

Five Favourite Practices:

Running with the Ball and Counter Attacking

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There are fewer more attractive sights than a player running at pace, committing defenders and executing precise skills at full speed. Here is a build up of practices to encourage this.

Practice 1 – Themed Warm Up

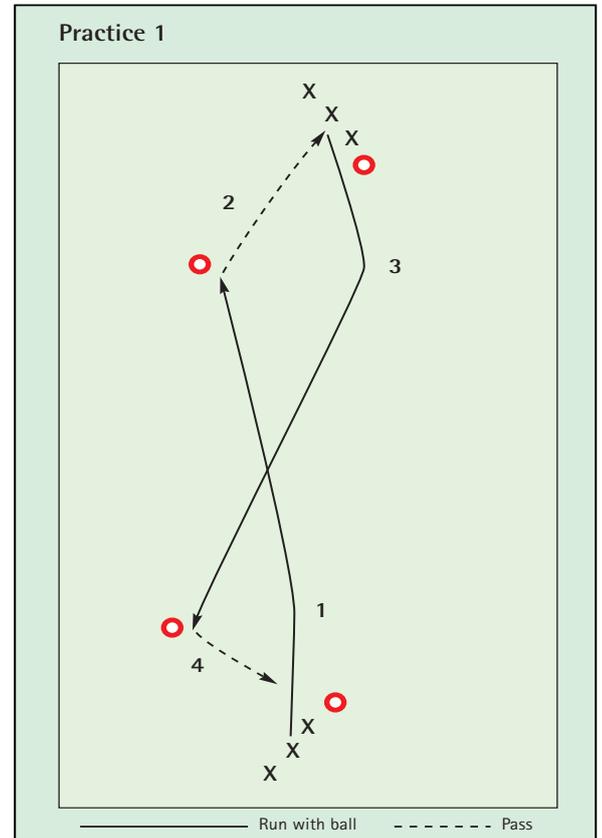
Simple running with the ball practice. Increase the intensity gradually, interspersed with stretching.

Objectives

- Encourage interceptions
- Commit defenders (not running in straight line)
- Playing off front foot with quality at top speed.

Organisation

- Cones 40 yards apart.
- The second man in line runs with the ball by intercepting from first man
- First touch straight down the pitch and then a change of angle to commit the cone
- As close to cone as possible play accurately and with good weight into the opposite cone.



