

*From the U.S. Soccer Communications Center -- May 1, 2003*

**Resource Center – U.S. Soccer Coaching Department (May 1, 2003)**

*As part of our continuing effort to service and educate our membership, each Thursday the U.S. Soccer Communications Center will send out an informative article from one of its departments. Once a week, you will receive an article/paper/essay in your inbox that will hopefully enhance your enjoyment and knowledge of the game of soccer - on and off the field. This month, we will look into the world of the coaching.*

*The U.S. Soccer Coaching Education philosophy advocates introducing general, key principles, and then allowing the players to learn from their first-hand experiences with the game. This week we look at a coaching session from Bob Jenkins, Region I Men's National Staff Coach, that emphasizes possession and defending principles.*

**LEARNING FROM THE GAME**

**By Bob Jenkins**

**Region I Men's National Staff Coach**

This session will use the game (in some slightly different forms) as the context for teaching players the demands of soccer. No one session will be able to appropriately address all the issues for your players' development. Growing as a player and coach is a process that requires time, consistency and repetition.

As players are placed into game situations (opportunities to score goals, defend, run at players, and at the this age group - win and lose), they will be confronted with the challenges that the game presents them. In this session, I am using the game to emphasize simple possession and defending principles as they pertain to team play.

**Points To Emphasize**

Generally

- \* Being involved and connected to what's happening
- \* Making good decisions quickly and comfortably
- \* Helping your team to be successful

Possession

- \* The importance of your first touch
- \* Recognizing when YOU are an option
  - Learning HOW to be an option
- \* Being pro-active / demanding the ball
- \* Knowing your options BEFORE you demand the ball
- \* Working to help your team keep the ball

## Defending

- \* Goal is to get the ball back ASAP
- \* How do you do this?
- \* Identify 3 factors
  - Where is the ball?
  - Where is your goal?
  - Where are the most dangerous opponents?  
and How do you define “most dangerous opponent”?

## Action

- \* Get the ball back
- \* Clog the middle of the field
- \* Get between the ball and your goal
- \* Force the ball wide or back
- \* Wait for the cavalry
- \* Be the cavalry
- \* (Pressure/Cover/Recover)

## **Organization of practice**

Now that we've reviewed some basic themes for practice, I've outlined below a three-step practice that will put your players in positions to deal with the above situations, and it will put the coach in quality coaching positions.

## Warm-up/ball routine

Any exercise that gets the players passing and moving to receive the passes (20 minutes)

### *Example: Scottish checking*

In an area the size of the center circle, half the players are placed inside the circle and half the players are evenly spaced around the outside of the circle, with the outside players each with a ball at their feet. Players on the outside pass balls to checking players from the inside - 30 second intervals and change groups. Introduce a variety of options for the inside players: (1) one touch back to server, (2) two touch back to server, (3) turn and find open outside player, etc.

### *Coaching Points:*

- Make sure players have ample opportunity to stretch
- Getting the players to focus on opening the angle of their approach, and the angle of their body to the server (i.e., trying to get a half-turn before they receive the ball)
- Getting them to take an early look over their shoulder to give them an idea of options around them

### Topic-related game

4v4 up to 8v8 to 4 or 6 goals – 2 or 3 small goals placed centrally along each endline.  
(The number of players and goals that you use is directly related to the abilities of your players. For younger and less skilled players, keep the numbers smaller.)  
(20 minutes)

#### *Coaching Points:*

- \* This is a great game for focusing on switching the point of attack, getting the ball away from pressure, and going to goal quickly. Remember, focus on switching the point of attack AND getting forward.

- \* Players need to be able to RECOGNIZE pressure, and have the skill to play with composure and precision.

- \* At the same time, this game challenges the defenders to limit the attacking team's options by trying to lock the attacking team to one side, goal.

- \* Players need to RECOGNIZE the dangerous players and moments as they arise and deal with them keeping the general principles of defending in mind.

### Game

Small-sided match to big goals

#### *Coaching Points:*

- \* Play on a relatively wide and short field, to force players to use width

- \* If goalkeepers and the numbers are present, play 8v8 to big goals

- \* Use this game to emphasize the day's themes, plus the challenges that soccer naturally presents by encouraging your players to consider the principles introduced and the lessons the game teaches

- \* At the same time, this game challenges the defenders to limit the attacking team's options by trying to lock the attacking team to one side, goal.