



Coaching Possession Soccer

sites

manage

tournaments

vendors

home

technical

tactical

fitness

mental

the match

Emphasis

The usual possession exercises progress through some warm-ups involving takeovers and combination play through 4v2 all the way to 6v6 to goals. You can choose some alternative elements in assembling your progression. The core emphasis should include quick support, open body shape, being prepared to play the ball first time, passing to feet, vision, and mixing short and long passes to split the defense and to relieve pressure. To these essentials, you can add other, alternative, components of the game to add interest and practical variety to your training session.

For example, if you want to emphasize the need for quick support after possession is won, then you can play a 4 v 4 v 4 three team game in a soccer shaped space, where two teams play against one. The team that loses the ball transitions to defense immediately.

If you want to emphasize decision-making, you can play possession games with multiple balls. For example, you can play 6 v 6 with two balls, each team starting with one. Two win a point, a team must get possession of both balls for 10 seconds.

Coaching the Practice

1. When introducing practice, make sure you've scaled it to your group. Make sure it is appropriate for the age. U10 boys can not drive balls 40 yards in the air, so crossing attack at U10 should finish on the ground, there will not be any lofted balls to the far post from the opposite touch-line.
2. Get to action within about 20 seconds. Introduce and start.
3. Gather team in semi-circle, step back a step, state your topic. Go.
4. At all costs, avoid taking 10 minutes to set up cones and don bibs.
5. Don't share common grid boundaries
6. Don't talk every minute of the practice. Let them play.
7. Look for your coaching points in play, freeze action, make one point.
8. Keep corrections short. Encourage, correct, encourage, restart.
9. Keep moving to good positions to observe.
10. Coach the group doing your topic, not their opponents. For example, in teaching shooting, coach the shooters, not the defenders.
11. Coach in sequence, first things first. Teach in a progression.
12. Keep it moving - move on to the next stage when you get success.
13. Adjust the space or conditions if you are not getting success.
14. Compliment good play.
15. Incorporate all the elements in your practice for efficiency.

16. Show is better than Talk, and Do is better than Show.
17. Get right into your topic. If it's 4v4 defending, don't start 1v1.
18. Use neutral players when you need to give one side numbers up.
19. Recognize when to rest. It is better to work for 5 minutes at full intensity than it is to drag on for 25 minutes at low intensity. Matches can't be played at low intensity, so work towards longer periods of high intensity play.
20. Relax, smile, and have fun. Your demeanor should say "this is cool".
21. Take it to the game. Get to a game at the end to see your topic played.

Coaching Points

Possession is tactical topic because it centers on individual and group decision making about where to play the ball to relieve pressure on the ball. Possession depends on individual technique for passing, receiving, turning the ball to create space and time for decision-making, and the ability to play one and two touch soccer under pressure.

To a great extent, the individual's key to success in possession depends on the player's willingness to keep an open body shape to the ball and the field of play, and to be prepared to play the ball from this ready posture. Players who play on their toes, open to the ball and supporting players, with head up and awareness of what's happening all around them can be exceptionally successful at holding the ball.

The key coaching points for possession are those that refer to team shape, support in attack, creating and using space, passing, and receiving.

Team Shape and Support

- Team shape must provide support at good passing angles to the sides, behind, and ahead of the ball. The "third attacker" ahead must push forward to stretch the opponents to create space for the players with or near the ball to use.
- Everyone must work hard to support the ball. Some players must check away to drag defenders out of space, others should check to ball to support it. If everyone comes to or checks away at the same time, there is no support.
- Supporting players should open their body shape so that hips and eyes face the field of play and the ball. Supporting players should be ready to receive the ball in a position to go forward or change direction on first touch. Players should never receive the ball with their back to support.

Creating and Using Space

- Players checking away from the ball, to drag defenders away and to create space, should bend their runs and look over their shoulder to be able to keep the ball in sight at all times.
- Players checking back to the ball should come at an angle to the ball to create good

supporting angles, rather than checking straight to the ball.

