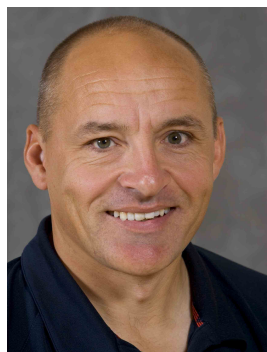


Introduction To Attacking Principles

The main focus of this session was to provide an overview of the 5 principles and how a coach can introduce them with youth players. Presented by Ian Barker



IAN BARKER

Director of Coaching Education, National Soccer Coaches Association of America

Ian is somewhat unique having held leadership positions with US Youth Soccer and NSCAA and he has had extensive experience at youth and college levels. Ian coached for 21 seasons with the men's programs at the University of Wisconsin and Macalester College, before becoming NSCAA Director of Coaching Education in 2012.

Ian was the Director of Coaching and Player Development for Minnesota Youth Soccer Association for 10 years and is a Head Coach of Region II Boys Olympic Development Program

Ian's qualifications are extensive and he holds the USSF A License, NSCAA Premier Diploma and NSCAA Master Coach Diploma.

Penetration

To introduce young players formally to the principle of penetration, Ian suggested using 'transition' – the moment in the game when possession is transferred from one team to the other. Start by asking the players what they should be doing when they have won the ball back from the opposition. The first objective is to get the ball forward by the using a shot, dribble or pass. As players become more technically proficient, we can then start to work on team play using combinations to move the ball up the field. A couple of issues the coach will need to address, are firstly the technical proficiency of the players and secondly decision-making when in possession of the ball. Both components need to be addressed in tandem, as it is difficult to foresee a successful outcome of good decision making without the technical ability to execute the decision.

Support

The objective of support is to create space in front, behind and to the sides of the player in possession of the ball. Simply, the principle of support means creating options for the person on the ball. The coach's role is to help players understand the importance of angles of support and distance of support. One method proposed by Ian is to discuss the importance of creating triangles. He challenged coaches to pose the question to players 'how can 2 players create a triangle?' This question is intended to stimulate thought and hopefully the players conclude that in order to create a triangle with 2 players one player has to move into a support position.

Mobility

Mobility becomes a more advanced concept as we add numbers to the field. Mobility is about creating space and movement of players on and off the ball. The objective for support players must be to make the field as big as possible and understand that effective mobility is away from the ball to stretch the opponent's defense. Coaches are advised to start with, 1) the person on the ball, 2) the person in the immediate vicinity of the ball in support and 3) players away from the ball. Consider 2 specific types of movement. Firstly, 'elusive movement' – movement by a player to find space behind or in front of an opponent - one objective being to distract the defenders concentration. Secondly, 'Velcro' movement – whereby the attacking player tries to drag the opponent out of the space and create room for a teammate with the ball or another teammate off the ball. With older players the coach can work on more advanced concepts like 'timing of

the run' and 'economy of the run'.

Width

Ian referred to width being the brother/sister principle of mobility. In simple terms width refers to taking up as much of the available space as possible and coaching the players to move towards the touchline in support positions when the team is in good possession of the ball. Width can have a dramatic effect on the opponent's defensive compactness. If the defense remains compact then there will be more opportunity to attack down the wings. If however, the opponent spreads out in response to the attacking team's width, passing lanes/seams will appear allowing penetration.

Improvisation/creativity

Ian put forth the case that although creativity is not as easy to coach in the same way as some of the other principles, improvisation still can be highly encouraged and must be coached. There are areas of the field where improvisation should be encouraged and discouraged. Benefits to the team can be extremely high in the attacking 3rd of the field, but the risks can be equally as profound when improvising in the defensive 3rd. Ian urges coaches to 'brave the percentages', suggesting that a coach must be willing to accept that in order to reap the benefits of exciting and creative players, there will likely be a fair amount unsuccessful attempts at first.

Questions asked by participants and answered by Ian Barker

Q1: Are changes to the formation of a team during the game potentially too difficult for younger youth players to properly execute? Marc Campoverde

Marc, this is an excellent question reflecting the need to be sensitive to the ability of the players to execute what we ask of them. If in doubt I would not make potentially complex changes and rather help the players to sort things out within the formation they have practiced. If, however, you have worked in training to sometimes mix things up and worked on a few variations then the players are prepared. This may not be earth shattering changes, but they could be meaningful and helpful. I would suggest making changes at half time for two reasons, to let the coach be sure upon reflection that they make sense and to allow the players some time to absorb and understand the changes that they have been prepared in training to make.

