



# The wall pass made easy

## Teaching the fundamentals of effective wall passing by **Gerd Thissen** and **Erich Rutmöller**

The successful wall pass—especially when played near the opposition’s goal—is one of the highlights of any soccer match. And a good wall pass gives attacking players a powerful advantage. After the pass, the player who had the ball can run past his opponent without it, avoiding a direct 1 v. 1 situation and getting past the defense, even when the attackers are outnumbered by tightly clustered defenders in a tight space.

In this article, Gerd Thissen and Erich Rutmöller describe and explain the basic elements of the wall pass, including detailed notes on corrections for each exercise.

### What is a wall pass?

The wall pass can be executed in any number of ways. The basic form or “simple wall pass” is the most effective type of two-player combination play. Two attackers get around a defender without engaging in 1 v. 1 play, using a combination of two passes:

The receiver (“wall player”) drops the ball directly back into the passer’s running path; the passer sprints past the opponent immediately after passing (“give and go”) in order to receive and control the ball without interference on the other side. The second pass is just as important as getting past the opponent: The ball should bounce directly back into the passer’s running path, just as if it were bouncing off a wall.

It’s important to note that the term “wall player” simply refers to the way the ball bounces. It has nothing to do with another characteristic of walls, i.e. the fact that they don’t move! The wall player must always get open and/or show for the ball before the first pass.

### Training the wall pass

#### Passing technique

In youth soccer, you should not incorporate the wall pass into your training program until players are able to play relatively reliable passes (properly aimed, with the right force and timing).

Passes can be played with the inside of the foot, the instep or the outside foot. However, the best foundation for a solid wall pass is clearly the pass played with the inside of the foot, because the relatively wide surface makes it easier to play a precise short pass to the receiver’s foot.

Therefore, in order to teach the wall pass systematically, the first step is passing with the inside of the foot. Riskier and more challenging, but also harder for opponents to anticipate, are the surprise outside foot pass and the back pass using the inside or outside foot.

**Play the first pass early so your opponent is unable to block it.**

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**TABLE 1 TRAINING THE WALL PASS**

<b>Passing technique</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the inside of the foot at first to execute the wall pass.</li> <li>• Do not teach wall passes using the inside or outside instep until players have mastered the tactical elements of the wall pass.</li> <li>• Otherwise you risk distracting their attention from the tactics, because the techniques are so demanding.</li> </ul> <p><b>Result: Players stop applying the correct tactics</b></p>
<b>Tactics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain, give reasons, and demonstrate the necessary tactical elements, including the proper sequence of moves (see also the “Tactical steps” for passer and wall player on the following page).</li> </ul>
<b>Repetitions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have players repeat the wall pass until they can execute all technical/tactical elements “in their sleep,” even under time, space and opposition pressure.</li> </ul>
<b>Corrections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When mistakes come up, correct them immediately, before they can take hold.</li> <li>• It’s better to have too many corrections and demonstrations than not enough!</li> </ul>
<b>Raising the level of difficulty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First use cones, then semi-active opponents, then fully active opponents.</li> <li>• Do give your players some freedom of action in the final stage: Both passer and wall player should be allowed to fake the pass and go for the goal instead.</li> </ul>

**Lots of repetitions, immediate corrections**

Players need to work out the technical/tactical elements of the combination one step at a time, so that they master each one. Careful training with lots of repetitions is just as important here as targeted corrections by the coach. You have to point out each mistake immediately, before it can take hold.

An important tool for training the wall pass is the use of cones as orientation points for working out running paths and the timing and direction of passes. Once players have mastered the spacing and timing of the wall pass, you can gradually replace the cones with semi-active and fully active opponents (wait until players have completely internalized the technical/tactical aspects before opponents go fully active).

However, it’s also important to give players the freedom to make their own decisions by letting them use other individual or group attack tactics. An “announced” wall pass rarely fools defenders!

**What to watch for**

For each of the exercises outlined in the following pages, we give you a detailed explanation of each technical/tactical element and each aspect of spacing and timing.

