

Jay Martin (Ed.)

The Best of Soccer Journal

Techniques + Tactics



National Soccer Coaches
Association of America

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The Best of Soccer Journal
Techniques and Tactics

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The Best of Soccer Journal

Techniques and Tactics

Jay Martin, Ed.

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Chapter 1: Techniques

Critical Teaching Points in Technical Training

NSCAA Academy Staff

The following lists critical teaching points for basic soccer technique as developed by the NSCAA Staff. Go to www.nscaa.com for an update on all Academy programs.

Passing – Ground

- Look at target as player approaches the ball; identify target as you approach the ball; approach the ball while looking at target; eyes on the ball
- Support foot placement – slight hop to ball, foot is planted along side of ball pointing the foot in direction of the target
- Contact-surface head down to strike head up to see target
- Instep pass: striking foot in L-shape and toe pointed up, strike ball with ankle bone; ankle locked; contact ball with inside of ankle bone; contact ball with inside of foot
- Top of foot: strike ball with the top of the foot
- Outside of foot: toes are pointed down, support foot is slightly behind the ball, strike the ball with the outside of the foot
- Follow through the ball toward the target – transfer the weight forward; speed of foot through the ball; follow through quickly; follow through with the hips toward the target

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** Look at target while approaching the ball off a slight hop, place the support foot alongside the ball
- **Contact:** Ankle is locked
 - Action:**
 - **Instep pass:**
 - **Foot** – L-shape and toe pointed up, strike ball with the inside of the ankle bone

- **Ball** – Middle, around halfway up
- **Top of foot pass:**
 - **Foot** – Toes pointed down; strike ball with the top of the foot/laces of the shoe
 - **Ball** – Middle, around halfway up
- **Outside of foot pass:**
 - **Foot:** Toes are pointed down, support foot is slightly behind the ball, strike the ball with the outside of the foot
 - **Ball:** Side of ball (left side for a right-footed pass), around halfway up
- **Follow Through:** Weight moves forward through the ball as the leg follows through low

Other Coaching Cues

- Qualities of a good pass
 - Pace / speed
 - Direction / accuracy
 - Timing: to feet or into space
 - Deception: threaten, be creative
- Head down to strike; head up to see target

Lifting Ball Over Distance: Long Driven Passes

- Ball out of feet; look at/recognize target; preparatory touch out of feet; identify the target as you approach the ball; second-to-last step, peek at the target
- **Approach** – power step at an angle; power step onto support foot; power step is longer than usual stride; place non-kicking foot pointed forward and alongside of the ball (actual distance will vary from player to player); hips square toward the target
- Toes pointed down & ankle locked; toes curled into shoe; push toes through the bottom of the shoe

- **Contact** – With big toe; longer back swing; strike through the lower half and left of center (for right-footed strike)
- **Action** – Strike through the ball; look at foot striking the ball; opposite hand points at the target
- **Follow through** – Weight moves forward through the ball; follow through high and toward the target; accelerate through the ball – positive body weight through the ball

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** At sharper angle while looking at target; off a power (longer stride) step placement of the non-kicking foot varies for each player
- **Contact:**
 - **Foot** – Toes pointed down and ankle is locked
 - **Straight drive** – With big toe
 - **"Outswinger"** – With outside of foot
 - **"Inswinger"** – With big toe
- **Action:** Head is steady, player leans back, lower leg extends from a flexed position
- **Follow Through:** Weight moves forward through the ball as the leg follows through high

Other Coaching Cues

- Ball out from feet
- Identify the target as you approach the ball
- Approach ball at an angle
- Power step onto support foot, which is longer than a normal stride
- Place the non-kicking foot slightly behind the ball (varies for each player)
- Curl the toes into the bottom of the shoe
- Follow through should involve a hop on the non-kicking foot or a transfer of weight onto kicking foot
- Qualities of a good pass
 - Pace / speed
 - Direction / accuracy
 - Timing: to feet or into space

