



ESSENTIAL SOCCER TACTICAL DRILLS

16

FUNDAMENTAL DRILLS
FOR PLAYING SAVVY SOCCER

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INTRODUCTION

Soccer is the universal sport. There are millions of coaches in hundreds of countries around the globe, each working with players of different ages that are at differing skill levels.

The philosophies change from country to country and coach to coach but all share two common things:

1. A passion for the game regardless of the result or performance
2. The need for basic soccer tactics to compete

Tactics in soccer can be individual things like passing, defending, and more or it can involve small groups of a few players for specific plays or tasks like in-direct kicks, corner kicks, penalty kicks and throw-ins. It can also be an overall team style of play.

In Essential Soccer Tactical Drills there are 16 drills that focus on both individual and small group basic tactics. The basics of throw-ins, corners, free kicks, headers, and more will be covered to allow your team the best chance on the playing field.

Many players and coaches skip over these basic tactics thinking that they already know enough and don't need to spend time on them. The truth is that these fundamental drills work on tactical skills that provide a foundation for elite play.

This is even more important in soccer because it involves very limited interference from coaches during game play. There are no time outs, limited substitutions, and no plays are called out or sent in; the players truly have to make the decisions on the field.

Under your direction, as players follow the games, exercises, and activities in this guide, they will gain unconscious awareness of their body and some of the key movements and plays that are crucial in the game of soccer making it easy and natural.

DRILL #1 – HEAD TO THE GOAL

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

This will be the younger players first real introduction to using their head to direct the ball.

Setup:

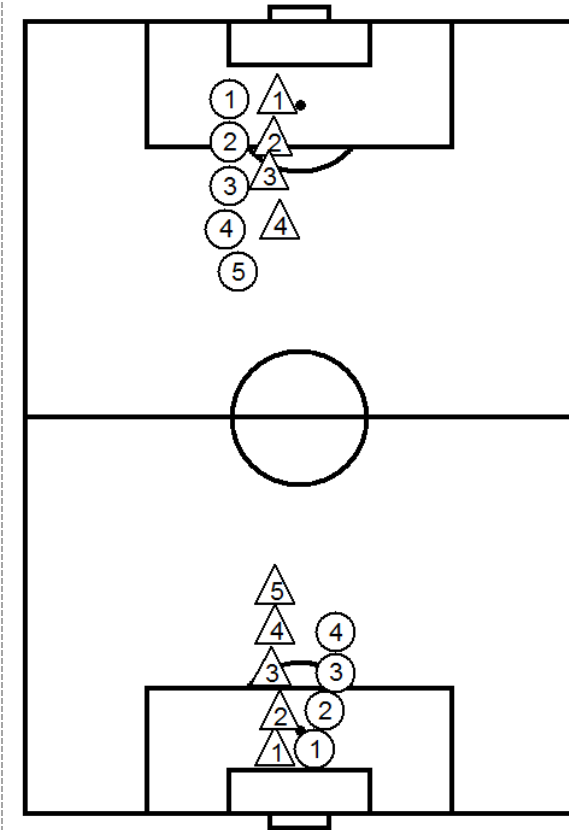
You can set up two goal areas and two single file lines with each of the goals. A coach will be needed at each station to toss the ball to the players.

Execution:

1. Coaches should toss the ball up towards the players
2. The players should attempt to direct the ball towards the goal.
3. At first, contacting the ball with their head is the most important thing, but as they get more accustomed to the drill, they should be able to direct the ball at the goal.

Coaching Tips:

- The result should be a player's ability to use their heads to direct the ball toward the net. If they can score a goal or two this way you have certainly done your job.



This tactical drill is basic but helps players learn to start using their head to direct the ball which is a necessary part of the game

DRILL #2 – CATERPILLAR (GAME)

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

This game helps players with building teamwork and quick thinking and reactions skills.

