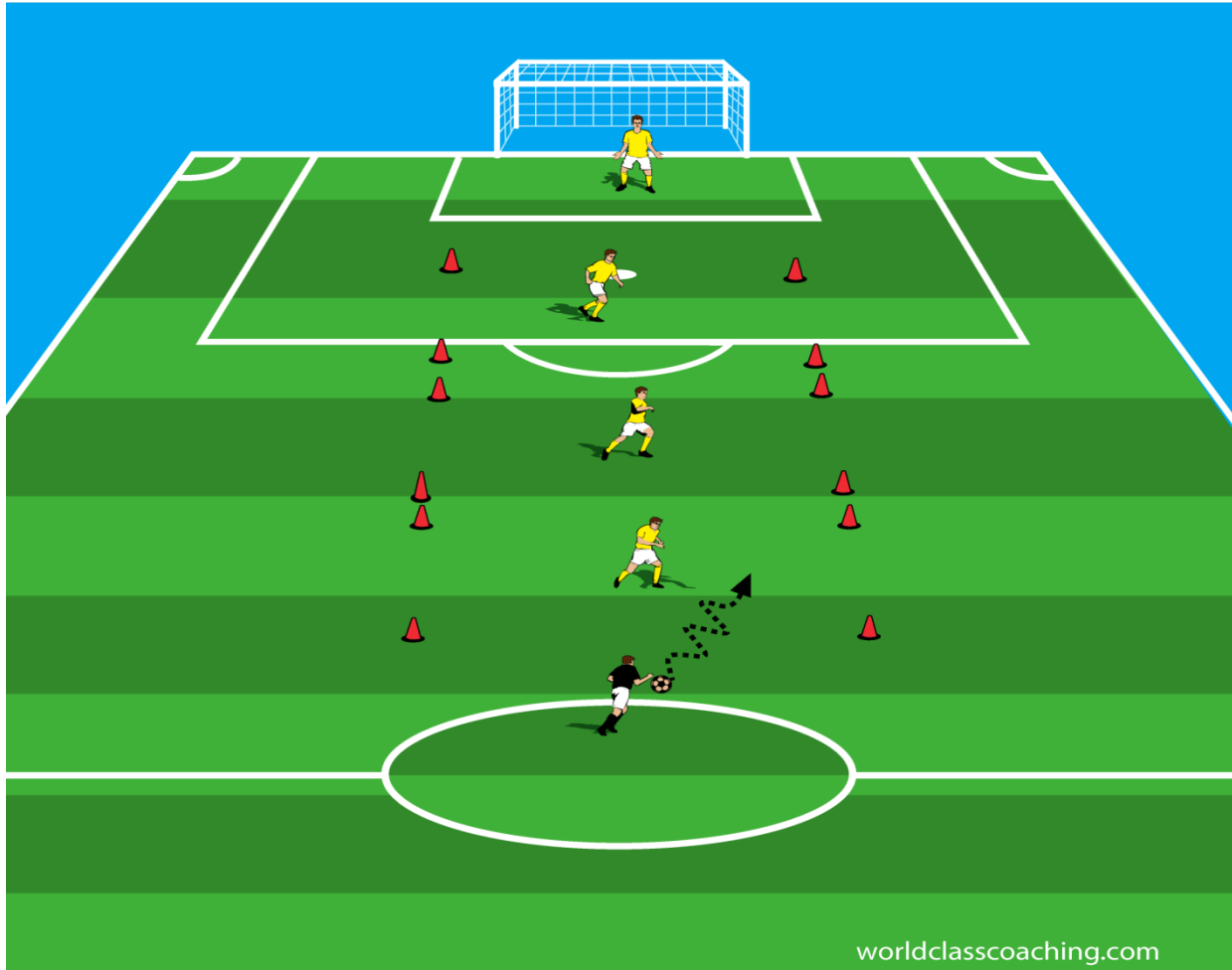
### **Shark Attack** - 20x20 yard grid

Select two sharks (1 for teams of 8 or less). All of the other players have a ball and dribble around the “shark tank” (the grid). The shark(s) run around the perimeter of the grid and then holler, “shark attack!” and charge into the grid. The sharks attempt to knock balls out of the grid. When a player loses her ball, she retrieves it and waits outside the shark tank. The coach should time the game to see how long it takes the shark to clear all balls from the tank. Select a new shark and see which shark requires the shortest time to clear the grid.



**Wasteland** - 15x20 yard grid

One player, the "fox," is positioned in the middle of the grid (the wasteland) and the others all start on one end line. At a signal from the coach, the endline players attempt to dribble their balls across the grid to the opposite end of the grid. The fox attempts to kick as many balls out of the grid as possible. Any players losing their balls are stranded in the wasteland where they must join the fox in trying to dispossess the remaining dribblers on their next pass. Play until all players have been dispossessed, and then play again with the game winner becoming the new fox. In this game, emphasize that good decision-making regarding when and where to run, as well as tight control of the ball, are critical to success.



### **Angry Neighbor** - 30x12 yard grid

Place a defender (angry neighbor) in each of the 3 10x12 yard grids. The remaining players should each have a ball and they line up at the end of the grid line. Explain that the goal of the game is to dribble the ball through the three “yards” past the the angry neighbors and then score by passing the ball into the goal at the far end. Whether a player is successful in getting through all three areas and scores, or if her ball gets knocked out of the grid by one of the angry neighbors, she then retrieves her ball and dribbles along the sidewalk (cone area on both sides of the grid areas) back to the line and the next attacker has a go. Play for three minutes and then change the defenders.

### **Crab Soccer** – The Area Varies

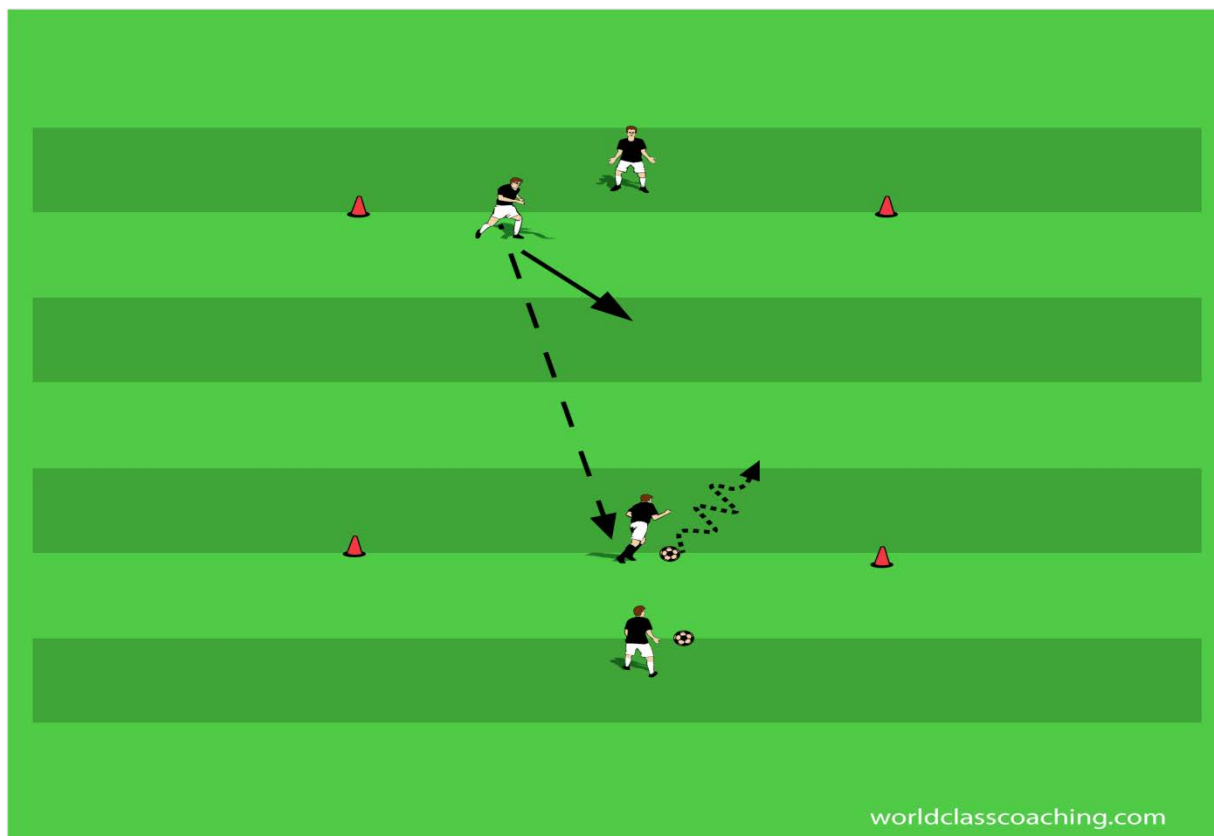
There are several variations of this game and the size of the grid must be carefully adjusted to meet the needs of the players (i.e. it must be big enough to give the dribblers room to experience success and also small enough so that the “crabs” can apply pressure. In the standard version of the game, two “crabs” are set in the middle of the grid, with the rest of the players on the endline, each with a ball. The crabs must move around and remain in the “crab” position, on all fours (stomach up) and try to maneuver to kick the other players’ balls out of the grid each time the group is sent across the grid (on a signal from the coach). Players losing their ball join the crabs for the remainder of the game.

### Variation

- Play to goal. Establish a safe-zone around the goal and then put the crabs in a coned area beyond the area. The dribblers are organized beyond these two areas and then attempt to dribble through the crabs before shooting from the safe area. Players losing their ball retrieve it and try again. Play for two minutes and then check scores before rotating the crab group.

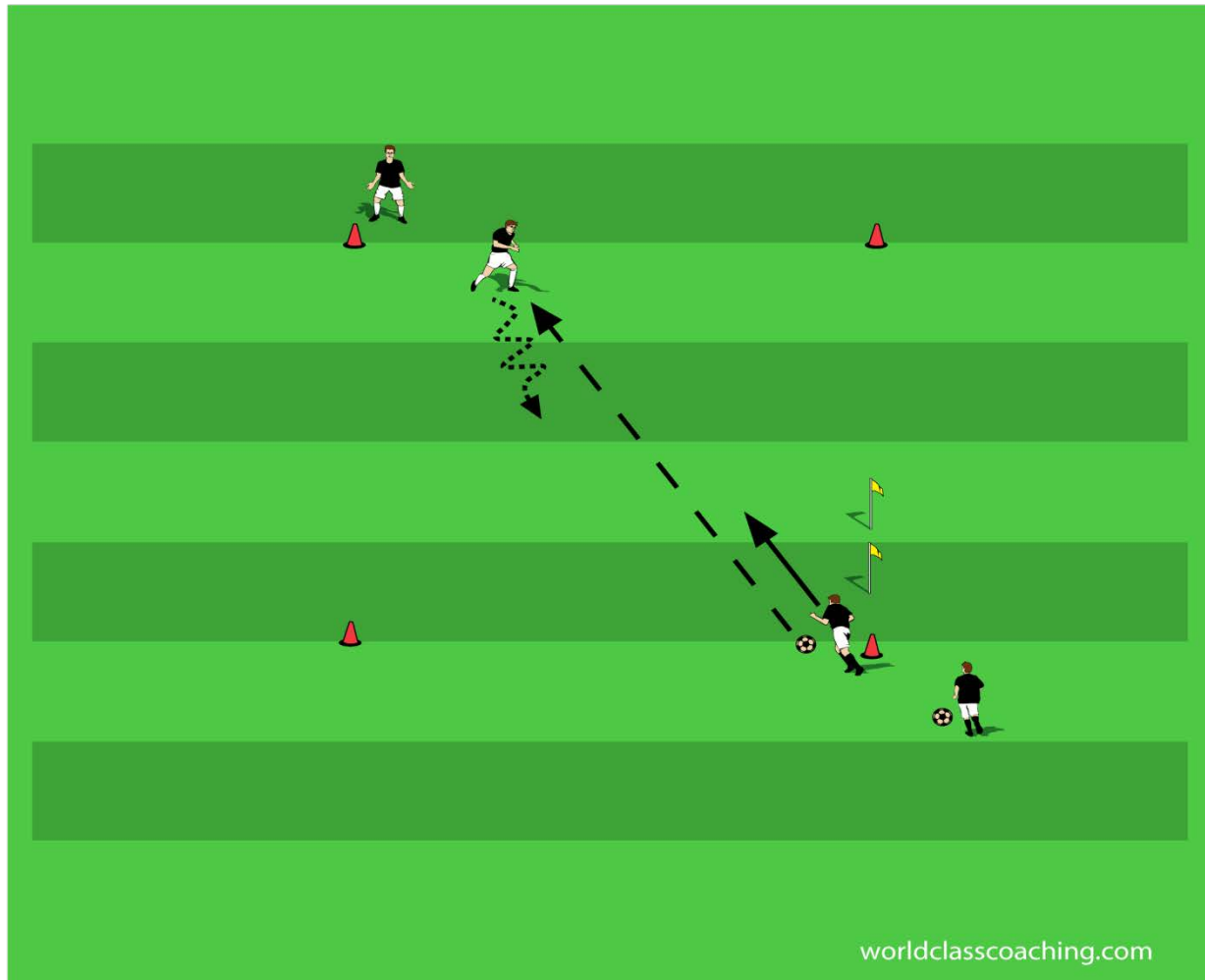
### 1v1 Nutmeg! - 10X15 yard grid

Players work in groups of 4 with two players resting as “goals” on either endline. The two active players duel 1v1, attempting to win the ball and then dribble to their opponent’s endline and pass the ball between the legs of the resting player on that end. When the resting player is scored upon, she retrieves the ball and then changes roles with her partner (i.e. she becomes the attacker). It is important that endline players cooperate with attempts by players to pass the ball between their legs and transition quickly.



### 1v1 continuous - 10x10 yard grids

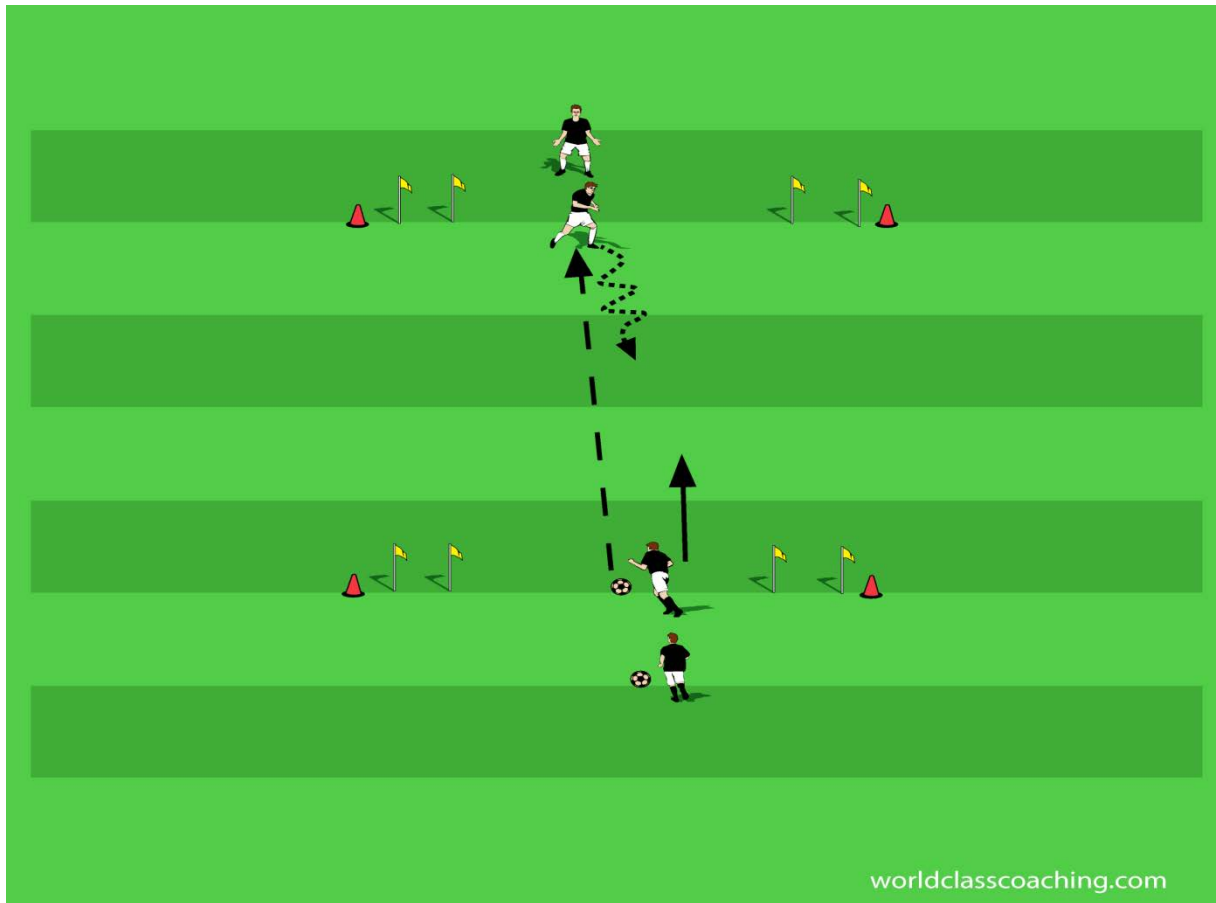
Organize players in groups of 4-6 per grid, with a ball supply at one end of the grid. Put an equal number of players in lines at each end of the grid. This is a simple, but very effective training environment designed to improve one vs. one play on both sides of the ball. Explain that the goal of the exercise is to dribble the ball over the opponents’ endline. Play is live as long as the ball remains inside the grid. The first player on the end where the balls are organized initiates re-starts by passing to the first player on the other end of the grid. These duels teach players how to deal with a defender in limited space, changing speed and direction on the ball, jockeying and tackling skills and much more. Play for two minutes and check scores. Be sure to have players switch lines after each duel.



