



THE GRASSROOTS COACH

Session Plan Overview

This is a simple session plan suitable for up to 20-30 children, with minimal equipment required.

I would always recommend a large enough space to comfortably fit all your activities, a half sized football pitch is perfect for between 20-30 kids.

Objective: To improve dribbling, control, shooting/ finishing, defending, awareness and decision making.

Duration: 60 minutes (times of drills can be adjusted for longer sessions accordingly)

Age Group: U5-U10 (Adaptable for other age groups)

Equipment: Cones, bibs, footballs, goals (if available)

Notes

Where possible have drills setup ahead of time, to avoid any periods of kids waiting around.

All the drills contained are simple enough that they don't take more than a minute to setup, however, any time saved is time better spent with the kids playing football, learning and having fun.

Remember we are coaching kids so your tone, how you direct kids and your instructions should be age appropriate and tailored to your group.

I would always recommend mixing abilities at younger ages and not separating the 'more advanced' players.



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Warm-up (10 minutes)

Active warm-up with a football

All players should have a football in coned area. The size of the area should equate to the number of players, for 20-30 players, 1m² per player. This allows enough space but keeps the children in close proximity to each other.

- **Simple dribbling (2.5 mins):** All kids dribbling with the ball inside the coned area. Encourage using different areas of the feet, practising turns, changing direction, all while ensuring they are not bumping into other players. This should be done at a jogging pace.
- **Turning on command (2.5 mins):** As the kids are dribbling we introduced a turn on command. Using a whistle (or a specific command) the kids while already dribbling need to turn with the ball as quickly as possible, keeping control of the ball and not bumping into other players.
- **Changing Direction (2.5 mins):** Add this in addition to the turn on command. Now we introduce another command where the players are encouraged to make a swift change of direction with the ball, encourage using tricks, step-overs, body-feints.
- **Change of Pace (2.5 mins):** Now we keep the same as above however we introduce the notion of a quick change of pace after a turn or change of direction. Focus should always be on the children's control of the football and building situation awareness allowing them to turn or change direction into a space and drive into that at pace for a few steps.

Notes

In the warm up the idea is to get the kids touching the ball as much as possible, encouraging their own individuality in turning and changing direction (its a perfect platform to practise). Don't dictate how a player dribbles, offer suggestions like.

'Can we use both feet?'

'Can we turn using our bad foot in that position to create more space?'

We are not trying to create carbon copy players here, we are trying to give the kids a platform to naturally improve while being offered suggestions.

The final **Change of Pace** activity we are looking to make sure the children are actually changing pace, warming up their muscles (and minds) for the session ahead.



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Drill 1 - Dribbling (15 minutes)

Simple dribbling drill

All players should have a football. We split the players into groups of 4 players each with their own setup for the dribbling routine (shown below).

This allows for very little idle time and loads of touches of the ball.

We can increasingly make this drill harder, we start simply as below.

- Level 1 (Basic)
- Level 2 (Intermediate)
- Level 3 (Challenging)

Players start as shown, dribbling through the course, focusing on control of the ball (not just speed), avoiding hitting cones with the ball or feet.

We ask for more speed as and when technique for individual players is at a level this can be done without compromising control.

