

Paris Soccer Club  
Basic Coaching Manual 2008

# ATTACKING TACTICS



## The Most Important Skills to Teach

Soccer players need a lot of different skills, and it does not matter for most of these skills whether you teach Skill A or Skill B first. However, there are some skills that are absolute "must-haves" for any player- and are so important that you probably will want to teach them first.

These are basic **ball-holding skills (receiving and shielding)**; **basic ball-stealing skills (defense)**; **and basic take-on skills (attacking)**. Most kids naturally seem to have a few basic defensive skills, even if they were never formally taught. The other two areas require instruction to accomplish with even minimal competency, so there is a good argument to start first with ball-holding skills; move next to take-on skills; and then to get to ball-stealing skills.

Why **ball-holding** before take-on? Simple. Once you get possession, the other side is going to try to take the ball back. If you can hang onto the ball under pressure, you'll have time to make better decisions (including finding an open teammate to pass the ball to). Also, if you are confident that you can hold the ball, you are much less likely to blindly try to simply whack it away and let someone else worry about it (a technique commonly known as "passing the responsibility rather than the ball" or the "hot-potato phenomenon"). What are ball-holding skills? Most folks refer to them as receiving and shielding skills. The first step (receiving) is to bring the ball under control quickly.

Then, you use your body/legs to get between the opponent and the ball to protect (shield) the ball. It includes really basic stuff like simply stepping over the ball when somebody is coming in, as well as somewhat harder stuff (but still easy) like rolling/pulling the ball back behind you or to your side. The rolling/pulling of the ball requires some work, as you need to learn to use both feet - and to switch feet. However, one of the key ingredients is to learn to bend the knees; get the arms out; and use your weight to push back into the opponent. As kids get more advanced, they can learn how to spring off of an opponent (or roll off of him by using a circle turn). However, at the very beginning stages, they are fine if they can simply get their bottoms down; get those knees bent; push hard back into the opponent; and get enough weight on their support leg to be able to free their far foot and use it to roll the ball around. Along with these ball-holding skills, you will want to introduce some basic receiving skills, so that they can bring the ball under control quickly (which is essential if they are going to have any hope of shielding it). How to do this? Start with two equal-sized players with a single ball in a grid about 3-yards square and have them work on holding the ball by using simple rolls, pullbacks and other touches to shield the ball. If you teach your players ANYTHING, teach them the **skills to keep possession**.

Once they realize that they have the skills to keep an opponent from stealing the ball, they will gain the confidence to lift their heads up and find another player to pass off to. Before they gain this confidence, you can expect terrible passing simply because they will get flustered at the first hint of pressure (and

might even "feel" panicked at pressure which is 10-20 yards away). Until your players can hold a ball 1 v 1 in a grid about 10 feet by 10 feet for a count of around 7-8, they are not going to have enough confidence to do very well on the field.

After learning some basic shielding/receiving skills, the next thing to learn is some basic **dribbling skills**. Different coaches have different philosophies on how to teach dribbling. Many coaches spend a lot of time trying to teach young players a lot of fancy moves, which were made famous by noted international stars (who, incidentally, only perfected these fancy moves after years and years of hard work on the basics). This approach works for some kids who are naturally graceful and quick. However, it can have the unfortunate result of convincing an awful lot of kids that "I can't dribble" when they simply are still growing; are a bit clumsy; and cannot get their big feet and/or unwieldy bodies to do all of the ballerina stuff.

What these coaches don't realize is that a player only needs to know about **3 basic moves** to be able to dribble very successfully--and that virtually all top-notch players use these same 3 moves about 90% of the time when they are dribbling the ball. ANYBODY CAN LEARN THESE 3 MOVES (and this includes the coach)!

The moves are the **check** (a/k/a "magic hop" in some Vogelsinger videos); the simple **cut/explosion** using the outside of the dribble foot; and the **chop** (cut with the inside of the foot). If they can master these three moves, and learn the standard, straight-ahead dribbling technique (i.e. knee over the ball; front of dribble foot pulls the ball along so it stays on/near the foot at all times), they can learn to beat a reasonable number of defenders especially if those defenders are coming in at speed.

The key to **take-on skills** is getting the head up to watch the defender, which is dependent on having enough ball control that you know where the ball is and what it is going to do without needing to look. Then, as soon as the defender tries to stab at the ball, you can take advantage of his "dead leg" (weight mainly on one leg) by *attacking the outside of the dead leg and going around him*. Piece of cake!! Of course, once your players become convinced that they can dribble, they probably will want to work on "cool moves". This is a great warm-up. In fact, it can be great homework (Coach at end of practice: "Johnny needs to learn a new move and teach it to us at next practice; anyone who uses it in the scrimmage gets a lollipop"). But don't put the cart before the horse. Convince them that they can dribble and the fancy moves will take care of themselves.

The next thing to learn is *basic defense including simple delay as well as ball-stealing*. The first thing to teach is simple **delaying tactics** by use of good footwork to get in the attacker's way. Time is the defender's friend, and speed is the attacker's friend, so you want to delay and delay and delay to allow your teammates to come and help. Once you're "numbers up", it's easier to steal the ball! The second skill is the *standing tackle followed by the shoulder charge*.

Of course, after you've taught these very basic skills, you'll need to work on passing technique and kicking technique since most kids won't be able to pass accurately or do a laces kick or a chip without

instruction (although most will toe-kick just fine). Whatever you do, please don't teach your kids that the "proper" way to score is to break the net with a hard shot. Many kids get the impression that they cannot play forward unless they have a very hard shot. This is garbage. Most of the goals in a game will be scored by passes, not by blistering shots on goal (pull out your WC tapes and watch - this is universally true for most goals, except for set plays). So, get them used to scoring by simply passing the ball into the net and their future coaches will thank you. Nothing wrong with scoring by a kick, mind you. Just don't get them into the mindset that their spectacular dribbling run through 6 defenders needs to end with a bullet shot as they'll inevitably put the ball out too far in front of them to get the shot off and the keeper will make a meal of it. On the other hand, they most likely would have scored if they had simply kept the head up; watched the keeper; and pushed it past him.

Depending on your age group, the next stage is often to introduce **wall passes** but these take lots of ball *control/receiving/passing skills* which often are not present at younger ages or with newer players. You'll also want to introduce the basic **cutback or drop** at some stage, as well as the **square pass**. The cutback or drop (where the on ball player takes the ball to the goal line and cuts it back to the penalty mark) are common support options. These are all basic 2v1 options for support - and I haven't even added the overlap!

There is not much point in even adding much in the 3v1 or 3v2 attacking category until your kids have mastered the basic jobs of the on-ball player and the player who is closest to him (the 2nd attacker, in coach-speak). Once the kids have figured out **how to keep the ball; take somebody on;** and provide simple 2v1 **support;** add in the concepts of **basic triangles** for support and focus on the job of the off-ball players to promptly move so that the on-ball player *always has 2 safe, short passing options*. Along with improving first-touch and some more basic take-on, finishing and defending skills, this should be quite enough to occupy your team (and you) through the next World Cup.

Along the way, expect them to make mistakes in deciding what was the "best" support option. Expect them to go to sleep from time to time, and not move into a good support position. Expect their first-touch to fail them. But, if you work them in these basics and push them to learn these simple rules, they are likely to be among the best players on the field in a few years.

# Practice Plans to Teach the Basics

In this section of the manual, you'll find a set of practice plans designed to help you through your first season of coaching. We want to stress that these practices are not the "be all and the end all" by any means, and that there are as many ways to teach these basic skills as there are practising coaches. These are simply intended to help you get started. As you develop as a coach, you'll find that you begin to pick up more and more ideas about how to teach and improve your players' skills, and as your players improve you'll find that they increasingly challenge you to develop your coaching skills.

Here's what you'll find in this section:

## **Ball control**

1. Straight-ahead dribbling and checking
2. A compilation of dribbling moves
3. Basic chop
4. Inside cut
5. Fakes & feints

## **Passing & receiving**

1. Push pass
2. Passing & receiving
3. Receiving the ball
4. Chest traps
5. Juggling the ball and receiving the ball in the air with foot or thigh
6. Shielding
7. Introduction to heading
8. Heading

## **Kicking**

1. Instep drive
2. Laces kick
3. Lofted kick

## **Defending**

1. Standing tackle
2. Shoulder charge and side tackle
3. On-field communication (in another section of this Manual)
4. First defender and the defensive stance
5. Second defender
6. Marking an opponent

## **Attacking**

1. Beginning take-on skills
2. 1 v 1 attacking skills
3. 2 v 1 attacking patterns (combined play)
4. On-field communication (in another section of this Manual)

## **Other**

1. Throw-ins
2. Restarts
3. Tips on basic goalkeeper training
4. Stretching and a sample stretching routine
5. Teaching the Laws of the Game (LOTG)
6. Fun Games that Teach Skills
7. On-field communication (in another section of this Manual)

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## **traight-Ahead Dribbling and Checking (Stopping) the Ball**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### **Warm-up**

Start with some basic ball-control movements, such as rolls, vees, toe-taps. Do your stretches, interspersed with assorted ball control moves which you want to practice.

### **Individual Work**

The first step in learning to dribble is learning how to "carry" the ball by dribbling it straight ahead. The technique is very important to get down correctly. Done properly, this technique allows a player to propel the ball forward by "feel", without needing to look down to see where the ball is. This technique should be practiced constantly.

The key coaching points are as follows:

1. The knee of the dribbling leg is bent and the toes are pointed downwards and slightly inwards, so that the front of the foot comes into contact with the ball.
2. Contact with the ball is made with the laces of the shoe, with the big bone of the arch slightly below the top of the ball at about the center of the ball.

3. The knee must be over the ball when contact is made, so that the gait itself is very similar to prancing.

4. As contact is made with the ball, the ball is dragged/pulled along by the dribbling foot, so that it comes to rest beside the dribbling foot when you step down again. Short steps are used, and the ball stays in front of the torso at all times. After illustrating this move, allow the players to have some time to experiment by moving around in free space. When most have learned the correct foot position and are successfully dragging their balls around with them, distribute them on a line (like they were lined up for a race) and get them to dribble to the "finish" line and check the ball (checking should be taught in the practice before this one). Start using a walking pace, then progress to a slow jog, then to a faster jog. It is doubtful that your players will be able to progress to full running speed using this technique until they have practices for several sessions. So, for your warm-ups for the next few practices, do a jog around the complex or your field to work on straight-ahead dribbling. Once they have learned to dribble with their dominant foot, switch to the other foot. It is fine to drop back to walking speed (dribbling is tiring) to work on the technique. Your main objective is to get them to learn to dribble with the dominant foot - and at least occasionally be able to take some dribbling steps with the non-dominant foot when they need to do this to shield the ball. Some players will be naturally left-footed and others will have no strong foot preference. However, all players can learn to use both feet, if encouraged and prodded to do so.

How do you encourage them to do so? Ask them to guess whether a race is going to be won by a guy with 1 foot or 2 feet. They know that answer. So, if I am a defender, and I know that you can only turn in one direction, you have made it at least 50% easier to guard you - because you voluntarily have turned yourself into a 1-footed player.

### **Small Group Work**

Divide the group into pairs, based upon size/speed (i.e., put bigger/faster players together). Set up 2 cones per pair, about 8 feet apart and widely spaced. Put one player between the cones, as a defender. Have the other player come directly at him (can come thru in either direction). If the defender put his hand up in a "Stop" gesture, the dribbler must check the ball and stop before the gate. If the defender signals "thumbs up", then the dribbler can go thru the gate unharmed as long as he keeps the ball in contact with his foot as he goes thru the gate. If dribbler tries to kick it thru, then he loses a point. After 10 attempts, the players switch places.

A contest should be held after both sides have had a turn. Possibilities include: pair with the greatest success wins; player with the most success wins; all players with X put in one group for a contest and all of the ones below X put in another group for their own contest.

## **Learning to Check (Stop) the Ball**

Of course, if you are going to go forward at speed, you are going to need to learn to be able to stop the ball. This is a good time, after some experimentation with speedy straight-ahead dribbling, to introduce the basic check (aka "Magic Hop" in some Vogelsinger videos - which is a name kids really enjoy).

This is a very useful move to be able to do in order to keep the ball in bounds, or to do a quick turn when you are in a footrace with another player. In order to be able to learn this move, your players must be developmentally able to skip. Players who are younger than age 8 may not be able to skip - and, if so, will be too young to learn this move yet.

The key coaching points in teaching the check are as follows:

1. With the ball moving forward at a slow roll, put the plant foot (usually the non-dominant foot) beside the ball and do a quick hop on the plant foot as soon as it comes down.
2. While you are airborne with the hop, lightly tap the top of the ball with the opposite foot (which will naturally be coming over the ball in the normal stride). DO NOT put any weight on the tapping foot - a very slight tap on the ball will cause it to stop.
3. Continue forward to land on the tapping foot, then turn back to get the ball. Older players will be able to turn in the air and do a "rooster-tail" type of hockey stop (landing with the foot already turned sideways so that they can immediately push off in the opposite direction).

## **Teaching the Check**

Put each player with a ball, and simply let them dribble around and work on stopping the ball with a check move. This move is not as hard as it sounds - and most players u8 and above can master it without real difficulty. Now, go back over a bit of your small group work - and let them incorporate the check into their work.

## **Large Group Work**

Divide the group into 2-4 teams. Set up a series of cone "gates", complete with gatekeepers (note: make the number of gates equal to the number of players on a team). Have the players dribble thru the various gates. The gatekeeper is allowed to kick their ball away if it is not in contact with their foot as they come thru the gate. Switch out gatekeepers periodically. Once everyone has run the gates, you can have a race if you like - or a contest to see how many gates can be run successfully. Of course, if your ball is knocked away, you have to re-run the gate, and this slows you down.

