



ESSENTIAL SOCCER CONDITIONING SKILLS

29

FUNDAMENTAL DRILLS
FOR ENDURANCE, SPEED, AGILITY, AND QUICKNESS

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INTRODUCTION

The game of soccer isn't slowing down and soccer players don't just jog the entire game. There are short sprinting bursts quickly followed by recovery running or walking and back again to more bursts. A good coach will condition their team for game play and won't just have them jog long distances.

To be successful and in order to perform well for the entire length of the game, players need to have speed, agility, quickness, and endurance. This is all developed through proper conditioning.

The most important part of proper conditioning will always be the last drill, sprint, or last push. Your players' bodies will naturally create new resistance points and the more you help them push themselves the better conditioned they will be.

There are 29 drills in Essential Soccer Conditioning Drills and they are divided into four sections:

1. Speed Drills - help improve players' sprint mechanics, quickness and overall speed.
2. Agility Ladder Drills - help improve players' power, flexibility and body control.
3. Dot & Cone Drills - help develop nimble feet and short area quickness.
4. Conditioning Circuit - a combination of select drills formed into a circuit; perform each drill at least once to complete one circuit or use the drills individually.

In addition to helping increase strength, agility, power, and speed, proper conditioning also helps players prevent injuries.

Conditioning may not appear to be fun in practice but you can create competitiveness with rewarding team relays or creating games out of each of the drills.

If you are a volunteer youth coach, conditioning isn't as important since speed, endurance and strength are attributes that are better developed in more mature competitive players, not in younger players that simply want to have fun and learn the game. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do any conditioning but it does mean you should scale back and that it doesn't need to be as intense.

SPEED DRILLS

The following five drills can be done as straight sprints or using resistance tools such as: a running parachute, resistance bands, or a weighted sled. Sprinting with resistance is a great way for soccer players to improve sprint speed, explosiveness, acceleration, stride length and stride frequency.

DRILL #1 - SPRINT PYRAMID

With the resistance attached, all the player will do is run a series of sprints. A single set will involve running several sprints of differing lengths. So, you'll have the athlete run 2 x 10 yard sprints, 2 x 20 yard sprints, 2 x 30 yard sprints, then 2 x 20 yard sprints again, and finish with 2 x 10 yards.

DRILL #2 - SPRINT AND JOG

As the name suggests, this exercise requires the player to alternately sprint and jog. With the resistance attached and starting at one end line on a soccer field, the player will sprint for ten yards, and then jog for ten yards, then sprint and jog all the way down the field. The exercise should finish with the player sprinting from the opposite 18 yard line all the way through the opposite end line. One length of the entire field counts as one set.

DRILL #3 - HIGH KNEES

The player runs with the resistance attached and lifts their knees up above the level of his or her hips. They should alternate every ten yards between high knees running and high knees jogging, for the full length of the soccer field. Be sure the player is throwing their arm back as their knee is coming up.

Remind your players that the speed of their arms determines the speed of their legs. Make sure they're using both their arms and their legs to move forward. One length of the field counts as one set.



Sprints with Parachute



Sprints with Resistance Band



Sprints with Weighted Sled

SPEED DRILLS

DRILL #4 - LONG STRIDES

With resistance attached, the player should run at three quarter speed for the entire length of the field. While running, they should concentrate on planting their feet and springing off the foot. Then they should glide through the air taking long strides and land, plant, and spring off the other foot. Their arms should also be in sync with their strides. One length of the field counts as one set.

DRILL #5 - SHORT CHOPPY STEPS

This exercise is the opposite of the Long Strides Drill. Again, the resistance should be attached if available. Instead of long strides the player will run in short, choppy, and powerful steps. Their arms should be quickly moving up and down only about three inches. Their shoulders should be back and their head should be up. One length of the field counts as one set.

AGILITY LADDER DRILLS

The Agility Ladder is a simple piece of equipment that is great for improving any players power, flexibility and body control. As the name suggests, it resembles a ladder (a rope ladder) with two lines running along the length of the ladder and ropes running across at intervals of approximately one foot. The Agility Ladder can be used indoors or outdoors on any surface.

You can purchase them from any sports equipment retailer for under \$30. Or simply, make your own by creating a grid of 10 connected boxes – each one roughly 18" by 18".

The main advantage of a “real” agility ladder is that it will immediately expose poor form. If a player is over-striding or under-striding, their feet will get caught in the ropes and it will be immediately apparent to any observer.

In this section we’ll review six simple agility ladder drills that can be used with players of all ages.

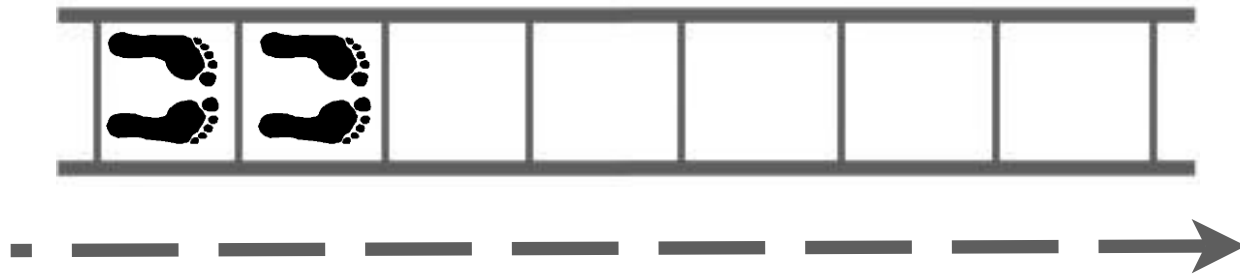
Pay close attention to technique and form as your players go through these drills. Don’t be afraid to stop the drill and make corrections where necessary.



DRILL #6 - TWO STEP HIGH KNEES

The Two Step High Knee Drill will require the player to step both feet into the ladder, one at a time, as they move forward. It's important that both feet land in each space.

