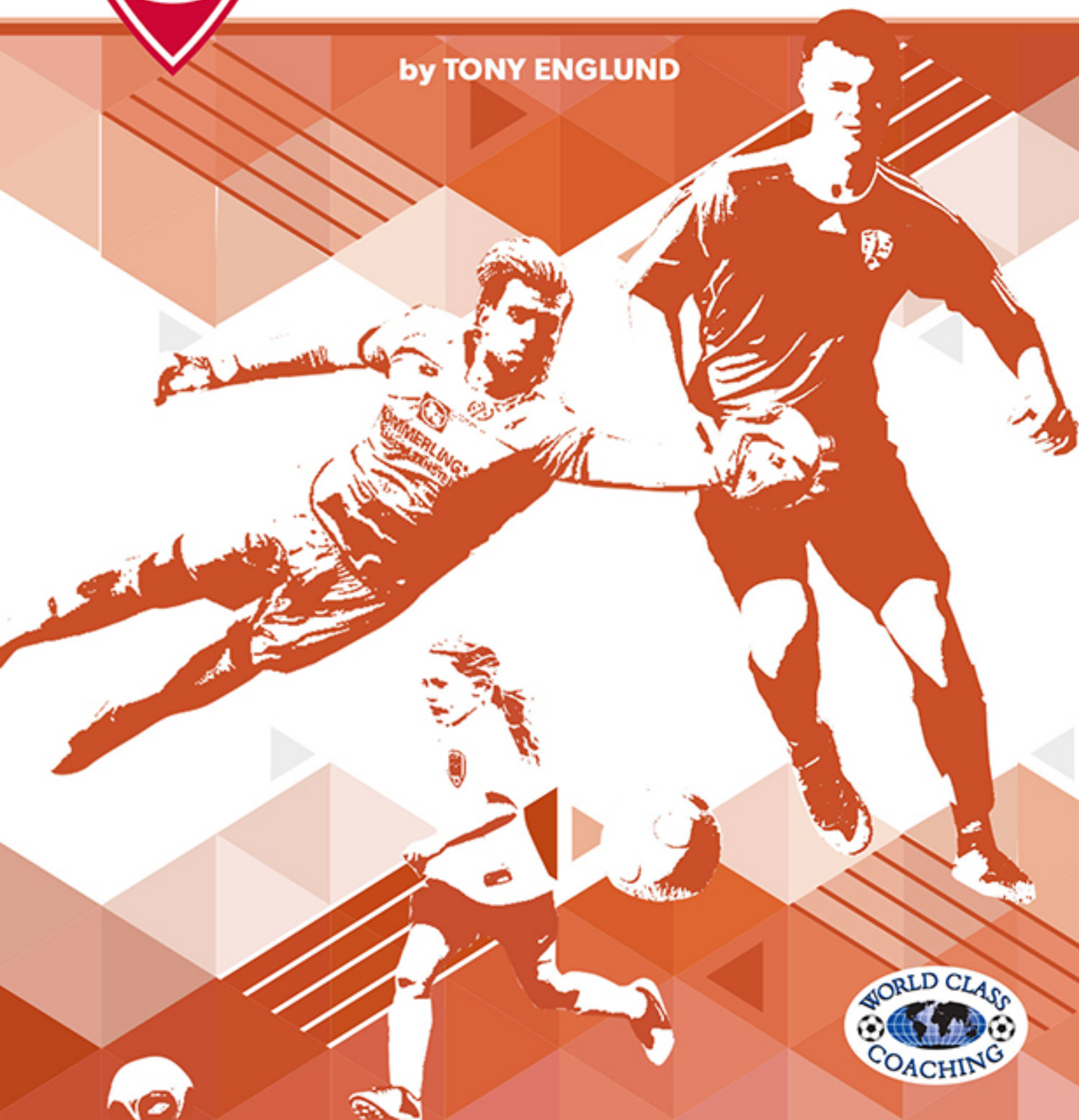


CLUB CURRICULUM



U9-U10 SEASON

by TONY ENGLUND



U9/U10 Complete Season Training Curriculum

by
Tony Englund

Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING

U9/U10 Complete Season Training Curriculum

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by Tony Englund

Edited by Tom Mura



Published by
WORLD CLASS COACHING



U9/U10 Complete Season Training Curriculum

A full season of training for a competitive U9/U10 team featuring 18 training sessions, systems of play and set-piece analysis, and 55 full-color diagrams.

Tony Englund

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Introduction: The Golden Age of Soccer Learning

The starting point for any adult planning to mentor young children is to be certain to adopt the proper perspective in developing a philosophy of coaching that reflects a thorough understanding of the differences between adults and children. Simply put, coaching 9-10 year-olds carries a mandate to introduce young people to physical activity, social interaction in the team setting and having fun playing the game of soccer.

Adults must take into account the physical and psychological abilities and needs of young children in planning and also coaching activities for 9 and 10- year olds. Children at these ages have immature and growing skeletal and cardiovascular systems that influence their motor abilities. They have limited agility and often go very hard, become exhausted and stop, and then quickly recover. Psychologically, young children have a fragile and evolving self concept that needs consistent nurturing through social acceptance and adult approval of their *efforts* (as opposed to results), and though they are intrinsically motivated, they do not have the sense of competition that is present in older children and adults.

In addition to accounting for the physical and psychological needs of young children, coaches must also attempt to understand why children play soccer (or any sport), and try to design the team experience to nurture those motivations. Fun, exercise, being with their friends and skill development are all important considerations for young children in this sense.

There are numerous studies in print outlining the reasons why children quit playing sports (as many as 75% by age 13). Not surprisingly, those reasons mirror the motivational elements that draw children to participate, as not having fun or improving and not being with their friends are among the chief reasons kids stop playing.

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

Given all of the requisite warnings about the philosophy of coaching the U9 and U10 years, it is also noteworthy that these two years introduce children to competitive soccer, and national coaching organizations the world over agree this period also represents the beginning of what is generally referred to as the 'Golden Age of Soccer Learning.' Children at these ages are able to learn mentally and physically at an accelerated pace, and their skills and tactical understanding can be dramatically improved during these critical years through quality training. Therefore, coaches must be well prepared for every training session and focus on both fun and learning.

Best Wishes.

Tony Englund
Hugo, MN
2012

Organizing a U9-U10 practice session

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

Preparation elements:

-practice plan: Which exercises will be used and for how much time? What are the key teaching points? The coach should have a written plan for every session.

-equipment: What types and how many balls, vests, cones, goals, etc. will be needed? Don't forget a ball pump!

-safety: The coach should walk the practice area before each session, checking for items that could pose a danger to children. In addition, the coach should carry a phone with emergency numbers for all players. The coach or manager should always have a first-aid kit on site. Lastly, the coach should be the first to arrive and the last to leave training, assuring that there is adult supervision of children at play and that no child is left alone at the field. It is recommended that two adults be present at all times.

U9/U10 Practice

Children at these ages are in the midst of acquiring motor and mental skills, and their U9/U10 experience is often their introduction to competitive soccer. Training for coaches in these age groups consistently emphasizes that the primary goal is for children to have fun through a combination of introductory skill learning and lots of fun playing environments.

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

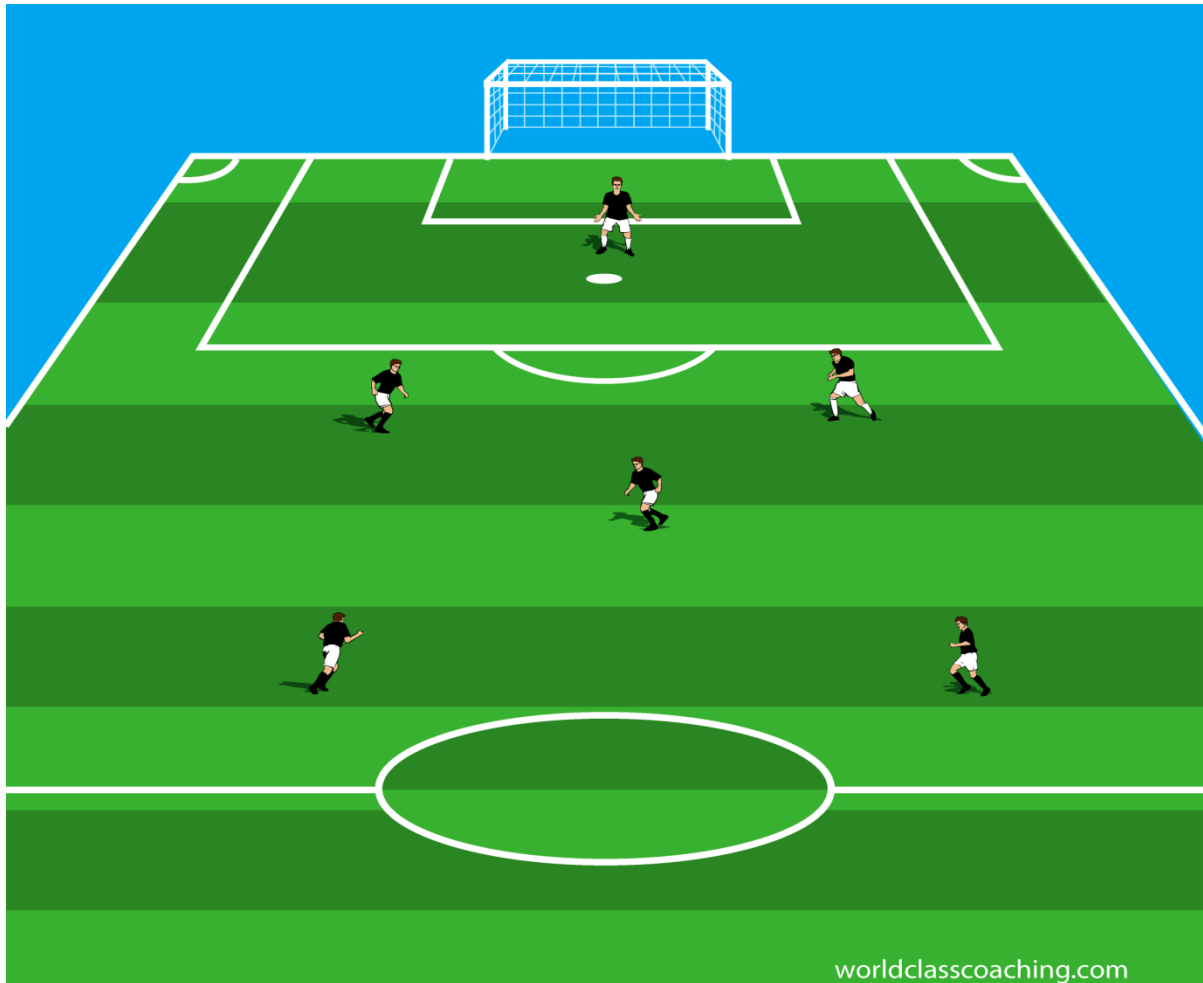
Composition: About ½ (usually the final portion of practice) of every training session should be spent just letting children play soccer. The remainder of the time should be built around a variety brief, instructive training and fun games that allow players to practice those skills. It is recommended that the coach choose a theme for each session (i.e. individual attacking, defending or passing and receiving). It is important to remember that at this age, children are ready to change activities fairly quickly and it is important to give them new tasks and challenges every few minutes to keep practice fun and exciting.

Setting Curriculum

This book is designed to provide a full season of training sessions for a competitive U9 or U10 team. While the sessions do not have to be used in order, the order of presentation will provide a coherent practice season for coaches that run the practices in that fashion.

Systems of Play: 1-2-1-2

Teams at these age groups often play with a goalkeeper and five field players. The most common and recommended arrangement of players is 1-2-1-2. This chapter provides an overview of considerations for coaches to implement this system of play. It must be stressed at the outset, however, that tactical considerations at U9 and U10 are secondary to technical development and the idea here is to simply provide a framework for organizing the team.



1-2-1-2

This system deploys a goalkeeper, two defenders, a midfielder and two forwards.

Key teaching points:

- All players should play each of the positions (including goalkeeper) at U9 and U10.
- Playing time should be equal or nearly equal for all players at this stage of their development.
- Teach the team to understand the various roles within the system.
- Forwards: Carry the attack and serve as outlet players in transition. Also apply defensive pressure to opposing backs. Teach them to use the midfielder for support.

Midfielder: Connecting player who supports underneath the forwards and works hard on both sides of the ball. In this arrangement, she typically plays centrally, allowing the forwards and defenders to work on the flanks. The midfielder should understand the concept of changing fields and also work with the defenders to deal with opponent attacks.

Defenders: One of the most common points of coaching that needs to be emphasized is the need to keep the defenders connected to play as the team moves forward (i.e. the defenders should get to mid-field when the ball is in the team's attacking front third, and not remain in the back third with the goalkeeper). In addition, the defenders should learn early on the concept of covering their partner, which in essence is the idea that the defenders need to be staggered, with one player pressuring the ball and the other player stepping back to "cover" her partner in case the ball gets in behind. Defenders need to learn to be disciplined in this concept and also understand how their roles interchange depending on the situation. In transition, defenders should be taught to look for outlet passes to the forwards and also to the midfielder.

Goalkeeper: As this should be a rotating position at U9 and U10, the coach should focus on making sure the entire team understands safe handling and distribution of the ball and the rules of the game (i.e. when and where to pick up the ball). Safe diving, angle play, and dealing with break-aways and set-pieces are more advanced skills that may be taught to the team, particularly at U10.

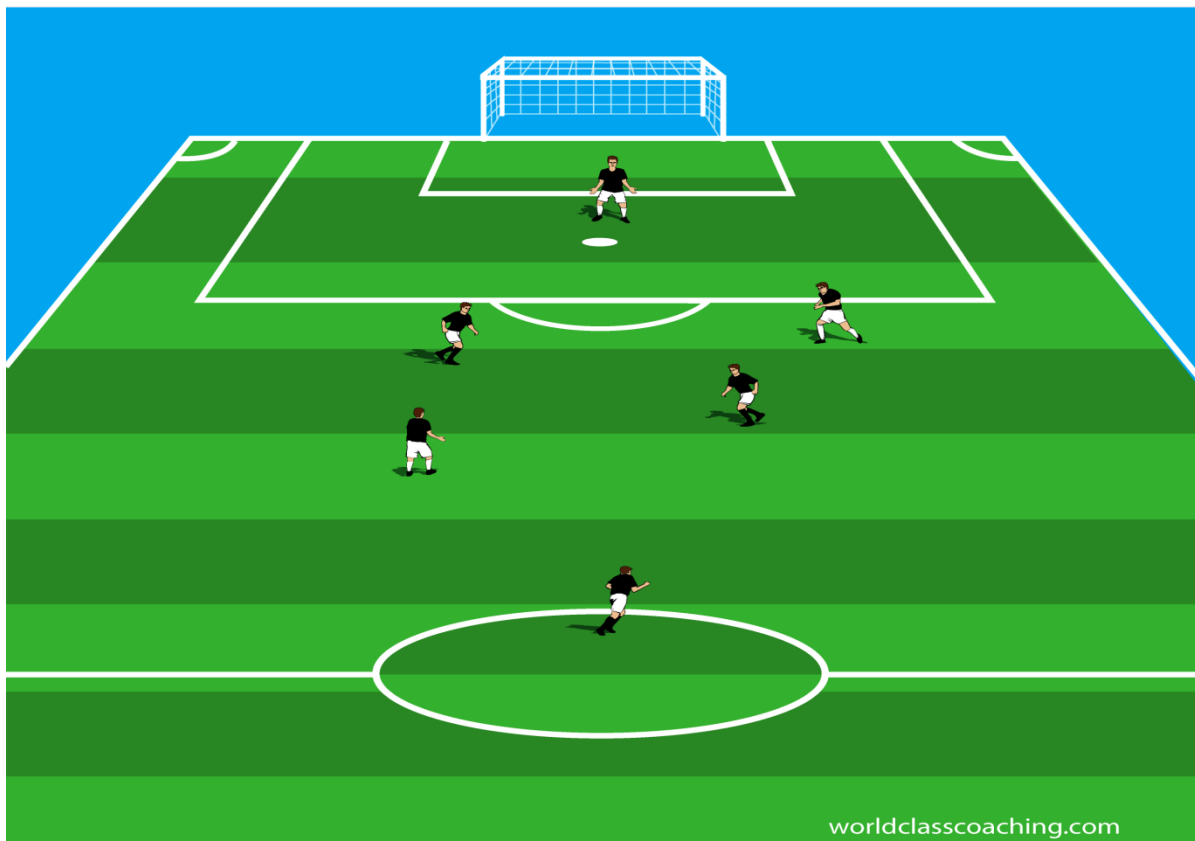
Common points of concern:

- The most common issue here is the tendency of young players to bunch up. This is endemic to the age groups, undeveloped sense of tactical understanding and enthusiasm of the age. Coaches need to be patient and persistent in encouraging players to develop a sense of tactical spacing. Many coaches use zone games, where players are confined to certain parts of the field, to enforce such spacing, and such restrictions have some value but should be applied only for a few minutes at a time in training, as the overriding concern here is the need to enhance players' enjoyment of the game and boxing them off in grids is not supportive of this priority. A more useful and less limiting tactic is to employ "freeze" calls in the course of playing to show players a picture of the bunching occurring on the field. Then quickly move players to better spacing and restart play. Either way, this is one issue all coaches of young players encounter and patience is the key.
- No transition. Many young teams look very good in their attacking half and struggle to clear their own end once the ball arrives there. This is another characteristic that is endemic to U9-U10 soccer. Transition is difficult because players have difficulty playing the ball over distance (and with accuracy) and because team shapes do not often allow for predictable development of transition. Once again, the coach needs to be patient. Ball striking is one of the most underdeveloped skills in young American players, and if coaches devote considerable training time to this topic, it will be possible to develop players' ability to play a longer pass (i.e. from the defenders to the forwards), which will aid in transition. Also, coaches can encourage the team to transition both directions together, which will increase the likelihood of winning the ball back on defense and providing support for the attack (another reason it's difficult to sustain transition at this age). Finally, the coach can demonstrate passing patterns (i.e. from the defenders to the forwards) with the players on the field in their positions to familiarize players with the most useful passing and transition patterns.

- Players who do not want to play goalkeeper. This is a difficult situation many coaches face in trying to rotate players through the positions as the season progresses. While no player should be forced to play goalkeeper, all should be encouraged to try. Many coaches rotate goalkeepers at the half, making the time a young player will play in goal shorter (they get to play on the field for half of the game) and often more tolerable. It is also useful to work with parents to have them encourage their player try playing goalkeeper.

Systems of Play: 1-2-2-1

Teams at these age groups play with a goalkeeper and five field players. One of two common arrangements of players is 1-2-2-1 (1-2-1-2 is recommended). This chapter provides an overview of considerations for coaches to implement this system of play. It must be stressed at the outset, however, that tactical considerations at U9 and U10 are secondary to technical development and the idea here is to simply provide a framework for organizing the team.



1-2-2-1

This system deploys a goalkeeper, two defenders, two midfielders and a single forward.

Key teaching points:

- All players should play each of the positions (including goalkeeper) at U9 and U10.
- Playing time should be equal or nearly equal for all players at this stage of their development.
- Teach the team to understand the various roles within the system.

Forward: Carry the attack and serve as an outlet player in transition. Also apply defensive pressure to opposing backs. Teach forward to use the midfielder for support. NOTE: In this system, it is useful to teach the forward to try to stay in line with the ball when it is in the defensive third of the field (this provides a long pass outlet for the backs in particular in transition).

Midfielders: Connecting players who supports underneath the forward and work hard on both sides of the ball. In this arrangement, they typically split the field and they should work to be available for one-another whenever the team is in possession. The midfielders should understand the concept of changing fields and also work with the defenders to deal with opponent attacks.

Defenders: One of the most common points of coaching that needs to be emphasized is the need to keep the defenders connected to play as the team moves forward (i.e. the defenders should get to mid-field when the ball is in the team's attacking front third, and not remain in the back third with the goalkeeper). In addition, the defenders should learn early on the concept of covering their partner, which in essence is the idea that the defenders need to be staggered, with one player pressuring the ball and the other player stepping back to "cover" her partner in case the ball gets in behind. Defenders need to learn to be disciplined in this concept and also understand how their roles interchange depending on the situation. In transition, defenders should be taught to look for outlet passes to the forwards and also to the midfielder.

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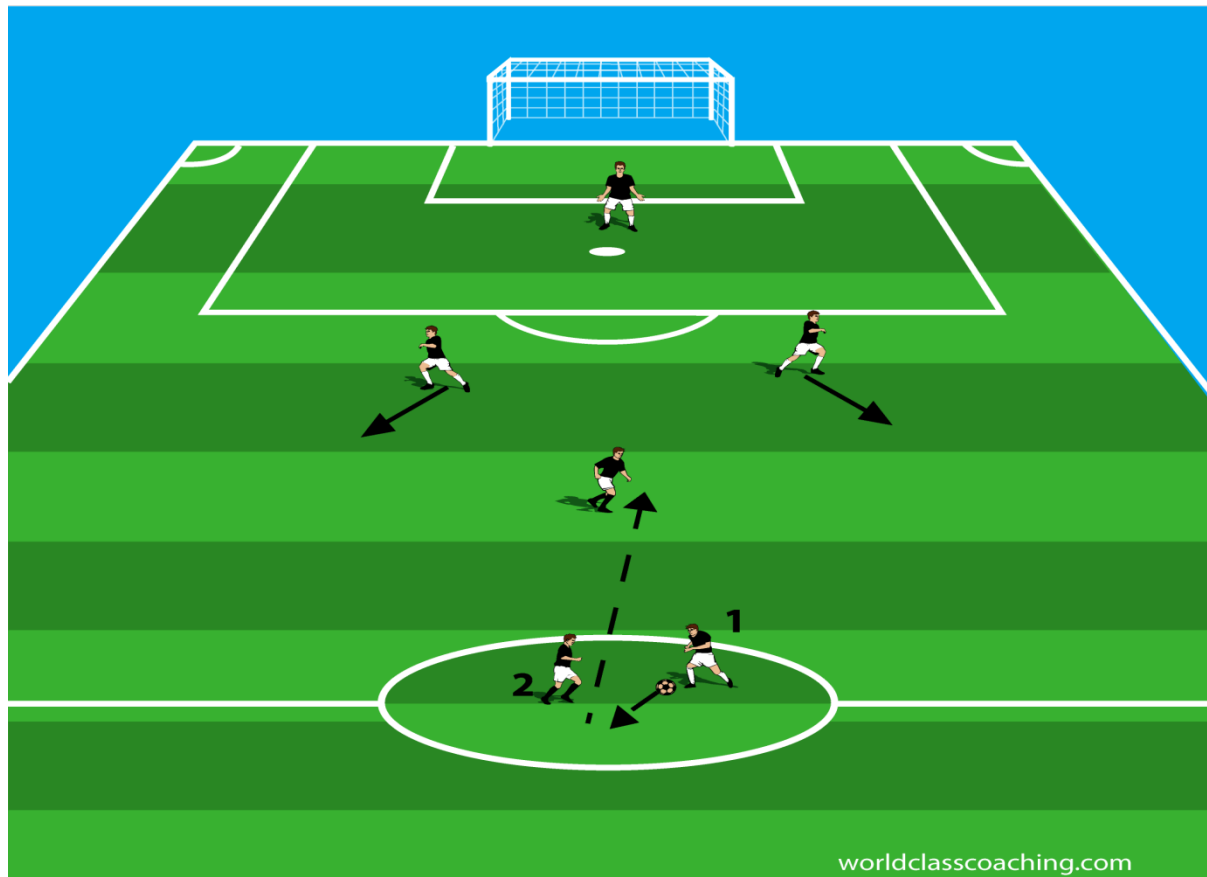
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- In this system, the single forward may not produce enough attacking. The coach should encourage both midfielders to push hard to get forward (attack with three players, not one).
- The defenders do not get forward. U9 and U10 teams often struggle because the backs stay deep in their own end of the field when the ball is in the attacking third. This is a critical point for the coach to address: All players participate in the attack and also in defense. The backs should get to the mid-line and be willing to step up and defend a bit, staying connected to the play at all times. This adjustment will both increase the team's ability to win the ball in the attacking half (and sustain attacks), and also substantially increase the sense of importance (and fun) for playing defense in young players.

Set-Pieces at U9-U10

At U9-U10, players must be trained to respond to attacking and defending set-pieces including kick-offs, goal kicks, corner kicks, throw-ins and also indirect kicks (all fouls result in indirect free kicks at this age). The general advice here is to work hard as a coach to help players understand the rules of the game, referee signals and interpretations, and then give players general instructions and roles to be fulfilled. Complicated re-starts are not recommended at these ages. The best means of practicing set-piece restarts is to either train a handful of repetitions in isolation in training or to mix in artificial restarts in the game portion of training to familiarize players with their responsibilities.

Kick-off: Attacking



Player 1, a forward, taps the ball to player 2, the other forward (or a midfielder if the team plays a one-front). That player passes back to the central midfielder. Note that the defenders then work to get a bit wider in support of the midfielder in possession, while the attacker(s) work to create flank angles to play forward.

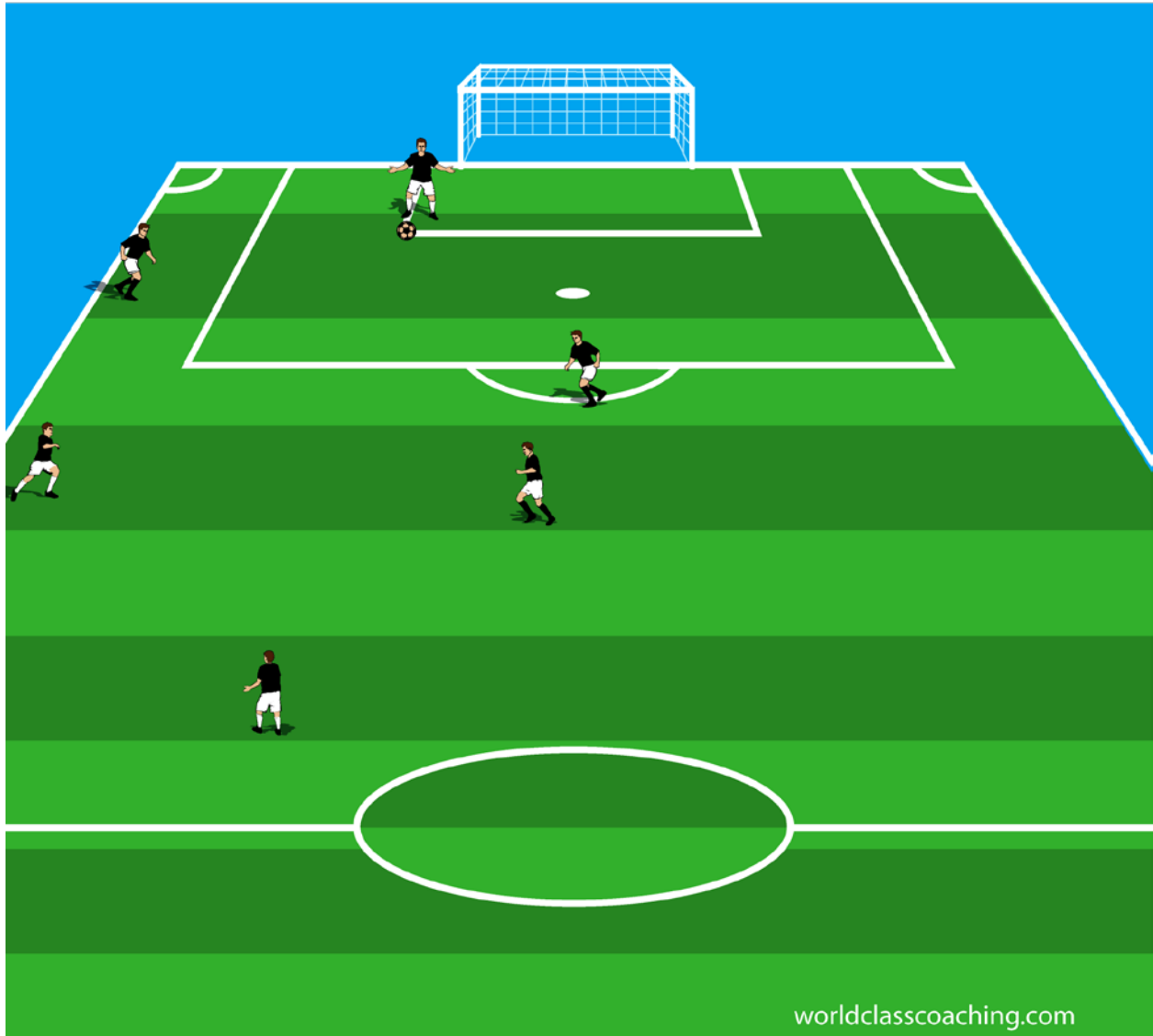
Variations:

- players 1 and 2 inter-pass, attacking the opposing goal immediately, while their teammates move forward in support.
- the ball is played early and hard into an attacking corner and the team moves forward in support.



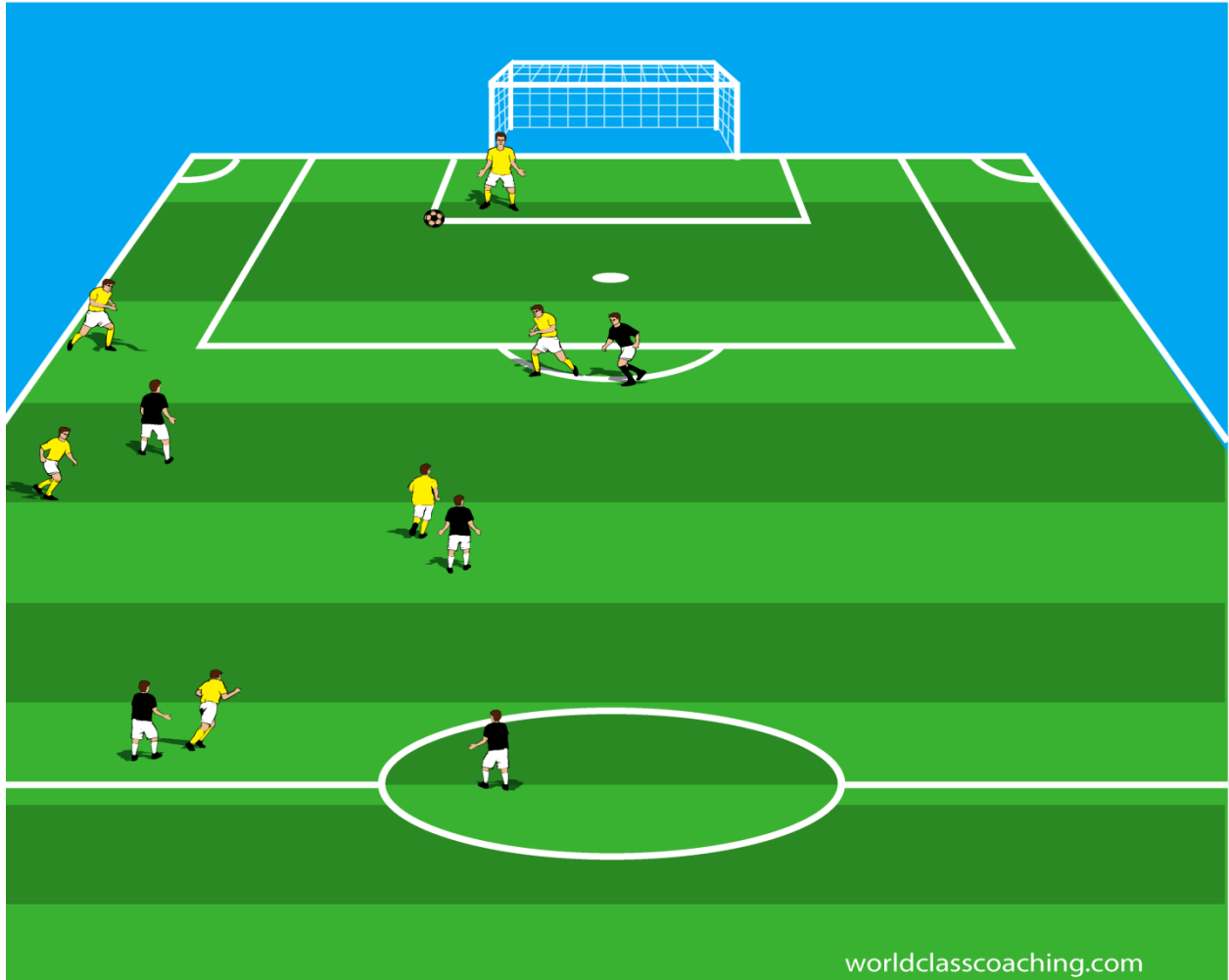
Kick-off: Defending

All players must be outside the center circle until the ball is played by the opposing team. Note that the shape of the defending team is centrally-concentrated, as the greatest danger is that the opposing team will make a quick run at goal. The attacker(s) should immediately press the ball when the ball becomes live.



Goal kicks: Attacking

This is an often-overlooked aspect of attacking that can lead to very poor team transition if the group are unprepared to focus and react when the ball is put in play. Note the starting positions of the team in the diagram. The goalkeeper takes the kick, and then returns immediately to the goal. The near-side defender stretches to the flank as a short outlet. She must be instructed to pinch in immediately if she is not played so that the defenders are in good position to defend if the ball is lost. The back-side defender is at the top of the box, ready to defend if the ball is lost (she is not a target on a goal kick, as playing her may lead to a loss of possession right in front of goal). The midfielder(s) move ball-side as well and if there are two midfielders, one stretches all of the way to the touch-line and is the primary target for the kick. If there is one midfielder, she gets in line with the ball. If there is one forward, she also gets in line or slightly outside of the ball. A second forward would be the target player for the kick and her starting position is along the touch-line as shown.



