

Shooting

Fundamentals of Shooting

There are many different ways to shoot the ball in soccer. Like passing, some of them are basic and some more advanced. You can shoot with the instep, with the inside of the foot, the outside, and yes, even the toe. You can drive the ball out flat, make it curve in or out, chip it, loft it etc.

What we'll be concerned with here initially are the fundamentals of basic shooting what you would teach to a 7 year old (and up) to build a foundation for more advanced techniques.

The basic coaching points for basic *instep drive shooting* , ***From the Nose to the Toes*** are:

1. Head down – eye on the ball
2. Plant non-kicking foot along side the ball
3. Pick a spot near the center of the ball, strike ball at, or slightly above, this spot.
4. Knee of kicking leg is over the ball
5. Instep is “locked” Toe down and ankle flexed up in direction of calf
6. Approach is slightly from the side.. not dead on
7. Follow through

Sounds simple right? Well lets break them down one by one and then suggest ways and means of teaching this technique.

First, head down, just like in passing The “head up” component of shooting precedes the actual execution of the skill.

In other words the player must already have his target picked out before he executes the shot. Why head down? Because your eyes cannot affect the flight of the ball. It is more important that you strike the ball correctly and that is done by eye-foot coordination. In the best case, and with a lot of practice, the head is down for only a split second. As the players get older, peripheral vision comes into play and only the eyes move.

Second... the plant foot. Important because if you plant your foot behind the ball your kicking foot is coming up as you strike leading to undercutting the ball. Now in advanced shooting that is *sometimes* what you want to do but when we're teaching the younger ages we just want the ball to travel in a straight line with some “weight” on it.

Third.. picking a spot on the ball. Again if you kick too low you'll undercut the ball, pick too high and you'll "top" it. With a lot of practice a child will automatically pick the sweet spot on the ball.

Fourth.. the knee of the kicking leg is over the ball. This technique determines the correct body position. If the knee is forward of the ball (which rarely happens) the weight is too far forward and the ball is mis-kicked. If the knee is behind the ball, a far more common occurrence, the player tends to arch their back away from the ball. This results in too little power.

Fifth.. instep is locked. A wobbly foot leads to inaccurate and low power shots. Locking the instep (sometimes referred to as locking the ankle) is not a natural thing for the kids to do. You have to break this down into steps and be vigilant when they shoot. It is very easy to back slide after this technique is taught.

Sixth... approach from the side. The biggest fault in the instep drive is coming straight at the ball. This leads to toe kicking. At the younger ages toe kicking is quite common and natural. They will enjoy more success kicking with their toes than with their instep. They will seem to get more power on the ball. This is illusionary. It is a simple matter of physics. The more surface area applied to the ball (instep) all other things being equal, the more accurate and the more powerful will be the shot.

But the biggest reason not to let them toe kick is that it is a bad habit that is extremely difficult to break in later years. Teach them the right way now and there will be far less problems in the future.

By moving in slightly from the side you naturally tend to want to kick with the instep instead of the toe

Last.. follow through. A common mistake made at the younger ages is the lack of a follow through...kick through the ball. They tend to jerk back as they strike the ball and consequently do not get a lot of power on the pass.

Teaching the Fundamental Skill of Shooting

Have the players form two lines facing each other. One line goes down to their knees and holds the ball with both hands on the ground. The hands are safely together and **BEHIND** the ball. It is best if you demonstrate this technique before someone's fingers are accidentally kicked.

The kicking players are to strike the ball moderately hard, without trying to kick the ball out of their teammates hands.

Coaching Points

1. Break the skill into simple steps.
 - Show where to strike the ball

- Show where to plant the non-kicking foot
 - Show the knee over the ball position
 - Show the ankle locked position
 - Show the approach from the side
 - Show the head down position (eyes-on-the-ball)
2. Make sure that the players take their time in “resetting” after each kick. It is more important that technique is perfected than they get done with the drill. A lot of the younger players view everything as a race or a contest.
 3. *Listen* for the sound of a ball being struck correctly. This is a very overlooked cue in sports. A well struck ball in any sport has a distinct sound to it. It is a very good way to get feedback on how a player is doing and once they recognize it, it is a powerful motivational tool that does not require “outside” (i.e. you the coach) intervention.
 4. Make sure that both the dominant foot and the non-dominant foot are used. As the skill is acquired, try spending twice as much time on the non-dominant foot in order to build it up.

Now its time to actually take some shots. The best place for you to view shooting technique is from the side. In that way you can see the knee placement over the ball , the ankle lock and the follow through.

In my opinion it is best if a player can take a multiple number of shots at one time, so this is a time when you want every spare ball that you have on the field. Break the players up into groups of shooters (1 per group) and retrievers (2 or more per group). Move from group to group and watch technique. Stress technique over power. Power comes with practice. Also with the younger set don't worry about hitting the corners. Get the shots on goal, corners will come later. Give them too many things to think about and nothing will happen.

Now of course very few goals are going to be scored when the ball is still, especially at the younger ages where penalty kicks and direct free kicks are uncommon so we need to move into drills where the player has to set the ball up, again outside their footprints, in order to make space for themselves to shoot.

At the real young ages you will find the kids setting up a shot by stopping the ball and then taking two steps back in order to run at it. That's the kind of stuff that we as coaches have to point out each and every time it happens so that this bad habit never gets a chance to form.

The second biggest “bad habit” that you'll see the younger ages have is not kicking with the non-dominant foot. They'll instead run around the ball to get in position to use their dominant foot. And of course they'll rarely have that kind of time in a game situation. Practice, practice, practice with the non-dominant foot,

but most of all look for coaching opportunities to praise the use of the non-dominant foot even if the shot is fluffed.

Basic Shooting Drills

After the kids have gotten some familiarity with the proper shooting techniques it is time to move on to some “game situation” type shooting drills. Except for penalty kicks and re-starts, (direct free kicks and indirect free kicks) most shooting is done with the player moving and the ball coming to her.

The following are a variety of shooting drills that have a few basic things in common. 1) there is always movement off the ball, 2) the ball is always coming to the player, 3) the shooter must first control the pass and then take the shot

The Flag Shooting Drill

The first exercise was suggested by Chris Mohr, a colleague on the soccer-coach-I mailing list. It is a simple exercise for younger players.

This simple but effective exercise emphasizes finishing on goal, and also efficiently incorporates complementary receiving skills. The exercise moves along so fast that although there is a "line" aspect to its structure, the wait per player is very short (in some cases almost not long enough, since it's a pretty vigorous exercise and they need to get back to the starting position in time for their next turn).

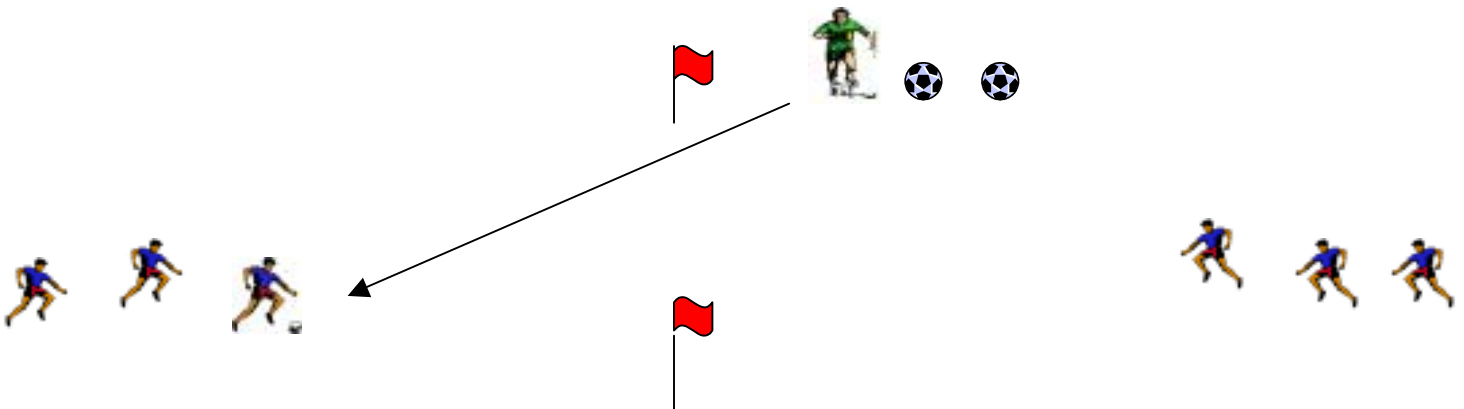
Set Up and Execution

For every six to eight players, you will need:

- a pair of bicycle flags to serve as the goal;
- a pile of extra balls;
- a coach (or knowledgeable parent) to supervise / feed the extra balls when necessary.

Two flags are placed about a goal-width apart. Two lines of 3-4 players each are formed, the start of each line roughly centered about 20 yards out from the flag "goal" .

For some groups, a couple of cones to mark about where players should start from may be useful aids, but they're not essential to the exercise.



The coach initially serves a rolling or bouncing ball toward the first player. The player has N# of touches to receive and get a shot off (ideally, N = 2 or even sometimes 1). Player "shot" will of course continue past the flags toward line 2.

The first player from the front of line 2 moves to receive the ball, two (or one) touches and returns a shot back through the goal, which is in turn received and shot by the next player in line.

If a shot or attempt at receiving it goes awkwardly astray, or is so poorly mis-hit so it doesn't effectively roll through the flags, the coach immediately serves another ball to the next player up to go after instead.

