

Five Favorite Practices: U-12 Fulham Girls Training Session

By Lang Wedemeyer

As part of my trip with the NSCAA Master Coach Diploma candidates, we visited the training ground of Fulham FC. After a couple of lectures by representatives of the Fulham FC Youth Academy and Paul Holder, English FA Coaching Education Instructor, we moved into the indoor training arena where Paul proceeded to work with an Under-12 girls team. He gave each coach a handout with the training plan, but as many coaches will, he deviated based on numbers, size of the area, and the flow of the session. There were eight players. The main theme was working with movement patterns and building upon those elements into soccer-specific functional actions.

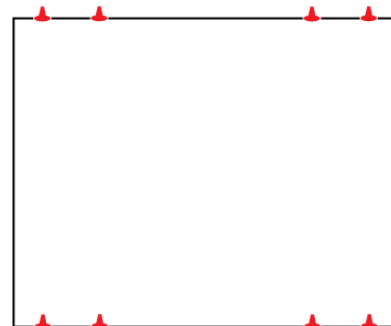
Warm-up: The first part of the warm-up was led by one of the Fulham Youth Academy coaches. This first part was all about dynamic movement, coordination, balance and agility. He had players doing things like cariocas, side-shuffling, skips, etc., both forward and backward in an area about 25 x 20.

EXERCISE 1

Activity Elements: 25 x 20 grid, four players each in blue and yellow, four gates two yards wide, three balls

Activity: Two balls were used solely for tossing with the hands in an effort to get through the gates. The third ball was used to toss to oneself and head or volley to pass to a teammate.

Coaching Points: Activity: The differences in movement as required in the game: turning, spinning, changing direction, accelerating to get into a gate, etc. All the players moved at one speed and didn't slow down until fatigue set in.



EXERCISE 2

Activity Elements: Same grid, no balls. More dynamic movement.

Activity: At this time, Paul took the balls out of the grid and had the players move in similar ways that the Fulham FC coach had already done. But prior to his instructions, he came over to the coaches and asked us to "watch and select" the player(s) that we felt would, based on their movement coordination, be the best player(s) in the group.

Coaching Points: After watching the movement and coordination of the players, the coaches were divided on two girls as our top picks. It was then that Paul said that each of these girls plays multiple sports, including one that is in karate.

EXERCISE 3

Activity Elements: Hand ball keep away.

Activity: a) Two teams of four. Players can run with ball in their hands. If the ball is touched by an opponent or dropped, it turns over to the opposing team.

b) Teams were given points for penetrating with the ball through one of the gates.

c) To score a goal, the ball had to be headed or volleyed through a gate to a teammate. If a player in possession of the ball is touched, the ball is turned over to the opposing team.

Coaching Points: Paul talked about how the movements changed due to the objectives of the games.

EXERCISE 4

Activity Elements: The grid remained the same, but the ball was on the ground now. The two teams of 4 were passing and moving within the grid with 2 and sometimes 3 balls.

Activity: a) If a yellow passed to a blue, she would have to speed up her run = sprint afterward.

b) When a player would receive a pass, she would have to sprint dribble it around a cone and back into the grid.

c) When a player would pass the ball, she would then have to sprint around a cone and back into the game.

d) When a player plays to a teammate (same color) she executes a wall pass. When she plays to a player on the opposite team, she chases her as that player sprints with the ball around a cone.

Coaching Points: Players were asked to think about sprinting while maintaining vision of the ball. This meant never turning your back to the play. The quick recognition of who has the ball and what your movement should be in that instant = "are you playing it to a foe or a friend."

EXERCISE 5

Activity Elements: Four gates, still with in the same 25 x 20 grid. Five blues playing keep away from three yellows.

Activity: Five blues pass and move to keep ball away from three yellows. After three consecutive passes by the blues, they were told to get through a gate to score a point. If yellow wins the ball at any time, they were told to get through any gate as fast as possible to gain a point. There was a pile of balls just off to the side where, once a point was scored by going through the gates, another player on the team that scored could pick a ball up from the pile and continue play.

Coaching Points: Points were made to the blue players about transitioning quickly from the 3rd pass to scoring, but not forcing it. Points were made to the yellow defenders about recognizing the successful completion of the third pass and cutting off the scoring opportunity = taking away penetration space.

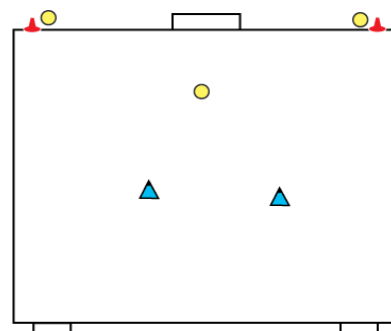
EXERCISE 6

Activity Elements: 2 v. 1 to goals with counterattacking options.

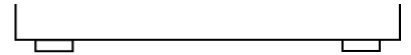
Activity: a) Two blues attacked one "large" goal (four yards wide) and defended two small counter goals.

One yellow defender attempted to stop the attack and score in transition when possible. There were two other yellows located on cones in the corner of the field. After a shot was taken by blue, one of the yellows (rotating turns) would take off with a ball at her feet in order to score on one of the counter goals. The two blue attackers then became defenders trying to stop the counterattack.

Coaching Points: Offensive points: 1) Combination play for blues to beat yellow defender to score goals. 2) Fast counterattack for yellow = pass is faster than a dribble to score. Defensive points: 1) When one blue is



about to shoot/score, can the other blue be aware of which side the yellow counterattacker will be coming from and move into a better defending position.



EXERCISE 7

Activity Elements: 4 v. 4 free play to two big goals.

Activity: There was an emphasis on knowing where you were on the field when you won or lost possession of the ball.

Coaching Points: The activity was less about 2v1 to goal as it was about counterattacking and stopping the counter.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In my tour with the Master Coach Diploma candidates to the different clubs, one thing was evident...they are all very concerned with the movement patterns and coordination abilities of the youth players. The elements of discovery that were part of playing street soccer: learning to fall, dealing with cobblestone streets and bumpy fields, variety in movement, etc., are not as common in the youth players as they were 20 years ago. In addition to that, the necessity to teach the better athletes more refined movements and body awareness will help them with their soccer coordination and subsequently, help alleviate many non-impact injuries.

One of the enlightenments that has come from studying a variety of soccer cultures is that the agility and movement capabilities of the Brazilians has been something overlooked as to why they have been such great footballers. Now, you can see many of the English pro clubs putting much more effort into training these things at an earlier age. This was the foundation of the whole session: functional movement for youth players. Paul did a good job of utilizing games and activities with different objectives to get different, yet all applicable, movements from the players: back pedaling, sprinting, jumping, cutting, turning, feinting, etc. The buildup was not uncommon from our coaching education, but contained good energy and flow and progressed nicely into game-related activities.