Striking Ball: Driving/Shooting

- Ball out of feet; look at/recognize target; preparatory touch out of feet; identify the target as you approach the ball; second-to-last step, peek at the target
- **Approach** – Power step at an angle; power step onto support foot; power step is longer than usual stride; place non-kicking foot pointed forward and alongside the ball (actual distance will vary from player to player); hips square toward the target
- Toes pointed down & ankle locked; toes curled into shoe; push toes through the bottom of the shoe
- **Contact** – With laces; compact back swing; strike through the lower half and left of center (for right-footed strike)
- **Action** – Strike through the ball; look at foot striking the ball; opposite hand points toward the target
- **Follow through** – Weight moves forward through the ball; Follow through low and toward the target; Accelerate through the ball – positive body weight through the ball

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** At an angle while looking at target, off a power (long stride) step placement of the non-kicking foot (varies for each player)
- **Contact:**
 - **Foot** – Toes pointed down and the ankle is locked
 - **Straight drive** – With laces
 - **"Outswinger"** – With outside of foot
 - **"Inswinger"** – With inside/big toe of foot
 - **Ball** – Lower half and left of center for a right-footed strike
- **Action:** Head is steady; player stays low, lower leg extends powerfully from as fully flexed knee as possible
- **Follow Through:** Weight moves forward through the ball as the leg follows through low

Other Coaching Cues

- Ball out from feet
- Identify the target as you approach the ball
- Approach ball at an angle
- Power step onto support foot, which is longer than a normal stride
- Place the non-kicking foot next to the ball (varies from player to player)
- Curl the toes into the bottom of the shoe
- Compact back swing with kicking leg
- Follow through should involve a hop on the non-kicking foot or a transfer of weight onto the kicking foot
- *Aggressive attitude*
 - Shoot at any opportunity
 - Positive attitude about the success of the shot
- *Power shooting*
 - Round and compact over the ball
 - Horizontal body movement and speed through the ball
 - Stay down on the ball with head steady
 - Last stride is longer onto the non-kicking foot
 - The non-kicking knee is slightly flexed
 - Non-kicking foot and knee are pointed in the direction of the shot
 - Ankle of the kicking foot is locked
 - Strike through the center of the ball
 - Hip and knee of the kicking leg are pointed in the direction of the shot
 - Follow through toward the goal with the weight going forward
 - Land on the shooting foot
- *Placement of shot*
 - Make an early decision on the target
 - Attempt to get into position to shoot prior to receiving the ball
 - Support foot, hips, and shooting knee; aim at the target when kicking through the ball
 - Shoot the ball before the advancing goalkeeper sets their feet
- *Volleying*
 - Side foot
 - Toe raised
 - Ankle locked
 - Lift outer border of foot

- *Instep*

- Coil shoulders
- Toe pointed down
- Ankle locked
- Upper leg parallel with ground
- Kicking of kicking leg points at target
- Power from knee extension

Heading

- Get into the line of flight of the ball; sight the ball (includes depth); read the flight of the ball
- **Elbows up at chest height** – arch back; hyperextend the hips; slingshot/bow-and-arrow position; arms out for balance; balanced start position – feet apart, knees slightly flexed
- **Move the head forward, versus up and down, through the ball** – no backspin; hands apart and elbows thrust backwards as back and neck snap forward; chin in; snap through ball; head, neck, trunk into ball; move eyes forward through the ball; throw eyes at ball
- **Point of contact:** Head ball between eyebrow and hairline; on forehead between eyebrows and hairline
- **Air-Heading** – Time jump to head at top of jump; jump first using arms to gain lift; use arms to make a cone of space and to ward off opponents; judge ball and attack space first; Note the difference between power heading and redirection heading

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** Read the flight of the ball – eyes on ball with the hips hyperextended and the elbows out at chest height with arms apart
- **Contact:** Head ball between eyebrows and hairline
- **Action:** Move the head forward, versus up and down, through the ball thrusting the arms backwards
- **Follow Through:** Chin up and looking toward the target