Progression: Players may be required to look up to see the number of fingers which the gatekeeper is holding up, and call this number out correctly, as they go thru the gate.

## **Scrimmage**

Play 2v1 in a mid-sized grid, which is divided into two parts, with a small cone goal at one end. Put 1 defender and 1 attacker in part near goal. Have other attacker at opposite end of the grid. Ball is passed to attacker at end of the grid, who dribbles towards goal end. Defender cannot come out of the defending end. Defender scores if he can kick ball back into no-man's land. Attackers score by making goal. Ball which goes over end line is a restart. Play to 5 points, and then switch roles. After playing 2v1 for awhile, you might try 4v2 and watch what happens.

Do not interfere or try to teach support decisions. Your team will not work on support roles until much later. For now, let the kids experiment with 2v1 decisions. The main idea at this point is just to get them used to carrying the ball in unopposed, and looking up to find a target player.

## **A Compilation of Dribbling Moves**

### **Some Beginning Moves to Develop Touch**

There are many different moves to develop ball control and ball touch. Many of those listed below were popularized by Weil Coerver, a noted Dutch coach. Indeed, when you hear other coaches talking about "doing coervers", they are referring to assorted footwork drills designed to improve ball touch.

#### **Hat-Dance (toe-tap)**

Lightly tap the top of the ball using the front sole of the foot, alternating taps with either foot. Try to keep the ball from moving by tapping gently from the top. When the ball can be kept still, try "Around the World" by taking slightly larger steps as you come down from each tap so that you manage to circle the ball.

#### **Inside roll**

Roll the ball to the inside of your body, using the sole of one foot. Try to position the sole of the foot on the ball towards the outside edge, so that the ball rotates just enough to allow you to put your rolling foot down briefly so that you can keep moving in the same direction. Repeat, going in the opposite direction with the other foot.

#### **Outside roll**

Roll the ball towards the outside of your body, using the sole of one foot. Try to position the sole of the foot on the ball towards the inside edge, so that the ball rotates just enough to allow you to put your rolling foot down briefly so that you can keep moving in the same direction. Repeat, going in the opposite direction with the other foot.

#### **Drag Back**

Alternating feet and using a skipping-type step, pull the ball backwards with light touches.

#### **Push Forward**

Alternating feet and using a skipping type step, push the ball forward with light touches.

#### **Tic-Toc (Boxing)**

Using the inside front edges of the feet, knock the ball back and forth rapidly between the feet, so that the ball is in constant motion and the ball is redirected with every touch. Basically, the ball is being "boxed" from one side to the other, then back again.

### **Pull-Back/Push Forward**

Use sole of foot to pull ball back, then immediately use front of same foot to push it forward. Alternate feet.

### **Vee**

Make a V-shaped pattern, starting at the top of the V, pulling the ball down towards the center of the body, then pushing the ball back out to the other leg of the V. Variations include switching legs after each Vee, and alternating inside or outside start of the Vee.

### **Multi-Directional Roll**

Assorted moves (often coach/player invented) in which the ball is rolled in various directions before being pulled or pushed or cut back behind the leg or tapped to the other foot for a repeat.

### **Inside/Outside Cuts (Snake)**

Do a series of easy cuts/taps with the inside, then outside, of the same foot so that the ball "snakes" across the field as you move along. Repeat with opposite foot. As they progress, encourage the players to exaggerate the moves so that they must stretch and reach to cut the ball back.

## **Dribbling Moves for Beginning to Intermediate Players**

There are hundreds of moves (some which vary only slightly from other moves). Some are basic and some very complex. Many are named for the player who "invented" the move or made it famous. Often, a move may have more than one name - so expect regional variations.

It is important to remember the function of a move is to move the ball away from the defender so that you can retain possession long enough to do something productive with the ball (i.e., get it to a teammate or shoot it into the net or wait until the defender makes a mistake so that you can go around him).

In general, expect that players will become more coordinated as they grow older. Players who are u8 often are uncoordinated, and cannot do moves which are simple for players just a few years older.

Smaller players also may have trouble due to the relative size of the ball (e.g., if the ball comes almost to the knee, it is harder to step over it easily). In addition, when players are growing, they frequently have "clumsy" attacks where they lose their coordination until their brain has time to reprogram and learn where their hands/feet now end (Note: fast footwork exercises can speed the reprogramming). Patience and practice are keys to developing comfort on the ball.

As you demonstrate moves for your players, work with them on keeping the upper body relaxed and learning to bounce on the balls of their feet. Jumping rope is an excellent way to develop the muscles used in dribbling. So is any kind of dancing which involves faster footwork (such as tap dancing,

Irish/Celtic dancing, and most folk dancing). Many coaches find that it helps to play music while working on ball touches.

Once players have developed their ball control skills (also commonly called "touch"), and have obtained a repertoire of basic dribbling moves, they will begin to learn some basic fakes which will trick a defender into believing that they are going one way - when they really intend to go somewhere else. Most of these fakes require that the player learn to let the upper body sway and go limp, so that they basically pull their torso in the new direction (starting with the hips). Practice of fakes/feints in front of a mirror is always helpful. However, even with much practice, younger players often will not be able to execute a fake as believably as an older player unless they are very limber.

Descriptions: The description of moves will include the mechanics and will always be described for use with the right foot. The default (N) will be the forward direction of the attackers run. After the name of the turn, the\_defender's position will be noted (N, E, or W) Generally the attacker will be approaching a defender head-on (i.e., defender will be directly N) or protecting ball by placing body between the 2 of them (W or E).

All moves are best-executed with the knees bent, the buttocks down (to lower the center of gravity), and with the player perched on the balls of his feet and ready to explode in any direction quickly.

### **Check - a/k/a "Magic Hop" (Defender to W)**

Do a slight skipping step on the left foot, while simultaneously tapping top of the ball with the sole of the right foot.

DO NOT PUT any weight on right foot - a slight tap is all that is needed to stop/slow the ball. Allow right foot to continue through running motion, but turn right foot towards left as it is planted, so that you can immediately push off back to the S.

### **Pull-back (Defender to left or NW)**

Place sole of right foot on ball. Pull/roll the ball behind you (S to SE).

### **Vee (Defender to N)**

Put ball towards NW at an easy reach. Pull ball back towards center of body with the sole of the right foot (SE), then push ball back out to NE with sole of foot (making a V-shape by the path of the ball).

### **Vee II (Defender to N)**

In some parts of the country, the Vee starts as above. However, when pulled back to the midline, the opposite leg of the V is made by a push-pass with the inside of the left foot or the outside of the right foot.

### **Inside of the Foot Cut (Defender to the NE)**

Use inside of right foot to reach over ball which is on right foot and moving slightly towards right (directly towards defender), then swivel hips and cut ball back sharply to left (W) with the inside of right foot.

### **Outside of the Foot Cut (Defender to the W)**

With ball travelling towards NW (directly towards defender), reach over the ball with the outside of the right foot and pull ball sharply back towards the E/SE.

### **Inside of the Foot Chop (Defender to the W)**

With ball travelling forward at speed, do pivoting hop on plant foot while reaching over ball with inside of right

foot; chop across path of ball with laces; and then pull ball back towards S with inside of right foot.

### **Matthews (Defender to N)**

Execute a quick inside of the foot cut to the left (W), followed by an immediate cut back to the right (E) with the outside of the same foot - exploding as you go into the second cut.

### **Inside Circle Turn (Defender to NE)**

With inside of the foot, cut ball to left (W), cut again to S, and then cut again so that you end up again heading towards the NE (Note: Newer/smaller players may require 1-2 additional touches to complete the circle). Get them to aim for as few touches as possible to keep control.

### **Beckenbauer -a/k/a Outside Circle Turn (Defender to N)**

When approaching a defender, do outside cut to pull ball towards E, a second to turn S, and then a third to accelerate away forwards to the opposite side (NW) [Note: This is also called a outside circle turn in many circles].

### **Behind the Leg Cut (Defender to NE)**

Put left foot to side and slightly ahead of ball. Tap ball back behind support leg and take away with outside of left foot.

### **Gascoigne (Defender to E )**

Place tip of sole of left foot on top of ball to stop ball. As soon as defender bites or hesitates, explode quickly

forward using front of left foot (or a quick toe poke). Modifications include using a slight roll-back, followed by a quick acceleration.

### **Step-over (Defender to NE)**

Place right foot slightly behind the ball. Swing left foot in front of ball, putting weight on left foot as it comes to rest in front of right foot. Swing right foot around the left foot and the ball as far as you can comfortably reach towards the left side (W), so that you swivel around to the left and end up facing S to SW.

### **Barnes (single scissors) (Defender to NW)**

Position ball on outside of left foot. Circle in front of ball with left foot, planting left foot beside the ball. Take ball away with outside of R foot.

### **Denilson (Defender to N)**

Basically a triple scissors.

### **Fake shot (Defender to N)**

Approach the defender as if you are going to shoot. As defender stops, cut ball sharply in front of body with the inside of right foot. (W or NW)

### **Beardsley (double hip swivel) (Defender to N)**

When running with ball, quickly swivel hips to left, as if to pass with R foot. When defender bites, quickly swivel hips back to left, and take ball away with inside of L foot.

### **Double cut (Defender to N)**

Similar to the Beardsley , but actually do execute two cuts - rather than faking the first cut.

### **Cruyff (Defender to W) (pronounced like St. Croix, with an f on the end)**

Set-up in a passing position for a right foot pass. Right foot fakes a pass or kick, but circles around and in front of the ball (pointing at other toe at 90 degree angle). Using inside of the right foot, push the ball behind leg and spin off to left. Basically, a fake kick with a behind the leg cut.

### **Maradona (Defender to N)**

Place left foot on ball, jump and rotate body about 180 while foot is still on top of ball, then pull back around another 180 degrees. Basically, a circle turn using a piroette to make \_ of the turn and then a sole-drag to finish the turn. Note: In some areas, a Maradona starts as a Cruyff, with the piroette/drag as you spin off.

## **asic Chop**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### **Warm-up**

Start with some basic ball-control movements, such as rolls, vees, toe-taps. Introduce tic-toc, if you have not already . Do your stretches, interspersed with assorted ball control moves which you want to practice.

### **Individual Work**

The basic chop is a rapid downward cut across the forward face of the ball as the ball is going forward, in order to stop the ball quickly. It is an effective way to quickly reverse direction while your opponent is already moving at speed in the original direction.

The basic mechanics of a chop (which is a sharp inside of the foot cut angled across the front face of the ball) can be illustrated while standing still. However, as quickly as possible, get the players moving so that they can learn the body mechanics necessary for the change of direction.

The key coaching points of the chop are:

1. As you prepare to do a chop, the body is going to be turned almost perpendicular to the direction of the ball, with the knee of the plant foot sharply bent inward and the weight transferred almost entirely to the plant leg. To achieve the rapid change in direction, it is helpful to do a quick hop as you come down on the

plant foot, which allows the plant foot/body to turn more easily.

2. Reach around the outside front of the ball with the chopping foot, with the foot/ankle turned inward (heel is towards the outside), and the knee/hip slightly bent inward.

4. Bring the chop foot down sharply, so that the laces skim across the front surface of the ball. The stance at the moment of the chop is almost knock-kneed.

5. As quickly as possible after contact is made with the ball, drag it back across the body towards the plant foot. With significant forward momentum, it may be necessary to briefly put weight on the chopping foot in order to reverse direction. At lesser speeds, weight can remain on the plant foot as the turn is made.

Work on dribbling the ball in one direction, and then chopping it back in the other. Begin by working with the dominant foot as the chopping foot, then progress to using the non-dominant foot. Encourage the kids to use an exaggerated hip swivel as they execute the chop, so that they appear to be heading in one direction and then quickly hop/chop to bring the ball in the other direction.

For Coerver devotees, you can create a ballet-type session where you tap the ball slightly ahead of you; chop quickly back; let the ball roll back in the other direction, while you do a cross-over step to reverse direction, then chop back, and repeat. Sounds weird, but fairly effective. Watch a Coerver video like Soccer FUNdamentals to get the idea.

## **Small Group Work**

If you have somewhat older players (or already have used the Coerver setup with two defenders and two attackers in a square), use this approach. With younger players, or if you are unfamiliar with the Coerver-square, then:

Set up 3 cones in a row, about 7-8 feet apart. Stack your rows so that you can turn into grids later. Put a player on each of the end cones, each with a ball. Have them dribble towards the central cone, chop back, dribble back towards their end cone, and then chop back. This will allow them to simulate using a chop against an opponent, without actually having to deal with a true opponent at this stage. Have an extra player. No big deal. Just add an extra cone at one end, and have him delay his run so that he is chopping at about the same time as the other player is returning to the end cone.

Progression: Combine adjacent rows and remove middle cone. Leave three players with balls (each on a corner of the square) and turn the fourth into an anchored defender in the center of the square. Have players dribble towards central defender, and then cut back towards their "home" cone. Tell defender to keep one foot anchored, but to lunge/dive at players as they come towards him, and try to knock their balls away.

Alternate activity: Create 2-3 slalom courses of staggered cones; divide team into competing groups; and have a race to see which team can complete the slalom course the fastest by doing cuts at each of the cones. Allow a practice run before holding the race.

## **Large Group Work**

Play Freeze Tag in a large grid, using 2-3 defenders. Start the defenders at walking speed. Require players to get away from defenders ONLY by using a chop. Progress to allowing defenders to go at 1/2 speed, and then at full speed. Switch out defenders after they have managed to freeze 5 players. Any frozen player can be unfrozen by having his hand tapped by an unfrozen player.

## **Scrimmage**

Play 2v2 or 3v3 to maximize the number of ball touches. If you have a ball hog, restrict touches to 5-7 before passing to avoid an automatic turnover to the other side. Praise any attempts to use chops in the game.

