

A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO SOCCER

**Developing Anticipation, Imagination, and
Awareness in Your Players (A.I.A.)**

(PRESENTED BY WAYNE HARRISON: EDEN PRAIRIE SOCCER CLUB)

This is presented to help understand the **thought processes** that a player goes through in playing the game of soccer. The concept is to link the mind and the body and have them work together to produce an awareness to develop **composure in possession** of the ball of the players, to **increase time on the ball** by **anticipating situations ahead of time** or **decrease the time needed to move the ball**, by having **total awareness of all players** around them and by encouraging players to use their **imagination** in their **use** of the ball and by **allowing them** to make their **own decisions**.

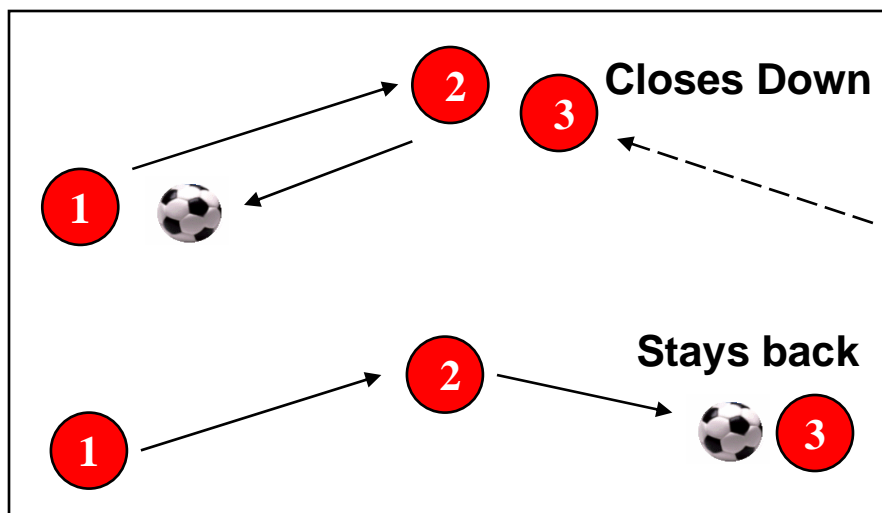
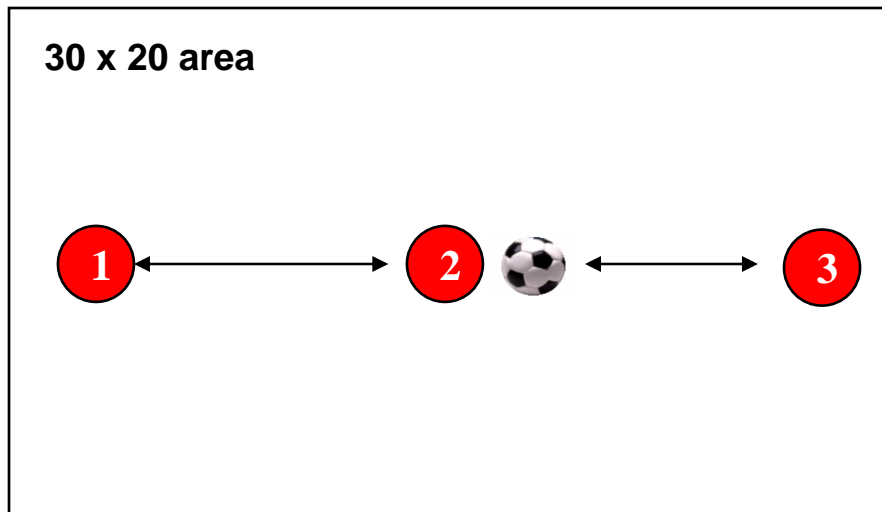
The training allows the players to develop their skills in a non – competitive environment to begin, building up to working more competitively when the players are ready to progress to that stage. Initially each exercise should be practiced without opposition building up to ultimately moving onto exercises with opposition to test the **composure** the players should have gained by following the program.

We are not looking to have players playing at 100 miles an hour and playing one touch all the time but to teach them to be **aware** of the options **before they receive the ball** then **they** can decide, does the ball need to go one touch, do I need to hold onto the ball for longer until another option opens up, is this the time to run with the ball, dribble with it, shoot, cross or pass?

