

THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL CURRICULUM

“THE ROADMAP TO INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS”

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Skill Acquisition Phase

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FOOTBALL
FEDERATION
AUSTRALIA

3.

Skill Acquisition Phase



- In the Skill Acquisition Phase the coach must focus exclusively on providing a solid foundation of **technical skill**
- If the player does not gain this **skill foundation** during this phase it will be very difficult to make it up later
- No amount of fitness or competitive spirit will ever compensate for deficiencies in **functional game skills**

The Skill Acquisition Phase (U/10-U/13)

The characteristics of children this age are:

- They are highly motivated and enthusiastic
- They are competitive, like challenges and want to show they're the best
- They are well balanced and coordinated
- They are very adaptive to learning motor skills
- Although still self-centred, they start to learn how to work together
- They are sensitive to criticism and failure (praise is important)
- They are physically and mentally ready for a more structured approach to training

As mentioned above, in the period before entering the growth spurt that goes hand in hand with puberty, children are well balanced and coordinated. This makes them very adaptive to developing motor skills (techniques) especially since this is one of the brain's key development periods.

The Japanese call this phase of 'turbo charged' technical development the 'Golden Age of motor learning'. In no other development phase in life will motor learning happen faster than here. As a logical consequence of the above, it makes sense that we make optimal use of this period to lay a sustainable technical foundation.

TECHNICAL SKILLS MUST BE DEVELOPED NOW

(if we miss out here it will hamper us for the rest of our playing career).

Hopefully it now makes perfect sense why we call this phase the 'Skill Acquisition Phase'. The focus during this period is on the development of the 'functional game skills'.

These are the technical skills you need to perform effectively during a game.

The word 'functional' emphasises the difference to 'un-functional' tricks, which may be fun to see and do but useless during the game.

The 4 Core Skills:

The FFA Skill Acquisition training program focuses upon developing four core skills when in possession of the ball.

1. Striking the ball

This includes all forms of striking the ball such as short/long passing; shooting and crossing

2. First touch

Controlling the ball with all allowed body parts

3. 1 v 1

All moves, feints and accelerations to get past and away from an opponent

4. Running with the ball

At speed (with a lot of space) or 'dribbling' (in tight areas), this includes techniques for protecting the ball and changing direction.

These four core skills cover 95% of the actions of any outfield player when in possession of the ball during a game of football. The other 5% consists of actions such as heading and throw-ins.

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Of course we can also distinguish defensive skills such as various tackling techniques and it goes without saying that the defensive 1 v 1 skills are equally important and must be properly developed too.

We made the practical choice to develop the defensive skills as part of the 1 v 1 practices. Although the emphasis is on the attacking skills, we are not ignoring the defensive ones. So, in the 1 v 1 Model Sessions, coaches will find the box below with coaching tips for the defender as well the attacker.

| 1 v 1 Coaching Tips | |
|---|---|
| ATTACKER | DEFENDER |
| "Go at the defender with speed" | "Show the attacker one way/force them away from goal" |
| "Use a feint to put the defender off balance" | "Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you're able to change direction quickly" |
| "Threaten to go to one side then suddenly attack the other" | "The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down" |

As far as heading is concerned, the advice is to start developing this specific skill at the start of the Game Training Phase. At younger ages heading is a 'scary' activity and not much heading takes place anyway since most players lack the power to play aerial balls.

If heading is practised during the Skill Acquisition Phase we advise the use of so-called super light balls (specially devised for youth football).

As we've explained earlier it takes many hours of practicing and lots of repetition to properly develop the four core skills with both feet and 'automate' the techniques. Automate means that we've practised the techniques so often that we can execute them without having to consciously concentrate on the execution.

We can compare this process with learning to drive a car: in the beginning we have to consciously think of every act in the process, we even tend to look where the pedals are. But after some time we drive from A to B while having a conversation, thinking deeply about something or making a (hands free) phone call. We arrive at our destination totally unaware of the driving acts we have executed on the way: driving a car has become an automatism.

The same principle applies for mastering the core skills: many hours of purposeful practice will eventually lead to automatism and we execute the skill 'unconsciously'. When this happens we will, as a consequence, have more time for scanning our options and making decisions. With top level players the ball is 'glued' to their feet while they look around and check the options.

The principle of thousands of hours of practice leading to automatism applies to everything, from playing a violin to playing golf or football. Football however differs from golf because the technical skills must be executed under constant pressure of football-specific resistances (opponents; space; time; direction), in ever-changing situations.

Scientific research (Daniel Coyle, 'The Talent Code'; et al.) shows that in football the most educationally effective way is to develop technical skills (execution) and perception skills (decision-making) **simultaneously**.

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This 'holistic approach' is one of the essences of the FFA Coaching Philosophy which is explained in depth in chapter 4.

So, herein lies the huge challenge for anyone working with players in this important age bracket: your primary role is that of a 'skills teacher' focused on individual technical development as opposed to being a 'team coach'.

Your mission is to 'automate' the core skills through lots of repetition, but at the same time avoid 'drill' practices, where there may be repetition but no decision-making.

It's not easy to get this right!

**You'll find the Skill Acquisition Phase Model
Sessions on page 127.**



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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions



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Skill Acquisition Phase

Model Sessions

At this age the children are ready for a more structured approach to training. In every session the focus is on one of the core skills, from the beginning until the end of the session (“theme based sessions”).

The Skill Acquisition Phase sessions consist of 3 components:

1. Skill introduction, this is the warm-up as well as an introduction to the designated core skill for this session. This is the only part of the session where drill-type exercises should be used, but the creative coach can include elements of decision-making.

- Flow, no ‘stop-start coaching’.

2. Skill training, this is the part of the session where conscious teaching and learning of the designated core skill takes place.

- Lots of repetition in game realistic scenarios!
- Task-based coaching
- Effective feedback
- Use of questioning (ask players ‘why did you choose that option?’, ‘where do you think there might be more space?’, etc)

3. Skill game, a game where as much as possible all the elements of the real game are present but organised in a way that the designated core skill has to be used regularly.

- Skill games are preferably **small sided games** to stimulate the number of repetitions/touches!
- The players play, the coach observes if learning has taken place.

It is also advisable to ‘wrap-up’ the session at the end, summarising the main points of the session to enhance learning.

Since the Skill Games are games in which all the **Game Specific Resistances** are present (team-mates; opponents; goals; direction; etc) they also provide an ideal opportunity to gradually establish the basic principles of the team tasks during the main moments of the game (e.g. ‘make the field small’ when defending; ‘try to face forward’ when attacking).

In other words: the emphasis in the Skill Acquisition Phase is on **Skill Development** but this can/should not be separated from developing insight/game understanding at the same time.

If this approach is applied properly, it will provide a seamless transition into the **Game Training Phase**.

This principle also relates to the concept of Small Sided Football and appropriate coach behaviour (refer to chapter 3):

During the Skill Acquisition Phase, 2-3 sessions of 60-75 minutes plus a game is a safe weekly workload, with the following session planning guidelines:

- Welcome: 5 minutes
- Skill Introduction: 15-20 minutes
- Skill Training: 25-30 minutes
- Skill Game: 20-25 minutes
- Wrap up: 5 minutes

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On the next pages you will find three consecutive 6 week cycles (18 weeks program) and 12 Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions, 3 for each core skill with increasing difficulty. The 6 week cycles are based on the assumption that the weekly training sessions are on Tuesdays and Thursdays with a game on Saturday.

During the first cycle, Model Session 1 of each core skill is repeated every two weeks. Each time we repeat the Model Session we try to make a step-up (make the session more challenging) but only if the players are ready for it. During the second cycle, Model Session 2 of each core skill is repeated every two weeks and during the third cycle Model Session 3 of each core skill:

| Skill Acquisition Phase CYCLE 1 | Tuesday | Thursday | Saturday |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| WEEK 1 | First touch MODEL SESSION 1 | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 1 | GAME |
| WEEK 2 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 1 | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 1 | GAME |
| WEEK 3 | First touch MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | GAME |
| WEEK 4 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | GAME |
| WEEK 5 | First touch MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | GAME |
| WEEK 6 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 1 Step up (if possible) | GAME |

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| Skill Acquisition Phase CYCLE 2 | Tuesday | Thursday | Saturday | Skill Acquisition Phase CYCLE 3 | Tuesday | Thursday | Saturday |
|------------------------------------|---|---|----------|------------------------------------|---|---|----------|
| WEEK 1 | First touch MODEL SESSION 2 | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 2 | GAME | WEEK 1 | First touch MODEL SESSION 3 | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 3 | GAME |
| WEEK 2 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 2 | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 2 | GAME | WEEK 2 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 3 | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 3 | GAME |
| WEEK 3 | First touch MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | GAME | WEEK 3 | First touch MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | GAME |
| WEEK 4 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | GAME | WEEK 4 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | GAME |
| WEEK 5 | First touch MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | GAME | WEEK 5 | First touch MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | Striking the ball MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | GAME |
| WEEK 6 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 2 Step up (if possible) | GAME | WEEK 6 | Running with the ball MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | 1 v 1 MODEL SESSION 3 Step up (if possible) | GAME |

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With 3 sessions per week our advice is to limit the duration of the sessions to 60 minutes and rest the players the day before as well as the day after the game. So, with a game on Saturday, we recommend a training session on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Factors to consider:

- Performance of the players in previous training sessions
- Performance of the players in matches (NB: matches should only be assessed in terms of core skill performance, not 'team tactics'. That way, training and matches are closely and logically linked)

Observation may lead you to conclude that one core skill appears to be especially deficient in most of the players, while another is generally strong.

Possible Cycle Planning changes:

- Replace the stronger skill with the weaker one every second rotation
- Move to a 5-session rotation in which each skill is focused on once, except for the weaker one which appears twice

The best advice for a coach working with players in this age group would be to attend the **FFA Youth C Licence course**.

This will give coaches a much better understanding of the why's and how's of session planning and season planning, while developing their ability to design their own practices.

Important:

- When the kids start playing 11 v 11 while they are still in the Skill Acquisition Phase, (U12/13) there is a common tendency for coaches to become totally obsessed with results, and forget that the players are still in the skill acquisition phase. This has a very negative effect on training session content as well as Match Day behaviour.

Training must remain focused on skill development; it is poor practice and detrimental to the players to sacrifice critical skill training time in order to conduct unnecessary 'tactical' coaching.

Match Day is when the coach can start developing the players insight and understanding of the basic team and player tasks. This involves reinforcement and elaboration of the basic tasks introduced at training during Skill Games ('Get between the lines', 'Can you face forward?' 'Look for the killer pass', 'Make the field big', etc)

It is also disadvantageous for young players' development to specialize for a specific team position too early; let them experience the various positions and aim for specialisation during the Game Training phase (the rationale for this is excellently explained in the book 'Coaching Outside the Box' by Mairs and Shaw).

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 1

1. Skill introduction

Players in fours (fives is also fine, and is a way of reducing intensity, if required) with one ball between them. 2 pairs facing each other 5m-7m apart. The yellow player starts by passing the ball to the orange player and following their pass at speed.

The orange player uses their first touch to move the ball away from the yellow player, and with the second touch passes to the blue player. The orange player follows their pass and jogs to the back of the opposite line.

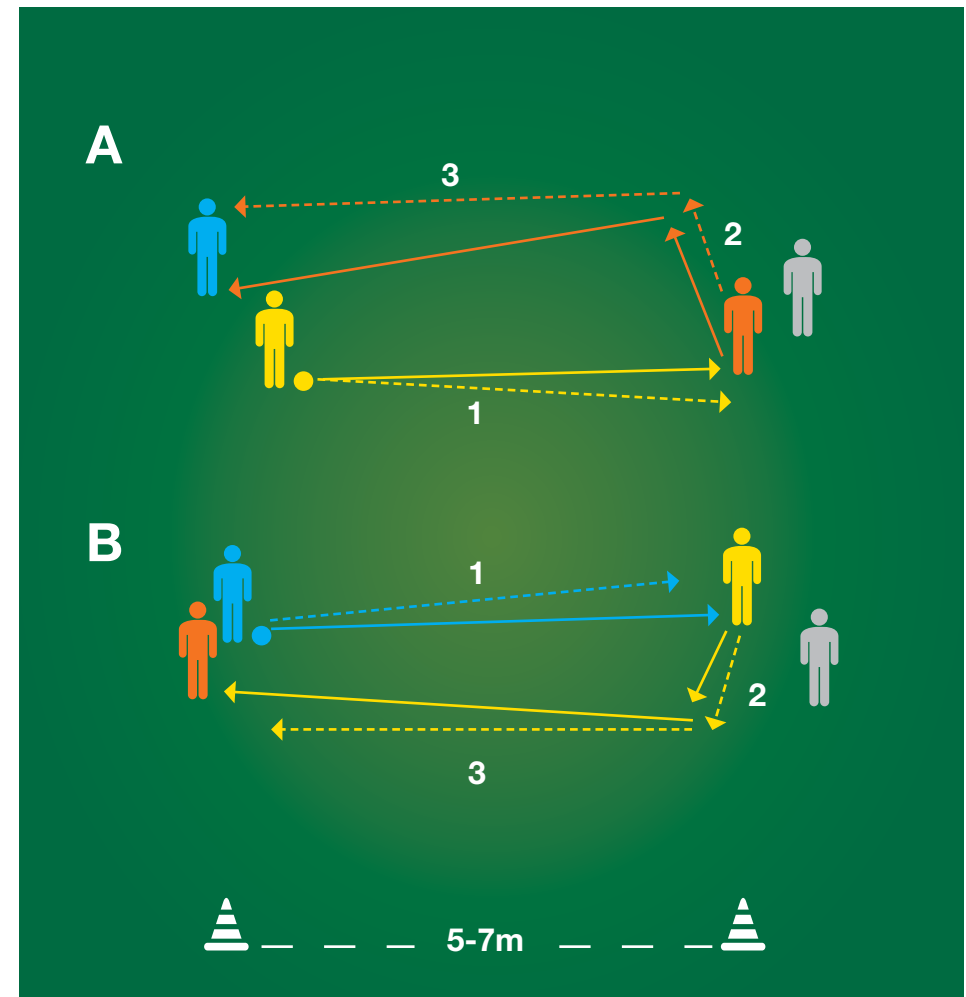
In example A, the orange player has moved the ball to the right because the yellow player approached him/her slightly to his/her left side.

In example B, the yellow player has moved the ball to the left because the blue player approached him/her to his/her right.

The coach can also direct the passer to follow the pass by running **directly** at the receiver. Therefore the receiver has the option of going left or right, ideally the receiver will fake to move the ball in one direction, and then with his/her first touch move the ball the other way.

Concluding Competition:

Which group can complete 10 passes first?



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First touch Model Session 1

2. Skill training component:

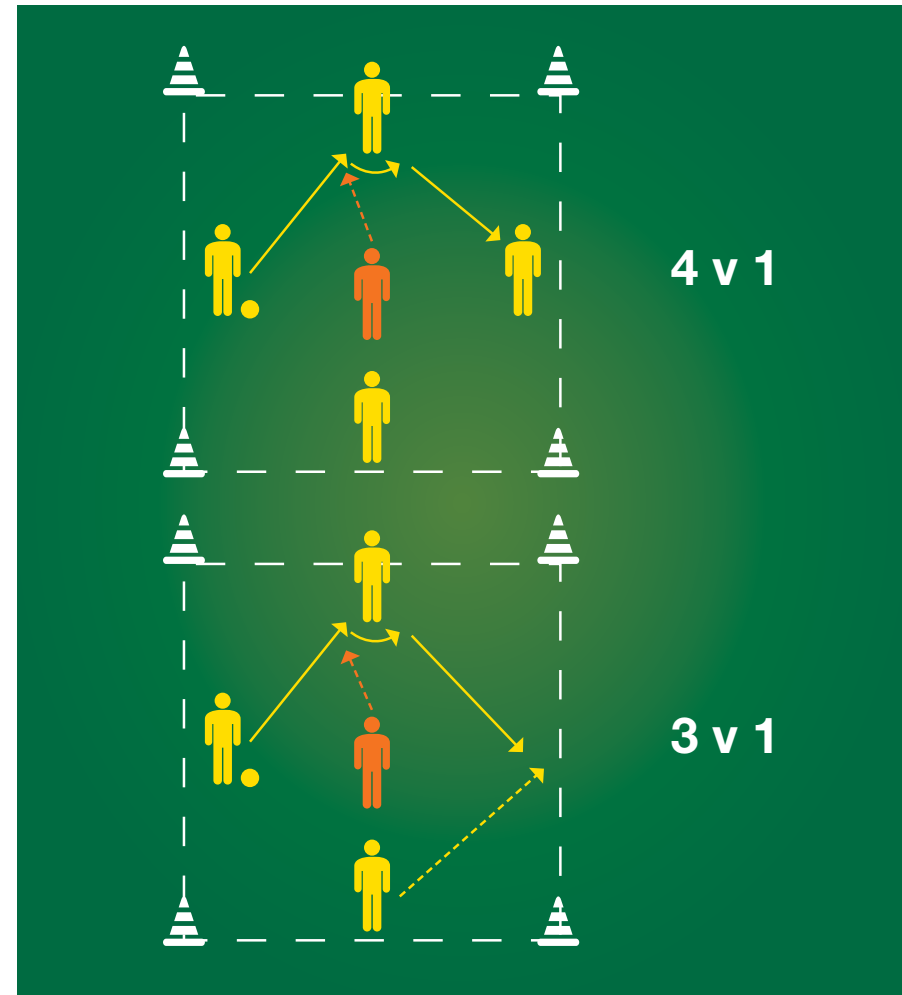
Positioning Games with **two touches** as a **mandatory** requirement (i.e. first touch = control the ball, second touch = pass the ball).

Disallowing a direct pass forces the players to have a good first touch in order to move the ball away from the defender(s) and keep possession!

Which positioning game to use depends on the level of the players and ranges from 4 v 1 (easiest), 3 v 1, 5 v 2 and 4 v 2 (most difficult).

The grid size also depends on the level and capabilities of the players with 15m x 15m as a starting point (15m x 20m for the 5 v 2).

The coach can make the exercise more challenging for the players by simply decreasing the space or easier by making the grids bigger.



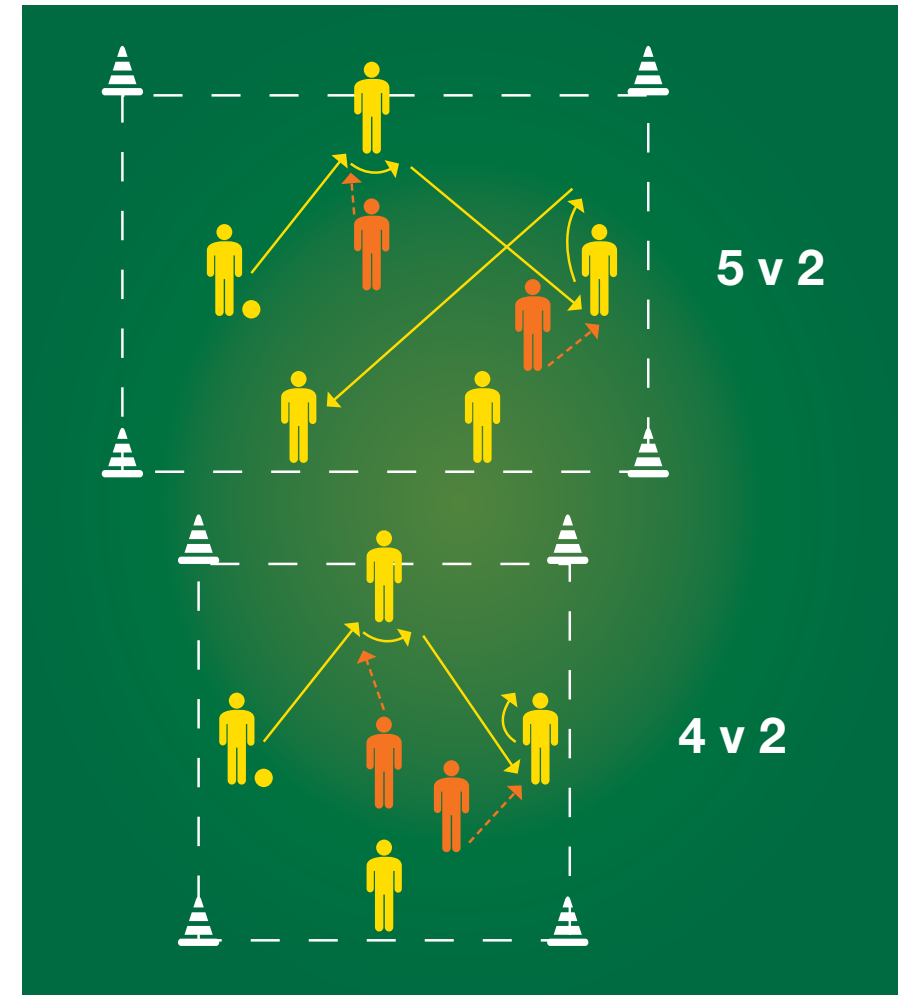
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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 1

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- “Move to support as the ball moves”
 - “Make angles (do not stand in the corners)”
 - “Keep your body open to the field”
 - “Move the ball with your first touch away from the defender(s) “
 - “Use body feints to disguise your intention”
-
- Competition: which defender(s) forces most mistakes in 1 minute



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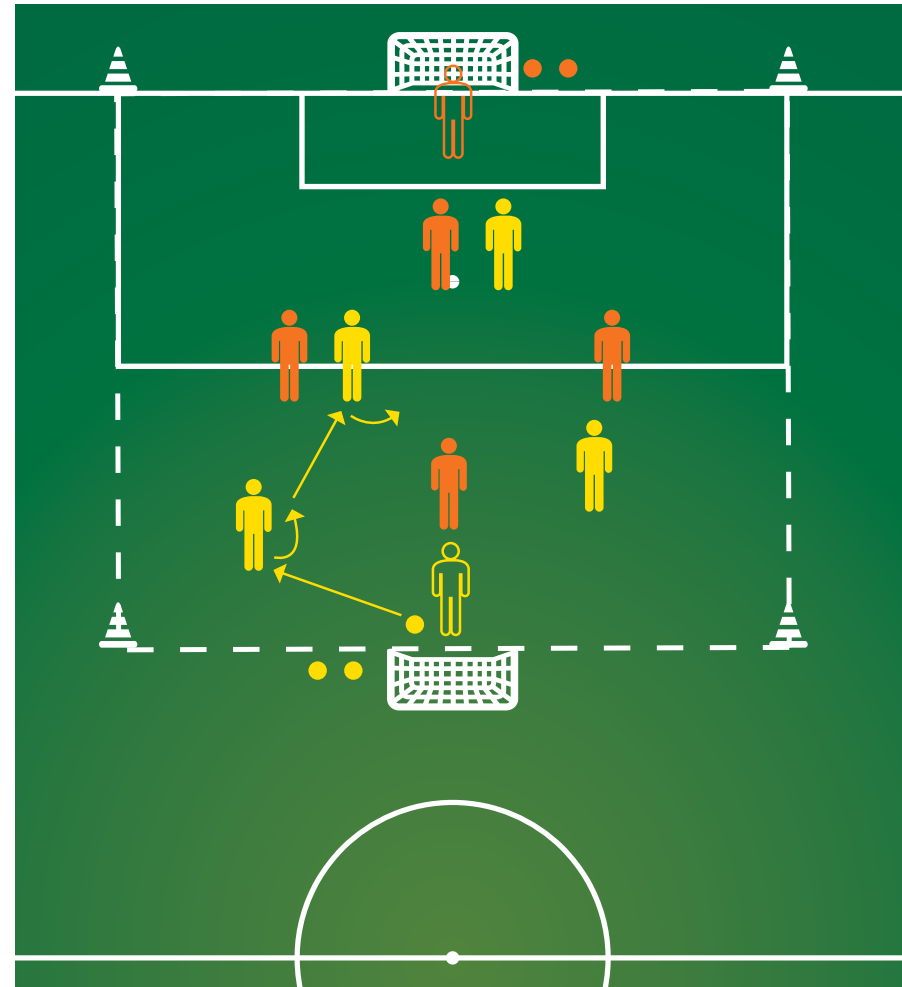
First touch Model Session 1

3. Skill Game:

5 v 5 with the restriction that with every ball contact each player **must take two touches**.