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## WHAT'S IMPORTANT? Basics of the 2 v. 2 situation

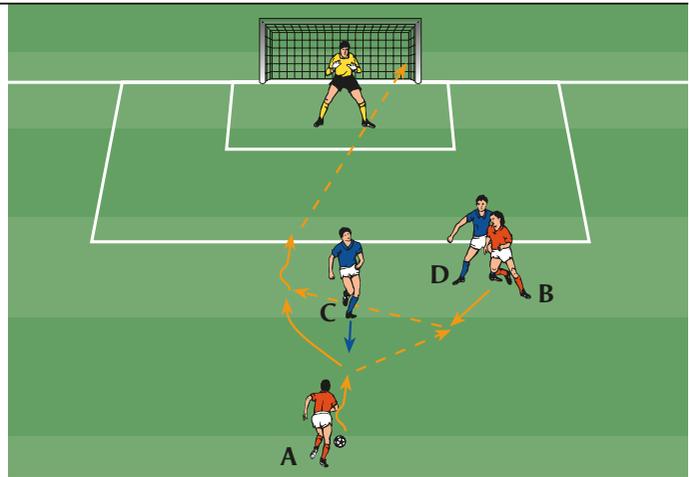
### Simple wall pass with shot (2 v. 2)

#### Setup

- Two attackers (passer A and wall player B) play against defenders C and D. They try to use combination play to finish with as little interference as possible.

#### Sequence

- Player A dribbles toward C, who moves toward A.
- B is to the side and ahead of A but is tightly marked by D.
- To allow A to pass, B suddenly breaks away from D and shows for a pass from A.
- Immediately, A passes past C to B and sprints past C on the opposite side.
- B passes directly into A's running path.
- A receives B's pass behind C, controls it and shoots.



#### Tactical steps: Passer A

- Make eye contact with B before passing.
- Pay attention to B's opening run.
- As soon as B has gotten away from D, pass from a point about two yards away from C.
- Play a hard, well-aimed ground ball to B's feet.
- Try to pass suddenly, to surprise C.
- As soon as you pass, take off explosively, sprinting to get behind C.
- Receive and control B's pass at top speed behind C, or pass the ball off directly, or shoot.

#### Tactical steps: Wall player B

- Make eye contact briefly with A.
- Suddenly break away from D with a quick sprint, a body fake or a step fake.
- Move in A's direction, sprinting at least one or two steps sideways toward the pass.
- Block D with your body to protect the ball.
- Pass directly and precisely back into A's running path.
- Get open again immediately after the wall pass.

## KEY CONCEPT 1: Passing technique

### 1 Focus on: The passer

#### What to do

- Make eye contact with the wall player before passing.
- Play a hard pass on the ground.
- Pass precisely to feet as you move forward.
- Keep moving forward as you pass, and take a new position.

#### Setup

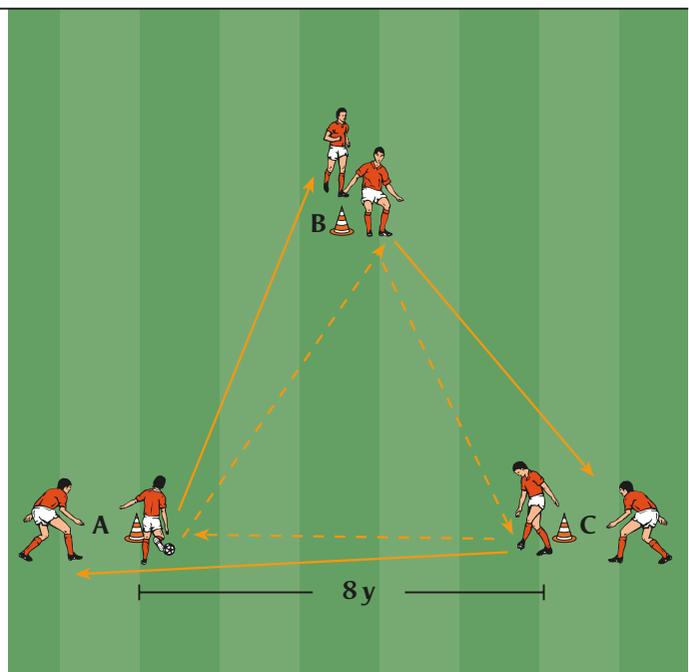
- Set up three cones to form an eight-yard triangle.
- Assign two players to each corner of the triangle.
- Player A has the ball.

#### Sequence

- Player A passes to B, runs after the pass and moves to the end of the line at B's position.
- B passes directly to C, runs after the pass, etc.

#### Variations

- Player A uses the inside of the foot, B the outside foot, C the inside of the foot, etc.
- All players use the outside foot.
- Reverse directions.





