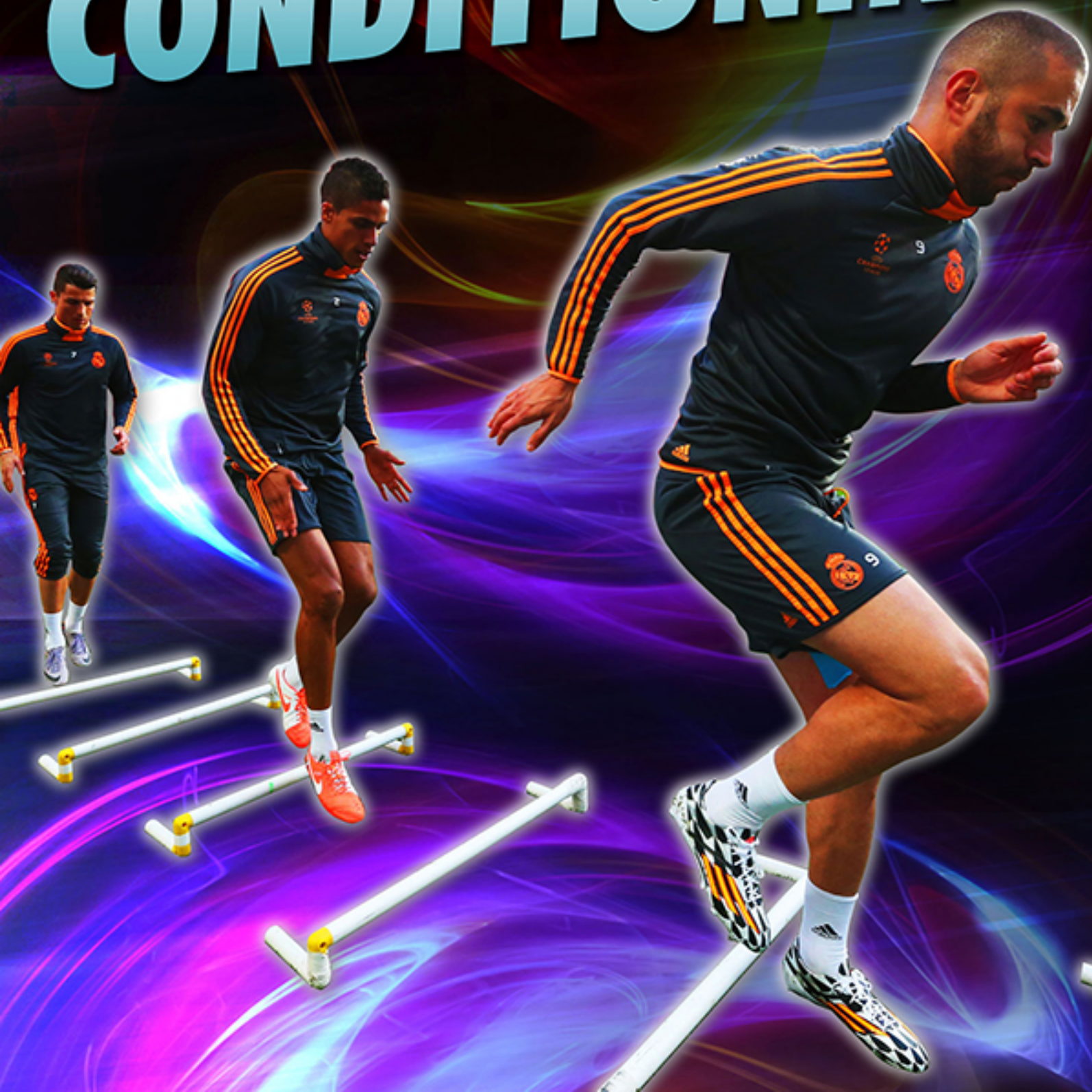




# SOCCER CONDITIONING



# **Soccer**

# **Conditioning**

Drills and exercises with a ball  
to improve conditioning

*Published by*

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Edited by Tom Mura



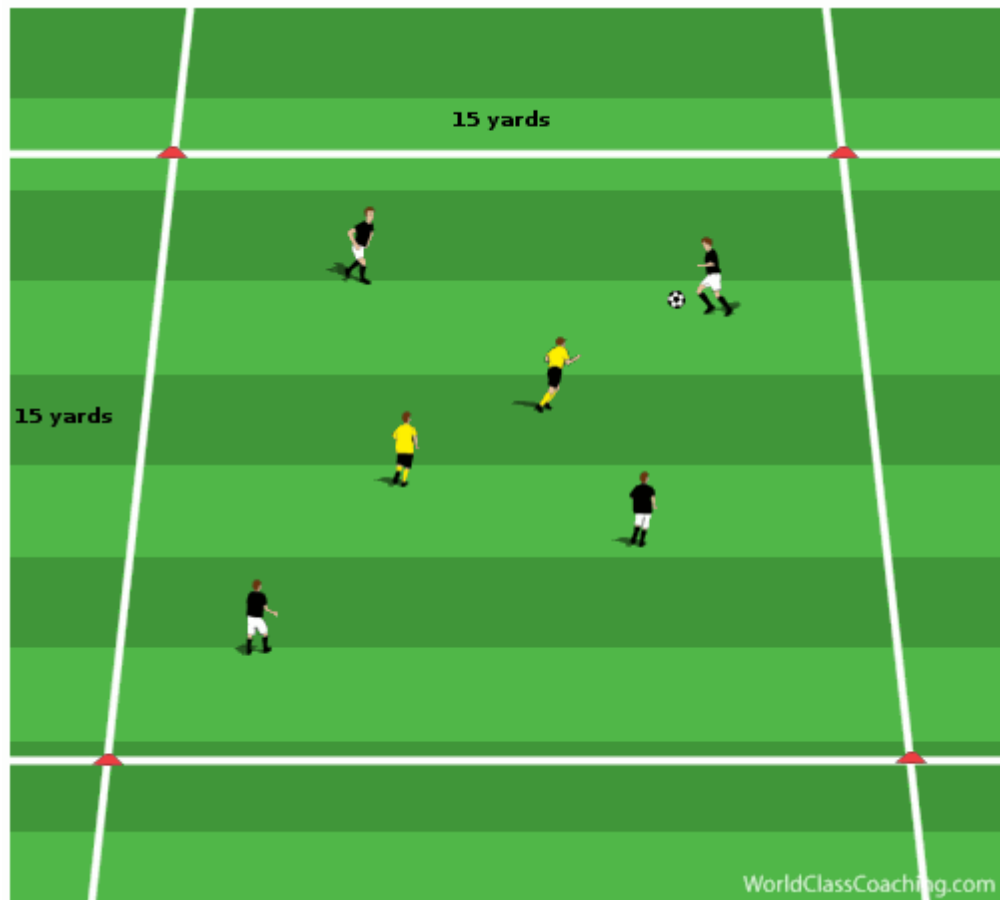
# **Table of Contents**

1. Winning the Ball Back Quickly and Working on Conditioning	4
2. The 'Complete Player' Challenge	11
3. Defending the Counter Attack – Continuous	14
4. Possession in a Compact Space with a Surrounding Circuit	18
5. Crossing and Finishing with Agility	20
6. First Touch Endurance Box	23
7. Endurance, Agility and First Touch	26
8. Dribbling with Quick Changes of Direction	29
9. Agility, Receiving and Dribbling Circuit	31
10. Working on Anaerobic Endurance, First Touch and How to Lose a Defender	33
11. Agility, First Touch and Speed Dribbling	37
12. 1 v 1's With a Conditioning Element	40
13. Dribbling Challenge With Endurance	44
14. Racing to Finish the Cross	46
15. Continuous 1 v 1 Battles	50

## Winning the Ball Back Quickly and Working on Conditioning

If you like to have your team play a high pressure game and win the ball back quickly when they lose it, then this is a great way to develop this. Playing a high pressure game can be very successful during games but must be worked on regularly during practices to ensure that the players are physically conditioned to be able carry this tactic out.

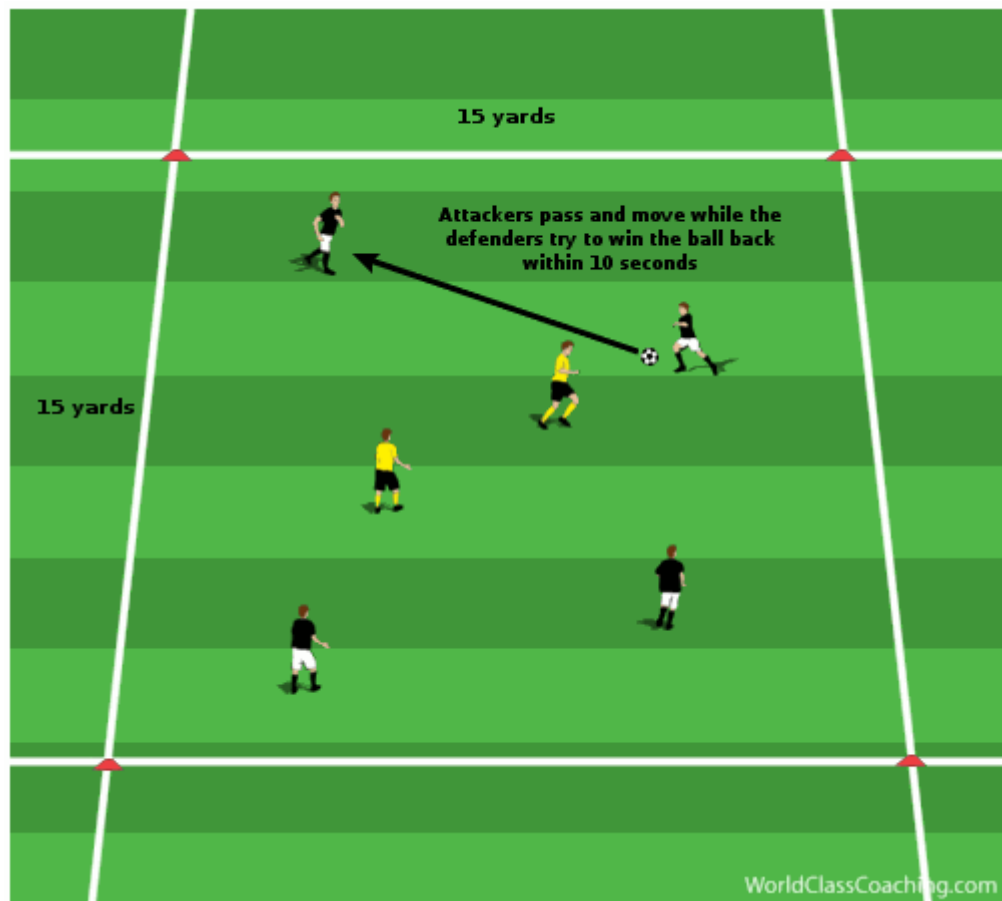
The exercise starts with four attackers and two defenders in a 15x15 yards square as shown below in figure 1.



The four attackers try to keep the ball away from the two defenders who have 10 seconds to try and win the ball back (figure 2). If the attackers keep the ball for 10 seconds then they are awarded a point and if the defenders win the ball within 10 seconds then they earn themselves a point. The aim is that the defenders work together to pressure the ball

and either win the ball back or force the ball out of the square. As the defenders are in a numbers down situation, they must work very hard to win possession of the ball and it is this work ethic that is needed to win the ball back in a real game situation.

This is a great way to develop the understanding that the ball must be won back as quickly as possible in order to avoid an attack against your team. You can increase the pressure on the defenders by reducing the time that they have to win the ball back. You can also change the situation slightly so that the defenders start with the ball. It will be difficult for them to keep the ball for long as they will be heavily outnumbered. However, when the defenders lose the ball, the timer starts and they must win the ball back within 10 seconds. This is a good development as it emphasizes the fact that the ball must be won back quickly when lost.



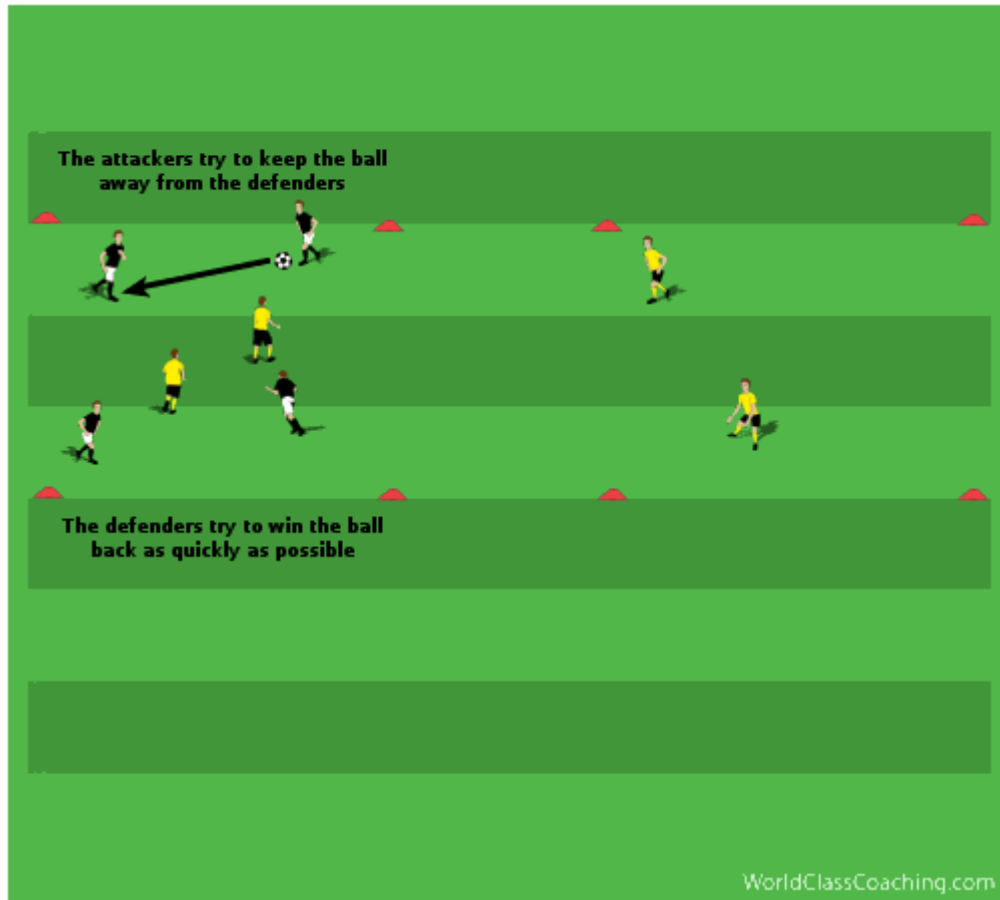
**Progression:**

You can progress this exercise to include the transition from defence to attack and so making it more game realistic. There are now two 15x15 squares with a 10 yard gap

between them as shown below. One square will start with a 4v2 like the previous part of the exercise and the second square will contain two players who are on the same team as the two defenders in the first square (figure 3).