Coaching Points

- Use your receiving first touch to direct the ball to the side a bit in front of you to set up your shot, ideally on the very next touch.
- Use good striking and receiving technique, BUT equally or more important is to receive and get a shot off QUICKLY!
- Emphasize that in a game, fussy extra touches to try to set up a ball perfectly = lost opportunity to get the shot off before the defense recovers (and also allows the GK to better cut off the angle and get set).
- Set the plant foot a little past the ball so it is in the correct position beside the ball when the ball is struck.
- We want the shot on the ground or low if possible (must at least come in under the flags to count). Without enforcing this condition, players will fail to ingrain the technique habits necessary to avoid skying the ball over the crossbar. (Let 'em learn chip shots over the GK in another exercise, another day)
- It's better to try for accuracy and smooth firmness than to deliberately try to swing at the ball hard.
- After awhile, you can direct (if the receiving angle is suitable) that the shot must be with the non-dominant foot (usually the left)...so try to set up the receiving touch that way if possible!

It is better to keep this exercise simple and uncluttered, by NOT attempting to have the players switch lines. Rather have them move quickly out of the way after their shot passes the flags, and move back to the end of their line in time for their next turn (which is coming up very quickly! That's in part because there's inherently no rebound to "follow" by the nature of this exercise (the ball passes through the flags)...and you want the action to flow immediately, without interruption, to the next player in the opposite line. This is a technical exercise to ingrain the proper instincts for receiving and shooting rather than a competitive small-sided game

Progression of Flag Shooting

Of course, it would also be a good (but very different and small sided take-on (rather than technical shooting) exercise to have the player from line 1 continue through the flags to be a facing oncoming "defender" against the next player up from line 2 to try to receive and shoot against, and so on. Here's a variation I would use first, to get players used to executing good receiving touch and shot with composure under stress and pressure. You can assign one player, or better yet (if you're strong-winded) yourself to give chase closely behind each player in one of the lines, starting immediately upon their first touch. Use the pause while the opposite line has its momentary turn to get back in place to give a controlled amount of harassment to the next player in line.

You can also do this slightly differently by having, each player have a ball, and when a player takes a shot, they must follow it to the goal to become GK for the opponent's shot. Then retrieve a ball and go back to your group.

More Progressions – Staggered Goals

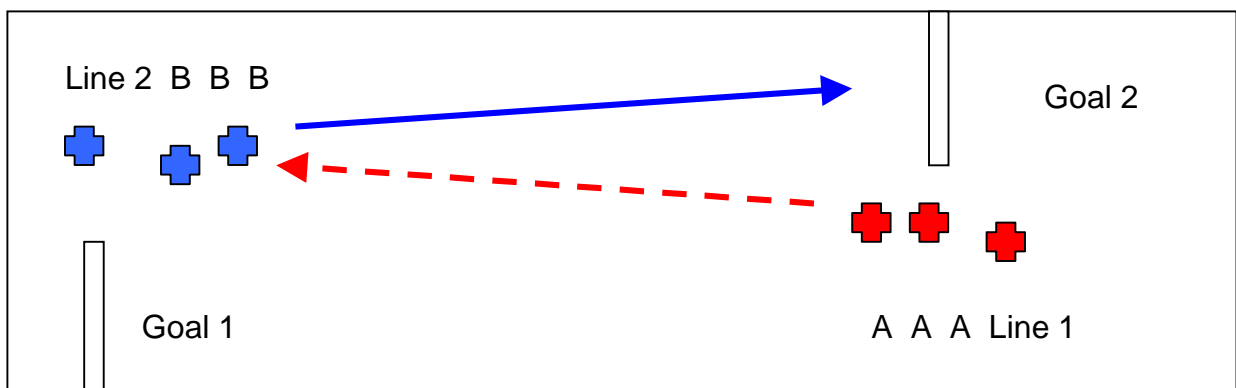
Even the top-level players perfect their shooting skills without a defensive presence. Shooting while under pressure is a critical part of a player's training, but only after the player has developed some skill and confidence in shooting. Actually, some coaches claim to see more scores (and missed opportunities) when there is no (immediate) defensive pressure.

Training environments should get players maximum shots with different varieties of passes and situations.

A staggered goal setup is a wonderful training environment especially when training in a small area. It allows for players to share an area and still feel as if they have large area to work in.

There are a couple of things one can do from this setup. If a coach has a flat goal, s/he can place it at the halfway off towards a touch and the players can be separated into shooting on four goals. Defensive pressure can also be included if needed in this layout.

Set Up and Execution

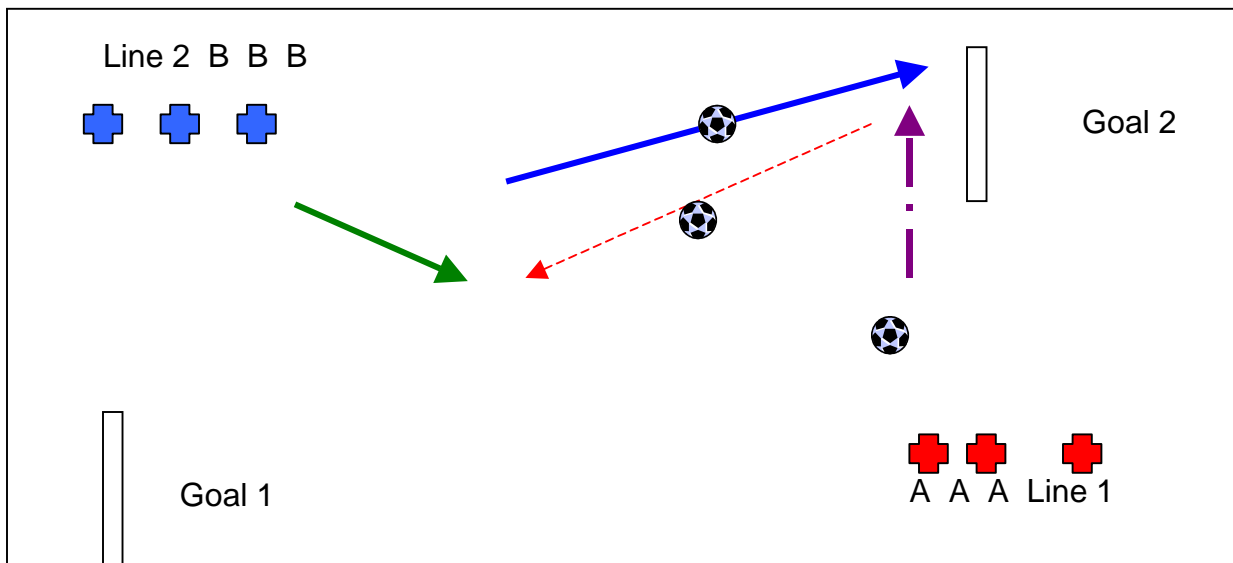


Long Shots

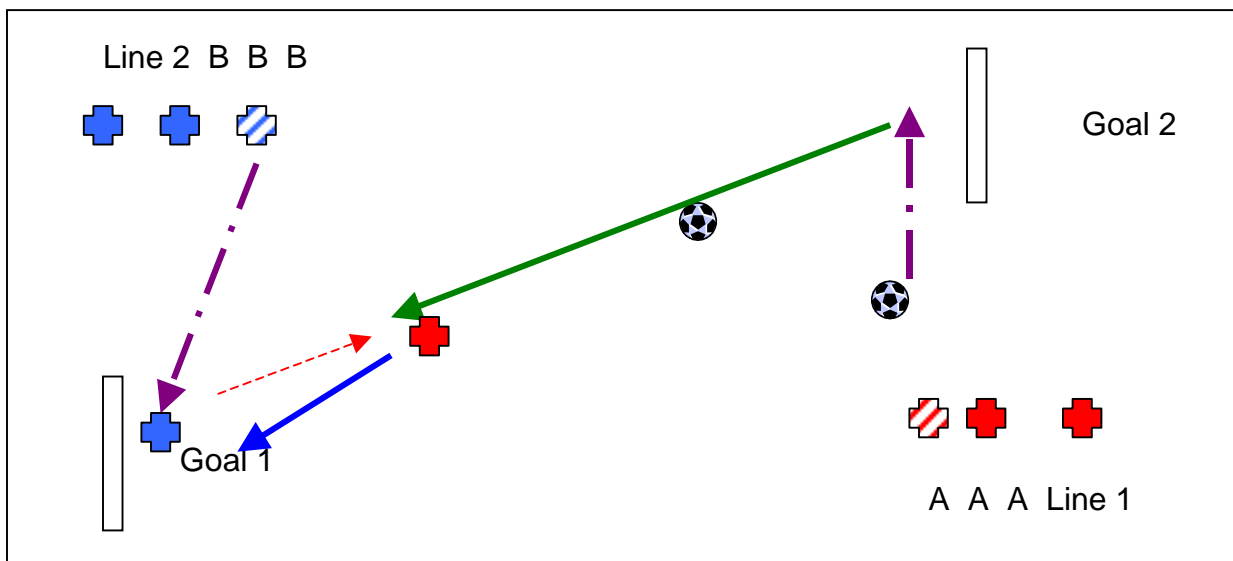
A plays long ball to **B** who controls and shoots on Goal 2; the next player **B** immediately plays long ball to **A** (initial passer) who controls and shoots on Goal 1.

Either the player retrieves his own ball and switches sides or he can retrieve the other shooter's ball and stay on same side.