Other Coaching Cues

- **Preparation**
 - Judge the direction and depth of the ball
 - Keep the eyes open and on the ball
- **Ready Position**
 - Mouth closed
 - Chin up
- **Action**
 - Eyes on ball
 - When heading while on the ground, use the legs to increase power into the header
- **Contact**
 - Neck should be firm
- **Follow Through**
 - No back spin on ball

Heading Out – Clearances – Objectives are height, distance, width, and accuracy if possible

- Leave late to attack the ball
- Use a one-foot take-off from the run
- Jump first
- Be side-on when jumping to head the ball
- Contact the ball below its mid-line (bottom half)

Heading Down – To Goal – Objective is to hit the goal line

- Bend run to side of field opposite ball
- Leave late to attack the ball
- Use a one-foot take-off from the run
- Jump first
- Contact the ball above its mid-line (top half)

Changing Direction of the Ball

- Side on – foot farther from the ball is farther forward
- Open hips toward the target as ball is headed
- Follow through with the chin up and looking toward the target

Receiving

- Move into the line of flight; sight the ball; read the flight of the ball
- Calculate part of body to be used; prepare the surface
- Present body part to ball to the flight of the ball – generally 90 degrees to the line of flight of the ball
- Relax and give (maybe a slight hop) as ball arrives; absorb the ball
- Touch ball out of the feet and explode (or accelerate) in desired direction; use controlling touch to move the ball in desired direction; respond to your touch; prepare the ball into the new space; be aware of defenders and touch ball away from pressure

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** Read flight of ball – eyes on ball and decide which part of body to use
- **Contact:** Absorb ball as it arrives
- **Action:** Touch ball out of the feet
- **Follow Through:** Accelerate away from pressure in the desired direction

Other Coaching Cues

- Look at the next target as the ball is being played to you
- Feint before and/or as ball arrives



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- Ball is on the ground
 - Keep hips open
 - Receive the ball across the body on the farthest foot if unmarked
 - Receive the ball with the toe pointed up and the ankle locked
- Relax and give (maybe a slight hop) as ball arrives
- Do not stop the ball – prepare ball for the next action: shot, dribble, pass
- First touch alters angle of the ball to:
 - Relieve pressure – angle of touch
 - Attack defender who has laid off – distance of touch
 - Trick the defender
 - Players can “buy” time by gesturing or feinting toward the ball and letting it run, or playing the ball in another direction

Dribbling

Running with Ball

- Running into space with ball; run with ball; head raised – look through the eyebrows – to see options
- Approach ball at speed – straight on with the head up; make up ground quickly
- Take ball with forward stride on top (with instep) or outside of foot with the toe down; contact ball with laces or outside surface of foot
- First touch is long
- Shorten touches as player approaches defender

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** At speed – straight on with head up
- **Contact:** Take ball with forward stride with a quick short extension of the lower leg with the toe down contacting the ball with the instep or outside of the foot
- **Action:** First touch is long; touches shorten as player approaches defender
- **Follow Through:** Leg follows through low

To Beat a Defender

- Head up
- Attack defender's lead/front/inside foot with

smaller steps as you approach defender; 1st touch forward as large as possible based on the distance to the defender; smaller steps as player approaches defender; attack on a straight path to goal or space; decide early which side to attack

- Beat the defender by
 - Change of speed
 - Change of direction
 - Use deception – a feint or trick
- Explode past defender
- Cut ball behind defender toward goal (cut off recovery run)

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** Head up, smaller steps as player approaches defender
- **Contact:** With the inside, outside, top or bottom of shoe
- **Action:** Beat the defender using deception by changing speed, direction
- **Follow Through:** Explode past defender and cut ball behind defender toward goal (cut off recovery run)

