

Checking runs, knockoffs and goals

A youth training session to improve offensive tactics with and without the ball

by Ian Mulliner, director of coaching, Illinois Youth Soccer Association

For youth soccer players, understanding when, where and why to play quickly is no easy task. This session is designed to address the issue by exposing players to the techniques and tactics involved in creating and executing combination plays and scoring opportunities.

How this session works

The training session is divided into four phases. It starts with a warm-up to introduce the topic, followed by small-sided games, and ends with a final 6 v. 6 game. The advantages of small games and exercises like these are:

- Small fields and teams make it easier to keep track of the action.
- The game alternates quickly between offensive and defensive situations.
- All players are constantly involved in the action.
- All players have both offensive and defensive roles to play at all times.
- Every player gets plenty of touches and playing time.
- Special rules (e.g. different field sizes, touch limitations, rules for shooting) help focus players on the desired topic.

Phase 1: Warm-up

During warm-up, players are encouraged to use two runs, one for the defender and the other for the ball. The first run should take the defender away from the space where the receiver is trying to accept the pass. The second should be straight back toward the ball, creating an angle so players can flick the ball into space with the outside of the foot and then spin away in the opposite direction to retrieve it.

Phase 2: Small-sided activity

The setup for this activity should allow the attacking player in the 1 v. 1 to be creative, sometimes using the outside of the foot and sometimes the inside to make the knockoff to a free player on the outside of the grid. The attacking player makes “dummy runs” to shake the defender and then checks back to the ball to make the knockoff. This activity is physically demanding and should be limited to short time periods of 45–60 seconds.

As a variation, the players on the outside of the grid can choose to serve the ball in with their hands, thus challenging the attacking player to use different controlling surfaces to make the knockoff.

The use of guided questions will empower players to come up with their own solutions to problems being posed. Examples:

- Where does the ball need to be played?
- How can we do this faster?

Phase 3: Expanded small-sided activity

By this point the session needs to have some direction to it, and for this topic there is no better area of the field than the penalty box. This also adds functionality to the session, allowing the players to start to see how it all fits together. Speed of play needs to be encouraged, especially in and around the penalty box. Now we are looking for players anticipating the knockoffs to make runs to create space for themselves and put themselves into position, not only to receive the knockoff but to create and finish scoring opportunities. Questions:

- What kinds of runs are the target players making? What kinds of runs should they be making?
- Are players using the correct techniques?
- Are players creating scoring opportunities, and how do they finish on the opportunities created?

Phase 4: Game

For the coach this is the final evaluation to see if the objectives of the practice have been retained:

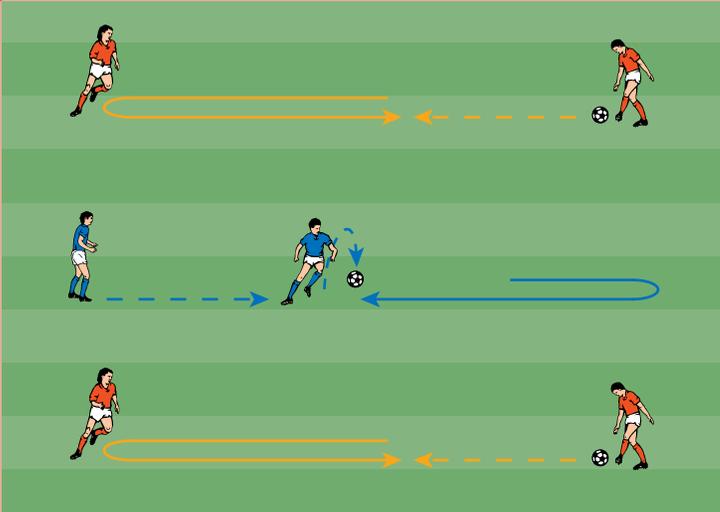
- Are the right players making the right kinds of checking runs?
- How is the ball being served to the target player?
- How does the target player deal with the pass?
- Are the supporting players recognizing the knockoff opportunity?
- Are they being mobile and getting into the right positions?
- Are they receiving the ball with the correct surface, and does their first touch set up a scoring opportunity?
- Are they able to finish?

Once the session is over, review it with your players and see if they can come up with solutions to the problems posed. Then observe their next game to see if the practice needs to be repeated.

YOUTH TRAINING

SAMPLE TRAINING SESSION

Warm-up



Setup and sequence

- Divide players into pairs. Each pair has a ball.
- The receiver checks away from his partner, then checks back and calls for the ball. He then flicks the ball behind him and retrieves it.

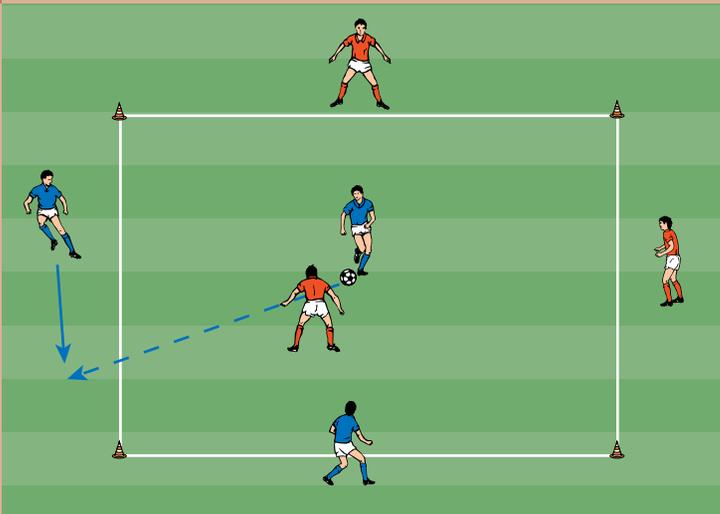
Variations

- Practice in groups of three (pass, flick and receive).
- Practice in a grid (half of the players have one ball each).

