

US Soccer RESOURCE CENTER - March 20, 2003
Making Speed of Play More Tangible and Specific
By Tracey Leone, U.S. Under-19 Women's National Team Head Coach

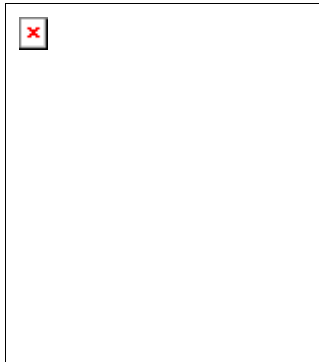
When we as coaches want our players or teams to improve their speed of play, the common thing coaches say is, "Play quicker!" But, I feel there are more clear and specific pieces of information we can communicate to our players that will help them actually accomplish this feat. We started this progression with the U19 Women's World Championship Team, and it proved to be beneficial.

We came up with, in chronological order, a series of things a player can do to contribute to the team's speed of play. They are as follows:

1. Get in early shape; have good, sideways-on body positioning; then move from that shape
2. LOOK! We must make this a habit, which takes time, practice, and consistency in teaching
3. Solve the pressure. Play one-touch or move with your touch. Have deception when needed to buy time and space
4. Play off of that quickly and don't relax
5. Move immediately

These 5 components will be used in training and touched on repeatedly in this session. Remember, improving speed of play takes time because the players have to form good habits, which doesn't happen overnight.

Warm Up Activity



Set up: see diagram above (four players – x1, x2, x3, x4)
 Groups of 4 – each group with a ball
 Each group is in a 15x25 yard grid

Activity: Technical patterns, incorporating habits

1. x2 checks at an angle and looks over his/her inside shoulder 2-3 times. x1 plays his/her the ball on the ground. X2 opens up, after a deceptive lunge, with the inside of his/her furthest foot, plays x3 and then moves and follows his/her pass (hopefully, in the same stride). x1 also follows his/her pass. Repeat in the other direction. EXERCISES RUN THE SAME WAY FROM HERE. PASSER AND MIDDLE PLAYERS FOLLOW THEIR PASS.
2. Similar to #1 but after x2 opens up, he/she fakes a pass down the flank, (hips open up, head goes up; then swivel the hips to cut in) cuts in off the dribble, and then plays x3 and moves
3. x2 checks and LOOKS; x1 plays him/her a ball on the ground; x2 self passes back and at an angle, and then plays x3 and moves.
4. If time, you can repeat #3, but have x2 do a wall pass with x3 before going the other direction.

There are many more patterns you can do than these. You can do double passes, etc.

Important coaching points:

- a. Body positioning is sideways on, and he/she MUST look over his/her inside shoulder to get a sense of pressure. The first two patterns simulate that pressure is off of him/her, so he/she can open up. The last two simulate that pressure is on his/her back, so he/she must self-pass away from pressure and move with his/her touch.
- b. I feel coaches have to teach deception. Teach players to lunge before they receive it (1st two patterns). Teach players to fake pass (2nd pattern). Deception buys players time and space and thus helps an individual's and team's speed of play.
- c. After the player receives the ball, he/she must play out of that quickly.
- d. Then he/she must move after he/she plays the ball. He/she starts his/her movement in the same stride in which he/she passes.
- e. All players play precise, clean balls. They should start to get in a rhythm.

“Conditioned” Games**GAME 1:**

Set up: 4v4+1 or 5v5+1, based on your numbers. You can even have 2 plus players.
Tight space. About 15-18x15-18 yards, based on numbers and skill level.

Activity: Competition (can have the same teams stay together and have a tournament)

Possession games with different restrictions-5 passes=goal (can change this based on skill level)

1. All players must play two-touch
2. Plus player plays one-touch, all else play two-touch
3. Plus player plays two-touch, all else play one-touch
4. All players play one or two-touch

Important coaching points:

- a. Attacking team must get in early shape and have support/depth, width, and penetration.
- b. Body positioning of all players must face the game. Tilt the hips. Getting in early shape helps this.
- c. Early movement by the team while the ball is played and movement from the player playing the ball.
- d. Taking looks, having deception.
- e. Proper solving of pressure-when to play one-touch (perfect pass; or poor pass and the player does not have time to clean it up) and when to play two-touch (poor pass and the player has time; or to control the tempo)
- f. Playing away from the numbers

GAME 2:

Set up: 5v5 (can have a plus player)-can play a 3-2 system or a 2-1-2 system

Size of area: 30x35 or 40 yards

Four small goals-two on each endline

Activity:

One team attacks two goals on their attacking endline; the other attacks the other two goals on their attacking endline. Once a team scores, they have to get 6-8 passes (whatever you determine, based on your team's skill level) before that team can go to their goals again. You can also run this in a tournament format if you want.

Important coaching points: Same as in previous activity. Encourage the defending team that if the attacking team cannot go to their goals (because they've scored) until they get a certain number of passes, that they need to implement high pressure and do all they can not to allow them to get the number of passes they need. There is not a risk of giving up a goal unless they get the number of passes. This forces your attack to play against a team who's defending hard and they have to be able to possess under tremendous pressure. I like this game because it's directional part of the time and also a grid possession game part of the time as well.

Final Activity

8v8, or 8v8 with 1 or 2 plus players, or even 9v9

Large four-goal game (using regulation size goals) with goalkeepers

Playing area: half a field (can alter based on skill-level and numbers); can bring in the width a little if playing 8v8 plus goalkeepers

Activity:

One team attacks 2 goals on their attacking endline; the other team attacks the other 2 goals. You can have a goalkeeper in each goal – if you have 4 goalkeepers – or you can have 1 goalkeeper for each team defend the 2 goals their team is defending.

The team can score in either goal that they are attacking. If you only have 2 goalkeepers, they have to run back and forth and defend 2 goals a piece so if you're speed of play and possession are good, the opposing field players can beat them across the field and score in an open goal.

Important Coaching Points: The components listed at the start of this article:

- 1-Get in early shape; have good, sideways-on body positioning; then move from that shape**
- 2-LOOK! We must make this a habit, which takes time, practice, and consistency in teaching**
- 3-Solve the pressure. Play one-touch or move with your touch. Have deception when needed to buy time and space**
- 4-Play off of that quickly and don't relax**
- 5-Move immediately**

Improving habits and speed of play take time. The coach must be willing to constantly remind players of the habits of getting in early shape, their body positioning, looking, having deception, playing off their first touch quickly, and then moving after they play the ball. Demand that your players "look" in everything you do with them. It's unnerving for the players at the beginning to take their eyes off the ball for a moment to look, so the players must be encouraged to do this and not worry about potential mistakes with their touch.

It will not become a habit unless they spend time doing it without the pressure of a defender to get comfortable and then with the pressure of a defender to make them look under pressure.

The coach must be positive, patient, and persistent in developing good habits. When your players do, you will see a huge difference in their ability to sense and solve pressure and in their speed of play.