

Football Coaching Guide for Middle School Coaches at International Schools

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<p>The primary objective of this thesis is to provide information on basic technical skills, goaltending skills, team tactics and a overall picture of what points should be considered when coaching the middle school football players at International Schools. This guide is targeted at coaches and teachers working at International Schools as well as volunteer coaches at football clubs.</p> <p>This thesis is product-oriented and split into theoretical and manual parts. Theoretical part is split into five sections: Introduction, analysis of football skills, team tactics, physical demands, and training sessions.</p> <p>The manual provides three different levels of drills for each technical skill, basic goaltending drills, and team tactic drills. There are example sessions as well as an example of a seasonal plan included on the guide. An assessment scope is provided to help the coaches see the development of the players.</p> <p>It is important to acknowledge that this thesis focuses on guiding coaches at International communities where skill levels vary among different players and teams from year to year. It is difficult to have the same players for more than two years which is why there is variety in the manual part for different levels. From there the coach can choose the most beneficial level for the whole team and each individual.</p> <p>This thesis has been produced in cooperation with the Western Academy of Beijing, an international school operating in Beijing, China since 1994. All sports are offered as an after school activity, meaning the students get to choose which activities and sports they participate in during the school year. Football season goes on for little over two months and always takes place during the first season of sports offered.</p>	
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1 Introduction

Only in the last twenty years time have we truly started to understand the overall picture of what it takes to coach a football team, not only at professional level, but most important at the youth level as those are the players who will carry on the greatest and most popular sport in the world. Many factors have to be taken into consideration when coaching at any level: Technical skills, goaltending skills, team tactics, physical demands and a successful plan of execution to find a balance among the factors mentioned above.

This thesis has been produced to provide coaching guide for football coaches at all levels: Beginners, intermediates and experienced. The main target groups are the coaches coaching the middle school players (11-14 year olds) at International Communities, both girls and boys. The primary goal of this thesis is to provide basic knowledge of technical skills, goaltending skills, team tactics and physical demands to help coaches in looking at the bigger picture when planning seasons and training sessions.

A lot of the information in the theoretical part is gathered from books, coaching manuals, seminars and the Internet. After the theoretical part a coaching guide is put together with three different levels of drills for each technical skill. There will be basic drills for each of the goalkeeper skill. The guide also provides variety in training physical demands and gives an example of a seasonal plan and training sessions. Lastly there will be tools how to measure technical and goaltending skills among players, and how to set goals to improve these skills.

It is important to acknowledge that coaching players who belong to International Communities (Schools) is different to coaching players at football clubs. Many times there is no more than two times a week training followed by a few games during the short, less than three-month seasons. It is tough to have the same players the next year as there is great migration of expat families arriving and leaving the International Communities. This is why the coach must have the right mindset ahead of each season and set realistic goals for not only himself, but for each individual on the team.

I personally started playing football at the age of five in Finland. Ever since then I have played football at various clubs and school teams and dedicated a lot of my life to this amazing sport. At the age of twelve my family moved to Beijing and I was to experience the difference between playing for a club compared with playing in an international community. Honestly speaking I was not greatly satisfied with the few training sessions and short seasons coming from Finland where a full season lasted 10 months with regular training sessions.

My personal experience highly motivated me to produce a guide for football coaches in international communities that would include variety and different perspectives in coaching. As each individual on the team is different and is there for different reasons, it is crucial to be able to satisfy each individual with maximum learning experience, especially among the middle school students.

The most important goal for all coaches should be to introduce a positive experience, the feeling of belonging to a team and in motivating the students to not only improve as football players but also as better individuals to cope in today's society. An importance should also be placed in finding a balance in school, family, friends, and a healthy lifestyle.

2 Analysis of Football Skills

In modern football it is crucial to understand the importance of the following basic football skills in order to be a successful coach. In mathematics it is impossible to solve complicated equations without knowing the basic ones. It is the exact same in football. Teaching complicated tactical skills without mastering the basic skills is no beneficial for any player.

2.1 Technical Skills

The basic technical skills are: Passing, ball control, dribbling, shooting and heading. There will be basic definitions of each technical skill and provide further insight to why the following skills are so hugely important and in what situations. The guide will provide further insight on what points to consider when coaching these basic skills.

2.1.1 Passing

Passing includes the most crucial part of the football player's equipment – the feet. Passing is the ability to place the ball to a wanted destination, both on the ground and in the air and to short as well as long distances. The accuracy of the pass can be best measured by how easy it is for the receiving player to control the ball. (Carr 2005, 18)

There are a total of four parts of the foot with which the ball can be passed to a teammate: Inside, outside, instep, and top of the foot.

First and most basic part is the inside of the foot. As it is the widest area, it leaves space for error and offers improved control of the ball and therefore better accuracy. Usually inside of the foot pass is performed to shorter distances and used to keep the ball on the ground, which makes it easier for the teammate to control the ball. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 42)

Passing can also be performed with the outside of the foot. However, this part of foot does not allow as much space for error as the inside of the foot does and is more diffi-

cult to execute. The advantage of the outside foot pass is that it is not as easily predicted as the inside foot pass. When mastered, outside foot pass can be performed quicker and with as much accuracy as the inside foot pass while passing the ball on the ground. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 42)

The instep of the foot allows the players more power in passing. Many times the instep is used for crossing and chipping, two more advanced methods of passing that require more balance and accuracy in order to be successful. The instep is also used for powerful ground passes that are very difficult to perform and rarely seen performed by players in middle school. The accuracy is many times nowhere near as high as in the inside or outside foot passes. (Hargreaves & Bate, 58)

The most difficult pass to execute is by the top of the foot. Most power is achieved by top of the foot but the common problem is to provide good accuracy by this type of pass. Mainly top of the foot is used when trying to perform long distance passing, or clearing the ball from own half. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 42)

2.1.2 Ball Control

Ball control is the way in which the player is able to cushion the ball. Control is the ability to leave the ball playable through touching and feeling the ball with any part of the body except the hands, as that would be against the rules. The ideal touch of the ball is to place it to the side and slightly in front of the player, ready to execute the next action (passing, shooting, dribbling). (Carr 2005, 18)

Four areas of the body can control the ball: the feet, thighs, chest or the head. Feet are the easiest option as they allow more balance to control the ball and fewer touches to execute the next action. (Hargreaves & Bate, 34)

The two most common parts of the foot to control the ball is to use the inside or outside of the foot. For middle school players the easiest part of foot is to use the inside of the foot as it allows better and more natural balance when controlling the ball.

When cushioning the ball, it is important to make the players think which way to cushion ball towards. The outside of the foot does not allow as much control to cushion the ball towards the right direction, especially if the pass is very powerful. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 38)

Thigh, chest and head are only used when controlling high balls. At this level controlled passing in the air rarely exists, but yet it is important to understand the importance of these body parts when controlling the ball.

The main disadvantage of using these body parts is the fact that an extra touch will be required. This will give more time for the defenders to close in and cover up more space for further passing, dribbling or shooting options. The height and power of the pass will determine which body part will be used. Just like controlling a ground pass, it is important to think about which direction to cushion the ball. (SoccerFansInfo)

2.1.3 Dribbling

Even though in modern football there is less time and space available for dribbling, it is an essential area to develop at youth level. Dribbling is the skill to travel with the ball while using different parts of the foot at different speeds. It also includes performing different body movements and weight transfers while controlling the ball. (TalkOnIt)

At junior level the most common mistake is to kick the ball far down and run after it. Coaches should encourage the players to keep the ball close enough so it is difficult for the opponent to get the ball away. It is also important that players have the skills to change directions and use their bodies to make their moves more unpredictable. A team always needs a few players that have the confidence and game sense to keep possession of the ball and attract more opponents to create more space for open passes. Usually these players play either in midfield or up front as attackers. (Carr 2005, 32)

The most common way to dribble is to use different parts of the feet. However, some more advanced players owe the skills to dribble with their thigh or head. This is not common and very rarely seen among middle school players. (Footy4Kids)

2.1.4 Shooting

Shooting is the ability to accurately place the ball on the opponent's goal. This can be done by different shooting techniques. Best accuracy is achieved by using the inside of the foot whereas a power shot is performed using the top of the foot. Effective shooting also involves having the ability to know when a shot should be taken. (Carr 2005, 50)

At junior level a lot of emphasis must be put into teaching the correct technique of shooting, power should come later. Accuracy is the decisive factor in scoring goals. This is why more emphasis must be placed on practicing accuracy over power. (Hargreaves & Bate, 143)

Body positioning will determine the height, speed and strength of the shot. In all shooting techniques the player's body will always be in balance, with the help of the supporting leg and balancing of the hands. Leaning more forward and having the head over the ball will allow the player for more power whereas leaning backwards and having the head behind the ball will make the ball go higher and travel slower. (TalkOnIt)

2.1.5 Heading

Heading is the skill to use the head to either place the ball to a desired destination or control it. There are three different types of heading: Defensive header, attacking header, and cushioned header. The correct part of the head to perform a header is to use the forehead as that allows the player to see the ball at all time. Most common mistake is to not look at the ball. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 54)

Many junior players are often scared of heading as they do not know the proper technique to execute the header. If done with wrong technique heading can be painful

for younger players. With proper progression heading can be a rewarding skill to master. (Hargreaves & Bate, 158)

Defensive headers are used when clearing the ball from own defensive half. The idea is to get beneath the flight of the ball early enough to be able to aim the head through the bottom half of the ball, which will allow the player to head the ball nice and high. This will also allow greater power. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 54)

Attacking headers are aimed low to make it more difficult for the goalie to catch the ball. The proper technique includes heading the ball through the top half of the ball. Players should try and jump to gain extra height necessary to beat the defenders. With practice the players can achieve skill to control where to aim the ball. (Hargreaves & Bate, 160)

Third type of heading is cushioned header where the player controls the ball. It is crucial for the player to get beneath the ball so that he can pull his head back at the moment of impact while slightly bending his knees.

2.2 Goaltending Skills

Goalkeepers are the only players on the field who wear different colored uniform to the field players. This is not only to differentiate who is allowed to catch the ball with hands and who is not, but that also describes the goalkeepers nature: He is the last person to stop the opponent from scoring and sees the field in a very different way as the field players do.

Goaltending is a natural skill that requires the player with high level of confidence, game sense, sacrifice, patience, focus and efficient decision-making. Unlike the field players, goalkeepers' one mistake could cause a game for the team, while one amazing save might be the winning save. Goalkeepers must be able to handle high pressures.(Carr 2005, 99)

In the past the goalkeepers would perform many of the same drills as the field players. This is not the case anymore, as goalkeepers require tailored practice sessions and individual coaching in order to improve their basic skills: positioning, foot work, hand work and diving.

2.2.1 Positioning

Positioning is the way the goalkeeper positions himself in relation to the ball. This is crucial even at the time when the ball is at the opponent's half. Experienced goalkeepers are able to move into line with the ball and move towards the ball while still effectively reducing the size of the target for the approaching attacker. (Carr 2005, 114)

Positioning also refers to the way the goalkeeper is capable of reading the game as he is required to predict the next move of the opponent's attacker. With experience the goalkeeper will be able to predict if the attacker is about to take a shot on the goal or make one more pass to another teammate.

2.2.2 Foot Work

Footwork is an essential area for the goalkeeper to master as that will determine the positioning in relation to the ball. The goalkeeper should always be square to the ball, with his hips and shoulders facing the ball. This will help him to catch the ball without always having to dive for the ball. A sign of good footwork is to make every save look easy. (Benjamin 2003)

It very important for the goalkeeper to be constantly moving and be on his toes. If the goalkeeper puts all the weight back on his heels, he is very unlikely to have time to react to shots going to corners.

There are two different types of steps the goalkeeper should master: shuffle steps and crossover steps. Shuffle steps are used to cover shorter distances as they allow for slightly quicker feet. Crossover steps are used to cover more ground, and should be done before shuffle steps if needed. It is vital to get behind the ball at all times and these two types of steps allow the goalkeeper to do so the quickest. (Benjamin 2003)

2.2.3 Hand Work

Hands are a very important tool for the goalkeeper as he is the only player on the field who is allowed to use hands to either catch, punch or throw the ball inside the field. The number one priority for the goalkeeper should be to get hands on the ball first.

Catching means to have total control of the ball, in other words cushioning the ball without other players being able to get possession of it. This is why footwork is extremely important, as the goalkeeper should always move to position that allows him to catch the ball. (Benjamin 2003)

Punching the ball occurs when the goalkeeper does not have enough time to get behind the ball, but instead has to either dive or jump to reach the ball. Punching the ball should be always targeted to the side of the goal, not towards the attackers as this makes it easy for the attackers to put the ball in an empty net.

Throwing the ball can either be done overarm or underarm. Overarm throw allows the goalkeeper to cover a longer distance more accurately than kicking the ball, and is many times used to create a quick counter-attack. Correct overarm throw technique includes holding the ball with palm of the hand and fingers spread to allow better control. Straight arm is essential in reaching a maximum distance. Underarm throw on the other hand is used to pass the ball to players outside the penalty box. The action is very close to tenpin bowling. (Carr 2005, 108)

2.2.4 Diving

Diving is the last resort for the goalkeeper to keep the ball from hitting the net. With good footwork and positioning diving should not be necessary. A common mistake for young goalies is to perform diving when they could take a few steps to catch the ball. (Benjamin 2003)

Diving looks easier than it actually is. It requires high level of eye-hand coordination and good timing skills. There are two different types of dives: high shots and low shots.

Correct technique for a successful dive is to begin the dive with the weight on the foot nearest the ball followed by a push off on this leg. Both hands should be reaching for the ball and remain as close as possible. Goalie must make a decision to either trying to catch the ball by placing his thumbs behind the ball, or push the ball away to safety, which is most commonly done with one hand as that is the last resort. (Carr 2005, 110)

Landing is an important part of the dive. The correct technique includes the goalkeeper landing on his side and shoulders, not his elbows which is a common mistake. If the goalkeeper catches the ball he should bring it close to his body as quickly as possible.

Diving for low shots tends to be more difficult. Instead of taking off with one foot, in low shots the goalkeeper collapses his feet and lands with hands before his body hits the ground. The correct technique includes placing the other hand on top of the ball and the other one behind it. After this the ball should be pulled close to the body to not allow the attackers to reach the ball. In both types of dives the landing should be soft. (Hargreaves & Bate, 178)

3 Team Tactics

When talking about the team tactics there is a lot to cover. This thesis will focus on the basic tactical aspects as the target group is middle school students.

The amount of training sessions per week and the length of the season makes a huge difference as to how much tactical ground should be covered. No coach coaching a team in middle school for little over two months should even try to go into too much detail with tactical aspects, as that would mainly confuse many of the players and leave them with an unpleasant learning experience.

It is important to recognize that based on the international schools' regulations, all games for the middle schoolers take place on half a sized football field, and games are played on seven a side rules. This means that games are two times 20 minute halves and offside rule does not apply. (WAB sports excellence handbook)

What is most important for players at this age in terms of tactics is to recognize the different roles on the field. A lot of focus should be in fundamental and match-related drills, especially for players aged 11-12 year olds. (Frankl 1997)

The only reason formations are included as a part of team tactics is to provide coaches the basic understanding of why different formations are used. It is vital to find a formation for your team that is A) simple enough for everyone to understand and B) suits your team the best.

3.1 Player Roles

One of the most common problems among the preadolescent is to find players willing to play as defenders as the majority of the team will want to be involved in scoring. One very effective strategy to overcome this problem is to have the players changing roles, especially during the early season, so they get an idea of the different roles.

By the age of fourteen the players should be able know all the different playing roles and know what is expected by each position on the field. They should also be able to

understand basic formations and how important it is for everyone to fill their roles in the formation.

