

GAMES FOR THE TRAINING PITCH

Here is a selection of games to help coaches develop SPEED OF THOUGHT and TEAMPLAY.

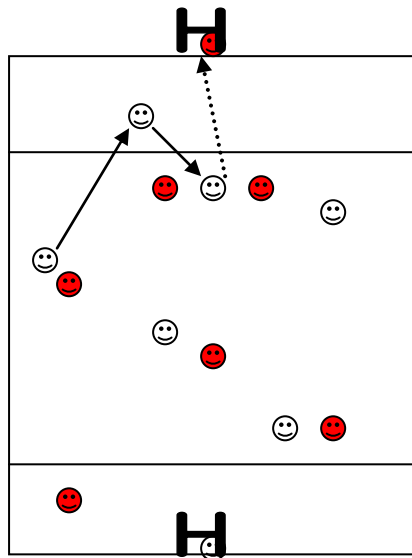
Coaches should remember that these games take time to work. Players often find them tough at first and may question the reason for changing from the standard game.

The games work best when players are told the reasons for playing them and how they help improve decision-making quicker than any drills.

COUNTDOWN [GAME]

Using a countdown [e.g. from 10 to zero] to force players to speed up their use of the ball. A team may be given this countdown once the ball has crossed the halfway line. Forwards learn not to overplay the ball.

DOUBLE BACK [GAME]



A game played on a reduced pitch with a line of multimerkers set along each team's 13m line. This creates a zone, inside which goes one attacking player. This player is not marked and becomes the link player. If a team takes possession, it must use the link player [who moves about inside the zone]. The link player cannot shoot. He/she must play the ball immediately out of the zone to a supporting player. Only then may a score be attempted. The game allows players to practise taking up effective support/scoring positions in attack, where depth is important.

DOUBLE OR QUILTS [GAME]

If you want your 'free' takers to practise in a realistic environment, where they've been running in the game, making tackles, breaking tackles, passing, shooting etc., and if you want to recreate a degree of pressure on the 'free' taker, do the following:- Set up a practice game between two teams on a full pitch or near enough a full pitch [teams from 10v10 up to 15v15].

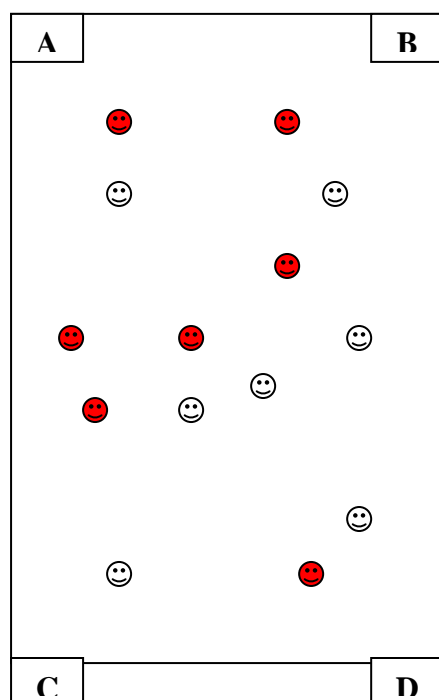
Before the game starts, scatter five or six flexible multimarkers [not the domes!] in an area between the 13m line and about 40m from goal. Do likewise at the opposite end.

Play the game as normal until one team gets a score from play. Now let a 'free' taker choose which marker to shoot from and let him take a 'free' from that spot. If he scores add this point to the original one scored from play. If he misses, take away the original point. If he scores, remove the marker from that spot. This forces him to choose another marker next time. If he misses, leave the marker there, so that he'll have to take a 'free' from that spot again sometime later in the game [i.e. pressure]

To ensure that the game flows and there is not a lengthy delay as the 'free' taker prepares, have at least two footballs behind the goal. Let the 'keeper set up a ball ready for the kick out, while the 'free' taker is getting set. Once the shot is taken, the other ball should be kicked out.

Think about it. The 'free' taker has the added pressure of doubling the score rather than the double whammy of missing and wiping out the original one that earned him the 'free'.

FOUR GOALS [GAME]



A game played on a reduced pitch with teams of 5,6 or 7 [whatever suits skill level best].

Set up four goals near the corners, using poles or tall cones [ABCD]

Ask players to play as normal in the outfield area [kick, catch, fist, solo, block etc.].

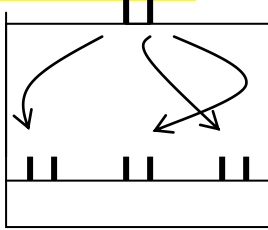
To score, a player must be in possession of the ball as he/she runs between the posts of any goal.

When the coach signals a score, the **same player** kick passes to restart the game [so the scoring team still has possession of the ball] and his/her team-mates must move the ball to score in one of the two goals at the opposite end of the pitch.

This means that, should a team score into Goal B, the next score must be into either Goal C or Goal D.

This game forces players to use longer passes, work on accuracy and note how punishing a poor pass can be.

