

PRESEASON CONDITIONING



by ALEX TRUKAN

Preseason Conditioning

By

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Introduction

With the new season approaching soon, most of the teams are now about to start their pre-season. Players often associate this time of the year with hard work, running and fitness drills. Although hard work is very beneficial, it can be even more effective if it's combined with clever work. In conditioning context, that might mean combining technical, tactical and psychological work all together in realistic practices to achieve conditioning outcomes. In other, simpler words, conditioning with the ball. This form of training is not only more enjoyable and engaging for players, but also links to real football better, with players using their physical attributes in football specific way. This booklet is not a comprehensive guide or scientific booklet about how to prepare your team for a new season. It is not a magical guide how to win games and have the fittest team in the league. It is rather a quick booklet with some ideas for pre-season practices. These practices can be adapted, changed and combined with others. These examples serve as a template and present a type of practices that might be used in pre-season training. Eight examples presented in this booklet cover various conditioning elements and are divided according to weeks in which they should be mainly used within 6-week pre-season block. These practices, however are not only for pre-season work. Any conditioning preparation should be build up gradually, sustainable and continued into the season. That's why, these examples should be used within the season as well, building up your players' fitness gradually. Most importantly, condition of your players should be monitored, whether it's coaches' intuition and observation skills or high-tech exercise monitoring systems. Based on this information pre-season training should be tweaked and changed to suit your specific needs. Listen to your players and they will give you a lot of answers! Enjoy the pre-season work and good luck in the upcoming season!

'Win by one goal' 8v8 Game (8v8 – 11v11)

Week: 1 & 2

This practice is focused on developing aerobic energy system using extensive endurance training method. Improving oxygen supply into the muscles will ensure ATP (energy) can be produced for longer and therefore body will have higher capacity to restore the energy. This type of training improves lung ventilation, strengthens veins and increases the number of red cells. From technical and tactical point of view, this practice challenges teams to improve possession, passing and staying on the ball. It is highly engaging practice as the learning happens within the game and multiple outcomes are achieved in different parts of the game.

Set up and directions

Organise an 8v8 pitch of approximately 60 x 40 yards with two goals. Divide the group into two teams of eight players. Goalkeepers should be set in goals. Prepare a supply of balls next to each goal to ensure flow of the practice.



The game starts with a goalkeeper playing the ball out into of the attackers. There are no corners, the game is resumed by a goalkeeper every time it goes for a corner.



Both teams compete against each other and attempt to score in the opposite goals. Quick and positive forward play should be encouraged.



When one of the teams score to make it 1-0, the team that has scored is not allowed to score again until the opposition scores to make it 1-1. Similarly, if one of the team scores to make it 2-1, it is not allowed to score again until the score is 2-2 (both teams allowed to score then). So the game can be only won by one goal. When one of the teams is winning, they will be looking to keep possession.



Timing:

Game should be played 10-15 mins and repeated 2-6 times with 2 mins break in between. The intensity should be 50-60 %.

Variations:

- 9v9/10v10/11v11
- Score only using first touch
- Assist has to be off one touch

Two Ball 6v6 Game (5v5 – 7v7)

Week: 3 & 4

This game is focused on developing aerobic energy system using intensive endurance training method. Aerobic energy system serves as a base for the development of all other conditioning components. This practice will improve oxygen supply into the muscles and therefore body's capacity to restore energy will improve. From technical and tactical point of view, it focuses on passing, combination play as well as movements off the ball. It develops players' ability to prioritise risk/reward. It also helps players to develop shielding techniques and strength to stay on the ball.

Set up and directions

Organise 40 x 30 yards pitch for a 6v6 format. Divide the pitch into three thirds with areas next to the goal being shorter than the middle area. Organise two teams of six. Set goalkeepers in goals. One of the players from each team starts in the area next to the goal. Rest of the players (4v4) start in the middle area. Prepare a supply of balls next to the goals to ensure flow of the practice.



On a coach's signal, both goalkeepers play out the ball into their team. Ball can be played into middle area or into the nearest third. Ensure quality of pass is good.



Both teams looking to keep possession of their ball and win the second ball from the opposition. Players in the first zone can be only tackled by one opposition player. That means it can be only 1v1 situation (plus a goalkeeper) in the zones next to goals.



If a team manages to get in possession of two balls, they can score in the opposition goal. Team can't score if they have only one ball in possession. The game then starts again from both goalkeepers.



Timing:

The game should be played 4-8 minutes and repeated 4-6 times with 2 mins breaks in between.

Variations:

- 5v5/7v7
- No end zones – free to go anywhere on the pitch
- Three balls in play – have to be in possession of two to score

