Drill Appendix

Applying Motor Learning Principles in Youth Soccer Coaching

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This appendix collects **60 drills, five for each of the 12 motor learning principles** in the article. Every drill follows the same layout: a diagram of the starting setup and first action beside the link to the principle's objective, the setup, how it runs, how to make it easier or harder, and the coach's role. Each principle in the article links to its drills here.

Distances are guides. Adjust them to the age, number, and ability of your players. Letters in the diagrams match the text: A, B, C are attackers; X, Y, Z are defenders; S is a server, T a target, N a neutral player, and O an observer. A gray outline marks a player who joins in a later stage. The symbol key is printed at the top of every page.

Source article

This appendix accompanies the article below, which explains the principles and the evidence behind every drill. Cite the article when using these drills.

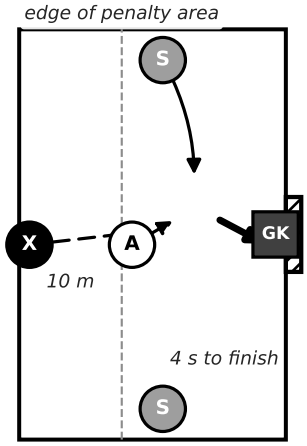
Furtado, O. (2025, May 20). *Applying Motor Learning Principles in Youth Soccer Coaching*. https://drfurtado.github.io/site/blog/posts/mlp/

Principle 1: Encoding Specificity

Preserve the Information That Guides Action

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to audit a drill for the information it preserves or removes, and rebuild a finishing task so that the player practices with the information that guides finishing in a match.

Drill 1A: Live-Service Finishing



Link to the objective. Restores the *information* and *action* elements: the player must read a moving ball and a closing defender before striking.

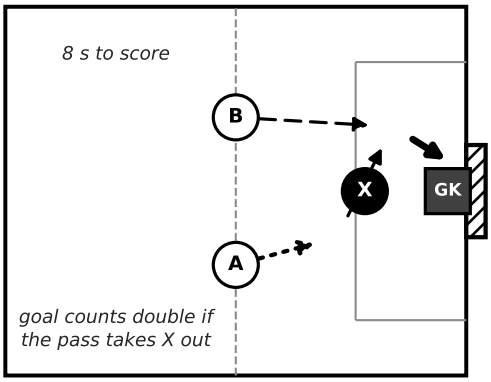
Setup. Penalty-area width, one goal with a goalkeeper, a server on each flank, one defender starting 10 m behind the striker.

How it runs. A server plays a ground pass into the striker's path; the coach varies which server plays and at what pace. On the pass, the defender recovers toward the striker. The striker has four seconds to finish. Rotate roles every three attempts.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: the defender starts farther away or recovers at walking pace. Harder: the defender starts closer, the server varies height, or the time limit shortens.

Coach's role. Observe whether the striker adjusts the first touch to the pass and the defender's position. Avoid correcting technique between attempts; let the outcome and the goalkeeper provide the information.

Drill 1B: 2v1 to Goal, Read the Defender



Link to the objective. Restores the *decision* and *consequence* elements: the striker must choose between shooting and passing based on the defender's position.

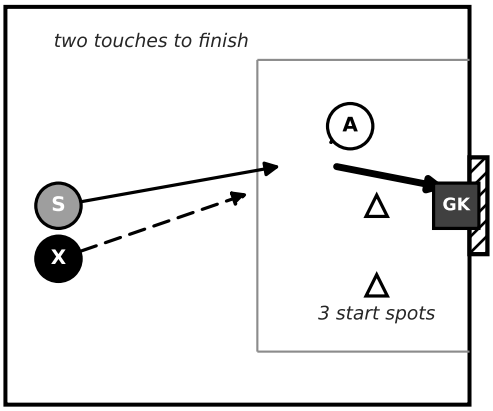
Setup. A 25 × 20 m channel ending at a goal with a goalkeeper. Two attackers start at the halfway line of the channel; one defender starts near the edge of the area.

How it runs. The attackers have eight seconds to score. A goal after a pass that "takes the defender out" counts double, as does a shot taken when the defender commits to the passing lane, so the reward follows the correct read rather than one predetermined option.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: widen the channel or delay the defender's start. Harder: add a recovering second defender (2v2) or narrow the channel.

Coach's role. After a set of five attacks, ask the ball carrier: *"What did the defender do that told you to shoot or pass?"* The answer reveals whether the player is using the information the drill preserves.

Drill 1C: Finishing From Match Positions



Link to the objective. Restores the *angle*, *distance*, and *pressure* information of real chances: the striker finishes from the spots where goals are actually scored, with a defender closing.

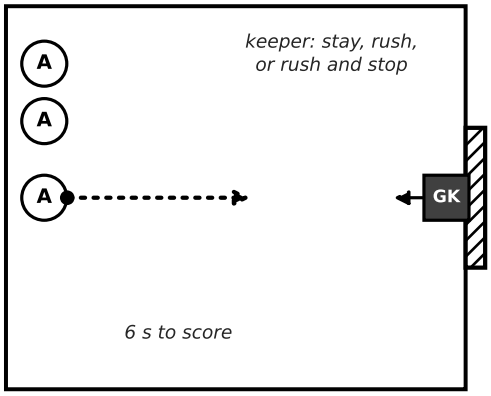
Setup. Half a pitch with a goal and goalkeeper. Three cones mark start spots in the area: central, half-space, and wide. A server stands 25 m out with a supply of balls; one defender starts beside the server.

How it runs. The striker starts at any spot and checks away from goal. The server passes into the striker's feet or path. On the pass, the defender sprints to close. The striker has two touches to finish. Change start spots each attempt so no two shots in a row come from the same angle.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: the defender starts later or farther away. Harder: allow one touch only, or add a second defender who blocks the near post.

Coach's role. Notice whether the striker looks at the goalkeeper before shooting. Ask after each set: *"Where was the goalkeeper when you struck?"*

Drill 1D: Read the Goalkeeper



Link to the objective. Keeps the most important finishing information live: the goalkeeper's position and movement decide whether to shoot early, go around, or place the ball.

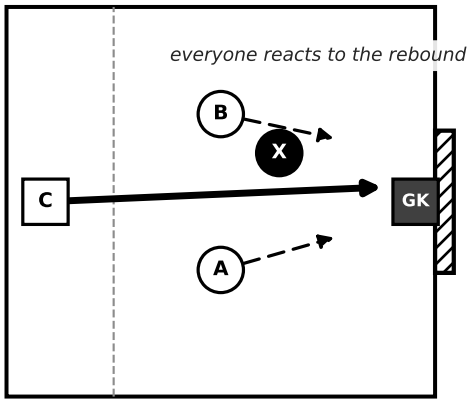
Setup. An area 20 m wide and 18 m deep in front of a goal. A goalkeeper on the line, attackers in a line 20 m out, each with a ball.

How it runs. The attacker dribbles at goal. The goalkeeper chooses on each attempt whether to stay, advance fast, or advance and stop. The attacker must score within six seconds. Award a bonus point when the choice fits the goalkeeper's action: an early shot when the goalkeeper stays deep, going around when the goalkeeper rushes, a placed finish when the goalkeeper stops.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: the goalkeeper may only advance slowly. Harder: add a recovering defender from behind, or shorten the time limit.

Coach's role. Stay quiet during the attempt. Afterward ask: *"What did the keeper do, and what did you choose?"*

Drill 1E: Rebound Hunters



Link to the objective. Many goals come from loose balls. Live rebounds give players the unpredictable bounce and spin they will meet in matches, which a static ball cannot provide.

Setup. A goal with a goalkeeper. Two attackers and one defender start at the penalty spot. The coach stands 20 m out with balls.

How it runs. The coach shoots at the goalkeeper (or strikes off a rebound board if no goalkeeper is available). All three players react to the loose ball. Play until a goal, a held save, or a clearance out of the area. Attackers score one point per goal; the defender scores one point per clearance.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: two attackers versus no defender. Harder: add a second defender, or let the goalkeeper restart play with a quick throw to a counter target.

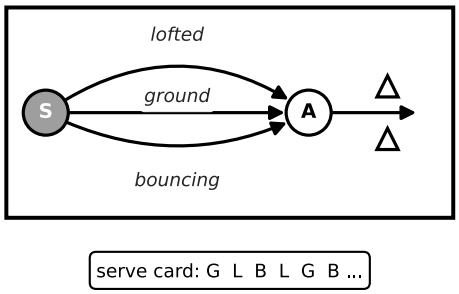
Coach's role. Look for players who move *before* the ball is struck. Praise anticipation, not only goals.

Principle 2: Practice Variability

Progress From Stability to Adaptability

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to decide when a skill needs stable, blocked repetition and when it is ready for variation and interleaving, and to sequence a receiving task from stability to adaptability.

Drill 2A: Serve Roulette



Link to the objective. Moves a receiving skill from blocked to random practice once the basic touch is established.

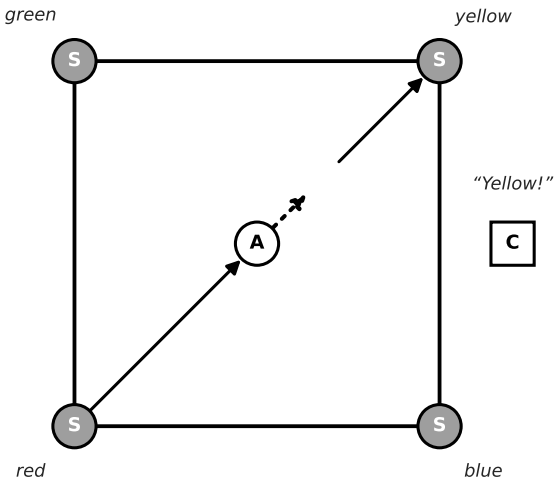
Setup. Pairs, 10 m apart, with a 2 m target gate behind the receiver. The server has a card showing a random sequence of three serve types: ground, bouncing, and lofted.