## **Inside Cut**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### **Warm-up**

Start with some basic ball-control movements, such as rolls, vees, toe-taps, and simple sideways taps.

Do your

stretches, interspersed with assorted ball control moves which you want to practice.

### **Individual Work**

The inside-of-the-foot cut is one of the easiest basic soccer moves to learn. All there is to it is to use the inside of the foot (around the arch), put the foot beside the ball and drag the ball so that it will go in the opposite direction, then transfer the ball to the other foot as you put your weight on the cutting foot. Start by dribbling straight ahead, then lightly dragging/pulling the ball so that it travels in front of the player to land in the vicinity of his other foot, then dribble forward for a few touches with the other foot, and drag/pull it with the inside of the other foot so that the ball zags back in the other direction. The transfer of the ball to the other foot is an important step. As weight is placed on the cutting foot, the ball will continue to be carried to the side with the outside/front of the former plant foot. Why? Because the whole object of the move is to get the ball quickly to the opposite side so that you can shield it from an incoming opponent.

Work on using very light touches, and on dragging the ball instead of tapping it. Most young players want to whack the ball, instead of stroking it, so it is good to get them used to the idea of gently pulling/dragging the ball along with them in order to keep the ball within playing distance of the feet.

Initially, all that you want to do is to get the player familiar with how it feels to drag/pull the ball along with him as he moves from side to side. The foot position is hooked slightly inward; the ball contact is below the middle of the ball; and the knees are slightly bent with the weight on the balls of the feet. Concentrate

on this aspect first, and then worry about the transfer of the ball to the opposite foot. For young players, the transfer may need to wait for another day, depending on how quickly they grasp the idea.

Coerver devotees likely will want to work on the Coerver ballet-type move to practice these cuts, so that you do the cut and pull the ball back across; do two crossover steps in the other direction; then cut with the opposite foot. Those who don't want to bother with learning the Coerver footwork can let the kids experiment in a big open space.

Because there is a natural zig-zag pattern in these cuts, cones will need to be staggered if you have them practice with cone defenders.

Once they have mastered the basics (which should not take long), you can put everyone in a long line, and have them play follow the leader as they dribble around the field. Alternatively, you can put them in a long line, and simply shout "cut right" or "cut left". It is a good idea to get their heads up quickly. By dragging the ball across, they should be able to "feel for the ball" without putting their heads down. Encourage them to try to dribble as much as possible without looking down.

If your players are ready, you can add the element of "faking" or "feinting" to the move. Basically, what you want to do is to swivel the hips sharply as the cut is made, so that you give the impression that you are going in one direction, then suddenly veer off to the opposite side.

### **Small Group Work**

Put one defender (a parent works nicely) in the center of a circle, space out about 8 feet, and put down about 4-5 cones around the outside edge of the circle (like spokes coming out of the center spot). Put a player with a ball on each cone, and have them practice coming into the defender; cutting; then going back out to their cone and cutting again; then going back. Have the defender whirl around and make lunges/fakes as if he will steal their balls. The idea is to give them some experience going at a defender, but to restrict the defender so that they get early success.

Progression: Create 2-3 slalom courses of staggered cones; divide team into competing groups; and have a race to see which team can complete the slalom course the fastest by doing cuts at each of the cones. Allow a practice run before holding the race. A fun variation is to set up the lines in front of the goal, and permit a shot on goal after going around the last cone.

### **Large Group Work**

Play Freeze Tag in a large grid, using 1-2 defenders. Start the defenders at walking speed. Require players to get away from defenders ONLY by using cuts. Progress to allowing defenders to go at 1/2 speed, and then at full speed. Switch out defenders after they have managed to freeze 5 players. Any frozen player can be unfrozen by having his hand tapped by an unfrozen player.

Sharks is also a fun game to work on cuts. Have 1-2 "sharks" who try to kick the balls of the Minnows out of the center circle. Switch defenders after they have kicked out X balls. Allow anyone whose ball was

kicked out to return to the circle after running a quick slalom course on the side (which allows some quick individual remedial work on cuts).

## **Scrimmage**

Play 3v3. Make a requirement that every player on the team must touch the ball for at least 3 touches before passing

- and every player on the team must have touched the ball (interceptions start the count over again) before their team can score. These restrictions are very important, as they force each player to hold onto the ball - and require the less confident dribblers to use their skills. The less-confident dribblers also will learn that, if they go to open space, they will get more time to handle the ball - and they will start automatically looking for "safe" space. In addition, these restrictions require them to start talking - which is an essential ingredient in any team sport.

## **fakes and Feints**

**Players: Age 6+; Materials: Cones, pinnies, balls; Players: 4+**

The art of feinting is delightful, and even young players can get a kick out of getting an opponent to "bite" on a good fake. Over the course of the season, the coach should introduce a new fake/feint every 6 weeks or so as a part of normal take-on work. Players should be encouraged to try these new feints, and some warm-up time should be devoted to learning the new feints. Coaches should not be discouraged if it takes players a while to actually use their feints in practice or in games. It takes time for a player to learn to "sell" the fake, and to remember to try it when under pressure. And, not every player will want to adopt a particular feint into his personal bag of tricks. Virtually all players, including top level stars, have some 4 or 5 basic feints that they use most of the time with great success. So, don't be surprised that players show decided personal preferences on which moves to adopt and which to discard.

## **Warm-up**

In feinting work, the muscles which are used are those which allow the hips to swivel from side to side (and the shoulders/arms to get in on the action of swaying about). These are the same muscles which are used in the more fluid kinds of modern dancing, so it can be fun to use music as a part of the warm-up.

Start with some fast footwork drills to get the blood pumping, then do some stretches (focusing particularly on the muscles running along the flanks which allow twisting and swivelling movements of the hips). Also work on stretches of the quads, as part of any feint will include very quick acceleration moves. Along the way, do some rhythmic swaying, then add some push-off jumping from side to side.

## **Individual Work**

In order to work on feints/fakes, your players will need to have learned basic take-on skills and how to explode by carrying the ball forward with the outside of the foot. If you have not covered this, you should do the practice on beginning take-on skills before holding this practice session.

Probably the easiest feint to learn is a simple step-fake. To do this, the player has the ball on the front of the right foot; takes an exaggerated step to the R as if intending to do a sharp cut toward the R with the inside of his L foot; then immediately explodes to the left, dragging the ball with him on the outside of his L foot. This fake obviously also can be done (and should be practiced) going to the L and then exploding to the right. In their beginning take-on work, players learned to imagine that they are exploding through an open doorway to escape the monster, and then they are cutting back to slam the door on the monster. Initially, you may want to eliminate the slamming door phase so that they can concentrate on the feint itself. However, as soon as possible, you will want to remind them to slam the door on the monster. This move is very easy, and can be mastered by even very small players. To avoid having players running into one another as they explode, try putting them in a line (queue) or widely space them so that they each are facing a cone (which serves as a defender). Then, simply allow them to experiment on learning to fake one way and then explode to the other. Encourage them to turn their shoulders/hips in the faked direction, which will help to "sell" the fake.

After working on step-fakes in one direction, switch feet and work on going in the opposite direction.

After the step-fake, one of the easiest feints to learn is one involving the use of a single scissors (Barnes) move. This next move should be added after doing some individual and small group work with the first move. Particularly with younger kids, you want to give plenty of time for the first move to "set" into their brains and muscles before adding a new move, so don't rush things too quickly. Besides, it is no big deal to wait for another practice to introduce the next move.

In the single scissors, the player comes directly at the attacker, moves his left foot around the front of the ball and plants it to the side of (and slightly behind the ball), while swiveling his hips as if he plans to take the ball to the left with the inside of his right foot. As soon as his right foot is moving over to the ball, he quickly brings his right foot behind the ball (so that he can carry the ball on the outside of his right foot), then explodes forward to the right while dragging the ball on the outside of his R foot. The primary difference between this feint and the simple step-fake is the movement of the faking foot to go in front of the ball before being planted. This is an important difference (both because it protects the ball better and because it confuses the defender more).

For younger players, it may work best to show them the move, and then start working on the motions involved without using any ball. Simply bring the L foot forward in a semi-circle (toe pointed down) and take a big step to the left (bending the knee sharply - as the left leg will give the acceleration). While transferring the weight to the L leg, exaggerate the appearance of a cut to the left side. Then, as soon as the weight is transferred, explode right. Note that some small players may have trouble bringing the foot in front of the ball with any speed (due to the relative size of the ball to their short little legs). It is fine for them to lift the L foot over the ball if this is easier. Once they have the move down, add a ball and allow

the players to experiment with doing the move. Encourage them to keep their upper bodies relaxed (almost limp), so that they can fluidly switch directions.

## **Small Group Work**

Put an anchored defender (one foot must remain on a cone and the other leg should be waving to make it clear which leg is "dead") in the center between two cones which are about 15 feet apart. Have the attacker come directly at the defender; feint towards the side of the waving leg; and explode past the outside of the "dead" leg. As soon as he is around the defender, he must slam the door by cutting back behind him. Have him turn around and then come back from the other direction. Tell the anchored defender to alternate which leg is waved, so that the defender must decide the direction in which to start his feint. Let the attacker have about 4-5 tries, then switch places with the defender. It is important for players to learn to recognize this type of opportunity - and which way to go - because this type of situation occurs often in a game (for instance, a defender who is trying to back-pedal without galloping quite often will be "dead" or getting ready to go "dead" on a leg when the attacker chooses to explode into a move).

Next, instruct the defender to stay anchored without waving a leg, and to simply "bite" by lunging in the direction of the fake as soon as it is made. Illustrate to the players that, when the defender's body and weight are moving in the wrong direction, an attacker can go around the non-lunging leg because it is "dead" due to the lunge - and, in fact, is "more dead" on the side of outstretched leg (the one with no weight) than the leg where all of the weight has been placed. Why? Because it is very easy for the defender to pull his outstretched leg over and transfer his weight onto this other leg fairly quickly - but, due to his momentum, it takes a lot longer to recover and go back the opposite way. It is important for new attackers to understand that, when the defender is standing fairly straight, the "dead" leg of the attacker is the one with all of the weight on it. However, when already moving, the most "dead" leg is the non-weight-bearing leg.

After allowing both players to work on feints against a defender who is lunging to the side, add the final most common defensive error - which is to dive forward from a sideways-on posture. In this situation, the player is completely "dead" on the front foot - and essentially dead on the back foot, so the attacker has the ideal choice of going by him in either direction. Most commonly, the attacker will want to go around the defender's back in order to cut in centrally - and this approach causes the defender the most difficulty because the quickest way to turn is to keep going forward (but, to do this, he has to turn his back on the attacker, which is very high risk because he will not know where his mark is). As a result, practice on rolling off the back of the defender - but point out that the attacker always has the option of going down the line if this makes more sense.

**Coaching Note:** As you progress in teaching more take-on skills to your players, you will begin to teach them how to "show" the ball to the defender to try to provoke a lunge or stab, so that they can accelerate

around him – and illustrate which moves tend to be best to cause defenders to "bite" in various circumstances.

## **Large Group Work**

Next, recruit some parents or assistants to become defenders in a "Tunnel of Death." Create the tunnel by putting 3-4 cone grids (each about 15x20 feet) in a row, with a defender standing at the top line of each grid so that he is between the 2 cones forming the top side of the grid. If you have a large number of players, you may wish to set up several of these stacked grids to reduce lines. If you do not have enough parents for players, you can rotate players through these slots - or start by using flags or cones for defenders.

Now, have the first player take-on the first defender and beat him, cut back to recover, then head directly at the second defender, and so forth. Tell your defenders to be very sloppy and to dive in the direction of the feint.

Obviously, you are setting up conditions to get success. As soon as the first runner has beaten second defender (and is entering the final box), start the next runner.

After running the Tunnel a few times, you can give more freedom to the defenders. However, with young players, you will need to relax restrictions very slowly in order to give them time to develop confidence in their take-on abilities.

## **Scrimmage**

The very best scrimmage for take-on work is 1 v 1. So, put players in pairs based upon their ability (i.e., skilled with skilled), and put each in a grid (you can reuse the Tunnel grids). Put one player on one side of the grid with the ball, and put the other player on the other side. As soon as the on-ball player starts into the grid, the opposite player can enter the grid and start to close him down. The on-ball player must take-on the defender and try to get around him sufficiently to be able to pass the ball across the opposing endline. However, he cannot pass until he is at least even with the defender. If he does this successfully, he scores 1 point. Alternate who is the attacker, and play until someone has 5 points (or for X minutes). Now, find out the points scored by each player. Put the players who scored 5 against others who scored 5, and put the ones who scored 1 against the others who scored 1. Play again.

The final game uses a real goal (if one is available). Divide the players into two equal groups, and give each team numbers from 1 to X. Put players on goalline, with teams on opposite sides of the net. Now, as you serve a ball out into the field, call out "Number 5" - and both players who are No. 5 race out and try to win the ball, then score on the goal. There are lots of variations on how to do this (including elimination and non-elimination games, and games where you call out several numbers at once - or number the players sequentially, so that you call out 5 and 2, then 7 and 1, and so forth).

## **Push Pass**

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones/balls/pinnies; Players: 12+**

### **Warm-up**

Basic keepaway, with 1-2 defenders and remaining players in large grid, with rule that outside players must keep moving at slow jog. Defenders get 1 pt. if they steal ball, and outside players get 1 pt. if they can get 5 passes in a row. Outside players limited to 3 touches, then must pass or defenders win a point. Play to 5 points, then switch defenders out. Do stretches at each switch. Play for about 5-10 mins.

### **Individual Work**

Illustrate the basic push pass.