THE DECISION MAKING THOUGHT PROCESS THE PLAYER IS GOING THROUGH AT ANY ONE TIME IS AS FOLLOWS :

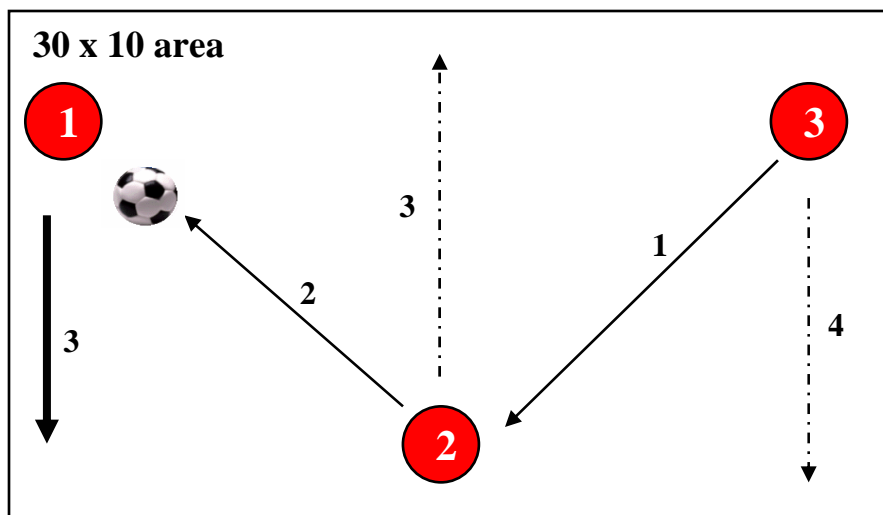
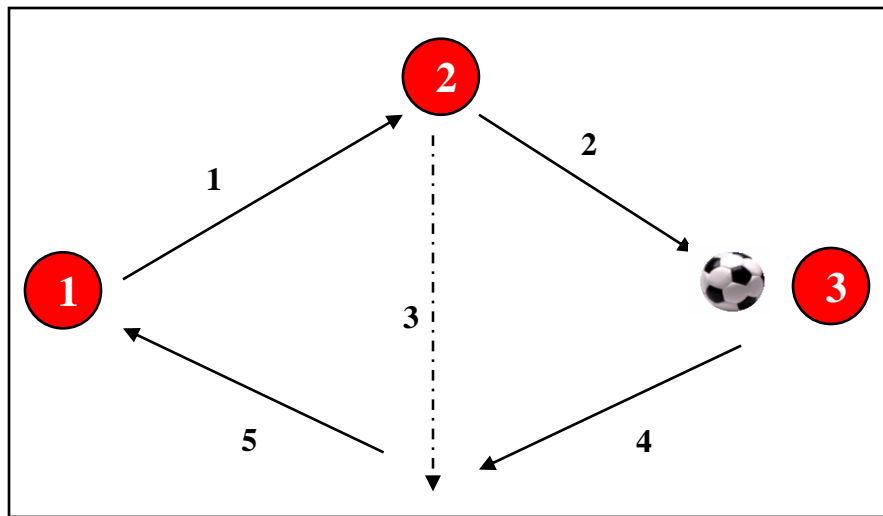
1. OBSERVING HOW AND WHERE THE BALL IS COMING FROM.
2. KNOWING WHERE THEIR TEAMMATES ARE.
3. KNOWING WHERE THE OPPOSITION PLAYERS ARE.
4. DECIDING “ **WHAT** ” TO DO WITH THE BALL. (TECHNIQUE / SKILL TO USE (EMPHASIS ON A GOOD FIRST TOUCH) - PASS, RUN, SHOOT, CROSS, DRIBBLE, DUMMY / LEAVE).
5. OBSERVING “ **WHERE** ” THE BALL IS TO BE MOVED OR PASSED TO. (WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?).
6. DECIDING “ **WHEN** ” THE BALL GOES. (TIMING OF THE TECHNIQUE / SKILL USED).
7. DECIDING “ **HOW** ” THE BALL GOES. (SELECTION OF THE TECHNIQUE / SKILL USED)
8. DECIDING “ **WHY** ” THE BALL GOES. (THE TACTICAL OBJECTIVE).

IN THREE'S (1 PASSES TO 2, then 2 PASSES TO 3 and BACK).



