

Getting Started: Maximizing your Warm-up

Your warm-up should:

1. Set the tone and rhythm of the practice.
2. Begin on time and get the players focused.
3. Provide numerous repetition
4. Be related to the activities that will make up the bulk of the session.

A good coach will take advantage of the first 15 to 20 minutes of a practice with creative/topic related warm-ups. If you want to focus on possession throughout your practice don't run a dribbling warm-up. The coach should view the warm-up stage as an integral time for player development not a time to plan out their practice. Although the warm-up should offer plenty of repetition, the coach should be creative in presenting various exercises to keep things fresh.

Do not begin your practice with static stretching. A players' muscles need to be warm prior to carrying out any stretching movements. New studies have coaches' moving away from static stretching and toward a more dynamic warm-up.

Three types of Warm-up's

1. Individual
2. Small Group
3. Full Team

The Individual Warm-up: should include one ball per player. Choosing to warm-up in this fashion puts a heavy focus on ball mastery (dribbling the ball, technical work, juggling and possible fitness with the ball routines). These types of warm-ups are excellent for a player to develop a better command of the ball, but can limit the players' vision and understanding the value of teammates.

Here are two examples of an individual warm-up:



Set-up: 25 x 25yd grid inside a 35 x 35 grid

The Game: Players dribble throughout the inner grid. The coach can use this free dribble segment to offer several options. When the coach yells:

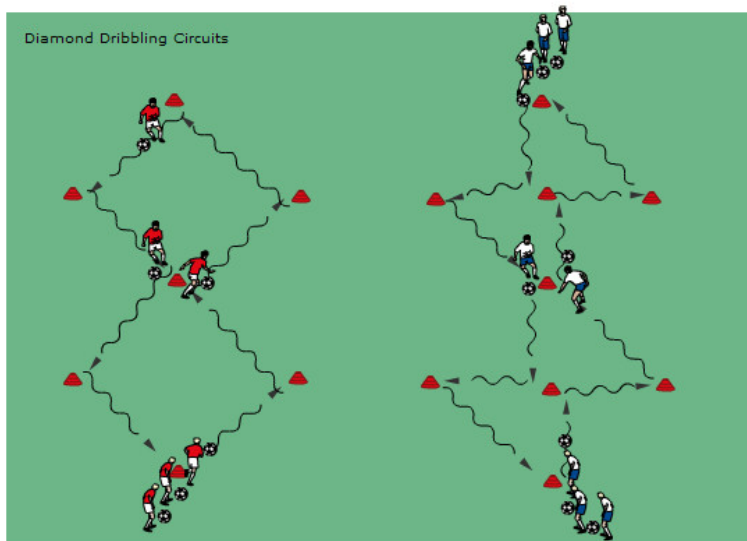
- **Turn-** players must change direction
- **Step-over-** players must perform the scissors move
- **Cruyff-** the players must perform the Cruyff move
- **Change!-** players step on their ball and quickly find another ball to dribble.
- **Etc.**

When the coach shouts a color, players must quickly dribble out and around that disc and go back to the grid. This forces players to get their head up to locate the proper disc, accelerate or “change their pace” to get to the disc. Coach can shout a 2nd color to force players to change direction when dribbling at speed.

This is an excellent alternative to running. Fitness with the ball is much more enjoyable and mirrors the real game.

Note: For younger players don't focus on the fitness, but instead the proper technique on the turns, the acceleration and ability to get their head up.

Diamond Dribbling Circuits



Note: Coach should have the players jog through the circuit without the ball a couple of times to get used to the movements. 2nd player in line shouldn't begin his/her movement until the 1st person as reached the second disc. Have no more than eight people working on one circuit. Set-up multiple diamonds so there is little to no standing around.

1st Exercise: (pictured on left)

Line should begin at the bottom. Players dribble out and cut the ball prior to reaching each disc. Players should pretend each disc is a defender and cut the ball in front of the disc, accelerate to the next disc.

Change the direction of the movement after a few minutes to force players to use both feet.

Variations:

- Both feet
- Just with your right foot
- Just with your left foot
- Just with the outside of your feet.