It is important to define the different areas on the field, what we call the thirds. First one is the defensive third which is the area from your own goal to the area between the penalty box and the center circle. The second third is the middle third which includes the half way line and the center circle. The attacking third consists of the opponents goal and penalty box. (Huddleston 1999)

3.1.1 Defenders

As it may be tough to find players who are willing to be defensive players, the coach should stress the importance of defensive play. Without proper defense any team is likely to lose games, even if they have superior attacking players.

Defenders are the last players before the goalkeeper to stop the opponent from hitting the net. Defenders mainly work on the defensive third of the field. As it is important to teach the different defensive roles, it is also crucial for the defenders to work together and keep the defensive line tight. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 97)

In seven a side games there are usually no more than three defenders. Many times all the three players are called full backs. Their main task is to mark the opposing team attackers and midfielders. Their task also includes providing the ball to midfielders and being able to read the game well to predict the opponent's movements. (Soccer-Training-Guide 2008)

Some teams may use a defensive player called the sweeper or libero. This is not common in modern football, but if a coach is lucky to have a player who can read the game really well and has good leadership skills the coach should consider having this role on the team. The sweeper's main task is control the defensive line and stay behind the fullbacks without marking the opponents. (Soccer-Training-Guide 2008)

3.1.2 Midfielders

Midfielders are the players placed between the defenders and attackers. They mainly work on the middle third of the field. Out of all the players it is the midfielders who usually run the most during games, as they take the ball up to attacking third, but are required to be helping the defenders when opponent gets the ball.

Midfielders need to have good vision to see where to pass the ball and predict the opponents movements in trying and get the possession back before the opponent reaches the defensive third. Midfielders also need to have good ball control and dribbling skills, so they can calm down the pace of the game when necessary. (Green Star Media 2011)

There are a few roles among the midfielders which are the following: defensive midfielder, central midfielder, wingers, or attacking midfielder. Each role requires slightly different strengths which we will discuss below.

As the name suggests, defensive midfielders focus more on defending than attacking. Usually these players are strong in the air to win headers and have good game sense to provide the ball to open players before the opponents intervenes. These players need to be able to predict the opponent's moves and be at the right place at the right time. (Soccer-Training-Guide 2008)

Central midfielders are what we usually refer to as the 'heart of the team'. These players need to have an excellent game sense as well as master the ball control and dribbling skills. These players play the key role in finding the lethal passes that seem so easy from the side, but are extremely difficult to execute when under pressure. Central midfielders must also have a superior stamina to be able to run the whole game.

Wingers can also be referred to as the left and right midfielders. These players need to have superior stamina and a lot of energy as well as patience, as they run up and down on the sidelines throughout the whole game. There may be long periods in the game when only right side is used. This means the winger on the left might not get the ball

for ten minutes that can prove to be frustrating. Once they do receive the ball, they need to be able to either execute an accurate shot at goal, or perform a full sprint down the wing followed by a controlled cross to the attackers. (Soccer-Training-Guide 2008)

Attacking midfielders, as the name suggests, are more involved in the attacking plays. These players need to have a good ball control and dribbling skills, as well as be able to accurately shoot at the goal at times. Their main role is to execute accurate passes through the opponent's defensive line, and hold onto possession at times to either attract more opponents to close in or wait for enough space to be available.

3.1.3 Attackers

The attackers on the team are players whose main duty is to score goals. These players spend majority of their time on the attacking third of the field, constantly looking for opportunities to put the ball on the opponent's net. (About.com 2011)

Attackers may also be referred to as strikers or forwards. In modern football it is also common to have second strikers on the field. In general the duties are the same for these players as the main priority is to be able score goals. The size of the attacker determines the strengths he/she owes. Taller strikers are stronger in the air while smaller ones' cause more damage with their agility and speed as they tend to have better ball control and dribbling skills and therefore are more difficult to stop. (About.com 2011)

Attackers need to have a lot of creativity and be able to sense when to be at the right place at the right time. It is crucial to have a good shooting technique and a accurate shot to score goals. Attackers must also have good sense of movement and visual skills to move to open space and sometime make the crucial final pass to a team mate who is positioned better. Even though it is argued attackers must be greedy, they also need to be team players.

3.2 Formations

As already mentioned the majority of the games take place on seven a side field. This is a lot more beneficial for the preadolescent as they do not have the fitness level to be running on a full sized field, and by playing on a smaller field they are more likely to have more possession of the ball. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 106)

At junior level good tactics are simple tactics. The coach should spend enough time to find the strengths of the players and then decide on which formation to use. With only six outfield players, there are obviously less options for more variety in formations.

The most basic formation is a 1 – 3 – 3 formation where there are three defenders and three midfielders. This is the easiest formation to focus on moving as a team to attacking third when possession of the ball, and back to defensive third when not in possession of the ball. Once the team understands this concept there is more space for variation with the different roles for each player. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 107)

Very close to the previous formation, the more advanced version is a 1 – 3 – 2 – 1 formation (also known as the pyramid formation). Three defenders remain in the back line, but one of the midfielders is given a more attacking role to score goals. However, this player should be making effort to come back to middle third of the field to receive the ball. As it is crucial for the players to get the idea of defending as a team, this formation allows the coach to focus on that aspect.

If the coach is fortunate to have players who read the game well and understand the defensive concept, one effective formation to try is a 1 – 2 – 1 – 2 – 1 formation. There are two fullbacks, one defensive midfielder, one central midfielder, one attacking midfielder and one attacker on the field. For this formation to work all three midfielders must master reading the game. The same principle of defending as a team applies. However, when attacking there is more variety for the midfielders to move into open space. (Ward & Lewin 2002, 107)

If the coach has two fast runners that are fit to run up and down the wings while performing effective cross ins, a 1 – 2 – 3 – 1 formation is worth trying out. There are two full backs, one central midfielder, two wingers and one attacker. The wingers must make great effort to help in defensive third, while run up the wings to attacking third to either execute accurate cross ins or shots on goal. The main problem is that there tends to be more space on the central midfield with only one central midfielder. However if the wingers understand the defensive concept they will move in to central midfield to help keeping the middle third tighter when defending.

Among these basic formations there are many options in giving different roles to the players. The coach must first recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the players and then decide which formation to work with. It is not recommended not to try too many formations, especially during short seasons. Just remember, simplicity at this level is key to success (Ward & Lewin 2002, 106)

4 Physical Demands

Physical demands include the following factors: flexibility, strength, power, endurance, agility and nutrition. Even if when coaching a team for little over two months it is yet crucial to understand these demands, as they will greatly affect the players in the future, even if the players choose not to play football.

4.1 Flexibility

Flexibility is the generous range of motion of a joint. Football players need to be flexible in order to perform slide tackles, kicking volleys, different jumps and receiving in different positions. (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 2.)

Flexibility is predominantly achieved by stretching. In the past there has been confusion as to which type of stretching is more beneficial, static or dynamic stretching. Static stretching involves reaching forward to a point of tension and holding the stretch for a given period of time. Dynamic stretching consists of functional based exercises, which use sport specific movements that prepare the body for the movement. (EST Sports)

For optimal performance football players should always stretch and warm up prior to training sessions and matches. Flexibility is done to increase the length of the muscles and range of motion of a joint while warm up focuses on preparing the entire body combining dynamic stretching, running and different ball skills. (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 19.)

4.2 Strength and Power

Even though strength and power training are not so relevant to middle school players, it is important for coaches to understand the basic definitions of each.

Strength and power walk hand in hand when talking about football. Absolute strength is forceful but slow. It is an all-out effort to overcome a maximum resistance,

independent of time. In general it is the mean of achieving optimal levels of power, endurance and speed. (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 2.)

All the following terms describe power; ballistic, dynamic, powerful, explosive, and speed-strength. It is the production of greatest possible force in shortest period. Examples of strength and power in football are sprints, jumping, diving, shots, throw-ins, rapid accelerations, quick changes of directions and punts performed by goalkeepers. (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 93.)

4.3 Endurance

Muscular endurance is the ability to perform work over a long period of time. As football involves frequent changes in running speed and intensity of effort the players therefore require a mix of aerobic and anaerobic energy to sustain performance. (Fitness4Football 2008)

Aerobic exercise is the ability to use oxygen while exercising. It is usually performed at 60 to 80 percent of maximum heart rate for a period between 20 to 40 minutes without stopping. Examples of such exercise include jogging and cycling as they are moderate pace exercises. On average a football player performs approximately 40 percent of jogging and 20 percent of running with 75 percent of maximum speed during a full football match. (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 112.)

Anaerobic capacity is the ability to perform repetitive, intense activity with little or no rest at all with the absence of oxygen. Elevated fatigue is produced in a short time which starts to eventually affect the performance during a football match. On average a football player performs approximately 12 percent of sprinting during a full football match (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 112.)

As it is a difficult mission for coaches to work on endurance during such a short season, it is yet a factor that all coaches should recognize and understand the basics of. In the past a lot of endurance training was performed without the ball, sprinting from

one line to the next. The most beneficial method is to include the ball as much as possible.

4.4 Agility

Agility is the physical ability to change movements quickly in the unpredictable, ever-changing game environment. Balance, strength and coordination walk hand in hand with agility as players are required to change direction at speeds of 50 to 100 percent with different body angles while controlling the ball. (Schmid & Alejo 2002, 117.)

By performing the right types of agility and coordination drills, the coach is also working on the following skills that are crucial for the fast growing middle school players: Reaction time, balance, coordination, stopping and starting. (Gatz, 114)

5 Training Sessions

Coaching involves a lot more than attending training and ensuring that everyone on the squad has a good time and leaves with smiles on their face. To be a successful and organized coach enough time must be put into planning the season and training sessions.

It is vital for coaches to be clear about what they want to achieve during the forthcoming season and having a plan to get there. It is very unlikely that not everything will proceed exactly as planned, but having these plans and goals on paper helps the coach to react to sudden changes more easily. (Carr 2005, 12.)

5.1 Planning the Season

Especially for short seasons like the one's at International Schools, the importance of maximizing each training session is huge. This can only be achieved through careful planning prior to the season.

The coach should carefully think about the following factors:

1. Setting goals for the team
2. First impression
3. Team rules
4. Equipment
5. Space for training and safety
6. Assessment of players and follow through

Even though setting goals for the team should be done when the whole team is present, it helps for the coach to write down some general ideas where he personally wants his team to be at the end of the season.

The way the coach introduces himself to the team will determine how the team behaves throughout the season, how they respect the coach and others on the team,

and how they will maximize the few training sessions. If the coach is always punctual, prepared, focused and enthusiastic his team is very likely to treat these values as a norm. (Carr 2005, 12.)

All coaches must always check the equipment available prior to the season, not before the first training session. Training with a limited number bibs, cones and balls will greatly influence the way you will plan your training sessions. (Footy4Kids 2011)

Knowing where you will train your team is very important. Coaches must always be aware of rivers, benches, or other possible hazards that could cause danger during training sessions. Safety must always come first. This is why one of the coaches should hold experience in first-aid. (Carr 2005, 12.)

Assessment of players is vital not only for the coach to see where to play certain players on the field, but also serves a very important learning experience for the players themselves. Especially for players with not much experience, to see they have improved during the season might be the difference in trying out other sports and making it very likely to return next year.

5.2 Training Sessions

As already mentioned the main priority should be the kids best interest, not winning a game or end of the season tournament. Developing skills for the entire team takes careful planning. First, the general level of the team has to be determined and from there the coach can plan the training sessions. (Footy4Kids 2011)

Coaches should keep the K.I.S.S principle (Keep It Simple and Short) in mind when coaching. Giving short, effective demonstrations while briefly explaining the new skill will allow the players to stay focused and on their toes. (Footy4Kids 2011)

Training sessions are generally speaking split into four main categories:

1. Warm Ups
2. Drills focusing on the day's theme (goalkeepers separate)

3. Small sided games
4. Cool downs

The most common length of a training session is 90 minutes, where about 20 minutes consists of warm ups, 40 minutes of drills, 20 minutes of games and approximately the last 10 minutes on the cool down. (Carr 2005, 13.)

The times mentioned above are only general guidelines for the coaches to get an idea what a training session consists of. With different themes the times for each category will vary. There might be days when the coach wants to focus more on games rather than skills, or the other way around. With experience it will be easier for the coach to determine how long to spend on each category. Maximizing every 90 minute training session is the most crucial goal for the coach.

For every training session there should be a theme for the coach to focus on. If there is no focus point in training, many times especially the younger players will loose their concentration and be rather confused than be learning something new. Theme brings in clarity and therefore a maximized learning experience. (Footy4Kids 2011)

5.2.1 Warm Ups

There are many factors supporting the argument why warm ups are the most important part of training sessions. As warm up is the first action leading to the session, it will set the tone for the rest of the training. It is extremely important that the coach sets the ground for a fun, friendly, and energizing environment. (Beale 2008, 7.)

The aim of the warm up is not only to raise the players' heart rates followed by an activation of the muscles, but also to set the mind ready for the upcoming training or match. Warm ups also serve as a great tool in building a good team spirit while improving performance. (Beale 2008, 8.)

Especially among middle school players, it is important to include the ball in the warm ups as much as possible. This will help the players to work on their ball skills and dribbling techniques even before the drills take place.

Here is a check list the coach should keep in mind when planning warm ups:

- Make it fun
- Do players know why warm ups are done?
- Related to the theme of the day
- Work with ball as much as possible
- Start from low intensity and progress into higher intensity
- Keep an eye on correct techniques but do not pause too much
- Make sure everyone has access to water

A lot of research has been done in recent years to determine what is the correct way to perform stretching. With younger players it is not necessary to spend too much time on stretching, but yet it is vital for the players to pick up the right habits of stretching. The older the players, more important stretching becomes.

The main aim of stretching is to reduce injuries, increase flexibility and range of movement. There are two main types of stretching: (Beale 2008, 9.)

1. Static Stretching
2. Dynamic Stretching

Static stretching is when the muscle is stretched to its maximum and held for a given period of time. In football a good rule of thumb is not to hold the stretch for more than 5 seconds as it would influence the performance if done for too long.

(EliteSoccerConditioning 2011)

Dynamic stretching in all simplicity includes stretching on the move. This type of stretching should be specific to football, in order to activate the right muscles prior to performance. Dynamic stretching should include various kicking, changing of direction and movement patterns. (Beale 2008, 10)

5.2.2 Drills

Followed by a good warm up the players will be energetic and ready to work on individual and team skills. This is when different drills are set up to work on specific skills. Keep in mind, the theme of the day will determine what kind of drills will be done.

There are thousands of drills for the coach to choose from to maximize the players learning experience. When choosing drills for specific themes, the coach should keep in mind the following factors: (SauderConsulting 2004)

- The drill supports the theme of the day
- Supports the age group and level of the individuals
- Motivates the players
- Drill is easy to explain and demonstrate
- There is space available for the drill
- Relevant to game situations
- Space for progression
- The drill ends on a successful note for the player

5.2.3 Small Sided Games

Compared with drills, small sided games focus on including more than two players to create pressure and make the drill therefore more comparable to real game situations. Creating small sided games involves a lot of creativity from the coach. These games should walk hand in hand with the topic of the day. (Footy4Kids 2011a.)

It is important to recognize that the more players included in small sided games, the less action each players gets. It is crucial that all players receive a maximum learning environment. With short seasons and seven a side games, the coach should focus on playing small sided games with small numbers. For example 2 vs 1, 2 vs 2, 3 vs 2 and 3 vs 3. (Footy4Kids 2001)

5.2.3 Cool Downs

After a successful training session the cool down is just as important as the warm up. It slows down the players' heart rate, allows them to take on fluids, and provides an opportunity for a mental debrief. (Carr 2005, 15.)

Cool downs do not require a lot of time. It may consist of the players selecting the cones by jogging around the field with low intensity while dribbling a ball. To finish off the training session, proper stretching should be performed. This is also a great time for the coach to go around and ask some of the key points that the theme included. Forcing the players to think on their own is a very important part of learning.