Back Angles



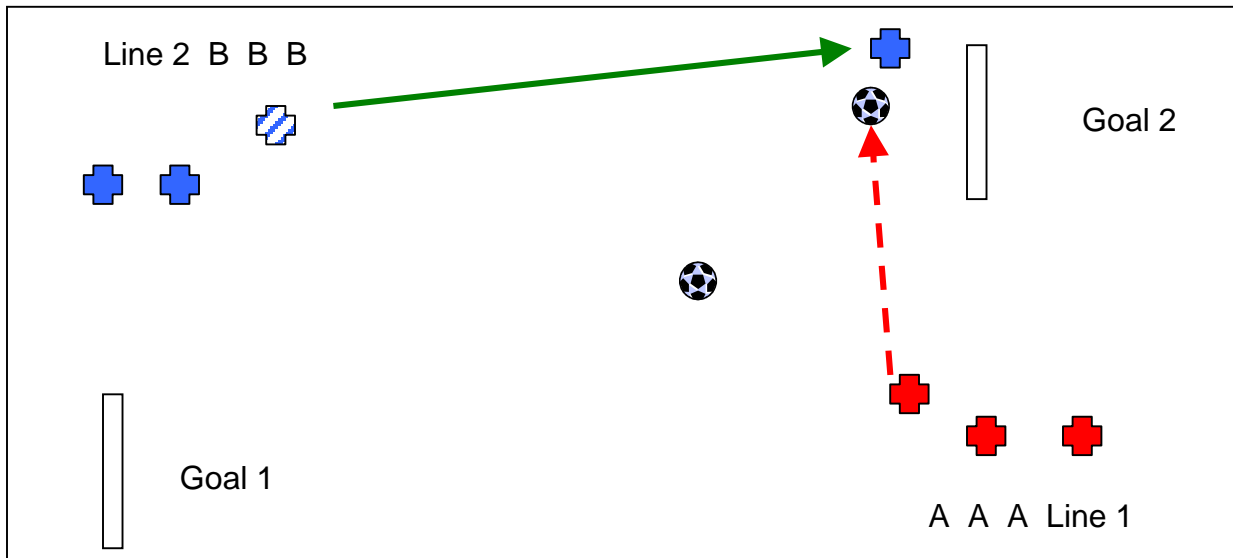
Line 1, player **A** dribbles along goal line (towards goal 2) and plays an angled pass back to player **B** in line 2 moving on to goal 2.



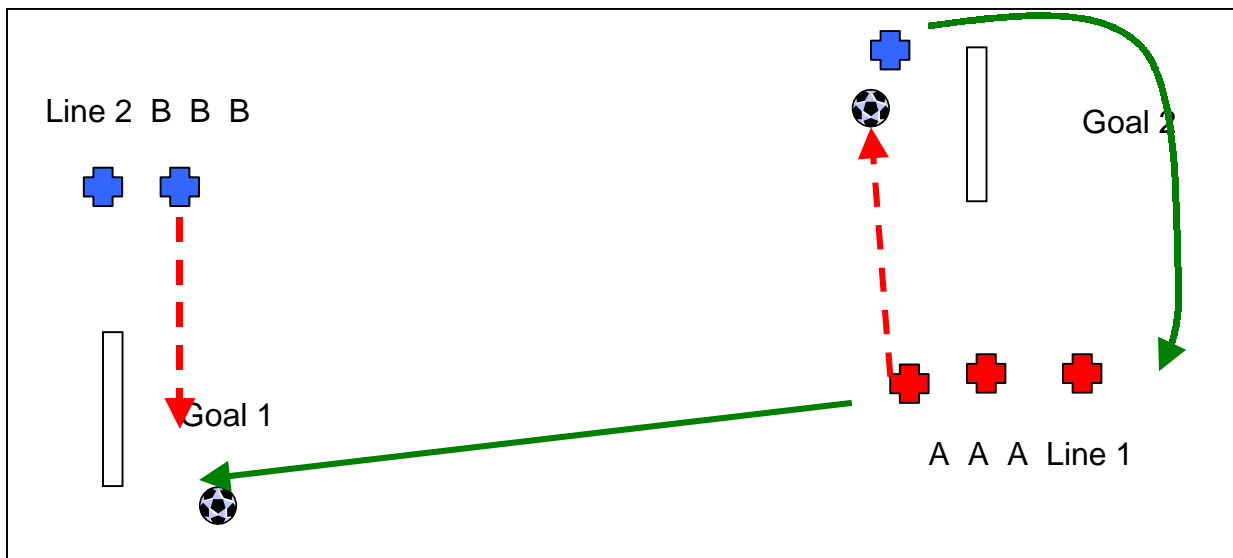
Immediately after the pass, player **A** makes run on goal 1 as next player in line 2 dribbles along goal line (towards goal 1) and plays back angle to A. Players retrieve shots and exchange lines.

Crosses

Same as above, except B makes a far post run on goal 2 and A crosses. A then makes far post run on Goal 1 and next B crosses, etc.



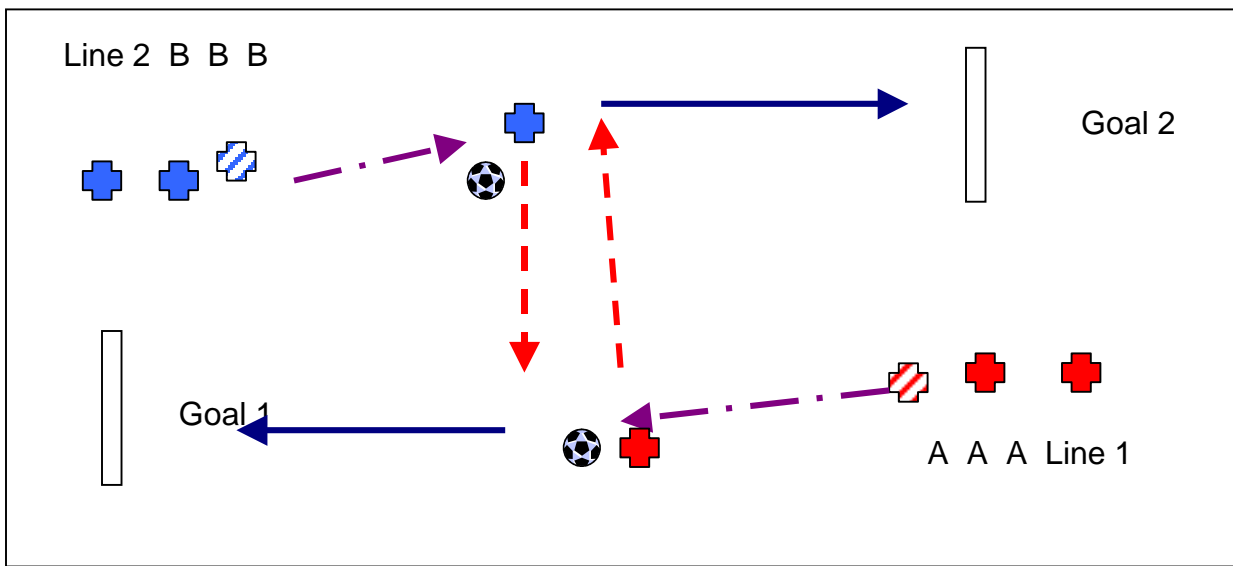
B Making Far Post Run A Makes The Pass



A Making Far Post Run - B Makes The Pass

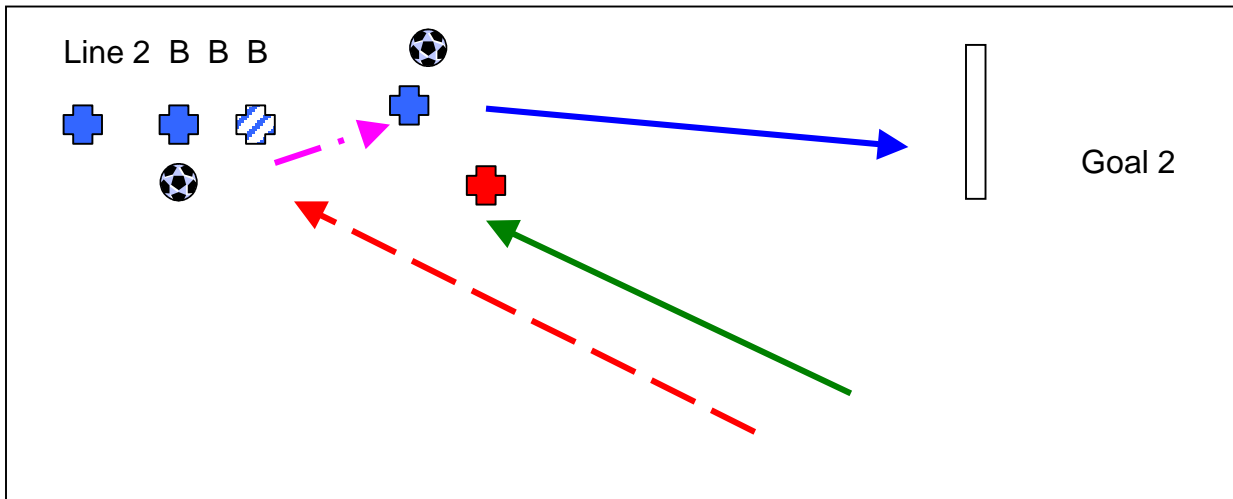
Square Balls

A plays a square ball in front of B as at the same time, B plays a square ball to A. A immediately shoots on goal 1 as B shoots on goal 2. Retrieve shots and switch lines.



Defensive Close Down

A plays long ball to B and closes down defensively; immediately, next B plays and closes down next A. Players switch roles next.