2nd Exercise: (pictured on right)

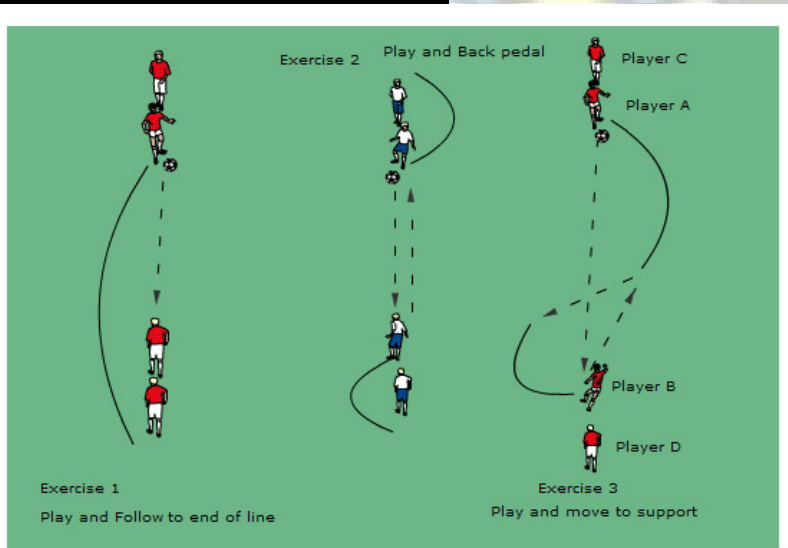
Split the line to begin at the top and bottom. Players' now dribble up and out before heading to the middle disc. Follow the path as pictured. The movements will now be a bit different with sharp turns as well as the ability to accelerate through the middle as you move forward.

Change the direction of the movement after a few minutes to force players to use both feet.

II. Small Group Warm-up's: Offer plenty of repetition and can encompass several different technical focuses. Most small group exercises will have dribbling, passing, receiving and moving elements. The small group warm-up will get the players to be able to recognize the value of teamwork and still provide numerous repetitions with the ball.

Here are three examples of Small group warm-ups':

Group of four passing movements



Exercise 1: Player passes the ball to teammate and runs to the end of the opposite line. Line should be between 5 to 10 yards apart. Play one or two touch depending on ability. *Focus:* Inside of foot passing "Toe up, ankle locked", change of pace -run to next line, be on your toes ready to receive the ball.

Exercise 2: Player passes the ball to teammate (across) and backpedals behind his/her partner. Line s should be 5 to 7 yards apart.

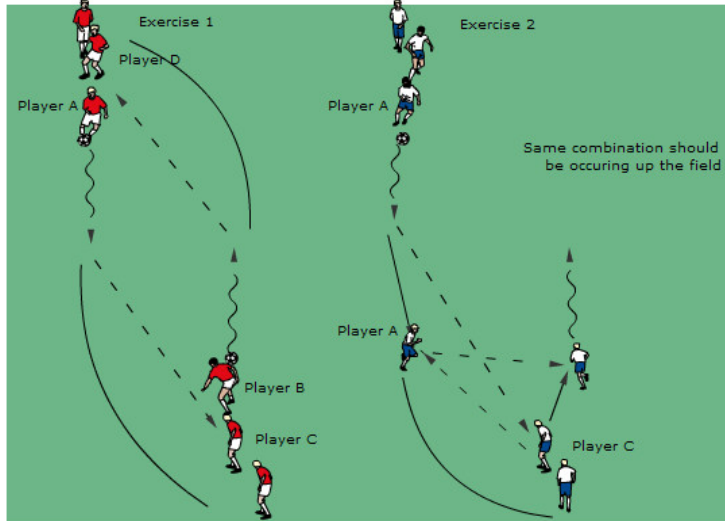
Focus: Step and meet the ball! Play should now be one touch. Move off backwards (opening up space for partner to step to the ball). Ask players to call for the ball as they step to meet it. Still focus on inside of the foot passing.

Exercise 3: Lines should be 10 to 15 yards apart. Player A passes to teammate across the way (Player B) and moves, at an angle, to support the ball. B drops ball to supporting

player A, who drops ball back B. B would now play to player C and move to support, combination continues. C to B, B to C, C to D, etc.

Focus: Proper weight of pass. Longer pass, shorter pass "combination". Move to support, call for the ball. All players should be on their toes, stress good technique.

Groups of 6 or 8 Passing Movements



Exercise 1: Two lines of 3 (or 4) facing each other on a diagonal. Lines should be approximately 20 yards apart. The first 2 players in each line have a ball. They dribble straight out (at the same time) and play a diagonal pass along the ground to the first two players in each line. After playing the ball they run to end of the line they just played to.