6 Empirical Work

The idea of putting together a football coaching guide first came to my mind at the end of summer 2010, as I arrived in Beijing to complete my internship at WAB (Western Academy of Beijing). The first season kicked off with middle school football and I was fortunate to find myself coaching the grade seven boys (under 13).

As I personally attended WAB from end of 1998-1999 for grade seven, coaching this group of boys brought some memories from the past. Having played at a high level club in Finland, training four to five times a week prior moving to China, it was quite a big shock to find no international football clubs in Beijing at that time. I remember being highly upset with the few training sessions.

Looking back at my personal experience, I asked myself if I could provide something that could benefit international kids moving to international communities from similar background as myself. The answer was to develop a coaching guide that would allow coaches with more or less coaching experience to maximize every players' playing experience.

6.1 Project Planning

It took me a while in the planning process to decide on what to include in the guide and what not. The original idea was to split the manual into girls and boys. However, after some research and long discussions with other more experienced coaches on the field, I decided to provide different levels of drills for each technical skill. This is based on the factor of kids moving in and out of the international communities which causes variation in the skill levels. It is difficult to be working together with the same team for more than one season, which is why I found it a good solution to have variety in the example training sessions. As the level changes, so do the focus points in training sessions. The idea is not to tell coaches this is the only way of teaching certain skills, but to widen up the perspective of doing it at the most efficient way so that everyone on the team benefits from the training session.

Another area in the planning process that took time to decide on was the amount of information to be put on the theoretical part and guide. Because there are more and less experienced coaches I concluded to provide material that would benefit the both.

Because many of the books and articles published on football often only focus on one area or few areas, it highly motivated me to produce a guide that would take into consideration as many perspectives in coaching a team as possible. That is why physical demands, mental skills and planning training sessions are included on the thesis.

6.2 Project Implementation

After collecting all my information from books, the internet, other coaches, and coaching manuals, I had to decide on the order of theoretical part. It felt logical to start from the analysis of football skills, then progress into team tactics, physical demands, mental skills, and finish off with planning training sessions. After writing the theoretical part, the next step was to produce a guide that would show how to teach these aspects on the field.

6.3 Product Description

The product is a coaching guide which includes different drills and methods to maximize the coach's efficiency during the short seasons. It provides different levels of drills for basic technical skills, goaltending skills, and team tactics. There is also a section on training sessions as well as on assessing the players.

The main focus on the guide lays in providing the coaches different levels of drills to improve technical skills, as that should be the main priority during a short season. The reason for providing goalkeeper drills separately is allow the goalkeepers to also improve on their skills rather than only on technical skills. The idea is to allow the goalkeepers join the warm ups but then devide them to execute more specific training for goalkeepers before playing small sided games.

The guide does not go too deep into team tactics as that would not be greatly beneficial for middle school players who train maximum two times a week for little

over two months. There are some basic tools included in the guide to teach the players of playing roles and formations.

Example of a seasonal plan and a full training session is included to show the coaches the idea of planning ahead an entire season for middle school team that trains for one sport season in an international school.

Lastly there will be an example of assessment guidelines that help the coaches in assessing their players throughout the season. It is strongly advised that assessment takes place in the start and ends of every season.

7 Discussion

To provide further understanding for why this guide was produced specifically for Western Academy of Beijing (WAB) I must quickly take you through some history of WAB. When WAB was first founded in 1994, the school site was part of an economically troubled state-owned factory, with 146 children. In August 2001 a new campus site was opened with multi purpose built facilities. 2007 was the year of the first graduation class from WAB. This was the first school year of WAB having grades from one to twelve. From this point on the athletics and activities department, WABX, has worked tremendously hard in improving their athletics and activities program. With little under 1,600 students today (2011), it is a real challenge to offer diverse activities to everyone, yet make them as challenging and fun as possible. The ultimate goal for WABX department is to provide a range of interesting activities that promote active lifestyle.

This product was put together in order to help coaches at WAB and other international schools who coach middle school football teams to maximize their training sessions during such short seasons. By maximizing a season I refer in providing every player a pleasant, fun, yet challenging enough learning experience to allow each individual feel they have improved as a player by end of the season. By going through a pleasant experience the players are more likely to try different sports as well as continue playing the most popular sport, football.

As football is a complex sport to coach with technical, goalkeeping, tactical, physical, mental, and planning aspects, it is hugely important to understand some of the basic terminology. This is why the theoretical part focuses on providing coaches the necessary insight and understanding of these aspects, without going too deep with the analysis.

Technical skills are divided into the following categories: Passing, dribbling, ball control, shooting and heading. If players do not have the basic skill level to perform any of these skills, it is very difficult to proceed into any tactical aspects of the game.

The stonger the foundation of technical skills by the time players finish middle school, the easier it will be for high school coaches to focus on team tactics.

Goalkeeping skills are divided into the following: Positioning, hand work, foot work and diving. The reason goalkeeping skills are mentioned is to maximize the goalkeepers' learning experience, as he/she is one the most crucial players on the football field. Without proper training, the goalkeeper is likely to get bored and will want to play on the field. The idea is to have one or two dedicated goalkeepers who will find themselves improving towards the end of the season.

Team tactics does not go any deeper than discussing the different playing roles on the field, and basic formations that can be used on seven a side games. The purpose in keeping this section brief is for the coaches to understand that during short seasons not too much emphasis can be spent on tactics. Only if the coach is fortunate to have a team with high enough average skill level, should he/she put more emphasis on tactics.

For any player to be a successful football player, they need to be working on physical demands at some level. When talking about middle school players (11 to 14 year olds) the obvious conclusion is not to put too much emphasis into fitness and physical training, but focus on introducing the different demands and provide reasons for why they are important. The guide provides a few basic tips on how to work on physical demans while improving on ball skills and making it more fun for the players. Running lines is not the proper approach anymore.

The reason I wanted to cover mental skills in the project was the factor of so much modern research proving the fact that by improving the mental game players can lift up their playing performance. As this field is very large to cover, I felt it would be most beneficial to introduce the topic to coaches and provide my personal experience on the field. Not too much focus is placed on it on the guide, but there are a few basic tips on how to improve mental game in certain situations. The younger the players start to understand how to handle pressure, the more beneficial it will be for them in many areas of life.

Finally after providing some insight and basic knowledge on technical, tactical, mental skills and fitness demands, I found it necessary to provide coaches with simple tools how to make a short season more successful. This is simply achieved through effective planning. As time is the biggest enemy for us coaches, learning how to efficiently use every minute during training sessions will be the decisive factor to make any season a great success.

Putting together a guide and choosing drills was not an easy mission. As this guide is targeted to improve the skills of middle school players (11 to 14 year olds) with various individual levels, I chose to include three different levels of drills for each technical skill. This way the coach would be able to pick a challenging enough level for the players to improve on. However, it was necessary in trying to choose drills that would be challenging but fun and easy enough to teach for the players. Also I tried to pick drills that can be easily modified to more difficult or easy if situation requires so.

Producing a guide that would help both, the less and more experienced coaches was not easy. I tried to keep things as simple as possible, while provide information that more experienced coaches would find useful. As coaching is a field where new information is learned everyday, I thought some experienced coaches would find this guide beneficial to some extent. The primary objective was to provide simple and brief enough information that would be easily be taken to the field and tried out.

A question that can be raised after finishing the guide is: Should the guide have been split into boys and girls separately? This is a very valid question specifically for this age group. As boys and girls mature and grow up differently there are slightly different areas that coaches could focus on. However, with such brief training season I concluded that it would not make a huge difference to keep the guide same for boys and girls, and rather focus on providing differentiation among skill level rather than sex.

Another idea I originally had was to provide a guide for each team in the middle school. This would have meant that there would have been six separate guides: Girls grade 6, boys grade 6, girls grade 7, boys grade 7, girls grade 8 and boys grade 8. This

might have been more helpful in some ways, but I came back to the same argument that the coach cannot know the starting level of the team as there are so many players leaving and arriving. Therefore the only logical approach was not to split the guide into too much detail, but allow coaches to have more variety in choosing the appropriate level for the team. I felt that as long as coaches get an overall understanding to provide appropriate challenge level, the players would benefit the most out of that. If I was to say this is the only way coaches need to be coaching the grade 6 girls, there would have been less space for coaches to use their creativity. In the end, I do not want to take any creativity out, but to add some extra spice to the existing knowledge.

Another question can be raised: Is this guide only beneficial for coaches at international schools, with two month seasons and few training sessions? The answer is no. There are many international clubs being offered in Beijing that target junior players. Many times these clubs offer training more than twice a week and for entire seasons. The common problem is to have shortage of coaches available. There are many volunteer coaches and parents helping out with different teams, that for sure can find this guide very useful. With no coaching experience this guide offers all the basic knowledge required to take on any junior team. With the variety in drills and examples of sessions and seasonal plans, coaches can shortly start to get the idea which direction to go.

I am highly confident and can assure you that this guide serves as a multi purpose guide to either start a football program or improve a current one. All the information provided are simple yet brief, and help in getting the overall picture to what to consider when coaching any football team at a junior level, specifically 11 to 14 year old players.

Producing this guide was very exciting and challenging at the same time. I feel this guide could be beneficial for any international school or community, and most important, for the benefit of any player at middle school level.

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Football Coaching Guide for
Middle School Coaches at
International Schools

Aki Mustonen

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1 Introduction

This guide has been put together mainly through my own ideas and experiences with the Middle School football players. Different coaching manuals, books, Internet sources as well as other experienced coaches helped me in finding ideas to my guide.

All the material in this guide is the artwork of me. I have personally drawn all the drills, put together the example sessions as well as drawn the tables for assessing of players.

Majority of the drills are as close to game like situations as possible, as this is most beneficial for the middle school players. This way the players are not only learning to execute different technical skills but are forced to think about what would happen in game situations. In other words, the drills also help to improve the players' game sense.

Let us not forget that the drills should be as much fun as possible for the players as this will help them to remain more focused and motivated throughout the season, and we are more likely to see them next year again. All coaches should try and focus on positive reinforcement. All players will make mistakes, but it is the coaches' responsibility to break down the mistake in a way that will not traumatize the player.

2 Example Seasonal Plan

The purpose of the example seasonal plan is to give an idea for coaches to think about of different focus points on different weeks and different training sessions. Having a plan helps to be more organized. It is difficult to produce a plan without knowing the level of the team, which is why assessment of players should be done during first training session to give an idea which direction to go.

Below is an example seasonal plan for a team with average level of two. Section four on the guide describes how to assess the players and give the team an average level, which will help to plan the season.

Week	Tuesday	Thursday	Intensity
1	Assessment	Passing& Ball Control	Medium
2	Ball Control &Dribbling	Game Day	Medium
3	Passing&Shooting	Dribbling&Fitness	High
4	Passing&Tactics	Game 2	Medium
5	Ball Control &Heading	Game 3	High*
6	Fitness&Shooting	Ball Control &Passing	High
7	Passing&Tactics	Game 4	Medium
8	Ball Control &Shooting	Game 5	Medium
9	Passing& Ball Control	Shooting&Tactics	High*

* = Tournament on the Weekend

Depending on the overall level determined doing the assessment; the plan for the season will look different for each team. The intensity refers to the intensity in training sessions. Because there are no more than two training sessions (some weeks only one session) during each week, it is important to keep a high intensity level in training to work on endurance and other physical demands simultaneously.

3 Example Training Session

After the coach puts a seasonal plan together it is easier to plan the upcoming training sessions to maximize the limited time during a nine-week season. By including a topic for each training session the coach does a huge favor for the players. This way they will be able to focus on specific skills rather than get confused by over load of information.

The example below demonstrates a 90 – minute training session:

Category	Order	Purpose	Time
WarmUp	1. Ladders	Speed&Agility	1. (5 minutes)
	2. In pairs of two with balls	Dribbling&Passing	2. (10 minutes)
Technical SkillDrills	3. Passing	Technique	3. (10 minutes)
	4. Passing	Accuracy	4. (10 minutes)
	5. Dribbling	Basics	5. (10 minutes)
	6. Dribbling	Control	6. (10 minutes)
GoalkeeperDrills	3. Handwork	Basics	3. (10 minutes)
	4. Footwork	Agility	4. (10 minutes)
	5. Diving	Basics	5. (10 minutes)
	6. Positioning	Basics	6. (10 minutes)
GameDrills	7. 2 vs. 1	Dribble, pass, shoot	7. (10 minutes)
	8. 2 vs. 2	Dribble, pass, shoot	8. (10 minutes)
	9. 3 vs. 3	Short periodgames	9. (10 minutes)
Cool Down	10. Jogging	Collectballs, stretch	10. (5 minutes)
Total Time			90 minutes

The training session is split into four main categories: warm up, technical drills, goal-keeper drills, game drills, and a cool down. After the warm up field players are separated from the goalkeepers who will go train on their individual skills. After forty minutes all players get together for simple game drills. There will be examples of each type of drill mentioned in the guide.

4 Assessment

Before seasonal plan can properly be planned the coach should assess the players. This can be done in various ways, but the easiest and quickest method is to have the players perform different skill tests during the first training. This way the coach is able to evaluate each individual closely rather than have the team playing games, where it is highly unlikely for every player to be involved equally.

I will not include a section separate for skill tests for the reason of keeping things brief. There are plenty of skill tests available online. One option is to plan the first training session so that there are a lot of fun games for a 90-minute period, with dribbling, passing, shooting, and goalkeeper skills included.

Below are the different technical skills assessment tables:

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Passing	1	Executes the skill below the average	Inside feet pass with stronger foot. No control with weaker foot. No consistency or control.
	2	Executes the skill at average level	Consistent with stronger foot. Performs other types of passes at times with stronger foot. Weaker foot struggles with control and consistency.
	3	Executes the skill above average	Can perform passing in the air. Good accuracy with stronger foot. Able to execute multiple passes. Controls the pass with weaker foot. Passes accurately with speed.

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Dribbling	1	Executes the skill below the average	Always uses stronger foot to dribble. Takes one long touch and runs after. No control of the ball, especially with weaker foot. Does not look around while dribbling
	2	Executes the skill at average level	Occasionally uses the weaker foot. Able to control at low speeds but struggles control with more speed. Looks around at times. Struggles to dribble with other parts of feet.
	3	Executes the skill above average	Reads the game while dribbling. Dribbles with multiple parts of both feet. Has a good balance while dribbling. Controls the ball with greater speeds. Able to change direction quickly.

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Ball Control	1	Executes the skill below the average	Has difficulty cushioning the ball. Cannot control the first touch. Does not look around before controlling. No control with the weaker foot. Only able to control with the feet.
	2	Executes the skill at average level	Cushions the ball without any speed. Able to use different body parts without speed, but struggles with speed. Uses weaker foot at times to control. Struggles with body balance.

	3	Executes the skill above average	<p>Able to cushion the ball with both feet.</p> <p>Controls the ball with all body parts.</p> <p>Has good body balance when controlling. Looks around for opponents before receiving.</p> <p>Able to juggle the ball for a long period of time.</p>

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Shooting	1	Executes the skill below the average	<p>Accurate only with inside of the foot.</p> <p>Cannot use weaker foot to shoot.</p> <p>Has difficulty in shooting high shots.</p> <p>Struggles with body balance.</p>
	2	Executes the skill at average level	<p>Decent accuracy when ball not moving.</p> <p>Uses only the stronger foot with speed.</p> <p>Able to perform high shots but lacks accuracy and power.</p> <p>Decent balance when ball not moving, but no consistency while moving.</p>
	3	Executes the skill above average	<p>Able to use all parts of feet to shoot.</p> <p>Performs power shots both with and without speed on the ball.</p> <p>Able to control body balance to place the ball high or low.</p> <p>Has a good followthrough of the leg.</p>

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Heading	1	Executes the skill below the average	Is afraid to head the ball from high balls. Does not head the ball with forehead, but tends to hit it with the upper part of the head.
	2	Executes the skill at average level	Only heads the ball when it does not go too high. At times hits the ball with forehead but does not use the core for more power. Has difficulty in performing jumping headers.
	3	Executes the skill above average	Uses feet and the core for maximum power. Hits the ball with the forehead. Able to place the ball to corners and hit it low or high on the goal. Able to execute jumping headers to either hit the target or clear the ball.

