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BELWEST FOXES SOCCER CLUB INC.

“TACTICAL PLAY U11 +” DEFENDING AS A TEAM, PASS AND MOVE, FORMATIONS AND SMALL SIDED GAMES

Talent, skill and fitness are all important, but for a soccer team to fulfil its potential it must be more than a mere collection of individuals. In short, the ‘whole’ must be more than the sum of its parts. Cooperation, organisation and discipline are all required, and it is the job of the coach to foster these qualities in junior players.

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AGE-GROUP GUIDELINES

MAIN FOCUS	AGE GROUP & COMPETITION FORMAT	TEAM GUIDELINES	TIC EMPHASIS
Learning to master the ball	U/8-U/7 4v4	No formation / tactics consist of only very general instructions	Setting a 'TIC' for football
Learning to act with the ball purposefully	U/8-U/8 7v7	1-3-3 formation/basic tactical instructions/everyone plays all positions	TIC
Learning to play together purposefully	U/10-U/11 9v9	1-3-3-3 formation/limited tactical instructions/talent for specific positions more clear (but still flexible)	TI
Learning the positions and basic tasks in 11 v 11	U/12-U/13 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Extending tactical instruction, explaining the positions and basic tasks	TIC
Learning how the basic tasks link together	U/14-U/15 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Choloy/ specialising for a positions + corresponding tactical instruction	TIC
Learning how to play as a team	U/16-U/17 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Extending development on one position related to the team's output	TIC Football conditioning
Performing/winning as a team	U/18-U/19 11v11	1-4-3-3 formation: Perfection per position and as a team; result-oriented teamwork	TIC Football conditioning
T : Technique I : Insight C : Communication			

ENJOYMENT IS THE THING, NOT WINNING!

When children are training or playing games against other teams they need a fun environment where they can play without pressure. The game result, for younger players, should be irrelevant.

If the emphasis is on winning matches or the competition, the development process is doomed to failure and the fun of junior play is replaced by the pressures and frustrations of adult football.

A study of youth sport values showed that the most important values were:

- enjoyment
- personal achievement

The least important value was:

- winning

The junior coach must value, above all else, the individual development and welfare of every single player. Research has shown that the emphasis should be on the child experiencing fun and excitement. Children at this age are still sampling many sports and activities; football coaches can have an impact on which sport the child will choose.

DEFENSIVE PRINCIPLES

At junior level, the art of defending is not about winning last-ditch tackles or making telepathic interceptions. Instead, it is about working as a team to win back possession by applying systematic pressure to the opposition.

DEFENDING AS A TEAM

Gone are the days when centre-forwards and wingers could stand on the halfway line with hands on hips if they lost possession. In the modern game, every player has defensive duties, and the team must work as a unit to win back the ball. Coaches should take time before every game to make it clear to each player which of the opposition team they are responsible for in any given situation.

All soccer players, whatever their position, need to appreciate what the coach expects of them. Junior players, however, should not be pigeonholed too soon, and you should be willing to try them in different positions before deciding where they are best deployed. For this reason, it is a good idea to involve all players in every training session.

TACKLING

It is inadvisable to spend a great deal of time practising block tackles or sliding tackles for two reasons. Firstly, there is a significant risk of players getting injured, and, secondly, junior players should be encouraged to close down and force the opposition into errors rather than dive into tackles. Junior players will often over-commit themselves when trying to make a tackle, thus giving their opponent the chance to go round them. Instead, players should direct opponents away from danger and towards covering team-mates.

DEFENDING AS A TEAM

MARKING SIZE FOR SIZE

When marking opponents at a set piece, players should be encouraged to mark 'size for size'. This means that defenders should mark attackers who are a similar size rather than continuing to take responsibility for the player they are looking after in open play. Players should stand near to their opponent, but not so close that it is easy for him or her to roll them.

CLOSING DOWN AND COVERING→

There is no surer way to confuse a junior player than to stand on the touchline barking out jargon-filled instructions. A particular favourite for many coaches is the phrase 'close down'. It is, however, pointless using such soccer shorthand unless you have first taken the time to explain exactly what you mean on the training ground. A small-sided practice game is ideal for teaching youngsters the principles of closing down. All you need do is let the game flow until an attacker has the ball in the final third of the field but finds the path to goal blocked. If you stop the game now, you can explain how you want your defender to combat the opposition's attacking threat.