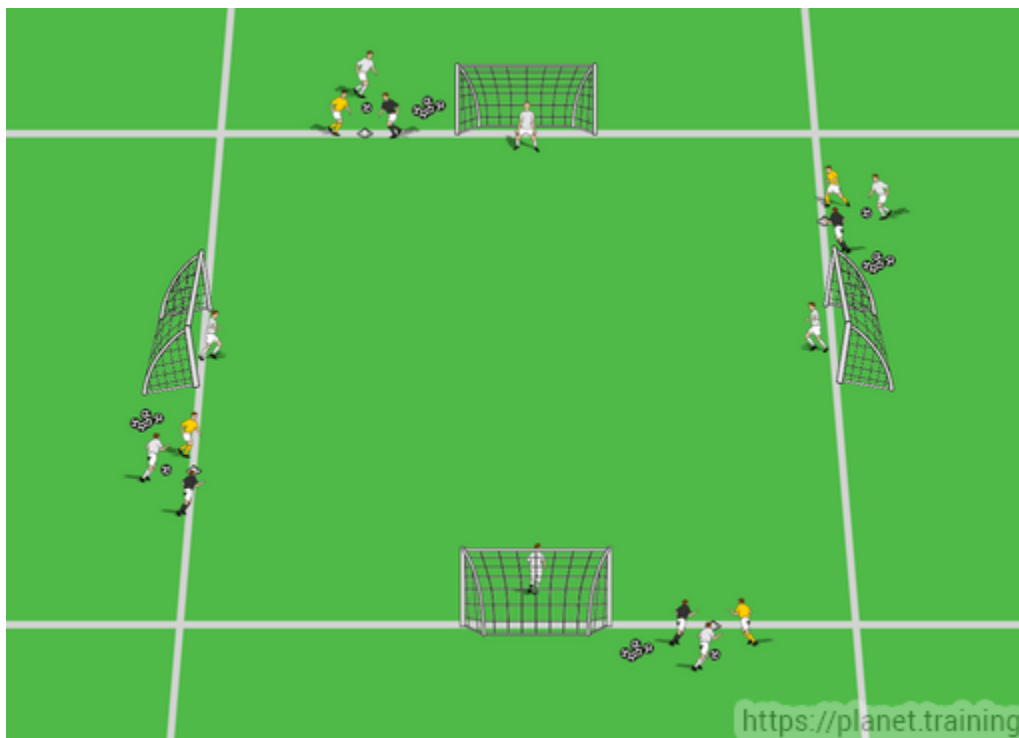
1v1 Duels to Develop Anaerobic Endurance

Week: 3 & 4

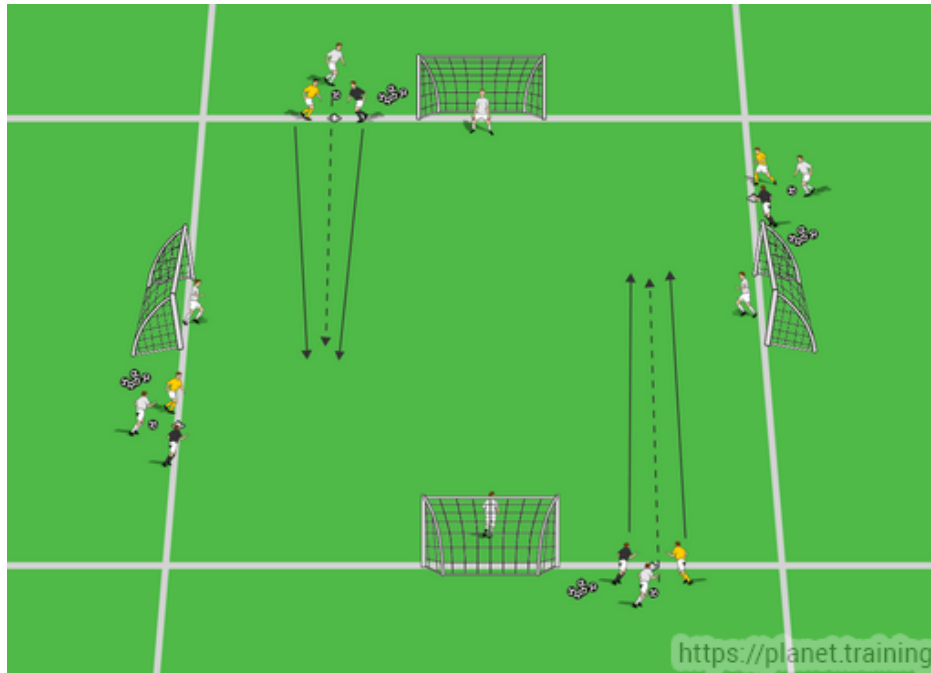
This practice is focused on developing body's ability to maintain the quantity of high intensity actions throughout the whole game. Thanks to this physical component, players will be able to sprint and produce bursts with quality even towards the end of the match. From technical point of view, the practice focuses on 1v1 duels both from attacking and defending point of view. It also develops players' reactions and challenges to do recovery runs. Final element of the practice is a shot which adds more enjoyment and keeps players engaged.

Set up and directions

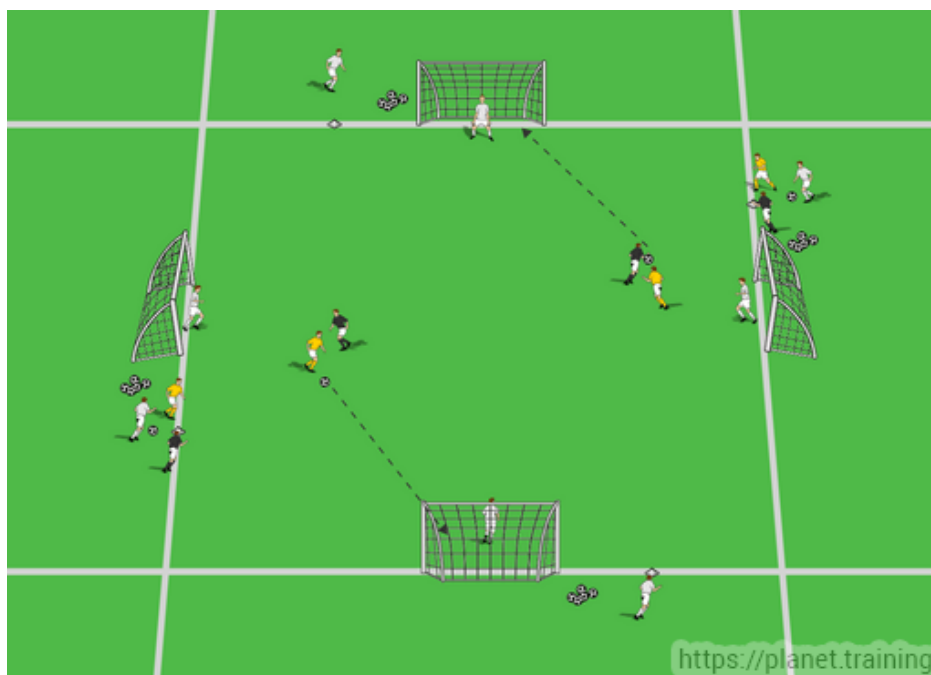
Organise 25 x 25 yards square with a goal on each end as shown on the diagram below. Set a goalkeeper in each goal. Divide players into pairs and set them up on the cone next to each goal (a pair next to each goal). Next to each pair there should be a server with a supply of balls to ensure flow of the practice.