How it runs. Round 1 (if needed): five of each serve type in a block. Round 2: the server follows the random sequence on the card for 15 serves. The receiver controls the ball and passes it through the gate in two touches.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: two serve types only, or a shorter distance. Harder: the server also varies the side of the receiver's body, or a passive defender starts behind the receiver.

Coach's role. Expect more errors in Round 2 and say so to the players: *"This version is harder on purpose. Mistakes here are part of learning."* Do not return to blocked practice simply because performance dips.

Drill 2B: Four-Corner Receiving



Link to the objective. Adds variable practice within one skill: the receiver adapts the touch to changing angles, distances, and late information.

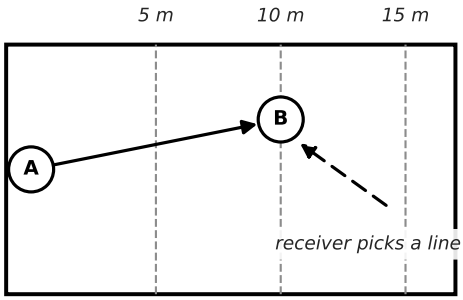
Setup. A 15 × 15 m square with a server at each corner and one receiver in the middle.

How it runs. Any server plays the ball; as it travels, the coach calls a color linked to one of the other corners. The receiver must take the first touch toward that corner and pass to it. Change receivers every 45 seconds.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: call the corner before the pass is played. Harder: call it later, enlarge the square to vary pass distance, or add a defender who closes the receiver.

Coach's role. Watch whether the first touch changes with the direction called. A receiver who uses the same touch every time has not yet adapted to the variation.

Drill 2C: Distance Ladder



Link to the objective. Varies one parameter (passing distance) after the basic pass is stable, so players learn to scale force rather than repeat one distance.

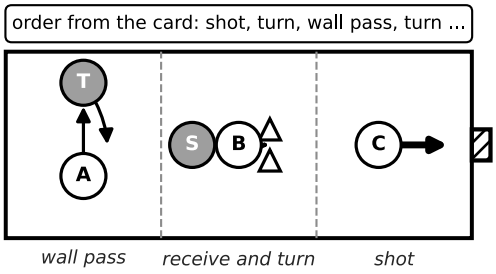
Setup. Pairs. Three lines of cones at 5, 10, and 15 m from the passer.

How it runs. Round 1 (if needed): ten passes at one distance. Round 2: before each pass the receiver jogs to a line of their choice and calls it. The passer must play a pass that stops within one step of the receiver. Change roles after 15 passes.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: use only two distances. Harder: the receiver calls the line while the ball is already being struck, or adds a fourth line at 20 m.

Coach's role. Expect more misses in Round 2 and say so: *"Misses here mean you are learning to judge distance."* Count successful passes per round, not per pass.

Drill 2D: Mixed Stations



Link to the objective. Interleaves three related skills so each attempt requires a fresh plan, the conditions under which contextual interference supports retention.

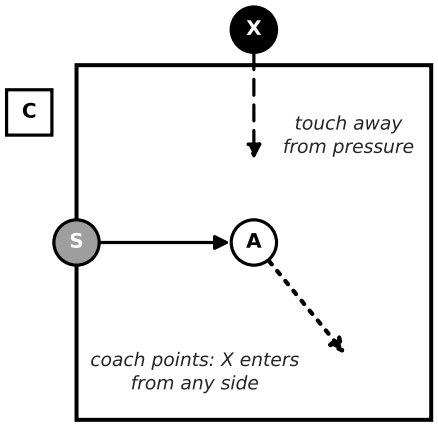
Setup. Three stations 8 m apart: a wall pass with a rebound board or partner, a receive-and-turn through a gate, and a shot into a small goal. A random-order card for each player.

How it runs. Players move through the stations in the order printed on the card (for example: shot, turn, wall pass, turn, shot). One attempt per station, then move to the next on the card. Ten attempts per player per round.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: use two stations, or repeat each station twice before moving on. Harder: add a time limit for the whole card.

Coach's role. Do not judge the drill by how smooth it looks. Test with a short retention check at the start of the next session.

Drill 2E: Pressure From Anywhere



Link to the objective. Varies the context of receiving (where the pressure comes from) so that the first touch must adapt rather than repeat.

Setup. A 15 × 15 m square. A server on one side, a receiver in the middle, and a defender who starts outside the square at any of the other three sides.

How it runs. The coach points to the side where the defender enters. As the server passes, the defender steps in at walking or jogging pace. The receiver must take the first touch away from the pressure and dribble out of the square on the opposite side. Change roles every four attempts.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: the defender only shadows. Harder: two defenders may enter, or the receiver must play out with one touch.

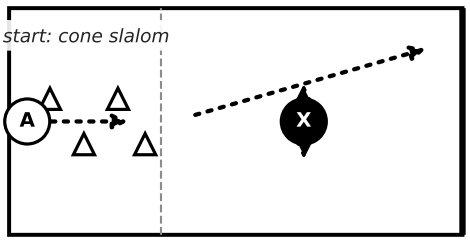
Coach's role. Ask the receiver after each set: *"When did you see the defender?"* Early sight is the target.

Principle 3: Transfer of Learning

Leverage Positive Transfer Between Skills

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to state the intended transfer before choosing a drill, identify drills likely to produce limited or negative transfer, and redesign them so they share functional elements with the game.

Drill 3A: From Slalom to Shadow to Live 1v1



stage 1 shadow → 2 walking tackle → 3 live 1v1

Link to the objective. Converts a limited-transfer drill into a positive-transfer drill by adding the defender's cue in steps.

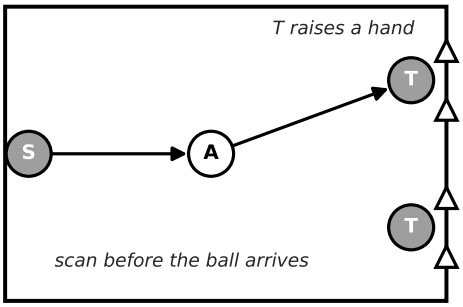
Setup. A 10 × 20 m channel with an end line to dribble across. Start with the familiar cone slalom in the first third of the channel.

How it runs. Stage 1: replace the cones with a "shadow" defender who moves side to side but does not tackle; the dribbler must go to the side the defender leaves open. Stage 2: the defender may tackle at walking pace. Stage 3: live 1v1, with the dribbler scoring by stopping the ball on the end line.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: widen the channel. Harder: narrow it, or give the defender a head start toward the dribbler.

Coach's role. Ask after each set: *"What did the defender do just before you changed direction?"* A player who cannot answer is probably not using the defender's cue yet.

Drill 3B: Two-Target Receiving



Link to the objective. Prevents negative transfer from pre-determined passing patterns by forcing the receiver to gather information before receiving.

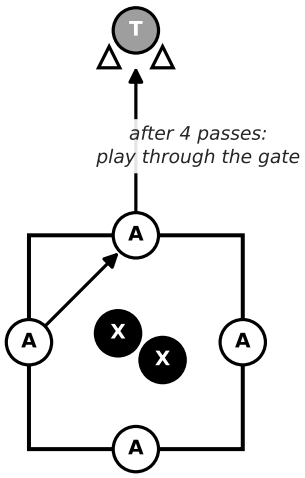
Setup. A 15 × 10 m area. A server at one end; two target players at the other end, each standing in a small gate.

How it runs. As the server passes to the central receiver, one target player raises a hand. The receiver must check over the shoulder before the ball arrives, open the body toward the signaling target, and play to that gate.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: the target signals before the pass. Harder: signal later, or add a defender who blocks one gate so the receiver must read the defender rather than a hand signal.

Coach's role. Count how often the receiver looks before the ball arrives. That behavior, not the pass itself, is the element meant to transfer.

Drill 3C: Rondo With a Direction



Link to the objective. A standard rondo builds passing and support but has no direction. Adding a target to play forward keeps what transfers (pressure, angles, decisions) and adds what the game requires.

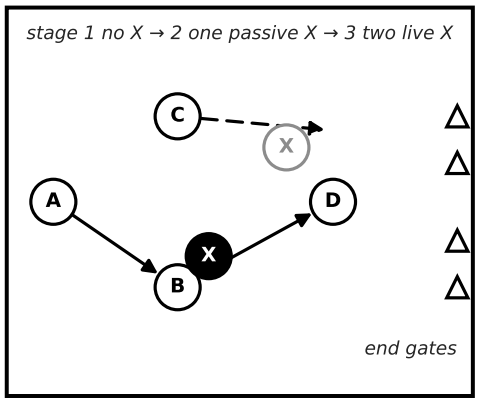
Setup. A 12 × 12 m square with four attackers on the sides and two defenders inside. A target player stands 10 m beyond one side, behind a 3 m gate.

How it runs. Attackers keep possession. After four passes, they may play through the gate to the target for a point. The target returns the ball and play restarts. If the defenders win the ball, they score by dribbling out of the square.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: 5v2, or allow the forward pass after three passes. Harder: two targets on opposite sides with only one active (the coach calls which), or narrow the gate.

Coach's role. Before starting, tell players the intended transfer: *"This is how we play forward through midfield."*

Drill 3D: Pattern to Live Build-Up



Link to the objective. Passing patterns can rehearse movements that never happen in games. This drill uses the pattern only briefly, then adds the opponents who make the pattern meaningful.