Disallowing direct play forces the players to have a good first touch in order to move the ball away from the defender(s) and keep possession!

The coach can make the game more challenging by simply decreasing the space or more easy by making the field bigger or creating a numerical advantage for the team in possession of the ball by adding a 'joker'.

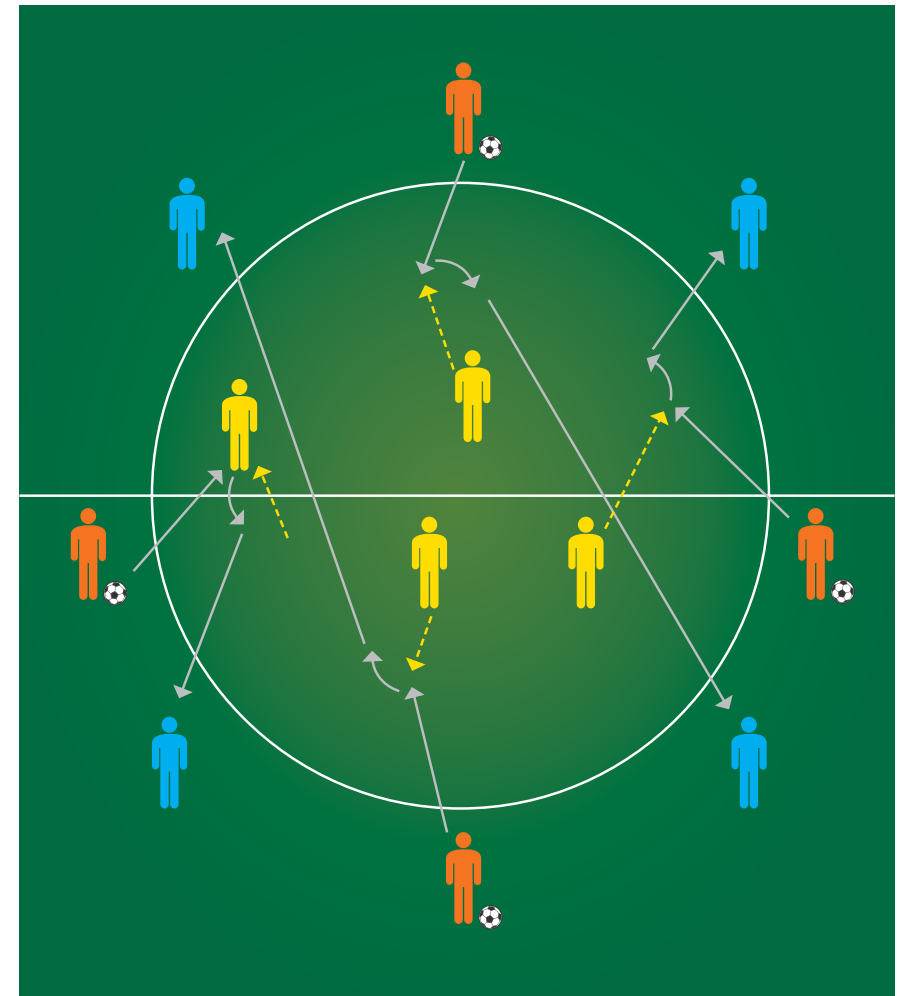


Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 2

1. Skill introduction

- In and around the centre circle 3 groups of 4 (or more) players with different colour bibs are positioned as follows:
 - a. The orange players outside the centre circle with a ball each
 - b. The blue players outside the centre circle without a ball
 - c. The yellow players inside the centre circle without a ball
- The yellow group moves around the circle calling for the ball and moving it with their first touch to pass it with their second touch to a player outside the circle who does not have a ball (anticipation, communication and awareness)
- Change roles after 1-2 min
- Only use left/right foot
- Only use inside/outside foot
- Serve out of hands to thigh/chest
- After passing the ball servers follow their pass to (passively) pressure the receiver on their 1st touch



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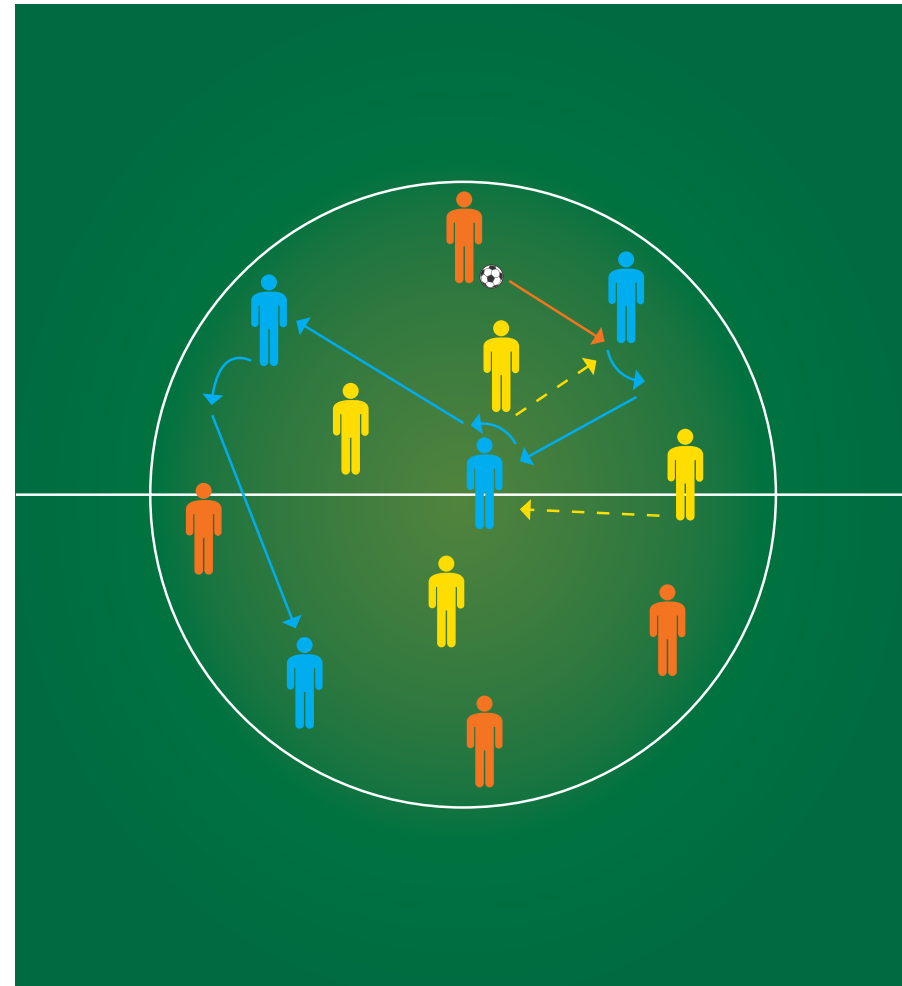
First touch Model Session 2

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- “Know beforehand to whom you are going to play the ball”
- “Try to use 2 touches only, the 1st touch to receive the ball and the 2nd touch to pass it”
- “Do not just move the ball side-ways, try to make a full turn sometimes”

Concluding game:

- 8 v 4 in centre circle, **mandatory** 2 touches to emphasise a quality 1st touch.
- Blue and orange try to keep possession with yellow defending
- Always position 1 or 2 ‘link’ players centrally
- How long does it take for yellow to make 5 or 10 interceptions? Now blue defends and then orange
- Who is the winner?



Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 2

2. Skill training component

Positioning game 4 v 4 with 4 'wall' players (8 v 4) in a 20m x 30m grid (depending on player's ability).

Mandatory 2 touches for all players including the 'walls' who must keep the ball moving (i.e. not allowed to stop the ball with their 1st touch). This simple restraint sees to it that each 1st touch must be perfect every time the player receives the ball.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

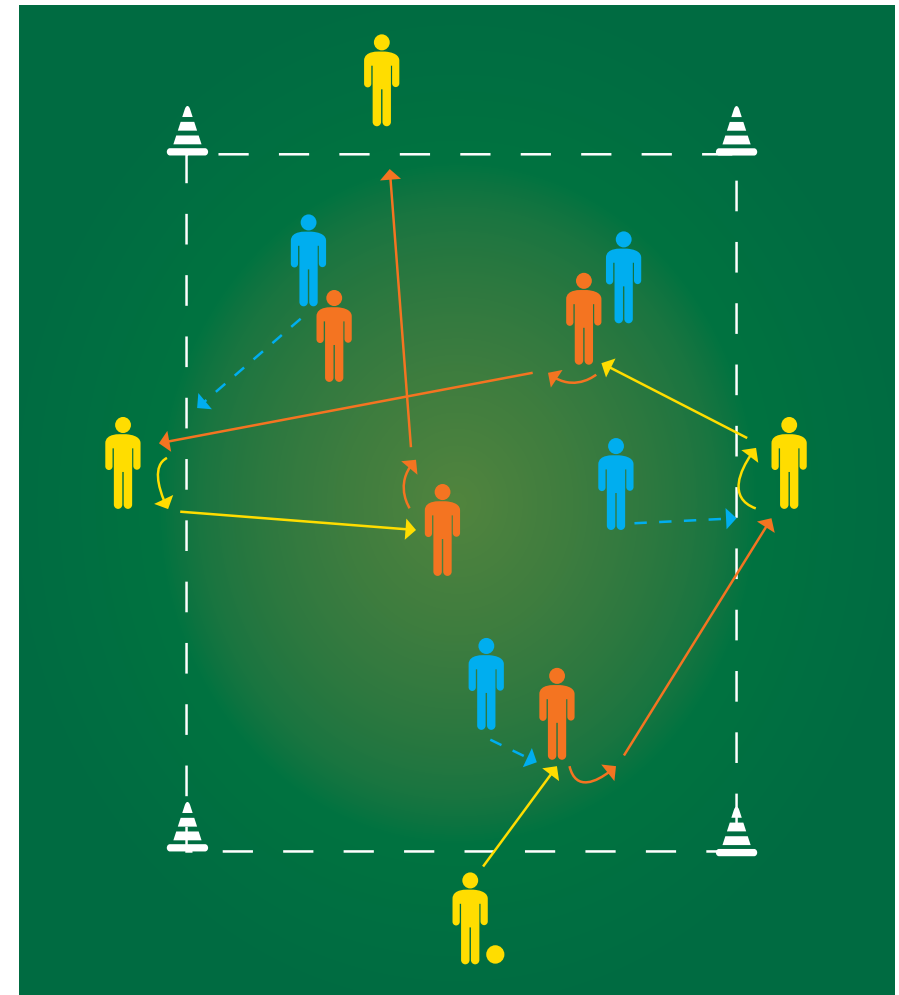
- "Move the ball with your 1st touch away from the defender(s)"
- "Use body feints to disguise your intention"
- "Make an angle when asking for the ball"
- "Try to position yourself in such a way that you can see as much of the grid as possible"
- "Scan your options before receiving the ball"
- "Walls: help the players in the grid by coaching them"

Step up

- Reduce grid size

Step down:

- Increase grid size or go back to an easier positioning game (4 v 1; 3 v 1 or 4 v 2)



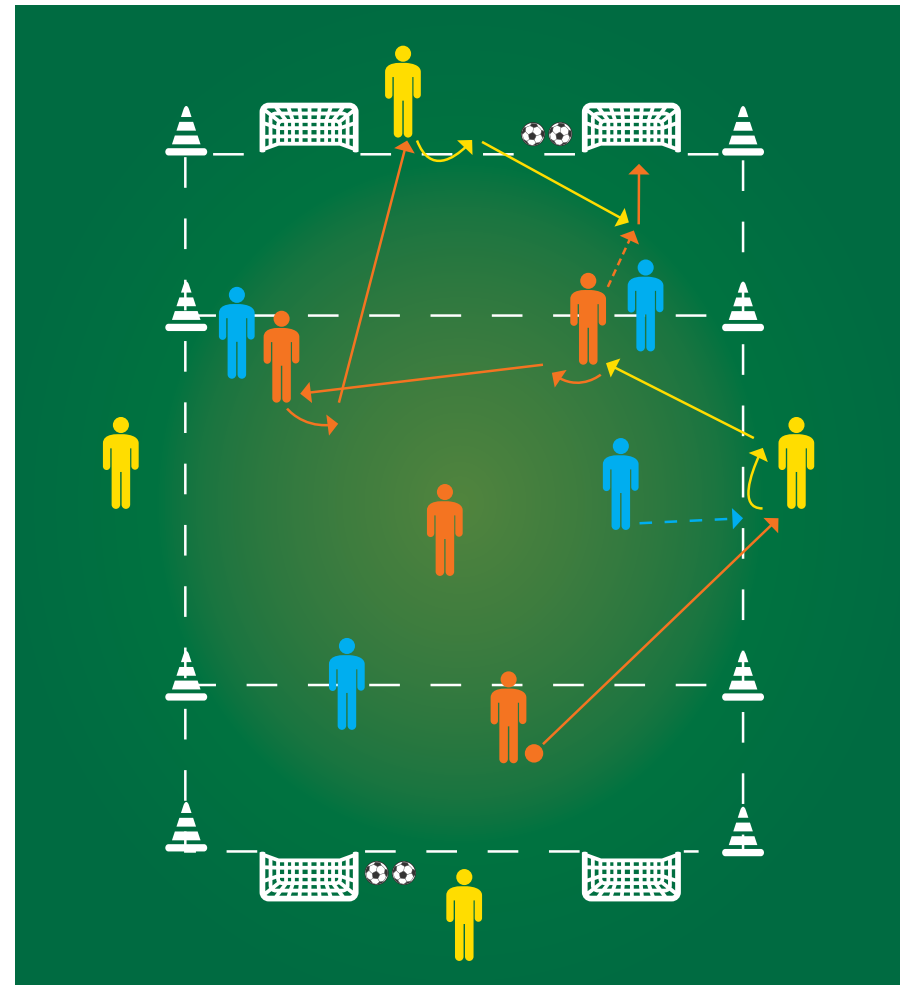
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3. Skill game

- 4 v 4 with 4 walls (8 v 4) in a 20m x 30m grid with two 2m goals and a 5m-7m scoring zone at each end (see diagram)

Game rules:

- Mandatory 2 touches for every player (MUST touch the ball twice)
- Walls not allowed to stop the ball or play to each other
- Inside the scoring zone one touch finishes are allowed if the ball comes from the wall player between the goals
- Change teams every 2-3 minutes or after a goal is scored



Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 3

1. Skill introduction

Players in threes, positioned as shown. Both players at the sides with a ball; the player in the middle stands in a 2m x 2m grid without ball.

The exercise starts with a player on one side passing the ball to the player in the grid. They must move the ball with their first touch side-ways out of the grid and pass it back with their second touch.

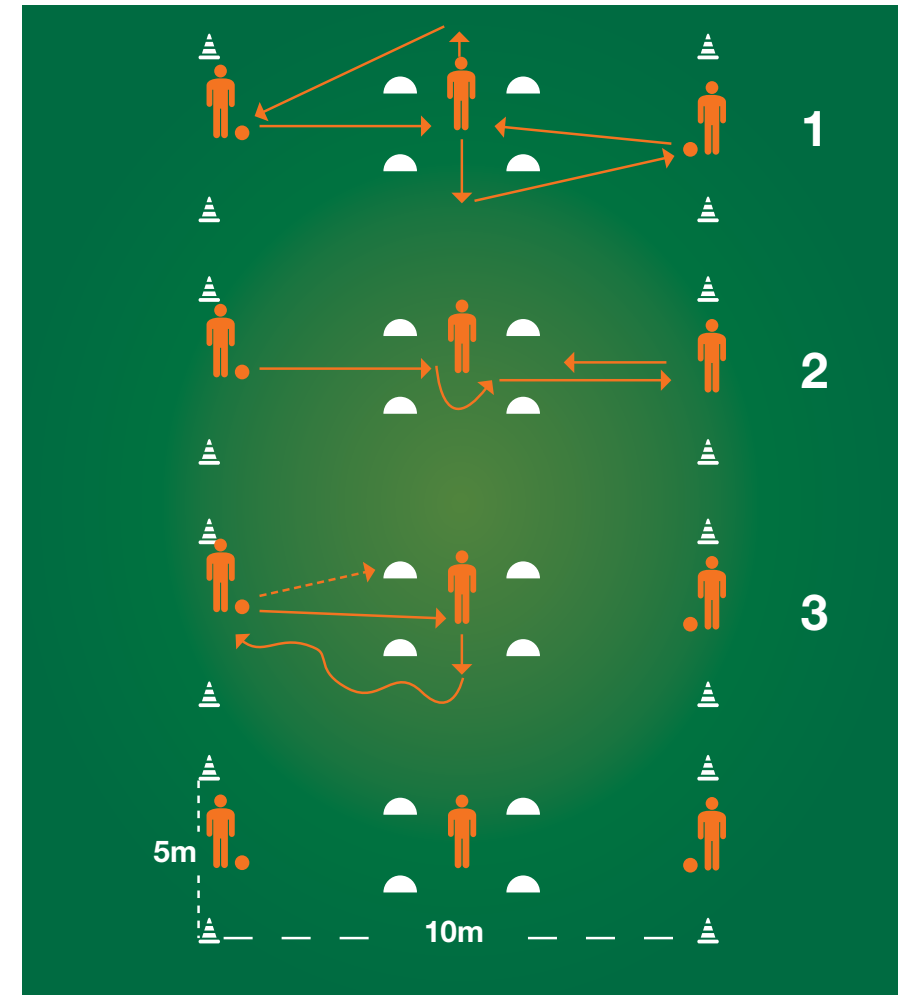
Then they receive the next ball from the player at the opposite side, etc. (see variation 1) Rotate positions after 10 repetitions. Use various techniques i.e. right/left foot only; inside/outside foot only.

In variation 2, the central player receives the ball, turns in the grid (one touch) and passes to the player at the opposite side with their 2nd touch. This player receives the ball and passes it back again to the player in the grid, etc. (so here we temporarily use one ball only!). Again: left and right; inside and outside foot.

In variation 3, the outside players follow their pass, sprinting to the left or right cone of the grid. The player in the middle must now move the ball out of the grid in the opposite direction with their 1st touch and dribble the ball to the empty cone. The new middle player now receives the ball from the other end and the pattern is repeated.

Concluding competition:

Use one of the 1st touch techniques for a relay:
 “which group has concluded 10 perfect repetitions by all 3 players first”
 “OK, one more time and now(other technique).



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First touch Model Session 3

2. Skill training component

- Positioning game 4 v 4 + 2 'rescue' players (6 v 4) in a 30m x 30m grid
- The 'rescue' players of both teams are positioned opposite each other (as shown in diagram)
- **Mandatory 2 touches** for all players, including the 'rescue' players (this simple restraint sees to it that each 1st touch must be good!)
- If someone passes to a rescue player, both players (passer and 'rescue' player) must immediately swap positions

Possible Coaches Remarks:

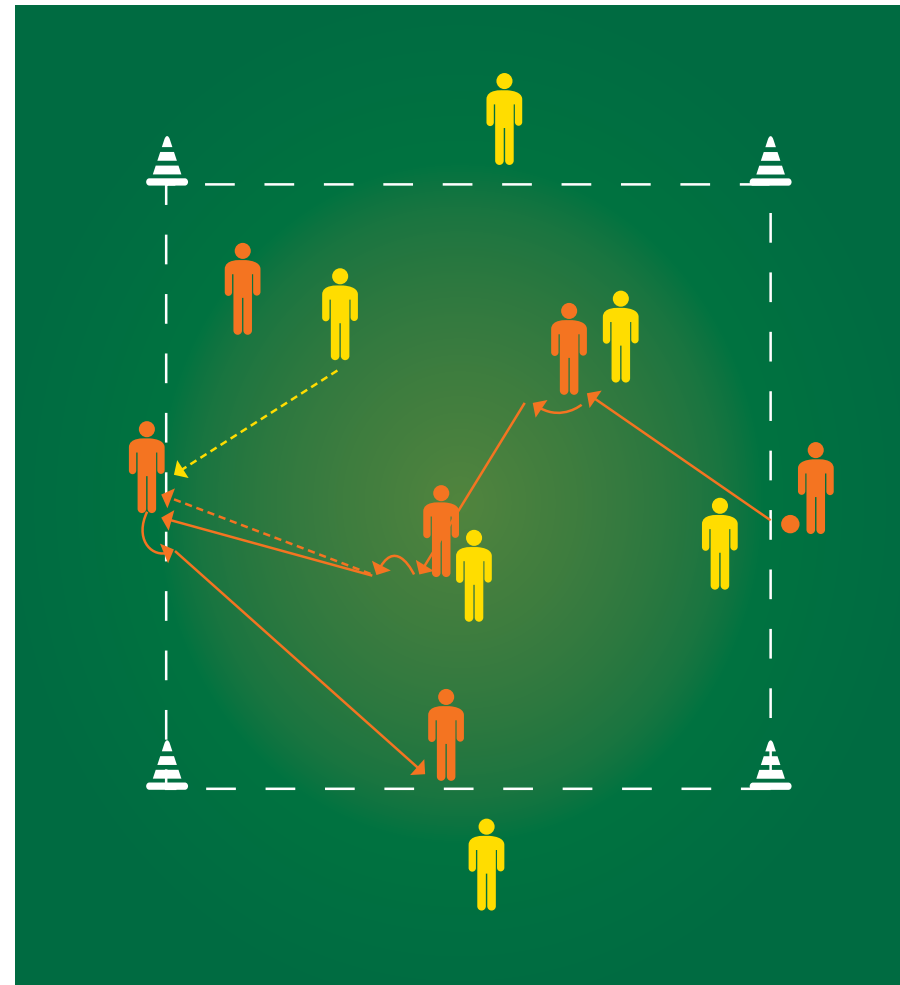
- “Move the ball with your 1st touch away from the defender(s)”
- “use body feints to disguise your intention”
- “make an angle when asking for the ball”
- “try to position yourself in a way that you can see as much of the grid as possible”
- “scan your options before receiving the ball”
- “rescue players: help the players in the grid by coaching them”

Step up:

- Reduce grid size
- Game: one point for every successful interchange passer-rescue player (NB the rescue player must continue possession)

Step down:

- Increase grid size
- Use a 'joker' or an easier positioning game



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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

First touch Model Session 3

3. Skill game

4 v 4 in a grid of approximately 35m x 35m with five 3m gates positioned as shown.

The team in possession scores a goal when one of their players passes the ball to a team-mate through one of the gates.

