



Small
Sided
Games

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Paul Cooper & SoccerCoachingInternational



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Publisher

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Design by Anton Gouverneur, Sportfacilities & Media BV
Copy Editing by Maaïke Denkers, Sportfacilities & Media BV
All photographs courtesy of Sportfacilities & Media BV
Printed and bound in Bulgaria.

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ISBN: 978-90-9022567-8



Introduction

It was hardly a hot bed of football, growing up in North Devon in the 60s. I only remember one organised football team with a coach and a proper pitch, which was Northam Boys. That was as far away to us as playing for Real Madrid. They had proper goals and nets, even if the pitch was covered in cowpats. Like a lot of kids in those days we played all day and everyday. Kicking a ball (a Wembley Trophy of course) around on a rough piece of land with my football friends, Andy, Socks and Peter. Sometimes we would feel adventurous and climb onto our bikes and cycle through the town and local villages looking for players and teams to play. Those games are some of the most memorable images of my life. The thrill and excitement of those days increases with each year, which is I guess a sign of pending old age.

We occasionally played on the beach at Westward Ho, and I am sure we had just as much fun as our fellow football fanatics on the Copacabana beach in Brazil. The girls at Westward Ho may have been wearing balaclavas, anoraks and Wellingtons, while the girls in Brazil were dressed in a pair of shoelaces for bikinis, but we wouldn't have swapped it for the world. Unless you were by yourself, kicking a ball against a wall, you played games. We picked teams and just played until it got dark or we were called in for tea. The game was the teacher and we learned from each other.

I became involved in coaching ten years ago when my son and daughter became interested in the game. I have since been searching for the best and most fun way for kids to learn. The world is not the same for today's kids, they don't go out on their own to play. They have little experience of climbing trees, exploring and doing anything without being supervised by adults. Football is often the worst example of kids living in an adult world with coaches and parents shouting from the side lines and football training reduced to running and drills. My only wish for this book is that coaches think about the lessons from the past. The fatter, balder, older coaches like myself should remember our own childhood and the younger coaches of today, take a glimpse of elements of street football and the great players and teams from the past.

Paul Cooper (May 2006)



Why Small Sided Games?

- Just as street football was for a previous generation, small sided games are fun and fosters a lifelong passion for the beautiful game
- Because it is so much fun, kids practise with a ball much more away from coaching and club sessions
- Play football to learn football
- Learn by doing
- Technique, football insight and communication are most effectively developed in game related situations
- Children naturally learn match situations by constant repetition and frequent ball contact.
- A small sided game maximises involvement in real football situations
- Freedom to fail
- Creativity & spontaneity



“Whenever we went to the park to play football my mum would make me take my brother Michael, who was eight years younger than me, in the pushchair, but that stopped when he was hit in the face by the ball, we were using his pushchair, with Mike inside it, as one of the goalposts at the time.”

Kevin Keegan

“Everything I have achieved in football is due to playing in the streets with my friends.”

Zinedin Zidane

“Everywhere I go there are coaches. Schoolmasters telling young boys not to do this and that and generally scaring the life out of the poor little devils. Junior clubs playing with sweepers and one and half men up front, no wingers, four across the middle. They are frightened to death of losing, even at their tender age, and it makes me cry.”

Alex Stock – Luton, Fulham & QPR manager

“Play-unstructured, free range, loosely supervised play – is the birthright of every child. For the next generation to grow up healthy, balanced and able to benefit from their education, we must ensure that children once again go out to play.”

Sue Palmer – children’s expert & writer

Coach & club philosophy

It is important to think about both your own philosophy as a coach as well as your club's philosophy. Here are a couple of examples of contrasting philosophies and how they can affect children.

Scenario 1

After Billy watched the World Cup on TV he was very keen to join a club and play football. He went to his local club and joined in with training. Training was ok but they did lots of running and physical work and Billy only saw a ball at the end of the session when they had a ten-minute game. Because there was so many playing, Billy only touched the ball twice, once when he kicked it to the opposition and once when it bounced off his knee for a corner. Billy was on the bench for the first three games but did not get on the pitch.

The manager's son Graham and his best friend Peter who are in Billy's class at school always play up front and score lots of goals. Billy thinks one day they will probably play for England. Billy gets a chance to come on as sub during one match but doesn't know where he should be or what he should do. The manager keeps shouting instructions at him but he does not understand what he is saying. After fifteen minutes Billy is substituted and his manager says he needs to do what he is told before he gets another chance to play.

Billy misses the next match and goes with his friend's skate boarding, which he finds much more fun than football. There are no parents to tell him what to do and he can do exactly what he wants. Billy's ex-manager tells the rest of the team that none of them will become footballers if they have Billy's attitude, because he has no staying power.

Scenario 2

Rick went to his local club training for the first time because his friend at school had said how great it was. He was given a welcome pack, which explained the rules and code of conduct at the club as well as the club's philosophy. It also had information on a club evening where all the children and parents were going bowling which sounded great fun. Rick really enjoyed training. He was introduced to all the other children and the coach was very friendly.

Most of the session was conducted with the ball, so Rick got a lot of touches, which did his confidence no end of good. They also played a lot of small-sided 4 v 4 games, which was good fun.

Before the team's first match all the players and parents met one evening at the club and the coach explained the plan for the year and that all players would be given an equal chance. He also explained that all substitutes would play at least twenty minutes a game. During the first match the coach explained what he wanted from the team in a calm voice and used words that Rick could fully understand. Rick loved his football and always looked forward with great enthusiasm to the next training session or match.

"The play's the thing."

Sue Palmer

Using this book

The most important thing for a coach is to be flexible. A lot of the coaching DVD's use only the elite children, the sky is sunny, the kids are kitted out in smart uniforms and there is exactly the right amount of players for each game and drill. In the real world, life is never like that. Try taking a session on a wet windy Wednesday in Walsall. The pitch has just been used for a dog obedience class and by the state of one of the penalty areas, half of the dogs failed! You are not sure how many children will be at the session because of a flu epidemic at school and a scout's trip to Epping Forest. Don't worry we have all been there.

Issues

1. Number of players - If you don't have equal numbers you can use substitutes to roll on and off, use a neutral player who plays for the team in possession or load one of the teams with an extra player. This is interesting to see if the team with the extra player can exploit their advantage and also if the other team can overcome their disadvantage.
2. Pitch sizes – The standard size for 4v4 is 40x20 metres. However this is just a guideline. Be flexible, if they are struggling, make the pitch a little bigger. Ask the kids if they think the pitch is big enough? If they don't think it is, get them to change the size themselves. They begin then to appreciate and think about space. I coach an U18s team and we play a 3-5-2 formation. I like to play some of our small sided games on an even smaller pitch, because I want to see how the players cope with in a crowded midfield area.
3. You don't need fancy goals, although kids do love them, I just use traffic cones for most of my goals.

“Good coaches use the basic criteria of street football for their vision of grass roots development; they realise that these elements produce a natural process which gives the most efficient training for young kids.”

Rinus Michels

“Liverpool practiced small-sided games every day and it was high-intensity stuff. We used to do a very light warm-up, jog around the field a couple of times to loosen the limbs, do a few stretches, put the cones down for goals and then go into five-a-side or eight-a-side.

It was the same every single day. There was no tactical work, none whatsoever. All the strategic stuff was done within the small sided games. Liverpool believed that everything we faced in five-a-sides would be encountered again on match day. That was why the five-a-sides were so competitive. Liverpool's training characterised Liverpool's play – uncomplicated but devastatingly effective.”

“Practising on smaller pitches, Liverpool were always going to play a short-passing game. We only trained with small goals so there was little long-range shooting. We passed the ball until we got close enough to score. The philosophy centred on passing, making angles and one-touch football.”

John Barnes

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The Playground Game

theory

I was told about this game by John Allpress who heads up player development at the FA. He is a very progressive coach with excellent ideas and this game replicates the ‘chaos’ that we all took for granted in the school playground at lunch time, which was actually a great way to learn. I am taken back to an age of torn trousers, scuffed shoes, dodgy haircuts, detention, the cane, gobstoppers, catapults and jumpers for goal posts.

The great thing about that era, when street football was king, was that it was the children’s game. The children made up the rules, designated the pitch size, picked the teams and refereed the game. The kids had to use their imagination and make all the decisions. It was the informality of the game and the various obstacles children had to overcome while playing, such as a number of games being played at once in the playground that bred generations of footballers who really felt the rhythm and heart beat of the game. The game is in fact two games. One game is 4 v 4, playing from North to South, the other game plays across that pitch playing East to West and is also 4 v 4.



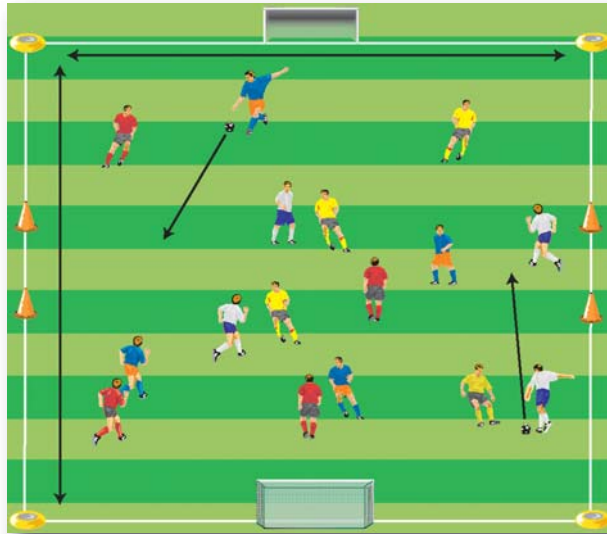
“At the hub of this ordinary life was football, a love affair that began, as so many others have, with street games that started after school and finished after dark. My first organized games were played at St Philomena’s Primary School and St Joseph’s Secondary School, where we honed our skills and scuffed our shoes, playing with a tennis ball at lunchtime in the yard”

Tony Cascarino

“I knew I was better at football than the others in the playground, although the teachers just looked at my size and that was against me from the start.”

Alan Ball

(Ball was never selected for his school side, despite winning a world cup winners medal some 6 years later at the age of 21)



Organization

- Age Group U8s to adult
- Pitch sizes – 40 x 40 Or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams - 4
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals
(But you can use a variety and have say big goals, north to south and small goals, east to west)

Progression

The main aim of this game is to see how players adapt to a chaotic situation and how they problem solve. This can be made even harder by wearing no bibs. The players have to get their heads up to identify who is on their team, who the opposition is, which ball is theirs and who is playing in the other game. When we have played this game with children, the first few minutes are a little confused, but very quickly the kids sort themselves out and play. I don't do any coaching I just observe and see how the kids solve the problems we have given them. At the end of the game I just ask them questions. Kids are very resilient and will just about cope with anything you throw at them. Their problem solving skills are probably better than you think, so this is a perfect set up to judge how they are coping with these issues. As coaches we need to let go and allow the kids to find their own solutions before we interfere and do their thinking for them.