## KEY CONCEPT 1: Passing technique

### 2 Focus on: The wall player

#### What to do

- Make eye contact with the passer.
- Run toward the ball, so the passer can pass.
- Drop the ball back to the passer.
- After the wall pass, move away and get open again.

#### Setup

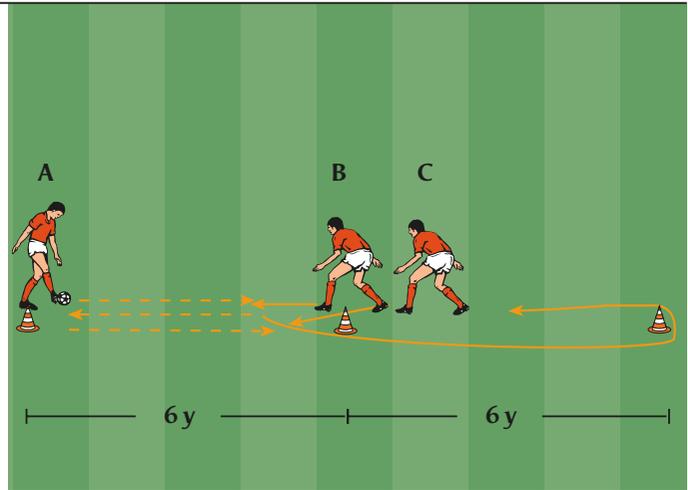
- B and C line up at a cone six yards in front of A, who has the ball.
- Another cone is placed six yards behind B and C.

#### Sequence

- Player A plays a hard pass on the ground to B, who meets the pass and passes back directly, then turns around and runs around the far cone.
- Player A passes directly to C, who has moved to meet the pass and now passes back to A, etc.

#### Variation

- B stands behind A. A passes to C and runs around the cone. C passes



toward B and runs after the pass. B passes back to A after A has run around the cone; then B runs around the cone. Then A passes to C, etc.

### 3 Focus on: Passer and wall player

#### What to do

- Watch to be sure the passer is open.
- Pass the ball off directly.
- Play a well-aimed pass into the passer's running path.
- Improve the timing of both passes.

#### Setup

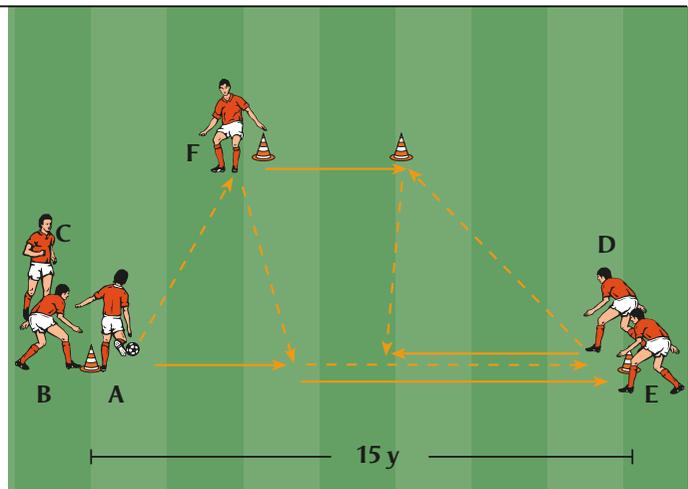
- Set up two cones 15 yards apart.
- Players A, B and C line up at one cone, D and E at the other.
- Wall player F stands off to one side.

#### Sequence

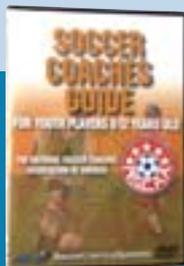
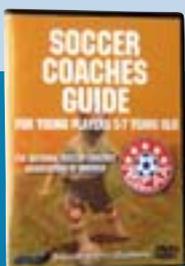
- Player A passes diagonally to F, who drops the ball back directly into A's running path.
- Player A passes directly to D, runs after the ball and lines up behind E.
- D receives and controls the ball and passes diagonally to F, who is showing for the ball again, etc.

#### Variations

- D passes A's pass directly off to F.



- Each passer uses an assigned passing technique.
- A, B and C use the inside of the foot (or outside instep), while F uses the outside instep (or inside of the foot).