Mandatory 2 touches for all players

If the defending team wins the ball, the roles change without stopping the game.

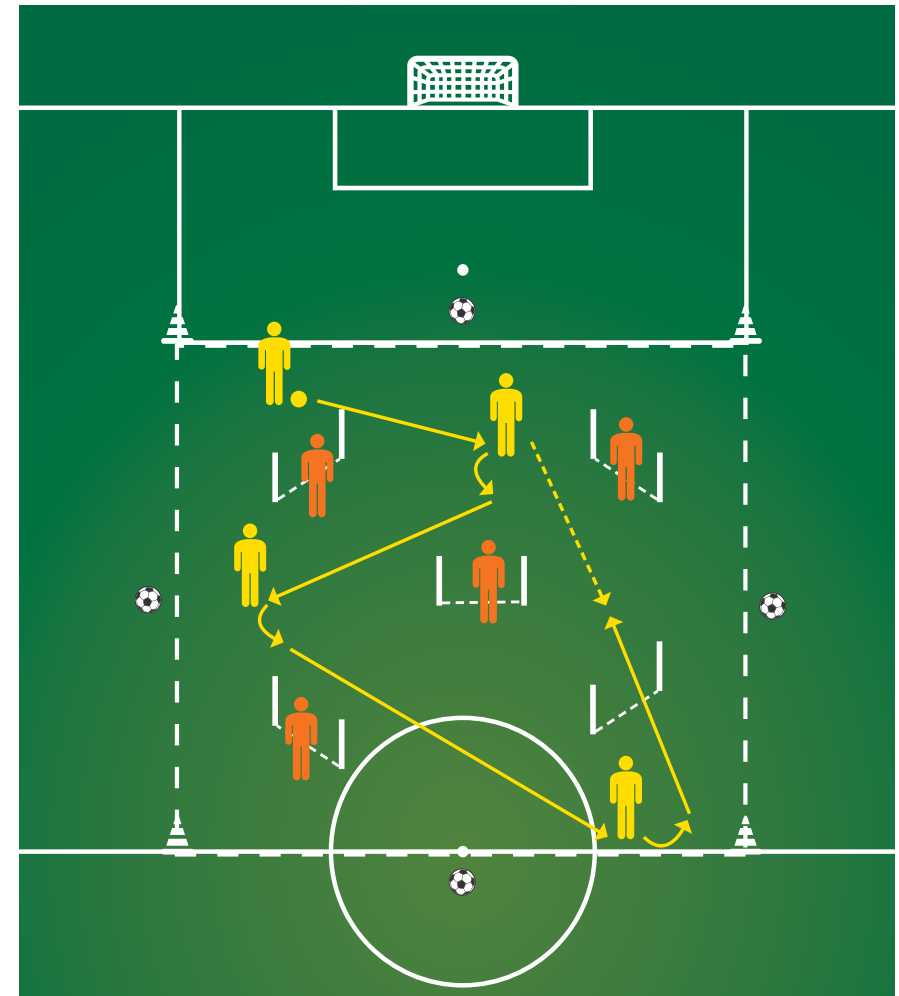
“Which teams scores most?”

Step up:

- The attacking team must make an effort to score within 30 seconds, otherwise the possession goes to the opponent
- Decrease the goal size

Step down:

- Increase the goal size
- Add another goal
- Introduce a ‘joker’



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Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

1 . Skill introduction

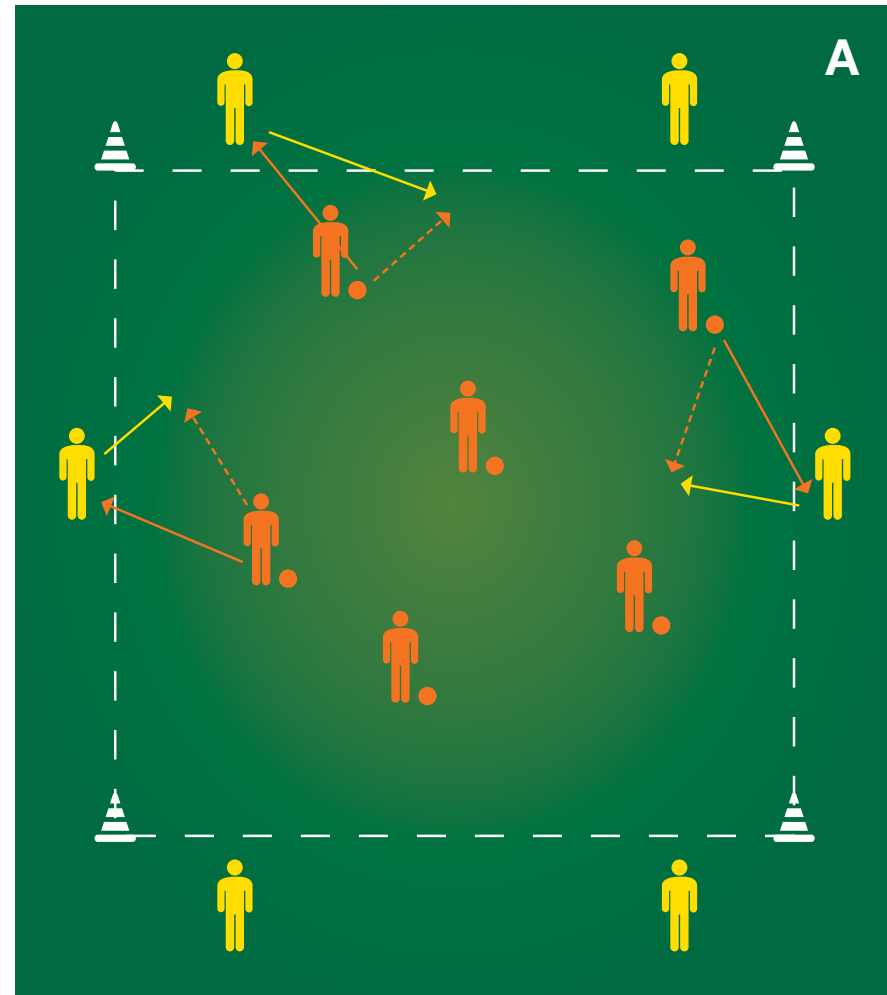
In a grid of approximately 20m x 20m (dependent on group size) half of the players position themselves outside the grid without a ball and the other half with a ball inside.

The players inside the grid dribble freely until they can pass to a 'free' player on the outside who then passes the ball back to the same player (see diagram A)

Change roles every two minutes, players must use left / right foot on coaches call i.e. 2 min left foot only; then 2 min right foot only.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Only pass the ball when the passing line is 'open' and make sure someone else is not passing to that player at the same time"
- "Pass the ball precise and with the right speed"
- "Look where you run when asking for the ball back and make an angle for the return pass"



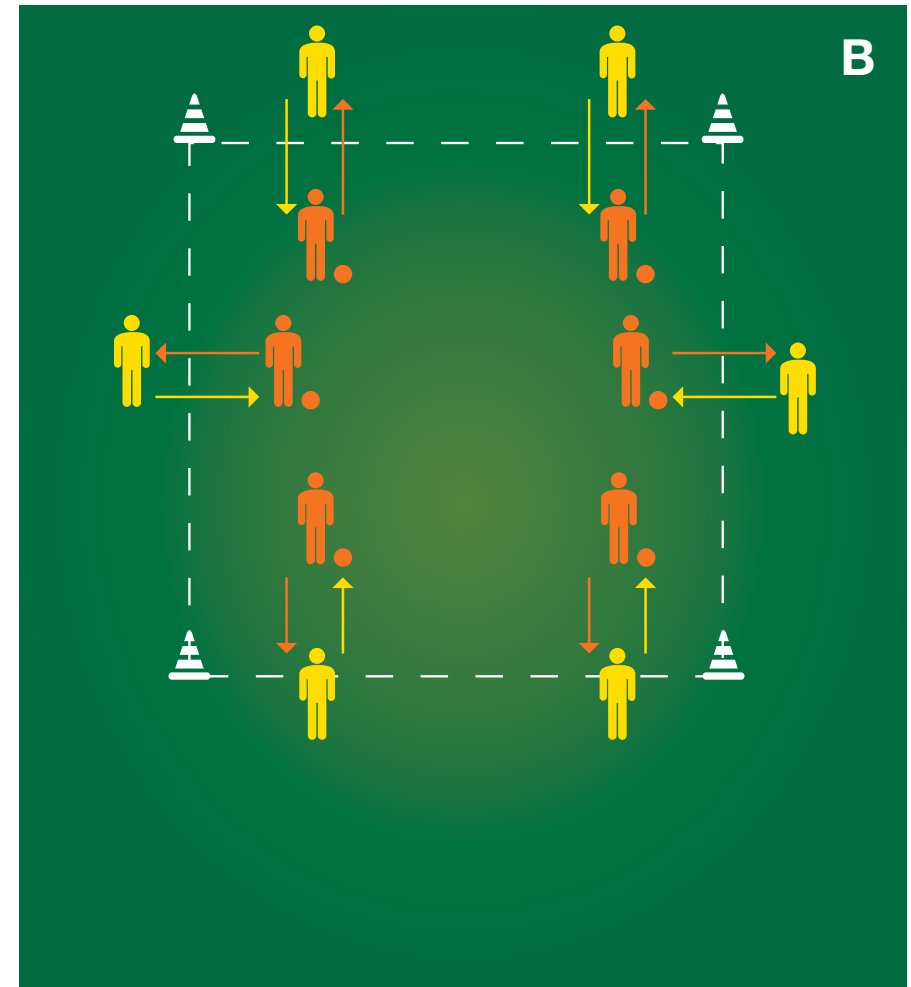
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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

- Next the players form pairs with one ball and position themselves at the edge of the grid, 3m on either side of the line (see diagram B)
- The players move towards each other while playing one touch passes until they have reduced the distance to 1m-2m. Then they move backwards again continuing to pass until they have reached their starting position
- Right foot only
- Left foot only
- Right-left alternately

This exercise challenges the players to work on the 'weight' and accuracy of their pass using both feet over varying distances



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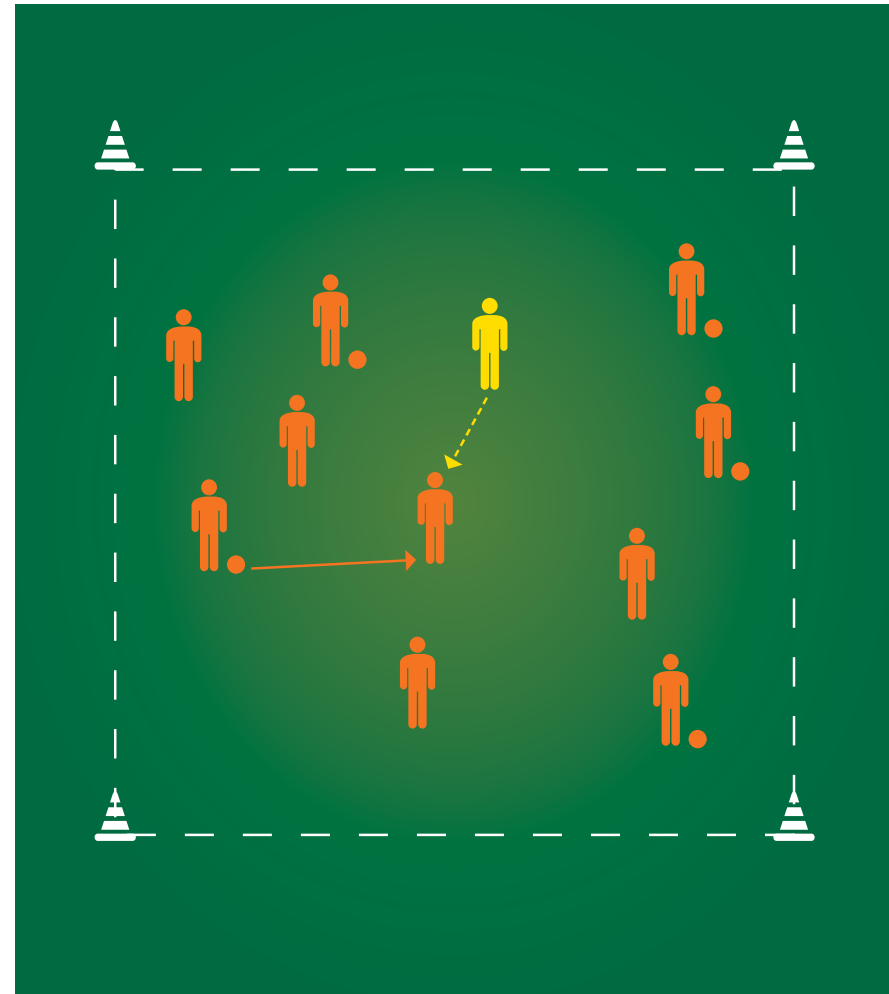
Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

Concluding tagging game

- All players go into the same grid we used for the previous exercises. Half of them have a ball at their feet, the others are without ball
- One player is appointed 'tagger' and carries a bib in their hand
- The tagger can only tag a player without ball. If the tagger succeeds in tagging a player without ball, both swap roles
- The players with ball can help their team-mates without ball by passing a ball to them when they are being chased by the tagger
- Any balls that roll out of the grid may not be fetched back, so the passes need to be accurate.

Variations to make easier or more difficult:

- 2 or more taggers
- More (or less) players with a ball



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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

2. Skill training component - Positioning games

Depending on the ability of your players, choose any of the 3 'basic' positioning games i.e. 4 v 1; 3 v 1 and 4 v 2. All have similar objectives but with varying degrees of resistance and complexity.

See diagrams on the right:

A. 4 v 1 (grid size 10m x 10m – 15m x 15m)

B. 3 v 1 (depending on the level of the players)

Possible Coaches Remarks:

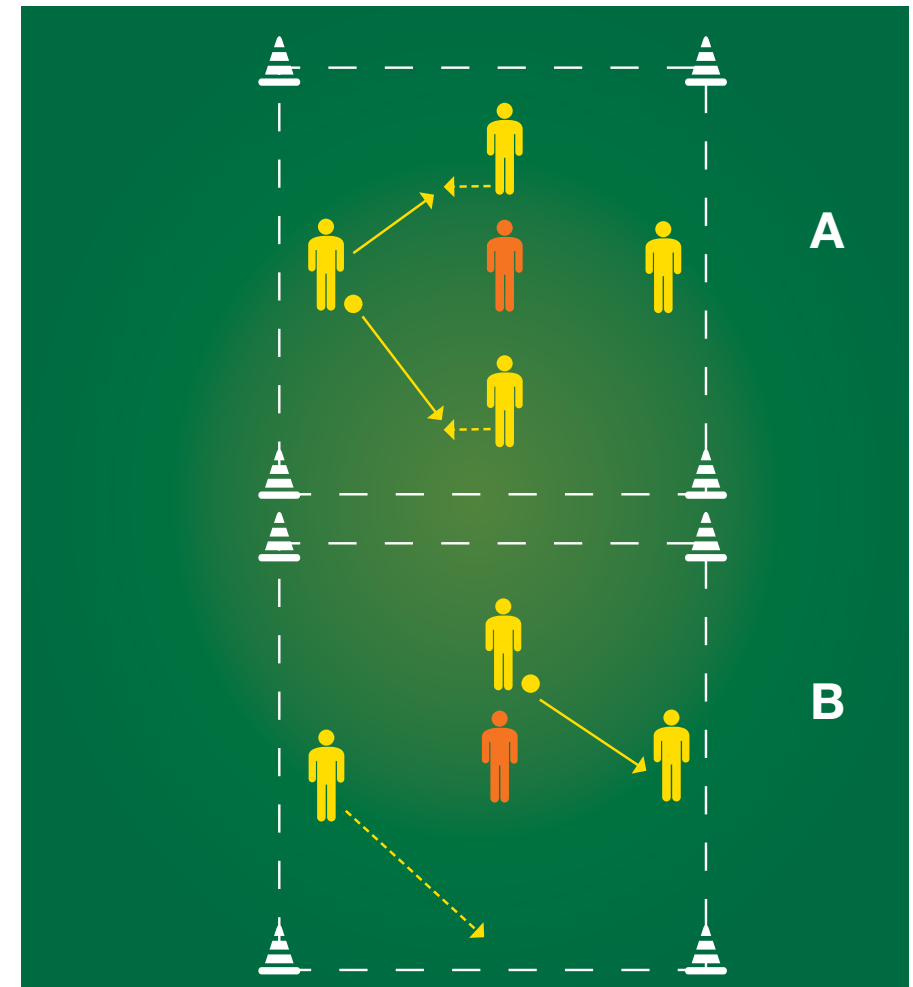
"The player on the ball must always have a player to their left and right that they can play to"

"But do not stand in the corners, your angle is much smaller if you do that"
With 3 v 1 this means that "you have to move each time the ball moves"
(see diagram B)

"Position yourself in a way that you can see the whole grid"
("with your back to the line")

"Play the ball to the proper foot of your team-mate (i.e. away from the defender) and with the proper speed and precision"

Please note that 3 v 1 asks for a lot of running and is therefore quite exhausting for players this age. Use regular drink breaks to allow for recovery



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Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

4 v 2 (diagram C) grid size 12m x 12m – 15m x 15m depending on level of players

Possible Coaches Remarks specifically for 4 v 2:

“Now the player on the ball must always have a player to their left, right and in between that they can pass to”

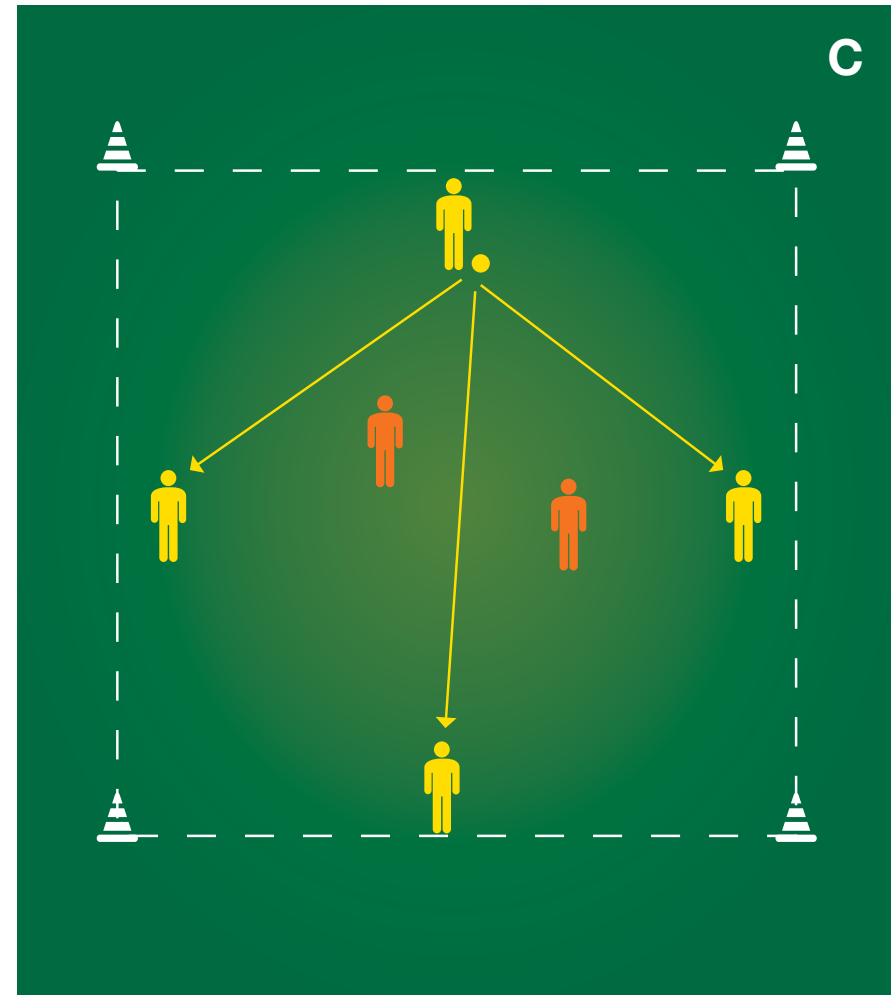
“Especially look to pass through the 2 defenders, that’s the most important pass! We call that the killer pass”

Step up:

Make the grid smaller

Step down:

Make the grid bigger



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

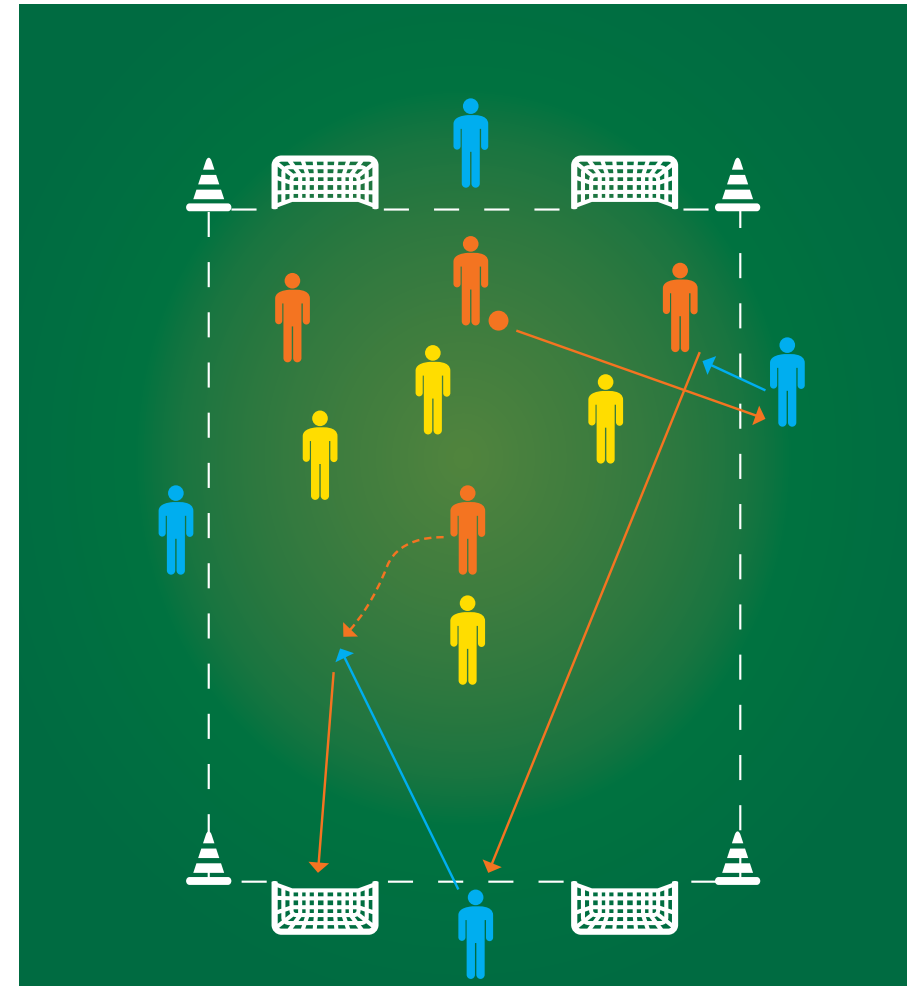
Striking the ball Model Session 1 (short passing)

3. Skill game

- 4 v 4 with 4 neutral players (walls) on a pitch of approximately 20m x 30m
- 4 small goals placed as shown (2m wide)
- The team in possession of the ball can use the wall players (8 v 4)
- Rotate teams after 3 min or after each score: scorers stay on
- Depending on level of the players: 2-3 touches max in order to get an emphasis on passing

Possible progressions:

- Wall players must play the ball direct
- Goals count as double if scored by a so-called **3rd man combination** (see diagram)



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Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

1. Skill introduction

6 players are positioned as shown, distance between the cones 7m-8m.