GATES [GAME]

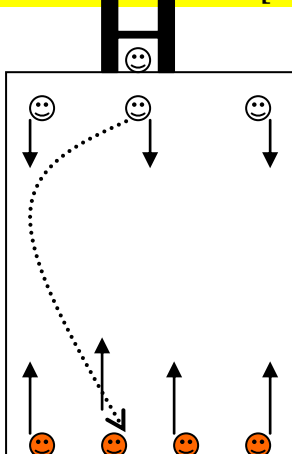


A game for backs v forwards, where the forwards attack the main goals while the backs play towards two or three 'gates' on the halfway line. These gates are simply cones or poles set at goal width. To score, a player must take the ball through one of the gates. This game promotes use of the ball along the wings rather than just through the middle. It also encourages players to switch play.

GIVE & GO [GAME]

Game where a player in possession of the ball must move to support play the very instant he/she passes it. No delay is permitted [e.g. to watch where the pass goes]. Coach must be strict for this game to work.

KICK IT...RUN IT [GAME]



Create a mini-pitch [approx. 40m x 25m]. At one end only, set up goals using cones or posts

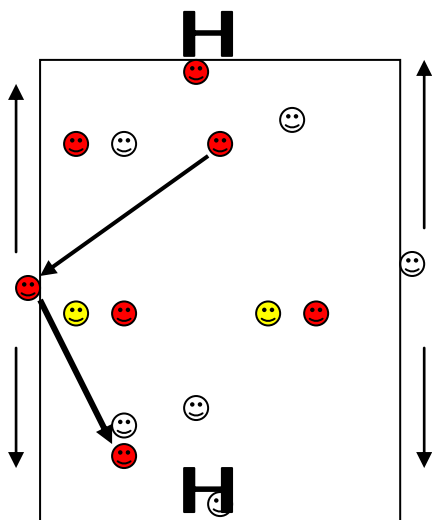
Choose two teams of four players each. Start one team in a line across an end-line. Give the ball to the other team and start them from the end-line that has the set of goals, but with only three of their players lined across it. The fourth player does goals to allow a 3 v 4 situation to develop outfield.

On the whistle, one of the three kicks the ball high and long towards the opposing team of four. Both teams advance quickly to meet each other. The team of four should now be in possession of the ball.

The four must work the ball past the three to get in a shot for goal. A score is only awarded if the ball is kicked low into the goal [on or close to the ground]. Should the three win the ball back, they simply work it out to the far end-line. After each play, the teams switch roles, rotate goalkeepers and start again.

Not much to it! So it seems. Quite a boring game then! **Not so! What happens is that the team of three will win the ball back and score more often than the team of four. This is not due to any slick move on the part of the three, but on poor use of players by the team of four.** You, as the coach should let these situations develop for a while, before taking the four aside and suggesting that they come up with a better decision re. how they use the extra player. In no time at all, the game will switch in favour of the four. Remember...let them make the decision...and let them think of new ones each time so that the opponents cannot counter.

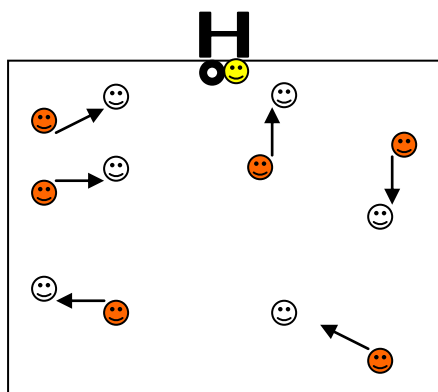
LINK TO SCORE [GAME]



A game played on a reduced pitch with teams of 5,6 or 7 [whatever suits skill level best]. Each team sends one player to play outside the sideline as a 'link player' who may not be tackled and who may not enter the pitch proper. Link players operate along opposite sidelines

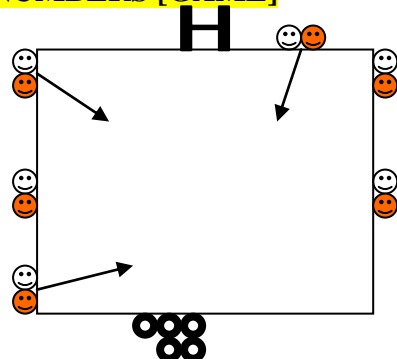
The rule is simple. If a team takes possession of the ball, it must use the link player once before shooting. The link cannot score, but can only pass. The key to this game is the link player's ability to move to receive a pass and then his/her ability to make a telling pass into the field of play again [often a diagonal pass]. Once a team has used its link player it does not have to score immediately, but may find it the better option. This game shows players the value of width.