Q2: How early can one teach the principles of attack? Age group? Dean De Aguiar

Dean, if you play some 1 vs. 1 in training with U6s you will talk about dribbling and shooting. As such you have addressed “principles of attack”. You will not use this language, but you will be asking and helping the players with different ways to “penetrate”. As soon as you go 2 vs. 1, or bigger, you now talk about “helping” which is essentially “support”. So the decisions of the game are there at the youngest of ages as long as the kids are in activities that allow for decisions. Of course technique should be the focus of what we help the players with at these younger ages, but we can talk about decisions.

Q3: I think a follow up to Dean’s question would be how you balance ‘Principles of the Game’ with kids who are just learning technique. Carl Gibson

Good question. While it is important the coach has a grasp of the principles they must “keep their powder dry” and focus on the technical needs of the players as a priority. Even when the players have the cognitive ability to understand the principles if they cannot execute technically that understanding is not of much value in performance. Certainly a coach can plan sessions on passing and receiving, dribbling, shooting and finishing that are highly technically focused and begin to prompt the ideas of penetration etc. The key is to primarily teach the players things they can reasonably achieve and try not give too much advanced content until they are ready to be able to respond to it.

Q4: How important are dribbling moves, fakes and feints when teaching youth players to improvise? Antonio Superbia

Antonio, this is a good question because I think we do not encourage kids to try tricks and flicks enough in training. If when we get to the game we come down on a player who attempts something a little extraordinary that does not work it can stifle creativity. With younger players try some tag activities without the ball and talk about body movement and change of speed and direction. You can even have them do such work with the ball in one hand before you put it on the ground. Lots of 1 vs 1 activity and/or “invasion” game where the player has to get “somewhere” are great. Remember cones do not move, so I like to do the dribbling with a lot of moving bodies, not all trying to steal the ball and this encourages heads up movement and body and ball movement. If you can create “free play” and “street soccer” environments you empower the kids to try more skills.

Q5: In the modern game would you also consider ‘transition’ as another principle of attack (as well as defense), or would you advocate that it doesn’t have its place here? Matt Malej

I think transition is definitely a “principle” that when training attacking and defending needs to be addressed. At younger ages it might be as simple as, “have the ball, get big”, “lose the ball, get small”. Transition is important to teach in small sided games because players are closer to the ball and can see more clearly why a quick reaction to the ball changing hands includes them. Of course if technical levels are modest the ball changes hands a lot so understanding the importance of these moments of transition is always there.

Q6: Are these activities appropriate for older and more proficient players? Osman Zeki Korkmaz

Osman, when I look at all these activities I am pretty confident they could be adapted and used with a wide age and proficiency range. The first activity in my series is a relatively straight forward technical one with no opponents. Certainly this activity is good for younger players for lots

of reps and yet you will still see higher ability teams dedicate parts of training to technical repetition of this kind. All of the other “opposed” activities I would recommend to younger teams with the caveat that we will reduce numbers and field size. I think the key is these activities can work in teaching the concepts and it is the ability of each individual coach to manage them to fit their players.

Q7: When considering the principles of attack and direct vs indirect play, do you think youth coaches should focus on direct play because of the technical skill level of the players? Jeff Norman

In short “no”. An extreme example of how the lack of technical skill crudely impacts play occurs when the youth goalkeeper cannot throw or bowl the ball well and the players are challenged in control. When this is the case the coach may ask the young goalkeeper to punt the ball and given the smaller field this direct style can be effective in the short run. Of course though if we as coaches do not encourage players to try to possess the ball and deal with passing and receiving we do them a grave disservice. I think that we can teach a variety of attacking ideas that reflect both direct and indirect play and not forsake technical training. If players can serve the ball in the air and receive it in the air then they have the technical ability to be more direct. If we are direct simply because there is no fundamental technical basis we should probably train a lot more and compete a little less.

Q8: Would you recommend that a coach (for that session) becomes more of a facilitator and confidence booster, rather than a coach, to help players improvise and become creative? Matthew Hodgson

Matthew, when you are in the finishing activities and the activities that have the opportunity for creativity I think it is essential to be really positive and to encourage chance taking and to help the players feel that a “failure” in training is totally “ok”. As such while the coach should be a confidence booster all the time in these activities it is even more important to support flair and risk taking. At the same time a coach should guide the players to other possibilities, suggest different techniques or ideas and as such still be a teacher. So I think you are on to something in that improvisation and creativity are somewhat unique to coach and you must not be too inflexible in your ideas, but I do think you still must have some ideas.