Coaching Points

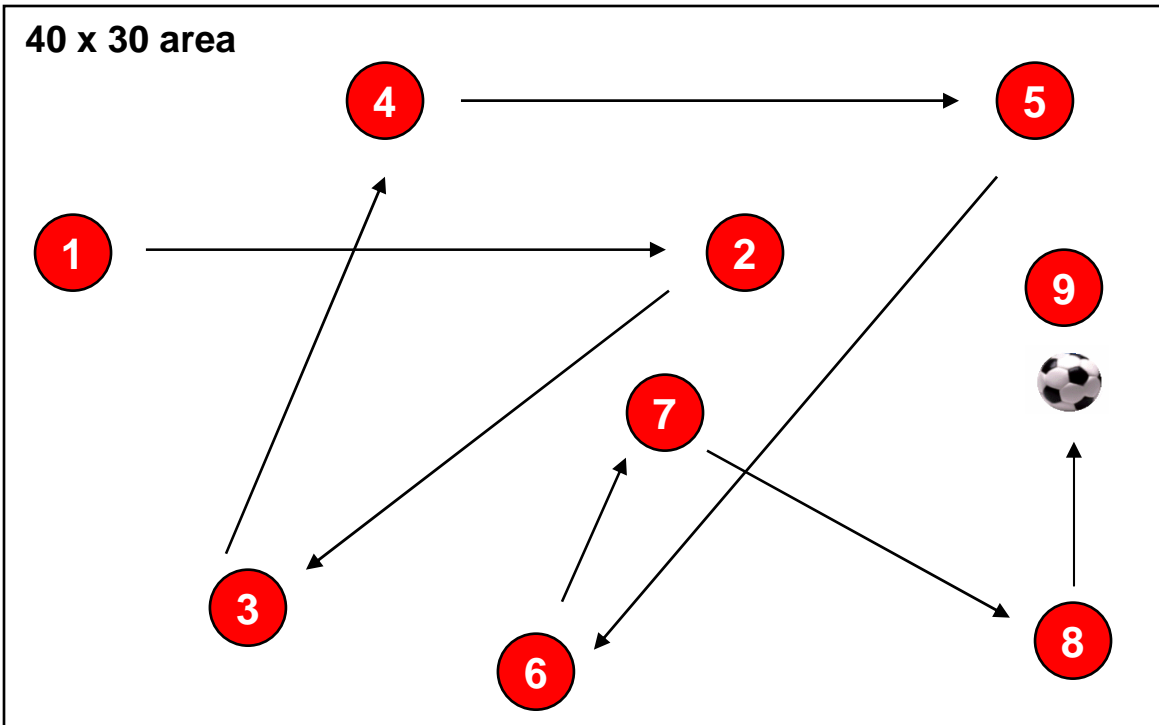
1. Look over **shoulder** before receiving (where you are passing to).
2. **Body Stance** – half turned (can see behind).
3. Support at an **angle**.
4. **Save a touch** – let weight of ball determine this- let it run across the body and move one touch.
5. If closed down by the outside opposite player (3), the middle player passes back to the same player (1) they received from.
6. if not closed down, the middle player turns and passes to the opposite player.
7. This identifies if the middle player has looked to see where the player behind them is, “**before**” they receive the ball. If (3) closes down on (2) as (2) receives the ball, and (3) then decides to turn and to pass the ball to (2), this then shows that (3) has “**not looked**” to see where (2) is because (3) has turned to pass which is the **wrong** decision. If (3) had looked first then the correct result would be (3) passing back to (1) if (2) closes (3) down.