LOSE IT/WIN IT [GAME]



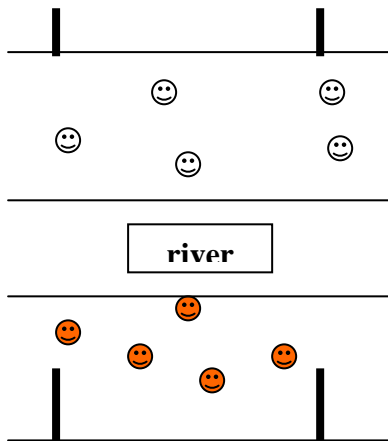
Simulates those match situations when forwards 😊 have made good runs to get a pass from midfield but the pass has been misdirected and ended up with the opposition goalkeeper 😊. To properly copy this, force forwards to stand at multi-markers at least five or six metres away from any backs. 😊 The ball starts with the goalkeeper. He throws it in the air and catches it to signal 'game on'. The forwards immediately try to stop the backs getting the ball out easily and carrying it over the halfway line. Do this over and over to work on suppressing a forward's instinct to simply watch where the ball goes and to improve his ability to close an opponent down.

NUMBERS [GAME]



An exercise where pairs of defenders and attackers are matched and stood at cones spaced out around the edge of one half of the pitch. Each pair is given a number [usually from 1-6 or 1-8]. The coach calls a combination of numbers [e.g. 1, 2, 5, 8] and this is the signal for those pairs to race onto the playing area and compete. The coach plays the ball to an attacker. Attackers try to score points while defenders attempt to win the ball and work it over the halfway line. Once the ball goes wide or over the bar, the pairs jog back to the edge of the pitch and the coach calls the next combination [e.g. 3 and 7]

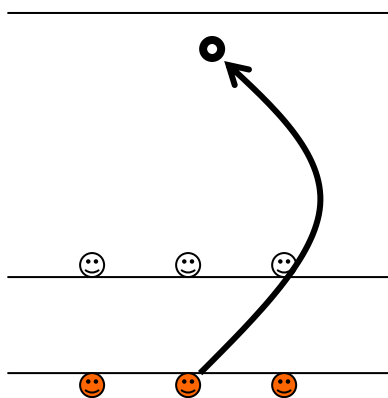
OVER THE RIVER [GAME]



A 5v5 game where the two teams stay on their own sides of a 'river' [no go area] set out with multimarkers. Each team has wide goals to defend [e.g. 10m wide] as the opposition tries to kick over the river to score. This game is best played using three or four footballs, so that players have to concentrate at all times and are always busy. This game teaches young players the rudiments of kicking to score without the problem of invasion.

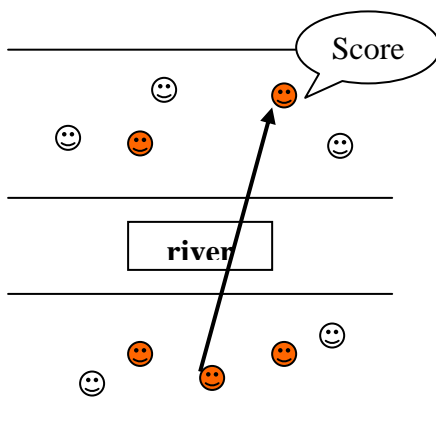
Players who gather a ball should take four steps before kicking. A modification can be to make the receiver pass to a team-mate who then kicks over the river. This encourages teamwork.

OVER THE TOP [GAME]



A 3v3 exercise where 3 attackers line up along the halfway line and 3 defenders face them along the 45m line [defenders may start in press-up position]. The width of the playing area is set at 30m-40m [use multimarkers and one sideline]. One attacker has the ball and lobs it over the line of defenders to force them to turn and retrieve. The attackers close down the defenders who must work it out over the halfway line to earn a point. Should the attackers win the ball back, they must work it over the 20m line to score. Swap roles, repeat, give players the chance to work out moves etc.

PASS ATTACK! [GAME]

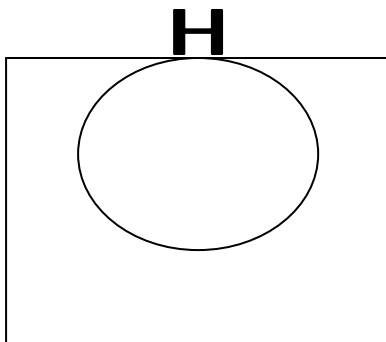


The next stage after 'Over The River' where the two players from each team of 5 move across to play on the other side of the 'river' [no go area] set out with multimarkers.

A team scores a point by any of its 3 'defenders' making a good pass to any of its 3 'attackers' across the river.

Should an attacker win the ball, he/she holds it aloft and shouts "SCORE!", before leaving the ball down for the opposition to take possession. Use two footballs.

PAY THE PRICE [GAME]



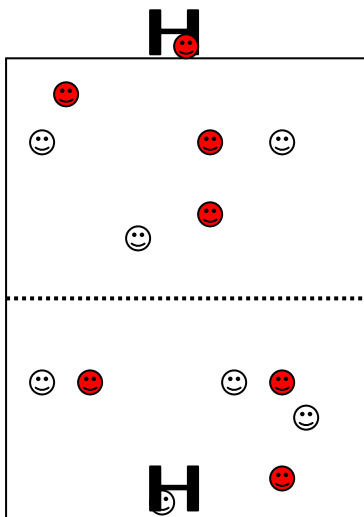
What about a game to allow defenders to work on tackling without fouling? What if the same game gave forwards the incentive to get closer to goal and even draw 'frees' from the opposition?