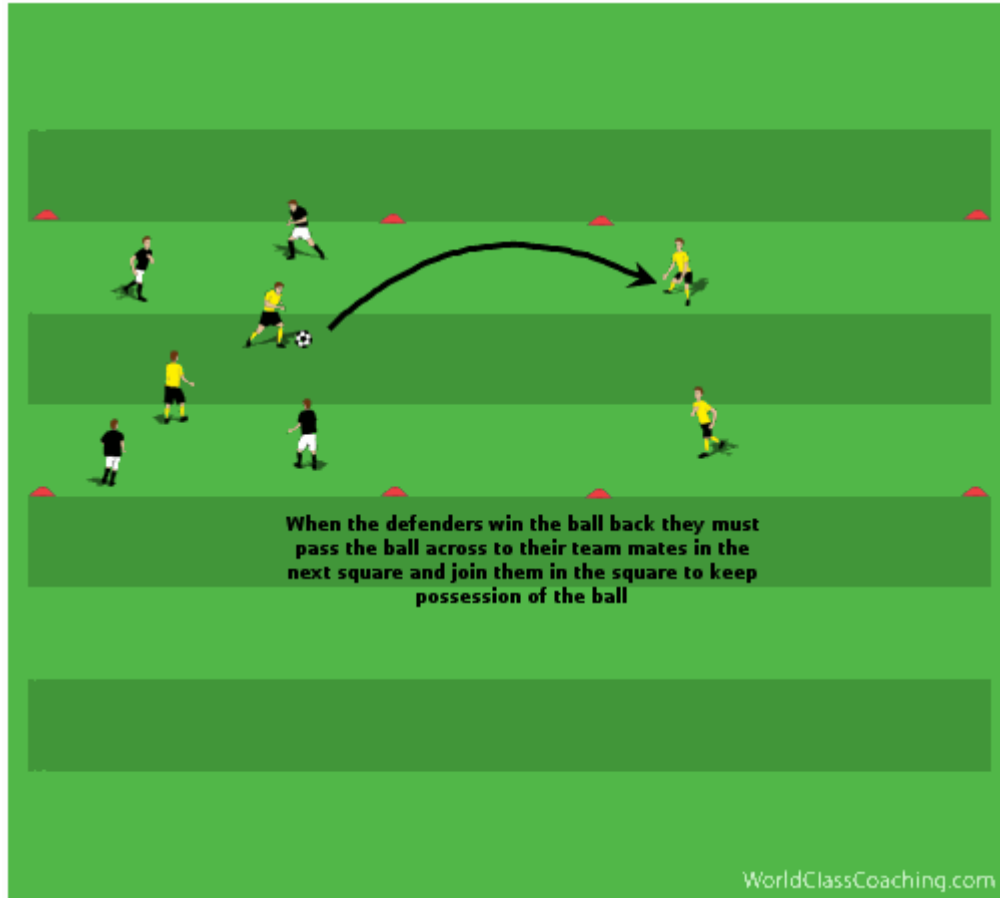


The four attackers keep the ball away from the two defenders, who try to win the ball back as quickly as possible. Though the time limit for the defenders to win the ball is no longer in force, it is important to keep emphasizing winning possession of the ball quickly to the defenders (in a real game situation, it will result in the attacking team not be able to construct an attack). The attackers get a point for every time they reach 10 passes without the defenders winning the ball (figure 4).

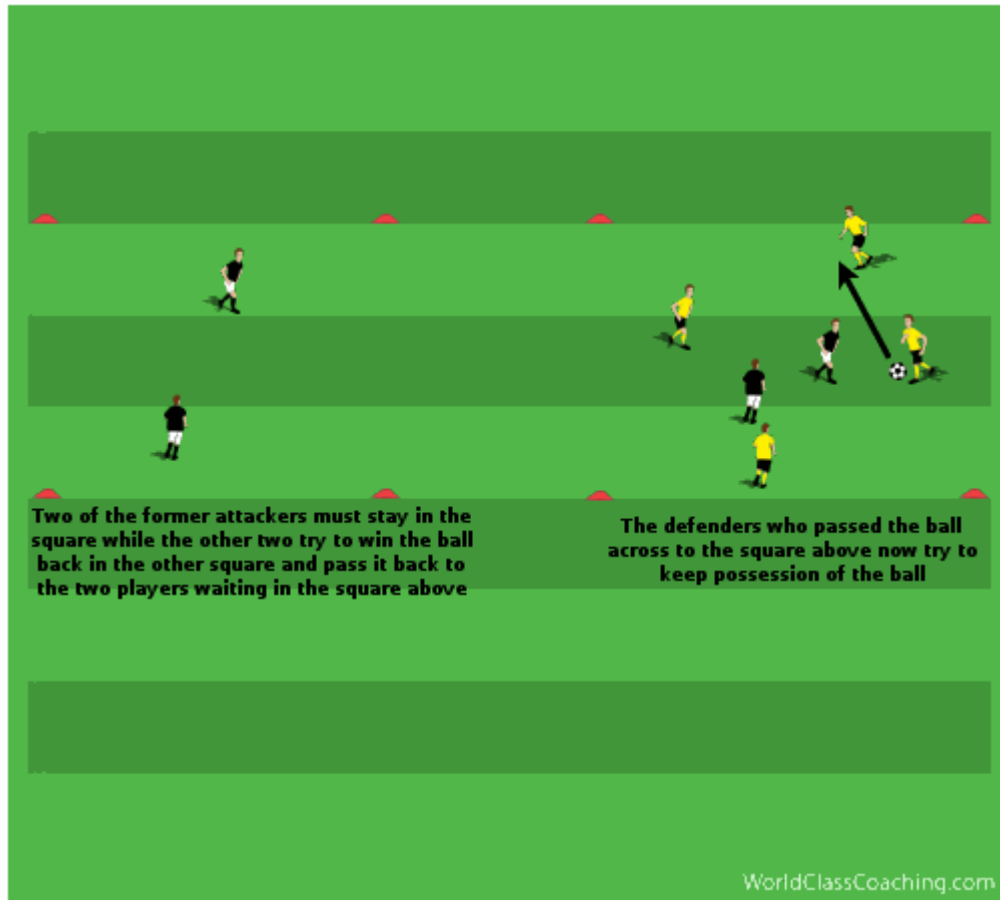


When the defenders win the ball from the attackers, they must pass it across to their two team mates waiting in the other square, which earns their team a point (figure 5). As soon as they have passed the ball across, they must join their team mates in the square and keep possession of the ball.





Two of the players from the team that just lost the ball will now sprint across to the other square to try and win the ball back from the new attackers (figure 6). If they win the ball back, then they pass the ball back to their team mates waiting in the original square.



When you are coaching this exercise, make sure that you have plenty of soccer balls with you so that if the ball goes out of play, you can restart the game again quickly. This will keep the intensity high and work on the player's anaerobic conditioning.

### **Coaching Points:**

- The defenders must work hard to win the ball back, applying pressure on the ball as quickly as possible to force the attackers into a mistake.
- Once the defenders win the ball, they must keep their composure and get their head up to see where their team mates are in the other square. This will enable them to make a good pass to their team mate. The idea is that when you have worked so hard to win the ball back, that you do not waste the possession with a poor pass.

- In the transition between defence and attack, the players must sprint as fast as they can to the next square to support their team mates and provide them with extra options to pass to.
- In the transition between attack and defence, two players from the team that just lost the ball must sprint across to pressure the team in possession. This quick pressure is what will hopefully result in winning the ball back quickly.

# The 'Complete Player' Challenge

This week we have a fun, exciting and competitive exercise for you to try in your session. When I think of the 'complete player' I think of someone who can dribble past opponents, pass over varying distances, has a great first touch, shows composure in front of goal and also has that drive to win the ball back for his team. This exercise will work on each aspect mentioned! It's time to create your very own 'Complete Player'.

## **Set Up and Directions**

Firstly you will need to set up the five stations as shown in the diagram. You can put the players in groups of three or four (I use groups of four in the diagram; this number helps keep the exercise moving as quickly as possible). Two players at the beginning of station 1, one player in the middle of station 4 and the final player in goal. If you have only three players in a group, then you would start with just one player at Station 1. The players will rotate positions with every turn.



**Station 1** – Agility. Jump over the cones with both feet together.

**Station 2** – Dribbling. Keeping the ball as close as possible, dribble through the cones at pace.

**Station 3** – Long Pass. Now the player looks up at the target player already positioned in the next station and plays an aerial pass to the player.

**Station 4** – Ball Winner. The player must now win possession of the ball from the player he/she passed it too.

**Station 5** – Mr. Cool. Player vs Goalkeeper, play at game speed, find the best moment to score!

The exercise begins on the coaches' whistle. The first player performs the agility over the cones at station 1 before collecting the stationary ball at the beginning of station 2. The player now moves through the cones keeping the ball under as close control as possible. When through the cones, the player looks up and plays a 20 yard aerial pass to the defender in the marked out square. The player immediately goes to retrieve the ball from the defender who tries to shield and protect it. As soon as possession is gained the defender becomes inactive and the player continues through to goal vs the goalkeeper, the aim here is simply to score!

I like to run this as a point scoring, timed exercise.

The players earn points for each station (eg. Complete station 1 without moving a cone = 1 point. Score a goal in station 5 = 2 points. Etc.) The player with the most points after 3 minutes is the winner. Adding in simple rewards such as this helps get the players competing against each other, creating a competitive atmosphere which has a great effect on any practice. The players continuously push themselves and by doing so the next player wants to emulate his/her teammate and pushes themselves even harder. The result is improved conditioning and techniques practiced at a very high intensity.

**To progress** this exercise you can now match up the winners from each group against each other and use some of the variations below to find your overall champion. You could even crown them as the most 'complete player'!

## **Variations**

**Station 1** – There can be a variety of different movements through the cones, hopping, quick feet, shuffling, reverse shuffling, high knees; just be creative with this one.

**Station 2** – You can specify which part of the foot, or even which foot to use. I.e. 'Insides only' or 'left foot only'.

**Station 3** – Vary the distance, longer for older ages, shorter for younger. The type of pass could also change; I often ask them to drive the pass along the floor using the laces.

**Station 4** – Increase the size of the square to make it more difficult for the defender. You can add a time limit to win the ball back from the defender.

**Station 5** – Limit the touches before shooting or specify which foot they must shoot with.

Another variation I have used is to make the player return to the beginning if they make a mistake at a station. For example if they cannot win the ball back from the defender in station 4 within the time limit, they must start again – with this system the only way to score points is to get a shot on target (1 point) or score a goal (2 points).

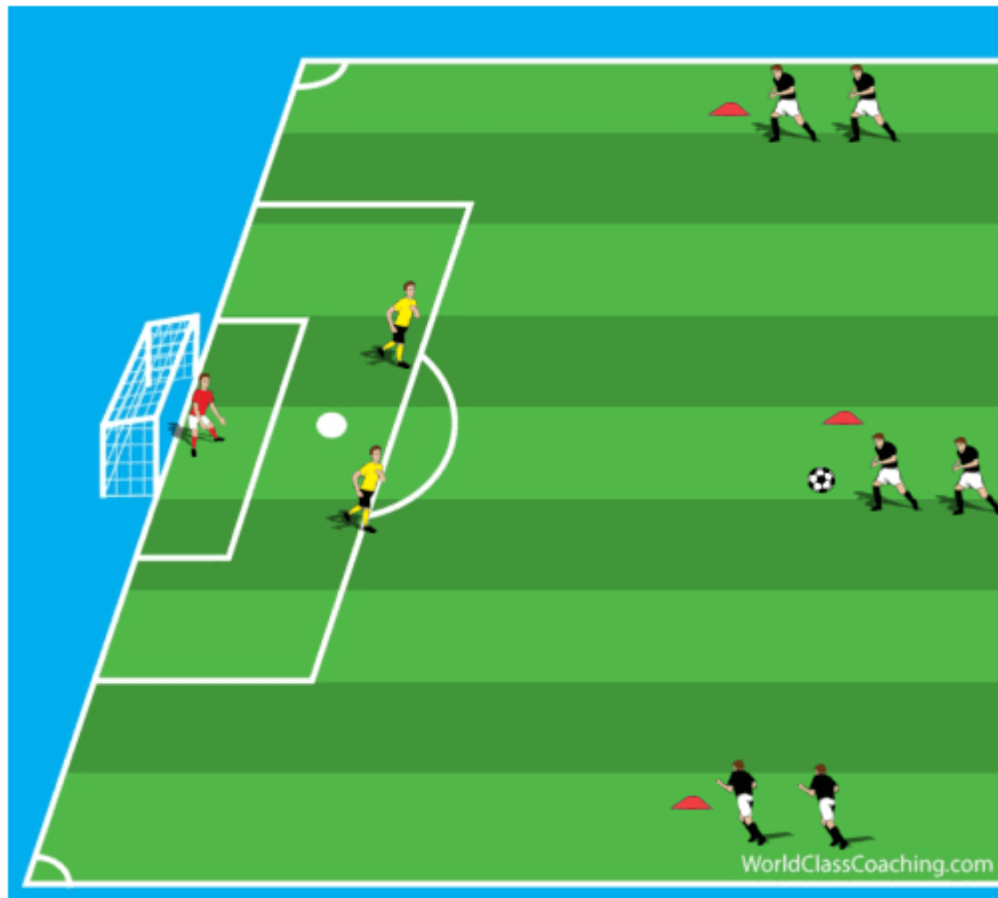
# Defending the Counter Attack – Continuous

This exercise will help your players to develop an understanding of key defensive positioning, delaying an opponent and help to develop their decision making. It can be broken down into a more tactical practice, but I like to play this game with a continuous aspect to increase the intensity. It is also a great way to teach players how to keep focus when tiring in the game.

## **Set Up**

You will need a minimum of 9 players to run this exercise as continuous (you can play this with just 6, but for the best intensity, 12 players is ideal). You begin with 1 Goalkeeper and 2 Defenders placed just inside the penalty area. You now have 3 lines of attackers set up as if they are playing the roles of a striker and the two wingers/wide midfielders. The Striker starts with the ball.

Set up is shown below in Fig 1.



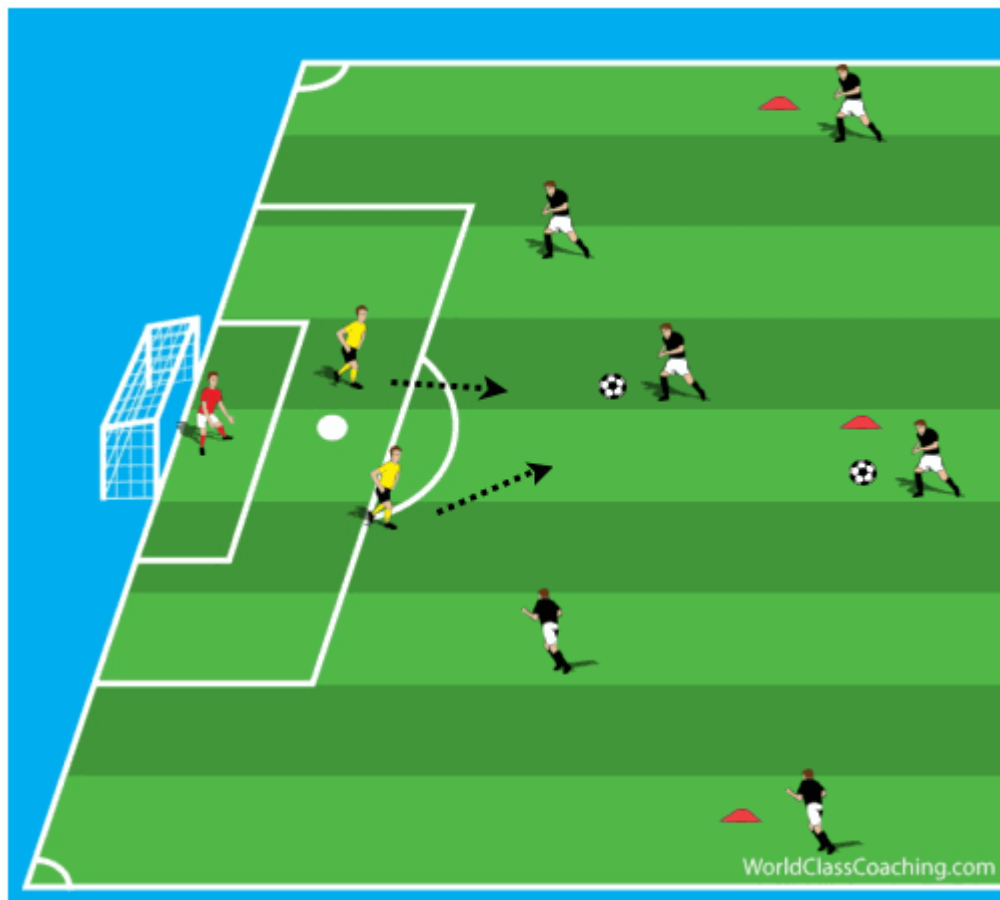
## Rules

- 2 minutes on the clock
- The defenders begin with 10 points
- Each goal they concede, they lost 1 point
- Winning pair are the ones with the most points remaining at the end

## Directions

The striker begins with the ball centrally. As soon as the striker takes his first touch, the wingers may leave their cone. The three work as a team to beat the two defenders, combine and score.

Fig 2. 3v2 in action.