The goalkeeping assessment can be also done during fun games and competitions. The field players can for example compete how many players from each team can score on one of the goalkeepers. This way the coach can be assessing the shooting techniques as well as goalkeeping techniques. Below are the goalkeeper's assessment criteria:

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Positioning	1	Executes the skill below average level.	Tends to stay at the goal line and is afraid to leave the 16 box.

	2	Executes the skill at average level.	Occasionally leaves the 16 box to help defenders. At times move into line with the ball and reduces the size of the goal.
	3	Executes the skill above average level.	Shows signs of being able to read the next moves well. Many times in line with the ball and covers the goal properly.

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
FootWork	1	Executes the skill below average level.	Uses only the stronger foot to pass to defenders. Most of the time on hisheels.
	2	Executes the skill at average level.	At times does shuffle and crossover steps before dives. Many times dives instead of taking a few extra steps. Occasionally on histoes.

	3	Executes the skill above average level.	<p>Performs quick shuffle and crossover steps to move into correct position.</p> <p>Makes saves look easy.</p> <p>Tries hard to be in square with the ball to cover as much of the goal as possible.</p>
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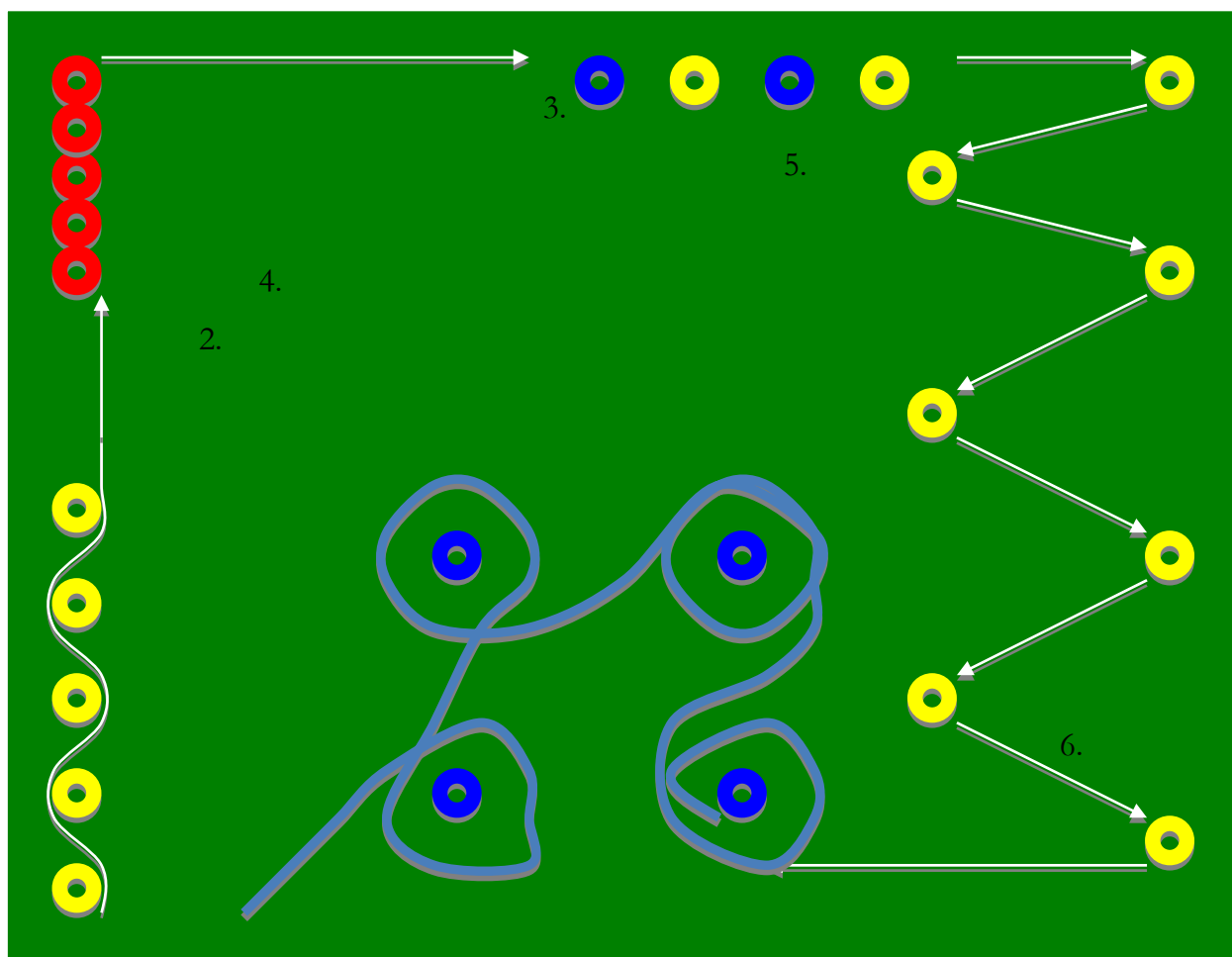
Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
HandWork	1	Executes the skill below average level.	<p>Has difficult time cushioning the ball.</p> <p>Tends to hit the ball away with flathands.</p>
	2	Executes the skill at average level.	<p>At times able to cushion the ball but few times loses the control. Does not have a good control when throwing the ball.</p>
	3	Executes the skill above average level.	<p>Cushions the ball by moving into correct place on time.</p> <p>Good accuracy on throws.</p> <p>Able to punch the ball to the side if necessary.</p>

Skill	Level	Description	Indicators
Diving	1	Executes the skill below average level.	Dives occasionally but slowly. Has difficult time timing the dive.
	2	Executes the skill at average level.	Is able to dive but many times does so when not necessary. Diving occurs more on weaker side and is slow on the wrong side.
	3	Executes the skill above average level.	Does not dive if not necessary. Can perform high and low dives with good landing techniques. Reaches the hands-farwhendiving.

5 Physical Demands

Instead of running lines without the ball, the coaches should encourage the players to perform fitness training with the ball as much as possible. Many times fitness training is seen as unpleasant and something not so exciting among the younger players. However, there are a few methods how to make it more fun for the players.

Below is a fitness circuit, which is done using a ball. Before the circuit is done, players run two easy laps around the pitch and perform dynamic stretches. This allows time to set up the circuit. Round one should last no more than 5 minutes, with medium intensity. Second round should be slightly higher tempo, and the last round can be done with higher intensity, but no more than two laps. Total time should take around 15 minutes.



1. Dribble through the cones using your own imagination – Using both feet
2. Pass the ball by the cones, and perform 5 jumps over the cones (both feet same time)

3. Accelerate to the next station using weaker foot, many touches
4. Go around the blue cone using only your right outside foot, and yellow cone by only using the left outside foot – full 360 circles
5. Dribble backwards using the bottom of the shoes
6. Taking as many touches with the ball as possible, go around each cone using left foot when going left, and right foot when going right
7. Dribble using the inside of both feet – left, right, left, right, etc
8. Quick acceleration around the cones with good control of the ball.

This is one example what a fitness circuit could consist of. The coach should set up the different stations according to skill level of the team. Fitness circuit can be done to replace a warm up.

Progression:

After round one or two make some changes to different stations to make the intensity higher. After three rounds are completed it is a good idea to perform different strength and power movements. Set up a circuit with the following movements: (Each movements done for 30 seconds. Perform two rounds with one minute rest in between rounds.)

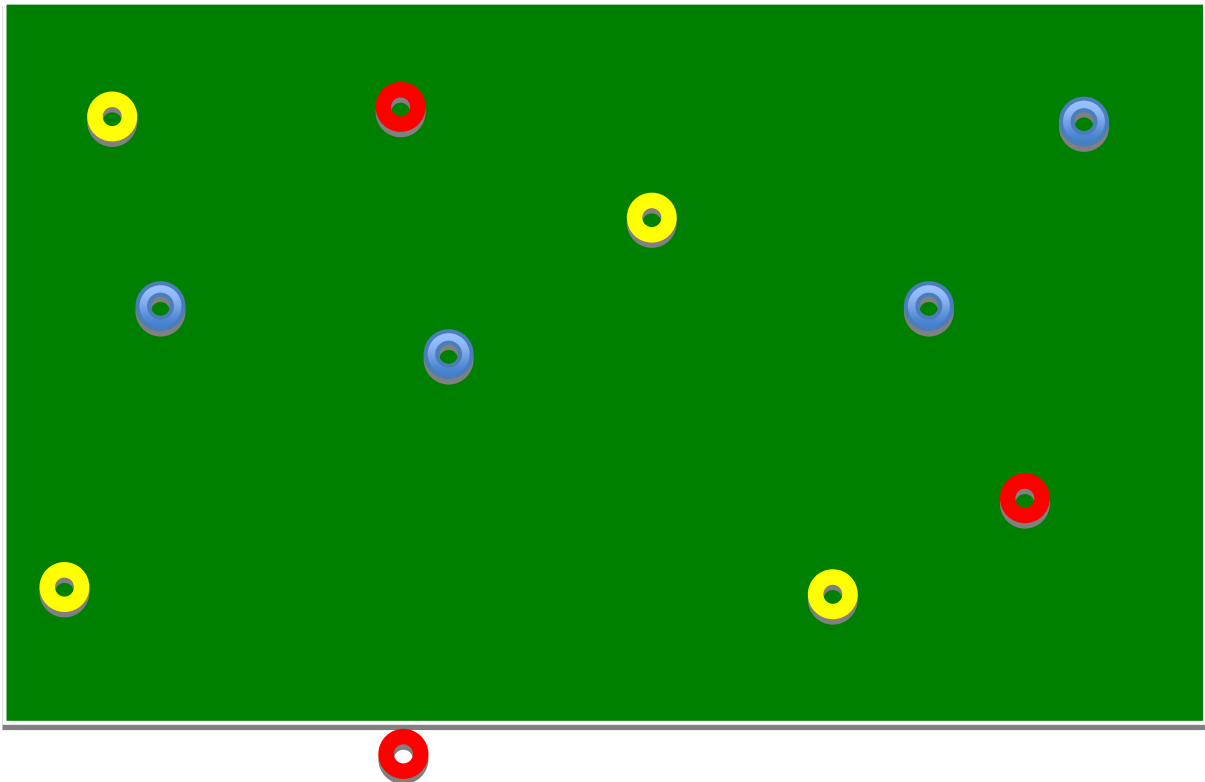
- | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 1. Jumping Jacks | 2. Jumping Lunges | 3. Push ups |
| 4. Plank (1 min) | 5. Leg Hold (1 min) | 6. Crunches |

Key Points:

- Set up circuit according to skill level
- Make sure players perform easy tempo laps prior to circuit
- Encourage players to use both feet
- Circuit works on fitness and dribbling skills simultaneously
- Progression from lower to higher intensity
- Have breaks in between different rounds

6 WarmUps

Warm Up One: (Reaction, dribbling, control, game sense)



Progression:

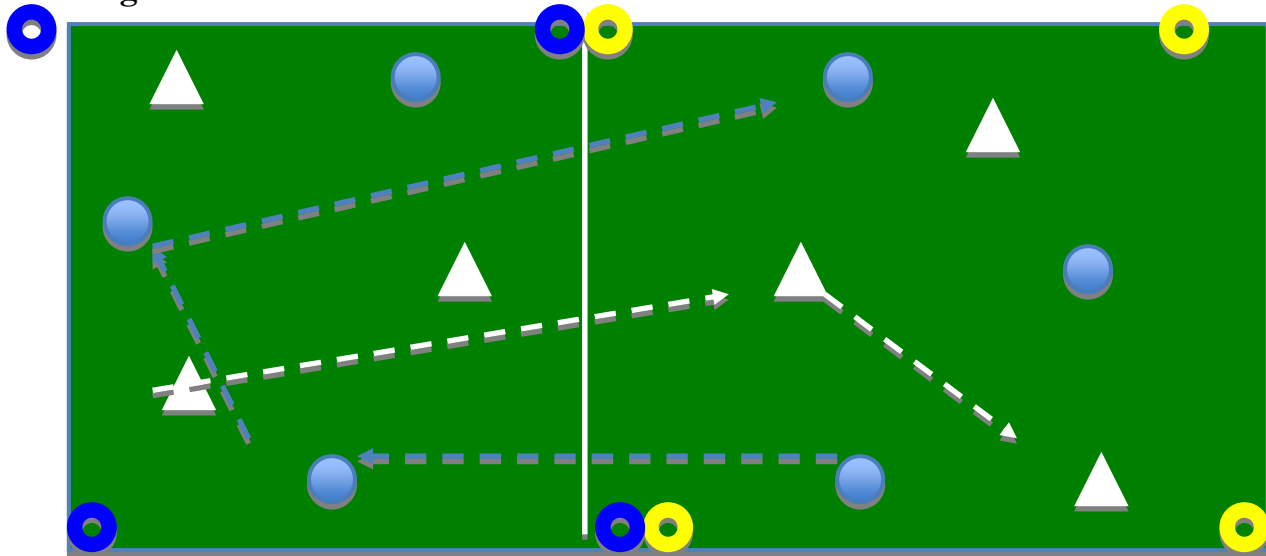
1. All players have one ball
2. Players start dribbling around the area using both feet. Many touches
3. Low intensity
4. There are three different colored cones set up around the area
5. The coach either shouts one of the colors or holds up one cone at a time
6. Each colored cone represents different movement:
 - Yellow = dribble around the cone using the inside of weaker foot
 - Blue = Perform any step over move prior to the cone
 - Red = Dribble around the cone using the inside of stronger foot
7. Take short resting periods in between and perform dynamic stretches
8. Change the movement patterns, for example to going around cones using the outside foot, or by doing different body weight transfers

Key Points:

- Keep head up for other players and coach's commands
- Players should use the space available
- Turns should be done as quickly as possible

Warm Up Two: (Pass, receive, dynamic stretch)

Progression:

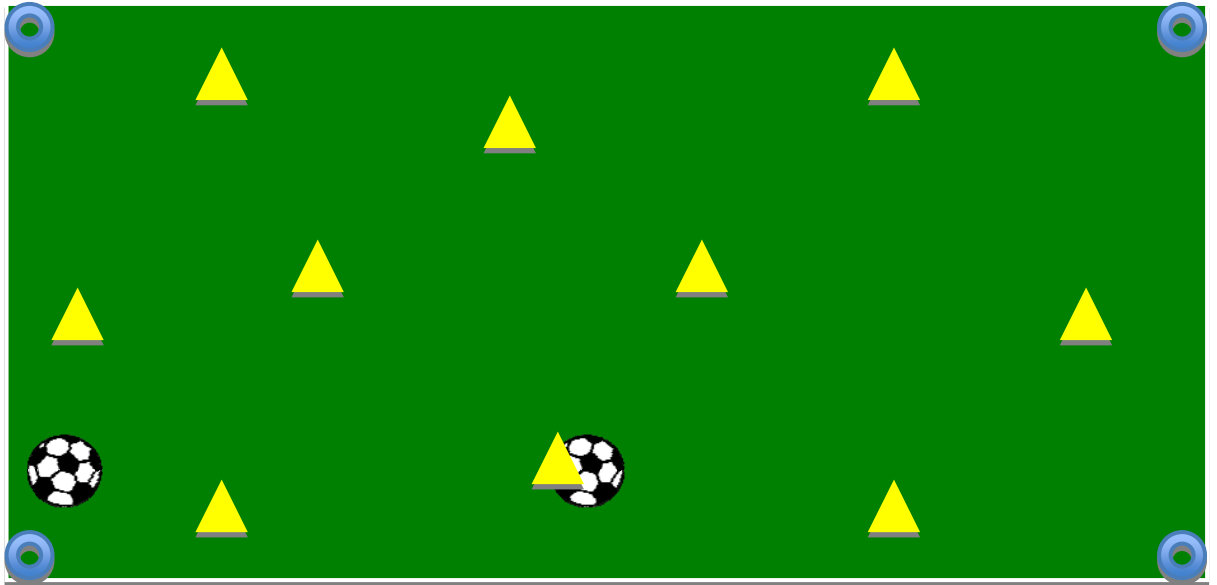


1. Set up two areas right next to each other
2. Players are split into two colored teams (blue and white)
3. There are two balls, one on each team. Passes only go to own team mates
4. Every time player passes the ball to different area the player must change sides. While changing the side the player will perform one of the movements:
 - High Knees, High heels, arm rotations, easy kicks forward, crossovers
5. Start off with two touches, progress into one touch and add two more balls

