
Passing with Purpose

Exploiting Space Between the Lines

STRATEGIES & SESSIONS

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Passing With Purpose: Exploiting Space Between the Lines

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Passing the ball and developing play as a team is the fundamental building block of a successful team. Great teams have an ability to move the ball to move the opposition. By moving the opposition, they develop space and opportunities. If a team is able to use this space to their benefit, it will lead to an increase in dangerous attacking situations.

In previous guides, we have looked at the importance of triangle passes and the run of the third man to create overloads and use the free player in attack, we recommend this guide for further reading. In this guide, we will look at the importance of passing between the lines of midfield and defense in order to develop an attack and offer some practical coaching session ideas to simulate real game situations. The situations shown and possible outcomes are by no means exhaustive and we encourage on field creativity and your players' own interpretation of any scenario as much as possible.

“Between the lines”

This is the free space between the lines of defense and midfield, or midfield and forwards. The larger the gap between the two lines, the more time you will have on the ball in this area. It's important to be able to assess the field as the player in possession and also the player off the ball in order identify the available space and use it to your advantage.





If we consider building the play from this situation, the defender can look up and see the whole field. A midfielder will have to receive a ball into feet either on a half turn (partially shielding a ball from an opposing midfielder) or will have to receive the ball with a closed body position (facing the passing player). Depending on the field situation, you may not be afforded the time to turn and make a positive forward pass. The receiving midfielder in the image shown would have very little chance to turn due to pressure from the opposing midfielder. It's encouraged to play in the direction you are facing unless you're certain of your space available. This would mean that the receiving midfield player would have to play a return pass back to a deeper lying "window player".

The pass to the window player does two things; firstly, it relieves the immediate pressure on the ball and secondly, the negative pass allows the window player to look up and pick a more expansive, attacking pass.

The window player in possession is the opportunity for players to make a move off the ball. Players who are able to read and understand the game well understand the importance of finding an extra yard of space in order to allow them a fraction more time to make their next move. We are aiming to understand the space between the lines here.

Scenario: Playing a pass into the available space between the lines highlighted here.



Option 1: The midfielder shown can make a forward run into the space shown, the player is currently being marked closely and may need to be creative to lose their marker for a second. The midfielder will be receiving the ball on the move, if the pass is good enough you will set your team mate up to be running at the defense.

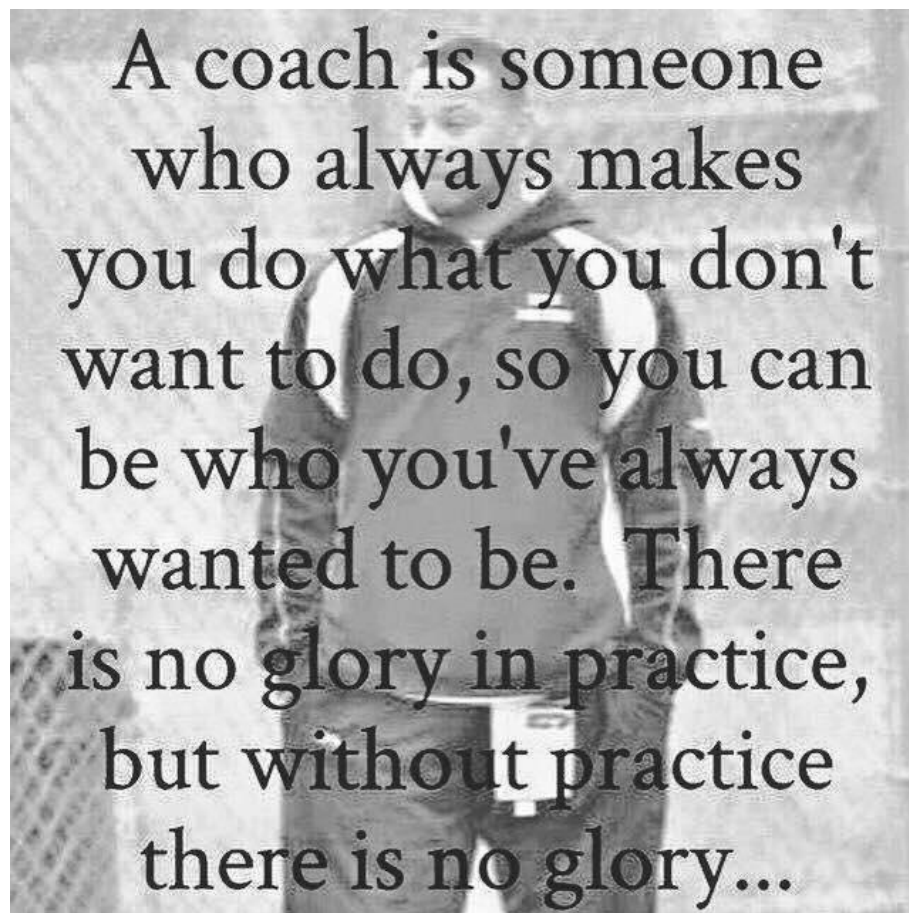
Tips for a successful pass: Diagonal passes for straight runs, straight passes for diagonal runs. Quality and weight of pass needs to be right for the situation, try to give the receiving player every chance of bringing the ball under control.

Option 2: Center forward drops deeper into the space. The forward will naturally draw their marking defender with them so movement to space and pass will have to be well timed.

The receiving player will receive the ball with their back to goal and in most circumstances, won't be offered the time or space to turn, they will be reliant on movement of their team mates around them to show for a pass.