Progressions

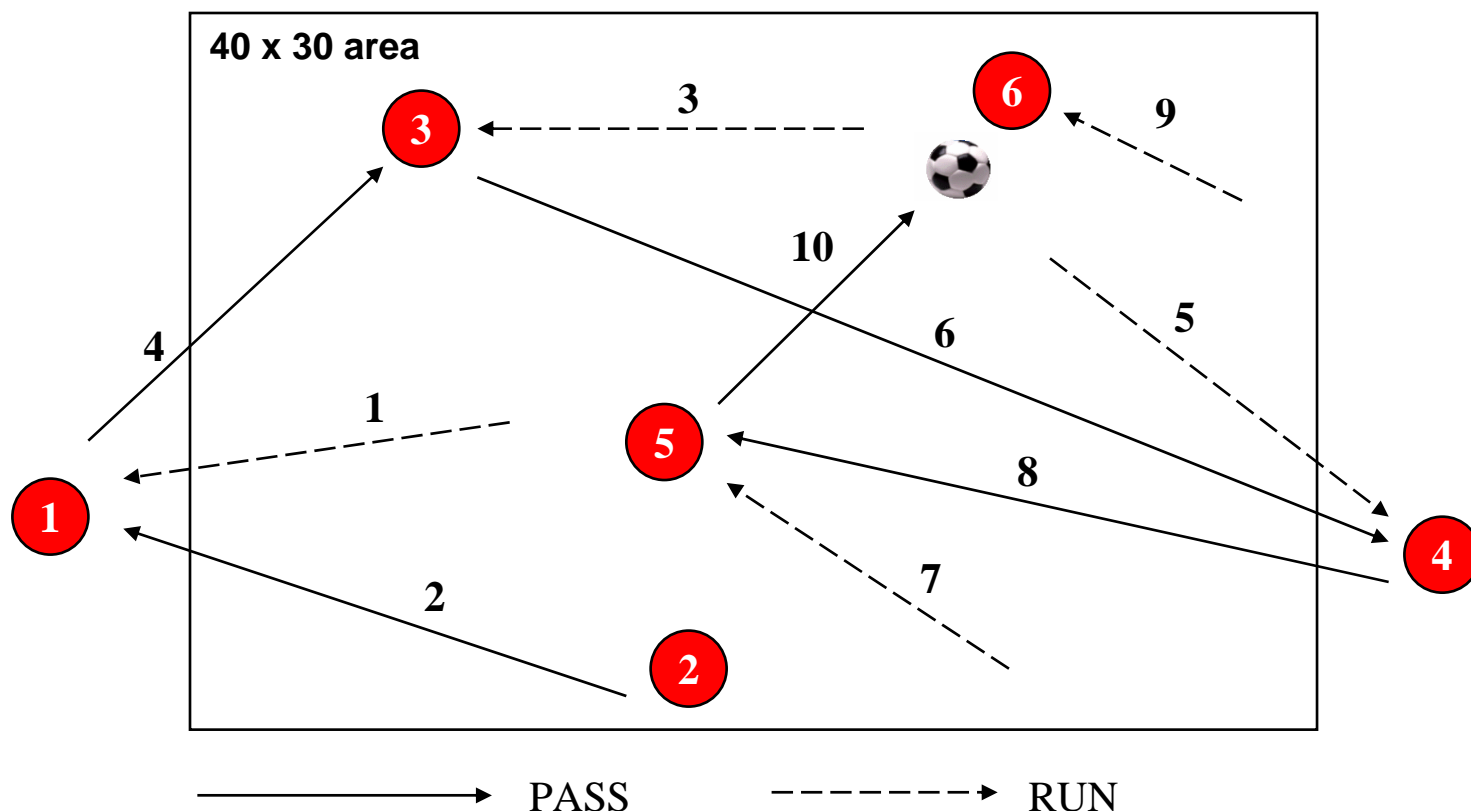
1. Movement of the **outside players** to create a bigger angle to pass and receive the ball.
2. Middle player “**checks to**” the ball to escape a marker in a game situation.
3. Middle player “**checks away**” from the ball to “**check back**” to receive, in a game situation this takes the defender away from the space to check back into it hopefully now not marked. Only do this in a game if the passer has “**Time**” on the ball to wait for the movement.
4. Middle player receives the ball and passes into “**space**” for the outside receiver to move to, rather than to feet as previously done.
5. Center player always looking to where the receiver is “**before**” they receive the pass themselves.

NUMBERS GAME : PASSING IN SEQUENCE



1. 8 Players and only 1 ball to begin. Players must pass in **sequence** ie 1 passes to 2; 2 passes to 3; 3 to 4 and so on to 8 who passes to 1 and we begin again. You can have players **static** to begin then have them passing and **moving**. Player **receives** from the same person and **passes** to the same person each time. This develops great awareness of time, space and player positions. Continuous work on and off the ball.
2. Awareness of : **where** the player you **receive** from is and **where** the player you **pass** to is. Because of this players begin to **anticipate** the pass to them and where it is coming from. Also they must look to where it is going to (where is the player they are passing to?).
 - We are trying to create a situation where players are looking **two moves** ahead not just one. For instance as (1) is about to pass to (2), (3) should be looking to support (2) for the next pass already, looking two moves ahead before the ball leaves (1).
4. **Peripheral Vision Development** results from this. Ask players to make it difficult to find them by lots of movement off the ball to **test** their teammates vision. **Develop** : Use **two** balls then **three** balls at the same time. Start with a ball at (1) and (5) then at (1), (4) and (7). To keep the sequence going players must move the balls quickly with few touches hence their peripheral vision development improves dramatically. As soon as they have passed one ball off the next one is arriving so **quick thinking** is needed to make the correct decisions.

SPECIFIC PERIPHERAL VISION COACHING SESSION



This is a simplified set up to get initial understanding. Increase numbers e.g. two teams of six. We start with one ball and six players for example so each person on the ball had five choices of pass to make and that is easy.

Now we must **identify one** and **only** one pass and must try to make it. That pass is to the person who runs outside the zone. This player is the **free** player (unmarked). The session goes as follows :

1. Player (1) runs **outside** the area (perhaps after several passes within the zone).
2. Player (2) on the ball **sees the run** and must **pass** to (1).
3. As (1) is about to receive, as the ball is traveling to (1), (3) moves into a position to **support** (1) showing anticipation and awareness.
4. As (3) receives the pass, (4) makes a run out the area.
5. (3) has **already** seen the run by (4) and passes. (4) brings the ball back in and the game continues. This is an indicator of how quickly players recognize the run and consequently make the pass.
6. Hence players are beginning to look **one** and **two** moves ahead of the ball. It doesn't need to happen so quickly in terms of the next player running outside but it serves as an example.