Goal kicks: Defending

Here, the team prepare to defend a goal kick by the opponents. Encourage players to mark the nearest opponent and to work to get the first touch on the ball once it is put in play. Many goals are scored out of this situation at these levels because the team taking the goal kick often fails to quickly condense their shape once the ball is put in play.

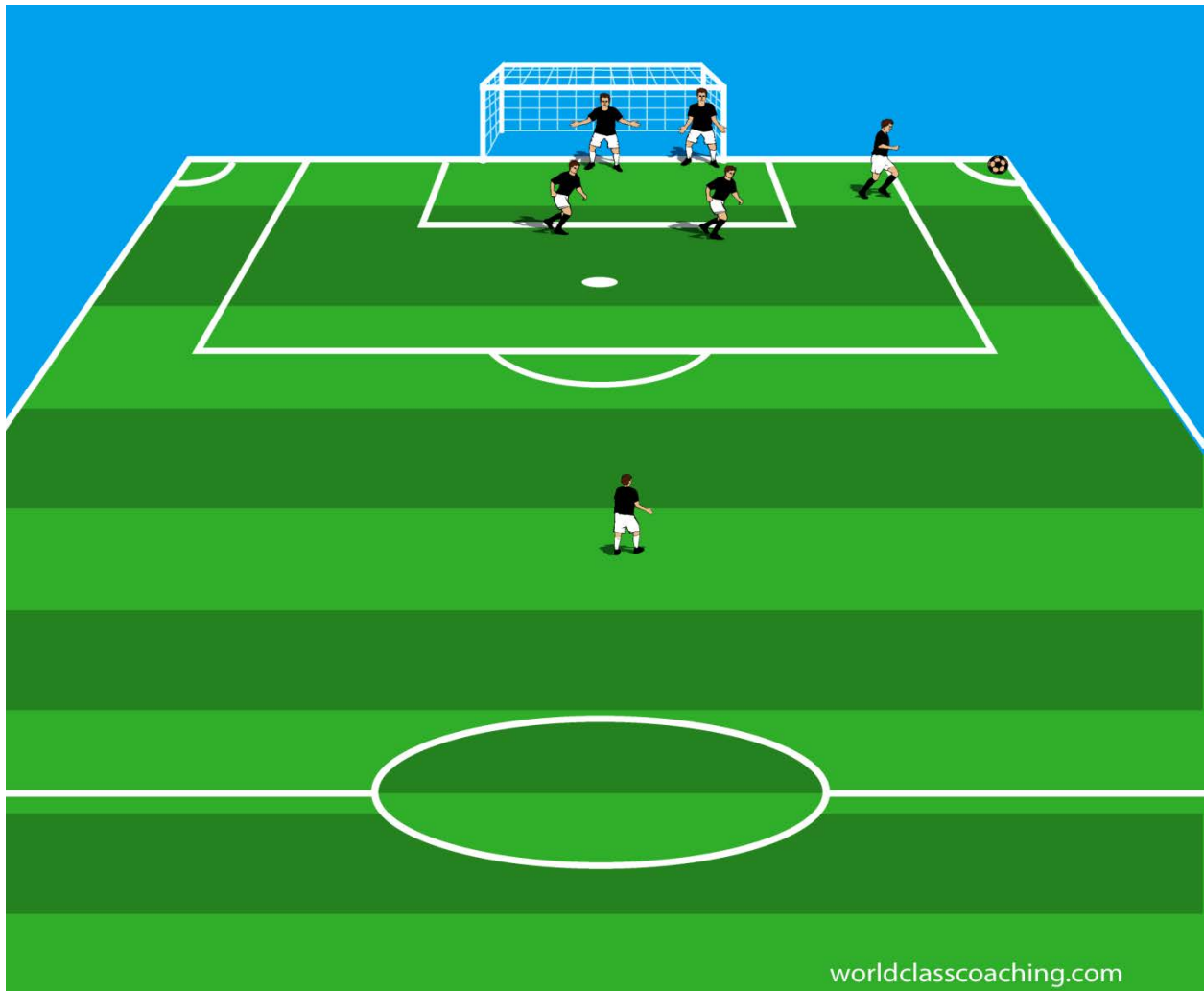


Corner kicks: Attacking

The attackers send one player to the corner for the restart. She sends the ball into the area for her teammates (note the run by the player at the back corner of the box, who serves as a target). Note also that one defender remains at mid field in case possession is lost and the other moves close to the top of the area to finish any ball that pops out. Finally, one of the attackers gets in tight to the goalkeeper, assuring that she cannot handle the ball off of the kick (the attacker cannot impede the goalkeeper's movement but she can move to the ball and get the first touch, and her presence often causes rebounds or easy finishing opportunities when the ball drops in).

Variations:

- Two players go to the corner and they restart play through a short pass and then a serve toward the goal.



Corner kicks: Defending

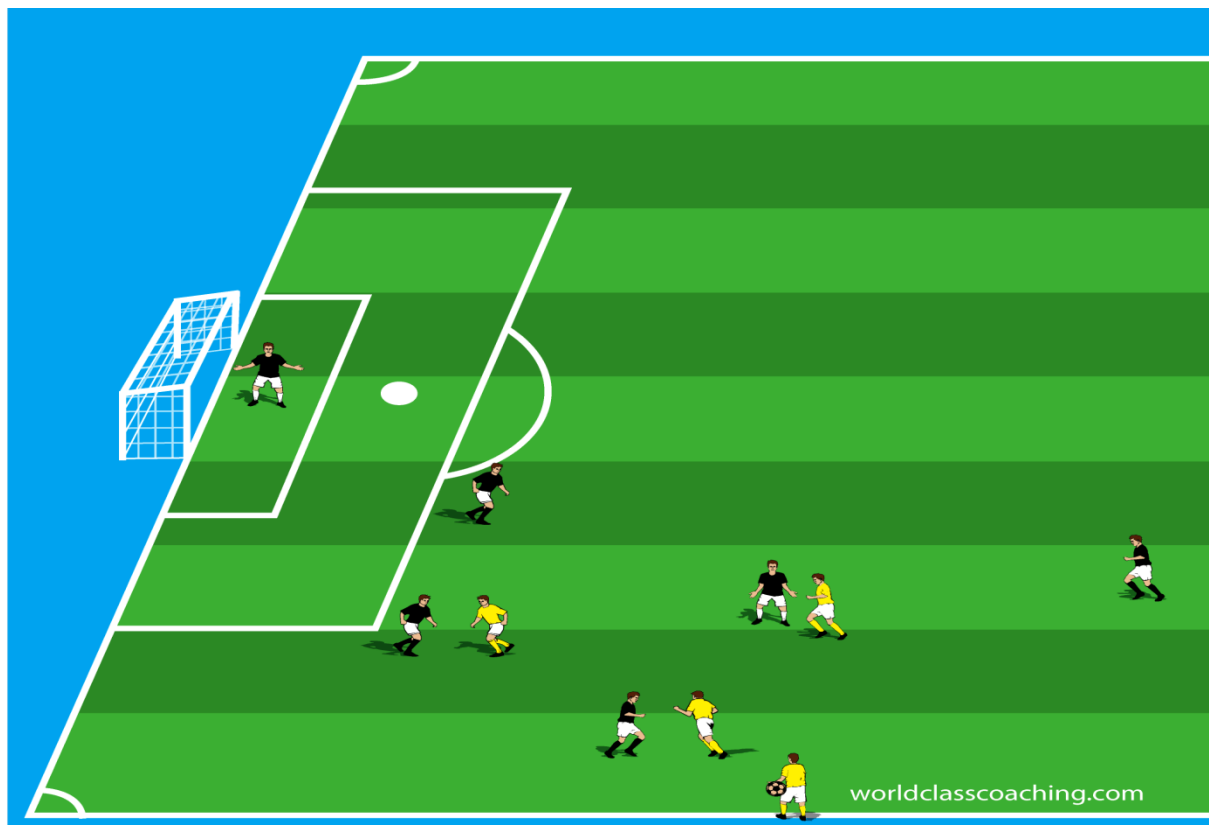
Defending corner kicks at these ages presents an opportunity to teach the players about thinking about defending as a group. In the example above, a defender stands at the near post. Her responsibility is to send away any ball that is played directly into her space from the corner. The other defender marks the nearest opponent (goal-side) in the box area, and the midfielder(s) do the same. Note that a forward is sent to the corner to deal with any short corner attempt by the opposition and perhaps knock down any effort by the kicker to serve the ball before goal. The general notion here is to teach young players to want to get the first touch in this situation and for the group to work together to clear the ball and move forward as a team.

Throw-ins: Attacking

Young players often struggle to learn throw-in technique as they enter competitive play. Coaches should mix in throw-in practice in isolation at training and also in inter-squad scrimmages at training, checking in particular to see that players know to keep their back heel on the ground and that they bring the ball back over their head before extending their arms forward on the follow-through. Tactically, the two most critical pieces of advice are to:

- throw the ball forward (lots of counter-attacks arise from backward throw-ins on the small field).
- throw the ball to the feet of the target.

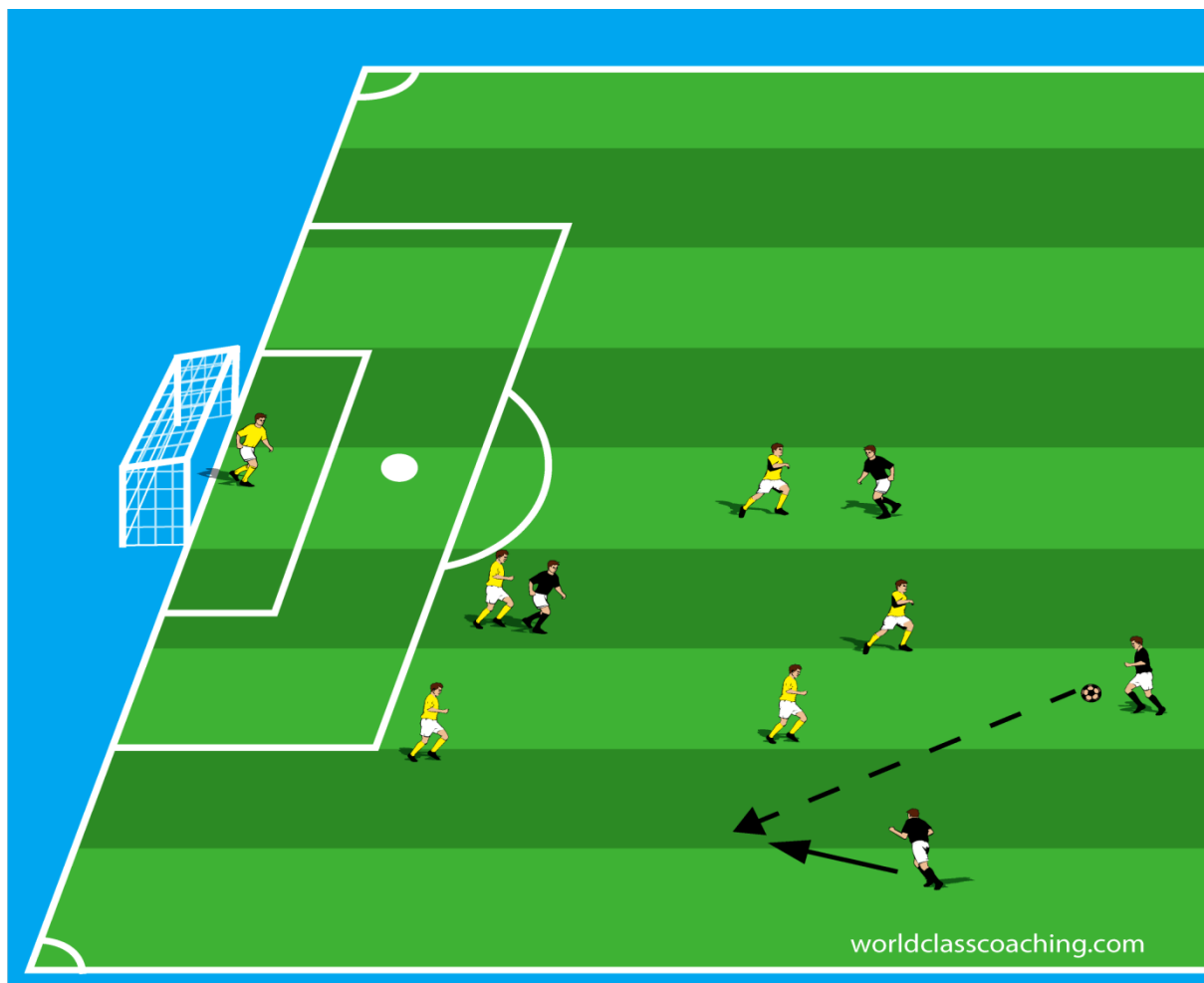
Target players should get ahead of the ball and work to get the first touch on the ball.



Throw-ins: Defending

Players at this age defending throw-ins should focus on:

- getting goal-side (all players in the front half of the field and all but the forward(s) in the back half).
- marking the most likely target players.
- trying to get the first touch on the ball.

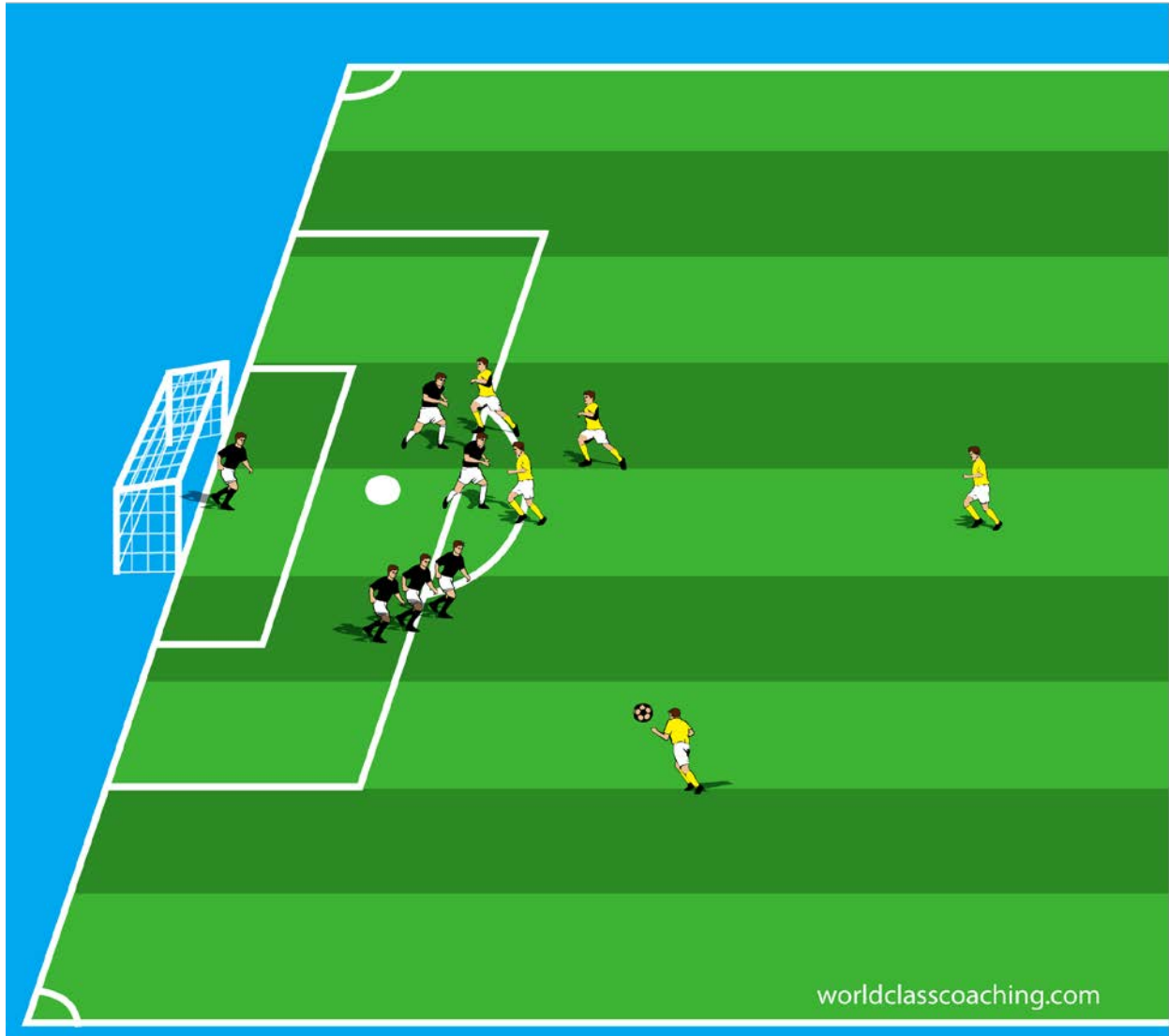


Indirect free kicks: Attacking

Free kicks can take place across the field and generally if they occur in the back half of the field, it is best to just restart with a short pass to a teammate. In the front half of the field, if the team is able to serve a ball at goal, it is useful to practice either a run-over with a touch (the ball must move) or a short pass of the ball to set up the serve. At least one other player should make a run at goal to try to put away any rebound.

Variations:

- pass a ball into a corner for a runner to cross toward goal.



Indirect free kicks: Defending

The spot of the restart affects the team's response. In the attacking half of the field, the team all get goal-side and mark opponents. In the defending half, if a shot is a possibility, 2-3 players form a wall (based on the near post) and the goalkeeper marks the back half of the goal. The other players mark the opposing players nearest the goal.

Training Session #1: Comfort on the ball.

Introduction: The first two training sessions in the U9-U10 curriculum focus on maximizing touches on the ball for players while also creating a fun environment in which to gain more confidence on the ball. This session features fun games and also introduces both a foundation set of touches that should be performed on a frequent basis and the basic 1v1 duel, which is critical to the success of young players and teams in particular.

Hospital Tag - 15x15 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players spread out around the grid. The purpose of this exercise is to dribble the ball around the area, trying to tag other players while avoiding being tagged. Demonstrate that when one is tagged, one must cover the “wound” with one hand. When one is tagged a second time, one must cover both wounds, and one is no longer able to tag other players. Upon being tagged a third time, a player must dribble her ball to the perimeter of the grid (the “hospital”) and complete six stationery dribbling touches. The player is then clear (“healed”) to re-enter play. Explain that players may only tag others on their back, shoulders, arms or legs. This is a fun warm-up game that improves dribbling skills, agility and awareness. Play for four minutes.

Foundation - 15x15 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players find space in the grid. This series of touches and dribbling exercises is designed to give players intensive touch work with both feet and all surfaces. Each stationery exercise should be performed for twenty seconds and each moving exercise should be performed for thirty seconds. If players begin to master the exercises, encourage them to work at maximum speed and to get their eyes up off of their ball as they work. Although the sequence appears lengthy here in print, the foundation touches and dribbling only require about five minutes to complete and should become a regular feature of training at this age level.

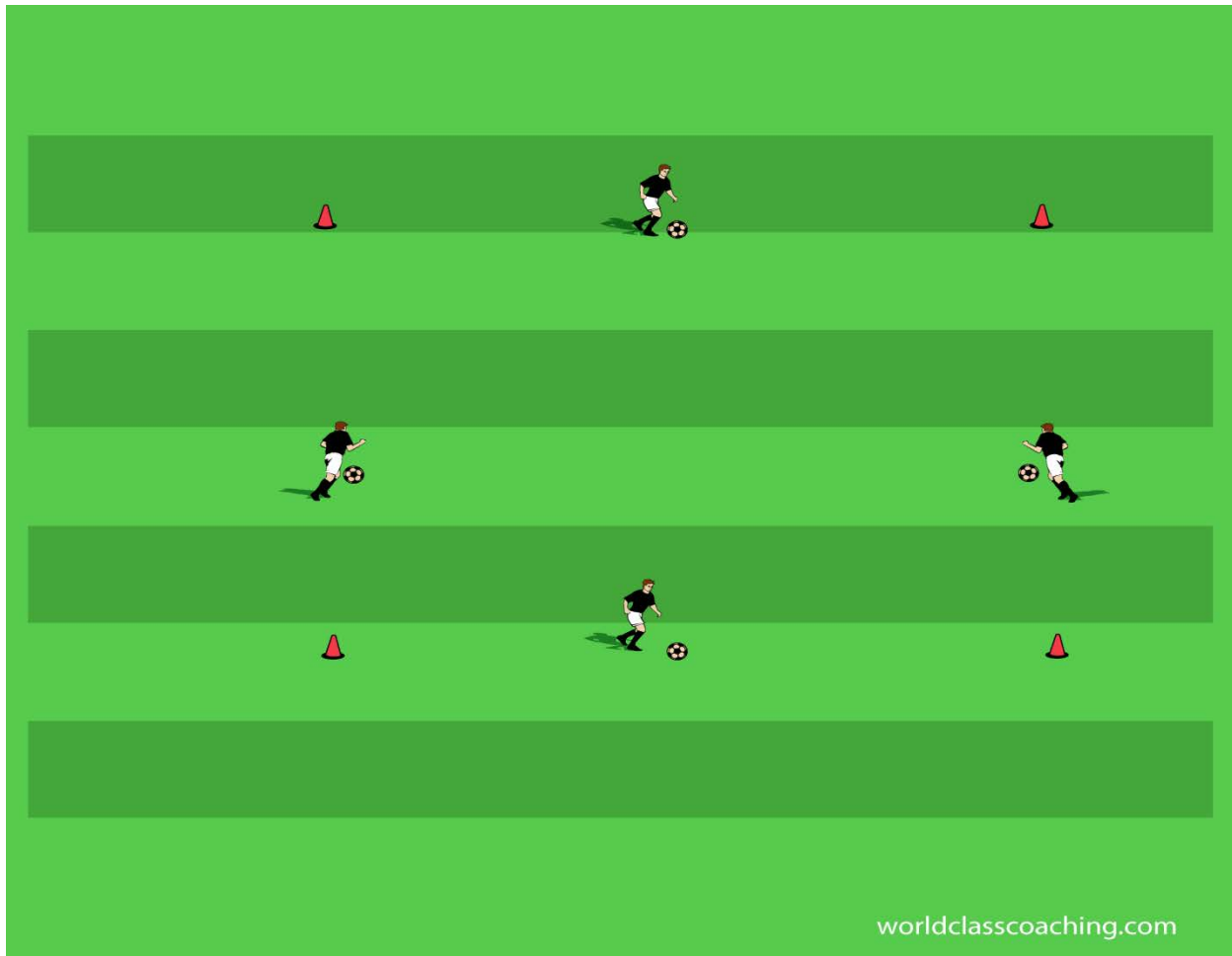
- dribble in place. Players push the ball back-and-forth between the balls of their feet, with the focus being on both consistent and quick touches.
- no-touch dribbling. Players dribble around the area with the goal of moving quickly, but also avoiding any contact with other players or their soccer balls.
- touches on top of the ball. Players work on the balls of their feet, alternating the foot that they use to tap on top of the ball. Encourage players to make light, consistent taps and to avoid moving the ball.
- inside/outside dribbling. Players use a single foot (left for fifteen seconds and then right for fifteen seconds) to dribble around the area. Require players to alternate between the inside and outside of the foot with each touch. Another useful tip here is for players to push the ball in a zig-zag fashion, emphasizing side-to-side movement (as opposed to forward) of both the ball and their bodies.
- pendulum dribbling. Players dribble in place, in the process trying to reach their legs and feet out as far to each side as possible while still working to keep control. This exercise increases both touch and agility.
- one-touch per step dribbling. Players dribble around the area, taking one touch for each step as they move. It is easiest to start by dribbling in place for a few seconds and then push into the dribbling movement.
- laces. Players stand on one foot and tap the ball forward using their laces to contact the ball. As the ball moves forward, the player uses the bottom of the tapping foot to step on the ball and

pull it back. Be sure to encourage players to lock the ankle on the tapping foot and to point their toes toward the ground to ensure that they get contact with their laces with each touch.

- change of speed dribbling. Players change speed with every fourth touch of the ball. Encourage players to sharply alter their speed, getting accustomed to both dribbling at high and then lower speeds.
- triangles. Players place the ball in front of one foot. Using the bottom surface of that foot, they pull the ball back and control the ball with the inside of the same foot. Then they tap the ball across to the inside of the other foot. Finally, the ball is passed back to the starting point and the sequence continues. Change the starting foot after twenty seconds.
- change of surface dribbling. Players dribble, changing surface with every touch. Explain that players can use the inside, the outside, the bottom and the laces surfaces of each foot.
- roll and step. Players place the ball inside of the right foot. Using the inside surface to keep pressure on the ball, players then drag the right foot over the ball, pulling the ball across their bodies. The ball is then released to travel across the front of the body as the player's right foot crosses over in front of the standing foot. Finally, the player moves to the left and stops the ball with the inside of the left foot. Then the sequence continues in the opposite direction, beginning with the left foot learning to roll the ball.
- change of speed and surface dribbling. Here players learn to mix surfaces and speeds. Encourage the players to be creative and to use the entire range of foundation touches.

Stoplight dribbling - 15x15 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players dribble around the area, listening for the coach to call out a color. "Red" indicates stop. "Green" indicates go. Yellow, for purposes of this game, is the call to speed up. Encourage the players to keep the ball very close throughout the exercise and to avoid contact with other players and their soccer balls. Reinforce the importance of using multiple surfaces as they play, and also their ability to change speed and stop sharply with each command. Play for two minutes.

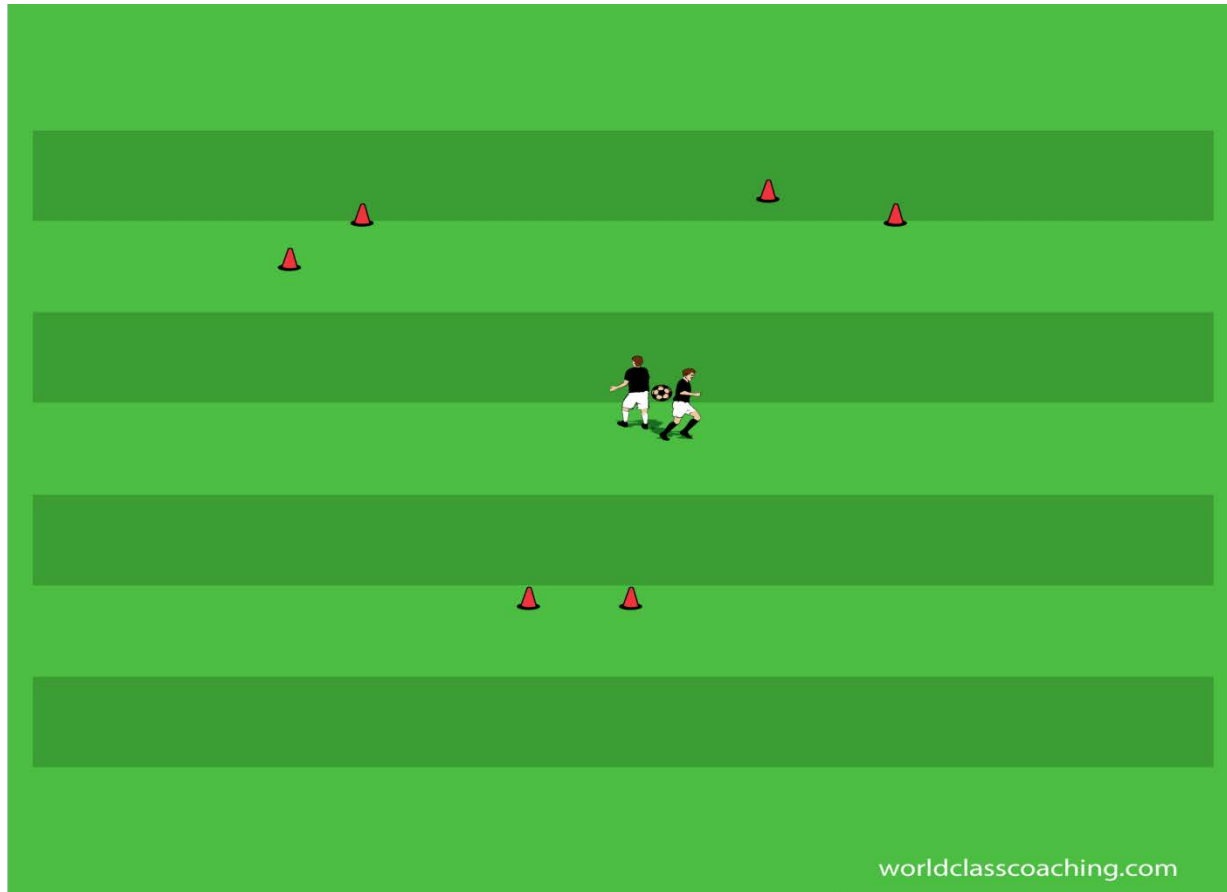


Basic moves in a square - 10x10 yard grids

Every player has a ball. Players each work on a side of the perimeter of a 10x10 yard grid. At a command from the coach, they work through the following sequence of basic moves on the ball. Note that players work on one side of the perimeter only (see diagram). Encourage players to stay on the perimeter line as they work and require that they alternate the foot used to perform each move as they reach the cone on each end.

- inside of the foot cuts. The player dribbles to the cut point, turns her hips and shoulders and takes the ball with the inside of the lead foot, pulling the ball across the body and returning to the edge of the grid. Players need to bend their legs as they perform the move and accelerate after performing the cut. Players should alternate the foot they use to cut the ball and advanced players should check their space (by looking over their shoulder while dribbling in toward the cut point) to be sure that the space is clear for the move.
- outside of the foot cuts. The players dribble to the cut point and turn hips and shoulders as above. The player then reaches past the ball with their lead foot, and then takes the ball with the outside of the trailing foot. As with inside cuts, the players need to check their space before the cut and accelerate after the cut to clear tight space. The most common error with outside of the foot cuts is that players fail to reach the lead foot past the ball, creating an unstable platform for the cut and also limiting the potential for the fake that can be created through quick movement with the cut foot. Rotate the cut foot.

- pull-back. As above, the players dribble to the inner cone. This time, they remained facing the cone. A pull-back is executed by placing one foot on top of the ball (reach the toes forward and down to increase control) and pivoting, pulling the pull-back side hip and shoulder back with the ball and turning before dribbling back to the start point. A pull-back must be preceded by a check of the space behind the attacker on the way into the grid and a sharp change of speed after the move is completed. Alternate the foot used to perform the pull-back.



1 vs. 1 to three cone goals - 12x12 yard areas

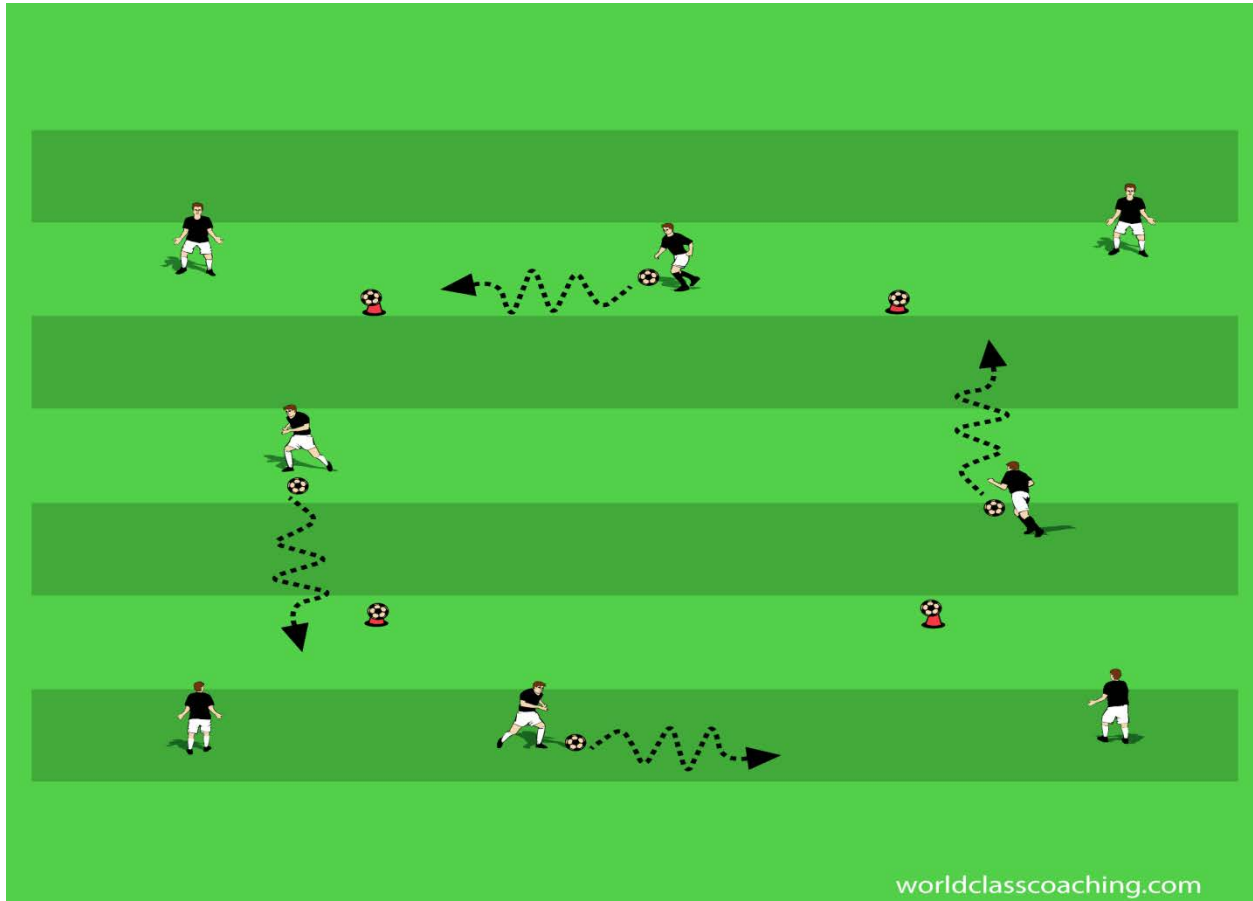
Play 1 vs. 1 to three cone goals. The goals should be one yard wide and arranged in a triangle in the area. The two active players stand back-to-back in the center of the area with a ball trapped between their lower backs. At a signal from the coach, they allow the ball to hit the ground and then play, with the purpose of winning the ball and dribbling through any of the three goals. Once a player has dribbled through a goal, play stops and the next pair enters the triangle. Encourage players to change speeds and directions when they have the ball and to utilize the moves outlined above to create space. Players earn a point each time they win a duel. Play for ten minutes.