Set up a large circle [diameter 40m]. Play backs v forwards to the halfway or far 45m line. The goalkeeper plays for the defenders. Start each play with a kick-out. Let the forwards take possession and attack. Only points count.

Should the attackers shoot and score from outside the circle, they are awarded 1 point. A score from inside the zone earns 2 points. A 'free' scored from inside the zone earns 3 points.

Defenders must work to keep the scores to a minimum, so they must make sure they do not commit fouls inside the zone and that they mark tightly enough to keep down the number of 2 point scores. Defenders can earn scores for themselves, by winning the ball and working it up the pitch to cross the halfway line or far 45m line while still in possession. The coach can determine how many points should be given. Try it...show defenders that if they are too rash and lack organisation they will pay the price!

PLAY YOUR POSITION [GAME]



A game played on a reduced pitch with teams of 5,6 or 7 [whatever suits skill level best].

No player may cross the line of markers set along the halfway. This game helps players link as defenders and attackers, without the 'beehive football'.

Coaches should watch out for attackers who line up along the halfway as if it were a cliff and have no room to attack the ball. Be quick to change these habits.

PROBABLES V POSSIBLES [GAME]

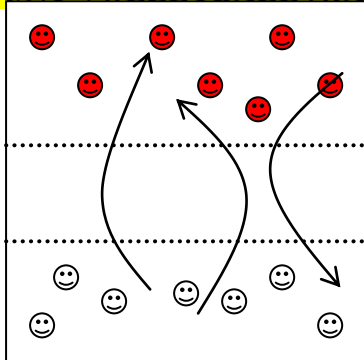
This simply means that they pick the strongest team on paper and play them as a unit. The opposition is made up of the remainder of the squad.

Those players most likely to make up the first team get the opportunity to play together, get used to habits, patterns of play etc. Those players on the 'possibles' who stand out and catch the eye will have done so against better opposition. Those on the 'probables' who find it tough may find themselves replaced by a 'possible' who really wants a place.

In Gaelic Football we tend to take a squad of 30 players and play our strongest backs against our strongest forwards. There is nothing wrong with this if you wish to play like v like, but it will never give the best 15 a chance to play together, blend and prove themselves. Nor will it give the coach/selector a true picture of the reserve player who shines.

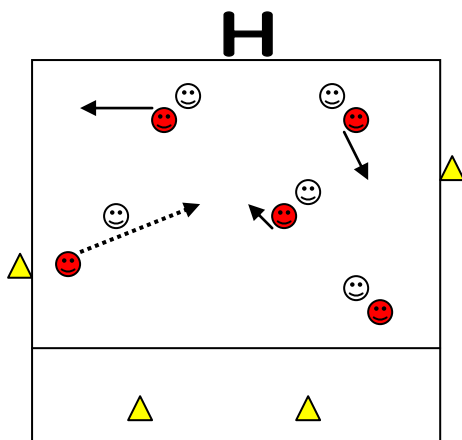
So, if you are blessed with a big squad, think about promoting the use of 'probables v possibles'. Go a step further and always 'bib' the probables in your own club colours. The task for every 'possible' is to win a bib and the task for every 'probable' is to retain it.

PUNT VOLLEYBALL [GAME]



Two teams either side of a divide [e.g. river of multimarkers]. One team starts with two footballs, the other with one football. On the whistle, balls are kicked HIGH across the divide for the other team to catch. A ball dropped or one that hits the ground directly counts as a point for the kickers. A ball fielded on either side must be fist passed to a team-mate who returns the kick. Keep on the boil for up to 10 minutes.

RECEIVE or DECEIVE [GAME]

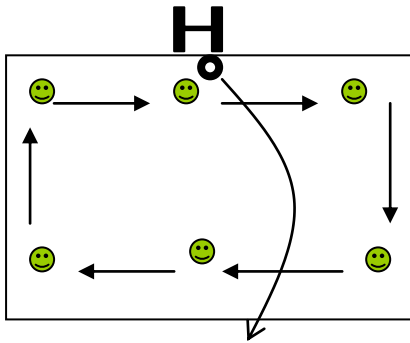


A game to allow coaches to study forward movement and players' abilities to make runs for a team-mate to receive the ball. Set out a line of multimarkers on the 45m line. Place two cones about 5m outside this line and two more cones at different points along the sidelines [as shown]. Put a ball at each cone. Play starts when one attacker [red] lifts a ball to kick pass from a 'free' or 'sideline'. The nearest opponent [white] must be 13m away. Reds must move to either receive the ball or to deceive

opponents to make space for a team-mate. Once the ball goes dead [i.e. score, wide, defenders win it and work it out over 45m line], any red player lifts the next ball and the game continues. Players only rest after all four balls have been used. At this point the coach can feedback. The footballs are set out once more and it's game on again.