Throughout the drill, similar to the sprinting Knees High Drill, the player's knees should be coming up past the level of their hips. Their arms should be pumping fast and hard in a regular running motion. The faster the hands go the quicker the feet will go. To maintain balance and speed, the athlete should remember to stand erect and maintain backward mobility at all times.

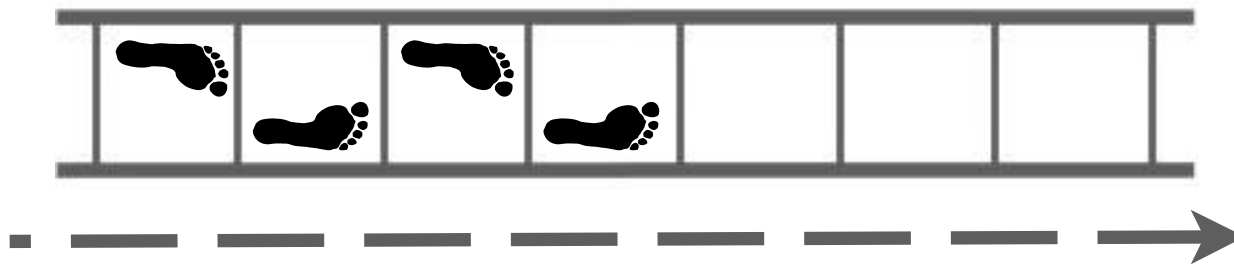


DRILL #7 - HIGH KNEES LADDER

This drill is very similar to the Two Step High Knee Drill. The one major difference is that the athlete will only be landing one foot in each space on the ladder.

The same form and technique should be kept with the arms pumping and knees coming up past the player's hips. However, the player will now be striding out more because there is only one foot per space. This means the player should be running closer to a normal stride and they should go through the ladder faster.

Make sure the athlete's arms continue to pump fast and hard and that their knees continue to come past the level of their hips.

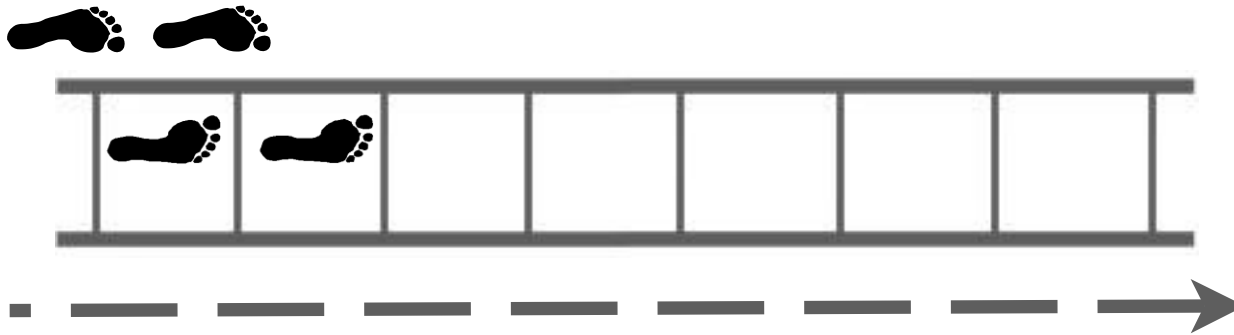


DRILL #8 - THE RIGHT LEGGED THRUST

For this drill only the right leg will be inside the ladder. The left leg will be on the outside and will only be used for balance and support. There will be no pushing off with the left leg. All the work of moving will be done by the right leg.

Because the arms and hands lead the legs to where the player wants to go, only the right arm should be pumping hard and fast. As the right arm goes all the way back, the right leg should rise up and go beyond the level of the hips.

So, the player will begin by throwing his right arm back, bringing the right leg up with the knee high and stepping into the first space of the ladder. Then the left leg will take just a small step (or it will slide) until it's even with the right leg. Then the process will be repeated until the entire ladder has been gone through this way.

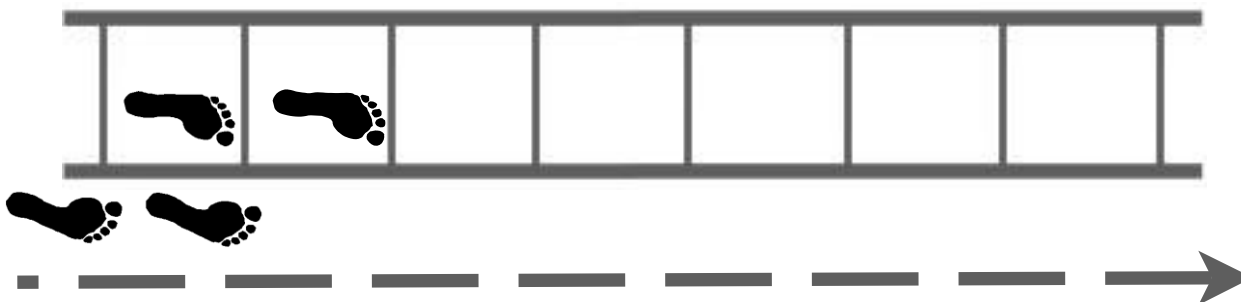


DRILL #9 - THE LEFT LEGGED THRUST

This drill is the same as the Right Legged Thrust Drill except everything is opposite. As the name of the drill suggests, this time the player will concentrate on the left leg.

The left arm should come all the way back as the left leg comes up. Meanwhile, the left leg should step into the spaces on the ladder while the right leg slides alongside.

It's also important to point out here that the player's non-dominant side tends to fatigue sooner than the dominant side. So, if a player is right-handed, be watchful for fatigue while they are doing the Left Legged Thrust Drill. Fatigue will cause laziness and laziness will destroy technique. Be sure to force the player to keep the proper technique all the way through to the end of the drill.