The passing exercise starts with player #1 at cone A passing the ball to the feet of the player at cone B (who moves away with a dummy run as if getting away from an imaginary defender, then checks back to the ball to receive it).

B bounces back to A1 who plays the killer pass to the first player at cone C.

C1 moves the ball (1st touch) and passes to the player at cone D (2nd touch) and the same pattern is repeated.

All players involved move to the next cone after completing their action/pass (from cone A to B; B to C; C to D and D to A). Every 2-3 minutes: change the direction (use other foot).

Variation for advanced players

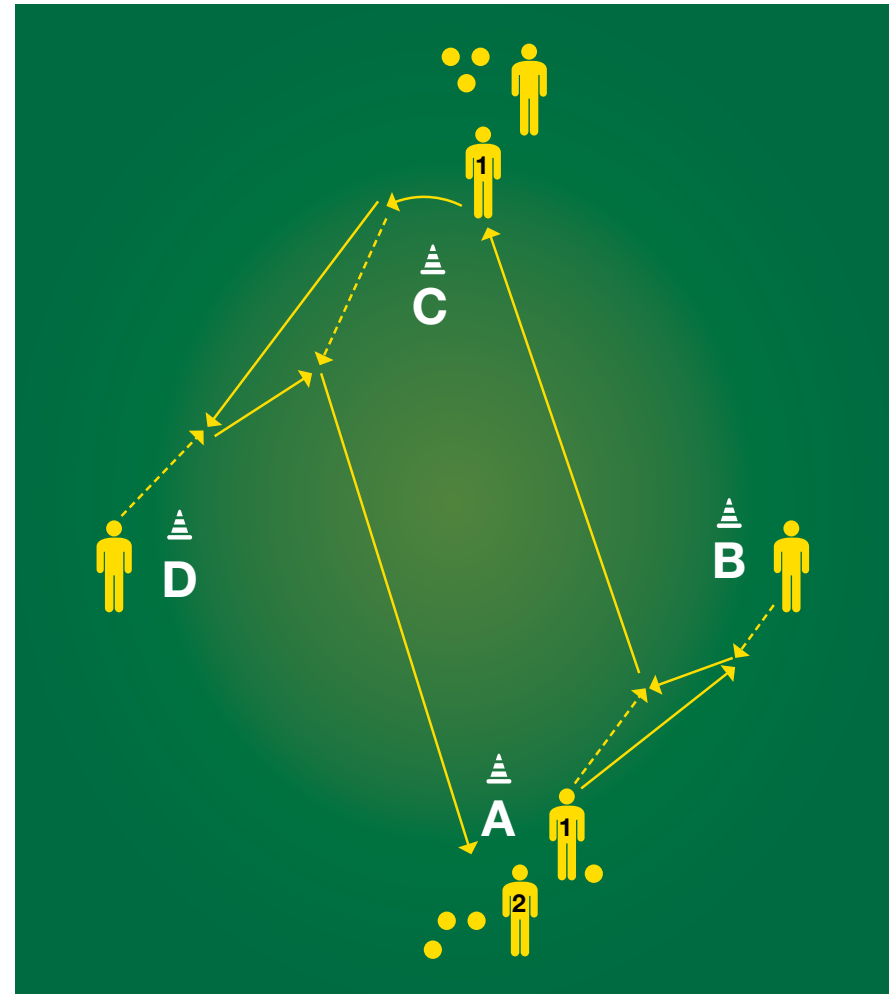
- 2 balls, starting with A1 and C1 at the same time

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"More accuracy, play the ball to your mate's right/left foot"

"Play the ball with more speed"

"Communicate, time your action"



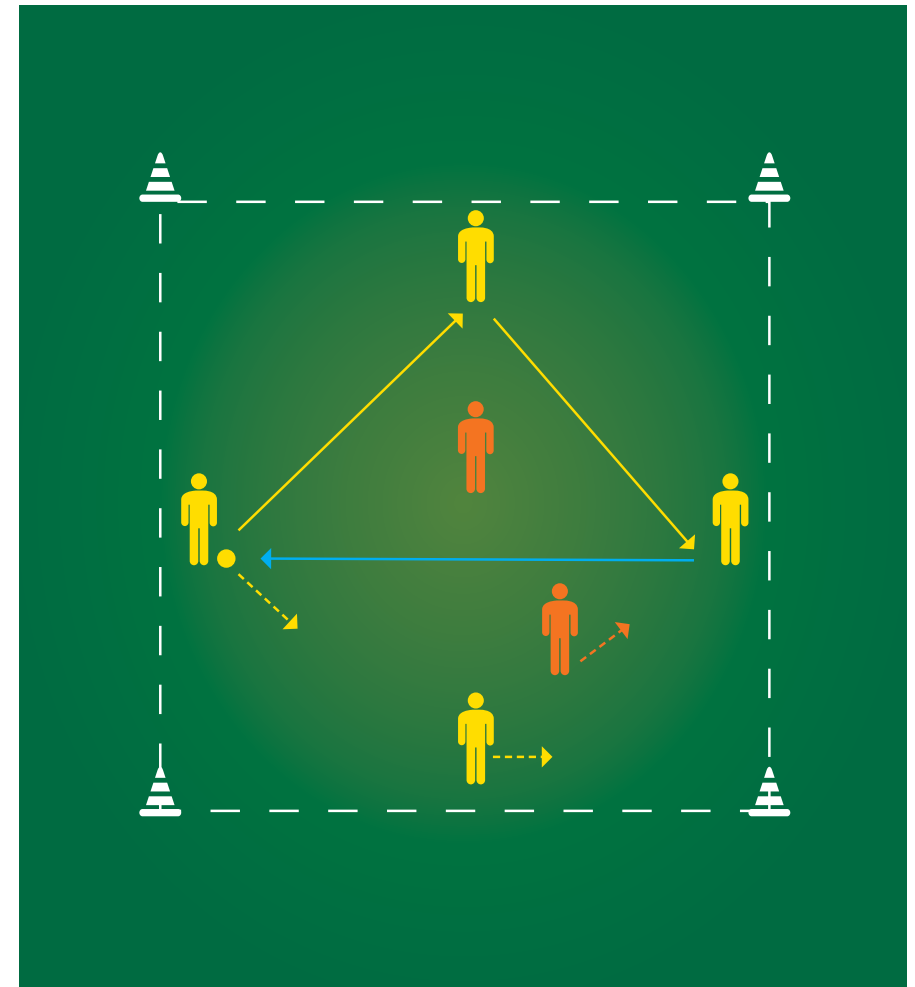
Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

Concluding Competition: positioning game 4 v 2

“Count how often you can play a successful killer pass (between the defenders)”

Every 2 minutes change of defenders and start again.



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Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

2. Skill training component

3 v 1 killer pass positioning game with 9 players.

Organisation

Two grids of about 12m x 12m (A & C) separated by a grid of 12m x 5m (B).
Three teams of 3 players with different colour bibs, one team in each grid as shown.

The coach is positioned with the balls centrally, next to grid B.

The coach starts the game with a pass to a yellow player in grid A. At that moment one orange player from grid B sprints into grid A to defend/win the ball:

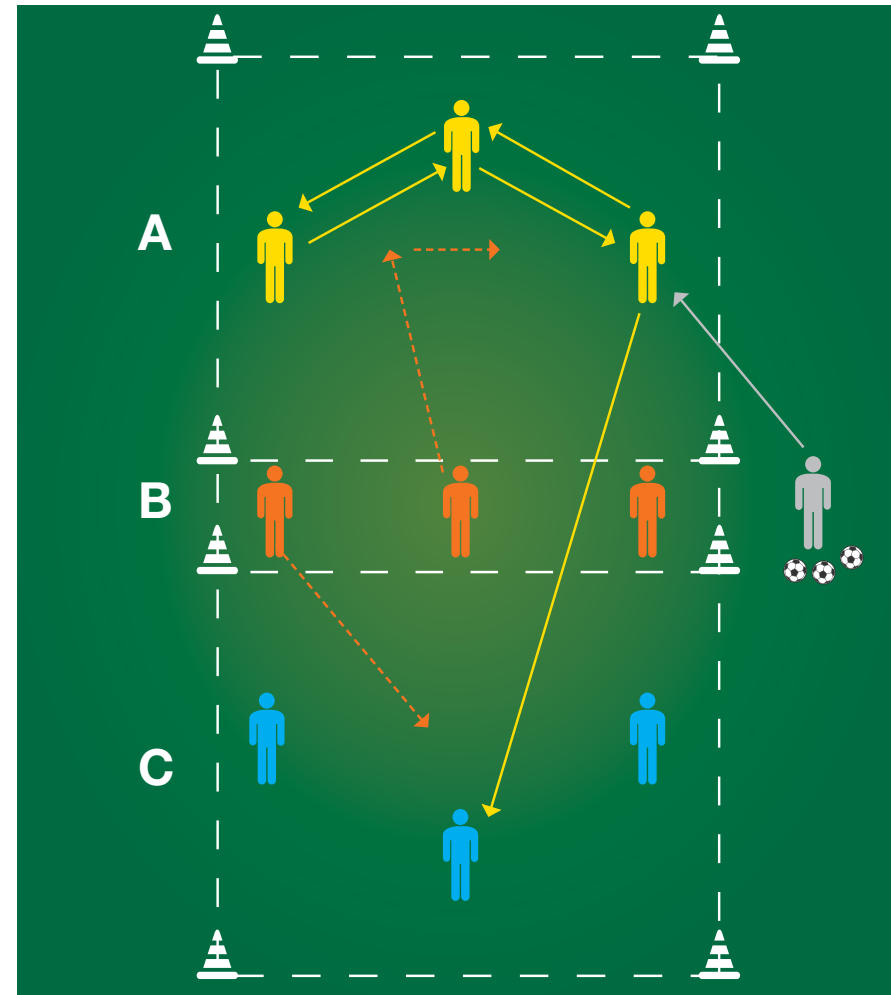
3 v 1 in grid A.

Yellow must now look for the right moment to play a killer pass through grid B (with the two remaining orange defenders) to a blue player in grid C. Then immediately another orange player sprints into grid C to defend while the defender from grid A returns to grid B.

If a defender wins the ball in grid A/C or the defenders intercept the killer pass in grid B, they change grids with the team that lost the ball.

Step up or down:

- Make the grids bigger/smaller
- Free or limited touches (2-3) in 3 v 1
- Killer pass: only on the ground or lofted pass allowed as well
- Make easier: 6 players (2 per grid: 2 v 1) or harder: 12 players (4 per grid: 4 v 2).



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 2 (the 'killer' pass)

3. Skill game

5 v 5 (include goalkeepers) + 2 'neutral' players on a 40m x 50m pitch with big goals, divided in two grids (A & B) by a 5m 'killer pass zone' (see diagram). 2 defenders + goalkeeper and 2 attackers in each half as well as a 'neutral' player ('joker'). All players must stay in their designated grids.

The game starts in grid B with yellow + the joker playing 4 v 2 against the 2 oranges. They must try to play a 'killer pass' through/across the middle zone to a yellow player or the joker in grid A. If the orange players intercept the ball they can score immediately.

The yellow players + joker in grid A try to score against the 2 orange defenders + goalkeeper (3 v 3). If they score the game starts again in grid B. If they lose the ball to orange, the game continues/re-starts in grid A with orange + joker playing 4 v 2 against the 2 yellow players. Players to change roles/grids every 3-5 minutes.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

"Focus on properly playing 4 v 2 first"

"look for the right moment to play the killer pass"

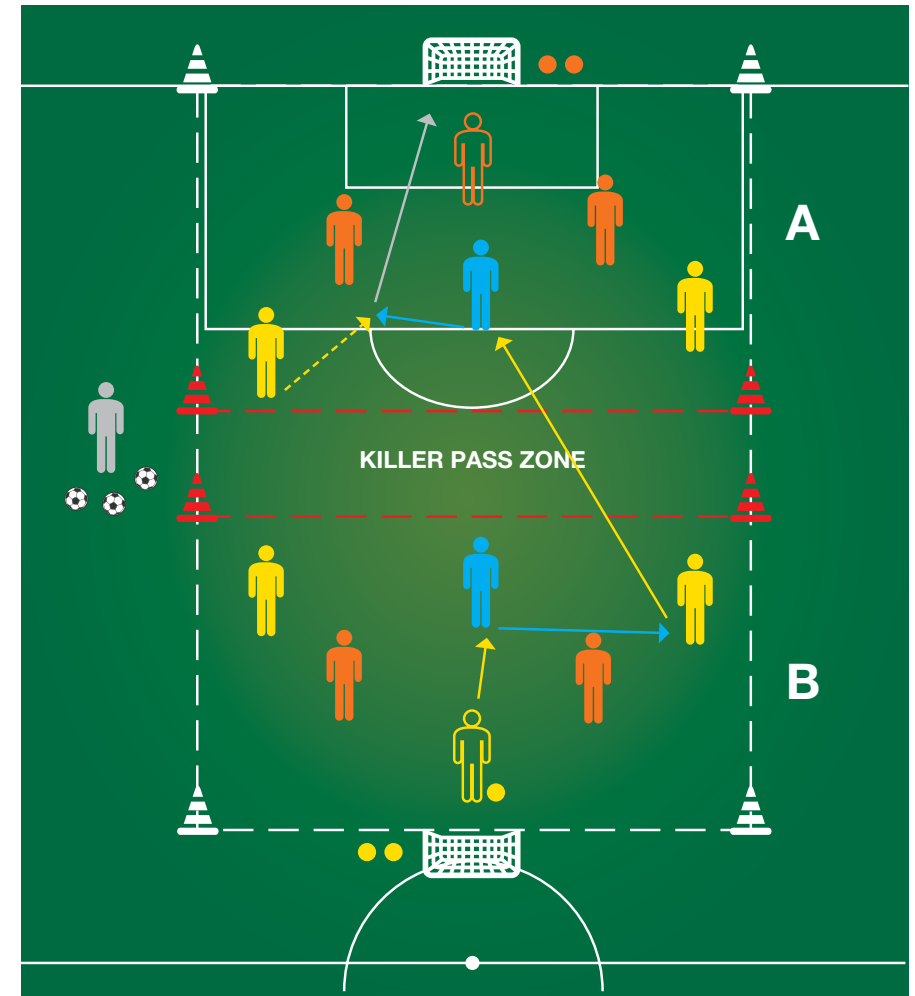
"the right moment is when you are facing forward and make eye contact with the player(s) you want to pass to"

Step up:

- 2 touches only in 4 v 2
- No jokers: 2 v 2 (or 3 v 3) + goalkeepers

Step down:

- 2 jokers per grid
- Make grids A & B bigger

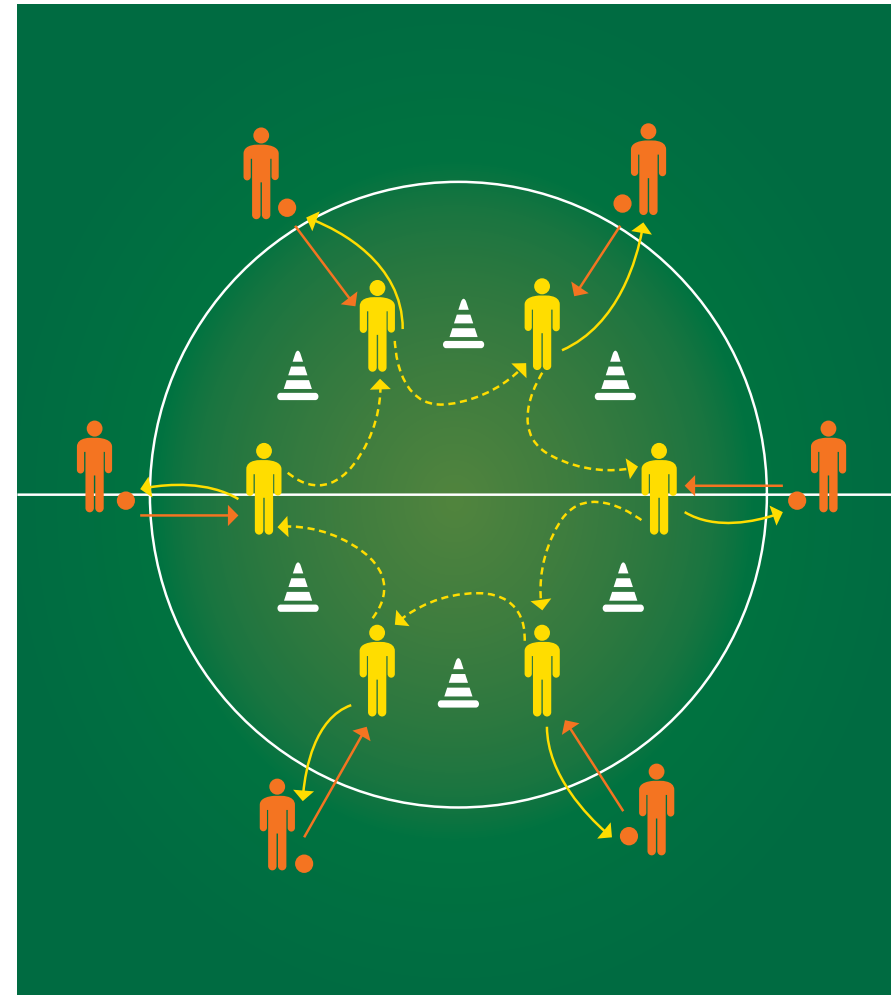


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Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

1. Skill introduction

- 6 orange players are positioned approximately 5m outside of the centre circle with a ball each and act as 'goalkeepers'
- 6 yellow players are inside without a ball, in a smaller (7m-8m diameter) circle shaped by 6 cones
- They receive a rolled ball off a 'goalkeeper' and with a **controlled instep drive**, shoot it back into the goalkeeper's hands
- After going back around the next cone they receive a ball from the next 'goalkeeper'
- Change roles and direction every 2 minutes
- "When we move in the direction of the clock, only use your right foot"
- "When we move the other way around, only use left"
- "Now goalkeepers: throw the ball and players: volley it back in the goalkeeper's hands before it hits the ground"
- "It's about accuracy, not power"
- "Now a half-volley"



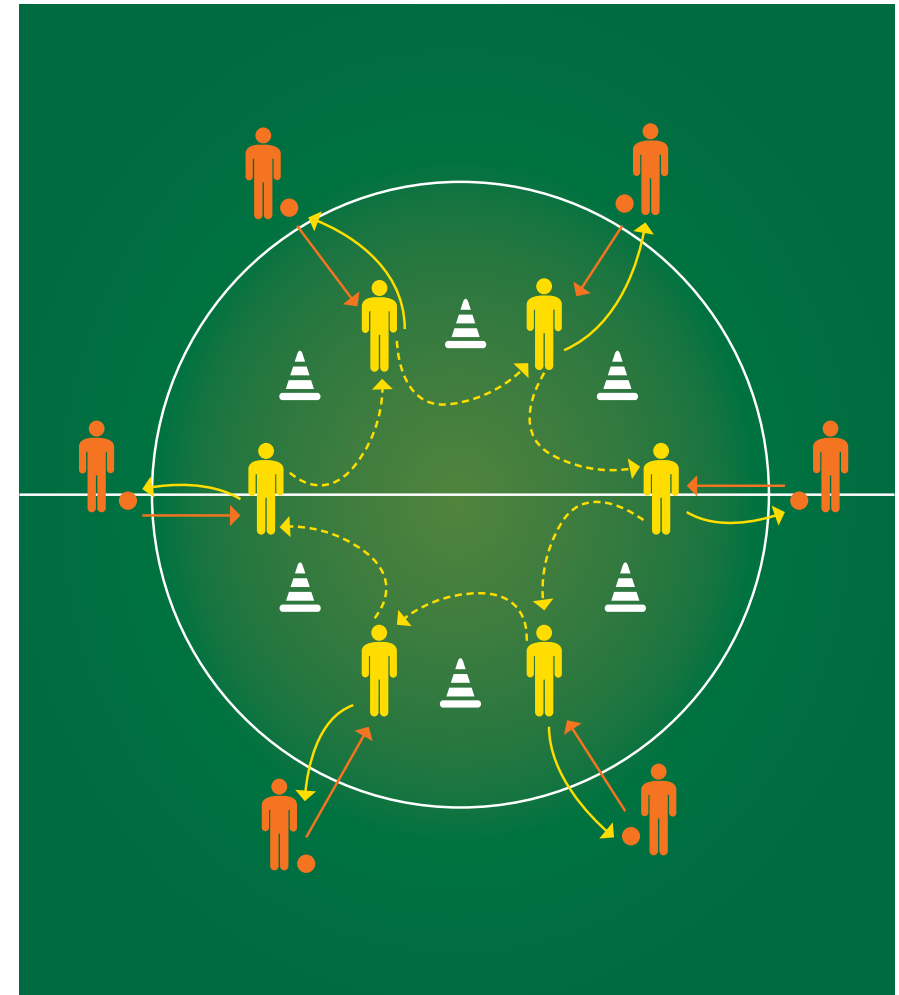
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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

1. Skill introduction - Concluding Competition

- “For every proper shot which the goalkeeper catches during one full round you earn a point”
- “Now change roles”
- “Count your points, who wins individually?”
- “And which group wins when you add up all individual points”
- “Now we do it again but in the opposite direction with our other foot”
- “Now only proper volleys count”
- Etc



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Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

2. Skill training component

Organisation

One group focuses on right foot shooting, the other on left foot. Change groups regularly.

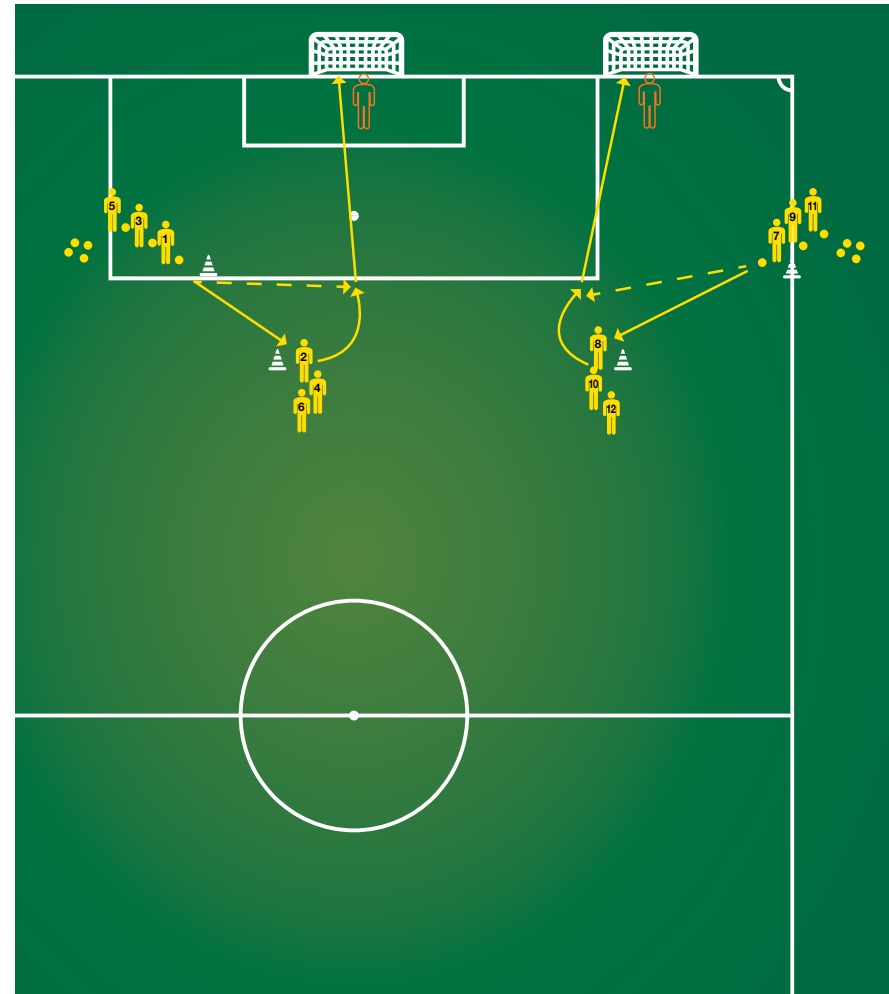
#1 passes to #2 and runs to apply pressure; #2 moves the ball with the first touch to prepare for a shot from the edge of the penalty area.

