
Coaches Common Problems & Practical Solutions

Author: Coach Mark Higginbotham



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Author: Mark Higginbotham

www.coachestrainingroom.com

info@coachestrainingroom.com

801.810.4423

The purpose of this eBook is to address some of the problems raised by coaches within our worldwide community. The goal is to share common problems, offer up a range of technical tips to combat the issues raised and also offer practical coaching solutions to help equip coaches with the techniques to correct any issues. This guide also provides aids and session ideas to offer further corrective solutions to problems.

The problems and questions come from a range of coaches from all over the world, from U5 recreational team's right through to U15 travel teams. All solutions are based on professional coach opinion and personal experiences.

Coach Question:**I need some advice on helping players handle disappointment. Can you offer any help?**

Support is definitely a key ingredient of team work. I'm aware from personal experience (both playing and coaching) that a blame culture can spread much quicker than a positive, supportive one. To correct this in a coaching aspect, I took it back to basics:

At the end of practice during a session review I sat all the players down and sat with them in a circle, the player holding the soccer ball is the only one allowed to talk, I lead by example and start off by complimenting one player in the group;

“Tim, I thought you played really well today especially when you blocked that shot.”

Then Tim takes the ball and follows my lead. This will get easier for players after a few times of trying, it's usually a fairly awkward social concept for players initially. It's a great little end of session confidence boost to get players sharing positive thoughts about each other and can help develop a more positive culture.

While still being a great team building exercise, it is very important to make sure to conclude by explaining why we do these things. Positivity and encouragement breeds more positivity. Can your players take this to the field with them? You're looking for leaders even at a young age. How would you feel if a player helped you up after you missed a shot and said 'don't worry you'll get the next one'? Encouraged I'm sure! Encouragement and positivity from the coach is essential, but encouragement from your peers on the field can mean so much more to other players. Positive professional role models to look up to are great as players look to emulate their heroes.

Get players to start helping each other up if they fall down, helping an opponent up, setting the right example to their team mates. Offer positive encouragement when you see it happen and allow time for your new culture to develop.

Coach Question:

Can you offer any corrective techniques to stop my players from stabbing at the ball (using their toe)?

One of the main reasons I have found that players use their toes to stab at the ball is to kick the ball a longer distance (I take very young players out of this, generally the younger players haven't developed the motor skills for truer passing or shooting form.)

If I am working solely on technique with players, I would start by shortening the distance they are required to kick. This will remove all emphasis on reaching the target and allow players to focus on their correct form. Once form is developed you will notice a natural increase in power.

Another reason why players may stab at the ball would be if they are reaching to kick the ball. This sounds like it would be easy to spot, however, the technical corrections may be more subtle. A key indicator of incorrect technique is to pay attention to where the players' standing foot is in relation to the ball. The foot should be in line with the ball pointing towards the intended target. The player's head should be over the top of the ball and they should be able to see the number 10 as they look down (foot being a 1, the ball being the 0 if the player is right footed, 01 for left footed players). If the player steps behind the ball they will have to reach to strike the ball, this will result in a loss of balance and ultimately power, and the players can overcompensate by pointing their toe to generate the lost force. Pay close attention to players striking a stationary ball and a moving ball offering the corrective techniques where necessary.

Correct passing technique shown below:



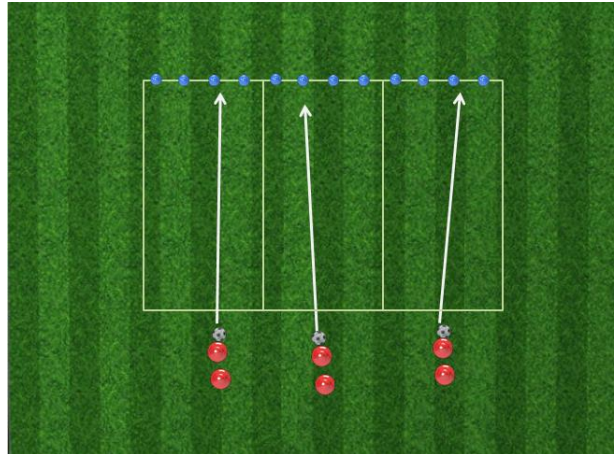


Practical passing games for allowing technical correction:

Passing Alley

Area: Set up lanes 5 yards in width by 10 yards length (adjust the length to suit the needs of your team) Set up small teams between each lane, each player has a ball with 4 cones at the other end.

