

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO

# PASSING AND POSSESSION

by JEBREEL BUBTANA



WORLD CLASS COACHING

**The Complete Guide  
To  
Passing and Possession**

*By*

*Jebreel Bibtana*

*Published by*

WORLD CLASS COACHING

First published March, 2017 by  
WORLD CLASS COACHING 12851 Flint Street Overland Park, KS 66213 (913) 402-0030

Copyright © WORLD CLASS COACHING 2017

All rights reserved. No parts of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Authors – Jebreel Bibtana  
Editor - Tom Mura  
Cover Art By - Barrie Smith



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Technical Warm Ups</b>	<b>6</b>
Passing technical Warm Up	7
Four Team Pass and Move	9
Passing Diamond	11
Passing Y	14
Passing and First Touch Square	19
Passing and Receiving on the Back Foot	21
Passing and Receiving	24
Passing and First Touch	28
3v0 Passing	31
<b>Non-Directional Possession Exercises</b>	<b>34</b>
4v2 Rondo	35
Rondo Variation	38
Three Team Possession Game	41
Penetration and Possession Game	43
Four Zone Possession	45
The Gate Game	47
5v5 with Safe Zones	49
<b>Directional Possession Exercises</b>	<b>51</b>

2v2 with Outside Neutrals	52
Switch the Point of Attack Small-Sided Game (across the river)	55
3v3 (plus 2) to Target Players and Neutrals to Teach Playing Out of the Back	58
3v3 with Target Players to Coach the Three Midfielders in a 1-4-3-3	61
4v4 to Wide Goals	64
Receiving Under Pressure Game	66
Crossing and Finishing and Possession Game	68
Shooting and Possession Game	70

## **Introduction**

This is a collection of exercises that coaches can use to train players in any age group regardless of ability level. The exercises are designed to be simple and easy to understand but ultimately effective in improving an individual's passing technique and a team's ability to possess the ball.

Soccer has developed and changed considerably in recent years, and possessing the ball has become an incredibly important part of the game. With that being said, the ability to pass and receive the ball well under pressure is the minimum expectation for any player and team.

We start off with exercises that can be used as a technical warm up for your players. Some exercises will focus purely on technique and others will add interference in order to encourage decision making. We then move on to non-directional and directional exercises that will encourage decision making and challenge your player's technique under pressure.

I would encourage anybody reading this to be creative and adapt these exercises to their own coaching situation. Every team is different so it is important to adapt these exercises to your own team! Another thing to consider is that many of these exercises can also be used to achieve different goals and so again, feel free to adapt these exercises.

# **TECHNICAL WARM UPS**

## Passing Technical Warm Up

This exercise will work on your player's passing and receiving technique with interference, which will also challenge your players with their decision-making.

Each team will have one ball to work with. Two players from each team will be in the middle of the square and one player from each team on the outside of the area opposite each other who will act as target players as shown below. Adjust the size of the area depending on the age and ability of your players.



The two teams must work the ball from one target player to the opposite target player using the two players in the middle. Both players in the middle must touch the ball before the other target player receives the ball. Both teams will work at the same time, working their way through the “chaos/interference”.





#### Progression:

If a gap opens up, the target player can pass to the opposite target player and the players in the middle must adjust their position to receive the ball again.

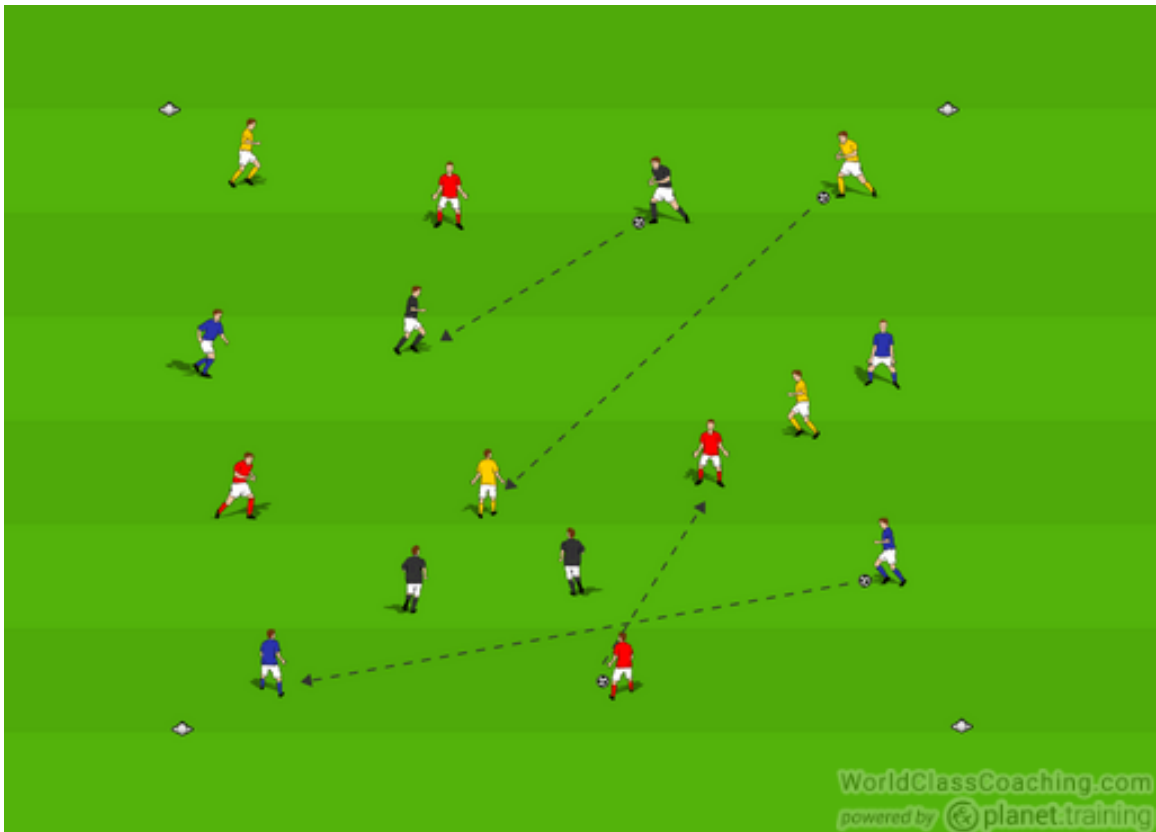
#### Coaching Points:

- Accuracy and weight of pass
- Players in the middle should receive with an open body position and on their back foot
- Check shoulder before receiving the ball to be aware of pressure and to take first touch into appropriate space
- Decision making of where to move to receive the ball and when to pass
- Communication

## Four Team Pass and Move

Similar to the previous exercise, this will also work on your player's passing and receiving technique with interference to provide the decision-making element.

Each color team will have one ball and they will pass and move in their group, ideally using 2 touches. Encourage all teams to use the whole area in order to create decision making as the teams get in each other's way. Adjust the size of the area depending on the age and ability of your players.



Progression:

The player receiving the ball can only do so once he has found a gap between two players of a different team as shown below.



Coaching Points:

- Accuracy and weight of pass
- Receive on the back foot and with an open body position
- Check shoulder before receiving the ball to be aware of pressure and to take first touch into appropriate space
- Keep scanning area as play is going on in order to know where to pass before next before receiving the ball
- Decision making of where to move to receive the ball and when to pass
- Communication

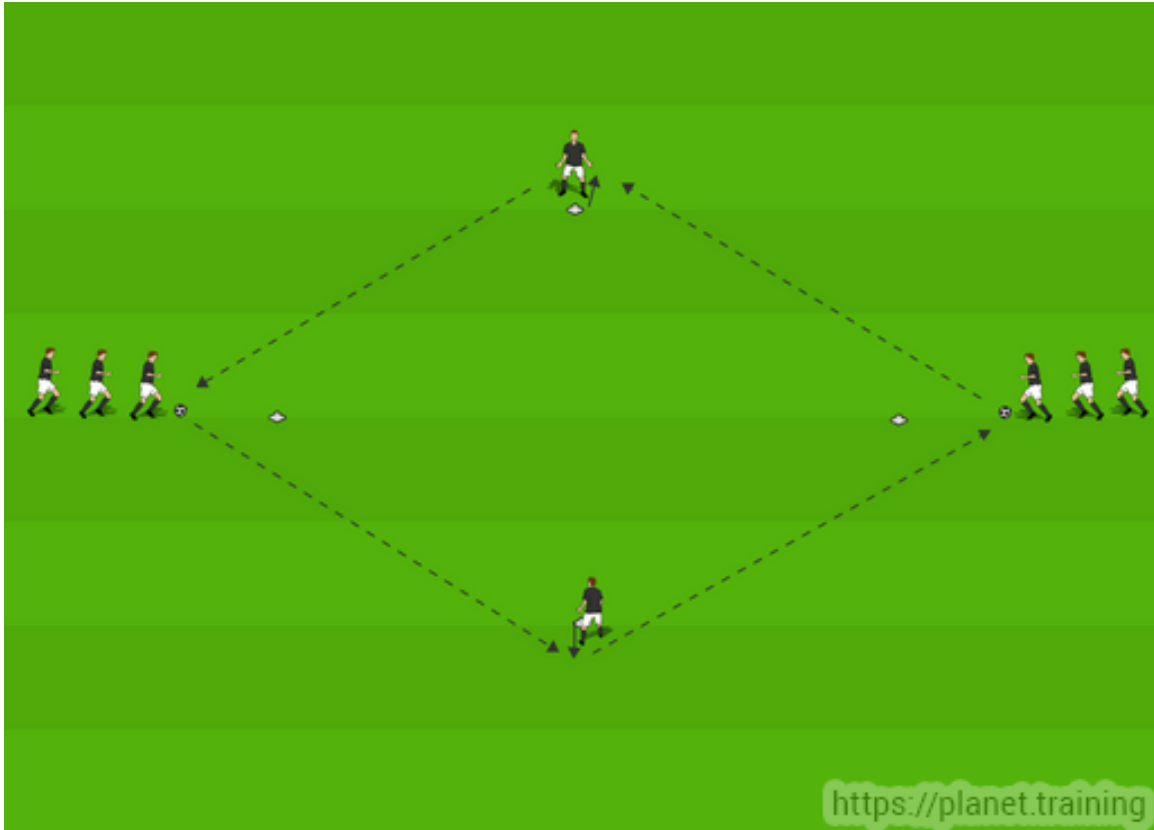
## Passing Diamond

The exercise will focus on receiving on the back foot as well as the timing of the pass and movements.

Set up the players as shown below, with 3 players on both ends of the diamond and one player on the other two cones. Two balls are needed in this exercise, which will start on the cones with the 3 players. The cones in this exercise will be the defenders. In this exercise, both lines will go at the same time. Adjust the distances between the cones depending on the age and ability of your players.



The players with the ball on either end of the diamond pass to the player to their right, who will have checked away from the cone slightly to create space to receive on their back foot, which would be their right foot in this situation. After this player has controlled the ball with their back foot, they also pass to the player to their right, after that player has also checked away from the cone/defender. All players must follow their pass.

