

Fitness with the Football

Wednesday 18th February 2009

Mid-Ulster Sports Arena Cookstown

Background:

How many coaches really trust players to work as hard as possible to improve their own fitness levels when working with a ball?

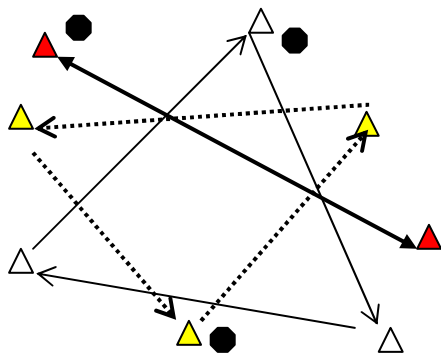
If we are honest we are sometimes concerned about:

- *Their work rate in unopposed exercises*
- *Opportunities to take lengthy rests in games*
- *Not being able to measure improvement easily*

There are also times when we, as coaches, may mistake quick ball and varied movement for player work rate and, in doing so, think we are improving physical fitness but we are not really.

Let's look at a drill that shows us this exactly:

INCREASING THE TRAFFIC



Two players on each of the yellow markers [fist pass and follow], two on each of the white markers [kick pass and follow] and three players on each of the red markers [solo run across]. One ball used for each exercise.

Start all exercises together [fist, kick and solo] and run for 1- 1 ½ minutes before changing positions.

This drill looks busy and it does have its advantages [but improving fitness is not really one of them]. The set up allows too many rests. Each player, on average, moves for 2-3 seconds and then rests for 10-15 seconds.

So the 'Work:Rest Ratio' is 1:5 meaning that too few demands are being made of the players.

Introducing a second ball will definitely change things and W:R shortens to 1:2.

However, the player who tends to go through the motions and move at ½ or ¾ pace between markers will still not improve his/her fitness.

In some exercises it should even be possible to reduce the W:R ratio to 1:1, especially if both are over a longer period and the work involves endurance.

This drill might suit:

TWO-WAY PASSING

Diagram 1

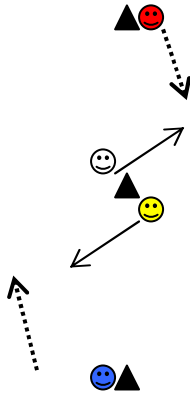
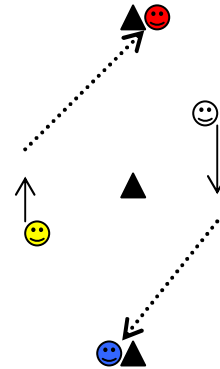


Diagram 2



Set up three cones in a line, each 25-30m from the next.

Place one player at each of the end cones [Blue player and Red player]

Place two players at the middle cone.[yellow facing blue and white facing red]

Red and Blue have a football each.

Diagram 1

Whistle starts drill.

Yellow breaks diagonally for a pass from Blue, while White breaks for one from Red

Diagram 2

Yellow turns sharply and kick passes to Red.

White does the same to Blue.

They turn again to receive a pass from their original feeders etc. etc.

Let Yellow and White work hard for one minute, then switch Blue and Red into the middle and resume.

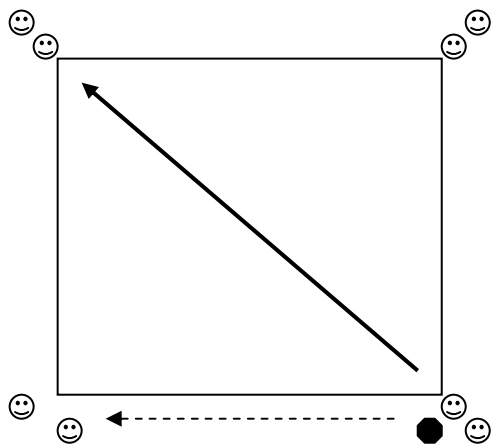
Coaches should emphasise that the kick passers are practising accuracy from 'free kicks', while the runners are working on speed endurance, angles of running, first touch, change of pace and proper fist passing from distance [no short flicks from the open hand]

If the coach continues to run drills that are non-contact then he/she needs to add a reason to run; best reason to run in sport is a **race!**

So, drills that can be modified to involve some sort of competition or race may help players put more effort into fitness with the ball.

Might this be an example?

BEAT THE BALL



10-25m square set out with tall cones. Two start players at each corner.