### **1v1 to a side cone goal - 10x10 yard grids**

Organize players in groups of 4-6 per grid, with a ball supply at one end of the grid. Put an equal number of players in lines at each end of the grid. The lines are organized on opposite corners of the grid this time. Play is live as long as the ball remains inside the grid. The first player on the end where the balls are organized initiates re-starts by passing to the first player on the other end of the grid. These duels teach players how to deal with a defender in limited space, changing speed and direction on the ball, jockeying and tackling skills and much more. The side cone goal can be used to introduce the idea of "goal side," which is a reference to the need for the defender to stay between the ball and the goal. If the defender wins the ball, she still attempts to dribble out her opponent's end of the grid for a point. For the attacker, she must now consider how to attack a more limited space and goal. After each duel, players change ends. Play for two minutes and check scores.





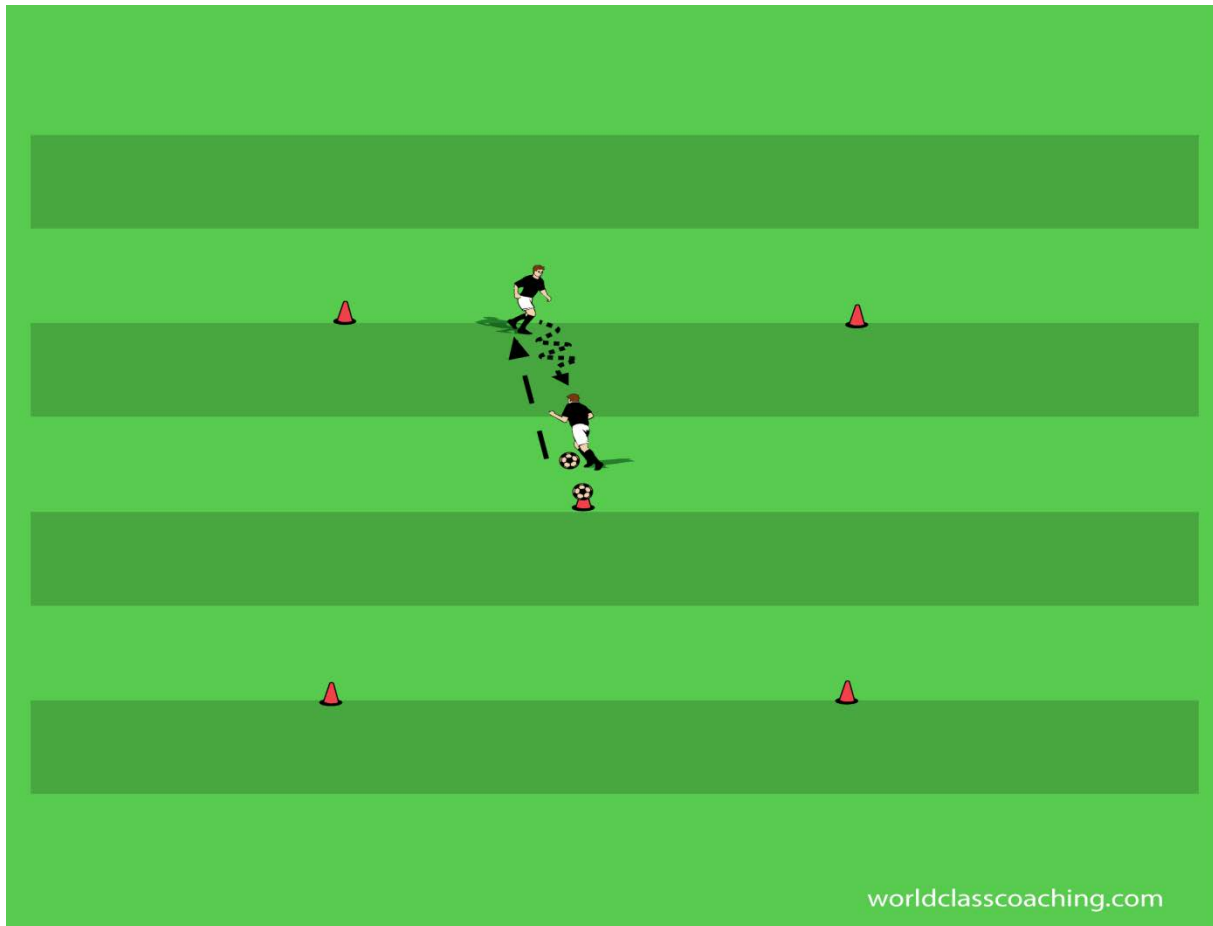
### **1v1 to 4 goals - 15x15 yard grids**

Organize players in groups of 4-6 per grid, with a ball supply at one end of the grid. Put an equal number of players in lines at each end of the grid. This is a simple, but very effective training environment designed to improve one vs. one play on both sides of the ball. Explain that the goal of the exercise is to dribble the ball through either of the the oppo-nents' cone goals. The presence of two goals encourages players to change directions. Play is live as long as the ball remains inside the grid. The first player on the end where the balls are organized initiates re-starts by passing to the first player on the other end of the grid. These duels teach players how to deal with a defender in limited space, changing speed and direction on the ball, jockeying and tackling skills and much more. Play for two minutes and check scores.



**1v1 back-to-back to three goals - 12x12 yard area**

Here, the players start back-to-back with a ball trapped between their lower back areas. At a signal from the coach, they let the ball drop and a duel ensues, with the goal being to dribble the ball through any of the three cone goals. Keep track of points and frequently rotate partners.

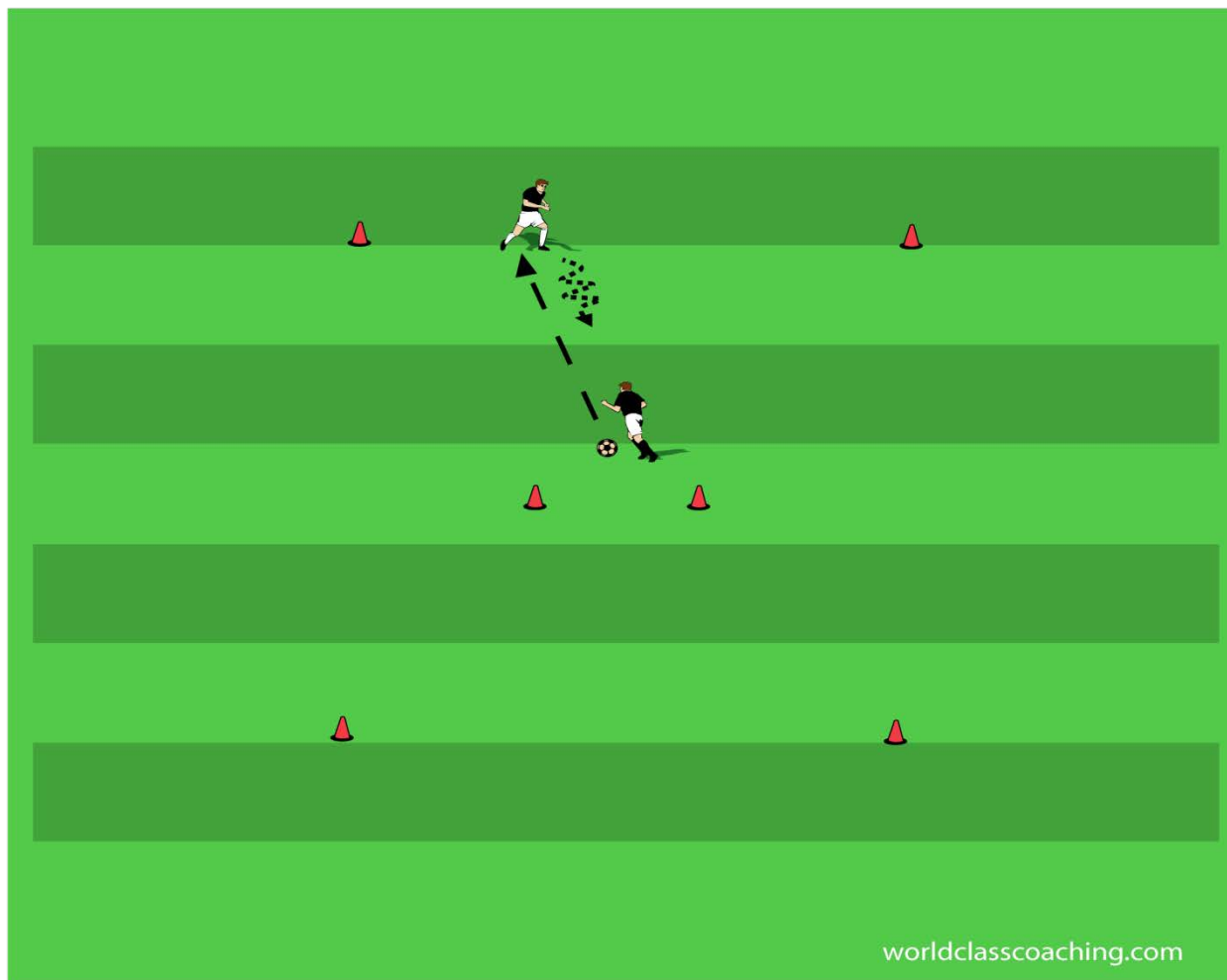


### **1v1 to a cone/ball goal - 10x10 yard grids**

Players work in pairs in 10x10 yard grids with two balls. Place one ball on top of a disc cone and give the other ball to one player. The attacker can start play anywhere on the perimeter of the grid. The attacker attempts to dribble the ball past the other player, who is the defender, and use her ball to knock the other ball off of the cone. Each time she does this, she earns a point. If the defender wins the ball, she must dribble to the perimeter of the grid and restart play and the roles change. Play for three minutes and check scores. It is important that the coach encourage the defender to come out and challenge the attacker and not just wait by the cone.

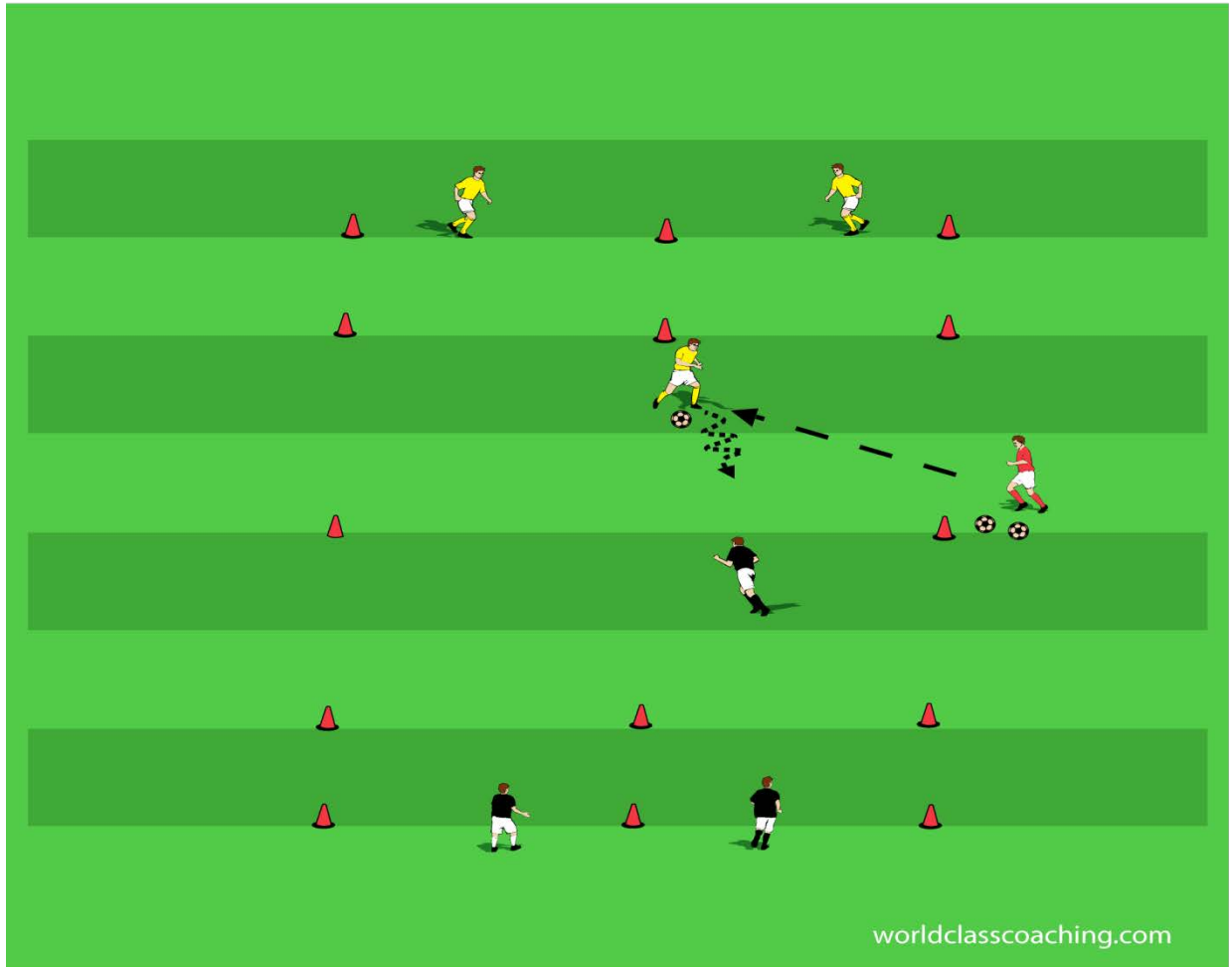
### **1v1 to two cone/ball goals - 12x12 yard grids**

Here there are two cone goals and the attacker can attack either goal. Again, the presence of multiple goals encourages the attackers to change directions and also make good decisions on the dribble. When a point is scored, the attacker recovers the ball to the cone/ball goal while the defender goes to the perimeter with a ball to restart play.