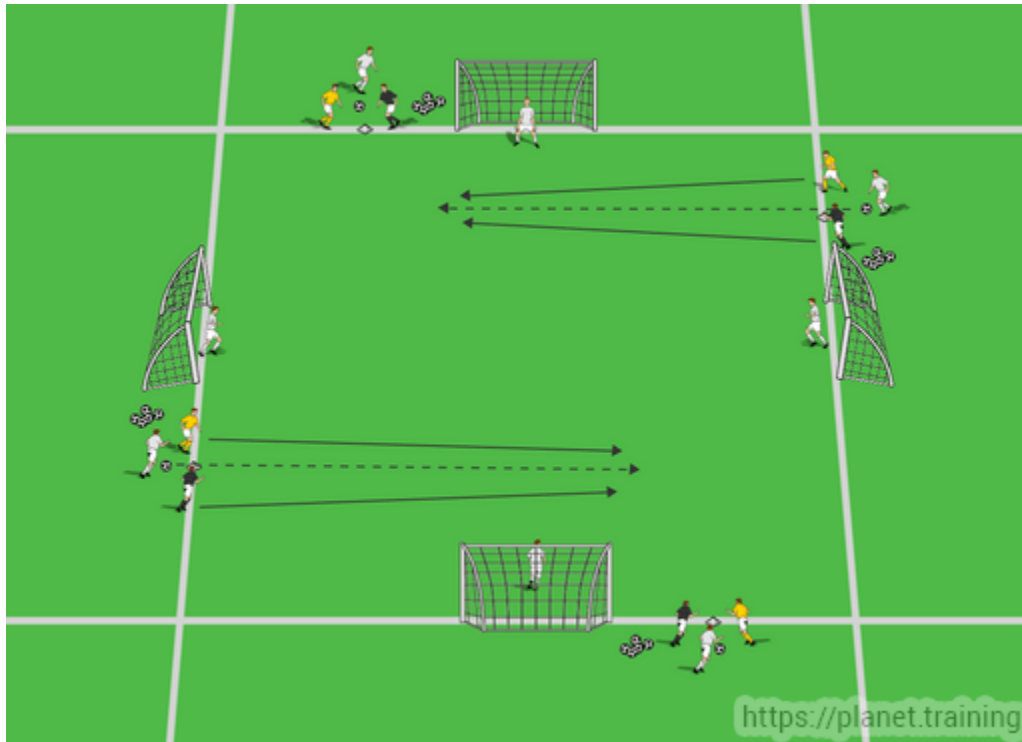
On a coach's signal, server passes the ball forwards, in between two players. As soon as the ball is passed, players compete in a running duel and try to get to the ball first. Two pairs opposite each other work at a time.



The player that gets to the ball first, has a shot on goal. Each player has just one touch so no further dribbling is allowed. Every goal counts as a point. No sliding tackles are allowed.



After two pairs opposite each other have finished, the other two start working. This will ensure appropriate work to rest ratios without unnecessary breaks. Players should be paired up strategically according to speed level.



Timing:

Each pair should complete 6-10 repetitions in 2-4 series. Rest between repetitions should be 10 seconds (other two pairs working), and between series, 4 minutes.

Variations:

- Have to take a touch before a finish
- Rotate partners
- Increase/decrease the size of the area (length within 15-25 yards range)

Continuous Recovery Runs to develop Anaerobic Endurance

Week: 3 & 4

The following practice is focused on developing anaerobic endurance – body's ability to maintain the quantity of high intensity actions throughout the whole match. From technical and tactical perspective, this practice involves counter attacking scenario when players have to run with the ball forwards and finish as soon as possible. The defending side of it are recovery runs – quick reactions after losing the ball. Competitive element gives players more motivation to produce 100% effort.

Set up and directions

Organise a 15 x 20 yards rectangle with a goal on two opposite ends as shown on the diagram below. Set goalkeepers in goals. Divide the team into two groups. One group starts next to one of the goals, the other group starts next to the opposite goal. Every player has one ball each.



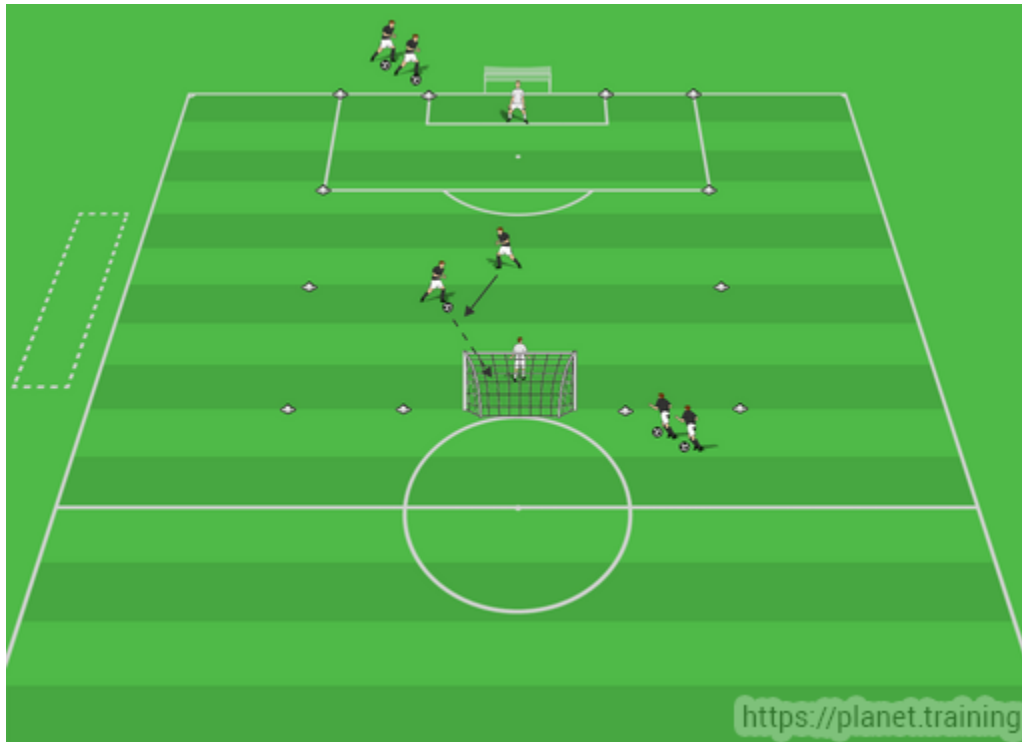
On a coach's signal, first player from one of the groups starts running with the ball as fast as he can towards the opposition goal. This should be done as fast as possible on a maximal intensity.