The Liverpool Game (Pass & Move)

theory

In the 1970s and 1980s when Liverpool were at their peak and most clubs idea of training was a lot of running and physical work without the ball, at Liverpool they played 5 a-side games with the emphasis on simple quick passing. Liverpool was renowned as the 'pass and move' team and Shankly made sure that everything was kept simple. Players were encouraged to make their own decisions and solve problems. Ronnie Moran, one of the legendary coaches at the club and very much part of the famous bootroom culture at Liverpool football club said of Shankly, "If he looked at a couple of kids juggling a ball, it wouldn't matter to him which one was better. He would want to see how they played in a game situation. His argument would be that you don't get opportunities to juggle the ball in a match so it was irrelevant." Moran also thinks that today there is a lack of game intelligence. "Players today don't seem to have that 'nouse'. I think all over the country now too much is being put in footballer's brains about what they must and must not do."

In Alan Hansen's excellent autobiography 'A Matter of Opinion', he talks about a game they used to play at Liverpool. "Every player concentrated on giving the sort of passes that a team-mate wanted to receive, rather than the ones he wanted to play; and every player repeatedly made good runs off the ball to give the man in possession plenty of options." Hansen adds, "Liverpool FC was encapsulated in just three words: 'Pass and Move.' Liverpool occasionally had a training match rule that a player had to move two yards forwards, backwards or to either side immediately after he passed the ball; if he didn't, his team would be penalized and the ball given to the other team."

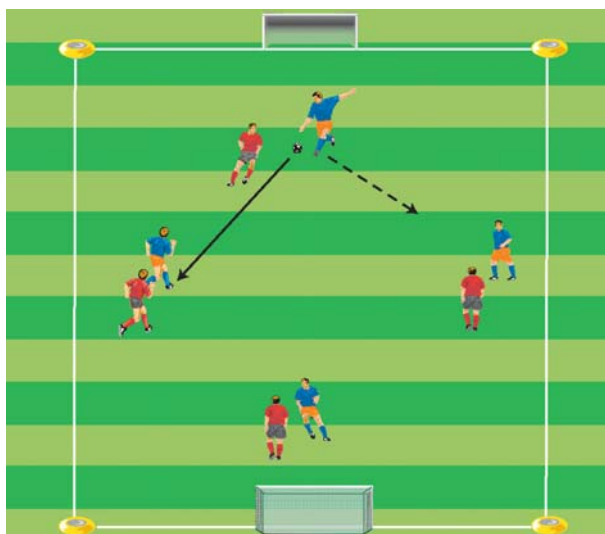


"Liverpool FC was encapsulated in just three words: 'Pass and Move.'"

Alan Hansen

"A lot of coaches in their fifties and sixties will tell you that with virtually all of the great players of their generation, their success was founded in the hours they spent playing football in the streets. It was an important part of the culture of working – class lads."

Alan Hansen



Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

This game is not suited for younger children and I think should not be tried with ages less than 12. It is very tiring and should only be used in small bursts as perhaps part of a normal 4v4 game. As soon as a player in possession passes the ball he must move either back, sideways or forward to support the player with the ball. If he fails to do this, possession is immediately given to the other team.

The One-Nil Game

theory

This is probably my favourite small sided game. This is more of a possession game, played like a standard 4v4 game but with a twist. Because of the nature of the game I limit each match to 5 minutes, but may play 2 or 3 games one after the other.



"We didn't need a referee; we accepted the rules of the game and stuck by them. For us not to have done so would have spoilt the game for everyone. It taught us that you can't go about doing what you want because there are others to think of and if you don't stick to the rules, you spoil it for everyone else. Of course, that was not a conscious thought at the time, but looking back those kick about games on the waste ground did prepare us for life."

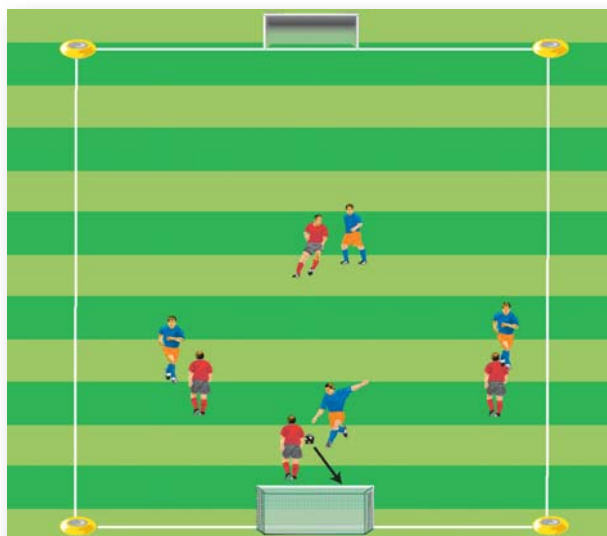
Stanley Matthews

"For me, the ball is a diamond. If you have something that precious you don't get rid of it, you offer it."

Glenn Hoddle

"Keeping possession is a way for a team to get a breather."

Gordon Taylor PFA



Organization

- Age Group – U11s to adults
- Pitch Size 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

The basic rule of the game is that you can only win by one goal. The game begins as a normal 4 v 4 game with the usual rules. When a goal is scored, the team that scored must just try and keep possession and can't score into the goal. If they do, the goal is disallowed and a goal kick ensues. If the other team then equalise and make it 1-1, either team can then score to make it 2-1. The team leading then just has to keep possession. This is an excellent possession game and also allows a team to play out time by keeping possession, which is why I limit the game to just 5 minutes. As well as possession, teams also have to attack with speed when needing to score and the game also focuses on transition.

Winner Stays On

theory

In Brazil they have old courts in the neighbourhood where kids come and play football. Players get themselves into teams and queue up to play. The rule is simple, winner stays on. By the end of the evening you can have ten or more teams waiting so you better be good and you better keep the ball if you want to win and stay on rather than wait twiddling your thumbs on the sideline. This is a transition game which helps players develop their concentration and understanding of the 3 main moments in football. Possession, opponent's possession and change of possession.

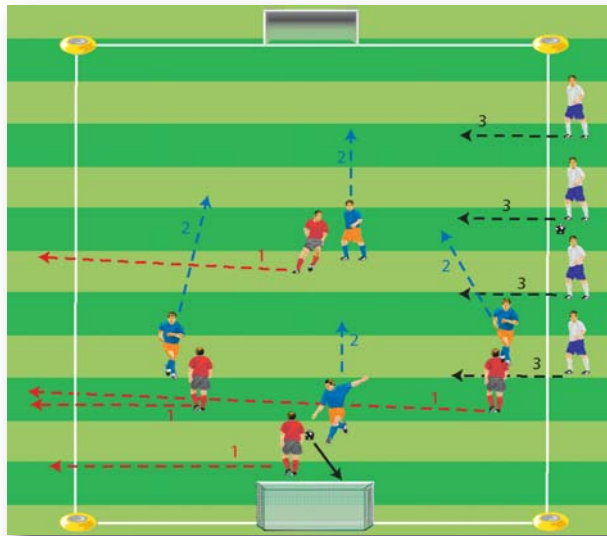


“And yet during the confusion and fog of battle, there were also those who seemed to be guided...directed... seeing something, someone...others could not see.”

Gary Beikirh, Vietnam Vet

“After eight years of this academy system, we have made great progress, but we should change the way we teach the youngest age groups. I'd like to see less adult influence on six, seven, eight – year – olds. They need to play and enjoy it out in the street, anywhere. We can be facilitators and help provide a safe environment, but as coaches we need to take a step back so we don't stifle the very natural players who are learning the game.”

Dave Paraby (Middlesbrough Academy Director)



Organization

- Age Group - U10s to adults
- Pitch size 40 x 20 –or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch
- Number of teams – 3
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

This is a terrific game which is frantic and is another example of a 'chaos' game. Two teams play a standard 4 v 4 game until one of them scores and then three things happen.

1. The team that let the goal in leave the pitch as quickly as possible. This is, in actual fact, quite difficult to achieve as the team usually are downcast and looking at the floor, but this adds to the wonderful 'chaos' that occurs. (Fog of battle and all that!)
2. The team that scored the goal immediately has to turn around and defend (no time for elaborate goal celebrations here) I tell the kids it is like flicking a light switch and instantly the light comes on, they have to react as quickly as that to the change of possession.

3. The team on the side run onto the pitch and try and score in to the goal that the team who have just scored are defending, i.e. the opposite goal to the one the goal has just been scored in. The team on the side are involved all the time as they have their own ball and bring that onto the pitch with them, for this ball will be the one that is used in the next game. They can move up and down the touchline, so as to anticipate which goal they will be shooting in. They have to really concentrate and be alert.

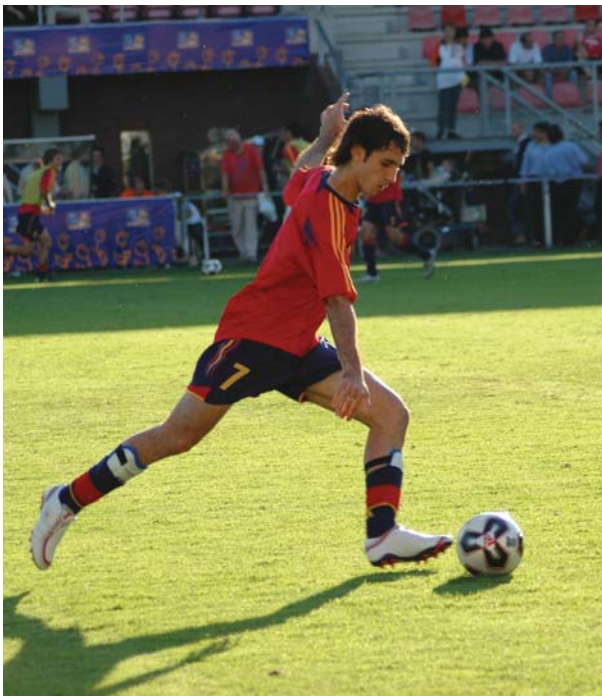
It does take a while for younger kids to get this as they normally run straight towards the goal that has just been scored in. All the three main points in a game are explored and reinforced. Team work is essential and concentration levels have to be very high. The game flows so quickly that the kids really get excited.

These games are all terrific fun, which all ages will thoroughly enjoy and will teach players a great deal about vision, insight and concentration. I mentioned earlier about John Allpress and trying to get more 'chaos' into our over-structured approach to training kids. I am reminded of a quote about 'chaos' that is very relevant to coaching. "Chaos and order are not enemies, only opposites."