The run can be likened to a penetrating run into the attacking third where the player hasn't been picked up or tracked and is in a great position to attack and score if the passer sees them and makes that pass.

TWO TEAMS PLAYING “THROUGH EACH OTHER”

Divide the players into two teams, a ball each team, passing and moving in the same area passing through each other, but not playing against each other. Each team can't take the other teams ball.

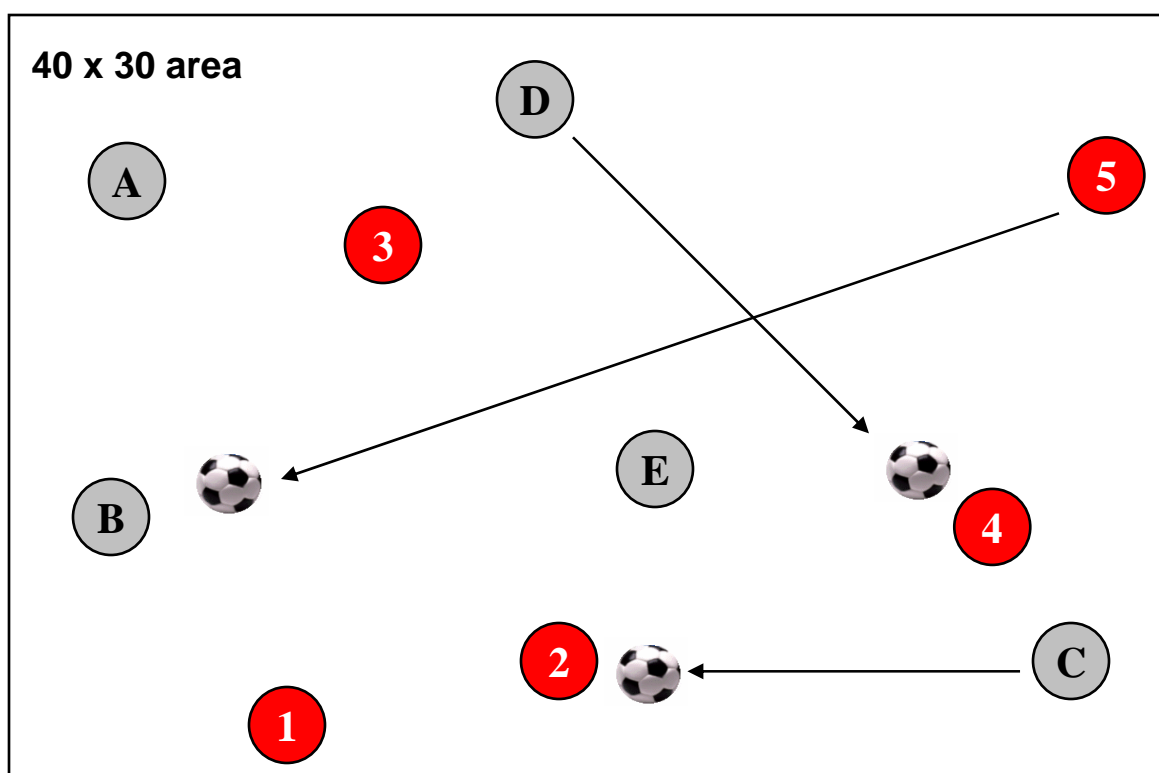
Technical/Tactical Design

Lots of touches on the ball are achieved in this practice.