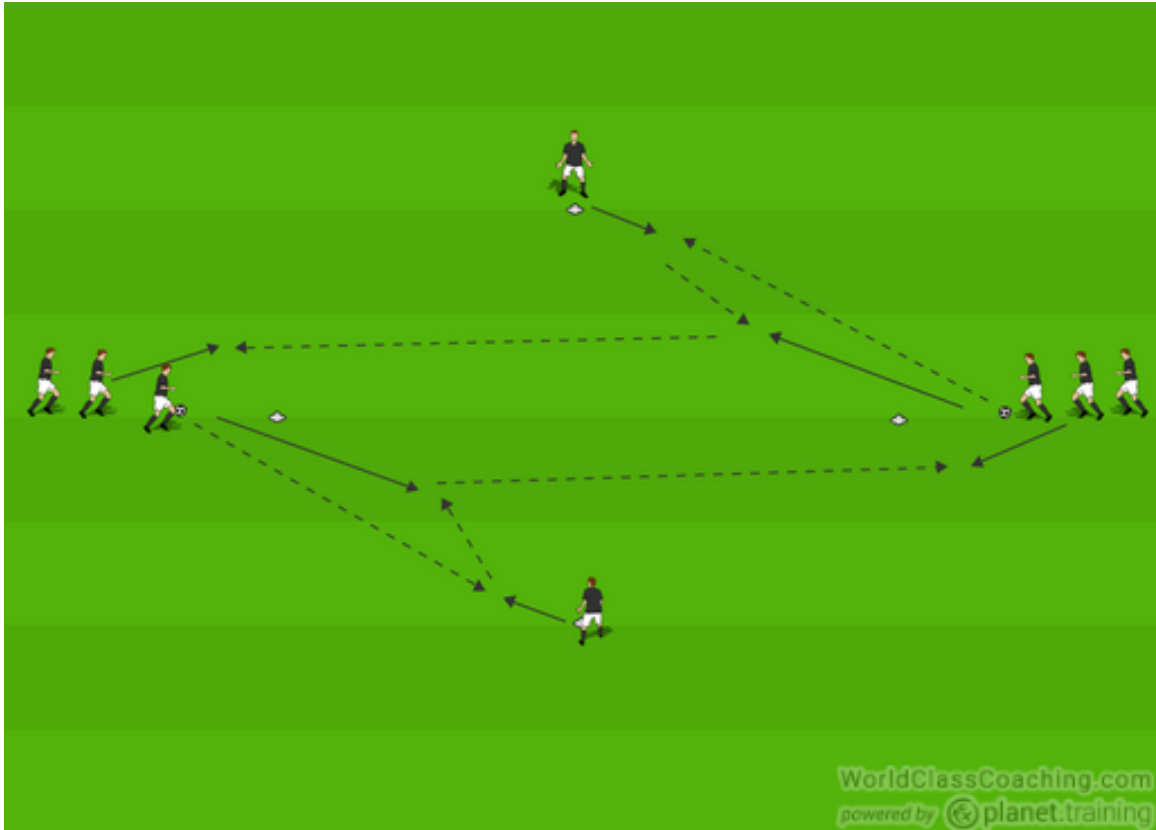


Progression:

Turn into a competition between groups to see who can get the ball around successfully the most in a 30-45 second period. Make sure that you practice this with the ball going to their player's left as well.

Progression:

You can also add to this to create a pass combination. The players will pass the ball to the player to their right just as they did previously, but this time that player will check away from the defender towards them and set it back first time. When the start player gets the ball back, they pass to player on the far side of the diamond as shown below. Again this player will have checked away from the cone/defender to receive the ball.



Make sure you have the players practice in the other direction and then you can have a competition similar to the previous one.

Progression:

A give and go could also be added to the last sequence but be creative and make up your own pass combination.

Coaching Points:

- Accuracy and weight of pass
- Receive on the back foot and with an open body position
- Check shoulder before receiving the ball to be aware of pressure and to take first touch into appropriate space (check right shoulder if right foot is the back foot)
- Communication
- Timing of movement and pass

## Passing Y

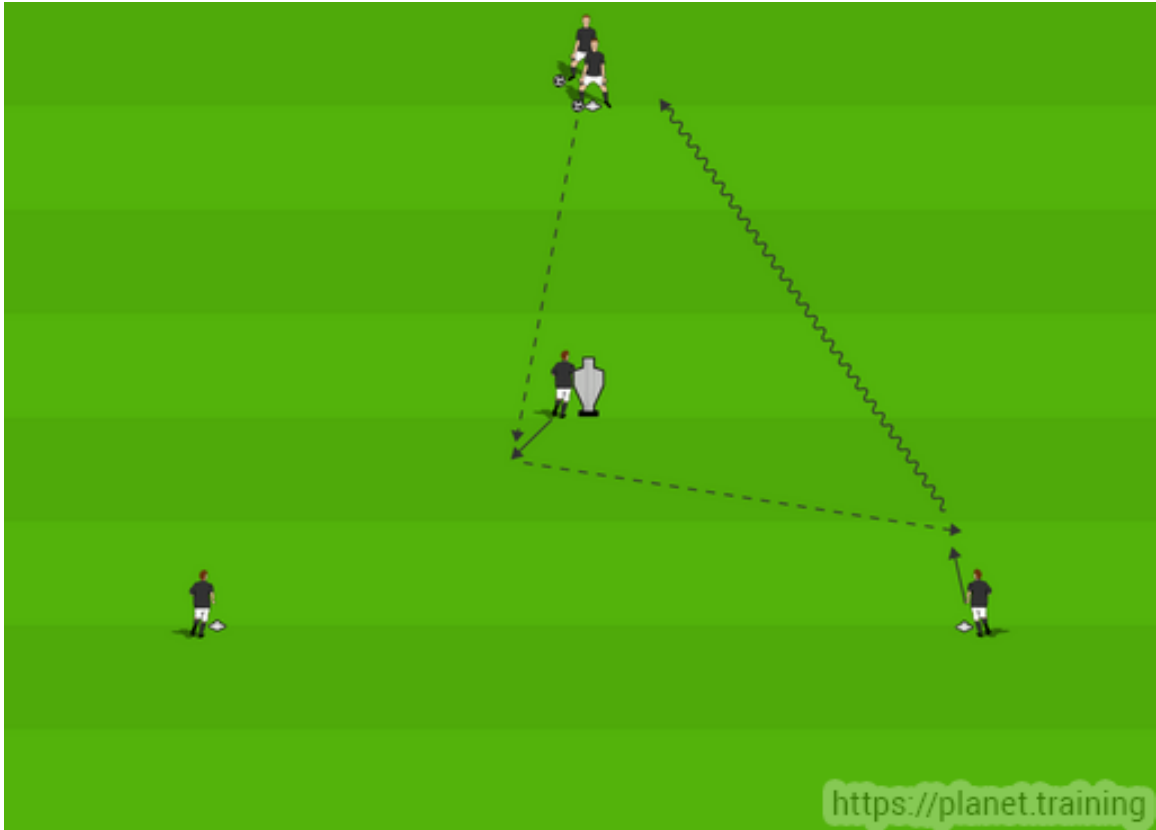
The passing Y is a very popular passing exercise that works on passing, receiving and timing. The beauty of this exercise is that there are so many variations that you can do.

Set up the field as shown below, the distances between the cones and mannequins can be changed depending on the age and level of your players.



### Variation 1:

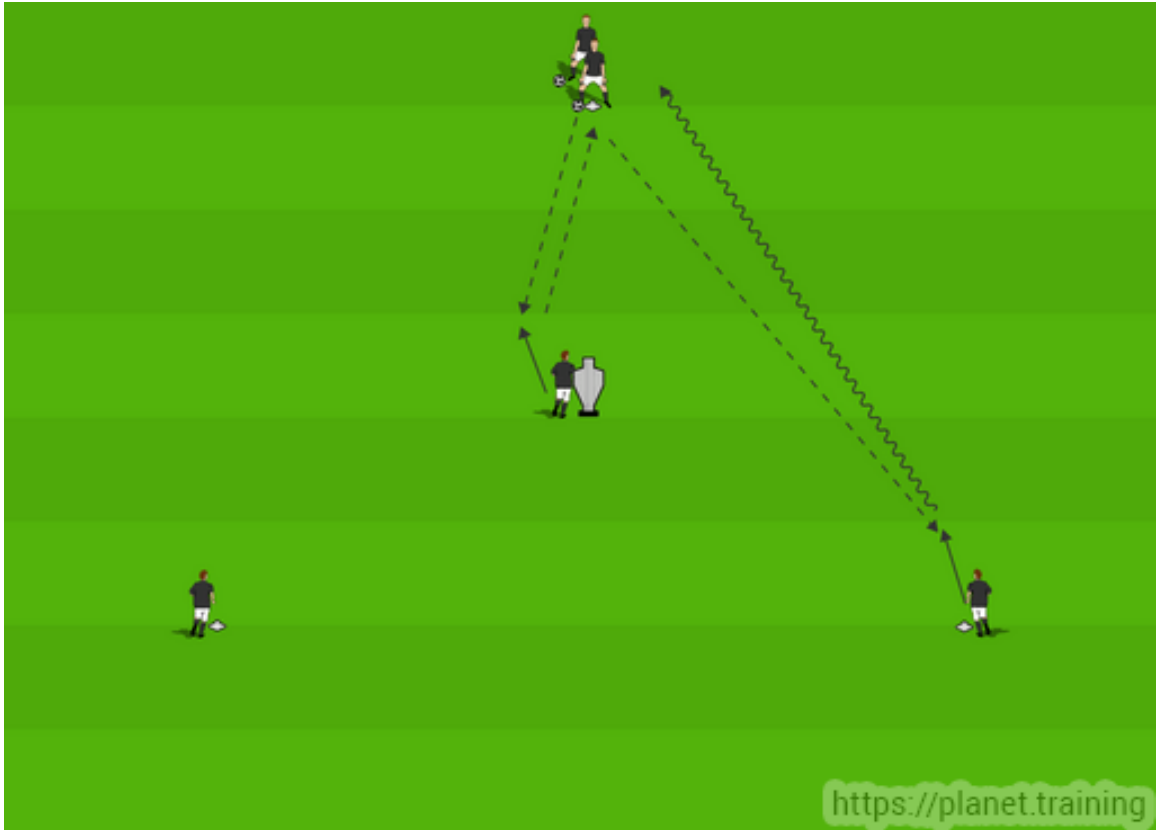
Player 1 passes to player 2 who has checked away from the mannequin to create space (change the side of the mannequin that the player moves to every time). Player 2 controls with their back foot and passes to player 3 who has checked away from the cone and receives the ball on the run. Player 3 dribbles back to the start. All three players follow their pass.



#### Variation 2:

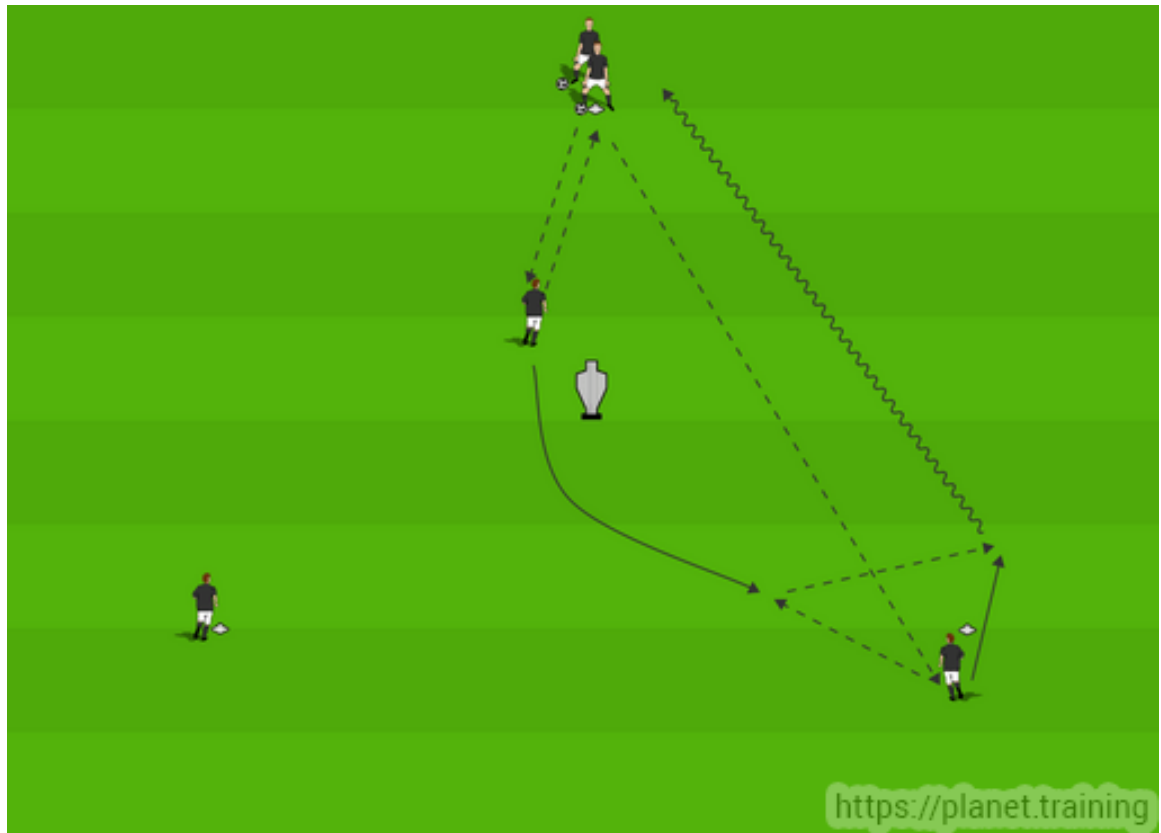
Player 1 passes to player 2 who has checked away from the mannequin to create space and then passes back to player 1 first time (change the side of the mannequin that the player moves to every time). Player 1 passes to player 3 who has checked away from the cone and receives the ball on the run. Player 3 dribbles back to the start. All 3 players move to the same places that they moved to in variation 1.