Shielding from Opponents

- Side on
- Lower center of gravity – “sit down” at a right angle with hip and shoulder to and into opponent
- Elbow out and bent to make bigger; elbow out to make and keep space
- Ball on outside of foot; ball on foot away from defender
- Dribble away from the goal or move laterally; keep the ball moving

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** Side on and lower center of gravity with elbows out and bent
- **Contact:** On the outside of the foot
- **Action:** Body between the defender and the ball, ball is on the foot away from the defender
- **Follow Through:** Dribble away from the goal or move laterally

Turning with Outside of Foot:

- Approach ball at an angle with knees bent; forward foot steps to meet the ball
- Lower center of gravity; lean into opponent; drop shoulder and lean into turn and receive the ball as the player turns
- Support foot planted beyond the ball
- Turning foot over ball, pronate out and plant beyond ball
- Outside anklebone and foot contact ball and takes full weight; wrap outside of foot around ball; turn body after touch to shield opponent from the ball; outside edge of front foot contacts the ball
- Player moves in opposite direction and head up; turn to follow ball and accelerate away from pressure

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:** At an angle, lower center of gravity and place the support foot beyond the ball
- **Contact:** Outside edge of front foot
- **Action:** Turn to follow ball
- **Follow Through:** Accelerate away from pressure with the head up

Other Coaching Cues

- Look at ball as you approach
- Feint in the opposite direction prior to turning with the ball
- Turn into defender by dropping a shoulder and leaning into the defender
- Turn ball as you receive a pass

The attacker should consider the following choices *before* receiving the ball:

- Can I penetrate by:
 - Shooting
 - Beating a player and shooting
 - Passing to a teammate
 - Possessing the ball

Individual Defending – Tackling

- Becoming the first defender; angle and speed of approach
- Purpose is to delay the attacker
- Close down quickly – long steps
- At approximately 5 yards away, slow down (short steps)
- Lower center of gravity; Body mechanics at arrival – lower base
- Angle to right or left
- Begin to move backwards (shuffle feet) with eyes on ball
- Distance from attacker
- Single leg tackle – with solid block on the ball with tackling foot; knee flexed; non-blocking foot close to the ball

Key Coaching Cues

- **Approach:**
 - **Speed** – Close space to attacker quickly, lowering center of gravity
 - **Angle** – Bend run as defender approaches the attacker to the right or the left so that the body is positioned side on (one foot in front of the other foot)
- **Action:** Eyes on ball and shuffle feet backwards at an angle forcing attacker to a covering defender, the touch line or the goal line
- **Contact:**
 - Decision on When to Tackle
 - Instant the ball arrives/just after the attacker touches the ball
 - When ball is misplayed
 - When defender is within one step of reaching the ball
 - Defender has cover, has the attacker against the touch line, or the attacker is within shooting distance
- **Action:**
 - *Poke Tackle – With the Front Foot*
 - Keep weight low over the back foot (be able to recover if the poke is missed), poke at an angle
 - With back to goal – moving backwards with shuffle steps, use feints

- Side to Side with Attacker – run level with attacker and poke the ball when it is in the middle of the attacker or closer to the defender

Block Tackle – With the Back Foot

- Step forward with the weight low next to the ball with the back foot, tackle with other foot – ankle locked, toe up – across the ball, move forward to gain possession