DRILL #10 - THE DOUBLE FOOT SHUFFLE

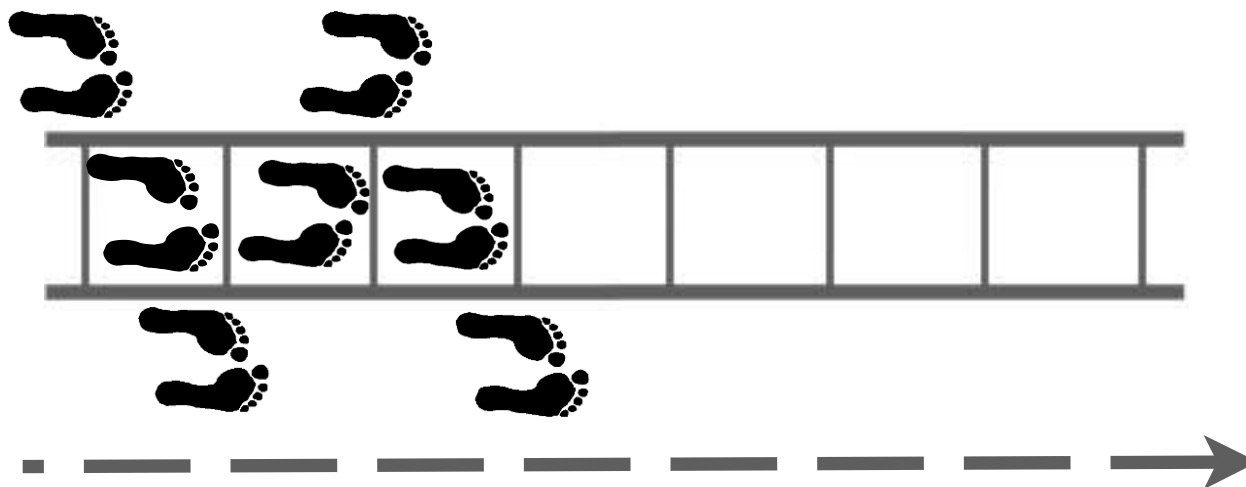
For this drill the player will be moving side to side (shuffling) through the ladder. This will work on stability and outside movement.

They will begin on the left side of the ladder, directly beside the first space. Then they will step both feet into the first space (right foot first, then left foot) and then step both feet into the outside to the left of the ladder (again, right foot first, then left foot).

As they step outside the ladder, they should plant with the outside foot (the right foot) and then step into the ladder's second space (this time, left foot in first, followed by the right foot).

Again both feet should step into the ladder and then both feet should step outside the ladder (even with the second space this time); the left foot will plant, and then the player will step into the third space with his right foot. The process will be repeated until they finish the entire ladder.

Make sure they are stepping down with both feet outside the ladder every time. This will help them remain stable at all times.



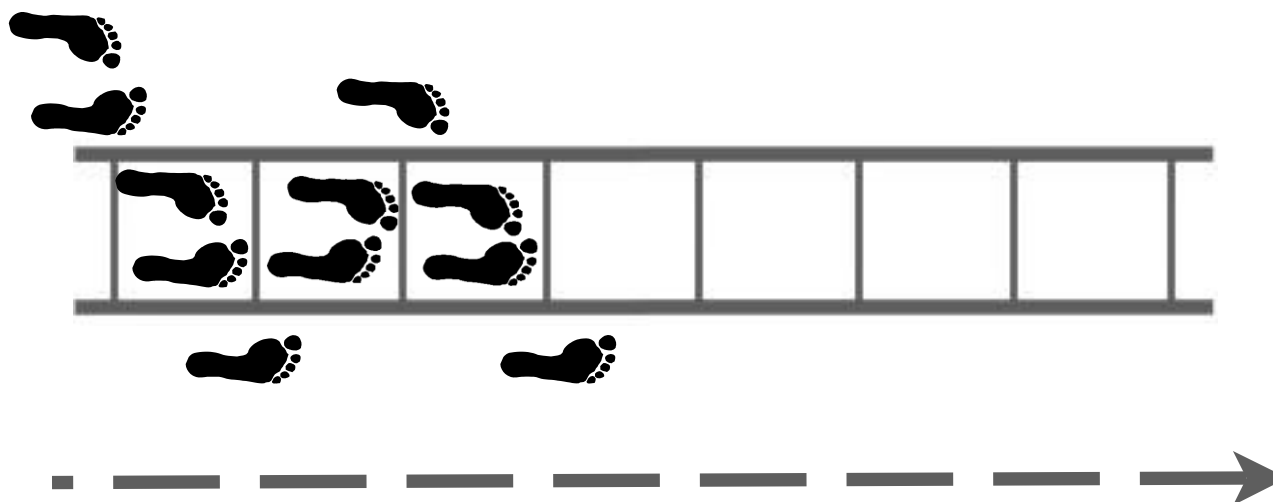
DRILL #11 - THE SINGLE FOOT SHUFFLE

This drill is basically the same as the Double Foot Shuffle Drill. Instead of working on stability and outside movement, the Single Foot Shuffle Drill will improve players' quickness and hip movement.

The Single Foot Shuffle Drill begins the same way as the other drill. It requires players to move the same way with one exception: While moving through and out of the ladder, only the outside foot will come down on the outside of the ladder.

So at the beginning the player will step into the ladder with both feet one at a time (right foot, then left foot). Then they'll step out on the other side with just the outside (right) foot. Then they'll step into the second space with their left foot, step with the right, step outside the ladder with their left foot, and then step into the third space with their right foot.

Obviously, this drill should be performed quicker than the Double Foot Shuffle Drill.



DOT & CONE DRILLS

These ten exercises are all designed to improve players' acceleration, deceleration, and short area quickness which are all essential skills for soccer players. The small, short movements required in these exercises also strengthen the stabilizing muscles in the ankles and knees, where many soccer injuries can occur.

