

CLUB CURRICULUM



U13-U14 SEASON

by TONY ENGLUND



U13/U14 Complete Season Training Curriculum

by
Tony Englund

Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING

U13/U14 Complete Season Training Curriculum

First published June, 2019 by
WORLD CLASS COACHING 34: 73"HpV'U'Qxgtncpf "Rctm"MU88435

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Edited by Tom Mura

Cover Design by P2 Creative Solutions



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WORLD CLASS COACHING



U13/U14 Complete Season Training Curriculum

A full season of training for a competitive U13/U14 team, featuring 25 training sessions, detailed analysis of systems of play and more than fifty full-color diagrams.

Tony England

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Introduction: U13/U14 – Competitive Soccer.

The starting point for any adult planning to mentor 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 13-14 year-olds carries a mandate to continue the technical and tactical development of young players while also nurturing their love of the game.

At U13/U14, the game reaches its full complexity with the move to the big field, full-sized goals and 11 vs. 11 play. State Cup play, forced relegation/earned promotion and a very competitive environment become features of play at U13 and U14, and the differentiation between the elite and competitive teams becomes more pronounced with each successive year. For coaches in these age groups it is important to emphasize the necessity of establishing and then coaching to the needs, abilities and aspirations of the group.

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.

It is thus critically important to strike a balance between continued development, competition and assuring that all players find fun, improvement and at least a measure of success in their experience playing soccer.

Organizing a U13/U14 practice session

One of the most important aspects of coaching is preparation. 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.

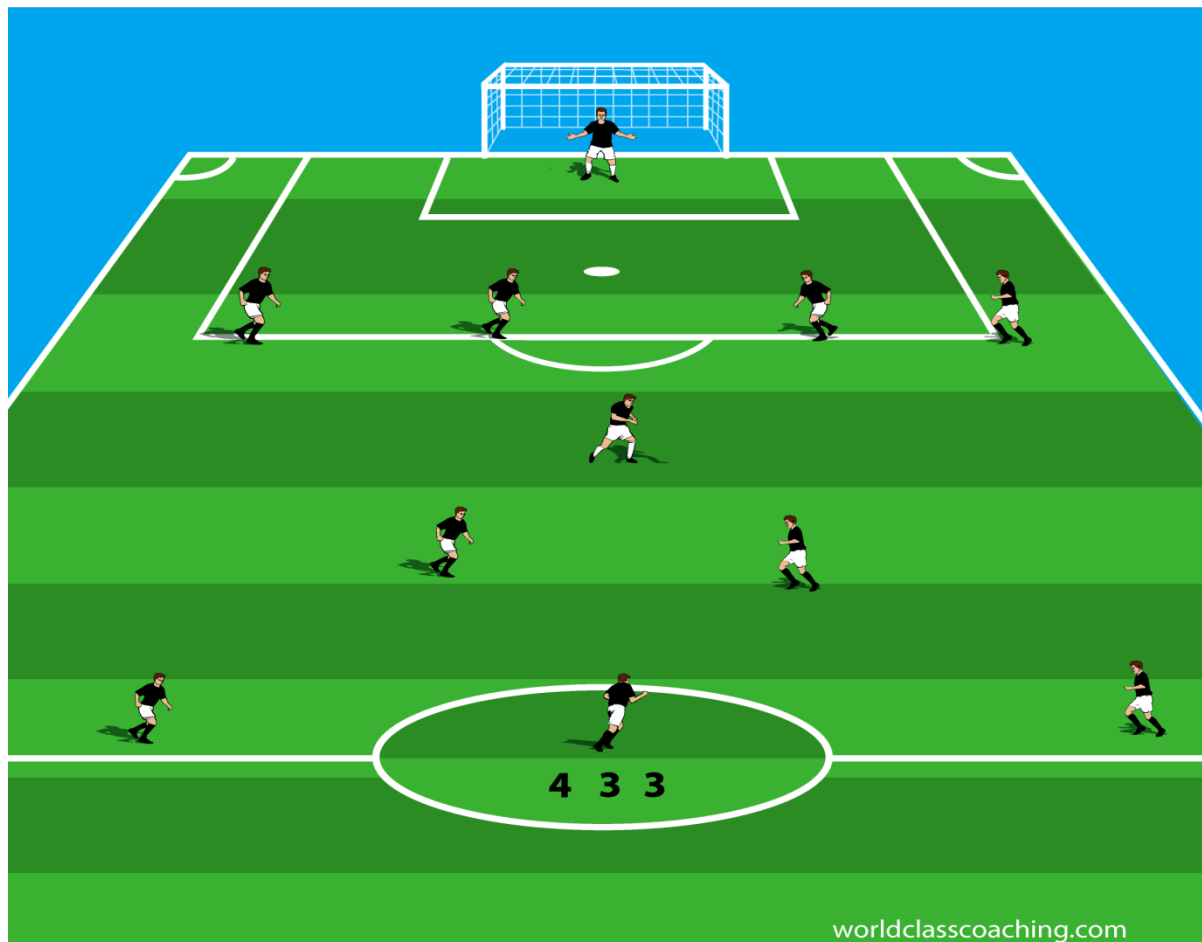
Training time: Roughly equal to the length of a game, and generally not more than ninety minutes.

Composition: 1/2 (usually the final portion of practice) of every training session should be spent just letting children play soccer. The remainder of the session is used to introduce and refine skills and

tactical understanding through efficient training exercises and games, building toward the final game. It is recommended that the coach choose a theme for each session (i.e. individual attacking, defending or passing and receiving). The curriculum presented in this book can be presented in order and will provide a complete season of training. However, the coach can also pick and choose according to the needs of her team, and much of the material presented here is suitable and designed for repeated use.

Systems of Play: 4-3-3

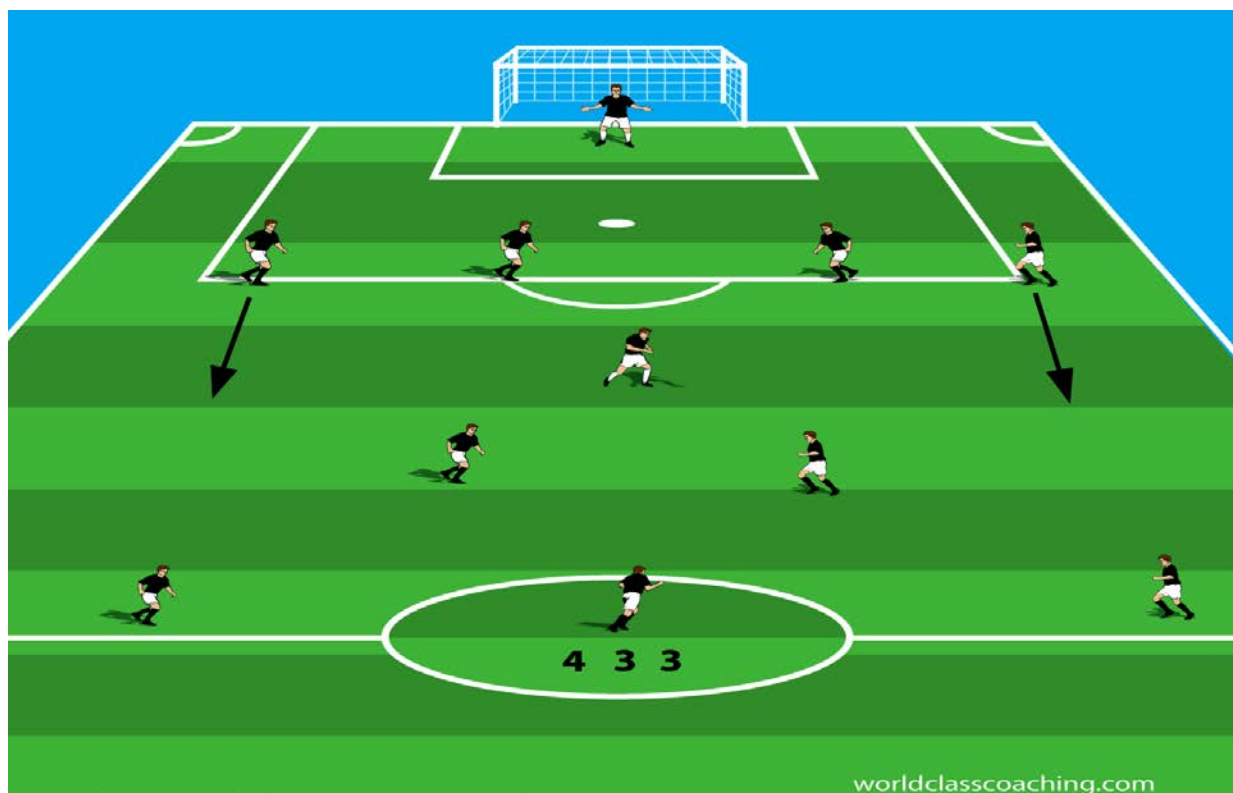
The 1-4-3-3 formation is a popular, attacking-oriented system of play. This chapter will give an overview of the system, including strengths and weaknesses, group tactical considerations, and key training concepts.



Strengths: The 1-4-3-3 deploys three forwards, giving the team attacking threats high up and in every space in the front half of the field. The three forwards also allow for immediate pressure when possession is lost in the front part of the field, and the forwards should be able to deny the opponent use of their back line to organize possession. This system lends itself well to high pressure defending. If the team plays a triangle midfield, those players will outnumber their opponents when playing against a 1-4-4-2, and the triangle shape allows for considerable flexibility in tactical philosophy for the team (play directly or indirectly; two attacking midfielders and one defending midfielder; one attacking midfielder and two defending midfielders). Finally, despite the use of three forwards, the system still deploys a

solid four-player back line, with room for the outside backs to press forward in support of the attack (no outside midfielders).

Challenges: The 1-4-3-3 also presents some concerns for coaches implementing this formation. The use of three forwards means that any pass from the opponents' back line into their midfield eliminates three defenders (the three forwards). The team assigns 7 players (the back line plus the midfield) to defending, whereas a 1-4-4-2 uses 8). The other major concern is the lack of outside midfielders if the team plays a triangle midfield. At the youth level, many opposing coaches will tell their teams to simply play their outside midfielders when the team wins the ball, and the coach must rehearse with the players the various potential responses to this tactic (typically the near-side back is released to press the ball in the middle or defending thirds, while the near-side forward drops down to pressure in the front third). Finally, transition (particularly for teams playing an indirect style) when possession is won is also a challenge for some younger teams playing this system because of the concentrated and fluid shape of the midfield, and the coach must spend some time working with the back line to assure that they understand how to connect to a checking midfielder or forward.



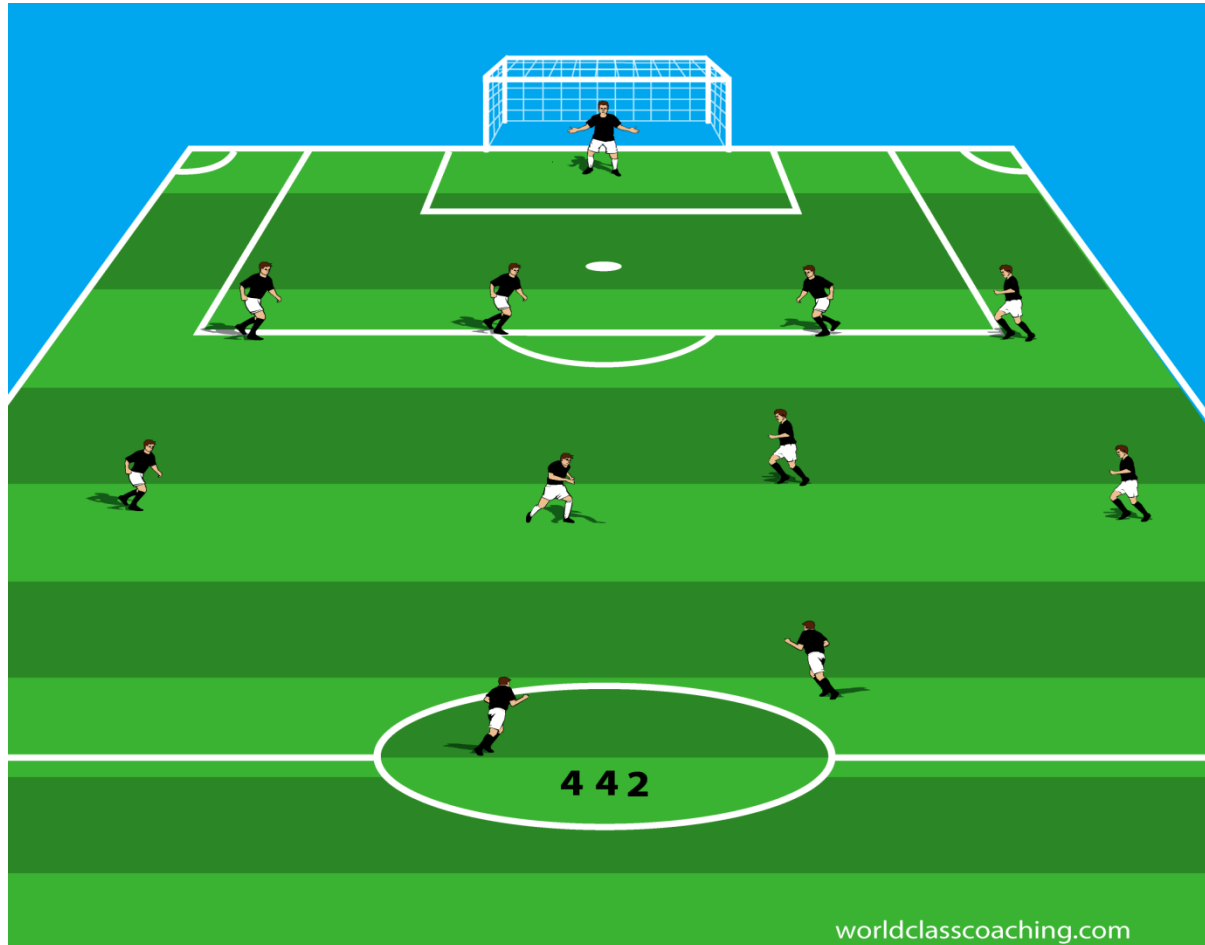
Tactical Considerations: In most 1-4-3-3's, the back line is a standard, flat back grouping. It is helpful, because of the space in front them in the 4-3-3 if the midfield is shaped as a triangle, if the outside backs are quick, skilled players who can get forward in support of the attack. The two center backs usually stay home, but they should be accustomed to supporting and connecting with the midfield group. The goalkeeper, incidentally, should be a skilled distributor of the ball who can play over distance (goal kicks, punts, throws), as most teams playing this system like to get the ball to one of the three forwards as soon as possible when possession is regained and at restarts.

The midfield in the 1-4-3-3 can be arranged as a flat grouping (increasingly rare) or in a centrally-condensed triangle. The flat arrangement is less common because the team must have a spectacular

central midfielder to deal with opposing central midfielders (usually 2 or 3 players). The triangle arrangement, which is flexible, common and very effective at any level, features either one attacking midfielder and two defending midfielders or vice-versa. These players often interchange roles and positions, and the coach should nurture both tactical creativity and discipline into the group. The front line arrangement is also fairly standard, with a central forward and two wing forwards. The most common considerations here are which position(s) drop in to aid in defending and transition. The advantage of the center forward dropping in is that the team has 4 players in the central space in front of the defense, a formidable block and also a springboard for counter-attacks. However, this posture means that opposing center backs have little pressure in possession. If the wing forward(s) drop in, they can help defend the flank spaces in the midfield, but they also are in poor positions to exploit the flanks once a counter-attack has begun. Many coaches just drop the forward nearest to the ball back into the defending block, a simple and often effective tactic.

Systems of Play: 4-4-2

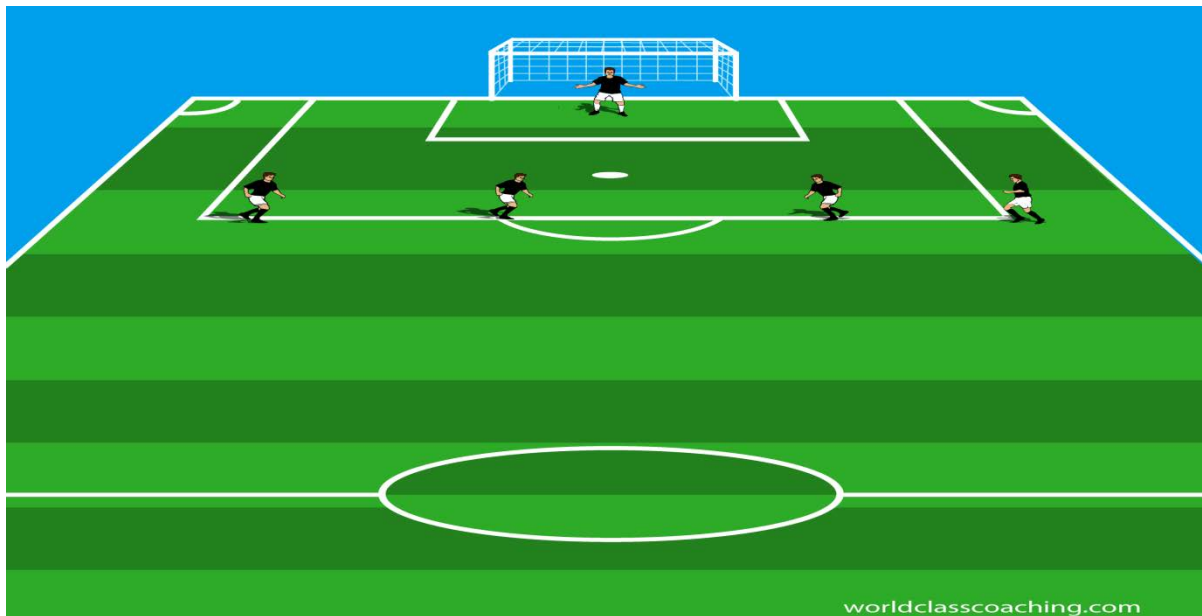
The 1-4-4-2 formation is the most common of the U13+ tactical layouts in today's game. This chapter will give an overview of the system, including strengths and weaknesses, group tactical considerations, and key training concepts.



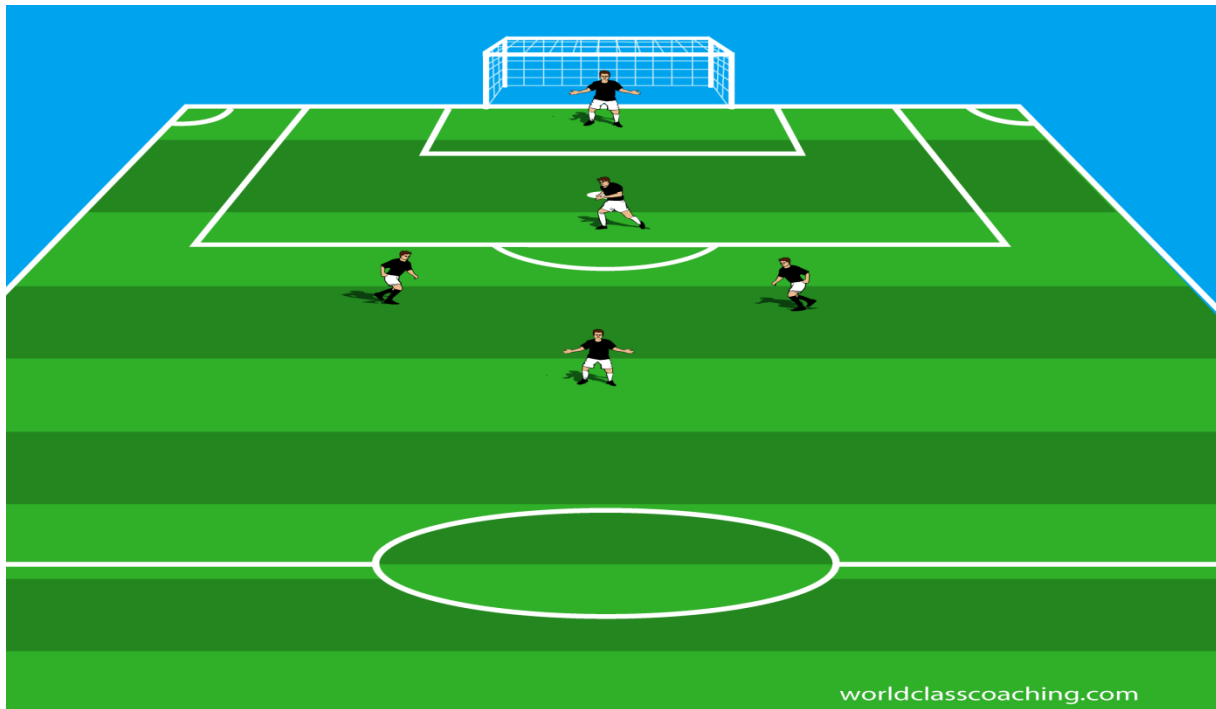
Strengths: 1-4-4-2 allows for a strong defensive bloc, with 8 players (plus the goalkeeper) committed to defensive work. This system is a smooth transition for U11-U12 teams moving on to the big field after playing 1-3-3-1, as a player is simply added to each of the defensive, midfield and front lines. This system is also easy to teach, as the areas of the field can be subdivided evenly and manageably among the players in each group, and passing relationships are easy to define. Finally, as outlined below, the midfield and back line can be deployed in different ways to highlight the strengths of the individual players and team.

Challenges: 1-4-4-2, like all systems, also has some inherent weaknesses. First, two forwards can become isolated and provide insufficient punch in the attack. For some teams, the two forwards can expend a lot of energy chasing the opponents' back line without winning many balls. Teams that play 1-3-5-2 will have an extra player in the midfield and still have a numerical advantage on their backline as well. The most common criticism of this system is that it is inherently defensive, and the coach will need to address how the team will get sufficient numbers forward to create and sustain attacks.

Tactical considerations: Both the back line and the midfield can be deployed in different ways to support player abilities and team tactical goals. The back line can be played “flat” with two center backs and two outside backs (see below). This layout requires a zonal philosophy be adopted for defending. In this arrangement, the center backs in particular need to be well versed in balancing one-another’s actions (i.e. when one steps up, the other covers), and players need to learn to focus on dealing with a particular space rather than a single opponent. Additionally, the goalkeeper must be able to deal with the space behind the defense by cutting out through balls in particular. The advantages of adopting a flat back line include the ease of providing a broad, stable line for organizing possession and, relatedly, because the players are organized to track space rather than individual opponents, their shape will facilitate predictable transition.



The other method for organizing the back line is referred to as a diamond shape. In this case (see below), the two central defenders are staggered, with a sweeper (deeper back) and a stopper (who sweeps in front of the defensive line). This arrangement is simpler and builds in depth, but is less useful, generally speaking, for transition to possession and attacking, and can be torn apart (if the front two or three man-mark) by intelligent attacking. The sweeper is typically the organizer and a very strong tackler, as well as a mobile player who long passes well and is strong in the air. The marking (outside) backs are often fast, tough 1v1 players who can isolate and strip opponents on a consistent basis. The stopper is frequently a strong, decisive tackler who serves as a wrecking ball for opponent’s attacks. She is typically also very strong in the air and, ideally, serves as an organizer as well. Either of these layouts can work, and each has its advantages and weaknesses. Certainly the flat back line, if practicable with a team’s talent, is the desirable and more sophisticated organization for U14+ teams.

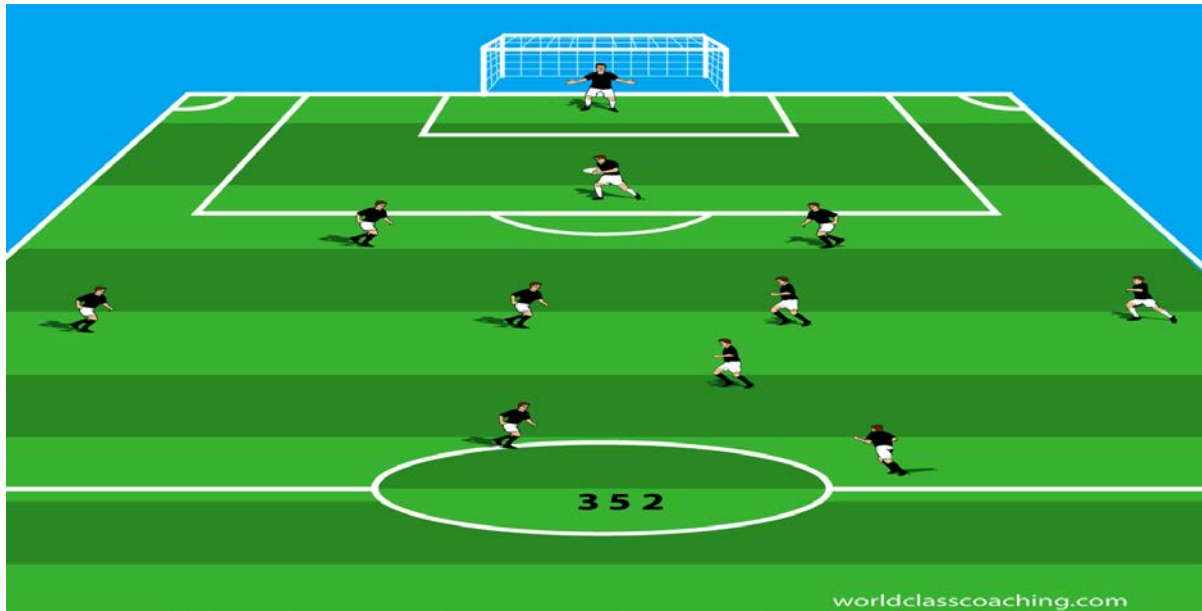


The midfield organization for classic level teams is typically fairly straightforward, with a pair of inside or central midfielders and a pair of flank or outside midfielders. The flank midfielders are typically players who excel in space for speed reasons and it is helpful if they can get end line and cross with consistency. If the team plays a diamond back line, the outside midfielders have important defensive responsibilities in dealing with space outside of the marking backs. The central midfielders are the organizers (the “engine”) of the team. They need to be technically-sharp, hard-working and intelligent players who communicate and organize the team’s attack as well as providing consistent defending presence in front of the backline. Many coaches like to stagger the two central midfielders, with one playing as a holding player and the other pushing forward behind the strikers.

The two strikers in a 1-4-4-2 are most often deployed in a staggered pairing, with the ball-side striker acting as a target underneath while the other striker stretches the line of the defense. Most coaches prefer that the two strikers work to stay within 15 yards of one-another so that they can provide constant support in transition. Finally, most striker tandems feature one very fast player and one physically-dominating player. The former tries to get in behind defenses and the latter is usually a target on crosses.

Systems of Play: 1-3-5-2

The 1-3-5-2 formation is increasingly rare in today's game. Many coaches find that three backs are too easily exposed at higher levels. However, some coaches still enjoy the five-player midfield arrangement, and this system is popular with coaches who like to hold the ball in the midfield. This chapter will give an overview of the system, including strengths and weaknesses, group tactical considerations, and key training concepts.



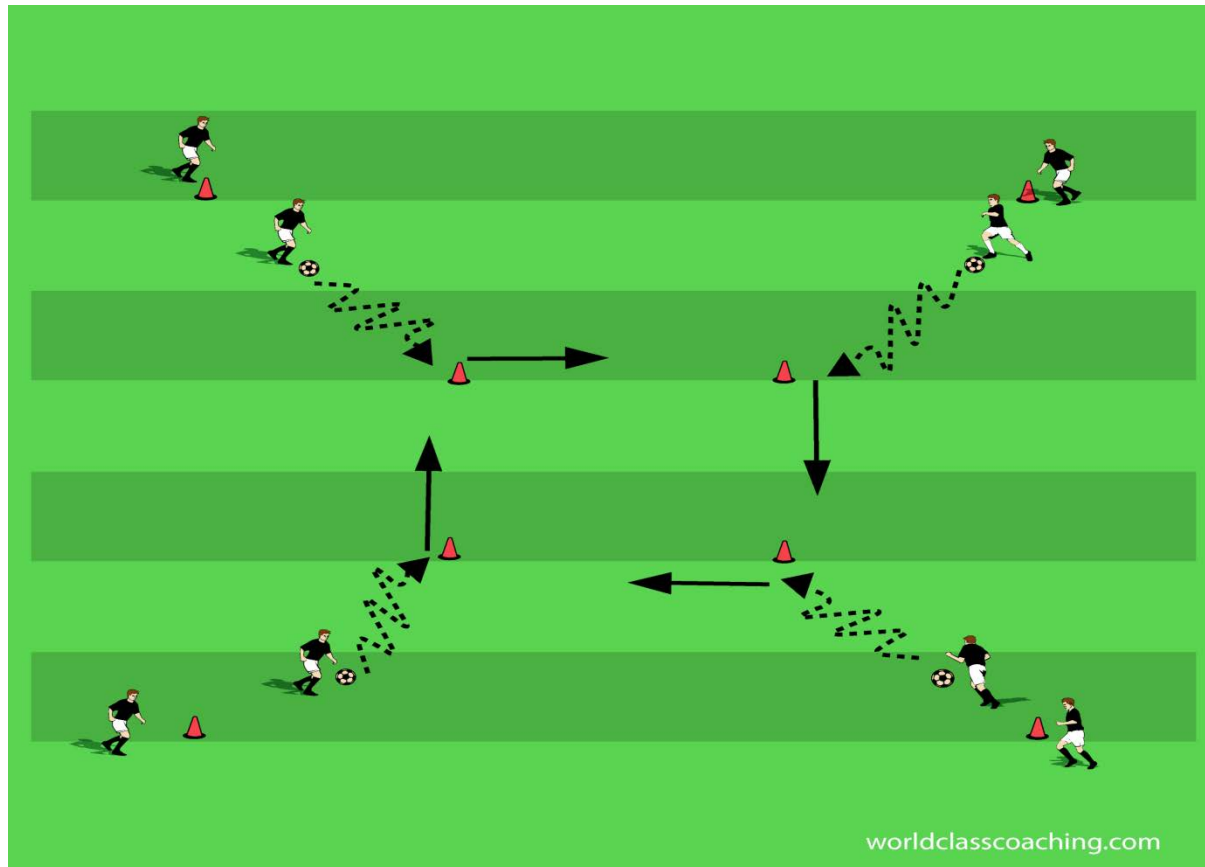
Strengths: The 1-3-5-2 features a very flexible and often powerful 5-player midfield. Often, the flank midfielders are very fast, talented attacking personalities. The attacking midfielder(s) also often join the attack, and they must connect with the forwards in possession.

Challenges: The three back is often beaten by teams that play directly and play into open space on the edges of the back line. For this reason, the outside midfielders can often be forced to adopt deep starting positions (while they help out on defense), limiting the formations attacking numbers and ability to develop width. The two forwards may be unable to provide consistent pressure on the opposing back line.

Tactical Considerations: If the coach opts to utilize this system for the team, then the team must become accustomed to controlling the middle of the field on game day. The center midfield triangle must feature players who can control that space and dominate in possession. The flank midfielders must possess very good fitness and speed and be able to play end line to end line, serving crosses in attack and covering the space outside of the back line when needed on defense. The back line players must be very mobile and disciplined, controlling central spaces and winning duels when isolated. The forwards work in tandem to provide pressure on the defensive side of the ball and to serve as targets in attack. They should remain within 15 yards of one-another, always looking to play a two-person game to get in behind. They also need to work well with the central midfielders in possession and combine well with the flank midfielders.

Training Session# 1: Advanced Technical Passing

Introduction: This session introduces rhythm passing in a group setting, providing a number of challenging and fun environments in which players learn to work together under time and then opponent pressure.



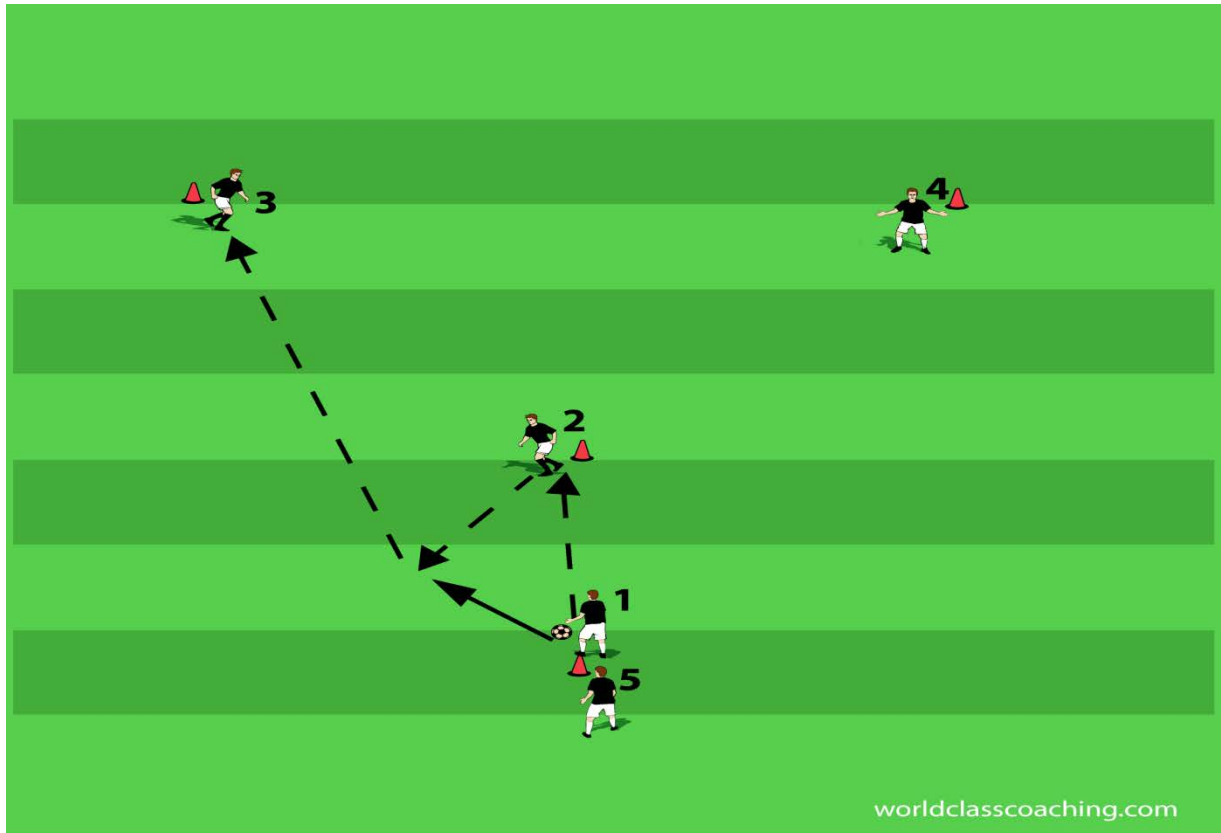
WPS Square - 15x 15 yard grid

Players and a ball at each corner of the larger grid. The first player in each line dribbles in and stops the ball at the nearest cone. The players then run along the perimeter of the smaller grid and pass the ball at the next cone to the first player at the cone the nearest line and join that line. It is critical that players develop a sense of unified timing to make this exercise function well.

Variations:

- players dribble the ball to the nearest cone and then run diagonally across the grid and pass the ball waiting there to the first person in the nearest line before joining that line. This variation compels players to deal with traffic as they move across the grid.
- players dribble the ball to the nearest cone and then run diagonally across the grid and pass the ball to the first person in the nearest line. This target player should be waiting 3 yards behind the cone and to one side of the cone. The passer then moves to the opposite side of the cone and the runner works to complete a 1-2 with the target, who then dribbles the ball to the inside

cone and play continues. Once again, a sense of timing as well as technical precision is important to the success of the exercise.

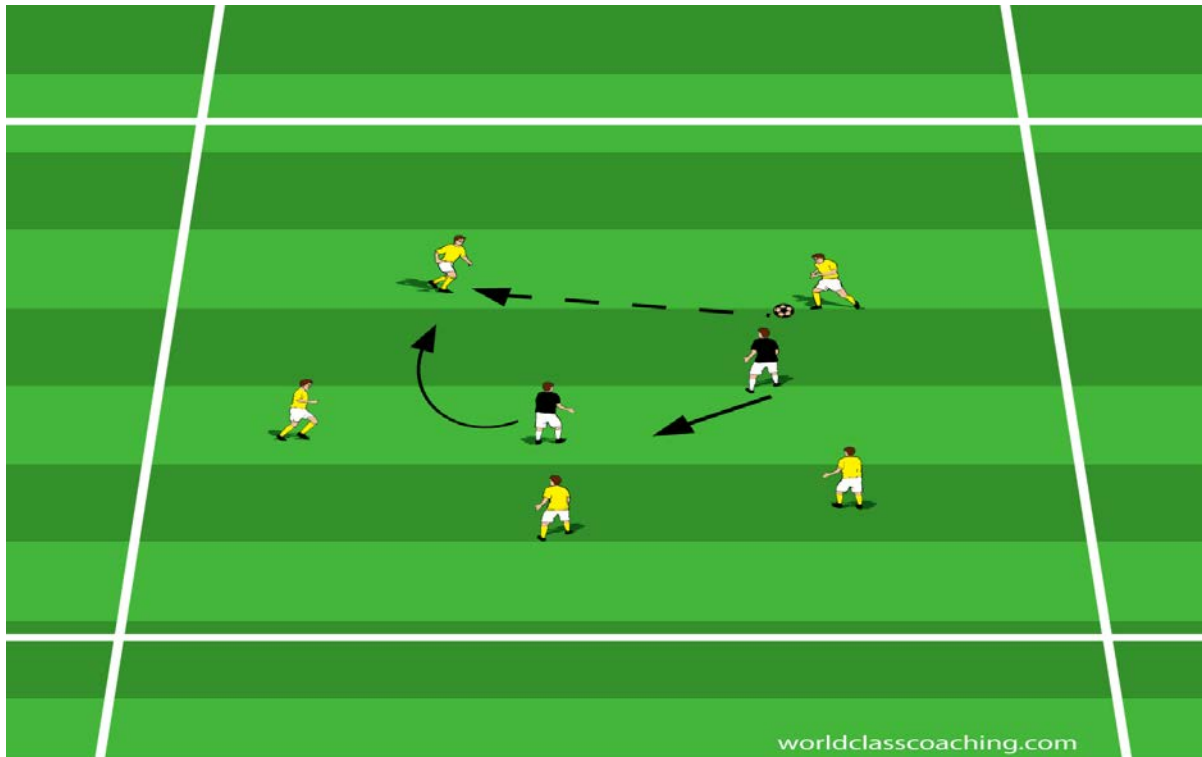


Y Drill - 10x12 yard areas

Player 2 checks away from the ball and then back toward player 1. Player 1 passes to player 2, who lays the ball off at an angle to player 1. Player 1 then passes in to the feet of player 3. Player 3 dribbles at speed back to the start point and leaves the ball for player 5 to commence the next sequence (to player 4's side of the grid). As the players develop rhythm in the passing, encourage them to play 1-touch as much as possible. Players move up one cone with each sequence.