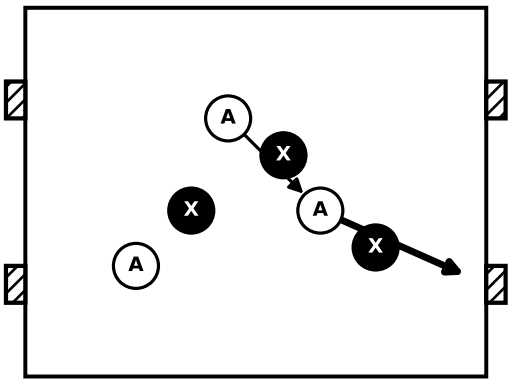
Setup. Half a pitch. A center back, two midfielders, and a forward against no defenders at first. Mini-goals or end gates at the halfway line.

How it runs. Stage 1 (two repetitions): the unopposed pattern, center back to midfielder to forward. Stage 2: one passive defender marks one midfielder. Stage 3: two active defenders; the attackers may use any route to score through an end gate. Most time is spent in Stage 3.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: keep Stage 2 longer. Harder: add a third defender or a time limit to score.

Coach's role. Ask the attackers after Stage 3: *"When did the pattern work, and when did you change it?"*

Drill 3E: Weaker-Foot 3v3



weaker-foot goal = 3 points

Link to the objective. Bilateral transfer suggests that practice with one limb can benefit the other. This game makes practice with the weaker foot frequent while keeping it inside game decisions.

Setup. A 25 × 20 m pitch with two small goals at each end. Teams of three.

How it runs. Normal 3v3 rules. Goals scored with the weaker foot count three points; any pass with the weaker foot that leads directly to a shot counts one point. Play four-minute games.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: allow two touches on the strong foot before a weaker-foot pass. Harder: goals count only when scored with the weaker foot.

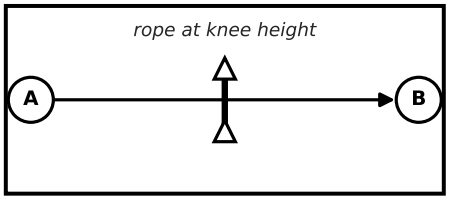
Coach's role. Track weaker-foot touches for a few players and share the count afterward. Players often underestimate how much they avoid that foot.

Principle 4: Action-Effect Principle

Focus on External Effects, Not Body Movements

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to rewrite body-focused cues as effect-focused cues, give one concise cue per attempt, and judge cue effectiveness by retention rather than by immediate performance.

Drill 4A: Skim-the-Grass Gates



cue: "skim the grass through the gate"

Link to the objective. Practices the driven pass with a single effect-focused cue and a visible outcome that makes the effect self-evident.

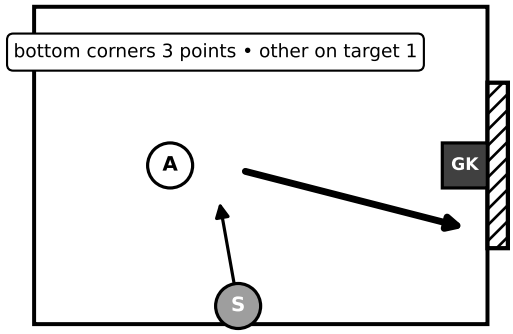
Setup. Pairs 12–15 m apart. Halfway between them, a gate made of two cones with a rope or pole set at knee height across the top.

How it runs. Players pass through the gate and under the rope to their partner. The only cue: *"Skim the grass through the gate."* Ten passes each, then switch feet.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: widen the gate or raise the rope. Harder: narrow the gate, lengthen the distance, or require a first-time pass.

Coach's role. Say the cue once at the start of the set. If players need more help, point at the gate or the rope rather than at a body part.

Drill 4B: Cue Comparison Challenge



set 1 body cue • set 2 target cue

Link to the objective. Lets players and coach compare an internal and an external cue on the same task, which builds the habit of testing cues rather than assuming them.

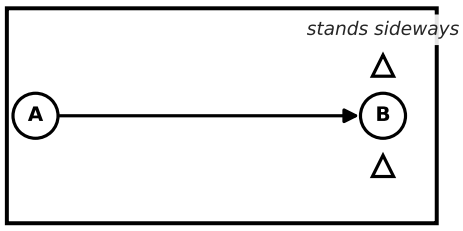
Setup. A goal divided into target zones (bottom corners count three points, other on-target shots one point). Shooters strike a ball rolled in from the side.

How it runs. Set 1 (five shots): internal cue, *"lock your ankle and point your toe."* Set 2 (five shots): external cue, *"drive the ball into the bottom corner."* Alternate the order across players. After both sets, players say which cue helped more and why.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: closer to goal, stationary ball. Harder: add a goalkeeper or a time limit.

Coach's role. Record points per set. Treat the comparison as a practice activity rather than a test; the real test is the retention check below.

Drill 4C: Arrive on the Back Foot



cue: "arrive at the back foot"

Link to the objective. Uses an effect-focused cue (where the ball should arrive) instead of a body cue, and tests the cue by results.

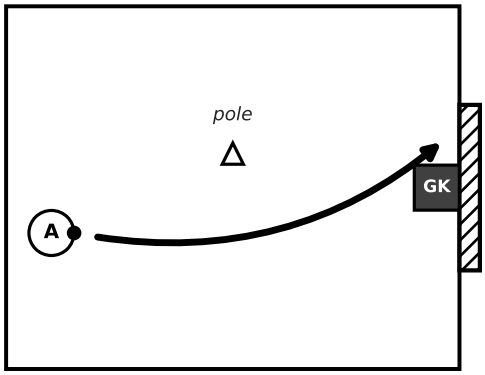
Setup. Pairs 10 m apart. The receiver stands sideways between two cones, so one foot is clearly the back foot.

How it runs. The passer's only cue: *"Make the ball arrive at your partner's back foot."* The receiver controls with the back foot and passes back. Ten passes each, then the receiver turns to face the other way, so the back foot changes.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: shorten the distance. Harder: the receiver changes stance just before the pass is struck.

Coach's role. Give one cue per set, not per pass. Judge the cue by accuracy in the next session.

Drill 4D: Bend It Around the Pole



start outside the pole, finish inside the post

Link to the objective. Directs attention to the ball's flight path, an external effect, for a technique that coaches often teach through body detail.

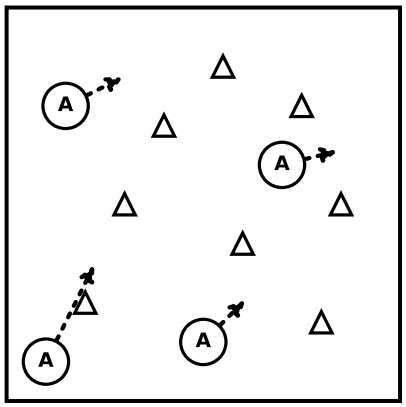
Setup. A goal with a goalkeeper. A pole or mannequin 10 m in front of goal, slightly off center. Shooters 18 m out.

How it runs. The cue: *"Start the ball outside the pole and finish inside the post."* Each shooter takes five shots, then the pole moves to the other side of goal and players shoot with the other foot.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: no goalkeeper, larger target. Harder: add a second pole to form a wall.

Coach's role. If a player asks about technique, answer in terms of the ball: *"Strike so it spins around the pole."*

Drill 4E: Ball on a Leash



round 1 body cue • round 2 "ball on a short leash"

Link to the objective. Compares an analogy cue with a body cue for close dribbling, and asks players which helped, a way to test cues instead of assuming one is best.

Setup. A 20 × 20 m area with cones scattered as obstacles. Each player has a ball.

How it runs. Round 1 (one minute): body cue, *"touch the ball with the outside of your little toe."* Round 2: analogy cue, *"keep the ball on a short leash."* Count touches that leave the area or hit a cone. Swap the order for half the group.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: fewer cones. Harder: add two defenders who try to knock balls out.

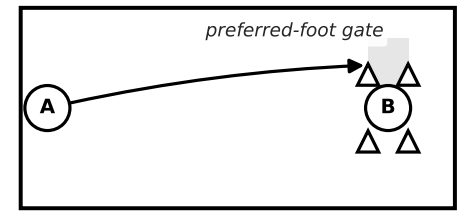
Coach's role. Ask players to say which cue helped. Accept that the answer can differ between players.

Principle 5: Augmented Feedback

Using KR and KP to Guide Skill Improvement

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to choose between KR and KP for a given error, phrase feedback so it is observable, actionable, and tied to the task goal, and use video with a specific viewing question.

Drill 5A: Estimate, Then Confirm



after 5 passes: estimate → confirm → one KP cue

Link to the objective. Trains the coach to use KR only when it adds information, and trains the player to read intrinsic feedback before receiving augmented feedback.

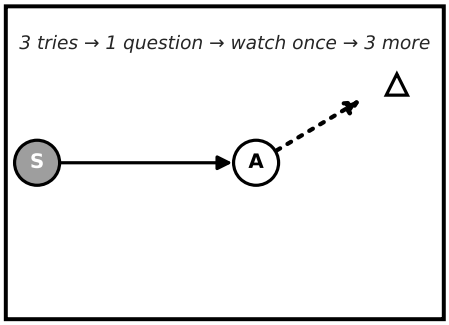
Setup. Pairs 10 m apart, with a 1 m gate on each side of the receiver marking the "preferred foot" side.

How it runs. The passer plays five passes to the receiver's preferred foot. After the set, the passer estimates how many arrived on the correct side. The receiver (or coach) confirms the count. Only then does the coach add one KP statement if a pattern needs correction.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: wider gates or shorter distance. Harder: narrower gates, a moving receiver, or a first-time pass.

Coach's role. Record the gap between estimated and actual counts. As the gap shrinks, the player is detecting errors without help, which reduces the need for KR.