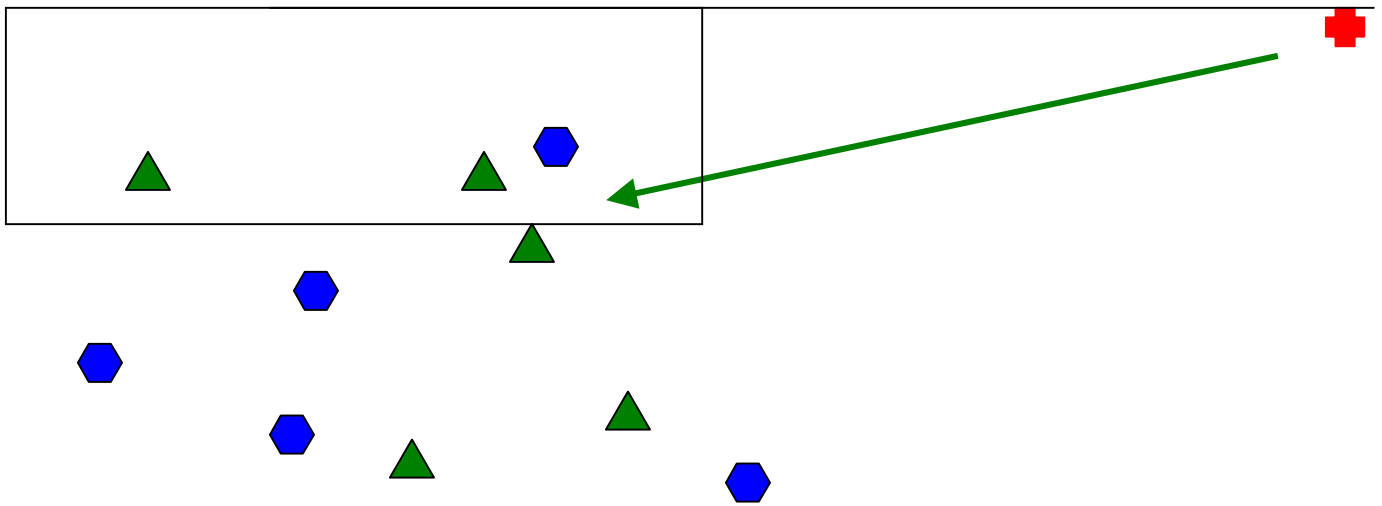


Goal 1



A A A Line 1

World Cup Crosses



3 teams, 1 keeper. Half a field. Keeper in goal. Team A at one corner with tons of balls, team B and team C on field. Start team B off in pinnies (pinnies designate the champs).

Have kids on A cross the ball, sometimes deep, sometimes just in front of the keeper. As soon as the ball goes out A kicks another in.

Whoever touched the ball last chases it and returns it to the pile in the corner before he/she can get back into play.

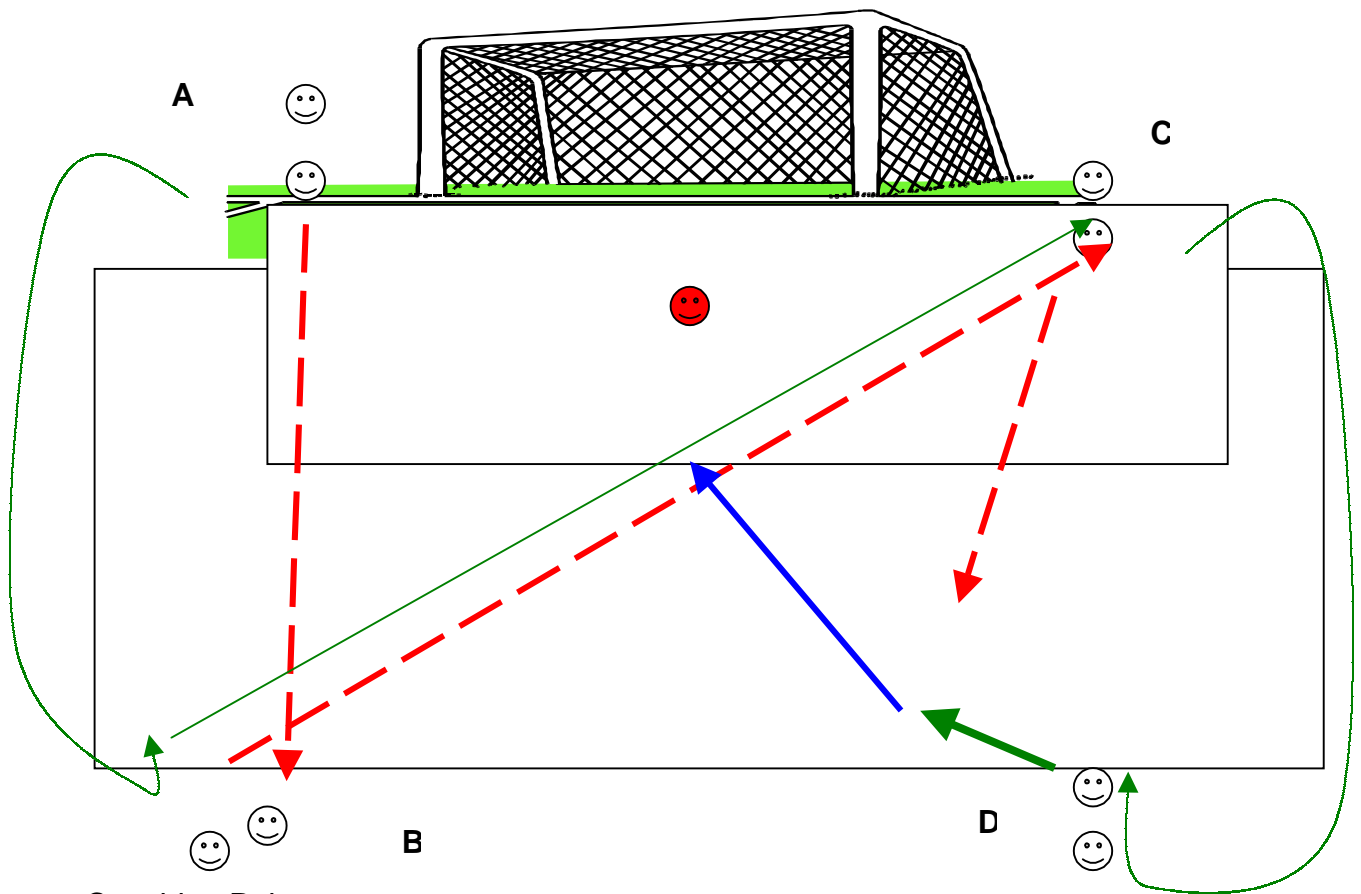
Play for 5 minutes. High score wears champs' pinnies, other team goes to the opposite corner, crossing team comes in to play the champs.

Near Post – Far Post

This is a favorite drill of coaches because it incorporates passing, movement and setting up a shot. It can and is used at the travel level as a basic warm up drill.

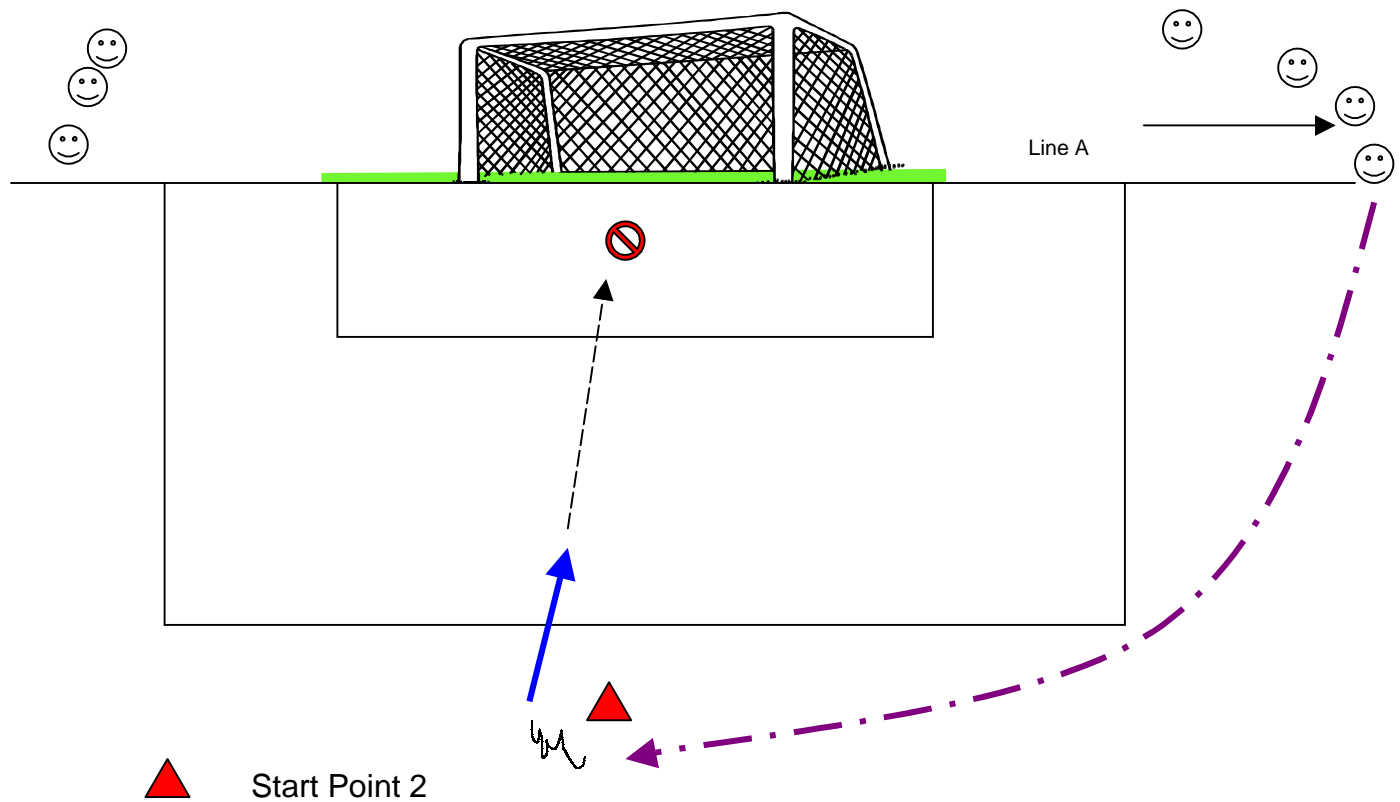
Set the players up on the 18 yard box corners. The line at the far right goal line corner has a set of balls. The passing sequence is shown as A to B to C to D who shoots.