Coaching points

- Players should look over their shoulders before receiving the ball.
- Ask players what other kinds of knockoffs they could do. Ask them to demonstrate and then encourage the rest of the group to try it.
- Encourage technically advanced players to try knocking off flighted and driven passes for a third player to receive.

Small-sided activity



Setup and sequence

- Mark out two 20 x 15-yard grids with two teams of three on each.
- Position one player from each team inside the grid, the rest outside.
- Players play 1 v. 1 inside the grid. To score, the attacker must receive a pass from an outside player and pass directly back.
- After one minute, rotate players and switch roles.

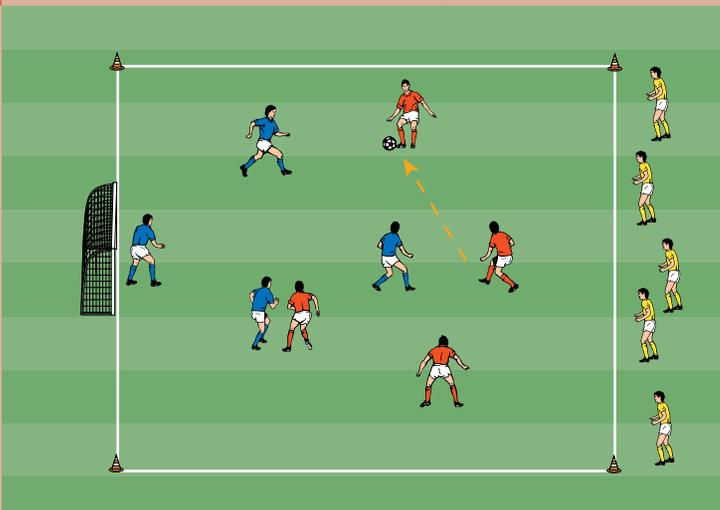
Variation

- Players outside the grid throw in high flighted balls.

Coaching points

- Look for the following: types of runs when evading defenders, eye contact and timing of runs, body angle and check over shoulder when receiving, timing of pass and visual communication, selection of receiving surface, quality of delivery in and out

Expanded small-sided activity



Setup and sequence

- Three teams of four play on a 44 x 55-yard field with one goal.
- Two teams play 4 v. 3 + keeper on the field; the third team (target players) stands behind the endline opposite the goal.
- The attackers play to goal; the defenders play out to the targets.
- The attackers keep attacking until the defenders complete three passes to the targets. Then rotate teams: attackers become defenders, defenders become targets and targets become attackers.

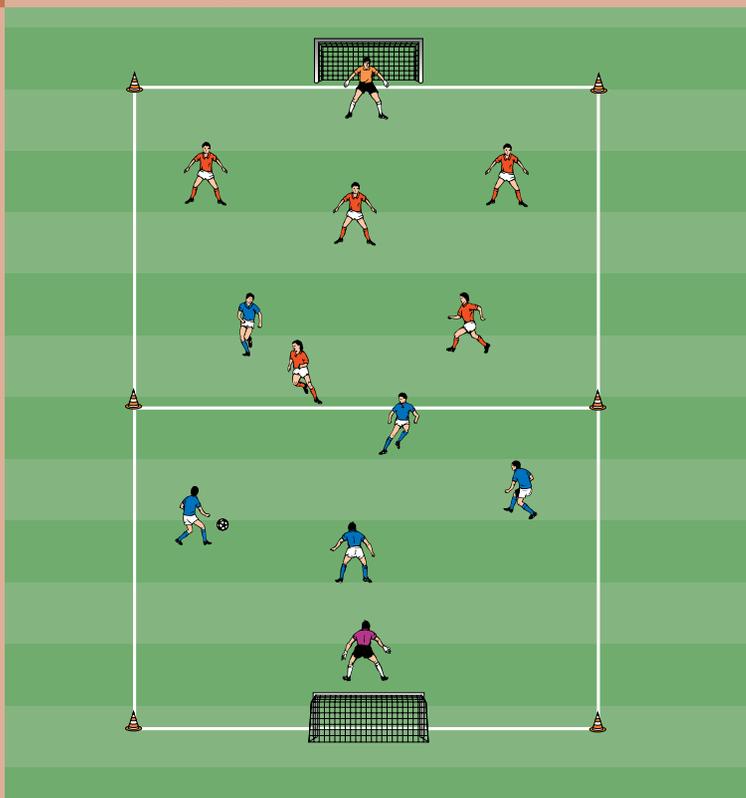
Coaching points

- Look for the following: accuracy of pass, weight and timing of pass, speed of play, execution of combinations, body shape of receiver, choice of surface (body and ball), angle and timing of runs to receive flicks and knockoffs, creating and finishing on scoring opportunities

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SAMPLE TRAINING SESSION

Concluding game



Setup

- Mark out a 75 x 55-yard field with two goals.
- Divide players into two teams of five plus goalkeepers.

Sequence

- Teams play 6 v. 6.

Coaching points

Look for the following:

- passing: weight, accuracy, timing, type
- receiving: angle, surface, layoff
- shooting: mentality, window, execution
- runs: types, timing, angles of support
- speed of play
- creating and finishing on scoring opportunities



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