First player at one corner has the only ball. He/she kick passes along one edge of the square and sprints the diagonal, trying to make it there before the ball does from the next passer.

Each passer must make that run to attempt to beat the ball.

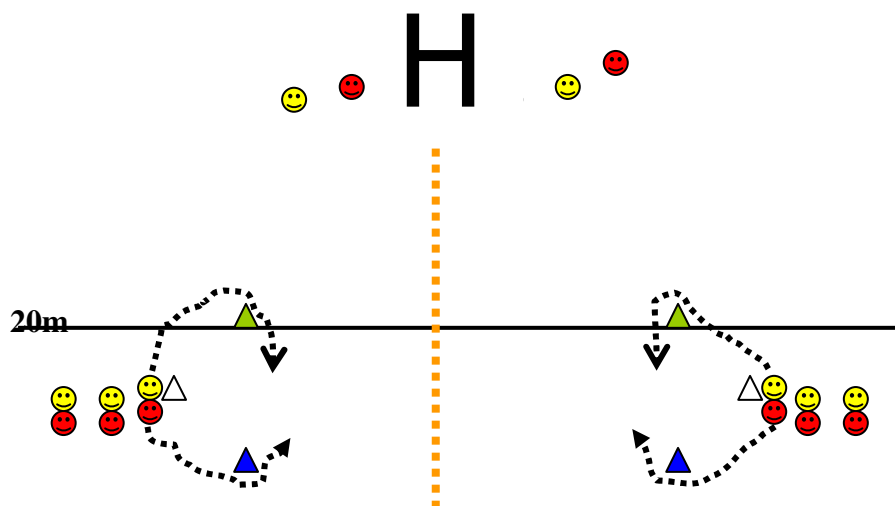
W:R ratio is 1:7 and can be reduced to 1:5 with 6 players instead of 8. [5 players is too few to keep the drill going]. Keeping the 8 players and starting with 2 footballs will reduce the W:R ratio to 1:3 which is ideal.

Still, the success of this drill depends on how accurate the kick passing is [will anyone misplace a pass just to beat the ball?].

Without doubt, the best way to ensure intensity and fitness development is to introduce competition in the form of a direct opponent. Force physical contact and the work rate goes up. No player wants to be outdone by a teammate.

There are hundreds of drills and exercises that may be modified to make them 'opposed'. Here are a few:

BREAK AND SHOOT



Six cones set out as above; each group of three shows where players work; Focus only on one set for this explanation.

Two players [Red and Yellow] stand side by side at centre white cone [set about 25m from goal – shorten to suit age or ability] and facing the sideline

Red is the attacker [with ball] and Yellow is the defender. Defender calls 'GO' and both break. Red turns to solo around the blue cone set at 30m; Yellow turns to race around the green cone set on 20m line.

Red must break the tackle to score a point or goal and Yellow must get in position to block or tackle. Coach can wait for one player to win the battle or call time after 10 seconds of work.

Only one pair works at a time. E.g. Left group starts, right group goes after they have finished.

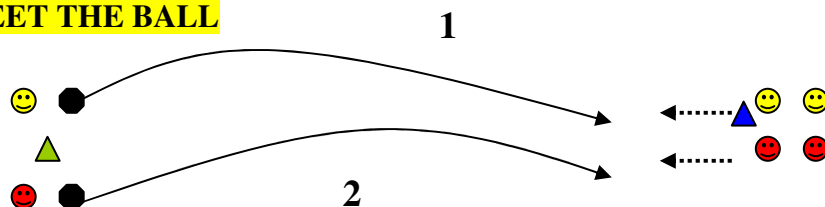
Reds and Yellows switch roles each time and players behind goal take over from the working group each time.

W:R ratio for the drill drawn above is 1:7, still lacking in intensity even if the action is sustained. To reduce it to 1:3 simply set the two sets of cones wider apart and run a line of markers [orange] down the middle of the pitch, over which a group may not cross.

Very often we might opt for complex drills over simple ones, yet the latter may give better results and allow the coach to use dedicate players who are natural leaders to pair up with those who need a push or some encouragement to get fitter.

The following are examples of the simplest work that can be very effective:

MEET THE BALL



Two players with footballs at the green marker, 20-30m from the pairs lined up at the blue marker.

Yellow ball player kick passes [1] into the area in front of the first pair, for them to run to meet the ball and compete to win possession. Yellow sprints to the back of the pairs line.