#1 then joins the shooting line (behind #6); #2 fetches the ball and joins the serving line (behind #5). The same pattern takes place in the left foot group simultaneously.

The angle/distance from #1 to #2 is manipulated by the coach to ensure #2 can shoot with the second touch without being tackled and without having to beat #1.

Step up/step down

- Increase the angle and/or distance from #1 to #2 to give #2 more or less time (less or more chance of #1 applying real pressure)
- With younger players, the coach may move the cones closer towards the goals so the shots are from shorter distance (ensure safety of players by not moving too close to the GK)



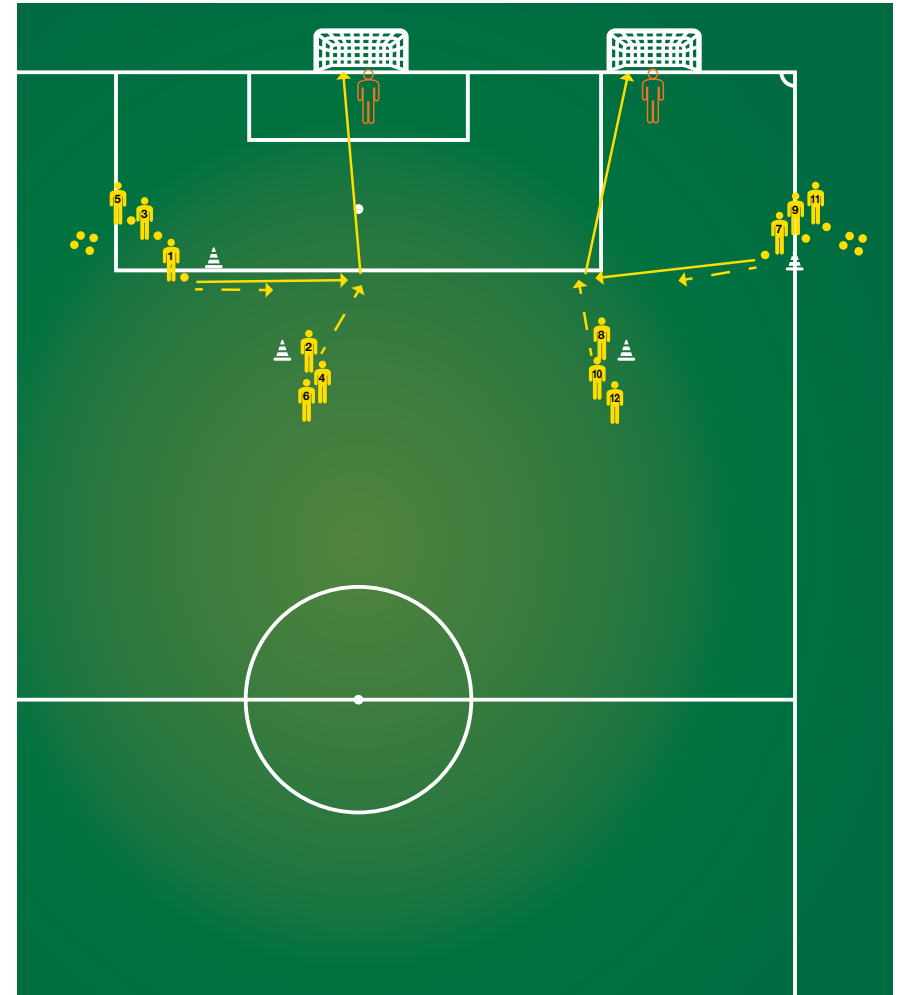
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Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

Variations:

- #1 passes the ball square (along the edge of the penalty area) so #2 can run and shoot with the first touch
- #1 starts on a cone to the side of #2 and plays the ball in front of him; the coach selects the distances to encourage first-time shooting under pressure from a chasing defender



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Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

3. Skill game

3 v 3 'shooting game' in a grid of approximately 20m x 20m divided by a halfway line.

In each half there is a goalkeeper + 2 outfield players from one team and 1 outfield player from the other team (see diagram), all players must stay in their own grid. Plenty of balls in/near to the goals.

The game starts with a 3 v 1 game in one grid. A team can only score by:

1. Shooting from their own half
2. A finish by the lone striker from a ball rebounding back from the goalkeeper; a defender or the post/bar

Rotate the players regularly.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

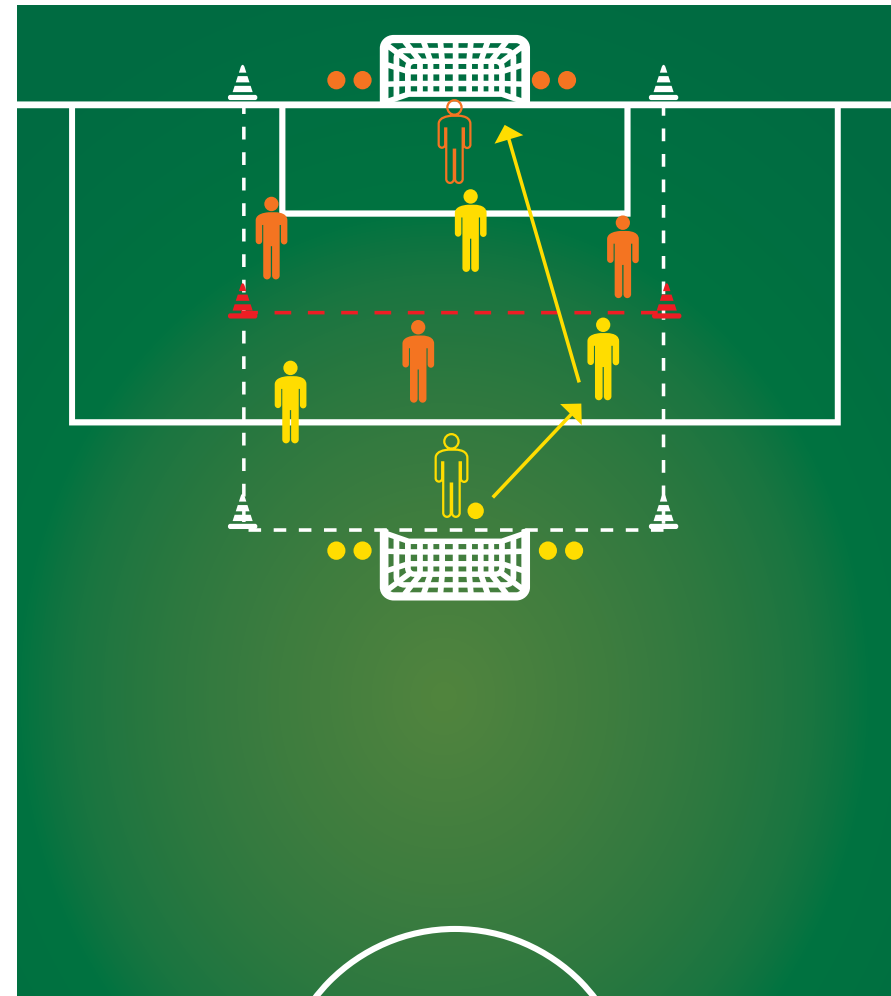
"As soon as the line to the goal is open: SHOOT"
 "move the ball quickly to open the line to the goal"
 "don't just boot it, precision is more important"

Step up:

- Limit the time or number of passes to take a shot
- Make the grids smaller

Step down:

- Make the grids bigger



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Striking the ball Model Session 3 (shooting)

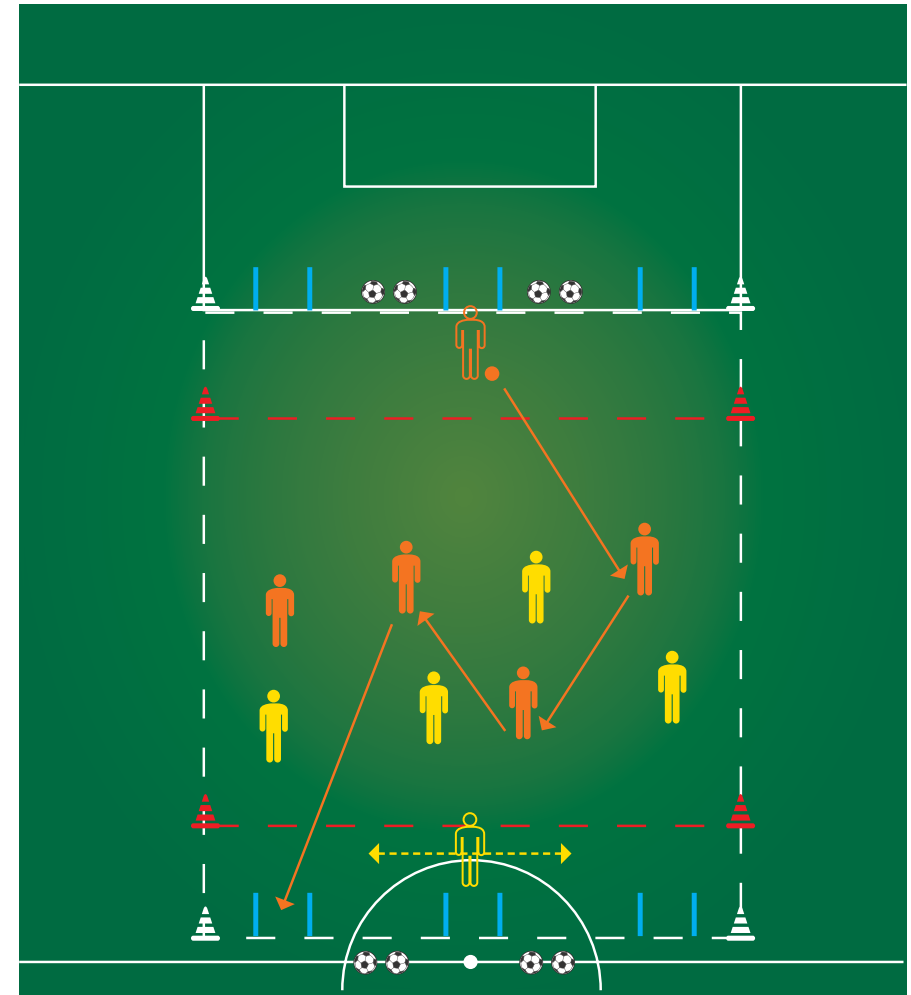
Here is another option (with the emphasis on awareness and shooting precision):

Field markings:

End zones 7m long, penalty box width.

Middle zone 20m long, penalty box width.

4 v 4 in the middle grid between the red cones. Players score by shooting in one of the three goals (3m-5m wide). The goalkeepers try to defend all 3 goals. The outfield players are not allowed to enter the 'goalkeeper zones'. If not enough shooting takes place: add 1 or 2 'jokers'.



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Running with the ball Model Session 1

1. Skill introduction

All players running with a ball freely in a grid of approximately 30m x 30m to warm up.

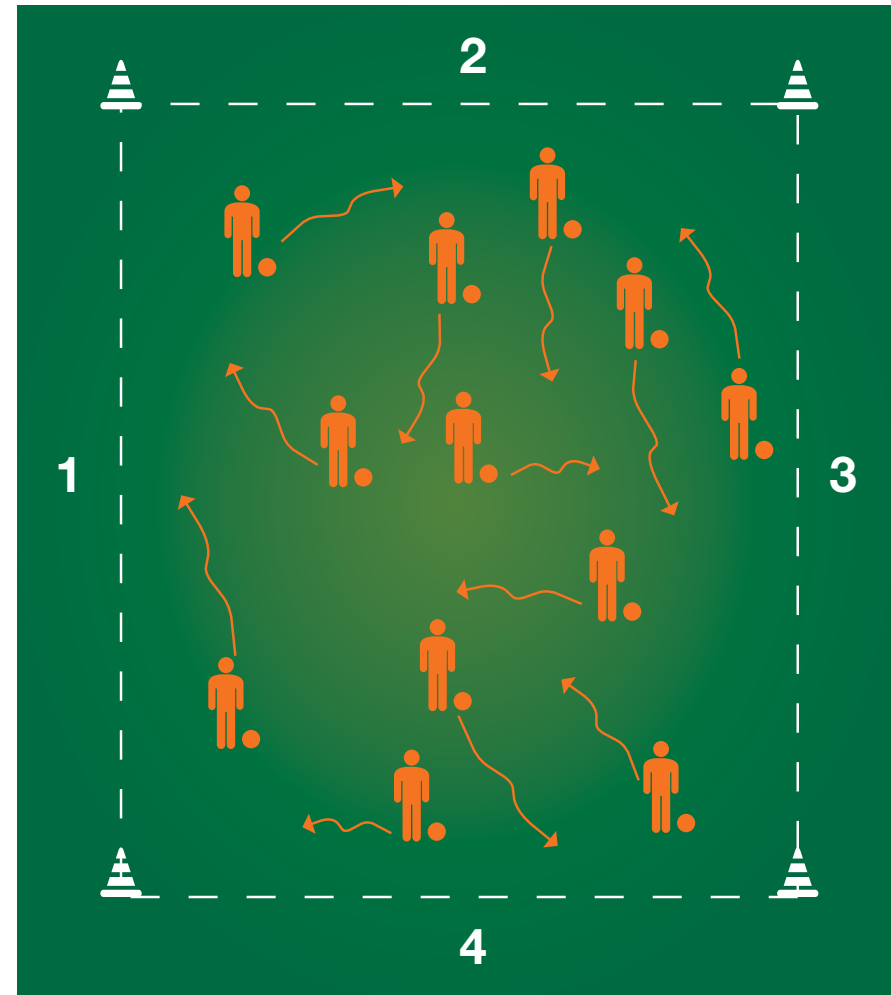
First 2-3 minutes: "low speed/intensity", "use both feet".

Next 2-3 minutes: "accelerate when you see a free space in front of you; now only use your right/left foot".

Now split the players into 4 groups and number them 1 to 4 placing them on all 4 sides. When the coach calls a number, these players run with the ball as quickly as they can across the area and back (opposite group will need to move back to give the others room to turn!).

Now 2 groups at the same time: "take care; vision; if necessary slow down and then accelerate again".

Look out for collisions!



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Running with the ball Model Session 1

Concluding Competition

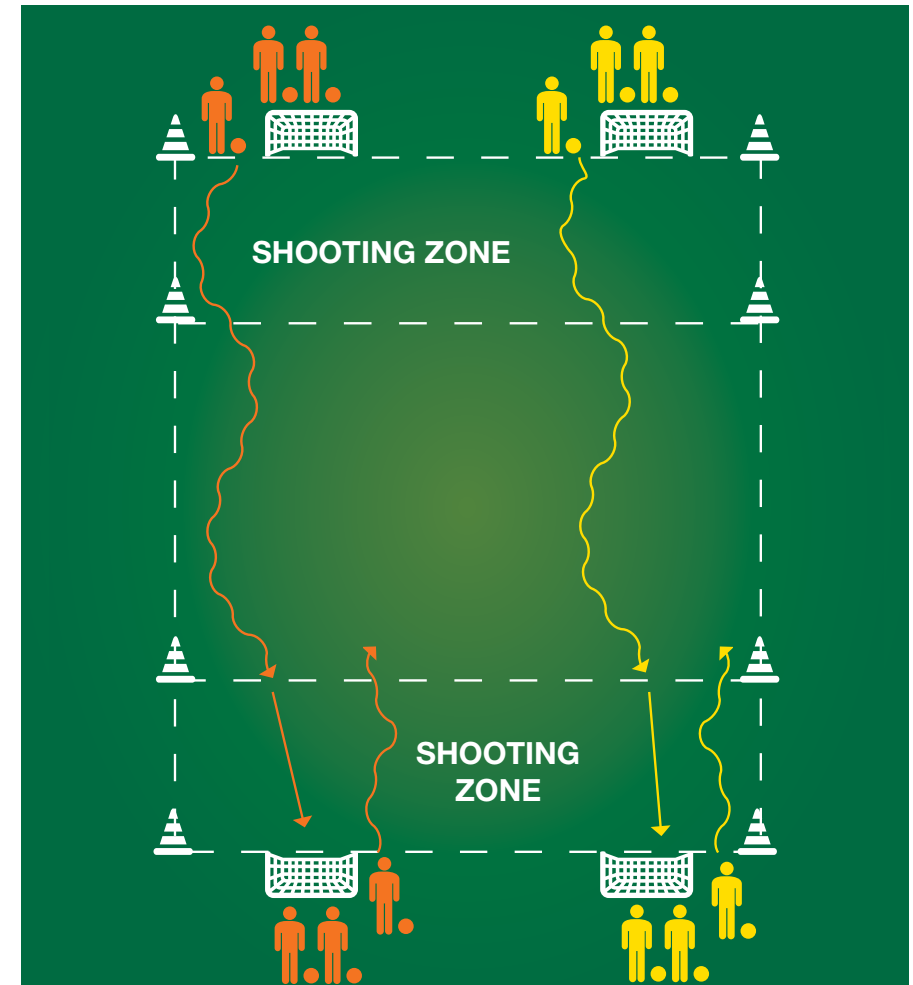
Relay. Grid: 30m x 20m; 4 small goals and a 5m-7m shooting line at each end. Two equal teams (orange and yellow) positioned as shown in a 30m x 20m grid; each player with a ball;

On the coach's signal the first player from each team start running with the ball to the opposite goal. When they enter the shooting zone they pass/shoot the ball into the empty goal. As soon as the ball passes the goal line the next player can start running with the ball in the opposite direction.

If the ball DOES NOT go into the goal the player who took the shot MUST go and touch the player waiting to run with the ball before they can start.

Which team can complete one full sequence first?

- Use right foot only
- Use left foot only
- Each player runs twice (first time right foot, second time with left)

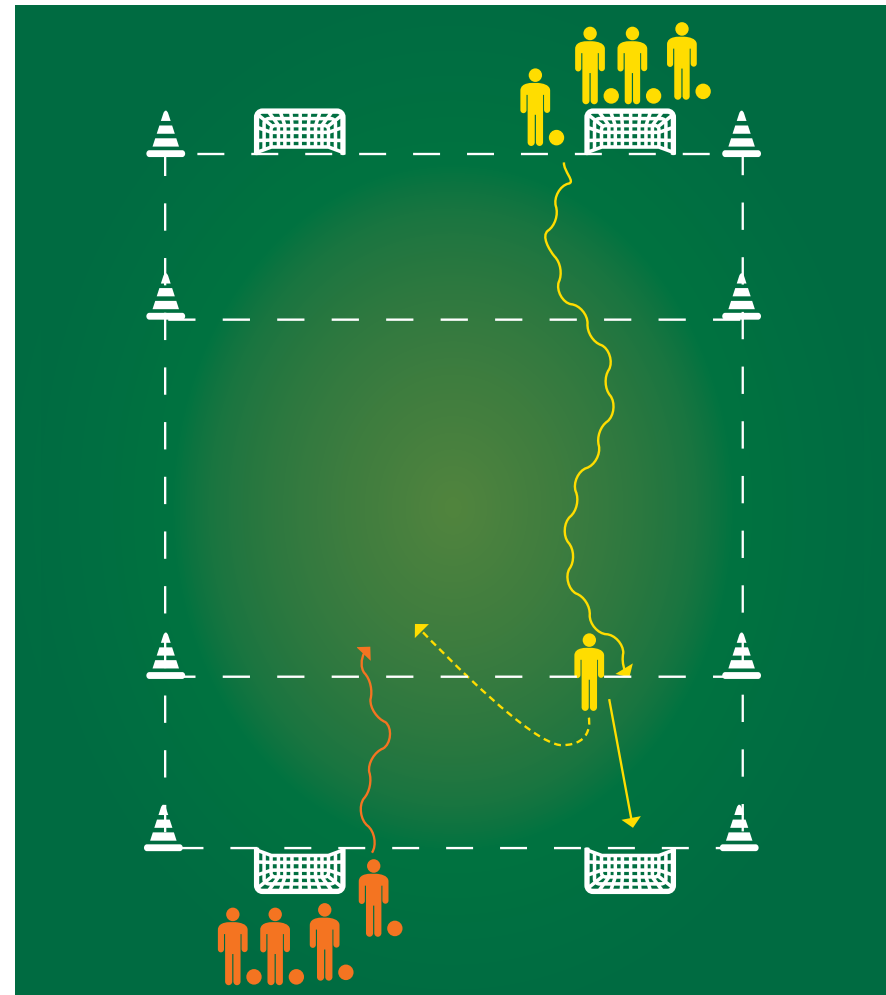


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Running with the ball Model Session 1

2. Skill training component

- A grid of 30m x 20m; 4 small goals and a 5m-7m shooting line at each end
- Evenly split teams positioned as shown
- Minimum 4, maximum 8 players per grid; if the group is bigger then make two grids
- The exercise starts with the first player of the yellow team running with the ball to the opposite side and shooting the ball into the goal. They can only shoot once they have crossed the line into the shooting zone
- As soon as the yellow player shoots at goal, the first orange player starts running with the ball to the opposite side
- As soon as the yellow player has had their shot at goal, they turn and chase the orange player to try and catch up with them and prevent them from scoring
- Count the goals! Which team scores the most goals?.