Variations:

- when the ball is played to the top of the 'Y', the receiving player plays first-time back to the start point.
- player 2 checks away and then checks back to the ball. Player 1 passes to player 2, who returns the ball first time. Player 1 then passes into the feet of player 3 and follows her pass. Player 3 plays a 1-2 with player 2 around player 1's run. The players each move up one cone as the ball is passed by player 3 to player 5 at the start point of the exercise. Play continues and the sequence is run to player 4's side of the grid.



5v2 - 10x10 yard areas

Two defenders at the center of a circle formed by 5 attackers. The attackers attempt to keep possession through 1 and 2-touch passing. The defenders attempt to gain possession of the ball or knock the ball out of the circle. The attacker who loses possession for her team changes place with the defender who caused the turnover. This is a commonly used possession exercise with many useful variations.

Variations:

- after passing, players must move to a new part of the circle. This requirement both gets players moving after a pass and also compels the attackers to continually reform passing angles by adjusting the circle.
- require the attackers to shrink the circle as they play. This variation applies added to pressure to the attackers as they attempt to keep possession.
- run two circles and have the defenders cross over to work in the other circle. The attackers count their passes and work to get the highest single score. Rotate the defenders every minute to provide high pressure.

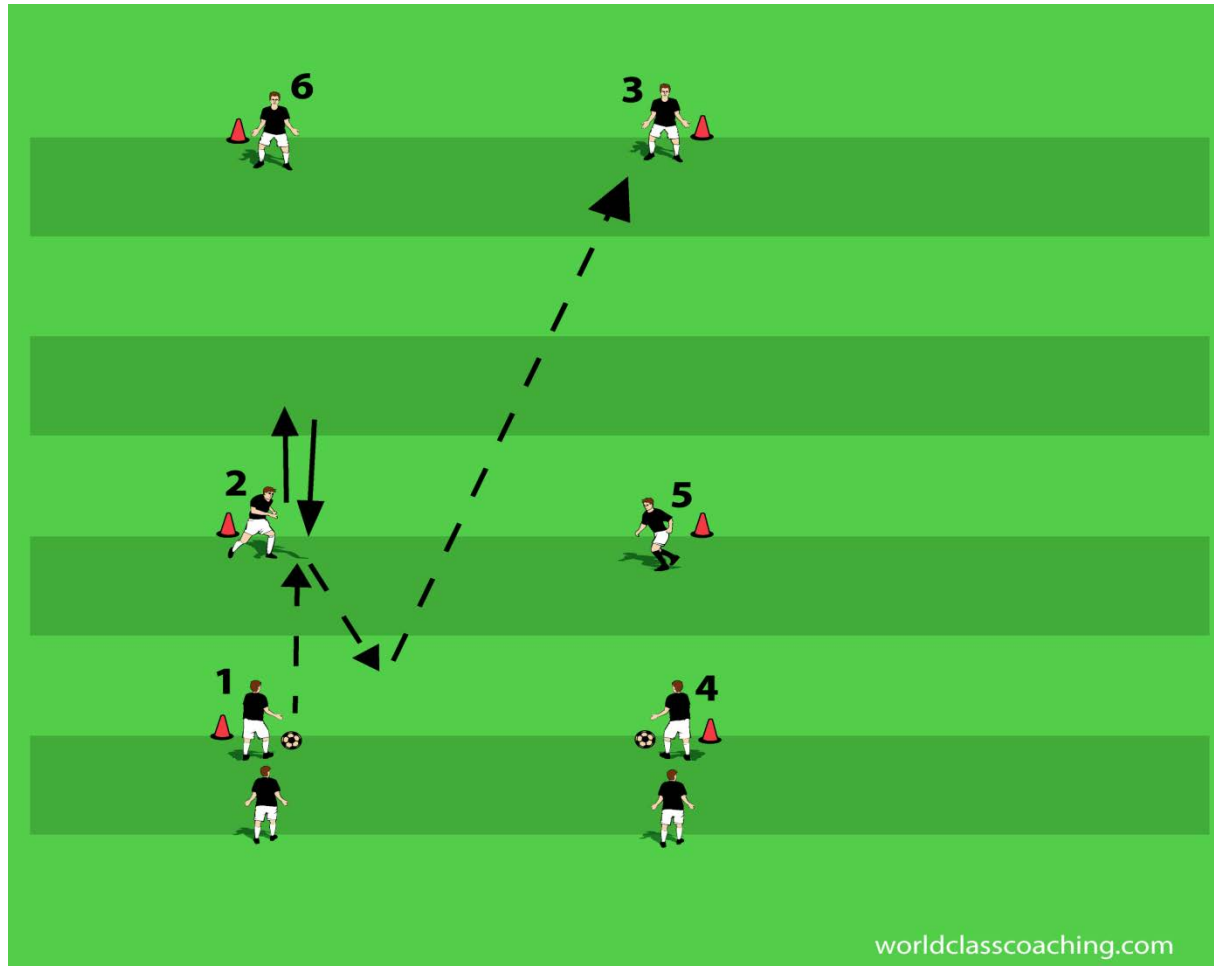
8v8 Game - ½ field

Play 8v8 on ½ field. Allow the teams to play for a few minutes and then utilize the following restrictions for 5 minutes each before returning to unlimited play.

- require a 1-2 before a shot on goal with each possession.
- 2-touch play.

Session# 2: Advanced Technical Passing 2

Introduction: This practice continues the theme of rhythmic group passing, adding new environments and small-sided games designed to produce increasing confidence and technical proficiency.

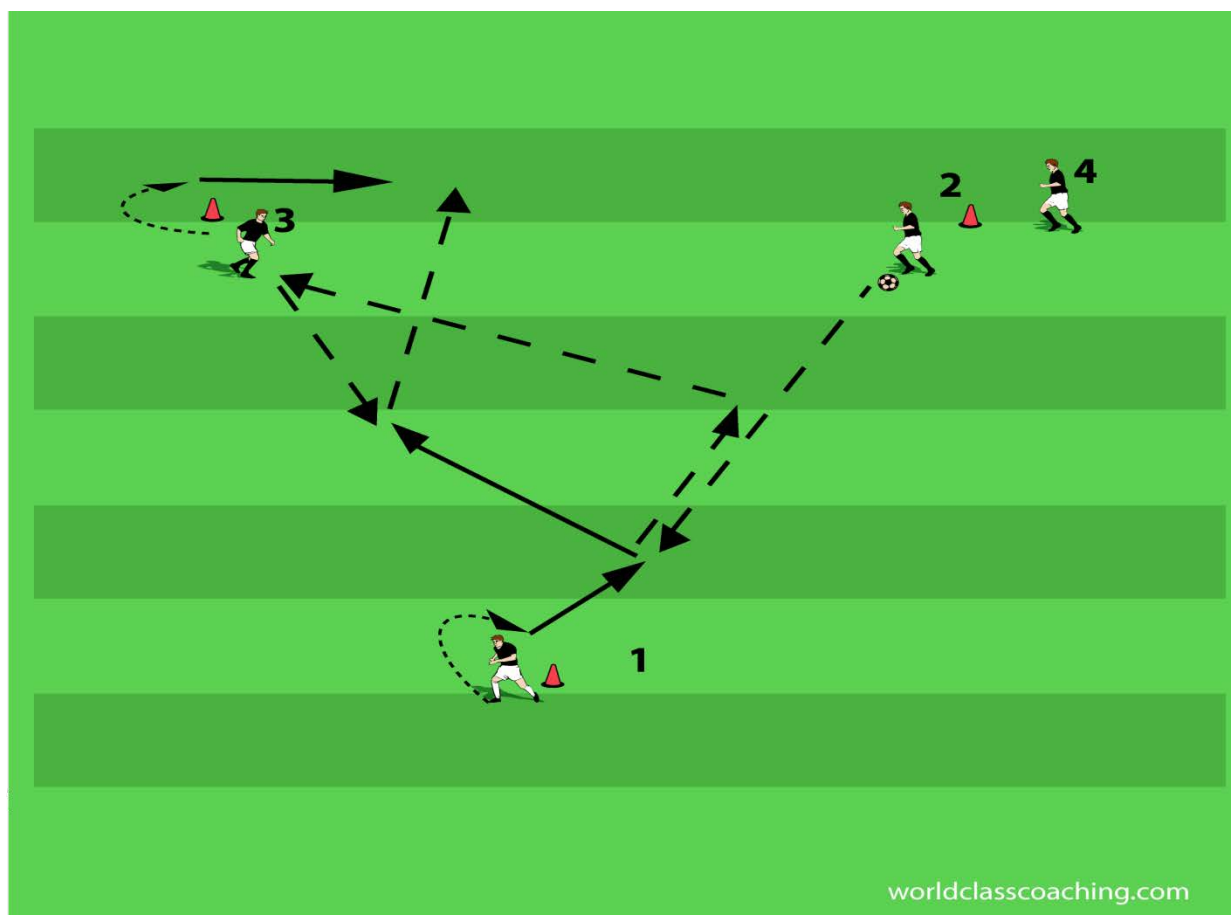


Rectangle Pattern Passing - 15x25 yard area

Player 2 checks away and then back to the ball. Player 1 passes to player 2, who lays the ball off toward the inside of the grid for player 1. Player 1 then passes into the feet of player 3. Players 1 and 2 move up one cone in the sequence while player 3 dribbles the ball at speed back to the starting point. Meanwhile, the exercise is repeated on the other side of the grid. As the players become more comfortable, encourage them to play one-touch where possible and at speed throughout.

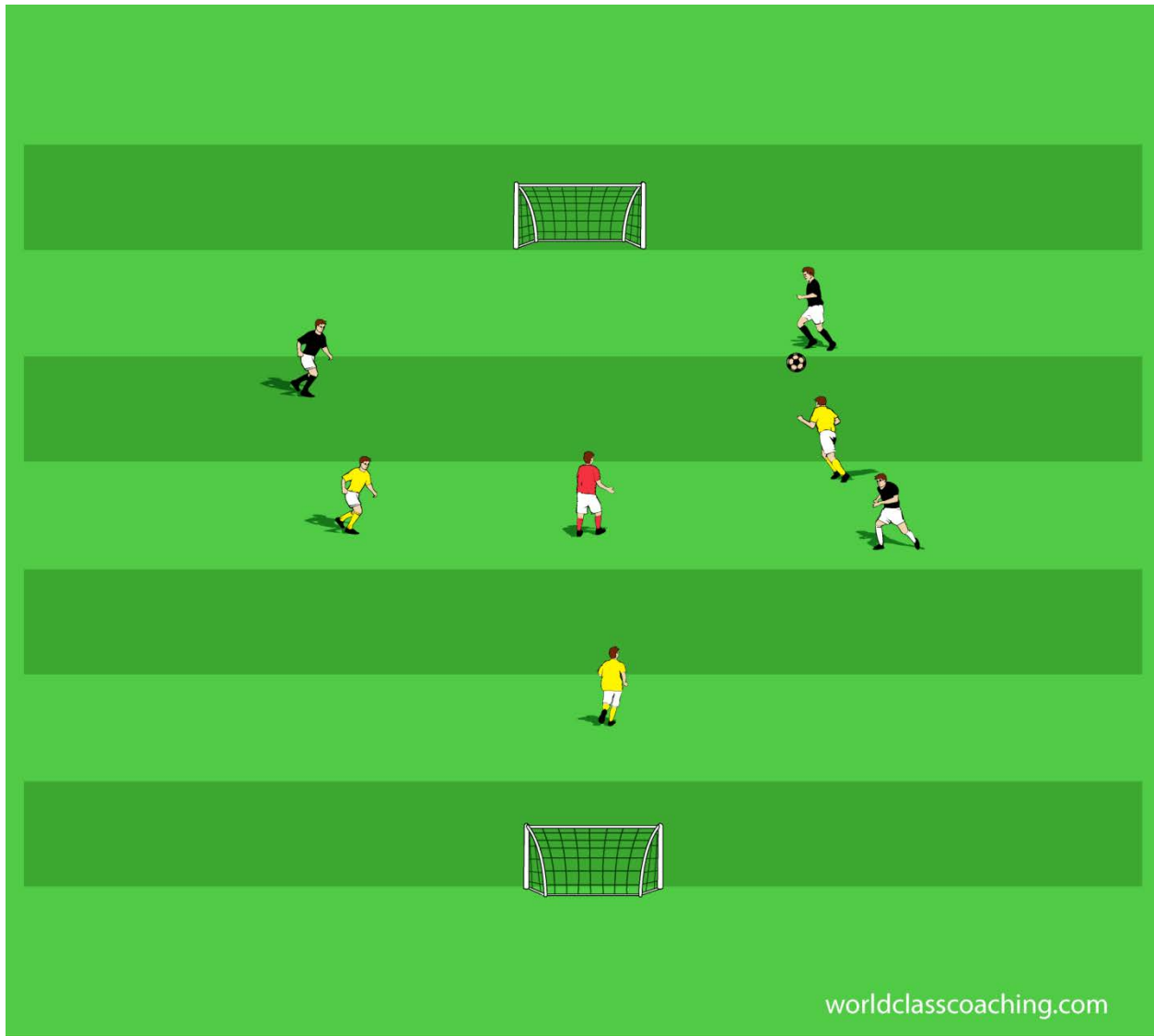
Variation:

- player 2 checks away and then back to the ball. Player 1 passes to player 2, who lays the ball off toward the inside of the grid for player 1. Player 1 then passes into the feet of player 3. Player 2 shows to the inside of player 3, who plays a 1-2 with player 2 before continuing back to the starting point. As with the base exercise, players move up one cone with each sequence, and they should play at speed and with minimal touches as they become more accustomed to the pattern. Finally, advanced teams can use the check run by the initiating player on one side as the passive defender for the 1-2 from the other side of the grid.



Triangle Passing - 15x15 yard area

Player 1 checks away and then back to the ball. Player 1 passes to player 2. Player 2 lays the ball off for player 1 to run onto and then spins off to the outside. Player 1 plays into the feet of player 3 and then moves ahead one cone. Player three lays the ball off for player 2 to run onto and then spins off and player 2 plays into her path before moving ahead one cone. Player three dribbles the ball to the start point for player 4 and the sequence repeats. This exercise builds speed, running off of the ball, communication and sharp one-touch play into a team. It also helps players become accustomed to playing together in a fast-paced pattern play environment.



3 vs 3 +1 Small-sided Games - 20x25 yard fields

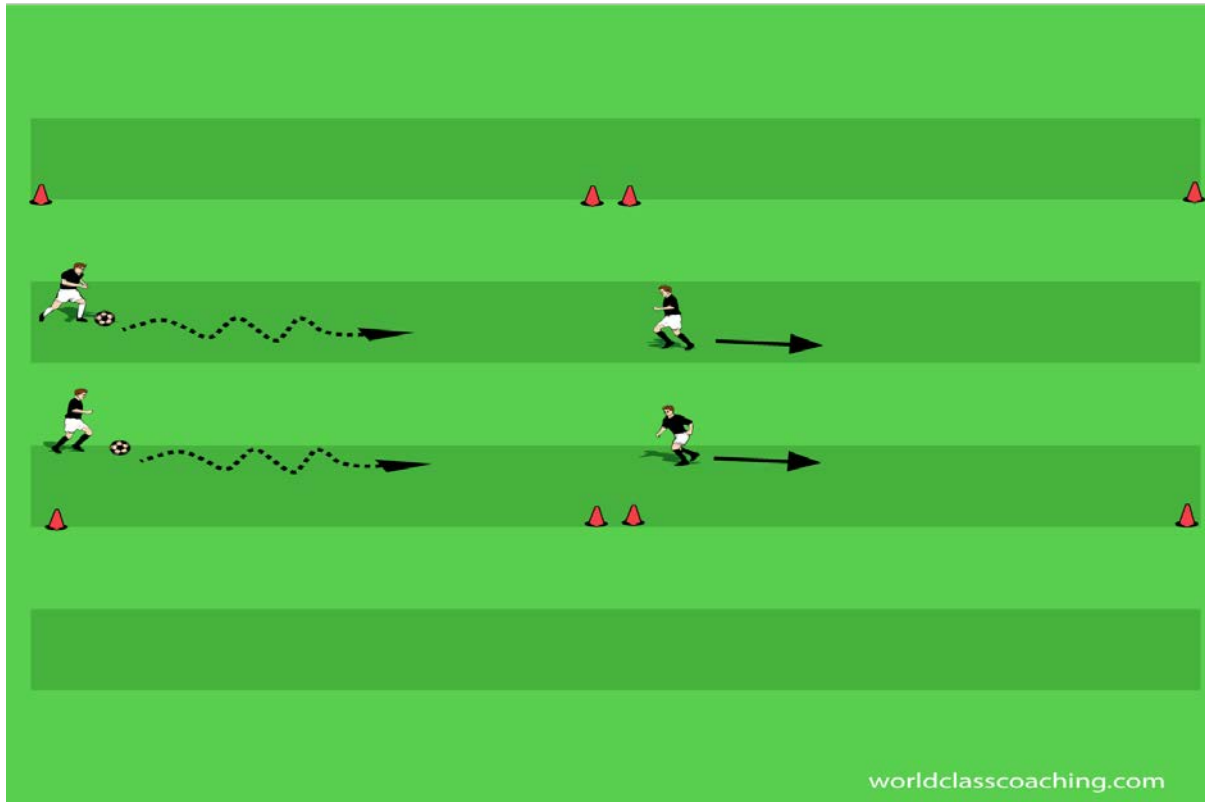
Play 3 vs 3 with a neutral attacker to small goals. Allow the players to scrimmage for several minutes before stopping to emphasize the importance of utilizing the neutral player in possession to maximize numerical advantage. Additionally, running off the ball, one-touch play, and combinations should all be points of concentration (require combinations before a shot for a portion of the scrimmage).

7v7+2 (becoming 8v8) Scrimmage - ½ Field

Play 7v7 with goalkeepers and two neutral attackers on ½ field. Once again, the emphasis should be upon pinging the ball around in possession and exercising one-touch play, combination play and running off of the ball. After 15 minutes, switch to an 8v8 game with goalkeepers, being careful to continue to reinforce the themes of the session.

Training Session#3: Turning.

Introduction: Turning is one of the least taught, yet most critical skills. Players must be comfortable and efficient making good decisions as to whether they can immediately face up to their opponents and the goal or if they must move to shield the ball with their first touch. This session provides multiple environments and ideas designed to help players think quickly and develop several options for turning in game situations.

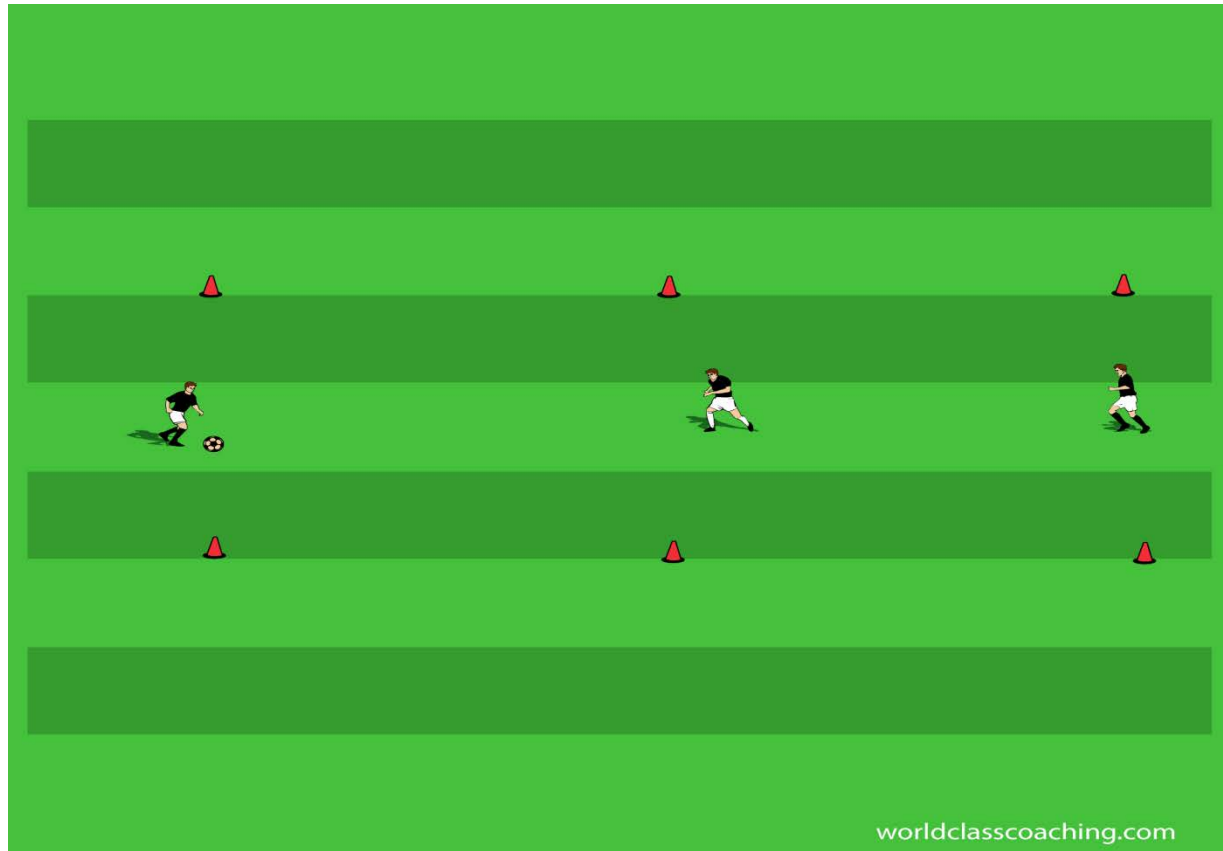


Touches and Turning - 26x26 yard grid

Players work in pairs with one ball. The grid should be divided in half to create a pair of thirteen yard wide grids. One partner, with the ball, stands on the edge of the grid. The other partner stands where the grids meet (see diagram). There are two variations of this exercise, the first of which is a warm-up and the second of which introduces the turning topic.

- the player with the ball dribbles toward the center of the grid taking one touch for every step. This player should work hard and work fast to get to the center. Her partner backpedals to the edge of the grid on her side. When the dribbling player gets to the center, she passes the ball to her partner and their roles reverse. Play for two minutes.
- in the second variation, the player with the ball passes immediately to her partner in the middle of the grid. As she plays, she instructs her partner to, "Turn!" The receiving player gets "shoulder on" (turn one shoulder to point at the passing player. In this way, she is already half-turned) and receives the ball with the inside of the foot farthest from the server. She then turns and dribbles to the edge of the grid. Meanwhile, her partner sprints to the middle of the grid

and their roles reverse. Instruct players that the running player who is checking to receive should time her run so that she is not waiting for the ball when it is played. Also, the turning player should alternate the shoulder she turns to the passer so that she can practice receiving with either foot. Play for three minutes.



Carolina Turning Series - 12x20 yard grids

Players work in groups of three with one soccer ball. There are many variations of what is often called the “Carolina turning series.” Here, the purpose is to introduce the basic format and simple turns for players learning to make good decisions in possession. Four turns are outlined below. To begin, the moves are performed without pressure. The working player needs to be instructed to check her space throughout the series. This is accomplished by taking a sharp look over her shoulder during the checking run. Each player should take a turn in the middle practicing each turn for one minute and at speed.

- front foot turn. This is the turn outlined in the warm-up exercise. Here the player decides that there is no pressure, gets shoulder on and receives with the inside of the foot farthest from the server. Once turned, she takes a dribbling touch and delivers the ball to the third player on the far end of the grid. The end line players need to be consistent in making the early command: “Turn!” Require the working player to alternate the receiving foot.
- man on. In this case, the receiving player is operating under the pretense of pressure. Therefore, in making the checking run to the ball, she prepares to receive the ball with the outside of the foot *nearest* to the server. This touch puts the working player into a shielding position with her first touch. The passer hollers, “Man on!” with each serve. Once the working player has controlled the ball, the passer hollers, “Back!”. At this signal, the working player

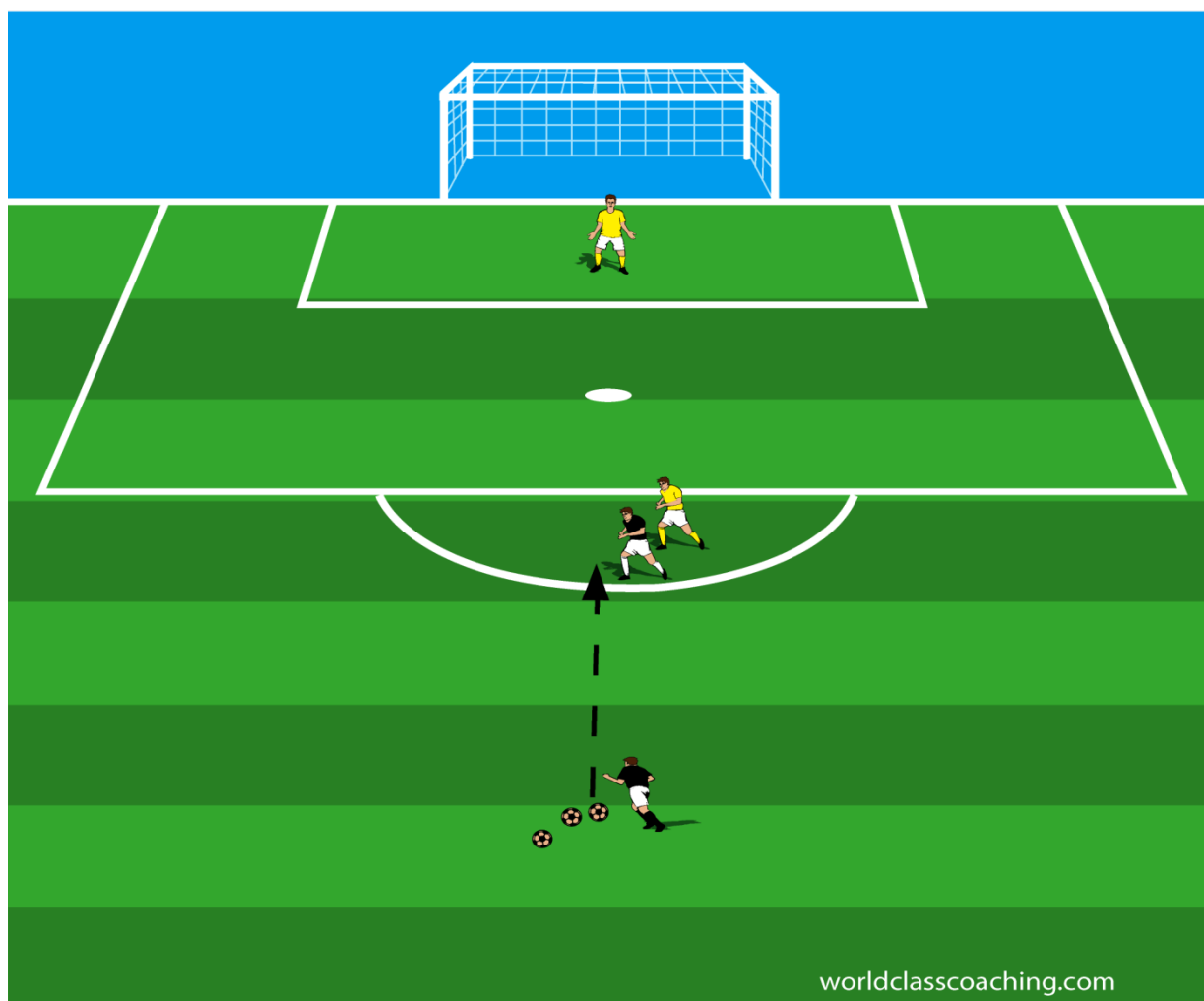
passes the ball back to the server. Note: The passer should get into the habit of changing the angle of the back pass by sliding left or right while calling the ball back. This adjustment will serve the players well when they get into this situation on the big field in that the change of angle requires the defense to adjust their pressuring runs, and new passing angles are created immediately for the team in possession. Note: For this “turn” only, a second ball is required (that is, each of the endline players has a ball).

- self-pass. Here the working player again operates under the pretense of pressure. Instead of shielding and back-passing, though, the working player “self-passes.” In essence, this amounts to the working player getting into a shielding position, but instead of a shielding touch, she uses the outside of the foot closest to the server to take a longer touch (typically about a yard or a bit longer). The purpose of this touch is to create separation from the defender. The working player then runs sharply back around the ball to face up with the defender and takes a couple of touches before delivering the ball to the end line player on the far end of the grid. This turn is extremely useful in particular for quick, agile players (often on the flank) who can use their speed to get separation from the defender and then face up to create favorable 1v1 dueling situations. Instruct players to alternate the foot they use to make the self-pass.



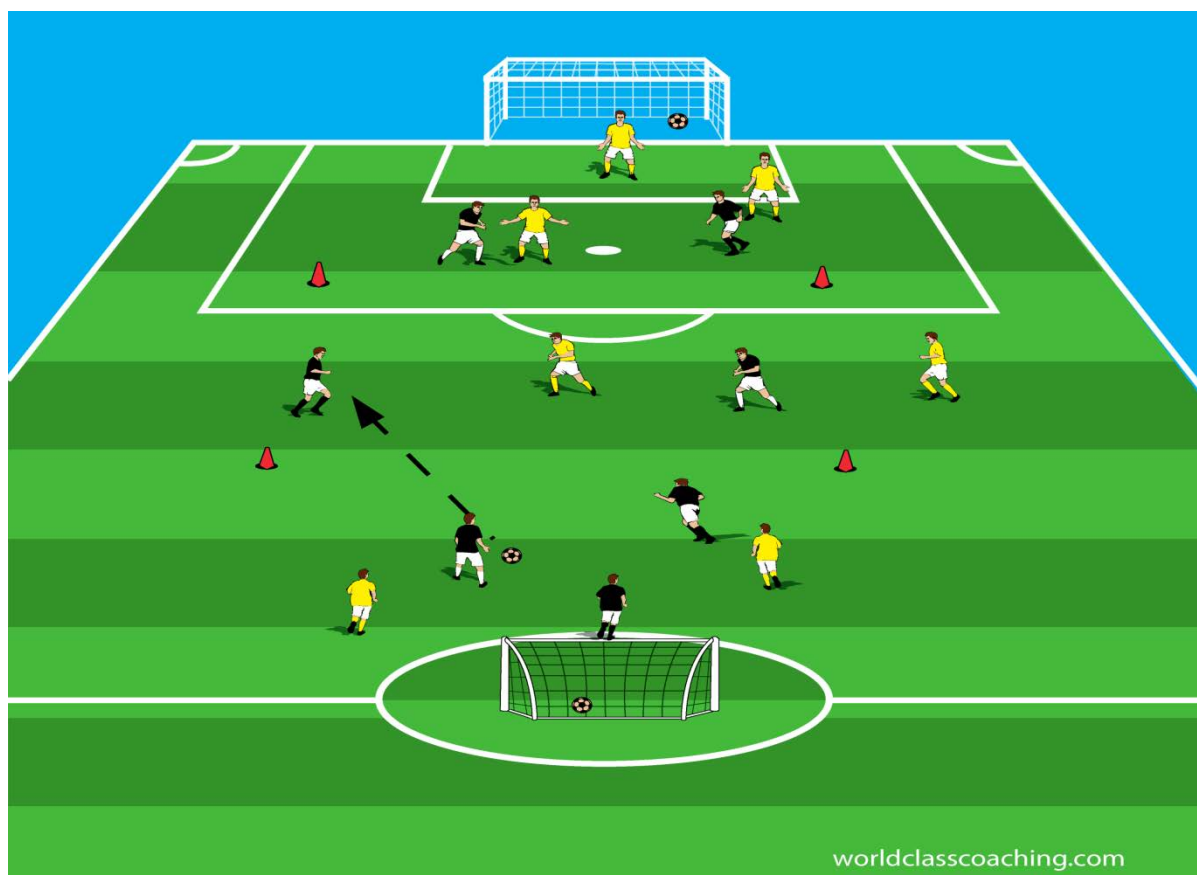
- screening the defender. Place a flag at the middle of the area as shown. The working player checks away behind the flag and then back where she ‘posts up’ on the flag (which acts as a passive defender), showing with her hand at her side where she wants the ball passed. Using her body, she screens the defender from the ball (without touching the ball as it runs past) and then runs onto the ball. Be sure to work both sides.

Once the turns have been performed in isolation, complete a second round of practice. Add a semi-passive defender, who gives some pressure without trying to win the ball.



1v1 to goal with turning emphasis - 1/3 field

Collect balls centrally and twenty-five yards from goal. An attacker and a defender begin in the “D” as shown. The attacker checks to receive a pass from the first player in line. Instruct defenders to vary their initial pressure so that the attackers can learn to think their way through their turning options. Play is live until the defender touches the ball or the ball leaves the area (i.e. through a goal or shot at goal). The easiest rotation is passer becomes attacker; attacker becomes defender; defender retrieves a ball and gets back in line.



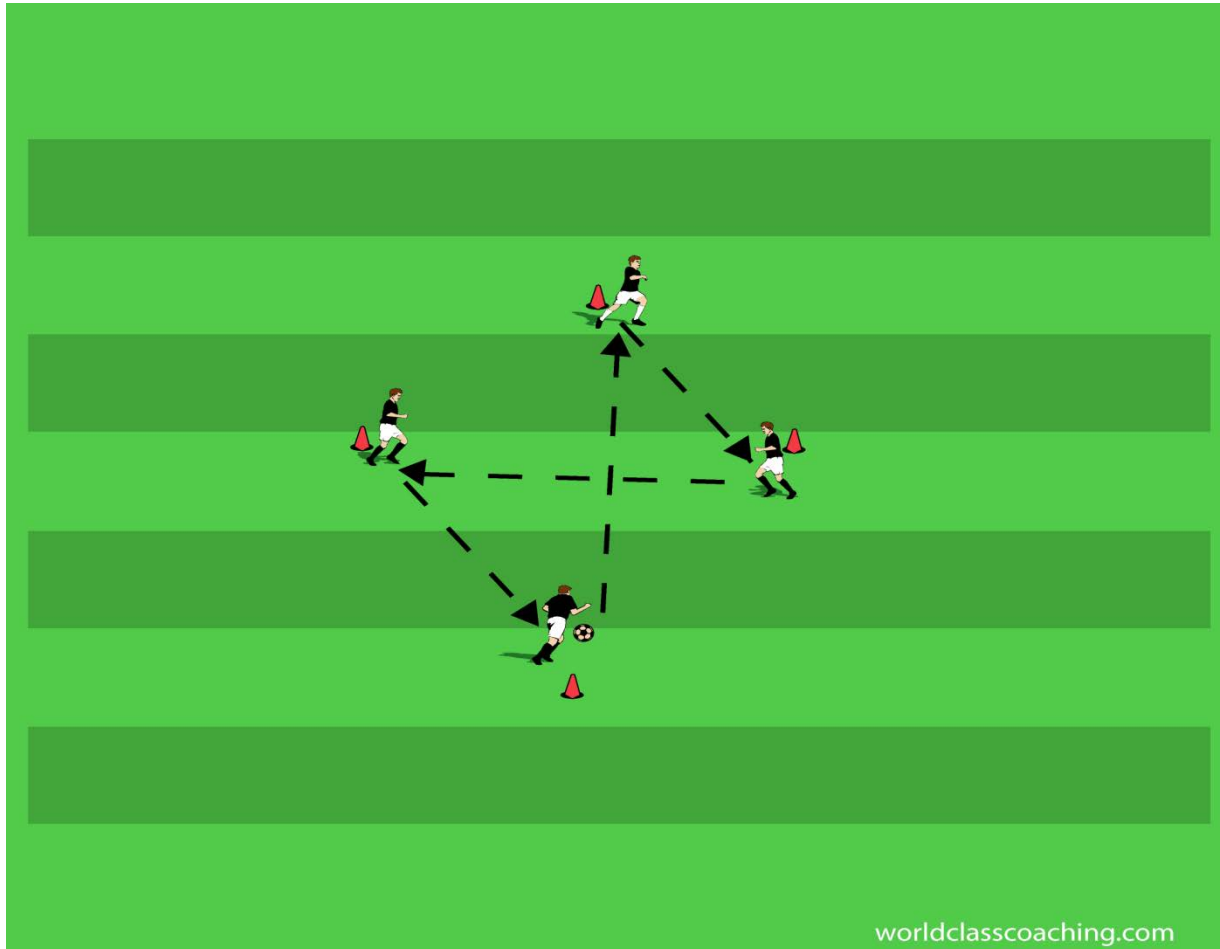
3-zone game - 25x45 yard field

Play 7 vs. 7 on a field divided into three 20x30 yard zones (see diagram). This game can be played to full-sized goals or to small goals, depending upon the numbers available. The teams place two defenders (and a goalkeeper if possible) in their defensive third; two midfielders in the middle third and two forwards in the front third. Explain to the players that for the first part of the game, they are locked into the zones where they are placed. This restriction is designed to compel players to play the ball forward, creating situations where the players can practice both the communication and technical execution of the turns introduced above. The coach will need to encourage target players in the zones ahead of the ball to avoid lingering at the near edge of their zone, waiting for the ball. Instead, they need to be disciplined about creating space by remaining well away from the ball and then checking in to receive when supporting players are prepared to play to them. The other important coaching point that often needs emphasis here is the advantage gained by checking in at an angle to the ball. A player checking in at an angle is a much easier target to find and play accurately to than a player coming straight on to the ball.

After ten minutes, introduce a new rule: Allow a player who makes a successful pass into the zone directly ahead to join the attack in that zone. This will help build possession as teams can get an advantage in numbers by playing intelligently. Also, point out to players that they can play back to the zone behind them if they receive the ball under pressure and in this way the team can organize possession and create more service to target players in the next zone. Note: When possession is lost, any players who have worked their way forward must return to their original zone. Remove the zone limits for the final ten minutes of the scrimmage and let the players play.