3 vs. 3 to cone goals - 20x20 yard fields

Play 3 vs. 3 to small cone goals. Encourage players to try the moves trained in the course of the session and also to utilize different surfaces and speeds in possession.

Training Session #2: Comfort on the ball.

Introduction: This is the second of the sessions which are designed around fun and learning confidence on the ball. This practice reviews the foundation touches introduced in the first session and also provides a series of fun games that introduce a bit of pressure into the notion of single player possession.



Dribbling Races around a grid - 12x12 yard grid

Put players in pairs and each person has a ball. Assign a cone to each of the pairs, and have one player (the resting player) place her ball on top of the cone. The resting players step back so that they are three yards away from the cone. The active players start next to their team's cone with a ball. Explain that the goal of the game is to dribble around the perimeter of the grid and upon arriving back at their team's cone, use their soccer ball to knock their partner's ball off of the cone. All players dribble in the same direction. The first player to dribble all of the way around the grid and then knock the ball off of the cone wins, earning a point for their team.

Players then change roles.

Variations:

- dribble in the opposite direction.

- at each corner, the dribbling player must tap the ball around the inside of the standing ball/cone belonging to each of the other teams and then run around the outside of the cone to catch up with their ball. Run this race in both directions as well.

Foundation - 15x15 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players find space in the grid. This series of touches and dribbling exercises is designed to give players intensive touch work with both feet and all surfaces. Each stationary exercise should be performed for twenty seconds and each moving exercise should be performed for thirty seconds. If players begin to master the exercises, encourage them to work at maximum speed and to get their eyes up off of their ball as they work. Although the sequence appears lengthy here in print, the foundation touches and dribbling only require about five minutes to complete and should become a regular feature of training at this age level.

- dribble in place. Players push the ball back-and-forth between the balls of their feet, with the focus being on both consistent and quick touches.
- no-touch dribbling. Players dribble around the area with the goal of moving quickly, but also avoiding any contact with other players or their soccer balls.
- touches on top of the ball. Players work on the balls of their feet, alternating the foot that they use to tap on top of the ball. Encourage players to make light, consistent taps and to avoid moving the ball.
- inside/outside dribbling. Players use a single foot (left for fifteen seconds and then right for fifteen seconds) to dribble around the area. Require players to alternate between the inside and outside of the foot with each touch. Another useful tip here is for players to push the ball in a zig-zag fashion, emphasizing side-to-side movement (as opposed to forward) of both the ball and their bodies.
- pendulum dribbling. Players dribble in place, in the process trying to reach their legs and feet out as far to each side as possible while still working to keep control. This exercise increases both touch and agility.
- one-touch per step dribbling. Players dribble around the area, taking one touch for each step as they move. It is easiest to start by dribbling in place for a few seconds and then push into the dribbling movement.
- laces. Players stand on one foot and tap the ball forward using their laces to contact the ball. As the ball moves forward, the player uses the bottom of the tapping foot to step on the ball and pull it back. Be sure to encourage players to lock the ankle on the tapping foot and to point their toes toward the ground to ensure that they get contact with their laces with each touch.
- change of speed dribbling. Players change speed with every fourth touch of the ball. Encourage players to sharply alter their speed, getting accustomed to both dribbling at high and then lower speeds.
- triangles. Players place the ball in front of one foot. Using the bottom surface of that foot, they pull the ball back and control the ball with the inside of the same foot. Then they tap the ball across to the inside of the other foot. Finally, the ball is passed back to the starting point and the sequence continues. Change the starting foot after twenty seconds.
- change of surface dribbling. Players dribble, changing surface with every touch. Explain that players can use the inside, the outside, the bottom and the laces surfaces of each foot.
- roll and step. Players place the ball inside of the right foot. Using the inside surface to keep pressure on the ball, players then drag the right foot over the ball, pulling the ball across their bodies. The ball is then released to travel across the front of the body as the player's right foot crosses over in front of the standing foot. Finally, the player moves to the left and stops the ball

with the inside of the left foot. Then the sequence continues in the opposite direction, beginning with the left foot learning to roll the ball.

- change of speed and surface dribbling. Here players learn to mix surfaces and speeds. Encourage the players to be creative and to use the entire range of foundation touches.

Awareness dribbling - 15x15 yard grid

Each player has a ball. Players dribble around the area with the following progressive restrictions.

- players point to open space and then dribble there as quickly as they can. Play for two minutes.
- players attempt to place the ball on the outside of the foot farthest away from another player as they get close to any of their teammates in the grid. Explain that this restriction is designed to put the ball where it will be difficult for an opponent to reach and tackle. Play for one minute.
- combine the two restrictions, asking players to put the ball on the away foot and then point to and dribble to open space.

Awareness tag dribbling - 15x15 yard grid

Each player has a ball. The goal of the exercise is to dribble around and tag other players on their backs. The only way the tag counts, however, is if the target player does not call out the color of the tagging player's shirt before the tag is applied. Thus, this game will improve both dribbling skills and also awareness, as the players must pay careful attention to the space around them if they are to be successful. Play for two minutes and then check scores.

Knockout - 15x15 yard grid

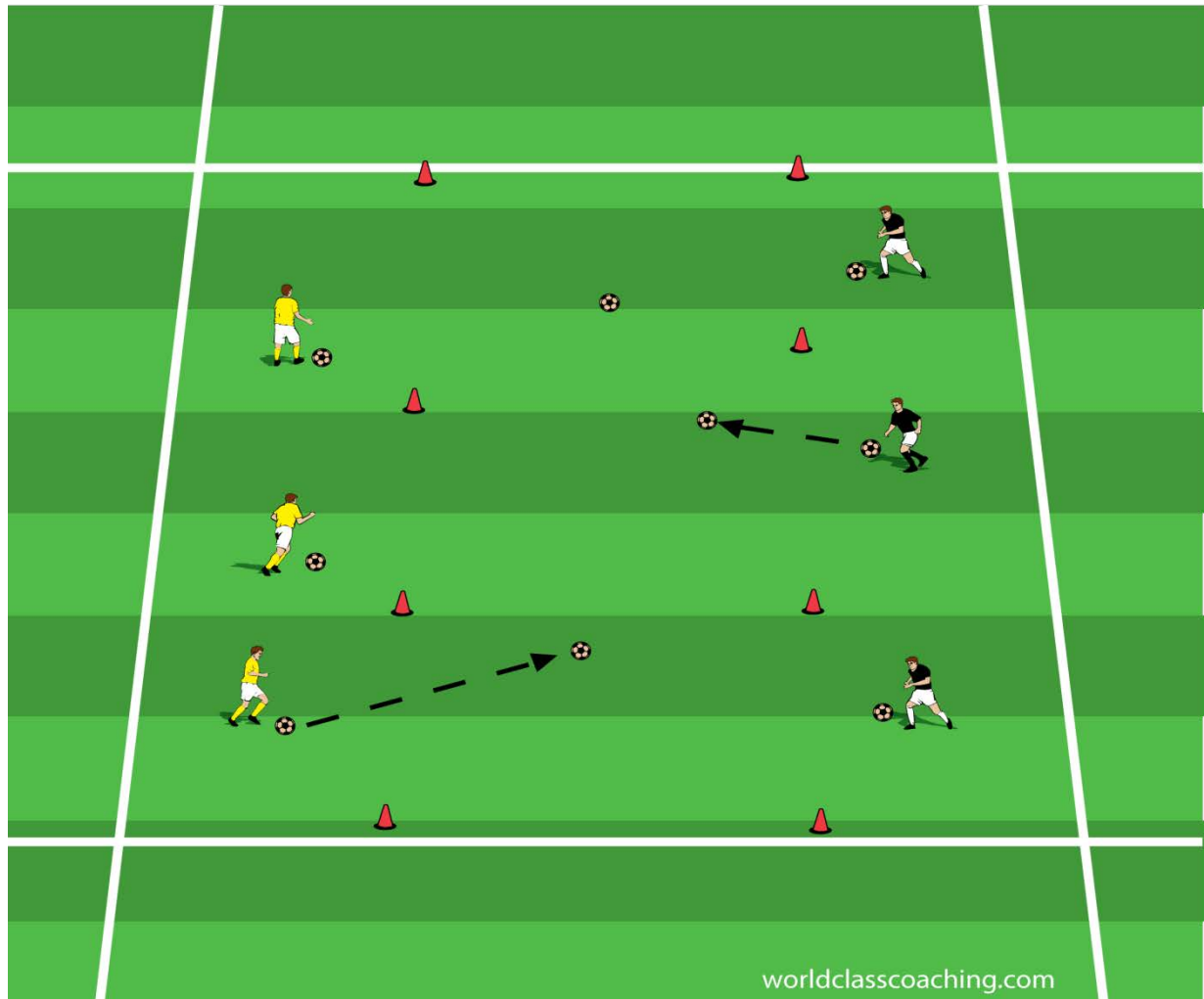
This is a fun and challenging game that builds upon the awareness and shield-ing skills introduced in this session. Each player has a ball. Players dribble around the grid, protecting their ball and attempting to knock any of the other players' balls out of the grid area. If their ball gets knocked out, the player must run after and retrieve their ball. Then they complete ten stationary dribbling touches and they are allowed to return to play (no elimination!). Play for three minutes.

3 vs. 3 to cone goals - 20x20 yard fields

Play 3 vs. 3 to small cone goals. Encourage players to try the moves trained in the course of the session and also to utilize different surfaces and speeds in possession.

Training Session #3: Passing and receiving.

Introduction: Session #3 is the first of two consecutive sessions designed to introduce passing and receiving the ball. In addition to a base progression for teaching passing and receiving, the session also features several fun games that focus on passing the ball for accuracy. Coaches should pay careful attention to the technical details involved in each skill, as the habits formed in these exercises will serve players for the duration of their playing years.



Cue ball - 22x20 yard area

Place two distinctively-colored balls in the middle of the central grid. Divide the players into two teams and put each team in an end grid. Each player has a ball. Explain that the goal of the game is to pass one's soccer ball in an attempt to hit the target balls, knocking them into the opponents' end grid. Players must pass from their own zone and may only leave their zone to retrieve a ball. Players may use any ball. Players may use their pass defensively to strike a ball that is rolling toward their zone. If a target ball rolls into their zone, the defending team picks up the ball and runs it back to the middle of

the central grid and play continues. Play for five minutes, using the time to assess players' passing ability.

Pairs passing and receiving - 20x20 yard area

Line players up in pairs with one soccer ball along a line on the field. One player stands on the line while her partner stands four yards away and facing her.

First, review the key technical points for short passing:

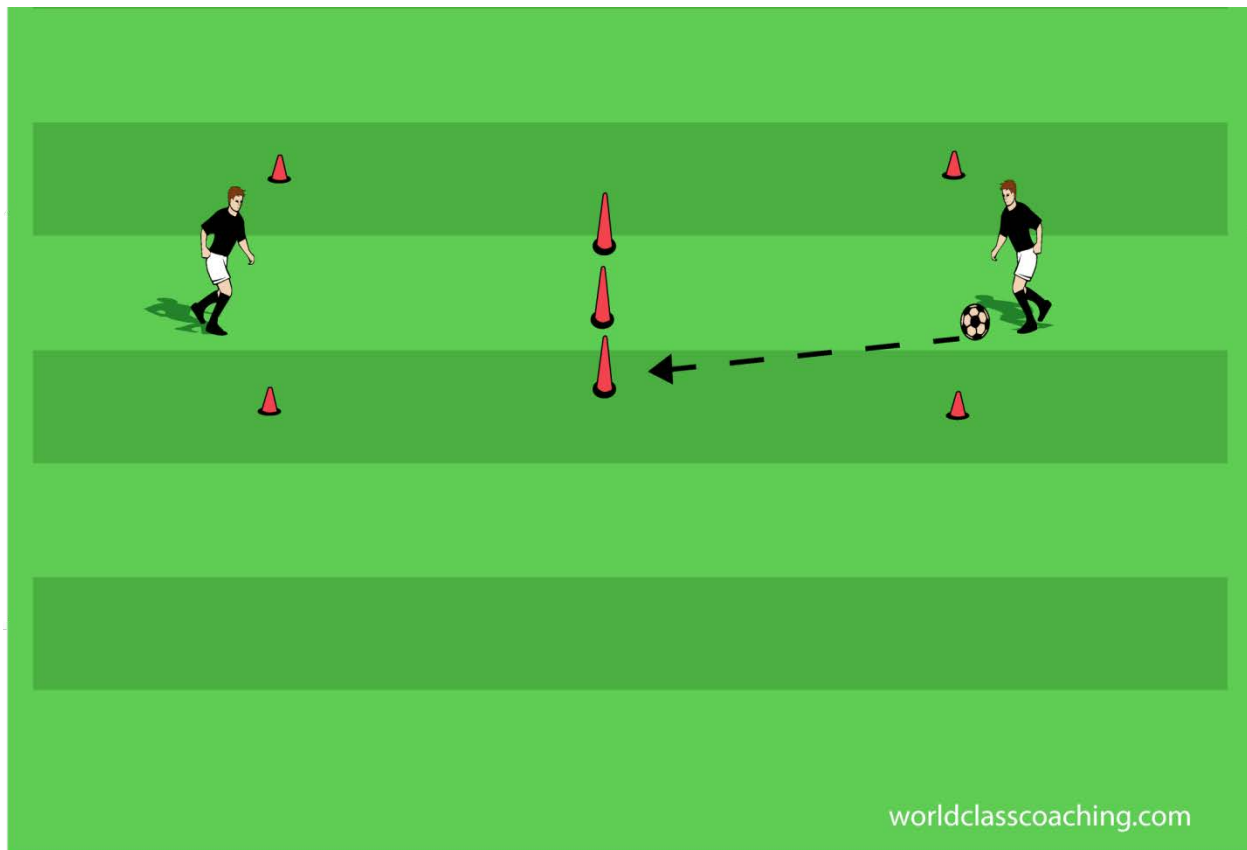
- find a comfortable, yet locked position for the knee and ankle of the passing foot before striking the ball (i.e. use the hip as the point of rotation). This creates both power and consistency.
- the plant foot should face the target. This allows for more fluid motion and also more accurate passing.
- the striking surface is the long inside of the foot. The toes should be slightly elevated and the heel is lowered. This posture creates a better controlling surface.
- the striking point on the ball is the center back. Players should diagnose the missed strikes by watching the path and spin of the ball. If the ball hops off the ground, the striking point is too low. If the ball skids unevenly along the ground, then the player topped the ball, striking too high. Similarly, side spin on the ball indicates that the player struck inside or outside of center on the back of the ball.
- the follow-through is a critical component of accurate passing. Players must learn in this isolated technical work to "hold" their foot at the very end of the strike on the follow through. This hold reinforces a proper striking form and also the idea of following through with an eye toward pointing the striking foot at the target.

Players pass and receive with a focus on proper striking of the ball. Insist that players alternate the foot they use to pass the ball. Play for one minute. At this early point in the progression, encourage the players to stop the ball as they receive so that they are striking a standing ball.

Now review the key technical cues for receiving. It is useful to look at receiving as being the reverse of passing.

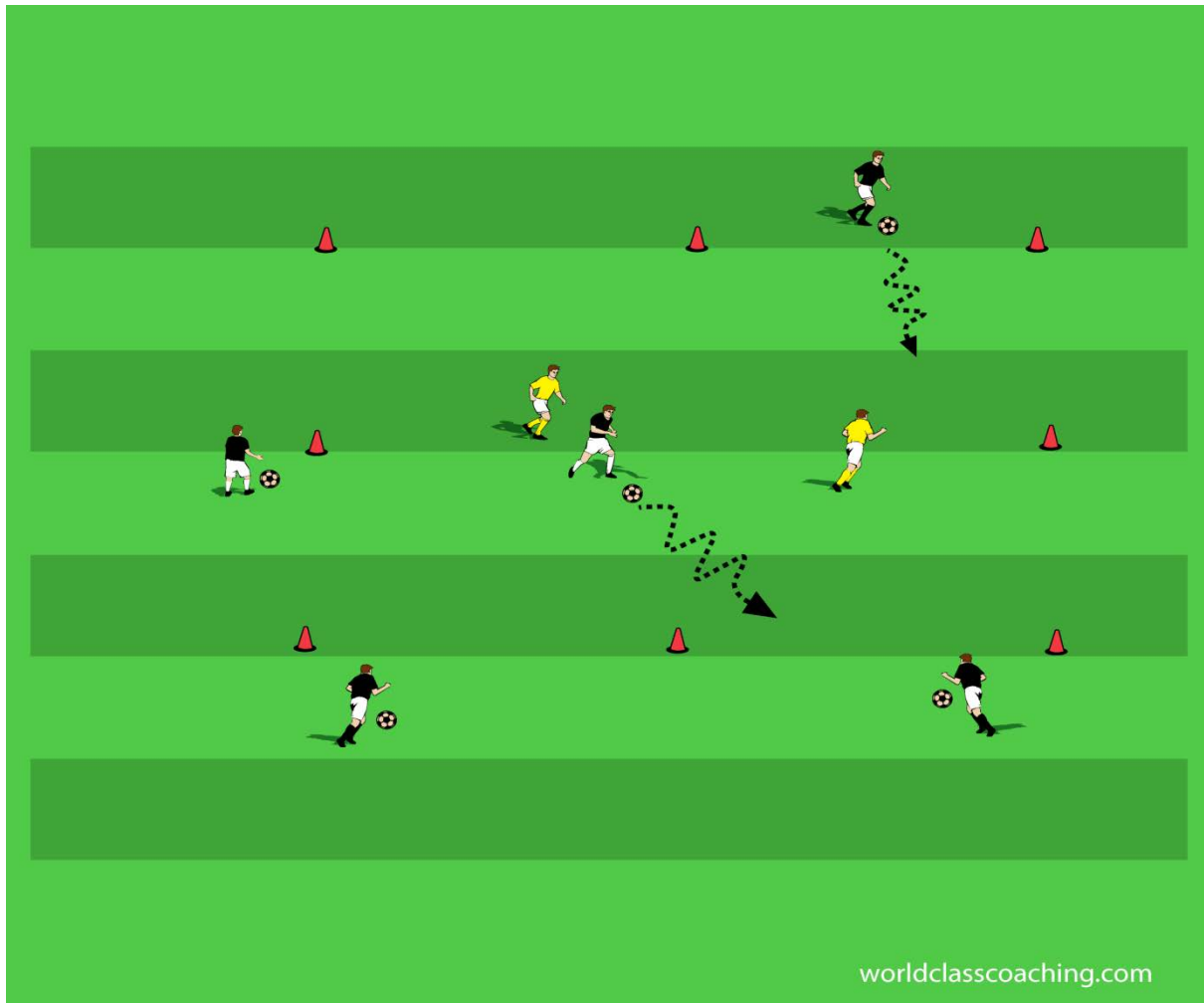
- as in passing, the ankle and knee are locked, although suppleness in receiving requires a softer posture than striking. The hips and shoulders must be "open" (facing) the ball as it arrives.
- begin with the follow-through used to strike the ball in passing. Here, one presents one's foot in front of the body to "welcome" the ball.
- once again, the receiving foot must be presented as a low heel and elevated toes to allow for a surface that will prevent the ball from bouncing.
- as the ball is received, players must learn to cushion it and take speed out of the ball without actually stopping it (see cue #5).
- in good soccer, it is said, the ball never stops. Ideally, the ball must be prepared for release in a single touch. If players stop the ball between their feet, they will need two more touches to release the ball, allowing defenders time to close and tackle. Therefore, players must learn to use their first touch to push the ball forward and outside of their hips and shoulders so that the next touch can be a pass if needed. This is done by sharply turning the hips in particular at the moment of reception. This change of angle allows players to avoid pressure and eventually prepare the ball in the direction they are planning to play.

Players return to passing with their partner. Observe their ability to maintain good technical form in both passing and receiving. Play for two minutes, emphasizing that all players need to alternate the foot they use both for passing and receiving.



Bowling! - 5x14 yard grids

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball. This activity is a very useful way to get players to focus on accuracy and quality in their passing. Place three tall cones at the center of each grid (“alley”). Players stand on either end of the alley. They alternate passing the ball to each other, attempting to knock down the cones. If one player knocks down two cones, they win the game and they stand up the cones and play resumes. Adjust the length of the alley to be both challenging and also to assure success for each pair. Play for three minutes and then compel the players to play with their off foot. After playing one round, players change partners and play again.



Alligator Alley - 5x20 yard area

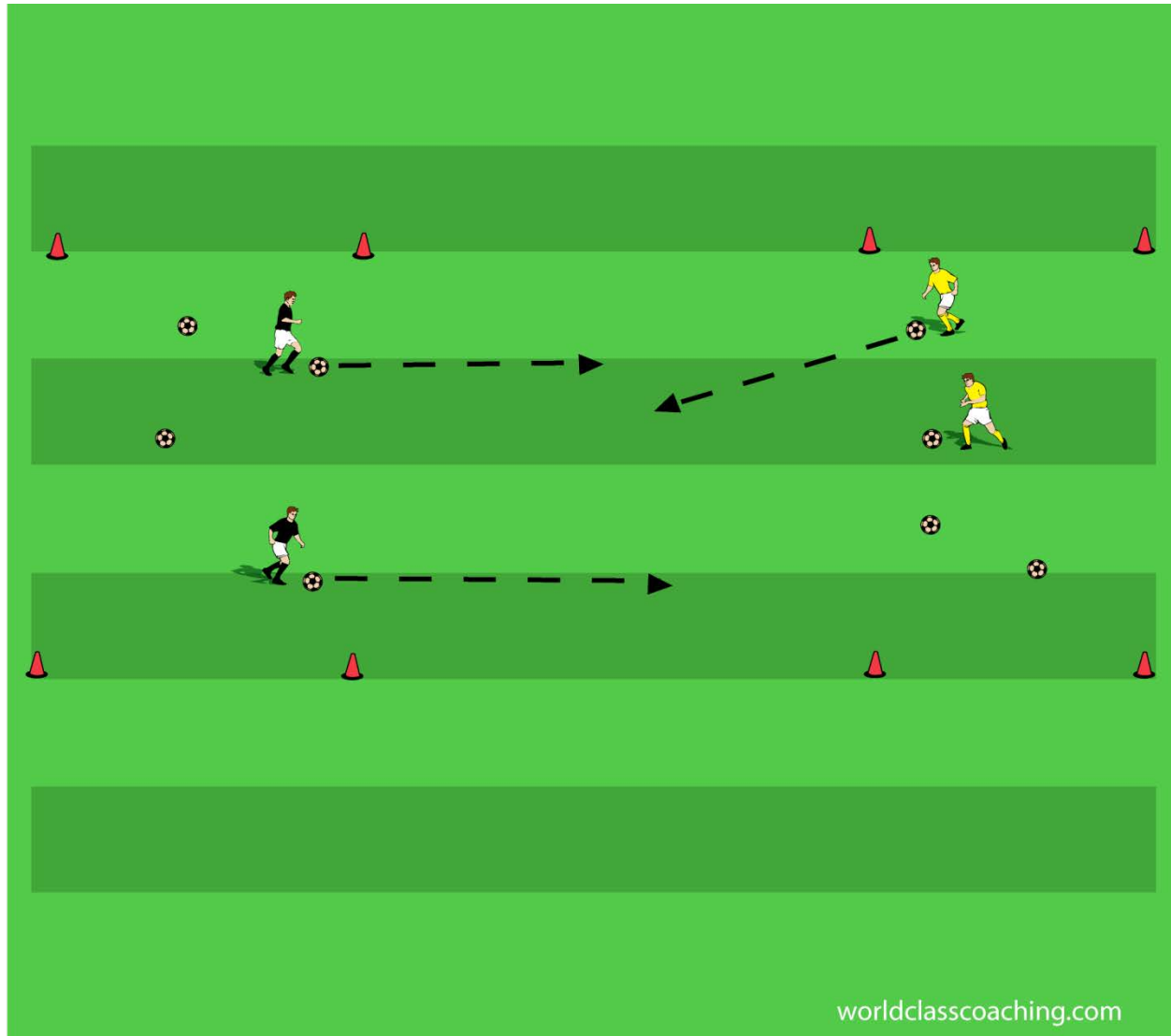
Select 2-3 players to serve as “alligators.” These players stand (without soccer balls) in the long, narrow grid. Explain that the alligators may not leave the “alley” during the game, and they each earn a point for each pass they intercept in the course of play. Give ½ of the remaining players soccer balls and place half of the players outside of each of the long sides of the alley. The players on the outside attempt to pass the ball across the alley to any player on the other side. They earn a point for every successful pass they make across the alley. There is no penalty for a pass intercepted by the alligators. When the alligators pick off a pass, they step on the ball to verify possession and then return the ball to any player on the outside. Outside players can enter the grid to retrieve a ball (and prevent the alligators from establishing possession) but only receive points for passes played from the perimeter. Play for three minutes and then rotate the alligators, playing sufficient rounds of the game to allow all players to serve in the alley. Players keep their score throughout the games. Compare scores at the end of the exercise.

3 vs. 3 scrimmages - 20x20 yard areas

Play a standard 3 vs. 3 scrimmage to small cone goals. Require a pass each time a team gains possession before a goal can be scored. After five minutes, remove the restriction and allow open play, still complimenting the players when they make a good pass.

Training Session #4: Passing and receiving.

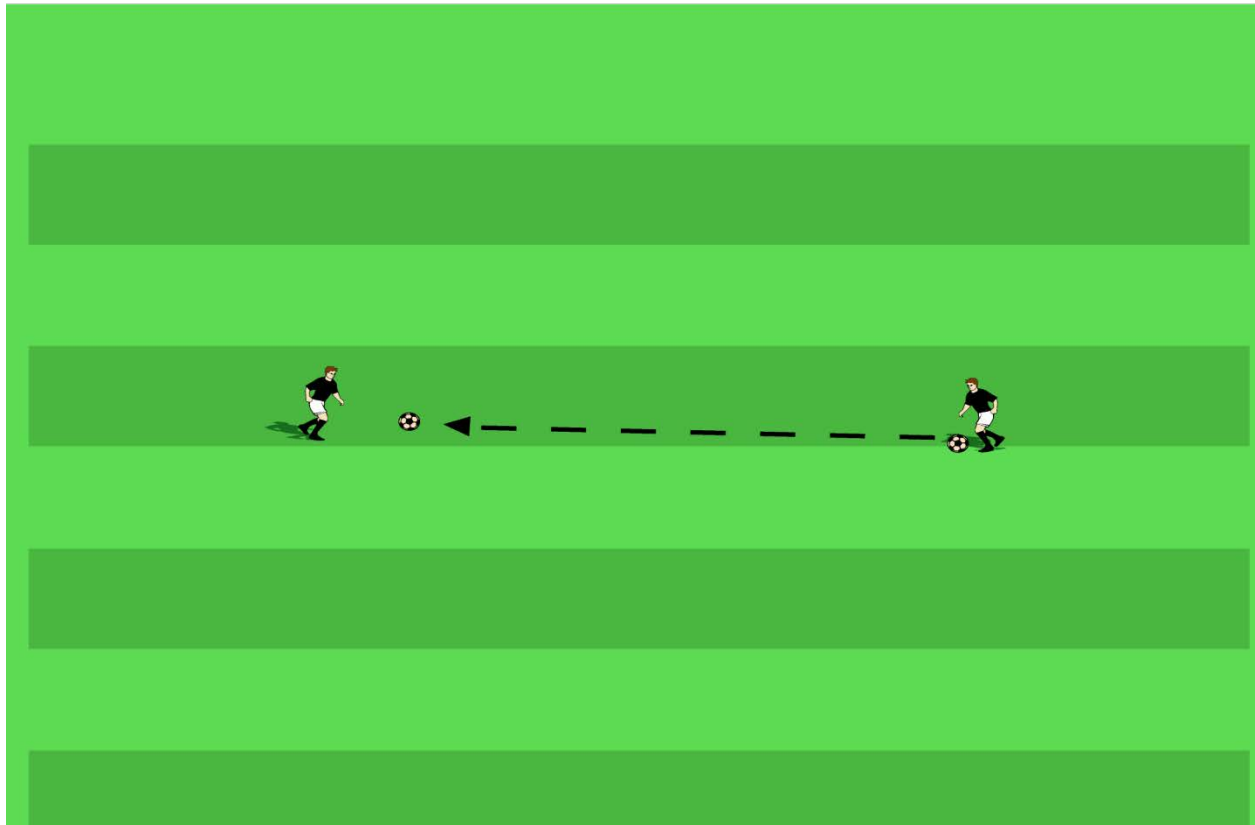
Introduction: This is the second of the two sessions designed to introduce passing and receiving to young players. In addition to reviewing the basic foundation of technical passing and receiving, this session introduces fun games that continue to challenge players to be accurate and also to think about the weight of their pass. Finally, this practice also introduces a tactical element (3 vs. 1 passing) that compels players to begin to think about the decisions they make with every pass and also how to run off of the ball to receive a pass.



Keep your yard clean - ½ field

Divide the area in half with a cone line. Each player has a ball. Create two equal teams and put one team in each half of the area. Explain that the purpose of the game is to keep as many balls as possible in the other team's area. Thus the two teams work to pass balls out of their area and into their opponents' area. Play for two minutes and then check the score. Then instruct players to think about

the importance of passing the ball to areas where there are no opponents and/or where it will be difficult to play a speedy return pass. Play a second game for two minutes and check scores.



Marbles - ½ field

Players work in pairs. Each player has a soccer ball. Demonstrate with one pair. Players start ten yards apart. One partner passes her ball in an effort to hit her partner's ball. If she is unsuccessful, her partner passes her ball with the same intent once the first pass has rolled to a stop. When a player is successful in striking their partner's ball, the two players re-create the ten yard distance and play is restarted. Players continue to alternate passing turns for five minutes, earning a point with each successful strike.

Check scores at the conclusion of the exercise.

Pairs passing and receiving 20x20 yard area Line players up in pairs with one soccer ball along a line on the field. One player stands on the line while her partner stands four yards away and facing her.

First, review the key technical points for short passing:

- find a comfortable, yet locked position for the knee and ankle of the passing foot before striking the ball (i.e. use the hip as the point of rotation). This creates both power and consistency.
- the plant foot should face the target. This allows for more fluid motion and also more accurate passing.
- the striking surface is the long inside of the foot. The toes should be slightly elevated and the heel is lowered. This posture creates a better controlling surface.

- the striking point on the ball is the center back. Players should diagnose the missed strikes by watching the path and spin of the ball. If the ball hops off the ground, the striking point is too low. If the ball skids unevenly along the ground, then the player topped the ball, striking too high. Similarly, side spin on the ball indicates that the player struck inside or outside of center on the back of the ball.
- the follow-through is a critical component of accurate passing. Players must learn in this isolated technical work to “hold” their foot at the very end of the strike on the follow through. This hold reinforces a proper striking form and also the idea of following through with an eye toward pointing the striking foot at the target.

Players pass and receive with a focus on proper striking of the ball. Insist that players alternate the foot they use to pass the ball. Play for one minute. At this early point in the progression, encourage the players to stop the ball as they receive so that they are striking a standing ball.

Now review the key technical cues for receiving. It is useful to look at receiving as being the reverse of passing.

- as in passing, the ankle and knee are locked, although suppleness in receiving requires a softer posture than striking. The hips and shoulders must be “open” (facing) the ball as it arrives.
- begin with the follow-through used to strike the ball in passing. Here, one presents one’s foot in front of the body to “welcome” the ball.
- once again, the receiving foot must be presented as a low heel and elevated toes to allow for a surface that will prevent the ball from bouncing.
- as the ball is received, players must learn to cushion it and take speed out of the ball without actually stopping it (see cue #5).
- in good soccer, it is said, the ball never stops. Ideally, the ball must be prepared for release in a single touch. If players stop the ball between their feet, they will need two more touches to release the ball, allowing defenders time to close and tackle. Therefore, players must learn to use their first touch to push the ball forward and outside of their hips and shoulders so that the next touch can be a pass if needed. This is done by sharply turning the hips in particular at the moment of reception. This change of angle allows players to avoid pressure and eventually prepare the ball in the direction they are planning to play.