Passing the Ball

- Against supported defenders, all passes should be to feet. All short passes should be on the ground. Only passes over 20 or 30 yards, depending on field conditions, should be lofted. (Once the point of attack is changed to reach an unsupported defender, the final pass is to space behind the defender. However, when teaching possession, this is not a key point).
- Two or three short passes draw in the defenders toward the ball. A long pass, struck hard, should be used to split the defenders as they try to close down the ball. (In a match, this changes the point of attack.)
- Do not pass to unsupported players. For example, do not pass to a player in a corner with defenders in a position to close down the player before support can show to the ball.

Receiving the Ball

- The player receiving the ball should have a quick glance over the shoulder just before receiving the ball to know where the ball can be played on the first touch.
- The player receiving the ball should take the ball off the line of play and clean it up on the first touch, and then play it away on the second touch. Alternatively, playing the ball away accurately with one touch is good.
- After receiving the ball, open hips and body shape to the field to enable all passing options. Otherwise, player who received ball is limited to passing in predictable directions so that the defenders can apply great pressure to next player to receive ball.

Difficulty Factors

When teaching possession, it is very easy to control the technical and tactical difficulty level of the exercise. These can be selected and used in different combinations to add interest and variety to the practice. At the extreme level, where many of these factors are in place, the purpose of the practice moves away from "Possession" and towards "Speed of Play", a closely related topic, in much the way that "motor racing" is related to "driving". Same setup, just different conditions.

To increase the difficulty of a Possession progression -

- reduce the space
- make the space more soccer - shaped, not open, not square

- add players without increasing the space
- level the sides to make it more even
- eliminate restrictions on opponents...for example with passers outside a grid and defenders inside trying to win the ball, allow the defenders to go outside the grid
- increase the number of teams in the exercise - like 3 instead of 2
- add psychological pressure by adding a goal - like 10 passes to win
- add psychological pressure by adding a penalty for the losers
- challenge the team with the ball to keep it against pressure for a set period of time - count down out loud as the time nears
- add restrictions - for example - if one player uses two touches, the next may only use one touch
- give direction to the exercise - play to goal lines or goals
- add goals and shooting - require possession before shooting
- increase the number of balls in play to force thinking and vision

Possession Warm-up Exercises

This section offers some technical warm up exercises appropriate to training sessions dealing with possession. There are many other such exercises that relate to possession. At the start of a possession progression, select a couple of these warm-up exercises, and mix your stretching into pauses in the exercises. You would not do more than a couple of these technical warm-ups before getting into your progression.

Technical Warm-ups for Possession Exercises

- Checking Away - Partners 5 yards apart with one ball. Player checks away 5 yards, comes back to ball, receives pass to feet. Passer checks away to continue exercise.
- Off Line of Play - Partners 5 yards apart with one ball. Pass to feet. Receiver takes ball off line of play with outside cut (little toe pushes ball) and cleans up ball with first touch, passes with second touch.
- Sideways On - Partners 5 yards apart with one ball. Pass to feet. Receiver stands at slight angle to line of play, receives ball and plays behind standing leg with one touch, returns ball with second touch.

- V Move - Partners 5 yards apart with one ball. Pass to feet. Receiver stops with front foot, reaches across with opposite foot, pulls ball with sole of opposite foot to position in front of opposite foot, plays away with inside of same "opposite" foot.
- Pressured V Move - Same as V Move, except passer chases own pass. Receiver must stop ball, use V move to play ball off line of play, accelerate into space left by passer, turn around, and pass ball to continue play.
- Turning Ball English Style - Partners 5 yards apart with one ball. Pass to feet. Receiver stops ball firmly with front foot, turn hips 180 degrees in a quick turning move, play ball sharply forward a foot or two, like short pass to self, accelerate a step. Turn and pass to partner to continue exercise.
- Turning Ball Brazilian Style - Partners 5 yards apart with one ball. Pass to feet. Receiver slows and turns ball with inside of foot with smooth slicing motion while turning body open to new direction of play, all the time pivoting away from the standing leg that did not touch ball.
- Holding Against Pressure - Partners with one ball. Player with ball tries to use turning moves, change of pace, shielding, and ball control to hold ball in 5 yard grid. Partner tries to win ball. Don't bother marking grid with cones, just ask players to hold in small space. If you are blessed with an excellent ball handler, add a second opponent.
- Wall Passing - Partners with ball executing wall pass in space.
- Wall Passing in Grid - Put the whole team into a 20 yard square, let partners with a ball do wall passes around other pairs.
- Takeovers - Partners with ball executing takeovers with overlap and pass.
- 1-2-3 Touch (from Kerry Miller, Women's Coach, Charleston Southern in 1993). Partners at 5 yards with ball, one touch passing as hard as possible. Change to two touch passing. Push the pace. Finally, change to three touch passing. First touch to stop ball, second touch push ball forward a couple of steps to attack, third touch pass. Passer must retreat several steps immediately after passing. Partners move up and back together very quickly, very demanding physically on the quads.
- Robbie Johnson's Drill - Team in space with 4 balls. Players check away into space, turn, call for ball, and check to ball to receive pass. After receiving pass, players must stop ball on front foot, turn away with ball, look to pass. Can only pass to players who have checked away and are just turning to come back to ball, no passing to stationary players or players who have already killed their space by checking back to ball to early.