Key points:

- Good loud communication – call out the players' name
- Keep head up, look for different passing options
- First touch should allow the player for many options
- Accurate passing, do not allow the ball to leave the area

Warm Up Three (Kinetic training, game sense, passing, control)



Progression:

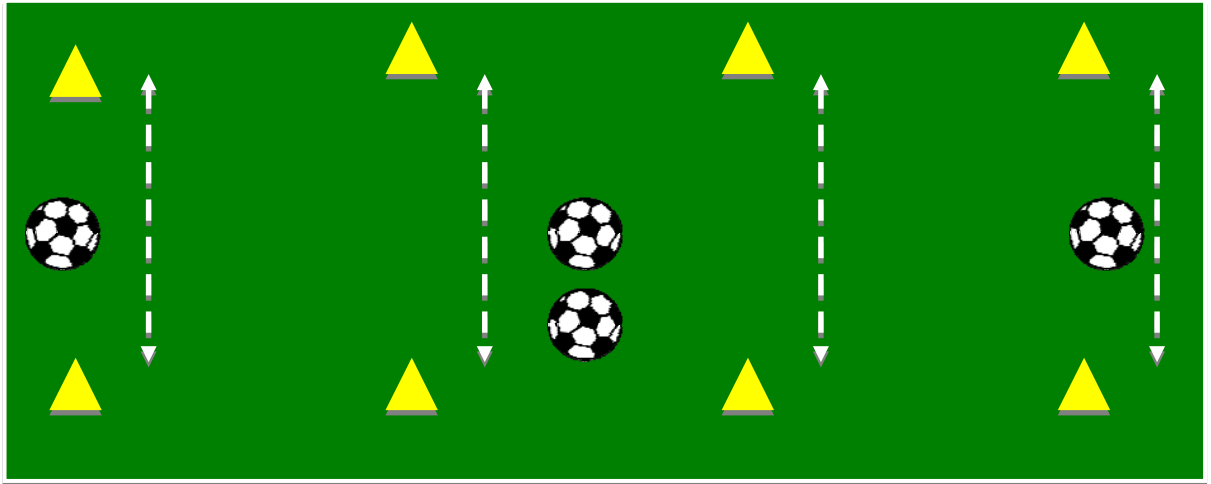
1. Set up an area big enough for the team
2. There are two balls to start off
3. Players start to move around the area passing the two balls around
4. After three minutes the coach stops and assigns one ball to be counted for numbers, and the other ball for alphabet.
5. Start with two touches to get the idea. The point is to try and get as far in the alphabet and numerical order as possible. If ball goes out of bounds or players use more than two touches, start the count/alphabet over.
6. After 5 minutes stop the game, see how far players reached. If too easy, add another two balls, one counting for numbers and the other for alphabet.
7. No back-to-back passes allowed. Make sure players are using the whole area.
8. After few weeks into training, add 2-3 defenders to try and interrupt the count. In this case the area should be big enough.

7 Technical SkillDrills

For each technical skill there will be three different levels of drills. Level one will always be first, and then level two followed by level three.

7.1 Passing

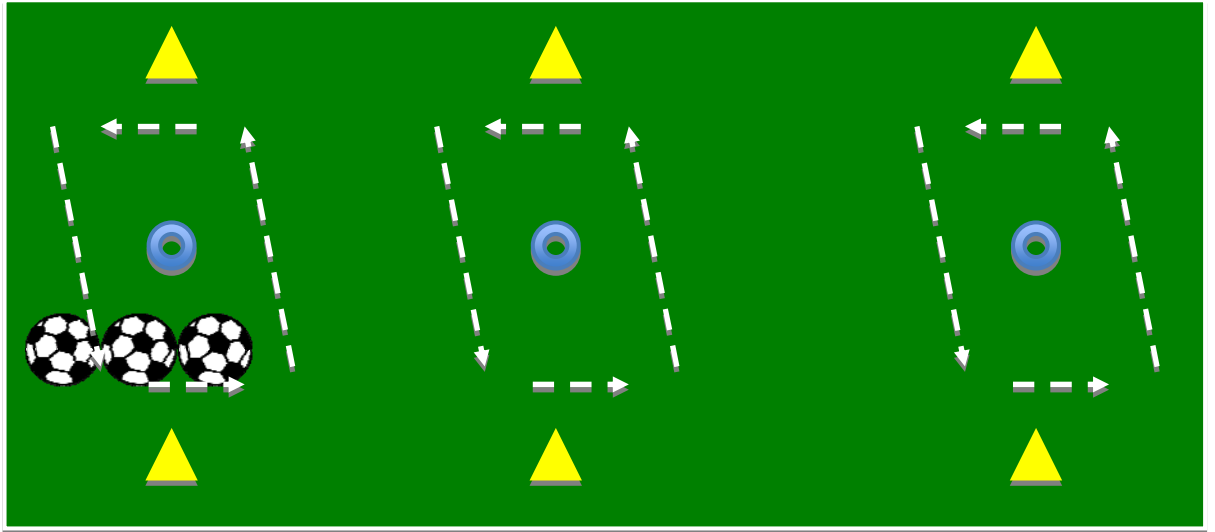
Passing Drill One (Passing and receiving)



Progression:

1. Get in pairs of two, one ball per pair.
2. Distance should not be too long
3. Players start to pass the ball back and forth – using the inside of the foot
4. Coach should make sure players place their supporting leg correctly, toes facing the direction of the pass, foot placed next to the ball. The inside of the foot pushes the ball accurately to the other player.
5. After a while change to weaker leg.
6. When passes start to be accurate, go through correct receiving technique and demand players to only take two touches with the ball, first being the receiving touch, second the pass.

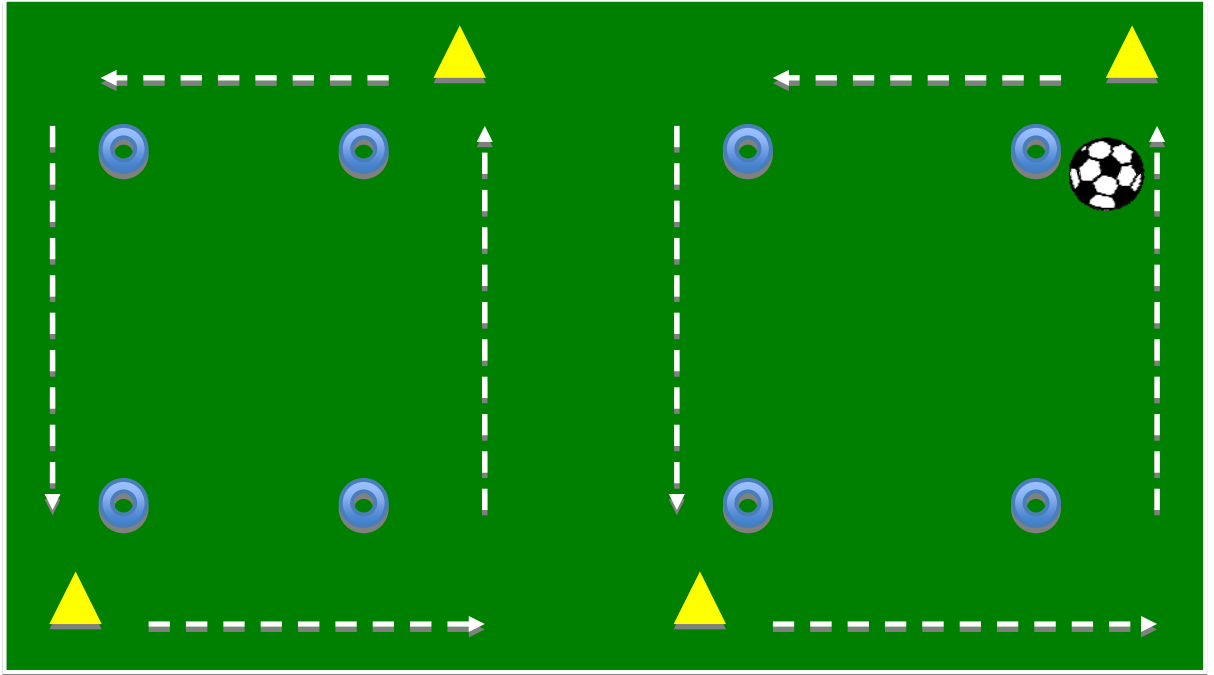
Passing Drill Two (Passing and receiving)



Progression:

1. Get in pairs of two, facing each other. One ball per pair.
2. Set up one cone in between the pairs. Distance not too long to start off.
3. The idea is to keep passing using two touches: First touch to cushion the ball to the right so that a pass can be made across past the cone in the center.
4. Start by receiving with left inside foot and passing with right inside foot
5. Players must be on their toes, ready to cushion the ball with soft touch.
6. Change direction so that left leg is used to pass the ball.
7. Change the drill so that receiving is done by the outside foot. This should be done after the players can perform the drill with the inside of the foot.

Passing Drill Three (Passing and receiving)

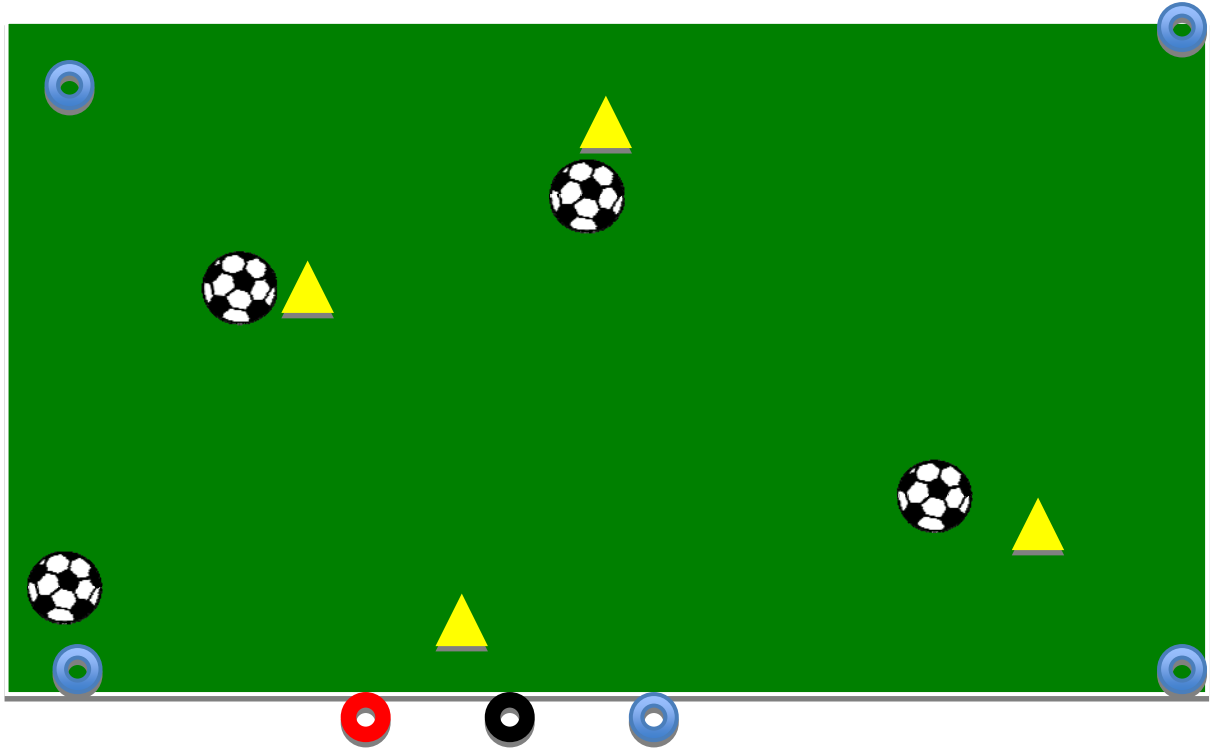


Progression:

1. Players get in pairs of two, facing each other
2. Two cones are set up on each side
3. Start by receiving and passing by the inside foot. Only two touches allowed
4. Change direction after a while.
5. Progress into receiving with outside foot, passing with inside foot.
6. Next, make a rule that passes must go through two cones. To make it more challenging, make the length of cones smaller and distance longer.

7.2 Ball Control

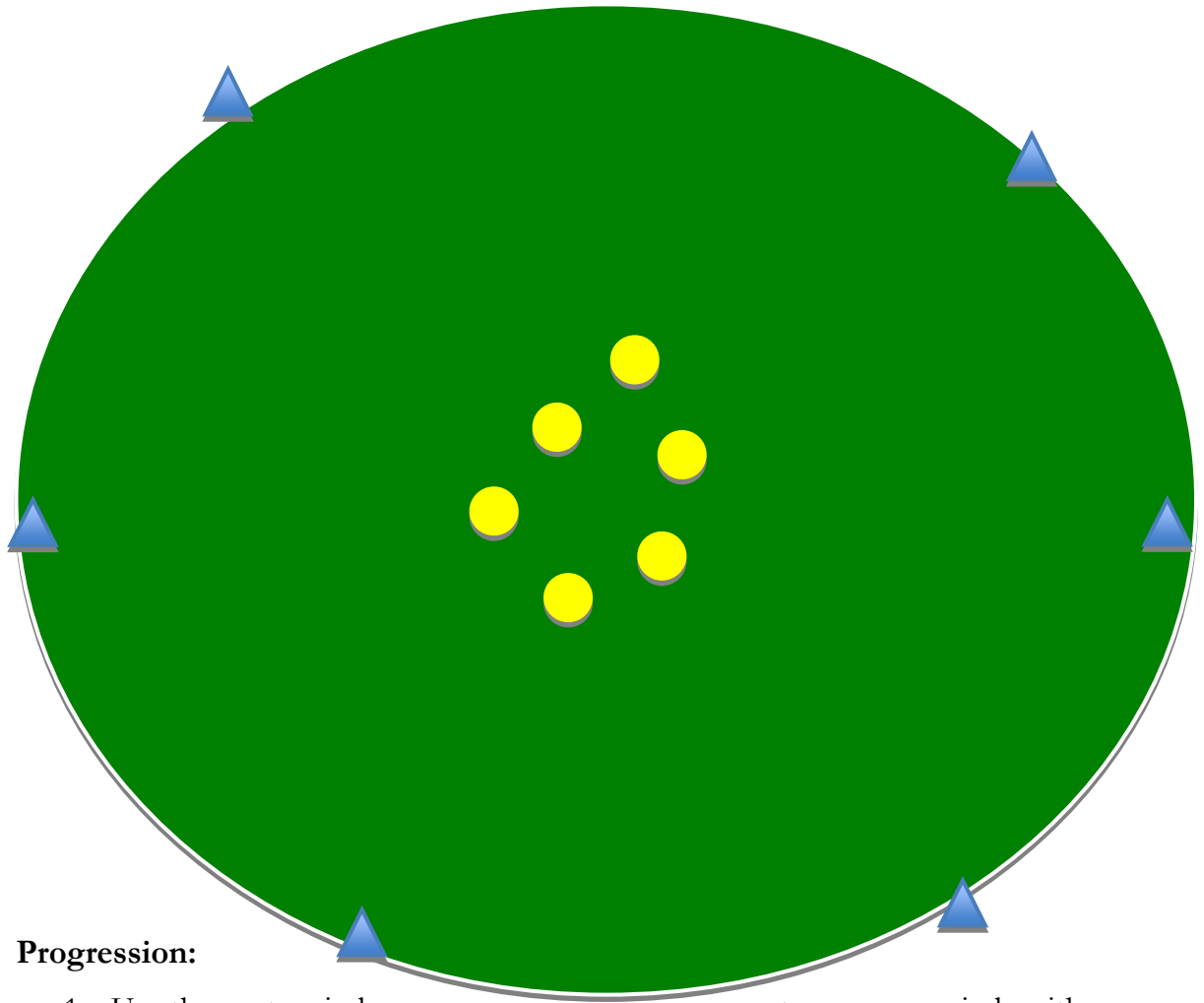
Ball Control Drill One (dribbling, kinetic, cushioning, passing)



Progression:

1. Set up an area big enough for players to move around
2. No more than 6 players per area
3. Each player has a ball to start off with
4. Players dribble around the area, keeping their heads up looking for coaches command from the side (or shout)
5. When coach raises the red cone (or shouts red), the players throw the ball in the air and cushion the ball by the inside foot, and continue dribbling.
6. When coach raises the black cone (or shouts black), the players throw the ball in the air and cushion the ball by lace of the foot, continue dribbling.
7. When coach raises the blue cone (or shouts blue), the players throw the ball in the air and cushion the ball by their thigh, and continue dribbling.
8. Next, have only half of the players with a ball. After cushioning the ball by coaches' command, players must quickly make a pass to a teammate without a ball. To make this more challenging, add bibs for the players and assign which bib color must pass to another color. In this case have the whole team perform the drill in one area.