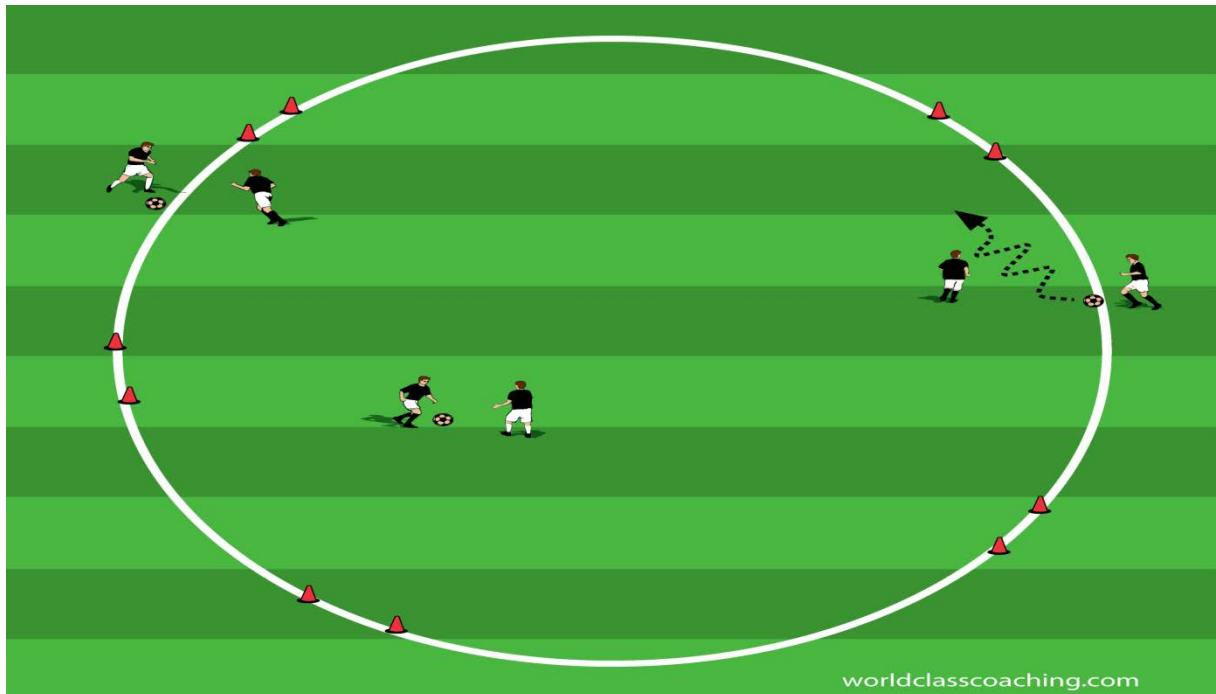
### **1v1 to a central goal - 10x10 yard grids**

Players work in pairs in 10x10 yard grids with one ball for each pair. The attacking player starts on the edge of the grid and the defender must come out and challenge the attacker, who tries to beat her on the dribble and run the ball through the central cone goal. If a goal is scored, the players change roles and play re-starts. If the defender wins the ball, she tries to dribble over the perimeter of the grid and the players change roles for play to re-start. This latter restriction teaches players to recognize transition in the game. Play for three minutes and check scores.



### **1v1 Zone Soccer** - 15x12 yard area

Divide the group into 2 teams. Each team has a set of colored vests and occupies an endline. The grid has two end zones as noted in the diagram. The coach has a ball supply and stands at the side of the grid, where he calls the name of a player from each team to enter the grid and duel. The coach should then serve a ball to the middle area of the grid. The players duel for possession, and then work to dribble the ball into the opposing team's end zone and step on the ball to earn a point. If the ball leaves the area or after a point is scored, the players return to their respective endlines and a new duel begins.



### **1v1 Center Circle Dribbling** - center circle

Create five cone goals around the circumference of the center circle. Players work in pairs with one soccer ball. One partner is on the inside of the circle, prepared to defend. The other partner, the attacker, is on the outside of the circle with the ball. The entire team plays at once. Explain that the attacker can only score points by entering the circle (at any point) and then exiting through one of the goals (dribble). Only the attacker's partner can defend the attacker. If the defender wins the ball, she tries to dribble through a goal and earn a point for herself. If the ball is knocked out of the circle, the players change roles (the defender retrieves the ball and becomes the attacker). Play for five minutes and check scores.

### **Many balls** - full field

Play a standard scrimmage to two goals and with two teams, but use two balls at once. Teams can score in either goal. When a ball leaves the area, the coach serves another ball onto the field so that two balls are always active. This game encourages players to avoid bunching and also tends to create room for individual attacking to goal.

## Part II: Games teaching passing and striking the ball

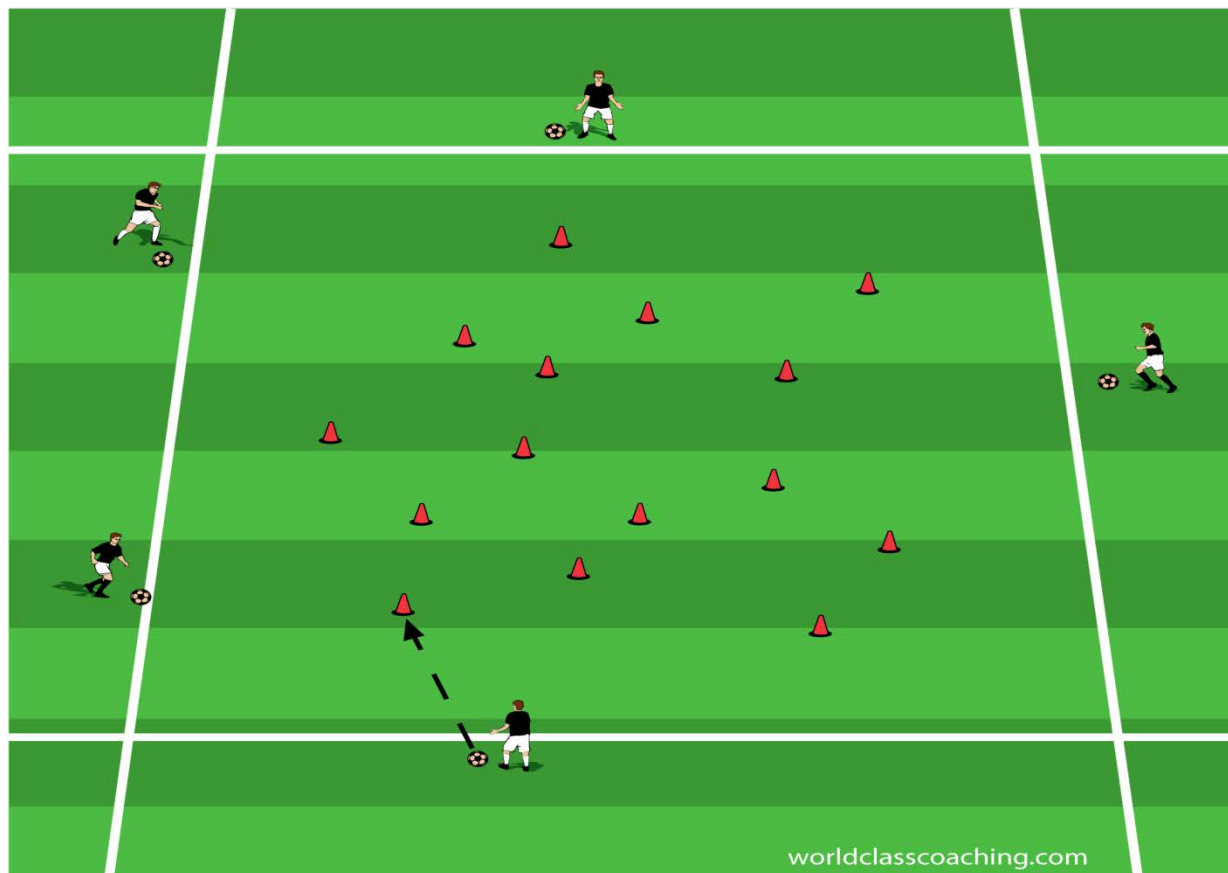
### Coaching Points

#### Passing

- Plant the non-striking foot so that the toes point in the direction of the pass.
- Lock the ankle and all points below the hip on the striking foot.
- Use the long inside surface to strike the ball.
- Strike the back of the ball.
- Follow through holding the foot showing the inside of the foot to the target.

#### Receiving

- Be sure to be in a balanced body position to receive.
- Extend the receiving foot, opening up the long inside surface to receive.
- Cushion the ball by pulling the foot back toward the body at the moment of contact.



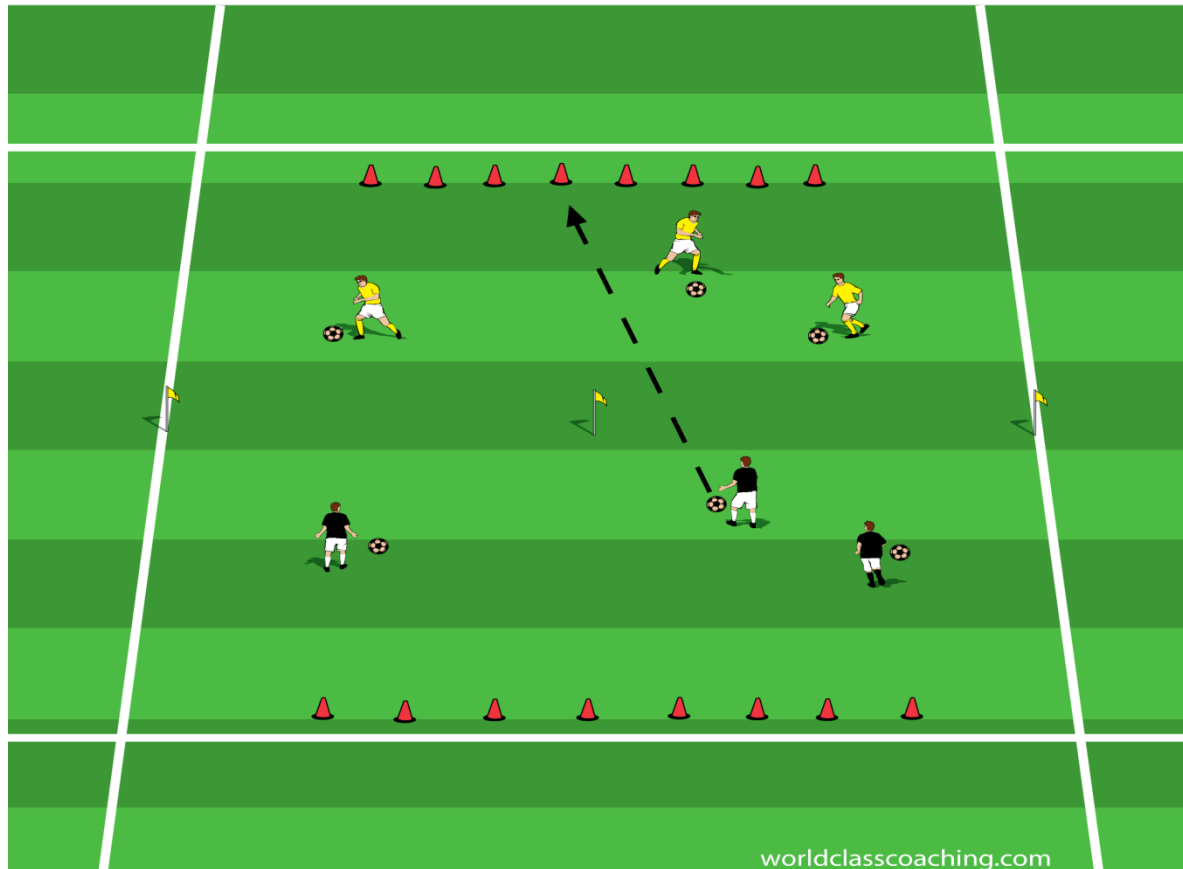
### **The great cone shoot-out - 15x15 yard grid**

Each player needs a ball. Spread a large number of tall cones around the interior of the grid. The players spread out around the perimeter of the grid. At a signal from the coach, the players strike their ball in an effort to knock down a cone. Then they chase their ball, being careful to avoid other players' balls and the cones. They also pick up any cone they knocked over with their strike and carry the cone(s) with them. Once they have recovered their ball and any cones, they go to the perimeter of the grid and

strike the ball again. This is a fun game that lets the players experiment with their striking technique. When all cones are down, see who has knocked down the largest number and reset the game.

#### Variation

- Use the off foot to strike the ball.
- Make the grid smaller or larger to challenge or build confidence in players.



#### **Fire away** - Two side-by-side 10x15 yard grids

Divide the group into two teams. Each team occupies one of the grids. Explain that no player can enter the other team's grid during the game, and players can only leave their own grid to retrieve a ball. Stand 8 tall cones at the back of each team's grid. The goal of the game is to strike the ball in an attempt to knock down the other team's cones. The first team to knock down all of the cones in the other team's zone wins. In the first round of the game, do not allow players to block shots by the other team, as it is important that immediate success is achieved.

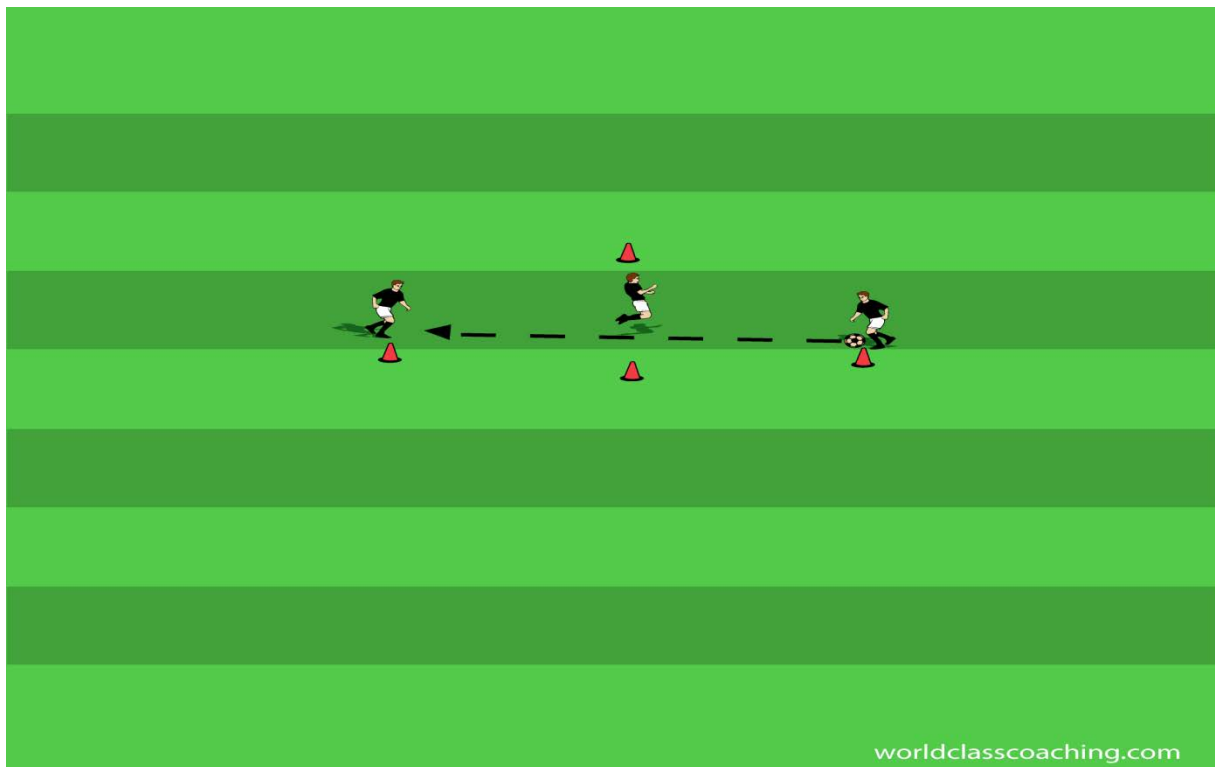
#### Variations

- Before commencing the second round of the game, instruct players that they may block a shot by the other team, but that they may not use their hands and they must be careful not to step in the way of a strike that might hurt at this age. It is also useful to explain that shots may only be "saved" near the cones, so that players do not stand near the center line and block shots.



- A third variation is to create a neutral, central zone, where players can shoot and can also challenge to win the ball. Players can thus get closer to their targets before shooting, and the shooting is now contested, making the exercise more game-like.

**Cops and Robbers** - 20x20yard grid with a circle (3 yards in diameter, outlined in cones) in the center  
Two 'police officers' without soccer balls and wearing distinctive vests, patrol the area outside the circle (they cannot enter the circle). The 'robbers' are players outside the grid area, each with a ball. The robbers try to dribble into the circle area and grab 'loot' (vests, cones, etc.) and carry it back out beyond the perimeter of the grid to their 'hideaway.' If the police officers can kick away the robber's ball, she must return the loot and then get her ball again and try to 'break in' once more. Play until all of the loot is removed or for three minutes and then change police officers.