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Running with the ball Model Session 1

Possible Coaches Remarks:

“Push the ball forward every 3-4 steps”
 “run as fast as you can but keep the ball under control”
 “If the defender catches up with you, this is what you can do” (**demonstrate!**)

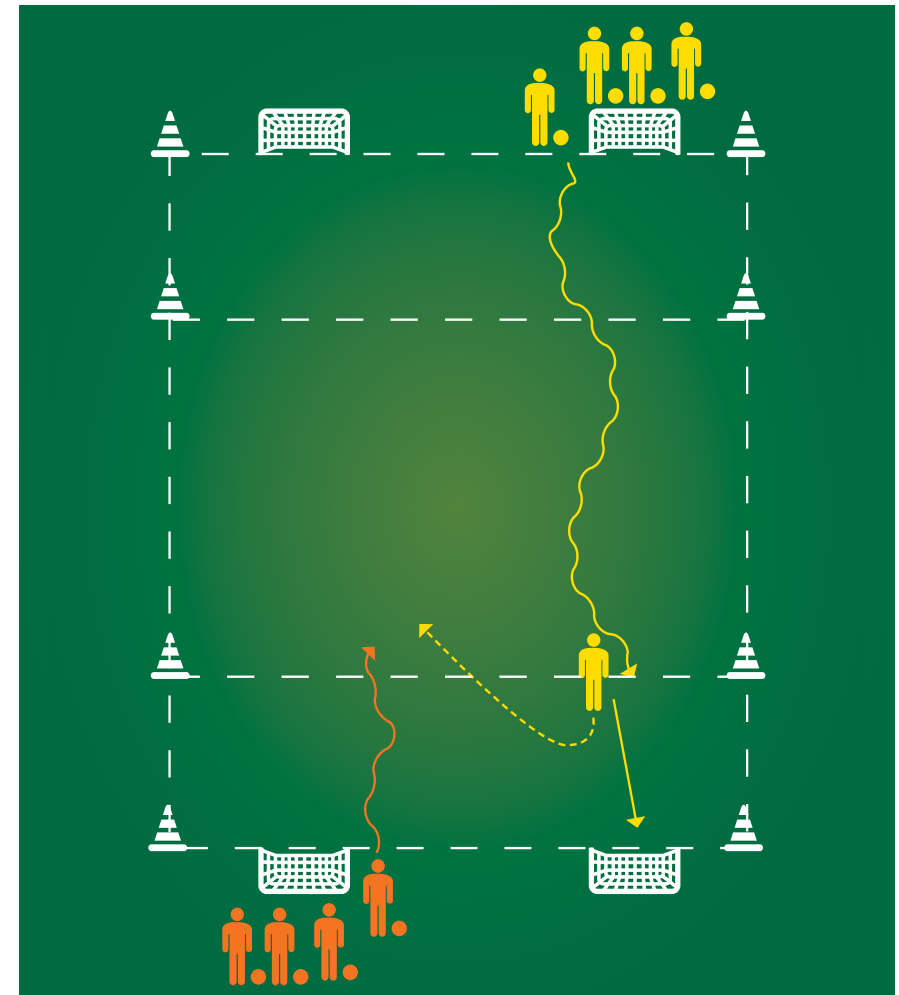
- Feint to turn and accelerate again
- Feint to stop and accelerate again
- Cut off the defenders line by crossing in front of them
- Take on the defender 1 v 1 if they manage to get in front of you (scoring in both goals is allowed!)

Step up:

- Narrow the distance between the two goals on the byline

Step down:

- The chaser just races against the runner to beat him to the shooting line. If the chaser reaches the shooting line first, the runner cannot shoot and score anymore



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Running with the ball Model Session 1

3. Skill game

4 v 4 line football

Grid size approximately 30m wide by 20m long (pitch shape is short but wide)

Explanation of the game:

4 v 4 small sided game; to score a goal a player must run with the ball across the opponent's by-line (see diagram A).

Possible Coaches Remarks:

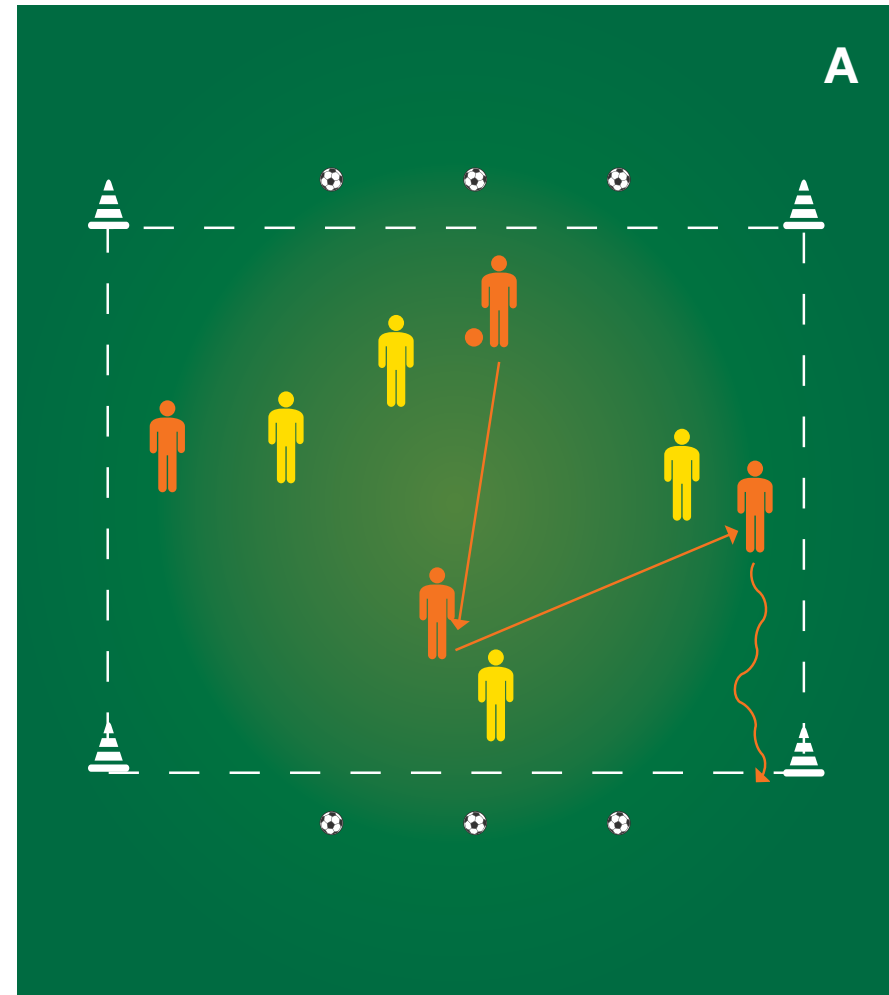
"Spread out; use the width of the grid"

"We must have a centre forward and 2 wingers"

"run with the ball whenever you see space in front of you"

"don't be afraid to take on opponents"

"when a defender is chasing you use the feints you learned earlier"



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

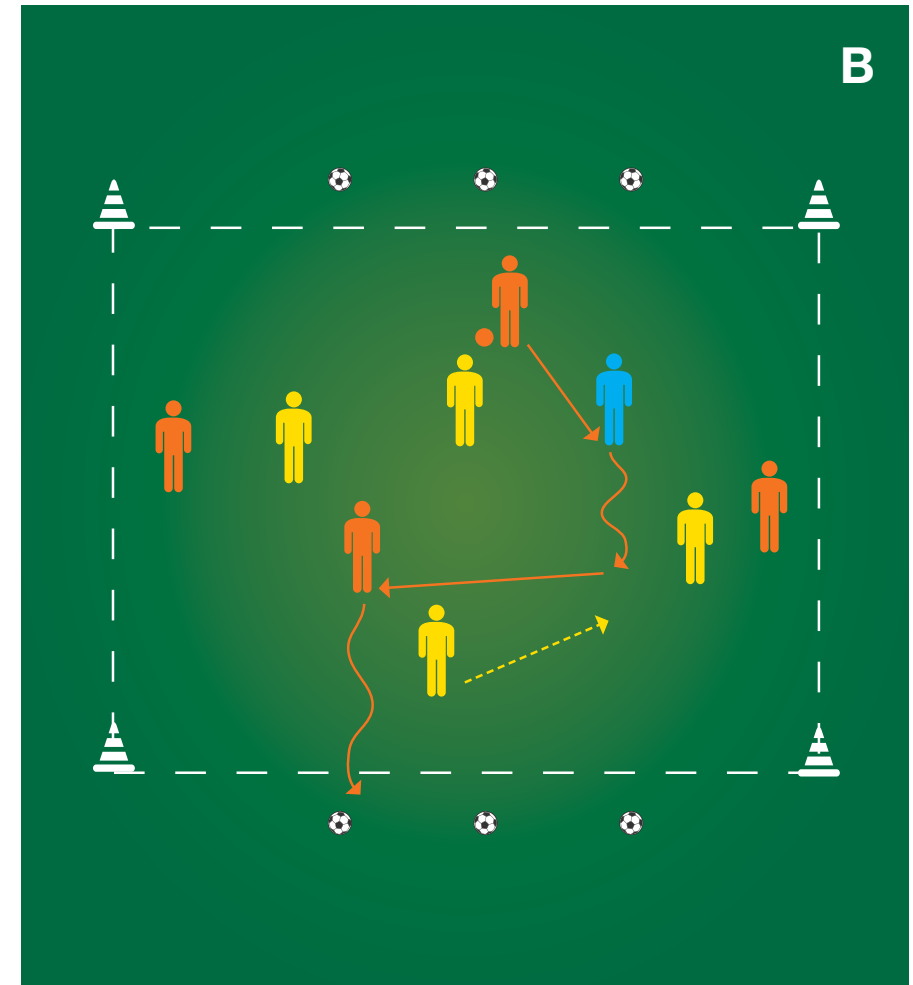
Running with the ball Model Session 1

Assess how the game goes: do all players run with the ball regularly and are goals being scored? If the answer is no, make it easier:

- Make the pitch wider
- Add a neutral player ("joker") who always plays with the team that has the ball (numerical advantage of 1 player; see diagram B)
- If still too difficult: bigger numerical advantage (2 jokers)

If too easy:

- Make the field more narrow
- Scoring zones rather than the whole line



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Running with the ball Model Session 2

1. Skill introduction

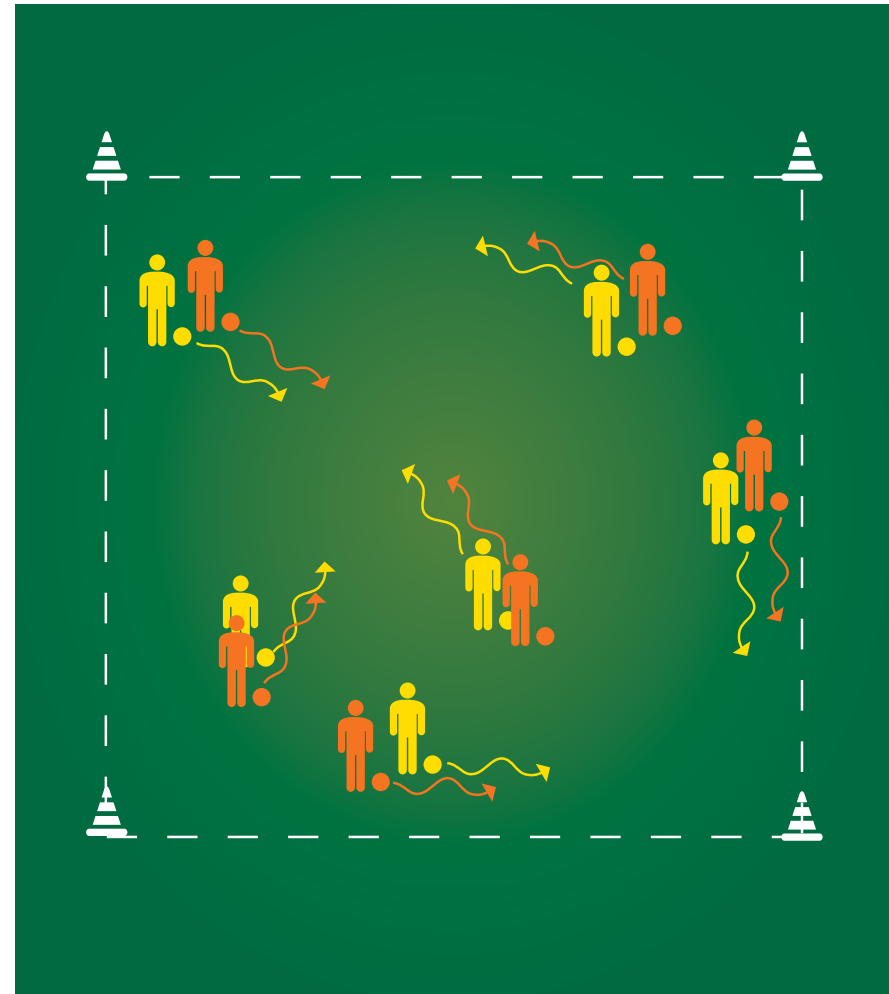
In a 30m x 30m grid the players are divided into pairs with a ball each (for safety reasons the grid should be rather too big than too small!).

One player dribbles in front, the other follows at short distance (change task of leader-follower regularly). In the beginning the speed is low and steady.

The coach asks the players to “scan” the field and be careful to not run into each other.

Next the coach instructs the players to gradually add the following variations:

- Accelerations (“when a space opens up in front of you”)
- Changes of direction and turns
- Stop-starts
- Feint stops followed by an acceleration
- Feint turns followed by an acceleration
- Etc



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Running with the ball Model Session 2

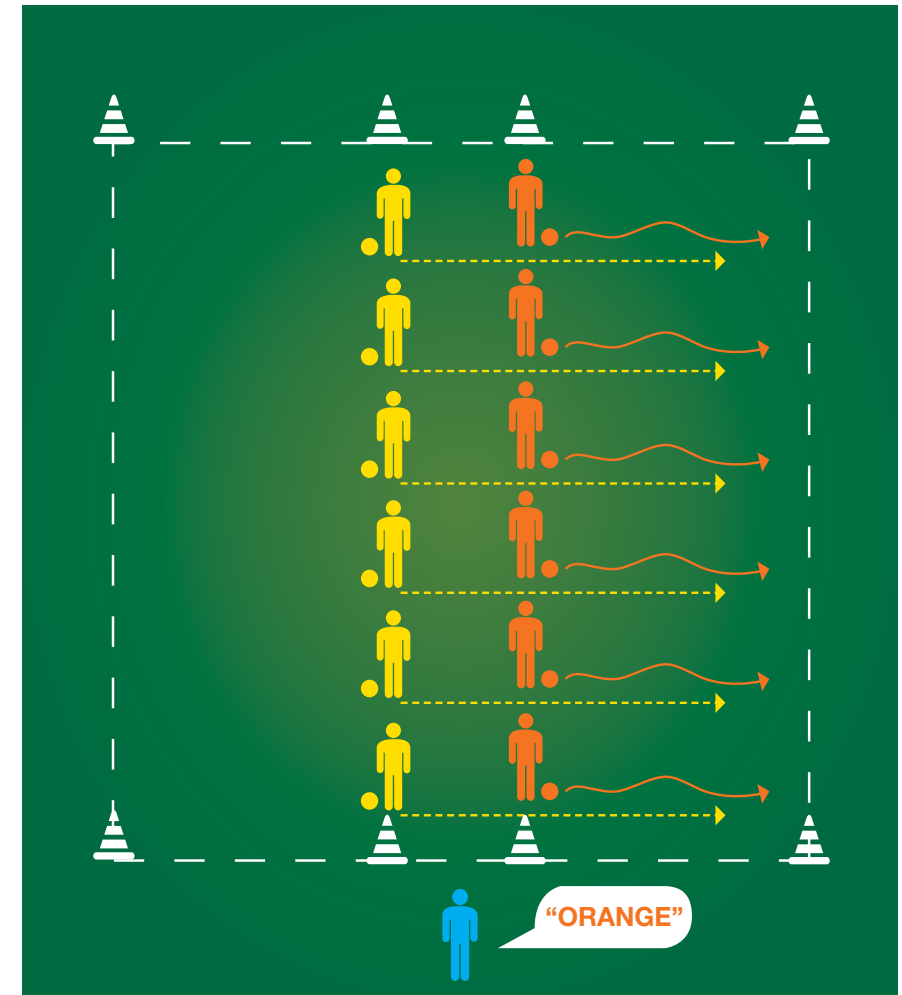
Concluding tagging game (using the same 30m x 30m grid)

The players line up with a ball each and facing the sideline (backs to each other). Distance between the players is 3m-4m and is marked out with cones.

When the coach calls “ORANGE” the orange players run with ball to the sideline chased (without ball) by the yellow players who try to tag them before they’ve reached the line. Depending on outcome the runner or chaser earns a point and we line up again.

When the coach calls “YELLOW” the reverse happens.

Since safety is extremely important, the players must only run in a **straight line** (stay in their own ‘lane’).



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Running with the ball Model Session 2

2. Skill training component

Organisation: Outside the penalty box another grid of the same size has been marked out.

Two teams (orange and yellow) are divided in 4 groups of equal numbers (A;B;C and D) and positioned as shown in the diagram.

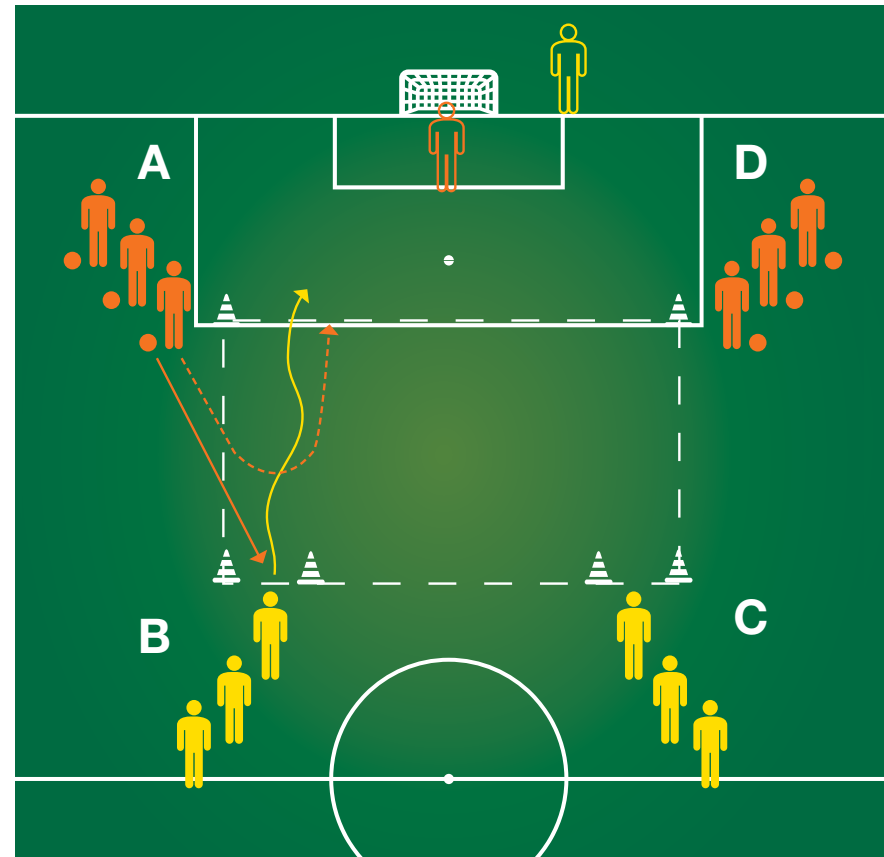
Groups orange A and D have a ball each, groups yellow C and B line up between the cones on the byline of the grid.

The exercise starts with the first player of group A passing the ball to the first player of group B (pass between the cones and with speed). Player B controls the ball and runs with it at speed toward the goal.

Player A follows their pass, overlaps and then chases player B who tries to finish (the shot can only be taken from inside the penalty box).

After the action has ended, the yellow player goes with the ball to position A; the orange player goes to position B.

Now it's group D and C's turn. Groups change sides regularly (use of other foot!).
"Who scores most?"



Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Push the ball forward every 3-4 steps"
- "Run as fast as you can but keep the ball under control"
- "If the defender catches up with you, this is what you can do:" (demonstrate!)
 - Feint to turn and accelerate again
 - Feint to stop and accelerate again
 - Cut off the defenders line by crossing in front
 - Take on the defender 1 v 1 if they get in front

5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Running with the ball Model Session 2

3. Skill game

4 v 4 in a grid of approximately 35m x 35m.

There are five gates of 3m positioned as shown.

The team in possession scores a goal when one of their players runs with the ball through one of the gates.

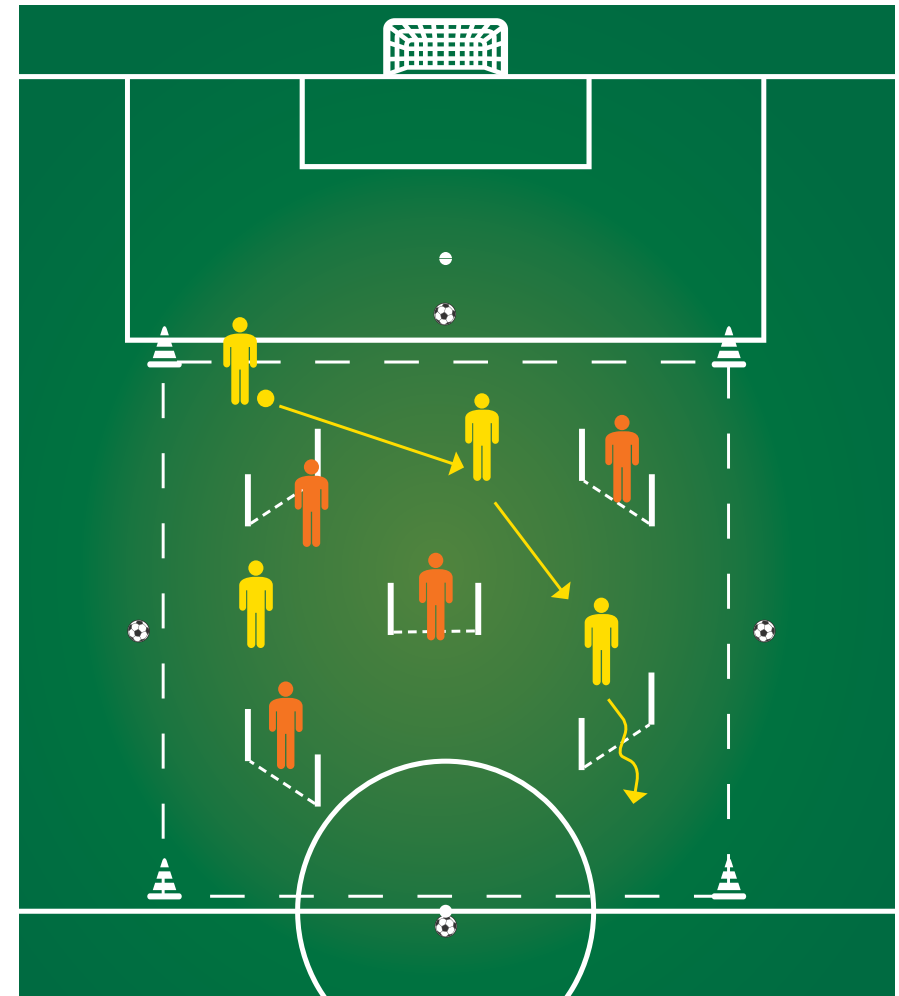
If the defending team wins the ball, the roles change without stopping the game.
“Which teams scores most?”

Step up:

- The attacking team must make an effort within 30 seconds, otherwise the possession goes to the opponent
- Decrease the gate size

Step down:

- Increase the gate size
- Add another gate
- Introduce a ‘joker’



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Running with the ball Model Session 3

1. Skill introduction

A grid of approximately 30m x 30m has 4 small 5m x 5m grids in all 4 corners.

