



Crossing on the run

Corrections and exercises for playing better crosses
by **Sam Snow**, Director of Coaching, US Youth Soccer

One of the shortcomings of the American player is the inability to accurately and consistently cross the ball to create good scoring opportunities. Too many players, and their coaches, are satisfied with simply getting the ball into the box. As long as the ball lands inside the penalty area they are fairly content. Part of the reason for this attitude is that many soccer players consider the crossed ball to be a kick rather than a pass.

A cross is a pass, and it should have the same characteristics as other passes in the game:

- accuracy (in the placement of the ball and its flight path, straight or bent),
- proper pace,
- timing,
- height (in the case of a pass in the air), and
- disguise.

As with other passes, the crossed ball can be played into space or to a teammate.

The cross pass

Ultimately the crosser should be able to play a cross pass with the instep (straight flight), the inside of the foot (ball curves out away from the goal) and the outside of the foot (ball curves in towards the goal). There are three phases of crossing, with characteristic basic body mechanics:

Preparation

- From the dribble, or in receiving the pass, the last touch on the ball before crossing should push the ball forward and in toward the penalty area: a short diagonal pass for oneself to set up the proper body mechanics for crossing the ball.
- Approach the ball at a 45-degree angle.
- Place the plant foot four to six inches away from the ball, with the toes pointing across the field towards the opposite touchline.
- The kicking leg should swing back, with the heel of the kicking foot going towards the buttocks.
- Arms should be slightly out for balance.

- The head should be slightly forward with the eyes on the ball.

Contact

- The kicking leg should swing from the hip.
- Strike through the center of the ball with the instep (shoelaces or top of foot).
- Point the toes of the kicking foot down and lock the ankle.
- The hips should rotate toward the opposite touchline as the kicking leg swings forward and strikes the ball.

Follow-through

- The kicking leg should follow through, moving slightly upward and slightly across the body.

- Keep the head down until the kicking foot lands on the ground again.

Once these basics have been mastered, it becomes possible to strike different types of crosses by contacting the ball with a different part of the foot and/or striking a different part of the ball.

Corrections through guided discovery

Armed with the knowledge of proper crossing technique, you are now able to observe your players in a practice session and reinforce the correct technique. Do not give players direct answers on the mistakes they make in crossing the ball. Instead, help them learn the skill through guided discovery. Guided discovery simply means that you raise



To create good scoring opportunities it is necessary to cross the ball accurately and consistently.

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questions and give the players options or choices, sparking their curiosity and guiding them to answer the questions for themselves. For example, you can teach players to use their insteps and improve the trajectory of their passes by asking the following questions:

Question 1: “What kind of kick would be needed to pass the ball to someone who is far away?”

Answer 1: “A long kick.”

Question 2: “How do you overcome an opponent positioned between the ball and your receiver?”

Answer 2: “The ball has to go over the opposing player.”

Question 3: “In what way should the ball be struck to go over the player?”

Answer 3: “Low, under the ball.”

Question 4: “To send it over the player, which part of your foot has to contact the ball?”

Answer 4: “The top of the foot (instep).”

Analyzing players’ ball skills

To ask the right questions, you have to be able to analyze your players’ ball skills:

Preparation

Movements leading up to contact:

- distribution of body weight
- shape of the approach to the ball
- position of the body and arms
- position and shape of the supporting leg
- position and shape of the kicking surface and the rotation of the body into contact

Contact

Shape of the foot and body on contact:

- distribution of body weight
- hip and shoulder position
- position of the supporting leg
- contact point, shape and angle of the kicking foot on the ball
- movement of the arms