**Dodgeball** - 10x15 yard areas

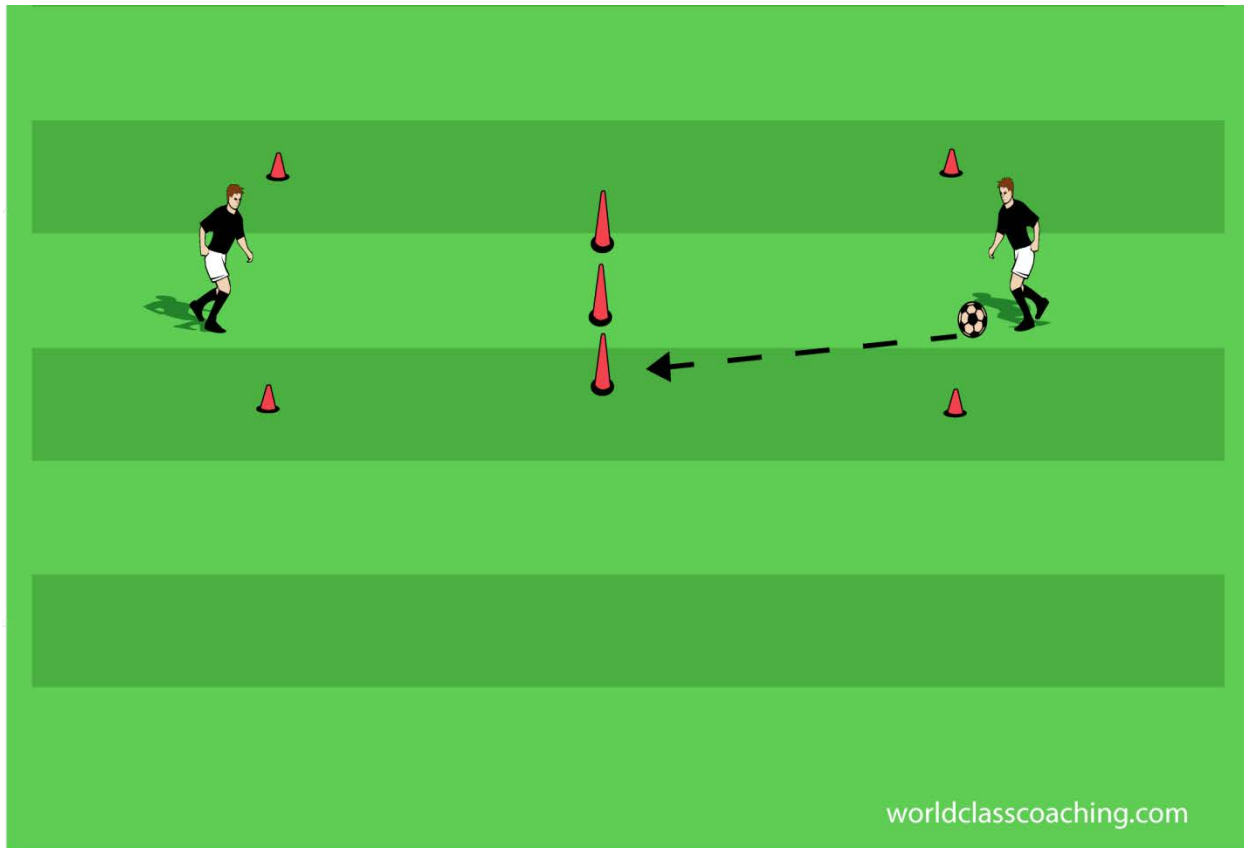
Players work in 3's with one ball. One player is located on each end of the area and one of the end players has a ball. The third player is the target and she must remain on the line between the center cones. The endline players try to strike the ball on the ground so that it makes contact with the center player. Emphasize safety and playing on the ground! If the center player dodges five consecutive passes, she wins and a new player moves to the middle. If she is hit by the ball (on the ground), the passer moves to the middle and play continues.

**Coaching Point**

- Encourage players to think about both accuracy and the pace of the strike necessary to be successful.

### Variation

- Adjust distances to increase or decrease the difficulty for the shooters.

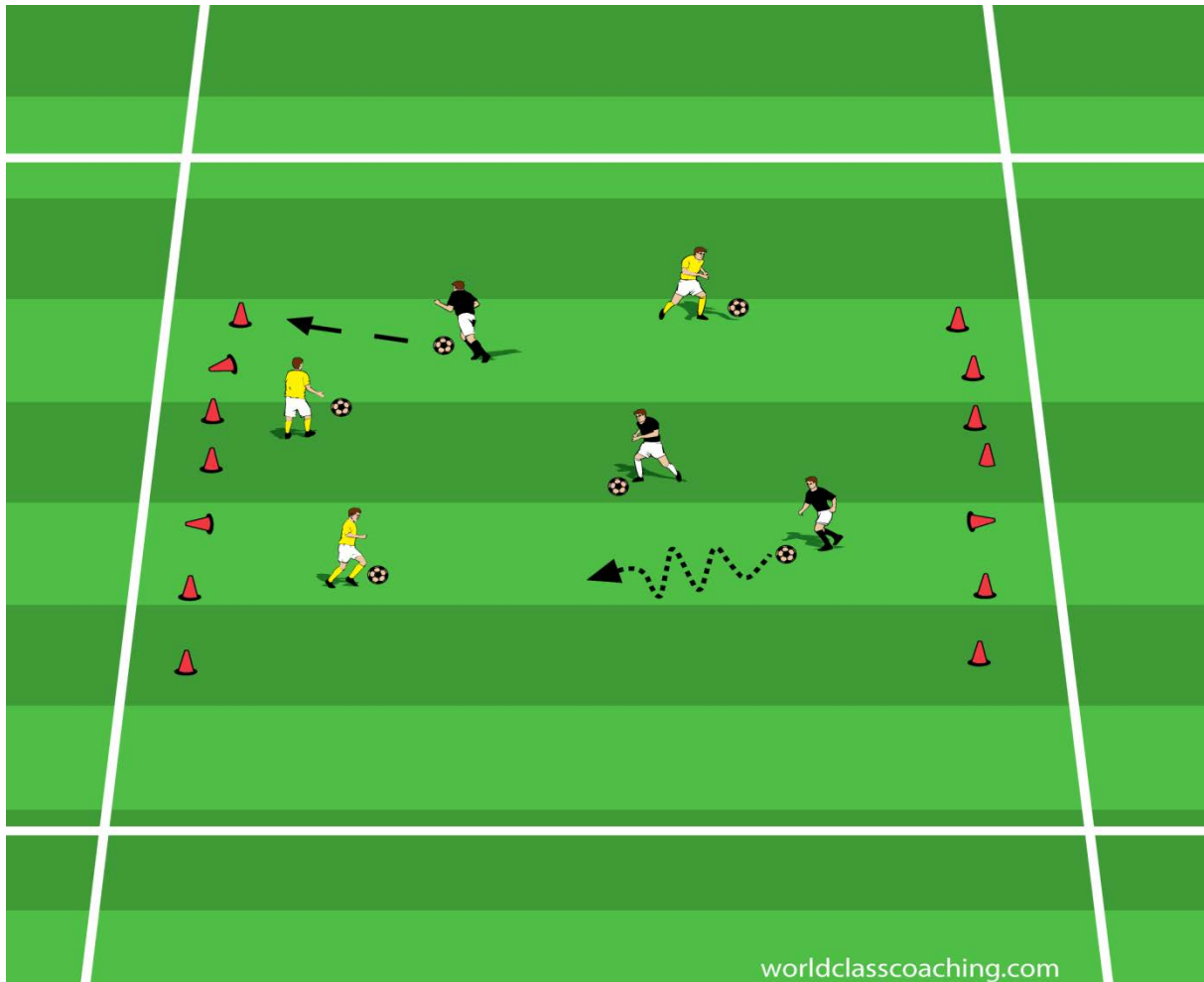


### **Bowling!** - 4x12 yard lanes

Players work in pairs with one ball. Put one player at each end of the lane and give one player the ball to start. Place three tall cones in the middle of the lane. Players take turns passing the ball in an attempt to knock over the cones. When one player has knocked down two cones, she wins that “frame” and the cones are reset to play again. The key points of emphasis are the use of the inside surface (accuracy), locking the ankle of the passing foot, and pointing the toes of the standing foot toward the target cone.

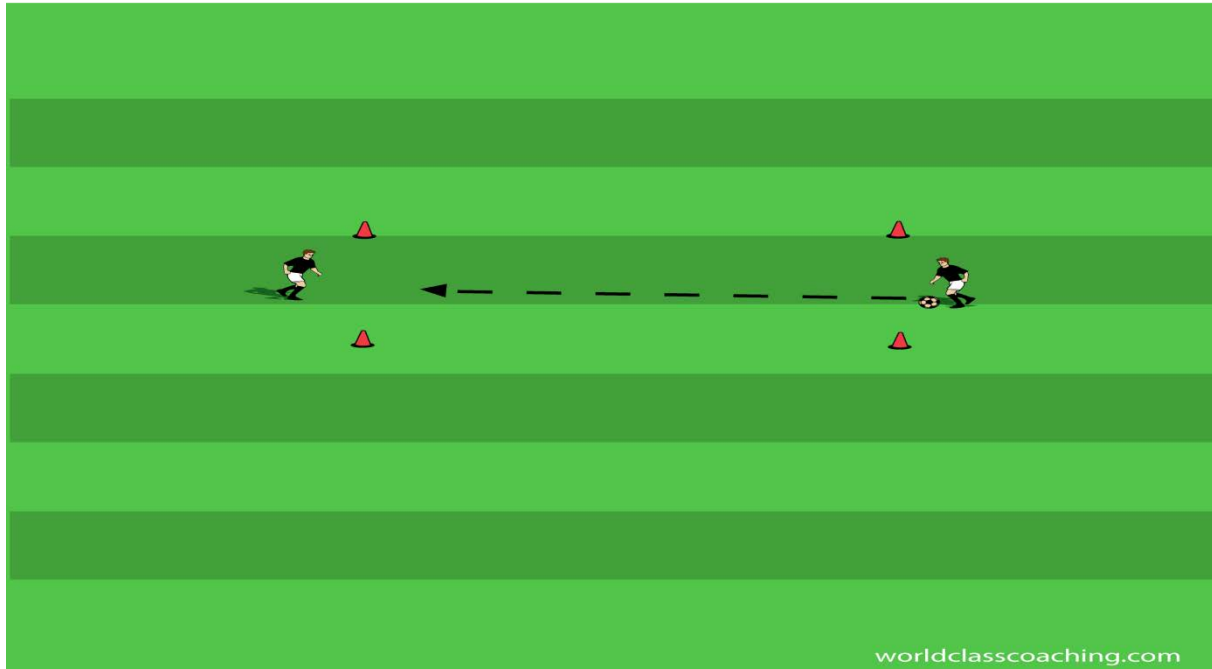
### Variations

- The coach should adjust the length of the lane so that players are challenged but also enjoy some success.
- Play for five minutes and then change partners and play again.
- It is also useful to require players to play a frame or more with their “off” foot.



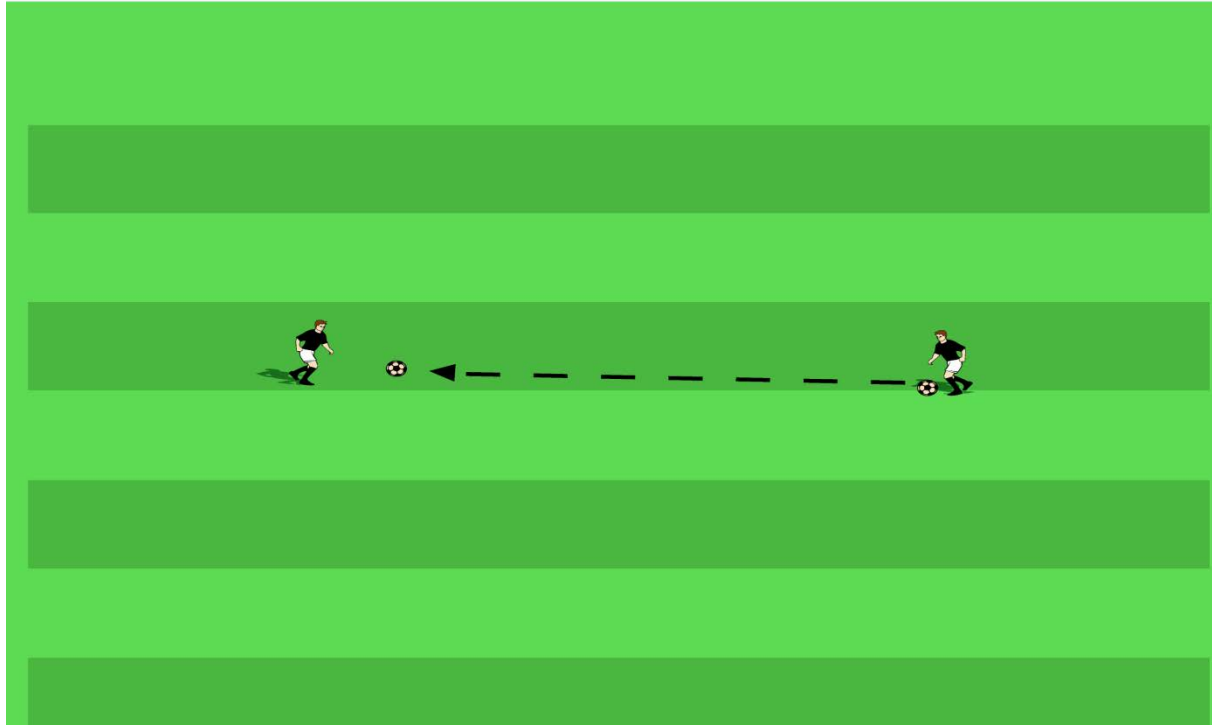
### **Cone Crashers** - 20x25 yard grid

Divide the group into two teams and give each team  $\frac{1}{2}$  as many balls as the number of players on the team. Each team defends one end of the grid and the tall cones standing on that end. Players with a ball dribble to the other end of the grid and try to strike the ball to knock over a cone on that end. Emphasize that roles change in this game. If one is defending and wins the ball, one should go over to the attack. The team must cooperate to both defend and attack throughout the game. The defenders can stand in front of a cone and block attempts to knock over the cone. The first team to knock over all of their opponents' cones wins. This is a fun, wide open game that presents lots of 1v1 duels and opportunities to strike and block the ball.



**Table-top** - 5x10 yard grids

Players work in pairs with a soccer ball in each grid. Players stand beyond the end of their grid. The goal of the game is to pass the ball to the other end of the grid so that it will stop on the cone line. Any ball that rolls to a stop there earns a point. Here, the emphasis is less on the angle of the strike and more on the pace of the strike necessary to put the ball in a particular spot. The coach should emphasize weight of the push on the passing foot being critical to success in putting the ball at the edge of the “table-top.”



### **Marbles-½ field**

Players work in pairs with two soccer balls. Demonstrate with one group. The players stand ten yards apart. One player passes her ball in an attempt to hit her partner's ball. If she misses, then the partner waits for the first ball to roll to a stop before she takes her turn. When one player is successful, then the players move to a ten-yard distance again and then her partner re-starts play. Give one point for each strike that is successful. Play for two minutes and then check points before changing partners.

#### Variations:

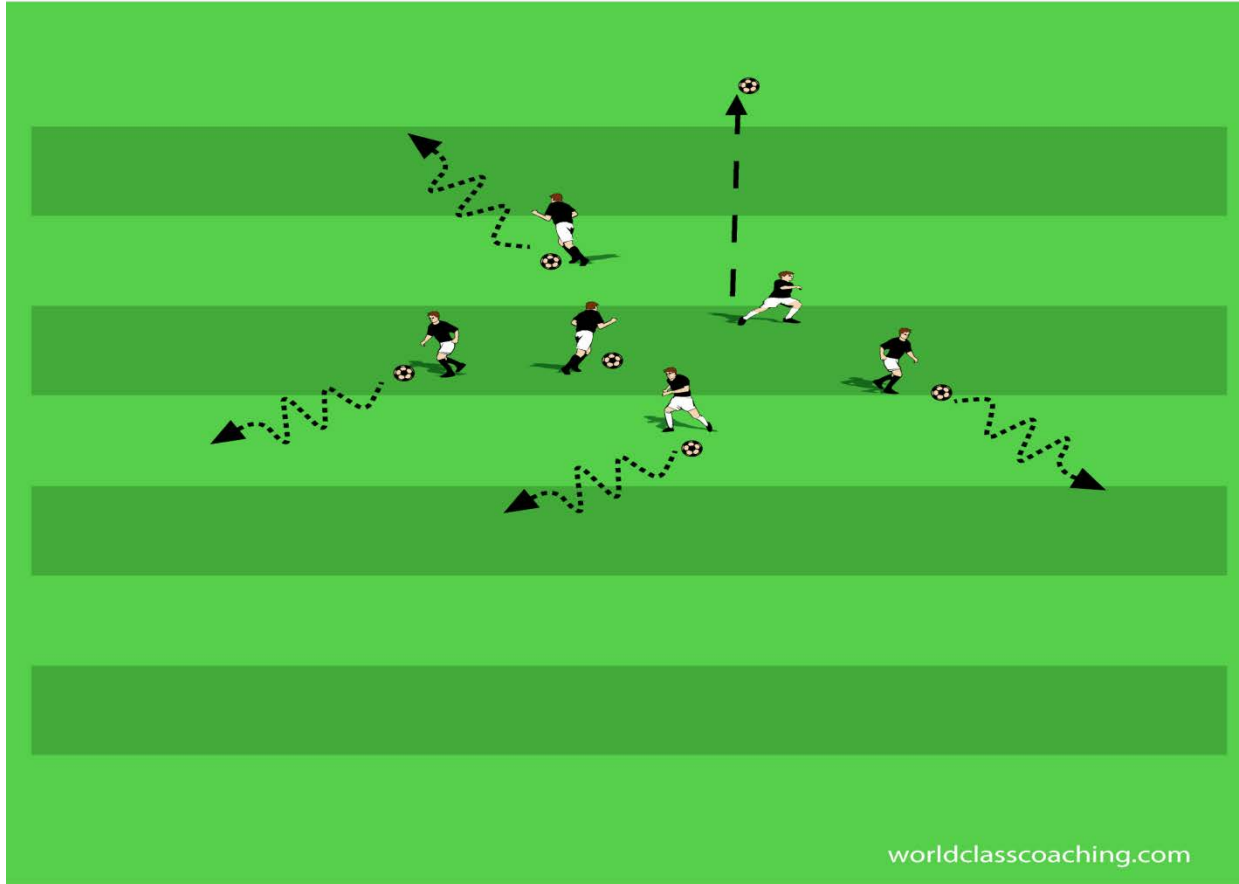
- Adjust the starting distance between players.
- All shots must be taken with the 'off' foot.