THE THEORY

When faced with an attacking team moving forward, your team must know exactly what is expected of them. The aim is to make the play compact, halving the pitch and concentrating all defensive effort accordingly. For the system to work, every player should have a job:

1. CLOSING DOWN

The defender nearest the ball should apply direct pressure to the player with the ball in an effort to force an error. The defender should stand on the balls of his or her feet, side-on to the opponent and with eyes fixed on the ball. The aim is to direct the attacker in towards fellow defenders, who may be able to win the ball. This is done by standing outside the line of the attacker's run.

2. FIRST COVER

The second-nearest player moves round on the cover to act as an insurance policy in case the attacker gets past the first defender. The cover defender should take up a position on an imaginary line between the ball and the centre of the goal.

3. REMAINING COVER

Any remaining defenders should shuffle across the pitch to occupy the half of the pitch that is currently under attack.



The red team defends perfectly to see off a blue attack. As the move progresses, the red defenders shuffle across the pitch, providing cover and applying pressure to the opponent in possession. The effect is that the pitch is 'halved' with all four defenders concentrated in the active area of the pitch. At the start of the attacking team's move, A1 has the ball on the edge of the penalty area. D1 moves toward A1 and closes him down. D2, in turn, moves to his right to offer cover and positions himself in a line directly between the ball and the centre of the goal. D3 and D4 also move across and keep a watchful eye on A2 and A3. With no other option, A1 has to turn away from goal and pass the ball to A4 who shifts the point of attack to the opposite flank, whereupon the red team will repeat the same routine.

TIP

When faced with an advancing opposition, defenders should try to make the play compact, focussing defensive resources on the half of the pitch under attack. It is better to ignore a player out wide on the far side of the pitch than to reduce the number of covering players nearer to the action. A far greater threat would be caused by an attacker exploiting space through the middle of the pitch than out wide.

INSIDE OR OUT?

There is much debate about whether to 'show' attacking players inside (i.e. in towards goal) or outside (down the wings). The consensus now is that the safest route is to show opponents in toward covering team-mates. If a defender does not have the benefits of any cover players, it is advisable to guide the attacker away from goal and down the flank.

THE SAFE ROUTE INSIDE →



The white-shirted attacker has his path to goal blocked by a defender.

THE RISKY PATH OUTSIDE →



This time, the blue-shirted defender offers his opponent space on the outside.



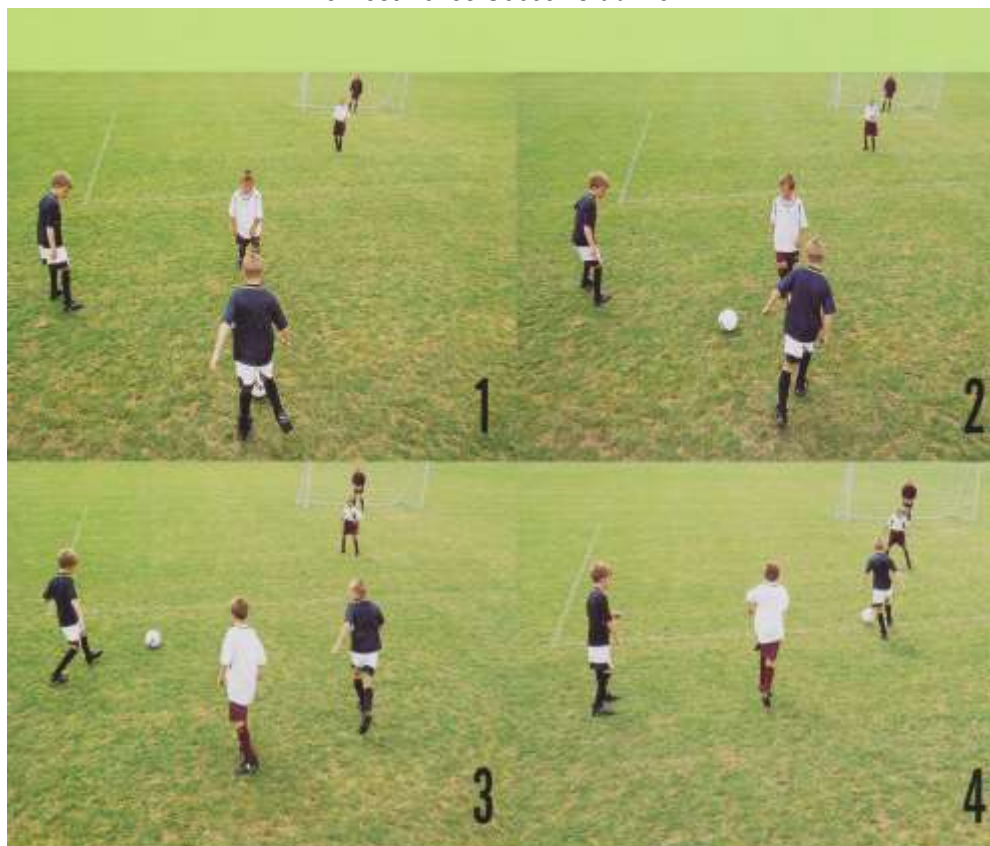
2 The defender positions himself just outside the line of the ball, and the attacker is guided in towards goal and also towards a covering defender.

