

YOUTH SCENE: How to Make Drills Work

They should be easy to understand, taken in small steps

By Alan Maher

There are a few simple guidelines for developing coaching exercises. Books devoted to drills rarely satisfy the particular needs of a coach, and at best can only point the coach in the right direction.

Some of the best and most effective drills for your team may be those you create to address the specific needs of your team. I would like to present a few rules to help a coach in this process.

Rule #1: Make it work

No exercise should be presented if it is too difficult at its onset. Make it easy to understand and execute. Give a clear statement of what is to be done. Provide objectives and purpose. Then proceed in small steps, but at a rapid pace. Make the steps concentrated.

As an example, walk through the drill instead of running, so the movement clearly is seen and understood. Also, pass the ball with the hands, not the feet, to show accurately how the ball is to travel within the exercise. If the drill is not working right, increase the space between the players to allow more time for them to react in terms of controlling a moving ball.

Rule #2: Make it better

Once an exercise is going well, it can be made more challenging for the players.

Limit the amount of touches. Go from unlimited touches to three, then two touches, and finally to one-touch passing. If this fails, go back up to two touch, etc. Remember that the demands on players must be increased in terms of intensity in order for it to be realistic and player improvement realized.

Reduce the space. As the space gets smaller in a game-like situation, the players must concentrate more on the accuracy of their passes and their movement off the ball. So begin in a large space and then make it smaller. This can be done simply by walking around and moving the cones closer together. Don't even mention to the players that it is being done. Look for their response and react accordingly.

Routinely add players. Just add more players in a given space. This increases the demands on players in terms of field vision and movement and makes the game-like situations more realistic.

Rule #3: Introduce opposition

It would appear to be rather obvious that things would go better without opposition in the beginning, but we constantly see practice sessions where there is an exercise run with opposition from the beginning, even when the players struggle for success. Introduce wall passing and then add an opponent. Teach a takeover dribble and then add an opponent. Do the up-back-through passing sequence and then add an opponent. Go back to Rule #1 — make it work. You might also play your attacking

players together as well as your defenders together in exercises, thus working on familiarity with each other.

The golden rule

The golden rule is to help in developing attacking success, overload on the side of the attacking team, perhaps in a two to one ratio. That is, two attackers for every defender. Again, go back to Rule #1. If attacking success doesn't occur, add more attackers. If attacking success does occur, increase defenders. Realistically we know that match conditions mean that defenders outnumber attackers. But, always make things work.

There are other basic physical activity factors to consider when creating new exercises for your team.

Consider these factors when deciding what you want to accomplish with a specific training exercise (drill). Build the exercise around these factors, but keep it simple. One exercise can be utilized to achieve several different outcomes. It always depends on the point of emphasis.

- **Time:** How many times in a minute do you want the exercise done? Or how many times in a row do you want it done? Or, how long do you want it done?
- **Velocity:** How hard do you want the ball hit? The harder it is struck, the harder it is to control by the receiving player. How fast do you want a player to run? The faster a player runs, the harder it is to receive the passed ball.
- **Direction:** Where do you want the ball passed? To the feet of a player? In front of the running player? In the general direction of the running player? Up field? Each pass has a different degree of difficulty. What degree of difficulty do you want and need?
- **Height:** Do you want the ball passed on the ground? Or in the air? It is much harder for the player to receive a ball out of the air quickly. It also is more difficult to deliver a ball that is chipped over the heads of opponents.
- **Distance:** The distance that a ball travels is crucial to the whole game of soccer. Short passes need to be more accurate, as the distance is short, as is the time for the player to get into a position to receive the passed ball. Longer passes allow the player receiving the ball more time to get in the path of the ball. Longer passes also allow opponents time to get to the same ball. But long passes frequently take the ball from an area of pressure and trouble. Short passes can pass on pressure from one player to the next.

Exercises work best when they are constructed to work right from the beginning. They become more challenging when new restrictions are added. Limiting touches of the ball, reducing the working space of the group or adjusting the number of players to the allotted space — all have a role to play in player development through coaching exercises.

Finally, the factors of time, velocity, direction and height can change a drill to make an exercise more challenging and realistic (game-like) for the players.