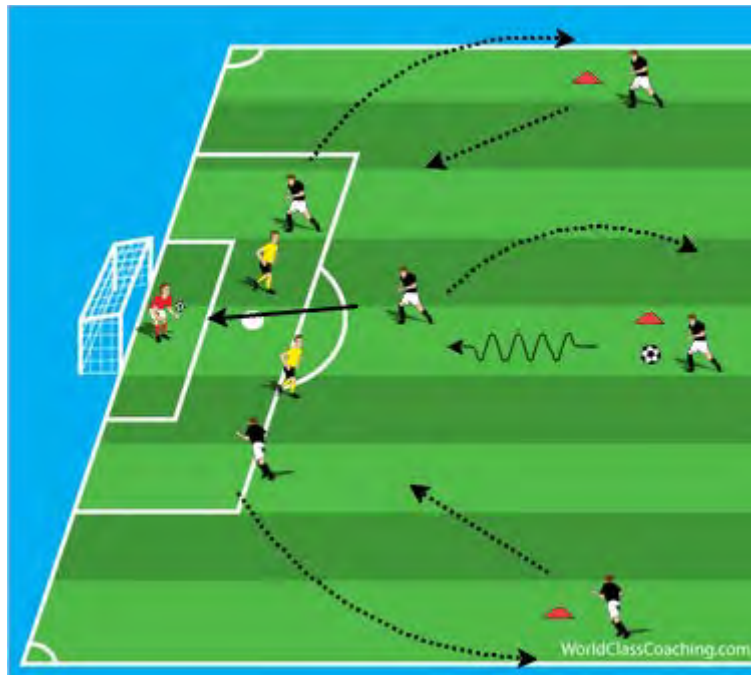
The play is over as soon as the defenders win possession, the ball goes out of bounds, or a goal is scored.



The second this happens, the next trio can attack. Keep this transition fast in order to test the defensive pairs' positional sense. The first attack should be the only time the pair are waiting centrally, the other times they will have had their positions adjusted by the previous attack and will need to recover into better positions to begin defending the next attack. This is where it becomes more difficult for the defenders, they will need to keep their focus and work rate at a very high level to have the best chance of stopping the opposition scoring.

Encourage the attackers to be quick, attack any space left by the defenders and to take advantage of the extra player.

Fig 3. Transition. One group taking a shot and moving aside as the next trio begin attacking.



### Coaching Points

- Communication. There can never be enough positive communication/talking on the field, the players should help organize each other, decide who is pressuring the ball, where each of them is covering, etc.

- Delay. Think positioning first, keep goal side and wait for the best opportunity to try and steel the ball. Over committing may result in being easily beaten and therefore an easier chance for the attackers.

- Show attackers wide. From the wider positions, the attackers have a worse angle to shoot, should they cross the ball, and you will have created a 2v2 in the area. Better odds than the 3v2 from central.

### **Variations**

- The number of attackers/defenders. I have also performed this exercise as a 3v1, 3v3, 4v2 and 4v3.

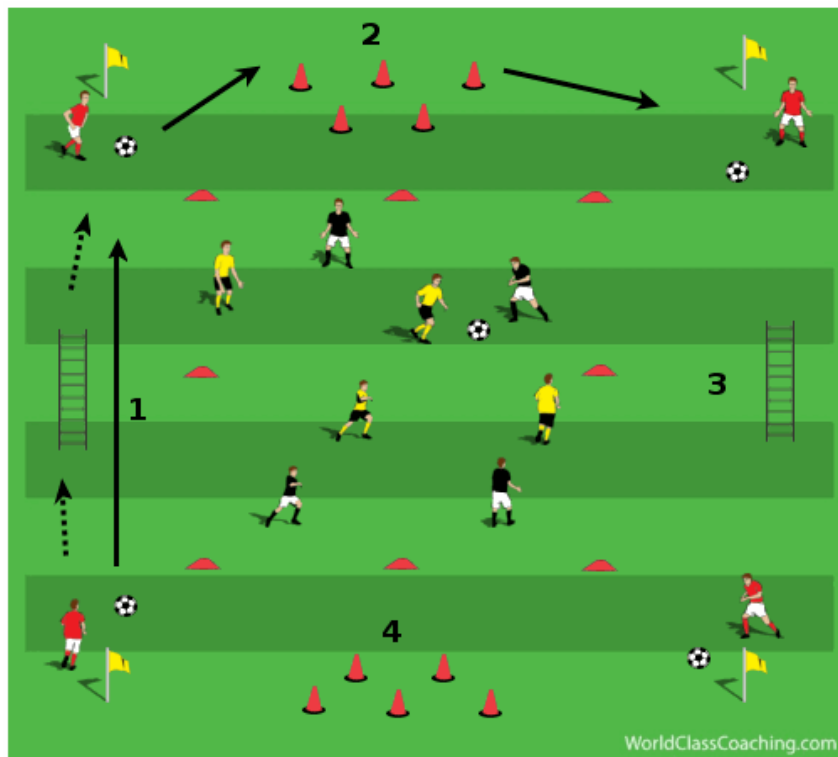
- Ball starting position. The coach could play a ball into a different area each time. The wingers could start with the ball.

# Possession in a Compact Space with a Surrounding Circuit

This week's focus is on keeping possession of the ball when working with limited space. To make this even more challenging, I have added a conditioning circuit around the outside of the 'possession area'. This practice will help develop concentration in possession when tiring, whilst developing a better endurance.

We will have three teams, each with four players, working here. Two teams will compete in a 4v4 possession game with conditions. The third team will perform techniques around the circuit.

## Set Up and Directions



## Possession:

The possession game takes place within the 20x20yd area.

Two teams compete to keep possession of the ball. Depending on the age of the players, I will often put a 'Two-Touch' limit on the individuals. If any player takes three touches or more, they must give the ball to the opposition before playing on.

A team scores a point by completing a five pass combination. The winners are the team with the most points when time is up.

**Circuit:**

The conditioning circuit is performed individually. Each player has a ball and will start in different areas of the circuit. The circuit is performed in a clockwise rotation.

**Station 1** – Measured Pass with Agility. Here the player must pass the ball from one flag and try to get the ball to stop at the next flag. As soon as the player makes the pass, they must run to the ladder, perform agility movements (shuffle/quick feet) through the ladder, before retrieving the ball and moving towards the next station.

**Station 2** – Close control dribbling. Here the player must dribble the ball as quickly as possible around the outside of each cone. To change direction they must only use the sole of their foot.

**Station 3** – Same as 'Station 1'.

**Station 4** – Same as 'Station 2' but instead of using the sole of the foot to change direction, the player must use the outsides of the feet to cut around the cone.

**Time/Rotation:**

The exercise continues for 3 minutes. Once time is up, the teams have a 30 second break. During this time the team that was performing on the circuit moves to play possession and one of the teams playing possession moves to the circuit. This is repeated until all of the teams have completed the circuit three times (time and repetitions dependant on age).

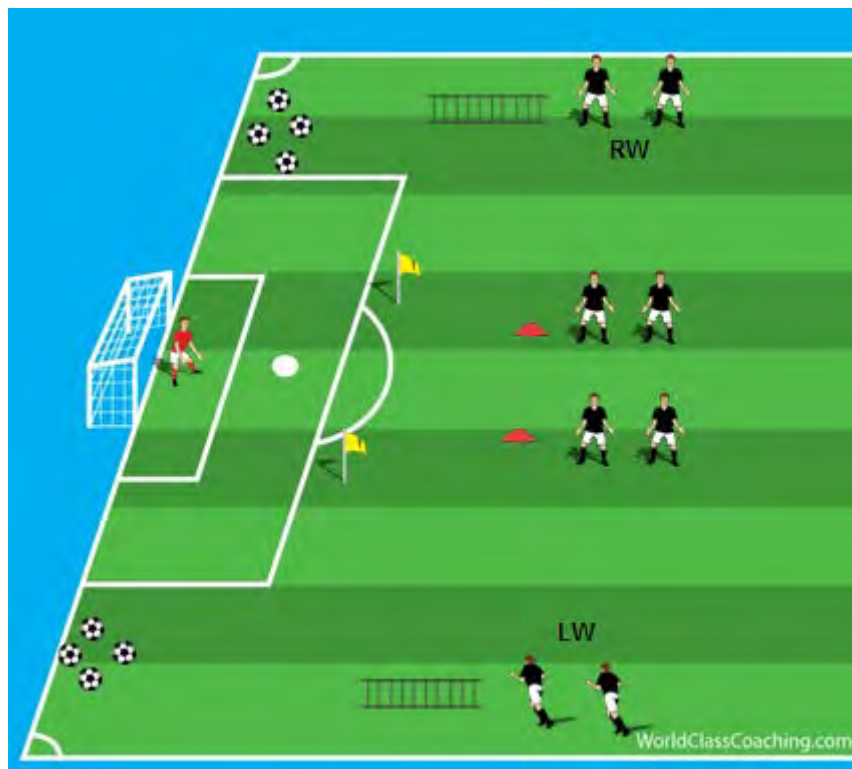
**Variation:**

To add to the intensity of the ball possession game, you can play 'Winner Stay's on'. Meaning the team that 'wins' the possession games, gets to stay in the middle and avoid the conditioning circuit. This will increase the pressure from the defending team and create a more game-like scenario for the players in the middle.

# Crossing and Finishing with Agility

This week the focus is on scoring goals from crosses. I have added in some ladders and need for short sprints to help improve the players' agility and explosiveness. During this exercise the players will be in pairs as attackers and are required to work explosively in order to get on the end of the crosses and score goals. This is a continuous exercise that you will need a minimum of 10 players plus a goalkeeper to run. The short sprints, agility and sharp changes of direction in this exercise will all help develop your players' anaerobic capacity.

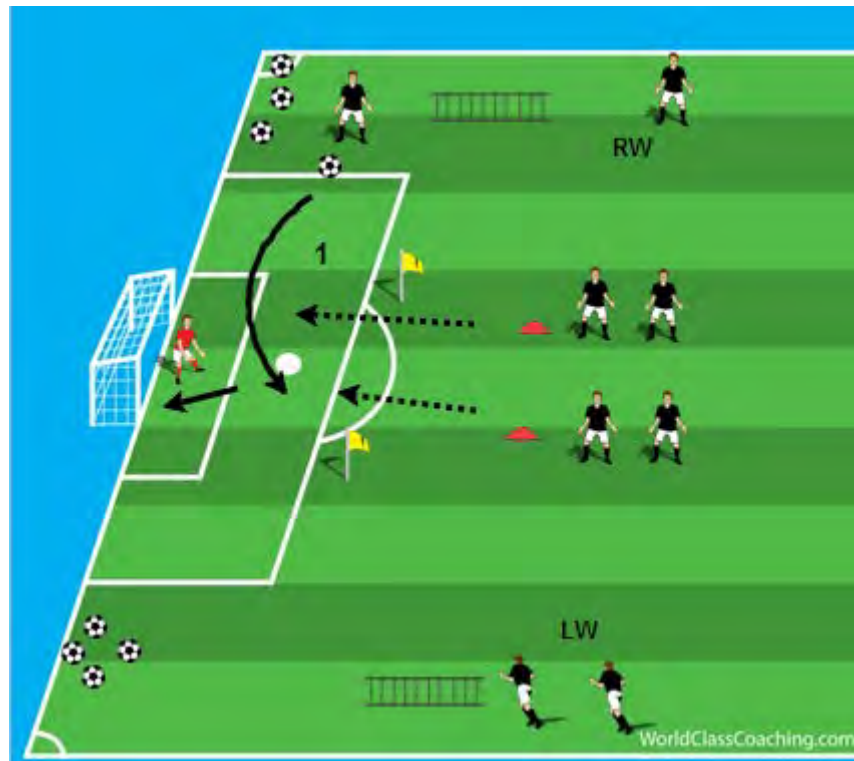
## **Set up and Directions:**



Firstly, set out ladders in front of your wide players (LW and RW) around 25yds from the end of the field. Add cones centrally, around 30yds from the goal – this is where your pair of attackers will begin.

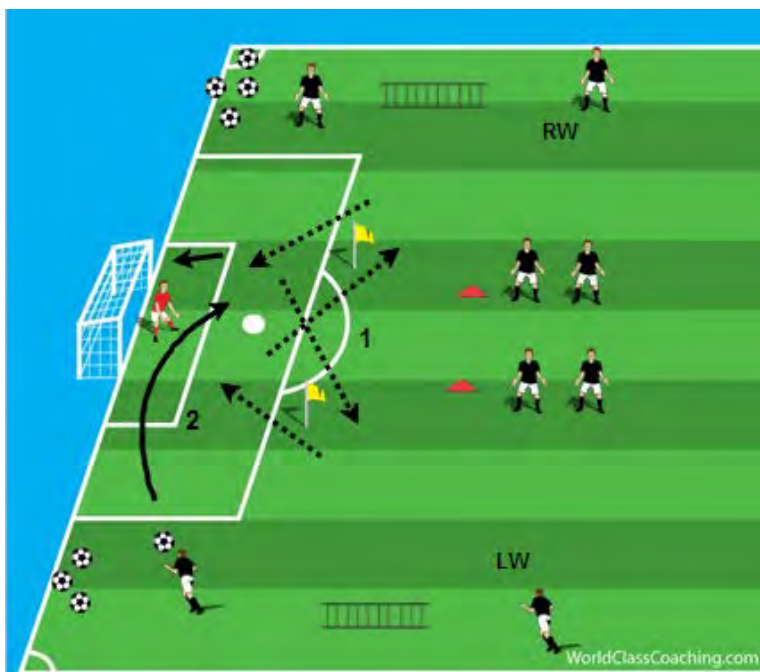
Divide the soccer balls evenly and place half in each corner of the field, between the corner flag and the edge of the box.

Play begins when the right winger (RW) performs agility through the ladder. As soon as the RW gets through the ladder, the attackers must make their sprinting runs into the box. The RW retrieves a ball and crosses it into the area for the pair to attack (as shown below).



The players must time the runs well and communicate with each other to make sure they know who will attack the ball and also where they plan on making the runs towards (front post/back post/penalty spot etc.).

As soon as the first play is over, the left winger (LW) then begins to perform agility through the ladders. The same pair that just attacked then turns and sprints back around the flag poles placed 20yds from goal and makes a second 'checked-run' into the box. While they were moving back, the LW collects a ball and crosses it as soon as the attackers get around the flag pole (shown below).



I show the players here performing a 'crossover run' as they return to the flag poles. This is just one of many variations the players can perform. The idea of this kind of run is simply to make it more difficult for the defenders to mark you in a game situation.

As soon as the attackers have received the second cross, the next RW will begin to move through the ladder and the process is repeated.

### **Timing and Rotation:**

I will run this exercise in 4 minute stints. Allowing the players to work as a pair and develop a good communication with their 'striker partner'.

I also use a simple points system to add in the competitive aspect. 1 point for a shot on target and 3 points for a goal. Every 4 minutes, switch the wingers and attackers and work with a new partner.

### **Variation:**

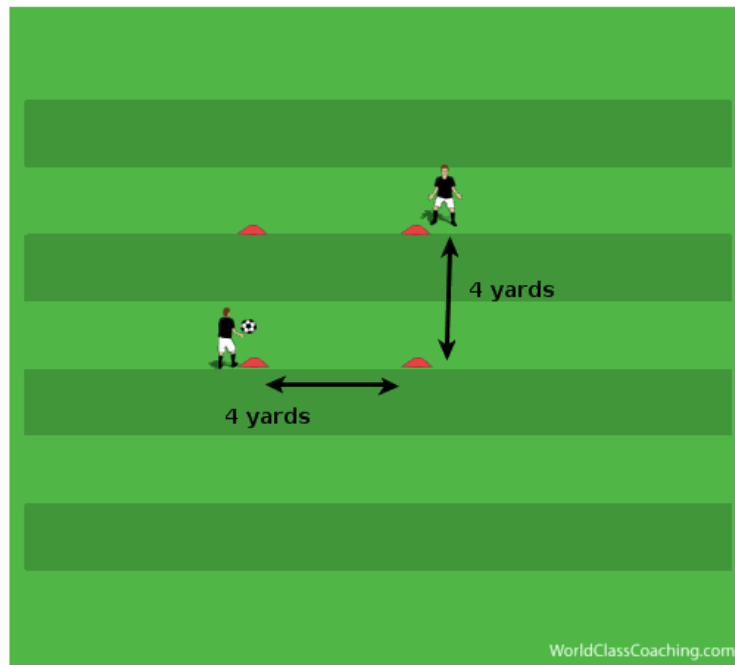
Add defenders. If your players are scoring lots of goals, make it more challenging by adding in a set defender (or even two). Now the attackers will have to time the runs even better in order to beat the defenders to the crosses.