Setup:

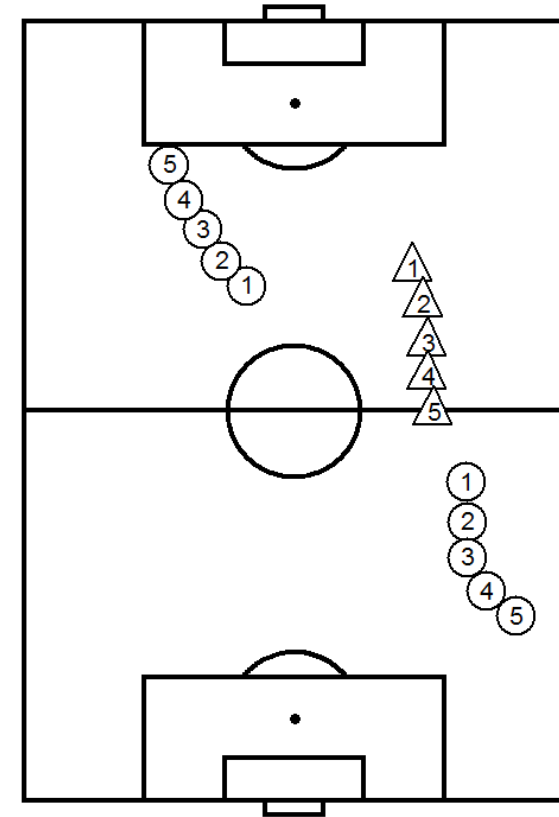
You need to put together teams of three to five players and they need to hold on to each other in single file line by the shoulders or the waist.

Execution:

1. This is a game of tag.
2. The front of each caterpillar try's to tag the back end of the other caterpillar.
3. The front of the caterpillar has to direct the team to tag the other players, but also needs to be aware of the other caterpillars trying to tag it.

Coaching Tips:

- The players will understand that in order to be successful they must work together as a caterpillar. This builds a sense of teamwork among them.



Players have fun while learning the important soccer tactic of teamwork.

DRILL #3 – KING OF THE RING (GAME)

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

Player will continue to work on dribbling the ball, controlling the ball, and also trying to be aggressive and get the other players ball.

Setup:

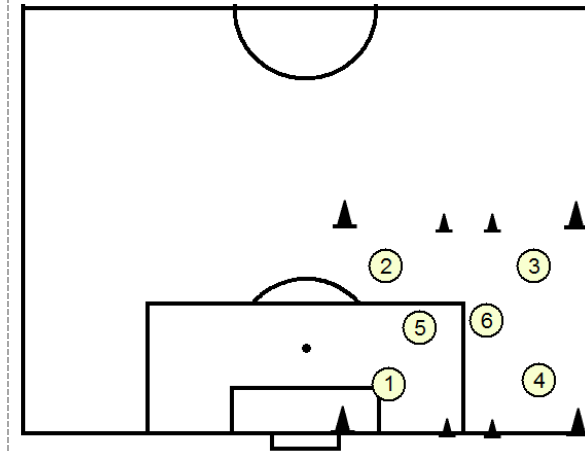
Cone off an area of about 20-yards by 20-yards and give each player a ball inside that area.

Execution:

1. The players inside the box must keep their ball moving at all times.
2. They must dribble the ball around the inside of the box, while trying to knock the ball away from other players in the square.
3. The players will be removed from the ring if they leave their ball to kick another ball out.
4. They will also be removed if they let their ball come to rest for any more than just a few seconds.
5. The last player standing wins.

Coaching Tips:

- Younger players will continue to work on their basic dribbling and ball control skills, while getting competitive with their attempt to knock the ball away from the other people in the ring.



This game engages players and helps them with practicing ball movement and protection.

DRILL #4 – PIG IN THE MIDDLE (GAME)

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

This game will help players pass around other players similar to what is need in a game situation.

Setup:

Divide the team into groups of three players each. Give each group of three one ball. The threesome should stay in an area of about 20-yards by 20-yards.

Execution:

1. One player stays in the middle with two players on either side.
2. The players on the outside are to pass the ball between each other in a way to try and keep it away from the person in the middle.
3. They can pass the ball high, low, or they can take a few steps within their box to make the player in the middle move.
4. Once the player in the middle steals one of the passes, then the player that passed the ball that was intercepted must be the pig in the middle.

Coaching Tips:

- You have probably played the game hundreds of times yourself and it may seem boring to you but this game helps players develop the skills to pass the ball around defenders. It also helps defenders learn to gain position in order to try and steal the ball.



This is a simple but fun game that helps players learn to pass and steal the ball.

DRILL #5 – KEEP YOUR SPACING

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

It is essential for kids to learn that they need to stay some distance apart in order to make the game flow easier and this drill helps them do that.