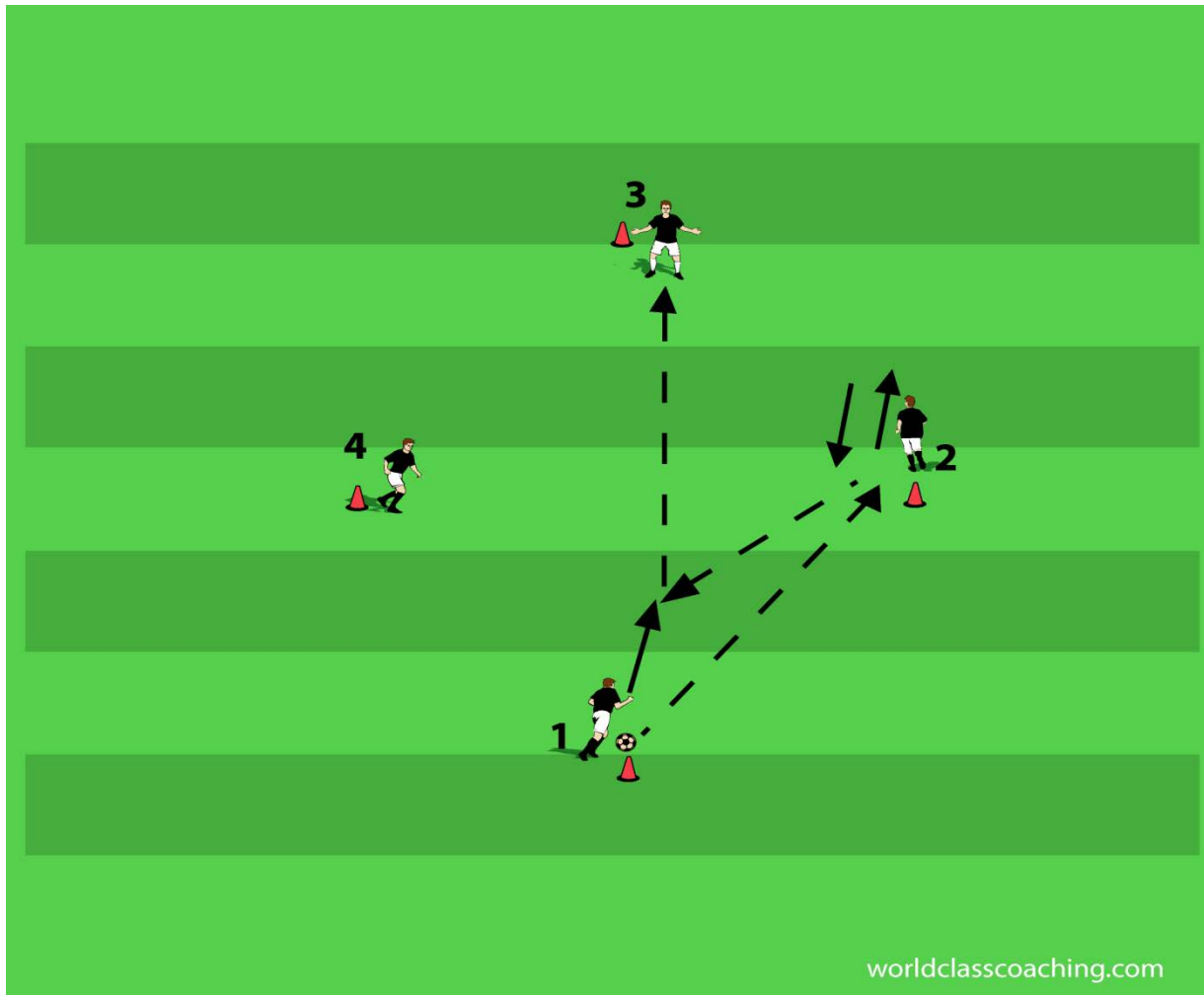
Training Session# 4: Combination Play – 1-2's.

Introduction: This practice includes a number of exercises designed to help players improve their understanding, touch and running off of the ball in situations where a quick 2-1 combination can create attacking space for the team.



Diamond Passing 1 - 10x10 yard areas

Players pass and follow as indicated with an emphasis on quality technique in both passing and receiving. Passes should be to the foot of the target that is on the side where the player will play next and the receiver should prepare early to receive.

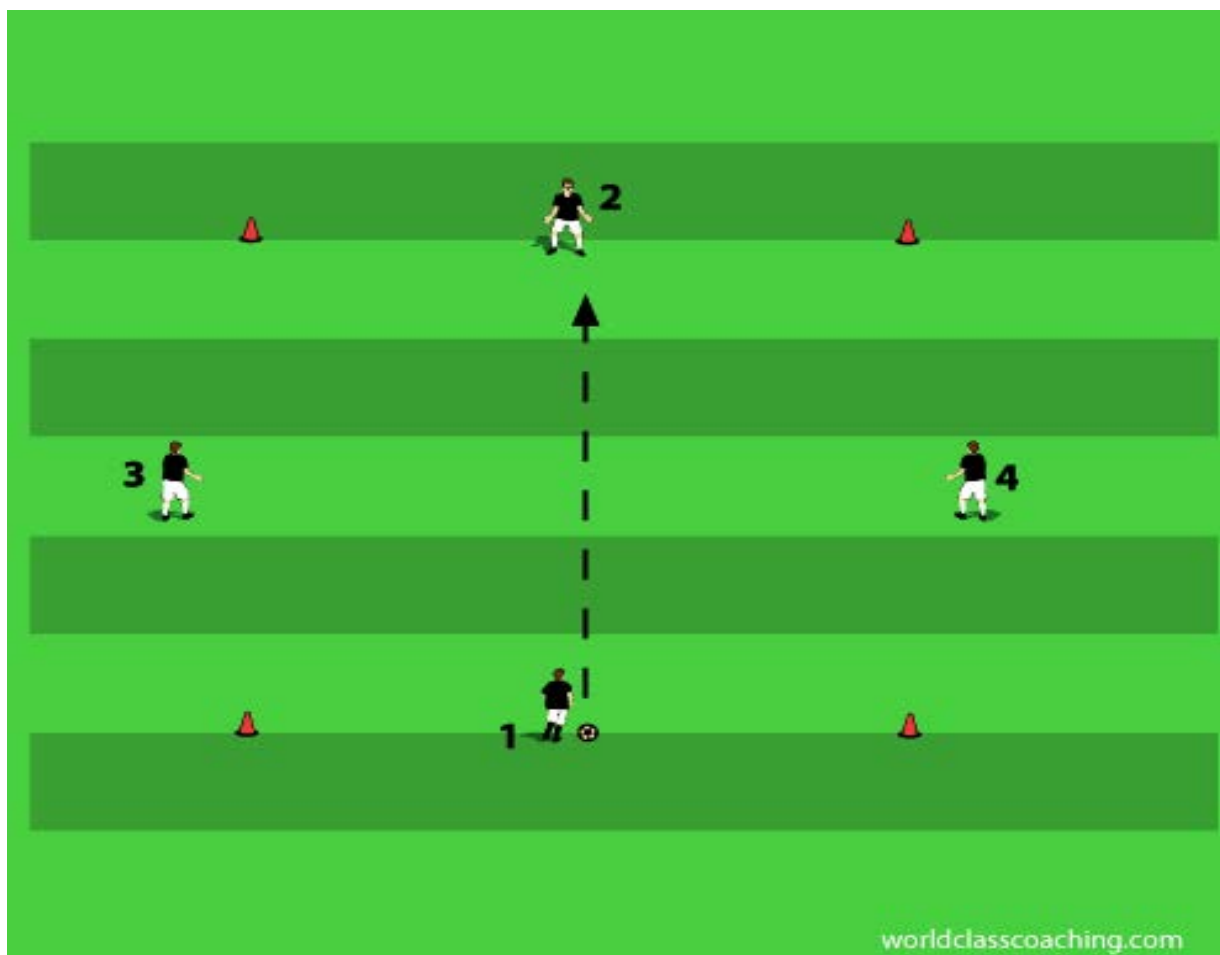


Diamond Passing 1-2's - 10x15 yard areas

Player 2 checks away and back to the ball. Player 1 passes in to the feet of player 2. Player 2 lays the ball off backward and inside for player 1 to run onto and pass into the feet of player 3. Player 1 and player two each move up one cone. Player 4 checks away and back to the ball and the sequence continues back to the starting position.

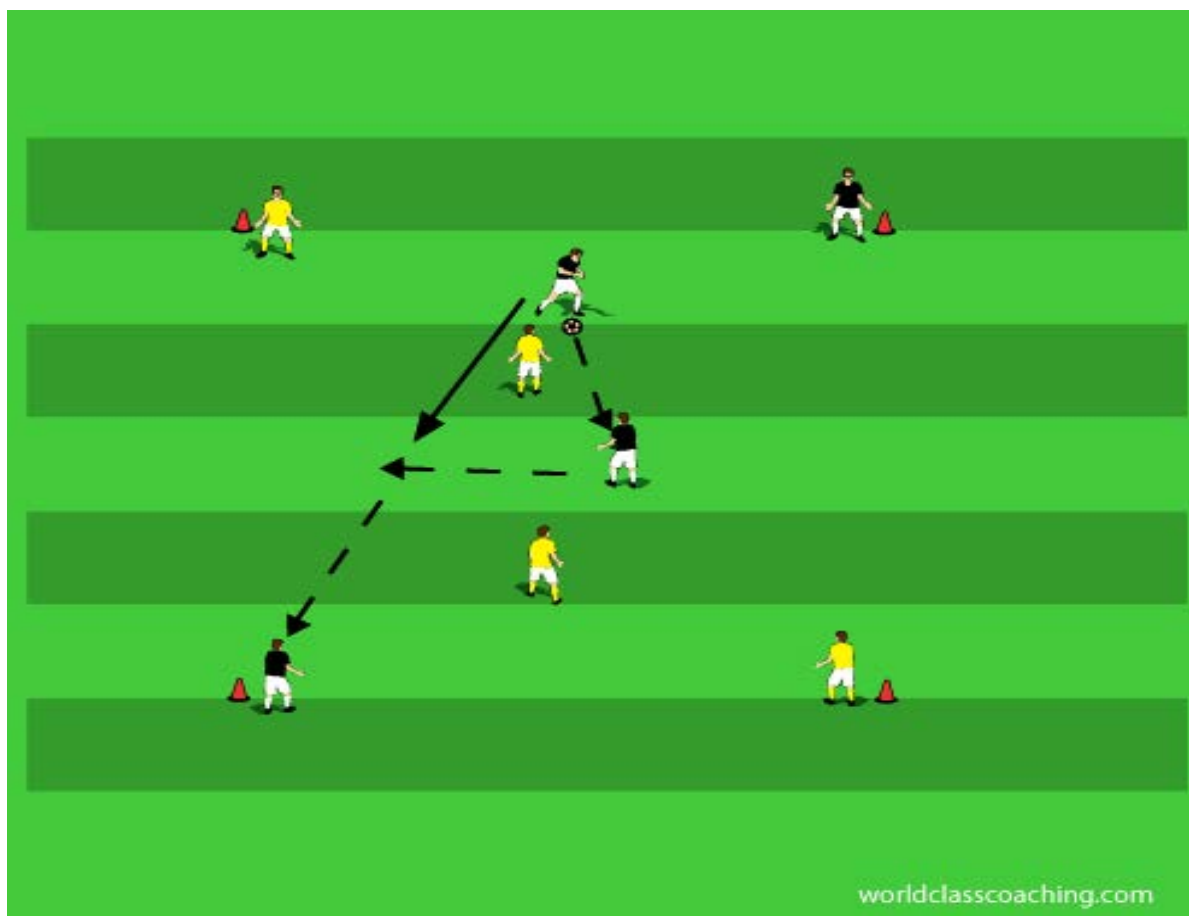
Variation:

- player 2 checks away and back to the ball. Player 1 passes in to the feet of player 2. Player 2 lays the ball off backward and inside for player 1 to run onto. Player 2, meanwhile, has spun off away from the ball and is running into space behind her starting cone. Player 1 takes a touch and then plays a through ball onto the feet of player 2, who touches the ball on to player 3. Player 1 and player two each move up one cone. Player 4 checks away and back to the ball and the sequence continues back to the starting position.



1v1 +Attacking Bumpers - 10x15 yard grids

Player 1 passes into the feet of player two and the two players duel. Each player attempts to win the ball and dribble over her opponent's end line. The player in possession can use the side bumper players to attempt to play 1-2's to get in behind the defender. The side bumpers are limited to 1-touch, and cannot play each other, but they can move up and down the sides of the grid. When the ball leaves the grid, the active players become bumpers and the bumpers become the active players. In this exercise, encourage the attacking player to learn to engage the defender, forcing that player to set her feet. At that moment, either bumper can be used to create the 1-2. Note: It is not required that the bumpers be used, as play can become too predictable.



2v2+4 - 12x12 yard grids

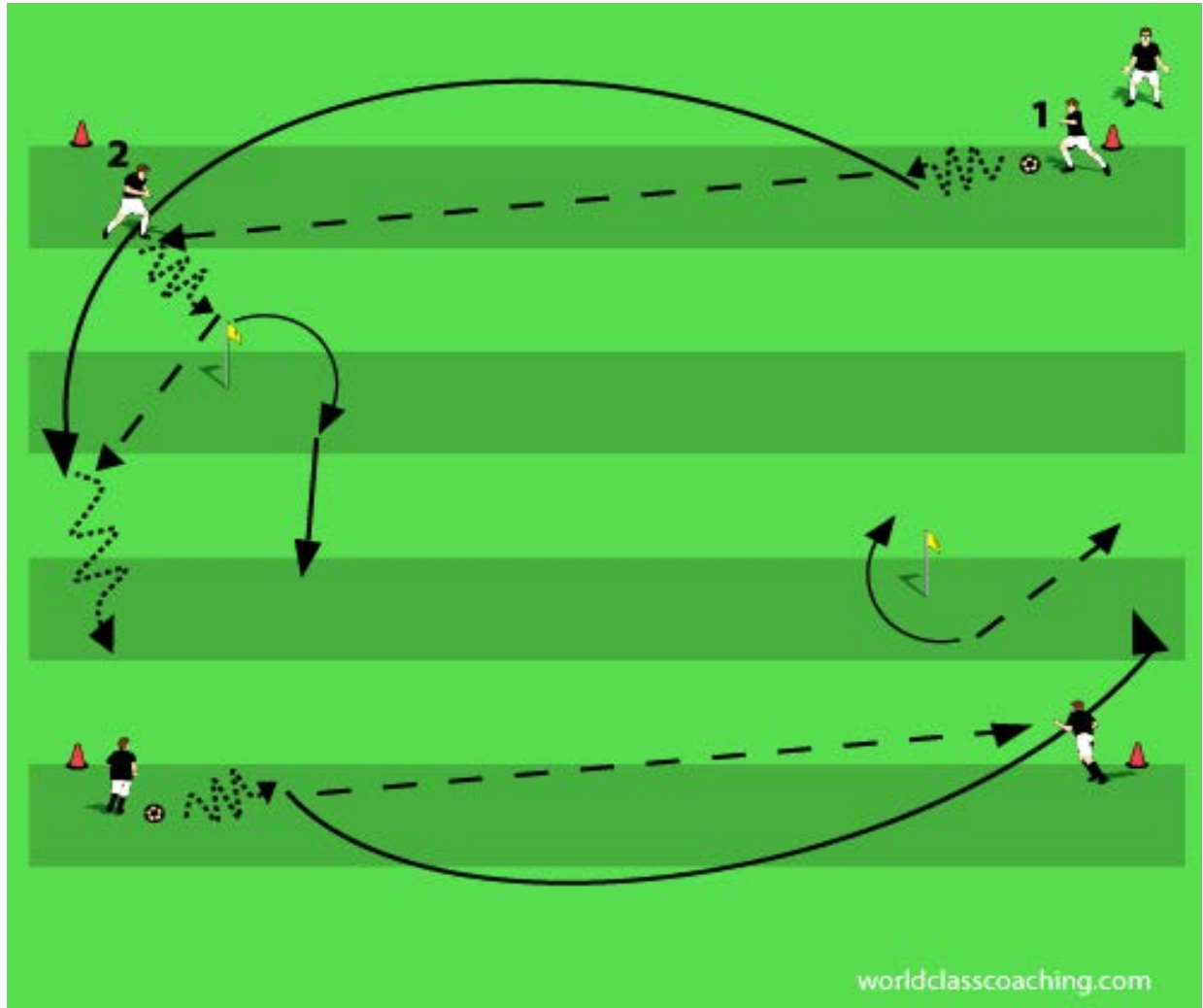
Play 2v2+4, with each team having a pair of diagonally-placed corner targets to play to. Players who pass into a target take that player's spot, while the target quickly dribbles into the grid and works with the remaining teammate to try to get the ball to the other target. This is an outstanding environment for training on 1-2 combinations, as the numbers, speed and space all force players to step, think and play quickly.

8v8 Scrimmage - ½ field

Play 8v8 on ½ field. Play without restrictions for the first phase of the scrimmage. Then require a 1-2 before a shot at goal. Finally, remove the restriction but encourage the players to find 1-2's where they can inside of the run of play.

Training Session# 5: Combination Play – Overlap

Introduction: The overlap is one of the most fundamental and useful methods for eliminating defenders and creating space. This session introduces a number of very efficient and increasingly challenging environments wherein players can learn to recognize and execute overlapping situations.



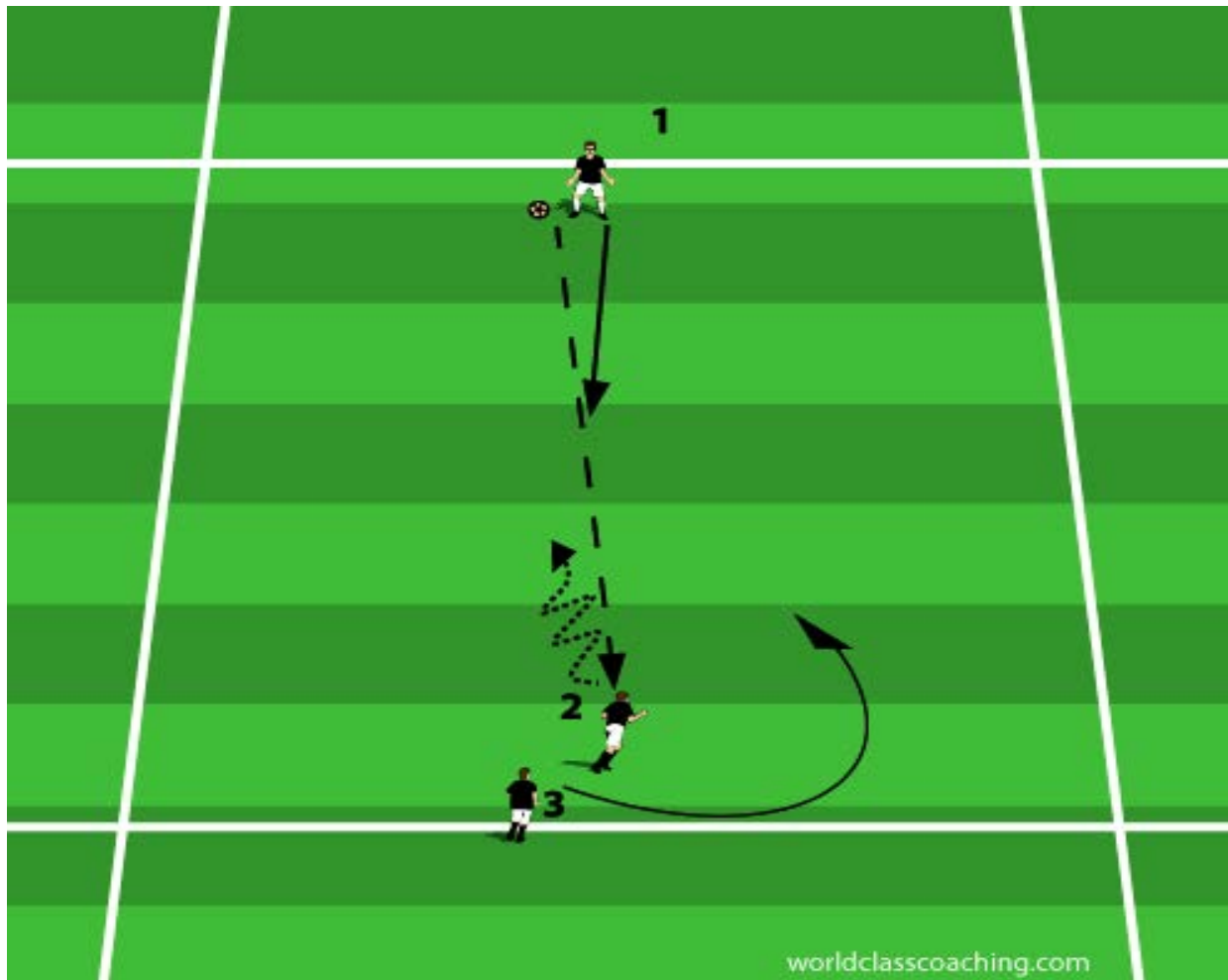
Overlap Machine - 20x25 yard area

Player 1 passes to the feet of player 2, who dribbles at the cone (representing an unsupported defender). Player 1 calls, 'hold!' and makes an overlapping run behind player 2. The latter slows her run to hold the defender and then plays in behind to player 1 completing the overlapping move. This sequence is practiced in both directions. Emphasize speed and accurate communication and passing. Players should change roles with each sequence.

Progression:

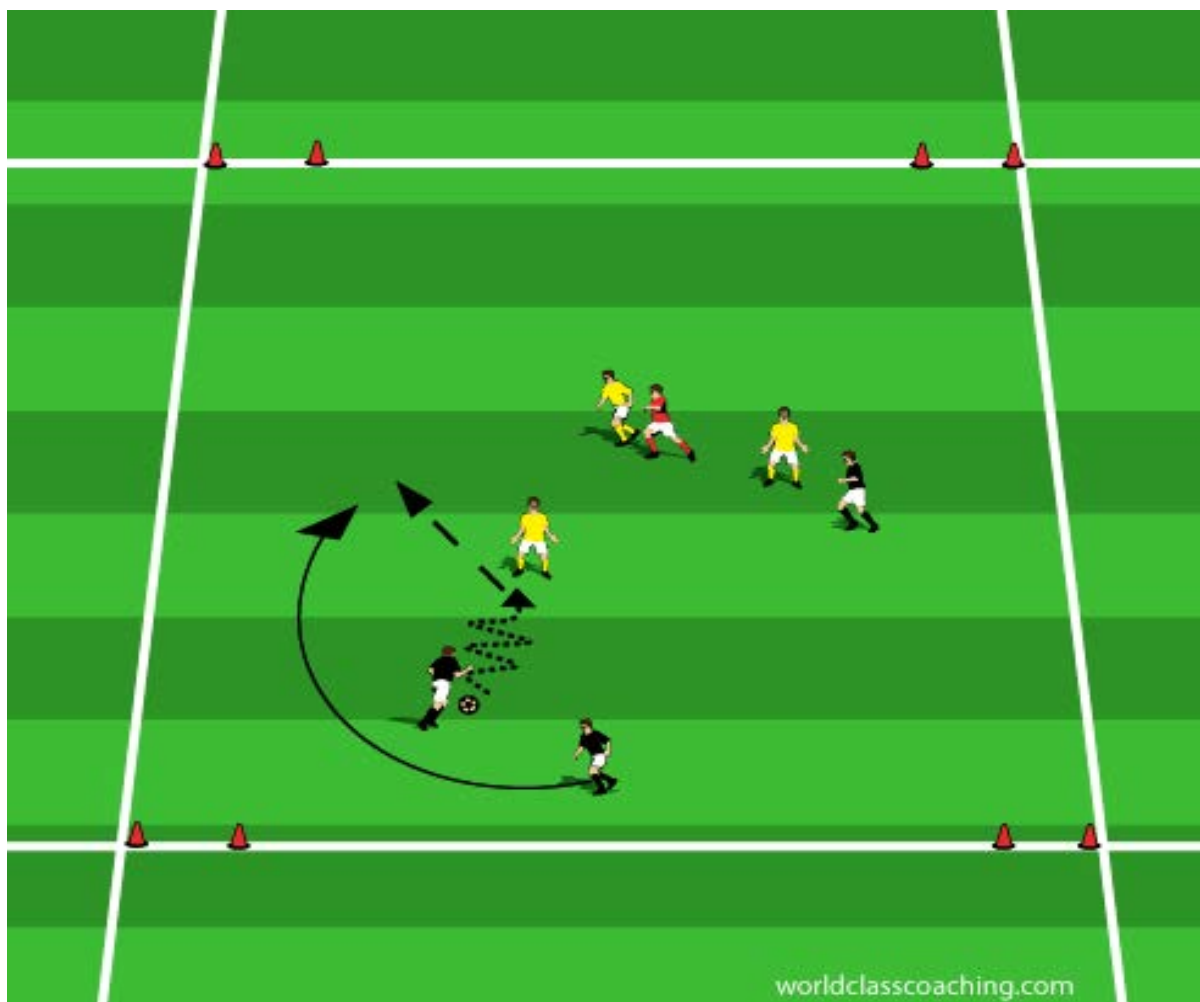
- player 1 passes to the feet of player 2, who dribbles at the cone (representing an unsupported defender). Player 1 calls, 'hold!' and makes an overlapping run behind player 2. Player 2 holds the ball and slows her dribble. Rather than playing the direct through ball, player 2 turns her

hips (toward the runner) to fake the direct pass, and then sharply cuts the ball toward the inside of the grid and past the defender. Then the pass to the overlapping player is completed after the defender is played out.



1v1 Plus Overlapping Attacker - 10x15 yard grids

Player 1 duels with player 2 with both players attempting to dribble over their opponent's end line. Player 1 passes to player 2 and moves to defend. Player 2 can try to beat player 1 on her own, or if she holds the ball, the next waiting player can call 'Hold' and attempt to overlap the attacker to get to the end line. Emphasize to the attackers that the run can be used as a decoy (i.e. the attacker looks to the overlapping player then sharply cuts away to get end line on her own). Players change ends after each duel.



3v3+1 to Corner Goals - 20x30 yard area

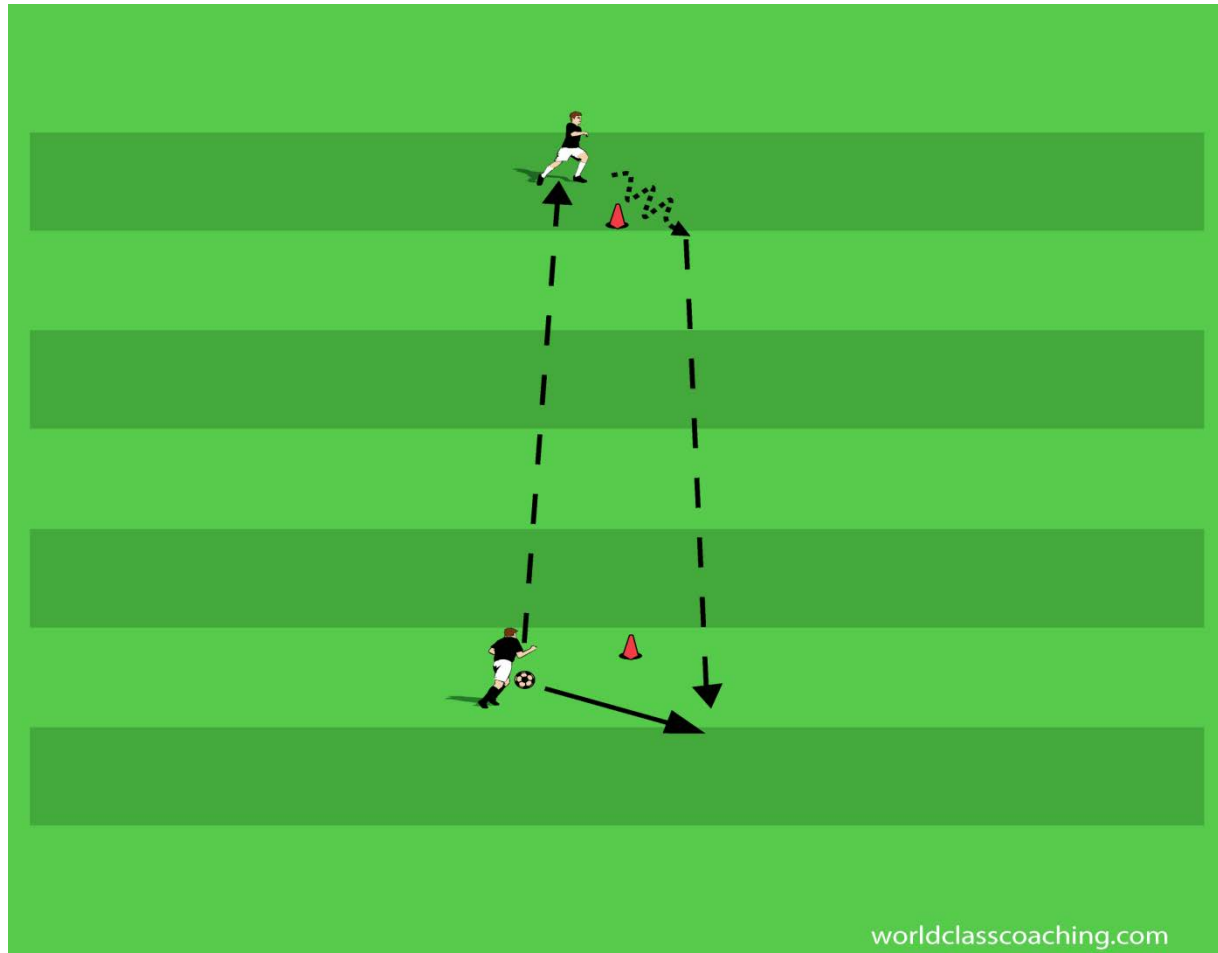
Play 3v3+1 in a 20x30 yard area to corner cone goals. Because the numbers are small and the goals are in the corners on a wide field, this is a good environment in which to train on overlapping combinations. Require each effort to score to be set up by an overlapping run. Encourage teams to be patient and possess the ball in the middle of the field to set up flank overlapping. Also, if the overlap is not on (i.e. the defenders arrive in numbers or the attackers run out of space), emphasize that possession should be maintained and the direction of the attack changed.

8v8 Scrimmage - ½ field

Play 8v8 on ½ field. Arrange the teams to keep numbers on the back and midfield lines (i.e. 1-3-3-2) so that overlapping runs can be built in and encouraged. Require an overlapping run to precede an effort at goal for the middle portion of the scrimmage, with open play to begin and end the game.

Training Session# 6: Possession

Introduction: This practice opens with a review exercise targeting players' passing accuracy and their ability to produce a consistent, quality first touch that will allow them to move the ball with their second touch. The session also includes two popular and challenging team possession exercises.



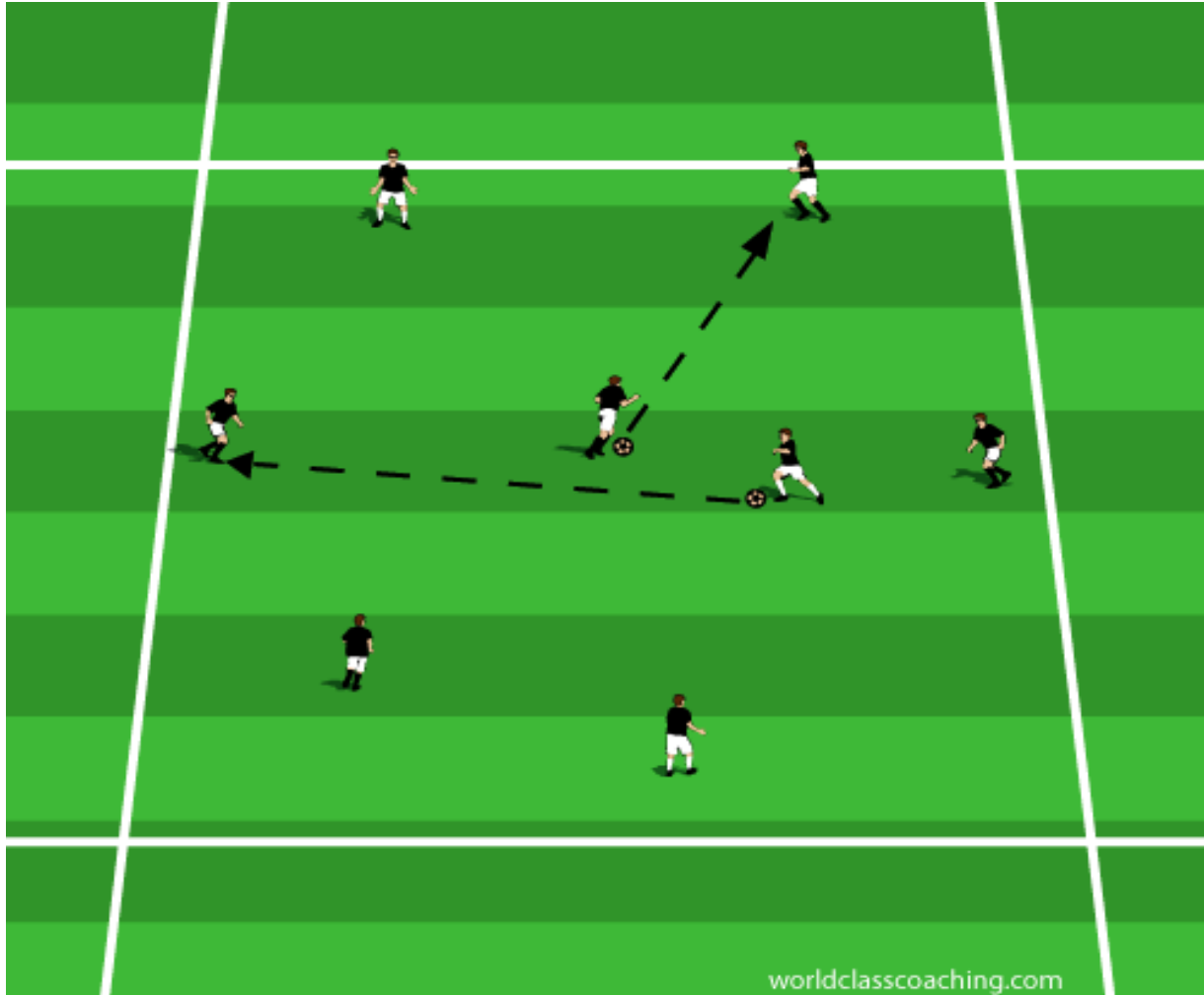
Pairs Dutch Passing - 10X5 yard area

Players work in pairs with two soccer balls. The players work to pass and receive the two balls at the same time. Both players pass with their right foot and receive with their left foot. The change of feet and the common passing lane compel the players to work very hard to sharply change the angle on the ball with their first touch, a mandatory consideration in tight space and to prepare the ball to be released in two touches.

Variations:

- players pass with their left foot and receive with their right foot.
- players track the number of passes they make in one minute. Check scores to see which pair completed the most passes. This competition adds time pressure to the technical demands of the exercise.

- one player passes the ball on the ground while the partner lifts their ball with their laces and flicks the ball to her partner. The player receiving the lifted ball works to receive and settle the ball quickly and the sequence is repeated. Change roles after one minute. Count the number of completed passes and compare scores.



Two-ball Circle Passing - 15X15 yard area

Form two groups of seven players. Each group has two soccer balls. Two attackers with balls stand at the center of each group. At a signal from the coach, both players pass their balls to players on the outside of the circle. They then move to receive the other ball from a player on the outside. Outside players do not play to one-another, but do call to the players inside to connect verbally and visually before passing. Players are encouraged to work very quickly (one and two-touch play) and to work on their turning in particular. Perimeter players are required to call 'turn!' after each pass to a central player. Rotate the middle players every minute.

Variations:

- after passing to a central player, each outside player must sprint to another position along the perimeter of the circle. This requirement compels players to be active after releasing the ball and to also continue to adjust their shape along the perimeter.

- outside players can call, 'man on!' when playing inside. If this call is made, the receiving player receives with the outside of the nearest foot to the server (shielding touch) and returns the ball to the server.

100 Passes - ½ field

Form two even teams. The coach serves balls into play for restarts. Each team counts their passes. The first team to reach 100 passes wins.

Cone Drop - 40X40 yard grid

Form three teams (yellow, blue, red). To begin, the reds will be neutral targets for a game between the yellows and the blues. Each red player gets three blue cones and three yellow cones. The reds are limited to one touch and cannot move, but also cannot be tackled. Each time a red target is played, she drops a cone corresponding to the color that played her. The first team to get all of their color cones on the floor wins. This game effectively creates an overload possession environment while still requiring some thought in the variations outlined below in particular. Rotate the targets after each game.

Variations:

- targets out of cones can demand the ball from players and if they are played, they pick up all of the cones of the corresponding color. This restriction requires passing players to think carefully about their choice of pass.
- target players can walk about the grid.
- target players move about at full game speed.

8v8 Game - ½ field

Play 7v7 with goalkeepers. For the middle portion of the scrimmage, offer a point for 6 consecutive passes by either team. Otherwise, the scrimmage is open play with an emphasis on possession of the ball.

Training Session# 7: Possession – Speed of Play

Introduction: After technical proficiency and tactical intelligence, one of the most critical factors in team success is speed of play. The term refers to the efficiency with which a player, and then a team, can execute successful cycling of the ball in the attack. This session looks at the tactical efficiency of the team in possession through unopposed movement of the ball with challenging restrictions and then puts the team's ability to play at speed to the test through small-sided play in the open field and also around the goal.

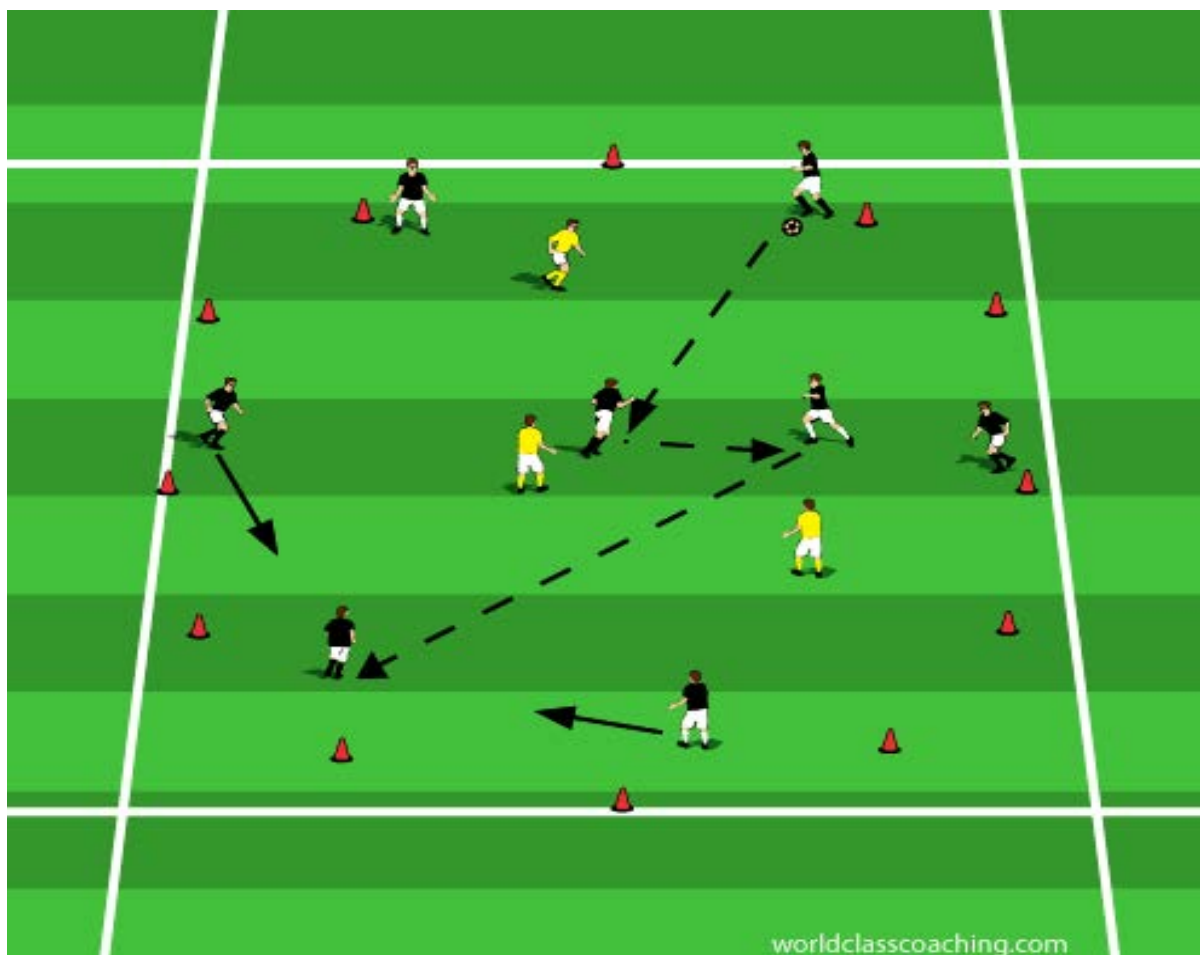
Two-team unopposed possession - ½ field

Create two equal teams. Explain that each team will have two soccer balls to begin and that the two teams cannot interfere with the other team's balls, though the players must intermingle throughout the exercise. Explain also that the current session is designed to increase individual and team speed of play. That speed of play encompasses technical speed, tactical speed and physical speed and the players must work throughout to increase their ability to play the game quickly with and without pressure.