Ask your players to deliver specific crosses. A low, drilled cross. High, lofted crosses. Whipped, curling crosses.

# First Touch Endurance Box

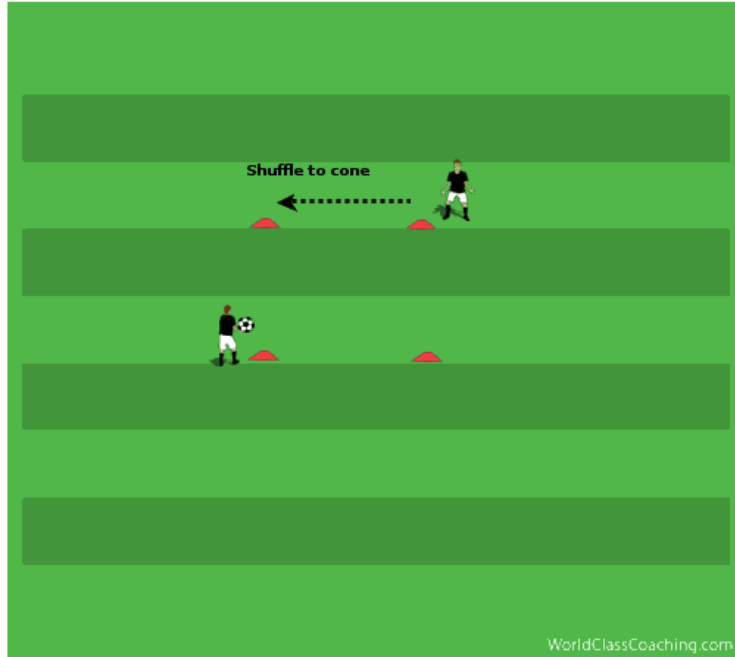
This exercise is a great way to work on your player's first touch at different heights and making sure that technique does not suffer as they get tired.

This exercise starts with a 4x4 yard box and one ball between two players as shown below (figure 1). One player will start with the ball in their hands and the other player will do all of the work for 1 minute.

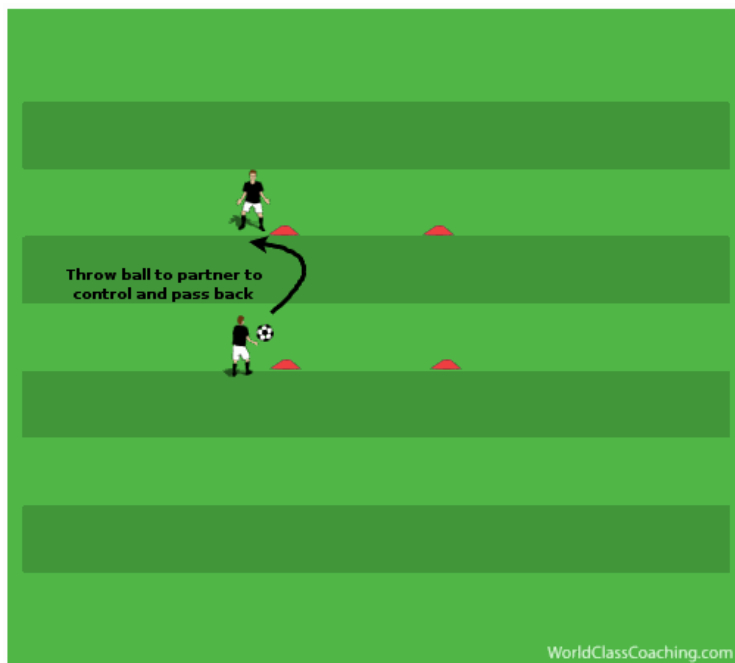


The player without the ball shuffles to the cone to their right (figure 2).



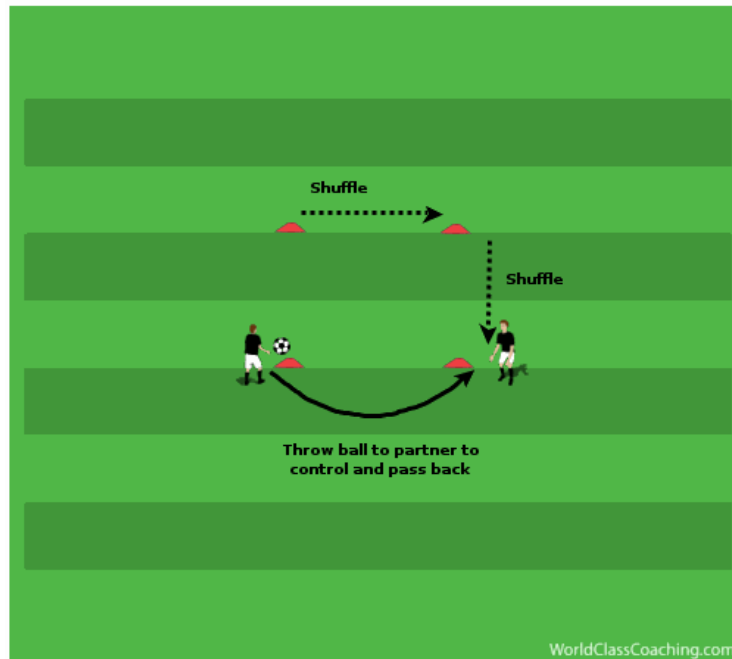


As soon as the player reaches the cone, their partner throws the ball to them to control with the inside of their foot and pass back (figure 3).



The player will now shuffle past the start cone and across to the next cone to their left as quickly as possible where they will again control the ball with the inside of their foot and pass back to their partner (figure 4). The working player will now shuffle their way past

the start cone and back to the cone where they first controlled the ball. The player will continue to work between the two cones for 1 minute. When the 1 minute is up, the players can switch positions.



After they have both had a go at the exercise you can start working on different heights of the ball:

- Inside of the foot volleys • Laces volleys • Thigh control and pass back • Headers

Once you have worked on all of the heights you can get the thrower to vary the throws to their partner to challenge them. The ball can be thrown to any height and so the partner must react to where the ball is thrown.

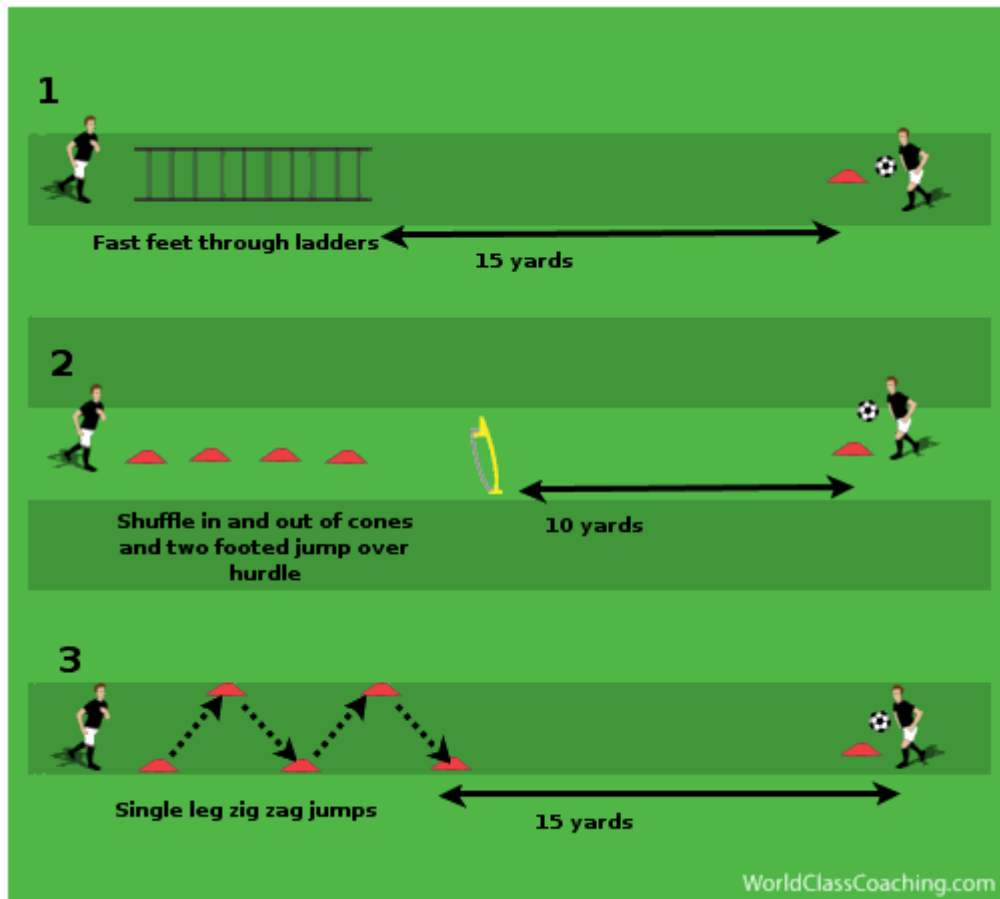
It is important that the player throwing the ball is not just throwing the ball lightly to their partner; the aim is that there is a challenge to control the ball and so as a coach, it is important to get your players to understand this.

The aim of the exercise is that it be fast paced with quick switch overs and quick shuffling between the cones. The player shuffling between the cones must work as hard as possible during the 1 minute and it is important that as time goes by, technique is not compromised due to tiredness. You can also increase the amount of time that the player is working between the cones.

# Endurance, Agility and First Touch

This exercise works on first touch with different parts of the body as well as agility, coordination and conditioning, which is great way to start your pre-season training.

There are 3 different stations as shown below (figure 1), with players spending 4 minutes working before switching with the feeder and then moving on to the next station.

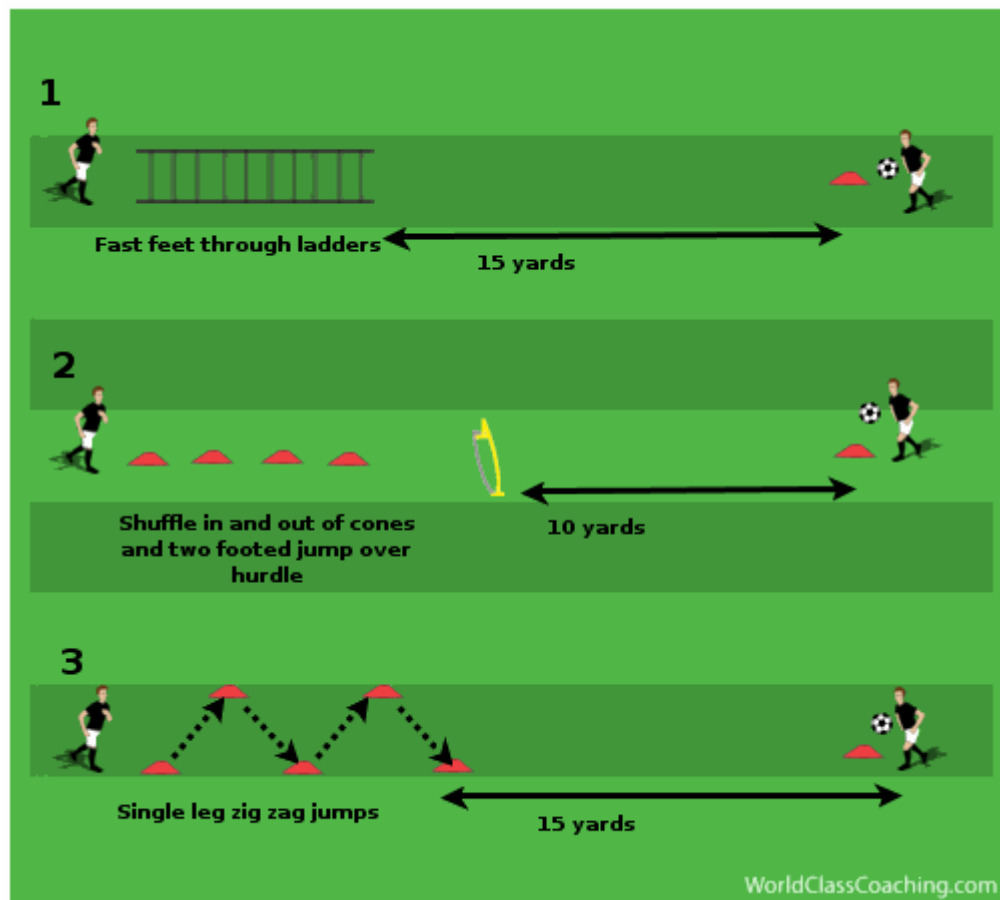


## **Station 1:**

The player must run through the ladder placing both feet in the gaps of the ladder, after this is done they must sprint to the feeder who will be holding the ball out in front of their body. The player who has just completed the ladders must tap the ball with one hand. As soon as this is done, the feeder will throw the ball high over their partner's head and they must run back as quickly possible and head the ball back to the feeder before jogging back to the start and going again (figure 2).

### Station 2:

The player must shuffle in and out of the cones as quickly as possible before jumping over hurdle with both feet. After this is done they must sprint to the feeder who will be holding the ball out in front of their body. The player who has just completed the agility must tap the ball with one hand. As soon as the ball has been tapped, the feeder will throw the ball high and to either side of their partner. The player must run back as quickly possible, control the ball before it bounces and pass it back to the feeder before jogging back to the start and going again (figure 2).



### Station 3:

The player must do single leg jumps to each cone in a zigzag. After this is done they must sprint to the feeder who will be holding the ball out in front of their body. The player who has just completed the agility must tap the ball with one hand. As soon as this is done, the feeder will throw the ball over their partner's head. The player must run back as quickly possible, control the ball before it bounces and pass it back to the feeder before jogging back to the start and going again (figure 2).

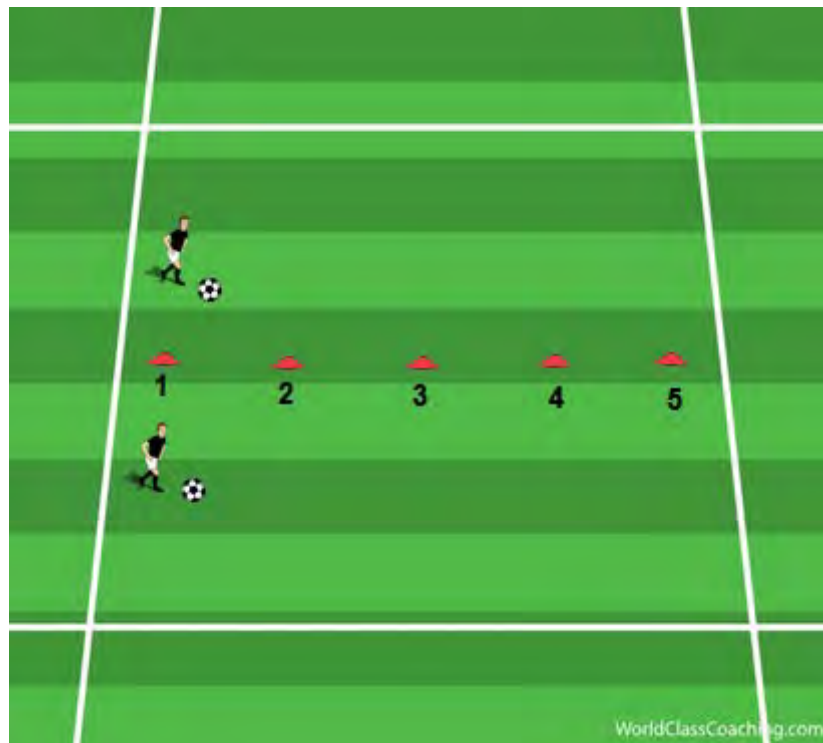
It is important that that the players at each station are working as quickly as possible. The player must react to where the ball is thrown and move their feet quickly to control or head the ball before it bounces, much like in a game situation where a player will try to get to the ball before an opponent and before it bounces. As time goes on fatigue will begin to set in and so it is vital that technique when controlling the ball does not suffer. The pass back is equally as important as the first touch. If the ball is not passed back to the feeder accurately then it is much like a misplaced pass during a game. You can also have the feeder switch with their partner after every go, having them sprint to the start to begin the station. If you decide to do that then I would recommend increasing the amount of time before moving to the next station as the players will be getting a little rest after every go.