All players sprint after their pass and join the line where their pass has gone.



Coaching Points

1. Make sure they sprint after their pass
2. Two-Touch in the box.
3. This isn't target practice on the keeper. Don't let them get too close
4. Player B A and Player D sprint across the penalty box providing additional distraction for the keeper
5. Have them play the ball outside their footprints.
6. Ball and themselves should always be moving forward
7. Progress to one touch passing and shooting



Organization

- This drill works best with two full goals with keepers set about 40 yards apart. Approximately twice the "range" of a shot where they would still be in air. However if you don't have that luxury, work it as shown with one goal and two lines going one after the other
- 2 lines of kids, each kid with ball, each line at opposite corners of rectangle with two goals. On the goal line outside the penalty area if only one goal.
- Line "A" dribbles to cone then performs foot move, like Cruyff, or a feint, like Simple Steptover.
- Player then accelerates to go 1 on 1 against the keeper - most will shoot, not try to dribble the keeper.
- Opposite line does same at the same time.(if there are two goals, after the first line if there is one goal
- After shot, player retrieves ball, goes to line B, to repeat. Change sides to later to work other foot.
- Players are always moving. Once the first guy starts, the next is fairly close behind.
- Leave enough space for keeper to get set.

Progression

- Add a defender, who plays passively at first
- Allow the defender to harass the attacker with taps but not steal the ball
- Change the line start to the center line edges (Point 2) and do the same to work a shot where one must come back at a 90 degree angle to direction of primary movement. Great for left foot coordination.

Coaching Points:

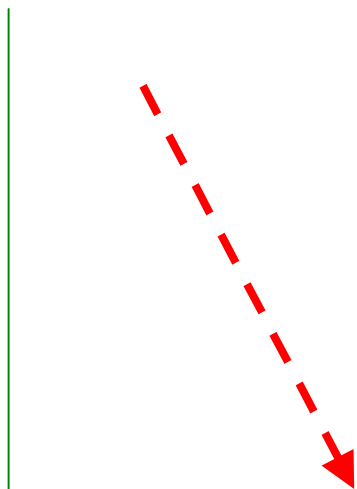
1. **Shot on goal against keeper**, not empty space, teaches shot with a placement intended.
2. **Set up(s) of shot**- teaches them to be sure to have close control of ball, and to push ball to space after their foot move
3. **Follow** through with kick (usually instep power)
4. Later in season, emphasize outside of foot as a means for swerves, or "guided" style pushed/kicked type shots where one uses the foot as a paddle, and also the benefit of a surprise to keeper (direction not evident until ball moves).
5. Foot move then kick requirement is a simple "live" explanation that one will have to do something "creative" to enable the shot.

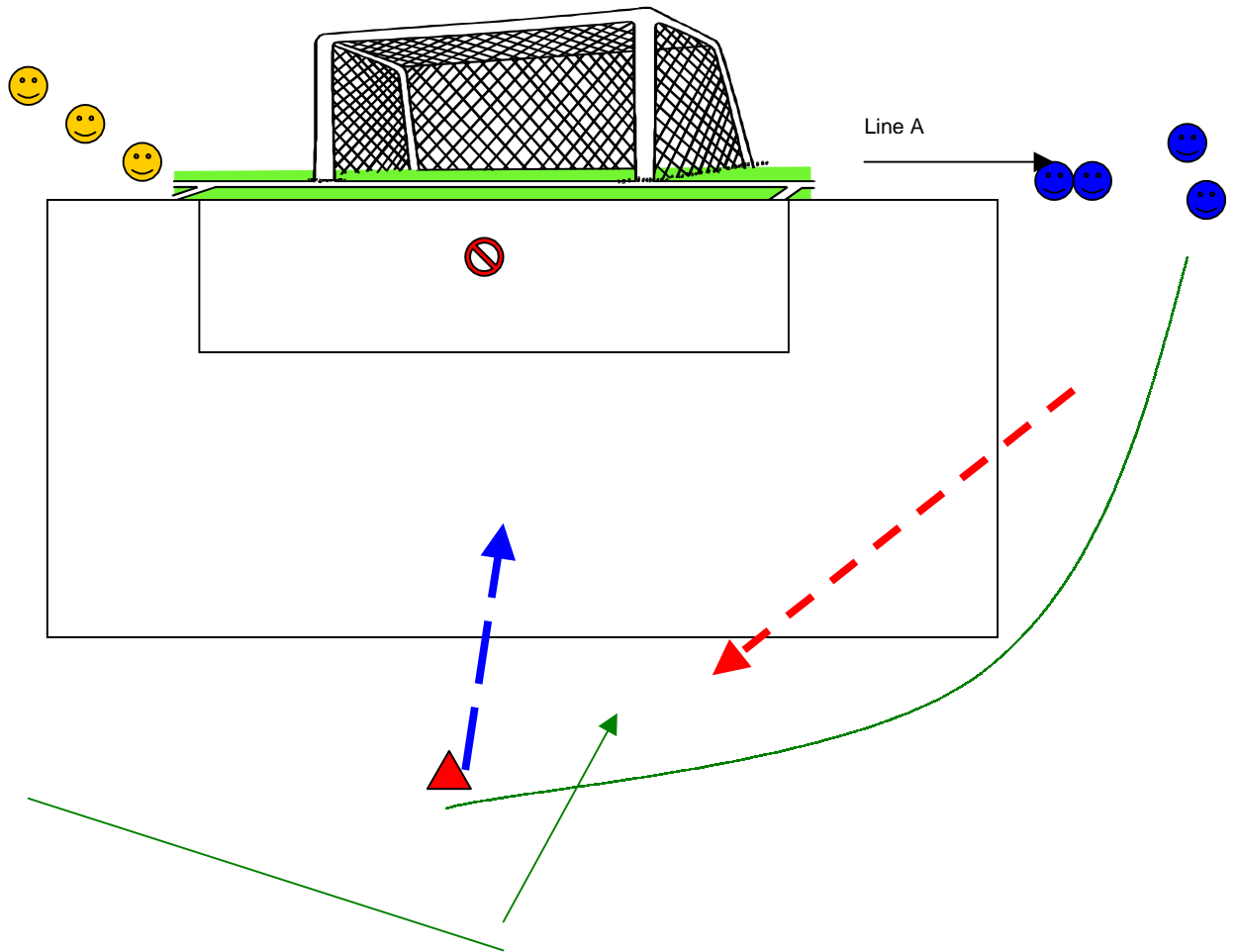
Shooting on the Move – With a Pass

This next drill involves constant movement of the shooter and the passer.

Set Up and Execution

2 lines on either side of the net. First player in one line runs without a ball around a pre-set marker. First player in the opposite line hits her with a pass at the top of the 18. She then starts her run and does not watch the shot. Player with the ball one touches the shot and moves to the line opposite of where she started

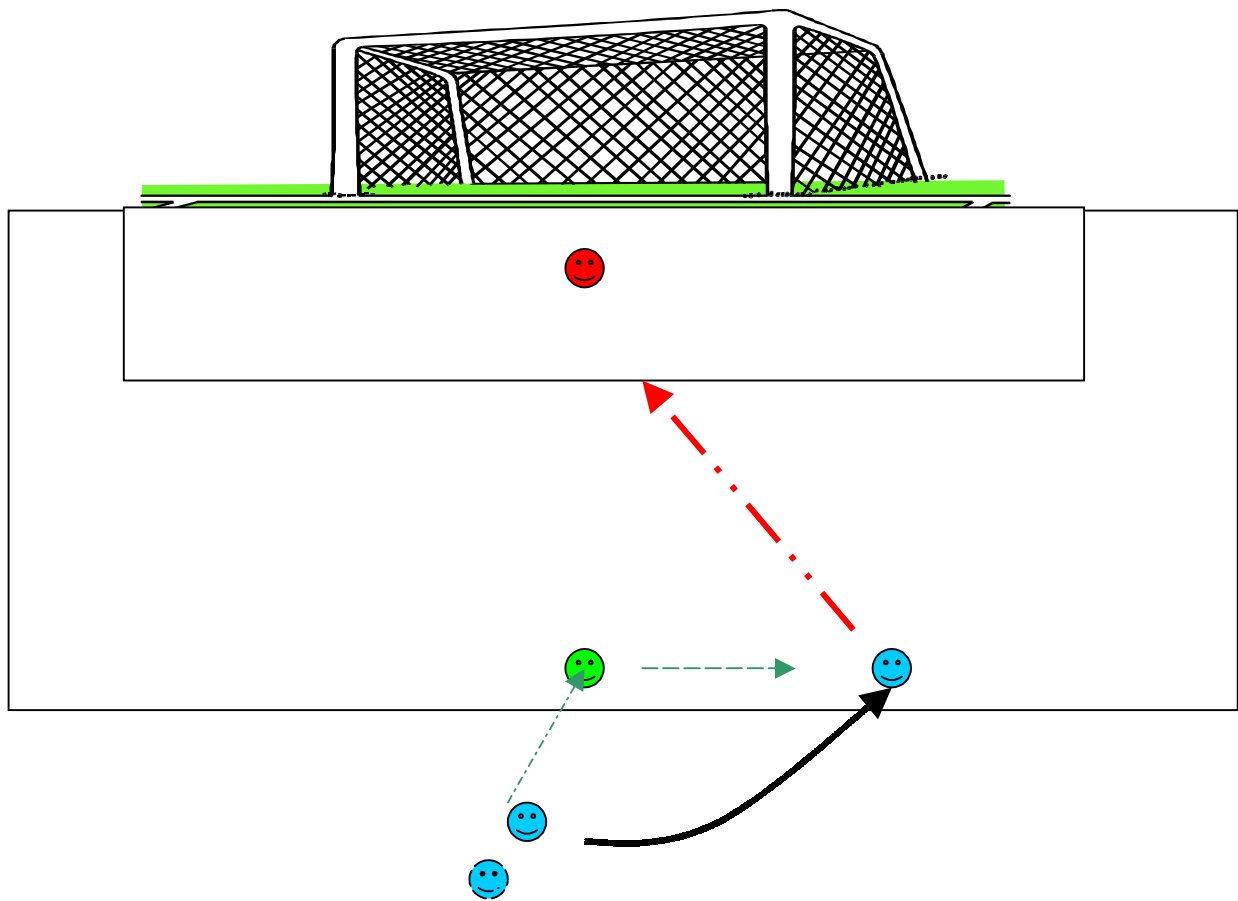




Target Player – Overlap Shooting Drill

Here is another drill where you can work on shots off of movement. This drill incorporates the concept of a one-two combination using a “target” player to lay the ball off to a teammate to take a shot.