Penetration

Sharpen up your players in front of goal with this devastating attacking practice that gives them so many chances to shoot they can't help but score

WHY USE IT

This session will put a stop to wasted chances up front. It allows your players to experiment with their technique and get used to hitting the target with a snap shot or when finishing off a move.

SET UP

Use the penalty area of the pitch you play on or recreate it with cones. The session uses nine players plus a keeper. You need lots of balls, bibs, cones and a goal. You need to start each sequence with the first pass from off the pitch.

HOW TO PLAY

Split your group into three even lines A, B and C and start with your pass to A. Run the drill as described and the players should work at a quick pace, speeding up as the session progresses. Keep a count of the number of shots they take in 30 seconds and try to beat it each time.

TECHNIQUE

Players should use their arms for balance and plant the standing leg next to or slightly behind the ball, striking it just below the centre. Coaches should look for players to use different parts of their foot (or their forehead with shot four) and make the correct runs with good delivery of passes.

You start with a pass to first player at A, who shoots at goal (first time or with a touch to control), then runs around his cone ready to make a diagonal pass

After shooting, B then runs behind column C and down the wing. He places one of the waiting balls ready to cross

To finish, A and C take up position to try to score from a cross by B

The moment A shoots is the trigger for B to dribble the ball through the cones and shoot before he gets to the penalty spot

While B is running to the wing, player A passes diagonally to an advancing C, who shoots at goal

At the end of the sequence the players collect their balls (hopefully from the back of the net) and each player joins the back of the next line: A to B, B to C and C to A

Player movement



Ball movement



Run with ball



Shot



Support

This good attacking and defending session from Team USA will teach your players the importance of keeping possession and helps with beating the offside trap

WHY USE IT

Possession is key with players tactically keeping position in the midfield focal point of the pitch. Movement is vital to keeping the ball and fast breaks will result.

SET UP

Use your full pitch, marking out the midfield area between the Ds of the penalty area and cutting off the wings by eight yards. Create two end zones that run along the six-yard lines. We've used 20 players.

HOW TO PLAY

Play 10v10 in the marked out box in the centre. Teams have a back four plus two midfielders in their half of the box, with three attackers and a midfielder in the attacking half of the box.

When defending, the centre backs can drop back out of the box to defend the area in front of the end zone. When attacking, two players from the back half can join the attacking half.

No more than six players from each team are allowed in either half. Teams can attack after making five consecutive passes and two attackers can break out of the box. Score by passing and receiving in the end zone. Play offsides.

TECHNIQUE

It is important for positional sense all over the pitch and winning the midfield battles.

Teams must make five passes before they can attack and break out of the box.

After five passes two attackers can break out, passing and receiving the ball in the end zone to score. They must try to stay outside.

When the ball goes dead, another one is passed in to the other team so they can attack.

The coach starts the session with a pass into one of the teams

Two central defenders can drop back out of the box when the opposition have the ball

Two players from the defending zone can join the attacking zone when their team has the ball

With their team in possession, the centre backs must return to the box, while at the other end the centre backs can drop out of it

Player movement 

Ball movement 

Run with ball 

Shot 

Mobility

With just four passes before a shot has to be made, your players will learn how break from midfield with pace and precision

WHY USE IT

Speed and incision are key elements in lightning breaks from midfield and this session uses fast movement to play past and eliminate opponents. Accelerating across open areas of the pitch with swift and slick support play are the coaching points in this session.

SET UP

Set up an area of 35x30 yards split into three zones: the outer zones are 15 yards and the central zone is 10 yards. We are using 12 players in this session and the teams line up with two players in the home zone, two in the central zone and one in the attacking zone. You need balls, bibs, cones and two goals.

HOW TO PLAY

Players have four passes to score from the moment they get possession. Any more and possession is turned over. Players must stay in their zones if they are defending but when they have the ball they are free to roam all zones.

TECHNIQUE

In a match situation the reality of recovery means that within five passes the opposition defenders will have time to recover and get back behind the ball, so the game revolves around a quick four passes and a shot.

Players have to create a goal scoring chance within four passes or possession is lost

The goalkeeper spots an opportunity to get into the midfield quickly and players combine to score

Players are locked into the zones but are released when their side has possession

Movement of players in possession is vital for success of the session

Here the attacking team lose the ball and a lightning burst from midfield sets the opposition away

Player movement



Ball movement



Run with ball



Shot



Width

Help your strike partners develop an effective understanding with each other in order to create the space needed to score goals like Robin van Persie

WHY USE IT

When two strikers play together they develop an understanding. Robin van Persie uses his strike partners to create the space needed for match winning shots on goal. Follow this drill and your players could forge a similar understanding.