### **Coaching Points:**

1. Lock ankle of pass foot and turn foot outward;
2. Step beside the ball, keeping knee of plant leg slightly bent, with toe of plant foot pointed where you want the ball to go;
3. Strike middle of ball with pass foot and follow through;
4. Stay loose and on your toes as the ball is approaching, so that you can adjust body position easily.

If possible, find a wall where each player can pass against the wall, or find flat bench (like for picnic table) to use as wall. Have players work on passing to specific spots (such as chalk marks) on the wall. Suggest to players that they can use wall or steps or garage door at home to work on passing.

If no walls available, then divide players into pairs, and put in small grids (about 20'x 10'). Put extra cones at the corners of the grids (will be used later). Have them pass to one another. Circulate to make corrections. When most have success, then add a contest where team which makes 20 good passes in a row wins the game. Hint: If you have an odd number of players, put 3 in a triangle in one grid.

Then, put cone in center of grid, and require players to stand at the ends. Have a timed contest to see which player can hit the cone the most times in 2 mins. from his endline. Can use 1 ball or give ball to each player, allowing them to take closest ball back to endline for another pass at the cone.

### **Small Group Work**

Set up series of small cone goals/gates in a large grid. Start 2-3 teams of players at any cone goal in the grid. Object is to pass thru all gates (either direction) to partner and then be first to exit by passing ball thru gate by coach. Must redo gate if ball not received by partner. Use extra players on sides to monitor that each team makes all gates. Swap out teams and run exercise with next group. Let each group run course 3 times, then do run-off of winners from each group. Hint: If you have an odd number of players, have 1 player play on two teams.

Set up new teams of 3 players each. Repeat exercise, and allow players to discover for themselves how much better they do with communication and an advanced runner. Say nothing for first 5 mins, except to

correct passing techniques. Then, mention that the teams which are doing better are the ones which are talking and planning ahead on which goal to use next. If there is time, do another run-off of the winners.

## **Large Group Work**

Pick up cone goals inside large grid. Put most players in large circle inside grid, with 2-3 target players inside circle. Each of the outside players starts with a ball. Inside players must call for the ball, then pass to the feet of an outside player who does not have a ball, and go to another outside player to ask for another ball. Run for about 10 good passes/inside player, then swap them out. Now, add "shadow" for each of the inside players, who does not try to steal ball, but just shadows the receiver to add some pressure. Run exercise again, swapping shadows with passers after 10 good passes, then swapping in outside players for them. Finally, allow shadows to become active and try to win ball. Hint: If you have only 8 or fewer players, reduce the number of inside players to allow at least 5 outside players.

## **Ending game**

Play keep away again inside large grid. See how many passes the group can now make in a row without interception by defender. Should have much better accuracy, as well as vision and communications.

**Coaching Tip:** This practice can be repeated for the next practice, to work on using the non-dominant foot. It also can be used to work on the quality of receiving the ball. Other passing games can be substituted for the sake of variety.

## **Passing and Receiving**

### **U-10/U-12 team of 14 players, 90 Minutes Total**

**Equipment: 7 red and 7 yellow pinnies; 16 disk cones; 1 ball per player; 1/2 field.**

Coach arrives at least 15 min. early and lays out two lines of cones 5 yards apart, 8 cones per line, with 5 yards between lines yielding 7 5\*5 grids. Players arriving early to juggle and loosen up.

15 min.: Warm up. Each player with a ball in 1/2 of the penalty area. Dribble with both feet, go at angles, change direction, moving slowly for 2-3 minutes. Stretch. 1/2 of players put their balls outside of area and spread out around area with feet spread apart. Remaining players dribble ball around area and, on command "start", begin to score points by passing ball between legs of stationary players. Can score on each stationary player once before moving on to next. Emphasize head up, avoid traffic and congested "goals", proper pace of pass so that it a) gets through but b) doesn't end up in the next county. Time for 1 minute and switch roles. Stretch. Now players with ball must dribble around area and on command "start" make eye contact with a stationary player, call their name, pass ball to them, and move to get a return pass. Time for 1 minute, score a point for each pass completed, switch and repeat.

Emphasize head up, communication before pass, proper pace on pass.

15 min: Players in pairs with one ball per pair, one pair in each 5\*5 yd. grid. Coach demonstrates Inside of Foot pass. Players pass inside their own grid for 5 min. Emphasize toe up, heel down, ankle locked, turn foot out sideways; plant foot faces direction pass is to go; kicking leg bent slightly. Hit through the ball slightly above center, contacting the ball with inside of foot between ball of foot and heel.

After 5 min., coach demonstrates simple foot reception and players both pass and receive for 5 min. additional.

Emphasize on reception don't stop ball, just cushion it and push it out to the side a bit; use same part of foot used for passing, step into ball for next pass.

After about 10 minutes, have players keep kicking foot raised for a few moments after kick. If they've done it

correctly, they'll be facing receiver and easily balanced on one foot.

Look to correct: for pass: Leg playing the ball stiff/straight; plant leg too far away from ball; kicking too hard/soft; hitting ball too low (goes up in air) or too high (bounces).

Look to correct: for reception: Ball stopped dead instead of cushioned and pushed out; ball pushed out too far/close; receiving surface "hard" rather than "soft"; receiving with wrong part of foot.

[Note: There those who shudder at the thought of mixing two concepts, e.g. passing and receiving, in the same exercise and they are certainly welcome to their opinion. It is the writer's opinion, however, that in the case of passing exercises, proper reception makes the ensuing pass easier in that the player is stepping into a slowly moving ball.]

10 min.--Groups of three (grab an assistant coach, parent, sibling, etc. or put 4 in a group and add another cone to that area), each group with a ball, 1st group standing on 3 of cones in first grid, next group on second group of 4 cones, etc. Player with ball starts with pass to either of other two players and runs to empty cone. Receiver repeats.

Move from unlimited touch to two-touch to one-touch over course of season. Emphasize and correct same points as in prior section. After they get the idea, time and see how many completed passes in 1 minute.

5 min.-- Drink break and socializing. (All players dribble their ball to you before heading off). Coach re-sets cones to mark off two 20\*25 yd fields with 4 yd. cone goals at the diagonal ends of the long sides of the rectangle.

25 min.-- 5v2 progression as follows. Technical points for all same as in first section. Emphasize also how much easier the game is for the attackers if they keep the space big, use the whole field, move after passing, & play away from pressure. (This can START off as 6v1 and move to 5v2 as players become more skilled.)

1. 5 players pass the ball around. Defenders simply give ball back if they intercept or kick out of area. No points scored. Change roles frequently.

2. Repeat 1 but every 5 consecutive passes is a goal (recruit assistant, parent, sibling, etc. to count passes). If defenders win, they score by dribbling to any side of the rectangle and stop it by stepping on it.

Any ball

going out of bounds, whether kicked or dribbled, goes back to attackers. Keep score out loud. Stop in few minutes and switch roles.

3. Same but defenders can score by inside foot pass through either of small goals.

5 min.-- Drink and socializing. Coach re-sets field to 35\*50, 5-6 yard goals.

10 min.-- Scrimmage. Coach observes ONLY.

5 min.--Warm-down, players pick up all equipment, shag balls, get reminded where and when next practice/game is, etc.

## Receiving the Ball

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### Warm-up

Introduce some very basic ball control movements, such as hat dance, ball rolls, and forward/backward moves. Do stretches as you switch from one move to another.

### Individual Work

The most critical skill which a soccer player can possess is the ability to get the ball under control on his first touch. Without a good first touch, the player is vulnerable to losing possession and is distracted from his task of deciding where to go next (because he has no idea where the ball might go after he touches it for the first time).

This lesson plan deals with very basic receiving and stopping of the ball which is coming toward the player on the ground. Over time, the player will need to learn to control balls which are bouncing or which are coming out of the air. To develop those skills, it is essential that the player learn to juggle the ball.

Later practice plans deal with teaching juggling and air-ball receiving.

Two basic skills will be taught in this lesson, because these skills are all fairly easy to learn. As the skills get harder, you will want to devote an entire practice to just 1 or 2 skills.

The skills are: the **wedge trap** and the **outside of the foot trap**.

### 1. Wedge Trap

The first trap which you will introduce is the wedge trap (which can be used to stop the ball or push it inward to be played by the opposite foot). This trap is easiest to perform when the player is moving at slower speeds or is standing.

### Coaching Points:

1. Plant foot is turned slightly outward, with knee bent;
2. Receiving leg is bent and foot is turned sharply outward with heel dropped down, so that lower leg/foot makes an "L" shape;

3. Lift receiving foot off of the ground about 4-5 inches, so that contact with the incoming ball is made just below the top of the ball.

4. Relax the foot/leg as the ball makes contact, so that the ball is cushioned to a stop.

### **Teaching the Wedge Trap**

Set up a line of small grids, about 2 yards square. Divide players into pairs. Put one player on one side of the grid, with 2 balls. Put the other player on the opposite side of the grid. The player who has the balls will gently roll a ball towards the opposing player, who traps the ball with a wedge trap. Once the ball is stopped, he passes the ball back to the roller (don't worry about passing technique at this stage - you will work on passing later). Have the receiver do 10 wedge traps, and then swap turns with the roller.

The players will discover that, if their foot is set at the proper height, the ball will wedge under the foot and will come to a stop. However, most of the time in soccer, you do not want the ball to come to a full stop - because you become a sitting duck for an attacker.

So, once the players each have had a turn, do a second round in which the player tries to just catch the ball enough to slow it down and then taps it to the inside (if right-footed, tap to left) so that he can pass back to the roller with his left foot. Again, don't worry about proper passing technique (although you can use it in your demos). Right now, we are worrying about learning how to catch the ball and lay it up to the inside for a pass by the opposite foot.

### **Outside of the Foot Trap**

The next trap which will be taught is the outside of the foot trap. This is the most often used trap in soccer, because it can be used quite effectively when moving. Basically, the object of this trap is to simply slow the ball down, and then redirect it.

#### **Coaching Points:**

1. Point the toe down and roll the foot over so that the outer edge is pointing toward the ground, bending the

knee and pulling the foot towards the opposite side of the body. Experiment so that you can turn the front of the foot into as flat a surface as possible to receive the ball.

2. Turn slightly away from the ball, so that the knee of your receiving leg can point towards the incoming path of the ball.

3. Make contact with the ball, catching the ball so that the middle of the foot is vertically centered on the ball

and the foot basically wraps around the ball (with the toes at the lower edge and the heel at the upper opposite edge of the ball).

4. As the ball meets the foot, relax the knee so that the lower leg can swing freely inward ("give"), which allows you to take speed off the ball and allows the ankle to aid in trapping the ball as your leg "gives" backward.

## **Teaching the Outside of the Foot Trap**

Use the same procedure as before, with a roller at one end of the grid and a receiver at the other. Have the receiver move toward the ball to catch it with the outside of the foot, redirect the ball to the side and then pass it back to the roller. Again, do not worry about passing technique - although it is okay to simply use good technique (kids often will mimic you - even without specific direction). What you want to do is develop the ability to catch the ball with the foot - and then lay it off to the outside for a pass with the same foot.

At your next practice, you will work on passing. However, spend the necessary time to work on receiving first.

Receiving technique is the basic foundation for almost all other soccer skills - and it is essential that the players learn to do this task correctly before moving on.

The absolute best way to perfect receiving technique (so that it becomes automatic) is to find a wall and use it as a backstop (like a tennis backstop) and pass/receive repeatedly against the wall. Good players may spend as much as 30 minutes or more each day on basic wall work. Encourage your players to do this while watching TV or talking on the phone. Because the ball stays on the floor, many mothers can be convinced to allow the child to practice indoors - using stairs or the side of a chair or even an interior wall as the backstop. If Mom prefers that a smaller or lighter ball be used, this is fine. Indeed, the Brazilian National Team reportedly used tennis balls in their hotel rooms for precisely this purpose- and the basic technique and development of eye/foot coordination is the same.

## **Small Group Work**

Now that you have the basic receiving technique down, you want to start learning how to use this technique in game situations. The general Rule of Thumb (ROT) of receiving is that you always receive the ball in a way which will allow you to take the ball into space and away from pressure.

In this work, you will put 3 players in a medium grid (about 15' x 20'). One will be the server, who stands at the end of the grid; one will be the receiver, who will be inside the grid; and the other will be a shadow defender to apply mostly psychological pressure (i.e., he doesn't try to steal the ball at this stage).

The three most common ways in which a player will receive the ball are: with a defender at his back; with a

defender standing to one side; and with a defender coming in hard from the front. You will introduce how to receive the ball in order to handle each of these 3 situations.

Start with the defender behind the receiver; have the receiver come towards the ball to receive it in order to briefly shake the defender off his back (which is a technique known as "checking to the ball"); and then pass the ball to the server. Switch positions after 5 serves and let the other players try this.

Next, have the defender stand to one side of the receiver; have the receiver take the ball with the outside of the far foot (the foot which is farther away from the D) in order to carry the ball even farther away from the defender; and then pass back to the server. After 5 tries, switch positions until everyone has tried this. Now, put the defender at the upper corner of the grid (by the server) and have him start walking towards the receiver as soon as the ball is served. Have the receiver check to the ball at an angle to cut off the defender- receive the ball with the outside of the foot (turning his body to protect the ball as much as possible); and then pass back quickly. After 5 tries, rotate positions.

**Coaching Note:** You will need to repeat these drills (or some variations) quite frequently as you train your players. Obviously, you will need to get your players to game speed - as their defenders are unlikely to be passive in trying to win the ball. You are slowing things down just to get the ideas across - and to allow success while the receiving skills are still very new. Keep using restrictions and/or extra space to give time for these skills to develop.