ROLLING ATTACK [GAME]

This may be set up and played as part of a backs v forwards exercise or in a full game.

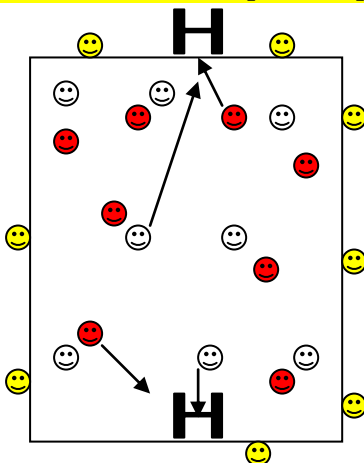


An attacking ploy where the six forwards wait for the opposition goalkeeper to kick the ball out: As the ball is in flight, they rotate one position clockwise and play from their new positions. This tends to momentarily upset the defence, with backs wondering should they follow or should they stay in position. If the ball is won at midfield, the attacking options are greatly enhanced.

RUNNING MIDFIELDER [GAME]

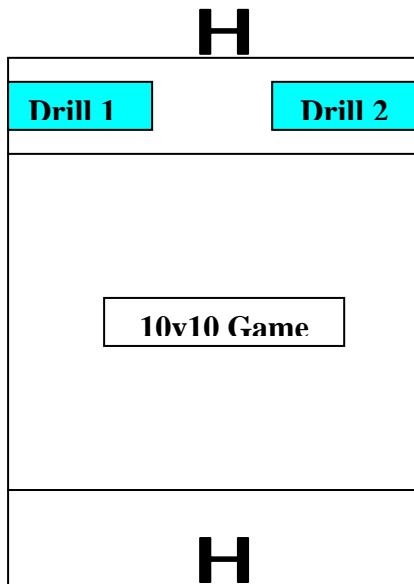
A backs v forwards game where a player starts his/her run from midfield without the ball, receives it on the burst from the coach [positioned on the halfway line] and bears down on the defence. How will the defenders cope? Will other attackers get in the way? Most of your coaching will be to correct poor runs by the forwards!

SHOOT ON SIGHT [GAME]



A game played on a small pitch with two goals, set out between the end line and the 45m line and no more than 40m wide. Divide a squad of 25-30 into three teams [two compete while the third supplies footballs from the perimeter of pitch]. Ball is lobbed in to start the game. The team that wins possession may score into either goal. Players may not bounce or toe-tap the ball. As soon as the ball goes out of play [e.g. score, wide, line ball] another ball is lobbed in from the perimeter. Coach decides who feeds ball in. Rotate teams every five minutes. This game helps players develop speed of thought and action.

SHOOT FROM DISTANCE [GAME]



Let's assume you have a squad of 30 players and only one pitch on which to train. You'd really like to work on shooting from distance in a game situation but the 15v15 set-up doesn't lend itself to it. Well, here's one recipe!

Take out two goalkeepers and put them in goals at either end. Set out a line of multimarkers across the pitch about 30m from goal. Do likewise at the other end of the pitch. Now take your players and create three teams - red, blue and yellow [8 or 9 outfield players in each]. Play Red v Blue inside the zone created by the two lines of multimarkers [i.e. in the middle 70m of a typical pitch].

No outfield player may enter the 30m zones close to either goal. Effectively these become the goalkeepers' areas only. Ask the 'keepers to take kick outs as normal and let play develop. To speed up play, the goalies should always have a spare ball set up for the next kick-out. Players may only score from outside these zones. Play a 10-minute game.

So...do the Yellows simply wait about and get cold while this game progresses? Not at all. If you think about it, the 30m zones at either end of the pitch should only be used for kick-outs. Why not set up two drills inside one of the zones, staying closer to the corners than to the goals? For example - run a tackling exercise for 4 minutes in one corner and a catching exercise in the other corner for the same period. The drills will not get in the way of the game. Swap over, run the drills again and there's the 10 minutes used constructively.

Now play Yellows v Reds in the game and let the Blues work on the drills. Swap once more and you have a 35-minute session after warm-ups.

You'll find that the game not only promotes shooting from distance, but also shows players the value of ball being played quickly and accurately upfield rather than across the park. The game also forces players to work harder and to get the ball into the shooting area before the other team has an opportunity to regroup.