The “target” player is one who is comfortable playing with their back to the goal.



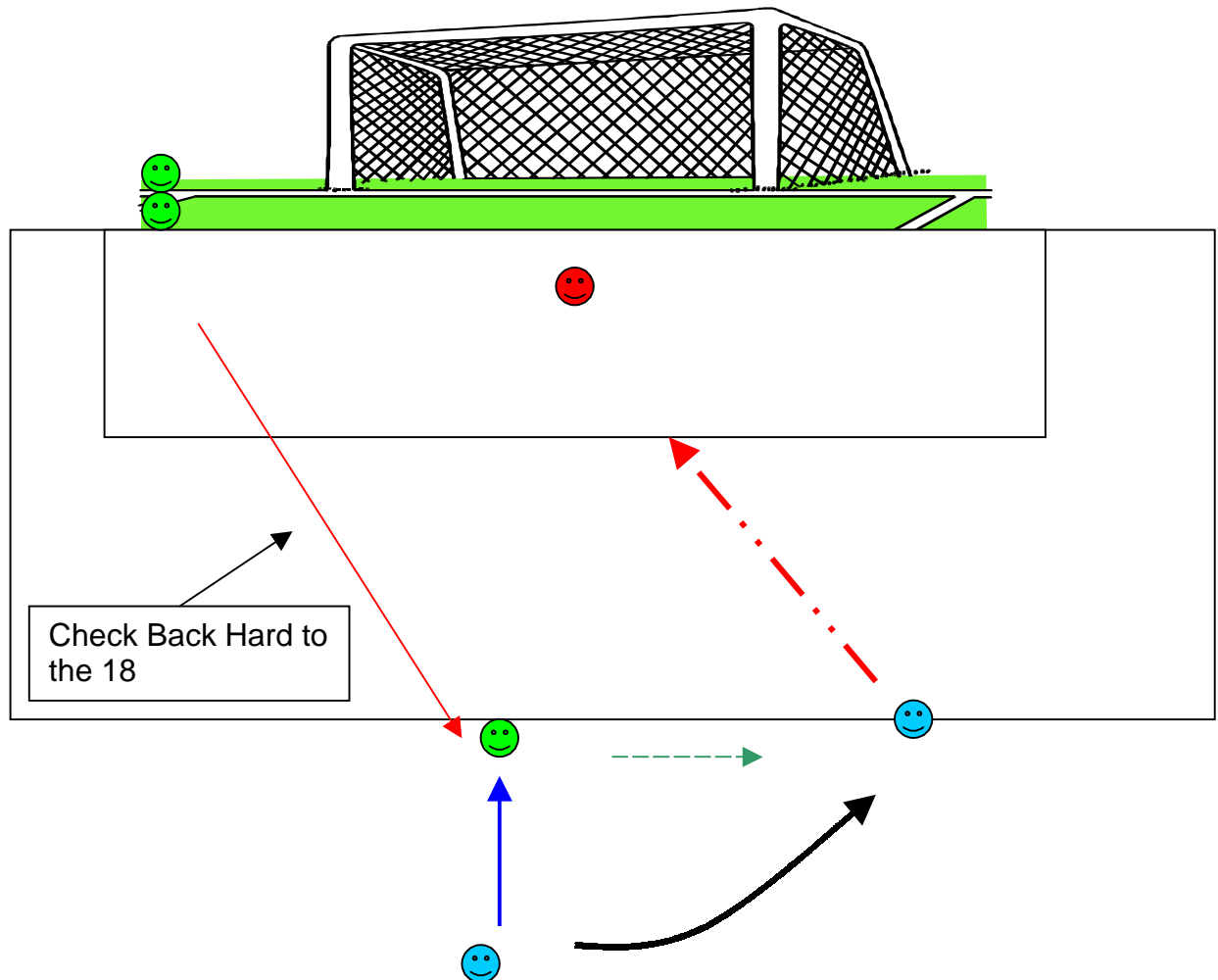
Coaching Points

1. Technical excellence to start. There is no pressure so the pass must be to the feet of the target player
2. Target player should two-touch to start and progress to one touch.
3. Target player should start with inside of foot pass for the return and progress to an outside of the foot pass
4. Shooter must make an overlapping run rather than a diagonal run. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line but that's not what we're after here. We want to "fool" the defenders.
5. Allow only one touch in the penalty area. If player loses control, player loses opportunity to shoot.
6. Work non-dominant foot at least twice as hard as the dominant.
7. Assign two players to chase and retrieve balls leaving the keeper free for shots. Have plenty of extra balls on hand. Make this drill fast paced.
8. Add a progression by putting in a passive defender behind the target player to harass them.

9. Let the defender become semi-active and let the target player then chose either to pass or turn on the ball for their own shot. This should keep the defender a little honest.
10. Add a second defender at the far post who is allowed to move once the target player receives the ball. This will encourage a quick lay off and quick shot.
11. Switch the target player every ten passes

Progression of the Target Player – Overlap

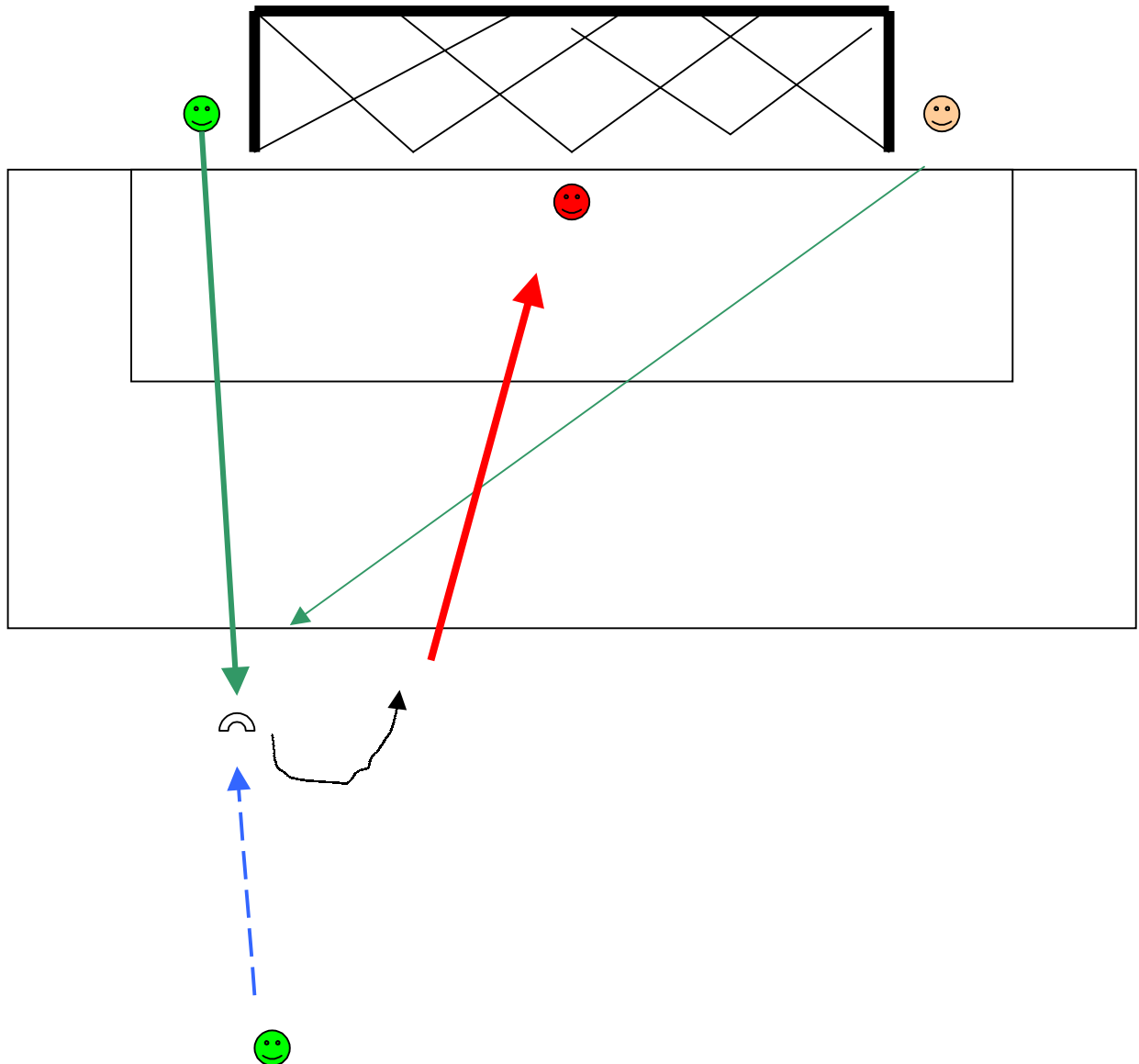
- Get the players on the move. There are a lot of opportunities to score when you make space. And making space involves movement.
- In addition the players must start to learn to control the ball at their feet when they are checking back



Coaching Points

1. Same points as the static drill except movement by the player checking back to the 18
2. Shooter takes the place of the person checking back. Checking player goes to the shooter line

Checking Back and Shooting



Set Up and Execution

One player with lots of balls outside the 18. Player from the near post checks back at full speed to the 18. Pass is laid in at her feet. Player from the far post runs hard to prevent the player with the ball from turning and shooting.