Progression:

- both teams knock their two balls around without restrictions.
- after passing, players must move to another ¼ of the field.
- after passing, the players must sprint to another ¼ of the field.
- players must check away before checking to the ball to receive (to create space).
- players must call the name of the player they will pass to before they pass the ball.
- players must call the name of the player they will pass to before they receive the ball.
- 2-touch limitation
- 1-touch limitation

Note: Except where the new restriction cancels the previous requirement, the previous requirements remain in place as play continues.



German Ellipse - 10x20 yard ellipse

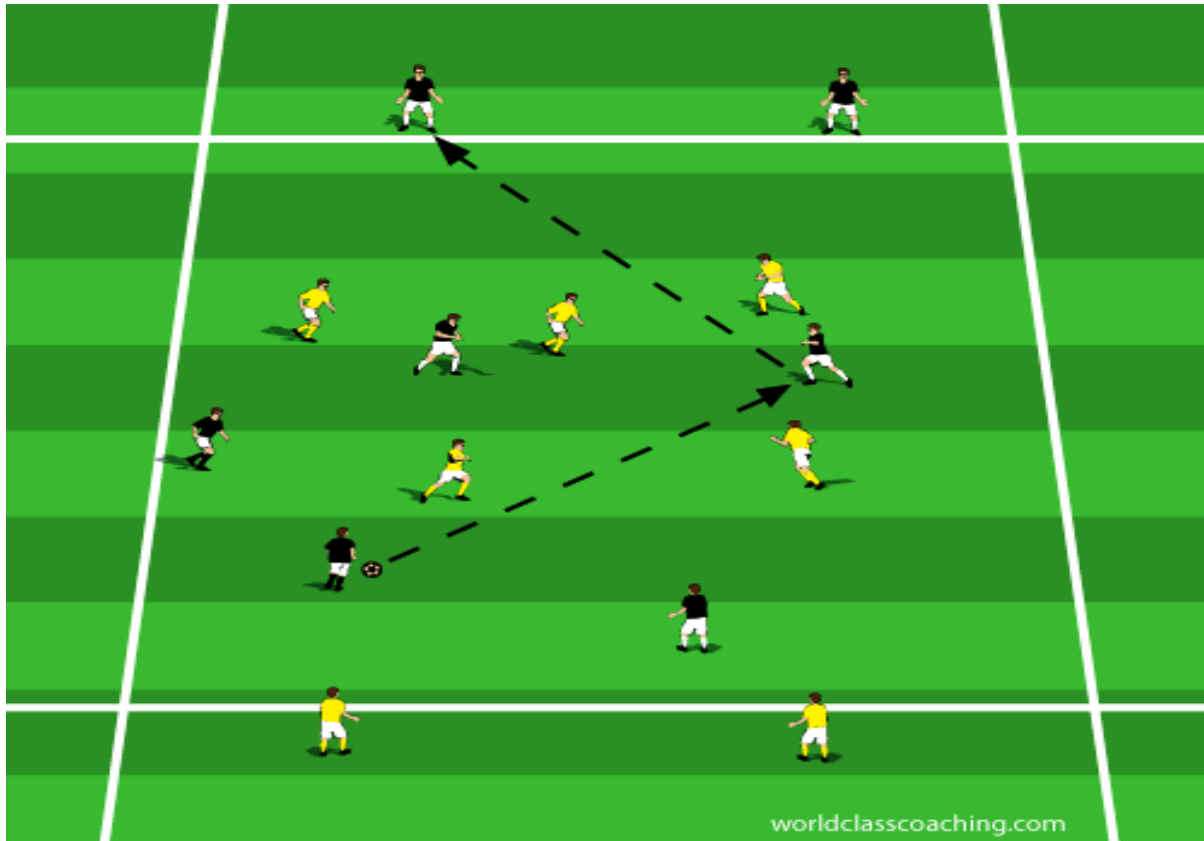
Create two equal teams. One team begins in the ellipse as shown. The other team provides three defenders and the remainder of the players serve as ball retrievers (rotate defenders every two minutes to get high pressure). The attackers are evenly distribute around the ellipse, with two or three central players (usually central midfielders) in the middle. A resting player from the defending team serves balls to the attackers for re-starts. The attackers attempt to keep the ball in the ellipse and in their possession.

When the defenders win the ball, they kick it out of the ellipse.

Progression and coaching points:

- insist that players move toward the ball as they play, particularly if there is pressure. At first blush, this seems counter-intuitive because we always encourage players to create space and a release, but there are times when we do need to play in very tight space and more players create more options as long as the speed of play is such that the defense cannot get set and contain the ball.
- attackers count passes and the two teams compare scores after each team works in possession for 5 minutes.
- attackers are encouraged to play through their central players. Award an extra pass for each touch by a central player.

- to encourage central players to find one-another under pressure, reward an extra pass point when one central player plays another.



End line Targets - 50x70 yard area

Create two equal teams. Each team places two targets on their opponents' endline. The coach has a ball supply for re-starts. Teams attempt to play in to either of their targets. The person playing in to the target sprints to take their place and the target receiving the ball plays to a back from the opposing team and play continues. Explain to players that this game will only be played for a few minutes (recommend 8-10), so the pace must be very high throughout.

3-teams to goal inside the 18-yard box

Create 3 equal teams. Two teams play to goal (against the goalkeeper) inside the 18-yard box, while the third team serves restarts (from the corners) and also plays first time any ball popping out of the box. The resting team earns points for goals scored off of serves. The other two teams earn points for goals. The goalkeeper earns a point for every difficult save. Play three five minute games (each team plays twice).

Final game - ½ field

Create two equal teams and play to full-sized goals. For the first five minutes, limit the number of touches a team can take before scoring (6-8 is a good range) or the number of individual touches a player make take in possession (2-touch is a good measure for most players) to force teams to play quickly and run off of the ball. Then remove the restriction and let the players play.

Training Session# 8: Counter-Attacking

Introduction: In recent years, national soccer federations have put increasing emphasis on the importance of counter-attacking. Because most teams are at their most vulnerable immediately after losing possession, it is useful to identify for the team the key cues to successful counter-attacking and to train into the group a thorough understanding of the potential of quick strikes in these situations.



2v2+4 - 15x15 grid

Play 2v2+4 in a grid. Teams play to opposite corners as indicated in the diagram. Players passing to a target then take that player's place at the corner and play continues. After scoring in one corner, the attacking team must work to the opposite corner. Target players cannot be used for support. This is a very fast-paced, demanding exercise that is very good for speed of play and also for encouraging a countering mentality. Players should be encouraged to look to play to the corner as soon as an angle is available and also to look to combine (1-2 and overlap) to imbalance their opponents.

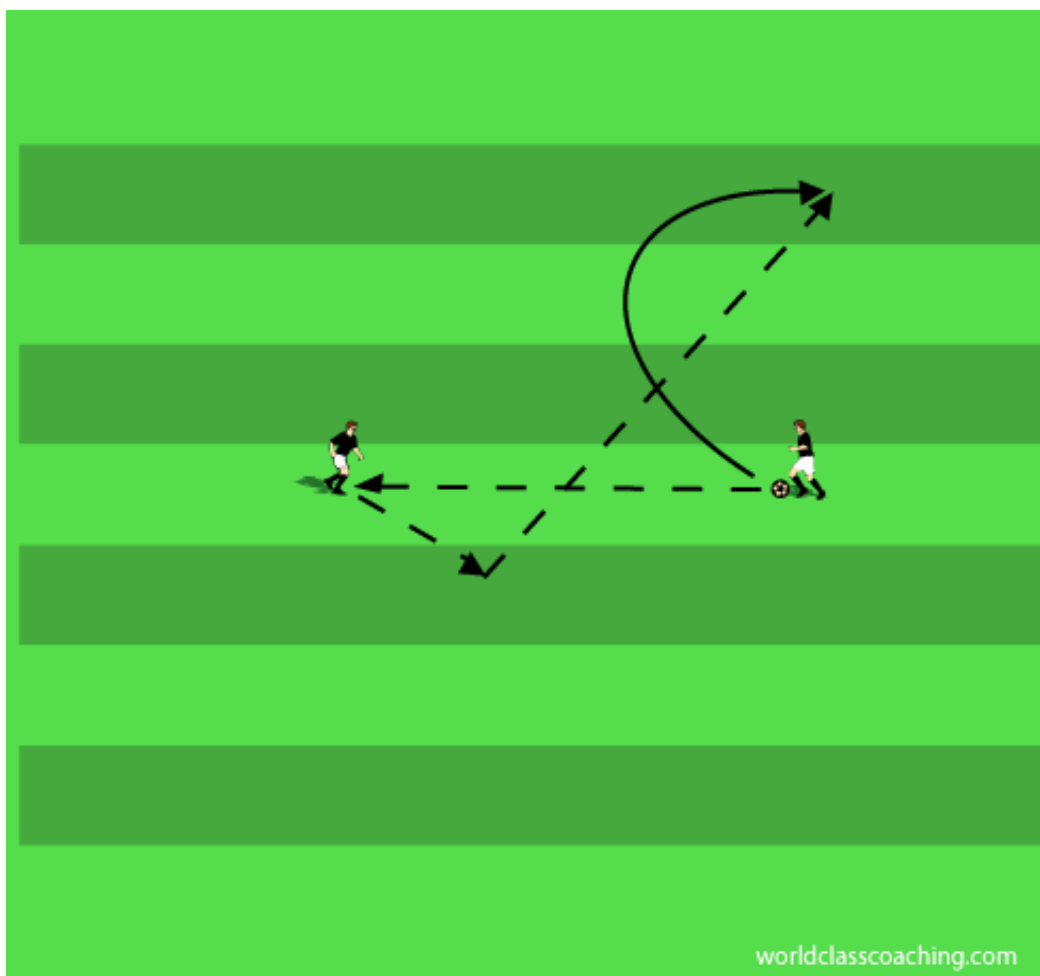
Pairs passing with cues - ½ field

Players work in pairs. Two-touch passing to warm up. Explain that this session is built around organizing the team to counter-attack. Introduce each of the variations and cues below, allowing the players to practice each cue and reaction in isolation every few passes.

- the receiving player steps on the ball. Her partner immediately runs to the ball and the players change places before continuing.

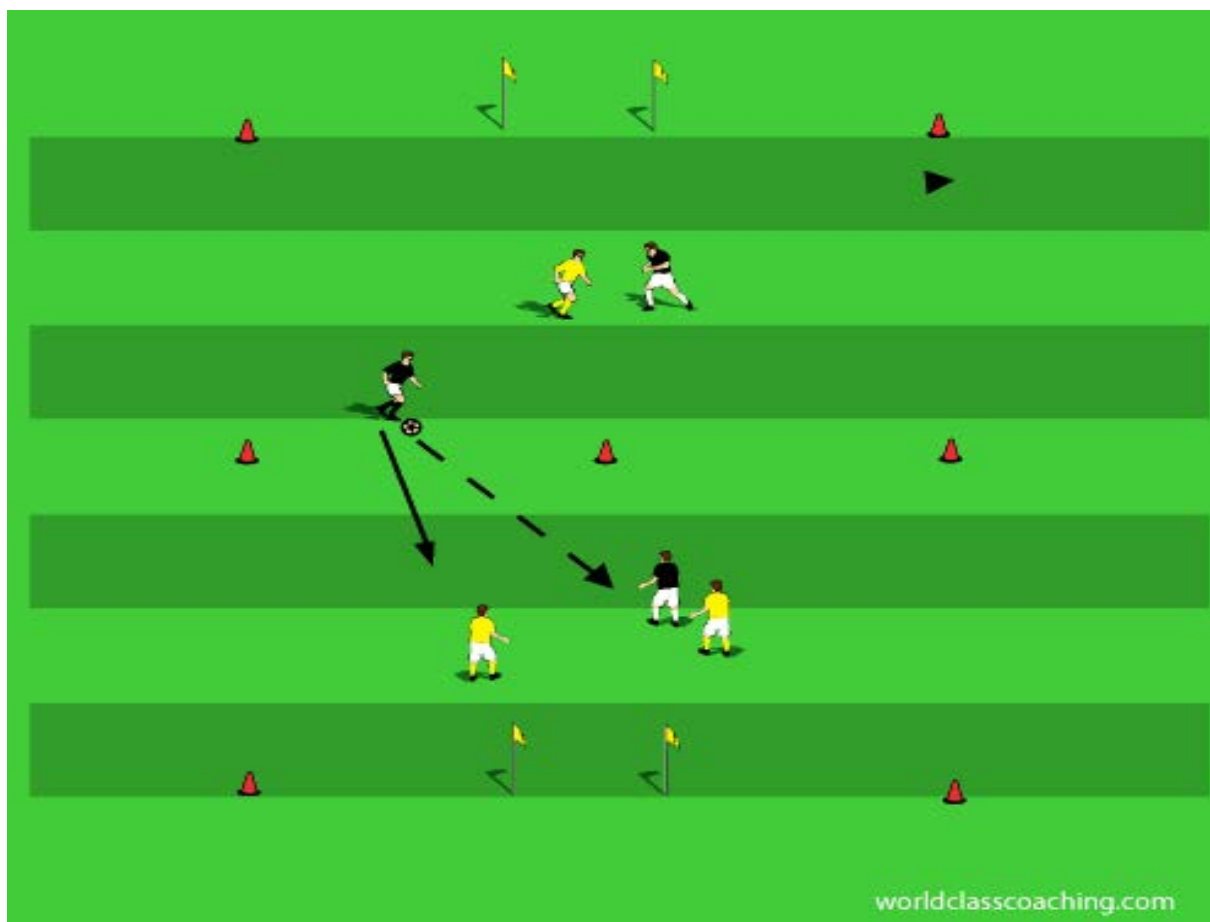


- the receiving player takes a short touch to one side and looks down (above). Her partner moves closer and to the opposite side and the pair complete a 1-2 before changing places.



- the receiving player takes a long touch and looks up. Her partner spins off and runs away from the ball and she is played a long pass.

Once the players have rehearsed each of the cues, explain that the meaning behind each cue is related to the team in possession. If the player looks down (as in the first two variations), she is under pressure and her teammate must check to her to offer a passing option to release pressure. If the player looks up and takes a long touch, she has time and space to play and her partner should check away to create a longer pass and unbalance the opposing defense. Now that the players understand the meaning behind each of the three cues, send them back to train two-touch passing with each of the variations mixed in.



Cobra Strike - (2) 12X15 yard grids

Players are organized in groups of three. Play on fields divided into two 12X15 yard grids. Each team plays two defenders and one forward. The forward cannot leave the front grid and the backs can only go into the front grid if they play into the striker. No one is allowed to play goalkeeper in this exercise. Play for 10 minutes, rotating the attacking player in each grid. Then, institute a rule that the striker is limited to one touch and when one defender plays into the striker, the other must go forward in support of the attack (the player passing forward cannot go forward). This requirement gets all 3 players to think ahead and look for a third attacker in possession.

8v8 Game - ½ field

Play 8v8 on ½ field. Encourage players to look to play forward early and then move in support of the pass.

Training Session #9: Defending Footwork

Introduction: Much of good defending is in the approach and ability to control the attacker's speed, options and movement. This session utilizes environments borrowed from national and high-level club team training to train defenders to focus on the quality and speed of their footwork in closing down.



Shadow Footwork - 10x20 yard lane.

Players form two lines at one end of the lane. To warm up, they complete following sequence of runs, jogging to the flag, then performing an active stretching exercise and then jogging from the second flag to the end of the lane before jogging back to the start.

- jog/high knees/jog
- jog/high heels/jog
- jog/shuffle left/jog
- jog/shuffle right/jog
- jog/backpedal/jog
- jog/sprint/jog

Progression:

- players in the far line step in front of the near line and jockey the player from the near line, who zig-zags forward through the lane. Players change lines after each run.
- finally, players from the far line jockey players from the near line and as the attacker nears the end of the lane, she sprints through one of the gates. The defender attempts to beat her through the gate.



Numbered Cones Footwork - 10x10 yard areas

Arrange cones as shown in the diagram. Form lines at the ends of the cone lines. The first two players step in and face the numbered cones at the bottom of the grid. They get into jockeying position and try to respond as quickly as possible to the following commands:

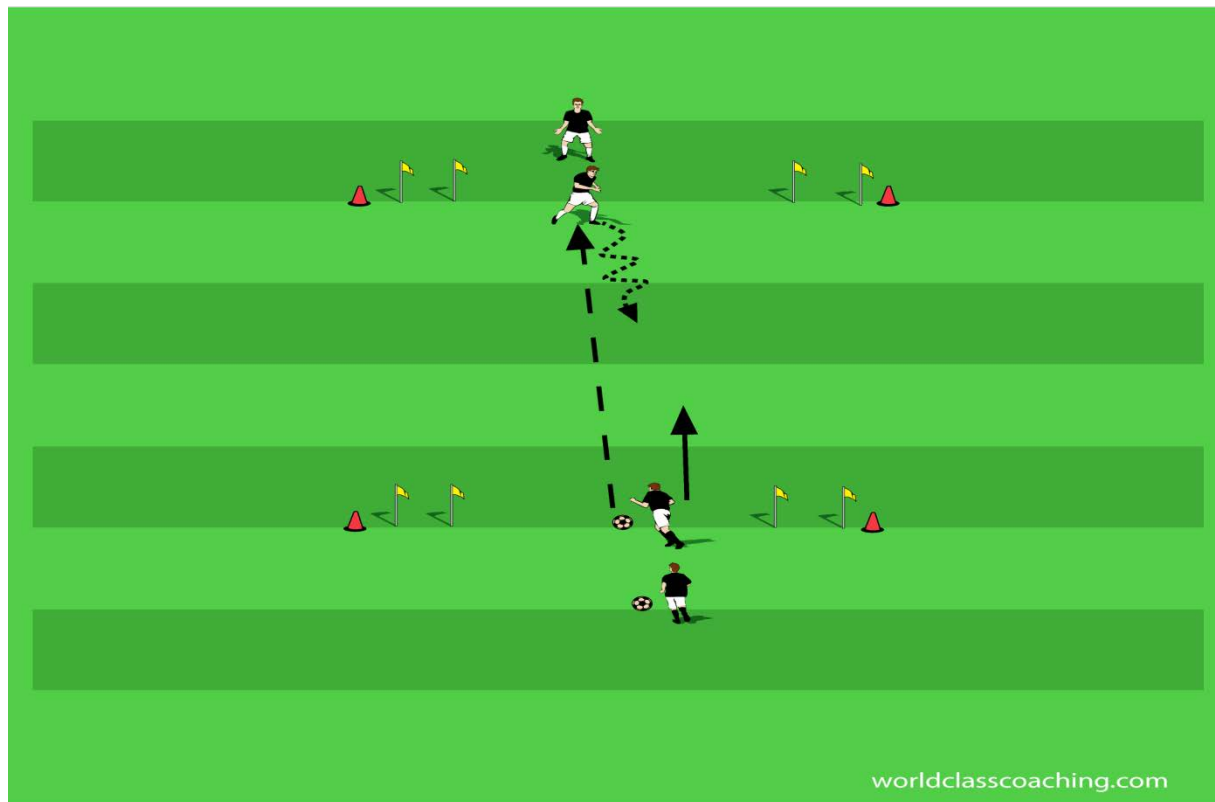
- 1: Move to jockey the #1 cone.
- 2: Move to jockey the #2 cone.
- 3: Move to jockey the #3 cone.
- turn: Turn around and jockey the same number on the other side.
- switch: Move to the other set of cones.
- recover: Run around the other set of cones and then return to current cone.

Each pair of players works for 30 seconds before the next pair takes over.

1v1 continuous – no tackling - 10x10 yard grids

Play 1v1 duels in a 10x10 yard grid. The defender initiates the duel by passing to the attacker and closing down. The defender is not allowed to tackle and must attempt to delay and drive the attacker

out of the grid through physical pressure and good footwork. Focus on passing the ball to a corner and denying the attacker space and options. The attackers attempt to dribble over the defender's endline. Play until the ball leaves the grid. Players change ends after each duel.



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 opponents' flag goals. The presence of two goals encourages attackers 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 compel the defending player to deal with an attacker with multiple options, and the defender will need to work to get her feet into defending position every time the attacker changes directions.

8v8 Scrimmage - ½ field

Play an 8v8 scrimmage on ½ field. For the first 10 minutes of the scrimmage, the coach calls out names of random members of the defending team. Any player whose name is called must run and touch the nearest field line (touch or end line or circle or parts of the box) before returning to play. This requirement compels the other defenders to scramble to deal with the holes in their defense, and the running defenders in essence are completing recovery runs and then getting settled to defend if their team has not yet won the ball, all of which conditions them to defend better 1v1.

Training Session #10: Advanced Individual Defending

Introduction: This session introduces a number of very important and useful concepts for advanced individual defending, from fake tackles to dealing with attackers in a variety of situations. Explain to the players beforehand that this session assumes that basic jockeying and tackling are already part of the players' understanding and that these tools are designed to allow the players the opportunity to be successful against quality attackers.

Footwork: Advanced concepts - 25x25 yard grid

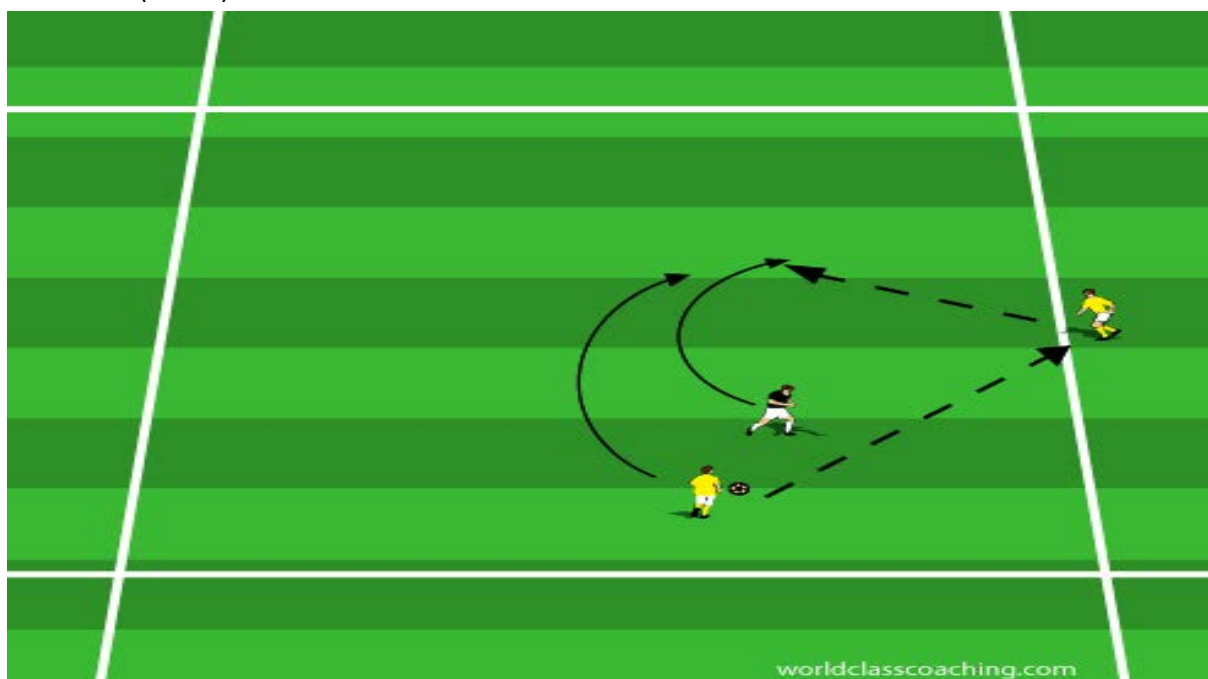
In pairs, the players work back and forth across the area rehearsing advanced individual defending concepts as outlined below. Each player should adopt the attacker's role twice and defend twice. There is no tackling in this exercise and the attacker should focus on changes of direction and speed, but not trying to get in behind the defender, except where noted.

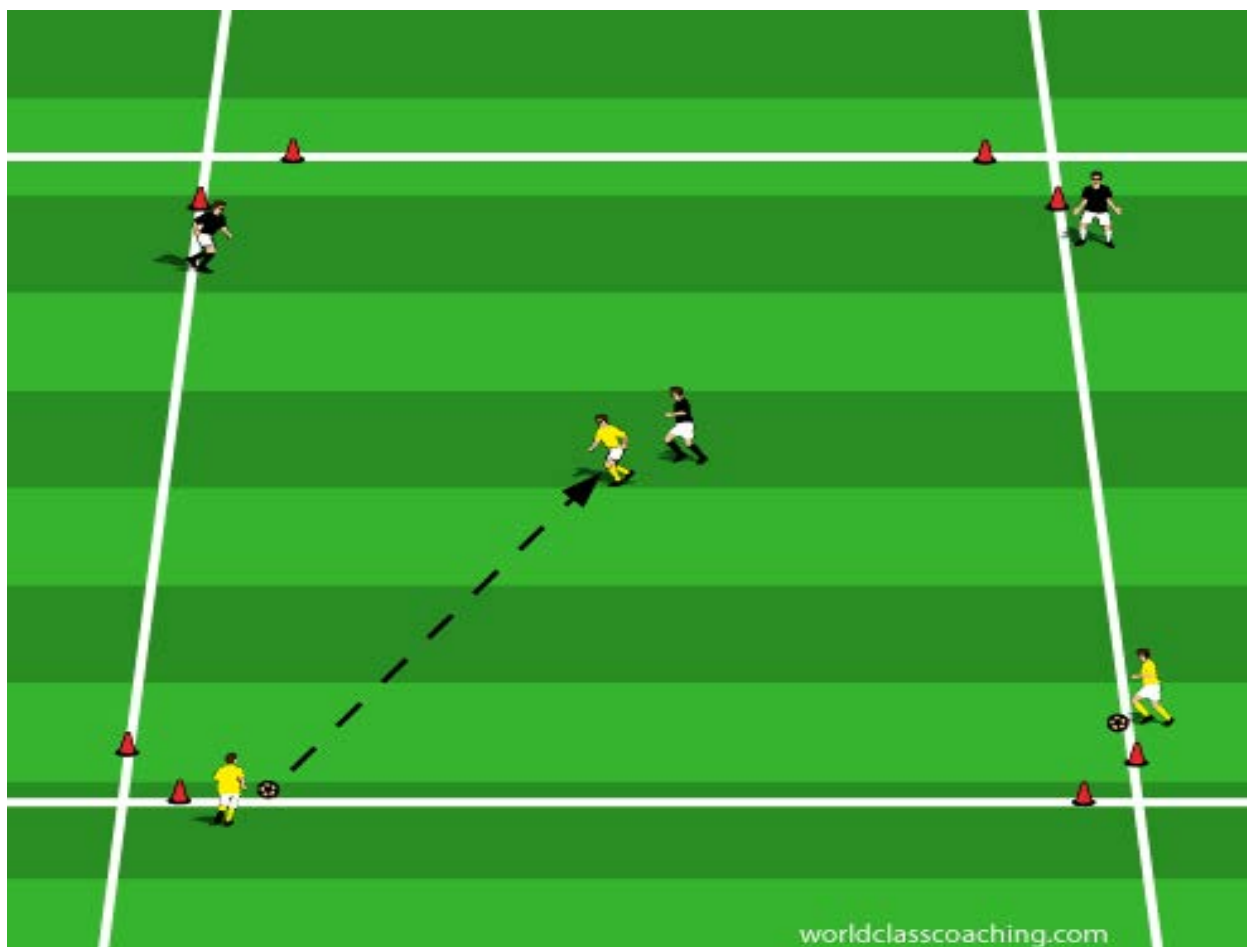
- close down and jockey. The defender starts 10 yards ahead of the attacker and initiates the run with a pass to the attacker's feet. The defender closes down with a bent run (show the ball to one side) and works to stay goal side by jockeying the attacker across the grid.
- fake tackle. One of the best ways for a defender to keep the attention of the attacker focused on the ball (rather than her options) is to fake tackle. This simply involves a hard step forward out of the jockeying position. The defender must concern herself with her timing, as the attacker can win the duel if she is able to play in behind when the defender steps. The best time to do this is when the ball is off of the attacker's foot. The defender then recovers (in a game she may choose to follow up with a tackle).
- cut out runs. Here the attacker starts with the ball and standing next to the attacker. The attacker touches the ball ahead and the defender steps immediately between the ball and the attacker and then closes to step on the ball. Players change roles with each sequence. This is a critical concept for the defender, as she must recognize that at some point the attacker will play in behind and the defender must move quickly to cut off the run while playing the ball.
- getting shoulder ahead. Play without a ball. The two players start shoulder-to-shoulder. One player hollers, "go!" and the two race for the opposite endline. In this case, they should be in shoulder contact throughout their runs and both players should be trying to get shoulder ahead in the direction they are running. The player who is shoulder-ahead in a duel situation will most often win the ball. Another tip in this regard is to encourage players to 'swim' as they run in contact with another player. The idea here is that the swimming motion with the arms will help to pull the player forward while inhibiting the ability of the opponent to do the same.



1v1+1 - 10x15 yard grids

Groups of 4-5 players at each grid. Locate a ball supply on one end of the grid. The defender begins the duel by passing to the attacker at the far end of the grid. The attacker can try to beat the defender on the dribble or use the bumper (limited to one touch, but can move up and down the side of the grid) to create a 1-2 to get in behind the defender. This environment compels the defender to read the situation and drive the attacker away from the support player, as shown above. The defender also learns to recover very quickly if the ball is played in to the support player, thus protecting the space in behind her (below).





1v1 with attacker facing away from goal - 15 x 15 yard grids with 4 corner goals.

Groups of 2 players at each goal. Locate a ball supply at two corners (not opposite). Duels run between players from diagonally-opposed goals. In this case, the defender and attacker begin at the middle of the grid, with the attacker shoulder on to the defender. Play is initiated by resting attacker, who passes the ball to the attacker's back foot. Neither player can move before the attacker's first touch, but then play is live and both players try to win the ball and play through their opponent's goal. It is very important for defenders to be able to distinguish the attacker's options based on their positioning. In this case, with the attacker facing away from the goal, here are some tips and considerations.

Priorities:

- deny ball (impossible here by design); deny turn; deny dribble; deny shot.
- get touch close: If the defender is too close, the attacker can spin off of the defender and get in behind; if the defender is too far away, the attacker can turn and face the defender, increasing her options. Touch close, as the term implies, means getting close enough to touch the player.
- eyes on one side, feet on the other. When the attacker is facing away from goal, the defender should put her feet on one side (left or right) and her head and eyes on the other. This helps balance the defender, and then the defender looks for the first touch forward as the moment to tackle.
- -press an attacker whose first touch is backward. Many talented attackers will take a touch away in an effort to try to create space to turn. When the attacker does this, she cannot spin

off, so the defender should get very tight to an attacker who is moving backward in pursuit of the ball.

4v4 games - 20x25 yard grids

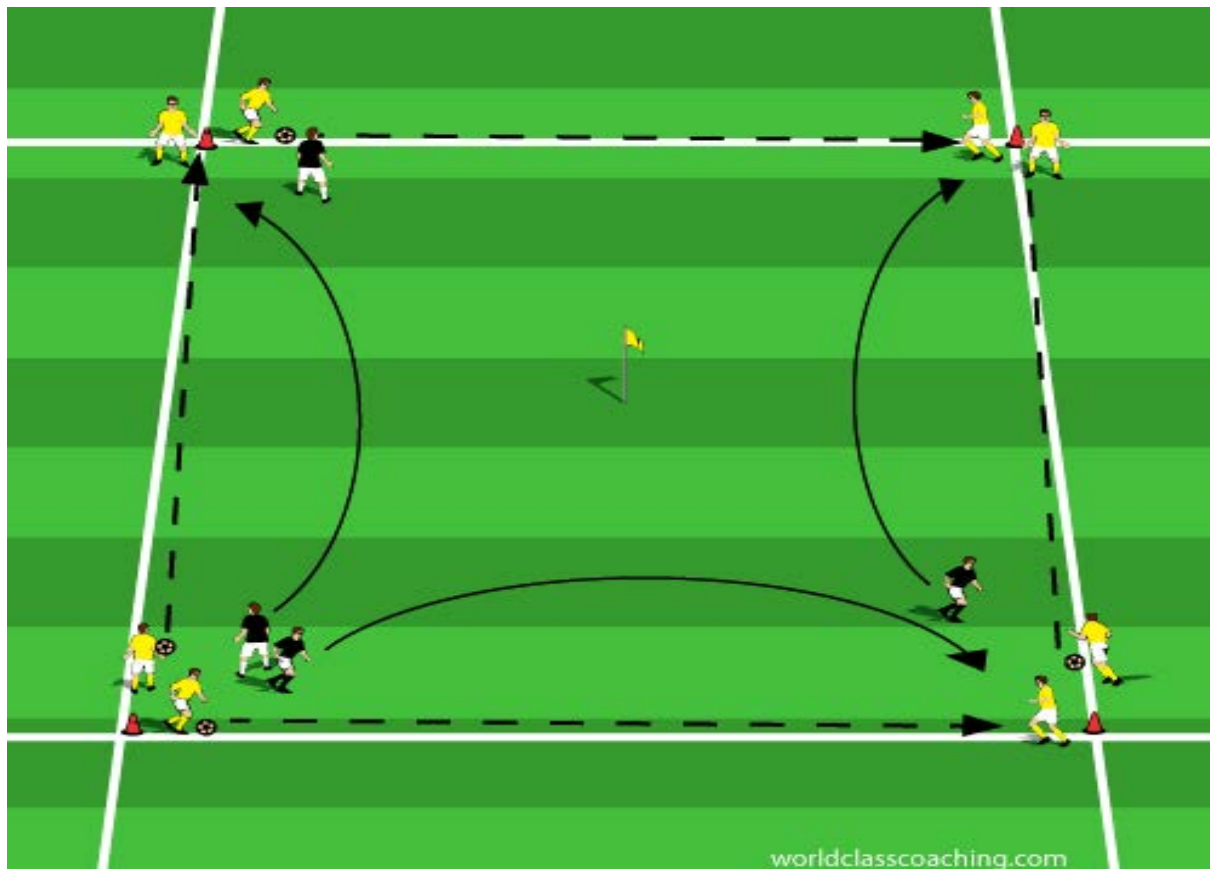
Play 4v4 games to small cone goals. Players are only allowed to defend against one player (assign opponents) from the opposing team. This requirement will create numerous opportunities for duels with attackers facing toward and away from goal and defenders should be encouraged to utilize the techniques introduced above.

8v8 scrimmage - ½ field

Close with an 8v8 game without restrictions. Continue to emphasize good technique and decision-making on the defensive side of the ball in particular.

Training Session #11: Second Defender

Introduction: The second defender is the player closest to the first defender, who is the player nearest the ball for the defending team. This player's role is to support and cover the first defender, and this session looks at building familiarity and discipline within the team regarding providing defense in depth in the game.

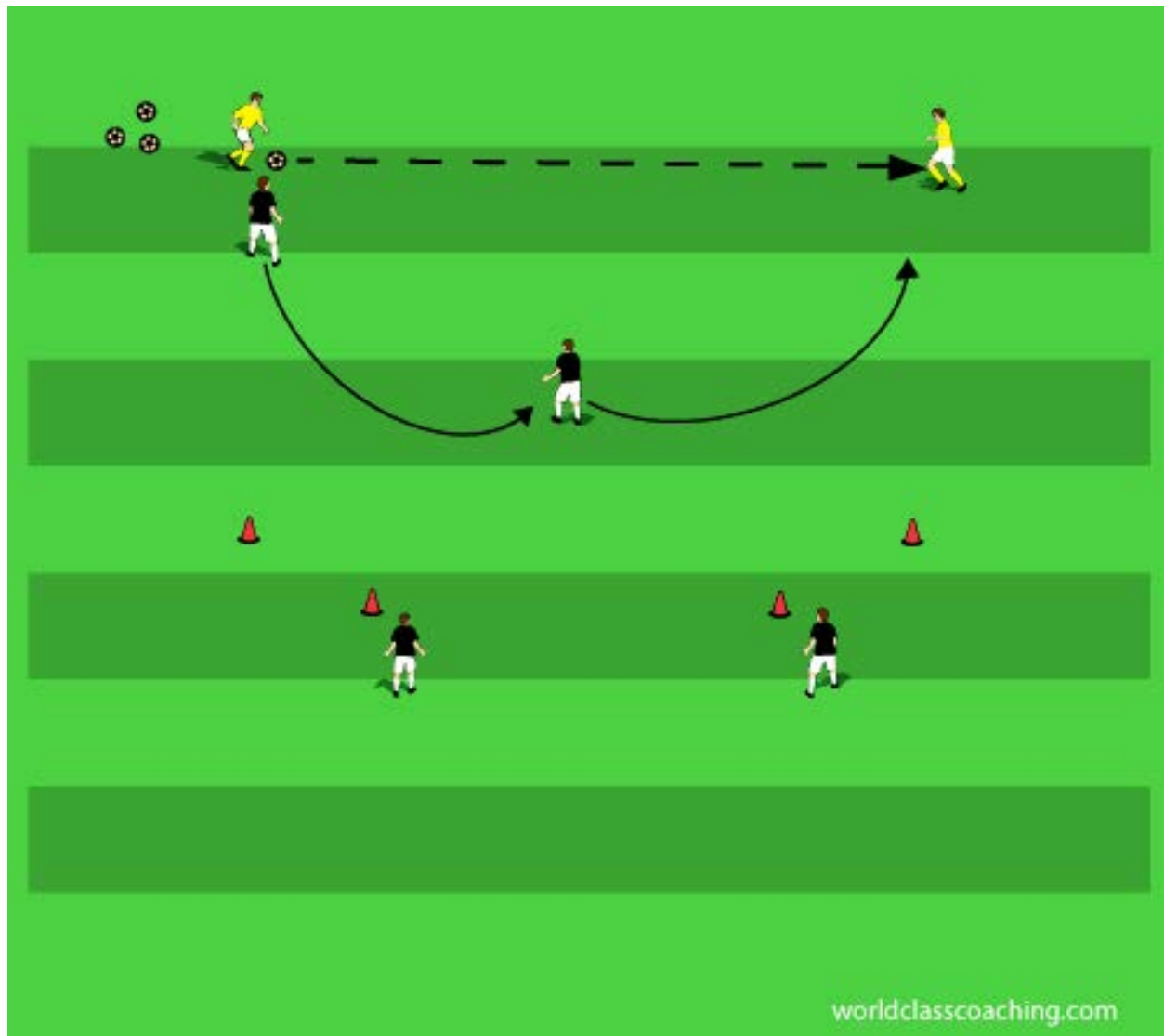


Defending footwork - 15x15 yard grid

Players work in groups of 3 inside a triangle formed by the coaching stick at the center of the grid and the cones on two corners. Two attackers stand near the cones and pass a ball back and forth between them (they hold the ball until the defender is in position and set). The defender, using the cone stick as a guide (as an attacking target), works back and forth between the attackers, working to get outside of the ball and screen the angle forward to the coaching stick (thus forcing the square pass). Quick footwork and the desire to force the ball away from critical space are very important to effective first-defending (the first defender is simply defender closest to the ball), particularly when the second defender is introduced in this session. Play for 30 seconds and then rotate the defenders.