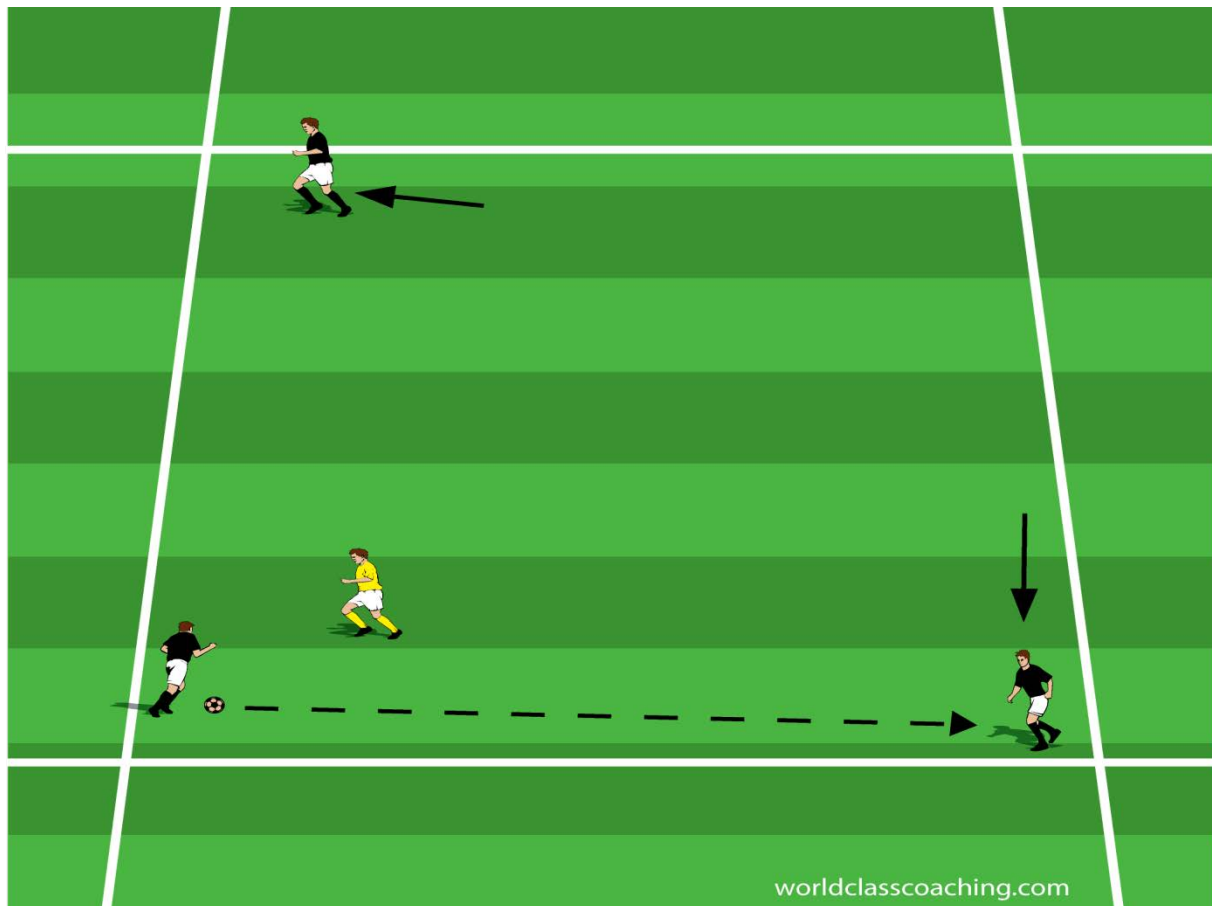
Players return to passing with their partner. Observe their ability to maintain good technical form in both passing and receiving. Play for two minutes, emphasizing that all players need to alternate the foot they use both for passing and receiving.

Two-touch contest - Touchline area

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball. One player stands just outside the touchline and her partner stands on the other side of a cone line laid four yards inside the touchline. The pairs work on two-touch passing for thirty seconds. For less experienced players, they may stop the ball with their first touch and pass with their second touch. For more advanced training, the players should focus on receiving the ball with the inside of one foot (the ball is kept moving) and playing the ball across the body with the first touch to play a pass with the other foot on their second touch. Once the pairs develop some rhythm, stop the exercise and initiate a contest. The pairs count their passes for thirty seconds and check scores.

One-touch contest - Touchline area.

The set-up and sequence are the same as above, except that players play with one touch when possible. Players must alternate the playing foot with each touch.



3v1 passing in a grid - 12x12 yard grids

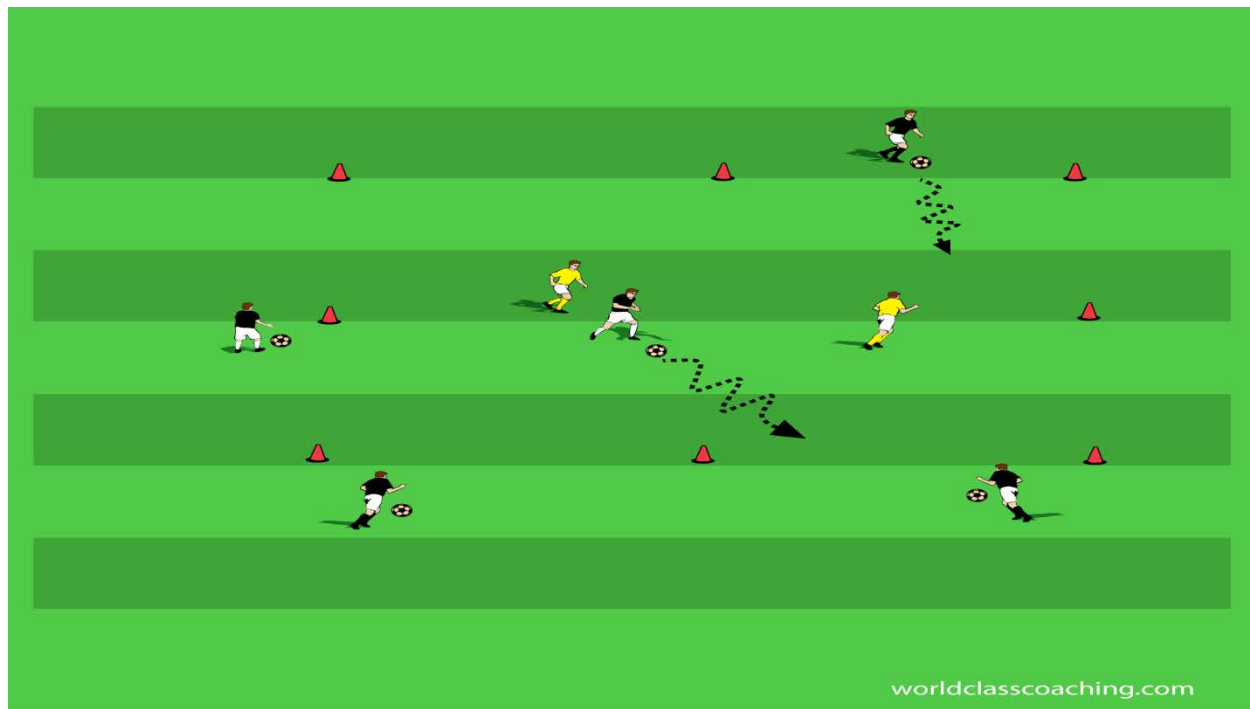
Build grids so that there are enough to place groups of four with one soccer ball. Start with players on three of the corner cones and one player, the defender, in the middle. Demonstrate with one group. Explain that in this environment, players must pass only to the corner cones and that all passes must travel along the perimeter of the grid. Similarly, the attackers may only move along the perimeter of the grid. The defender may move freely within the area of the grid. Start the ball in a corner with one of the attackers. Show that the attacker must always have two passing options available by moving the attackers not in possession to the adjacent corners of the grid. Begin the exercise by having the defender work at $\frac{1}{2}$ speed so that the attackers get a rhythm and lots of repetition. If the defender wins the ball, have her return it to any of the attacking players. Rotate the defender every minute. After every player has taken a turn at the defender role, play through again, this time with the defender playing full speed after the first pass. Once again, if the defender wins the ball, she should return it to one of the perimeter players to restart play. This exercise is useful both to give some technical pressure to both passing and receiving, and also to begin the tactical building blocks of movement off of the ball and creating useful passing angles.

3v3 game to cone goals - 20x25 yard fields

Play 3v3 games. For the first five minutes require teams in possession to complete two consecutive passes before they can score. Then remove the restriction and let the players play.

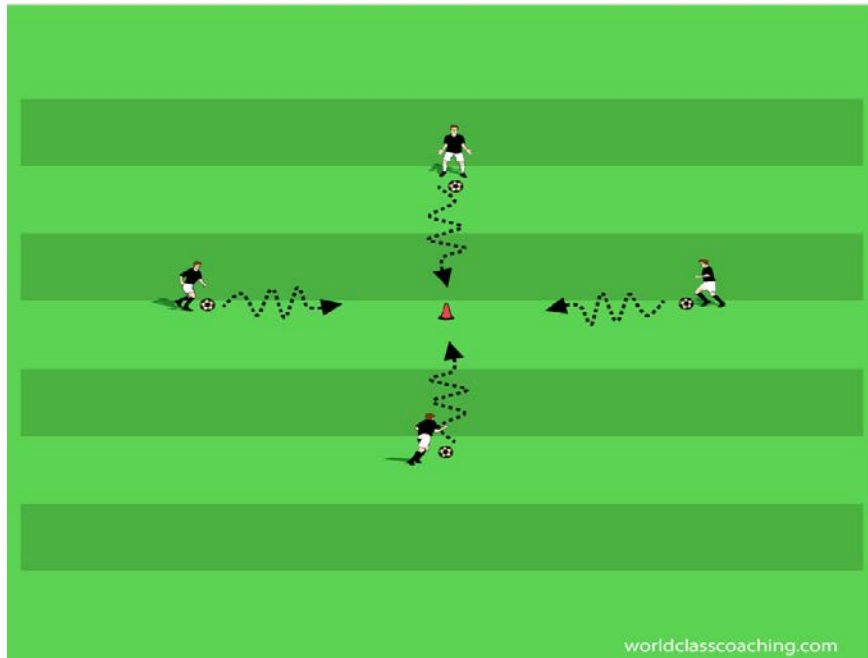
Training Session #5: Individual Attacking.

Introduction: Session#5 challenges players to begin to think about dueling with another player to gain a better position on the field. Through the introduction of basic moves to beat opponents and release pressure, and the use of several environments that encourage players to take on an opponent, players will learn to understand the dynamics of using moves and changes of speed and direction under pressure to defeat a single opponent.



Alligator Alley - 20x20 grid

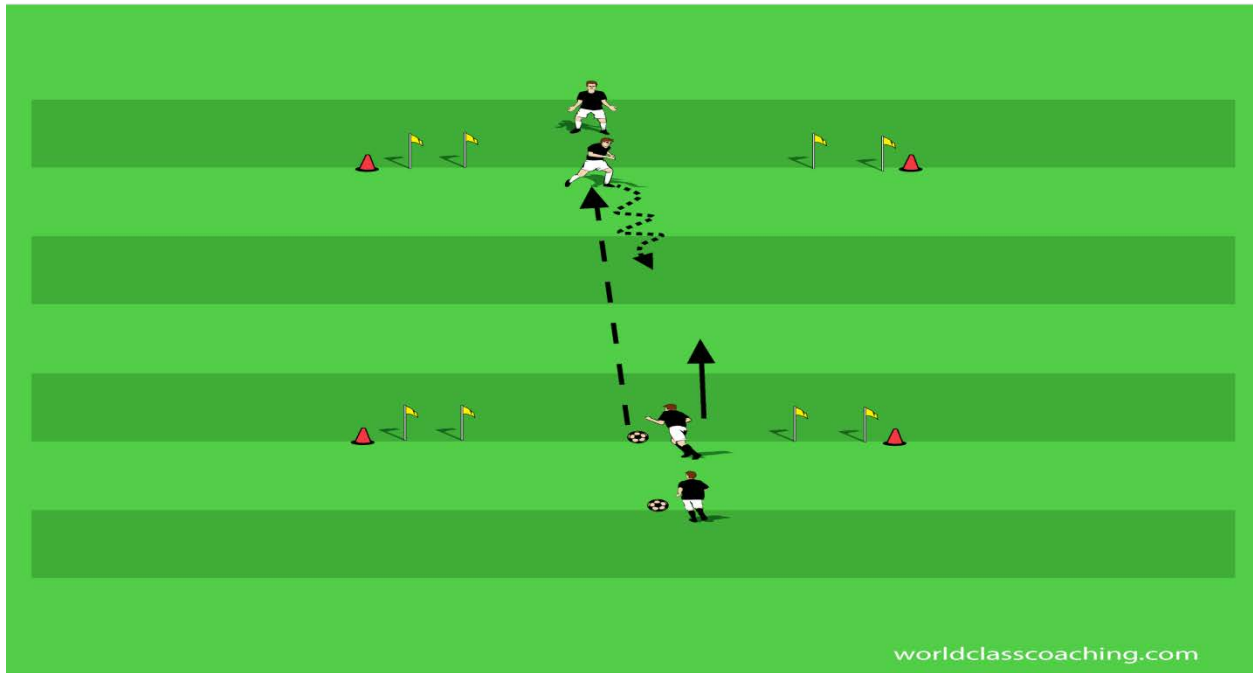
This is a fun warm-up game used to get players focused on 1v1 play. Select three “alligators” who enter the smaller, central grid (see diagram). These players do not have soccer balls. Explain that the central grid is the “alley” and that the alligators are confined to this space. The rest of the players each have a ball and they spread out around the perimeter of the central grid. The object of the game for the players with balls is to dribble across the alley as many times as possible without losing their ball to the alligators. Players earn one point for dribbling across the narrow length of the grid and three points for dribbling the longer length of the grid (see diagram). The alligators earn one point for each ball they kick out the grid. Players who lose their ball in the alley are not eliminated. They must sprint to get their ball and try again. Play for two minutes and then check scores. Ask players what the attackers have to do well to be successful in this game (see space; change directions and speeds; keep their ball close). Make the high scorers the new alligators and play a second game.



Cut Circles - ¼ field

Put players in groups of 4-6. Each player has a ball and they form a circle, each player facing toward the center of the circle. Appoint a leader for each group. The leader makes sure that all players have returned to their starting point before restarting the exercise. Players dribble (all at once) toward the center of the circle and then perform the moves outlined below before returning to their starting point. Each time the players perform the moves, they should alternate the foot that they use. Emphasize close control of the ball and a sharp change in speed after players perform the moves.

- inside of the foot cuts. The player dribbles to the cut point, turns her hips and shoulders and takes the ball with the inside of the lead foot, pulling the ball across the body and returning to the edge of the grid. Players need to bend their legs as they perform the move and accelerate after performing the cut. Players should alternate the foot they use to cut the ball and advanced players should check their space (by looking over their shoulder while dribbling in toward the cut point) to be sure that the space is clear for the move.
- outside of the foot cuts. The players dribble to the cut point and turn hips and shoulders as above. The player then reaches past the ball with their lead foot, and then takes the ball with the outside of the trailing foot. As with inside cuts, the players need to check their space before the cut and accelerate after the cut to clear tight space. The most common error with outside of the foot cuts is that players fail to reach the lead foot past the ball, creating an unstable platform for the cut and also limiting the potential for the fake that can be created through quick movement with the cut foot. Rotate the cut foot.
- pull-back. As above, the players dribble to the inner cone. This time, they remained facing the cone. A pull-back is executed by placing one foot on top of the ball (reach the toes forward and down to increase control) and pivoting, pulling the pull-back side hip and shoulder back with the ball and turning before dribbling back to the start point. A pull-back must be preceded by a check of the space behind the attacker on the way into the grid and a sharp change of speed after the move is completed. Alternate the foot used to perform the pull-back.



1v1 to 4 cone goals - 20x20 yard grid

The above move set is designed to be both simple to learn and also to give players a means to changing directions to create space. Often these moves do not eliminate opponents, but they allow a player to move in a new direction and reset their options. This game allows players to practice the move set under pressure, and the players will find that when followed by a sharp change of speed, the moves in this set can help them eliminate a single opponent as well.

Divide the team into two groups and line them up at opposite ends of the grid. Provide a ball supply for one group. The first player in line with a ball begins the duel by passing to the first player in line at the other end of the grid. The active players then duel with an eye toward dribbling the ball through either of the goals on their opponent's end line. The duel lasts as long as the ball stays in the grid, and players return to their group's line and play again. The availability of multiple goals should encourage the use of the moves set practiced above. Give each team a point for every goal scored. Play for five minutes and then switch the ball supply to the other team and play again.

Numbered duels - 20x20 yard grid

Split the group into two teams. Number each player so that there are identical numbers on each team. Place each team on an endline and create a cone goal on each end line as well. The coach is positioned at the side of the grid with a ball supply. When the coach calls a player's number and plays a ball into the grid, the duel begins. Players attempt to beat their opponent and score through the end line goal. Keep track of the score and encourage players to use the moves set outlined above to create an advantage in their attacking. The coach can expand the game by calling multiple numbers for each duel.

3v3 to cone goals - 30x25 yard fields

Play a small-sided scrimmage without restrictions. Place small cone goals on the endlines and encourage the players to continue to practice the move set introduced in the session.

Training Session #6: Individual Defending.

Introduction: This session introduces young players to basic defending concepts, including controlling an attacker through jockeying and also use of a block tackle to take the ball off of an attacker. The understanding of these concepts is then tested in dueling and playing environments. Encourage players to be both aggressive and technically-sound in their defending.

Knee tag - ¼ field

Players work in pairs (no soccer balls). This is a fun warm-up game that also highlights the posture and footwork essential to quality jockeying, a building block for defending. Partners stand arms' length away. Demonstrate with one group. Explain that the goal of the game is to tag one's partner on the knee as many times as possible during play. At the same time, one tries not to allow one's partner to tag her knees. Play for thirty seconds and then check scores and change partners.

Coaching cues for the second round:

- players must adopt a crouched stance.
- to be able to move quickly, keep the weight on the front half of one's feet.
- players should neither run away nor stand still, but rather constantly shift their feet to make it difficult for their partner to tag their knees.
- in the second and later rounds, compel players to alternate the knee that they tag on their partners. This restriction will create an advantage for players who adopt the closed stance that is central to proper jockeying.
- demonstrate the utility of faking to jump to tag, which will also be useful in duels for the ball.

Play four games, checking scores and changing partners with each restart.

Jockey - 20x20 yard grid

Begin a progression to introduce the basic concepts involved in individual defending.

Players work in pairs along the endline of the grid with one ball for two people. The attacker is on the endline with the defender two yards away and facing the ball and the attacker. Explain that the ultimate goal of the session is to create opportunities to win the ball back. Footwork is critical to setting up tackles. Jockeying is the footwork used to set up the tackle. The attacking player will dribble slowly across the grid allowing the defending player to practice drop-stepping to stay goal-side (that is, between the ball and the endline). Emphasize that the attacking player is not trying to beat the defender at this point and the defender may not tackle. Here are more concepts to introduce into this exercise as the players get comfortable.

- the defender must learn to only "show" one foot to the attacker. That is, the foot work here is staggered and a drop-step is employed to remain in good tackling position. This will help drive the attacker to one side and make play more predictable and also prevent the attacker from playing the ball between the defender's legs.

- the defender's attention must be on the ball. Most fakes used by attackers involve body swerves or foot movements that do not affect the path of the ball. Defenders must learn to focus on the ball.
- defenders should adopt a semi-crouched approach to the ball. Standing upright slows reaction time and the bent approach increases focus as well.
- can the defender channel the attacker to one side only? Attackers are taught to cross the defender by attacking their lead foot, so defenders work to contain the ball and player and avoid being crossed. If they do get crossed, defenders must learn to switch their footwork to try to contain the ball on the other side.
- finally, pay careful attention to the spacing between the attacker and the defender. This is the most critical concept in jockeying. If the defender gets too close, the attacker can touch the ball beyond the defender and win the duel. If the defender is too far away, the attacker can look up and assess options (i.e. not enough pressure is being applied). A balance must be maintained.

Block tackle - 20x20 yard grid

There are three types of tackle in soccer: Block, poke, and slide. Block tackling will be introduced here and slide tackling will be dealt with at a later date. Demonstrate using two players with a ball between them.

Here are the basic cues for block tackling:

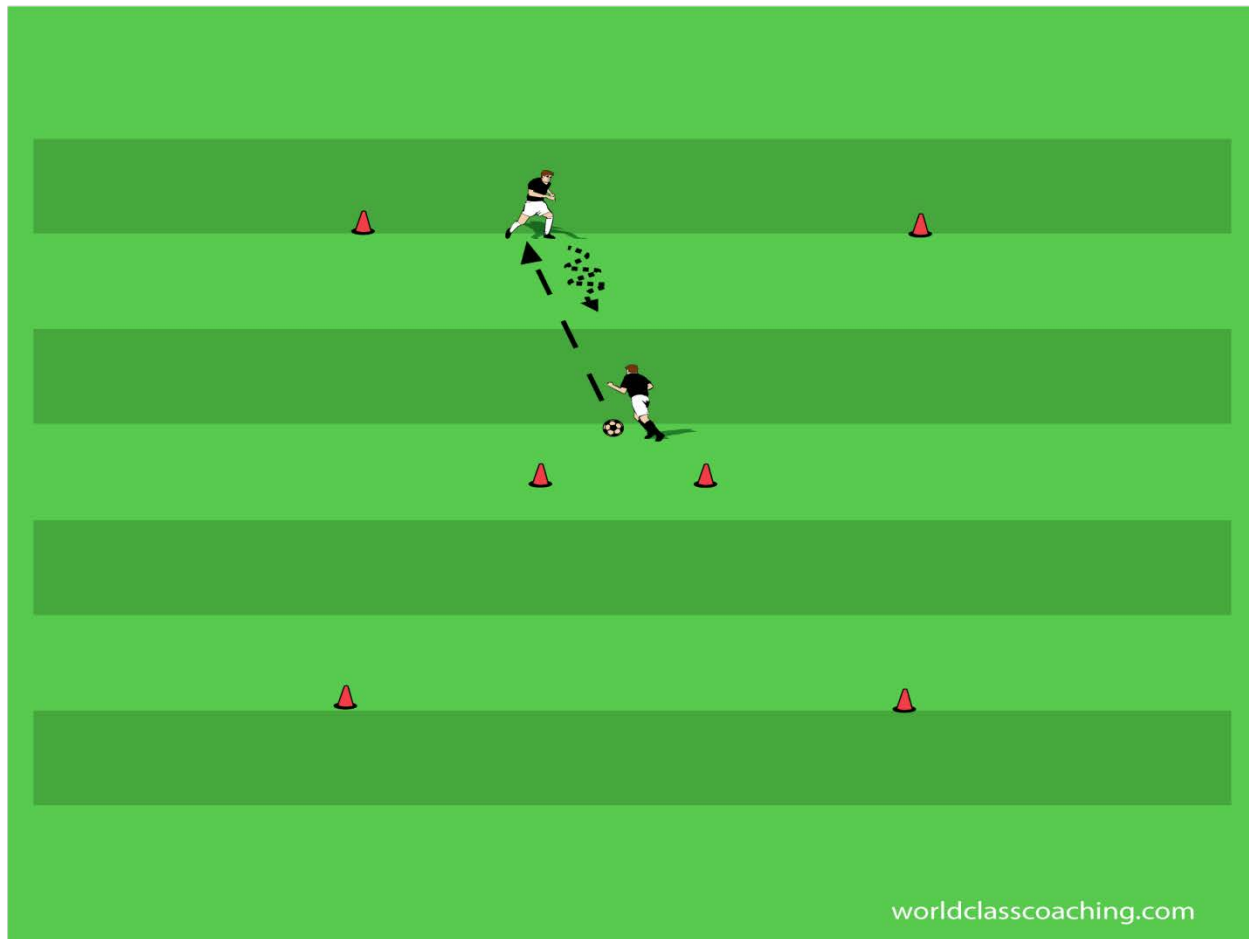
- this tackle is typically used in tight space where it is possible to catch the ball on the foot of the attacker. If the attacker is about to use her right foot to touch the ball, the defender must be faced up on the attacker and she should use her right foot to effect the tackle.
- the tackle is made by trapping the ball between the attacker's foot and the defender's foot. The ankle of the tackling players must be locked (both to control the ball and also to avoid injury). In addition, the surface used to tackle is the inside, long surface of the foot. The heel should be just above the ground and the front of the foot needs to be held higher. This will prevent the ball rolling over the tackling foot.
- the other cues for a sound tackle include: The distance between the tackling and standing foot should be smaller than the ball so that the ball cannot be pushed between the feet in the course of the tackle; the knee of the tackling foot should be pushed slightly forward. This will help trap the ball between the two feet of the tackler and the attacker and will prevent the ball from popping up in the air.
- the final instruction is to "stay in the tackle." The most common mistake in block tackling is that the defender walks through the tackle. It is critical that the tackler remain goal-side of both the attacker and the ball until the tackle is won.

Have players practice block tackling in pairs in a grid. The ball is placed between the players and one player says, "Go!". The players then work to take a plant step and tackle. There is a tendency to swing the tackling foot at the ball and make a popping sound. However, swinging at the ball can create timing problems and will make it hard to disguise the tackle. The tackler should make a sharp, but controlled stab at the ball. The pairs should train the right foot for a minute and then the left foot for a minute.

Controlled block tackle - 20x20 yard grid

Give one-half of the players a ball. Players with balls dribble around the grid and those without a ball practice block tackling. Each time, the player with the ball walks through the tackle, allowing the

defender to win the ball. Then the player who lost ball wins a ball off of another player. Play for two minutes, reminding players of the basic tenets of good tackling as outlined above.



1v1 to a central cone goal - 12x10 yard grids

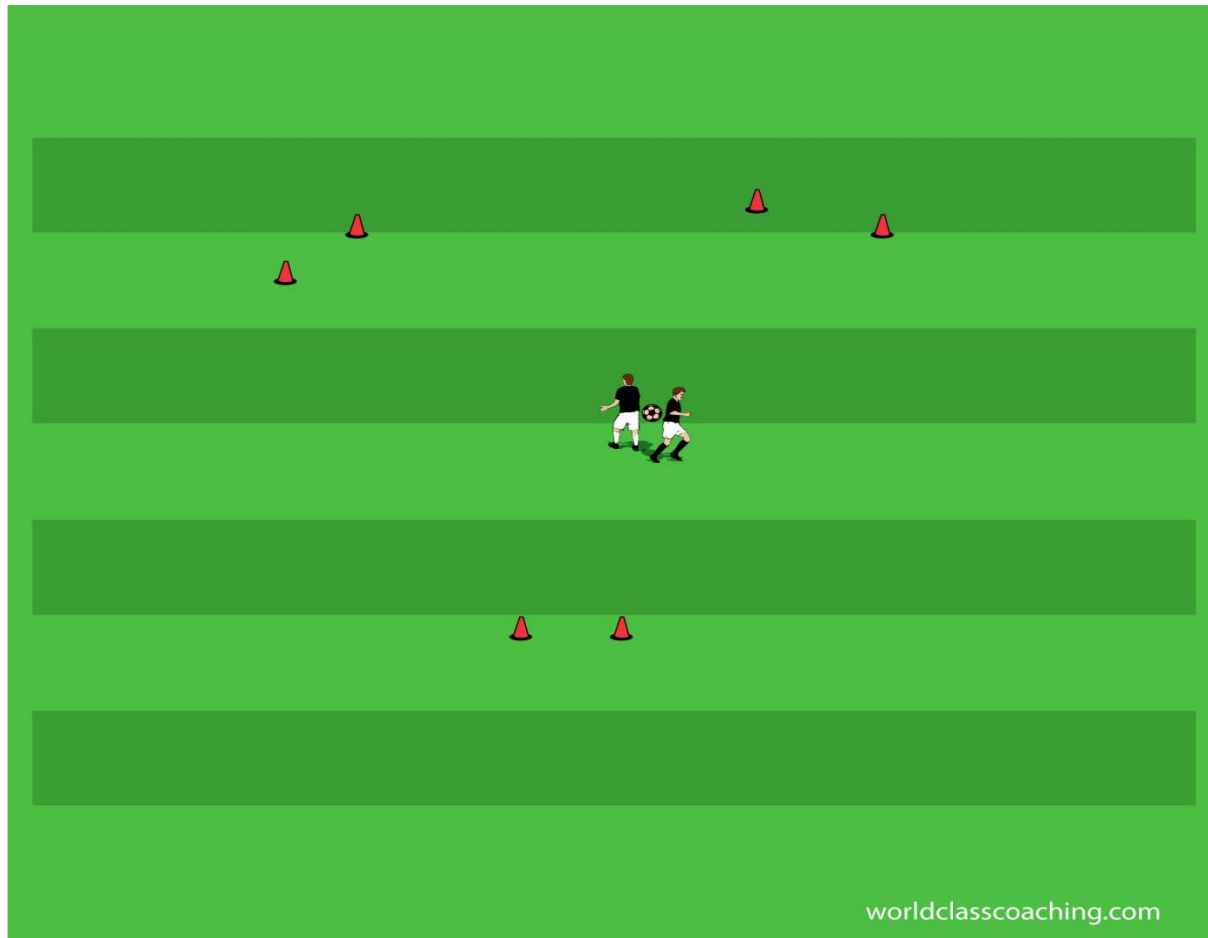
Players work in pairs in 10x10 yard grids with a 2-yard central cone goal. Demonstrate with one pair. The attacking player starts on any part of the perimeter of the grid. She may score by dribbling through the central goal from either direction. Show the defender how to work to remain *goal-side* (between the attacker and the goal) of the attacker at all times and then remind the defender that her goal is to jockey and then block tackle the attacker. If the attacker scores, she give the ball to her partner, who restarts play from the perimeter. If the defender wins the ball, she must dribble to the perimeter then roles change and play restarts. Play for three minutes and then check scores. Assign new partners/grids and play a second and third round.

3v3 to goals - 20x25 yard fields

Play a standard 3v3 game to cone goals. Reinforce strong individual defending by awarding a point for a strong tackle and two points for a goal. After five minutes, just award a point for a goal and let the players play.

Training Session #7: Individual Defending

Introduction: Session#7 in the U9-U10 curriculum continues the theme of introducing and refining individual defending concepts. This session features the introduction of the poke tackle and a series of fun 1v1 environments in which players learn to control the attackers' options and set up the tackle.



1v1 to 3 cone goals - 15x15 yard areas

Players work in pairs with three small cone goals set up in a triangular shape around the area. Two players stand back-to-back in the center of the area. Instruct the players to pin a ball between their lower backs and to wait for a signal from the coach. At the signal, the players step away, allowing the ball to drop and then they try to win the ball and dribble it through one of the goals. Then the next players step in and the cycle continues. Players earn a point for each duel they win. Arrange the game so that players get to duel against different opponents each time. After playing for five minutes, check scores and then alter the rules to require players to dribble through two separate goals in a turn to win a point. In other words, if player X wins the ball and dribbles through a goal but then gets stripped by player Z and Z dribbles through a goal, then the next player to dribble through a goal (assuming they have not dribbled through that goal in this duel) wins the point. Play for five minutes and check scores again. This is a fun and competitive way to start a session on 1v1 play.

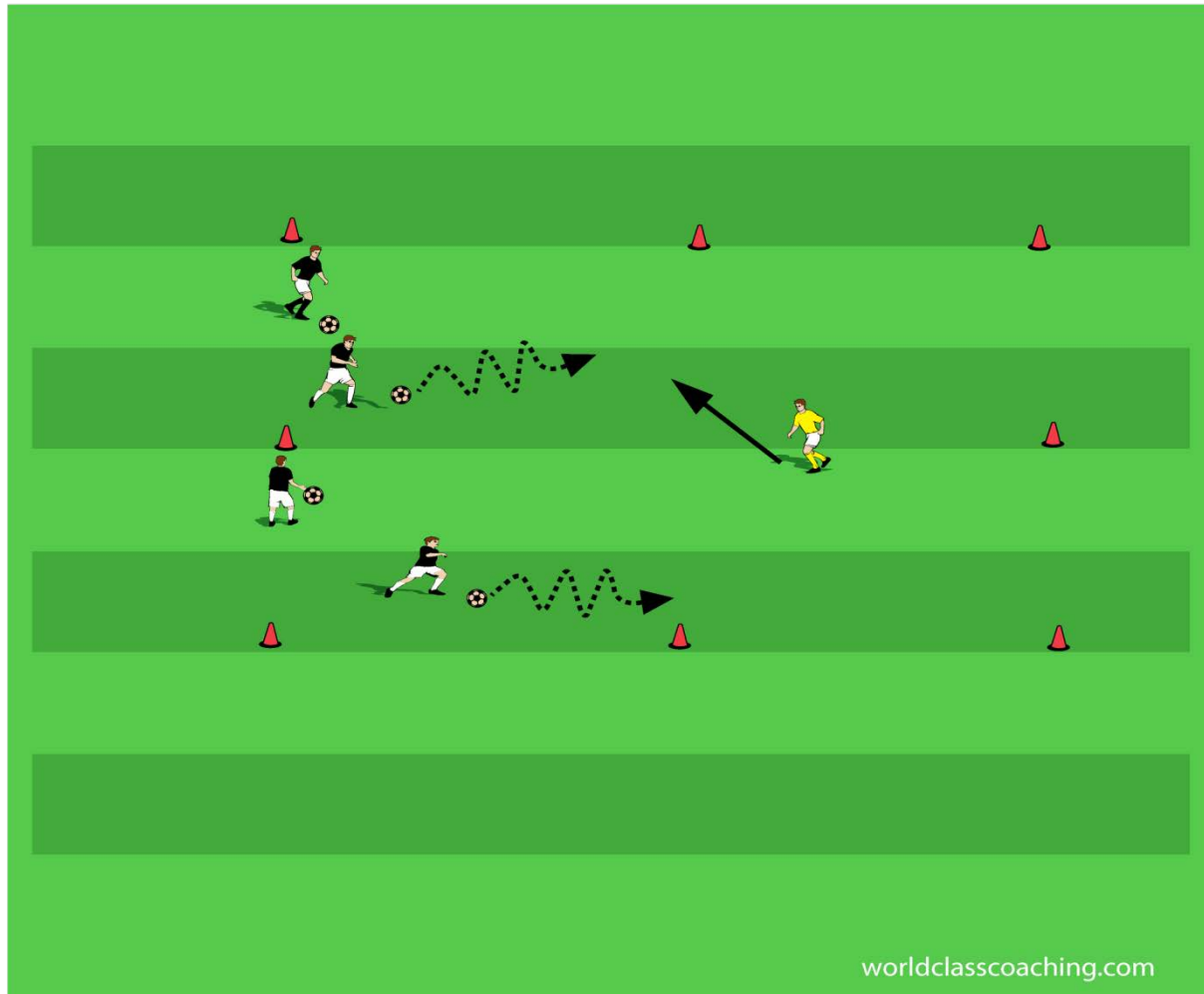
Poke Tackle - 12x12 yard grids

Remind players that there are three basic forms of tackle in soccer: Block, poke and slide. The block tackle has already been covered in an earlier session, and it is useful to begin by reminding players that block tackling requires contacting the ball simultaneously with the attacker and trapping the ball between two players. Therefore, it is often used in tight space. The poke tackle, by contrast, is set up differently and also more useful, in general, in more space.