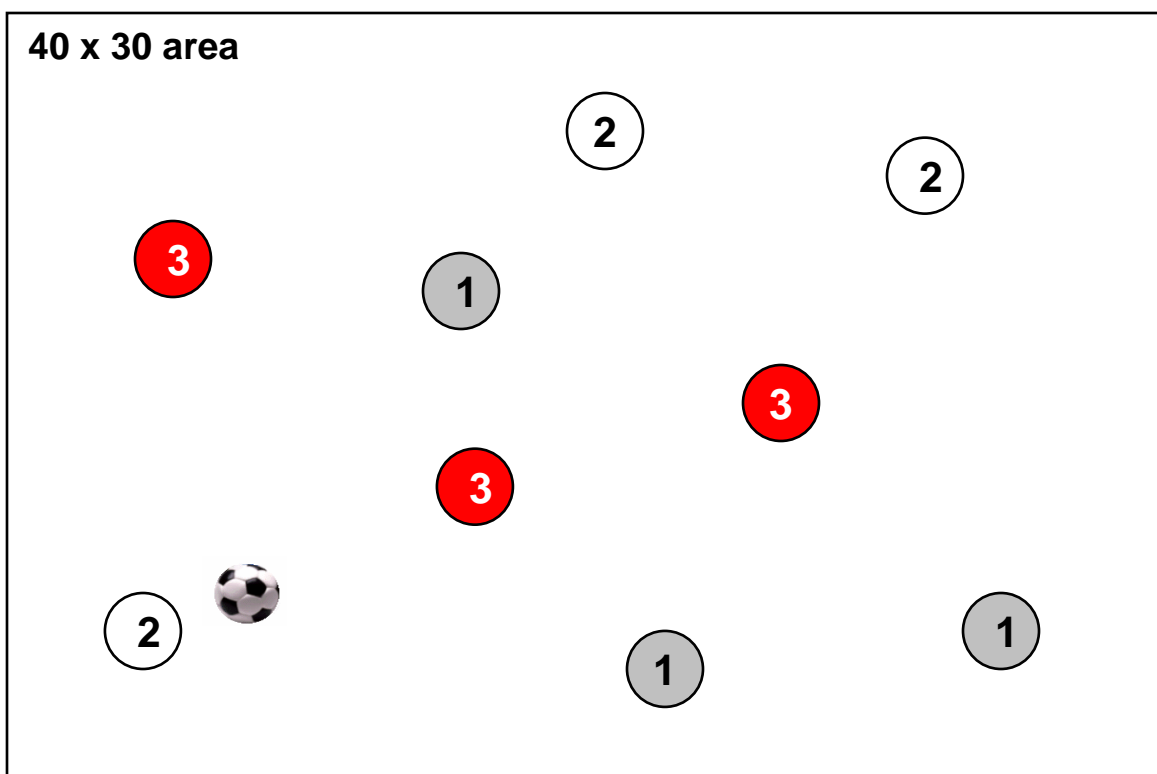
- a) The players must play with their heads up (so they view what is around).
- b) Look over shoulder before receiving the ball.
- c) Body stance open to receive the ball.
- d) Move the ball on the 1st touch away from pressure and into space or towards where you are passing it, or one touch transfer.
- e) Awareness of teammates positions on the field in advance.
- f) Awareness of opponents positions on the field in advance.
- g) Passing to space to move players into a better position on the field
- h) Passing to feet.
- i) Turns / dribbles / 1t / 2t, free play.
- j) Communication (key words).
- k) Support Angles / distances to help the player on the ball.

DEVELOP

- a) Increase the **number** of soccer balls per team.
- b) Pass to **Opposite** colors. Below we have several balls being passed.
- c) Progress to an **overload game**, for example 3 v 3 v 3, before going to an equal numbers two team game of **possession**.



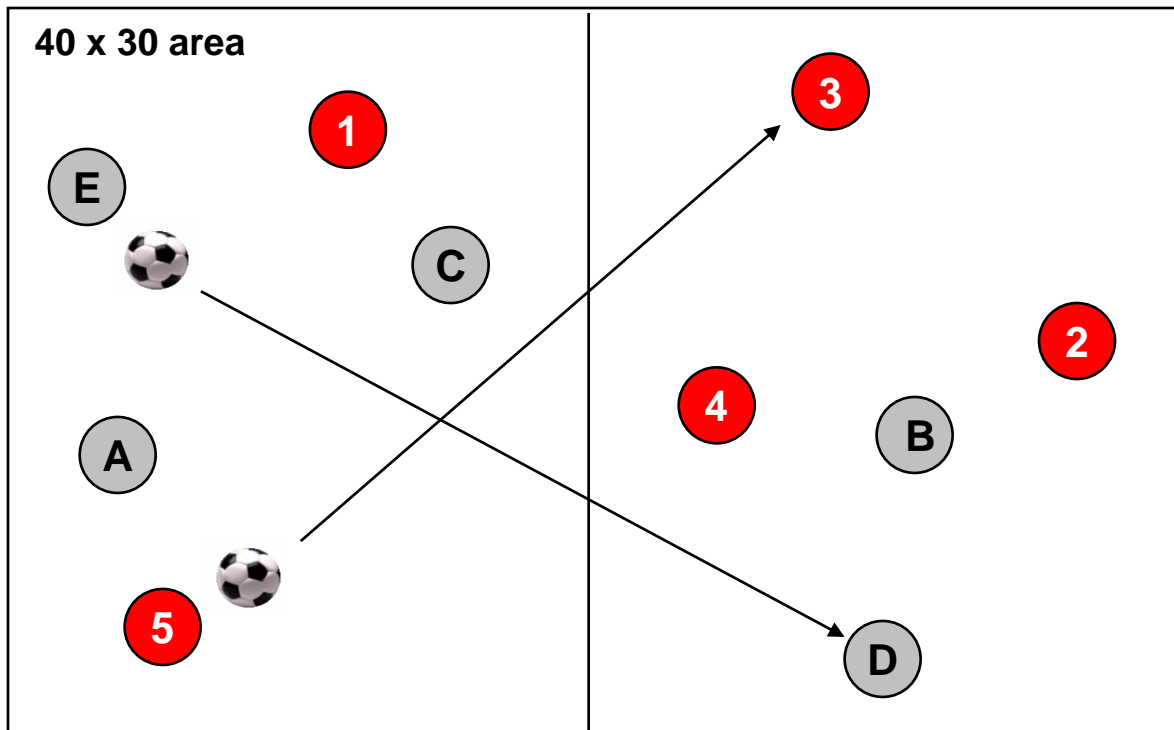
NON - DIRECTIONAL THREE TEAM GAME (3 v 3 v 3)