Drill 5B: One Clip, One Question



× tablet

Link to the objective. Uses video as targeted KP rather than general review.

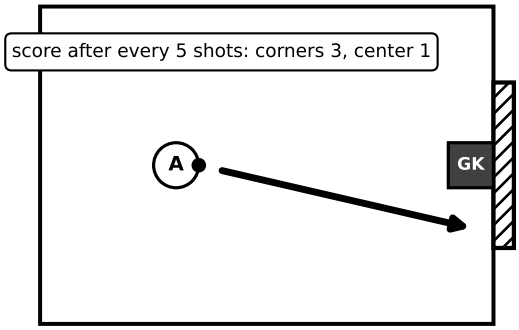
Setup. A tablet on a tripod filming a receiving-and-turning activity from the side. One player at a time is filmed for three attempts.

How it runs. Before showing the clip, the coach asks one question: *"Watch where your first touch sends the ball compared with where you want to go next."* The player watches the clip once, answers the question, and then performs three more attempts immediately.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: slow motion and a pause at the moment of contact. Harder: the player chooses the feature to look for and explains it.

Coach's role. Keep each review under one minute. One viewing question per clip; no running commentary.

Drill 5C: Scoreboard Shooting



KP only after 3 misses the same way

Link to the objective. Gives knowledge of results (KR) only, so players must link their own feel with the outcome. Knowledge of performance (KP) is added only when a repeated pattern appears.

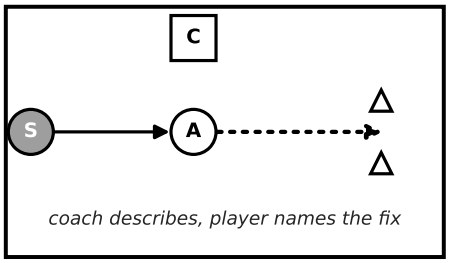
Setup. A goal divided into zones with ropes or cones (corners three points, center one point). A whiteboard or card to record scores.

How it runs. Each player shoots five times, and the score is written up after each set. The coach adds one KP statement only if a player misses in the same direction three times in a row.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: shoot from closer, or remove the goalkeeper. Harder: add a defender closing from the side.

Coach's role. Keep feedback to the score unless the pattern rule is met. Ask: *"What did your best shot feel like?"*

Drill 5D: Name the Fix



Link to the objective. The coach describes the error (descriptive KP) and the player proposes the correction, which builds error detection and correction.

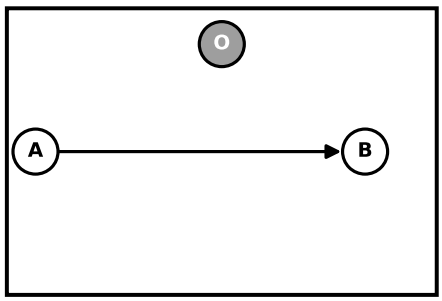
Setup. A receiving-and-turning activity: a server, a receiver, and a gate to turn through, 12 m apart.

How it runs. After a failed attempt, the coach describes one observable fact: *"Your first touch went behind you."* The player must say what to change before the next attempt, then tries it. If the change does not work after two attempts, the coach gives a prescriptive cue.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: the coach offers two choices. Harder: the player must describe both the error and the fix.

Coach's role. Describe; do not prescribe at first. Keep statements short and observable.

Drill 5E: Peer Feedback Cards



card: arrived at front foot? (KR)
first touch out of the body? (KP)

Link to the objective. Teaches players to give observable, actionable feedback using KR and KP, which also sharpens their own understanding of the task goal.

Setup. Groups of three: a passer, a receiver, and an observer with a card listing two prompts: *"Did the ball arrive at the front foot?"* (KR) and *"Was the first touch out of the body?"* (KP).

How it runs. The pair completes five passes and receives. The observer gives one KR statement and one KP statement, using only the words on the card. Rotate roles.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: KR prompt only. Harder: the observer chooses which prompt matters most and explains why.

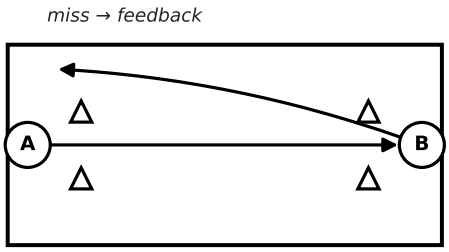
Coach's role. Coach the observers: listen to their feedback and help them make it observable.

Principle 6: Feedback Frequency

Less Can Be More: Summary, Bandwidth, and Self-Selected Feedback

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to choose a feedback schedule (summary, faded, bandwidth, or self-selected) for a given learner and task, explain it to players, and test whether players can self-correct when the coach is silent.

Drill 6A: Bandwidth Gates



Link to the objective. Applies a bandwidth schedule the players understand, so feedback appears only when it is needed.

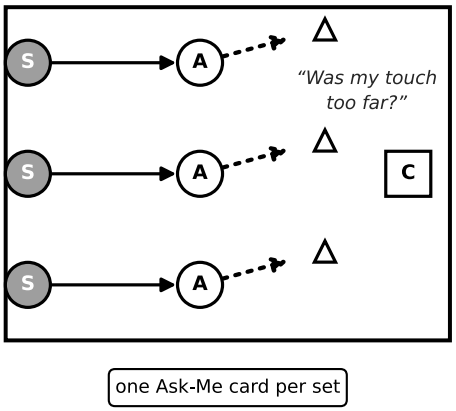
Setup. Pairs 12 m apart. A 2 m gate in front of each receiver marks the acceptable range.

How it runs. The coach explains the rule: feedback only when the pass misses the gate. Players complete three sets of ten passes. After each set, the passer states how many passes were inside the gate. Narrow the gate to 1.5 m once a pair reaches eight out of ten.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: wider gate, shorter distance. Harder: narrower gate, weaker foot, or a moving receiver.

Coach's role. Stay silent while passes are inside the bandwidth. When a pass misses, give one short KP statement, not a lecture.

Drill 6B: The Ask-Me Card



Link to the objective. Introduces self-selected feedback and builds the habit of evaluating attempts before asking for help.

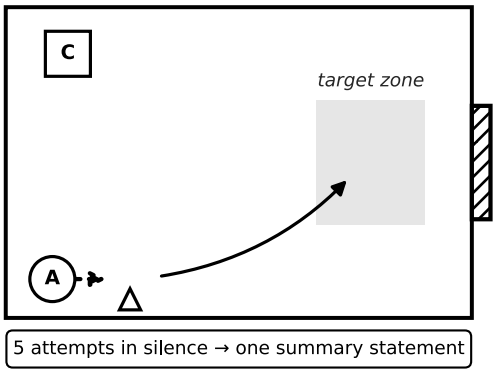
Setup. Any repeated technique activity, such as receiving and turning. Each player has one card (or token) per set.

How it runs. Players complete three attempts, then decide whether to "spend" the card to ask the coach one question. The question must be specific: *"Was my touch too far?"* is allowed; *"Was that good?"* is not.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: two cards per set for beginners. Harder: one card per two sets.

Coach's role. Answer the question asked, briefly. Note which players never ask and which ask after every set; both patterns are worth a conversation.

Drill 6C: Summary After Five



Link to the objective. Uses summary feedback: the coach watches a block of attempts in silence, then gives one statement about the most common pattern.

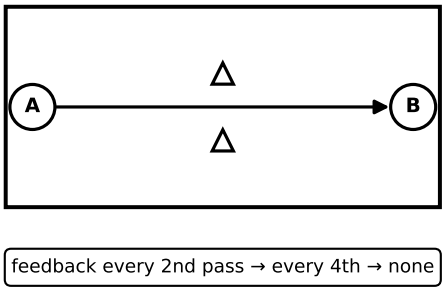
Setup. Any repeated technique activity, for example crossing from a wide cone to a target zone.

How it runs. Each player completes five attempts with no feedback. The coach then gives one summary statement: *"Four of five crosses landed short of the zone."* The player completes the next five.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: summary after three attempts. Harder: summary after ten, or the player predicts the summary before the coach speaks.

Coach's role. Resist commenting during the block. Write down the pattern rather than reacting to single attempts.

Drill 6D: Faded Feedback Ladder



Link to the objective. Gradually reduces feedback so players rely more on their own information. A no-feedback retention check then tests whether learning lasted.

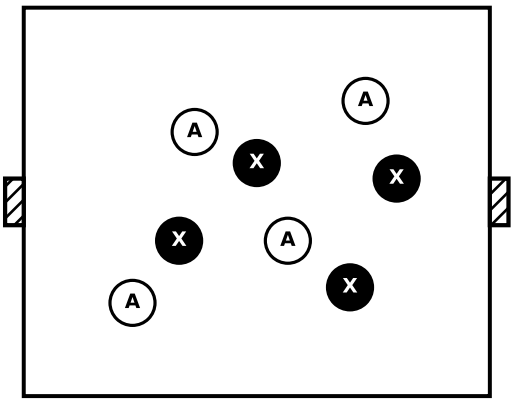
Setup. Pairs passing through a 2 m gate, 12 m apart.

How it runs. Set 1: feedback after every second pass. Set 2: after every fourth. Set 3: none. Next session: one set with no feedback as a retention check, recorded as passes through the gate out of ten.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: fade more slowly. Harder: widen the distance during Set 3.

Coach's role. Explain the plan to players beforehand so silence is not read as indifference.

Drill 6E: Silent Coach Game



Link to the objective. Tests whether players can detect and fix problems when the coach says nothing, the real condition of match play.

Setup. A 4v4 game on a 30 × 25 m pitch with small goals.