The Vision Game

theory

This is a game I adapted from Insight magazine, the FACA publication. It is another game where players must use their insight and get their heads up. Lots of decision making.



“The game’s changed so much. For instance, whatever happened to the playmakers? Johnny Haynes was the first, but then you had Glenn Hoddle, Stan Bowles, Trevor Brooking, Tony Currie, Alan Hudson, the creative types. Teams were geared to attack, to create, to score. It’s terribly sad, where’s that lovely type of passing player now?”

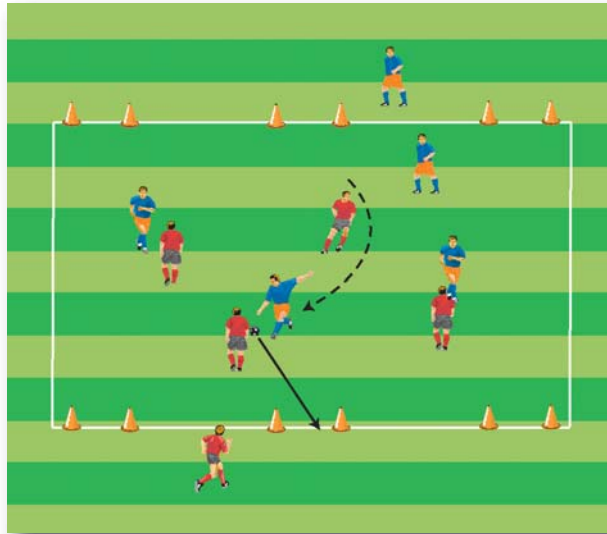
George Best (on playmakers)

“They’ve been killed off by athletes. Today’s game is about athletes. It started about six years ago when Arsenal signed Patrick Vieira. He became the prototype 6ft 2in, 15 stone powerhouse. Since then everyone has been trying to replicate that. There is no room for the playmaker now.”

Rodney March (on playmakers)

“In Holland we don’t think about the first man. We think of the third man, the one who has to run. If I get the ball the third man can run immediately because he knows that immediately I will pass to the second man, and he will give it to him. If I delay, the third man has to delay his run and the moment is over. It is that special moment, that special pass.”

Arnold Muhren



Organization

- Age Group – U9s to adults
- Pitch size 20 x 40 - or at the discretion of the coach but must be wider than it is long
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 3 for each side made from either traffic or marker cones 1-2 metres apart depending on age group and ability. The younger and less technically able, the bigger the goal.

Progression

I play this game normally 4v4 but I have played it with up to 8 a side for U18s. The idea is for the teams to score in any of the 3 goals, however behind the goals there is one extra person. They do not touch the ball but run behind the line of the three goals. If they are standing behind a specific goal, the other team can't score into that goal. For the younger players we use coaches behind the goals as the kids love to work them

by making them run and run as play is switched from side to side. Basically the better the game is played the more the coaches have to run and sweat, much to the amusement of the kids. If the ball goes out of play it can either be dribbled, passed or thrown onto the pitch. For the younger age groups we dribble the ball on and for the older age groups we usually pass the ball on.

More than any other small sided game you really get to see who are the players with vision and insight by the way they look up, switch play, sell dummies to confuse the opposition as to which goal they are going for. These are the players that see the whole picture. The only condition I occasionally use is that players can only score in the opponents half as sometimes there is a tendency for players to always shoot and not build up play. I usually play both ways and change it during a game.

The Parma Game

theory

This game was invented by former Parma coach Arrigo Sacchi in the 1980s. Sacchi was better known for his time as coach to AC Milan and also the Italian national team at the 1994 World Cup finals. The game encourages lots of passing and moving and is very popular with both kids and adult players alike.

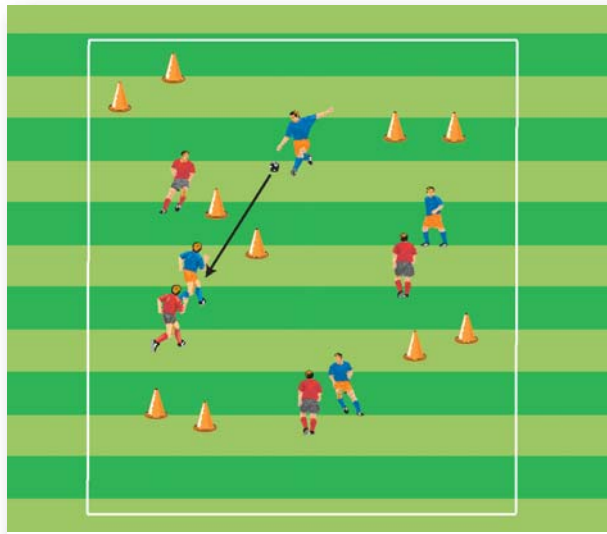
"You don't have to have been a horse to be a jockey."

Arrigo Sacchi

(defending the fact he had not been a professional player)

This game was invented by the then Parma coach Arrigo Sacchi in the 1980s. Sacchi was better known for his time as coach to AC Milan and also the Italian national team at the 1994 World Cup finals. The game encourages lots of passing and moving and is very popular with both kids and adult players alike.





Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20– or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – are two small traffic cones. You need one more goal than there are players for one team. So for 4v4 you have 5 goals (10 cones) and for 6v6 you have 7 goals (14 cones). You can add extra goals for the younger age groups. The goals should be about 2-3 feet apart (depending on age and ability) and should be distributed around the a pitch.

Progression

To score a goal, a player from one team has to pass the ball through the goal, where a player from his team controls the ball on the other side without any of the opposition touching it first. (You can score in either side of the goal.) You then have to score through a different goal before you can return to the one you have just scored in, unless the opposition get the ball. Players need to get their heads up to see the full picture, pass accurately and have good movement off the ball. This is also a game about vision.

With older players, they can score goals by passing accurately through the cones at some distance, occasionally the better players can even pass through two goals at a time. It is a very taxing game but also very rewarding.

A variation of this for younger children is to have just one cone for a goal and they simply need to knock this over with the ball to score. We have found this more suitable at the U8s and U9s level.

The Pressing Game

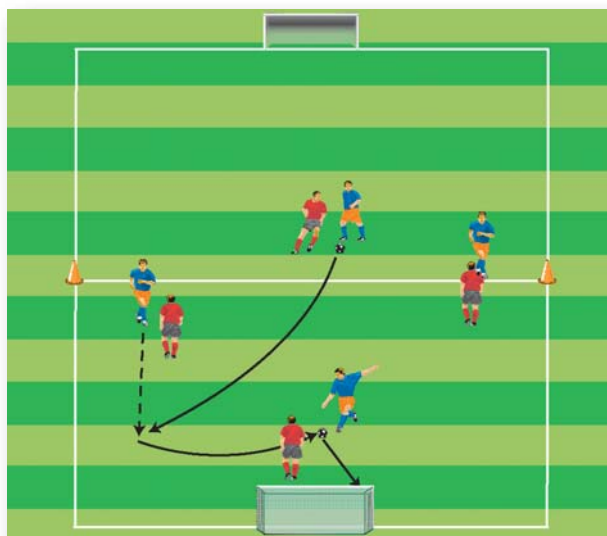
theory

A study in 1988 of 16 international matches showed that possession was won 13% of the time in the attacking third. A staggering 66% of goals scored were from this 13%. This game can have a big effect on how your team performs and is about encouraging the players to defend from the front. It is quite a high tempo game. It is also good for conditioning and developing a physical and mental toughness.



"I would describe what the journalists call 'total football', as 'pressing football'. To me, this expression seems to put the emphasis on the type of football I was trying to create with Ajax and with the Dutch national team in the 1974 World Cup. What I wanted to create was a game in which all ten outfield players pressed forward all the time – even when we didn't have the ball!"

Rinus Michels



Organization

- Age Group – U8s to adults
- Pitch Size 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch, with a half way line marking. (you can use two traffic cones at each side of the pitch)
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

The game is played as a standard small sided game with one condition. If a team wins the ball in the oppositions half and then goes on to score before the ball has left that half, they are awarded two goals. A goal scored any other way counts as just one goal. Very popular with the players and evokes good team spirit. The attacking team need to work as a unit and both press and close down defenders.

Shooting Game with Sniffer

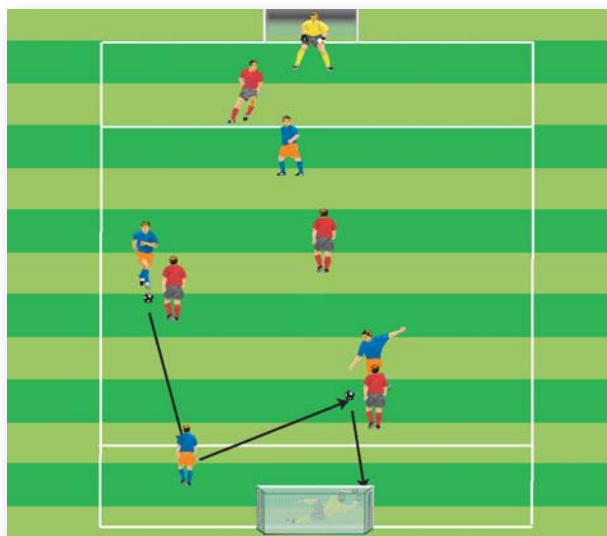
theory

Every player young and old loves shooting games. When you catch the ball right on the sweet spot and it curls and bends at speed rippling the back of the net there is no better sight or sound. This game combines shooting, setting up the strike and sniffing (following up a rebound from the keeper, post or bar.)



"I was fast; I learned to shoot from any angle. After training I'd stay to practise because I like it. For me it was love, passion."

Eusebio



Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 50 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach – a zone of about 10 metres from each goal should be marked out with a line or marker cones
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 6-8 players (including keepers)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – mini soccer goals for children and full size goals for older kids and adults.

Progression

The game is a standard small sided game but with a zone in front of each goal. In this zone are the keeper and an opposition forward (sniffer). Players can only shoot outside of this zone and can use the sniffer to set up play. The sniffer however is not aloud to shoot at goal unless it is a rebound off of the keeper, goal post or bar. There are no goal kicks or corners and the keeper can only throw the ball out. This is great shooting practise at distance. It is also good to work on setting up shots and reacting to rebounds.

The game is also an excellent workout for keepers as they have to be alert and on their toes, should they spill the ball or the ball rebounds from the post or bar to the sniffer. It is a good idea to have a plentiful supply of balls in each goal to keep the game moving.

The 2nd Ball Game

theory

Football is not only about attractive skills like dribbling and shooting, it is also about the physical side, winning headers and reacting to the 2nd ball. This game is also good for team bonding and is an excellent physical work out.