Coaching Points

- Have the defender come at full speed but play the shooter at 50% to start
- Make sure that the pass is at the feet of the shooter. As the defender becomes more active have the shooter indicate, by voice or action, where they want the pass to be played so that they can turn
- One touch in the box. Get the shot off
- Have players switch lines after the shot.

Rapid Fire Shooting Drill

The next drill combines two elements of shooting, half volley and one touch. It also makes the players use both feet and because it is a high intensity drill, works aerobic conditioning.

Play this drill against a goal or a wall so there isn't a lot of ball chasing. If you can, see if you can recruit some parents to play the balls back into the field.

Set Up and Execution

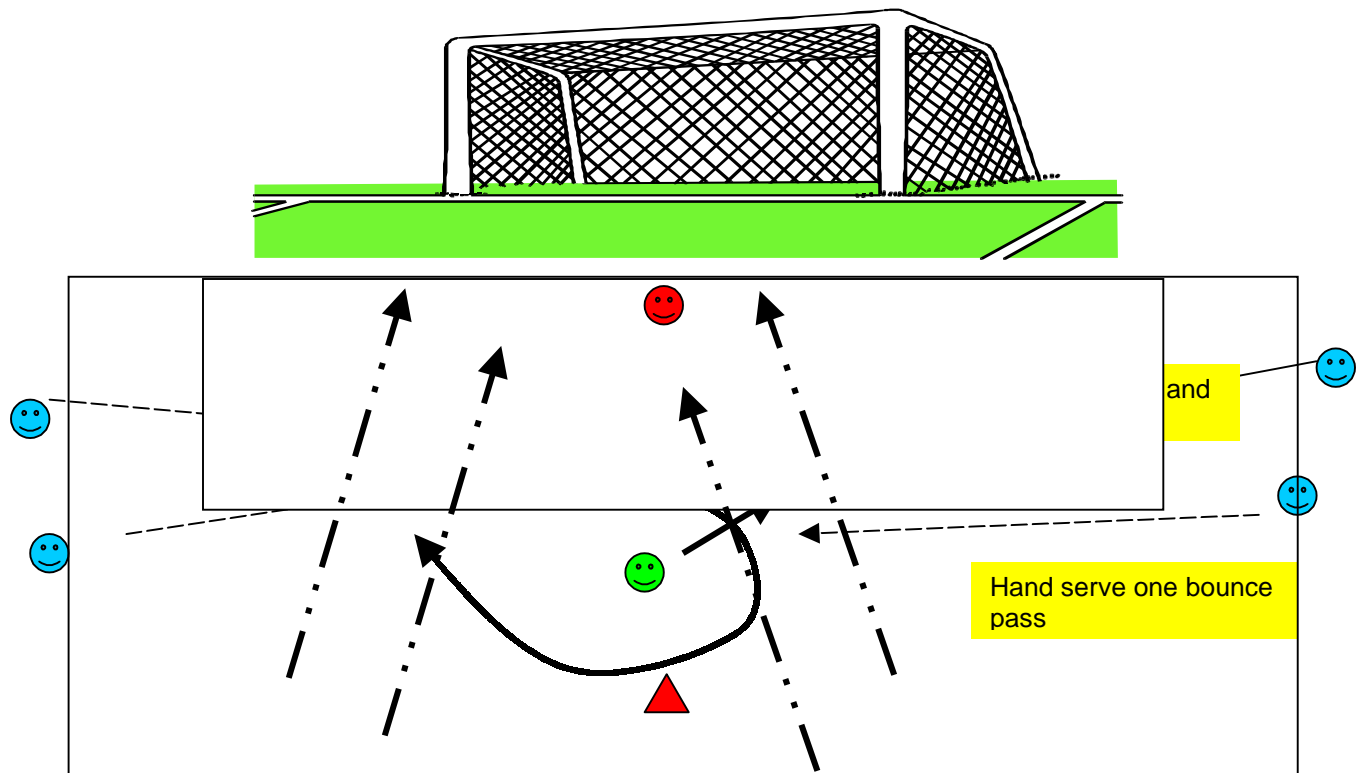
4 players, each with a ball (2 if you have extras) are set up outside the penalty area as shown. The shooter has to take a half volley with the right foot, a one touch with the right, then return around a cone and take a half volley with the left and a one touch with the left.

If each player has two balls repeat the sequence. If not each player rotates as shown. Keeper should ignore the balls once he has played them. The important thing is to keep the drill moving. This drill encourages a game type situation where balls are coming from all different directions, bouncing and flat.

Coaching Points

1. Hand serve the one bounce pass until the players are capable of chipping the ball
2. Half volley shot should be taken side on. A common mistake is to hit under the ball. It is more important that they hit down on the ball so the shot goes on goal.
3. Sprint after first two shots
4. Goalkeeper plays only initial shot and then leaves the ball.

5. If the keeper is having trouble getting set for the next shot put a sprint around the cones in for the shooter so the keeper has time to get up



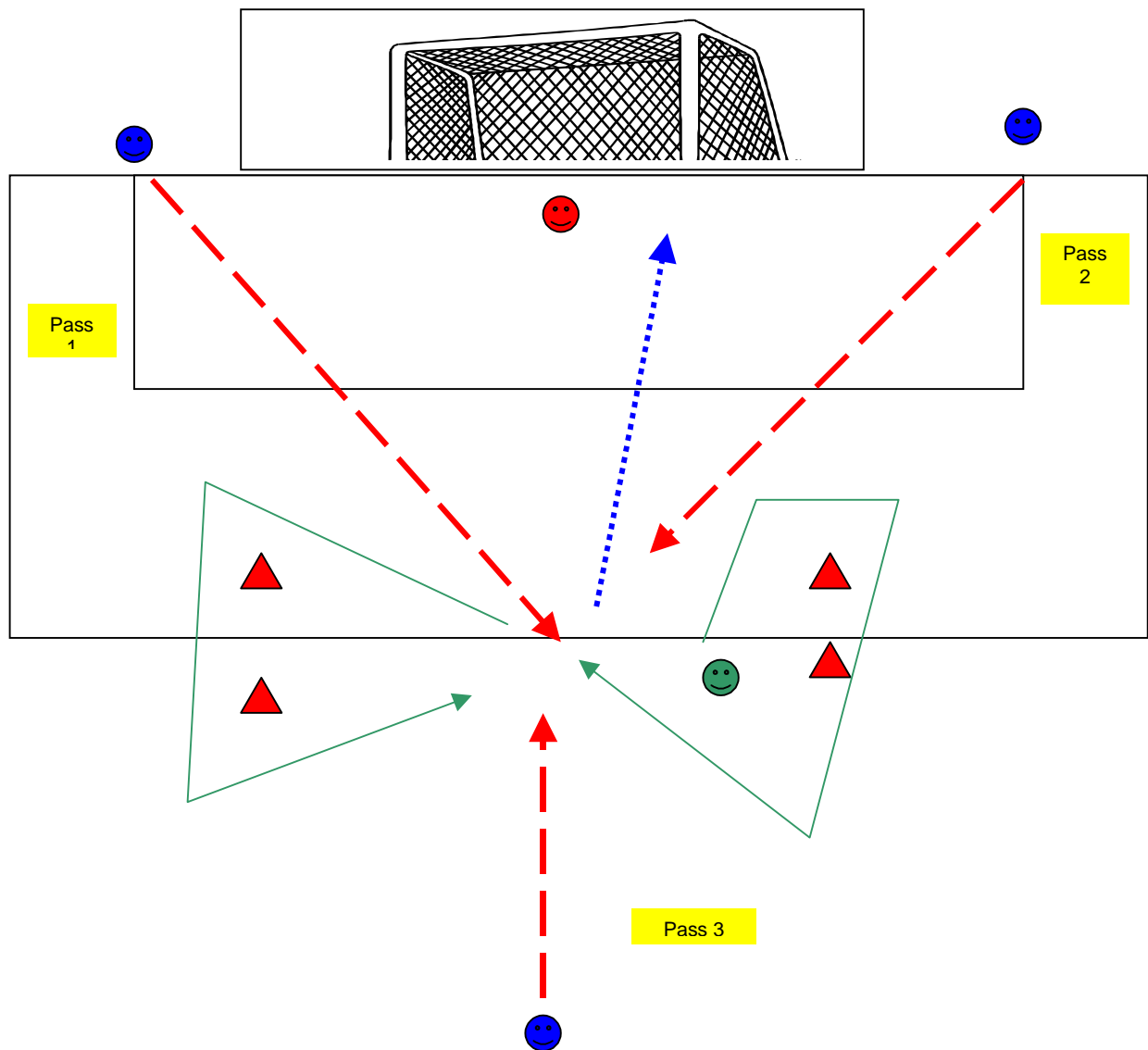
Rapid Fire Shooting Drill – Figure 8 Plus

This is a variation on the above drill. It again has players shooting on the move like they will have to in a game and it provides a good anaerobic conditioning regime.