How to: Players must attempt to pass their ball and knock over a cone, one player per team at one time. If a player knocks a cone over, they must pick up the cone and put it into another teams' lane. Play until one team has removed all their cones or play to a time limit.



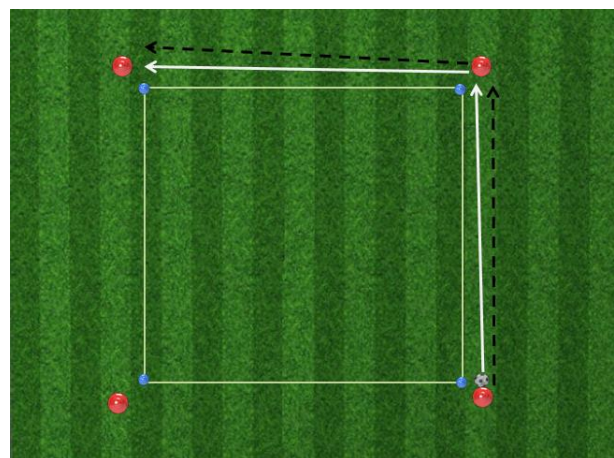
Coaching Points: Basic passing/shooting technique, toes of standing leg pointing towards target, strike with instep/laces, keep your head over the ball. Tactics will play a part here, watch other teams and how many cones they have, to keep the game going you may need to target a team with fewer cones.

Passing Square

Area: 12 x 12-yard square (adjust the size of the area to suit the type of pass and game speed you wish to achieve.)

How to: Pass clockwise/counter clockwise to the next available player and follow your pass, the pattern continues. Coach can reverse the direction to change the angle.

Coaching Points: quality of pass, do not pass the ball too close to the cone to force the receiving player to step away from to cone and create a better passing angle by opening up their body. Move quickly to take up your new position.



Coach Question:

I need some tips on teaching how to defend based on field location vs defending players without the ball, when to pick up runners etc.

The first thing to note here is that defending is a fine balance of communication, collective teamwork, discipline, concentration and quick thinking. Naturally there will be times where these individual parts of the larger system don't work in unison and this is when mistakes happen. It is to be expected that momentary lapses in concentration will result in conceding goals over time, this can be seen right through to the present day professional levels.

There is a set of general rules that set the foundations of a good defensive unit. In my opinion, the key attribute that underpins a good defensive unit is the ability to communicate. Every individual within the defence should vocalise their movements, by this I mean things like;

"I've got the ball", "I've got the runner", "I'm covering", etc.

These phrases should be heard constantly within the general chatter of the defensive unit. No matter how obvious it may sound, always communicate your own movements, it gives your team mates a chance to fill their roles around you and builds trust in that everyone is performing their own individual tasks. Furthermore, it gives you the best chance of avoiding simple mistakes like two players going for the same ball and leaving an opponent completely unmarked.

To address some of the specific points you asked, defending a team based on field location depends ultimately on how you operate as a team. To give you an example, a team with pace and a high work rate might choose to press high up the field, pressuring a player's first touch and trying to win the ball or force a mistake. If this is a system you play, ensure that players are following up around the first defender by restricting space and cutting off passing channels. If players do not move together to press the opponent, it is easy to bypass. Other teams prefer sit off their opponents and invite them to attack, defending in a smaller area allows you to restrict space naturally by having more defenders in a smaller area.

Coach Question:

I want to inject some pace and urgency into my players, especially when recovering defensively, any ideas?

One session I would use for counter attacking and conditioning has just as much of a focus on defensive recovery. It's also lots of fun! I'll explain below:

Play a small sided game (3v3 or 4v4 is ideal here, set up more games to accommodate more players.)

This is normal free play rules however when a player scores a goal they must run around the back of the opposition goal before joining back in with the play. If we say for this example we are playing a 3v3, when someone scores a goal the play can commence immediately from the goal.

This creates a temporary 3v2 in favour of the team who conceded a goal. Their focus is to exploit these opportunities and try to score a quick goal back. There are two main factors at play here;

Firstly, from an attacking perspective, can you attack quickly? Off the ball runs are crucial to create space. The attacker with the ball should try to draw a defender into their space to open up the field for other players. This counter attack should be swift to exploit the numerical advantage.