As soon as the running player gets into the final third, he has a shot on goal. At the same time, first player from the opposite group starts driving forwards with the ball and goes to score in the opposite goal.



The player that just had a shot has to react and recover quickly and try to stop the opposition from scoring. After a shot and recovery run, players join back into their groups. With two players on each end, work to rest ratio is managed well.



Timing:

Each player should complete 6-10 repetitions in 2-4 series. Rest between repetitions should be 10 seconds (given there is two on each end, it will be the other two players working at that time), and between series, 4 minutes.

Variations:

- Goalkeeper plays the ball out into the first player
- One-two combination before running forwards
- Different sizes and shapes of goals and pitch

1v1's to Develop Power to Accelerate

Week: 5

This practice is focused on improving maximal explosiveness of the action. It will help players to gain advantage over opposition in running duels and be more powerful in 1v1 battles. Technically, the practice contains a lot of staying on the ball skills, combination play as well as an element of a finish. It can be adapted to include more tactical elements as well whilst working on the conditioning aspect.

Set up and directions

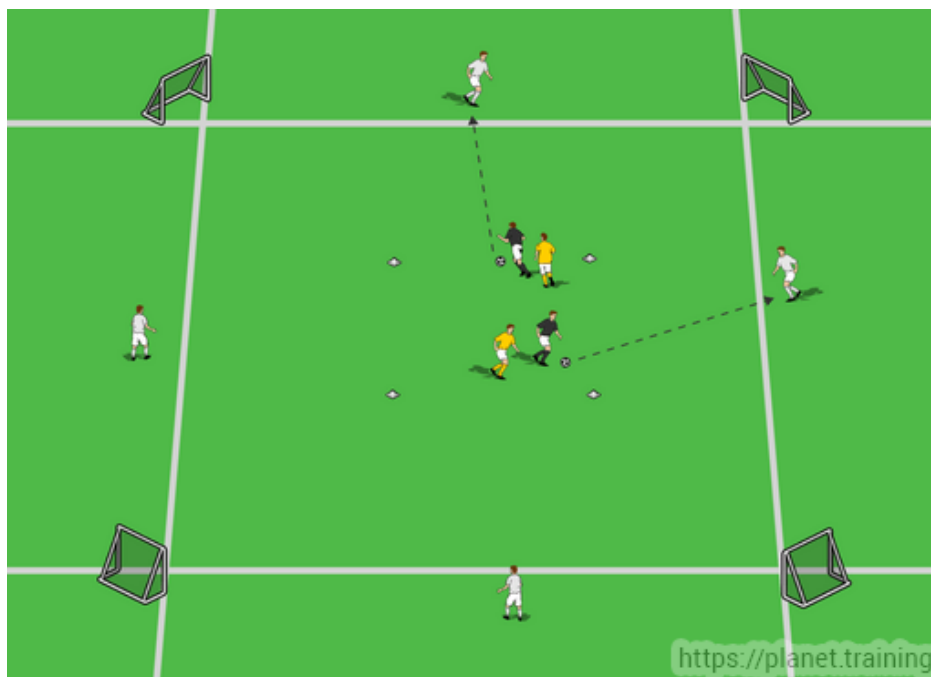
Organise 40 x 40 yards square and a further 8 x 8 yards square in the middle of it. Place a small goal in each of the corner of the big square. Divide the team into two groups of four. First group of four starts outside the square, with one player on each end. The other four get in pairs and assign one defender and one attacker within a pair. Both pairs in the middle need one ball each.