Practice 2 – Functional Shadow Play

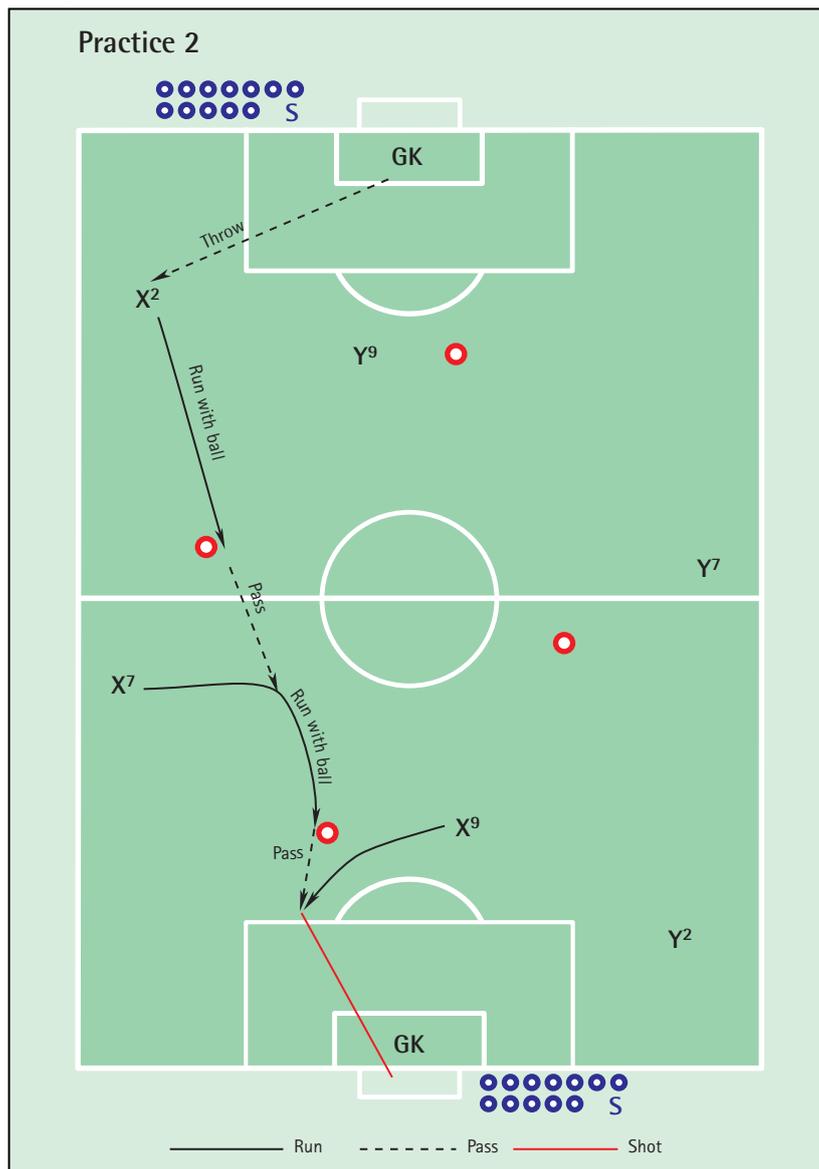
Objectives

- Developing key relationships between players in counter-attacking.
- Encouraging high quality techniques.
- Encouraging cleverness and timing of movement and receiving.

Organisation

- 2 footballs – working simultaneously
- Goalkeeper throws to full back
- Full back drives towards cone/mannequin on the half-way line
- X7 runs forward then checks inside to receive the ball at pace from a well-weighted pass from X2
- X7 drives inside to cone/mannequin in centre half position
- X9 times run to receive a disguised front foot pass from X7 and clips ball into the goalkeeper
- Goalkeeper switches the ball to Y2 who repeats the sequence

NB: 2 footballs working at one time. 2, 3 or 4 players on each cone.



Progression

- Introduce reverse passes from full back to winger and winger to forward (left foot in diagram 2)
- Introduce switching play, eg X2 runs with the ball, switch to Y7
- Y7 runs with the ball and plays X9 in
- Introduce 3 or 4 footballs

Introduce shooting and finish, S (server) then re-starts if ball by-passes the goalkeeper.

Practice 3 – Functional Practice

Objectives

- Transition from possession to counterattack mentality in the same phase
- Counterattack from different angles of the pitch via running with the ball in a 3 v 2 situation
- Timing and angles of runs of forward players
- Clinical finishing.

Organisation

- Possession games across the pitch – 3 v 1, 3 v 2, 4 v 2, etc
- After 5 passes or 10 seconds, break out via
 - running out of square
 - passing out to a forward player and following your pass for a bounce back
 - passing out to a forward for a third man to receive the bounce back.
- Strike on goal within 6 seconds of counterattack.

Key Factors

- 1 Composure and quality in possession
- 2 Decision on when to counter
- 3 Creation of space to receive balls from forwards
- 4 Decision on ball to run with ball, to pass timing to go yourself
- 5 Technique – of above and weight
- 6 Support – Angles, timing distance of forward players movement to stay on side and be in a shooting position when threaded in (do not drift wide)
- 7 End product: Clinical, composed finish.