Secondly, can the two defenders delay the attack long enough to allow their team mate to make a recovery run and join in the defending? The recovering player must show determination to get back and help out defensively as quick as possible.

Top tips for increasing speed of play in practice:

- Area size: A smaller area will limit time on the ball and increase the game speed.
- Set limits for time on the ball or limit the number of touches.
- Smaller group activities increase the number of touches on the ball.
- Competition between teams can create a sense of urgency.
- Create a game scenario during games to increase urgency and speed: an example scenario could be team A has one less player and has a 1 goal advantage heading into the last 10 minutes. Can they protect the lead?



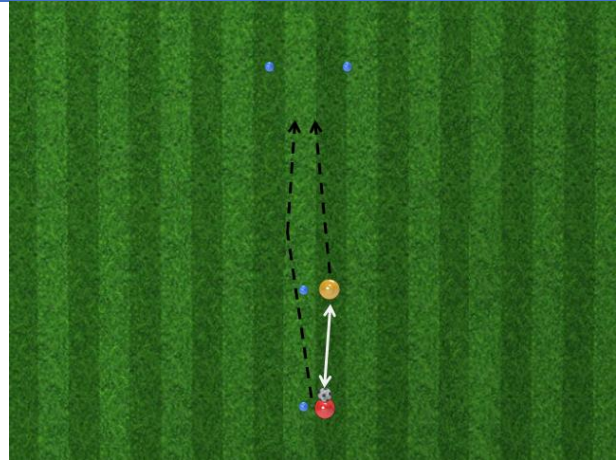
Practical small sided games to work on speed of play and recovery runs:

Defensive Recovery Runs

Dimensions: Two cones placed 5 yards apart with a cone 10 yards behind one cone.

How to: Both attacker and defender pass the ball back and forth to each other. The attacker can make a move at any time and sprint to the free cone 10 yards away. If the attacker gets to the cone successfully they score a point. Defenders must try their best to make a recovery run and get back behind the soccer ball to cut the attacker off. Roles switch after play concludes.

Coaching Points: Defenders must be on their toes and ready to react to the attackers move. Reaction time, determination and speed are all important factors.

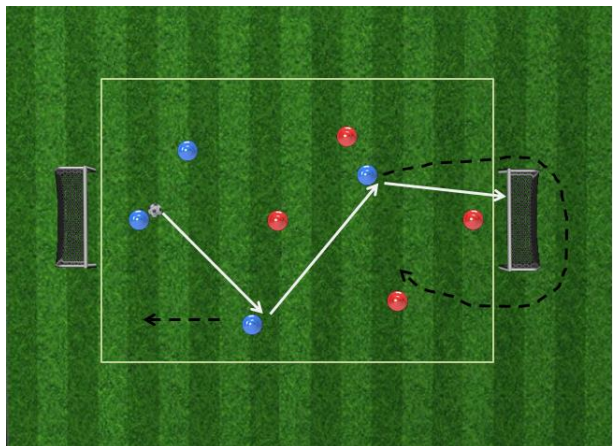


Counter Attacks and Recoveries

Area: Set up a 3v3 or 4v4 SSG within a 35 x 30-yard field. (adjust dimensions to suit your team.)

How to: Normal game rules apply, when one team scores a goal, the player who scored the goal must run around the opponent's goal before joining back in play. The team who conceded can play immediately after the goal is scored and must try to take advantage of a temporary numerical advantage.

Coaching Points: Attack at speed, movement off the ball. Draw a defender into your space to open up the field for other players. This counter attack should be swift to exploit the numerical advantage. Defending team must delay long enough for their team mate to recover and help. Show determination.

