

27 WAYS **TO RUN A BETTER** **SOCCER SESSION**



David Clarke

BetterFOOTBALL
COACHING 

1 Needs Analysis

About to start a new season with a new group of players? Or do you feel that you need to re-examine the qualities of the players currently in your squad?

Needs analysis is management-speak for the process of identifying the gap between what an organisation requires in terms of skills and what the employees currently have to offer. When we know what the gap is, we can look for learning resources that will help employees to increase their competencies and hopefully fill the gap.

In soccer terms this means making a list of key competencies required to win games - for individuals, the team as a whole, and you and your colleagues as coaches. You must then critically and honestly assess each of these people against this list and highlight any gaps. The result of this process becomes an integral part of your coaching plan.

These gaps are very specific requirements that you have identified that you can do something about and that will make a real improvement to your team. You now need to schedule in special training for individuals or the team to take account of these gaps.

For example, the needs analysis might show that your winger is very fast and skilful but doesn't have very good crossing skills. The solution is to consult our own Soccer Coach Weekly issue 2 with an article by Tony Carr on that very subject – drop me an email at david.clarke@coach-soccer.com and I will send you a copy. Armed with this knowledge you need to make time with the player in question to work on the specific techniques. Tell them why you're doing it, what the benefits will be and encourage them all the way.

Worried that this might infringe on the time that you have to devote to the team as a whole? The only solution is to make time by perhaps asking a

knowledgeable parent to help out. Easier said than done, I know, but if you've gone to the trouble of running a needs analysis and gathered all this great information, not to act on it would be to let yourself and the team down.

By at least attempting this process you can feel that you are doing something about the situation. This in itself can help you see the situation in a more positive light. A calm, rational and structured approach will relieve you of that awful feeling of panic and helplessness.

2 Small-sided Games for Fitness

Traditionally, coaches have used running sessions - jogging, sprinting, side-strides etc - as the basis for the fitness aspect of their training sessions. There are indeed some benefits to this approach and many teams (from grassroots to Premier League) still do this as a matter of course.

However, the use of small-sided games is now more often recommended as an ideal training method for improving fitness and competitive performance in soccer.

It has also been suggested that match-specific small-sided games can effectively improve the fitness of the cardio-vascular system whilst mimicking match-specific skill requirements.

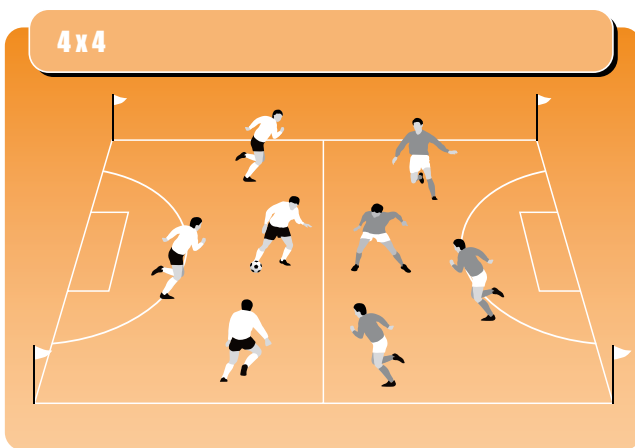
Other advantages have been suggested, including increased player motivation, training the capacity to perform skills under pressure and a reduced number of training injuries.

Whereas in the past small-sided games were mainly used to develop the technical and tactical abilities of the players, they are now being employed by

amateur and professional teams as an effective tool to improve all physiological aspects of the game.

You will find examples of small-sided games in all our newsletters. It should always be your aim to provide players with a variety of training styles using the ball and soccer related games are great for keeping players motivated.

However, sometimes performing specific running exercises can add a different kind of competitive element to training, so don't rule out that approach.



3 Five Ways to Make New Players Part of the Team

Many of you will be approaching the start of a new season and you may well have some new players to introduce into your team. Here are five tips to help you reduce the sometimes unsettling effect that this can have on your team.

1 Get to know your players

Make the effort to get to know the player, and not just for their soccer skills. This can pay dividends when trying to understand their wider motivations. The process of asking is a classic motivational tool for the player - it shows you care. Consider getting them to complete a player information sheet that asks them about all areas of their lives.

2 Make use of your senior players

Ask your senior players for their opinions on how best to integrate new players, as well as feedback on how the new players are settling in.