The Up and Back Drill, Right Foot Drill, Left Foot Drill and Both Feet Drill, are performed using three to five Agility Dots placed on the floor. These colored circles can be placed on any hard surface, including a gym floor, soccer field, or track. You can purchase Dots from a sports equipment retailer, or simply mark spots on the floor using tape or agility cones.

The Four Corner Drill, Pro Agility Drill, 60 Yard Shuttle Drill, Three Corner Drill and Nebraska Drill are typically done using Cones.



Agility Dots



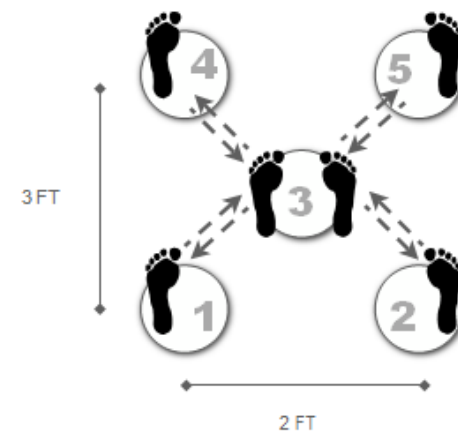
Agility Cones

DRILL #12 - THE UP AND BACK

As the name of this drill suggests, this exercise requires the players to jump forward, then backwards in a succession of quick hops. To start, arrange the dots as shown in the diagram.

The player begins with their left foot on dot 1 and their right foot on dot 2. Then they hop and land with both feet on dot 3. Then they hop again and land their left foot on dot 4 and their right foot on dot 5.

Then they hop backwards with both feet, landing on dot 3 again. Lastly, they hop back again, spreading their feet so that the left foot lands on dot 1 and the right foot lands on dot 2. Completing those 4 jumps counts as one set.

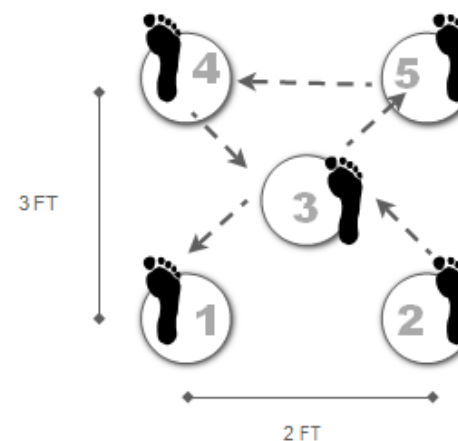


DRILL #13 - RIGHT FOOT

Arrange the dots as shown in the diagram. Players will begin this drill with their left foot on dot 1 and their right foot on dot 2 again.

This time, they will hop on all the dots with just their right foot. So, on the first hop, the player lands on dot 3 with their right foot, keeping the left foot raised in the air and not touching the ground.

They continue by hopping on their right foot to dot 5, then dot 4, then back to dot 3, then finishing by hopping on their right foot to dot 1. Completing the 5 hops counts as one full set.

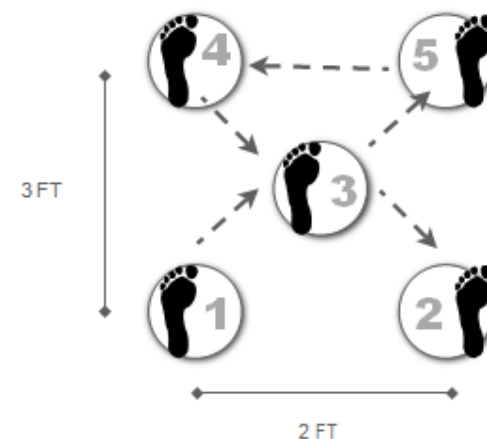


DRILL #14 - LEFT FOOT

Arrange the dots as shown in the diagram. This drill is like the Right Foot Drill but it's done with the left foot.

Players start out with the left foot on dot 1 and right foot on dot 2. On the first hop, the player lands on dot 3 with their left foot only, keeping the right foot raised in the air and not touching the ground. They continue by hopping on their left foot to dot 4, then dot 5, then back to dot 3, then finishing by hopping on their left foot to dot 2.

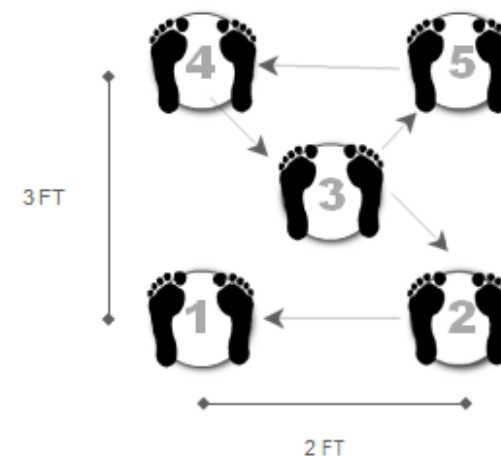
Players can also combine this drill with the Right Foot Drill. To do this, at the end of the Right Foot Drill, instead of landing on their right foot at the end, they simply jump to dot 1 with their left foot and then follows the rest of the drill. Again, completing the 5 one-footed hops counts as one set.



DRILL #15 - BOTH FEET

Set up the dots as shown in the diagram. The players will start with both feet on dot 3.

Then, using short quick hops, jump from dot 3 to dot 5, then to dot 4. Jump backwards from dot 4 to dot 3, then backwards again to dot 2. Finish by jumping sideways to dot 1. One series of 5 jumps counts as one set.