### **Human croquet** - 3x8 yard areas

In groups of three with one soccer ball, players line up with two players on the ends and one person in the middle. The middle player stands with her legs apart and the end line players take turns trying to pass the ball between the legs of the standing player. Play for one minute and then change the middle player. Keep track of points and see which team can score the most goals.

#### Variations:

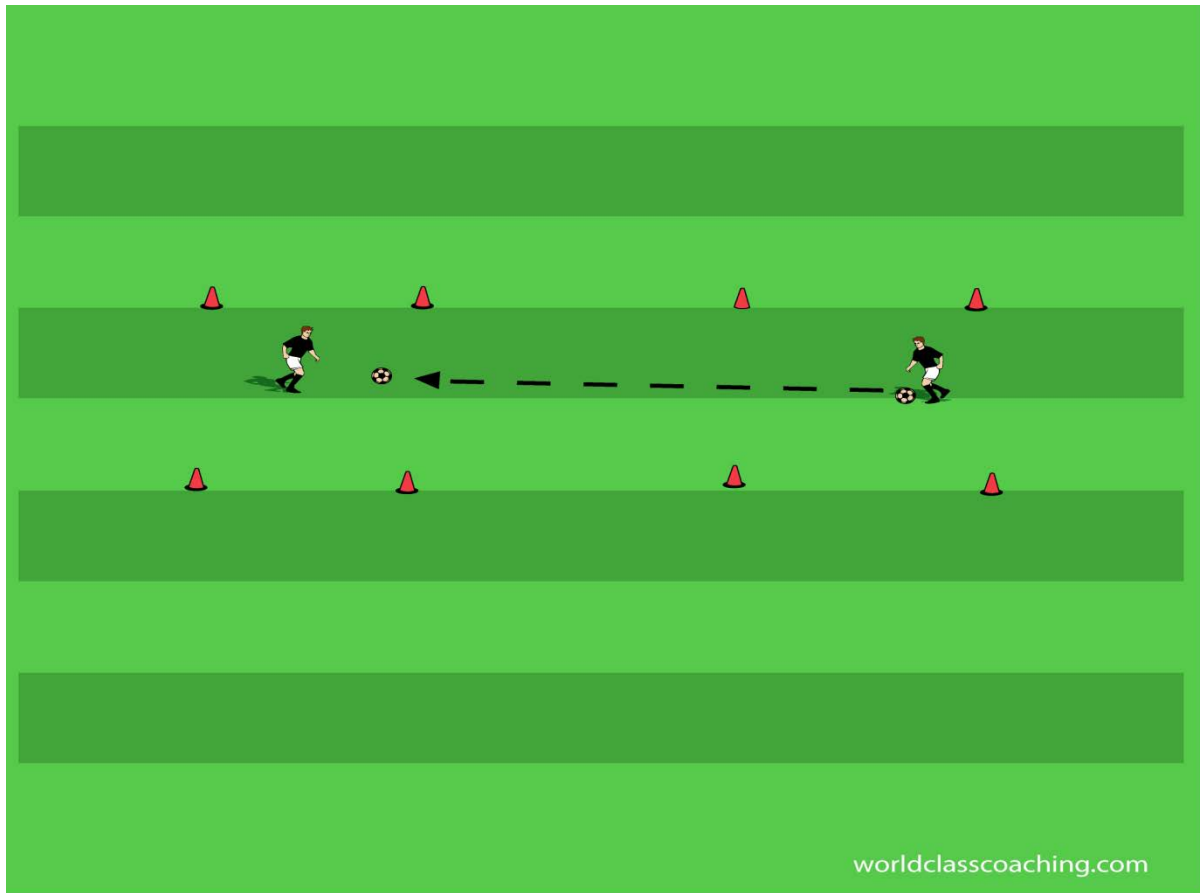
- Require passes be made with the 'off' foot.
- Vary the distance to the player in the middle.



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**Fountain spray** - 20x20 yard area

One player holds a ball while the others stand 2-3 yards away in a circle around the ball holder. The player with the ball throws it up in the air and then calls out the name of one of the other players. That player tries to catch the ball before it hits the ground while the rest of the players run away. If the ball is caught, the sequence is repeated. If the ball hits the ground, the player whose name was called settles the ball and hollers 'freeze!' The other players must stop in place. The player with the ball tries to pass the ball to hit the feet of any of the other players. The target player retrieves the ball and becomes the next server. This game combines a chance to work on some passing accuracy with introducing players to judging and controlling a ball in the air.

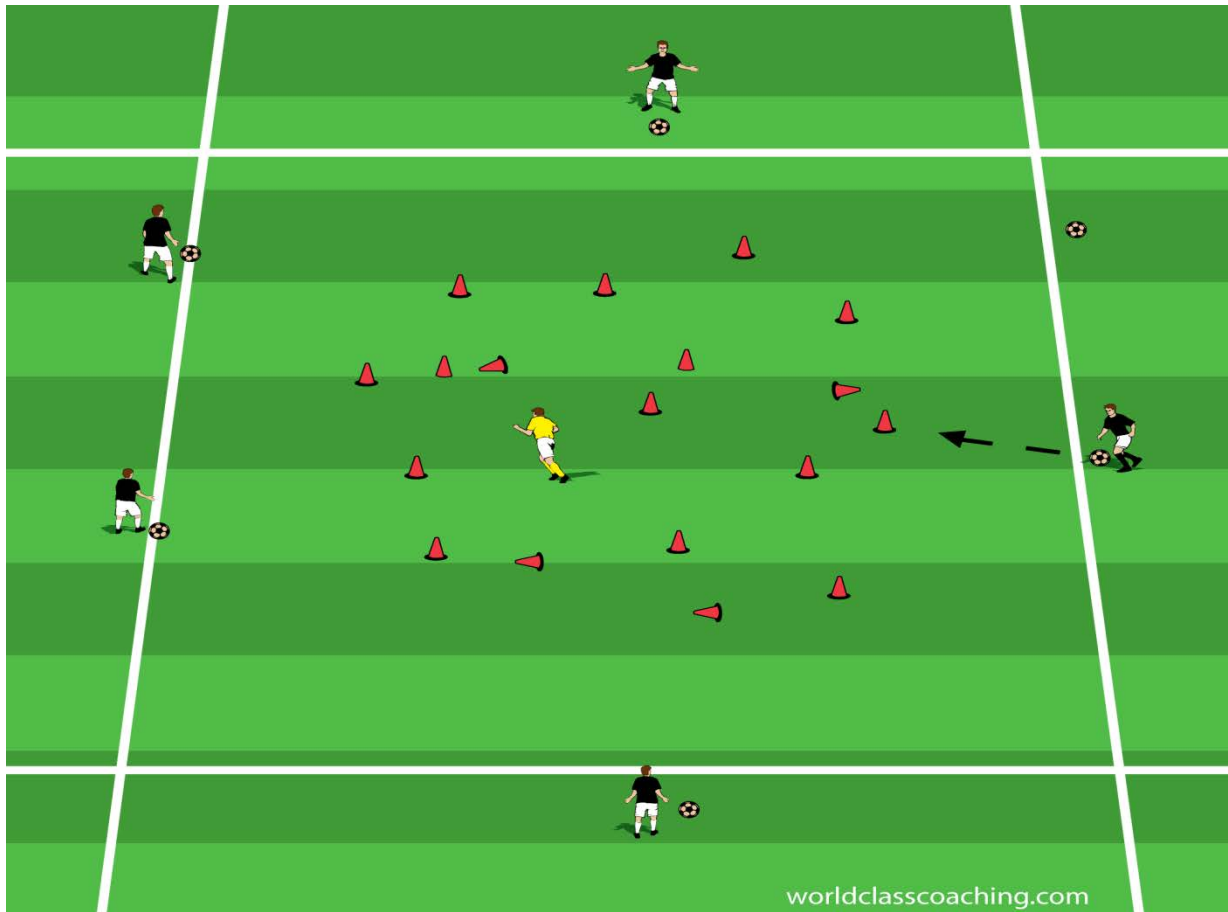


**Grid Wars** - 2 10x10 yard grids ten yards apart

Place one player in each grid. Use one ball per pair. Players alternate striking the ball with the goal of trying to get the ball to roll to a stop inside their partner's grid. Each successful strike earns a point. This is a useful exercise in that it compels the players to think about both placement and pace in their shots. Require players to shoot with their laces surface throughout. Play for three minutes and check scores.

Variations

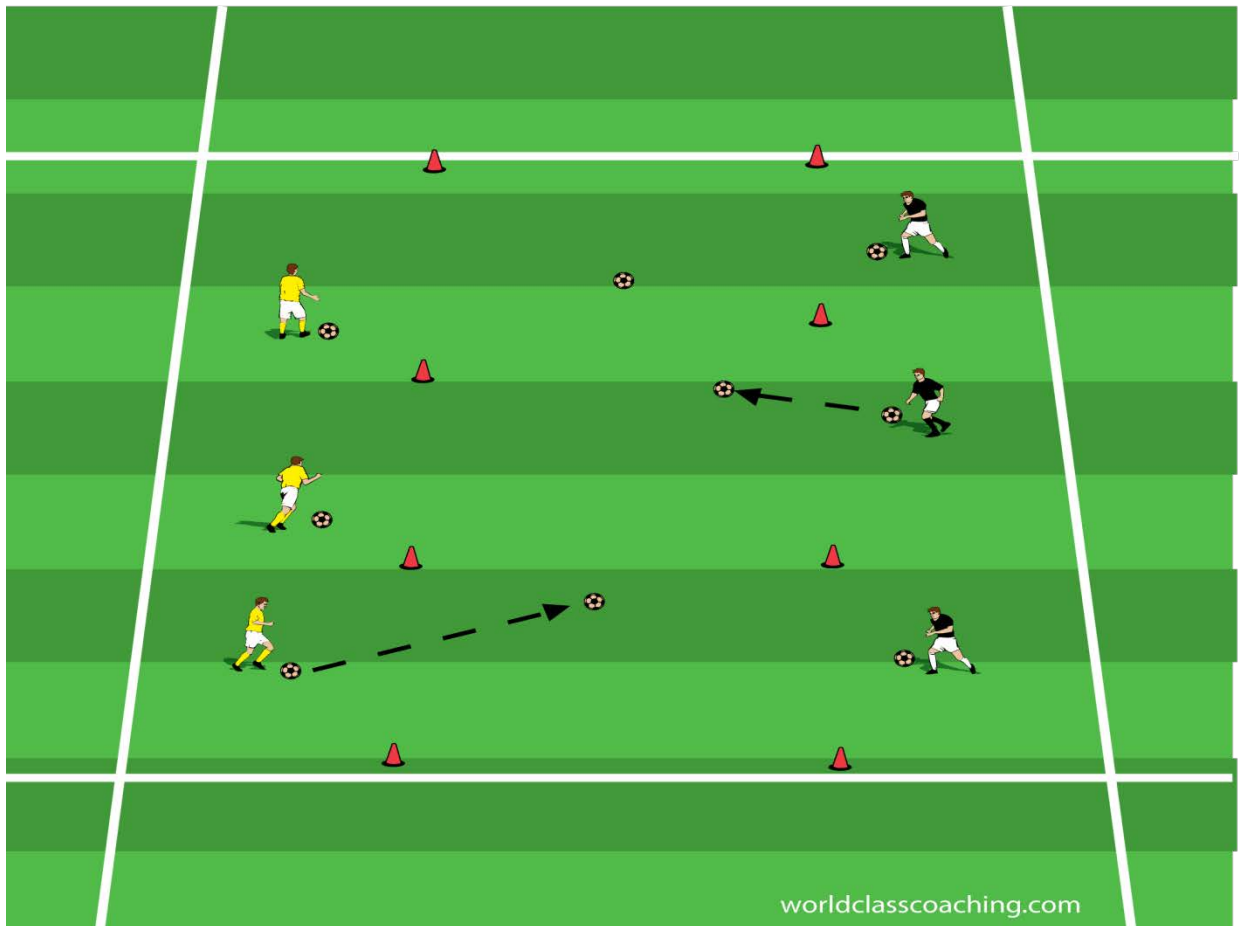
- Play with the off foot only.
- Create a smaller, target box inside each grid and give extra points for the added accuracy.



**Cone Medic - 20x20 yard grid**

The cone medic starts inside the grid. All other players are on the outside of the grid. At a signal from the coach, all players enter the grid and try to knock over the cones using their balls. The cone medic works to stand up cones as fast as possible. Play until all of the cones are down or for one minute and then change medics.



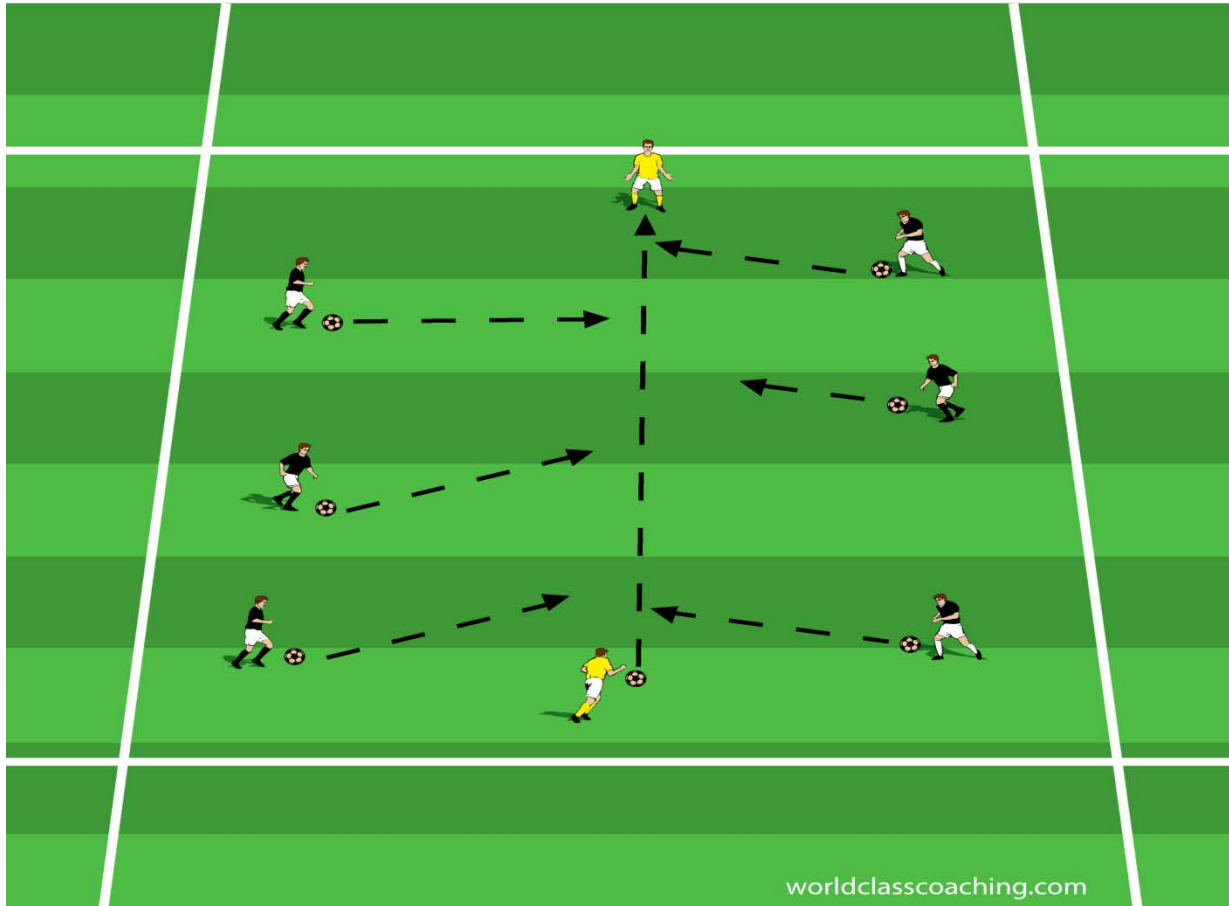


### **Cue ball** - 25x12 yard area

Put a ball (or two) of a distinctive color in the middle of the grid. Put a ball supply in each end zone and put half of the players in each of the end zones. Explain that the goal of the game is to pass a ball from the end zone to strike the ball in the center. The target ball must be knocked into the opposing end zone to earn a point. Players may only enter the center area to retrieve a ball. If the target ball is knocked into a team's end zone, they pick it up and run it back to the center and play continues. Teams may kick a cue ball at a target ball rolling toward their end zone in an effort to keep it from crossing the line. Play for five minutes and then check scores.