How it runs. Play four minutes with no coach comments. Then a 60-second team huddle: each team answers one question, *"What should we change?"*, and chooses one fix. Play another four minutes, then compare.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: give teams a choice of two fixes. Harder: teams must also say how they will know the fix worked.

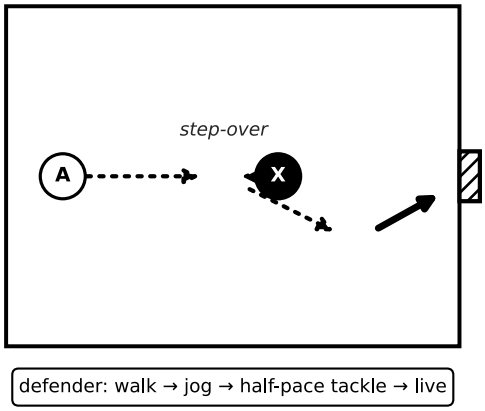
Coach's role. Observe and take notes. Speak only for safety.

Principle 7: Whole vs. Part Practice

Find the Right Balance for Complex Skills

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to classify a skill by complexity and organization, choose among whole practice, segmentation, and simplification, and reconnect any isolated part to the full action quickly.

Drill 7A: Simplify, Don't Split



Link to the objective. Keeps the full sequence intact while reducing its difficulty, which preserves the timing between the feint and the defender.

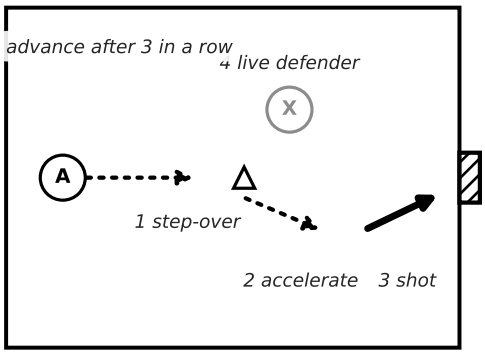
Setup. A 15 × 20 m channel ending at a small goal. One attacker, one defender.

How it runs. Round 1: the defender walks toward the attacker and does not tackle; the attacker performs the full step-over, acceleration, and shot. Round 2: the defender jogs. Round 3: the defender may tackle at half pace. Round 4: live.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: more space between attacker and defender at the start. Harder: less space, or a second defender covering behind.

Coach's role. Watch the *distance* at which the step-over happens. The goal is a feint close enough to commit the defender and far enough to escape, which only exists when the defender is present.

Drill 7B: Segment and Chain



Link to the objective. Uses progressive part practice with brief isolation and fast reconnection.

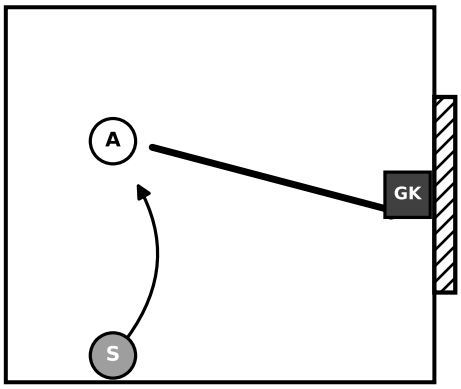
Setup. The same channel as Drill 7A, with a cone representing the defender for the first stage.

How it runs. Stage 1 (two minutes): step-over at the cone. Stage 2: step-over plus a three-step acceleration past the cone. Stage 3: step-over, acceleration, and shot. Stage 4: replace the cone with a live defender. Players move to the next stage after three successful attempts in a row.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: stay longer at Stage 2. Harder: skip Stage 1 for players who already have the footwork.

Coach's role. Keep Stage 1 short. If the full action breaks down at Stage 4, return to Stage 3 rather than to isolated footwork.

Drill 7C: Soft Serve Volleys



underhand → firmer → kicked → cross

Link to the objective. Volleying is a highly organized skill whose parts depend on each other. Simplifying the serve keeps the whole action intact, which is usually better than splitting it.

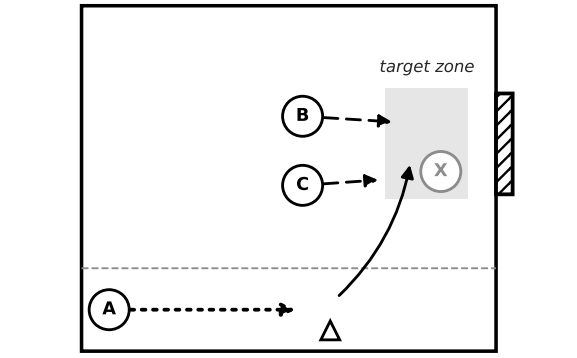
Setup. A goal with a goalkeeper. A server with balls 8 m to the side of the shooter, who stands 12 m from goal.

How it runs. Round 1: the server throws underhand at a soft, predictable height. Round 2: a firmer throw. Round 3: a kicked serve. Round 4: a cross from wide. The shooter always performs the full volley.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: stay longer in Round 1, or allow a bounce. Harder: vary height and speed without warning.

Coach's role. Simplify the ball, not the movement.

Drill 7D: Crossing, Segmented and Reconnected



1 static ball → 2 dribble and cross → 3 + attackers → 4 + defenders

Link to the objective. Crossing after a run is a long sequence that can be segmented into the approach and the delivery. The parts are then reconnected quickly so they do not stay isolated.

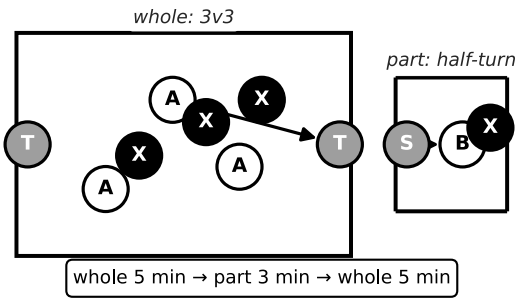
Setup. A wide channel ending near the corner flag. A target zone in the box with two attackers. Cones mark the crossing spot.

How it runs. Stage 1 (three crosses): strike a stationary ball from the crossing spot into the zone. Stage 2: dribble 15 m and cross. Stage 3: dribble and cross while the attackers attack the zone. Stage 4: add a defender in the box and a recovering defender on the winger.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: a larger target zone. Harder: the winger must cross within two touches of entering the channel.

Coach's role. Move to the next stage after three good deliveries. Spend most of the time in Stages 3 and 4.

Drill 7E: Whole, Part, Whole Turning



Link to the objective. Applies whole–part–whole: the game exposes the problem, a short part practice targets it, and the game returns at once to test the change.

Setup. A 30 × 20 m area. Play 3v3 with a target player at each end. A side grid for the part practice.

How it runs. Whole (five minutes): 3v3; score by playing to the target. Part (three minutes): in the side grid, players practice receiving on the half-turn from a server, with a passive defender. Whole (five minutes): back to 3v3; a goal after a forward turn counts double.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: a longer part phase for players at an early stage. Harder: an active defender in the part phase.

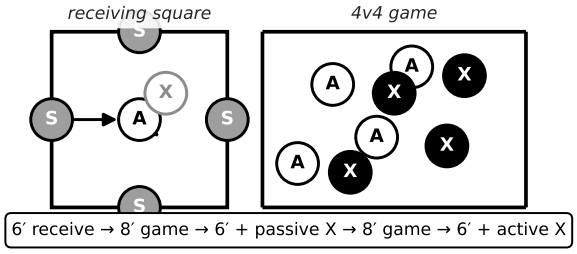
Coach's role. Keep the part phase short and tied to what the game showed.

Principle 8: Distribution of Practice

Distribute Practice When Quality Declines

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to recognize when fatigue or attention loss is degrading practice quality, and to distribute practice within and across sessions so that repetitions remain worth learning from.

Drill 8A: Pulse Blocks



Link to the objective. Distributes a receiving objective within one session so each block is performed at high quality.

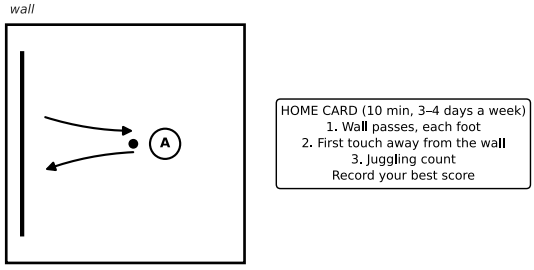
Setup. A 20 × 20 m receiving square with servers on the edges, plus a nearby small-sided game area.

How it runs. Block 1 (6 minutes): receiving and turning in the square. Then 8 minutes of a 4v4 game. Block 2 (6 minutes): the same receiving objective with a passive defender added. Then 8 minutes of a different game. Block 3 (6 minutes): receiving with an active defender.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: longer rests or simpler games between blocks. Harder: link the games to the receiving objective (for example, a goal counts double after a turn).

Coach's role. End each block while quality is still high, not after it has collapsed. Note the time point at which quality begins to drop; it is the coach's best guide for future block length.

Drill 8B: The Ten-Minute Home Challenge



Link to the objective. Distributes practice across days rather than concentrating it in one weekly session.

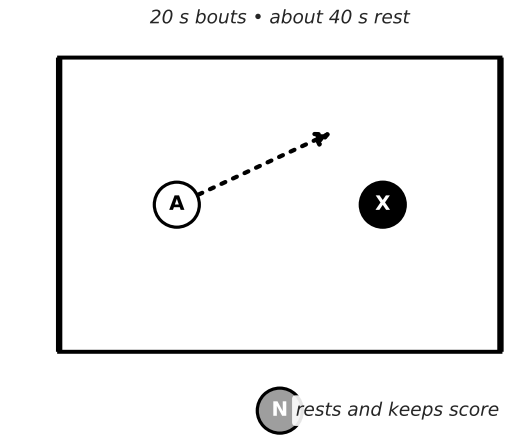
Setup. Each player has a ball and a wall or a partner at home. The coach provides a simple card with three tasks: wall passes with each foot, a first touch away from the wall, and a juggling count.