Slide Tackle – Closest Foot to Attacker

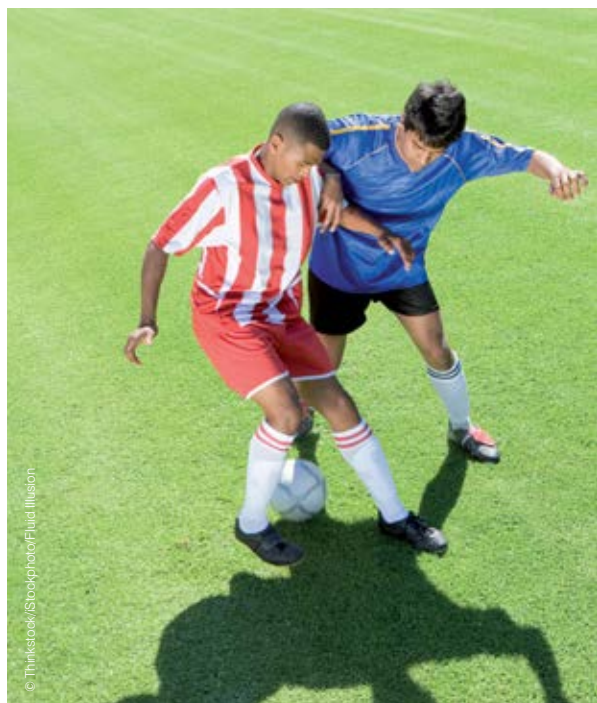
- Slide on the outside of the lower leg and hip with knee flexed, ankle locked, toe up

Follow Through:

- Move forward on the diagonal to gain possession

Other Coaching Cues

- Close space with long steps, shorten steps as defender approaches attacker – around 5 yards
- Distance from attacker depends on the relative speed and ability of both attacker and defender, but it is generally around 2 yards with the lead shoulder the defender aligned with the shoulder of the attacker



Good Technique Is Not Enough

Lang Wedemeyer
NSCAA Academy Staff

On several occasions, I have heard former U.S. National Team coaches Bruce Arena and April Heinrichs mention that one of the biggest problems with our rising youth players, boys and girls alike, is that they do not have the ability to play effectively under pressure. The players' technique breaks down when under pressure and their speed of play is not fast nor accurate enough to create a flow in high-level games. This raises a question: "What is the youth coach's role and responsibility in teaching technique that leads to better speed of play and the development of more creative and skillful players?"

We constantly preach "technique, technique, technique" to our younger players, but are coaches truly helping them develop efficient technique under pressure? Or are we constantly setting up unrealistic situations for them?

Take for example the "Coerver Craze." Fast footwork is wonderful; I do it with my players all the time. But what are the situations in which coaches are training their players to use these technical skills? Are we having them make moves against phantom defenders? What happens when they are faced with a real live defender coming at them at different speeds or different angles or in different parts of the field? Are we doing enough to help prepare and develop our players to deal with these types of situations? Often, we are left with technical repetition without tactical context.

What is the coach's responsibility in relation to training technique? The responsibility is three-pronged:

- Giving the players tools with which to practice on their own

- Repetitively putting players in a pressured environment in training sessions, and
- Emphasizing the important coaching points during the games.

Defining technique and skill

Technique is the mechanism with which the body maneuvers itself to be able to complete an objective. If the objective is to pass the ball 15 yards to a teammate, the brain informs the body to maneuver itself in order to kick the ball in that direction. How well the body adjusts to the demand determines how good the technique is, while how quickly the brain interprets the cues and the message sent to the muscles determines the speed of play. The better the technique, the greater the likelihood that the ball will go where we want it and how we want it played.

Then what is the difference between technique and skill? As taught to me by the late Mike Berticelli (former Director of Coaching on the NSCAA) in my first NSCAA National Course, technique is the mechanics behind solving a problem, and skill is being able to solve the problem regardless of the mechanics. Skill is basically getting the job done no matter how it looks. But with better technique, the player's success rate is heightened.

In the early stages of the coaching schools, we teach youth coaches about progression in their training sessions. The first progression in a technical session is referred to as fundamental. This is placing players in an environment in which they are receiving lots of repetitions without initial pressure. Then pressure is added progressively,

judging by the success rate of the players. Most coaches still organize technical training based on this format. What I am proposing is using these ideas to help players start to practice on their own outside of the team training sessions. Youth coaches need to instruct players on how to effectively self-train. Most coaches give our youth players "homework" to practice between training sessions, and that is a good start. The problem is how to get these players to really self-train when there are so many other things that they want to be doing. Coaches have to compete with Nintendo, birthday parties, other sports, watching TV – the list goes on and on. The only real way that I see is to continually stress the importance of ball work to the players and their parents. The ones who are practicing on their own will naturally be the more motivated and usually emerge as the best players as they develop at a faster rate.