### Variations

- Adjust the size of the center area to increase the challenge or success rate.
- All shots must be taken with the 'off' foot.

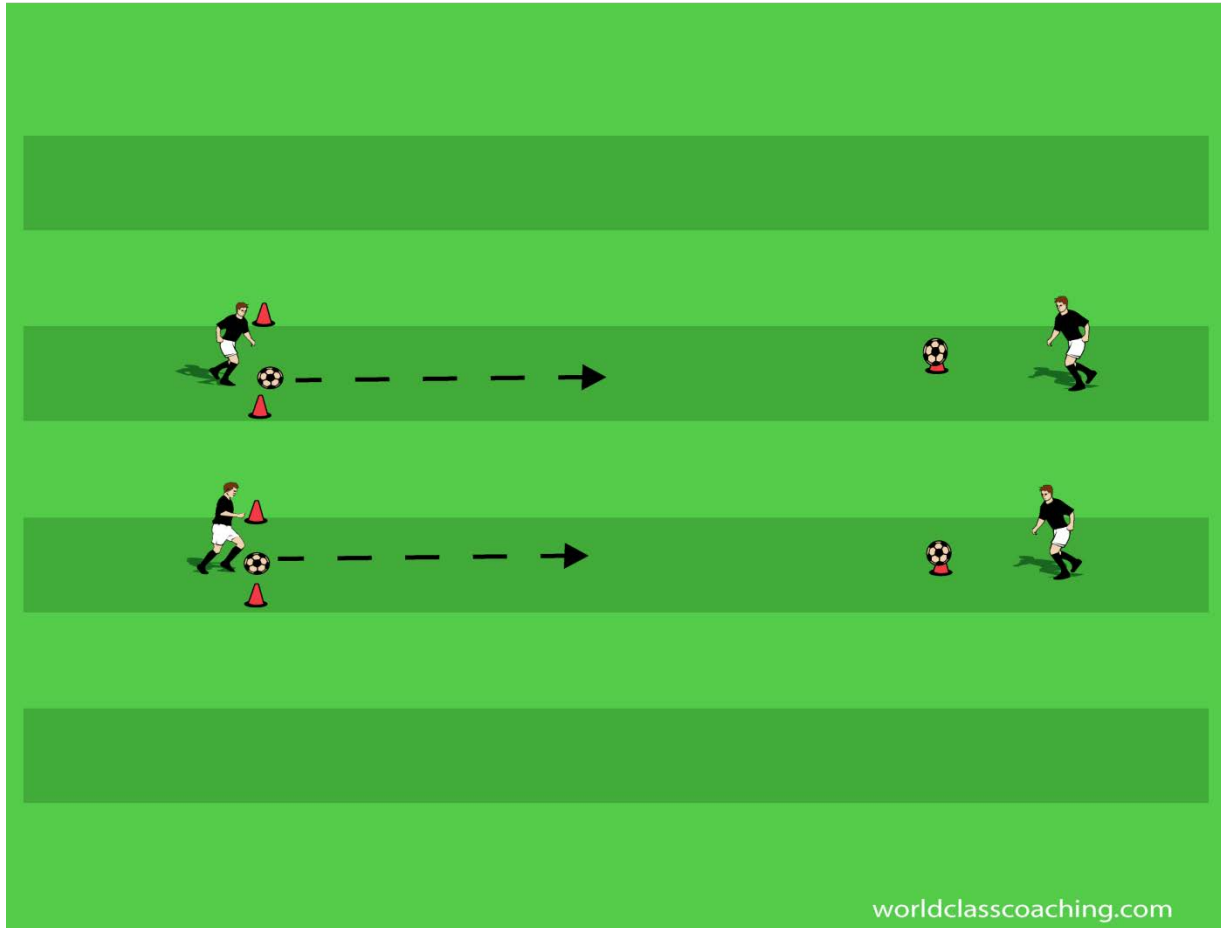


### **Duck Hunting - ¼ field**

Select two players to pass a ball to each other. They stand in the middle of the area, ten yards apart. The remaining players stand with a ball on the side of the area so that they can kick their ball to try to hit the target ball when it is passed. Play once, then the players retrieve their balls and try again from the other side. Play for two minutes and then change the passing pair.

#### Variations

- Adjust the size of the center area to increase the challenge or success rate.
- All shots must be taken with the 'off' foot.



### **Pineapple Drop** - 10x15 yard areas

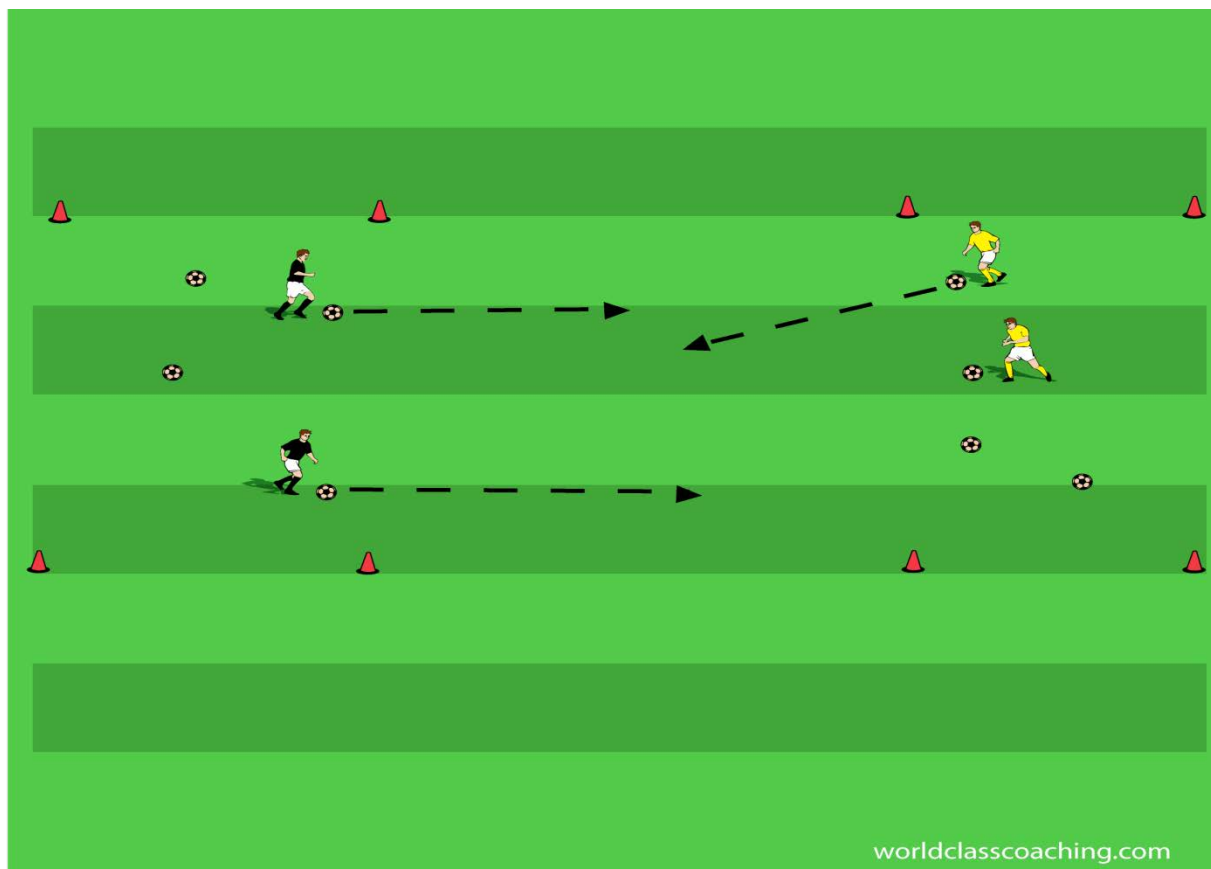
Divide the group into teams of 3-4. One player puts her ball atop the group's cone and then steps behind to monitor and retrieve errant shots. The other players form a line and proceed to pass/strike their balls (one at a time) in an effort to knock the 'pineapple' off of the cone. When a successful shot is made, the shooter puts her ball atop the cone and becomes the monitor. Play for two minutes and check scores.

#### Variations

- Players must use their off foot to strike the ball.
- Vary the length of the shot area.
- Players must hit a moving ball.

### **Pac man** - 20x20 yard grid

Two players are "Pac men" to start. All players have a ball and the Pac men wear distinctive vests. In this game, players dribble their balls around the grid and the Pac men try to kick their own soccer balls to hit the balls of the dribbling players. If their ball is struck, the players then put on a vest and join the Pac team until all players have been caught. It is critical to emphasize safety here. All balls must remain on the ground throughout the exercise.



### **Keep your yard clean - (2) 20x20 yard grids**

Each player needs a ball. Put half the team in each grid. This is a simple exercise designed to give players the opportunity to practice striking the ball. The goal of the exercise is to keep as many balls as possible in the other team's "yard." Require players to stop the ball before striking it. Play for one minute and check the number of balls in each grid before restarting play. The coach should emphasize using the inside of the foot or the laces to strike the ball and also locking the foot. The nice part of this exercise is that accuracy is not particularly important, so players can just focus on striking the ball.

#### Variations

- Adjust the size of the center area to increase the challenge or success rate.
- All shots must be taken with the 'off' foot.

### **Passing Relay - 15X30 yard area**

Divide the group into two teams and spread them out in two lines, with 5-10 yards (depending on age and ability) between each player. Each team gets a ball to start at one end of their line. The object of the game is to pass the ball along the team's line to the far end as quickly as possible. Each player must stop the ball and pass it in turn. When both teams have worked the ball to the other end of their lines, determine a winner and then play again in the other direction.

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### Variations

- Each player must take four dribbling touches (in place) before passing to the next player.
- Play with the off foot only.
- Demonstrate the importance of turning one's hips and shoulders after receiving to face the next player in line before passing the ball. Encourage players to control the ball and then turn before passing.

### **Windows** - 20x20 yard area

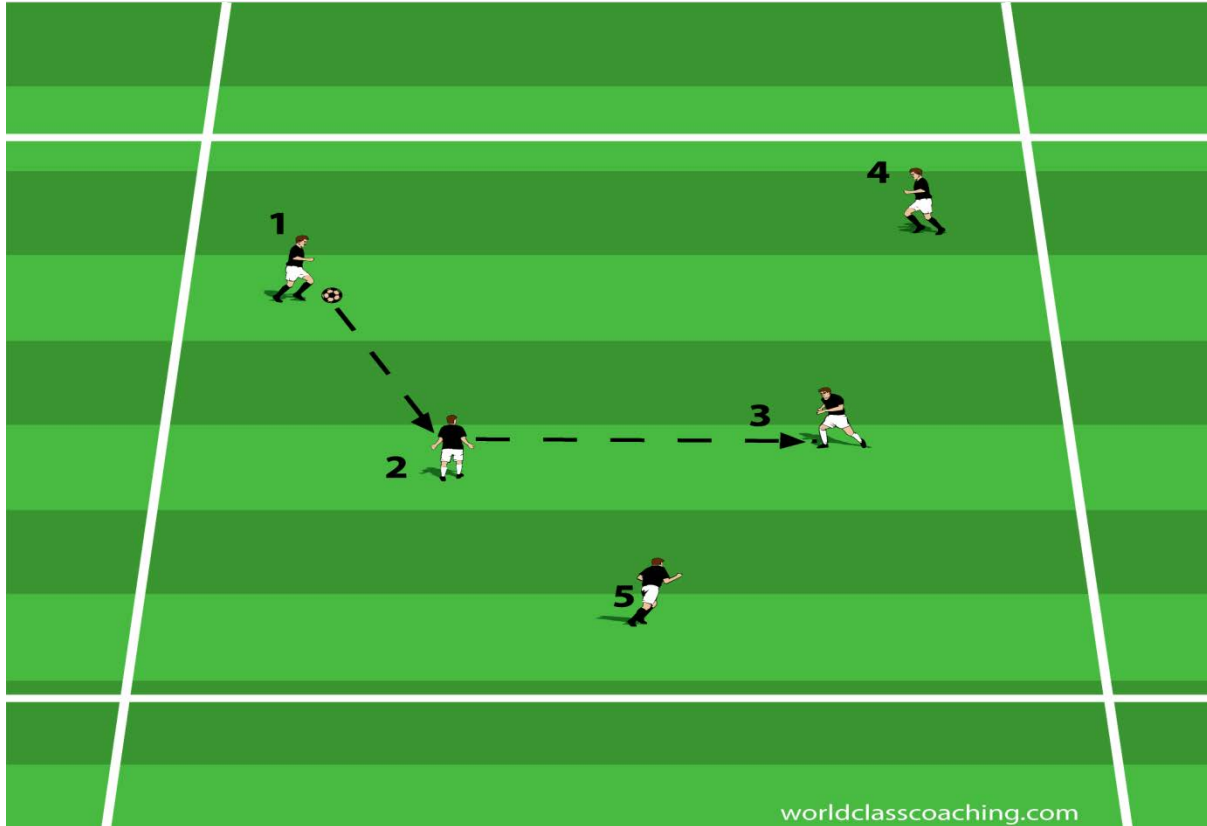
One-half of the group, each with soccer balls, spread around the perimeter of the grid. The other half of the group, without soccer balls, are inside the area. At the signal from the coach, the active players on the inside run toward a player on the outside, stopping 3-5 yards away (demonstrate the proper spacing). Then the player on the outside passes to the inside player, who stops the ball with the base of her shoe and then passes it back. Then the inside player finds another player with whom to exchange passes. Play for one minute and then change roles. Who can get the most exchanges?

### Variations

- Control the ball with the inside of the foot.
- 1-touch passing.
- Start the balls on the inside. The active players pass to a player on the outside, receive a pass back, and then dribble to another target player.
- Start the balls on the inside. The active players pass the ball to a player on the outside and then take that player's place. The receiving player on the outside dribbles into the grid and looks for another outside player to pass to.