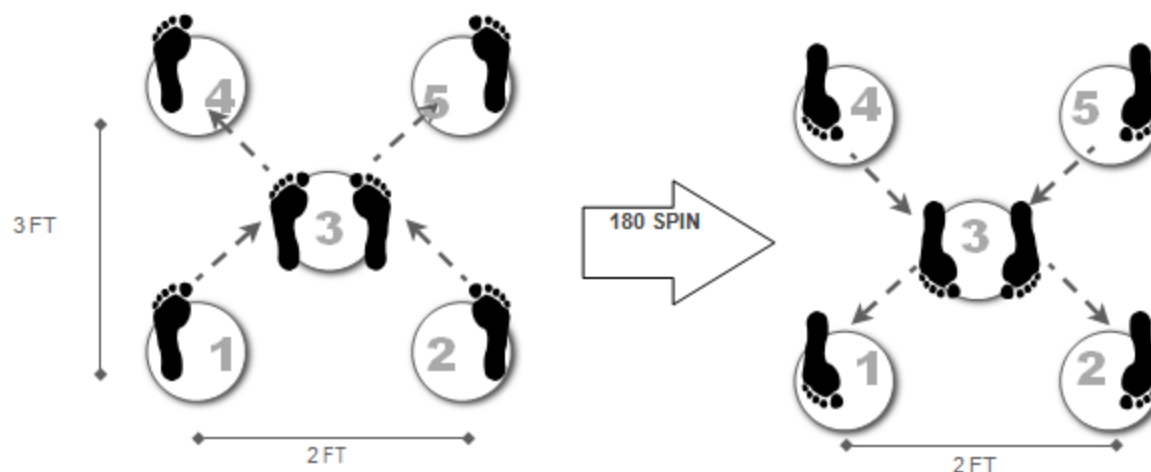


DRILL #16 - 180

Players should begin this drill with the right foot on dot 2 and left foot on dot 1. Set up the dots as shown in the diagram.

Players start by hopping to dot 3 and landing with both feet, then immediately hopping again, spreading the feet and landing on dot 4 with the left foot and dot 5 with the right foot.

Then they should jump and turn 180 degrees in the air, so that they land with their left foot on dot 5 and their right foot on dot 4. The player will now be facing the other way. They then hop to dot 3, landing with both feet, then hops again, spreading the feet to land with the right foot on dot 1 and the left foot on dot 2. One series of 5 jumps (going up and back) counts as one set.

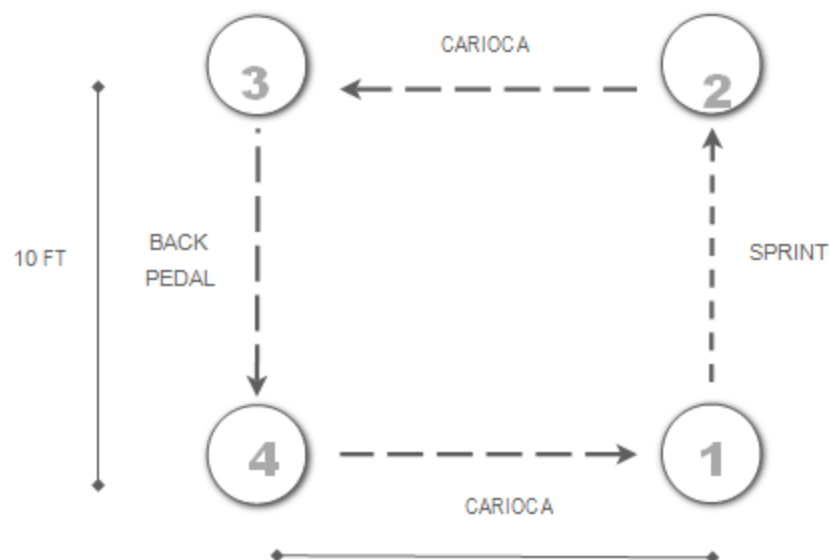


DRILL #17 - FOUR CORNERS

This drill begins with four cones or dots spread 10-15 feet apart in a box formation. Set up the box as shown in the diagram.

Players begin by sprinting down the right side of the box from cone 1 to cone 2. At cone 2, they should make a reverse pivot right, throwing their shoulders counter clockwise.

Next, they carioca from cone 2 to cone 3. At cone 3, they reverse pivot again, throwing the right shoulder backward. Then they backpedal from cone 3 to cone 4. At cone 4, they carioca across the width of the box until they return to cone 1. One four corner circuit counts as one set.

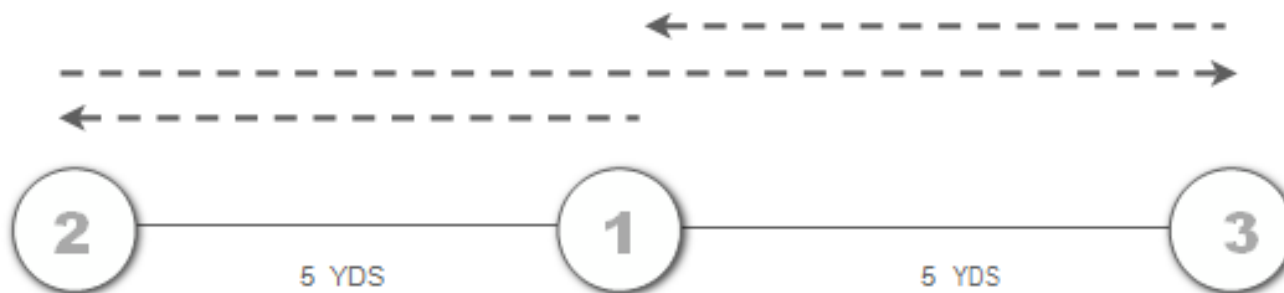


DRILL #18 - PRO AGILITY

Set up three cones in a line 5 yards apart, as shown in the diagram.

Players should begin at cone 1. When the coach blows the whistle, they should sprint from cone 1 to cone 2, touch the cone, push off with their outside foot and sprint from cone 2 to cone 3.

They should touch cone 3, push off the outside foot again and sprint back to cone 1, finishing strong past the finish line. This counts as one set. Have the players complete multiple sets.