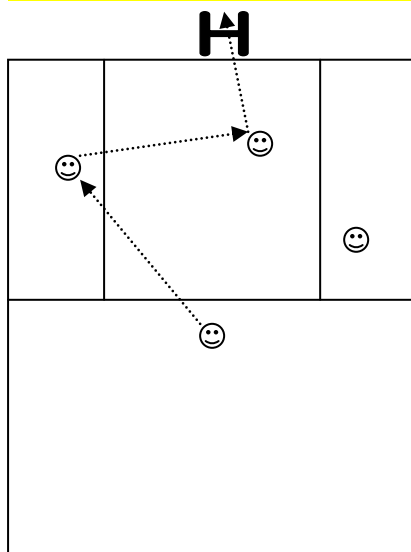
SILENT [GAME]

Start the game you want to play, be it a small-sided or full-sided one, on a shortened pitch or not. Let the game run for a few minutes to get the flow going and then introduce a single rule. **NO SPEECH ON THE PITCH!** That includes...no calling for passes, no reminding team-mates to mark opponents, no speaking to the referee, no issuing instructions of any kind. Should any player break the 'no speech' rule, award a 'free' to the opposition. This game forces players to look up when passing and to make themselves available for that pass. Only play for about 5 minutes periods [alternate with normal game].

SPACE TO SPACE [GAME]

Game where the ball must not be passed directly to a player, but always into a space for players to run onto. The passer must make space before passing [i.e. never kick when an opponent is close enough to tackle – better to break the tackle first]

SWITCH THE PLAY [GAME]



A game that only takes effect for one team when in the opposition half [or for forwards in a backs v forwards situation].

Set out two lines of fleximarkers [not domes] running from the half-way line to the end line. Both should be approx. 20m in from each touchline.

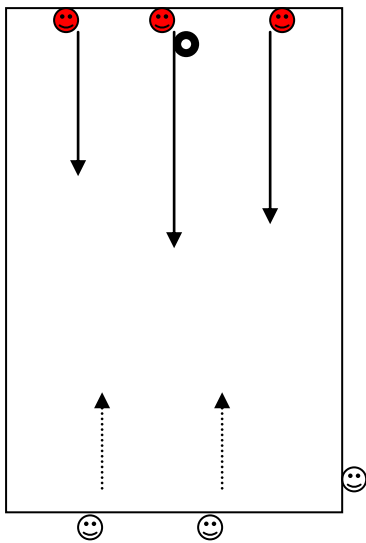
The lines create 3 channels [wide channels of 20m each and a centre channel of 35-40m on normal pitch].

The rules are simple. Should the attacking team have possession in any of the two 'wide' channels, the player on the ball must switch play into the middle channel rather than give a pass down the wing.

The game is designed to ensure that any attack does not end up in the corners and that the main thrust is through the centre. This does not mean that players should pack the centre channel. Players may move freely between channels to create space, but the ball should be played from wide to centre as much as possible.

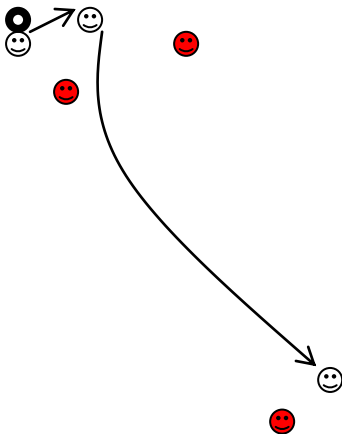
Coaches should only inform the attacking team of the ploy so that defenders have to work it out and counter it.

TEN SECOND TOUCHDOWN [GAME]



A game played across the pitch [from sideline to sideline] and in an area 30m wide. Best run with 6 players [3v3]. Each team starts on its own end line; one team has the ball and a limited time [i.e. the countdown from 10 to 0 called out by the coach] to work the ball across the pitch and over the opposition line. The team without the ball drops one player off for this play, leaving two to defend against three. They should advance to delay and deny the team in possession, hoping to hold them up until the countdown has finished. Rotate roles and repeat. This mini-game helps teams practise at pace and how to make best use of an extra player.

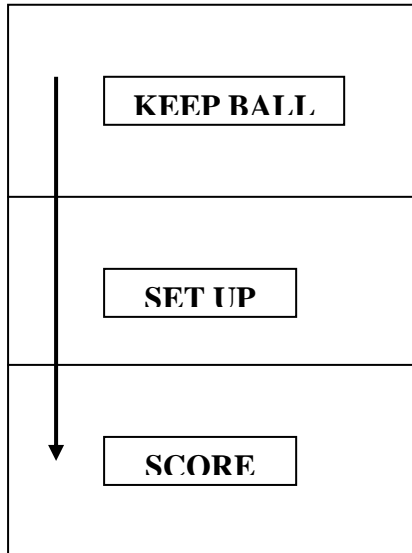
THIRTY METRE PASS [GAME]



A game for six players [3v3] where there is no direction of play and plenty of room in which to play. Players may toe-tap, bounce, fist pass etc. but may only score by completing a 30m kick pass to a team-mate who catches it cleanly on the full or after one bounce. The coach determines a score. Having scored, the player in possession leaves the ball on the ground for the opposition to restart the game with a free kick situation. Best run for 3-4 minutes at a time. The game allows players to practise accurate kicking over realistic distances, to practise timing runs off the ball and to practise all the elements of a quick free.

THREE PART PITCH [GAME]

Here is one way to develop teamplay. It also allows you, the coach, to step back, spot where things are going wrong and move to fix them.