Variations:

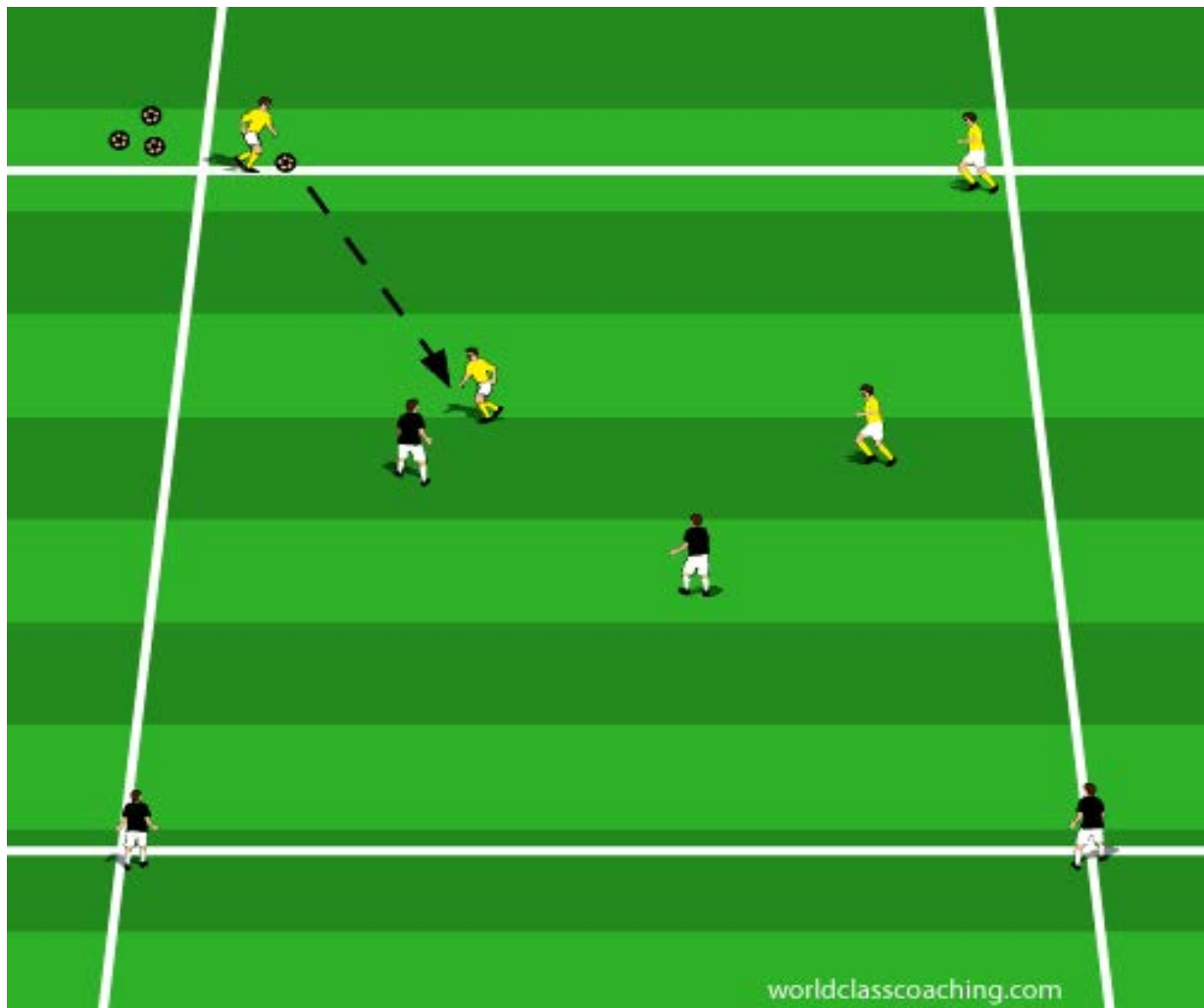
- the coach calls “next!” and the defenders (not the attackers) move one triangle clockwise and continue to defend. This variation forces the defender to change position and then get right to work containing the attackers again.
- the coach calls “cross!” and the defenders move to the opposite side of the grid and continue defending.



1st and 2nd defender interchange - 15x15 yard grid

Two attackers ping a ball back and forth at two cones at the top of the grid area. Two defenders, moving out of each of the goals at the other end, interchange first and second defender roles while closing the space between them and the attackers. The attackers are not looking to score, but rather continue to slowly pass the ball back-and-forth in place. The first defender (the defender on the ball side) needs to work forward, getting outside of the ball (to show the ball back toward her support) and

also covering the goal on her side of the field. The second defender gets into a covering position, which is to say that she gets behind the line of the first defender and about a corner flag pole length away from her. From this position in a game situation, the second defender would be in position to deny the attacker a run at goal if the first defender was beaten. Defenders continue to interchange roles as the ball is passed. Play for 30 seconds and then the defenders become the passers and play continues with a new set of defenders.



2v2 plus 4 - 15x25 yard grids

Play 2v2 plus 4. The game features 2v2 in the grid while two members of each team serve as targets at their opponents' corner ends of the grid. The active players try to play in to either of the corner targets. When the corner targets receive the ball, they play in to their opponents and the game continues in the other direction. The active players cannot play back to the corner players for support. This environment is ideal for training first and second defender roles. The space is tight enough for the defenders to be able to apply good pressure and the even numbers will create frequent interchanges between the two attackers and consequently the defenders will need to adjust their roles often as well.

8v8 Scrimmage - ½ field

Close the session with an 8v8 scrimmage. Deploy the teams in 2-4-2 formations and encourage them to pay attention to the first and second defender roles within their particular group (i.e. the two backs or any two neighboring midfielders).

Training Session#12: Training the Back Line

Introduction: This session introduces a progressive set of exercises the coach can use to develop understanding between players assigned to playing on the back line. This session assumes the team will be playing in a 'flat' arrangement.

Shaping the group: Movement to confront an attack - ½ field

The back four move up the field together to confront each consecutive ball. At each ball, the players adopt a ready position and then hold while the coach makes adjustments to assure the group's shape is appropriate.



Coach:

- the general shape, as shown above, is that of a hook or the letter "J" when the ball is on either flank.
- the first defender (player 1) closes on the ball, using a bent run to channel the ball to a touch-line or toward defensive cover. The near-side center back, the second defender, provides close cover.

- note that the third defender from the ball (i.e. the far side center back, player 3) sets the depth of the line.
- the back-side defender (player 4) tucks in to protect the space outside of the neighboring center back (player 3)



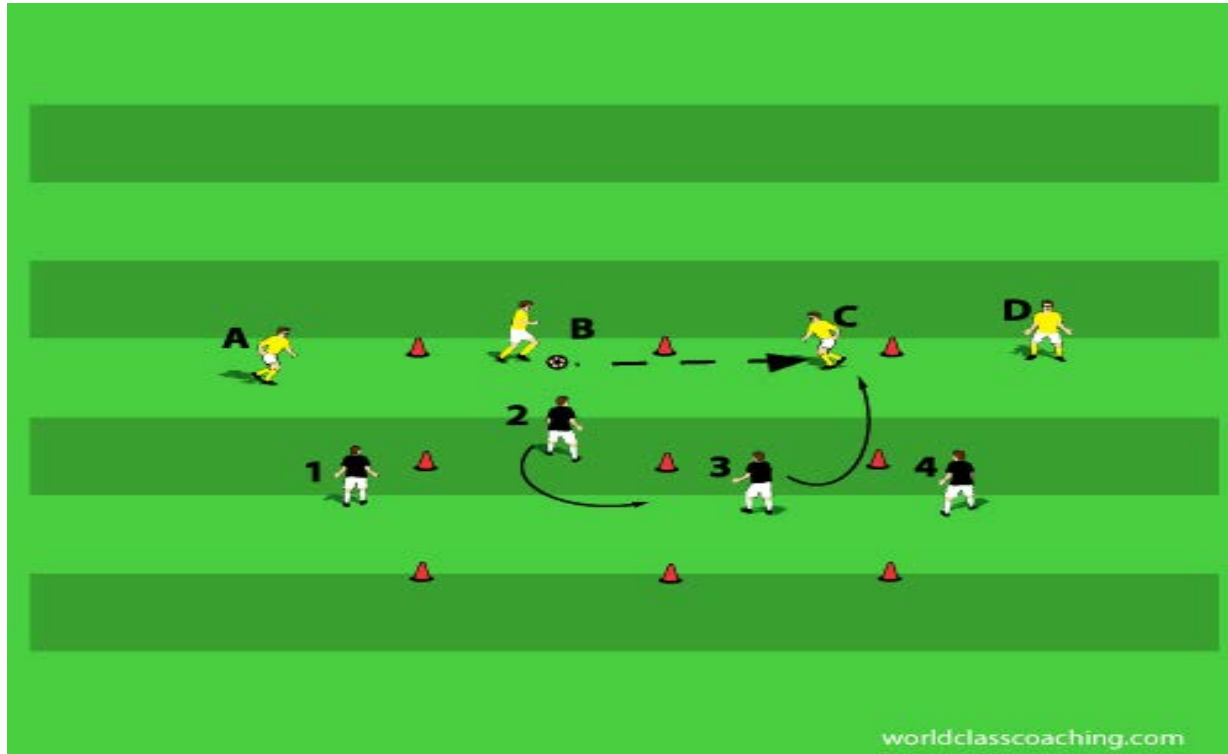
- when the ball is nearer the middle of the field, the shape is more of an “S,” situated on its side.
- here, defenders 1 and 3 cooperate to set the depth of the defense, while providing cover to the first defender (player 2).
- the back-side defender (player 4) tucks in again to protect the space outside of the center back (player 3).
- with every movement to a new ball, each of the players must look to the rest of the group, communicating and dressing their positions in unison with the group.
-

Considerations:

- tactical priorities of the team. Will the team show the ball to the flank or channel the ball inside? The coach must be ready to instruct the players as to their priorities and the team/system philosophy of play.
- area on the field (i.e. in the back third, the flank defenders likely show the ball outside, while in the front two-thirds the team’s defending strategy may call for the ball to be shown inside).

Progression:

- at the command of the coach, the group moves up one ball or back one ball. This movement compels the players to work together in pressing up and also recovery.
- two attackers ping the ball to one-another (and move about the field, giving new angles and distances) for the back line to adjust to.



Adjustment under pressure: 4v4 zone play - 30x30 yard area

This exercise allows the back four to practice responding together to a group of attackers in a progressively live and functional environment. Players A-D begin play as stationary passers across the width of the grid. Defenders 1-4 adjust to each square pass, once again rehearsing smooth and quick movement to each movement of the ball. Allow no tackling for the first two minutes of play, giving the defensive block the opportunity to work through shadow movements.

Progression:

- live play. The defenders now attempt to win the ball, but are confined to their vertical zones unless multiple attackers enter an individual zone. If the defenders gain possession, they step on the ball and then return it to the attackers to restart play. The attackers simply aim to keep possession.

Coach:

- demonstrate how the group can deal with attacking overloads in individual zones. For example, if players A and B both attack (and attempt to overlap to play out player 1) into the zone occupied by player 1, player 2 moves into the zone in a covering position and either releases

player 1 to track B's run (and then marks player A) or tracks B's run, allowing 1 to continue to press A, depending on the situation.

Progression:

- remove the vertical zones.
- add small cone goals in the corners on the ends of the playing area. Each team plays to and defends two goals. The multiple goals encourage both teams to work to constantly change fields, forcing the defenders to continue to adjust. The coach should continue to monitor the defending group's shape, paying particular attention to the seams between defenders and also the ability of the group to respond in unison to any attacking movement.



6 vs. 4 + Goalkeeper - 1/3 field

The attackers field four midfielders and two forwards. The defending group is composed of the goalkeeper and the four players along the back line. Restarts are played by a coach or resting player in the center circle. The attackers play to goal without restrictions. The defending group defend the goal. If the defenders win the ball, they play to the resting player at the restart point.

Coach:

- the defending group must move up field together, dressing their line with each pass by the attackers.
- The playing relationship between the goalkeeper and the back line. The goalkeeper must control the area behind the back line and communicate with the backs as to her intentions and also their priorities.

- The backs must learn to be patient. They are outnumbered, and their priority must be to delay and contain any attacking threat.

Training Session#13: Team defending

Introduction: This session is an extension of Session#12, which dealt with training the back line to play with the goalkeeper on defense. This functional session adds the midfield and then the front line to the defending group, allowing the coach to train the entire group together. The session also asks philosophical questions of the coach, helping her sort out defending roles and priorities for the team.

Goalkeeper, back line and midfielders defending - 2/3 field

Place the goalkeeper, back line and midfield group on the field, prepared to defend the goal. In the first phase, the coach walks around with the ball, aligning the team in various defending positions and situations, and clarifying critical roles.

Considerations:

- how many players will the team place in the midfield? If the team plays with three midfielders in a concentrated central triangle, the outside backs must work to understand how and when to step out to press the ball in the midfield. In a standard 4-midfielder set, the team must know whether and when they channel the ball to the inside or out on defense. If the team plays a 5-midfielder system, the ball is most often forced inside toward the defensive support of the central midfield grouping. The coach must think through and then discuss the relevant details with the players.
- how high will the defensive line play, and will they attempt to trap the opponent? If the team will play a high line, the midfielders (and forwards) must press the ball constantly in the middle third, so that the opponent cannot find space and time to set up runs and passes to defeat the high defensive line. Similarly, the goalkeeper must understand her duties as well if she is to adopt a high starting position to control the space behind the back line.

Progression:

- add an attacking group consisting of four defenders, four midfielders and two forwards. Also, add counter goals for the defending group to play to. The resulting game is 10 vs. 8 (assuming a defending block of 8 players from a 4-4-2) plus a goalkeeper. Play a standard scrimmage, with the attackers playing to goal and the defending group trying to score in the counter goals.

Coach:

- this is a very good environment for assuring that the defending block work together to squeeze the ball to desired spaces (central to a concentrated defensive unit or to the flanks to limit space and options).
- The other major coaching opportunity here is to work to control the space in front of the defense and behind the midfield group. The holding midfielder, in particular, must be aware of and connected to the center back(s) to assure that this critical space does not become a staging area for opponent attacks.

Team Defending - Full field

Add the appropriate front line players for the defending group and a goalkeeper for the attackers and play a full-field standard scrimmage.

Coach:

- the roles and responsibilities of the front line players. In a two front, the strikers press the opposing back line and try to channel the ball to one side of the field (or the middle), funneling opponent attacks into predictable and controllable space. In a 3-front, the pressure should be constant, with the flank attackers assuring that the opposing outside backs are not allowed to get involved in their team's attacking and the center forward similarly stymieing efforts to play to either of the opposing center backs.
- Another consideration in this full-sided environment is the overall philosophy of the team with regard to pressure. Will the team play high pressure all over the field, or will the team confront the ball at a point (restraining line) on the field that allows the group to condense and frustrate opponent attacks?
- Situational defending. Another very good coaching tool in this environment is to work on situational defending. For instance, the team is down 0-1 with five minutes to play. How will the team play? The entire team must know that there must be considerable effort to pressure the ball and to keep the ball on the field as they try to find an equalizer. Conversely, what if the team leads 1-0 with five minutes left? They might still press, but they may also back off and condense their shape and be more willing to concede restarts to help kill off the game.

Training Session #14: Playing in the air

Introduction: As the size of the field and the abilities of the players to drive balls over distance increase, the capability and willingness of players to deal with a ball played at them in the air become very important. This session provides a mix of fun, challenging environments in which players' comfort playing in the air will increase.



Soccer Volleyball - back to back 6x8 yard grids

Play 3v3 soccer volleyball games. This is a fun and flexible activity to warm-up in a session focused on playing in the air. To begin, the coach serves balls randomly to either grid. Each team is allowed one bounce of the ball on their side of the cones each time the ball enters their area (for advanced players, no bounces should be allowed). Play to ten points.

Variations:

- play multiple games simultaneously and have the grids compete against each other for the highest single total number of exchanges (one point for each ball played from one side of the center line to the other).

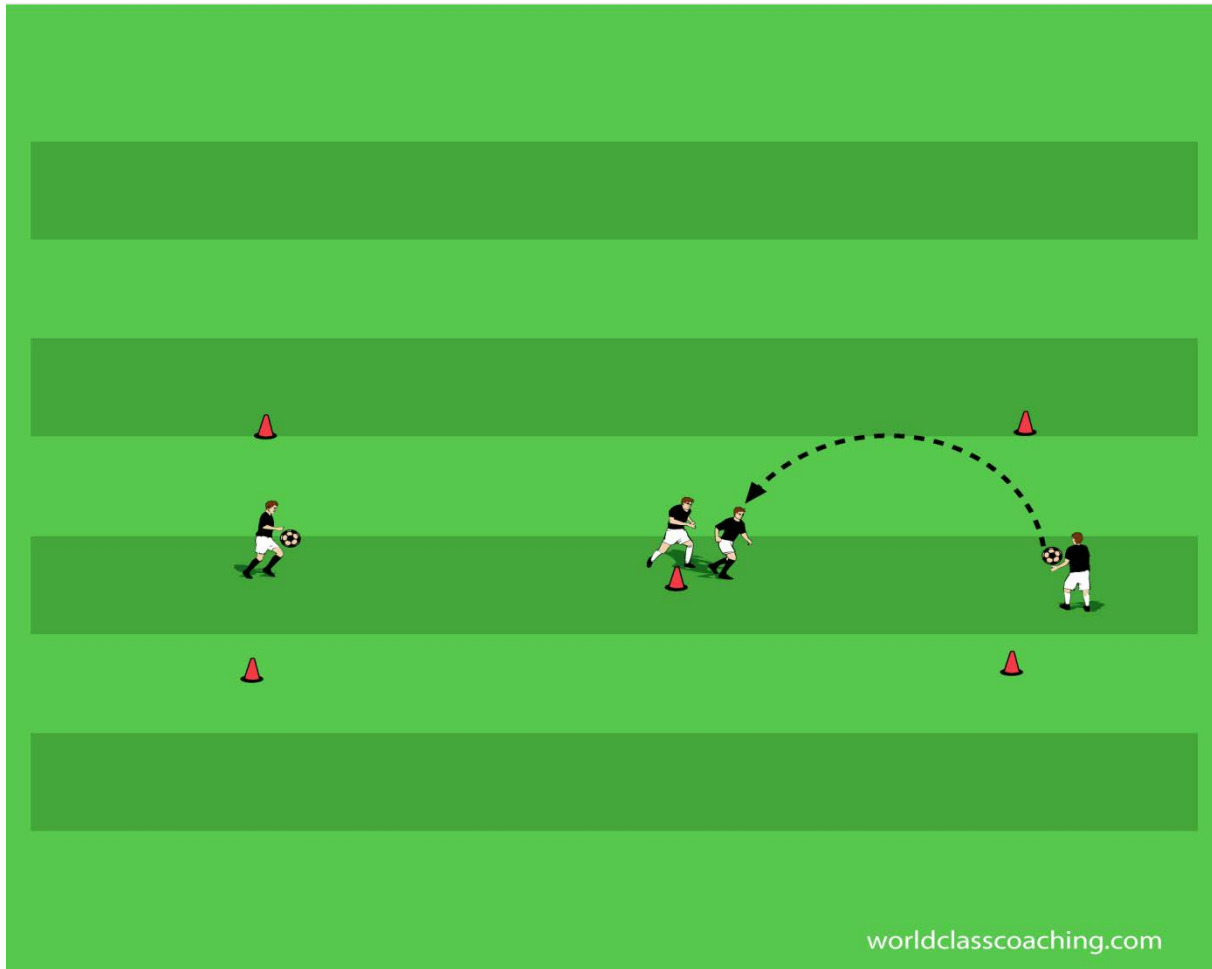


Three serving one with two balls 10x10 yard areas

Three servers (two with balls) passing balls in turn to the working player, who plays first time each successive service to the player without a ball (rotates with each serve). This environment compels the receiving player to redirect the ball in the flow of the exercise and with technical speed.

Progression:

- serves are tossed underhand for the working player to volley first-time to the open player
- serves are tossed underhand for the working player to play 2-touch in the air (serves should be chest or thigh height)
- serves are tossed underhand for the working player to head first-time to the open player



Competitive Heading - 10x10 yard areas

Players work in groups of 4, with two working players in the middle and two servers on the ends with soccer balls. The working players return to the center cone after each duel. Servers toss balls for the working players to try to head back to the servers. Any ball caught by the server is a point for the working player who headed the ball. Encourage servers to vary the height and type of service (i.e. lofted ball or flat throw).

Variations:

- players need to settle the ball before playing back.
- players need to flick the ball on to the other server (shorten the area of play for this variation).

Flankenspiel - 40x25 yard area

Each team provides a crosser at a corner on their attacking end. Restarts are by cross and from alternating ends. Give two points for a first-time finish on a serve out of the air and one point for any other goal.

Training Session #15: Heading.

Introduction: This session reviews technical heading, working players through a progression designed to strengthen the power and refine the technique of their striking, and then gives players the opportunity to utilize heading in a game situation.



Team Handball - 25x25 yard area with full-sized goals

Divide the group into two teams. Players pass the ball with their hands but can only score off of a serve from a teammate resulting in a header. Defenders can use their hands to block or intercept passes. Any ball that hits the ground is a turnover and play restarts from that point. Players in possession are limited to three seconds and three steps.

Progression:

- every other pass must be a header, and goals can only be scored off of a serve from a teammate that results in a header at goal.

Pairs technical heading progression - touch line area

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball through each stage of the progression. At each level, emphasize safety (eyes open, mouth closed) and quality repetition. Explain that the progression is designed to isolate particular muscle groups and motions that strengthen heading and improve technique.

Progression:

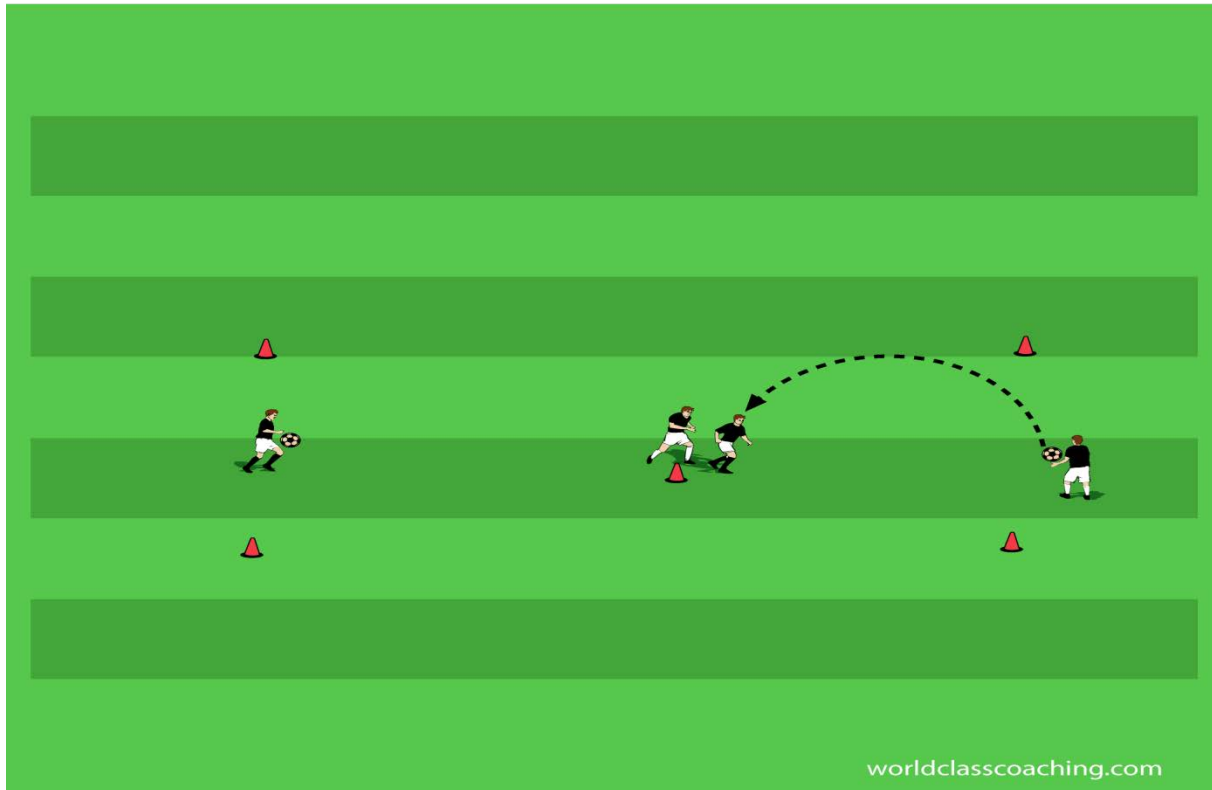
- active player laying on her front side. The active player lays down facing her partner with her arms fully extended and supporting her shoulders and head. The server prepares to toss balls underhand and not more than a foot in front of the working player's head. The working player initiates each repetition by arching her back and pulling her head and shoulders back away from the server.
 1. eyes open, mouth closed.
 2. contact point is the hair line at the top of the forehead.
 3. shoulders and head should be locked with the head forward and the shoulders pushing away at the moment of contact.
 4. drive the ball back into the hands of the server.
- active player seated. The active player initiates the repetition by leaning back to do about 1/3 sit-up.
 1. utilize the lower back muscles, in addition to the points of emphasis above.
 2. Now the arms are held low and forward before contact and then thrust away from the ball (accentuating the shoulder movement) at the moment the ball is struck.
 3. drive the ball back into the hands of the server.
- active player standing. The server initiates each repetition with the toss.
 1. in addition to the above points of emphasis, it is advisable for young players in particular to have them stagger their feet, with one foot closer to the server and one comfortably further away. The working player starts each repetition with her weight on her away foot and transfers the weight to the front foot as part of the striking motion. This posture adds power and also gives a longer time window for timing the heading motion.
 2. attacking heading. In attacking situations (i.e. in finishing crosses), it is often best to drive the ball downward (this makes it very difficult for defenders and the goalkeeper to react to). Show players that to create a downward angle on the header, the players need to contact the ball on the back side and above the center-back.
 3. defensive heading. In defending situations (i.e. defending crosses) it is preferable to head the ball upward, clearing the ball away from danger and giving the defense time to organize while the ball travels. Show players that to create an upward angle, they need to contact the ball on the back side and below center.

Pairs heading contest - touch line area

Working in pairs with one ball, see which group can complete the most consecutive headers. Players must alternate touches. Restarts are by a toss from one partner to the other. Explain that this exercise simulates defensive heading, as it requires that the ball be headed upward to one's partner. Players can use their feet, thighs and shoulders (not hands) to sustain their juggle, but those touches do not count toward the total. Keep track of the single best sequence for each pair.

Variation:

- Rather than tracking the best single sequence, record the total number of headers by each pair throughout the exercise. This is a useful variation for very young players in that it encourages repetition rewards hard work if the players are unsuccessful with the standard rules of the game.
- 2-touch heading. Same contest except that each player must head the ball twice each time they receive the ball in the sequence. This restriction develops touch in heading and helps differentiate between a controlling (1st touch in sequence) and a driven touch (second touch played to partner). Each touch counts as a point.



Competitive Heading - 10x10 yard areas

Players work in groups of 4, with two working players in the middle and two servers on the ends with soccer balls. The working players return to the center cone after each duel. Servers toss balls for the working players to try to head back to the servers. Any ball caught by the server is a point for the working player who headed the ball. Encourage servers to vary the height and type of service (i.e. lofted ball or flat throw).

Variations:

- players need to settle the ball before playing back.
- players need to flick the ball on to the other server (shorten the area of play for this variation).

4v4 Games to goal with controlled restarts - 18-yard box

Play 4v4 games to goal with all restarts coming from throw-ins. This restriction creates numerous opportunities for players to duel in the air.

Additional ideas:

- goalkeeper re-starts are short, high punts.
- goals can only be scored off of crosses (add neutral crossers to promote).

Training Session #16: Long Passing.

Introduction: This session features a progression from basic passing through technical long passing and then a pair of playing environments where playing over distance is required. At this stage in their development, players should be working very hard to become proficient playing over distance with either foot.

Passing warm-up - ½ field

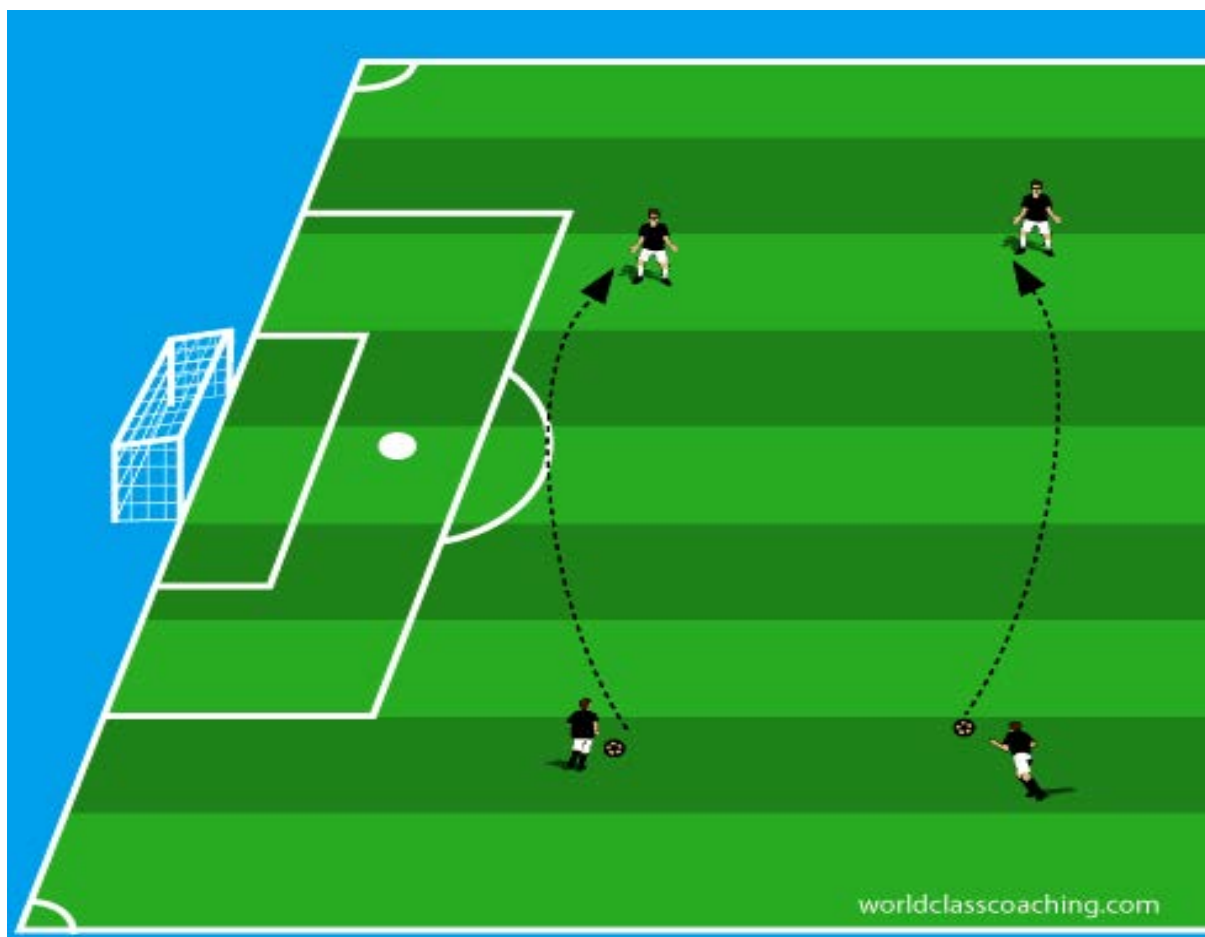
This exercise requires soccer balls of several different colors (three is preferable). There should be ½ as many balls as the total number of players. Players are instructed to spread out around the playing area. The team jog around the area, exchanging the soccer balls in the prescribed manner. For example, a white ball calls for a throw-in; a red ball indicates a short pass, and a black ball must be played over distance (long pass – which should be at least 15 yards). Play for three minutes. The coach can use this time to assess the players' ability to play a variety of passes with particular emphasis upon long passing.

Pairs passing - Touchline

Players work in pairs with a soccer ball for each pair to start (have a second ball nearby).

Progression:

- two-touch passing. Players pass in pairs using two touches. Emphasize technical speed and proper technique, including locked ankle, utilizing the inside of the foot, pointing the plant foot toes at the target and holding the foot momentarily after the strike to accentuate proper follow-through. Players should alternate the strike foot with each pass. Play for one minute and then change partners.
- one-touch passing. Players pass in pairs using one-touch where possible. Here the emphasis is upon measuring the strike so that the ball can be returned with one-touch. Once again, players must lock ankles, point the plant foot at the target, and use the laces surface. Players should also change the passing foot with each strike. Finally, point out to players that they need to be aware of the part of the ball that they strike. To keep the ball on the ground, players should focus on striking just above the mid-point on the back of the ball. Play for one minute and then change partners.
- two-ball passing. Players pass in pairs with two balls using two touches. Here, the players must work to develop a rhythm in both passing and receiving. Players pass the ball simultaneously with their right foot and receive the pass from their partner with their left foot. Their first touch should be made with the inside of their left foot and should push the ball forward and across their bodies so that they may pass the ball with the inside of their right foot as the sequence begins again. The purpose here is to apply light technical pressure while also developing consistency in technique. Play for one minute and then change the passing and receiving foot.
- pairs laces passing. Players work in pairs with one soccer ball. Here the players stand about four yards apart and focus on passing the ball to their partner with their laces surface. As the focus of the session is long passing, the laces surface will be critical to the technical success of the session, so players must focus on getting their toes down, locking their ankles and finding a comfortable placement for their standing foot, pointing the toes toward the target of the pass. Players work to get consistency in their strikes. After each pass, the ball should be stopped so that the technique can be practiced in isolation. Players should alternate the passing foot with each strike.

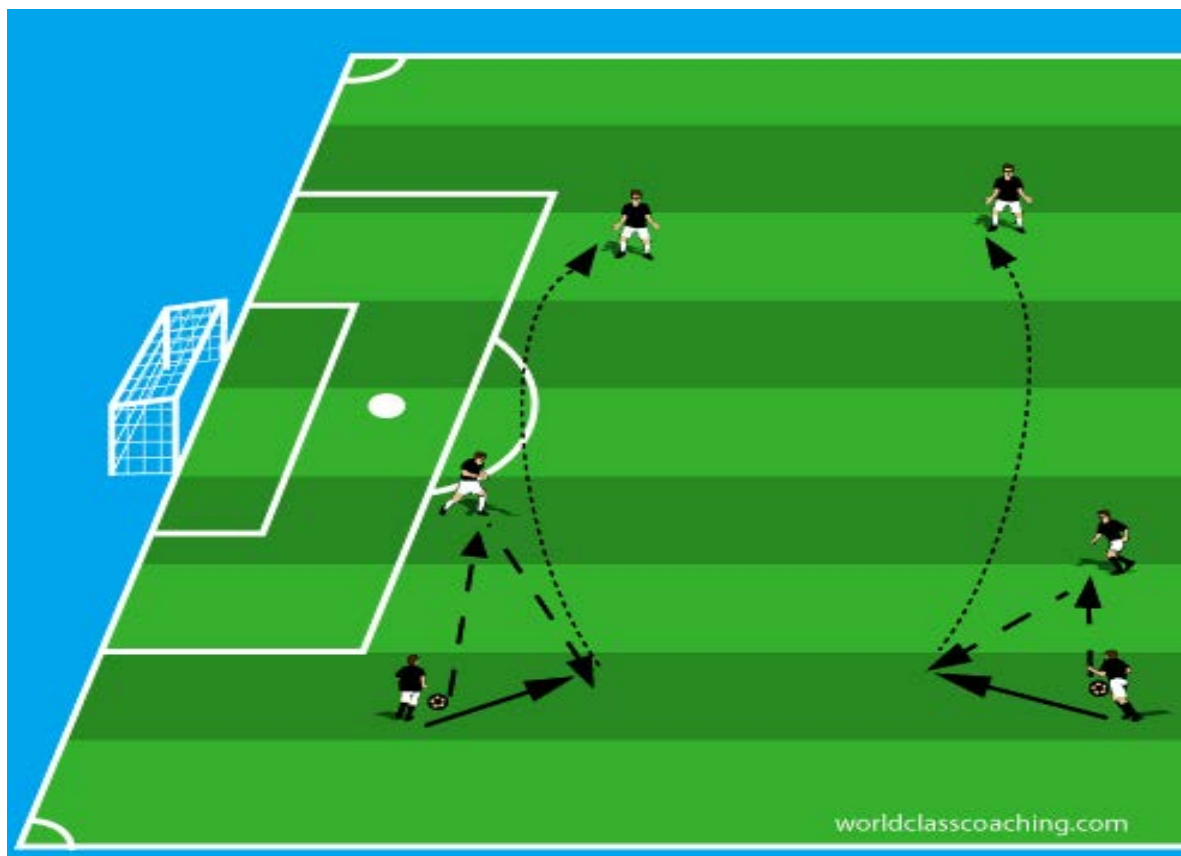


Driving range - ½ field

Introduce long passing. There are three types of long pass: Driven, lofted and chipped. Demonstrate one pass and allow players to practice striking the ball with a partner over a twenty to twenty-five yard space for about four minutes, compelling players to switch to their off foot after two minutes.