# Dribbling with Quick Changes of Direction

This week we will focus on quick changes of direction within a fast paced, competitive exercise. I will use the 'drag-back' turn as the example throughout the exercise, but any other turn involving a full change of direction can be used (e.g. Cruyff turn, step-over, inside/outside cuts etc).

## **Set Up and Directions**

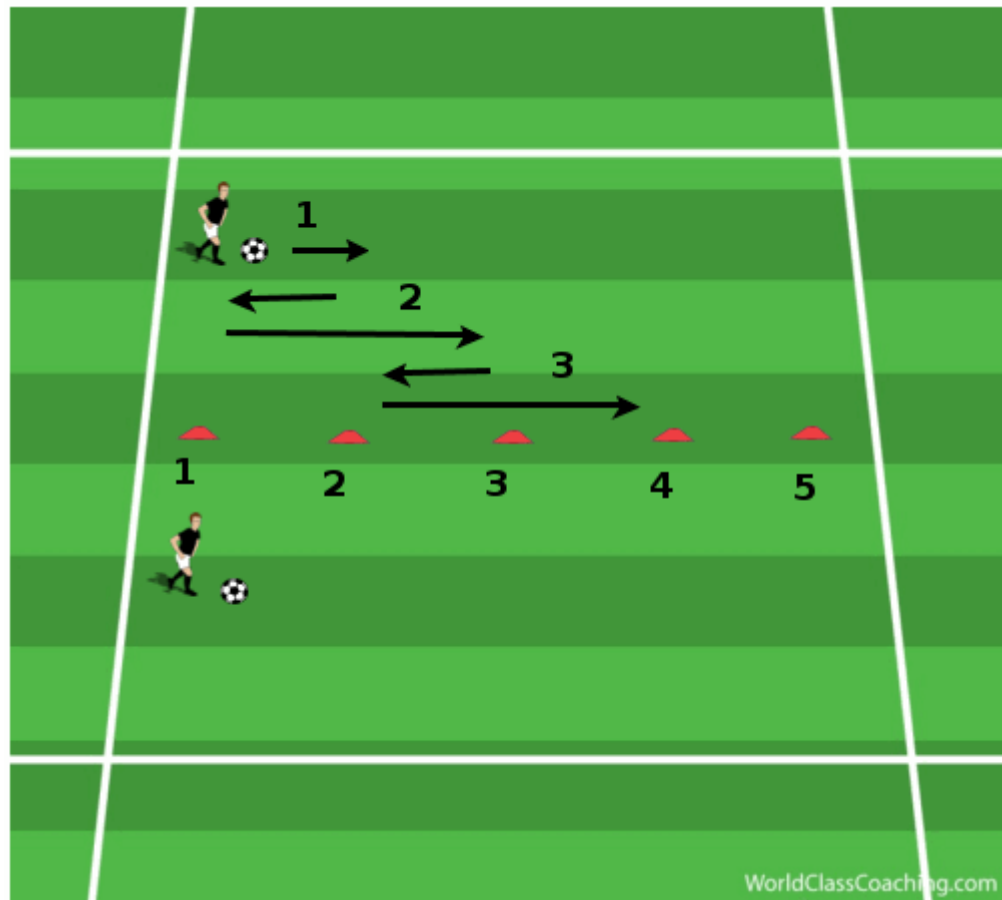
For this exercise you only need a few cones. The example in the diagram is set up for just two players, but you can add in more 'lanes' of cones to involve as many players as you need to accommodate.



Here we have five cones laid out approximately 5 yards apart from each other. Two players begin each with a ball a few yards either side of Cone number 1. On the coaches signal the players accelerate with the ball towards cone 2, perform a drag-back turn and check back to cone 1. The players again perform the drag-back turn and accelerate to cone 3. The players then perform the turn and check back to cone 2. The players repeat this once more, accelerating forward this time to cone 4, performing the turn, checking to cone 3 before turning again and sprinting over the 'finishing line' at cone 5.

As you can see there are many turns required in the exercise and it may be a good idea to 'warm-up' to the exercise - I'd do one or two practice runs to focus on the technique of the turn itself. After the players are performing the turns consistently, I would pair them as shown above and they would compete against each other to see who can complete the course the fastest.

The direction of movement with turns is shown through to 'Cone 4' below:



The conditioning aspect of this game comes when the players are competing versus each other. By adding competition, the players push themselves harder and in turn will develop the turning technique at a more game-realistic speed. They will also be accelerating as fast as possible in between each turn to give themselves the best chance of winning. Again, by putting your players in a situation where they have to push themselves in order to win against their teammates in practice exercises, you will get the best results in time for game day.

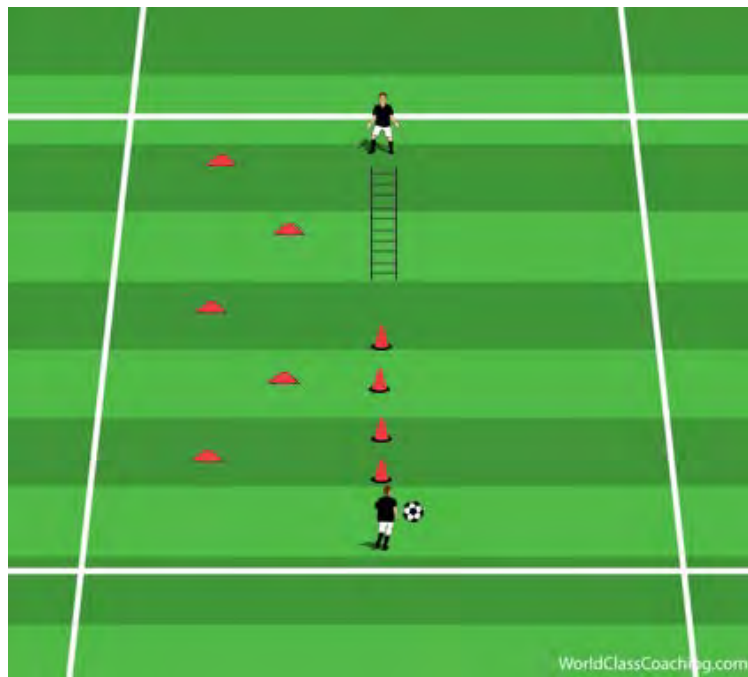
# Agility, Receiving and Dribbling Circuit

This week we focus on agility and technique. Agility plays a huge part in a players' ability to perform in a game, soccer has so many changes of direction and the more agile players have the best chance of reacting in many different situations – defending, dribbling, intercepting passes to name a few. Technique is also key to a players' performance, without a good first touch and dribbling skills, a players game can become limited. Developing these aspects of the game can only enhance performance.

This circuit is designed to work groups of 2 or 3 players at a time. I would set up 5 stations exactly the same to allow a full team to work at the same time.

## **Set Up and Directions**

Each station should be set up as shown below. If you do not have a ladder you could use cones to mark out the agility aspect of the mini course.



Player one begins at the start of the ladder and Player two will begin with a ball at the opposite side of the circuit (the end of the dribbling section).

Play begins by player one performing some agility through the ladder. As soon as player one completes the agility, player two plays a pass into player ones' feet. Player two

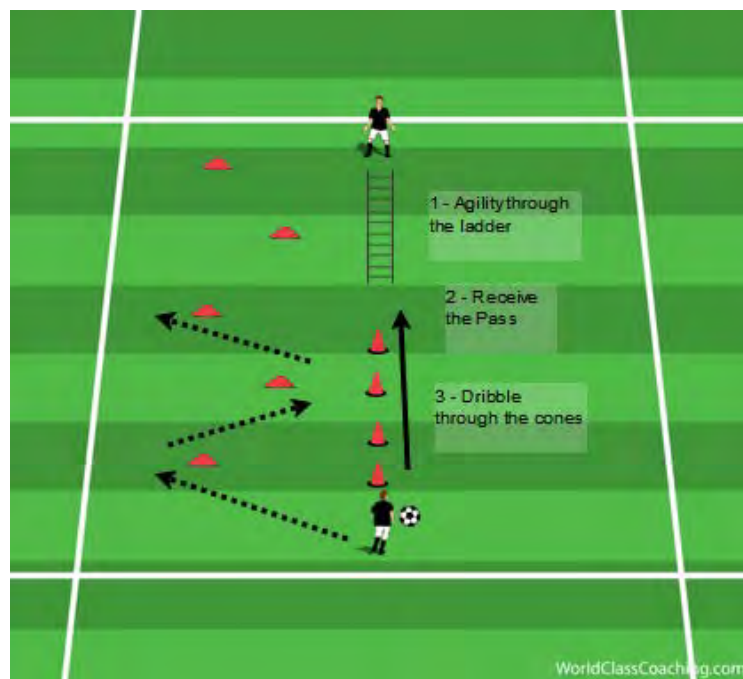


should ensure that this is a firm pass in order to ensure a good first touch is needed by player one.

At this point both players will work. Player one continues by dribbling through the cones as fast as they can before putting their foot on the ball at the opposite end.

Immediately after playing the pass, player two checks to the left and performs short sharp diagonal sprints between the cones laid out. Player two then finishes in the original start position of player one.

The roles are then reversed and repeated.



### **Timing**

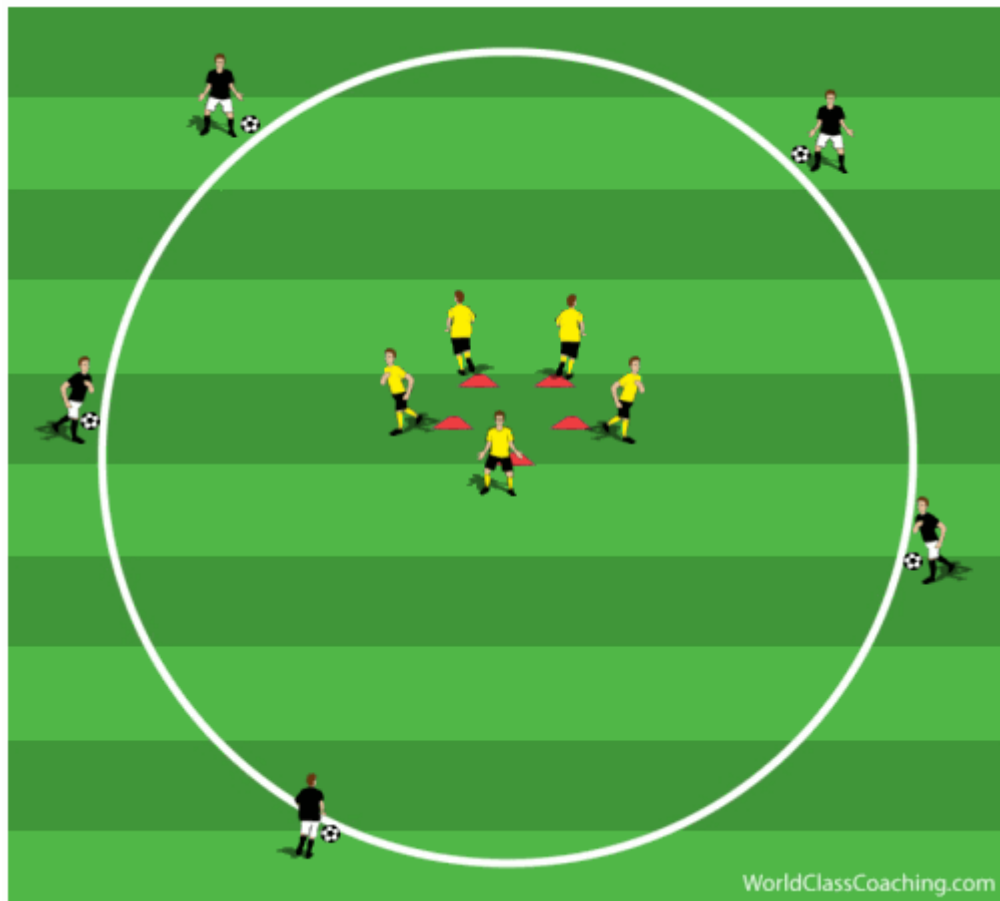
The exercise should be continuous for 2 minutes and the players should be encouraged to work at a high tempo throughout.

### **Variations**

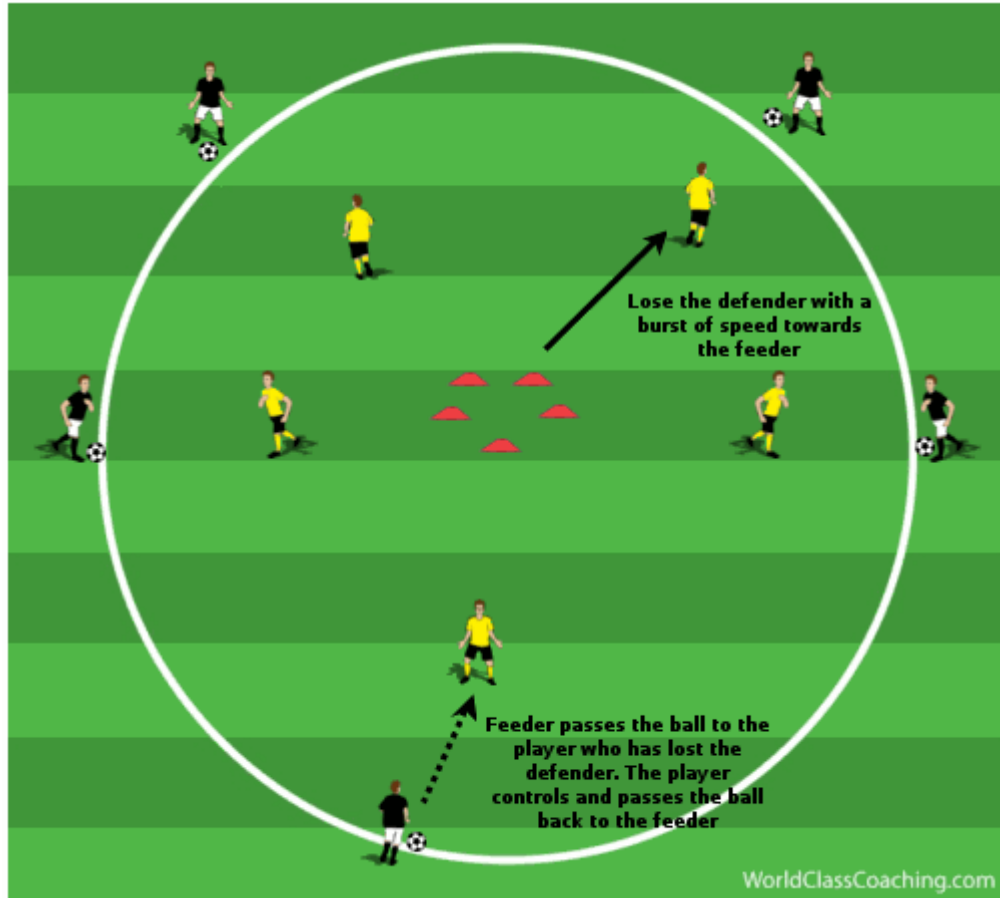
- Agility– quick feet; shuffling; backwards etc.
- Dribbling – the player can use only the inside of their feet to cut through the cones/ sole of the foot only/ outsides only etc.

# Working on Anaerobic Endurance, First Touch and How to Lose a Defender

This is a great exercise to use to work on first touch and develop your player's endurance levels. I have used 10 players in this exercise as an example; however the numbers can be modified depending on the size of your squad. The exercise starts with 5 players on the outside of the area with a ball each and the other 5 players in the middle of the area without a ball (figure 1).



The players in the middle run towards the outside players and when they are around 5 yards away, the ball will be passed to them by the player on the outside. They must control the ball and pass it back to the player on the outside (figure 2). The players in the middle have to work for 3 minutes before switching the feeders and players in the middle.



The idea is that the players in the middle must imagine that they are being followed by a defender. In order to get away from this defender they must have an explosive burst of speed towards the feeder on the outside. After they have done this, the player jogs back into the middle before finding another outside player to receive the ball from.

Start the exercise with the feeders passing the ball to the players in the middle before working on controlling the ball with the thigh and chest. You can also get the players in the middle to side foot volley the ball or head the ball back to the feeder.