Pair up new players with experienced team members. This will help the new players feel less like outsiders and will help them quickly pick up the values and behaviours expected of and by the squad.

3 Avoid cliques

Cliques are groups of players who stick together. Avoid cliques by splitting up players to work in different groups or on different teams in training. If you have the opportunity, for example on tour, vary whom the players room or eat with.

Team discussions can also promote positive relationships within the team and make players aware of the damage cliques can cause. Whilst it is inevitable that players will spend more time with some team-mates than others, cliques tend to be disruptive and are exclusive by nature.

4 Team meetings

Spend time before or after training with team meetings. New players can be given the opportunity to work with other players in small groups (thus continuing the work of avoiding cliques), can be given the responsibility of feeding back to the whole squad, or their views on a particular issue, for example match strategy, can be invited.

To help the new player the coach can let them know in advance, or even discuss on a one-to-one basis, what they will be required to comment on. This gives the player time to prepare and approach the meeting with more confidence. In this way the new player can begin to feel a part of the squad as his views are shown to be valued.

5 Roles and responsibilities

Make sure the new player understands (and accepts) his role within the team and any responsibilities that go with it. Clarify any other expectations concerning for example, behaviour, match day dress, and so on.

All players hate being criticised for doing (or not doing) something they did not know about in the first place! As with all the other points, this is about maintaining clear and open communication.

One useful exercise for clarifying responsibilities is to list all the responsibilities a player has in a specific position whilst asking them to do the same. Any discrepancies can then be clarified, and the role can be understood and agreed to by the player.

Make sure your players know their tasks

PLAYER 1



**SUPPORT, COVER,
PASS, FILL IN**

PLAYER 2



**LINK, COVER,
WIDTH, PRESSURE**

PLAYER 3



**SHIELD, HASSLE,
SCORE, BLOCK**

4 Growth Spurts

During a growth spurt a child's bones are the first and fastest things to grow. Because of this their muscles and tendons become inflexible as they get stretched tight until they catch up. Girls usually have a growth spurt at around age 7-12, boys around age 10-14.

The results of the growth spurt - longer limbs, bigger feet and lack of muscular structure - can often lead to a loss in co-ordination. There is also a greater tendency to be injury-prone.

Minimise the impact on your players by taking the following precautions:

- make sure your players stretch before and AFTER training
- ease your players into the new season
- watch out for nagging heel or knee injuries or inflammation.

5 Ball Winners

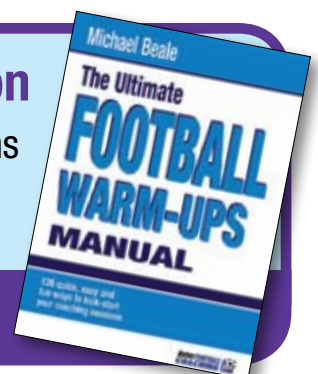
It's great to see players receiving the ball in midfield and going on a surging run forward, perhaps releasing a forward with a well-judged pass into space. But for every Steven Gerrard there's a Momo

Freshen Up Your Warm-Ups For The New Season

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Sissoko and for every Kaka there's a Gattuso. Every team needs a ball winner and there's no shame in coaching a player to do the donkey work. Often these are the unsung heroes and the players who make victory possible.

Do you have a player who is quite large, strong and not afraid to tackle? Use them like this:

- identify the midfield playmaker in the opposition team and get your player to concentrate his efforts on denying him the ball
- get them to pressure the opposition at every opportunity, forcing them to concede possession
- make sure that they are aware of their position in relation to the defence so that they can help disrupt attacks but be in a position to launch a counter attack
- encourage them to practise the simple things - when they win possession make sure the next pass is simply but sweetly struck - make sure they watch the ball as they strike it

6 Keep Your Cool

Regardless of your personal standards of behaviour and your determination to have your team play the game in the right spirit, you know that you will regularly face opposition who are determined to win at all costs - even if that means cheating, bullying and intimidation. How many times have you had an away game where the referee is, shall we say, sympathetic to the opposition? Your players are knocked around the pitch and no fouls are given; you don't seem to benefit from any 50:50 decisions; the opposition coach and parents have an aggressive tone which intimidates your young players.

Let your captain keep control on the pitch



In these circumstances it's all too easy to think that such behaviour becomes acceptable because the opposition are doing it. If you follow this approach the game will quickly descend into mayhem. Despite having turned up with the best of intentions you'll have allowed yourself to drop to their standards.