Here are the cues for poke tackling:

- the approach (shutting down) and the use of jockeying to contain and control attackers is the same as with the block tackle.
- to poke tackle, defenders must look for a touch that moves the ball off of the foot of the attacker to a point where the defender can step in and literally “poke” the ball out of the attacker’s path.
- there is some debate as to which foot is the preferred one to use for the poke tackle. Out of the jockeying position, the front foot is easier to disguise and allows for easier recovery in case of a failed tackle, but it is also more likely to cause a foul, as it is closer to the attacker’s feet and a tangle often leads to a call against the defender. The rear foot, on the other hand, is more difficult to disguise and a miss will often put the defender in a wrong-foot position, facing up field (usually having lost goal-side position), but it is easier to avoid contact with the attacker using this foot. Most players use the front foot, but it is useful to point out both the advantages and disadvantages of using either foot to players learning the poke tackle.

Train on the poke tackle by having players set up in 12x12 grids. Put two players on one end (in line) and two on the other end. Give one group a supply of balls. The first player with a ball passes to the first player on the other end of the grid and then closes down and jockies the attacker. For the first two minutes, have the attackers take a couple of short touches and then a longer touch to help set up the tackle. Once the tackle is made, the two players change ends and the other pair duel. Encourage the defenders to utilize fake tackles as well and to learn to feel the distance needed to both remain goal-side and also apply pressure and make good tackles.

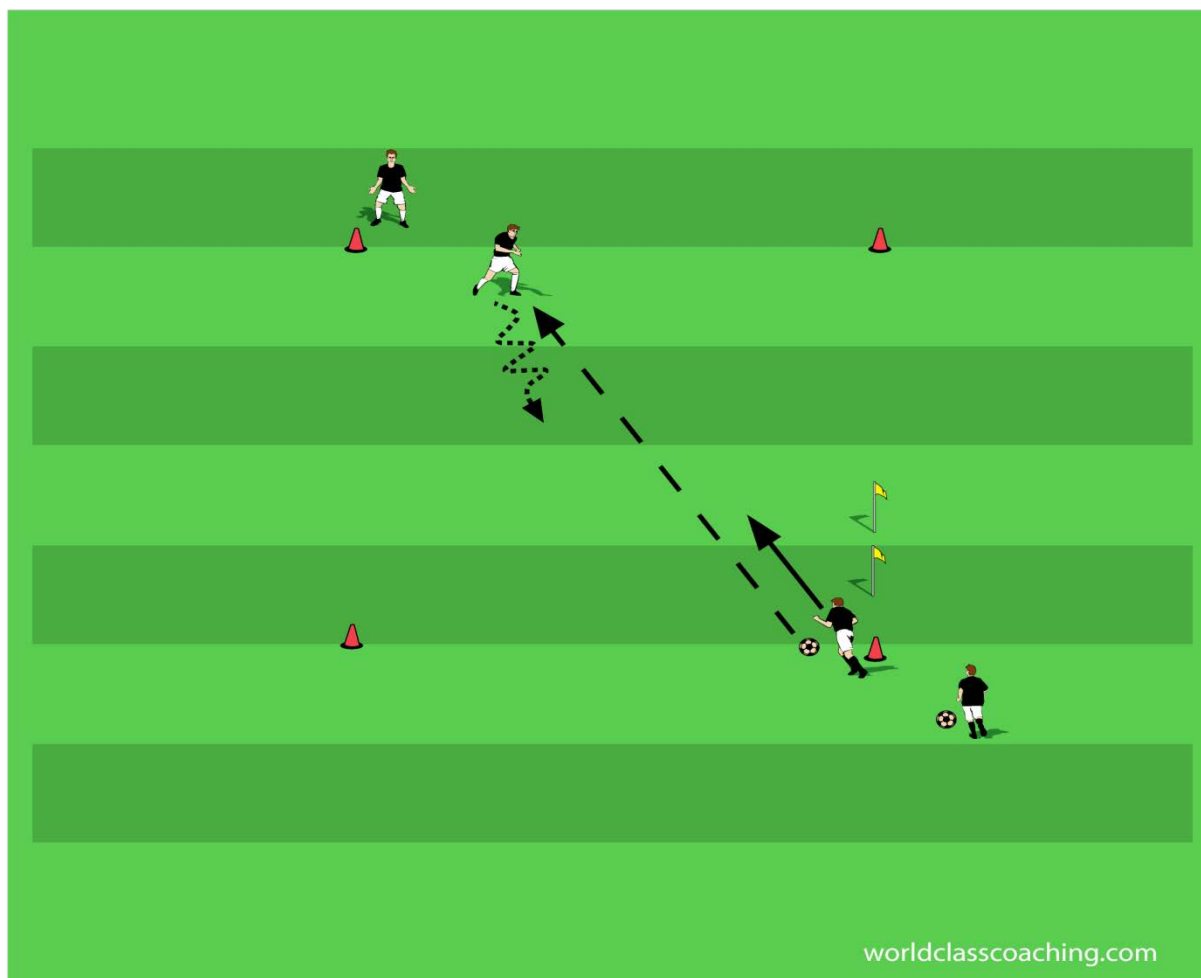


No one's land - 20x25 yard grid

Select a defender to stand in the middle of the grid. The remaining players line up across one end line of the grid, each with a ball. At a signal from the coach, the end line players attempt to dribble across “no one's land” to the other side of the grid. The defenders try to poke tackle the ball off of the runners and knock the ball out of the grid. Players who lose their ball join the defenders and play continues until all runners have been stripped of their soccer balls. This is a fun exercise and the coach can determine how strict the poke tackling rule should be enforced (it is probably best to apply the rule very loosely to begin).

Variations:

- start with two defenders and allow players who successfully poke tackle an opponent to then get their ball and join the attackers. The player losing the ball becomes a defender until they win a ball. This restriction both prolongs the game and also adds incentive to the poke tackling emphasis.
- for a player to lose their ball and join the defenders, a defender must win the ball and dribble it out the end of the grid where the run started. In this variation, there is emphasis for both groups to work in transition as well. If the defender simply knocks the ball out of the grid, the attacker retrieves the ball and joins the next attacking run.



1v1 to a side cone goal - 12x12 yard grids

Use the same set-up as the above exercise. Add a cone goal along the side of the grid near where the defenders serve (see diagram). Now explain to players that they may play full out. The exercise is also different in that the attacking player can earn a point only by dribbling through the cone goal. The defender earns a point by poke tackling the ball off of the attacker. The placement of the cone goal near the corner aids the defender by creating a logical lane for the attacker to play in, which also creates more opportunities to poke tackle for the defender. The defender must also understand that the angle of approach becomes very critical in this environment. Specifically, as the attacker is taught to “cross” the defender, the latter needs to blend a high approach with the necessity of remaining goal-side to contain and press the attacker. Watch players work and check to see that they are cognizant of the two variables (as well as the speed of individual attackers) as they close down and jockey. After each duel, players change ends. Play for five minutes and check scores.

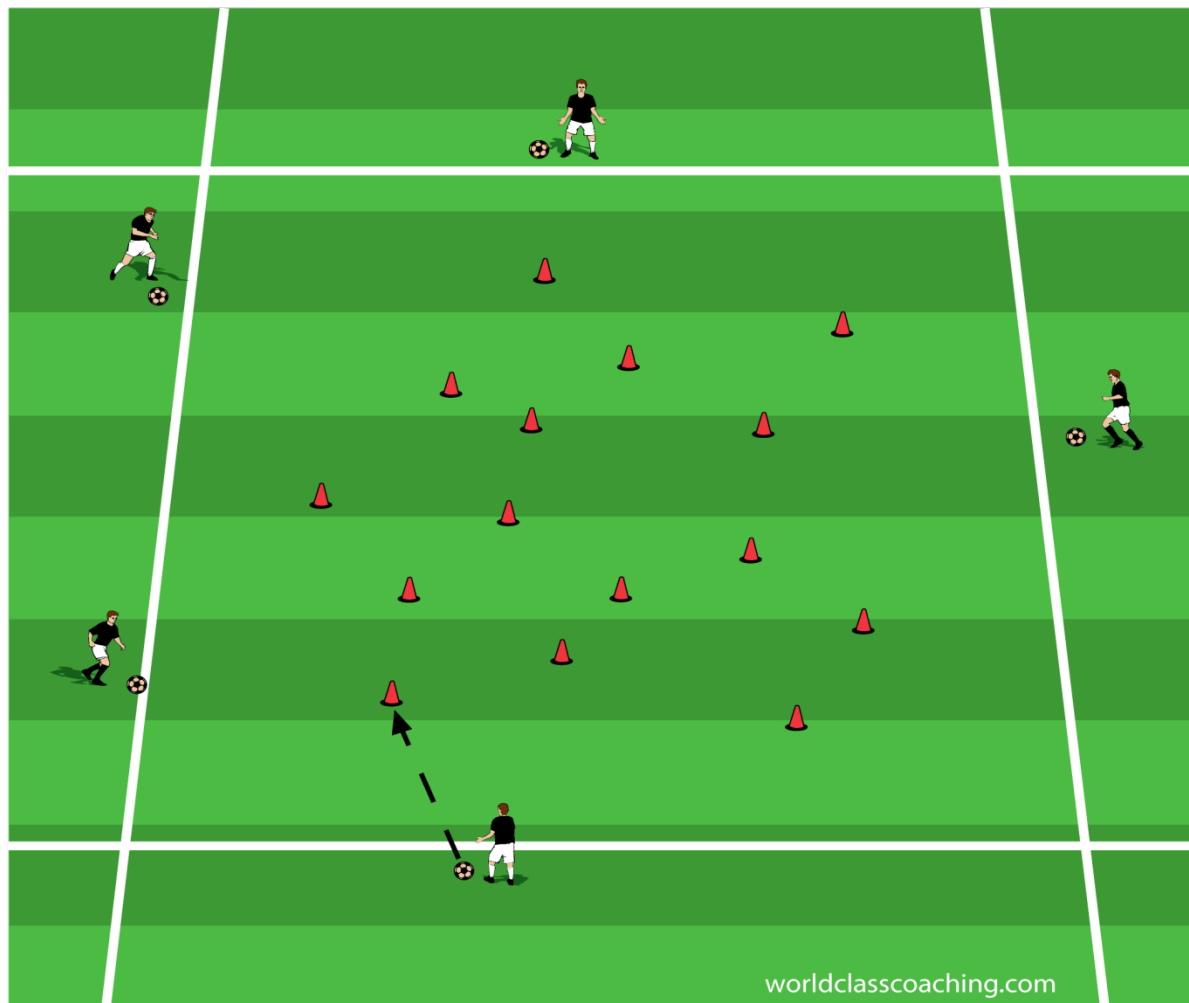
3v3 to cone goals - 25x30 yard fields

Continue the theme of playing small-sided games early in the training process. Play 3v3 to small endline goals. For the first five minutes, award a point for a good poke tackle and two points for a goal. If there are multiple games, rotate teams and implement tournament scoring (i.e. total points over all games

played). Then simplify the rules to just grant a point for a goal and let the players play for the remainder of the session.

Training Session #8: Striking the Ball

Introduction: This session helps the players differentiate between the simple passing surface (the long inside surface of the foot) and the striking surface along the top of the foot (laces). Once again, the habits formed by players at this age will serve them for the remainder of their playing careers, and the coach must take the time to reinforce the importance of proper technique in striking so that the players have a good understanding and feel for striking the ball with power and technique.



The great cone shoot-out - 15x15 yard grid

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

strike the ball again. This is a fun game that lets the players experiment with their striking technique. When all cones are down, see who has knocked down the largest number and reset the game. The key coaching points are to use either the laces or the inside of the foot, lock the ankle, and point the standing foot at the target.

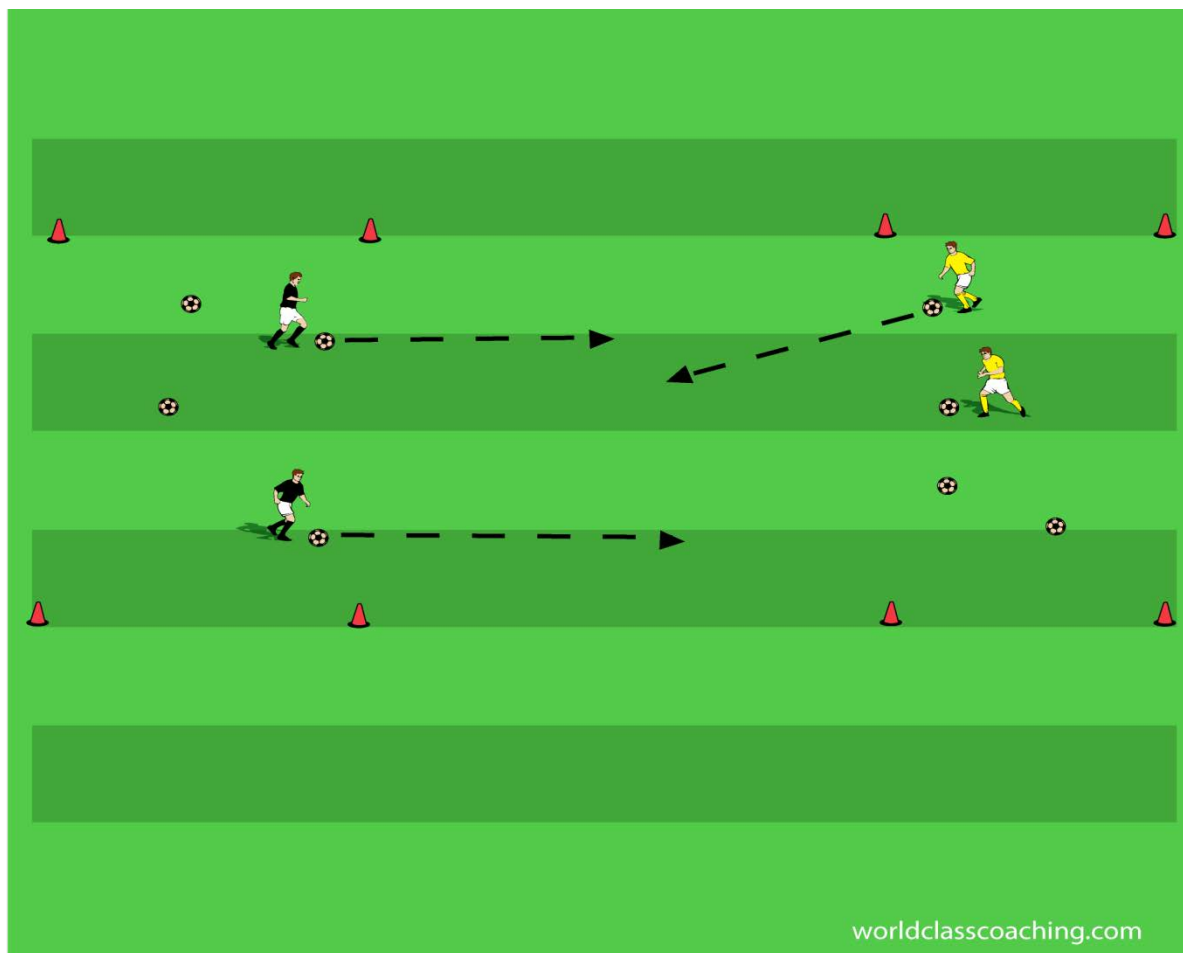
Pairs passing and shooting progression - ¼ field

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball per pair and along the touch-line. Instruct each pair to start and stay four yards apart. The following progression is designed to both give players numerous striking touches and also provide them with a useful tutorial in learning to select a finishing surface. Play each sequence for two minutes, focusing upon proper technique, accuracy and also assuring that players alternate the striking foot each time they play.

- two-touch passing. Using the inside of the foot, players ping the ball back and forth with their partner. Emphasize speed and quality of footwork and striking.
- one-touch. Using the inside of the foot again, players knock the ball back and forth with their partner, alternating the striking foot with each touch. Players use one touch where possible and two touches when necessary to sustain the exercise.
- laces striking: Short distance. Demonstrate with one pair proper use of the laces surface to strike the ball. Explain that this surface allows for the greatest striking power, but also creates more room for error, as the laces surface is more narrow and inherently less stable than the inside surface of the foot. Therefore, players must work very hard to develop consistency in striking with their laces. The technical cues for striking with the laces are:
 1. lock the ankle with the toes pointed at the ground.
 2. place the plant foot next to the ball, below the shoulder, assuring that the toes of the plant foot point in the direction of the target.
 3. encourage players to put their knee in a firm position as well and consider their hip as the point of rotation. Players should practice this striking motion without a ball to begin, holding their foot on the follow-through to check their form.
- laces striking: Medium distance. Move the players back so that the pairs are working with ten yards between them. Players continue to strike the ball with their laces, alternating feet with each strike. Continue to emphasize accuracy and proper technique.

The most common technical errors are:

- the ball pops up in the air. This indicates that the player is striking the ball at a low point, causing the ball to fly upward off of her foot. This player needs to strike the middle-back of the ball to keep it traveling on the ground.
- the ball consistently travels wide of the target. Here, the player is typically either playing with the plant foot pointed away from the target or failing to strike the ball on the center back, so that the ball spins off of the laces to one side.
- the ball does not travel the distance. Here the player is typically failing to lock her ankle and/or knee or she is not striking the ball with sufficient force.



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

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

Crab soccer to goal - ½ field

Divide the group into two teams. Set up a zone outside the goal box where one team is spread out and seated in the crab position. The other team gathers beyond this area, each with a soccer ball. Explain that the attackers must dribble through the "crab" zone and into the goal box before shooting the ball at goal with their laces to score for their team. Once their shot is taken, players run to the goal, retrieve their ball and then dribble around the playing area back to the starting point where they try to dribble through and score again. Emphasize that safety is critical and that no shots may be taken before the goal box is entered. Players must also be careful in removing their ball from the goal as their teammates will be shooting at the same time. The members of the "crab" team must remain in their box and in the crab position. They may move around and should try to knock the balls out of the attackers' possession and out of the box. Attackers who lose their soccer balls simply retrieve them and try to cross the

“crab” zone again. Play for two minutes and then the teams change roles. The coach should adjust the “crab” zone to create success for both the attackers and the defenders.

Multiple balls game with no goalkeeper - ½ field

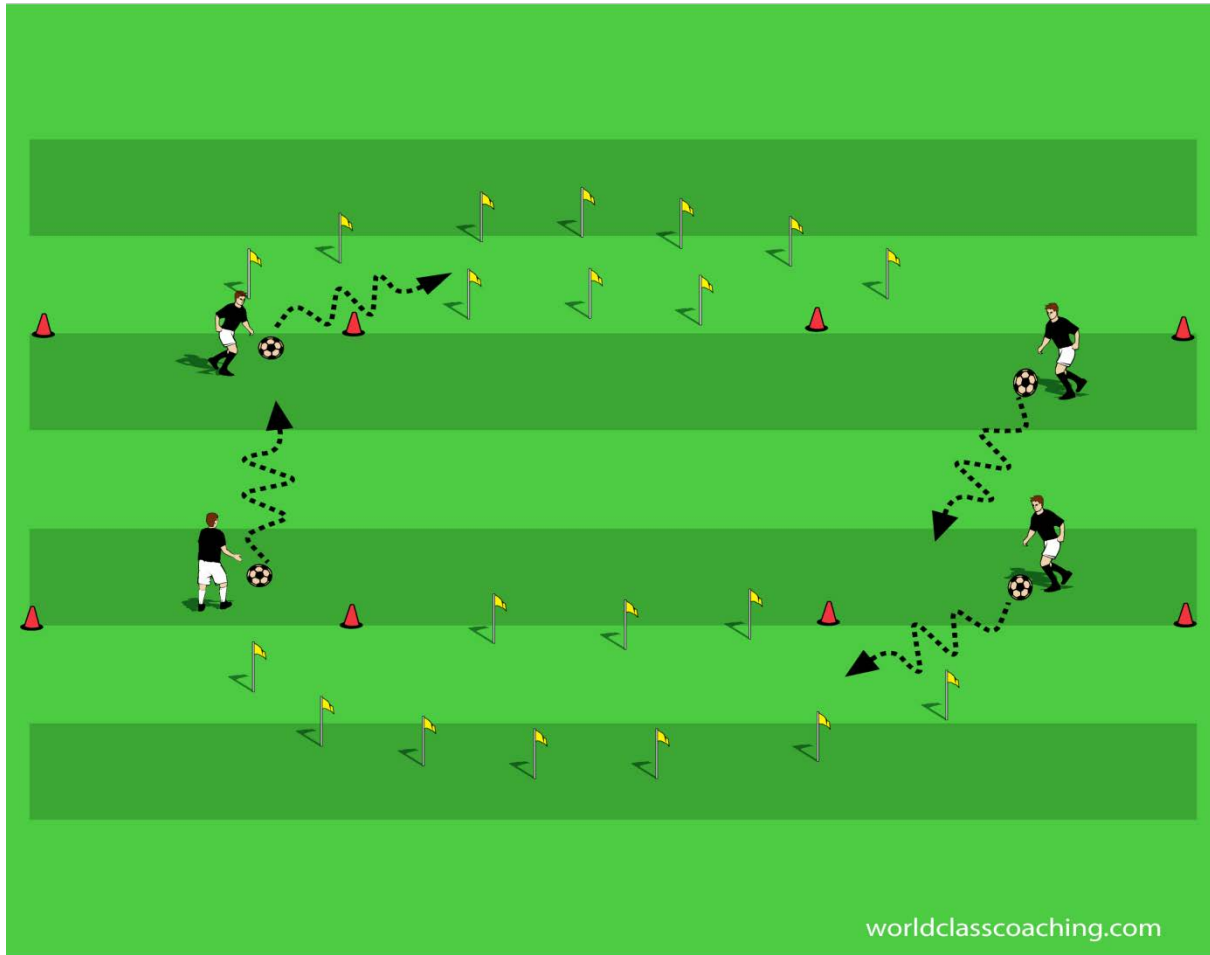
Divide the group into two teams. Explain that either team may score in either of two goals at the ends of the field. The ball remains live while it is within the grid. All re-starts should come from the coach, who keeps a ball supply along the perimeter near the center of the field. The coach should keep at least two balls in play at all times. Encourage players to both play defense when the other team has the ball and also to attack either goal and shoot whenever they have the opportunity. Keep track of goals scored and play for five minutes.

3 vs. 3 to goals - 20x20 yard fields

Play 3 vs. 3 to cone goals. Encourage players to use their laces to finish as in previous exercises. The goals should be full-sized despite the relatively small fields, so that there is frequent opportunity to shoot and to score. Play without goalkeepers and keep score.

Training Session #9: Individual Attacking.

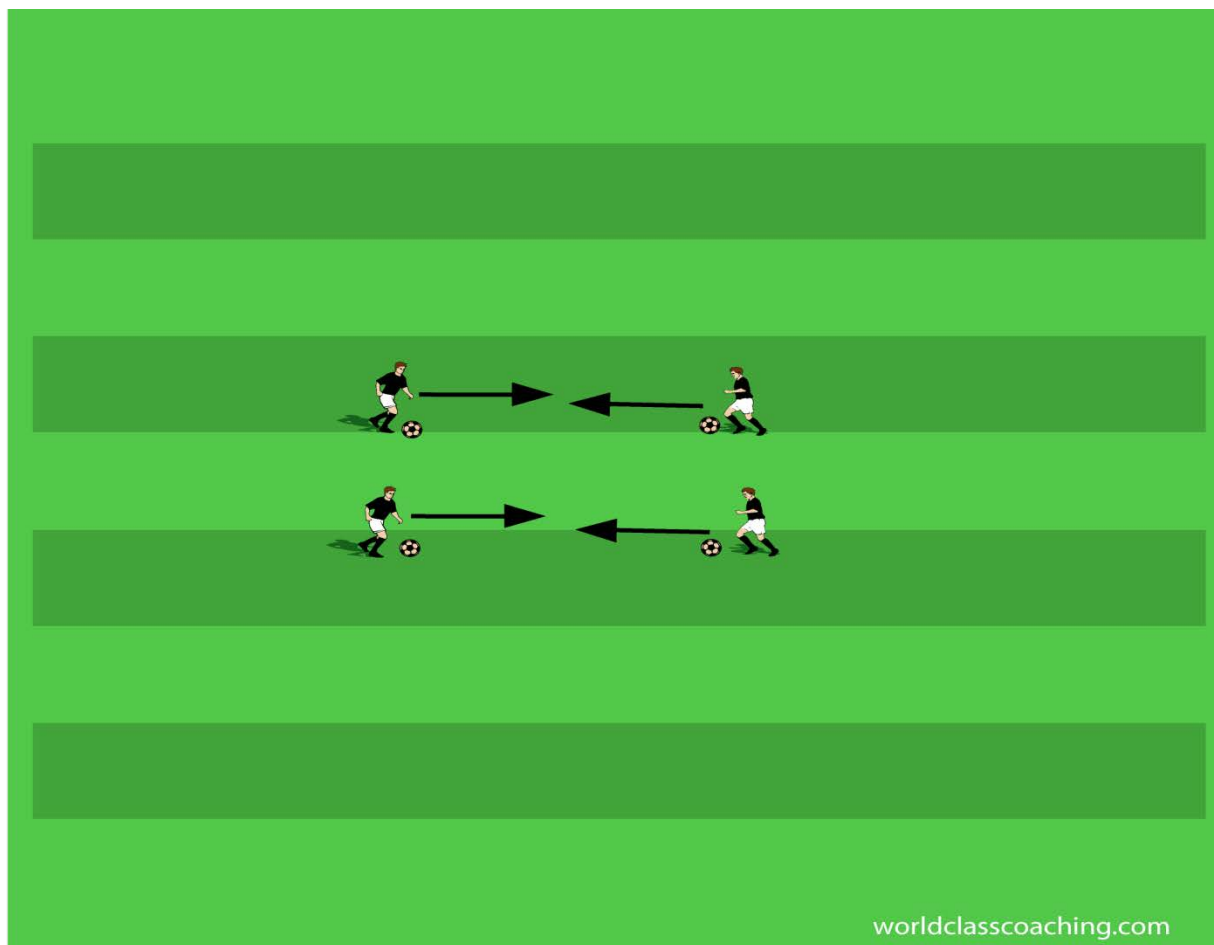
Introduction: Session#9 revisits the role of the individual as an attacker through exercises that mix fun with maximum touches on the ball and reinforcement of the learning of basic attacking moves.



Subway dribbling (2) - 12x12 yard grids Each player has a ball. Players are placed in equal numbers in the two grids. Players dribble around varying speed and surfaces used to dribble. As the game progresses, players are required to practice inside and outside cuts and pullbacks in the grid areas as they dribble. At a signal from the coach, the players dribble out of their grids and through either 'subway' to the other grid, where play continues.

Variations:

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



Mirrors - 10x20 yard area

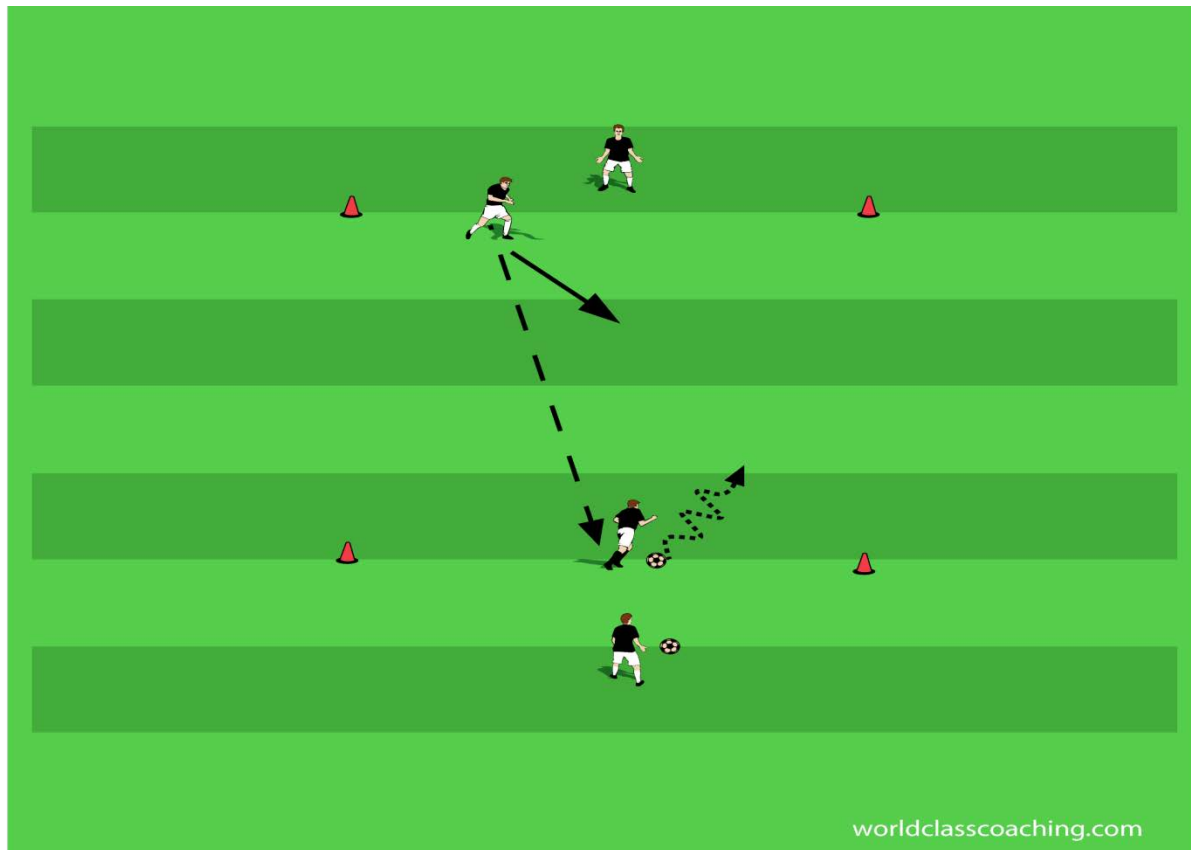
Each player has a ball. Players are paired up and facing one-another as shown in the diagram. Players work in short, intensive spurts on the touch routine listed below. When the coach calls out, “Go!” the players exchange spots (and balls) with their partners. Perform each of the touch exercises for 30 seconds.

Progression:

- dribbling in place.
- touches on top of the ball.
- 4-touch (touch outside with the outside of the left; touch inside with the inside of the left foot; touch outside with the outside of the right foot; touch inside with the inside of the right foot and repeat).
- triangles (start with the ball in front of the right foot. Pull the ball back using the bottom of the foot; stop the ball with the inside of the right foot; tap the ball across to the inside of the left foot; use the inside of the left foot to tap the ball back to the starting position). When players change balls, they should alternate the start foot.