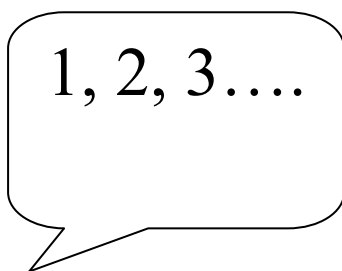


Think of the pitch as three separate zones: The first, Zone A, runs from your own team's end line to the 45m line. Zone B lies between the two 45m lines and Zone C is that section from the far 45m line to the opposition's end line. When your team is in possession, watch carefully what happens in each zone.

Priority in Zone A is 'KEEP BALL', with the emphasis on keeping possession through close passing and plenty of support play. Once in Zone B, the focus changes to 'SET UP'. In this area a player should aim to use the ball quickly and directly to set up teammates who are inside the opposition's 45m line. The ball must not stay in this zone for any longer than 3-4 seconds or for more than 2 passes. Zone C is the 'SCORE' zone. In here the aim is to get into position to either go for a score or to directly assist a score.

NB. It does not matter which player is in which zone.....the task remains the same.

THREE SECONDS [GAME]

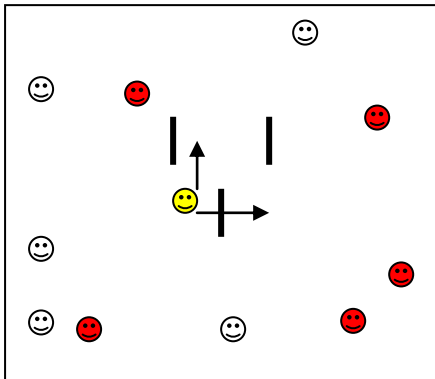


One of the traits a good player has, is the ability to look up when in possession and scan the area ahead. He/she is scanning in order to make the right decision. One of the easiest methods of developing this is by running the 'Three Second Game'. This simply means playing a match or a backs v forwards game and introducing the rule that allows each player a maximum count of '3' on the ball.

To highlight this, the coach should referee the game and call out loudly "1.....2....3" when a player receives the ball. Should the ball be played on the count of '2' then the coach stops the call and begins again as the next player receives the ball. Should any player still be in possession after the count of '3', a free may be awarded to the opposition. The same count applies to the free kick.

The 'Three Second' approach has proved much better than the traditional 'one toe-tap, one bounce' game, for many players took this too literally and made sure they got in a toe-tap and a bounce before scanning for possibilities. Counting to '3' forces more players to look up first and, indeed, leads to more teammates making runs for passes.

TRIANGULAR GOALS [GAME]



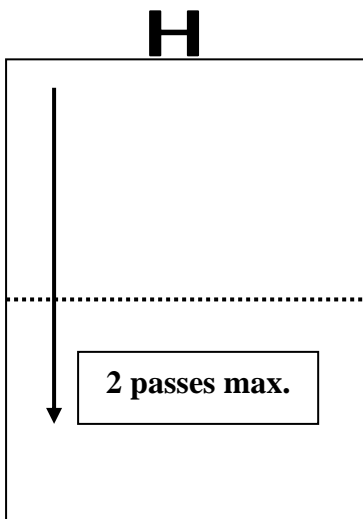
A game played on a reduced pitch [50m x 50m is best] with teams of 5 and 1 goalkeeper who plays for neither team.

The goalkeeper [yellow] is the focus of this game. He/she must defend three different goals [set together in the middle of the pitch, as a triangle of posts or cones].

Outfield players work to score into any of the three goals, forcing the goalkeeper to reposition every few seconds. A team may attack one goal and suddenly switch the point of attack to shoot at another goal. The shooting rule is that players may only score with shots that are struck low and hard along the ground. Coach decides.

If a goal is scored the ball is still in play and may be picked up by any player from either team. The ball is only out of play when it crosses a touchline.

TWO PASSES MAX. [GAME]



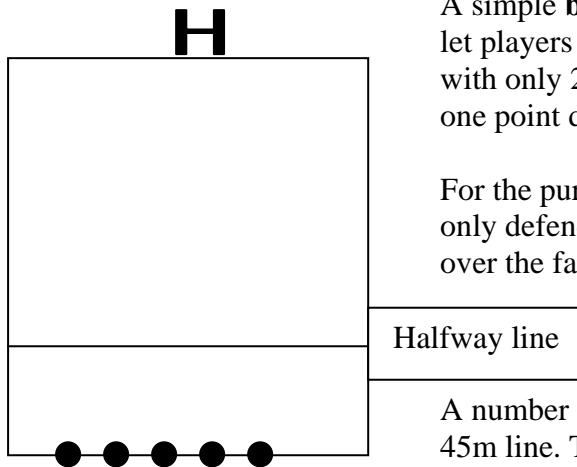
A simple game to make passes more telling and players more economical in their play when in the opposition half of the field.

Once a team takes possession of the ball inside the opposition half of the pitch, the ball may only be passed between players a maximum of two times before a shot is taken.