This is precisely the kind of situation where you have to show true leadership. Losing control of your emotions doesn't help your players. But it does give everybody else - the players, the parents and the opponents - permission to act the same way. So, you may not know a great deal about technical coaching matters; you may not be able to cite the FA Cup winning goal-scorers all the way back to 1937; you may not have won a game all season. But you can prove to yourself, your players, their parents and supporters that you really are a good coach by conducting yourself properly.

Don't lose control if the opposition start cheating

That should be a red card!

He was miles offside, linesman you're a cheat!



If you're going to cheat we will too!

That's not a goal, it's a foul!

COACH

So when faced with the scenario described above, resist the temptation to fight fire with fire. Keep your cool, deal with it in a calm and rational manner and then make your concerns known to the relevant individuals and authorities after the match.

7 Safety Guidelines for Soccer Boots

Poorly maintained studs or blades on the sole of the boot can constitute a danger. All referees in youth soccer must do a boot check before kick-off.

The English FA offers the following guidelines:

“When inspecting footwear, officials are to be alert to the possibility of the edge of the blades or studs developing rough areas on either the plastic or metal used in their construction. These burrs can become very sharp and have been the cause of lacerations on opponents. If match officials are concerned over the condition of the blades or studs, they should refuse to sanction their use until they have been made safe.”

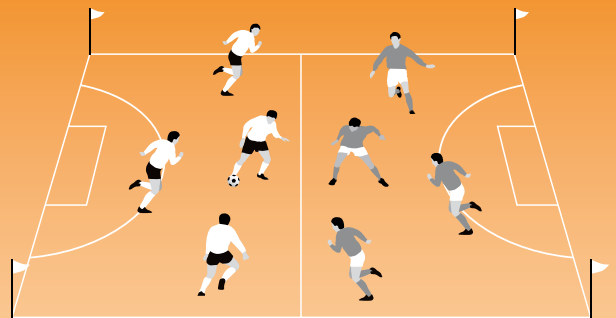
Whether you are a parent, coach or referee you must be aware of the dangers posed by poorly maintained boots. Make sure your players are aware too.

8 Problem Solving

In many ways, playing soccer effectively is a matter of problem solving. When I realised this, I also realised that to put it in these terms can be very helpful for young kids in particular. They should have had recent experience from the classroom proving to themselves that they are capable of solving problems in partnership with their team-mates and you should tell them that soccer is no different.

Set up a simple 3v3 or 4v4 and explain to the players that they must figure out a way to get the ball from one end line to the other using a minimum of three passes. Of course, in the first instance they won't be able to do it. So use your whistle to stop the practice and rearrange the players. Show them how the move broke down, and show them what would have happened if they had moved into space to provide a passing opportunity for the player in possession.

4 x 4

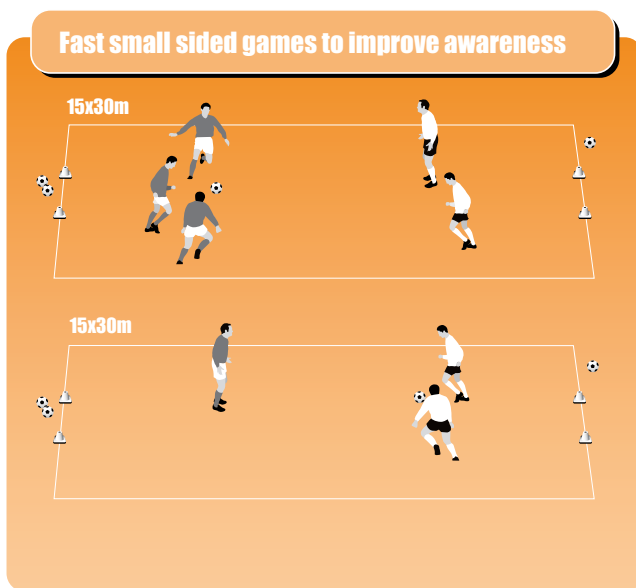


However, make sure not to do this too often. The point about problem solving is that you have to let the players solve the problem for themselves. When they do you will witness that Eureka Moment again. The first time they make it work is a joy to behold. From that moment on, your team will become a lean mean passing machine. And they will have achieved it by themselves.

9 Session Structure

Whatever level or age group you coach at it's important to structure your sessions. This is an U8 session but you can follow the pattern for older age groups substituting the drills and warm-ups you want to use.