The rest are the players whom coaches have to motivate in terms of self-development. There is an unlimited number of exercises that coaches can give their players to practice on their own – everything from the Coerver techniques to passing against a wall to juggling, etc. But there is still a problem. Tom Turner, Region II DOC, talks about a girl at one of the regional camps who had unbelievable technical ability. This youth player could juggle forever and do Coerver moves faster than anyone in camp, but was lost and ineffectual on the field. Here is where the role of the coach must emerge to place these players in environments where their technical ability is under pressure. If they are successful in a more challenging environment, they will turn each technique into skillful play.

Evaluating technical progress

How do coaches evaluate players' technical progress? The coach could test them with how many Coerver moves they execute in a minute, how many juggles in two minutes, how many correct receptions out of 10 tosses, etc. But that all

takes too much practice time, though such testing might be a worthy self-testing mechanism for off-field work. Such testing is quantitative as opposed to qualitative.

The coach's responsibility is to create the environment in which players are placed under immediate pressure. The role of the coach is to help players understand the cues that allow them to apply proper technique in game-like situations. We always hear there are no tactics without technique. Well, there is no technique without tactics. The use of the proper technique comes from decision-making ability in pressure situations. This will help the speed of play while also enforcing a higher level of technical ability, but all within the context of the game.

A sample practice

An example of this would be if a coach has a group of U-10s and wants to improve their passing ability. If the coach teaches them early on in the season how to practice passing on their own, then come practice time they shouldn't have to be lined up to practice that technique. Perhaps the warm-up might have some small group line drills (passing back and forth and exchanging line positions, etc.) but the session could move right into a 5 v. 2 game for warm-up where they are passing under some type of initial pressure.

In this situation the coach can now help players with understanding, of the technical nuances of the weight of pass, deception, etc., which are all decisions that lead to the success of the technique of passing.

This must progress into a more game-like situation in which there is free movement and free decision-making on the part of the players. The technical aspects of passing along with the cues that lead to the use of those techniques would then be continually emphasized throughout the session.



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A key point here is to still keep the numbers small, especially with younger players. In situations where they are placed in two goal games of 4v4, players can't hide and are forced into pressure situations more often. So now we are getting the repetition of using the different techniques over and over. The players are also in an environment in which they are constantly making the choices based on cues from the game. This must be progressed into a bigger game, depending on the age group, so that more technical abilities come into play, such as long passes, crosses, etc.

Playing the game

But what do coaches do when it's game time? For younger players, U-12 and down, it is a good idea to set different goals for their games instead of winning and scoring. Set goals of completed passes in a row or everyone using the outside of

the foot to pass the ball at least once or everyone chipping the ball at least once during the course of the game, etc. In setting these goals, coaches can emphasize the use of techniques in the game atmosphere. When the technique breaks down for a player, the coach can then make the decision whether it was a simple mechanical mistake or the decision to use that technique was not the right one for that situation. Hopefully the player has already determined what the problem was.

It is in the game environment, where players are under the most pressure to perform, that coaches can evaluate how well their training regimen has prepared them. When evaluating their performance, the coach should make some notes on different situations that can be recreated in a training environment to help prepare the players to understand the technical cues. An example would be if the coach has been emphasizing passing in the team's training sessions for a period of time,

but realizes that the team is weak on shooting the ball, then shooting might be the focus of subsequent training sessions.

Problem solving

Having reviewed technical training methodology, we are still faced with two real problems:

- How do we get our players to practice and improve their technical ability so they are proficient enough to place them into games?
- How do we as coaches learn and understand how to give our players the proper combination of technique with tactics?