- driven pass. This pass is very similar to a driven shot. This pass is used to send the ball over distance as fast as possible. The pass is driven and usually not more than shoulder high, and is often used to cross the ball (near post usually) or to change fields, and to play sharp, long through balls.
 1. lock the foot with the toes pointed down.
 2. use the laces to strike the ball.
 3. the plant foot is placed comfortably next to the ball and in a more forward position than in the lofted or chipped balls. This placement helps to limit the height of the pass.
 4. players should think of their leg below their hip being locked and the hip as the point of rotation, as this will increase consistency and power.
 5. the strike point on the ball is on the center back, slightly above center. Again, this will aid in keeping the ball down.
 6. follow-through should be held to emphasize a clean strike and balance and also the foot should be kept low.

- lofted ball. This pass is used to put the ball over defenders to teammates. Typically, the lofted pass is utilized when the ball is crossed to the back post, or cleared from the back line, and also in changing fields and sometimes in playing through-balls.
 1. lock the foot with the toes pointed down.
 2. use the laces to strike the ball.
 3. the plant foot is placed comfortably next to the ball and in a more withdrawn position than in the driven ball. This placement helps to create the height of the pass.
 4. players should think of their leg below their hip being locked and the hip as the point of rotation, as this will increase consistency and power.
 5. the strike point on the ball is on the center back, below center. Players need to learn to feel their laces cupping beneath and on the back of the ball. This lower striking position helps to raise the ball off of the ground for a lofted pass. Follow-through should be held to emphasize a clean strike and balance and also the foot should be raised to accentuate the lift placed on the ball
- chipped ball. This pass is used to drop a ball over a defender or group of defenders to the feet of a target. This is the most difficult of the passes to learn well, but it is also important for players to learn to perform this skill in that it teaches a new way to strike the ball in a way that is important for consideration in numerous situations on the field. Chipping the ball is particularly useful in that the strike creates backspin, allowing the ball to settle off of the bounce, meaning that the receiving player should be able to play it more easily and quickly than a driven or lofted service. The ball is often chipped on free kicks to put it behind the defense; on through-balls; to change fields to a particular target; sometimes to find a target on a short cross, etc.
 1. lock the foot with the toes pointed down.
 2. use the laces to strike the ball.
 3. the plant foot is placed comfortably next to the ball and in a more withdrawn position than in the set for the driven ball. This placement helps to create the height of the pass.
 4. players should think of their leg below their hip being locked and the hip as the point of rotation, as this will increase consistency and power.
 5. the strike point on the ball is on the center back, well below center. Players need to learn to feel their laces cupping beneath and on the back of the ball. This lower striking position helps to raise the ball off of the ground for a chipped pass.
 6. the follow-through is the major difference between the chipped and lofted passes. With a chipped ball, there is no follow-through. In the strike, the player “digs” beneath the ball and then does not follow-through. Players must practice both of these cues, as part of the learning here is that with the chip, there is a bit of contact with the ground, which helps create backspin on the pass, and the lack of follow-through will not feel natural at first, but this also increases the backspin effect on the pass.



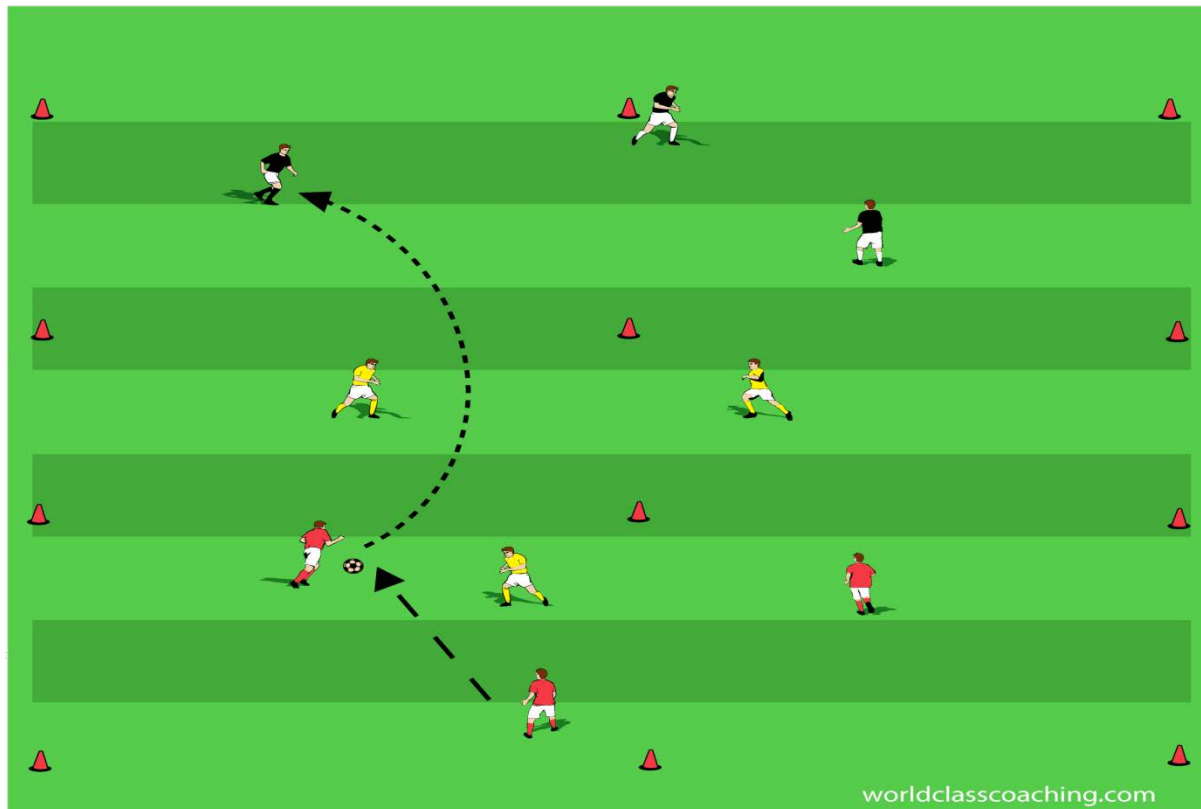
Short-short-long - ½ field

Players work in groups of three with one soccer ball. Demonstrate with one group. Put two players about twenty five yards apart and the third player between them. Give one of the end players the ball. The inside player starts the exercise by checking (running) toward the player with the ball. The ball is passed to the inside player who returns it with a single touch if possible. The end line player then takes a touch to settle the ball before playing a long pass to the end line player on the other side. The inside player then checks to the player with the ball and the sequence continues. This is a commonly used exercise that can be adjusted to train long passing at any level.

Here are some additional considerations for the coach in tweaking the exercise:

- players learning to chip and loft the ball often benefit from having a target to play over. Therefore, with a warning about playing safely, the end line players can be encouraged to play lofted or chipped balls over the central player to their target on the other side.
- to make play more realistic, players who can already long pass well can be required to play the long pass one-touch (no settling touch) off of the return pass from the central player.
- notice in the diagram that the angle of the return pass from the central player is changed. This is done both to create a better approach angle for the outside player and to force a defender pressing the central player to adjust her run if she were to try to press the long-passing player. The long-passing player should indicate (using a hand signal) to the central player where she wants the ball played to set up the long pass. These considerations are not as important for players just learning the technical aspects of long passing, but are very important details for more advanced players.

- another variation that adds some emphasis on skill for more advanced players is to encourage the end line players to receive and play the pass to the central player with one touch. This will force them to play the ball in the air sometimes and to learn to take some pace off of the ball in making the pass.
- finally, to add a bit of skill emphasis for the central players, have the end line players receive and control the ball off of the long pass and then pick the ball up and take a throw-in toward the central player who settles the ball before playing the set-up pass back to the end line player.



3-zone passing game - 20x42 yard grid

Split the group into three teams and put them into different-colored vests. Each team occupies one of the three zones. Explain that the purpose of the game is to practice long-passing between the two end grids. For teams just

learning to long-pass, the players are all confined to their respective zones. The coach serves a ball to either end grid. The team in that grid knocks the ball around to find a useful angle to play through to the far grid. The player in possession then lofts, drives, or chips (the coach can require a particular type of pass) the ball to the far grid. The team in the central grid attempt to knock down (no hands) the pass. For players learning to long pass, keep the central team in their grid even if they win a ball. Instead, the coach plays a ball into the other end grid and the players there attempt to play through or over the central grid to the far grid. Play for two minutes, giving each end team a point for every successful long pass. The central team also earns a point for each pass they knock down.

Here are more advanced variations:

- every time the middle team knocks down a ball, their team takes the place of the team failing to play a successful pass and that team moves to the middle grid.

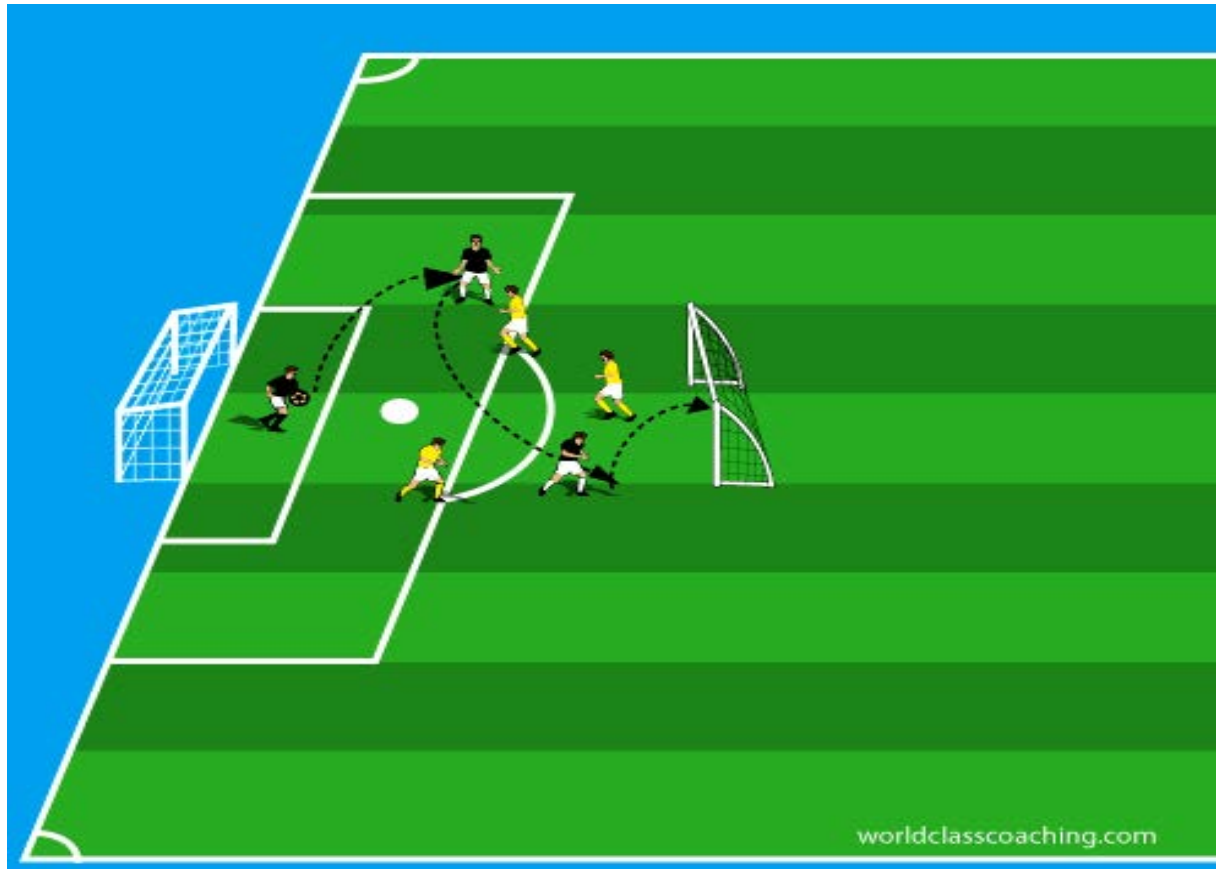
- teams must receive the ball properly after a long pass or move to the central grid.
- the central team sends one player into the end grid when the ball arrives there. If that player wins the ball or forces the ball out of the grid, her team exchanges places with the team losing the ball.
- building upon the last variation, require the endline team to string together 4-5 passes before playing a long pass. This allows the pressuring player from the center grid to apply pressure before a long ball can be played and also compels the teams in the end grids to be more active, making the game more realistic. When introducing this restriction, it is often useful to freeze the pressuring player from the center grid once the team in possession has strung together 4-5 passes. This will usually give enough success to develop some flow in the exercise. Then remove the “freeze” restriction so that the end grid teams are forced to play long passes under some pressure.

5v5 with a dead zone - full field (divided into 3 zones)

Play 5 vs. 5 with a neutral dead zone. Each team places three players plus a goalkeeper in their defensive zone and two players in their attacking zone. No player may enter the dead zone. The coach has a supply of balls on the side of the dead zone and he or she restarts play from there any time a ball leaves play. The defenders have a 4 vs. 2 advantage in their respective zones and their purpose is to win the ball and play a long pass over or through the dead zone to a teammate in the attacking zone. Play this way for ten minutes and then remove the dead zone, allowing open play, but encouraging players to look for a long pass to set up scoring opportunities and to clear their own defensive zone.

Training Session#17: Volley and half-volley.

Introduction: The ability to volley and half-volley become very important as more of the game is played in the air and both finishing (often off of crosses) and urgent clearances requiring both skills become regular features. This session challenges players to improve their technical ability to strike a ball in the air or just after a bounce.



Gaelic football - 30x35 yard area

Divide the group into two equal teams. Play on the prescribed field size to two full-sized goals (the game can be played with or without goalkeepers). This game is similar to team handball except that instead of throwing the ball around in possession, teammates must volley (or half-volley) the ball to one-another (serve the ball to one-self), and goals are scored by volleying the ball into the goal. It is important to emphasize, for safety reasons, that defenders cannot take the ball away from a player in possession and cannot attempt to block a volley or half-volley. Passes can be intercepted and any ball hitting the ground is an immediate turnover. The player in possession is allowed three seconds and three steps with the ball, with any violation resulting in an immediate turnover at the spot.

Variations:

- all exchanges and attempts at goal must be made off of the half-volley.
- attempts at goal must be off of a serve from a teammate.



3's technical volleying and half-volleying - 10x12 yard areas

Players work in groups of three with two soccer balls as shown. The central player shows first to one server and then the other. Work through the following progression:

- 1-touch passing. The players serve and return the ball first-time, with the servers alternating the foot to which they play.
- volley. Servers toss balls at knee height and lower, for the working player to volley back first-time.

Coach:

- lock the ankle at striking point.
- the knee is bent and also locked.
- the hip is the rotating point to reach and follow through the striking position.
- use the laces surface to strike the ball.
- target point on the server is the waist.
- alternate foot to which ball is served.
- rotate the working player after one minute.

Progression:

- half-volley. The servers expand the space by several steps to give the working player more room to adjust to each serve.

Coach:

- the technique for half-volleying is similar to that for volleying except for the timing. Here, the player attempts to contact the ball just after it bounces. The serves must therefore be made to bounce in front of the working player. Encourage the players to take short steps in preparation so that they can adjust to the ball. The timing may take some time to master, but once acquired, this skill can produce very powerful strikes.

Variation:

- competition: Which group of three can catch the highest number of volleys/half-volleys? Add up the score for all three rounds.

Volley and half-volley to goal - 18-yard box

Players line up along the top of the 18-yard box and a goalkeeper is in goal. Each player has a ball.

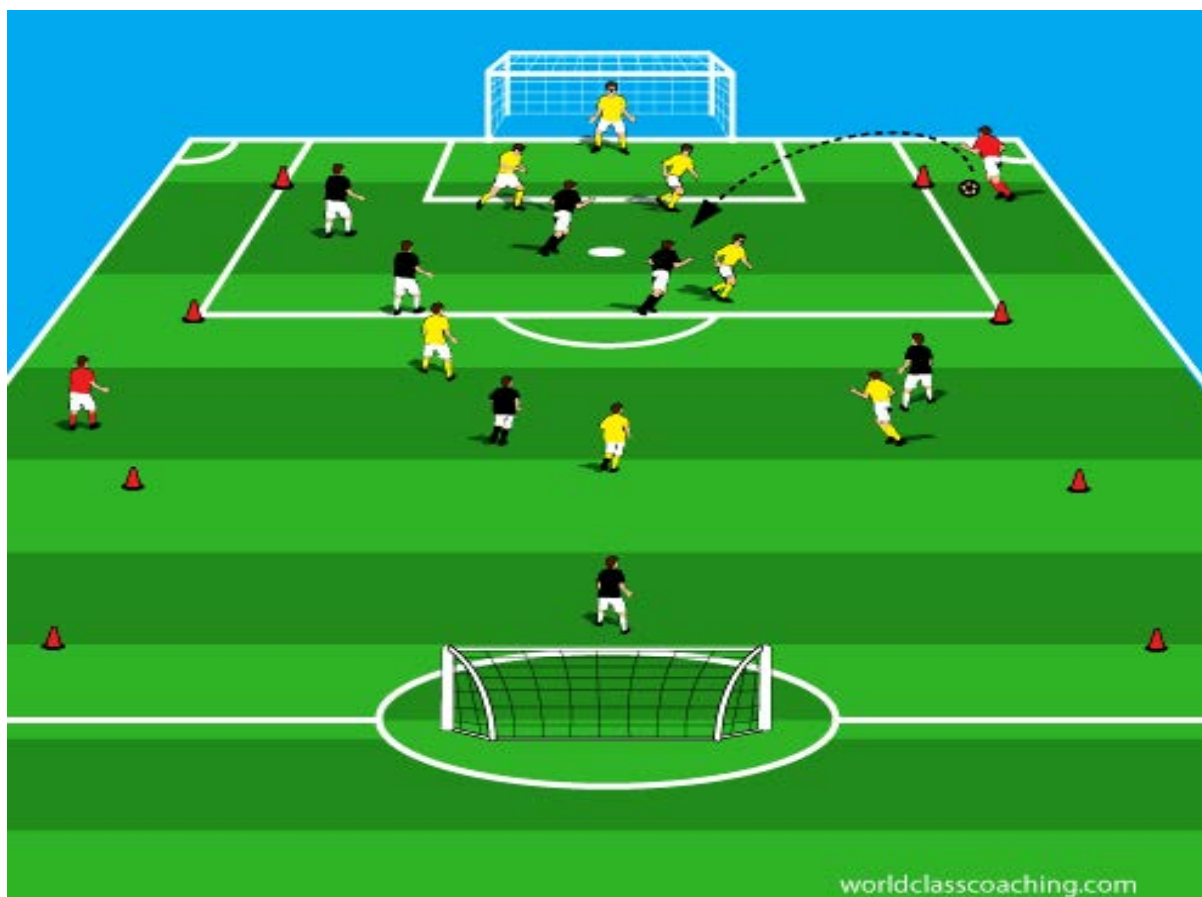
Players hold their soccer balls. One after another, they serve to themselves, attempting to volley the ball on goal. After several opportunities for each player, compel players to strike the ball with their off foot.

Coach:

- short steps, good timing.
- consistent tosses. Some players will try to toss the ball very high, making their timing very difficult to set. Tosses should be about head height.
- advanced striking. Once players are able to time and strike the ball with consistency, it is important that they learn early on that their most powerful and effective volleys will be struck by putting the ball outside of their body frame on the striking side. The reason for this is the fact that if the ball is underneath them, their natural power stroke will finish with the foot rising, a leading contributor to the large percentage of volleys that fly high over the goal. If the ball is struck outside of the frame, with the player rotating on their away hip and leaning in that direction, it is possible to create a level, long power striking area, and players should learn to strike balls both underneath them and also outside of their frame.

Progression:

- the coach is located at the penalty spot and tosses balls for players to run on and volley.
- half-volley. Players serve their own balls and attempt to half-volley the ball at goal. Once again, players should become accustomed to striking balls with both feet and also finishing balls struck directly in front of them and also off to either side.
- the coach is located at the penalty spot and tosses balls for players to run on and half-volley.

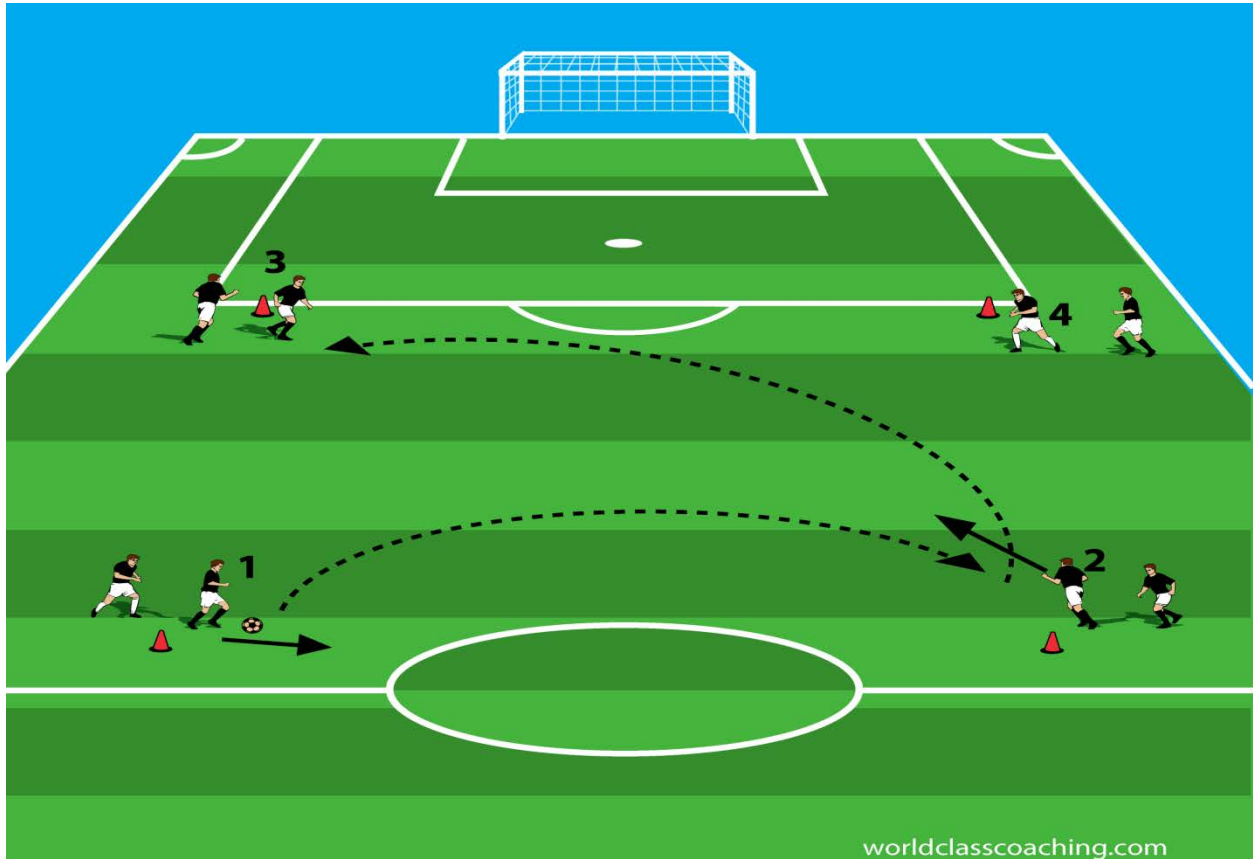


6 vs. 6 plus goalkeepers and neutral crossers - ½ field

In this game, all goals must be scored off of crosses and the goal must also come from a volley or half-volley. The neutral crossers must remain in the crossing zones and play at speed, but no other players can enter the crossing zones. Instruct the crossers to play low, driven crosses to try to set up opportunities to finish with a volley or half-volley.

Training Session #18: Cross and finish 1.

Introduction: With the bigger field and increasing complexity of opposing defenses, many goal-scoring opportunities will come through stretching the opposing back line and serving the ball for on-running players to finish. This session looks at the technical nature of crossing and introduces basic runs to finish.



4 corners long passing - ½ field

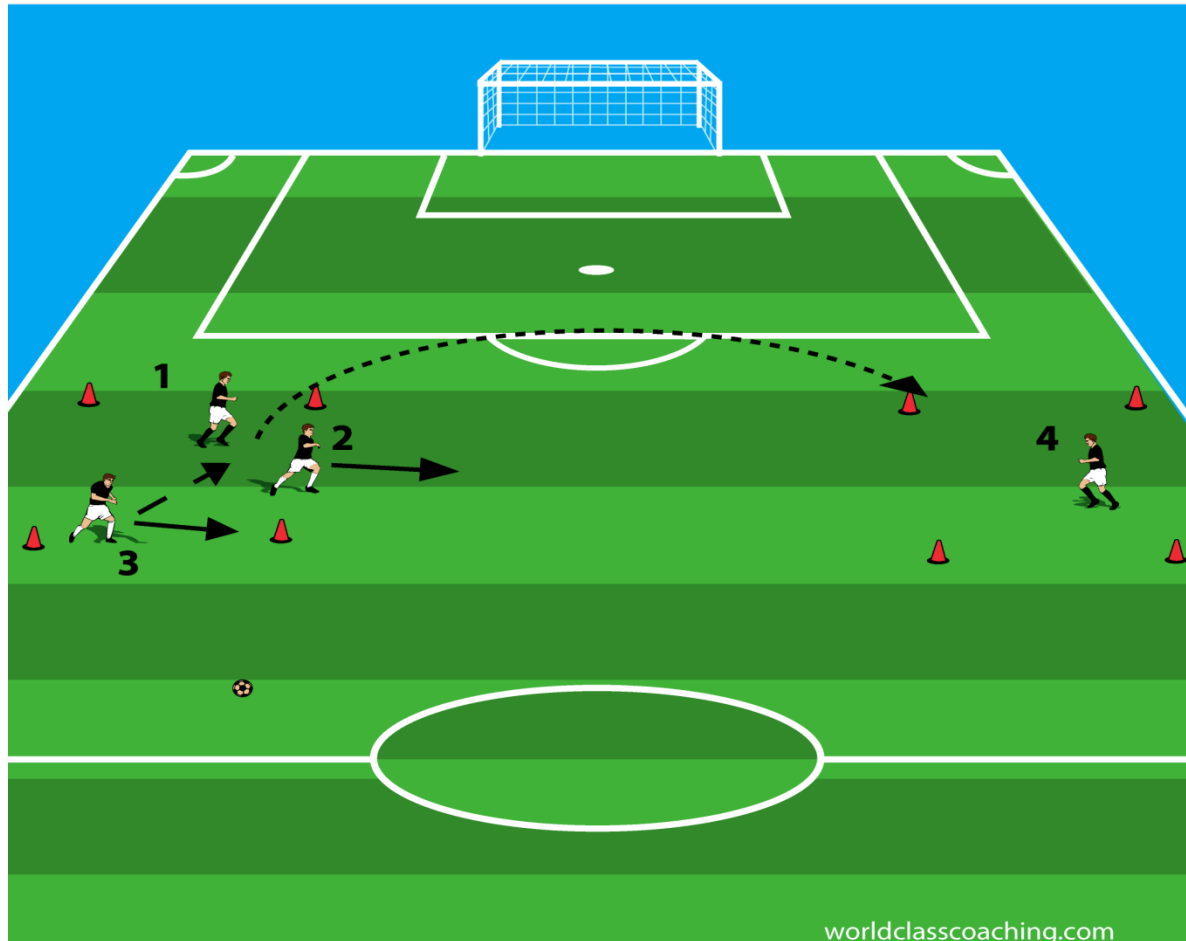
Divide the team into four groups. Each group forms a line behind one of four cones placed to form a 20x20 yard grid in the center of one end of the field. Keep a ball supply at one cone. Explain that this is a passing sequence warm-up that will be expanded into a long passing exercise. The first player in line with a ball (1) passes straight ahead to the first person (2) in line at the cone opposite her line. She then follows her pass and goes to the end of that line. The player receiving the ball at the second cone then passes at a diagonal to the first player in line at the third cone (3 - see diagram) and follows her pass. The player at the third cone plays straight ahead and then follows her pass. Finally, the player at the fourth cone (4) plays diagonally back to the start and follows her pass and the sequence begins again. This is a useful warm-up to emphasize passing accuracy, quality receiving (players should receive the ball using their first touch to set up their pass with the second touch, which is to say that their first touch should push the ball in the direction that they intend to pass), and running after the pass.

Progression:

- play for two minutes, and then see if the players can keep two balls moving at the same time.
- after two more minutes, move the cones back to create a 25x25 yard space. The exercise remains the same, except that now the passes are longer and the coach can dictate what type of

serve (driven, lofted, chipped) is required. The coach should require players to alternate the foot they use for passing (in the short and long phases).

- once the players have the pattern for the long pass, introduce a second ball to apply some time pressure and also more repetition for the players.



Fitness long passing - 10x10 grids (spaced)

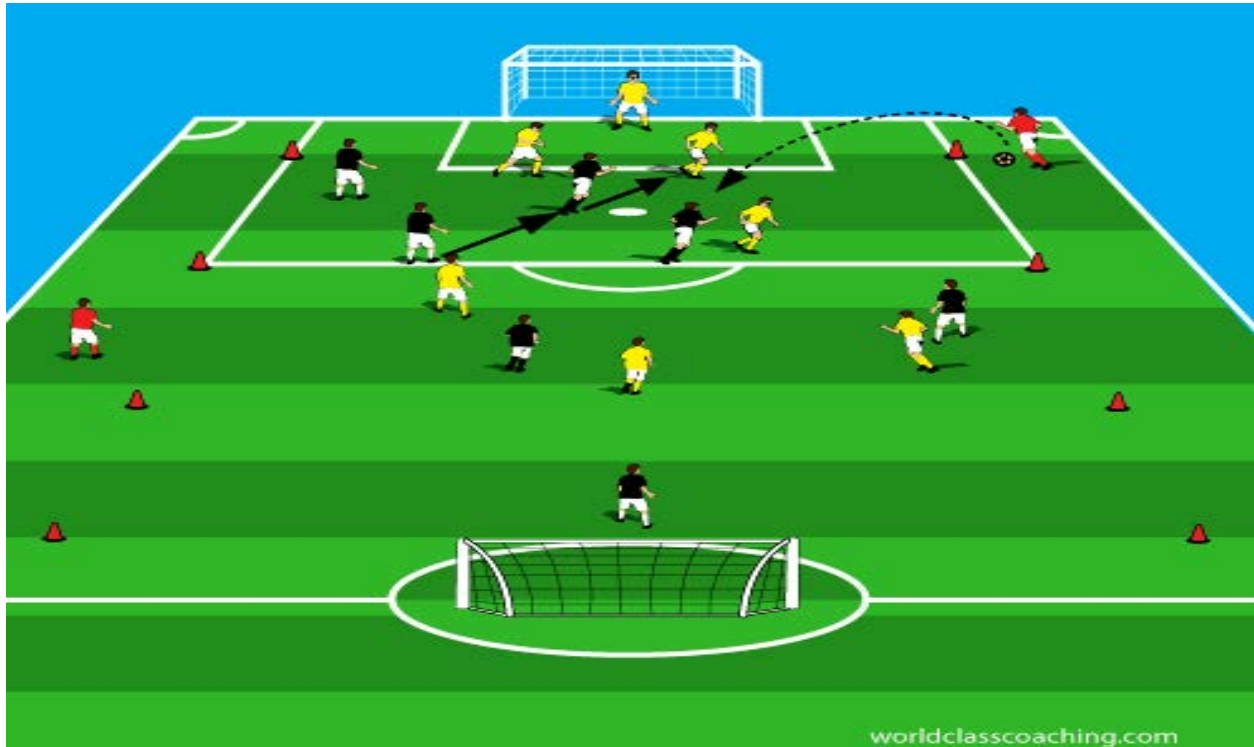
Players work in groups of four with a ball. Place one player (4) in a 10x10 yard grid, and the other three in a 10x10 yard grid that is set up about twenty-five yards (adjust to fit the abilities of the players) from the other grid (see diagram). Demonstrate with one group. In the grid with three players, identify a single, passive defender (2). This player is to play at walking pace to start. The remaining two players (1,3) are to pass the ball at least three times before one of them plays a long pass to their teammate in the far grid. Once the ball has left the grid, the player making the long pass (1) stays in the grid, while the other attacker (3) and the defender (2) race to the far grid. The last player to arrive in the new grid becomes the defender, while the other two players are attackers. The attackers move around the grid to connect three passes while the defender provides passive resistance. Then the long pass is made and the sequence continues. It is important that players understand the changing roles before commencing the exercise. This exercise provides long passing practice, highlights the importance of providing early support to the ball when the field is changed, and also raises the players' fitness by requiring frequent, short sprints. Play for five minutes.

- the other point of focus here is the runs to get onto the end of the cross. There are several stages of development in learning to finish crosses, and the most basic imprint is desired here.
- impress upon the runners the tactical importance of creating space and timing the runs. The most difficult aspect of this process is getting the players to hold their runs until the appropriate time. If players arrive in the target areas before the ball has arrived, they are much easier to mark and the effectiveness of the movement will be very limited under pressure. It is often useful for the coach to hold the runners and release them a bit late so that they learn to be more patient.
- target areas. In 8v8 soccer, there will rarely be more than three targets for a given cross. Therefore, it is useful to teach players at this early stage to sort out runs to three critical areas.
 1. Near post. The first player in will crash the near post
 2. The second player in will arrive in the second six at the same time as the ball.
 3. Back-post. This player is the last player to arrive and is typically the back-side midfielder or forward. It is useful to emphasize that this player's purpose, particularly at the younger levels, is to assure that any ball that passes by the first two targets and the defenders is kept "in the mix," which is to say that she cleans the ball up by either finishing it at the back post or pushing the ball back into critical space if the cross has passed out of the target areas. The most common concern here is the that back-post player will want to close too tight to the goal, when she is often best served by remaining wider and higher until after the ball is hit and it becomes clear that she needs to adjust her position. This run becomes very important as players become more adept at serving lofted crosses to the back post, where the far target can get in to finish.
- bent runs. Players will want to run straight to the goal. This choice makes them easier to mark and also gives them poorer finishing angles to the ball, an element that is critical to building success and confidence in young players. Instead, players need to be shown how to bend their runs away from the ball as the crossing run is developed. This forces the defenders to give attention to either the ball or the player, but makes it difficult to do both. Also, as the players then close at speed into their target positions, their collective body positions will be "open" to the ball, meaning that the ball will come straight at them (as opposed to from the side), giving them more finishing options and a better look at the ball (which gives them the ability to adjust their runs on approach to the ball as well).

Improving quality. Here are some additional suggestions for improving the quality of basic crossing and finishing as the exercise is developed.

- allow play to continue as long as the ball is knocked down by one of the runners inside the large box. This way, young players are not compelled to finish with the first touch as they learn to deal with balls driven toward the front of the goal.
- begin the exercise with a pass from one of the runners in the center to the flank runner. The idea here is that most crosses are set up by a ball served to the runner from a central position, so the pattern is expanded to simulate a realistic opportunity to set up a cross.
- create teams and keep score. Each server and group of runners are a team (and the goalkeeper is her own team, earning points for quality saves) and each team earns a point for scoring (or if there are not a lot of goals in the early stages, give a point for a first-time shot that is on the face (i.e. would be a goal but the goalkeeper made the save) and two points for a goal.
- be sure to switch the service to the left side (if there are enough players, arrange service from both sides and alternate the source of the runs and crosses).

- -also be sure to alternate the servers so that all players have the opportunity to serve and learn the runs to goal (players should also alternate the runs they make to goal (i.e. back-post, near-post, etc.).
- encourage players to serve crosses on the ground first (to an open target), and then encourage them to try playing a long cross in the air to the back post area as they get more comfortable.
- train all players to communicate. The server should visually and verbally identify her target and the runners should learn to demand the ball from the server.



6v6 with neutral crossers - ½ field

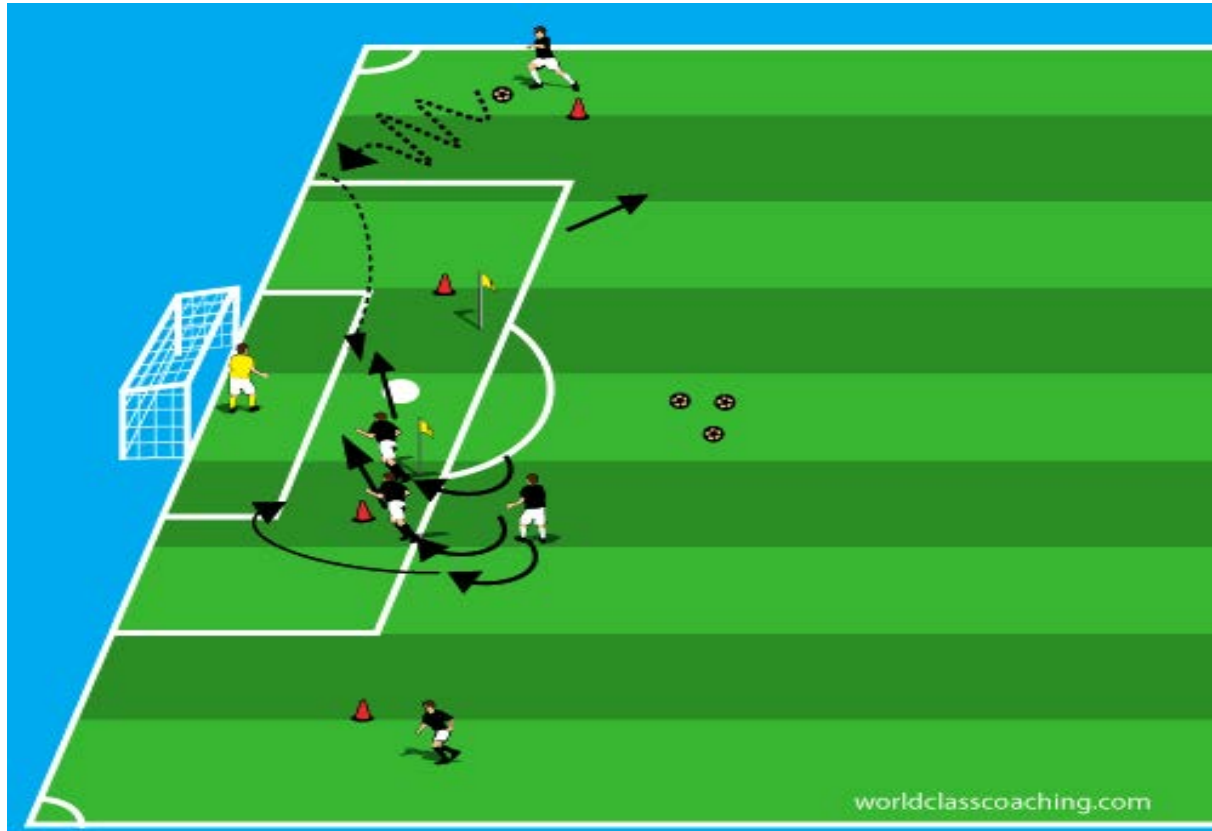
Play 6v6 with neutral crossers and goalkeepers. The crossers are required to stay in the neutral lanes on the flanks (see diagram) and no other players may enter that space. Re-starts come from the goalkeepers (place a supply of balls in each goal). The only means of scoring a goal is directly off of a cross, so teams will need to work to play in to the crossers to set up scoring opportunities. This is a good environment for training the runs for the targets and also for building the quality of the crossing. The coach should encourage early service wide to the crossers (even from the goalkeepers at re-starts) to create numerous crossing situations. Play for two minutes and then change the crossers. Crossers need to make end line runs before crossing. Coach the runners as above. Keep track of score.