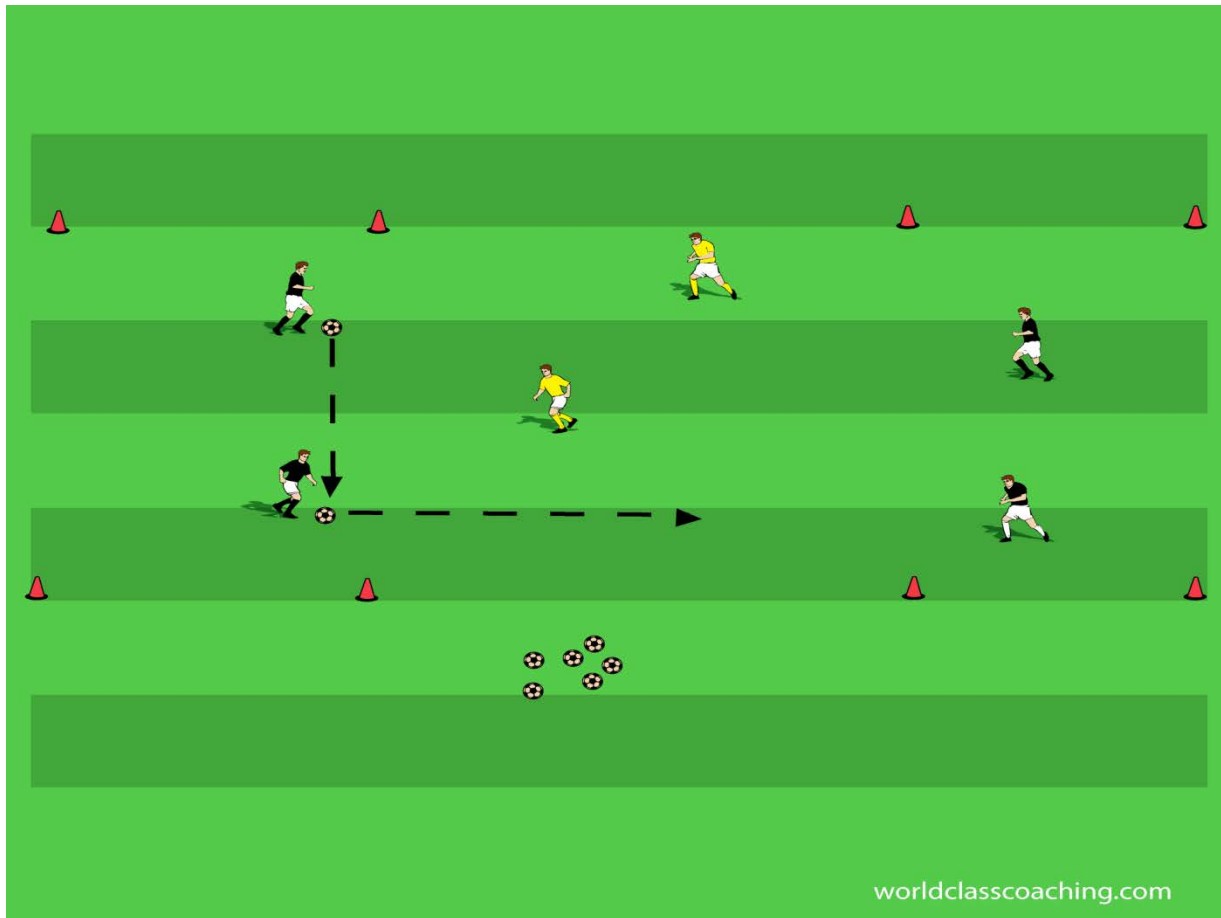
### **Soccer Golf** - Field Area

Each player has a ball. This is a fun way to work on striking the ball and also passing accuracy. The coach selects a target and the players see how many strikes they need to get their ball to hit the target. It's fun to utilize non-traditional targets, such as waste receptacles, fence posts, large trees (go easy on nature here), and also to compel the players to play across baseball infields, up or down hill, around trees, etc.



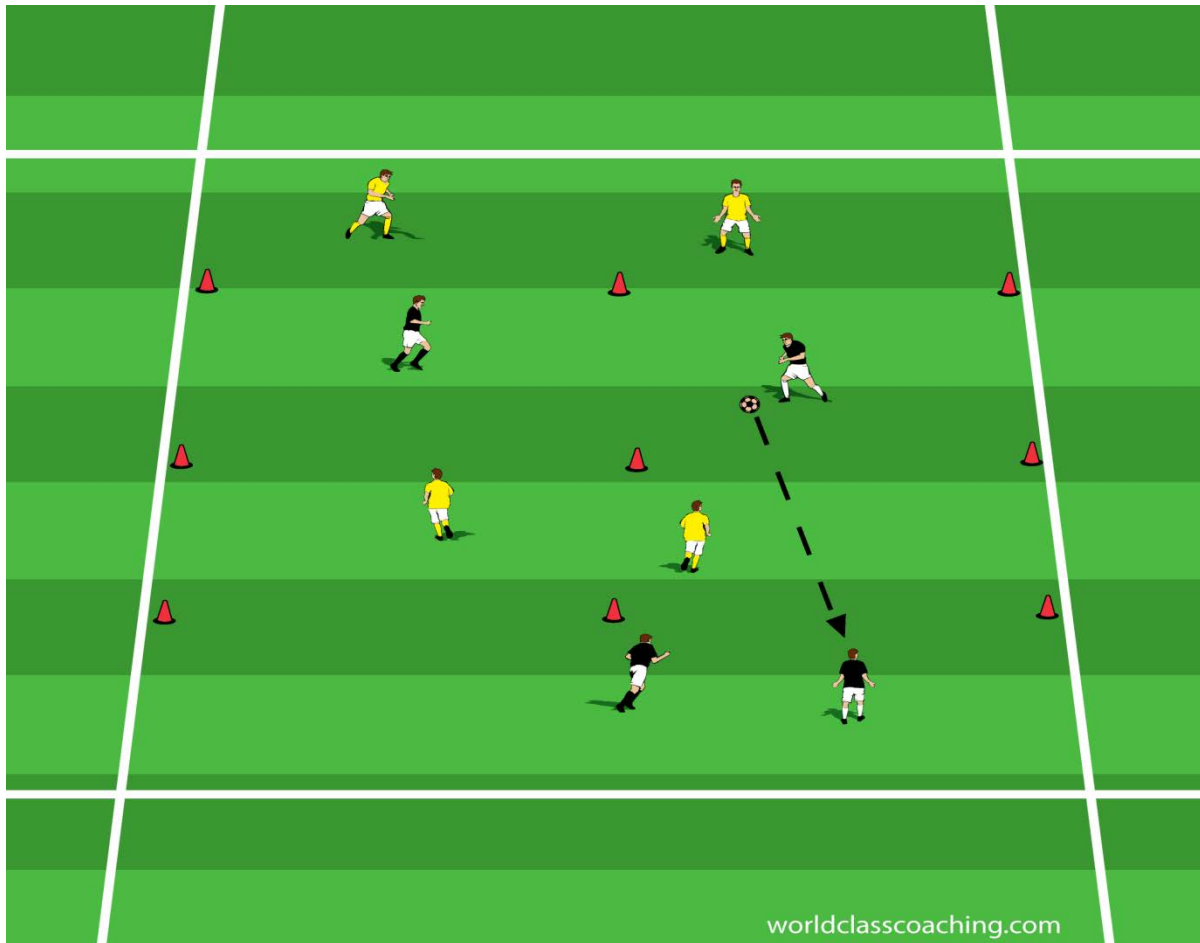
**Sequenced Passing** - 20x20 yard grid

Give each player a number (U8+). Use one ball. Player #1 dribbles the ball until player #2 approaches and then she passes the ball to her. Player #2 finds player #3 and play continues. The highest number plays to #1. Emphasize movement and communication. To add some fun, count to see how many passes can be completed in one minute and then see if the team can beat that score in the second minute.



**Monkeys - (3) 17x10 yard grids**

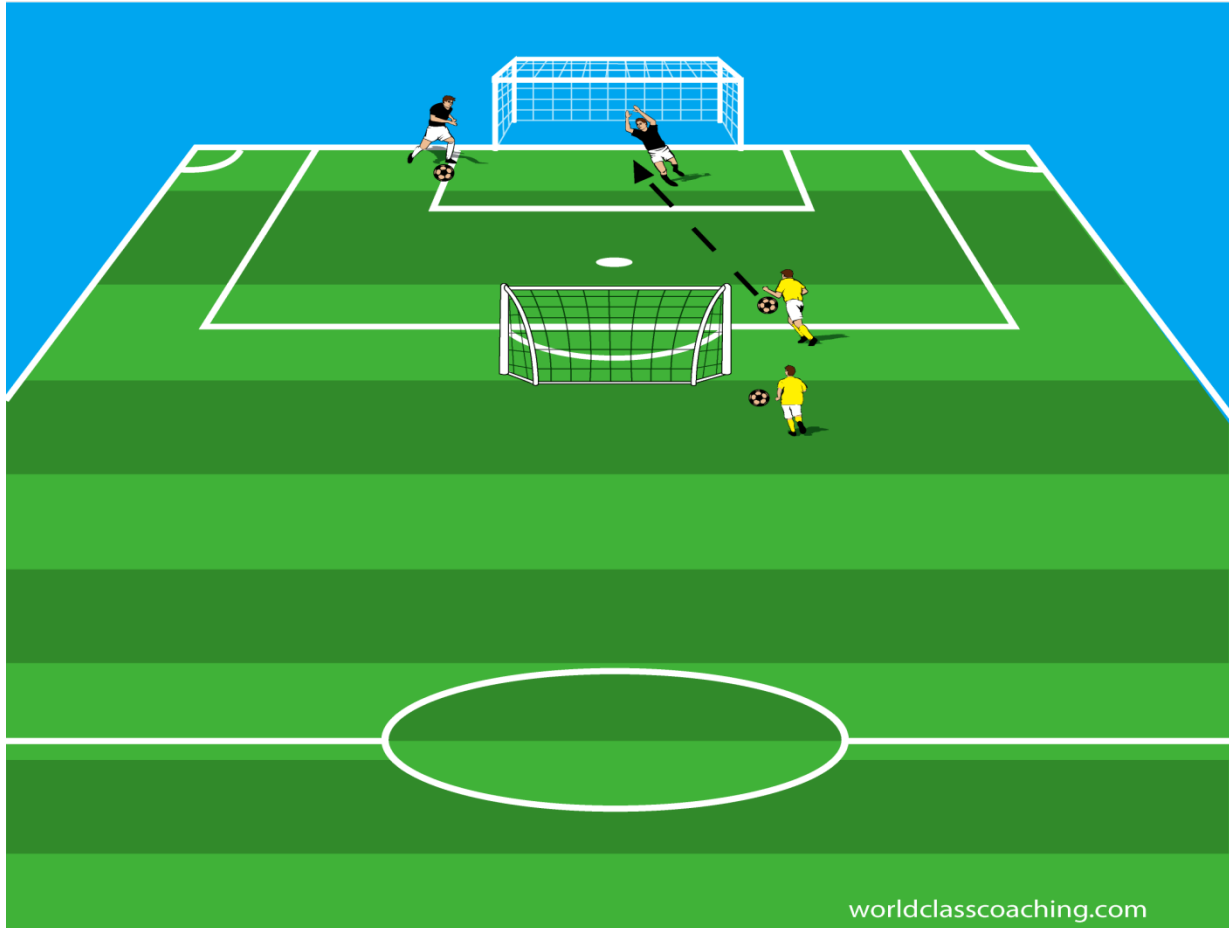
Divide the group into three teams and put one team in each section. The end teams pass the ball back and forth and the middle team attempts to win the ball. When the middle team gains control of the ball, the team they won it from takes their place in the middle. Encourage the teams in the end grids to dribble and pass the ball within their grids to create an angle from which they can safely pass the ball to the other grid. If one team gets stranded in the middle for more than a minute, rotate them out so that everyone gets to work on playing through occupied space to a target.



#### **4-zone passing - (4) 12x6 yard grids**

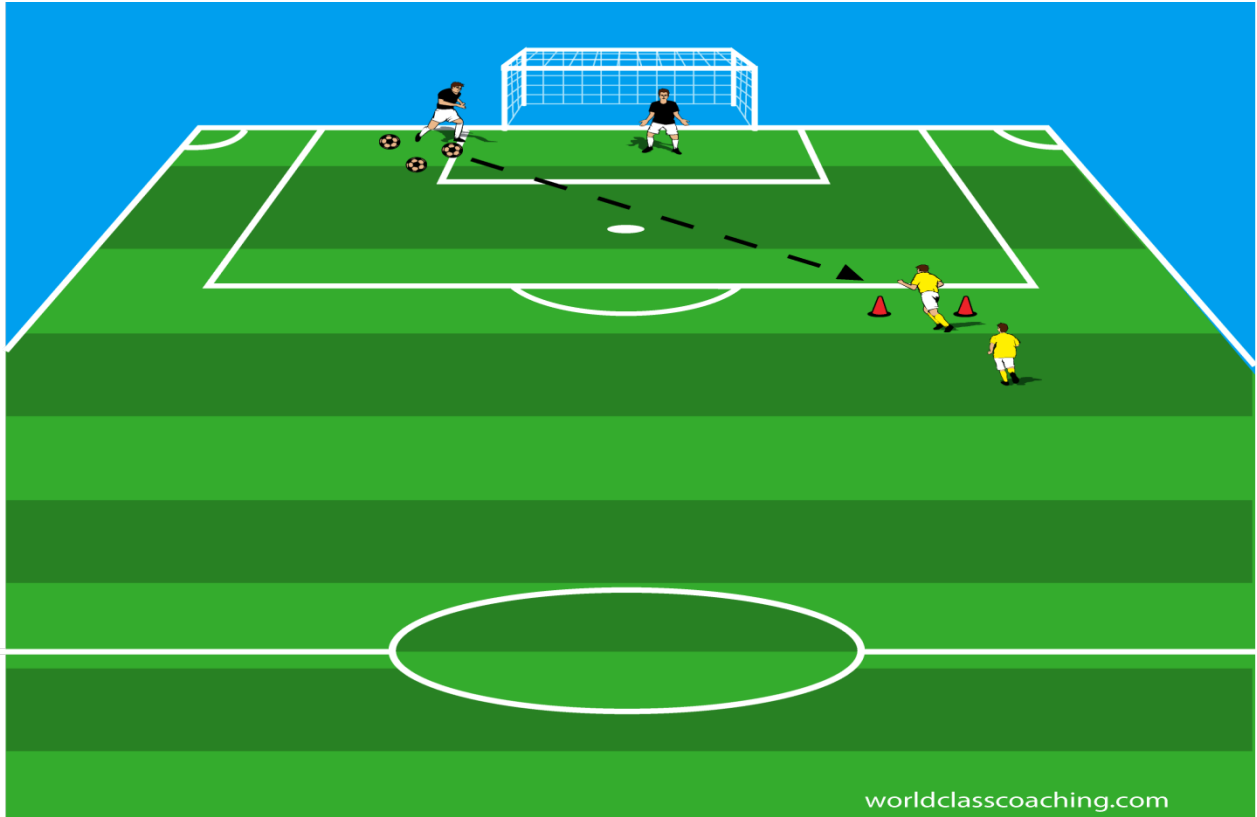
(U8+) Divide the group into two teams and place  $\frac{1}{2}$  of each team in two grids (one end grid and the middle grid on the opposite side –see diagram). The other team occupies the remaining two grids. Explain that the purpose of the game is work on passing to teammates in the other grid. All players must stay in the grid where they start the game. The team not in possession attempts to intercept passes and then play to their teammates in the other grid. Encourage players to pass within their grid to create a passing angle to the other grid. Give one point for each successful pass across the opponent's grid.





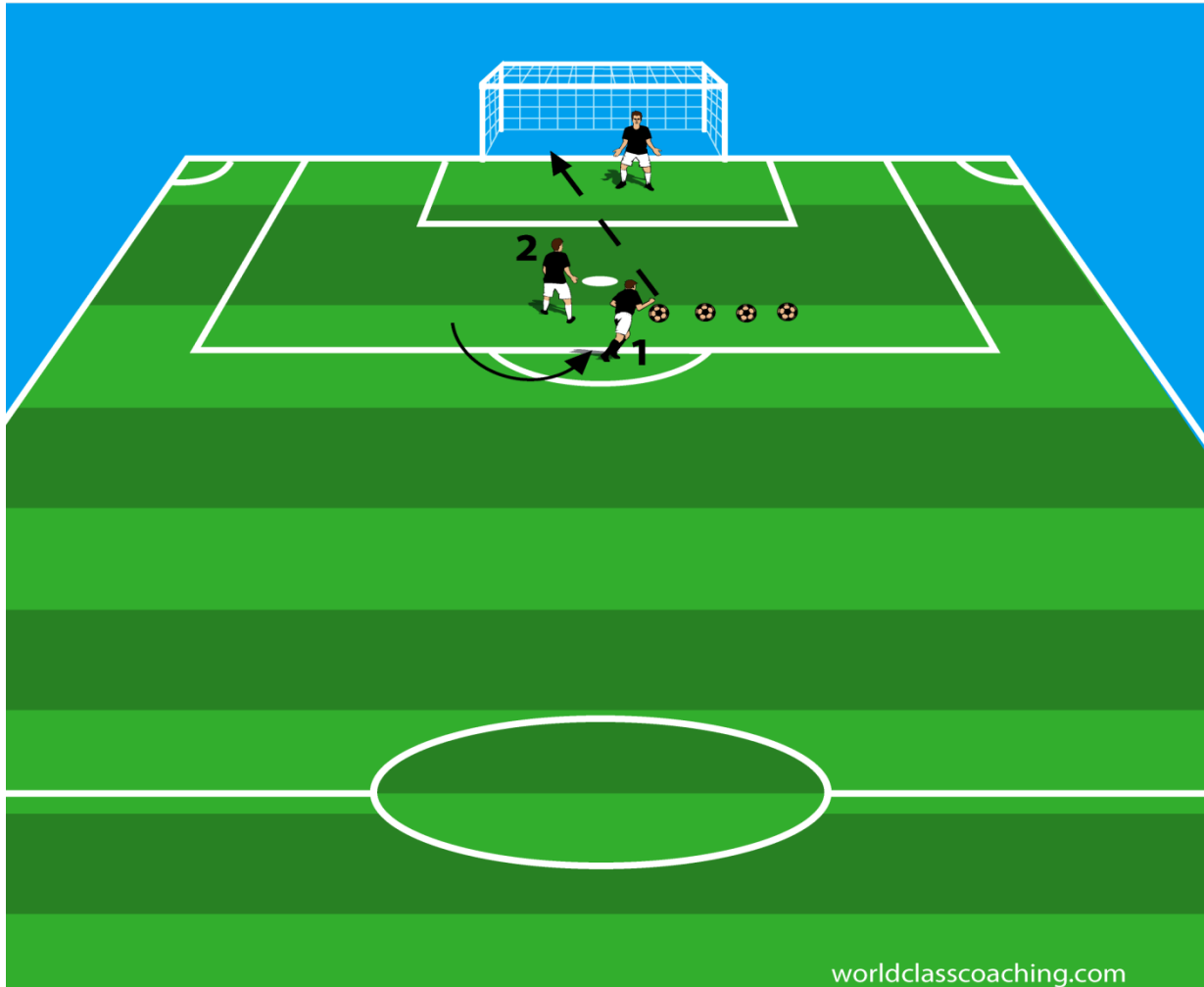
### **Shoot-keep-retrieve**

Divide the team into two groups. Put each group at the side (opposite sides – see diagram) of a goal. Players take turns shooting the ball at the other goal, then playing goalkeeper for one turn and then getting a ball and getting back in line. Players may not cross the center line between the goals before shooting. Adjust the grid size to be sure that players are not too close (for safety reasons) or too far away (shots are not reaching the goals). For U8 players, the goals should be about 10 yards apart and 3 yards in width. Encourage players to shoot on the ground and to use their laces or the inside of their foot to strike the ball.