The first thing we do when the players turn up is to give them a ball and just let them play. When they have all arrived we get them together for a chat while we do some light stretching. The purpose is to settle them down and outline what our objectives are for the session.



The next step for our particular bunch of players is to work on ball manipulation. We put them into a fairly compact coned area, again with a ball each, and tell them to run with the ball at pace, avoiding each other, and performing different types of turn on command (inside, outside, stop turn etc.). This promotes comfort with the ball and confidence in possession.

We then move on to practices involving one ball between two. The idea is to introduce a 1v1 competitive element. We might work on shielding the ball or simply taking it in turns trying to beat each other and swapping roles.

The next step is to introduce team play by setting up 2v1 situations where two players must figure out how to combine to beat one defender. Depending on how successful this is, we can then move on to 3v2 situations. We can run two of these simultaneously, stopping and starting to show the players how they can find space. This works really well as you can see the Eureka moment on their faces when they figure out how movement can unlock defences.

We usually finish with a short 7v7 practice game. Again, we use the whistle to stop and start to point out the options as we go along. I know some coaches don't like to run practice games (or scrimmages, as our US colleagues call them) as some players can go through the entire game without getting a touch. Use the informal nature of the game to stop and start and make sure the play switches often to get everyone involved.

As you can see, the structure here is like an upside-down pyramid. We start with individual skills, moving on to 1v1, 2v1, 3v2 and finish with a short game to give them the opportunity to put their new skills into practice.

This is more accident than design on my part, and no doubt many of you think it is just plain common sense, but I was pleased that Mike thought it was a good structure. It seems to me to reflect the way 8 year olds learn. I doubt if this is necessarily the correct approach for older age groups but it certainly addresses the needs of my team. I would be very interested to hear any comments any other coaches have. Feel free to start a thread on our forum, The Dug-Out.

10 Make The Most of the Summer Months

By the time the season finally draws to a close many of you will be heartily sick of the training/match cycle and are possibly looking forward to getting your Saturday mornings back.

Personally, I've had a week or two off and I'm starting to suffer withdrawal. I've recently taken over my local Under 8 side and we're a long way off being ready for next season so I thought I might try and use the summer months to get the ball rolling (apologies for the pun).

The close-season is a great opportunity to start working with a new team. Although the weather is probably too hot to do much physical work, and you'll struggle to get a full turn-out every week because of family holidays, there is still much to be achieved. This is a good chance to take your time and work on, for example, corner kicks or other set plays. You might also be able to devote a little more one-on-one time to players who have particular weaknesses which you need to address.

But more than anything the close-season is a great opportunity to really get to know your players away from the hurly-burly of the training session/match cycle. It's also a great chance for the players to get to know each other. I've seen the effect that this can have on team-building and it really is worthwhile.

Make the best of the time you have in a relaxed and fun way. Then finish off your pre-season preparation with a couple of friendlies.

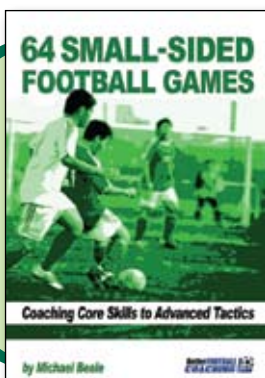
You might also consider having a summer barbecue or other social event that involves your players and their parents. The benefits of this are obvious. You can spend time with the parents and really let them know what your approach is going to be and what you want them to contribute in the season ahead. Maybe even try some non-soccer activities like a game of rounders or softball involving players, parents and coaches.

And for me the main personal benefit of close season training is that I get to have a run around on Saturday morning, get the blood flowing after a week stuck behind a desk, and keep myself fit for the season ahead.

11 Goalpost Safety

In the wake of yet another tragic fatality caused by goalposts tipping over, it's worth all of us reminding ourselves of best practice.

Movable soccer goals can fall over and kill or injure children who climb on them or hang from the crossbar. The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has reports of at least 28



Coaching Core Skills to Advanced Tactics

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deaths since 1979 resulting from soccer goals falling over, and there is a comparable number in the UK. To help prevent deaths and injuries associated with soccer goals, follow these safety guidelines.