6v6 to full-sized goals - full field

Play 6v6 to goals. For the first ten minutes, give three points for a goal scored as a result of a cross and one point for all other goals. Then remove the three point bonus and let the players play.

Training Session#19: Cross and Finish 2

Introduction: This session takes a more in-depth look at the nature and timing of runs to finish crosses.



Cross and finish - 1/3 field

Runners gather in groups of 3-4 twenty-five yards from goal. The group has a large ball supply. Crossers are located at the touch lines on both sides eighteen yards from goal. In the first phase, the goalkeeper provides the only defense of the goal. The ball is served by one member of the finishing group ahead of the crosser on either flank. The crosser runs the ball to the end line and serves a cross for the runners to finish. Each goal earns a point for the crosser and for the group of finishers. Keep track of the score throughout the exercise. Allow each sequence to continue as long as the runners' touches move the ball in the direction of the goal.

Variation:

- require one-touch finishing.

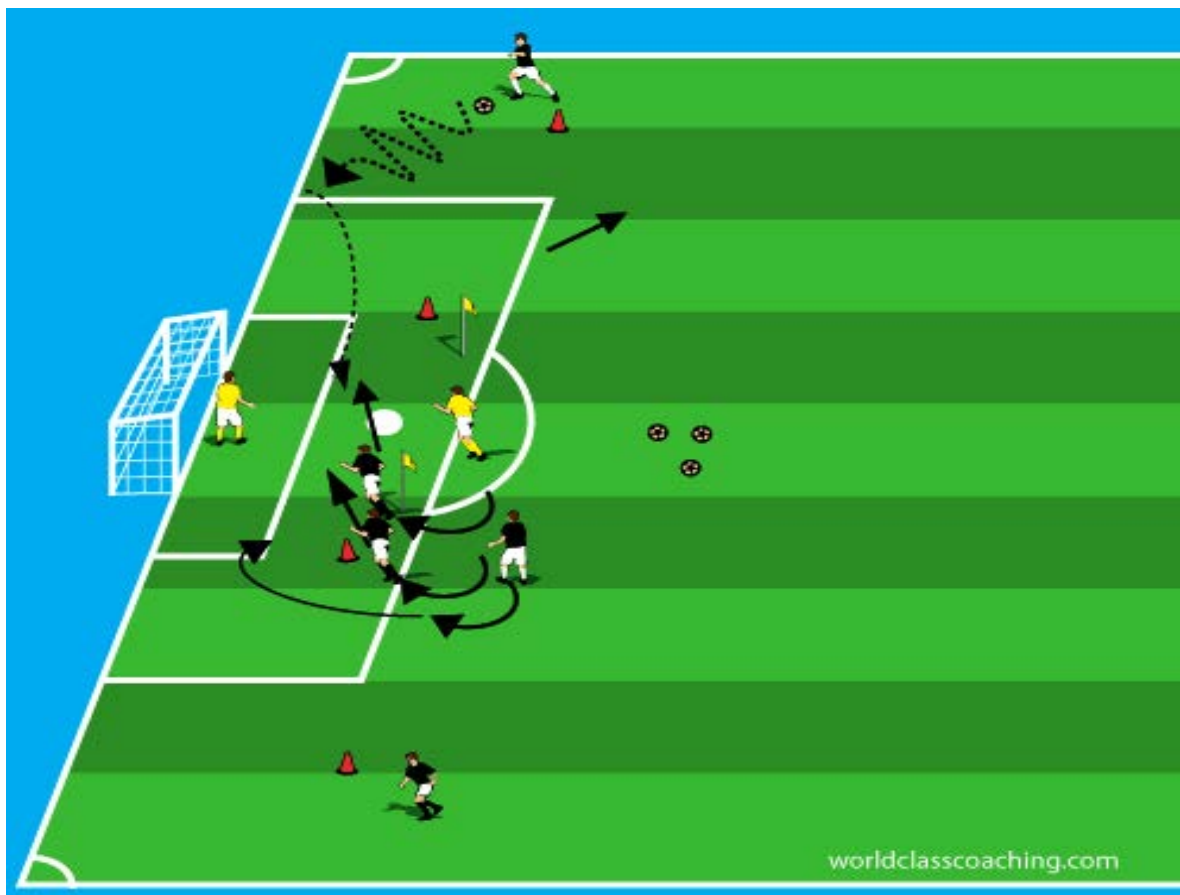
Progression:

- setting the runs. Place flags 15 yards from the goal line and even with the top corners of the six-yard-box. Also mark a send 6-yard box (as shown), doubling the standard box markings.

Coach:

- end line crosses. Explain to the crossers that taking the ball to the end line before crossing accrues the following benefits:
 1. the defenders are compacted back into their own goal area.
 2. by attacking the end line, the crosser often forces the goalkeeper and defenders to either focus on the ball or the runners.

3. crosses from the end line can be made at angles that are easier for runners to intersect and finish.
 4. finally, crosses from the end line create a visual timing cue for the runners that maximizes coordination.
- target zone for finishing. Coach the group to look to serve and finish in the second six. This area is far enough from goal to discourage the goalkeeper from attempting to field the cross, and yet close enough to allow runners to finish first-time. Additionally, defenders compressed back into their own six-yard box will have difficulty defeating oncoming runners in dueling for the ball in this space.
 - tactical runs. After playing the initial ball for the crosser, the finishers must now run around the away-side flag before closing on the goal. The run away from the ball both allows the runners to time and choose their angle in closing on the cross and also furthers the likelihood that the defenders and goalkeeper will not be able to track both the runners and the ball.



Progression:

- add a single defender. Instruct the defender to start in the “D” and then recover as the ball is played to the flank. The defender should, for the purpose of this exercise, mark one of the runners.

Coach:

- frame the goal with the attacking runs. The diagram above outlines the areas to be attacked in a crossing situation. Thus, the first runner to round the flag is tasked with sprinting to the near post area to finish a short service. This player also focuses on assuring that the goalkeeper is not allowed to handle the cross. The second runner stays up high, looking for a cross cut back into the second six-yard box. The last runner to round the flag gets into the space beyond the back post, completing the 'framing' of the goal.
- service types. Crossers must learn to select the type and texture of the service. On reaching the end line, the crosser should round the corner, taking a touch toward the goal and then quickly surveying the runners' progress and the defender's location to see which runners are un-marked. The following are guidelines for the type of pass to be played to the various runners/zones.
Near post: Driven ball.
Second six: A sharp pass on the ground or driven ball for the finisher to run onto.
Back post: Lofted ball to cut out the goalkeeper and defenders.

Progression:

- add a second defender. The defenders continue to make recovery runs from the "D" and they now mark two of the three attacking runners. The crossers continue to try to pick out the open player in each sequence. The ball is live as long as it remains inside the 18-yard box.

8v8 + neutral crossers - ½ field

Close the session with an 8v8 game plus goalkeepers and neutral crossers. Play to full-sized goals on ½ field with a 10 yard lane on both flanks where only the neutral crossers can play. Goals can only be scored off of crosses from the neutral flank players. All restarts (no corners, goal kicks or throw-ins) come from the goalkeepers. If the coach wants to make flank service more difficult to set up, do not allow the goalkeepers to play into the neutral crossers. This will compel both teams to invest in more build-up play.

Coach:

- quality service from the flanks, including both good technical crosses and intelligent selection of the type and location of the service.
- well-timed and structured attacking runs to goal and aggressive finishing efforts on each cross.

Training Session#20: Overload Attacking Training

Introduction: Overload attacking situations are environments where the attackers are numbers-up. The exercises in this session require the attackers to make decisions about the speed and direction of play when confronted with high pressure defending on the way to goal. Encourage defenders to vary their decision-making and thus compel the attackers to deal with the full range of defensive responses.



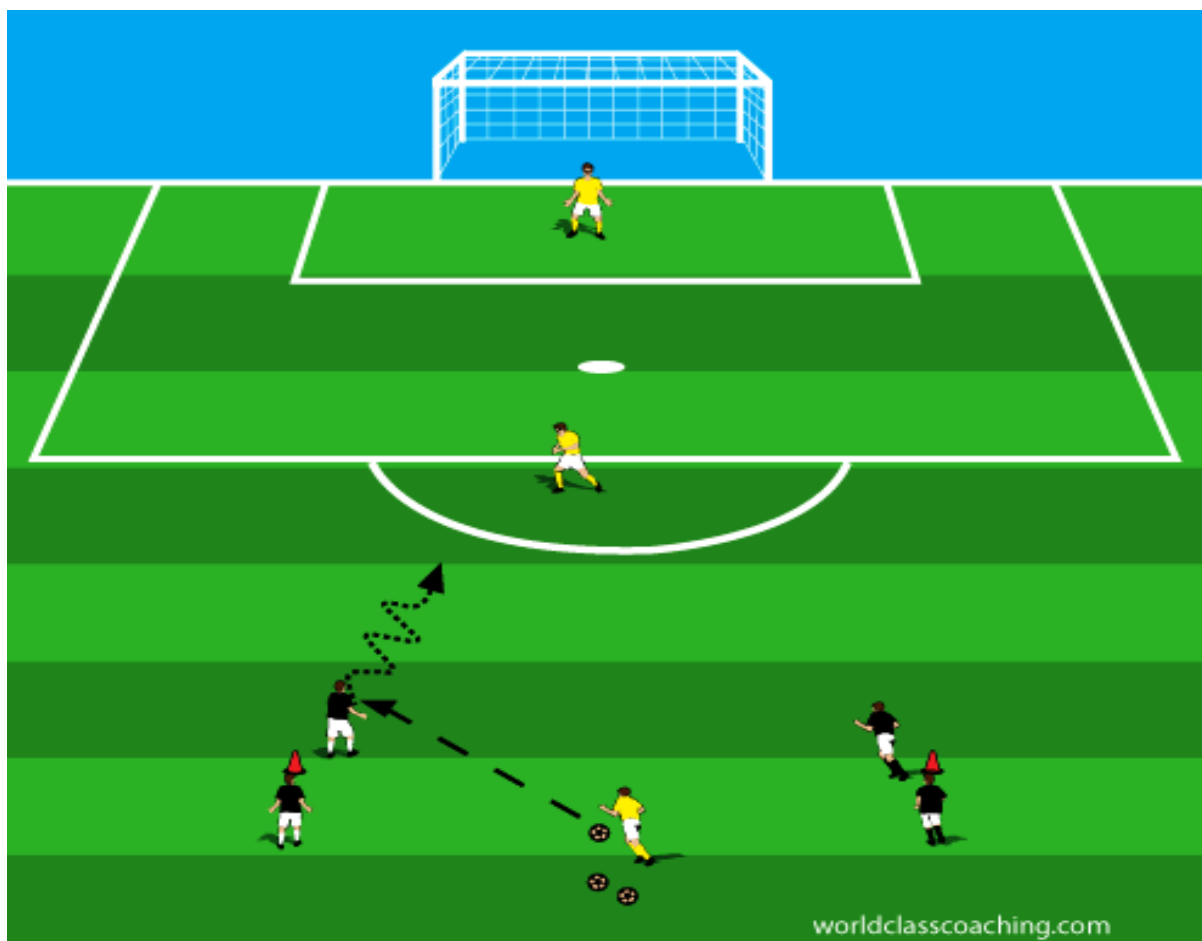
2 v 1 Overlap - 1/3 field

Attackers work in pairs, with one player starting with the defender in the “D” and the other prepared to serve the ball from ten yards further up field. The pass to the striker initiates the duel, with the striker compelled to decide whether to hold the ball and wait for the oncoming overlayer; spin off and go to goal herself; use the overlayer as a decoy, attempt to face-up and play the overlayer in or lay the ball off immediately and create off of the ball. The defender should vary her pressure and positioning to encourage the attackers to make conscious and good decisions. Players change roles with each restart. This environment challenges players to read their options and make good decisions under pressure in a situation replicated often in game situations.



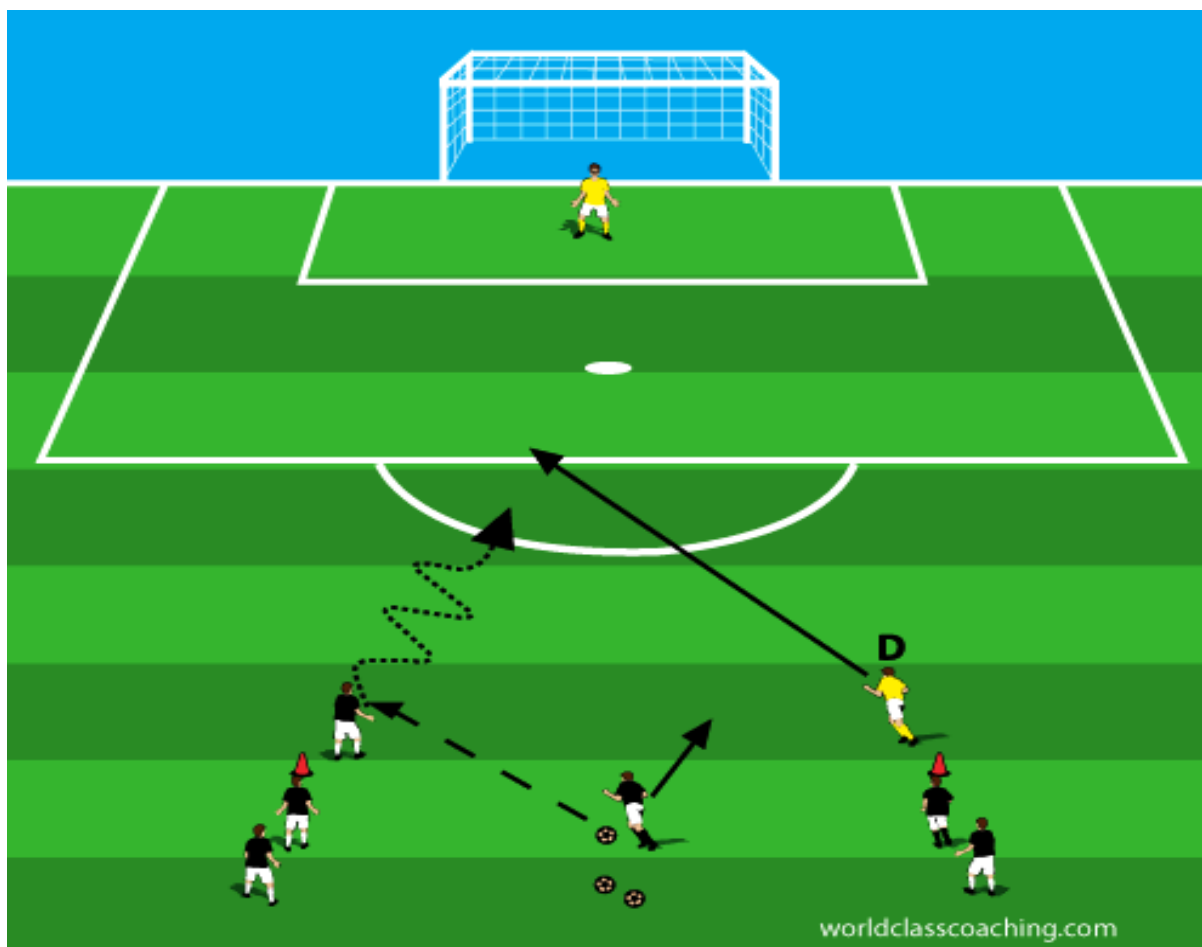
2v1 Reaction - 1/3 field

Once again, two players in different color vests wait in the “D.” This time, there are also lines to either side of the center service area (one in each color). The coach initiates play by passing to the first player in either line. The player in the “D” with the corresponding color becomes the attacker and the other player is the defender as the players play 2v1 to goal. The attacker receiving the pass from the coach then takes the place of her teammate in the “D” as play continues.



2v1 +1 Recovering - 1/3 field

A defender serves to either of the attackers and then sprints to recover. An additional defender waits in the "D." The attackers have a 2v1 to goal if they play quickly. If the defenders win the ball, the duel ends.



2v1 Choice - 1/3 field

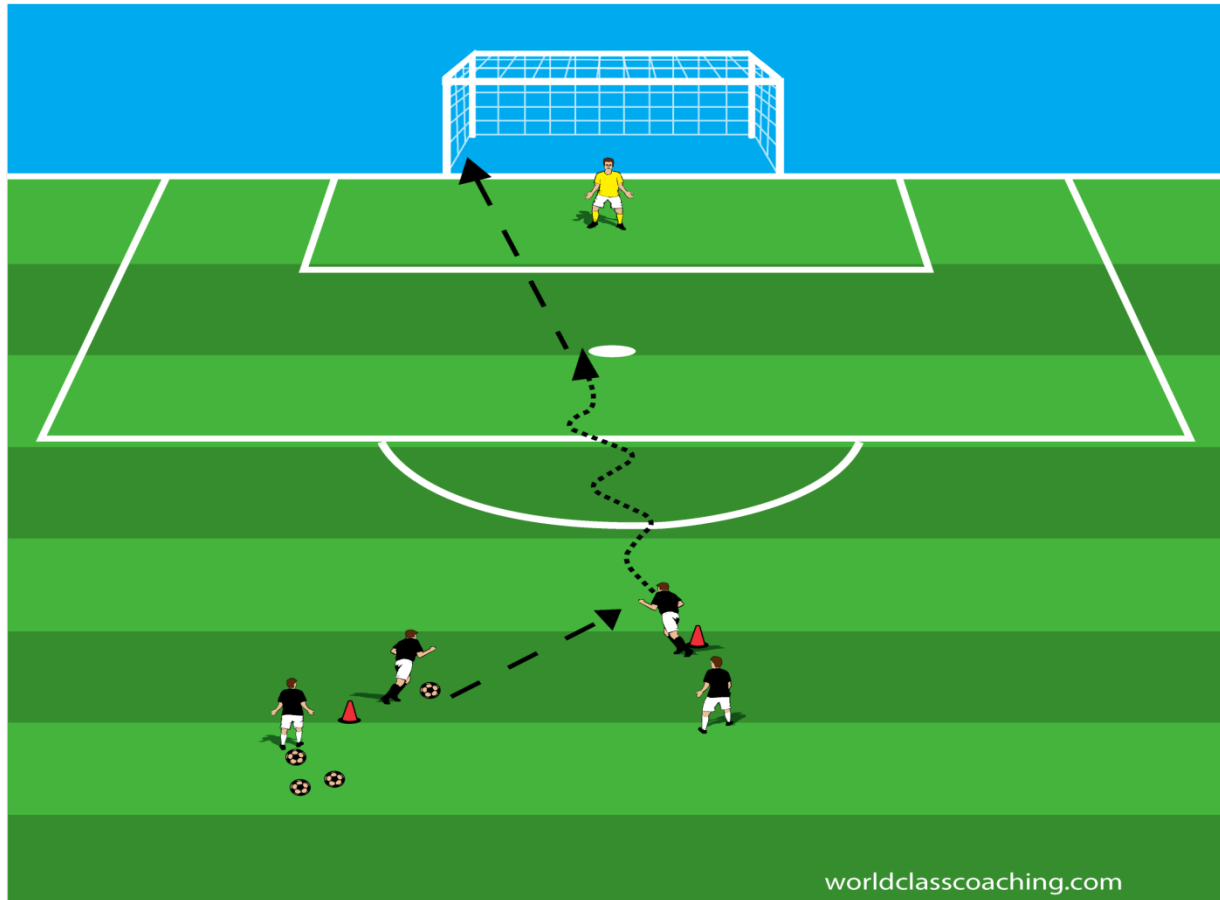
Players work in groups of 3. The server can play to either of the targets. The other player becomes the defender and the duel proceeds (2v1) to goal. Change roles with each restart.

2v2 Games - 20x25 yard grids

Organize 2v2 games to small goals. To begin, one defender has to take a knee when her team loses possession and remain there for three seconds. This will create 2v1 opportunities for the attackers. After 5 minutes, remove the restriction and let the players play.

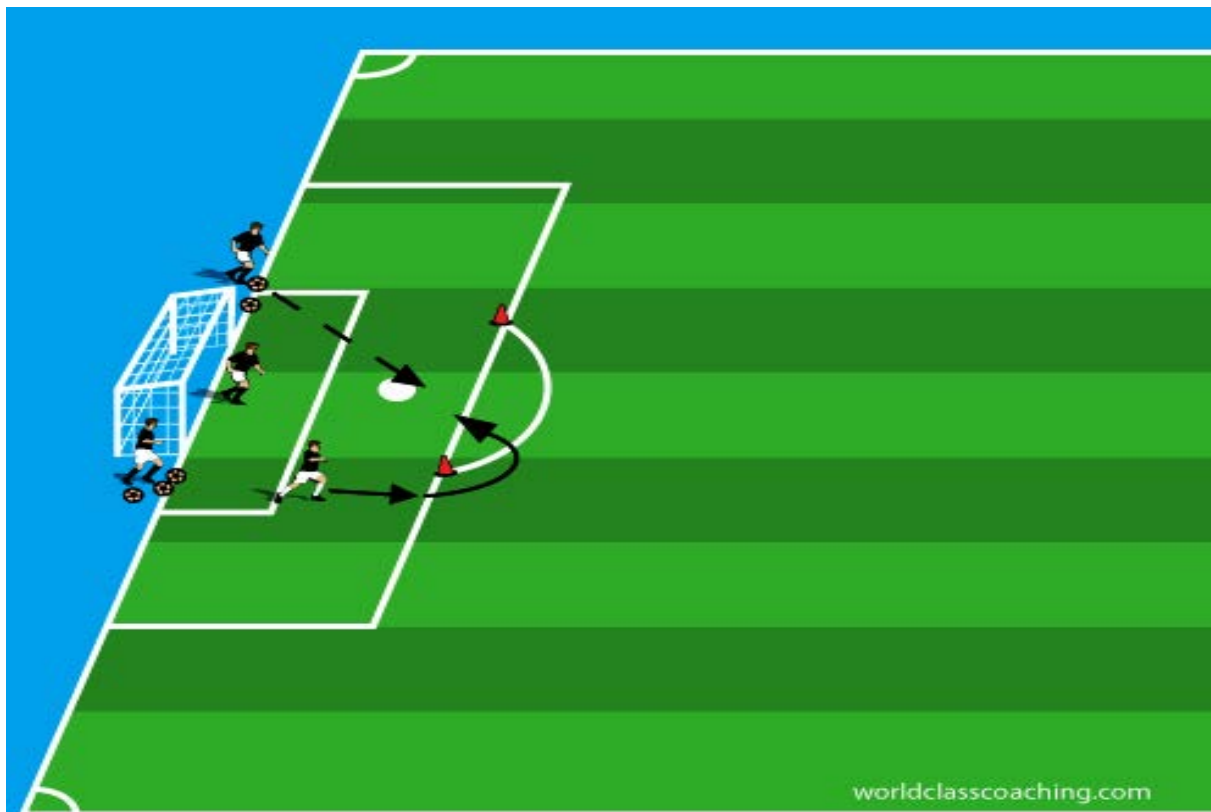
Training Session#21: Finishing 1

Introduction: This session features a collection of effective finishing exercises. As such, it is not a free standing session per se, but any combination of these exercises would fit well into a session on finishing.



Pressure shooting - 1/3 field

Two lines form at the cones 30 yards from goal as indicated in the diagram. Note that the cones are staggered to give the attackers an advantage. The first player in the defending line passes to the front foot (or into space in front of her) and then the defender pressures and attempts to win the ball from the attacker, who sprints to finish. If the defender wins the ball, she tries to score. After the shot is taken, the attacker retrieves the ball and jogs back to and joins the defender's line. The defender joins the attackers line. Encourage the attacker in this exercise to take a straight angle with speed to the goal (there is a tendency for the attackers to veer to their right to avoid pressure) and adopt a good shooting angle. The attacker should also get a good look at the goalkeeper's position after her set up touch and see if she can shoot (low, back post is best) while the goalkeeper is trying to close her down (catch the goalkeeper moving forward).

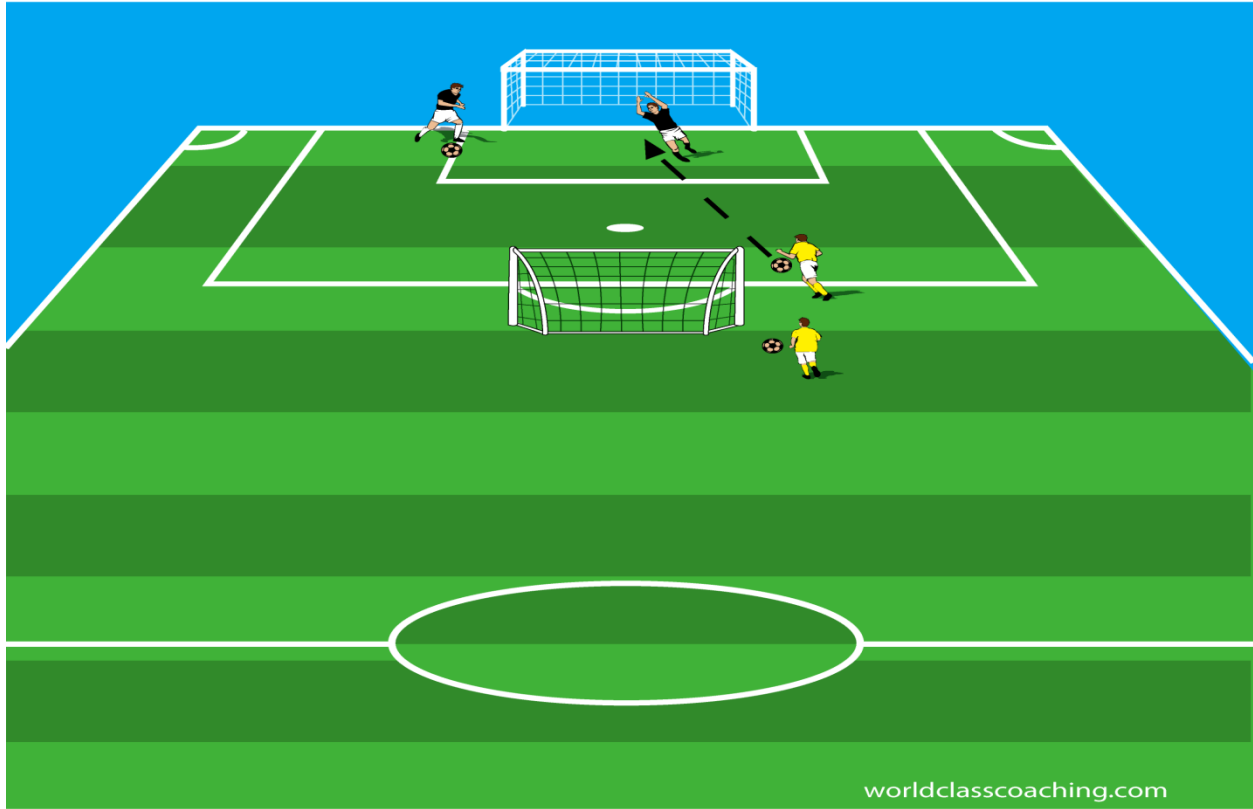


Pass and Shoot - goal box area

Create two groups and have them collect balls just outside the posts. A player from one 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. Then the passer becomes the attacker. Urge players to remember to move to their next role quickly and to restore the ball supply and change lines after shooting. Keep track of goals scored for each team.

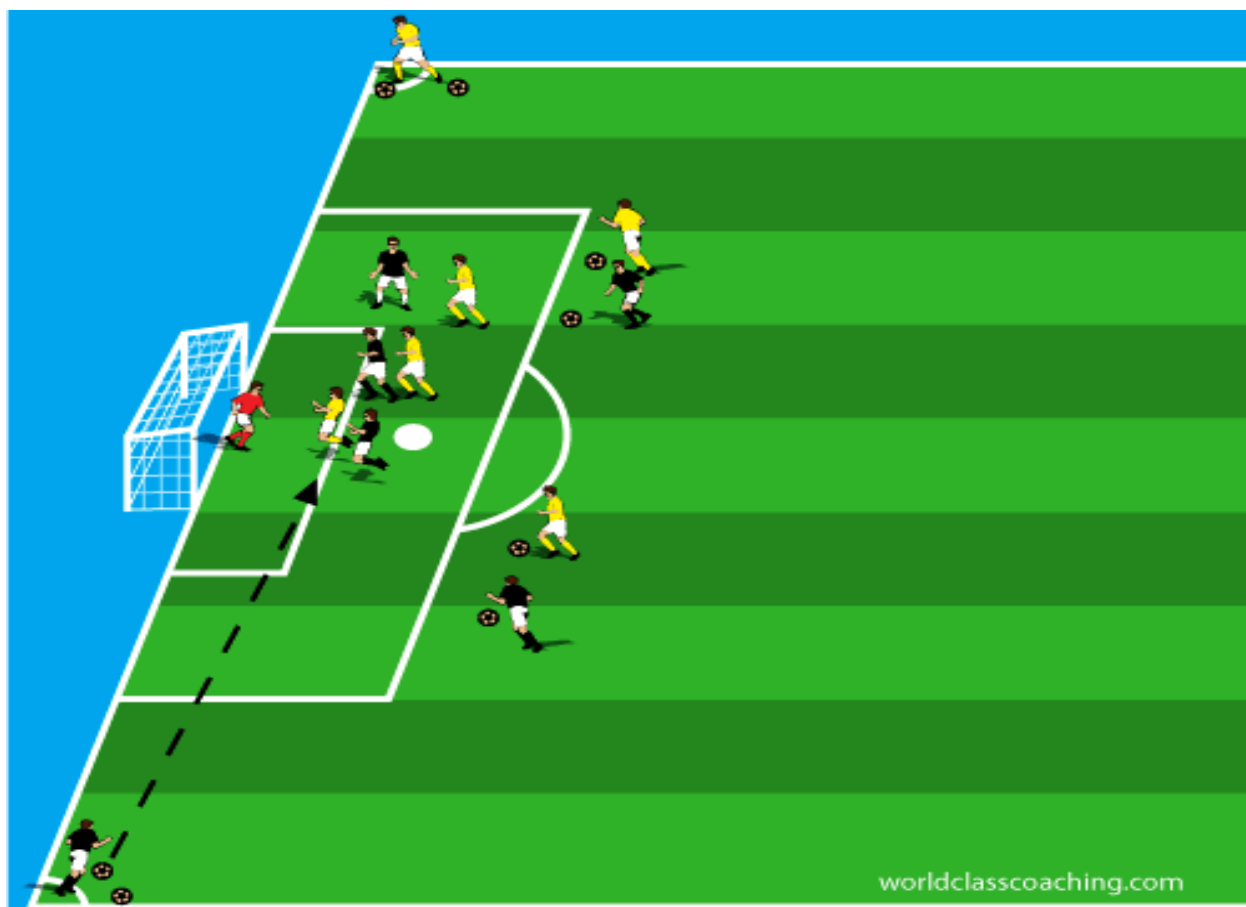
Variations:

- one-touch shooting
- give the goalkeeper points for great saves
- rebounds are live
- only goals scored in the air count



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.



Team Trains 'Keeper - goal box area

Create two equal teams. Each team places three players in the goal box area and one crosser in one of the corner areas. The remaining players get a ball supply and spread out across the top the 18-yard box. The goalkeeper calls out names of servers (players on the top of the 18 can shoot or pass and players at the corners serve crosses) for each restart. When a player at the top of the 18-yard box opts to shoot, the players inside the box must clear the area of the 6 yard box for the goalkeeper. The ball is live as long as it remains inside the 18-yard box. Play for five minutes and then rotate servers and active players.

Training Session #22: Finishing 2

Introduction: Many coaches like to plug in 10 minutes of finishing near the end of every training session and these exercises require limited set-up and provide a variety of efficient, sometimes functional finishing environments. This session features a variety of effective finishing environments that players and coaches consistently cite as being among their favorites.

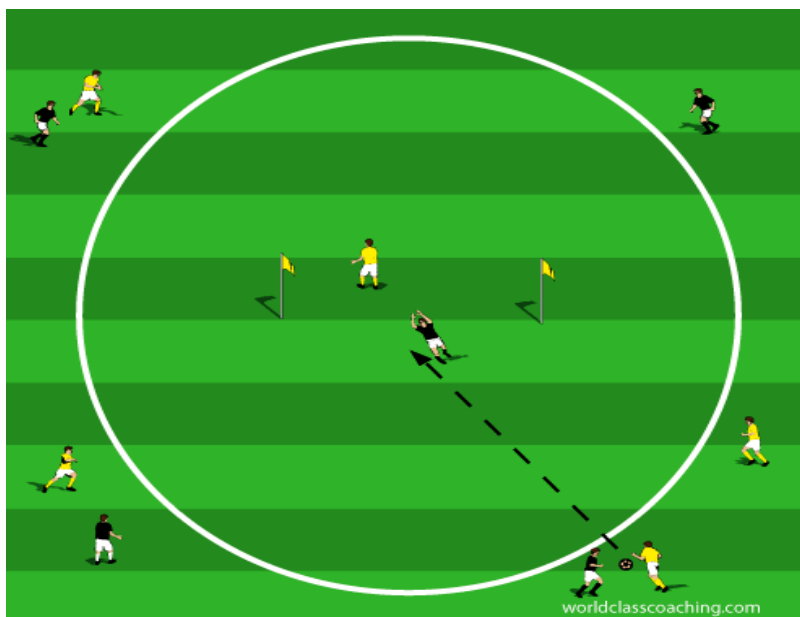


Long-range finishing game - 1/3 field

Utilize an area twice the size of the penalty area (36x44 yards). Divide the group into two teams. Each team places one player in their attacking half of the field and four in their defending half. The players must remain in their respective halves of the field. If the player in the attacking half wins the ball, she cannot shoot, but rather must lay off the ball to the back half of the field for a long-range shot. Restarts come from the goalkeepers. Play for three minutes and then rotate the lone player in the attacking half for both teams.

Coach:

- technical long-range finishing.
- setting up the long range shot. In particular, players should learn to think carefully about the longer preparatory touch required for a driven ball from distance, and for the types of angle, pace, and placement required in the set-up passes leading to a shot at goal.



Two-sided goal finishing game - 1/3 field

Divide the group into two teams. Put a goalkeeper on either side of a flat, full-sized goal (or two flags placed to form a goal) at the middle of the center circle. Teams can score on either side of the goal. No players other than the goalkeepers are allowed inside the center circle. The goalkeepers restart after gaining possession or a goal by throwing the ball anywhere in the area. The goalkeepers tandem receive a point for every clean save.

Variations:

- attackers can enter the area for rebounds only.
- attackers are allowed inside the circle once the ball has entered the area.
- attackers are allowed into the area but goals can only be scored by head or volley off of a serve.

Rapid Fire - 1/3 field

Divide the group into two teams. One team, each with soccer balls, dribble in a grid 30 yards from goal. One attacker is posted 20 yards from goal and serves as a wall-passer. This attacker calls out the names of teammates who pass into her feet, receive the return pass and try to finish before crossing the penalty spot. The defending team post two supplemental goalkeepers on the posts of the goal. These players must keep one hand on the back of the post and cannot use their hands to save the ball. The remaining defenders are arrayed well behind the goal. They can earn a point by receiving in the air errant shots over the goal by the attackers and the completing three juggles before the ball hits the ground. Play for two minutes and then rotate the supplemental goalkeepers. After three rotations, the two teams change roles.

Variations:

- when a goal is scored, one or both supplemental goalkeepers must run out and touch the line on their near side of the six-yard box (meanwhile, the attackers continue to try to finish).
- defenders behind the goal get a point for heading any errant shot.
- vary the service (i.e. toss balls to be volleyed) and distance (or striking foot) for the shooters.

Training Session#23: Technique Olympics

Introduction: This series of technical challenges can serve as a fun team competition or as a periodic assessment of players' technical progress.

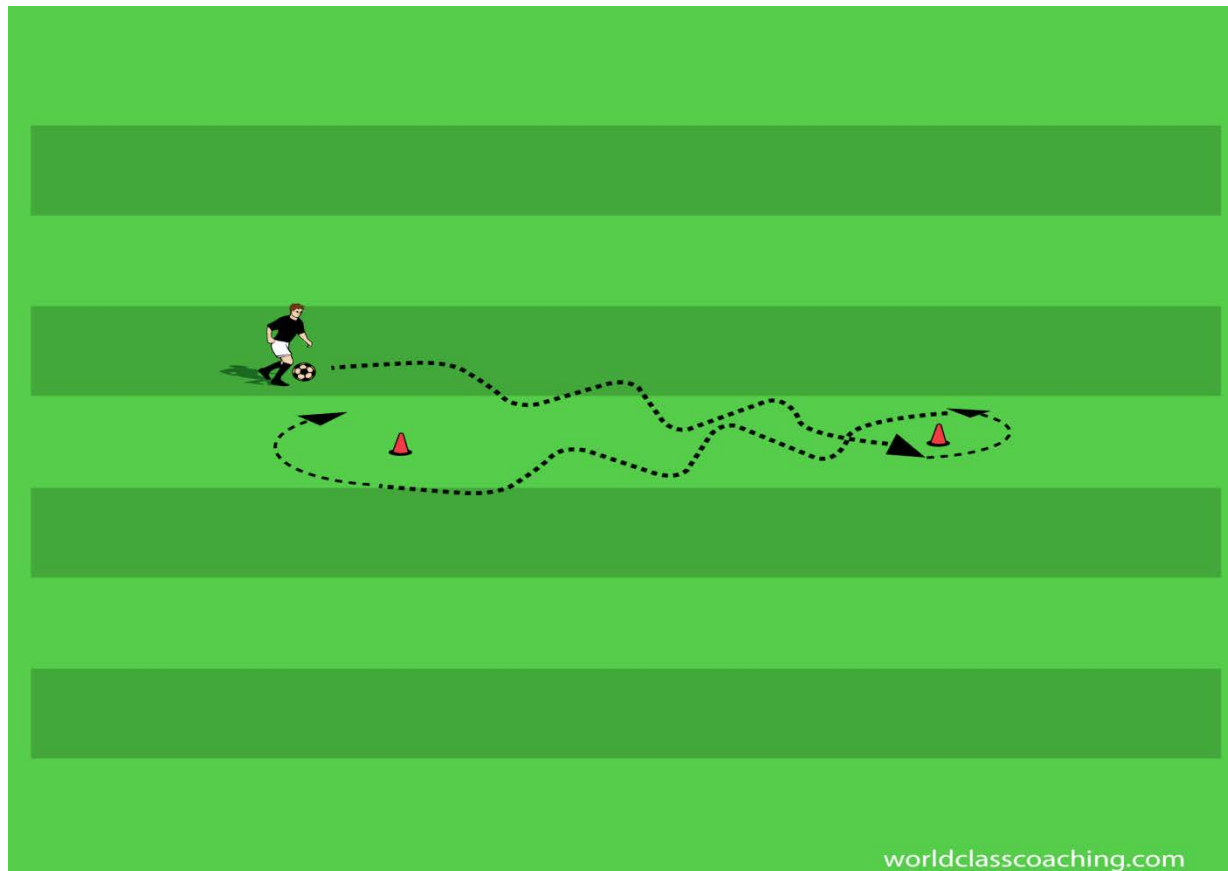


Figure 8 Dribbling - 10x3 yard areas

The player dribbles in a figure 8 pattern around the cones, using the inside of the foot for each turn. Which player can complete the most circuits in one minute?