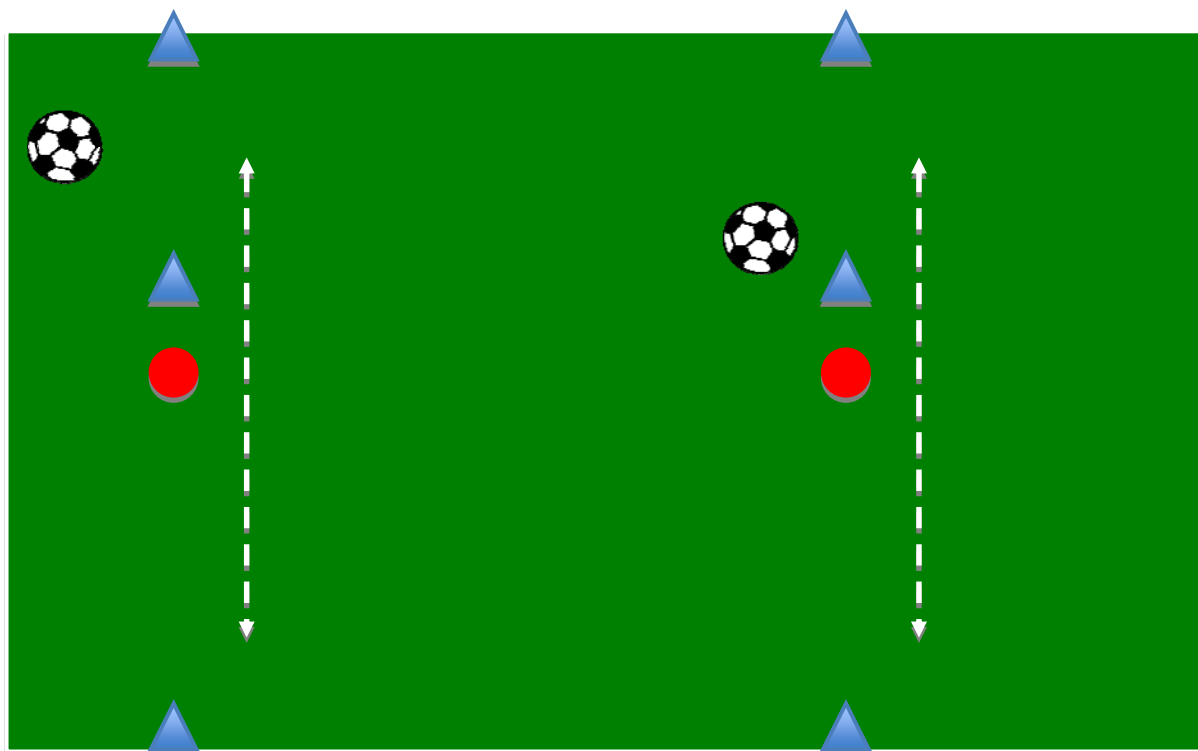
Ball Control Drill Two (Reaction, ball control, passing)



Progression:

1. Use the center circle, or create your own circle with cones
2. Have half the players on the outside of the circle, the other half in the center without balls
3. Players without balls have to look for an open player with a ball and run up to them, performing the following movements:
 - Inside foot pass on the ground (one touch)
 - Outside foot pass on the ground (one touch)
 - Inside foot pass in the air (one touch)
 - Instep pass in the air (one touch)
 - Receive with thigh, return with inside foot in the air
 - Receive with chest, return with inside foot in the air
4. Perform only one of the above movements at a time. Let players perform movement for one minute at a time, then switch the outside and inside players.
5. The drill can also be done in pairs of two to make it easier. Having players running around make the drill more game like and forces the players to think.

Ball Control Drill Three (Pressure, ball control)

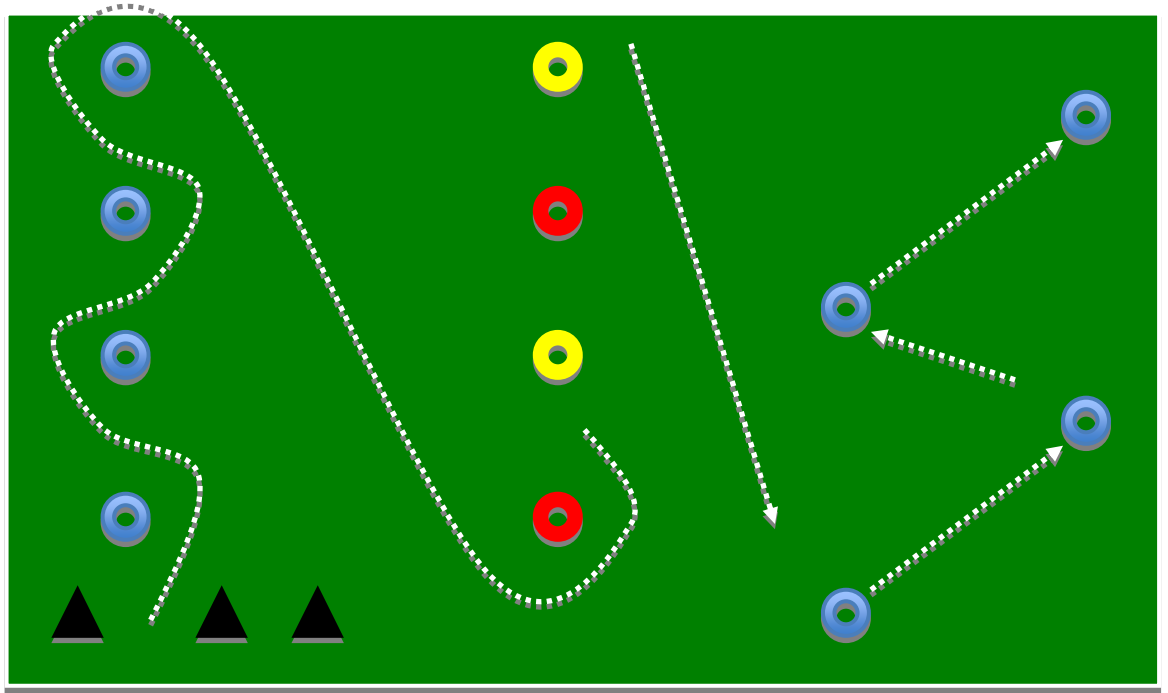


Progression:

1. Get in groups of four, with two balls.
2. Taking turns in the center, there will be one person performing different skills while there is pressure provided by one player.
3. This drill can be done using the circle in drill two.
4. The idea is to create pressure so that it is more game like situation
5. The following skills should be done:
 - Inside foot pass with one touch
 - Outside foot pass with one touch
 - Thigh receive, return with inside foot
 - Thighreceive, return with instep
 - Chest receive, return with inside foot

7.3 Dribbling

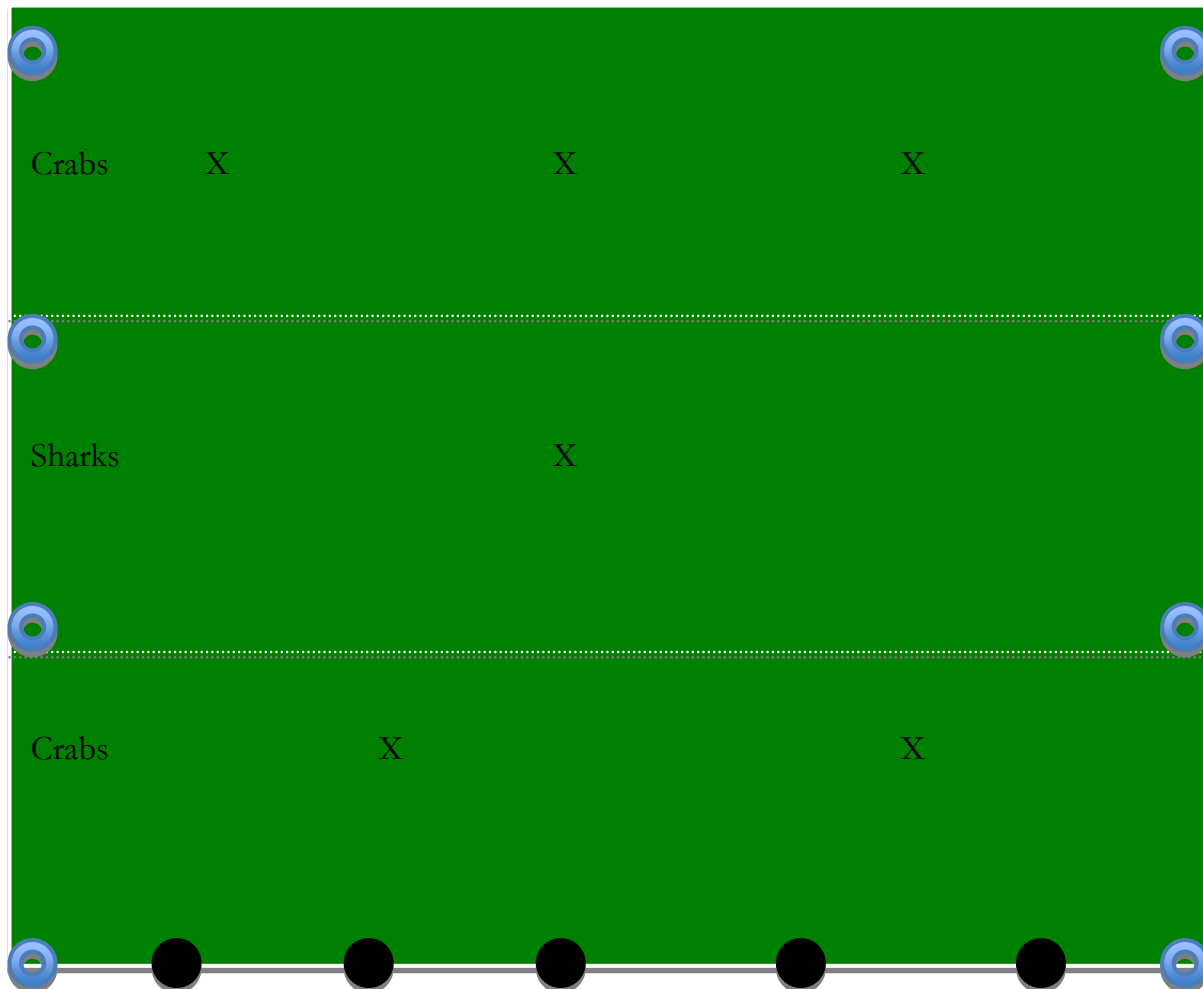
Dribbling Drill One (Dribbling basic skills)



Progression:

1. Set up three areas as shown above. No more than four players per area.
2. One player at a time with one ball goes around the dribbling track.
3. First set of cones the player may choose how to go around the cones
4. Second set of cones are done so that red cones are dribbled using the left outside foot, and yellow cones using the right outside foot
5. Emphasize a slow speed to start off with
6. Third set of cones is dribbled using the left inside foot to go right and right inside foot to go left.
7. After third set of cones the player comes back to starting point without disturbing other players.

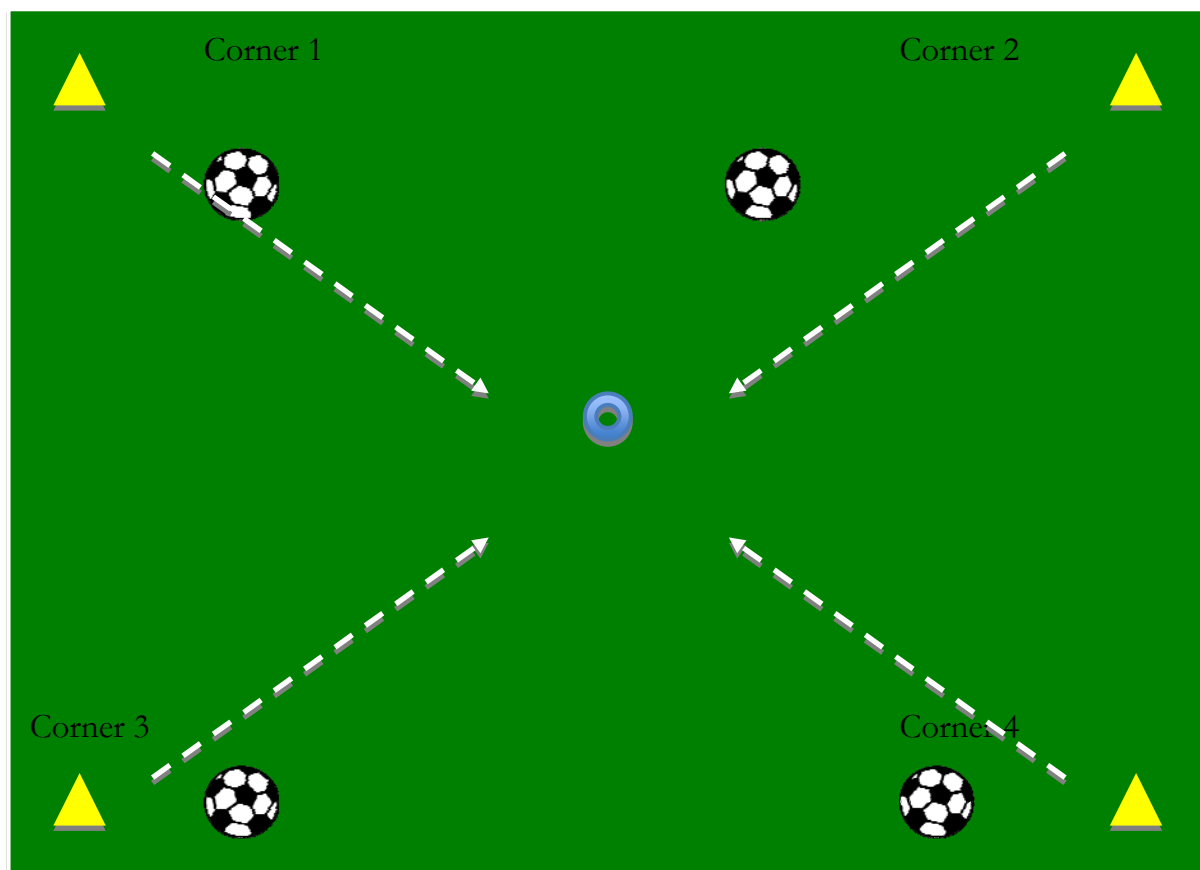
Dribbling Drill Two (Dribbling, defending, fun)