Shark Attack - 20x20 yard grid

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



1v1 continuous - 10x10 yard grids

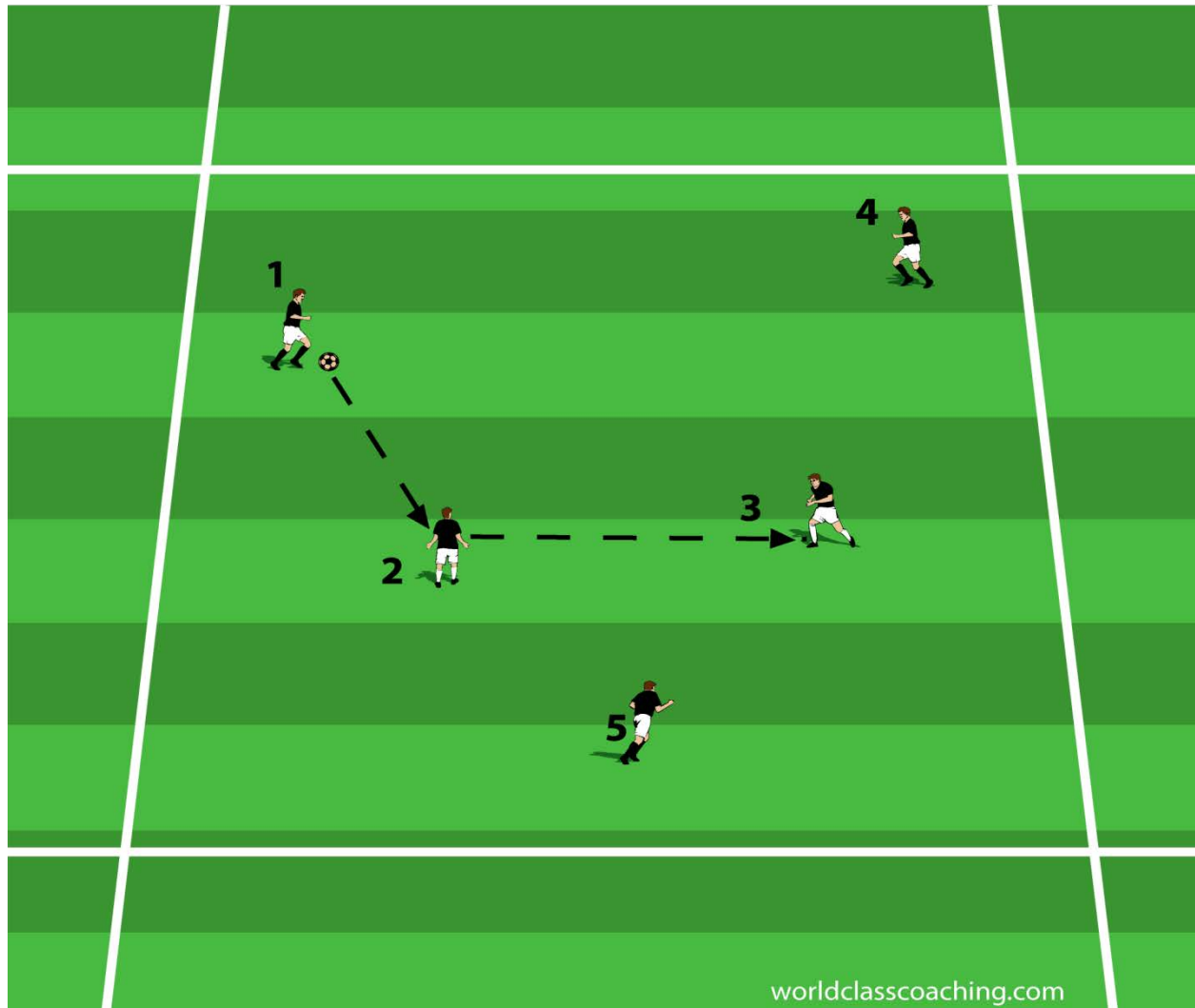
Organize players in groups of 4-6 per grid, with a ball supply at one end of the grid. Put an equal number of players in lines at each end of the grid. This is a simple, but very effective training environment designed to improve one vs. one play on both sides of the ball. Explain that the goal of the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

3v3 to cone goals - 30x25 yard fields

Play a small-sided scrimmage without restrictions. Place small cone goals on the end lines and encourage the players to focus on the quality of their attacking in duels inside of the game.

Training Session #10: Group Play.

Introduction: This session introduces the idea of structured group play. One of the most challenging aspects of coaching U9 and U10 players is the tendency of young players to bunch up. While teaching team shape is an evolutionary process, the following session is designed to begin to give players an understanding of shape and roles in a 6 vs. 6 playing environment.



Sequenced Passing - 20x20 yard grid

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



Monkey (3) - 17x10 yard grids Divide the group into three teams and put one team in each section. The end teams pass the ball back and forth and the middle team attempts to win the ball. When the middle team gains control of the ball, the team they won it from takes their place in the middle. Encourage the teams in the end grids to dribble and pass the ball within their grids to create an angle from which they can safely pass the ball to the other grid. If one team gets stranded in the middle for more than a minute, rotate them out so that everyone gets to work on playing through occupied space to a target.

4-Goal Soccer - ½ Field

Play 4-goal soccer on ½ field. Place small cone goals in the corners of the field. Each team attacks the two goals on the opposite end of the grid. This game is useful to demonstrate the importance of changing fields and also learning to read the shape of the defense. Because the goals are very small, teams will need to learn to maintain an option and a sense for changing the direction of the attack. The coach can use “freeze!” calls to show the need to expand the team’s shape and also to point out options for the attackers.

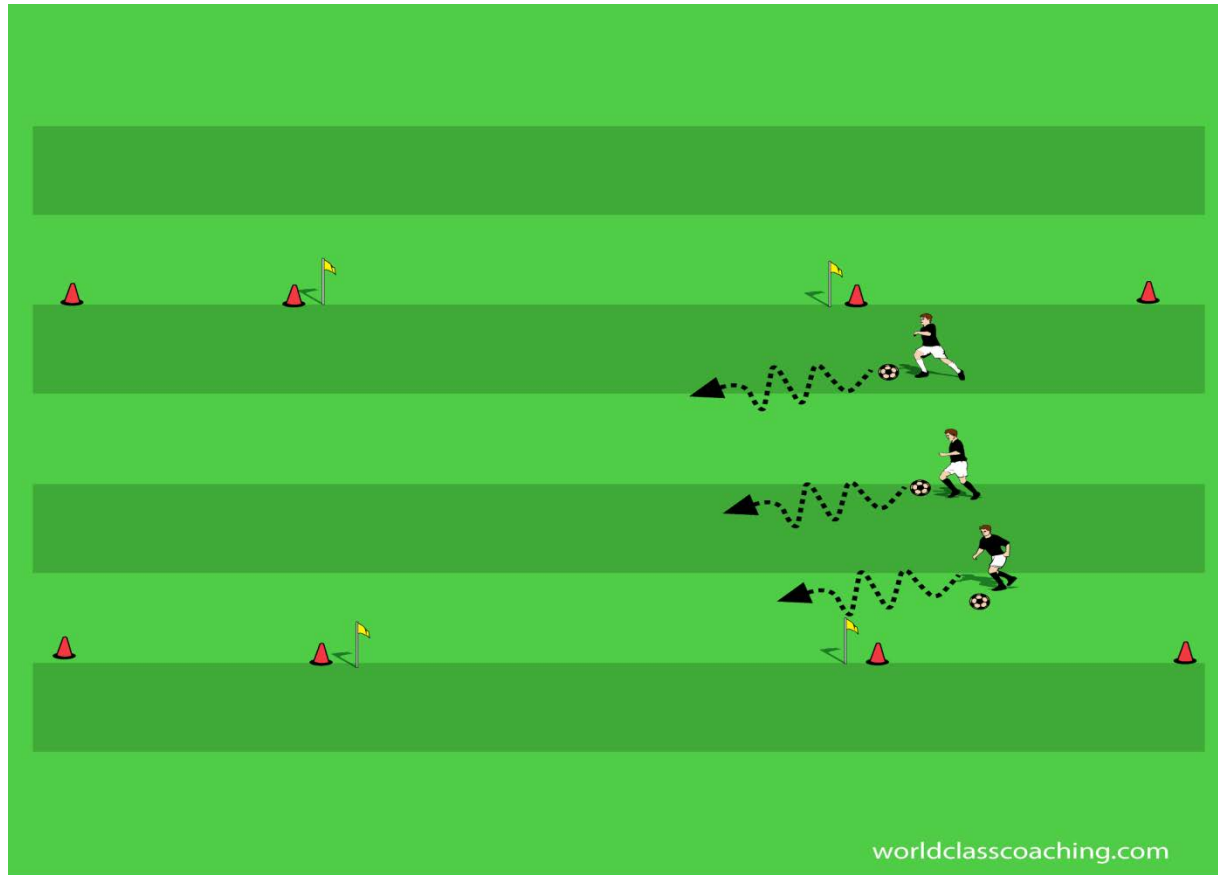


Zone Soccer - ½ field

Play a regular game with players required to stay in their respective zones. Place at least one player from each team in each zone. This restriction teaches players the importance of discipline in shape and passing. The zone can be drawn horizontally as shown or vertically (or both with larger numbers). Because this can be a bit frustrating for some players, only practice this restriction for a few minutes at a time.

Training Session #11: Individual Attacking.

Introduction: This session puts players on the ball and under time and opponent pressure as they continue to learn to feel confident in possession.

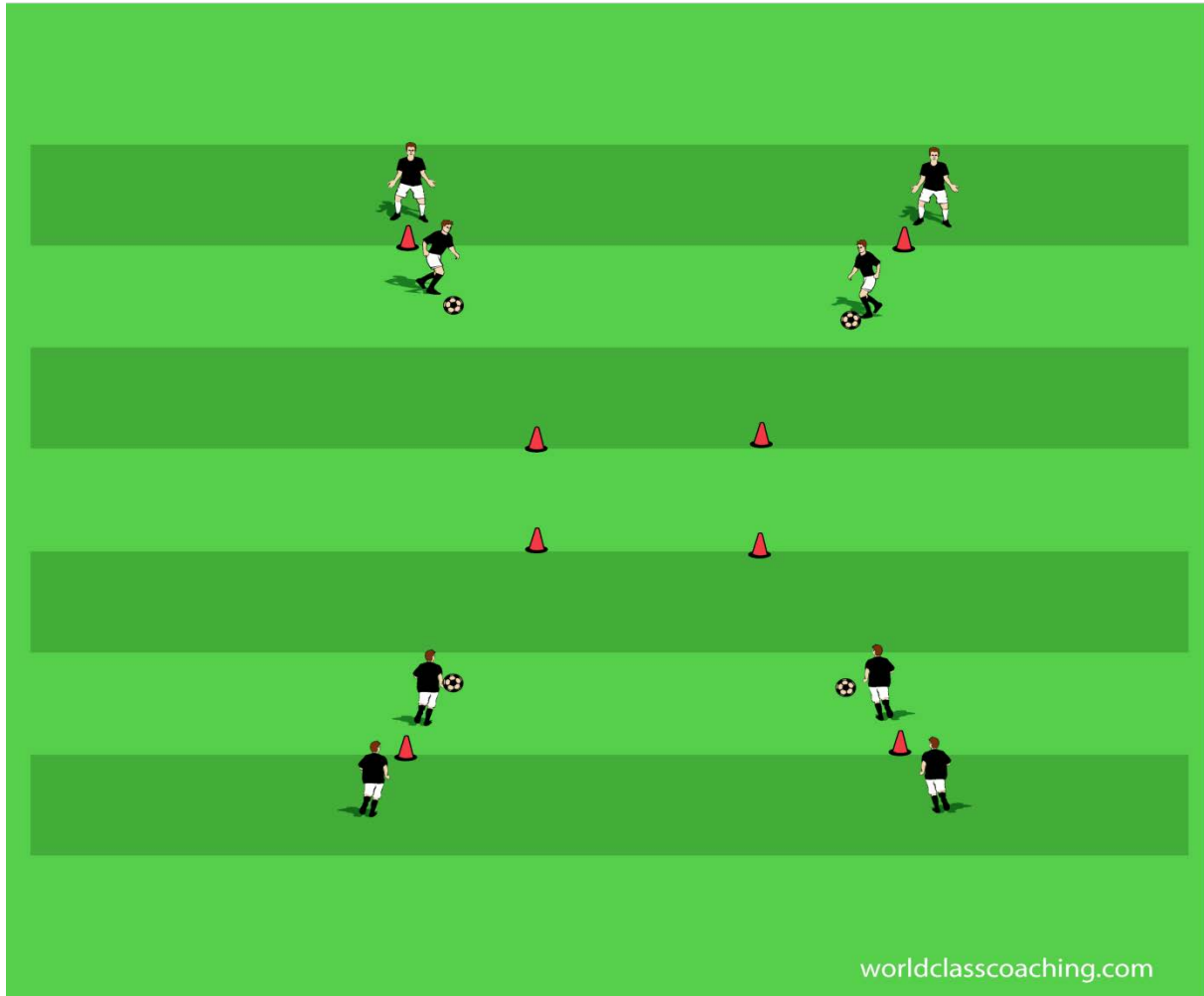


River Dribbling - 20x25 yard grid.

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

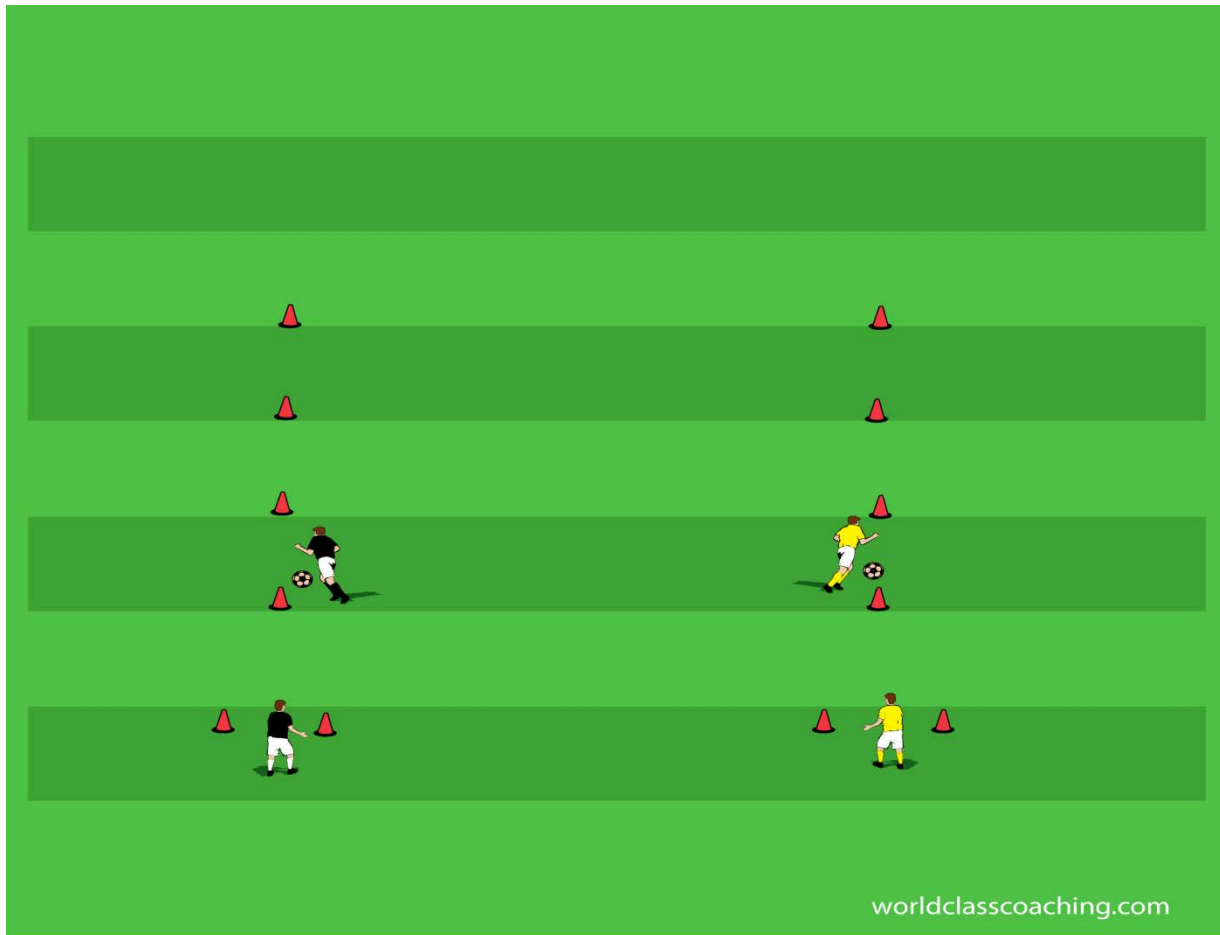
Variations:

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



Dribbling and moves - 20x20 yard grid with a 5x5 yard small interior grid

Divide players into four groups. Each group forms a line facing into the grid at one of the corners. Each group has a ball. Demonstrate with one player. The player dribbles to the nearest cone on the small interior grid before cutting the ball with the inside of the foot and dribbling back to her starting point, where the next player in line takes the ball and repeats the run and move. Players should be encouraged to dribble in a straight line both on their way into the grid and also after they perform the move. Each time the players enter the grid, they should alternate the foot they use to perform the move. After performing the move, the players should work to get out of the grid as quickly as possible (simulate running away from tight space after performing a move). Finally, compel players to check the space that they are about to move into (by looking over their shoulder) before performing the move. This is a challenging instruction for young players, but it also helps form good habits under pressure. After two minutes, move on to cuts with the outside of the foot and then simple pull-backs for the final two minutes. A competitive element can be added by keeping track of how many times each group can complete the moves and runs (1 point for each completed run). Finally, the coach may find it useful to locate herself in the small grid, where she can simulate pressure on the runners and also give constructive feedback while watching the runs and moves.



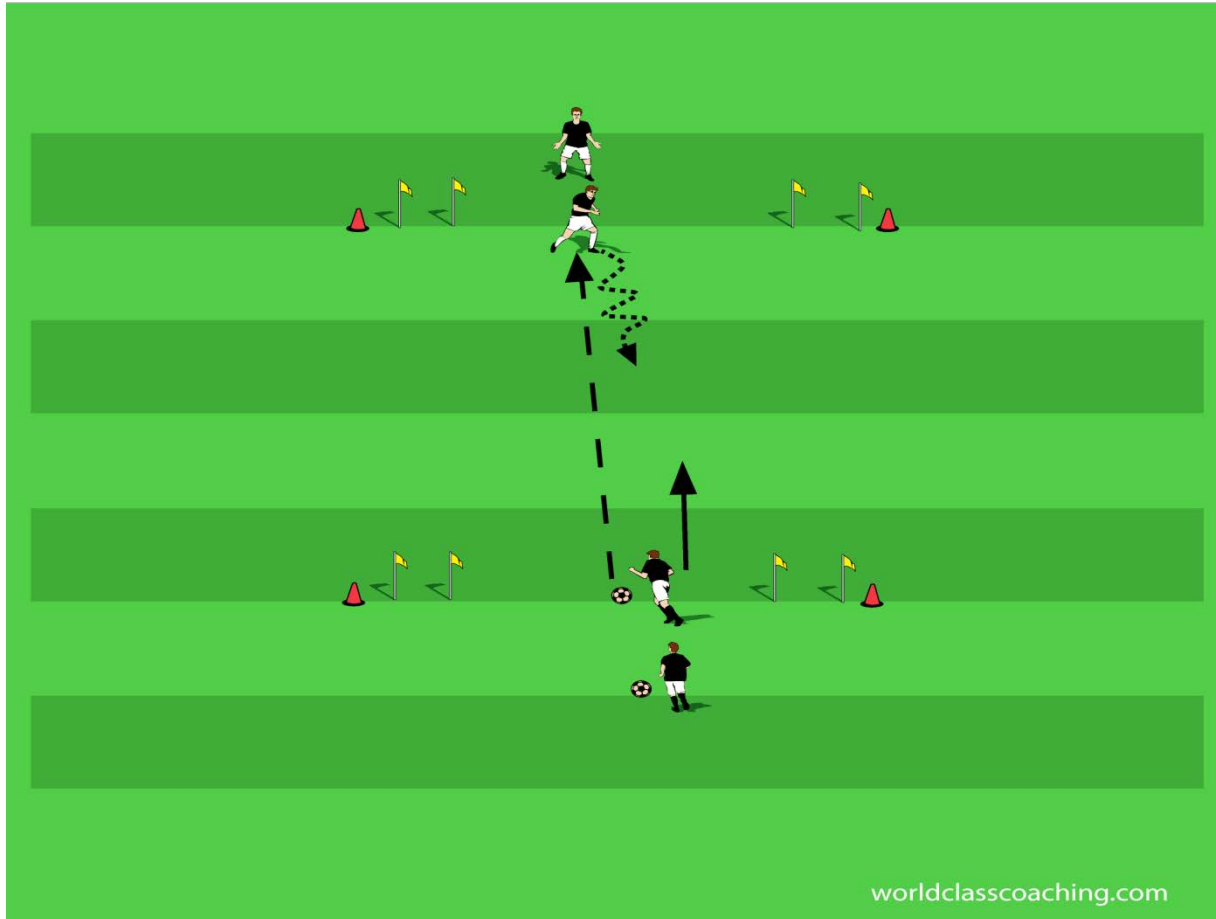
Relay races - $\frac{1}{4}$ field

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

Examples:

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

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



1v1 to 4 goals - 15x15 yard grids

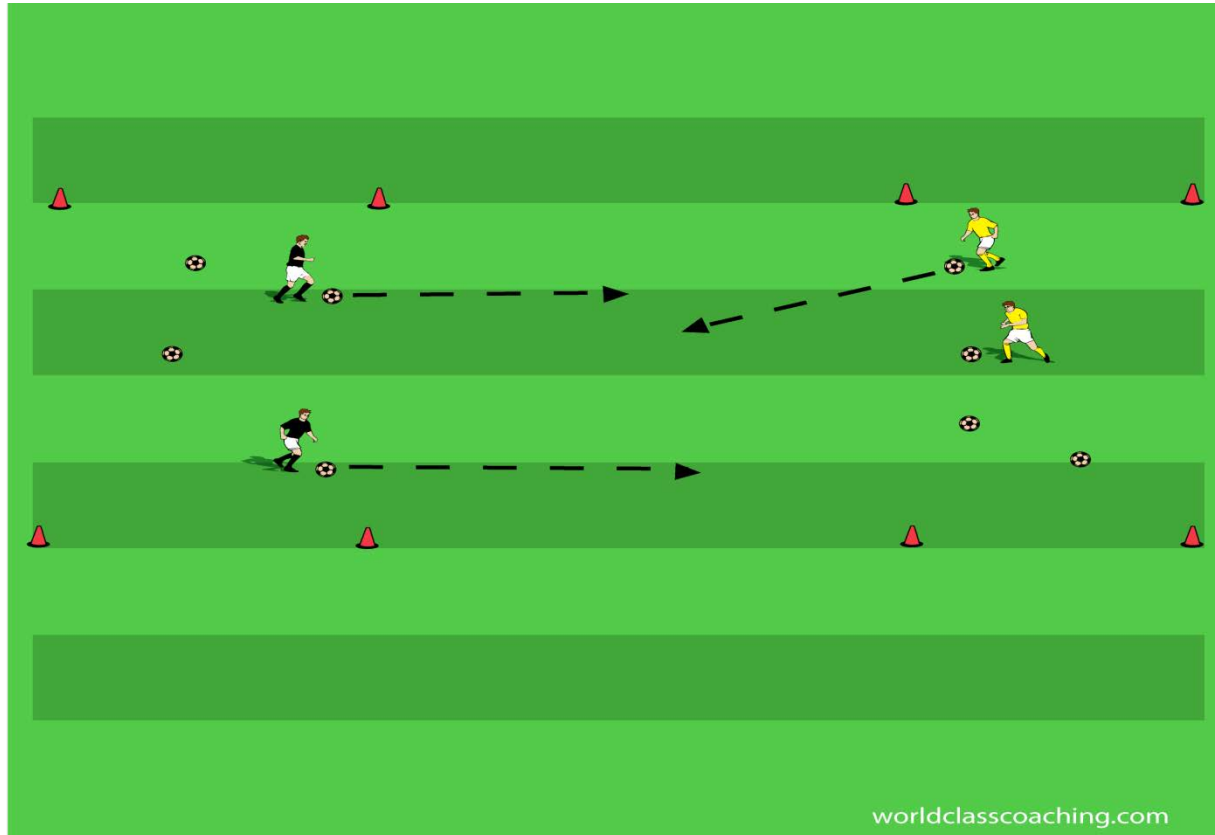
Organize players in groups of 4-6 per grid, with a ball supply at one end of the grid. Put an equal number of players in lines at each end of the grid. This is a simple, but very effective training environment designed to improve one vs. one play on both sides of the ball. Explain that the goal of the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

3v3 to cone goals - 30x25 yard fields

Play a small-sided scrimmage without restrictions. Place small cone goals on the end-lines and encourage the players to focus on the quality of their attacking in duels inside of the game.

Training Session #12: Striking the Ball.

Introduction: Session#12 revisits the concept of striking the ball through a pair of fun games and also a technical progression that isolates the skill. This session also introduces the concept of striking the ball at goal through a fun and fast finishing exercise (Shoot-Keep-Retrieve).



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

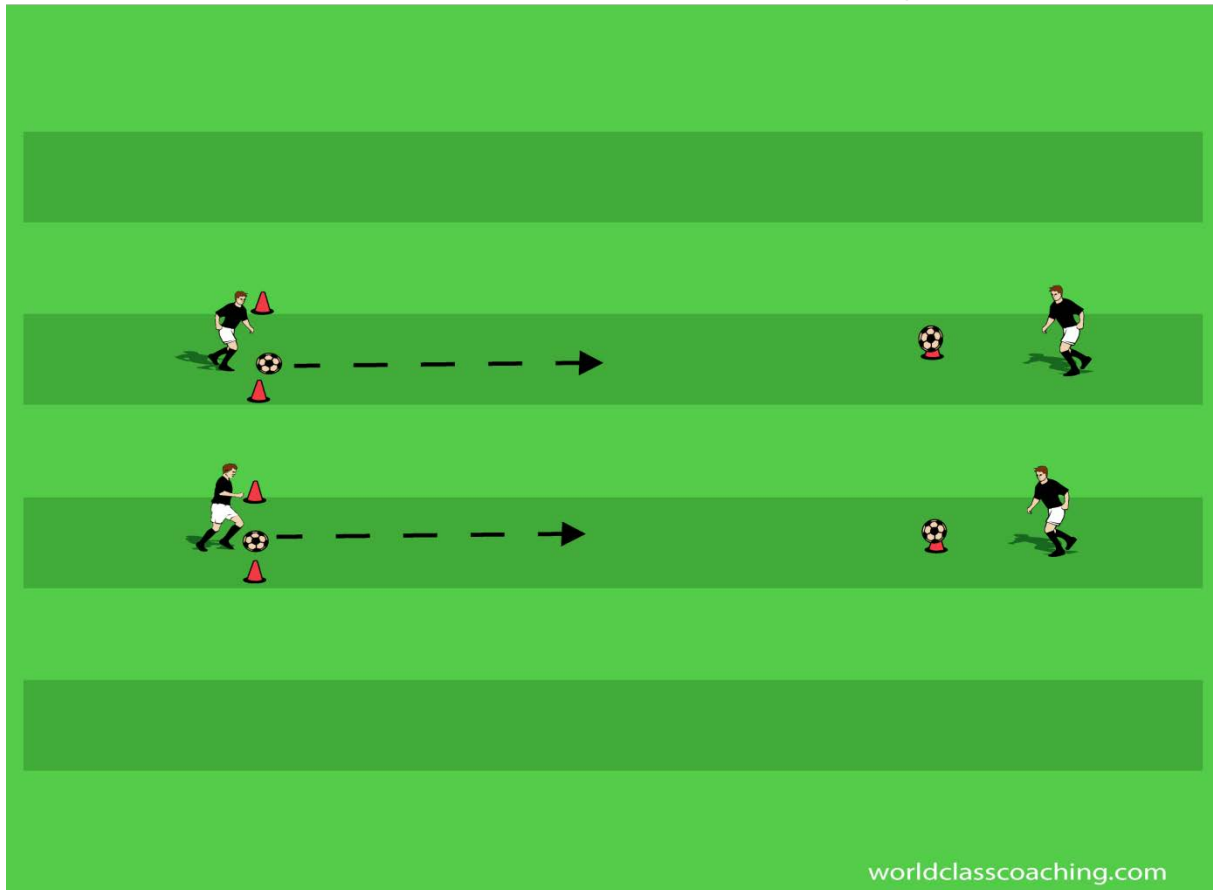
Each player needs a ball. Put half the team in each grid. This is a simple exercise designed to give players the opportunity to practice striking the ball. The goal of the exercise is to keep as many balls as possible in the other team's "yard." Require players to stop the ball before striking it. Play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

Pairs passing and shooting progression - ¼ field

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball per pair and along the touch-line. Instruct each pair to start and stay four yards apart. The following progression is designed to both give players numerous striking touches and also provide them with a useful tutorial in learning to select a finishing surface. Play each sequence for two minutes, focusing upon proper technique, accuracy and also assuring that players alternate the striking foot each time they play.

- two-touch passing. Using the inside of the foot, players ping the ball back and forth with their partner. Emphasize speed and quality of footwork and striking.

-
- one-touch. Using the inside of the foot again, players knock the ball back and forth with their partner, alternating the striking foot with each touch. Players use one touch where possible and two touches when necessary to sustain the exercise.
 - laces striking: Short distance. Demonstrate with one pair proper use of the laces surface to strike the ball. Explain that this surface allows for the greatest striking power, but also creates more room for error, as the laces surface is more narrow and inherently less stable than the inside surface of the foot. Therefore, players must work very hard to develop consistency in striking with their laces. The technical cues for striking with the laces are:
 1. lock the ankle with the toes pointed at the ground.
 2. place the plant foot next to the ball, below the shoulder, assuring that the toes of the plant foot point in the direction of the target.
 3. encourage players to put their knee in a firm position as well and consider their hip as the point of rotation. Players should practice this striking motion without a ball to begin, holding their foot on the follow-through to check their form.
 - laces striking: Medium distance. Move the players back so that the pairs are working with ten yards between them. Players continue to strike the ball with their laces, alternating feet with each strike. Continue to emphasize accuracy and proper technique. The most common technical errors are:
 1. the ball pops up in the air. This indicates that the player is striking the ball at a low point, causing the ball to fly upward off of her foot. This player needs to strike the middle-back of the ball to keep it traveling on the ground.
 2. the ball consistently travels wide of the target. Here, the player is typically either playing with the plant foot pointed away from the target or failing to strike the ball on the center back, so that the ball spins off of the laces to one side.
 3. the ball does not travel the distance. Here the player is typically failing to lock her ankle and/or knee or she is not striking the ball with sufficient force.

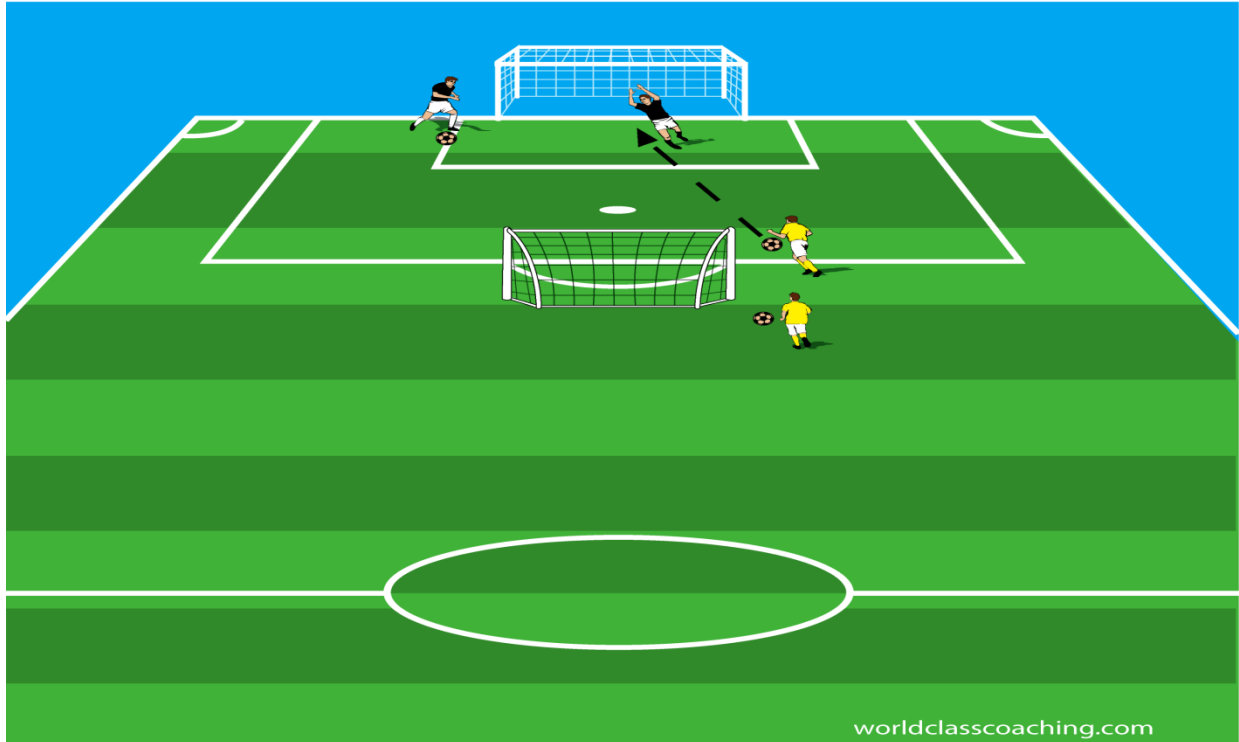


Pineapple Drop - 10x15 yard areas

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

Variations:

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



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.