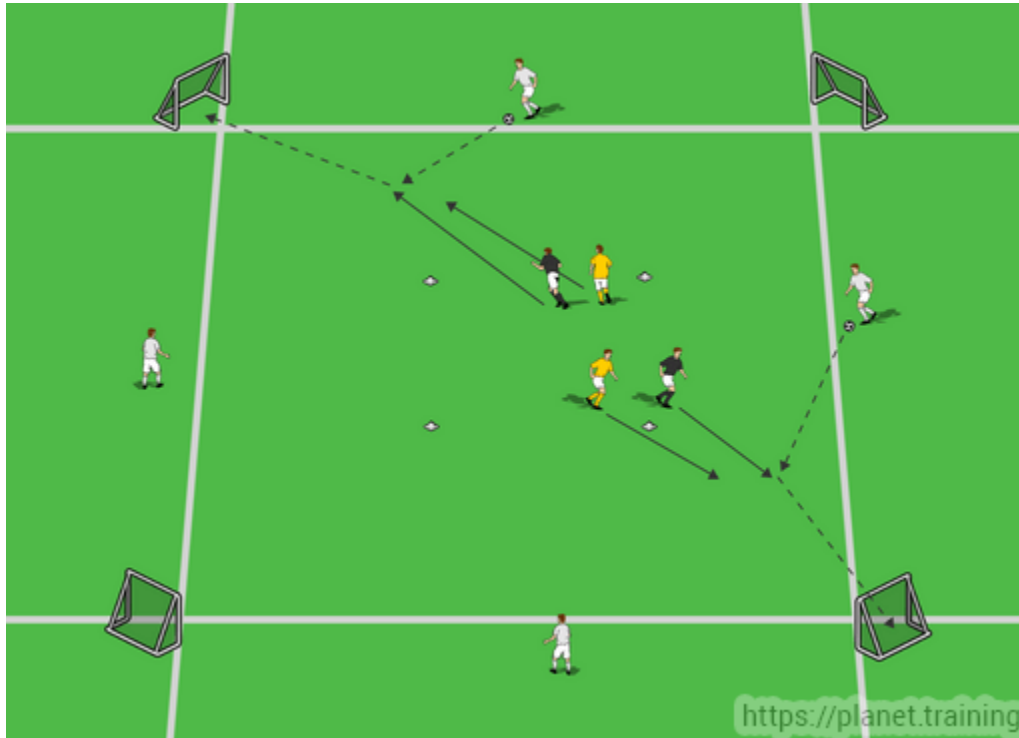
The practice starts with a player on the ball trying to stay on it within small square. The other player from a pair tries to win it back. If he wins it back, he tries to stay on it and don't give it away.



On a coach's signal (staying on the ball should not last longer than 5 seconds), whoever is on the ball tries to break out and combine with one of the outside players.



Outside player plays back off one touch to set the finish up into one of the small goals. Finish has to be off one touch as well. After each go, players rotate. Players from the inside swap with the outside players.



Timing:

Each repetition (staying on the ball plus break out) should last between 5-7 seconds and be repeated 4-6 times in 1-2 series. Ensure maximal effort on each repetition. Rest between repetitions should be 1 minute (other four working) and between series, 4 minutes.

Variations:

- Outside players play off one touch
- Can't finish in the nearest goal
- Increase/decrease the size of the area

3v3+2 Turning Game (3v3/4v4)

Week: 5 & 6

This practice is aimed at improving body's speed of recovery between high intensity actions. Therefore, the quicker ATP (energy) can be returned and available, the quicker a player will be able to produce sprints and maximal bursts again. Main technical component of this practice is turning. This will require players to be good at scanning, combination play as well as recognising and creating spaces. Goals can be also included in the practice what will add finishing element to it and make it more engaging.

Set up and directions

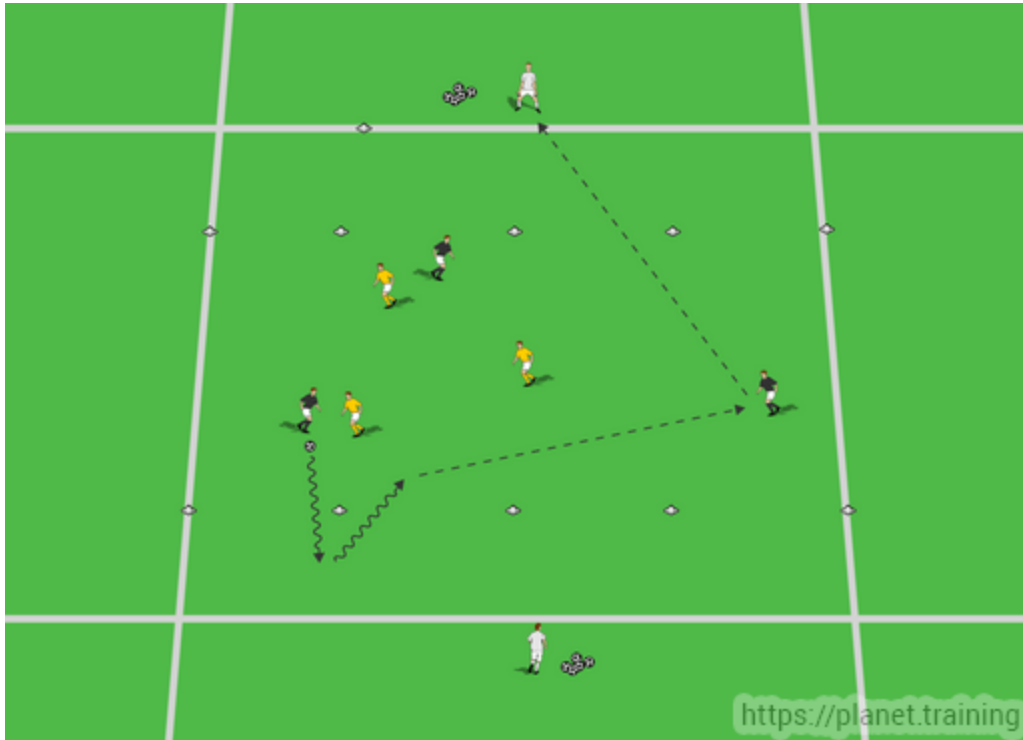
Organise 20 x 30 yards rectangle with two end zones (3 yards long) as shown on the diagram below. Divide the group into two teams of three and two target players. Set target players behind the end zones, one on each end. Remaining six players start in the middle. Prepare a supply of balls next to each target player to ensure flow of the practice.



The practice starts with one of the target players who plays the ball into attacking team (which team is attacking first is decided by the coach). The team in possession then tries to combine and play through to the other side of the area.



The aim of the team is to visit opposite end zone, turn back and play the ball into the same target player from which they got the ball originally. That counts as one point. If the pass back to the target player is not available, they might choose to visit opposite end zone and then play the ball into the other target player. The idea stays the same – visit opposite end zone before passing the ball into the target player.