Use an **Overload game** before you go to a regular game with equal numbers on each team.

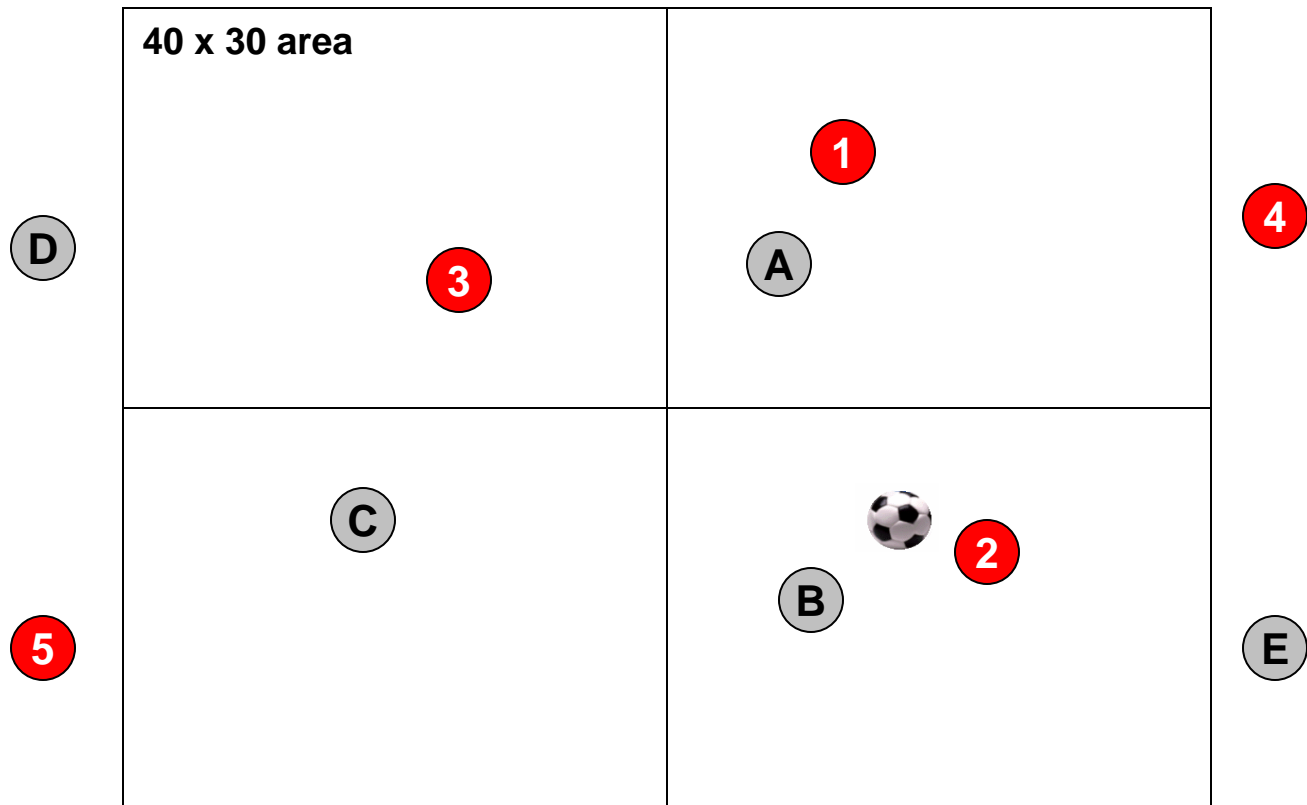
1. Teams (1) and (2) work **together** to keep the ball from team (3). If team (3) regain possession the team who gave it away become the defenders. The defenders **reward** is they keep the ball and **link** with the other team.
2. **Rules** : Once possession is gained, to establish who gave the ball away the defender who won the ball puts their foot on the ball to stop play and the coach can call out the team who gave it away. Play begins again working on transitions.
3. **Develop** : Increase difficulty for attackers by :
 - a) Reducing the zone size.
 - b) Decreasing the number of touches on the ball of each player.
 - c) Condition the passing to be only to the other attacking teams players eg (1) only pass to (2) and vice versa therefore only half the number of passes available per player.
 - d) You can increase the numbers to suit how many players you have, eg 4 v 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 v 5 etc.