3 vs. 3 to goals - 20x20 yard fields

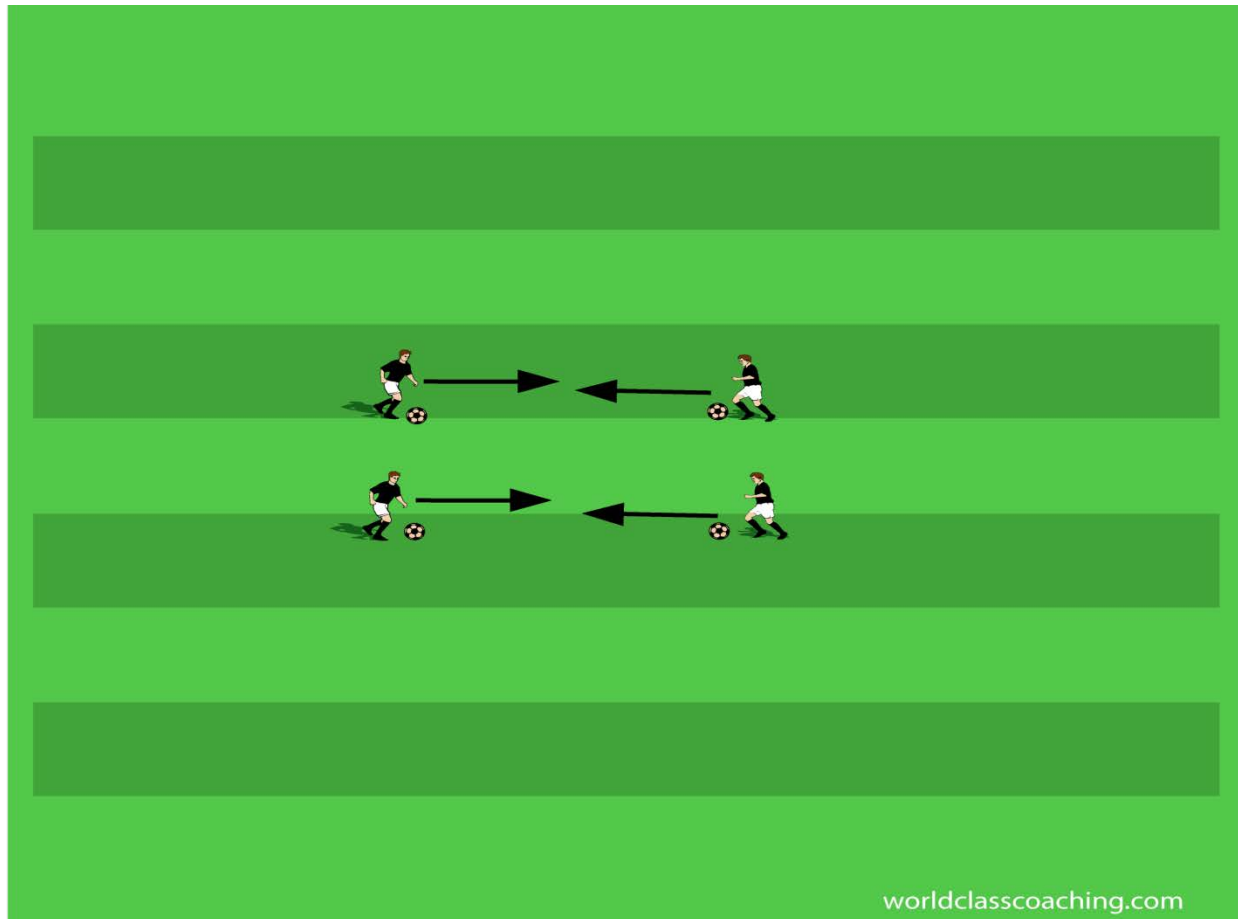
Play 3 vs. 3 to cone goals. Encourage players to use their laces to finish and to practice good technique in passing as well. The goals should be full-sized despite the relatively small fields, so that there is frequent opportunity to shoot and to score. Play without goalkeepers and keep score.

Training Session #13: Individual Attacking.

Introduction: This session continues the theme of maximizing the time young players in particular get on the ball in training. This session combines fun games, technical training for attacking and open play.

Statue Tag - 20x20 yard grid

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



Mirrors - 10x20 yard area

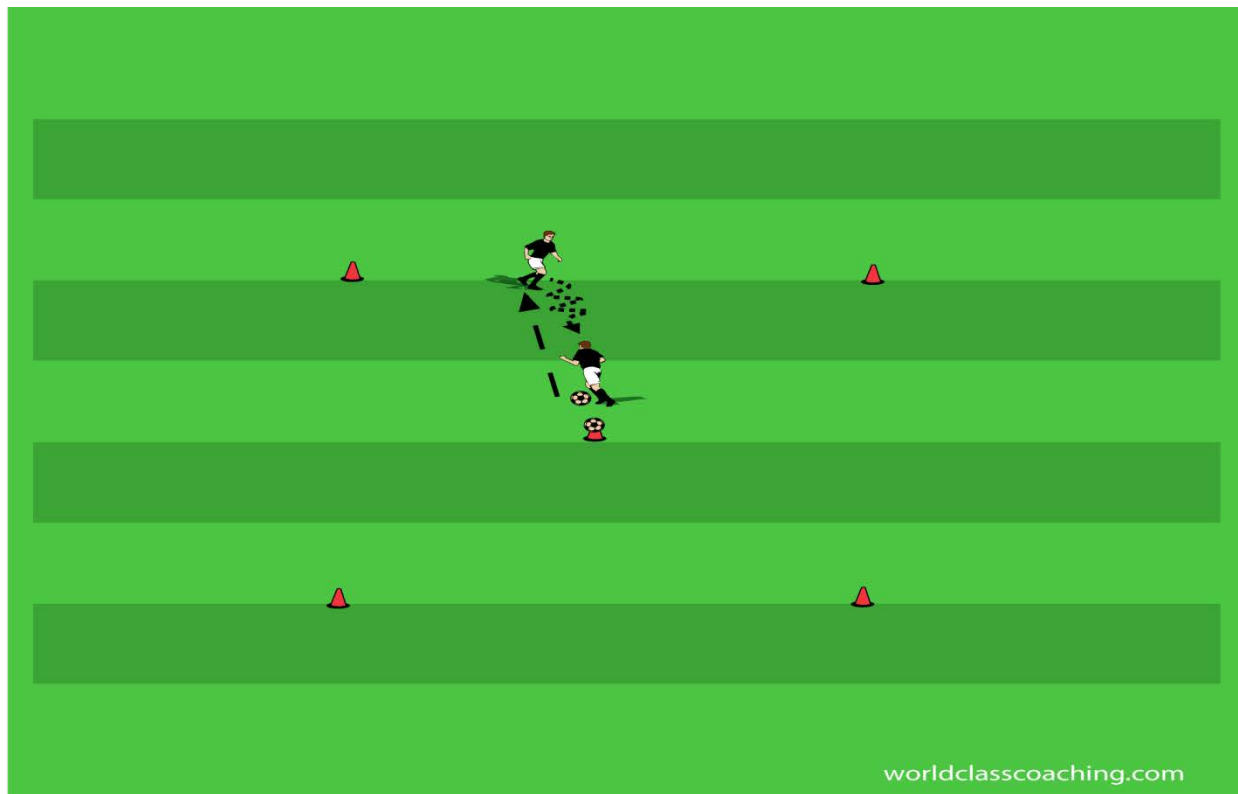
Each player has a ball. Players are paired up and facing one-another as shown in the diagram. Players work in short, intensive spurts on the touch routine listed below. When the coach calls out, "Go!" the players exchange spots (and balls) with their partners. Perform each of the touch exercises for 30 seconds.

Progression:

- dribbling in place.
- touches on top of the ball.
- 4-touch (touch outside with the outside of the left; touch inside with the inside of the left foot; touch outside with the outside of the right foot; touch inside with the inside of the right foot and repeat).
- triangles (start with the ball in front of the right foot. Pull the ball back using the bottom of the foot; stop the ball with the inside of the right foot; tap the ball across to the inside of the left foot; use the inside of the left foot to tap the ball back to the starting position). When players change balls, they should alternate the start foot.

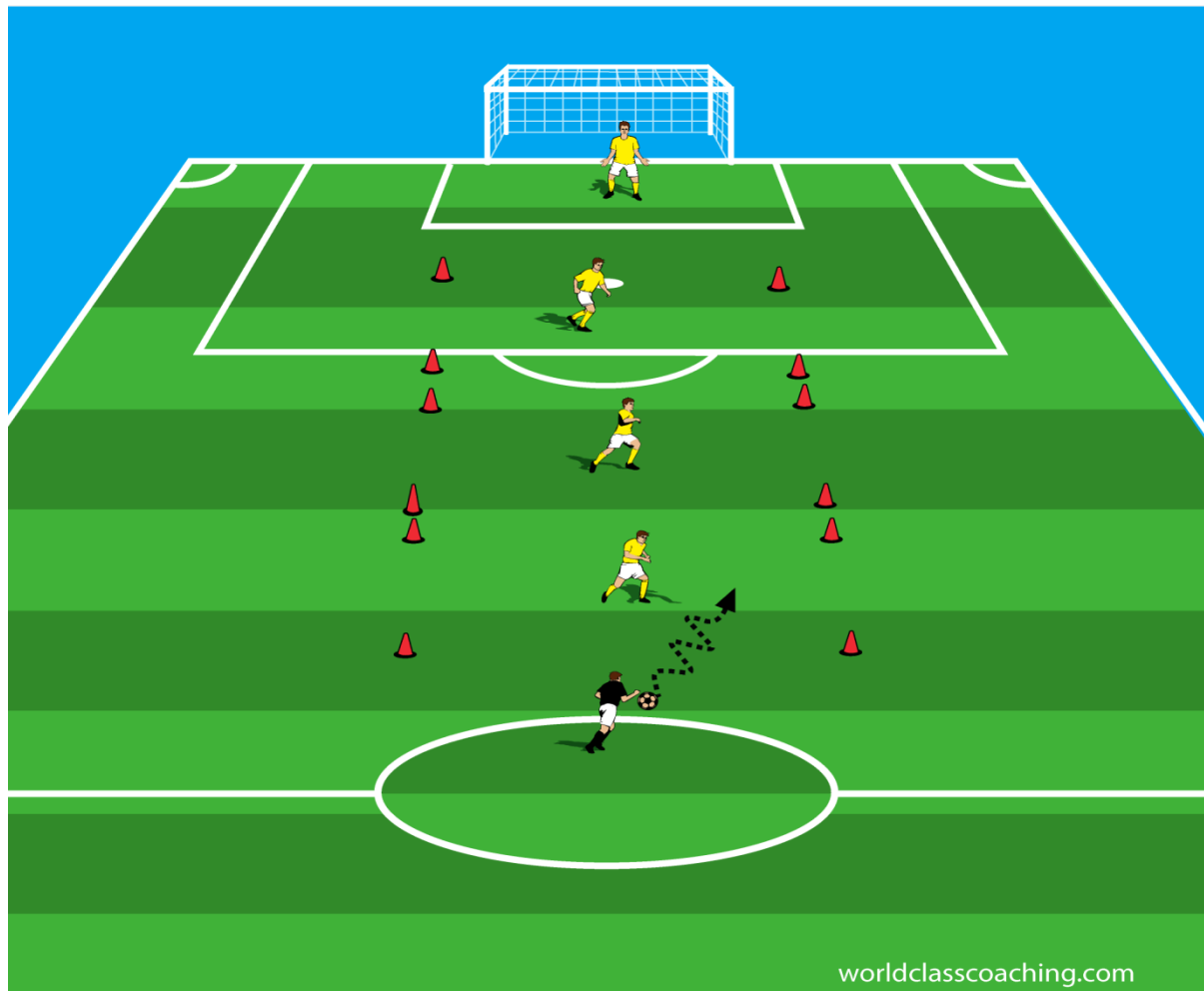
In the second phase of the exercise, players continue to face one-another in pairs, but back off to start 8 yards from one-another. Both players dribble toward one-another and perform moves (below) to change directions and return to their starting point. Each time the players perform a move, they need to alternate the foot used to make the move.

- inside cuts.
- outside cuts.
- pullbacks.
- hook turns. This is a new move for the players. As they approach their partner, they turn to get shoulder-on (one shoulder points at the partner). Using the bottom of the foot closest to the partner, the players pull the ball in front of the standing foot, hop and turn to face and dribble back to the starting point.



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

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



Angry Neighbor - 30x12 yard grid

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

3 vs. 3 To Cone Goals - 20x20 yard area

Play 3 vs. 3 to small cone goals. Encourage players to change pace sharply when in possession in particular and to focus on winning duels.

Training Session #14: Passing and Receiving.

Introduction: Session#14 revisits the skills of passing and receiving through fun games designed to apply time and opponent pressure, and emphasize accuracy, to the attacker's efforts.

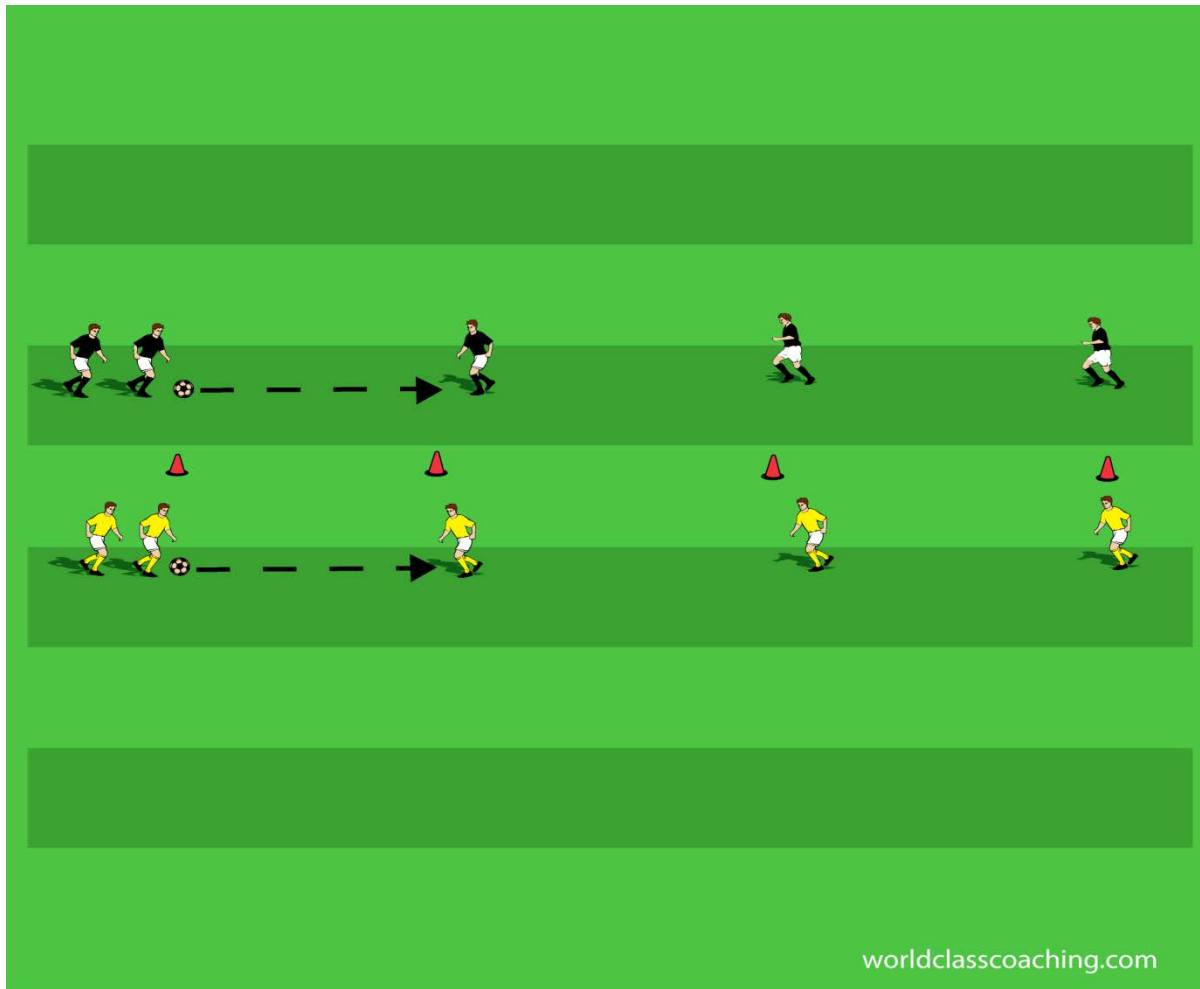
Pac man - 20x20 yard grid

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

Pairs Passing Contests - 20x20 yard grid

Players work in pairs along the touch-line. Conduct thirty second contests with the themes outlined below. No player may cross the line at any time, and each successful pass counts as a point.

- two-touch passing. The players stop the ball with the inside of their foot and then pass back to their partner. They must alternate the passing and receiving foot with each pass.
- two-touch passing. The players stop the ball with the sole of their foot and then pass back to their partner. They must alternate the passing and receiving foot with each pass.
- one-touch passing. Players can play with one or two touches. Encourage them to use one touch where possible and two when necessary to keep possession. Once again, players must alternate the foot they use to play.
- dribble and pass. Here the players must take 4 dribbling touches (in place) after receiving and then play to their partner.
- 4-touch and pass. Upon receiving the ball, players must complete the following sequence of touches along an imaginary line directly in front of them before playing back to their partner.
 1. touch right with the outside of the right foot.
 2. touch left with the inside of the right foot (back to starting point).
 3. touch left with the outside of the left foot.
 4. touch right with the inside of the left foot (back to starting point).



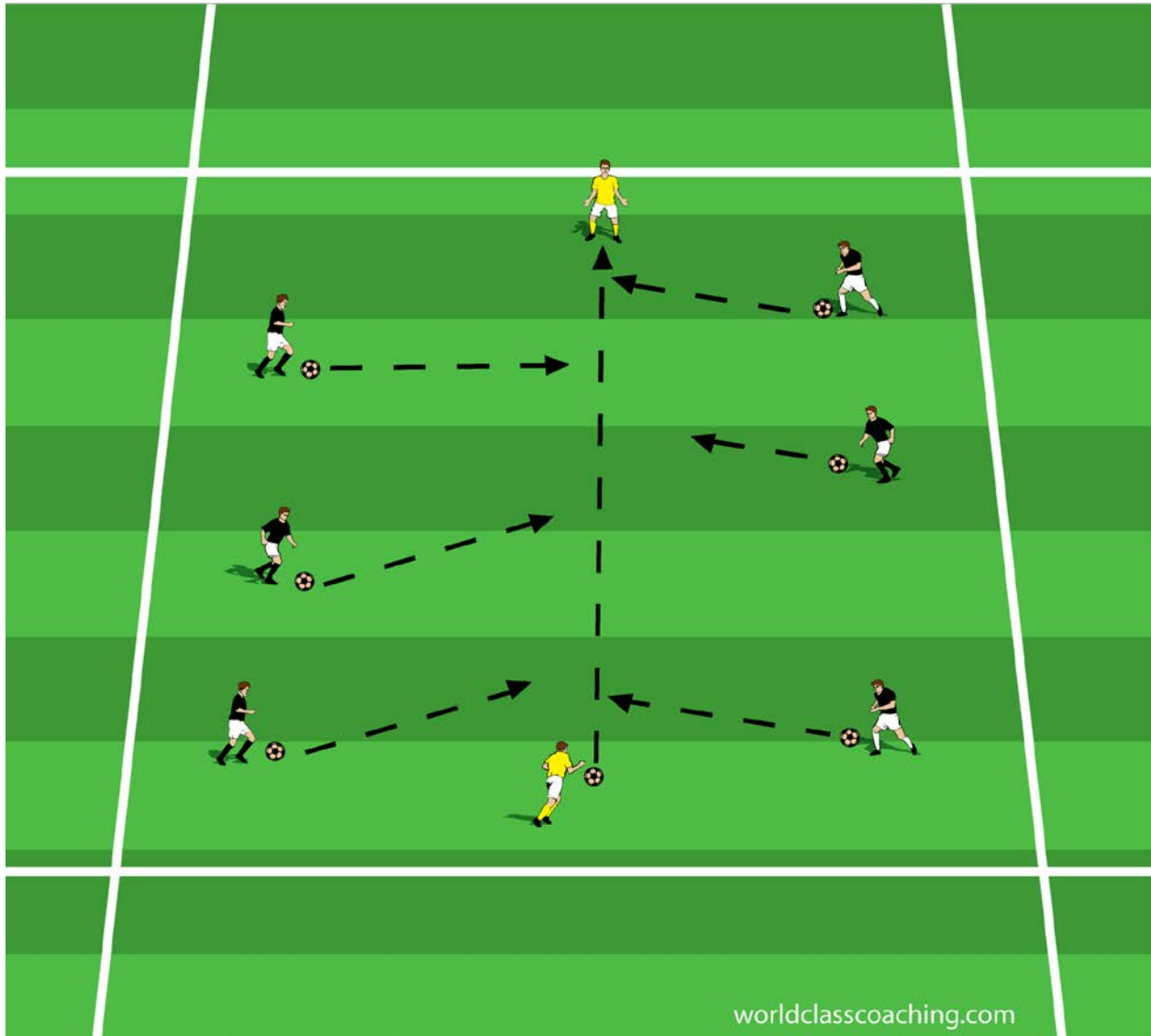
Passing Relay - 15X30 yard area

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

Variations:

- each player must take four dribbling touches (in place) before passing to the next player.
- play with the off foot only.

Demonstrate the importance of turning one's hips and shoulders after receiving to face the next player in line before passing the ball. Encourage players to control the ball and then turn before passing.



Duck Hunting - ¼ field

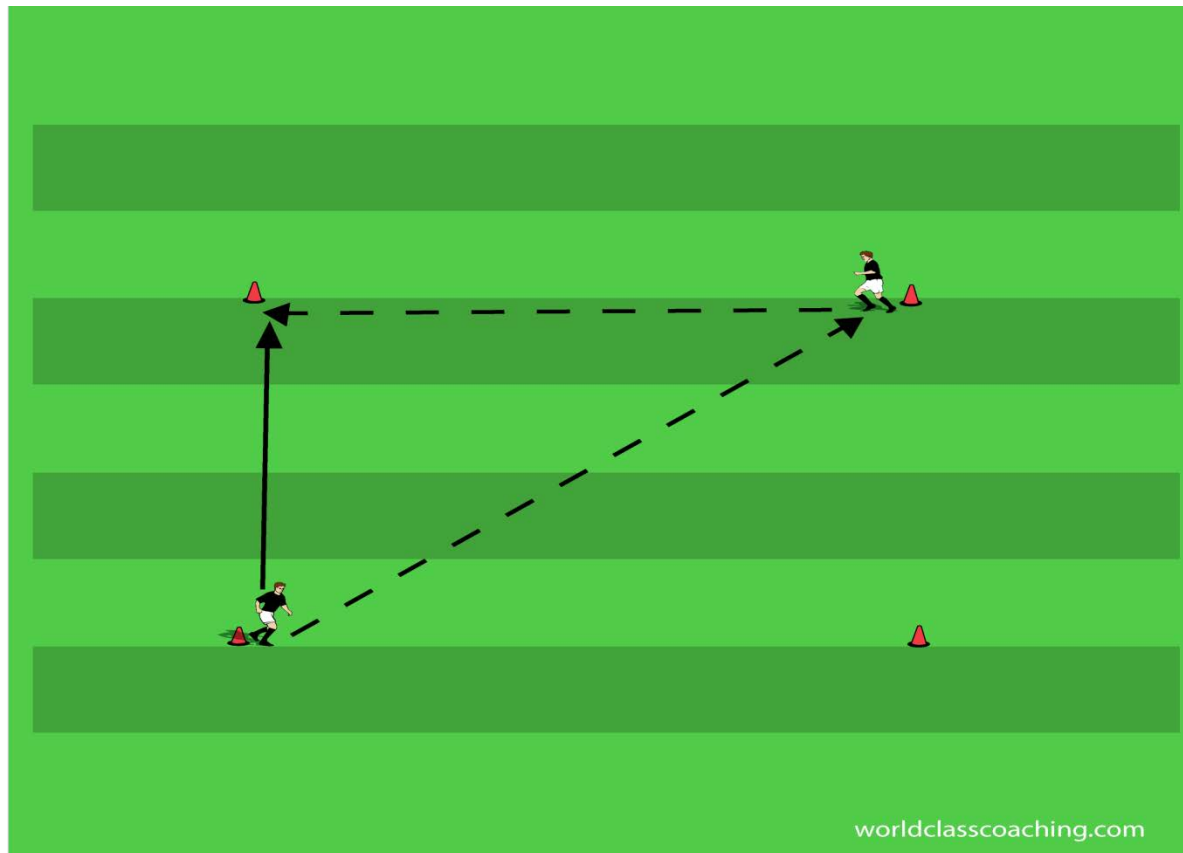
Select two players to pass a ball to each other. They stand in the middle of the area, ten yards apart. The remaining players stand with a ball on the side of the area so that they can kick their ball to try to hit the target ball when it is passed. Play once, then the players retrieve their balls and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

3 vs. 3 To Cone Goals - 25x25 yard field

Play 3 vs. 3 to small cone goals. For the first five minutes, require two passes from the team in possession before they can score. Then remove the restrictions and let the players play.

Training Session#15: Group play

Introduction: This session is designed to continue developing the players' sense of awareness and ability to support group play. This practice escalates the players' need to analyze increasing complex playing environments while also having fun learning to work together.



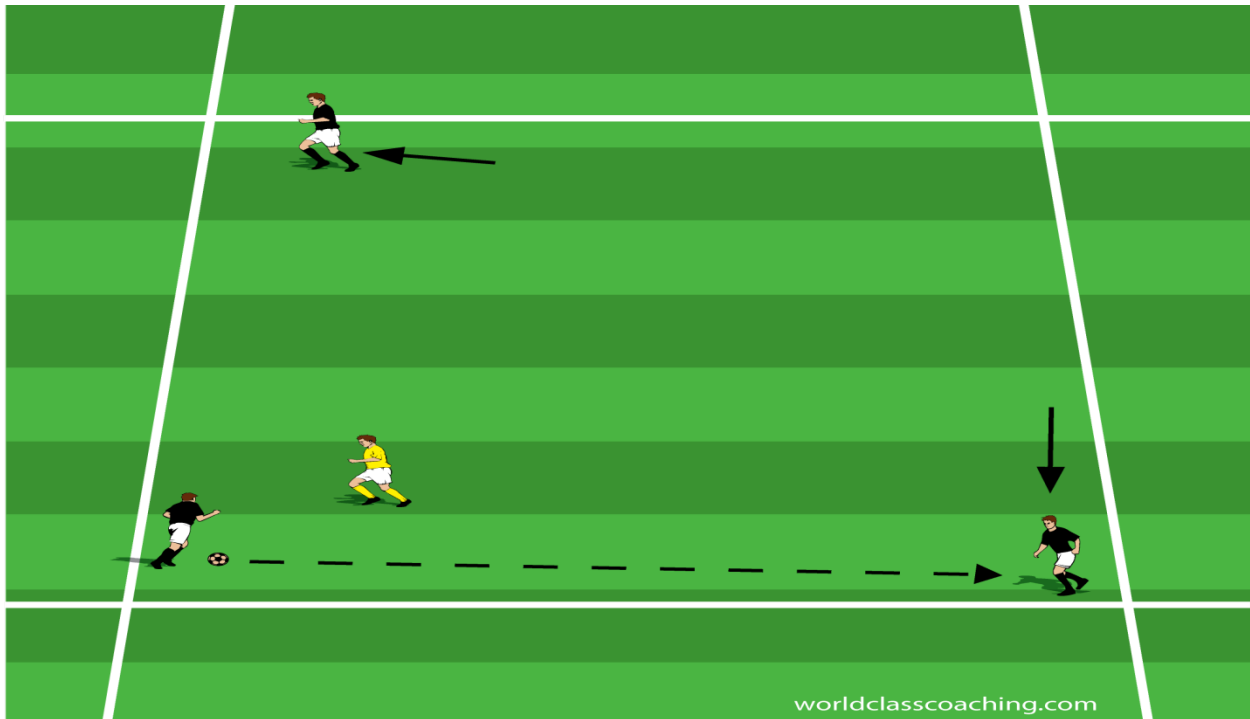
Angled passing in a grid - 10x10 yard grids

Build enough grids so players can work in pairs. Demonstrate with one group. Players start at opposite corners of the grid (see diagram). One player has the ball. This player passes at an angle to her partner, who receives with one touch and then plays straight ahead to her partner, who has sprinted over to the opposite corner on her end of the grid. After each pass, the players sprint to the other corner on their end, so that one player always plays straight and one at an angle.

Coaching cues and progression:

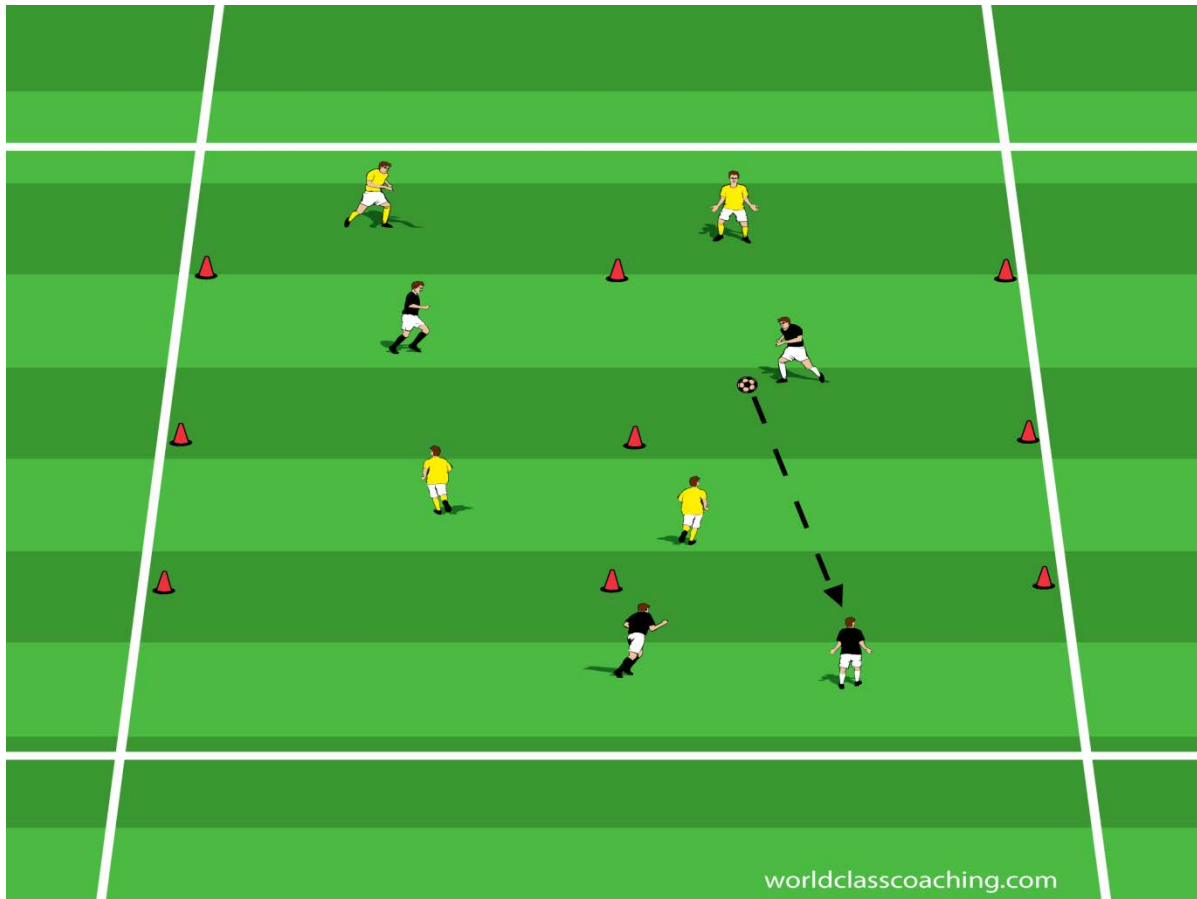
- having the players sprint to a pre-determined point compels them to learn to play to a moving target. It's a bit easier because they are still playing to a fixed point, but there is still timing involved and players should learn to play with a sense of rhythm.
- the pace of the pass is critical. If they play too hard and/or too early, play will break down. If they delay or play with insufficient pace, their partner will be waiting for the ball at the cone, and the coach must encourage players to find the proper pace.

- the preparation touch is also important. Players must prepare the ball in the direction in which they intend to play. The first touch must get the ball out of their feet to allow them to play the proper ball on a consistent basis.
- play for two minutes and then have the players change roles (i.e. so that the player who was playing straight ahead is now playing at an angle and vice versa).
- play a second round, encouraging players to use one touch where possible. They will need to take a bit of pace off of the ball to allow the runner time to get to the cone.



3v1 passing in a grid - 12x12 yard grids

Build grids so that there are enough to place groups of four with one soccer ball. Start with players on three of the corner cones and one player, the defender, in the middle. Demonstrate with one group. Explain that in this environment, players must pass only to the corner cones and that all passes must travel along the perimeter of the grid. Similarly, the attackers may only move along the perimeter of the grid. The defender may move freely within the area of the grid. Start the ball in a corner with one of the attackers. Show that the attacker must always have two passing options available by moving the attackers not in possession to the adjacent corners of the grid. Begin the exercise by having the defender work at $\frac{1}{2}$ speed so that the attackers get a rhythm and lots of repetition. If the defender wins the ball, have her return it to any of the attacking players. Rotate the defender every minute. After every player has taken a turn at the defender role, play through again, this time with the defender playing full speed after the first pass. Once again, if the defender wins the ball, she should return it to one of the perimeter players to restart play. This exercise is useful both to give some technical pressure to both passing and receiving, and also to begin the tactical building blocks of movement off of the ball and creating useful passing angles.