Possession Exercises

This section offers a list of example exercises from which to select in developing a tactical progression to develop the team's ability to maintain possession of the ball. These are

certainly not the only exercises, these are just a representative sample of exercises. By combining three or four of these, a progression can be assembled.

I will leave the work of creating the Lesson Plan, including specifying and laying out the topic, equipment, objectives, warm up, demonstration, progression, summary, and diagrams as an artistic exercise for the coach. The coach, familiar with the specific technical and tactical strengths and weaknesses of the team, is in the best position to adjust the practice for maximum benefit.

Exercises

In any of the exercises, you will find that it will be more effective to have the opponents work to win possession of the ball, not just to kick it away. Make the rules such that this is required. Otherwise, you will be chasing cleared balls and players will be standing around.

- Pass and Chase - Groups of 6 in circles, each circle with one ball. Player with ball passes the circle to another player, chases pass to pressure passer into one or two touch pass. Play continuously.
- Two Balls - Two teams in medium size space (like 30 x 40 yards for U14 boys playing teams of 6) each start with a ball. Each team works to maintain possession of one ball, win possession of other team's ball. Point for every success, play to 3 or 4 points, move on. For 18 players, use up to 4 balls. Encourages small group play, decision making in support of possession.
- Keep Away - Groups of 4, playing 3 v 1 possession with 1 ball in 10 yard grid.
- 5 v 1 - Play possession, 5 v 1 in free space. Move to 10 yard grid. With 12 players, run two groups at once.
- 4 + 1 v 1 - Play possession in 10 yard grid. Four passers on outside, one supporting player in grid, one opponent in grid. Player who loses ball takes opponents place. Try for 20 passes without losing possession. With 12 players, run two groups at once. Encourage the passers to work to split the defenders.
- 7 + 2 v 3 - Play possession in 20 x 10 yard grid. Three opponents and 2 possession players in middle of grid with seven possession players around grid edges. Possession team tries to keep ball in grid and to complete 20 passes without losing possession. Rotate players every few minutes.
- Splitting Defenders - Play 8 v 4 in a large space, 30 x 40 yards. Work to keep possession and to complete several short passes in order to draw defenders in, then split defenders or make lofted pass to space away from pressure. Push the pace so it happens quickly. Adjust the numbers to get some success and some difficulty.
- Two Zones - Play 4 v 2 for team with ball in each of two zones, like 30 x 40 yard space. Players have to stay in their own zones, can pass with team mates in other zone. Team

with ball tries for continuous possession. Add restriction, team must make 5 passes in one half before passing to other half to get point. Defenders get point for every ball one. Change defenders. If it's too easy for possession team, reduce the space.

- Three Zones - Play 4 v 2 for team with ball in their defending half, 2 v 4 against team with ball in their final (attacking) third. Leave a 5 yard empty zone between the two halves. Play to goals without goalies. Two opponents in first zone try to pressure possession team into mistake. Possession team tries to hold ball until its "strikers" in the final third can get away from their four opponents.
- Game - Play 6 v 6 to goals. Coach players to keep possession and to switch the point of attack quickly to create a good isolation situation (1v1) to create a shooting opportunity. Can add restriction, like 6 passes before any shot, to encourage possession.