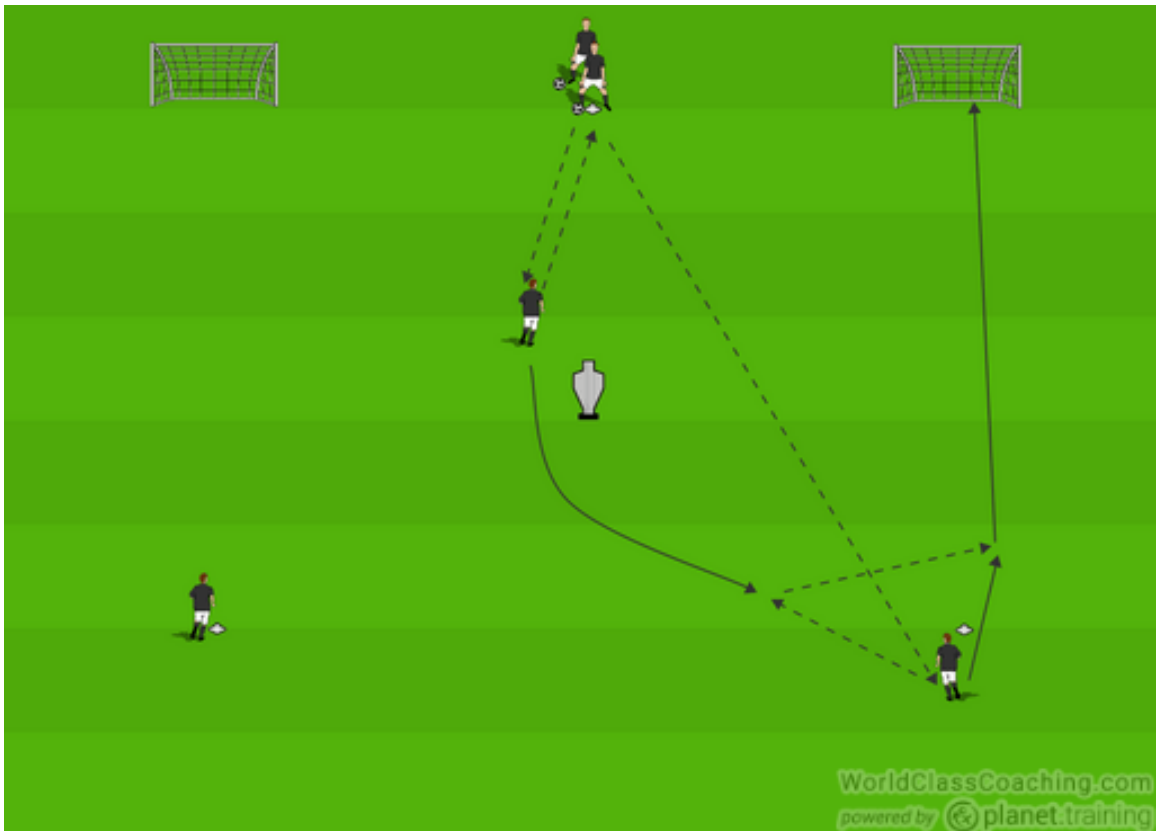
### Variation 3:

Player 1 passes to player 2 who has checked away from the mannequin to create space and then passes back to player 1 first time (change the side of the mannequin that the player moves to every time). Player 1 passes to player 3 who has checked away from the cone to receive in space. Player 2 moves to perform a give and go with player 3 who then dribbles back to the start. The players move to the same cones afterwards that they did with the first two variations.



Variation 4:

You can perform any of the passing variations above but now when player 3 receives the ball they will shoot on the goal below as shown below.



#### Further variations:

Be creative and make your own passing combinations. You can also introduce other parts of the game as shown in variation 4 with the shooting at the end of the exercise, for example, you can designate a defender and when player 3 receives the ball it will turn into a 1v1 to a mini goal.

#### Coaching Points:

- The quality of the pass to the correct foot
- Timing of the movements before the pass
- Receive on the back foot
- Check the correct shoulder before receiving the pass

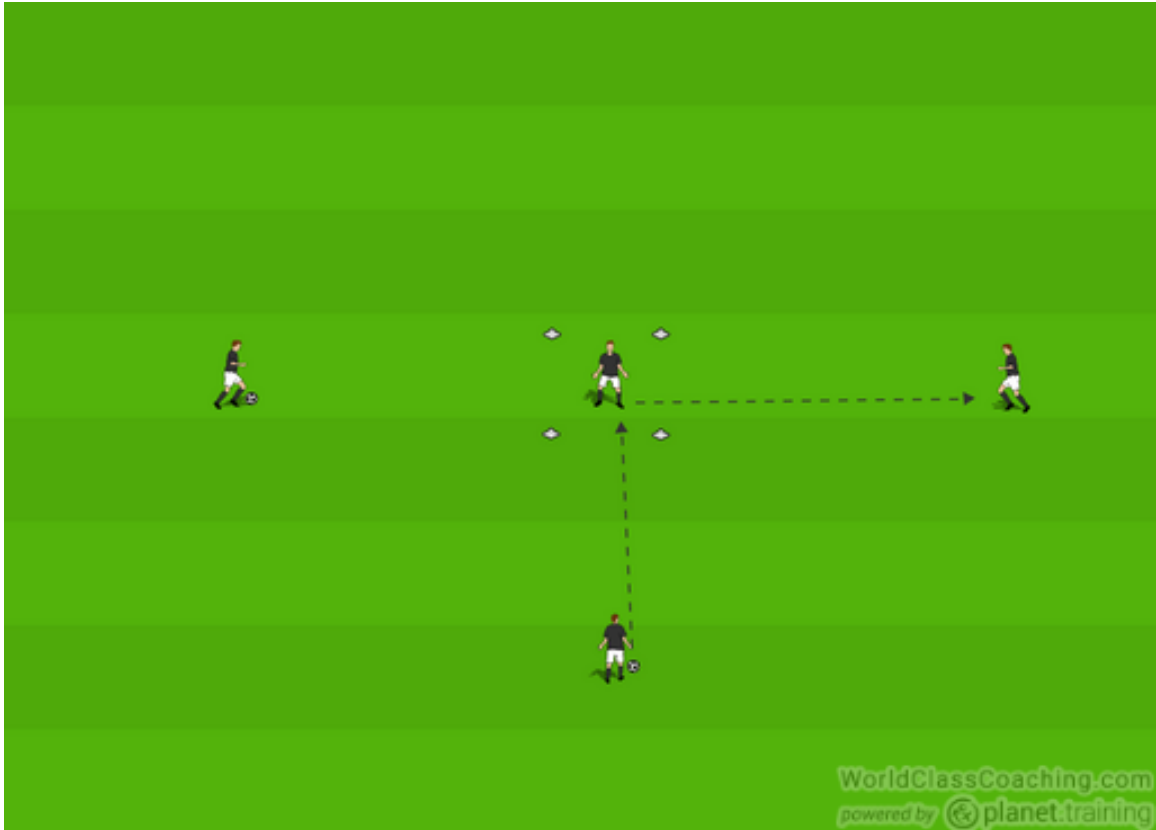
## Passing and First Touch Square

The main focus of this next exercise is the technique of passing and receiving the ball.

One player will start in the middle of the square and the 3 other players will be 10-15 yards outside the square as shown below. Two of the players on the outside will start with a ball.



The player in the middle of the square will receive a ball from either player on the outside, take a touch and pass to the open player who started without the ball. The player in the middle then receives from the next player and again passes to the open player and this continues.



After a minute in the middle, rotate this player.

Progression:

Challenge the player's first touch by having the players on the outside play the ball in or throw the ball in at different heights.

Progression:

The players on the outside can move so that the player in the middle has more of a challenge in getting the ball to the open player.

Coaching Points:

- Accuracy and weight of the pass
- Receive on the back foot and with an open body position towards the open player when receiving on the ground
- Cushion the ball when receiving it
- Communication

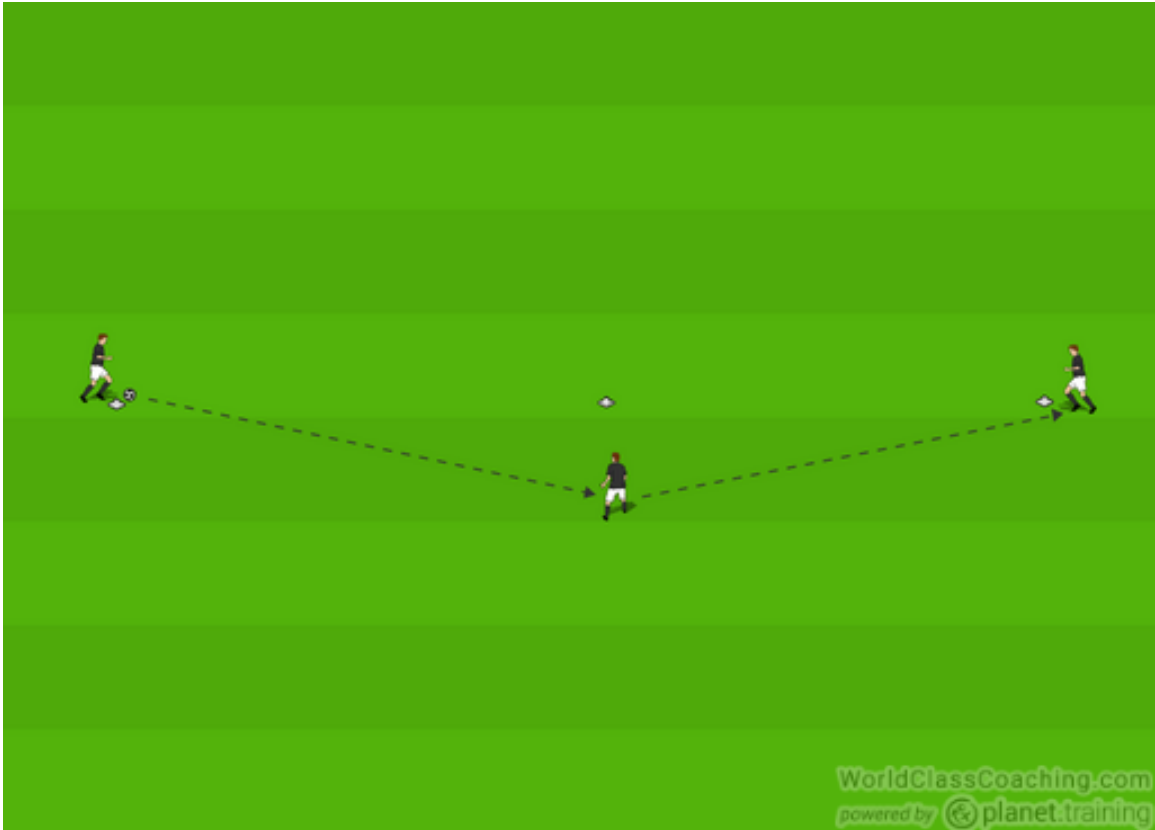
## Passing and Receiving on the Back Foot

An important aspect of possession soccer is switching the point of attack. The following exercise will work on the technical aspect of this and get the players into good habits.

Set up 3 cones 15-20 yards (vary distance depending on age, this could be shorter or longer) apart in a straight line across the field, with a player on each cone and a ball starting on one end as shown below.