As a progression, goals might be added. In this scenario as the ball is passed into the target player, he will be looking to play a wall pass and set somebody else to finish in goals off one touch. The game is then restarted from opposite target player.



Timing:

The practice should be played 1-3 minutes and repeated 6-10 times in 2 series. Rest period between repetitions should be 3 to 1 minutes and between series, 4 minutes.

Variations:

- Add goals (various sizes can be used)
- Player that passed the ball into target player can't score
- 3v3/4v4

2v2 Staying on the Ball League (3v3/4v4)

Week: 5 & 6

This practice is improving body's speed of recovery between high intensity actions. Thanks to this conditioning component, players will be ready to perform another high intensity action earlier (speed of recovery improved). Technically, the practice is focused on staying on the ball in small teams of two. Players will be challenged to shield the ball, dribble as well as combine in two's.

Set up and directions

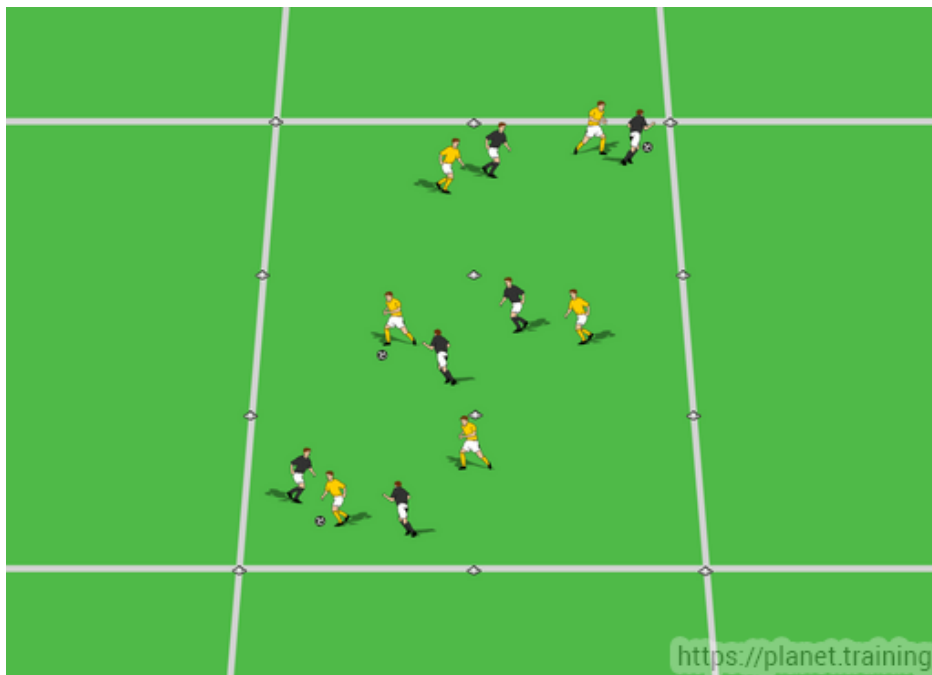
Organise three rectangles of 5 x 10 yards next to each other as shown on the diagram below. Split the group into six teams of two. Assign each team and their opposition into all of the three areas. Each area needs one ball to play plus supply of extra balls next to the pitch.



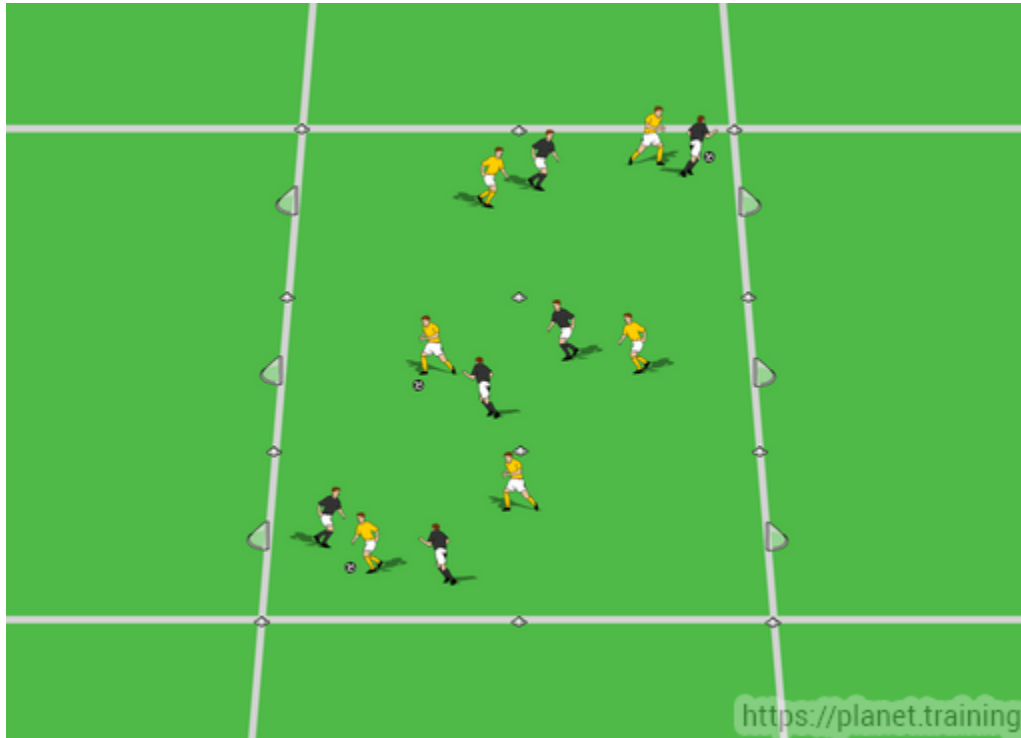
On a coach's signal, one team starts on the ball and tries to keep possession of it within their square. When it goes out, pass in or dribble in applies. No sliding tackles allowed. Defending teams should be encouraged to stay on their feet and regain possession cleanly.