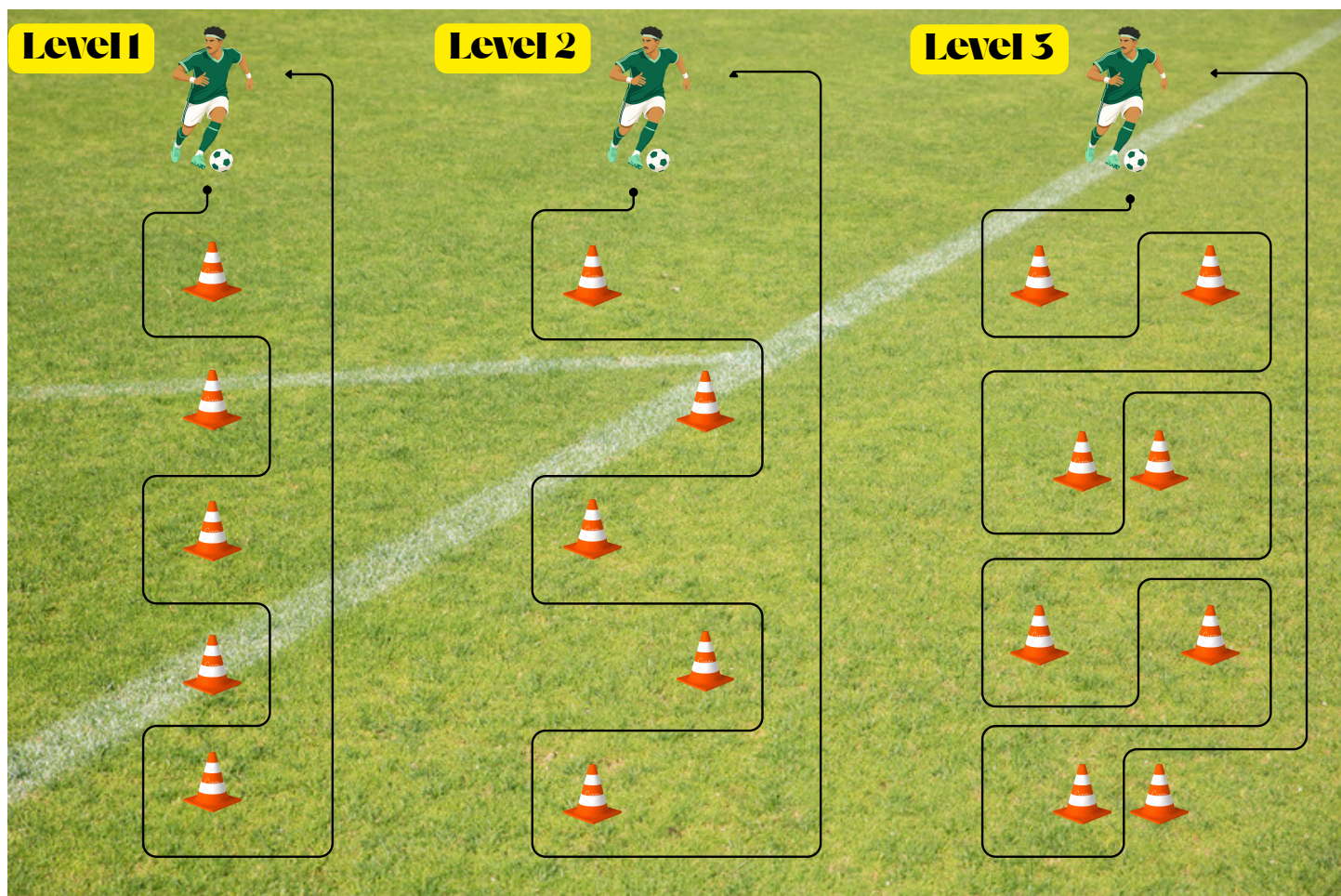
When a player exits the course you are looking for a quick turn and an injection of pace to return to the start.

Depending on the skill level of the players and age we do not need to use all 3 levels and can spend different timeframes on each.

Only move players onto a harder course when technique demands the extra challenge, DON'T RUSH and destroy confidence or sacrifice technique for speed.

To keep players constantly active, do not wait for the first player to finish the drill. As player 1 gets the the 3rd cone (level 1 & 2) and cone 5 (level 3), the next player should start.

This keeps 3 players active at anyone time and allowing players a very short rest before going again.



Notes

This drill is not about speed, this is about mastering the football. We are looking for players to be in control of the ball, not hitting the cones as they pass them with the ball (or their feet) and being aware of their surroundings.

As technique improves we look to try and inject speed without losing control.

Its very important we look to get technique improved before looking for more speed. A child dribbling fast, having next to no control over the ball and knocking down all the cones isn't improvement.

Cone drills are about mastering the ball and making the ball move where you want it to go, dribbling at young ages does not need to be done with an opponent, these drills are designed to challenge control and allow loads of touches of the ball, which is the only way control will improve.

Finally once a player exits the coned area and returns to the start you are asking for a change in pace, an added aspect to create an element of game situational training.

DO NOT move players up to Level 2 and Level 3 if the technique is not there, master the basics, then you are looking to challenge the children with a more advanced course.