We firmly believe that repetition and replication of in-game situations is key to developing the type of field awareness and decision making we want to see from our players. It's well noted that the best midfielders aren't necessarily the fastest, tallest or strongest, but the ones who are able to see the pass, space or opportunity before the chance has fully developed. Here we offer a few practical coaching activities to run with your team to develop the kinds of skills and awareness we have touched upon under conditioned scenarios to maximize success rates.





Switching play

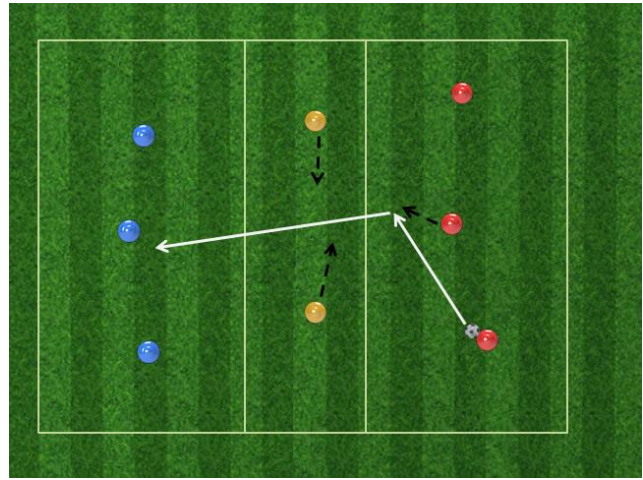
Dimensions: 40 x 30-yard area played width ways.

Place two coned off channels placed 10 yards in on either side

Two teams of attackers split evenly into the two outside channels, the defending team are placed in the middle section (two or 3 defenders max)

How to: Players must stay within their channels. The team in possession must attempt to work an opportunity to pass through to their team mates in the other section. Points are scored each time the ball passes successfully to the other side.

Coaching Points: Move the ball quickly to create gaps in the defense, exploit the areas when they are available.

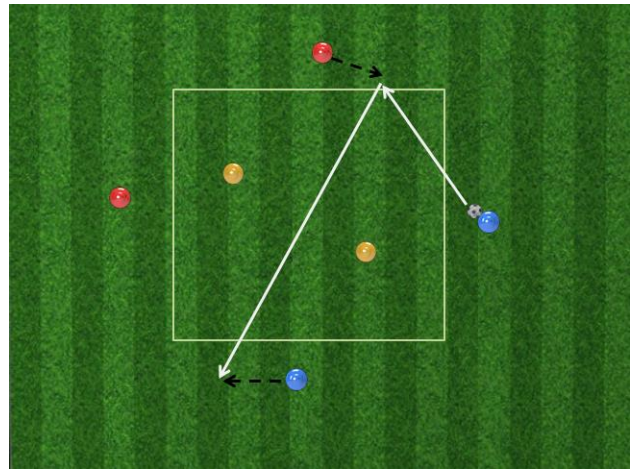


Splitting Defenders

Dimensions: 12 x 12 Yard coned square, 6 players per square split into three teams of two. Adjust dimensions to suit player ability.

How to: One team of two starts in the middle of the square as defenders, the other two teams work together around the outside of the area. Defenders cannot leave the square; their goal is to intercept passes. Passing teams' objective is to pass the soccer ball through the middle of the two defenders. Points are scored each time they successfully split the defenders. Team becomes defenders if they lose the ball

Coaching Points: Patience, movement off the ball, encourage positive passes and calculated risks.



Attacking with depth

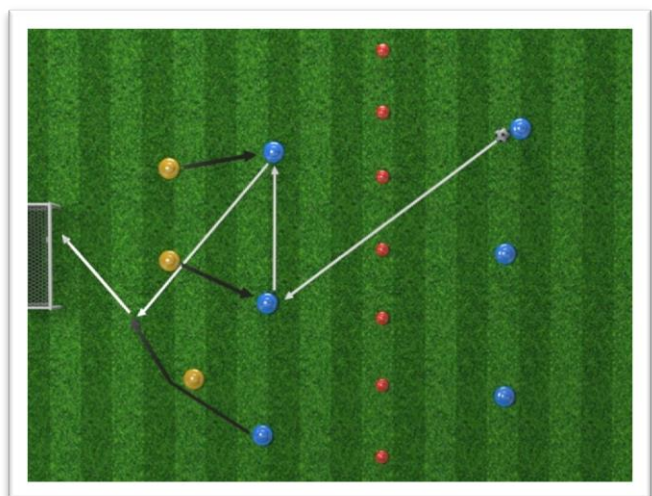
Dimensions: 45x45 Yard area, 1 goal, one line 10 yards in from the end line opposite the goal which the deep supporting attackers will play in.

Two teams, Attack vs Defense (numbers up) attacking team is split into two, one group providing deep support for their attacking team mates.

How to: The ball starts with the supporting attackers who look to play the ball into the main area to their team mates who then attempt to create a scoring opportunity.

Defenders cannot move into the supporting midfield coned area but can apply real pressure to the more advanced forwards.

Coaching Points: Shape, support, movement, communication



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“ I am a coach because of the kids and the passion I have for the sport itself. There is no other feeling quite like helping young athletes further develop their natural persistence, determination, discipline, dedication, resiliency, work ethic, heart, leadership skills, connection with, and respect for others, not only in competition, but in life! ”

-Stacie Mahoe



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