Setup:

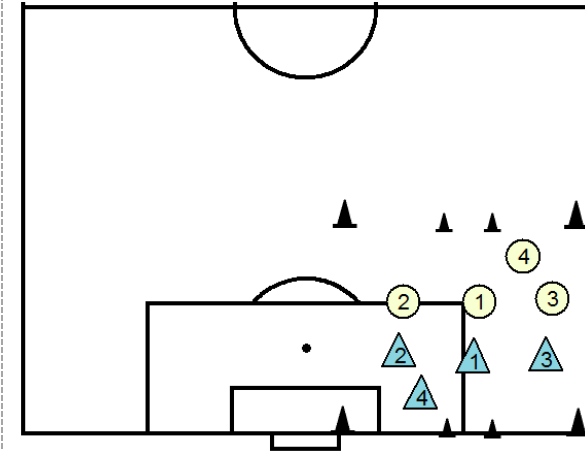
Divide the team into two even number teams. Section off a 20-yard by 20-yard area with cones, using two cones for goals on each side. One ball is all that is needed for this game.

Execution:

1. Instead of it being a 'real' game, players have to play the game with their arms outstretched.
2. They cannot touch another one of their players with their hands or arms outstretched but it is OK for the players to touch the opposing players.
3. If a player does touch his or her own teammate, then you should treat it as a regular infraction and the other team will get the ball.

Coaching Tips:

- Kids are often controlled by the 'pack mentality' when they are playing at earlier stages in their soccer career. If you can get them to create some space between each other, they will begin to understand the advantages of player spacing and how it can help their team.



Players will learn the proper spacing as they are required to play in a small area with outstretched arms.

DRILL #6 – THE BASIC THROW-IN

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

Sometimes the skill of throwing the ball into play is overlooked by coaches. Once players learn the basics then they will build on that for years to come.

Setup:

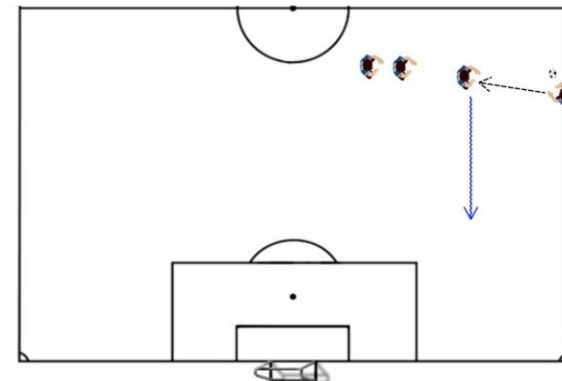
Create two separate lines. One for throwing in and the other for pass reception.

Execution:

1. After teaching the players the proper method of throwing the ball in, you can then put them into this drill.
2. Have the players receiving the ball stand about 5 to 7 yards away. Younger players aren't going to be able to throw the ball that far so adjust accordingly.
3. The throwing player will then try to throw the ball to the pass receiver, and they have to stop the ball and then dribble it forward.
4. You can add another element to the drill by setting up targets for the players to toss to at different distances and different angles.

Coaching Tips:

- Your players will get a beginning lesson on the throw-in and how doing it well can give you an advantage in the game.



This is a simple way to teach players how important the throw-in tactic is in the game of soccer.

DRILL #7 – PASSING WITH A DEFENDER

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

When the offense is in the defenders area, the defense usually plays a little tighter. To advance the ball, you need to be able to get the ball to a player in the offensive zone. This drill helps players understand this tactic.

Setup:

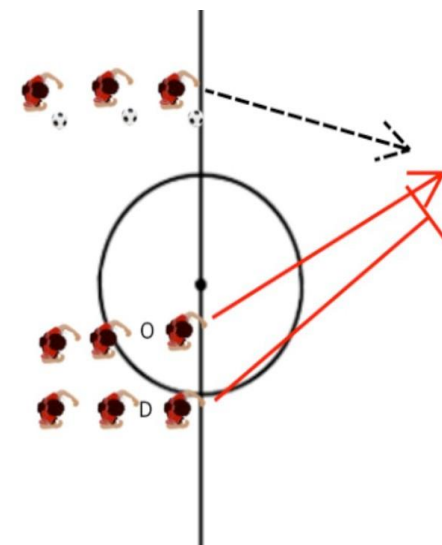
Divide the team into three lines. One for passing, one for receiving, and one for defending. The receiving and defending lines will be right next to each other and the passing line will be about 10 yards away, with all lines being parallel.

Execution:

1. The passer will be in the defensive zone.
2. The receiver will streak into the offensive zone.
3. The defender will cover the pass receiver while they streak.
4. The passer must try to get a pass into the receiver at a place where the defender cannot get to it.
5. The receiver must see where the pass is headed and create a space for him or her to receive the pass without the defender getting in the way; then they need to receive the pass and control it.
6. The defender will do what they can to get into the passing lane and disrupt the pass.