### **Coaching Points:**

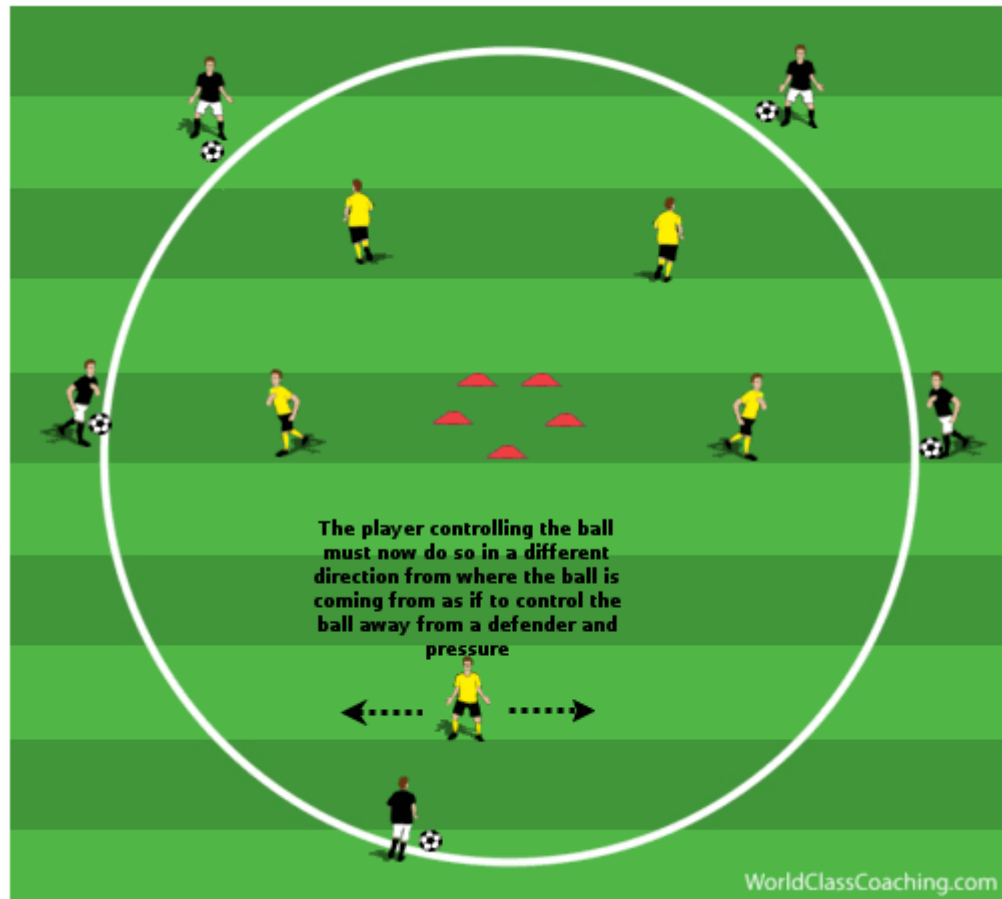
Jog back into the middle after controlling and passing the ball but then explode with speed towards the player on the outside as if to lose a defender in a real game situation. Relax when controlling the ball.

Make sure that the ball is on the ground before passing to ensure accuracy.

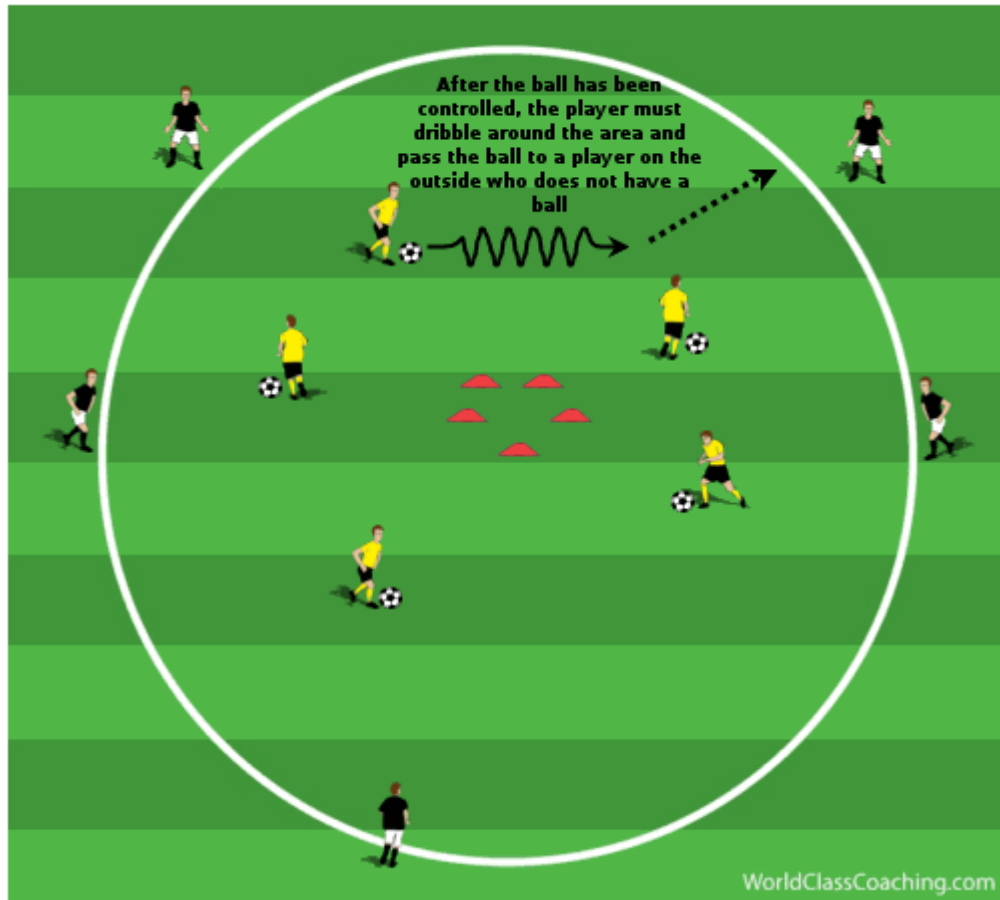
Communication - the player controlling the ball must ask for the ball.

### **Progression:**

The exercise is essentially the same; however, the player controlling the ball must do so to their right or left as if controlling the ball into space (figure 3).



Once the ball is under control they must dribble around the area and pass the ball to a player on the outside who does not have a ball. Verbal and eye communication is essential to ensure that two soccer balls are never passed to a player on the outside at the same time.



Another variation can also be that the feeder must shout either “man on” or “time”. If the player controlling the ball hears the shout of “man on” then they must control the ball and pass it back to the feeder. If the player controlling the ball hears the shout of “time” then they can control the ball into space and dribble around the area before passing the ball to a player on the outside who does not have a ball.

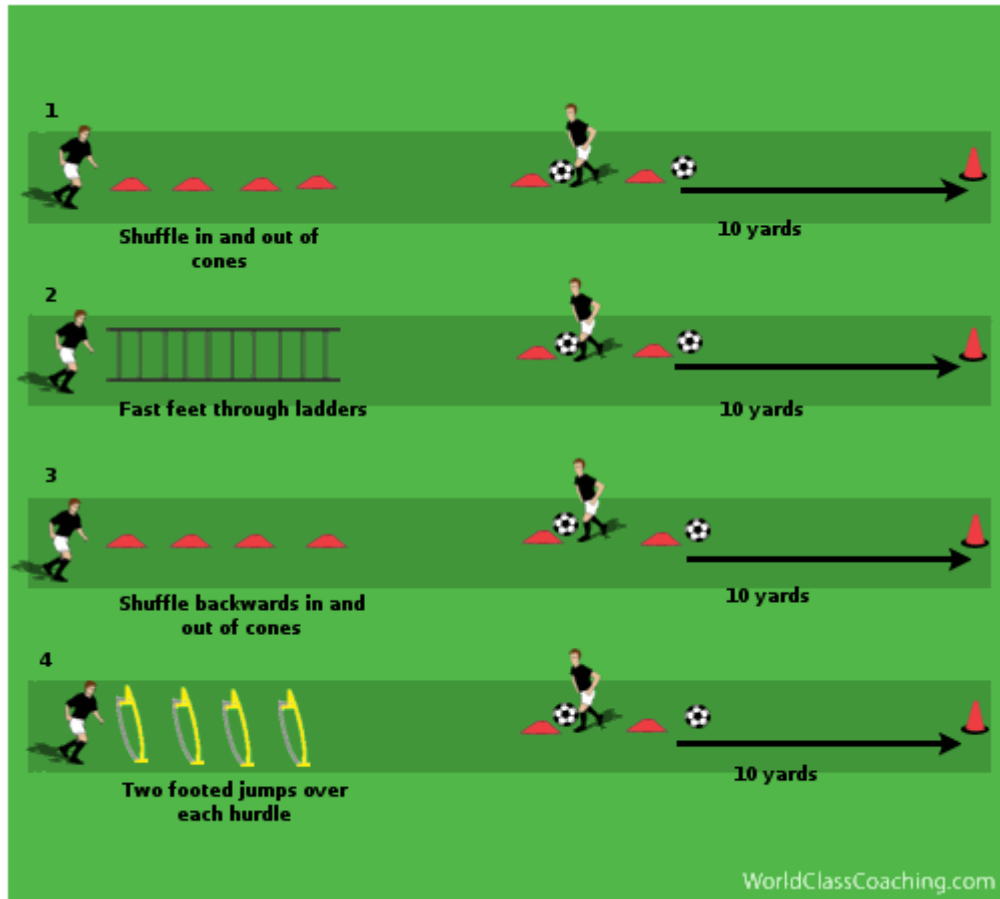
Again with all of these progressions and variations, it is important that as the players get tired that the quality of control of the ball and the pass is not compromised.

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# Agility, First Touch and Speed Dribbling

This exercise works on your player's first touch, speed dribbling and endurance. This is another exercise that can work very well with your team for preseason training.

There are 4 stations as shown below (figure 1), with your players spending 5 minutes at each station before moving onto the next.



## **Station 1:**

The player must shuffle in and out of the cones before receiving a pass from the feeder. The ball must be controlled with the inside of the foot and passed back. As soon as this is done, the player must sprint to the ball behind the feeder and speed dribble around the tall cone and stop the ball where the speed dribble started (figure 2). The two players switch roles and keep doing so until the coach calls time.

**Station 2:**

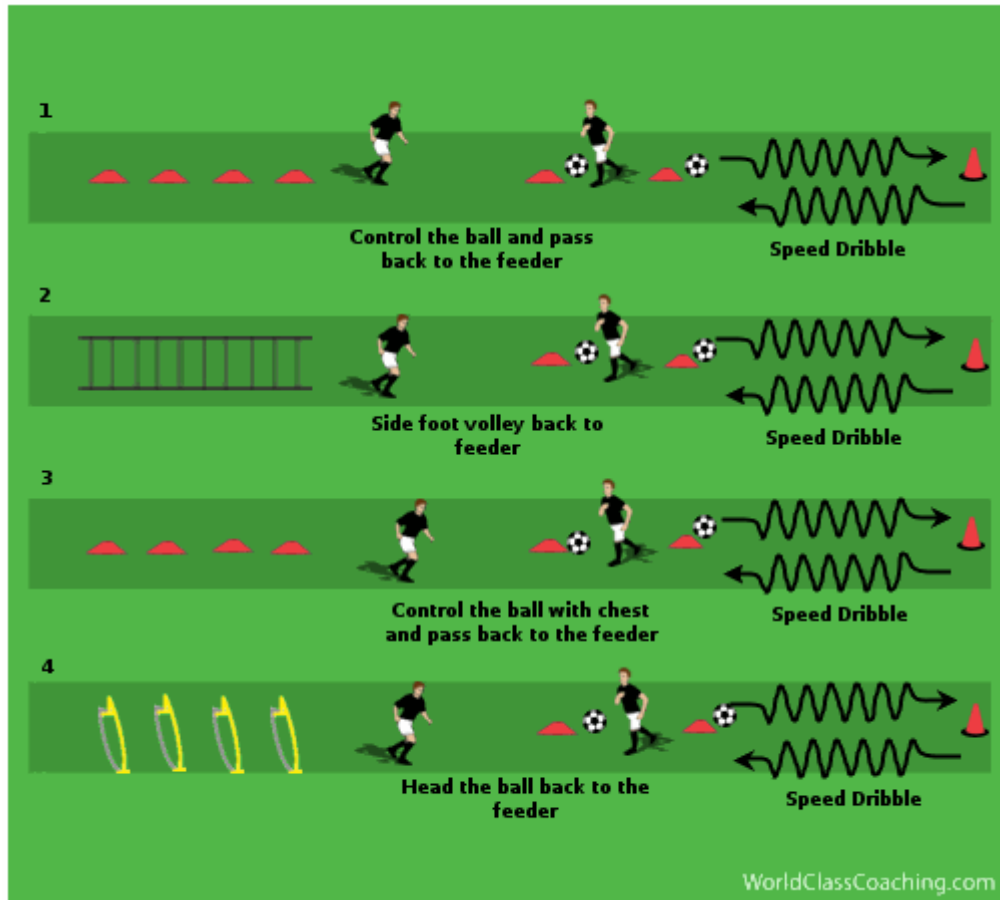
The player must run through the ladders placing both feet in the gaps of the ladder. The feeder at this station starts with the ball in their hands and throws the ball to their partner who will perform a side foot volley back into their partner's hands. After this has been done, the player must sprint to the ball behind the feeder and speed dribble around the tall cone and stop the ball where the speed dribble started (figure 2). The two players now switch roles and continue until the coach calls time

**Station 3:**

The player must shuffle backwards through the cones and then turn to face their partner. The feeder at this station starts with the ball in their hands and throws the ball to their partner who will control the ball with their chest and pass it back to their partner. After this has been done, the player must sprint to the ball behind the feeder and speed dribble around the tall cone and stop the ball where the speed dribble started (figure 2). The two players now switch roles and keep doing so until the coach calls time.

**Station 4:**

The player must perform two footed jumps over each hurdle. The feeder will now throw the ball high in the air and their partner must head the ball back into their hands. After this has been done, the player must sprint to the ball behind the feeder and speed dribble around the tall cones and stop the ball where the speed dribble started (figure 2). The two players now switch roles and keep doing so until the coach calls time.



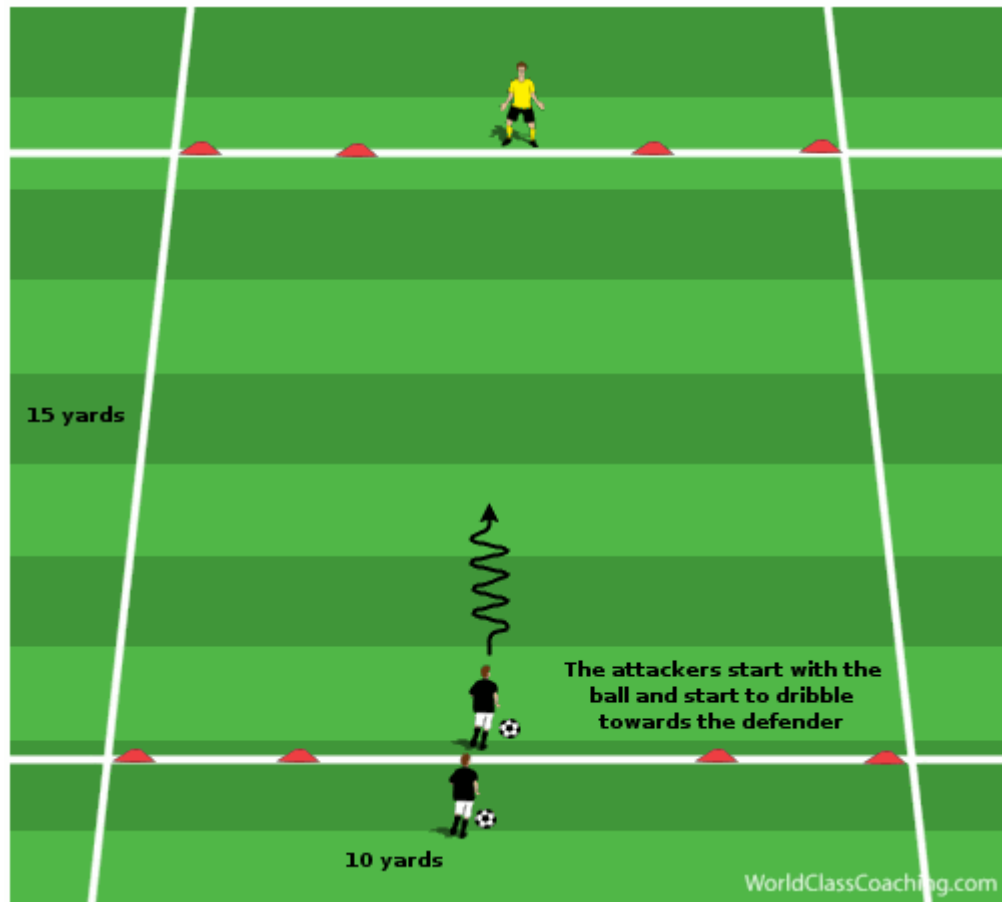
It is important to make sure that the intensity is kept to a maximum during this exercise ensuring that the players complete the stations as quickly as possible every time they go, especially as they have a little rest after every go when they switch with the feeder. Eventually fatigue will start to set into the players so it is important to emphasize that technique does not start to suffer when controlling, volleying or passing the ball. You could also increase the work load on the players by having them and the feeder stay in the same role for a set period of time rather than switch after every go. If you choose to do it this way then I would recommend 2 or 3 minutes in each role before moving onto the next station.