“We used to play with a tennis ball on concrete and we used to tackle. I remember my mom bought me an England tracksuit, and I ripped it up doing a slide tackle in the playground. I was gutted. Nightmare if you’re a defender you have to tackle – its part of the game. I love to defend. If the ball is there to be won, I’ll go and win it.”

Johnathan Woodgate



Organization

- Age Group U15s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

The coach has a number of balls and stands on the side of the pitch. He starts the game by throwing or drop kicking the ball onto the pitch so that players have to challenge in the air to win the ball. The two main issues are winning the aerial challenge and reacting to the knock down or 2nd ball. Every time the ball goes out of play whether for a throw in, goal kick or corner, the coach starts proceedings again. Play for a set time or until the balls have all been used and then free play for 5 minutes. It is a good game to help players become more confident at challenging for high balls.

Line Soccer

theory

A well known game that has a number of good teaching points for players. You can play this game on a normal size 4 v 4 pitch or make the pitch wider than it is long. I use both and change it for the next practise session. As the goal line is right across the pitch as in Rugby, the defending team have a large amount of pitch to defend. It also of course means you have a large goal to score in. The secret here is by running and passing the ball you make as many 2v1 situations as you can near the opposition's goal.

The game lends itself for players to spread out which, is a bonus when teaching younger players who tend to bunch when playing on a conventional 4 v 4 pitch with goals.



“All my life I’ve worked on this ability to dribble past or get away from players who are marking me or who are trying to tackle me. Really, I’ve been like this from the first moment I picked up a football. It’s so natural that if I’ve had a good match and someone asks me about a particular trick or move, then most often I won’t remember it.”

Lionel Messi

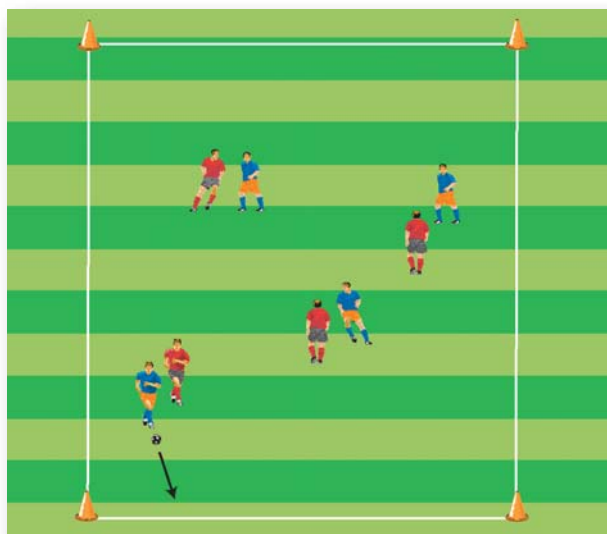
“It’s all down to street football; we’d eat, drink and breathe football. I always felt very comfortable on the ball and have always had the belief that if you put 1 or even 5 in front of me I could go past them all.”

Christiano Ronaldo

“From a technical standpoint, I couldn’t help but improve my skills. Anybody can trap and control a ball on a picture-perfect billiard table smooth pitch. But where I played, you had to learn how to control the ball no matter what, regardless of whether it bounced off the rubbish or skidded along the gutter. I learned how to dribble up steps, how to run non-stop for hours (there was no such thing as ‘out of bounds’) and how to thread my way through tight spaces (we played eleven-a-side on a pitch which would have been tight for a five-a-side). I guess much of my close control and dribbling ability originated on the Stenditoi.”

Paulo Di Canio

practise



Organization

- Age Group – U8s to adults
- Pitch Size 20 x 40 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch, this can however be played in either portrait or landscape format.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Either a line across the pitch or cones at the side indicating an end line.

Progression

The main difference with this game is that there are no goals as such. The players score by running with the ball over the opponent's end line and put their foot on the ball. For the older children and adults you can also stipulate that they have to do a trick such as a Maradona turn as they go over the line. The game brings out many skills such as running with the ball, beating players, passing short and long as well as switching play. It is also a good game for decision making.

The Arsenal Game

theory

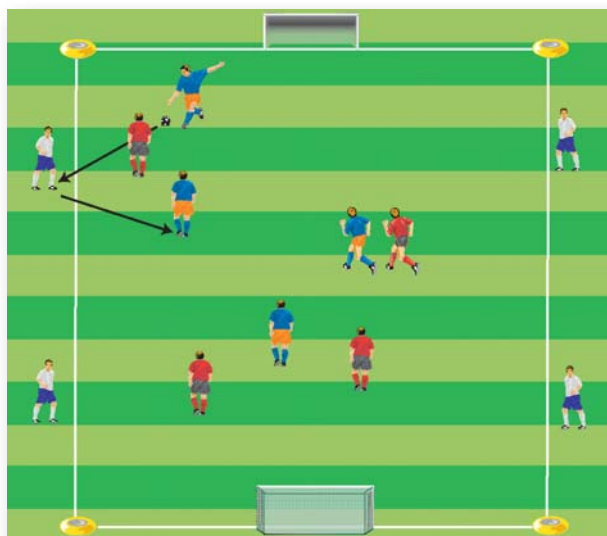
This game was based on how I thought you would structure a small sided game in the style that the present Arsenal side would play. Their play is made up of lots of quick short passing with plenty of movement off the ball. They use give and goes a lot (wall passes) which I have highlighted in the game.



“Fluency, Speed & Technical Quality”
Arsene Wenger

“Young players need freedom of expression to develop as creative players...they should be encouraged to try skills without fear of failure.”
Arsene Wenger

“When we’re at our maximum and we’re playing our quick passing game, it’s outstanding. It’s one-touch football and it destroys the opposition. Today in training we played four against four and everyone touched the ball in six seconds. One touch, one pass, cut it back and score.”
Robin Van Persie



Organization

- Age Group - U12s to adults
- Pitch size – 40 x 20 or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch
- Number of teams – 3
- Team sizes 4 players (+ keeper)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

I play this game as a 4 v 4 with keepers. I also have four additional players, two on each side (who are neutral and play with the team in possession). The game is a standard 4 v 4 game, except that the neutral players on each side can be used. The neutral players have one touch only (younger players and less technical players may require two touches) and play with the team that have possession. They take any throw-ins or kick-ins from their side. Having the neutral players encourages plenty of give and goes. The players should also be encouraged to play at a fast tempo. Change the four neutral players (one team) with one of the teams on the pitch every few minutes.

The Magnificent Magyars Game

theory

The English game got a rude awakening in 1953 when Puskas's Hungary game to Wembley. England had never been beaten at the home of football by a team from overseas. The joke was that the last team to beat England were the Normans in 1066. The Hungarians not only beat England, 6-3, (they also beat them in Hungary later that year 7-0), but also sent shock waves around the world. Hungary were very different, they played in light boots that looked more like slippers. The formation they played had a deep-lying centre forward which completely flummoxed the English who did not know who should pick him up. The Hungarians were masters of the ball, and their movement and changing of positions was a fore runner for the Dutch Total Football of the 1970s. Part of their preparation for defeating the English was to play against top Hungarian amateur teams. These games were different however as the Hungarians restricted themselves to just one touch. Ninety minutes of one touch football, was the perfect tool for a simple pass and move game that the Hungarians dominated teams with during the 50s.



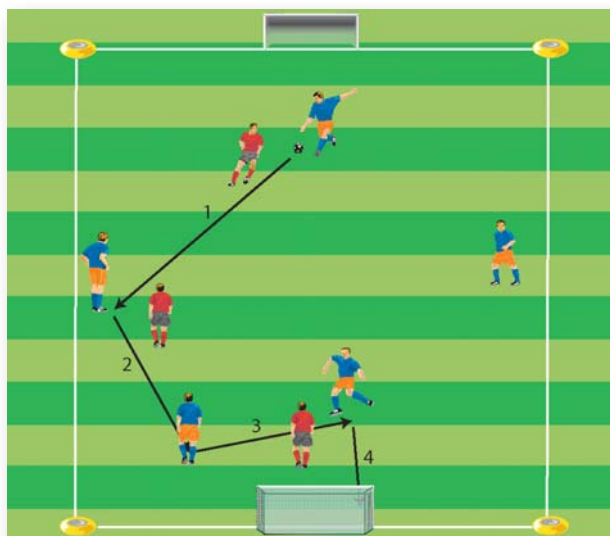
"From the age of 16 they used to pool their scraps of money and send Puskas's father, the trainer, down to his favourite wine bar. And while he was away they would practice for hour upon hour. Puskas volleyed the ball endlessly, and Kocsis would be there meeting each one with his head. On the rough training pitch beside a railway track Hungarian football was being revolutionised by two kids with great talent and the will to draw upon it."

Malcolm Allison on Puskas

"I am grateful to my father for all the coaching he did not give me."

Puskas

"A good player with the ball should have the vision to spot three options. Puskas always saw at least 5."



Organization

- Age Group U14s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20– or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes (one team of three and another team of 5)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – standard 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

You can play around with the numbers for this game but a good ratio is 3 to 5. The three players have as many touches as they like, while the five players are restricted to one touch only. If players are struggling with this go to two touch only. The team of five have to move as soon as they have passed the ball into space. Change the teams so everyone has a go at playing in the team restricted to one touch only.

Street Football Game

theory

Whether an under 8 player or a super star like Wayne Rooney, all footballers just want to play. There is a time when you must just let them play, and like street football, that great breeding ground for talent in days gone by, a sanctuary away from adults and coaches.

What is street soccer?

Our definition of street soccer is football played in the streets, parks, playgrounds, waste grounds and gardens without adult involvement. There are many benefits from playing street football which include:

- Many touches of the ball
- The children learn by themselves and from each other
- Many hours playing the game, as there was little else for children to do, made them both fit and better footballers
- Freedom to play and explore, which is essential to a child's development
- Players made their own decisions which leads to intelligent footballers
- Experience of playing in different positions for all round football knowledge
- Playing with older and bigger children helped children be tougher and forced them to learn technical and tactical solutions in order to cope
- Confidence, as there were no adults to tell you were doing it wrong



“But something else had also taken a grip of me – football. At any free moment, in any empty space, a gang of us would play, unconsciously learning the art of control, shooting and dribbling as we played for our imaginary teams – Dynamo against Spartak, Torpedoes versus Locomotiv, and Shakhtyor against Dynamo Kiev.”