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## KEY CONCEPT 2: The simple wall pass: Technique and tactics

### 1 Developing a match-quality wall pass

#### Objectives for both players

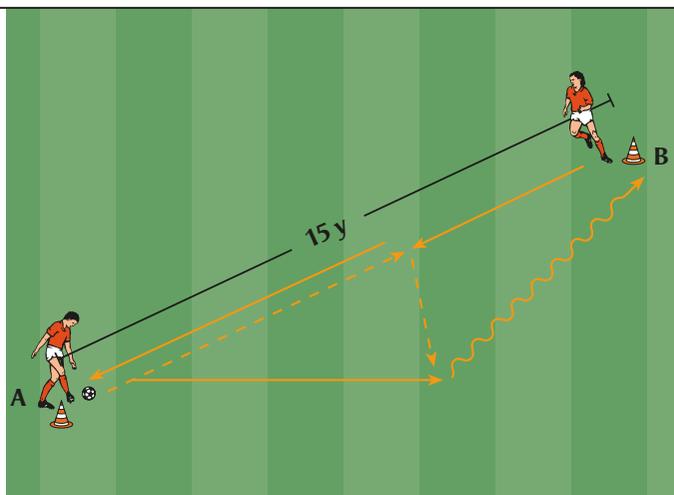
- Passer: to learn how to dribble, pass and get open.
- Wall player: to learn how to get open and pass.

#### Setup and sequence

- Players A and B stand 15 yards apart, each at a cone.
- Player A plays a hard pass on the ground toward B, then sprints diagonally forward.
- B lays off a square pass into A's path and runs to the opposite cone.
- A receives the ball and takes it to the other cone, etc.

#### Raising the level of difficulty

- Player A dribbles two or three yards before B sprints forward to call for the pass.



#### What to watch for

- Both players should make eye contact before the wall pass so they can react to each other's actions.
- B should sprint forward to call for the pass from A; only then should A pass.
- To facilitate B's square pass, A should play a hard, well-aimed ground ball to B's feet.
- To be able to receive and control B's pass at high speed, A should run forward immediately after passing.

#### For advanced players

- Player A should create a clear change of speed and rhythm by taking off explosively at the same moment as the pass.
- B should watch A's approach, to be able to prepare for the pass and show at the right moment.
- To make the combination as fast as possible, B should lay off the square pass directly.
- A should receive and control the square pass at high speed.

### 2 Passing around cones

#### Objectives for both players

- Same as above.

#### Setup

- A and B take the same positions as above.
- Position a "defender" (cone) seven yards away from A.

#### Sequence

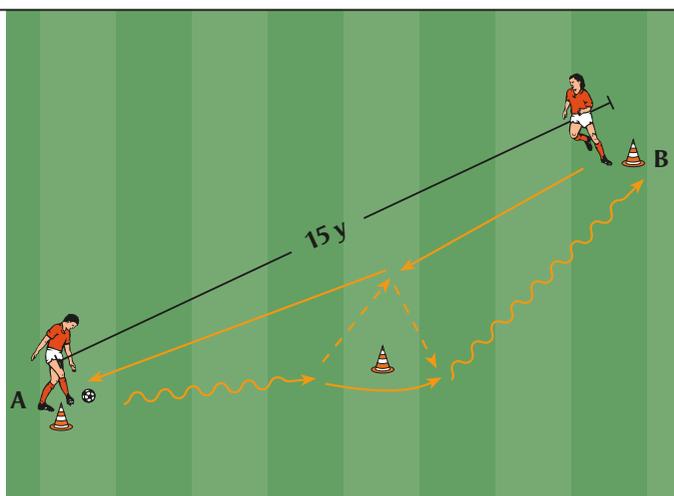
- Player A dribbles toward the cone and passes toward B, who lays off a square pass into A's running path.

#### Variations

- Both players use the outside instep.
- Players alternate between the outside instep and the inside of the foot.
- Both players run and pass faster.

#### What to watch for

- Player A should dribble slowly toward the cone, then sprint explosively around the "opponent" while passing (takeoff/change of speed).
- Player A should pass no more than two yards away from the cone, to make it easier to get around it after passing.
- B should watch A's approach, to be able to prepare for the pass and show at the right moment.



- B must lay off the square pass directly so that A can receive and control it at high speed.