- Securely anchor or counter-weight movable soccer goals at all times.
- Never allow climbing on the soccer net or goal framework.
- Always instruct soccer players on the safe handling of, and potential dangers associated with, movable soccer goals.
- Use movable soccer goals only on level (flat) fields.
- Check all connecting hardware before every use. Replace damaged or missing fasteners immediately.
- Ensure safety labels are clearly visible.
- Remove nets when goals are not in use.
- Anchor or chain goals to nearby fence posts, dugouts, or similar sturdy fixtures when not in use.

Thanks to reader John Parisi of New York for raising this issue. As a coach, John always travels with a mallet and spikes - just in case. Visit this website for more goalpost safety advice.

www.anchoredforsafety.org

12 Size Isn't Everything

A recent report showed that 70% of players currently playing in the English academy system are born between September and December. Does this tell us that the best players are born in these

months? Or does it tell us that the older children have had more time to develop both technically and physically?

A 14-year-old player born in September will be on average 7 cm taller and 5.7 kg heavier than a player in the same class born in August. The next time you are making a judgment between two players, consider those numbers. When selecting or releasing players in your club would these figures be useful? If two players are on the same level and you have a choice, would you pick the one that is six months

Older or younger?

Size isn't everything and given a further six months, the smaller player could well become a greater asset to your team. Perhaps it's worth re-evaluating each player in your squad with this in mind. I wouldn't be surprised if the majority of youth and mini "B"-teams consist of just such kids.

In my experience, coaches tend to pay much less attention to these players and focus on their first team. If this is you, you could be missing a trick so make a real effort to constantly re-evaluate the players on the fringes of your squad who you had previously thought weren't up to the mark.

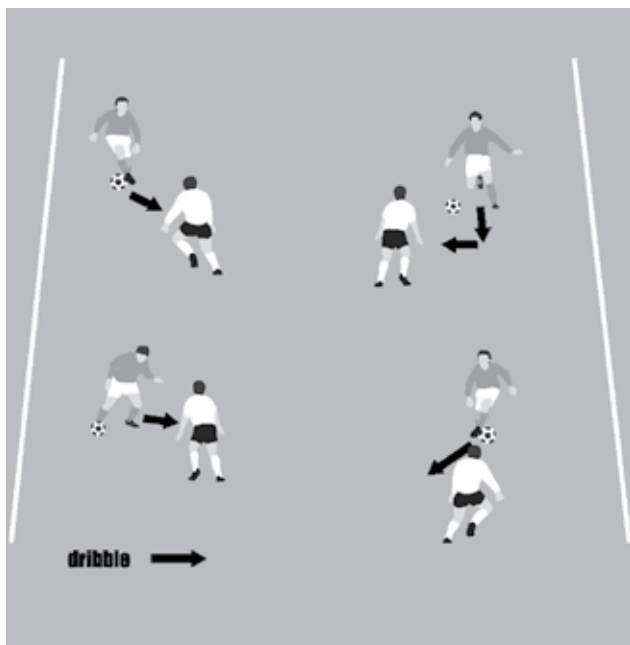
13 Alternative to Tackling

In recent issues we've discussed the slide tackle and the block tackle. It's a thorny issue, particularly among youth coaches, and has become quite a hot topic on our forum (www.bettersoccercoaching.com/forum). But tackling is not always the best approach. If a tackler gets it wrong in a dangerous area of the pitch they can easily take themselves out of the game and allow the attacker a free run on goal.

This is where jockeying comes into play. Jockeying is a hugely important technique and it is crucial that you coach it to your players. When performed properly it slows your opponent's progress, denies them time and space and provides your team mates with the opportunity to regroup. The key elements are as follows:

- adopt a nearly side-on stance with the shoulders opened out slightly
- keep the knees slightly bent, with the weight on the front of the feet, making it easier to change direction as you move backward
- maintain a goal-side position, always in front of the opponent
- maintain your position pivoting off your back foot as you move backwards
- increase the pressure by staying within an arm's length of the opponent
- don't use any part of your body to push the opponent.

Jockeying rather than tackling means the player



doesn't have to commit in certain situations. It's up to you, the coach, to give your players the confidence and experience to know when to use the appropriate technique.

There's a lot more to holding off an opponent than simply standing in the way. Our publication, ***Perfect Defending***, contains a number of very useful exercises to practice this technique in realistic match scenarios.

14 Coaching the Swarm

When you first start coaching youth players right down at the under 4 age group, you can expect the players to be like bees round a honey pot. But let most of them be part of this swarm (call it the collective "midfielder"), and choose one or two to stay a bit further forward as attackers and one or two to follow behind as defenders.