3 The first defender holds his position, forcing the attacker to run across the pitch and the covering player nips in to win the ball.



2 The attacker moves forward into the space, where there are no covering defenders, and whips in a cross.

3 A second attacker collects the ball and is now in possession in a dangerous position in the penalty area.



PASS AND MOVE

Passing a football to a team-mate should be a simple enough task, but for some junior players it seems to be the hardest thing in the world. Dribbling, juggling, shooting . . . 'no problem, coach!', but ask them to lay the ball off to a colleague rather than take on a defender, and you can expect some old-fashioned looks from your young players. However, as a coach or parent, it is your job to teach your soccer prodigies the value of simple pass-and-move tactics, while also explaining that they do not always have to jink their way around three defenders to be a good player.

← THE WALL PASS

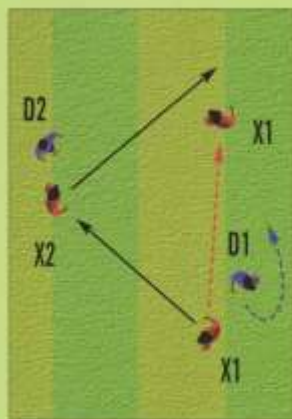
Contrary to what most young players believe, a burst of pace and a drop of the shoulder is not necessarily the most effective way to get past an opponent. A safer and far more straightforward option is the wall pass (also called the one-two or the give-and-go).

1 The blue-shirted attacker has his path to goal blocked by a defender on the edge of the 18-yard box. With the goal in such close proximity, the attacker contemplates taking on his opponent.

2 He resists the temptation to drive forward and, instead, plays the ball into the feet of his team-mate on the left. Once he has played the ball, rather than stand and admire his pass, he makes a forward run past the defender. It is this run that is the key to the success of the wall pass. Communication is also important, and players should give a shout of 'give and go' as they pass the ball so that their team-mates know their intention.

3 The second attacker plays an angled pass into the path of his on-running team-mate. The ball must be played away from any defenders and should be rolled along the ground.

4 The blue-shirted attacker runs onto the ball and bears down on goal, while the defender is left trailing in his wake.



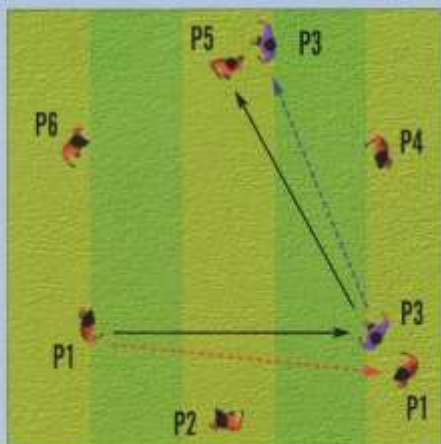
The attacking team (the Xs) have their path forward blocked by defenders, who appear to have their opponents well marked. However, X1 passes the ball to X2, who returns the ball into X1's path. Defender 1 now has to turn and chase, handing the initiative to the attacking side and X1, who breaks forward in possession of the ball.

