



TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT: CENTRAL MIDFIELDERS

SESSION OVERVIEW

This training session aims to enhance players' abilities in receiving the ball, retaining possession, and playing forward. Additionally, it focuses on improving the players' capacity to maintain possession under pressure.

PART 1: UNOPPOSED PASSING

In this segment, players engage in an unopposed passing practice within a square playing area. Mannequins are strategically positioned throughout the area, and two players work together to transfer the ball from one side to the other while avoiding the mannequins. Players are limited to three touches and are encouraged to continuously improve their positioning, first touch, and passing precision.

PART 2: 5V3 RONDO

The second part of the session involves a possession-based practice. Players positioned on the outside of the playing area attempt to find a single player positioned in the middle. The player in the middle aims to receive the ball, turn, and play to another teammate. Defenders surround the player in the middle, aiming to intercept passes and disrupt the possession flow.

PART 3: 5V5 ZONED GAME

In the final part of the session, players participate in a zoned game, which challenges them to play through the thirds of the field and score goals. The ball must be transferred through a midfielder in the middle zone to progress from defence to attack. The central midfielder faces the challenge of retaining possession and playing forward under pressure and fatigue.

Through these three parts, players will develop their technical skills, tactical understanding, and decision-making abilities. The unopposed passing practice helps refine passing and control, while the 5v3 Rondo encourages players to work on maintaining possession under pressure. In the zoned game, players are exposed to realistic game situations, fostering their ability to transition effectively between defence and attack while retaining possession in critical areas of the field.

UNOPPOSED PASSING (PART 1)

This technical practice aims to enhance the central midfielder's capacity to execute forward passes effectively. The setup consists of a 20m by 20m playing area, with four players positioned on the outside - two from each team on opposite sides. Randomly placed mannequins create obstacles for passes within the playing area.

SET UP

- The diagram illustrates Player A and Player B simultaneously receiving a ball from their respective teammates and delivering passes to their teammates on the opposite side of the square.
- Players are limited to three touches, with the option to reduce it to two touches based on the players' skill level and proficiency.



PROGRESSION

- The player positioned in the middle of the playing area must play a bounce pass with an outside player before receiving the ball back and turning to deliver a pass to the player on the other side.
- To introduce a competitive element, a scoring system can be implemented: players earn one point each time the ball is transferred from one side of the playing area to the other.
- To further challenge the players' skills, the coach can restrict them to using only one touch. This restriction emphasises the importance of creating effective angles that allow for precise forward passes.

By engaging in this practice, central midfielders will hone their technical abilities, improve their passing accuracy, and develop their spatial awareness to create openings for forward passes. The competitive aspect adds motivation and reinforces the focus on successful ball circulation. With the added challenge of one-touch restriction, players will sharpen their decision-making and execution, contributing to their overall development as effective playmakers on the field.

COACHING PROCESS

The coaching process aims to develop players' forward passing skills by focusing on body shape, first touch, and pass detail.

BODY SHAPE

- Emphasise the importance of having a good body shape that enables players to play passes to the other side of the playing area effectively.
- Encourage players to receive the ball with a body shape that allows them to observe three corners off the pitch, with two of those corners situated in the opposite half.
- To reinforce this coaching point, ask players to receive only diagonal passes initially, avoiding straight passes.

FIRST TOUCH

- Guide players to focus on taking a positive first touch that positions the ball favourably for a subsequent pass to their teammate on the opposite side.
- The first touch should not be excessively large, enabling the player to quickly execute a precise pass with their second touch.

PASS DETAIL

- Encourage players to deliver passes firmly throughout the practice to increase the chances of beating any defender, especially when the practice transitions into opposed situations.
- Advocate for playing passes along the ground with no spin, as this allows the receiver to have better control of the ball.

By implementing this coaching process, players will enhance their forward passing skills, improving their overall effectiveness on the field. Focusing on body shape will help players better assess the field and make accurate passes to the other side. Mastering the first touch will facilitate quick and efficient ball circulation. Emphasising pass detail will result in more effective passes that challenge defenders and enhance the overall flow of play. The combination of these coaching points will contribute to the players' development as confident and precise passers, adding value to the team's attacking capabilities.



5V3 RONDO (PART 2)

This possession-based practice is played on a 20m wide by 20m long pitch, with a 4m x 4m box set up in the middle as shown.

SET UP

- The session features a 5v3 rondo, with Team A consisting of five players, four of whom are positioned around the outside of the large square, and one player inside the small square.
- Players from Team A are limited to two touches.
- Team B comprises all players inside the playing area, but none are allowed in the small square.
- The objective for Team A is to score points by playing the ball into the player within the small square. The player in the small square cannot pass the ball back to the player they received it from.
- Team B aims to win possession, after which Team A players are free to move anywhere on the pitch. Team B can score a point by dribbling the ball out of the playing area or completing three quick passes.

PROGRESSION

- To increase the challenge for Team A and enhance defensive pressure, allow defenders from Team B into the small square to defend.
- To progress the practice further, remove the small square constraint and allow the central player from Team A to move freely to receive the ball.

Through this session, players will develop their possession skills, decision-making abilities, and adaptability in various game scenarios. The central player constraint in the small square will encourage creative movements and quick passing decisions for Team A, while Team B will work on pressing and regaining possession effectively. As the practice evolves, players will face more realistic challenges and develop a deeper understanding of maintaining possession under pressure and transitioning from attack to defence seamlessly.