Progression:

- all turns are made with the outside of the foot.

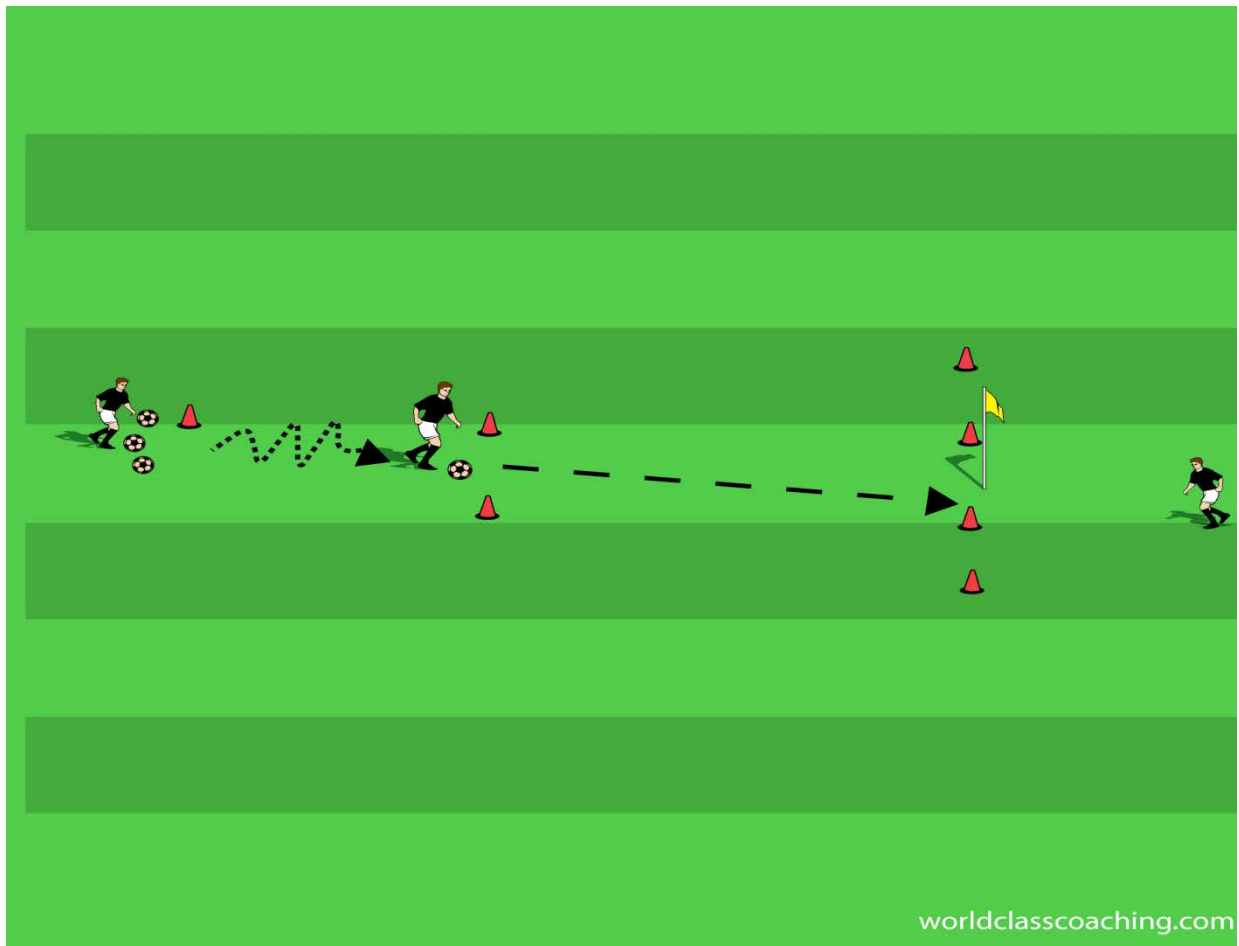
Body part juggling

Each player has a ball. The challenge here is to try to utilize as many body parts from the list below in each juggling sequence. Players earn a point for every different surface used in each sequence, but not for redundant use of a given surface.

1. head.
2. left shoulder.
3. right shoulder.
4. chest.
5. right thigh.

6. left thigh.
7. top of right foot.
8. top of left foot.
9. inside of right foot.
10. inside of left foot.
11. outside of right foot.
12. outside of left foot.
13. right heel.
14. left heel.

Which player earns the best score?



Passing accuracy - 10x10 yard areas

The active player dribbles to the cone line and passes, attempting to push the ball between the flag and the nearest cone on either side (2 points). A pass between the first and second cone on either side is worth a single point. Any pass outside of the flanking cones does not earn a point. The active player then runs back to retrieve another ball and tries again. The two resting players are responsible for maintaining a ball supply for the active player. Play for one minute and then change roles.

Variation:

- all passing is with the 'off' foot.

Which player earns the highest score?

Head juggling

Each player has a ball. Which player can complete the most consecutive headers in one sequence? Play for one minute and check scores.

Variation:

- tally *total* headers over one minute.

Long passing accuracy - Two 10x10 yard grids twenty yards apart

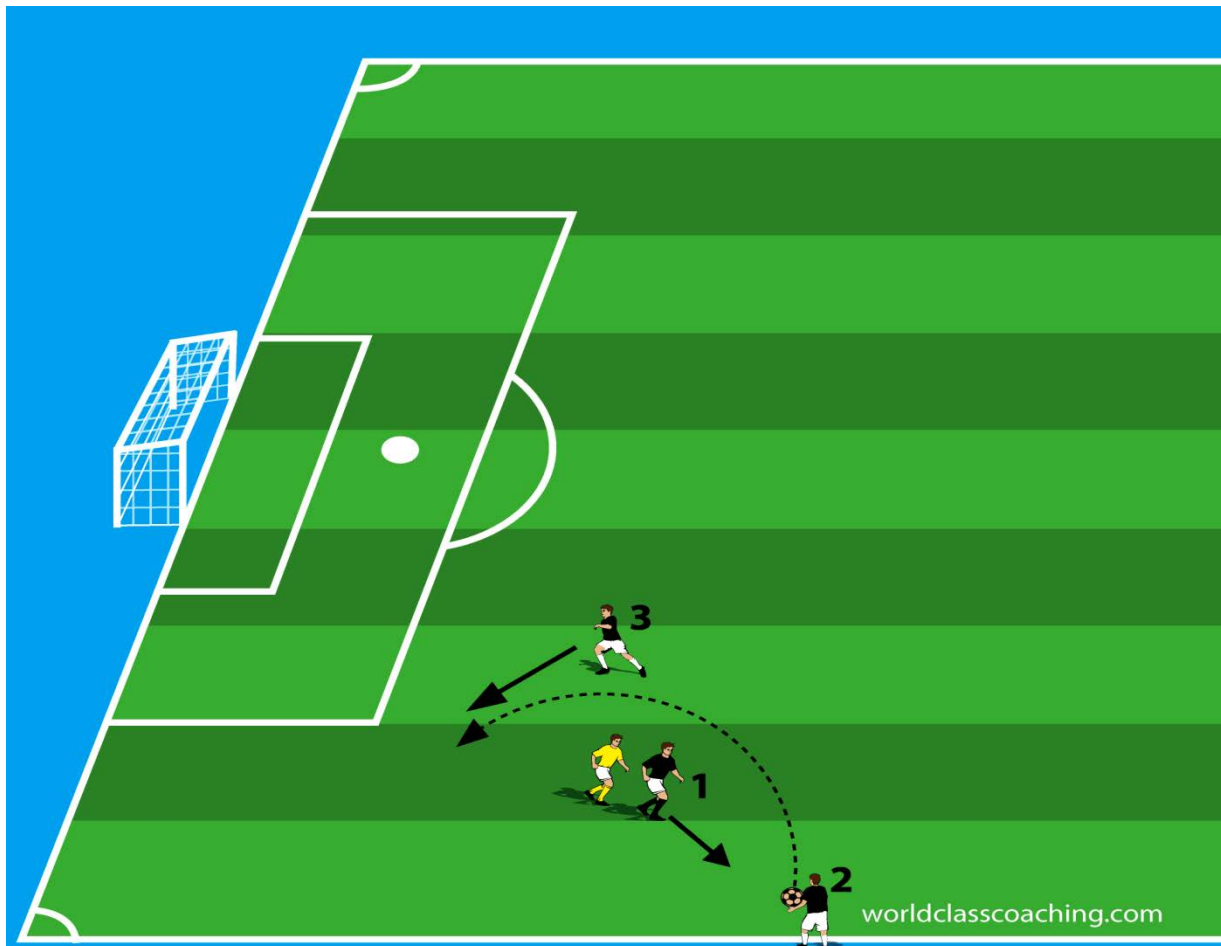
Players work in pairs with a ball. One player stands in each grid. Players earn a point for every ball they can long pass in the air into their partner's grid. Play for three minutes.

Variations:

- all passes must be made with the 'off' foot.
- give another point for proper receiving touches that keep the ball inside the receiving player's grid.

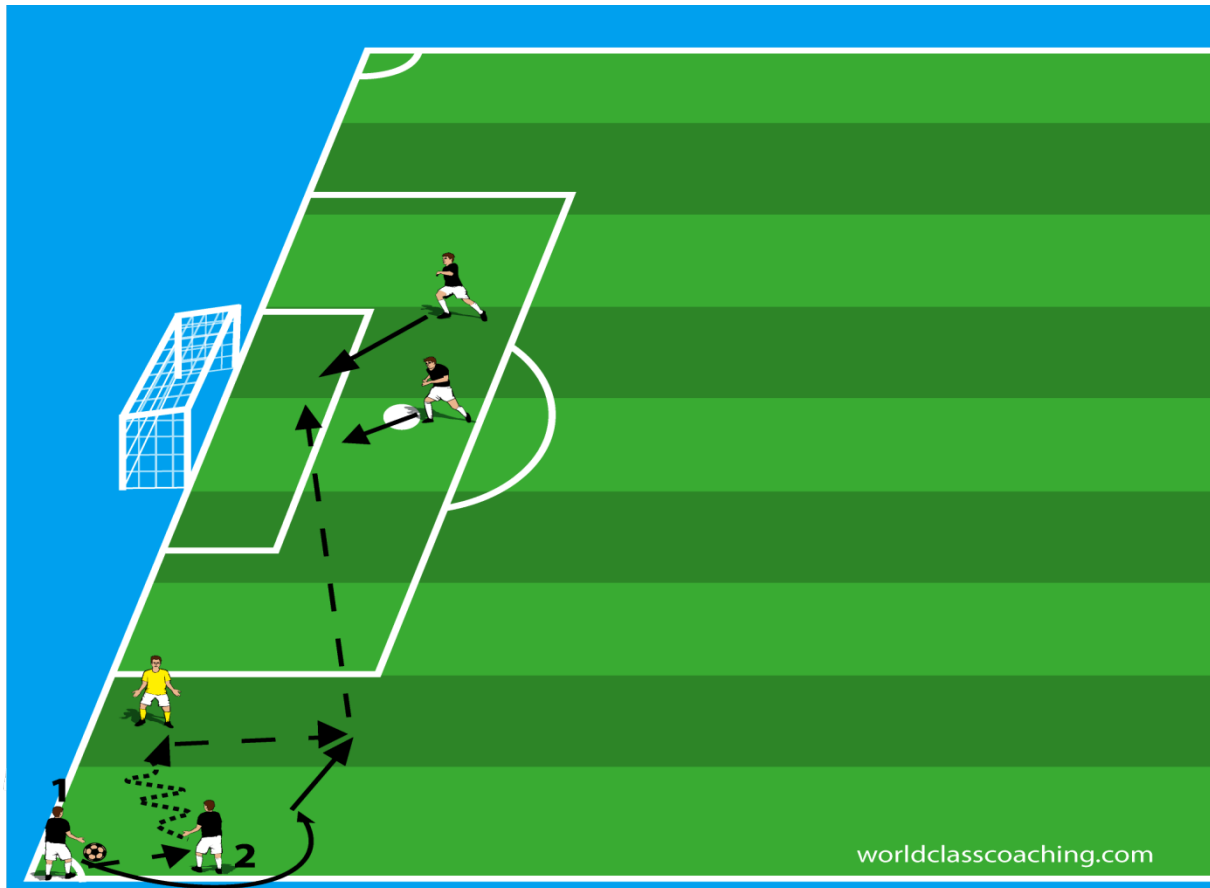
Training Session #24: Attacking Set Plays

Introduction: For any competitive team, regardless of the chosen system of play, effective attacking set plays are critical to the team's success. This session is not intended to be a free-standing training session, but rather a collection of creative and effective throw in, corner kick, direct and indirect free kick plays.



Decoy throw-in play.

Player 1 checks back toward the ball while player 3 sprints into the space behind player 1 as player 2 throws the ball for player 2 to run onto. Player 1 needs to be very demonstrative in demanding the ball as she checks to the ball so that the defender will be pulled out of position and player 3 can find space to run into.

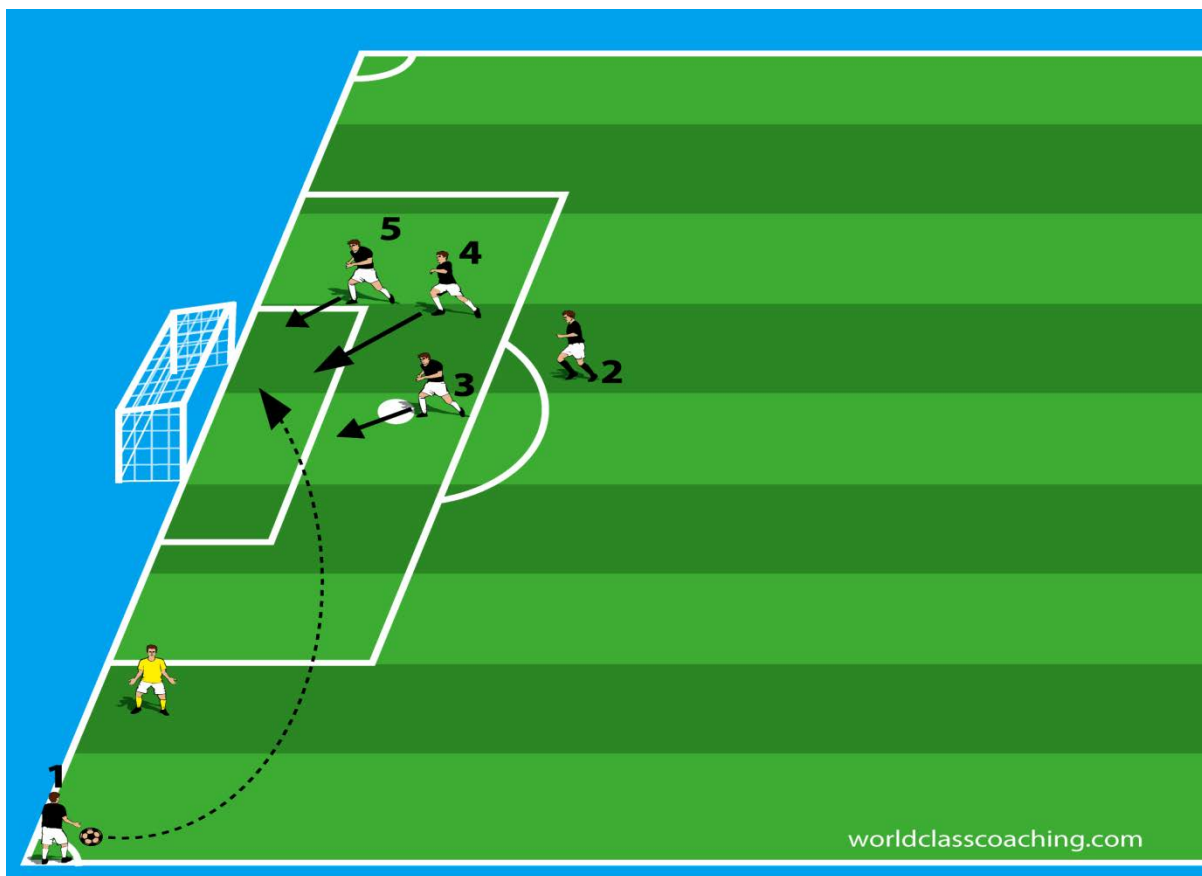


Short corner kick play

Player 1 and player 2 are at the corner. Player 1 passes to player 2 and then overlaps her. Player 2 dribbles at the defender. Player 2 can either pass to player 1 or fake the pass and dribble past the defender. Either way, the ball is crossed for the coordinated runs before goal, or shot at goal if the runner can achieve a good angle and distance from which to attempt to score.

Considerations:

- if an opponent is closer than ten yards, the players should ask the official to set the proper distance before commencing their movement.
- note that if the opponents send two players to defend this play, the attackers change the play to serve a ball into the area.
- a useful variation to this play is to place a single player at the corner to start and then have a runner come from the crowded area in front of the goal and check to the ball to play a 1-2 with the server. In this way, it is both easier to disguise the short corner and also create a better angle and distance for the serve into the area.

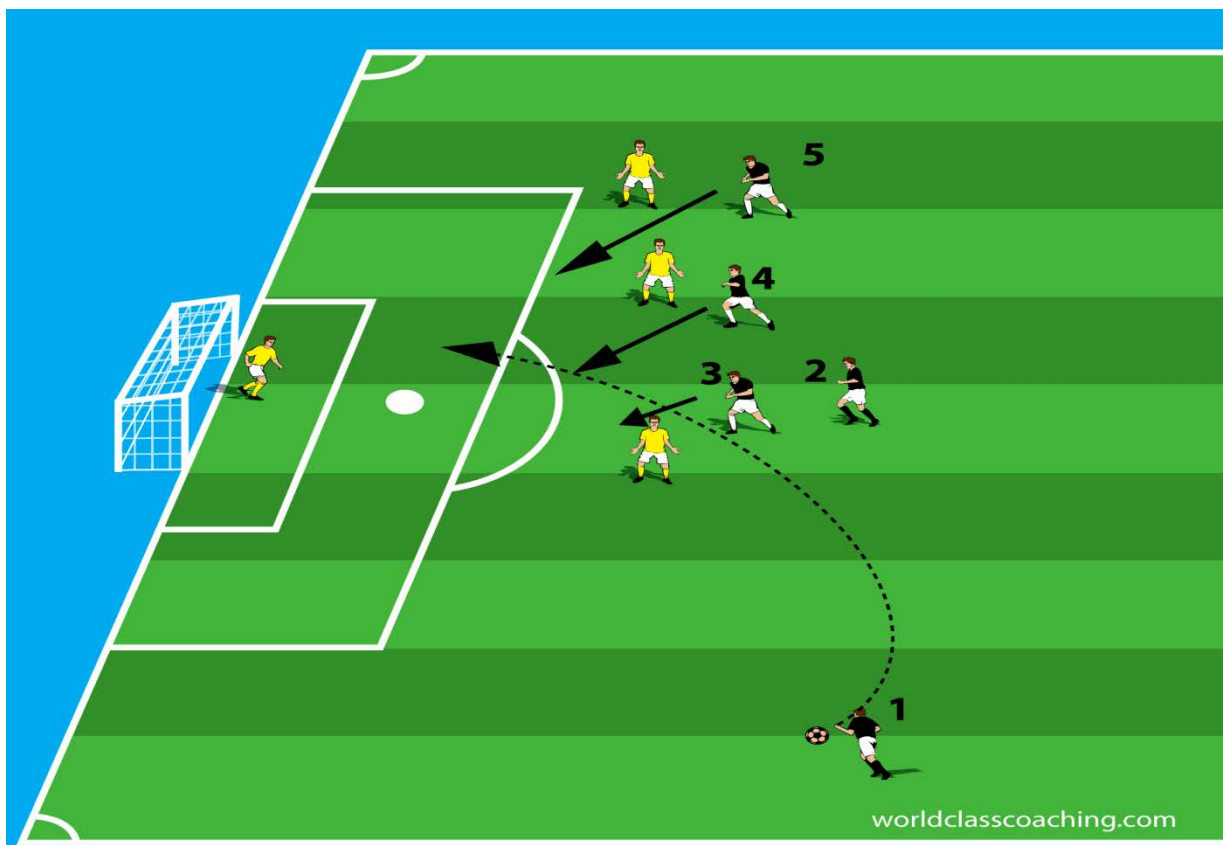


Wave corner kick play

Player 1 is at the corner. Players 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 gather at the top of the box and just beyond the back post. At a signal from player 1, the runners close on the goal and finish the serve from the corner.

Considerations:

- the starting position for the runs can be varied. Some teams group the runners together, making the individual players difficult to track. Other teams put the players together but then have them mix about until just seconds before the kick, making the runners even more difficult to sort out. Finally, some coaches like to send the runners in stages, hoping to drag defenders out of position. Regardless, it is important the coach find a rhythm and pattern that is predictable and successful for the team.
- the coach can set the runs to meet the anticipated service to a particular zone (often the back half of the goal and 5-7 yards from the goal). It is advisable to have at least one runner getting into the near post area to find a short or low serve (advanced teams often target this player to flick the ball to the targets at the back post). Similarly, one runner should attempt to get to the goalkeeper to disrupt her concentration on any ball served to a point where she can play it), and one player should seal off the area outside the back post to frame in any ball that gets through the area.



Distance free kick play

This is the classic play to take advantage of a free kick opportunity from a distance beyond which a direct shot at goal can be attempted. Player 1 is at the ball. Several target players line up along the defensive restraining line. Player 1 serves the ball behind the defensive restraining line, but also far enough from the goal to prevent the goalkeeper grabbing the serve, for the runners to find and finish.

Considerations:

- the runs should be coordinated in such a way as to assure that a player gets end-line to prevent the ball going out for a goal kick and at least one player should make an effort to challenge an advancing goalkeeper for the ball as well.
- the runners should not all start on the defensive restraining line where they are easy to mark and where their runs can be disrupted by the defenders. Rather, it is useful to have some runners start in wider positions (and several yards on-side) and approach the restraining line at full speed (and out of the vision of the defenders as they focus on the ball) as the ball is served.
- another tactic to frustrate markers is to have a runner(s) stand in an off-side position during the set-up of the play and then check sharply on-side just before the ball is struck.
- finally, at high levels teams often run switches, with players crossing (and, cynically, picking off defenders) as they run, making it difficult to isolate a particular defender on a dangerous attacker.

Direct free kick

If the ball is close enough to finish, most teams at this age select a player to shoot directly from the restart. If there is a concern about the opponents sending a player from the wall to block the shot ('bullet'), the team can send a player to run over the ball to draw out the bullet and then point out the infraction to the official. If there is an ongoing concern in this regard, the team can send multiple players to the ball and have them discuss who will run over and who will shoot the ball (perhaps the first player onto the ball strikes it).

Variations:

- for indirect kicks within shooting range, many teams will have the player running over the ball touch it, thus setting up the direct shot from the second player.

Training Session#25: Defending set-pieces.

Introduction: Defending set plays requires considerable preparation, first by the coach in deciding the framework with which the team will confront opponents' efforts to finish and then in the team setting, to assure that every player instinctively understands their roles and will react properly and consistently under pressure. This session lays out the possibilities for defending at set-pieces, and also suggests ways to comb defending set-pieces into the training environment.



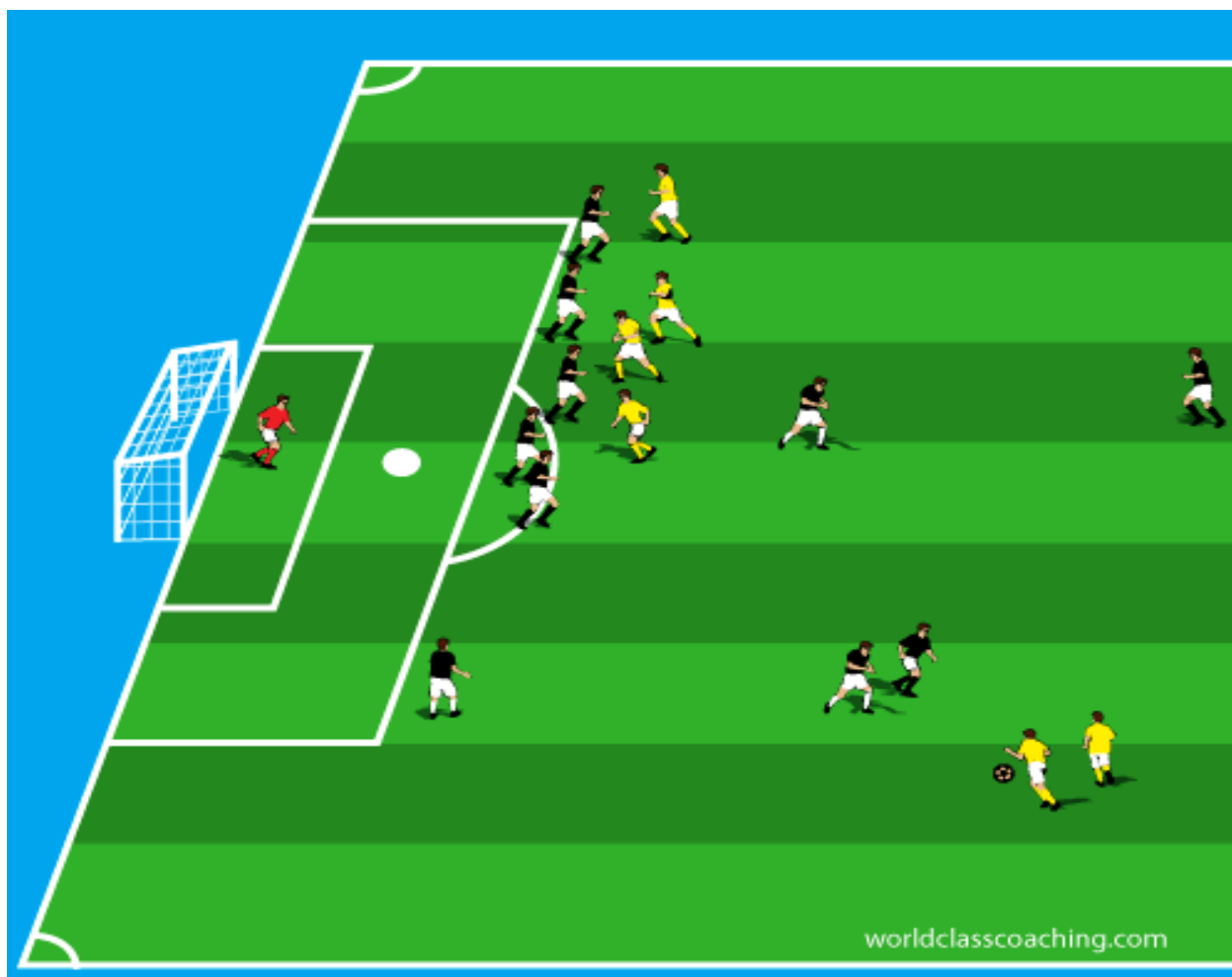
Defending corner kicks - 1/3 field

Corner kicks offer a very strong chance to score at any level, and the coach preparing her team to defend in these situations must first answer several important questions:

1. Will the team employ zone or man-marking or a mix?
2. How many players will defend?
3. How well does the team defend in the air (the answer to this question impacts the answer to #2)?
4. How big an area can be assigned to the goalkeeper (i.e. how strong is the goalkeeper in the air and handling the ball in traffic)?
5. Other considerations (opponents' efficiency at corners, weather, game situation).

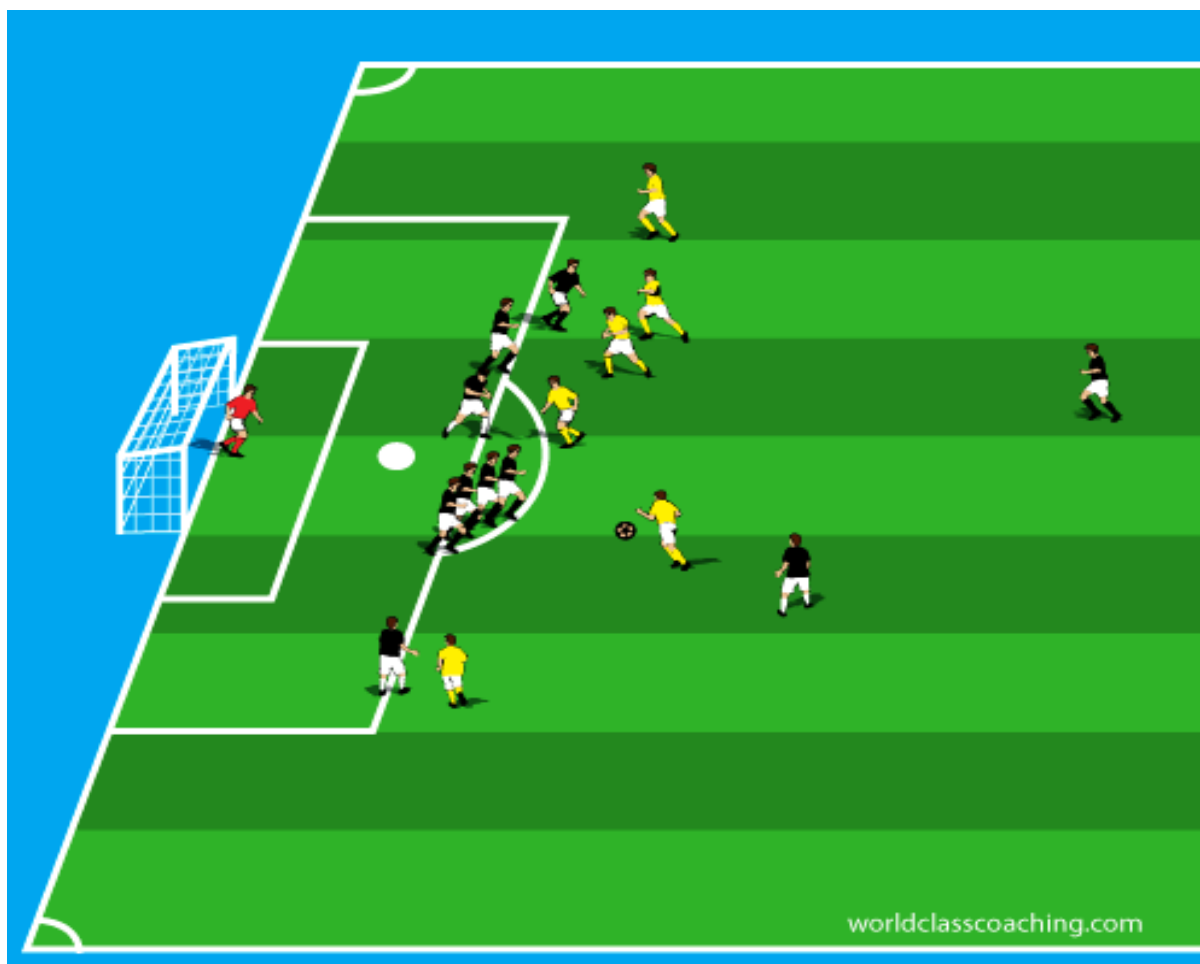
Recommendation:

- deploy a mix of zonal defending and man-marking as shown, placing players at each post (note the near-side defender's up-field-facing position before the kick, freeing the goalkeeper's vision. If instructed to clear the ball by the goalkeeper, she steps out and plays the ball away); the center backs and the goalkeeper to control the six-yard box; the midfielders are placed in a stacked zone across the top of the six-yard box. Any ball that would fall in front of any one of them is their responsibility. One forward is responsible for dealing with any potential short corner (many teams send one player to the corner to deal with this possibility and distract the kicker. It's even better to send a second player- a midfielder- to play 2 vs. 2 against a short corner). A midfielder or the extra forward(s) can be detailed to mark a particularly dangerous opponent. Most teams leave at least one player near midfield to start counters and also to keep as many of the opponent's back line as possible from joining in the corner kick.
- train a confident, aggressive mentality into the group for defending corners. Playing passively will lead to goals being conceded, whereas a loud, active and determined defending group provides an intimidating environment for the attackers and also gives the defenders a psychological sense of purpose.
- clearing out. The team hunts the ball once the serve is struck. When the ball is played away from the goal, all but the two backs on the posts must pursue and pressure the ball. When the ball leaves the box, the two players on the posts sprint forward. Keeping them in gives extra protection in the goal area while the ball is still in a dangerous position. However, when the ball leaves the area, the danger decreases and the retention of those players on the posts both eliminates the possibility of an offside call against the attackers and detracts from the width of the defensive back line in transition.



Defending direct or indirect free kicks: Beyond shooting range - 2/3 field

When the opponent earns a free kick from beyond shooting range, the defending group may still employ a small wall (1-2 players) to distract the server and additional players may remain in the area to deal with short options for the attackers. The remainder of the team organize a restraining line to develop space for the goalkeeper to handle a long serve toward the area. Players along the restraining line should get shoulder-on with an attacker, with the idea that the contact will wreck the timing of their run into the area and also allow the defender to arrive first. If possible, at least one central defender should be left free. Some teams, particularly at the youth level, prefer to have this player leave the line and run into the area just before the ball is struck to give the player an advantage in the race to the ball. This decision may wreck the offside protection offered by holding the line, but it also gives the defender a major advantage. Regardless, the goalkeeper must make an early call as to whether she will handle the ball or if the team will need to clear the serve, and once the ball is cleared, the entire team must work to get forward and recover their shape as quickly as possible.



Defending direct or indirect free kicks: Shooting range - 1/3 field

Direct free kicks from around the edge of the 18-yard box and at angles where shots can be taken require special treatment from a defensive perspective. The coach should give parameters for the number of players to be placed in the wall (from 1-2 for wide angles and up to 4-5 for shots from straight on). Typically the midfielders and/or forward(s) form the wall. The coach can instruct the goalkeeper to arrange the wall or a forward can perform the same duty so that the goalkeeper can focus exclusively on the ball. Either way, the wall should be arranged with the tallest player on the near post (this area is most in danger, as the goalkeeper begins in the back half of the goal) and shorter players filling out the line. It is critical that the coach work out the process for the placement of the wall so that it can be done in just a few seconds under pressure. If the goalkeeper will set the wall, the end player (tallest) should either turn and face her or look over her outside shoulder to see her instructions, all the while grasping the next player in the wall to assure that movement is synchronized. The end player, as a rule, should be at least the width of one person outside the post to deter attempts to bend the ball around the wall. The defenders mark opponents around the wall, picking up the most dangerous players first and holding a line nearly as high as the wall itself (to minimize traffic for the goalkeeper in trying to make the save).

Tactical considerations:

- in the modern game, most defending teams put a player(s) 2-3 yards in front of the ball to wreck any idea of taking the kick before the wall can be set. By the rules of the game, this is meant to

be rewarded with a yellow card, but it is almost universal that there is no card and the attacker requests the proper 10-yard spacing. Once the official steps in to set the wall at the proper distance, play is only restarted with the referee's whistle.

- use of a 'bullet.' Although more common in indirect free kick situations, some teams send a player off of the end of the wall running at the ball ('bullet') just before it is struck. Once again, technically-speaking this should result in a yellow card, but most often it results in a blocked kick. Many coaches only employ a 'bullet(s)' only in indirect kick situations.

Indirect free kick in the area - 18-yard box

Occasionally, a team will concede an indirect free kick in the area. This is a very dangerous situation, particularly if the placement of the ball is close to the goal mouth (as shown). In this case, many coaches place the entire team on the goal line, splitting the wall around the goalkeeper. Remind players that since this is an indirect kick situation, the opponents will need to take a touch before shooting. When that first touch is taken, the entire wall (some coaches leave players on the posts) sprints forward, keeping in their lanes, hoping to block the shot. Indirect kicks from sharp angles can be played more like a corner kick, with defenders on the posts and a combination of zone and man-marking in front of goal.

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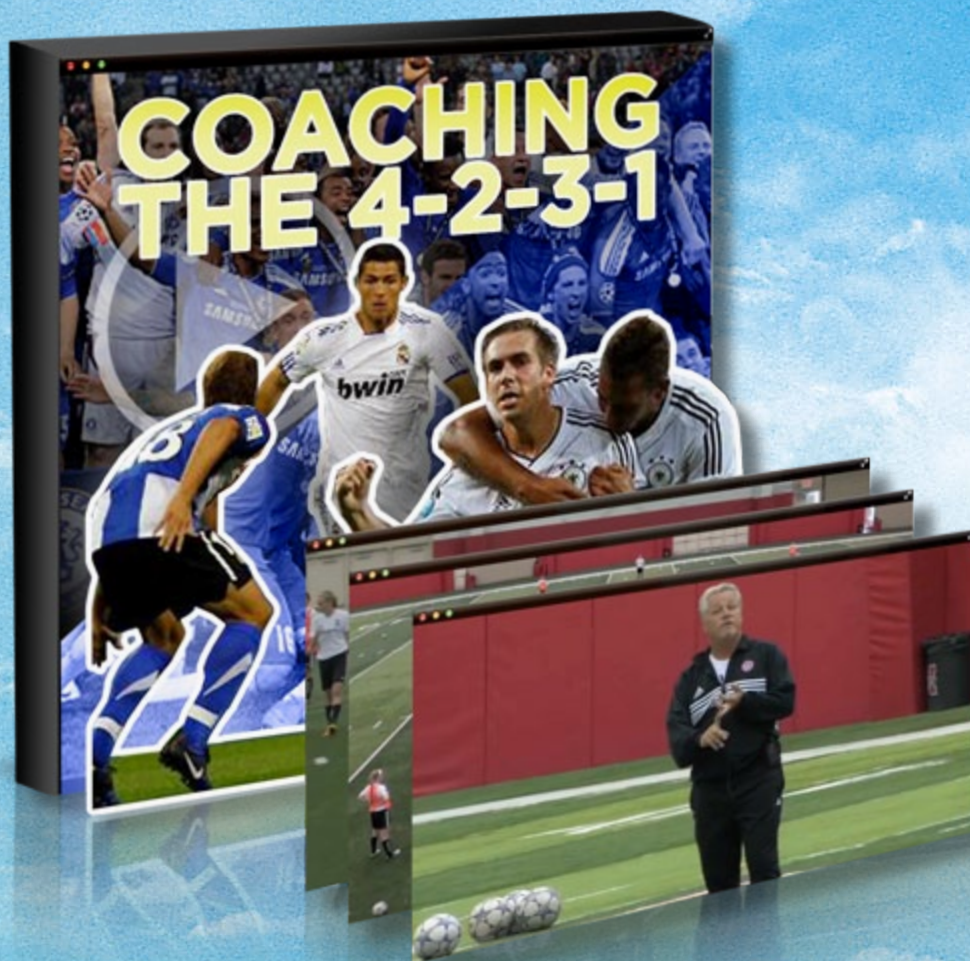
About the Author



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.

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