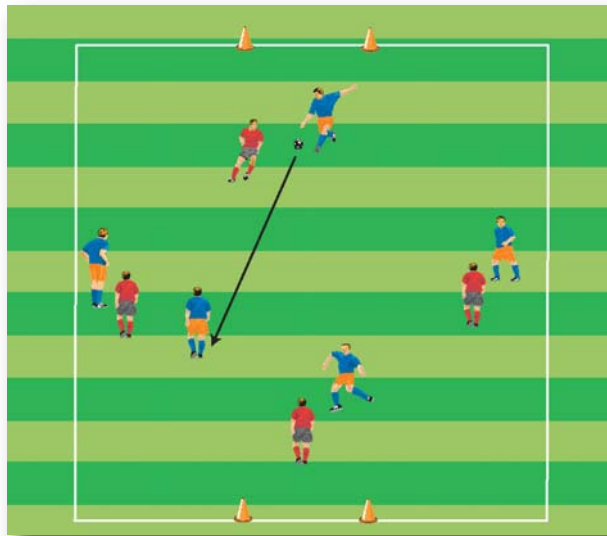
Andrei Kanchelskis

“The World Cup wasn't won (in 1966) on the playing fields of England. It was won on the streets.”

Bobby Charlton

“We played until our legs gave way – scores of 15-13 were not uncommon – and I never stopped running. I tried to make up in enthusiasm what I lacked in physical presence for all the boys were much bigger than I was, or so it felt. Football united the kids. You didn't have to call for your mates; simply walking down the street bouncing a ball had the Pied Piper effect. We could all smell a game from 200 yards.”

Tom Finney



Organization

It truly was the children's game and a fantastic grounding for not just football but for life as well. Kids had to learn to socialise in order to play. The faster a country grows financially the faster the decline in street soccer.

Tony Farrell, Everton FC academy coach wrote an excellent and inspiring article in the magazine Soccer-CoachingInternational, which paid homage to street football by introducing non-compulsory street soccer sessions for the academy boys. Remember Tony is coaching the elite players and they have 3 other training sessions a week as well as a match and are coached by top class coaches. Tony says that the sessions have been a 'significant' part of the academy player's development, which can be evaluated by their performance in academy matches over the last four years, which is when the sessions were introduced. So if it had made a significant difference at the top of the pyramid, think what it can do for the kids further down who don't benefit from excellent facilities and top class coaching?

Progression

It is down to the players with regard to how many players a-side, the size of pitch etc. It is a good idea to make this a regular game.

Fox in the Box Game

The Spurs and England legend, Jimmy Greaves was a cold blooded assassin in the penalty area. The vast majority of his goals were scored in and around the six yard box with the ball simply rolled into the net with the side of the foot. 'Being in the right place at the right time', well clearly Gary Lineker's comments disregard the psychic striker theory that we associate with 'fox in the boxes' such as Gerd Muller (de bomber) Ian Rush, Greaves and Lineker. A goal from two yards out rolled into the corner of the net with the inside of the right foot still counts the same as one of Steven Gerrard's 35 yard swerving volleys.

This game promotes cool, accurate finishing where the goal scored is clinical and cold, like a large icicle driven into the heart of the opposition. It is also about getting into the right position to score, and like a fox, often slyly and unannounced, gliding into position.

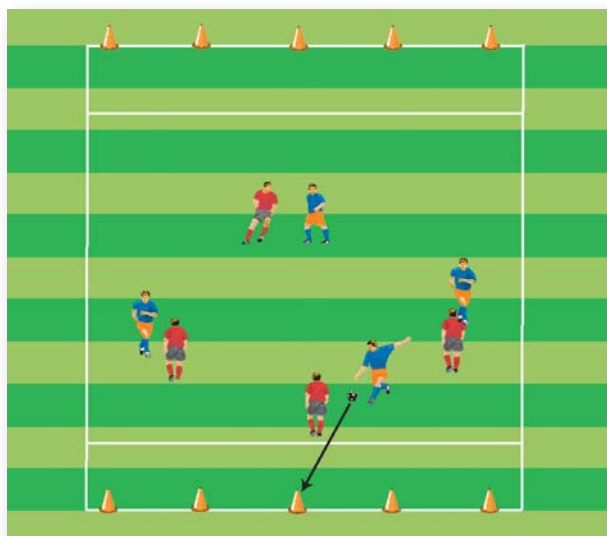


"The big thing is everybody says it's being in the right place at the right time. But it's more than that, its being in the right place all the time. Because if I make 20 runs to the near post and each time I lose my defender, and 19 times the ball goes over my head or behind me – then one time I'm three yards out, the ball comes to the right place and I tap it in – then people say, right place, right time. And I was there ALL the time"

Gary Lineker

"All Greaves did this afternoon was score four goals"

Bill Nicholson



Organization

- Age Group U9s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 –or at the discretion of the coach but with a no go zone of some 8-10 yards from the goal line at each end.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes (4-5 players)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – Five traffic cones spaced out along the goal line, at both end of the pitch.

Progression

To score a goal you need to knock down a traffic cone (one of the five). However you are not allowed in the end zone so you have to kick the ball accurately in order to knock the cone down. When knocked over the cone stays down until all the cones at one end are knocked down. Players will need to make imaginative runs and get into space so they have to chance to set themselves to kick the ball and knock over a cone for a goal.

The Dutch Brick Game

This game is from the streets of Amsterdam. Gullit and Rijkaard played together in the same games. Incredible to think they went on to play together for both AC Milan and the Dutch national team. This game is all about showing skill in a confined space. Ideal for a warm up game as the space restriction will prevent players from running quickly and pulling muscles. This game will only really work with older youth players with good skill. Younger players would struggle with the lack of space. I like these types of games as they replicate a crowded midfield. It is easy to look good when you have plenty of space but how can you handle playing in tiny areas of space. This game really sorts out the technical players with insight from the rest.



“Someone would find a brick which was then placed on its end to serve as a ‘goal’. The object of the game was to ‘score’ by striking the brick with the ball and knock it down. We played our version of football every single day.”

Ruud Gullit

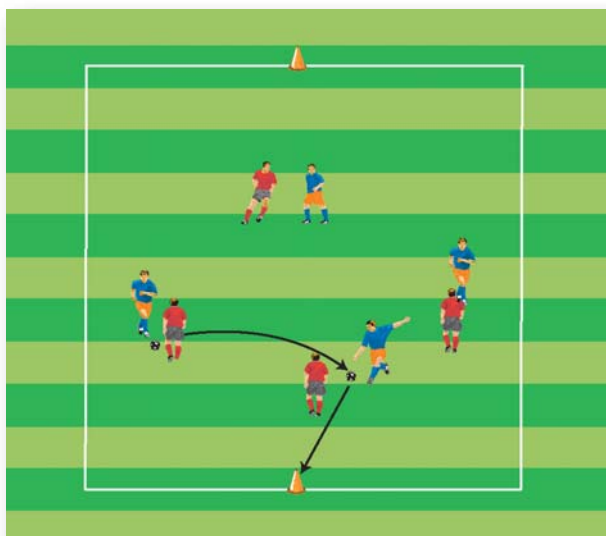
“I never played on the main pitch; we preferred the adjacent basketball court where the target for a ‘goal’, the post of a basketball net, wasn’t so big, and no one had to stay there and guard it. Because the court area was so much tighter, and the goal so much smaller, it was imperative to develop your skills and technique, to be quick-thinking rather than chase the ball all the time. The football was so good.”

Ruud Gullit

“But as a human being in the streets I was already a winner. I mean in my neighbourhood I was a winner, a fighter. Street football is about one on one, it’s aggressive and I always wanted to go against the best players. After the game in the street when everyone was going home I always invited someone to play with me one on one. That was real winning or losing. Dead or alive. And I liked that. I was playing for my life.”

Frank Rijkaard

practise



Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 30 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach but much smaller than a normal 4v4 pitch
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes (4 players)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – A traffic cone at both ends of the pitch.

Progression

A normal game, but to score a goal players have to knock down the solitary cone.

The Wee Jinky Game

theory

The art of dribbling the ball is fast becoming a dying art as teams pass the ball like robots, scared to death of making a mistake. With space at a premium in the modern game, dribbling and running with the ball can open up space and terrorise defences. The game is conditioned so that you can only dribble the ball in two thirds of the pitch. The game is very tiring and should be kept to 5-10 minute games.



“On my first day as Scotland manager I had to call off practise after half an hour because nobody could get the ball off wee Jinky.”

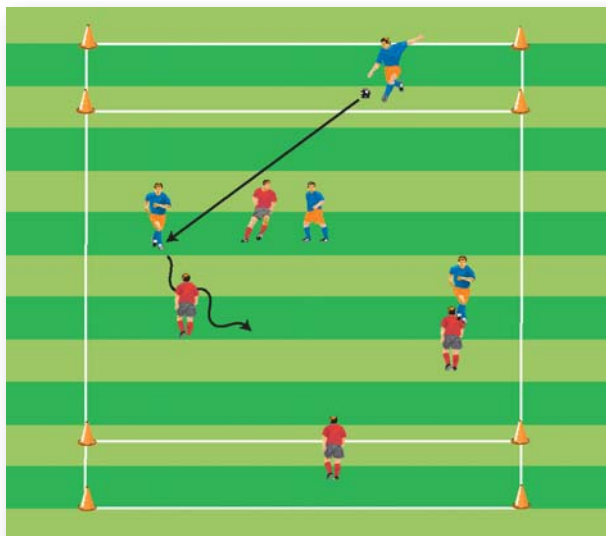
Tommy Docherty on Jimmy Johnstone

“My granddad got me a ‘Jinky’ (Jimmy Johnstone) video. I refused to watch it but he persisted. Jinky used to set up milk bottles and dribble the ball through them in his flat.

I’ve still got that video at home.

He’s inspirational for players like me.”

Andy Welsh – Sunderland



Organization

- Age Group – U12s to adults
- Pitch Size 40 x 20– at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch, this can however be played in either portrait or landscape format. Markers are placed at either end of the pitch to indicate an area of about 10 yards.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4 players
- Bibs optional
- Either a line across the pitch or cones at the side indicating an end line.

Progression

The same as line soccer except that there is a 10 yard area in front of each goal where the defending team can pass the ball. In all other areas players can only dribble the ball. Team mates are allowed to do a 'take over'.

The Ajax Game

theory

A terrific small sided game with plenty of passing and movement, used by Ajax in the 70s and 80s. Ajax has always been famous for its excellent academy that has produced some of the best footballers in the world such as Cruyff and Van Basten. The Dutch have always had a passing culture with players comfortable on the ball in all positions, even the goalkeeper.



“I love football – particularly beautiful football.”

Johan Cruyff

“I never practice tricks. I play very simply. That’s what it’s all about. Playing simple football is the hardest thing. That’s the problem of all trainers. Simple play is also the most beautiful. How often do you see a pass of more than 40 metres when 20 metres is enough? Or a one-two in the penalty area when there are seven people around you when a simple wide pass around the seven would be a solution? The solution that seems the simplest is in fact the most difficult one.”