Because the midfield bees are charging all over the place, you need to give them the option to switch places with the front/back players if they get tired. You also need to give the front/back players the option to ask for a switch if they notice that somebody is getting tired.

By adopting these rules, you introduce the idea of automatic observation and support for team mates. You need to watch that you don't have one player who is always trying to be the back or front player (and, if needed, you may need to make a rule that everyone else must get a turn before he can go back – or place some other limits which require that the bulk of playing time be spent in midfield).

Until you develop good passers, most of your goals are likely to come from individual efforts or simple short passes to a team mate. So, let the best

midfield players dribble it upfield but try and get them to pass to the ones hanging around the goal. Of course, once one midfielder breaks rank, you need to have someone else to run with the ball until he can get back. Often, the best approach is to find a reliable observant player to act as Captain, and have this player keep a lookout for when someone else needs to take this job and get him to nominate players.

15 Seven Tips for a Great Training Session

- 1 Set a target for each player to get an absolute minimum of 300 touches each and try to achieve this in the first 20 minutes of the session.
- 2 Don't run drills which involve long lines of players standing around, chatting to each other, waiting for their turn to have one or two touches. Design practices that keep everyone involved all the time using small-sided games.
- 3 Make all of your practices as realistic as possible. Insist that all of your practices simulate real match conditions.
- 4 Restrict practices to set periods of time or target scores (you do have a stop-watch don't you?) and don't let them run on for too long - 5 minutes is usually enough.
- 5 You might understand the practice and what it's meant to achieve - but do your players? Plan how you are going to communicate the practice before you get there. Is it easy to understand and communicate? If not, ditch it and do something else.
- 6 Avoid long practice games or scrimmages. A number of players will get considerably fewer

touches than others. Keep it to 10 minutes maximum.

- 7 Make it fun for your players, for their parents and for you.

16 Different Learning Styles

Do you find that some of your players are quick to pick up certain ideas and concepts while others are not? It's easy to assume that some players are not quite as "bright" as others, but the truth is likely to be more complex. Learning professionals will tell you that some people learn in different ways to others. This knowledge might help you get through to particular players where you haven't been able to before. There are three types of learner:

Visual learners

Visual learners need to see the coach's body language and facial expression to fully understand the point being made. They tend to prefer standing at the front of the group to avoid visual obstructions. They think in pictures and learn most effectively from visual displays like diagrams, illustrated text books, videos, flipcharts and hand-outs.

Auditory learners

This group learns best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed and other nuances. For these people, written information may have little meaning until it is heard.

Tactile/kinesthetic learners

Tactile/kinesthetic learners benefit from a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for

long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration. They prefer to do rather than listen or watch.

So, if you feel that you are simply not getting through to some of your players, bear these points in mind and see if you can't make some progress.

17 The Need for Honest Self Appraisal

We often talk about the importance of preparation to make sure that our training sessions are as effective as they can be. But it is just as important to review the session just completed and to be absolutely honest with ourselves about our own coaching performance.

There are a great many things to do at the end of a session, but you may find it useful to set aside a few quiet moments each week to review your performance. Consider preparing yourself a checklist of questions to help organise your thoughts. Such a list might include:

- Did I have a realistic plan in place before the session started?

- Did my players improve in the areas that I wanted?
- Did the practices highlight any other training requirements? List them now.
- Were the practises too difficult or too easy?
- Did I conduct myself properly?
- Did I ignore any players or concentrate too much on some?
- Did I communicate effectively?
- Did everyone have fun (myself included)?

Make sure to do this within an hour of finishing the session while it is all still fresh in your mind and write your answers down. To fully realise the benefit of this approach you must revisit your answers when preparing the next session.

Of course, in order for this approach to work you must be able to be completely honest with yourself and have the facility for self-criticism. For some, this is easier said than done.



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18 Remember To Warm Yourself Up

How many of you turn up very early for training just so that you can have a kickabout before your players arrive? If I'm completely honest, that's a large part of the attraction of coaching youth football for me personally. I love to arrive early Saturday morning, put the goals up, mark out the planned exercises with cones, get a ball and blast off a few shots at an empty goal.

We all know the importance of a proper warm-up for our players but do you warm up properly yourself?

If you're not properly warmed up something as innocent as hitting a single long pass into an empty goal can cause an injury which could have an adverse effect on your ability to carry out a full training session.