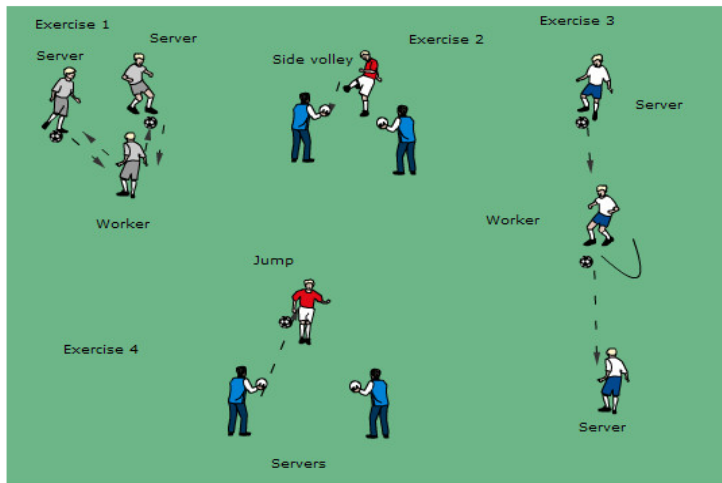
Note: Coach should switch the positioning of the lines so that players are forced to play the ball with both feet.

Exercise 2: Same set-up as before, but now when the players pass the ball to awaiting players they move to support the pass.

Pictured: Player A dribbles out, passes to Player C, Player C plays a short pass to a supporting Player A who drops the ball across to Player C who dribbles out and begins the combination up the other side. **Not Pictured:** Player B should be carrying out the same combination along the right side with Player D.

This is an excellent exercise for repetition. Dribbling, Passing, Moving to Support, and Communication are all present.

Warm-up 2 Balls for 3 People



Work to Rest: 1 minute to 2 minutes. You can do each exercise twice. Stress technique than speed.

"Practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes permanent."

Exercise 1: 2 servers with ball one worker without.

Servers play ball to the workers outside foot. Left foot one side/ right foot the other. Worker should make sure he plays a proper inside of the foot ball back to the servers.

Technique- *toe up, ankle locked, hips and supporting foot facing the partner. Stay on your toes.*

Exercise 2: Same as Exercise 1, but now the server tosses the ball for an inside of the foot volley back.

Technique is the same, but the worker needs to keep better concentration and have his head remain locked onto the ball and steady when he/she strikes it back to partner.

Note: If the ball goes astray the server should sprint to get it while the worker remains volleying back and forth with the remaining server.

Exercise 3: Two servers with balls, worker now in a central position.

Server plays ball into worker, worker drops ball back and checks to the other server. Ball is played in to the worker who returns it to the server and moves off to initial server, repeat.

Worker should call for the ball! Always meet the ball, don't wait for it.

Variation:

Servers have ball in hands

One server has a ball in hands, one on the floor.

Exercise 4: Same as Exercise 2, but now the service is to the workers head.

Worker should still keep his/her feet moving and face up to server.

III. Full Team Warm-up's: When choosing to run a full-team warm-up a coach will be sacrificing the number of touches a player receives, but will be enhancing the players ability to see a larger scope of the field and understanding the value of combining with teammates. Generally speaking, a full team warm-up is more appropriate for older players that have already established a strong technical base.

Here are a couple of full team warm-up options:

Chain Passing



Set-Up: Divide team into 3 equal groups (2 balls per group) section the field in 3rds.

The Game: All players are numbered 1 to 7, 1 plays to 2, 2 to 3, 3 to 4, etc. 7 plays' to 1. You can begin with one ball, but should quickly add a 2nd ball, it will double the number of touches players have throughout the warm-up.

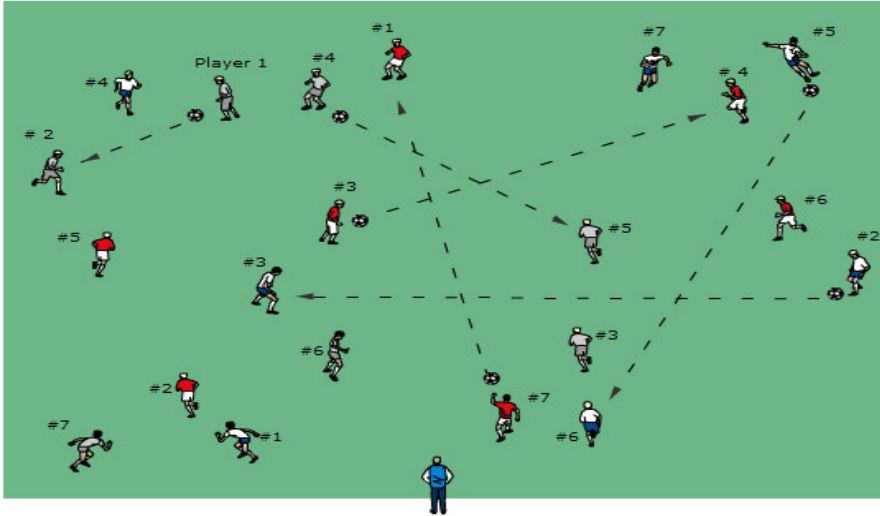
Note: If you have 12 to 14 players, have two groups of 6 or 8. Don't add a 2nd ball if your groups are 5 players or lower.