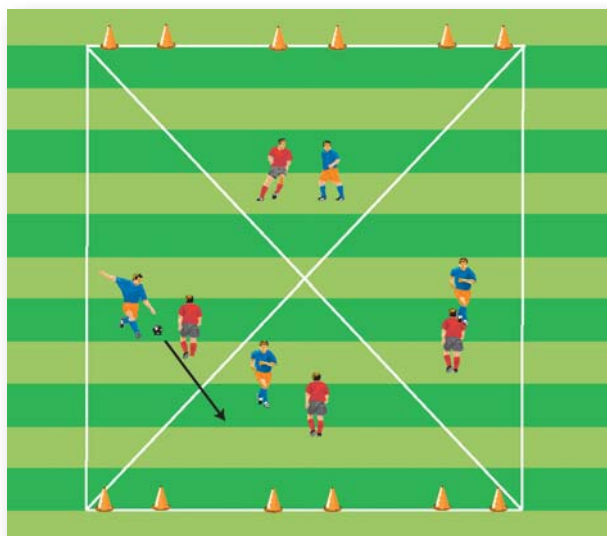
Johan Cruyff

“We did things automatically. Football is best when it’s instinctive, when it comes from the heart.”

Barry Hulshoff (on 70s Ajax)

“Football is not art. But there is an art to playing good football. Michels taught us always that simple football is the best. It is also very difficult to play simple football. It’s the same with artists. The best work is not difficult, it is very simple.”

Ruud Krol



Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach. The pitch is divided with cones to make four triangles. From above it is a giant X.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4 (no keeper)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 3 small goals of about a metre made with traffic cones, at both ends

Progression

The players can only pass the ball once in a triangle; therefore they need to move to another triangle if they want to receive the ball. They score one point for a two touch finish (controlling the ball then finishing) and two points for a one touch finish. The game is similar to the Liverpool, pass and move game with the added advantage that the pitch lay out designates where a player can move too.

Les Blues Game

theory

France had one of the greatest midfields in the eighties which included the great Michel Platini, Jean Tigana and Alain Giresse. During the world cups of 1982 and 1986 and in particular the 1984 European Championship which they won on home soil with such cultured exciting football. This game emphasises midfield play and breaks in down to a 2v2 game in the centre of the pitch. This can also be developed by adding a neutral player in the mid-field area.

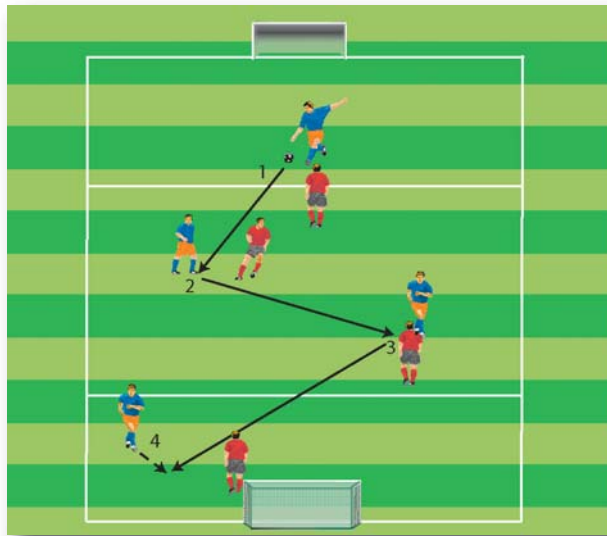


“You could imagine Platini or Jean Tigana coming up, kicking a deflated ball on the street with other boys, rehearsing the magic with which they would dazzle the world. The ease and flair they played with was different only in degree but not in kind from the soccer I played with my mates – in the French game, much as in the Brazilian one, there is a joy of playing rooted in the purity of the street game. In contrast, no one could ever accuse Germans of enjoying themselves and no one could ever imagine them playing on the street.”

Alexsander Hemon (*The Thinking Fan's Guide To The World Cup*)

“Remember that the midfield players of the 1984 French national team were never called as youth players at any national level, not even for the U18s. Neither Giresse nor Tigana nor myself. The qualities required in young players are based on physique. There's a huge difference between a thirteen-year old kid 1.8 metres tall and another measuring only 1.6 metres, whereas at eighteen years old, each will run as fast as the other. At that age footballing skills and the understanding of the game become more important; earlier on the prime concern lies in athletic prowess.”

Michel Platini



Organization

- Age Group U11s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach, but with a marked off midfield zone of approximately 20 yards
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4v4 (+ optional neutral player)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

A striker and defender from each team are in the end zones. The middle zone is 2v2 or 3v2 if you use a neutral player. When the ball enters the midfield zone all the players must touch the ball before it can be played in to the last third. The player that is the last person to touch the ball in the midfield zone can either pass it to the attacker or dribble the ball into the area and make a 2v1 situation. The opposition midfield players can't track him.

The Passing Technique Game

theory

This game came about at a DutchUK coaching clinic for coaches on small sided games. My Dutch colleague and mentor Bert-Jan Heijmans was doing a 4v4 session with the coaches, who were being used as the players. It quickly became apparent that the players were struggling with passing and receiving. It does not matter how great the game is at teaching some tactical points. If the players are struggling with their technique, that must come the priority. The interesting thing here was that Bert-Jan showed how it could be done in a small sided game format.



“A touch is a touch, even a bad one.”

Bert-Jan Heijmans

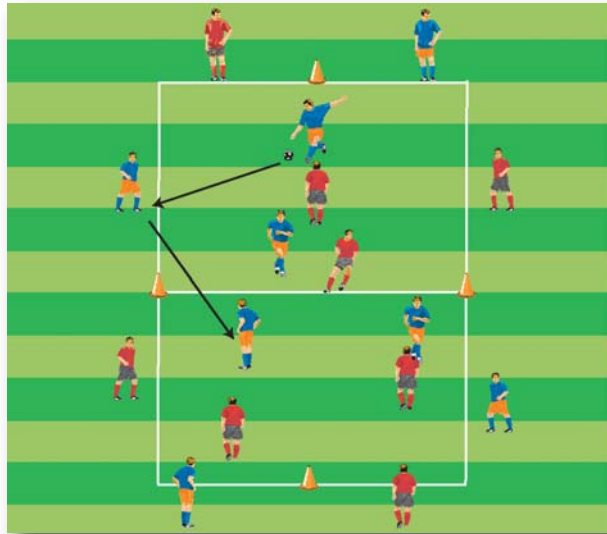
(DutchUK football school)

“If God had wanted us to play football in the clouds, he’d have put grass in the sky.”

Brian Clough

“They think too much about this simple game. The talent of the players is decisive: one should always play naturally. No thinking, please! No thinking!”

Jan Mulder



Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach. Cones are placed on the halfway line (each side) and in the centre at both ends
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 8 (half on the pitch and the other half around the pitch)
- Bibs optional
- No Goals

Progression

On the pitch are two teams of four players each and around the outside are spread out in sequence the remaining players from the two teams. i.e. two on each side of the pitch and two each at the ends of the pitch (eight in total). The players are placed in sequence, red bib, blue bib, red bib, blue bib and so on. The players around the edge can't be tackled and should be restricted to two touches. They play with their team mates on the pitch. To score a goal you need to complete a set amount of sequential passes, six, eight or whatever you think appropriate given the ability and age of the players. The players now have so many more passing options in a situation which is not as pressurised. Change the players on the outside with the players on the pitch every few minutes.

The Argentinean Passing Game

theory

The words of Angel Cappa were confirmed in the last World Cup in Germany. The Argentineans passed the ball beautifully. Caressing it with love, one and two touch passing, pass and move. But they don't just move anywhere. They have fantastic technique, but also a great insight into the game, creating angles with their runs. I feel we do not practise simple possession play enough and the Direct Game, the brain child of Charles Hughes, technical director at the FA in the 1970s, who preached a direct style of play using as few passes as possible to get the ball forward. It had been wing commander Charles Reep, retired from the RAF and a statistician who had studied how goals were scored in hundreds of games. He discovered that 80% of goals scored were from three or less passes. He went onto work with Graham Taylor at Watford in the 1970s that had great success using this theory. But times change and one of the greatest ever goals was scored after a 24 pass move by Argentina against Serbia and Montenegro in a 2006 World Cup group match.

This game celebrates the beauty of good possession football.

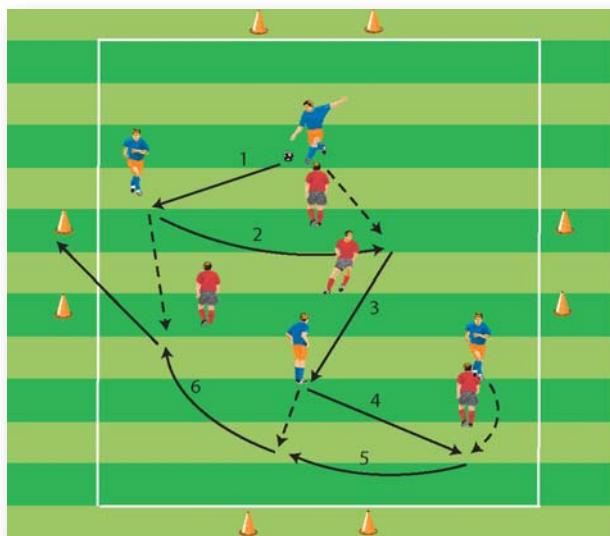


“The elementary steps that define a good player are that he receives the ball, passes. And then runs. Not the opposite. But increasingly frequently we see that when a player receives the ball, the first thing he does is run with it. Then when he looks up, it’s already too late. He is surrounded, and if he tries to go forward he runs into an opponent. And so the journalists have a justification for their view that nowadays there is no space on the field. Of course there isn’t; playing like that, the players close down their own space.”

Angel Cappa (an Argentine coach)

“Where I come from, Don Torcuato (a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires) we are lucky to have a lot of open spaces and fields. I spent my whole childhood playing football with my friends, from dawn to dusk, always in open spaces. Sometimes we’d stop for a bite to eat and then carry on. I still live there – when I go to Buenos Aires – and I still play football there with those same friends.”

Juan Roman Riquelme



Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 1 metre wide (use traffic cones) placed 5 metres back from the pitch, centrally at each end and on the sides.

Progression

The teams play a possession game. To score a goal they must complete a set number of passes, e.g. 6-8 before they can score in any of the 4 small goals. This gives the team that does not have possession a further chance to win the ball back. The team in possession has to show composure to score after the passing sequence. To help the team in possession you can add a neutral player.