Set Up and Execution

This drill should be done only with 4 field players and the keeper. Any more and they are standing around too much. There are three passers and a shooter. Two passers are on the goal line outside the posts. The third is 25 yards out facing the goal. Each passer has two balls.

The first pass comes on a diagonal off the goal line as if a player had driven around the defense, but too deep for a shot. They would then cut back a pass to a trailing player. The second pass is the same way but from the opposite direction. The third pass is to the shooter who is checking back from the goal and now has to turn and shoot in one motion. The shooter basically makes a figure 8 as they shoot and check back for the next pass.

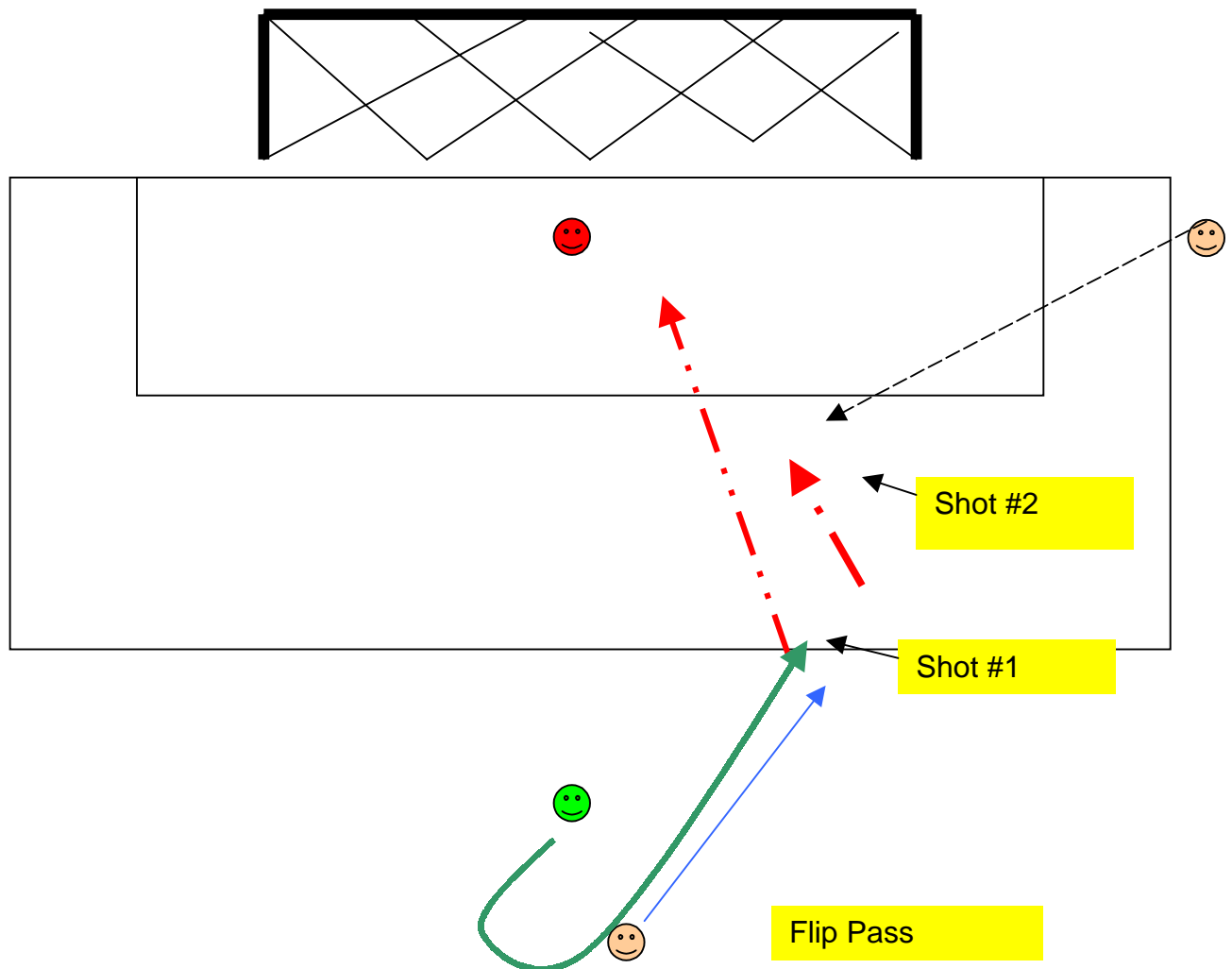


Coaching Points

- Passes must be crisp and meet the shooter at the 18.
- Shooter should not have to slow up to take the shot
- Two touch maximum... once to prepare and the second to drive the shot
- Technical excellence in shooting. Do not allow kicking with the toes because it is more 'convenient'.
- Left and right foot shooting. This drill is set up precisely so both feet have to be used. Don't let them "run around" their non-dominant foot.
- If the ball gets away from their first touch, don't let them chase it. Forget it and go on to the next shot.

- On the pass where the player is facing away from the net, they have to touch the ball as they turn, not just let it roll by and run to catch up with it. They won't be able to do this in a game so don't let them practice this way.
- Make a game out of this with scoring as follows. 1 point for a shot on goal, 5 if it scores. 3 points if it hits the post or crossbar because that shows they were looking for the upper and lower 90. Minus 1 point for missing the net and minus 5 points if they miss the net because they toe kicked it, (Toe kicking being notoriously inaccurate because of the small surface area hitting the ball).

Advanced Shooting – One Touch Volley

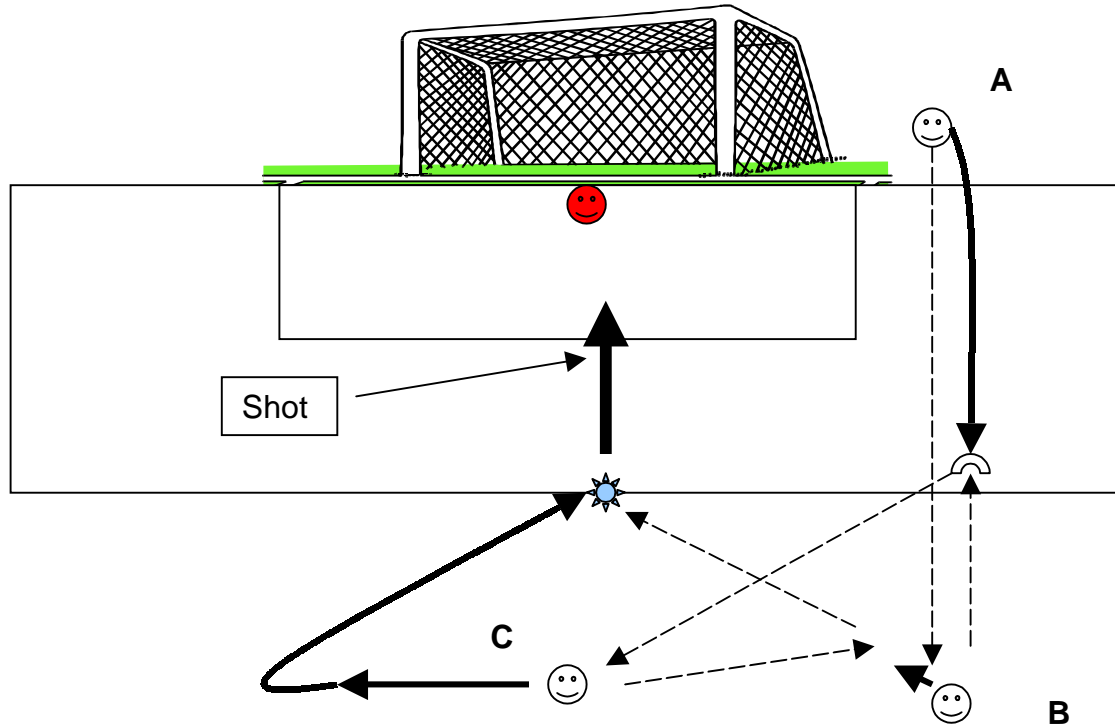


Coach flips ball over head of the shooter who is initially facing him. Shooter turns and chases ball. Ball should be played so that shooter can one touch a half volley

Add a second player in the corner area who can then flip a ball to the shooter and have a full volley shot. Full volley means play the ball before it hits the ground

Advanced Shooting – Drop Through Pass and Shoot

The following drill is from the AJAX (pronounced I-AXE) club training tapes. It is used to teach the concept of staying outside until the ball is played and then exploding to the ball for the shot.



Organization

1. Lots of balls and a few extra players with Player A
2. Player A plays ball to Player B
3. Player A follows checks to his pass.
4. Player B plays ball back to player A approximately as shown (top of penalty area)
5. Player A then diagonals the ball to Player C
6. Player C touches the ball sideways to Player B
7. Player C then makes a run, staying outside until the ball is played.
8. Player B diagonals the ball into C for a shot
9. Players follow their passes or shots (A goes to B, B to C, C to A, Player behind A in original line steps up to make the next pass)

Coaching Points

- Player C must stay outside and then explode to the ball. Don't let them take a direct line to the pass. Make them sell the run.
- Two touch passes to start. Insist on technical excellence since there are no defenders.
 - Look for Player C playing the ball with outside of foot to Player B and then drifting outside for the run.

World Cup

One of the all-time favorite shooting games is World Cup. Team up two players and have them pick a country. You can have as many groups of two as you have players.

Mark off an appropriate boundary area. Start off with 2 balls and a keeper. The keeper throws the balls on to the field and anyone, on any team can go and get them.

The object obviously is to score. When you score you go off, i.e. advance in the World Cup. The last team on is eliminated from the round. They go behind the net to track down errant shots.

At the conclusion of the round everyone goes back on to the field and the next round commences. Do this until only one team is left standing.

This game encourages players to communicate and shoot at the earliest opportunity.