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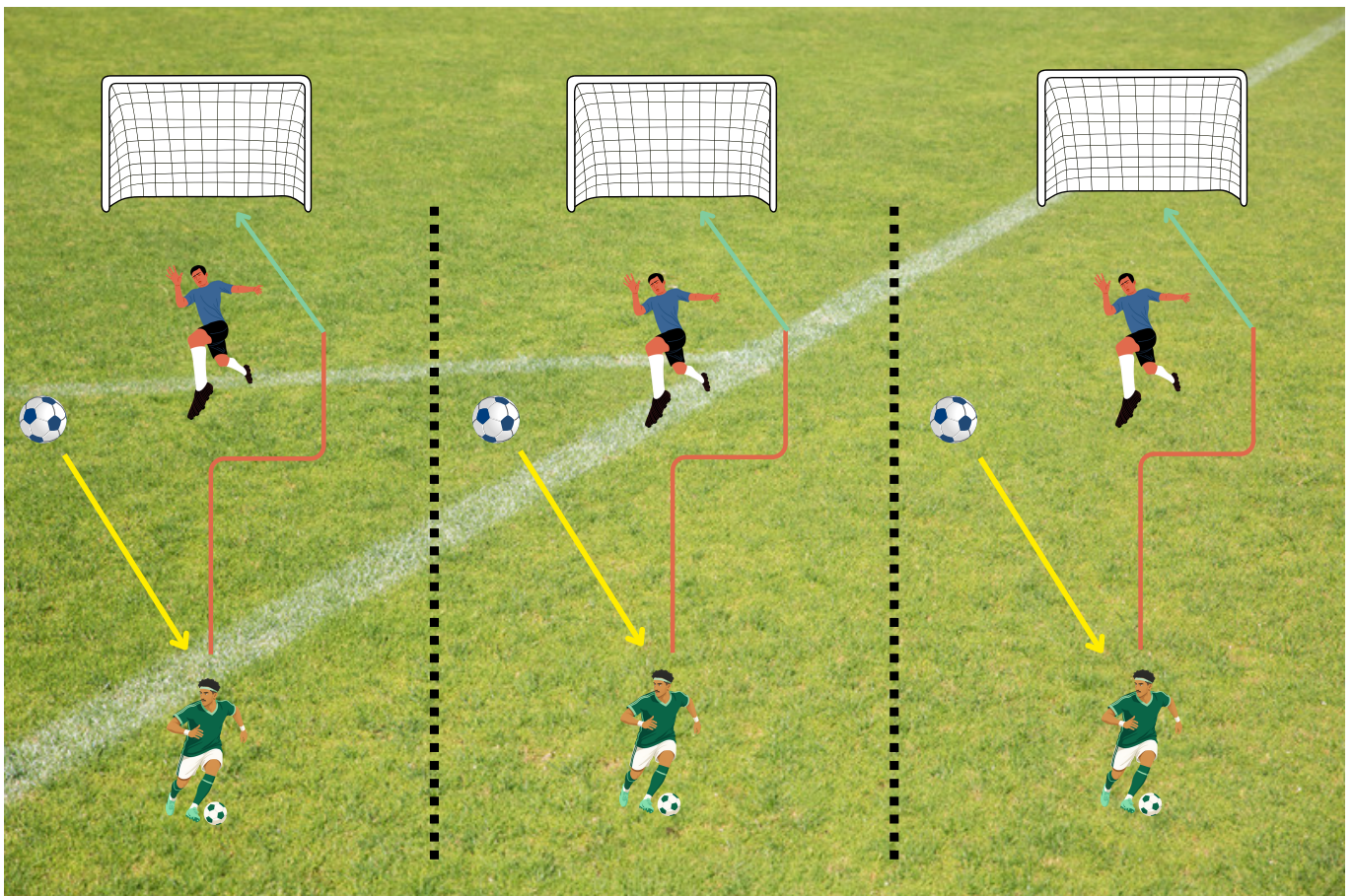
Drill 2 - Beat The Defender (15 minutes)

1 v 1 - Beat The Defender

Players should be in groups of 4-6 (as small as possible)

Simple drill allowing 20 seconds for the attacking player to attempt to control a pass then attack a defender, attempting to beat the defender and score into the goal.

