

# DRIBBLING

The ability to beat opponents with the ball has always been long admired by football enthusiasts the world over. John Peacock, National Coach, The FA discusses the 'Factors involved in Dribbling.'

There have been many exponents in the art of dribbling, from Stanley Matthews back in the '50s to Eddie Gray and John Robertson in the '70s and '80s, to more recent players such as Ryan Giggs and Damien Duff. All are different; some attack players with pace, others use disguise and close ball control to beat the opposition.

Whichever way is chosen, and there are many, watching defenders being eliminated by skill is always refreshing to see. Young players in the parks within mini-soccer and other competitive matches seem to relish the challenge at a young age. Unfortunately, as they progress through the ranks and into adult-hood, I see less and less attempts at trying to beat players and succeeding in 1v1 situations. Too readily we tell our players to pass, pass and obviously through good combination play we can get to the other side of the defence. However, what happens when attackers are isolated 1v1 in the attacking third and they don't possess the necessary qualities to go past anyone? We may have to start again by playing negatively, ie backwards and square or, even worse, lose possession through inefficient skill when facing an opponent.

Obviously confidence and a positive attitude play a huge part in attacking play, but the players need to be encouraged and taught the various ways of beating opponents. There will be an element of failure, but risking the ball 60 yards from your goal is a risk worth taking as the rewards for success are high, eg crosses, goalscoring opportunities and possible numerical advantage. Crowds like to be excited by skilful play and dribbling certainly falls into that category. However, dribbling is a

means to an end and, allied to good dribbling skills, must come a positive decision which is well executed. How often do we see the attack fizzle out due to a poor cross not reaching the desired target or a shot that fails to make the goalkeeper make a save? Practising dribbling, therefore, cannot be done in isolation. Technique needs to be mastered, but decision-making, ie realistic defending in appropriate areas, is crucial to deliver the end product correctly. I have enclosed a few practices, which show a steady build-up to attacking players centrally.

In my last few years back at The FA, I have watched hundreds of games at senior professional domestic level, right through to senior and youth internationals. One of the 'biggest' factors that has struck me is that the most successful teams have players (not just one) who can effectively eliminate defenders through a combination of speed and skill. There are many examples in our Premiership while, at European Youth Level, Spain, Portugal and France all possess exciting dribblers. I do not, however, exclude England from this list. I have had the pleasure of recently working with

many young internationals in the European Finals at under-17 level. We have produced our fair share. Rooney in 2002 at the UEFA under-17 Finals in Denmark. James Milner, Aaron Lennon and Dean Bowditch at the Finals in 2003 and Shane Paul, Kyel Reid and Mark Davies at the Finals in 2004. Reaching the last four in Europe on all 3 occasions was an excellent feat and was not only achieved by good organisation, but by having exciting players who could beat defenders and score goals. We must continue to encourage and develop these types of players. Spain and Portugal and the South Americans seem to have that flair, expression and ability, allied to supreme confidence, to challenge themselves against defenders in sometimes tight and difficult situations. They invariably put defenders 'on the back foot' and force defenders deeper to stop the threat of players attacking the space behind. Patience then becomes critical, trying to prise an opening from which to attack, but once that opening arises they quickly and confidently attack again.

In summary it is up to us as coaches to encourage this freedom of expression. Yes, we need to teach and point players in the right direction, but we must give players the chance to find out for themselves. Preaching 'command' style often takes the decision-making of the player away from him. Through good and frequent practice encourage risks and, as they improve, re-define the critical areas between risk and safety. Good dribblers are essential in any team - remember the best teams possess quite a few.

## FACTORS INVOLVED IN DRIBBLING

### POSITIVES

1. Create numerical advantage
2. Unsettles defenders
3. Unpredictable
4. Leads to more crossing/shooting opportunities
5. Develops a positive attitude with the team
6. Creates potential match winners
7. Creates 1 v 1 confrontations - leads onto 1 v 2 situations if successful
8. During practice times, by product improvement in defending
9. Produces understanding and developing coaches

### NEGATIVES

1. Risk - understanding the when & where
2. Players maybe caught out of position - vulnerable to counter attack?

**John Peacock, National Coach, The FA has had a long and varied career including his time as Centre of Excellence Director at Coventry City and Academy Director at Derby County. He is now Coach for the Under-17s National Team along with his Coach Education commitments.**

"Good Dribblers are essential in any team - remember the best teams possess quite a few"