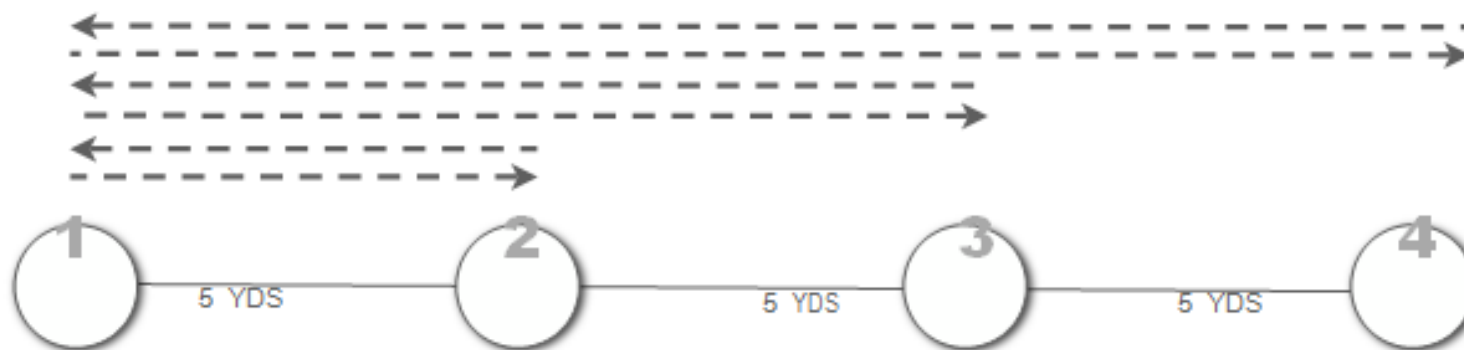


DRILL #19 - 60 YARD SHUTTLE

Set up four cones at interval of 5 yards, as shown in the diagram.

Have the players start on cone 1, sprint to cone 2, touch it and run back to the cone 1. Touch that cone and then run to cone 3. Touch it and return to cone 1. Repeat the process going to cone 4 and touching it and then returning.

This process all the way back and forth through all four cones counts as one set.

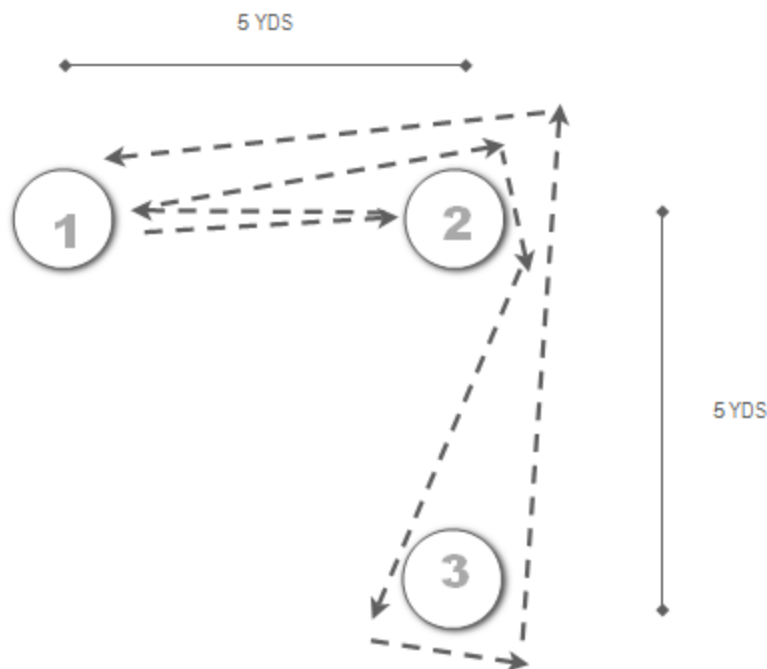


DRILL #20 - THREE CORNERS

Place three cones in a “L” shape, 5 yards apart, as shown in the diagram.

Have the players start at cone 1. When the whistle is blown, sprint the 5 yards to cone 2. Touch cone 2 with both hands and immediately sprint back to cone 1. Touch cone 1 with both hands then immediately sprint around the outside of cone 2 and to cone 3. Cut to the inside of cone 3 and sprint around it, then come back up to cone 2. Finish by making a tight turn around cone 2 and sprinting through to cone 1 at the finish line.

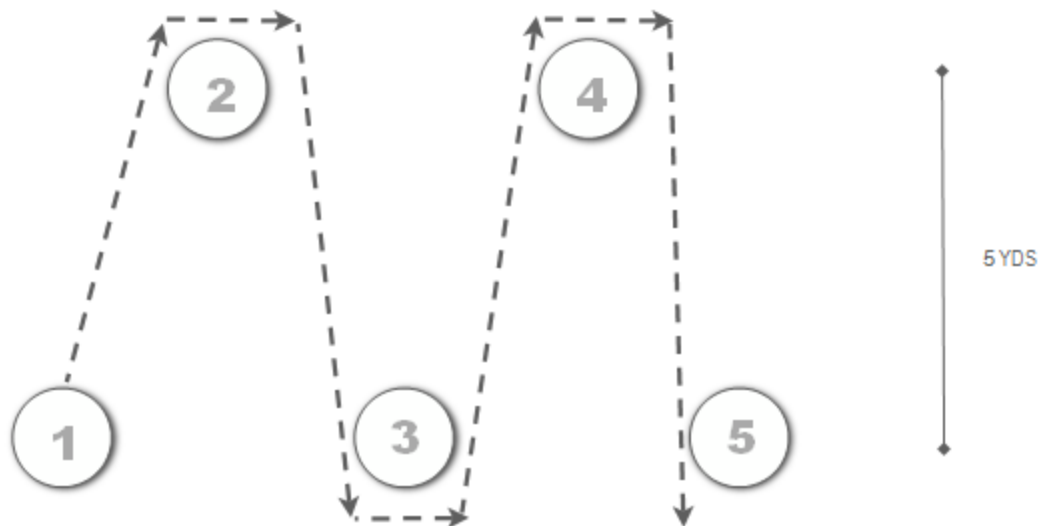
One run through the 3 corners counts as one set.