How it runs. Players complete the card for ten minutes, three or four days a week, and record their best score for each task. At the next practice, players report their scores in pairs.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: two tasks only. Harder: add a weak-foot requirement or a time limit.

Coach's role. Keep it voluntary and enjoyable. The card should not become homework that adds stress to a child's schedule.

Drill 8C: One-v-One Bouts



Link to the objective. Builds rest into a high-intensity duel so that every repetition stays at match quality instead of fading with fatigue.

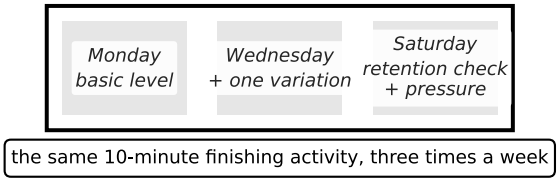
Setup. A 15 × 10 m channel with an end line at each side. Groups of three: two players duel, one rests and keeps score.

How it runs. Bouts last 20 seconds. Score by stopping the ball on the opponent's end line. After each bout, rotate: the resting player replaces the loser. Each player works about 20 seconds and rests about 40.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: bouts of 15 seconds. Harder: 2v2 bouts with four resting.

Coach's role. Shorten bouts as soon as you see players walking in the last seconds.

Drill 8D: Spread the Same Ten Minutes



Link to the objective. Distributes one practice goal across sessions instead of massing it into one long block, using the spacing effect.

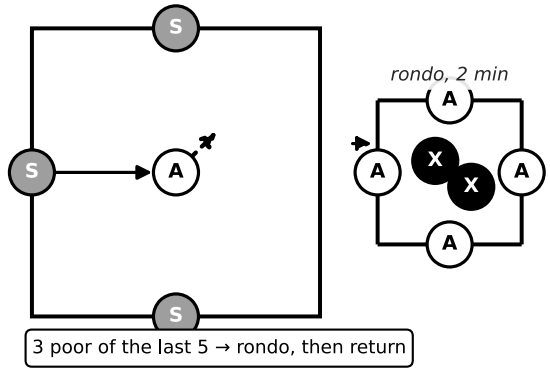
Setup. A weekly plan: three sessions. The same 10-minute finishing activity appears at the start of each session, after the warm-up.

How it runs. Monday: the activity at a basic level. Wednesday: the same activity with one variation added. Saturday: a short retention check (five shots, same conditions as Monday), then the activity with pressure added. Record goals per five shots.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: keep the conditions the same across all three days. Harder: change the type of service on each day.

Coach's role. Compare Saturday's retention check with Monday's start, not with the end of Monday.

Drill 8E: The Quality Stop Rule



Link to the objective. Uses a simple rule to stop practice when repetitions are no longer worth learning from, then returns after recovery.

Setup. A receiving-and-turning square with servers. A nearby area for a low-intensity rondo.

How it runs. Players count their good repetitions. When three of the last five are poor, the player moves to the rondo for two minutes, then returns.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: switch after two poor repetitions out of five. Harder: a stricter standard for a good repetition.

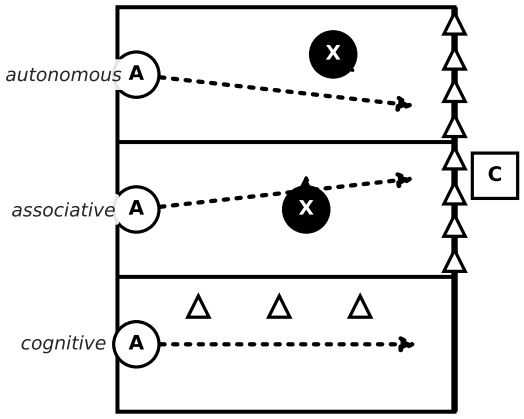
Coach's role. Agree with players beforehand on what counts as a good repetition, so they can judge it themselves.

Principle 9: Stages of Learning

Tailor Coaching to Cognitive, Associative, and Autonomous Phases

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to identify a player's stage for a specific skill under specific demands, and adjust instruction, feedback, and challenge accordingly within the same team activity.

Drill 9A: Three-Lane Dribble



Link to the objective. Applies stage-appropriate constraints to one shared objective in one organized activity.

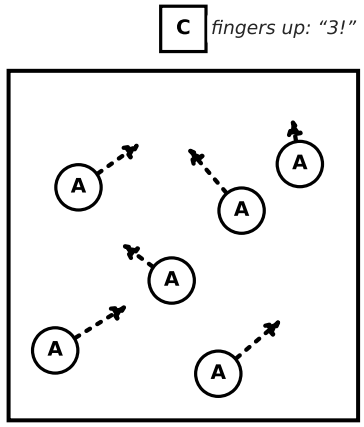
Setup. Three parallel lanes, 10 m wide and 25 m long, with an end line in each.

How it runs. *Cognitive lane:* dribble to the end line, no defender, cones as reference points; one cue (*"keep the ball close enough to touch every step"*). *Associative lane:* a passive defender who shadows; the dribbler must look up to see which end gate the coach opens. *Autonomous lane:* a live defender and two end gates; score through the gate the defender leaves open.

Make it easier / harder. Move players between lanes after every two rounds based on performance, not on age or reputation.

Coach's role. Give the cognitive lane a short demonstration and encouragement; give the associative lane less frequent, more specific feedback; give the autonomous lane questions about decisions rather than technique.

Drill 9B: Dual-Task Scan Check



count lost balls and missed calls

Link to the objective. Provides a practical way to estimate how automatic a dribbling skill is for each player.

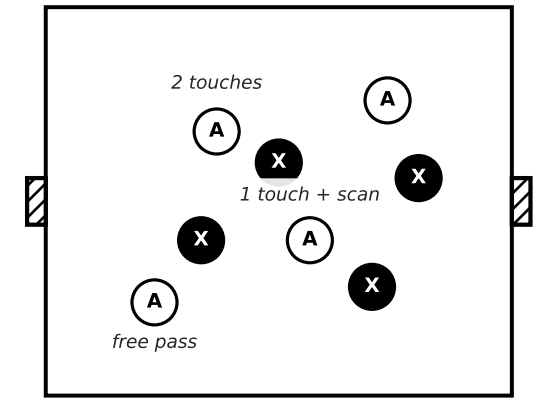
Setup. A 15 × 15 m area. Each player has a ball. The coach stands at one edge.

How it runs. Players dribble freely. Every few seconds the coach raises a number of fingers; players must call the number out while keeping the ball under control. Count lost balls and missed calls over one minute.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: raise the fingers more slowly. Harder: add a second coach on the opposite edge, or have players call a color instead of a number.

Coach's role. A player who loses the ball or misses most calls is still relying heavily on attention for close control (cognitive or early associative). A player who manages both is ready for the autonomous lane.

Drill 9C: Same Game, Different Rules



each player plays with a condition matched to their stage

Link to the objective. Lets players at different stages play the same game with individual conditions matched to their stage.

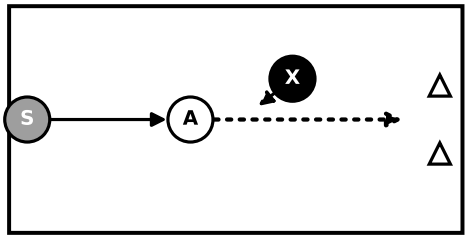
Setup. A 4v4 game on a 30 × 25 m pitch. Each player has a colored wristband or bib marking their condition.

How it runs. Cognitive stage: unlimited touches and one free pass without pressure. Associative stage: a two-touch limit. Autonomous stage: one-touch when receiving in midfield, and must scan before receiving. Swap players' conditions after a few games based on what you see.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: fewer conditions. Harder: the autonomous player defends one extra opponent.

Coach's role. Give cognitive-stage players more guidance, associative-stage players questions, and autonomous-stage players challenges.

Drill 9D: Self-Rate, Then Test



self-rate 1–3 → 5 tries vs passive X → 5 tries vs active X

Link to the objective. Checks a player's stage for one skill under specific demands, instead of assuming it from age or general ability.

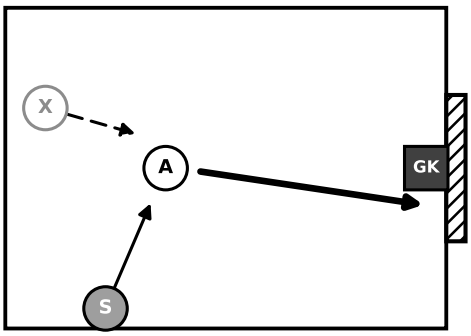
Setup. A receiving channel with a server and two conditions: a passive defender and an active defender.

How it runs. Players rate themselves for receiving and turning: 1 (still thinking about it), 2 (mostly reliable), or 3 (automatic under pressure). Each player then completes five attempts against the passive defender and five against the active one. Group players by what they show, not by what they rated.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: no defender for the first set. Harder: add a time limit to turn.

Coach's role. Share the results privately and explain what the next stage looks like.

Drill 9E: Pressure Ladder



rung 1 free → 2 within 3 s → 3 recovering X → 4 three in a row

Link to the objective. Gives autonomous-stage players extra demands (time, scoring stakes, dual tasks) that keep practice challenging and test whether the skill holds.

Setup. A finishing channel with a server, a goal, and a goalkeeper.