PRACTICE DRILL – PASS AND MOVE ↓

When junior players makes a successful pass, their instinctive reaction is to stand back and admire the quality of the delivery. But, as all good coaches know, there is no excuse for standing still during a match. Once a player has passed the ball, his first thought should be to get into a position from where he can receive the ball back again. Put simply, junior players must learn to pass and move, and the following drill should help make running off the ball become a habit.

DRILL DETAIL

- Space a group of players equidistantly around a circle that is 20m (22yds) in diameter.
- Set a boundary of cones around the outside the circle to prevent the players from extending it and making the exercise easier.
- Get players to pass the ball across the circle and into the feet of a colleague.
- As the ball is received, the player who passed it follows the ball's path, running across the circle to take the place of his team-mate, who, in turn, passes the ball and moves off after it.
- This exercise should be practised regularly, though its duration should never exceed ten minutes.



P1 passes to P3 and then follows the ball, taking the place of P3 in the circle. P3 in turn passes the ball to P5 and then takes his or her place. And so the drill continues.

SETTING THE BALL

The centre-forward has traditionally been regarded as the player who finishes off an attacking move, coming into the play at the final moment to carry out the critical act of putting the ball into the net. However, in the modern game, strikers do much more, and in a good, passing team they should play a pivotal role in setting up attacks. By 'setting' or 'bouncing' the ball off the centre forward, your team will simultaneously move forwards and open up a range of attacking options.

THE UNSELFISH OPTION ↓

When the ball is played into the feet of a striker on the edge of the box, his first thought will be to try and turn his marker and fire in a shot at goal. If, however, he controls the ball and sets it back to the midfielder, who had played the original pass, he will set up a better shooting chance.



1 The red team's number 9 is in possession and surges out of midfield.



2 Number 9 plays the ball into the feet of his team-mate, the centre-forward, who gets in position to shield the ball from the white-shirted defender.



3 The centre-forward controls the ball and, using a sidefoot technique, pushes it into the path of his oncoming team-mate.

4 The number 9 runs onto the ball and drives it towards goal.

A VARIETY OF OPTIONS

A ball played into the feet of a centre-forward can give an attacking team a variety of options, although only if the supporting players make quick and decisive runs off the ball.

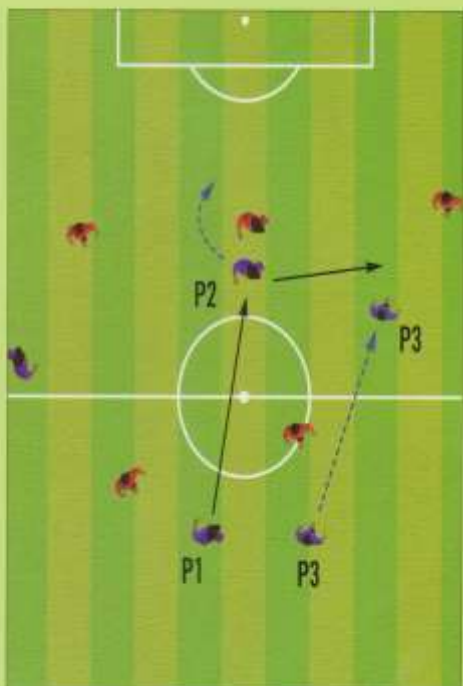
OPTION 1: The centre-forward returns the ball to the onrushing midfielder, who shoots for goal (see photographs).

OPTION 2: The centre-forward returns the ball to the midfielder, and then turns and spins back towards goal. The midfielder can then push the ball forward into the path of the centre-forward, who has now moved beyond his marker.

OPTION 3: One of the most effective and simple tactics is for the centre-forward to receive the ball and then knock it out wide to a third player, who can then build an attack down the wing. The centre-forward, in turn, moves forward in anticipation of a cross once the ball has been worked out to the flank.