Ultimately, you will want players who can receive, shield and play the ball back with a single touch in very tight quarters. This will not happen in one day, one week, or even one season of work. However, if you continue to emphasize these basic concepts, and develop the underlying skills needed to make the concepts work, your players will develop very nicely over time.

## **Large Group Work**

Play 2v2+2, as follows. Combine the adjoining grids, so that you have 4 players inside the grid (2 for each team - use pinnies to identify them) and another teammate for each team who is on the outside of the grid. Have 3-4 balls at the side of the grid, to keep things moving.

Have one of the outside players start, by rolling a ball into a teammate - who must receive it and pass it back – or pass it to the other teammate inside the grid before the opponents can touch it. A successful reception & pass is worth 1 point. The ball is then rolled out to the opposing team's outside player (if it was kicked away, use a new ball), and he tries to get the ball to his teammates inside the grid. Continue the contest until one team has 5 points, then swap the outside players with inside players and repeat.

## **Scrimmage**

Put small cone goals at the end of each grid, and play 3v3 without restrictions. After this much technical and tactical work, the players need a rest - so just let them play and try out the new skills.

## Chest Traps

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### Warm-up

Players will be working in pairs for much of this practice, so do a warm-up which requires pairs. A nice version is to have partners link arms (with hand of outside arm on hip to form an extra link). Create two rovers who can replace one of the partners by linking his/her arm thru the available outside arm. When the rover has "adopted" a new partner, the old partner becomes the rover and must go find another partner. This develops into a fun game of chase, and gets the heart rates up. Intersperse stretches with this game.

### Individual Work

It is a good idea to cover chest traps and heading in consecutive sessions. Why? Because, when an air ball is coming in around chin high, the player usually has 2 options. One is to back up (or jump up) and chest it down - and the other is to bend the knees slightly and head it. Often, just a slight change in positioning (under 1 yd or so) will be all that is needed to switch the surface being used to control the ball. This type of receiving should be taught after some work on basic gallops and cross-over running (covered in the section on 1st defender skills). This footwork is important, because the player has to be able to move into position to receive the ball while keeping his eye on the ball - so he has to be able to be confident in his footwork. So, if you haven't worked on the footwork, do it as a part of your warm-up. Chest traps are pretty easy to learn to do, and most players can get moderate success in just one session.

### Coaching points:

1. Put the feet about shoulder width apart or a bit wider, knees bent, pull arms/elbows back to flatten the chest as the ball arrives.
2. The chest is quickly collapsed inward to make a tunnel by bringing the arms forward quickly - which causes the ball to channel down to the feet.
3. As the channel is made, take a step forward with one foot which will help to redirect the remaining momentum of the ball in the new direction.

**Variation 1:** You also can trap the ball with your chest (which is a type of trap which is often not taught - and should be). Often, a player can "catch" the ball with his chest and simply walk it into the goal, which is a very nice way to score (even if not spectacular).

**Variation 2:** More advanced players may want the ball to pop back up/out in order to volley or juggle it (but, of course, it is pointless to try to learn this skill until you know how to juggle). They do so by simply keep the chest flat, although they give slightly to take some steam off the ball, which allows the ball to pop off the chest; and look to play the ball with a volley of some type.

After demonstrating the basic channel-type chest trap, scatter the pairs of players around the field, and have them gently toss balls to one another to practice the technique. Then, once they have got the idea down, put them in midsized grids; station the receiver on one line and the tosser on the other end; and require the receiver to have to move into position to manage the trap (as this is the realistic situation in games).

### **Small Group Work**

Split up every other pair, so that you now have 3 players in one group. Assign the 3rd player to act as a shadow defender, who simply lurks along behind the receiver. Now, put the shadow player about 3 yards to the front and side of the receiver, and allow the shadow to close in as soon as the ball is served. The shadow is not trying to steal the ball - just to illustrate the point that this chest trap takes TONS of time, so they need to be careful about when/where to use this technique.

In general, chest traps are okay outside of your final third of the field, and are quite useful if the D is behind you or you are unpressured. However, because chest traps take so long, they may not be a good idea in your final defensive third if an attacker is close by. The better decision may be to head the ball farther upfield (or towards the sidelines).

### **Large Group Work**

Put 8 players around the edges of a large circle, each one with a ball, and put the rest inside of the circle. The outside players will toss a ball into the inside player, who chest traps it and passes it to any outside player who doesn't have a ball. Once the concept is down, add a shadow behind each receiver, who just follows to add some pressure. Progress to half-pressure and then full-pressure (in which the shadow can become the new receiver if he wins the ball). Tip: Use plenty of space -- you want success.

### **Scrimmage**

End with a regular 3v3 scrimmage - but award an extra point to a team if their players do a successful chest trap (i.e., you can score a goal the regular way - or by doing a good chest trap from either a throw-in or a lofted ball).

### **Teaching the Run-Thru Chest Trap and Turning Chest Trap**

The running thru trap works nicely with bouncing balls. Simply have the partner throw a ball at the ground hard enough that it will bounce up, and practice running thru the ball and controlling it with the chest and/or trunk of the body. Take care to keep the lower arms/hands well away from the ball - as it is easy to get a handball call otherwise. The turning chest trap is a variant of the running thru trap, but is a bit harder to learn because of the timing. Just as the ball is making contact with the chest, a quick step is made to turn the body sideways by stepping into the path which the ball has just taken, and redirecting the ball to the side and down by using the angle of the chest and by continuing to move in the new direction with the ball. This turning trap can be useful when there is heavy pressure on one side, but plenty of space into

which the ball can be directed (and an available support player to whom the ball can be dropped as soon as it is controlled). Once again, care must be taken to get the arms out of the way to avoid a handball call.

## **Juggling the Ball and Receiving the Ball in the Air with Foot or Thigh**

**Ages:7+; Materials: Cones, pinnies; Players: 4+**

In order to develop a quality first touch on the ball, it is essential that players learn to be able to control (basically, to "catch" and redirect) a ball coming in from the air. Two of the key body surfaces which they will use to catch air balls are the foot or with the thigh. In other practice sessions, you will teach them how to "catch" the ball with the chest and how to redirect the ball with the head. At about age 12+, you also can start to teach players to juggle with their heads (so that, eventually, they can "catch" a ball with their heads), but this requires more coordination than most younger players will possess.

### **Warm-up**

To start players on learning to juggle with the feet, have them sit on the ground with the ball. Have them toss the ball up over one foot, then try to gently catch it with the foot and then toss it back up in the air with the catching foot.

Allow them to catch the ball with their hands after each try. The key to catching the ball with the foot is to turn the knee of the receiving foot inward a bit so that the foot is flattened and allow the thigh to "give" as the ball comes in so that the foot is catching the ball and then tossing it back up. Tell the players to be sure to use the thigh/ hip for movement and to leave the lower leg still. After a few successes in doing this, have them try for two touches on the ball before catching it with their hands. Once they can get to 3 touches in a row, have them switch and try to use the other foot.

After a few tries with the non-dominant foot, have the players stand up. Now, have them toss the ball up high so that it bounces in front of them, and then try to catch the ball on the foot and toss it back up in the air. The trick to doing this while standing is to keep the foot flattened; to keep the foot itself still (with all motion coming from the hip and upper thigh); and to make sure that the hip of the catching leg is allowed to go loose so that it "gives" when it catches the ball. Initially, allow a bounce between each catch with the foot, then try to progress to the point where they can do 2 or 3 touches in a row. Now, ask the players to use the non-dominant foot for catching the ball. After some more experimenting, have them work on alternating touches of the feet (players who are under age 8 may have trouble with balance/coordination, so don't push this if most are having trouble).

**Coaching Note:** As players gain more experience and ball control, you will want to encourage more and more juggling skills (see "Additional Juggling Ideas" below).

After working on juggling with the feet, you can progress to working on juggling with the thighs (which is the

preamble to learning thigh traps) - or you can spend some time working on elevator traps before coming back to work on thigh juggling. With newer players, you might even decide to handle thigh traps in another session altogether. If you wish to introduce thigh juggling, here is how to do it:

Juggling with the thighs is very similar to juggling with the feet. The player is simply trying to catch the ball on the surface of the thigh and toss it back up. Once again, the knee will need to be turned inward to flatten the surface of the thigh, and the work will be done entirely with the hip. The object is to catch and cushion the ball - not to let the ball hit the thigh and bounce back up. Work on the idea of having the thigh come to meet the ball and then drop down a bit to cushion it before tossing the ball back up again. It is fine to allow the players to catch the ball with the hands after each attempt, although you will want to have them try to progress to 2-3 touches after they get the hang of this. Once again, after working with one leg, try to work with the other leg. Because thigh juggling is a bit harder in terms of balance, save work on alternating thighs for a later date - or for practice at home (with prizes for the most in a row).

### **Individual Work**

The first thing which you will work on is **elevator traps**. This is nothing more than catching the ball with the top of the foot and then lowering it to the ground in front of you. The trick is that, if the ball is coming in at a high arc (and will have lots of speed), it is going to need a lot of cushioning to take this speed away - so you need to lift the leg/knee fairly high to make the first contact and then let the thigh go almost limp to cushion the ball to the ground.

To do this, put the players in pairs and have them work on gently tossing a ball high into the air for their partner to catch. The partner then reciprocates. Show them that it is easier to catch the ball if they are standing slightly sideways to the direction in which the ball is coming in, with the catching leg to the inside. To increase the difficulty, you can move them farther apart, so that they have to move around more to calculate when/where to catch the ball. For players who show a real knack for this, have them try to catch the ball and, instead of putting it on the ground, flick it up over the head of the defender and run around him. This is one cool trick to use in games – and little boys love it!

Another trap which is related to the elevator trap is the **instep trap**. This trap is used to catch balls which are coming in at a flatter angle (or somewhat ahead of the player) so that it will be impossible to catch on the foot. Thus, the player puts the foot out to block the ball - and permits some slight give in the leg so that he can drop the ball at his feet. This technique may be a bit hard for young players, but can be introduced (even if not extensively practiced) at this stage simply to show players another option to deal with balls which are not catchable otherwise.

The next trap to introduce is the **thigh trap**. In this trap, the player simply catches the ball on the thigh (as in juggling with the thigh), but immediately lets the thigh collapse so that the ball falls to his feet. This is a very nice trap to use for awkward balls coming in a bit below waist level, so rather low to try a chest trap (even with really bent knees), but too high to do an elevator and perhaps a bit too straight on to allow a instep trap.

Once again, put the players in pairs and have them toss balls to one another, making sure that the ball takes a nice arc so that the player can get underneath it. The key is to bring the thigh up to make contact with the ball and to relax the hip as soon as contact is made so that the ball is cushioned to drop at the feet. When the players have achieved some success in this technique, then go to the group game.

### **Small Group Work**

Put two players inside the grid, with two servers outside who alternate service into the grid. Have the server send a high ball into the grid. The player with the best ability to receive the ball shouts "I've got it". This shout requires that the other player back off and let him try to receive the ball with the foot or the thigh. He gets a point for each good trap. Play until one inside player has 3 points, then rotate with the outside players.

When both sides have had a turn inside the grid, then allow the server to become a slow-motion defender – which means that he starts to walk toward the receiver as soon as he has played the ball into the grid (but does not aggressively defend). With the addition of pressure incoming from the front, the receiver must adjust his body position to try to shield the ball as it comes in and quickly pass it to his teammate. Take some time in working on the need of the off-ball attacker to talk to the receiver; warn him of the incomer; and get into a position where he can accept the ball immediately upon reception.

You then can progress to active defending, by telling the server that he cannot enter the grid until the ball touches the foot or thigh of the receiver. In other words, he is rushing in to rattle the defender as he receives the ball and pressure him as he tries to get rid of it. Watch to make sure that you are getting success, and place more restrictions on the defender if necessary to achieve it.

### **Large Group Work**

Obviously, you will want to play a game which involves reception of lots of air balls. Presumably, you already have covered chest traps & heading, so the players will have a large set of tools to receive air balls. Here is one fun drill which provides such options.

Make a large rectangular grid, with small cone goals on each end. Put a moat in the middle, with narrow alleys on the sides and about 30 feet of space on each end in front of the goal (the grid will look like a large box, with a smaller box in the middle). The ball can be served over the moat or dribbled/passed in the alleys. If it falls in the moat, then the other side gets a throw-in. A team scores 2 points for a successful elevator or thigh trap (ball under control and kept in bounds), 1 point for a good chest trap or header, and 5 points for a goal. This game is fun for 4v4 or greater numbers.

**Variation:** For smaller players who do not do lofted kicks well, another option to get more high balls is to put 2 moat-keepers in the moat and allow the first one who gets to any ball which drops into the moat to pick it up and punt it to his team. Of course, no goals can be scored directly from the punt - but can be scored from headers. For the safety of both keepers in the moat, be sure to set some rules against

contesting for any ball once the keeper is getting down to pick it up. Of course, it is fine for the moat-keepers to trap the ball to score a point and then pick it up to punt it.

## **Scrimmage**

Remove the moats and play a regular scrimmage, but continue to award extra points for good traps (you can make regular goals worth 5 points, and goals off headers or flicks from an elevator trap worth 10 points). This can be a fun game, even for older players, as they will quickly see that they can score lots more points by some really fancy juggling work or by doing some delicate flicks in front of the goal, so this will encourage them to try all sorts of tricks which they ultimately may find to be very helpful in games.

## **Additional Juggling Ideas**

As players progress, here are some additional juggling ideas:

- □ Drop to left foot, kick up with shoe laces, catch. Then, try to do this with right foot, left foot, and then catch.

- □ Drop onto right thigh, then catch. Now, drop on left thigh, and catch. Then try to drop on both thighs before catching. Have contests to see how can get the most touches in a row. Then, start adding patterns, such as 2 left, 1 right, 1 left, 2 right, etc. You also can play variations of the game "Simon Says" or variations of the electronic Simon (where one player does something, the next player repeats and adds a new thing, then the next one does all 3, etc.).