Progression:

1. Team is split into two: Players with balls, and players without balls
2. The idea is for the players with balls to dribble through the three different areas: Area 1 with crabs, area 2 with sharks, and area 3 with crabs
3. Crabs may only be in their own zone and must be on crab positions with feet and hands on the ground. Sharks can move freely on their zone
4. Play for several rounds then switch roles
5. The coach can use imagination to add in other creatures. Make it fun

Dribbling Drill Three (Dribbling, turns, fakes)

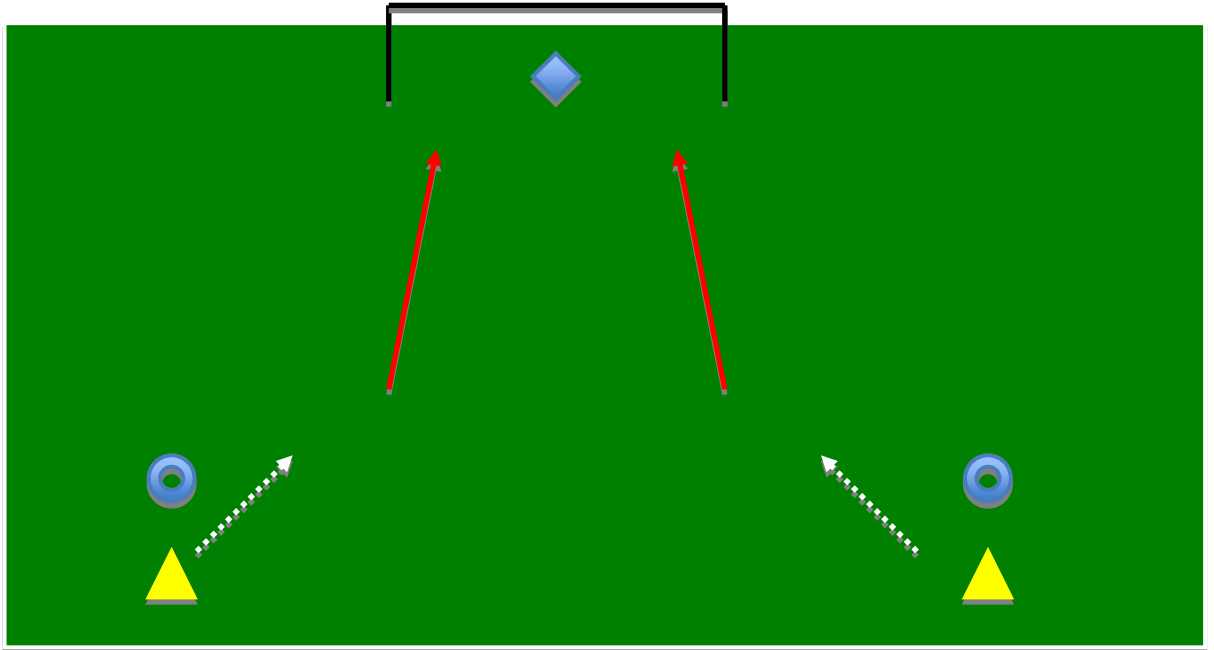


Progression:

1. Divide team into four equal groups. Each group with one ball
2. One player at a time from each corner dribbles up to the cone, performs a turn and comes back to line and gives ball to next player
3. Odd corners go in at the same time, perform a 90 – degree turn and move to even corners. Then even corners perform the same moving over to odd corner to the right. Changedirectionafterfewminutes.
4. Odd corners dribble toward the cone, perform a fake and dribble across to the opposite line. Thenevencornersperformsomething
5. Same thing, this time players perform a step over move

7.3 Shooting

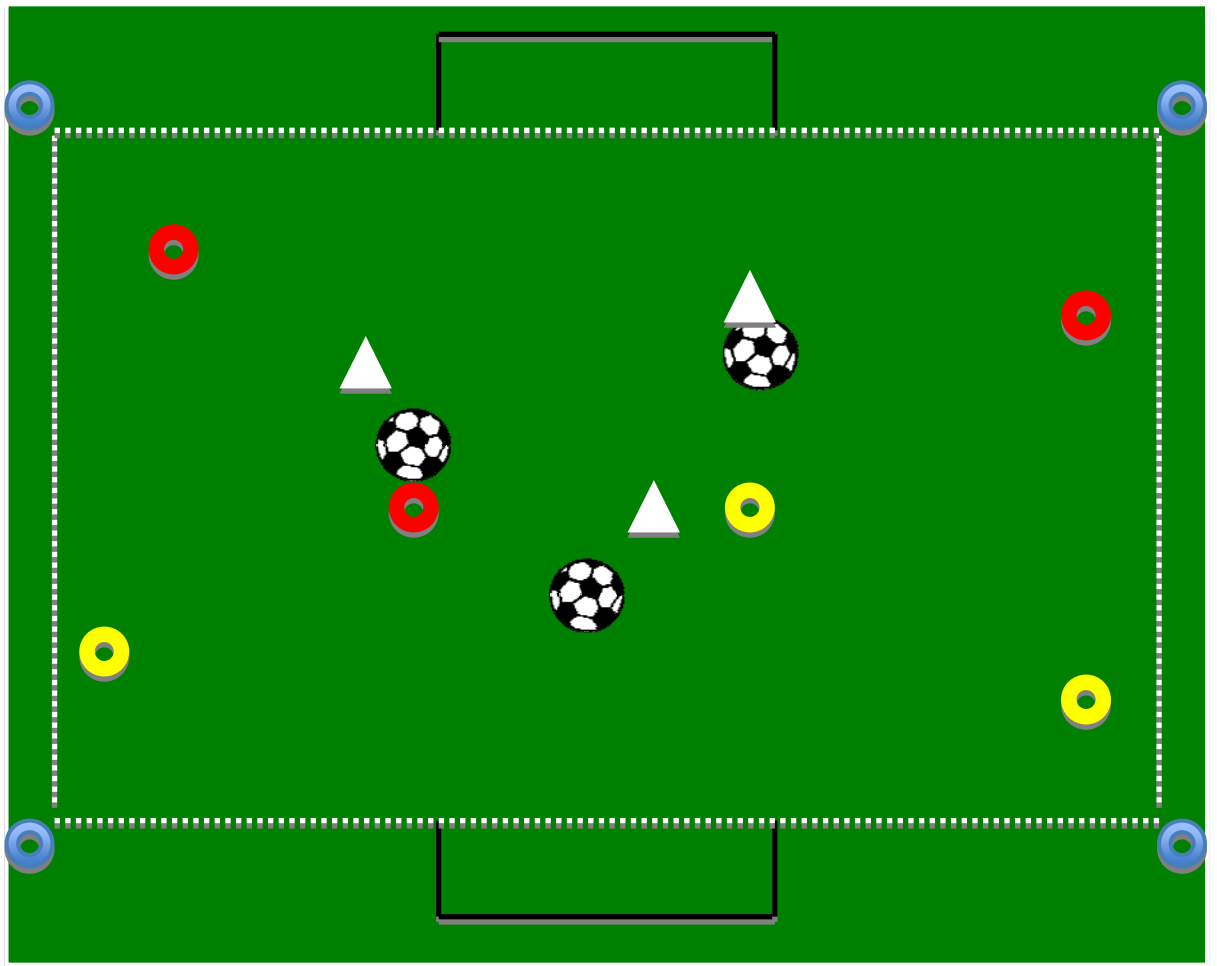
Shooting Drill One (Shooting accuracy and technique while moving)



Progression:

1. This drill should be done on two goals to get many repetitions
2. There is goalkeeper blocking the shots
3. Players line up behind cones, dribble a few meters one at a time, take one touch inside and shoot using the inside of the foot. This is to focus on accuracy.
4. Once the players get the idea, coach should go through the power shot technique of shooting by instep of the foot.
5. Players will change lines after every shot to make sure both feet are used
6. After a while, add defenders to make the situation more game like. Defenders can first act as passive defenders, meaning they are not allowed to get the ball, but only cover space to make shooting more challenging.

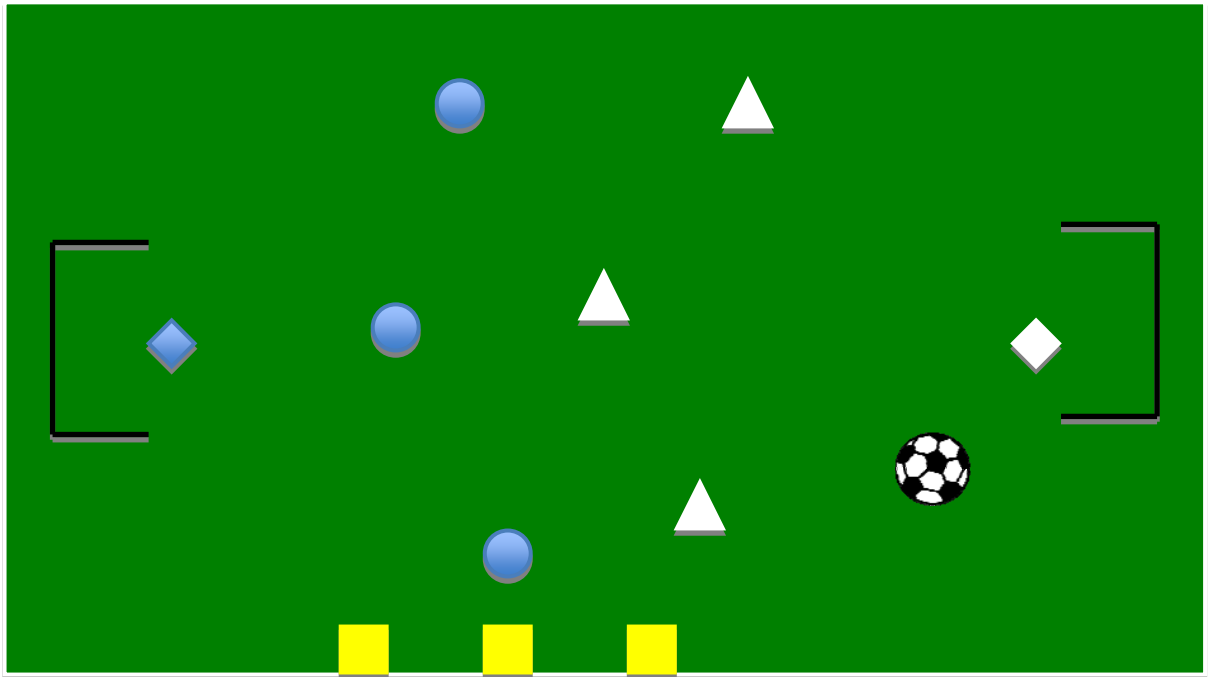
Shooting Drill Two (Reaction, dribble, shoot)



Progression:

1. There are two goals set up in an area, with no goalkeepers
2. No more than three players are in the area at a time, dribbling the ball around
3. With coach's demand the players must dribble around the colored cone and shoot the ball in goal
4. Once the coach shouts or shows the colored cone, players will dribble as fast as possible, and try to shoot as fast as possible, not going too close to the goal
5. Only one player may dribble each cone at a time, meaning they have to react quickly and make a quick decision in choosing a cone that other players are not using
6. Take turns rotating the players around
7. Change between stronger and weaker foot, and demand what part of foot to shoot with

Shooting Drill Three (Reaction, fitness, shooting)



Progression:

1. In a given area not too large, there are two goals with two goalkeepers
2. There are three white, three blue and three yellow colored players
3. The coach will throw a ball in the zone and the two teams will have to fight for the ball. The idea is to work as a team, but take as many shots on goal as possible. With any space the players should shoot
4. All the balls will be split into two goals so that the game flow is high the whole time. One game should last no more than one minute, and then change the players around. There is always minimum one team resting.
5. The drill can also be done in groups of two or four, depending on the size of the team
6. Encourage players to take as many shots as possible, but also for defenders to block the space
7. Players should be exhausted by end of each one minute period

7.4 Heading

Heading Drill One (Basic heading technique)

Progression:

1. Split the players into pairs of two. If there are uneven number, groups of three will work as well
2. There will be one ball for each pair
3. Players will start by holding the ball by their head height, and heading the ball to their pair using the forehead.
4. It is ok for the ball to bounce on the ground
5. The idea is for the players to get used to experimenting how it feels to use the forehead for heading
6. After players get the idea, they can throw the ball in the air and perform a header to their partner. It is important to emphasize on following factors:
 - Player performs a body weight transfer from one leg to the other
 - Player uses the core to get strength for the header
 - Eyes remain on the ball the whole time, and eyes stay open until the contact point
 - Player hits the ball with the forehead

Heading Drill Two (Moving headers)

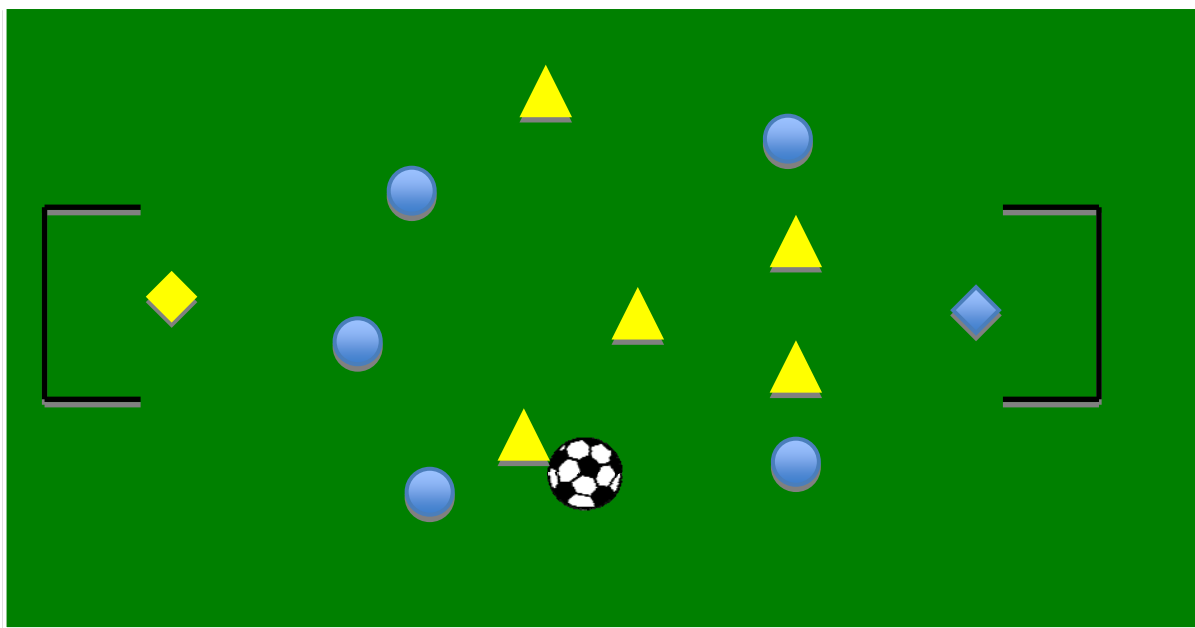
Progression:

1. Get in groups of three, two balls per each group
2. One player in the center at a time, going back and forth between two players with balls on their hands
3. Good throwing technique is crucial for this drill to work. Ball should go high enough for the center player to have time to get under the ball.
4. Change the central player after 30 seconds to avoid head aches
5. Progress into jumping headers if players are able to use forehead for heading
6. Players can try and take two contacts with the head, the first contact going high and second back to the partner.