## TOPIC: DRIBBLING - SKILL (1V1)

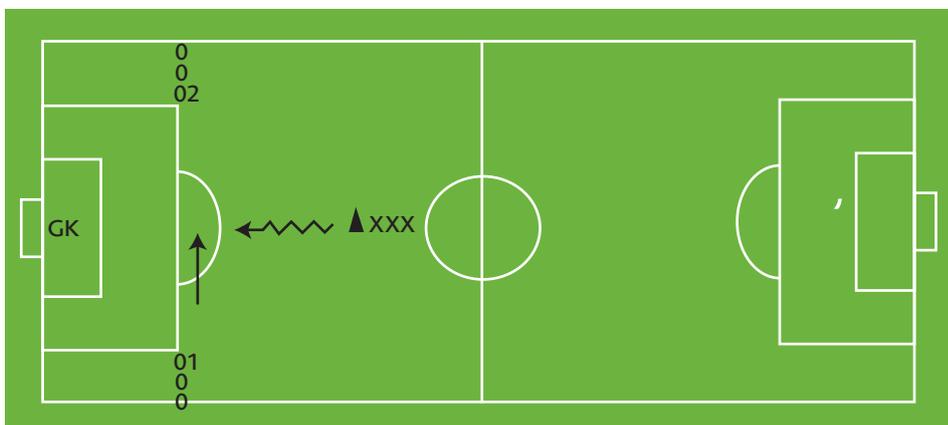
### KEY POINTS

1. Attack with speed but controlled
2. Decision by X to dribble and shoot, or shoot before O can block

### ORGANISATION

- ▲ = Cone
- X = Attacker
- O = Defender

X starts, O1 defender runs into D to close down. Repeat other way with O2.



## TOPIC: DRIBBLING - SKILL (1V1)

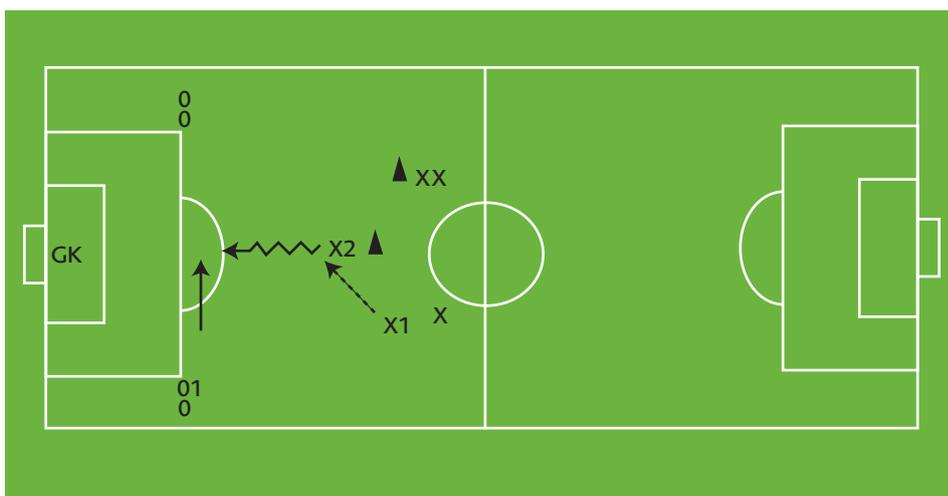
### KEY POINTS

1. Observe space / defender
2. Receive side on
3. Control ball forward
4. Decision - dribble or shoot
5. Quality of finish