How it runs. Rung 1: finish with no pressure. Rung 2: finish within three seconds. Rung 3: finish with a defender recovering. Rung 4: the team needs three goals in a row to win a point. Players climb when they score three of five.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: stay on a rung longer. Harder: add a dual task, such as calling a number shown by the coach before shooting.

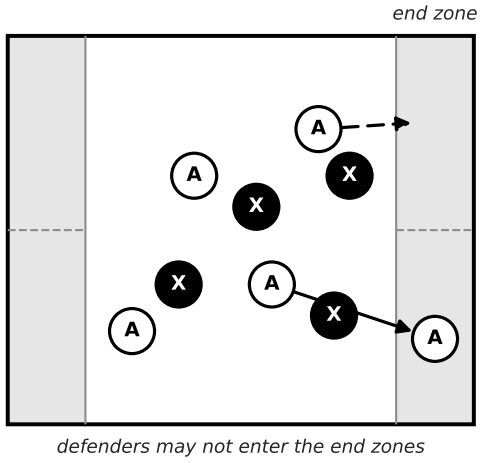
Coach's role. Watch for players who move backward under pressure. That is normal and tells you which rung to practice.

Principle 10: Practice Like You Play

Preserve Perception–Action Coupling

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to design a small-sided game in which the rules and space amplify a target problem without removing the player's choice.

Drill 10A: 4v4 End-Zone Game



Link to the objective. Amplifies the forward-passing problem while preserving defenders' choices.

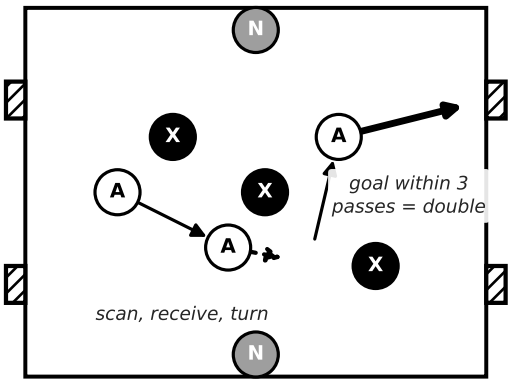
Setup. A 30 × 25 m pitch with a 5 m end zone at each end, each end zone split into two halves (left and right).

How it runs. Teams score by completing a pass to a teammate who controls the ball inside the opponent's end zone. Defenders cannot enter the end zone. Play 4-minute games with 1-minute rests.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: widen the pitch or add a neutral player who plays for the team in possession (4v4+1). Harder: narrow the pitch, or allow one defender into the end zone.

Coach's role. Freeze play sparingly. When you do, ask the player on the ball: *"What did you see before you passed sideways?"* rather than telling the player where the pass should have gone.

Drill 10B: Scan-to-Score 3v3+2



Link to the objective. Couples the forward-passing problem with the perceptual behavior (scanning) that makes forward passing possible.

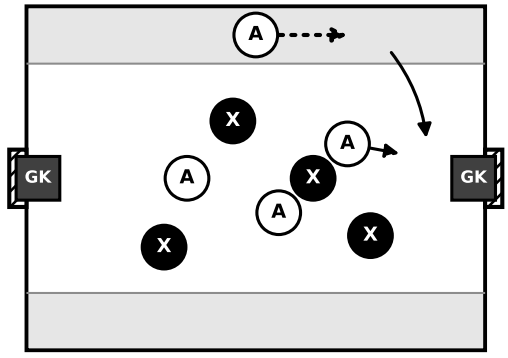
Setup. A 25 × 20 m area with two small goals at each end. Two neutral players play for the team in possession.

How it runs. Normal small-sided rules, with one bonus: a goal scored within three passes of a midfielder receiving and turning forward counts double. The coach (or a substitute) calls "scan!" points when a receiver visibly checks over the shoulder before receiving.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: remove one defender (3v2+2). Harder: remove the neutral players or reduce touches to two.

Coach's role. Recognize scans aloud without commenting on the pass that followed. The aim is to reinforce the information-gathering behavior.

Drill 10C: Wide Channels 5v5



no tackling in the channels • goal from a cross counts double

Link to the objective. A small-sided game in which the rules and space make width valuable without forcing it.

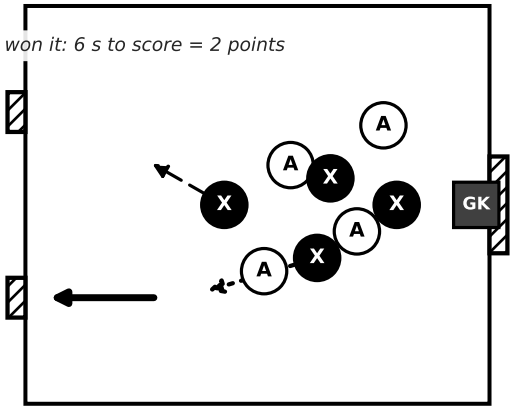
Setup. A 40 × 30 m pitch with goals and goalkeepers. A 5 m channel down each side. Teams of five.

How it runs. Players in the side channels cannot be tackled. A goal scored from a cross out of a channel counts double. Only one player per team may be in each channel at a time.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: wider channels. Harder: one defender may enter the channel.

Coach's role. Ask after games: *"When did using the channel make sense, and when did it not?"*

Drill 10D: Win It and Go



Link to the objective. Amplifies the moment of transition, one of the most important information-rich phases of the game, by rewarding fast counter-attacks.

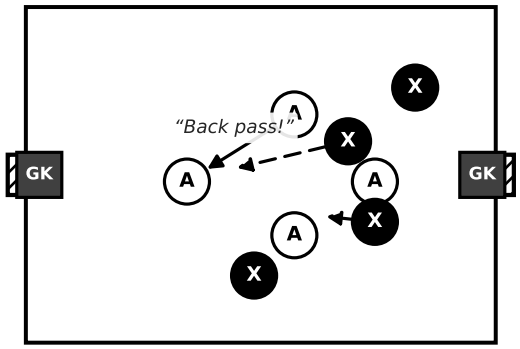
Setup. A 35 × 30 m pitch with a goal and goalkeeper at one end and two counter-goals at the other end. Four attackers against four defenders.

How it runs. The attackers try to score in the main goal. When the defenders win the ball, they have six seconds to score in a counter-goal for two points. After six seconds, a counter-goal counts one point.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: 4v3 for the attackers. Harder: shorten the counter window to four seconds.

Coach's role. Notice who reacts first after a turnover, on both teams.

Drill 10E: Press Trigger Game



win it within 5 s of a back pass = 1 point

Link to the objective. Makes a pressing cue (a back pass) visible and rewarded, so players learn to read when to press as a group.

Setup. A 4v4 game plus goalkeepers on a 35 × 25 m pitch.

How it runs. Normal rules. If the defending team wins the ball within five seconds of the opponents making a back pass, the regained ball counts as a point.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: allow seven seconds. Harder: the point counts only if the team then scores within five passes.

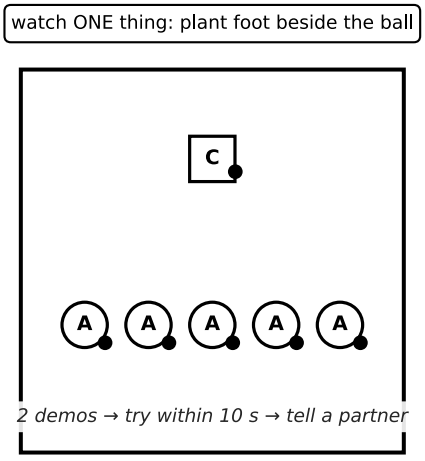
Coach's role. Ask players to call the trigger out loud: *"Back pass!"* This makes the cue explicit.

Principle 11: Observational Learning and Demonstration

Show With a Purpose, Then Let the Learner Act

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to plan a demonstration by deciding who models, what the learner watches, from which angle, and when the learner attempts, and to use peers and video as models.

Drill 11A: Watch One Thing



Link to the objective. Applies a planned demonstration routine: one feature, the learner's viewing angle, and an immediate attempt.

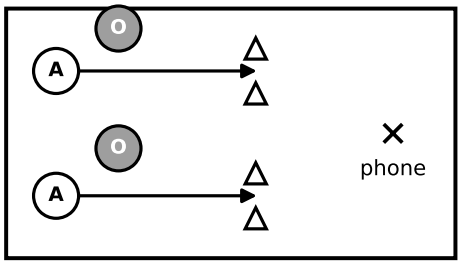
Setup. Players in a line behind or beside the demonstrator, each with a ball, in a 15 × 15 m area.

How it runs. The coach names one feature, demonstrates twice (slow, then game speed), and players attempt within ten seconds. After three attempts, players pair up and tell each other what feature they were watching for. The coach repeats the demonstration after two minutes with the same feature or a new one.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: slower demonstration, stationary ball. Harder: the player watches a demonstration against a passive defender and must identify when the turn was triggered.

Coach's role. Ask players to name the feature before they attempt. A player who cannot name it did not attend to it.

Drill 11B: Learning-Model Pairs



O watches one feature, describes it, then roles switch

Link to the objective. Uses peers and video as models, including a learning model whose errors and corrections are visible.

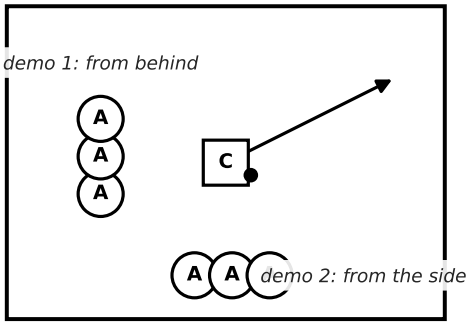
Setup. Pairs, one tablet or phone per small group.