There are different ways of answering both these questions. The first one is up to the individual coach. Only you as the coach can determine what will inspire your players to go out and practice on their own. Maybe you have them keep a juggling record or rewards system for younger players or give homework sheets to the parents. But all in all, it will be the more inspired and dedicated players (even at that age) who want to practice on their own, who want to become better. The ultimate test is how they perform in the game under pressure. As these players progress, it will more than likely be the motivated players who will develop the fastest and go on to higher levels of soccer. Your job with these youth players is to try and inspire all of them, but also to nurture the ones who really have the desire.

As for the second question, if you are reading this article, then you are the kind of coach who will also learn on his/her own. You have taken a big step by just being a member of the NSCAA and reading the magazine. Another way is by attending coaching courses.

Also watching and evaluating games at every level as often as possible is a great way to enhance your knowledge. By watching an MLS or WUSA game

on television, one can learn how and why players succeed by using their technical abilities. The coach must also watch other games at or just above his/her own coaching level to see how other players handle speed of play issues. This is not only for the coach. The players can also learn a lot by watching other players or by trying to emulate them.

Conclusion

The teaching of technique is very important. But technique without game application is worthless. Players must have the ability to match technique with tactics to be more successful in the game. A player who can juggle 3,000 times is not effective if the individual doesn't have an impact on the game. It is up to the youth coaches to help inspire players to work on the fundamentals of soccer outside of regular team training sessions. It is also important for the coach to create a training environment where the repetition of application of technique is taught within the context of game-like situations. Having said all of this, players should always be encouraged to collectively play on their own. It is within the game that they learn the most.

"Creative, skillful players will develop in response to an environment where techniques and tactical awareness develop together," Tom Turner says. Wouldn't it be much nicer to coach players in the game as opposed to constantly setting up stagnant drills, not to mention more fun for the players? By expanding time spent by the players training technique on their own, coaches have a better chance to achieve this ideal.

Teaching Technique Tactically

Mark Nicole

Most would agree the modern game continues to evolve into one of increased speed of play in attack, immediate transition both ways, and the pressure of playing efficiently in decreased space with less time. As a consequence, much higher levels of competence are being expected of players as individuals and as a collective unit. These levels are of course technical and tactical in nature as well as extremely demanding psychologically and physically. Youth training sessions must now incorporate less exclusive teaching of technique in preparation for this phenomenon. The “drilling” of technique without adding difficulty and pressure is myopic. What is taught must be match related to effect a more complete personnel development of the young player. This is not to profess that practicing a specific technique in isolation outside of the moving game is counterproductive. This type of training is of course necessary but should be made more realistic as soon as possible

The Challenge

The challenge now becomes how to effectively present, demonstrate, and teach “advanced technical training” topics within a format that incorporates other facets of the game. To succeed, training must be stimulating for the players, manageable for the coach and relevant to the match. For example, basic concepts, such as looking up field to play an early pass forward to feet and striking the ball with the instep, must be taught simultaneously. The technical ability becomes an acquired skill enabling the player to solve tactical soccer problems more efficiently which in turn will ease to some degree the psychological burden developing players are confronted with. Individual

confidence and composure on the ball will manifest into collective cohesiveness of the group. Through this cycle, players will continue to influence one another in a self-directed, player-coaching-player environment. This facilitates personnel growth within the team structure increasing the probability of the individual reaching their full potential as a soccer player. Over time, this culture becomes the accepted norm and each player benefits immensely from the combined experience. The message here is training must incorporate both technical and tactical areas of focus in concert with one another. If structured correctly, this vision can be offered to players at an early age.

Small-Sided Tactical Games

To institute this type of mindset, it is important to illustrate the differential between two commonly used terms and approaches, these being “tactics” and “small sided games.” Team tactics are the framework by which the collective group attack and defend in specific situations and locations on the field. Playing direct versus the patience of the counterattacking team is a pertinent example. This type of knowledge at this level should be discussed and demonstrated as briefly as possible to orientate the group to operate within a few general guidelines setting the stage for the more important matter of teaching individual tactics. Learning to understand the problems and solutions of playing out of pressure near the touchline against even numbers is vastly more important at this stage than to understand that the game plan is to stroke a long flighted ball from defending third to attacking third and chase. There must be a separation of learning how to win games versus how to play the game correctly from an early age.