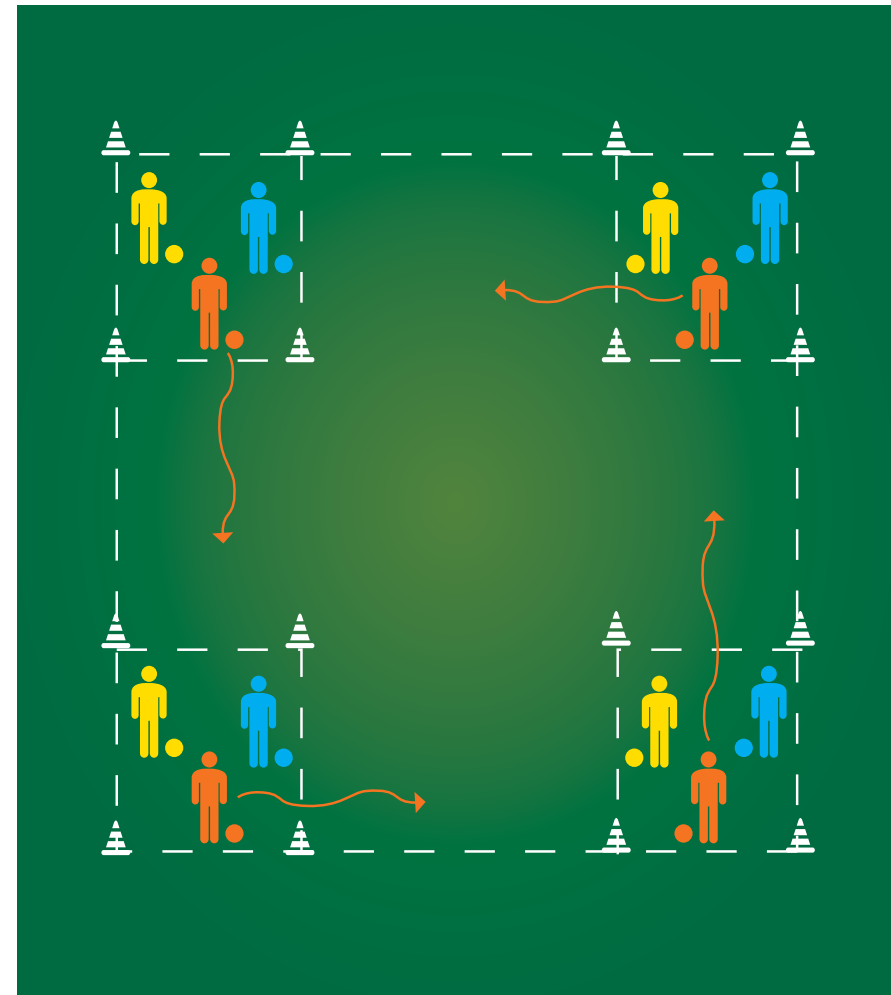
The players are divided into 4 groups of 3 players and positioned in the corner grids with a ball each as shown.

The 3 players in the corners wear different colour bibs or are numbered 1-3. On the coaches signal all players of the same group (all orange or #1's) run with the ball to the next corner followed by the next group, again after the coaches signal.

When everyone is back in the grid where they started; we start again but now in the other direction using the other foot only. In the beginning the speed is low and should be raised gradually.

Next we add the following variations (both with right as well as with left foot):

- Accelerations
- Stop-starts
- Feint stops followed by an acceleration
- Feint turns followed by an acceleration



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Running with the ball Model Session 3

Concluding tagging game

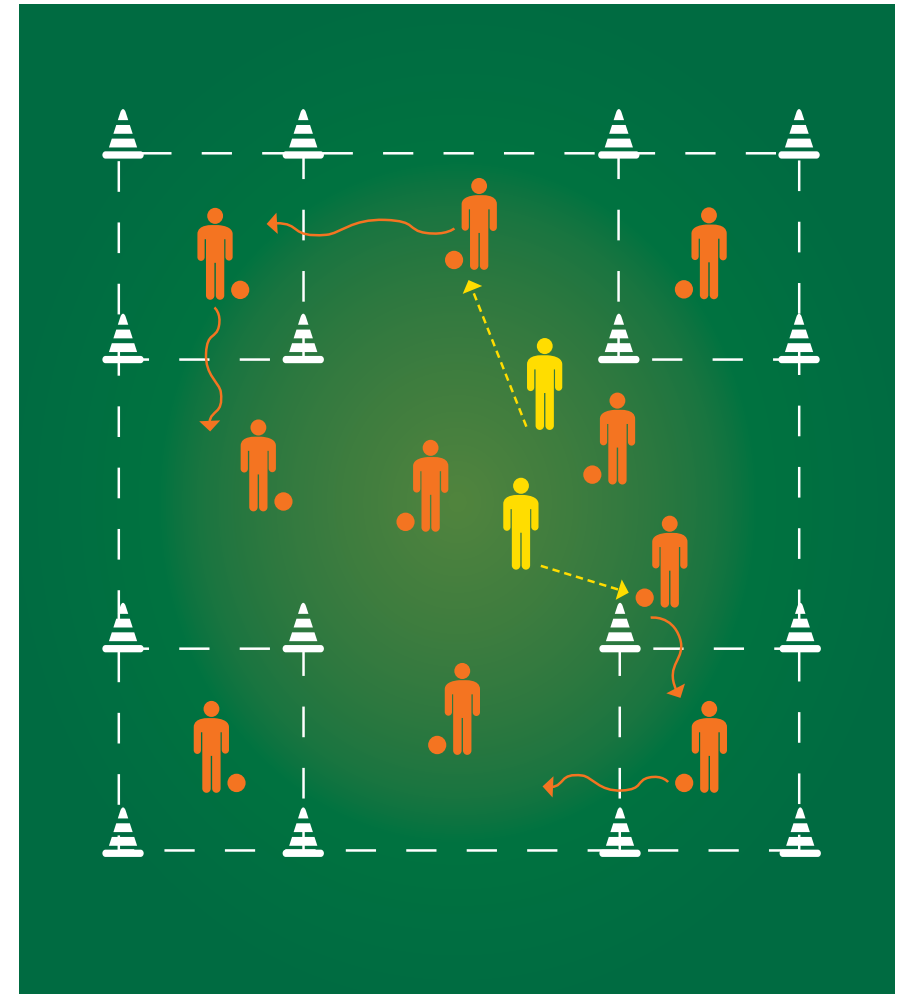
Use the set-up from the previous exercise.

One player with a ball in every corner grid; the rest of the players with a ball in the centre grid. There are one or two 'taggers' without a ball who try to tag the players with the ball. The players that get tagged, leave the grid and wait outside. A player can 'escape' the tagger by running with the ball into a corner grid but then the player that stands there must immediately leave the grid.

"How long does it take the taggers to tag all the players?"

After everyone has had a turn as taggers:

"Who are the winners?" (i.e. fastest time)



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Running with the ball Model Session 3

2. Skill training component

Organisation: 15m outside the penalty box, two lines of cones are placed as shown in the diagram.

The players in pairs with one ball and positioned in grids A;B;C and D as shown.

The pairs pass the ball back and forward to each other while waiting for their turn.

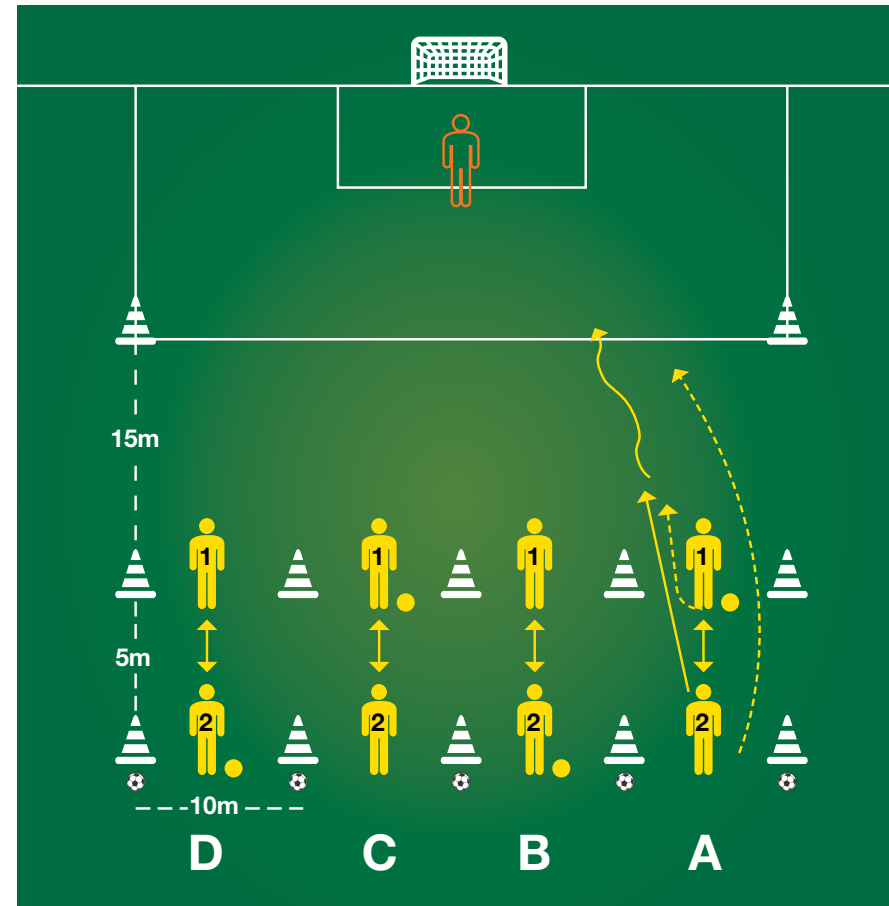
The exercise starts with the pair in grid A when, at the coach's whistle, player #2 passes the ball past #1 in the direction of the goal. Player #1 turns and runs with the ball towards the goal and tries to score (inside the box). Player #2 gives chase and tries to stop #1 from finishing.

As soon as the action ends, pair A return to their grid and pair B starts; etc. after every turn #1 and #2 change positions.

Regularly change the composition of the pairs as well.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

- "Push the ball forward every 3-4 steps"
- "Run as fast as you can but keep the ball under control"
- "If the defender catches up with you, this is what you can do:" (demonstrate!)
 - Feint to turn and accelerate again
 - Feint to stop and accelerate again
 - Cut off the defenders line by crossing in front of him
 - Take on the defender 1 v 1 if they get in front



Step up:

- Reduce the distance between the two lines of cones (4m-3m-2m)

Step down:

- Increase the distance between the two lines of cones (6m-7m-8m)

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

Running with the ball Model Session 3

3. Skill game

4 v 4 + 4 'walls' (8 v 4) on a long and narrow pitch with big goals and goalkeepers (as shown).

All players choose (or get assigned) a **direct opponent** and can only take the ball from that opponent.

The team in possession can use the wall players to combine with (walls: 1 or 2 touches only).

The offside rule applies

Change of teams when a goal is scored or after 2-3 minutes.

Variations:

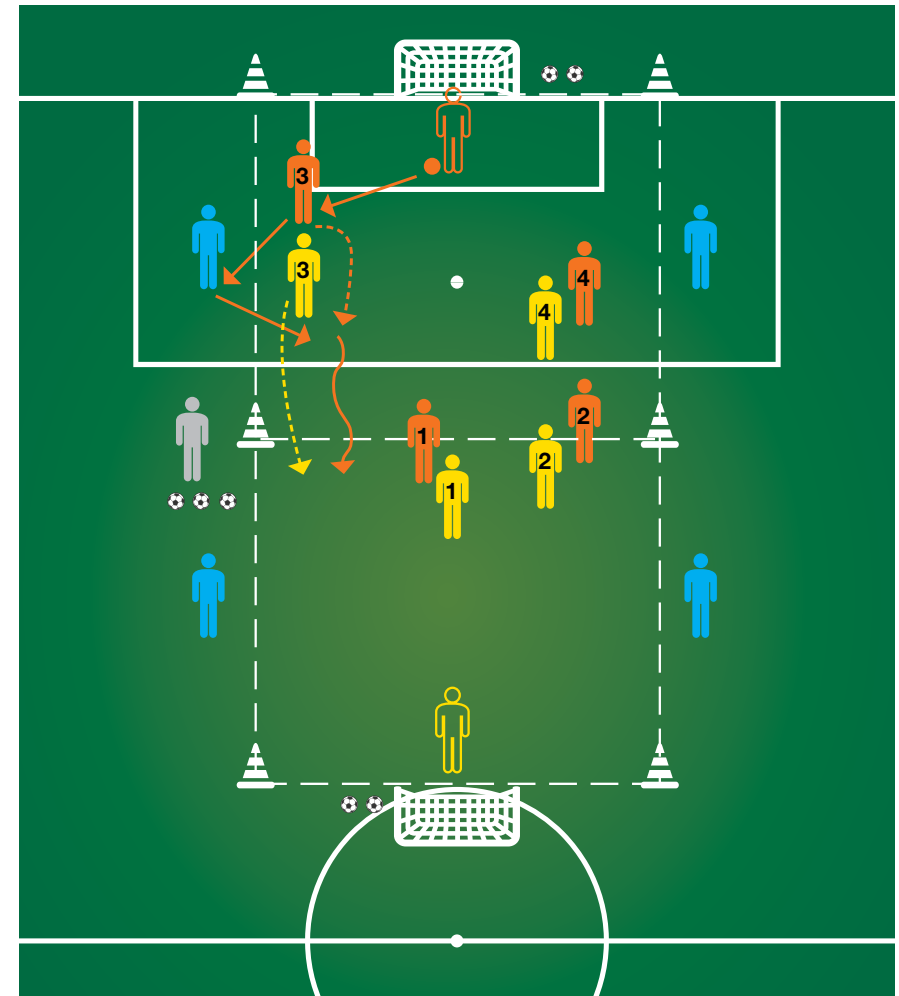
- 1 or 2 small goals without goalkeepers
- No goals but 'line-football'

Step up:

- Teams can only use the walls in their own half
- Narrow the pitch

Step down:

- Widen the pitch



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1 v 1 Model Session 1

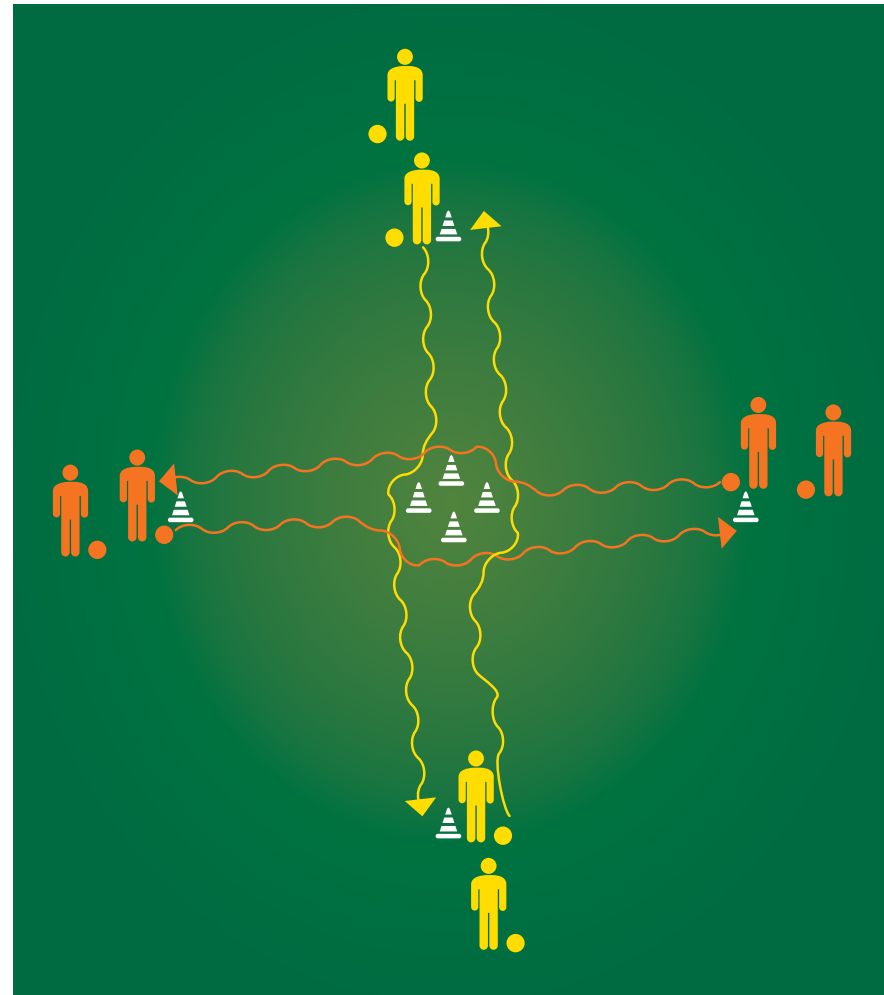
1. Skill introduction

4 markers placed 12-15m opposite of each other with 4 markers centrally in a diamond 1m-1.5m apart (see diagram).

Max. 2 players with ball line up at the markers. On the coaches call two players opposite each other start dribbling to the other side. In the middle they perform a prescribed or free feint to go around the **right side** of the markers and accelerate to the opposite marker. After 2 minutes: now go around the **left side** of the markers.

Progression:

- Speed up tempo (maintain proper execution)
- Take out the markers (perception and communication)



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

1 v 1 Model Session 1

Concluding tagging game:

All players move with a ball inside a 15m x 15m grid while 1 or 2 “taggers” (holding a bib in their hands) chase the other players and try to “tag” them.

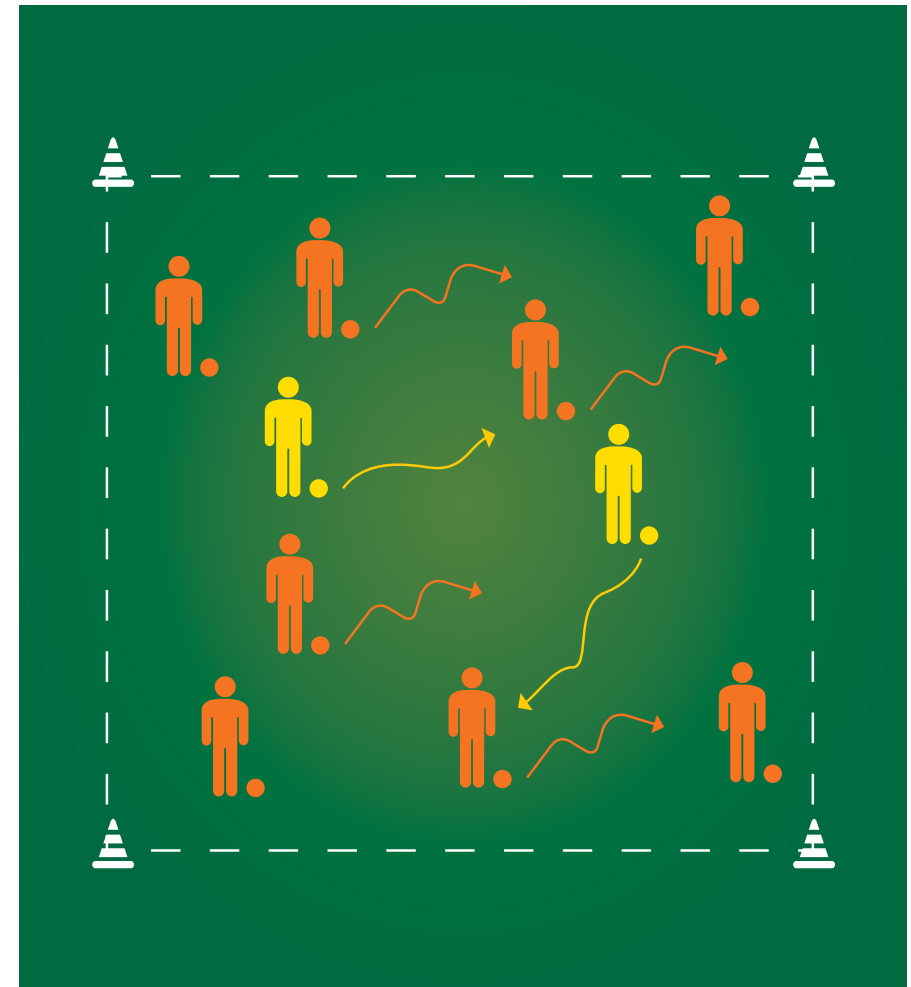
All players (taggers and runners) MUST keep their ball under control at all times.

A player who is tagged or loses control over the ball or runs out of the grid must change roles with the tagger.

The same rules apply for the tagger(s): they cannot tag someone unless they have the ball under control.

To make it easier/more difficult (for taggers):

- More/less taggers
- Smaller/bigger grid



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1 v 1 Model Session 1

2. Skill training component:

In a grid of approximately 20m x 30m two small goals are placed on each byline with markers on the corners and on the sideline at 5m from the corners to mark the 'scoring zone'.

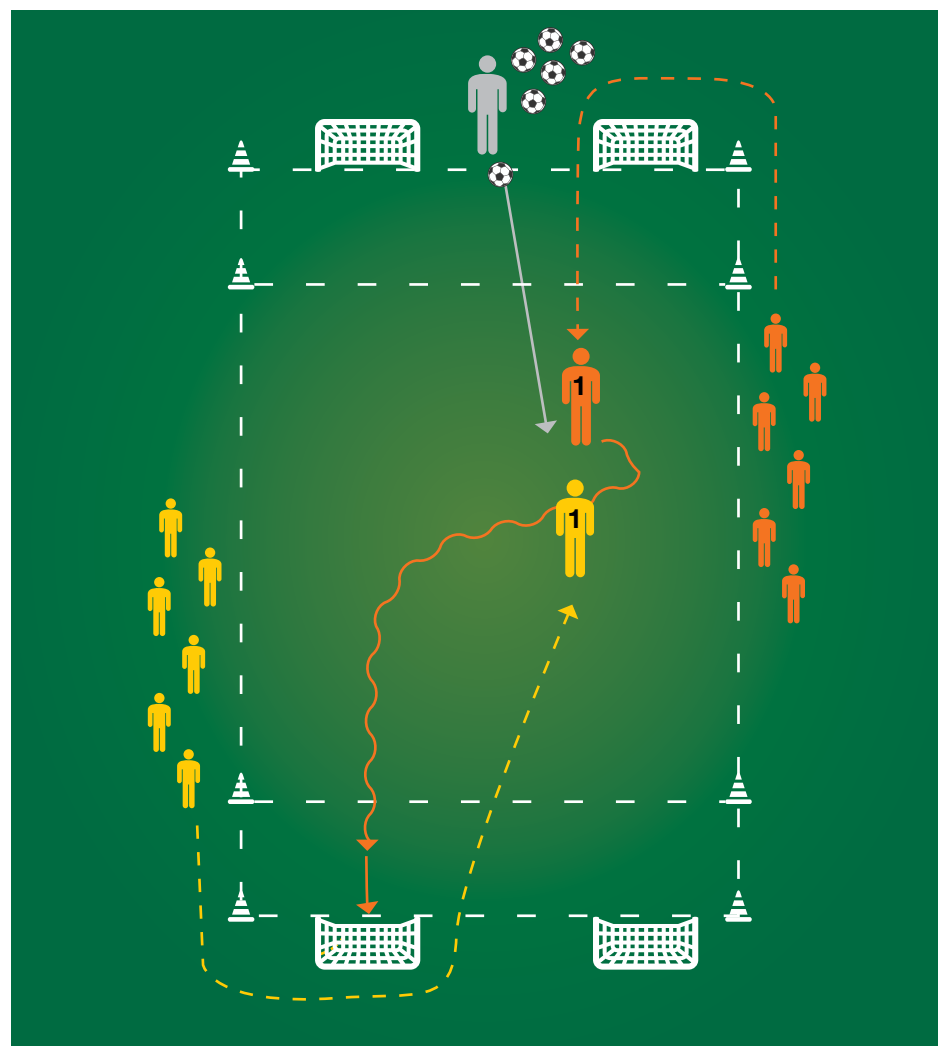
Two teams of 6 players maximum line up behind the markers on the sideline as shown. The coach is positioned with the balls between the two goals on one side of the pitch.