The winner takes the ball player's place and the loser returns to the back of the line with the ball player.

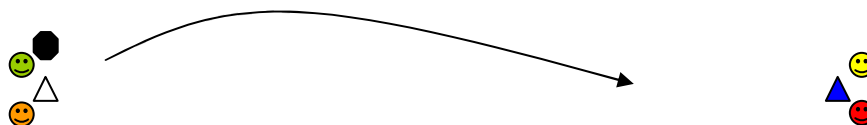
Red now does the same, passing the ball in front of the next pair.

Once again the winner takes Red's place, while the loser and the ball player must run at pace to the back of the line and get ready to attack a pass when their turn comes.

The coach can ask the ball players to kick different types of passes into the area in front of the competitors.

Modifications of this basic pattern are numerous. Here's one:-

MEET & SUPPORT



Green kick passes the ball 20-30m towards the blue cone for Red and Yellow to meet it and compete. Let's say that Red wins the battle for the ball.

Orange runs in support to take a fist pass from Red and solo the ball back to the blue marker.

Red turns and runs to take a short return pass from Orange before they both reach the blue marker.

Yellow carries on running to reach Green at the white marker.

Now Orange has the ball and kicks for Green and Yellow to compete. Red runs in support for the fist pass etc. etc.....

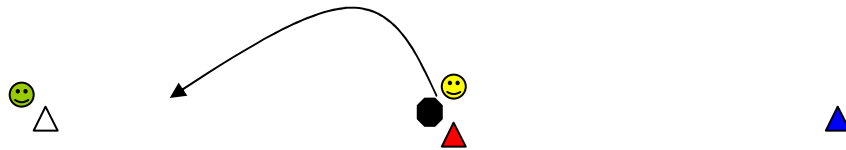
The W:R ratio for this drill is 1:2 max [or shorter, depending on how many times a player loses the battle].

Tackling and breaking tackles both make big demands on players, so it's worth working on them to improve the techniques and fitness levels.

As these are mostly 'one on one' situations, why not set up simple drills to force contact? Pairing defenders and attackers can pay dividends as one can coach the other re. what does and does not work.

This drill involves only two players

MAKE OR BREAK



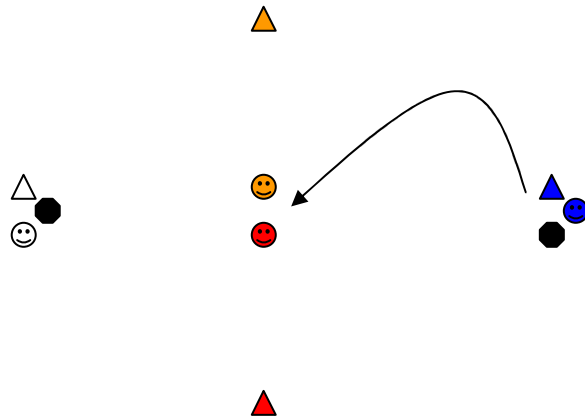
Set three markers out, each 10m from the other. The defender [Yellow] lobs the ball for the attacker [Green] to run onto, catch and drive forward to break Yellow's tackle and reach the blue marker.

Once the ball is caught, Green has the count of '6' to break the tackle and reach the blue marker. Yellow calls the count and does not simply back off to guard the blue marker. Repeat immediately with minimum rest – another count of '6' would be enough to get in place again, ready to go. Green works five times before swapping.

As this exercise is replicated by several other pairs across the pitch, the coach may only have minimal input, so he/she depends on the players to force work out of each other and encourage improvement.

Competing for a high ball may also be set up with small numbers and allows players to work up to 1 minute at a time.

HIGH BALL / BREAK BALL



Set out a diamond of four markers [each diagonal 10m]. Red and Orange pair up in the middle and face Blue [who has a ball]. White [also with a ball] stands behind them.

Blue lobs the ball high for Orange and Red to compete for a high catch / break ball. Blue immediately runs to one of the two vacant markers. White then moves to the opposite one.

Whoever wins the battle must find Blue with a fist pass, then both Orange and Red turn towards White, who lobs the next ball and runs to a vacant marker etc. etc.

Should one player be losing the battle regularly, he/she must rethink how to take position, jump and compete.

Change the working pair after 1 minute.

Run the drill for 4 minutes in total. W:R ratio is obviously 1:1