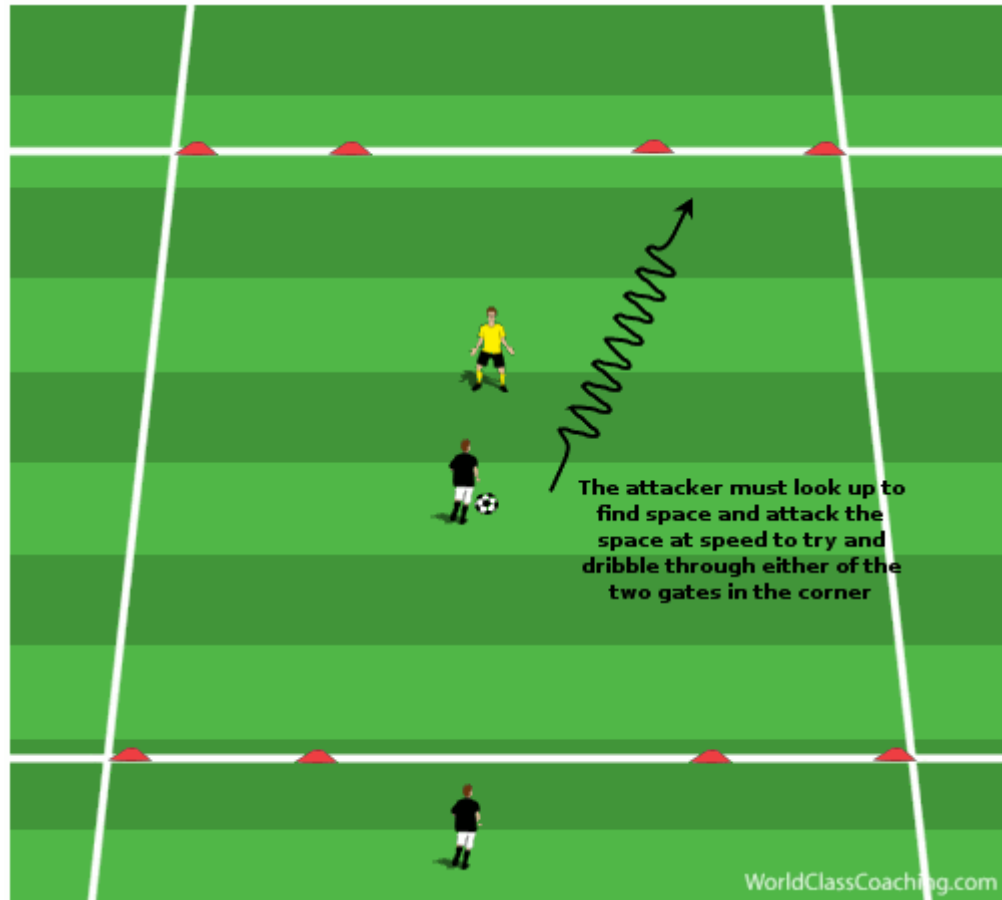
# 1 v 1's With a Conditioning Element

This exercise is a great way to have your players work hard and have fun at the same time. This helps to develop aerobic and anaerobic fitness as it involves many short sprints and changes of direction as well as recovering as a defender.

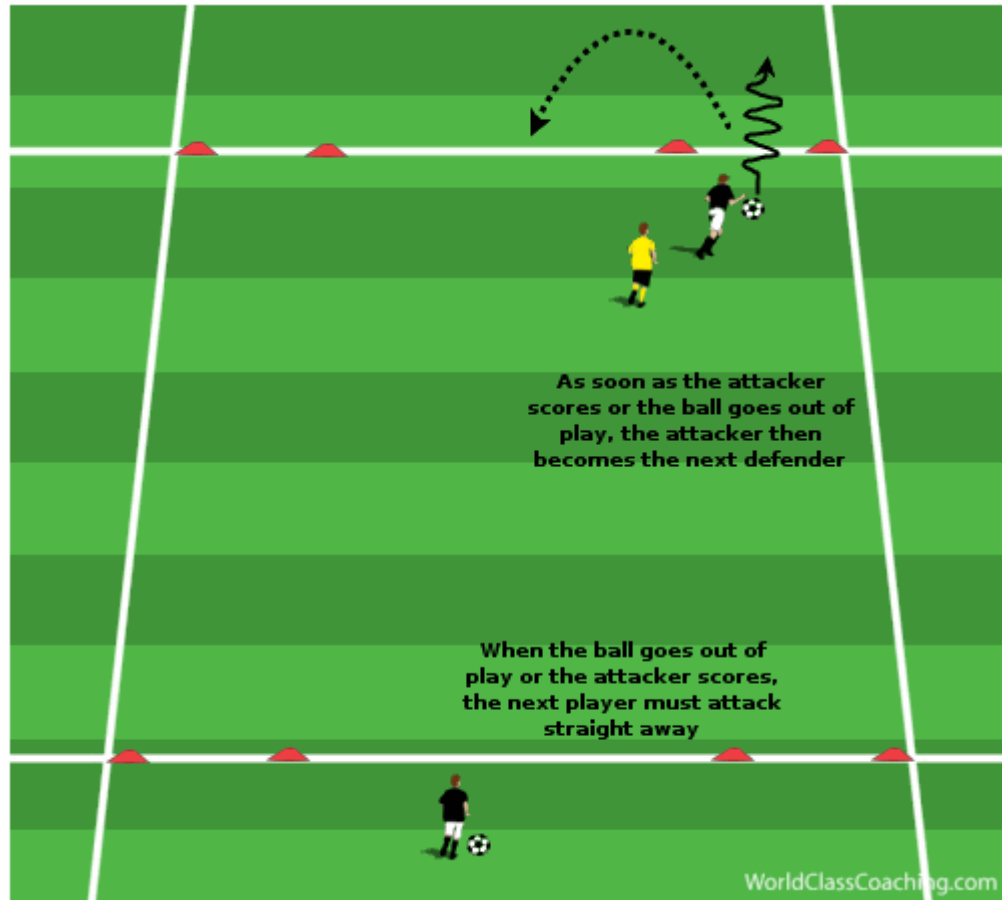
Split your team into groups of 3 and set up the field as shown below in figure 1.



The attacker starts with the ball must score in either of the two gates at the other end of the area (figure 2).



The 1v1 continues until the attacker scores by dribbling through either gate or the ball goes out of play. As soon as either of those things happens, the attacker becomes the new defender and the next attacker starts to dribble towards the gates (this ensures that everyone gets to play as an attacker and defender). The idea is that the next attacker does not wait for the new defender to get ready; they must attack as soon as the previous two players are done, which means that the new defender must recover quickly to close down the space for the attacker. This is to ensure that the intensity of the exercise is kept at a high level (figure 3). Also, if the defender wins the ball then they can attack the two gates at the other end of the area.



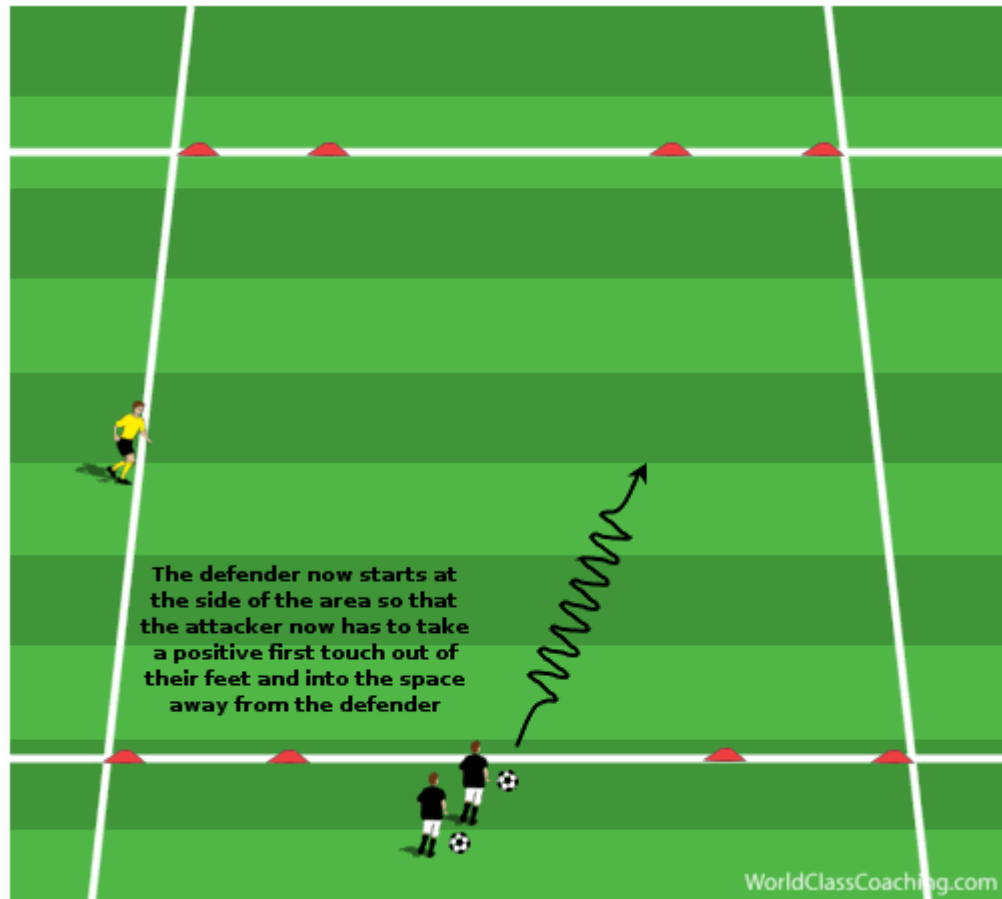
### Coaching Points:

- The attacker must have their head up to see where the space is and attack that space at speed.
- When facing the defender, the attacker must not let the ball get too close to the defender. A quick decision must be made as to where to attack to avoid this.
- If the defender blocks off one of the gates then the attacker can turn and attack the other gate.
- A slightly bigger touch can be taken in order to get past the defender and run onto the ball at speed and into the space.

### Progression:

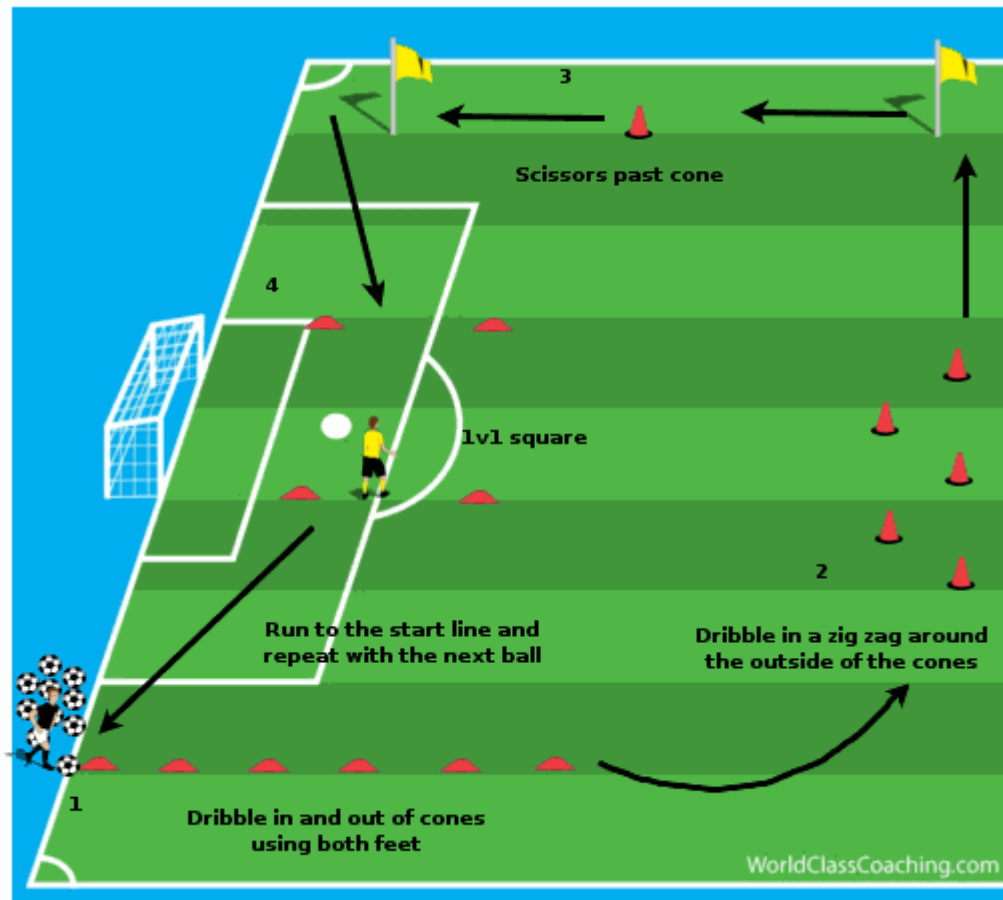
The exercise is very much the same but the starting point for the defender changes. Now the defender is closer to the attacker and to one side. In order to beat the defender now, the attacker must decide where the space is away from the defender and take a positive first touch into that space and accelerate into that space to get away from the defender.

The rotation of the players is the same after every go and must be done quickly as previously done.



# Dribbling Challenge With Endurance

This dribbling challenge is a great way to have your players work on different dribbling techniques, whilst working on their endurance. The objective is to complete the challenge with 5 soccer balls as quickly as possible. Set up your field as shown below (figure 1).



There are 4 stations that your player/players must complete before getting the next ball and going again.

**Station 1** – Dribble in and out of the cones using the inside and outside of both right and left foot. It is important that the player moves their feet quickly and keeps the ball close using small touches.

**Station 2** – Dribble in a zig zag around the outside of each cone. As the player goes around the outside of a cone they can use the inside of their right or left foot and cut

inside towards the next cone. Again small touches will ensure that the ball is kept under close control at all times. After they have done this they dribble towards the flag and cut inside towards the next station. To get there as quick as possible the player can use bigger touches so that they can build up some speed to get to the next station.

**Station 3** – Perform the scissors move to get past the cone. The player must ensure that they perform the move at a good distance away from the cone so that they do not hit it (in a real game this would be a defender and if they hit the cone it is like the defender winning the ball). After this is done the player must dribble around the flag and towards the next station.

**Station 4** – The last station is a 1v1 square. The player must make sure that they attack the space as quickly as possible to get past the defender.

As soon as they beat the defender they run to the starting point and get the next ball to perform the circuit again. This exercise is timed and the player must go around the circuit 5 times to complete the challenge. This is a great way to get your squad competing against each other and can create healthy competition.