Coaching Tips:

- Making passes while being covered by defenders is a great skill for a team to learn.



Players will work on passing, receiving and defending, in a game-like scenario.

DRILL #8 – DON'T GO OFFSIDES

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Learning the offside rule is one of the best things you can instill in players at an early stage. It is quite often a reason why goals are called back in games.

Setup:

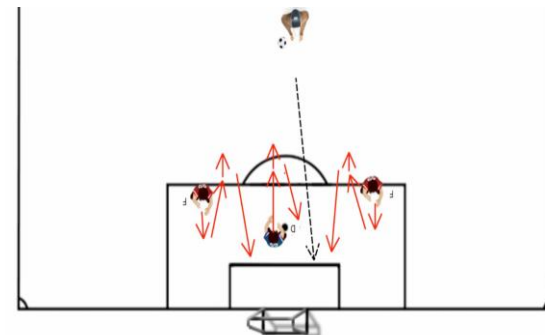
Have one defender and two forwards or strikers. They should be around the goal area.

Execution:

1. Explain to the players that the offside call is made when an offensive player is deeper than the deepest defender without the ball going there first.
2. The defender sets the pace as he or she will move forward and backward in the defensive area.
3. The offensive players need to react to where the defender is on the field so they do not put themselves offside.
4. You can add to this drill by having a ball kicked into the area with players still keeping in mind the offside rule.

Coaching Tips:

- Your players will be more aware of keeping onside during a game. Offensive players will learn how to adhere to the rule and defensive players will learn how to use this to their advantage.



Players will learn to follow the offside rule and use it to their advantage.

DRILL #9 – CORNER KICK CHALLENGE

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Attacking and defending on a corner kick are two areas that happen quite often during the course of a game and are vital to mastering soccer tactics.

Setup:

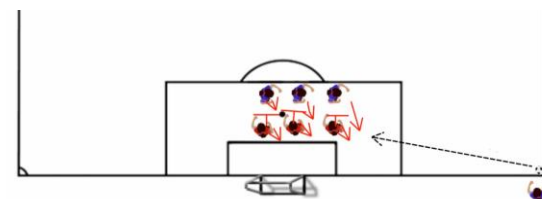
If you have enough players set this up at both goals. You need one goaltender, three offensive players, and three defensive players.

Execution:

1. The offense has the slight advantage in that they have the kick coming in from the corner and all they need to do is collect the ball and kick it to the net.
2. The defense has to prevent the offense from making a play on the ball and must get it out of the defending zone.
3. For each kick, the offense must be wary of not putting themselves offside waiting for the ball to enter the defending area.
4. You can give each side a point for succeeding in their effort.
5. The losing team has push ups or laps or sprints.

Coaching Tips:

- Your team will learn how to successfully attack and defend on the corner kick which will likely occur at least a few times in any game.



This drill pits the offense against the defense and allows for both sides to try to work for the ball in this common game situation.

DRILL #10 – PASS RECOGNITION

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Choosing the right person to pass to is crucial in maintaining ball control as a team and advancing down field.

Setup:

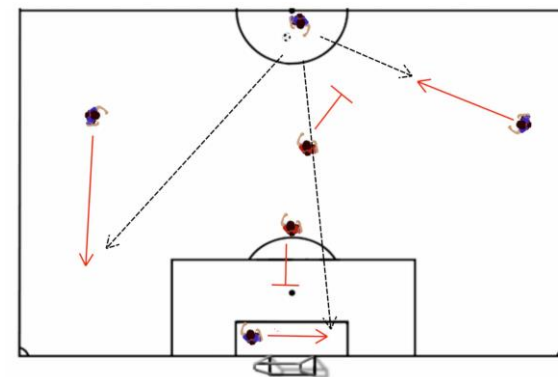
One line of players will be at the center circle to pass the ball. You will also have three players that will be pass receivers. Two defenders will patrol the defensive area.

Execution:

1. The player in the circle will have to find the right person to pass to in order to avoid the defenders.
2. The three pass players will start in three different areas: one 10 yards downfield to his left, one player right in front of the goal crease, and one 10 yards downfield to the right.
3. The player on the left will come back towards the passer, the player on the goal crease will move along the front of the goal crease, and the player on the right will move downfield to the corner.
4. The defenders will try to cover this area and the passer will have to determine which pass will be the most effective.

Coaching Tips:

- Make sure you have your players complete the drill at game speed. Although the defense is at a disadvantage in numbers of players they can plug passing lanes from a distance and still intercept the ball.