On a signal from the coach orange #1 and yellow #1 sprint around the corner marker and the nearest goal. The coach serves in favor of the orange player who take on the yellow player at maximum speed. The attacker can finish in either of the 2 goals but must finish from INSIDE the 5m 'scoring zone'. If the defender wins the ball they can score in one of the opposite goals (one attempt max. each). When the action has ended the players line up on the opposite side.

The coach can manipulate the 1 v 1 through the **angle** with which they serve the ball.

Possible Coaches Remarks:

| ATTACKER | DEFENDER |
|---|---|
| "Go at the defender with speed" | "Show the attacker one way" |
| "Use a feint to put the defender off balance" | "Bend your knees and stand on your toes so you're able to change direction quickly" |
| "Threaten to go to one side then suddenly attack the other" | "The best moment to commit is when the attacker takes a heavy touch or slows down" |



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

1 v 1 Model Session 1

3. Skill game

3 v 3 on a pitch (20m wide x 40m long) with big goals and goalkeepers. Placed on the halfway line are 3 equal sized 'gates' as shown in the diagram. Each player (orange or yellow) must defend their 'own' designated gate when the opponent has the ball (i.e. player #1 defends gate 1, player #2 defends gate 2 etc).

The orange goalkeeper starts the game with all outfield players of both teams in grid A. The orange team combines till one orange player beats their opponent 1 v 1 and moves through one of the gates into grid B and tries to score.

If orange scores the game starts again in grid A.

If yellow wins the ball in grid A they can immediately score. If yellow scores, the game restarts in grid B with possession for yellow.

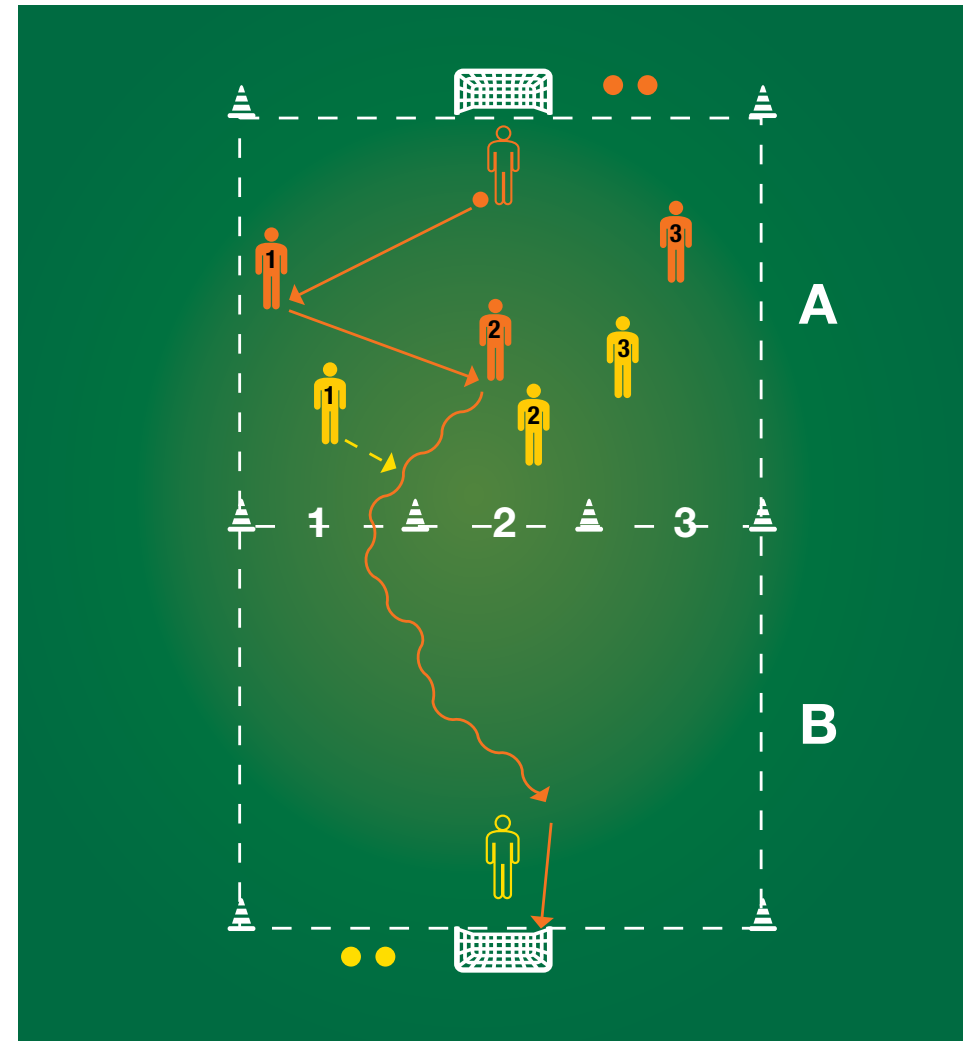
If the yellow goalkeeper wins the ball in grid B, the game restarts in grid B with possession for the yellow team.

Step up:

- The attacking team must make a 1 v 1 effort within 30 seconds otherwise the possession goes to the opponent
- Narrow the pitch (smaller gates)

Step down:

- Introduce a 'joker'
- Widen the pitch (bigger gates)



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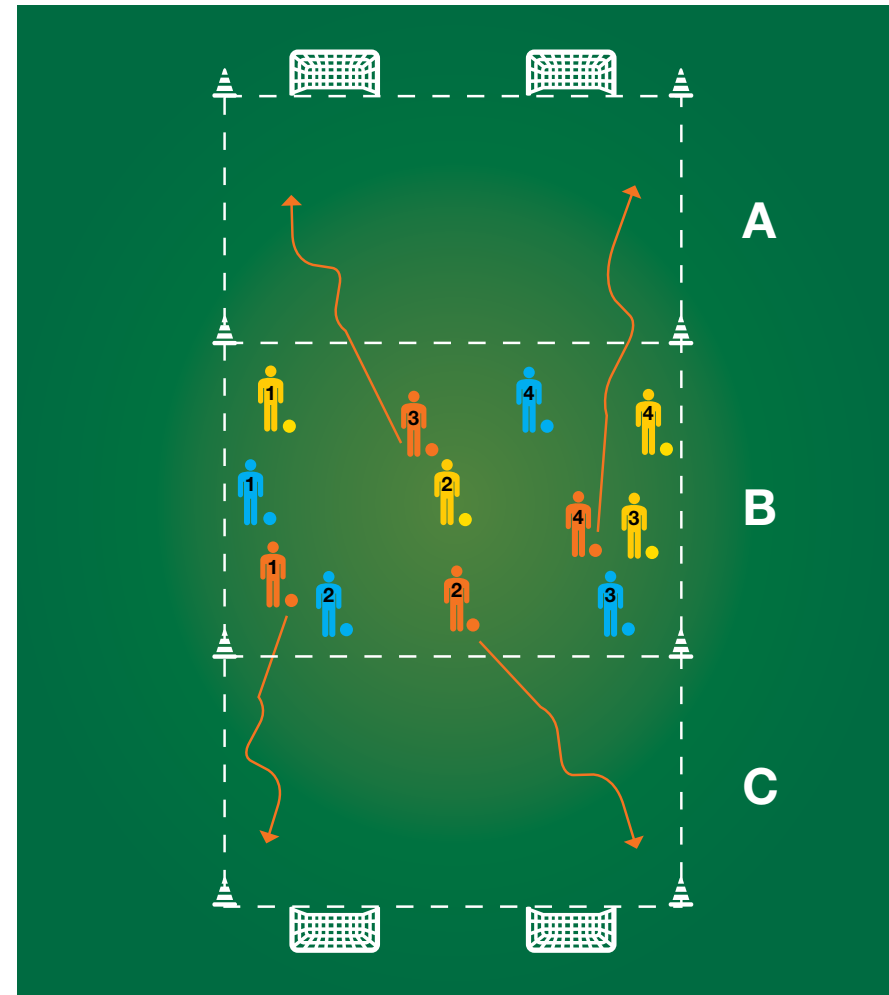
1 v 1 Model Session 2

1. Skill introduction

- Set up the organisation as shown in the diagram. Grids A and C 20m x 10m, grid B 20m x 15m, with two 2m goals on each byline
- All players dribble with a ball in grid B
- **Avoid collisions** (balls and players)
- Make feints (free choice)
- Accelerate after a feint into grid A or C

Progression:

- Number all players 1-4. On the call of a specific number these players (i.e. all #1's) feint and accelerate out of grid B and finish in **separate** goals (awareness; communication and decision-making!), then get their ball and return to grid.



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

1 v 1 Model Session 2

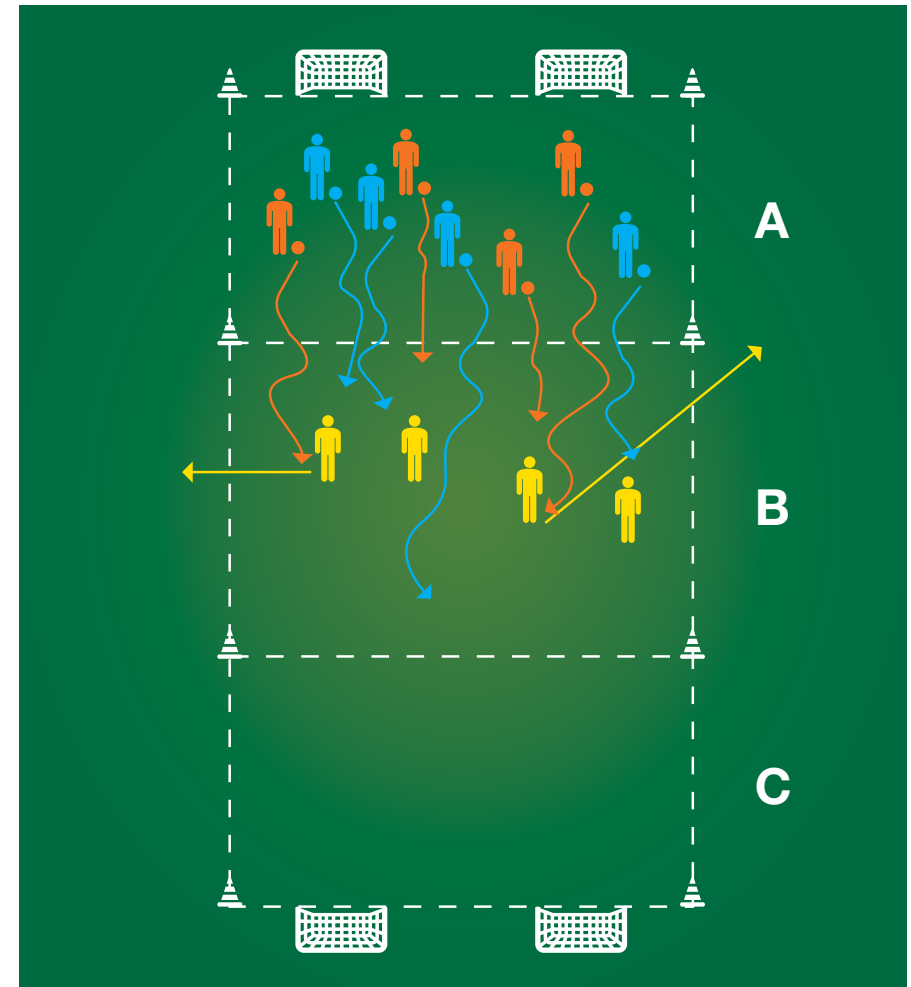
Concluding Game:

'Cross the canal' to free zone on other side.

One group (yellow) position themselves in grid B and are the 'defenders'. All other players with a ball each in grid A. On the coaches signal they must all dribble to grid C.

The defenders must eliminate runners by kicking the runners balls out of grid B. When a defender kicks your ball out of the grid, you have to get it and start to juggle on the side until a new game starts.

"Who wins?" (fastest time by defenders or last runner standing).



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1 v 1 Model Session 2

2. Skill training component

Organisation:

Outside the penalty box is a 15m x 15m grid with 6 cones placed as shown in the diagram.

Two teams (orange and yellow) are divided into 2 groups of equal numbers and positioned as shown.

Groups orange A and yellow C have a ball each. The exercise starts with A1 passing the ball to B1. A1 then runs around the central cone to receive the ball back from B1. At the moment A1 starts their run around the cone, D1 also starts to run around the opposite central cone.

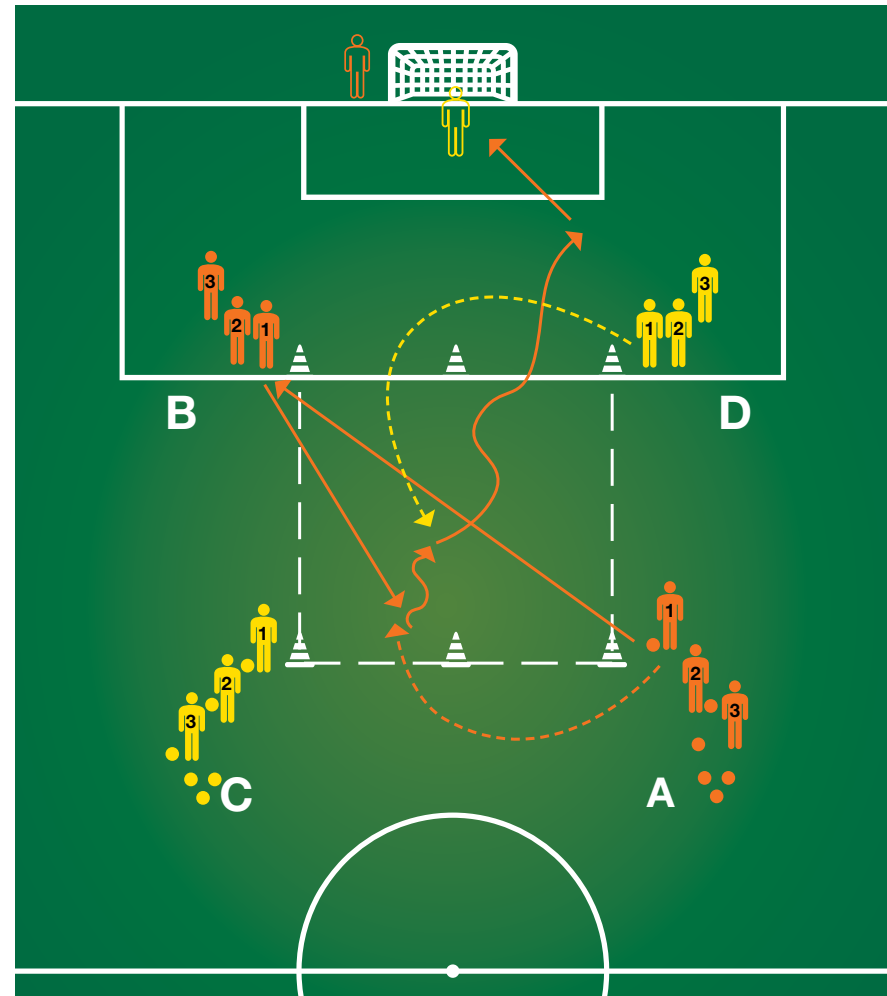
A1 must now try to beat D1 in a 1 v 1 to enter the penalty box and finish on goal. D1 can only defend in the grid and is not allowed to enter the penalty box.

The action stops when A1 has finished on goal; D1 captures the ball from A1 or the ball goes out of the grid.

After the action has finished the players involved move as follows:

- A1 to group B (bring back the ball)
- B1 to group A (bring ball from A1)
- D1 goes back to group D (line up at the back)
- Next sequence is C1 passing to D2 with B2 defending

“Which team can score the most?”



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1 v 1 Model Session 2

3. Skill game

Organisation:

A grid of 40m x 30m (depending on ability) divided in 2 grids of 20m x 30m by a halfway line of 4 cones (see diagram). Two small (2m) goals on each byline and a 5m-7m shooting line at each end.

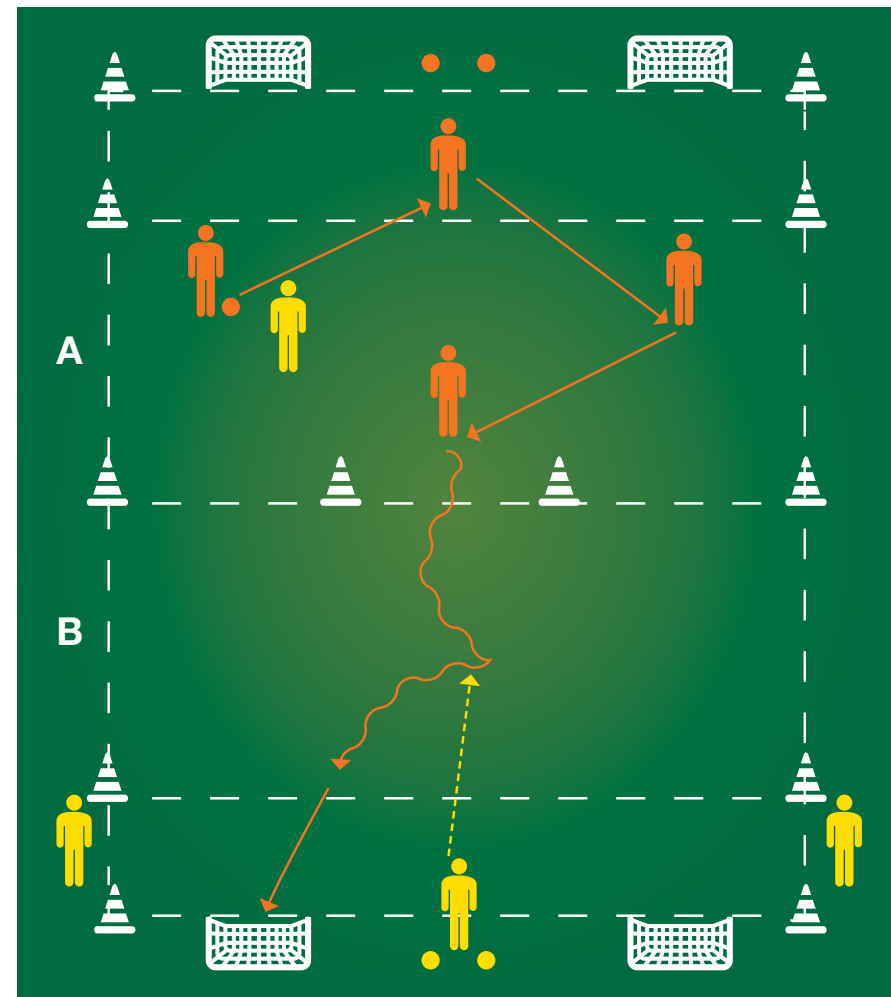
Two teams of 4 players each. The game starts in grid A with the orange team in possession and one yellow defender (4 v 1). The 3 other yellow players position themselves as shown (one between the goals and the other 2 at the shooting line cones).

The orange team must get a player running with the ball across the halfway line into grid B and score in one of the goals (inside the scoring zone).

At the moment the orange player crosses the halfway line one of the yellow players enters the grid to attack the orange player (1 v 1).

Which defender commits depends on the 'gate' through which the attacker enters grid B (see diagram).

- If orange scores: restart in grid A
- If the yellow defender captures the ball in grid B: restart in grid B with yellow in possession
- If the defender wins the ball in the 4 v 1, they can score immediately in 1 of the 2 goals (from any distance)



5.

Skill Acquisition Phase Model Sessions

1 v 1 Model Session 2

Variations:

No goals but the attacker must run with the ball across the byline

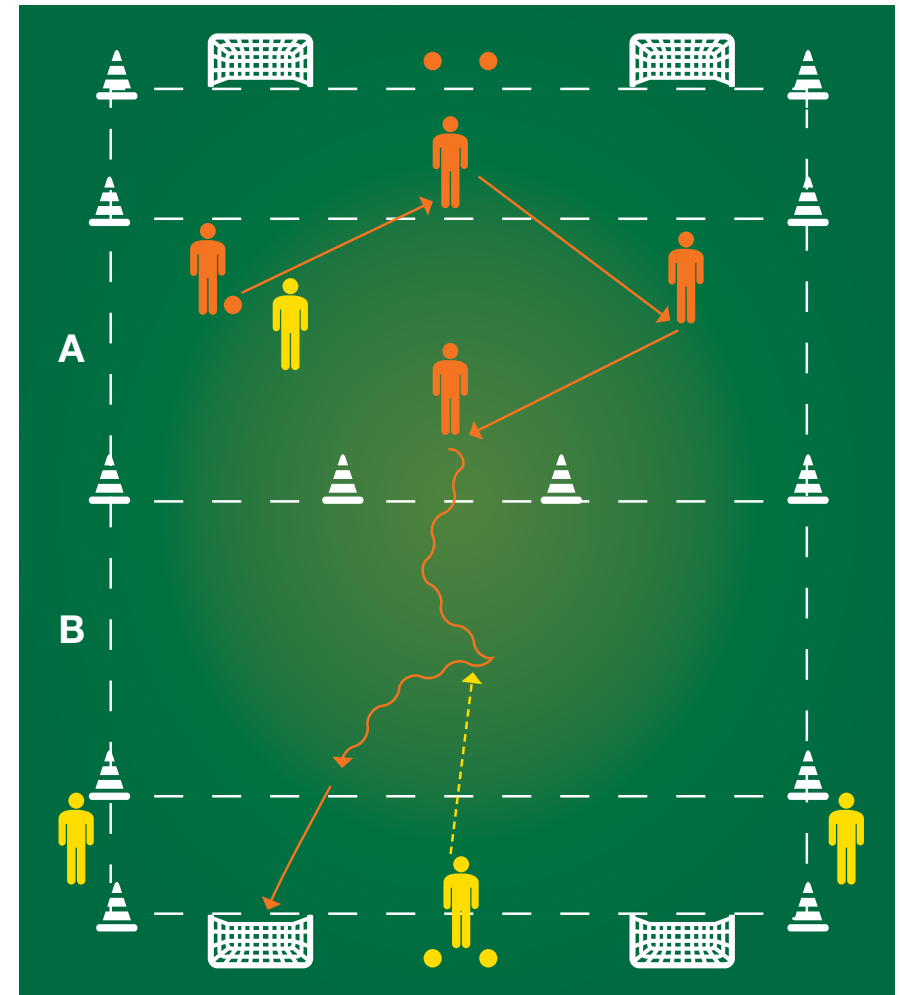
Step up:

- The attacking team must cross over the halfway line within 15 seconds otherwise the possession goes to the opponent

- Decrease the grid size

Step down:

- Increase the grid size





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