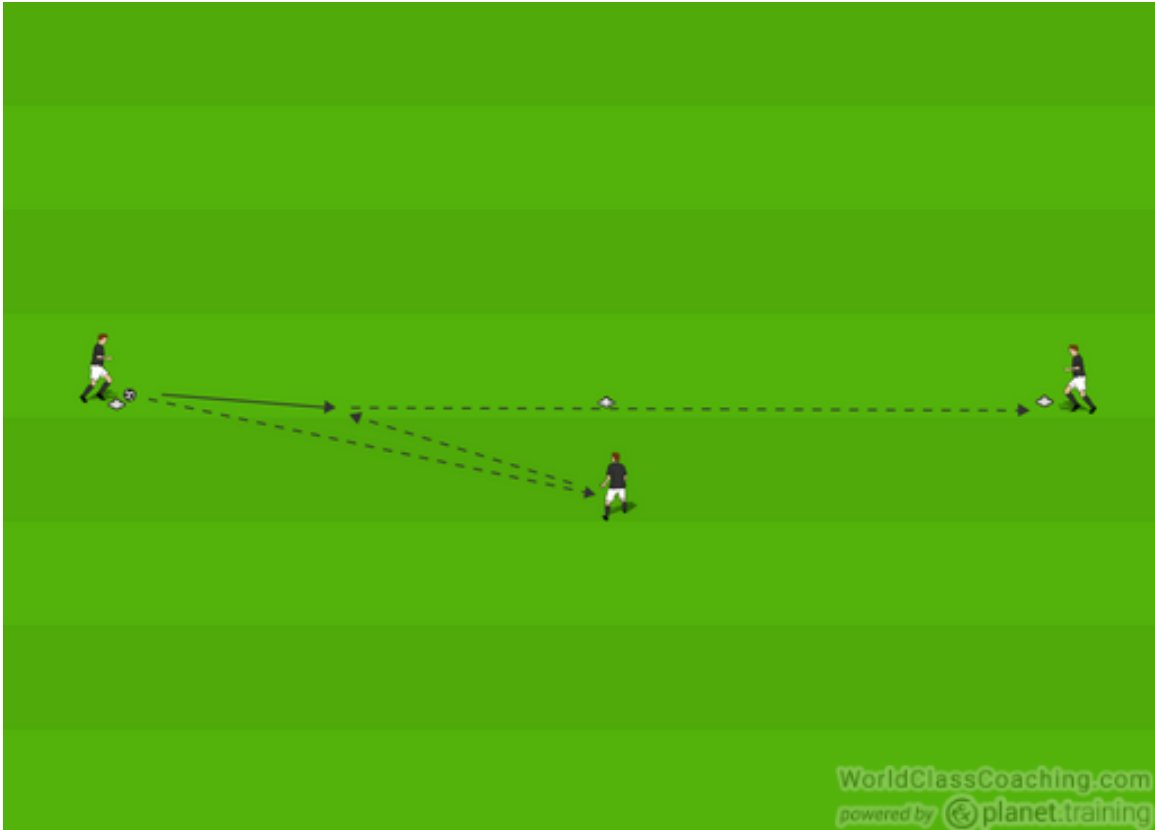
The player in the middle checks away from the cone to receive from an outside. As they check away, they must open up their body and receive on their back foot before passing across/switching the play across to the open player. The player then returns to the middle cone, and checks away again to receive the ball and switch it back to where it started.



After rotating all 3 players, you can turn this into a competition between groups. Each group has 30-4 seconds to try and switch the ball through the middle player from one side to the other. Points only count if the player in the middle gets in the correct open body position and receive it on their back foot.

Progression:

The player in the middle now receives the ball and plays it back to the same player with their back foot, who then plays it all the way across to the open player on the far side. The middle player then returns to the middle cone and repeats this on the other side to get the ball back to where it started.



#### Coaching Points:

- Accuracy and weight of the pass
- The player in the middle should check away from the middle cone/defender with a short sharp movement
- Encourage the player in the middle to receive with one foot and pass with the other to speed up the play, for example, if the right foot is the back foot then they receive with that foot and pass with the left across to the other side as this is quicker than using the same foot throughout
- Check shoulder before receiving the ball to be aware of where the open player is
- Communication



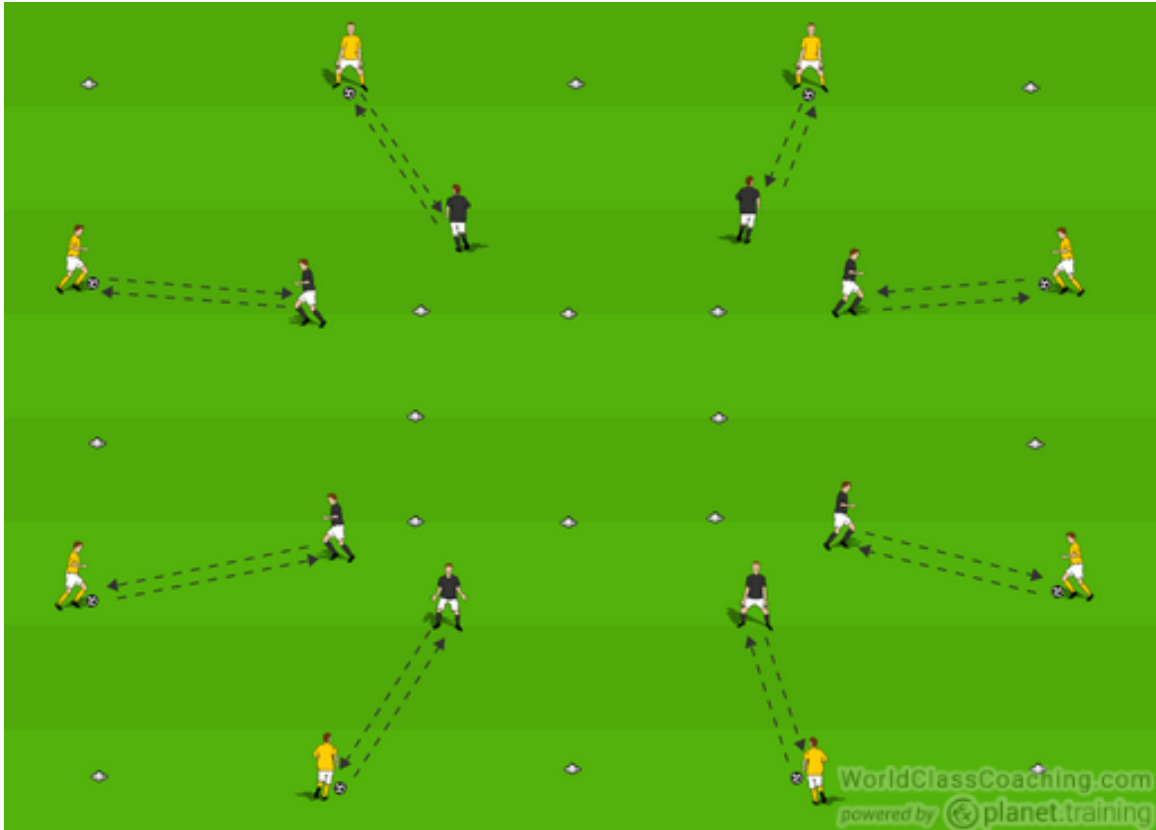
## Passing and Receiving

The focus of this exercise is on passing and receiving technique. However, there will be a lot of interference in the progressions, which will give the players plenty of decision making opportunities.

Set up the field as shown below with a small square in the middle of a bigger area (adjust depending on age and ability). Split your group into two, half of the players will have a ball on the outside to act as feeders and the other half will wait in the middle square.



The players in the middle run towards any feeder on the outside, receive a pass, control the ball and pass back to the same player using the inside of the foot.



The middle players then head back into the middle before receiving another pass from a different feeder. After one minute, switch roles.

Progression:

You can test the first touch of the players in the middle by having the feeders throw the ball in at different heights.

Progression:

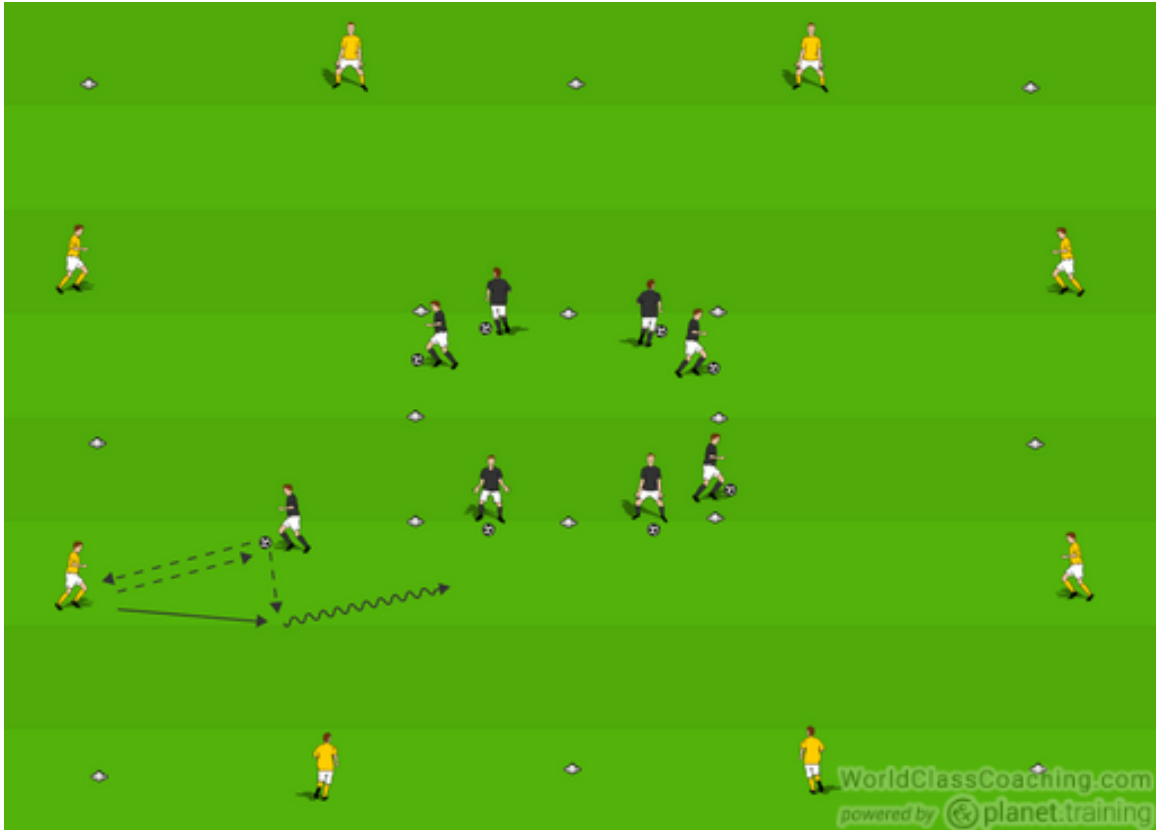
The exercise starts off in the same way with the players in the middle checking towards a feeder and receiving the ball from them, but rather than passing back, they will pass the ball out to a different player/feeder on the outside who does not have a ball. The middle player then heads back into the middle and looks to receive another ball from a different feeder.



The players in the middle will have a lot of decision making opportunities as the other players will be performing at the same time as them, so they will need to decide when to dribble or pass and where the space is.

Progression:

The players in the middle will now start with the ball. Their job is to dribble and then pass the ball to an outside player. Once the outside player receives the ball, they will perform a give and go with the player in the middle. The two players now switch roles, so when the player who was on the outside receives the ball back from the give and go, they continue to dribble in the middle of the area before finding someone else to do the sequence of passes with.



Again, the players will have to make a lot of decisions in order to work through the chaos in the middle of the area.

#### Coaching Points:

- Accuracy and weight of the pass
- Cushion the ball with the first touch using the inside of the foot
- Encourage controlling the ball using the back foot as much as possible, make sure that the body position is open and that the player has checked their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication
- Decision making (where the space is to receive the ball, when to dribble and when to pass)

## Passing and First Touch

This is a very simple exercise but can be a good start to a session to give the players plenty of touches on the ball to get them comfortable with passing and receiving.

Each pair will need one ball. The two cones will be 3-4 yards apart, with one player standing on the outside of one of the cones and their partner with the ball 10-15 yards away, who will act as a feeder as shown below. Adjust distances depending on age and ability.



The feeder passes into their partner, who will control and pass back. As soon as this player passes back, they side shuffle to the outside of the other cone, receive the ball and pass back in two touches.