Various Restrictions:

- Unlimited touches
- 2 touch
- Sprint 5 yards after you play the ball
- 1 touch (only for an advanced team)

Focus: Crisp passing, Communication, Movement off the ball. Coach should encourage player who is about to receive the ball to a position where the player on the ball can see him. "Play the way you're facing."

Progress to:



The Set-Up: Same as above, but take away the discs that divided the field in 3rds.

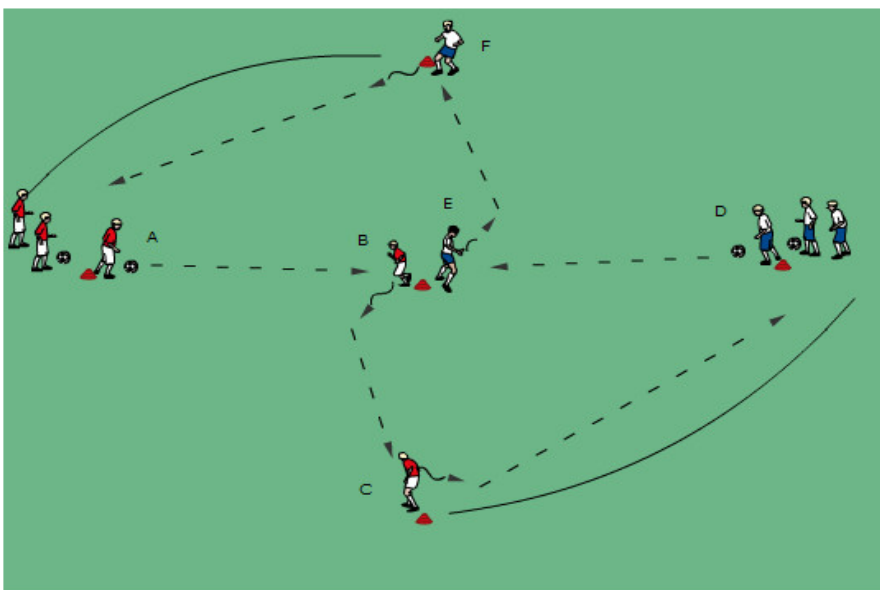
The Game: Still chain passing, but now there will be more confusion with all the teams spread throughout the area.

Restrictions: same as above

Focus: Crisp passing, communication, movement off the ball, getting you're head up and locating teammate. Coach should encourage player who is about to receive the ball to a position where the player on the ball can see him. "Play the way you're facing."

Note: There is still no defensive pressure, but the exercise is much more advanced for players. They have a larger area to cover (passes are done over a greater distance) and there are 2 to 3 times as many players (forces greater communication and getting head up). * Initially players will probably begin mixed throughout the zones and then move to one zone like the initial exercise. If this happens, freeze the exercise and point this out to the players. Restart the game and encourage players to keep the spacing.

BD Full Team Warm-up:



The Set-up: as pictured. 4 balls, 12 players (ideal number)

The Rotation: Player A passes the ball to Player B (moves to B's initial position)
Player B takes a first touch in the direction of Player C
Player B passes to Player C (moves to C's position)
Player C takes a first touch in the direction of the "white line"
Player C passes to first person in the white line without a ball and follows to the end of the line.