### **1v1 to Goal - ½ field**

Divide the team into two groups. One group, with soccer balls, lines up next to one of the goal posts. The other group lines up at the top of the large box. The first player in the line by the goal passes the ball to the first player in the other line and then plays defense. The receiving player attempts to beat the defender and score. If the defender wins the ball, she tries to dribble the ball out of the large box. Players change lines and the next duel begins.



### **Speedy Shooting**

The active player here (1) runs around the resting player (2) and shoots to score past the goalkeeper (3). After each shot, the active player must run around the resting player before shooting again. Play until the ball supply is exhausted, and then rotate roles and play again. See which player can score the most goals. For U6 teams, play without a goalkeeper.

### **Money in the bank - 1/3 field**

Spread balls around the 1/3 of a field in front of a goal, but outside the large box. Appoint a pair of 'bandits' to play in front of goal. The bandits try to block 'deposits' by the rest of the team, who try to put balls into the goal through dribbling and shooting. Any ball won by the bandits is passed back outside the box area and the person trying to make a deposit just starts over. Play until all of the 'money' is deposited, then change bandits.

### **Big goals! – Area Varies**

Play a regular game, but with very large goals (i.e. U11-U12 or even U13+ goals). Encourage players to shoot early and often. This type of setting promotes both fun and successful attacking.

#### Variations

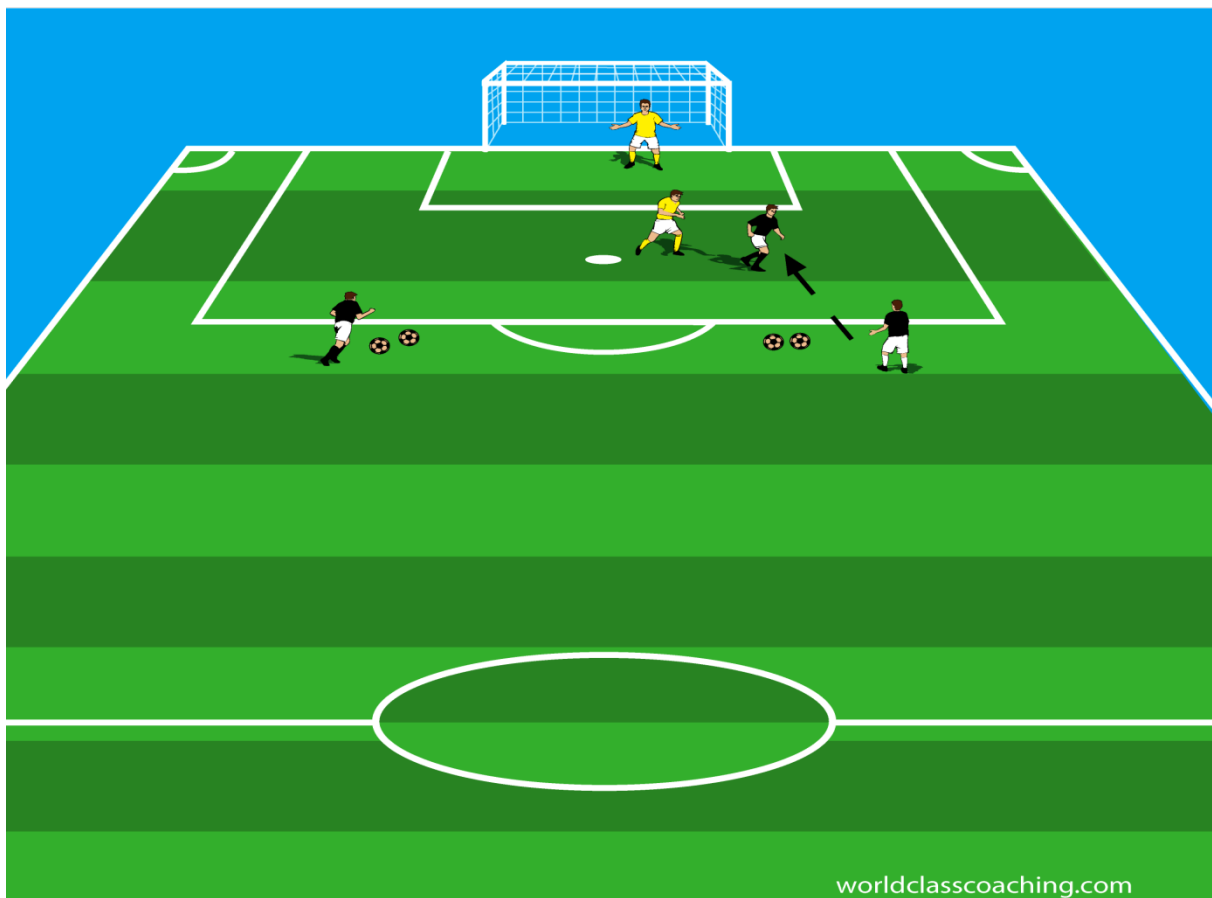
- Play to end lines, but allow shooting (the entire line is the goal).
- Play to as many goals as you can create (cones, flags, etc.).

#### **Portable goal** - ½ field

Two players or coaches hold onto the ends of a rolled-up towel and walk or run around the field, creating a portable goal. All other players have a ball and dribble around the area, scoring by passing the ball through the moving goal. Play for two minutes and then rotate the 'posts.' Who can score the most goals?

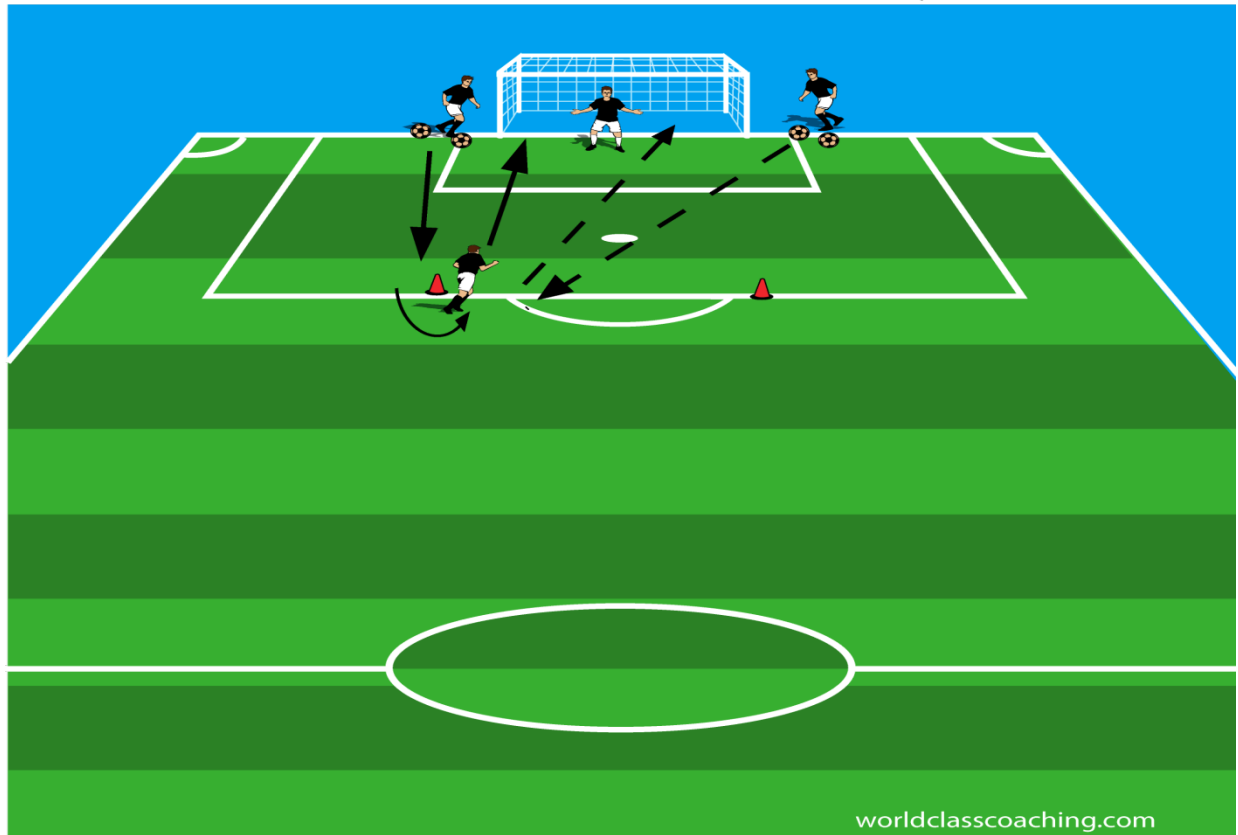
#### Variations

- Players can only shoot with their off foot.
- Players must dribble over a field line after scoring before shooting again.



#### **1v1 Hotbox to goal** large goal box

Place two players (plus a goalkeeper for U8) inside the box. Both players are trying to score at all times (while preventing their opponent from scoring). The remaining players act as servers and line up with balls around the edge of the area. The coach indicates which server should introduce a new ball each time the ball leaves the area. Play for two minutes and then rotate the middle pair.

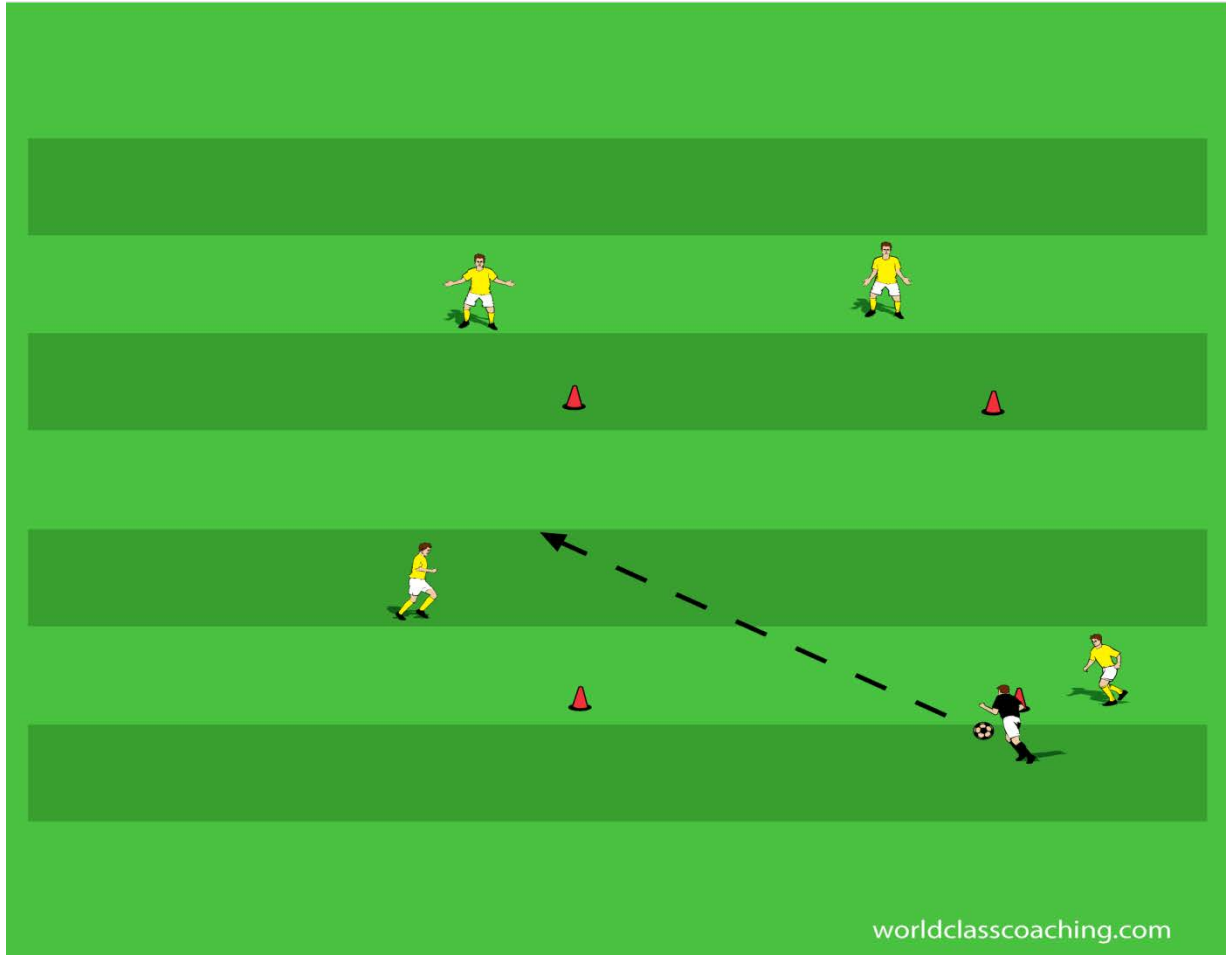


### **Pass/Shoot/Play GK - goal box area**

Create two even teams and have them collect balls just outside the posts. One player starts in goal. A player from the other team runs around the cone 10 yards from goal and then receives a pass from the opposing line. The attacking player takes a touch to set the ball and then takes a shot at goal. The shooter then plays goalkeeper for one turn and the passer becomes the attacker. Urge players to remember to move to their next role quickly and to restore the ball supply after playing goalkeeper. Keep track of goals scored for each team.

#### Variations

- One-touch shooting
- Give points for great saves
- Rebounds are live
- Only goals scored in the air count



### Soccer kickball - ½ field

Divide the group into two teams. The game is played similarly to kickball, with the batter kicking the ball and then trying to touch all 3 bases and return to home plate. The fielding team must run down the ball and return it to the home plate cone before the runner gets there. Each team bats around and then rotates to the field.

#### Variations

- The fielding team, to create an out, must run down the ball and then pass it amongst themselves until all team members have touched the ball before the runner returns home.
- Batters must use their 'off' foot.

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## About the Author



Photo courtesy of Christopher Mitchell and Minnesota Youth Soccer Association

Tony Englund is the Assistant Director of Coaching at St. Croix Soccer Club. Tony has earned more than a dozen diplomas from the National Soccer Coaches' Association of America, including the Premier, National Goalkeeping and Director of Coaching awards and he serves as an Associate Staff Coach for that organization. Tony is a frequent presenter at high-level coaching clinics. He has served as Director of Coaching and Player Development with three Minnesota clubs and has more than twenty years' experience as a successful club, high school and college head coach. His teams have repeatedly earned promotion to the highest levels of state and Midwest Regional League play and won multiple state championships, premier league titles and consistent regional rankings. He is the author of nine books published by World Class Coaching.