Once possession is gained by the opposition, they are looking to stay on the ball as well. The team that finishes in possession of the ball at the end of designated time, wins the game. Winner moves up one pitch, losing team moves down one pitch. Winner in the highest league (pitch) stays and similarly, loser in the lowest league (pitch) stays in his area (promotion/relegation system).



Goals can be added for further competitiveness and used in various ways. For example, if the team manages to make 10 passes without opposition touching the ball, they can score in any of the two goals.



Timing:

Each round of 2v2 should be played for 1-3 minutes and repeated 6-10 times in 2 series. Rest period between repetitions (each round) should be 3 to 1 minutes and between series, 4 minutes.

Variations:

- Add goals
- Increase/decrease the size of the area
- Limit amount of touches/challenge players to take min. 3 touches

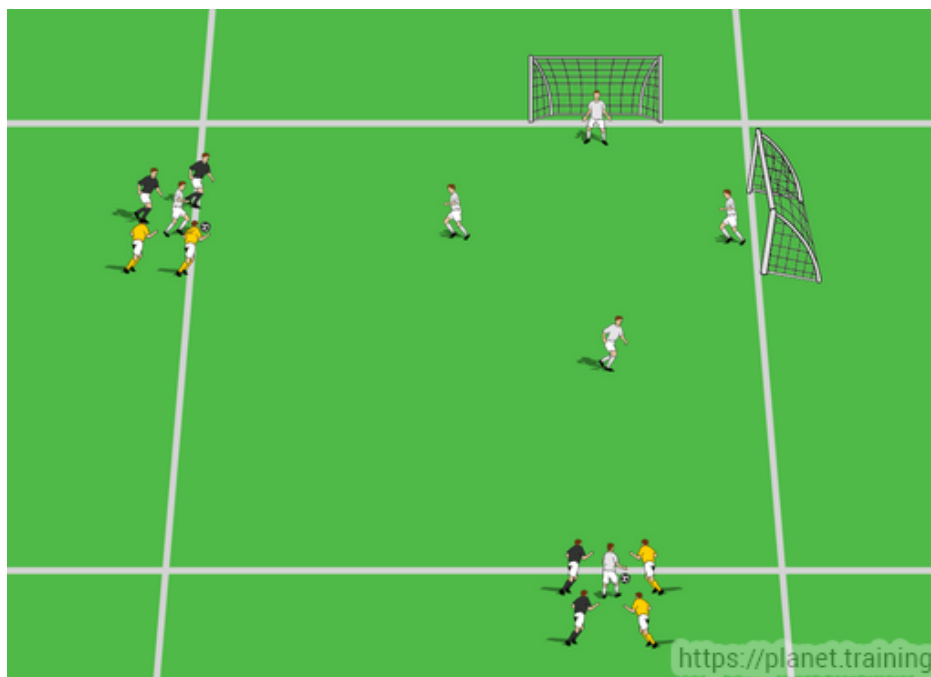
1v1's with Starting Speed

Week: 6

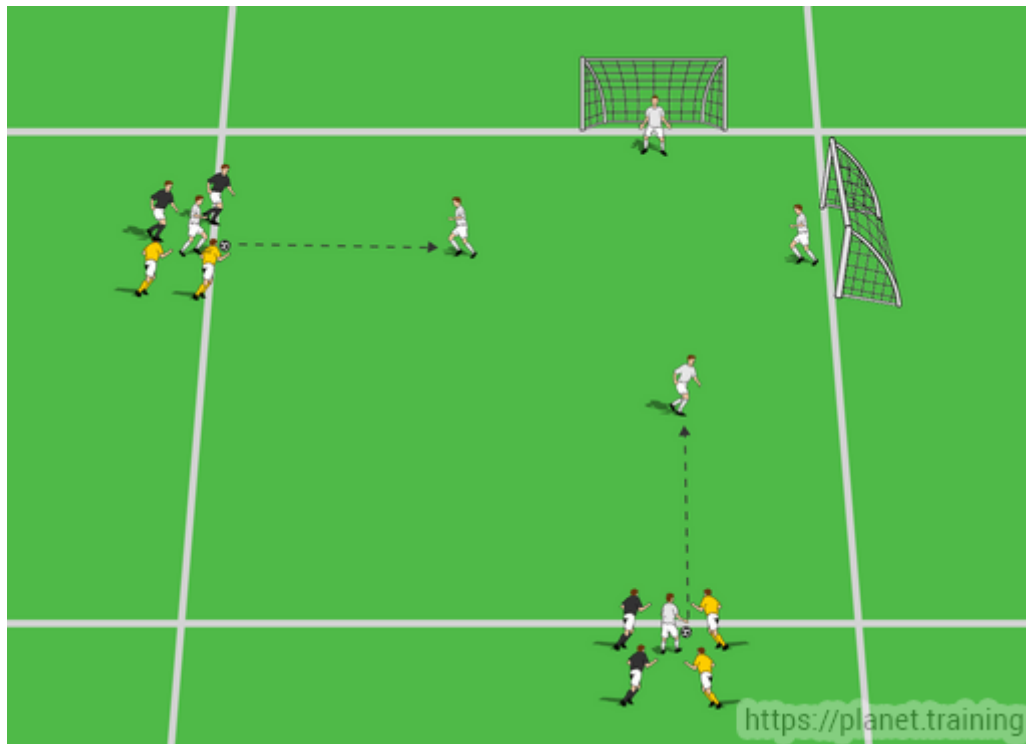
This practice is specifically designed to improve players' starting speed over short distances (5-10 yards). This is especially important in and around the box and can be a crucial element which determines winners and losers. From technical point of view, the practice includes finishing skills under pressure what links to the real context in which starting speed is often used. This increases players' motivation and helps to make them work with a maximal effort.