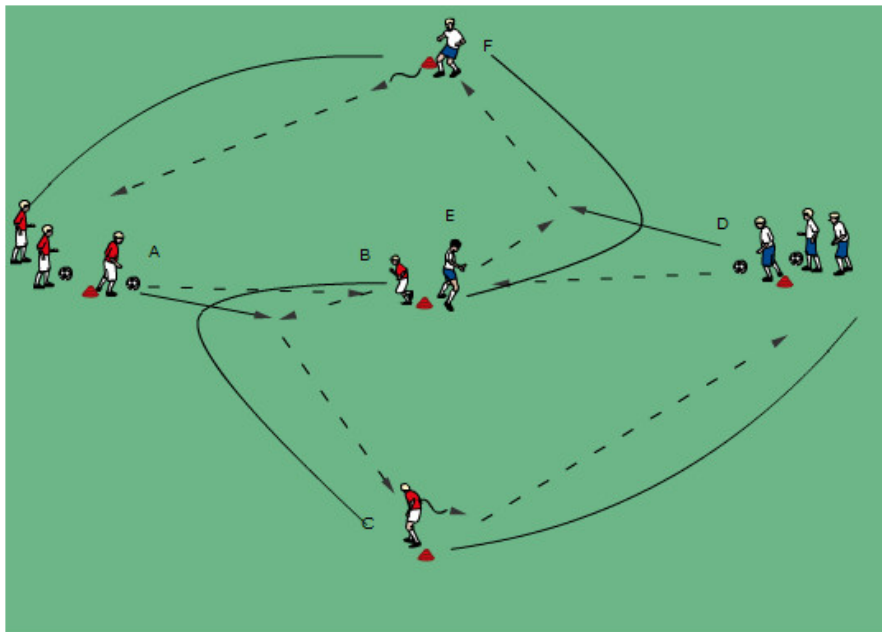
** The exact same movement occurs from the other direction.*

Note: Once A and D assume B and E's position, they should turn quickly and receive a ball from the first person in the line.

Focus: Crisp first touch, sharp passing, quick movement from spot to spot.

Progress to BD Warm-up with combination

BD with Single combination



The Rotation: Player A passes to Player B (A moves to support)
Player B drops ball to A (makes a bent run around A and will assume C's position)
Player A passes the ball to Player C (A takes B's initial position)
Player C takes a first touch in the direction of the "white line"
Player C passes to first person in the white line without a ball and follows to the end of the line.

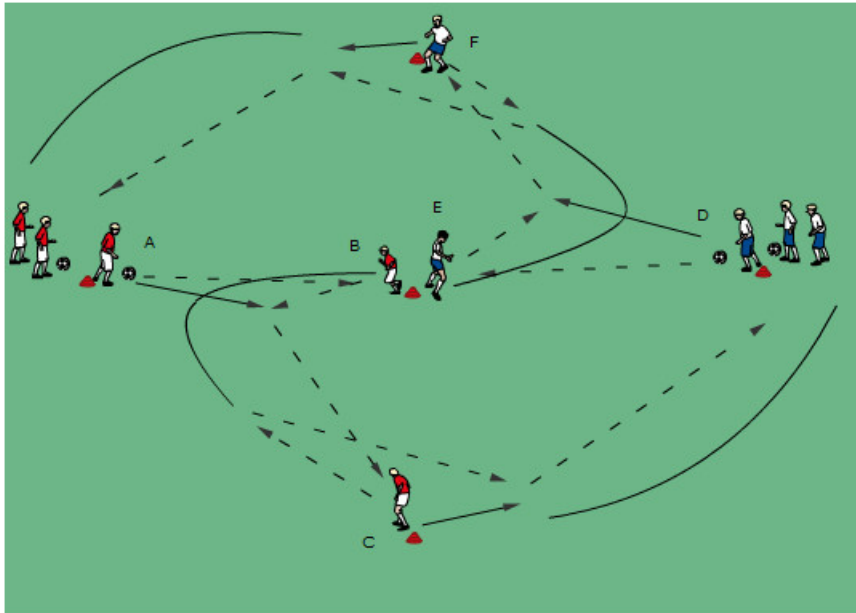
** The exact same movement occurs from the other direction.*

Note: Once A and D assume B and E's position, they should turn quickly and receive a ball from the first person in the line.

Focus: Crisp first touch, sharp passing, Combination play, quick movement from spot to spot. Communication! Call for the ball every time.

Progress to BD Warm-up with Double Combination

BD Warm-up with Double Combination



The Rotation:

Player A passes to Player B (A moves to support)
Player B drops ball to A (makes a bent run around A and will support C)
Player A passes the ball to Player C (A takes B's initial position)
Player C drops the ball to oncoming Player B (Player C moves off toward the white line)
Player B quickly returns the ball into Player C's path.
Player C passes to first person in the white line without a ball and follows to the end of the line.

** The exact same movement occurs from the other direction.*

Note: Once A and D assume B and E's position, they should turn quickly and receive a ball from the first person in the line.

Focus: Crisp first touch, sharp passing, Combination play, quick movement from spot to spot. Communication! Call for the ball every time.

This article was submitted by Brendan Donahue. Brendan is the Director of Coaching for Lexington United Soccer Club. He holds his USSF "A" license and NSCAA Premier Diploma.