DRILL #21 - NEBRASKA AGILITY

Place five cones approximately 2 yards apart. The second and fourth cones should be advanced 5 yards up from the second cone, as shown in the diagram.

Have your players form a line and begin next to cone 1. The first person will sprint to cone 2, and make a right-hand turn, rounding the cone and sprinting back to cone 3. Round cone 3 with a left hand turn, then sprint up to cone 4. Round cone 4 with a right hand turn, then sprint hard through cone 5. One circuit through the 5 cones counts as one set. Have them rest 20-60 seconds and then complete another set.



CONDITIONING CIRCUIT

DRILL #22 - BURST INTERVALS (SPEED)

Setup:

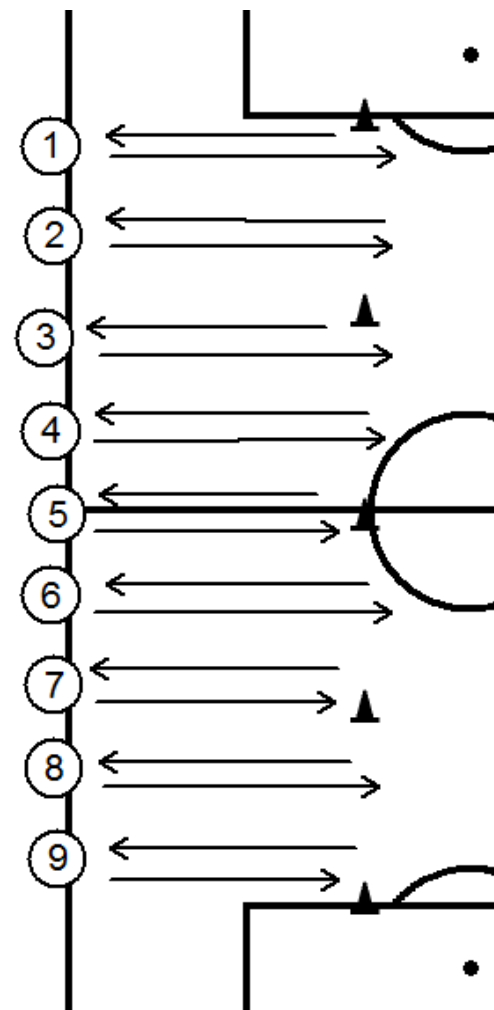
Mark off a 30 yard distance on the field and have your players line up at one end.

Execution:

1. On the whistle, all players will sprint as fast as they can to the other end of the 30 yards.
2. Have them turn around and rest for one to two minutes.
3. Then repeat the next sprint by blowing the whistle again.
4. Repeat this at least three times but you can continue as many repetitions as needed or desired.

Coaching Tips:

- Soccer players need and often use quick bursts of speed in games. They need to be able to call upon their body to provide those bursts using stored energy. The way to train your body to react accordingly is to simulate those with speed burst sessions.
- When you burst out sprinting, you are simulating the quick reaction you need to get going. This type of energy doesn't require a lot of oxygen to start, but in the recovery between sprints, you will need oxygen to help you recover, and get ready for the next sprint.
- It is important for this drill to make sure that adequate recovery time is given to the player in between sprints. This ensures that the body is training to replace the necessary enzymes and hormones to achieve the best quick sprint.



This is a great drill to increase players ability to utilize quick bursts during games.

DRILL #23 - PARTIAL SQUATS (POWER & BALANCE)

Setup:

Have your players form a circle facing inwards or a straight line all facing forwards.

Execution:

1. The player will start with their arms crossed in front of them, with their hands on their biceps.
2. They will keep an erect posture (not leaning over), and they will stand on one foot.
3. They will drop in a squat down to a comfortable position and then come up, still maintaining balance on one foot.
4. On the 10th 'squat', the player will hold it for 10 seconds.
5. After 10 seconds the player will do 10 more 'squats' on the same leg at a slightly quicker pace.
6. Then they will repeat on the opposite leg.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure you explain to your players that the leg is an important part of the kicking game. So by working on the strength and stability of this leg you are going to improve the power of your stride and your kick and your legs will offer more stability each time this exercise is done.
- Keeping the body upright is extremely important in this drill. Also, bending at the knee while keeping the foot firmly planted on the ground is important. Further, this drill should be done with control to avoid as much wobbling as possible. A player should only squat down as far as they can while still maintaining control.

DRILL #24 - LOW BACK STABILIZER (CORE)

Setup:

Instruct your players to form a circle facing inwards or a straight line with all players facing the same direction.

Execution:

1. Each player will lie face down on their stomachs.
2. Have them put their hands behind their heads and interlace their fingers together.
3. Then they should raise their body as high as they can while maintaining control.
4. Have them hold that position with their body raised for one to two seconds and then slowly lower back their body back down.
5. This should be done 10 times.
6. On the 10th raise, the player must hold as long as they can. Remind them that their feet must stay on the ground and encourage them to try and hold for 10 seconds.
7. Allow the players to rest two to three minutes and then repeat the exercise again.
8. Complete at least two to three times and increase the rounds for more experienced players.

Coaching Tips:

- You may want to consider having your players use a mat in order to protect from injury.
- Advise your players that anytime they are stabilizing the core muscles in the body, they are making the way the body works, more efficient.
- It is important in this drill for the player to keep their feet on the ground. While you do not want another player holding their feet down, the player should try to keep the tops of their feet on the ground so they are getting the most from the exercise.
- It is also important that the player not try to extend themselves upward too far. The drill isn't about how high you can go, it is about building the muscles and creating the resistance at the end.

DRILL #25 - STEP UP EXPLOSIONS (LEG POWER)

Setup:

Players will need a bench or a step of some sort that is about knee height. Players will start with the right foot on the step and the left foot on the ground and will keep their arms at their sides.