- □ When players can reach 10 juggles with either thigh and either foot, then start them on trying to do "Around the World", which is to get the ball on one foot, then to the thigh of the same leg, then to the head, then to a chest trap, then to the thigh of the other leg, then to the foot of that leg.

- □ Introduce juggling with the inside of the foot, starting with simply catching the ball on the side of the shoe, and progressing to being able to juggle from the inside of one foot to the inside of the other foot.

- □ Introduce juggling with the outside of the foot, starting with trying to just catch/settle the ball with the outside of the foot. Most players will have lots of trouble with this, as it requires real flexibility.

However, some can manage to juggle from the outside of one foot to the outside of the opposite foot.

Illustrations of this juggling are shown in Vogelsinger's "Power Soccer Basics" Video.

- □ Add group juggling to your warmups when the players have reached around 10 juggles on their own. Allow 2-3 touches and then require that the ball be passed to the next player. If the ball is served poorly, then the server has to sprint around the circle X times before returning. If the receiver blows the catch, then the receiver must do the sprints.

□ □ At around age 12, introduce juggling with the head. This is fairly hard to learn, so make a big deal out of

of anyone who can manage to get to 5 in a row.

Consider making some certificates, so that you will award the a certificate to players at the end of a game if their parents certify that they got a certain number of consecutive juggles. Use different colored certificates for 5 in a row, 10 in a row, 15 in a row, 20 in a row, 50 in a row, and 100 in a row. If you make a big deal of this, with a public issuance of the award, you will guarantee that the kids will try very hard to get these certificates.

## **Laces Kick**

**Ages: 6+; Materials: Cones, Pinnies; Players: 4+**

The laces kick (a.k.a. instep drive) and the driven pass are very similar in terms of technique. The primary difference is that, in the driven pass, the player typically will want to keep an eye on play and has less of a need for added power on the pass. As a result, the player usually will not run through the pass or add any type of snap to the pass. On the other hand, when a player wants to take a very hard low, shot like a penalty kick, additional power is needed. Also, smaller players will often need to add a significant follow-through to most shots in order to get enough power.

Some coaches opt to teach the laces kick and the driven pass in the same practice. This is fine, as long as you have enough time and as long as you are careful to distinguish for players when each technique will be most useful.

## **Individual Work**

Start with players, each with a ball, seated on the ground. Point out the big bone that runs along the inside laces of the foot. This is the hardest surface of the foot, and is the area which they will use to make a laces kick. Have them toss the ball up in the air, and try to hit the ball solidly in the center with the big bone of the foot.

Now, put them in pairs. One player will bend over and hold the ball with the hands, while the other player works on the foot position needed to make the big bone of the foot come into contact with the center of the ball. Players with big feet often have to turn the foot sharply to the side and turn the knee inward to get this optimal contact.

Furthermore, as they continue to grow, they may need to periodically redo this exercise to find the correct foot position, so coaches should not overlook the need to do this if a player suddenly becomes unable to do a low shot after having prior success.

Next, work on the correct distance for the plant foot. One of the most common problems with young players is a tendency to put the foot too close to the ball, which makes it almost impossible to make good

contact with the ball. Tell the players to leave plenty of room for their hips to swing, because they will get power from the swing of the hips/legs.

Finally, work on the proper approach to the ball. Put the player at an angle to the side of the ball, usually around 35 degrees, and back at a distance that he will need to take 3 steps to reach the ball. Note that a right-footed player will step L, R, and then put his L foot beside the ball. As the non-kicking foot is planted, the kicking leg is drawn back; the ankle of the kicking foot is locked with the toe down; and the knees of BOTH legs are bent so that the knee of the kicking foot comes over the ball as contact is made with the ball.

**Coaching Note:** Do not skip the phase of checking out the proper foot positioning. It is critical that the players be allowed to experiment with the positioning which feels "best" to them and they will automatically feel when they are making solid contact. The coach can make the rounds and to check each player while they are experimenting with their foot position.

Once both partners have tried this basic positioning, put partners across from one another at a distance of about 30 feet, each player with a ball, lining up the partners so you have two lines of players who are facing one another. Get some parents/assistants to shag errant balls and let the players work on their kicks. To maximize touches, allow both players to go at the same time and allow players on one side to use any ball which comes their way. While they are working on these skills, walk around and correct technique as necessary.

Common problems are:

Erratic shots caused by failure to lock the ankle/foot.

Tip: to get players to lock the ankle with the foot in the 'down' position, encourage them to curl their toes

into the bottom of their boot.

Shot not staying low, caused by foot position too low on the ball or by putting the plant foot too far behind

the ball.

No power on the shot, caused by poor leg swing or improper position of plant foot.

Stubbed toe, caused by poor run angle and/or failure to bend leg of kicking foot and/or failure improper

foot angle.

Tip: cut the bottom off of a styrofoam cup and use the use the inverted upper half as a kicking tee); shorten

the tee as the player improves

Lifting the head, which causes the ball to become air-borne or the shot to be erratic.

Tip: get the players to focus on a particular panel of the ball and "watch their foot hit the ball".

Once the players have learned the basic mechanics of the shot itself, they are ready for the next stage, which is to teach the follow-through. In order to impart the maximum power to the ball, the player must

continue to run through the shot, ending in a high-kick worthy of a can-can dancer, with his head/nose almost coming into contact with his kicking leg. To do this, it is easiest to practice the move without the ball. Simply put the players on the field and tell them to select a spot which represents the ball such as a mound of grass or a spot marked on the dirt. Have them start their run so that their foot will go over the spot; and then practice leaping through the contact with the ball so that they go over the spot and land on their kicking foot.

**Coaching Note:** Some players who are worried about stubbing their toes may be afraid of an exaggerated follow through. For these players, it is sufficient initially if you can get them to run through the kick and land on their kicking foot. Now, put the players back into their two lines. Because of the increased power, and the need to run forward, have the two lines alternate on doing these kicks and leave plenty of space so that nobody gets hit by a shot, Let the players see how much extra power is achieved by the follow-through.

## **Small Group Work**

Of course, in an actual game, there will be very few situations where the player actually can take the time to place the ball and then take a careful run-up. As a result, players need to learn to control and shoot balls that are coming in from the front, from the side, or from behind them.

Divide the players into groups of 3, and put players in a long grid about 30 feet by 40 feet. Make two narrow cone goals at one end to imitate the corners of the net with a "keeper" stationed several yards behind the goals so that he can more easily shag balls which come through the goals. Have one player as a shooter and one with 3-4 balls as a server. Start with service of a ball coming from behind the shooter by having the server about 15 feet to one side and slightly deeper than the shooter. Server rolls the ball so that it will cross the path of the incoming shooter about midway to the goals. The shooter must take one touch to control the ball and then take a laces shot at either of the cone goals. After 3-4 shots, the players rotate positions.

Repeat, with balls coming in square by putting server about 20 feet wide of the shooter and about midway to the goals, and have him roll the ball out as the shooter starts his run. Again, the shooter tries to control with one touch and put the ball into position to make a laces shot with his second touch. Rotate after 3-4 shots.

Repeat, with balls coming in from the front by putting put server about 20 feet wide of the goals on the goal-line and have him roll the ball so that it intersects his path about midway to the goals. Rotate after 3-4 shots.

Now, repeat the entire exercise again with the server becoming a lazy defender who just jogs slowly towards the shooter to add a bit of extra pressure on him after the serve. Rotate players after each sequence of balls (back, side, front) has been completed. Finally, end with shooters dribbling their own balls in, and the extra player acting as a lazy defender to apply some minimal pressure.

**Coaching Note:** If players are having difficulty, the coach may opt to delay square and front-coming balls for a later date. This is especially true of younger players, who may not have the ability to accurately judge or time these balls, either from the service or shooting sides of the equation. If you run into this problem, limit your initial drill to balls passed in from behind recruit parents to help as servers when you are going to work on other types of service at a future practice. When the slight-pressure rotations have been completed, turn the drill into a contest. To prevent sabotage by poor service, have the contest between the shooter and the keeper. Then put the servers into their own groups for their own contest, using the others as shaggers and servers. See how many goals can be scored in X tries, perhaps around 9-10 each, divided into the types that you've practiced.

Now, divide the groups up so that the top scorers are in one group; the middle ones in another; and the lower ones in the last group. Run the contests again, making a mental note of strength levels of the various shooters.

## Large Group Work

Divide the players into 2-4 evenly balanced teams (good/average/poor shooters) and run some relay races or have some contests. Use your imagination about conditions. Ideas include:

□ □ Put players in 2 lines about 40 feet out from goal. On your shout of "go", first player dribbles and shoots

with laces kick. If he misses, and shooting high counts as a miss, he must run and tag the goalpost before running back to tag hand of next player on team. If his shot goes in, he can run back and tag hand of next teammate in line. If you do not have even numbers, let one member of the team run twice. First team to finish wins.

□ □ Create distance lanes, and see which team has the most balls that land in the farthest lane out.

□ □ Have a penalty kick contest.

□ □ Play for points. Teams are in two lines, about 40 feet out from goal, and will alternate shooting. Coach has

all balls, and teams take turns in shooting on balls served by coach. Team with most points wins.

□ □ Similar to last drill, except players have balls. Coach stands in between the groups; players serve balls into

coach, who lays them back out to the incoming player for a shot.

## Scrimmage

Because you've already made balanced teams, you can proceed to a regular scrimmage at the end of the contests. Alternatively, you can allow the winning team to decide how to end the practice, and let them choose the ending game. Periodically, repeat this practice during the seasons to continue to work on shooting balls which are coming in from various angles. Almost all players enjoy shooting work, so these sessions are good to include after several hard practices.

## Lofted Kick

**Ages: 8+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

### Warm-up

Kicking work is fairly sedentary, so have a vigorous warm-up that will spend some energy and work on fitness.

### Individual Work

The lofted kick is very useful, especially for defenders. Although it's slightly more difficult to learn than a laces kick, it can be mastered by most players. Very tiny and light players sometimes have difficulty getting good air, because they have so little mass that it is hard to get the "oomph" necessary to get the ball off of the ground. Encourage them to keep trying, as it will only be a matter of time before they can accomplish this.

**Coaching Note:** It's possible to get air with a laces kick by setting the plant foot well behind the ball, causing the body to lean back slightly since the player will be "reaching" a bit for the ball with the kicking foot. This causes the ball to be struck more on its underside which lifts it up. Be aware, however, that it might be better to reserve laces kicks for low shots in order to get kids used to the idea of keeping the knee over the ball and keeping the head down to keep the ball low.

### Coaching Points:

- Plant foot to the side and slightly behind the ball with knee slightly bent;
- Kicking foot turned outward and locked so that the foot forms a shovel;
- Strike the ball so that the big bone on the inside of the foot will hit on the lower half of the ball which causes

the shovel to come under the ball and fling it upwards.

The position of the foot will vary somewhat, depending on the size of the player's foot in relation to the ball. Players with large feet, especially tall boys at the end of U-12s who may be trying to hit a size 4 ball with a size 11 foot, will need to cock the foot outward and rotate the entire foot inward to get the proper ball contact. The only way to figure out the proper foot position is by experimenting a bit until it "feels" right.

Put the kids in pairs, with one kneeling and holding the ball and one striking at the ball to get the proper feel of where to kick it. The bigger the foot, the more of an angle will be needed to be able to strike it properly. Go around and check to see that the foot angle is correct and that the foot/ankle is properly locked. Reverse, and have the others do the same thing.

Then, put the kids into two lines some distance apart, and have them shoot the ball to their partner on the other side.

Watch and check on mechanics. Each kid will have to experiment a bit on foot position, so you will need to make adjustments as you work with them. Most common errors are putting the plant foot too close to

the ball, so that the hips cannot swing through; getting too far behind the ball to generate enough power; not locking the foot into position; and not following through.

### **Small Group Work**

Now, divide your team by size into about 3 groups and have a shooting contest between the members of each group.

This allows the tiny ones to compete among themselves rather than with folks who have twice the size/power. Allow each player to have 3 shots, and take the one with the most distance. Next, have a contest to see who can get the most height. Finally, have a contest to see who can get the most height and distance.

### **Large Group Work**

Put a moat in the middle of the field, with some defenders/attackers on each side of the moat. To get the ball to your teammates on the other side, you have to loft the ball across the moat. If the ball goes in the moat, then the other side gets the ball and can do an uncontested shot over the moat. Make the moat fairly narrow at first since you want success and then gradually widen it. Rotate which kid on the team does the shot across the moat. Switch so that the attackers become defenders and do the lofted shots.

### **Scrimmage**

Any type of regular scrimmage will be fine. Kids take naturally to lofted shots and will be trying them without much encouragement, so simply praise the efforts that you see

## **1 v 1 Attacking Skills**

### **Ages 7+; Materials: Cones, balls, pinnies; Players: 4+**

The minimum number of cones needed to adequately mark the exercises is two for each player (preferably the flat kind). However, the markings are more ideal if four cones per player are available, with the extra two preferably, though not essentially, of the short upright triangular kind. The main exercises require one ball for every two players. However, the preliminary warm-up exercises require one ball for each player to be done properly. It is strongly desirable to have pinnies available for at least half the players for the end-of-practice scrimmage.

### **Introduction**

This practice focuses on developing the essential skills that an on-ball player needs to get past a defender who is trying to keep him away from the goal. To build success, the practice gives the attacker ample time to control the ball and face the defender, rather than exposing the beginning attacker to more intense pressure when the ball is received.

### **Efficient Field Pre-Setup**

This practice lends itself well to an initial setup that minimizes the amount of cones that must be moved to set up each succeeding exercise. For most of the exercises, your players will be divided into groups of either four (ideal) or three (ok), as needed to make the numbers work.