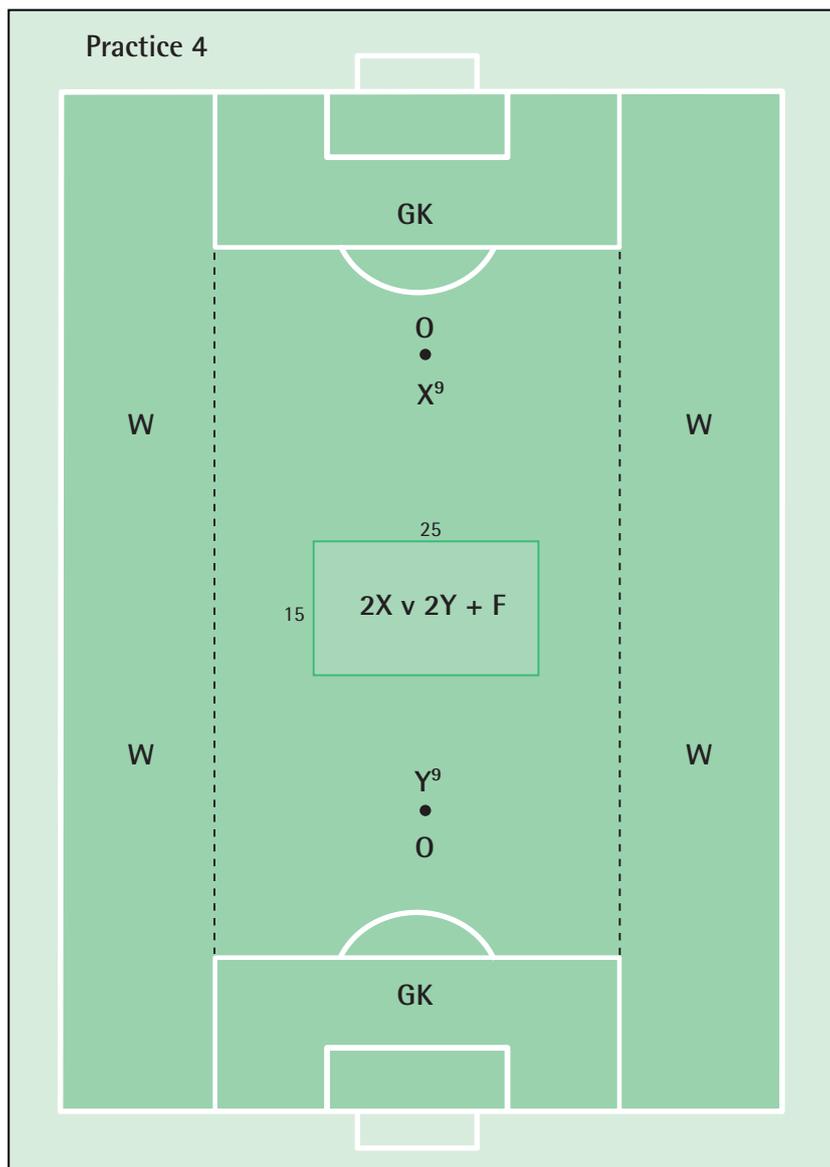
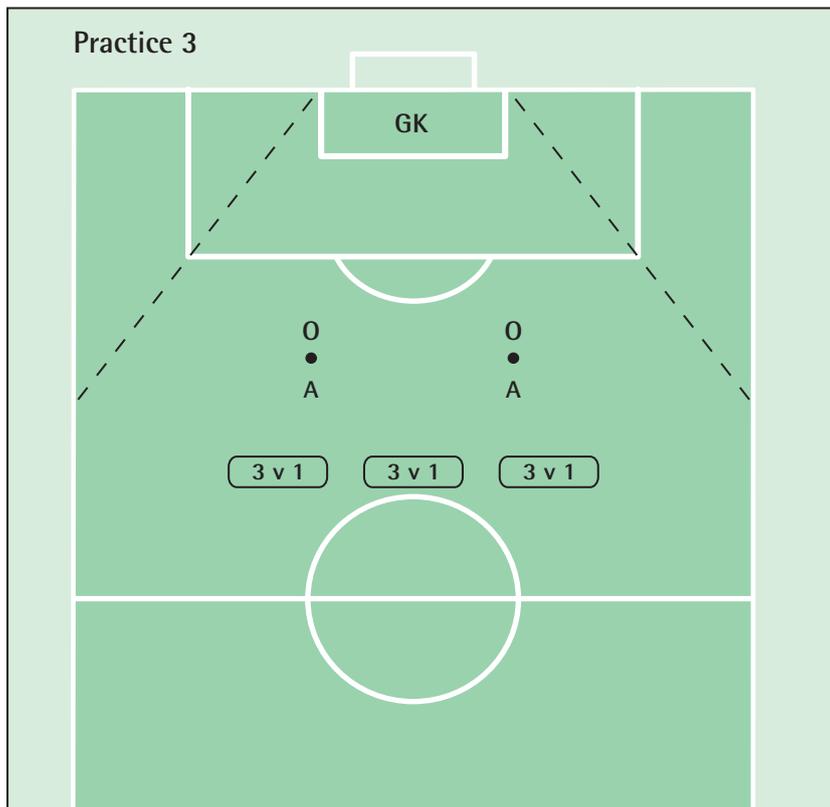
Practice 4 – Full Width

Objectives

- Transition from possession play to counterattack
- Counterattack using wide players
- Midfield players starting attacks and flooding the box
- Finishing from wide positions.

Organisation

- Keep ball situation in a central area with a floater (F) – numbers and areas depend on ability
- 5 passes to play into number 9
- Bounce back to floater who breaks out of box and plays wide
- Both attacking midfield players break. One defending midfielder tracks. Opposite winger tracks far post.
- Give players a time limit, eg 8 seconds for a strike on goal



Key Factors

- 1 Decision to break out
- 2 Creating space
- 3 Decision and Passing, Running with the ball, Technique of crossing
- 4 Angle and timing of runs
- 5 contact on finish and rebounds.

Practice 5 - 11 v 11

Organisation

- Ball with opposite goalkeeper
- Conditioned to throw out

Objectives

- Defending deep to counterattack
- Draw opposition on to you
- Have pre-planned players in position
- Break quickly
- Keep balance

Key Factors

- Recover and Retreat: two tight banks of defence and midfield drop into own half (assuming opportunity to successfully press is not on)
- Decision and Press: O⁹ guides ball to wide positions and then threatens defenders far shoulder.
O¹⁰ drifts into no-mans land as transition player
O¹¹ shows inside.
- Support and Cover: players around the ball threaten to intercept.
Cover players marking distance dependant on pressure on the ball
- On gaining possession
 - quick creation of space 6-10 seconds to strike
 - decision to counter or retain possession bouncing off X¹⁰ or playing to X⁹ running with the ball
 - support positions in front or behind
 - end product.