Simple diagram below showing 3 stations setup.



- Players should start as shown, with the defender at the goal at the other end of the marked area.
- Attacker should start ready to receive the ball.
- The coach passes the ball to the attacker to start the drill (yellow line)
- Attacker receives the ball and immediately attempts to dribble past the defender (red line) and score (green line)
- The defender can only start approaching the player **ONCE** the attacker has touched the ball.
- Allow 20 seconds for the players to compete, once the ball is outside the marked area or the defender has won the ball and made a pass to either the coach or the attackers end of the field, the drill is over.
- Switch attacker and defender on each iteration of the drill.

Notes

This drill has a number of key attributes and coaching points.

- First touch/ Control
 - the initial pass from the coach to the attacker is working the attackers first touch, a key coaching point is getting young players to understand the importance of your first touch, instant control of the ball opens up options, a bad touch and the defender is on you.
- Dribbling
 - you are **NOT** coaching the children into dribbling a certain way or with a certain style, **DO NOT** force them to use both feet (suggest it if anything when an opportunity arises where using their less dominant foot would have been beneficial).
 - Focus on close control, using a skill or body feint or change of pace when attacking the defender.
 - A kid trying something that doesn't work is better than a kid not having the confidence to try, always be positive and offer suggestions rather than direction.
- Finishing
 - the element of finishing here is also tested, it's great if the player can take on and beat the defender, but can they score?
 - Focus on accuracy rather than power, a lot of kids love hitting the ball as hard as they can, but try to reinforce the benefits of accuracy over power.
- Defending
 - Coaching points for defenders are essential also.
 - can they get to the ball quickly
 - push a player in a certain direction
 - don't 'dive in' or 'sell themselves'.
 - being strong in the tackle
 - not pushing or grabbing
 - if they win the ball, focus on them trying to pass the ball to the end of the area in a controlled fashion (where the attacker started) or even better, get a pass back to the coach. Both options allowed.

So we see here a very simple 1-1 drill has a load of coaching opportunities that are invaluable in games and for players to progress.

Do not focus on them getting everything perfect or overload them with information initially.

Give them the tools and allow them to make mistakes and learn what works and what doesn't.

DON'T keep stopping the drill to coach, use 30 seconds every 5 minutes to reinforce something you are seeing that can be improved.



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Drill 3 - Small Sided Games (15 minutes)

Small Sided Games (4-a-side)

End with small sided games.

4 players in each team maximum, the less players in each team the more involvement each player has.

Large sided games at younger ages allow for players to 'go missing' and have very few meaningful touches of the ball, avoid them.

At this point just let them play, simple coaching points, but avoid over coaching here.

Notes

Remember this is the part the kids enjoy the most, it's the reason they come to football... to play the game.

Allow them the freedom to express themselves and have fun. Don't use these games to over-coach.

'Can you work a bit harder there?'

'Could we have passed there instead of dribbling into traffic?'

'Could you have taken a bit of power off that shot and been more accurate?'

These kinds of questions as broad questions while the game is going on are great examples of what kids are likely to respond to, you're not critiquing individuals but offering an alternative to the group.



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Cool Down - Session Review (5 minutes)

Session Review

This is not done very often at young ages for some reason, however, it is an invaluable tool.

Using the last few minutes of your session to pose some questions, get the kids feedback importantly and revisit some of the key coaching points, works wonders.

Any structure here works but the below is a great start.

- Simply asking if the kids enjoyed the session and what they found fun and what they learned.
- Going over the key coaching points in each drill briefly and why they are important.
- What they can all work on for next time, giving small tips on simple ways to improve technique and control for example.

The aim is to gather some feedback, reiterate coaching points and send the kids home feeling accomplished, happy and eager to improve.

Notes

Remember we are coaching kids so don't expect insightful information always to come back in our reviews, don't expect your coaching points to be understood straight away and remember the key at early grassroots football ages is to make sure all the kids want to come back and want to improve.

With sessions, consistency is key!

Running this identical session again in two weeks, allowing 4 different sessions in between, gives the kids time to take on the ideas, and then we look for improvements the next time we run the session.

Always remember improvements will come for every child in different areas at different stages, be patient but always remember communication, fun and learning for both you (as the coach) and the kids is the key to success.