Each group works in its own grid. A minimal setup requires 8 cones per group; for 3 player- groups this means two cones per player is not quite enough, and you need two more. In an optimal setup, each group would have 14 cones.

The symbols used are: (o) flat cone strongly preferred so that players can step on it without injury; (x) flat cone is preferred; an upright triangular one will do OK; (X) upright triangular cone is preferred, a flat cone will do OK.

Grids are made as follows (if 8 cones are used):

(o) (o)

(X) (X)

(X) (X)

(x) (x)

The middle cones on each side are set to divide the grid into thirds.

## Warm-up

**Suggested Games: Keep-Away:** One person is the defender until they make a control touch on the ball with the sole of their foot, or the ball goes out of the grid off another player. Person responsible for either losing the ball out or to the defender becomes the next defender. For this practice, add the limitation that players must hold the ball for at least two touches, to encourage players to control the first touch. This will give them the idea of possibly beating the defender themselves, rather than immediately being able to pass responsibility off to someone else. Another option is modified Keep-Away in which every player but one or two has a ball, and tries to stay in the grid without having their ball stolen by one of the players momentarily without a ball. Defender has to make a legitimate takeaway to convert the other player into the new defender.

## Directed Warm-up Phase

Send everyone the length of the available practice field and back two or three times, with each player to go as fast as they can with the limitation that they must touch the ball at least every third step. Use standard straight-ahead dribbling technique. Do stretches, then play Red Light/Green Light, with the coach asking for cuts to right or left with inside or outside of the foot. Stretch again. Now, work on the following moves:

- a. Hook the ball to the right or left with the instep of the foot, and pull it along in the other direction;
- b. Do magic hop (check), then push ball behind support leg with checking foot.
- c. Pull ball under the body with the sole of that foot, pivoting on the other foot.
- d. Do quick acceleration cut with the outside of the foot, pulling ball along so that it remains in contact with the dribble foot.

Space players along the field with plenty of room between players, and have players head towards a row of cones, trying to make a 180 degree turn as close to the line as they can and still do maintain control. Stretch again. Now, on your command, have players execute a sharp cut to the outside, followed by a sharp cut to the inside, then a sharp cut to the inside, followed by a sharp cut to the outside. Make sure to keep them widely-spaced to avoid collisions.

### **Individual Work**

Divide those present into groups of 4 (preferred) or 3 (ok), and assign each group to their own grid. If you really have to, make one group of 5, but this sometimes will cause one player to sit out some of the time in that group.

### **First Exercise**

Taking defenders straight on and cutting around them (10-15 min).

Divide each group in half, sending one half a few yards beyond the end of a grid 12 yds.\*25 yds., and the other a few yards beyond the other end, so they are 25 yards apart facing each other. While you don't have to use the cone grids or divide players into groups for this exercise, it helps. You need one ball per group.

P1 and P2 are at the end of the grid, while P3 and P4 are at the opposite end. P2 passes the ball to P3 and begins immediately trotting straight toward P3, who receives the ball and begins dribbling straight at P2. P3 must dribble straight for P2, and waits until P2 is just out of reach of the ball to make a sharp 90 degree cut to either side, and then a quick 90 degree cut back to go around P2. P3 then passes to the ball to P1, and P4 becomes the new defender while P3 continues on to the end of the grid left by P1 and P2 goes to the other end to get in line to be a defender.

Ideally, the players should pace/space themselves so the cut-around occurs about a third of the way across, i.e. about where the respective middle cones are, and be on guard against the lines creeping together (which kills the space needed for this exercise to work). This exercise moves quickly, giving each player lots of chances to experiment with choosing the right moment to make the cut, and making the cut itself under nominal pressure.

### **Coaching Points:**

1. The cuts must each be made to \*sharp\* angles, particularly the first one, which must be laterally across to minimize exposing the ball to the defender. Use either the inside of the left foot or the outside of the right foot to make a cut right, and vice-versa.
2. The closer the attacker can safely come to the defender before making the cut and still be out of range of the defender's tackle, the better, because that minimizes the defender's time to react and turn or attempt a

tackle. This is something an attacker has to experiment with to find the closest distance they can still succeed at which should be approximately two yards in front.

3. It's easier to beat a defender who is in a position to pressure an attacker trying to get by them, if the attacker

approaches the defender straight on then cuts sharply around them. It's harder to beat the defender by trying

to avoid them at an oblique angle, because the defender can get turned and match the attacker's momentum

rather than having to guess which way the attacker will go. A defender rushing at an attacker too quickly head-on is the easiest of all to beat, which is exactly the favorable condition this exercise attempts to set up

for the attacker.

4. The attacker should try to watch for the defender getting caught directly facing them or with their weight mostly on one foot, particularly if it's the front foot, and take advantage of it by making the cut in that direction.

5. With or immediately following the second cut, the attacker should take a couple of steps to accelerate by

the defender, ideally moving toward the space directly behind the defender. This effectively "shuts the door" on the defender, making it more difficult for them to recover and pursue.

## **Second Exercise**

Taking defenders straight on and cutting around them, with defender restricted in movement, but free to attempt tackle (10-15 min).

This exercise has all the same aims and coaching points as the first exercise, but introduces more opportunities for the defender to pressure the attacker while still restricting the defender's pursuit with conditions that favor success for the attacker.

If you have set the grids up so that they are side-by-side, then you can use the same grids for this exercise. You will need about 3-4 grids, which form a chain of boxes to create a Tunnel of Death. A defender is placed at the top of each box in the Tunnel.

Attackers take turns going through the Tunnel, taking on each defender in succession. Defenders are free to tackle for the ball, BUT must always keep at least one foot touching the cone. They can switch feet, but this slows them

down which is the whole point of the restriction, in addition to limiting their ability to pursue the attacker.

Switch attackers and defenders periodically.

**Coaching Points:** The coaching points are identical to those in the previous exercise. However, the object here is to give attackers a chance to experiment with defenders who offer some realistic pressure, but in an amount the attacker can control by how close they dare come before making their cuts.

1. The main point of emphasis is to discourage attackers from taking the lazy way out by going by wide of

where defenders can possibly reach and still touch their cone.

2. Attackers must keep moving forward, and not dally indecisively just out of reach of each defender trying to

get courage/thinking up a way to go by. Just do it, and if it doesn't work, try something else, but try something each time, quickly, and keep moving! There is no time to stop and think in a game.

3. The attacker should be discouraged from simply blasting the ball by D1 so hard it can be gathered or simply whizzes past the next defender as well, without being gathered in-between under the control of the attacker. This is about learning to beat a defender under control, not kickball or blast-and-outrun, which is totally inadequate to rely on in games.

Continue this exercise, but give the defenders increasing freedom by allowing them to roam freely on the line. For more advanced players, you might allow the defenders to defend at walking speed in their own box. Ultimately, you will want to allow the defenders to defend at full speed, but it will take a lot of practice before your players will reach this stage.

## Scrimmage

Take a short break, and set up the field for an end-of-practice scrimmage. Instead of goals, however, initially set up two opposite, shallow zones at each respective end, but otherwise make the field a small normal size suitable for the number of players.

Divide players into two teams, with goals being scored by making a controlled touch on the ball in your own

shallow goal zone (which encourages ball control, and not kickball or blasting it unthinkingly). Start play with

restriction that each player cannot pass it to another player before the second touch to encourage thinking about taking on a defender rather than immediately kicking it off to another player's responsibility.

Eventually, add a pair of cones at either end as goals and end with an unrestricted scrimmage to goals but still encouraging players to take defenders on 1 v 1.

## 2 v 1 Attacking Patterns (Combined Play)

**Ages: 8+; Materials: Cones, Balls, Pinnies; Players: 4+**

There are a number of different ways in which an off-ball player can provide support for an on-ball attacker in order to provide increased chances to beat a defender and ultimately put the ball in the back of the net. In this practice, we will discuss the 4 basic passing combinations which can be used by two attackers to "beat" a defender.

The four combinations are:

1. **slotted or through pass**: a deep pass into space in front of the supporting player;
2. **overlap pass**: a pass to space to the side of the on-ball player but in front of the off-ball player;

3. **wall pass** or **give-and-go**: a pass to the feet of a support player positioned ahead of the on-ball player and to one side of the defender;

4. **drop** or **heel pass**: a pass played behind the ball-carrier, to a supporting player.

It isn't be feasible to introduce on all of these passing combinations in a single session. However, if you have an assistant who can help you to demonstrate these various options, it may be worthwhile to give a quick overview as you begin this segment of training. These various options are only combined in this plan because the same basic format can be used to teach all of these combinations of passes.

**Coaching Note:** Before conducting this practice, players should have learned basic take-on skills, basic receiving and basic passing. If this has not been covered, or players are unable to get more than 3-4 passes in a row when playing keep away, they need more work on their individual skills. It is not uncommon for new players to need two seasons or more of work on individual skills before they are truly ready to spend time on combination attacking.

Therefore, don't try to force things by introducing practice sessions which will fall apart because the basic passing or receiving skills are not there yet. Also, physical maturity plays a role in when they are ready. Many players who are U-9 may have difficulty with the footwork needed to do square passes, while most U-10s can handle the footwork easily. Likewise, young players often will not "see" space, because their brains have not yet learned to think abstractly or in 3 dimensions. So, be prepared with a backup practice plan if your players appear to be baffled by the concepts or appear to lack the skills to carry out the task.

### **Warm-up**

Put the players into pairs with one ball per pair and then send them to jog around the field while passing to one another. Try to put players together who will play close together on the field, so that they can get used to the speed of their partner and can develop a sense of timing. This timing is crucial when passing to a moving player requires the ability to estimate accurately where that player is going to be when the ball arrives. The easiest 2-man attacking combo is the through ball, using either the inside or outside of the foot, so it is fine to just use simple leading passes to warm up for this work. As you get ready to work on overlaps and walls, you probably will want to use a weaving pattern for this inter-passing.

### **Individual Work**

After explaining and illustrating the basic principles of the particular pass in question, give each set of passing partners a cone (or 2 cones, if applicable) and send them off to work on giving passes to one another, using the cone(s) as imaginary defender(s). Give them ample time to work on the timing of their passes and on their positioning while you rotate around to make corrections. Both partners should have at least 10-15 tries as an on-ball and off-ball attacker.

### **Slotted or Through Pass**

There are only a few things to remember in using a slotted pass to beat a defender. These basic coaching points are as follows:

1. The on-ball player must take-on the defender by heading directly at him, because this forces the defender to have to focus his attention on the ball since that player always has the choice of beating the defender himself.
2. The supporting player should be about 3-4 yards wide of the on-ball attacker, and about 1-2 steps to his rear. If he is even with the on-ball attacker, he will clog up the passing lanes and greatly increase the chance that the ball will come behind him.
3. When the on-ball attacker gets to within about 5 feet of the defender, he should slot the ball into space behind the defender where the supporting attacker can run onto it.
4. Both attackers should approach the defender at a steady speed, without slowing down.
5. As soon as the pass is made, the prior on-ball attacker should circle around the back of the defender to receive a return pass and/or to become the support player for the other attacker.

This type of pass is most useful when there is considerable open space behind the defender, and there is relatively little risk that an opponent will be able to get to the ball before the supporting attacker. Very often, slotted passes are used by incoming midfielders to set up scoring runs for forwards when the defense is pushed up fairly far, and flat so that the keeper cannot get to the ball. It is also frequently used by forwards to send the ball to the corner flags so that a wing can cross the ball into the box while the forward gets into position to receive the return pass.

## **Overlap Pass**

In the basic overlap, the object is for the on-ball attacker to pull the defender away from desirable space by aiming towards the opposite space. He then makes a **square pass** into the space just vacated by the defender so that the ball can be picked up by a trailing (overlapping) support player. This type of pass is used in tighter spaces where there is more traffic, so a square pass is more commonly used because such a pass leaves the ball unattended only briefly, reducing the chances of it being stolen. Quite often, this technique is used to "tee the ball up" for a shot on goal by a teammate, but it also is used prior to getting into scoring range in situations where a defender is blocking the path into which a scoring or serving run will be made. For example, it is often used by a forward to pull a wing defender towards the center of the field in order to create space on the wings which can be used by an incoming wing mid to get behind the defense and serve a ball into the goal area.

The main coaching points for this type of pass are as follows:

1. The on-ball player goes towards the defender on a diagonal, in order to aim at the space into which he wishes to pull the defender. Typically, if not in scoring range, he will try to pull the defender inside, in order to open space on the wings. If in scoring range, he will try to pull the defender away from the goal to open space for a shot.

2. The on-ball player may slow down somewhat and roll the ball inward if necessary to give the off-ball supporting player time to get into position or to pull the defender over sufficiently.

3. The on-ball attacker must convince the defender that he is going to try to beat him on the side to which the defender is being pulled. As a result, if possible, the off-ball attacker should not shout or announce his presence at all, and any call for the ball must be held until the last possible second. Once players are familiar with this technique and when it should be used, they will automatically know when an on-ball attacker is looking for an overlap. With experience, they will then make the run so that the on-ball attacker can make the pass "blind" with the confidence that somebody will be there to use the space.

4. Timing of the supporting run is very important. Typically, the runner will position himself to the rear of the attacker and far enough away that he can get into the desired space at the same instant that the ball arrives.

For small windows of space, the runner must be closer and/or moving at greater speed. For bigger windows

of space, the runner can be wider and move more slowly. Initially, practice overlaps where the ball is being

served into space about 3-4 yards away from the on-ball attacker. As technique develops, work on timing of

little flicks into space which is only 2 yards or less to the side of the attacker.