The Tempo Game

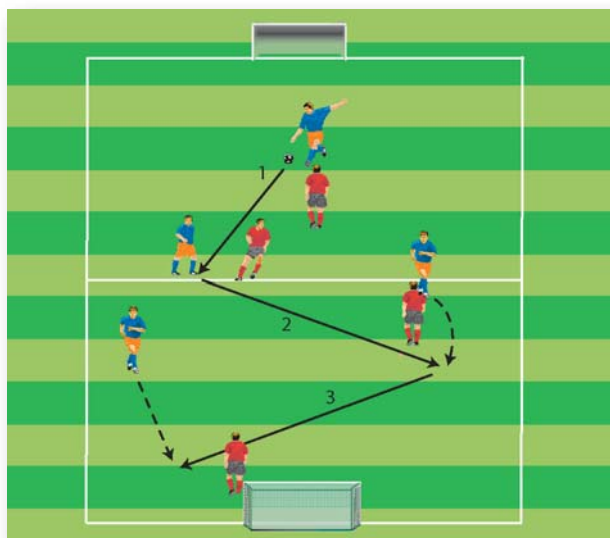
theory

The English Premiership is well known for its fast pace and physical style. It does however tend to be very one paced. Last season under Jose Mourinho, Chelsea were often patient and slower in their build up until they saw a gap and exploded, catching the opposition off guard, rather like a boxer who continually jabs away before throwing a lethal right hook. Argentina demonstrated this in the last World Cup, with a sudden gear change when they were in the final third of the pitch. Their playmaker, Riquelme could slow and quicken the game at will. This game is about creating different tempos in different parts of the pitch.

"I spent a lot of time training at Gremio. After training I went to play futsal. After that I'd play with my friends in the streets and when I got home I played with my father and my brother. My life is football and always has been."

Ronaldinho





Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

The Half way line has a clear marking with either a line or cones at the side. When a team has possession in their own half they must build up slowly through passing. As soon as they enter the attacking half they must explode and raise the tempo. If they don't, possession goes to the other team. This game demonstrates to players that a change of tempo can be an invaluable tool.

The Sweeper Game

theory

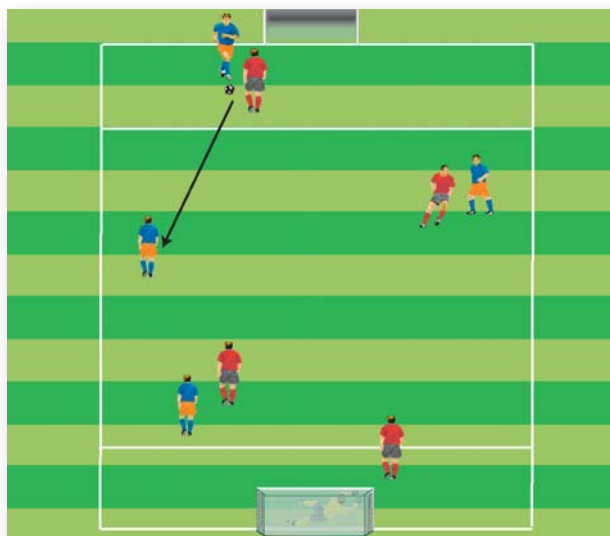
The sweeper has all but disappeared from the modern game. However I feel there is still a place for that role and as football trends change, one of the welcome returns would be that of the sweeper. No one epitomised the role of the sweeper more than the Kaiser himself Franz Beckenbauer. It was his ability to read the game and anticipate what was going to happen. He combined that with excellent attacking attributes and could gracefully bring the ball out of defence and start an attack.

*“Practice doesn’t make perfect,
perfect practice makes perfect.”*

Franz Beckenbauer



practise



Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach. There is an area marked off about 8 metres from each goal line
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

This game is best played as a 4v4 game with no keepers. Each team has a designated sweeper who can't get tackled in the 8 metre zone in front of his goal. He can play outside of this area but can be tackled. All players can go inside the sweeper zone, but just can't tackle the sweeper. They can however tackle his team mates. This game allows the sweeper time to build from the back and also gives the option of a pass backwards if there are no options forward or sideways. You can also have the sweeper start with the ball if it goes out for any throw-ins, so that he gets a lot of practise.

The 6 Second Transition Game

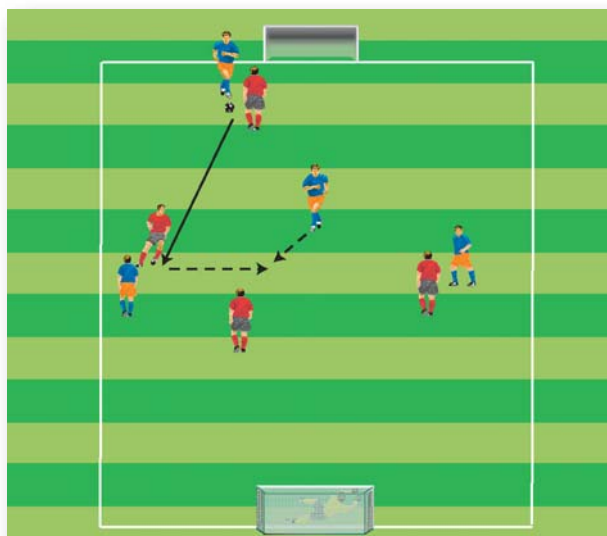
theory

Teams are at their most vulnerable in terms of losing the ball, in the first few seconds after gaining possession. It is this transition period that we are looking at, both in terms of winning the ball back quickly and then keeping it. The key is the first six seconds after losing the ball. This period is when the opposition have not yet switched from defensive to possession mode. The other key period is those six seconds after you have won the ball back and the need to maintain possession during that critical period when your team is changing shape and finding space (going wide and deep).



“Everybody says that set plays win most games, but I think it is more about transitions.”

Jose Mourinho



Organization

- Age Group U12s to adults
- Pitch sizes 30/40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

In this game when a team lose possession they have 6 seconds to win the ball back (the coach counts this out). If they win it back in that time they are awarded a point (a goal). The idea is to double team and work frantically to get the ball back in the allotted time frame. If they fail to achieve this they must then go to the centre and make sure they close all the gaps and limit the space for the opposition. If they do win the ball back within 6 seconds, if they are high up the pitch they must look for an immediate goal scoring opportunity. If they are in a more crowded midfield area they must look for an 'out-man' who can get hold of the ball and maintain possession through the crucial 6 second period. This may well be a sideways pass or a backwards pass to a player in plenty of space.

In the excellent book by Patrick Barclay, 'Mourinho, Anatomy of a Winner', Jose talks about doing a lot of work on 'keep ball'. This was based on Mourinho's theory of possession for possession's sake. All teams need rest periods, and it is much better to do this when your team has possession. Other than the 6 second condition the rest of the game is a standard small sided game. Goals can also be scored in the normal way.

The Diagonal Game

theory

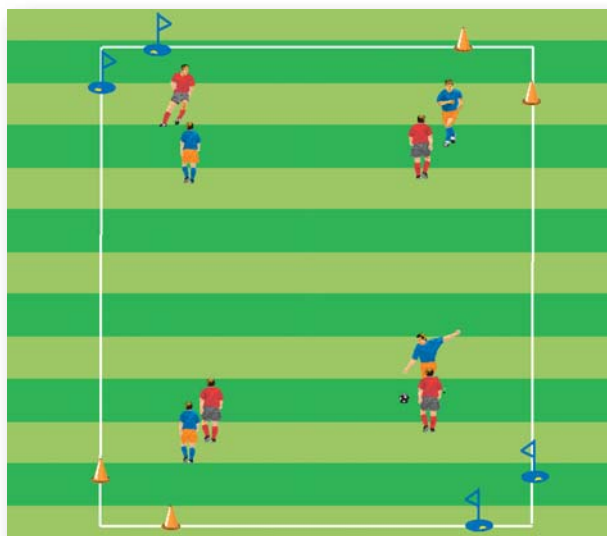
This game was inspired by an interview I did with Malcolm Cook the founder of Freeflow. He described his childhood, playing football in the streets of Glasgow. The streets were lit by gas lamps which were diagonally opposite each other. They were used as goals so the children automatically made diagonal runs.



“A lot of great players in the world will often say they don’t know how they produced a piece of game changing magic – ‘It just happened’, said with a shrug of the shoulders.

What has actually happened is that they have often merely instinctively carried out an act from the archives of tricks and instincts built up over the years of playing football with no boundaries in their formative years.”

Oscar Egbogu (grew up playing street football in Africa and now plays 5 a side in London with work colleagues)



Organization

- Age Group U9s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 4 goals made up of 8 traffic cones and 8 coloured marker cones. These are placed at each corner

Progression

The pitch can be laid out in either portrait or landscape mode. The goals are situated in the corners. Red marker cones are placed on the traffic cones at one end and also on the goal diagonally opposite. Blue marker cones are played on the other two goals. So one team tries to score in 2 goals that are diagonally opposite and has to defend the other diagonal, made up of the blue goals. The game can take a bit of time for the players to adjust to scoring in and defending goals at opposite end of the pitch. Another game to really test the insight of players and a game which encourages diagonal movement.

The Sound of Silence Game

theory

Communication is so vital on the football pitch. Communication can come in many forms and not just words.

- Speech, giving commands and asking
- Pointing
- A shrug of the shoulder
- With your eyes

Verbal communication on the pitch can cover a number of things:

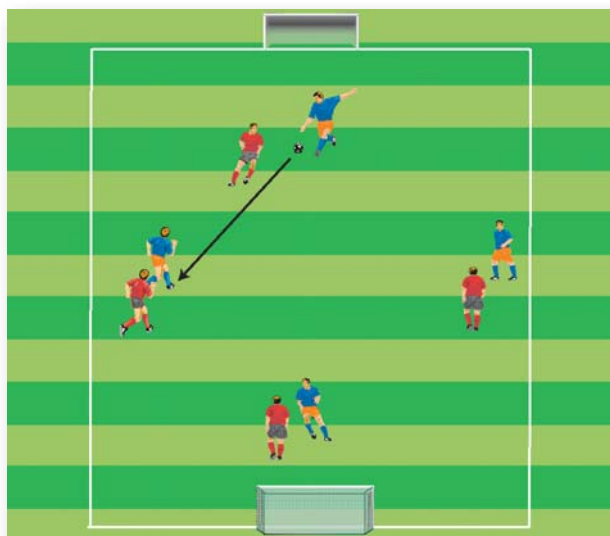
- Asking for the ball – ‘Pete’s ball’ etc
- Warning a fellow player - ‘Man on’
- Giving extra information – ‘Turn’ ‘Time’

Children are very often very quiet on the pitch, this could be down to nerves or confidence and is in stark contrast to the constant chatter before and after the game in the dressing room. In contrast in a lot of adult football everyone is shouting for the ball, even when they are in a poor position to receive the ball.