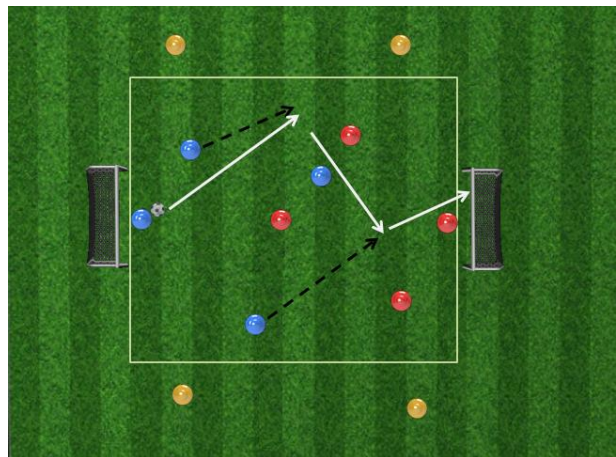


Half Chances

Area: 35 x 35 Yard field with a large goal at either end. Play 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 inside the area with another team of floating players outside the area.

How to: This is a 2-minute competition. Normal game rules apply. Encourage lots of shots on goal. The players outside the field bounce the ball back in play, they can pass to either team, they can choose whether to cross, set someone up for a volley or simply bounce the ball back in play. If you miss the target you must run and get your own ball while the game continues. (excludes saves or shots off the post.)

Coaching Points: Awareness, confidence to take the chance when it becomes available. Basic shooting technique, being alert to the early ball/rebound. Be creative in tight areas, take on half chances.



Coach Question:

I'm looking for some player motivation and team bonding ideas. I have a new team and I'm struggling to pick them up after losses and getting the team to gel.

Firstly It's important to get a good structure in place early on, setting good foundations makes for a beneficial coaching and playing experience. New players will have to grow to trust you as a coach. Here are some good extracts from our Mental Skills Training Coach Anthony Lanzillo on how to set the right tone as a coach so that you can build up your team in the right manner.

Principle 1: The Players Come First

The coach must make it clear to his players, and to himself, that the players come first...not the coach. The coach is there to serve them and to guide them to become better players on the field, and better people off the field. The players need to see that every choice or decision that the coach makes is for the benefit of each player and the whole team. That he is simply trying to choose what is in the best interest of the team and its players.

Principle 2: Each Player Has Strengths

Second, the coach needs to use this sports experience to help each player identify his or her personal strengths and qualities, and how they can be used to help the individual player grow as an athlete and competitor as well as making a significant contribution to the overall "welfare" and success of the team. The coach must be careful not to simply pour all his praise on the athlete who scores the most points but acknowledges and celebrates all the different contributions that many of the players will make to the team – whether it be in their enthusiasm, mentoring, commitment to practice, intensity, being the best backup player, etc. Every player will be recognized for being an important part of the team. The message is that a team can't win with just one or two players – all the players are needed to be successful."

With new teams, it's important to develop the right culture, an environment where everyone plays for each other, cliques and groups are minimized and players feel safe in the environment to express themselves and to make mistakes. Off the field, I believe it is important to encourage socializing as a team; team meals and bonding activities (Chelsea FC amongst other teams regularly talked about how popular their team FIFA tournaments were as an off-field team bonding exercise.) On field, it is important to set problem solving scenarios or conditions. Teamwork to solve problems is great for building a sense of self-worth within a team.

Practical team building problem solving game:

Handball:

Divide the players into 2 teams, players start with ball in hand. Teams must throw the ball to each other and attempt to throw the ball into a PUG Goal to score. The player holding the ball cannot move and defenders cannot take the ball from the player in possession, this means players off the ball must move to support the player in possession, working on teamwork, movement and communication. Defending team must move to try and intercept the throws, working on their field awareness and anticipation.



Coach Question:

My players don't take practice seriously and it's starting to show during games, do you have any advice?

It's important to get the message across to your players that practice is about simulating, as much as possible, the conditions of actual play. It's about the feel, the pressure, the intensity, the decisions made under those conditions. Setting high standards in practice and preparing to win, go hand in hand. The standard of winning and doing everything it takes to win, requires that we prepare to win. Not just hope to win, but prepare for it.

The time during practice is your time as a coach, either to address any issues that you saw in the last game or prepare for the game ahead. Once the players cross that white line onto the field that is where your corrective input stops and your focus as a coach turns to subtle tactical tweaks, for this reason it is vital that time during practice is time well spent.

Tips for during practice:

- Keep the delivery time of coaching points to a minimum to keep activities moving.
- Experiment with the delivery of your coaching points and session explanations; speaking quietly will make players come in closer and listen harder. Raising your voice in places will work to regain players' focus.
- Train with intensity, explain to players not only how to do things, but why we do these things.

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