5. The usual technique for a square pass is to make a stutter step and quickly pass the ball with the inside of

the inside foot (i.e., the foot farthest away from the space). The stutter step is crucial, because it allows the

attacker to slow and put his weight on the plant foot at an angle that allows the ball to be passed horizontally (or square). In general, especially with younger players, passes with the inside of the foot can be made with greater weight and accuracy than other surfaces of the foot. However, when the pass needs to

be made over a short distance into a small window of space, the stutter step will telegraph the pass to the defender. In this instance, most players will opt to use a simple little flick-on pass with the outside of the

outside foot instead, as this provides ample momentum and accuracy for a ball which is going only a short

distance.

Start by using partners who simply work on the mechanics of timing of the runs, by giving the players two cones.

Put one cone down and put the other cone down about 5-6 yards to one side and about 2-3 yards back from the first cone. The first cone represents where the defender is at the beginning and the second cone

represents where the defender should be after being pulled inside. Have one attacker aim to the side of the first cone, then do some ball rolls to take the ball inward towards the second cone. As soon as the attacker is almost ready to reach the second cone, have him do a slight feint inside and make an immediate square pass to the outside. As soon as the runner sees the feint, he should start heading towards the first cone and shout "Now" to ask for the pass, which should be made instantly. Work on timing and the weight of the pass so that runner and pass arrive in the space at the same time. Each partner should have at least 10-15 tries as an on-ball and off-ball attacker.

### **Wall Pass (a.k.a. Give-and-Go)**

This is a pass that uses an off-ball attacker like a wall to simply relay the ball back to the passer. It is a great way to get around defenders in medium traffic, especially where defenders tend to follow the ball instead of staying with a particular mark.

In this pass, the off-ball attacker is ahead of the ball instead of behind it. The off-ball attacker gets about 2-3 yards to the side of the defender and stands parallel to the defender (sideways) so that he can see more of the field. When he is in the sideways stance and open to the field, especially if he is near the touch-line, this is a clear signal to the on ball attacker to use him as a wall. How does the on-ball attacker accomplish this?

1. The on-ball attacker comes at the defender with speed (as this option works best at jogging speed or better).
2. As soon as the on-ball attacker gets within about 5 feet of the defender, he quickly passes the ball to the front foot of the wall player, and runs around the backside of the defender. The pass must be crisp, with sufficient force that it will rebound off of the foot of the wall player without any real added effort by the wall player. The pass normally will be made with the inside of the inside foot, i.e. the foot farthest away from the wall player.
3. The wall player turns the receiving foot so that it is almost flat, but has just enough angle to allow the ball to rebound to the space behind the defender. If the foot is angled too much, the ball will not rebound but will instead travel into his other leg. If it's too flat, the ball may not rebound at a sharp enough angle to get past the defender. Some experimentation will be required for the players to learn the correct angle.

**Coaching Note:** Another option is to receive the ball with the outside of the near or far foot. Some older players prefer to use the outside of the foot, as they believe that it gives them greater immediate freedom to continue running down the field after serving as the wall. Some younger players who have difficulty with inside of the foot reception do fine using the outside of the foot, so this is worth trying if they are getting little success otherwise.

Once the players get the hang of this technique, you can introduce them to running walls (give-and-goes) where the wall player is facing forward instead of sideways to the field; gets to the side of the defender to receive the pass; and, depending on the weight of the pass and on the speed of the incoming passer, may immediately return it or carry it for brief instant before returning it to the server. In general, it is better to send the return pass early and deep than to run the risk that the defender will close down the passing lane.

To do the initial work on the stationary wall pass, put the wall player on a cone that is about 3 yards wide of the cone representing the defender. Have the on-ball attacker take-on the cone defender, then execute the wall pass when about 4-5 feet in front of the defender, and run around the back side of the cone to accept the return. In the meantime, send the wall player to another cone that is set up about 3 yards on the opposite side of the cone defender, so that the on-ball attacker can come back using the same foot (and the wall can practice with his same foot). Allow around 10 tries before switching places. Once each player has tried with his dominant foot, then try with the non dominant foot.

To do give-and-goes, have the supporting player jogging about 3 yards wide of the on-ball attacker and about even with him. As the on-ball attacker gets within 4-5 feet of the cone, he passes to the moving wall player, who is coming into the space to the side of the defender as the ball arrives. The moving wall player receives the ball with the inside of his far foot or outside of his near foot, and immediately passes it back into space behind the defender.

This is one-touch passing, so he must control and redirect the ball in a single touch. Young players may have trouble with this technique and may require more than one touch to control the ball. If this is the case, then they are not ready for give-and-go work yet. Instead, spend some time on 1-touch keepaway games until their proficiency improves enough to make this practice productive.

## **Drop or Heel Pass**

The final type of pass is the **drop pass**. The most spectacular use of the drop pass is when the on-ball attacker lures the defender towards the end-line to give his supporting player time to get into a central position in front of the goal, and then passes the ball back across the penalty mark so that the runner can put the ball into the net at the far post. This is one of the nicest methods for 2-man attacking combos, and has one of the highest percentages of success in upper level games. This same pass also can be used at any time when the on-ball attacker must turn his back toward goal which may be necessary to receive the ball if being pressured hard from an incoming defender. If he cannot turn easily, it is often better for him to honor the Rule of Thumb to "Play The Way You Are Facing" and drop the ball to an incoming attacker in order to relieve pressure. This might also allow him to make a run which will pull his defender over enough to allow a shot by the support player or allow the support player to send a slotted pass for him to finish.

The key ingredients for a drop ball are timing, timing and timing. First, the runner usually must hold his run until the pass is being made or the pass has a high likelihood of going behind him. This means that he

must wait until he sees the head of the server go down to make the pass which is his signal to run. Secondly, the server must time the ball to arrive at the proper angle at the proper time. If his pass is too hard, the runner may overrun it or have to pullout too wide. If his pass is too soft, the opponents will have too much time to intercept the pass. Finally, at least in finishing these balls, the runner should time his footwork/steps so that he can receive the ball on the inside of his near foot, like in a wall pass, and neatly deflect the ball to the far post. Have the on-ball attacker feint as if he is going to try to bring the ball down the end-line, then quickly send the dropped pass to the onrushing teammate with the inside of the far foot. It takes plenty of practice to get this timing down. However, when the timing is learned properly, the goals are terrific. Good examples of these goals can be seen in tapes of the 1998 WC Quarter-Final between Germany and Croatia, and the Third Place game between Croatia and Holland.

### **Small Group Work**

Divide players into groups of 3. Put one player as defender who is anchored on a cone, and practice the pass that is being taught, rotating the players to a different position after around 10 tries. Use coaching points noted above. Then, create medium grids (about 20 feet by 30 feet) with a cone goal at one end. In each of these exercises, the defender must be VERY passive initially. Ideas to restrict the defender include having him hop on one foot; making him defend backwards; or having him crawl around. As the players improve, gradually permit the defender to become more active.

For overlaps and through passes, put a player at each end of the grid, and put one in the middle. Designate one of the end players as the defender, and give him a ball. Defender plays the ball into the attacker, and starts to close him down at walking speed. Supporting attacker then comes to assist, and the pass is made. Coach can use the points noted above to make corrections here. In each case, the original on-ball player comes around the back of the defender to provide another scoring option for the other attacker who can shoot on goal or send to the support player, depending on what the defender does.

For wall passes, put the off-ball attacker on the end-line with the defender and have him come up with the defender, staying to the side of the grid to create the wall. For give-and-goes, put the off-ball attacker on the opposing end-line and have him sprint to get into position to provide the return pass. For drop passes, have the on-ball attacker take the ball and the defender to the end-line and then drop the ball back to the trailing attacker for a shot on goal.

### **Large Group Work**

Create a Tunnel of Death (which is a series of grids that are stacked on top of one another). About 2-4 stacked grids should be used. Put a cone goal at the end of the last grid. Then, put a restricted defender at the top of each of the grids (Note: parents are great to use for these defenders). Send pairs of attackers through the Tunnel, so that they have to beat several defenders to take a shot on goal. Allow about 3 tries, then reduce the restrictions on the defenders and go again. Then, if players have been used as defenders, rotate the defenders out for their turns.

**Coaching Note:** If players have been used as defenders, create even numbers of grids so that you can rotate partners out together. Also, if you have a large group, create two Tunnels to reduce lines.

From a coaching standpoint, you will want to adjust the defensive pressure to get considerable success but you do not want it to be too easy. It is fine to adjust pressure from grid to grid (i.e., one grid is easy, followed by one which is more difficult), and to adjust from group to group (i.e., if one pair is consistently running the grid without problems, allow the defenders to be more active). Ultimately, you are hoping to get to the point where your defenders can defend at full pressure within their particular grids, while your attackers can still run the grids with reasonable success. Along the way, you can have contests among the pairs (e.g. greatest number of goals out of X number of tries; most number of grids completed in X tries; etc.).

## **Scrimmage**

Play 4v4, by combining pairs from the prior exercises. Any goals scored by use of the combo pass of the day will count triple, while use of any of the other combos will count double.

## **Throw-Ins**

**Ages: 6+; Equipment: Cones, balls; Players: 4+**

Young players are notorious for losing possession on throw-ins, even after they have learned how to keep possession momentarily by doing a legal throw. Therefore, this lesson plan will cover the basics of a legal throw, as well as some ways to teach the players how to retain possession. Before holding this practice, it is a good idea to do some beginning work on chest-traps, as well as on receiving air-balls with the feet.

### **Warm-up**

Start with some basic ball-control movements, such as rolls, vees, toe-taps. Do your stretches, interspersed with assorted ball control moves that you want to practice.

### **Individual Work**

To do a legal throw-in, the ball must come back over the head (refs usually look to see if the ball goes back past the ears) before being thrown forward; both feet must be on the ground when the ball is released; and both feet must be behind or on the touch-line.

There are two basic ways to do a legal throw-in. One is to step forward with one foot in the direction of the throw, and drag the toe of the trailing foot as the ball is thrown. The other is to simply stand with both feet firmly planted and throw the ball in. Which style is used is a matter of player preference. Both ways are effective so let your players use the one that works for them.

The most common error in throw-ins is lifting the foot. This error almost always occurs because the player is trying to throw the ball too hard and almost always occurs in players who use the first method and are

lifting the trailing foot in an unconscious effort to get more power on the ball. Therefore, if you notice that a player is lifting the foot repeatedly, switch them to doing throws by standing with feet together and tell them that their main job is just to get the ball on the field. By taking the pressure to set distance records off, your chances of a good throw are greatly improved.

After demonstrating the two styles of throw-ins, divide the players into pairs. Create two long touch-lines with a space of about 5-7 yards between them. Have one partner stand at or behind his touch-line and throw to the other partner, who catches the ball and throws it back. Watch for proper technique and make necessary corrections.

A fun game, which gives lots of repetitions, is to play "housekeeping" by putting one or more players in the "house" (center circle works well) with a supply of balls. Put the rest of the players around the circle. Objective is to clean house by throwing balls out using proper throw in technique. Foul throws are penalized with a five-second no-throw penalty for everyone in the house, which means that the house can get full of balls again. Outfield players retrieve balls, and then must dribble them back into the house. House players work for one to two minutes or until they clean up, whichever comes first. By varying the number of balls, you can make it more or less difficult to succeed. You also can place conditions on the outfielders to slow down the refilling of the house. When you call "time", you can count the number of balls in the house and record this for the "team". At the end, hold a "clean-off" contest between the two teams with the cleanest house.

## **Small Group Work**

Return to the touch-lines, and divide players into groups of 3. One will be the thrower, the second will be the

receiver, and the third will be a shadow defender who plays behind the receiver. Start by having the receiver side-by-side with the shadow and have him break in towards the server, then sharply cut back down the line. As soon as he makes the reverse cut, have the server throw the ball down the line into the space where he will be running. In general, it is easiest for players to collect a ball which is already moving in the desired direction, so this is a good choice for a throw. Switch roles after 3-5 throws. The key to this throw is timing, so that the throw is made as soon as the player reverses direction.

The second option is to have the shadow defender on the back of the attacker, so that he cannot turn easily. Have the server throw in a gentle ball to the receiver's chest, which is immediately passed back to the server as he steps in bounds. Once again, rotate the 3 players through all roles.

The last throw-in option is to throw the ball to the feet of a player who is standing downfield. This is almost always the best choice for young players and, unfortunately, rarely used because all of the players are expecting the ball to go up-field and never mark the back players. Practice this option by having the shadow stand up-field and the receiver stand some distance downfield. The thrower initially sets up to throw up-field in the direction of the shadow, then quickly turns and throws the ball back to the open receiver.

## **Large Group Work**

Put 3 attackers on the field, along with 2 defenders. Put a thrower on the touch-line. Now, explain to the attackers that the thrower always must have a front target, a middle target and a back target player. You might also want to take time to explain what positions would serve this function in your lineup. In general, your wing defenders will take all throws outside of your defensive third. Wing midfielders will take your throws in the defensive third, because you want your defenders available in case possession is lost. Start with shadow defenders, and work on movement of your players to get themselves open for a throw, except for your back player who should remain quiet and just slip back to become available. After 2 throws per attacker, allow the defenders to become active, and play a game where the attackers must have 3 touches on the ball to score and the defenders score if they can intercept the ball before these 3 touches. Play until all attackers have done 2 throws apiece, then switch 2 of the attackers with the defenders and repeat.

## **Scrimmage**

Play a regular game with the full team. Focus on good quality throw-ins from a technique standpoint, and look for target players to get open to offer options to the thrower. It will take several years for the players to develop the ability to break well, and to develop the judgement about when/where/why to throw a ball to a particular player. It also will take some time to develop air-ball receiving skills. As a result, your main objective is to get legal throws, and to get a beginning awareness of the tactics.