The blue team are attacking the goal at the top of this illustration, and they have possession with P1. The ball is passed into the feet of P2 (the centre-forward), who 'sets the ball', laying it back into the path of the onrushing P1. As P1 collects the return pass, P2 has the option of spinning into space on either side of his marker. He is now available for a pass while simultaneously opening up space by taking his marker away from the middle of the pitch.



The blue team are once more in possession with P1, who again passes the ball into the centre-forward (P2). This time, however, P2 simply controls the ball and pushes a pass into the path of P3, who is moving forward down the right wing. P2 then spins off to the left to get in position for a cross or a return pass.

SMALL-SIDED FORMATIONS

At junior level many competitive leagues play small-sided games, usually eight-a-side. It is felt that younger players benefit from the fact that they each enjoy a greater share of possession than if they played a full 11-a-side game. Another factor is that younger children often struggle to cope with the additional physical exertions of playing on a full-size pitch, while many of them are also unable to kick the ball with sufficient power to make any headway.

FORMATIONS

It is easy for coaches to get unnecessarily preoccupied with systems of play, tactics and formations, but it is vital to remember that young players will neither be capable nor interested in remembering a long list of complex instructions during a game. At junior level, good tactics are simple tactics. It is important, however, to employ a formation that suits the abilities and ambitions of your team.

MOVE PLAYERS AROUND

Some young players are keen to embrace labels, and seem desperate to pigeonhole themselves as 'right-backs' or 'central midfielders': at the earliest opportunity. However, a nine- or ten-year-old cannot possibly know what their best position is yet. At junior level, it is important that coaches encourage individuals to try out different positions so that they can find out where their strengths and weaknesses lie.



← 3-3-1

This is the standard formation for an eight-a-side team. A bank of three defenders is protected by three midfielders, who simultaneously support a lone striker. The system works in a similar way to 11-a-side's popular 4-4-2 formation. For 3-3-1 to work effectively, however, it is vital that the centre-forward plays a pivotal role, setting the ball for his team-mates. Since the striker plays alone, there is little point in him trying to turn his marker as he will easily be outnumbered by supporting players. It is far better to knock the ball back towards the midfield and await reinforcements.



← 2-3-2

The 2-3-2 system is an attacking formation which relies upon midfield players to take full responsibility in defensive situations. With only two dedicated defenders, the two wide midfield players usually have to operate as part-time wing-backs, shuffling across when needed. Similarly, the second striker must also be willing to tuck into midfield if his team-mates get outnumbered. Flexibility, therefore, is the key to this system.



← 2-4-1

The 2-4-1 formation can be both an attacking and a defensive system, depending on how high up the field the two wide midfielders operate. If they tuck in alongside the central midfielders and play a conservative game, the 2-4-1 is a solid system with the emphasis on defence. If, however, the widemen play like wingers, getting up alongside the centre-forward whenever possible, then the formation becomes a far more attacking one.

Once junior teams begin to compete on full-sized pitches, games become 11-a-side and coaches have to learn a whole new catalogue of tactical systems. This time, however, the formations all have familiar names and are already employed by the big professional teams and managers.

SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS ARE BEST

When preparing a team for a match, players will invariably switch off if team-talks become too long or too boring. Simple directions given to each player one at a time are the most effective way to get your team following orders out on the pitch on a match day.

4-4-2 AND 4-2-4 →

The most popular formation in world football is the tried-and-trusted 4-4-2 system that came to prominence during the 1960s. It was the system with which Brazil's famous team of 1970 – still widely regarded as the greatest team of all time – won the World Cup, and it is also the formation employed by successful club sides like Manchester United and Bayern Munich.

The foundation of a good 4-4-2 system is a solid defence. The two central defenders are flanked by two full-backs (a left-back and a right-back). The full-backs play an important attacking role but should not both go forward at the same time; if they did, the two centre-backs would be left exposed to a counter-attack. If one of the full-backs pushes into a forward position, the opposite full-back should tuck in to support the other defenders, effectively giving the team a back-three. The raiding full-back supports a midfield that already boasts four players, so the traditional 4-4-2 has now become a more modern 3-5-2. From this example you can see how different tactics can overlap depending on circumstances.

