

Functional Training of the Central Midfielders

Objective: To provide a training environment that focuses on the functions of the central midfielders: where they play, how they play and the decisions they make to keep the attacking action connected, effective and going to GOAL.

1) Inter-passing in Two Groups with Designated Central Midfielders (25 minutes):

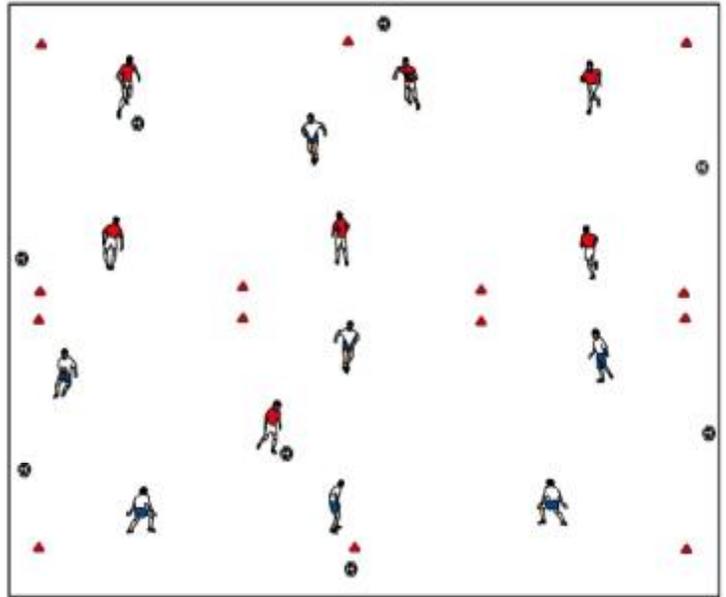
In two grids, each 30 yards long x 20 yards wide, two groups of 7-8 players inter-pass the ball freely. Dress your central midfielders (CM's) in a different colored vest and assign each one to a different grid. As the ball is being passed amongst the players in the grid, the CM must demand the ball every 3-5 passes and play it back to the player who passed it to him or play it to another player in the grid.

Version 2: If the CM plays the ball back to the passer, it must be one-touched. If he plays it to another player, he can take 2-3 touches before passing it.

Version 3: Introduce an opponent who is responsible for marking the CM man-to-man.

Version 4: Play an 8v4 keep-away game. Make sure that your CM is one of the Eight. The Team of Eight is awarded a

point every time they can pass to the CM and the CM can return it to one of the Eight. The team of four is awarded a point if they win possession and can dribble the ball out or pass it out of the grid to a teammate.

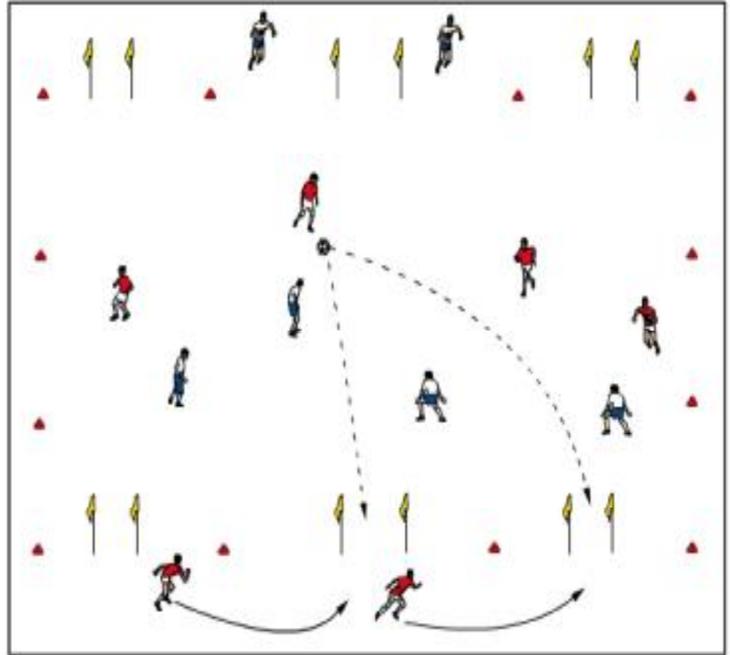


Coaching points:

- CM must be technically clean...perfect execution (dribbling, receiving, passing, shooting, heading, tackling)! CM must be technically fast...timing of dribbling and/or passing is crucial!
- CM must be tactically fast...timing of decisions to speed up play or slow it down is crucial!
- CM must be tactically fast...patience...keeping space live...knowing when to show up for the ball.
- CM must be surveying the field 100% of the time to give proper direction to his teammates...keep the ball; slow it down; change the point of attack; penetrate, delay the opponent's attack, win the ball back, etc.
- CM must know when to move the ball to another part of the field.

2) 4v4 game to Six Goals with Target Players (25 minutes):

In the middle third of the field set up a grid the full width of the field (about 60 yards) and 35 yards long (the grid is wider than it is long). On each 60 yard end line set up three 4-yard goals with cones or flags; two of them about 3 yards in from each corner and one centrally located. Make sure that one of your CM's is assigned to each team of four. Position 2 target players behind each set of goals on both ends of the field. Play a game of 4v4. Each team scores by passing the ball through one of the 3 goals opposite them to a target player. The 2 target players must move laterally, covering all 3 goals, and show up behind a goal at the right time to receive a ball from the attacking team. If a goal is scored, the target player who received the ball restarts the game by passing it in to the team who just got scored upon.



Coaching Points:

- Reinforce the coaching points from the 1st activity.
- Pay special attention to the decisions made by the CM:
 1. is her combination play appropriate;
 2. is she looking to penetrate into the attacking third when possible;
 3. if she's defending, is she forcing the ball into appropriate pockets of the field;
 4. is she taking responsibility for the ball and taking long range shots, getting the ball to flank players to open up the opponent's defense, and/or slotting passes through the defense to forward players.

3) Match...8v8 to 11v11 (30 minutes): Organize your players into 2 teams and play soccer.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce coaching points made throughout the training session.
- The coaching points made in these more realistic game-like environments will be more beneficial to the players.

4) Cool-down (10 minutes): Individual juggling; challenge players to see who can juggle the most in a 2 minute period.