TWO TEAMS PLAYING THROUGH EACH OTHER THEN BECOMING COMPETITIVE



1. Here we **first** have **all** the players moving **freely** passing and moving within their own team. Divide the group into two teams again. Begin with one ball being passed around each team and as they become proficient introduce another ball to increase their awareness qualities. A ratio of approximately one ball per three players is ideal to build up to eventually.
2. Once they have got good at this introduce a competitive element to the game. Have 1 ball to play with and make it a possession game. Introduce another ball so each team has 2 balls to focus on so at the same time one teams players can be defenders trying to win a ball back and at the same time be attackers having possession of the other ball.
3. It may be that a particular player is involved in trying to win a ball back but has to be aware that other teammates have possession of the second ball and she / he may have to adjust their thinking and positioning instantly if a player looks to pass the second ball to her / him. This helps the mind prepare for instant **transitions** from attack to defense and defense to attack.
4. On changing from a defender to an attacker by receiving the second ball which this players team has possession of, this player must think about where the other players are who are free to pass to, to keep the momentum of the move going. Going back to the "**awareness**" principles this player has to know where the ball is going before receiving it to have the best chance of keeping possession of this second ball.

QUICK TRANSITION DIRECTIONAL PLAY



1. **Quick continuous attacking play** which is good for anaerobic fitness. Breaking one way passing to an outside player and switching positions, inside player out, outside player in then attack the other side of the zone.
2. **Coaching Points**
 - a) **Technical** ability on the ball in 1 v 1 situations.
 - b) **Quick Transition in attack** - As the transition between players happens for example (3) changes with (5), the numbers team must get the ball to (4) as quickly as possible.
 - c) **Observe** the movement of (2) and (1) in terms of their **support** positions as the directional change takes place, they must move in **anticipation** to find space to help the player on the ball as the switch occurs (awareness training emphasized).
 - d) **Observe** also, as the change occurs, the **positions** of the **defending** team; has the decision been made quickly enough who presses the ball. Are the other defensive players supporting and covering and especially tracking runners off the ball. The **coach** must learn to look **away** from the ball and observe what may happen next before it happens.
 - e) This session improves quick decision making, tight control because the spaces are small to play in, and thinking in advance due to the switch in direction of the play. You can also work on the defending players.
 - f) All the coaching points we have discussed up to now can be brought into play in this game.

The theme running through all these practices is quite simply teaching the players to **LOOK BEFORE THEY RECEIVE THE BALL**, to identify all the options **in advance** that they have in front of them depending on where their teammates and where the opposition players are positioned.

This is the **raw ingredient** we are trying to establish in the players minds above all else.

All the other aspects related to this requirement fall into place as you go through the program. Everything I am attempting to show you here leads from this simple basic philosophy.

I hope this has given you some insight into the thought processes that a player must go through in order to assimilate all that goes with playing soccer successfully.

This article is focused on the basic fundamentals of performance in soccer, to enable the players to have a preparation standpoint from which future development of their game can take place.

To develop the **link between the mind and the body in terms of the development of soccer players**.

Most of the work is **small sided game** activity where the players get lots of touches on the ball and they are able to have concentrated practice of the fundamentals they need to learn.

The majority of the exercises have the players spending considerable time touching and manipulating the ball and it is advisable that the coaches allow this to happen and they don't spend too much time explaining and thus stopping the momentum of the exercises. Show the players what you want then let them get on with it stepping in to make coaching points where and when it is appropriate.

This article was provided by Wayne Harrison, Director of Coaching for Eden Prairie Soccer Club in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, USA. An UEFA "A" licensed coach, Wayne played professionally for Blackpool F.C. and in Finland for Oulu Palloseura and previously served as the Director of Coaching for the Blackpool Football Club's "Center of Excellence". In addition, he has coached for a number of other professional and semi-professional teams, including Accrington Stanley F.C., Bamber Bridge F.C., Lancaster City F.C.; Workington Reds F.C. and Carlisle United F.C. You can write to him at wharrison@integraonline.com.

There is a book : **“Recognizing the Moment to Play”** written by Wayne that teaches this training, available from www.Reedswain.com