Similarly, the second bank of four players – the midfield – can also switch shape to affect a change of formation. By pushing forward into advanced positions, almost up alongside the central strikers, the two wide midfielders can operate as orthodox wingers. It is a tactic that is often used by teams who are chasing a game and trying to score a goal at all costs.





← 3-5-2 OR 5-3-2

The 3-5-2 system has been popular in much of Europe for more than 20 years. It offers defensive security through the sweeper or third centre-back, and flexibility, since it can be both a defensive system (5-3-2) and an attacking solution too (3-5-2). Most coaches regard this system as one that is fundamentally defensive, but, in truth, it is as attacking as the players and coach want it to be. In many cases, if teams are happy to attack from a solid base and use wingbacks, a 5-3-2 system quickly evolves into 3-5-2.



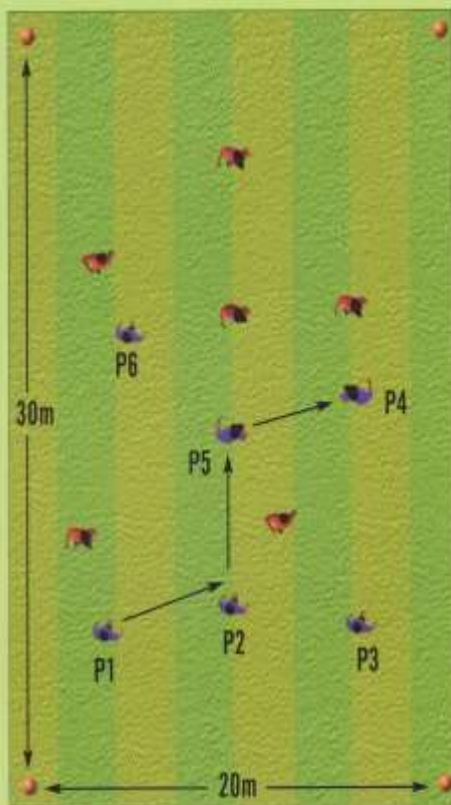
← 4-3-3

The 4-3-3 formation is rarely used today, although it has been employed by some clubs in recent times, including Leeds United in the English Premier League. Under this system, the full-backs are expected to provide both attacking width and defensive cover. A two-man central defence is also employed, thus providing cover for the marauding full-backs. In midfield and attack the 4-3-3 formation is made up of two banks of three. However, the attacking and defensive responsibilities of these players varies tremendously according to the ideas of individual coaches.

Small-sided games provide an effective and flexible framework for coaches to teach junior players a variety of techniques, from first touch to closing down. They can also be used to teach players tactical responsibilities and the importance of team play.

GAME WITHOUT GOALS →

Getting junior players to pass the ball is not an easy task, but this training drill should encourage even the most greedy of centre forwards to pass to a team-mate. A pitch is marked out using cones (as illustrated), but there are no goals. The idea is that by removing the goals then players are left free to concentrate on their passing unfettered by the temptation to dribble past opponents and shoot at goal. Points are awarded for three consecutive successful passes. As players get more proficient, the number of passes can be increased. This drill demonstrates the importance of moving off the ball and retaining possession.



The blue team scores a point by completing three consecutive passes (from P1 to P2 to P5 and on to P4).

SMALL-SIDED GAMES

STOP BALL ↓

An alternative possession game can be played with only minor modifications to the pitch used for the 'game without goals'.

1. By setting a gate of two cones spaced 1m (3ft 4ins) apart at each end of the pitch, players can focus on moving the ball forwards rather than merely on retaining possession.
2. The objective is now to stop the ball on the line between the two cones to score a "goal".



KEEP IT SIMPLE

A keep-ball session, (see page 46) in which players are restricted to a set number of touches, usually two, is a simple but effective way to teach junior players the key skills of possession football.