SET UP

You need at least eight players, plus two keepers. One striker and a defender should be in each half, with a line of second strikers for each team at the side of the pitch by the halfway mark. You need balls, bibs, cones and goals. Play a small-sided game on a 40x30-yard pitch with goals at each end.

HOW TO PLAY

To attack at both ends simultaneously, each keeper throws the ball to the first of the strikers waiting on the sidelines. He must combine 2v1 with the attacker already on the pitch in order to set-up a scoring chance.

TECHNIQUE

To develop a partnership between two forwards they must work intensively in training, moving into different positions to disrupt the defence. Creativity is key to opening up space and a good first touch can help to beat defenders.

Each keeper throws a ball out to the right in the direction of the first striker queuing at the halfway line

The practice works in both directions, with both teams attacking at the same time

The striker receives the ball and turns to combine in a 2v1 situation with the second striker to try and score

After each attack, the striker who first received the ball takes the place of the second striker, who joins the queue at the halfway line

A quick pass from the striker coming on can catch the defender out, leaving space to exploit with a one-two

If the striker coming on dribbles rather than passes, he can take on the defender 1v1. He must avoid being forced away from the goal

Player movement

Ball movement

Run with ball

Shot

Improvisation

An end-to-end game that will help your players to develop a goal poacher's instincts by limiting strikers to just one touch in the final scoring third of the pitch

WHY USE IT

To score, players need to have the correct techniques and the ability to use all parts of either foot. This session will have your players practising a variety of shooting techniques.

SET UP

Set up an area of 30x35 yards split into three 10-yard zones: attack, midfield and defence. We're playing 5v5 including keepers. You need balls, bibs, cones and goals.

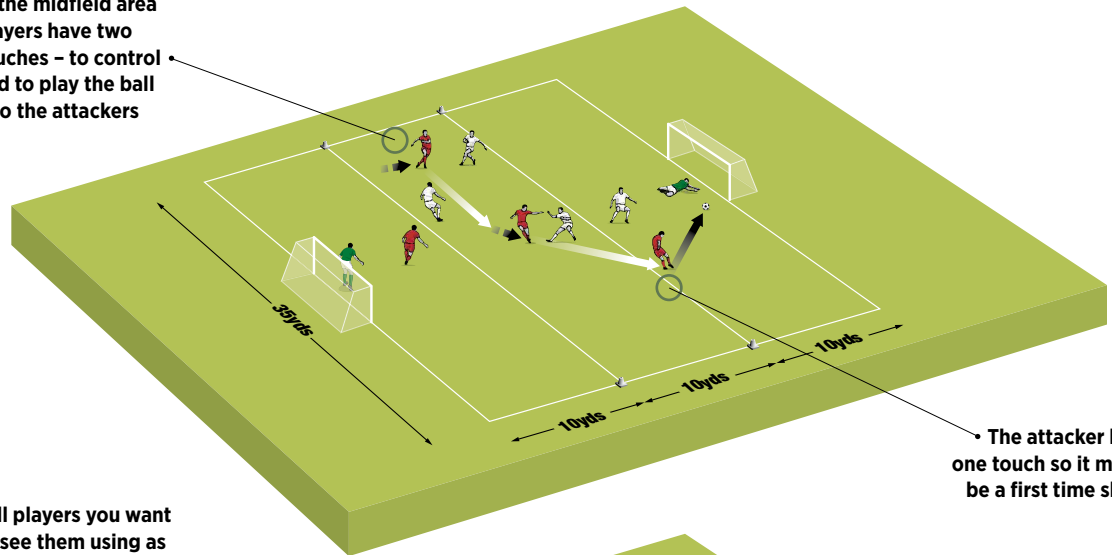
HOW TO PLAY

Play a small-sided game. Players have limited touches in different thirds: they are allowed three touches in the defensive third, two touches in the middle third and just one touch in the attacking third. Players can only score from the attacking third. The first team to score five goals wins.