Execution:

1. To start the drill, the player pushes hard off their right foot, which is on the step, and pushes upward.
2. While in the air the player will switch the leg that is on the step and the support leg that will land on the ground.
3. This can be done in sets, but coaches or teammates can time different groups for 30 seconds at a time. Each group should get a rest and then it should be done again so you could rotate with one group on and one group resting.

Coaching Tips:

- This drill is going to assist in building muscle strength and coordination. Each time the player pushes up, they are building explosive power which is used for kicking or sprinting, and they are also increasing the mobility in their hip joints.
- You can also use this drill as a cardiovascular helper, simply by increasing the speed at which the drill is done.
- The player should make sure they are not pushing too hard on the leg as to hyperextend their knee. They should have solid control and balance each time they thrust upward.

DRILL #26 - RESISTANCE PUSH UPS (UPPER BODY)

Setup:

Have your players form a line or circle and get down into a push up position.

Execution:

1. On the whistle, players should lower their body like they're going to do a push up.
2. As the player is lowering their body, make sure they go into a 90 degree position at the elbows.
3. They must hold this for a five seconds and then push up quickly.
4. They then repeat slowly lowering down to 90 degrees, holding for a count of five, and then pushing up quickly.
5. Players can do this continuously for two minutes or for a total of 20 push ups.
6. Then have them rest for at least two to three minutes.
7. Following the initial round, you may have them repeat the entire exercise for a total of two to three rounds.

Coaching Tips:

- It's fairly obvious that this drill works on players upper body strength. The resistance training helps build muscle fiber and also the strength and endurance of the upper body.
- While many people might not equate this particular skill to soccer, it is important to note that a strong upper body helps in overall coordination and overall strength which ties into a players stride, quickness, etc. Further, the push up also increases strength in the hip flexor area and in the abdominal area.
- In order to get the most out of this drill, the players should try to take five seconds to get into the 90 degrees, before they hold for another five seconds. This will help to build greater control and coordination in their upper body.

DRILL #27 - HOP SQUATS (EXPLOSION)

Setup:

Once again have your players form a line or a circle. The players will start in a crouching position with their hands outstretched to the sides for balance. Feet should be flat on the ground to start not on the balls of the feet.

Execution:

1. To start the drill, the player will explode upward, with arms still stretched outwards at their side.
2. Then the player will cushion their descent back to the ground and return to the squat position.
3. They should maintain their balance in the squat position before trying hop squat again.
4. Repeat this for a minimum of 10 good jumps that are completed in extreme control.

Coaching Tips:

- This drill is working a variety of areas; most noticeably the quads, hips and the hamstrings, but it also works the abdominal area by forcing it to stabilize the body when the player comes down from the explosive jump.
- By working all of these areas simultaneously, the player will build coordination and strength of movement, along with the explosion of all of the muscle groups at the same time.
- This drill is about the quality of the squat not the quantity. The player should focus on good balance, maintaining their arms to the side, and then explosion.

DRILL #28 - BODY ROWS (STRENGTH ENDURANCE)

Setup:

You will need a pull up bar or other apparatus that is capable of holding a player's full weight. The player will then grab the bar about shoulder width apart and then lower their body under the bar. The body should be straight and the heels should be a few feet in front of them.

Execution:

1. To start this drill, the player needs to pull their body so their chest reaches the bar. Make sure the player is at such an angle that they can execute this pulling motion without having to reach up. It should just be a pulling motion, like a reverse push up.
2. They should be using their feet as a fulcrum or anchor.
3. Do 10 body rows or pulls up.
4. Rest for one to two minutes
5. Complete another set of 10 reps.
6. Repeat at least two to three times.

Coaching Tips:

- This is a great exercise for almost the entire body. The player is going to be using all of the major muscle groups to try and get the chest to the bar. It will work to stabilize the upper body, build strength in the chest and shoulders, but also forces the glutes and the hamstrings to tighten and work to get the player up to the bar.
- Do this under control to maximize the amount of effort and the overall benefit of the exercise.

DRILL #29 - BAR & DRIBBLE (TORSO CONTROL)

Setup:

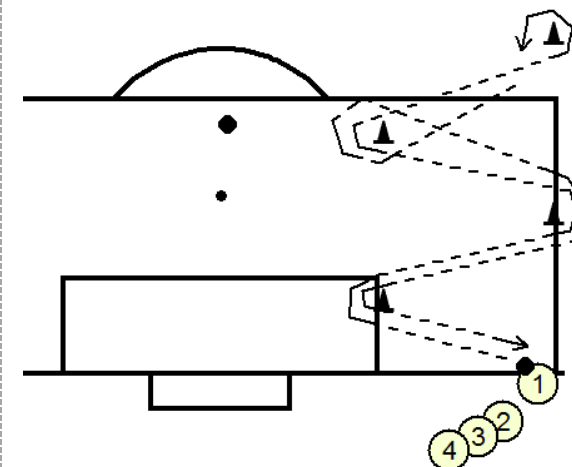
Set up four cones into a 15 by 20 yard zig-zag course. Have the players form a line and provide the first player with a ball and a two inch dowel rod that is long enough to use across the backs of the shoulders.

Execution:

1. The first player in line will place the dowelling or rod behind their head and rest it on their shoulders.
2. The arms are then brought up and rested on the dowelling. They shouldn't pull down.
3. At this time, the player must control the ball through the zig-zag course one way, and then back.
4. Time permitting, each player should execute this drill two or more times.

Coaching Tips:

- Since we use our arms a great deal for balance, this drill effectively tries to limit how much we can use the arms for balance, transferring that responsibility to the torso. Each time the torso has to twist to go around the cones or to keep control of the ball, it is building the small structural muscles in the torso that help a player maintain good coordination and upper body control.
- A player can improve their quickness and the effectiveness of this drill by trying to execute the drill faster and faster.



Players practice and gain experience working on balance and ball control when completing this drill.

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