



# Improving vision and decisions

Attack-oriented training for U10–U16 players  
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**Let's start by looking at some numbers: In a 4 v. 4 match there are 56 channels of communication on the field. In a 6 v. 6 match there are 132 channels. In an 8 v. 8 match there are 240, and in an 11 v. 11 match there are 462 channels of communication on the field. So why do we still see coaching from the sidelines?**

For some of us who played sports other than soccer growing up, that's the way we were coached. The coach was the sage on the stage, in control of the ship. Yet soccer isn't baseball, basketball, or football. It is chess in motion, where players are in control of their own destinies, regardless of age and ability.

## What players need

In training, it's important for coaches to put players in situations that force them to improve their vision and decision-making, without coaches telling them where to go, where to run, and when to dribble, pass or shoot. The reason is that players already have to process a great deal of information—much of it coming from off the field! Soccer is definitely a multi-tasking sport. Being able to control the ball is one thing; to

actually think about what do to with the ball before it arrives and after it leaves is another. How many of us adults can e-mail one person and talk to someone else on the phone at the same time? Not many. Most of us have to either quit typing and talk, or quit talking and type. The point is that for coaches, there are times to instruct and teach, but these things should be done at practice, not during the game.

## Being the “guide on the side”

For a player's overall development, it's vital for coaches to facilitate the learning environment without controlling it. Coaches need to put the players in control and give them confidence that they can play without guidance from the sideline during the match. Instead of thinking about what they're going to do with the ball, players need to know what they're going to do with it. When this starts happening consistently, then we know we're creating the right environment for player development. Putting players in control of making their own decisions creates learning experiences (both good and bad) that foster development.

We need players who “feel” and “sense” the game. Have you ever watched a match where a player pulled something out of nothing? Players like Pele, Maradona and Zidane (just to name a few) always made it look so easy. They also looked like they were absolutely enjoying themselves—Zidane still does! These players all share the ability to mentally fast-forward the game without effort; they have a “picture-in-picture” in their minds.

**Players need to learn to make their own decisions during game time.**

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## Training vision and decision-making

The purpose of the following sample exercises is to plant seeds in players' minds, to im-



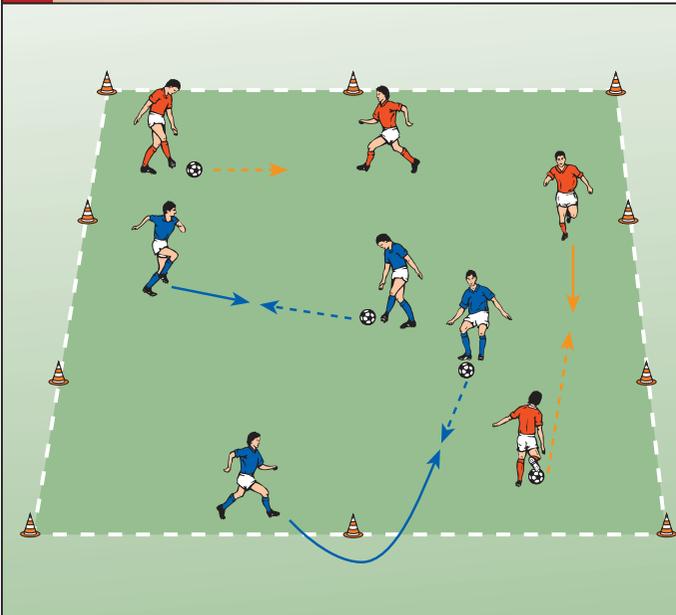
prove the way they think about passing, receiving and moving off the ball. These exercises can be used for U10 and older players. As they get older, you may want to vary the number of touches, make the space smaller, etc. For coaches of young players, it's important to take a questioning approach rather than always telling players what they're supposed to do. This requires you to really know and understand what you want to get out of the

training session. It gives players the opportunity to learn not only by doing, but by answering specific "guided" questions that you ask (see "Questions and answers" below). The more often they give you the right answer, the more likely they'll be able to deal with the situation in the game. These exercises cover:

- when to run for support or space
- when not to run
- how to "open out" when receiving the ball for better vision and decision-making
- how to "sneak a peek" before receiving the ball
- how to pass to the correct foot
- when to play the ball forward and when to keep possession

## IMPROVING VISION AND DECISIONS

### 1 "Check-out" passing



#### Setup

- Mark out a 15 x 15-yard field.
- Put 10 cones on the sidelines around the field.
- Divide players into pairs; each pair has a ball.

#### Sequence

- Partners pass, dribble and move.
- After each pass, the passer runs (or "checks out") around a cone.

#### Questions and answers

Q: If a player without the ball is running toward you, where you should pass the ball?

A: To the player's feet ("feet or space" would be another option).