A small sided game played without a specific technical and tactical focus becomes an exercise in playing a game to justify its own title. Without specified and understandable teaching topics, what is there to be learned? A more directed methodology would be the utilization of training games to elicit the desired behavior from the players, again as individuals and collectively. Various tactical elements can be identified and presented in a forum that provides the trainer with a plethora of teaching opportunities. The proximity and small numbers assure that all will see and hear. There are also ample chances to repeat positive and correct match-related solutions in the correct sized area of the field where the training topic occurs. It then becomes important to relate the issues learned back to the general team-playing guidelines. Within this framework, the players become stimulated and in turn have the confidence to experiment and partake in alternative solutions to the problem to be solved. The willingness to fearlessly take risk in the attack is a prime and desirable example of a player who has the confidence to deal with the challenges of the situation. The individuals grow self-assured and more mature, freeing themselves to experiment with new self-taught solutions.

Practice Design

The crux of all this lies hidden within the ability of the trainer to design sessions that continually teach and recreate an identifiable technical and tactical topic utilizing small player numbers. Building to a team versus team training game on full goals is the objective. This should be considered a worthy endeavor that will indeed take considerable time and patience from all participants involved. Over time, a multitude of rewards will become apparent to the teacher and the tasks required to enjoy them will be vastly outweighed by the pleasure of the experience. The following example of teaching dribbling with a tactical twist is but one example of the aforementioned training concept. For the

purpose of this series of articles, it has been assumed that the players are somewhat “free of the ball” and have acquired a level of skill that allows them to perform technically while moving.

TOPIC: Attacking 1v1 with the Dribble

Objectives:

Technical: Change dribbling direction.

Tactical: Change of pace during move.

Teaching Points:

- Sharp cuts with the ball.
- Drive defender one direction, attack opposite.
- Once past, cut into the defenders running path.

Organization:

Players: 12 players

Gear: 16 cones, spare balls

Field: 10 yards x 20 yards with a four-yard middle zone (two fields)

Time: 40 minutes



Instructions:

There are six players on each field. A defender is positioned in the middle zone and may not chase attackers out of it. The other five attacking players are split at each end of the field. To begin, defenders must hold their hands behind their back. Upon winning a ball, the defender dribbles out of the zone and passes to a player on the end. The ball loser becomes the defender. If the attacker beats the defender, a pass is made to the end and that player attacks the defender. The game should be high tempo.

attacked. The original attacker may chase until the player reaches the middle zone. If the player gets past the middle defender, a third defender will step onto the field on the opposite end. The scoring is the same.

Organization:

Players: 6v6 with two goalkeepers

Gear: 6 vests, 8 cones, 2 goals

Field: 60 yards, two goal areas and a middle zone, field box width (44 yards)

Time: five 10-minute games

Instructions:

There are two teams of six players. One player from each team is positioned in the defensive zone in front of their own goal. The other 10 players begin in the middle zone. The players in the middle must defend in front of their defensive line on the field and may not chase attackers in. Players, as an initial restriction, may not pass the ball forward.

The ball must be dribbled into the attacking zone, not passed. The dribbler takes the lone defender on and attempts to score then rejoins the middle group at the end of the play. If the defender wins, the ball is dribbled free back to the middle to

Progression:

Next, the middle defender then plays completely live. Players score one point for each defender beaten. The games are five minutes long. The player on each field with the most points at time wins.

Progression:

Thirdly, when the middle defender is beaten, a second defender steps onto the field from the opposite end line. The attacker attempts to beat the second defender over the end line. If the second defender wins the ball, the middle zone is