Players will learn to read the defense and recognize the best pass.

DRILL #11 – TACKLING DRILL

Skill Level: Advanced

Purpose:

Tackling is a tactical skill that must be learned in order to steal the ball away from the opposing ball carrier and disrupt his or her movement.

Setup:

Divide the team into two groups and create two lines. One side has the ball, the other side is going to execute the tackle.

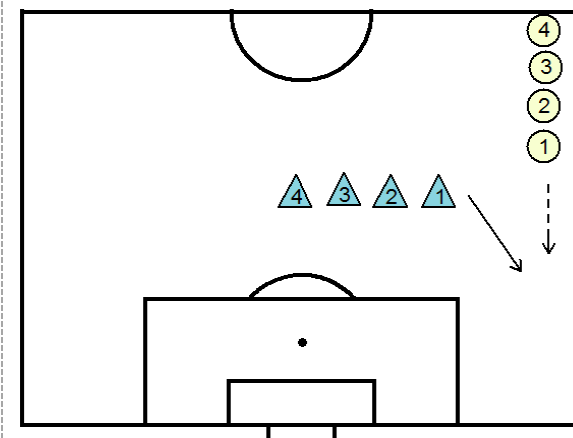
Note: Players need to understand the best way to tackle in order to avoid penalty or injury. Giving them the right instruction is crucial for this drill to be a success.

Execution:

1. One player will streak down the sideline with the ball and the defender will attempt to get into a position to make the tackle.
2. They cannot contact the player before they contact the ball. The ball must be contacted first.
3. Rotate through the two lines and have players switch lines so that every player gets several changes at making proper tackles.

Coaching Tips:

- It's important that you help educate the players on the best times to make a tackle, which are: just before a pass, once the player has dribbled forward, or when they are stopping to turn with the ball. This increases the chance of contacting the ball first.
- With practice, there will be increased ability to execute a tackle and to help steal the ball.



This is a great exercise for players to get basic tackling experience.

DRILL #12 – DEFENSIVE COVERAGE

Skill Level: Advanced

Purpose:

Learning to cover the offensive players is an important skill to preventing goals during the course of the game.

Setup:

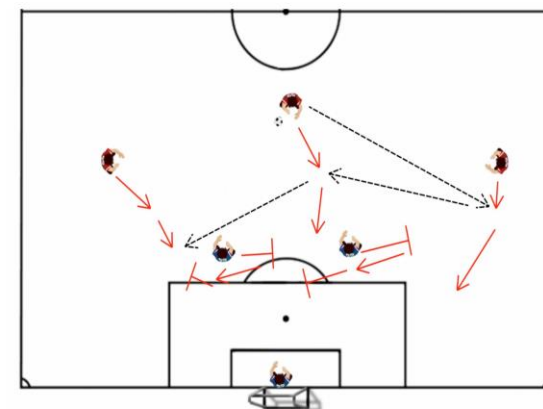
You can have two players on defense and three players attacking. One goaltender can be used in this drill.

Execution:

1. The attackers simply move the ball around with one another by passing and dribbling back and forth.
2. While the passes are being made the defensive players work on maintaining the proper defensive positioning between the player and the goal.
3. There is no attempt to shoot the ball at this point.

Coaching Tips:

- Increasing the awareness of the defensive players as to their appropriate defending position when the offense is there.
- Defenders need to learn the proper positioning when they are defending a player from the opposition. They need to remember to stay between the player and the goal, and to be in a position to get between the passer and the offensive player when a pass is attempted.



This is a drill that helps players learn to prevent goals which will help them win games.

DRILL #13 – THROW-IN CHOICE

Skill Level: Advanced

Purpose:

In most cases, offensive players will be defended during a throw-in and the thrower needs to find the right player to pass to.

Setup:

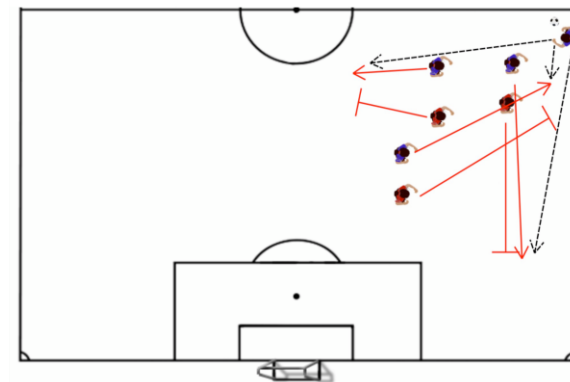
You can have one player throwing the ball in with three attackers with three defenders.