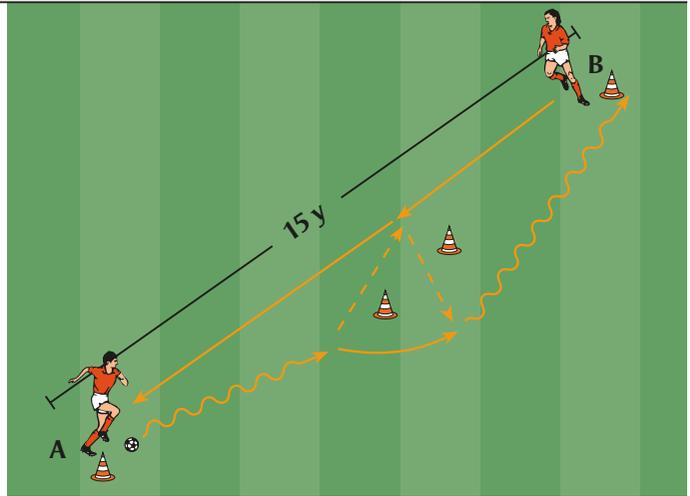
### 3 Laying off the ball accurately

#### Setup and sequence

- Set up a second cone diagonally in front of B.
- A passes as soon as B reaches the second cone.

#### Variations

- Use an assigned passing technique.
- Run and pass faster.



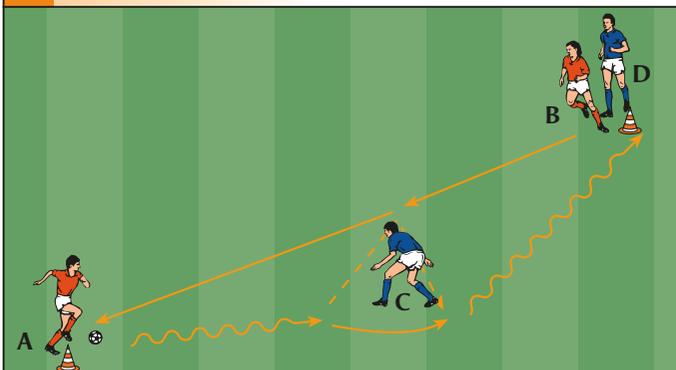
#### What to watch for

In addition to the points from Exercises 1 and 2:

- B should pass between the two “opponents.”
- At the same time, the pass should be aimed precisely into A’s path, so that A can easily receive and control it at high speed.

- In receiving and controlling the ball, A must not give up the advantage gained by getting past the “defenders.” That way, A can execute the follow-up play (pass/dribble/shot) without interference from them.

### 4 With semi-active defenders



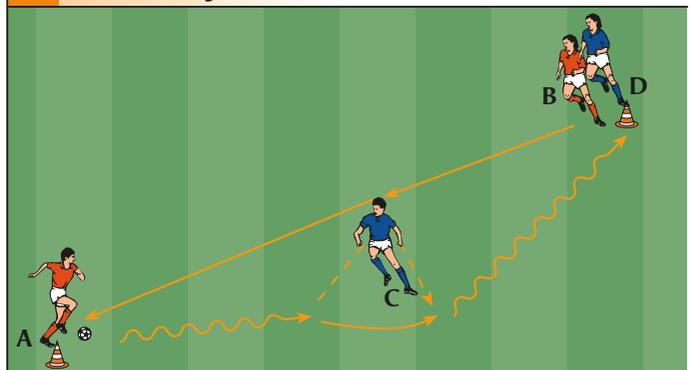
#### Setup and sequence

- Two semi-active defenders (C and D) replace the cones.
- C stands in the middle; D stands behind B.
- A dribbles toward C and plays a wall pass with B, as above.

#### What to watch for

- Player A should pass early enough to keep C from being able to attack him or intercept the ball.
- To get open, B should surprise D with a quick sprint, a body fake or a step fake.
- B should use his body to block D and protect the ball.
- Immediately after passing, B should get open again in order to draw D away from the area around the ball, and also to be able to take part in a new combination.

### 5 With fully active defenders



#### Setup and sequence

- Same as above, except that C and D play fully active, match-quality defense.

#### What to watch for

- Players A and B should use everything they’ve learned so far.
- Because C and D are already prepared for the wall pass sequence, B’s opening run must be that much more surprising.
- In addition, the pass sequence (pass/wall pass) between A and B must be completely internalized and executed at high speed.
- In spite of opposition pressure, A and B must coordinate their pass sequence so that A can receive and control the ball at high speed after getting past C.