How it runs. Player A performs three attempts while Player B watches for the named feature. B then describes what A did and A performs again. Switch roles. Once per session, film each player's best attempt so the player can watch it before the next session (self-modeling).

Make it easier / harder. Easier: give the observer a simple checklist with one item. Harder: the observer must identify both the error and a correction.

Coach's role. Pair players at similar levels so the observer sees a model just ahead of their own stage, not an unreachable expert.

Drill 11C: Watch From Where You Play



Link to the objective. Shows that viewing angle matters: learners watch from the angle that reveals the feature they need.

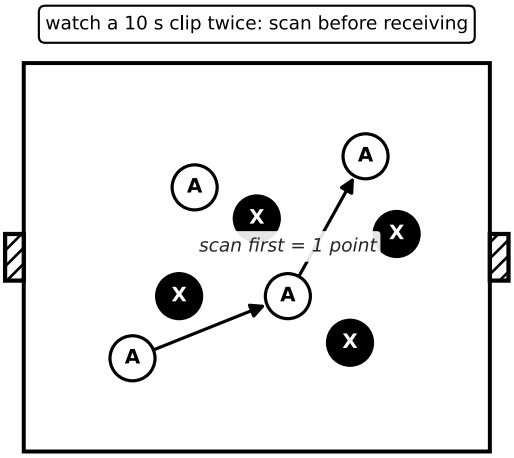
Setup. A coach or skilled player as model, demonstrating an inside-of-foot pass across the body.

How it runs. Demonstration 1: players stand behind the model to see the direction of the pass. Demonstration 2: players stand beside the model to see the body shape. After each demonstration, players attempt immediately and say which angle helped more.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: one demonstration from the angle most relevant to the cue. Harder: the players choose the angle themselves.

Coach's role. Name the feature before the demonstration, then stay silent while players watch.

Drill 11D: Clip, Then Play



Link to the objective. Uses a short expert video to direct attention to one action, then gives players a game where that action pays.

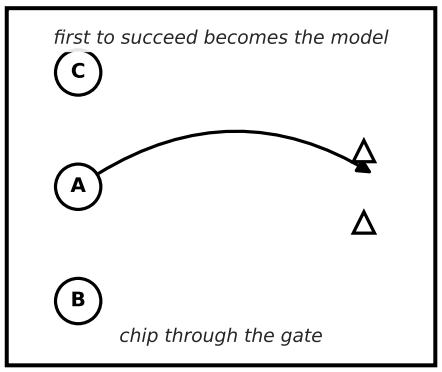
Setup. A tablet or phone with a 10-second clip of a professional player scanning before receiving. A 4v4 game area.

How it runs. Players watch the clip twice and name the feature: *"Looks over the shoulder before the ball arrives."* In the game that follows, a pass completed after a visible scan earns a point.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: a neutral player in midfield. Harder: points only count when the scan leads to a forward pass.

Coach's role. Keep the clip short and the discussion to one feature.

Drill 11E: Peer Model Rotation



Link to the objective. Uses peers as learning models: watching someone improve can be as useful as watching an expert.

Setup. Groups of three, each with a ball and a gate 8 m away.

How it runs. Each player attempts a chip through the gate. The first player to succeed becomes the model and shows it again while the others watch one named feature. Rotate every two minutes; the model can change.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: a wider gate. Harder: chip over a pole.

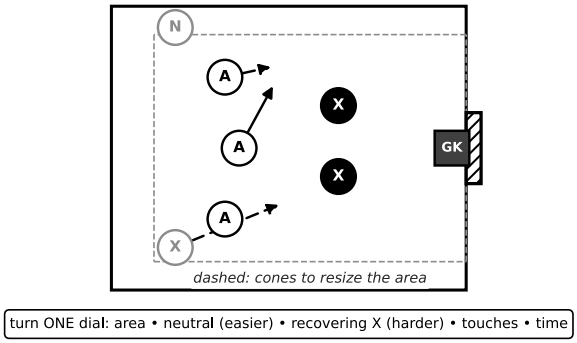
Coach's role. Encourage the model to describe what they focused on.

Principle 12: Optimal Challenge

Match Functional Difficulty to the Learner

Objective. After this section, a coach should be able to recognize when a task is too easy, productive, or too hard for a particular group, and adjust one constraint at a time to bring functional difficulty into a productive range.

Drill 12A: Dial-a-Challenge



Link to the objective. Teaches the coach to adjust functional difficulty one constraint at a time within a single game.

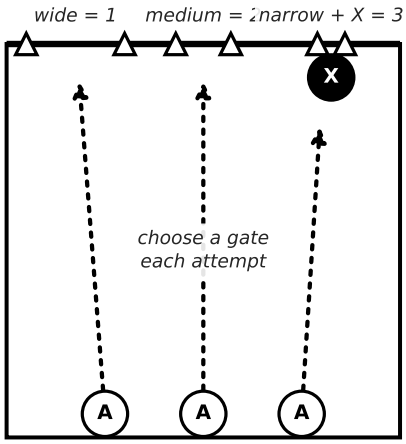
Setup. A 3v2 attacking game toward a goal with a goalkeeper. Prepare cones to change the area quickly, and pinnies for a neutral player and a recovering defender.

How it runs. Start with the standard game for two minutes. Use the calibration signs to classify the challenge. Turn one dial: area size, a neutral player (easier), a recovering defender (harder), a touch limit, or a time limit. Play two more minutes and classify again.

Make it easier / harder. The drill is the adjustment itself. Keep a written record of which dial moved the group into productive challenge.

Coach's role. Change only one dial at a time so you know which change worked. Watch the *type* of error: lost control under no pressure means too hard; no search for options means too easy.

Drill 12B: Choose Your Gate



Link to the objective. Lets players take part in calibrating their own challenge, which supports both functional difficulty and motivation.

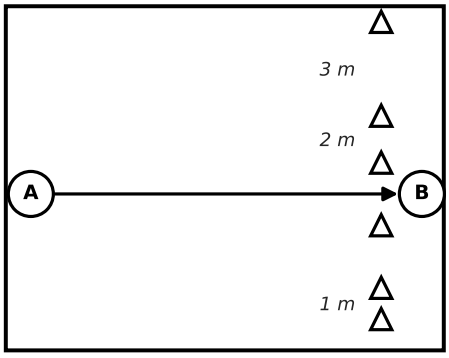
Setup. A 20 × 20 m area with three dribble gates on the far line: a wide gate (1 point), a medium gate (2 points), and a narrow gate guarded by a defender (3 points).

How it runs. Players dribble from the start line and choose which gate to attack on each attempt. Each player tracks their own points over two-minute rounds.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: remove the defender from the narrow gate. Harder: add a defender to the medium gate.

Coach's role. Notice which gate each player chooses. A player who always picks the wide gate may need encouragement; a player who always fails at the narrow gate may need a conversation about choosing a productive challenge.

Drill 12C: Success-Rate Gates



7+ of 10 → narrower gate • 4 or fewer → wider gate

Link to the objective. Uses a success rate to place each player at a productive level of challenge, which then shifts as they improve.

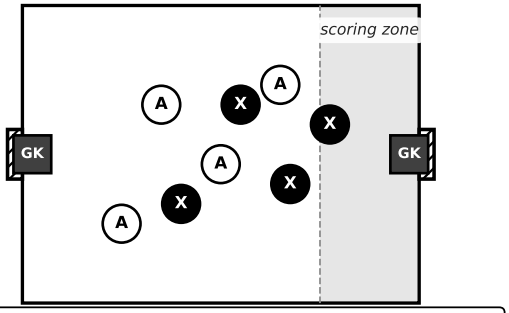
Setup. Pairs 12 m apart, each with three gates of decreasing width: 3 m, 2 m, and 1 m.

How it runs. Each player starts at the 2 m gate. After ten passes, a player with seven or more successes moves to a narrower gate; one with four or fewer moves to a wider gate.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: shorten the distance. Harder: one-touch passing.

Coach's role. Treat the thresholds as a coaching rule of thumb, not as a precise research target.

Drill 12D: Handicap Game



two goals up: 2 touches → score only from the zone → one player fewer

Link to the objective. Keeps a mismatched game close by adding constraints to the stronger team, so both teams stay in a productive range.

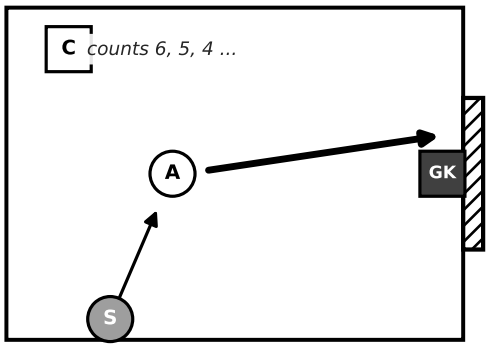
Setup. A 5v5 game on a 40 × 30 m pitch with goals.

How it runs. The leading team gets one handicap each time it goes two goals ahead: a two-touch limit, then goals only from inside a scoring zone, then one player fewer. Remove handicaps when the score evens.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: smaller handicaps. Harder: the leading team must make five passes before it can score.

Coach's role. Watch the score and the players' faces. Close games usually produce the most learning.

Drill 12E: Time-Pressure Dial



3 of 5 → 1 s less • 0–1 of 5 → 1 s more

Link to the objective. Adjusts one constraint (time) to keep finishing challenging but achievable as players improve.

Setup. A finishing channel with a server, a goal, and a goalkeeper. The coach counts the seconds out loud.

How it runs. Each attempt starts at six seconds to finish. If a player scores three of five, the time drops by one second; if they score one or none of five, it rises by one second.

Make it easier / harder. Easier: start at eight seconds. Harder: add a recovering defender.

Coach's role. Change only the time, not other constraints, so players can see what made the task harder.