TECHNIQUE

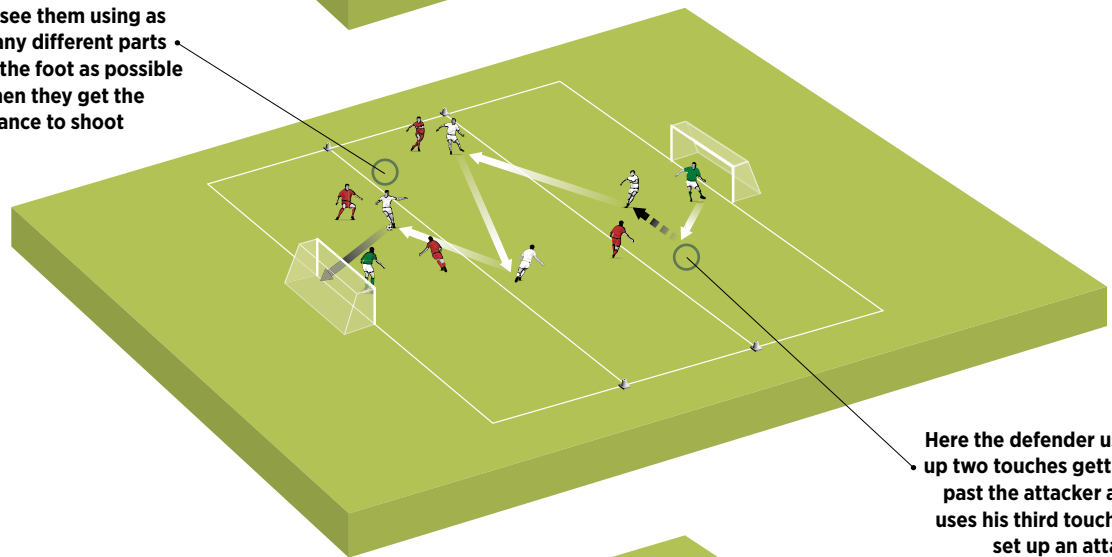
Look for players to use a variety of techniques to strike the ball. For power, tell them to use the instep (the laces) with the toes down and the ankle locked; to side foot the ball, they should strike the horizontal mid-line of the ball; to chip they should 'stab' underneath the ball with the toes; or they can swerve it with either the outside or the inside of their boot.

In the midfield area players have two touches – to control and to play the ball into the attackers

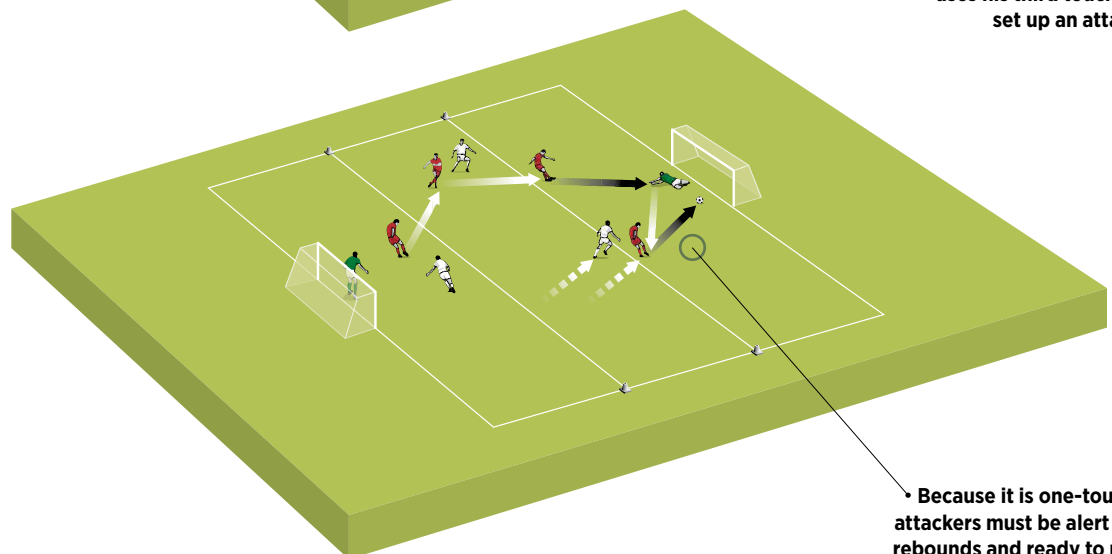


The attacker has one touch so it must be a first time shot

Tell players you want to see them using as many different parts of the foot as possible when they get the chance to shoot



Here the defender uses up two touches getting past the attacker and uses his third touch to set up an attack



Because it is one-touch, attackers must be alert for rebounds and ready to put the loose ball in the net

Player movement →

Ball movement →

Run with ball →

Shot →