### ORGANISATION

- > = Pass
- = Run
- ~~~~> = Run / dribble
- O = Defender
- X = Attacker

X1 play to X2, who controls and attacks space, O1 comes across to defend. Repeat other side.



## TOPIC: DRIBBLING - SKILL (1V1)

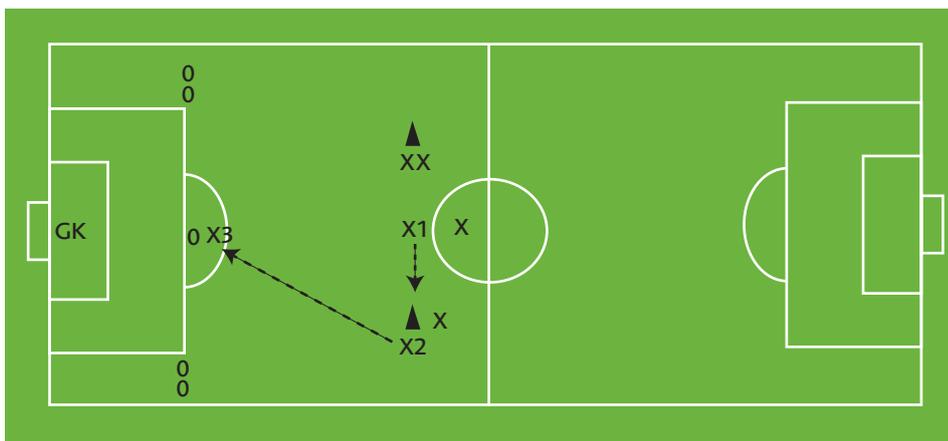
### KEY POINTS

1. Drift off O - side on position
2. Control ball forward
3. Decision dribble / shoot
4. Quality of finish

### ORGANISATION

X1 play to X2, who plays into X3

X3 must start on being tight to O. X3 comes off, O defender stays in D. On X3 first touch can now defend. Repeat the other way.



## TOPIC: DRIBBLING - SKILL (2V1)

### KEY POINTS

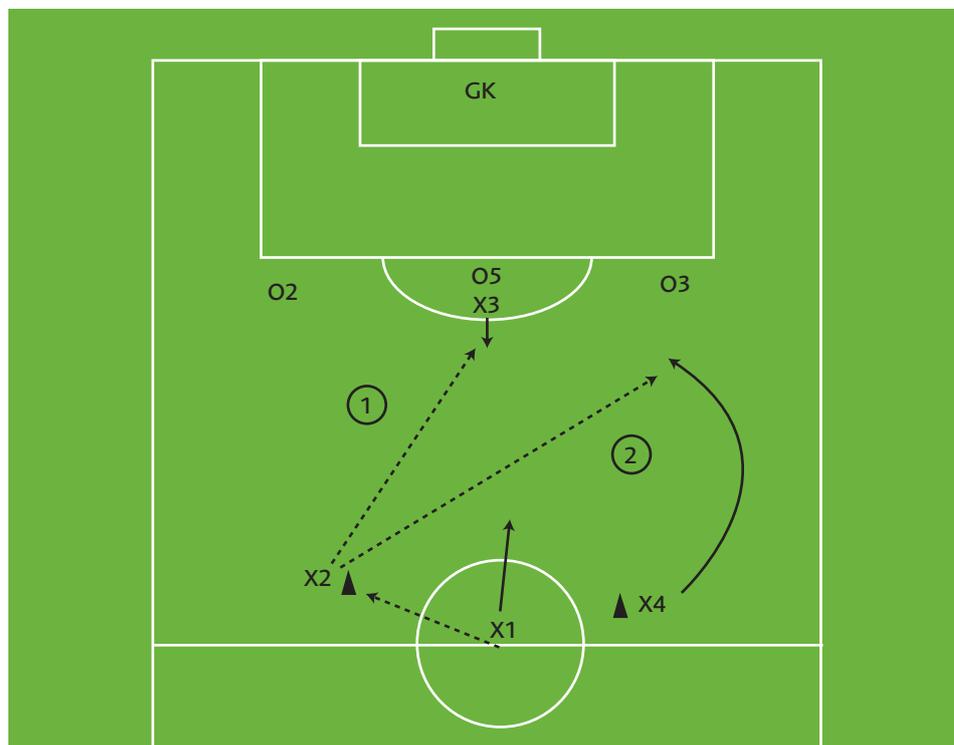
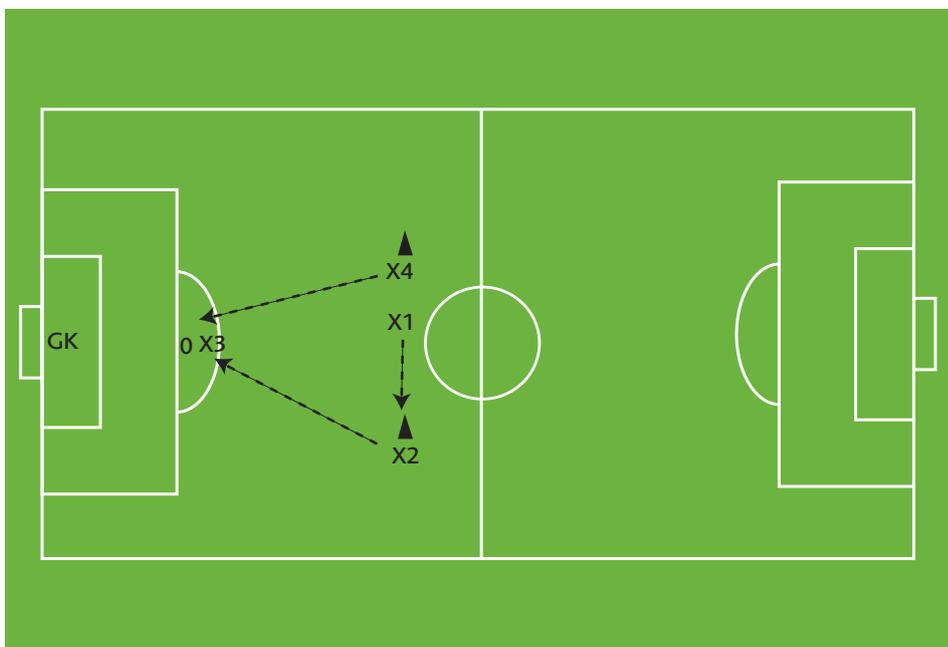
1. Drift off O-side on position
2. Decision by X2 - feet or space
3. Timing / angle of run by midfield players
4. Quality and selection of 2v1 situation
5. Quality of finish