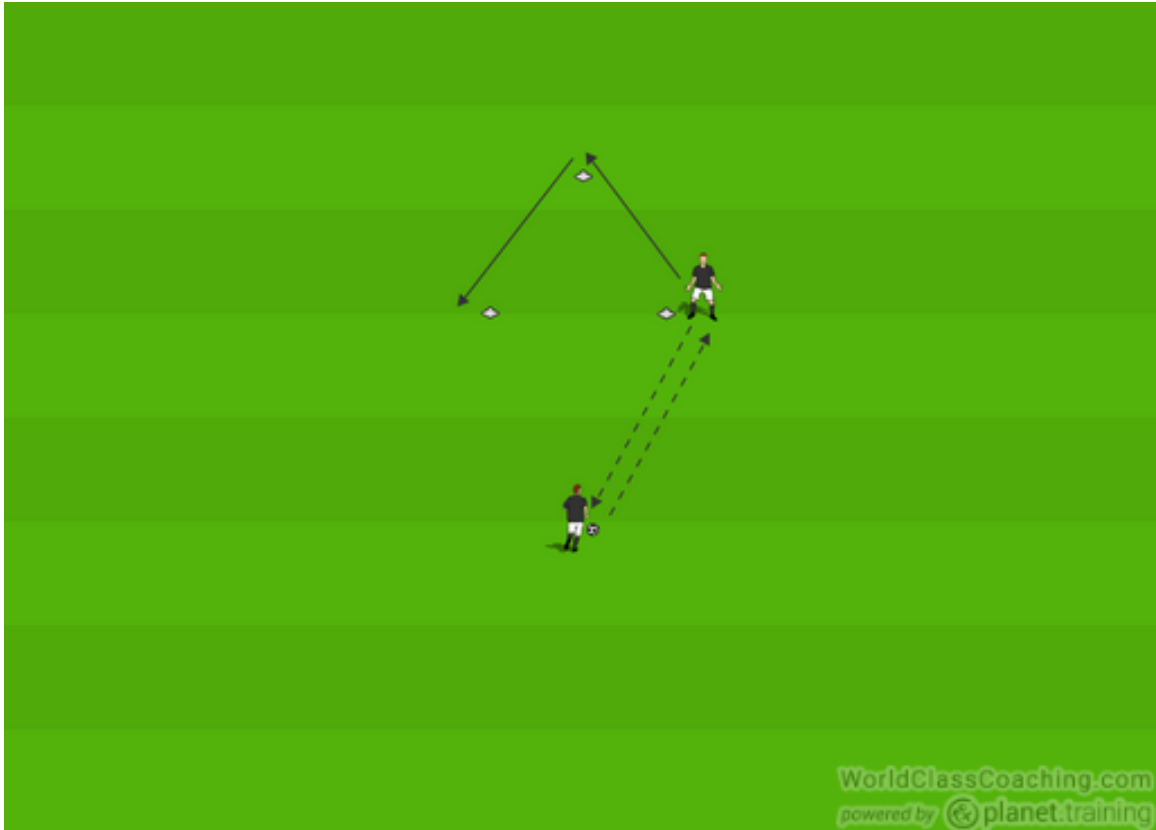
After 45 seconds, switch the two players over.

Progression:

You can have the player who is working on the cones pass back first time. You can also work on controlling the ball at different heights before passing back.

Progression:

Add a third cone, 3-4 yards behind the original cones used to create a triangle. The passing is the same as before but now the player at the cones will move back slowly after every pass they make towards the back cone before making a quick sharp movement as it to get away from a defender to receive the ball on the outside of the next cone.



#### Coaching Points:

- Correct passing technique using the inside of the foot
- Accuracy and weight of the pass
- Cushion the ball with the first touch using the inside of the foot
- Communication
- In the last progression, ensure that the movement from the back cone to outside of one of the cones in front of them is done quickly as if to create space away from a defender

## 3v0 Passing

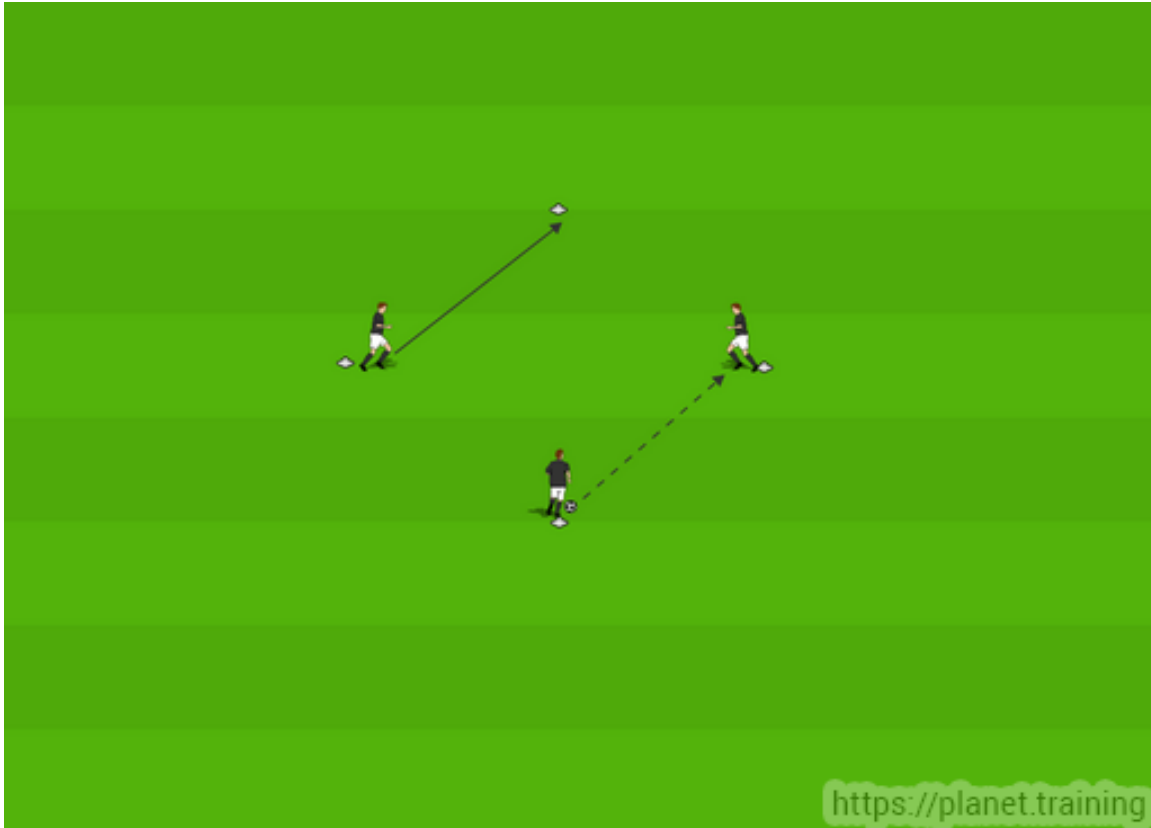
This exercise will focus on movement and maintaining triangles on the field, which will help your team keep possession of the ball.

Set up a 8 x 8 yard diamond, with three players and one ball per group/diamond. The players without the ball must be on the cones to the right and left of the player with the ball to create a triangle with two passing options either side of the player with the ball. The cone opposite the player with the ball is always going to be empty.



The exercise starts with a pass to one of the open players. As soon as a pass is made, the player who did not receive the ball must move quickly to the open cone in order to maintain the triangle shape with the options being to the right and left of the player with the ball. Continue with the passing and moving.

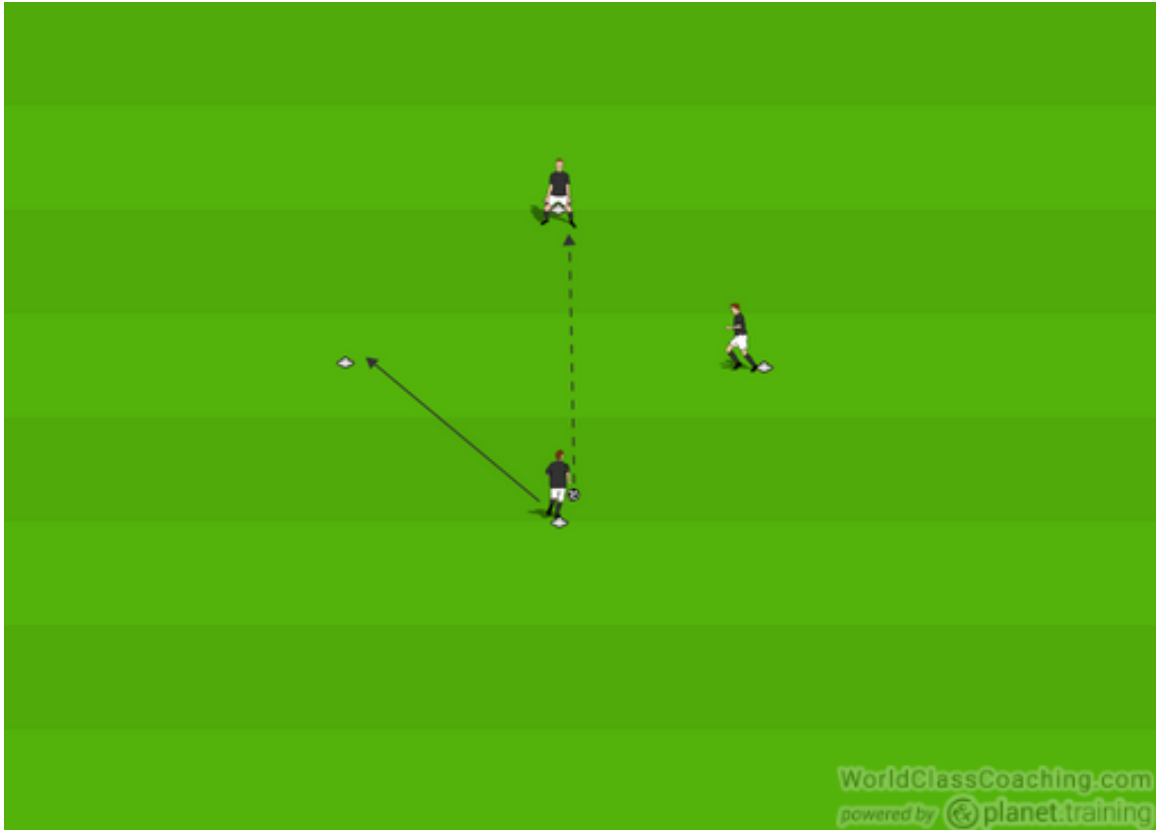




After the players understand the movement required, you can turn this into a competition to see which group can get the most passes in 30-45 seconds.

#### Progression:

Now you can allow passes to go through the middle of the area to a player stood opposite the player with the ball. For example, the exercise continues as before, but a player may decide to stay on a cone rather than move to give the player on the ball an option to their right and left. The pass can now be made to the player opposite but this now means that the player who just passed the ball must now move to the open cone to give the player who just received the ball a passing option to their right and left. Encourage the players to still maintain the correct shape as previously mentioned and to not use this option all the time.



Just as before, you can turn this into a competition to see which group can get the most passes in 30-45 seconds.

#### Coaching Points:

- Correct passing technique using the inside of the foot
- Accuracy and weight of the pass
- Quick movement to the correct cone (read body language of the player with the ball and try to start the movement to the open cone as the ball is being passed)
- Communication
- Back foot first touch

# **NON-DIRECTIONAL POSSESSION EXERCISES**

## 4v2 Rondo

Rondos have become increasingly popular in recent years with it being a big part of the training that some of the top clubs in the world use such as Barcelona. The numbers you use in this exercise can also be adjusted.

Split your team into groups of 6, with two players set as defenders and 4 attackers. Adjust the size of the area depending on age and ability.



The attackers will try and get as many passes in a row without the defenders winning possession.



For every 5 passes, the attackers get a point and every time the defenders win possession of the ball they get a point. Switch the defenders every couple of minutes.

If the attackers are becoming comfortable with keeping the ball then you can challenge them by limiting their touches.

Progression:

The exercise is the same but now when the defenders win the ball, they must make 2 passes to get a point, which means that when the attackers lose the ball, they must work quickly to win the ball back. Once they have won the ball back, they continue with keeping the ball.

Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Speed of movement to support player on the ball (read the body language of the player passing the ball and move quickly to support teammate)
- Maintain diamond shape with two options for the player either side of the ball and the player opposite looking to split the two defenders

- In the progression, react quickly and work hard to win the ball back in order to limit the opponent's time on the ball and continue with their own possession
- Communication

## Rondo Variation

Continuing with the theme of rondos, this one will focus on getting the ball into an area of the field where there is less pressure.

Set up the field as shown below with two identical areas set up next to each other and a 3-4 yard gap in between. Adjust the size of the area depending on the age and skill level of your players. One area will have a 4v2 and the other area will have just one player in it.