INNOVATION AND OBSERVATION

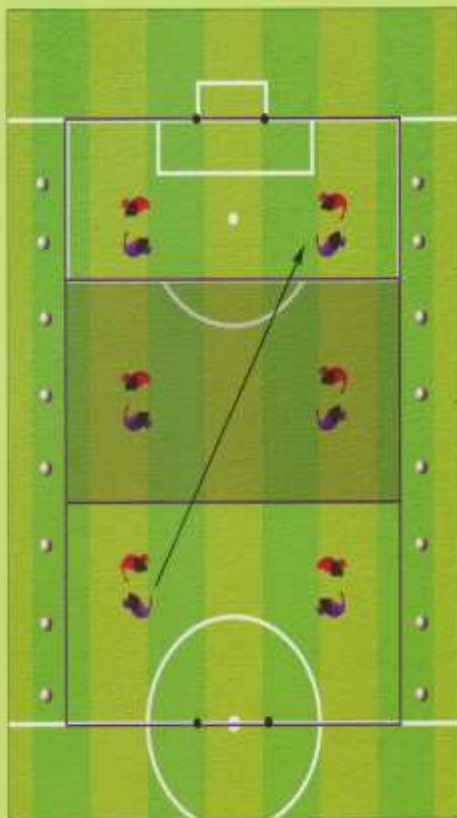
There are countless different small-sided drills with infinite variations and numerous names, but there is still room for you to innovate. Do not be afraid to change things around or to adapt a recognized drill to meet your needs.

You should also be prepared to stop a small-sided game to highlight examples of both good and bad play. If, for example, your drill is intended to encourage players to use the width of the pitch, but they are bunched around the ball, you should blow your whistle and ask the players to stop where they are so that you can point out the error of their ways. You should always observe small-sided games, just as you would any training drill, taking time to encourage good play and correct any faults.

CONDITIONED GAMES →

A conditioned game can help players think about their positioning and their role within the team. In the example illustrated, the pace of the game is restricted by the use of three zones (defence, midfield and attack).

Two players from each team are positioned in each zone, and the defenders and attackers must never leave their respective zones. Midfielders, meanwhile, can move between zones, fetching and carrying the ball for their team-mates. In theory, the defenders focus on the job of marking the opposing team's attackers, who in turn try to find space in a restricted area. The midfielders must try to retain concentration and cover the forward runs of their counterparts.

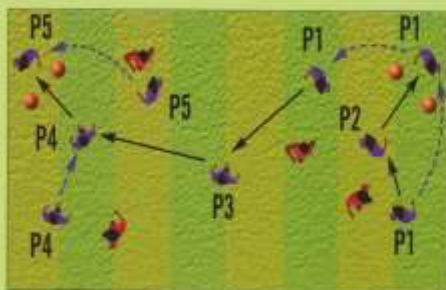


In this moderate-intensity conditioned game, players are restricted to particular areas to limit their exertion while tackling is not allowed in the middle third of the pitch. Passes are allowed between any zones (as illustrated) and balls are ready on the sidelines to keep the game running.

← GAME WITH FOUR GOALS

A game with four goals may sound confusing, but it should help improve positional sense and ensure that players begin to use the whole pitch. Each goal is made up of a gate of two cones spaced 1m (3ft 4ins) apart positioned approximately 2m (6ft 8ins) inside the corner of the pitch. To score goals, players must pass the ball between the two cones, but the ball must not leave the playing area. Play is continuous but consecutive goals cannot be scored in the same corner. As a result, players must switch the play from one side of the pitch to the other, thereby encouraging them to stay out wide and in their positions.

- 1 Take the time to clearly explain this drill, as this coach is doing. Players often get confused because they cannot score consecutive goals in the same corner.
- 2 As the red-shirted team score in the right-hand goal, one of their teammates has already moved into position in the opposite corner, ready for when play is switched.



The top diagram shows the pitch layout for the game with four goals, while the lower illustration depicts the blue team scoring two consecutive goals in opposite corners. P1 passes to P2 and then moves round the back of the goal himself. P2 scores by shooting between the two cones and P1 collects the ball, carrying it a short distance before passing to P3. With the ball in the middle of the pitch, P4 moves into position and receives a pass from P3. Meanwhile, P5 has moved round the back of the goal to await P4's shot.



NOTES