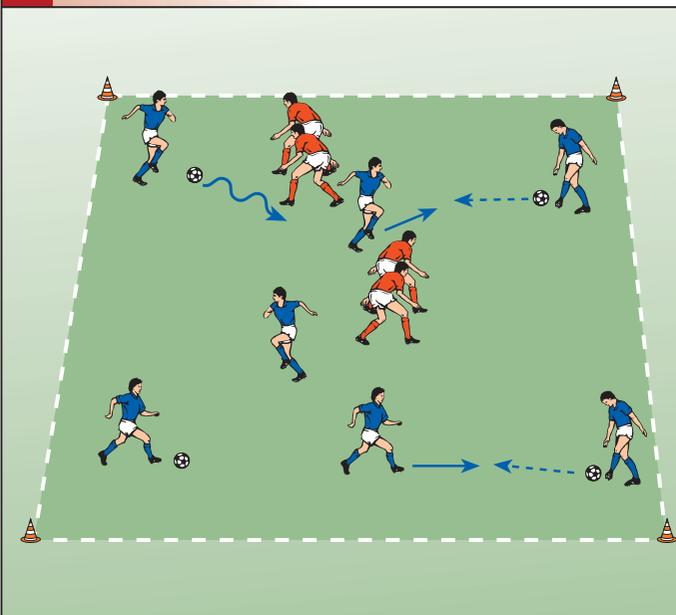
Q: If a player without the ball is running away from you, where should you pass the ball?

A: To space (or "feet or space").

Q: How do I know my teammate is ready to receive a pass?

A: Because he is looking at you (eye contact).

### 2 "Partner tag"



#### Setup

- Mark out a 15 x 15-yard field.
- Divide players into pairs; each pair has a ball.
- Two pairs do not have a ball; each of these holds a vest between them.

#### Sequence

- The two pairs without a ball try to tag any player who has a ball.
- Partners who have a ball can only pass to each other.
- If a player who has a ball gets tagged, he and his partner give up the ball and switch roles with the pair that tagged them.

#### Questions and answers

Q: If the player who has the ball is under pressure, where do you run, support or space?

A: Support.

Q: If the player who has the ball is not under pressure, where do you run?

A: Space.

Q: Which foot should you pass to?

A: To the foot that keeps the receiver in the game.



## IMPROVING VISION AND DECISIONS

### 3 3 v. 1



#### Setup

- Mark out a 10 x10-yard field.
- Place a cone in the middle of the field and a ball on top of the cone.
- Inside the field are four players with a second ball.

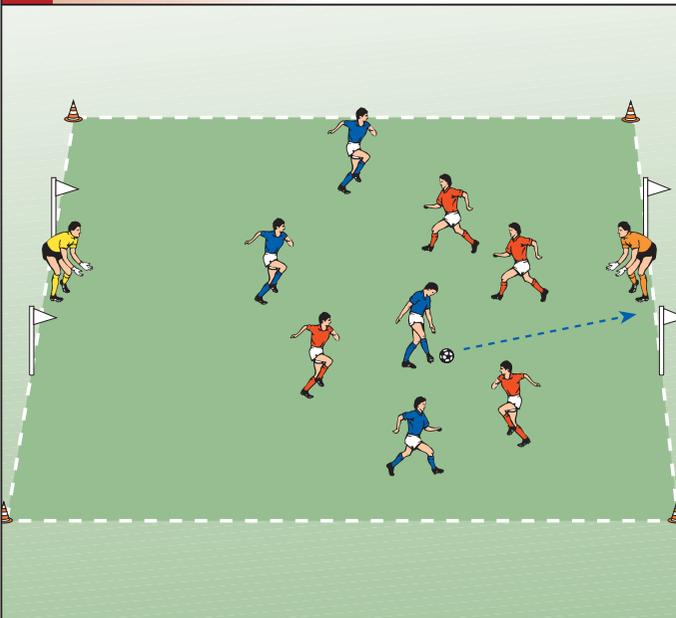
#### Sequence

- Players play 3 v. 1 around the cone.
- The three attackers pass their ball around, trying to knock the ball off the cone. Any player who succeeds at this goes to the middle.
- The player in the middle tries to protect the ball on the cone and tag any player who tries to pass or knock the ball off the cone. Any player who gets tagged has to go to the middle.

#### Questions and answers

- Q: How do you move the player in the middle so you can play forward?  
 A: By passing the ball quickly and accurately; by receiving “open-out” so that you can see in all directions (vision); and by moving to a good supporting position before the ball is passed.
- Q: What do you do if you can’t play the ball forward?  
 A: Get it to someone who can.

### 4 4 v. 4 to 6 v. 6: Play to goals with restrictions



#### Setup

- Mark out a 20 x 35-yard field.
- Set up a goal with goalkeeper on each endline.
- Divide players into two teams of four or six.

#### Sequence

- Teams play 4 v. 4 or 6 v. 6 with restrictions.
- First restriction: Receiver may not pass back to the passer (i.e. three-player combinations are allowed).
- Second restriction: Play silently (no clapping, hooting, hollering, etc.). Violation leads to loss of possession.
- Third restriction: Players are limited to two touches.

#### Questions and answers

- Q: What should you do before receiving the ball?  
 A: Orient yourself toward unmarked teammates.
- Q: How can you help the player who has the ball?  
 A: Make runs to get open.
- Q: How can you get the player with the ball to recognize you?  
 A: By moving and making runs.



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