### **Variations**

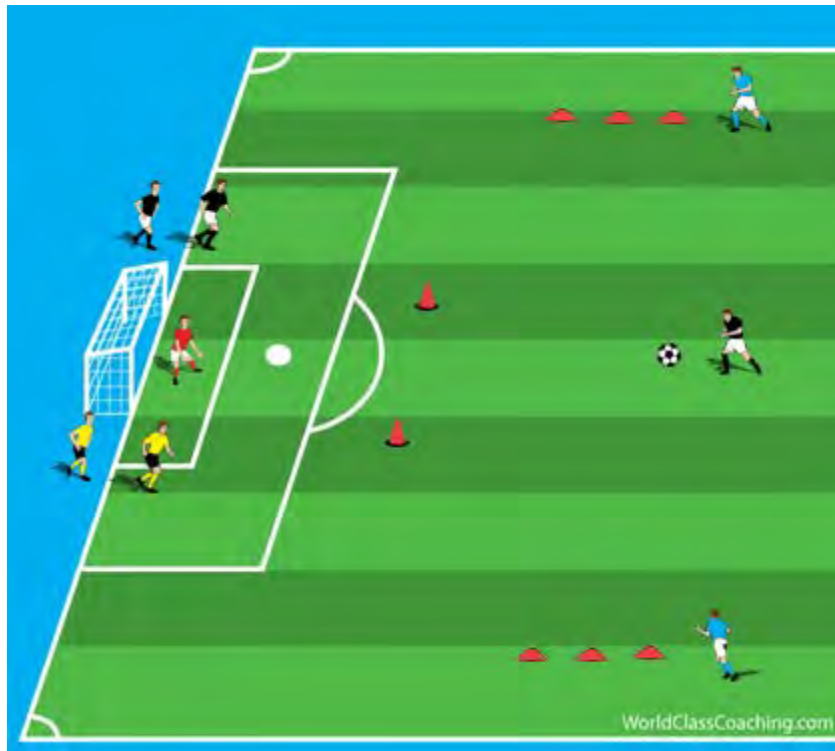
You can create your own challenge and change some of the dribbling techniques through the circuit, for example, you may want to change the 2nd station so that the player uses the sole of both feet to complete the station. Be creative!

## **Racing to Finish the Cross**

This week we focus on speed and agility combined with crossing and finishing under pressure. The exercise works best when run as a competition as this adds extra motivation for the players. Speed and Agility are obvious essentials in any game of soccer as players in any role or position on the field will benefit from having good speed and being more agile. The crossing and finishing aspects are more honed towards specific positions, so depending on the situation of your team, (whether you rotate players in positions or if your players have set positions) you can work a little bit of positional specific training into this exercise, especially for your outside defenders and midfielders. A good warm up should be performed before this exercise as it is played at a very high tempo.

### **Set Up and Directions**

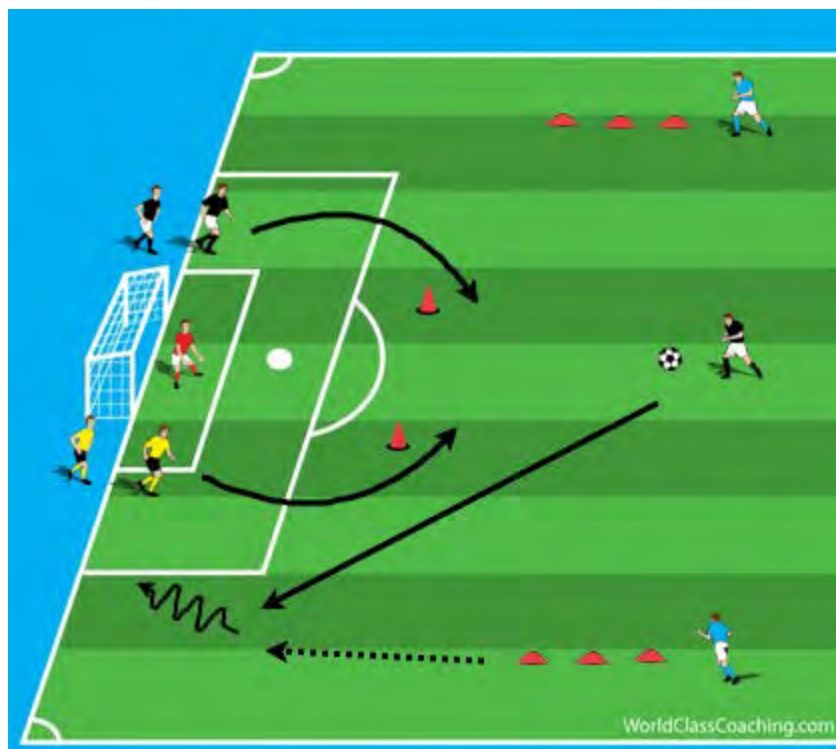
The exercise is set up as shown below with the coach positioned centrally around 30 yards from goal. The coach must have a supply of soccer balls to keep the exercise fluid. We also have two wide players, positioned on each wing. Each will have three cones laid out in front of them which they will use to perform agility. The wide players will act as neutrals and should try to play crosses into general areas, trying not to favor a team, but giving the players a good chance to score from the cross. Two teams will line up on opposite sides of the goal (minimum two players per team) with a goalkeeper in the goal.



Play begins with the coach playing a pass out to either wing (left wing in the example below), the winger then shuffles through the cones as quickly as possible and then sprints forward to retrieve the pass before dribbling towards the end line.

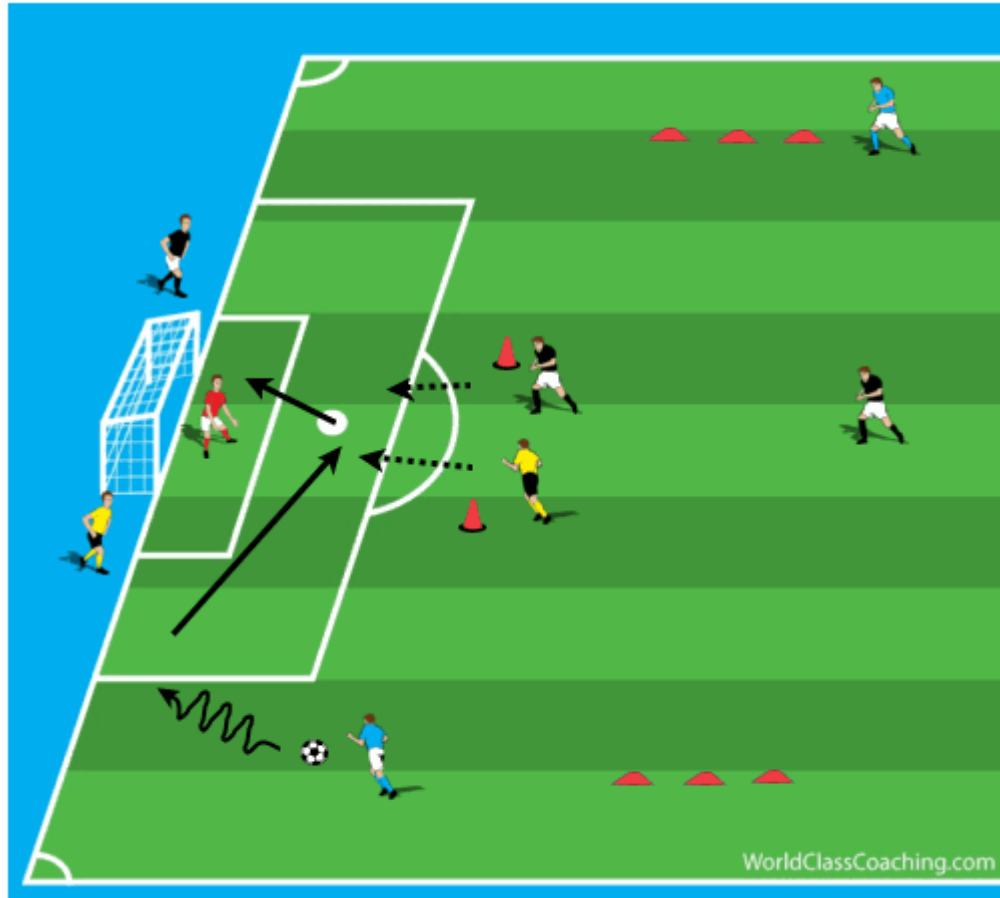
At the same time, the attacker at the front of each line will sprint out towards the cones positioned just outside the penalty box, before turning back through the gate, as shown below.





The wide player will then play a low cross into the penalty area, being sure to keep the cross away from the goalkeeper (preferably a diagonally cut-back cross) and the two strikers compete to score against each other and the goalkeeper.

To encourage the players to go as quickly as possible, I award 3 points for a 'first-time finish' and 1 point for a regular goal (with a touch to control, or dribbling before a shot). If they manage to get to the cross just ahead of their opponent, then they can finish quickly without too much pressure. If they get there around the same time as the opponent, then they will be put under pressure and will usually need to control the ball before shooting or trying to get past the defender to shoot.



## Timing

The timing of the exercise can be varied easily as you can continue adding many variations (shown below). The players should be encouraged to work at a high tempo throughout.

## Variations

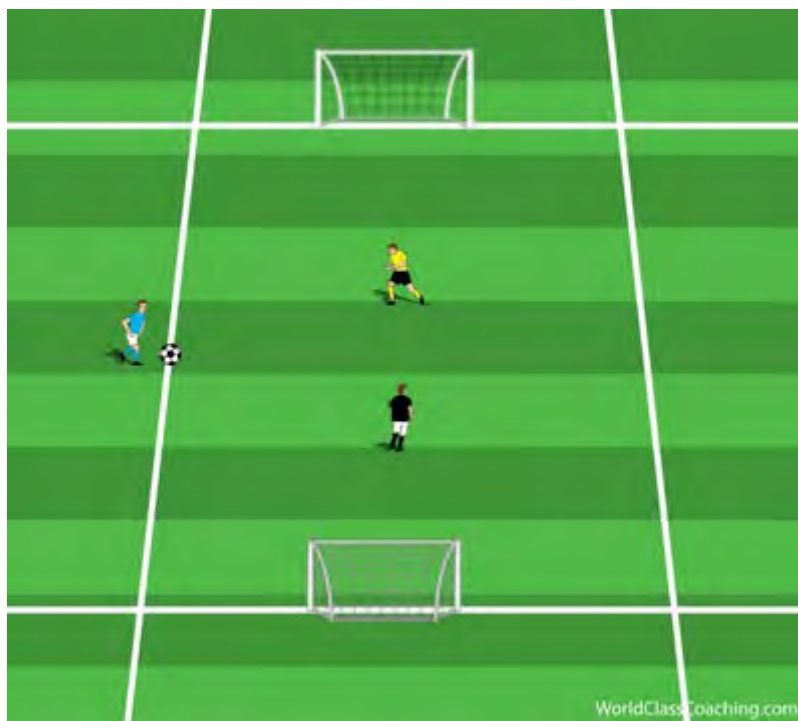
- **Agility**– quick feet; shuffling; backwards etc.
- **Coaches Pass** – the coach could play a high pass into the corner to be retrieved by the wide player, this makes the first touch more difficult for the wide player and therefore becomes more challenging.
- **Crossing** – you could choose to work on crosses in the air from this situation also.
- **Number of players** – you could add a second player for each team and play 2v2 to goal from the cross.

## Continuous 1 v 1 Battles

This week we have a very high tempo, quick-fire 1v1 exercise that is worked in groups of three. It is always good to practice 1v1s they happen all over the field in every single game. 1v1s also get players thinking from both the attacking and defensive side of the game. A good warm up should be performed before this exercise as it is played at a very high tempo.

### **Set Up and Directions**

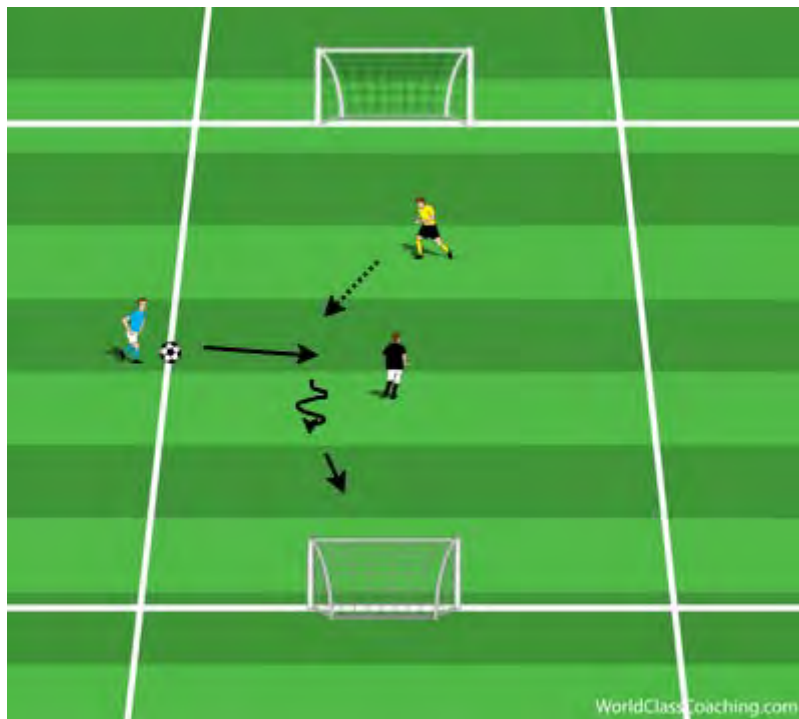
The exercise is set up as shown below. The feeder ( player in blue on the outside of the field) must have a number of soccer balls available in order to keep a high tempo for this game. The two active players wait centrally in the 20x15 yard field marked out with two goals, one at either end.



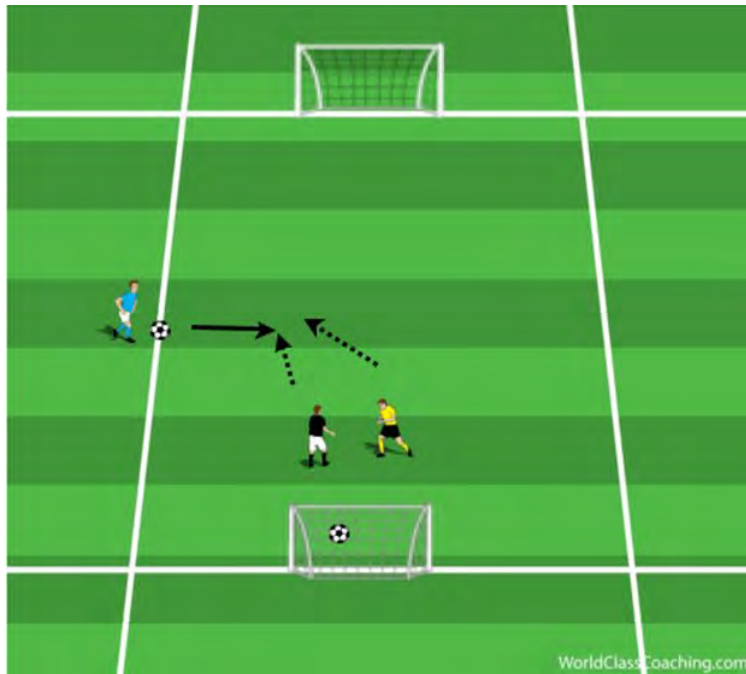
Play begins with the feeder playing a pass directly between the two competing players. The two players then compete for possession. The player that wins possession must try to dribble away from their opponent in order to create enough space to take a shot and score on either goal.

Shooting towards both goals helps encourage awareness of surroundings and individual creativity e.g. faking towards one goal, causing the defender to move, and then turning back towards the opposite goal.

As there is lots of opportunity to score here, we play seven rounds with the same two players in the middle.



As soon as one ball goes out of bounds OR in the goal, the feeder plays the next ball directly between wherever the two competing players are on the field at that time.



This allows very little rest-bite for the players and keeps a very high tempo.

After seven round of play, you should have a winner...if not, then you can play one more 'tiebreaker' round. The winner stays on and the losing player now becomes the feeder.

Be sure to reset the soccer balls each time you change feeders so that the new feeder can help keep a flow of passes into the area.

### **Timing**

The timing of the exercise can be varied depending on the conditioning level of your players and by using some of the variations shown below. The players should be encouraged to work at a high tempo throughout.

### **Variations**

**Feeder**– throw the ball in high every time OR play a pass to the opposite side of the field to where the two players are.

**Direction** – play with a goal to defend and a goal to attack for each player, this is more game realistic and adds more of a defensive element to the game also.

**Number of players** – you could add a second player for each team and play 2v2 to goal.

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