Execution:

1. Similar to the pass recognition drill, the offensive players should be finding different areas to go to in order to provide options for the player throwing the ball in.
2. One player should be streaking to the downfield to the offensive zone, another should be breaking directly away from the thrower, and another breaking toward the thrower.
3. Then the thrower must make the right decision based on where the defenders are.
4. Rotate players at the throw-in spot so that everyone gets a chance to enhance their ability.

Coaching Tips:

- Same as pass recognition, players will be able to identify the areas to throw to when defenders are in certain positions.



This provides a game scenario for players to learn the proper throw-in skills.

DRILL #14 – CORNER KICKS TACTICS

Skill Level: Advanced

Purpose:

This is a basic tactic for your team to learn on the corner kick.

Setup:

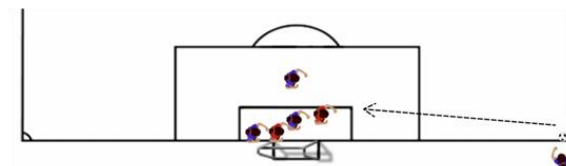
You will need to set up two defenders and three offensive players with one person kicking the ball in from the corner.

Execution:

1. One offensive player will start on the far side of the goal post, one in the goal area, and another at the front of the goal area. The kicker will decide which one to kick the corner pass to.
2. If he or she kicks it across the goal area, the offensive player should shoot the ball towards the net.
3. If the pass is to the player in the crease, they should merely attempt to redirect or deflect the pass toward the net.
4. If the pass goes to the player in front of the crease, they should one-time the pass towards the goal.
5. You can add more players into this drill if you want, to make it more difficult and to provide more options to the person in the corner.

Coaching Tips:

- More practice and utilizing an effective corner kick strategy is going to help you score a few more goals in your game.



Players will learn the basic offensive positions for corner kicks.

DRILL #15 – FREE KICK TO SCORE

Skill Level: Advanced

Purpose:

Often times you get a chance to kick the ball on an in-direct kick that happens just outside the goal area and although it's not in the goal area, you still can use it to try and score.

Setup:

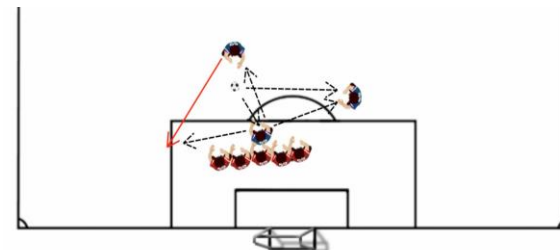
Five players need to line up in the wall position to defend the kick. The offense will have three players to try and execute a few different plays.

Execution:

1. First, an offensive player will line up directly in front of the wall.
2. This can be a decoy for the kick right to the net, but they can also be used to pass the ball to the third player waiting to kick the ball at the net.

Coaching Tips:

- You can use this set up to run several different plays, including passing it back to the kicker and moving around the wall, or just straight back to the kicker to kick again to kick once the wall has separated.



This setup allows players to take advantage of a free kick and try to score.

DRILL #16 – PASS RECOGNITION 2

Skill Level: Advanced

Purpose:

Add a few more players and a few defenders to the original pass recognition drill and you make for an interesting opportunity to read a defense.

Setup:

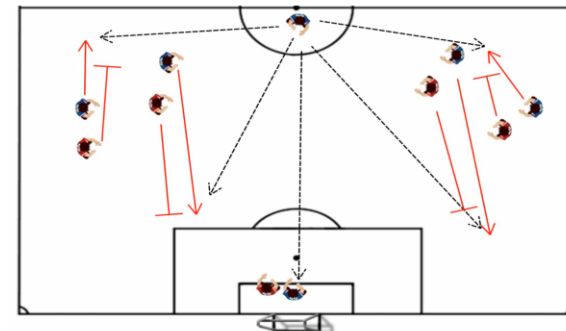
You will have the passer in the center circle, but this time you will have five passing options and five defenders.

Execution:

1. You can have the players on each side of the field do the opposite things. One goes deep, the other is short and the player at the goal crease stays the same.
2. Now there are five options for the passer and they need to pick the best one to move the ball into the offensive zone.

Coaching Tips:

- This is a more advanced pass recognition drill for your players to learn and also creates a game like situation for defenders and strikers.



Players learn the importance of decision making when passing into the offensive zone.

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