Ever woken up the morning after a training session with a sore calf or groin? The chances are that it was caused by an over-exuberant kickabout with your assistant coaches before your players arrived.

If you must do this (and who can resist?) make sure you do at least 5 minutes of stretching (static and dynamic) first. Your players need you to be fit just as much as you need them to be fit.

19 Be Unpredictable

Make your strikers more effective by exploiting the fact that defenders hate uncertainty.

There is no doubt that a controlled and tight structure is best for your defence and even for the midfield. But strikers should be encouraged to dart here and there, to continually pull the opposition defence out of shape.

Drag back



Put your foot on top of the ball



Roll the ball back



Move off in another direction

- Don't let your strikers simply stand and wait as if they are in a bus queue.
- A static target is an easy target for a defender.
- A moving target, and a mobile striker, is a lot harder to deal with.

So, tell your strikers to go wide, go narrow, drop deep and continually challenge defenders to keep up with them. Make sure that your playmakers are in on this tactic as this movement will create lots of spaces for them to pass into.

20 Other Ways To Win The Ball Back

Of course, you can only score goals if you have the ball, and you can only get the ball if your players know how to win it. The block tackle is an extremely effective core skill but make sure that your players know that there are other ways to win possession:

- Interception – are your players aware of their surroundings and able to predict the movement of the ball? Jamie Carragher may not be the fastest player in the world but he “reads” what is going to happen and intercepts to win possession.
- Getting the body between the attacker and the ball when the attacker overruns it.
- The Poke Tackle – stabbing the ball away from the opponent or out of play using the foot closest to the ball.
- The Sliding Poke Tackle – a cross between the Poke tackle and the Slide Tackle.

We will look more closely at the slide tackle (or kung fu kick, as practiced by my son) in a forthcoming issue.

The sliding tackle

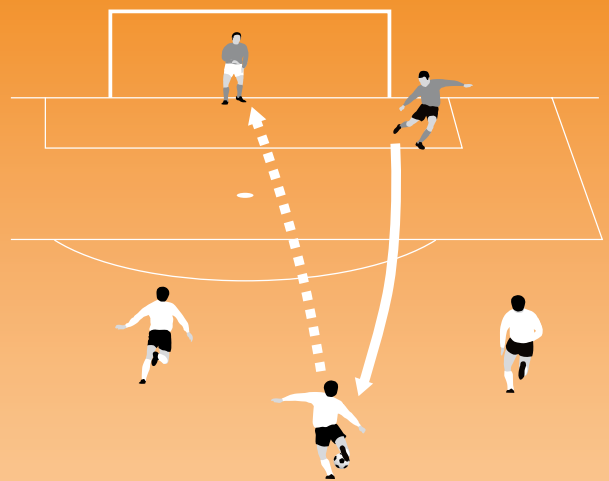


The sliding tackle should be made from the side and across the path of your opponent.

21 When Goalkicks are as Good as Corners

From the opposition's point of view it is often better to concede a goalkick rather than win themselves a corner, especially for under 4s and under 5s when it is difficult to get the ball into the penalty area.

At goalkicks put a defender on the line



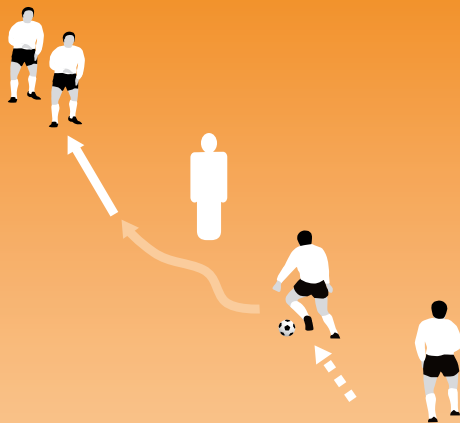
From a goalkick the ball is coming straight at the opposition attackers and unless your defenders are concentrating all the time, often the attacker wins the ball and scores.

How do you deal with this? Put a defender on the goalline. Some coaches prefer to have a defender take the goalkick, particularly if the goalkeeper doesn't have a very powerful kick. However, unless you let the goalkeeper practice this under pressure how are they going to improve? Give them the responsibility and they will reward your trust in the longer term. But put a defender on the goalline in the meantime.