This does not mean that the players MUST take two passes [perhaps one pass may get them into a scoring position – e.g. if they take possession deep into the opponents' half].

The coach may change the rule to suit the skill level – would three passes be better for younger teams? Would a smaller pitch be more effective?

TWO MINUTE COUNTDOWN [GAME]



A simple **backs v forwards** series of games to let players experience two situations – a game with only 2 minutes of added time left and either one point down or one point ahead.

For the purposes of this game, the backs may only defend the lead and try to clear the ball out over the far 45m line.

A number of footballs are set out along that far 45m line. The game starts with the defenders 1 point ahead and an attacker lifting a ball from the far 45m line.

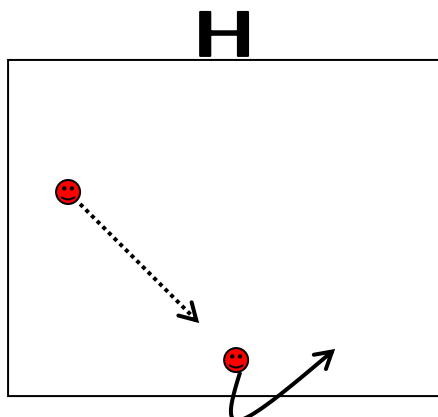
The attackers have two minutes on the clock to draw or win the game. Should a ball go out of play as a 'wide', a 'score', a '45' or a defensive clearance over the far 45m line, the game always restarts with an attacker lifting another ball from that far line.

A win for either team earns 2 points – a draw earns 1 point. Give one-minute rest between games, keep switching the teams and play 4 or 6 games to see which team earns most points.

TWO WAY MIDFIELD' [GAME] A game where two teams are chosen and lined out with only ONE midfielder between them [not one each, but one to play for both teams]. The midfielder is then given a neutral bib to identify him. His job is to play for whichever team is in possession. At no stage does he tackle; he simply plays both ways. This gives the player more opportunities to practise how best to support forwards and how to do the same for defenders. Rotate who plays this role at least every five minutes during the play.

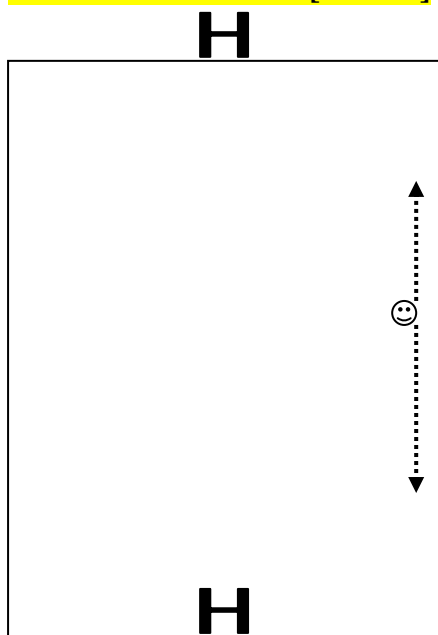
WEAK SIDE SCORE [GAME] As with the 'Play Your Position' Game [see description], but shots must only be taken using weaker foot or fist. Players wear wristbands [tennis-style sweatbands] to identify weaker side for coaches.

WHO'S ATTACKING? [GAME]



Two teams of 6-8 outfield players line out in one half of the pitch. One goalkeeper stands ready to play for whichever team is defending. The coach starts the game by lobbing a ball into the playing area. The team that wins possession must work the ball out over the halfway line, keeping possession. Once across the line, this team turns with the ball to attack the goals. The other team defends and tries to win the ball back. If the ball goes dead [score, wide, sideline] the coach lobs the next ball in. Should one team dispossess the other during open play, that team must work the ball out in the same fashion. In short, no attack may be mounted without the ball first being taken over the halfway line. This game is designed to force players to change quickly from defensive mode to attacking mode and vice versa.

WIDE EXTRA MAN [GAME]



Practise using the 'extra man' wide. Opponents find it much more difficult to mark width rather than depth. It tends to stretch them much more and gaps begin to appear. Playing the 'extra man' wide also provides a release player for others on the team. Players are not lulled into a false sense of security about the 'extra man' covering for them if they mark loosely. What's more, if the opponents move a player to mark this 'extra man' after a while, the response is simple - move the new 'extra man' wide on the other side of the pitch.

The 'extra man' is in a perfect position to play diagonal passes into a scoring zone, rather than pointless passes deep into the corners.

STAYING ALIVE!

In a full practice game, set fleximarkers across the halfway line and add one rule; - when a team is in possession and on the attack [i.e. one of its players has the ball in the opposition half], all supporting players in that half of the pitch **must move constantly and at pace!** No player may stand, jog, walk etc. Movement may be for a pass, on a decoy run or in support – as long as the ball stays alive, the attackers must do likewise. If a player breaks the rule, the penalty must be a 'free' against the team. On average, the ball stays alive for 6-10 seconds before it is lost [e.g. wide, score, sideline or dispossession]. This is a fitness game and should only be run for 10 minutes at a time!

