

U12 and up Dribbling to Attack

Though we think of the U12 to U14 ages as ones where we can make a lot of progress with youth players on passing and possession, which is quite true, we may neglect the fact that all players, to be effective later, have to be comfortable on the ball. I see a lot of players who have gotten by on knocking the ball past people and being fast and strong enough to make that work at a younger age. These players may be very athletic, but may not have the technical ability to be dangerous once they reach an age where *everyone* is pretty athletic & defenders are much better at tackling.

This session is a little long, but concentrates not only on the skills of dribbling but also on how to use them. Speed of decision-making and reaction (making the game “slow down” for us) is often as difficult to build as the technical skills themselves. This session tries to do both by consciously introducing choices about dribbling options and pressure. If you have less skilled players or a shorter practice time, cut out one of the middle games.

Another thing worth noticing is that it uses exercises that fit the “Slanty Line” principle: players can challenge themselves or be challenged at different levels, so players of different ability can all find an appropriate challenge.

Warmup: Dribble Across in 3s

Pairs of cones are set 15 yards apart as shown.

3 players set up so they can dribble across and leave ball for next player to take in stride.

Coach calls out the instructions or moves:

Touch every step, one foot inside-outside-inside etc., cut back and forth on outside of foot only, fake and take, 2-touch inside of one foot then outside of other, roll with one foot, Stanley Matthews roll and cut w. same foot, Stanley Matthews move with fake and cut other way, Alfredo diStefano move (scissors)...

Coaching points: Balance, movement, comfort, rhythm. Do motions and moves at a pace that’s possible, then work on speeding up.



Dynamic stretching exercises can be done at intervals between the cones as well.

Traffic and Openings

Use a square grid 15-20 yards on a side with cones scattered in the middle. Each player has a ball.

Dribble through the maze of cones (and other dribblers!), out the other side, around the far cone, then along an outside edge, right or left, then back through the maze, etc. Let players try it out, then play for time, say 1 minute. Most outside corners rounded in allotted time wins.

Coaching points: Focus on *modes of dribbling*. Ball close, sharp cuts, feints, and draws in traffic; pushing the ball and flying in open spaces. Particularly notice comfort in transition: close down on the ball at the exact time or smoothly push ball out and go.



Beat the Square

In this game, 2 begin without balls in a small square, 8-10 yards on a side. All the rest have balls.

Players with balls try to dribble through small square any time they choose, reaching the opposite side (one point). They can go any direction or even cut back to keep their ball. Defenders try to take balls. If a defender gets a ball, she becomes a dribbler and the person losing the ball becomes a defender. Play for time, giving the first defenders bonus points so they have an equal chance.

Coaching points: Different players try different comfort levels of traffic and taking defenders on. Praise attempts and successes getting behind defenders. Ball close, balance, quick feet in traffic, sharp acceleration.



3-Gate Dribbling Game, 1v1

3 gates are set up in a line across the center of the playing area. 4-8 pairs of players begin with one on a ball, one defending.

Dribblers try to beat their defenders and dribble through any of the gates in either direction and any sequence. If a defender wins the ball, she begins trying to dribble through gates. Play for time, 1-2 min. Most gates of the pair wins. Next round, other partner begins with the ball.

Coaching points: Players should see opportunities to change direction and speed to lose defenders. Options are open, so choices are at a premium.



Game: 6v6 with Dribbling Emphasis

Each team has 4 players on the field and two on the touchlines, alternating as shown.

Players try to score in small goals. If they pass to an outside player, that player dribbles on and passer replaces her. Possible restriction: If last player took fewer than 3 touches, you must take more; or, alternatively, all must take more than three. The idea is to challenge every player to get comfortable on the ball.

Then remove restrictions, with all players on at the end.

Coaching points: Encourage dribbling and risk-taking to get behind defenders, draw defenders in, or break down defenses by dribbling. Players dribbling in from edges should utilize speed dribble when an advantage presents itself.