22 Other Ways to Beat a Player

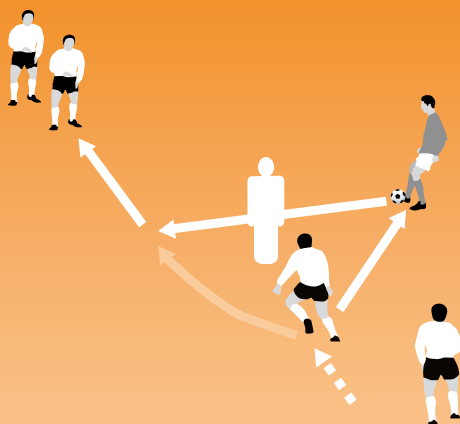
A winger doesn't always have to dribble past a defender to beat him. A one-two is effective, or if, for example, your full back has the ball, the winger can drag their marker with them towards the ball, and spin off behind the marker into the space vacated for your full-back to play the ball over the top.

Simple way to beat opponents 1



ground covered direction of run
direction of pass direction of run

Simple way to beat opponents 2



ground covered direction of run
direction of pass direction of run

Alternatively, if there's space to run into and they're quicker than their opponent, a winger can just knock the ball past and give chase. Finally, sometimes there's no need to beat the defender – David Beckham has made a career out of taking one touch to control the ball and with his second touch bending dangerous crosses into the penalty area.

23 The 4 Corners of Player Development

Make sure that your training sessions cover the four corners of player development (as espoused by the English Football Association):

- technical (skills, passing, dribbling, shooting)
- physical (power, running, change of direction, strength in 1v1)
- mental (decision making and choices)
- social (communication, combining with team mate)

If each of the exercises that you give your players fulfils these criteria, you can be confident that you are giving them all the tools they need to be effective team players.

24 Do You Over-Coach?

A few thoughts to consider before your next session.

- Do you coach in absolutes? (“never do this, always do that”).
- Do you constantly yell orders at your players rather than let them make their own decisions on the pitch?
- Are your players receiving conflicting advice from coaches and parents?
- Do your players look nervous and uncomfortable on the pitch, looking to you and others for help?
- Do your players sometimes ask to be substituted?

Signs of the overbearing coach



If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you are possibly guilty of over-coaching. Try the following tips to get you back on the right track:

- Avoid “never” – ask your players what they think, then tell them what you think and why.
- Give your players the space to make their own decisions and let them make their own mistakes – they will learn.
- Don’t shout so much – if they can solve their on-field problems by themselves you’ve done a good job.

Which coach are you?



25 Child Protection Issues

It's a thorny issue, but if you are new to coaching you might not have given much thought to your Child Protection responsibilities. You are probably aware that your duties extend beyond protecting the children in your care from others. You also need to consider carefully how you conduct yourself in the company of children, how you communicate with them in front of their peers, and how to spot any problems that may have originated elsewhere (perhaps in the family home or at school).

Perhaps the most important point to remember is that physical contact should NEVER take place out of sight of others. The adult coach should ALWAYS explain to the child the reason for any physical contact.

It should also be noted that the legislation and guidance is constantly changing. Each issue of Soccer Coach Junior provides specific guidance in this area. You can also access information at the Child Protection in Sport Unit of the NSPCC, www.thecpsu.org.uk/Scripts/content/Default.asp

26 Pick Your Spot

Here's a quick tip to help stop your players blasting every shot "down the goalkeeper's throat". Simply place a water bottle in either corner and ask them to knock it over with the ball from an appropriate distance.

Get them to do this with both the instep (laces) and side-foot. For development, get them to try it with their weaker foot.

This is fun, easy to incorporate into other drills (perhaps for adding a bit of interest to fitness drills and warm-ups) and best of all, it works!

27 Make your corner defenders SMART

If you want to make sure you're giving your players targets that they have to meet, do it the **SMART** way.

SPECIFIC

MEASURABLE

AGREED

REALISTIC

TIMED

The SPECIFIC target for your players is to clear the ball when it enters the penalty area at corners during training. Make it MEASURABLE by telling your players 50 per cent of corners must be cleared. AGREE it with them in training. Is 50 per cent REALISTIC? I think so. Make it TIMED by agreeing it for a particular training session. Tailor the SMART sessions to your individual players and get them to tell you if they have reached the target.



Green Star Media Limited

Meadow View, Tannery Lane, Guildford, Bramley, Surrey GU5 0AB

T: +44 (0)1483 892894 F: +44 (0)1483 894148 Email: kevin.barrow@bettersoccercoaching.com