The attackers in the area with the 4v2 will try to make at least 3 passes and then pass the ball across to the player in the other area. A point is scored for the attacking team every time the ball is passed across to the player in the other area. The defenders score a point by winning the ball and making two passes. If the attackers lose the ball, they must win the ball back and restart the rondo.



Three of the players in the original rondo now have to transition across to the next square along with the two defenders to create a new 4v2. Again, after at least 3 passes, the ball can be passed across to the area that has one attacker in it.





### Progression:

The attackers can pass the ball across to the player in the other area whenever they want in order to encourage decision making as it may be appropriate to pass the ball across straight away or it may need a few passes to open up the space to do this.

### Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Speed of movement to support player on the ball (read the body language of the player passing the ball and move quickly to support teammate)
- Maintain diamond shape with two options for the player either side of the ball and the player opposite looking to split the two defenders
- React quickly to win the ball back when possession is lost
- Communication

## Three Team Possession Game

This is a great exercise to use regularly as it allows your players to get confidence on the ball whilst also under a little bit of pressure. There are plenty of opportunities for decision making in this exercise as well.

Split your group into 3 teams with different color pinnies for each team.



One team will defend and the other two will work together to keep possession of the ball. The attacking teams get a point every time they reach 10 passes and the defending team will gain a point every time they win the ball and get it under control.



Every 30 seconds – 1 minute, the coach will shout out a different color and that team becomes the defending team.

Progression:

Now rather than the coach shouting out a color, the team that loses possession or kicks the ball out of play becomes the defending team. Every time 10 passes are made, the two teams that worked together gain a point each.

Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Try to receive on back foot as much as possible, make sure that the body position is open, which will allow the player to see more of the field
- Look over the shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication

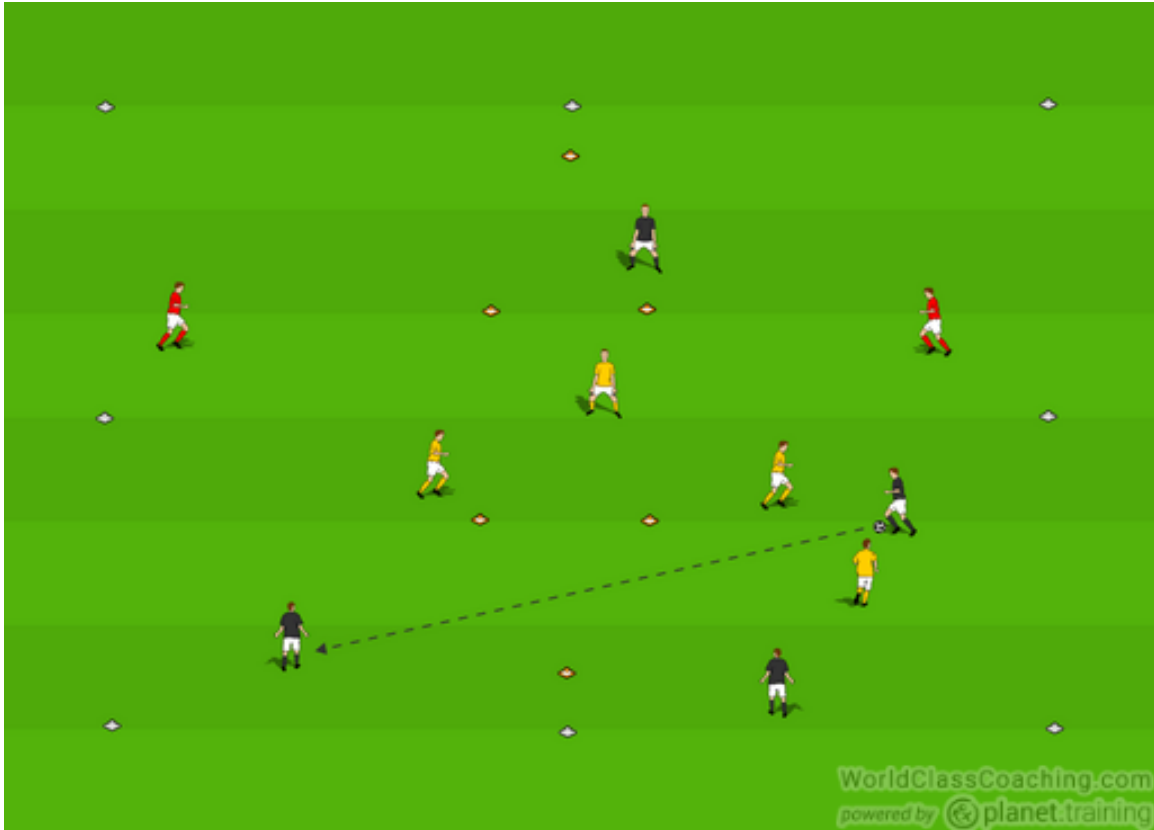
## Penetration and Possession Game

A very important aspect of possession soccer is developing the understanding of when to maintain possession and when to try penetrate to score.

Split your group into two teams and assign two of the players to be neutrals. In the middle of your field there will be two triangles as shown below in orange.



A point is scored when either team manages to pass the ball through the triangle and is received by a teammate on the other side.



#### Progression:

Once the players have got the hang of playing with the two triangles, you can take one triangle out and go with one bigger triangle in the middle.

For more advanced groups, you could also play this game without neutrals.

#### Coaching Points:

- Decision making of when to possess the ball on the outside and when to look to penetrate through the middle.
- Patience (when to possess and when to penetrate) so that the players don't try to force things and look to penetrate when it is not appropriate.
- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Receive on back foot as much as possible, make sure that the body position is open, which will allow the player to see more of the field
- Make sure that the player has looked over their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication

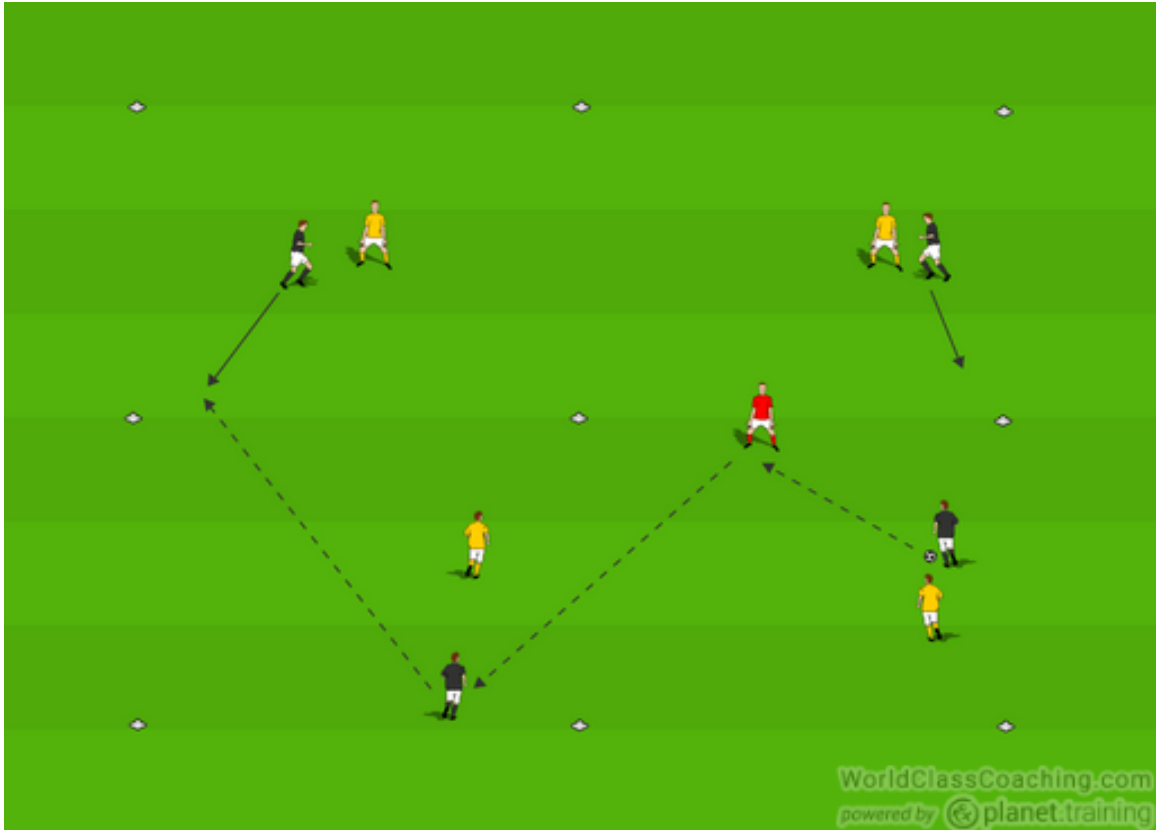
## Four Zone Possession

In this exercise, players will have to win their duel with the opposition player in their zone in order to keep possession of the ball.

Set up area as shown below with one big square split into four. There is a 1v1 in each square and a neutral in the middle of all four areas.



The players in the four areas are restricted in their movement and can't leave their area. The neutral can move around freely to create overloads in any area. Every five passes made count as a goal.



### Progression:

Allow free movement for all players but keep the four areas to guide the players in possession in terms of keeping as spaced out as possible to make it more difficult for the defending team win the ball back.

### Coaching Points:

- The player on the ball should have three passing options so the players off the ball need to move to create angles to receive the ball
- Decision making of when to pass and when to dribble in the 1v1 in each area
- Receive on back foot as much as possible, make sure that the body position is open, which will allow the player to see more of the field
- Accuracy and weight of the pass
- Communication

## The Gate Game

As mentioned in the Penetration and Possession Game earlier, knowing when to penetrate and when to remain patient in possession is very important. In this exercise, the players will have to remain patient in order to find the right moment to pass the ball through a gate to a teammate.

Set up the field as shown below and adjust according to the number of players and their age. There will also be a number of gates set up with cones in different parts of the area.



Split your team into two with two neutrals. Both teams will try to keep possession of the ball for as long as possible with the help of the two neutrals. A point is scored for every pass that is successfully made through a gate. The first team to 10 points is the winner.





#### Progression:

If your players have a good grasp of the exercise you can increase the difficulty by taking away the neutrals or reducing the number of gates that the players can score a point through.

#### Coaching Points:

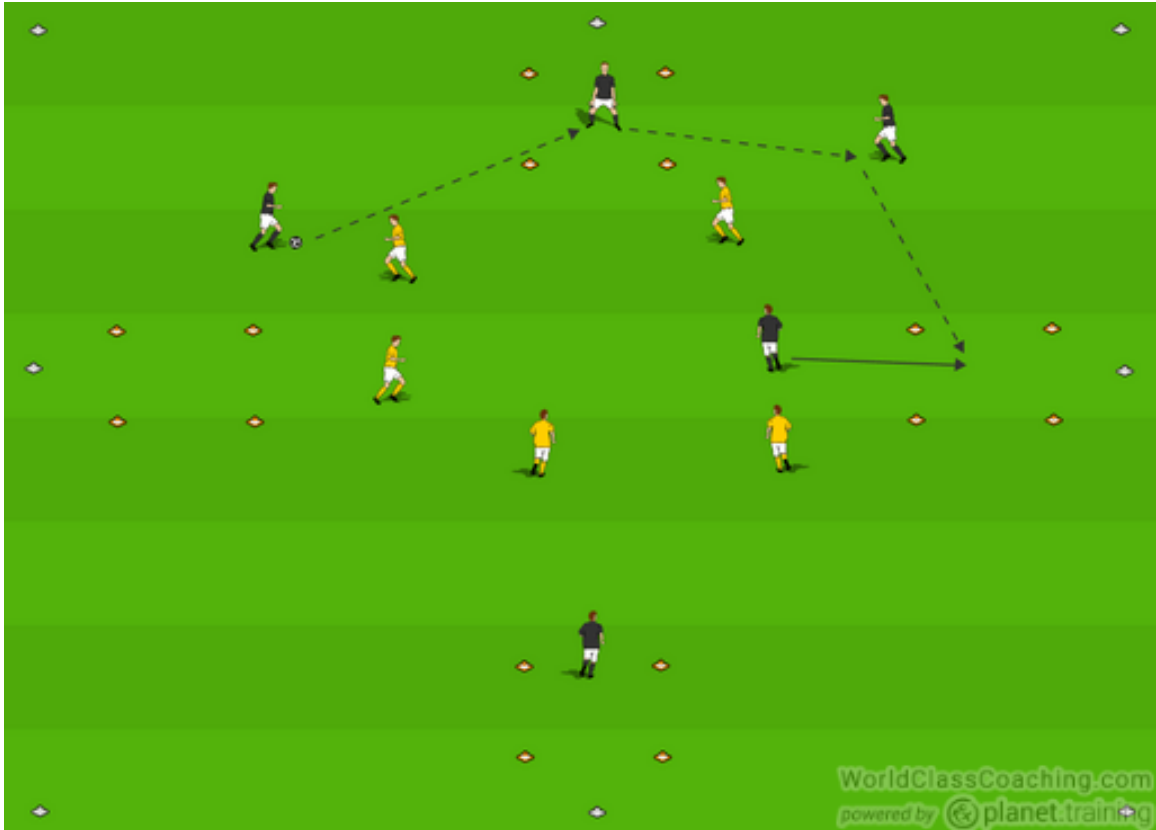
- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Make sure that the players are moving quickly to create angles and give their team mate on the ball passing options
- Patience is key in terms of when to try to score and when to possess the ball. The team in possession does not have to score a point with every pass that they make
- Awareness by constantly looking around and over the shoulder. This will help with the decision making of when to try to score and when to keep possession of the ball

## 5v5 with Safe Zones

Set up the field as shown below with 4 squares that will act as safe zones. Adjust the size of the area depending on the age and ability of your players.