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

(U8+) Divide the group into two teams and place ½ of each team in two grids (one end grid and the middle grid on the opposite side –see diagram). The other team occupies the remaining two grids. Explain that the purpose of the game is work on passing to teammates in the other grid. All players must stay in the grid where they start the game. The team not in possession attempts to intercept passes and then play to their teammates in the other grid. Encourage players to pass within their grid to create a passing angle to the other grid. Give one point for each successful pass across the opponent's grid.

Variation:

- the defending team can send one player in to the zone of the team in possession to try to win back the ball.

5v5 to goals - full field

Play a full-sided scrimmage, deploying two teams in the team's chosen arrangement (typically 2-1-2 or 2-2-1 – no goalkeepers). For the first half of the scrimmage, impose a pair of restrictions (one at a time):

- All players on the team must touch the ball when the team gains possession before a goal can be scored.
- 3 passes must be completed before a goal can be scored,

Once the players have shown the ability to focus on group play, remove the restrictions and let them play.

Training Session#16: Receiving out of the Air

Introduction: Session#16 introduces the idea of receiving the ball out of the air. This is one of the most difficult of concepts for young players, who are still developing their motor coordination and often misjudge the ball. Most young players are a bit scared of the ball as well, and this session is designed to help improve motor perception of the ball and also learn to take the ball on the body, reducing the fear element as well.

Bounce juggle - 20x20 yard area

Each player has a ball. This is an activity designed to introduce players to juggling the ball. For young players, reacting to a ball in the air is an evolutionary process and this first challenge allows them to begin to work on their touch and to often experience some success as well. Players begin holding the ball at shoulder height. They allow it to drop and bounce and then try to use their laces surface to play the ball straight up in the air (not very high – usually waist high is a good starting point) and then the ball is allowed to bounce before they strike it again. Allow the players some time to experiment with and develop rhythm and touch. How many bounce juggles can they complete consecutively? The surfaces used in this progressing (laces, thighs, head) are three of the four standard surfaces (along with the chest) for receiving out of the air.

Progression:

- alternate the striking foot
- touch the ball with the thigh after one bounce, then the foot after a bounce, followed by a touch with the other thigh and finally the other foot (pattern repeats).
- Alternate between a touch with the head and one with a foot. When heading the ball, players should be instructed that safety is the primary focus at this age. Players should have their eyes open and mouths closed when heading and they should contact the ball at the hair line on their forehead.

Can they create other patterns?

Pairs receiving out of the air - touch line area

Players work in pairs along a touch line, with one player on the line and another on the field facing her, two yards away. Players on one side serve to their partner (underhand serves) for her to receive, settle to the ground and pass back. After ten repetitions, players change roles.

Progression:

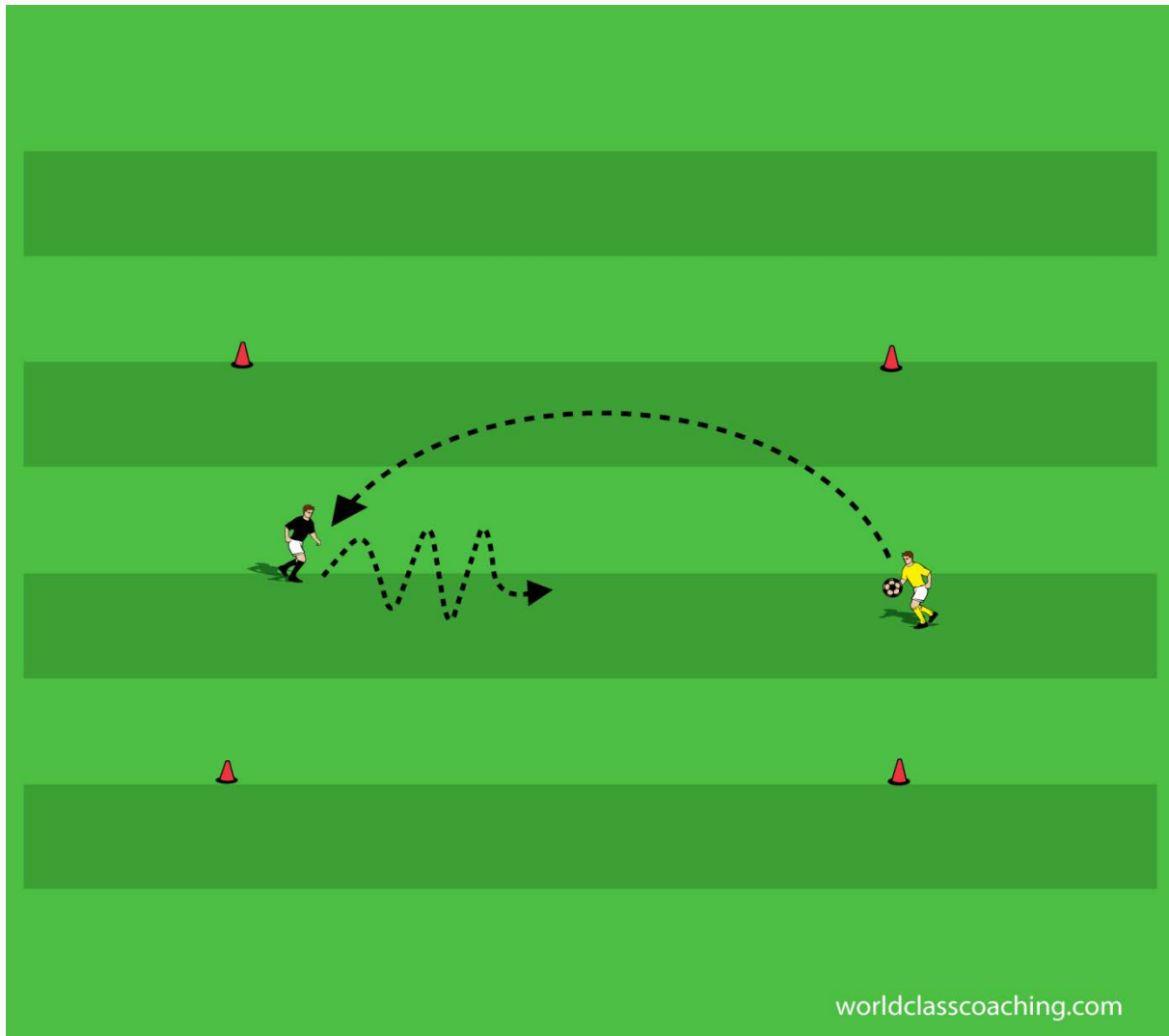
- receiving with the laces. The receiving player gets in line with the ball, presents the foot to be used to receive the ball, contacts and cushions the ball by lowering the foot at the moment of contact, and settles the ball to the ground. Players should learn to receive the ball with the outer half of their laces, pushing the ball into space outside of and in front of either foot. This first touch puts the ball in a position to avoid immediate pressure and also to be able to pass the ball with the second touch (where as dropping the ball between the feet often requires an extra touch to put the ball in a position from which one can pass). Instruct servers to toss to alternating feet on the working player.
- receiving with the thighs. The receiving player gets in line with the ball, presents the thigh to be used to receive the ball, contacts and cushions the ball by lowering the foot at the moment of contact and settles the ball to the ground. Players should learn to receive the ball with the outer half of the thigh pushing the ball into space outside of and in front of either foot. This first

touch puts the ball in a position to avoid immediate pressure and also to be able to pass the ball with the second touch (where as dropping the ball between the feet often requires an extra touch to put the ball in a position from which one can pass). Instruct servers to toss to alternating thighs on the working player.

- receiving with the chest. The receiving player gets in line with the ball, pushes her chest forward and shoulders back, contacts and cushions the ball (contact point is the high center chest boney spot well below the base of the neck) by pushing the shoulders forward and guiding the ball to the ground. Players should learn to turn to one side above their waste, pushing the ball into space outside of and in front of either foot. This first touch puts the ball in a position to avoid immediate pressure and also to be able to pass the ball with the second touch (where as dropping the ball between the feet often requires an extra touch to put the ball in a position from which one can pass). Instruct the active player to turn the ball to alternating sides with each serve.
- receiving the ball with the head. Although this is a technique that is rarely used (most often the ball is driven with the head rather than controlled with this surface), it is a useful introduction to heading for young players and a skill that can be very useful in game situations. Once again, the receiving players should be instructed to keep their eyes open and their mouth closed for safety. In this sequence and to learn to control the ball with the head, the server will continue to serve a ball for the active player to receive, but the goal, rather than settling the ball to the ground, will be to see if the active player can get the ball to stop, even briefly, on her head. This involves cushioning (the ball may bounce on the head a bit, but players should try to get shorter bounces with each touch) the ball with good balance. For this exercise, the players should alternate server/active player roles with each toss. Can anyone get the ball to settle on their head and stay there?

Individual collections - 20x20 yard grid

Each player has a ball. This exercise adds movement to the receiving. Players dribble around the area. Every 5 touches, they pick up the ball, toss it up high and settle the ball using any of the surfaces trained in the previous exercise.



1 vs. 1 with throw-in restarts - 10x10 yard grids

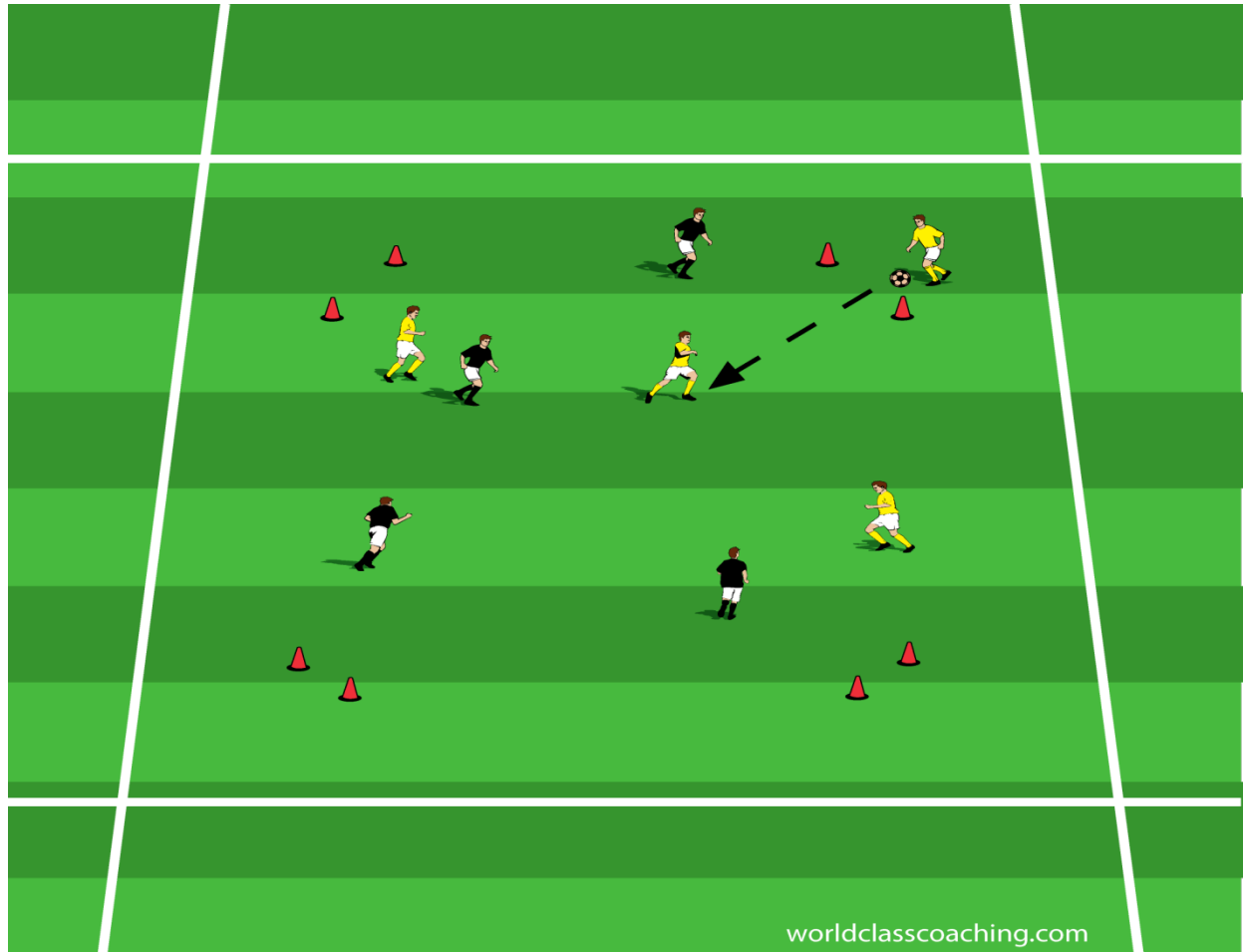
Put two players at each end of the grid as shown. A ball supply is located at one end. The server restarts play with a throw in to her opponent, who settles the ball out of the air. The two players then duel, trying to dribble the ball over one-another's end lines. When the ball leaves the grid, the duel is over. The two players change ends and the next duel begins.

3 vs. 3 games on a narrow field with throw-in restarts - 15x25 yard fields

Play small-sided games on narrow fields (to create more throw-in opportunities) to small cone goals. All re-starts are throw-ins and the target player for each throw is allowed one free touch before other players are live. Players should focus on receiving the ball and settling it. Mid way through the scrimmage, remove the restriction and allow free play.

Training Session#17: Group play

Introduction: This group play session continues the theme of raising players' awareness of – and ability to use – their teammates to increase team success in possession.



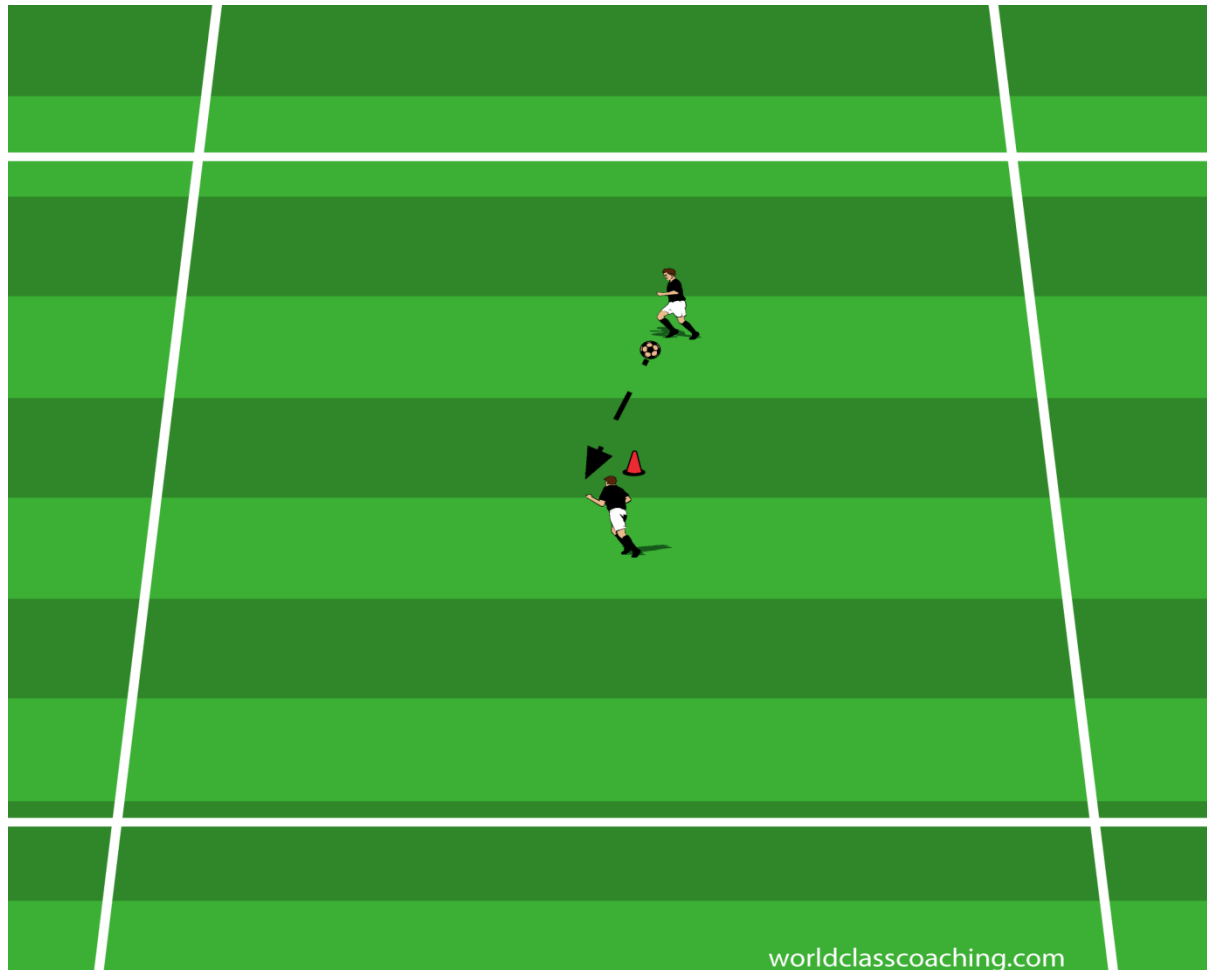
Gates - 30x30 yard grid

Create two equal teams (one in vests). The coach will need to have a supply of balls near the perimeter of the grid for restarting play when the ball leaves the grid. The two teams play a possession game inside the grid with the goal of passing the ball through any of the “gates” (pairs of cones one yard apart scattered throughout the grid as shown in the diagram).

Rules and coaching points:

- to score, a pass must travel through a gate and be received by a teammate on the other side.
- explain to the players before beginning that it is very easy to defend a single gate as a defender can simply stand between the cones. Therefore, the teams need to look to possess the ball with an eye toward working to find an open gate. If a gate draws a defender, the attackers must look elsewhere.
- the most common breakdown in this game is a tendency to crowd the ball. The coach should stop the action if need be a couple of times early on to demonstrate the need to spread out the game. Longer passes typically create open gates and relieve pressure for the attackers.

Play for ten minutes, using the game to assess the team's ability to possess the ball under pressure.



Pairs pass and receive with a cone - 20x30 yard area

Arrange players in pairs with a ball. One player stands on the touchline with the ball and her partner stands behind a cone placed four yards from the touchline. Demonstrate with one pair. The player behind the cone works on the balls of her feet, alternately stepping around one side of the cone and then the other to receive. In receiving, she needs to touch the ball around the cone and play back on the other side. For example, if she steps around to her right, she should receive with the inside of the right foot and touch the ball behind the cone (forward, at an angle) and play back to her partner on left side of the cone using her left foot. Play for one minute and then change roles.

Variations:

- play one touch for the working player.
- play one touch for both players. This requires a very high work rate for the active player and will require rotation after thirty seconds.

No pressure possession in groups - ½ field

Put the players in two teams (one in vests). Each team has a ball. This environment is designed to allow players to focus on: Their technical ability; their speed of play; their communication; and their movement off of the ball. The two teams play in the field at the same time (they do not interfere with the other team's possession). Play each of the following variations for two minutes.

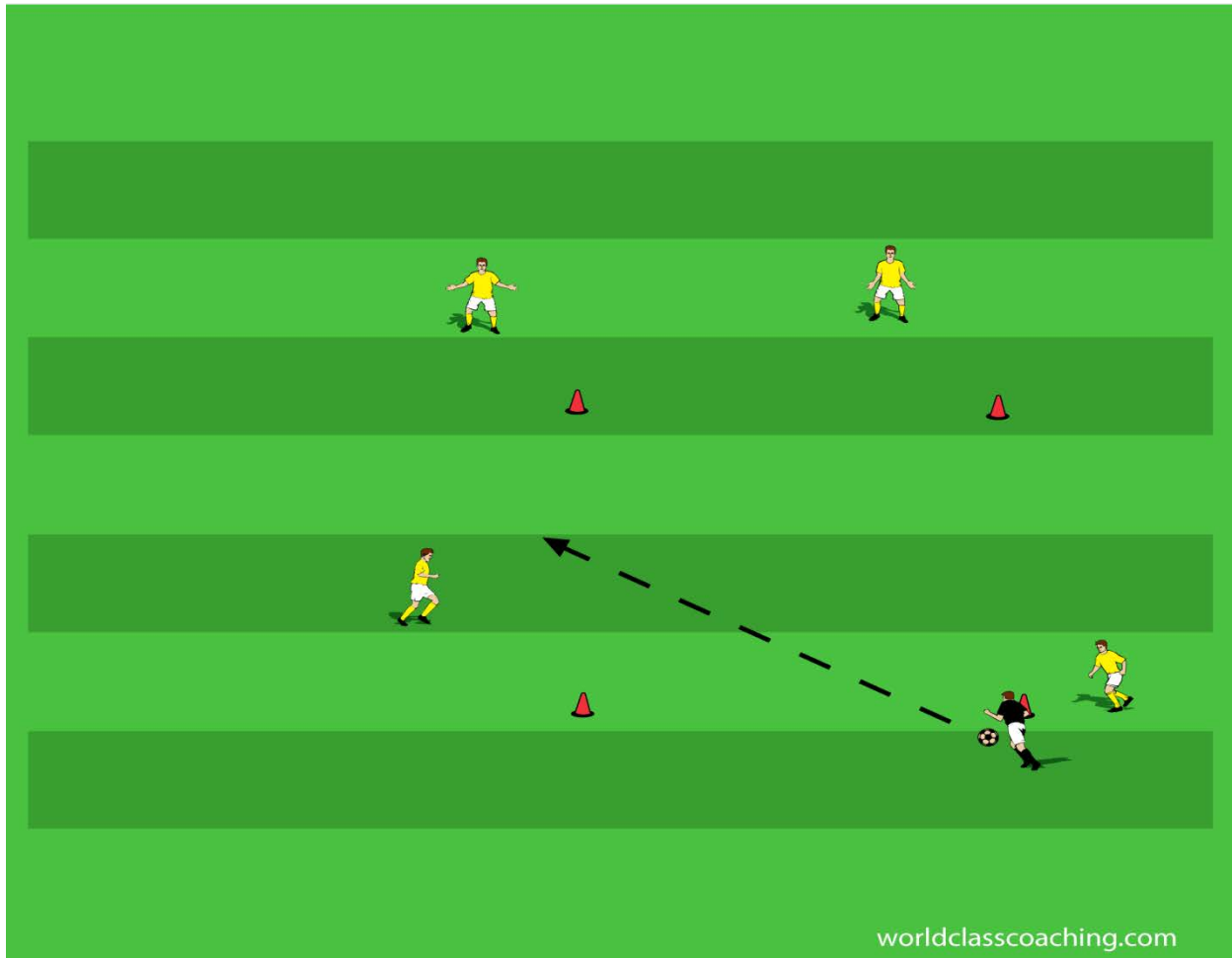
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- communication. Before a pass can be made, the passer and the target must get eye contact (visual) and call out one-another's names (verbal communication).
 - pass and sprint. As the team knocks the ball around, the player who just passed the the ball makes a five yard sprint away from the ball. Emphasize that all players must continue to jog and to use the entire space as their team plays. Explain that these rules apply throughout the exercise.
 - off foot only. Require players to both pass and receive with their off foot.

5v5 with Scatter Rule - full field

Play a regular scrimmage (without goalkeepers), deploying the team in the chosen formation. For the first few minutes of the scrimmage, after passing the ball, players must run around a corner flag (nearest or any or furthest – mix it up for the players) before rejoining play. This restriction helps limit the bunching so common in games among young teams. Mid way through the scrimmage, remove the restriction and let the players play.

Training session#18: Finishing

Introduction: This final session in the U9-U10 curriculum is intended as a reinforcement of players' good habits in striking the ball, with an emphasis on playing around the goal and finishing in particular.



Soccer kickball - ½ field

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

Variations:

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

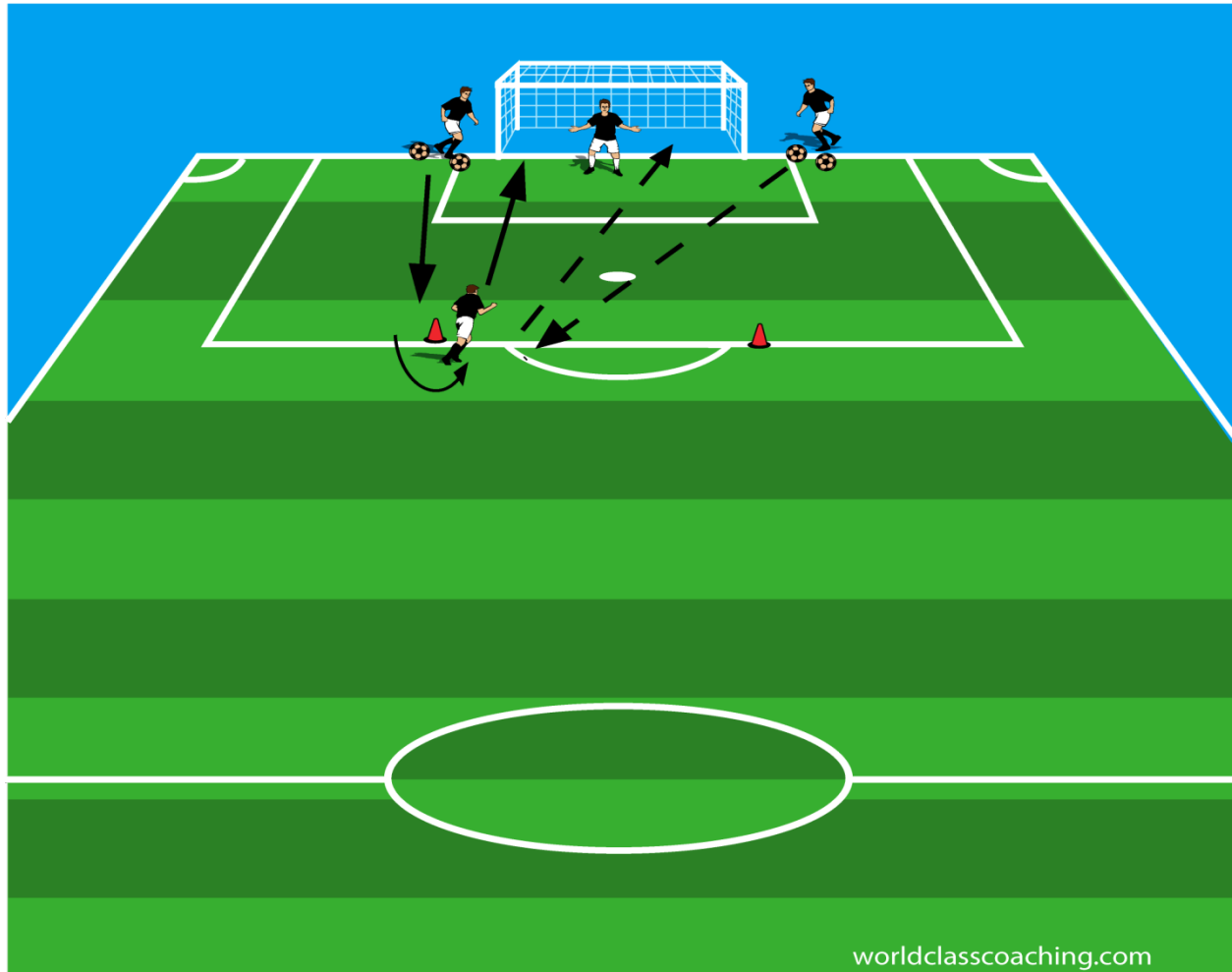
Pairs passing and shooting progression - ¼ field

Players work in pairs with one soccer ball per pair and along the touch-line. Instruct each pair to start and stay four yards apart. The following progression is designed to both give players numerous striking touches and also provide them with a useful tutorial in learning to select a finishing surface. Play each sequence for two minutes, focusing upon proper technique, accuracy and also assuring that players alternate the striking foot each time they play.

- two-touch passing. Using the inside of the foot, players ping the ball back and forth with their partner. Emphasize speed and quality of footwork and striking.
- one-touch. Using the inside of the foot again, players knock the ball back and forth with their partner, alternating the striking foot with each touch. Players use one touch where possible and two touches when necessary to sustain the exercise.
- laces striking: Short distance. Demonstrate with one pair proper use of the laces surface to strike the ball. Explain that this surface allows for the greatest striking power, but also creates more room for error, as the laces surface is more narrow and inherently less stable than the inside surface of the foot. Therefore, players must work very hard to develop consistency in striking with their laces. The technical cues for striking with the laces are:
 4. lock the ankle with the toes pointed at the ground.
 5. place the plant foot next to the ball, below the shoulder, assuring that the toes of the plant foot point in the direction of the target.
 6. encourage players to put their knee in a firm position as well and consider their hip as the point of rotation. Players should practice this striking motion without a ball to begin, holding their foot on the follow-through to check their form.
- laces striking: Medium distance. Move the players back so that the pairs are working with ten yards between them. Players continue to strike the ball with their laces, alternating feet with each strike. Continue to emphasize accuracy and proper technique.

The most common technical errors are:

- the ball pops up in the air. This indicates that the player is striking the ball at a low point, causing the ball to fly upward off of her foot. This player needs to strike the middle-back of the ball to keep it traveling on the ground.
- the ball consistently travels wide of the target. Here, the player is typically either playing with the plant foot pointed away from the target or failing to strike the ball on the center back, so that the ball spins off of the laces to one side.
- the ball does not travel the distance. Here the player is typically failing to lock her ankle and/or knee or she is not striking the ball with sufficient force.

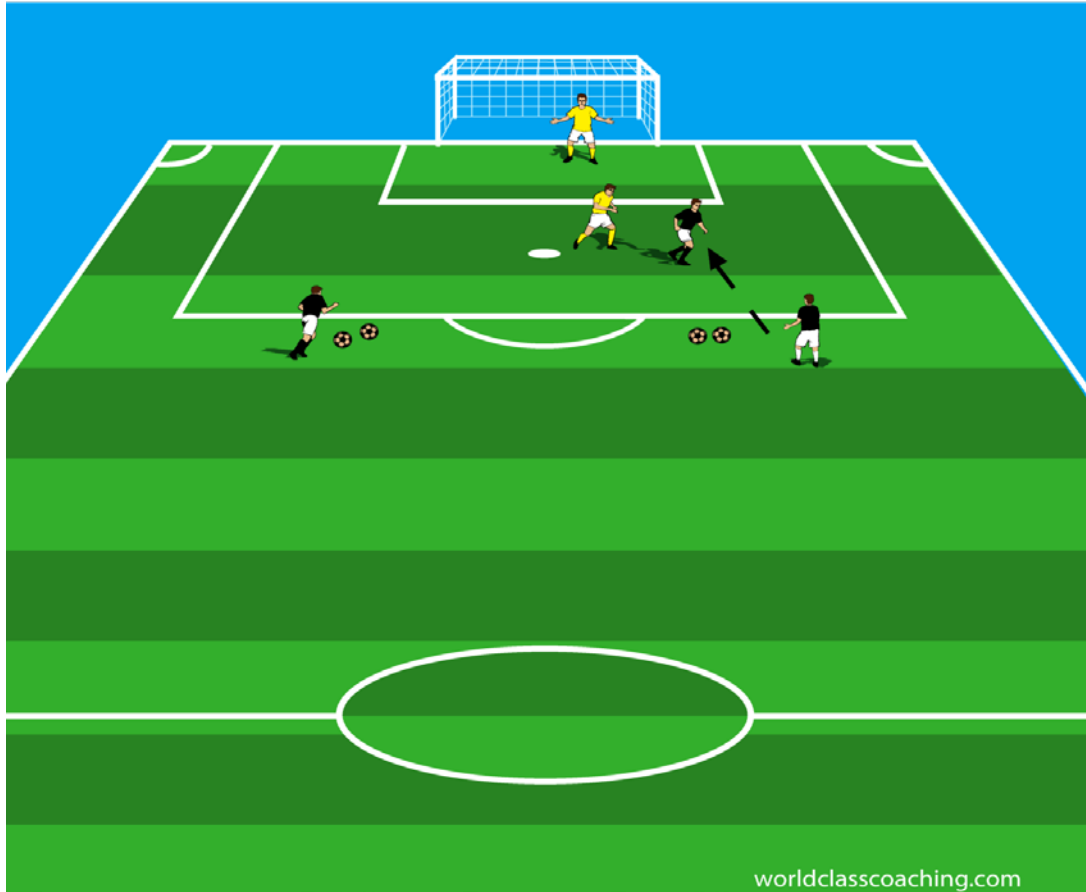


Pass/Shoot/Play GK - goal box area

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

Variations:

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



1v1 Hotbox - large goal box

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

Multiple balls game with no goalkeepers - ½ field

Divide the group into two teams. Explain that either team may score in either of two goals at the ends of the field. The ball remains live while it is within the grid. All re-starts should come from the coach, who keeps a ball supply along the perimeter near the center of the field. The coach should keep at least two balls in play at all times. Encourage players to both play defense when the other team has the ball and also to attack either goal and shoot whenever they have the opportunity. Keep track of goals scored and play for five minutes.

3 vs. 3 to goals - 20x20 yard fields

Play 3 vs. 3 to cone goals. Encourage players to use their laces to finish as in previous exercises. The goals should be full-sized despite the relatively small fields, so that there is frequent opportunity to shoot and to score. Play without goalkeepers and keep score.

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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.