“Communication works for those who work at it”

John Powell



Organization

- Age Group U9s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

Play this game as a normal game but for sections of the game have no talking at all. The sound of silence makes the players aware of how important verbal communication is. Without verbal communication players must find other ways of communicating such as pointing or a movement of the eyes.

It is a good idea to agree on very simple commands such as 'Take', 'Keepers' etc. Also as mentioned earlier too much communication can be as bad as too little. Am I in a good position to receive the ball, no Pete is in a far better position. When a player has the ball and five team mates are calling for it you have a problem.

It goes without saying that other than the coach (and even this should be kept to a minimum) no parents or spectators should be coaching or offering advice from the side. This is very confusing for young players.

The Gate Game

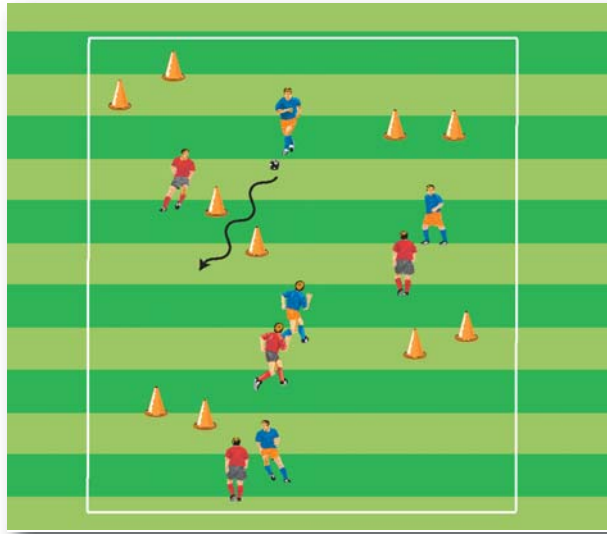
theory

The gate game is the same set up as the Parma game but it is more of a dribbling game. Dribbling is often overlooked in youth football which is a crying shame as coaches look for results and play one touch and two touch football at nine and ten years old. Coaches think they are doing a good job as his team is replicating what people see on the TV. But that is very much the adult game and kids needed to be encouraged to run with the ball and dribble in those early years. Where is the next Cristiano Ronaldo or Messi going to come from if they have to get rid of the ball as soon as they get it?



"I go out and play with imagination. It comes naturally to me. That's how everybody plays in London when you're playing street football."

Joe Cole



Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 30/40 x 20– or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – are two small traffic cones. You need one more goal than there are players for one team. So for 4v4 you have 5 goals (10 cones) and for 6v6 you have 7 goals (14 cones). You can add extra goals for the younger age groups. The goals should be about 2-3 feet apart (depending on age and ability) and should be distributed around the pitch.

Progression

To score a goal a player needs to dribble through a goal (gate). He can dribble through from either side. When the player gets a goal in this manner he scores one point for his team. If the player then goes on to score a second goal WITHOUT the opposition winning the ball (must be through a different goal) they get 2 points for the second goal, and 3 points for the third goal, etc. This is a very tiring game so you need to do it in short bursts. It is quite a physical game as well. The better dribblers love to compete to see who can get the most goals in a row. It is not just a dribbling game as passing and switching play is very important to find a player in space near a goal.

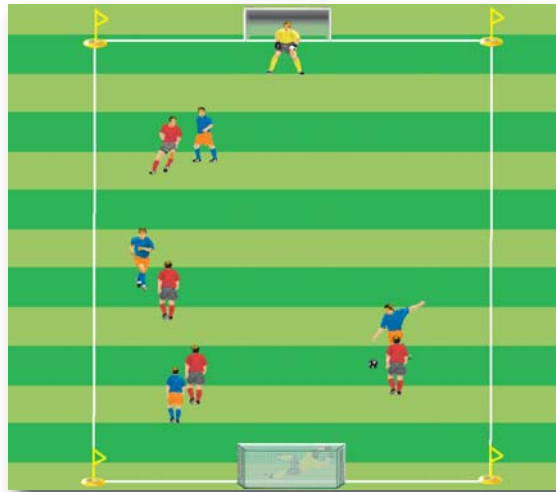
The Man-Marking Game

theory

I restrict this game to the older age groups as it is exhausting, but rewarding all the same. Most teams play a zonal game these days when defending. But it is a useful exercising in keeping with your man and tracking back.

*"The closest I got to him was when we shook hands at the end of the game."
(Northampton player
Roy Fairfax who had been marking
George Best when he scored six goals
in an 8-2 FA Cup win for Manchester
United in 1970.)*

practise



Organization

- Age Group U15s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 –or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players (+ keepers)
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

You will need to have equal numbers in this game. The players are all put in pairs, one half of the pair from each time. That is your marker for the game and visa versa. No one else is allowed to tackle you, other than the selected player from the other team. So if you are up the other end of the pitch to your marker and your team lose possession you need to work hard to get back. At the coach's discretion a player can hold up a player, but not tackle. For the team in possession you must use all the skills and trickery you can muster to try and lose your man marker. To make it more fun and also more competitive we have established forfeits for players whose partner on the opposite team has been allowed to score a goal or goals. This could mean of course a number of players earning forfeits.

The Stanley Matthews Game

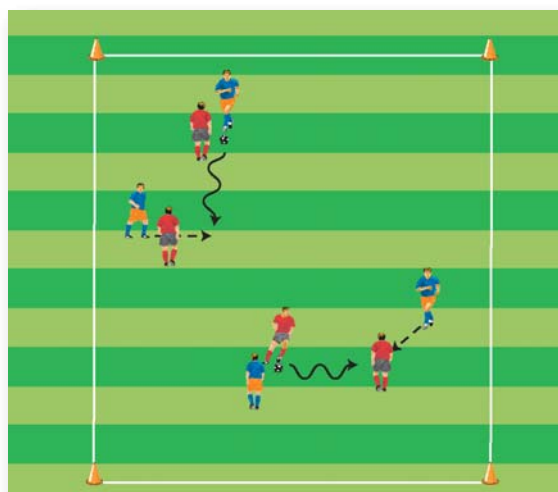
theory

Sir Stanley Matthews was one of the greatest players of our time. Matthews was a gentleman who was known for his wonderful dribbling skills. He would drop his shoulder and beat defenders at will. Children are not encouraged enough to dribble the ball and this game is a great warm up game.

"The man who taught us the way football should be played"

Pele

practise



Organization

- Age Group – U8s to adults
- Pitch Size 20 x 30/40 – or at the discretion of the coach, but basically a standard 4 v 4 pitch, this can however be played in either portrait or landscape format.
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Either a line across the pitch or cones at the side indicating an end line.

Progression

The game is the same set up as line soccer only in a 4v4 game you play with 2 balls. Players are not allowed to pass but can do a take with a player from your own team. You can add a third ball if you want. The game is incredibly tiring, so play in short five minute bursts. It really improves both dribbling and shielding, which is an essential part of any players' game. This is a very good game as part of a warm up.

The Real Madrid Game

theory

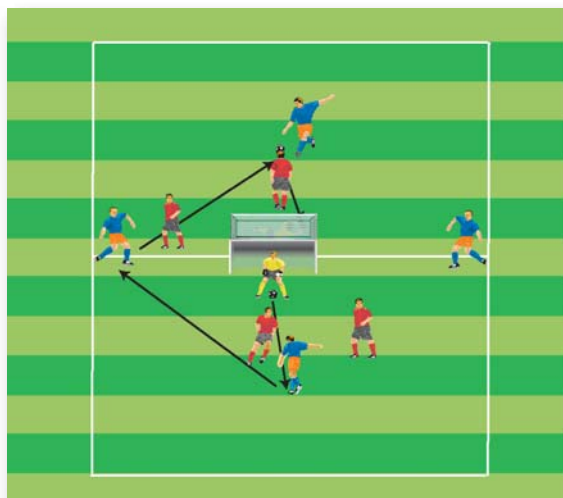
I got this game from Dave Murphy at Newport YMCA. Dave is a passionate believer in 4v4s and small sided games and is a big fan of the Dutch system. We saw this game demonstrated in Cardiff by coaches from Real Madrid. It is one of those games where you think..."why didn't I think of that?" It is an excellent game for encouraging players to go wide.

"Puskas helped Real Madrid shine the world over...he was a hero and an example for all children."

Ramon Calderon

(Real's president on the death of Puskas)

practise



Organization

- Age Group U9s to adults
- Pitch sizes 40 x 20 – or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes – 4-6
- Bibs optional
- Goals – 5 a side or mini soccer goals

Progression

The big difference with this game is that the goals are positioned in the centre of the pitch, back to back. One team defends the goal that is facing south and score in the goal facing north. The other team do the opposite. You must have at least one play in each half at all times and you can't kick the ball over the goals into the other half. The ball must be played around the goals. The game encourages players to take up wide positions so as to get around the goals. Players naturally form into a diamond shape with two players going wide, one attacking and one playing out of the back. The game also encourages playing from the back as the keeper can't kick it long over the goals. Because of the unusual pitch lay out and goal positions it really makes the players think.

The Closing Game

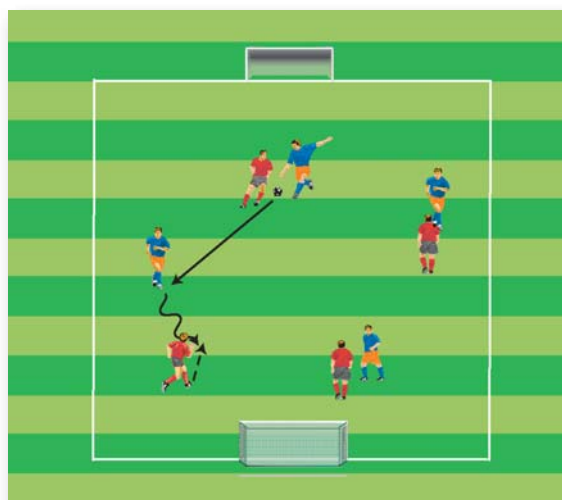
theory

This game is an excellent example of how a small change to the structure of a standard game changes the game to allow a specific skill or topic you want to work on. You don't need to say anything; the explanation is in the game.

"More touches of the ball, more involvement in the game."

Sir Alex Ferguson – (on why the younger United Academy teams play 4v4)

practise



Organization

- Age Group U10s to adults
- Pitch sizes 30/40 x 20– or at the discretion of the coach
- Number of teams – 2
- Team sizes 4-6 players
- Bibs optional
- Goals – full size adult goals or made with cones

Progression

A standard small sided game but with big goals and no keepers. Players can score from anywhere on the pitch. It is very easy to score a goal in this game, so players quickly understand they have to put pressure on the ball and not allow players to shoot. They must close quickly. Players need to concentrate as a poor defensive position will ultimately lead to conceding a goal.

SOCCER COACHING

International

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