### ORGANISATION

X1 play to X2, who plays to X3. O can now defend by coming down line with X3 immediately.

Decision, if O comes tight X4 can make a run in behind.

If O drops off X3, X2 to give ball to X3 feet.



## TOPIC: DRIBBLING - SKILL (3V2)

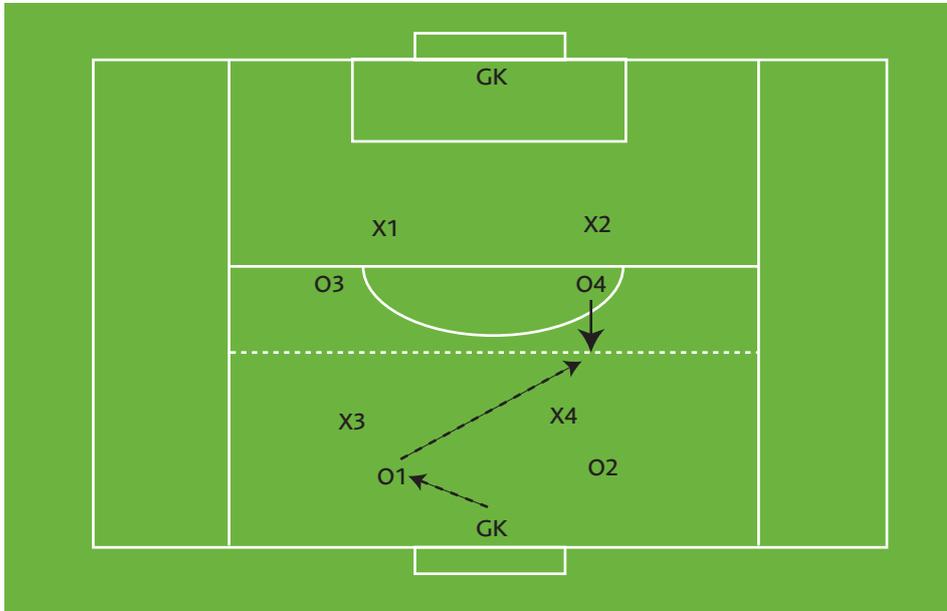
### ORGANISATION

X1 plays to X2.

X3 drifts off to O5.

Decision to X2 to play into X3 or play to X4.

O5 plus one other defender O2 or O3 joins in as does X1 to make it 3v2



**TOPIC: DRIBBLING - SKILL (2V2)**

**KEY POINTS**

1. Encourage diagonal passing into strikers
2. Strikers to work as a pair. One short, one further forward
3. Receive short / side on position
4. Assess space / defender
5. Movement of play without the ball
6. Decision, dribble / shoot / pass

**ORGANISATION**

2v2 plus gk's  
 Gk must throw ball to D1/2  
 i.e. O1 or O2 / X1 or X2

Attacking strikers X3 or X4 / O3 or O4 can drift into D1/2

Defenders to stay in D1/2.  
 Repeat both ways.