Both teams will try to keep possession of the ball. If a player receives a ball in one of the safe zones, then they can't be tackled (players can't dribble into a safe zone). Every 5 passes count as a point but make sure this target is adjusted depending on the skill level of your players.



#### Progression:

Passing from one safe zone to another is no longer allowed. Also, depending on the amount of time your players spend in the safe zone with the ball, you can restrict the time they can stay in there with the ball.

#### Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Make sure that the players are moving quickly to create angles and give their team mate on the ball passing options
- Receive on back foot as much as possible, make sure that the body position is open, which will allow the player to see more of the field
- Awareness by constantly looking around and over the shoulder. This will help with the decision making of when to try to score and when to keep possession of the ball

# **Directional Possession Exercises**

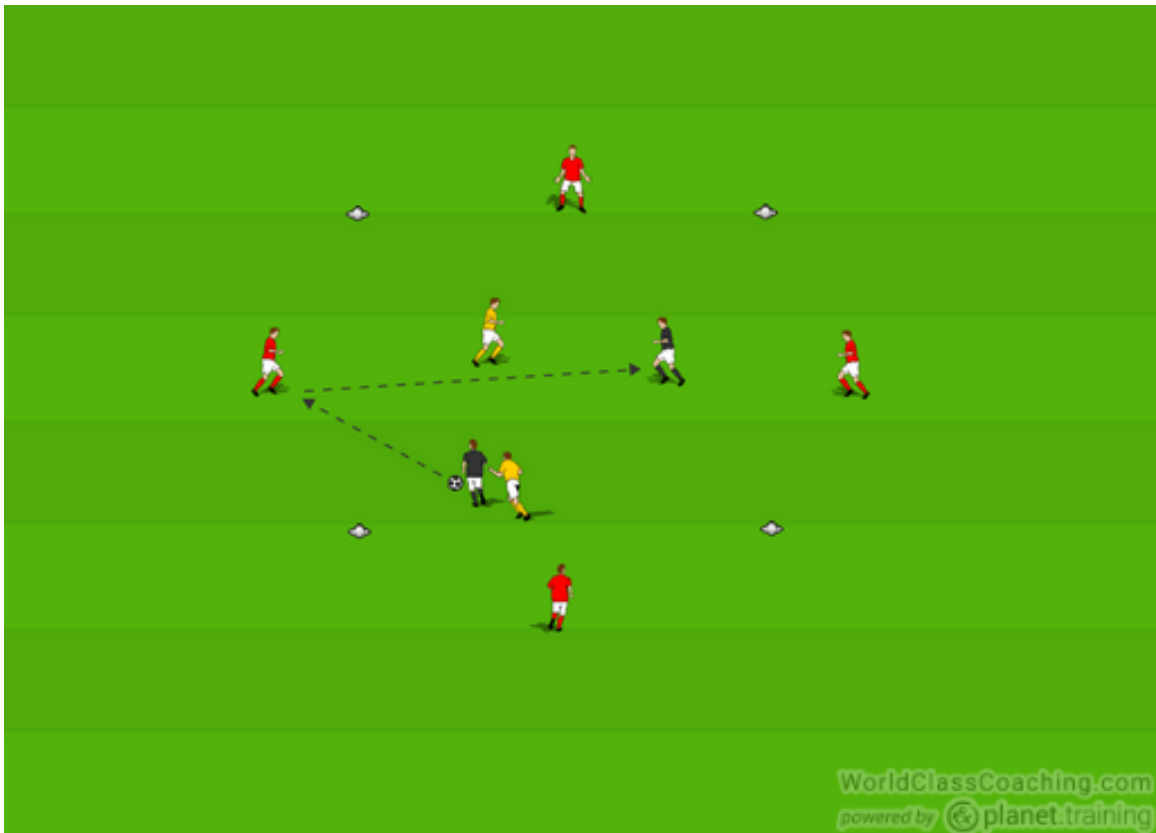
## 2v2 with Outside Neutrals

This exercise is a good progression for the “Passing technical warm up” exercise earlier, adding pressure and direction to the exercise.

It is 2v2 in the middle of the square and four neutrals on the outside of the square.



Initially all four neutrals can be used by the players in the middle to help them keep possession. The teams in the middle get a point for every 5 passes, which include passes to the players on the outside.



Progression:

The players in the middle are now only able to use the two players on the outside of the same color to help them keep possession. Again, every 5 passes count as a point.



### Progression:

The exercise is the same but now if the space opens up for the outside player to pass straight across to the other outside player on their team then they can do so. The players in the middle must react to this and offer passing options quickly as the ball is moving across.

### Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Speed of movement to support player on the ball (read the body language of the player passing the ball and move quickly to support teammate)
- Open body position to see as much of the field as possible and receive on the back foot
- Make sure that the player has checked their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication

## Switch the Point of Attack Small-Sided Game (across the river)

Switching the point of attack quickly is a very important part of the game in order to exploit space to put the opposition defence under pressure.

Set up the field as shown below with 4 players in both outside thirds who will be working together along with two players in the middle third. The numbers and size of the thirds can be adjusted depending on how many players you have, their age and their ability. Four defenders will also be in the middle area. Make sure that there are plenty of extra balls with the coach to keep the tempo of the game high when the ball goes out of play.



The ball will start in one of the outside thirds and two defenders will go in to pressure the ball. Every time the ball is switched from one side to the other, the attacking team gets a point. The defending team gets a point by winning the ball. When switching the ball across to the other side of the field, the ball must pass



through one of the two attacking players in the middle area who act as central midfielders. Initially, the defenders in the middle can't pressure the attacking players. When the ball is switched, two new defenders go in to pressure the ball and the previous defenders returns to the middle area.



Make sure that the players are being switched every few minutes. When the ball goes out of play or the defenders win the ball, take a ball and pass across to the other side of the field in order to keep the exercise flowing.

#### Progression:

The defenders left in the middle can now pressure the attacking players in the middle. The attackers can also choose to bypass the players in the middle if they are not in an open position and just pass all the way across to their teammates on the other side of the area. This means that those central midfielders must work to create space to receive the ball. The central midfielders can also pass back to the same area if they are under pressure and it is not appropriate to switch the point of attack,

bringing in the type of decision making they would need to make in a match situation.

#### Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Speed of movement to support player on the ball (read the body language of the player passing the ball and move quickly to support teammate)
- Open body position to see as much of the field as possible and receive on the back foot, especially the central midfielders
- Make sure that the player has checked their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication

## 3v3 (plus 2) to Target Players and Neutrals to Teach Playing Out of the Back

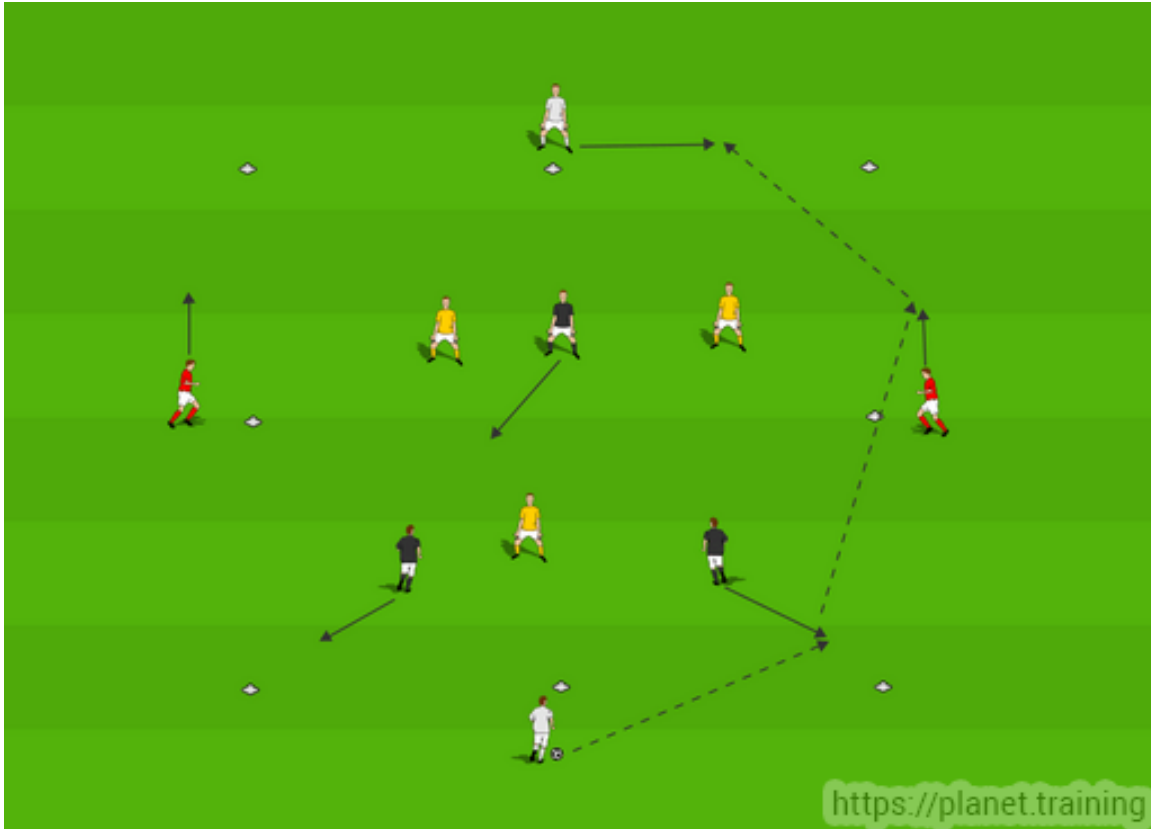
Increasingly over the years, the role of the goalkeeper and defenders in possession has gone from them getting rid of the ball as quickly as possible to the need for them to be comfortable in possession. The exercise below is great for developing this ability and confidence on the ball in a small setting.

The exercise is 3v3, with a target player either end of the area and two neutrals on either side. The neutral players on the side will act as full backs when either team is in possession. Adjust the size of the area depending on the age and ability of the players.



The 3 in the middle will set up their triangle with two in the back to act as central defenders and one player in front of them who will act as a deep lying midfielder. The aim of the game is for the players in the middle to get the ball to the target players for a point. When they have scored, they are rewarded by receiving the ball

back but now having to attack the opposite end, though they can go back to the target player they just used to score if they are under pressure but it won't count as a point until they have tried to attack the other end.



The main point of emphasis is the shape of the players. When the target player has the ball, they act as a goalkeeper and pass the ball into either central defender who will have split to the width of the area. The full backs/neutrals on the side will move higher up their line and the central midfielder will offer an option through the middle. If one of the central defenders receives the ball, the central midfielder will check in to offer a passing option, whilst keeping their body shape open. Initially I would allow the defending team to drop back slightly so that the attacking team can get into the correct shape and also allow either central defender to receive the first pass before being pressured in order to build a confidence and familiarity with what movements are required of the players first.

Progression:

You can allow the players defending players to press whenever they want and also allow the target player/goalkeeper to pass the ball to any player they want to so now they have some more decision-making opportunities.

Progression:

Both teams will now have one direction to attack.

Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Ensure that the team in possession gets into position quickly to give the target player/goalkeeper quick options to play out from the back
- Open body position to see as much of the field as possible and receive on the back foot
- Make sure that the player has checked their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication

## 3v3 with Target Players to Coach the Three Midfielders in a 1-4-3-3

The 1-4-3-3 has become a very popular formation recently, with many teams across the world adopting it. The exercise below is very simple and can be adapted depending on whether you play your midfield 3 with a point up or point down.

Set up the field as shown below with 3v3 in the middle and two target players on either end of the area. The 3 in the middle will set up as they would do in a 1-4-3-3 with a number 6, 8 and 10. The size of this area can be adapted depending on the age and ability of your players.



The teams score by passing into either target player and the reward for scoring is that the team receives the ball back to attack in the opposite direction. After scoring, the team in possession can go back to the target player they just used to score if they are under pressure but it won't count as a point until they have tried to attack the other end. It is important that in possession, the 3 players are not in the same line as

each other both vertically and horizontally, which will help to create angles to receive the ball.



As shown above, the number 6 will come short to receive the ball, the number 10 will create depth by being the furthest passing option in yellow and the number 8 will find space a little further forward than the number 6 to provide an angle and passing option forward. This would be when playing with one holding central midfielder. It is important for the holding central midfielder to remember that if they are not able to pass forward, that they can pass back to the feeder (or central defender in a match) in order to keep the ball. You can also encourage the rotation of positions as the game is going on, which may help to create space to receive the ball.

Progression:

The teams can now only attack one way, but they can still pass back to help keep possession.

### Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Ensure that the team in possession gets into position quickly to give the target player passing options
- Make sure that the 3 players do not play in the same line as each other either vertically or horizontally
- When in possession the 3 midfielders need to use as much space as possible by creating depth and width with their movement (essentially a big triangle)
- Open body position to see as much of the field as possible and receive on the back foot
- As well as checking their shoulder, the players should be encouraged to look forward to see if there is a passing option in that direction as it is important for the players to realize that if they can pass forward then they should do so quickly to exploit the space and score rather than going sideways or backwards
- Communication



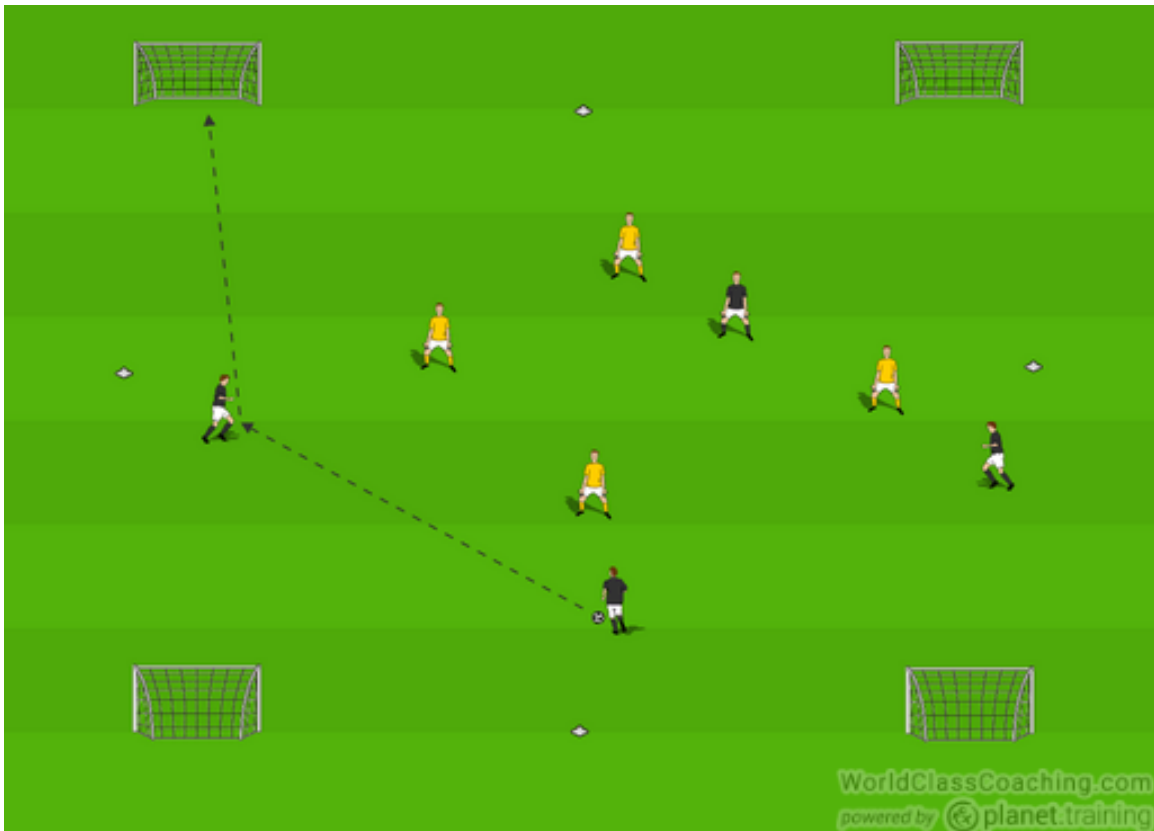
## 4v4 to Wide Goals

The exercise below is a great way to encourage switching the point of attack and as mentioned previously, is a very important part of possession soccer.

Ensure that the area is wider than it is long and place 4 mini goals in the corners of the area. Each team will set up in a diamond shape, with two players out wide, one further forward and one player who supports the play from behind.



Each team will have two goals they can score in, with one team attacking the two goals at the top of the picture below and the other attacking the two goals in the bottom.



#### Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- When the team is in possession, make sure the players create width and depth to stretch the opponents
- When the ball is lost, encourage the 4 players to work together to pressure the ball quickly and be compact
- Remind the players that if they can't attack one goal that they should switch the point of attack and try to score in the other goal
- The player at the back of the diamond needs to always offer the option to pass back to them in order to help switch the point of attack
- Encourage the rotation of positions as they game is going on as this may help to create space to receive the ball
- Open body position to see as much of the field as possible and receive on the back foot
- Make sure that the player has checked their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Communication

## Receiving Under Pressure Game

This small-sided game will work on your player's ability to receive the ball under pressure.

Set up the 6v6 game as shown below, using the appropriate size field for the ability and age of your group. The field will include a square in the middle that one designated player from each team will be in.



It will be a regular 6v6 game but before a team is able to score, they must use their player in the middle square in every possession.



#### Progression:

Now both teams can score without using the middle player but if they are used and a goal is scored, the goal counts as double.

#### Coaching Points:

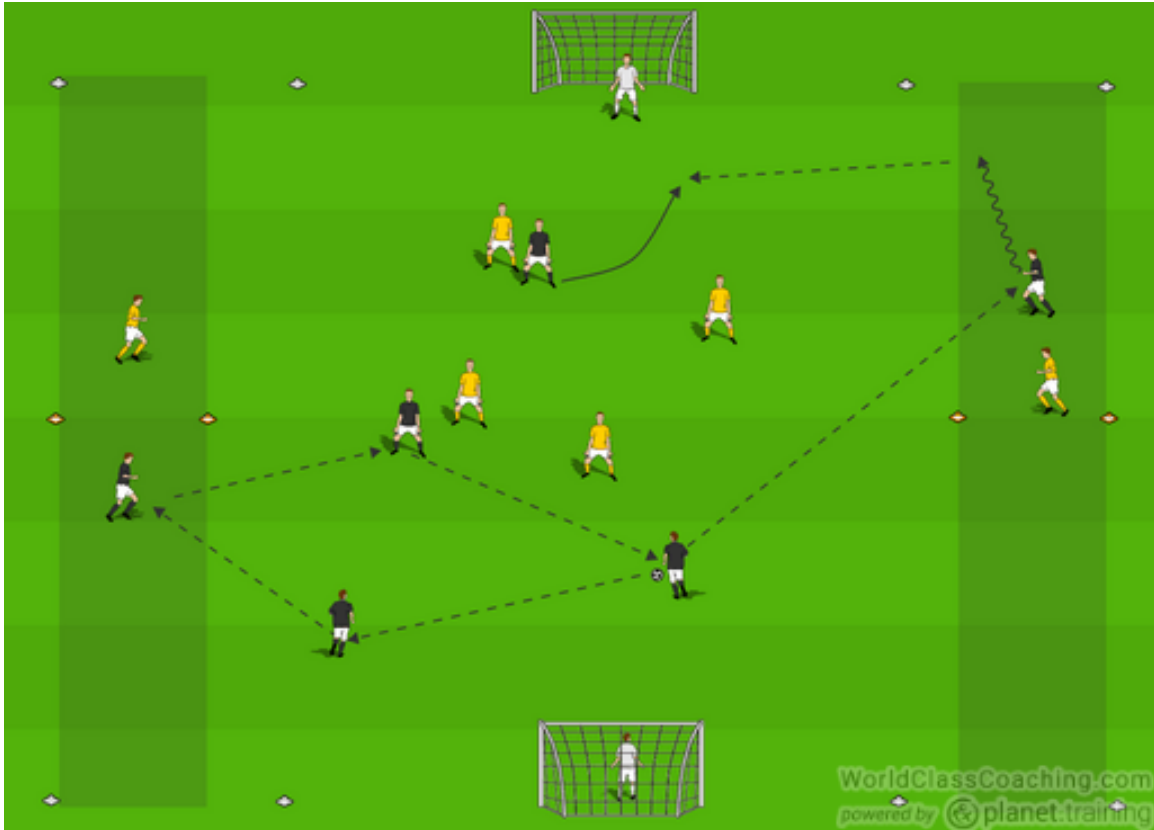
- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Quick and sharp movement to create space away from an opposing player and to create passing options
- When the team is in possession, make sure the players create width and depth to stretch the opponents
- Open body position to receive the ball on the back foot
- Decision making, especially in the progression in terms of when to use the player in the middle and when not to

## Crossing and Finishing and Possession Game

Set up the field as shown below with a wide zone on both sides of the field, with one player from each team in a wide zone (signified by the shaded area below but cones can be used to set the two zones up).



In order to add an element of decision making, a goal can be scored with or without using the wide players. If the wide player does receive it then they can't be challenged by any other player. As shown in the diagram below, each zone will also be split into two, with different roles depending on which zone the wide player receives the ball in. If they receive the ball in the zone closer to their goal then their aim is to help their team keep possession, but if they receive in the zone closer to the opposition goal then their aim is to cross the ball in for one of their team mates to score. This is in order to try and reflect real game situations. For example, if a wide player were to receive the ball in the final third then they would look to attack, whereas if they were to receive the ball deeper, then they would most likely look to help their team keep possession of the ball.



**Progression:**

Allow the opposing wide player to challenge the wide player in their zone.

**Progression:**

Take away the wide zones but encourage the players to keep utilizing the width of the field.

**Coaching Points:**

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- Decision making in terms of when to play through the middle and when to use the wide players
- Open body position to receive the ball on the back foot
- Quick movement to support the player in possession
- Particularly in the last progression, make sure the players understand then when in possession to create width and depth and when out of possession to be compact
- When the wide player receives the ball in the attacking part of the wide area, then they need to get their head up quickly to see the runs of their team mates

## Shooting and Possession Game

The exercise below focuses on keeping possess with the intent of creating a shooting opportunity as quickly as possible.

Split your group into two teams, including a goalkeeper in each goal and make sure there is a half way line in the area that is clearly visible to the players.



Both teams try to keep possession of the ball and when the opportunity arises, they can shoot on goal. However, they can only shoot from their own half.



Encourage the players to be patient in their build up play and to use their goalkeeper to work the space for a shot on goal.

Progression:

Limit the maximum number of touches that the players can have, for example, 2 or 3 touch.

Coaching Points:

- Weight and accuracy of pass into the correct foot depending on pressure
- When a team is in possession, make sure the players utilize the width of the field to stretch the opponents
- When the ball is lost, encourage the players to work together to pressure the ball quickly and be compact
- Encourage the players to take chances and be creative
- Open body position to receive the ball on the back foot
- Make sure that the player has checked their shoulder to see where the space is before receiving the pass
- Decision making of when to possess and when to shoot



- Move the ball at a high tempo to take advantage of the space that opens up
- Use the goalkeeper to help keep possession
- Communication
- Correct shooting technique and keeping the head down to keep the ball low and on target