COACHING PROCESS

Awareness and technical skills are fundamental to success in this practice. The coaching process focuses on developing players' scanning abilities, first touch, pass detail, and disguised passing techniques.

AWARENESS

- Stress the importance of continuous scanning for players to build a comprehensive picture of their surroundings. Regular scanning enables the attacker in the small square to make informed decisions when searching for the player on the outside with the most space.



FIRST TOUCH

- Instruct the player inside the small square to concentrate on executing a precise first touch. Their initial touch should direct the ball toward a position that allows them to find a free player on the outside with their second touch.
- Encourage a soft and controlled first touch, enabling quick and accurate follow-up passes.

PASS DETAIL

- Emphasise the significance of playing firm passes throughout the practice, as this increases the likelihood of bypassing defenders near the small square.
- Advocate for ground-level passes with no spin to facilitate better control for the receiver.

DISGUISED PASSING

- Encourage players to use disguise in their passes to deceive defenders and maintain possession effectively.
- Demonstrate the use of body shape to fake a pass in one direction and then change direction at the last moment to deliver the pass elsewhere.
- This element of deception will make it challenging for defenders to read the passer's intentions and intercept the pass.

By implementing this coaching process, players will develop their situational awareness, technical proficiency, and deceptive passing abilities. Improved scanning skills will heighten their understanding of the game and enable them to make well-informed decisions. A focus on first touch and pass detail will enhance the quality and speed of their passing, making them more effective in possession. Incorporating disguised passing techniques will elevate their tactical acumen and aid in maintaining control during the practice. As players refine these skills, they will become more confident, creative, and resourceful on the field, ultimately contributing to their overall growth as versatile and skilled footballers.

5V5 ZONED GAME (PART 3)

This session is a dynamic 5v5 (plus goalkeepers) game, utilising a pitch split into three zones as shown in the diagram.

SET UP

- The pitch measures 20m wide and 35m long, with end zones of 20m wide and 15m long, and a middle zone measuring 20m wide and 5m long.
- Two players from each team are positioned in the end zones, while one player from each team is assigned to the middle zone. Players are initially confined to their designated zones during the start of the game.

OBJECTIVE

- Team A's goalkeeper initiates the game by playing to a teammate. Team A then aims to progress through the thirds and score in the opposite goal. However, before passing into the attacking third, the ball must be transferred through the player in the middle zone.



- The midfielders (players in the middle zone) are allowed to participate in the attacking third once their team gains possession. They can either dribble into the attacking zone or pass and move into that area.
- Additionally, midfielders can drop into the defensive third to create an overload during the team's build-up phase.
- Should the opposing team win possession, they can either attempt to score or retain possession. If they opt for the latter, the practice continues as before, with the teams swapping roles.

PROGRESSION

- Progress the practice by allowing the midfield player to recover into their defensive third when their team is defending. This adds a layer of tactical complexity, encouraging players to quickly transition between attacking and defensive roles.
- Introduce a defender into the middle zone, making it more challenging for the midfield player to receive the ball and play forward. This adjustment tests their ability to maintain possession under pressure and make precise decisions.

Through this session, players will refine their skills in possession, decision-making, and tactical awareness. The zonal setup encourages players to be strategically positioned, fostering effective ball circulation through the thirds of the pitch. Allowing midfielders to participate in both the attacking and defensive phases adds versatility to their play and strengthens their understanding of various roles on the field. By incorporating these developmental elements, players will grow into well-rounded and adaptable footballers, capable of handling the complexities of the game.

COACHING PROCESS

To excel in this practice, players must focus on enhancing their awareness, movement, and ability to employ disguised passing techniques effectively.

AWARENESS

- Stress the paramount importance of awareness in this practice. Players should constantly scan the field to identify potential passing options and opportunities to progress play into higher areas of the pitch.
- The midfielder, in particular, must be attentive to assess whether dribbling or quickly passing to a teammate in the final third is the best course of action.

MOVEMENT

- Challenge players to exhibit intelligent movement to create space and find openings in the practice.
- Emphasise positioning on the defender's blind side, making it challenging for the defender to anticipate their actions.
- Encourage attackers to move at the precise moment when the defender is focused on the ball, either by making a forward movement to receive or positioning on the shoulder of the defender to facilitate playing forward passes.

PASS DETAIL

- Motivate players to utilise their body shape effectively to deceive opponents when making passes. They should initially shape to play with an open body position and swiftly close it at the last moment to disguise their intentions.



- Advocate for the use of eyes and head position to further mislead defenders, creating uncertainty about the intended direction of the pass.
- Stress the importance of delivering passes at speed, keeping them on the ground, and with no spin to benefit the receiver's control and maintain possession.

By focusing on these coaching points, players will develop a comprehensive skill set and tactical understanding. Enhanced awareness will enable them to make informed decisions and exploit available passing options effectively. Intelligent movement will lead to better positioning and increased opportunities to receive and play the ball. Implementing disguised passing techniques will make players more unpredictable and challenging for defenders to read, thus increasing the team's overall attacking prowess. Through consistent practice and dedication to these elements, players will grow into more astute and versatile footballers, capable of elevating the team's performance on the field.