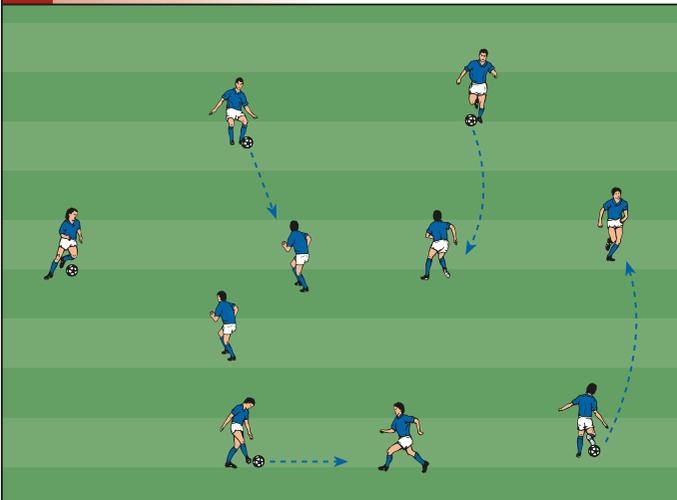
Follow-through

Movements that occur after contact:

- distribution of body weight
 - shape and ending position of the body
 - shape and direction of the kicking leg
- Good analytical observation and guided discovery coaching will make for a good learning environment at your practice sessions. Feedback is more relevant to the players because it focuses on performance (e.g. “Follow through onto your kicking leg and rotate your hips to face across the field”) rather than results (e.g. “You kicked the ball behind the goal”).

CROSSING

1 Warm-up



Setup

- Use one half of the field.
- Divide players into pairs; each pair has a ball.

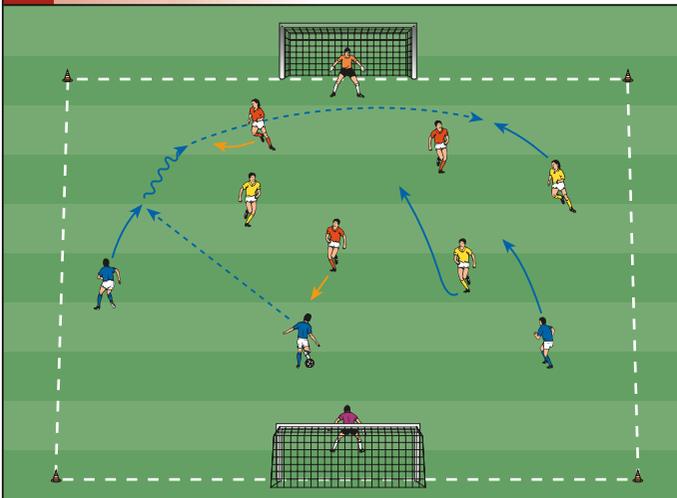
Sequence

- Partners pass back and forth while gradually increasing the distance between them.
- Start with stationary passing and build into passing on the move.

Variations

- Only pass with the right or left foot.
- Only pass with the instep, inside or outside of the foot.

2 3 v. 3 game



Setup

- Mark out a 30 x 35-yard field.
- Set up two goals with goalkeepers.
- Divide players into two teams of three plus three neutral players.

Sequence

- Teams play 3 v. 3.
- Neutral players are always on offense.

Note

- This activity is designed to create even more options to cross/score with three additional players, especially from wide positions.

CROSSING

3 3 v. 3 channel game



Setup

- Use one half of the field.
- Set up two goals with goalkeepers.
- Mark out a channel on each side of the field, two yards from the touchline.
- Divide players into two teams of three.

Sequence

- Teams play 3 v. 3.
- Goals do not count unless the attack has come through one of the channels.
- Level 1: Defenders are not allowed to enter the channels.
- Level 2: Defenders can close down flank players inside the channels.
- Level 3: Flank players may attack the goal: with the cross (teammates have an advantage in the penalty area), with the ball (defenders or space to attack) or without the ball (ball on the opposite side of the field).

Variations

- Set a time limit on crossing/shooting. This will speed up the attack.
- Limit the number of touches.
- Adjust the distance between the goals if you are not getting enough crossing chances.
- Play 5 v. 5 or 6 v. 6 with goalkeepers in a 40 x 45-yard field. Make each team play with a specific formation (3-1-1, 2-1-2, 3-2-1, etc.).

Notes

- Level 2 encourages flank players to cross an early ball behind the defense.
- At Level 3, the position and reaction of the defenders will dictate the flank player's response to the game.

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