Set up and directions

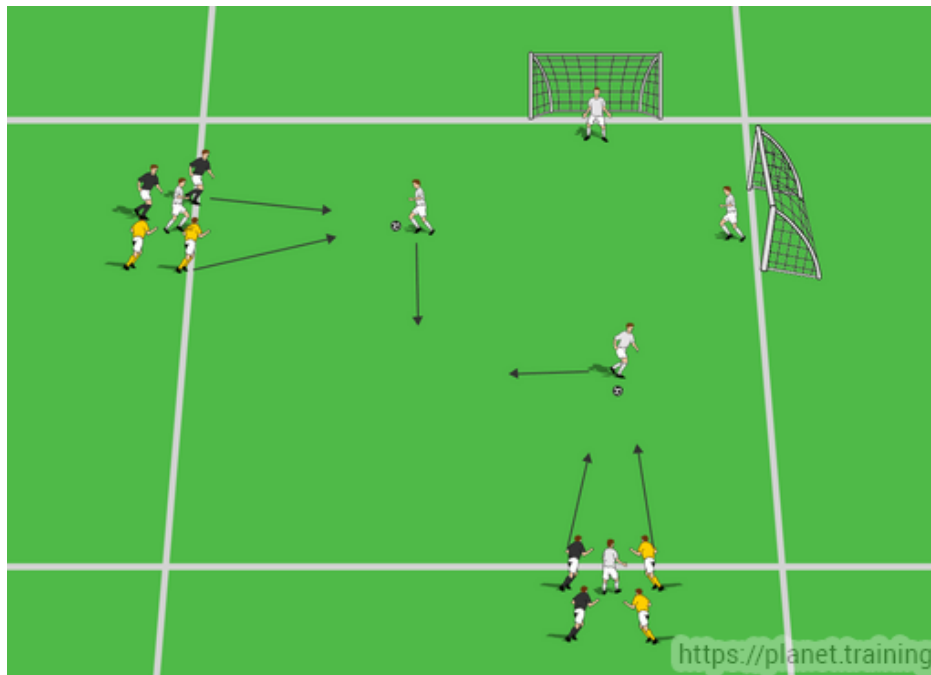
Organise two starting cones and set up goals 20 yards in front of it as shown on the diagram below. Organisation used below with two goals next to each other is one of the options. Set goalkeepers in goals. Divide the team into pairs and further assign four servers/target players. Two pairs start on each of the two cones. One server goes on each of the cones as well and prepares a good supply of balls. Two target players start 10 yards away from the starting cone facing the server.



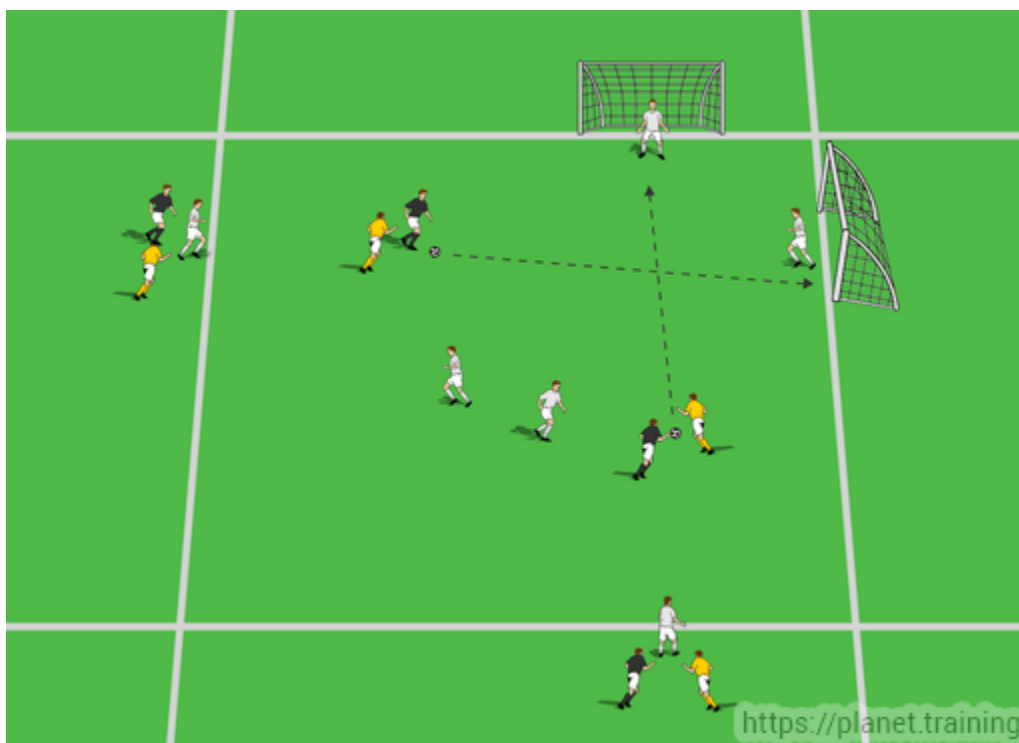
The practice starts with a server passing the ball into the target player. The pass should be of a good quality with appropriate weight and accuracy. At the same time server holds hands of two players not letting them start to early.



Target player stops the ball in front of him on a little angle (right/left). As he touches the ball, both players can start the run into the ball (their hands are released at the same time). Target player has to move away quickly and leave the space for the runners.



First player to the ball has a shot at the goal. No sliding tackles allowed from the player that is delayed. Players should be careful not to injure each other. After each go, pair brings the ball back and comes back to the starting point.



Timing:

Each repetition (running duel) has to last max. 2 seconds. (5-10 yards). Each pair should repeat it 8-10 times in 2-4 series. Rest period between repetitions should be 30 seconds (other pairs working), and between series, 4 minutes.

Variations:

- Ball already stopped 5-10 yards away from the pair, running duel triggered by a coach
- Increase/decrease the distance between ball and starting point (within 5-10 yards)
- Vary sizes and types of goals