Heading Drill Three (Heading, fun, game situation)

Progression:

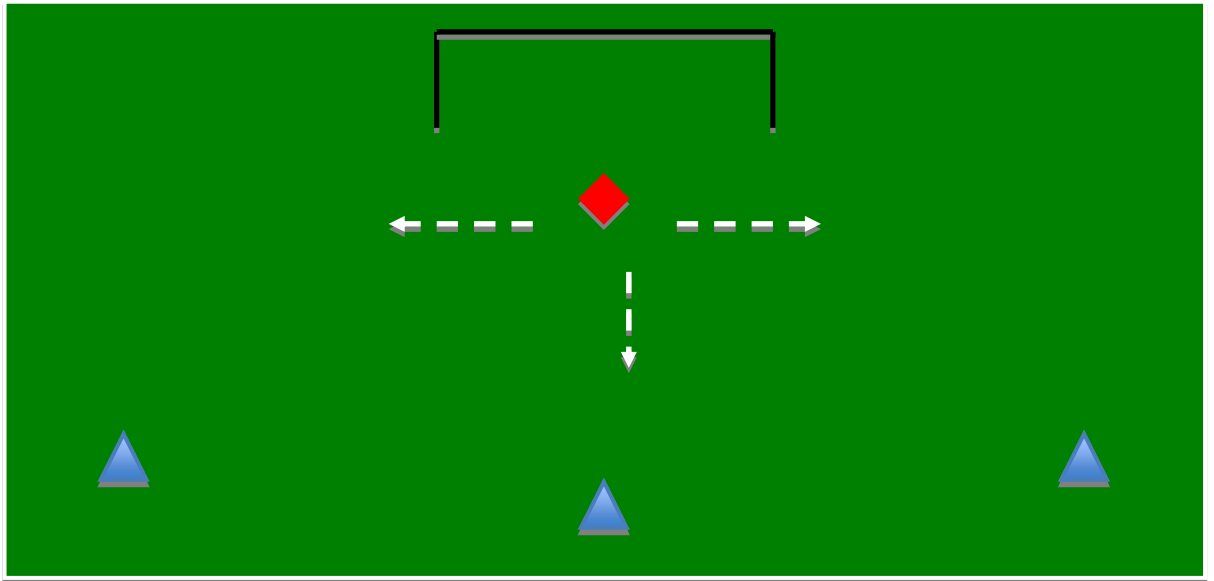
1. Split team into half, with two goals and two goalkeepers
2. This drill also works as a great warm up
3. With one ball in the area, both teams try to score on opponent's goal
4. Passing is only done by throwing the ball in the air and heading to a teammate. Once possession of the ball, players can't move.
5. Defensive team can only get the ball through interception
6. If the team passes the ball in the air without using hands and scores, they will add the amount of passes to the score. For example, team blue player 1 throws the ball in the air, heads it to player 2 who passes the ball by one header to player 3 who heads the ball in goal by one touch. This would count as two goals. If player 2 received the ball with hands and passed it to player 3, it would have been one goal. So only one touch heading passes count as an extra goal.



8 GoalkeepingDrills

The goalkeeping drills are split into four different sections: Positioning, footwork, handwork and diving. There will be one example drill for each of the goalkeeping skill.

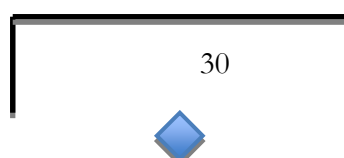
8.1 Positioning

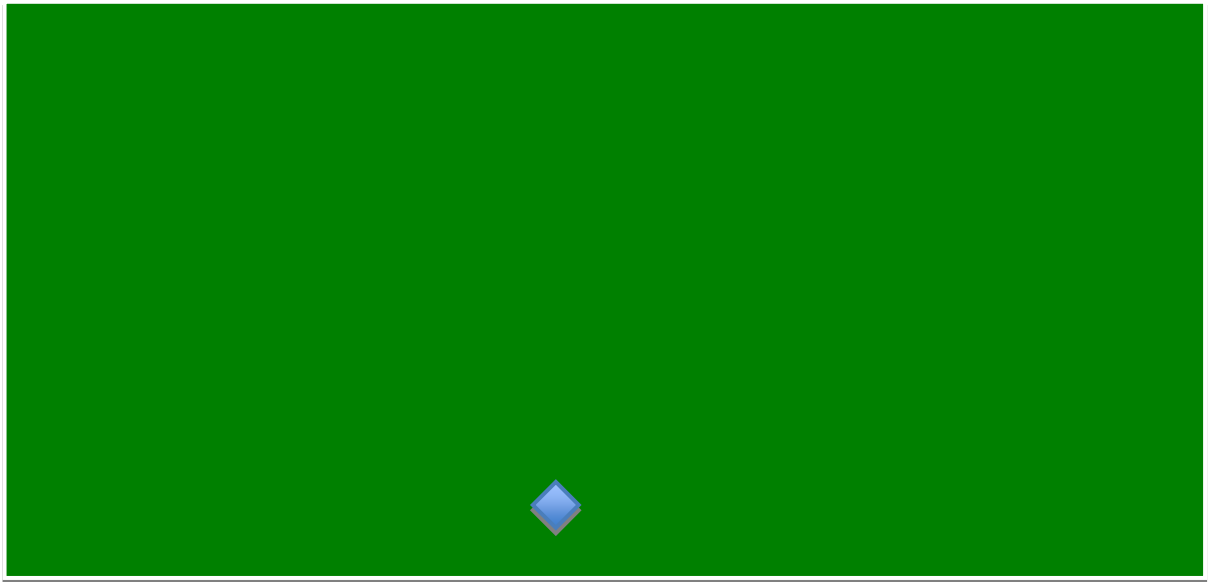


Progression:

1. There are three field players positioned outside the penalty box, each with a few balls
2. The goalkeeper will have to position himself according to where the shot is taken
3. The coach will be behind the goal making sure the goalkeeper is in correct line with the shot, covering the right angles and moving to place correctly
4. The goalkeeper will have to be ready to move quickly to where the next player will shoot from
5. Goalkeeper should not be standing on the goal line, but come out a few meters to cover more of the goal
6. With correct positioning the goalkeepers should not have to dive too much

8.1 Handwork

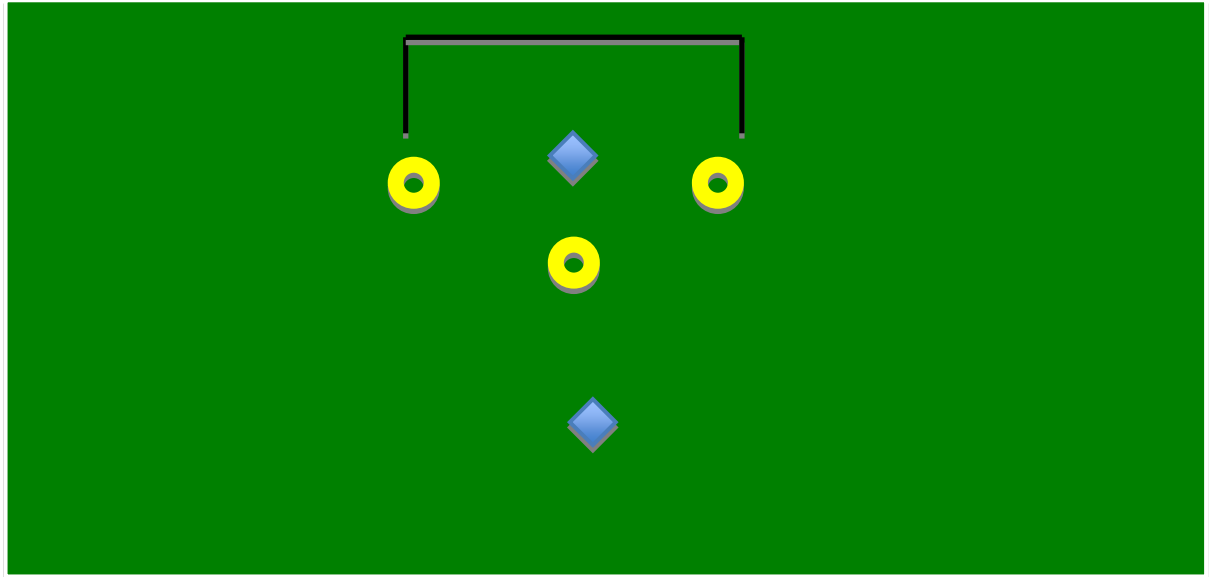




Progression:

1. Two goalkeepers stand face to face inside the box, the other goalkeeper by the goal and the other by the penalty spot
2. The goalkeepers will start to throw the ball to each other under arm with not too much power to get used to catching the ball
3. Next step is to throw the ball under arm on the ground so that the goalkeepers get used to catching the ball from the ground, using one of these techniques: Picking up the ball with straight legs, or one of the knees on the ground. The important point is to have body behind the ball
4. Next the goalkeepers can take more distance so that the other goalkeeper is on the line of the 16 - box. Now the other goalkeeper will start to either throw or kick the ball at the other goalkeeper. First shots should go towards the keeper, both low and high shots. Change roles after a while
5. After changing roles, the goalkeeper taking shots can start to shoot to the corners as well, from different angles. Change roles

8.2 Footwork and Diving



Progression:

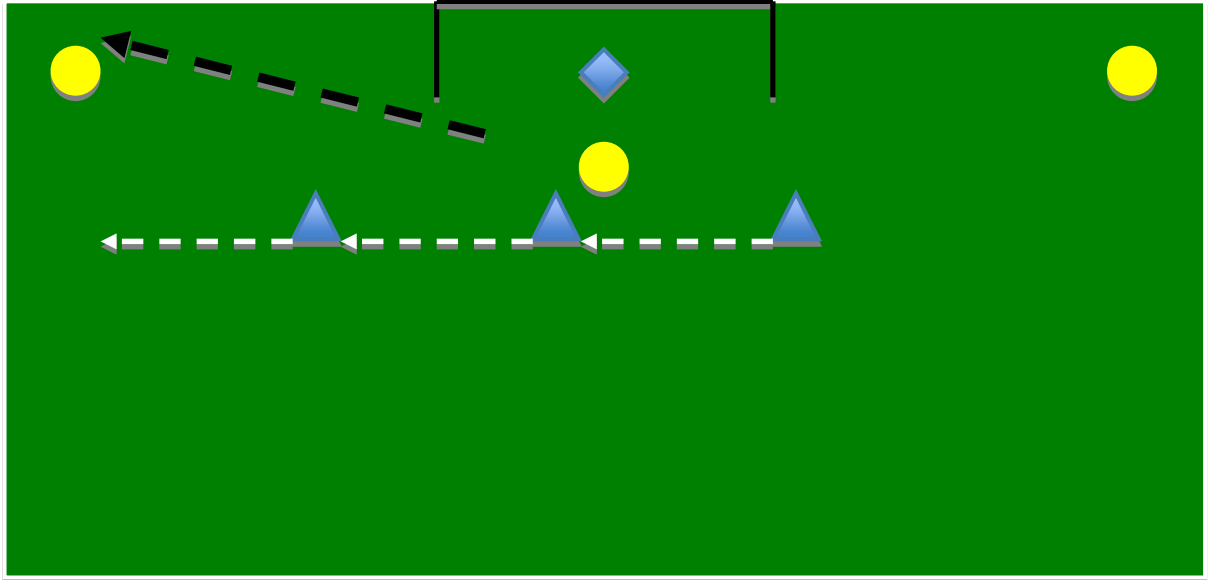
1. Two goalkeepers face to face. The other one by the goal and other by penalty spot
2. The goalkeeper by penalty spot shouts “right”, “left”, or “straight”. The goalkeeper in goal has to go touch the cone mentioned with his hand, before coming back to catch the ball
3. Throws should be easy enough for the goalkeeper to cushion the ball
4. The main focus in this drill is to work on crossover and side steps while facing the ball
5. After both goalies have done the footwork drill, the next step is to make the goalkeeper dive doing the same idea as previously but this time throwing the ball further to the corners
6. Before this is done few throws can be done without touching the cones to get the idea how to dive correctly
7. Throws should be going both on the ground and high
8. Goalkeepers should take enough steps to be able cushion the ball rather than punching it to the side

9 TeamTactics

This guide will not go too deep into team tactics but will cover a basic drill how to keep defensive line tight and once possession of the ball, build a counter attack keeping

the ball on the ground. Coaches should be reinforcing playing the ball on the ground rather than shooting the ball high and hoping it reaches own teammates.

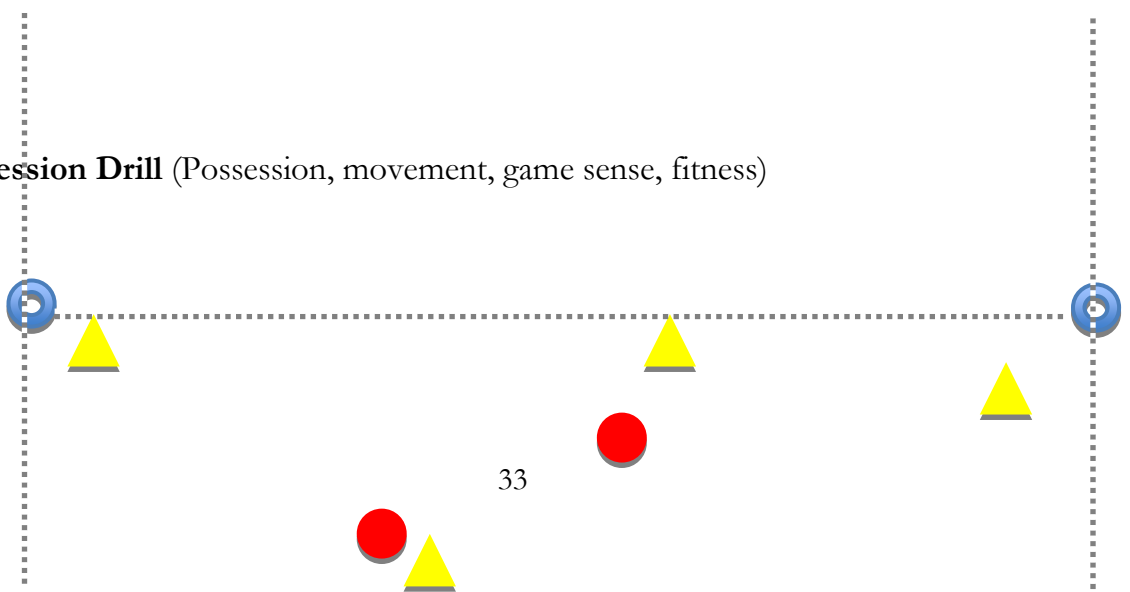
Defensive Drill



Progression:

1. There are three defenders and three attackers, one goalkeeper
2. Central attacker decides which way he/she wants to pass. Defenders will move accordingly towards that direction where the pass is made. The idea is to keep the defensive line tight so that no easy passes can be made in between the defenders.
3. The goalkeepers or central back should be organizing the defensive line, by directing which way to move.
4. To get the drill started the attackers are not allowed to attempt scoring but to hold onto possession, making the defenders move from side to side
5. When players get the idea then attackers may attempt to score

Possession Drill (Possession, movement, game sense, fitness)





Progression:

1. This drill is a 7 vs. 3 game situation
2. The area should be big enough for the players to get the idea of the drill
3. Start off by passive defenders to make sure everyone gets involved
4. Once everyone has the idea, 1 minute periods of three defenders trying to get the ball away
5. Focus on good communication, accurate passing and moving to open space
6. This is a more advanced drill and requires the players to have foundation in basic technical skills in order to work efficiently
7. If too easy, divide the team into three equal teams and three different colors. Then one team at a time is the defending team while the other two hold onto possession. Also 1-minute periods.
8. This drill is high intensity so also great for fitness

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